Subject: 2 Pi Magic
Posted by Barryso on Wed, 30 Jan 2019 21:27:37 GMT
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TLDR: Nailed it. Finally got the sound right a decade later.

First off, pardon the length of this post but it's been a long journey and there is always the chance somebody else can benefit from reading through all this to avoid making the same mistakes.

Heard a combo at the 2007 Lone Star Audio Fest that paired a Jef Larson 2A3 amp with Wayne's 2 Pi Towers. Interesting combo. Beguiling. Charming. You'd get in front of it and it would draw you into the music. Couldn't put my finger on what made it so nice - just knew it was special and that I kept going back into Jef and Deborah's demo room to hear it. It was also kinda cheap compared to a lot of audiophile gear and I made the decision to buy it on the trip home.

Bought the amp from Jef and Deborah and got the 2 Pi Tower kits from Wayne.

But no magic.

I lost interest in making it right as things were insanely busy at the time. The combo sat unused for about a decade and then last fall the towers got pulled out of storage. Turned out to be an interesting journey:

There was an error putting the speakers together years back:
https://AudioRoundTable.com/forum/index.php?t=msg&th=21360

The speakers were on a suspended wood floor with a crawl space under them:
https://AudioRoundTable.com/forum/index.php?t=msg&th=21821

There were also additional small speaker tweaks:
https://AudioRoundTable.com/forum/index.php?t=msg&th=21644

All of the above changes made a dramatic difference to the towers. Night and day.

During these months of tinkering the towers were being driven by a Conrad Johnson preamp into a Texas Instruments TPA3255 class d amp. Good preamp and amp, a fairly neutral pairing with a bit of tube warmth but no sweetness. In that time the speakers went from kinda sad to very good. All the speaker and room changes turned them into thwack monsters - put anything with percussion on and just sit and be stunned. There are very, very expensive systems that can't come close to the way the towers can recreate a percussive strike.

Things were very much moving in the right direction but the towers still didn't sound like they did in Texas.

In an effort to make the midrange a bit prettier I hooked up a sub and turned up it's crossover frequency point. That gave a bit more heft to the midrange but it also overdid the bass and removed a good deal of the dynamics and thwak from percussion. Changing the sub back to normal settings gave a nice, modest increase in the lowest bass while the dynamics were kept

intact - and left the midrange unchanged. So the sub was a modest improvement to the sound but it wasn't changing the midrange to what it sounded like in Texas.

It was time to try Jef's 2A3 amp again but I was kinda paranoid. The last time Jef's amp was in the mix the towers were still over the crawl space and the combo sounded very bloated and slow. How would it do now that the speakers were fixed and were not sitting over the bad part of the floor? I was kinda scared of being disappointed again so it got put off. Really, I was scared to put the combo together again for fear of being disappointed. It took a while but I finally got the nerve up and dropped the tube amp back into the mix.

Magic. Just like 2007.

All of the fixes and changes paid off. It has clear mids and treble with a touch of sweetness. Bass isn't loose or overdone as it was over the crawl space. An upright bass playing through the towers now has the right tone, texture and pluck. THAT is what they sounded like at the show.

One of my friends has heard the Pi's progress through the fixes but always with the CJ preamp and class d amp. After hearing the towers with the triode amp he just kept saying "don't change anything". He said it several times. Emphatically.

Magic.

Discovered the 2A3 amp is far better than the other electronics in the house for low volume listening. The other tube amps and the class d amp need to be at moderate or high volumes to start sounding good but the little SET amp is coherent at pretty low levels. This is a really big deal as I've never been one to listen at loud volumes and my ears have gotten far more sensitive over time. So the low volume listening is a very big deal. Who knows, it might have been one of the things that made the combo so special in the first place.

The solid state amp thwaked a bit better, got a whole lot louder and if I listened to mostly rock or techno it very well might be the better choice. But for Jazz there's no contest. This combo has the textures and detail that make you sink in and just enjoy. Folks pay a lot of money for audio gear that can't communicate the way this does.

So it's a nice, happy ending to a very long journey. Would have rather had the magic show up a decade ago but am pretty tickled it finally found it's way here now.