

Prelog Lecture 2000

Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich
Laboratorium für Organische Chemie

Abstract: On Monday, November 13, 2000, the rector, Prof. Dr. K. Osterwalder, presented the Prelog Medal 2000 to **Prof. Drs. h.c. Helmut Schwarz**, Technische Universität Berlin, Institut für Organische Chemie. The title of the lecture that followed was 'Elementarschritte metallvermittelter Bindungsaktivierungen'.

Keywords: Bond activation · Mass spectrometry · Prelog medal · Reactive intermediates · Schwarz, Helmut

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Konrad Osterwalder (left) and Helmut Schwarz.

Prof. Drs. h.c. Helmut Schwarz was born in 1943. He studied chemistry at the TU Berlin, where he received his diploma in 1971, and one year later, his doctorate. Habilitation followed in 1974. He moved up the academic ladder within the TU Berlin, becoming ord. Professor of Organic Chemistry in 1983. Already in his dissertation, Prof. Schwarz performed pioneering work on the application of mass spectrometry to problems in organic chemistry. Among his associations from his formative years, a stay at Churchill College, Cambridge was of particular significance. It was there that he first developed the distinguishing characteristic that marks his work up to today. Mass spectrometry for Prof. Schwarz was always much more than an analytical tool for structure elucidation; he used mass spectrometry to study basic issues of structure and reactivity in well-chosen model systems of broad applicability. With this orientation, he has addressed a wide audience. Although sophisticated technology and instrumentation are critical to the success, or even the feasibility, of his experiments, the chemistry has always been center stage. Several research areas have evolved from his

early work on molecular rearrangements and fragmentations in organic cations.

Reactive intermediates have been of consistent interest in the Schwarz group. Prof. Schwarz is an early pioneer in a variety of mass spectrometric methods for their investigation. Two, in particular, deserve special mention because these methods demonstrate a depth of sophistication in the combination of organic chemistry and advanced instrumentation. Uncharged reactive intermediates, *e.g.* radicals, are normally inaccessible to mass spectrometric methods. However, a prosthetic charge at a site remote from the radical center allows these 'distonic radical ions' to be manipulated in a mass spectrometer. Although it is the charge that renders the molecule tractable, it is the odd electron that confers the characteristic reactivity. Prof. Schwarz was among the first to explore the chemistry of these species. A second methodology for the investigation of uncharged reactive intermediates is Neutralization-Reionization Mass Spectrometry (NRMS), a technique in which Prof. Schwarz can rightly claim to be an early innovator and also the most prolific user.

The existence and properties of elusive transients, such as water oxide ($\text{H}_2\text{O}-\text{O}$), highly reactive cumulenes ($\text{X}=[\text{C}=\text{C}_n=\text{Y}]$, $n=1-4$, $\text{X},\text{Y}=\text{O},\text{S}$), as well as neutral $\text{He}@\text{C}_{60}$, can be obtained from these experiments. These studies provide benchmarks for computational studies, many of which were also done in the Schwarz group; they also provide direct evidence for proposed chemistry in fields as diverse as astrophysics and materials science.

Prof. Schwarz has also made seminal contributions to the study of the gas-phase chemistry of transition metal-con-

taining ions. These small ions are often models for catalytic processes in the condensed phase. From remote functionalization studies, *i.e.* C–X and C–H activation, to the demonstration of genuine turnover of a catalyst ion trapped in an ICR, the work shows a deep appreciation of the versatility and ubiquity of metal-organic compounds. Of special note is the relation of the experimental studies to new theoretical constructs for the intuitive understanding of reactivity. While the application of computational methods to chemical problems has become widespread in recent years, it is rare that new intuitive models of general applicability that rationalize and predict the major trends in reactivity come to light. In the course of his studies on the reactivity of small ions such as FeO^+ , Prof. Schwarz has formulated, in collaboration with Prof. S. Shaik, the concept of Two-State Reactivity, which, despite its origins in the study of diatomic ions in the gas-phase, rationalizes gross trends in the chemistry of cytochrome P-450.

New areas of investigation include the exploration of relativistic effects in chemical reactivity. For AuF^+ or PtCH_2^+ , Prof. Schwarz has shown that relativistic effects can account for nearly half of the bond energy. The careful experimental work on relativistic effects should provide a touchstone for theory in this area, which is still in an early stage of development.

The outstanding level of innovation and broad range of topics is matched by Prof. Schwarz' remarkable productivity. Between 1972 and 2000 Prof. Schwarz has been author or coauthor on nearly 750 publications in peer-reviewed journals. His contributions have been recognized with several honorary doctorates – the most recent from the Israel Institute

