

T.H.E. SHOW NEWPORT BEACH

ROBERT HARLEY



Jon Whittedge, creator of the Magic Bus, shows off the world's best car stereo.



Artist Merryll Jaye showed her musician portraits.

Boulder gear brought out the Sasha's dynamics, but was not as liquid as the VTL gear.

The new **YG Kipod II Signature** (\$49k) driven by the new **Tenor Line1/Power 1** preamplifier and **350M** monoblock amplifiers connected with **Kubala-Sosna** cabling sounded spectacular, and was significantly better than the original Kipod I reviewed. The new model features the ForgeCore tweeter and BilletCore driver diaphragms machined from solid aluminum billets. The Signature version also incorporates a new crossover that reportedly reduces midrange distortion, along with a high-pass filter on the upper module. This system was one of the show's highlights.

Acoustic Zen always produces great sound at shows, and Newport was no exception. The **Crescendo** (\$16k) disappeared as a sound source, throwing amazingly tangible images. It also went very low in the bass and was extremely dynamic.

Dan Meinwald produced an absolutely gorgeous sound with a **Townshend Rock 7** turntable, **EAR 912** preamp, **EAR 890** power amp, and **Marten Coltrane** loudspeakers. It seemed odd to put a \$3200 turntable at the front end of a system with \$70k loudspeakers, but there was no arguing with the result, which was one of the show's best sounds—liquid, communicative, and expressive.

The new **MBL 101 E MkII** sounded great despite being demonstrated in a too-small room. Overlooking the room-

induced bass problem, the 101 E MkII exhibited all the famous MBL virtues of massive dynamics, huge soundstage, and a feeling of hearing live music rather than an electro-mechanical reproduction. MBL's new stand-mount **120** was also terrific, with much greater image specificity than the model it replaced.

I'd never heard **Lumen White** loudspeakers until this show, and I was quite taken with the superb sound from the **Artisan** model (\$35k per pair). Not only was the sound beautiful, but the cabinetry was equally stunning. The three-way, five-driver column features inverted-dome ceramic drivers and is reportedly time-and-phase-coherent. The Lumenwhite Artisan was driven by the **Ayon Orthos** 150W Class A triode monoblocks (280W in pentode), **Ayon CD-5s** tube CD player/preamp, and **Synergistic Research's** cables, **PowerCell 10 SE MkII** conditioner, and **Acoustic Art** room treatments.

I finally heard **Magnepan MG-3.7s** and understood what all the fuss was about. Driven by **Audio Research** electronics in the room of retailer **Hi 5 Stereo**, the 3.7 sounded unbelievably lifelike in the midrange. I can imagine them really opening up in a space larger than a hotel room.

Two rooms stood out for good sound without an astronomical price tag. The first was the **Nola Contender** loudspeaker (\$3400) driven by a **PrimaLuna PA-1** integrated amplifier (\$2995) as presented by **Upscale Audio**. The system sounded

remarkably refined, detailed, dynamic, and uncolored. The second system included **The One** loudspeaker from **Audience**, a tiny cube housing a single full-range driver. Everyone in the demo thought that the subwoofers in the corners were active, but the full bass was coming from the \$995-per-pair Ones. At the end of the demo, a showgoer began applauding.

Jon Whittedge showed the latest incarnation of his "Magic Bus," a van that houses what I called "The world's best car stereo" when I heard it five years ago. Since then, Whittedge has taken the system to an entirely new level of performance. The design, construction, passion, and dedication that went into the Magic Bus are unprecedented, and it showed in the sound quality. The system had effortless dynamics, very high resolution of low-level detail, and tremendous timbral fidelity, throwing a soundstage that rivaled that of a well-set-up home system.

Finally, artist Merryll Jaye showed her fabulous musician portraits, which are available as oil originals or as more affordable *giclée* ("zhee-clay") reproductions. You can see Merryll's exceptional work at www.merrylljaye.com.

THE BEST OF

BEST ENTRY-LEVEL SOUND

Audience: The One loudspeaker

BEST MID-PRICED SOUND

Upscale Audio: PrimaLuna/Nola

BEST OVERALL SOUND

The Audio Salon: Spectral/
Magico/MIT/ASC

Brooks Berdan: VTL/Wilson/dCS/
Grand Prix/Cardas

E.A.R. USA: EAR/Townshend/
Marten

YG Acoustics/Tenor/Kubala-Sosna
Hi5 Stereo: Magnepan/ARC