

Comments on Hector Rubenstein from a former student

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From August to October 2006 I attended Hector's course on the Physics of Music at the University of Stockholm physics department. I did graduate work in Stockholm in economics in the 1960s, and in recent years have returned to school to take courses in areas of life-long interest, one of which was physics and astronomy. I had never heard of Hector Rubenstein before, and I was more than surprised after the first lecture of his down-to-earth and friendly manner, not having any idea that standing in front of us was a great physicist, with an international reputation. Hector did not want to give exams, he said they were not really relevant for us, but gave us the choice, exams or three papers on an area of physics of our choosing, though preferably related to the physics of music. When our papers were slow in coming in, he kept on reminding us, saying this could create problems within the administration and the future of the course, but he stuck to his commitment to papers, not exams. He entered in detailed and long discussions, and repeated and repeated his explanation until the student seemed to understand, something I have rarely seen. One could see that he had a burning, passionate interest to relate and explain his subject, music and the physics of music. One had no idea that his expertise was in a completely different area of physics, let alone that he was highly regarded for his contributions. Hector in the classroom was a joy to listen to. He answered every question with a smile on his face, reflecting his great love of teaching. I was planning to meet him after the course, but never did. It was with great sadness when I learned of his death earlier this year. A great man has been lost and the world is poorer for it.

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