

Subjective Sounds

PAUL MESSENGER

HIFICRITIC

AUDIO AND MUSIC JOURNAL

BECAUSE HIFICRITIC IS FUNDED BY ITS READERS THE SUBSCRIPTION COST IS NECESSARILY HIGHER THAN FOR MAGAZINES SUBSIDISED BY ADVERTISING REVENUE, THOUGH CERTAINLY NOT AS HIGH AS PROFESSIONAL SPECIALIST JOURNALS.

Our budget is directed towards obtaining the very best research and writing from the very best freelance authors, whom we encourage to express themselves fully in print, an opportunity not always available via established publishing regimes.

Through the use of a virtual office, we aim to be exceptionally cost effective. Subscription management, production, printing, editorial, design, laboratory measurement and journalism are scattered around the world, yet are also efficiently and almost instantaneously linked at the touch of an e-mail send button.

Our independence from product advertising allows us to criticise and comment without fear or favour. The HIFICRITIC team scrutinises interesting and internationally important issues and equipment in depth and detail, technically and subjectively, and provides comprehensive investigations into the key issues facing high quality stereo music recording and reproduction today.

Paul Messenger, Editor

SUBSCRIPTION DETAILS: Full details are provided on the WWW.HIFICRITIC.COM website, including foreign rates and secure electronic payment. If you prefer to pay direct for the UK please copy this page and send the filled in form, including a cheque payable to HIFICRITIC Ltd and send it to: **Hi Fi Critic Ltd., PO BOX 59214, LONDON, NW3 9EZ.**

Our website supports the day-to-day activities, reports, archive and download material, while the Journal contains the primary contemporary output of our editorial team. The HIFICRITIC audio journal is a full colour print magazine with about 40,000 words of original editorial content per issue. To see what is in our most recent issue, see our [current issue page](#).

Name

Address

.....

.....

Town.....

Post Code

Country.....

Email

Please give your choice of issue number for start of subscription (see above) Issue no.....

UK SUBSCRIPTION PRICES: (mail included)

1 Year £63, expanded quarterly issues

With a further, 5th issue free (25% discount)

The hi-fi industry today is split, quite obviously and dramatically, into two quite distinct sections. On the one hand, new style computer-based digital hi-fi equipment is appealing to a computer literate, techno-savvy generation that automatically embraces any new technologies with enthusiasm, and welcomes the apparent operating convenience.

On the other it's impossible to visit hi-fi shows these days without noticing the continuing and growing strength of what some dismiss as 'oldfashioned' hi-fi, as seen in the steady increase in the use of vinyl discs and valve amplifiers in the demonstrations.

I can appreciate both points of view, but admit it's quite difficult to achieve equal enthusiasm for both, and their mutual exclusivity is positively schizophrenic.

My role in journalism not only gives me early access to new technologies, it makes investigating them virtually obligatory, though I admit that my enthusiasm for the latest technogadgetry has been growing increasingly thin.

Furthermore, my ability to guess and predict the future has always been decidedly suspect. For example, through much of the home cinema 1990s I reviewed dozens of TV sets, which in their way were every bit as interesting as loudspeakers. In the late 1990s the first of the flat screen plasmas started appearing. I took one look and immediately decided they were not only rubbish, they were also very expensive rubbish, initially costing several times as much as an equivalent size colour picture tube (CPT)-based set. "These will never catch on", I thought.

Twelve years later of course I now have a 53inch Pioneer plasma screen fixed to the wall of my lounge, replacing the lovely 36inch Panasonic CPT set that finally died. The pictures are still not that wonderful (not even the HD ones – another over-hyped new technology in my opinion), but they're adequate enough, certainly impressively large, and the sets now cost much less than those earlier CPT equivalents, which are of course unobtainable in any case.

A major reason that plasma (and LCD) TVs took over was of course hang-on-the-wall convenience. And much the same argument also applied when CD started taking over from vinyl in the 1980s, and indeed when solid state electronics started supplanting valves back in the 1960s.

While convenience and performance are normally used to justify these major changes in direction – plasmas have flat geometry; CD has no surface noise; solid state runs cool and is more reliable – other less obvious agendas invariably lurk beneath.

On the surface, 'computer-music' (for want of a better term) is wonderfully convenient, and promises steadily improving performance with the ultimate practical potential to deliver hi-res digital audio.

Scratch that surface, however, and cracks do become visible, and my own experiences have not been particularly easy or happy. My problems have mostly had to do with the fundamental immaturity of the computer scene, exacerbated by my own lack of interest and enthusiasm in doing battle with the damn things.

Both software and hardware seem to need regular updating. So the recordings I made a few years ago are not up to the standard of those I can make today. And when I renewed my computer a year or two back (with allegedly exactly the 'same' model), my installer singularly failed to get my Squeezebox working, after hours of trying.

In complete contrast, much of the vinyl I bought forty years ago sounds even better today. Such continuity simply doesn't happen in today's frenetically changing world, and it would seem that the stability of a medium might be directly proportional to its age!

'Computer music' is certainly maturing, and Linn's 2009 decision to stop making CD players in favour of its DS 'streamers' seems to have been vindicated. However, vinyl's comeback is also impressive: Rega recently set a new company record, making 2,000 turntables in one month. So it looks as though hi-fi's schizophrenia will continue for the foreseeable future.