



Jean Tinguely's vision of DNA: His mobile Grosse Spirale (Great Spiral) or Doppel-Helix (Double Helix) in the institute courtyard



In Memorium: 1971-1973
The Basel Institute for Immunology
Basel, Switzerland
Wallace L. McKeehan, Member
Kerstin Dahlberg McKeehan
Technician

The Basel Institute for Immunology on the Rhine River in Basel, Switzerland was a precedent-setting, unique and overwhelmingly successful venture in the history of science.

For 30 years the institute was supported with no strings attached by Hoffmann La Roche to carry out basic research related to immunology. By any bean counter's classical scientific benchmarks it was an overwhelming success in producing large numbers of high impact publications, three Nobel prize winners and scores of leaders in science in academia and industry.

More importantly with a precedent-setting low average scientist age of about 35 over its 30 years, the institute experience developed hundreds of individuals at both scientific and social levels who have integrated around the world and passed on those experiences to new generations.

Directed by Dr. Niels Jerne, the institute established a non-hierarchical structure in which every scientist, fresh post-doctoral to experienced professor, was assigned one technician, liberal lab space and unlimited autonomy of budget. Contracts were for 1, 2, 5 and 10 years. The institute was an unprecedented example of how visionary synthesis of science, art and social diversity can unite to transcend national differences, personal ego and short-term personal profit to synthesize something greater than the sum of the parts. In 1973 it was estimated that 17 languages were represented among the staff all united in practice by English and the language of science. The energy, invention and creativity sparked by the union of such youthful international diversity resulted in unique experiences and results. In order to direct resources to short term profitable and less visionary ventures, the institute structure was dissolved into the conventional compensation- and ego-driven structures that dominate today's science industry. History will prove that the institute structure was a successful proof of concept venture far ahead of its time in the history of science.



In 1970 there were scientific members, a new building on the Rhine, unlimited support and no technical staff. Member Göran Möeller convinced all that Sweden had an unsurpassed pool of highly trained, adventurous, sophisticated and beautiful technicians that could do the job. Here are four of the originals that are in agreement. Skoal!



The first Christmas the Swedish imports together with a smaller Swedish male contingent, Jan Andersson and Olle Sjöberg, made the celebration of Santa Lucia an institute tradition. *Left to right:* Inge Sundkvist, Lena Hägg, Kerstin Andersson, Kerstin Dahlberg, Aina Rydén, Lena Hägg, Monica Gidlund, Anita Söderberg, Ulla Vianden, I.S.

The paucity of Swedish males was swiftly remedied by recruitment of an Aussie, Japanese, Italian and other multi-national starboys.



Left to right: Ulla Vianden, Jan Andersson, Olle Sjöberg, Graham Mitchell, Takeshi Matsunaga, Tommy Meo and Stanley Read.



By 1972 there were over 20 nationalities represented and at least 15 languages. One of them was a Texan (W.L. McKeehan) whose English accent stood out, but not at the BII among all those strange accents of English (especially British friends here--David Dresser and Jennifer Lowe). At the '71 Fasnacht most thought the native Texas wear was a costume (note the confetti on the jacket), Every Crew that passed used up all their raw chicken feet trying to knock the hat off.



BIER PARTY

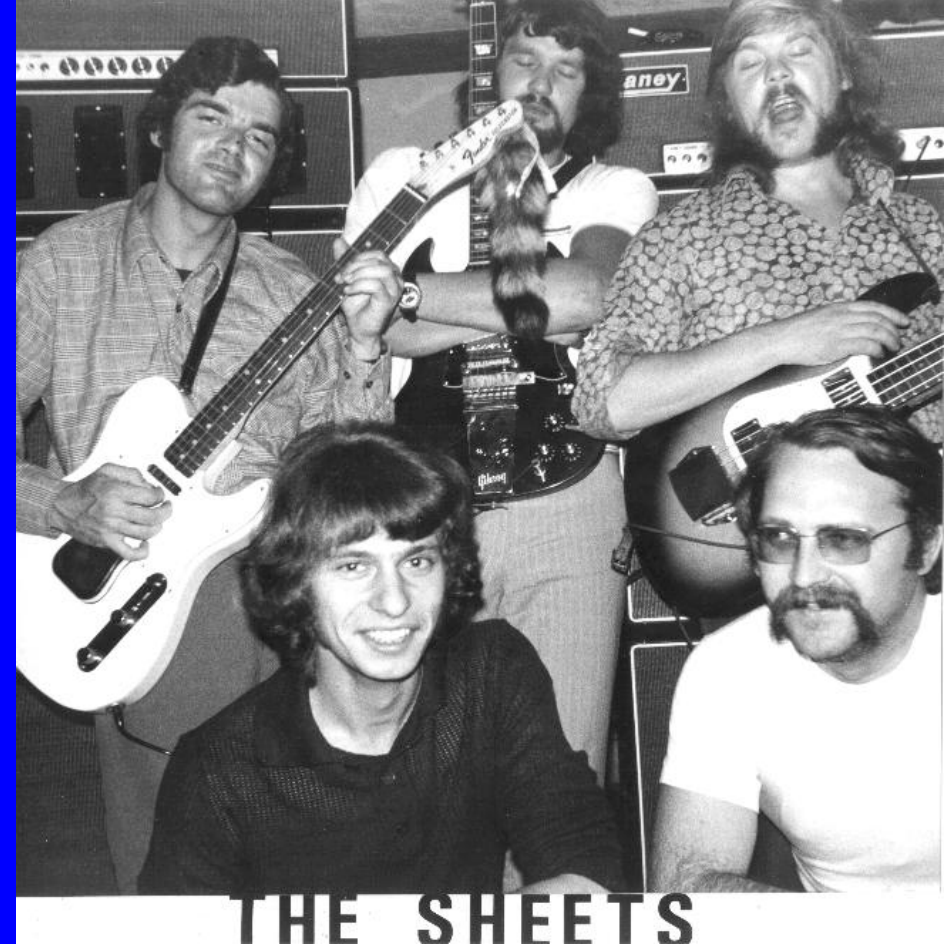
A '72 poster to publicize the frequent BII beer parties illustrated the pre-computer age creativity and photo-montage skills of the AV staff. The poster maintained McKeehan's presence in the BII long after his departure in '73. For years, meeting a BII alumni anywhere worldwide, the conversation went:

"You're from Texas, you were at BII." "Yes, '71-73." "Ohhh, you're the guy on the beer party poster." This was before strict enforcement of intellectual property rights. 1% royalty payments for the unauthorized use would provide a lifetime supply of Warteck and Feldschlössen.

The Sheets

Sänger : Wally Mc. Keehan
Bass : Max Jberg
Solo : Emil Metthez
Begleit : Fre dy Strassmann
Schlagzeug : Danny Herbst

Manager : Meyer Helmut
Postfach Nr.130
4310 Rheinfelden Tel. Gesch. (061)343850



The first performing group that arose from BII talent was a rock group known as The Sheets.

BII shop machinist Daniel Herbst (lower left) heard Wally McKeehan (lower right) singing while he and Tonegawa were isolating mRNA's (9S hemoglobin from reticulocytes and Ig from myeloma). Wally sang English lyrics, none of the group spoke English, so the Texan was forced to speak German. The Basel Deutch-speaking band members tolerated high German, but only from a band member with a Texas accent!

Freitag, 10. Dezember 1971

Beat - Abend

Restaurant Quelle Rheinfelden

Beginn: 20.30—24.00 Uhr

The Sheets

mit Sänger Wally aus USA

Eintritt: Fr. 5.--

Coca-Cola

**Concert Poster
From a Rheinfelden
Restaurant Gig**



The Sheets performed publicly from Rheinfelden to Zurich, but BII personnel were the band's most dedicated and loyal fans. The group made Basel history in '71 when it played in a mass in one of the most well known Catholic churches in Basel. With a row of kneeling, praying nuns on the front row, the rowdy group played "Put your hand in the hand of the man". An unusually progressive assistant priest convinced the diocese to allow us to practice our loud and rowdy music in the recreation room of the church which became a church-sponsored alternative to the streets with free entertainment for area youths.



While Sanger Wally was on break, those wild rock and rollers dancing to a Sheets instrumental are BII's Zoltan Tokes and spouse at front left, Theo Staehelin in brown and Bela Takacs (back of head at top.



Lunch breaks on the Rhine. *Top: Unidentified, Inga Birgén, Inge Sundkvist; Middle: Unidentified, Kerstin Dahlberg; Bottom: Anita Söderberg*



Lunch at the
Roche Canteen

Inge Sundkvist
W.L. McKeehan
Lena Hägg
Pat Young



1971 Flower Children of the BII, The Miescher and Biozentrum

Three major basic research ventures were initiated in Basel in the early '70's which were staffed to a large degree with young researchers and support staff with limitless energy with unprecedented freedom to plot new directions. The staff of all three institutions when not in the labs were almost constantly together in nearby pubs and restaurants, fields and ski slopes comparing notes on life, the arts and science.



Aussie Stephen Fazekas St. Groth had trouble cannulating sheep, but he was an expert at carving bratwurst, cheese and Hungarian delicacies in this institute outing. Unidentified lower left and E. Kellenberger?, upper left.



From time to time future Nobel Prize Winners also found time to take off and join us in the fields (Susuma Tonegawa).



Theo Staehelin
Ingegerd Sundkvist



BII Christmas
English Tech Susan Davies
Rear L-R: *Unidentified*, W.L. McKeehan
John Hamilton, Jack Kettman.



**Ivan Lefkovits, Louis Du Pasquier,
Niels Jerne, Helmut Pohlit**



??, Max Schreier, ??, Andrew Kelus, ??



Inga Birgén, Bela Takács



Frau Degen & Assistants



**Kerstin Hild, Theo Staehelin
Inga Birgén, "Fraulein" Ingrid Schnurr,
"Madame" Gisèle Bron
(sitting Hansruedi Kiefer)**



Tommy Meo?, Francis Loor



Typical BII Late Night Session

Rear: Ron Citronbaum, W.L. McKeehan, Lane Smith (Biozentrum)

Front: ??, Mel Slaughter, Pauline Moorhouse, Hansruedi Kiefer



Fortunate for the flatlanders who did a stint at the BII, the native staff members were expert and willing ski instructors. At left top, McKeehan, Swedish tech Aina Rydén and shop machinist/ski instructor, Danny Herbst. Above tech Reto Jaeggi, tech Kerstin Dahlberg, W. McKeehan and tech Pierre Lix. Left: Acrobatics beneath the Matterhorn, Herbst under McKeehan.



Surrounded by some of the best skiing in the world BII staff utilized every spare moment away from the labs to hit the slopes whether they knew how to ski or not. Trips on the train or bus to the slopes were as much fun as them. Left, Ron Citronbaum and Wally McKeehan. Right. Englander Penny Hamilton and Scottish Highlanders, Pat and Hazel Young.



Miescher Institute member, Norman Iscove checks the Davos ski patrol as they bundles up Swedish tech Monica Gidlund, tech Aina Rydén at left. No break, but a bad cut that took stitches causing Monica to miss the evening party.



In '71-73, Europe was separated by the Iron Curtain including East and West Germany. The BII was scientific home for several who earlier escaped Nazi oppression and later Bolshevik tanks. Tech Anita Soderberg teaches then East German scientist, Frieder Grummt, how to sew on a button. The Swiss BII was neutral ground on which colleagues behind the Iron Curtain could get permission to visit, but only one family member at a time.



The 1972 Federation of European Biochemical Societies in Varna, Bulgaria. We met colleagues who were spouses, Drs. Frieder and Ingrid Grummt, together for the first time as well as others living and working behind the Curtain . Under strict supervision, we met mainland Chinese colleagues, all in gray Mao jackets, for the first time. (Left BII member Max Schreier)

First Created: ca. 2002 after the closing of the institute by LaRoche.

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W.L. McKeehan is a Texas A&M University Regents & Distinguished Professor Emeritus: <http://ibt.tamhsc.edu/faculty/mckeehan-bio.html>

Kerstin McKeehan is a retired Texas A&M University Lab Manager.

Both are farming and ranching on the South Texas Gulf coast.