

# IN RICORDO DI

## Emilio Picasso (1927-2014)



Emilio Picasso passed away on Sunday 12 October 2014 after a long illness. Having been one of the most prominent Italian physicists and staff members of CERN, he contributed to the incredible success of this organisation over 50 years.

Born in Genoa on 9 July 1927 he studied at first mathematics but changed later to physics. After his PHD promotion he became assistant professor at the University of Genoa and started some research in atomic physics before changing to particle physics.

He acquired his first experience with particle accelerators at the Betatron in Turin and at the electron synchrotron at Frascati. In 1961/62 he went to Bristol where he joined the group of Cecil Powell who had become famous and received eventually the Nobel Prize for investigating the cosmic radiation with balloons. There Emilio met Francis Farley who explained to him that he intended to measure at CERN the magnetic moment of the muon particle. After some drinks they became friends and Emilio decided to join Farley at the CERN experiment.

The measurement of the anomalous magnetic moment (the deviation of its true value from the theoretically expected one, called the  $g-2$  experiment) delivers an extremely important value to test fundamental theories. Emilio was attracted by this experiment since it corresponded to two different aspects of his thinking. He was fascinated by fundamental questions and, on the other hand, the experiment required new

magnet technologies.

From 1963 on he commuted between Genoa and CERN and in 1964 he became a research associate to work on the “ $g-2$ ” experiments, which he was to lead when he became a CERN staff member in 1966. The measurements went on for 15 years at two successive storage rings, achieved an incredible accuracy of 5 ppm and became famous for their precision tests of quantum electrodynamics. A short period with studies of detectors for gravitational waves followed, but was interrupted by a completely new challenge.

In 1981 I had succeeded to get the LEP project approved by the CERN Council, alas under very difficult conditions, *i.e.* a constant and reduced budget, and human resources had to be found among the technical and scientific personnel of the newly unified CERN I and CERN II laboratories. Under such condition it was not easy to find the right person to be responsible for such a project. Several excellent accelerator experts were available at CERN and it would have been obvious to appoint one of them as project leader. However, since it became necessary to reassign about a third of the total CERN staff to new tasks I considered the human problems as dominant and I appointed Emilio Picasso as project leader for LEP. He was respected by the scientists as well as the engineers and he had sufficient technical experience. But above all his human qualities were essential. He was prepared to listen to people, his moderating temper, his honesty and reliability and, last but not least,

his Mediterranean warmth were indispensable for the successful construction and operation of the largest accelerator of those times. His name will always remain closely linked with the unique Large Electron-Positron (LEP) collider of CERN, a true testament to Emilio's skills as a scientist and as a project leader.

After his retirement I visited him often in a small office in the theory division where he had returned to studying fundamental physics questions. But he also took up other charges, for example becoming from 1991 to 1995 the director of the Scuola Normale Superiore at Pisa, where he had been nominated professor in 1981.

He had been an active Member of the Italian Physical Society (SIF) since the beginning of his scientific career, and in 2003 he was assigned the title of Meritorious Member for his contributions to physics and to SIF.

He received many distinctions among which the title of Cavaliere di Gran Croce dell'Ordine al Merito della Repubblica, one of the highest orders of the Italian state.

In spite of the heavy demands of his job he always cared about his family and in return his wife Mariella gave him caring support in times of crisis.

It is very regretful that he could not live long enough to enjoy the great recent success of CERN. Science has lost a great physicist and many of us a dear friend.

Herwig Schopper  
CERN Director-General 1981-88