

The form of our loudspeakers is largely driven by the needs of acoustics.

Did your interest in the high end come from the music side or the electronics side?

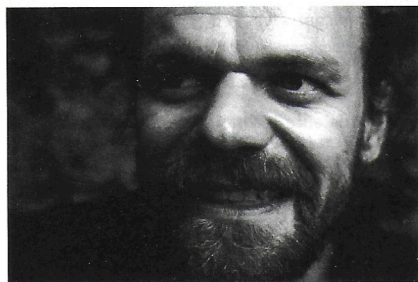
I was born into a musical household; my mother came from a musical family herself and played piano, while my father was passionate about classical music and was a fan of reproduced sound. I was a Quad/Tannoy baby; Dad's system comprised a Tannoy 15" York corner speaker driven by the Quad II and mono preamp. Years later I persuaded him to accept the gift of a pair of B&W 801 Series2. After many years of badgering, my dad let me have a Vitavox 12" driver which had been at the center of his first speaker system back in the 50s. I built a proper wooden enclosure for that driver and it even followed me to university.

What gear made up your first high-end system?

I started by scavenging speaker drivers from old radios and putting them into cabinets and quickly decided that the best enclosures were tubes. That was a fair time before Nautilus! Then I acquired the Vitavox driver and built an amp based on EL84s; it was quite an enjoyable system.

When did audio develop from a hobby to a career?

After I finished university and got my degree, I managed to get a job in the electronics development lab of a gambling machine manufacturer, but that was just to pay the rent. I'd been messing around with active speakers, because it just seemed to be the logical way forward and came up with something like an active LS3/5a. Very shortly after that, I saw the advertisement for "Loudspeaker Engineer" with B&W. I knew this was an amazing opportunity, so I cut my hair



and went for the interview. I got the job, perhaps because I'd been messing around with active speakers and it happened that they were in the process of developing just that—an active version of the DM1400.

Who were your high-end heroes as you started out?

Coming to audio from a pure science background meant that my heroes had less to do with modern high-end audio—people like Newton, Lavoisier, Oersted, and Faraday. As I did start to focus on sound, I learnt about the work of Western Electric and Bell Labs. These days I'm a bit in awe of Bruno Putzys and his team at Purifi.

What education did you receive?

I had a fairly ordinary British state-school education, but I was so driven by my interest in science that it would have happened anyway. I went to Southampton University to study electronics but found it quite taxing, as the course is very theoretical while I'm a very hands-on practical worker. I think that's why I was ultimately driven towards loudspeakers because they're the fusion of so many disciplines.

What interesting fact or aspect about Vivid Audio might surprise audiophiles?

That we manufacture in South Africa? I'm not sure that message has really got out.

What is the least understood aspect about Vivid speakers?

That we are an engineering-led company not design-led. The form of our loudspeakers is largely driven by the needs of acoustics, although it's true that where the

form has no effect on the sound we have allowed ourselves a little artistic license.

How do you feel about the shift from physical media to computer-based audio, for example, streaming and downloads?

I'm quite happy to accept that, ultimately, a digitized signal can have all the fidelity and resolution of analog. Whether we've reached that point yet is arguable, but I believe we have. I do like the process of putting on an album and enjoying it in full in the order the tracks were arranged by the artists and with the gaps between tracks unedited.

What are the greatest challenges confronting the high end in the next few years?

Persuading enough of the younger generation that fine sound is a worthwhile pursuit and, as far as we as loudspeaker-makers are concerned, that filling a room with sound as opposed to just the ear canal is a desirable goal. But there's also the social angle; my father's generation and mine really enjoyed going to each other's homes to enjoy listening to music together. It was at the core of our social lives. I try to encourage my kids to appreciate the sharing of the same music by playing through speakers rather than one headphone each, which I sometimes see!

Outside of audio, what do you do for fun?

One of the dangers of making one's hobby into one's career is that it leaves a bit of a vacuum. Otherwise I enjoy most of the good things in art and life. I enjoy traveling and getting a taste of the way others live. I spend a little time supporting the Green movements. As a scientist I've been aware of the risk of man-made climate change since the early 70s. It's been extremely frustrating, but finally I think the penny's dropping.

What is the most gratifying aspect about your work?

When I get a call from a Vivid customer just to say how much he or she is enjoying listening to music. **tas**