

In Memoriam

Johan L. Ooms, AES fellow, died August 23, 2001, at the age of 88. Born in Amsterdam in 1913, Ooms received a degree in electrical engineering from Amsterdam Polytechnic. As a young boy he was fascinated with music. He played the violin until adolescence when his hands became too large for the instrument.

After World War II, he joined the labs set up by Philips Eindhoven, in anticipation of forming a full-fledged recording and replication company, which became known as N.V. Philips' Phonographische Industrie. It later became Polygram B.V. His official title was that of chief engineer. The entire domain of strategy, physics, development, patents, recording, basically everything except the replication process proper, were under his supervision until the merger of the technical sectors of PPI and Deutsche Grammophon were implemented. At that time Peter K. Burkowitz, who joined DG in early 1967, came to lead the recording section. Ooms briefed Roland Gelatt on the Compact Cassette when preparing for the 2nd edition of "The Fabulous Phonograph." He also had a genuine interest in Clement Ader's 1881 "stereophonic" (by 2 identical telephone lines) transmission endeavors and patents, from the Paris Opera to the homes of wealthy subscribers.

Ooms had a fairly unique position in the industry in Europe: he traveled extensively, in Europe and across the Atlantic, both in a corporate and an IEC Standardization context. He was a regular visitor (and early European member) at AES Conventions both in New York and Los Angeles. A passport of the early 1960s returned to him only a few years ago, was literally filled with visas, entry and departure stamps from all major Latin American countries, next to those of the USA and Canada.

In Autumn 1967 when AES prepared itself for its 20th anniversary celebrated in October 1968, it was logical to ask the cooperation of



Johan Lodewijk "Joe" Ooms
1913–2001

Ooms for "some extra color" to their festive occasion. Ooms gathered no less than 18 papers from overseas, including Europe, the Soviet Union, Japan and Latin America, under the title "Audio Abroad." In the process the desire for an AES presence in Europe was expressed rather than exporting lecturers to the US. It started with 102 members in 14 countries—with 11 languages between them—as well as huge distances. In less than no time a small crew formed what was called a Central Europe AES nucleus and organized a first convention in Cologne in 1971. This resulted in a rapid local membership build-up; and national sections soon followed.

Ooms was fascinated by recording techniques. He made early stereophonic recordings with Leopold Stokowski in the late 1940s. Stokowski always made sure to send his regards to Ooms whenever he was in The Netherlands. Ooms also was an admirer of A.D. Blumlein's 1931 all-encompassing stereophony patents.

Tape as a consumer medium was much furthered by Ooms in the Compact Cassette format. Under his supervision the standard, which was the basis for IEC Publication 94, was finalized. He introduced High Speed Tape Duplicating (AES preprint, October 1966). All the while standardization activity on the black gramophone record, IEC Publication 98, continued. It was the wealth of international contacts, particularly in industry and the standardization domain, that enabled him to quickly

"internationalize AES." The telex was the primary means of communication. A fluent mastery of English, French and German certainly was beneficial. He saw no political boundaries and helped East-block colleagues he met at international meetings. He was head of the Netherlands delegation to IEC TC 29B and TC 60A.

As an unofficial European counterpart to the RIAA, Ooms initiated the RIEE platform around 1970: Recording Industry Engineering Europe that had a simple 1-page Rules of Conduct as its starting principle. It provided a good basis for informal industry contacts whereby each major company in Europe would in turn host an annual meeting. Later, meetings would be held during AES Europe Conventions until the need for them expired about a decade ago. Ooms was always a welcome guest at RIAA meetings.

Late in Ooms' career a new technological era was on the doorstep. He organized two Philips/PolyGram-internal symposia on Audio-Video-Presentation in 1969 and 1971, respectively. At these, a multitude of papers was presented, one of them on the principles of optical recording by Piet Kramer of Philips Nat. Labs. Ooms immediately saw the potential of optical media for consumer and professional applications and was the fervent advocate of optical data carriers within PolyGram. Ultimately, after his retirement, the emphasis shifted from VLP, a video consumer carrier to that of an audio carrier, resulting in the introduction of the CD family of formats. Ooms retired "comme d'habitude" at age 60, but volunteered to remain in an advisory capacity to his successor Han Tendeloo for another two years.

Ooms was a fervent admirer of the fine arts. His particular interest was in Mannerism, which was later extended to the history of art in general. In anticipation of retirement, he took up a new hobby around age 50: an in-depth knowledge of Egyptology including the ability to read hieroglyphs. He assembled a fine collec-

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tion of monographs to which he added new ones on his long distance trips. The collection, including monographs largely unknown to European institutes, was eagerly accepted. He donated it a few years ago to the Allard Pierson Museum of Egyptology in Amsterdam. With permission of the museum directors of several specialized museums abroad he had replicas cast of several ancient statuettes. He became an expert at doing the patina on the replicas, which were his treasures and were applauded by the museum directors. He took great care to mark the replicas as such at the bottom.

Ooms was awarded the AES Bronze Medal in 1972 and received AES Honorary Membership in 1975 in recognition of his breakthrough contributions to the advancement of the AES.

On the occasion of the AES Golden Anniversary celebrated in Amsterdam at the 104th Convention, Ooms addressed the participants on the historical video. He laid the foundation for the Europe Region and the more than 400 European members and over 50 sections in Europe.

It was a joy for Cor Doesburg and Titia Bakker to work with him in 1998 on the Golden Anniversary video. He spoke extemporaneously directly and flawlessly on the audio tape. Cor just made a 2nd recording as a safety measure. And he still was an amazing source of historical audio information. His family report his skills in fixing anything broken, electronics included, and his meticulous methods of arranging everything.

A widower since 1989, he is survived by a son and step-son and his wife. Together they were active in a corporate history of the Maschmeijer company created around 1900 (presently part of a major multinational) and a brochure at the festive occasion of the company's centennial. He remained active until his declining health prevented him from working.

Titia K.S. Bakker
Peter K. Burkowitz
Herman A.O. Wilms