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Subject: Japanese philosophy

Posted by [Manualblock](#) on Thu, 10 Jun 2004 12:33:50 GMT

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This thread concerning amplifier topology and feedback has me thinking. While not having professional training I believe many of us have spent countless hours involved in the pursuit of this hobby. The number of amplifier, speaker combinations I myself have heard is staggering as I am sure you all have also. Yet only a small amount of times spent auditioning have I felt the "connection". The Japanese in their audio approach seem to require that their equipment transform the listener in some ways that we seem to ignore. So we rehash endlessly the same arguments and discussions while treading intellectual water. What I would like to find is a common path of understanding; like a chain from source to transducer; including a respect for the conditions of reproducing music in the home. The Japanese audiophiles seem to take some understanding of conditions regarding equipment as universally accepted without disagreement; then they move on. The best sounds in my experience have always occurred in situations where the mood is set and the surroundings comfortable. They understand that all perception of sound is mediated by these interactions. So while the equipment is important; the learning curve must be ratcheted up exponentially regarding the intangibles that affect every aspect of reproduced sound. We all have experienced the transformation of qualities of sound that occur just from combining pieces in different ways or replacing simple components such as caps or resistors; components that radically change in sound quality from one set-up to another. They seem to approach the art as in cooking; combining ingredients to produce a pleasing flavor. In reviewing the Japanese literature it appears they have evolved beyond the swapping amp/cable/pre-amp/cd player phase and into an integrated approach to the experience as a whole. Mr Barbour's contention that the older engineers of 50 yrs. past had an understanding that was accepted universally within their small community sparked these comments. Why it seems the dog is chasing his tail within audio as it presently exists is the question. While there has been advances in materials and implementation in the intervening time, I contend that there has not been a significant advance in the musicality of reproduced sound in 30 yrs. )

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Subject: but master.....

Posted by [TC](#) on Thu, 10 Jun 2004 14:17:37 GMT

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>>The Japanese in their audio approach seem to require that their equipment transform the listener in some ways that we seem to ignore. ==The Japanese have an unbroken 3000 year track record for appreciation of art and music. In that tradition comes respect and diligence to the craft. The Japanese recognize ones hobby pursuits as integral to ones own integrity and happiness, very serious stuff.>>So we rehash endlessly the same arguments and discussions while treading intellectual water==Baseball cards are to blame most of the time. We are more \*statisticians\* than we realize. Beating numbers in hope of a better average score. To relax and commit to music is very rare. The magazines have dumped gasoline on our specsman ship race to financial and musical ruin. The emotional content (and it's preservation) is lost.>>. They seem to

approach the art as in cooking; combining ingredients to produce a pleasing flavor. In reviewing the Japanese literature it appears they have evolved beyond the swapping amp/cable/pre-amp/cd player phase and into an integrated approach to the experience as a whole. Mr Barbour's contention that the older engineers of 50 yrs. past had an understanding that was accepted universally within their small community sparked these comments. ==The Japanese approach to most anything is very refreshing if you are interested in pursuing excellence in any vocation. One also has to remember while we teach home economics, agriculture and science. Japanese high schoolers are also busy studying home entertainment systems and media. That is their "pay dirt", and of course autos and trans.>>Why it seems the dog is chasing his tail within audio as it presently exists is the question==Americans for the most part like the taste of tail. Currently our most prolific art form is modifying pickup trucks, and Hondas.>>I contend that there has not been a significant advance in the musicality of reproduced sound in 30 yrs. ==I say about 65 years. And there may not be anything new and better as far as sound quality goes except for very incremental resolution gains largely overshadowed by analog formats. Convenience and cost are the new frontiers. But essentially you are correct, musical energy and the preservation of that energy is what we yearn for. And the Japanese do have the edge. Ever read Japanese hifi mags? They kill western publications with magnificent photography, technical authority and endless depth of exploration both in and out of hifi/music. TC Gizmo had it pretty much right

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Subject: Re: Japanese philosophy  
Posted by [metasonix](#) on Fri, 11 Jun 2004 02:08:36 GMT  
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30 years? I would opine that it has not substantially improved since 1954. Even multichannel surround sound was being experimented with in the 1930s. The problem is not technological, it is social. One must convince highly technology-ignorant consumers that your magic box is more magical than the other guy's magic box. Motivation is everything, and it often involves motivation of upper-middle-class "lifestyle slaves". Distortion figures don't mean very much to those types....but when Harvey Rosenberg or Dan Schmalte raves (raved) about something, people respond to the emotional appeal. Nevermind the distortion figures or the frequency response. This is often NOT a good thing. It invites scammery and decreasing technical standards.....excuse me for pointing this out, but the Japanese also seem to have a strong taste for comic books featuring child molestation, amputee rape, and brutal bloody violence against women. It's perfectly legal to publish that stuff in Japan. If you ever want to see some, try the visual-art archive on Portal of Evil. The sickest websites listed therein all seem to be Japanese. If Japan=obsession with quality, then it must extend to everything they do--including tentacle rape cartoons.....thanks but no thanks.... [http://www.portalofevil.com/archives/ArtVisual\\_Arts.html](http://www.portalofevil.com/archives/ArtVisual_Arts.html)

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Subject: Re: Japanese philosophy  
Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Fri, 11 Jun 2004 07:33:29 GMT  
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I have a slightly different viewpoint but one that has a similar conclusion. While I love some of the things made by Japanese companies, I prefer to buy from my neighbors and friends where possible. I'm sure the Japanese are fine folks, but I don't know any of them. Foreign feels exotic and that has an attraction of its own - Not better or worse, just different. But there is greatness to be found in every culture, and I prefer to find greatness in my neighbors and friends. So that's where I tend to place my alliances. Speaking of alliances, let me shill one a little bit. FSAudio is a sponsor here and I think they may be on to something for the entry level market. Check out the little ultralinear amp kit that Heart (Netherlands) is making. They'll loan you one for review just for the asking. I've got one now, and it sounds like a pretty neat amp, especially for the price. Disclaimer: My only relationship to FSAudio is that we are both sponsors of AudioRoundTable.com.

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Subject: Re: Japanese philosophy  
Posted by [Manualblock](#) on Fri, 11 Jun 2004 11:48:13 GMT  
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I could not agree more, I personally cannot claim to own anything from Japan except my TV. I drive a Buick Roadmaster and all my equipment is either American or British. What I mean to point out is that the Japanese have an approach and philosophy towards our hobby that serves the music more faithfully; that is why they bought up all the old American tube equipment and speakers and now you can find a mint Fisher 80z easily in Japan while they are scarce as hens teeth here. My post was not meant to be a love letter to the Japanese only to reflect on their approach and how that statement of Mr. Barbour's illuminated the debate over equipment choice and progress. As for exotic, all those amps they build were originally designed right here in the good old U.S. of A. Unless we adopt new approaches and outlooks we stand to become mired in the same old same old. Look on the personal websites of many Japanese audiophiles; horn loaded and push-pull. And what speakers are cherished over there? JBL, ALTEC, probably PI. My alliances are here with the people I know and know me but it doesn't do to place your head in the sand and ignore what others around the world are exploring in this pursuit, that's the short path to stagnation. The point of any hobby I think is to become deeply involved and knowledge is universal. The difference seems to lie in the approach and that is what is intriguing.

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Subject: Re: Japanese philosophy  
Posted by [Manualblock](#) on Fri, 11 Jun 2004 11:56:37 GMT  
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Jesus H. Christ, how does a post on philosophy turn into a promotion of child rape? And the points I made could just as well apply to the Italian sites as well as the Dutch audio sites. Whattya got for them?

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Subject: Re: Japanese philosophy  
Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Fri, 11 Jun 2004 13:40:36 GMT  
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Yep, yep. I agree. I think what Eric was trying to say is that he feels some might be seduced by sensationalism and intrigue more than substance. I think his references were sort of an "exclamation point" to make his case.

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Subject: Re: Japanese philosophy  
Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Fri, 11 Jun 2004 14:10:38 GMT  
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If I understand you right, I think you describe a holistic approach to sound and that's what you're calling a Japanese philosophy. This in contrast to a reductionistic approach that is more analytical. Seems like the best understandings of a subject are those that can be described equally well whether viewed reductionistically or holistically. Like drawing a waveform as a whole or as a series of sines, and both being equally accurate. Each view is better suited for certain things. I think being lop-sided either way leaves a blind spot. To be so rigid as to care only about the technical description of an item leaves the feel of the item unrealized. I can have the entire CAD layout of an airplane and build it perfectly and still not have the exhilaration of first flight if I never get in and fly it. On the other hand, I can fly a thousand planes and know them like the back of my hand, yet if I am unfamiliar with mathematics and physics and I design one, then my first flight in that plane might very well be my last. So both approaches are valid, and to stubbornly see only one side leaves a desperately blind spot. I think Eric has had experience with those that chase the subjective view with an almost manic fervor, throwing all objectivity to the wind. That's what I thought he was driving at. Certainly, it can go too far the other way too. That's what I think you were driving at, and it looks like Terry's position too. Nice thing is that we're just talking about stereo systems here. I'm glad to have some really good sounding gear, and to be able to relax and enjoy it. I'm also glad that we can all talk about them and tinker with them and make 'em even better. Just like nice cars. I like making nice things because I get a lot of joy when they work well.

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Subject: Re: Japanese philosophy  
Posted by [Manualblock](#) on Fri, 11 Jun 2004 15:38:08 GMT  
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Excellent synopsis. Now we are getting somewhere. I agree with Mr. Barbour and am well acquainted with his writing in V.T.V. Your position is not in question as your products and methods speak for themselves. I specifically singled out the example of the Japanese due to their appropriation of American designs from the 50's and 60's as well as their fanatic dedication to American loudspeakers. While we in this country debate non-issues such as SE vs. Push-pull

they appear to have transcended these irrelevancies and pursued an approach that incorporates methods and materials together in an attempt to develop an integrated response that includes not only the modern advances in design but also attempts to combine the intangibles such as musicality with the concrete evidence of technical testing. I pose this question; is there such a thing as intuitive engineering? At some point does the human ability to assign value to intangibles and recognise patterns enter the equation?

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Subject: Re: Japanese philosophy  
Posted by [metasonix](#) on Fri, 11 Jun 2004 18:50:50 GMT  
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I was just trying to say that the Japanese aren't audio gods. They are very, very fallible human beings. They often place subjectivism on a golden platform, as if it could exist on its own--a problem that Caucasians are equally prone to. My issue is that the Sound Practices gang (and some others, to be fair) tends to holify every fad that comes from MJ magazine as if it were a sermon from the mount. I have heard a lot (A LOT) of single-ended tube amps. Some of them sounded really great, and some of them were abysmal. Some commonplace commercial amps sound excellent, and some lovingly-built homebrew projects sound bad. It's literally all over the map. And it doesn't help to have had conversations with people like MJ's Mac Watanabe and Koichi Hanzawa. They are quite willing to admit that they are disturbed by some of the articles appearing in their own magazine, often things written by their most popular contributors. (Mr. Sakuma is a prime example but not the only one. It's funny, I've never heard Sakuma's amps myself, but people who have heard them often seem to complain--frequently--about how awful they usually sound. And yet, Sakuma is a consummate salesman and cheerleader, and enjoys a considerable worldwide audience.) Their obsession with old American speakers is another strangeness. I'm sorry, but I just don't think Altec A7s are magical. To me they are (still) just old P A speakers, having really high efficiency and really bad horn-speaker flaws. I've heard some reproductions that were carefully built and set up in a good listening room, with a good SE amp--and still wasn't impressed. The same goes for Klipschorns. Only a damn fool would use K-horns with an average solid-state amp. That is one "classic" speaker that responds really well to a low-power tube amp. But it is still not for everyone--being VERY sensitive to room setup and ambient acoustics. (And let's not even bring up the Japanese obsession with JBL Hartsfields and Paragons.... I won't repeat that old joke about burying Eero Saarinen....) Sorry if I offended, just trying to point out that you can't always trust the members of a given "scene" as if they were infallible. Some aspects of Japanese culture are charming, and some are very, very disturbing to me. And I've often wondered if violent manga bondage cartoons and SE tube amps have some kind of unspoken social relationship or connection. They are both quite "off the wall", compared to the mores of American society. SE amps almost seem alien, from another planet, compared to what the mainstream electronics industry is focused on, in terms of design goals and procedures. And btw, SE tube amps still aren't a very big part of American high-end audio. The giant push-pull 6550 amps made by Audio Research, VTL, Conrad-Johnson etc. still outsell SE amps by a 10-1 ratio or more. I feel that high-end audio is still more about the unbound ego of the rich and powerful white/asian male, than it is about good sound. That is probably a good socially-responsible reason for the SE-amp movement--less is more, meaning, a simple amp with only one tube doesn't feed the swollen ego. Nothing wrong with that. I'd just like to see more

consistency in how it's implemented. Hopefully that helps?

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Subject: Re: Japanese philosophy  
Posted by [Manualblock](#) on Fri, 11 Jun 2004 19:46:48 GMT  
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Yes I have followed your essays in V.T.V and quite agree with your point of view( although I must admit it seems a stretch to compare bad cartoons to SE amps, but who knows?). Here's the rub. It's my belief there is a reference standard, not in the sense of equipment lists or comparisons to live music but in the sense of the emotional response to music. We all have been to bad sounding concerts and heard bad sounding home systems, every aspect of reproduction fluctuates. However; when it's right everyone knows it. When the sound at a concert jells with the music or when the sound of a home system locks in there is no denying that even innocent bystanders can tell there is something special happening. Thats the quest and my point was that we in this country seem not to understand that this is the reason to pursue the hobby, not to fulfill mythical criteria or exacting tech graphs. Those are tools. Thanks for your comments; they are always thought provoking.

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Subject: Re: but master.....  
Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Sat, 12 Jun 2004 11:29:53 GMT  
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Hi Terry, On a similar but unrelated subject, I have a few thoughts about speaker drivers. That's something near and dear to your heart, I think. If I remember correctly, you use Fostex drivers in your speaker systems, maybe Lowthers too. They're a couple of favorites for single driver enthusiasts. Personally, I really like the sound of the Fostex speakers I've heard. I wonder what you'd think about having Eminence make a high-quality part tuned to work in your cabinets. Something with electro-mechanical specs suitable for your cabinets and a low-distortion symmetrical flux stabilized magnetic structure. Eminence makes drivers having various cone shapes and materials, so you have a good choice there as well. I'm not talking about a budget model here - I'm talking about a statement product. If you could have Eminence pull out all the stops for a high-end full-range driver, would you give it a go? I ask this because I can't help but think it's viable. They have a lot of experience and they are capable of doing some really high-quality work. Ever since they started making speakers with shorting rings, they've become a top-quality player, in my opinion. Another thing that makes me think about it is the JBL 2115. It was a wonderful little 8" full-range driver that was capable of great sound from 30Hz all the way up to 10kHz. All you really needed was a super tweeter and you had the basis for an excellent little

93dB/W/M and handled 50 watts, so they were suitable for studio monitors. Not real high output, but very good sound. It occurs to me that the Fostex F-220A speaker is almost exactly the same thing as the JBL 2115. They look so much the same, I can't tell them apart from the front. And

the specs are very similar too. The thing is that I'd love to have a similar part made by Eminence, and I think they're capable of it. I've also considered having something made that's tuned like the Alpha 10 but with a symmetrical flux stabilized motor, so that's another thing on my wish list. I'd love to have one or two specific high-quality full-range 8" and 10" speakers. I'm guessing you'd probably add a 6" driver or two to that list. So I'm just thinking aloud here. What do you think? Wayne

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Subject: Re: but master.....

Posted by [TC](#) on Mon, 14 Jun 2004 13:02:52 GMT

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Hi Wayne,>>I wonder what you'd think about having Eminence make a high-quality part tuned to work in your cabinets. ==I'd prefer to do it the other way around. There's far far more at stake building drivers. If Eminence had a driver I like I'd use it in my products. >>Another thing that makes me think about it is the JBL 2115. ==It is a very fine driver.>>It occurs to me that the Fostex F-220A speaker is almost exactly the same thing as the JBL 2115. They look so much the same, I can't tell them apart from the front==Like Datsun engine blocks of the 70's that mimicked Mercedes to the gnat, Many Fostex aspects look like JBL only more refined if you look closely. The first thing I look at is the basket. CNC die, spun cast aluminum, as beefy as they make it gives an insight into the start of the engineering in these drivers. >>So I'm just thinking aloud here. What do you think? ==I think it's time for some real work....TC

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Subject: Re: but master.....

Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Mon, 14 Jun 2004 14:11:57 GMT

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Hi Terry, You wrote:>> If Eminence had a driver I like I'd use it in my products. What would you like? I ask because there are a couple drivers I'd like, and I think I've mentioned them to you. What I'm looking for is pretty well defined. So I'm sort of wondering what your requirements might be, because our requirements might be similar. If that's the case, we may be able to have something made that we both would want to use.>> Many Fostex aspects look like JBL only more refined if you look>> closely. The first thing I look at is the basket. CNC die, spun>> cast aluminum, as beefy as they make it gives an insight into the>> start of the engineering in these drivers. Fostex parts do look nice. But the machining done on JBL parts is pretty tough to beat. Either way, I'd say they're both very fine drivers. I wonder if we got out the micrometer and the flux meter, which would be made to more exacting tolerances. Honestly, I'd place my bet on JBL on this one. But then again, it's probably part specific, and if we started doing the one-upmanship thing, we'd most certainly find that each plant was capable of outdoing themselves with each new project. So I think probably we'd also find that both factories were capable of doing top-notch work. And I'd say both make excellent parts, so a person probably wouldn't be disappointed either way.>> I think it's time for some real work....Whatcha up to? Wayne

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Subject: Re: drivers

Posted by [TC](#) on Mon, 14 Jun 2004 19:09:54 GMT

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>>What would you like? I ask because there are a couple drivers I'd like, and I think I've mentioned them to you. What I'm looking for is pretty well defined. So I'm sort of wondering what your requirements might be, because our requirements might be similar. If that's the case, we may be able to have something made that we both would want to use.===Drivers for me are a given. For now the Fostex line offers plenty of challenge to \*keep up\* with as far as cabinet design. I firmly believe that cabinet design and fab can always be optimized further, so I choose to focus here. As far as driver design goes, I am very happy to leave that to the experts, of which I am not and happy to admit. So my focus is on drivers (current) application.>>Whatcha up to? ==making sawdust.TC

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Subject: Re: drivers

Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Tue, 15 Jun 2004 01:22:22 GMT

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I understand. That's a pretty good way to go at it.What I was thinking of was a very high quality part tuned for a specific application. Not so much designing the motor structures, cone materials and geometries 'cause I agree with you there. I was planning to leave that part to Eminence. But they'll build parts to spec, if the specs are possible for them to build. Now that they are building Magnum's, they're able to make some really good parts, like the JBL SFG series. So I thought it might be nice to have them make something like the JBL 2115, which is no longer available. They could make it with a machined cast frame, symmetrical flux stabilized motor structure, and one of a variety of full-range cone designs. Might be worthwhile to see what they could do; Maybe it would be something really special.

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Subject: Re: Japanese philosophy

Posted by [akhilesh](#) on Tue, 15 Jun 2004 18:22:53 GMT

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No one denies that all human beings are fallible. One "generalization" about asian cultures in general (esp Japanese & Korean) is that they are very prone to herd behavior, to deifying humans, and to following a trend almost fanatically. I suspect some folk figured out that top of the line vintage speakers sound better than medium and low priced modern speakers (though probably not as good as top of the line new speakers) and bought a few with their tube amps. This started a maniacal trend. To read some "zen" philosophy into this would be a mistake in my opinion. I suspect the "Japanese masters" who meditate before building their tube amps (filled with vintage western tubes i might add) are just making a sales pitch. Unfortunately, the audiophile community is also very prone to herd behavior (enthusiasts by nature are, i think).

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Having said that, i have to admit that i love my SET amps, and my vintage american drivers....:-)And yes i do drive my Klipschorns with SETs. However, in all fairness, i have never owned a high end setup by modern standards. I have heard one or two that didn't seem to sound that much better than mine, but that was just my bias probably...one always loves what one builds, right?well off to designing a passive preamp for my latest SET...-akhilesh

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Subject: Re: Japanese philosophy  
Posted by [Manualblock](#) on Wed, 16 Jun 2004 21:43:35 GMT  
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Thanks for responding AK. I really never mean't to deify an entire nation; my post basically attempted to comment on the Japanese sites on the web that give the impression of observing all facets of audio reproduction as an integrated whole that takes into account the complicated interrelationships between all active and passive components and assembles the different system parameters according to exhaustive trial and error. Similar to the way good luthiers build stringed instruments. What SE amp is this you mention; not the Zen or the ASUSA? I too am in the quest mode; after finishing the little el84 I am pondering whether to attempt a Williamson PP. First I will try the Stoekit for a while. Ciao for Now,J.R.

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Subject: Re: Japanese philosophy  
Posted by [akhilesh](#) on Wed, 16 Jun 2004 22:22:27 GMT  
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HI JR,It's a 45 SET, vert very low powered (about a watt)Other alternatives would be like a 300B or a 2a3. It's a home made amp..one of a kind. I have heard the FI amps are good manufactured o0nes. If you do go PP, i would suggest use great parts...those will make a difference in my experience. -akhilesh

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Subject: Re: Japanese philosophy  
Posted by [Manualblock](#) on Thu, 17 Jun 2004 00:32:47 GMT  
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Yes absolutely; check the posts ealier about the Korneff, a great amp. I have lived with my EAR SE for 7 yrs and am beggining to long for a little more depth of field lately. Hence the Williamson or likewise.

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Subject: Another circuit to look at  
Posted by [akhilesh](#) on Thu, 17 Jun 2004 16:41:59 GMT  
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JR, also check out the Loftin white circuit...JC Morrison amp do a search on google...i have heard it in a 2a3 config....very nice. -akhilesh

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