



Photo courtesy of the artist

## WILLIAM WILDE MEETS KATE CONWAY

19TH JULY 2018

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# *William Wilde* meets **Kate Conway**, the driving force behind **The Hackney Proms** and **Suzuki Hub**

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Having learned the violin under the Suzuki method, which her mother passed on to her, Kate has taught in schools as well as through Suzuki Hub, being the Director of the Suzukian Schools Initiative. "It was developed in Japan in the 1950s. Dr Suzuki's approach to education is that every child is able, and that we can teach talent, rather than looking for it and developing it where it's already found," she explains.



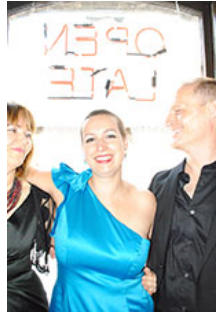
Taking a similar approach to the idea that children innately absorb language, the Suzuki method is all about harnessing their sponge-like capacity for learning. In addition to classes, students practice for half an hour each day and listen to the provided recordings. Another difference to traditional music classes is that parents attend lessons with their children and learn how to best support them in their practice at home. Students can start as early as four years old.

“Positivity is so important. The environment in which the child is brought up at home and in the lessons is paramount to their success.” Suzuki Hub, based in Shoreditch, is a family-run venture, with involvement from Kate’s wife, Ella, and brother, Rick, and there’s a real sense of engaging with the community. It’s a fun and effective way to learn an instrument, while maintaining a rigorous approach to practice.

*“I feel like when we took on Hackney Proms, I wanted to continue to build on this idea of using music as a social cohesion project.”*

Another vital part of the Suzuki philosophy is to never turn anyone away. Kate recalls one severely autistic student who may have found more traditional music learning a challenge. “Henry was completely non-verbal and he could not make eye contact with anybody. Now he comes to group lessons every week, he can play piano to grade seven, he’s doing jazz improvisation with one of our teachers, and he can play the violin really beautifully.”

His mum entered Kate for the Classic FM Music Teacher of the Year Awards, for which she got a special mention (<https://loveeast.london/2-open-late-three4/>) in the Special Education Needs Music category. “The thing about music is if you can play classical music, you can play anything else. Our kids who’ve learned classical up till their teenage years are going to be able to go and play grime with no problems.”



Subsidies are offered for those who can’t afford the full price, too. In a similar way to youth sports clubs, one big advantage is to give kids something to be passionate about, to focus their attention on something positive. Kate believes music can help disadvantaged children forge a happy path through life. “It’s the kids who literally are in danger of becoming gang members because they’ve got nothing to do.”

Kate’s other main project is her involvement in The Hackney Proms, with the band three4 (which also includes Emma Dogliani, soprano, and Stuart Wild, on keyboard). With four concerts a year held in different London venues, they put on a variety of gigs with a relaxed ambience. “I feel like when we took on Hackney Proms, I wanted to continue to build on this idea of using music as a social cohesion project.”

Some shows are more focused on traditional classical music, and others incorporate different styles, such as an upcoming gig on 7<sup>th</sup> October with She’Koyokh, a Balkan/Turkish ensemble band. Kate explains how some people are intimidated by classical music shows. “They feel either so put off, or it’s live music and they don’t know what to expect. It’s not only a financial barrier.”

The gigs are affordable and offer a superb introduction to classical music performances. You can have a drink at the bar and enjoy the show in a relaxed setting, so it’s less formal and intimidating. “I would say the majority of people living in Hackney have a really strong sense of celebrating diversity and actively thinking; that’s a good thing,” she explains.

Check out Suzuki Hub at [suzukihub.com](http://www.suzukihub.com) (<http://www.suzukihub.com>) and The Hackney Proms at [hackneyproms.co.uk](http://www.hackneyproms.co.uk) (<http://www.hackneyproms.co.uk>).

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