

In memory of Vladimir Borisovich Braginsky



(August 31, 1931 – March 29, 2016)

Vladimir Borisovich Braginsky was one of the great experimental physicists of the second half of the twentieth century, and also a great theorist. His insights into quantum noises in macroscopic systems and how to control them, dating way back to 1968 and continuing into the 2000s, are having a profound impact on optical science and technology, nano science and technology, and gravitational wave science. His insights into the origin and control of dissipation in mechanical systems were profound, and have been crucial to bringing macroscopic systems such as LIGO into the domain where quantum noise is manifest. For two decades he was the “conscience” of LIGO, identifying and characterizing a number of unexpected noise sources whose understanding was crucial to LIGO’s ultimate discovery, last September, of gravitational waves arriving at Earth from the distant universe.

Vladimir Borisovich had a larger impact on me, scientifically, than any other experimental physicist I have known, and also a huge impact on me personally. My understanding and intuition about experimental physics came largely from conversations and collaborations with him - and turned out to be crucial for my own contributions to LIGO, and my own mentoring of students. My opportunities and ability to help maintain science ties between Russia and the West during the cold war were due largely to my friendship with him. He was my friend in the deepest sense of that word. His death is a terrible loss for me, personally, and for science broadly.

Kip S. Thorne

California Institute of Technology

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