

Adina
Jean Pierre

L'homme à la flûte d'or

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A TRIBUTE TO *Jean-Pierre Rampal* by Jeffrey Khaner

Flutist Jeffrey Khaner was in Paris the day Jean-Pierre Rampal died. In his own words he now pays personal tribute to the memory of his idol.

I first heard of the death of Jean-Pierre Rampal as I walked into the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris on the very day of that sad event. The Philadelphia Orchestra was on tour and this was our only day in the City of Lights.

Maestro Wolfgang Sawallisch immediately decided to dedicate the concert to the memory of Monsieur Rampal, and the announcement from the stage elicited a gasp from the audience that was clearly audible backstage. Every culture euphemizes death but the French, not surprisingly, are particularly poetic. The news that Monsieur Rampal had "disappeared" that day was evidently not yet widely known despite the modern media machine which was hard at work and a eulogy by the French President Chirac. I immediately joined in the communication frenzy, e-mailing friends around the world, my messages miraculously escaping collision in mid cyber-space with the same messages on their way to my laptop. Everywhere radio stations mourned the loss of a national icon, broadcasting hour after hour of Rampal recordings, never coming close to exhausting the vast catalogue that includes all the major repertoire for the instrument, and much of the less well known. He was in large part responsible for the fact that no nation has produced as much music for the flute as France.

My first personal memory of Rampal is as a high school student of thirteen years, going to a centuries old church in Montreal to hear the six Vivaldi concerti. Being left dumbstruck by the phenomenal finger and tongue technique, as well as the tremendous character he gave each piece, I was moved to tears by the encore, the sarabande from the JS Bach solo partita. I thought I had never heard anything so exquisite. After more years than I care to remember, I still get a chill remembering the spell cast over the audience that evening.

I became an avid fan, going to all concerts I could get to, listening to recordings till they became too worn. How much I learned by trying to emulate the great man!

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It was as a student at the Juilliard School in New York that I finally met Jean-Pierre Rampal. He was in the habit of coming to visit my teacher, Julius Baker when his schedule brought him to town, and sometimes the two of them would put on massive flute celebrations at Carnegie Hall or Lincoln Center. They would invite current and former students to participate, and all manner of flute chamber music was performed. I played fifth flute (one of five flutists playing just that part) in a Boismortier quintet at one of these concerts. What a thrill to share the stage with these two legends of the flute!

As principal flutist of the Mostly Mozart Festival, and subsequently the Cleveland Orchestra, I regularly saw Jean-Pierre, as he had become known to me, when he came to solo with those orchestras. He was a very large man, in height and girth (the flute looked like a toy in his hands), and had a prodigious appetite. Just before a Cleveland Orchestra concert at Tanglewood, he moaned that his breath support might be somewhat lacking in the concert. He confided, with what I believe was a touch of pride, that he had just consumed an eighteen pound lobster in Boston and feared the beast would exact some form of revenge. Needless to say, the Mozart concerto sounded effortless. He seemed able to transport himself as well as the audience, and their appreciation was prolonged. On another occasion he invited me to join him in a double flute concerto as a sort of programmed encore after his solo. I remember so well the giddy glee I felt - two flutes merrily chasing each other around the stage. His joy and enthusiasm was infectious - it was impossible to not enjoy a Rampal performance. Some years later, after I had moved to the Philadelphia Orchestra, I was called upon to substitute for an ailing Rampal in Milwaukee. He had been scheduled to play three concertos on one program, a feat I as a very young man found taxing, but that he, as a man of seventy, was apparently able to do with ease.

I've asked colleagues in the orchestra about their memories of Rampal. The recurring word is generosity. He was always available to talk and advise, to invite and to accept invitations. Always up for a celebration after a concert, always ready to warmly greet old friends and graciously meet new fans. He gave unstintingly of himself, doing interviews and writing articles for the benefit of young flutists and his myriad other fans. Although I never actually studied with Rampal, he has been a tremendous influence on me. He had a way of putting succinctly into words concepts of flute playing and musicianship that have had profound meaning to me and to hundreds if not thousands more.

With the rapidly evolving recording technology, we have the good fortune to re-acquaint ourselves with the Rampal legacy. I have been able to replace my well-worn LP's of the sonatas of Poulenc and Prokofiev, the variations of Schubert and Chopin, the concerti of Mozart and Ibert, the fantasies of Telemann, and the chamber music for diverse instruments with new CD's that promise to last forever.

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Indeed, the great Jean-Pierre Rampal will never "disappear". We will always have him with us, to move and inspire us, to encourage us to play better than we thought we could.

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