

FIDELITY

international

07

english



07

04/2017 • November/December/January 2017/2018

The German Voice of Premium Audio... a free online magazine

QUIETER AND STRONGER



In many audiophile circles, it is commonly believed that power conditioners and various other power-line accessories often do more harm than good, robbing the music of its vitality, color, and that oh-so-important, wildly intangible "boogie factor."

AudioQuest's **Niagara Low-Z Power Noise-Dissipation Systems** are designed to do the exact opposite. Niagara kills the noise while *honoring* the music, so that the listening experience can be exactly as it should be: compelling, immersive, *fun*.

"The difference was huge. AudioQuest's Niagara 1000 not only cleaned up the power, it did everything that is the *opposite* of killing the boogie.... It was as if my system had gotten a heart-shot of adrenaline."

— Herb Reichert,
Stereophile,
April 2017



audioquest®

Photo: © Fanghong

Many spectacularly designed concert halls are built directly on a waterfront, providing uncluttered views at least from one direction. Familiar examples are the Opera House in Sydney, the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg and the KKL in Lucerne... —>

1970

1973: Sydney Opera House—Australia

1980

1990

1997: Auditorio Alfredo Kraus—Las Palmas, Spain

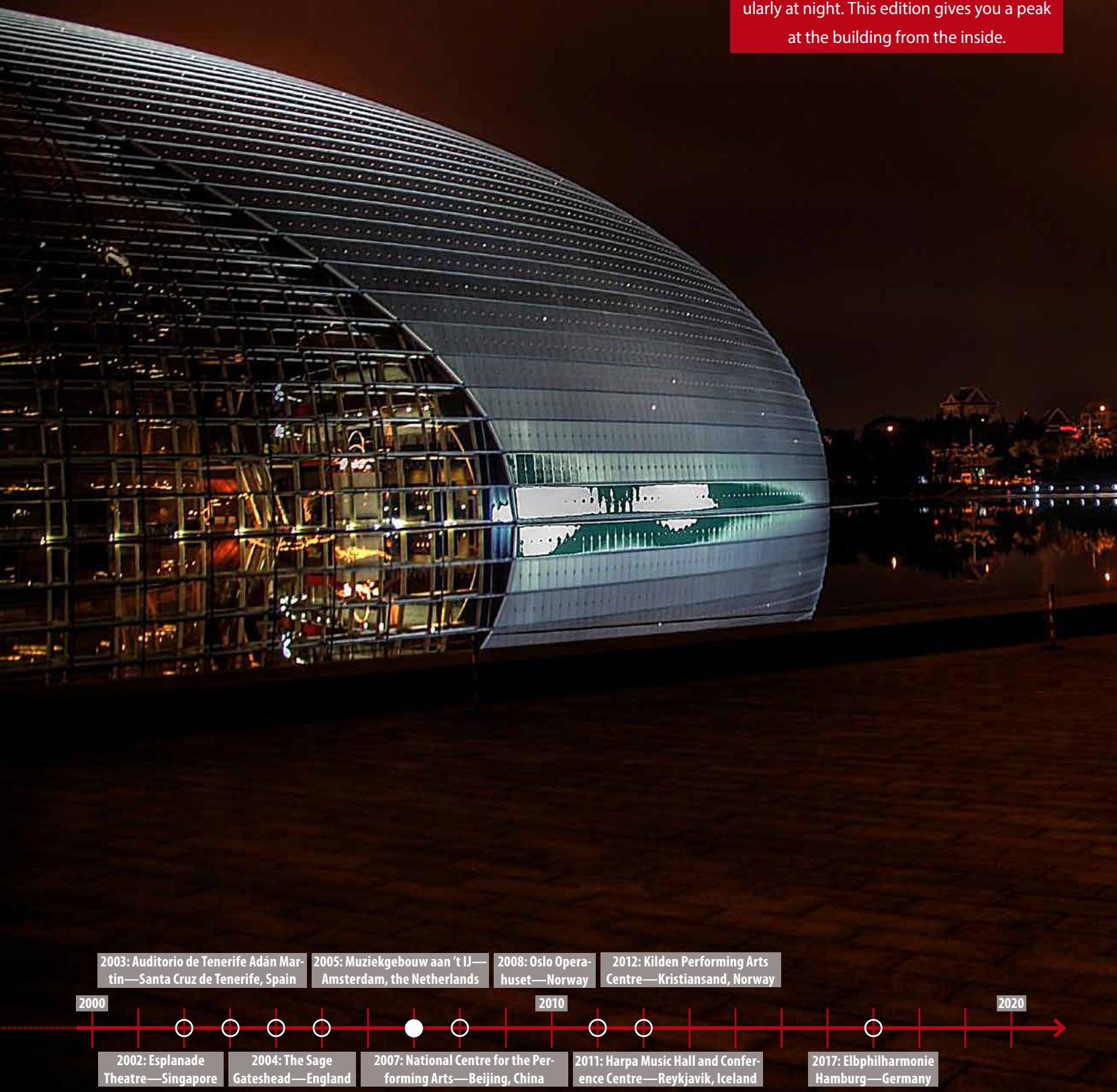
1999: Palacio de Congresos y Auditorio Kursaal—San Sebastian, Spain

1998: Kultur- und Kongresszentrum KKL—Lucerne, Switzerland

2000

Photo: © das farbannt

—>...Perhaps the most spectacular of all is the National Center for the Performing Arts in Beijing. This ellipsoid dome of titanium and glass is surrounded by an artificial lake, giving it a spaceship-like appearance, particularly at night. This edition gives you a peak at the building from the inside.



2003: Auditorio de Tenerife Adán Martín—Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Spain

2005: Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ—Amsterdam, the Netherlands

2008: Oslo Operahuset—Norway

2012: Kilden Performing Arts Centre—Kristiansand, Norway

2000

2010

2020

2002: Esplanade Theatre—Singapore

2004: The Sage Gateshead—England

2007: National Centre for the Performing Arts—Beijing, China

2011: Harpa Music Hall and Conference Centre—Reykjavik, Iceland

2017: Elbphilharmonie Hamburg—Germany



Cai Brockmann

picture: Ingo Schulz

DEAR READERS,

Many of us in the FIDELITY team just can't help ourselves when we encounter the number "nine hundred eleven": It captures our full attention. Why? Because two of our favorite brands have a "911" in their product portfolio: Porsche and Burmester. Although the cult sports car only plays a peripheral role in this edition of FIDELITY INTERNATIONAL (the Porsche 911 gains a touch of class from Burmester's sound system), Burmester's legendary 911 power amp, already with us now for a quarter of a century, dovetails nicely with one of our main topics. We're celebrating 40 years of Burmester Audiosysteme by spotlighting a spectacular hi-fi icon, the Burmester 808. For no fewer than 37 years, this superb preamplifier has enlivened the hi-fi scene, still remaining very much at the top of the league with the MK5 version. Like both 911s, the 808 is probably the best-known name in its product category. For the hi-fi sector, it's an exceptional combination of entertainment equipment, professional tool, design sculpture, and investment object. Otherwise, few words are needed to describe this preamp's outstanding quality — the

808 "sounds" so superb simply by not getting in the way of the signal. Provided, of course, the rest of the system is good enough, and a good "driver" is at the wheel.

Burmester Audiosysteme was only three years old when the company produced the first 808. Two further company milestones give us an even deeper insight into Burmester's "garage phase." The 777 and 785 models illustrate how Burmester (both the person and his creations) came to define and popularize *high-end audio* in Germany.

We hope you enjoy this edition of FIDELITY INTERNATIONAL — the German Voice of Premium Audio.

Best regards,

FIDELITY international—
the German Voice of Premium Audio.



THE PERFECTIONISTS

Once in a generation we design and hand build loudspeakers of such stunning quality they set the standard by which all others are measured for years to come. For perfectionists who demand uncompromisingly accurate sound, capturing the full emotional range, depth and detail of the original performance, THE REFERENCE delivers an experience without equal.

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KEF

OBSESSED WITH HIGH RESOLUTION

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November/December/January (2018)



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Think Fink!



Karl-Heinz Fink

Maxstraße 75

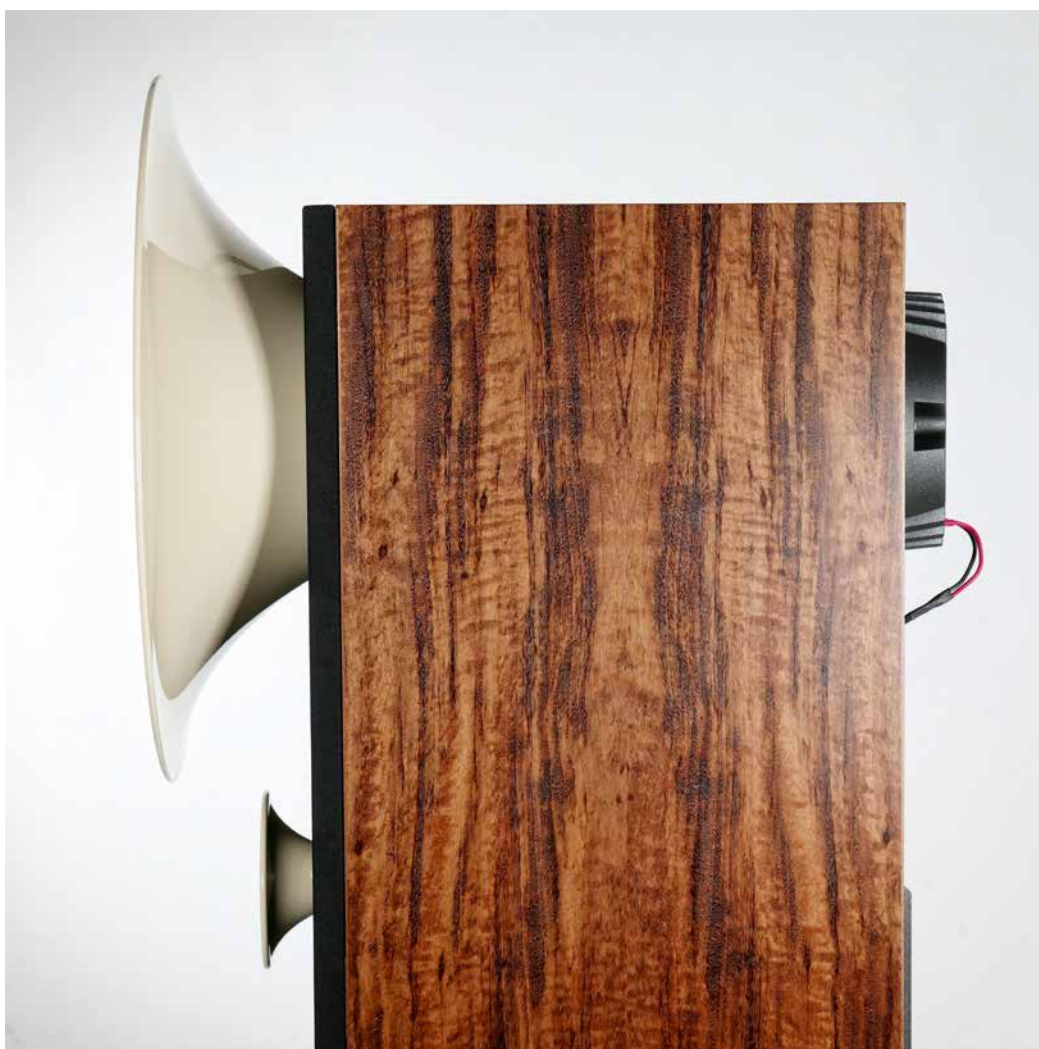
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info@finkteam.com

Avantgarde Acoustic UNO XD

FAULTLESS FURNISHING

By Cai Brockmann and Hans von Draminski. Photos: Ingo Schulz



THE TIME BETWEEN THE TEST LAB
AND THE LIVING ROOM WAS
ONLY SUPPOSED TO BE A SHORT
BREATHING FOR THE SWEET LITTLE
AVANTGARDE ACOUSTIC.



BUT "SHORT AND SWEET" JUST WASN'T POSSIBLE: DURING ITS LAYOVER WITH US, THE UNO XD CAST SUCH A SPELL OVER EVERYONE THAT WE SIMPLY "FORGOT" TO FORWARD IT ON.





Balance, coherence, accuracy of tone together with proportionally correct depth and breadth scaling are the UNO XD's signature features.



Some guests who drop by unexpectedly are folks you want to have stay a little longer. Avantgarde Acoustic's UNO XD is one of them. Having only just passed a slew of technical tests with flying colors (see FIDELITY No. 32 for results) and mastered the onslaught of flashing lights in the photo studio with such aplomb, the elfin speaker suddenly didn't know where to go for its next engagement. With the designated owner unexpectedly incapacitated, the "little one" suddenly had a few days to kill. The FIDELITY hospitality team was only too happy to offer a top-notch furnished room (that is, the listening room) as an interim solution and in a jiffy a deal was struck: The UNO XD, having barely just settled in with the rest of the high-end community, lost no time in wrapping me around its little finger.

Its rather lascivious ways and exceptional performance had entranced everyone here. Avantgarde Acoustic's UNO is actually no stranger to me. Many moons ago, in a previous hi-fi life, I had access to a G2 version that had also on the whole really impressed me. But there had definitely been some room for improvement, however not upward, rather downward. You see, the sticking point back then was connecting the bass notes. Both the midrange

and the tweeter horns banded together so quickly to create a well-coordinated team that the bass drivers had twice the challenge to just keep up. The UNO G2's active electronics had decent power and control, so it played as well as but never quite at the same ear level as the two spherical horns.

This minuscule but sometimes decisive gap can often make all the difference and has now been closed — neatly "calculated out" and "powered out". The UNO XD also delivers superior acoustic coherence compared with the G2 and previous models, doing so with artistic flair: The "one-box design" as opposed to an open modular construction is just the thing these days. Its now full-bandwidth sound (including in the low and lowest ranges) kicks in immediately; there's no escaping it, even while innocently sauntering down the corridor past a closed door. Oh, what the heck, my work could wait. All I wanted to do was flick through the vinyls again and enjoy some music, — so without hesitation I took a detour, opened the closed door, and entered the listening room ...

But the sofa was already occupied: on the left LP covers, on the right various piles of CDs, and there in the middle my colleague Hans von Draminski, indulging himself fully in music. The

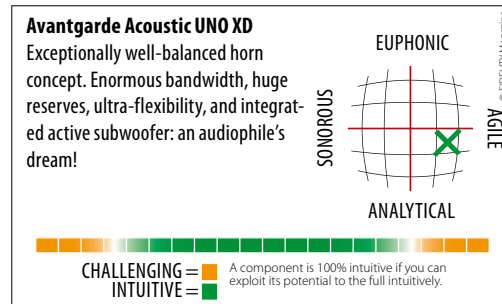
seductive combination of the UNO XD and the sweet spot had clearly enticed him to linger several hours in the listening room, leaving the sofa only to feed more music into the analog and digital drives. I could've actually guessed his whereabouts and undertaking myself by the slightly "experimental" choice of music. Quietly but audibly I cleared my throat, and Mr. von D. languidly opened one eye. A satisfied grin and almost ecstatic look spread across his face. His mouth then suddenly, but quietly, formed the words, "These are mine now! I want to write about them. End of discussion!"

I don't think I've really seen him that euphoric. Even exceptional speakers usually only manage to get a hard-to-suppress yawn out of him. So I abandoned my plan to write about the UNO XD myself and surrendered the listening room and sofa as well as my laptop to the allegedly impromptu listener (this actually turned out to be the third time Mr. von D. had secretly paid Ms. UNO a visit!). As I picked up the MacBook Pro from my desk two rooms away, the next experimental sounds were already beginning to rip through the FIDELITY side wing.

Cai Brockmann







What's he like, that Cai Brockmann? I don't think there was anything "experimental" about what I was feeding into this fantastic combo comprising Audio Note (CD drive), TechDAS (turntable), Tidal (preamp), Air Tight (tube monos), and these dreamy horns. I was simply responding to the fact that the Avantgarde Acoustic UNO XD positively screams for something I call "going-out music." Software with inherent boom, you might say, software that enables this exceptional loudspeaker to demonstrate everything it's got, in the process showing off some very surprising talents and appealing to my personal tastes more so than many (sometimes much more expensive) speakers have managed to do over the years.

It's true that in the past I've bitterly disappointed not only the FIDELITY editor in chief but also many hopeful developers. This is because the products, which were no doubt created with a lot of blood, sweat, and tears, simply didn't do it for me: They didn't speak to my emotions despite sounding great on paper. Sometimes it's been

the overly polished perfectionism that's put me off; you see, when you take away the imperfections of a device or loudspeaker, you take away their soul. Doing nothing wrong is not the same as doing everything right. At this point, I have to admit that my viewpoint on horns has been stuck for (too) long in an era when horn constructions were indeed efficiency monsters that generated almost endless volume levels from comparatively minimal amplifier power, but at the same time more or less unashamedly discolored and distorted tones. Okay. Admittedly, that was a long time ago and the horn situation in 2017 is completely different. If I were to hide this gorgeous horn speaker behind a curtain and carry out a blindfold test, the test listeners would very likely get it all completely wrong and guess, solely drawing on their impressions from listening, that the speaker used a conventional loudspeaker principle. At least, that is, until I would turn the volume control past 12 o'clock and then gradually to the right until the sound pressure made the windowpanes rattle and the listening room walls start to shake. In that sense, the UNO XD really remains a typical

shining example of the horn principle supported by formidable active bass. And that's also a good thing. After all, it massively enhances your potential enjoyment when, if necessary, you can achieve decibel levels at home that are more common to cinemas or the sound systems of huge concert venues. Yes, it's true that with small-ensemble chamber music I don't really need that, but amid the dense turmoil of Gustav Mahler's *Symphony No. 8* I definitely do. The introductory "Veni, Creator Spiritus" movement, with its vehement invocation of a higher power bestowing spirit and intellect, has presented a problem ever since humankind has tried to achieve true-to-original sound recordings and playback. A huge choir, an impressive orchestra, and an audibly rumbling church organ using principal pipes need to be properly captured so the result doesn't end up an undefinable mushy mess of music. When the Decca sound engineers recorded for all eternity the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra being deftly led through Mahler's sound masses with the skillful hands of Riccardo Chailly, they managed to square the circle in some respects: Without stripping the *Symphony of a Thousand* of its

The Avantgarde Acoustic UNO XD positively screams for something I call “going-out music,” software with inherent boom.



STRIKING VOICES AND SUPER-CRISP PERCUSSION—THIS HAS BEEN GREAT FUN!

majestic power, the Main Hall of the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam was so skillfully and enchantingly captured in zeros and ones in January 2000 that the space had been given an almost three-dimensional contour even without infusing it with any extra imagery or adding any surround-sound bells and whistles. With sharp lines, the Avantgarde Acoustic UNO XD traces an acoustic hologram with appropriate dimensions and intense tones without jeopardizing the balance the conductor is working to create.

This can only work when the loudspeakers themselves demonstrate real homogeneity, a feat the current version of the UNO XD achieves primarily due to its fully active control of the bass range. The “XD” in the name stands for “Xtreme Digital” and is what enables the bass range to seamlessly snuggle up to the mid-high range while also impressing with its bass precision: It benefits the deep, deep organ passages in Mahler’s *Symphony No. 8* as well as such pop music of the early 1990s that Freddie Mercury and his group Queen perfected in *The Miracle*. When the disc spinning in the CD player features the version remastered some time ago in Japan, Queen fans can look forward to real bass and wild drum orgies. Especially if they take the plunge and dial up the volume to let

things rip at dance-club levels to make the walls shake, or at least vibrate, and not just in a figurative sense.

The UNO XD had also come into its own when I decided to listen to the American diva Renée Fleming’s Handel recital. Not only did the Avantgarde Acoustic reproduce her penetrating voice with all its glorious detail, all its shades of timbre, and all its phrasing tricks to create a remarkably correct three-dimensionality in the listening room, it also balanced the delicate accentuation of the upper end of the treble scale so skillfully that this thrilling record grew into a truly great example of Baroque music.

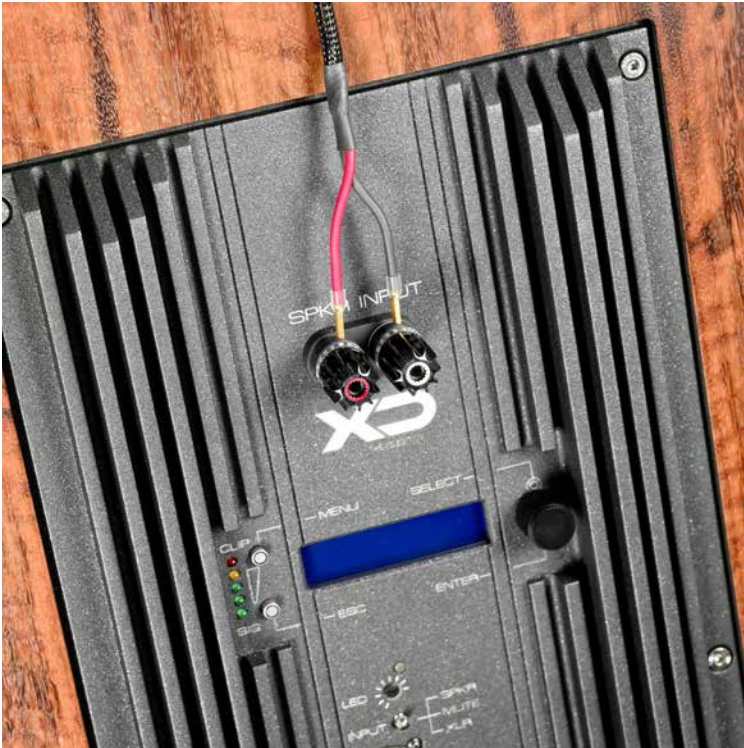
Balance, coherence, accuracy of tone together with proportionally correct depth and breadth scaling, even of large recording rooms, are the UNO XD’s signature features. With Paul Simon’s cult-status album *Graceland*, this had come across through the horns with such ease, which was also the case with Yello’s refined and bass-thumping album *Touch Yello* and AC/DC’s bone-dry produced album *Ballbreaker*. With *Buena Vista Social Club*, which Ry Cooder had taken out of retirement and brought back to the stage for Wim Wenders, the phenomenal horns outdid themselves: striking voices and super-crisp percussion—this has been great fun.

So what’s experimental about that? Nothing. Classic rockers and Latin fans always look extremely irritated when I put the live album *Neon* by the Medieval heavy-metal band Subway to Sally on the TechDAS turntable. Eric Fish and his crew call their new-found and/or invented mixture of acoustic instruments, such as the hurdy-gurdy and the shawm, and modern synthesizers “ecooustic”: post-modern balancing acts involving pleasant yet dark lyrics recorded with such presence and energy on the tour that conventional loudspeakers tending to get short of breath quickly reach their limits. The low-distortion, lightning-fast, and formidably homogeneous UNO XD miracle horns, on the other hand, had made this unusual material what it’s meant to be: a memory of the future. ■

Hans von Draminski

►►

It massively enhances your potential enjoyment when, if necessary, you can achieve decibel levels that are only common in live sound systems.





With sharp lines, the Avantgarde Acoustic UNO XD traces an acoustic hologram with appropriate dimensions and intense tones without jeopardizing the balance the conductor is working to create.

ITS RATHER
LASCIVIOUS
WAYS AND
EXCEPTIONAL
PERFORMANCE
HAD
ENTRANCED
EVERYONE
HERE.





Horn loudspeaker | Avantgarde Acoustic UNO XD

Functional principle: Three-way floor-standing speaker with active subwoofer | **Nominal efficiency (2.3 V/1 m):** 107 decibels | **Nominal impedance:** 18 ohms | **Equipment:** lacquered ABS injection-molded spherical tweeter horn and spherical midrange horn, two 25-centimeter woofers in the enclosed housing, subwoofer power amplifier XD-1000 | **Input music signal:** loudspeaker cable (screw terminals), high-level balanced (XLR) | **Output:** subwoofer out (XLR) | **Terminals:** USB and LAN for service and calibration, 12-volt trigger for on/off automatic functionality | **Subwoofer amplifier power:** 1,000 watts | **Special features:** midrange without

crossover, sound processor (DSP module) for fine-tuning the subwoofer to room acoustics and personal sound tastes; removable front cover; adjustable brightness of subwoofer LED operating light | **Finishes:** body in black, white, zebrano, or tiger rose-wood; horns in 11 standard colors; optional extras for an additional fee | **Dimensions (W/H/D):** 50/138/53 cm | **Weight:** 74 kg | **Warranty period:** electronics: two years; drivers: five years; material (metal, wood, horns): 10 years | **Price for a pair:** €22,600

Avantgarde Acoustic Lautsprecher-systeme GmbH | Nibelungenstr. 349 | 64686 Lautertal-Reichenbach | Germany | Telephone: +49 (0) 6254 306100 | www.avantgarde.acoustic.de

ACCOMPANYING EQUIPMENT

Turntables: Audio Note TT-2, Clearaudio Innovation, TechDAS AirForce 3 | **Tonearms:** Audio Note Arm 2, Clearaudio TT-II and Universal, Einstein The Tonearm | **Pickups:** Audio Note IQ3, Clearaudio DaVinci and Concept MC, Einstein The Pick-up | **MC transformer:** Audio Note S2 | **Phono stages:** Clearaudio Absolute Phono, Einstein The Turntable's Choice | **Digital players:** Audio Note CDT-3/DAC 3, Ayon CD3sx, Gato CDD-1, Marantz HD-CD1, T+A PDP 3000 HV | **Music servers:** Audirvana Plus, Roon Music Player | **Preamplifiers:** Air Tight ATE-2001, Audia Flight FLS-1, Tidal Audio Preos | **Power amps:** Air Tight ATM-3211, Audia Flight FLS-4, Audio Note P2SE, Musical Fidelity M8 500s | **Integrated amplifier:** Cayin CS-100A | **Cables:** AudioQuest, Audio Note, HMS, Vovox | **Power supply:** AudioQuest Niagara 7000, IsoTek Aquarius EVO3 | **Accessories:** Fastaudio, Harmonix, Sieveking Sound QNR, Subbase Audio



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.

BROWSER

№ 01



A modern utopia

The groundbreaking insights Focal gained during development of the Sopra series have now been applied to two of the company's Utopia models, previously being built in practically unchanged form since 2008. Both the Scala Utopia Evo (€32,000) and the Maestro Utopia Evo (€56,000) speakers are now equipped with an internally developed tweeter that uses patented TMD (tuned mass damper) rings. Modifications to the crossover and interior cabling are just two of the many other upgrades.

www.focal.com

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BROWSER

№ 01



The crown prince

While the new BeoLab 50 from Bang & Olufsen doesn't have all the bells and whistles of the BeoLab 90, it still boasts the same great sound. Its slim silhouette and slender footprint gives the BeoLab 50 just the right look for the home environment without being obtrusive. When you switch the unit on, an elegant tweeter lens rises out of the speaker. This acoustic lens can be adjusted depending on the position of the audience (beam width control). Each box has seven built-in amplifiers controlled by seven drivers. The BeoLab 50 has a master-slave configuration and features active room compensation technology that permits connection of an external microphone to help the system adapt to the acoustics of the individual listening room.

www.bang-olufsen.com

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Fancy a new washing machine?

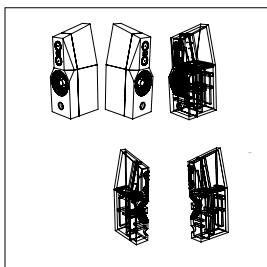
Those familiar with the loudspeaker scene sure tend to sit up and take notice when they hear the name Karl-Heinz Fink. His all-star team of Essen-based engineers has been responsible for a large number of top-quality speakers sold by a range of different manufacturers. The Fink team has now decided to launch a product under its own brand name: Dubbed the WM-4, the speaker's designation allegedly stems from its resemblance to a washing machine. The huge speaker is housed in twin cabinets, one for the 15-inch bass driver and the other for the twin flat-membrane midrange units and an AMT tweeter arranged as a D'Appolito array. The WM-4 combines wide bandwidth (30 hertz to 30 kilohertz) with high sensitivity (90 decibels). A speaker pair will set you back around €65,000.

We'll be looking at this product in more detail in an upcoming issue of FIDELITY.

www.finkteam.com

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BROWSER № 01





BROWSER № 01

A legend returns

Following the reincarnation of its SL-1200/1210, Technics has now launched a new version of the legendary SP-10 professional turntable. Up to now, the SP-10R has been the highest-quality product built by this premium audio brand in the Panasonic group. The prototype combines a coreless direct-drive motor with a heavy platter weighing in at seven kilograms. Technics is working flat out to meet the scheduled release date in early summer 2018. The price for the SP-10R will be just under €10,000. A matching tonearm is also planned.

www.technics.com

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YOU MIGHT THINK THE POWER FROM AN ELECTRICAL OUTLET IS CLEAN AND STABLE.



IT ISN'T. NIAGARA COMES
TO THE RESCUE.



AudioQuest Niagara 7000

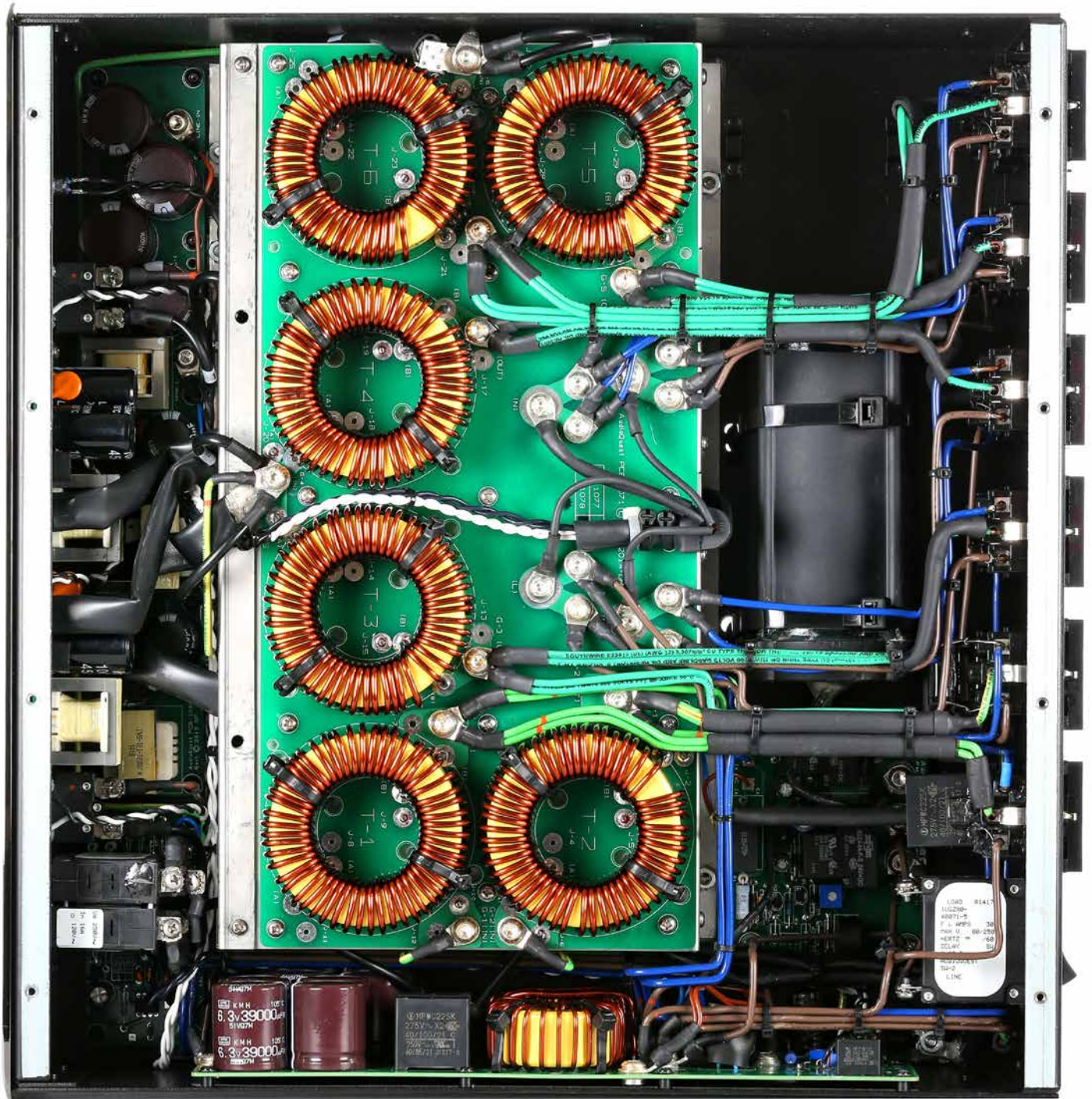
STRENGTH IN SERENITY

By Cai Brockmann and Hans von Draminski. Photos: Robert F. Tobler, Ingo Schulz



Niagara Falls: the impressive waterfalls that straddle the border between the US state of New York and the Canadian province of Ontario

AudioQuest's Low-Z Power Noise-Dissipation System combines passive and active filter technology as well as smart protection circuits. It also permits enormous peak-current demand to ensure maximum dynamics. Its own power consumption is less than 15 watts. According to the manufacturer, this means it can also be operated in an upright position—of course only with the cover on.





Brimming with outstanding technology

Essentially the whole thing sounds pretty straightforward: You plug your beloved hi-fi system into the electrical socket in the wall and everything is hunky-dory. But, as with all things in life, sometimes the quality of the power supply is good, and sometimes it's bad. Substandard, "dirty" power isn't really much of a problem for toasters, vacuum cleaners, and model railways as you can't hear the difference. But when it comes to enjoying your favorite music, power quality does, in fact, play a significant role. This is even more the case the better a high-end system's individual devices have been coordinated to work in sync with each other. For me personally, ensuring the power supply is as good as it can possibly be is on par with decent room acoustics in the hi-fi hierarchy. This means it is even *more* important than all the other magnificent music devices comprising my setup. A hi-fi system cannot reach its full potential in terms of sound

quality unless the power supply has been perfected.

AudioQuest has now decided to throw its hat into the power optimization ring—and its new product looks mighty impressive. About three years ago, Bill Low, the fastidious head of the US firm who is known for being a lateral and forward thinker, hired a well-respected expert. Garth Powell, who has amassed a wealth of knowledge about power conditioning and audiophile applications over the past 20 years, was given plenty of time and space to create an entire series of devices at AudioQuest, as well as tasked with ensuring the top-of-the-range model redefined the "audiophile power" market.

Enter the AudioQuest Niagara 7000. So, what exactly is supposed to be so complicated about a power filter? You just plug the power cord into the wall socket, connect the hi-fi components to the power filter, and off you go. Operating and connecting the AudioQuest Niagara 7000

properly is not really complicated. You just have to bear in mind a few basic rules, which are explained in detail in the quite lengthy operating instructions. When you read the information, you also learn the inner workings of this Low-Z Power Noise-Dissipation System (its full official name) are rather complex: The system is brimming with outstanding components, a wealth of know-how, and even a patent or two.

Of the 12(!) connection options, four outlets are reserved for power-hungry components (power amplifiers, integrated amplifiers, and loudspeakers). These outlets are specially wired and can supply even the most power-needy devices without so much as breaking a sweat. Two rows, each containing four outputs, supply all other components—like CD players, phono stages, DACs, streamers, and preamplifiers—the power supply that needs to be handled completely differently in order to squeeze out the optimum sound quality. You'd ►





don't really need to delve into all the details about the exact technology that governs the three outlet quartets. Rather, you should just do what AudioQuest considers the most important activity for every development: listen to music.

So it's time for me to hand things over to my colleague Hans von Draminski to do just that. Let's see what he makes of it all.

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A case for Agent "Spooky Draminski"? Not this time. The AudioQuest Niagara 7000 definitely didn't fall out of the sky from the hatch of a UFO. Neither was it pieced together of magical components by devilish house-elves educated in the dark arts and beaver-ing away in the shadows of a gallows tree. Apart from the stylish front plate, this power filter is pretty much the prototype of a no-nonsense machine that, when you reach a certain quality level, every high-end-er actually needs.

And the reason is clear: The power you get out of your electrical socket is dirty. If we were talking about a young boy who had just come in from playing outside,

you'd be tempted to immediately throw him, clothes and all, in the bathtub. Of course this is definitely not advisable when it comes to your power supply and most certainly wouldn't achieve the desired effect. I'll admit I'm one of those unfortunate people who live in a big inner-city jungle and therefore have to live with all the extra distortion that pollutes the power-supply network. My apartment is located in an old building constructed over 100 years ago, and parts of it have a rather dated primary power connection. Right next door to me, they've been working on expanding the museum for over a year now; less than a kilometer away, a large company manufactures sports accessories such as ski goggles. With its extensive computer network, the town hall across the street also surely doesn't contribute to improving the quality of my power supply. The Bavarian Purity Law might apply to beer, but it sure doesn't address power. From experience, my system only ever sounds the way it's supposed to sound on paper in the dead of night or early on a Sunday morning when assembly line operations at the ski goggle manufacturer are halted

for at least a little while. However, the distortion is getting more and more noticeable and the "quiet time" when I can actually listen to my music is getting shorter and shorter. I feel like the only thing that could salvage the situation and solve my sound-quality crisis would be for me to move to the countryside in the not-too-distant future. But even out in the sticks, there's no longer any guarantee you'll get clean power.

These factors make me the ideal target customer for such a top device as the AudioQuest Niagara 7000, which filters and cleans the power across a very broad spectrum of frequencies and takes a balanced approach on several levels to remove the maximum amount of distorting noise from the power supply. Right at the first glance, you'll not only notice the 7000's very solid mechanical design, but also its lavish features: As Cai Brockmann already explained, the mighty AudioQuest can connect to 12 devices, while offering real power gobblers four separate reserved outputs that take a different approach to filtration and do not restrict musical performance. And it's true: We can already say the Niagara 7000 fully maintains the timing ►

No less than a dozen audio components can be connected on its rear panel. A foursome of especially contact-strong outputs is reserved for power-hungry units such as power amplifiers and active loudspeakers.





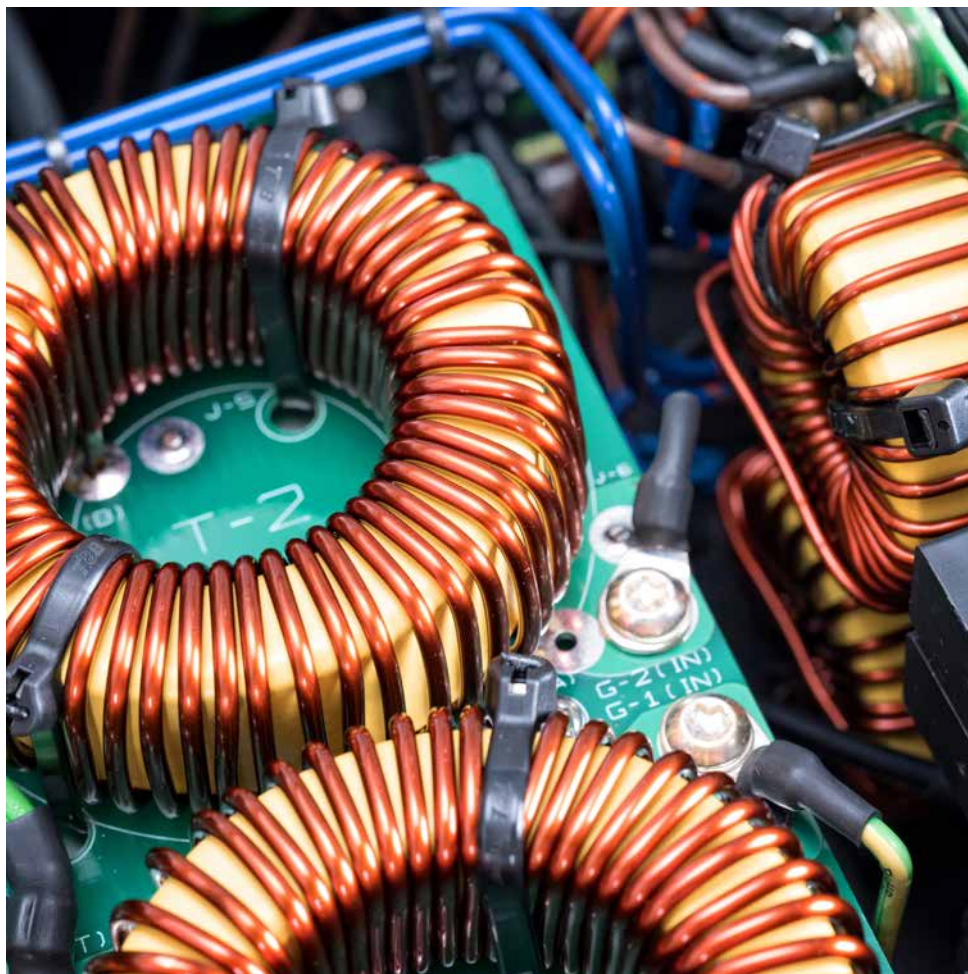
and the “flow” of the connected devices and as such all the enthusiasm, too.

Over the course of several weeks, the mighty Niagara shows off all its many talents in the FIDELITY listening room with the main system we currently have set up there. You don’t need the ears of a wolf to be able to pick up on the massive differences the device makes: By way of comparison: Whenever this system has depended on a certain simple but very well-respected German

power strip, it has always sounded decent and punchy, but definitely not electrifying. Every time I now switch to the 7000, it feels like I’ve traded in all the links in the audio chain and upgraded to each device’s bigger sibling in its respective product range. Practically every sound-related spectrum benefits from plugging in the US heavyweight.

I use a few test CDs, including Riccardo Chailly’s recording of Gustav Mahler’s Symphony No. 8 with the Concertgebouw

Orchestra in their home concert hall, a venue known to be one of the best in the world. Without the Niagara, my reservations about the CD are at best reinforced: In the introductory “Veni, Creator Spiritus” hymn, the opulent orchestra and choirs involved in the performance sound unduly jerky, a little untidy and casual, and the wind instruments sound almost provincial. Above all, the sound is not balanced, individual sections in the orchestra push to the forefront without being asked to ►



and negatively impact the flow of the music. Three-dimensionality and depth gradation are average at best.

Then I switch to the AudioQuest Niagara 7000: The color spectrum expands as does the space, and a decent big-city ensemble is reconverted into the exceptional Dutch orchestra that it truly is and shows the Concertgebouw fully deserves its honorific title of “royal” orchestra. A myriad of meaning-charged details are added, details that had obviously gotten lost somewhere along the way amid the barrage of distortion. The background is filled with circulating “black tones,” indicating the working condition

of the music devices connected to the Niagara have been vastly improved. The fact that Chailly must have meticulously prepared for the “Symphony of a Thousand” and the dedicated Mahlerian Chailly tackled not only the broad but also the precision dynamics at all the important points in the piece is absolutely apparent with the Niagara—during the playback without the 7000, the whole thing developed into a rather garish, one-dimensional fresco. The same comparison holds true with rock, pop, jazz and folk music. David Crosby’s album *Croz* boasts a full, rich production and is definitely not one of those infamous listening test discs that

irritate potential customers at hi-fi trade fairs. This disc is out of this world when you listen to it on a decent system. Without the mighty AudioQuest, thought, the whole thing sounds a bit like it’s stumbling all over the place, not very articulate, and colorless and indecisive. You can guess for yourselves what happened after we finished our power test marathon.

And with that, let’s return to Cai Brockmann ...

+++

The mighty AudioQuest Niagara 7000 not only fascinates my colleague ▶

Chic yet powerful with an outstanding talent for cleaning power: AudioQuest has given the Niagara 7000 a cover that wouldn't look out of place among the most elegant of high-end devices.



but me, too—and for the same reasons. Our notes about the device, which we made completely independently of each other, are astonishingly similar in every respect.

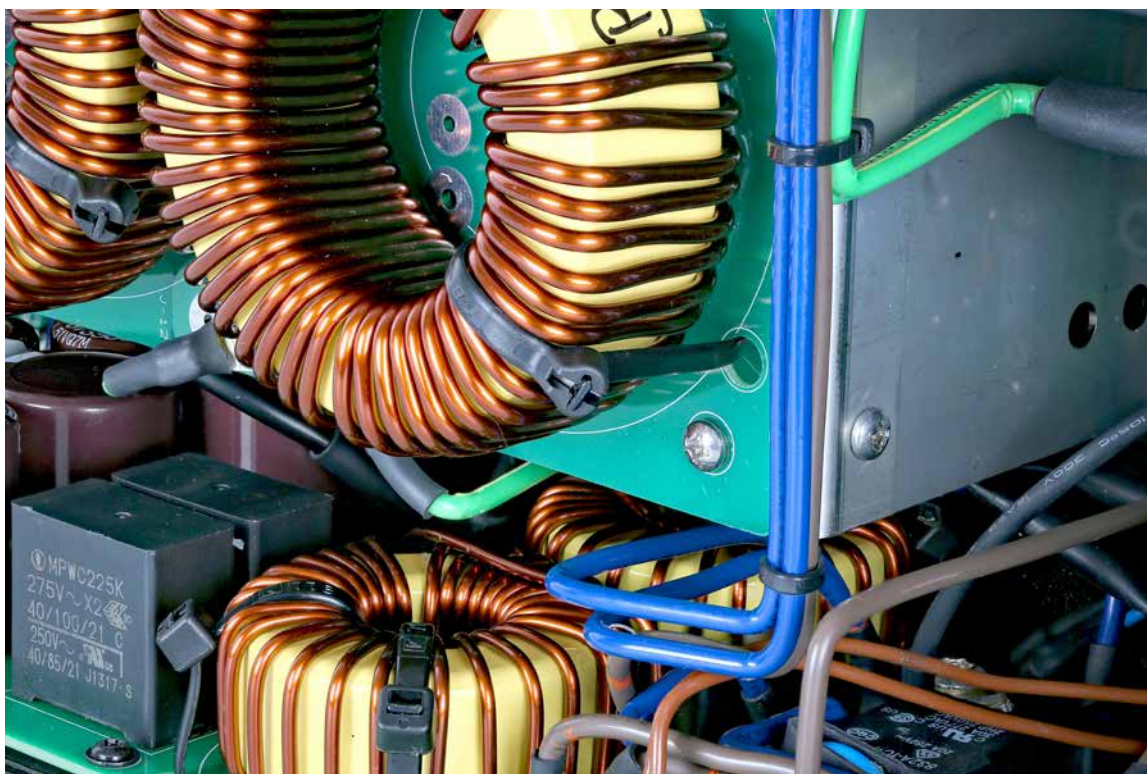
Most of the tricks and circuits used in the AudioQuest Niagara 7000 should be familiar to any decent electrical engineer. But here, too, the devil is in the detail: A product first deserves to be truly classified an audiophile device when the interaction of all the circuits and components involved has been professionally refined. And, as such, the reputedly simple power filter is in no way a trivial matter; it is a complex machine with a clear mission. After all, the trained human ear is even more sensitive to the minutest of details than any measurement equipment, especially if the high-end system involved also affects a first-class musical instrument with even the tiniest

amount of atmospheric distortion. After a long and insightful visit from the Niagara 7000 to the listening studio in my cellar, I finally manage to load the 37-kilo AudioQuest beast into the trunk of my colleague's car—with his help, I should add.

+++

Thanks for lending me a hand, Cai. My next step and the ultimate litmus test: I integrate the Low-Z Power Noise-Dissipation System into my idyllic listening setup at home, which is threatened by a whole bunch of issues that go beyond the ski goggle manufacturer. And the results were astonishing because, although the devices I have at home are in no way super top-of-the-range high-end products, the improvement in sound quality with the Niagara 7000 was so massive that I started

to reconsider my plans to move. You see, the mighty AudioQuest moves even my systems—whether modern Marantz devices from the MusicLink series or a selection from my vintage collection—a few rungs on the quality ladder. It also gives an overall impression that is unequivocally more acoustically transparent, sounding more light and airy and more plausible in terms of timing and precision dynamics. The improvements were much, much more noticeable than any improvements that could be achieved by changing any cables or bases. Of course, it sounds silly to combine a high-performance multitasking power filter costing around €9,000 with stereo devices that, taken together, cost just about the same. However, the Niagara 7000 has some smaller, less expensive siblings that apparently have very similar qualities. Anyway, I am *not* going to ►



move from my apartment, but also have no intentions of spending a future suffering at the hands of the ski goggle manufacturer and the town hall computer network. Especially when such a sublime power filter as the AudioQuest Niagara 7000 represents a sound investment. After all, our power supply is definitely not going to clean up its act of its own accord in the foreseeable future.

+++

Hans von Draminski has hit the nail on the head for two reasons: The distortion that attacks and pollutes the power with airborne and AC-line-transmitted distorting signals won't be any less significant in the future. Therefore, it's definitely worth getting an exceptional power

filter, power conditioner, power processor, or, in short, a Low-Z Power Noise-Dissipation System from AudioQuest. Once you've installed such a top-end device in your audiophile setup at home, you can look into other hi-fi component upgrades at your own leisure— if that's actually still “necessary,” that is. You see, the AudioQuest Niagara 7000 also demonstrates one other thing: A lot more untapped sound potential than you've thought is always lying dormant in your devices than what you've experienced so far.

In addition, anyone who simply finds the hefty (yet absolutely worthy) price tag for the mighty Niagara too much, say, for example because the system to be connected to it just isn't in the same price category, will be glad to know that the Niagara series

from AudioQuest also includes smaller, much less expensive models that are apparently just as efficient and solid. And we'll actually be taking a look at them in the next few issues of FIDELITY. But until then, we're quietly and secretly pleased that we can continue to use the 7000 for a little while longer and delve deeper into our music collections with it. And we would like to take this opportunity to sincerely take our hats off to anyone in a position to afford one of these masterpieces. ■



Brand-new, triple-twisted, unassuming flexible power supply lines are delivered with the AudioQuest Niagara 7000. The supply lines evidently benefit from the same kind of technology and are, of course, equipped with AudioQuest's Dielectric-Bias System (DBS).



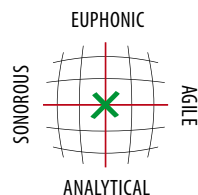
Power conditioning | AudioQuest Niagara 7000EU

AC outputs: 4 x "high-current/TPC" for power amplifiers, active loudspeakers, etc., 8 x "ultra-linear/dielectric-biased symmetrical power" for preamplifiers and music sources (Schuko plugs) | **In-phase disruptive noise dissipation:** > 30 dB from 60 Hz to 100 MHz | **Transversal disruptive noise dissipation:** > 24 dB from 3 kHz to 1 GHz | **Special features:** "Transient Power Correction" (TPC), Dielectric-Biased AC Isolation Transformers, exceptionally good contacting outputs, surge protection, automatic switch-off in the event of extreme voltage, automatic reset in the event of "safe" voltage; disengageable automatic power-on and -off | **Finish:** front dark chrome, housing matte black | **Dimensions (W/H/D):** 44.5/13.5/44 cm | **Weight:** 37 kg | **Warranty period:** five years | **Price:** €8,990

AudioQuest | Hoge Bergen 10 | 4704 RH Roosendaal | The Netherlands | Phone +31 165 54 1404 | www.AudioQuest.com

AudioQuest Niagara 7000EU

Anyone who gets to experience unbridled music enjoyment with the AudioQuest Niagara 7000 will be a very happy customer indeed. A return to distortion fog is virtually inconceivable now.



CHALLENGING = INTUITIVE = A component is 100% intuitive if you can exploit its potential to the full intuitively.

ACCOMPANYING EQUIPMENT

Turntables: Audio Note TT-2, Clearaudio Innovation, EnVogue Astra | **Tonearms:** Audio Note Arm 2, Clearaudio TT-II and Universal, Nottingham Analogue AnnaArm 12" | **Cartridges:** Audio Note IQ3, Clearaudio DaVinci and Concept MC, EMT JSD S75 | **Digital players:** Audio Note CDT-3/DAC 3, Ayon CD3sx, Soulution 541, T+A MP 3000 HV | **Preamplifiers:** Audia Flight FLS1, TIDAL Audio Preos | **Power amps:** Air Tight ATM-3211, Audia Flight FLS4, Audio Note P2SE, Bryston B14SST, T+A A 3000 HV | **Integrated amplifier:** AcousticPlan Mantra | **Loudspeakers:** Avantgarde Acoustic Uno XD, KEF LS50, Live Act Audio LAS312, Stereophone Dura, Wilson Audio Yvette | **Cables:** Audio Note, AudioQuest, Vovox



IT'S A MOUTH- FUL!

Cai Brockmann interviewed Garth Powell,
Director of Power Products at AudioQuest

Garth Powell, born in 1962, is Director of Power Products at AudioQuest, that is, head of all products ranging from power cables to complete power filtration systems. During our chat, the vinyl aficionado proved to be an attentive and quiet listener eager to answer each of my questions with well-founded knowledge and a refreshing sense of dynamism.

FIDELITY: Garth, why did AudioQuest decide to christen its range of power filters Niagara?

Garth Powell: The name is a reference to the famous Niagara Falls as well as the renowned inventor Nikola Tesla, who helped construct the world's first commercial hydroelectric power station at Niagara Falls. But we couldn't and didn't want to call our own power stations Tesla as that would have been rather confusing. So Niagara stands for clean power in two respects.

What differentiates the Niagara series from other power conditioners?

First of all, Bill Low pretty much left me to my own devices and allowed me to implement my ideas at AudioQuest with hardly any limitations. This meant I could draw on my decades of experience with power products and their use in audiophile applications and even take everything to the next level when designing the Niagara components. To come up with the best possible solution, you should never focus on one single problem as is all too often what unfortunately happens. Instead, you should strive to achieve a perfectly balanced combination involving several measures. It's all about balance, you know. The Niagara 7000 is a multi-stage and, very importantly, consistently efficient filtration solution with an particularly broad bandwidth. The considerably improved resolution of fine details is definitely audible and is what ultimately

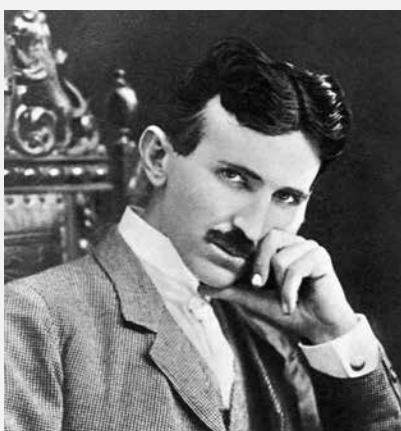
convinced Bill Low to commission an entire series.

Some power filters have a reputation for limiting dynamics ...

Yes, this is a well-known phenomenon, but not an issue at all for AudioQuest. We really understand the requirements of power-hungry components and for this reason developed our patented Transient Power Correction (TPC). With this TPC technology, we can drive connected power amplifiers to achieve new peak performance levels. The Niagara 7000 provides a clean and fully continuous current flow through the four relevant outputs.

What is the main audible benefit that music lovers will receive if they connect a power filter such as the mighty Niagara to their current system?

Up to 30% of musical details can get lost due to distorting signals that infiltrate the hi-fi system from outside and over the power network. However, these ►



“We have many a monument of past ages; we have the palaces and pyramids, the temples of the Greek and the cathedrals of Christendom. In them is exemplified the power of men, the greatness of nations, the love of art and religious devotion. But the monument at Niagara has something of its own, more in accord with our present thoughts and tendencies. It is a monument worthy of our scientific age, a true monument of enlightenment and of peace. It signifies the subjugation of natural forces to the service of man, the discontinuance of barbarous methods, the relieving of millions from want and suffering” – Nikola Tesla’s speech at the opening ceremony of the hydroelectric power station, January 12, 1897.

fine details are essential to the overall enjoyment of the music. They contain all the transients, the spatial information, all the details that make a good recording a really outstanding recording. If these details are lost, it’s impossible to conjure them up again. The Niagara 7000 ensures the details remain in tact, which means the music is much richer. Let’s talk briefly about the term “power filter”: I christened the Niagara 7000 a Low-Z Power Noise-Dissipation System because the device is so much more than “just” the

best distortion filtration system ever. I know it sounds like we’re bragging a bit but I really do think the resulting sound speaks for itself.

In terms of coordinating a power fil...., sorry, a Low-Z Power Noise-Dissipation System, does it help if you have a few musical bones in your body? *(smiling)* It never does any harm to listen to live music or play an instrument yourself. I, for one, often use my drum kit to assess whether a change has improved the sound or not. Careful work in the

test laboratory is a must. Listening to and assessing music using a decent system is something we like to do personally— and is decisive in determining whether or not we’re on the right track.

What should we expect to see next from AudioQuest in terms of power products?

We’re going to further expand the Niagara portfolio from three to six products next year.

Garth, many thanks for speaking with me. ■



...and now for something completely different...

Burmester 777, 785 and 808 MK5

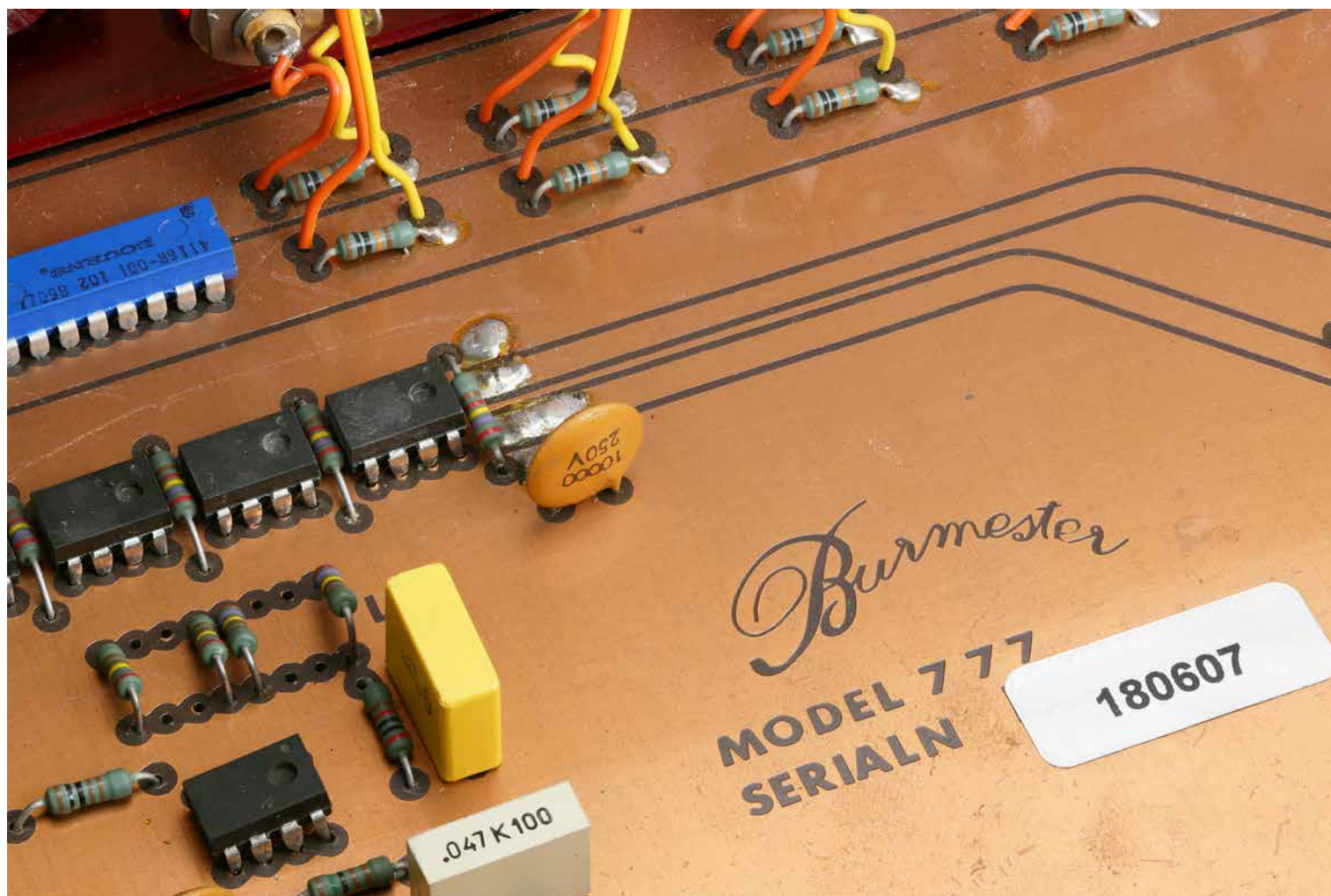
SEVEN- SEVEN- SEVEN AND ITS IMPACTS

By Cai Brockmann. Images: Ingo Schulz, Stefan Schulwitz, manufacturer

Three's a charming logo:
Three numbers for forty
years at Burmester.







777 + 785 + 808

Three sets of three digits on three devices: 777, 785, and 808. This trio gives us a lot to go on for delving into the story behind Burmester Audiosysteme. But we don't plan to just take a walk down the company's 40-year memory lane, we also want to look ahead to the next four decades to see what they hold in store. Obviously, we're not going to do all that with just any old devices. No. Even in a portfolio full of legends, the 777, 785,

and 808 do stand out as exceptional products. In fact, they have played pivotal roles in shaping the company's history and its fate. In turn, Burmester (and by that I mean both the legendary man and the company bearing his name) gave the newly flourishing high-end scene a real boost and quickly found fame on the international stage as well — a rare achievement for German hi-fi manufacturers at the time. Astonishingly, all three products belong to that ordinarily most unassuming of

device categories in an ambitious audio system: the preamplifier. But let's just start with the three numbers. The 777 was the first model to be released 40 years ago using what has now become a well-established code: The first two numbers indicate the year and the final one refers to the month when development of the particular device was considered finished. Okay, you can't represent the last three months of the year with just one number; but this is a limitation the company can live with ►



as, unlike electronics giants, it's a small manufacturer and so doesn't flood the market with new products every week. Quite the opposite in fact. Or maybe at Burmester nothing got developed from October to December ...? Well, if you've ever had the pleasure of meeting Dieter Burmester or his team, you'd know what a ridiculous assertion that'd be. The (more or less correct) series of numbers was, of course, the brainchild of the boss himself — who else?! Burmester was certainly well known for his flair for catchy expressions, slogans and statements. He knew potential high-end customers could really wrap their heads around three little numbers more than a long string of digits: When you hit four,

it all gets a bit cumbersome. Besides, 777 sounds so much cooler than the more accurate "197707", which no doubt would have appealed to small-minded bean counters. But they wouldn't have bought his expensive devices anyway. You know: sensibility and money and all that. So, back to preamplifiers — those devices that still all too often slip under the radar of your average hi-fi fans. These plain Janes of the audio system have nothing to brag about or proudly show off, and they're too small to marvel at but too big to hide ...

... until, that is, the 777 entered the still very understated scene. A large, all-round-er ensconced in gold and designed to blow the competition out of the water.

But what competition exactly? Until well into the 1970s, preamplifiers were anything but popular, and you'd have been hard-pressed to find a living room in Germany that actually had one. Dominating the ambitious market for products meeting the legendary DIN 45500 hi-fi standard were bulky, heavy receivers and their radioless siblings, integrated amplifiers. In the case of these battleships, the preamplifier was an integral part of a massive music machine with all manner of buttons and heat loss. Stereo consoles featured a bulky amplifier or receiver, a turntable, tape recorder and two more or less sizable stereo speakers, all of which had to fit nicely with (or, even better, within) the console's exterior walls. ►

The Golden Big Bang: The 777 glistens with exuberant equipment (switchable LED level display, disengageable tone control!), strikingly neat inner workings with cutting-edge components at the time (op amps, upstream MC linear amplifier), and a 23-stage volume rotary dial.



Do you remember common 1970s updates? I do: decorative doilies and flower vases. As if things weren't bad enough! Okay, the idea of using a control amplifier (or a preamplifier, too) as a separate control center for a hi-fi system had become well established by the end of the 1970s in the UK and North America, and even in Japan for that matter. Germany was lagging way behind on the preamplifier scene. But along came the sevenseven-seven — from West Berlin no less. And it had an impact.

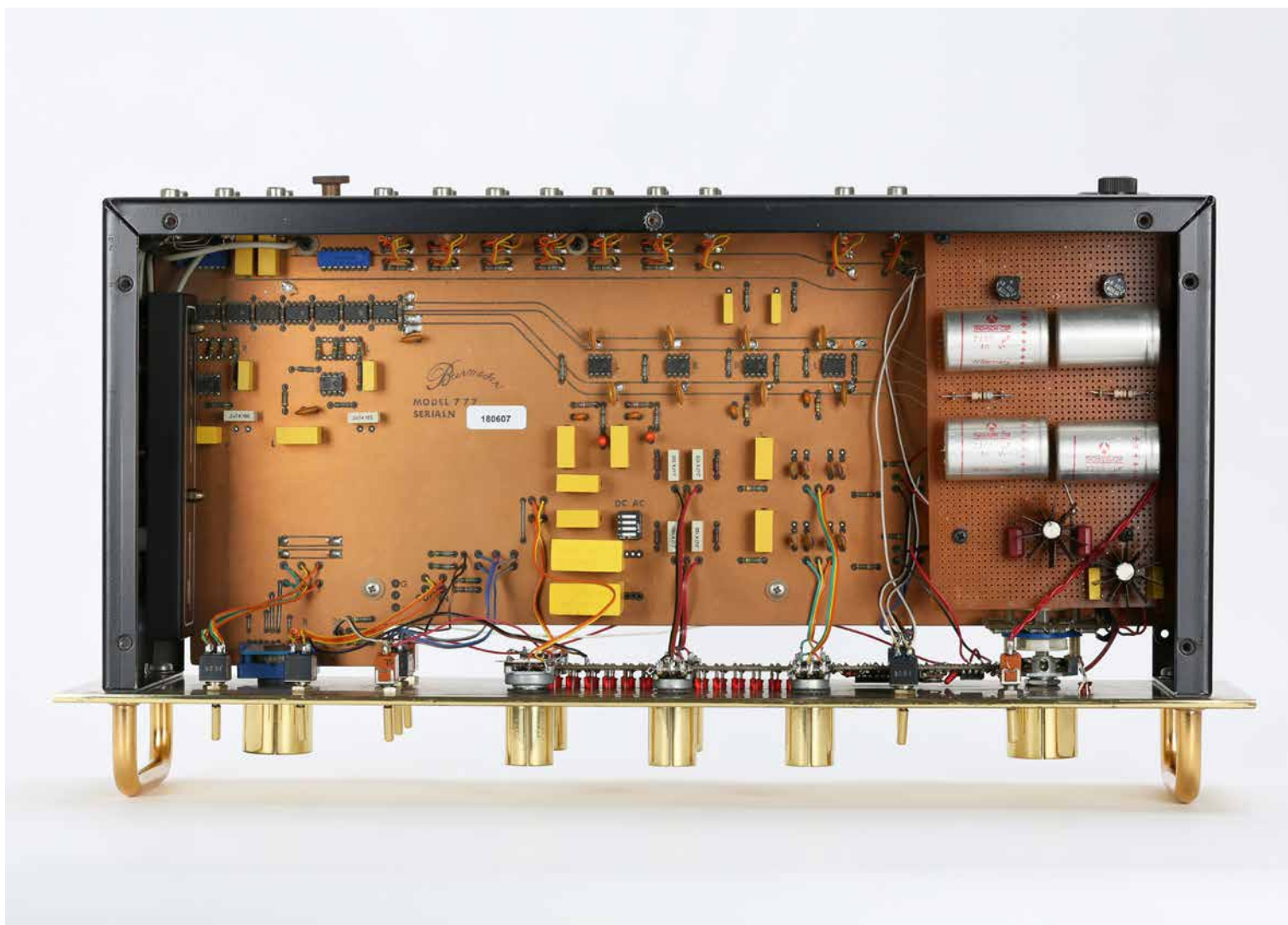
777

July 1977. Founder and mastermind Dieter Burmester, whose engineering firm actually focused on medical technology

and manufactured top-quality devices, was annoyed with the unreliability of his hi-fi tube amplifier. That drove the qualified radio and television technician and electrical engineer to build a control center to get his amplifier to behave the way he wanted it to. His 777 preamplifier was given a US-style tone control with separate channels and cut-off frequencies that could be switched for treble control, but could also always be disengaged. The latter quickly proved worthwhile from a sound-quality perspective provided the players, the power amplifiers and the loudspeakers could boast correspondingly high levels of playback quality. The unusual volume control attracted a lot of attention: A fader would control a 23-stage resistor network, which replaced

the otherwise standard, comparatively imprecise and failure-prone carbon film potentiometer.

The basic circuitry of the 777 is straightforward: nothing ground-breaking or mysterious here. But you immediately see it is super clean, has lots of refined parts and avoided the usual mess of tangled cabling. A freely available circuitry proposal for ICs, which were gradually becoming useful at the time, including for audiophile purposes, formed the basis for its design. In any event, Burmester was one of the first to recognize the potential of this op amp for audio applications, incorporating it — while never forgetting the importance of reliability and high-quality results — into an exceptionally elegant, striking housing. ▶





The Chrome Prince: Based on the 777 in terms of its technical circuitry, the visually pared-down 785 impresses with a new sense of high-end purism (no level display, no tone control), precise craftsmanship down to the very last details and the first (and, as would soon become apparent, pioneering) chrome housing.



A small series of 20 Burmester 777s was built, all by the boss himself at his work table complete with a soldering iron and measuring tools. Each unit would end up costing almost as much as a small car. After first wowing his close circle of friends with the 777, Burmester saw his golden boy land in a then-popular hi-fi magazine thanks to an ambitious hi-fi dealer. This exposure had huge repercussions. The 777 smoothed the way for Burmester to enter the uncharted territory of the German high-end scene, which, incidentally, wasn't called that at that time. Back in 1977, it was still just (and quite correctly from a linguistic point of view) referred to as high fidelity, and high fidelity was about to be taken over by a golden boy from Berlin.

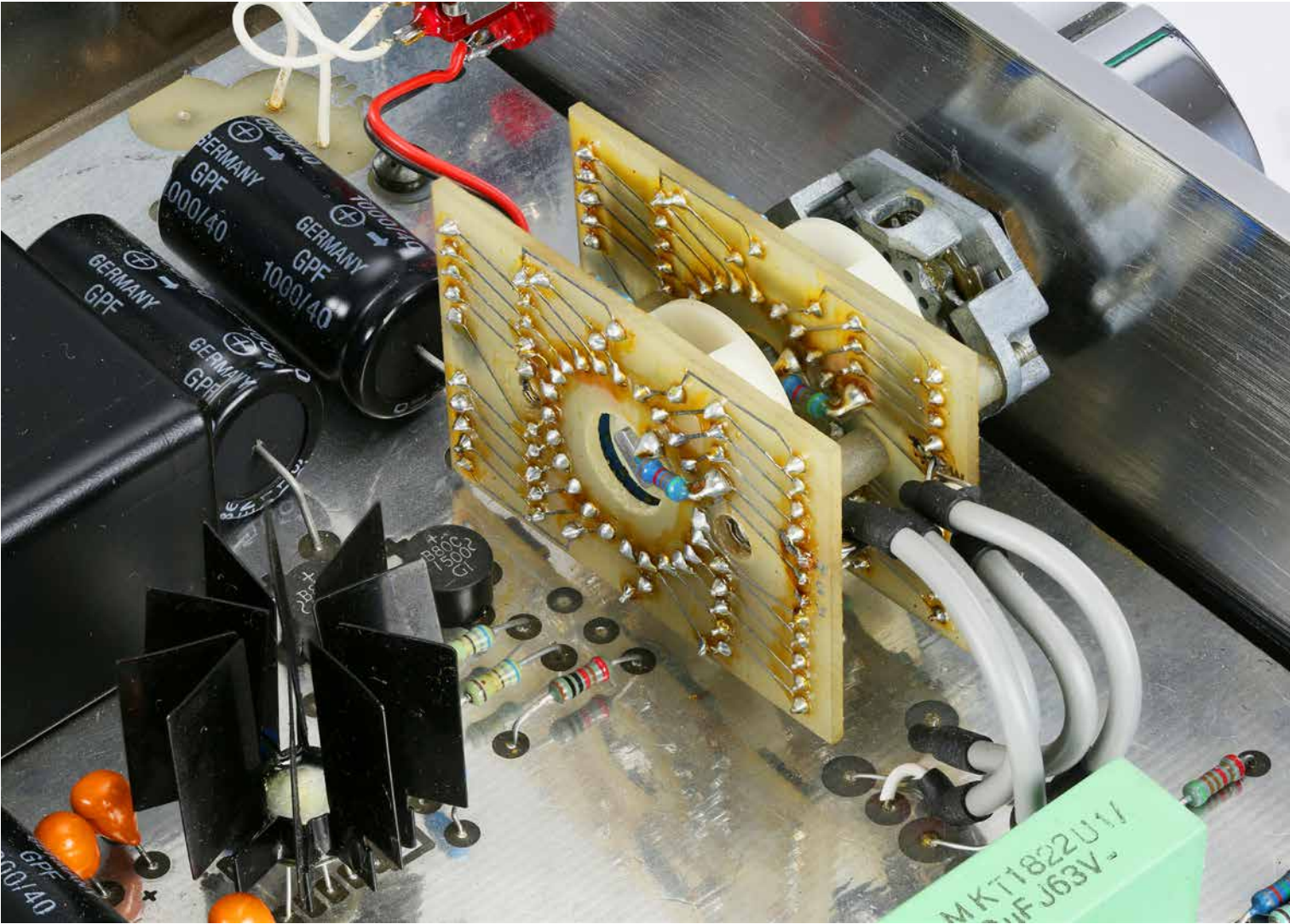
785

May 1978. By now, the 20 777s had been sold, so a bank loan to (officially) found the company wasn't needed. Dieter Burmester was also on the verge of setting new standards and reaching new heights with a second, significantly slimmed-down preamplifier. The puristic technical features of the 785 were the kind of thing you might have expected from British hardcore hi-fi manufacturers such as Naim Audio, but Burmester's new gem looked like something from a jeweler's: In just one year, the tone-control network, half a dozen toggle switches, and even the handles had disappeared from the Burmester preamplifier (it still had no siblings at that time). The striking gold had also

given way to equally striking chrome, which quickly became another typical Burmester feature, alongside the three numbers and the logo that would look handwritten. The inner workings essentially consisted of the already well-known and tried-and-tested basic circuitry of the 777, though, of course, with some improvements, tweaks, and refinements here and there.

Both the idea of doing away with any pretentious bells and whistles like the tone control and the truly “new” look and superb technical execution contributed, in hindsight, to the 785, a pretty inconspicuous device by modern standards, to shine in all its true Burmester splendor. The 785 also cost a small fortune at the point it was launched, yet it seemed ▶





The King of Control: The 808, featuring a modular design and inspired by professional mixing console technology, has occupied the preamplifier throne since 1980. The updated MK5 version features remote-control functions and a solid substructure with (obviously disengageable) display together with a Reference Line design base plate.



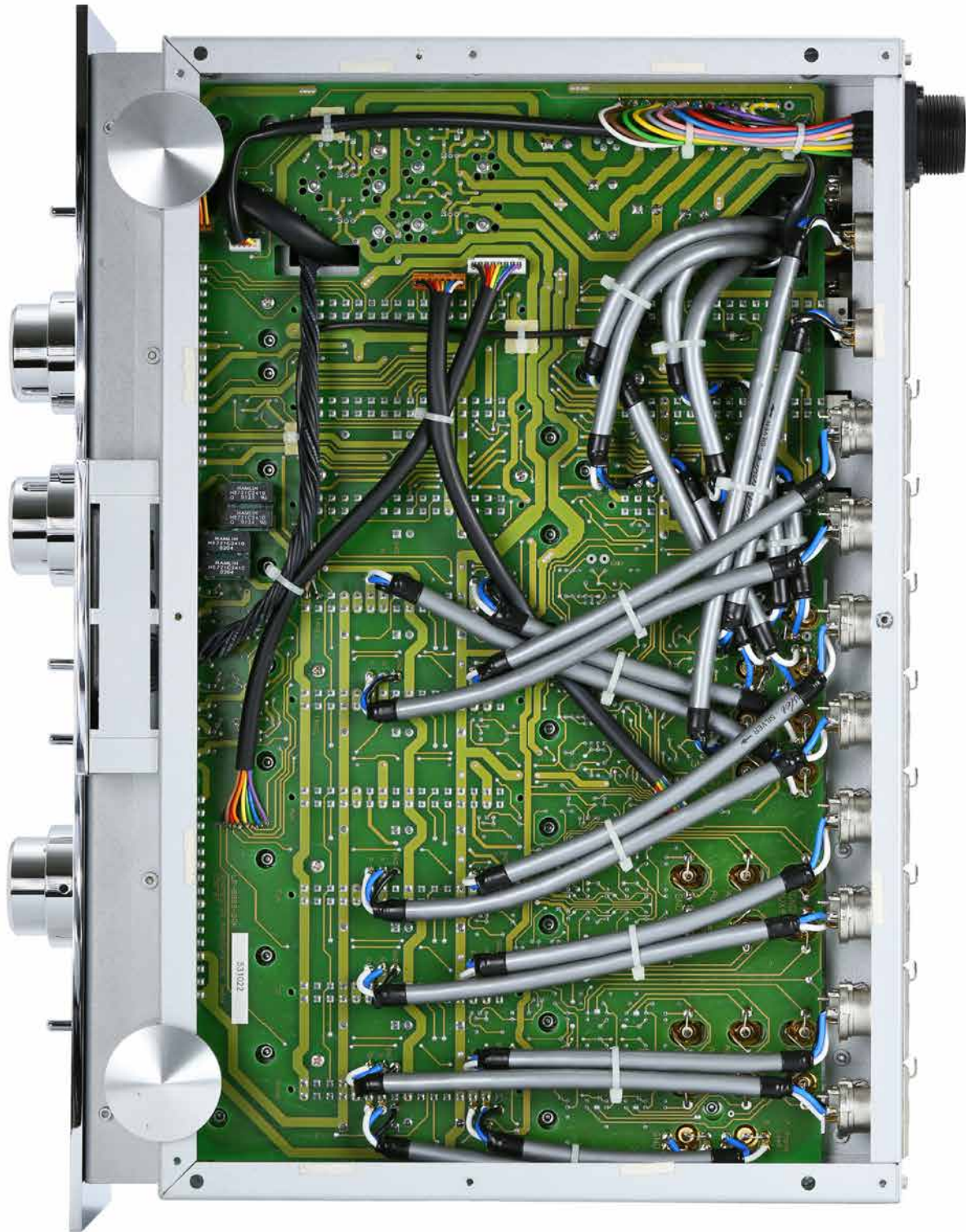
like the hi-fi community had been lying in wait, ready to pounce on it. The Chrome Prince solidified the reputation of the up-and-coming high-end manufacturer — that is until a good year later when the godfather of all preamplifiers came along ...

808

August 1980. It was high time for a machine, the likes of which the hi-fi world had never seen before. Inspired by his passion for live music and recording studios, Dieter Burmester launched the 808 model — the first preamplifier ever that could be extensively configured according to the user's wants and desires, fleet

of devices, and ambitious technical requirements. Like the best recording-studio mixing consoles, the 808 (available in the series only with a chrome front — okay, we got it) was created on the basis of a variable basic framework that could be equipped with the desired input and output modules. Anyone sitting in front of a fully-equipped 808 would think they'd died and gone to button heaven: An 808 has all manner of dials and switches not only on the front but also on the top. So how does it manage to stay puristic? Because maximum flexibility in a device calls for a certain number of setting options and every button — just as you'd expect from Burmester — makes technical sense.

As standard the 808 came outfitted with two completely independently controlled outputs; if you needed a second output module, you only had to include it with the order. In fact, you could even order one at a later date without a hassle. Two large, stacked double dials would serve to control the 808's output level, or, more specifically, the master output level — of course using elaborate resistor networks. The satisfying feeling you get as you touch and turn the dials is fully in keeping with the outstanding quality of the components and the 808's impressive appearance. Analog-wired plug-in units (modules) were all that could be ordered for every conceivable music source: from finely tunable ▶



► Insight into the 5th version of the 808: For the preamplifier's remote-control feature, super-refined Burmester silver cables have been installed in the "basement" level. Even when opened up, it's clear the extremely powerful power unit of the MK5 model is a prime example of pure class (see next page).



The extremely powerful power unit of the MK5

You're in the driver's seat: The basic version of the 808 MK5 comprises an integrated measurement tool for precisely adjusting the modules and a large separate power unit that is connected using a special supply cable. Burmester also delivers four basic modules as standard for immediately operating the 808 with a high-level source and a power amplifier. Any extras you may want on top of that can be fitted, even further down the line if necessary. The sublime look of the top-notch device is completed with an acrylic glass plate over the RCA jack panel.



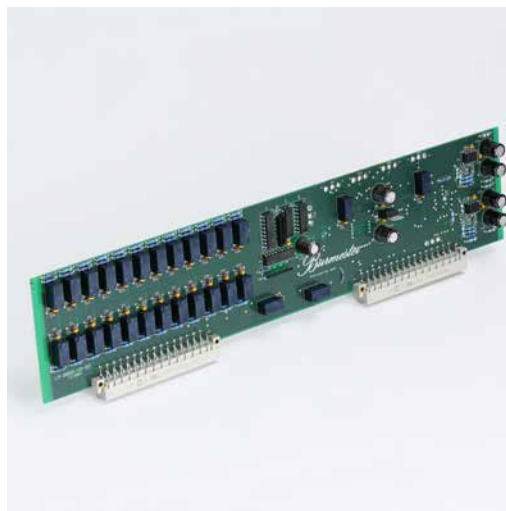
MC and MM modules and the Linear high-level module right through to the thoroughly modern "thru-put" module, these were all available to integrate the 808 into an ambitious high-end home cinema system hassle-free. Speaking of "modern" and "ambitious": The 808 was, is, and will continue to be a machine that's not necessarily self-explanatory in terms of its details (as is otherwise the case at Burmester). The 808 demands something of its users, who should know exactly what they're doing with their systems and how to get the most out of them. Much like driving

courses for supercars or race bikes, advice from 808 specialist dealers and careful study (several times) of the operating instructions proved essential. Sure, you could, figuratively speaking, use the 808 to just cruise around the corner to buy a loaf of bread or take a spin down the road to the ice cream shop, but this fireball really comes into its own on a true racetrack or, at the very least, on a freeway with no speed limit or during a picture-perfect sunny drive in the mountains. Those who don't know what they're doing can quickly come to blows with the 808. However, if you do know exactly how to get your

fleet of music machines to cut loose, the 808 is the ideal tool for you. If you haven't got one, you've already missed out on 37 years of fun!

We have a current 808 model on hand, one that bears the added inscription MK5 and for good reason: From the outset, the visionary 808 has been consistently designed to stand the test of time, so much so that it has even survived extensive upgrades without actually having to change its name. There have been four versions of the 808, with subsequent models designated by the added inscriptions MK2, MK3, and MK5. There ►

A quick look at the components (clockwise): multistage fader with resistor network, relay-controlled input circuit board, high-level plug-in module, adjustable Moving Coil plug-in module.



has never been an MK4 as that number has extremely negative connotations in Asia, which is a key market for Burmester. Besides, the technical upgrades made to the MK3 (for instance, the full remote control function) were so extensive they actually warranted a leap directly from 3 to 5, says Stefan Größler, Head of Development at Burmester.

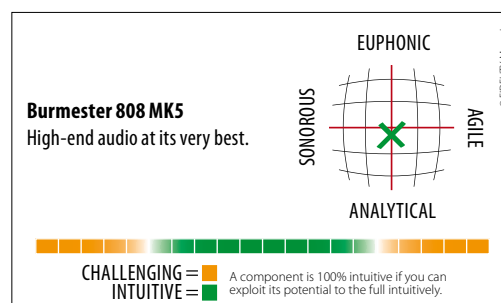
The inner workings of the 808 include a consistently symmetrical circuit layout. This means twice the expenditure on components but then vastly reduced interference, too. In a hi-fi system's control center, this is simply invaluable. The dynamics and clarity of the signal, which is transmitted as purely as possible, are exceptional. Incidentally, the comparatively simple, modest basic version of the

Burmester 808 MK5 will set you back considerably more than a small car these days, but thanks to its modular design (and optional 24-carat-gold housing) can be easily souped up to sports-car status.

177 + 178

July and August 2017. The FIDELITY editorial team found itself in exceptional circumstances: The three legends had arrived and were right in the thick of the party atmosphere at the Burmester Audiosysteme 40-year anniversary celebration in Berlin: Even hardened rock 'n' rollers were voluntarily donning white gloves, and we were busy assigning the two Burmester months their own three-digit abbreviations. Perfect.

Just like the sound experience created by the 808 MK5. It's nothing less than perfect. Completely free of any artifacts and not limited in any discipline, the 808 MK5 ensures any power amplifier or loudspeakers placed next to it reach peak performance. The 808 MK5 practically embraces any source — or, better put — welcomes it and shows it the greatest respect. From the very first minute after the 808 has fully warmed up (you should allow it about an hour), these machines give you a clear and impressive insight into what listening to music is all about. Reality just recedes into nothingness). From then on it's just pure music! Anyone keen on delving even further into the music has precisely three options: 1) Buy a “better-sounding” ▶



preamplifier, which produces its own sound and doesn't quite represent the truth so much; 2) optimize the 808 MK5's complete surroundings, from the power conditioner and the room acoustics through to the players and the loudspeakers; or 3) organize the next concert outing.

How does a historical 777 or 785 actually sound compared with the King of Pre-amps? Well, astonishingly good, actually. While the golden boy is no longer in such great shape (thanks for being with us anyway), the 785 (same circuitry, same concept) really astounds us. Okay, sure, getting nearly 40 years of service under your belt is no walk in the park, and we've possibly gotten to experience some freer and more flexible preamplifiers (808!),

but the really sprightly oldie has proved to be a jolly partner to play with and one that's nice to have around. Great performance, Chrome Prince!

Now, back to the 808 MK5 and the sun-kissed mountains. The way Burmester has managed to make this preamplifier one of the longest-produced hi-fi components of all time is truly visionary. My thoughts are now circling around one single question that you should also ask yourself: Would I order it in chrome? ■

Preamplifier | Burmester 808 MK5

Functional principle: modular preamplifier with external power unit | **Inputs:** one to maximum of six inputs, balanced (XLR) and/or unbalanced (RCA), can be variably equipped | **Outputs:** one to maximum of two outputs, each balanced and unbalanced (XLR and RCA),

separately switched and controlled | **Optional input modules:** phono MC balanced/unbalanced (€2,130), phono MM unbalanced (€1,680), high level (€1,120) | **Optional output module:** Out two balanced (€2,640) | **Special features:** solid aluminum device base, system remote control, high-quality power, and supply cables provided as standard | **Finish:** chrome (standard), optional black or gold-plated (24 carat) as well as other surfaces for an additional charge; external power unit also in the Reference Line design (additional charge of €4,980) | **Dimensions of preamplifier (W/H/D):** 48.3 cm./17.0 cm./38.5 cm. | **Dimensions of power unit (W/H/D):** 48.3 cm./9.5 cm./28.5 cm. | **Weight of preamplifier incl. base plate:** 23 kg. | **Weight of power unit:** 9 kg. | **Warranty period:** two years | **Price of basic version including four standard modules (CD in, Surround Thruput, unbalanced out, balanced out):** €27,020

Burmester Audiosysteme | Wilhelm-Kabus-Str. 47 | 10829 Berlin | Germany | Telephone: +49 (0) 30 7879680 | www.burmester.de



Profile of Dieter Burmester

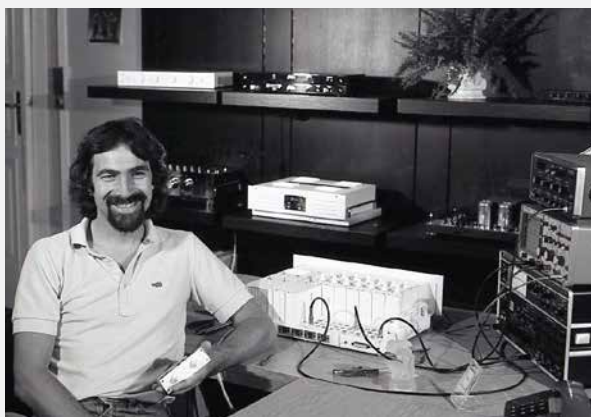
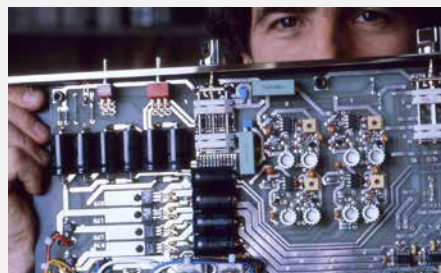
GO-GETTER, ICON, AND MUSIC LOVER

—In addition to all its other qualities, “a hi-fi system that bears my name,” says Dieter Burmester, has to always be “ready to rock,” too. In the eyes of the founder, owner, and head of Burmester Audiosysteme, high-end audio is “a means of transporting musical emotions; nothing more, but also nothing less.” And this should apply to every single music genre. In 1977, bitterly disappointed with unreliable tube amplifiers,

the qualified radio and television technician, trained electrical engineer, and rock band member decided to make his first-ever hi-fi device, which, even back then, would already feature the striking Burmester logo that would look handwritten. This decision would signal the start of Burmester’s entry into the newly flourishing high-end scene, a scene he would come to influence like no other person in Germany. With immense

determination and incredible precision drawn from his original specialist area of medical technology and applied to the audio world, Burmester seems, looking back in hindsight, to have been sowing the seeds for not only his future creations but also for his own legendary status.

In 1981, Burmester was one of the founding members of the High End Interessengemeinschaft für hochwertige ►



Musikwiedergabe e.V. (High-End Interest Group for High-Quality Music Playback) and one of the three board members of the association. His masterful knowledge and understanding of the theoretical principles of his profession and his ability to convey them are readily apparent in articles on the technology involved in high-end systems that he published in the 1980s in several trade journals, for instance one in 1987 about “cable problems” in *HiFi Exklusiv* No. III.

Burmester felt at home in the international hi-fi scene, coming across as self-confident and friendly. He created a distinctive look and feel for “high-end from Germany,” serving as the scene’s symbolic figurehead and enjoying an outstanding international reputation. As he not only enjoyed music in all its forms during his spare time (his guitar collection is legendary) but also had a penchant for stylish modes of speeding around on water and roads, he was particularly

thrilled to be able to finally incorporate his sound into some of the world’s best automobiles. ■

Born on February 9, 1946, in Austria, raised in Lüchow in Lower Saxony, and a longtime resident of Berlin, Burmester passed away on August 15, 2015, following a short but serious illness. Since then, his exceedingly adept and gifted wife, Marianne Burmester, has assumed responsibility for continuing his huge legacy and ensuring his ideas and plans are realized.

Born in 1972, Andreas Henke, joined the Burmester Audiosysteme management team, which now consists of him and the deceased company founder's wife, Marianne Burmester, at the beginning of 2017. Prior to that, Henke was responsible for product strategy, marketing, and key clients at Porsche. The athletic, eloquent manager loves photography, cars, and fine cuisine, as well as music and all things hi-fi of course, and can occasionally be found singing on (a private) stage.



LONG LIVE THE KING!

Interview with Andreas Henke, CEO at Burmester Audiosysteme

FIDELITY: Have you heard any particularly good music today? In a Mercedes taxi, perhaps?

Andreas Henke: That would have been nice. But no, unfortunately not. I'll have to wait until I get home this evening to enjoy listening to some good music.

When the first Burmester pre-amplifier was released, you were five years old. When did you first get to meet Dieter Burmester in person?

As a teenager, I used to read hi-fi magazines and came across the name Dieter Burmester a lot. But I didn't meet him in person until many years

later when the Burmester sound system was being developed and presented for the Porsche Panamera. I was already an enthusiastic customer of the company, which I now have the honor of running.

You've stated that you plan to significantly expand the Burmester portfolio. What should we expect from your Berlin-based company in the short and medium term?

It goes without saying that we would never alter the sound DNA of Burmester Audiosysteme and have no intention of following fleeting trends. But customers should expect to be able to control the classic

components from their iPad in the foreseeable future, for example. They'll also be able to experience considerably improved connectivity and compatibility. To achieve this, we plan to overhaul all home audio components over the next few years. And, at the top end of the scale, you should expect our big power amplifier, the 1S9, to get a few suitable partners to play with ...

But the "little" Phase 3 system has also been an unbelievable success ...

Yes, it's helping us attract completely new potential customers who are less likely to start with an ►



“altar-style architecture” and who prefer integrated design over complexity — and can appreciate it. At the end of the day, we want to gain more exposure for everything that makes Burmester what it is and get more people interested. The automotive systems have been really helpful in that regard, but there are other product categories that we could imagine getting involved in, such as high-quality mobile products.

Won't it soon be high time to send off the 808 into retirement? Absolutely not! The 808 is a chronological product and must and will remain the “king.” We will, however, equip the current version with substantial upgrade options.

Where do you see Burmester Audiosysteme in four years? And what about 14 years? In fact, what about 40 years?

In four years, all the upgrades and expansions we discussed should be ready. In 14 years, Burmester will be even more well known than it is now. We can only dream about what will have happened in 40 years' time, but I'm sure Burmester Audiosysteme will remain an independent company.

What do you think of Frank Zappa's “We're Only in It for the Money”?

I prefer Henry Ford's thinking: “A business that makes nothing but money is a poor business.” That's

why we're, for example, working on setting up a foundation with the working title Akademie des feinen Klanges (Academy of Fine Sound). The idea is for it to be a place for all people deeply involved in music to come together and share ideas and experiences: musicians, composers, neuroscientists (from the Fraunhofer Institute, for example), producers, and, of course, manufacturers of high-quality audio components. The whole thing will have a “pro-craftsmanship” focus, if you will.

That sounds really exciting. We look forward to seeing that develop. Thank you for speaking to us. You're welcome.



BURMESTER AUDIOSYSTEME GMBH

The company Burmester Audiosysteme as we know it today was founded in 1977 by Dieter Burmester as a typical one-man band in the Schöneberg area of Berlin. Initially set up as an engineering firm specializing in computer interfaces and circuit technology for medical measurement devices, the aspiring company enjoyed decent success initially with the 777 and 785 preamplifiers. Just three years later in 1980, Burmester made a real name for itself on the emerging international high-end scene with the sensational 808 model. Burmester often drew inspiration for outstanding home audio technology directly from professional recording-studio technology and used the latest chips at the time, for example the first audiophile operational amplifier chips. The especially long-term, stable developments ensured from the outset that the company would attract a great deal of attention for such technology as, for example, resistor networks (which are technically complex to manufacture) as faders instead of classic (failure-prone) potentiometers. In 1983, Burmester established the fully symmetrical circuit configuration for hi-fi components. The complete test records for every single device the company has ever built are available — tangible proof of rigorous quality-control measures and outstanding attention to detail within the production process that has always met veritable manufacturing standards.

Within its first 15 years, Burmester Audiosysteme successfully made the leap from amplifier specialist to high-end full-range manufacturer; the only thing missing was a turntable, which fans finally got to enjoy in 2017. The company has often made a name for itself with groundbreaking, benchmark-setting new developments such as the 916, the first belt-driven CD player; the 948 power conditioner; the 100 phono preamplifier; and the 111 MusicCenter and luxury streamer. The range even includes the company's own line of cables and specially produced CDs and vinyls.

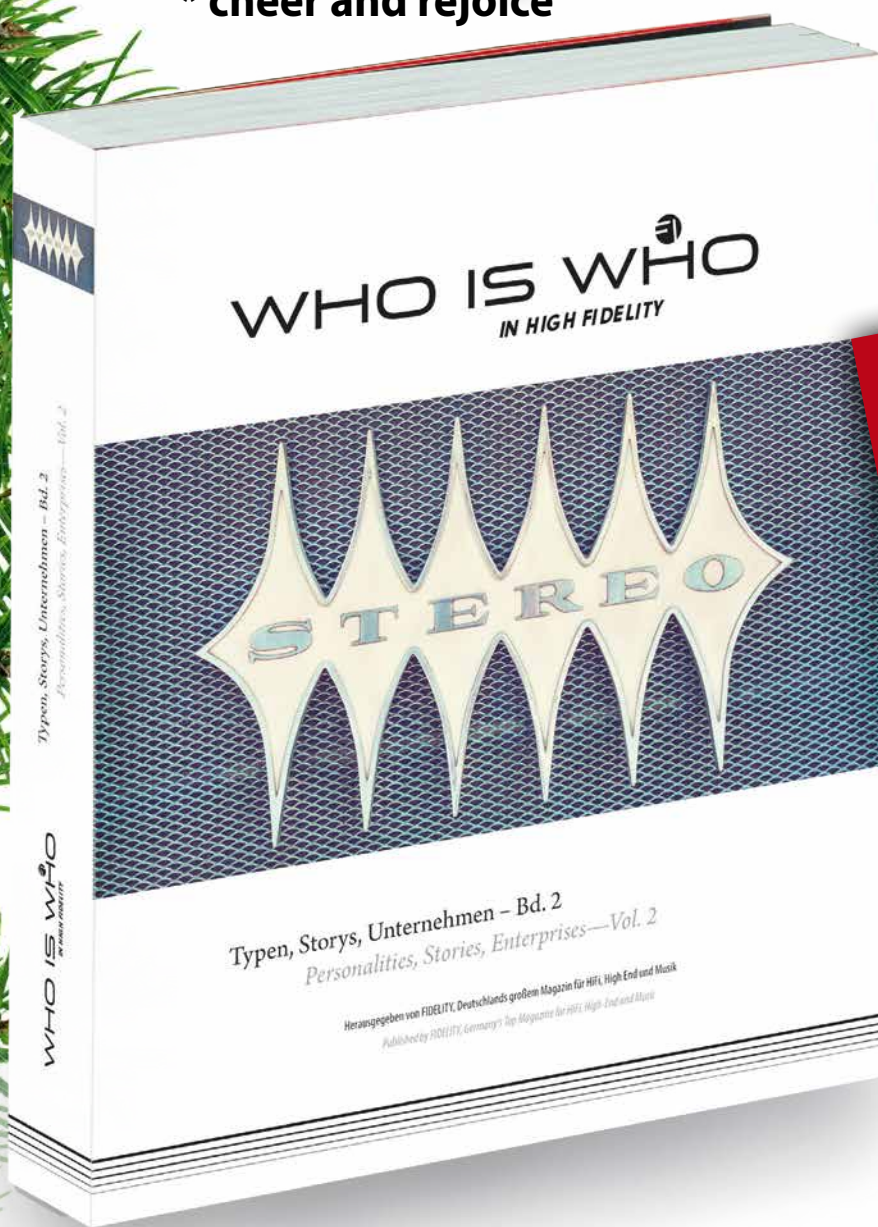
In the middle of the first decade of the new millennium, the owner-run manufacturer even managed to firmly establish a place for itself in the automotive industry, which is not only extremely competitive but also functions very differently. Burmester Audiosysteme won the race for the best in-car sound quality against formidable and much larger opponents first for the Bugatti EB 16.4 Veyron supercar and later for the Porsche Panamera. The considerable levels of investment required to penetrate the automotive industry would only pay off years later, but it would certainly be worth the wait. Burmester sound systems now define state-of-the-art sound quality not only in all Porsche series but also Mercedes models. In the process, this has helped the company gain more exposure in the far reaches of the world,

embedding it deep into the consciousness of music lovers who appreciate top sound quality. At the same time, “classic” high-end hi-fi has always remained the core line of business at Burmester and this area is now being further expanded, most recently with the unveiling of the gigantic 159 power amplifier, the long-awaited 175 turntable and gargantuan loudspeakers with switchable “live mode.”

In 1982, the company Burmester was owned by the 12 founding members of the High End Interessengemeinschaft für hochwertige Musikkwiedergabe e.V. (High-End Interest Group for High-Quality Music Playback), which subsequently became the High End Society e.V. Since 2010, the company has been a member of the German Manufacturers Initiative (Initiative Deutscher Manufakturen — Handmade in Germany, or IDM). Burmester also supports the social commitment work undertaken by the “Vamos Adelante” project in Guatemala by providing grants. Since January 2017, Burmester Audiosysteme has been run by Andreas Henke and Marianne Burmester, the wife of the founder who sadly passed away in 2015. In the medium and long term we can expect the company to explore the realms of “personal high-end audio” and further expand its top-of-the-range category. An interdisciplinary Akademie des feinen Klanges (Academy of Fine Sound) is also in the cards. ■

JAUCHZET, FROHLOCKET*

* cheer and rejoice



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Snappy hybrid from Magnat

Magnat has made a number of improvements to the fourth incarnation of its successful RV amplifier. Like its predecessor, the RV 3, the RV 4 is no longer a pure tube amp — it's a hybrid integrated amplifier with double triodes in the preamp and Sanken transistors in the power amp. The phono MM/MC inputs have been retained. What's new are the entirely digital enhancements with integrated Burr-Brown DAC and Bluetooth-aptX connection. Price: €3,000

www.magnat.de

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BROWSER № 02



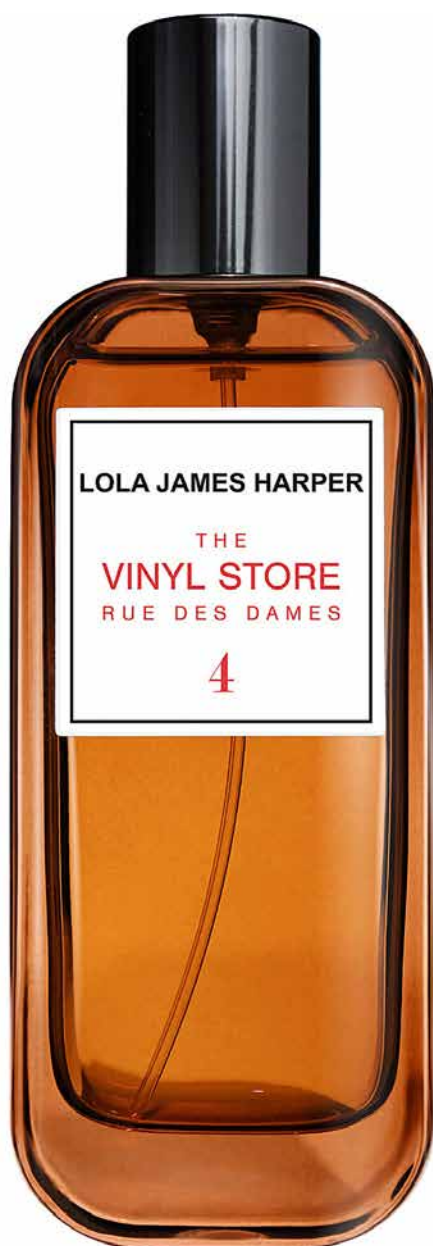
BROWSER № 02

Top-quality magnetostatic headphones from HiFiMAN

With improvements to three important details, the HiFiMAN HE-1000 V2 has morphed into the HiFiMAN Susvara. Designed to reduce interference, these headphones are equipped with specially shaped "stealth magnets." On top of that, the side metal grilles are even more minimalist and, as a result, cause fewer reflections. Rounding out the improvements, the diaphragm is larger than the HE-1000 V2's, and feature voice-coil traces of gold instead of aluminum. Apart from the price of €7,000, the only downside of these 60-ohms-headphones is the lower sensitivity, necessitating a powerful amplifier for this HiFiMAN product.

www.hifiman.com

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BROWSER N° 02



The scent of old vinyl

Have you ever taken a rarely played LP out of its cover and been assailed by a smell that transports you back to the tiny, cramped second-hand store where you bought it? You can now relive this experience without reaching into your record shelf. Lighting a €35 scented candle called the *The Vinyl Store* (from Lola James Harper) will recreate the fragrance of that cozy old shop. A pump spray version of the aroma is also available.

www.lolajamesharper.com

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BROWSER

Nº 02

Twin lasers from McIntosh

McIntosh has unveiled the new MCD350 SACD/CD Player, featuring twin laser units behind a single objective lens. With 32-bit, 192 kilohertz internal signal processing, analog outputs can be sent to the amplifier in both balanced and unbalanced offerings. Two digital outputs (coax and optical) are also available if you want to use an external DAC or incorporate the MCD350 into a home theater system. The MCD 350 will cost you around €5,900.

www.mcintoshlabs.com

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ISOTEK EVO3 INITIUM

By Georg-Cölestin Jatta. Images: Ingo Schulz







As we all know, our line voltage has to flow through dozens of kilometers of cables that have neither been advised upfront of the running direction nor “burned in.” Even our editorial team has come to acknowledge that. But what can't be denied is that most interference occurs in the short distance between the electrical outlet and the beloved hi-fi system. We have our Wi-Fi permeating the entire house with a signal, possibly even boosted by extenders (after all, you have to be able to use your tablet on the toilet as well). We can even get a cellphone signal in our basements these days, and, besides, whoever turns off their Bluetooth at home? I know, nobody! So we happily fry our brain cells on browning level three and call it progress.

For a little over 15 years now, Keith Martin and his team have been researching how to supply hi-fi system components with power free from differential mode interference (between the devices) and common mode interference (from interspersing radio signals). Depending on the requirements and scale of the audio altar in question, IsoTek has five different product lines that come to the rescue. They range from the Super Titan high-end line

power conditioner, which can be easily certified in terms of component status, right through to the affordable but technically sophisticated object under examination, the EVO3 Initium (Latin for “start”).

Just under €80, the power cable's price tag won't make any seasoned hi-fi aficionados gasp. In taking a closer look at the EVO3, it's clear Keith Martin has put a huge amount of manufacturing work into his entry-level cable, which leaves the retail price sounding ridiculous. The construction of the cable makes its sincere aspirations more than clear. Three internal conductors of chemically pure, silver-plated copper have been twisted to ensure the radio-frequency interference mentioned above has absolutely no chance. Polyethylene is used for the dielectric, which perfectly insulates the conductors from each other. Cotton filler and a thin paper wrap are used to encase the inner core in order to reduce microphony. The EVO3's snazzy green outer jacket is made of PVC. This all results in a cable that, despite a decent cross-section and construction, remains flexible enough to not pull even lightweight devices like my phono stages off the rack.



So it's not full of intergalactic high-tech gadgets, just extremely solid, tried-and-true materials. The great thing about Initium is not that it's been made using exotic materials, but rather with a sophisticated design in mind. The plug connections, which have been firmly attached to the cable using injection molding, appear a little on the economical side. But that doesn't really bother me as I've never really managed to work out exactly how much of an effect punched or elaborately milled plugs have on playback quality. Let's be honest — a lot of what we see every year at HIGH END is primarily designed for buyers to show off what's in their bank accounts. Surprisingly, however, the inexpensive injection-molded connectors are completely free from backlash and unshakable. This can't necessarily be said about many significantly more exclusive competitors. In terms of the technology involved and how it feels, the EVO3 Initium definitely gets our thumbs up and a green light. Then there are the (age-old) questions: A) Can you really hear it? B) Or is, as so often the case, the expectation, created by merely making a change, what results in the audible outcome? I would argue for A. Of course, a power cable won't turn

a mediocre system into a hi-fi superstar, but the difference in sound is actually discernible, even to the less-trained ears of an audiophile newcomer or only slightly more experienced hi-fi fan. These are nuances that add up to a clear "yes," whether it's the tighter, crisper playback of funky bass lines; a homeopathic pinch of more splendor and glory with soprano voices; or (and this is my subjective opinion) a little more "air and space" between the performers on stage. As a matter of fact, I usually enjoy playing around with cables to find out where I can improve my chain the most. In the case of the IsoTek EVO3 Initium, my wish would be for complete cabling — from the turntable right through to the Einstein The Tune (which, according to its instructions, really comes into its own when used with high-quality power cables). Affordable, clearly discernible, and extremely well made. You can shell out a hell of a lot more on power cables if you really wanted to, but the EVO3 really calls into question if that would truly be worth it in terms of improving sound. ■

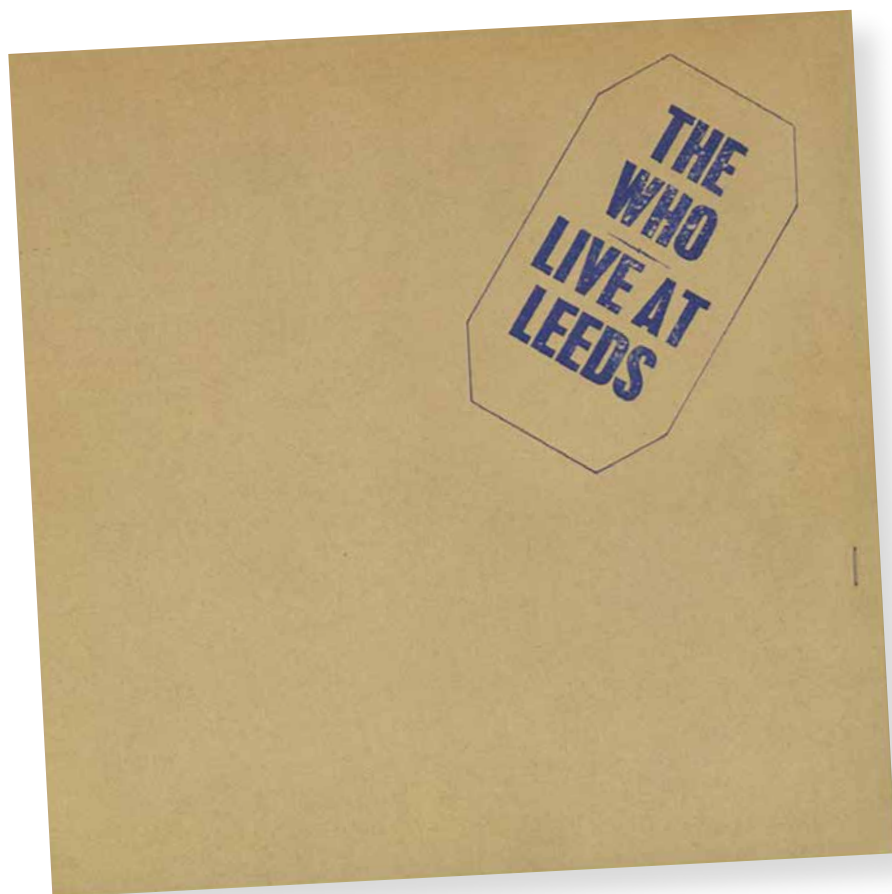
IsoTek EVO3 Initium power cable | Length: 1.5 meters |
Warranty period: two years | **Price:** €79
www.isoteksystems.com



...and now for something completely different...

THE BOOTLEG LOOK

By Hans-Jürgen Schaal—Part I



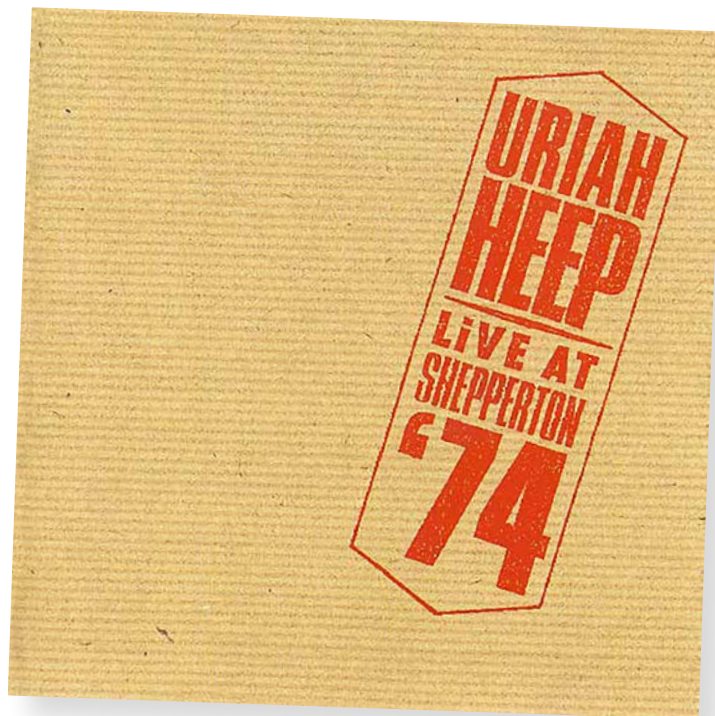
Covering normally refers to songs being performed by other artists, but actual album covers attract their share of impersonators, too. The covered cover: Is it a witty reference, respectful homage or parody? Or is there a deeper meaning behind it?

_____ Coarse brownish packaging paper and a clumsy-looking skewed stamp are normally the kinds of things you'd expect to see on an express delivery parcel or on something improvised and unofficial, exuding a real sense that there's something truly raw, genuine, and uncontrived inside. It's no wonder then that this look became all the rage for illegally recorded and illegally released music recordings (referred to in the industry as "bootlegs"). This packaging tells us that what's inside is the real deal. It's dangerous and uncensored — with no proper cover, no marketing, and definitely no bells and whistles. This was, in any case, the message behind Bob Dylan's album *Great White Wonder* and the Stones' recording *Live'r Than You'll Ever Be*.

Both live bootlegs were released with a similar look in 1969, precisely the time The Who's band members realized that live performances were what they did best. After releasing the extravagantly artistic album *Tommy*, it was time for The Who to give their fans a raw and untamed live album. However, the band didn't have the patience to listen through all the existing concert recordings and compile a final list for the album. The tapes from their recent US tour had even been ceremoniously burned in Pete Townshend's garden. So instead, the band decided to stage two concerts in northern England specifically to produce the live album, one at the University of Leeds and the other at the City Hall in Kingston upon

Hull. The concerts were performed on two consecutive days in February 1970. The second (as you might expect) was bolder and gutsier, but there were technical problems with the recording. For that reason, *Live At Hull* wasn't released for another 42 years, after having been fixed with the help of some clever digital tricks. However, the vinyl of the hour was *Live At Leeds*, one of the greatest live albums in rock history.

Although it was actually an official album from the band, it was given an authentic, pared-down bootleg look. This was a smart move by the record label — rather along the lines of "The Empire Strikes Back." The first edition of the album looked like a creased cardboard cover, but inside was brimming with all manner of little surprises for fans, with inserts like posters, photos, and copies of documents from The Who's everyday lives (letters, delivery notes, and contracts, etc.). Lucky fans back then were really living in the golden vinyl era. Even the vinyl's center label was special: a handwritten template reportedly done by Pete Townshend himself. Intended to look like instructions stuck on a studio tape, the side of the label read: "Crackling noises o.k. Do NOT correct!" The bootleg look ultimately came with a bootleg sound as well — raw and unaltered. The uncompromising rocking music was totally worth all the effort that went into the packaging. On *Live At Leeds*, The Who bring white blues and rock 'n' roll into the dry hard rock sound of 1970 by covering ►



THE BOOT- LEG LOOK

Part II

Mose Allison's "Young Man Blues," Eddie Cochran's "Summertime Blues," and the track "Shakin' All Over" from 1960. The real showstopper though is the B-side: It featured the seven-minute "Magic Bus" with Bo Diddley beat, a duet, and a harmonica as well as a 14-minute version of "My Generation," which became *the* defining song of the British "Mods" in 1966. Thanks to various breaks, rhythm changes, inserted episodes, and *Tommy* quotes, "My Generation" on *Live At Leeds* becomes quite simply a progressive rock demonstration. The full Leeds concert, where the band primarily played tracks from *Tommy*, wasn't actually released until 2001 on a double CD.

Shepperton is not in the north of England but southwest of greater London near Heathrow Airport. The city also has a stage at the famous film studios of the same name where concerts are held and can be filmed in top quality. Just like The Who's concerts in Leeds and Hull four years earlier, Uriah Heep's concert in Shepperton in 1974 took place only so it could be recorded — not for a live album, however, but for US television. Eight tracks were also subsequently released on vinyl but not until 12 years later when only three of the five musicians in the Uriah Heep lineup of 1974 were still alive. Long-time Heep producer Gerry Bron didn't spend too much time deliberating over the LP packaging. So, is this an

impressive live album from the early 1970s? Perhaps, but there's simply no beating *Live At Leeds* in that department!

Live At Shepperton '74 will probably never go down as a milestone in rock history. The concert was simply too tailored toward the material from the then-current studio album *Wonderworld* — that had four tracks that then reappeared as live versions. That said, the live album features by far and away the best Uriah Heep lineup. These five band members recorded four famous studio albums between 1972 and 1974 — plus the concert album *Uriah Heep Live*. The overlaps in repertoire between *Live* (1973) and *Live At Shepperton '74* are, incidentally, limited to the obligatory "Rock 'n' Roll Medley" and the two reliable crowd-pleasers "Easy Livin'" and "Love Machine" — even these are both essentially pure rock 'n' roll. When directly compared, the band was especially enthusiastic, almost overexcited in Shepperton — maybe they had a little help from some biochemical substances. The tempos are interestingly fast, David Byron makes a few mistakes with the lyrics, the background singing sounds a little anarchic, and Gary Thain's bass is even grittier than usual. ■

The Who: *Live At Leeds* (Polydor 2480 004)

Uriah Heep: *Live At Shepperton '74* (Castle CLACD 192)

Photo: Stefan Gawlick



Professional musician Stefan Gawlick travels the world and knows almost every major concert hall around the globe. In this series, he reports on the acoustics and other characteristics of famous venues—both in the auditorium and on stage.

Great Concerto Hall

NATIONAL CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS, BEIJING

_____Based on my previous trips to China, I was expecting anything and everything; but not one of the best concert halls in the world. But that's what I experienced when I got to play again in Beijing last year. The National Center for the Performing Arts is located right next to Tienanmen Square and opposite the main entrance to the Forbidden City. It's an incredible setup, although such an undertaking could only be implemented somewhere where capitalism functions a bit differently than it does back home. The building's architecture is undeniably spectacular: The whole complex looks like a glass spaceship hovering over an artificial lake. Inside, visitors will find several halls, the most important being the Opera House and the

Great Concerto Hall. Guests reach the hall, which can seat just under 2,100 people, through a glass walkway and under waterfalls — a truly unforgettable experience.

And it's no less of a spectacular entrance for musicians either. A bus takes you on a ramp over the lake and then into an entrance underneath the entire building. The underground road system is sealed with synthetic resin and polished to a mirror finish. And, in the end, you're dropped off right in front of the entrance to the artists' dressing room area, which is just a stone's throw away from backstage. That, my dear readers, is simply breathtaking for a musician. Alone the journey to the stage leaves me wanting to come back again already. ►

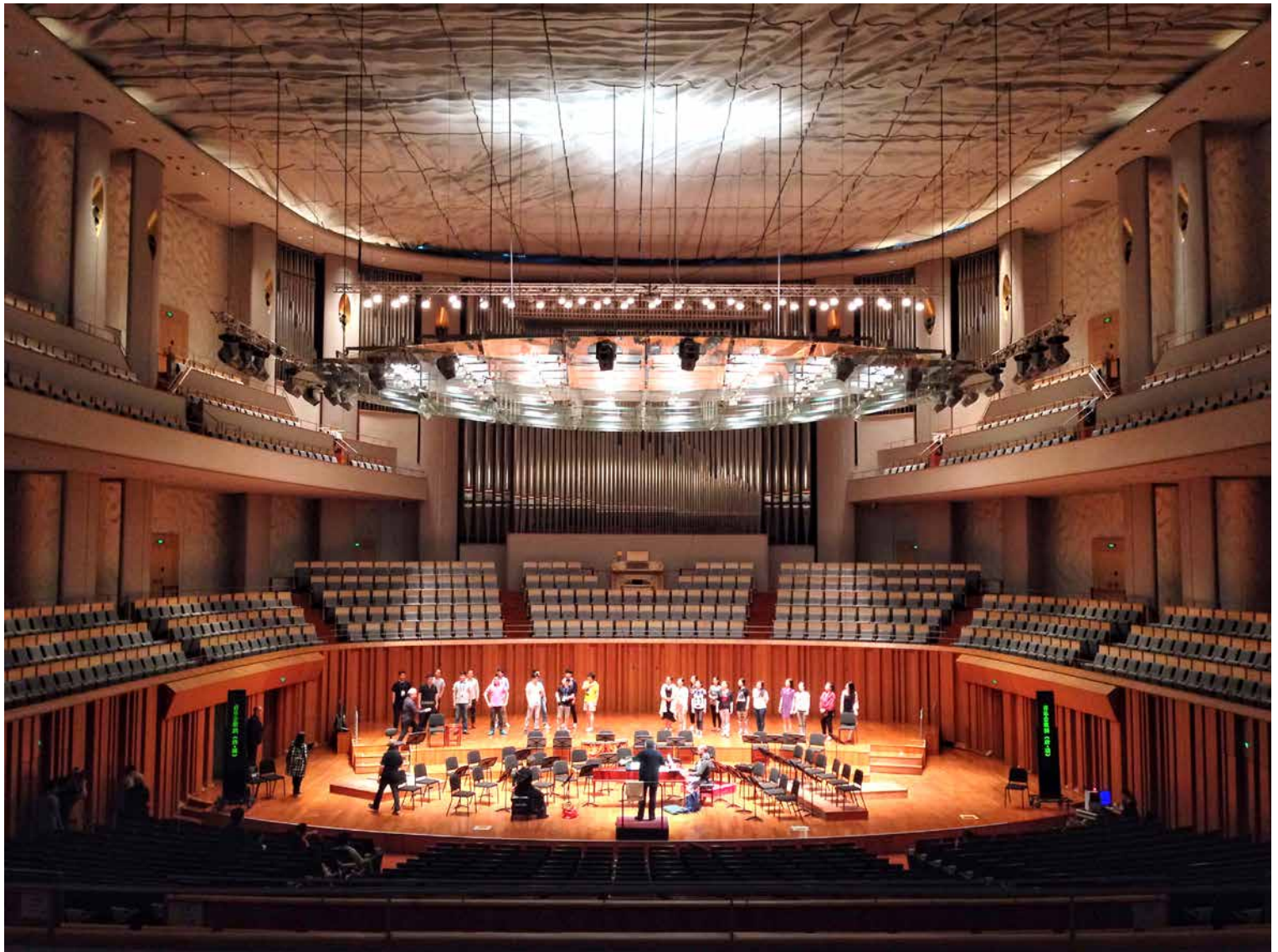


Photo: Stefan Gawlick

The large concert hall itself — which incidentally reminds me a little of the KKL (Culture and Convention Center) in Lucerne — has quite a spacious stage, which can be moved in every conceivable direction. That means whatever orchestra composition you desire can be achieved in next to no time. The stage is also brightly lit and free of shadows — and pleasantly cool. You wouldn't believe how rare that still is.

And when you start playing, you somehow feel at home. This hall sounds so average and ordinary (and I mean that in a positive way) that you become accustomed to the acoustics within a matter of seconds. It's not as debilitatingly reverberant as the Musikverein in Vienna, not as dry as the Cité de la Musique in Paris, not as grandiose as the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, or as analytical as the Hamburg Elbphilharmonie. Here, “on the other side of the world,” you find yourself in a hall where you suddenly feel like you've always played. The audience here is

also delightfully young and interested. Concertante operas are followed with evident expert knowledge and even the Italian text doesn't seem to be a stumbling block, as we learn in conversations during the intermission.

The walls, incidentally, are wave-shaped like in the new Elbphilharmonie, however less markedly so. Perhaps that's why the sound is smoother and more rounded? Either way, around 10 years ago they managed to create an almost shockingly perfect hall here, not outstanding in any one particular acoustic discipline and perhaps also too impersonal and faceless for it to trigger love at first sight, but all in all a magnificent hall. ■

National Center for the Performing Arts, Beijing | “The Giant Egg” |
<http://en.chncpa.org>

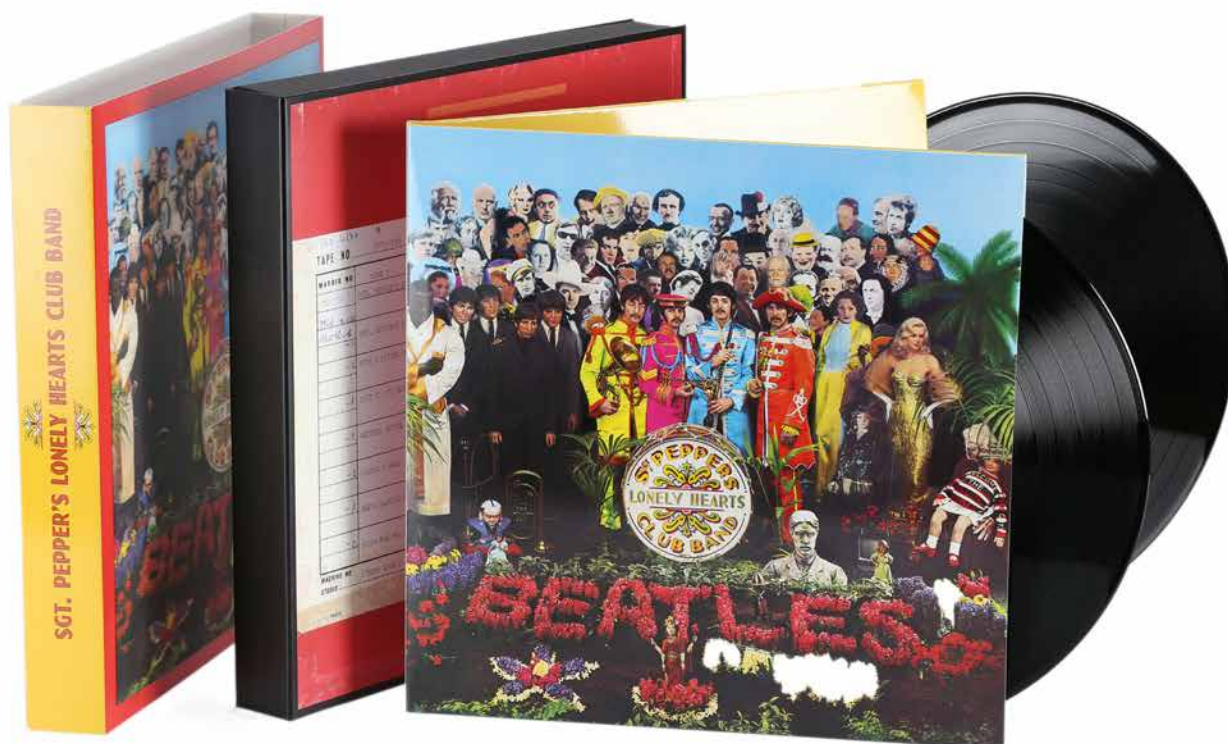
Music tips: Unfortunately, it's impossible to recommend recordings with a typical concert hall sound as there is no “typical” concert hall sound from here and (still) no world-renowned resident orchestra here.

CIRCUS MAXIMUS

Hans von Draminski

“It was fifty years ago today, Sgt. Pepper taught the band to play. They’ve been going in and out of style. But they’re guaranteed to raise a smile. So may I introduce to you the act you’ve known for all these years: Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band.”





_____Did you spot it? I specifically changed one little part of these immortal lyrics. You see, it's actually half a century since a British band bearing the name The Beatles recorded an album that changed pop music forever.

Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band came like a small earthquake. Okay, it may not have been the first conceptual album in pop history or the most consequential, but overall it turned a lot of standards from the late 1960s on their heads. The Beatles, at the height of their success and as bored and revolted by themselves as they were by the mechanics of the pop business, were looking to try something new. The fictitious "Sergeant Pepper" band in their brightly colored glistening costumes, which John, Paul, George, and Ringo visibly enjoyed wearing, allowed the group to explore new territory

both in terms of content and music. It also gave them a chance to be cheeky and disrespectful, to brutally poke fun at the Beatles image they had long ago come to dislike, and to massively criticize the political events of an England that, back in 1967, had serious problems with its own national identity and the relationship between the nation and the country's citizens. As a result, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* was, among other things, an intelligent, critical analysis of society and the system packaged in superficially nice songs laced with lyrics carrying hidden meanings that were often biting vicious.

From a technical production point of view, the band was exploring new avenues and experimenting with different sounds, the likes of which the 60s had yet to experience. The last

song on the album, "A Day In The Life," is an audio drama and listening to it is much like taking a ride on a musical roller-coaster — confusing, thrilling, and extremely unusual.

And now is a fitting time to celebrate that it's been 50 years since this exceptional record was produced. With the Super Deluxe Anniversary Edition of the album, which contains six silver disks, an opulently designed accompanying book, and posters, EMI is doing precisely that. The case is designed to look like the studio master-tape box, and the protective sleeve features a 3D hologram version of the original album cover.

What FIDELITY readers are most likely interested in hearing, however, is that the stereo mix remastered by Giles Martin, the son of then Beatles producer George Martin, sounds ▶



spectacularly good even on the silver disk. *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* has never sounded so acoustically transparent, present, or tonally balanced as it does now. Anyone who's not familiar with the album or entering the colorful psychedelic world of the Sergeant for the first time would definitely not think they're listening to a 50-year-old recording. What's more, the creators of the anniversary box have approached the project with the integrity of skilled historians: The album not only exists in the stereo mix created at the time by George Martin and his production team — more or less without the involvement of the four "MopTops" — but also in the mono version authorized by The Beatles, although a few flaws from previous remastering work have now been

ironed out in the stereo version. The mono version nevertheless sounds different here and there, and you could spend whole days comparing them one to one. Single releases and demo tracks have also been included with the Super Deluxe Anniversary Box. There's even a DVD and a Blu-ray with a 5.1 surround audio mix of the stereo remaster in LP format included in the box ... This won't leave any Beatles fans completely satisfied, though, as they'll have to purchase an LP version of the anniversary edition separately. In the quest for the ultimate album sound you can't rule out the vinyl version, however; after all, it has a (crucial) tad more tonal homogeneity, three dimensionality (created by the mixing console), and unconditional coherence that turns a "merely"

brilliant edition into an audiophile edition. The vinyl outdoes the CD by a hair's breadth, and so it has to be the vinyl.

Anyone interested in getting their hands on these collector's items will have to be quick as at the time that this went to press some of the large online retailers were reporting the boxes had already sold out. The Beatles phenomenon long ago became immortal and the fan base is enormous ... ■

The Beatles

Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band

- Ltd. Super Deluxe Anniversary Box Set (four CDs, one Blu-ray, and one DVD)
- 50th Anniversary Deluxe Edition (two LPs)



...and now for something completely different...

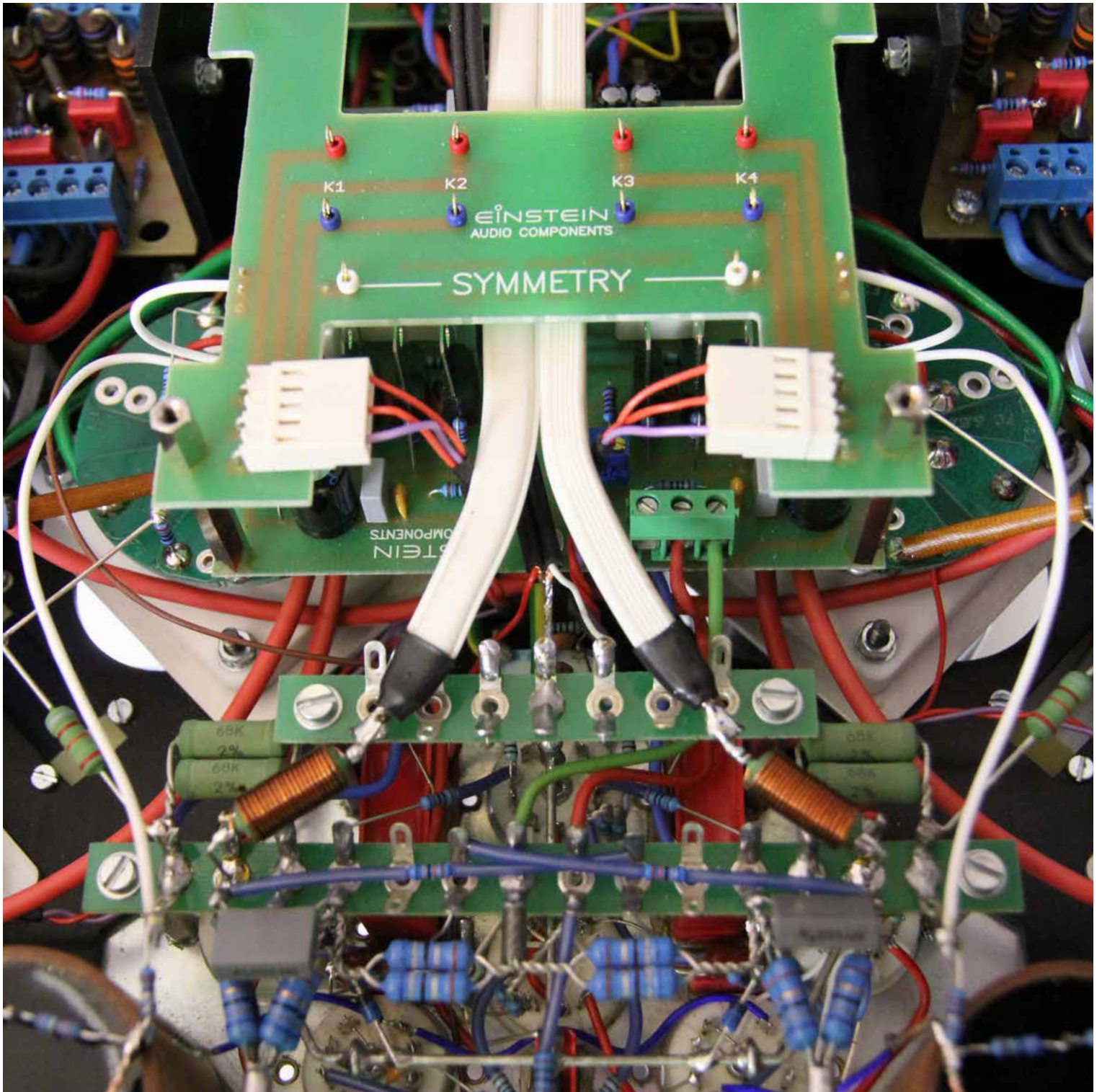
JIMI ALWAYS RINGS TWICE

By Cai Brockmann. Images: Cai Brockmann and manufacturer



EINSTEIN





Only a very elite group of brands has managed to establish their own signature design language. EINSTEIN is one of them. For more than a quarter of a century, this small manufacturing company in Bochum has been run by a team of individualists and real connoisseurs who work together like a well-oiled machine.

There's no Albert though—here he's called Rolf.





Before I press the doorbell, I quickly rerun the company name through my head one more time. EINSTEIN Audio. Please excuse the cheap cross-reference, but the name is simply genius. Less genius, and slightly confusing actually, is the fact you have to access the company using the little door at the back. Quite a solid little door I have to add though. EINSTEIN's premises are in a well-maintained brick building that was once part of the old Bochum coal mine. An especially broad range of media types and artists now find themselves working under the same roof here, for example the Bochum Symphony Orchestra, the theater Schauspielhaus Bochum, the Prinz Regent Theater, architects, media firms, vinyl labels, the Akademie Deutsche POP — and last, but

not least, EINSTEIN Audio. The actual main entrance leads to a decent-sized lobby where a poster quotes the German national football team record holder Lothar Matthäus as saying, in his rather skewed English, "I'm a German record player." This refreshing mix of solid and sophisticated culture, of proletariat history and modern-day media provides the perfect fit for EINSTEIN Audio.

And with that comment, now back to the entrance and the doorbell. From the parking lot, it seems totally obvious and logical that you would simply enter EINSTEIN Audio through the "main side entrance." You'd expect a friendly hello, a quick invitation to come in and then find yourself standing right in the thick of it all. Things around here do, however, run ►



fundamentally much more sedately and disciplined than that. A frenzied environment is not conducive to a manufacturing company. Care and attention are what matters, not a mad dash to the finish line.

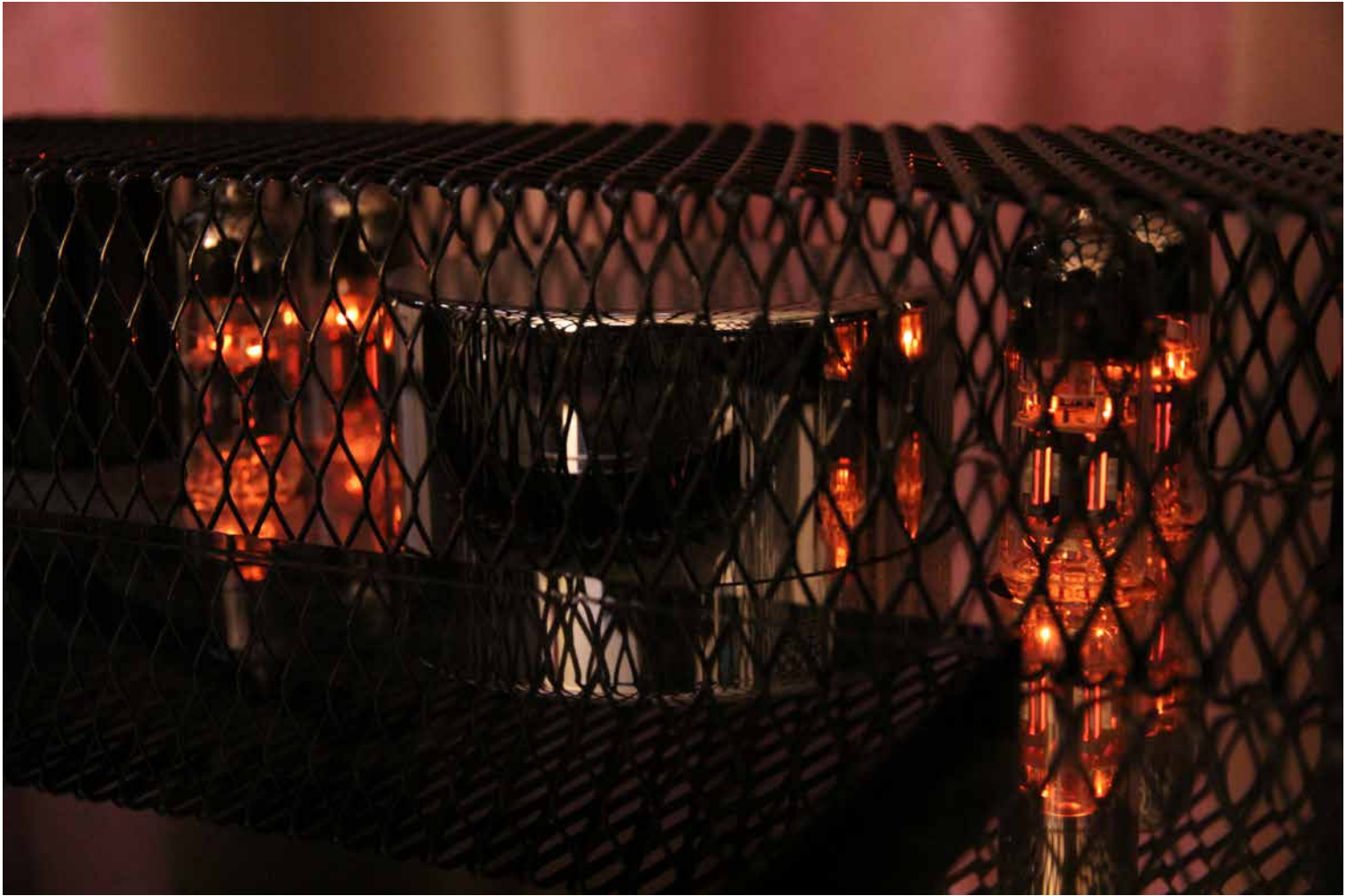
The entrance area is home to the desk belonging to Annette Heiss. She is both the “finance fairy” in charge of accounting and EINSTEIN cofounder, codirector, and designer; that is, the person crucially responsible for the company’s public image. Shape, color, and material studies are draped right by her desk, and colorful paintings, product posters, and awards hang on the walls — as well as a real gold record: *Talk Is Cheap* by Keith Richards. The solo album by the Stones guitarist

was released in 1988, the year EINSTEIN Audio was founded.

Wooden boxes filled with reconditioned gems have assembled in front of her desk for their return trip home, joining a batch of rigorously selected tube sets (“only 15% are good enough for our purposes”). A passageway toward the “back” (i.e., heading to the “main entrance”) leads directly to the parts and dispatch warehouse. The striking EINSTEIN wooden boxes dominate the scenery here.

On the left, you can get a glimpse into the bright, generously sized office of EINSTEIN’s CEO. Volker Bohlmeier is on the phone, and my eyes wander from his XL desk and across the walls adorned with ▶





some very fine electric guitars. I spot a Fender guitar amplifier sitting on a MESA Boogie box in the corner next to the fax machine. If you asked me, I wouldn't say this was an office. It's more of a feel-good space, a kind of audiophile's tranquil oasis. If, that is, you like electric guitars, like me.

To the right is the production department. You just have to turn two corners and you find yourself in front of the first assembly table, with others distributed throughout three consecutive rooms. Every EINSTEIN component is assembled and tested here. Measuring devices and soldering stations stretch into the far distance. I find a historical tube testing device on one desk.

Speaking of history, It was in 1990, after around three years of development work, when the name

EINSTEIN first appeared on a hi-fi product: "The Amp" was unveiled at the IFA in Berlin and suddenly an integrated amplifier, which also visually departed from the uniform, standard look on the scene, joined the mix of premiere-league hi-fi products. The innovative amp was the first visible attempt by the company, which had officially been founded two years earlier, to get people to sit up and take notice. In the years that followed, the amplifier's design wasn't intended to come across as playful, amusing, original, or contemporary as others tried to do in the late 80s. Rather, it strove to be pioneering in its elegance yet weighty as well as the most highly recognizable of all new developments. Even this first release from EINSTEIN featured the striking front panel in the form of a section cut from a circular arc. It is, like all of the ►



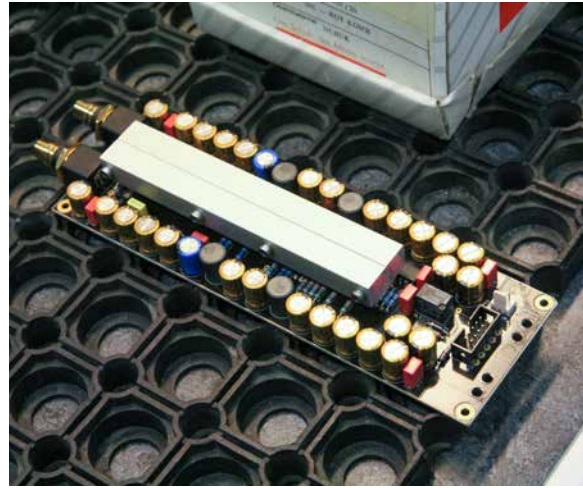
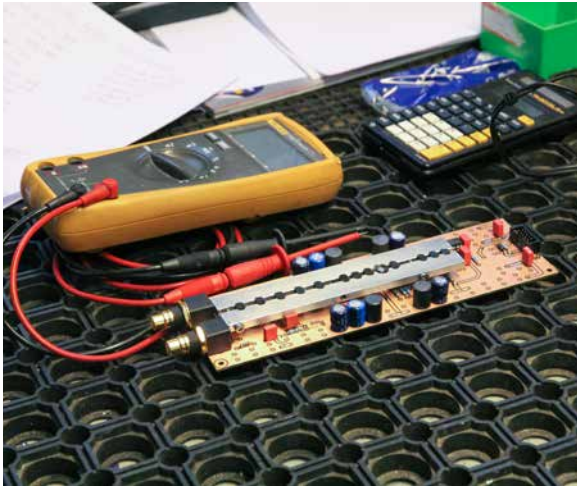


company's products, still instantly recognizable today from far, far away as an EINSTEIN product, not least because of the brand's two-tone design.

Its form draws primarily from a sketch produced by the industrial designer Martin Topel. Heiss, the cofounder and finance fairy mentioned above, has always been responsible for the practical implementation and consistency of the company's designs. The qualified interior designer ensures the perfect balance between self-confidence and understated luxury. The feel of the products and their "materiality" are of particular importance to her: "Only a few materials age gracefully." In view of longevity, which the company has always striven to achieve and has proven it can over the years, this statement does, of course, make total sense. In the world of hi-fi, EINSTEIN Audio has

been synonymous with "modern classics" for a quarter of a century.

Incidentally, the company name also traces its origins to Heiss. While she was sleeping one night, the idea of playing on the similarity in names between the head developer and a certain famous gentleman from contemporary history once captured sticking his tongue out (and I'm *not* referring to Mick Jagger here) just came to her as a concept for the company name. This takes us neatly away from the visual appearance and on to the inner values of the devices and the circuitry of the head developer, Rolf Weiler. He does actually look quite similar to Albert Einstein, however he dabbles "more with the saxophone than with the violin," as you find out if you ever get the chance to ask him, which is easier said than done. You see, ►



Weiler loves nothing more than peace and quiet and steers clear of the public. For that reason, he works at night. However, in a quarter century, I have already had the pleasure twice of meeting this creative inventor, who, in addition to his work at the Max Planck Institute, has been under contract as a kind of mastermind right from the beginning when EINSTEIN Audio Components was founded. Weiler enjoys a legendary reputation even among electronics experts; after all he did introduce one or two completely new and *truly* innovative circuits to the circuitry scene, a landscape full of conventional amplifier circuits that remained generally stagnant for decades with only a few slight alterations.

Yes, Weiler doesn't give a damn about what everyone else is doing, according to Volker Bohlmeier, the third

person in the trio of company founders. He has always been fond of this approach though, it seems. Everyone at EINSTEIN sees him- or herself as a timeless servant of music, an innovator, and a guardian of the best music playback machines possible. The products developed in house shouldn't neglect any desired emotions — the ideal sound everyone at EINSTEIN aims to achieve is the celebrated live experience; nothing more, nothing less. And the folks there still have some thoughts about this.

That was also the case back in the mid 80s when the three friends — Weiler, Bohlmeier, and Heiss — decided (incidentally as a result of a coffee machine that was practically impossible to operate!) to develop hi-fi components that everyone would be immediately able to intuitively operate. What's more, the idea ▶







was for the sound quality to be phenomenal, with every component a finely tuned piece of manufacturing designed to achieve perfection, and no individual deviations from the strict reference specifications allowed.

To achieve that, every single EINSTEIN employee works incredibly hard. Take Uwe Gespers, for example. He was born in 1957 and, after completing his electrical engineering degree, didn't go to work "for the likes of Siemens," but was hired immediately by this high-end manufacturer that had been recently founded at the time. And Gespers has never once regretted his decision: Since joining EINSTEIN, he

has overseen all the development stages of EINSTEIN products, meticulously keeping a record of every component — and even does this manually. The expert in mining history has (despite of or because of this?) an exceptional reputation and working hours I'm quite jealous of: Gespers usually turns up around mid-morning and then stays until the evening. Rolf Wittling, on the other hand, a friendly and adept radio and television engineer sporting a light-gray pigtail and full beard, calmly goes about his day-to-day activities but works "normal" hours. This gives the hobby guitar player more time in the evenings to devote to his six-string and his band. Southern ►



rock can be heard playing quietly at his workstation, which he says inspires him. “I can’t get anything done without music,” says the self-confessed Allman Brothers fan.

Every technical engineer should be able to master everything required to painstakingly manufacture a product and is therefore properly trained. This may include, for example, student trainees who relax in their spare time to electronica, house and lounge music. This is very different from Bohlmeier, who likes to play the guitar himself and is a huge blues fan, as is suddenly apparent when the boss’s cell phone rings and Jimi Hendrix’s riff from “Hey Joe” starts to play. Less than a minute later, Klaus Wiczorek appears to personally discuss the manufacturing details of a

new component. The highly gifted mechanic, who also happens to be a veteran of the company, runs his workshop not too far from here, which is not unusual as most EINSTEIN Audio suppliers have their premises nearby. And no, he definitely doesn’t want to be photographed. He is at least as camera shy as Rolf Weiler — or Ivan Tupa. The Czech, who is actually retired, oversees assembly at EINSTEIN and is known for his extreme meticulousness.

To my surprise, I manage to get EINSTEIN’s decisive “digital expert” in front of the camera a little later without any problems. IT expert Sebastian Schlitte discovered jazz, hi-fi, and ultimately EINSTEIN Audio all thanks to his father. He is now officially in charge of the company’s latest digital developments. ►



And Weiler is presumably happy he can continue to primarily concentrate on analog amplifier technology. The company's showroom is just a couple of minutes' drive from the manufacturing site. This is where all EINSTEIN components have to prove themselves in audiophile practice and with other precious objects in various setups. And this is also where you can experience all the other products sold by EINSTEIN Audio in Germany, such as the genius (sic!) turntables from TechDAS and the solid loudspeakers from Audiomachina. These now sit side by side with in-house developed "siblings": EINSTEIN has now launched its own turntable complete with tonearm and cartridge as well as innovative loudspeakers, making it a true full-range supplier.

Here in the company's show and demo refuge, however, there are other delicious delights for the senses. In the back room of the shop, a high-end slicing machine is proudly displayed between guitar cases, while in the front showroom the shelf behind the counter is nicely stocked with fine wines. There is no doubt that the last quarter of a century has seen EINSTEIN Audio as a company shaped by a perfectly balanced, well-crafted mixture of taste, precision, and a good helping of genius. Perhaps Albert's famous formula ($E = mc^2$) should be reformulated. How about EINSTEIN = master of ceremonies squared? ■

www.EINSTEIN-audio.de



...and now for something completely different...

LEHMANN DRACHENFELS

By Boris Fust. Photos: Ingo Schulz



With its dainty dimensions, the Drachenfels is a real pipsqueak.





_____Anyone keen on listening to music through headphones would be well advised to take a good look at what industry professionals commonly use. Consider the broadcasting industry, for example: Here, headphones play an integral role in sound playback day in and day out. Industry professionals spend whole days and nights with their ears tucked under headphone cushions, a reality that presents certain challenges for the playback chain. Rattling, jerking and static are absolute no-nos there. For many years now, a small but quite exquisite box has been a common sight in professional studio environments: The Linear headphone amplifier has been setting benchmarks

for Lehmannaudio, a German manufacturer based in Rhineland.

The company has now given this flagship product a baby brother. Priced at about € 500, the Drachenfels is intended for demanding home use, but is, in fact, much more than just a headphone amplifier: The Drachenfels actually serves as more of a technological platform that you can equip as and how you see fit.

In its standard configuration, the Drachenfels (Dragon's Rock, a mountain in Germany's Siebengebirge) comes equipped ready to take feeds from high-level sources such as CD players. Thanks to its modular design, however, ►



the rear panel and module circuit boards can be changed so the headphone amplifier is also able to receive its signals over Wi-Fi, Ethernet and Bluetooth. And, should a new digital format ever catch on in the audio world one day, Norbert Lehmann, a sound engineer by trade, will develop a suitable circuit board attachment. Those thinking of investing in a Drachenfels can therefore be rest assured they will be well equipped for any future developments. What's more, the headphone amplifier can also be used as a preamplifier for active loudspeakers or a power amplifier.

It's impossible to grok just how versatile and efficient this little dragon is just by looking at it: With its dainty dimensions, the Drachenfels is a real pipsqueak. The only thing that's big about it are the gold-plated Neutrik headphone outputs (6.3-millimeter jack) and the ALPS loudspeaker potentiometer that you can also use to control the volume of the headphones and the preout RCA if you unplug the headphones. Just one touch of the control dial lets you know that no expense has been spared. The volume control feels impressive with its smooth and solid turning. The Drachenfels offers 12 decibels of maximum gain ►



when the potentiometer is all the way to the right. On the left of the front panel (optionally available in a silver or black finish), the blue LED of the standby switch signals the device is ready for action. The power switch is located on the back of the device where the RCA inputs and outputs are also found.

When put to the test in combination with the Amiron Home headphones from Beyerdynamic and the NightOwl from AudioQuest, the Drachenfels proved to be a real long-distance runner. A lot of what you hear

through headphones comes across first and foremost as imposing—imposing and exaggerated. The Lehmann device, however, always exudes confidence and a sense of neutrality. It deals with fast sound events reliably and depicts tones very cleanly without ever understating or overstating them. ▀

Lehmann Drachenfels | Headphone amplifier | Price: €500
Lehmannaudio Vertriebs GmbH | Richard-Zanders-Str. 54 |
51469 Bergisch Gladbach | Germany | +49 (0) 2202 2806240 |
www.lehmannaudio.com



...and now for something completely different...

AVM
AUDIO VIDEO MANUFAKTUR



HANDMADE THE MODERN WAY

By Patrick Pohlmann







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

»»»» OR »

Volume up or down? *From... to.*

Analog or digital? *Both.*

Tube or transistor? *Both.*

Vinyl or download? *Both.*

Cross-country run or gym? *Both.*

Trends or tradition? *Both.*

Tea or coffee? *Coffee.*

Salad or steak? *Both.*

Wine or beer? *Beer.*

Mountains or the sea? *Both.*

Book or screen? *Book.*

Jazz club or opera house?

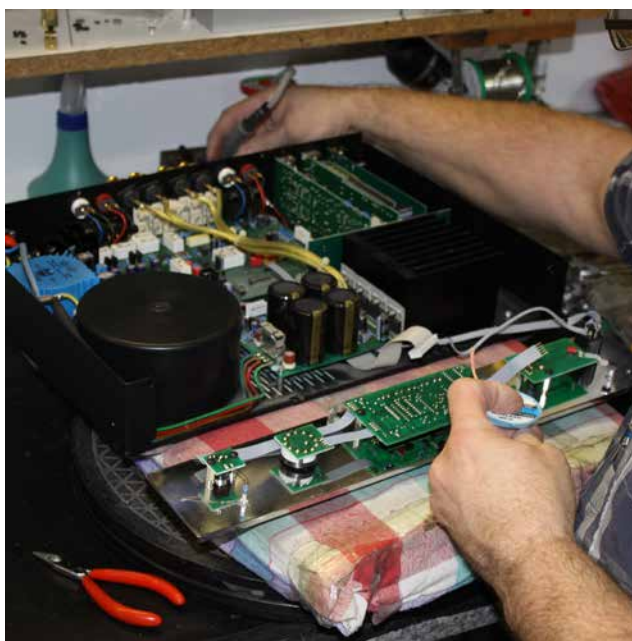
Opera house.

Bach or Beatles? *Both.*

Wagner or Wacken? *Wacken.*

Stand-by or plug out? *Stand-by.*





As is so often the case with hi-fi start-ups, Audio Video Manufaktur was born of a combination of engineering and product development

passion, scientific curiosity and a no-compromise love of music. Engineering graduates Günther Mania and Robert Winiarski started up their business, called AVM for short, in April 1986. Mania had previously

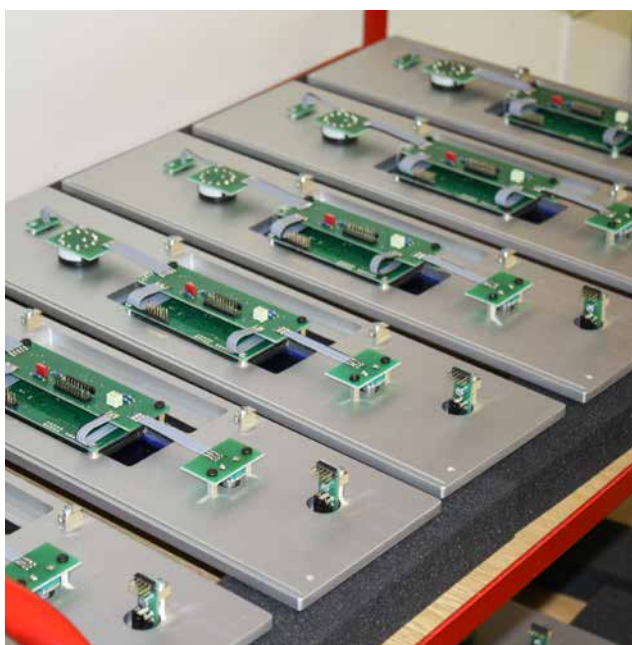
published an assembly manual for a power amplifier featuring innovative circuitry technology, which really struck a chord with the audiophile community. The amplifier, which was initially sold in kit form, later ▶



became the daddy of a range characterized by handmade, no-frills design and made in Germany engineering craftsmanship at affordable prices, when the company started assembling the product at its own plant in Malsch. Udo Besser, who took over the company located on the edge of the Black Forest in the autumn of

2010, is also committed to this corporate philosophy. Having said that, Besser, who worked for Burmester for 15 years after studying electrical engineering and engineering management, latterly as Managing Director and co-responsible for the bulk of the company's product innovations, also set new priorities: given the

opportunities generated by digitalization, the AVM range now focuses on digital media and streaming. Udo Besser, who back in his youth would tinker about under instruction from his father with anything ranging from radios to motorbikes that could be stripped down and then reassembled, experiences a particular ►



sense of satisfaction when customers' or reporters' "jaws drop", as he puts it, when they are confronted with the versatile range of streaming functions—or when the latter express their exasperation at being unable to incorporate this deluge of technical details in an article. Alongside streaming technology, he regards the Music Library as

the company's currently most exciting product; it enables users to conveniently store their CD collections on an SSD and manage them using an app. Given the wide range of functions available, a clearly structured, intuitive operating concept that makes the technology as manageable as possible right away, is all the more important,

especially since the AVM brand, as Udo Besser stresses, is aimed primarily at music lovers and not leisure-time computer scientists. Udo Besser moderately updated both the design of the housings, which are now made of unobtrusively elegant brushed aluminum instead of curved sheet metal, and the company's logo: the formerly ▶

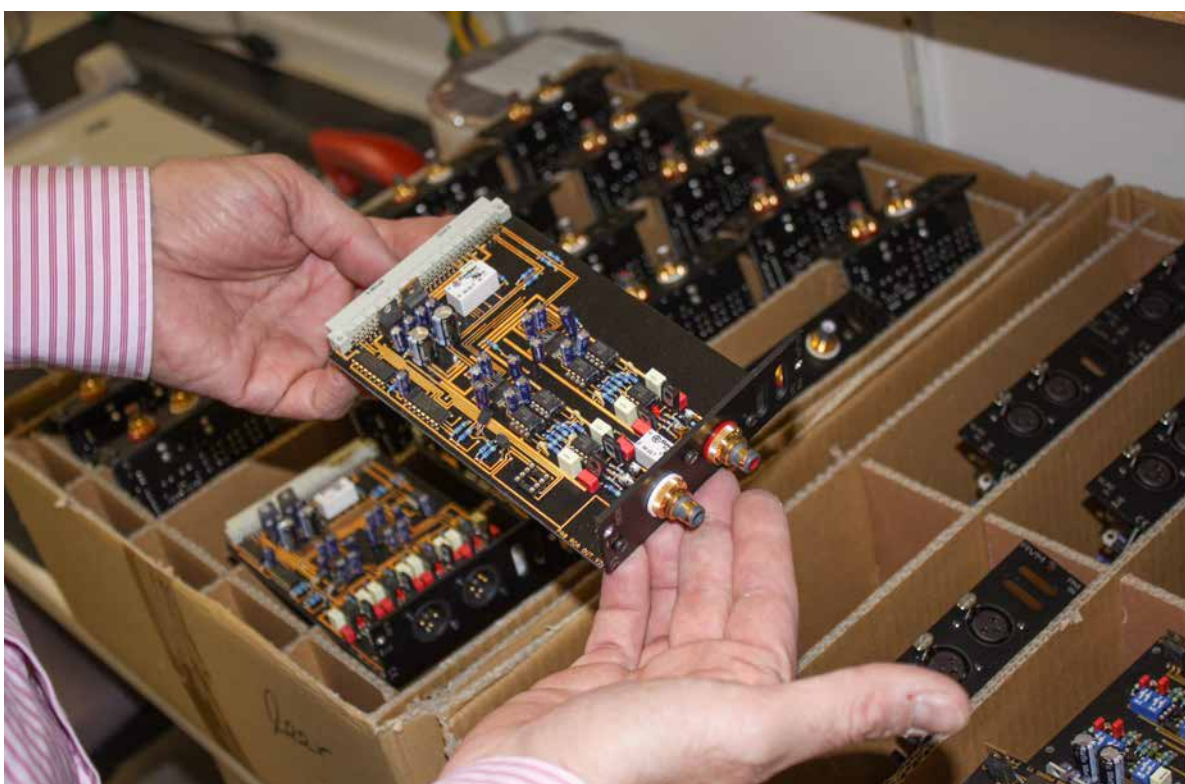
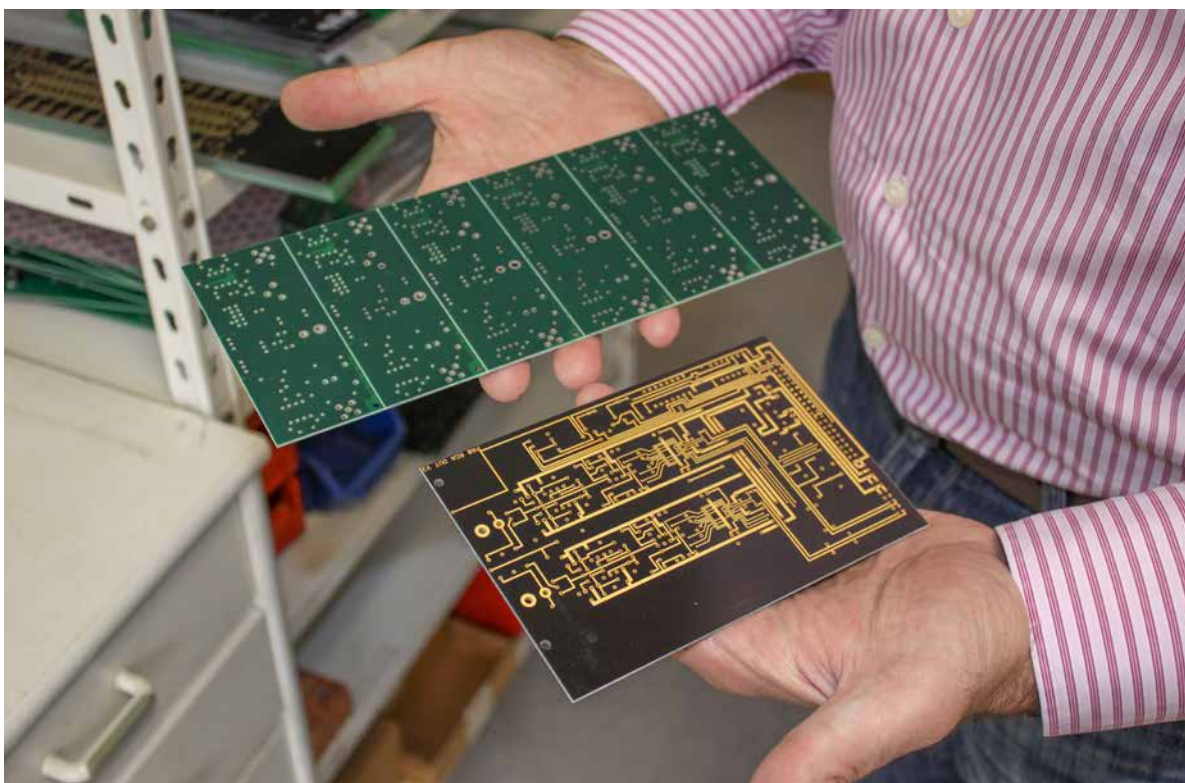


slightly jagged letters AVM now feature a rounded, thoroughly no-frills design, which also provides a practical benefit, since they can be engraved in the aluminum in one go.

Another innovation are the optional tube output stages for the Ovation and Evolution product ranges. Whilst

both these ranges feature separate components priced up to 10,000 euro and aimed at experienced high-end aficionados, the third range, called Inspiration, features midi-format all-in-one products priced at between 3,500 and 4,500 euro aimed at discerning music listeners, who want to indulge

in their hobby in an as uncomplicated, space-saving and non-cost-intensive manner as possible and are looking for a visually appealing solution. Given their modular design, Inspiration units can even be custom-configured. The company continues to manufacture its products entirely at its ►





Malsch plant, and its biggest market is still Germany. The past three years however have seen an increased focus on international markets, given that the “Devised and handmade in Germany” label represents an appealing reason to buy, especially abroad. AVM now sells its products in more than 50 countries worldwide. The company’s current headcount of 14 still includes Günther Mania as chief designer, whilst Robert Winiarski has to some

extent stepped down from his executive role at the company, although he is still responsible for Service and Quality Control. Since audio and video, as highlighted by the company name, need to receive equal treatment, the company is again considering expanding its range in the future to incorporate visual media. However, AVM will initially focus on its traditional values by launching new integrated amplifiers and phono preamps.

After all, in the opinion of Udo Besser, the AVM brand’s identity and recognition factor, which has evolved over the years, should not be lost amongst the processes of adapting to modern trends and developments. ■

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.

photo: © Philip Wesselhoff

Boom, boom, boom, boom: It's a formula that reduces the music of the last hundred years to its smallest common denominator — and a recurring line in John Lee Hooker's biggest hit... —>

August 22, 1917: born in Clarksdale, Mississippi

1920

1930

1937: first solo appearance in Detroit, Michigan

1940

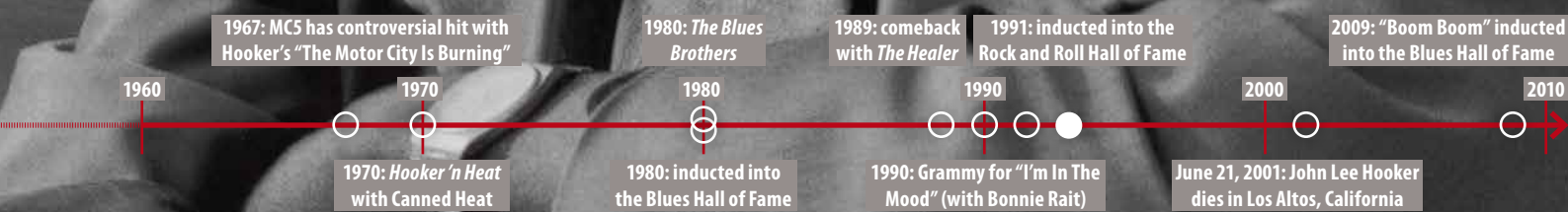
November 3, 1948: first single released ("Boogie Chillen")

1950

August 7, 1951: recording session of "I'm In The Mood"

1960

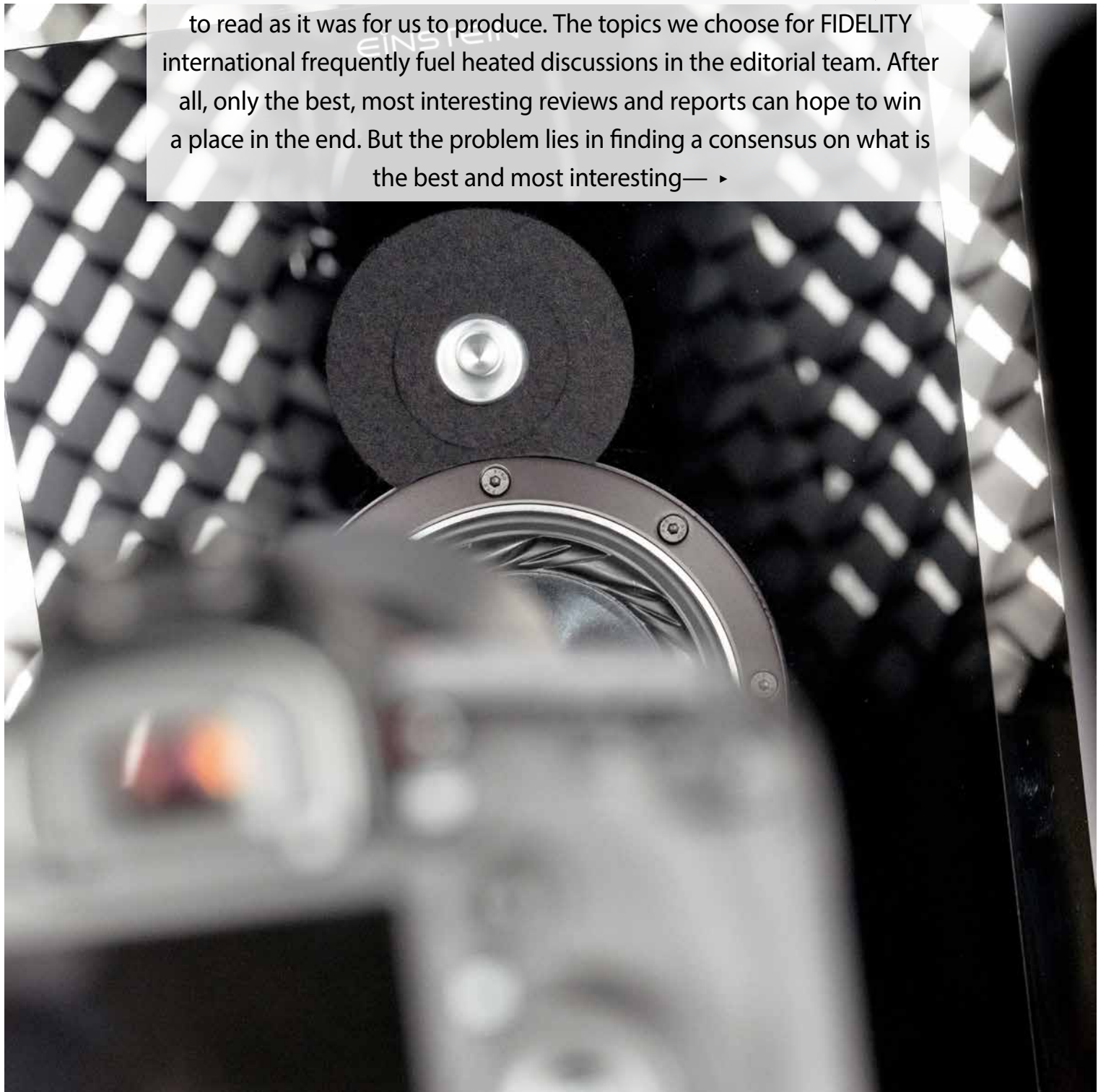
—>...With a career reaching as far back as 1947, Hooker laid the foundation for rock 'n' roll to grow and develop. August 22, 2017, marked the centenary of his birth. On the same day, a major exhibition titled "John Lee Hooker: King of the Boogie" opened at the Grammy Museum in Cleveland, Ohio.

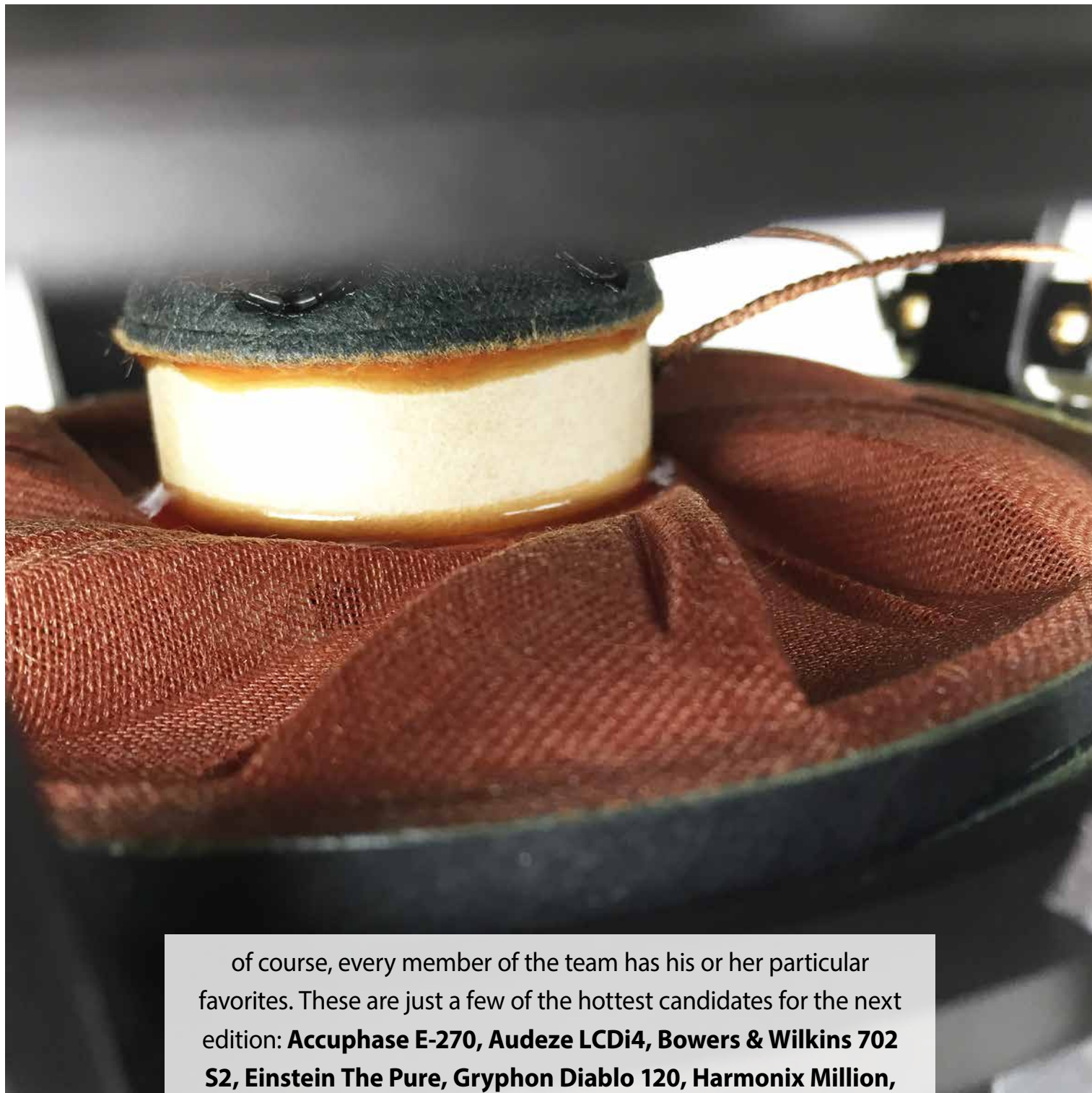


PREVIEW

FIDELITY international No. 08

Dear hi-fi aficionados worldwide, I hope this free international edition of our German-language FIDELITY magazine was as much fun for you to read as it was for us to produce. The topics we choose for FIDELITY international frequently fuel heated discussions in the editorial team. After all, only the best, most interesting reviews and reports can hope to win a place in the end. But the problem lies in finding a consensus on what is the best and most interesting— ▶

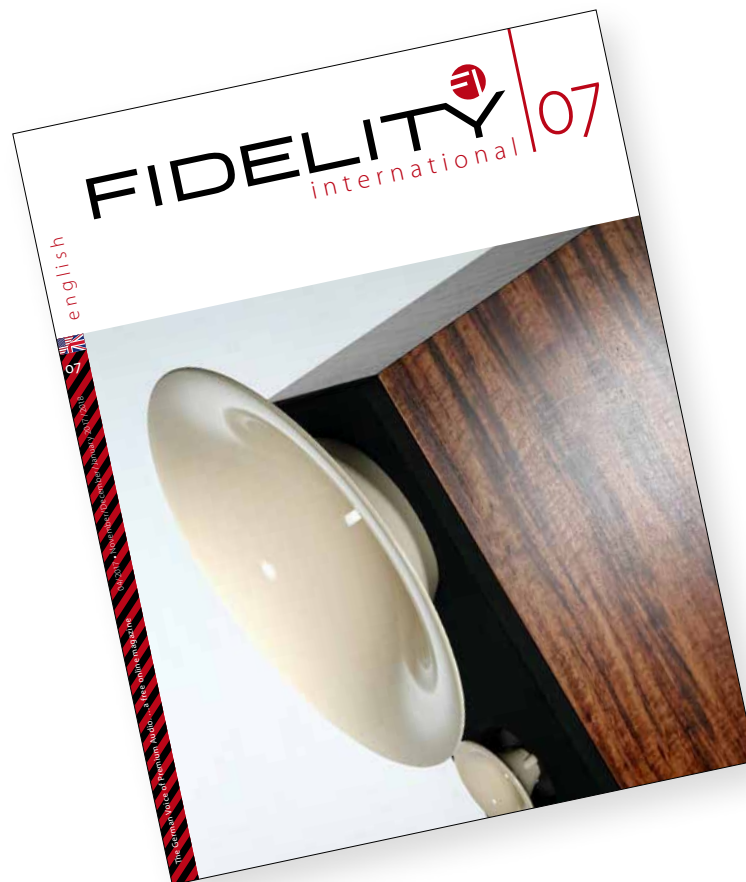




of course, every member of the team has his or her particular favorites. These are just a few of the hottest candidates for the next edition: **Accuphase E-270, Audeze LCDi4, Bowers & Wilkins 702 S2, Einstein The Pure, Gryphon Diablo 120, Harmonix Million,**

MartinLogan Expression ESL 13A

Whichever articles manage to make the final cut, our goal is always to make you, our readers, the true winners. FIDELITY international No. 08 will appear in February 2018 or when ready.



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equipment evaluation.

THE END

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