



CES/Grammys/Holidays

By Bruce A. Brown

This year has brought about quite a few changes and events. It's so hard to plan anything during this time, especially if you're into audio. CES 2010 this year saw a few less people, but the new products brought about many manufacturers was anything but.

If the photo above looks vaguely familiar, then you've been to Mike's barn. Jonathan Tinn with Blue Light Audio was presenting in a room at the Flamingo. From what I have read on the forums, Stereophile, Positive Feedback and others, this was the room to beat.

The room had the new dartZeel NHB-458 monoblocs with their own pre, Evolution Acoustics MM2 speakers, Playback Designs MPS-5, Steve Dobbins modified Technics SP-10 Mkiii and a new Music Servers Direct MSD-1 Reference Music Server. All in all, about \$300k! And no, this was not the most expensive system there. There were rooms that topped out at over a half-million \$\$.

Does more money get you a better sound? Absolutely not! What I can say is that this \$300k system was as good as it gets in Vegas with the acoustics you're dealt with in these

rooms. There were more reel to reel tape rigs than I've seen ever. Most were playing "The Tape Project" tapes. Most sources were hard disc playback from laptops and servers.

Blue Smoke Entertainment had a new server that would play back DSD files. They were in several rooms at the Mirage, Venetian and Flamingo.

I'm just glad the Holidays are over. There's too much stuff packed into one or two months. I can't wait 'til RMAF 2010!!!

Kicking off the New Year the subject of the January meeting was "Bring Your Favorite New Music". Everyone enjoys a kick back and listen evening, looking across the crowd you can always see someone planning a CD purchase after the meeting. We used the club system with a few changes thanks to Joe from Kosmic. The biggest and I do mean diameter were the *Cable Research Lab* interconnect cables. These things have RCA plugs the size of a garden hose. Joe Pittman also brought the small *ARS* Phono stage that worked really well with the *Soundsmith* cartridge on loan from Gary Koh: The System sounded really good. Before the meeting started to warm up the turntable system and get our daily fix of violin we opened a Speakers Corner re-issue of the Decca, David Oistrakh and London Symphony Orchestra: Bruch Scottish Fantasia. Here is what we played in the order it was played it.

Presidents Own Band: this marine brass Quintet was directed by Col Michael J. Colburn, the track was *Colchester Fantasy*.

Joey DeFrancesco: *You Don't Know Me*, the song written by Eddy Arnold and Cindy Walker although many people remember it as performed by Ray Charles as his cover made it to #2 on the billboard. This Hammond organ version had several club members looking for their roller-skates.

Nojima Plays Liszt: *Mephisto Waltz*, this Piano HDCD Reference Recording sounded great as all RR label CDs and LPs do.

Ramsey Lewis: Songs from the Heart CD, *To Know Her is to Love Her*. This cover has been recorded by many and

was originally written as *To Know Him is to Love Him*. In 1987 it topped the country charts as *To Know You is To Love You* by trio of Dolly Parton, Emmylou Harris and Linda Ronstadt.

Darius Rucker: *Forever Road* from the Learn to Live CD. Rucker was the driving force behind Hootie and the Blowfish; this was his second country album.

Thomas Marriott, *Little Frances* from the CD Flexicon: Marriott does trumpet.

KEXP 90.3 FM volume 5 CD, Key Marseillies performs From a Terrace.

Mark Knopfler, *Before Gas and TV* from the Get Lucky LP

This CD was released in 2004 but recently discover on KPLU, Ripping up the keyboard at the end of the meeting was a track off Henry Butler's CD *Home-land, Henry's Bogie*.

to market this year. A word of warning: each company is using proprietary technology to achieve a 3D image, there is a Blu-ray group standard for 3D disc but displays have yet to be standardized.

Samsung signed a deal with AE the game developer so they will have content for their displays. Several companies have developed their own 3D generators; reports from CES say the LG display in Vegas looked very good on a football game that was simulated 3D. Samsung, Sony, Panasonic and Toshiba (Remember HD-DVD) all announced 3D BDPs at CES

BD Home front: Oppo has introduced a couple new BD players the 83 Special Edition with a hotrod power supply and better analog output stage for \$900. The latest entry is their BDP80; the \$289 player was designed for people that already have good outboard scaling.

The S1Digital Blu-Ray changer holds 100 BDs and is designed to work with Microsoft Media Center. I think this is a great concept for a product however there is no mention of a slave unit and at \$1500 each, well let's just say I had over 100 BDs a year ago, so keep working. Sometimes I wonder if anyone in product development ever listens to what enthusiast want.

Tech Stuff

Vizio will release its Cinema wide 2.35:1: 58" LCD monitor, this will be the first 2.35 widescreen display targeted for home consumers.

46% of US households have at least 1 HDTV

A British company Light Blue Optics demonstrated a laser projector that shines on the table top and the key-pad image is touch sensitive. This is the first touch sensitive interactive projected image.

3D Video:

CES 2009 3D was a popular thing and pushed by Panasonic. In Vegas 2010 manufactures: LG, Mitsubishi, Samsung, Sharp, Sony and Panasonic were showing displays set

WA State Legislature: SB 6489 & HB 2416 introduced at the end of January will place energy efficiency standards on TVs. The standard based on watt/square inch and will completely eliminate plasma display sales in the state. CEA estimates about 8% of current manufactured displays will meet the standard. Class A amplifiers and anything that doesn't uses a transformer based power supply may soon be on the chopping block.

XstreamHD: This is a video rental/server system enabling full resolution 1080p satellite downloads.

The system doesn't go online till April. With a initial cost \$600, monthly service charge and rental fees the company may not last long but if the quality is as good as promised it could last a while or get bought by a larger rental company.

Title Track

We have set a meeting schedule for the rest of the year, we haven't nailed down guest speakers yet so we may move a few things around but hopefully we can keep on subject each month.

February 11th: Bruce Brown will go thru the steps to set up and record your valuable LPs and get quality that will rival CDs.

March 11th Two local manufactures in the club have agreed to demo there products; Jones a local manufacture of power amplifiers will drive Eficion speakers, I heard this stuff at RMAF and it sounded really good.

April 8th is DIY

May 13th Tweaks

June 10th Turntable set-up

July 8th 70s System and Music

Aug 12th TBA

Sept 9th TBA

Oct 14th TBA

Nov 11th High Def. Video

Dec 9th Christmas Party

December Meeting

By John Stone

The December 10th meeting was the club's annual excuse to be playful and goofy. After all, if you can't get a little silly during the holidays, well, you need to get out and listen to more live music. Members trotted out their favorite versions of traditional, and some non-traditional Christmas music.

I played Misa Criolla - Navidad Nuestra. Christmas song for the Southern hemisphere. Invoking sun and heat for Christmas. Looks like it worked. The weather warmed up!!

Originally intended to be a contest, by popular demand the group thought it more pleasurable to just listen to the music rather than rate each song.

Selections were introduced by the person supplying the track and then played on either the club's recently modified and now much improved Rega P5 TT or crusty trusty SCD777ES SACD/CD player¹.

The annual raffle took place in the second half of the program. The raffle was simple, buy a ticket for \$3 each or trade your CDs, LPs or whatever prized audio possession you brought for tickets. Several members, and a few very generous members, contributed enough raffle prizes so that most everyone² received at least one raffle prize. As usual, the music represented a highly eclectic mix of music, video, shirts and accessories that will be appreciated by some and brought back again next year by others. Gary provided some tasty hand-brewed hot spiced apple cider. All proceeds for the raffle go into the club's treasury for future use.

On a personal note, this was my first club Christmas party and I had a great time. Jerry, our illustrious leader, was not feeling well, but valiantly showed up to help set up the equipment and deliver his raffle prizes before departing and going back to bed. Thanks Jerry, we missed you, but hope you had a chance to recover over the holidays.

Hope all of you had a merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

¹ Someone on the equipment committee really needs to look into getting a new digital player for the club. The read/access time for the Sony is a real problem. The darn thing also weighs over 55 lbs and is a bear to move and set up. If any member wants to take the lead on this effort, please speak with Jerry or John Stone.

² If I'm mistaken and someone who had a raffle ticket did NOT get a prize, my bad. There were plenty of prizes that should have been distributed better. My apologies for not paying better attention. Those of you who had tickets but left before the drawing, sorry you missed out on prizes, but thanks for your contribution.

Last night was the occasion of the fifth Music Matters product presentation at Definitive Audio in Seattle. This "event" consisted of six show rooms with equipment and manufactures' reps or owners from some well known audio companies. It was part busker, part evangelism, part educational, part ridiculous and part sublime. I will get to the sub-

l i m e p a r t e v e n t u a l l y .
The event was crowded, and I'm not sure if it was the chance to hear some great systems or the free hour devours and wine that brought out the crowd, but it was hard to get a seat in any of the rooms. The first room I attended was the Vandersteen and Ayre Acoustics room. Richard Vandersteen was there to demo his new model 7, and I will relay that he is very proud of his hand built speakers. I thought they sounded nice with solid bass and natural timbre through the spectrum, but the choice of music, particularly the video of an outdoor concert in Germany was not particularly stirring. The Ayre electronics were polite to the point of being a little boring. It wasn't until John Harley from Blue Note pulled out a recent 45 pressing of Lee Morgan's Tom Cat and put it on the Ayre TT that the system seemed to open up. I'd give the speakers a B+ and the Ayre electronics a C+ (but the Ayre TT an A-)

Next up was the B&W and Classe room. This room featured the new version of the speaker maker's 802D and new mono block amps from Classe that look big, angular and retro compared to their rounded front end and line stage on display nearby. I really liked the Classe electronics, they had lots of punch, drive and PRAT. The new 802's had glorious treble and midrange. The bass was tight, maybe a little too tight... I was craving a sub woofer after about 20 minutes into the demo. I would give

the Classe gear a B+ and the speakers a B, and a W as in "where's the bass?"

The next room was interesting - a pair of Maggie 1.6's, a hard drive source, a Peach Tree Decco integrated amp operating as a DAC and line stage connected to a 100 Watt Rotel amp hidden (along with the Wizard) somewhere behind the curtain. Total system cost: \$5,000, a veritable bargain given this evening's other company. The sound was pretty good, mid range had that Maggie spatial thing going on, but why the Decco sales rep chose a Dean Peer song as a demo for this system I will never know - it was like "I am going to prove to you that under-powered Maggies can do convincing bass" and all he did was prove just the opposite. The Peach tree comported itself well, but everything had the slightest veneer or veil over the sound compared to the previous two systems. I would give the whole set up a B- by virtue of the pleasant and engaging mids and overall hoot spa of the presenters.

We seemed to time our progression around the place completely out of sync with the restocking of the food table, so we ate some artichoke dip with a torn up paper plate as a spoon and got another glass of wine while waiting to enter our fourth room (which was, incidentally, room #4) and which sported a Transparent power cable and conditioner demo - Oh Boy AB tests! I relished this opportunity because my co-listener is a retired engineering professor who thinks "cable" is just code for thick wire with big price tag. Wondered if he would hear a difference in this AB exercise. The test equipment was good quality, an Audio Research tubed CD and solid state integrated amp. Speakers were the new Wilson Audio Sophias. Based on previous listening experience, I was ready to like the electronics and HATE the speakers. I actually liked both, in fact I liked them both very much.

The actual demo consisted of listening twice over to a live recorded cut of a female singer and her rock band with the electronics connected to the wall via the stock AR power cords. Then they replaced the stock cords with two Transparent cables with that rat-in-the-python bulge midway down the cable that retail for \$875 each. Then the piece de resistance (nudge, nudge) was to add Transparent's new black power box between the Transparent cables and the outlet. A third Transparent cable was used to connect their power thingy to the outlet.

To cut to the chase, both actions taken improved the sound. The power cables cut through the sibilance in the signer's voice, and the power conditioner thingy increased the perception of the performance hall's spatial cues. Very nice. My engineer friend heard it too. But as an aside, the presentation by the Transparent wire "technician" as he was introduced by the sales rep almost did more harm to the credibility of the products than the demonstration did good... Like Zappa, they should have just shut up and played their wires. Oh, and by the way, the AR and Wilson gear comported themselves very well, B+ for both.

The next room had had a long line outside all evening. The room was actually sponsored by AR, Wilson and Stereophile. The set up was some of AR's reference electronics - CD player, line stage, and the amplifier was one of two existing beta versions of AR's new 450W/channel stereo switching amp. Speakers were Wilson Audio's new Sasha's, and Michael Fremer was there jockeying a SME model 30/12 with the Lyra Titan cartridge, referring to the set up as a "Heirloom" product. Dave Gordon from AR discussed how the amp was so efficient that it was energy star rated, that AR had developed their own switching module for it, and that they were convinced it sounded as good as any

amp they had ever built (more on that later). I believe he said it has a projected retail cost of \$7,600.

Mr. Gordon played something next on CD, but what came later wiped my memory banks of whatever it was. Then Mr. Fremer gave a brief essay on the beauty of vinyl, and produced two plain white covered LPs - one contained a recent pressing of Nat King Cole in mono, and the other was a recent pressing of Fleetwood Mac Rumors in stereo. I think both were 45s. Geeeee! The mono NKC album sounded great. The Fleetwood Mac album was absolutely revelatory. I saw them during that tour in 1977 and had people trying to buy my tickets at the gate for 5 times what I paid for them. It was one of the best rock shows I have ever seen. But that vinyl pressing on that system came MUCH CLOSER to the punch and impact of the band live than anything I had listened to before, and of course, like everybody else, I have heard that recoding on everything from elevator speakers to large audiophile systems. This was a totally new experience though. And it got better!

Peter McGrath from Wilson Audio was next up and he played a CD recording of Frank Sinatra from "Only the Lonely". It was transfixing - great sound stage depth, great tone. Blue eyes sounded goood. Then he played a very recent high resolution digital recording of opera, I believe it was the climax scene from Lucia di Lammermoor. Lights off, music on, people signing, people dying... WOW!!! My engineer friend wasn't quite transported to the venue, but this was about as close as you can come. Very, very impressive! I have always had a soft spot in my heart for AR gear, but Wilson's have left me cold in every previous audition. I am not sure if it was the synergy with the AR electronics, or that Wilson has done something fundamentally different with their speakers in the latest iteration, but this listening

experience was in the top five of all time for me. Solid A's all around.

PS - the amp was cool to the touch after playing the Sasha's at moderate to high volume off and on for 30 minutes. Impressive, energy star rating indeed!

PS2 - I told M. Fremer about my multiple concert experiences with Fleetwood Mac through the 70's and he questioned my ability to remember any of it. I protested feebly, but then lost my train of thought and left the room and went to the last room of the evening where the Linn Gear was set up. Now this was something of a let-down. First of all, the Lp12 they had set up wasn't playing because they had found/put a scratch in the preferred cut on the record, and one of the sales people whisked it out of the room never to return. The factory rep also noted that Linn was cutting production of ALL their CD players, which I found kind of depressing, I don't know why. My engineer friend was beaming because he has ripped all his CD's and now hangs Christmas lights all over his old CD rack as a sort of light sculpture. Now he is digitizing "some" of his favorite LPs. No old fangled stuff for him ("how can you listen to all that noise between the tracks and actually think that is 'better'???"). Anyway, we politely listened to the very polite sounding Majik Digital Stream integrated which is essentially a \$4200, 100W integrated amp with built in DAC and phono pre, playing through some of their also very polite sounding Majik 140 speakers. More AB'ing, this time between the now ill-fated Linn Majik CD player and the DSi. It all sounded very polite to me.

If the CD is a "tweener" technology "between" LPs and streaming digital music, then Linn has now gone entirely "out-from-between" with their new analog-digital music server product. If I was

forced to pick "between" slightly quirky HiFi gear from the UK, I think I would name Naim as my house brand - and there is NOTHING polite about that. They are even sold up the street in a decidedly, shall we say, more casual environment. I will give the Linn gear an "Incomplete" for failure to demo their fine turntable along with the Digital Streamer.

I would like to thank to Definitive Audio for opening their store to us Hi Fi bums, and inviting folks from far and wide to entertain us with their stories, story lines, and some great sounding gear.

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Classified Ads

Ads are free to members and will run for three consecutive issues unless renewed. Please limit ads to make, model, short description, condition, MSRP, asking price, contact information.

Crown CE2000 Amplifier
Balanced & XLR inputs
5 way binding posts & speakon outputs
2 ohm stable
950W x 2 ch into 2 ohms / 1900W x 1ch into 4 ohms
Rack mount (3 rack spaces)
Thermally controlled cooling fan
\$500 obo.
If interested, email: ranedoggy@msn.com

Club discounts

Northwest Sinfonietta

The Northwest Sinfonietta (a classical chamber orchestra) provides discounts to members of our club for performances of the 2007-2008 season. The regular single ticket price of \$38 will be only \$20 per person per performance at the door (or by phone or mail). Just tell them or note on your order that you are a member of the PNWAS. Information and order forms are also available at their website: www.nwsinfonietta.org.

Kosmic

www.kosmic.us
Contact Joe Pittman
206-878-3833

Pro Sound and Vision

Contact George H. Pro
425-889-9499, 425-445-3308 (cell)

Revolution Power

www.revolutionpower.com
Contact: Ken Garza

Visitors Welcome!

Meetings are held on the second Thursday of every month at 7:30 p.m. at 4545 Island Crest Way, Mercer Island, WA 98040.

PNWAS Mission Statement

- ◆ To bring together people with a common interest in music reproduced at its best, for their mutual edification and pleasure.
- ◆ To facilitate the exchange and dissemination of accurate data concerning audio equipment and musical recordings.
- ◆ To promote, sponsor, and cultivate the highest quality reproduction of music in the home.
- ◆ To encourage maintenance of high standards in the performance, recording and transmission of music.

PNWAS Objectives

1. Provide a forum for meeting other audiophiles and exchanging information on musical recordings and audio equipment.
2. Demonstrate and compare equipment and recordings.
3. Give members opportunities to become familiar with the techniques of audio manufacturing,

testing, repair, recording, broadcasting, etc.

4. Explore related avenues as the membership deems appropriate.

Club website

www.audiosociety.org

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U.S. Mail

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Annual dues

\$60 due each January. New members pay a prorated \$5 per month for remainder of year.

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Action Committee Chairs:

Equipment: Vacant—Volunteers?

Refreshment: Vacant—Volunteers?

Editorial

Editorial submissions are welcome.

Content must be audio-related or of general interest to the club in plain text or Word document format without automation (macros or scripts). We reserve the right to edit for style, content, and length.

Editorial deadline: two weeks before meeting date.

Publishing any editorial material is contingent upon the approval of the Executive Committee.

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Audio Society**

Bringing Audio Enthusiasts Together Since 1978

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