

HIFICRITIC REPORTS:

The Third *Hi Fi News* Show, Windsor, 24th, 25th October: 2015



While not overflowing there was a firm and steady attendance at this show and several rooms required advanced ticketing, so popular were the exhibits.

Arguably the biggest speaker on *The HI FI Show* block was the curvaceous all alloy tower, the *KEF Muon*, back for a further outing after several years, thanks to a worldwide upgrade program. The 100 or so made were a limited edition, and more recent developments on *Uni-Q* concentric driver technology for the *Blade* and *Blade 2* have prompted matching crossover and bass driver improvements for the *Muon*. For £10,000 or so *KEF* engineers will fly to any customer and perform the full upgrade to this £100,000 loudspeaker: the new version was ably demonstrated.

Interestingly, not only was the sound very promising, but eyes closed, it sounded like a normally sized example, but very powerful, and was not bloated in a way that their huge size might have suggested. The presentation also included the diminutive *Reference One* which stood up to the unintended comparison with *Muon* very well: we need to review the *Reference One*, and soon.



KEF Muon second edition, and for comparison the diminutive *Reference One*. By the way, *Muon* looked much better in the flesh, here the photo lighting has really exaggerated the -polished surfaces.



The high end *Moon Audio* stack which KEF used for the Muon demo, which material included visitor's LPs. Almost every room had LP playback options

Absolute Sounds take this opportunity to field almost their entire range of brands and products, taking especial care to showcase the latest introductions to larger seated audiences; as well as is possible under show conditions. While only a taste of what is possible may be demonstrated this way it is always clear to visitors when audio systems are installed with great care, whatever difficulties of room acoustics and electricity supply are involved. There were so many star products in action at *Absolute Sounds* it is only possible to highlight a few specials. *Magico* provided the latest iteration of the *S-7*, £60,000 plus, first seen at Munich in early prototype form, but nevertheless more than interesting, and now further refined over the past few months, here sounding faster and more open than before. I reckon that this is a most significant speaker development.



John Giolas (Constellation) and Brian Rivas (Absolute Sounds) running the *Magico S-7 / Constellation* suite. Without artifice, huge levels of structured detail were delivered over a wide frequency range by the above system; the drive was from the new *Constellation Hercules II* stereo block with the *Virgo III* preamplifier, ably sourced from that familiar high end media server, *The Beast*, which has true high end *MSB Platinum* convertors at its heart.



Wilson Audio Sabrina with Audio Research Reference 150 SE

Driving similarly sized audiences was *Wilson Audio's* elegant and quite compact floor stander *Sabrina*, a sophisticated and well sculpted three-way which was playing improbably loudly in this audience space, and to good effect; impressive bass with a large sound stage and a nicely detailed sound. They survived near-corner placement, this position dictated by the unusually lossy and uneven low frequency behaviour of the room. Here orchestrated by recording engineer and brand ambassador *Peter McGrath*, drive was from tube/valve Audio Research components comprising the *CD9* source, the brand new *Reference 6* pre, driving the *Reference 150 SE* stereo power amplifier; high end cable looms were from *Transparent*.



Sonus Faber Venere Signature

While not formally presented I got a promising earful from the latest Italian made *Sonus Faber Venere Signature* tower speaker, visually showy, and impressive in stature, with three 180mm pure piston bass drivers per side . It sounded dynamic and powerful, with almost shining clarity and costs £3,900 a pair, talk about bang for the buck!



Symmetry borrowed a pair of tall *Magneplanars*, (stock photo) the 3.7i, which performed well in this larger space driven by the new high value yet well finished *Audio Alchemy* components, whose design I was able to discuss with Alchemy owner/ designer *Peter Madnick*. While he is an electronic design major on the upmarket *Constellation* team, here he played his *Audio Alchemy DPA-1* power amplifier; a Class D type that he was sure would alter my thinking on this technology. It was partnered by *DDP-1 DAC pre*, and *DMP-1* digital music player, soon to be joined by a custom phono preamp. These components look to be a fine combination of value and performance at around £2,000 each. These *Audio Alchemy* components also powered the *Elac* budget speaker demo.



A stack of the new *Audio Alchemy* components



Elac powered into this show with the new Andrew Jones designed budget stand mount compact, this the first in their Debut series. While Andrew is well known for his excellent work on the costly audiophile TAD monitors, and more recently for genuinely low cost and well regarded designs under the Pioneer brand, here he is associated with the long established German company Elac. Elac's own drivers were too pricy for this high value, low cost project and here Andrew has designed the lot from the ground up, including woven aramid fibre (Kevlar) cones and top quality doped fabric treble domes. The sound was lively yet unforced, with natural timbres and very good detail and surprisingly good stereo imaging, a great start to this project



The *Pre-audio* invitingly illuminated acrylic turntable, with a remarkable air bearing tone arm, parallel tracking. Power amplification was by *Thoress* and sounded nicely involving via a large horn speaker, even in this very cramped space



Two *Thoress* SE power amplifiers. Some *Lampizator* units were also present



Graham Tricker of *GT Audio* fielded his SE amplifiers, driving *Devore Orangutan 0/93* high efficiency loudspeakers, and to good effect



The *Dynaudio Confidence S 3.4LE* was driven by a punchy sounding *NAIM* stack including the *NAP300*. And if you know your speaker cables these were Naim Super Luminas, perhaps more costly than these tall floorstanding loudspeakers!



That properly supported *Naim* stack for Dynaudio included the familiar high end *NDS* streamer and the irreplaceable *UnitiServe*.



EgglestoneWorks Emma loudspeakers provided pleasingly musical replay in this small room arranged by *Divine Audio*, with driving, chunky bass despite the seemingly impossibly small bass ports on the *Emmas*. The *AnalogueWorks Turntable One* was equipped with the 12" *SME-M2/AT-33SE* cartridge feeding *Rogue Audio* valve amplification.



KingSound showed their latest and most beautifully made electrostatic headphone, and with a difference. This *KS-H3* is portable and the alloy block in the picture is of an amplifier and polarising power supply with a 14 hour battery life. When worn these cans proved very light and comfortable. The company is perhaps better known for its large electrostatic loudspeakers.



Signature Audio Systems showed the new *PS Audio BHK* power amplification by Bascombe King, here with fine sounding, passive *Vandersteen Treo CT* loudspeakers. The open architecture *PS Audio Directstream DAC* is easily upgraded through free software revisions as they are developed, with several already pipelined.



The *PS Audio* stack



Signature Audio Systems also fielded Dali floorstanders, driven by a fetching array of *Jeff Rowland* electronics and I noted that their latest compact power amplifier was said to have returned to a Class A/B type, thus differing from the current series of Class D designs.



CAD Audio and *SoundKaos*; a most civilised and musical performance here, with these distinctive loudspeakers now showing extended but quick bass thanks to a matching, new, push-pull force cancelled, drum shaped sub woofer



The very tidy looking *Bakoan AMP-51* power amplifier from Hong Kong at £10,000 working nicely with *CAD Audio* digital audio and *SoundKaos* loudspeakers



Henley

Once again it proved hard not to show off the articulate *Roksan Darius*, the integral stand mount loudspeaker in the *Henley Designs* room running with the *Project Signature 12* vinyl spinner here distinguished by an intermediate flywheel drive and 12inch tone arm. (*Darius* review in the *hificritic* Vol. 9 No 4 issue, in preparation)



Kudos Titan 808 loudspeakers with the *LINN Exakt DS* active drive system, including LF room compensation, delivered fast tuneful bass from digital sources.



KOG partnered with DCS showing the latest DCS Rossini digital audio components including that tasty £18,000 CD player. There was a veritable stack of Entreq noise reducing accessories on their new Athena rack system and the very tidy and very well focused sound was provided by Avalon Acoustics in the form of the well regarded Transcendent floor stander, amplification by VTL the S-200 Signature power amp and matching Series II preamp. Stillpoints were used under the loudspeakers and they seem to suit Avalons.



Puresound showed their own valve amplifier designs the *2A3*, with Aurorasound components, plus that unusual sub-chassis equipped, direct drive turntable *Motus II*. The lively, dynamic and well timed sounds emanated from a new *Heco*, the *Direkt*, a new, large, broad fronted classic bass-reflex loudspeaker, highly dynamic and efficient with a 10inch pulp cone bass-mid and a semi-horn loaded dome tweeter. Despite the cramped room the sound was substantially entertaining and it was proving hard to move on. The lively sound impressed me more than their appearance but we would certainly like to review the *Direkt*.



Chord Electronics showed their new DAC, *Dave* in a neat system fed by the popular *Melco* server



KEF Reference Five with *Chord Electronics*