A Visit With Fred Fox

07/20/09

In July, 2009, Patrick Moor (UAHS student now studying in Weimar, Germany) and Ben Rynex (freshman UAHS student) drove the 8-hour Tucson-Los Angeles route to meet with and play for the master teacher Fred fox. Fred (he hates to be called “Mr. Fox”!) studied with the great Bruno Jaenicke, solo horn in the NY Philharmonic in the 1930s as he grew up during the Depression. Fred went on to play principal in the old Minneapolis Orchestra and then the Los Angeles Philharmonic before moving the the sound stage recording orchestras in Hollywood. Along the way he developed a unique and very effective set of concepts and style of teaching that has literally changed many fine horn players instantly and permanently (when his suggestions are followed thoroughly).

Fred’s book, “Essentials of Brass Playing”, is inexpensive, widely-used and, well, essential. Copies can be ordered directly from me.

If you want to meet with Fred in person (UAHS members can do it for free), arrange with me to make a road trip to LA. Hurry: he’s 95, very enthusiastic and works miracles!

• MAKE THE AUDIENCE BELIEVE IT! It’s called “art” because you are communicating emotions to your audience. Do it completely and they will feel it too.

• PRETEND YOUR SOUND IS YOUR TOTAL PERSONALITY. You are behind a screen (you will be at auditions) and how you look, what you’re wearing, how you talk, etc., have no bearing on your audience’s reception of your art. Only your sound does. So make it a great sound!

• USE YOUR FULL MIND. Don’t “coast” on less than full attention to your playing at all times. Use 100% of what you have to offer. That way you won’t be able to say “I could've tried harder.”

• USE THE “HANGING LIP” CONCEPT. Emulate a clarinetist’s reed, which always retains its relative hardness. Do not harden your lip when playing.

• DO IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME AND EVERY TIME THEREAFTER. Don’t “try” something halfheartedly on the first attempt: go for it completely. This applies especially to accuracy, phrasing, tone and timing.

• PERSIST TOWARDS GREATNESS. Don’t settle for “okay” or “pretty good”. Go for the gold/brass ring/A+ every time. Why do less well than you can?

• ACCURACY WORK: Take three pitches and play them 10 times in a row, putting down your horn after each one to simulate beginning a solo or other entrance. If you do three a day (x10=30), you’ll go through the entire horn’s range twice every month, great for your accuracy development.

• COORDINATE YOUR DIAPHRAGM WITH YOUR ARTICULATING. When you cough, you have a burst of strength from your upper diaphragm muscles. If you do that at the same time that you tongue, it will help your articulations be clearer.
• AIM FOR EACH NOTE BEFORE HITTING IT. While playing one note, mentally prepare the next note for better accuracy and pre-production preparation.

• EQUALIZE THE PRESSURE ON YOUR AIR. As your air supply diminishes, increase the diaphragm pressure on the lungs to keep the airflow even.

• MULTITASK! Do everything all the time! In this way you will stand out as the best player.

• RAISE YOUR TONGUE IN THE HIGH REGISTER JUST LIKE WHEN WHISTLING. When you whistle, you raise your tongue to make a higher pitch. Do the same as you ascend on the horn, raising your tongue almost to a hissing sound.

• EMULATE THE VIOLINIST'S BOW IN THE HIGH REGISTER. A violinist’s bow has a wide swath of horsehair. In the higher register, the violinist uses less of it (a narrower band of hair). We should also a narrower band of air.

• MATCH ALL NOTES’ TIMBRES IN ALL REGISTERS. First play a mid-register note (e.g. concert middle C) with a way-too-tubby timbre. Then continue in a three-note arpeggio, matching all notes’ timbres. Next, play the same mid-register note with a way-too-bright timbre, and continue up the arpeggio matching all notes’ timbres. Finally, now that you’ve outlined the timbral extremes, play a good mid-register note and match the entire arpeggio to it.

• ADD LOWER DIAPHRAGM MUSCLES AS YOU ASCEND TO THE HIGHER REGISTER. This will focus the support accordingly for the highest notes.

• BE RELENTLESS! Don’t take “maybe” for an answer. Go for “absolutely yes!”

• ALWAYS STOP AND SET BEFORE PLAYING. It’s like packing your bag ahead of time and leaving it by the door so you can just grab it when your ride comes. That’s how prepared each entrance should be on the horn.

AND, as Fred always says, “Eternal Vigilance!”

Or, to paraphrase Nike, “JUST DO IT... ALL!”