

Martin Smith (1947-2005)

by John Cerminaro

Martin Smith, co-principal horn of the Pittsburgh Symphony, died unexpectedly on Friday, September 23, 2005 of arterial sclerotic cardiovascular disease. He was 58. Mr. Smith was with the Pittsburgh Symphony for 25 years, serving numerous terms as chairman of the orchestra committee and as a member of its board of directors. Previously, he had played with the New York Philharmonic, Denver Symphony and the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra. Mr. Smith had also taught at Carnegie Mellon University in the mid-1980s and had been on the faculties of Brooklyn College, the Manhattan School of Music and Montclair State College. He recently began assembling an audio engineering studio, said Carrie Smith, his wife of 20 years and a freelance horn player. Mr. Smith had played with the symphony the night before his death and, for the following two performances, flowers sat in Mr. Smith's chair, and his death was announced to audiences. A moment of silence in his honor was followed by Benjamin Britten's epilogue of Serenade for Tenor, Horns and Strings by principal horn player William Caballero.

A month after hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf coast, one of New Orleans' favorite sons, hornist Martin Smith, died suddenly of heart failure at the age of 58.

Martin was one of my oldest and dearest horn player pals. We first met at the Texas All-State high school symphony auditions in the mid-1960's and played together in that orchestra for several years. We continued our friendship as students together at the Aspen Music Festival and The Juilliard School, and later met up again as principal and associate in the New York Philharmonic.



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When I left New York for Los Angeles in 1979, Martin stayed only for a few more months himself, acting as temporary principal horn,

before being superseded by another player of destiny, Philip Myers. Shortly after this, Martin joined the Pittsburgh Symphony as associate principal, where he remained for 25 seasons.

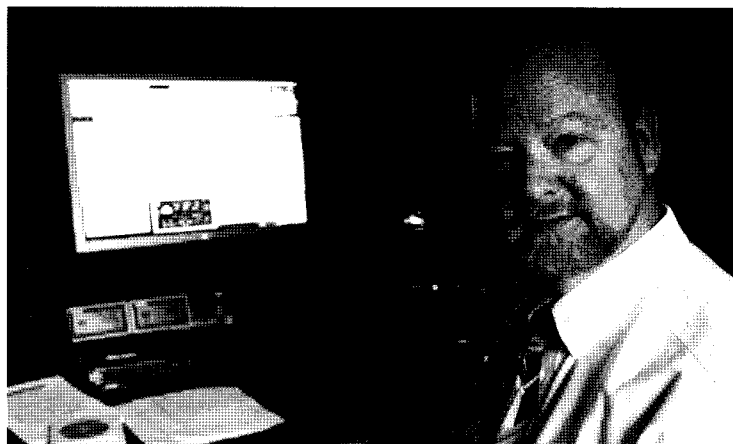
It is impossible to sum up in this brief memorial Martin Smith's achievements or the effect his friendship had upon my own life and career. All I can say is, Martin was a complete original.

As a horn player he was a New York-trained power house, with a range of five octaves and a highly successful self-analytical approach that was the envy of all who knew him.

As an individual, he was first and foremost a scientist. His approach to life was scientific and analytical. Even more remarkable was his most recent turn to Christianity. As with his horn playing and his outlook on life, Martin approached his new-found religion with the same highly rational and critical eye, arriving at his own state-of-the-art biblical conclusions

through rigorous scientific investigation. Near the end of a life of introspection and self-control, he discovered perhaps the most disciplined tenant of his faith: To trust God more than the opinions of men. For anyone who had come to know Martin over the years, his sudden conversion to Christianity was the most astonishing turn of events imaginable.

As a teacher, Martin Smith had a huge following and was an almost guru-like figure to his students. He taught at Brooklyn College and gave master classes at Juilliard, the Aspen Music Festival, and the Tchaikovsky Conservatory in Moscow. His teaching emphasized the physical and psychological components of horn playing rather than technical or equipment-oriented trends popular with so many other



Martin Smith in his audio studio



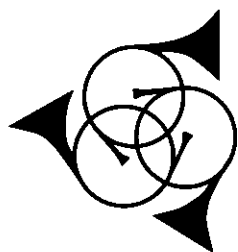
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teachers. In short, Martin believed it was all up to the individual, not the particular choice of mouthpiece or horn.

During his final years, while playing with the Pittsburgh Symphony, Martin also turned his attention to many interesting sidelines. For example, he became fluent in speaking and writing Japanese. He was also a contract negotiator for the Pittsburgh Symphony's orchestra committee and an active member of the Kingdom First Ministries in Forest Hills.

Martin Smith is survived by his wife, Carrie, and also by two grown children, Jenn and Michael, both of whom have expressed comfort in the sure and certain knowledge that their father is now in heaven — quite probably playing in "God's own horn quartet" alongside his favorites, Dennis, Aubrey, and Alfred Brain.

John Cerminaro is currently principal horn of the Seattle Symphony.



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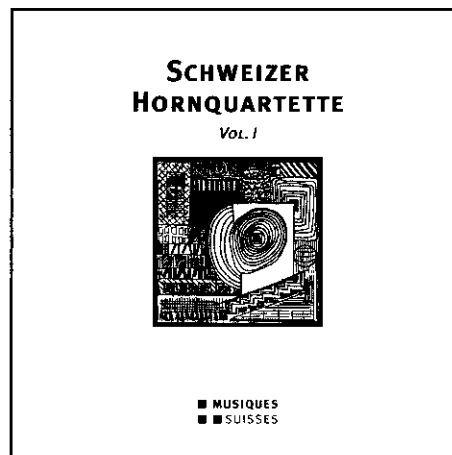
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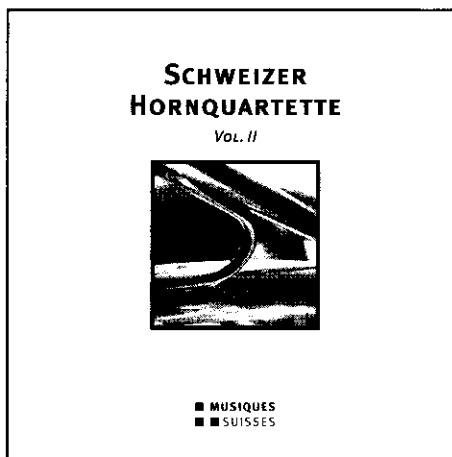
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