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01

02/2016 • May/June/July 2016

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EMT



A cave is a marvel in many ways, including acoustical ones. You can also use your ears to gain a feel for the size and the very nature of the place... →



→ ...Geoff Martin has surrounded himself in the acoustical chaos of this cave. The musician and acoustics specialist is the "Tonmeister" at Bang & Olufsen, the expert who calls the shots about B&O's sound design. His latest masterstroke: the gigantic high-tech project BeoLab 90.



Cai Brockmann

DEAR READERS,

Up to now, the hi-fi magazine considered to be world's finest—and not just by us—has been the sole province of people versed in German. It is an unfortunate state of affairs that we are happy to bring to an end today. Welcome to FIDELITY international, the publication for English speakers who happen to be anywhere in the world, be it Asia, Australia or the United States, and who may be jetting across the skies, relaxing at around a premium hotel and settling into their favorite couch at home.

We have designed FIDELITY international particularly with tablet PCs in mind, tailored exactly for hi-fi fans and music lovers around the entire world. And, of course, in the air. We have gone out of our way to answer the demand for a user friendly, high-quality "i-Medium" written in the global language of English. We have come up with an eye-catching design for tablets and introduced ideas that respond to today's reading, swiping and touch needs. If you like, we can even have FIDELITY international do a song and dance for you. Great prospects for the future! There are more than a few reasons for us to crack open the champagne right now: FIDELITY's widely read

print edition in German has entered its fifth year. The FIDELITY team will be an exhibitor for the fifth time at HIGH END, the leading international audio show, in Munich, and our website has developed a huge following of visitors. But, above all, we want to raise our glasses to the debut of FIDELITY international. We are really happy that you could join us and hope you enjoy exploring our premier edition.

Esoteric, Diapason, AudioQuest, Dynaudio, Chord Electronics, Live Act Audio and Acoustic System—we have put together a dazzling kaleidoscope of the world's most exciting, interesting and best-sounding hi-fi specialists for you. Products that every hi-fi and music lover with a good set of ears just shouldn't miss. But you can read and hear for yourself...

FIDELITY international—The German Voice of Premium Audio.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cai Brockmann". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.

Armonia

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O. Sturm



Armonia
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Armonia

Ein gelungener Technologietransfer.

Die Lautsprecher und Interconnectkabel dieser Neuentwicklung profitieren von den Konstruktionsmerkmalen und hiermit erzielten klanglichen Eigenschaften unserer Top-Serie Gran Finale Jubilee.

Minimalste Verluste und höchste Einstreufestigkeit offenbaren klangliche Details und eine Dynamik die in dieser Preisklasse ihresgleichen suchen.

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Object Names: Hubble Captures View of „Mystic Mountain“ Credit: NASA, ESA, and M. Livio and the Hubble 20th Anniversary Team (STScI)

CONTENT № 01

02/2016
May/June/July

Equipment

- 009 Loudspeakers
Diapason Dynamis
- 022 Acoustic Tuning
Acoustic System Resonators
- 029 DAC/Headphone Amplifier
Chord Electronics Mojo
- 034 Loudspeakers
Live Act Audio LAS 312
- 044 Pre-/Power Amplifier
Esoteric Grandioso C1/Grandioso S1
- 074 Loudspeakers
Dynaudio Emit M10



Standards

- 003 Fanfare
- 005 Editorial
- 019 Browser № 01
- 056 Browser № 02
- 078 Finale
- 080 Preview
- 082 Imprint

Please note: All items are listed with German retail prices (including sales tax) at the time of equipment evaluation.

CONTENT № 01



Stories

066 Report
Who Is Who: AudioQuest and William E. Low

Music

060 Album Copycats
Michael Jackson vs. "Weird Al" Yankovic

062 The Earworm
Manfred Mann turned 75

065 The Hidden Treasures of Jazz
Miles Davis: Bags' Groove



Reviews in this Issue

029 Chord Electronics
Mojo

009 Diapason
Dynamis

074 Dynaudio
Emit M10

044 Esoteric
Grandioso C1

044 Esoteric
Grandioso S1

034 Live Act Audio
LAS 312

Please note: All items are listed with German retail prices (including sales tax) at the time of equipment evaluation.

Diapason Dynamis

THE SILENT TEARS OF A MASTER CAR- PENTER

By Cai Brockmann. Photos: Ingo Schulz



When I hear the name Diapason I automatically think of the beautiful walnut cabinets' compact two-way speakers and four-figure price tags. But not any longer! ▶

Fourteen sides: optimum
distribution of resonance
in the manner of the best
musical instruments

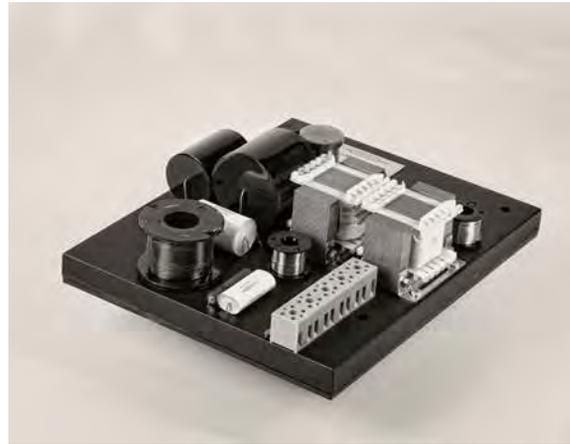
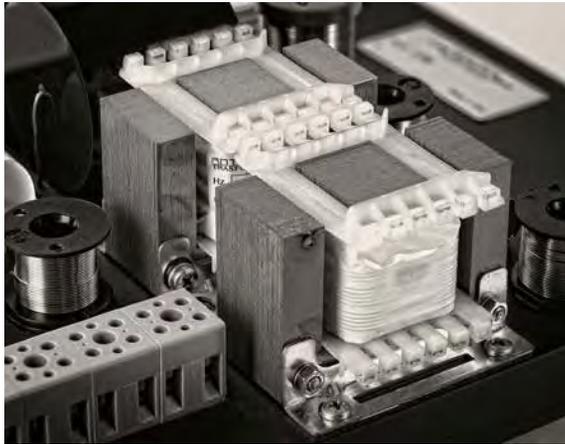




———It took a quarter of a century before Alessandro Schiavi finally gave in! After 25 years of denial, the Diapason founder finally admitted that his company needed to build a really large loudspeaker, too. During that quarter of a century, Schiavi had remained convinced that nobody needed massive, bulky speakers to listen to music “properly.” And who could really blame him? Every speaker that Diapason had produced for its audiophile clientèle had been two-way devices housed in beautiful, solid wood cabinets—which also boasted an amazing sound. What’s more, when you’re keen on classical music and jazz, or are even a trained musician like Schiavi himself, it’s arguably easier to make the most of what you already have. You can then simply ignore all the great halls, palaces and ballrooms where a few insatiable audiophiles insist on listening to music. All you then need to do is declare medium-sized

rooms as the largest chambers in which hi-fi music can be properly enjoyed. Schiavi is not alone in this mindset, of course. Until quite recently, Porsche also refused to recognize the need to have a four-door model in its product program.

Diapason’s compact speakers are so obviously good though that adherents frequently call for more. And there comes a time when fans who want to use the speakers in large rooms can no longer simply be brushed off with a recommendation to add a top-class subwoofer. And so the call for a really large Diapason loudspeaker grew louder and louder until, 25 years down the road, the company finally listened. This led to the release of Diapason’s first four-door model—uh, sorry!—to the unveiling of its first big three-way speaker. Is this the perfect piece of equipment for the owners of great halls and ballrooms? Of course it is. In this case, ►



Elegance: a custom-made crossover with the cabling hidden beneath it

however, the word “big” means it’s suitable for any room that’s at least 30 square meters in size. But before the monumental leap of introducing the Dynamis to the waiting audiophile world, the Diapason team had one serious and almost philosophical problem to solve. As I already mentioned, all other Diapason speaker models come housed in beautiful solid-wood cabinets that are crafted with possibly the greatest skill and perfection found in speaker cabinets. But as beautiful as it undoubtedly is, solid wood has an almost natural upper limit in terms of size and the number of sides when building a speaker cabinet. So when it comes to crafting a six-foot, solid-wood speaker, even Loris the Silent has to take a rain check.

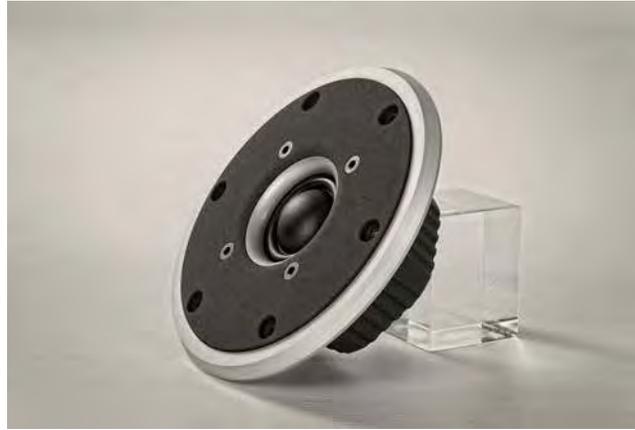
You haven’t met Loris yet? Loris Copiello is Diapason’s in-house carpenter and a true master of his trade (see *FIDELITY* No. 15, issue 5/2014). Visiting his workshop, I was able to see the first experimental carpentry work for the big Diapason. I was also able to see the

expression on his face when he realized that he wouldn’t be able to create the complex lines of the new speaker out of solid wood. At least not without taking the risk that tiny cracks would emerge a few years (or decades) down the road. As a consequence, the Diapason team decided to switch to HDF panels as the basic material for the Dynamis cabinet. As Schiavi says, this material “doesn’t sound as dead as something like marble.” Which is certainly true. I’m also glad they decided against using concrete, stainless steel or lead for exactly the same reason! Thanks to using high-density fiberboard, they were able to restrict the total weight of the Dynamis to around a hundred kilos. A good portion of this weight is concentrated in the base plate and baffle, both as thick as a master chef’s chopping board. As with the Dynamis’s smaller siblings, the rest of the weight is distributed across the cabinet’s 13 other sides. Despite its weight, the Dynamis is still relatively easy to move around. Soft rollers on the base enable

you to maneuver it about until you find the perfect listening position in your room. These rollers don’t ruin the ballroom’s expensive flooring or the speaker’s performance. Once they’re firmly in position, there’s no movement at all.

Should there be any problems, however, Diapason offers the option of selecting adjustable feet—the professional’s choice. Simply remember to check the appropriate box when placing your order. And while we’re on the subject of personalizing your Dynamis, it’s also possible to replace the logo on the base. A laser is used to etch the text into a stainless steel plate that is attached magnetically. Maybe you’d like to like to have your favorite name there or simply “right” (or “left”). The only limit to your creativity is the length of the text—it has to fit between the two tuning forks on the logo. I briefly thought about choosing “Malcolm” for the left speaker and “Angus” for the right. Or “Sviluppo Technologie Audio,” but the company’s ▶

The tweeter is custom made by SEAS and has a coated silk dome.
The midrange, also from Norway, boasts a Nextel-coated paper cone and phase plug.
The woofer originates from Scan-Speak, with modifications made by Diapason.



slogan already adorns the robust wooden chests that have been blocking my garage since the Dynamis arrived.

The two unpacked speakers are now standing in my living room. The radical three-dimensional form, so typical of Diapason, is similar to the Adamantes design from 1987, and so also alludes to a loudspeaker book from the 1950s (from Wharfedale). What's more, the ratio of surfaces to angles is designed to give "a balanced distribution of resonance," according to Schiavi, a concept he learned from an instrument maker he is acquainted with. Because even an extremely rigid cabinet can still produce resonance, he prefers to exploit this for a lively musical performance rather than try to fight the sound to death. After all, this design principle has proved successful in the company's compact speakers for the last quarter of a century. The Diapason holds other direct links to company tradition, especially the Astera, the company's former top-of-the-range model. Astera's excellent drivers—an 18-centimeter midrange from Scan-Speak with a Nextel-coated paper cone and phase plug plus a 29-millimeter silk soft dome tweeter from SEAS—are responsible for

the mid- and high-frequency ranges in the Dynamis.

A highly resilient 30-centimeter chassis from Scan-Speak extends the frequency spectrum into the low bass range. The chassis features an aluminum cone and a fiberglass dust cap (somewhat reminiscent of the Magico). At the bottom of the diamond-shaped cabinet, a large and very deeply tuned reflex port supports the high-end bass driver. The cabinet itself stands on three dampened stainless steel tubes. And like its smaller siblings, the Dynamis is said to lack any sound signature that could suggest a bass reflex design. It is reputed to perform very freely and in a relaxed manner, effortlessly filling any room right down to the deepest levels of the musical spectrum without droning. This is something we will want to hear for ourselves.

So we start to set things up. The rear side of the Dynamis has a large plate with two pairs of binding posts. The screw-type terminals were specially manufactured for Diapason by a bike component maker from Brescia. An extreme biker himself in his free time, Schiavi was not satisfied with any of the components already available

on the high-end supplier market. By the way, single-wire terminals can also be ordered. Ironically, however, for an extra charge.

Should you or your partner (or your interior designer) not find the right color finish in the standard program, you will also have to pay an extra charge to get "just the right" shade. The company offers a number of unusual finishes, including glossy gold/copper leaf finishing.

Whatever color you choose, the Dynamis is coated in waterproof fiberglass that has several layers of high-gloss sealant. Interestingly enough, this curvy Italian beauty is coated and sealed by the same company that equips the famous Riva yachts. These decisions about materials contribute to Schiavi's goal of making Diapason products robust enough to be enjoyed by several future generations.

We are notorious for our critical niggling when testing products, but we were only able to find one tiny weakness: On the symmetrical and exceedingly attractive crossover where the Van-den-Hul cabling exits in a hidden extra layer, amidst all the fine and mostly custom-made components, we discovered a pair of ▶



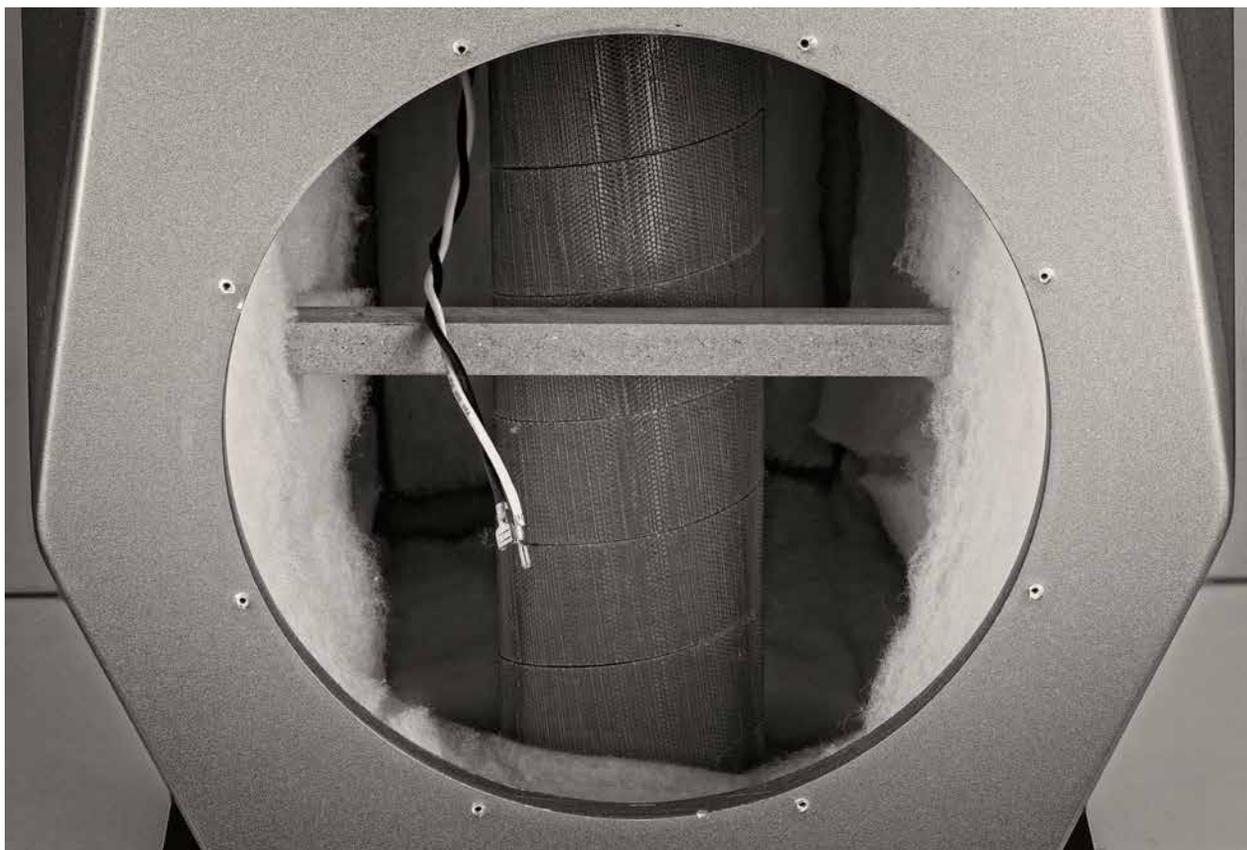
electrolytic capacitors that would probably not meet the highest standards in terms of robustness. This is surprising in view of the otherwise superb quality and attention to detail.

What's more, the crossover features numerous options for adjusting the sound to the owner's individual tastes and preferences. This is why it is built into its own recess on the rear of the speaker and can be accessed by unscrewing an aluminum plate. Thinking out loud, I remark that this architecture would enable a lot of innovative electronics to be fitted into this recess. With a mild smile, Schiavi explains that the Dynamis has been designed with maximum "upgradability" in mind. But such options are for the future and completely irrelevant to me in the weeks that follow.

The Dynamis acts like a true professional in my listening room, performing in a truly uncomplicated and cooperative way. After connecting up the first electronics and cables I can find, the speaker races out of the blocks in a totally unexpected fashion. No bitchy behavior, no annoying warm-up exercises, no coughs and splutters, no need for constant attention. Just a brief hello and you can immediately choose the music you want to hear. Indeed, the Dynamis makes a distinctively alert and ▶

THE REST OF THE TEAM

Turntables: AMG Giro, Audio Note TT 2, Clearaudio Innovation, EnVogue Astra | **Tonearms:** AMG Giro, Audio Note Arm Two, Clearaudio Universal, Nottingham Analogue Anna 12" | **Pickups:** AMG Teatro, Audio Note IQ-3, Clearaudio Da Vinci V2, Transrotor Figaro | **MC transformer:** Audio Note S2 | **Phono stages:** Clearaudio Absolute Phono, Pro-Ject Phono Box RS | **Music servers:** Burmester 151, T+A MP 3000HV | **CD players:** Audio Note CDT-3, Soullution 541 | **DAC:** Audio Note DAC-3 Signature | **Preamplifiers:** Audia Flight Strumento #1, T+A P 3000HV | **Power amps:** Audia Flight Strumento #8, T+A A 3000HV | **Integrated amplifiers:** Soullution 530, Westend Audio Monaco | **Cables:** Audio Note, HMS, Vovox | **Mains conditioner:** IsoTek Aquarius | **Accessories:** Clearaudio Double Matrix Professional Sonic, LignoLab TT100 and "Die Bank," Solidsteel HS, various products from Harmonix and Subbase



good-humored impression. It's raring to go. Quite phenomenal! There was probably little difficulty in choosing a name for this speaker. It greets its listeners immediately and effortlessly with a laid-back yet captivating dynamism. Using the Greek word was simply a nice extra touch.

FIDELITY has often talked about "truly high-end" devices and about "great" or even "brilliant" performances. But, in this case, these terms really hit the nail on the head! It takes only a few seconds for the listener to appreciate the amazing intrinsic qualities of this speaker. The Dynamis fills every corner of the room with sound—featherlight and detached yet incredibly space-filling at the same time. Its very broad range of sound can be heard even under the most unfavorable conditions—through a closed door while standing in the corridor. But that's something you shouldn't talk about too loudly when there are hard-core sweet-spot adherents around—you'll probably get a dirty look. So we decide to choose the best spots on the sofa.

With the Dynamis delivered to me in person by Schiavi, he sets about making the last tiny adjustments to the speakers' positioning. At last he judges the performance as worthy of the

official benchmark. There is a serious reason for doing all this. The speakers in a Dynamis pair are supposed to sound like identical twins and produce exactly the same measurement data with practically no deviations from the reference pair in the company's own premises. So when a speaker performs so powerfully and captivatingly after only a few minutes of playing time, what do we decide to do? We decide to have fun experimenting with different combinations of cables, players and musical styles. Who knows? We might even find one or two weaknesses. But, apart from the obvious fact that a low-power amplifier connected to a pretty average and bassy 4-ohm speaker would not normally be the equipment of choice, the Dynamis proves to be an absolute team player. Instead of hogging the limelight, it highlights subtle acoustic characteristics of the upstream electronics, including the cable. And it certainly doesn't have to be the Van den Hul CS12, although this is used inside the speaker and is Diapason's favorite cable. Personally, I prefer the amazing Vovox.

How does the 3000 HV series from T+A sound? Or electronics from Soullution? Or the stylish Italian equipment from Audia Flight that is allowed to show its stuff a little later on?

What impression can the unassuming yet powerful combination from JE Audio make? Or the heavyweights from Musical Fidelity?

The Dynamis has no trouble at all in revealing the sound signatures produced even by top-class electronic equipment. But it does this in a completely ladylike way, without raising its eyebrows or going into a huff. This is a particularly attractive quality that makes the speaker really easy to live with. Have I already mentioned that the wonderfully integrated bass can descend to the furthest depths of the basement and fill the room with sound? The performance is sharply defined and featherlight at the same time. So much so that, after only a few moments, you'll glide from critical listening into pure enjoyment. With the right choice of music, and in sharp contrast to its roughly edged exterior, the Dynamis can be a real seductress. But it's not limited to schmaltz and bel canto—it can deal effortlessly with the entire musical spectrum right through to rock 'n' roll and heavy metal. The Dynamis belts out Fauré's Requiem, featuring a double symphony orchestra and choir, in all its glory, producing three-dimensional sound and filling the room. It also easily handles cathedral organs and the sporadic shrieking electronic guitar when Brian Setzer's big ▶

Color samples for cabinet finish: You can order practically anything except solid wood. The color of our test system is...





Loudspeaker



Diapason Dynamis

Type: three-way floorstanding, bass reflex | **Sensitivity:**

89 dB/W/m | **Nominal impedance:** 4 ohm | **Drivers:**

30 cm woofer from Scan-Speak with aluminum cone, 18 cm midrange from SEAS with Nextel-coated paper cone, 29 mm tweeter from SEAS with a silk dome; all drivers have been modified by Diapason | **Crossover**

frequencies: 150 Hz, 2500 Hz | **Special features:**

Bi-wiring terminal with custom-made screw-type terminals (single-wiring terminal available for an additional

charge!), 14-sided cabinet, fiberglass coating inside

and outside, bass reflex aperture at bottom, base plate

with magnetically attached stainless steel logo (can be

personalized), finely-adjustable crossover accessible in

separate recess on rear side, internal cabling with Van

den Hul CS12 | **Versions:** HDF cabinet entirely coated

in fiberglass, with high-gloss finish of choice, several

unusual colors available, such as "Chocolate Paper

Effect" in gold, silver or copper | **Dimensions (W/H/D):**

45/128/71 cm | **Weight:** 100 kg | **Warranty period:**

5 years | **Price for pair:** 45,000 EUR

www.diapason-italia.com

...“Glossy sparkling
bronze,” only one of 1,001
possible color variations!



You will love the bi-wiring-terminals of the Diapason Dynamis.

band is unleashed. And then Boris Blank's subitō transforms the living room into an exclusive nightclub. Nothing whatsoever seems to cause problems for the big, new Diapason. It masters anything you throw at it on the highest possible level and with a finesse that really justifies its ambitious price tag. All in all, the Dynamis combines artistry and artisanship exceptionally well. Instead of having just one "best side," it has as many as the cabinet it comes in.

One might think that really expensive equipment such as this (and you could almost buy a four-door Porsche for the price of a pair of these speakers) would take high expectations in stride at all times. Experience teaches us, however, that this is by no means always the case. A lot of high-price speakers seem to focus on only a small portion of the music spectrum, thrusting their own technology into the foreground rather than serving the music they are supposed to be reproducing. When using the Dynamis, however, it immediately casts a spell over me and keeps me entranced for weeks on end. Schiavi has succeeded in retaining all the outstanding qualities of his previous products while also adding at least one additional attribute: magnitude. A truly tangible and exciting magnitude thanks to a bone-dry and bouncy low bass and the sense of energy that only truly large speakers can create. What's more, the exceptionally well-implemented bass extension also dramatically enhances spatial dimension and permits higher peak levels—but this is simply the icing on the cake. All in all, the performance of the Dynamis is so precise and finely balanced that I was able to listen to it for weeks on end with no desire to hear anything else. No matter how much is happening around me, the fantastic Diapason Dynamis lets me sink into a world of my own. This is a speaker that is great in terms of both size and sound! ■





BBC LS5/8 revisited

The new M40.2, the latest evolutionary step taken by the BBC LS5/8 monitor from Harbeth Audio, has been on sale since September. Compared with its forerunner, the monitor speaker is better adapted to the acoustical conditions found in listeners' living rooms. The result: music reproduction that is both more three-dimensional and differentiated. With the M40.2, Harbeth has pulled off the trick of enhancing a product that was already a classic while taking its sound to an even higher level. Upgrades of the M40.1 are expected to be available starting next year.

www.harbeth.co.uk

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BROWSER

Nº 01

Moving coil from Air Tight

Air Tight founder Atsushi Miura is a perpetual product inventor. His latest masterstroke: the PC-7 pick-up cartridge. The MC system with 0.6 mV output voltage is equipped with a Microridge stylus and boron cantilever. Weighing nearly 10 grams and costing about €3,000, the PC-7 is designed to fill the shoes of a global darling, the PC-3.

www.global.airtight-am.net

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The magical seven

The new flagship of the Magico-S line is a full-range three-way speaker. The drivers used in the S7 represent a totally new way of thinking and grew out of research conducted for Magico's M-Pro series. The housing of the S7 consists of two preassembled aluminum shells produced in Magico's own aluminum-processing facility. A solid bi-wiring terminal, a speaker cover held in place by magnets and sturdy precision spikes round out the exceptionally well-executed housing. One other addition to the lineup is the Magico S-Sub, which is capable of diving down to 15 Hz.

www.magico.net

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BROWSER Nº 01



Going to ground

Essentially, it's a box with the job of grounding the housings and bases of devices. The GroundBox made by Subbase Audio offers 12 outlets with banana jacks and is cut from solid aluminum. Inside, potential currents connected to the device are grounded, a process that nearly eliminates them entirely. You can really notice this on housings. Also for component bases, absorbed electrical and electromagnetic fields are redirected faster, reducing storage effects in the process.

www.subbase-audio.de

+++

A lowered rear axle and rally stripes

Traditional hi-fi performance coupled with innovative technology – the Heco Direkt floor-standing speakers marry a two-way system based on classic designs with the very latest in development technology. Its bass-mid-range chassis made of kraft paper is supported by two downfire reflex tubes and extended upward by silk cone with solid aluminum wave control. The Direkt speakers are designed with high efficiency in mind, making them the perfect partner for tube or transistor amplifiers starting at 10 watts. The speaker's slanted enclosure is accentuated with racing stripes, a retro touch that adds to the design.

www.heco-audio.de

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BROWSER Nº 01

Nonstop master quality

Turning their backs on the digitization craze, the audio experts at Revox have kept their ears attuned to the highest level of sound precision. This commitment has led them to now offer selected master-quality studio audio-tapes in their online shop. Audio lovers can now enter a world of sound that was once reserved only for recording engineers and the artists themselves – with exact copies of their analog master tapes. The range of recordings is huge, covering jazz and big band sounds to blues and classical music. The tapes are offered on the Revox shop website.

www.musicstore.revox.com

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Acoustic System Resonators

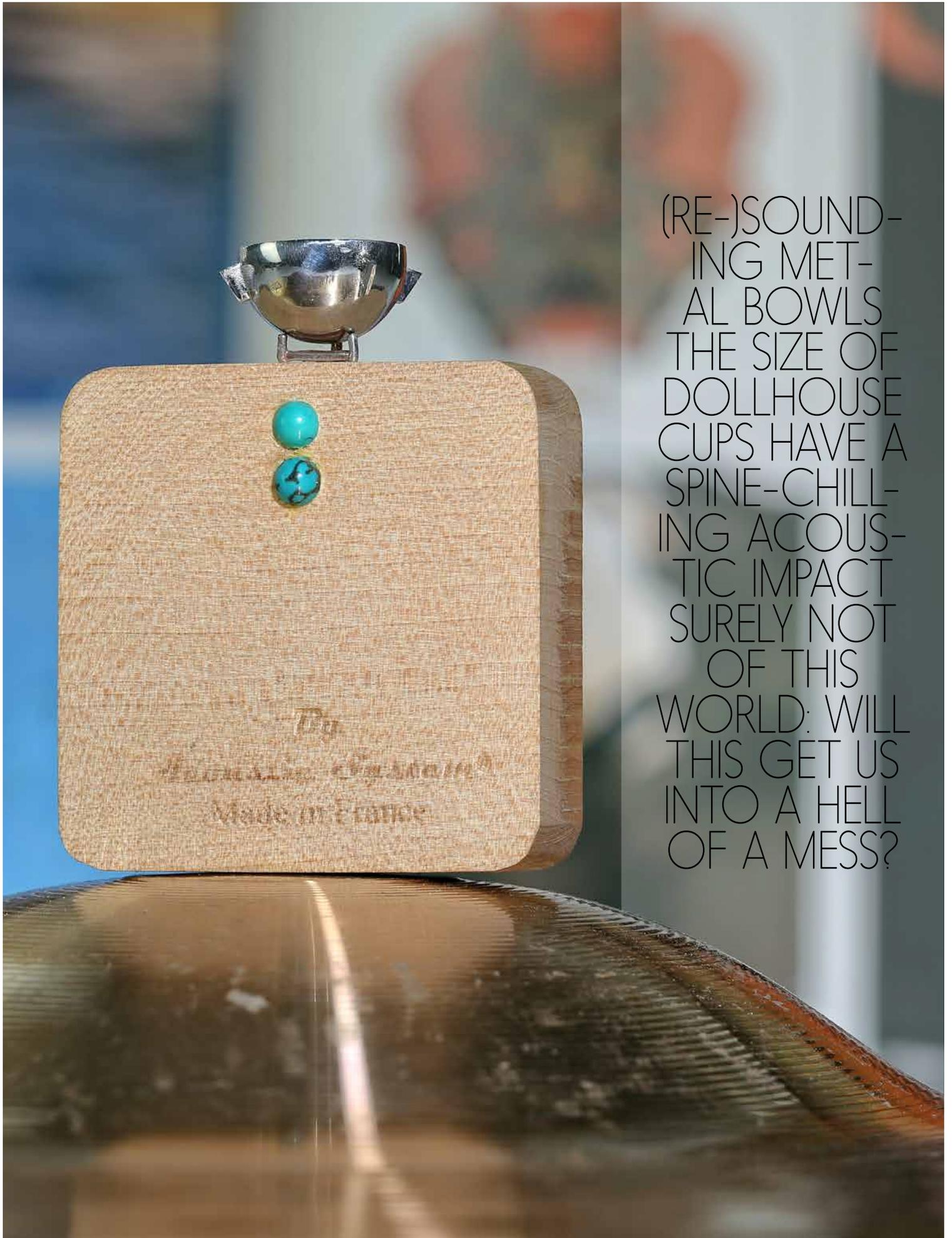
HELLS BELLS OR
HEAVENLY CHIMES?

By Helmut Hack. Photos: Ingo Schulz



_____The Lord of Darkness wasn't involved in designing the resonators—at least that's what Franck Tchang says. He claims he's solely responsible for the invention (or, to be more precise, for the experimental deduction) of Acoustic System International's sound bowls. Of course some folks will think both are one and the same individual, but that's speculation better left to the orthodox faction. I'd have to start from the very beginning. But then again, I'm already in the thick of things.

The corners of my mouth involuntarily move upward as I listen to Daft Punk's "One More Time." The pumping bass fires like dum dum bullets from somewhere out of the almost unimaginable depths lying between the speakers, and water bombs seem to burst at chest level two steps before they even reach me. But I'm still not completely satisfied, despite the 15 resonators mounted on their little maple blocks in my listening room. There's something in the upper frequency range ▶



(RE-)SOUND-
ING MET-
AL BOWLS
THE SIZE OF
DOLLHOUSE
CUPS HAVE A
SPINE-CHILL-
ING ACOUS-
TIC IMPACT
SURELY NOT
OF THIS
WORLD: WILL
THIS GET US
INTO A HELL
OF A MESS?



THE REST OF THE TEAM

Turntable: Feickert Firebird | **Tonearm:** Mørch DP-8 | **Pickups:** Lyra Kleos SL, Ortofon MC Quintet Bronze & 2M Black | **Phono preamplifier:** Lehmann Audio Black Cube Decade, MFE Tube One SE (integrated) | **DAC:** Lector Digitube S 192, PS Audio Digital Link III | **Preamplifier:** MFE Tube One SE | **Power amplifier:** DNM PA3S | **Integrated amplifier:** Genuin Straight | **Loudspeakers:** Steinmusic Masterclass SP 1.1 | **Cables:** Musical Wire, Audiophil |

that tingles in my ears. I've noticed the same über-motivation during the applause on Fanny van Dannen's *Grooveman*. It sounded different (better) in our editorial listening room when Thomas Fast, Acoustic Systems International's German distributor for as long as anyone can remember, performed his well-studied and prepared-for-all-possibilities magical ritual. I wasn't the only person to

think so, by the way. Cai Brockmann also witnessed the "magical mystery treatment" in amazement. Anyway, back to my listening room. I distributed the resonators according to the instructions supplied with them, but I had mixed up the silver and platinum versions. This can happen quite easily, I have found, but maybe I have a slight visual impairment: Sometimes I need a ▶

YOU CAN BELIEVE ME WHEN I SAY I HAD BEEN QUITE SATISFIED WITH MY SYSTEM'S PERFORMANCE BEFORE USING THE RESONATORS, BUT AFTER THE TUNING WITH THEM, IT GAINED IT WHOLE NEW DIMENSION.



second to distinguish the (copper) basic resonator from its gold cousin. Along with the basic copper and yellow gold versions, three other variations are available: silver, special (red gold) and platinum. The resonators I was trying out came from Thomas Fast, who had given me a white briefcase filled with them. Considering their enormous value, I would've preferred to have the briefcase chained to my arm...

To confirm I was using the correct resonator in its dedicated position, I weighed, tagged and arranged them all. The "Made in France" slogan stamped on the wood blocks explains the production tolerance of 10 percent. Let's just say that the secret of the Acoustic System International resonators, if there is one, doesn't probably lie in a perfect build quality. Maybe then it's the manual labor: Each resonator is manually polished and "pitched" by ear. The maple blocks are available in a thicker version for the noble metals and in a slightly thinner, softer one for the basic resonators. Both of them must be attached to the wall using a bit of Blu Tack or something similar in such a way that the blocks don't touch the wall. They should be able to resonate freely so they can transmit the resonances to the small trident on which the little bowls rest. If I understand Franck Tchang correctly, the resonators interact with and reconfigure air molecules. Long waves become short ones and overpressure transforms into "radiance." As passive resonators, they need excitation from outside to have an effect. Here they function as secondary sound sources, primarily adding harmonics to the sound. I imagine, however, they even have an effect on the audible range: for example, the decay of strings and voices seems to obtain an "extra kick" just before fade-out. Now this might almost appear to be an argument in favor of the competition; but applied with the right amount, the effect is incredibly natural and harmonious. I'm facing the paradox to clearly perceive the artifact but still find it inherently more correct.

But now listen carefully: When thinking of a room as a loudspeaker that must be optimized, I don't think of something being added to the sound.

Rather, I consider correcting room modes I've come to accept because I've gotten used to them. This would also explain why I intuitively found it more authentic. However, the resonators still seem to have the greatest influence in the inaudible overtone range as tonality is unperturbed. They don't really add anything; rather, they complement—according to Tchang's theory—overtone that were lost during the recording process. Okay, you have every right to be skeptical at this point. I, too, don't really understand how a golden thimble could possibly know the exact overtone range of various instruments, let alone reproduce them... Once again, though, the convincing argument proves to be practical implementation: To my mind, it just works. Maybe precision again isn't the point—maybe the sheer presence of harmonics that were not there before makes the difference and creates the feeling of authenticity. After all, hi-fi is not really about the exact reproduction of the original (impossible), but about creating a credible illusion of the original. Those who disagree are welcome to contact me personally.

As mentioned at the beginning, placing the resonators is extremely important. A silver resonator under the ceiling behind and between the loudspeakers produced too much energy in my listening situation, shifting size relations in an irritating manner. The same resonator behind me and a platinum resonator in the front resulted in a lively presence and a perfect soundstage. With the resonator in its initial position, Ella Fitzgerald's voice seemed to grow to enormous dimensions with increasing pitch. After relocating the resonator, only the volume of her voice changed, not her position.

The distribution and number of the resonators start on a vertical axis on the wall behind the speakers. Just above the floor, copper is recommended to provide a drier and more focused bass range. Systems that tend to be lean are better served with gold resonators in this location, though. In the middle, just about at the height of the tweeters, gold or silver is best. Bright-sounding systems need gold, ▶



I daresay. Silver resonators can be quite an ambiguous tool: In my setting, silver in the middle position caused too much presence, almost as if the Steinmusic SP1.1 suddenly started to have a lisp.

All of the resonators are powerful tools, but the silver ones, in particular, can overdo things. As I can't complain about a lack of presence and temper in my system, one silver resonator in the back, a basic copper model just above the floor behind and between the speakers, red gold in the middle and platinum under the ceiling did the trick just fine for me. The platinum version is, without a doubt, the most universal model, and it also has the biggest effect:

One platinum resonator alone creates a live atmosphere and gives you the magnificent feeling of being immediately involved. Starting from this harmonic base, I went on to complete the fine-tuning. Instead of listening to many different tracks and changing configurations, I limited myself to the B-side of Nina Simone's live album *At the Village Gate*. It's a raw and very early recording with lots of mistakes such as falling microphones, loudness deviations and the overly present atmosphere of the club. Maybe that's what makes it so moody and compelling. I often use the track "Brown's Baby" to fine-tune sound. As soon as the voice and piano form a harmonic unit—when they sound round and full without getting in each other's way—and as soon as the voices from the audience and the chinking of glasses don't seem superimposed but more an inherent part of the sound, I have a result that is

suitable for all other kinds of music. After this step, two of the gold models that had previously found a place to the side of my listening chair due to my initial unfiltered intoxication with tonal colors had to leave the room. In the end, I achieved a perfectly balanced and fantastically pronounced reproduction with a setup using seven instead of nine resonators. Even before listening to music, I was able to notice the exceptional reproduction reflected in increased speech intelligibility.

You can believe me when I say I had been quite satisfied with my system's performance before using the resonators, but after the tuning with them, it gained it whole new dimension – as if yin and yang had lived apart in two separate speakers until now finally being reunited, hand in hand in the center of the soundstage and able to fill the room far beyond its boundaries. The alchemist Franck Tchang has given us a powerful and seductive tool. Use it wisely, and your system will make a huge leap forward that you will never be able to achieve with new components. The Acoustic System International resonators let the listening room disappear in an almost magical way, placing the listener in the middle of the recording ambiance. Even if it sounds absurd considering the asking price, these five resonators should form the basis for any system. They should be attached to the walls before you even determine the power phase and switch on your amplifier. It's about time to finally expand the term hi-fi by the dimension of the playback conditions. ■

Acoustic Tuning

Acoustic System International resonators

Type: magic, psycho acoustics, resonance entropy |

Price: Basic (copper), silver, gold, gold special (red gold), platinum—upon request

www.francktchang.com/acousticresonators.html



A small trident fixed on a maple wood base supports the resonator element. Silver, copper, red gold, gold, and platinum: five resonators, five individual sound characteristics.

Subbase

| audio manufaktur |

We manufacture individual audiophile systems for every part of your stereo system - 100% handcrafted to the utmost perfection. Subbase audio creations breathe new life into the emotions lingering in music.

Kind regards


Thomas Schlipper



www.Subbase-audio.de

JUST WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO HEAR MUSIC WHILE YOU'RE ON THE GO? IT'S ALL PRETTY BASIC: A GOOD SET OF EARPHONES AND A MEDIA PLAYER OR SMARTPHONE LOADED WITH GREAT TUNES. BUT THERE'S NOW ONE OTHER DEVICE YOU SHOULDN'T FORGET: THIS TINY SOUND TURBOCHARGER FROM ENGLAND. BUT WATCH OUT: IT'S ADDICTING! ▶

Turn smartphones into pure music

CHORD MOJO

By Cai Brockmann. Photos: Cai Brockmann, Chord Electronics



_____Mojo is the name of Chord Electronics' latest stroke of genius. The English high-end company has developed this tiny Tim to act as an audiophile interface to enable mobile media players (smartphones!) and good headphones to reach their full potential. And the promises the company made at the device's world premiere in London were not too much, as the exceptional sound of the "Mobile Joy" demonstrates with bewildering clarity. No wonder: It took its inspiration from the bigger (and much more expensive) Chord Hugo.

Mojo is smaller than most smartphones and rests in your hand like a luxury TV remote. Or on your hi-fi rack. Or next to your laptop. Tucked within the 180-gram aluminum case of this reference-quality product is a DAC, which—thanks to its Xilinx Artix-7 FPGA—can also handle DSD and PCM files up to 768 kHz along with any other regular format.

At the London presentation, all sizes and price classes of headphones as well as a few top-of-the-line media ▶



players were available. Tracks I always have on the iPhone in full resolution really opened my eyes and ears: The resolution, dynamics and joy of created while using the Mojo are superb, far exceeding what you would typically think such a compact device could produce. It is a cinch to operate: Three opaque lighted buttons show the sampling frequency and listening level by changing colors. This color scheme includes producing a type of rainbow show every time you turn on the device—cool. When you let the volume display run through the color spectrum when you use the Mojo, you'll hear practically every level from a soft breeze to loud thunder.

I got hooked on this amazingly robust pipsqueak at the premiere. Since then, it's also shown just what it's capable of doing under real-world conditions. On the road or on my desk, the Mojo has earned even more accolades as an alluring sound magician. I gave it a home in my media case long ago. It takes just four hours to charge its batteries. ▶



The reward for the wait? Up to 10 hours of listening pleasure. In terms of sound, this showpiece generates a level I've at most seen in stationary models that generally cost much more. The output socket of the integrated and unbelievably powerful amplifier will easily drive any set of headphones I know of. I've already put this tiny power pack to the test with the Beyerdynamic T-1, Grado PS-1 Pro, AKG K-701 and even the HiFiman HE-1000. And my ears have been amazed every time. You also have the option of setting the output level to "line level," where the Mojo can serve as a simple DAC in a puristic digital chain. But you should donate a good NF cable to the cause if you do so.

Chord's tiniest-ever component is a digital gem. It's made entirely in England—and the quality is exceptional! The price of nearly €600 is not simply reasonable. It is also a real audiophile bargain. Yeah, I got my Mojo working! ■



Chord Electronics Mojo | mobile DAC and headphone amplifier |

price: €600

www.chordelectronics.co.uk



Burmester

Phase 3 Loftstyle

PHASE 3 is an extension to the traditional Burmester product lines, joining ultimate demands on sound quality with musical culture and modern lifestyle in a perfect blend. The designoriented concept incarnates both the timelessness of the Bauhaus style steel tube furniture and the industrial charm of modern lofts.

Live Act Audio LAS 312

BEYOND HIGH-FIDELITY

By Cai Brockmann. Photos: Ingo Schulz



THE VERY BEST IN MUSICAL EXPERIENCES—
NO MATTER WHAT THE COST,
BUT NOT AT ANY PRICE! ▶



THE REST OF THE TEAM

Turntables: Audio Note TT-2, EnVogue Astra | **Tonearms:** Audio Note Arm 2, Nottingham Analogue AnnaArm 12" | **Pickups:** Audio Note IQ3, Clearaudio Concept MC | **Digital player:** Audio Note CDT-3/DAC 3, Soultion 541, T+A PDP 3000 HV | **Music server:** Audirvana Plus | **Preamplifiers:** Audia Flight Strumento No.1, Esoteric Grandioso C1, T+A P 3000 HV | **Active crossover:** Bryston 10B-SUB | **Power amps:** Audia Flight Strumento No.8, Audio Note P2SE, Bryston B4SST und B14SST, Esoteric Grandioso S1, QUAD II, Silvercore TB3/1000, T+A A 3000 HV | **Cables:** Audio Note, Audioplan, Funk, HMS, MFE, Refine Audio, Silvercore, Vovox | **Power supply:** IsoTek Aq. EVO3 | **Accessories:** Acoustic Systems, Harmonix, Biophotone, LignoLab TT100 and "Die Bank", Subbase Audio Shambala

Sensational “split wood” or thick veneer surfaces, new edge detailing.



_____ There’s a music fanatic, a timber expert and a loudspeaker designer...

If you’re waiting for a corny punch-line, you’ll have to look elsewhere. There’s ample opportunity in the hi-fi industry for cracking tired jokes about a line-up like that, but Live Act Audio is not one of them. The people involved are passionate about what they do and, in contrast to the many hobbyists out there, are also very professional. Even the music fanatic

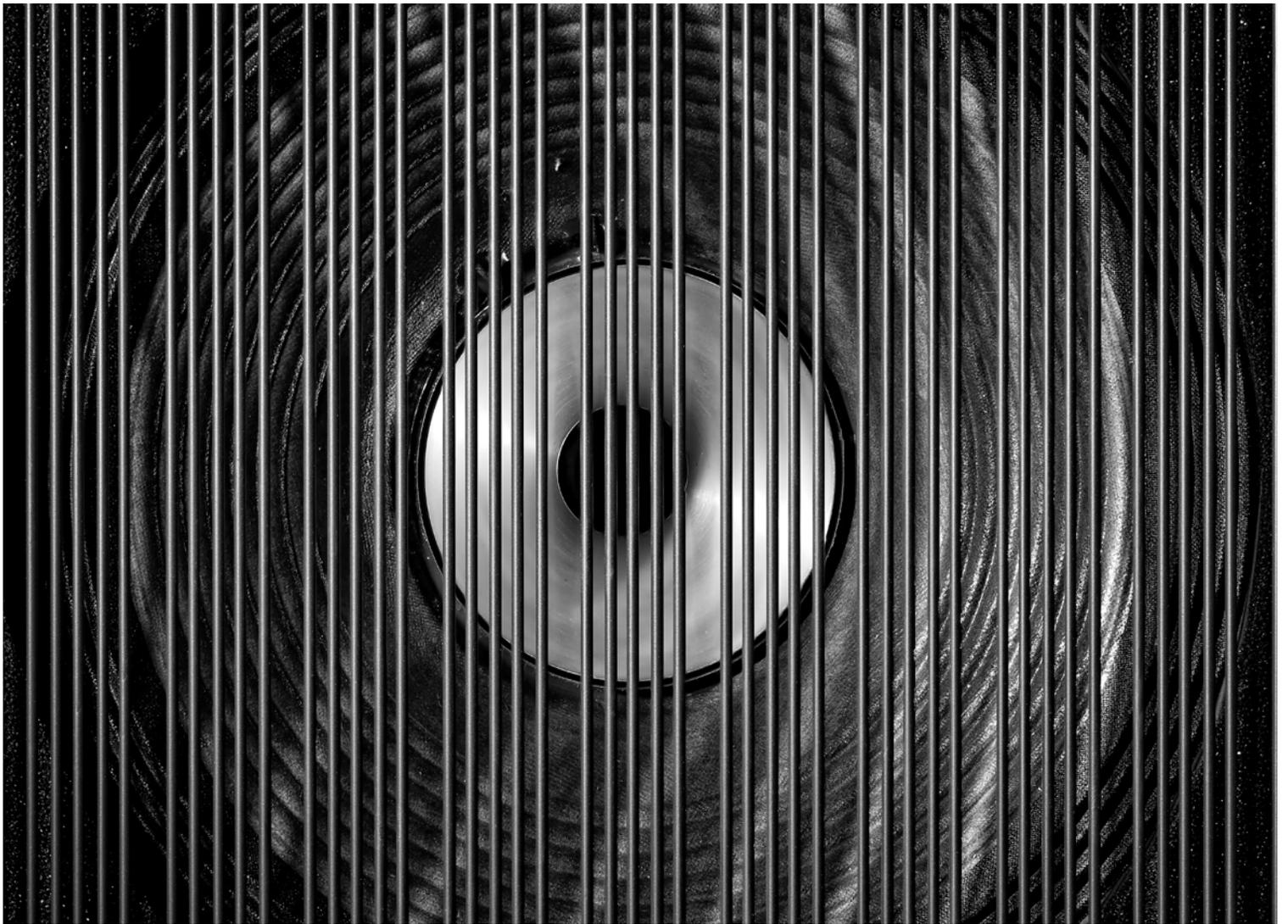
in this trio, who winks and says that he “actually can’t do anything right,” has nailed everything.

Live Act Audio is the brainchild of Dieter Molitor. Previously at MHW Audio, he recently founded Live Act Audio GmbH to position his sensational loudspeakers more clearly within the market and begin series production. The previous preproduction models were also redesigned as part of this process. The visual difference may be noticeable, but

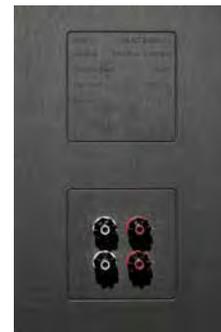
absolutely nothing has changed from a technical or sound perspective. As a result, my initial strong impression of performance can be directly applied to Live Act Audio (LAA).

Molitor has always known exactly what he wants: a loudspeaker capable of conveying the thrill of a concert in all its glory, the electrifying “live act” with unapologetic power and gusto. For years, he searched high and low for this, investing large amounts of money into “dream ▶

COAXIAL
MONSTER
BEHIND
BARS



SEMIACTIVE CONTROL (HERE: BRYSTON)



loudspeakers” along the way. But he never found that one single speaker that met all his key criteria. After another attempt carrying a six-figure price tag, which (once again) left him emotionally drained and cold, Molitor decided to take matters into his own hands.

It was time for Molitor to officially show his true colors. So Live Act Audio began discussing such things as the almost-sacred hi-fi ideal sound produced by a “linear loudspeaker.” But what is “linear” supposed to mean? What good is a linearly aligned loudspeaker to the listener if it’s practically without flaw on paper and works perfectly in the lab but simply isn’t any fun in the living room and instead just sits there, emotionless and disengaged, droning on. Let’s clear up any possible misunderstandings: Obviously

the Live Act Audio team has absolutely nothing against a linear amplitude response. It’s just that this is just one of umpteen criteria any competent designer should have on his or her radar and be ticking off a specification sheet. And that actually brings us to the most important point in understanding the construction and signature sound of a loudspeaker: the designer. Every loudspeaker that wants to be taken seriously obviously contains, without exception, the sonic signature of its designer, and the loudspeaker makes this audible. After all, when it comes to all the technical parameters, which, to some extent, influence each other, and, to a large extent, determine a loudspeaker’s sound balance, priorities need be set at some point. Solving the notorious issue of squaring the circle—in other words,

reaching the theoretical goal of producing the “perfect loudspeaker”—is only possible to a certain extent and not fully achievable. And every practical attempt to get closer to the theoretical ideal either involves an enormous technical undertaking or complete mastery of complex subjects. To make things even harder, there is also the fact that a typical high-end’s idea of the “perfect loudspeaker” will differ completely from that of a sound engineer or sound studio professional. Live Act Audio, or LAA for short, attempts to bridge the gap between these two worlds with Molitor choosing “exactly the right person” to be his chief designer. This expert relies on his heart and soul and incorporates the best of both audio worlds to now (finally!) do this at LAA. I personally met the designer (who also ▶



Made from the best: Screw terminal, optional screw covers, internal cabling by Audioplan.

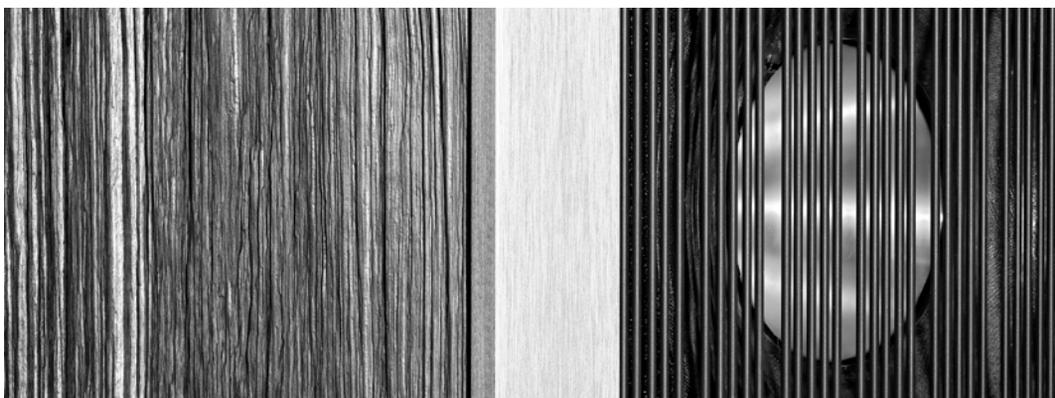
works for other companies, primarily in the pro-audio sector, and would therefore prefer to remain anonymous). During our extensive discussions, I was bowled over by his extremely broad skill set and his proposals for the design of the LAA model. To address the desire for achieving practically unlimited dynamic performance by employing the heretical slogan “traditional hi-fi drivers cannot do that at all, they are simply hi-fis,” you have to know exactly what current professional chassis are able to deliver and how good they sound in living-room-compatible applications. It surely also doesn’t hurt if you can fall back on custom-made, first-rate drivers that you can’t get hold of for love nor money. The large LAA series, known as the Live Act Series (LAS)

reference line in the product portfolio, is living-room compatible. As should be the case with benchmark-setting loudspeakers, its physique plays a rather inferior role. In compact, slim housings, it’s not feasible to have practically unlimited bass reserves with small drivers (in this case, all under 30 centimeters in diameter). Deep, efficient and absolutely uncompromising bass needs volume and membrane surface. The main issue is making sure the housing somehow still fits through the front door and doesn’t poke through the ceiling during the first attempt at installation. These relaxed yet systematic design maxims are very nice. In addition, the 312 is “just” the middle-of-the-range LAS model; the substantially larger, and more expensive, 512,

which measures 2.3 meters high, actually doesn’t easily fit into my listening studio.

The unique housing design of the LAS 312 is a real head-turner. The refined yet wild look is sensational, and the surface, which incidentally looks rough but isn’t, resembles split wood cut from a full block and creates a nice ambiance, like that of a fireside lounge and a chic country house. The surface is the result of a highly refined, expensive process where a single-sided structure is embossed on a multiplex board using high pressure. This “work-hardened forged timber” is then combined with “normal” MPX boards in the sandwich process. This forms an extremely rigid base for the housing that is low resonance but not damped to death. ▶

MILLED FRAME



Also to thank for the sensational appearance and outstanding resonance damping is Markus Reitz, the timber expert and corporate strategist (and “second in command”) at LAA. Reitz joins Molitor to assemble the LAS 312 in the editorial office’s listening room to start and then later back at mine. That commands my respect, since each loudspeaker weighs in at a whopping 130 kilograms—a direct consequence of the positively lavish but purposeful use of materials. All housing walls, even the

inner recesses for the midrange speakers and crossover, consist of at least 40-millimeter-thick multiplex boards. Added to that are the massive aluminum boards for the rear wall and base as well as the aluminum frame on the front that has been milled from solid blocks.

This not only keeps the acoustically permeable “rubber curtain” in perfect shape but also houses the only detail of the LAS 312 that I personally do not like at all: two Swarovski crystals cover both upper (sunk-in) screw

heads in the frame. Fortunately, LAA also offers several alternatives to that.

Aside from its visual appeal, LAS 312 captures my attention with the equipment behind it even “when idle.” The two 12-inch basses are produced in the United States and equipped with everything that gets the heavy-duty, high-end heart beating, from the enormous rear-ventilated voice coil to the firmly suspended coated paper cone. The two woofers cover the frequency range up to 100 hertz like ▶



An enormous beryllium dome fuels the high-range horn of the coaxial driver, which is cleanly separated from a passive crossover at approximately 1,150 hertz.



an integrated subwoofer. Each driver works in its own recess and is supported by four symmetrically arranged reflex ports on the front; this enables LAA to guarantee the desired acoustic and technical resonance stability, even at the highest levels. In the existing test version, an active analog crossover with its own Bryston power amplifier also provides the bass with precision and power. Above 100 hertz, a coaxial driver kicks in. Its coated midrange membrane, separated from a passive, very delicately fitted crossover in its own recess, measures 30 centimeters across and covers the range up to 1,100 hertz. The central high-range horn of the coaxial driver is served by a special beryllium membrane 75-millimeter in diameter that marches effortlessly into the highest highs while still remaining extremely resilient. Apart from the weight issue, initial installation of the LAS 312 in a normal living room is relatively straightforward: the speakers should preferably be placed

close to the wall and not too far from each other—a real advantage for audiophiles compared with all other big-hitters in the league to end all leagues, which usually make diva-like demands and are immediately audibly offended if they are not surrounded by two meters of space for their performance. The LAA 312 is completely different: Cabling the controlling Bryston electronics has hardly been put in place and I can already start with the fine-tuning after just a few minutes. Every step of the way, the speakers inform me without any chance of misunderstanding whether another small step or subtle change is taking me in in the right direction or not. And that is actually what I expect from a top-of-the-range tool aimed at audiophiles: uncomplicated, unequivocal communication about simply everything that is happening “around it,” right down to the subtlest of atmospheric details. Let it be said: This hefty juggernaut has a fantastic flair for everything that’s happening ▶

Loudspeakers



Live Act Audio LAS 312

Type: three-way loudspeaker, bass reflex, passive or semiactive | **Sensitivity:** 96 dB (passive 94 dB) | **Nominal impedance:** 8 (passive 4) Ω | **Power capability:** 700 W | **Drivers:** 2 x 30-cm woofers, 30-cm coaxial chassis with high-range horn (75-mm beryllium membrane) | **Crossover frequencies:** 100/1150 Hz. | **Special features:** passive or semi-active control possible, decoupled base plate | **Finish:** Thick veneer or split-wood appearance (€10,000 additional charge), front frame and base plate anodized upon request, one-off special models for an additional charge | **Dimensions (W/H/D):** 42/132/52 cm | **Weight:** 130 kg | **Warranty period:** five years | **Price for pair:** from €69,000

www.mhw-audio.de



THE US CHASSIS ARE EXTREMELY RESILIENT.



in its environment, and it's happy to "show" that without having to be asked to do so beforehand.

Another nice characteristic of the LAS 312 compared to practically all other top-of-the-range speakers is that every effort in terms of the sound sources, cabling and set-up will not lead to less dissatisfaction but greater satisfaction. This is a serious and critical difference in order to be able to enjoy listening to music even with "smaller" electronics,

"way too low-priced" cables or positioning which is not 100% right, for example. Yes, the LAS 312 is the best kind of super-sporty team player with no airs and graces. Nevertheless, it is naturally always worth continuing to refine the set-up at home because of the aforementioned flair for every little step. Over several weeks, I test almost a dozen large (and not so large) amplifiers inside the semi-active system., experiment with numerous cables, but

never lose the desire to discover music, listen and enjoy. So, I have really never experienced such a consistent, professional and, at the same time, joyous music machine until now.

A sensationally dynamic and gutsy performance awaits the listener each and every time, ranging from boxing gloves to velvet gloves, from pianissimo to Motörhead stage rock-outs—including wonderfully vivid tones and amazingly deep-reaching, exceedingly ▶



illuminated spatial expression despite being set up close to the wall. No, this is no surface or omni emitter, but rather speaker system that's right on the mark, one that's able to handle itself and remain well balanced. "You should expect that for this price," I hear you say: Yes, I think so, too. The real fascination behind this classy yet extremely down-to-earth artist lies in the charming way it transmits all forms of energy without any loss to the listener and, if in doubt, a tiny whiff, a hint of an idea "forward"—like the very best drummers do. I am extremely impressed. The LAS 312's visit to my place turns into an intoxicating party with my record collection. Before the 312 buckles even just a little bit,

either an amplifier that is obviously too small or I throw in the towel. The LAA, on the other hand, carries on regardless. I probably won't ever need the kinds of reserves it offers, but it's always reassuring to have them. With its various talents and the particularly broad dynamic range, the 312 ranks so high up in my high-fidelity appreciation that I can already imagine just how it will eat renowned 8-inch competitors for breakfast—and will hardly see a 10-centimeter "bass" as little more than an appetizer. Man, it's gotten really hot in the CB Clubhouse. I need to open some windows and think ...
... about me and the LAA. Have I ever had so much uncomplicated, approachable

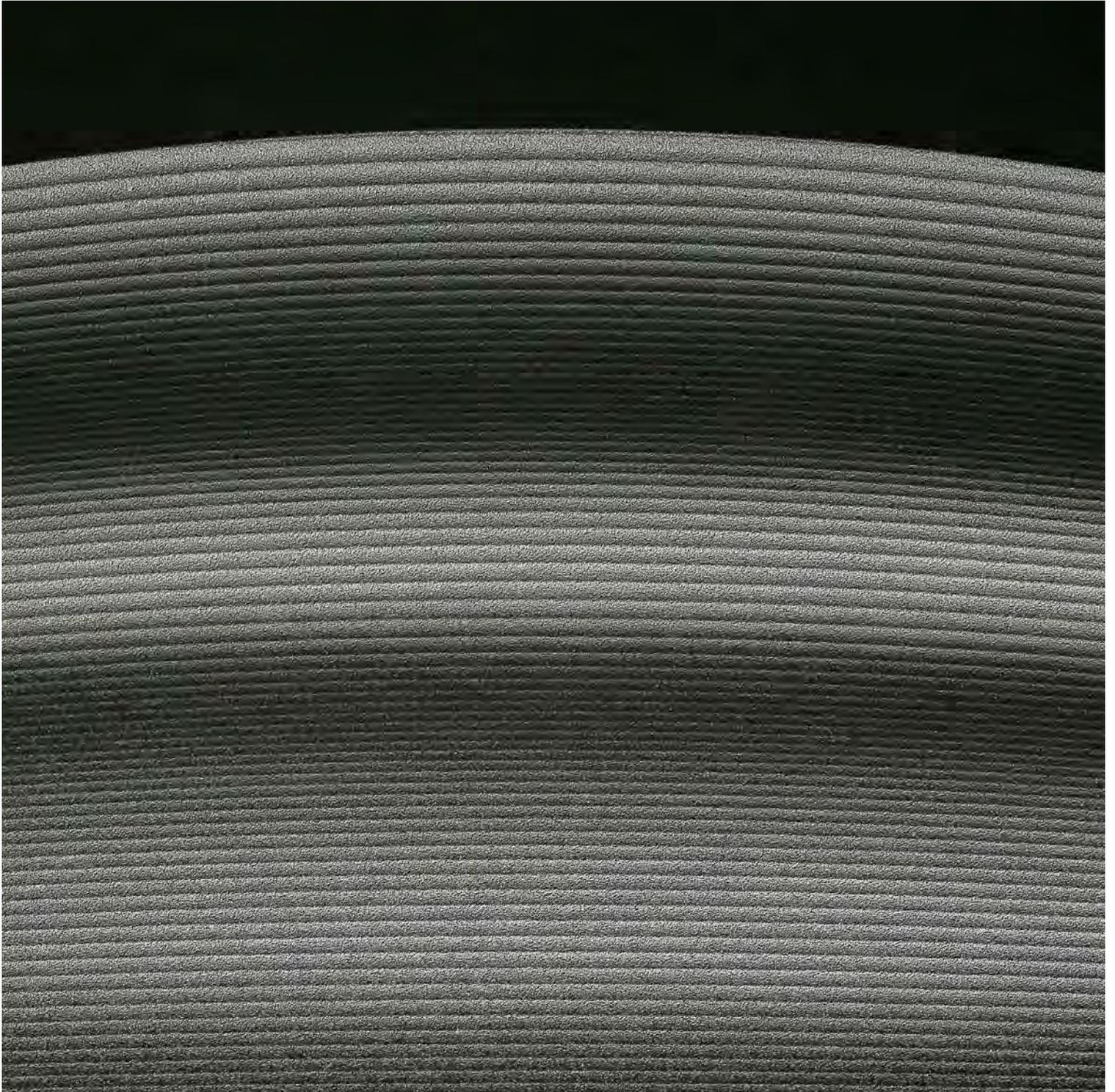
listening fun at my fingertips? Is the 312 too big for my 30-square-meter listening room? Will I ever want to stop using this speaker? "No," "no" and "no!" In other words: The Live Act Audio LAS 312 is moving in with me, no matter what it costs! ■



Esoteric Grandioso C1/Grandioso S1

DAWN OF THE BLUE SUN ▶

By Cai Brockmann. Photos: Ingo Schulz



JAPAN AND ITALY? SUMO AND SCULPTURE? THE FLAGSHIP AMPLIFIERS FROM ESOTERIC CONVEY AN AURA OF TRUTH AND COM-



MITMENT STRAIGHT FROM THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN. BUT THEIR NAME AND OUTWARD APPEARANCE ARE ALL ITALIAN IN STYLE. ›



_____What do well-bred amplifiers do each time their masters enter the room? They roll out a carpet of blue light to lead their rulers to the font of truth. To delight the eye, they look attractive. To please the ear, they sound wonderful. Then their masters can thank their lucky stars, make themselves comfortable in their listening chairs and slowly turn up the volume...

There's no doubt about it. Stepping into the listening room and feeling like the Prince of Hi-Fi is pretty nice from time to time. Especially when nobody's looking. For a couple of weeks at least, I was able to pretend I was the real owner of this wonderful set of amplifiers. The first thing I did, though, was stare into the fascinating blue light for just a bit longer...

Before I digress even further and enter into esoteric realms, I think I should tell you a little bit more about the origins of these three amplifier units. There are probably few product names that

conjure such false associations as this exclusive brand from the renowned TEAC Corporation. By no stretch of the imagination could this Tokyo company be regarded as "esoteric." What the Esoteric engineers do is apply accepted principles of physics to create top hi-fi electronics that ensure outstanding precision and consistency. Esoteric has established a great reputation among audiophiles, and its parent company is closely linked to aerospace and measurement technologies. At its Tokyo headquarters, Esoteric has a staff of 28. More than half of these people, 16 to be exact, work in R&D, but a team of precisely zero is employed to work on supernatural phenomena or in the area of borderline sciences. Even Esoteric doesn't have this sort of department. Renowned for its technical excellence, the brand has established a name for itself throughout the world and launched a series of products to round out the top end of its portfolio. The series ▶



sets visual as well as linguistic accents and is being expanded on an ongoing basis. The Grandioso line of products uses sculptured front panels in an attempt to combine Japanese precision technology with Italian grandeur. This fusion of modern with classical really works, and the gracefully crafted 3-D front panels really do add more than just a touch of *bella Italia*. Looking both elegant and dynamic, the precisely tooled aluminum housing is perfectly suited to underlining the sophistication of the musical performance—just as Esoteric intends. And then there's this mesmerizing blue light...

Let's start by taking a closer look at the brand-new stereo power amplifier. Despite its relatively modest dimensions – the standard full-size hi-fi format – the Grandioso S1 weighs in at almost 50 kilograms. The single on-off button on the aluminum front panel sits flush in the 3-D curve in both operating states. But when you switch the S1 on, it radiates a cone of soft blue light onto the area immediately in front of it. For film enthusiasts, this may be reminiscent of UFOs in old sci-fi films or souped-up cars in US action movies. The indirect blue light on the Grandioso S1 is similarly spectacular, but also has a quality you may find soothing or quite simply "cool." And you can even adjust it to your own personal preference. Alongside all the usual high-end hi-fi connections, there's a small knob on the rear of the Grandioso S1 that controls the intensity of the blue light.

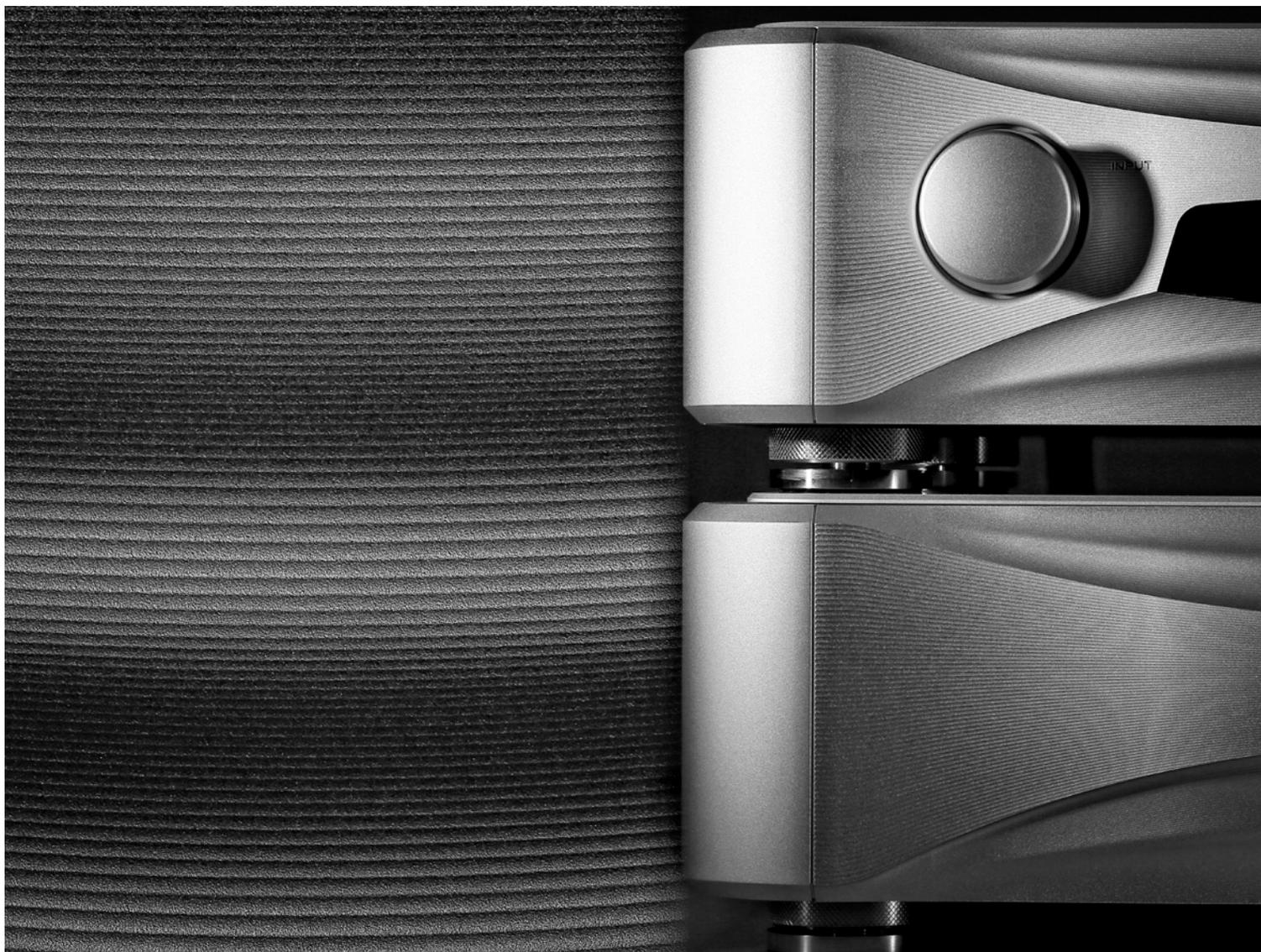
I love little extras like this. They often reveal more about the "character" of a device (or its designer) than an extensive test would. Unfortunately, some audiophiles tend to mix "character" with "sound" in their search of and disregard certain aspects completely. A love for detail can be found in other features of the S1 as well, including the small aluminum bracket Esoteric supplies with the power amp. This bracket can be screwed into position on the rear of the unit to support the connector on the power cable. This makes me recall my first encounter with Esoteric and TEAC products: While using a beautifully featured VRDS CD player in the 1990s, I discovered several knobs that enabled me to adjust the opening and closing speed of the tray completely independently of each other. Details like this have nothing at all to do with the sound, but they're part of the overall experience and great to have.

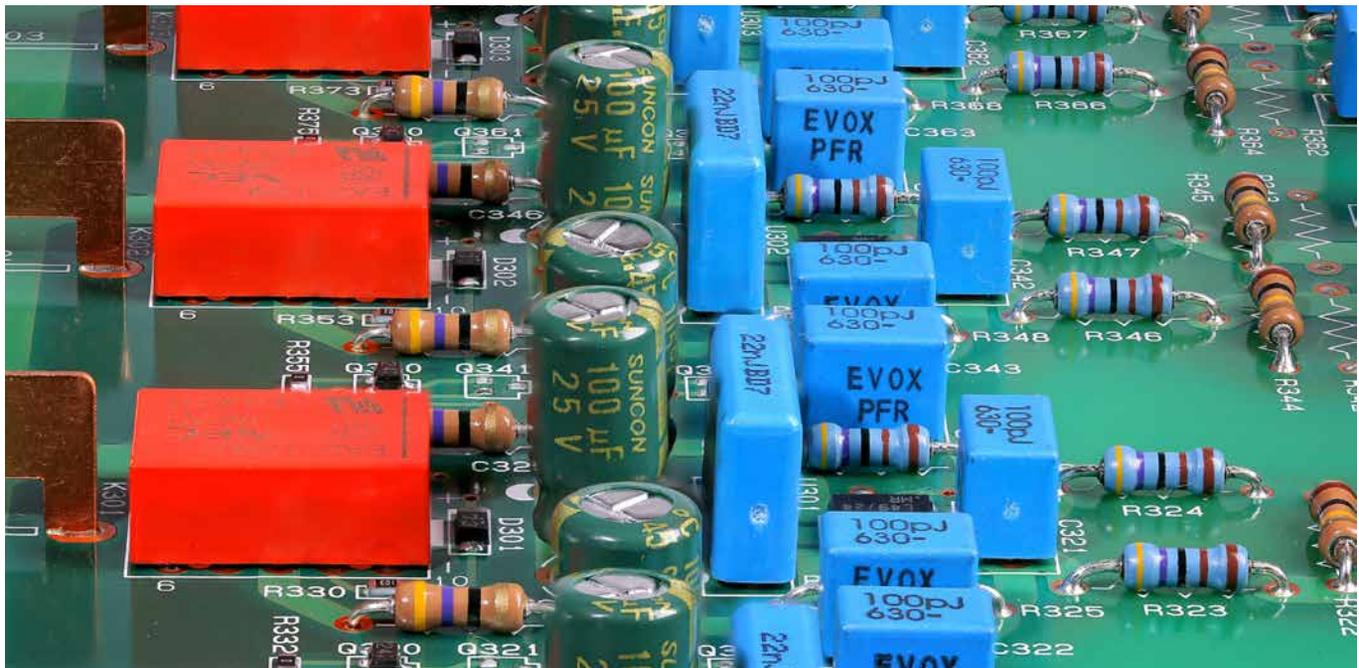
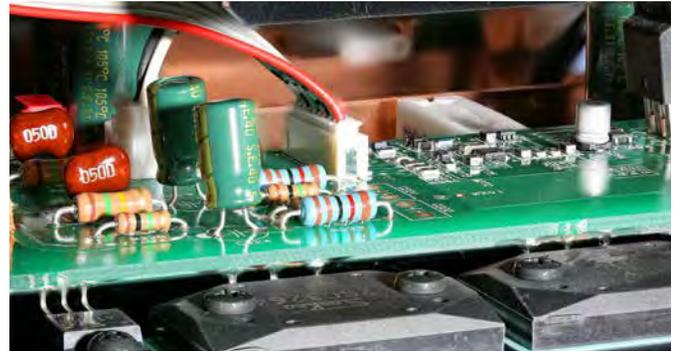
But let's get back to the Grandioso S1. A close look inside the housing reveals all the know-how and experience of a technology powerhouse. The elaborate double-walled, low-resonance, sandwich-type chassis is divided into several internal ▶

INSIDE THE C1 AND S1 SUPERB
WORKMANSHIP QUALITY. THE
STEREO POWER AMP IS PACKED
WITH COMPONENTS.

THE REST OF THE TEAM

Turntables: Audio Note TT-2, Clearaudio Innovation, EnVogue Astra | **Tonearms:** Audio Note Arm 2, Clearaudio TT-II and Universal, Nottingham Analogue AnnaArm 12" | **Pickups:** Audio Note IQ3, Clearaudio DaVinci and Concept MC, EMT JSD S75 | **MC transformer:** Audio Note S2 | **Phono stages:** Clearaudio Absolute Phono, Project Phono Box RS, Synthesis Roma 79DC | **Digital players:** Audio Note CDT-3/DAC 3, T+A PDP 3000 HV | **Music server:** Audirvana Plus | **Power amps:** Bryston B4SST and B14SST, T+A A 3000 HV | **Loudspeakers:** Burmester BA-31, DeVore Fidelity Gibbon 88, KEF LS50 and Reference 1, Live Act Audio LAS312, Stereofone Dura, TAD-CE1, Tannoy Prestige Turnberry GR LE | **Cables:** Audio Note, HMS, Silvercore, Vovox | **Power supply:** IsoTek Aquarius EVO3 | **Accessories, racks, furniture:** from Acoustic Systems, Biophotone, LignoLab, Subbase Audio





compartments and packed full of components. The central compartment contains a large 2,180-watt transformer that provides the amplifier's power. A smaller dedicated toroidal transformer supplies the power for the voltage amplification stage and S1 controls. Located above the two transformers is the main circuit board where the power-supply units are flanked by two vertical circuit boards and the drive stages. These feature a three-stage Darlington Circuit with 10 bipolar, high-output LPTs (linear amplified power transistors) in a push-pull configuration. Esoteric is particularly proud of its newly developed low-impedance coupling that reduces the output impedance from the second stage of the drive section to the final stage. This LIDSC (low-impedance drive-stage coupling) makes it possible to obtain the maximum amplitude within the power supply's available

voltage while minimizing distortion. This LIDSC, or so it is whispered, gives the new S1 stereo power amplifier a loudspeaker drive capability that is very near to that of the M1. Be that as it may, the S1 boasts two complete amplification units living under one and the same roof, which is also evident from the heat sinks on the left and right of the chassis.

The S1 is completely symmetrical, of course, and its specs indicate it performs at an appropriate level. Each time impedance is halved, power is doubled: at 8 ohms, the Grandioso S1 delivers an extremely robust 150 watts, with 300 watts at 4 ohms and 600 watts per channel at 2 ohms. With a damping factor of 1,000, the S1 keeps connected speakers on an extremely short leash. Happily, however, there's nothing at all aggressive about its performance—quite the contrary. It remains ▶



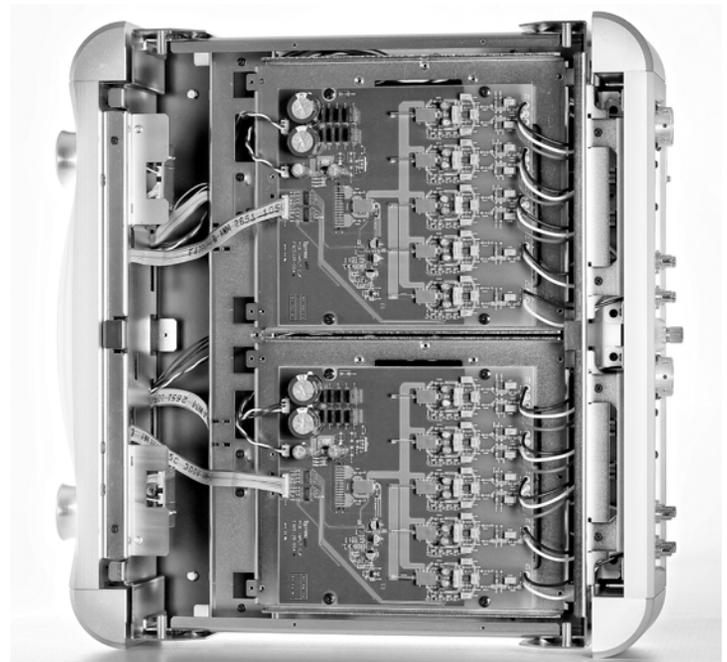
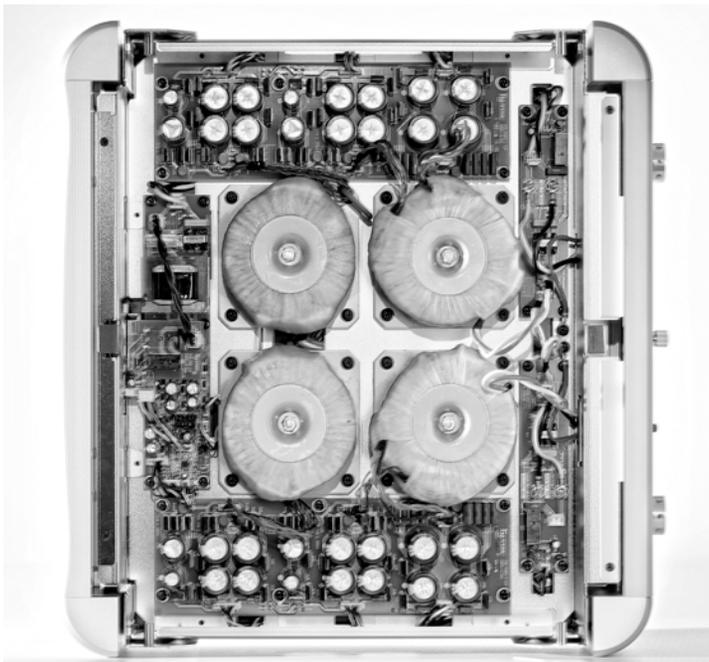
completely unobtrusive as far as the overall sound is concerned, creating a warm state of symbiosis between music lover and state-of-the-art technology. Or is that caused by the cozy temperature of the chassis after a few hours of operating under the seductive blue light?

The perfect complement to the Grandioso S1 is the Grandioso C1 preamp. It distributes functions and weight over two separate chassis: the power-supply unit weighs 29 kilograms and the main unit weighs 21 kilograms. The power supply attests to the dual-mono design of the C1, with dual AC inputs and DC

outputs. It's fantastic how flexible and easy it is to use these solid-looking multipin connectors that slide effortlessly and snugly into their jacks. Those Japanese aren't showing even the slightest weakness.

The front panels serve as a further source of tactile enjoyment. Visually, there's not much to distinguish the power-supply unit from the S1 power amp: an elegant button and an intoxicating blue light—no further features are necessary. The preamp itself, of course, has a more extensive interface. The two solid aluminum knobs use TEAC's own VRDS drive-mechanism bearing system for their control shafts. This ▶

THE PREAMP'S FULLY SYMMETRICAL DUAL-MONO DESIGN ALSO BOASTS A SEPARATE POWER SUPPLY FOR EACH CHANNEL.



enables silky-smooth rotation with no play at all. When the unit is on, the knobs are surrounded by a halo of blue light. The centrally located display gives plain text information about all the relevant settings, automatically switching itself off again after a short period. The remote-control unit supplied with the C1 is nothing out of the ordinary, however, apart from the pleasant tactile experience of a leather cover on the reverse side.

My first instinct was to criticize the somewhat coarse increments in the lowest volume-control range, but the C1 counters this by providing five different preset volume curves. What's more, each of the five inputs can be individually and finely adjusted by

up to ± 18 decibels. Renaming and balancing is also possible, of course. This means the C1 can deal with just about any application scenario. The preamp controls the output level through four parallel, fully symmetrical networks that TEAC calls the Quad Volume Control System (QVCS). Apart from the QVCS, the C1 also boasts Esoteric highlights such as HCLD (high-current line driver") and a whole array of EDLCs (electric double-layer capacitors). You don't need to keep any of this in mind, of course. Nor do you need to know that the music signal in the C1 only really needs to pass through a single operational amplifier—but it's an excellent one. What you should definitely take note of, however, is that ▶

RIGHT DOWN TO THE SMALLEST
DETAIL: AS WELL SUPERB QUALITY
OF THE WORKMANSHIP!



the Grandioso C1 is an extremely polite and well-behaved product—a powerful, high-end device that remains practical to use. Basically speaking, the Grandioso C1 is a classical stereo preamplifier in a modern—but not new-fangled—guise. A remote controller and electronic control are mandatory items these days, but there's no place for a DA converter, USB port, network connection or phono board. But who needs them? The Grandioso series already boasts excellent digital source systems in the P1 and D1, and vinyl fans will soon be able to admire a matching phono equalizer. But that's just a footnote to this review.

Up to now, I haven't said anything about prices. Yes, they're quite steep, even for units with these great looks, superb controls and massive weight. On the other hand, the Grandioso series is pretty much perfect. A look under the hood lends final proof to the quality of the outstanding components, amazing attention to detail and Esoteric's refusal to enter into even the tiniest of compromises. This stubbornness and passion for perfection are really expensive traits, but result in magnificent products like those in the Grandioso series—devices that function so perfectly and bring such a hint of luxury that owners probably terminate any further search for the holy grail of hi-fi.

This realization sets in after the very first day of listening. From that moment on, I waste no further thoughts on the wonderfulness of the blue lighting. Over the next few weeks with Grandioso C1 and S1, the only thing I let seduce me is the music itself.

The trio of devices (weighing a total of over 100 kilograms and requiring no little degree of fitness to move around) fits perfectly into any existing hi-fi system and demonstrates no apparent weaknesses. The preamp keeps a low acoustic profile, simply receiving the signals and passing them on to the appropriate downstream powerhouse – with no hint of coolness or prudishness. If I were forced to attribute character traits to the C1, then I'd have to go for something like "big, powerful and energetic." It also operates seamlessly with all my other power amps.

Its partner in the Grandioso series, the S1, has a similarly impressive, self-confident disposition. In combination with the KEF LS50, the stereo power amplifier is a strict disciplinarian (little monitors love that!) and can even easily deal with a needy big sister like Reference 1. With its generous, muscular approach, the S1 quickly becomes the bosom buddy of my Stereofone Dura. Later in my basement studio, the S1 almost sends my Live Act Audio LAS 312 into orbit. ▶



THE S1 IS
EQUIPPED WITH
A TOTAL OF 20
FAST POWER
TRANSISTORS
FROM SANKEN.



DETAIL OF C1,
AND THE REAR
SIDE OF THE
S1 HAS EVERY-
THING A STE-
REO POWER
AMP NEEDS—
PLUS A CON-
TROL KNOB
TO REGULATE
THE INTENSI-
TY OF THE BLUE
LIGHT.

So much so that a tongue-in-cheek neighbor would ask me the following morning what live band had been playing in my basement. In the listening room at the office, I connected up the Esoteric devices to all the speakers that were not currently being used in a photo shoot. The result: all the speakers I used (Tannoy, Burmester, TAD and DeVore) took an immediate and audible liking to the classical high-end audio components from Japan. For one short second, however, I almost (deliberately) pushed the S1 to its limit (and the Tannoy Turnberry GR LE set the room booming). But this was the only time I ever spared a thought for the doubly powerful monos in the Grandioso series, and it only lasted for one brief second: the S1 only takes up half as much space as the M1 pair, has an outstandingly authentic sound and definitely provides enough power to meet the needs of each and every audiophile.

In a nutshell, the Grandioso devices from Esoteric are true masterpieces of Japanese engineering. The C1 and S1 look great on paper and sitting on the hi-fi rack, but they also perform magnificently where it really matters to audiophiles—in the listening room! The best of Japan combined with a hint of Italian elegance – who could resist such a pairing? Definitely not me. For people with refined tastes in sound, style and technology (and for aspiring Princes of Hi-Fi), Esoteric's Grandioso C1 and S1 are serious candidates in any ultimate amplifier decision. ■

Info and tech details ►



Preamplifier

Esoteric Grandioso C1

Functional principle: linestage preamplifier |

Inputs: 3 x balanced line (XLR), 2 x unbalanced line (cinch) | **Input impedance:** 10 k Ω | **Outputs:** 2 x balanced (XLR), 2 x unbalanced (cinch) | **Output impedance balanced/unbalanced:** 66 Ω /47 Ω |

Special features: external power supply, dual-mono design, adjustable input level (up to ± 18 dB), remote control unit, pinpoint feet, automatic display dimming, adjustable intensity for operating light; extremely elaborate sandwich-type chassis | **Casing:** aluminum | **Dimensions of main unit (W/H/D):**

44.5/13.5/46 cm | **Dimensions of power unit**

44.5/13.5/46 cm | **Weight of main unit:**

13.5 kg | **Weight of power unit:** 29 kg | **Warranty**

two years | **Price:** 28,000 EUR

Power amplifier

Esoteric Grandioso S1

Functional principle: Stereo power amplifier |

Power output (8/4/2 Ω): 2 x 150/300/600 W | **Inputs:** 1 x balanced (XLR), 1 x unbalanced (cinch) | **Outputs:** one pair of speakers (screw-type terminals) |

Special features: Dual mono design, extremely elaborate sandwich-type chassis, pinpoint feet, adjustable intensity for operating light | **Casing:**

aluminum | **Dimensions (W/H/D):** 44.5/22.5/50 cm |

Weight: 47 kg | **Warranty period:** two years | **Price:**

36,000 EUR

www.esoteric.jp





Pass: the pacesetter

The new Pass INT-60 integrated amplifier pumps up to 120 watts per channel to speakers – in real Class A! As a result, crossover distortion fades to a distant memory. Mastermind Nelson Pass thinks this creation represents the finest that amplifier technology has to offer today. In our next edition, we intend to find out if this is indeed the case. – price: €11,750.

www.passlabs.com

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BROWSER Nº 02

Grado enhances its MI systems

More than 60 years into its history, Grado has taken a huge developmental leap into moving-iron technology with its new Reference 2 and Statement 2 series. Both lines have certainly done some growing up. The extra space added to these jarrah-wood cartridges is designed to deliver better damping as well as offer more space for the bulked-up generator. The models in the Reference 2 series deliver a powerful 4.8 mV to the MM inputs. And the pick-up cartridges of the Statement 2 series with 1.0 mV output voltage are designed for use with MC preamps. – prices start at €430.

www.gradolabs.com

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BROWSER N° 02



HiFiMAN mobile

The HiFiMAN Edition X is the little brother of the pioneering HE-1000 reference headphones. Thanks to a sensitivity boost to 103 dB, it can now be used with portable devices as well. Because solid-metal driver mountings are not employed, the headphones weigh just 399 grams (excluding cable). The wide headband and the ergonomic ear cushions are designed to provide excellent wearing comfort. – price: €2,000

www.hifiman.com

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BROWSER Nº 02

Something fabulous from Gryphon

For more than 15 years, the Antileon Signature power amp produced by Gryphon remained the same. No more. It has now undergone a complete makeover and emerged as the Antileon EVO. Of course, a Class A, fully symmetrical power amplifier is still tucked into the massive chassis. But some really eye-catching innovations are hidden there as well, things like the ultra-fast JFET input stage, a microprocessor-controlled, noninvasive protective circuit, and the option of adjusting the power amplifier bias as needed. As usual, the stereo amp can be converted into a monoblock for increased power needs. – price: €35,000

www.gryphon-audio.dk

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BROWSER N° 02



The return of a legend

At the CES, Technics presented a new 1200 model, a product that is related to the legendary DJ turntable in appearance only: a new drive, a new tonearm, solid aluminum construction and a brass platter. Both presented versions, the SL-1200G and SL-1200GAE (limited) models, appear to have entered adulthood. Sales are planned to start in summer 2016. Prices have not yet been announced.

www.jp.technics.com

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BAD GUY, BAD GUY

By Hans-Jürgen Schaal—Part I

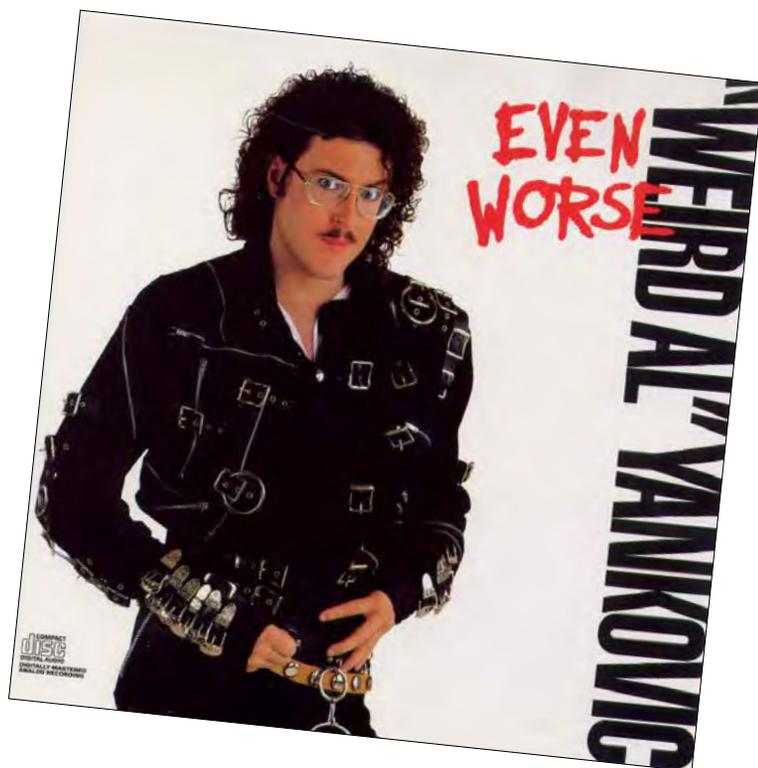


Songs aren't the only things that get covered in the music business. Album covers attract their share of impersonators, too. The covered cover: Is this some sort clever little game, a form of veneration or a simple parody? Then again, there just may be something meaningful behind it.

Five years after *Thriller* shot to the top of the charts, the next Michael Jackson album couldn't end up anything less than a huge hit. When *Bad* came out in the summer of 1987, Jacko was at the peak of his popularity. He was the King of Pop, bar none. Only Prince was able to come anywhere near him in the royal pecking order of pop. The album's release was also accompanied by mile-high expectations – a smash album with advanced billing. And the expectations were met. Virtually every song on the album became a hit, with not a single dud in the lot. Even serious people took note of the album, although it was really filled with simple pop dance music. But it was dance music you liked to hear, music with a fresh blend of R&B, funk, soul, rock and jazz. Jazz legend Quincy Jones presided in the producer's chair once again, which meant plenty of wind-instrument solos and the use of the likes of Jimmy Smith, Eric Gale and Paulinho da Costa as backup musicians. Stevie Wonder,

guitarist Steve Stevens and keyboarder Steve Porcaro put in appearances, too.

The album cover showed that *Bad* was in tune with the times. The days of the kitschy, soft-focus look of *Thriller* were gone. No white Las Vegas-look suit. No romantic pose. No flourish of romantic lettering. No soft nose. And no chocolate complexion. This time, we saw Jacko's new pale face protruding from a black street jacket studded all over with metallic buckles and zippers. This is a guy trying to be some sort of half-rapper, half-rocker, the tough guy with the hair-trigger temper who is just itching to take a swing at you with his balled-up right hand. He is pretending to be the "bad guy" of the *Bad* album. People who remember the gangsta rap of 1987 get the message quite clearly. Two months before Jackson's album hit stores, another bad guy showed up in town: *Bad: Bigger And Deffer* by L.L. Cool J. On this album cover, the hip-hopper is also ▶



BAD GUY, BAD GUY

Part II

decked out in a black jacket. But he's standing on the hood of a car while leaning against a fence in front of a school and peering down at the camera. Maybe, just maybe, Jackson's *Bad* had become—in terms of the pose and title – both homage and parody.

The monumental success enjoyed by Jackson irked many. Even at the time, the notion of Jackson as a “bad guy” brought smiles to people’s faces. Just how absurd can you get? The title song “Bad” inspired a few parodies of its own. One of the first came from “Weird Al” Yankovic: His song “Fat” is a virtual musical replay of the original, but with very funny lyrics about fat people. Yankovic, an American satirist, is rarely politically correct. He also turned Jackson’s hit “Beat It” into his very own version of “Eat It”: Obesity is a topic near and dear to Yankovic’s heart. He later even cooked up a compilation of all of his songs that had something to do with eating. But his humor does not stop here. He decided to name his album *Even Worse*, and not “Fat,” a sign that he doesn’t take himself so seriously, too.

Yankovic’s album cover is more homage than satire. The back of the cover and the record sleeve ever so carefully mimic the work executed on the original cover. The whole thing is calculated. The mere thought of “Weird Al,” with his glasses and his mini-mustache, coming off as some sort of “bad guy” is even more absurd than Jackson playing the role. Through it all, however, Yankovic never tries to make fun of Jackson’s

music or lyrics. What gets his juices flowing is using well-known songs and styles as a means to transport his own audacious satirical texts. The surprise effect of this combination is his secret. On *Even Worse*, Yankovic takes aim at some hits from the 1960s that were enjoying a revival in the 1980s, including “Got My Mind Set On You,” “I Think We’re Alone Now” and “Mony Mony.” He copies different artists’ styles in other, self-composed songs. But the point is his pointed texts: With the lyrics’ exceptional humor, Yankovic mocks the clichés that characterize the United States. “Alimony” tells the story of a divorced man who loses the last shirt on his back. “Melanie” is the perverse love song of a stalker. “Good Old Days” makes fun of the nostalgic past. “Twister” is a rap song about a popular children’s and party game. “Velvet Elvis” takes on those who love Elvis Presley.

By the way, Jackson expressly gave his approval of the parody of his album cover and his song “Bad.” He even provided Yankovic with some technical assistance for the music video for “Fat.” When *Even Worse* went gold, “Weird Al” knew exactly who deserved the award and gave it to Michael Jackson. Yankovic couldn’t believe that Jackson was willing to help him out. “The only reason why he didn’t stop me was that he has a sense of humor.” ■

Michael Jackson: *Bad* (Epic EPC 450290 1)

“Weird Al” Yankovic: *Even Worse* (Scotti Bros. INT 147 335)

Manfred Mann turned 75 in 2015

THE MAN ON THE MOOG

The king of cover songs. The pioneer of the synthesizer. The soloist with the jazzy drive. The keyboardist Manfred Mann may have never been a true headline act. But he has certainly written a chapter or two in rock history. Happy birthday, Manny!



_____ Actually, he is a jazz musician, this guy, this Manfred Lubowitz from South Africa. He got his start on the piano, running his fingers through blues and boogie tunes. Later, he began jamming in the jazz clubs of Jo'burg. Then he was off to England, shedding his old name, assuming a new one (after the

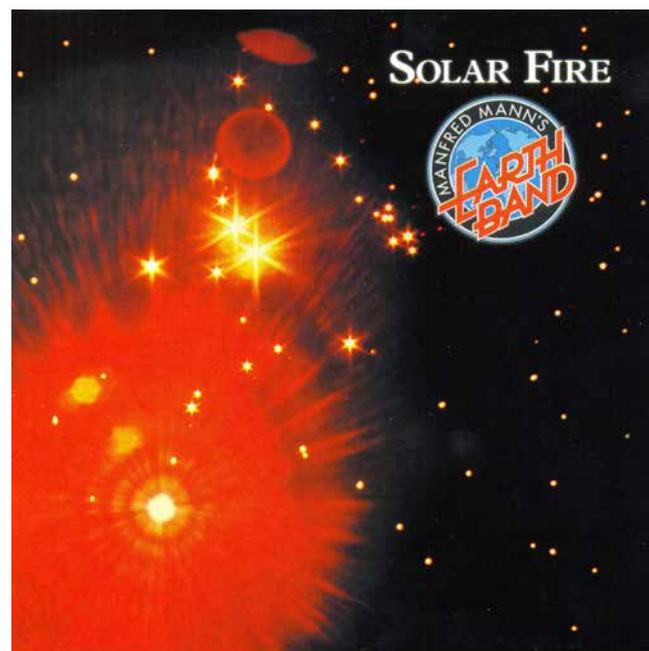
jazz drummer Shelly Manne) and starting a blues band. He cut his first album as Manfred Mann in 1964, a record filled with blues and soul jazz songs like “Smokestack Lightning” and “Sack O’Woe” – complete with blues harp and saxophone. But it was the group’s more uncomplicated beat songs that had people singing along: “My

Name Is Jack” and “Fox On The Run” were two of their top 10 hits. Looking back, Manfred Mann is hardly nostalgic: “The ‘60s aren’t a time of fond memories for me. We just couldn’t get anything going with our blues stuff—even though we were a really good blues band on stage. The songs that people remember are the lightweights

like ‘Do Wah Diddy Diddy’ and ‘Mighty Quinn.’” “Mighty Quinn” – this was one of several Bob Dylan songs that Mann applied his own sound and polish to. You can certainly say it out loud: The South African is the uncrowned king of cover songs. But he’s not particularly thrilled by the use of the word “cover” ▶



Chance (Petbrook RME CD9): 1980
 Nightingales And Bombers (Petbrook MFMCD 8): 1975
 Solar Fire (Petbrook MFMCD 1): 1973



to describe his work – after all, the way he reworks a song has absolutely nothing to do with “replaying” it. Mann’s creations celebrate the melody, produce atmosphere and make songs shine with his cleverly arranged details. “I’m not a song writer,” he says. “That’s why I decided years ago it was better to play other people’s songs in my own way. I add the Manfred Mann sound to them.” You could call him the earworm

maker: Bruce Springsteen’s “Spirits In The Night” (1975), “Blinded By The Light” (1976) and “For You” (1980) are just a few of Mann’s little masterpieces. Just like his adaptations of songs written by Joan Armatrading, Bob Dylan, Randy Newman, Sting, Ian Thomas, Gary Wright and others. These were the heady days of the Earth Band: It recorded 10 studio albums between 1972 and 1980. The evolution of Manfred

Mann’s group in the 1970s into one of the more interesting phenomena of the prog rock era was a rather unplanned event – despite the replacement of the lead singer in 1975. Mann served as the foundation that ensured continuity: the man on the piano – or to put it even better, on the Moog synthesizer. After all, Mann was the Moog pioneer of rock music. Mann lent his instrument out to be used to produce the

first Moog solo on a record by Emerson Lake & Palmer. He even did the keyboard work himself on the first Moog solo by Uriah Heep. “Somehow, I found my personal sound on the mini-Moog,” he says. “The mini-Moog gives you immediate physical control of the sound.” Prog-rock fans really took notice when the fourth Earth Band album was released, *Solar Fire* (Petbrook MFMCD 1, ▶



1973). It had everything a progger desired: an album concept, a classical touch (Holst's *Planets*), augmentation to the group's sound (with choirs, mellotrons, trombones ...), a long track ("Father Of Day, Father Of Night"), a religious-cosmic focus, experimental psychedelic accents, drawn-out improvisations, two purely instrumental songs, ample internal structure in the songs, secondary and concluding themes, etc. Listening to the album today, you also hear traces of Uriah Heep and the Mahavishnu Orchestra. During his synthesizer solos (four in all), Mann reminds you of a jazz musician. In case you were wondering: The album does not contain a single theme from

Holst's *Planets*! (But there is a little Debussy.)

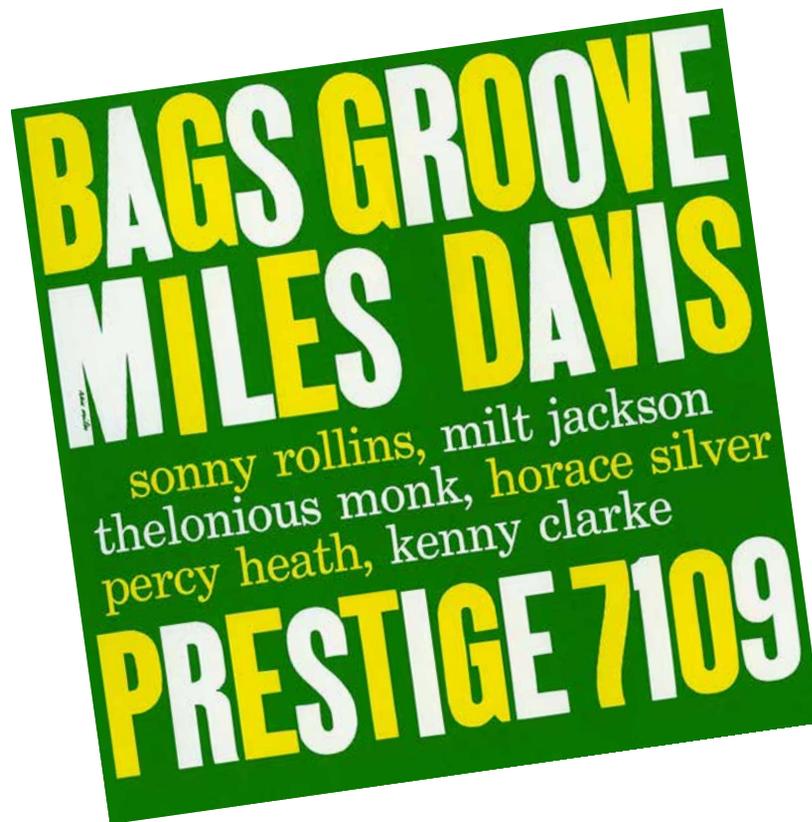
Two years later, the Earth Band's sixth album was released: *Nightingales And Bombers* (Petbrook MFMCD 8). Half of the songs are instrumentals in which the guitars and synthesizer split time equally. Mann's style with electronics is filled with so many expressive details that you occasionally have trouble distinguishing it from the guitar. "I have never played a single second of a solo using notes," the former jazz musician says. "Everything is improvised. I never know in the beginning what I'm going to play." The most important song on the album: the Springsteen cover "Spirits In The Night" with

a string quintet. Incidentally, the album title was inspired by a field recording made by an ornithologist during World War II – you can hear it at the end of the last song.

Chance (Petbrook RME CD9), the 10th album by the Earth Band, provided the overture to the '80s. The electronic sound landscape has added a few floral touches. "The Mann" began to experiment with digital drum machines, music sequencers and pop sounds. Production took more than a year to complete. The songs went through many transformations. The heart of the band was formed by three individuals. Several guitarists were drafted into service. Barbara Thompson added a touch

of saxophone. Scores of singers contributed their vocals. We even get to hear MM himself. When all was said and done, we ended up with some of the greatest hits ever performed by the Earth Band: "Lies," "On The Run" and "For You." Rarely have keyboard chords woven such a musical tapestry of moods.. "Stranded" is a fascinating little musical drama and "Fritz The Blank" a humorous synthesizer instrumental. In case you were wondering: Mann also made an exception and actually composed liner notes for the LP because "I always liked them on the old jazz albums." Why should we be surprised? He is a jazz musician after all. ■

Hans-Jürgen Schaal



Jazz is indeed a big forest—and it's certainly easy to overlook some momentous trees. Hans-Jürgen Schaal points out a few we may have missed in the tall timbers.

BAGS' GROOVE

_____The great Miles Davis created some masterpieces in his time – albums like *Kind Of Blue*, *Sketches Of Spain* and *Bitches Brew*. But the roots of this brilliance reach back much farther—to an album called *Bags' Groove*: This is where the world star Miles Davis came into being. For the very first time his creative magic emerged, a genius that turned jazz compositions into works of art. Using the Harmon mute for the first time, the horn player produced one of his unforgettable sounds in the process. This album also launched the careers of Sonny Rollins and Horace Silver, two musicians who went on to become hard bop legends. During the very first session – in the early summer – Miles put his faith in the younger Rollins and the new pieces he brought along. All three would become jazz standards, even though Rollins did not finish writing parts of them until the very last minute in the studio. “Oleo,” a subtle bebop number with an improvised bridge, takes its name from a brand of margarine whose packaging Rollins used to scrawl down the notes. The piece is arranged like a small work of chamber jazz art. The theme of the A section is performed by the trumpet, sax and bass. The B section by the piano and drums. The piano provides accompaniment

only in the B sections. The piano solo then follows the duo played by the trumpet and bass. Rollins’ cheerful “Doxy” creates a wonderful relaxed contrast to “Oleo.” With Gershwin’s “But Not For Me” (in two versions), Miles took a casual Ahmad Jamal adaption and made it the trumpet’s own – a ballad concept that would become his trademark. A true classic.

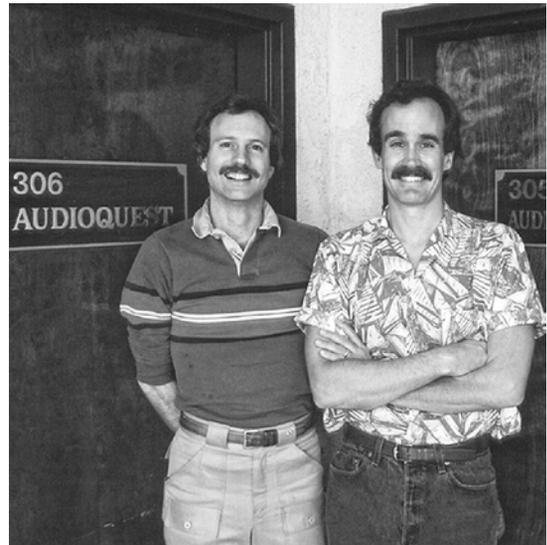
At the other session – on Christmas – Miles got together with two equals from his own generation: Milt Jackson (vibes) and Thelonious Monk (piano). The only piece from the session that made it onto the album was Jackson’s blues number “Bags’ Groove” – but in two versions that each last about 10 minutes. One soloist follows the other: first Miles (without any piano accompaniment), then Milt, then Monk, then back to Miles. But this performance is much more than just a simple jam session. It is an expression of three philosophic statements about the blues that could hardly be any different from one another, particularly in the first take: at the outset excessively melodic, then earthily linear and, finally, minimalistically formidable. Great basic stuff of jazz aesthetics. ■

Hans-Jürgen Schaal

AudioQuest / William E. Low

TRANS- PORT- ED AWAY ON THE PER- FECT TRIP.

By Patrick Pohlmann. Photos AudioQuest, Ingo Schulz



Bill Low and Joe Hartley, 1980





In 2015, AudioQuest announced the launch of its first headphone, NightHawk.

For William E. “Bill” Low, it’s always been about unadulterated pleasure. Having discovered his passion at a very young age, Low still finds getting high on music is the best way to relax.

_____ The desire to enhance this pleasure is what sparked an urge in him to delve into the mechanisms of sound reproduction. In his initial experiments, Low would soon discover it only took a safety pin to elicit sound from a spinning record. He also learned it was possible to create a kind of stereo effect by simply placing two portable mono radios on either side of a listener in the left and right drawers of a desk. Later, he would also assemble radios and amps, first only for himself, then for classmates and fellow students who would pay him a few dollars for his efforts. He used the money he earned to upgrade his hi-fi equipment and to expand his music collection. After finishing college, Low thought it only logical to apply his passion to making a living. He founded Executive

Audio and, from his apartment in Oregon, sold hi-fi equipment to customers by appointment only. After garnering four years’ experience as a retailer, Low found he could no longer resist the call of California and headed south in 1976. His plan was to establish himself as a representative for various hi-fi companies in northern California; but, in contrast to the general open-mindedness and liberalism of the Golden State, the local hi-fi business turned out to be remarkably conservative. Low discovered that the retailers in Southern California showed greater interest in new products and companies, however in the end he had to admit he simply lacked the professional talent required to convince seemingly skeptical retailers about the quality of unknown brands. So scarcely a year after his relocation to ▶





William E.
Low holding
"Dragon Fly"

After finishing college, Low thought it only logical to apply his passion to making a living.

California, Low again launched an appointment-only business to sell hi-fi equipment from his apartment—this time in Santa Monica. Often shocked at the poor quality of cables used for speakers at that time, Low added high-quality, specialty audio cable to the equipment Encore Audio would sell. Soon, retailers also became customers: With various producers starting to launch premium audio cables on the market in 1976, interest in cable was growing among those in the high-end scene.

Turning his passion into a profession back in 1972 would lead Low to the more or less unplanned decision to establish the company AudioQuest eight years later, but this time with his own products. After all, this would make it much easier for him to convey his uncompromising passion to retailers. By the end of 1980, 42 stores in Southern California and one in Texas were

selling his cables. The next year saw AudioQuest products being widely distributed in the United States and in several European and Asian countries. Today the company is active in about 70 countries around the world with Europe, including Russia, joining the United States and Canada as AudioQuest's most important markets.

An ideal audio system is characterized by its ability to play back music exactly as it sounded when it was recorded. According to Low, this means the quality of the playback system's individual components, including cables, can be measured by the amount of interference or distortion they cause. While the hi-fi industry primarily focuses on signal filtering, the actual problem lies in preventing the addition of misinformation, such as previously nonexistent harmonies. Given that the ideal of a perfectly transparent, realistic playback cannot ▶



actually be achieved, Low has ultimately not concerned himself with how realistic a system sounds, but rather how effectively it conveys emotions. Or, in other words, the length of time it takes before a playback system's sound grows tiring. When it comes to developing new technologies, Low, who, by his own admission, never had any interest in electronics, always follows an empirical approach, the same as he did in the early stages of his technical research into audio. Low's college studies ranged far and wide, laying the groundwork for both his ability and tendency to constantly learn new things and let his curiosity run

free. His studies focused on economics, physics, biology and, above all, history, in addition to sociology, psychology, philosophy and political science. To some extent, Low obtained much of the know-how that would become fundamentally important for creating AudioQuest while testing and presenting his products at the very beginning of his career. One of these discoveries was made essentially in passing when a subwoofer manufacturer asked him to produce a heavier cable for his equipment: In doing so, Low identified an improvement in sound from enlarging the cable cross-sectional area by spiraling together four instead of

the usual two conductors. Another time, Low was invited to a presentation by a speaker manufacturer. After making a compelling demonstration of the quality of his cable, Low was inspired to further improve sound quality by shortening the signaling pathway and using a cable that was half as long. This, however, resulted in the unexpected deterioration of the sound. Closer observation revealed that the shorter cable had a softer PVC jacket than the longer one. In short, Low had inadvertently demonstrated the effect of mechanical stability on the audio signal. In 1987, Low wrote a paper titled "Cable Design: Theory versus Empirical" ▶





Beauty.



Over the years, the AudioQuest product line has been continuously expanded to include all types of audio, video, and digital cables as well as various accessories and even a D/A converter.

Reality.” In it, he outlined the basic elements that to this day still set the AudioQuest cable line apart from other cables: the massive conductors to prevent interaction between braids during signal transmission; the use of high-quality metals with few grain boundaries, smooth surfaces and a small amount of oxygen to make the sound as clear and detailed as possible; effective adaptation of the

conductor geometry to their function; and use of cable insulation to absorb as little energy as possible from the conductor’s magnetic field and add it to the signal with a time delay. Further characteristics of the AudioQuest line include aligning the cable running direction with the cable’s grain-structure-based directionality to generate a softer, more spatial sound as well as directly coating the plugs with silver or

gold to prevent sound deterioration due to power reduction caused by intermediate layers containing nickel. The company boasts several in-house developments, too: the Dielectric Bias System (DBS), which prevents absorption and emission of energy from the insulation by polarizing molecules with a strong electromagnetic field, as well as the Noise Dissipation System (NDS), which features ▶



alternating layers of metal- and carbon-containing plastics that can absorb high-frequency disturbances before they reach the ground-based layer.

Over the years, the AudioQuest product line has been continuously expanded to include all types of audio, video, and digital cables as well as various accessories and even a D/A converter. One of the most interesting developments is the DragonFly USB DAC and headphone amp that enables hi-fi-quality playback of all types of audio files from a PC up to a resolution of 24 bit/96 kHz. In 2015, AudioQuest announced the launch of its first

headphone, NightHawk. Plans are also in place to introduce power products in the near future. The various components for these products, which are designed by the development team in California, are manufactured by specialized factories and suppliers from the United States and Europe as well as from Taiwan and China.

Despite the rapid expansion of sales outlets all over the world, company headquarters remained in Low's apartment in Santa Monica until 1985 when a move was made to San Clemente. Today, AudioQuest is headquartered in Irvine and has more than 100 employees ▶

The NightHawk

Volume up or down?
A very quick interview with Bill Low where we wanted him to respond as fast as possible.



Volume up or down? *Whichever best suits the music and context.*

Analog or digital? *Either, as long as the sound is analog.*

Tube or transistor? *Either, as long as the sound is tube.*

Vinyl or download? *Both.*

Jogging in the forest or gym? *Forest.*

Trends or tradition? *Both or either depending on the circumstances.*

Tea or coffee? *Coffee.*

Salad or steak? *Turkey sandwich.*

Wine or beer? *Water and carrot juice.*

Mountains or the sea? *Both.*

Book or screen? *A real not-home-theater movie screen.*

Jazz club or opera house? *Singer/songwriter in a club-type venue.*

Bach or Beatles? *Both ... but better yet, Cowboy Junkies, Passenger, etc.*

Wagner or Wacken? *See Jazz club or opera house?*

Stand-by or plug out? *Leave it on! And, use tube amps with Octave's Eco circuit.*



Today the company is active in about 70 countries around the world with Europe, including Russia, joining the United States and Canada as AudioQuest's most important markets.

worldwide. To better serve European markets, the company opened its first subsidiary outside of the United States in 2009. Like the Southern Californian headquarters, this location includes warehousing and product support as well as a portion of the company's cable-manufacturing. Another subsidiary was opened in Hong Kong the same year. ■

www.audioquest.com

This is a reprint from "WHO IS WHO IN HIGH FIDELITY"—Vol. 1, the compendium from FIDELITY VERLAG GMBH, to highlight the heavyweights as well as the little guys who still pack quite a punch, and to introduce you to the people behind, to bring some order to the ever-expanding high-end business. Ask for your copy.

DYNAUDIO EMIT M10

By Georg-Cölestin Jatta. Photos: Ingo Schulz



A REAL DYNAUDIO FOR A MEASLY €600? NO WAY! I THOUGHT. BUT THE NEXT EVOLUTIONARY STEP OF THE EMIT SERIES THAT'S BEEN ON SALE SINCE OCTOBER 2015 SET ME STRAIGHT. ▶

_____The Emit series comprises a floor-standing speaker, two bookshelf versions and a center speaker. The line paves the way to all sorts of possible uses, ranging from home theaters to a high-end second system. Even the M10, a speaker not much bigger than a shoebox, will immediately strike you as a dyed-in-the-wool Dynaudio . Clear forms, elegant finishes, a woofer membrane made of magnesium-silicate polymer (MSP) and a fine soft-dome tweeter have been the hallmarks of the company's higher-end speaker series and a key to their success as well. When I first saw the speakers, I couldn't believe just how much speaker you could get on a student's budget. ▶





The M10 doesn't care much whether transistors or tubes are used to generate the power, as long as 25 watts are available.



And before the smallest Dane in the family left home, its sisters shared a few secrets with it. The back of the speaker includes a large ventilation port that delivers the volume you need in the lower end. Those who think this may be too much of a good thing can close the opening by using the enclosed plugs. The reward: a crisper kick bass.

The secret to the M10's bass volume is the location you choose for the speakers. When you put the Emit on a stand and locate it a short distance

from a wall, it sounds a little thin in the fundamental range. But I was taken at once by the transparent-airy reproduction on the upper end. The type of amplifier I chose from my collection to connect to the speaker hardly mattered at all. As broad-minded as it is, the tiny speaker handles just about every single amp at an amplifier-friendly nominal impedance of six ohms. The M10 doesn't care much whether transistors or tubes are used to generate the power, as long

as 25 watts are available. The small speakers really entered a world of their own once they were moved into the dining room. There, I set them up at ear height on a nicely filled Expedit shelf. I plugged the reflex opening and then connected the speakers to a Yamaha Pianocraft compact system. The M10 proceeded to shame the original Yamaha speakers, in spite of their subwoofer support, into the very last winding of their voice coils. With back-up support from the shelf itself, the reproduction of Cecilia ▶



Bartoli's "St. Petersburg" was more than ample, given the cost of this system. In the evening, Joe Bonamassa's "Burning Hell" was called on to put Dynaudio's real bass abilities to the test. The first beat simply has to explode at exactly the right point here. OK, you can't exactly rock the house to its very foundations with the M10.

But it was enough for my partner to ask just why somebody needed to invest a fortune in a music room when you can get such good sound from such a "cute little guy." As usual, she just might be onto something. ■

www.dynaudio.com

pictures: © The Handel House Trust Ltd, 25 Brook Street, London W1K 4HB | <http://handelhendrix.org>



The pendulum of world history packs a surprise by unexpectedly sketching the same arc: Separated only by a wall and a mere 200 years, Georg Friedrich Handel and Jimi Hendrix each took up residence in London's Brook Street... →



→ ...While there from 1968 to 1969, Hendrix became acquainted with Handel's Messiah, something a listener with a little fantasy can hear in the introduction to Electric Ladyland.

And for those interested in dropping by: Since February 2016, the museum The Handel House (small photo previous page) broke down the wall and opened Hendrix's apartment for visitors to see.

PREVIEW

FIDELITY international No. 2

We hope that you, a member of the world's hi-fi community, enjoyed reading FIDELITY international as much as we had putting it together. In the upcoming second edition of FIDELITY international, we will provide you with another fabulous potpourri of interesting equipment and background information.



Things like a modern classic: the **ZERO 1** made by **Avantgarde Acoustic** – a true horn loudspeaker that is compact, contemporarily designed and active. The only way to get closer to the music is probably with a pair of top-of-the-line headphones like the astonishing **NightHawk** from **AudioQuest**. Furthermore there will be an intimate personal story about **Peter Qvortrup**, the mastermind behind **Audio Note**. Today's installations increasingly set up classic sound sources right next to modern audio streamers or hard-drive players. With **Melco**, we have taken a close look at one of the most interesting providers of such equipment. You will definitely benefit from an orderly setup, no matter whether your system is digital and handy or analog and lively and troublesome. Superb, ideal and unshakable: **Shambala** from **Subbase Audio**.
Enjoy it and remain loyal to FIDELITY international.





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www.fidelity-magazine.com
 and www.fidelitymedia.de

Authors: Cai Brockmann, Helmut Hack,
 Georg-Cölestin Jatta, Patrick Pohlmann,
 Hans-Jürgen Schaal a. o.

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Please note: All items are listed with German retail prices (including sales tax) at the time of equipment evaluation.

THE END

Thanks for reading issue 01 of FIDELITY international.
Issue 02 will be put online by August 2016. Be prepared and
subscribe to our newsletter to get the latest news at first.