

Joseph Rezits (1925-2020)

In a profession filled with egotism, Joseph Rezits seemed devoid of ego. To him, it was only about the music and the students at Indiana University. Because he did not carry himself with an air of self-importance, those who never knew him directly probably would never have sensed that he provided a more lasting legacy to the music profession than many of those who spent their lives touring the globe as performers.

It should never be forgotten that Joseph Rezits was an outstanding pianist at the Curtis Institute and whose performance with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy was highly praised: “an instinctive artist....Few of today’s crop of young pianists have the grace and natural poetic quality Mr. Rezits displayed.”

His piano and chamber music teachers, as well as his classmates, read as a “Who’s Who” of musicians in his era. However, his primary mentor was the legendary and tyrannical Isabelle Vengerova, whom he would 50 years later immortalize for posterity in his masterful, engaging 200 -page book, “Beloved Tyranna: The Legend and Legacy of Isabelle Vengerova.”

Had Dr. Rezits produced nothing else than this volume, he would have earned a special place in the annals of the piano world. However this volume was only one of his six books, which include the 993 page “The Pianists Resource Guide.” He also authored numerous insightful articles.

Dr. Rezits never ceased performing, and he evolved into primarily being a duo and chamber pianist. Even in his last years when in his 90s, he continued to perform in this capacity, while also continuing to explore lesser known solo literature.

There are many who can perform successfully but who are not especially articulate as writers and speakers. In this latter capacity Joseph Rezits appeared in nearly all of the states of the United States, and on five continents.

What Joseph Rezits was about was passing on the tradition, the love, the excitement, the scholarly background of the piano. He possessed an insatiable curiosity which never diminished.

Joseph Rezits was never my piano teacher. However, one does not have to officially be a student to have a person be an influential mentor and role model. Joe Rezits showed a continuing, lifelong devotion to any student, whether officially his student or not. He was always eager to share anything he had or knew.

Perhaps, most meaningful of all, was his continuous, abundant encouragement to all of us. His omnipresent smile was representative of his delightful charm and spirit. He was a joy to be with whether one was in his/her mid-20s or later 60s. Our stimulating times together in person or visiting over the telephone, along with his illustrious example as a humble and dedicated servant of music will always be remembered and treasured.