

In Memoriam

Carson Taylor, AES fellow, passed away in November after a long illness. He was just shy of his 92nd birthday. He received the Fellowship Award in 2002, in recognition of his lifelong contributions to the art and science of music recording techniques. This, however, gives only the merest glimpse of the man who was a colleague, friend, and mentor to many recording artists and engineers during the last half of the twentieth century.

During his extensive career as a recording engineer, Taylor worked in all media from wax discs and wire, to modern magnetic tape and early digital recordings. As one of the principal recording engineers at the “Capitol Tower” in Hollywood for nearly three decades, he gained a reputation as an innovator of many recording and editing techniques that remain staples of the art today.

During his tenure, Carson worked with all of the major artists in the Capitol and EMI catalogs and in all musical genres. Once they worked with Carson, many of these artists would accept no one else. The band Earth Wind and Fire even asked him to go on tour with them. He declined, however, because sound reinforcement for a touring band was not his idea of how to spend his life. Many of the following gave credit for their unique “sound” to his engineering creativity: Nat King Cole, Frank Sinatra, Peggy Lee, Stan Kenton, Carlo Maria Giulini, Leonard Pennario, John Browning, Seiji Ozawa, George Szell, Carmen Dragon, Felix Slatkin, the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra, Chicago Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, and many others.

Here are just a few highlights of Carson’s technical and artistic achievements:

- He worked extensively with Nat King Cole and produced the original version of “Unforgettable.” Recorded onto three (or four?) track tape, with Nat on an isolated track, this recording was the basis for the recent award-winning “duet” between Nat



Carson Taylor
1913–2004

and his daughter, Natalie Cole.

- He used a similar multitrack technique to record the singer Love so that his records could be released in both English and Spanish versions.

- His recording of the Stan Kenton Orchestra utilized microphone techniques that “changed their sound” and brought the group from near obscurity to the top of the charts at the time. The album, *Adventures in Jazz*, was awarded the Grammy in the category of Best Jazz Performance—Large Group (Instrumental) in 1962.

- He was nominated four times for Best Classical Engineering Award (Grammy): the Chicago Symphony (Giulini), Chicago Orchestra (Ozawa), and twice with the Cleveland Orchestra (Szell). Although he never won the Engineering Award, several of his recordings did receive the Grammy Award for Best Classical Recording of the Year.

- He made several early quadraphonic recordings utilizing two mixing consoles to record both “direct-to-stereo” and four-channels simultaneously.

- He developed several special tricks during postproduction to

achieve in the final product what the artist was unable to accomplish in the studio. For example, on one occasion when a soprano simply could not sustain her final high note in an aria, he carefully extended it during the mixing session by employing an oscillator and one of the tower’s superb echo chambers. On another, when a few inches of a critical master tape was damaged, he edited the final version together note-by-note from session out-takes. Although Carson often described these techniques in private conversation, he never disclosed the names of the artists or the albums. He was a very ethical person and never would do anything to mar an artist’s reputation. His only job was to serve the music the best way he could.

Carson retired from Capitol in the late 1970s but remained in the industry for several years as a consultant and, for a time, operating a studio in the San Francisco area. He was a quiet and elegant gentleman, who throughout his career, and even during his retirement, mentored many young engineers, emphasizing musicianship and the artistry of recording.

Ron Streicher