May 29th

Iannis Xenakis

Born: May 29, 1922;

Brăila, Romania
Died: Feb. 4, 2001

Xenakis applied mathematical models to music, including stochastic processes and game theory, which had an important influence on the development of electronic [Sept 20] and computer music [Feb 20; March 10; Nov 13].

Xenakis had originally trained as an architect, and this informed the development of his UPIC system (Unité Polyagogique Informatique CEMAMu) in 1979 which could translate images into music. Many of the drawing resembled architectural structures, while others had a more organic form.

Iannis Xenakis (1970). Photo by Les Amis de Xenakis. CC BY 2.5.

UPIC consisted of a digitizing tablet linked to a computer. The user could manpulate wave forms in temporal compositions where the X-axis represented time, and the Y-axis stood for pitch.

Xenakis' best known written work was “Musiques formelles” (1963), which was later revised and translated into English as “Formalized Music: Thought and Mathematics in Composition” (1971). The book contains the complete FORTRAN code for one of Xenakis’ early computer music composition programs, GENDY.

First Hundred Percent Club

May 29 ??, 1925

Every year IBM [Feb 14] recognizes the sales representatives who have achieved or exceeded their sales quota by inducting them into the "Hundred Percent Club". (Not to be confused with the “Mile High Club”.)

The tradition began in 1925 when IBM president Thomas J. Watson, Sr. [Feb 17], congratulated 52 qualifiers at the company’s first sales convention, held in Atlantic City.

After another decade of conventions at the swish Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in NYC, the annual week-long event was switched to a sprawling tent city erected in Endicott, N.Y in 1940.

500 two-man tents were put up on the hillsides for the achievers, on a site laid out with street names, tent numbers, and road rules. A massive, centrally located tent, 38 feet high and 98 feet wide, was used for the meetings.

Every salesman was expected to give a speech, and Watson sat through them all, often making notes on the person’s presentation. An important aspect of this was personal appearance, with each attendee required to have two fresh white shirts available every day.

One of the club’s songs [May 4] utilized the tune from “I’ve Been Working On The Railroad”, but with new lyrics:

"We’re the I.B.M. Go-Getters, All the live-long day. We are all One Hundred Pointers And will strive to be always. We have learned from Mr. Watson, Loyally we’ll serve him all the time; And we’ll always help each other sell our whole big line."

Christopher Riche Evans

Born: May 29, 1931;

Aberdovey, Wales
Died: Oct. 10, 1979

Evans is best known for his 1979 book, “The Mighty Micro: The Impact of the Computer Revolution”, which included predictions up to the year 2000.

He also presented a six-part British TV series based on the book, which was broadcast shortly after his death at the end of 1979. The episodes are online at https://archive.org/details/mighty_micro_ep1

The enormous impact of the book and documentary led to the BBC forming the Computer Literacy Project [Jan 11], which led to the creation of the BBC Micro [Dec 1].

Evans was a close friend of renowned sci-fi author J.G. Ballard; they had an agreement that Evans would send him the contents of his wastebasket once a fortnight. Ballard called him “the first ‘hoodlum scientist’ I had met”.

Evans often wore a German Iron Cross on a gold chain, but the TV producers of “The Mighty Micro" forced him to keep it hidden.

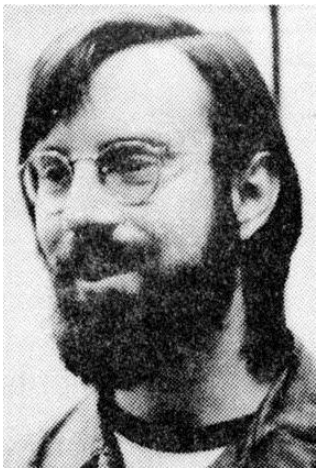
Bob Wallace

Born: May 29, 1949;

Arlington, Virginia
Died: September 20, 2002

Wallace coined the term ‘shareware’ for his PC-Write word processor, which he released in early 1983. He encouraged users to copy and share the $10 diskette for free, but asked them to pay to register the program after trying it out. He was fond of the quote, “making a living, not a killing.”

By 1989, Wallace's Quicksoft company had 32 employees and annual sales of more than $2 million.



Bob Wallace (1977). Photo by John Aurelius, member of the Northwest Computer Society.

Before his shareware career, Wallace had joined Microsoft in 1978 as employee no. 9, and was a key developer of BASIC for Texas Instruments (TI)'s graphing calculators. He also appeared in the famous 1978 Microsoft Staff photo [Dec 7].

Wallace and Bill Gates [Oct 28] were known for their hijinks; one incident supposedly had them breaking into a construction site to test-drive the bulldozers, one of which almost ran over Gates' Porsche.

Wallace was the main organizer of the Northwest Computer Club which held meetings at the Pacific Science Center in Seattle. He also set up the first Personal Computer Fair in April 1978 which drew over 5,000 people and featured over 60 computers for the visitors to try out. Despite the name, it wasn't the first such fair. Earlier ones were The World Altair Convention held on [March 27] 1976, and the First West Coast Computer Faire on [April 15] 1977.

Wallace decided to become a programmer at the age of 11 (or perhaps 12) after reading a 1961 *Reader's Digest* article, "The Man Who Talked to Machines". (Sadly, I couldn't find that article in back issues.)

Another shareware pioneer was Andrew Fluegelman [Nov 27].

Univac 1107 Tour

May 29, 1962

Sperry Rand [Jan 25] released the Univac 1107 [Oct 00], the first computer to employ thin-film memory for storage, a faster, but more expensive, alternative to core memory [May 11]. The machine was nicknamed the "Seven".

The memory's cycle time was just 600 nanoseconds compared to 4 microseconds for core.

The thin-film technology deposited 4 micrometer thick dots of an iron-nickel alloy onto small glass plates. Drive and sense lines were added by printing circuit wiring over the dots.

Sperry Rand developed the process under a NSA contract [Oct 24] and announced its commercial availability during the US "Univac Executive Tour".

Thirty-six Univac 1107's were sold altogether, including one to the Norwegian Computing Center, where it was used to develop Simula [Feb 10]. Kristen Nygaard [Aug 27] (one of Simula's designers) had been a member of the Univac tour.

The 1107 was further immortalized by Donald Knuth [Jan 10] in his MIX virtual machine in the first edition of "The Art of Computer Programming". "MIX" can be read as the Roman numeral for 1009. Knuth came up with it by summing the serial numbers of 16 computers, and then calculating the rounded average:

floor(360 + 650 + 709 + 7070 + U3 + SS80 +**1107** + 1604 + G20 + B220 + S2000 + 920 + 601 + H860 + PDP4 + II)/16) = 1009

The 1960's-era MIX has been superseded by a new (also hypothetical) computer architecture called MMIX (the Roman number for 2009; pronounced EM-micks). This is calculated in the same way, but with 14 different machines:

(CrayI + IBM 801 + RISC II + Clipper C300 + AMD 29K + Motorola 88K + IBM 601 + Intel i960 + Alpha 21164 + POWER 2 + MIPS R4000 + Hitachi SuperH4 + StrongARM 110 + Sparc 64)/14 = 28126/14 = 2009

There's one machine that occurs in both equations, the IBM 601, which was introduced in 1931 and the first IBM machine that could do multiplication. However, the tendency to reuse serial numbers means that it could perhaps refer to the Minivac 601 from [Oct 00] 1961.

Kodak's Ektaprint

May 29, 1985

Eastman Kodak announced the Ektaprint Electronic Publishing System (KEEPS). The $50,000 system consisted of software from Interleaf, hardware from Sun Microsystems [Feb 24], a customized front-end by Kodak that ran on UNIX System V Release 4 [June 14], and Kodak's high-end Ektaprint printers, scanners, and copiers.

At the peak of KEEPS's popularity in 1990, Adobe PageMaker [July 15] and Xerox Ventura Publisher were still seen as only suitable for home computer users. But they eventually became serious competitors, and KEEPS (briefly renamed Lionheart) was unable to compete.

In Jan. 2012, Kodak filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection.

Newton MessagePad

May 29, 1992

During CES [June 24] in Chicago, Apple CEO John Sculley [April 6] announced the imminent release of the Newton PDA [Jan 7], saying it would be "nothing less than a revolution."

The first prototype unveiled on stage had dead batteries, but a charged one was eventually found. Sculley ordered a pizza by moving "pizza topping" icons

onto a “pie” icon, and then faxing the order from the device.

But, unknown to the audience, all the MessagePads used during the event were plugged into Macs — they had proved to be too unreliable to run independently.

Sculley’s announcement was later considered something of a mistake, since it committed the company to the design he had demoed, and revealed the company’s plans to its competitors many months before the product shipped. For example, General Magic [May 00] gave its first public demo of Magic Cap just weeks later, and Microsoft and Amstrad quickly announced that they would release similar products.

The first MessagePad was released 14 months later, on [Aug 3] 1993.

JavaOne

May 29, 1996

The first JavaOne developers’ conference was held by Sun Microsystems [Feb 24] at the Moscone Centre in San Francisco.

The main auditorium featured smoke machines, giant on-stage oscilloscopes with pulsating sound waves, blacklight displays, but sadly no 18-inch Stonehenge model.

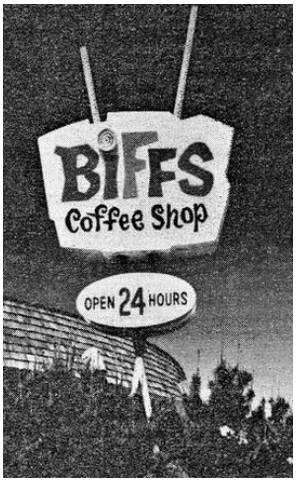
Aside from the wonders of the Java language [Feb 23], there was much talk of the JavaOS and JavaChip. James Gosling [May 19] predicted that with the JavaChip, “You can build a complete speech recognition system into a doorknob.” As it turned out, JavaOS was dropped in 1999, and JavaChip (renamed picoJava) never became a Sun product, although it was licensed to Fujitsu [Oct 00].

From 2007 to 2009, an associated one-day event called CommunityOne was held for open-source developers. This was quickly discontinued after Oracle's acquisition of Sun [Aug 17].

During the 2008 conference, 70 staff members and three attendees were sickened, not by the unrelenting boosting of Java, but by an outbreak of norovirus.

After the Oracle purchase, JavaOne was held concurrently with Oracle OpenWorld, and moved out of the grandiose Moscone Center into an assortment of local hotels. Was Oracle sending a subtle message? Not to worry, the 2017 keynote speech by Oracle Vice President of Engineering, Mark Cavage, included the quote: “Java first, Java always”.

The next year, Oracle announced that JavaOne would be discontinued, in favor of a more general programming conference called Oracle Code One. Reports that it would be held in a coffee shop somewhere in Oakland have (so far) proved unfounded.



Biff's Coffee Shop (1986). Photo by Alden Jewell. CC BY 2.0.

IUMA Lives

May 29, 2012

Jeff Patterson started the Internet Underground Music Archive (IUMA) in 1993 because he wanted his punk band, “The Ugly Mugs”, to reach a wider audience.

Up until then, Patterson and his friend Rob Lord had been uploading their songs to a public FTP server, included their well-known hit “Cold Turd on a Paper Plate”. However, the FTP site soon expanded its range to include discerning songs from other local bands.

As the Web took off, Jon Luini, Patterson, and Lord launched IUMA with the goal of helping independent artists get their music heard without having to adopt the usual distribution-by-record-company model.

In June 1999, IUMA was purchased by EMusic, and became more widely known through a few publicity coups. For example, it offered to pay $5,000 to name a baby after the site. The ‘lucky’ winner, on Aug. 11, 2000, was Iuma Dylan-Lucas Thornhill from Kansas.

But EMusic was hit hard by the rise of Napster [Nov 22] and the bursting of the dot-com bubble [March 10]. IUMA was shut down in 2006, but not before EFF co-founder John Gilmore [Aug 00] managed to backup the site. On this day, much of IUMA’s collection (45,000 bands and over 680,000 tracks) was uploaded to the Internet Archive [May 12]. A "best of" compilation of Ugly Mugs classics can be found at https://archive.org/details/iuma-ugly_mugs