



The Artist as Hero?

Niall O'Riordan *has the last word on putting players on pedestals*

Having a good role model is vital for learning the flute. We all need somebody to inspire us; it is a really healthy way of learning. Mine has always been Sir James Galway. I have learnt so much from listening to his playing, more than anything I've learnt from any one single teacher. Too much of a good thing will kill you, though, and I'm curious as to whether there is a moment that putting somebody on a pedestal can become destructive.

I believe there is a critical time in learning where we really need step into our own power. There is a very big difference between putting someone on a pedestal rather than simply admiring their talent and having great respect for them. I believe the first approach to be destructive and the second to be empowering. The ability to give compliments freely without agenda is a very admirable quality.

I believe that we all have a personal sense of power. All too often we give this power away far too easily, an example we see all too clearly in the world of celebrity and the beauty industry. These industries play on our vulnerabilities, presenting us with something apparently so high upon a pedestal that it seems completely unattainable. And, of course, it is, that is the whole point of their strategy. It's about making us feel inadequate so that

we spend our money and buy into their marketing. The problem is that right from the start we have given power away to something outside us. I believe we are all equal and no one person is better than anybody else regardless of their success, skills, talent, money ...we should never use somebody else's success and turn it inwards to make ourselves feel bad.

What really got me thinking about all this was a recent conversation I had with a flautist. They began speaking about a flute player in a very idealised way. I sensed their wanting me to participate in this. The person we spoke about is indeed a very fine flute player and I most definitely agreed with the admiration, which I expressed wholeheartedly, but it was the WAY that they did it I had an issue with. I got a feeling that they were using this person's success and talent to put themselves down and make them feel bad. This person was handing their power away, effectively saying, *'I'll never be that good'* and *'what's the hope, it's just depressing'*. I felt a sense of hopelessness from them and they wanted me to participate! I declined. They had put this person on a pedestal in an unattainable way.

We are invited into conversations like this all the time. These little conversations grow and spread throughout our community. Sometimes the artist in question is not necessarily

wildly impressive, but the conversation becomes like a hobby that people involve themselves in – and it is much more about making themselves feel bad than genuine admiration. It can even be an unconscious effort to make the person they're speaking to share the feeling of inadequacy. It has nothing at all to do with being sincerely complimentary. I was once at a summer course when a very well-known flautist gave an excellent recital. After the concert everybody was depressed rather than inspired. The destructive conversations continued well into the night. Why? Shouldn't great flute playing inspire and motivate us to strive for such excellence too?

Finally be careful not to become the 'eternal student'. This is another way we give our power away. Many students place their teachers on such a pedestal that they constantly need their opinions and approval well into their professional career. Unfortunately, this means they never truly grow up and embody their own sense of power, which is always there waiting to be claimed.

If you consider something unattainable, it is. Nobody can take your power away; you have to give it away in the first place. By placing somebody on a pedestal you are handing your power away. Instead, start today to direct that power into improving your playing and following your dreams.