

Valdas Povilaitis

Born in Vilnius, in 1969, Valdas Povilaitis started taking cello lessons at the Balys Dvarionas Decenary Music School and pursued further studies at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre, from which he graduated in 1993. In 2005, he also obtained Master's degree in law and administration from the Mykolas Romeris University in Vilnius.

Immediately after graduation he has been appointed cellist with the Lithuanian State Symphony Orchestra (1993–2009) and later also with the Liepaja Symphony Orchestra in Latvia (2008). In these positions he gained invaluable artistic experiences and worked with many outstanding soloists and conductors. Yet in the long run, monotonous work of an orchestra musician seemed to lack excitement, challenge and, consequently, motivation.

On the other hand, over all these years he has developed strong determination to share his knowledge and experience with children. Having taken side jobs as a construction worker in the United States and acquired several new instruments, Povilaitis started a teaching career back in Lithuania, in 2008. During his first years as a cello teacher in the little provincial town of Širvintos, he managed to popularize his 'little known' instrument in the whole vicinity.

While visiting New York in 2009, Povilaitis became familiar with the Suzuki method and later joined the activities of the Lithuanian Suzuki Association. He instantly realized that the curriculum for musically gifted children and teaching philosophy, created by Japanese violinist and educator Shinichi Suzuki in the mid-20th century, is what Lithuanian music education system urgently needs today: in a nutshell, it primarily aims to raise a sensitive and noble musical personality rather than a prize-winner.

In 2009, he founded the Cello School, which combines the principles of the Suzuki method and ideas adopted from Venezuelan *El sistema*. He teaches the cello to children in Vilnius, Širvintos and nearby villages (Vileikiškiai, Bartkuškis, Bagaslaviškis, to name but a few); most of his pupils are impoverished children from at-risk families. In 2010, he devised the project titled "The dissemination of high culture in Lithuania's villages," which he continues to implement as part of his School's activities. It is an exemplary social and cultural project, demonstrating efficient ways to engage, occupy and integrate children from at-risk families in rural communities into music programmes thereby ensuring their opportunities to become fully empowered citizens. Free and regular music education to children in rural communities through direct instruction and introduction into broader artistic context proved to be the most efficient way to reduce social exclusion and increase access to cultural resources.

Valdas Povilaitis currently has more than 40 pupils, with whom he regularly tours across Lithuania and abroad. In 2015, he invited Rushad Eggleston, an innovative cello virtuoso and educator from the United States, to perform in Lithuania. Together with his pupils, Mr. Povilaitis took part in the 1st International Cello Festival in Klaipėda, in 2017.

Since 2012, Mr. Povilaitis has been appointed president of the Lithuanian Suzuki Association, a non-profit organization which provides structured training in the Suzuki method for teachers and organizes the annual Suzuki festival, as well as diverse seminars, conferences, international music camps, and concerts.