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Shows and concerts are largely recommencing. AXPONA 2022 was recently held in the USA with some success, while the Munich High End show came back after three years away, and Andrew Everard was there to take a look at some new exhibits and unfortunately old trends. And the UK show season is firing up again: the North West Audio Show took place in mid-June, and then we have the 2022 UK Hi-Fi Show Live back at the Ascot Racecourse Grandstand.

Moving into Autumn, the UK Audio Show is at the beginning of October at the De Vere Staverton Estate, Daventry, while the biannual Audio Jumble audio 'swap shop' follows up its success in May with a return to The Angel Centre in Tonbridge, Kent on Sunday 2nd October. Expect the usual mix of bargains, curiosities and the odd ambitious price – so maybe not so far from a traditional hi-fi show, then.

And I've been enjoying live music again: one of my favourite musicians is the prolific and workaholic jazzman Pat Metheny, currently on a massive whirlwind world tour which I managed to catch at the Hammersmith Apollo. Unless the sound is awful, which it wasn't, these live performances simply carry you away. PA or not, live sound remains stunningly dynamic and expressive. Metheny is tireless, composing, recording, and performing, a force of nature. This London gig was about halfway through the marathon schedule of his 100-concert, Side-Eye world tour, and he was joined onstage by Blue Note artist, pianist and keyboardist James Francies, and drummer Joe Dyson – both of whom were excellent.

Talking of things live – or as close as possible in the recorded world – our industry personality is the erstwhile intrepid diver and underwater photographer Mike Valentine: the founder of Chasing the Dragon audiophile recordings, specialising in high-definition audio files and direct cut LP issues, takes Chris Frankland behind the scenes of his work. And there's a link with hi-fi shows and live performances there, too: Valentine is an enthusiastic demonstrator of his productions at hi-fi events, as Andrew Everard experienced in Munich, and is planning a 'live with audience' recording project at Suffolk's Snape Maltings.

Loudspeakers remain an endlessly popular topic, perhaps because there is such a variety on offer, and in this issue I cover three very different examples. The Dynaudio Emit 20 stand/shelf mount brings all that company's extensive experience to bear in the creation of a well-priced but surprisingly powerful compact form. Meanwhile the term 'compact' could also be applied to the slender, full-bandwidth and high-value floorstander from Q Acoustics, the beautifully-finished Concept 50.

The third of this set is the increasingly popular Magico A3, a slim all-aluminium floorstanding design, satin anodised in black, and which mightily impressed our listening panel. Once properly installed and aligned in the room it sailed through our test programme: underestimate its performance at your peril as you may well miss its full high-end potential by not taking it sufficiently seriously.

Also in what's become something of a loudspeaker issue, Chris Frankland explores unusual Latvian desktop loudspeakers from Aretai, engineered by industrial designer Jānis Irbe, as well as the latest Russel K creation, the 120Se – a slim £3,000 three-driver floorstanding design. And not to be outdone, Chris Kelly delights in the all-British Ophidian Mambo 2 speaker, while our audio scientist Keith Howard tackles the many difficulties involved in loudspeaker measurement including the thorny subject of relating test results to perceived sound quality.

But amplification isn't overlooked: PrimaLuna books a place with its EVO 400 integrated amplifier, reviewed by Chris Kelly, while Audiolab joins the 'all-in-one' party with its Omnia, complete with classic class A/B power amplification CD transport and streaming, plus analogue inputs, too. Meanwhile Marantz has a new spin for its strikingly-styled Series 30, adding the Model 40n: its a classic integrated stereo amplifier re-imagined for the digital age with built-in streaming tech like HEOS, Bluetooth and Apple AirPlay 2.

Sharing my enthusiasm for passive line volume controls, Kevin Fiske scrutinises the IcOn 4PRO and finds much to favour, not least the high build quality and the relatively moderate price. But does he like the sound? Take a wild guess...

Keith Howard is somewhat less enamoured of the first headphone from the Mark Levinson brand: the No.5909 carries a £1000 price-tag and a comprehensive specification, but is it trying too hard to offer too much? And finally in a varied issue Steve Harris looks closely at the Shaktspin analyser – a very clever way to find out how well your turntable is behaving.

Martin Colloms
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