

# Obituary

## Bill Sacks, 1954–2017

If you listened to radio during the 1980s, most likely you heard some of the products Bill Sacks designed. His phono preamps were defacto industry standard and the replacement circuit boards he designed made broadcast cartridges sound pristine. Bill was someone that could look at any technology and within moments make it better. Most of all he was a genius and a gentleman.

Bill was very active in the Audio Engineering Society. He was DC Section chair and a presenter at many conventions. Also Bill was chair of AES SC 05-05 where he helped develop uniform standards for professional audio interfaces and audio grounding. He was always willing to discuss and share knowledge.

Mike Byrnes of WETA said: “He had an incredible ear. He rarely needed actual test instruments other than those already in his head. He would point out something and then I would hear it—as in “Oh yeah!!!” No matter what he worked on he always tried to make it the best that it could be!”

Bob Orban said: “Bill had a restlessly inquisitive mind; he was always eager to learn more about tech, and in fact, was studying C++ audio plug-ins in his sick-

bed. Above all, Bill was a lively, fun guy. Although he had suffered many health problems in his life, he fought them stalwartly and was never a complainer. I will greatly miss our phone conversations and the opportunity to hang out with him and Kim at NAB and AES conventions. I both taught him and learned from him. In losing him, our industry became poorer.”

Greg Ogonowski says: “Bill Sacks and I had several things in common. If you knew Bill, you knew he was always very passionate about what he did. It is said that your professional passion helps strive for perfection. And that it did for Bill’s products. Bill will be missed.”

Bill Sacks was an SBE board Certified Professional Broadcast Engineer who has designed dozens of broadcast audio products. He has worked in broadcast and live sound for nearly forty years. He was chief engineer of radio stations WYRE, WHFS and WWDC in his early career. He then founded Straight Wire Audio in 1979 and designed all of their preamplifiers including phono preamps still in everyday use.

Bill was the original audio editor for Radio World Newspaper and wrote extensively for them in the 1980s on proper audio practices for broadcasting. He wrote chapter 7.2 “Using Operational Amplifiers in Broadcasting” for the 50th anniversary and 7th edition of the *NAB Broad-*

*cast Engineering Handbook*. He served as chapter chair of SBE 37, Washington DC for many years. He was a contributing member of the NAB/EIA BTSC MTS committee that developed the standard for analog stereo television broadcasting.

He was director of research and development for Maryland Sound Industries in the late 1980s and early 1990s, where he developed new methods of in-ear monitoring for live sound. Bill is the sole inventor and patent holder (US 5,355,416) for the pioneering wireless in-ear stage monitor system originally used by artists such as Stevie Wonder, Luther Vandross, Roberta Flack, Celine Dion, Axl Rose, and many other early adopters of in-ear foldback monitoring. His in-ear monitor system was nominated for the 1992 Mix Outstanding Technical Achievement, Sound Reinforcement Product of The Year TEC Award.

Though Bill had many things to be proud of, he spoke the highest of his wife Kim who became his work partner as well. He and Kim ran Optimod.fm where they rebuilt and improved analog Optimods to sound incredibly good. Bill and Kim have collaborated to design many of Henry Engineering’s digital broadcast products, winning six Radio World “Cool Stuff” awards, including the USB Matchbox.

**Skip Pizzi and David Bialik**