Newsletter

October 2024

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President's Message

By AAVC President John Harvell

As we finish up this year and get ready to plan next year's events, we look forward to your continued support. You can help us plan new events by passing along your questions about new components or systems, telling us what music you are listening to, participating in regular club events, and inviting club members to come out and experience your system improvements/setup. To that end, we're excited to finish out this year with lots of membership participation in the three final events of 2024.

1. Oct 17, 7-9 pm D'Agostino Master Audio Systems Tour (see future meetings section below for details)
2. Nov TBD 7-9 pm Club Membership Party & Listening Session (Bring some snacks & music)
3. Dec TBD Meet & Greet with USA Tube Audio (Great opportunity to try out some 1st class tube gear and then some).

So, come out, meet other club members, and share your experiences and interests.

Future Meetings

October 17 at 7:00 PM: *Dan D'Agostino Master Audio Systems Factory Tour* (5855 E Surrey Drive, Cave Creek, Arizona, 85337). Please RSVP to Jim Welby at catchgroove@gmail.com. See the club's website for more details. We will have a review of this event in the November newsletter.

November Meeting - Although we don't have a date and location (although the assumption is at the club's regular meeting place at Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church in Phoenix.

December Meetings—Although we don't have a date yet, USA Tube Audio has agreed to host an AAVC meet and greet at their store in Scottsdale.

Also, Greg's Audio Shrine will be visited again on Saturday, December 7, 2024, for a Dolby Atmos Music listening session (see Amp Challenge article below).

If you have an idea for a club meeting, please share it with the club's president, John Harvell (jharvell_1@cox.net), or the Newsletter Editor, Jim Welby (catchgroove@gmail.com).

Recent Meeting - Amp Challenge 2024

By David Das (*with additional contributions from Joe Goswami*)

I had the pleasure of attending the Amp Challenge 2024 event hosted by AAVC club member Greg Wann at his Audio Shrine in Sun City with about twenty other club members. Greg has set up his 30ft by 20ft space for Dolby Atmos multichannel movies and music. A summary of the Dolby Atmos setup is included at the end of this article.

He uses a pair of **Philharmonic BMR speakers** for his left and right channels in the multichannel setup and for stereo. Thanks to their RAAL Ribbon Tweeters and 6" Ceramic woofers, they deliver astonishing clarity, detail, smoothness, and transparency. These are 4-ohm speakers with a flat frequency response from 36Hz to 20kHz. However, they have a relatively low sensitivity rating of 86.5 dB. These speakers were used for the Amp Challenge.

The first amp challenge was between two low-watt tube amps:

JoLida FX-10 Integrated Tube Amp (ten Watts)—This amp is no longer manufactured, but it is easy to find on the used market. Black Ice is now manufacturing its successor, the Glass FX10H. *Editor's note: I have an original Jolida FX10, which was my introduction to tube amps—here is a blog post about my introduction to tubes.*

The other amp was the low-watt (six-watts) Decware amp: the Zen Triode Integrated Amplifier.

The second challenge was between two more powerful tube amps:

PrimaLuna DiaLogue Premium HP Integrated Tube Amp with 8x TungSol KT150's

Black Ice Audio F22 with 4x TungSol KT170 Tubes

A tube preamp (Black Ice Audio Fusion F360) with solid-state Class D monoblocks (ArgentPur Monoblocs with solid silver wiring utilizing an Orchard Audio Ultra GaN FET Amplifier module) was auditioned.

Finally two [Benchmark AHB2]Class AB solid state power amps.

The input for the the amp challenge was the following:

- Blusound Node for all things Streaming
- Cambridge Audio DacMagic
- PS Audio Gain Cell MM/MC Phono Preamp
- SPL Elektor Preamp used to drive ALL Amplifiers in the shootout

Joe Goswami did all the amp switching between each demo session.

First up were the two low-wattage amps: the JoLida FX10 and Decware. While they both had the characteristic tube quality of extra richness, smoothness, and musicality, the Decware could not deliver the volume or punch to drive the Philharmonic BMR Speakers. The little FX10 didn't have the bass depth of the bigger brother Black Ice F22 (Jolida has evolved into Black Ice Audio) or the Prima Luna DiaLogue Premium HP that would be auditioned next.

The Decware was an unfortunate mismatch for the Philharmonics, rated at a low sensitivity of 86.5 dB. It began to clip when the volume was turned up. The Decware amp's "home" uses a pair of Klipschorns. Decware is a small boutique tube amp manufacturer. All their products come with a lifetime warranty. They can hardly keep up with the demand, as evidenced by their order backlog.

Next were the two higher-wattage tube amps from Black Ice Audio (F22) and PrimaLuna. They performed a lot better, and the Philharmonics produced adequate volume. The PrimaLuna edged out the Black Ice Audio with more musicality and transparency. They elevated the performance of the Philharmonics to a whole new level. They delivered the dynamics, punch, and volume in spades while retaining the transparency, smoothness, clarity, resolution, and musicality of the PrimaLuna Tube amp.

Finally, the Benchmark and Agent Pur Orchard Audio Ultra monoblocks were compared. What a revelation! Benchmark AHB2 sounded identical to the Orchard Audio Ultra when both Amplifiers were driven directly from the SPL Elektor Preamp.

Paul (who owns the Benchmark amp and is an electrical engineer) made the custom speaker cables terminated with SpeakON connectors on one end and lockable Banana Plugs on the other. Paul purchased these Benchmark AHB2 power amps in 2018. They have served him well with not a single issue. They were used in bridged Mono Mode with a rated capacity of 480 Watts into 6 Ohms.

The presentation was effortless, dynamic, and breathtakingly transparent. The speakers melted away, leaving you enjoying a wide sound stage with every instrument clearly positioned. Thanks to Paul, this was the treat of the day.

The Philharmonic BMR/Benchmark AHB2 was a match made in heaven. The ArgentPur/Orchard Audio Powered Amps sounded identical to them, but when the Black Ice Audio F360 Tube Preamp was inserted in the chain strictly for the ArgentPur/Orchard Class D GaN FET Amps. The eerie similarity between the Black Ice Audio F22 and the PrimaLuna Dialogue Premium HP Tube Amps was real. This proves that you don't need big, heavy Class A & Class A/B tubes or solid-state amplifiers to enjoy the warmth that those designs yield. We never used the Benchmark paired with the F360 Preamp. Although that, too, would have been a fun pairing.

Here was my takeaway from the Amp Challenge: If you want to experience high-end Audio on a modest budget, get a pair of Philharmonic BMR speakers ($2,200) and a Benchmark AHB2 stereo power amp ($3,500). To complete your setup, add a professional DAC like the RME-ADI-2 FC ($1,300).

At this price point, you would have an unbeatable system for $7,000. You do not need a Preamp. The RME DAC feeds directly into the AHB2 power amp, and you can control the volume with the RME remote.

You can subscribe to a streaming service like Amazon Music, Qobuz, or Tidal and enjoy all your high-resolution music 24/7 for a minimal monthly charge.

If you want to use a Tube Amp like the Black Ice Audio (or Jolida), PrimaLuna, or Decware, make sure your speaker has a high enough sensitivity, like a Klipschorn 😊.

Thanks a million to Greg Wann for graciously offering his space to host this Amp Challenge Event. It was an educational experience for me. I'm looking forward to visiting Greg's Audio Shrine once again on Saturday, December 7, 2024, for a Dolby Atmos Music listening session. I hope you will join us! As a preview, here is Greg's **multichannel setup**:

The two Philharmonic BMR speakers for his left and right channels used in the Amp Challenge are the left and right channels for the multichannel setup. The Philharmonic Center Channel matches them.

All three are resting on sturdy Rockville wooden stands 28” tall.

There are 4 RSL XDR-300 Subwoofers at the room's four corners.

Four [Dayton Audio Classic B65 speakers] have been mounted on the ceiling as height-channel Dolby Atmos speakers.

Greg had the Surround and Rear speakers tucked away in his adjacent storage room for the Amp Challenge.

Solid-state amps power the multichannel system. A 4-channel [Emotiva BasX Amp] drives the 4 Dayton Audio Classic B65 Height-Channel Speakers. A [Marantz AV7706] AV/Preamp is the Brains of Greg's system.

Member's Corner

The Long and Winding Road - Living with Audiophilia
Chapter Two: Tech Hifi Dreams Lost to Good Intentions
Final Chapter (Chapter 3): Refrigerator Boxes and Epiphanies

By AAVC Member Barrett Strong

I was 23 when I drove home with the first pair of speakers I had saved for and chosen myself. Brand new Magnepan SMGa's were boxed up neatly in the back of my car, and I couldn't wipe the smile off my face. They were huge, modern, and enigmatic – like the monolith from Kubrick's "2001: A Space Odyssey". But more importantly, they sounded better than anything I had ever heard. Open and transparent. All the other speakers I had listened to sounded like they were in a refrigerator box by comparison. They were my first real epiphany. I couldn't wait to get them home.

Of course, there was one problem. The salesman had been clear that my Realistic STR -62 12 watts per channel (WPC) receiver would likely put the refrigerator box back on. I needed a decent, high-current amplifier to make these things work correctly. I was back to saving and researching until I found a good amp I could afford. Fortunately, it didn't take long, and I found the Onkyo Integra A-8190 Integrated amplifier that could drive low impedances and had 100 WPC at 8 ohms. It was heavy and gorgeous.

I was living in a townhouse with a high school buddy and set up the Maggies with my

Pioneer CD player and the new amp in my spacious 10” x 12” room. Dire Straits *“Ride Across the River”* was my demo at the time. I set the speakers up according to the instructions, probably took a few hits of White Widow, which was all the rage, hit play, and the room suddenly became a jungle. Insects buzzed all around, and I was transported to the rainforest – I swore I could feel the humidity. Yeah, it was that good—epiphany number 2.

The years passed. I married Karen, my wife now of 35 years, and we spent six years in a tiny ranch, fixing it up and making enough to buy a larger ranch house with a great room that measured 14” x 28”. The vaulted ceiling was a significant improvement, but I also noticed something was missing as the speakers tried to keep up with all those square feet. I needed more bass.

Most of our money was going into the house, and the cost of a powered subwoofer was out of the question, so I decided to build a passive sub that I hoped the Onkyo would drive along with the Magnepans. The most efficient set-up I could afford was a pair of Pyle 15” drivers in a big ported cabinet that I made to fit exactly under the TV. If I recall correctly, they were something like 102 dB efficient, and the enclosure was tuned to 23 Hz.

You had to open the TV cabinet doors when you wanted to do some serious listening.

It was a compromise with my Interior Decorator wife, but it did things the Maggies simply could not. I fired up *"Yet Another Movie"* from Pink Floyd's ***A Momentary Lapse of Reason***, and the room shook. I had to go around and locate objects that were now vibrating and put felt pads on things. I had to keep the front door closed because the aluminum storm door could not be silenced. I know the bass was not accurate or fast, but it was a blast, and I checked off another audio epiphany.

I've had many epiphanies since, both big and small. I now have three systems I've cobbled together on my long and winding road – truck, office, and main, each with its own story. This series's speakers and components are long gone, replaced by newer and better models. Of course, they still have strengths and weaknesses. I'm not a perfectionist; I just like improvement when possible. Each is capable of a little epiphany from time to time.

I look forward to sharing great music with others, bringing me to one of the most influential twists in the road: the Arizona Audio Video Club. Through the people and shared events, I have listened and learned, enjoying epiphanies I would not have had otherwise.

Being startled by a small television sitting on a table 90 degrees to my left and 4 feet away, only to turn my head to look and having it not be there at Dave Snyders was a first for me. True 180-degree soundstage. (*"The Ballad of Bill Hubbard"* by Roger Waters).

Even more recently, I felt the power and precision of Roy Cook's ATC's play Infected Mushroom, which was a first. There is a big difference between sounding perfect at 90 dB and at 110 dB.

There will be more epiphanies, of course, though now there is little standing between me and the music. With streaming and my primary system, it's rarely about feeling it could sound any better but more about getting the time to listen, explore, and enjoy what is available right there in front of me. The long and winding road is solid and smooth underneath and is of less concern now than the scenery, always changing, always ahead.

In a future AAVC newsletter, Barrett will share his interest in the avant-garde artist/musician and filmmaker Laurie Anderson with a retrospective of her recording career.

Editors Note: Please contact me (catchgroove@gmail.com) if you want to provide an audio memoir to share with members via the Newsletter. The editor can help you write this up if you are uncomfortable doing it yourself.

Thoughts in a Quiet Space

Acoustically treating your listening space: reasons and results

By Rick Rachkofski

The Origin of the Spark

In the late 60s and early 70s, I was both a burgeoning audiophile and a working musician entrusted with various recording duties for my band. To increase my knowledge within my hobby and expand my technical skills for my occupation, I signed up for a course sponsored by a local recording studio in Buffalo, NY.

The day I stepped into that studio, my worldview of all things 'acoustic' changed. Before any music came through the speakers, I was struck by how the acoustical environment 'felt.' When I asked the engineer why the room sounded the way it did, he told me it gave them the best opportunity to hear what they *will capture* from the musicians/microphones and what they *have captured* on the magnetic tape. Trying to pry out the technical secrets needed to create this space, all he said was, "soften the room."

Then the tape rolled. In that moment, I heard music at a depth I'd never experienced before, as if I were listening directly to its emotional core. It was one of those moments that you realize will stay with you for life. I thought to myself, *someday I'll have this*.

Although I retained the main points of the recording/mixing process, the technical details of the course soon faded from memory, but that acoustic epiphany stayed with me forever. Sometimes, the most valuable lessons are the ones we weren't seeking.

Fascinated, I dove into the science behind my newfound interest in acoustics. I read several books on the physics of sound: air pressure, wave mechanics, diffraction, diffusion, absorption, etc. Then, I read books on how recording/mixing studios are constructed to handle the intricacies of sound within an acoustic space. Intellectually, I found satisfaction with having a good handle on "sound." But then I thought back to that moment that was engraved in my memory. The feeling that I had never really heard music as I had during that first session in the studio. There was something missing in the equation. The missing piece was me! That euphoric feeling wasn't just based on the physics of sound, it was also based on the biology of hearing and all the emotions springing from it.

I realized that a deeper investigation was necessary. I needed to understand more about the biology of hearing—not just the mechanics of how the eardrum vibrates and transmits signals to the brain, but the brain's internal processes that either facilitate or inhibit those unique emotional moments I experienced in the studio. This exploration had to encompass both human auditory function and the highly specialized brain mechanisms that have evolved over millions of years to shape our perception and emotional responses to sound.

As a generalist rather than a scientist, my goal was simply to gain a high-level understanding of how brain functions relate to listening. One example of an evolved brain function is the ability to determine the location of a sound source. This involves two key variables: *interaural time difference* and *interaural intensity difference*. The brain calculates the position of a sound based on the time delay of the sound reaching one ear before the other and the difference in intensity between the two ears. Interestingly, the evolutionary driver behind this ability wasn't to create a rich soundstage for audiophiles like us but rather to enhance survival. For example, if an early hominid walking through a grassy meadow heard the faint crunch of a stalking sabertooth tiger's paw, pinpointing its location could mean the difference between life and death. Knowing which direction to run gave him a better chance of survival—and ensured that those with this trait passed it on. Thanks to that ancient survival mechanism, I can now close my eyes and vividly imagine a jazz quartet performing in a smoky nightclub.

Many brain functions related to hearing operate subconsciously and cannot be turned off, but they do consume energy. For various good reasons, the brain is constantly working—often below our awareness—to make sense of the sounds we hear. A clear example of this mental energy drain is how we cope with the constant drone of jet engines during a long flight. Consciously, we understand and tolerate the noise, but subconsciously, the brain is continuously expending energy to make sense of this unfamiliar sound, trying to integrate it into a coherent perception of the world around us. This subtle but ongoing mental effort ultimately contributes to the fatigue we feel after arriving at our destination.

My longing for the pure emotional euphoria of listening to music in a quiet room has now been deepened by an intellectual appreciation of the many evolutionary mechanisms our brains have developed for subconscious deployment. While most of these mechanisms evolved for survival, their activation can lead to fatigue and subtle distress. During a focused listening session, a range of these subconscious processes are engaged to varying degrees. The more the brain has to work to

process the sound, the less relaxed and enjoyable the experience becomes. As it constantly strives to make sense of our environment, the brain either fills in gaps or filters out anomalies in the musical input, responding to factors like noise, frequency or phase distortions, directional inconsistencies, and echoes—among others.

As an audiophile, two key priorities became clear to me: 1) assembling the highest-quality equipment I can afford, ensuring all components work synergistically, and 2) creating an acoustically 'softened' space with qualities as close to a professional mixing studio as possible. Both are essential for the best listening experience.

In the subconscious realm, the amount of mental effort required to listen to music through substandard equipment in an overly reflective space is directly proportional to the speed with which I start looking for something else to do.

***<u>The Ongoing Struggle</u>**

Although I had experienced the ecstasy of listening to music in an acoustically ideal space and deepened my understanding of the physics and biology of hearing, I was bound by the realities of everyday life. I knew what was necessary to recapture that level of listening satisfaction, but living with a partner and facing the usual economic constraints required significant compromise in my audiophile pursuits. For nearly five decades, that dream lay dormant. During that time, I engaged in the ongoing process of upgrading components for my living room-based hobby, but it was never what it could be, and I knew it.

Every veteran audiophile knows that the journey to his present sound system is long and winding. Each new component feels like a small victory in the ongoing battle to make the music just a bit more emotionally engaging. There are moments, after installing the latest upgrade, when we believe we've reached a satisfying plateau of performance—only for that familiar itch to return, pushing us to hunt down the weak link we know still lingers somewhere in the system.

Although the dream of a dedicated soft listening room remained in the back of my mind, all I could do for years was play the role of a dutiful audiophile, continuing the never-ending battle of upgrading components. But about a year and half ago I finally wore my wife down to the point where she blurted, “Fine. You take that room for your system and we’ll make this room for living in and entertaining.” The look on her face was priceless when she saw the number and size of boxes filled with acoustic panels being delivered. “Think of it as a selling point for the house”, I assured her. “People are always looking for properties with established home theater spaces”.

***<u>The Nuts and Bolts of Getting There</u>**

There are many free tutorials and consultations provided by purveyors of acoustical materials and components. After some research, I chose GIK Acoustics.

They have many online tutorials and are very responsive to email inquiries and follow-up questions.

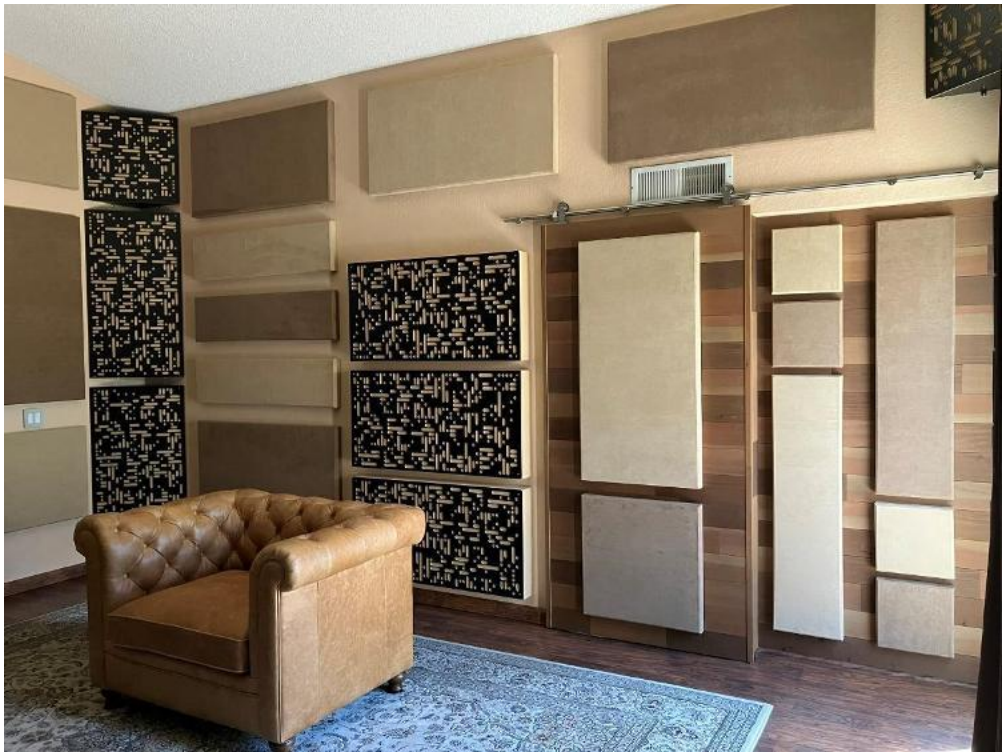
I sent in detailed room dimensions and received a full-blown design recommendation. They did, however, understand this was a home stereo application and not a cost-no-object recording studio project. I made them aware that I would be attacking the project in phases and I might never fully implement all their recommendations. They appreciated my approach and suggested what order I might take to get the best incremental results. About 65% of what is listed below was sourced from GIK; the remainder came from a variety of other acoustic vendors (see pictures below inventory list):

- Absorption Panels [proprietary fiberglass-like material with wood frame w/ acoustic suede covers]
  - (8) 4' x 2' x 4"
  - (6) 4' x 1' x 4"
  - (4) 2' x 2' x 4"
  - (4) 1' x 1' x 4"
- Absorption/Diffusion Panels [proprietary fiberglass-like material with wood frame w/ acoustic cloth covers and a hardboard front with various size slots]
  - (6) 4' x 2' x 4.25"
- Corner Bass Traps [proprietary fiberglass-like material with wood frame w/ acoustic cloth covers and a hardboard front with various size slots]
  - (2) 4' x 1.4' x 2' [hypotenuse]
  - (2) 2' x 1.4' x 2' [hypotenuse]
- Flat Panel Bass Traps [proprietary fiberglass-like material with metal frame w/ acoustic cloth cover]
  - (2) 4' x 2' x 3.25"
- Bass Panel Absorbers [proprietary fiberglass-like material with wood frame w/ acoustic cloth covers]
  - (2) 4' x 1' x 4"
- Corner Foam Bass Absorbers [acoustic foam, where full-sized corner traps would not fit]
  - 6.25' total length
- 3D Quadratic Diffuser [one piece molded hard styrofoam-like material]
  - (1) 4' x 4' x 6.25"

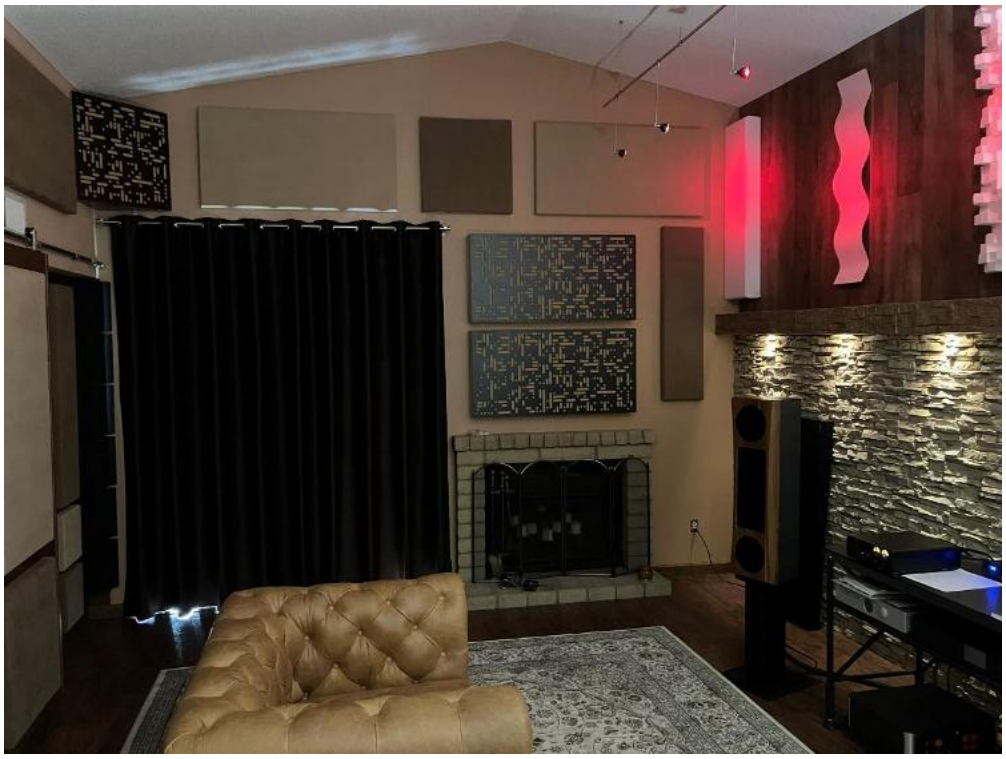
The dedication sound room dimensions are as follows (speakers are on the long wall):

- 18 ¾ ft wide x 14 ft deep x 12 ft high (cathedral ceiling's highest point)

The pictures are of the south, west, and north walls respectively.



South Wall



West Wall

North Wall

Afterthoughts in a Quiet Space

When we listen attentively to music, much of the mental work occurs at the conscious level. Our intellect, analysis, memories, emotions, and other complex brain functions are engaged, all of which are highly developed in humans and set us apart from the rest of the animal kingdom. We create and enjoy music because it satisfies us by engaging these higher-level mental capabilities. This drive fuels the demand for increasingly sophisticated audio components that can better replicate the music we love. Moreover, while the relationship between cost and performance can be difficult to quantify, there's a general sense that higher-quality components offer a deeper emotional connection with the artist's intent. High-end designers and builders strive to provide the best possible equipment within our reach to enhance that connection.

However, we must not overlook the subconscious level of our perception of music. At this level, various more primitive brain functions operate beyond our control, constantly working and expending energy as needed. Consider how a well-presented live musical event in a familiar venue aligns with our brain's expectations; in such cases, the sound is processed by our conscious mind, requiring minimal subconscious effort. In contrast, when we try to replicate this live event with recorded music in our listening space, our brain instinctively activates those low-level, stress-inducing, energy-draining processes. These processes strive to adjust what we hear to align more closely with what it believes the music should sound like.

The better our components reproduce the source material, the less our subconscious processing is engaged, resulting in a more relaxing and enjoyable listening experience. However, even the highest-quality reproduction can be compromised by a weak link we may have overlooked in our system. If our acoustic space is altering frequency amplitudes or introducing delayed coherent wave reflections and other uncontrolled reverberations, we inadvertently add another layer of ambiance to the original recording. This activates those subconscious gremlins once again. We must view our listening room as just another essential component subject to upgrading. As that recording engineer advised me, 'soften the room.'

It has taken me more than fifty years to get here, but now that I've 'got it,' I am hearing things in my music I had never heard before. My listening sessions are much longer because listening fatigue has been greatly reduced. The sensation of listening deeper into the music is evident and relaxation is now part of the process. This whole new aural presentation has opened doors to many new genres and I am exposing myself to music for which I never owned any sensibilities. I recently spent several hours with freeform jazz. That is a real test for maintaining a relaxed state.

Despite the intense satisfaction I felt after tuning the room, I wanted to attack any remaining deficiencies that could trigger those automatic brain processes. So I invited AAVC club member David Snyder to do his magic. He was impressed with the room's acoustic measurements before he adjusted anything, but he is the wizard of room correction in the digital domain. He further smoothed out the overall frequency response and tamed remnants of phase anomalies. I did not think having an even more transparent, relaxing presentation was possible, but it was. It was icing on the cake. If you dabble in digital, there is no excuse not to avail yourself of his expertise. He is a top-level asset to our club and a generous contributor.

A few last truisms I've encountered in 'calming down' my listening space:

- Bass traps are very high on the priority list
- It seems that smaller rooms actually need more treatment per cubic foot than larger rooms. As you approach near-field listening, quick and coherent wave front reflections are the most damaging to sound stage realism
- In larger rooms, acoustic treatments are best placed near your speakers/listening area and at ear height. The reflections that take longer to get to your ears have much less impact on subconscious processing than more rapid ones
- If you significantly tune your room, you might find yourself embarrassed by how strongly you once felt about the positive or negative value or efficacy of a component or accessory. This is because, before creating this new reality, you hadn't fully established a valid context in which to judge

Reproduced music may never be as good as *produced* music, but we can get closer ...a lot closer. Creating this listening environment was the most significant audio

upgrade I ever made, maybe with the exception of moving from box to planar speakers 😉

So, listen and enjoy.

Dave's Record Reviews

By AAVC Member Dave Hjortland

Patti Scialfa – ***Rumble Doll***
(Columbia, 1993 – CD only)

There are a great number of artists (and groups) who turn out wonderful debut albums, really excellent works that rise above the morass of musical sludge that gets put out every year. Then, in subsequent releases, it's like they've shot their bolt, given it their best, and they never seem able quite to reach that impressive level of achievement again. I suggest that this album is a case in point.

Patti Scialfa is… well, a bit obscure as a solo artist. If you've never heard of her, it's understandable. She put out three solo albums, of which this was her first, but she has a lot of music cred. She was a member of minor groups and a backup singer for several years; then in 1984, she became a member of the E Street Band (and was later inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as a member of that group). She married its leader in 1991, so yeah, she is Mrs. Bruce Springsteen. But don't expect a female version of The Boss – Scialfa is a different and distinctive talent. And this is no mere vanity project resulting from her husband's influence. Rolling Stone magazine gave the album four stars when it was released.

Scialfa wrote all of the 12 songs on the album, though Mike Campbell (of Tom Petty's Heartbreakers) co-wrote one. Campbell and Springsteen share producer credits for the album, and both play on it and a few other music notables. The songwriting is outstanding – personal, insightful, and I would even call it powerful. She wrote them from the point of view of a mature woman (she was 39 when the album was recorded) and with her experiences in life – no lightweight teen girl-boy stuff here. Some songs are about relationships, yes, but there is real angst in her lyrics. The songs may best be categorized as 'rock.' If you have no affinity for that genre, you need to read no further. And you have my sympathy.

I confess that when I started writing this review, I was going to call it rock-pop, but this is serious stuff that really doesn't deserve to have any sort of 'pop' label

associated with it. Most of the cuts are extremely well done, with only a few turkeys. Scialfa's backing is first-rate – as well as guitars, we're talking real talent on keyboards, percussion and occasionally other instruments. Production on the album is perhaps not the absolute best, but is very good. The album (yes, even on CD) has good depth and soundstage that a decent system will bring out.

The album opens with the title cut, a soul-baring song about having a "China heart" but presenting a "rumble doll" face to the world; "...measure my intentions against my sins." *"Lucky Girl"* is the song co-written by Campbell and as nice and catchy tune as it is – it moves right out, sounding very much like it would have been great on a Tom Petty album. On a song called "*Baby Don't,*" she pleads with a married lover not to tempt her, "cause just a few kind words from you and I fall apart." This may relate to her early relationship with Springsteen, who was married to another when they met. My favorite cut is "*Big Black Heaven,*" a haunting, almost elegiac song about disillusionment and the need for love.

Scialfa demonstrates that she is unquestionably not just another pretty 'chick' singer-songwriter but has an impressive vocal range and a sweet vibrato, which she uses to imbue her songs with sensitivity and sensuality. She sings with a passion that brings home the fact that she is singing from the heart.

This is an album that does not deserve to be lost in the dustbins of history – or the cut-out racks in music stores, for that matter. Her second and third albums... well, I have those as well, and they sadly do not measure up to her first one. I would grant that her second (***23rd Street Lullaby***, 2004) does seem to have some good songs and fine work on it, but its production/engineering is so muddy that her vocals are hard to understand in spots. Her third (***Play It As It Lays***, 2007) is simply forgettable.

Discogs lists an LP of the ***Rumble Doll*** album that I didn't know existed before I checked the listing as I wrote this review. As much as I'd love a vinyl copy of it, used ones apparently start at about $50, which seems a bit dear. The CD, however, sounds very good indeed, may be had for about $3-10, and is well worth the coin.

Highly recommended.

Editors Note: Please contact me (catchgroove@gmail.com) if you want to provide an album or artist review to share with members via the Newsletter.

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

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

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

Woolson Audio https://www.woolsonaudio.com/

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

Mythic Home Theater https://mythicsls.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/

Repair Work: The editor recently contacted these repair providers to confirm they are still in business. As of the newsletter's publication, he has not heard back from all the companies.

James Koch - confirmed James is still in business
james@highendrepair.com
480-398-7362

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

Jeff's Professional Audio Repair 602-274-0794 - Also, Car Stereo work emailed 9/9/24

jparepair@yahoo.com

Re-foaming Speaker Surround Service:
Michael Mitchell 480-749-7003
mmiller43228@yahoo.com emailed on 9/9/24

Turntable Set-up and record cleaning:
Richard Jensen emailed on 9/9/24
602 717 2399 | worksbau@gmail.com