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Rippon skates, choreographs with deep love of craft

Two-time world junior champ gears up for quadrennial, creates for others

Posted 11/22/14 by Jean-Christophe Berlot, special to icenetwork



There's no stopping for 2012 U.S. silver medalist Adam Rippon, who is determined to continue skating for as long as he can. -Getty Images

Adam Rippon seemed so relieved after he skated a beautiful and clean short program Friday night at *Trophée Éric Bompard* in Bordeaux. His program was an instant hit with the audience. Quincy Jones' saxophone, to which he skated, encouraged him to explore new upper body positions and to play with more edges accordingly. Icenetwork asked him to reflect on his career so far and on the artistic direction he now seems to be exploring.

Icenetwork: The short program you displayed seemed to be quite different, and original, with that saxophone music that had you work on your upper body and edges. How did you choose it?

Rippon: I wanted to do something kind of fun, to help motivate my training. I worked with one of my favorite skaters, Catarina Lindgren.

I watched a lot of Fred Astaire's movies, to better understand how these great dancers were moving their bodies. In fact, when you watch them, you realize that they were very subdue with their bodies. And yet, they managed to be effective. It means that a more subtle approach of movement can be more effective.

I'm not sure that this pays in terms of marks, but I do it for me and for the audience. People are still watching Fred Astaire's movies, and yet not everybody understands how his magic's worked. I went to study that.

Icenetwork: Is it a new direction you are opening in your skating?

Rippon: I wanted to try something different. Now I think that I am really open to trying new things. I am spreading my wings artistically. The fact that I am now doing choreography for other skaters does also expand my horizon further.

Icenetwork: You choreographed Ashley Wagner's short program this year. How did you come to that?

Rippon: Ashley wanted to do a program with me because she wanted to skate to something beautiful. Ashley is a powerful skater, too, so I wanted to find something that would be beautiful and powerful at the same time. When I saw her skate that program for the first time, I was blown up.

I was really lucky this year. It was my first year as a choreographer, and I could work as a choreographer for two Olympic team members. I did both of Mirai [Nagasu]'s programs, and Ashley's short.

Ashley and I both had our share of going across country to train with different coaches. Having one of my best friends training every day in the same rink makes a huge difference.

Icenetwork: Have you given up the idea of mastering the quad?

Rippon: Oh no, not at all! What I needed was to take a step back with the quad and go working on it at home prior to trying it in competition again. I land quad toes and quad Lutzes at home. I am trying to get more consistency before including them back into my programs, later this season. This should enhance my confidence.

Icenetwork: You have been in the spotlight for several years. Now it seems that you are not as much, at least in your country. How do you manage to go through this process?

Rippon: The American audience is a critical one, because it is such a big country in skating. If you want to get notoriety in this country, you need to be the best in the world. Still, it is a true honor to skate for a country like the United States. This is what you get, and this is how you handle it.

Being in the spotlight one day and nowhere the next is kind of a difficult pill to swallow, for sure. You feel that you are still going at the same pace, but at the same time ... Where are you going? You feel like ... Lost, in the middle of nowhere. For a while I was the best next thing. I was a junior world champion twice. Then I grew up. Skating was changing tremendously at the same time, there was lots of pressure, I moved back from Canada to the U.S. When I look back at that time, I see that you do not know how to deal with such pressure when you are 20 years old.

Throughout those years I looked up to a Japanese friend of mine, who was a great skater in her own time: Fumie Suguri. She won several world medals and participated twice in the Olympics. She has just announced that, at nearly 34, she was ending her competitive career. She had left the spotlight years ago, as she was last seen internationally in 2010, but she kept skating because she loved it so much.

We trained together in New Jersey years ago. I always have looked up to her. I always felt she was a big sister to me.

Icenetwork: Would you see yourself going for another quadrennial cycle?

Rippon: Yes, I'm ready to go for it. At start, I did not know if I would be skating this season. Now I am asking myself, "Why not?" I started skating rather late in my life, and I don't feel like an old 25 skater at all. I will compete as long as I can. Being a competitor and as an athlete, you learn a lot about yourself. I feel like a more mature person, knowing more about my goals and being more in charge of how to achieve them. I feel really settled as a person.

As a skater, you have to take your hardest moments in front of thousands of people -- and also your biggest triumphs -- and this certainly makes you a better person.

Icenetwork: How would you say maturity enhances your skating?

Rippon: You learn the power of stillness as you grow older. There is a lot of power in a look. In a standstill, in an edge. These are moments of mastery. When you are younger, you don't realize or feel that connection with people.

There is no other sport like this. Skating is even very different from gymnastics in that respect. You surely need to be artistic to be a good gymnast, but you don't have that power of a look or a step. There is so much difference between a younger and older skater.

If you want to portray a character, you need to know who you are. I read a quote recently, which I enjoyed. A famous actress was saying that, "If you want to play other people, you need to find yourself first." Then, you may be able to tell other ones' stories.

Icenetwork: Choreography seems to be a path for your future. Do you consider yourself as an artist?

Rippon: Yes, definitely (he says boldly).

I would love to work with so many different people, because I feel I have so much to give within me.

But at the moment, this is still a secondary purpose in my life: I have a lot to give as a performer first!

Rippon's fans, who are numerous in any rink he skates, should be happy to read the news!



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