The 2022 Capital Audio Fest | Alan Taffel and Andrew Quint

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The Lowlands Pavilion, Washington, DC

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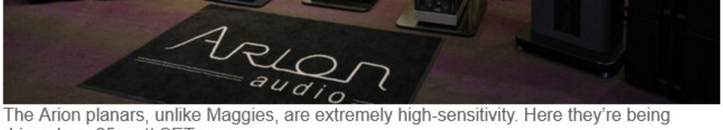

The Arion planars, unlike Maggies, are extremely high-sensitivity. Here they're being driven by a 25-watt SET amp.

One of my favorite systems, because it was composed of brands that were new to me, included **Arion Audio Apollo 12** planar speakers ($50k) with the Dual-Pack Woofer Package ($8900) and **Phasemation** electronics complemented by a **Wolf Audio Systems Red Wolf 2 SX** music server ($16,500) and a **T+A SD 3100 HV** DAC ($36k). The analog front end was a **VPI Avenger Direct** ($36k), which is now out of the prototype phase and in full production. Grand total equals $350k. The combination got right to the heart of the music by completely disappearing, both electronically and physically. A true chameleon, the system changed character with the material. It also had the best depth I heard at the show. Proving its claim of high efficiency in the planar speakers (12 AMT drivers in the main tower, 16 10" drivers in the bass tower), the amps put out just 25 watts from an SET configuration. You'd never know it.

Estelon speakers continue to impress. At CAF, you could find them in two rooms. One had the **Xb Mk II** (in a seductive deep black), and the other featured a pair of **Xb Diamond Mk II**'s in look-at-me red. I particularly liked the black pair, perhaps because they were paired with **Bricasti** electronics and **Kubala-Sosna** cables. This was one of those systems where everything immediately just sounded "right." And, for an Aspirational system, it's price was modest at roughly $125k.

One of two million-dollar systems at the show (the other was a **Lansche/Thrax** system) featured the now-familiar pairing of top-flight **VAC** electronics with **Von Schweikert** speakers. In this case, the speakers were the newish **Ultra 7**. This system was truly full range, from the highs of multiple super-tweeters to the lows of three big woofers. No subwoofer was needed. Bass was a depth charge, imaging was impeccable, and resolution and dynamics were simply sensational.

Alan Taffel's Best of Show

The best sound of the show was this VAC/Von Schweikert system, presented by The Audio Company.

Best Sound of the Show (cost no object)

The Audio Company room featuring **VAC and Von Schweikert** room. Every year this team goes all out for a best of show award, but this time they outdid themselves. This system looked and sounded like every music-loving audiophile's dream.

Best Sound (for the money)

The **Technics** room, which featured all-Technics non-Reference-Line components, most of which were under $3k apiece. The speakers were $5400/pair, and the integrated amp was the most expensive element at $9499. This under-$25k system did what recent Technics gear always does: make gloriously engaging music without any fuss.

Most Significant New Product

The **MoFi SourcePoint 10** by Andrew Jones. Unshackled from having to build sub-$1000/pair speakers, Jones shows what a sub-$4000/pair speaker can do. Turns out, it's a lot.

Best Demo

The **Theoretica Applied Physics** room, wherein the BACCH-SP crosstalk-cancelling processing enabled a small system in a small room to create a huge, enveloping soundstage.

Best Joke

Alan to Andy: "I just checked in. Unfortunately, my room is right between two exhibit rooms that sound like they're still breaking in their systems."

Andy to Alan: "Well, I hope you like Dire Straits."

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