

## ► Burning Amplifier 2008

By Jan Didden

An Audio DIYer's Dream Come True!

The BAF event is organized by a group of people who meet regularly at what is perhaps the largest online DIY audio forum, [www.diyaudio.com](http://www.diyaudio.com), with close to 100,000 registered members. On the forum, each has a nickname, and at the BAF, people were given stick-on labels with their nickname and real name. It is always a pleasure to meet someone in the flesh with whom you have had conversations online. You feel as though you know that person well, even if you haven't seen him before. The audio hobby allows you to (sometimes heatedly) discuss your opinions and experiences with other DIY audio fans, but you also exchange something of your personality and character in the process.

Almost 200 participants brought their projects to the show, ranging from small items such as a tube amp supply regulator (yours truly), to refrigerator-size (but much heavier) subwoofers with 12Hz cutoff frequency. This particular subwoofer, built by a member that goes by the nickname of DSP\_Geek (Francois Souchay), was used to reproduce the songs of blue whales, in the very lowest audio octaves. People from the other rooms came running asking whether anyone else felt the earthquake. Projects on display varied from technically sophisticated DSP systems, to equally sophisticated CNC/CADCAM power amplifier constructions. Styling was straight no-nonsense tech to something

that was called "steam punk." But even in this case, good design principles were in evidence, for instance, making the enclosure



PHOTO 1: Impression of Burning Amplifier 2008.

sure non-resonant and non-cubic.

The organizers chose a venue that allowed several activities to take place at once, which was an improvement over last year. There was one room for presentations and demos, while systems were displayed in another room. In a third large room people could hang out, have lunch, and attend the raffle and auction.

Also remarkable was the participation of several giants in the audio industry: Nelson Pass from Pass Labs; John Curl of Parasound fame (**Photo 1**); Siegfried Linkwitz—who has been a household name in crossovers with the Linkwitz/Riley filters and his Orion and Pluto active speakers; and Scott Wurcer, the designer of the highly acclaimed Analog Devices AD797 audio op amp. It was a unique opportunity to chat with these personalities about their designs and audio in general.

You see, the BAF has a tradition of people bringing in items that they just want to give away! Blame Nelson Pass for that: This year he brought, among many other items, 12 large, Pass-style amplifier chassis with complete output stages fitted, power supply transformer, rectifier and caps, as well as all connectors and some wiring. Add an input stage of your choice, and you have a power amplifier that would make others jealous. Alexander Raal from RAAL/Requisite Audio gave away a pair of the highly acclaimed RAAL ribbon tweeters.

**PHOTO 2:** Elaborate CNC-based amplifier enclosure design.



**PHOTO 3:** This speaker could have been stolen from Capt. Nemo's Nautilus.



Then there were books, CD-ROMs, and complimentary subscriptions sponsored by *audioXpress* and *Elektor USA*, who provided lunch. (*Elektor USA* made its first appearance in the audio DIY scene. This is a very high standard elec-

tronics journal that is well known in Europe, South America, India, and so on, but is now also available in North America, being distributed by Audio Amateur. Check it out at [www.elektor.com/usa](http://www.elektor.com/usa)).

Iain McNeil exhibited a highly techni-

cal implementation of DSP-based crossovers. When he switched his crossovers between flat phase and an analog-type, phase cycling filter, it became clear how very difficult it actually is to hear these types of differences in a system. Many listeners missed it when the switching was done at a discontinuity in the music.

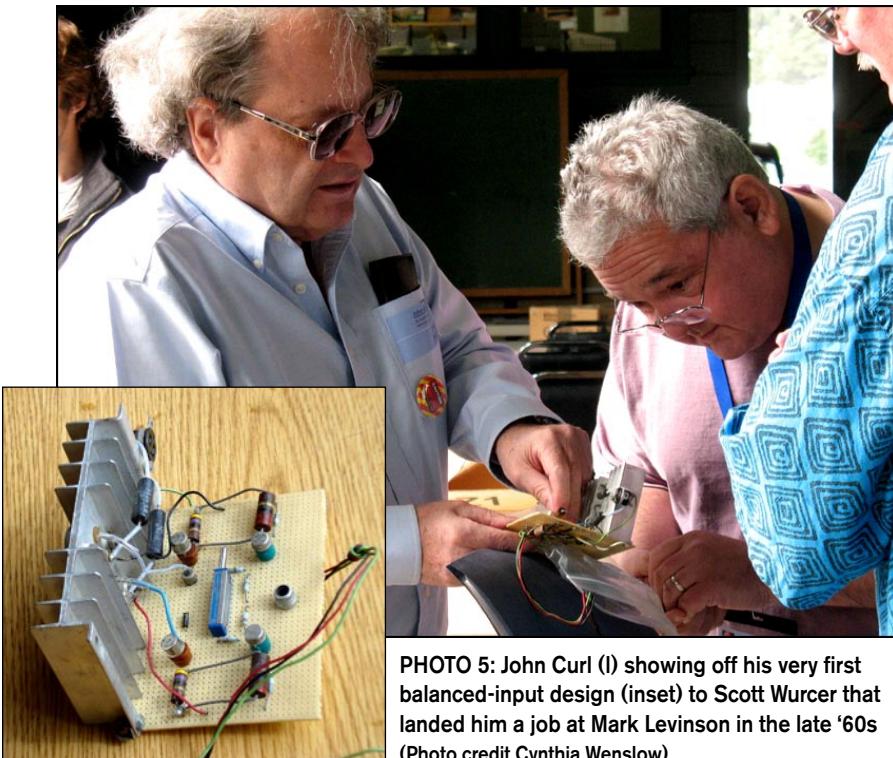
Siegfried Linkwitz also drew a full crowd with his presentation on phantom images and localization of sound in listening rooms, and the implications of his findings for speaker design. (This presentation is at [www.linkwitzlab.com/publications.htm#23](http://www.linkwitzlab.com/publications.htm#23)).

## HOW DID IT SOUND?

I had the unique opportunity to attend both the AES and the Rocky Mountain Audio Fest (RMAF) in Denver the weekend before (see accompanying report). While RMAF was much larger than BAF, in terms of sound quality, BAF easily held its own. RMAF included excellent-sounding (and very expensive) systems, but I found that the selections of music used at the demos was not always the best. At BAF, participants were more aware that your system cannot



**PHOTO 4:** The lucky winner of a pair of RAAL ribbon tweeters.



**PHOTO 5:** John Curl (l) showing off his very first balanced-input design (inset) to Scott Wurcer that landed him a job at Mark Levinson in the late '60s  
(Photo credit Cynthia Wenslow).

sound better than the music you play, and I heard some very good combinations. That music selection is something that is dear to my heart anyway, and I was allowed to talk about loudness and compression in modern recordings. This led to some interesting discussions, making it clear that it is a concern shared by many.

In addition, the wide range of projects on display and several excellent-sounding reproduction systems made this year's Burning Amplifier Festival another very enjoyable event. So, whether you want to show off your latest design, listen to music, or chat with like-minded DIYers, be there next year! **ax**