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Posted by: Jonathan Valin at 12:12 pm, December 13th, 2011

Like me (up until a few months ago), most of you have probably never heard of the German turntable manufacturing firm Acoustic Signature, its brilliant chief engineer and CEO Gunther Frohnhöfer, or its beautiful, massive (176+ pound), \$34k flagship turntable, the Ascona. In Europe and Great Britain, I'm told, it's quite a different story. AS 'tables have been highly praised for their superb engineering (this is a German hi-fi product, after all), their unbelievably precise and solid build-quality (ditto), and, of course, their sound.



Acoustic Signature Ascona Turntable

Before I talk about that sound, a few design highlights, starting with the Ascona's platter (called by AS the SilencerPlatter3). Frohnhöfer, who is an electrical engineer, set a very high goal for his top-of-the-line 'table: eliminating the impact of structure-borne vibration, airborne vibration, and bearing noise by removing resonance at all frequencies, and increasing the rotating mass of the platter "to aid stability."

To achieve these goals, Frohnhöfer starts with a 50mm (2-inch) thick solid-aluminum platter with a diameter of nearly 350mm (13.78 inches). This massive platter is CNC-milled in-house (AS, which does a good deal of industrial manufacturing, owns many expensive CNC machines) from a very soft alloy "to optimize its periodic resonance; [in addition] a resonance-reducing material is applied to the bottom face." Solid brass "Silencer" inserts are then fitted into the aluminum to eliminate resonance via constrained-layer damping. (The Ascona uses thirty small Silencers on the outer diameter of the platter, and 24 larger Silencers within the body of the platter.) The holes for the Silencers are drilled and line-bored into the aluminum with a clearance of less than 0.01mm in a pattern that is absolutely true about the center of the turntable (to maintain ideal balance). The fit is so perfect that the Silencers effectively become an integral part of the platter, "absorbing all vibrational energy [so that] the platter remains resonance-free."

To achieve his goal of eliminating bearing noise, Frohnhöfer invented a platter bearing "with the ideal performance characteristics of exact fit, extremely low noise, very low friction, and long-term stability." Manufactured from special hardened and polished steel, with an extremely hard tungsten-carbide ball at its base, "the bearing housing uses perfectly matched and 'aged' sintered-bronze inserts which are self-lubricating; and therefore maintenance-free." The thrust plate is made of a specially developed high-tech material called TIDORFOLON (a unique combination of ferrite, vanadium, Teflon, and titanium).

The platter-drive mechanism, which sits in a separate CNC-milled aluminum housing at the rear of the CNC-machined solid-aluminum plinth, comprises three motors triangulated about the spindle of a subplatter, upon which a massive aluminum flywheel (with its own set of brass Silencer inserts) sits. The three motors drive the subplatter (and the flywheel atop it) via three separate belts. (The flywheel then drives the platter via its own belt.) The motors are powered by an electronic controller (called the AlphaDIG) that uses digital output stages and quartz-lock-loop technology "to [generate] a perfect sine wave at 24V AC." The motors are thus "totally impervious to the negative effects of AC voltage fluctuations," i.e., they should maintain perfect speed stability regardless of house current.

The Ascona's CNC-milled aluminum tonearm-mounting plates are "the most rigid versions [Acoustic Signature] has ever designed." Adjustable to suit tonearms of lengths from 9 to 12 inches, two can be fitted on the Ascona, allowing for the use of two different arms and/or cartridges.

Outside of its highly damped mass, the Ascona has no suspension. Three adjustable feet allow precise leveling of the 'table, which comes with a machined record weight (a clamp is also available) and a newly developed platter mat.

Once set up (with the sterling Kuzma 4P arm), the Ascona is quite a sight to behold. It wowed my friend (and analog guru) Andre Jennings, who has seen just about every other 'table and arm out there, with its sheer beauty, solidity, and breathtaking build-quality. (The thing is built like a brick scheisshaus.) Nothing about the Ascona smacks of garage tinkering or home brew; on the contrary, it looks like a scientific instrument designed by a talented industrial artist—a veritable Magico of analog playback. I myself have never seen anything quite like it.

Nor have I heard anything quite like it (or that marvelous Kuzma 'arm).

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QuiffMcBain -- Tue, 12/13/2011 - 17:47

JV: Where ya been bro??? Really miss your blog posts. For real.

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Jonathan Valin -- Tue, 12/13/2011 - 20:18

Thanks, Quiff.

I have been so completely consumed by editing and writing for the mag that I haven't had the time to blog. But I will be blogging a good deal more regularly. Next up, in a day or two, will be the Audio Research Reference Phono 2 SE. Which, frankly, should've been mentioned in the Ascona blog (I just added a note to this effect). It clearly played an important role in preserving the ultra-low-level detail that the Ascona/Kuzma/Ortofon is digging out of these forty-year-old grooves. Indeed, I'm not sure that I would have been able to hear this change in perspective if the ARC weren't in the system. (This is the problem with getting too much new gear all at once.)

Jon

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QuiffMcBain -- Tue, 12/13/2011 - 21:42

Way, cool! Too much gear...a "problem" some of us might not mind!!! Looking forwards to more blogging for sure.

FYI, Gordon Rankin posted on AA that he was at your digs setting up a 21st century computer audio set up. Can you tell us what he set up? I think an easy guess that a Crimson DAC made its way over with an Apple com-puta. Unless I am wrong, which won't be the first time.

Looking forwards to CES?

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Priaptor -- Wed, 12/14/2011 - 22:12

Quiff,

I would love to see a comparison of Rankin's Crimson to the Lampizator Level 5, both top of the food chain tube DACs

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Jonathan Valin -- Tue, 12/13/2011 - 22:48



...ke me lives in Cincinnati, has been a friend for fifteen years, and, yes, he did come over to my digs with a Crimson DAC (about which I will be writing in the not-too-distant future and which, I can already tell you, will win the Choice Award in Issue 221). I've never heard a piece of gear that Gordon has mentioned that isn't extraordinary.

BTW, although the DAC is Gordon's, the Apple Mini computer and associated FireWire drive are mine. I had been using them with one of Gordon's USB-to-AES/EBU converters and a Berkeley Audio Alpha DAC, which the Crimson has replaced.

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QuiffMcBain -- Tue, 12/13/2011 - 23:45

Wow. This is seriously exciting stuff. I am chomping at the bit. Honestly. I too use a Mac Mini with 3TB of music attached, but I stream FLAC via Ethernet to a file player. It bypasses a whole host of problems that a computer can cause.

I almost can't wait for your first blog on this set up.

I have also spent quite a bit of time with the Bryston BDP-1, which HP is apparently using now. It is the most extraordinary digital playback I have personally heard.

Sorry for leading you off topic here!!!!!! Just excited to have you back.

This WAS a vinyl blog after all.

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Jonathan Valin -- Wed, 12/14/2011 - 00:52

It is a vinyl blog. And as good as computer-audio playback can be nowadays, you really ought to hear an analog setup like the Ascona/Kuzma 4P/Ortofon A90/ARC Ref Phono 2 SE before completely going over to the Digital Dark Side.

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QuiffMcBain -- Wed, 12/14/2011 - 11:50

I am fully on the dark side. The only time I hear vinyl is at hifi shows. I love that

it is still around and thriving in audiophile circles. Software is outrageously priced, and if you are not loaded, it means used record shops and putting up with pops, clicks, dust, and scratches.

I also find it silly when audiophiles wax poetic about a vinyl release that was digitally recorded.

These days SOTA vinyl costs a good amount more than comparable digital.

All of this, IMO, of course.

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Jonathan Valin -- Wed, 12/14/2011 - 16:53

Quiff,

I take your point, Money is a legitimate issue. And the kind of analog I review is way too expensive for most of us (including me). BUT...if the absolute sound is what you're after (and you're loaded with dough), vinyl still rules.

Jon

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QuiffMcBain -- Wed, 12/14/2011 - 19:57

I think vinyl is like dining at a steak house or wearing sans a belt pants .. It is for a certain generation of listeners... generally with disposable income.

.

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Jonathan Valin -- Wed, 12/14/2011 - 20:55

Kiddo, top-line vinyl playback may be for those with money (just as top-line digital is), but it is NOT a generational thing. Hell, vinyl's recent "comeback" was fueled in part by kids sick of MP3s and



g for the "hands-on" experience that only analog can simply a demonstrable fact that the best vinyl n as the Acoustic Signature/Kuzma/Ortofon/ARC rig I s blog, isn't merely better than or different than the back, high-res or low--it indisputably kills it in recreating the illusion that you're hearing the real thing (provided, of course, you're listening to a top-flight LP). And it kills it precisely where all the digitalosphers (like you, alas) think high-res digital has such an edge: in the amount of information stored and reproduced.

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QuiffMcBain -- Wed, 12/14/2011 - 23:03

Fair enough. With your permission, I may nick your "digitalosphers" tag. Love it!

I am curious, have you heard Audio Note analog? Or for that matter, if you have heard any Audio Note systems..do you have any impressions?

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Jonathan Valin -- Thu, 12/15/2011 - 00:42

Haven't heard Audio Note in a long time.

But...back in the day I think I heard virtually every Audio Note (Japan) amp that Kondo-san made. And my impression was that they were gorgeous sounding.

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QuiffMcBain -- Fri, 12/16/2011 - 18:18

Ironically, the Audio Note co in the UK, which has no relation what so ever at this point to Audio Note Japan, may be best known for their speakers...then for their very expensive tube amps. Weird stuff too. Strange measurements and corner loading.

Any chance of a pictures of your current set up?

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Jonathan Valin -- Fri, 12/16/2011 - 20:44

Yup. I'll post one soon.

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QuiffMcBain -- Fri, 12/16/2011 - 20:55

Freakin" awesome. I am up for a good bit of audio porn, and based on what you have rolling,

it should be far out. I am sorry if this common knowledge, but how big is our vinyl collection?

I personally have 3000 CDs/SACDs and about 200 high rez downloads.

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QuiffMcBain -- Fri, 12/16/2011 - 20:56

Freakin" awesome. I am up for a good bit of audio porn, and based on what you have rolling,

it should be far out. I am sorry if this is common knowledge, but how big is our vinyl collection?

I personally have 3000 CDs/SACDs and about 200 high rez downloads.

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Jonathan Valin -- Fri, 12/16/2011 - 21:04
Quiff,

I haven't done a stock count in years, but last time I did I counted approximately 7000 LPs. It's probably closer to 8000 now.

Jon

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QuiffMcBain -- Fri, 12/16/2011 - 21:19
Holy S***.

Those are some serious numbers.brother.

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Jonathan Valin -- Fri, 12/16/2011 - 21:21

Unlike downloads, 8000 or so LPs take up a LOT of space--like most of my basement and half of my listening room--which is something important to be said on behalf of downloads!

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Priaptor -- Fri, 12/16/2011 - 18:26

With all due respect to your saintly reviewing skills, I think you may just be overstating a claim that is nothing more than a baseless opinion. Digital has indeed come of age. The problem is you probably haven't given the same time and effort into setting up your digital source.

I have heard all the LP kills digital before and in some cases it indeed does, especially when you have slime bag resellers selling garbage in "high res" format.

You really need to spend more time with a properly set up source and the right DAC

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Jonathan Valin -- Fri, 12/16/2011 - 20:43

As pleasant as usual, I see,

I'm not at all sure how I (or anyone else) could "overstate a claim that is nothing more than a baseless opinion." It would seem to me that a baseless opinion would, ipso facto, be an "overstatement." Be that as it may, when it comes to the realistic reproduction of acoustic instruments IMO the BEST analog setups I've heard kill the best digital ones I've heard, high-res or low, in my home, in other people's homes, at trade shows world-wide, and at manufacturer's show rooms and demo facilities. This doesn't mean that you don't have a point about me spending more time with digital. I plan to. And you certainly have a point about low-res digital masquerading as high-res.

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Priaptor -- Fri, 12/16/2011 - 21:54

First you are correct regarding my illogical logic and I stand corrected and have been guilty of a Yogiisms here and there,



making them.

Not one who buys into the "high res" craze with that high res must be better de facto. In fact many Redbook recordings are outstanding and in fact better than their so called high res remasters. I can also say, after futzing around and playing around with many sources and dacs I believe there is a tremendous variability and easy to come to a hasty and wrong conclusion regarding digital without the right source setup properly mated to the appropriate DAC. All players are not the same, all computer delivery is not the same and surely all DACs are not the same.

Few spent more time than me in my dealership days setting up turntables and loving vinyl and the unfortunate reality is that the best it sounds is when properly setup, few know how and quite frankly takes too much effort to keep setup properly. Friction unfortunately will ultimately degrade sound which can partly be fixed by replacing your 15K cartridge requiring further setup which few know WTF they are doing. However, the wear on your vinyl, while you may enjoy its "purity" of sound is degrading nonetheless.

I strongly recommend you open your mind a little more towards digital. Its time has come.

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Jonathan Valin -- Fri, 12/16/2011 - 22:19

Well! This is certainly a different Priaptor from the name-calling wiseass I usually deal with.

I must say that I, too, have been disappointed in the sonic variability of "high-res" downloads, although I wouldn't go so far as to say that Red Book outdoes the best of them. Your point about digital setup is well made (in fact I just had a fascinating conversation on this very subject with Michael Ritter of Berkeley Audio--one very smart and informative cookie, who would probably side with you on the question of digital versus analog, provided that every link in the digital chain is optimized). All I can tell you, as I told Michael, is that in my experience even the finest digital setups that I've heard world-wide have never outperformed the best analog setups when it comes to recreating an illusion of real instruments in a real space. HOWEVER, as Michael pointed out, it may be that the finest digital setups I've heard aren't the finest in every regard. And, as I noted, it appears that everything in the digital chain (including, most especially, the computer itself) must be just-so to get the best results. I will be looking into this closely.

I'm less impressed with your argument about the vagaries of vinyl. While it is true that setup is key, it is no more true than it apparently is with digital. Yes, it takes work and experience to set up a tonearm and cartridge. But frankly that's part of the hands-on fun of vinyl! One of the things I hate about digital is that it's so uninvolved. You just press buttons, for chrissake. You might as well be sitting in front of a computer, which I have enough of every damn day. I like the involvement that a record player demands of you. Yeah, it can be a frustrating pain in the ass, but without that sense of hands-on personal involvement what will become of this hobby? Can you imagine a car fanatic who doesn't know how to change a spark plug or tune an engine remaining a fanatic for long? As for record wear, purely on an experiential basis I have never experienced a degradation of fidelity from well-worn LPs.

On the contrary, some of the best-sounding (which is to say most lifelike) records I own--a few of which I bring to shows--are among the most well-worn. Yes, you do accrue ticks and scratches, but like most analogophiles I'm so used to them (and to tape hiss) that I listen right through them.

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Priaptor -- Fri, 12/16/2011 - 22:36

Trust me, I understand the nostalgia that goes along with that of vinyl with all its nuances, etc. and in my younger days absolutely loved it. I am not criticizing those who love vinyl and in many cases vinyl will continue to outshine digital; one mans fun is another's royal pain in the ass.

You caught my drift regarding computers and proper setup. For the vinyl futzer like yourself, you will be happy to know we are now entering a new era of "optimizing" our computers and playback to the point that it is becoming almost equally annoying as vinyl in its setup so I think you will be happy with the direction digital is going.

Naim just released:

<http://www.naimlabel.com/recording-meet-me-in-london-192.aspx>

A 24/192 remaster of Antonio Forcione & Sabina Sciubba, which is excellent. I think you may find the video of how a high res remaster should be done pretty interesting on the referenced site. There lies one of today's big problems. Taking the master tapes and giving a damn about how one remasters it to digital.

Of course, the real comparison will come as we move forward, as high res native digital recordings become the norm rather than remastering but of course, no different than with vinyl, the capability of the engineer (as well as the performance of course) will be ultimately determine how good it sounds.

Check out the Forcione video and download the 24/192 I think you will like it, assuming you have your digital optimized of course.

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Jonathan Valin -- Fri, 12/16/2011 - 23:02

"For the vinyl futzer like yourself, you will be happy to know we are now entering a new era of "optimizing" our computers and playback to the point that it is becoming almost equally annoying as vinyl in its setup so I think you will be happy with the direction digital is going."

This is genuinely witty, but, Priaptor, programming computers just isn't the same thing as optimizing a turntable/tonearm/cartridge. You're not doing anything! You're inputting data, that's all. Pressing buttons, mousing icons, checking boxes on a screen. This is not the involving (and, yeah, frustrating) human experience, the hands-on physical experience, that analog affords you. Yes, I'm sure that optimizing a server is time-consuming, and can be (in your funny phrase) as annoying as vinyl setup. But I don't love vinyl because it annoys me--or because it's nostalgic. I love it because, when push comes to shove, it

sound more like real music--and I play an active, ongoing part in making it sound that way.

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Priaptor -- Sat, 12/17/2011 - 11:05
JV,

This discussion reminds me of a "typical liberal" who loves to paint all Conservatives with the same bible thumping brush. In their world, there is no room for those believing in providential intervention compared to Creationism as defined by the Bible. To ignore "facts" where it is clear life and earth existed more than 6000 years ago, is no different than you ignoring the facts of physics and its play in aging vinyl, belts, cartridges and styli. Your argument just doesn't work, unless of course you believe in divine Vinyl Creationism.

I understand how you VinylAnaloguePhiles (VAPs) love to worship at the altar of the more expensive than Golden Turntable Calf, but the facts and physics just don't support your beliefs. I am happy to say I have been rescued and am not a Born Again VAP. May the 60K Lord of Turntables follow you for the remaining days of your life.

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Jonathan Valin -- Sat, 12/17/2011 - 11:48
This is utter nonsense.

We're not debating "facts of physics." We're debating whether, in the real world of a listening room, analog at its best sounds more realistic than digital at its best (and, tangentially, the relative pleasures and pains of using each). Hell, I had this very conversation with Gordon Rankin a week or so ago, and HE conceded that vinyl sounds more like the real thing!

You can choose to believe what you want: that I am like a "typical liberal" (although you somehow switch my political allegiances halfway through your first paragraph, so I end up believing in Vinyl Creationism) or a Luddite or an utter materialist who worships the Golden Turntable Calf, making you, I suppose, the Moses of Digital Truth. Well, I'll give you this: The Ten Commandments came with numbers (although they weren't zeros and ones, except for one and ten).

If and when I hear digital playback sound as lifelike (or more lifelike) than analog, I'll be the first to embrace it. Until then, I'll continue to prefer LPs.

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Priaptor -- Sat, 12/17/2011 - 15:03
JV,

You are confusing my argument. First, most vinyl sounds better than most digital. No argument. Several points are in order. Your perspective is just a little

skewed given your reference equipment and these gazillion dollar setups that come your way for review.

My comments regarding your undying faith has more to do with your comments that vinyl and analogue setups don't degrade with time which is utter nonsense. It's a physical impossibility. We are not talking fine wine or malt scotch that gets better with age. There may be a certain mystique that we audiophiles love to believe and swear by with religious fervor, but physics doesn't lie.

Digital is getting better and is approaching the ambience of vinyl. When I can afford 60K for the setup you are reviewing, 13K for an ARC Phone stage, 50k per year to hire a "person" to change my vinyl selections in lieu of a remote control maybe I will reenter the absolutely inane world of vinyl. But I do have to admit, the table is an awesome looking one and IF I were to reenter the VAPs world and enable my wife to hate me more than she does, I would consider it.

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Jonathan Valin -- Sat, 12/17/2011 - 16:24

Look on the bright side: At least, you've enabled ME to hate you more than your wife does.

(That's a joke, son--Foghorn Leghorn.)

BTW, Don't you own an ARC Ref 5 and a Ref 250 and Noia Baby Grands? Or am I confusing you with that other Priaptor?

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Priaptor -- Sat, 12/17/2011 - 16:36

You have the right Priaptor. The other Priaptor is a schmuck.

The good thing about being a misanthrope is that I take no offense to being hated as I expect nothing more.

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Jonathan Valin -- Sat, 12/17/2011 - 16:39

Being a misanthrope also appears to have skewed your sense of fairness when it comes to the pricing of the stuff that I've recently blogged about.

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Priaptor -- Sat, 12/17/2011 - 17:10

Not really, you can't take it to the grave. If a person has it spend it all the power to him or her. "Money" is all make believe anyway, no? Given this economy and performance in the stock market, etc., losing 40-

50% on used audio equipment, should one choose to sell it, is a better investment and at least yields more enjoyment.

I am a first edition collector. People think I am nuts for spending what I do on them. However, unlike audio, my Lewis and Clark and other early American history 1st editions, not only bring me enjoyment but increasing value, not that I care about the latter, because it is all BS as I said.

People take money and themselves too seriously. Trust me, if I had the time to futz around again with vinyl, I would probably go for something like what you are reviewing in this blog. My only caveat is when people such as yourself, or myself for that matter, starts thinking (as you have indicated in the past regarding 60K being a "relative bargain" for Q5s) starts thinking this is "normal". I know it is not "normal" but I don't care.

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Jonathan Valin -- Sat, 12/17/2011 - 17:28

I think we're running out of things to say to each other. Plus my teeth have been on edge so long they're beginning to hurt.

Let me close by reminding you (and readers) that you are most definitely and deliberately taking what I said about the (mmmmm) Q5s out of the context in which I said it. What I said was that in the world of ultra-high-end, ultra-expensive loudspeakers, the (mmmmm) Q5s were a good deal (since, IMO, they outperformed speakers that cost two and three times what they did).

To alleviate the potential confusion of late-comers to this blog, understand that this exchange with Priaptor (up to here) occurred AFTER the exchange I had with Priaptor that immediately follows, which quickly got out of hand.

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Priaptor -- Wed, 12/14/2011 - 08:10
JV,

You have me laughing hysterically. I was actually reading your review until I came across the comment "a veritable **Magico** of analog playback. I myself have never seen anything quite like"

Are you kidding me? Man lay off the Magico Koolaid, it is becoming a joke in the audio circles already, pretty much mitigating every "review" you write.

But keep up the good work, I am sure those guys in Berkeley appreciate

the press.

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Jonathan Valin -- Wed, 12/14/2011 - 16:20
The return of the cantaloupe!

Let's see. Magico makes, by consensus, beautifully built loudspeakers out of CNC-milled aluminum that is artfully damped. Acoustic Signature makes beautifully built turntables out of CNC-milled aluminum that is artfully damped. But...I guess you're right: There is no comparison to be made, and (horrors!) I shouldn't have mentioned those Kool-Aid peddlers at Magico.

You are a riot.

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Priaptor -- Wed, 12/14/2011 - 16:28
"A riot Alice, a regular riot"

Ralph Kramden

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Jonathan Valin -- Wed, 12/14/2011 - 16:48
Really? Ralph Kramden said that? Wow, you learn something every day!

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Priaptor -- Wed, 12/14/2011 - 16:41

I mean, come on, you could have used any adjective you wanted. You are a writer with a vast vocabulary. I looked up Magico in my Merriam-Webster and found no such adjective. But then I looked in my Jonathan-Valin Dictionary and guess what? There was only one word- MAGICO

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Jonathan Valin -- Wed, 12/14/2011 - 16:48
That's funny, because when I looked under Priaptor there was a picture of a pinhead.

And, BTW, I believe "Magico" is a noun, not an adjective. (How did you manage to use a dictionary? Or did someone literate help you with this?)

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Priaptor -- Wed, 12/14/2011 - 17:05

Well, in the manner in which you used "Magico" in this review, I guess we could quibble whether it is a noun or adjective. But in JV World, I think we could all agree Magico is ubiquitous

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Jonathan Valin -- Wed, 12/14/2011 - 17:51
No, we could not quibble. Magico is a noun.

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Elliot Goldman -- Wed, 12/14/2011 - 08:52
Priaptor,
IS that Koolaid an adult beverage? :)

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Priaptor -- Wed, 12/14/2011 - 08:58
Anyone drinking it becomes a Magico Zombie



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Jonathan Valin -- Wed, 12/14/2011 - 16:27

On the basis of your posts, you are clearly halfway to zombiehood already. Why don't you eat some brains, buddy? (Or get some.)

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JeffK -- Wed, 12/14/2011 - 20:26

Jon,

Ignore them! I have the M5's and have heard the Q5's, 3's and 1's as well as most of the V series. I have listened to them at 4 different dealers and multiple times, 3 trade shows and of course my own home. They have always sounded wonderful except at one dealer, who happens to no longer be able to sell them. These dealers have access to many wonderful speakers... Avalon, Sony, TAD, Focal, Rockport, QUAD, Maggies among others, and I have also listened to most of them. And when they talk casually the Magico's always are their personal favorites. There is a reason!

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jfkbike



Jonathan Valin -- Wed, 12/14/2011 - 21:05

Jeff,

I'm just having fun.

Priaptor and I have a long-running feud. This is only the latest chapter.

Although my mention of Magico in the Acoustic Signature blog was intended to point up the outstanding build-and-finish quality of the Ascona (and its superb engineering and industrial design), your point about the M5s, Q5s, and Q1s' sound is, IMO, well made. Magico wouldn't have rocketed from "nobodies" to one of the most successful manufacturers of ultra-high-end loudspeakers in the world in the space of three or four years if its products HADN'T impressed an awful lot of people, retailers and consumers.

However, this is supposed to be a blog about the Acoustic Signature Ascona...so enough about Magico.

Jon

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Priaptor -- Wed, 12/14/2011 - 21:44

The Smiths and McCoys.

I make your blogs more fun, admit it.

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Jonathan Valin -- Wed, 12/14/2011 - 21:52

I believe that would be the Hatfields and the McCoys.

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JeffK -- Wed, 12/14/2011 - 10:54

JV have you ever listend to the Basis Inspirtation table? If so curious how it compares with this table and the Walker.

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jfkbike



Jonathan Valin -- Wed, 12/14/2011 - 14:37
Jeff,

I've not heard the Basis Inspiration in my home, so cannot make the comparison.

Robert Harley reviews the Basis Inspiration in our upcoming Issue 220.

Jon

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Jonathan Valin -- Thu, 12/15/2011 - 13:36
Folks,

Fun is fun, but this is a blog about the Acoustic Signature Ascona. Let us--ALL of us, including me--henceforth confine ourselves to discussion of it or of analog matters or, at least, hi-fi in general.

JV

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brian -- Thu, 12/15/2011 - 19:02

Jon, I don't see any mention of the cartridge used, except the name Ortofon in one of your replies.

Acoustic Signature frequently recommends the Kuzma 4Point tonearm for their turntables.

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Brian Walsh

[Essential Audio](#) ~ Chicago area ~ 773-809-HIFI (4434)



Jonathan Valin -- Thu, 12/15/2011 - 19:04

You didn't look close enough. It is the Ortofon MC A90.

I'm looking to score another Clearaudio Goldfinger Statement so I can make an apples-to-apples comparison with the Walker.

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brian -- Thu, 12/15/2011 - 20:26

You're right. I searched the page for Ortofon, not Orotofon. "Oh, a wise guy!" (3 Stooges)

Putting the Clearaudio on the 4Point is one thing, but have you put the A90 on the Walker, and how compatible are they? I ask because the A90's mass is 8.0 grams, while the Clearaudio's is 17.0 grams. The compliances are similar, but then there's stuff such as arm mass. Hmm.

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Jonathan Valin -- Thu, 12/15/2011 - 21:07

Yes, I have tried the Ortofon on the Walker, whose Black Diamond II viscous-damped air-bearing arm is medium-mass. The match was excellent; however, everything else that I used at the time that I tried the Walker with the Ortofon has been changed--amp, preamp, phonostage, and speakers. Since Ortofon is apparently no longer producing the limited-edition A90, I need to get another Statement--and I may need to swap out speakers or at least spend more time with the ones I now have set up, as the Estelon XA-Ds currently in my listening room have rather a different presentation than the (Lord forgive me for uttering this word) Magico Q5s that are my current references or the Audio Physic Avanteras, which (IMO) nestle in right behind them.

This is what I meant when I told Quiff I'd changed too much stuff all at once. When you throw in ARC's new (and terrific) phonostage, the Ref 2 SE, which just arrived last week, it becomes difficult to isolate exactly what is doing what. Happily, no matter what is doing what the sound is exceptional.

Before the arrival of the Ref 2 SE and the Estelon XA-Ds, I did do some listening to the Ascona/Kuzma/Ortofon with the (mmmmm) Q5s (I am holding my hand over my own mouth to prevent the utterance of the word that offendeth), and a good deal of what I now hear was evident then, which is why I am confident that the Ascona is one helluva fine piece of gear.

BTW, I fixed the "Ortofon" (wiseacre).

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brian -- Thu, 12/15/2011 - 22:18

Point taken about the A90 availability.

My quip referencing the 3 Stooges was made in a lighthearted way and directed toward myself. Let's refrain from the name calling and keep it fun.

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Jonathan Valin -- Thu, 12/15/2011 - 22:19

No offense meant or taken.

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Amandela77 -- Fri, 12/16/2011 - 08:48

The return of the king. Nice preview, JV, and nice to see you blogging again. Stereophile reviewed the Acoustic Signature Final Tool - great table, awful name - years ago, and raved. But the brand never had much currency in the U.S. Perhaps they ran into some distribution challenges. I hope your upcoming review helps to raise the AS's profile here in the States. Me, I really like the Thunder model. Half the price of the Ascona, and almost as nice to look at.

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Amandela77



Jonathan Valin -- Fri, 12/16/2011 - 14:50

Hey, man! Listen: If I'm the king, then judging by my reception it's Bastille Day.

I'm surprised and pleased to discover that you already know about Acoustic Signature. I knew nothing about the company until I heard one of its numbers (it might have been The Storm) at RMAF making Audio Physic Avanteras sound terrific. I went on-line (<http://www.as-distribution.de/index2.htm>) and took a peek at The Thunder, which does, indeed, look awesome. Gunther clearly has a gift for industrial design.

Jon

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brian -- Fri, 12/16/2011 - 11:08

Amandela77, one of my clients has a Final Tool and upon Acoustic Signature's strong recommendation purchased a Kuzma 4Point from me. He had owned an SME V and a late version TriPlanar. Zyx Universe cartridge as I recall. He has a keen ear and amazing taste in single malt Scotch as well :-)

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Amandela77 -- Fri, 12/16/2011 - 15:22

I'm saving my pennies for a a Storm. Simply gorgeous, and under 8K w/o the arm. Maybe an Ortofon 12 inch... I live in Florida but own property in the Windy City. I'll look you guys up on my next visit.

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Amandela77



brian -- Fri, 12/16/2011 - 16:40

Hey, by all means please do! I travel all over, soon going to the Bay Area to do a 4Point install and computer alignment and do some other alignments for folks while there.

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Jonathan Valin -- Fri, 12/16/2011 - 15:35

"I'll look you guys up on my next visit."

Do that!

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john195 -- Sat, 12/17/2011 - 20:28

Hi JV, what mat are you using on this wonder-lust ?

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Jonathan Valin -- Sat, 12/17/2011 - 21:35

john,

Acoustic Signature supplies this perforated mat, which is both attractive and effective. Also available is the mat pictured at the start of



the blog.

Jon

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Priaptor -- Sun, 12/18/2011 - 10:31

So the supply the perforated mat and the mat you show in the picture in the beginning of the blog is extra?

Also, are you using their claim and is their clamp extra and if you are using what is your take.

Thanks
Noj Nilav

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Jonathan Valin -- Sun, 12/18/2011 - 11:28
Rotpair,

The perforated mat was just starting to go into production when the turntable arrived, so it came with the non-perforated one. I got the perforated one several weeks later. I do not know which is current standard issue, but I'll find out. I am using the (supplied) Acoustic Signature record weight, and do not have the AS clamp yet so cannot compare. I have tried the superb Walker clamp on the Ascona and it has its pluses and minuses, as does the Acoustic Signature weight. Clamping with the Walker appears to buy you somewhat tighter focus (indeed a somewhat tighter, more incisive, albeit slightly brighter and more clinical sound); to my ear the weight, though not quite as precisely focused or as incisive, sounds a little looser, darker (in comparison), and more easygoing, at least with the Ortofon A90. I could (and do) live with either, although the weight is definitely more convenient. (BTW, in the picture I took the weight is perched on the pillar nearest the camera.)

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brian -- Sun, 12/18/2011 - 21:58
(deleted)

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Amandela77 -- Sun, 12/18/2011 - 08:14

The Ascona also comes in a tasty silver-hued version. Simply mouth-watering... Looks like you are having quite the early Christmas, JV.

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Amandela77



Jonathan Valin -- Sun, 12/18/2011 - 11:33
Amandela,

Yeah, I've gotten some cool analog stuff of late, plus Gordon's Wavelength Audio Crimson USB DAC (with directly-heated triode-powered output stage and battery-powered 32-bit DAC)!
Jon

Jon

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Priaptor -- Mon, 12/19/2011 - 09:58

There is "supposedly" some really good digital sh-t coming out of Europe that sounds right up your alley as well. Such as the Lampizator Level 5 and LessLoss DAC 2004 MKII. Maybe Sircom has heard the stuff.

Particularly the Lampizator seems to be a contender if not superior to the American Crimson according to my European friends (actually I have no friends, let me say acquaintances). Both are "tubes" and my European friends keep telling there is NOTHING like the Level 5 Lampizator.

At least keep an open mind as either may sway you just a little regarding the digital now being produced on this Htrae

Thanks
Noj Nilav

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brian -- Sun, 12/18/2011 - 23:01

Jon, you should really try to spend some time in the Sound Lab/Teo Audio room at THE Show, room 4004...some surprises are in store :)

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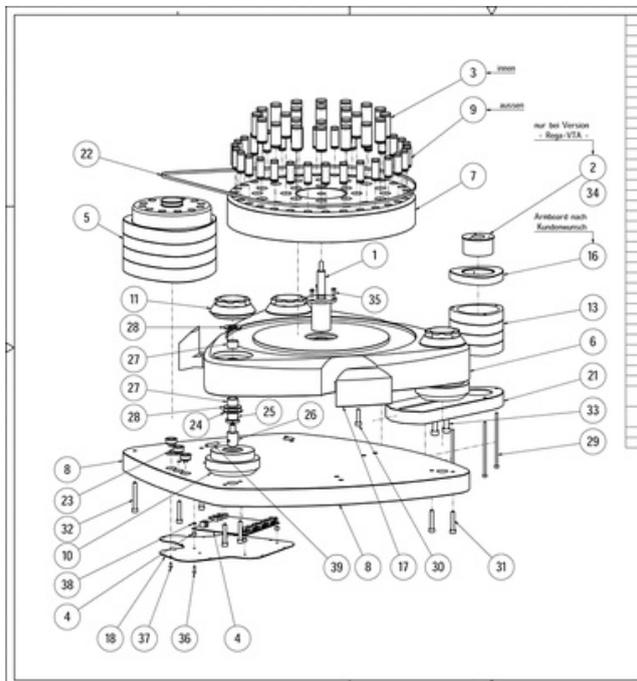


Jonathan Valin -- Mon, 12/19/2011 - 15:38

John 195,

To follow up on your question, I just learned from Gunther of AS that the mat with the cut-outs is now standard issue with the Ascona; the weight and/or clamp, however, are options (i.e., you have to pay for them).

Gunther also sent me an "exploded view" that shows in detail how the Ascona is considerably more complex than a standard "three-piece" belt-drive turntable.



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Priaptor -- Mon, 12/19/2011 - 17:25

JV,

Thanks.

That is a pretty amazing schematic. I built buildings less complex.

Thanks
Noj Nilav

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Jonathan Valin -- Mon, 12/19/2011 - 17:56

Rotpair,

Are you making a joke or are you actually an architect?

JV

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Priaptor -- Mon, 12/19/2011 - 18:05

I am not an architect but have worked with many and designed many medical office buildings. The last I did I think you would be impressed with. I did it in a

Renaissance motif, utilizing aspects from 14 different great Renaissance buildings with fountains, domes, etc.. I was literally obsessed with the thing.

The "cast stone" didn't meet my specs, so I found some guy in Italy who carved me 4 lions heads out of red Venona marble (one was I had him carve into a fountain) and imported them to me in S. FL. The amazing thing about it was that it was cheaper than the crap cast stone they gave me here. Imported Peruvian wood doors that were to die for. The elevator was nicer than most people's homes.

Artists painting the ceilings and walls. Green marble with redwood. Where patients were to get their imaging, illuminated ceilings of landscapes and skies. LCD and music throughout.

I could go on, but it was a spectacular building. It actually sold for more per square foot than any building ever sold in Palm Beach. That one was my best. I understand architectural drawings and am not making a joke. That is impressive.

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Jonathan Valin -- Mon, 12/19/2011 - 18:12
Interesting!

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john195 -- Tue, 12/20/2011 - 09:20

JV, thanks for the exploded view info, this is Geman engineering at its best.

Just downloaded the Acoustic Signature cataloge and it looks like a dedicated stand is also on the cards (see photo on pdf).

All the Best.

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Jonathan Valin -- Tue, 12/20/2011 - 12:45
john,

Although Gunther had planned to bring me the Acoustic Signature stand, it proved impossible to "carry it on" the airplane and get it through customs on the short notice required for his visit to Cincy. Happily, I just happen to have the most effective equipment stand I've yet tried--the Critical Mass System MAXXUM (<http://www.criticalmasssystems.com/maxxum.htm>)--on hand (and arm and foot--the thing is large). Judging from the results, it is a great match with the Ascona. As you must know, you're going to need a sturdy equipment stand for this two-hundred-pound chunk of sculpted aluminum.

Jon

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Amandela77 -- Mon, 12/19/2011 - 18:46
And this relates to the Ascona how?

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Amandela77



Jonathan Valin -- Mon, 12/19/2011 - 18:55

If you're referring to the diagram (and not to Priaptor's medical building), the exploded view above is of the Ascona, Amandela, and I printed it to show the engineering smarts that went into its design and construction. One assumes--or I assume--that the sophistication of the engineering and build-quality is the chief reason it sounds the way it does.

I found Priaptor's comments interesting because he has experience

with architectural blueprints, building materials, and construction techniques.

Jon

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Amandela77 -- Mon, 12/19/2011 - 21:37

Thanks for the clarification, brother. I was in a sour mood earlier having just read one of the WORST student papers I have ever come across. I think a glass of wine should do the trick...)))

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Amandela77



Jonathan Valin -- Mon, 12/19/2011 - 22:05

If you teach, you deserve as much wine as you can drink! (I speak from experience.)

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Elliot Goldman -- Sat, 12/24/2011 - 08:35

I am sending Priaptor and JV one of those Christams fruitcakes each. The thinking behind that is it will give both of them the runs. They both being full of something can use the cleaning out . Have a happy healthy and lighter New year :) (this is a joke boys so dont get your bowels in an uproar.....HO HO HO)

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Priaptor -- Sat, 12/24/2011 - 09:36

Elliot,

Your condescending and duplicitous remarks this Holiday season are not appreciated, especially when many of our countrymen find themselves in such dire straights. While JV, may be a stubborn and obnoxious pig headed reviewer believing ONLY vinyl is of worth, he is openly admitting that he listens to vinyl 99.9% of the time, so what is your major malfunction? Additionally, while he may be infatuated with extruded AL, if you spent a second going to the Ascona website, you would be similarly impressed with the detail of every aspect of the construction of the turntable under review AND even the "cheaper" turntables which appear to have the same spectacular detail at, what I would consider very reasonable prices, given the competition. JV and I have common bonds over this incredibly engineered piece of gear and unfortunately, a misanthropic shoat as yourself, could never understand "human bond" even during these festive holiday season. You are no doubt a product of the Progressive Vision of the Anointed Left Wing ideology who can't see past his own nose.

Very sad, very sad

Sincerely,
Noj Nilav

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Elliot Goldman -- Sat, 12/24/2011 - 09:41

Dear Priaptor

You really area stiff!!! Ho HO Ho

I will make sure yourt fruitcake has a specail dose of ex lax for you are surely full of it and yourself!!!

May the Schwartz be with you!

Happy New year

Joyfully

Rotpairp

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Priaptor -- Sat, 12/24/2011 - 09:49

That's your comeback?? Pathetic.



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Elliot Goldman -- Sat, 12/24/2011 - 10:35

Sorry I forgot that you play an architect on TV. Building buildings, analyzing Turntable diagrams, solving the worlds issue, saving lives. The Priaptor is truly a renaissance man. He who meets where fantasy becomes his reality!

By the way I did look up the TT website and they do look amazing!

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Priaptor -- Sat, 12/24/2011 - 10:50

It is quite obvious that you are one of those Vision of the Anointed Left Wing Liberals who wants all others to do what they themselves would never do. You exude hatred for those who are successful. Sell any stereos at any Occupy Wall Street Rallies lately, pal? Are you a patron of the Nancy Pelosi Plastic Surgery Center for Human Rights?

People like you are what is wrong with America today. They have a hard on for those who achieve success. Don't try to patronize me and JV by now claiming you looked at the website and found it amazing. It is quite clear the only thing worse than your ability to analyze a "turntable diagram" is your ability to know when a stereo sounds good. Once a shoat always a shoat. Despicable.

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Elliot Goldman -- Sat, 12/24/2011 - 10:57

Thats a good idea promote HE to the homeless, you are a visionary

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Priaptor -- Sat, 12/24/2011 - 11:00

Yeah, your idea of supporting the homeless is trying to sell them a \$50,000 pair of speakers. Lots of compassion, pal. Put your money where your mouth is. OOPS, can't do that, your foot is already there.

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Elliot Goldman -- Sat, 12/24/2011 - 11:03

I was being sarcastic but alas it is wasted on you . All the blood runs to the wrong head in your case :)

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Jonathan Valin -- Sat, 12/24/2011 - 11:30

Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night.

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SundayNiagara -- Mon, 12/26/2011 - 14:40

Man, such a kvetchfest!

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Jonathan Valin -- Mon, 12/26/2011 - 15:11

Yeah. But at least some of it's good-natured. (Some of it.)

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Priaptor -- Mon, 12/26/2011 - 15:13

JV,



as talking about you.

Years

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Jonathan Valin -- Mon, 12/26/2011 - 15:14
Rotpair,

I think he was talking about us.

Happy New Year back at ya, and everyone else on this thread.

JV

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SundayNiagara -- Tue, 12/27/2011 - 08:17
Buffalo Bill: All of those guys!

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