

Felix Sun
Myth

The last time I was in Boston was sophomore year, when I crashed at some friend's place in BC. This time I was paying a proper visit, with a hotel room, plane tickets, and all. And to the other side of the river, nonetheless; to a place where rumors say royalty and technocracy, future presidents and hackers, intermingle. I passed the confetti from Harvard's still-ongoing 400th anniversary celebration, and stopped in front of 77 Mass Ave., looking for directions into the Institute's maze of hallways.

I stopped a girl walking by. "Would you happen to know where Felix Sun's conference on applied phlebotinum mechanics is?" I asked her.

"Oh, you're talking to the wrong person. I don't actually go – wait, did you say Felix?"

"Yes, are you familiar with him?"

"Of course, we went to high school together! In fact, he used to sing in chorus with me."

Chorus? A crack in my granite-faced mental image of Dr. Sun: unsmiling picture in the conference invitation, principal investigator in the journals, now this? "News to me. I imagine he must have been very talented." I formed an impression of a monk, voice resonant like an organ, chanting motets as he copied books.

She laughed. "Talented? He was atrocious! We used to say that our director only kept Felix because she felt sorry for him."

"Are you sure this is the same person?"

"Well, of course! Last I heard from him, he'd graduated and gone to MIT; I imagine that's the one. I'll never forget him because of what he did to me... do you have a minute?" She motioned for me to sit down, and checking my watch, I did.

"It was junior year for me, and I had my first solo in the choir. Looking back, it was really not a big deal, but I was scared out of my mind back then. Whenever I had time, I would sing it to myself, and check the pitches on the piano app on my phone. You see, it was in an a capella piece, so if I slid out of tune, I would drag the entire chorus with me. So I practiced and practiced; I practiced so much that I think I developed perfect pitch in the key of D major.

"One day, Felix caught me singing it in the hall after lunch. He complemented my voice, and warned against me practicing too much, or else I might lose it. I knew he was just being

nice; or at least, I imagined so. He then suggested that my real voice was perfect the way it was; now I knew he was just buttering me up.

“By the final dress rehearsal, I had completely forgotten about that exchange. But, Felix had been right about that over-practicing thing: my throat felt sore and scratchy. I stepped up to the microphone to quietly utter my first note – I planned to start softly and crescendo into the solo, so that if I started out of key, no one would notice.

“I heard a soft, synthesizer-like drone a quarter step above my voice. I looked around; no one else was singing. I slid up to match the drone, and it blended with my voice, but something quite strange was still audible. In fact, I sounded really metallic and expressionless. Then, I realized what was happening: I was being auto-tuned! You might recall; this was back when pop singers first discovered autotuning, and all the music critics were at odds over it. By this point, our director had noticed, and was gesturing up to the sound room, where our techie was making an exaggerated, confused shrug. I finished my solo with the autotuner backing my voice. Afterwards, a bunch of singers crowded the microphone to play with the new feature, but found the sound system had mysteriously reverted to normal.

“Only afterwards did I think of Felix, but he was nowhere to be found. The next day, while everyone was talking about the stunt, I found a carefully-worded apology note in my music folder. I could not corner him; I felt like he was avoiding me. Towards dismissal, he suddenly approached me.

“ ‘I’m really sorry about yesterday – that was, like, really not called for. Come to think of it, I have no clue what made me scare you like that.’ He said.

“ ‘No, no problem at all. That was actually really cool – how did you do that?’

“ ‘Door to backstage is always unlocked.’ Avoiding the real question. ‘At any rate, it’s great knowing that you like it. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have some stuff to do... you wouldn’t want tonight’s concert to sound like rehearsal, would you?’

“ ‘Actually I – no, you’re right, that wouldn’t go over well.’ With that, I left him to his devices. And that was the last he or I ever mentioned of the incident.” She stood up, and made a motion to leave.

“That was a very interesting story, one that I will keep in mind.” I told her, and we parted. At the conference, I saw nothing but the professional Dr. Sun: suit, speaking mostly from pre-written notes. Nevertheless, when I took the podium, I couldn’t help anxiously checking the microphone.

After the conference, that story reemerged in my mind; it was quite humorous, and deserved to be told. “And hundreds of parents and siblings sat stunned in their seats as they all heard her distorted voice. The director ran offstage in horror; all the while, she had no choice but to finish her solo.” I concluded the story at our company mixer, to howling laughter.