

Jascha Heifetz in the Studio and at the Beach: *Aphorism and Humor as Teaching Tools*

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How does a legendary performer turned teacher reconcile an iconic, fascinating and complex persona with the imperatives of effective teaching? Jascha Heifetz, in his Master Class at the University of Southern California, made effective use of aphorism (he was a master one-liner) and humor in his interactions with his students, both in the classroom and in less formal settings (including occasions such as his annual Malibu beach house party), to convey a gestalt culture of the violin and of a life in music as he knew it and practiced it.

A Heifetz Dozen...

Prepare like it means everything in the world to you; perform like you don't give a damn.

Do you also scratch your ear like this (reaching over his head to scratch the opposite ear; doing something in an un-necessarily difficult way)

It is not necessary to play the violin in tune; you only have to sound as like you are playing it in tune (Heifetz the *zen*-master, my own personal favorite in teaching).

No Swiss notes, please (pitches are in between, or neutral)

You know, when I think I am playing out of tune, I usually am (quoted by Erick Friedman, NPR interview)

Make a dent (exhorting a student to play with more presence, intensity or panache; or, more often, more "*je ne sais quoi*")

They are all hard! (i.e., there are no easy pieces)

Prove it (e.g., response if a student pleaded not ready to play)

Don't be afraid of those scales, make them afraid of you (quoted by Ayke Agus)

You can never be too rich or too famous to play three pages of Schradieck (Book I) every day.

I am unarmed! (typical response to pleas of nervousness before, during or after a student's performance).

I cared too much! (comment to self if, in demonstrating for the class, he missed something; *very infrequently* needed and always followed by a perfect instant replay).

Most often heard Heifetz pun:

We'll meet (day) , weather permitting – or not!



The class of Leopold Auer, St. Petersburg; JH, third from left, back row; LA, center

Heifetz Master Class dress code (for men): Coat and *tie*; no facial hair; *no* overly long haircuts!

This is for the "Sartory" bow -
for Dan Mason -
Thanks + greetings -
JH

Document in collection of John Maltese; JH note to Benjamin Koodlach concerning a "gift" bow, on which a "Sartory" stamp's first letter was worn down.

With “Jim Hoyle”....*



Malibu beach house; piñata hung from porch cover at left.



At a Halloween party; JH is the one with the mask; DM watching.



Malibu beach, piñata time; DM is the one with the mask; JH disorienting.



JH, holding forth with mock grandiloquence; please do not ask DM about outfit.

* Jascha Heifetz wrote songs in popular style under the pseudonym “Jim Hoyle”, which he also used in informal settings. At parties, if addressed as “Mr. Heifetz”, he corrected it to “Jim”.

Resources...

Two engaging, valuable memoirs:

Jascha Heifetz Through My Eyes, by Sherry Kloss (Kloss Classics) Sherry Kloss was Jascha Heifetz' Teaching Assistant beginning in 1980.

Heifetz As I Knew Him, by Ayke Agus (Amadeus Press) Ayke Agus was Pianist for the Heifetz Master Class from the mid-70s

A recent translation has been released of a biography of the early years:

Jascha Heifetz: Early Years in Russia (Russian Music Studies) by Galina Kopytova (Author), Dario Sarlo (Translator), Alexandra Sarlo (Translator) (Indiana University Press)

Recordings, in a definitive collection:

Jascha Heifetz (Complete Original Jacket Collection) (104 CD) Box set, Limited Edition (Sony) This collection (which holds the record for number of CDs by one artist in a single set) is apparently available again, after having sold out. As of 3/18/15, Amazon had 2 left.