

May/June 2006
Volume 5 Issue 3

Recent and Upcoming Events

May 6, 2006

Overture
Wilmington, DE
Dealer Show
with Peter McGrath

May 25-28, 2006

High End 2006 Show
Munich, Germany
Peter McGrath Attending

June 1-4, 2006

Home Entertainment Show
The Sheraton Gateway Hotel
Los Angeles, CA
WATT/Puppy System 8 Debut

June 14-15, 2006

Audio Unlimited
Denver, CO
Dealer Training
with Peter McGrath

June 19-20, 2006

ESC
Aspen, CO
Dealer Training
with Peter McGrath

June 28-29, 2006

Soundworks
Kensington, MD
Dealer Training
with Peter McGrath

June 30, 2006

Atlanta Home Theater
Rosewell, GA
Dealer Training
with Peter McGrath

WILSON[®] AUDIOFILES

“There is No Other Way” (and other fundamentalist fallacies)

by David Wilson

The reason I'm in the field of audio is that I have a consuming passion for sound that communicates a musical event. I believe any successful designer in this field must also share that passion. If they don't – if they are coldly dispassionate accountants or scientists – then what they produce will only be an appliance. It may be cost-effective, efficient, and measure well, but it won't be widely embraced by discerning sound and music lovers. It would also never be seen as opening new frontiers of what is sonically *and* musically possible.

But passion alone is not a complete platform for achieving successful designs – or businesses. Passion may supply the driving force. But without discipline, accurate technical knowledge, customer savvy, and business integrity, multifaceted endeavors such as state-of-the-art loudspeakers and first-rate businesses will not be successful. To paraphrase the business guru, Vidal Sassoon, excellence is like a baby – easy to conceive, but hard to deliver. Put differently, if a company whose only intellectual resource is passion can be likened to a 1000 horsepower car careening down the road with no steering or brakes, then a company and its designs created without vision can be likened to a properly equipped car rushing down a dark road with no lights. Ultimately, all business, aesthetic, and technical qualities must follow an insightful vision.

Understandably, the loudspeakers that bear my name reflect my vision of how such a thing should be built, how the company should be run, and, of great importance, what speakers should sound like. As is true of some other designers, I want Wilson Audio loudspeakers to sound as much as possible like live musicians playing music.

What are the specific characteristics

of the sound of live music that are the most important to me? It's a question I've pondered many times over the years. I keep returning to three sonic attributes I always associate with the sound of the real thing. I've noticed these qualities during years of location recording in a wide range of venues, as well as private recitals in our own music room. The following three are central to the target sound of every Wilson Audio speaker, from Duette™ to Alexandria®. These qualities will come as no surprise to those who are intimately familiar with our creations. They are, not in any order of preference, the following:

- Dynamic Contrast
- Harmonic Expression
- Silence Between the Notes

It doesn't take much exposure to even small musical instruments played up close to realize just how much power they can produce. Sure, it's not the ear-splitting type of loudness that you endure in some live rock concerts, hyped-up car audio systems, or even (regrettably) your local cineplex. But unamplified acoustical instruments have been developed, in some cases, over centuries to such that the volume and pitch density they are capable of producing has increased. They also seem, in the hands of a skilled musician, to be able to go from pianissimo to fortissimo levels with breathtaking and delightful alacrity. So, while I rarely marvel over a live instrument's airiness, I am always thrilled by its dynamic contrast.

Imagine the dynamics you hear while on a ladder hanging microphones over an open-lidded 9'Fazioli grand piano – what a sound! Or, even in a large hall, try setting mics in front of a 50 piece symphonic wind band: huge dynamics! No PA speaker is required

(Cont. on pg. 2 as No Other Way)

Excerpted with permission from Australia's *Tone* magazine April 2006 issue.

“Ideal World”

by Gary Steel

“It doesn't stop me from dreaming though, now that I've experienced first-hand the difference between entry-level hi-fi, high-end hi-fi, and the rarefied world of Wilson Audio....

“Listening to the Alexandrias, on the other hand, was totally captivating. I was right in the auditorium with the orchestra, or underneath the guitar strings, or - depending on the intention of the recording engineers

- inside the sounds or riding rapids with them.

In short, listening to the Alexandrias is an *experience*. Totally involving, it made me want to really *listen*, such was the life-like fidelity, the exciting dynamics, the resolution of each note and the textural information constantly on tap. I never wanted it to stop, and my humble stereo, by comparison, sounded about as exciting

as the kind of speaker system you might encounter in an elevator....

“Ultimately, Kern says, [*Simon Kern is Wilson's Australian distributor*], ‘you simply hear *more*’ with Wilson Audio speakers. ‘It's a bigger screen, a higher resolution. It helps you to listen to a piece of music and really get it, and more often than not I find I'm able to actually understand what people are singing.’”

No Other Way (Cont. from pg. 1)

or desired, just pure, unadulterated *acoustical* sonic ecstasy and dynamic contrasts. The perception of large dynamic scale is only appreciated when you hear delicacy at the pianissimo end. It is this kind of dynamic range I want my speakers to reproduce.

I first began to really appreciate pure harmonic expression during some of those same recording sessions. Usually at the beginning and half way through the day, the piano tuner would touch up the instrument. Over time, I developed an increased sensitivity to purity of pitch. Perhaps of even greater importance, I began to appreciate how the pure pitch of the well-tuned instrument blended harmonically and dynamically with the other instruments. Comparatively, the sound of an untuned instrument is both more rough and less expressive. Harmonic expression requires consistent tonal balance across at least the middle six octaves as well as accurate wave front propagation alignment of the drivers, and finally, linear enclosure resonance control.

“Silence between the notes” took on special meaning to me when violinist David Abel worked with me on putting together the master tape of our recording of WCD-8722, *Sonatas for Piano and Violin*, works by Brahms, Debussy, and Bartok. David explained to me that classical musicians do not have as many avenues of expression as do jazz musicians. *Pitch* cannot be validly changed in the name of interpretation, and *tempo* must be observed within fairly narrow limits. *Dynamics*, on the other hand, provide many arresting and colorful opportunities for artistic expression in classical music. David pointed out several of these elements in the second movement of the Debussy, and then said, “I make music in the silence between the notes.” Much of what is so compelling in acoustical music occurs at the pianissimo (quiet) end of the dynamic range. Elimination of or rapid settling of electrical and mechanical noise is important to allow subtle nuances at pianissimo levels to be revealed.

Followers of one design model or another frequently criticize us because our design model is different than their own beliefs. One school of thought is that since 6 dB/oct. crossover slopes can theoretically yield more accurate impulse response, our speakers are fatally flawed because we use a different approach. But what if, as I have found, 6 dB/oct. designs have less dynamic range and contrast than our designs? Remember, I value dynamic contrasts.

Similarly, what if I have found that some wideband tweeters are dynamically compressed and colored in the lower 2 kHz of their bandwidth? Or if, on the other hand, I have chosen to use tweeters with less ultrasonic bandwidth but more consistent dynamics over the audible range? It is more consistent with my personal sonic values to use the more dynamic tweeter. I choose to use those approaches that allow me to more closely realize my vision of musical sound – even if those design elements are not the latest darlings of the press or the current fetish of audio fundamentalists.

Many of us remember the Total Harmonic Distortion wars of the 70's. Amplifier designers found that by employing certain circuit topologies, such as massive amounts of negative feedback, they could reduce THD to vanishingly low levels. Distortion is bad . . . like a disease. Less distortion is always better! End of discussion! When the hoopla died out, it was found that those low distortion wonders sounded pretty sterile – terrible, actually. The medicine to cure the THD disease, it turned out, had some nasty side effects.

Another example can be found in the comparison of solid state amps vs. tubes. Anyone knows that similarly priced and powered solid state amps exhibit wider bandwidth, higher damping factor, and lower distortion than their tube counterparts. Therefore, no one could possibly prefer tubes!

Finally, since noise, distortion, and flatness of frequency response are always desirable, then early digital (which was superior in these respects) must surely be superior to mere analog.

No single design element or criterion can embrace all of truth and result in perfect sound. Most experienced, successful designers know this.

Successful designs come from designers who know what they want and use appropriate approaches, and, finally execute to the best of their ability. The danger is to be seduced by the notion that there is only one correct design approach, and back this false belief with narrow-minded fundamentalism. There are always a number of perfectly valid design approaches. A mature designer accepts and embraces *this* fundamental truth, and with a mind open to the possibilities, picks the set of design criteria best suited to his vision and priorities.



The Wilson Audio crew poses in the static display room after a successful Home Entertainment show June 1-4 in Los Angeles. Wilson showed in two rooms: one featuring a static display of each of our products, and the second featuring a demo of the WATT/Puppy 8.



While waiting to hear the System 8 demo, guests at the Wilson display were able to view Wilson speakers in a variety of WilsonGloss™ colors, Wilson product posters mounted and framed as art, and the entire set of Wilson Authentic Excellence Posters available to dealers.



Dave Wilson discusses the changes in the latest iteration of the WATT/Puppy during a press conference and listening session Thursday afternoon. *Stereophile* magazine's Wes Philips said in his blog entry (<http://blog.stereophile.com/he2006/index5.html>), "I think it is safe to say that the WATT/Puppy 8 just might be the WATT/Puppy for music lovers - at least 20 music lovers were more wowed by the music they played than the guests of honor themselves. That's no mean feat at a hi-fi show."



Most of the over 50 listening demonstrations were conducted by Dave Wilson. John Giolas, Peter McGrath, and Daryl Wilson conducted presentations as well. Over 700 guests experienced System 8 during her weekend debut.



Brooks Berdan, Wilson's dealer in Monrovia, CA, provided Wes Philips a "perfect ending to a great show" (<http://blog.stereophile.com/he2006/>). His room featured Sophia 2s, VTL MB450 monoblocks, TL-7.5 Series II preamplifier, and the prototype of VTL's new TP 6.5 phono section.

Wilson Posters

Wilson product posters are available to dealers by request. The posters measure 20" x 24", are photo quality, and are printed on glossy paper.



WATT/Puppy[®] System II



WILSON[™]
AUDIO