

SARASWATI

(from *And the Skylark Sings with Me: Adventures in Homeschooling and Community-Based Education* – New Society Publishers/Holt Associates, 1999)

*Piping down the valleys wild,
Piping songs of peasant glee,
On a cloud I saw a child
And he laughing said to me:*

*"Pipe a song about a Lamb!"
So I piped with merry cheer,
"Piper, pipe that song again;"
So I piped, he wept to hear.*

-- William Blake, Introduction"
from *Songs of Innocence*

Saraswati had not prepared us for musicians. Serious musicians, two of them, each with very different and unique talents.

In Hindu mythology, Lord Shiva has two daughters, Lakshmi and Saraswati. A family can hope to win the blessing of one perhaps, but not likely both at the same time. Lakshmi is the goddess of wealth and abundance. We have enough for our needs, praised be, but certainly not enough to cause much envy among our friends. But Saraswati -- the goddess of memory and music -- has blessed our household many times over.

And so we were caught almost totally unprepared. My partner Ellen had played the flute and oboe through junior high, could carry a tune, and enjoyed listening. Her musical tastes around the time of birth of our older daughter Ali leaned toward the political gospel of Sweet Honey and the Rock and the feminist folk-rock of Holly Near. I was a different story. Though without any childhood training to speak of, I had strong music and music history interests throughout my college years, sang in the college choir, and loved opera. I pursued virtually none of these interests for almost 15 years preceding Ali's birth, and had practically given up listening to classical music. Neither Ellen nor I had attended a classical music concert or an operatic performance in almost a decade, and counted no classical musicians, amateur or professional, among our friends.

There was the barest of threads. In my 30s while in India I had taken up the veena, the seven-stringed South Indian musical instrument made from the wood of the jackfruit tree. The veena is sacred to, and played by, the goddess Saraswati. I turned out to be quite good at it, for an American. The number of Americans who master the veena's intricacies beyond the beginner's level can be counted on two hands, with several fingers likely left over. I had played for religious rituals with up to 5,000 people in attendance in South India, a benefit concert in Sri Lanka, and at musical soirées in the U.S. At the time of Ali's birth, I hadn't studied the veena in several years, and rarely practiced.

Not a particularly propitious beginning for musical children, I would have thought. Ali played happily to the sounds of the Beach Boys during her first year or so, and Ellen and I were working so hard we scarcely gave music a second thought.

The fateful turn of events occurred at a Handel's *Messiah* Sing-and-Play-In held in July. Yes, July. Santa Cruz, California possessed the unusual distinction of holding its yearly participatory celebration of Handel's great oratorio shortly after its annual July 4th "Anarchist-Socialist Softball Game", which now must be approaching its 25th year. And I, for reasons having nothing to do with religion, musical upbringing, or tradition, somehow decided I had to attend. Ellen also thought this would be a fun outing and decided to bring 20-month-old Ali along.

We arrived early and Ellen, trying to amuse the already-squirming toddler, decided to lead her by the hand up to the makeshift stage to look at the instruments, none of which Ali had ever encountered live before. To Ellen's astonishment, Ali knew their names -- flute, cello, trumpet, clarinet... We don't know from where -- we didn't teach her. We've assumed she must have picked up this information from an episode of *Sesame Street* when we weren't looking, but honestly we just don't know. (It would be years yet before Ellen and I would have a serious "kids and tv" discussion.)

We had explained to Ali that we were going to sing the "Hallelujah" chorus. I have no idea why we thought this might be a useful explanation, as Ali had never heard the Hallelujah chorus! After examining the instruments, Ali turned around to face the gathering singers, and in her high-pitched toddler's voice urged, "Now let's all sing together," and launched into her version of "Michael Row Your Boat Ashore", the only song she knew with "hallelujah" in it.

Ellen hustled Ali off the stage and, to keep her occupied, asked whether she'd like to learn to play any of those instruments some day. Ali replied, "The violin. I want to learn to play the violin. Now!" Ellen assured her that someday she might learn to play. The rest of the evening was uneventful; I don't even remember whether we stayed late enough to sing the Hallelujah chorus.

Nothing would have come of this except that every day, sometimes twice a day, for the next three months, Ali demanded that she wanted to learn to play the violin. This sounded absolutely crazy to us. Did they make violins that small? Could a teacher be found who would be willing to teach a toddler still in diapers? Would a bad experience turn her off from music-making for life? Would she learn anything that would be of value?

The answers to the foregoing questions are: Yes, Yes, No, and emphatically Yes. Ali's first violin was 14 inches long (a "1/64th" as it's called), and currently sits atop our piano. A local teacher versed in the Suzuki method found the idea of teaching an under-2-year-old somewhat amusing, and Ali was pretty determined. Ali had now given us two of our most important homeschooling lessons, both of which carried over into all aspects of our learning adventures: first, that we weren't going to be able to do everything ourselves, and hence would have to learn how to find other resources; and second, that we were going to be experimental in approach rather than be governed by someone else's narrow conception of "age-appropriateness".

We learned another lesson, too, which led me to risk beginning this book with our family's musical adventures. I am aware of course that music is not every child's cup of tea, and our experience around it might be sufficiently foreign as to make it difficult for some readers to relate to easily. But the point is that music turned out to be, regardless of our own expectations, something both of our children are passionate about, intimately entwined in their earliest notions of their unique

identities. Our kids taught us that our task is to seek avenues for whatever inward leadings they exhibit to blossom, and to find ways for our children to become who they already are, or were meant to be.

Anyway, the story is supposed to go like this: "Ali picked up the violin and bow and within seconds was playing Bach and sounding like Yehudi Menuhin, today her favorite violinist." Nothing could be further from the truth. Parenthetically, it should be noted that Menuhin, upon demanding a violin for his fourth birthday, was given a metal one which he promptly broke in frustration. Menuhin, by the way, along with Isaac Stern and the sensational young violinist Hilary Hahn, is one of the world's most famous contemporary products of homeschooling, having lasted in first grade precisely one day. Fourteen-inch violins played by a virtuoso might sound like a cat in heat; played by Ali it was more chalk upon easel. Still, she got the general idea that four lefthand fingers could be set down upon four variously tuned strings at dozens of different points, and that only one spot at a time would be correct. At her first public appearance, she walked onto the stage, announced she would play "Mary Had a Little Lamb", brought the violin to her chin, strummed the strings twice, and proceeded to *sing* it, to great applause.

Seeing and hearing Ali and our younger daughter Meera today, parents often ask our opinion of the Suzuki method. This is despite the fact that neither of our children learned by utilizing it. But for what it's worth, from what we know, we look upon Suzuki quite favorably. Firstly, it must be said that Suzuki is single-handedly responsible for hundreds or even thousands of string programs springing up in elementary and middle schools across the country, which, for some children, is the best experience they will ever have in school. When Ellen and I were growing up, the violin was thought to be simply too difficult for all but the most talented children. Band instruments, pianos, or even, perish the thought, accordions! (I too have my own prejudices) were the recommended choices for pre-teens. Now we know, thanks to Suzuki, that stringed instruments can be taught effectively to children at an early age. Furthermore, recent brain research suggests that for a string player to have any real hopes of succeeding, instruction should commence before age 12 (and preferably much earlier) to reinforce brain/fine-motor skill interactions. I would note, however, that my own experience and that of the late John Holt, a founder of the modern homeschooling movement who successfully took up the cello after age 40, are firm reminders that our early childhoods do not have to be the sole determinants of our musical destinies.

Secondly, Suzuki insists on substantial parental involvement, more than just driving one's child to and from lessons. In some larger Suzuki schools including most of those in Japan, parents are required to attend their own classes while their children are learning. That level of parental commitment is sure to redound to the child's benefit, as is the creation of a musical community.

Thirdly, the early stages of Suzuki teaching focus on repetitive motion training. It's rather like learning to throw a baseball the right way -- you're more likely to get it if you do it a couple of thousand times. Repetitive motion training is particularly useful for the majority of children who are reasonably physically coordinated, have moderately good musical ears, but may not yet be ready to tackle complex symbol systems.

Fourthly, the selections included in the well-edited Suzuki music books are meticulously chosen to allow a child to progress and gain technical proficiency. The accompanying music tapes provide an aural crutch and standard by which students can chart their own progress.

Lastly, while there have been some notable exceptions, Suzuki was under no illusion that he was going to produce a bumper crop of virtuosi, though he surely had his share. His goal was to create a climate in which music could be better appreciated by young and old, and raise the general benchmark levels of musical performance. The major growth of community youth symphonies around the U.S. and the rest of the world, even at a time when general understanding and appreciation of classical music is on the decline, in part attests to Suzuki's success. If today I have a single quibble with the application of Suzuki's work, it is with some Suzuki teachers who, at some remove from the master, elevate technique over musicianship, control and method over total involvement and the free flight of the child's imagination. But then I wouldn't only say that about Suzuki teachers!

Regardless of what we might think of Suzuki, after six months of sawing, Ali informed us and her music teacher in no uncertain terms: *she wanted to read the notes*. Out went Suzuki and in came Leopold Mozart, scales, and later, the progressively more difficult exercise books. In hindsight it is plain that 2 ½-year-old Ali knew herself well and had better sense than we, the one saving grace being that we listened. Ali has always possessed good fine-motor skills, but her gross-motor skills tend toward clumsy. Her ear is better than average, and has now been trained for a long time, but all-in-all we knew very early that she lacked the magical concatenation of natural talents that marks a true virtuoso. But what she has, and what others besides her parents recognize, is an abundance of intellectual curiosity. Reading the notes, recognizing their relationships in sound, and understanding their physical demands upon her playing, the intellectual puzzle posed by the music itself became the motivating force behind Ali's growth as a musician.

Early on, Ellen and I agreed on some ground rules for our children's musical education. The cardinal and inviolate rule is that music is to be its own reward. From age 5 on, Ali and Meera came to understand that learning an instrument assumes daily practice, seven days a week, with inevitable and not-infrequent exceptions. There are no external rewards for practice: the reward for practice is more lessons, and more opportunities to make beautiful music. They do not have to practice, and they do not have to take lessons; this is totally their choice. Of course, we have our share of squabbles, and there have been those terrible practice days, and *dry* periods (adults experience them, so why shouldn't kids), but Ali and Meera always know what our expectations, and their responsibilities, are. We have explained to surprised and bemused teachers that we don't approve of them giving gold stars or reward stickers for practice, only for progress (and after the fact), and never as prizes.

If this seems a bit harsh in theory, in practice it has served both of our children extremely well. Several of their music teachers have remarked that our rapport with our children around music is unique among the families they serve. We keep Ali and Meera motivated by making them aware and excited about the musical universe the future holds in store for them if they apply themselves. For Meera, this takes the form of classical compact discs, mostly of famous pianists. For Ali, it's usually new sheet music.

We often celebrate their small triumphs – performances and student recitals – with commemorative gifts, usually music oriented – books, compact discs, musical-note jewelry, etc. When possible, I date the object with a note, so they can look back at the gift and be reminded how far they've come since then. I try to make sure these gifts are offered as surprises, and are given

regardless of how well their actual performances went.

Our move to Olympia, Washington was somewhat disruptive to all of our lives. Ali gave up the violin for the following year. We then found her another teacher, but both temperamentally and musically, it wasn't a perfect match. When her teacher announced a year later that she wanted to devote herself totally to country fiddle-playing, and limit her teaching to that, 6 ½-year-old Ali tearfully insisted that she only wanted to study classical music. It was time to look for a new teacher.

Ali and we quickly narrowed down the field of new violin teachers to two fine candidates. The deciding factor was remarks each teacher made to Ali following her auditions. Upon hearing Ali attempt pieces that were perhaps somewhat above her technical abilities, the first teacher complimented her profusely and stated it was now time to go back to simpler music and concentrate on polishing up her technique, fixing her bow hold, etc., to make the music sound even more beautiful. The second teacher, noting similar deficiencies, suggested she would start with yet more difficult music to challenge Ali's imagination. They would work on technique, but slowly, over time. We wouldn't have had a clue as to which was the correct approach (assuming there is one), but Ali had absolutely no uncertainty – she chose the latter.

After three years, Ali's relationship with Phyllis – who is primarily a viola player and a member of the local symphony and chamber orchestra – is complex and a thing of beauty. At times, the learning process is barely perceptible – work on an alternative fingering here, a rhythmic correction there. Exercises, selected pieces, and compositions of Ali's own choosing make up a steady and ever-changing diet. Ali enjoys seeing Phyllis perform in symphony and chamber music concerts, and at other local cultural events. We are especially pleased that our children encounter their teachers in other than instructional settings.

Just before she turned 7, we signed Ali up to participate in our local public school's second-year strings program, as we wanted her (and she wanted) to have the opportunity to play in a group. While the other students were fifth graders, Ali more than held her own. An experience in the music program reminded us of the fascinating gaps that occur in our children's general knowledge as a result of homeschooling. Ali got to class early one morning and excitedly told her teacher about her birthday present from her grandmother – a tape of Sibelius' Second Symphony performed by the Philadelphia Orchestra -- which she had requested. She also played a portion of a new composition she was writing. When the other children arrived, the music teacher placed new sheet music on each of their music stands. All of the other children broke out in song, "Frosty the Snowman/Was a very jolly soul....." Ali, normally quite reserved, anxiously looked around, plaintively inquiring, "Who is Frosty the Snowman?"

The following summer, Ali auditioned for and was accepted into the Capital Area Youth Symphony as their second youngest member. The Olympia area, with a metropolitan population of around 70,000, on a per capita basis has one of the largest youth symphony associations in the United States, with well over 400 members. Ellen has since joined its board, with a special interest in increasing young musicians' attendance at area music events. Ali regularly attends and even has her own season tickets to various local music groups, and we've kept our family expenses down by becoming ushers at the local performing arts center and distributing publicity posters in exchange for free admission. Ali's progress has been steady, with her greatest initial problem being that in her

orchestral chair, her feet had difficulty reaching the floor. She continues to be creative. Ellen and I rarely attend rehearsals, but at a recent dress rehearsal, I noted her bowing was going in an entirely different direction from the second violinists around her. “What happened?” I asked. “Well,” she replied, “my music stand partner wasn’t turning the pages quickly enough, so I decided to play along with the firsts, who have the melody.” The “creativity problem” was cleared up before the performance. Ali does not seem to mind competitive auditions for chairs. She can be a perfectionist at times, but it is inner-directed rather than competitively motivated. Given that she is much younger than most of her fellow violinists, she doesn’t feel much pressure. In one audition, she jumped from tenth chair to third. “How did you do it?” I asked. She grinned, “Well, it turns out I practiced the wrong passage. So I played the required one that I didn’t practice, and then asked to play what I’d practiced. They seemed to like them both.”

Ali moved from violin size to size, each increase in size improving her tonal quality. When reaching the “3/4” size, she was pleased to have us purchase her own instrument, since she would have it for a while. We were satisfied since it was cheaper than renting, and we could resell it when Ali grew into her next one. Actually, *she* purchased the instrument, paid for with funds earned from selling six of the mutated cornsnakes she had bred that summer. The violin cost almost exactly what she received for the snakes, which pleased her immensely. When people would ask her what her violin cost, she would smile and sometimes reply, “Six snakes.”

Her next violin purchase caught us unprepared. Ellen, Meera, and Ali went to Seattle to spend the day at the Northwest Folklife Festival, held each May. After looking at various craft activities, Ellen and Ali went to the large room where instruments consigned for the annual musical instrument auction could be inspected. The auction attracts musicians and dealers from the entire three-state region all the way up to Canada, and Ellen was hoping to find a reasonably priced oboe. While so engaged, Ellen suggested to Ali that she might enjoy looking at the violins. After trying out four or five, Ali ran back to Ellen with eyes aglow. “Look what I found!” She held an old, molasses-colored full-size instrument that had clearly once had a large crack in it, and which a former owner obviously thought worthwhile to restore. She waxed rhapsodic about the tone and, to Ellen’s unequivocally amateur ears, it sounded fine indeed. “Can we bid on it tomorrow?” she asked. Ellen told her she would have to consult with me, but suggested Ali could help pay for it herself. Ali had observed other youths playing on the walkways of the festival grounds, with passersby dropping coins into their instrument cases. Within minutes, Ali had retrieved her violin and was out there playing.

Ellen did consult with me that evening. I had misgivings. We knew next to nothing about selecting violins or assessing their relative value. Violins at the auction sold at anywhere from \$50 to \$5,000. Ali’s teacher had not had the opportunity to try it out. And besides, Ali did not currently need a new violin; it would take more than a year to grow into the full-size. But on the other hand, we could agree to set a bidding limit for ourselves. Ali would be needing a full-size instrument, and our limit would be lower than a decent instrument would likely cost locally. Ali could resell this one if she later decided she wanted a different violin. She was enthusiastic, as her playing the previous day had proven, and she’d have a good lesson in the value of money – she was already extremely frugal, but to date had shown little interest in worldly economics. What clinched it for me was that in undertaking to pay for it herself, Ali would find new opportunities to perform, and discover ways

to connect her music to the world of listeners, something which to that point had for the most part eluded her, and for which she had had little occasion.

The next morning we went straight to the auction hall and got our bidder's number. The auctioneer was up to item #123; Ali's heart's desire was stringed instrument #359. We left the hall. Ali found herself a spot, set up her violin, and began to play. The previous evening she'd made herself a sign, printed in her 8-year-old's scrawl – "For My New Violin. Thanks! Ali." An hour later and some \$50 richer, she returned to the hall. People were bidding on and buying instruments, sometimes three or four or more. Ali's teacher was there, having purchased a violin, a viola, and a box of bows.

At last #359 came on the block. Two minutes later, and after a round of spirited bidding, Ali owned her violin, purchased for \$446, our winning bid having been right at our price limit. I was reassured to meet our main competitor, a Portland, Oregon violin teacher who purchased quality violins at the auction to resell to her better students. Ali beamed with her new instrument in hand.

Within 31 days, she paid off "Violetta", as the violin had now been named. Ali performed at a local college outdoor festival, earning \$186 in 2 ½ hours, the bag of coins and bills being too heavy for her to carry. During the summer, she performed regularly at the local farmer's market, delighting in being paid in fresh vegetables by the grocer whose stand she graced, thus helping to attract customers. We happily chaperoned, and enjoyed conversations we had with other parents and the occasional musician as they passed by. Ali played at Pike Place Market in Seattle, before and after Shakespeare theatrical performances in the park, and in front of her favorite nature store during our local community "Art Walk". We helped her develop her repertoire to include music passersby would be likely to recognize, all within the limits of her playing ability. This included a mix of popular favorites and well-known classical pieces: Brahms' *Hungarian Dance No. 5*, Dvorak's *Humoresque*, pieces from Bach's *Orchestral Suite No. 3*, "La Donne é Mobile" from *Rigoletto* (those who are not opera aficionados might recognize this as the theme from the Spattini Spaghetti Sauce commercial), "Somewhere Over the Rainbow", the theme from *Fiddler on the Roof*, "Oh Wouldn't It Be Lovely" from *My Fair Lady*, "My Favorite Things," "Lonely Goatherd", and "Edelweiss" from *The Sound of Music*, and "Greensleeves". The quality of her playing would not have marked her as some kind of child prodigy, but her enthusiasm more than made up for whatever musical deficiencies there might be. She showed and shared her violin with other children, and took delight in the occasional foreign coin, polished rock, or apple dropped into her violin case.

Over the course of the summer, Ali earned \$1,300, approximately \$55 per hour. Together we constructed a bar graph for her to keep track of her earnings, which she was required to count and take to the bank, and taught her how to do percentages so she could calculate how close she was to her goal. We reached an understanding that funds were to be restricted to jointly agreed-upon educational uses. After paying off the violin, Ali used some of the funds to enroll in a telescope-making workshop that winter. More significantly, you could detect a marked improvement in Ali's playing. Her hands and fingers got stronger, her bowing more precise, and her sense of self-assurance strengthened.

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Hahn, Hilary, *Hilary Hahn Plays Bach* (audio compact disc). New York, NY: Sony Music Entertainment,

Inc. 1997. The extraordinary debut recording by the phenomenal teenage homeschooled violinist, containing the fiendishly difficult last three Bach “Partitas and Sonatas for Solo Violin”, recorded when she was 17. The story goes that Hahn took up the instrument at the Peabody Conservatory before age 4 after walking through downtown Baltimore with her dad and coming upon a sign offering free violin lessons. At age 16, she completed her B.A. in Music from the prestigious Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia through a homestudy program. Asked whether she believes she is gifted, Hahn replies, “I wouldn’t call it a gift, just hard work.” She reports that once, at age 6, she asked her teacher whether she really needed to practice every day. “No, dear,” the teacher responded, “You only have to practice on days you eat.” A great gift for the budding homeschooled musician, or just for yourself!

Holt, John, *Never Too Late: My Musical Life Story*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1991. All of Holt's books have been an inspiration to homeschooling families for more than a generation. This is my personal favorite, a friendly reminder that serious learning, and the love of it, does not have to be reserved to the young.

Menuhin, Yehudi, *Unfinished Journey: Twenty Years Later*. New York: NY: Fromm International, 1996. Among the most engaging and well-written of musical autobiographies. After reading it, one could only wish his parents had written a book about their family’s unique homeschooling experiences. Menuhin writes that his first-generation immigrant parents used to smuggle him at age 2 into the balcony for matinee concerts of the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra. Asked about it later, his mother said they did so because they couldn’t afford a babysitter. Hmmm. Menuhin at 4 chose his own future teacher by insistently pointing at Louis Persinger, the SFSO’s concertmaster. Persinger, who at the time did not even teach children, soon found himself giving Menuhin lessons five days a week. How his parents managed to break down Persinger's barriers to get him to teach a raw 5-year-old who, up to that point, was without any special display of talent remains a mystery. We've lost a good story.

Suzuki, Shinichi, *Nurtured By Love: A New Approach to Education*, translated by Waltraud Suzuki. New York, NY: Exposition Press, 1969.

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ON CHOOSING A MUSIC TEACHER

Parents often ask us for advice on how to select a music teacher. We have quite a bit of experience in this regard and strong opinions which, to date, have stood us in good stead.

We've learned most critically that the selection of a music teacher should not be taken lightly, especially for the beginning student. You are choosing what will hopefully blossom into a long-term relationship for your child, one that might last for many years or even a lifetime. In the best of circumstances, music teachers become like cherished members of the family. Be prepared to invest at least as much time and energy as you would in buying a new car – the relationship may last longer.

We suggest you start with a minimum of three-five good candidates. Don’t make a decision until you’ve met and done due diligence on all of them. Ask friends, musicians, church music directors, or music stores for recommendations. Some music stores will have annotated lists of teachers.

Before making a single appointment, make a list of questions you want answered. Questions we’ve

asked have included:

- How many other students does the teacher have, for what duration, and over what range of age and ability? This can be important, as serious students will want to see others more adept than themselves, and whose progress they can use as benchmarks.
- Does the teacher specialize in a particular type of music, or teach using a particular technique or method? Is this flexible? The best method in the world will fail if it does not meet the specific needs of an individual child.
- How often are lessons held, and for how long? Can lessons be scheduled at a time when you can conveniently attend with your child, if necessary, and at a time when your child's attention is likely to be optimal?
- Does the teacher ever hold group lessons or master classes, and are all students expected to participate? When is the next one and, if soon, can your child sit in?
- How often are student recitals held?
- Is the teacher an active member of a local music teachers' association or guild? This can be invaluable because there will often be joint recitals involving students with several different teachers, graded competitions, and joint master classes, sometimes with special guest instructors. You will, however, have to be prepared to figure out how you want to deal with the competitions, which, in our experience, can cause music-making to uncomfortably resemble a sporting event.
- Does the teacher perform locally as part of a musical group? This can provide opportunities to meet other musicians.
- Will music theory be part of the lesson, or will theory assignments be made between lessons?
- For piano students: will lessons be held at a studio or at your home? There are good arguments for either approach. If at a studio, will the instrument used for lessons be an electric piano, acoustic upright, or grand? More advanced students will likely want to learn on an acoustic instrument; there are advantages for the teaching piano to be similar to the one your child will practice upon.
- How far away from your home is the studio?
- What will the lessons cost, and is tuition charged by the lesson or by the month? Are there opportunities to barter?
- Are there other families you can call for references?

Don't expect to have all your questions answered on your visit. Indeed, having made this long list of questions, I can assure you that the answers to all of them combined is not as important as the rapport – the emotional chemistry – between the teacher and your child. Good chemistry may lead to a lifetime of musical fulfillment; poor rapport, especially for the beginner, can lead to grave frustration and disappointment.

Unfortunately, just as your meeting with the car salesman may be among the worst ways to evaluate an automobile purchase, your interview of the music teacher may not be conducive to getting a feel for the potential rapport. The teacher is in an awkward position, focusing on you as the purchaser, even though your child is the consumer of the service. We watch carefully to discern how the initial interaction goes. If you respond favorably to the answers given most of your questions, but are unsure about the chemistry, ask the teacher for several trial lessons (for which you should pay). Above all, explain to your child what the process is and how she is included in the decision-making.