

IN MEMORIAM
DIANA KRULL (1930–2013)

Diana Krull, professor of phonetics, Stockholm University, has died at the age of 83.

Diana Krull was born in Tallinn, Estonia, in 1930. While attending high school, she fled dramatically with her parents across the Baltic in a small boat.

After nursing her mother for many years, she was able to begin her own studies. She was admitted to the Royal Swedish Academy of Music where she was taught by the renowned piano pedagogue Gottfrid Boon. She also composed her own music under the guidance of modernist composer Karl Birger Blomdahl. Her compositions were performed on Swedish Radio and at Fylkingen, the avant-garde center for experimental music in Stockholm in the 1950s. Her long-standing colleagues remember that, on the day of her formal retirement from the Phonetics Department at Stockholm University, one of her pieces was performed, an étude for the piano – ‘modern’, but still tender and gentle, and reminiscent of Béla Bartók’s *Mikrokosmos*.

In the 1970s, Diana began studying Spanish, German, English, Estonian, general linguistics and phonetics at Stockholm University. At the same time, she earned her living as a language teacher. Her studies also comprised Russian and French (languages that she had become acquainted with as a child) and two additional languages, then new to her, Catalan and Hebrew. During the International Congress of Phonetic Sciences in Barcelona in 2003, Diana’s fluent command of Catalan made a great impression.

Phonetics became Diana’s prime area. In her doctoral dissertation from 1988, she showed that the speech signal, despite its abundance of variation, displays a great deal of regularity and that vowels and consonants influence each other in a systematic and predictable way. She was among the first to use the slope of Locus Equations as an index of degree of coarticulation – a regularity that we, her fans, informally refer to as ‘Diana’s Law’. These results, much noted internationally, represent a valuable contribution to our understanding of human speech acoustics and perception.

It seems natural that a musician such as Diana would be attracted to prosodic phenomena such as the rhythm, quantity and timing of many languages, and that she applied her solid knowledge of acoustic phonetics to these areas. In particular, she published numerous weighty papers on various phonetic aspects of the elaborate quantity system of her native Estonian.

Diana kept up the same pace in her work as long as she lived. To the very last, she shone with happiness and exuberance.

Diana’s intellectual vitality was astonishing. It served her well in her concentrated research work. But as if that were not enough, she was constantly busy solving all kinds of problems, riddles and puzzles. She was a member of the Swedish Mensa Society (and its oldest member at that). And she was an enthusiastic crossword solver. One of the many pleasant aspects of working by her side was a standing invitation to ‘crossword lunch’. Every day, 15 minutes before lunchtime, she printed out the New York Times’ crossword puzzle. Then we went to the Department’s lunchroom to spend the next hour there, joyfully pondering and chatting over clues and possible solutions. It was at these moments that Diana’s impressive general knowledge and quick associations would come into full bloom.

Diana Krull overcame obstacles that would have broken most of us. She was a person of deep integrity and warm sympathy. An irreplaceable colleague and friend whom we miss deeply and who has left so many bright memories.

Björn Lindblom & Olle Engstrand
Stockholm University