

Memories of Leonard Falcone's Teaching Techniques

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This list of memories is far from exhaustive, but these are just a few memories of how Dr. Falcone worked with me during the years I studied with him.

- *Always play better than your best student and model/demonstrate through playing on the instrument.* Leonard Falcone was close to 80 years old when I first started with him, but he kept himself in shape. Although his sound was different than mine (based on equipment), his tonal concepts were sound, his musicianship was impeccable, and his technique was brilliant. I can vividly remember a few occasions, working hard on perhaps a Rochut or Arban's or Tyrell, ready to "impress" the old man. He would encourage me "Very Good!" "It's sounding well!" Then he'd pick up the old Conn and play something ungodly beautiful that was the piece I'd just played. He used these opportunities to teach—first by playing it so well, then pointing out, in vivid detail, exactly how, where and why what I played was different. It was eye opening and breathtaking at times. Frustrating at times, but educational. He was constantly modeling and never had a bad day on the horn.
- *He structured lessons according to the individual, not as a "cookie cutter."* All of us have strengths and weaknesses. For me, I was somewhat lacking rhythmically, but I had a good ear, and had been listening to Italian Opera for most of my life, with a good lyrical concept that Leonard enjoyed. I wasn't a terrific sight reader, usually due to rhythmic things, and I had a "Troat vibrato/closed troat" when I first met him. So he added to my repertoire things like Bona's Rhythmical Articulation (which were beastly for me!), Alan Ostrander's Shifting Meter Studies (which largely mystified me) and we used the Rochut more as lyric flow studies to work on opening the "Troat." I think we all had Arban's and Tyrell, most of us Vobaron, but he also added Blazeovich's Sequences, which also proved rhythmically challenging. In this way, he challenged and taught me just about to the breaking point, but fed me Rochut, Tyrell, Arban's to keep me in touch with beautiful melodies and to hone the things that came more naturally to me. Individual programming. Some guys had embouchure issues, so they worked a bit on Kopprasch, learning to pop out intervals and hit the note squarely in the middle. All of us got a thorough schooling in technique: Arban's scales, at 120 up to 160, 16th notes—"No, not clean enough...listen." And he ripped them for me. Amazing—single tongued. Each of us had a well-balance approach that grew our strengths and slowly eliminated our weaknesses.
- *A Zen-like approach to technical problems.* When I butchered a difficult technical passage he would often stop me. He would begin to point to individual pitches often out of order in the passage. "Play this note...play this one...now this one...no, play it loudly to get it in your ear, and land squarely in the center of each note." Then backwards through the phrase, finally as written but one note at a time, pounding them out loud and centered. "Now," he'd finish, "You've proven to me that you can play each of these notes beautifully in any order...all you have to do now is just play it slowly and somehow connect them together." (Well, DUH!) But the technique worked, and I still use it in my own practice.
- *He somehow taught us to be better people.* It was not unusual to talk about world affairs, things in the news, and he demonstrated that he was remarkably flexible, had good insights and synthesized most situations as a deep thinker, although sometimes his world-view was a bit naive. I think back to these casual conversations, and realize that he was always measuring and always teaching, even in these interactions.

- *While most of his background grew out of the 19th century Italian tradition, he was not afraid to have us tackle other things, even from other instruments.* I was surprised, for example, when he incorporated the Hindemith Trombone Sonate into a recital I was giving. Leonard taught it well, and my most difficult issue was finding a pianist who would be willing to tackle it with 3 weeks notice. (I eventually married the woman!) I played Gordon Jacob's Fantasia a year or so after it was published, but Dr. Falcone had a terrific handle on it. The Clarke solos, classical pieces drawn from cello or bassoon literature he also taught with conviction and integrity.
- *Because...back to demonstrations for a moment...frequently in my lessons he would mimic what I played (good mimicry!) and would play it back to me his way. He would explain what he did and then ask the question "Do you know why I played it this way?" [me:"No."] "Because it sounds better, that's why." Sometimes that's the only answer I needed to hear from "the source."*
- *Non-verbals.* We all send non-verbal clues. If he got up from the desk and walked over while I was playing it either meant I was bombing it, or (if he was smiling) it meant that he was happy that I'd finally mastered something. The absolute worst was when he sat at his desk and put his head down...no, it got worse...when he bowed his head and shook it side to side. This was almost as bad as when he bowed his head, shook it side to side, and covered his face with his hands. (That was about as bad as it got, but it really took the wind out of your sails in a hurry). But—despite this "accidental criticism" he would invariably first ask "Did you prattice this at all this week?" Then he'd get out the pencil and circle problem areas. Finally, he picked up his horn and demonstrated. Then we played it together, slowly, and he might grab one of the other method books to demonstrate a similar passage. (He was unerring doing this!) By the time 15 minutes or so had gone by, I was on the way to understanding my problems and another week of "prattice" would go by. He would invariably remember, a week later, what I had done to that piece of music and would be very encouraging—provided it got better.
- *Be on time.* The young pianist I married had a teacher of about 29 years old. Leonard was 80. We had 10 40-minute lessons in a term. Leonard blocked his time in 1 hour increments with ample time in between in case he wanted to run the lesson long. He never missed a lesson. On the other side of the coin was this young piano professor, who had a group lesson of 4 students, for 40 minutes, and typically missed at least half of her lessons a term. To make it worse, she consistently started late, and typically cut the lessons short at the 30 minute mark. Dr. Falcone typically arrived early (according to then-Department Chair Kenneth Bloomquist), sometime around 7AM. I know Dr. Falcone played a pretty substantial warm-up each day. He was never EVER late, and insisted that we be on time, and he was shocked to hear that some of his colleagues treated their time commitments like they did. A lesson with Dr. Falcone was all work, intensive, exhausting work to play in his studio for 60-90 minutes, but results were easy to measure.
- *Be true to yourself.* Dr Falcone's sound fit him, and it emanated from an old Conn 4 valve gold-plated euphonium coupled with a "cookie cutter" relatively small and shallow mouthpiece. The sound was unique, but it was "his" sound. Most of us had Bessons or Boosey & Hawkes horns in that day, much larger, and while he liked our sounds, he stuck with his old horn and made the most of it. I remember during the 1970's Southern Music came out with a survey of modern brass teaching philosophies. One of the respondents to interviews and surveys was Leonard Falcone. One entry of his is still memorable under the heading "Warm Ups". College instructors and professionals from all over the country had responded with their long tones, lip slurs, arpeggios, scales, etc. All except Leonard Falcone, who wrote something like this: "The high

notes being the most difficult, this is what I typically start my warm up with.” Walking by his office at 7:30 AM you’d hear this and say “Sonofagun—he really DOES that!” In other words, he wasn’t afraid to answer a question literally and exactly how he felt about how something worked for him. On the other side of things, we all had our lips slurs, some of us played Remington Warmups for him, and he was a huge advocate of long tones. But the question posed had been “How do YOU warm up.” This was his answer, contrary though it might have seemed.

- *Care about your students and let them know about it.* Leonard Falcone was a compassionate man, and this compassion manifested itself in many different ways. In my case, he knew I was engaged to the fine pianist who had learned the Hindemith for me. He knew I was dirt poor, and would need a car. He kept me busy doing house work, yard chores, etc. I made enough money to put down on a car and then some. (Dr. Earle Louder reports having painted the Falcone’s basement a number of times, and Marty Erickson claims he made the whopping sum of \$3.00 an hour to do very little work!) My young bride found a job at the school where Mrs. Falcone taught. They were very kind people. On the other side of it, from time to time a student simply couldn’t/wouldn’t advance, and had to be let go from the studio. I don’t know first hand how this was effected, but I do know that Leonard Falcone was a fair and decent man in all my dealings with him. In other cases our youth and exuberance needed reigning in, with words like “Roger, you’re too entoosiastic!”

There are many more technical things, but these are some that jump out at me. I’m reminded of a very FINE conductor/Leonard Falcone friend/follower working with my brass band a few weeks ago. We had some material that shifted meters with the 16th note being the unit of beat. “Dr. Beat can’t go this fast”, he said, “But I have this App on my I-phone that can give me the 400 beats per minute to really dial this in at quarter = 100.”

It made me smile inside, remembering Leonard Falcone’s pathetic little Mini-Taktell, that sat on the piano and would go “TIIIIICK-toc-TIIIIICK-toc-TIIICCCK” in an uneven sort of swingly 6/8 gait. Not that Dr. Falcone played particularly out of rhythm, (yes, he stylized a lot of figures, to be sure, but by his own musical choice), but to think how far we’ve come in 40 years to a point where we have to beat 400 beats per measure to read through the various odd meter changes is to compare an I-phone with a rotary dial phone of that age.

I had to ask myself, what would Leonard do with this? First, he would buy a cell phone after carefully shopping for it, he’d download the app, and he’d start studying the score. He’d punch buttons on the phone, mumbling to himself, and he’d poke at the screen a little bit. But at some point he’d put it together, “prattice” it for a few days, and not long after that be prepared to start teaching it...undoubtedly scrapping the I-phone and its App for the old reliable swinging Mini-Taktell or the unerring built in metronome in his head. (“The pulse is like a heartbeat—sometimes it goes faster, sometimes slower, but always evenly.”) He would be at a point where he’d just feel it. He’d demonstrate the patterns, tie them together, grin broadly and say “Because it just sounds better this way, that’s why.”