

Rocky Mountain Audio Fest 2015

Different, Upbeat, Younger High-End Audio



By
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(United States)

Another high-end audio show, another road trip. After a brief overnight stop in Lincoln, Nebraska, I rolled into Denver, CO, prepared for the usual crush of gear and geeks at the annual Rocky Mountain Audio Fest (RMAF). Though the crush didn't materialize until Saturday, the huge quantity of new product introductions kept me busy. Here's a sampling of what I found of interest at the 12th annual RMAF and CanJam at RMAF 2015, which took place October 2–4 2015.

Let's start the show tour with big transducers. Vandersteen Audio (www.vandersteen.com) introduced the new Quatro Wood CT floorstanders, paired with the \$995 M5-HP balanced high-pass filters. While not

what I'd call affordable, the new Quatro (\$13,900) offers much of the technical know-how derived from its older siblings and delivers excellent value for its level of performance.

Ryan Speakers (www.ryanspeakers.com), one of my favorite small loudspeaker manufacturers, took a big step forward in design, engineering, and style with its upcoming Tempus III. A four-way floorstander, the \$16,000 Tempus III will incorporate a beryllium dome tweeter and Nomex midrange, plus mid woofer and dual side firing woofers. The rear-vented tapering tower will have a target response of 24 to 35 kHz ± 3 dB, and will be available in the first quarter of 2016.

While sprinting down the halls of the show, I was drawn into a room with small white, stand-mounted speakers that superficially resembled the Gauder Akustik Arcona 40 (www.gauderakustik.com). Like the Arcona, they also sounded great. However, a quick inspection revealed dissimilarities—a time-aligned Accuton mid/low-frequency driver and rectangular enclosure with a port on the back. I inquired as to their pedigree, and the lone attendant informed me they were the Mundorf MA30s—easy-to-assemble, custom German kit speakers that feature its AMT tweeters (see



Photo 1: The compact and competent Mundorf MA30 kit



Photo 2: A preview of Wyred's upcoming Intimo HPA

Photo 1). Pricing for the kit version ranges from \$1,750 for a bare bones collection of parts to just shy of \$3,000 for the luxe version that includes premium examples of everything you need, except a soldering iron. It can also be purchased assembled.

I was told the MA30 celebrates the 30th anniversary of Mundorf (www.mundorf.com), which supplies some of the best speaker components you can buy (e.g., its new SUPREME EVO series capacitors). After a moment, I realized that I was talking with the CEO and founder, Norbert Mundorf!

Source Systems, a representative for M2Tech, Apertura, and Sbooster, had France's Apertura Armonia and Edena loudspeakers at the show (www.apertura-audio.com). The Armonia and the Edena were not for sale in the US until RMAF. The Armonia is making a return to the US domestic market, after having been shown here briefly in 2013. Announced but not at the show, was the \$12,500 Kayla, a



Photo 4: Kingsound's KS-H04 headphones & M-03 HPA



Photo 3: Audio Alchemy's DPA-1, DDP-1, and PS-5 separates

vented, stand-mounted two-way, fitted with an 8" low-frequency driver, composed of a polypro amalgam, mated to a ribbon tweeter that is 3 dB down at 30 kHz. Availability was slated for the end of 2015.

From M2Tech (www.m2tech.biz), the affordable EVO, the EVO Supply, and the EVO Clock have been upgraded to the new DXD and 4x DSD-capable hiFace EVO Two (\$650), the ultra-low-noise EVO Supply Two (\$550), and the EVO Clock Two (\$650). The dedicated EVO Clock Two is particularly interesting for its price, as the twin TCXO and ultra-low noise voltage regulator feature set usually carries a much higher price. From Source Systems, Sbooster (www.sbooster.com), a Dutch vendor of low noise linear power supplies, its external inline power supply units (PSUs) replace noisy and inconvenient switching wall warts that gear often ships with, and cost less than \$450.

Electronics

What Vinnie Rossi started with his modular LIO has now become a trend. I haven't seen so many slots since my Eurocard days at Philips! Audia Flight (www.audia.it) rolled out the new Flight Three S (\$3,500), a 100 Wpc, dual mono, Class A/B integrated amplifier from Italy. An optional 192k-capable DAC and MC/MM phono preamplifier can be added at any time. Fully loaded, the cost is \$4,300. I liked the preamplifier bypass feature that reverts the product to a straight power amplifier. Also new from Audio Flight is the STRUMENTO n° 4 stereo power amplifier (\$28,500). The power amplifier is 200 lb of hardware delivering 200 W of power into 8 Ω , 800 into 4. Small signal bandwidth extends from 0.3 Hz to 1 MHz, where it's down only 3 dB.

Wyred 4 Sound (www.wyred4sound.com) previewed two new



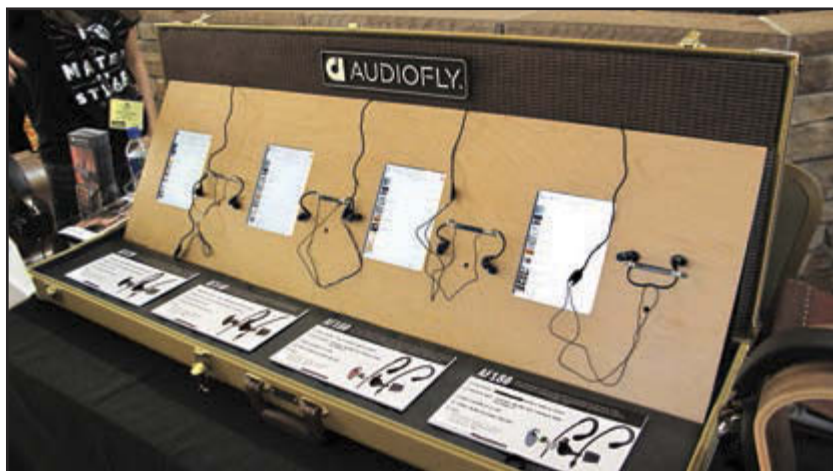
Photo 5: Fostex's extravagant HP-V8 HPA

Photo 6: NAD's new VISO HP30



products from the Statement Series—a bridgeable 250 W into 8 Ω amplifier with 5" color touchscreen user interface (\$3,000 to \$4,000) and a matching "future-proof" controller. The fully balanced controller, which will run from \$2,000 to \$5,000 depending on the configuration, is what I would consider a preamp, a modular one. Planned input modules include a DAC, phono stage, some flavor of wireless, and others yet unannounced. Even the PSU is modular, and the unit will also include a 5" color touchscreen. The duo

Photo 7: An Audiofly swarm



was expected to be released in late 2015 or early in 2016. Also new from Wyred is the upcoming Intimo headphone amp (HPA), priced at \$995 (see **Photo 2**). Signage for the nonfunctional demo mentioned single-ended and balanced outputs, three global gain settings to accommodate everything from in-ear monitors to pro cans, plus multiple digital inputs and built-in EQ.

Also from Wyred, a new SST-branded product, the Thoebe II stereo preamplifier (www.sst.audio). Fairly rare these days is the inclusion of "bass and treble controls," plus two global gain settings and a "world-class" headphone amplifier. Starting price for the Thoebe II is \$3,500—a 2x DSD DAC or phono stage adds \$500. For \$4,250, you get both. An optional remote is also available.

Last seen bopping around the 2015 AXPONA show, Peter Madnick of Threshold and Constellation Audio fame has revitalized the Audio Alchemy brand (www.audioalchemy.com) that was lost in the 1990s. At RMAF, he offered a line of reasonably priced, similarly styled separates (see **Photo 3**), including the DDP-1 preamp/DAC/HPA (\$1,995) with an optional PS-5 external power supply (\$595), the DPA-1 and the DPA-1M, Class-D stereo and mono power amps (\$1,995 each), the PPA-1 phono preamp (\$1,595), and the DMP-1 NAP or network-attached player (\$1,595). NAP could also stand for Network(ed) Audio Player or Network Access Point. All I know is the common "streamer" level is not only nebulous but drives me crazy.

Network Audio Players

Regarding NAPs, another separate that's trending is pure network audio players with no other inputs, and Canadian concern exaSound (www.exasound.com) was offering its \$1,999 PlayPoint. Like the DMP-1, the PlayPoint requires a DAC—in this case, an exaSound DAC as the PlayPoint supports every format the talented e22 and e28 can handle, including 4x DSD multichannel and TIDAL via AirPlay. From murmurs I heard circulating around the show, I'm guessing that Master Quality Authenticated (MQA) decoding for most TIDAL client hardware and apps isn't far off.

Cary Audio (www.caryaudio.com) debuted its flagship DMS-500 digital music NAP. At \$4,995, the DMS-500 accepts a wide variety of inputs, from direct-attached USB and NAS drives plus SD cards to streaming data from TIDAL, Wi-Fi and aptX Bluetooth. It also supports AES3 in and outs to and from your old-school DAC. Both XLR and RCA outs are provided, as is upsampling to 4x DSD or 2x DXD. Let's hope that upsampling is defeatable.

After the show, I had the pleasure of touring the Boulder Amplifiers factory in Boulder, CO. Just the day before I had checked out the new Boulder 865 amplifier at RMAF. As with all of its products, the



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Photo 8: Aki Yamazaki from Atomic Floyd



\$14,000 integrated is a stately, no compromise design, delivering 150 Wpc.

Headphones

beyerdynamic (www.beyerdynamic.com) played its top-of-the-line closed pro headphone, the DT 1770 (\$599). The new cans, along with the second-generation T1 (\$1,099) had already been released in Berlin at the consumer electronics (CE) trade show IFA, but its US debut was at RMAF. Parker Bradley, beyerdynamic's US Sales Manager, told me that "it was

Photo 9: Echobox's Finder X1



the first time the headphones were able to be listened to by the general public." The DT 1770 comes equipped with a 3 m straight cable and a 5 m coiled cable along with two sets of ear pads—a high isolation set made of leatherette and a pair of velour-covered pads for a "...more open sound for mixing and mastering."

STAX (www.stax.co.jp), long known as the leader in electrostatic headphones, showed its new SR-L700, an entry-level electrostatic (approximately \$1,500). As with any electrostatic headphone, a suitable energizer/amplifier is needed to run it. Challenging STAX's electrostatic hegemony is King's Audio (www.kingsaudio.com.hk). Its Kingsound KS-H04 (\$900) and M-03 (\$450) combo (see **Photo 4**) was new at the show. The over-the-ear KS-H04 looks tasteful and plays loud. What's cool is the M-03, a portable energizer that also combines a headphone amplifier with a 6,200 mAh "power bank" for charging other USB devices. The anodized M-03 comes in six colors.

Fostex (www.fostexinternational.com), which supplies OEMs and tweekers worldwide, has decided to take back some market share with its new \$159 T20RP Mk3 open, T40RP Mk3 closed, and T50RP Mk3 semi-open planar magnetics. The T50RP Mk3 is an update of the venerable T50RP, the stock modder headphone now with updated voicing.

Having cut my teeth in the 1980s on Fostex's wood horn studio monitors, I can appreciate the voicing and the build quality of its pro cans. Now, they're even better out of the box! Also from Fostex, a no-holds-barred HPA. Weighing more than 30 kg, its HP-V8 hollow-state statement piece has transformers galore—toroidal power, a heater and a choke, plus custom iron for the ins and outs. E88CC and 300B tubes are used in the audio section, and premium components are used throughout. The HP-V8 (\$7,999) is expected to ship in the first quarter of 2016 (see **Photo 5**).

Speaking of Fostex, MrSpeakers started life with OEM parts modified from Fostex's parent company Foster. RMAF was something of a milestone for the company (www.mrspeakers.com), with the introduction of the new \$1,499 ETHER open and ETHER-C, a closed planar magnetic. These models are the first to incorporate internal components designed in-house.

NAD (www.nadelectronics.com), part of the Lenbrook Group, had the new VISO HP30, a \$249 on-ear, with a sleek, lovely design, and good sound (see **Photo 6**). PSB (www.psbSpeakers.com) was showing its new ported in-ear, the \$299 M4U4, with a balanced armature mid/high and a dynamic LF transducer.

Lyrus Audio (www.lyrusaudio.com) displayed its Model Nine and Six circumaural, planar magnetic headphones. The Model Six (\$1,290) has a 80 mm

diaphragm with a silver voice coil, and the 90 mm Model Nine (\$1,890) sports gold traces. Lyrus Audio also previewed the new, entry-level Model Four (\$790) with 60 mm drivers with copper traces.

I first talked with Audiofly (www.audiofly.com) in the summer of 2013, and this year at RMAF, the company showed it's not just about in-ears anymore. I listened to its new AF240, a \$250 over-the-ear model that's manufactured in China from Audiofly's in-house design. Comfortable, dark, with a nice overall balance, the AF240 is lightweight for all day wear (see **Photo 7**).

If you think 10-way IEMs are not enough, Guangdong's Unique Melody (www.uniquemelody.co) goes two better with a four-way IEM that includes dual supertweeters for each side. Its North American agent, Musicteck (www.musicteck.com) was demonstrating the 20 Ω UM Maestro, which starts at \$1,449 for a universal version, while the custom model goes for \$1,599.

Japanese manufacturer Atomic Floyd (www.atomicfloyd.com) revealed its latest earphones, the SuperDarts (\$400). Built tough, the new in-ears feature a machined titanium body, a three-button in-line remote for iOS, and a shelved up low-frequency response for "deep, primal bass" (see **Photo 8**). Their only down side is the straight, not angled, 0.125" gold-plated plug.

Echobox (www.echoboxaudio.com) is another vendor going with titanium for its bodies. Using German polyether ether ketone (PEEK) for its diaphragms, the Finder X1 (\$199) are sleek small in-ears that are manufactured in-house (see **Photo 9**). A companion piece, the Explorer X1 is a nicely designed novel critter in the crowded HRA portable space. Flask-shaped, with a big touch UI, brushed metal and real leather, the Explorer X1 (\$199) does streaming audio including TIDAL, up to 192k for PCM plus 1x DSD in a future firmware release. It also acts as a Wi-Fi hotspot and has an AES3 optical out for connection to your fixed gear.

Although I tried Alclair's (www.alclair.com) Curve a few months ago, it was nice to witness its first public showing at RMAF. The \$249 entry-level universal two-way IEM features dual-balanced armatures, a detachable cable, and a carrying case (see **Photo 10**). With a unique, ergonomic shape derived from years of fitting hearing instruments to a wide range of ears, the see-through Curves are lightweight and, they won't break the bank. Voiced for pros, these have perhaps the most comfortable shells I've tried. Plus, once inserted, they stay put.

ALO, which brought you headphone amplifiers, has entered the earphone business via its Campfire Audio brand (www.campfireaudio.com). At RMAF, the company introduced a range of three earphones, the



Photo 10: Alclair's new UIEM, the Curve

Jupiter (\$899), the Lyra (\$749), and the Orion (\$399). The latter integrates a single-balanced armature into their chunky and not very comfortable machined aluminum housing. The mid-range Lyra has a ceramic enclosure housing a custom dynamic driver comprised of thermal vapor deposited beryllium on a polyethylene terephthalate (PET) diaphragm. The premium Jupiter combines the Orion's aluminum housing with quad BAs in a three-way configuration.

Straddling the pro and CE markets are Jerry Harvey



Photo 11: The jewel-like Kaiser 10U



Photo 12: An almost final Woo W8

(www.jhaudio.com) and Aurisonics (www.aurisonics.com). Aurisonics came to the show with a revamped lineup, the all-new Bravo series of universal in-ear monitors (UIEMs)—the Eva (\$179), the Kicker (\$249), the Forte (\$399), and the Harmony (\$499). The Eva, sitting in a new sealed “slimline” shell, employs a single custom 9.25 mm dynamic driver. The Kicker employs a port to endow an Eva configuration with low-end boost. Forte adds a single BA tweeter, while the Harmony engages dual balanced armatures, in a crossoverless, two-way configuration. The Kicker, the Forte, and the Harmony, designed for pro monitoring during performance, are housed in a new 3D-printed polymer shell.

Jerry Harvey, a custom pro IEM pioneer, has made new Universal versions of two of its Siren series. The Layla (\$2,495), with 12 balanced armatures, and the eight balanced armature Angie (\$1,295) are both three-way designs.

Design trendsetters Noble (www.nobleaudio.com) has also reworked an existing design, its acclaimed 10-driver Kaiser 10, into a universal as the new Kaiser

10U (\$1,599). If Movado made UIEMs to match its Edge, they might resemble the Kaiser 10U, with its intricate CNC-machined aluminum housing and two-tone crimson and clear-coat color scheme (see **Photo 11**). Noble also had an entry-level UIEM, the Savant (\$599). With a bit more low-frequency lift than the Noble 4, the Savant is neutrally voiced in the mids and highs with very low distortion for the price.

Remember the bankrupt theory, “trickle down” Reaganomics? HiFiMAN’s Edition X has managed to make trickle down viable, with lessons learned from manufacturing its premium HE-1000. The Edition X (\$1,799) is a cost-reduced new model, with a thicker diaphragm and 25 Ω impedance. Also new is the HE400S, a \$299 entry-level planar.

The HiFiMAN (www.hifiman.com) booth also displayed a prototype of its third new model, the Edition S (approximately \$200). With magnetically attached baffles, the normally open dynamic can be converted to a closed configuration.

Looking like tiny gourds, the new A8 Ear Speakers (\$299) from Cardas (www.cardas.com) sport a rubbery, royal blue coat over a brass housing, with a 10.85 mm dynamic driver inside. Both single-ended and balanced cable assemblies are available.

At Woo Audio (www.woaudio.com), it was all about the W8 (see **Photo 12**). Michael Liang, a marketing representative at Woo said, “We previewed WA8 at RMAF in 2014 (with a revised version I wrote up for AXPONA). At the time, the goodies were housed in a 3D printed chassis.” Since then, Woo Audio has upgraded the DAC to an ESS Sabre for 384k DXD capability. The analog circuit has also been greatly improved. “Sonic quality (I heard at the show) is set... We are now buttoning up the cosmetics for a cleaner/sexier look before going to full production.” The US retail price for the W8 will be \$1,799 for black and silver, and \$100 more for gold.

Speaking of ultra-premium, my LCD-3s have now been bested by another, the new LCD-4 (\$4,000) from Audeze (www.audeze.com). With a carbon fiber and leather headband, very high 1.5 Tesla flux density, and giant 106 mm diaphragms, the LCD-4 goes even lower than the 3, and is sure to please any headphone fan. Audeze also had a new headphone amplifier playing, the King (\$3,995). Designed by Bascom King, the DC-coupled, HPA is distinguished by N-channel MOSFETs driven by a matched pair of E88CC triodes. Power developed is 6 W into a 20 Ω load with less than 0.1% THD, and the frequency response is an admirable 10 Hz to 100 kHz with a -0.1 dB tolerance.

Reid Heath Audio (RHA, www.rha-audio.com) has also been working on improvements. Its new T20i (\$250) is a refined, lower distortion version of the already enjoyable T10. It offers cleaner sound in the



Photo 13: Torque Audio’s filters

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same bomb-proof sintered stainless housing with three user swappable acoustical filters to tailor the response. RHA also had a new, small \$40 single driver model in a cylindrical metal housing, the lightweight S500 and

Photo 14: Lotoo's new HRA porta-player, the PAW Gold

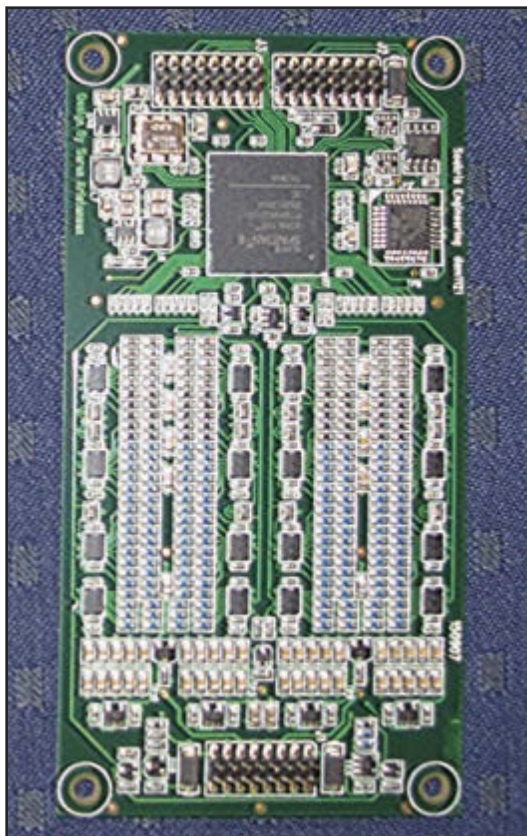


Photo 15: Soekris Engineering's dam1101 board-level DAC

the Apple store exclusive counterpart, the \$50 S500i headset version. RHA is also moving into electronics, showing a prototype of the upcoming DACAMP M1, an affordable dual mono portable powered by two ESS monolithic DACs, with phone and AES3 inputs.

Another brand employing user selectable acoustic filters for user-tailored response is Torque Audio (www.torque.audio), with its t096z (\$330). This in-ear headset includes six threaded filters to subjectively tilt up highs, lows and/or mids. The company also showed a sample of its folding t402v supra-aural that includes a novel, four-position acoustic filter built into the removable cup assembly (see **Photo 13**). The t402v (\$400) includes an inline wired mic and remote for iOS.

The headphones of my youth were the wonderfully light and comfortable Sennheiser HD 414, in stark contrast to the bulky and heavy closed cans of the day. I always think of Sennheiser (sennheiser.com) as a slightly stodgy open headphone manufacturer but had to recalibrate my brand image a bit with the interesting HD 630VB (\$499). This stylish new folding aluminum model is a closed circumaural design, with a big knurled ring around the circumference of the right cup. The control enables you to dial in the



Photo 16: The new HD6 from Audioengine

amount of subjective low-frequency boost you want, to the tune of ± 5 dB at 50 Hz. The HD 630VB also includes an inline wired remote and mic for headset functionality.

At last year's show, I reported on the only wireless headphone, Pendulumic's STANCE S1, but that's changed. Like its predecessor, the STANCE S1+ from Pendulumic (www.pendulumic.com) combines a nice \$200 price with Bluetooth A2DP's aptX for clean wireless connectivity. V-MODA added its gothically stylish Crossfade wireless (\$300) to the mix, which manages high fidelity without aptX support. Also showing was V-MODA's new ZN in-ear (\$180), with a big, dark, present sound.

Pioneer (www.pioneerelectronics.com/Home) had several new products at the show, including its XDP-100R portable HRA player (\$700) and the wonderful SE-Master1 circumaural open headphones. Voiced with the help of AIR Lyndhurst's technical director Tim Vine-Lott, the hand assembled, TAD-designed \$2,500 cans compete with other top shelf headphones in fit, finish, and sound quality. Pioneer also has an optional balanced, OFC litz wire cable.

HRA Portables

A company new to me is Beijing's Lotoo brand (www.lotoo.cn) from INFOMEDIA, known for its pocket audio recorders. Lotoo was showing its PAW Gold, a \$2,000 player supporting the now common DXD plus 1x and 2x DSD (see **Photo 14**). I was surprised to learn that the PAW Gold includes a significant and, to my knowledge, unique feature in this increasingly crowded space—SACD ISO image playback support! Audio geek that I am, I own almost 100 SACD disc images, and would love to be able to listen to an entire album just the way it was premastered.

Never one to rest on its laurels, iRiver's Astell&Kern (www.astellnkern.com) had an updated T1p semi-closed with a lower 32 Ω impedance (\$1,199). Also developed in collaboration with beyerdynamic, the new AK T8iE (\$999) is built in Germany with Tesla tech inside. But wait, what about its players? Known for its HRA players, the AK380 (\$3,499) is the new paramount portable, with native 2x DSD support, DLNA connectivity, a very low jitter clock, and built-in 20 band parametric EQ with fine, 0.1 dB adjustments, all via dual AKM AK4490 DACs.

Portable but not pocketable, the Soekris Engineering (www.soekris.dk) dac1101 is a \$650 USB-powered DAC/HPA. This product combines a zero feedback discrete amplifier with an exclusive R-2R sign magnitude DAC, also discreet, that's capable of converting DXD plus 1 and 2x DSD! The DAC is also available as a board level OEM module, the dam1101 (see **Photo 15**).



Striving for ever-higher fidelity with good looks and minimal footprint, Audioengine (www.audioengineusa.com) showed its HD6 (\$749) for the first time at RMAF. The HD6 carries on the tradition of previous models with an integrated amp, slot venting on the back, and a plethora of inputs including aptX Bluetooth, AES3 Type II optical, analog on RCA and 0.125" TRS along with an analog thru also on RCA (see **Photo 16**).

An interesting trend that accelerated at this year's show was special cabling for premium portables. Ray Kimber (www.kimber.com) brought his new Axios headphone cable line (see **Photo 17**). With conductors formed from an oxygen-free alloy and jacketing made

Photo 17: Kimber Cable's Axios



Photo 18: Pro audio geek buddy Aaron Reiff with the Vero HC/AB-29 HPA prototype



Photo 19: The bold and beefy Stromtank

About the Author

Oliver A. Masciarotte is a graduate of the Lowell Institute of MIT. Masciarotte has been the principal of Seneschal, a consultancy to the professional audio and rich media industries, for more than 25 years. He has more than 100 trade articles in print and authored *To Serve & Groove*, a book about file-based HRA music playback for the home.

of high dielectric fluorinated ethylene propylene, a softer version of PTFE, the cables feature hardwood-cased connectors. Prices will run from \$700 to \$900, depending on configuration, and availability should be the first quarter of 2016.

The folks at Musical Interface Technologies, a.k.a. MIT (www.mitcables.com), also have a new brand to specifically address headphones and it's called Vero. Since MIT's core benefit is its Multipole technology, the range includes both cables and "dongles" that incorporate its passive, in-line filters. Pricing starts at \$299 for an in-line add-on, while cables start at \$499.

Recording engineer Aaron Reiff was stationed at the MIT table (see **Photo 18**), demonstrating a prototype of his latest collaboration with company president Bruce Brisson. The Vero HC/AB-29 Headphone Amplifier is a high-current, battery-powered desktop HPA that incorporates 29 poles of MIT's Multipole tech. MSRP is projected to cost approximately \$2,000.



Photo 20: Mytek's new MQA-capable Brooklyn DAC

Crazy But Cool

MBL founder Wolfgang Meletzky's Stromtank (www.stromtank.com) demonstrated an audio-optimized uninterruptible power supply (UPS) built like a... umm, tank (see **Photo 19**). At \$29,900, it's for cost-is-no-object systems. That said, it drops right in whereas a quality mains retrofit, balanced power, and electrolytic grounds can be messy and costly. Besides, it looks really spiffy!

I would be remiss if I failed to mention what I thought was one of the most significant product introductions of the show. NYC-based Mytek (www.mytekdigital.com) ushered in its latest DAC, the Brooklyn (see **Photo 20**).

As a DSD pioneer, Mytek's support for 4x DSD and DXD is no surprise. What is a surprise is that this compact \$1,995 unit incorporates a 6 W HPA, line and phono (MC & MM) analog ins, optional battery powering, included remote, a Word Clock output for the pros and multichannel enthusiasts in the crowd, plus a third party first—certified MQA support! A matching companion ADC provides a complete, round trip encode/decode signal path for MQA content creation and playback. The Brooklyn, housed in an attractive half rack, 1U enclosure with a CNC-machined black or clear coat aluminum faceplate, should have shipped around the New Year.

TIDAL continues to expand its reach and capabilities. I got to hear a live 352.8/24 MQA stream from TIDAL (www.tidal.com) decoded on-the-fly with the aforementioned Mytek Brooklyn. AURALiC's new starter ARIES (www.auralic.com), the MINI, comes bundled with a year of TIDAL.

OPPO Digital (www.oppodigital.com) was playing TIDAL at its table, and Sonic Studio (www.sonicstudio.com) dropped its version of a TIDAL bombshell. "Sonic" is known for its Mac OS apps, even though it's had OEM products running on that Redmond 'ware and Linux for years. Sonic Studio's client is my go-to software for TIDAL listening. At RMAF, it announced an upcoming iOS remote app for Amarra for TIDAL, along with its first Windows release; Amarra for TIDAL for Windows, still \$40.

The Recap

This year's show felt a bit different—less crowded yet more upbeat. I, for one, was delighted to hear the rather tired venue we've all come to know and hate was due for a major makeover. I could also feel a tide of change slowing rising over the sometimes moribund and elitist audio enthusiast community—youth, exuberance, plus great sound and actual value for the price from gear that's now available. So, get out there and listen! For more information, visit www.audiofest.net.