

## In Memoriam

**T**om Dowd, an innovative recording engineer and producer, died of emphysema, on October 27, 2002 in Florida at the age of 77. Dowd had made albums with luminaries such as John Coltrane, Otis Redding, Eric Clapton, the Allman Brothers, and other musicians.

A pioneer of stereo and multitrack tape recording, Dowd was known as a producer of recordings that sounded natural, making the listener feel he was in the same room as the performer. Clarity and warmth were the hallmarks of his recordings.

Dowd grew up in Manhattan. His father was a theater producer, and his mother was trained as an opera singer. He studied piano and violin. After graduating from Stuyvesant High School at 16, he attended Columbia University. Working in the physics department, he operated the cyclotron, a particle accelerator. When he enlisted in the Army at the age of 18, he was sent back to Columbia to work on the Manhattan Project, which produced the atomic bomb.

After World War II, he worked for the Voice of America and became a freelance recording engineer until he began working full time for Atlantic. "There is no one who better epitomizes the ideal marriage of technical excellence and true creativity," said Ahmet Ertegun, chairman of Atlantic Records, in a 1999 speech. Dowd was a staff engineer at Atlantic for 25 years. His recordings captured drums and bass playing at full volume without distortion.

At Atlantic in the early 1950s, he suggested that the company build a control room in its Midtown offices, which doubled as a studio for nearly a decade. The stairwell was used as an echo chamber. He pushed the label to switch from recording on acetate discs to using tape, and made some of the first commercial stereo recordings: binaural recordings, with a separate needle playing each channel. He also had Atlantic buy the second 8-track multitrack recorder ever made. He designed and built Atlantic's first stereo and 8-track consoles.

Dowd recorded Atlantic's jazz roster, which included the Modern Jazz Quartet, Charles Mingus, Freddie Hubbard, Coleman and Coltrane. He also recorded pop and rhythm-and-blues hits for Bobby Darin, Ruth Brown, Solomon Burke, and the Drifters. In the 1960s he recorded Cream, Dusty Springfield and many other rock and jazz musicians, eventually earning credit as a producer as well as an engineer.

He left Atlantic in the late 1960s to work as a freelance producer. In 1967 he moved to Miami, where he worked mostly at Criteria Sound Studios. But he continued to make albums in London, New York, Los Angeles, and the Bahamas until earlier this year. In 2002 he received a lifetime achievement award from the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences. A documentary, "Tom Dowd and the Language of Music," is scheduled for release early next year.

In addition to his daughter, of Miami, he is survived by his wife, Cheryl of Dearborn, MI; two sons, Todd, of Miami Beach, and Steven, of Denver; and a grandson.

**Editor's Note:** *A long-time friend and colleague provided the following reminiscence.*

I am truly saddened by our loss of **Tom Dowd**. Tom and I were friends in the mid-50s. He used to bring his staggered head Magnacorder to our Capitol Studios in New York to make stereo recordings while we were still recording in mono.

Tom and his family lived quite close to me and my family in Westwood, NJ, and we used to visit often. He was on my to list of people to interview for sometime. Each time we set a date, something happened, and I was unable to do the interview. Late in September, I finally did a phone interview, which I recorded with Tom in two sessions. I sincerely hope this will help to preserve some of the wonderful recording firsts he performed over the years.

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