Subject: In defence of the poor haute audio critic
Posted by abajaj11 on Sun, 23 May 2004 04:37:39 GMT
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IThought it would be nice to add a post in the defence of the much aligned audiophilic critic: they are in my opinion, people who have a fondness for audio, and who can write (at least to a point). The problem is the phenomenon...it's like being a critic for fine art or haute couture. I mean how do you PREDICT which component will sound good for a particular listener-room-RestOfSystem combination. You cannot!So, as long as one realizes that haute audio reviews are merely entertaining, and catering to a different audience perhaps than one who is interested in good music, one is OK. One merely has to look at ads in stereophile, or talk to the haute audio manufacturers, to realize that they share many traits common with makers of haute couture:a) an emphasis on presentation and looks that often belie the content ($50 drivers in $9950 cabinets anyone?)b) a knack for taking relatively simple technology and mumbo jumboing it to impress the credulous well heeled buyerc) a prima donna attitude completely at odds with the sheer simplicity of the product (compare the technology in a cheap computer with an audio component).Hence, IMHO, there are two worlds: (i) the world of people who want to listen to music and want the highest fidelity, and (ii) the world of haute audio (whose inhabitants are often colloquially called audiophiles). Critics in the world of haute audio serve a valuable function when they connect the well heeled bourgeouis client with the haute audio manufacturer. The problems only occur when people in world (i) expect the publications (almost all of which are in world (ii)) to cater to THEM. As long as one understands that reviews in haute audio publications (like stereophile as only ONE example) serve a particular purpose, and are in no sense PREDICTIVE of how a system will really be perceived by one listener in one room, one is OK. So, rather than bash the poor haute audio critic, let us accept their function for what it is, and choose to subscribe or unsubscribe to their publications, as we wish!thanx for reading!-akhilesh

Subject: Re: In defence of the poor haute audio critic
Posted by Wayne Parham on Sun, 23 May 2004 12:17:55 GMT
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Recently, I've had a dialog wih the editor of a magazine that strikes me as being an excellent publication. It seems to be more like the electronics magazines that have schematics and hobby projects than the types that simply review products. Personally, I like these kinds of magazines much better. It's not about any kind of subjective opinions, instead, it's about telling you how to build things or get the most out of equipment you already own. I like these technical publications much better than review magazines. But that's just me.I'm sort of a "hands on" kind of guy and I want to experience things for myself. That said, I sometimes enjoy reading reviews, especially if the writer is articulate and interesting. What interests me in a review is the emotion they can bring to the topic. The presentation is as important as the facts. I like it when there is some technical data and I like it when it is academically sound, so that you feel confident that the facts are good. But just as important, I like it when the reviewer can paint a picture with words, and that has little to do with the facts.I suspect that there are good reviewers and bad reviewers, just like in any other industry. Everyone works with their talents and capabilities. Some are articulate and

entertaining. Others are more analytical. Then there's the matter of whether of not the writer shares similar tastes as you, the reader. I have had the chance to have some dialogs with a handful of writers and editors. I've thought each of them were pretty good people, and I enjoyed talking with all of them.Personally, I've enjoyed visiting with each of the writers and editors I've met. They all seemed to me to be pretty honest and sincere, just trying out products and writing their opinions. I couldn't help but think how it must be easy to get burned out, since equipment setup is sometimes a lot of work. To do that day in and day out might get to be a drag. It's not like you can just get something right, leave it alone and enjoy the music, 'cause your job is to move stuff around and try things out. So I'll bet it's both fun and tiring at the same time.I've had occasion to deal with a reviewer and an editor from an online magazine that primarily does reviews. These guys seem like real nice folks to me. They tend to use uncompensated reviewers and writers, but I think there are probably a few paid staff as well. But since many of the reviews are written by uncompensated writers, that pretty much takes the profit motive away. I don't see any chance that their reviews might be biased by a hope for any sort of financial gain. But I suppose there is still the desire to "fit in" so a writer might be embarrassed to make comments that he felt would be unpopular with his peers. So I guess even without a profit motive, there is still peer pressure that can make the a situation like the "Emperors New Clothes."I've also had some discussions with the editor of a very successful high-fidelity review magazine. Lately, I've noticed a lot of controversy surrounding his magazine, and it seemed to rise out of nowhere. The man seems level headed to me, and I think most of the controversy surrounding him and his magazine is unwarranted. Then again, the source of the controversy is suspicious, and that says a lot to me. It smacks of tabloid measures used to fabricate negative bias and artifically generate a story. I think you know what I mean; It happens all the time over there.After all, magazines and discussion boards are just opinions; Read if you like and don't if not. I can see being extremely upset with a publisher if you spent thousands of dollars advertising and your ads didn't appear or something was misrepresented. But I can't see being upset if you bought a magazine for five bucks and simply disagreed with a writer. Big deal. If it's not your company's product reviewed, most people wouldn't be very emotional about a differing opinion. They might throw the magazine away, and might not ever buy another. They might even tell a friend. But I don't think they would dwell on the matter for months or years and I don't think they would pounce on every messageboard post. People that do that have an axe to grind.So when I see messageboards with people foaming at the mouth about a magazine, review or writer, I am suspicious. Looks to me like it's someone with an agenda, either a representative of a product that was reviewed in the magazine, a competitor of the company making the product or a competitor of the magazine attempting to malign them. Somebody's probably got an agenda. It's one thing when you know what the beef is, and you know it's a Ford/Chevy thing. No harm in that. But as for me, if I don't know the inside story, I pretty much disregard things I can't verify for myself. It all just becomes noise.That's why I don't care for unmoderated usenet forums or other online discussion boards that act that way. If a place turns into cyber-graffitti, it loses all value to me. But as long as it isn't allowed to become like that, I really like online discussion forums because they allow all kinds of people to visit with each other and share opinions. The participants of the forum represent a large cross-section of the public. Online discussion forums have lots of people so there are lots of chances to find others with personalities and interests similar to yours.

Subject: Re: In defence of the poor haute audio critic

Posted by abajaj11 on Sun, 23 May 2004 12:55:49 GMT
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I agree Wayne! As my little post surmised, the revieer CANNOT tell you how the coponent will sound to you, in your setup, in your room. All they can do is tell you how THEY liked the component. Some of us enjoy reading that (i subscribe for exampl to stereophile) while others bash this...it;s kinda like bashing an economist for not being able to predict how the economy will do next...it;s inherently unpredictable. -akhilesh

Subject: Re: In defence of the poor haute audio critic
Posted by Wayne Parham on Sun, 23 May 2004 14:11:05 GMT
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Good quote, "kinda like bashing an economist for not being able to predict how the economy will do next."Hey, on an unrelated but similar topic, did you see Eric Barbour's post in the Tubes forum? He's the editor for Vacuum Tube Valley, which looks like a real fine magazine. You might want to check it out.

Subject: Re: In defence of the poor haute audio critic
Posted by abajaj11 on Sun, 23 May 2004 20:02:48 GMT
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That does sound morelike the kind of publication iwould really like to subscribe to Wayne. Another one that you may already like is audio Xpress: www.audioxpress.comthanx-akhilesh

Subject: Re: In defence of the poor haute audio critic
Posted by Wayne Parham on Mon, 24 May 2004 04:47:32 GMT
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Yes, AudioXpress is a fine publication. Bill Fitzmaurice, a regular in the Pro Speakers and High Efficiency Speakers forums here, is a regular writer for that magazine. Good folks there.