

OBITUARIES

Reginald Williamson 1925–2009



Audio Amateur's very first contributing author passed away quietly in his sleep this past June after a yearlong battle with cancer. He was not only a fine engineer and author, but over the years became a

great personal friend. He made many influential friends over his lifetime and performed the painful duty of reporting the passing of most of them. These included Peter Walker, famous for his Quad line of preamps and power amplifiers, but more so for his Electrostatic loudspeakers; and Peter Baxandall, designer of the Baxandall tone control topology, as well as superior test equipment. Not so well known was another fellow British Telecom engineer, Alan Watling, who converted Reggie's designs into working hardware.

Most Britons who have a special interest manage to make the knowledge useful in some way which benefits society. Reggie's love for music took him into positions of leadership and responsibility for music societies such as the one honoring Elgar, or a local Norwich audio club which built a wired-wireless radio facility for entertaining patients in a local hospital.

Reggie was a popular, highly demanding teacher in local community and university colleges. His standards were high but practical as well. He understood the art of the possible and was very good at what he thought were obvious improvements in the designs of others. His simple upgrades to Heath's IG-18 audio generator became one of his most popular and widely used articles in early *Audio Amateur* issues. He was one of the first of many British authors giving permission for their articles to be reprinted in the pages of our magazines. He opened doors to his wide range of technical friends who enriched many of our publications over decades.

He leaves behind a son by his first marriage and his most enthusiastic and supportive wife Marjorie who relays one of Reggie's characteristic quotes, "On the day I refuse my glass of red wine, call the undertaker." We will all miss our lively, roisterous and beloved friend.—ETD

Ronald Wagner 1932–2009



Ronald Wagner, the author of *Electrostatic Loudspeaker Design and Construction*, died of cardiac arrest on April 5, 2009. He was 77. Ron's love for electronics and audio

systems started early in life. After graduating high school, he attended Milwaukee School of Engineering. In the 1960s, he and a few coworkers at Ampex Corporation in California started to experiment with electrostatic loudspeakers. Through all of his years of working at various high tech companies in the San Francisco Bay Area, he always was busy in the garage on weekends working on his electronic equipment and designs. Even after he retired, he did some consulting work and was writing a second electrostatic loudspeaker book. In 2003 he moved to Oregon to be closer to his daughters since his wife passed away from melanoma cancer five years prior. While living in Oregon, he enjoyed doing a lot of golfing and even had his own putting green in his backyard. He battled Parkinson's the last several years of his life, which ultimately led to his death in April. He will be missed by his two daughters, one son-in-law, four grandchildren, and many dear friends.

Justin Gordon Holt 1930–2009

Justin Gordon Holt left us the other day, on Monday, July 20, 2009, after losing a long battle with lung cancer. Born in Australia in 1930 to parents who were both killed in an auto accident, he was adopted by American parents whose home was in Wallingford, Penn. After two years as Tape Recording editor at *High Fidelity* magazine, he departed the company, along with Roy Allison, when *High Fidelity* was purchased by *Billboard* magazine. As a new owner, *Billboard* killed *HF's* younger sibling *Audiocraft*,

which was barely out of its swaddling clothes at almost three years old. They claimed that the DIY magazine was not profitable. The real reason: *Audio-craft* had cheaper ad rates and its elimination increased lineage for the larger *HF*. Allison went on to do world famous work for Acoustic Research, and Gordon worked for two years with Paul Weathers in New Jersey.

Gordon and Roy had other fundamental reasons for leaving Great Barrington (Mass.). *High Fidelity* under Charles Fowler had begun as a well-rounded journal treating both audio equipment topics and very authoritative recorded music reviews as monthly fare of the highest quality. Commercial interest in satisfying advertisers led to more and more "positive" reviews, which bothered Gordon and Roy.

After leaving Weathers, Gordon moved to his widowed mother's home in Wallingford, where he founded *Stereophile* magazine in 1962. Its early issues were quarterly, slender, and quickly became erratic in schedule. Gordon was not a businessman. However, he had other characteristics which fully equipped him as a great editor: he was a superb writer, he had a mordant wit combined with curiosity and a relentless insistence on the truth about things. He loved sound, but cared very little for equipment. He became a tinkerer, not by inclination, but only by necessity if something needed fixing and if he could figure out a way to do it.

The Ampex 601 had a chatter problem, being otherwise a remarkably good tape machine. He repaired his unit and made stunningly realistic recordings. He regularly taped rehearsals of the West



Photo courtesy of *Stereophile*.

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Chester College's orchestra, which were so accurate you could hear every sour note any member played. He made recordings of all manner of mundane sounds, some very distinctive ones heard only in a toilet.

He was also a fine artist, a fine cartoonist, and a master with an airbrush. The earliest covers of *Stereophile* are collector's items. He moved his wife Mary and the family to Santa Fe, falling in love with the beauties of the southwest. In the 70s, he sold *Stereophile* to a master manager, Larry Archibald, who turned the magazine around financially, hired new people, and set it on the road to success.

Gordon's most important achievement was, however, a change in the character of audio equipment reviews in the periodicals of the United States. As several have pointed out in their appreciations of his influence, his reviews were based on listening rather than measurement only. This was not because Gordon did not know the basics of engineering and physics, but because what you heard seemed far more important to him than the few

measurements possible at the time.

One of his funniest covers was a spoof of the front panel of Heath's distortion meter, which he had carefully renamed the "Beast-kit Audio Analyzer," with switch choices for "Acuity, Timbre, Test and % Fi." The "Beast Company" was located, of course, in "Henton Barber, Mich." The meter markings were "Lousy, Fair, and Whoopee."

Gordon was one of the few reviewers to notice that English has the smallest number of adjectives for the characterization of sound than any of the human senses. One of his major efforts was a glossary/dictionary of audio, published in 1990 (Audio Amateur Press). Peter Mitchell, in his foreword to the book, said, "Holt has always been The Great Explainer—using plain English to tell readers what is happening behind the front panel and how new processes operate to produce a sonic benefit. So this is two dictionaries in one: a glossary of subjective audio and a comprehensive plain-English guide to nearly two thousand technical terms."

Since those early days, most of the audio publications in the US have disap-

peared. The survivors avow their loyalty to Gordon's methodology and philosophy with varying levels of success. His perception was that reviews were too often affected by periodical management's pressures on reviewers. Responding to this criticism, reviewers countered with the claim that, "No one wants to read bad reviews," or the belief that advertisers are the primary financial support for magazines. This latter ignores the more than evident fact that the money manufacturers spend on promoting their products comes from their paying customers. And the purchaser of a disappointing piece of gear will be sorry he could not read a more candid and revealing review.

Physically, J. Gordon was small of stature, a quirky, friendly, formidable adversary, and a great human being. The only time I saw him clad in conventional shoes was at his wedding. He found old-fashioned sneakers more comfortable. It was always fun to join him for an evening, and deeply interesting. He was unique, one of a kind. We are much poorer for his departure.—ETD

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