



Leon Knopoff

July 1, 1925 – January 20, 2011

Brilliant scientist, inspiring teacher,
extraordinary father, devoted husband

May your spirit live on!

UCLA Faculty Center
Thursday, May 5, 2011, 3:30 p.m.

Leon Knopoff

1925-2011

Professor of Physics and Geophysics, Leon joined the UCLA faculty more than 60 years ago, in 1950. He was known for his extraordinary intellect and for his delight in sharing his knowledge and in exchanging ideas. He was a gifted educator who took great joy in teaching and in seeing his students develop into scholars.

Leon was an internationally renowned scientist who was extremely creative and prolific. With his students, postdocs, and colleagues, he made significant and pioneering discoveries in a wide variety of fields, including fundamental geophysics, nonlinear earthquake dynamics, earthquake statistics, music as a complex system, and even archaeology. His publications number more than 365, and many demonstrate his endearing sense of humor.

Some of the papers he wrote decades ago are still cited today. Two of them establish what are widely recognized as founding principles of modern seismology. Leon was regarded as the father of theoretical seismology. By applying ideas from mathematical physics to seismology, he contributed to both fields. His positions at UCLA included Research Musicologist, and he was one of the original members of UCLA's Institute of Ethnomusicology soon after its start in 1960.

Leon's international ties were strong. He traveled widely to attend conferences and to work with colleagues all over the world. He was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Strasbourg, and he was named the first Honorary Professor of the Institute of Geophysics of the China Earthquake Administration, Beijing. He received medals from the Royal Astronomical Society, the European Geophysical Society, the German Geophysical Society, and the Seismological Society of America. Leon was a member of the three top honor societies in the U.S.: the National Academy of Sciences, the American Philosophical Society, and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He was named UCLA Faculty Research Lecturer in 1972.

In 2000, UCLA's IGPP honored Leon's 75th birthday and his 50th anniversary at UCLA with a symposium entitled "The Earth: Earthquakes and Seismic Waves." The majority of his former Ph.D. students attended, along with many colleagues and former postdocs, some from as far away as Australia, China, Germany, and Russia. The symposium led to publication of a Festschrift volume in his honor.

A man with broad interests, Leon had a deep love for and encyclopedic knowledge of classical music. He played piano and harpsichord and for many years hosted chamber music sessions at home. His backpacking expeditions in the Sierra Nevada and in mountains in far-flung parts of the world were among his happiest times. He took a keen delight in travel, especially with his wife and children, and they shared many adventures together. Cherished only child of Max and Ray Knopoff, Leon was born in Los Angeles and was the first of his family, their relatives, and their friends to attend college. He had a very happy childhood and loved his parents dearly.

Leon was a superb father and a remarkable husband, greatly beloved by his wife, Joanne, and his children, Katie, Rachel, and Michael. His friends and colleagues knew him as a man of integrity, brilliance, humor, generosity, kindness, modesty, and a great sense of fun and adventure. He was an extraordinary human being.

In the near future you may access a website set up in Leon's honor for today's tributes, today's photos, obituary articles, his CV and publication list, and other information about his life:

leon.knopoff.com

Remembering Leon Knopoff

David Jackson, Professor of Geophysics, UCLA

Joseph Rudnick, Dean, Division of Physical Sciences;
Professor of Physics, UCLA

Mark Harrison, Director, Institute of Geophysics
and Planetary Physics; Professor of Geochemistry, UCLA

Ferdinand Coroniti, Professor of Physics and Astronomy, UCLA

Paul Davis, Professor of Geophysics, UCLA

Gary Ernst, Professor Emeritus of Geology, Stanford University

Jean Elkhoury, Postdoctoral Fellow, Environmental Engineering,
UC Irvine; Leon's last Ph.D. student

Margaret Kivelson, Professor Emerita of Space Physics, UCLA

Herbert Morris, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy and of Law, UCLA

Michael Knopoff, Rachel Knopoff, Jo Knopoff, Katie Knopoff Wadley

Remembrances by colleagues and friends

Guests are cordially invited to a reception on the patio after the program.

Frances Teng, pianist, daughter of Prof. Leon Teng,
scientific colleague and former graduate research assistant of Leon's



1975 Switzerland



1973 Tajikistan



1967 UCLA



1986 Cambridge MA



1998 Sherman Oaks