



Donald Buchla Class of 2017

Don Buchla graduated from Oroville High School (OHS) in 1955. He was a life member of the California Scholastic Federation (CSF), received the Bank of America Laboratory Science Award, and the Bausch and Lomb Science Award. He was awarded an Alumni scholarship to UC-Berkeley. He played on the tennis team as a senior, and was a member of the French and Spanish Clubs and the Junior Red Cross. Outside of school, he was a Boy Scout Patrol leader, built a telescope, studied piano, and built radio sets.

Immediately following his graduation, Don attended the University of California at Berkeley (Cal), earning his BS degree in physics in 1959 and also studying astronomy, physiology, and music. He did post graduate study at Cal where he worked on NASA projects, including controls for the Gemini space capsule. Don had a lifelong fascination with the ways that humans, technology, and sounds interact.

For the next 54 years, Don worked as an inventor, composer, instrument builder, musician, and was an electronic music maverick. In 1962, he founded his own company, Buchla and Associates in Berkeley, CA and one year later constructed his first voltage-controlled synthesizer. The year 1963 also saw him designing his first modules for the San Francisco Tape Music Center (SFTMC). He released his first units shortly after Robert Moog's first synthesizers; however his instrument was arguably designed before Moog's. With partial funding from a Rockefeller Foundation Grant, Don assembled his modules into the Buchla Modular Electronic Music System, later known as the Series 100 Modular Music System, which he began selling commercially in 1966. The Series 100 was also featured in the May 22, 1967 issue of Newsweek magazine. It was used by Mort Subotnik to create the groundbreaking album, "*Silver Apples of the Moon*". During the sixties, he also built part of the sound system for The Grateful Dead and sometimes mixed the band's live shows, adding electronic sounds from the Buchla Box.

Following the Series 100, Don released the 200 and the Buchla 400 with a video display. He followed these with the first digitally controlled analog synthesizer named the 500 series. In 1987, the massive 700 system with digital touch-plates was released. In the 1990's, he began designing alternative MIDI (musical interface) controllers, "Thunder", "Lightening", and "Marimba Lumina". "Lightening" is the most impressive as it used just two wands to control the music. With the resurgence of interest in analog synthesizers in the 90's, Don revamped his older 200 series into a modernized 200e with a standard MIDI musical interface and new modules. Don received grants from the Veterans Administration (guidance devices for the blind), the Guggenheim Foundation (music languages), and the National Endowment for the Arts (composition). He was a consultant to the Institute for research coordination in Acoustics/Music in France, and received a National Endowment for the ARTS Fellowship to design instruments and write music for a 100 piece electronic orchestra. He held several patents in the fields of optics and musical instruments.

In 2002, Don was awarded the prestigious "SEAMUS Lifetime Achievement Award" in recognition of his pioneering achievements and lifetime contributions to the art and craft of electro-acoustic music.

While attending the 2007 Macworld Convention in San Francisco, Suzanne Ciani had the pleasure of sharing a 3-hour lunch with technocrats Steve Wozniak, mastermind of the original Apple computer and Don, inventor of the Buchla Music Box. She said, "*When I found out these two had never met, and each have played such important roles in the music technology that I use, I felt that the opportunity to bring us all together was very special. A day to remember!*"

Words from the Bob Moog website: *“Don Buchla’s contributions to the history of synthesis are substantial, varied, and iconic. His work has been an inspiration to many engineers, composers, and musicians. He envisioned a voltage-controlled modular device that would realize the dreams of electronic music composers since the early part of the 20th Century. Today, his work is more popular than ever. He is among the most important innovators in electronic music. We have lost one of our great geniuses, but luckily for us, his legacy will endure and inspire countless more.”*

Quote from brother David, *” Don never liked the word ‘synthesizer’ because it implies mimicking something else, when he wanted to create new sounds and new ways to interact with musical instruments.”*

Don passed away at his home in Berkeley, CA on September 14, 2016. He leaves his wife, Ann-Marie (Nannick), son Ezra, and daughters Jeannine Serbanich, Erin Buchla, and two grandchildren.