

Copy of Letter to the son of Igor Kipnis (1930 -2002)

February 12, 2002

Dear Jeremy and Cherie,

I can't express enough gratitude for the privilege of knowing your father. Since the late 1960's, I felt he was one of my teachers through his recordings, which I zealously studied with great delight. Conscious only of his incredible musicianship, I never dreamed that he was such an extraordinarily beautiful human being, and that I would one day experience his unique personal qualities firsthand.

We first met in person in March of 1999. I couldn't believe that one who possessed such erudition and scholarship could be so down-to-earth and approachable. He was identified with the most aristocratic of instruments, yet was the most unpretentious of people. I never ceased to be amazed at the surprises I gradually discovered, as I got to better know this special man.

He was a harpsichord virtuoso. Yet he was virtually self-taught, commenced study at a very late age, and was not blessed with hands innately made to play the keyboard. I know of no other major keyboardist like this. He must have been an indefatigable worker to achieve what he did.

He possessed a truly brilliant mind, but an even bigger heart. The world associated him with Froberger, Scarlatti, and Bach on the harpsichord. Yet it seemed to be Brahms, Chopin, and Liszt on the piano, which he most enjoyed coaching.

He knew every tiny indication on the page, and every difference between editions. But it wasn't just his knowledge which was so special. It was that he instinctively felt and grasped the emotional gesture and feeling behind every scrawl on the page. There was an intensity, a fire, an impassioned Romanticism which burned in his soul.

Yet there was an exacting, uncompromising sense of discipline which made his musicianship an example of immaculate taste and purity. It was musical Truth and integrity personified—honest and genuine, with never a hint of pedantry or gimmickry. Like he himself, it was always spontaneous and full of vitality and variety.

Not only was his musicianship instinctive, but he could articulate it—whether through the written or the spoken word. He seemed equally at home writing for connoisseurs in scholarly journals, or speaking to inner-city elementary school children. He knew everyone's language, and everyone found it easy and natural to respond to him. His common sense and pragmatic wisdom were all too rare in this often esoteric field.

Little could those who did not know him realize that this gifted speaker and writer seemed actually to be innately shy. It could not have been easy to be the son and grandson of such prominent musicians. He never seemed to lose a child-like honesty, innocence, and sweetness. That smile—that inimitable smile—will always be treasured, as will that omnipresent humor—so evident even when he was in severe pain in his last months.

He was at heart a giver, a nurturer, and always seemed to be looking for new ways to give to others, and to serve the cause of music. He was the true missionary of music.

He could have cancelled my last two coaching sessions. But instead, he taught flat on his back for over five hours each time, in pain, but still discoursing with his usual wit, humor, and thoroughness.

He could have charged more for his invaluable coaching. He could have carried himself as a "master" teacher, and exhibited airs and aloofness. But instead, he seemed to view his coaching as an opportunity to help in every way possible—interpretively, technically, and even program-building.

He never tore one down—he built you up and gave you confidence.

I hope he knew what a musical giant he was. He never seemed to take himself seriously, and was always so self-deprecating. But surely he knew his ears were phenomenal.

Susan and I were so transported by his solo piano recital in San Francisco last Fall. We felt it a true revelation, and were so pleased for him—that having already mastered the harpsichord, the clavichord, the fortepiano, and the modern piano with 4-hand literature, that he even musically surpassed his modern piano colleagues in the repertoire he performed on this occasion of his “modern piano debut.” Igor could do it all—and **did** it all. He needed no pretences of greatness—he simply **was** greatness.

I will miss arriving at the train station, and being picked up with that warm, tender smile. I will miss being in that incredible music room the most inspiring room I’ve ever been in. I’ll miss the dinners where we conversed about everything under the sun, and the trips back to the station, sitting in the car waiting for the train. I’ll miss the e-mails which he so regularly sent.

Igor exemplified what musicianship and teaching is all about. I hope to reflect and retain that in my teaching and performance. But of equal import is what he exemplified about living and life. I treasure his gentleness, his kindness and compassion. He was a true friend to all and he will always be treasured and honored.

It must be hard to be a great musician’s son. You undoubtedly had to make many sacrifices in sharing your father with the world. I thank you for this.

Our thoughts are with you—and we haven’t forgotten that it has not been long since the passing of your mother as well. If there is ever anything I can do for you, please let me know. It’s the least I can do after all your father has given me.

Sincerely,

George Fee