

*Da Capo*  
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*Commemorative Concert*

Konsertkamer **Da Capo** Concert Chamber  
10 November 2002

## **ALBERT HONEY**

I drafted the following obituary for Albert shortly after his passing during December 2001.

### ***Bibliography***

*Albert Edward Honey M.Mus., Ph.D. (Rhodes), I.R.A.M., A.R.C.M., I.G.S.M.  
Diplôme avec Mention, Conservatoire Nat de Musique, Paris*

*It is with deep regret that I have to announce to the flute world the sad passing of Albert Honey, also known as 'Doc', 'Bert' or Albert at the age of 82 on 9 November 2001.*

*All who have known Albert will remember him as a great character, virtuoso flute player, possessed of the most wonderful tone, and teacher, and a man of many other talents, including a great sense of humour, composer and arranger, writing poetry and very amusing doggerel.*

*Albert was born in Torquay, Devon, on 29 April 1919 and did most of his schooling in Canterbury. During the war he was principal flute in the Band of the Royal Dragoons in Edinburgh, and from 1946 – 1949 he was principal flute of the Coldstream Guards. These military positions were followed by his completing a Composition Scholarship at Trinity College, which was awarded by Sir Granville Bantock. Albert also studied with Geoffrey Gilbert and Gerald Jackson during this time.*

*Albert was one of the early English players to change to the silver flute and French method, and in 1949 – 1950 he studied with Fernand Caratgé and Gaston Crunelle at the Conservatoire in Paris.*

*Albert was principal flute of the Scottish National Orchestra from 1951 – 1954 and principal flute of the BBC Review Orchestra from 1954 - 1964. He was a profound influence on many students and friends, and a mentor to many leading flautists. These include William Bennett and James Galway, he was a friend to Albert Cooper.*

*Albert assumed a position as a senior lecturer at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa in the department of Music and Musicology. It was also from this institution that he gained his music degrees, including a Ph. D. with distinction in 1973. During this period, other than teaching actively he led a Wind Band and was also Bandmaster of the Prince Alfred Guards Regiment in Port Elizabeth.*

*Albert retired in 1984 whereupon he moved to Johannesburg and took up a very active retirement during which he taught and played in the National Symphony Orchestra. This was then followed by a later move to Muizenburg outside Cape Town where he spent the last four years of his life near the sea, which he loved so much.*

*Albert will be remembered with the greatest affection and respect by his family and many friends whose lives he had touched in such a positive way.*

*A more detailed eulogy will be published in due course and the writer invites anecdotal information in this regard. This will be published in a later edition of "Pan".*

The problem with obituaries is that they are always a little bit thin and they never actually tell you about the person. I had the privilege of being friends with Albert for many years

and when I say privileged, I mean very great privilege as in my view he is a little known genius of the flute and in current terms, a forgotten genius. Today I am a flute and headjoint maker holding patents, and friendships with leading figures in the flute industry. None of this would have been possible without the help, guidance and inspiration of Albert.

I first heard of Albert Honey when I was a national serviceman in the SA Army band and heard that there was a lecturer at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa who was an incredible piccolo and flute player. I was not privileged to visit him with the officers and warrant officers of the band, but I heard the stories and heard him playing at a concert. Well to say that Albert's playing on the piccolo was staggering would be an understatement. He had been a principal piccolo player in the Coldstream Guards.

As I wanted to study with a leading teacher with international credentials, I went to Rhodes to study with Albert. What follows are treasured memories of interactions with him:

1. At my first lesson with Albert I remember seeing Hamilton Harties 'In Ireland' on the music stand. I remember looking at this with the word 'unplayable' screaming through my mind. Albert proceeded to rattle it off on the flute and said "Boy you can't play Pussycat now but when I'm done with you, you certainly will." This piece has always been very special to me and I am a great fan of my friend Raffaele Trevisani's rendition of the piece. I remember early lessons playing the Handel Sonatas. Albert had a piano which was fitted with organ stops, which enabled him to produce all sorts of effects. Also I have never heard a flute player who could play a figured-bass in the way that he could. This was an early indication that later teachers after I had left university would somehow never match the magic I found in this man.
2. As a student there are those awful days when the lesson doesn't work. When rhythm and pitch are both gone, yet one has to do what one has to do. I remember Albert's irritation. Ultimately jumping up and down on a wooden floor to give me the rhythm, the whole music annex rocking. On particularly bad days he would say "I make the boys and girls cry". He was always sorry after an onerous lesson and would drag one off for a drink. It was understood that the heat in the lessons occasionally was to push you towards being a better player. Inevitably we would have a drink in the bar of the Goodward Hotel in Grahamstown, now the Frontier Hotel, where Albert would muse upon many things. He always had the notion that a silver flute should be hardened with an electric current. I well recall when a major Japanese manufacturer started producing flutes, which had their tubes hardened on this basis, Albert thought the sound was terrible, but he had the idea and it was a good idea.
3. I remember first hearing Albert's sound – this rich, dark, luminous sound and at that point being a fan of a lighter sound and wondering what this was all about. Some weeks later he advised me that a former student of his was playing in Port Elizabeth and he would like me to go to the concert. He announced that the student was one James Galway and with the arrogance and stupidity of youth I said, "Who the hell is James Galway?". My early technical interest in flutes was developing so I wanted to know what flute he would be playing. I was told that he would probably be playing a Cooper, and I think I said something stupid like, "What the hell is a Cooper?" To

induce me to go he gave me a lift and paid for my ticket – the embarrassing arrogance of youth.

To hear Galway playing was a culmination of what I had heard and what had stimulated me with Albert. To say I was totally stunned would be an understatement and then there were drinks with Jimmy in the bar of the Hotel Edward afterwards, where when I had summoned up the courage I said to Galway, "What do you think is the best headjoint?" With a twinkle in his eye he looked at me and said, "The one with the dent in the right place".

Of course this has a bearing on the turbulence in a flute, and turbulence has a bearing on the colour and response. Little did Jimmy know that he would be triggering off what would be many, many years of experimentation, and of course I would not have met such a man and asked such a question if I hadn't met Albert Honey.



A SUPERB instrument in the hands of a master, James Galway and his flute of pure gold.

## Golden flute has a tone to match

HERALD REPORTER

THE DESCRIPTION "worth its weight in gold" is not a misnomer for the flute played by the world celebrated Irish flautist James Galway. It is pure 14 carat gold with a tone to match.

"Sure and it's a Rolls Royce of flutes," said the bearded flautist with the Irish brogue that is as musical as his performance in Port Elizabeth last night.

Nor is the custom built instrument, which was made by the English master goldsmith A. R. Cooper, his only gold flute. He owns three in all and a fourth is presently in the smelting pot.

Along with those, he has three pure silver flutes. All are slightly different in pitch and answer different needs.

**Value**

Asked the value of his golden instruments, the diminutive musician who has earned the title of the world's greatest flautist today, grinned and said: "They are beyond price. They are part of me, like my soul, and you could not put a price on that, could you now? But if you really want to know, the keys alone of the flute that is being built will cost £4,000."

Among those who heard Galway and his golden

flute in the Feather Market Hall last night, was a man for whom the recital held more than musical interest.

For Dr. Albert Honey, senior lecturer in flute at Rhodes University, it meant renewing a friendship with a former pupil. More than 20 years ago in London, Galway, then aged 15, had lessons from Dr Honey and spent many evenings in his home.

**James Galway**

4. The next major person I met was many years later after Albert had retired, when both players such as William Bennett and Susan Milan did tours of South Africa. Major objectives of theirs was to meet and see Albert, and I remember at Susan Milan's concerts in 1997 her being very pleased at having met Albert and saying, "Well you know you're still famous in England", and Albert's beaming smile on hearing that he had not been forgotten, even though he had moved out to the Third World.
5. On two occasions when William Bennett toured it was very clear that Albert was very special to him. He told me that he had some influence on Bennett and Galway when they were boys, and as he said, "they were naughty little beggars" and they both came to the BBC Studio because they had heard there was a player who could produce a French tone on an American flute, and they did not believe this, and consequently had come to see what he was doing.
6. Other than family and his dear wife Jean, Albert's loves of his life were his Powell and his Louis Lot flutes. Albert's rich, dark sound was a much larger more modern version to that wonderful French sound that started emerging after World War II. While it had puzzled me first my work is dedicated to building that more traditional sound with modern dynamics and I have many people who come to me for overhauls and headjoints saying they want their flute to make "that sound". Another gift from Albert Honey.
7. Albert wrote his PhD on the development of wind and band instruments through the ages and as such was incredibly knowledgeable on flute key work. I have a mass of correspondence with him, because at the point that I decided not to follow a career playing the flute, but to focus on the technical development of the instrument, he was very supportive and very informative. I remember very clearly a flute friend coming around with a flute that I could identify as a 1867 system Rudell Carte, but could not identify all the key work. I phoned Albert to describe what I saw, and the answer was immediate and unhesitating, "It's a Guard's model 1867".
8. Albert's musical tastes were varied. They ranged from classical masterpieces through to band music. As students we were all part of the Rhodes Wind Band which had the job of playing at all the Beer Fests and of course many, many different arrangements which students involved with Beer Fests would find attractive, and I remember playing flute and then saxophone to the strains of Lorelei.

Absolutely Albert's favourite music to play was Victorian Flute music. I remember many happy hours spent with Albert playing Kohler Duets, often with a glass of wine and again the statement, "When I'm done with you boy you will be able to play Pusycat".

Amongst his favourite pieces were the Boehm showpieces written to show off the flute and in particular Du Du Liegst Am Herzen, the notorious "Du Du". Albert used to describe it as a 'wall of death'. In particular as he explained, because it had been written for an open G # flute and it was not that simple on a closed G # flute. I remember sitting at concerts with other of his students enraptured by this music while the rest of the audience sat with a slightly puzzled look of their faces as to what this was all about.

Albert was a very human and caring person, particularly with the young. He mentored many aspiring flautists, and there was always time for children. We spent many Saturday afternoons in my workshop fiddling with flutes and headjoints, and he always brought sweets for my young daughters.

As my interests developed more into flute making of course Albert was there and he introduced me to Albert Cooper who was persuaded to see me on a number of occasions over the years for purposes of assisting my endeavours in flute making. I doubt that this entrée would have been there without the friendship of Albert. I was privileged to know Albert for the last 27 years and I have never met a character like him and I must say that the modern flute world is at a loss for his passing.

