

David A Wilson II

(1944–2018)

by Alan Sircom and John Giolas



I have written many hundreds of thousands of words on audio, tens of thousands of them about Wilson Audio Specialities. But these are some of the toughest words I have to write: Dave Wilson, founder of Wilson Audio, died peacefully at home on Saturday May 26th. He was 73 and had been suffering from a rare form of bone cancer.

It's difficult for those of us who knew Dave Wilson to step away from the personal and discuss his achievements, in part because he was a true renaissance man. He was a man of great personal warmth and delighted in both meeting people and discovering new things. He also had a remarkable ability to bring out the best in those people.

Dave and his family lived in Inglewood, Southern California until he was six, and then moved to Sacramento. Early on in his young life, he became interested in audio and music reproduction—specifically the science of loudspeaker design. Dave designed and built several loudspeakers, testing ideas, and experimenting with various parts and construction strategies.

After two years at American River Junior College, he transferred to Brigham Young University starting in 1964, where he obtained a bachelor's degree in zoology and chemistry. It was at BYU he would meet Sheryl Lee Jamison, who, at the time, needed Dave's help with a recording project. Dave was instantly smitten and, after some persistence on Dave's part, the two began dating. They were married in 1966. For over 50 years, they were loving partners in all things: in parenthood, in business, and in life's triumphs and challenges.

After finishing college, Dave and Sheryl Lee moved to Glendale, California where Sheryl Lee began a teaching job at the school she attended as a student, Wilson Junior High. Dave worked on a master's degree in molecular biology, and subsequently began working for the pharmaceutical company Pfizer. Not long afterward, he was offered a position in clinical research at Abbot Laboratories. This required them to move to the small town of Waukegan, just north of Chicago, Illinois. Dave's professional star rose quickly, and he was offered yet another position at Cutter Labs in Berkeley, California as a product designer. It was during this time that he learned and developed the protocols and procedures of the scientific process—a skill set that would that he would later use in the pursuit of his true academic and scientific love: loudspeaker design.

Dave was best known for his principal leadership role at Wilson Audio Specialties, a high-end loudspeaker manufacturer he and Sheryl Lee co-founded in 1974. At first, Wilson Audio was an extension of Dave's hobby, but eventually Sheryl Lee encouraged Dave to pursue his love and passion full-time. In the early days, the business was located in their home in Novato,



Marin County, California, and expanded to commercial spaces as the business grew. In the early nineties, Dave and Sheryl Lee made the choice to relocate their business and their home to the town where they first met, Provo, Utah.

While the two faced many struggles and challenges, together they built one of the most respected and revered companies in the audio industry. Wilson became well known for its state-of-the-art loudspeakers, which featured innovative technology authored and invented by Dave, and which were built and executed with exacting standards. Dave, with Sheryl Lee at his side, fostered a company culture with authenticity and excellence as its core principles. The professionals and craftsman who work with them at Wilson are considered a part of their extended family and are treated ►



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high-end world), and this helped develop the high-end amplifier market in the process. More than 40 years later, the brand that carries his name still dominates the high-end loudspeaker scene.

In his last years, he increasingly stepped back from the company he created, passing the baton to his son, Daryl. Dave formally stood down as CEO and President of Wilson Audio Specialties on Veterans Day, 2016, to serve as ambassador (or, as he liked to call it ‘WAMMbassador’) for his magnum opus, the WAMM Master Chronosonic loudspeaker.

Away from business, Dave Wilson was a charming and humble man, passionate about everything that fell into his wide sphere of attention. Although he was very much the public face of the company, he was a private family man, who loved spelunking and discovering the local geology while doing so. But, it was that constant quest to know more that was the real passion: just one look in his office in the factory in Provo, Utah showed that – who else but Dave Wilson would have a NASA operations manual from the Apollo missions alongside acoustics texts?

Indeed, much of Dave’s complex nature could be seen as paradoxical. While on the one hand, he was an articulate public speaker, seemingly comfortable in that venue, delivering cogent, articulate presentations, he considered himself to be shy and introverted. And yet, he spent much of his professional career successfully promoting his company within very public venues. In reality, he was more at peace in the isolation of his Kanab ranch than in the bustle of large crowds. He enjoyed spending time there with Sheryl Lee, his children, and grandchildren. He often guided friends and family through the spectacular sites and landscapes of the surrounding the area. He loved hiking and would expound on the geological history of a particular rock formation, often with a young grandchild on his shoulders. Or, he would relax by exploding some water-filled milk jugs with one of his many rifles and, after a missed shot, would quip that Sheryl Lee was the real ace marksman of the family. The Kanab ranch was an oasis for Dave and Sheryl Lee and their extended family and friends.

I have known Dave personally for a couple of decades and perhaps of all the people I know in (and outside of) the audio industry, he was one of the most centred and humble. Those of us who knew him have spent much of the last few days quietened and stilled.

He was a loving father and grandfather and found great satisfaction in teaching and mentoring his children and extended family. He adored his wife, Sheryl Lee, and often marvelled how blessed and fortunate he was to have her in his life. Indeed, Dave often remarked on how lucky he was generally – he was married to his best friend, was able to do the work he most valued, and spend his life surrounded by the people he loved.

Dave Wilson is survived by his wife, Sheryl Lee, his three sons, one daughter, and 15 grandchildren. +

▶ accordingly. Within the audio industry, Dave is almost universally regarded as the greatest loudspeaker designer of his generation, and the company he led is one of the most respected and admired in its industry.

His passion for music extended beyond the design and manufacture of audio products, and in 1977 he and Sheryl Lee founded Wilson Audiophile Definitive Recordings. Many of his recordings are highly prized by music lovers and audio enthusiasts alike, and many are still available.

But it as a designer and manufacturer of audio equipment where his impact is truly incalculable. The original WAMM loudspeaker represented a paradigm shift in what was possible from a loudspeaker, setting a high bar in performance that created a standard for ultra-high-end loudspeaker designs that in many respects still stands to this day. In addition, the WATT loudspeaker (coupled with the PUPPY bass cabinet) transformed what was possible in loudspeaker performance at an attainable level for the rank-and-file audiophile. Both of these loudspeakers set new levels in performance thanks to careful system matching and installation (things that weren’t taken so seriously before Dave Wilson’s designs began to permeate the