

# Robert A. Katz Biography



From his earliest years, Bob has been as curious as a *Katz*. He voraciously reads audio books, service manuals, product spec sheets, license plates, and bumper stickers. But his favorite reads are Science Fiction writers Spider Robinson and Frederick Pohl, which may explain Bob's punny personality. In his teens he dabbled in hypnotism and magic, but was a bit klutzy to turn that into a career. Bob is an animal lover—all dogs and cats love him back.

Coming from a family of medical doctors, musicians and composers, Bob gravitated to the B flat clarinet at the age of ten; his aunt, a viola teacher, gave Bob his first lesson in solfège and transposition. At the age of 13, he rebuilt his first tape recorder. After wiring the house for sound, he was forced by his parents to remove the microphones he had secreted throughout the house. Clearly destined for a career in audio, by high school he had begun an amateur recording career, plus studying the sciences and linguistics, practicing French and Spanish and looking for female pen pals on three continents. Perhaps out of default he was voted *most versatile* in his class. Eventually his language skills would reach the point where he can give seminars in any of three languages.

An enthusiastic young man with a passion for good sound, Bob developed a reputation as an

audiophile around Hartford, Connecticut town. The local audio stores regularly invited him over, for Bob is never short of opinions. One day he was invited to audition a new pair of speakers with the designer present. After hearing a few notes, Bob ran out of the store covering his ears! Over the years, he has learned to be more diplomatic, but his opinions continue to be defined by a love for the art of audio.

In college he played in an *ad hoc* Dixieland ensemble, and the treat of his performance life was soloing *Sweet Georgia Brown* before the homecoming football crowd. Two years at Wesleyan University were followed by two more at the University of Hartford, studying Communication and Theatre, but he spent less time in the classroom and more at the college radio station, where he became recording director. A fan of the Firesign Theatre, Bob used to write and edit humorous radio ads, and he became a DJ, manning a free-form-progressive rock radio show titled *The Katz Meow*, and doing a stint on the commercial rock station.

Bob taught himself analog and digital electronics, and was influenced by a number of creative designers. In Hartford, Bob's mentor was Steve Washburn, an EE who invented a way to nearly double the power-handling of a Hartley 24" woofer and also constructed Bob's first custom-built portable audio console. Just out of college, Bob became (1972) Audio Supervisor of the *Connecticut Public Television Network*, producing every type of program from game shows to documentaries, music and sports, and he learned to mix all kinds of music live. When he wasn't working television, he was on location recording music groups direct to 2-track.

In 1972, Bob wrote his first article for **dB** magazine, describing a set of mike heaters he developed to warm his AKG microphones and keep them from sputtering due to changes in humidity. This spiked a *heated* controversy as Stephen Temmer of Gotham Audio wrote a response stating that "Neumann microphones are never affected by humidity" but Bob's experience was supported by some others and in those pre-Internet times the controversy remained of modest proportions. Hooked by the writing bug, Bob is a natural-born teacher who puts himself in the mind of the learner. He has written over a hundred articles and reviews in publications such as dB, RE/P, Mix, AudioMedia, JAES, PAR, and Stereophile.

In 1977 he moved from Connecticut to New York City, and began a recording career in records, radio, TV, and film as well as building and designing recording studios and custom recording equipment. Long before the advent of the home PC, Bob taught himself several computer languages, and sold one assembly-language program used in an embedded system at a brokerage firm. During the primitive time before cell phones, the voice of *Matilda* became well known. Matilda answered Bob's phone and forwarded calls to any place Bob happened to be. Visitors to Bob's house were dismayed to discover that sultry-voiced Matilda was not flesh and blood but rather a 6502-based controller, DTMF encoders, decoders and other gear. Matilda's true identity remains a mystery today.

From 1978-79, he taught at the Institute of Audio Research, supervised the rebuild of their audio console and studios and began a friendship

with IAR's founder Al Grundy, mentor and influence. Other New York era influences include Ray Rayburn and acousticians Francis Daniel and Doug Jones. **In the 80's**, one of his clients was the spoken-word label, *Caedmon Records*, where he recorded actors including Lillian Gish, Ben Kingsley, Lynn Redgrave and Christopher Plummer.

An active member of the *New York Audio Society*, Bob was the ultimate audiophile. This led to a full-page interview/article in the *Village Voice* called *Sex With The Proper Stereo*, a story about Bob's railroad apartment on East 90<sup>th</sup> with the empty refrigerator in the kitchen and mysterious monoliths in the living room.

But the refrigerator was not empty for long. In **1984**, Bob was doing sound for a motion picture in Venezuela and met multi-lingual Mary Kent, production assistant. After the filming, Bob invited Mary to come to New York for a vacation that became a permanent engagement! One day new girlfriend Mary came home and turned on the stereo system in the wrong order, blowing up the Krell amplifier and one of the Symdex woofers producing sparks and blue smoke. When Bob arrived home, he calmed her down— "Don't worry, Mary, your love for me means more than any stereo system." Bob and Mary have been together ever since (Mary jokes that she's really in love with the stereo system).

One day Bob received a call from musician David Chesky, who had read the *Voice* article and was looking for an audiophile recording engineer. In **1988** this led to a long and pleasant association with Chesky Records, which became the premiere

audiophile record label. Bob specializes in minimalist miking techniques (no overdubs) for capturing jazz and other music that commonly is multimiked. His recordings are musically balanced, exciting and intimate while retaining dynamics, depth and space. **In 1989** he built the first working model of the DBX/UltraAnalog 128x oversampling A/D converter, and produced the world's first oversampled commercial recordings. Over the years, the converter was refined, until by **1996** Bob found a commercial model that performed slightly better. Bob has recorded about 150 records for Chesky, including his second Grammy-winner, and **in 1997** the world's first commercial 96 kHz/24 bit audio DVD (on DVD-Video).

This obsession with good sound has developed into Bob's passion: *Mastering with a Capital M*. Every day, he applies his specialized techniques to bring the exciting sound qualities of live music to every form recorded today. **In 1990** he founded **Digital Domain**, which masters music from pop, rock, and rap to audiophile classical. Besides mastering, Digital Domain provides complete services to independent labels and clients, graphic design and replication. Mary, who became Bob's wife, is an accomplished photographer and graphic artist, the visual half of the Digital Domain team and more than two-thirds of the charm. **In 1996**, Bob and Mary moved the company from New York to Orlando, adding numerous Florida-based artists and labels to the international clientele.

In the **90's**, Bob invented three commercial products, found in mastering rooms around the

world. The first product, the *FCN-1 Format Converter*, was dubbed by Roger Nichols the *Swiss-Army knife of digital audio*. Then came the *VSP model P* and *S* Digital Audio Control Centers, which received a Class A rating in *Stereophile Magazine*. These devices perform jitter reduction, routing, and sample rate conversion.

Bob has delivered lectures and seminars to the Audio Engineering Society at the conventions and sections and chaired AES workshops. He has been Convention Workshops Chairman, Facilities Chairman and served as Chairman of the AES New York Section. In 1991, Bob began the **Digido** website, the second audio URL to make the World Wide Web, an educationally-oriented site which has grown to be a premium source for audio information. Over 1000 pages around the globe have linked to [www.digido.com](http://www.digido.com).

Bob's first 21<sup>st</sup> century invention is patent pending. He designed and introduced an entire new category of audio processor, the **Ambience Recovery Processor**, which uses psychoacoustics to extract and enhance the existing depth, space, and definition of recordings. Z-Systems of Florida and Weiss Audio of Switzerland have licensed Bob's K-Stereo™ and K-Surround™ processes.

Bob has mastered CDs for labels including EMI, BMG, Virgin, Warner (WEA), Sony Music, Walt Disney, Boa, Arbors, Apple Jazz, Laser's Edge, and Sage Arts. He enjoys the Celtic music of Scotland, Ireland, Spain and North America, Latin and other world-music, Jazz, Folk, Bluegrass, Progressive Rock/Fusion, Classical, Alternative-Rock, and many

other forms. Clients include a performance artist and poet from Iceland; several Celtic and rock groups from Spain; the popular music of India; top rock groups from Mexico and New Zealand; progressive rock and fusion artists from North America, France, Switzerland, Sweden and Portugal; Latin-Jazz, Merengue and Salsa from the U.S., Cuba, and Puerto Rico; Samba/pop from Brazil; tango and pop music from Argentina and Colombia, classical/pop from China, and a Moroccan group called *Mo'Rockin'*.

Bob mastered *Olga Viva, Viva Olga*, by the charismatic Olga Tañon, which received the **Grammy** for Best Merengue Album, 2000. *Portraits of Cuba*, by virtuoso Paquito D'Rivera, received the **Grammy** for Best Latin Jazz Performance, 1996. *The Words of Gandhi*, by Ben Kingsley, with music by Ravi Shankar, received the **Grammy** for Best spoken word, 1984. In 2001 and 2002, the Parents' Choice Foundation bestowed its highest honor twice on albums Bob mastered, giving the **Gold Award** to children's CDs, *Ants In My Pants*, and *Old Mr. Mackle Hackle*, by inventive artist Gunnar Madsen. The Fox Family's album reached #1 on the Bluegrass charts. African drummer Babatunde Olatunji's *Love Drum Talk*, 1997, was Grammy-nominated.

Bob's recordings have received *disc of the month* in *Stereophile* and other magazines numerous times. Reviews include: "best audiophile album ever made" (McCoy Tyner: *New York Reunion* reviewed in *Stereophile*). "If you care about recorded sound as I do, you care about the engineers who get sound recorded right. Especially you appreciate a man like

Bob Katz who captures jazz as it should be caught.” (Bucky Pizzarelli, *My Blue Heaven* reviewed in the San Diego Voice & Viewpoint). “Disc of the month. Performance 10, Sound 10” (David Chesky: *New York Chorinhos*, in *CD Review*). “The best modern-instrument orchestral recording I have heard, and I don’t know of many that really come close.” (Bob’s remastering of Dvorák: Symphony 9, reviewed in *Stereophile*).

Some of the great artists Bob is privileged to have recorded and/or mastered include: Afro-Cuban All Stars, Monty Alexander, Carl Allen, Jay Anderson, Lenny Andrade, Michael Andrew, Lucecita Benitez, Berkshire String Quartet, Gordon Bok, Luis Bonfa, Boys of the Lough, Bill Bruford, Ron Carter, Cyrus Chestnut, George Coleman, Larry Coryell, Eddie Daniels, Los Dan Den, Dave Dobbyn, Paquito D’Rivera, Arturo Delmoni, Garry Dial, Dr. John, Toulouse Engelhardt, Robin Eubanks, George Faber, John Faddis, David Finck, Tommy Flanagan, Foghat, Fox Family, Johnny Frigo, Ian Gillan, Dizzy Gillespie, Whoopi Goldberg, Bill Goodwin, Arlo Guthrie, Steve Hackett, Lionel Hampton, Emmy Lou Harris, Tom Harrell, Hartford Symphony, Jimmy Heath, Vincent Herring, Conrad Herwig, Jon Hicks, Billy Higgins, Milt Hinton, Fred Hirsch, Freddie Hubbard, David Hykes Harmonic Choir, Dick Hyman, Ahmad Jamal, Antonio Carlos Jobim, Clifford Jordan, Sara K., Connie Kay, Kentucky Colonels, Lee Konitz, Peggy Lee, Chuck Loeb, Joe Lovano, Patti Lupone, Gunnar Madsen, Jimmy Madison, Taj Mahal, Sean Malone, Manhattan String Quartet, Herbie Mann, Michael Manring, Marley’s Ghost, Winton Marsalis, Dave McKenna,

Jackie McLean, Jim McNeely, Milladoiro, Mississippi Charles Bevels, Max Morath, Paul Motian, New England Conservatory Ragtime Ensemble, New York Renaissance Band, Gene Parsons, Gram Parsons, Danilo Perez, Itzhak Perlman, Billy Peterson, Ricky Peterson, Bucky Pizzarelli, John Pizzarelli, Chris Potter, Kenny Rankin, Mike Renzi, Rincon Ramblers, Sam Rivers, Red Rodney, Rodrigo Romani, Phil Rosenthal, Mongo Santamaria, Horace Silver, Lew Soloff, George ‘Harmonica’ Smith, Janos Starker, Olga Tañon, Livingston Taylor, Clark Terry, Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Big Band, Steve Turre, Stanley Turrentine, McCoy Tyner, Jay Ungar, U.S. Coast Guard Band, U.S. Marine Band, Amadito Valdez, Kenny Washington, Peter Washington, Doc Watson and Son, Clarence White, Widespread Jazz Orchestra, Robert Pete Williams, Larry Willis, and Phil Woods.

—by Mary Kent (who knows him best)