



## Eugene Ellsworth Rousseau

August 23, 1932 - August 26, 2024

Eugene Ellsworth Rousseau, whose career grew from playing saxophone as a teenager in Chicago-area dance clubs to performing and educating classical saxophonists across five continents, died peacefully on August 26 in Bloomington, Indiana. He was 92. A devoted husband, father, grandfather, and mentor, he will be missed for his warmth, humor, and music making.

Ask virtually any student of saxophone if they know of Eugene Rousseau, and you will learn the unmistakable influence he has had on the expansion of the saxophone as a medium of classical music and artistic expression.

Recognized as one of the great saxophonists of the world since his 1965 Carnegie Hall debut, the legendary saxophonist Marcel Mule of France described Rousseau as "a brilliant saxophonist and distinguished artist," and critics the world over have echoed Mule's praise.

As a performer, Rousseau's artistry inspired many "firsts." He gave the first solo saxophone recitals in Paris, Berlin, Vienna, London and Amsterdam. He gave a yearly master course at the prestigious Mozarteum in Salzburg during 1991-2001, marking the first time that the saxophone was included at that institution. And he has premiered numerous works written for him that remain key pieces in the classical saxophone repertoire. Rousseau has appeared as a soloist with many bands and orchestras throughout the United States and abroad. His wide-ranging discography includes solo albums for Deutsche

Grammophon, Delos, Liscio, Crystal, and RIAX.

As an innovator, Rousseau influenced the development and sound of the instrument. Beginning in 1972, Rousseau served as Yamaha Corporation's chief consultant for saxophone research for more than 40 years, contributing to the development of acoustic improvements in saxophones, Yamaha and non-Yamaha alike. In the 1970s, unable to find commercial mouthpieces that met his vision for tone, color, projection and power, he also designed a mouthpiece for his own use. Over time, this mouthpiece became the inspiration for E. Rousseau Mouthpieces.

As an educator, Rousseau served as Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Music at Indiana University and was also on the faculty of the University of Minnesota and guest professor at numerous institutions. He published a number of arrangements, scholarly works, and method books, many of which have been translated into French, German, Japanese, and Chinese. He was the recipient of many awards and honors. He co-founded the World Saxophone Congress in 1969 and served as president of both the North American Saxophone Alliance and the Comité International du Saxophone. His numerous students hold major teaching positions in the U.S. and throughout the world.

These lists of accomplishments, however, only hint at his greatest legacy – his ability to nurture, mentor, and inspire the musicians surrounding him to be better students, better musicians, better educators, and better performers.

His family and friends will remember his lifelong devotion to the Chicago White Sox, his love of terrible puns, a good meal, and a nice dry gin martini. We will remember the stories of the wonderful people he met throughout his life across the five continents he visited in his work, and his penchant for speaking phrases in another language out of the blue. We will remember the

stories he told of his childhood – the scrappy child working hard to make a better life for himself. We will remember how much he loved his family and friends, and the fine example he set for us all that relationships are the most important success of all.

He is survived by his wife, Norma; daughter and son-in-law Lisa-Marie Rousseau and Eric Tollefsrud and their daughters Rachel Tollefsrud and Claire Tollefsrud; and son and daughter-in-law Joseph and Beth Rousseau and their sons Henry Rousseau and Alec Rousseau.

A private, family service will be held in his honor. Memorials may be directed to Shell Lake Arts Center in Shell Lake, Wisconsin, an arts summer camp devoted to bringing the joy of the arts to aspiring musicians and artists <https://shelllakeartscenter.org>.

Special thanks to the staff of Bell Trace Senior Living in Bloomington who helped him live out his final years with loving care.

To learn more about Rousseau's amazing life, go to. <https://rousseaumouthpieces.com> or click here.

Allen Funeral Home and Crematory have been entrusted with arrangements. Online condolences, photos and memories may be shared with family and friends at [www.allencares.com](http://www.allencares.com)

# Tribute Wall



“ Allen Funeral Home and Crematory created a Tribute Video in memory of Eugene Ellsworth Rousseau



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**Allen Funeral Home and Crematory** - August 28, 2024 at 05:29 PM

TM

“ I am saddened to hear of the passing of Dr. Rousseau. I was a saxophone student at his at Indiana University in 1965. And met him years later when he came to Troy University where I served as Associate Professor of music.

*My condolences to his family.*

*Dr. Thomas Moffett (saxothom@aol.com)*



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**Thomas Moffett** - January 13, 2025 at 05:13 PM

BM

“ *My brother Ed and I send our condolences on the loss of the man, the musician, the wonderful human being, our cousin Gene. We'd like to share a few memories. It was always great fun when Uncle Joe, Aunt Laura and Gene would come to visit.*

*Ed recalled the time when Gene competed on the Ted Mack Original Amateur hour. Since we lived in the boonies of Upper Michigan we could get WGN only when the weather was good and we didn't get to hear his performance. Voting was done by postcards so our mother bought a hundred penny postcards and she and our aunties submitted a hundred votes for Gene. Apparently another contestant had more aunties so he didn't win... but we did what we could.*

*Gene and Norma spent a couple days with me and my friends in Connecticut after which we bon voyaged them on the Queen Mary to begin his Fulbright Scholarship at the beginning of his amazing music career.*

*My husband and I visited Gene and Norma in Salzburg during one of his summer residencies and met some of their wonderful international friends. We had a memorable dinner on the porch after which Gene broke out his saxophone and we were entertained by him and an opera singer from the Netherlands. Good times, good memories. Love and prayers from Cousins Ed and Barb.*

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**Barbara Rousseau Mason** - September 15, 2024 at 09:35 AM

MS

“ I remember meeting Eugene when he'd stop on one of his walks through Sycamore Knolls to talk to our dog Effie. Effie got to be friends with both Eugene and Norma and therefore so did I. Oh Norma, you took such loving care of your fella - I can only imagine how much you miss him. He was such an easy man to talk to and I am impressed with all his accomplishments. It sounds like the two of you traveled the world over. I hope to see you often walking and get to share a talk with you. All my sympathy and love, Mary Sepanski...a Sycamore Knolls neighbor

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**Mary Sepanski** - September 03, 2024 at 09:19 AM

SR

“ I send my condolences for the loss of your dear husband, father, grandpa, and friend. I feel so grateful to have studied with Dr. Rousseau in Bloomington 1973-1978. He was a master musician, an encouraging and excellent teacher, and a kind and gracious person. I've tried to emulate him in my music teaching and playing as well as his humble and positive mindset in life. Be comforted by the many people he has helped and influenced through the years. Rest in peace dear one.

Sue (Spies) Reinhart  
sns80rhart@gmail.com

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**susan reinhart** - September 02, 2024 at 07:53 PM

DB

Ah yes Sue, I remember you and have taken the same teaching path from Dr. Rousseau (I'm retired now though). Onward with his philosophy is what I say. David Branter

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**David Branter** - June 17, 2025 at 11:38 PM

AM

“ I have many memories of you all and of Eugene's warmth and courtesy, but my most treasured memory is of Eugene so patiently giving individual saxophone lessons to my son Ronald Michael and how much that attention meant to my son. I send you my thoughts at this time. Antonia Matthew

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**Antonia Matthew** - September 02, 2024 at 11:53 AM

LH

“ Imagine the PURE JOY that I experienced upon hearing that one of my 5th band students was the great niece of this great man! My college woodwinds professor had music majors listen to recordings of Dr. Rousseau's and they were the gold standard of performances. I had the pleasure of attending a concert where he was the featured soloist with the Cedar Rapids Symphony. He was amazing, yet so humble. I offer my heartfelt sympathy to his family, friends and colleagues. God bless his memory.

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**Laura Hanna** - August 30, 2024 at 05:58 PM

RA

“ Uncle Gene was my hero from my early years living with my Gram and Grampa Rousseau and Gene. He took me under his wing and treated me as a young sister . My memories and love will always remain in my heart.

*My heart is broken/ Rhonda*

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**Rhonda Anderson** - August 29, 2024 at 10:21 AM

WP

Uncle Gene was such a talent man! I remember one Christmas Eve we were at Uncle Dave's and Uncle Gene pulled out his Saxophone 🎷 playing us Christmas Carols. I hope Grandpa Earl, Aunt Lucille and Uncle Gene are drinking a dry martini at their reunion. Hugs to all who knew and loved him.

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**Wendy Potocki** - August 29, 2024 at 06:52 PM