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RICARDO MORALES

IN THIS ISSUE

Interview with Ricardo Morales
and Genesis Riboldi

“Queen Clarinet”: Doreen Ketchens

A New Look at Lefèvre’s *Third Concerto*



ClarinetFest® 2021 GOES VIRTUAL

Pedagogy Corner

by Phillip O. Paglialonga

LEARNING FROM YONA ETTLINGER

In my last article for this column, I wrote about “Developing Artistry,” which is a topic I am certainly passionate about in my work as a teacher and pedagogue. In that article, I presented philosophical ideas alongside some practical ways we can each develop as artists. In this article, I would like to continue this pursuit by looking at the playing and teaching of Yona Ettlinger.

One of my teachers, Fred Ormand, was fond of starting his first studio class each year with a paraphrase of a quote from the legendary flutist Marcel Moysé:

Anytime you hear a player that you really admire you should ask them three questions:

1. *Who did you study with?*
2. *What etudes do you play?*
3. *Where did you buy your lips?*

Ormand would go on to tell us that we needed to really think about what Moysé was suggesting to people. *Who did you study with?* Where did their ideas and approaches come from? *What etudes do you play?* What exercises or practice techniques can you borrow? *Where did you buy your lips?* What sort of equipment do they use?

We each are able to do some things at an exceptionally high level, but struggle with other things. When you find someone who can do something exceptional, try to figure out how they were able to learn to do that. And when you hear someone who plays in a way that you admire, try to gain a better understanding of their approach to the instrument.

One of my musical heroes has always been Yona Ettlinger (1924-1981), the famous former principal of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra (1947-1964). Ettlinger was a complete artist in the most sincere way. He was a fine clarinetist who

played for nearly two decades as principal clarinet of the Israel Philharmonic, but in 1964 he left the orchestra and moved to Paris, where he taught clarinet and studied composition with Nadia Boulanger. In 1966, he then joined the faculty at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London where he taught clarinet and conducted the school’s orchestra.

Though I never had the opportunity to meet Ettlinger, I have certainly been influenced by his legacy, both through his recordings and his teaching. When I listen to recordings of Ettlinger I am consistently struck by both the ease with which he played, and also the sincerity of his music making. There is a certain simplicity to his playing, but also an inherent beauty to his sound. To my ear, I can definitely hear influences from his teacher, Louis Cahuzac, but also a unique voice.

Below are excerpts from interviews I did with three distinguished clarinetists, each influenced by Ettlinger.

James Campbell recently retired from the faculty of Indiana University, Alexander Fiterstein teaches clarinet at the Peabody Institute of Music, and Eli Eban currently teaches clarinet at Indiana University.

PHILLIP O. PAGLIALONGA: *Could you talk a bit about how you knew Yona Ettlinger?*

JAMES CAMPBELL: I met Yona, we all called him Yona, when I was a senior at the University of Toronto and looking for a place to continue my studies. Yona was a friend of Abe Galper, my teacher in Toronto, and suggested I consider going to Paris to work with him. As luck would have it, just at that time Yona was playing the Mozart *Quintet* with the Tel Aviv Quartet in Buffalo. Several of us made sure

we went to hear him. That night my immature brain told me that I really needed to study with him. I couldn’t explain why, and I still can’t, but there was something deep and sincere about his musicianship that spoke to me.

ELI EBAN: I “grew up” on Ettlinger’s chamber and solo performances when he flew from Paris to Tel Aviv two or three times a year. I studied with him intensively and sometimes concurrently with Richard Lesser, who was never territorial about this despite the fact that neither of them liked each other. During my four years at Curtis I would also stop over in London or Paris for intense study on my annual summer trip back home to Tel Aviv, between the end of the academic year and the start of the Marlboro Festival. In 1973 the World Jeunesses Musicale orchestra convened in Israel under Zubin Mehta. Jim Campbell represented Canada and I represented Israel. Yona was the woodwind coach. Jim was studying with him in Paris at the time. We split the principal book; I played Mahler 1 and Jim played a beautiful Schubert 3. We became fast friends, and met again in Toronto in 1976, at one of the early ICA conferences. Yona was one of the featured recitalists, the other was Stanley Drucker.

So, starting around age 16, through the years in the Israeli orchestras, and up until the time of his death, it was a concentrated series of lessons and hearing his concerts, two to three times a year, as both of our schedules permitted. And an ongoing personal relationship with him.

POP: *So many of us never had the opportunity to hear Ettlinger play*

in person, so I am curious which of his recordings you think are most representative of his playing. Which of the recordings available do you think best exemplify his approach?

JAMES CAMPBELL: His recording of the slow movement of the Mozart *Clarinet Quintet* is for me the gold standard of clarinet playing. It sums up all that I remember from my lessons.

ELI EBAN: The great clarinet quintets and the transcriptions of Pergolesi and Veracini concertos. The playing is very nuanced but in a very subtle way. There is a purity of intent, and a well-informed sincerity about the musical approach, which he always felt is the most important part of this endeavor. Nothing was done for cheap effect. In lessons he would talk about a sense of “responsibility” he had towards our great repertoire and towards a refined, cultivated aesthetic of clarinet playing.

POP: *When you listen to recordings of Ettlenger what aspects do you think are particularly special?*

ALEXANDER FITERSTEIN: The recordings of Ettlenger that are available on YouTube that I find inspiring are the Burgmüller *Duo*, Handel *Concerto* (live recording, arranged by Ettlenger), Mozart *Concerto* first movement (live recording), and the Brahms sonatas and *Quintet*.

His softer dynamics are full and resonant, his rubato is very natural, and he continually creates a sense of flow within a larger musical arc. He has impeccable intonation, matching notes in different octaves or with the piano, both synchronously and in echoing notes stated by the piano earlier. He has a wonderful sense of ensemble with his partners (especially in the recordings with Pnina Salzman). The music-making is purposeful and sincere, but also powerful and fiery when needed.

POP: *What were your lessons with Ettlenger like? What sorts of things did you play for him? Did he have any specific exercises or methods that he used?*

ELI EBAN: Lessons were long and very intense. Much time was spent on long tones, slow scales and intervals, lyrical phrase analysis and shaping, and clarity and variety of articulation. I remember working out of the Stark *Staccato Studies*

and Kroepsch, also some Klosé. Yona stated that his role was not supplying answers or solutions, but to “raise questions.” The student was expected to work towards their own solutions or “results,” as he called them. Any kind of technical guidance, about embouchure, etc., was very cryptic, almost like a Zen koan, and very sparse in terms of specific physical application.

JAMES CAMPBELL: I was never aware of Yona having specific methods or exercises. Embouchure solidity and control were very important to him, all at the service of a beautiful, consistent sound. The Klosé “Daily Exercises” and Jeanjean etudes became my daily clarinet diet.

I do remember my first lesson with him very clearly. He had me play four notes starting on throat F, then E, E_b and D, each with the embouchure that most of us teach – pointed chin, corners in, etc. He then told me to play only those notes until the next lesson, nothing else. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, the next lesson was three weeks away. There I was, a stranger in Paris, in my little room, with only four notes to keep me company. A few weeks earlier I had won an international clarinet competition in Belgrade, and, at 21, was all set to “conquer” the world. Those four notes turned out to be the most important of my life. When the time for my second lesson finally came, I was once again a student, ready to learn!

POP: *Could you speak about the influence Yona Ettlenger has had on your playing?*

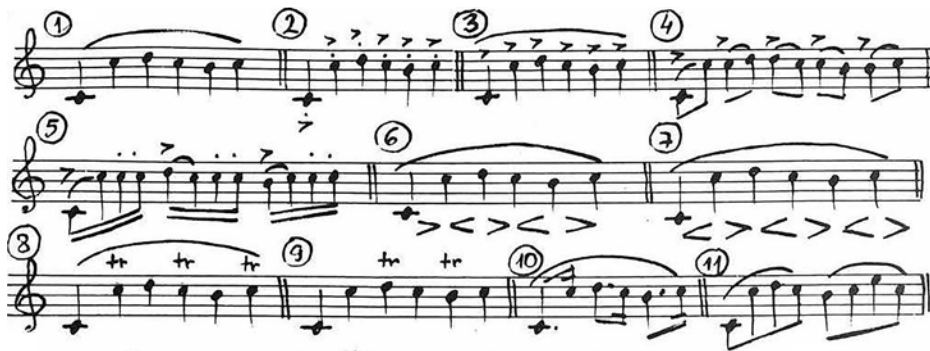
ALEXANDER FITERSTEIN: Although I never met Yona Ettlenger in person

(I was very young when he passed away), he had a significant influence on my playing through my teacher, Eli Heifetz, who was one of his most notable students in Israel and from listening to his wonderful recordings. I also studied for a year with Mordechai Rechtman who was the principal bassoonist of the IPO and played next to Ettlenger for 17 years.

Heifetz admired Ettlenger and mentioned him in our lessons (I was 12-16 years old at the time, and this made a big impression on me). Among the repertoire I studied at the time were Ettlenger arrangements such as Mozart’s *Church Sonatas* and Theme and Variations from the *Gran Partita* as well as some baroque music. We also worked on Klosé *Exercices Journaliers* and other French etudes. Listening to Ettlenger’s recordings I can say that Heifetz absorbed a lot of Ettlenger’s approach and style. They spoke the same “language” in terms of clarinet playing and musical expression.

Heifetz wrote a method book titled *Legato-Staccato*. In it he mentions that he created the book to alleviate some of the boredom associated with working on long notes. I believe Ettlenger worked on long tones extensively and so did his students. As far as I can tell Ettlenger emphasized “correct” playing: embouchure, hand position, posture, breathing and articulation. During the first six months that I studied with Heifetz, I mostly did long tones and slow legato exercises. I would describe his approach as uncompromising but patient, always in search of the highest quality. (He suggested practicing in “dry” acoustics and not in resonant





Example 1: Excerpt from the method book *Legato-Staccato* by Eli Heifetz



In each letter (A - G) the sign \longleftrightarrow implies the possibility of playing each bar : a) normally , b) backward . Slow tempo is recommended $\text{♩} = 40-60$

Example 2: Excerpt from the method book *Legato-Staccato* by Eli Heifetz

spaces in order to be disadvantaged and to be forced to improve your basic tone.)

In these excerpts from *Legato-Staccato* you can see Ettlinger's ideas about the execution of smooth legato and his method of teaching articulation (see Examples 1 and 2). Heifetz emphasized that one should use the diaphragm and abdominal muscles actively in all of the examples that require it (Nos. 2-7) and not to move your mouth (add pressure) or throat.

POP: *Were you ever able to play on Ettlinger's setup? Do you know what sort of equipment he used? Do you know if he changed equipment often or if he more or less played the same setup through most of his career?*

ELI EBAN: In his early career he played Selmer mouthpieces, quite close facing, when these could still be played on Buffet clarinets. I am told that Selmer got tired of Buffet players using only their mouthpiece so they changed the

design. Later, he played a German-influenced French mouthpiece, perhaps by a gentleman called Berger who worked in Munich. His first clarinet instruction in Israel came from Zvi Tzipin who played a German system. Yona's intonation was close to impeccable, so the choice of mouthpiece bore or interior was acoustically viable on French bore clarinets. I tried it once, very free, without a lot of back pressure. He said "it's set up very much to remain in place with the embouchure," no compensatory lip movements or jawing.

POP: *In your teaching, do you feel there are ways Ettlinger's legacy continues?*

ALEXANDER FITERSTEIN: Absolutely.

I think it is important to have an ideal, a type of a "lighthouse," something to strive for and for me Ettlinger is this type of an ideal. A way of playing where the technical aspect is always in the service of the music, and I try to convey this to my students. Breathing, embouchure, posture, hand position and making phrases sound natural are things that we work on in every lesson. Ettlinger was a complete musician. He studied composition, taught, conducted and wrote arrangements that expanded our repertoire. By passing on the principles that were taught to me by Eli Heifetz and introducing a new generation to Ettlinger's recordings I hope to continue his legacy.

JAMES CAMPBELL: Basics, basics, basics! If you can't play the clarinet you can't make music. (And if you don't make music, there is no point in playing the clarinet).

ELI EBAN: Well, I would hope – imbuing a sense of appropriateness to the musical style of a piece, whether it be an etude or a concert piece or certainly any orchestral excerpts. More does not necessarily guarantee better. More force, more volume, more muscle, more unbridled velocity was not the point at all! So as I think out loud here, I would sum it up in one word – proportion. ❖

* * * * *

In many ways I think Ettlinger was always striving for the highest level of artistic excellence. It is my sincere hope

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that reflecting on his musical journey, thinking about his approach, and listening to his recordings will help you discover ideas that will elevate your own musicianship.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Aronson, Josh, dir.. *Orchestra of Exiles*. 2012. New York, NY: Aronson Films. DVD
Heifetz, Eli. *Legato-Staccato Method for the Clarinet*. Tel Aviv: OR-TAV Music Publications, 1984.

ABOUT THE WRITER



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