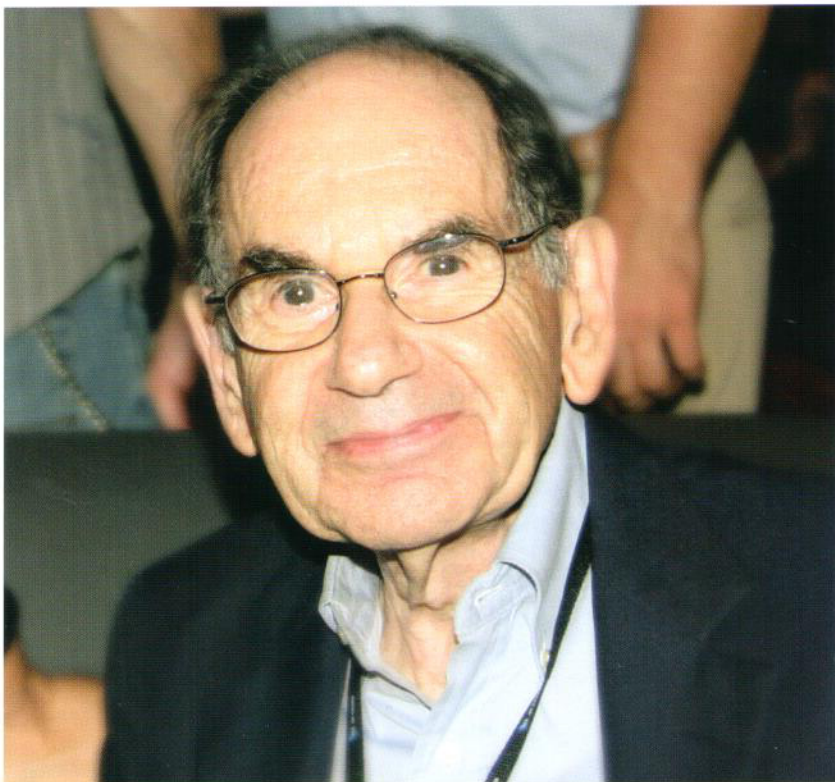# SAUL WALKER

COURTESY OF API

BY TOM ELMHIRST

T IS NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO DISCUSS THE development of audio technology from the late '60s forward without mentioning API and its co-founder Saul Walker. API's history can be traced back to World War II, when Saul worked as an electrical engineer for the United States Navy. During his tenure, Saul worked on projects that made use of early sound design recordings and what would later become transistor technology. Saul went on to develop a series of audio products designed to assist students with hearing difficulties in the classroom.

In 1968, Saul teamed up with neighbor Lou Lindauer to found API. One of Saul's earliest innovations under the API name was the 2520 Discrete Circuit op amp—a revolutionary design that is still used in virtually all of API's products to this day.

Just a year later, Saul invented the groundbreaking 500-Series module. The 500-Series served as the building block for all future API consoles, allowing preamps and equalizers to fit interchangeably into uniform sized slots on the desk. The design became so popular that in the mid-'70s, engineers began to make homemade racks to house their API modules.

API launched their first proprietary 500-Series rack, the "lunchbox", in 1985. In 2006, API's current owner, Larry Droppa, launched an open-source program to standardize the manufacture of 500-Series modules by third-party companies. This initiative cemented Saul's earlier modular vision as a mainstay in modern engineering.

Saul helmed many other major innovations at API, including the 312 mic preamp, 325 line driver, 512 mic preamp, 1604 console, and the 550A equalizer, the latter being one of his most revered designs that is still seen in major studios worldwide. His ingenuity defined API's position as a powerhouse in the industry and his innovations remain the technical backbone of the company to this day.

My first experience with API equipment was at RAK Studios in the late '90s. I recorded and mixed an album in a single weekend with Phil Thornalley producing and was blown away by the 550A EQ in particular, and the console's inherent musicality.

Through his work as a teacher, inventor, and engineer, Saul has helped shape the sound of recordings and broadcasts for more than 60 years. He was awarded a fellowship with the Audio Engineering Society in 1979. In 2011, he received the prestigious AES Silver Medal Award. His plan, to "build the best-sounding audio gear, use superior components, and give the customer the best warranty in the business," remains the mission of API today. Saul was a true visionary whose contributions will continue to influence and inspire generations of audio professionals to come.

Engineer Tom Elmhirst is a 14-time GRAMMY winner who had two nominations this year for his work on the Record Of The Year-nominated recordings "Shallow" by Lady Gaga & Bradley Cooper and "The Joke" by Brandi Carlile.