

# The Autumn Hi-Fi Shows

## MARTIN COLLOMS REPORTS ON THE LONDON INDULGENCE SHOW

At the Indulgence show 2017, some 250 brands exhibited over five floors of the Hammersmith Novotel (formerly the Cunard), including some massive suites with substantial sound systems. Both live music and music production featured, and plenty of floor area was devoted to headphones earphones and supporting amplification, as before.

Kog Audio showed German high end product from Tidal (not to be confused with the Tidal music streaming service, of Norwegian origin). A pre- and power amp were on hand with a pair of powerful but more moderate cost, adjustable floorstanding loudspeakers called Velvetec, in a white matt textured finish and priced at £23,000. The finish contrasted with the deep piano gloss of more costly examples of this genre. Dealer Lotus is looking after Tidal Audio in the UK.

The ground floor had a number of exhibits including guitars, vinyl, cables, accessories, and not least Townshend who were showing the latest version of the *Allegri* passive auto-transformer line controller, now called the *Allegri Plus*. Improvements include a 2.5mm front panel line jack for auxiliary music players, and a revised volume step calibration for finer control of the loudness settings.

CAD demonstrated its new local grounding components for RFI noise control (perhaps providing an alternative to Entreq), here kitted out with a high-tech Harmonic Resolution *HRS* audio rack. A Trilogy *925* integrated amplifier ably drove this effective noise control demonstration with Kaiser *Kavero Vinace* loudspeakers.

The Vertere turntable and vibration control system was working here with F M Acoustics electronics that included a phono stage that had click and scratch suppression for noisier LPs; it sounded quite effective too.

The inimitable and irrepressible Costas Metaxas showed a new line of electronics and loudspeakers from Metaxas and Sins, looking as if they came from the film set of the opera house in the *Fifth Element*. Costas played open reel tapes on his prized Stellavox master recorder, and these sounded delicately refined and atmospheric.

Yamaha's bass reflex *NS-5000* has recently been introduced to commemorate and acknowledge the

pioneering *NS-1000* sealed box monitor of some 40 years ago. After searching for an ideal material to replace the pure beryllium of the original, Yamaha developed a silver coloured diaphragm made of ZYLON®. Used for all three drive units, it's a synthetic fabric that was invented in Japan and is vapour-coated with a reinforcing monel alloy. (Monel is an alloy of nickel and copper with further trace metals, which variations confer a range of properties.)

Musical Fidelity's *Core* streamer is now well under way in the marketplace. The KEF *Reference One* three way compacts sang well in this simple but effective demonstration.

I knew Goldmund were at the show but the signage was a bit confusing. I eventually found it in the Sonata room, a North London dealer/agent who holds the Goldmund agency for the UK. It was worth the search because fine sounds were on dem in this room, from the Goldmund *ProLogos Plus*. A three-way bass reflex design, stand mounted, it is distinguished by a cantilever styled frame support while the enclosure is firmly grounded mechanically by a rigid vertical central spar/spike. It is fully active, very powerful and wirelessly connected to music sources *via* a high definition proprietary Goldmund interface. It has a 3-way crossover implemented in the digital domain, with full amplitude, phase and time correction. Total amplification amounts to 1.2kW and it sounded like it, fully in control of the input signal. The price is somewhere north of £60,000 complete.

## JULIAN MUSGRAVE PROVIDES A VERY PERSONAL VIEW OF THE HI-FI NEWS SHOW IN WINDSOR

While all audio shows have their quirks, this show is quirky to the point of nuttiness. I'll not go on too much about the dysfunctional parking or the Gormenghast-like nature of the hotel structure itself, which has more than its fair share of blind corridors, smelly back rooms and functional non-sequiturs.

No; it's the show that puzzles. Why, for instance, split the show over five separate areas? (I think it was five but may have missed a zone or two!) One requires days of walking and a sat-nav to get there. One requires the use of a secret staircase. Another is a wide, dusty tumbleweed infested corridor that goes on for ever and is populated by a few audio rooms but rather more vast echoing chambers where



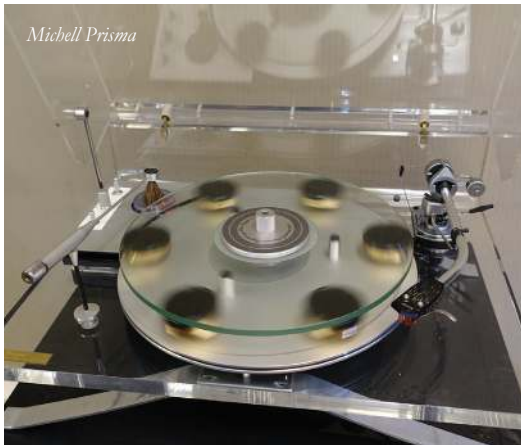
Max Townshend and the *Allegri Plus*



Goldmund *Prologos*



A TEAC open reel and Pearl single driver loudspeakers



Michell Prisma



Victoria Ballan

the wind blows ragged net curtains against long-forgotten skeletons. (Presumably of show-goers from a past age that couldn't find their way out, or died of boredom.)

Why charge a will-sapping £22 for entry? Bristol is £12; other shows are free to the public (of which more later). And why so few companies? (Again, more anon.) Quirky? I should ko-ko.

A key absentee this year was Naim/Focal. I commented last year on the paint-stripping nature of the sound in their room. Then I listened (if that is the right word) for all of ten minutes, which was longer than all the other visitors by a considerable margin. This was two otherwise good brands that should not, in my opinion, be paired at shows. Their wise absence falls into the: 'If you are in a hole, stop digging' class. So let's move on to the kit that was being demonstrated this year.

#### **Sonus Faber/Audio Research/Martin Logan:**

This was one of three rooms taken by Absolute Sounds. In the morning the Sonus Fabers sounded pleasant if anodyne. I returned later in the day and listened to a pair of Martin Logans which also sounded pleasant but anodyne. It seems that these brands, along with the various electronics they perform with are all of the pleasant but anodyne persuasion and are now struggling against both cheaper upstarts and the super-cleans like Magico, KEF and YG. I saw no Krell kit.

#### **Metronome Kalista/Constellation/Magico S3 II:**

A nicely chosen selection of acoustic music showcased the strengths of this uber-system - detailed, powerful and with a vast soundstage. Also its weaknesses: for me it was a tad edgy, made small instruments sound overlarge, and in my opinion was also played too loud. Talking to other show goers confirmed my enduring impression that these uber-systems often underperform at shows.

#### **Luxman/Dali:**

This room was an oasis of calm, free from distortion and with a very musical sound.

#### **Chord/KEF Reference:**

This repeated last year, when I noted that Chord amplification driving the *Muon* was impressive but rather forward and bright. This was another equipment match made in the nether regions, and I do wonder what these people are thinking of. Nor was I alone; comments overheard in the bar suggest that for some listeners this dem did KEF few favours.

#### **SME/Nagra/YG Acoustics:**

This was another of all too few rooms worth stopping in. Not only had great care been taken in system matching and set up, but a live musician was performing and we were able to compare live with recorded sounds! The presentation was a bit muddled, but I found it almost impossible to tell when the guitarist had stopped playing and the equipment took over. I'm sure that more critical and longer listening would have shown up differences, but that is not really what shows are about. If distributor Padood had set out to persuade audiophiles that their equipment came very close indeed to the real thing, that mission was accomplished. I also had a long and interesting discussion with SME about white or grey *Model 15* turntables, *Series V* tonearms, and all sorts of exciting adventures in colour from this slumbering giant.

#### **T+A:**

Pure serendipity put me in this room at exactly the right time to hear Mathias Bode from Germany's *Stereo* magazine demonstrate the differences between MP3, CD and high res data files on a good, but not especially expensive T+A system. Time and time again the flat and threadbare nature of MP3 was exposed: the sounds were there, but the music wasn't. The difference between CD and 24/192 was much less obvious, but I thought I heard an



*“there were also numerous examples of enthusiast-oriented (ie bulky!) loudspeakers, such as horns and dipoles”*



*Colourful new Focals*

enriching of the instrumental mix and more air. The room was packed; the presenter wise and articulate; and we all went away thinking we were enriched by the experience. And the equipment was super too. Like the Padood room, the intent and presentation were excellent. This is the way to do shows: do one interesting, fairly simple thing really well, using the best equipment you have, and leave the rest to the intelligence of your audience.

**Others:**

I have missed out many, if not most, rooms simply because they were unremarkable, making so-so sounds on (apparently) so-so equipment using the standard repertoire of audiophile recordings and genres. Being bored rigid by the same tracks on unremarkable rigs is not what I go to shows for. I must also comment on the wisdom, or rather the lack of it, of distributors creating show systems from the brands they sell. I understand the commercial reasons for this but all too often they do not make good music together, and that can't be a good thing.

Which brings me to the wrap. And I have to say I found the Windsor show a disappointment. It was insufficiently representative, with many poorly sorted systems and a general lack of innovation from the trade. I must also comment on us audiophile mug punters – the ones blagged for £22. It's the same faces year in year out, and we are all, to a man, tyre-kickers. I could not identify one face which had '£100K system-buyer' written on it, and I do wonder just how long Absolute Sounds, Padood and other high rollers are going to keep pouring time, money and people into entertaining carping, know-it-all bottom feeders like myself. It makes no commercial sense whatsoever to anyone in the trade.

Neither does it, I think, make much audiophile sense to anyone in the hobby. I'm not going to spend another £22 plus for travel, plus an overnight hotel to schlep round such an event. Like they say on Dragon's Den: "I'm Out".

**WARSAW IS NOW THE SECOND BIGGEST SHOW IN EUROPE. PAUL MESSENGER GOES TRAVELLING!**

If you really want to find out what's going on in hi-fi today, you first need to get to Heathrow and then catch a British Airways plane to Warsaw, in Poland (and in November!). After many years operating under the Soviet yoke the Poles might still be in catch-up mode, but they're certainly enthusiastic about music and its reproduction. The attendance figure for the show was a claimed 14,000,



which is certainly much more than any British show, and there was no avoiding the crowds and the crush once the show had opened. And whereas May's Munich High End show has developed into a business-to-business affair, Warsaw remains very much an enthusiasts show.

The show has grown steadily so that it now occupies three sites. The Sobienski hotel was presumably the original venue, followed by the larger rooms in the Golden Tulip hotel that stands on the opposite corner of the intersection. Last year (and this) saw a shuttle bus added, and this took attendees to a newly built football stadium on the edge of the city, where most of the larger brands were using big Sky Box 'hospitality suites' to show their wares.

Whereas the Golden Tulip was limited to eight large rooms and a corridor, the Sobienski had nearly 100 rooms distributed around eight floors! A further 100-odd rooms could then be found at the stadium – this is by no means a small show!

Many of the rooms were run by Polish dealers, located in various cities around this large country (the Polish population is 38 million). But there were plenty of brands, and plenty to interest the casual visitor like yrs trly too. One trend that sticks firmly in my mind is the considerable popularity of valve amps, of all shapes, sizes and types. In numbers terms they even seemed to be at least on a par with the solid stateres even though they were supposed to have been superceded half a century ago.

And while it's certainly true that there were plenty of convenience-oriented components on view (streamers, Bluetooth etc), there were also numerous examples of enthusiast-oriented (ie bulky!) loudspeakers, such as horns and dipoles, and plenty of stands were still using vinyl as a source too. The stands selling vinyl seemed to be busy too, and in some respects the show did remind me of the UK's Audiojumble, but on a massive scale.

Anybody with a taste for nostalgia should take time out to visit Warsaw next November. The organiser Adam Mokrzycki already added a Smart Home feature this year, and is frighteningly on the ball when it comes to growing his show. I do, however, believe he'll have to change his surname for something more pronounceable before making a bid for the whole world!