

The Munich Hi-End Show 2008

A tribute to two-way analog stereo.

I'm not really a hi-fi show guy. They are fine if you want to get an idea of next month's crop in the hi-fi shops, but I want something different. I want to be able to compare—sound-wise—different systems, different components, different concepts. But, first, most shows are not set up for that. The rooms are often not ideal to judge the sound reproduction.

Second, you would need to make the effort to take your own CD, and unscrupulously force the people who run the demos to put on your music and let you handle the level control. There's bound to be some serious opposition to that. So, don't expect me to extol the virtues of the umpteenth "new and improved" component with features that defy physics. Still, the show had some pleasant surprises and made some progress to accommodate the needs of serious audiophiles. Two events got my attention in that respect.



PHOTO 1: German Audio magazine's ultimate source reference.

LISTENING TESTS

The first was a demo set up by the German journal *Audio* (Photo 1). They repeated some of the tests they described in their May issue. The experiment used two different systems—one very hi-end (and very expensive!), the other an "affordable" system. Amplification on the high-end system was by Charles Hansen's AYRE, and the conversion of electrical to acoustical power was done by large TAD speakers with "the world's only full beryllium tweeter." The "affordable" system had amplification by Meridian and speakers by KEF.

But the real interesting part was the choice of sources (hold on): LP, DVD-A, streaming audio from a hard disk, and directly from a 30+ year-old REVOX analog studio tape machine with a direct copy from the master tape. The DVD-A and the hard disk also had direct copies from the master tape, digitized at 24 bit, 192kHz by Keith Johnson using a Pacific Microsonics A/D converter.

For more on the Munich show, go to www.audioXpress.com.

The Rocky Mountain Audio Fest

Perfect Sound forever?

The fifth edition of the annual Rocky Mountain Audio Fest (RMAF) took place in The Mile High City last October.

Success can be overwhelming. What started in 2004 as an audio get-together organized by Alan Stiefel, Marjorie Baumert, and Ron Welborne, supported by volunteers from the Colorado Audio Society, has, within five years, expanded to what is perhaps the largest consumer hi-end audio show in North America. After the first few years, a dedicated organization was set up, headed by Stiefel and Baumert. Al is well known as the owner of Red Rock Audio in Denver, manufacturing a wide range of audio electronics and speakers at the very highest fidelity level.

"Let me be clear," Al said, "without many 'audio-phools' behind the scene, we could not have pulled this off. We have a dedicated group from the Colorado Audio Society (including friends and family) who volunteer their time during the weekend starting on Thursday. We also have spouses of attendees who pitch in while their husbands attend the show. Because of the size the show has become and the extensive directory we publish, we hire part-time help just prior to the show to take some of the burden from us. There's a myriad of things to take care of for a show with over 160 dealer demo rooms in two adjacent hotels and a whole floor of vendors offering things from rare LPs and CDs to cables, connectors, speakers, and speaker system components."

A show with over 160 demo rooms is too large to cover in detail, so you need to make a choice of which to visit. This year my interest was more in speakers than in electronics. Having just bought a pair of Emerald Physics CS2s, which were a hit at RMAF 2007, I auditioned the new CS1 and several other systems.

Clayton Shaw of Emerald Physics introduced his flagship design, the CS1 (Photo 1), which sports four large woofers per side (double the CS2), and a better high-frequency waveguide and driver. This is an important improvement; while the CS2 is a fine speaker, the rather high crossover frequency requires the woofers to reproduce the lower midrange. In the CS1, not only is the crossover frequency lower, but double the number of woofers means that they have only half the excursion (and half the distortion). The CS1 bass reproduction was strong, fast, balanced, and uncolored, and belied any concerns about low-frequency reproduction from open baffles. This is a very high-end speaker system for a very reasonable price.



PHOTO 1: Emerald Physics' new flagship, the CS1 (company photo).

For continued coverage of the Rocky Mountain show, visit our website at www.audioXpress.com.

Burning Amplifier 2008

An Audio DIYer's Dream Come True!

The BAF event is organized by a group of people who meet regularly at what is perhaps the largest online DIY audio forum, www.diyaudio.com, with close to 100,000 registered members. On the forum, each has a nickname, and at the BAF, people were given stick-on labels with their nickname and real name. It is always a pleasure to meet someone in the flesh with whom you have had conversations online. You feel as though you know that person well, even if you haven't seen him before. The audio hobby allows you to (sometimes heatedly) discuss your opinions and experiences with other DIY audio fans, but you also exchange something of your personality and character in the process.

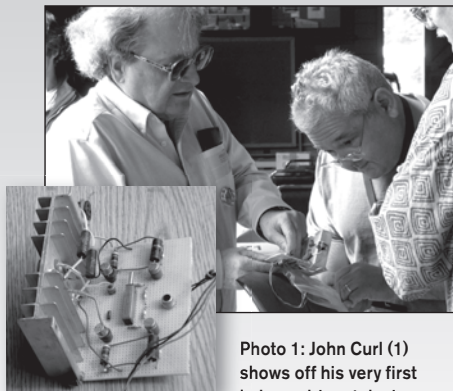


Photo 1: John Curl (1) shows off his very first balanced-input design (inset) to Scott Wurcer that landed him a job at Mark Levinson in the late '60s.

Almost 200 participants brought their projects to the show, ranging from small items such as a tube amp supply regulator (yours truly), to refrigerator-size (but much heavier) subwoofers with 12Hz cutoff frequency. This particular subwoofer, built by a member that goes by the nickname of DSP_Geek (François Souchay), was used to reproduce the songs of blue whales, in the very lowest audio octaves. People from the other rooms came running asking whether anyone else felt the earthquake. Projects on display varied from technically sophisticated DSP systems, to equally sophisticated CNC/CADCAM power amplifier constructions. Styling was straight nonsense tech to something that was called "steam punk." But even in this case, good design principles were in evidence, for instance, making the enclosure non-resonant and non-cubic.

The organizers chose a venue that allowed several activities to take place at once, which was an improvement over last year. There was one room for presentations and demos, while systems were displayed in another room. In a third large room people could hang out, have lunch, and attend the raffle and auction.

For more coverage of the BAF, visit our website at www.audioXpress.com.