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RECORD REVIEW

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RECORD of the month



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IMPETUS: VINYL CACHE

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MEGATRON

British valve amp proves the single-ended argument

On test B&W Nautilus 803 Tannoy R2 speakers
Pathos hybrid amp McCormack phono stage
More speaker cables Pro-Ject tonearm
Plus Chicago show report Linn's CD12 revisited

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ACCESSORIES, TOYS AND ODDITIES... PART 2

Black Oak. It's a two-way system with a 1in gold dome tweeter and two 5.5in Silver C-CAM woofers. It's shielded for A/V use, and the company boasts that it delivers 'tons-o-bass'.

Nova's Applause is, despite Texan origins, a very British-looking, classic floorstander. A two-way vented design, it uses the same 1in soft dome tweeter found in the smaller Bravo, but employs two 7in carbon-fibre composite woofers to the one in the Bravo. The drivers are positioned with the woofers above and below the tweeter, in the upper half of the enclosure. Bi-wirable, the Applause is specified as having 89dB/1W sensitivity and a 4 ohm nominal impedance. (www.novaaudio.com)

Reference 3A's pretty La Veritas is a phase coherent, time-aligned slope-fronted floorstander measuring 810mm tall and 300mm wide, but 250mm deep at the base, tapering to 120mm at the top. Its primary unit is an 8in carbon fibre-coned driver good for 112dB, positioned below a dome tweeter working above 4kHz. Sensitivity is 92dB/1W, impedance is 8 ohms and power handling 100W RMS.

Roksan demonstrated a cute speaker in collaboration with Spondor, a joint-venture we couldn't have predicted. (Though an audio genealogist would point out that Spondor made the original small box speakers for Quad, and Quad and Roksan once shared proprietors...) Set to sell for £1100 per pair, or £2500 for five, the speaker is a two-way reflex design finished in grey, with an MDF cabinet and sculpted grille; the centre-channel variant features a neat, changeable 'base angle bar' to adjust the speaker relative to the listening position. Components include a VIFA TC20 20mm soft dome tweeter and two Spondor 130mm woofers. Compact, the speakers measure 480x156x285mm; prices include dedicated stands. (www.roksan.co.uk)

Soliloquy's SM-2A3 is a small two-way, stand-mounted design with an enclosure measuring only 14x11x7.5in (hdw). Its curved-bottom grille protects a 5.25in rigid poly fibre cone woofer mounted above a 1.125in double chamber silk-dome tweeter. Despite the small dimensions, the SM-2A3 weighs in at 22lb. The speaker is aimed at users of low power amps, such as single-ended triodes, so the quoted 91dB sensitivity, 10 ohm impedance and a suggested power range of 3-25W make this a potential mate for 300B-equipped amplifiers.



Above: Dynaudio's baby



Left: Hales Alexandra speaker

PS AUDIO, once known for no-frills amps and pre-amps, returns with a completely new concept. PS Audio Power Plants take control of the AC mains to a stage beyond mere filtering or conditioning — these devices earn the tag of 'AC synthesisers'. The P300, P600, P1200 and P2000 (model numbers referring to the wattage) provide between four and eight AC outlets to drive your components with newly generated pure AC line voltage; their behaviour is comparable to that required by high-tech industries requiring 'laboratory grade' AC power for critical scientific and medical applications. Among the claims made are output distortion below 0.1%, guaranteed regulated, low impedance/low distortion 115V or 230V output from any AC supply rated between 95V and 260V, and output voltage fluctuations below 0.3V. Expect some listening tests very soon. Oh, and another thing: I wish there were power amps as pretty... (www.psaudio.com)

RIGHTWAY AUDIO PRODUCTS elicited a 'Gee whiz' from me, as in, 'Gee whiz, it's been a while since anyone showed me something to support cables off the floor'. The Suspender is a 1.5lb device made from electrical-grade porcelain with a groove in its top to accept the cables; it resembles the insulators on top of power pylons. It's set up in such a way that you can rest cables on top, while allowing others to criss-cross without making contact, and the hand-out even shows wacky alternatives, like wrapping the wires around a pair of them to coil up excess cable. Its *raison d'être*? The 'proper managing of electromagnetic fields' (EMF) which surround audio cables. Hell, I don't care if they work or not: they just look so cool...

Some unusual floorstanders from Stanley Linear Audio feature small footprints and drive units in stepped arrays to improve time alignment. The UD-6.5 and Pro 6.5 stand 45in tall, 7.7in wide and 10.5in deep, with an extra 1.5in on the UD-6.5 if you add the grille. Both use a 28mm Esotec tweeter from Denmark, a French-made 100mm aerogel mid-range and an Esotec 170mm woofer. With crossover points at 500Hz and 6500Hz. Sensitivity is 85dB/1W, and impedance is nominally 7 ohm, 4 ohms minimum. The Pro differs from its sister by providing tri-wiring, level adjustment on the mid and treble drivers, no provision for the grille (doncha just love purism?), extra-heavy ballast base measuring 15x20in and weighing 13lb each, extra internal bracing and double the wire gauge for the bass unit. Prices for '6.5s, from basic to Pro depending on choice of finish, are \$3274 to \$7670 per pair.

Waveform uses a clever egg-shaped module to contain the tweeter and midrange for a series of speaker which, for the UK, could have been called Egg-Cups. The head module contains a 1in silk dome tweeter and a paper cone mid with foam surround, fitted to an egg made of 10mm cast aluminium

SENNHEISER, normally a conservative and sensible company, showed a bizarre device aimed at computer gamers. The Sennheiser Surround Pro is a collar — yup, just like what you'd picture on a dray horse — with front and rear speakers so you can wrap yourself in sound. I suppose one could, if so inclined, use it with cinematic surround sources, but — frankly — most audiophiles would be too ashamed to be caught dead in the thing. In defence of the venerable German firm, this must surely be aimed at the sort of human catastrophe who would stand in line for weeks for The Phantom Menace while dressed up as a Wookiee.

ULTRA SYSTEM takes tweaking to a new extreme with its Audio Desk Systeme, which — I kid thee not — makes your CDs 'truer' to reduce jitter, by trimming their shape to better approach that of a perfect circle. The cutting device is made in Germany; it's attached to a mechanism which, in 60 seconds, trims the disc, while bevelling the edges to a 38° angle to reduce laser scatter and painting a black edge at the same time. Guys were running around the show swearing by this, so investigate it if you have a spare \$500.

WINTER'S TALE followed a rival's chair launched at CES, the one which moves via hydraulics in concert with whatever you're watching, with a chair which more sedately merely rumbles, vibrates and feels nice to the tush. It's a handsome thing, a wooden framed recliner with nicely padded leather seats ideal for long listening sessions, but it contains full-range transducers and 300W of power to create a therapeutic environment. Yup, you guessed it: Winter's Tale is based in California. (www.winterstale.net)



VAC integrated amplifier

400mm tall and 300mm in diameter. Its own spec, separate from the supporting systems, is 8 ohm impedance, around 89dB/1W sensitivity and recommended amplifier rating of 60-350W. In the Mach 17, the egg nestles on top of a truncated pyramid bass enclosure housing two 12in treated paper cone woofers in a unit with a 597x597mm footprint. Add an all-enclosing grille, and you wouldn't know an egg lurks within.

Other speakers, active crossovers and mounting accessories in the range make this one of the most flexible systems I can recall, the same basic ingredients forming the heart of wall-mounts, small floorstanders, stand-mounters, bookshelf systems and anything else you require. (www.waveform.ca)