Subject: Great Plains Audio Club Meeting
Posted by Wayne Parham on Mon, 08 Sep 2003 05:47:12 GMT
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I had a really great time at the Great Plains Audio Club Meeting yesterday. Not only was the sound great and the company even better, but I'm telling you what - I had the best brisket I've ever had. I'm not exaggerating either. We ate great, and all thanks goes to Phil Wilson who hosted the event. Just really a super time.In attendance was Bill Wassilak and his wife, Forrest Merrill, Mark Fitzgerald, Akhilesh Bajaj and his son, Anitesh, Mark Margiotta, Phil and Janet Wilson and Alona and me. There was always music playing, and we often found ourselves silent for an impromptu listening session. But we visited with one another throughout the afternoon as well.Standing, from left to right: Mark Margiotta, Phil Wilson, Wayne Parham, Forrest Merrill, Mark Fitzgerald and Akhilesh BajajSeated: Anitesh BajajNot Shown: Bill Wassilak (Where'd you go, Bill?)Left to right: Alona Parham, Janet Wilson and Mrs. Wassilak (Big apologies, I didn't get your first name)Listening Impressions:I would have been happy with any of the three systems that was there. We swapped some components around, but basically, there were three systems that we listened to. One was my small system consisting of a pair of Paramour SET amps and a pair of

Select stereo SET amplifier and a pair of small towers using bass-reflex loaded 8" Fostex single-drivers. And the third system was a higher-power push-pull pentode amp driving a pair of very small but beautiful bookshelf speakers having a dome tweeter and a 6" midwoofer.I don't

here. But I will say that I thought it was the most plain and least expensive of the three systems. It sounds great and looks fine, but the speakers are those that my son uses in his bedroom, so they take more abuse than my Big Block Olds on a summer evening on the strip. Nothing like the beautiful Martinelli cabinets in a showroom setting, which is the only option we're selling for finished loudspeakers these days, by the way.The big surprise of the day for me was Phil's system. I've heard some of the best builder's single-driver implementations and never been really impressed. But Phil's was really great. Simple and pure, just what the single-driver guys boast about.Phil Wilson's system - Single driver Fostex bass-reflex on Decware Select amplifierThe bass was adequate, and didn't sound like it was really missing. Of course, we didn't play some of the selections that really push a bass subsystem, and I suspect that we would have wanted a sub for home theater use. But it did have bass that didn't sound artificially enhanced. As you might expect, it sounded like we had bass down to about 100Hz, maybe 80Hz, and it sounded pretty well balanced down to that point. That's pretty good really.What was amazing - and what I've missed from other single-driver implementations - was the content above 10kHz. These things sounded very much like the response you get from modern compression drivers. I'm not talking about dynamic range or character or anything like that, but I am talking about content and response. The speakers sounded like they were relatively flat up to like 16kHz or so. It was kind of amazing to look at an 8" driver and hear what sounded very much like it should have been coming from a tweeter. I wondered if they snuck a little piezo in the magnet hole or something because the highs sparkled like I'd have never expected from a system like this.Phil Wilson's Decware Zen Select amplifierHere's one you gotta check out. It was also surprising, not so much by its capability or novelty, but just because it's really cool. You would expect 250 watts of good, clean push-pull pentodes to be able to do some pretty amazing stuff. But expecting something and experiencing it are two different things.Mark Margiotta's system - Two-way mini-monitors on a 250 watt pentode amplifierI probably should have written down the brands of each of the components here, but maybe Mark or someone can clarify. These were all purchased on the

West Coast when Mark lived there, and the amps were hand-built by a custom builder there. It all looks top-notch, with special emphasis on detail.Mark's "Music reference" 250 watt pentode amplifierYou can tell that this is a commercial offering, built to compete with other high-end production components. I really like Mark's amplifiers, and it inspires me to find a nice amp and preamp like these, to round out my personal collection. I have the best prosound high-current amps, I have a nice clean 100 watt receiver and I have a great little DIY triode amp. But I don't have a commercial tube amp system, and I really love the glowing lights, and the beautiful wood and the brass. And the sound of tubes with some power behind them is enchanting too.Mark's Class-A tube "Audio Illusions" preamplifier, with stepped resistor attenuatorsEven though Mark's system uses separates, he didn't have noticable hum. Honestly, I'm sure a lot of this is due to the loudspeakers, which were probably 86dB/W/M. But he also had a system that needed chassis ground, and Phil's house presented Mark with only two-prong outlets. I think they found some outlets with a ground plug, but I know these Tulsa homes - Phil's home was absolutely beautiful, but some of our historic homes weren't wired with good grounds. So when three-prong outlets are added, they usually are grounded poorly. Usually the conduit is just attached to a water pipe, if even that. So for Mark to not have hum with separates in this situation is pretty cool.Mark says that he normally uses Magneplanars on this amp, but he uses the little two-way speakers shown above as his right and left channel for home theater. I really liked these little speakers because they look great and they are very small. They reminded me of speakers like the Minimus seven's. And these sounded like some of the better mini-monitors of this type - They are very flat and so they sound realistic, but they just don't get very loud.They are prefect for a small apartment or dorm room, and you can push 'em with 100 watts and not have any neighbors complain. They'll sound just fine at this level too. But their maximum output is probably 105dB-110dB at a meter or something like that. So you just can't crank 'em. You can, but even at full power, you feel like you still want more.Next meeting will be held at Mark's house, so we'll be able to see this system in its

you can!