

THE STEREO TEAM





BOOTLEGS WITH A GRUNDIG



- PROFILE**
- **Reiner H. Nitschke:** Publisher and Editor in Chief
 - **Born in:** Berlin
 - **Education:** Newspaper and magazine editor
 - **Favorite food:** Fresh fish prepared just right
 - **Motto in life:** Life without art and music is probably possible, but why would you bother?
 - **Favorite music:** Glenn Gould, Keith Jarrett, John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Joni Mitchell

In the beginning there was... a Grundig tape recorder, which I used to record music from the radio using a microphone, and this was followed by my first attempts at the electric guitar. With my friends, I listened to Bob Dylan and Joan Baez songs, played by a school friend of ours who could imitate Neil Young stunningly well, but soon we wanted to hear the originals. We had to get a record player.

I don't even remember what brand it was, but it was definitely a long way from HiFi, and our chronic lack of funding kept our record collection rather "streamlined" Instead we focused on live concerts, and those experiences to this day inform my demands for a live-like sound from my HiFi.

When Sony pushed compact discs onto the market, with the vigorous support of the by-then almost deaf Herbert von Karajan, it seemed like the dawning of a new age – but almost nobody realized that

suddenly something was missing. Instead people simply invested ever-more money into speakers and electronics – surely it had to be possible to recreate an emotional sound somehow? It was difficult in a time when the attribute "digital" was synonymous with quality, but today we realize that most CDs of the 80s really sounded pretty awful.

In the end I found a specialized dealer to once again infect me with the vinyl virus, which led to me upgrading three times in just two years. By the way, the LP 12 still can do its thing after 20 years.

Thankfully, labels like ECM and ACT made sure that I did not say good-bye to CDs completely, by producing discs not only fully exploiting the potential of the CD format, but also generally recorded with excellence. And now a fantastic player-converter combination ensures that the best CDs can really compete with the "swing" of high-quality vinyl reproduction.

Just for professional reasons, there is also no longer a way around streaming, and in ideal conditions it can sound great. However, as a music fan I miss the liner notes and discographic data, and being able to touch the vinyl and reminisce about my youth. ■

MY RECORDS WERE TAPES

When I was a kid, every day started with music. I came into the kitchen and the radio was usually already playing: it was mainly hits and my mother knew all the words, even though when it came to the melodies she was a bit more... well, free. In the evening we often listened to music from the tape deck, the music – mostly recording from the radio, winding its way through a Grundig TK 8. I learned to operate this wonderful device quickly and at about eight I could call it "my" tape player: records



- PROFILE**
- **Michael Lang:** Managing editor
 - **Born in:** Cologne
 - **Hobbies:** Concerts, HiFi, politics, reading, communication, people
 - **Education:** Wholesale/retail sales
 - **Favorite food:** French
 - **Motto in life:** Time is on my side
 - **Favorite music:** Rolling Stones, Bruce Springsteen – the remaining eclectic range depends on my mood

and a something on which to play them were only a dream at the time, mainly due to finances.

The boy grew up and so did his standards. This was driven partly by my first concert experience: Deep Purple, in January 1973 in Cologne. About a year later I had my first stereo tape recorder in my room, a Philips N 4414. DIY speakers and Sennheiser HD 414 headphones, a Körtling amp, and a Dual 1019 took up more and more space in my audio corner.

My eye-opener happened in Berlin. If memory serves, the store was called Audio Level: the space was broken up with large folding screens, and some rather large boxes were placed in the corners. This completely ragged-looking fellow who was comparing Tympanis and Klipsch horns let me sit in and listen. This was the point of no return for me. I suddenly understood what "airiness" and "dynamic"



◀ This is how it all started: suitcase tape recorder Grundig TK 8

meant. And that one day I wanted to own a system with such qualities.

On weekends we got together for the “Cologne Sound Contest”, and once I got my first apartment, I no longer had to be considerate of my parents in terms of volume and my new neighbors were quite open to loud music. A large step in the direction of HiFi heaven were a Thorens TD 125 with SME 3012 and EMT cartridge, an Audiolabor VV 2020 preamp with Symphonic Line power amp, and Rogers Studio 1/1p speakers.

At some point in my 20s I started turning my hobby in to a profession. My fascination with sophisticated mechanics and precise electronics has not worn off, and neither has my preference for electrostatics (preferably as dipole emitters) and analog. I hardly ever use the tape deck and my old tuners anymore - but I still have them. And amps? I am hopelessly old-fashioned and like the soft glow of tubes. ■



▲ The ESS AMT 1, here a late „d“ version, has hardly changed over the decades

from the glass – it hit me in the face, in all its vibrant, dazzling, seductively sparkling fascination. I had never heard anything like it.

In that moment my something inside me erupted, like a bolt of lightning: I

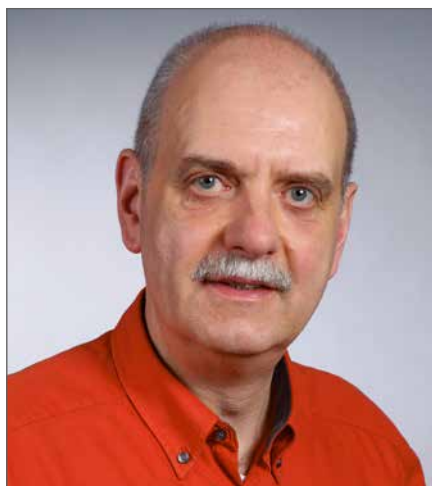
suddenly knew this would be my subject for the rest of my life. In short: just a few seconds is all it took for HiFi to grip me with its charms. Everything after that – the devices, the work in dealerships, the road to the magazine – started with that one spark. Simply, the decision was simply made for me. And off I went... ■

GONE IN 60 SECONDS

I can still remember it exactly: the moment in which the passion for HiFi gripped me. It was a spring afternoon and, as always, we were zipping through the city of Bremen on our bikes and looking in shop windows. We went into “Profi-HiFi” because the atmosphere was relaxed there and nobody looked at you like you were not supposed to be there. The salesman said: “Come on, I’ll show you something!”

In front of the windows was a pair of the then-famous ESS AMT1a speakers, whose revolutionary “Air Motion Transformer” emitted midrange and treble both to the front and the back. It was hooked up to an amp combination by GAS (“Great American Sound”) and a record player I can’t remember now. The record was one of Sheffield’s first-class direct cuts with the Harry James Big Band. Off it went – and I was sold within a minute.

Did it sound right? No idea! But I remember exactly the huge spectrum resulting from direct sound and reflection



PROFILE

- **Matthias Böde:** Special task master
- **Born in:** Bremen
- **Hobbies:** Photography, being on the go
- **Education:** Diploma in German language and literature and art history
- **Favorite food:** Light in the summer, more hardy in the winter, mother’s stews
- **Motto in life:** Everything about which you are serious is never-ending
- **Favorite music:** Modern symphonies and modern jazz, introverted, intimate, heady



PROFILE

- **Tom Frantzen:** Editor
- **Born in:** Aachen
- **Hobbies:** Photography/AV, traveling (camper), vintage
- **Education:** Diploma in Commerce and Technology Editor
- **Favorite food:** Chinese
- **Motto in life:** Main thing is staying happy
- **Favorite music:** Fleetwood Mac, P. McCartney, Pink Floyd, Supertramp

HIFI BEGINS

Everything started on October 2, 1977: as a member of the Aachen Cathedral Choir – the oldest German boys’ choir founded by the emperor Charlemagne – “little Tom” was involved in a recording session, Sadly, puberty hit soon after and his voice changed: there would be no more recording sessions for him.

I was overwhelmed by the acoustics of the ancient church, construction of which began 1200 years ago – and, as a result, all the more disappointed by the sound of the record of the session when I heard it at home via a 1973 Philips compact system with broadband speakers in



Sansui's amp flagship AU-X1, already more than 30 years old bears its share of the blame for Tom Frantzen's „HiFi career“ – and still runs great in the bi-amping package

rustic oak.

It would be three more years until I finally had a system of my own, able to do it justice: an Onkyo TX-20 receiver, Thorens TD 115 turntable, and Ecou-ton compact speakers my own. It was an entirely different story: even Haydn would have enjoyed that sound.

However, the ignition point for my emotional journey through the HiFi hobby – which is always powered from two sides, the music and the tech (hard-ware and software) – had to be the demonstration of the “Dynaudio Con-sequence” in Düsseldorf and another of Apogee full-range electrostatics with Krell electronics. Mangione’s “Children Of Sanchez” sounded incredible, while the system in Bonn lifted you out of your seat during “Koyaanisqatsi”.

Clearly, I would never shake this never-ending search for better sound, even when it was achieved through accessories, placement, and so on. You can see where this sort of thing takes you... ■

FROM MIXER TO PREAMP

I have always been interested in high-quality music playback, even though I came to the subject from the recording side. That came about through pure pragmatism: I have been rocking out in various bands since about 1990, first with a guitar strap around my neck, then later on various keyboards and synths.

For a long time, when I thought about “high fidelity”, I was considering studio mixers, power amps and monitor



PROFILE

- **Carsten Barnbeck:** Editor
- **Born in:** Eschwege
- **Hobbies:** Making and listening to music, everything to do with history
- **Education:** Almost historian, volunteered for a while after quitting college
- **Favorite food:** The entire Mediterranean tour
- **Motto in life:** The proof of the pudding is in the eating!
- **Favorite music:** Alternative / rock and all shades of electronica

speakers., and I only used DAT as a source – I really miss Tascam’s DA-40 – and computers with premium sound-cards. Of course, I also had a CD player, but just on the side: I connected it through the excellent D/A converters of the DAT recorder without giving it much thought.

My Eureka moment came with a Cyrus 5 amp in one of its countless tuning incarnations: as soon as I hooked it up, it projected such phenomenal spatial imaging into the studio that I first suspected a phase shifter in the speakers. Together with Tannoy’s exotic DTM-8, it still makes up one of my dream teams.

This experience increased my interest



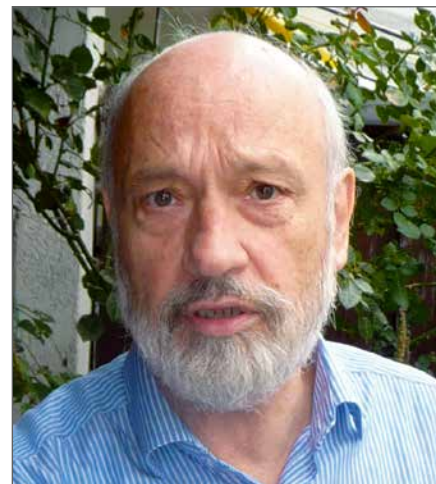
I keep using my antiquated Roland M-16E as a preamp – refined by a bit of tuning. I should really clean it sometime...

in reproduction to such an extent that I joined STEREO in 2001 But – between us – these days I prefer listening to music on the computer. That’s a big change from the way I was a while ago. Consistent, huh? ■

HIFI – BECAUSE IT LASTS LONGER

No, not everything used to be better: on the contrary, some of the normal “mainstream” entertainment equipment was so lousy, it could really ruin your fun. Frustrated about these wet blankets I started gravitating towards elevated HiFi.

Even as a child I had been fascinated by this technology which made it possible to record and play back one’s own voice, but it took a quite few years before I could save up enough to afford my first Telefunken “tape recorder suitcase”. Device unpacked, microphone connected, recording started – tape runs but nothing is recorded. A brand new machine, and



PROFILE

- **Ulrich Wienforth:** Editor
- **Born in:** Unna
- **Hobbies:** Music and (long-lived) technology
- **Education:** Electrical engineer
- **Favorite food:** Mediterranean (and Black Forest cake)
- **Motto in life:** Que sera, sera
- **Favorite music:** Everything with acoustic guitar, but also rock

already I had to take it to get fixed! That was frustration number one.

More disillusionment piled on over the years: cheap sheet metal bars which buckled quickly; friction wheels wobbling on their spindles; pressure rollers which fluttered and brakes which ate up all my tape.

OK, so still maybe good enough to record your voice but how long before that gets boring?

However, music was becoming more important, and I was recording the latest hits from the radio, in quarter track mono at 4.5 cm/s – after all, you really wanted to fit a lot on that tape. And when it was full, you just started over and erased all the old stuff – but then in your teens music has a relatively short half-life. As I said: In terms of sound and reliability this Telefunken box was a mid-level disaster.

I read in some hobby magazine – I didn't know about any HiFi magazines at that time – about a company called Revox, which built extra-robust tape recorders,

FOTO: TECHNOSEUM



Saved up money from summer jobs: Revox G36 – built to last

complete with three motors, capstan direct drive, everything die-cast rather than flimsy. I just had to have one! But the fact they cost more than 1000 Deutsch Marks meant they weren't really attainable for high-schoolers, so it took me a few summer jobs before I had somehow saved up the money for my G36. I'd fallen in with the high end – even though at the time that term didn't yet exist.

Now I recorded in half track stereo at 19 cm/s, and a few of us friends would pool money for every long-awaited new Beatles album, then record it one after the other – the last one got to keep the record.

My Revox G36 still works, though it recently needed to have its pressure rollers and capstan shaft replaced, but in the meantime I've also obtained a more modern B77, also a work horse built for eternity.

These days, I mainly listen to music from my hard drive via a network player – of course, hard drives also don't live forever, but backups have saved me from losing my music collection. And if need be I can even store it on the cloud – I don't care if the NSA listens in on that. ■

DRUNK ON MUSIC

In the beginning was the music: even as a child, songs with “beautiful” melodies could drive me to tears – although admittedly there are a few of them I find embarrassing these days. Even the crappy playback from a dull suitcase radio or a rattling record player didn't bother me – it was all about the music.



PROFILE

- **Andreas Kunz:** Music Editor
- **Born in:** Frankfurt am Main
- **Hobbies:** Playing piano, reading
- **Education:** Musicology, psychology (minor), volunteer work
- **Favorite food:** Italian, Indian, Thai
- **Motto in life:** Without music the world would be a mistake
- **Favorite music:** Mozart, Beatles, and few more from the last 300 years

My first classical concert experiences in Kiel Castle, and visits to friends who proudly showed me their systems, opened my ears: wow, music can sound like that! As a result, the 1000 Deutsch Marks I got for my confirmation celebration was quickly spent on a Grundig amp record



A musical soundscape which fascinates me to this very day: the legendary „Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band“ by the Beatles

player and Magnat speakers, at the time a sonic quantum leap for me.

Between 1966 and 1973, it was almost all about psychedelic rock: Jimi Hendrix's “Voodoo Child”, The Doors' “The End” and Pink Floyd's “Dark Side Of The Moon” let me immerse myself in different worlds of sound, and also central to my listening were Beatles classics like “I am The Walrus”, “Tomorrow Never Knows” and “Strawberry Fields Forever”. “Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band” was THE record: it was such a defining experience that to this day I use it to christen every new component in my system.

My demands for grew continuously, and in particular after I joined the STEREO editorial staff: after long sessions in the sound booth I would come home less satisfied with my own set-up. But these days I tend more towards acoustic – not electric or electronic – music, from classical to folk to jazz, and I pay more attention to audiophile qualities. But I would never want to live without milestones like Maria Callas, Dinu Lipatti, Billie Holiday, or the Kinks, no matter how (partly) problematic they are in terms of recording technique.

Audiophile sound is great, but inspired music is irreplaceable. ■

BEHIND THE SCENES

A gang of motivated editors does not alone a HiFi magazine make: at least as important are the “men behind the curtain”. What would STEREO be without Joachim Zell, who shoots all these great pictures? From two-page spreads, showing off the best side of the components in spectacular lighting to emphasize the HiFi magic, all the way down to the smallest details on a circuit board – all of it comes out of his studio. Working at the heart of our publishing house, over the years he has become specialized in everything HiFi and knows just how to make it look “sexy”.

If you can Joachim Zell is the “eyes of STEREO magazine”, then Hilga Pauli is the “face”. Our graphic designer puts images and text, tables and info boxes together to make it all flow as a whole, her layouts defining the look of the magazine – which of course has to be perfect.

So the material has to be good, and image editor Jürgen Meier-Vahlkamp makes sure that the pictures – even our hand-held images from trade shows, workshops, and company visits – look crisp and sharp. Every picture has to pass his computer, and if something doesn’t look right, his mastery of Photoshop is here to help. He also makes sure the laboratory charts are in the right format.

Which brings us from the look to the



PROFILE

- **Joachim Zell:** Photographer
- **Born in:** Bingen am Rhein
- **Hobbies:** Dancing, badminton, cycling
- **Education:** Masters in Photography
- **Favorite food:** Italian
- **Motto in life:** Laugh at life, maybe it'll laugh back at you
- **Favorite music:** Billy Joel, Elton John, and Katie Melua



PROFILE

- **Jürgen Meier-Vahlkamp:** Image editing
- **Born in:** Cologne
- **Hobbies:** Speed skating, listening to music
- **Education:** Reproduction photography
- **Favorite food:** Mediterranean and Asian
- **Motto in life:** The last shirt has no pockets
- **Favorite music:** Rock from AC/DC to ZZ Top and „old school“ like David Gilmour



PROFILE

- **Hilga Pauli:** Graphic designer
- **Born in:** Berlin
- **Hobbies:** Tennis, skiing, jogging, sailing, singing in choir
- **Education:** Dipl. Graphic Design
- **Favorite food:** Italian, Thai, and Spanish tapas
- **Motto in life:** Don't think about tomorrow – your life happens today
- **Favorite music:** Chill-out music to relax



PROFILE

- **İlhami Düzgün:** Advertising management
- **Born in:** Kelkit (Turkey)
- **Hobbies:** Excessive listening sessions on vinyl, high-end, pool/billiards
- **Education:** Croupier
- **Favorite food:** Sushi & Italian
- **Motto in life:** There is nothing good unless you do it
- **Favorite music:** Avant-garde jazz, especially John Coltrane, funk, and increasingly

heart of the matter. Measurement technician Ulrich Apel determines how the inner workings of the equipment on test perform in the STEREO lab, using high-quality equipment like a Rohde & Schwarz analyzer. With it – and a few additional devices – you can capture all relevant parameters of HiFi components. We have a large, in-house concert hall to measure speakers, to ensure there’s not too much reflection, while a modern program creates the foundation. Tube buff Apel, who also works as sound engineer for the movies and restores historic studio equipment, connects theory with practice and has come up with quite a few unconventional solutions.

Our Editorial Assistant Elke Mudra s the fairy godmother of STEREO, and takes care of everything concerning the magazine, from reader services via the shop all the way to preparations for trade shows, as well as being responsible for proofreading the magazine. It definitely helps to be a HiFi buff, and she is: as a

wedding present her hubby didn't give her jewels or a round the world trip, but – girls, listen up! – a high-end turntable. Many readers know Elke Mudra from "World of HiFi" where she regularly presented systems.

In order to keep a magazine like STEREO going you need a constant supply of devices for testing, and these need to be received, stored, moved, packaged, and shipped. Our warehouse manager, Manfred Müller, can find any box – no matter how lost – and has developed a remarkable sixth sense for the location of misplaced remote controls and similar equipment. "Manni" maintains his calm demeanor even when large speakers have to be handled, and he is always there with a helping hand for our editors.

Ilhami Düzgün manages the advertising in STEREO, very sobering work concerning acquisition and administration – which is why many people working in this field often have no connection to the subject matter of the magazines on which they work. Not in this case: yes, the advertising section is strictly separated from the editorial room, but our colleague is definitely "one of us". Having moved from

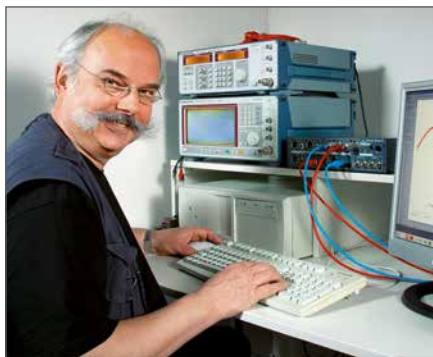


PROFILE

- **Elke Mudra:** Editorial assistant, copy editing
- **Born in:** Düren
- **Hobbies:** Music, literature, nature, sports
- **Education:** Masters in German language and literature, dramatic arts
- **Favorite food:** Fresh fish at the sea and home-made meatballs
- **Motto in life:** If you're gonna do it, you'd better like doing it
- **Favorite music:** Blues

Turkey as a child, this bon vivant loves pure high-end stuff, having worked in HiFi retail and lived the audiophile life (possibly beyond his means) when he was younger. That makes him a perfect fit for our team – people for whom STEREO is much more than just a job.

Matthias Böde



PROFILE

- **Ulrich Apel:** Measurement and technology
- **Born in:** Oberhausen
- **Hobbies:** Photography, tube technology
- **Education:** Diploma in Engineering
- **Favorite food:** Italian
- **Motto in life:** As soon as you do it right it somehow starts working
- **Favorite music:** Modern classic and techno because it is relaxing



PROFILE

- **Manfred „Manni“ Müller:** Warehouse management
- **Born in:** Hürth
- **Hobbies:** Motorcycling, listening to music
- **Education:** Factory mechanic
- **Favorite food:** Italian
- **Motto in life:** So far so good
- **Favorite music:** 80s hits and the best of today



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