

Foreword

Guy Serra died prematurely on August 15th 2000 aged 52. He was one of the most active pioneers in the field of infrared and submillimeter space astronomy. After completing a PhD thesis on gamma ray astrophysics in 1973, he was among the first to measure the far-infrared dust emission from our Galaxy with the AGLAE balloon-borne experiment. He then devoted his whole career to contribute in a decisive manner to the emergence and achievement of the infrared and submillimeter space program at the French and European levels with the AROME and PRONAOS balloon borne experiments, and with the satellite missions ISO, ODIN, Planck, and FIRST (which became Herschel).

This three day conference dedicated to Guy Serra was held in Toulouse on June 11-13 2001. We took time both to remember the legacy of Guy Serra, and to discuss current advances and prospects in the field of infrared and submillimeter space astronomy. It was clear to all of us that in this first year of the XXIst century, with the construction of the SIRTf, Planck and Herschel satellites, we were close to enter in the golden age of infrared astronomy which would bring us fabulous new insights on our Origins.

A Great Humanist

Guy Serra was passionately interested in science and physics. He had such generosity and enthusiasm to share with others his very wide-ranging knowledge, his intellectual refinement, and his perceptive views of things, that it was a real joy to work with him. His creativity and capacity for hard work were stunning, and extremely motivating. But first of all, we deeply appreciated his exceptional human qualities. He showed a deep respect for the views of others and had a great capacity for listening. In particular, he was very concerned with the training of PhD students for, and through, research, and with their future after the defense of their thesis. Guy was also exceptional in his will to communicate with the general public, including very young pupils in primary schools.

Beyond his own scientific work, and because he had always considered the collective interest as a priority, he was someone who thought deeply about astronomy as a science and about its evolution in France. He devoted a lot of energy to such reflections and played an active role in local and national committees. Among the ideas he defended was that the standing of astronomy as a science depends on a unity between modelling and observation. He particularly liked to point out that similar advanced physics is needed both in the field of instrumentation and in the astrophysical modelling. He considered instrumentation as an essential component in astronomy, that had to be continuously developed, and to remain a part of the astronomers activity. He also liked to emphasize the importance of the collective aspect in the success of a project, which directly depend on researchers and engineers working together as a team. He was also extremely active in developing interfaces and cooperation with others communities: physicists, chemists, mathematicians, biologists. He considered that this was the best way to trigger great leap forward for astronomy.

Guy Serra was a real pillar for many of us who worked with him. He was a dazzlingly talented friend, passionate not only to astrophysics, but also for history, philosophy, music. Guy was a lover of nature and of life, remarkably altruist, and always concerned with the collective interest. His sudden departure has left a tremendous empty space. The memory of Guy, smiling warmly, with his sparkling eyes full of intelligence and sensitivity shall always remain in our hearts.

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DOI: 10.1051/eas/20020401