

# Obituaries

## Peter Kurt Burkowitz 1920–2012



The Audio Engineering Society mourns for Peter K. Burkowitz, one of the great authorities in professional audio engineering and the doyen of the branch in Germany, who died recently in the

93rd year of his life.

He was for all of us not only an outstanding professional practitioner, but also a true, genuine friend and adviser. We lose a man who had a big reputation and who gave us a lot.

He struggled and campaigned all his life to optimize sound quality, so that an audio record sounds like a true performance. And especially in his field of professional activities, sound recording and reproduction technology, he lived through the early years in the 1930s to see the important, major, and remarkable discoveries of recent years. He formed his own concepts, and we could learn a lot from his ideas.

His perfectionism, his sense of reality,

and above all his modesty will remain as a shining example in our lasting memory.

Peter Kurt Burkowitz was born in 1920 in Königsberg, the capital of East Prussia in those days at the east end of Germany after the end of World War I, and moved to Berlin with his family when he was one year old. Completing his schooling in the 1930s, he had to do his military service, where he came into contact with sound recording machines. After World War II, he started his career in 1946 (to 1953) with RIAS (Radio im Amerikanischen Sektor) in West Berlin, where he would engineer his first recordings.

His first recordings were trend-setting, and the brilliance and sound quality can still be heard today on the old recordings. He made those recordings with his friend Helmut Krüger, who made the first stereo recordings on tape with good sound quality during World War II in 1943. In those early years after the war, he and a colleague discovered in the largely destroyed Berlin two very good and perfect halls with excellent acoustics: the Siemensvilla in Berlin-Lankwitz and above all the legendary Jesus Christ Church in Berlin-Dahlem. In this church he was confirmed and married by the well known German priest and Nazi opponent Martin Niemöller. Here he discovered the importance of little reverberation in low frequencies. Here, Herbert von Karajan

made for decades many excellent recordings with his Berliner Philharmoniker. Burkowitz worked together with the most famous, prominent, and outstanding performers, musicians, and orchestras of his time.

In 1953, Peter Burkowitz found another job as head of the recording department at the Carl Lindström GmbH in Cologne (the future EMI Electrola), where in 1962 he became a member of the company's board of directors.

He developed the legendary four-track REDD mixing console, which was later used at EMI's Abbey Road Studios in London for recording the Beatles. The whole story can be read in the book of Kehev and Ryan, "Recording the Beatles," which was written in 2006 and to which Peter contributed the technical part. For his 90th birthday in 2010, his family baked him a cake in the form of this console and every guest could taste its sweet and exclusive flavor.

In 1967 Burkowitz became vice president, recording at Polygram in Hannover, in the group of DGG (Deutsche Gramophon Gesellschaft)/PPI (Philips Phonographische Industrie). He was responsible for all the company's recording studios worldwide. During this period he had one of the highlights of his career, the introduction of digital recording, where he influenced the technical fea-

tures of this new medium and contributed to the age of the compact disc.

Peter Burkowitz had an extraordinary and interesting professional life, and he was also instrumental in the founding of the AES in Europe. Up to 1970, the AES was exclusively active in the U.S. Burkowitz and J.L. Ooms organized the first AES European conventions (Cologne 1971, Munich 1972, and Rotterdam 1973) with more and more success. Peter served three times as a governor, two times as vice president for the European Region, and finally in 1979/1980 he was elected as the first European member to be president of the AES. For his unflagging effort he was honored with a number of awards, and in 1984 he became a Honorary Member of AES.

He was also active for the VDT (Verband Deutscher Tonmeister), and he prepared for the VDT Conventions (Tonmeister-tagung) several very interesting papers on the profession of tonmeister.

Today we mourn for a friend who has left us. But we shouldn't be sad, we should be glad that he was with us. It was always incredibly stimulating to follow his inspirations, his ideas, and his experiences,

He made a plea that AES conventions should be less academic and should organize many more demonstration sessions on the practice of sound recording and editing: for example using different and fewer microphones and where to place them. It was evident that Burkowitz was speaking from his love of good music, good sound quality, and from his lifelong experience of recording. He was a real professional tonmeister.

He published all his experiences and knowledge in many magazines, in congress papers and in his books ("The World of Sound" and "Achtung: Aufnahme"). For all that, we have to thank him.

We should cheer up with the words of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe :

"Over all the peaks  
it is peaceful,  
in all the treetops  
you feel  
hardly a breath of wind;  
the little birds are silent in the forest...  
only wait – soon  
you will rest as well."

Dear Peter Burkowitz, rest in peace.

Herman A.O. Wilms, Reinhard O. Sahr  
and Titia K.S. Bakker