

# Obituaries

## Irving Joel 1931–2015



Irving Louis Joel passed away on November 27, 2015 in Pompton Plains, New Jersey at age 84.

Irv attended high school in Norwalk, Connecticut, and began his career in audio at local radio station WNLK. He joined the United States Army Signal Corps in 1951, serving a tour of duty in Europe with the Army's first film-for-television group.

In 1955 he joined a team at Capitol Records in New York, who made many early stereophonic recordings including the Pittsburgh Symphony on location and Capitol's first stereo Broadway cast recording, "The Music Man," still available today.

Irv soon began a parallel career working on AES events. From the *AES Journal*, July 1956: "Irving Joel, recordist at Capitol Records, tapes the Ernest White lecture and demonstration on pipe organs, which highlighted the November meeting of the New York Section of the AES. To record

the meeting, an audio line several hundred feet long was stretched from the recording studio over several backyard fences, into St. Mary's Church, and up to the choir loft on the second floor. This exemplifies Irv's 'we'll find a way to get it done' attitude," which continued throughout his life.

In addition to his volunteer work organizing AES meetings, he was facilities chair at AES conventions for five years, served on the Board of Governors in 1963, 1964, and 1977, and was Eastern Region vice president in 1966. Irv was a founding member of the AES Standards Committee and participated in several working groups early on.

In 1968 Irv became chief engineer at A&R Recording, where he worked on recordings of many famous artists including Judy Garland and Liza Minelli. In 1974 Irv formed his own company, Joel Associates, which over the next three decades worked on projects too numerous to list here. He also spent several years working for Schulke Radio Productions, traveling the country to help their affiliated stations improve their audio quality.

In the course of providing facilities and producing events for AES conventions and the New York Section, Irv carried many people into AES on his coat tails. Arthur Gruber gave a great description of this process upon accepting the AES Bronze Medal Award 1975:

Gruber, the Society's treasurer, told an appreciative banquet audience: "Ten years ago I was an innocent, average, active member of AES, taking part in conventions and giving an occasional paper. One day I heard the siren's song in the form of a telephone call from Irv Joel asking me if the New York Section could list me as a candidate for local office. One thing led to another and the

involvement became deeper and deeper, and here I am. I didn't know local office was this complicated. I haven't regretted a minute of it."

Many other people in AES have had similar experiences, and discovered that although being on one of Irv's teams was a lot of work, it was also a lot of fun.

In 1973, Irv produced the highly popular event "Look What They've Done to My Song, Ma" at the 46th AES Convention in New York. The *Journal* described this as "a rousing roundup (turnout, nearly 800 at two performances) of present and past attempts of the recording industry to capture the elusive impact of music."

At the 52nd Convention in 1975, Irv coproduced the event "Those Magnificent Men and Their Music Machines," an evening devoted to electronic music, with script written by Robert A. Moog.

In 1993, Irv was acting convention chair for the 95th Convention, stepping in to assist convention chair Len Feldman, who was suffering from a serious illness. Under Irv's guidance, the convention made a smooth transition to its new, larger venue, the Javits Convention Center.

Irv's next major projects were celebrations of the 50th anniversary of AES. A year of planning and work preceded the first event on March 11, 1998. The *Journal* reported, "The gala was more than the usual party celebrating the passage of 50 years. It reunited ten of the original founding members who set the course for the society back in 1948. As with any major event, the planning and execution required a considerable amount of time and effort. Producer Irv Joel and his capable staff deserve special tribute for their skillful work in ironing out the countless details to create a first-class

event.” Irv went on to organize 50th Anniversary events at the 104th Convention in Amsterdam and the 105th convention in New York.

Irv, along with Paul McManus, organized a special historical event, “When Vinyl Ruled,” at the 109th Convention in Los Angeles. Irv organized a crew who transformed a demo room into a working recreation of a 1960s control room, featuring Paul’s restored Universal Audio vacuum tube console and vintage tape machines. The audience was treated to playback of 1-to-1 copies of 1960s master tapes and guest speakers including Al Schmidt, Dennis Drake, David Baker, Ed Greene, Irv, and Bruce Swedien.

Irv and John Chester organized another edition of “When Vinyl Ruled” at the 111th Convention in New York. This event featured a fully restored Neumann cutting lathe, which was used to record a live direct-to-disc session in the demo room. Overflow audi-

ences learned about disc recording technology, and heard first-hand accounts of audio history from an array of guest speakers.

Irv was also a member of a group led by David Baker who organized “Vinyl Goes Digital” at the 115th Convention. This event featured several early digital recorders with original master tapes, including one of the few Soundstream recorders still in working condition, along with another impressive array of guest speakers.

Probably Irv’s most significant legacy is the AES Historical Committee’s Oral History Project. In 1999 he began recording video interviews with important figures in the history of audio engineering. For several years he set up a video recording studio at U.S. and European conventions, and conducted many of the interviews. He also made many field recordings in homes and studios. The work Irv started is still being carried on by Historical Committee members. Over 120 interviews have been

conducted with many of them available on DVD via the Historical Committee’s site, [www.aes.org/historical/store/oralhistory/](http://www.aes.org/historical/store/oralhistory/). All of the interviews (including Irv’s own) are being added to the AES Live web site for streaming to AES members as time permits. See <http://www.aes.org/live/?cat=Legends>

Irv has been honored by the AES over the years for his dedicated service. He was awarded an AES Citation in 1972, a Fellowship in 1973, a Board of Governors award in 1994, a Bronze Medal in 1999, and a Distinguished Service Medal in 2009.

Irv was predeceased by his wife of fifty years Marjorie Joel. He is survived by his daughter Beth Joel, son Kenneth Joel, granddaughter Victoria Breare, and sister Sheila Abrahamson. Memorial donations may be made to the Benevolent Care Fund of Cedar Crest, 1 Cedar Crest Village Drive, Pompton Plains, NJ 07444.

**John Chester  
High Bridge, NJ**