



BLOG

Munich 2022

Hits and Misses...

By Roy Gregory and Dennis Davis

Having written show reports for both TheAudioBeat.com and Audio Technique magazine, it seems utterly superfluous to repeat that copy or content here. However, a few post-show observations are certainly pertinent, especially given that we previewed or highlighted certain rooms and products. Which delivered on their promise and which failed to impress? Of course, as far as individual products are concerned, it's always hard to be definitive. Few companies actually do properly structured, comparative demonstrations, which leaves you listening to complete systems comprising often alien or unknown elements. Add to that a decision to run the AC throughout the show due to health-considerations – a decision that resulted in 55dB+ ambient noise levels in the Atrium rooms where most of the better sounding systems are generally found – and it was frankly hard to reach any solid sonic or musical conclusions at this show. Indeed, the most remarkable thing about most of the show coverage I've seen is the absence of any comment on the prevalent noise floor – and the extent to which that undermines the value of what observations were made.

The show itself was a slightly strange experience, lacking the continuity that normally shapes such a large, annual event. If major brands like Wilson, VTL and Nordost all change distribution between one show and the next, you can pretty much guarantee a significant ripple effect across other exhibits. Generally, you arrive in Munich with a pretty good idea of the landscape you are going to encounter but this year it was, if not all change, then distinctly different. Limiting ticket numbers made the rooms quieter than normal, especially on Sunday. With three years of accumulated development, rather than evolution we saw step-changes in product lines and brand presentations, new associations and new strategies from exhibitors, with a notably improved standard of room dressing and display materials.



SEARCH GY8

RECENT POSTS

[Munich 2022](#)

[CAD Ground Control GC1.1](#)

[Matador](#)

[Rooms to Visit, Products to Hear...](#)

[Nordost Tyr X1 Umbilical for CH Precision components](#)

CATEGORIES

[Blog](#)

[Review](#)

[Think Piece](#)

[Nordost Tyr X1 Umbilical for CH Precision components](#)

CATEGORIES

[Blog](#)

[Review](#)

[Think Piece](#)

CY8

Welcome to Cy8, a dedicated audio reviewing and listening space established in the heart of Europe.

OUR ROOMS

[Music Room](#)

[Reading Room](#)

[The Studio](#)

LATEST REVIEWS

[Munich 2022](#)

[CAD Ground Control GC1.1](#)

[Matador](#)

BLOG

Munich 2022

Overall it has to be said that sound quality was disappointing, although the limited number of great sounding systems resulted in clear winners and losers. With that background in mind, who came out ahead, who's treading water and who's not waving but drowning?

The Hits...

Digital Components



The unrivalled digital success story of this show was the Wadax Reference components. The Reference Server and Reference DAC featured in no fewer than four systems spread across the High-End Show, including two of the best sounding systems there. Both the Wadax room, which featured ARC Ref 6SE and Ref 160 mono amps and Wilson Benesch Eminence speakers and the Göbel room, which featured TLA amps driving Divin Marquis loudspeakers and Sovereign sub-woofers, delivered consistently excellent results throughout the show. Add to that the Croma/Cryphon system (at the off-site Hi-Fi Deluxe event) that also received considerable praise, along with the Fono Acoustica/Koda/Kharma set up that definitely deserves an honourable mention, and that's an unequalled strike rate at an event where overall sound quality was well down on previous years. By now, even the most sceptical or observers are going to have to accept that the rise and rise of Wadax is more than just a fleeting phenomenon. What was self-evident to anybody who bothered to listen 10 years ago is now undeniably apparent. The original Pre 1 signalled a significant change in the musical capabilities of digital systems, with each successive generation not just building on that foundation but actually widening the gap. The Reference products clearly live up to the hype, while the arrival of the new Reference PSU for the Server promises another jump in performance. There are few products that can claim genuine head-and-shoulders superiority over the competition, but Wadax is definitely one.



Elsewhere, Metronome launched a totally revised version of their impressive and iconic Kalista, now morphed into a CD/SACD transport/streamer, with the option to add a slim-line DAC and digital pre-amp. The new unit looks more compact and muscular (although apparently the footprint remains almost unchanged) while the cleverly executed external power supply, includes space for another of the substantial power supply boards, dedicated to the DAC/pre-amp if fitted. But while the striking Kalista Dreamplay X (as it's now known) was receiving most of the attention, the Metronome AQWO and Le DAC/Le Player product lines are also worthy of considerable attention. This is one digital space that's definitely worth watching.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

SEARCH GY8

RECENT POSTS

[Munich 2022](#)
[CAD Ground Control GC1.1](#)
[Matador](#)
[Rooms to Visit, Products to Hear...](#)
[Nordost Tyr XI Umbilical for CH](#)
[Precision components](#)

CATEGORIES

[Blog](#)
[Review](#)
[Think Piece](#)

CY8

Welcome to Cy8, a dedicated audio reviewing and listening space established in the heart of Europe.

OUR ROOMS

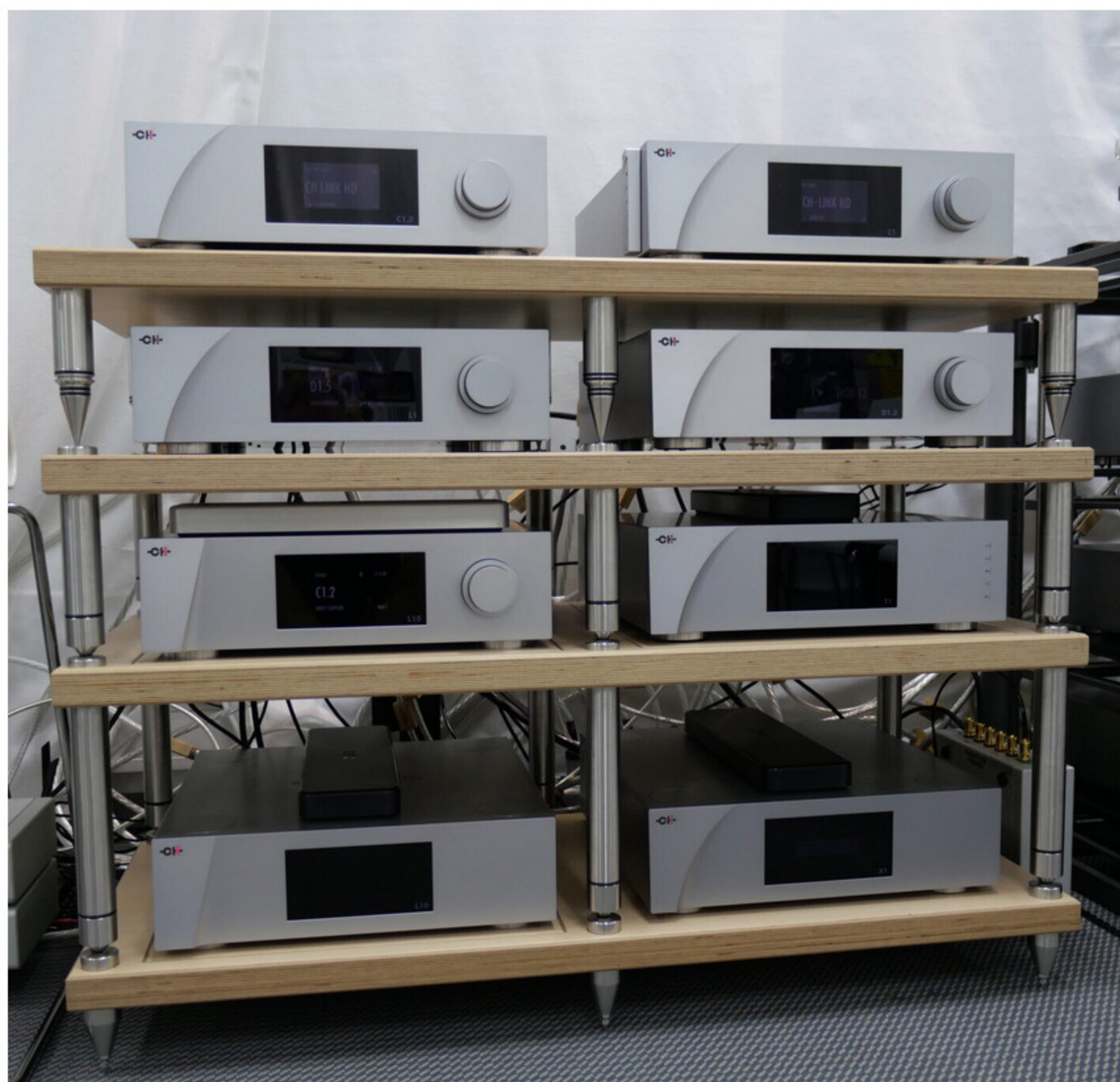
[Music Room](#)
[Reading Room](#)
[The Studio](#)

LATEST REVIEWS

[Munich 2022](#)
[CAD Ground Control GC1.1](#)
[Matador](#)

BLOG

Munich 2022



Meanwhile, CH Precision were doing a great job of demonstrating the versatility of their digital front-end, showing both the multi-format capabilities of the D1.5 and the benefits of the new C1.2, compared directly to its predecessor. Add in the T1 clock option and this was a demonstration of digital architecture with lessons for all, even those who don't or don't intend to own CH equipment. Given the enthusiastic public response, it would be nice to see more manufacturers following their lead.

Analogue Components

Whilst the Wilson Benesch GMT and Nagra 70th Anniversary Reference record players gain points for being present in person, for us, it was two other launches that stole our attention. Digital and amplification engineers Esoteric surprised us with a serious anniversary record player of their own. They might not have been running for as long as Nagra, but the Grandioso T1's squat, compact dimensions manage to pack in a tonne (well, 45kgs) of heavy-hitting technology. The massive platter is magnetically suspended and driven by a variable torque, zero-contact, magnetic drive, while speed stability is derived from a 10MHz VCXO clock – which raises the entertaining prospect of owners hooking their turntable up to the same master clock as their digital components and Ethernet switch! This is definitely an intriguing package and, at €75,000 including a tonearm (exact choice as yet undecided, although the show player featured the elegant Ikeda arm) it undercuts many of the top-end contenders by a substantial amount.

But the turntable we'd most like to get our grubby mitts on is the Acoustical Systems Astellar. Tantalizingly, it was only present in the form of a computer -rendered image, but even just a picture and some sketchy details were enough to set the musical juices flowing. Another design built around a magnetically floated main bearing, the AS 'table combines a double flywheel, belt drive with full air suspension that isolates the bearing/platter and armboards from the laminated base and motor level. Promising exceptional isolation and geometrical accuracy, the Astellar might be big and solid to look at, but its 'table-top' design is positively svelte compared to the monster Apolyt. Although no pricing or release date are available as yet, those searching for genuinely cutting-edge record replay will do well to keep an eye on developments –while also casing covetous glances in the direction of the latest, titanium, Axiom 12" tonearm.



SEARCH GY8

RECENT POSTS

[Munich 2022](#)
[CAD Ground Control GC1.1](#)
[Matador](#)
[Rooms to Visit, Products to Hear...](#)
[Nordost Tyr X1 Umbilical for CH Precision components](#)

CATEGORIES

[Blog](#)
[Review](#)
[Think Piece](#)

SEARCH GY8

RECENT POSTS

[Munich 2022](#)
[CAD Ground Control GC1.1](#)
[Matador](#)
[Rooms to Visit, Products to Hear...](#)
[Nordost Tyr X1 Umbilical for CH Precision components](#)

CATEGORIES

[Blog](#)
[Review](#)
[Think Piece](#)

GY8

Welcome to Gy8, a dedicated audio reviewing and listening space established in the heart of Europe.

OUR ROOMS

[Music Room](#)
[Reading Room](#)
[The Studio](#)

LATEST REVIEWS

[Munich 2022](#)
[CAD Ground Control GC1.1](#)
[Matador](#)

BLOG

Munich 2022



On a personal note, the TechDAS Airforce III Premium S that was provided for our *Formats and EQ Curves* presentations in the CH Precision room proved to be a thoroughly engaging and enjoyable performer. Paired with two of the excellent Thales Statement tonearms, along with cartridges from TechDAS and EMT (for mono replay) it was a stable, unfussy and un-intrusive player – in the best sense of those terms. Beautifully simple to use, even allowing for the vacuum hold-down, it was as musically inviting, it was utterly dependable and consistent, making for reliable demonstration of what some would suggest are subtle or non-existent differences. Whether it was the musical impact of the correct replay EQ on a 1970s Decca pressing, or the lamentable quality of ERC's recent, ruinously expensive release of Coltrane's *My Favorite Things*, listeners were left shocked by the obvious, smack-you-in-the-face significance of the differences being shown – sure testament to the qualities of the record player being used. I particularly enjoyed the listener who was reduced to helpless laughter on first hearing Dylan's 'Like A Rolling Stone' replayed with the Columbia curve: who knew that old Bob really could sing?

Amplification

Although there were plenty of high-priced heavy hitters when it came to amplification in Munich, many were also familiar. The CH Precision 10 Series were belying claims that they don't 'do' bass, by not only controlling the Rockport Lyras but generating plenty of transparent, tuneful and informative low-frequency energy – all from 1% of global feedback. VTL's Siegfrieds were on hand, as were new, more affordable (although just how affordable remains a mystery) Relentless models from D'Agostino. But the amps that really caught our ear were the Creek TLA (True Life Audio) models, driving the Divin Marquis speakers in the Göbel room. The SSP-1/PSU-1 line-stage and SSA-350 mono-blocs contributed mightily to the relaxed fluidity and responsive dynamics that made this system so enjoyable. Although a long way from affordable, these electronics were invisible in the best sense, and they've gone straight to the top of my Would Like To Review list.



SEARCH GY8



RECENT POSTS

[Munich 2022](#)
[CAD Ground Control GC1.1](#)
[Matador](#)
[Rooms to Visit, Products to Hear...](#)
[Nordost Tyr X1 Umbilical for CH Precision components](#)

CATEGORIES

[Blog](#)
[Review](#)
[Think Piece](#)

GY8

Welcome to Gy8, a dedicated audio reviewing and listening space established in the heart of Europe.

OUR ROOMS

[Music Room](#)
[Reading Room](#)
[The Studio](#)

LATEST REVIEWS

[Munich 2022](#)
[CAD Ground Control GC1.1](#)
[Matador](#)

BLOG

Munich 2022



But whereas many of the products and systems I'm high-lighting here seriously expensive, amplification was one area in which serious performance was to be had at far more approachable prices. Living Voice was running the latest Auditorium OBX RW4 compact floor-standers. Those expecting to see (and hear) the Vox speakers were beguiled by sound that was both delightful and extremely engaging and, while the Kuzma R/Safir and Grand Prix Monaco/4Point14 front-ends (with CAR-60 and CAR-50 cartridges respectively) were obviously playing their part, don't overlook the contribution of the SJS electronics. In typical LV fashion (although SJS is an independent company), these bespoke boxes are available in a range of different specifications and performance levels, despite being outwardly identical. At the show, they were playing the top of the line Model 7 Premier Silver line-stage (£29,000) and Model 5 Enhanced 300B power amp (£20,000), but those products start at around £6,000 and £15,000 respectively. The Model 7 Enhanced line-stage (c. £8,500) is genuinely remarkable, while the power amp has to be one of the most elegant pieces I've ever seen. Hand-built, limited production products like these are never going to be available off the shelf, but the wait will be more than worthwhile.



But there were even more affordable options available. The interesting Kora 400 integrated amplifier, with its novel hybrid circuitry, was delivering excellent results in the Diptych cabin, but the budget star of this show came from Aesthetix, whose Pallene pre-amplifier and Dione power amp combination look almost indistinguishable from the company's pricier products, yet are priced at \$6,500 USD each! For that you get an all-tube, balanced line-stage with a resistor ladder volume-control (and the option to add phono and/or DAC cards at \$1,200 each). There's even the option to upgrade the internal headphone amp. The hybrid power amp offers balanced and single-ended inputs and delivers 160W/ch 8Ω, 320W/ch into 4Ω from its substantial 20kg/44lb chassis. With the same fit, finish and operational niceties as other Aesthetix products, the sound from this pair was beautifully open, unforced and intimate. Aesthetix has always been a high-value brand, but with these products they appear to have hit it out of the park. I can't wait to get better acquainted with the Pallene and Dione...

Loudspeakers

The superb performance of the Göbel Divin Marquis came as no surprise, but the equally superb and superbly integrated contribution of the Divin Sovereign subs lifted the smallest (well, everything's relative) Divin speakers onto a completely different level. Their faceted and tapered cabinets even managed to look elegant – and that's no mean feat for what is basically one big driver in an even bigger box. The units at the show included built in electronics with blue-tooth DSP control from any phone or tablet (€44,000 each). However, what piqued my interest was the option to run the Sovereign as a passive sub, using the active cross-over that Göbel already produce for the Epoque Aeon series speakers. Being able to use identical amplification top and bottom in a sub-based system is a proven approach to superior performance and, judging from what we heard in Munich, that performance uplift could produce results that are spectacular indeed.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

SEARCH GY8

RECENT POSTS

[Munich 2022](#)
[CAD Ground Control GC1.1](#)
[Matador](#)
[Rooms to Visit, Products to Hear...](#)
[Nordost Tyr X1 Umbilical for CH Precision components](#)

CATEGORIES

[Blog](#)
[Review](#)
[Think Piece](#)

[Munich 2022](#)
[CAD Ground Control GC1.1](#)
[Matador](#)
[Rooms to Visit, Products to Hear...](#)
[Nordost Tyr X1 Umbilical for CH Precision components](#)

CATEGORIES

[Blog](#)
[Review](#)
[Think Piece](#)

GY8

Welcome to Cy8, a dedicated audio reviewing and listening space established in the heart of Europe.

OUR ROOMS

[Music Room](#)
[Reading Room](#)
[The Studio](#)

LATEST REVIEWS

[Munich 2022](#)
[CAD Ground Control GC1.1](#)
[Matador](#)

BLOG

Munich 2022



We've already mentioned the excellent results achieved by Diptych in their pre-fabricated cabin. The new Reference speaker (€44,000/pr) was making beautiful music on the end of a modest system consisting of a hard-drive, a B-audio DAC and the Kora 400 integrated amp. The sound had all the scale and presence we associated with the best planar magnetics, combined with real bandwidth, tuneful bass and superb coherence and integration. The novel crossed push-pull operation certainly seems to overcome many of the dynamic limitations of the planar magnetic topology, while maintaining the direct musical and communicative qualities that come from its inherent simplicity. Diptych's smaller models are already garnering an impressive reputation, but the Reference has elevated performance significantly and the company has a new high-end contender on its hands. Lovers of panel speakers in general, be they ribbon, electrostatic or planar magnetic are going to find much to admire here, while this could be the first step towards the rehabilitation of those big panels that were once so dominant in certain markets but have recently faded from view. The Reference will be winging its way our way soon. I for one am looking forward to re-visiting my audio-youth!

And the misses!

With so many rooms failing to meet the challenge presented by the combination of the MOC rooms and the constant AC, there was no shortage of dreadful sound. Even so, certain trends did emerge. This isn't a list of rank bad sound (although there's a few examples in there): more a case of those products or product categories that failed to deliver on their promise...

After many years of off-site presentations and product launches, Wilson Audio hit the MOC with a splash. The Covid years have seen the launch of both the XVX and the Alexx V, but for many listeners this was going to be their first opportunity to hear either speaker performing in the flesh. With two pairs of XVX and two pairs of Alexx V on hand, all in predictably high-profile, high-end set ups, the results can only really be described as disappointing. Whether it was a function of the show environment or the company possibly over-reaching itself, the sounds on show were ordinary at best and in one case, verging on the painful. After a three-year hiatus, the industry as a whole needs its big names to come back stronger than ever. Few names are as big as Wilson and, especially given the praise heaped on both the XVX and the Alexx V, it's not just a case of could but really should do better.



SEARCH GY8



RECENT POSTS

[Munich 2022](#)
[CAD Ground Control GC1.1](#)
[Matador](#)
[Rooms to Visit, Products to Hear...](#)
[Nordost Tyr XI Umbilical for CH Precision components](#)

CATEGORIES

[Blog](#)
[Review](#)
[Think Piece](#)

GY8

Welcome to Gy8, a dedicated audio reviewing and listening space established in the heart of Europe.

OUR ROOMS

[Music Room](#)
[Reading Room](#)
[The Studio](#)

LATEST REVIEWS

[Munich 2022](#)
[CAD Ground Control GC1.1](#)
[Matador](#)



BLOG

Munich 2022

In the absence of either Vox loudspeaker system in the Living Voice room, the field was wide open for another horn speaker to stake its claim. Despite that, no company stepped up and, much as we love a good horn-based system, sadly there was little to get us excited here. Having experienced the astonishing performance of the active Avantgarde Trio G3, I was hoping for great things in Munich, but it was not to be, with the big spherical horns definitely hiding their light!

But surely the biggest disappointment at the show was the poor performance of so many high-end digital contenders. Streamed music has certainly contributed to a general decline in musical standards (it's no coincidence that, with the sole exception of Wadax, all the best sounding rooms were playing physical media) but it was also noticeable that none of the highly touted digital brands trying to close the musical and technological gap to Wadax managed to deliver. MSB, TotalDAC and dCS all disappointed, with sound that varied from sterile through to actively unpleasant. It is difficult to draw lasting conclusions from a single show, but there does seem to be a distinct absence of inspiration amongst the more traditional and higher profile digital practitioners. Streaming inputs that accept ever bigger numbers simply aren't going to do it and more fundamental engineering advances are required. Otherwise, this is another aspect of the audio landscape that could see significant change.

If there is a single conclusion to take from the Munich show in 2022, it's that there's an awful lot of the industry that needs to seriously sharpen up its act. Given the poor quality of the sound in most rooms (and in some, you had to wonder what the exhibitor was hearing – 'cos it certainly wasn't the same as us) it is hard to escape the verdict that many of these companies don't know how, never knew how or can't be bothered to produce good sound – and that is not acceptable, not at these prices! In an industry that constantly bemoans the lack of public interest and new customers, missing the opportunity to show why hi-fi is a worthwhile investment sits somewhere between gross negligence and suicide. I'm fed up with hearing about the bad rooms in Munich. If some companies can regularly defy the odds, then there's something wrong with that reality. Companies that don't know how to work with systems and rooms need to learn. Companies that can't or won't learn should hire those skills. The post Covid era is an opportunity for the audio industry – but it is an opportunity that needs grasping and exploiting. For anybody who cares about audio and musical performance, the complacency on show in Munich was worrying. The complacency from high-profile companies in particular, is hard to understand. The landscape is definitely changing. The question now is who wants to remain a part of that picture?



SEARCH GY8



RECENT POSTS

[Munich 2022](#)
[CAD Ground Control GC1.1](#)
[Matador](#)
[Rooms to Visit, Products to Hear...](#)
[Nordost Tyr X1 Umbilical for CH Precision components](#)

CATEGORIES

[Blog](#)
[Review](#)
[Think Piece](#)
[Munich 2022](#)
[CAD Ground Control GC1.1](#)
[Matador](#)
[Rooms to Visit, Products to Hear...](#)
[Nordost Tyr X1 Umbilical for CH Precision components](#)

CATEGORIES

[Blog](#)
[Review](#)
[Think Piece](#)

CY8

Welcome to Cy8, a dedicated audio reviewing and listening space established in the heart of Europe.

OUR ROOMS

[Music Room](#)
[Reading Room](#)
[The Studio](#)

LATEST REVIEWS

[Munich 2022](#)
[CAD Ground Control GC1.1](#)
[Matador](#)