

KENNETH TSE'S EQUIPMENT

Soprano

Yamaha YSS-875 with a Eugene Rousseau NC3 mouthpiece and Vandoren 4 reeds.

Alto

Yamaha YAS-855 with a Eugene Rousseau NC4 mouthpiece and Vandoren 3½ reeds.

Tenor

Yamaha YTS-875EX with a Eugene Rousseau 4R mouthpiece and Vandoren 3½ reeds

Baritone

Yamaha YBS-62 with a Eugene Rousseau 5R mouthpiece and Vandoren 3 – 3½ reeds

All Saxophones

Bay saxophone Ligatures, including Gerry Mulligan's baritone Bay ligature.

In the world of professional classical saxophone artists there ▲are few who are more acclaimed then Kenneth Tse. Following his Carnegie Hall debut, The New York Times called him, "A young virtuoso." American Record Guide, perhaps the world's leading authority regarding classical recordings, said Tse has "supremely elegant tone... (and) sheer virtuosity." They also wrote, "Kenneth Tse plays the saxophone with seductive tonal beauty." Fanfare Magazine wrote, "(Tse is) of the caliber of instrumentalists whose sound is captivating." The great Eugene Rousseau, one of Tse's teachers, and who rarely gives praise, wrote, "Tse is a uniquely talented saxophonist with a facile technique and a tone of great beauty, plus the ability to understand and interpret a wide range of music styles." He adds, "(Tse is) a brilliant saxophonist... worthy of any stage." To say Tse as an all-around accomplished artist would be an understatement. His playing is a masterful display of artistic genius melded with technical skill, yet one never loses the sense that above and beyond all else Tse's always careful to bring out the intent of the line, the phrase and the utmost of musical sentiment.

Born in Hong Kong, Tse amazingly spent the first eight years of his saxophone life teaching himself the instrument. He studied at the Hong Kong Academy for the Performing Arts, followed by work in the United States at the University of Indiana, where he earned a Bachelor and Master degree, along with the rare Artist Diploma, and the University of Illinois, where he earned his Doctorate in Performance. Since then he has and continues to appear as a soloist throughout the world, having to turn down more opportunities to play than he can possibly accept. Among the featured solo concerts Tse has given include the featured concerto performance with the Slovenia Army Band at the 14th World Saxophone Congress in Ljubljana, Slovinia. He has also been featured soloist with the United States Navy Band, Indiana University Wind Ensemble, Hong Kong Sinfonietta, Des Moines Symphony and Emory University Wind Ensemble. He gave a recital at XingHai Concert Hall in GuangZhou, China, was guest professor at the 7th Faenza International Saxophone Festival in Italy, guest clinician at the Midwest International Band and Orchestra Festival and guest recital and masterclass leader at the 2004 Changchun International Clarinet and Saxophone Festival in China.

by Thomas Erdmann

Today Tse is Professor of Music at The University of Iowa and Membership Director for the North American Saxophone Alliance. He has had numerous recordings released on labels such as Enharmonic, Arizona University Recordings and the highly prestigious Crystal. A Yamaha and Vandoren artist, he

was recently featured by Greg Banaszak in an excellent "A Lesson With..." article here in Saxophone Journal in the 2004 January-February issue. He has 12 works dedicated to him, has had two of his own arrangements published by Reed Music and he has had articles published in the Yamaha Educator Press, Saxophone Symposium and the Iowa Bandmaster Association Journal, to name just a few. Kenneth Tse resides in Iowa City, Iowa with his wife and four daughters. To find out more about him, visit his website at: www.kenneth-tse.com

How did you come to choose to play the saxophone and was it the first instrument you played?

I started violin lessons when I was seven and piano lessons when I was 9. However, I did not continue with either. Then when I was in the seventh grade, I wanted to play the trumpet. But after the band director looked at my hands and teeth, he gave me a saxophone. Later, I found out that it was because he needed more saxophones in the band.

One can only marvel at your ability, but even more so in light of the fact for the first eight years you played it you did this by teaching yourself. How did you go about teaching the instrument yourself?

You are very kind. Strictly speaking, I did have a teacher, who was the band director and a bassoon player. However, in terms of the different aspects of saxophone playing, I developed my tonal concept through listening to recordings, such as Eugene Rousseau's *Concerto* record and other instruments. One can always practice their scales and other basic techniques, but I was fortunate to not have gone wrong with the sound concept.

How did you progress from self-taught saxophonist to acceptance into the prestigious Hong Kong Academy for the Performing Arts?

Just like any other students I think we all practiced hard, and maybe the fact that I was one of only two saxophonists who applied gave me the advantage!

What was the experience like for you there?

Frankly, it was very difficult. If you can imagine not having a saxophone teacher, not having to play in an orchestra (band was not organized until later) while all your colleagues are in rehearsals, and being alone with all the time to practice. You are the only motivation you have. In short, there were not many challenges or opportunities.

Why did you choose Indiana University as the place for your collegiate studies?

Actually, there is an interesting story behind that. As I have mentioned earlier, I had listened to Eugene Rousseau's recording quite a bit but had not memorized his name. In 1989, when I was asked to perform for a saxophone master in a master class at the Academy, I wanted to hear if this person was better than the one in the recording. Of course, I soon found out that they were one and the same! My parents arranged a dinner meeting with Rousseau and the rest is history.

What was it like to study with Eugene Rousseau?

It was the most thrilling and exhilarating experience I have ever had. Not having had a teacher for so long, it was a dream

Saxophone Recordings



KENNETH TSE

"plays with seductive tonal beauty" American Record Guide. "Tse's name has become synonymous with excellence" Sax Journal. CD656 (Sparkling Sax): Feld, Sonata; Muczynski, Sonata; Bernstein, West Side Story Medley; Heiden, Solo; Morosco, Blue Caprice; Kaufmann, Meditation; Benson, Aeolian Song.

CD657 (American Exhibition): Alto & Baritone Sax. Canfield & Cheetham: Sax Sonatas; Wm. Grant Still, Romance; also music by Libby Larsen, Mark Lewis, Jay Vosk, & Walter Hartley.

CD658 (Lyric Soprano): Kenneth Tse, Soprano Sax. Music by Piazzolla, Fauré, Pasculli, Albéniz, Naulais, Bédard, Worley, and Lewis.

CD358 (Pas de Trois): Kenneth Tse, Saxophone; Benjamin Coelho, Bassoon; Alan Hucklebery, Piano. Music by van Beurden, Feld, Froom, Goldstein, & Freund. "stimulating works...beautifully performed" Fanfare.



HARVEY PITTEL

"A master of his instrument" New York Times. CD655 (Moving Along): Dahl, Concerto; Ibert, Concertino da Camera; Creston, Sonata; Maurice, Tableaux de Provence; Albinoni, Concerto; Rachmaninoff, Vocalise.

CD654 (Bach & Noodles): J.S.Bach/Rodby: New Classics Suite; Del Tredici, Acrostic Song; Bozza: Caprice; Milhaud: Scaramouche; also Oodles of Noodles, Carnival of Venice; Flight of the Bumblebee; Saxophobia; Valse Yvonne; Perpetual Motion, Vocalise, & Bonneau Caprice

CD651: Laura Hunter, Alto Saxophone. Bolcom: Lilith; Cooper: Four Impromptus; Rogers, Nature of the Whirling Wheel; Galante, Shu Gath Manna; Gottschalk, Jeu de Chat. "a splendid artist" Audio Magazine.

CD652: An American Tribute to Sigurd Rascher. Lawrence Gwozdz, Alto Saxophone: Cowell, Air & Scherzo; Husa, Élégie et Rondeau; Lamb, Three Antique Dances; Russell, Particles; Still, Romance; Wirth, Jepthah & Beyond These Hills; Worley, Sonata. "extraordinary saxophonist; tremendous range of colors" Fanfare.

CD653: Bill Perconti, Alto Saxophone. Hovhaness, Suite for saxophone & guitar; Bozza, Improvisation et Caprice; Thomys, Miniatures; Noda, Improvisation III; Massias, Suite monodique; Gershwin, Three-Quarter Blues & Promenade; Grant, Duo 1 Point 5. "creamy, smooth tone" – American Rcd Guide

C155 (cassette only): Harvey Pittel Saxophone Quartet. Bach, Glazunov, Rivier, Joplin, Desenclos, Bozza; plus popular works with drums & bass.

C157 (cassette only): Harvey Pittel Trio. John Rodby, New Classics Suite (after J.S. Bach); Creston, Sonata; Villa-Lobos, Aria; Duke Ellington medley.

C151 (cassette only): Brian Minor, Saxophone. Persichetti, Parable; Lunde, Sonata; Leon Stein, Quintet for saxophone & strings.

C152 (cassette only): Mark Watters, Baritone Saxophone. Boismortier, Sonata; Bonneau, Caprice; Linn, Saxifrage Blue; Petusi, Concert Piece.

C153 (cassette only): Nova Saxophone Quartet. Pierne, Intro et Variations; Trois Conversations; Clerisse, Intro et Scherzo; Absil, Suite.

C353 (cassette only): Sextuor a Vent. Harvey Pittel with Westwood Wind Quintet. Milhaud, Scaramouche; Heiden, Intrada; Dubois, Sinfonia.

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come true. He was always encouraging and professional. His professionalism showed in his attire, mannerism, interaction with students, and high standard in performance and teaching. To use his words, I came to him with good technical ability and musical understanding. Then he chiseled out the rough edges and helped refine my tone projection and control on various saxophones. He also had an abundant supply of jokes and many fascinating stories of Marcel Mule and others.

What's your most lasting impression of your work at Indiana?

There are many, of course. However, if I were just to name one thing, it would be the professionalism of, particularly Dr. Rousseau and Ray Cramer, who was the Director of Bands. They were always prepared, punctual, sharp, and motivated. They never slow down with their work even today and were always ready to teach. They were an inspiration and great role models for my own work ethic.

Your first collegiate teaching position was at the University of Missouri. Did you enjoy collegiate teaching right from start, or was it a bit of a shock having your own collegiate studio along with the requisite committee work?

Because of the great examples I had had and also teaching experience as an associate instructor at Indiana University, I had taught quite a few music majors, it was not so much a shock but an exciting opportunity. I had a lot of freedom to experiment with my teaching style and had many recording and performing opportunities also.

What's the best thing about your current position at The University of Iowa?

Obviously, being in one of the Big Ten research universities, I have a lot of support in terms of funding and other resources. I would also say that because the saxophone studio was relatively young when I started, instead of building on someone else's work and fulfilling expectations, I have tremendous freedom and opportunities to create my own studio, which is very satisfying. We successfully hosted the 2006 North American Saxophone Alliance National Conference and many prestigious guests have visited us such as Jean-Marie Londeix, Eugene Rousseau, Fred Hemke, Jean-Yves Fourmeau, Nobuya Sugawa, among others. It is my goal to have a world-class studio that would offer substantial training with the aim of building each other up.

I'd like to ask you about your recording of Lars-Erik Larsson's 'Alto Saxophone Concerto.' Your recording of it is impeccable, and the recording was done live. You were very brave. For students who are working on it, what advice do you have in approaching the piece?

Thank you very much and I am glad you enjoyed it. Although it was written at about the same time as Glazounov's *Concerto* and has been used as a required piece for international competitions, the work has never received the recognition that it deserves. There are many technical challenges in the piece such as wide slurred intervals, long cadenzas, fast tonguing, and many high altissimo passages that require tremendous control on the instrument. The most important aspect and the power within this piece is the expressiveness of all the themes. One must perform with the utmost connectedness in the notes and with the most vibrant tone color.

You've just returned from performing the 'Dahl Concerto' with the Vanderbilt University Wind Ensemble in Nashville, Tennessee. This got me to thinking, with all of the clinics you do throughout the world every year, are there one or two concepts, above others, you like to make sure you emphasize?

This is always a tricky question to answer. Are there really some concepts that are more important than others? For instance, if a student has a weak sound and bad posture, then those are the concepts that need to be addressed. Having said that, I would say that the optimal and flexible use of air and the concept of a resonant sound are extremely important and weigh heavily on my list. Although we wind players know that we play a wind instrument, how often do we actually talk or hear about the "wind" part? I am not just referring to the adequate use of air and the volume of breathing in and out, but rather the inflection and flexibility in the air stream when we blow. Like many other concepts, it is much easier to demonstrate than to write about. But in general, when something is not quite right such as a weak sound, lack of musical expression, etc., I always ask my students to blow air into the instrument while fingering the notes, but without making the reed sound. One must hear the speed and volume of air that are suitable for the desired expression. If it is not in the air stream, it will not happen in the sound. Besides, I can also tell from the sound of the air whether the student is using the correct oral cavity for the register played.

The recording you did in honor of the passing of your mother, 'In Memory,' is full of some of the most beautiful pieces ever written. Could you tell the readers about your mother and how she helped and supported you throughout your life?

She was the one who had arranged the dinner with the Rousseau's, which led to my study with him. She also supported me financially and emotionally in my early projects and was very proud of my achievements. She was a principal of an elementary school in Hong Kong and was a very motivated and strong leader. Prior to that position she was a music teacher who played piano and clarinet. Without her support, I would not have become who I am today. She was a wonderful woman and would have been an inspirational grandmother for our children.

Just about every collegiate saxophone teacher I've met has always stressed the importance of learning and performing Johann Sebastian Bach's music on the saxophone. You've recorded his 'Sonata in E Major, BWV 1035.' What is there in his music you find important for saxophonists to learn?"

It is always a controversial and sensitive topic when we talk about playing Bach's music on the saxophone. Someone said I should have recorded that sonata with a harpsichord. Moreover, other musicians can be a bit suspicious when it comes to the use of a "jazz" instrument to play Bach's music. Many musicologists and instrumentalists also argue over the "correct" interpretation of Bach. I believe Bach was very clear with his musical expressions and "instructions." Phrasing, articulation, ornamentation, harmonic texture and the discipline of all these are well worth studying. However, performing Bach's music should not be a science in itself. I cannot help but think of what Pablo Casals said once about his experience in a restaurant. He heard a gypsy violinist play a Bach partita beautifully and said it was the best performance of Bach's music he had ever heard. The free and unpretentious interpretation had resulted in a

very convincing performance. I happen to believe that Bach's music should not be boxed in. And I think one should be open to exploring and studying various types of music.

The recording you did with Benjamin Coelho on bassoon and Alan Huckleberry on piano, 'Pas De Trois,' is a clinic in expressive yet sympathetic playing. Do you have any tips or advice for students who are playing in chamber ensembles?

Without getting into the technical and musical aspects of performing chamber music, I think one important element is a healthy and honest relationship between the members. There are many fantastic professional groups today but many more have separated because of personal issues. When I work with my students, I always encourage an open dialog but doing so with sensitivity and kindness. No one likes to be told that their intonation is off or they are too loud. But, in order to give a convincing and breathtaking performance, everyone in the group needs to be receptive to suggestions as well as healthy criticism and not be afraid to praise each other.

There are a number of works which composers wrote for you on your 'An American Exhibition' CD, including works by David DeBoor Canfield and John Cheetham. When you're preparing pieces that have been written and /or dedicated to you by composers, do you like to work with the composer as you're preparing the music? If so, in what manner?

It is not so much during performance preparation but rather throughout the writing period that most of the discussions occur. They were often related to technical issues on the saxophone, whether the music is idiomatic or not. I am fortunate to work with some outstanding composers whose music is transparent enough for understanding and yet deep enough for creative expression.

I had the great honor of interviewing and writing an article about Libby Larsen for 'Women of Note Quarterly.' She is an absolutely delightful woman and a brilliant composer. You perform her powerful 'Holy Roller' on your 'An American Exhibition' CD. Your recording of that work is the first to be issued on the original saxophone and piano version. How did you approach that work?

Frankly, I was very surprised to find out that I was the first to record the piano version. Libby is one of those composers who is extremely creative yet her music is not too whimsical to comprehend. Since this piece is descriptive in nature, it is actually quite easy to interpret once you understand the power and the particular style of revival preaching. It is mostly about dramatic inflections.

I studied theory under and played the music of Walter Hartley while I was a student at SUNY Fredonia. I loved how you treated his musical passages in his 'Sonata for Baritone Saxophone and Piano.' How do you approach a piece by a composer who is both serious and whimsical at the same time?

Although most of Walter Hartley's numerous saxophone pieces are atonal, they still follow a certain formal structure and pattern. All the basic attributes of music are presented: melody, harmony, rhythm, form, and unique timber. I think he is very clear in what he wants in his music. The language that he uses is atonal but his music speaks as tonal music. Frankly, compared to today's "avant-garde" repertoire, his music almost sounds "neo-classical." Just think about that for a moment. What used to be contemporary musical expressions and language are now considered conservative.

You get around on all of the saxophones with equal fluency. Going from alto to baritone is not like a trumpeter going from trumpet to flugelhorn. What advice do you have for students in order to help them move between the different saxophones?

Since the fingerings of all the saxophones are basically the same, it comes down to embouchure and the amount of air used. To use Rousseau's analogy of round circles, imagine a soprano using a coin sized amount of air while a baritone needing a tire-sized amount. Obviously this is not a precise compari-



son but one needs a drastic change in air volume. In terms of embouchure, the roundness of it does not change but tightness of the lip muscle does. As the circle of the embouchure expands, so does the oral cavity, hence, the necessary increase in the volume of air.

You've arranged/transcribed two works which have been published. How did you choose the pieces you picked, and is this something you'd like to continue to do?

I have actually arranged quite a few pieces but not all of them are prepared and printer-ready. Whenever I enjoy hearing a piece and think it would work well on any of the saxophones, I purchase it and put it on the "to-do" list. Finding the time to prepare the music is always a challenge. At times I did hire a score preparer to help in the process. Yes, I do plan to continue arranging. Besides concert pieces, I also like to arrange for educational purposes such as pieces for young players.

Your recording of soprano saxophone works with piano, 'Lyric Soprano,' is excellent. This is a uniquely difficult instrument to control from many standpoints, but perhaps no more deadly than intonation. What advice do you have for students with regard to intonation practice on the soprano, and is this different advice from work on the other saxophones?

Obviously, different brands of instrument have slightly different intonation tendencies on the soprano, and in fact, on other saxophones as well. Perhaps one of the reasons why we struggle with intonation on soprano is that we play it like an alto saxophone. Since the mouthpiece and the instrument itself are so much smaller, we need to adjust our air volume, tongue position and oral cavity accordingly. Most of the intonation problems occur when one is over-blowing or is too tense on different registers. The only way to improve on soprano playing is to play on it often. One has to be careful not to move the tongue too much or make drastic changes in the oral cavity. The cavity shapes are very different from that of the alto and other saxophones.

As busy as you are, do you still find time to practice?

Honestly, it is getting harder and harder. Often it is not whether I have time to practice; one can always find time to do what is necessary. Rather, after a day's work I am tired mentally and physically. With my family growing, other responsibilities arise that also take energy. Nevertheless, most of my practicing is done in the evening after I get home. I also try to put in some time between lessons, meetings and other engagements. This is why I would encourage younger players to spend as much time as possible to hone their basic technical training (scales, tonguing, long tones, etc.). If done right and with proper maintenance, it should last a lifetime. Even Marcel Mule said that after he started teaching at the conservatory and performing so much, he did not have time to practice scales anymore. Now I feel that the time and effort that I put in during my earlier years of learning the instrument is really paying off.

Do you have a routine you like to follow when you do practice?

Ever since I started learning the saxophone, I have had a strange and stubborn habit; I always insist on warming up with long tones. Nothing helps the player to connect with his/her instrument more than playing long tones. The wind instrument is an extension of one's body. In order to play it efficiently, one needs to be one with the instrument through air. Moreover,

playing long tones in different dynamic levels also force the player to use correct embouchure, tongue position, and shape of the oral cavity. Without having to worry about fingerings, long tones allow the player to listen and notice any minute problems that would be missed otherwise in technical exercises. From what I gather, people seem to enjoy my sound for which I am grateful. I attribute the outcome to many years of diligent long tone practice in my early study.

Besides long tones, I also practice different scale patterns, articulations, and of course, repertoire. I usually like to divide the scale patterns into two categories: speed training and coordination training. With speed training I use simple scalar patterns but much faster speed, and with coordination training I normally combine it with different articulations and also tongue and finger coordination exercises. I find that separating the two yields the best result because I do not have to worry about speed while learning the pattern and vice versa.

My technical routine changes depending on the repertoire that I am preparing. For example, if I need to use circular-breathing and double-tonguing, I would spend more time on these techniques. I am sure there are as many different practice routines and habits as there are players depending on their strengths and weaknesses. However, I do encourage students to cover all the areas and not just the "fun" exercises. I always like to compare practicing to eating. We all have the same basic nutritional requirements but some people have special needs. All in all, we must have a balanced diet.

When you're looking for musicians to play chamber works with, what qualities are you looking for in fellow musicians?

Ones who are easy to work with. Seriously, I believe in compatibility. For instance, if one of the group members or even a pianist is overly opinionated or dominating, music making becomes drudgery not collaboration.

As far as phrasing goes, are you influenced more by singers or instrumentalists?

We should all play like singers because we are essentially singing through our instruments, whether wind or string. If I may comment on the difference between string and wind instruments, many saxophonists imitate strings in regard to vibrato and articulation. However, because a wind instrument is, in essence, an extended tube from one's body, both within and without, it has a much closer relationship to our body. Instead of a vocal cord we use a reed, and the oral cavity has a direct connection to the resonance of the instrument. Even though one might say that the bow of a string instrument is an extension of one's arm, one's body does not influence sound projection as in a wind instrument. Moreover, the acoustical design of the saxophone produces many colors just as in a human voice, making vibrato and articulation a vocal technique in a sense.

I was reading your article with Greg Banaszak from the January February 2004 issue of 'Saxophone Journal' and loved how you talked about the lack of career building taught in education, as if once you've learned the art the rest should fall into place. As an educator, do you think there are any changes needed to improve this situation, or do you think the status quo will continue to be maintained?

I think that, unfortunately, our current system does not help performance majors to get jobs. Yes, it is true that what comes out of the bell is very important. However, what if there are 100 excellent performers competing for the same job? I think it would be helpful if there are seminars available with information on how to audition effectively, formulate a résumé, how to interview, negotiate a job offer, how to create a career outside of the academia, etc. I know that some schools are starting to offer career development courses, but it's still not widespread. I do try to incorporate a master class on "What you will not learn at the School of Music" and discuss building a résumé while in school, acquiring a marketable skill outside of music, and learning a variety of skills in music education. Interview skills and résumé writing are covered in my graduate literature class and students have appreciated that.

What advice do you have for young saxophonists?

I won't repeat here what I have said in my other article. however, I would like to encourage students to have a balanced

life outside of music and the saxophone and having a positive attitude in all you do. Playing the saxophone should not be the reason for one's existence. I had an experience that terrified me once. I was judging a saxophone competition in a prestigious school, and after the result was announced one of the contestants looked utterly shocked as if a close family member had died. When I greeted the person I was treated with a blank face. I understand the disappointment of losing, but I do not understand the rudeness and arrogance. As I encourage my own students, perfect your art but do so with humility and perspective.

If I may add one thought in closing, we classical saxophonists are probably at the most crucial time in our instrument's history. We have an abundance of music that are written especially for the instrument, but how many of them are known to the general concertgoers? I do not believe that in order to reach out to the general audience we need to play only "light" music. On the same token, I do not believe that in order to maintain the quality of our art form we should embrace only avant-garde or "high-art" music. Our choices do not need to be in the extremes. Whether the instrument survives the next 160 years will depend on our musical direction. Music is all about sharing and I think it is important to have a balance. Above all, we are all servants to the music that we play. §

COMPOSITIONS DEDICATED TO KENNETH TSE

Sonata for Soprano Saxophone and Piano by David DeBoor Canfield (in progress)

Quintet for Alto Saxophone and String Quartet by Perry Goldstein (2006-2007)

Noir for Alto Saxophone, Bassoon, and Piano by Perry Goldstein (2005)

Arirang Variations for Alto Saxophone, Bassoon, and

Piano by David Froom (2005) Prelude for Soprano Saxophone and Piano by Leonard Mark Lewis (2004)

Concerto Agrariana for Alto Saxophone and Band by John Cheetham (2004)

"On My Mind..." by Ketty Nez (2004)

Martyrs for the Faith by David DeBoor Canfield (2003) As in Stained Light for Alto Saxophone and Piano by Leonard Mark Lewis (2002)

Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano by John Cheetham (2001) Le Petit Duo for Alto Saxophone and Clarinet by David DeBoor Canfield (2001)

Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano by David DeBoor Canfield (2000)

KENNETH TSE'S SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Adolphe Sax, Series Volume IX (Arizona University Recordings) Pas de Trois (Crystal)

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