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Cardiac electrophysiology: Past, present and future

Part I

Introductory remarks

It was not an easy task to find a suitable way to celebrate Silvio Weidmann's 65th birthday and his retirement as head of the Institute of Physiology in Berne and from his academic duties. However, since Silvio Weidmann was one of the pioneers in the art of applying microelectrodes to heart cells, it seemed appropriate to bring together his friends and collaborators both past and present for a symposium on cardiac electrophysiology in Bern.

From its humble beginnings some 37 years ago, when the first Purkinje fiber action potential was recorded by Draper and Weidmann, cardiac electrophysiology has since spread to some 200 laboratories throughout the world. Despite the now large size of the family of cardiac electrophysiologists, a great number of them have spent some time, ranging from a few hours to years, in Silvio Weidmann's laboratory in Bern. It is the desire of the contributors to this symposium, which took place from September 10–11 1986 in Bern, to express their gratitude and admiration to Silvio Weidmann not only as a person, but also as an outstanding scientist. We would also like to extend our thanks to the editors of Experientia, who made this tribute possible.

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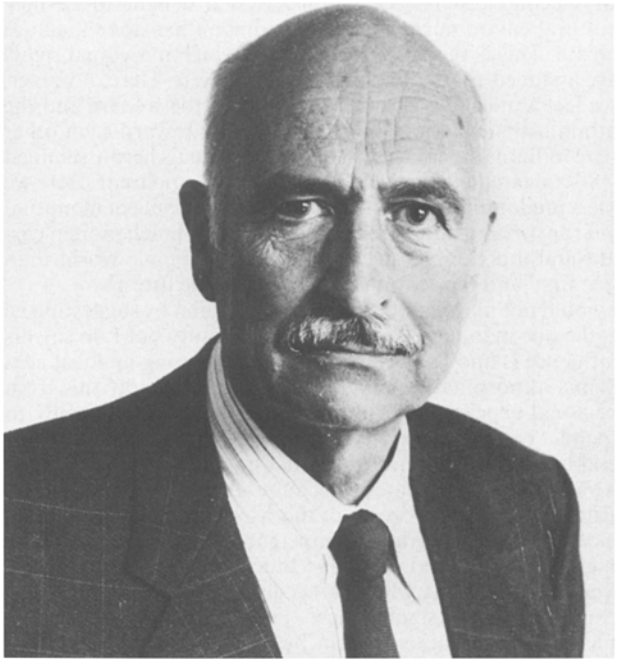

A statement of appreciation and presentation of a perspective honoring Silvio Weidmann

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I much appreciate this opportunity to acknowledge both a personal and a scientific debt to Silvio Weidmann. In doing so I wish to present a perspective, a concept of the significance of this meeting and why he should be honored. I shall attempt to do so by three statements.

First, only a few here have personally seen the full scope of scientific events of this century. There has been a rebirth of the age of humors: now we know the heart as well as other tissues produces them. In this century endocrinology attained its maturity. Neuroendocrinology was born and is no longer in its infancy. The cytologists of the early decades became geneticists and we have now the awesome and somewhat frightening potentials of genetic and bioengineering. The concept of the synapse developed and the battle between those believing in humoral transmitters and those adhering to electrical transmission of excitation and inhibition across tissue junctions was fought and lost by the electrophysiologists. All this and more has occurred in the fields of physiology. What has happened in cardiology?

During the early decades of this century cardiology was in the doldrums – at least intellectually. To be sure electrocardiology developed, cardiac catheterization was introduced, the pacemaker was invented and has come into common use as has coronary bypass. Cardiac transplants have been successful. I do not denegate these extremely important developments nor do I say they were not products of the intellect.