

LMC Tempe Amp Comparison Event

Review by David Das

I had the pleasure of attending the Amp Comparison Event at LMC Tempe on June 18, 2026.



This event was hosted by **Paul Henningsen** who is the Premium Systems Consultant at LMC's Tempe Showroom. The objective was to showcase the sonic differences between Solid State and Tube power amps using top-tier McIntosh gear.

This event generated a lot of interest amongst club members. We had a larger than expected gathering. Paul had to accommodate us into two listening groups. Club President **John Harvell** along with Committee Member **Joe Roberts** was in the second group.

Sean Turner, LMC's Outside Sales Specialist was also on hand to interact with club members and demonstrate components at the request to those who were not in a listening session.

I sat through both sessions attempting to critically evaluate the differences. It only helped reinforce my findings that tube amplification brings an added layer of warmth, smoothness, liquidity and musicality to the presentation.

Tube amplification has an unmistakable sound. It makes music sound more natural and relaxed. It opens up the sound stage. The moment you switch to solid state, the sound stage shrinks, the music feels less 3D and sounds a tad brittle. The magic is gone.

Equipment List

Main Speakers

[Sonus Faber Electa Amator III](#) 2-way bookshelf speakers featuring a 28mm silk dome tweeter and a 6.5" mid-woofer.



This speaker got rave reviews on [HomeTheaterHiFi](#) and [Positive-Feedback](#). They have a Frequency response of 40Hz – 35kHz and retail for \$12,000 a pair. This design put Sonus Faber on the map and became a best seller. I could not believe the bass coming out of these mini-monitors.



The stand features aluminum, brass and Carrara Marble resting on iron spikes.

Integrated Amplifier

[McIntosh MA12000](#) 2-channel flagship Hybrid Integrated Amplifier.
It features a tube preamplifier with a 350W solid state power amplifier.



Tube Power Amplifier

[McIntosh MC2301](#), 300W Vacuum Tube Mono Power Amplifier.





Digital Network Streamer

Linn Akurate DS/1 Digital Network Streamer. Here is a [review](#).



The Linn Akurate DS/1 unit is sitting below the [McIntosh MPC500](#) Power Controller.

Speaker Cables

[Transparent Ultra](#) Speaker Cables.



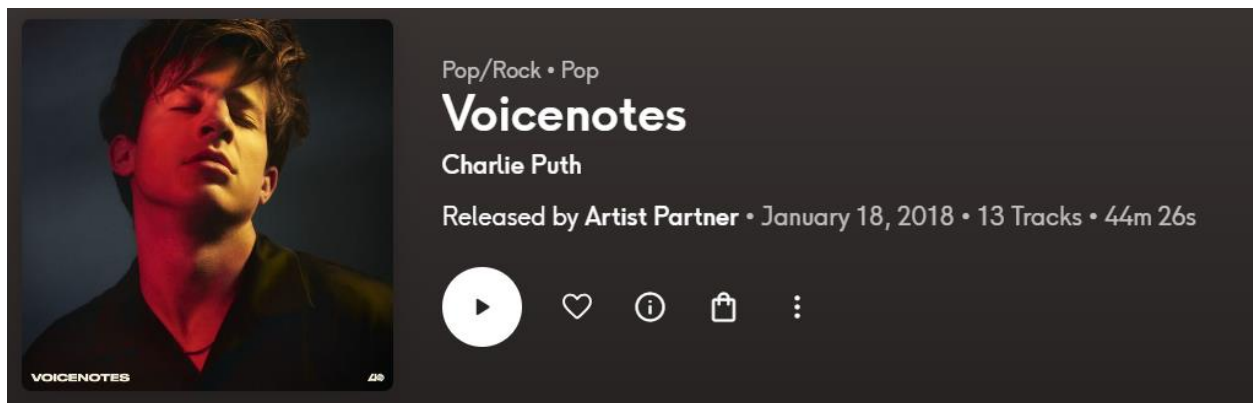
The Ultra category sits right below the [Transparent Opus](#) and super expensive [Transparent Magnum Opus](#) category.

Listening Session

Paul had charted out a plan. He selected 6 audiophile tracks that best reveals the differences between solid state and tube amplification. He played all 6 tracks first while engaging the solid state power amps on the McIntosh MA12000 Hybrid Tube Preamplifier. Then he switched over to the McIntosh MC2301 tube mono power amps while using the tube preamps on the MA12000.

Track #1

“Done for Me (featuring Kehlani)” – Charlie Puth

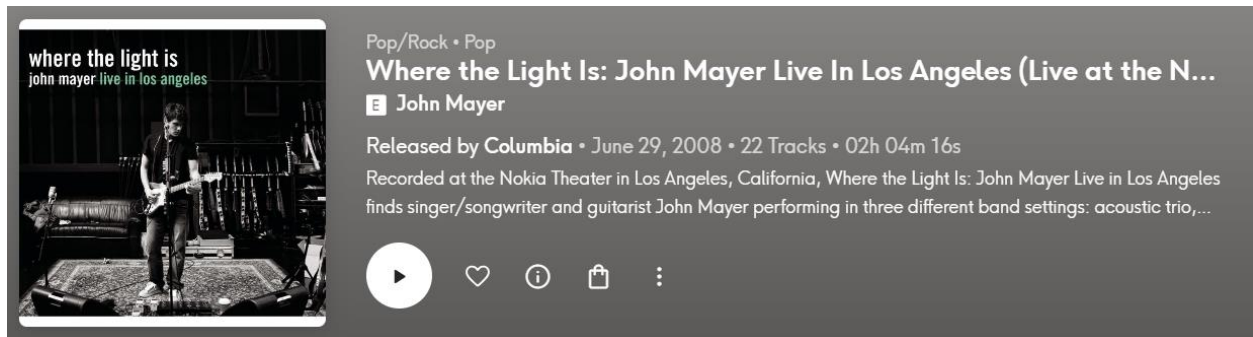


I was instantly impressed with the punch and speed of the bass notes from the solid state power amps built into the MA12000 unit. It pressurized the entire room making me wonder if there was a separate subwoofer in the room.

When I heard the same track played back through the McIntosh MC2301 tube mono amps, I could feel a slight loss in punch and raw power. However, the bass notes were rendered with greater texture which more than made up for the loss in punch and speed. It was a softer but more engaging presentation.

Track #2

“Free Falling: Live at the Nokia Theater” – John Mayer



This was an excellent live recording of John Mayer. While the solid state power amps did a good job in capturing all the details, the tube mono amps elevated the experience to a new level by opening up the sound stage. I felt more emotionally connected.

Track #3

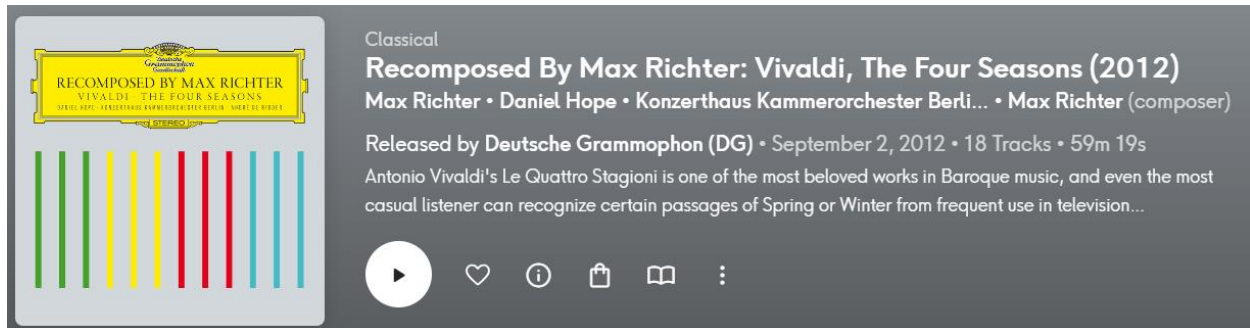
“All Blues” – Brian Bromberg



This was an excellent track for appreciating a double bass. This was the definitive track that showed the superiority of tube power amps in their ability to render the multilayered textures of each bass note. I felt I was hearing more details, more harmonics that added an extra layer of realism.

Track #4

Recomposed by Max Richter: Vivaldi, The Four Seasons



The tube power amps added an extra layer of bloom to the ambience. The sound stage opened up. Tube power amps definitely helps when listening to symphonies and classical music. They add to the harmonic content ever so slightly in a pleasing way.

Track #5

“What’ll I Do?” – Chris Botti



Chris Botti is a Grammy-winning Trumpet player. The tube power amps made the Trumpet sound dreamy and ethereal. They imparted an extra level of richness and spaciousness.

Track #6

“Nightshift” – The Commodores

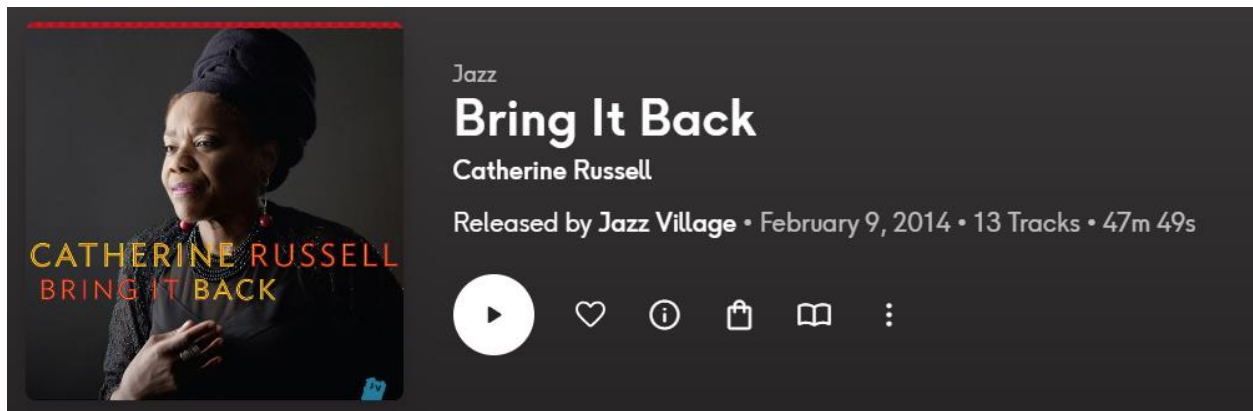


Paul chose this last test track which everyone is familiar with. The tube power amps added an extra level of polish, smoothness and musicality.

After we listened to Paul’s playlist of 6 tracks, once using the solid state power amps followed by the tube power amps, he opened up the floor for song requests from the audience.

Joe Roberts requested this track which everybody unanimously loved.

“Aged and Mellow” – Catherine Russell



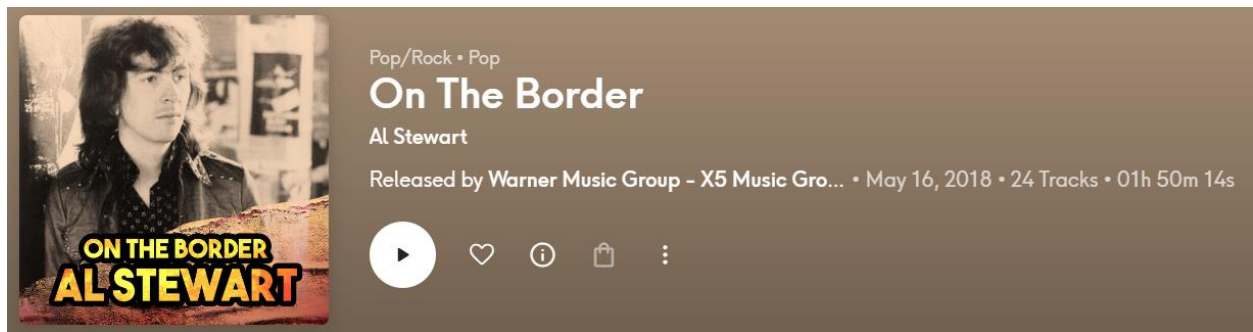
John Harvell requested this track cautioning everyone about its racy lyrics.

“Hands on You” – Ashley Monroe



Here were some of the other requested tracks.

“On the Border” – Al Stewart



“Anna Rose” – Vienna Teng

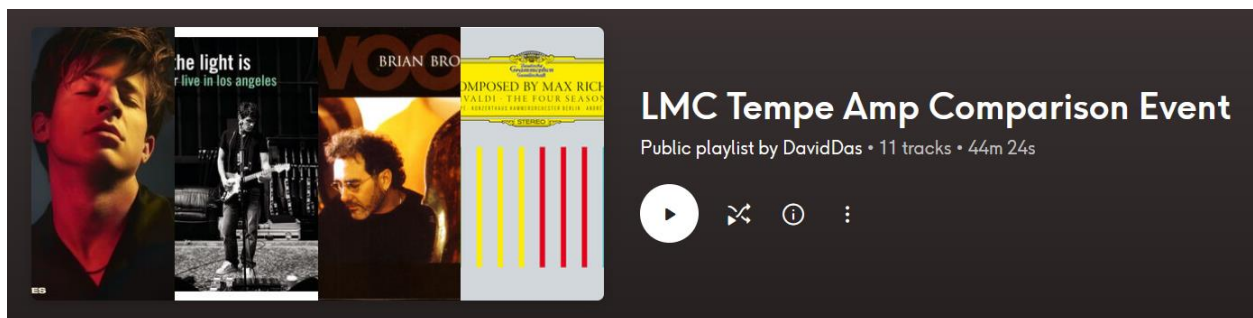


“1br/1ba” – Vienna Teng



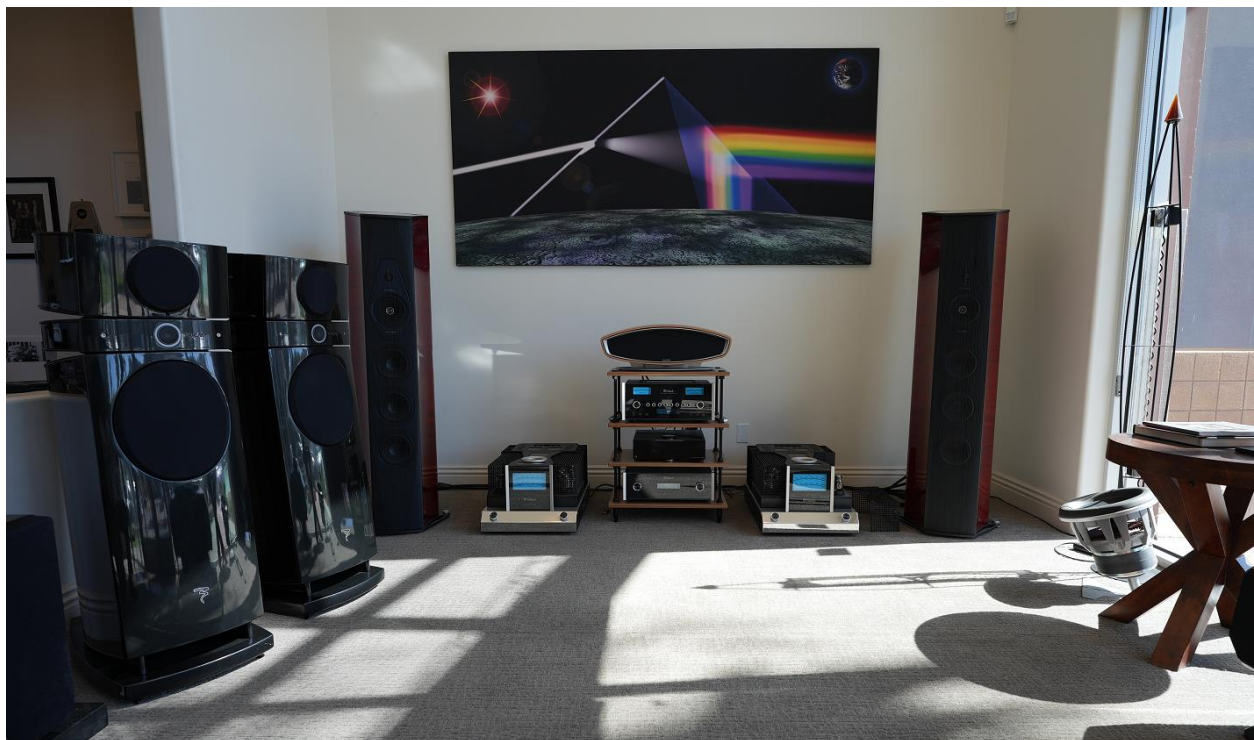
I made a **Qobuz Playlist** of the 11 tracks we listened to:

<https://open.qobuz.com/playlist/66440830>



Tour of LMC, Tempe

The LMC Tempe showroom is located at 1705 W Ruby Drive, Suite 109, Tempe, AZ 85284.



















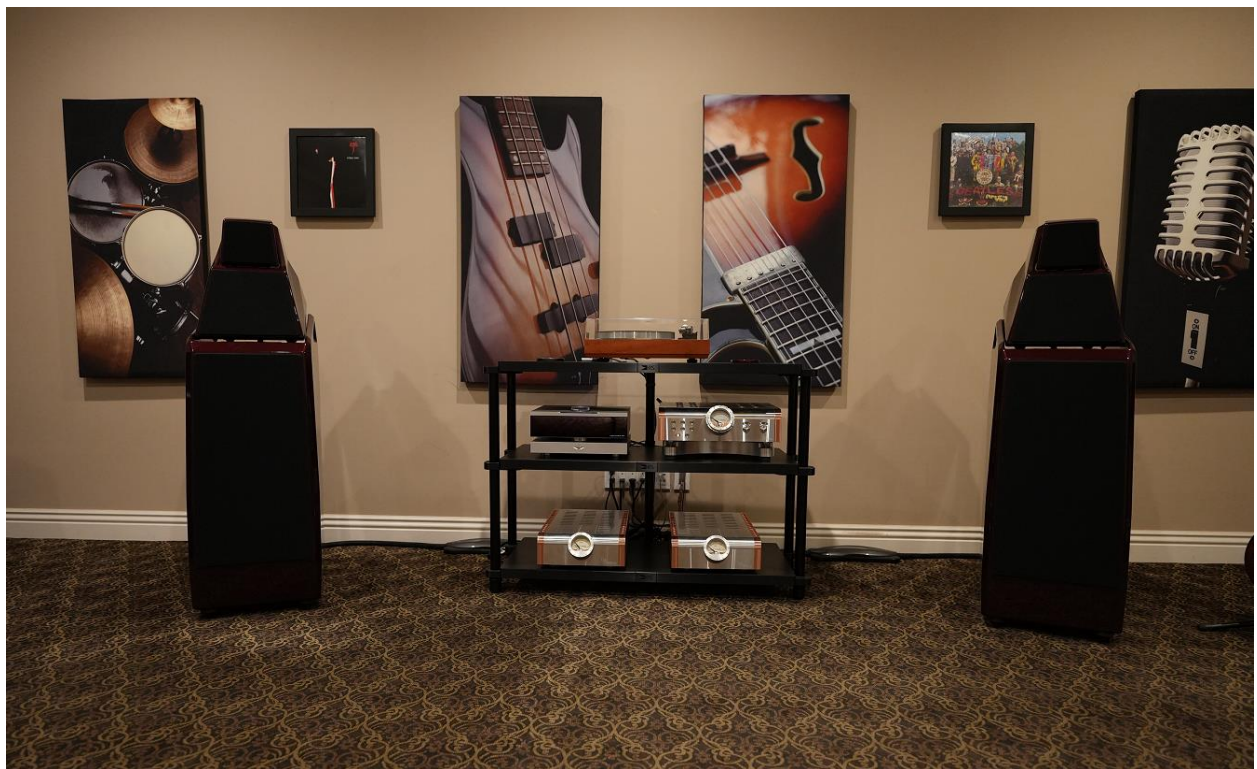
















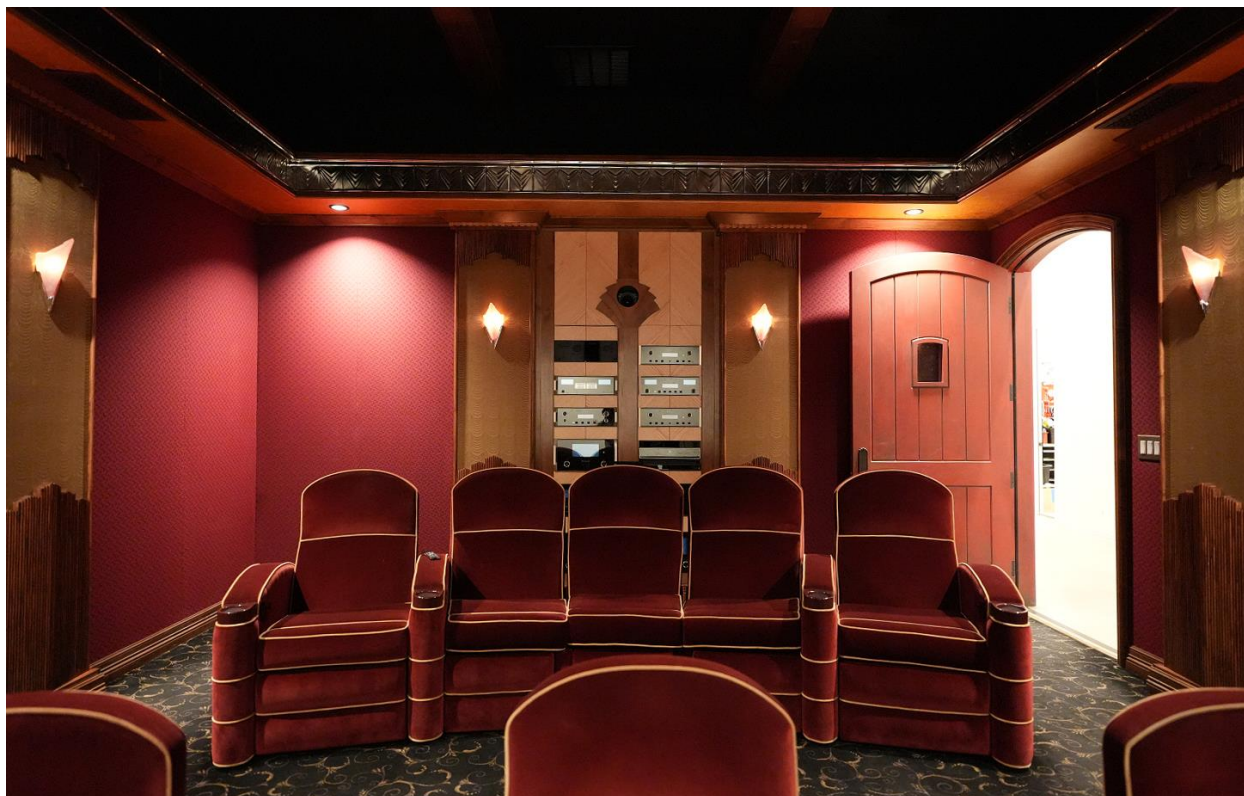


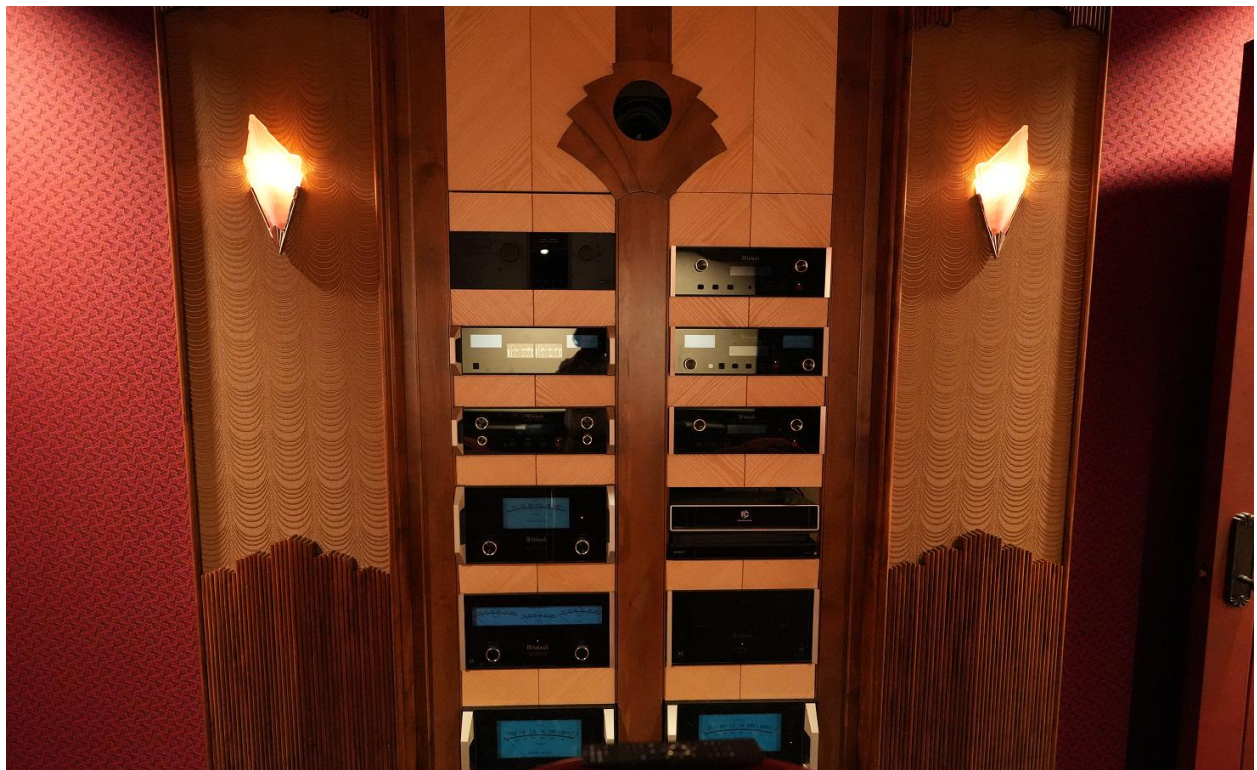


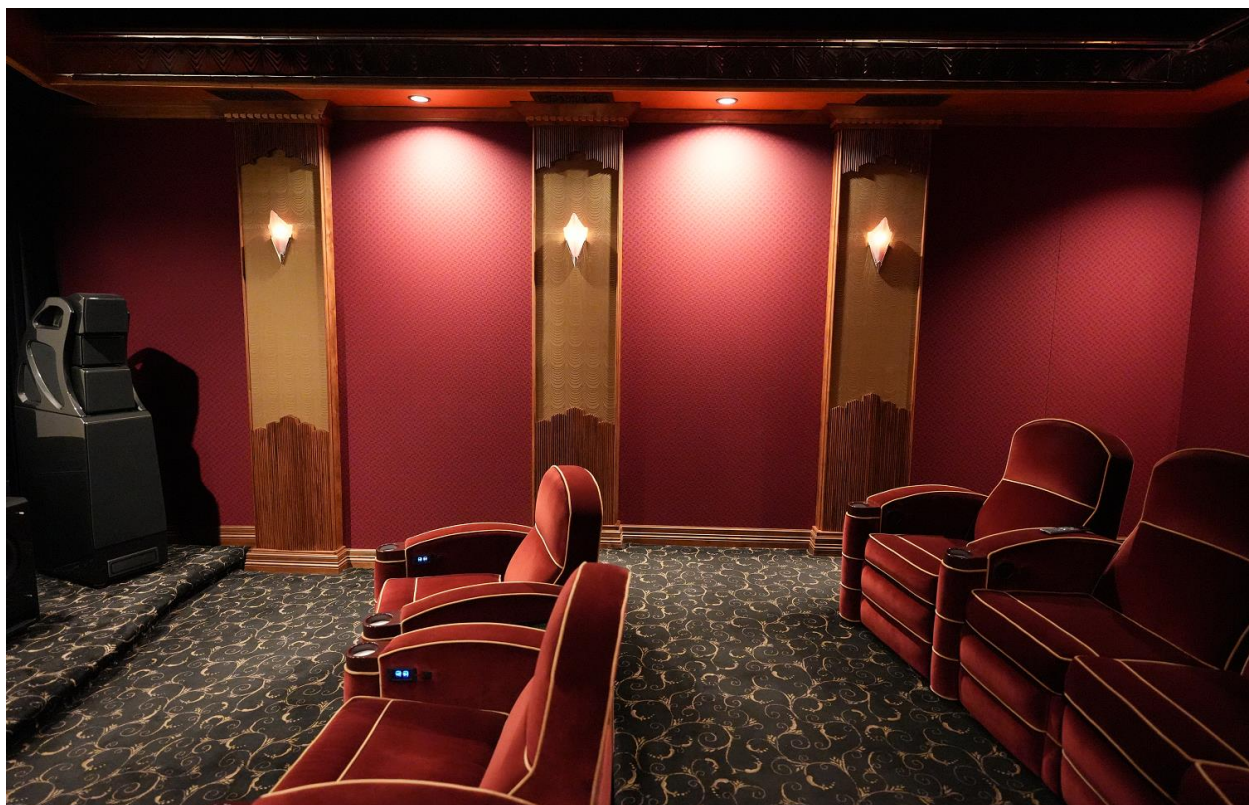












Read my detailed [review](#) of the Ruby Theater at LMC, Tempe.









Closing Thoughts

The sonic differences between Solid State and Tube amplification are unmistakable. We got the opportunity to compare the best tube amplification against the best solid state amplification from McIntosh. While tube amplification does not measure as well as solid state amplification on paper, the extra harmonics coming from vacuum tubes impart a euphonic layer of smoothness, liquidity and sweetness to the presentation with a wider, expansive sound stage. Tube amplification eliminates the digital harshness and glare from digital sources making the music sound ever so relaxed, engaging and non-fatiguing.

It is true that tube amplification costs significantly more than solid state amps with the same power ratings. Solid state power amps deliver more punch at the expense of texture. A good compromise is to use a tube preamp to capture all the goodness of vacuum tubes while pairing it with an affordable, high power solid state power amp. The [McIntosh MA12000](#) 2-channel flagship Hybrid Integrated Amplifier does exactly that. There is a reason why Paul sells one of these units every month. This is the smart choice and the price is right.

On behalf of the Arizona Audio Video Club members, I would like to thank Paul Henningsen and his lovely wife **Laura** for being such gracious hosts. Laura's home baked brownies were a hit at last year's event. She along with **Leslie McPheeters**, wife of LMC partner **Mike McPheeters** brought these delicious brownies once again along with several other treats and drinks.





It is always a pleasure to hear audiophile quality recordings played back through hi-end gear at LMC. There are no better ways to spend a relaxing evening in the company of fellow audiophiles while getting educated on the possible ways to elevate your listening experience to the next level.

Everyone had a terrific time. We should do this again next year!

Best regards,

David Das

All photos for this review were shot with a Sony FE 20mm f/1.8 G Lens mounted on a Sony a7C II full frame camera body.