

Eric Berlin's Workshop

For some reason, students have a difficult time embracing recording in their practicing. At this time of the year, my students are in the midst of a mad rush to create a recording for a competition. It is always a struggle for some to get it done, but it's eye-opening for them when they do.

Recently I pulled out a treasured find to play for a student and it was incredibly enlightening not only for him, but also for me. Many moons ago, I was working in building operations at my alma mater, New England Conservatory. A good friend and I were given the task of cleaning out a basement room in the office building across the street. While we were there, we browsed through a treasure trove of records in filing cabinets including the file of one of our most notable alumni, Adolf Herse! Yes, grades, GI Bill paperwork, letters from Georges Mager etc. I wish I had thought to photocopy it for Bud! Someday I will get back there and find it again.

Among the things marked for trash were several boxes of cassette tapes. Still in the era when this was the standard recording medium, we decided to walk a couple of blocks over to my apartment and "dispose of them" to my living room. Later that night we sorted through these to find the "hi bias" and "metal" tapes to reuse and

discarded the rest. Most of these tapes were audition tapes, but there was also one marked "Philadelphia - Brass" and



Eric Berlin.

on the side was printed "Eric Berlin - Trumpet". It was an amazing find.

This recording of my live audition for NEC is a priceless time capsule of a 17-year-old me. Is it perfect playing? No. I often pull out this recording or my senior recital recording from NEC to show that

you don't have to start out life as a superstar to succeed. I laugh at some of the musical choices that I made without the benefit of a conservatory education and cringe at a few less than beautiful sounds that I produced, but it is still unmistakably me. There was a fearlessness in the playing which I think most of us lose once we begin to believe that playing trumpet is hard!

It is impossible for us to judge our playing objectively while performing. We are hyper-aware of our mistakes and what we are trying to improve. The only thing that we can hope for is that we are on an upward trajectory. My primary teacher through Junior High and High School, David Rentschlar, was very keen to point out that learning is not just a straight upward trajectory. It is filled with peaks, some valleys and lots of plateaux. It is only from a distance that we can see the true landscape of our progress.

When you look back 10-20 years from now, how will you judge the work you are doing today? Will you have any way of knowing whether you have gotten better? A regular habit of recording your practice as well as archiving performances for future reference will allow you to more objectively see your progress. I imagine that you will be pleased. *Eric Berlin*