

Of Drugs, Constitutions & Reviews

Human nature, regardless of whatever else about the world changes, remains statically the same. *The New York Times*, as well as PBS, carried stories recently about unpublished studies of the effectiveness of two antidepressants (1/17/08). The published tests reported 60% effectiveness, with 40% of the testees receiving a placebo. However, when the unpublished tests were added to the totals, the drugs were only slightly better than the placebo for depression sufferers.

The New England Journal of Medicine investigated why only some of the trials were not being published. Other previous studies of this issue found much the same reluctance to publish unfavorable test results. There is more to the story. In one, 74 trials of 12 drugs, 90% of the favorable results made it into print, while only 14% of the poor results did. Both the pharmaceutical industry and Congress have recently taken steps to require manufacturers to make full information public, and for several reasons: safety of patients and protection of investors, among others.

This news sounded rather like an echo to me. The main characters in this episode seemed similar to those who participated in an AES forum in the eighties which was billed as "Are Equipment Reviews Accurate?" The participants included all but one of the major reviewers from the audio consumer magazines of the day. The attendees rapidly shifted the subject to "Why aren't bad reviews ever published?" The most popular rejoinder at that time was, "Nobody wants to read bad reviews." It turns out that, on later queries I made to those who were then reviewers, the *publishers* did not want to publish bad reviews.

The reasons are not hard to find.

American publishers did not then, or now, wish to upset advertisers, and the reasons for that are certainly not difficult to deduce. At the time I queried John Crabbe, editor of *Hi-Fi News & Record Review* (as it was then), about the situation. He suggested that British reviews were sometimes critical of certain equipment, and that this might result in modifications. British reviewers present at the forum were visibly and vocally scornful of audio review practice in the US.

We've published less than favorable reviews. Two cases had sharply contrasting results. In one, we reluctantly published a report by two of our most competent reviewers who were unhappy to find their negative result but were confident that they were correct. Nor could they discover what the basis of the problem with the equipment was. The manufacturer was not happy at all and thought we were mistaken—and canceled his advertising. In another case our reviewer found a shortcoming in a tube tester made by a British firm. Not too long afterward, we received a revised sample which was right on spec, news of which we happily published.

It seems strange that bad test results of any magnitude in the drug industry do not seem to send the makers back to the drawing board. Doubtless this does happen in some companies. This question has become extremely personal for me. A close member of my family took a diabetes medication—one pill a day—for 422 days. On advice of his physician, he stopped, and two months later suffered congestive heart failure. After a two-week hospital stay and three months intensive rehabilitation, he is largely recovered. However, the pharmaceutical company is facing a class-action lawsuit.

By a strange coincidence, just as news

of the prevalence of unpublished unfavorable tests appeared in the media, I was reading "The Genius of America," by Eric Lane and Michael Oreskes (Bloomsbury, 252pp, \$23.95, 2007). The subtitle reads "How the Constitution Saved Our Country and Why It Can Again." The authors, one a lawyer, the other a distinguished editor, have one main point: the Constitution, unlike the prior organizing document of the United States, the Articles of Confederation, is firmly and clearly based on a belief in the basic selfishness of every person. The earlier document assumed that everyone would act in a gentlemanly and polite manner, following the rules of honor.

The 13 years between 1776 and 1789 conclusively demonstrated that such a high-minded based government was a disastrous failure. Although most of the delegates to what turned out to be the constitutional convention in the summer of '89 were deists, they knew enough about Puritan Calvinism to recognize that human beings are usually self-centered and will act in their own self-interest.

The Constitution is constructed with three balanced powers. In order for anything to be accomplished, cooperation is absolutely required between these. In any given issue, no participant should go away from a final decision completely happy with the result. Most would agree, I think, that we have just lived through seven years which graphically and tragically demonstrate the truth of what the delegates of 1789 assumed. The Constitution has been seriously violated in deed and spirit and the health of this country, because we have not honored its precepts, has suffered serious damage, whether in the drug business, governments, or in the audio publishing business.—E.T.D.

CONTRIBUTORS

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Born and educated in England and now living in New Zealand for the past 30 plus years, **Terry Bicknell** ("Valve (Tube) Regulated Power Supplies," p. 26) trained in the British Telecom system. He has been in electronics all his life and closely connected with audio for most of it. He taught electronics in the NZ polytechnic system for a number of years. Because he developed an interest in older technologies, he formed Renascent Audio, specializing in refurbishing and designing (mainly) valved audio, studio, and test equipment.

AJ van Doorn ("Build a Hybrid SE OTL Amp," p. 34) resides in The Netherlands.

After 40 years in engineering and product management in the consumer, industrial, and telecommunications field, **Ken Bird** ("The Sidewoofer Line Array," p. 41) retired to his native Missouri, where he pursues his interest in building speakers and tube amplifiers, along with model railroading, amateur radio, and digital photography.

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