Newsletter

November 2026

In this issue:

- President's Message by John Harvell
- Future Meetings
- October AAVC event by David Das
- Roy Cook on if I were to open an audio store
- Afterthoughts with David Das
- The Core Problems with Traditional Stereo By Paul Johnson
- Dave's Record Review: Hall & Oates – ***Abandoned Luncheonette***
- Robert Plant's ***Now and Zen*** by Jim Welby
- Portable Audio by Jim Welby
- Wasting Time on the Internet
- Paul Johnson's playlist
- Dealers Corner

President's Message

By John Harvell

Well, here we are approaching the end of 2026. We have two remaining events planned for this year.

The November (see details below)) event looks very interesting with two main pieces. First, David Snyder will walk us all through the process he uses to pick, position, and integrate one or more subwoofers to extend and improve your listening experience. Second, Barrett Strong has offered to bring in his newly designed and built DIY speakers that were discussed in some detail in the September Newsletter. I'm truly excited to see and experience his new speakers and see how well David can augment them with subwoofer support.

Then in December, we have planned the 2nd Annual End of Year AAVC Party. This will be hosted at John and Ginette Harvell's home on 12 Dec from 3 to 9 PM. This is a Potluck Event, so it would be nice if each of you brought a dish to share with other attendees. The address for those who haven't been there yet is 2048 E Leo Place, Chandler, AZ 85249. I have parking spaces for 4 cars in the driveway; everyone else will need to park along the street. Note: The narrow concrete strip is considered the edge of the road, while the wide concrete is the community sidewalk and should not be blocked. The community is gated, and #1958 will grant you access at the gate off of East Cloud Road/Drive. Music will be available on the CLX system downstairs (DIY Music Server, LINN Selekt Organic DAC, ARC Ref 6SE Preamp, BAT VK 6200 amp, BJC XLR Interconnects, DIY Kimber Cable-like speaker cables, Martin Logan CLX main speakers, and two Balanced Force 210 Subwoofers). The upstairs Lilium System will also be playing music with the same music server, an Esoteric N01XD SE DAC, a D'Agostino Mometum HD preamp, a pair of Momentum M400 monoblocks, and a pair of Sonus Faber Lilium Speakers. We look forward to having you all visit this year to enjoy the music, food, and rousing discussions with our wonderful club members.

Please vote for the club leadership for 2027 during the first week of December. Jim Welby will be emailing a link to an electronic ballot. Help the club leadership deliver the best 2027 program we can by suggesting events to plan for the 2027 season.

Finally, an interesting video I came across earlier this month was a presentation by Galen Gareis (a retired Principal Product Engineer at Belden and the founder and chief designer behind Iconoclast Cables) at Axpona 2023 on Frequency Dependent Cable Properties and how they affect how speaker cables sound. I found this presentation to be interesting, and it made a lot of sense to me. Here is another video on the same topic by a YouTuber you might also find interesting (the YouTuber adds his interpretation of what Galen says in his presentation). Those of you who are smarter than I am can tell me if all the technical details are correct.

Next Meeting

When: Wednesday, November 18, from 7:00 - 9:00

Where: Faith Lutheran Church, Parrish Hall, 801 E Camelback Rd, Phoenix, AZ 85014

What: AAVC Member David Snyder will walk through the process of identifying a subwoofer or subwoofers to augment primary speaker systems. Methods for identifying subwoofer location(s) that best address lower-octave balance across a range of listening positions. Approaches to properly integrate (amplitude and time align) the subwoofer with the primary speaker system. For the left and right speakers, we will use club member Barrett Strong's DIY speakers featured in the September club Newsletter.

Future Months:

December 2nd Annual End of Year Club Party

See the President's Message above for more details.

Additional meeting ideas being discussed for next year:

- D Agostino Meeting in Cave Creek
- Swap Meet
- Isolation Systems for Components
- DIY sound absorption panels
- Club member Ed Goff on "The Physics of Electrodynamic Speakers"
- Comparison of low-cost streamers
- Demonstration of Cinematic Home AV Theater System to club members
- Multichannel DSD Super Audio CD/ Fosgate 2 channel to multichannel

Multichannel Final Speaker Demo Event

Review by David Das

I had the pleasure of attending the Multichannel Final Speaker Demo Event at **Ravi Velnati's** residence on Saturday, October 24, 2026. Ravi is the US Distributor of Final Electrostatic Speakers. This was a follow-up event to the Final Model 35 demo on July 18, 2026.



Ravi rearranged his spacious 18’ x 24’ living room, with a 20’ high ceiling, to the best of his ability to give us a glimpse of the magic one can experience from an array of Final Electrostatic panels wired for multichannel sound, augmented by 6 subwoofers.

I arrived early at 1:30 pm to take photos and learn about the gear he had configured and calibrated for this special event. Club President **John Harvell** and Steering Committee Member **Joe Roberts** came in at 2 p.m., followed by Club Member **Nick Mavrikos**. A bit later, another individual named **Jason** joined us who may become a future club member.

This was an intimate gathering, giving each one of us plenty of opportunities to enjoy the best multichannel surround sound from the sweet spot.

I was quite overwhelmed by the amount of gear Ravi had on display in his residence, which also serves as his showroom for the Final, Coda, and Starke Sound brands he represents.

Gear List

Main Left and Right Speakers: Final Model M7 (x2)
Center Channel Speaker: Final Model 3
Surround Speakers: Final Model 5 (x2)
Dolby ATMOS Height Speakers: Final Model 1 (x4)
Subwoofers: Starke Sound SUB5 (x6)

There were 3 subs in the front of the room.



There were 3 subs in the rear.

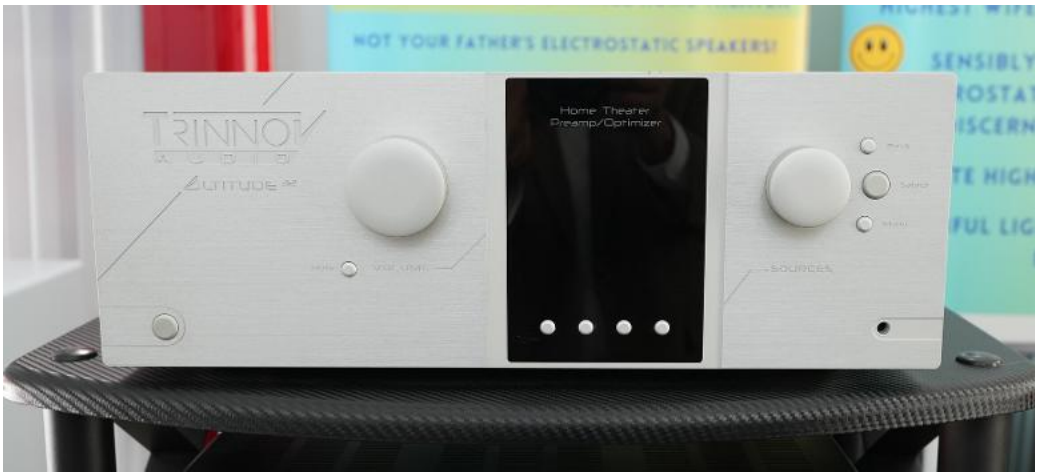


Each SUB5 unit features a massive 17” driver with an industry-leading 120mm excursion housed in a sealed enclosure. These subwoofers play down to 8Hz and cost $7,500 each.

Analog surround sound processor: Fosgate Audionics FAP-V1 7.1 pure analog all-tube surround sound processor/preamplifier designed by Jim Fosgate, inventor of Dolby Surround Sound.



Digital surround sound processor: Trinnov Altitude 32 reference processor for handling Ravi’s 7.6.4 Dolby ATMOS speaker layout with 7 bed-level speakers, 6 subs, and 4 height speakers.



Power Amp: Starke Sound Halo A3 3-channel power amp rated at 620 W/Ch
Universal Disc Player: Oppo BDP-105

Here is a photo of this impressive setup.



The multichannel demo

Ravi had indicated that he would be rearranging his living room for this special multichannel event. When I saw his setup for the first time, I was overwhelmed with the sheer amount of electronics that he had managed to squeeze in. This was a monumental effort by Ravi and his teenage son Dhruv. I applaud the time, effort, and patience it took to hook up, test, and calibrate all the gear. This was a sight to behold.

Ravi then played a sequence of carefully curated, multichannel, high-resolution DSD tracks. They were the best audiophile tracks to showcase the added realism and ambiance from studio-mastered multichannel recordings.

The Trinnov Altitude 32 did a fantastic job steering the multichannel audio through the 7.6.4 Dolby ATMOS setup. There is a reason why this unit is considered the industry reference.
When Ravi switched over to the pure analog all-tube Fosgate Audionics FAP-V1 7.1 surround sound processor/preamplifier, I heard some extra warmth and subtle details.

If you are an audiophile interested in multichannel audio, you may prefer the Fosgate. It handles 7 bed channels and a subwoofer channel. It costs a fraction of the Trinnov Altitude 32.

If you are into movies, your top pick will be the Trinnov Altitude 32. It handles the Dolby Height Channels, which the Fosgate cannot. The Trinnov comes with its unique calibration microphone, making it easy to accurately calibrate all your bed-level speakers, Dolby ATMOS height speakers, and multiple subwoofers.

Ravi's multichannel setup would have been ideal in a larger room measuring 32' x 51' with a 20' high ceiling. The lowest fundamental note you can get in such a room is 11Hz. It would have been the ideal environment to test the potential of the 6 Starke Sound SUB5 subwoofers working in tandem.

Ravi's living room measures 18' x 24' with a 20' high ceiling. The lowest fundamental note you can hear is 23.4Hz.

Ravi's residence is not the right environment to evaluate what is possible with a full-blown FINAL electrostatic multichannel setup. Ravi rented a giant ballroom at the California Audio Show 2026 that took place June 26-28. He used the flagship Final M35 model along with other Final speakers, CODA amps, Starke Sound Subs, and a Trinnov Altitude 32 processor/preamp in a multichannel demo. This was the only multichannel presentation at the show. It was highly appreciated by the show attendees.

If you wish to hear what is possible, be sure to attend any of his upcoming Audio Shows.
Ravi can be reached at highreshifi@gmail.com

At the moment, Ravi sells directly on AudioGon under his storefront name HighResHiFi.
Ravi has built quite a loyal following in 3 years. He has grand plans to open an acoustically treated showroom in the future where he could demonstrate the full potential of the brands he carries.

To see more high-resolution photos and my closing thoughts, please read my full 19-page review.

If I were to open an Audio Store – What would be sold there

By Roy Cook

There are lots of audiophiles who have dreamed, one time or another, about opening their own store. This vision has occurred to me several times over the years, without any real possibility of it ever happening. It would even be better to work at a great store and have some say in what was sold there, all the while getting a 50% discount ☺

An almost Einsteinian-level thought experiment was in the offing, and I'm presenting it here for your edification.

SPEAKERS
Prior to buying my current main floorstanders, I went to Miami, Atlanta, San Diego, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, St. Louis, Stockholm, Oslo, and Philly to hear possible contenders (it was a long list).

Rockport: (Never heard a pair that wasn't impressive) The Lyras are incredible.
ATC: Came in the top 3 of all our speaker shootouts (the 40s won our floorstander event).

More reasonably priced: Philharmonic (the BMR won our standmount shootout). These are incredible for the money; used to be a lot cheaper, Stereophile fame drove the price up.

Wharfedale: Guess I like Brit speakers.

Elac: Andrew Jones is truly a wizard; hard to beat for the money. (Some models)

Would love to carry MBL, if LMC would give them up.
Truly like the Wilson DAW (The only Wilson I really venerate)
Some Sonus Faber models, but there are already lots of dealers.
Would also sell PS Audio if Paul would let me.

Subwoofers – I've been looking and listening for years; I would have to build my own line. I will be building a pair later this year with stiff paper cones, no DSP, renowned linear motor, low mms, and a plate amp with balanced in/out, and class AB topology.

ELECTRONICS
Sim Moon Audio: Excellent engineering

Pass Labs: If your house can stand the heat
Boulder: Bulletproof
Benchmark: Also excellent engineering
Cambridge: Respectable mid-fi
Audio GD: DAC technology and sound very much to my liking
Technics: For people who like meters and knobs; good tech actually

ANALOG
Rega: No-brainer
Technics: Second no-brainer
SME: Superb machining and tech
Ortofon
Hana
Lyra

CABLES
Audioquest
Transparent
Pure Silver Connection (PSC)
Silver Dragon

Cinematic Home A/V Speaker Comparison Event

Afterthoughts by David Das

Editor's note: *I did not attend the Cinematic Home A/V speaker comparison event in September as I am a snowbird living in Minneapolis, MN, in the summer. When I read David Das' review, I was gobsmacked that Cinematic Home A/V's definition of "entry-level" speakers included a pair of speakers that cost $32K! Even $12K for entry-level seemed absurd to me. My idea of "entry-level" is about $1,000 a pair for an average consumer, maybe $5K for an audiophile. I replied to David with my reaction to "entry-level," and he agreed it was a pretty absurd term for the speakers Cinematic Home A/V demoed for the club. I love David's event reviews, especially because I miss a lot of club events as a snowbird. David's reviews tend to be "just the facts" with a positive spin. I know David well enough to know he has interesting opinions and good ears, and I encouraged him to write a reaction piece to the September event. This month, we introduce "**Afterthoughts by David Das,**" which I hope will become a regular contribution to our newsletter, where David writes about a club event without the burden of being a reporter and instead serves as a columnist. Thanks, David, for all you do for the club!*

Club members heard 3 entry-level speakers at the Cinematic Home A/V Speaker Comparison Event on September 23, 2026.

- Estelon AURA ($31,800/pair)
- YG Acoustics Talus ($19,900/pair)
- Fyne Audio F702S ($11,999/pair)

The Estelon AURA was the unanimous winner in this shootout. Between the YG Acoustics Talus and the Fyne Audio F702S, I preferred the sound of the YG for it tighter bass, while many felt the Fyne Audio delivered a warmer, fuller sound.

I came back pondering if any of these entry-level speakers from Estelon, YG Acoustics and Fyne Audio would be a smart buy or if there were other speakers that offered better performance for less money.

The first speaker that came to mind was the Tekton MOAB. The base model can be purchased for $4,500 with free shipping and no taxes. Here is a review by Terry London. This photo shows the size of the MOABs relative to the flagship ULFBERHTs in the back of the room.



I first encountered this speaker at the Rocky Mountain Audio Fest in Denver on September 5, 2019. I met **Eric Alexander,** the designer who was demoing his latest creation, along with **Richard Schram**, founder of Parasound, who was demoing the Parasound Halo JC5 stereo power amp in the same room. It was a match made in heaven. I could not believe the width, depth, height, clarity, imaging, and dynamics of the soundstage I was hearing from a pair of Tekton

MOABs. I made it my mission to find any other speaker under $5k/pair at the show that could rival the MOABs. I could not find any. Nothing came close. I came back with the impression that these were the best-sounding speakers one can buy for $5k. I hold that position to this day.

The MOABs became such a best seller by word of mouth that Eric no longer feels the need to attend any Audio Shows. His patented design offers unbelievable value, which becomes evident the moment you price the 34 driver elements that make up a pair.

Eminence Delta Pro-12A 12" base drivers 4@$160 = $640
Wavecore TWO30WA06 30mm Tweeters 30@$79 = $2,370
Total price for the 34 drivers = $3,010

Add to this the cost of the cabinet, internal crossover, solid copper binding posts, and finish, and you can see what a bargain you are getting for $4,500. The industry standard is to price the speakers 5 times the cost of the parts. By that metric, the MOABs would be retailing for $3,010 x 5 = $15,050.

The dealer markup on high-end speakers typically ranges from 40% to 50%. This allows the dealer to make a handsome profit even while offering a 25% discount on the MSRP. Direct marketing operations like Tekton Design completely eliminate the middleman. This is why it is mathematically impossible for high-end brands to offer the same price/performance ratio.

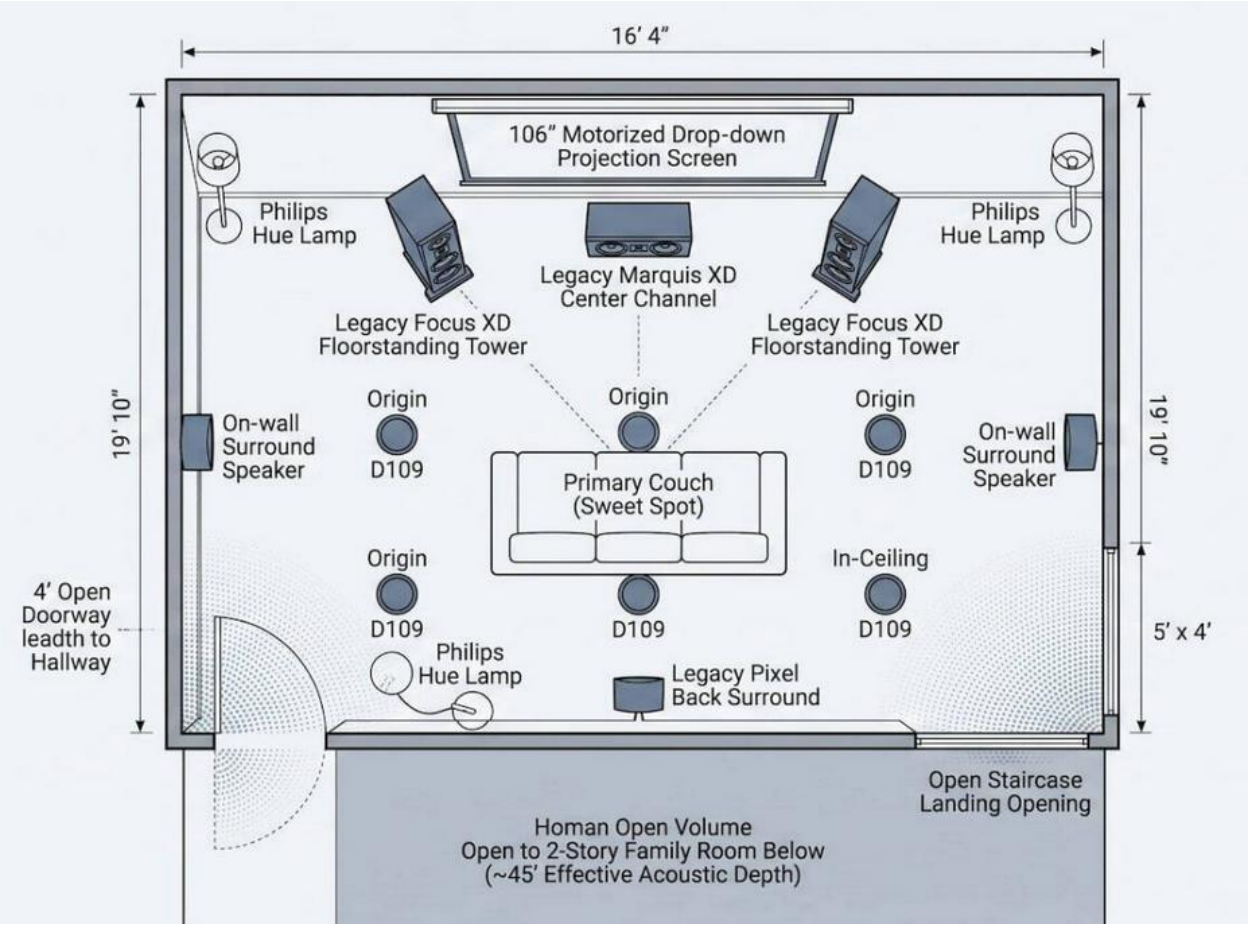
Upgrading to the Satori TW29BN-B Beryllium Dome Tweeters brings the MOABs' price up to $6,100. It beats the Estelon AURA priced at $31,800 a pair.

The next significant step up in performance from the MOABs is the Legacy Audio Focus XD powered speakers priced at $17,500 a pair. Club Secretary **David Snyder** has shared a detailed description of his Audio System featuring a pair of Focus XD speakers in Rosewood.



David has built his 6.2.6 Dolby ATMOS Home Theater using matching surrounds and subs from Legacy Audio. He has spent countless hours experimenting and calibrating all his speakers using FIR Filters generated by ACOURATE and fed into the Convolution Engine of his ROON Server.

The result is pure audio magic. Once you experience this yourself, either in 2-channel stereo mode with music streamed from Qobuz/TIDAL utilizing the Diretta Audio Protocol or multichannel movie mode using the Marantz AV10 15.4-channel Preamp/Processor, you will be left wondering if there is any reason to spend any more. To most audiophiles, this will be considered an end-game system.



The Legacy Focus XDs completely outclass the Estelon AURAs priced at $31,800 a pair in every metric.

I like the modular approach of David's audio system. One can start with a pair of self-powered Focus XDs and a Gustard X18 DAC for strictly 2-channel audio listening. Later, this can be expanded into a Home Theater by adding the Dual

Subwoofers, center channel speaker, surround speakers, height speakers, and the Marantz AV10 processor, along with the motorized screen and Sony projector.

I think David's system offers the best price/performance ratio. It is a practical example of what can be built without breaking the bank.

If someone finds the MOABs too big for their listening environment or the Focus XDs a bit beyond their budget, the Philharmonic BMR Monitors at $2,300/pair are the perfect choice.

Former club member **Gregory Wann** is a proud owner.



They beat out every other contender by popular vote at Speaker Fest 2022 held on August 27 at the Fountain Hills Community Center. I couldn't believe the bass extension, imaging, resolution, and width of the soundstage these small monitors projected into the room.

For someone who is just beginning their journey as an Audiophile, this is the speaker I would recommend as their first buy. Later, when one advances to a pair of Focus XDs, the Philharmonic BMR monitors can be repurposed as surround speakers.

Any of these speakers from Tekton Design, Legacy Audio, or Philharmonic Audio would be a better choice for someone new to the world of high-end audio.

The Core Problems with Traditional Stereo

By Paul Johnson

This article was inspired by an article in audioXpress.

Traditional stereo suffers from interaural crosstalk, an acoustic flaw where sound from the left speaker reaches the right ear, and sound from the right speaker reaches the left ear. BACCH (Band-Assembled Crosstalk Cancellation Hierarchy) technology solves this by using precision digital filters to cancel out the unintended sound waves before they reach the opposite ear. When listening to two loudspeakers, physical acoustics prevent your ears from hearing pure, isolated audio channels.

- Acoustic Crosstalk - Sound waves travel from each speaker to both ears, arriving at the opposite ear a fraction of a millisecond later. This mixes the left and right channels together and confuses the brain.
- Collapsed 3D Imaging - Crosstalk masks natural spatial cues, specifically Interaural Time Differences (ITD) and Interaural Level Differences (ILD). Instead of hearing a realistic 3D room, the listener perceives a flat, two-dimensional "phantom image" trapped on a line between the two speakers.
- Flaws in Older Solutions - Early crosstalk cancellation methods required the listener to keep their head completely still in a tiny sweet spot. They also caused severe tonal distortion, making instruments sound unnatural.

How BACCH Technology Solves It:

Developed by Dr. Edgar Choueiri at Princeton University's 3D3A Lab and commercialized by Theoretica Applied Physics and BACCH Labs, BACCH acts as a "stereo purifier" rather than an artificial surround effect.

- Phase-Inverted Cancellation - The BACCH filter calculates the exact sound wave traveling from the left speaker to the right ear and emits an inverse, phase-canceled wave from the right speaker to neutralize it. This happens simultaneously for both ears.
- Zero Tonal Coloration.- Unlike older filters, BACCH uses optimized

mathematical algorithms that eliminate crosstalk without altering the timbre, frequency response, or natural tone of the music.
- True Holographic Soundstage - By removing crosstalk, BACCH reveals the hidden spatial cues already present in standard stereo and binaural recordings. Audio expands well beyond the physical speakers, placing sounds with pinpoint accuracy around, behind, and even right next to the listener's head.
- Head Tracking and Customization - Advanced versions of BACCH use small in-ear microphones to tailor the filter to a listener's exact head and ear shape, while optional webcam head-tracking adjusts the filter in real time so the 3D sweet spot moves with the listener.

Key Strengths

- Expansive 3D Soundstage - By preventing sound from the left speaker from reaching the right ear (and vice versa), BACCH unlocks spatial cues already embedded in recordings. Reviewers from The Absolute Sound and Stereophile note that instruments gain realistic depth, height, and width, often wrapping far beyond the physical boundaries of the speakers without sounding artificial.
- Real-Time Head Tracking - Traditional crosstalk cancellation requires the listener to keep their head completely still. BACCH uses an infrared camera to track head movements in real time, dynamically adjusting the filters so the 3D sweet spot follows you across the room.
- Tonal Transparency - When calibrated properly using the included in-ear binaural microphones, the filter eliminates spatial distortion without altering the natural timbre or frequency balance of the music.
- Flexible Product Tiers - Listeners can access the technology through the software-based BACCH4Mac (starting around $980 to $6,950 depending on the bundle) or dedicated hardware units like the BACCH-SP dio ($19,800) and adio ($23,800).

Drawbacks & Limitations

- High Cost of Entry - Even the entry-level Mac software requires a significant investment, while the standalone hardware units sit firmly in ultra-high-end territory.
- Room and Speaker Sensitivity - Some users note that results vary

depending on your setup, working best with directional speakers, treated rooms, or near-field listening.

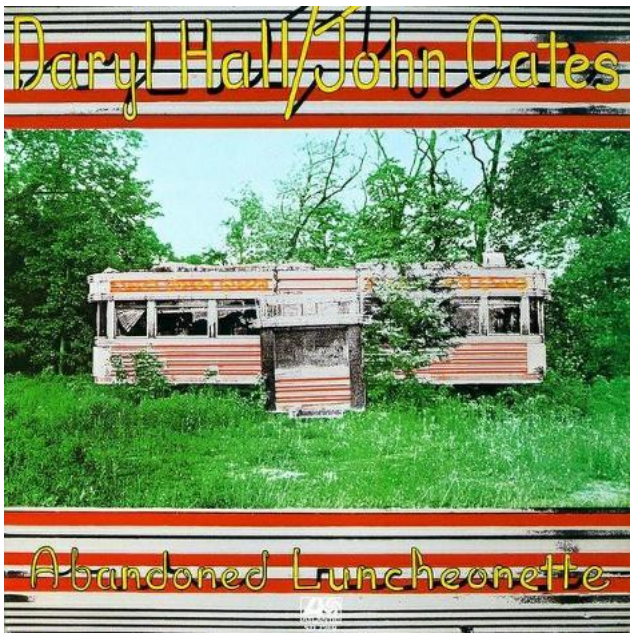
- Recording Dependency - The 3D effect shines brightest on live acoustic, classical, and binaural recordings. Heavily processed pop or multi-mic studio tracks show a much smaller improvement, and extreme hard-panned mixes can occasionally place sounds behind the listener's head.
- Solo-Listener Focus - Because the calibration and head tracking lock onto one person's ears, guests sitting elsewhere in the room will not experience the full holographic effect.

Dave's Record Reviews

Championing worthy albums from the past that should not be forgotten...

For the AZ Audio Club ~ November 2026 **#45**

Hall & Oates – **Abandoned Luncheonette** (LP & CD, Atlantic,1973)



I usually try to review albums from the past for the club that I think the majority of members may not be familiar with but that I think are very worthwhile and "should not be forgotten." However, occasionally I consider an album that I'm not certain about, that I think, "*Gee, this was so good back in the day that maybe everybody is familiar with it*." Herewith is a case in point. But this album has an interesting history, and did not garner the attention it deserved at least on its

initial release. So – you might be familiar with it or not, but I'm gonna write about it.

Daryl Hall and John Oates were both natives of Pennsylvania, both involved in music and different bands in high school and college, and met in 1967 while both were attending Temple University, albeit in different classes, each heading up his own music group. They didn't start seriously working together as a duo until 1970. Their first album, **Whole Oates**, was released in 1972 and was not, to put it charitably, very successful.

Their next effort, **Abandoned Luncheonette**, was released the following year and did better, climbing briefly to #33 on the charts, but was also no great triumph. At least, not initially – more on that later. After their 3rd album, **War Babies** in 1974, was a commercial failure Atlantic Records dumped them. They were promptly signed by RCA, and released **Daryl Hall & John Oates** in 1975 which became a major hit and launched them on their way to superstardom.

They worked together well, Hall generally handling lead vocals while Oates supplied guitar work, backing vocals, and occasionally lead vocals. They wrote most of their own songs, either together or separately. Their sound had influences of rock, pop, soul, rhythm & blues, and what-have-you, and was most often characterized as "blue-eyed soul." They chose their side people well and their albums were usually quite well produced, though some might accuse them of being a bit overly so.

So, what's this **Abandoned Luncheonette** album all about, then? Not all songs are terrific, to be sure, but some are, and I'll highlight some of the best ones. It leads off with "*When the Morning Comes,*" a relatively light, catchy song with a bit of reggae flavor, Hall's distinctive vocals telling of waiting in the rain for a lady that doesn't show up. Oates takes lead vocals on the next song, "*Had I Known You Better Then*," basically about how it's a shame that the opportunity for love may be lost by circumstances of time and distance.

The next song, "*Las Vegas Turnaround (The Stewardess Song)*" is about – no surprise – a stewardess flying "off on a turnaround." A jazzy number with a good dose of the blue-eyed soulful sound that H & O could almost have patented, it became a favorite among fans of the group but was never a successful hit for them. The next song, "*She's Gone*," was released as one of the album's singles but went nowhere. Then, eventually it would become a major hit, but more on that in a minute.

The album's title cut leads off side two of the LP. A couple sits in the old luncheonette and reflects on the passage of time from their youth to old age. Not a particularly effective song to my mind and apparently also not for many

others, but not bad. "*Lady Rain*" is a well-known song, at least among fans, for its melancholic vibe, acoustic guitar melodies, and prominent violin arrangements, blending elements of folk rock, soul, and pop. And there are more songs, of course.

Two factors proved to be significant in the album's later history: (1) As I mentioned, H & O hit it big with their very next album after leaving Atlantic Records, and (2) a R&B group called the Tavares had a #1 hit with "She's Gone" on the R&B charts. As the suits at Atlantic watched the album titled **Hall & Oates** and its single, "*Sara Smile*" climb the charts, they kicked themselves, scratched their heads, and pondered how to capitalize retroactively on the duo that they had jettisoned. They still controlled the rights to those first three albums, and they noticed the Tavares' success, so – Aha! They reissued "*She's Gone*" as a single again in 1976, and now it rose to #7 on the Billboard Hot 100. A reissue of the **Luncheonette** album followed in 1977, which proved to be the first of several reissues. So if you are familiar with this album, your experience with it may be either from its first life, shall we say, or in a later resurrection.

The album was produced by multi-Grammy Award winner Arif Mardin, who produced many hit albums for many other artists. I won't run on listing the other supporting artists on the album, though they are very capable indeed. Discogs lists a number of releases of the title, perhaps the most interesting (to me, anyway) being a 2024 Analog Productions 2-disc 45 RPM remastered version. I currently have a copy of the original 1973 LP and a 1990 CD. Sound quality of the album is generally excellent, surprisingly even on the CD I have.

A final note: *Twenty-nine years* after its release, which I believe would have been 2002, the album was certified platinum (over one million copies sold) by the Recording Industry Association of America. It is worthy.

Robert Plant's Now and Zen

Plus some audio format thoughts
By Jim Welby



Robert Plant
Now and Zen
Es Paranza Records
1988

When Led Zeppelin broke up, I assumed Jimmy Page would have the most interesting solo career. Wrong! Robert Plant has had the most interesting post-Zep career. Early in his solo career, Plant tried to distance himself from Zeppelin by reinventing his sound and refusing to play Zeppelin songs in concert. But by ***Now and Zen***, his fourth album and a decade removed from his famous band, he embraced Zeppelin (the song ("*Tall Cool One*" has a Led Zep vibe and Led Zep samples from "*Whole Lotta Love,*" "*Black Dog,*" and "*Communication Breakdown*"); the tour (I witnessed it) included songs from the Led Zeppelin catalog. Jimmy Page plays on a couple of ***Now and Zen*** tracks.

I orginally purchased ***Now and Zen*** on CD when it came out in 1988. CDs were a shiny new thing in the late 80s, as CD players and albums released in CD format hit the North American market in the spring of 1983. I got my first CD player around 1985. When ***Now and Zen*** was released, CD sales were surging worldwide and ultimately overtook vinyl LP sales for the first time that same year. However, cassettes were the dominant format in 1988 (about 55% of sales); CDs didn't become the dominant format until 1992. Pre-recorded cassettes were convenient, but they had poor audio quality for several reasons (they were

duplicated at 32x to 64x normal speed, used poor-quality tape stock, used slow playback, and used narrow tape). CDs were becoming the preferred choice for audiophiles.

When I bought ***Now and Zen***, part of the novelty was that it was a "full digital recording" (as noted on the back of the album cover), although that would become the industry standard within the next year. Dire Straits ***Brothers in Arms*** (1985) was my first all-digital album (designated DDD for digital recording, digital mixing, and digital mastering). Most of the CDs I bought in the 80s were AAD (Analog recording, Analog mixing, Digital mastering) or ADD (Analog recording, Digital mixing/mastering). ***Brothers in Arms*** was tailored specifically for the CD format and became the first CD in history to sell over one million copies, single-handedly convincing millions of listeners to upgrade to CD players. I remember being as excited by the ***Now and Zen's*** sonics as I was by the musical content.

Many years later, I picked up a used vinyl LP of ***Now and Zen*** (an original, not a reissue), and I recently accidentally bought a second vinyl edition (a mistake I used not to make – I must be getting old LOL). That second purchase has me revisiting ***Now and Zen***. The vinyl edition omits "*Walking Towards Paradise,*" and the outro is slightly trimmed on "*Tall Cool One*" and "*Helen of Troy*" to keep the side length under 22 minutes (a common practice back in the day as CDs could hold more content than vinyl). The vinyl version sounds very similar to the CD; however, it is a touch warmer and has a less punchy low-end. The vinyl version is less fatiguing on the ears. Lossless streaming services have a Redbook (16-bit/44.2 kHz) of the 2006 remaster (with bonus material) that sounds better than both the original CD and LP. The remaster boosts the low end (bass and kick drum) and smooths out high-end digital harshness for more analog warmth.

Well enough of the audiophile nerd talk, what about the songs and performance? Despite revisiting the Zeppelin vibe, including some big guitar, the most distinctive texture is the synth and gated drums. ***Now and Zen*** is very much a product of its time: think ***In Through the Out Door*** meets Pet Shop Boys (and I mean that as a compliment). Keyboardist Phil Johnston co-wrote 7 of the 10 tracks with Plant, and his keys play a major sonic role on the album. Lyrically, Plant pokes fun at his past and aging rock-god status on "*Tall Cool One*." He contemplates mid-life romance on several songs. He trades rock-star swagger

for middle-aged vulnerability on the gorgeous ballad "*Ship of Fools*." Finally, he pokes fun at 80s consumerism on a few songs.

It is an impressive album sonically and lyrically for an aging rock star (although he was only 40), especially given how many of his peers struggled in the 80s. Plant had more in common with Phil Collins (a regular collaborator on Plant's solo albums) in the 80s than with the rest of his classic rock class – those two managed to grow with the times. Plant fully embraced the era without seeming like he was trying to be hip – it came naturally to him. He kept reinventing himself throughout the rest of his career. ***Now and Zen*** is a standout in Plant's post-Zeppelin career and an adventurous 80s pop-rock.

CD track list
1. "Heaven Knows" (4:06)
2. "Dance On My Own" (4:30)
3. "Tall Cool One" (5:12)
4. "The Way I Feel" (4: 07)
5. "Helen of Troy" (5:06)
6. "Billy's Revenge" (3:34)
7. "Ship of Fools" (5:01)
8. "Why" (4:14)
9. "White, Clean and Neat" (5:28)
10. "Walking Towards Paradise" (4:40) (CD & Cassette Bonus Track)

Vinyl track list
Side A:
1. "Heaven Knows"
2. "Dance On My Own"
3. "Tall Cool One" (Slightly edited outro)
4. "The Way I Feel"

Side B:
5. "Helen of Troy" (Slightly edited outro)
6. "Billy's Revenge"
7. "Ship of Fools"
8. "Why"
9. "White, Clean and Neat"

Primary Band

- Robert Plant: Lead Vocals
- Doug Boyle: Guitars
- Phil Johnstone: Keyboards, Synthesizers & Programming
- Phil Scragg: Bass
- Chris Blackwell: Drums & Percussion

Guest Musicians & Additional Personnel

- Jimmy Page: Guitar Solos on “Heaven Knows” and “Tall Cool One”
- Kirsty MacColl: Backing Vocals
- Toni Halliday: Backing Vocals
- Marie Pierre: Backing Vocals
- David Barratt & Robert Crash: Additional Programming
- Jerry Wayne: Spoken Voice-Over on “White, Clean and Neat”
- Charlie Jones: Bass (Bonus live tracks on 2006 remaster)

Portable Audio

By Jim Welby

I spend more time listening to music in the car, on bike rides and walking the dog than I do in front of my stereo. In the car, I am using Tidal on my iPhone with Bluetooth to my factory car stereo - hardly an audiophile experience. When on my bike or walking the dog, I am using Tidal on my iPhone with Bluetooth AirPods - again - hardly an audiophile experience. When outside on the patio, I am using Tidal on my iPhone with a Bluetooth speaker - see a pattern here? When it comes to portable audio, like most consumers, I go for convenience over quality.

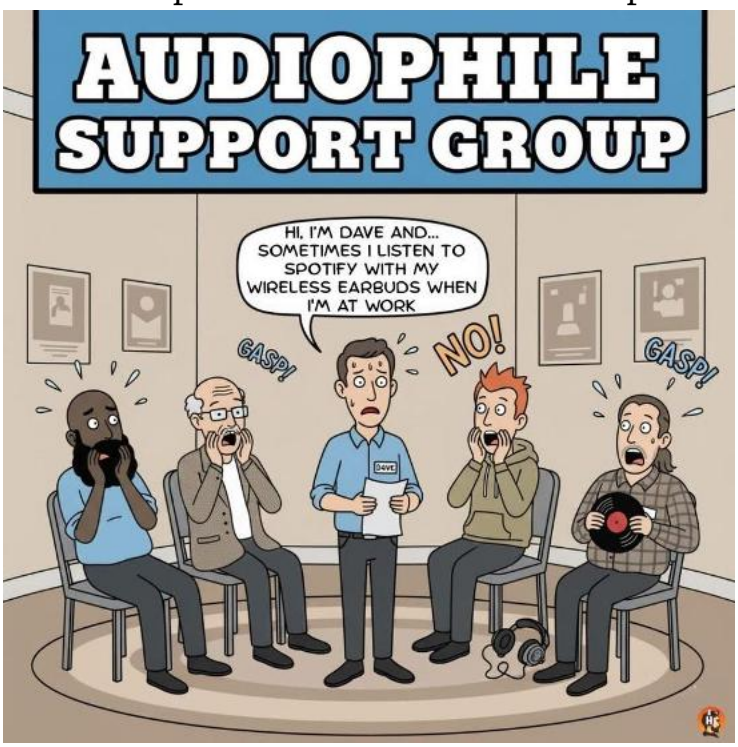
I do have an audiophile option that I use occasionally: my regular stereo headphones (Sennheiser HD 600 - open-back, over-the-ear) plugged into an AudioQuest Dragonfly (a portable USB DAC) connected to my iPhone. That sounds way better. The only hitch is my headphones are open-back, and you need to be in a quiet place to enjoy them. Obviously, I could solve that with closed-back or in-ear monitors (IEMs).

I am curious what other club members do for portable audio. Do you value convenience over quality as I do? Have you found a way to have your cake and eat it too? Email me at catgroove@gmail.com with your thoughts.

WASTING TIME ON THE INTERNET CHANGE

By Jim Welby

A couple of cartoons in the spirit of the above article on portable audio.





Paul Johnson’s Playlist

Schaefer Llana| Full Circle
Talking Heads | Fear Of Music (Deluxe Boxset)
Margo Price | Days Of Unrest
Kali Malone | Burning Song
U2 | Carnaval De Luz
Willi Carlisle | Universal Bubba
Radie Peat | No Human Tongue Can Tell
Kim Deal | Live At The Barbican
Nine Inch Nails | Nine Inch Noize
Injury Reserve | By The Time I Get To Phoenix
Tom Petty And The Heartbreakers | Origins 1971-1978 (Boxset)
Buddy Miller | Buddy Miller
Richard Thompson | Hippies, Thugs And Heroes
Jimi Hendrix | Magic Boy: The Jimi Hendrix Experience Live At Berkley
Gurf Morlix | Ain't No Perfect World
Bill Evans Trio | Waltz For Debby
John Coltrane & Wilbur Harden | The Savoy Recordings
Masayoshi Takanaka | Takanaka
Miles Davis & John Coltrane | The Best of Miles Davis & John Coltrane: 1955-1961
Merce Lemon | Watch Me Drive Them Dogs Wild
Various Artists | Cardinals At The Window (Benefit Album For Flood Relief in North Carolina)
Josh Rouse | Museums and Women
Samara Joy | Live At The Blue Note
Tom Morello | Everyone Gets Everything They Want
Caroline Rose | Gentling the Horse
Marshall Crenshaw | The Bootleg Sounds of Marshall Crenshaw
The Beach Boys | Sail On Sailor (Deluxe)

Dealers Corner

As always, we want to recognize and thank the local retailers who graciously support our club.

Equipment Dealers:

Acoustic Designs Group https://www.adgroupaz.com/

Arizona HiFi http://tubeaudio.com/

Audio Video Excellence https://www.audiovideoexcellence.com/index.html

Cinematic Home AV https://www.cinematichomeav.com/

Dedicated Audio https://www.dedicatedaudio.com/

LMC Entertainment https://www.lmche.com/

USA Tube Audio https://www.usatubeaudio.com/

Mythic Home Theater https://mythicsls.com/

New addition to list August 2026: Soundcave Audio Exchange (used)
https://soundcaveaudioexchange.com/

Vinyl/CDs:

In-Groove Records https://www.theingroove.com/
They also sell audio equipment per the store's website.

Zia Records https://www.ziarecords.com/ Zia has several stores throughout The Valley.

Stinkweeds https://www.stinkweeds.com/

Vinyl Record Dude https://vinylrecorddude.com/

Repair Work:

Tim Hoffman is an AAVC member and the owner of Arizona Audio Video Electronics (http://www.azvideoelectronics.com).

Audio Doctor - active website
http://www.audiodoctor.biz/
602-741-0730

Turntable Set-up and record cleaning:
Richard Jensen confirmed still in business
602 717 2399 | worksbau@gmail.com

Scott Cohen- geared more towards vintage gear. Email **VintageAudioReview@proton.me** with device info and problem(s), and I will let you know if I think I can help. Located in Tucson. Your device might even be featured in a YouTube video.

Jeff's Professional Audio Repair 602-274-0794 - Also, Car Stereo work
jparepair@yahoo.com

Re-foaming Speaker Surround Service:
Michael Mitchell 480-749-7003
mmiller43228@yahoo.com