

In Memoriam

Ross H. Snyder, a founding member of the AES, passed away January 1, 2008.

Ross was very active in the AES in its early days. He was an AES Life Charter Fellow, an AES Western vice president, an awards chair, banquets toastmaster, and an AES governor. He was chairman of the San Francisco Section in 1950. He also led a symposium on stereo tape standards in 1957, which was reported on in the April 1958 *Journal*. He was recipient of the AES Award (now called the Bronze Medal Award) in 1962. In recent years, Ross served as interviewer on a number of videos for the AES Historical Committee Oral History Project.

Ross wrote a number of papers and articles for AES and others, including "High-Power Triode Amplifier" (Selsted and Snyder, *Audio Engineering*, February 1949), "Toward a More Realistic Audio" (*Audio Engineering*, August 1951; <www.aes.org/aeshc/pdf/how.the.aes.began/snyder_toward-a-more-realistic-audio.pdf>), "History and Development of Stereophonic Sound Recording" (*JAES*, March 1953), "Practical Tape Duplication" (*JAES*, June 1955), "Building Simplicity into Hi-fi Systems" (*Audio Engineering*, October 1955) and "Is Tape the Ideal Medium for Audio?" (*JAES*, March 1958).

He was a member of American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA), and an inductee into Broadcast Legends.

Ross was born January 5, 1920 in Cheyenne, Wyoming. His family moved to California two years later. He was educated in Berkeley schools and studied physics and mathematics at the University of California at Berkeley.

World War II interrupted Ross's education. He served as a B-29 pilot in the U. S. Army Air Corps, flying many missions in the Pacific theater. After



Ross H. Snyder
1920–2008

Photo courtesy Howard Samner

the war he was a radio announcer and newscaster at several radio stations, including WOR and KJBS-FM. He was also a technical consultant for Consumers' Research, creating studies and performing measurements of loudspeaker systems, tape recorders, amplifiers, pickups, radio receivers and equalizers.

In 1952 Ross joined Ampex Corporation as product manager for the Model 450 long-playing tape player. He was heavily involved in the development and promotion of professional and consumer stereo tape systems. These were exciting times and are best related in Ross's own words: "Thinking stereo to be the future, Ampex hand-built a 3-track, quarter-inch Model 400 to demonstrate. In 1952 I turned it over to Bill Cara, then with an Ampex dealer in L.A., he an enthusiast in the growing tape recording business. He recorded the arrival and departure of a steam train from the Glendale station, achieving sensational effect. He also recorded a privately owned pipe organ and a session with the Santa Monica Symphony, composed mostly of studio musicians. No less than Jack

Mullin edited the demo tape. As manager of the Audio Fair, Cara arranged for Ampex to demonstrate the recording over and over throughout the meeting to capacity crowds. That event is often declared the catalyst of the stereo revolution among record companies. In 1953 Capitol got the first three-track half-inch 300, and other record companies soon followed. We sold two-track stereo recorders to just about every record company in the business in the next very few years."

Shortly after this, Ross became project manager for the Ampex CinemaScope and Todd-AO multichannel magnetic film systems (after Mike Todd saw the Audio Fair stereo demonstration). These systems became so popular that at one point about half the theaters in the U.S. were equipped with Ampex sound systems. But, as Ross ruefully stated, "We didn't make a dime on it!"

Ross went on to become the audio special products manager; he conceived the system of synchronous multitrack overdubbing that became Ampex Sel-Sync, which Ampex trademarked but never patented. Ross relates this story in full in the *ARSC Journal* (Vol. 34, No. 2) and online at <www.aes.org/aeshc/docs/sel-sync/snyder_sel-sync.pdf>. There is no doubt that with Sel-Sync he started yet another phenomenal change in studio recording technology.

Later Ross became video products manager, participating in the industrial design and promotion of the Ampex VR-1000, the first commercially successful professional magnetic tape video recorder.

In spite of this brilliant career, Ross is probably best remembered by outsiders as "the voice of Ampex." With his years of radio announcing experience, combined with a naturally resonant voice and impeccable grammar and pronunciation, he was the perfect

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man for Ampex's own announcing needs. He is familiar to most older studio hands as the voice that announces the tones and levels on Ampex Standard Alignment Tapes (before 1961). He also performed the announcing on Ampex promotional and demonstration tapes, as well as for many live events. Throughout all of these activities Ross wrote many Ampex promotional and technical brochures and papers, where his perfect writing and language skills served him well.

Ross left Ampex and joined Hewlett-Packard in 1961, where he became an important part of their publications and public relations operations. He was a prolific contributor to the Hewlett-Packard Journal; he was on the editorial staff from 1967 until 1974, and served as editor from 1969 until 1972. He was able to develop close friendships with editorial staff members of the many electronic magazines in which H-P advertised. This resulted in his ability to get H-P's editorial coverage into choice locations in those magazines.

Ross often briefed David Packard on new product releases prior to press and shareholder conferences. He retired in 1986 after 25 years at Hewlett Packard.

Ross was a great lover of classical music and opera, and he regularly flew to New York City for performances by the Metropolitan Opera. He was a particular fan of Wagner, and he attended the complete Ring cycle no less than 18 times.

He recorded audio books for the blind and was a member of the International Wine and Food Society.

Ross Snyder was an exceptional person. Fiercely loyal to his employers and friends, he was also very approachable and easy to like. He had many friends who knew him as a particularly kind and decent man. Many of his friendships go back way past the half-century mark. In describing Ross in a short phrase, "a real gentleman" comes most readily to the minds of his many friends. We will sorely miss him.

Larry Miller