



Fred Hemke

by Matt London

For me, two American sages of the saxophone come to mind who are responsible for the development and teaching of the modern classical saxophone today... Eugene Rouseau and Frederick Hemke.

Both form the basis of the modern American saxophone tradition as performers and educators with an influence that will resonate for time to come.

As a budding classical saxophonist myself I have a real appreciation and respect for all the traditions across the world. Their similarities and differences are fascinating.

When it comes to the most influential and perhaps important American saxophonist, then Frederick Hemke certainly gets my vote.

Background
Prior to Hemke and Rouseau's emergence, the founding stalwarts of the classical saxophone in America were Larry Teal and Cecil Leeson,

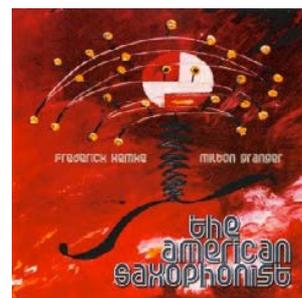
later joined by Sigurd Raschèr from Germany. All three were hugely important in commissioning new music, and the development of the saxophone repertoire.

If you trace through the lineage of the modern American virtuosos at least one of these names will make an appearance.

Hemke's lineage starts with saxophone royalty as a student of Marcel Mule at the Paris Conservatory from 1955 - 56. Here he became the first American to be awarded the *Première Prix du Saxophone*.

This early influence and focus certainly forms core values

found in his playing, - technique, agility and perhaps approach to vibrato. It also influenced his teaching (Northwestern University) in the way it is structured from individual lessons through to group classes, and this has formed the template used by many of his students who have gone on to become respected and influential saxophone teachers today.



What I find most interesting about his playing is how his sound and tone has evolved. It is strong and expansive, not something I always associate with the American tradition. This is probably more down to my own lack of thought and knowledge, now changed through listening to Hemke recordings and students, who are now highly celebrated soloists.

A personal favourite would be "The American Saxophonist" a collection of important works for tenor saxophone plus a rather wonderful performance of Karel Husa's Concerto for Alto Saxophone and Piano.

The power and strength of sound combined with varied tonal and subtle pallet colours impresses. However it is the spirit in which the music is played that really leaves it's mark. It is vivid, evocative and open to differing approaches



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and genres.

This is best demonstrated in Hemke's performance of M. William Karlin's work Music for Tenor Saxophone and Piano. Here improvisation is woven in alongside the fully notated and is used as a means of creating tension and freedom of expression for the performer. Pretty radical stuff for the classical saxophone still today!

The second movement 'To the memory of Coleman Hawkins' is a particular favourite with Hemke's expert and authentic use of subtone. Beautiful.

Hemkes' legacy is continued by his former students across America, many of which are

virtuosos and respected teachers in their own right such as Debra Richtmeyer, Timothy Roberts and Joseph Murphy.

I still remember Richtmeyer performing Lee Actor's Concerto for Alto Saxophone and Orchestra at the 2012 World Saxophone Congress. She truly engaged the audience musically with her rich tone presence of sound... I now know where that all started!

This influence stretches out to Japan with Ryo Noda and to the UK with Kyle Horch at the Royal College of Music London, Gerard McChrystal at Trinity College and Naomi Sullivan at Birmingham Conservatoire plus many more across the world...

And lets not forget his own line of reeds! Reflecting his open approach to sound these long established reeds are used by both classical and jazz saxophonists due to their tonal depth, response and flexibility.

Fred's achievements in building and supporting the

saxophone is vast. The North American Saxophone Alliance (NASA) was established in 1976 under his leadership and is now one of the largest saxophone events in the world.

His influence even stems out beyond the classical to jazz with Chico Freeman and superstar David Sanborn both former Hemke pupils!

So in conclusion it is his constant support and open approach to playing which results in individual and unconfined performance that will be his ultimate legacy. A true musician and advocate of the saxophone.

Matt London



Debra Richtmeyer carries on the legacy of Fred Hemke.



Matt London

Matt is a D'Addario Woodwinds artist, composer and doctoral student at Brunel University, London. Matt's latest album "Speak Now" is available from iTunes.

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