

THE SENSUALITY OF THE ROSE

When René Schmitz of Palatine Roses spoke to my rose society on the first of March, he began his presentation with a few minutes of symphonic music to set the mood. I appreciated this respite from the hum-drum world. With the distinctive harmonies of Wagner soothing the assembled rhodophiles, Mr Schmitz asked what single word best describes the rose. He thought the best answer came from his daughter one evening. She said ‘sensual’.

What he said went something like this.

The rose is sensual for its fragrance. He recalled the rose industry of the Bulgarians who grow fields of ‘Kazanlik’ to produce Attar of Roses. It has the same value as gold. It is a damask rose (*R. damascena trigintipetala*) and to my senses, this is the scent I regard as the true rose fragrance. I value it as simply the best.

The rose is sensual for its appearance. The sight of a rose is something unique to human experience. It summons memories of great experiences in life. Mr Schmitz recalls being taken to an East German cathedral with his grandmother when he was only eight. The visual impact of the interior, the organ music, the incense, the whole experience, has never lessened over the years. That, he said, is the same as what he experiences when walking alone on a Sunday morning in his dewy rose fields. It can bring tears. On occasion, he has piped Vivaldi’s Four Seasons to his fields while visitors were walking there, and he has seen ladies dabbing the tears away.

He asked what our aesthetic sense might be. And as the music soared and ebbed, he flashed a different rose with each change. There were mmms from some for the roses best described as voluptuous. I see the hand of providence in the single rose for its simplicity and its fertility. He told us that taste in roses shifts from one generation to another. For example, you see few HT roses in Europe now. Where have they gone?

It is commonplace to hear someone say she can’t grow a rose. “They die.” She doesn’t explain that she purchased her roses at \$5.50 from Wall Mart on the wrong root stock. He regards it as a fact that an HT is not a beginner’s rose. He questioned the methods of competition in showing roses and the unnatural way of gardening HTs. It is also highly questionable environmentally with the use of pesticides. He thinks that showing gardens is the better way to introduce roses to beginners. Show them how to get away from the fast pace of life today. Show them what you know about roses in the ambiance of the garden, rather than on the show bench.

Mr Schmitz showed many rose images, and told his audience how he is introducing roses from Europe after they have demonstrated their suitability in Canada. To this end, he said he was interested in interacting with sincere serious rose gardeners to test roses in different parts of Canada. His own Zone 7b is not typical of most of the country. Therefore it is important to see how they perform in other climates.

For those who wanted to know what the commercial names of the roses were, he repeated the presentation quickly. Without the magic, it had all the romance of reading a book’s index.

René Schmitz is in tune with the future. He sees the deeper reason behind rose appreciation – the spiritual dimension. Among many commercial propagators, it is perhaps only hidden from view. The last time we witnessed a man willing to speak openly of sensuality, and the romantic aspects of the rose, his name was Austin.

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