

PORTERFLUTE POD

S. 5 Ep 1

PERFORMANCE THERAPY: HAVE A GOOD LESSON!

Welcome to PorterFlute Pod! It's becoming cold here, winter in fact and we're at the beginning of Season 5. Guiding me from time to time is Justine Sedky and Alan J. Tomasetti.

You're in our Performance Therapy segment and it has something to do with a "performance" we call the "lesson." I'm always laughing and wondering what it means when I'm at school and students, and teachers for that matter, say to each other, "Have a good lesson! There are two perspectives to take – that of the student and that of the teacher.

Today I went to the vault and found my recent performance of the Ballade by Perilhou, a standard favorite of all students, and sometimes a delusion of grandeur for teachers. What do I mean by that?

- For example, programming repertoire too difficult for the student but you assign it anyway to try to see if they can win a contest or seat -
- Or, students' thinking they can handle a piece way before they have the needed skills.

So today I want to break down the issues and go into what it might mean to

'Have a good lesson'

Let's just say it like it is – Every lesson is different. You're just going to have to get used to it. I'll also say that teaching is to human beings, not students. Each person in front of you is a soul and each person teaching you is a mentor. Students learn from all their teachers and teachers learn from teaching all of their students. I'm going to discuss the points that can make or break a "good" lesson and maybe you can relate!

I found eight things I can discuss and each of them has a valid point for both teacher and student. So here they are.

1. **"It went fine in the Practice Room"**. How fine? Good enough to nail it tomorrow in public? That's how many times you should practice your passage in your practice session. And Fine isn't good enough, anyway. Fine means you could mess it up 6 times out of 10 and don't you want to go big or go home? Don't you feel you can practice it ten times in a row and spend that time honing your skills instead of cheating yourself and thinking everything is OK?

I'm here to tell you, everything is not OK when you think "I'm good." "I got this." That is a clear danger to your level of performance. You must practice performing. Even etudes – but I'll get into that later. It bears repeating– that repetition is the way to your success. Just like you learned how to read and do math and more. If you're a talented musician with the biggest ears in the world, perhaps you must be the MOST careful. This means you cannot play and ride on your talent alone and you should buckle down and work your scales, your intonation exercises and your basic skills as if you're a beginner every day. You've heard me say that before! Where? In the Anatomy of Sound movie.

I'll take a **commercial break** here to remind you that **The Anatomy of Sound** workshop you know, and love has found a new home online! It's called **AOS-wellness** and we are here for you as a faculty to provide resources and products for arts educators and performing artists. Join for 6-months or 1 year and get our 5 changing channels every month plus the back content from previous months. Those channels are Wisdom, Movement, Meditation, Breathing and Wisdom. So after the show you can go to

PorterFlute.com/AOS and learn more. You can opt in for our 7-day trial and get access to my popular Focus Sheet along with all of the wisdom we're bringing to you from our amazing faculty – only here at **AOS-Wellness.com**

OK Back to the podcast.

2. Here's number two. **How was your lesson?** I played well! Or, I played like doo doo. Or I don't know what that means! here are a number of excuses we can make as to exactly HOW we feel the lesson went as a teacher and as a student. Is a good lesson one in which the student plays well? Does the teacher teach well? What does have a good lesson mean and to whom? And Also what does it mean to be reviewed as a good teacher, or a good student? OK I get it – you can get completely blindsided by nerves but that's when you know you're unprepared! You should go into this lesson understanding that LEARNING SOMETHING is the goal for both parties.

In her student handout *The Ideal Student*, Jeanne Baxtresser points in the direction of the student and asks them to be prepared, first and foremost. When a student is prepared, the teacher can do their job.

The teacher's perspective? Well, teachers get reviewed by students. What are they reviewing, exactly? I keep a list next to my desk of the questions asked in my annual reviews, but I have them in answer form. I will impart knowledge fairly. I will provide proper guidance in the proper situation. I will not play favorites. It's a list of questions that the University has put together to garner the outcome of these one-on-one situations in a snapshot lens of the student's perspective. I make sure I get an A on those reviews, simply because I have the guided answers to the test in front of me.

A good lesson for me is a lesson where we've done our job in the most loving and nurturing way possible. A good lesson for me is one where the student has come

prepared for what I've written down in their notebook. That notebook is for both of us. Me, to remember what the issues and assignments are for each student, and for the student to see my advice in writing and, if I've written it many times, then I can prove on paper it's been an issue for some time. I usually flip the pages saying – "I keep reminding you!"

What are the responsibilities for the student brought by Ms. Baxtresser? Bring your manners. When a student says "Thank you for the lesson" then it's clear that both parties agree that the appreciation for their knowledge and guidance has been recognized. And for the the teacher to say "Great lesson" means the preparation was there. The best student's are the ones who combine discipline wit, a desire to learn, a driving curiosity and enthusiasm. They express feelings of excitements and inspiration. She ends by writing "Find that quality that will inspire your teacher to reach further into themselves to find answers. You will truly be a joy to teach."

3. **"Oh, I know how it goes."** This one always stops me dead in my tracks. Like many of my now memorable quotes, I have a saying I like to use that stops that student dead in THEIR tracks. I tell them, "I have news. There's how it goes, and there's how you think it goes. And, quite frankly, nobody cares how you think it goes. They want to hear how it goes. So simply play what's written and you'll be fine." Simple, truthful, and honest. All the qualities that a teaching statement should hold. No malice, just frank.

Especially in orchestral excerpts, I believe it's best to show you can merge with your colleagues in representing what's best for the piece, the composer and the orchestra. I'd shy away from playing too far outside the zone of prideful playing, out of tune, imposing vibrato speeds, or even missing notes. Take practicing excerpts for your lesson seriously as if you were in an audition. That way you're mindful of what's happening in the orchestra when you're playing and know your part of the whole. Everyone knows how it goes and if you don't play it that way then it's my job to tell you how it goes.

4. And along those lines, here's another phrase that makes me wonder if a student has heard themselves. **"Oh, you're right."** I only have one thing to say. Yes, I know I'm right. I've memorized it, I've performed it, I've counted it, I've cursed it. I've taught it for 24 years so yes, I'm right. And the teacher, should absolutely check to make sure they ARE right just in case there's an error in the edition or something else wrong with the issue at hand. When the student thinks the teacher might be wrong, it leads to all sorts of mistrust issues.

Believe me, when I teach without a score and I think there's a slur and I'm wrong, and the student corrects me, I absolutely say, "You're right." And I admit my mistake. But quite often I'm right.

Let me take one more opportunity to introduce you to AOS Wellness where you can do a 34 minute yoga class or several different meditations, all for free. You can see more of our content at AOS-Wellness and if you're on our PorterFLute website, it's /AOS. Check us out for memberships and products that help the performing artist and arts educators.

5. OK, back to the Pod. Along the lines of teaching students that are new to my studio, I've had the lesson of **"This was my old teacher's way. This is your way."** Yes, correct and my way is the way we will run this show called lessons. My way will be not singing rhythms to help you out in mimicking me so you can learn rhythms easier. My way will be counting loudly in Firebird with you in every single lesson, annoyingly so, until you learn to count the rests correctly. My way will be playing bad piano with you during Daphnis so you can hear the chords in the orchestra part.

Truthfully, this scenario came to me quite early on in my teaching life so I'm very keen on noticing the discomfort when I don't count or do count or sing or whatever I'm doing that's bothersome. In fact, I developed my 4-hour practice routine for that student. And if I know you're not counting, I will never sing you the rhythm. In the end, my way is not your former teacher's way, nor should it be. Case dismissed.

6. **“They spent 40 minutes on an etude. (Eyeroll)”** The student’s perspective is that they’ll get to play a lot. Play. Play the instrument. Like play for more than a few measures at a time, especially when the concerto has been the priority, not the etude. Etude? Really? Why is the teacher spending so much time on my etude?

Well, according to the teacher, everything that happens in your repertoire is going to be covered in an etude. So, I know I’m preaching to the PorterFlute choir here when I speak about etudes. Just reference any of my podcasts on etudes – please – and make sure you’re paying attention to them carefully.

A good lesson is one where you learn information to help you grow. Not just tips and tricks as you all like to say now, but real pearls of wisdom, ones that take you to a better level of playing and growth as a musician. Then you put those etude lessons into all your other repertoire when you get home or back to your practice room. Yes, you’ll spend 40 minutes on an etude and love it. Thank your teacher and the composer of that etude for making you a better player

7. Just talking is OK. When you’re ready but you have some distress in your life, it’s not uncommon to want to just sit and have a good old-fashioned chat. Talking in a lesson is appropriate if there’s an issue interfering with your work. A good teacher will hand the reins over to a legal and certified expert in whatever needs you might have. We are trained to know what’s available like mental health officers in our school who are ready to listen. Your Professor is there to teach music, in my case, so music I shall teach. I can give wisdom that will definitely show itself as an issue in your life and it’s an interesting phenomenon that what issues are in your playing certainly can show up in your life.

Make sure you’re ready with an agenda when you want some professional time with your teacher. These talks are about jobs, summer festivals, repertoire, calendar issues. All

these must happen in the lesson in order to make it a good lesson. Everyone feels organized and ready to tackle the future. Bring your agenda to the lesson, not just to play but to discuss.

8. “They stopped a lot.” That could be said about a teacher or a student. Teacher’s often need to correct immediately so they can be sure you know it happened. Students stop a lot for several reasons. Saying “Sorry” or “Oh God,” or stopping for a mistake allows the brain to now have to push through the hard stuff. It also allows the student to breathe wherever and then not be in control of the phrase the next time around since they kwpt stopping to begin with. It’s annoying to keep stopping.

Maing a mistake in your piece or etude is one thing. Move on. But to continually stop and provide a non-stop flow of banter that projects your fears and doubts and all of the excuses you’ve brought into the room in your back pocket, well that is annoying – truthfully! Teachers don’t need your excuses. They need your discipline. Discipline doesn’t require perfection but time. Lots of time devoted to the craft you’ve chosen.

Stopping and talking to yourself or your teacher in a lesson too much signifies a break in the flow of the music, the piece and the lesson. Leave your doubts under your chair in the practice room. The teacher’s don’t know what they arem nor do they need to hear them. The teacher thinks you’re great. The teacher needs you to keep going and play what’s on the page. This, I believe, can lead to coming out into the hallway and saying, “That was a good lesson. I learned a lot.”

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