

Getting an Early Start: Children and Historical Performance **Shulamit Kleinerman**

She Wants “Packington’s Pound”

When she was six and wanted to be like Maria in *The Sound of Music*, Dylan Kenard started classical guitar lessons. But as time went by, her favorite pieces in the Suzuki guitar books often turned out to be English country dance tunes, and her teacher would mention that the arrangements came from lute pieces. She also found a new inspiration in a CD from the Canadian music-education series “Classical Kids.” Song of the Unicorn invokes the Middle Ages with stories about Merlin and King Arthur, along with, Dylan’s mother Jennifer says, “a lot of haunting music. We had checked all the CDs on that series out of the library, but this is the one that she just totally zeroed in on.” Dylan had also been interested in the early instruments she’d seen at historical fairs, where the once-upon-a-time atmosphere captured her imagination.

Jennifer called the Early Music Guild of Seattle and asked if there was anyone Dylan, now nine, could go to for lute lessons. They were put in touch with local lute and early-guitar specialist Elizabeth Brown. “We lucked out. I guess there’s not a lot of material out there for teaching lute to children, so Elizabeth does her own arrangements and skill progressions.” Dylan takes out her lute in our interview and plays an evocative minor-mode tune from the French Renaissance publisher Le Roy. “Elizabeth has given me Greensleeves and Nonesuch so far,” Dylan says, recalling her old guitar favorites. “I still want Packington’s Pound.”

During their lessons, Jennifer keeps her younger child busy in the hallway. “Whenever I get to scootch a little bit closer to the doorway, it’s so beautiful to hear. I really like Elizabeth’s style of teaching because it seems more collaborative than an authoritarian teacher/student relationship. She sits next to Dylan, like two musicians talking about their craft together.”

As a homeschooler, Dylan has an easier time than many children fitting music into her day. She spends time most days practicing piano – “that’s good for jazz and other stuff” – as well as lute, and she has a lively range of academic and social pursuits. “When I was growing up and taking piano lessons,” Jennifer recalls by way of comparison, “I’d go to school all day and then I’d come home and I’d still have to practice. It was easy to resent not being able to just go outside and hang out with my friends.” Dylan is also able to explore areas of related interest, as when her fascination with classical mythology and medieval history led her to study Latin for a while.

When she was playing guitar, she would set up to play in the busking free-for-all at Seattle’s Folklife Festival, Jennifer backing her up on a guitar of her own with the beginning skills that Suzuki parents often pick up. Dylan enjoyed it because “everyone’s not staring at you; it’s not like a concert.” Jennifer recalls that the instrument’s sound got lost in the busy outdoor setting, but that people stopped to ask the young lead player about her music. “The lute isn’t going to be any louder,” Dylan muses, “but...”

“You want to try busking with lute?” Her mother is surprised.

“Yes! But the instrument is more unusual, so hopefully more people will listen.”