

Obituaries

Benjamin Bernfeld 1928–2011



Benjamin Bernfeld was a great mind, a hard worker, a faultless professional, and a visionary. Benjamin was born in Brashov (Kronstadt), Romania, in a family of musicians. His father was a concert pianist who studied with Edwin Fisher and his uncle played first violin in the Berlin Philharmonic. Chamber music was the favorite pastime of the family.

Benjamin studied music, playing as a cellist at the Radio Symphonic Orchestra in Bucharest, as well as in a quartet with Mendi Rodan, the renowned Israeli conductor during the end of the 1940s. In the early 1950s, Benjamin studied electrical engineering at the Technical University of Leningrad, today's St. Petersburg. He received his major in acoustics with excellence.

Back in Bucharest, his first job was in research, at ICECIN (Institute of Cinematographic Research), reaching his peak with the design of a large diaphragm microphone.

During the 1960s and until he left Romania in 1974, Benjamin worked as a sound engineer for the classical label of Electrecord, the Romanian record company, producing many brilliant symphonic and opera recordings. In 1974 he moved with his family near Frankfurt, Germany. In 1975 he received his doctor of engineering degree in spatial hearing and stereophony from the Strasbourg Louis Pasteur University. In 1977 Benjamin became the first chief sound engineer at IRCAM (Institut de Recherche et Coördination Acoustique/Musique). He was an early adopter of Ambisonics.

Back in Germany, this time in Freiburg, he joined forces with the Harmonia Mundi (HM) record label to open the first digital editing studios in Germany and one of the first in Europe. Benjamin made numerous splendid recordings for HM, especially in the Cedernsaal of the Kirchheim Castle.

In the early 1980s, Benjamin recognized the lack of digital interfaces and sound processing tools, so he created one of the first digital sound processing systems in 1984, the BW102. Daniel Weiss (former Studer Digital) developed and supervised the manufacturing and testing of the modular "hand-made" equipment, while Benjamin was deciding on the functionality, product definition, and most of all developing the markets worldwide. Hundreds of BW102s were sold to many studios like Bob Ludwig's Gateway Mastering, Bernie Grundman Mastering, EMI Abbey Road, CBS Records, Sonopress, and many more. A novelty was added to the system in the early 1990s with the DOS-based Pinguin GUI interface and automation system developed by Ralph Kessler.

Benjamin was active for over 40 years in the AES. He was the president of AES in 1986 and served many times as papers chair. He also was active in the VDT (Verband Deutscher Tonmeister) for many years.

May his soul rest in peace.

Ben Bernfeld Jr.

An early AES Europe convention committee was in the middle of a pre-convention meeting when the telephone rang. The caller was Benjamin Bernfeld Sr., reporting that he had recently emigrated from Romania and had come to live in Germany. Herman Wilms had answered the call and spread the news: a big hooray followed. Future AES Europe conventions would be able to rely on this eminent man to expertly handle the convention calls for papers.

Before Ben's arrival in Germany, the papers chairs would change each year, as the location of the convention moved to different cities in various European countries. With Ben as papers chair, each convention received consistently excellent management of the papers sessions. Ben arrived at meetings of the convention committees with well planned papers programs so that

planning could begin quickly for the other convention events. With some conventions having 150 papers to organize, mapping out the papers sessions was a critically important task.

You could not really overlook Ben Bernfeld; he was tall and broad-shouldered. We remember his wonderful personality, dependability, efficiency, modesty, and his good humor.

Ben, Magda, and Ben Jr. first lived in Germany for a number of years, then a couple of years in Paris before returning to Freiburg, the capital of the Germany's Black Forest. Their home was near the road leading to much of southern Europe, and many a car of a convention committee members ended up at the residence of the Bernfelds en route to the Alps. With Ben and Magda you felt like you were among family, with Ben proudly guiding you through his offices next door and also serving as advisor on the best Schwarzwald spots.

**Herman A. O. Wilms
and Titia K. S. Bakker**