In Memoriam Stanislav Štefl

Dietrich Baade[1]

[1] ESO

On 11 June 2014, ALMA and ESO astronomer Stanislav (Stan) Štefl died in a car accident in Santiago. He was 58 years old.

Stan was born in Počátky (Czechoslovakia) and received his PhD from the Charles University in Prague in 1987. He then held a staff position at the Ondřejov Observatory. From 1991 to 1993, Stan worked at ESO Headquarters as a research associate and, from 2004 until 2012, he was a Very Large Telescope Interferometer (VLTI) support astronomer at Paranal Observatory. For the past year and a half, Stan had been on secondment to the Atacama Large Millimeter/submillimeter Array (ALMA), working in Santiago and at Chajnantor.

Stan's premier fields of research were the formation and evolution of rapidly rotating B-type stars that eject matter into a circumstellar disc. He was the first to notice and demonstrate that during the outbursts of Be stars their pulsational power spectrum changes. Stan initiated the integration of dynamic models of Be star discs with detailed radiative transfer calculations. He was chair of the International Astronomical Union Working Group on Active B Stars from 1999 to 2003. Throughout his career Stan kept expanding his observational expertise in an impressive way: from the ultraviolet work of his thesis to radio wavelengths, from photometry to spectro-interferometry, from photographic plates via electronic imagers to radio receivers.

Olivier Thizy

His modesty and fine Czech humour were Stan's personal trademarks. In the same unpretentious way, he served the ESO community as VLTI and ALMA support astronomer and on the organising committees of two ESO workshops and on many internal committees.

Stan was a passionate and skilled mountaineer: he climbed Aconcagua (but had to halt 200 metres below the summit on account of bad weather), Chimborazo, Kilimanjaro, and many more mountains in Chile and around the world. A few months ago, he also undertook a sailing expedition with friends to Antarctica.

Stan will be remembered as a hard-working and very cooperative colleague, as a passionate scientist, and as a man of rare human qualities. He, his wife Magdalena and their daughter Marketa were about to move to Ondřejov, where Stan was to lead the ALMA Regional Centre node, when his life ended so abruptly. Our thoughts are with them.

Fellows at ESO

Neale Gibson

It was quite late into my undergraduate degree that I considered pursuing astronomy as a career. As a child I remember staring at pictures in astronomy books, in particular being fascinated by the gas giants in the Solar System. Whilst astronomy may have inspired my interest in science, it was many years before I realised it was something you could actually do for a living!

I grew up in Carryduff, a small town near Belfast in the north of Ireland. Throughout

Neale Gibson

school, maths, science and art were my favourite subjects, but by the time I had to apply for university courses I hadn't settled on anything. All I knew was that I wanted to do something science related, and I ended up choosing a physics degree at the Queen's University of Belfast which allowed me to delay any serious career decisions to later in life. For the next few years I really enjoyed studying physics, but still had no idea what to do afterwards, other than something science related. In my final year of undergrad, I had the opportunity to specialise in astrophysics and undertook a project studying supernovae. It was only then that I realised that a career in astrophysics research was a realistic possibility, and doing a PhD in astronomy at Queen's was the perfect way to explore this and again avoid making any serious career decisions!

I began my PhD in the (then) small exoplanet group at Queen's working with Don Pollacco, trying to search for and characterise exoplanets using high precision transit light curves. This was an exciting field to be in – at this time (2006) there were only a handful of known transiting planets, none of them like anything in our Solar System. During my PhD I got my first taste of observing, spending two months living on the Canary Islands to be near the Roque de los Muchachos Observatory. We also built an instrument specifically for my project called RISE (Rapid Imager to Search for Exoplanets) on the Liverpool Telescope, giving me lots of valuable experience with observations and instrumentation. It was during these years that I decided that I wanted to continue in astronomy; making a living by learning new things and thinking about the Universe was just too good to be true.

My next step was taking a postdoc with Suzanne Aigrain and Frederic Pont, starting in Exeter and soon moving to Oxford. It was there that I started working on observations of exoplanet atmospheres, and three years later I was delighted to be accepted onto the ESO Fellowship programme in Garching. Aside from providing an exciting research environment, ESO Fellows get the opportunity to participate in observatory operations. I have joined the User Support Department at ESO where I support FORS2 (one of the older VLT instruments), and will also support SPHERE (the next generation exoplanet imager) in the near future.

Now about half way through my ESO Fellowship I continue to worry about how we can observe exoplanet atmospheres. Whilst exoplanets are relatively nearby compared to most objects of astrophysical research (although I have been called a cosmologist by Solar System folks), they are extremely difficult to study due to their faintness and the inconvenient fact that they're located right next to their very bright and noisy host stars. Development of observational and data analysis techniques has so far enabled us to peer at the atmospheres of hot Jupiters (gas giants orbiting their host stars much closer than Mercury orbits our Sun) although this remains challenging. With the next generation of ground- and space-based instrumentation like the James Webb Space Telescope and ESO's E-ELT we might just be able to peer into the atmospheres of terrestrial planets and even search for life beyond the Solar System. I have no idea where I will be after my ESO Fellowship, but I hope to play a part in this search.

Claudia Lagos

I started to think about astronomy as a real possibility for my career option when I was 16 years old. Before that it always seemed a bit of a dream, a fantasy. It was only when I was 16 that making life-long choices became reality. I always liked to think about space, about its scales, its geometry, its evolution. I think I was always a bit of a theorist though... My first approaches to astronomy were through cosmology books, where closed and open spaces were described, where they talked about the "seven samurai" and the Great Attractor. I always liked abstract thinking in that sense.

When the time came to make an actual decision about my university career I was seriously undecided between astronomy and philosophy; those were two areas that I felt really passionate about. Before that, I thought of doing engineering, since it's a more standard choice of career in Chile. What put me off that road was the comment of my literature teacher back then: "anyone can be an engineer but not everyone can be an astronomer... For astronomy you really need an abstract mind". So I decided to take up that challenge (although his statement was incorrect... engineering is as difficult!).

I may not be like many of the astronomers who write about themselves here, as I have to confess that I never liked staying up during all the night observing, nor suffering the cold (Oh yes! It really was cold in Santa Martina, the Observatory of Universidad Catolica in Chile). I enjoyed all my courses on astrophysics and other theoretical physics courses much more: general astrophysics, stellar and extragalactic astrophysics, mathematical methods in physics, etc... It was during my Bachelor degree that I started working on galaxy formation and simulations.

Both my Masters degree and my PhD were focussed on galaxy formation physics, albeit on very different aspects.

Claudia Lagos

The former was on active galactic nuclei, accretion onto black holes and spin development; while my PhD was focused on star formation, the interstellar medium and feedback from stars. All of these are challenging and very interesting topics. I really enjoy working in such a wide field as galaxy formation, where a large range of expertise is required.

I think I did a good job at convincing the Fellow selection committee in 2011 that a theorist at ESO was not oil on water, but instead a rather natural mixture. I joined ESO in October 2012 and I have greatly enjoyed my time here, where I'm intensively learning about observational astronomy. I perform my duties on ALMA, where I have discovered a passion for observing. I act as astronomer on duty, and I have also been involved in the ALMA Helpdesk and the creation of scheduling blocks. The ALMA Regional Centre at ESO have been great and patient at explaining to an inexperienced modeller how to do certain tasks and how ALMA works. I have another year left at ESO and I hope I can squeeze something out of every second of it and continue enjoying its great environment.

Personnel Movements

Arrivals (1 April–30 June 2014)

Europe	
Álvarez Méndez, Domingo (ES)	Detector Engineer
Arumugam, Vinodiran (MY)	Fellow
Gotschewski, Katrin (DE)	Administrative Assistant
Huber, Stefan (DE)	Integration Opto-mechanical Technician
Ivison, Robert Julian (GB)	Director for Science
Karabal, Muhammet Emin (TR)	Student
Steins, Steffi (DE)	HR Advisor

Chile	
Capocci, Robin (FR)	Safety Officer
Sanhueza, Sebastian (CL)	Mechanical Engineer
Tristram, Konrad (DE)	Operation Staff Astronomer
Zins, Gérard (FR)	Instrument Software Engineer

Departures (1 April–30 June 2014)

Europe	
Guieu, Sylvain (FR)	Fellow
Karban, Robert (AT)	Software Engineer

Chile	
Andersson Lundgren, Andreas (SE)	Deputy Program Manager
Aravena, Manuel (CL)	Fellow
Gitton, Philippe (FR)	System Engineer
Jager, Henderikus (NL)	System Integration Manager
Morel, Sébastien (FR)	System Engineer
Vuckovic, Maja (RS)	Fellow