



THE ADAMANTER

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Summer is here! Let's make music!

Greetings, Fellow Adamanters!

As you have undoubtedly heard by now, the world lost one of the piano giants, Menahem Pressler, last month. Mr. Pressler, who would have celebrated his 100th birthday later this year, had enormous influence on pianists of all generations for many decades. Mr. Pressler cultivated a special community of pianists here at Adamant for 30 years. We mourn his loss deeply, but we celebrate the legacy he left to the several generations of students he taught over the decades. This edition of The Adamanter is dedicated to Mr. Pressler's memory. You will read accounts from some of our former masterclass participants, whose lives were touched by Mr. Pressler.

On a brighter note, the summer is almost upon us. The enrollment in our classes looks good – with a full roster of excellent performers. There is still room for auditors in each of our masterclass sessions. I look forward to what promises to be the best summer at Adamant yet!

See you soon!

Matthew Manwarren

Artistic/Executive Director





Remembering Menahem Pressler

Menahem Pressler, renowned pianist and beloved teacher, died on May 6, 2023 at his home in London, England. He was a founding member of the Beaux Arts Trio and Distinguished Professor of Music in Piano at Indiana University in Bloomington since 1955. A prize-winning documentary film entitled “**The Life I Love: The Pianist Menahem Pressler**” can be found on YouTube, and for more detailed information on his life and career, see the following:

[Read here: Jacobs School of Music](#)

[Read here: The New York Times](#)

Students from all over the world attended Mr. Pressler’s masterclasses at the Adamant Music School. He loved being at Adamant and always publicly thanked Frank Suchomel for creating such a beautiful place, entirely

devoted to piano. He taught both advanced students and amateurs, often commenting on how he loved the word amateur, because it described someone “in love” with music. That’s what Menahem Pressler was—in love with music, and happiest sharing music with others who felt the same.

This issue of The Adamanter is devoted to tributes and memories offered by his students, including four of our current faculty, **Angela Cheng, Alvin Chow, Jeffrey Cohen** and **Lucie Robert**. We begin with the story of how Mr. Pressler first came to Adamant, as told by **Vickie von Arx**:

“In the summer of 1988, Mary Lou Francis (long-time Director of the school) and I first approached Mr. Pressler with the idea of giving a masterclass at Adamant. I

had attended Mr. Pressler’s master class at Indiana University, and we had both attended Mr. Pressler’s performances in New York with the Beaux Arts Trio. We discussed at some length what a wonderful thing it would be to have Mr. Pressler give a master class at Adamant. So that summer, Mary Lou and I drove from Adamant to Shelburne Farms in Vermont to meet Mr. Pressler who was giving a masterclass there. In order to persuade him, we stressed the natural beauty, magnificent practice facilities, excellent performance piano, comfortable accommodations, healthy and delicious meals, and distraction-free environment that Adamant provides. And we made an appointment to bring Mr. Pressler to Adamant a few days later so that he could see for himself. A short time after this initial meeting, Mr. Pressler phoned Adamant and told Mary Lou that he did not have time to visit, but based on what we had told him, he said he would be willing to come to Adamant the following summer of 1989.

“The next year, following Mr. Pressler’s brilliantly successful first master class in Adamant held on Aug. 21-26, the Board meeting minutes of Oct. 14, 1990 reported: ‘Classes were enjoyed by all. The students have had experiences like they never had before.

Menahem Pressler gave his personal time to develop public relations. He was involved with interviews where he had only praise for the Adamant Music School.’ Mr. Pressler’s second Adamant master class for summer of 1990 was scheduled during that meeting.

Mr. Pressler always said that he intended to come to Adamant for only that one master class. But in fact, he returned every summer through 2019, a period lasting for thirty years.”



Menahem Pressler teaching at Adamant Music School.

Remembrances by his students

Mr. Pressler was my greatest role model and a musical hero. I don’t have enough words to thank him for his teaching, his inspiration, and his performances. They are my most beautiful treasures forever. **Manami Kawamura**

Over the course of more than 30 years, first at Indiana University, but mostly at Adamant, Menahem Pressler

changed the way I listen to music, and especially the way I play the piano. He taught me that the piano does not have to be a percussive instrument. The piano can sing, laugh and cry. His markings in my scores will be treasured forever! **Mark Reiss**



Menahem Pressler with his daughter, Edna and masterclass participants; taken in the 1990's.

I am very grateful to Mr. Pressler for changing my life and letting the inspiration and expressiveness of music say what I could never say with words. Mr. Pressler made Nietzsche’s statement “that without music life would be a mistake” come to life and enlighten the world around all of us, who he so magnificently taught and inspired with his glorious playing and teaching. What a phenomenal privilege it has been to know him!

Jan Deats

Remembering Mr. Pressler and the years of lessons



is for me to describe something so special, so deeply unique: Lessons were challenging but intended to help the student grow, improve—go a small or giant step further. He taught with sensitivity, emphasizing acute listening, and practicing with intellect and passion. Most of all we were privileged to feel the warmth of his humanity which radiated into his dedicated teaching and formed the crux of his great performances. **Joyce Ucci**

I vividly remember Mr. Pressler's lessons on a late Haydn sonata and the Variations in F Minor. He revealed the intricate nuances of every phrase, while simultaneously seeing the works as a whole. His approach made me think of a Parisian *haute couture* gown—gorgeously unique on the outside with the finest craftsmanship underneath. He always wanted us to search for *innig*, that elusive sense of heartfelt expression within *pianissimo* or *pianississimo*. Who of us did not hear the familiar, "Too laut! Too laut!" **Barbara Kudirka**

My best remembrances of Menahem Pressler are the humorous ones. Here is one: When criticizing my volume at the piano, he said I played reasonably well but imitated my playing by playing crashing chords on the keyboard. I said to him: "You played the chords two ways. You can't have it both ways." His immediate reply: "In chamber music, you can have it both ways!" And again, when Mr. Pressler first stayed at my home, he was, not surprisingly, practicing the piano. My 9-year-old daughter, who was a great fan of my piano ability, was listening from another room. She said to me: "Sorry, Dad, I can hear the difference." **Dick Sogg**

The time I spent with Mr. Pressler and his students are the most precious memories for me. I learned so much from his lessons to me and to other students. I am truly grateful for being a part of this wonderful group! **Michiko Sasaki**

Mr. Pressler leaves behind such a rich and beautiful legacy. As to colorful memories of the masterclass, the one I keep thinking about is when a student was banging away at a fortissimo spot in the music and Pressler said, "What are you doing, are you trying to kill us?" **Linda Lienhard**

Adamant and Mr. Pressler were a life line for me. I had a goal and I practiced because I knew he never settled for anything but the best from each performer. He brought the music to life through his attentiveness to the score, and his imagination and creativity were truly amazing! I know that through my years of study at Adamant, I became a better teacher because of this Master Pedagogue - the unforgettable and irreplaceable Menahem Pressler. **Janet Hickey**

Turning pages for Mr. Pressler when he performed with the Beaux Arts Trio is one of my fondest memories. It was like getting a free lesson right in front of my eyes and ears! Watching his magical touch, hearing the endless shades of beautiful colors, sensing the intensity of his concentration on every note and every phrase, even checking out his pedaling. He was always teaching me something. **Andrea Swan**

Mr. Pressler's master classes were transformative for me. He unraveled the mystery of the word 'musicianship,' a word I did not really understand when I first began in his class. But in looking back I see that is what the classes were all about, giving us the tools to improve our musicianship. Lessons were demanding, sometimes difficult, but we all came away with comments that would move us forward as musicians. Those moments when he put into words his emotional response to the piece being played, I found to be very meaningful. One sensed his humility before the great music he loved, which for him reflected all of humanity. He leaves much to reflect on. These past few weeks his markings in my music seem to have grown larger... **Janice Nimetz**

I will forever cherish the time spent with Mr. Pressler as a master class student, absorbing his incredible words of musical enlightenment, wisdom, and imagery in describing a phrase or nuance. My husband, daughters and I so loved the personal time we spent with him during the few times he stayed with us when performing at Ravinia, when he took breaks from practicing on my piano! **Elaine Felder**

Menahem Pressler was an extraordinary musician and teacher. He cared deeply for the music and his students. I always felt he was holding us to a higher level of musicianship and cheering us on as we made our own discoveries on the way. And sometimes I felt I was being held up by the scruff of my neck!! **Linda Ellison**

Attendance at the Adamant Music School breaks down all barriers of rank and title while establishing long-enduring ties of friendship. This happened to be the case with Mr. Pressler and Lady Annabelle Weidenfeld. As a new Board member, and rookie Pressler auditor, I wanted to introduce myself, but was shy. However, the sight of Mr. Pressler enjoying his breakfast Rice Krispies and chatting amiably with everyone, gave me the courage to step up. I decided to make my introduction in the most "Adamant" way possible—by playing a couple of Scriabin preludes at the auditors' recital. At dinner the following day, Mr. Pressler waved me over to his table, "I

liked your Scriabin very much. You must play some Rachmaninoff Preludes." Lady Annabelle also gave a warm and encouraging review. I asked if I could sit for a while with them, and this photo was taken. **Alex Last**



Alex with Menahem Pressler and Lady Annabelle

My first meeting with our beloved teacher was way back in 1975, and since then, I followed him every summer for masterclasses. Although there were so many memories, I will focus on only one element—the "Tests," of which I remember three most vividly:

On Monday, the first day of a chamber music masterclass in Bloomington, Mr. Pressler asked me to fill in as pianist for the Mendelssohn D Minor Trio, to be performed two days later. I failed the test because I said no, I had never played it. "You missed an opportunity" he said to me in the elevator afterward, in front of several others.

One year later, another masterclass in Bloomington. Another pianist drops out of a trio, this time the "Beethoven Ghost." Again Menahem asks me to step in two days later. I accept, even though this was another work I had not yet learned, bearing in mind the humiliation of the year before. Two days and about 20 hours of practicing later, I join my new group in the first two movements of the Ghost Trio, barely able to move my wrists anymore. Menahem comments to the class: "She learned it in two days. I couldn't have done it!"

Another time, I arrive at Shelbourne Farms for a solo masterclass (Monday again!) and Menahem says:

“I have to play the Rachmaninov 2nd Concerto next week. Could you run through the orchestral part with me Wednesday evening?” I am inwardly terrified to say no again. On Wednesday, after another 20 hours of practice, we run through the concerto together. In spite of the huge challenge to learn the orchestral score in two days, that experience was one of the absolute highlights of my entire musical life. Menahem never stopped testing me from the moment I met him; he demanded the impossible, and one had to try to deliver. **Dina Namer**

Pressler’s distinctive handwritten notes are preserved in our scores, his sound still sings in our ears and, even more importantly, his musical inspiration lives on in our hearts. For this and so much more, we are forever grateful and blessed. **Angela Cheng & Alvin Chow**

Mr. Pressler brought such joy to so many through his art and we share the world’s profound sense of loss at his passing. There is not one day when we are teaching our students or in front of our instruments that we

do not think of him and the inspiration he gave us to aspire to the highest level of artistry and musicianship. It is so hard to believe that he is gone - his presence was always such a large part of our lives, but he will always remain in our hearts and minds. The world has lost one of its greatest musicians, but his legacy will last forever. **Jeffrey Cohen & Lucie Robert**



Menahem Pressler in 2018 CREDIT: Stefan Hoederath/Redferns

We first walked into Menahem Pressler’s studio at Indiana University over 40 years ago, and after a single hour with him we realized that our lives would never be the same. It is impossible to express in words how we felt as we left our first lessons with him. It’s as if the world was suddenly in technicolor - the grass a brighter green, the sky more intensely blue, and music even more beautiful. We learned from Mr. Pressler that every note and marking on the score had meaning, and that our eyes, ears, heart and imagination were all at the service of unlocking the magic of every piece of music we touched. We feel so lucky that we were able to have weekly lessons with him for 7 unforgettable years. Mr.



Menahem Pressler in conversation in the AMS dining room.

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Matthew Manwarren, Artistic/Executive Director

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Annual Meeting Notice

The Annual Meeting of Behre Piano Associates, d/b/a The Adamant Music School will be held via Zoom on Sunday, June 4, 2023 at 5:00 pm EDT. All members in good standing as of May 28, 2023 will be eligible to vote either in person at the Zoom meeting or by proxy. Complete information will be sent by email two weeks before the meeting.

Questions? Contact Alexander Last at president@adamant.org

Gifts to the Adamant Music School

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