MR. BAILEY

"Let yourself sing, don't make yourself."

"Rhythm is the soul of music."

Arthur Albert Bailey was a professional singer with the barrel chest, thick neck, and strong arms of a hockey player. He had a crooked nose and a bulldog's jaw, and he wore his blond hair, with its widow's peak, brushed back from his forehead. His tenor voice was powerful and dark, with baritone characteristics—*heldentenor* rather than lyric tenor. He would crouch down and push against the floor with his legs when tackling a high note.

Mr. Bailey came from New York City to Eugene in the 1950s and opened a voice studio in a one-story house directly across East Nineteenth Street from South Eugene High School. He lived there with his wife Exine, a professor of vocal music at the University of Oregon. I knew about Mr. Bailey because he coached the soloists in the high school's annual spring musicals and I was the rehearsal accompanist in my sophomore (*Oklahoma*) and junior (*South Pacific*) years. When I was a senior, I got an after-school job as an accompanist in Mr. Bailey's studio. The pay was fifty cents an hour. Or was it a dollar? I worked a couple of nights a week, continuing into my freshman year at university.

I often munched on Mrs. Bailey's homemade peanut cookies while waiting in the kitchen, which was next to the studio, for Mr. Bailey to finish leading his students through the warm-up vocal exercises called vocalises. Up the scale by thirds, then down one step and up four, taking you to the second above the octave. Up the scale as far as you could go, then down. Mr. Bailey railed against teachers who told students they could not carry a tune. If someone had trouble imitating the notes Mr. Bailey played on the piano, he would keep working until he or she got it.

When I was invited into the studio, my job was to sightread anything the singers put on the piano in front of me. I had played the piano since I was five and was a good sight-reader. Most of the music was not difficult, and students tended to sing the same pieces from the same books, such as *Pathways of Song* or *Art Songs for School and Studio*. Occasionally, however, a more advanced student would plunk down a tricky aria, one with five or six sharps and masses of sixteenth notes to untangle. Many of those who came to Mr. Bailey for singing

lessons were young, some even in grade school. He also had a few older students, such as the wife of a local doctor. Mrs. Cockrell sang in the First Methodist Church choir and wanted to be a soloist. I think she did actually sing solos once in a while, but her pitch wasn't reliable. She had long gray hair that flew out around her face, refusing to be confined to its bun.

A number of the young people who came to Mr. Bailey were referred because of emotional or psychological problems. Mr. Bailey treated the problems with music. His most memorable advice was, "Let yourself sing, don't make yourself." He meant that singing is a natural human activity, not difficult or specialized, not just for the elite or the expensively trained. Not something you should be afraid of, that you need to force yourself to do. (In fact, forcing is what causes problems such as singing out of tune.) It is nice to imagine that humans learned to sing by imitating the birds.

"Let yourself sing, don't make yourself" is also a good metaphor for how to live better. So many people believe they can make things happen, try to push their lives a certain way, apply their will to whatever stands in their way or troubles them. The writer William S. Burroughs thought that Americans in particular had "a special horror of giving up control, of letting things happen in their own way without interference." Burroughs created a memorable image of control freaks: "They would like to jump down into their stomachs and digest the food and shovel the shit out." One of my bosses once bragged that she could even control her dreams. "I tell myself what I want to dream about before I go to sleep," she said, "and that's what I dream."

Those two years or so that I worked in Mr. Bailey's studio allowed me to listen and watch as he worked his magic on hundreds of young people. He taught them to pay attention to the words they were singing. When demonstrating a song, he would thrust his jaw forward and almost spit the words out. And he made his students count. "Rhythm is the soul of music!" he always said, and he would break down a measure of music into the smallest unit to get the pulse—halves into quarters, quarters into eighths, eighths into sixteenths.

He drew the shy students out of their shells, and he gave the confident ones the tools to do their best. He got the frightened ones to relax by telling them their tense jaws were like glass. He said, "You can break a person's jaw if you hit him when his jaw is tense," and he would tap you on the jaw to get you to relax the muscles. He taught all his students that worrying about the diaphragm is nonsense. Do not listen to singing teachers who talk about "breathing from the diaphragm," I learned from Mr. Bailey. You cannot control the diaphragm, but you can control the intercostal muscles. He would have you punch him in the stomach to demonstrate how hard he could make his intercostals. He did not exactly teach breath control, but he would have you breathe deeply, so your stomach stuck out when you inhaled. Then do hard exhales that made your

stomach bounce in and out. He advised that trying to lift the piano off the floor would help you reach high notes.

Even the slow learners who came to Mr. Bailey for lessons learned something about music. More important, they learned that they could learn. And some even learned how to sing.

* * *

Mr. Bailey told the story of growing up in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan (he was born there on November 1, 1903), where the dialect was strong: "Dost yer 'ed lahk, mine douze?" was Moose Jaw's version of "Do you have a headache, my dear?" How as a boy soprano, he won a competition in Montreal at the age of sixteen. And then how he worked his way through the Toronto Conservatory of Music by playing semiprofessional ice hockey. Which accounted for his crooked nose. And how, having lost his dialect, he came to New York at age seventeen, sang *Aida* with Toscanini, and made the rounds of cocktail parties singing Gs above high Cs while standing on his head. And how he burned out and went back to Toronto.

And how in the Forties he came back to New York and sang with the soprano Eileen Farrell on the radio. He liked her because she was married to a policeman and was unpretentious. And how he came west to Oregon and found much better students than he had had on Long Island. The woman who became his wife, Exine Anderson, had won an opera scholarship to the Metropolitan Opera. They met in New York City, where they lived in the same neighborhood in Morningside Heights and rode home on the subway together. She preceded him west to teach voice at the University of Oregon, then in 1952 he followed, and four years later they married. He told me they had decided not to have children.

One of Mr. Bailey's favorite stories was about Enrico Caruso. It seems a group of illustrious musicians approached Caruso and asked, "Maestro, how do you sing so beautifully?" Caruso replied that, surely, there was little he could teach such eminent maestros about the art of singing. "Gentlemen," he said, "it's very simple. Uppa to effe, I just sing. After effe, I poosh." Mr. Bailey always said that you sing from your feet upward and that to reach the high notes, you plant your legs firmly on the floor, dig in with your feet, and bear down. "Poosh."

I took singing lessons from Mr. Bailey as well as playing the piano in his studio. He introduced me to the Appalachian folksongs collected and arranged by John Jacob Niles ("Black Is the Color of My True Love's Hair"), to art songs in Italian ("Caro mio ben"), French ("Il pleure dans mon coeur"), and German ("Wiegenlied"), and to the oratorio repertoire. I don't remember how it came about or whether it was a usual thing for Mr. Bailey's students, but I gave a solo vocal recital in the Baileys' living room in May 1961, the spring of my freshman

year at university. A week before the recital, Gay, my accompanist, embarrassed me by complaining to Mr. Bailey that I wasn't working hard enough and didn't have all the songs memorized. It has never been easy for me to memorize music, but I buckled down and finally learned everything by heart.

The recital started with the Elizabethan song "Have You Seen But a Whyte Lillie Grow," set to a text by Ben Jonson. The composer is unknown (it might have been John Dowland), but whoever wrote it, the seemingly simple song poses technical challenges, particularly for a beginning singer. For example, it requires singing the word "sweet," with its tense e-vowel, on a high note (F in my edition).

Recital Program

May 7, 1961

Charlotte Potter, assisted by Gay Gilbertson

PROGRAM

HAVE YOU SEEN BUT A WHYTE LILLIE GROW . . . . Anonymous (1614)
poem by Ben Jonson — accredited to John Dowland

NO, NO, NON SI SPERI . . . . Giacomo Carissimi (1605-1674)
(No, No, Hope Has Perished)

KOMM, SÜSSER TOD . . . . Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
(Come, Sweet Death)

PUR DECESTI, O BOCCA BELLA . . . . Antonio Lotti (1667-1740)
(Lips Alluring)

BEAU SOIR . . . . Claude Debussy (1862-1918)
(Beautiful Evening)

DIE LOTOSBLUME . . . . Robert Schumann (1810-1856)
(The Lotus Flower)

BERCEUSE . . . . Alexander Gretchaninoff (1864-1956)
(Slumber Song)

LAMENTO . . . . Henri Duparc (1848-1933)
(Lament)

BY THE WATERS OF BABYLON . . . . Antonin Dvorak (1841-1904)
Biblische Lieder, Opus 99, no. 7

NEBBIE . . . . .Ottorino Respighi (1879–1936)
(Mists)

LILACS . . . . Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)

DEBORAH . . . . Gene Bone (1905-) and Howard Fenton (1917-)

FIVE SHAKESPEAREAN SONGS . . . . Stuart Findlay (1886-1957)
How sweet the moonlight
The current that with gentle murmur glides
It was a lover and his lass
The poor soul sat sighing
Under the greenwood tree

After a series of Italian, German, French, and Russian art songs and a contemporary song called “Deborah” that I don’t recall at all, the recital closed with five Shakespearean songs by a twentieth-century composer, Stuart Findlay. I remembered Mr. Bailey’s advice that to counteract nervousness—he said it affects both your hearing and your sense of balance—you should hang on to the piano while you sing. I gripped the side of the Baileys’ black Baldwin baby grand all during the recital, but a friend told me my knees shook anyway.

* * *

For ten years in New York City, Mr. Bailey was tenor soloist at St. Thomas Episcopal Church on Fifth Avenue. T. Tertius Noble, who edited the gray-covered edition of Handel’s *Messiah* that almost all choirs used to sing from, was organist and choirmaster. He had presented the gold medal to Mr. Bailey in Montreal in 1919. Mr. Bailey also soloed at synagogues in New York City during High Holy Days and was a radio and concert artist. He sang, for example, at the memorial service for Gertrude Lawrence. In Eugene, he served as soloist at the Christian Science Church, even though I am pretty sure he was an Episcopalian.

Mr. Bailey’s connections got me a soloist job at the Christian Science Church in Cottage Grove, about twenty-five miles south of Eugene, during my sophomore year in college. The women parishioners, particularly one whose neck was swollen with a goiter, liked my soprano voice and would stay after the service to compliment me (“Divine Love certainly found you for us,” she wrote to me). My solo was usually a composition by Mary Baker Eddy, the church’s founder. Only once did I forget my music score after being on a late date the night before. I would come home about four o’clock on Sunday morning, sleep a few hours, then get up and climb into the family’s sea-green VW bug and drive to the church.

After I graduated from the University of Oregon, I moved away from Eugene and lost contact with the Baileys except for an occasional visit. In early 1990, after moving back to Oregon, I had lunch with Mrs. Bailey, with whom I had studied voice for two years at the university. Afterward we went to see Mr. Bailey, by now living in a nursing home. He was frail, in a wheelchair, his life a “living hell,” in Mrs. Bailey’s words. But he told his Caruso story just as well as ever.

Mr. Bailey died two years later, on Christmas Day 1991, aged eighty-eight. The *Eugene Register-Guard* ran an inaccurate obituary because the person at the newspaper who knew where to find the correct version was on Christmas vacation. For example, the obituary wrongly stated that Mr. Bailey had been choir director at South Eugene High School. Mrs. Bailey was, of course, upset. I wrote to her before Mr. Bailey’s memorial service, and she responded a couple of

months later: ". . . he was my life, and I his. . . . Knowing him since I was twenty-three and now, having turned seventy, you can see how much of me was his."

(Register-Guard photo)

In this newspaper photo, Mr. Bailey is grinning over the return of two missing swords belonging to the Scottish Black Watch. On October 16, 1963, the Eugene Civic Music Association, of which Mr. Bailey was named president in 1959, sponsored a concert by the Scottish Black Watch Regimental Band, Pipes and Drums, and Highland Dancers. The concert attracted a crowd of 8,000. That night, the swords of two of the highland dancers disappeared. Mr. Bailey sent out a plea for their return, and they mysteriously arrived on his doorstep the next day. He shipped the swords by bus to Portland in time for the Black Watch's next appearance. The photo was published in the *Eugene Register-Guard* of October 18, 1963.