

REMEMBERING THE MASTER: JOE ALLARD

I don't remember the exact details of how I began lessons with Joe, but it was somewhere around the age of 17 which would be about 1963. I had studied with a local teacher in Brooklyn but needed to go further and after speaking with several teachers in Manhattan, somehow I got to Joe. First of all it was quite a thrill to go to Carnegie Hall Studios on the subway-it felt heavy! My first six months of lessons were mostly on clarinet since I at that time I thought I would major on it to get a music degree at Queens College where I had decided to go by then, since majoring in saxophone was not a possibility on those days

I was completely baffled by Joe's lessons. Here was supposedly the heaviest guy in New York and all he did was tell stories about Toscanini, Mule, Duffaye, etc., etc., and take out Gray's studies of anatomy to show how the respiratory system and vocal cords worked. I would play one line out of the Rose clarinet studies and that would be it. Of course there would be fixing reeds for the last part of each lesson. Taking the subway home and writing notes down of what I remembered (no cassette machines then), I just didn't get it.

But I persevered and realized that Joe was ecumenical in that it didn't matter whether you were going for jazz or classical, or played flute or sax or clarinet. I remember seeing the Giant Steps transcription around the studio, but realized also he was teaching the highest classical majors at Julliard and other conservatories. Joe was about principles and concepts-content would follow. Like all great masters, he taught by metaphor. The stories and his amazing demonstrations were meant to lodge in your brain till it really seeped in. The overtone exercise is the best example of that.

Finally, years later I realized the importance of Joe's exercises and explanations: the "fat" bottom lip, the abdominal breath, the "e" position for the back of the tongue, anchor tonguing for the tip and more. These were guiding principles and once understood it meant that you were playing the saxophone as intended-as an extension of your voice, not as some separate piece of brass that you fingered.

And Joe was a nice guy. He had a cot in the studio for cat naps because he taught for hours on end. Sometimes you would go out while he napped and get a soup or coffee for him. Weekly, he traveled up to Boston staying in the dormitory at the New England Conservatory and taking a late plane home to Jersey. He also taught at his home. Several times he came to see me play at the Vanguard meeting Elvin Jones, at the Willow in Boston which was a student hang out and Carnegie Hall when I played with Miles Davis there. In fact, Miles was unusually respectful when I introduced him. He said: "You taught Steve(Grossman) and Dave-nice to meet you".

I stayed in touch with him and visited the home in Jersey meeting his wonderful wife, Anne. I also spent days up in his summer home in New Hampshire putting together the concepts and thoughts for my eventual book and video on saxophone tone. When I saw that Alzheimer was happening, I told Anne to get it checked because I knew it from watching my father die that way. This was the saddest of all things-to see Joe near the end or to watch the video, "the Master Speaks" because you can tell he is losing it.

But my memories of him are vivid today with that impish smile, easy laughter and a wonderfully pleasant personality. He was very hip and knew the score, but was always a gentleman and kind to his students.

This was a true master!!