

OBITUARY

Knut Guettler died suddenly Sunday 17.th of feb. 70 years old. He was a unique and irreplaceable figure in the world of musical acoustics. He left school at the earliest possible age, with very little in the way of formal qualifications. He became a professional jazz musician at the age of 19, playing double bass and trombone with Kjell Karlsens Orchestra in restaurants, theatres, and studios. At the age of 22 he joined the Oslo Philharmonic, where he later became an alternating principal double bassist. Knut rose to become a highly respected performer and professor of bass at the Norwegian Academy and the Royal Conservatoire in the Hague.

He was an autodidact in most respects, but he had Henrik Lindemann as his first bass teacher. Knut dedicated his text book on bass playing "A Guide to Advanced Modern Double Bass Technique" (Yorke 1992) to Lindemann, who was the leading bass player in Norway at that time. He later studied with Gary Karr in 1968, who writes: "Knut was the most challenging student I ever had and for that we remained close friends and I even lived with him and his family in Norway one summer in the 60s. I still play his exercises every day so he's always on my mind".

Knut was fascinated by Gary Karr's ability to make inaudible bow changes and to control the string with the bow very close to the bridge thus producing a more projecting sound. These things that Karr does intuitively led Knut to replicate them using the French bow rather than the German bow as used by Karr. It led him to try as well to understand them scientifically and in the early 1980s he started to get interested in the science behind the playing of bowed-string instruments. This was the time when computers were just beginning to become readily available, and the first computer simulation models of bowed violin strings had been produced. Knut read some of this early work, and decided to have a go himself. Having a brother who worked for IBM, he had access to an early PC and a compiler for the rather arcane computer language APL. He started reading up some of the necessary science background, and programming simulations of bowing. Very diffidently, he wrote to the scientists in the field, and was somewhat surprised that they did not reject him but encouraged his interest.

A few years further on, he decided that he wanted to develop this research interest more formally, and he enquired whether it might be possible to study for a PhD at KTH in Stockholm. To their great credit, faced with this application from a mature student (to say the least of it) with no formal science qualifications, they allowed him to embark on study provided he was able to satisfy some conditions. From then on, he worked steadily on his research into how a player controls a bowed string, under the guidance of Erik Jansson and Anders Askenfelt at KTH. He combined this serious academic work with a successful career as a professional performer, spending one month per year at KTH, while working on his own the rest of the time.

After some 10 years, he produced a doctoral thesis of outstanding quality. His public Defence of his thesis work was a very unusual occasion. Usually, graduating PhD students have their parents and grandparents in attendance at the Defence and the party that follows. In Knut's case, his daughter, brother and grandchildren attended, along with some of his colleagues from the Academy and some of his pupils: the music at the party that night was impressive.

After retirement from his duties as a teacher, he intensified his research activities into a variety of topics including podium acoustics and extended performance techniques with a direct relevance to players. He also took initiative to bring the implications of music acoustics research under the

attention of a wider audience, and to bridge the gap that exists between acousticians and performing musicians. In these years he also was an important inspiration to a next generation of researchers. His advice could sometimes be difficult to fathom at first thought, but always proved valuable in the course of time.

The double bass maker Jim Ham knew of Knut by reputation due to his work in acoustics and through their mutual friend Gary Karr long before he had the opportunity to meet him, so when he heard that he would be attending the Acoustics Workshop in Oberlin Ohio in 2009, Miriam Chong, his bass player wife and he took full advantage of a week together. Knut was initially shy about playing since he had retired from professional playing years before but he was eager to try one of his basses and to demonstrate what he was explaining about the interaction between bow, hair and string. It was immediately obvious that he was still a great player as well having an incomparable knowledge of (and ability to explain) the physics of what he was doing with the bow.

Knut was a rare bird. Despite the lack of formal training, he had the mind of a natural researcher and philosopher. He never accepted anything he did not understand in depth: one always had to be well prepared before discussions with Knut, and he would always give you something to “chew on”. Especially for players wanting to see a bit deeper into what they are trying to do, Knut’s computer simulations of the bowed string proved very illuminating, all the more so when Knut himself demonstrated the phenomena by playing his double bass.

What Knut was able to bring to the scientific world of musical acoustics was his outstanding experience as a player and teacher, and also his wide-ranging curiosity. This led him to pose questions about how a string behaves when it is bowed, that had immediate and profound importance for actual musical practice. This work immediately put him in the front rank of researchers in the field, and made everyone else think more carefully about what questions they chose to study. He shed light on many of these questions, and also posed many more that he did not live to answer. His publications, and the memory of his presence and personality, will continue to inspire workers in the field for a long time to come.

Jim Woodhouse and Claire Barlow, Cambridge University, UK

Anders Askenfelt and Erik V. Jansson , KTH, Stockholm

Asbjørn Krokstad, NTNU, Trondheim

Claudia Fritz, LAM, Paris, France

Erwin Schoonderwaldt, HMTMH, Hannover, Germany

Martin Schleske, violin maker, Stockdorf, Germany

Matthias Demoucron, IPEM, Ghent, Belgium

Joe Curtin, violin maker, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA

Fan-Chia Tao, D'Addario & Co., Farmingdale, New York, USA

George Stoppani, violin maker, Manchester, UK

Andreas Hudelmayer, violin maker, London, UK

Murray Campbell, University of Edinburgh, Scotland, UK

Jim Ham, double bass maker, Victoria, Canada

Ted White, Arbutus Fittings, Victoria, Canada

Hans Johannsson, violin maker, Iceland

Rolf Inge Godøy, UIO, and Tor Halmrast, Statsbygg/UIO, Oslo

Håkon Thelin, double bassist, Oslo

Anders Buen and friends at Brekke & Strand akustikk, Oslo

And the rest of the musical acoustics community spread around the world