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Montreal Salon Audio / Montreal Audio Fest 2017 Show Report Part 3 Show Report By Rick Becker



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Back at the AntiCafe I took a stool at the counter by the window that overlooked the main street and tore through my chicken as I caught the last couple of songs by a local musician. I sort of hoped a young Ferlinghetti might get up and start reading poetry, but it would have been in French and it didn't happen anyway. I wandered into the kitchen where Ben made up a hot chocolate for me and I took a comfy seat on a sofa to review the day's photos. (I shouldn't have.) Afterward, I returned to the kitchen where I instinctively washed my cup in the sink as I listened to a couple of dudes talk about flying from Moscow to Morocco, recalling how wayward I was when I was their age. It was \$3 and change for the hour+ that I was there, including the drink. I gave Ben a \$5US bill to show my appreciation for being so welcoming. I confessed that I was totally lost in Montreal and he beamed up a map on the computer to show me the way back to the Bonaventure. Somewhere a man should be proud to have Ben as his son. As I left I noticed a small poster (in French) about a film made about the place that might be viewable on [their Facebook page](#). Check it out. The place is a trip.

The city blocks began adding up and I started seeing people wearing red and white Canadiens' jerseys walking in the opposite direction. I had missed a turn and on doubling back came upon the old train station and the familiar St. Hubert restaurant. There must have been a game that night as there often is on the audio fest weekend. I dropped into the parking garage to pick up juice and my battery chargers and returned to my room. That's when disaster struck.

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In the chaos of leaving Rochester, somehow I had left with the battery charger for my previous still camera. Maybe the right one had fallen out of the bag in the car; and maybe the guys from SoundStage that I saw in the bar would have one that I could borrow. Nope and nope. I thought about the amp-hour I spent looking at my photos in the AntiCafe. Plan B was to take lots of video notes on Sunday and maybe squeeze a couple of more shots out of the still camera battery.

In the morning, it was breakfast at McDonalds in the train station across the street as usual. Large coffee, for sure. As I returned through the station I came across Art Dudley from Stereophile who was returning to the States that morning via rail. We chatted about cars and I learned about the exceptional all-wheel-drive capabilities of his new (to him) Audi sportwagen, which gave me something to think about after my little "experience" two nights earlier in the ADKs.

After downloading all my gear to the car, I headed for all the rooms on Level 1 that I had missed on Saturday. Praying that I might have enough battery power for a few crucial shots, I knew I had to shoot to kill. It felt kind of like the old days shooting with film. Every frame was precious and I had maybe a 12 shot roll, not a 36.

First off I dropped back to **Gershman Acoustics** in room 2413 to catch a listen to their new Studio II stand mounted monitor (\$3500). Eli tells me it is 88dB/W/m efficiency with about 4 or 5 Ohm lowest impedance, 6 Ohm nominal. Frequency range is said to be 25Hz to 20kHz and it sounded quite good with very respectable bass coming from the 8" woofer. I noticed the woofer had a very large rubber surround that allows for very deep excursion. The top end, coming from a 1" coated silk dome tweeter seemed a touch hot to me, but that might have been the recording with closely miked cymbals with a small jazz group. Eli tells me it is already in use in some recording studios. This is definitely a monitor worth investigating further as it seems to be a very good value for someone looking for a robust, full-range monitor with a small 12" wide x 10" x 17" high form factor. The curved side panels give it a touch of style to counterbalance the satin black studio finish. A gloss color finish would make these simply spectacular, though it would drive up the price, for sure.

Niveau 1//Level 1 Rooms

Moving over to Level 1 which I totally missed on Saturday, I first encountered **Richard Kohlruss** in the **Asona** (formerly Vmax Services) room, 1216. I spotted a **Hegel** CD player feeding a very stylish **Pathos** headphone amplifier with two tubes protruding out the top. Of particular interest was the large circular red rubber volume knob that breaks into new territory. I had the pleasure of listening to the new **HiFiman** HE1000 V2 (a very expensive set of cans) which sounded very good, plugged into the Pathos amp. Of course tubes can have a way of making any headphone sound good and Pathos has a long history of using tubes, particularly in the input stage of hybrid amps.

I don't often think of **Ann Bisson** as a classical pianist, but her CD with **Vincent Belanger** heard on a modest **Hegel** rig powering smallish **PMC** floorstanding speakers was a powerful, convincing argument in her favor. The amp was the new Hegel Rost, a 75 Wpc integrated amp that is stable into 2 Ohms — very impressive! Not to forget that it has a built-in DAC, AirPlay capability and more. Peeking around back, I noticed the rig was strung with **Tellurium Q** cables, a brand that is racking up accolades in Great Britain with models ranging from affordable to moderately priced. Nothing extravagant. From what I heard here, they must be doing something right. Further investigation is warranted if you get the chance. I met Patrick Sareault, Director of Sales at Brosseau here in room 1216, too, who pointed out the black **Innuos** Zen MkII server hiding at the bottom of the rack with the Hegel gear. It goes for \$1600.

In 1215 or 1218 I ran into **Rene Evans** of **Bonefish Audio** who is the Canadian distributor for **SBooster**, a power supply upgrade for any component that has a cheap external power supply (e.g. wall wart, though Rene was too polite to use that term). Manufacturers often outsource their power supplies to avoid going through all the certification necessary for countries around the world, thus ending up with something cheap, light weight and more affordable. SBooster has developed a more universal external power supply with a variety of adapters and certified them for correct polarity and the proper voltage for a wide range of manufacturers and specific product lines from those manufacturers. Their hefty two pound (or so) power supply has more power and more stable supply of current. It retails in Canada for \$499 which may seem like an expensive "add-on", but as Rene pointed out, in the case of a Lumin server, the entry level model retails for \$2700 and the upper level model goes for close to \$6000. The SBooster for \$499 takes the entry level Lumin almost up to the performance of the upper level for a little more than only half the price of the upper model, making the SBooster a very high-value option. I like the way he thinks!

In 1215 or 1218, again, I encountered a very transparent rig in which **Triangle** Signature floorstanders (\$9000) were driven by the uniquely styled **Auris** Forte 150 monoblocks from Serbia (\$20,000/pr). These push-pull design amps put out 100 Watts each with a pair of KT150 tubes. The Auris preamp (\$5000) and DAC (\$5000) brought the system to \$39,000 plus XLO cables, the stand and tweaks. Very transparent, focused and dynamic sound characterized this room.

Erikson Consumer is one of the largest audio distributors in Canada supplying home audio/video, mobile and multimedia products. They showed here in rooms 1221 and 1223. In one room I heard the **Revel** Performa 3 Series F208 floorstanding speakers (\$7000) driven by the **Arcam** SR250, an AVR two-channel integrated amp (\$5500) offering the connectivity of an audio-video receiver and a built-in DAC. The rig was tethered with **Straightwire** cables. Unfortunately, the room was quite noisy and it was impossible to get a fee for the quality offered here. On a side table I was able to get a better listen to the **Master and Dynamic** MW60 wireless, over the ear headphones that sounded good and the less expensive MH40S2 over the ear headphones (\$550) powered by a **TEAC** stack of electronics that sounded very good... even though they may be the less expensive model. On silent display was a TEAC all-in-one CD receiver CR-H101, a small-scale, lifestyle unit.

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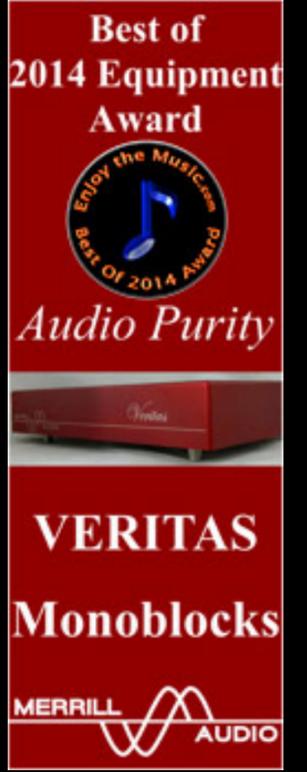


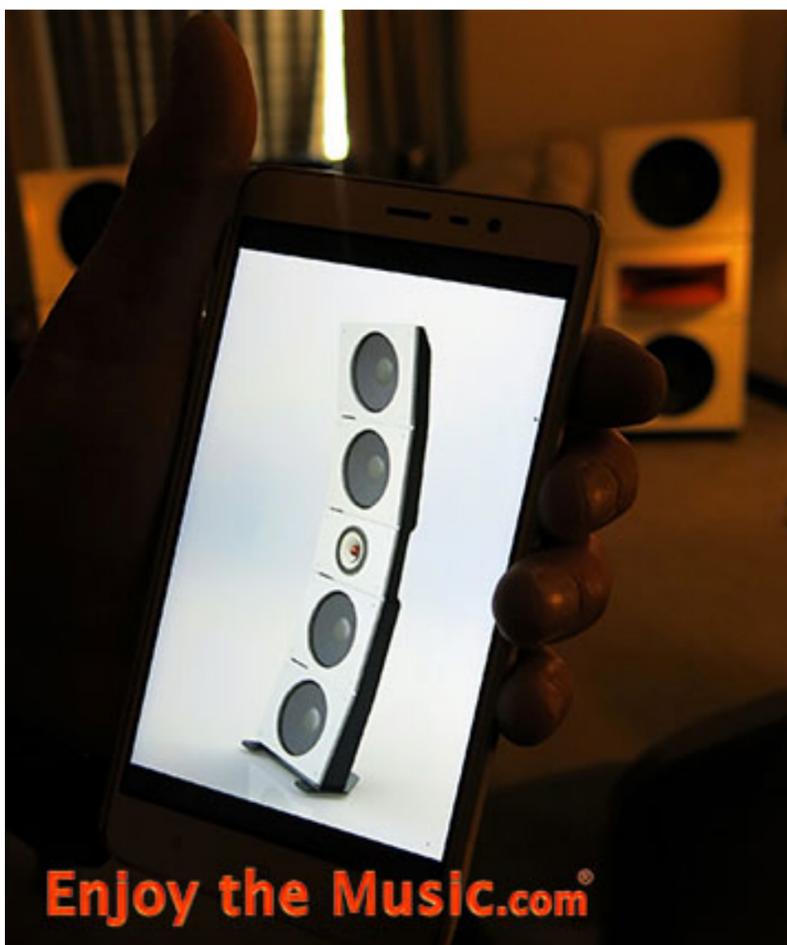
Next was the **Coherent Speakers** room in 1229, a stop that I look forward to at both Montreal and TAVES. A couple of shows ago I introduced **Frank Fazzalari** of Coherent Speakers to the **Frank Ng** of **Triode Labs** and the combination of the Triode Labs amps with the Coherent Speakers has been extraordinary. The Model 12 GR (for Golden Ratio) is the smallest of Frank's speakers that I've seen and heard. With a sensitivity of 96dB/W/m and an easy 8 Ohm load for tube amplifiers, the Model 12 GR is said to range from 35Hz to 20kHz and can be driven with amplifiers from 3 to 300 Watts. The 12 GR shown here still has solid wood edges inlaid on all sides, but unlike the floorstanding Model 12 seen before, the edges are stained the same as the sides, rather than given a darker walnut color. The uniform stain gives it a cleaner look, putting the focus on the large concentric driver with a 12" coaxial woofer and 1.75" aluminum driver in the center. In the past, Frank has priced the speaker with the matching stands, but at \$3695, that would seem to be an incredible bargain... especially if it included the fancy footers. Also, the stand shown here seems to be a more substantial design than the parson table stand shown in the past. Driving the 12 GR was a **Triode Lab 2A3** stereo power amp putting out 3.5 Wpc with 2A3 tubes, 6SN7 drivers and an SU4 rectifier, along with fancy **James** transformers. With the all metal chassis, this may have been an older model, as I recall they are migrating to the construction seen on the Triode Lab Au Pre preamp seen in the stand with a very handsome wood surround and a metal top plate to support the tubes and transformers.

The source was a **Baetis** server which he has used before and the DAC appears to be the **Audio Note** (UK) 2.1. The **Nordost** speaker cables were cleverly coiled in a new cable riser, and it should be mentioned that Frank uses Nordost wiring in his speakers as well. The music absolutely floated in this room with a level of bloom, decay and holographic imaging that only I've only heard from 2A3 power amps. This was easily one of the **Best Rooms** at the show again and the attractive price of the 12 GR speakers makes it more accessible than ever. Also noteworthy, on silent display was the Triode Lab 45-RS by Frank Ng, a \$9000 stereo amp putting out 1.5 Watts per channel for those with ultra-efficient loudspeakers. And behind the rack was a vertical slab of live-edge wood with holes of various sizes acting as a cable tree to keep the many power and signal cords randomly spaced — very clever, if your rig is spaced out sufficiently from the wall. Wish I could show you a photo of this.

Moving on to 1233 I met the lovely Nancy Lavoie of **Bleu Stereo**, a distributor of some very select lines. On top of the rack was a **VPI** Prime turntable with the drive unit below. Underneath that was a **Balanced Audio Technology** (BAT) VK-23SE preamp followed below by a VK-P6 phono stage. At the bottom was an **Isotek** power conditioner. A BAT power amp was off to the side of the rack, driving **ELAC** floorstanders in a gloss black finish.







It was the chance encounter with **Ze'ev Schlik** of **PureAudioProject** at the cocktail party last night that I discovered I had missed the entire first floor of the show yesterday. It was a delight to meet up with him and **Rachel** of **Grant Fidelity** and hear the evolutionary form of the **Trio 15TB speaker I reviewed back in 2015**. The speaker version shown here was quite different with a wood horn in the middle and beefed up custom **Eminence** 15" bass drivers. It has cast baskets and 2.5" voice coils, Neodymium magnets, Faraday shield — basically an Alpha 15 driver taken to audiophile grade. The triangular metal support rig has also been replaced by a pair of vertical metal supports for mounting the individual driver panels. This allows the speaker kit to be shipped in a more compact box, saving several hundred dollars. Price has gone up, too, from about \$2900 to \$3700 with **Tang Band** full range drivers and up to \$7500 with the horns. The wood horn has been specifically shaped to correct for the compression driver, so no correction is necessary in the very simple crossover, which occurs at 550Hz.

The DAC was an **ANK DAC5.1 Signature** of which I spoke yesterday. The amp was also from ANK, the **KIT 1** integrated amplifier with 300B tubes. Music was sourced from a laptop computer. Rachel has restructured Grand Fidelity after the passing of her husband. She now focuses on vacuum tubes and is the distributor for PureAudioProject in Canada and in China, though she still offers some Chinese amps and turntables on a "factory direct" basis at very good prices. It is certainly nice to have such a broker who speaks Chinese! And as a teaser, Ze'ev pulled out his phone and showed me a photo of his latest project for those with larger rooms or need for more bass.



With the hype around **Andrew Jones** and the ultra-affordable speakers he's been developing with **ELAC**, I never expected to meet the man. Surely, I thought, he's a marked man for undermining the mega-buck foundations of the High End and thus keeping a very low profile. But there he was, greeting people for ELAC America in room 1234 with his dis-arming personality. The UF5 speaker in the extra cost gleaming white finish was looking far more upscale than its \$2200 cost. If you can only afford \$1500 you can have it in a vinyl finish which, instead of fake wood, is fake metal. Still, only \$1500?! The catch here was that the electronics from Audio Alchemy will cost you quite a bit more, but still not launch you beyond the earth's gravitational pull. Andrew said he has been working with **Peter Madnick** of **Audio Alchemy** for the past two years doing shows. And since they got along so well together, ELAC bought them out. I hope it is smiles all around as this is very fine sound at their respective price points. Not to be overlooked at the bottom of the rack was an **audioquest** Niagara power conditioner.

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