



The Golden Ear

Newsletter of the *Chicago Audio Society*

June 1999

Meeting Notice

Sunday, June 27th - 2:00pm

Jack Shafton - Paradigm and Sonic Frontiers

Note: This meeting is on the *fourth* Sunday of June, *not* the usual third Sunday (June 20 is Father's Day).

In an unprecedented fourth presentation to our group (the first two representing SOTA), Jack will give us an update on offerings from Paradigm and Paradigm Reference, as well as those from Sonic Frontiers, which was acquired by Paradigm.

Jack gives an energetic, educational presentation describing the product features and design facets, and barring unforeseen circumstances, always gets the gear to perform well.

We'll have digital and analog source components, so please bring music to play.

Last Month

Two things happened: We visited TLG Acoustical Design in Chicago, who make the enormous stereo horn speaker system. It was a blast! (literally) What, you missed it?! The guys were great, very hospitable, and the speakers had to be seen and heard to be believed. Driven by a pair of Cary 300SE monoblocks using KR Enterprises' double (sic) 300B tubes putting out 11 watts each, the speakers, rated around 107 dB sensitivity, had no problem filling the place with loud yet very satisfying sound. TLG is the small sideline company under the same roof as Advantage Cutting and Gasket, who make gaskets for loudspeaker driver manufacturers such as Eminence and Pyle. TLG builds the cabinets for the Platinum Air Pulse (also

very large) horn speaker systems, using their unique design and manufacturing capabilities.

The other thing that happened was Hi-Fi '99, of course. We had a booth at the show, courtesy of Stereophile, and we anticipate a number of people will join our club as a result of finding out about us. The show was well run, with plenty of interesting exhibits and good sounds. Rich Sacks' review of the show is included here and is also on our web site. If you missed the show, kick yourself, and try to attend one in the future whether it's out of town or not. Thank You! to all those who helped at our booth.

Future Meetings

July 18th - Keith Herron, of Herron Audio in St. Louis, will present his fine sounding tube line stage and phono stage preamps, as well as some monoblock amps that will surprise you. Contrary to some popular opinion, Herron is no newcomer, having made equipment for quite a few friends for several years before deciding to make the gear available elsewhere.

August 15th - to be announced.

September 19th - Jud Barber of Joule Electra and Bobby Palkovic of Merlin Music Systems. If you heard their system at the show, you know some of what's in store! It should be awesome.

Officers' Message

We welcome your participation in meeting discussions and bringing music to play at meetings. The Society officers have discussed this, and like you, we want to make the most of our time. We especially want to play a variety of music, to let all members who have something to play to do so, to discover new

Chicago Audio Society, P.O. Box 313, Barrington IL 60011, tel. (847) 382-8433 website: <http://www.xnet.com/~bpwalsh/cas.html>

We meet on the third Sunday of each month at 2pm at The Dance Building, 1330 Webford Ave., Des Plaines IL, nonmembers welcome (\$5 fee, may be applied to \$30 annual dues). CAS is a volunteer, not for profit, *fun* group of audiophiles and music lovers.

music and recordings which you would like to share. Thus as we plan for some future meetings to be dedicated to music, we invite and urge you to get together some of your favorite recordings to play and present their highlights and history to members of the group. The same is true of meetings where a manufacturer is represented. What better way to judge a component than play music you enjoy?

Web Site

Several things have been added to our web site, so be sure to check them out. The CAS forum area is a bulletin board system type discussion area, and there are also a couple of mailing lists to which you can subscribe and contribute. We also have Rich Sacks' Hi-Fi '99 report online, with manufacturers' names linked to their respective web sites for your convenience and viewing pleasure. More goodies are to come.

For Sale

Steve Hess has a pair of Quad ESL-63's for sale, best reasonable offer. (630) 858-2846 or email kgbmi5@inil.com

Members may advertise their own personal items for sale at no cost.

Hi-Fi '99 Report

by Rich Sacks

The Stereophile Hi-Fi '99 Show at the Palmer House in Chicago was my first non-CES audio show (I've been to about 25 of the CES variety) and proved to be most enjoyable and in many respects to the audiophile more enjoyable than the CES variety. Gone was the hoopla, CES report dailies, shuttle busses, banners, and often wired exhibitors who might not welcome the public. In its place--Quality Live Music (what a concept!), uncrowded setups, and a more relaxed tone than the CES. At the full public cost of \$25 for 3 days this was a huge bargain just for the live music alone! For any audiophile who has never been to a CES (and has wanted to) and missed this show, I would suggest going to the next available Stereophile show.

Kudos to Stereophile for how they ran the show. I was amazed at how they stepped well on the other side of self-promotion and allowed the show to flow smoothly. I was amazed that the banners outside to Palmer House read Hi-Fi '99 with no mention of Stereophile. The live music venue was excellent in

musicianship, acoustics, and equipment setup. And of course, a big thank you to Stereophile for granting the Chicago Audio Society a booth at the show at no charge. I think we may experience some meaningful growth in the months ahead! And for those of you who helped out at the booth--thank you!

My time was definitely torn between three activities--manning the CAS booth, attending the live music performances, and experiencing the rest of the show. I'm sure I missed a bit, but not too much. A number of impressions were brief and will be noted.

The show was a rare opportunity to hear the Patricia Barber Quartet outside of the Green Mill, and they did not disappoint. I was disappointed for only hearing them one day out of the three. I had only heard Doug McLeod briefly at a friend's place on CD prior to the show and was really taken by his performance. He really pours himself into it, and any fan of traditional country blues was in for a treat. Lorna Hunt, a folk artist sponsored by Classic Records, also did covers of *Take Another Little Piece of My Heart* and *Whipping Post*, but I found her original material even more compelling. There were at least three additional artists I would have liked to have heard, but there was a show to see! The acoustics and setup in the Red Lacquer room were superior to most venues I've been to in a long time.

The show introduced some exciting new technology in the areas of digital room correction, digital speaker correction, and power conditioning. Perpetual Technologies, headed by Mark Schifter (who had done a meeting with us a few years ago when he was with Audio Alchemy), was showing the DAW-1, a small DSP box, that corrected response anomalies in a pair of Vandersteens. The effect was meaningful (my opinion); others thought it an enormous improvement. A library of various speaker corrections is being compiled at this time for individual models. Mark indicated that their forthcoming room correction would be a far greater improvement and should be available towards the end of the year. To learn more go to: www.perpetualtechnologies.com.

In the area of power conditioning Paul McGowan (of PS Audio fame for many years) has now reorganized PS Audio in Colorado and had developed a power conditioning unit that converts the AC line voltage to DC and then recreates a new clean AC! For more information go to: www.psaudio.com.

Paul McGowan and Mark Schifter shared a suite and we are hoping that we may be able to get both of them at a future meeting!

Tact Audio was displaying the Millenium, a unit that is essentially a DAC, preamp, and power amp in one box all operating in the digital domain! This was my first opportunity to hear this breakthrough product, and I was very impressed. The resulting sound was anything but "solid-state sounding" or "digital". At a list of about \$10K it's hardly cheap, but when one considers that both interconnects are replaced and exotic speaker wire is unnecessary with this component it's hardly in the stratosphere of high-end gear. In addition, TACT makes a digital room correction unit that can be set up and completed in about 20 minutes. Gunnar Ek of TACT indicated strong interest in doing a future meeting, having already done one for the Gotham Audio Society. Hmm...do you think our meeting room could use any room correction? I can't wait!

Ray Kimber demonstrated what may prove to be a breakthrough in dynamic loudspeaker crossover technology with a pair of \$1200 (~\$500 kit) Zalytron minimonitors using Scanspeak drivers. The resulting soundstage and top to bottom coherency was excellent, especially on a Queen's Greatest Hits CD purchased by Ray at the Las Vegas airport, and verified by another attendee as being a miserable sounding recording. The studio effects on *Bohemian Rhapsody* were unlike I had ever heard on that track before. For more info on this, see last month's *Stereophile*. Basically 2 inexpensive components can replace a complex crossover in a given speaker at less cost. In the coming year this technology will be licensed to speaker manufacturers.

On a value per dollar per sound basis, Creek Audio had the best sound I heard at the show. The entire system consisting of Creek integrated amp, CD player, and Epos 15 speakers retailed at about \$3500 and had an ease and musicality that would hold its own with anything else at the show. However, when I went back the next day and heard the less expensive amp, CD, and speakers (we're now looking at about a \$2K system), the magic was not present as it was on the other setup. I know one person who voted the bigger system "Best Sound of Show" and I can't argue with him.

I was very impressed with Sony's DSD demo. The sound had a "master" type quality that would have struck me as a complete breakthrough had I not heard

this quality recently on the Naim CDS-II and the Stan Warren modified MSB. Joe Harley, of JVC XRCD fame was at the demo, and even though JVC is committed to DVD-Audio, Joe couldn't stop raving about the sound of DSD! Sony is introducing a flagship model of this in the fall at \$5K, and all I can say is maybe they didn't learn enough from Beta and the El-caset! A more affordable model and a supply of music would go a lot further to promote DSD. By the way, Sony removed the disc from the DSD unit and placed it in a \$100 boombox to prove the dual encoding on the disc!

Naim Audio was showing their new NBL speaker (2nd from the top) and the flagship CDS-II CD player. I enjoyed the sound in the room with the passive crossover setup, but was really knocked out by the triamped all Naim setup with the same speakers in the adjoining room. An expensive setup, that in my opinion, delivered the goods. Naim did a meeting for us a while back and indicated an interest in showing the new products. I don't believe anyone would be disappointed!

I only had the opportunity to check in very briefly at Thorens, but each time the analog sound from reasonable to moderately priced units was unflinchingly musical, and an education as to why everyone is tinkering away harder than ever at digital nearly 20 years later.

A personal favorite of mine at the show was the sound at Reference 3A speakers being driven by the Art Audio Jota Amplifier and Copland CD player with Chang Lightspeed conditioning. The Reference 3A mini-monitor (which isn't all that mini and bears a striking resemblance to the head of Darth Vader) has previously been manufactured in France and retails here in excess of \$6K. It is now going to be manufactured in Canada with allegedly no compromises at a new retail of \$2700/pr. The speaker uses a handmade 8" driver that runs full range from the bass and rolls off at about 5KHz. The tweeter is protected by just one Hovland capacitor. As close to a crossoverless dynamic speaker as there is, except for the Brentworth (which is). Except, that unlike when I heard the Brentworth (an excellent unit) the soundstage width, depth, and the speakers' ability to disappear was greater. These sounded like full range speakers only lacking true subwoofer bass. The specs indicate phase coherency + or - 1 degree. As an electrostat/tube fan I was mightily impressed. Art Audio and Reference 3A indicated interest in a future meeting. Stay tuned!

A pleasant surprise was a very brief stop at the AR (Acoustic Research) room to hear the top of the line 315HO speakers. These attractive units finished in a rosewood-like wood finish have a 15" servo-controlled powered bass driver with about 300-500 watts of power built-in. The top section of the slim tower has two mids and a tweeter in a D'Appolito configuration. The efficiency of the top section is 97 dB, so this speaker is a strong candidate for single-ended or push-pull triode tube amps. They were playing Patricia Barber's *Cafe Blue*, a disc I'm a little more than casually acquainted with, and in a very brief visit it sounded right--with plenty of air, effortless bass, and depth. If you haven't found a horn speaker to warm up to your SET amp, or are just in the market for a new speaker period, this may be a real winner. The price: \$1199 each.

I was disappointed in the audio component of the home theater part of the show. Nothing I heard was even in the same ballpark as what I heard at the Jolida suite at the Las Vegas CES a year and a half ago. HDTV (or 1080i, as they would say) looked excellent and was shown by Samsung, Pioneer, Sharp, and I'm sure others I forgot or overlooked. Later this year, satellite broadcast of HDTV will be accessible (as shown by Dolby Labs). Had there not been the leap in video picture quality of DVD I might be more excited. Actual 1080i material for a home user to view is simply not there right now, and looks to be scarce

for at least the next year or two. It's a dangerous time for anyone on a budget to make a sizeable investment in video.

The one video product that did impress was the Dreamvision DLP projector weighing in at about 12 pounds, complete with Zeiss lenses and resolution up to SVGA (but not 1080i). At \$6200 retail this unit compares favorably to products I have seen at 2-5 times its price in picture quality. The DLP technology from TI gives excellent resolution and no scan lines. I would have liked to have seen this picture on a screen with gain!

The biggest disappointment of the show to me was Dolby Digital, the guys who should know how things should look and sound for home theatre. The video setup was decent (it's pretty hard to ruin HDTV!), but not as good as others at the show. The sound setup consisted of the Martin Logan setup (Quests, center channel, and SL3's) and REL subwoofers. How components of this quality could be made to sound so bad remains a mystery to me!

At any rate, if this report piqued your interest consider traveling to a future Stereophile show (this was the first one ever in Chicago), and by all means attending our future meetings!

<i>President</i>	<i>Vice President</i>	<i>Treasurer</i>	<i>Secretary</i>
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