

AES Boston Section Newsletter

AUDIO ENGINEERING SOCIETY

SEPTEMBER 1998

Looking Ahead

• Intellectual property rights in the world of cyber-audio. Don't miss the **September 15** meeting. See Page 2 for more details.

• Join the BAES on **October 13** for a recap of issues and products from the 105th Convention in San Francisco.

• On **November 11**, the BAES joins forces with Parsons Audio for a discussion of mastering for DVD Audio with guest Bob Ludwig.

• Reserve December 7 on your calendar for the traditional feast and white-elephant sale.

Details and location information for all meetings will appear in future newsletters and on the web.

Boston Section—Audio Engineering Society: online at www.aes.org

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Birth of the LP: Banquet speaker recalls competition and innovation

By DAVID MOULTON

About 60 Boston AES members and guests attended the annual banquet June 9th at Northeastern University's Henderson House in Weston, MA. The keynote address was presented by record producer George Avakian, who spoke about the early days of long-playing (LP) records and the adaptation of that medium to the production of popular music recordings.

George Avakian was manager of the International and Popular Album Departments for Columbia Records in 1948 when the label created and began to release 33-1/3 rpm long-playing records. The LP was originally conceived as a new medium for classical music, since many classical works or movements are twenty minutes or more in duration. By contrast, pop record productions of the time consisted of much shorter releases featuring "hit singles."

Nonetheless, Avakian was put in charge of developing a catalog of "pop" LPs. His pioneering work over the next ten years established many key characteristics of the genre, including the popular concert recording, the concept album, the extended pop performance recording and the all-important mail-order record club. But as George described in his presentation, engineers and managers traversed equally new and complex terrain during the almost 20 years it took to invent the LP.

In 1931, RCA Victor tried to market a longer-playing recording revolving at 33-1/3 rpm. However, the effort struggled due to technical problems and the marketing realities of the depression. Edward Wallerstein, who became president of the company, recognized these flaws and stopped production in 1933. However, he felt that with proper improvement, the long-playing record was a great idea.

In 1938, CBS's founder and president, William Paley, considered starting a record company in order to compete with the leading broadcast organization, NBC, which owned RCA Victor Records. He spoke to

Wallerstein, who advised him to buy the bankrupt American Recording Corporation, which controlled the name "Columbia Records"—a perfect match for CBS. He also told Paley that pursuing the LP concept would be the only way to compete with RCA's Red Seal catalog, which enjoyed a virtual monopoly in America.

Following Wallerstein's recommendations, Paley bought the American Recording Corporation and hired Wallerstein as its president at the beginning of 1939. Paley also assigned the development of long-playing records to the CBS Sound Lab under Dr. Peter Goldmark.

The project to develop a satisfactory long-playing record was curtailed by WWII, but even so, Goldmark never came close. He failed to develop a system for preserving continuity between short 78-rpm sides, and he also failed to develop a disk compound that could support repeated playing of a very narrow groove.

Paley shut down the CBS project in 1946 and allowed Wallerstein to pick it up at Columbia Records itself. Wallerstein's first step was to hire William S. Bachman, a young engineer who had developed the variable-reluctance pickup cartridge at General Electric. Within two years, Bachman and the Columbia Records staff had solved the problems, creating a quiet, high-response, durable disc which played up to 22 minutes a side. Simultaneously, classical producer Howard Scott and engineer Paul Gordon perfected a technique for transferring short "takes" to long-playing masters. Remarkably, this was achieved without magnetic tape, which was still highly imperfect at the time.

The final hurdle was the problem of getting the necessary 33-1/3 rpm playback attachments into the hands of

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New format, new horizons

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the public. Wallerstein made a deal with Philco to produce a player (\$29.95 retail) which plugged into any radio or phonograph and was sold with one or more free LPs. Soon these players were available for \$9.95 with a variety of package deals for free or discounted LPs. Although Wallerstein offered every aspect of the LP process to the entire industry free of patent royalties, RCA was so piqued that the company did not adopt LPs until the medium was already firmly established.

Competition between the two parent companies, CBS and NBC, remained fierce, however. To a large extent, George explained, it reflected the ongoing personal enmity between William Paley of CBS and NBC head General David Sarnoff.

While this conflict led Paley to deliberately misrepresent facts about the invention of the LP, the competitive success of the format opened new doors for producers like Avakian. This story will continue in the next BAES newsletter!

**Next Meeting:
Tuesday, September 15**

Cookies, bytes and copyright

By MARTIN POLON

Our September meeting will examine developments in intellectual property law as they apply to high-tech audio and cyberspace. We'll focus, in part, on the aggressive efforts by record labels to protect their copyright-able intellectual property (recorded music, in other words) at all costs, even if the ultimate cost may be a serious infringement of our First Amendment rights.

The record industry fears an assault on its property as companies begin to experiment with direct music sales through web downloads. Recently, the industry has attempted to influence the markup bills in Congress that must be drafted and passed for the United States to remain a signatory to the World Intellectual Property Organization treaty.

While this is all very interesting in itself, the issue becomes more complex as we also consider electronic watermarks, "cookies" and potential legisla-

Location: Newman Auditorium
GTE (formerly BBN)
70 Fawcett St.
Cambridge, MA

Off Concord Ave., near the
Fresh Pond Shopping Center and
the Alewife T-Station.

Reception: 6:30 p.m.
Meeting: 7:00 p.m.

tion that may affect access to these features.

Who actually requires protection and whose rights may be compromised in the process? What methods can be used to police the electronic distribution of illegal or bootleg recordings?

With an expert panel leading the debate, this meeting promises to be lively and extremely relevant to anyone active in electronic media.



**Boston Section
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