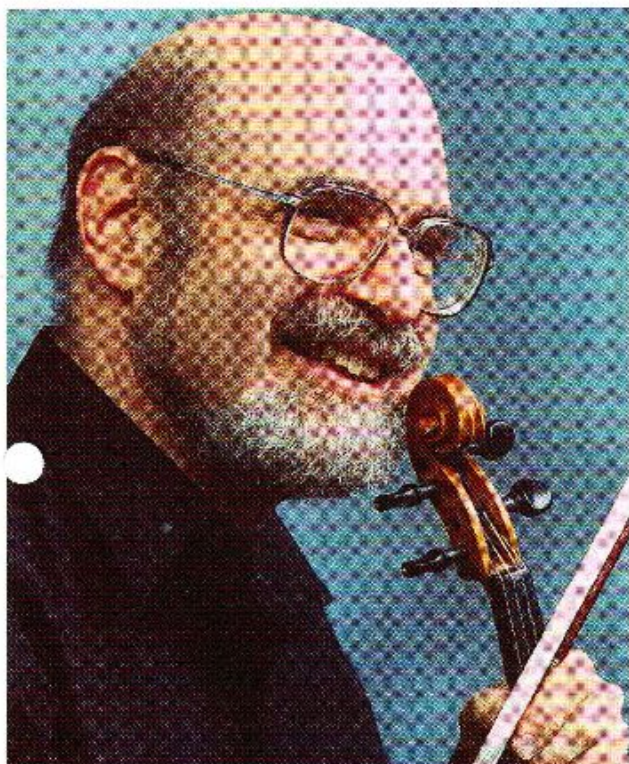




ROY SONNE ASKS HIS STUDENTS TO BE ADVENTUROUS AND TO WATCH CLIPS ON YOUTUBE



Roy Sonne has a private studio and is on the faculty of Carnegie Mellon University. His teachers included Raphael Bronstein and Dorothy DeLay

What age groups do you teach?

Most of my students are between 10 and 18. I also teach a few adult amateurs, which is very rewarding in a different way.

What is the first thing you do with a new student?

We talk for a few minutes about their violinistic experience and then ask them to play a piece of their choice. From that I get a good sense of where they are. Then I usually focus in on some aspect of their basic set-up that needs to be modified or developed, using routines for holding the bow and violin that I've developed from those of Mimi Zweig. Then I go to a scale or study that ties in with the set-up routine and I assign a new piece of music that ties in with the technical issues that we are already dealing with.

Which exercises do you most often prescribe?

I love the Kayser études. I see them as a less advanced equivalent of Kreutzer, covering the basics and building up fluency. Sometimes I use Kayser and Mazas together. The Mazas études are wonderfully musical.

What do you think is the most important thing about your role as a teacher?

Building skills. Building the knowledge of how to build skills and the confidence that comes with that. Opening doors to the wide world of culture and to the life experiences of that realm.

What's the most useful advice you offer your students?

Have patience. Set mini-goals and be prepared to explore.

If you could change one thing about all your students, what would it be?

That they would be more willing to step out of their comfort zones and to follow through at home.

How do you motivate students who don't practise?

I get them to do masterclasses, performances and auditions, and I try to get their parents involved. Sometimes a good repertoire choice makes all the difference.

What is the most surprising thing a student has ever said or done?

One of my students was studying *Souvenir de Sarasate* by William Potstock. One day he said, 'I decided this piece needs a cadenza, so I wrote one!' Later he performed the piece in a recital, with his own cadenza, and it was a tremendous hit.

What's the most recent breakthrough you've had with a student?

I started with a new adult student who had played in community orchestras for many years. I told her that we must strive for a beautiful tone on every note we play. That was a revelation for her. By the end of the hour she was producing a beautiful tone on open strings and on a one-octave G major scale, and she was thrilled.

What saying do you over-use in lessons?

'Find the tone.' My students all know that this means: find the best combination of bow speed, pressure and sounding point for a particular passage.

How do you avoid students developing tension in their playing?

For a start, I try not to use the word 'tension'. I prefer to ask for 'flexible' fingers or wrist joint. We start with very basic exercises and then immediately plug their new flexibility into a study or a piece.

Do you have any special tricks or gadgets?

I write things on sticky notes and stick them to the score. A tool that has revolutionised my teaching is YouTube. I ask students to watch three different performances of the piece they're studying. Often they'll come back and tell me, 'There's this amazing player called Heifetz,' and I'll smile.

Sometimes I ask them to write down ten specific things that the performer in the film is playing differently from them. The things they write down have to be very specific, for example 'in bar ten he plays spiccato and I play on the string.' Then I ask them which way they liked better in each case. This is a really good way of helping students to focus on the details of playing, rather than just thinking a performance is 'good' or 'bad'.

When is it time for a student to move on?

This is hard and takes a lot of soul searching. It takes a lot of honesty to know when the relationship is getting stale and the student would do better with somebody else. Interview by Ariane Todes