

ONHIFI

January 15, 2005

THE CES 2005 JIMMY AWARDS

The format of this year's Jimmy Awards had to be modified due to theft. Like a clueless rookie traveler, I packed my digital camera in checked baggage, and somewhere between Costa Rica and Las Vegas the camera was heisted. My MO includes the use of photos as mnemonic devices, but at the 2005 Consumer Electronics Show I was flying blind, having to rely on indelible impressions of components and room demonstrations. But in most cases (a notable exception is mentioned below) it's impossible to identify the prime source of good sound in a show system, so this blanket approach may actually be better. By giving out awards to entire rooms, I hope to honor those rooms' main ingredients as well. If I inadvertently give associated equipment undeserved praise, so be it. If an exhibitor has chosen components carefully, then all the pieces that played roles in the stirring epic deserve credit.

My notes (analog to the rescue!) tell me that 18 rooms blasted me out of my socks. For purposes of alliteration, I've rounded up the list to a Top Twenty, with a few Honorable Mentions. I'll start at that end. All prices cited are in US dollars.

HONORABLE MENTIONS

A heartwarming development at CES was the unveiling of several new digital amplifier designs. As a user of chip-based amplifiers from Audio Research and Bel Canto, I have grown to love the sound, cool running, light weight, and low power consumption of these computer-age designs. My spine and abdominals do not miss the massive heft of class-A/AB amplifiers, nor do my emotions, which were often hijacked by the harshness of transistorized signals. Amps that use the Tripath chip are simply easier on my ears.

I've been waiting for other manufacturers to be inspired by chips; I like to have more than one or two choices. Several rooms at CES showed new variations on the theme of digital error correction, and the preliminary results were impressive. In the fertile world of digital creativity, chip designers are becoming amplifier builders, and three systems powered by proprietary digital devices won awards. As Marc Mickelson pointed out, the time may come when magazines will test digital implementations rather than amplifiers. We'll be wondering, "Whose input board sounds better?"

JEFF ROWLAND DESIGN GROUP

Not only does the Jeff Rowland Design Group's 501 monaural amplifier use a chip (the ICEpower from Bang & Olufsen), it also incorporates a switching power supply. By substituting for the power transformer, the 501 eliminates 60Hz line noise from the signal path. As with so many subtle distortions



in hi-fi, one is usually not aware of the existence of transformer noise until it's gone. The Rowland room produced much sweeter sound than I expected, and would have received an award if I didn't think new competition will soon force B&O to update the ICEpower.

PEAK CONSULT/STEREOVOX

By the time I reached the Peak Consult/Stereovox room on the afternoon of January 9, I was CES'd-out. This may explain why my mind recognized the Peak Consult Princess speakers' inner beauty but my heart wasn't keen on a private demo. I did notice that the Princess had dynamic snap when the music called for it, but not when it didn't. After witnessing a plethora of loudspeakers with fatiguing snappiness, I considered the Princess a speaker that would probably wear well over an evening spent alone with a pair of them.

ZCABLE/BPT

These manufacturers of accessories produced clean sound from a humble system. I would like to have compared the results before and after the Z-sleeves and Balanced Power unit were installed, but they had to be doing something to make the Gallo Reference 3 speakers disappear so completely while hooked up to a \$700 receiver.

Perhaps more important, ZCable and BPT used a special CD for their demos. Their *Re-Clocking Test CD* uses Exact Audio Copy (EAC) software to reclock CDs to hard disk via .WAV files, which are then burned on a system that uses ZCable and BPT techniques of rejecting EMI and RFI. "Comped" a copy of the compilation by ZCable's Mark Hampton, I can attest to the CD's clarity in my system; it suggested a freedom from parasitic influences. I plan to recopy the CD using EAC, Plextor drives, and MAM-A CD-R discs. My logic: If my copy sounds better than the original, then the Plextors and MAM-A discs are responsible. If it sounds worse, then I'll have to give the ZCable/BPT demo disc a belated Jimmy Award.

PARADIGM/ONKYO

While touring the Las Vegas Convention Center, I heard music above the din. Shouldering aside the suited philistines hronging the demo-unfriendly LVCC, I homed in on the source of such wonderment. Lo and behold, two brands dear to my heart were playing together: Paradigm's Reference Studio speakers powered by an Onkyo AVR-702 receiver. Despite being driven hard, the 5.1-channel system re-created a DVD concert with likable fidelity and recognizable dynamics. I actually sat and listened for a while—high praise for show sound.

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GRANITE AUDIO

Granite Audio introduced the Ground Zero Ground Loop Elimination System. Dubbed "affordable" by Granite, the \$600 passive star-grounding system is said to equalize the ground-impedance path of every component in a system, despite cable and power-cord potentials. The Ground Zero is intended to be used by show attendees who have to deal with 60Hz hum from hotel-room wall outlets. If it's good enough for the pros, it's more than good enough for me. Although \$600 isn't chump change, the GLE does come as a kit "with cables to connect to every component chassis in a system." I presume these are grounding cables; I can't imagine an exhibitor parting with his favorite audio cables.

May I also add that Katie, the Granite Audio saleswoman, was the best-looking person I saw at CES? She reminded me of a lovely friend in Costa Rica. In Spanish, the phrase is *amor a primera vista*. Where's the Granite order form? Ah, if it were only so easy...

Now, the Main Event.

THE TOP TWENTY DEMONSTRATIONS AT CES 2005

20. PENAUDIO/ PORTAL AUDIO

At \$9000 per pair, the Penaudio Serenade loudspeaker does not set a new standard in terms of price/performance ratio, but it does exemplify a happy trend toward



smooth sound at *almost* affordable prices. Driven by Portal Audio Paladin 200W monoblocks (\$3500 per pair), an acknowledged update of an old (Threshold?) solid-state design, the Finnish Serenade proved how perfectly it had been named. I could easily live with this system on a desert island inhabited by a vodka bar and a Finnish ballet school.

19. STAR SOUND TECHNOLOGIES/HARMONIC PRECISION

The Star Sound/Harmonic Precision room was the first place I heard Nils Lofgren's "Keith Don't Go," which turned out to be a staple demo track at the high-end show. I was caught up in the song's fresh emotion, which other systems muted. Overexposure, perhaps? At \$5000 per pair, the Harmonic Precision Caravelle is not as pricey as it seems, given the inclusion of its high-performing art deco stands. As I recall, the electronics were also by Star Sound Technologies, as were the Sonoran cables, Sistrunk stands, and Audiopoints footers. The synergy inspired great confidence in the team from Ohio. This room was among several that featured electronics, loudspeakers, and cables all from the same design house. My hope is that more companies will adopt

this approach. It's high time that the guesswork of system matching was eliminated.

18. ZINGALI/VIVA

A few CESes ago, I picked a Zingali loudspeaker demonstration as my Best of Show. In 2005, the mighty Zingali Monitor 115 (\$18,000 per pair), driven by Viva Aurora single-ended-triode monoblocks (\$27,000 per pair), reminded me why I liked the robust Zingali sound. Driven by a stout 30W, the big Monitor 115—which is only Zingali's third-biggest domestic model—gave vocals the breath of life. Although the speaker manufacturer and amplifier company are independent enterprises, their products seem made for each other—like Naim and Linn two decades ago. If I ever move to a desert island with a grappa bar and an Italian modeling school, I'd want Zingali and Viva for my stereo set.

17. DALI

You're about to build your dream house and your SO won't allow loudspeakers in the living room. What's an audiophile to do? Install the Helicon in-wall loudspeakers from DALI (\$3500 per pair) and bask in hi-fi glory. I would pit the Helicons against any pair of like-priced floorstanders and expect at least a draw. In fact, I urge anyone who's about to remodel with music in mind to consider building around a pair of these speakers, and perhaps a third for center-channel use. Leaving the DALI demonstration, I briefly yearned for a normal life with family, home, and in-wall speakers in the living room. Thankfully, the spell was quickly broken.

16. HYPERION SOUND DESIGN

When I first heard the Hyperion HP-938 loudspeaker (\$4000 per pair) at Home Entertainment 2004 last May, I thought it an excellent work in progress. The ripe tonalities of instrumental music were unprecedented in a speaker of such small price and dimensions. But as soon as the music switched to vocals, reality bit—Diana Krall's alto sounded like Cassandra Wilson's baritone. I was amazed by the glowing reviews that followed in the press. However, I'm pleased to see that someone at Hyperion agreed with me. Hyperion built a stronger cabinet to reduce internal resonances and re-voiced the speaker much closer to neutral. To my ears, the HP-938 is now ready for prime time.

Hyperion also offers electronics at attractive prices. Their BEC-Mono 100Wpc amplifier sells for \$1600 per pair, the BEC-P25T tube preamp for \$1500. For a stunning new system, I'd add to Hyperion's speakers and amplifiers the excellent Audio Aero Prima CD player (\$2200) and Analysis Plus cables. This would produce an immensely satisfying "full-range" system for slightly more than \$11,000. Hi-fi is no game for the faint-hearted.

15. NORDOST

Earlier, I mentioned a demonstration at which I could identify

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a single component as the system's sole source of better sound quality. Here it is. The demo took place in the Nordost room, and the component was a power cord—not just any power cord, but the Nordost Valhalla (\$2749), which is priced like an amplifier and performs like one.

For greater effect, the demonstration was two-tiered. First, Lars showed off the impact of Nordost's new Thor power-distribution block with a quick A/B comparison. I was impressed, but not \$3000 worth. Then Lars substituted the Valhalla for the power amp's lower-priced cord. The improvement was well worth *whatever* Nordost asks for the Valhalla. When Lars opined that the most important cable in a system is the AC cable, I asked myself two questions: (1) Why do power-distribution blocks and line conditioners command so much journalistic interest when they sink or swim depending on the AC cables attached to them? (2) If power cords are so important, why don't more consumers buy them? Hmmm. Maybe consumers are, but *my* customers aren't. Note to Jim: Work on power cords for 2005. Where's that pesky Nordost dealer when you need him?

14. HIGHLAND AUDIO BY INOVADIS

Journalists look for giant-killers to emerge from any CES. My vote for the deadliest small fry goes to Highland Audio's Oran 4305. At \$899 per pair, this slender column of a speaker has a build quality to defy a cost accountant's calculator, and its big, bold sound enables junior's system to outshine dad's. The Oran was decked out in real cherry veneer, used drivers optimized for pulse response (shades of John Dunlavy!), was internally wired with silver-plated cable (like Focal's Utopia series), and had binding posts that would inspire envy in a Polk owner. If someone wanted to graduate from mini components to real hi-fi, he or she would be hard-pressed to find anything at twice the price to better the sound I heard in the Highland Audio room.

13. UNIWAVE TEK

This tiny, Utah-based company's entry in the digital-chip amplifier race was an amazing debut—or, rather, *two* debuts; their preamp also uses a chip. Although the prices are on the high side for digital gear, the specs alone justify higher-than-entry-level tags. For example, the ANACO 2 preamp (\$4800) has an amazing bandwidth of 3MHz, is truly balanced, and has a digital volume control that should be the envy of all—the preamp's amazing signal-to-noise ratio of 110dB remains unaltered throughout the control's range.

The ANACO 2 stereo amplifier is equally impressive. For \$6800 you get an amp rated at 500Wpc into 8 ohms with a 250kHz bandwidth, 98dB signal/noise ratio, 92% efficiency, and a 2500W-capacity switching power supply. Moreover, both amp and preamp are squeezed into shiny, curvaceous chassis that tickle the acquisitive urge (think Jeff Rowland

gear). I'm concerned whether Uniwave Tek will be able to fight the big guns massing on the horizon, but the company has been producing loudspeakers since 1990 under the name Chateau Research. Driven by ANACO amplifiers, the Chateau speakers produced a pristine, nonelectronic sound that was difficult to nit-pick. Sometimes that says a lot. Here's a toast to Uniwave Tek's prosperity.

12. NUFORCE

In comparison to the Uniwave Tek gear's polished appearance, NuForce's Reference 8 analog switching amplifier is housed in a black box only an inventor could love. However, the specifications and low asking price (\$1500 per pair) make these 3-pound wonders as attractive as Britney Spears. The sound they evoked from an old pair of Sound Dynamics loudspeakers was downright voluptuous.

NuForce's rationale is that no digital amplifier maintains its 1W distortion specification as power demands increase. NuForce claims that the Reference 8 puts out 140W into 8 ohms while retaining its 0.05% THD+noise rating from 10Hz to 100kHz, from first watt to last. As we *Law & Order* buffs say, those are serious allegations.

Although I don't see NuForce threatening Tripath or ICEpower any time soon, I hope the company can attract some deep-pocketed manufacturer to license its technology. The Sound Dynamics speakers were pretty good, but they'd never impressed me in my system as they did in the NuForce setup. I can't help but think that the gentlemen from San Jose, California have created a technology to rival Dr. Tripath's, and perhaps outperform it. For such a dramatic entrance into high-end audio, NuForce's little amp deserves a big Jimmy on the mantelpiece.

11. ZETEX SEMICONDUCTORS

For me, a potential Big Kahuna at the digital-amplifier luau could be a specialist in analog technology, Zetex Semiconductors plc. Although Zetex already offers a class-D analog-input modulator (it's a chip), at CES the company showed an amazing baby that could take a bite of the market. The demonstration consisted of a circuit board with a power supply sitting on a table and driving a pair of loudspeakers to excellent effect. When I asked the man in charge where the chip was, he said it was half the circuit board. All Zetex had to do was shrink it down to a plug-in module. I understand from Bel Canto's John Stronczer, who has friends at Zetex, that this feat of legerdemain is no big deal for a chip designer. Where have I been all these years?

The design goal for the chip-in-progress is to provide sound quality that surpasses that of the best linear, class-AB amplifiers. Because I'm convinced that Tripath- and ICEpower-based amplifiers already do that (leaving aside

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the Edge amps), I'm certain that Zetex will soon reach its objective and provide a third choice for "digital" amplifier design. The geniuses at Tripath and ICEpower may want to stay alert—the Zetex Kahuna is hungry.

10. EPIPHANY AUDIO

Epiphany Audio's Model 12-12 loudspeaker looks like the Infinity IRS system of 20 years ago. A line-source design with two 12-driver columns housed in a rosewood cabinet, the 12-12's appearance is almost quaint. At \$14,900 per pair and -3dB down at 40Hz, the 12-12 seemed mildly overpriced—until the music started. Then those big boxes disappeared from the mind's ear, leaving behind only the performers.

Despite their price, I wound up burning time in the presence of the Epiphany's. The 12 tweeters per side are the Bohlender-Graebner Neo 3 planar diaphragm ribbons used in BG's highly regarded professional line. I was also told that the woofer column's in-room response was closer to 30Hz than 40Hz, which says a lot about room gain.

Still concerned about the Model 12-12's low-frequency specs, I noticed a smaller Epiphany speaker with two 8" woofers per side. The spec sheet listed it as -3dB at 25Hz. I asked to hear the better-specified model and, sure enough, the bass increased in quantity, but not in quality. We switched back to the 12-12s, where the sensation was one of music without artifice but with plenty of art. If I had 15 large to spend on speakers, the Epiphany Model 12-12 would be on my short list.

9. VON SCHWEIKERT

One of my missions at CES was to listen to the much-ballyhooed Von Schweikert VR-4jr, which I did and enjoyed. However, the VR-4jr seemed much smaller than in the photos I'd seen, and thus less of a value at \$4000 per pair than I'd been led to expect. When Albert Von S. his own bad self advised me to check out the new VR-4SR, I anticipated a larger version of the jr. Well, the VR-4SR is larger, all right; it's also a much more exciting speaker than its diminutive sibling.

At \$8000 per pair, the VR-4SR strikes me as a better investment than the VR-4jr. For instance, the VR-4SR goes from 20Hz to 25kHz, +/-3dB, and except for a plateau of 4 ohms from 20 to 150Hz, its impedance is 8 ohms from 150Hz up. It's physically imposing—the midrange/tweeter unit is 24" deep, the matching woofer module 44"H by 11"W by 24"D. Each VR-4SR weighs 150 pounds and, unlike the VS-4jr, looks a lot bigger in the wood than in photos.

Listening to the VR-4SR, I detected an edge in the midrange that was less than pleasing. Mr. VS opined that it must be the recording—the speaker itself couldn't be adding anything to the playback. I'm no engineer, but that didn't sound exactly

right. When a friend suggested that room reflections were at work, a light bulb went on. As soon as no one was looking, I turned off the rear ambience tweeter (*don't* try this at shows). The sound immediately sweetened up, the singer's voice was more natural, and the center image was tighter. However, the sound was now not quite as dynamic as when the rear tweeters were firing into the room corners.

Based on the VR-4SR's performance with its rear tweeter up *or* down, I would not vote the Von Schweikert demo as Best Sound of Show. However, I'm hopeful that there is a level adjustment that will provide an edgeless midrange with sufficient dynamic contrast to make the VR-4SR a solid contender in the performance-per-dollar sweepstakes. I think the VR-4SR at \$8000 per pair has a chance of being a best-buy product of the year.

8. CABASSE

The most memorable surround-sound system I heard at CES 2005 comprised loudspeakers from Cabasse's Altura series. Manning the left and right sides were the Bahias, with a Sena in the center and Rivas in the rear. A Largo subwoofer anchored the system with nimble low-bass output. The total cost of these 5.1 speakers was \$9900, which allows me to authoritatively state that the Altura system is one of the best available for less than \$10,000. I don't think spending even twice that would produce better soundstage width, depth, and front-to-back continuity than the Cabasse Alturas. Watching the onslaught of Japanese fighter-bombers in *Pearl Harbor*, I was struck by the airplanes flying *overhead*. Or was the sound striking me *in* the head? If I had to move to a desert island where only action flicks and Air France flight attendants were available, an Altura system would be a decent fate.

7. ANTHONY GALLO

At long last, the Gallo Nucleus Reference 3 subwoofer crossover-amplifier (\$949) has arrived. It was worth the wait. With the precision control of the Reference 3's second voice coil, the speaker is now capable of casting a density of image that went missing from the single-amplified version. I suggest that any audiophile who bought the highly praised Reference 3 in expectation of harmonically richer sound place an order for the crossover-amplifier as soon as possible, then call the Gallo dealer weekly. Tell him Jim sent you. My order is already in, but I've no one to call.



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Anthony Gallo also sprang two other surprises: the Reference Center speaker (\$1200) and the TR Series subwoofers (TR-1, \$425; TR-2, \$700). Because we listened to two channels *without* TR subs, I can only take Anthony's word for it that the Reference Center goes down to 55Hz (!) and has the CDTII tweeter's dispersion limited to 120 degrees. Intelligibility from the Reference Center must be good enough to justify the unit's high price compared to the Reference 3 (\$2500 pair).

6. LUMAGEN

The best video demonstration I saw was in the Lumagen room, where the VisionDVI (\$1000) did an excellent job of scaling a shadowy, mottled DVD image to near high-definition standards. Anyone who owns a standard-def video source can plug it into a VisionDVI and output a DVI-I signal at 768p from the composite or S-video input. If the video source is of higher definition, the VisionHDP (\$1500) can scale up to 1080p, which is about as good as digital video gets. My experience was limited to the VisionDVI, but I'm tempted to bring the VisionHDP in to see how much our excellent DLP projectors will improve when fed a 1080p signal. One never knows when videophile tendencies might surface.

5. GREEN MOUNTAIN AUDIO/EDGE

Here was a room where I felt confident I could identify the amplifier's contribution to the sound. When I heard unfamiliar detail coming from a favorite recording, I volunteered that the Edge amp was providing the excellent inner detail. Green Mountain designer Roy Johnson replied, "A lot of people say that about Edge amps." I had assumed Edge products were out of my price range, but with the 75Wpc G4 amplifier at \$3250 and the G1 preamp at \$3000, I'm thinking of ordering sample units. So many amplifiers, so little time.

The other piece in this room's mosaic of great sound was the Callisto loudspeaker from Green Mountain Audio, a most attractive buy at \$2300 per pair. The Callisto is made from cast marble (whatever that is), weighs 49 pounds, and is down 3dB at 47Hz. The frequency response from 80Hz to 20kHz is an incredible +/-0.75dB—with music I knew, I experienced no lack of bass. Using a first-order crossover, the Callisto is phase coherent and ruler-flat through the midrange. No wonder it was so easy on my ears. Without having to make constant mental corrections of frequency and phase anomalies, the brain can relax and absorb the music. I would gladly pay \$2300 for such psychic repose. Anyone considering a fancy office or bedroom system should audition a pair of Callistos. I bet they'll sound better than the bigger, more expensive loudspeakers downstairs.

4. ACOUSTIC DREAMS

Acoustic Dreams displayed the Ayon Butterfly, an Austrian-

built loudspeaker three times as wide as it is deep. Driven by two Mastersound 845 tube monoblocks (\$10,000 per pair), the quasi-boxless Butterfly reminded me of the legendarily cabinetless Audio Artistry Beethoven loudspeaker of the mid-1990s. Images floated wide and deep, tonality was warm and enveloping, and inner detail was a natural offshoot of see-through clarity. At a price of \$5500, I consider these speakers as belonging to a niche of one. I assume that they would sound as wonderful with digital amplification as with bottle amps, but at this point I can only dream about how these beauties might sound in my system. So many loudspeakers, so little money.

3. HERRON AUDIO

An oasis on the last day of CES was the Herron Audio room. Whether it was the graciousness of Mr. and Mrs. Herron or the vinyl being played, after the usual perfunctory listen I found it impossible to leave. Because the Herron ESP-1 loudspeakers were prototypes (no price yet), I restrict this Jimmy Award to Herron's electronics: the VTSP-2 tube preamplifier (\$5000), M1 mono power amplifier (\$6000 per pair), and VTPH-1MC tube phono stage (\$3250). Heck, I'll throw in the Herron interconnect (\$225) and DiMarzio speaker cables (\$500) as well. I could also single out the VPI turntable and Lyra cartridge, but I have no way of evaluating the current state of the analog art. Nor do I care.

I don't know how much of a dealer network Herron Audio has or when the company will be shipping the ESP-1, but anyone with access to Keith Herron's highly engaging products should take a listen to the full setup. A Herron system would be a classical-music-lover's Holy Grail.

2. EBEN BY RAIDHO ACOUSTICS

For the uncluttered music I like—light rock, female voice, jazz trios, Latin philosophical—the best loudspeaker at CES 2005 was a Danish tower of unprepossessing proportions and seemingly overoptimistic price. I approached the Eben by Raidho Acoustics X-3, and before sitting down, I asked its price: \$14,400 per pair. My spirits sagged. So many rooms at CES featured unproven, high-ticket components and speakers for which only a filthy-rich novice would consider plunging that I almost got up and walked out.

I'm glad I didn't. The electronics were from GamuT (which I'd thought had gone out of business), and they cooperated brilliantly in producing the best sound at the show. The Eben X-3 was dynamic, transparent, and seamless; it was like listening to a cross between MartinLogans and Avantgardes. Electric guitar had startling twang. Vocals were textured in minute fractals. The growl and pop of bass chords were right out of a club gig. If I had 15 large to spend on new speakers, I'd wire the money to Denmark.

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The secrets of the Eben X-3's success are its drivers. The tweeter is a planar device with instantaneous reactions—other loudspeaker manufacturers should consider buying or developing such a tweeter. The midrange and woofer cones are from Audio Technology, which, as any aficionado knows, was founded by the legendary Ejvind Skaaning, of Dynaudio and Scan-Speak fame. Skaaning drivers are dearly priced, and deservedly so. A speaker using *five* Audio Technology transducers per side is bound to *seem* expensive, but I can't think of a speaker that's more exciting to listen to than the Eben X-3. In that sense, it's inexpensive. In lieu of purchasing a pair for my personal use, I hereby award the X-3's designer, Michael Borresen, a Double Jimmy.

1. USHER AUDIO

For me, the best show at CES 2005 was not one of music but of force. Usher Audio of Taiwan brought over examples of its full loudspeaker lineup. I had never seen so large a collection of such beautifully styled products in one room.



The relationship of retail price to build quality and, presumably, performance of Usher's products defies logic. For instance, the speaker that was playing, the CP 8871 II, has two 8"

low-bass woofers, a 7" mid-low woofer, and a 1" beryllium-coated dome tweeter—all in one of the most exquisitely finished wood-veneer cabinets I've ever seen. How did it sound? Well, at a suggested retail price of \$8900, who cares? But seriously—to my ears, the sound was lush, liquid, and large, but I may have been struck deaf by the CP 8871 II's appearance. For nine grand, there's nothing that comes close to the Usher Dancer series, visually speaking.

The same held true for the other Usher speakers, which were on silent display. For instance, the 14-pound S-520 minimonitor comes in rock-solid piano black or white and responds down to 55Hz. At a retail price of \$400 per pair (\$375 for wood veneer), the speaker makes likely competitors look like doo-doo. I emphasize the Usher line's presence/price ratio because sales of hi-fi products are made almost as much on looks as on sound quality.

My understanding is that not all of Usher's loudspeakers are currently available in the US. North American manufacturers should regard the respite as temporary. At some point, Usher containers will start being unloaded onto American docks, and the world of hi-fi will turn upside down.

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