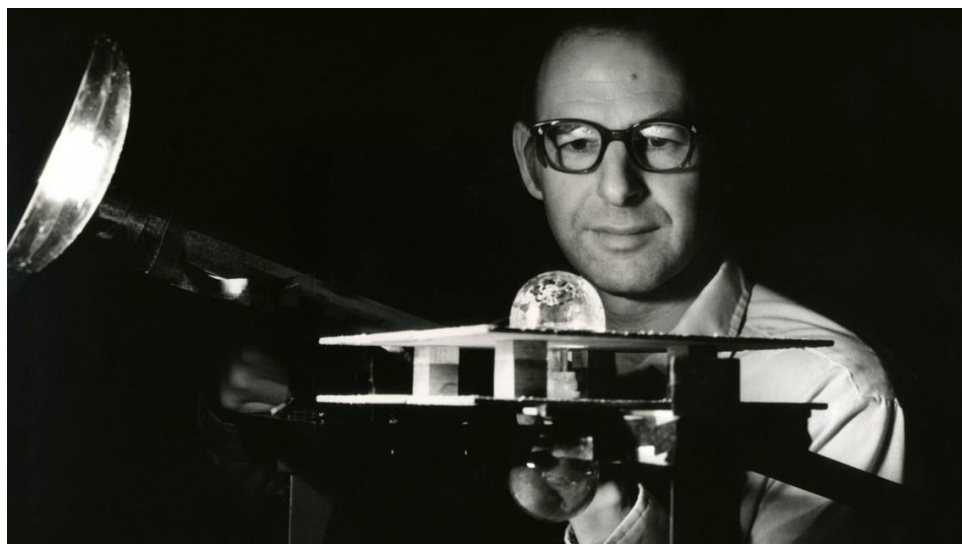


David A. Usher (1936–2017)



Born in England on 1 November, 1936, David Usher moved with his family to New Zealand in 1948 and attended Wellesley College in 1949, catching a bus to Days Bay from Wellington before his family moved to Eastbourne.

David remembered teacher Mr Hoppy Stevens was immensely supportive of his interest in chemistry, giving him an alcohol-fueled burner for his home laboratory and creating classroom explosions by igniting a mixture of oxygen and hydrogen. David was also grateful to Margaret Barns, who gave him a life-long love of tennis.

David studied at Wanganui Collegiate before going on to gain a Master's degree in science at Victoria University of Wellington in 1960, followed by a PhD from Cambridge University. His postdoctoral research was conducted at Harvard University, and he joined the Department of Chemistry at Cornell in 1965.

David taught chemistry and chemical biology until his retirement in 2016, and combined his knowledge of chemistry, biology and astronomy to focus on studying the origin of life. He served on advisory committees for NASA and the Space Science Board of the National Academy of Sciences and co-chaired a task force to set goals for future space science research.

Music was David's other vocation. He performed as a tenor lead in 13 Gilbert and Sullivan shows put on by the Cornell Savoyards, and is fondly remembered for the way he serenaded his students – usually with songs related to science.

'I'm sorry if you find this a little lugubrious,' he said to chemistry students after one thermochemistry lecture, and then launched into Tom Lehrer's song about the atomic bomb called 'We'll All Go Together When We Go'.

At the age of 60, David started playing tennis tournaments at a senior level. He continued to play until two months before his death. He leaves behind his wife, Barbara, their two children Elizabeth and Michael, and two from a former marriage, Jonathan and Cathryn.