





High Fidelity

hi-fi, hi-end magazine

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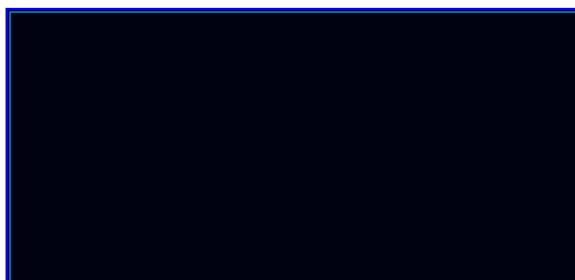
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SMALL DREAMS



SPEC RSP-101 Real-Sound Processor

[SPEC Corporation](#) is a Japanese company, mostly known in Japan, and rather in extreme high-end, some time ago presented an incredibly interesting RFA-M1 Real-Sound Amplifier, and its variants RFA-F1 and RFA-V1. During this year's High End Show in Munich I had the opportunity to listen to this amplifier. It was part of the system that received from us the Best Sound 2011 award (reportage from the show [HERE](#)). In parallel with presenting the amplifiers, SPEC prepared something completely different, something that could easily come from the hands of Mr. Ken Ishiguro, the demiurge from Acoustic Revive, a product called RSP-101 Real-Sound Processor.

It has the shape of two small boxes, perfectly made from wood and incredibly packaged – the Japanese know exactly how to do that. The boxes have loudspeaker terminals and are to be connected in parallel with the loudspeakers. On the SPEC web site we can read: “The real sound processor RSP-101 brings out the full potential of your speakers, delivering realistic sound and rich musicality. Simply connect to the speakers and improve the sound quality of your audio equipments.”

All my testing was with the big, although easy to drive Harbeth M40.1 Domestic loudspeakers. The PA0901A amplifier (this name is hell) seems however to be destined to work with headphones. It is absolutely beyond my comprehension that the APPJ (Synergy HiFi is their worldwide distributor) did not equip it with a headphone output. As somewhat of a remedy, APPJ offers a special HP A adapter – a small box with loudspeaker input (only holes, like in the amplifier), to which three headphones can be connected – two with a ‘big jack’ and one with a ‘small jack’. I have this adapter. And I will return to this in one of the editorials.

Acoustic Revive Hickory Under Board RHB-20

This is one of the new additions to the vast catalog of products from Acoustic Revive. Not the only one, but important. RHB-20 is a simple board, made from special wood, Hickory. This is a rare kind of wood, known as source for manufacturing high quality percussion sticks. It has a very weak own sound, which became the key to good sound for Mr. Ken Ishiguro, the owner of AR.

The platform is quite thin, only 20mm, and should fit all existing platforms. The natural color of Hickory is light, but AR supplies it covered with dark brown mordant and varnished with colorless lacquer.

As it turns out, the properties of this wood are so interesting that Acoustic Revive also offers improved versions of their RAF-48 and RST-38 anti-vibration platforms with top shelves made from that wood. The platforms will now be called RAF-48H and RST-38H respectively.

The RHB-20 looks very ordinary – it is just a plain plank. Its secret is hidden in the material it is made from. As I also received for testing the Lavardin IT-15 amplifier, which comes complete with a thick plywood shelf to be placed on, the opportunity to compare these two materials was obvious. Have a look at the amplifier test to see how things turned out.

Power in my wall



There is a lot of magic black boxes, and there always be. But this time it comes from a manufacturer deeply rooted in the industry, measurements and academic tradition. And it ennobles. What do we have here? The company claims that it counters the electromotive force generated by speaker coils. The vector of this force is oriented in opposite direction to the musical signal, in the direction of the amplifier and is added to the usable signal. This is a known phenomenon, countered by, for example, upping the damping factor of the amplifier. Plugging in the RSP-101 should help by reducing the impedance change of the loudspeakers, especially in midrange and treble. How? The company does not tell. The box is small (100 (W) x 47 (H) x 117 (D) mm), light (190g) and seems to have some electronic components inside (coils, etc). But this is only my speculation.

Looking at the company's offer we can assume that the RSP-101 came into existence by expediency – class D amplifiers, and SPEC amplifiers work in that class, are very sensitive to loudspeaker and cable parameters. The companies fight with that in many ways, and it seems that the manufacturer of the RSP-101 has its own solution. And probably this was the foundation for the boxes that I am reviewing. And the fact that they also work with a classic top class amplifier? There is nothing I can do about that.



I started the listening session of the RSP-101 without any prejudice. I did not read any other reviews before and I had no idea what to expect of a product like that. I do not claim that the lack of knowledge is a blessing in this case, but just that I shaped my opinion from scratch.

The changes introduced by the SPEC box are rather subtle. Although the word 'subtle' can be deceiving in this context, because I do not mean 'small', but rather that in contrast to most audio components, there were no fireworks. My first impression after listening was that everything was quieter. I am not 100% sure about that, but I think that the RSP-101 presents some load for the amplifier, and that in some way it modifies what the amplifier 'sees'. It is just that the modification is very small. And so that "everything quieter" impression was only my imagination, which tried to find some sense in the new presentation, tried to put a rational mask onto a completely new experience.

The sound with the SPEC boxes is much less "noisy". And I am not talking about noise we know – for example – from a tape or vinyl. I am talking about background noise, something included in the main sound. I heard this effect many times before, but it was usually while changing a device to a class better one, or changing



I would like to refer to one of the Krakow Sonic Society meetings (#69, text [HERE](#)). This meeting, besides purely social values, also had an educational value. It was about comparing two different power networks at home – one classic and one prepared by the Nautilus company. The latter was composed of:

- fuse and holder from AHP,
- Acrolink power cable,
- Furutech power socket.

As you could read, the reactions to the changes introduced into the sound were mixed, from enthusiastic to sceptical. I must confess that I did not fully agree with Janusz who predicted the success of the new network (he could not think otherwise, given the money he spent). As it turned out, I was wrong. I have visited Janusz many times since and each time his system sounded better. For one, it is surely the result of continuous experiments made on his system by Jarek Waszczyszyn. But there is a second reason – the power network. It turns out that you can learn to appreciate the value of this installation only after months of playing. Now I cannot imagine listening to Janusz's system with the old power network – its socket is still there, next to the new one, so the comparison is easily made.

Recently, I have made a small refit of my apartment. Because I needed to move some lighting points anyway, I decided to upgrade my power network. As it is a longer story, I will tell you about it next time. Now I will just mention that I chose the Oyaide Tunami Nigo instead of the Acrolink. The new installation was made by Mr. Robert Nowak from Nautilus. The what and the why will have to wait until next month.

Conversations V

Awards of the Year

Yes, it is coming – the Awards of the Year are granted in the beginning of November, when we know all the devices tested in a given year. For us it is important to have them ready at that time, because the relevant companies can show their awards during the [Audio Show](#). Let me just remind you that this year the show will take place on 12 and 13 November in three hotels:

- Jan III Sobieski
- Bristol
- Golden Tulip. The last one is the old Kyriad Prestige, which changed its name.

I encourage you to visit the show, it is always nice and this year it should be even better – Michael Fremer from "Stereophile" will conduct workshops on setting up turntables and there will be a concert of Antonio Forcione from Naim Label.

Back to the main topic. Awards of the Year present for us an opportunity to an even closer selection of the products tested. I must say that nominating devices, loudspeakers, cables, etc. for the award causes big problems for me, because I only test the things that interest me, only valuable products that – in my assumption – will find good friends among the readers. Most of the devices I review qualify for the award. This is why my methodology was fairly simple: I sat down with a list of reviewed products and underlined those that I found especially worth recommending, regardless their price, category, manufacturer, distributor, etc. And

the loudspeakers for ones that have lower distortion. Initially I did not know how to approach this. The change was easily catchable – it did not turn things over, but certainly was there – but I did not know how to interpret what I heard.



Only after many repetitions (turning on and off) of the same recordings I managed to find a repeating pattern. And the lower background noise was one of its main stitches. It gives interesting effects. At first, it seems that there is less treble in the sound. And there may be something to it. But I would not see it as a frequency corrector. The midrange is simply more saturated and deeper. It is not a plain "brighter-darker" situation, as can be seen from the fact that without the RSP-101 everything seems more dull, more blunt. Please compare this with what I wrote earlier: "it seems that there is less treble in the sound." These two statements do not exclude each other – high quality systems, very natural systems, allow for such differentiation. What is meant here is that there is not much treble in live sound, and yet we have absolutely no problem with selectiveness, depth of the sound, etc. And this is how the Japanese box works: it improves depth, selectiveness, naturalness and at the same time it seems that there is less treble. Well, this is another feature of high-end...

Synergy HiFi APPJ PA0901A

it did not matter how many things I'd choose (or rather we'd choose – Marek Dyba chooses a number of products proportional to the amount of tests he made).

However, it turned out that many of the "High Fidelity" readers would prefer fewer awards. Because they have higher value then. Well, with an aching heart I decided that this year we will drastically reduce the amount of awards – there will be less than 20. Most have already been chosen, but we need to wait for the full list before we can share it with you.

Plans for November

For the November issue we plan the following products:

- Soution 740SACD player; this Swiss machine costing 190000zł will also be depicted on the cover and its review will show in a special printed version of our magazine that will be given out freely during the Audio Show (one more reason to visit it...)



- Miyajima Laboratory KANSUI MC cartridge; new top cartridge from this Japanese manufacturer. I am very curious how it will fare against my current reference, the Shilabe from the same company (test [HERE](#))



- B.M.C. C1 integrated amplifier; a new brand from Germany that appears in Poland. I have been trying to get this amplifier for review since I saw it during the High End in Munich. Now that the company found a Polish distributor ([Audio System](#)), we can get this object of desire (look at the picture).



Perhaps you remember the 6F3 amplifier from the Chinese company [Synergy HiFi](#). If not, please read the test [HERE](#). If yes, you probably also remember that the cover featuring this amplifier was chosen the Cover of the Year 2010 by the readers of [“High Fidelity”](#). And rightly so – that small amplifier, based on 6F3 tubes, a triode and a pentode in one glass, was really charming and sounded well, too. ‘Was’, because it is not produced any longer.

Dr Ningsheng Liu, representative of Synergy HiFi, from whom I received the products of that company, sold under the Create Audio brand, informed me about that in person, when he visited Krakow mid September.

The arrival of Mr. Liu was a perfect moment to arrange a meeting of the Krakow Sonic Society and to listen to new tubes KT-88sx from Ayon Audio (more about that in this issue of HF) but also a great opportunity to talk and learn more about the products of Synergy HiFi and the Chinese market in general. This is when I learned that the production of the 6F3 was terminated – due to a prosaic reason: the company could not guarantee the availability of the tubes. Hence, the only small product remaining in production is the APPJ PA0901A. In this case Synergy has a lot more to show off...

APPJ PA0901A is an amplifier with a single EL84 tube per channel in the power stage and a double triode 12AX7, one for both channels, in the control stage. That’s a chance to go all out as both tubes are manufactured by Mr. Liu’s company and sold under the Create Audio brand. And in addition we have the fuse, something I wrote about many times before. And especially for [“High Fidelity”](#) readers, Mr. Ningsheng Liu brought us the amplifier, the tubes and the fuse. After initial listening with the standard tubes, I exchanged them for Mr. Liu’s tubes. Instead of the Chinese NOS 6PI4 I plugged the Luxury Series EL84, instead of the 6N4 – the Luxury Series 12AX7 and instead of the standard fuse, the Create Audio Luxury Series 3A/250V.



The Chinese amplifier sounds surprisingly strong and dynamic. Although measurements do not lie, and they show that this is only 2x3.5W so we deal here with a micro-amplifier, what we have to take into consideration is that these are “tube” watts. In comparison to “transistor” watts they seem louder. The reason for that is simple: they are tubes. And because they are what they are, they enter clipping more smoothly and the distortions they generate are perceived by the listeners as more “ear friendly” than the transistor ones, sometimes they even get confused with natural sound. And the PA0901A amplifier takes advantage of that. What



- Vitus Signature SCD-010 CD player; you probably remember our review of an amplifier from this company – if not, please have a look [HERE](#). The player comes from the same series and is equipped with a completely modified CD-Pro2 LF Philips drive and an advanced digital section. The section uses an Anagram Technologies upsampler, similar to the one found in the Soulution 740.



- Thorens TD309 turntable with a dedicated TeddyPardo PSU; I reviewed this turntable for “Audio” and I liked it. Now it is available with a power supply from the TeddyPardo Israeli company which we already came across during our review of the DACs from Musical Fidelity and Arcam ([HERE](#)). This test will be conducted by Marek Dyba.



- we will have a special guest at our Krakow Sonic Society meeting (the 80th meeting!!!) – Gerhard Hirt, the owner of Ayon Audio will come and present us his newest product, the file player S-3. And next month we will host another great man: Srajan Ebaen, the Editor in Chief of “6moons.com”. Things will happen...

more, it does not modify the treble. If the source is bright it will sound bright. Sometimes there may be a sting in the upper treble but it will not be especially annoying. The only clear modification of the timbre happens in upper bass, which is underlined and not so well controlled. But this is what gives it such a big, expansive sound. The resolution is, for the money, splendid but of course it is nowhere near high-end.

Swapping the tubes and the fuse (I did all of them at the same time) will bring many changes, although it must be said that the "backbone" of the sound, probably the sound of the amplifier itself, remains the same. Create Audio tubes give everything breath, kick and higher resolution. The tubes supplied as standard with the amplifier are dull and a bit muddy. Without direct comparison this may not be obvious, but after the change there is no return.



- there will also be a surprise – the first Polish presentation of a brand that has not yet been represented in Poland, something that I could not comprehend. Since the official premiere will be November 1st, I cannot say anything more now. But it is good!

Wojciech Pacuła
Editor in Chief

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Please direct your questions, suggestions, opinions, etc. to:
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WHO ARE WE?

"High Fidelity OnLine" is an internet magazine, published since may 2004, devoted to high quality reproduction of sound and picture. It is a monthly magazine, but the articles are uploaded twice a month - in the beginning of the month and in the middle. The news column is updated on on-going basis, if possible. The main sections are: "Tests", "Events" (interviews, reportages, and similar), "Hyde Park" (user tests, opinions) and "Who asks..." (readers questions and HFOL answers). Articles from earlier issues can be read in the "Archive". Have a nice read!

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