

LMC dCS Varese Launch Event

Review by David Das

I was one of the lucky ones to attend the dCS Varese Launch Event hosted by LMC Home Entertainment, Scottsdale on February 20th, 2025.

The attendees at this event got an opportunity to experience the pinnacle of 2-channel audio engineering utilizing the very best speakers, power amps and streamer/dacs that money can buy.

The star of the show was the [dCS Varese](#) streamer/dac. This elegantly crafted 5-box stack served as the front end feeding a pair of massive Dan D'Agostino [Relentless Epic 1600](#) power amps connected to a pair of visually stunning Wilson Audio [WAMM Master Chronosonic](#) speakers.



A pair of Wilson Audio [Subsonic Subwoofers](#) allowed this system to play flat down to 10Hz with deep impactful tightly controlled bass.

The [Varese Music System](#) is the flagship product of dCS Audio.

It comprises of 5 separate boxes that houses the User Interface, Master Clock, two Mono DACs and the Core.



What makes the dCS products so unique and impressive is their implementation of differential Ring DACs. Here is a [technical explanation](#) of how they work.

For a simpler overview, read Robert Harley's [explanation of Ring DACs](#).

You see the User Interface box on the top shelf. The other 4 dCS boxes are stacked on the right. Resting on the floor are the 2 Dan D’Agostino Relentless monoblocks weighing 570 lbs each.



The User Interface box has a large touch screen. It can be controlled remotely via Bluetooth.



The [Varese System](#) can be operated from the convenience of your listening chair with a simple circular hand held remote.



Here is a close up view of the dCS stack. Each box is connected via a single ACTUS Cable made up of six twisted pairs of copper cable carrying all the signals. We got to examine a sample.



These are the majestic Wilson Audio WAMM Master Chronosonic speakers in Cranberry Pearl.



They are the late David Wilson's ultimate statement design and are considered to be the finest transducers in the world. Only 70 pairs were ever made. LMC Home Entertainment in Scottsdale is the only showroom in the world where you can audition a demo pair.

Each speaker weighs 900 lbs and stands 84 inches tall. The ported bass enclosure at the bottom houses a 12.5" woofer and a 10.5" woofer.

The 5 upper elements contain two 7" lower midrange drivers and two 4" upper midrange drivers flanking a 1" silk dome tweeter in the middle. Each of these 5 elements can be individually angled to throw a razor sharp focus at the listening position. In addition there is a 1" silk dome rear firing tweeter for adding ambience.

You can learn more from the glowing reviews on [Stereophile](#) and [Absolute Sound](#).

They were priced at \$685,000 a pair when first released in 2016. They play flat down to 23Hz.

A pair of Wilson Audio Subsonic subs comprising of three 12" woofers each were used to extend the low end bass response down to 10Hz.



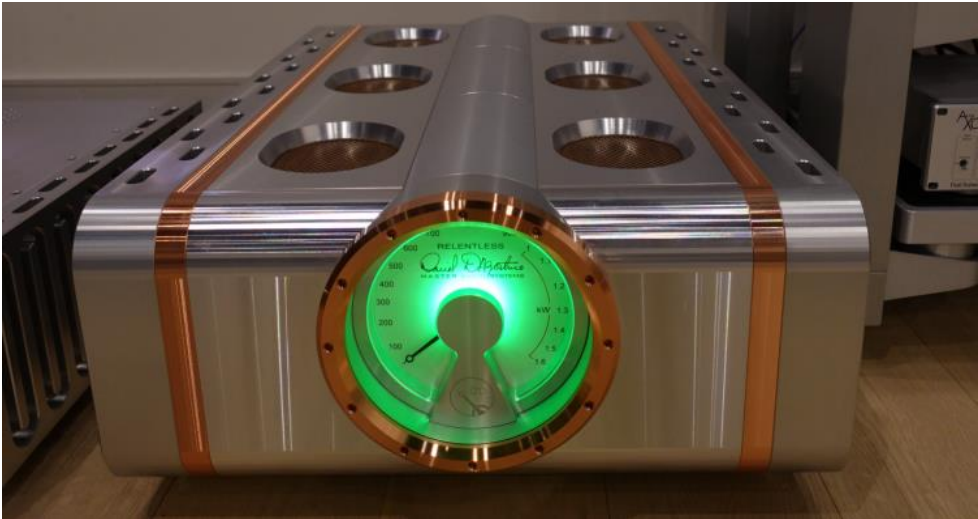
Each sub weighs 505 lbs and measures 65" high x 18" wide x 27" deep. Each was powered by a Dan D'Agostino [Progression M550](#) Mono Power Amp.



Here is how the Wilson Audio WAMM + Subsonic system looks from the side.



Here is a close up of the Dan D'Agostino Relentless 1600 mono block driving each WAMM.



David Steven, Managing Director of dCS began the demo with a brief [history](#) of their company and their unique Ring DAC design that propelled them into becoming the finest in the industry.

He played 3 tracks to showcase the strengths of the Varese Music System.

- Roadhouses & Automobiles – Chris Jones & Steve Baker
- Queen Mary – Francine Thirteen
- Man in the Long Black Coat – Bob Dylan

From the very first note it became clear what is so special about dCS. I felt I was listening to a high-end analog rig. It was liquid smooth. It had the warmth and fluidity of a reel to reel master tape but without the tape hiss. There was no trace of any digital harshness. This was unlike any digital front end I had heard before.

I could have closed my eyes and fooled myself into believing I was listening to a high-end turntable. It had all the attributes that make analog gear stand out in providing realism and musicality.

I requested David Steven to play the synth heavy bass track “Make us Stronger” by Ghost Rider. This was a revelation. I have heard this audiophile torture test tract on many high-end setups. This was the best presentation. The pulsating hypnotic bass line had the power, precision and impact that hit you in the chest.

What was magical was the way the dCS Varese System tamed the extreme edgy synth overtones on this track and removed all digital glare which otherwise tends to hurt your ears when played through lessor systems.

This system had breathtaking resolution, delicacy and smoothness while exhibiting limitless dynamics when called for. The 3D imaging was wide, deep and precise from the sweet spot where all the WAMM elements were carefully focused and time aligned.

Out of all 2-channel high-end setups I have heard at previous audiophile events and dealer showrooms, nothing matches the synergy of this Wilson Audio/dCS /Dan D’agostino pairing. This was a match made in heaven. This encapsulates the pinnacle of audio engineering.

If an audiophile with adequate resources and the space wants to enjoy the very best, this is it. Your search ends here.

Such extreme performance comes at a price. Here is a breakdown of this \$2M system.

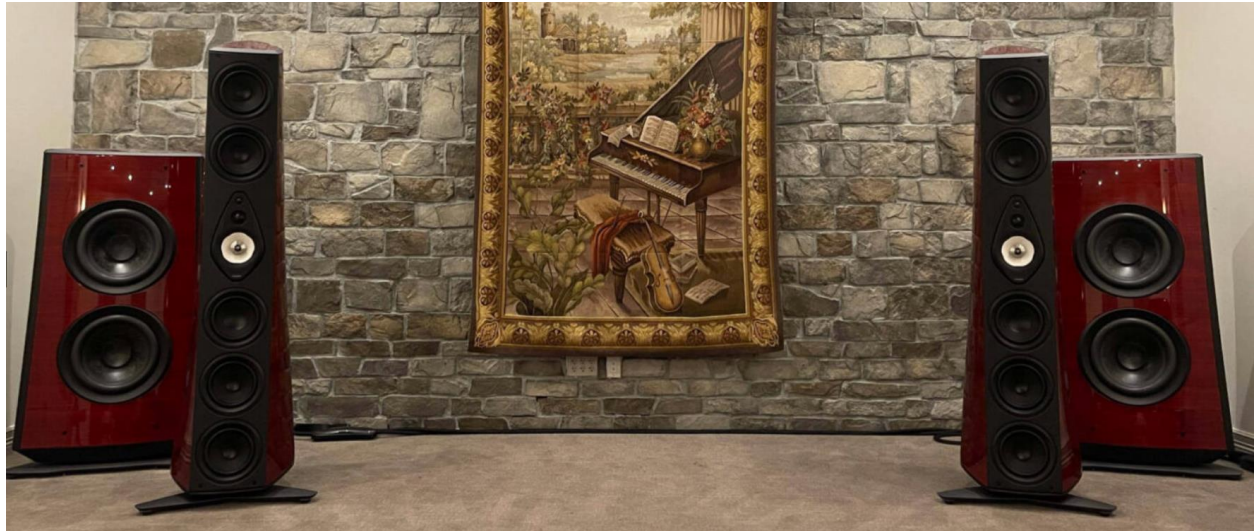
- dCS Varese Music System with Master Clock and I/O Module = [\\$276,500](#)
- Dan D'Agostino Relentless Epic 1600 Mono Amps (x2) = [\\$699,000](#)
- Dan D'Agostino Progression M550 Mono Amps (x2) = [\\$95,000](#)
- Wilson Audio WAMM Master Chronosonic Speakers + 2 Subsonic subs = [\\$944,000](#)

Grand Total = **\$2,014,500**

Mike Ware is the founder and owner of LMC Home Entertainment. He is the world's number one Wilson Audio Dealer. He carries the entire product line of Wilson Audio speakers, Dan D'Agostino amps and dCS music systems. This is the only showroom in the world where one could demo this combination.

I was curious to find if any other system in Mike's 9,000 sqft showroom could come close to this ultimate reference setup.

I walked over to their Sonus Faber Demo room featuring the [Sonus Faber Suprema](#).



This \$750,000 flagship model got rave review from [Absolute Sound](#), [Audioholics](#) and [SoundStage](#).

These speakers were paired to an identical dCS Varese Music System. However, the power amps were all Burmester.



I listened through many of the same demo tracks along with a few more requested by several attendees.

- Fanfare for the Common Man – Minnesota Orchestra & Eiji Que
- Hanuman – Rodrigo y Gabriella
- You Want It Darker – Leonard Cohen
- Hey Laura – Gregory Porter
- The Three Trumpeteers – Nicholas Payton
- Big Bad John – Geoff Castellucci
- Sista – Rachelle Ferrell
- Spanish Joint – D’Angelo
- Bungee Jump – Captain Hook & Astrix
- The Awakening Pt. 1 – The Reddings
- Sittin’ On The Dock of the Bay (Live) – Sara Bareilles
- Ship of Fools – Robert Plant
- Somehow It’s Been a Rough Day – Ai Kuwabara, Steve Gadd & Will Lee
- Homeless (featuring Paul Simon) – Ladysmith Black Mambazo
- Que Sera, Sera – Hidden Citizens
- Keith Don’t Go – Nils Lofgren

After an extended listening session I felt the bass from the Sonus Faber Suprema system was not as tight, defined and controlled as the WAMM system. It could not match the impact, precision and speed. The overall presentation was on the warmer side. Some may actually prefer this for its euphonic qualities.

Next, I visited the [Wilson Audio Chronosonic XVX](#) room. The front end being used was the dCS [Vivaldi Apex](#) system which is a step down the Varese system.



Daryl Wilson introduced the Chronosonic XVX in October 2019 with the objective to capture the essence of his dad's magnum opus, the WAMM Master Chronosonic but at a lower price point.

He brought a static display to the 2019 Rocky Mountain Audio Fest in Denver and I got to meet him and his mom Cheryl and learn all about his first design product as the new CEO and Chief Designer at Wilson Audio.

I learned why Daryl designed the XVX to be 6'2" tall. He wanted them to match his height! I was touched by the warmth and hospitality of Daryl and Cheryl. They are so down to earth, friendly and approachable. Wilson Audio has the best customer support in the industry.



So how does the Chronosonic XVX compare to the WAMM Master Chronosonic?

Both speakers were augmented with a pair of Wilson Audio Subsonic subs to get the bass response down to 10Hz.

The XVX System was powered by 4 Burmester power amps.



The dCS Vivaldi Apex system is much more affordable at [\\$46,500](#) compared to the Varese system. It includes a DAC, Upsampler, Master Clock and CD/SACD Transport.

I listened to several of the same demo tracks. The presentation felt like a slightly scaled down version of the WAMM/dCS Varese/Dan D'Agostino combo. The width and depth of the soundstage felt a little smaller. The resolution, smoothness, micro-dynamics were all there but just felt short of the absolute transparency and overall scale of the presentation in the cost-no-object setup.

Considering how close the performance of this XVX/Vivaldi setup approaches the WAMM/Varese setup at a fraction of the cost, this makes it a bargain, the smarter choice.

The qualities of the smaller and more affordable XVX speakers were highly praised by [Stereophile](#) and [Absolute Sound](#). Michael Fremer bought a personal pair.

The XVX works better in smaller spaces whereas the WAMM needs a much larger space to breathe.

Besides the Varese and Vivaldi, dCS has 3 more products in their DAC/Streamer lineup.

- dCS Rosini APEX Player [\\$36,800](#)
- dCS Bartok [\\$20,950](#)
- dCS Lina [\\$13,650](#)

The dCS Rosini APEX is an integrated player that includes the Ring DAC, Streamer and CD Transport.



It was paired with the Wilson Audio [ALEXX V](#) speakers.





They were driven by a pair of Burmester power amps.



The most affordable DAC that dCS makes is the [LINA Network DAC](#).

Although priced at only \$13,650, this Network Streaming DAC shares the same DNA as its more expensive siblings. It enjoys the trickle down benefits of the R&D that went behind the Varese and Vivaldi DACs.

As with any dCS DACs, there is no need to add a preamp. They handle the entire front end of your setup. All you need to do is feed this detailed, natural sounding analog output to your power amp and enjoy a crisp, clear, transparent playback with an expansive soundstage from your speakers.

A LINA Network DAC and Master Clock were used to demo a pair of smaller Wilson's driven by a pair of Burmester amps.



I thought they sounded really good for the price. [Stereophile](#) and [AV Forums](#) ran extensive reviews on this product.

Amongst the attendees I met a gentleman named **Kazuya Ohtake**. I was surprised to learn that Mr. Ohtake flew in from Japan to document this event. He told me that this was the only showroom in the world where one could audition the dCS Varese Music System in conjunction with the Wilson Audio WAMM/Subsonic speaker system powered by the Dan D'Agostino Relentless Epic 1600 mono amps.

His next stop was to meet Dan D'Agostino at his Cake Creek factory during this trip. He would be attending the AXPONA Show in April 11-13, 2025.

Kazuya is a professional reviewer who attends all the HiFi audio shows all over the world. This is his website.

<https://www.avcat.jp/next/>

Kazuya was kind enough to share with me the Camera and Audio Recording gear he was using. This information may be helpful to anyone who intends on taking professional quality videos and photos at such audio events.

Camera:

[Sony a7C II](#) Full Frame Mirrorless Camera (\$2198)

Lens:

[Sony FE PZ 16-35mm f/4 G](#) Lens (\$1098)

This combination makes it the lightest full frame mirrorless wide angle camera that is compact and perfect for travelling.

Microphone:

[Audio-Technica BP4025](#) Stereo Mic (\$649)

XLR Audio Adapter:

[Sony XLR-K3M](#) XLR Audio Adapter Kit (\$548)

As club members we are fortunate to have access to Mike Ware's LMC showroom in Scottsdale and Paul Henningsen's LMC showroom in Tempe along with John Aker's showroom at Cinematic Home A/V. These are the places to experience the pinnacle of audio and video technology.

Of all the audio events in the past, this one was the most memorable and educational. We got to experience what is possible in building a \$2M system comprising the best of dCS, Dan D'Agostino and Wilson Audio.

After our ears got trained on this reference sound, we got to compare the sonic sacrifices one encounters as you go down the product line. The individual sweet spot will be dictated by ones budget.

While the WAMM system was an absolute knockout in terms of raw performance, the XVX system followed very close at a fraction of the cost. The latter will emerge as the real world winner.