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Subject: Interesting Article

Posted by [FredT](#) on Wed, 07 Sep 2005 13:11:53 GMT

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Here's an interesting article written by a couple of PhD's about the role of psychological factors in the evaluation of audio products. And there's an equally interesting linked article about the economics of audio equipment that covers pricing, perceived value, etc.

Psychology of Evaluation of Audio Products

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Subject: Re: Interesting Article

Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Wed, 07 Sep 2005 14:08:53 GMT

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Makes sense that preconceived notions would play a major role. Kinda goes hand in hand with expecting something that is expensive/big/fancy/well-reviewed to sound better than something unknown.

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Subject: Re: Interesting Article

Posted by [Manualblock](#) on Thu, 08 Sep 2005 00:53:10 GMT

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Fred what did they say? Where are the phd references . Even I who have no advanced degree recognise that the term disbenefits has no meaning in pysochological lexicon. It sounds like personal observations cloaked under the guise of loosely studied phenomena. So much of it is so self-evident I find it hard to grant much validity to the essay. I try Malcom Hawksford's stuff first.

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Subject: Re: Interesting Article

Posted by [FredT](#) on Thu, 08 Sep 2005 12:31:56 GMT

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You raise some valid points. 1) Regarding the question about "what did they say", I can only respond that the articles explained in a very cogent way some things I have long believed but didn't know how to verbalize. Here's just one example: I was present at listening sessions where a speaker that I considered obnoxiously bright with attenuated bass below 70hz and attenuated upper treble with poor resolution was highly praised by others. To my ears was a real dog! Then followed a speaker (mine) with powerful, tight and extended bass, relatively flat response across the entire audible spectrum, and crystal clear and extended treble. The second speaker was of

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little interest to the other listeners and, while it wasn't openly criticized, the group's consensus decision was to quickly go back to listening to the first speaker. Why? Because the first speaker was a unique and quirky diy horn speaker with a \$10 driver, while the second was a conventional low efficiency professionally designed ported speaker using expensive low efficiency drivers. The group's "pre-consumption expectation" may have been that highly dynamic and efficient horn speakers are "better" than lower efficiency ported types, so they were inclined to minimize the shortcomings of the horn speaker and fail to see the virtues of the ported speaker. Of course, I approached this session with even less objectivity than the others, comfortable in my belief that all horn speakers suck - the professionally designed and expensive ones just suck a little less than the cheap ones. (Readers, please take this a joke about my lack of objectivity and not a serious comment about horn speakers).2) Where are the PhD references? Larry Borden's degree is in Neuropharmacology. I didn't find any references for Chris White's, but I assume it's in Economics. So it likely that neither has an advanced degree in psychology.3) It sounds like personal observations cloaked under the guise of loosely studied phenomena. I would not apply quite so sinister a description, but yes it is.4) So much is self-evident... True, but I make two points here 1) It explains the whole thing better than I could, and 2) You are obviously more aware than most of the subtle subjective influences that cloud most evaluations. One more example if I might - Two days ago I received a very inexpensive dac; yesterday I posted positive comments about it in the digital forum. How much of my enthusiastic response was driven by the fact that it cost only \$135? Or by the fact that its circuit and components are very similar to another dac that I know is a high performing component? Or simply the fact that I found it on the internet and bought it, therefore it must be good? I Googled Malcolm Hawksford and found numerous engineering oriented technical articles but none related to the psychological factors that influence our perception of audio components (There's so much there I could easily have missed something). I described this as an "interesting article". Upon reflection I can see that it's interesting to me because I am fascinated by the study of people's belief systems and how they sometimes drive irrational (to me) choices. Technical articles about "things" make my eyes glass over.

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Subject: Re: Interesting Article  
Posted by [lon](#) on Thu, 08 Sep 2005 19:42:30 GMT  
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From what you have said about it, it sounds like an Intelligent Design theory applied to audio. Intelligent Design = Bogus Science. That said, I truly believe in the audiophile predisposition to hear what they want or expect to.

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Subject: Re: Interesting Article  
Posted by [Manualblock](#) on Thu, 08 Sep 2005 20:57:04 GMT  
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First allow me to express my thanks for a very thorough and insightful response. You know the

article covered all the bases; I guess I just have a hard time understanding why this concept that there isn't any one capable of listening to a piece of stereo equipment and determining whether it sounds good. Discussing this becomes a chore because it has been beaten to death so many times. I find your example interesting and here's why. In your first paragraph you describe the scene well; wherein you disagree with the opinions of several others during a listening session. I see you do what many of us do; borne out by the last paragraph where you tell of the DAC and your reluctance to define it as sounding good without addressing those standard caveats that have been set in stone by the measurement people. You know; we can't possibly separate our inherent bias from our perceptions. How people throughout the ages were able to write music; build instruments of unparalleled quality based on how they sounded etc etc; without the aid of blind ABX tests is beyond my comprehension. You're an experienced listener with a very solid grasp of what constitutes good musical sound and yet you have to check your capabilities at the door to satisfy a paradigm that exists nowhere except in audio. If we measure something with a measuring device or method all we measure is that measuring device and nothing else. Baffling. I think I understand where you are coming from with the example since I have always maintained that many of the small British Monitors sound as musical as a speaker can sound. In terms of pure musicality the B&W's and Spondors and Rogers still can't be significantly improved upon. All originally designed with minimal technology.

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Subject: Re: Interesting Article  
Posted by [Manualblock](#) on Thu, 08 Sep 2005 21:38:15 GMT  
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You do a disservice to science when you mention that in the same clause. It is not any kind of science; not even a bogus one. Actually we should not even be discussing it; why give those clowns free publicity.

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Subject: Re: Interesting Article  
Posted by [FredT](#) on Thu, 08 Sep 2005 21:53:47 GMT  
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You said "I guess I just have a hard time understanding why this concept that there isn't any one capable of listening to a piece of stereo equipment and determining whether it sounds good". I suspect many people can, but few of them are audiophiles. Whenever a non audiophile comes to my house and sees my six foot line arrays and tube monoblocks they say something like "I couldn't hear the difference (between this and a mass market system)". So I sit them down in the sweet spot, spend 30 seconds telling them what to listen for, and play something really sweet like a Nora Jones disk. After the first few bars it's clear to them that the system is better than anything they have heard before. When an audiophile comes to listen he is more likely than not to focus on those characteristics of the system he dislikes. Virgins are easier to please than whores.

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Subject: Re: Interesting Article  
Posted by [lon](#) on Thu, 08 Sep 2005 22:03:48 GMT  
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Eh.If you can't laugh at it, they win.

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Subject: Re: Interesting Article  
Posted by [FredT](#) on Thu, 08 Sep 2005 22:22:21 GMT  
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There might be some similarity, but while the article isn't based on any scientific evaluation of data, it does appear to have some merit.

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Subject: Re: Interesting Article  
Posted by [Manualblock](#) on Thu, 08 Sep 2005 22:29:49 GMT  
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Point well Taken. In fact a couple of us were commenting on how good it is that these people are more vocal and recieve more airtime. Now we see what is lurking in the shadows.So you're right let them show their ignorance to the world.

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Subject: Re: Interesting Article  
Posted by [Manualblock](#) on Thu, 08 Sep 2005 23:25:01 GMT  
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Another good point. Do you get criticism? Whats the point. I get so now if it doesn't grab me quickly I just let it go. I get more excited when exposed to new music.

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Subject: Re: Interesting Article  
Posted by [Mike.e](#) on Fri, 09 Sep 2005 02:18:39 GMT  
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the pcabx.com website,the guy who started the pc based ABX program,Art,hes all for TRAINING

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people to hear the differences. I think that this is half the problem. If it sounds different, people have to get used to it. I'm going to take a look at Malcom Hawksford's stuff. I'm interested in this thing, as it affects the listening experience so much. The article you posted at the start of this thread is interesting, unsurprising to me, but I need proof as things that make sense, aren't always right and are still unproven. But then I don't want thousands of AES papers to buy. I can't win, can I!  
!regardsMike.e

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Subject: Re: Interesting Article

Posted by [akhilesh](#) on Mon, 12 Sep 2005 13:45:56 GMT

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Fred T wrote: "Virgins are easier to please than whores." There's 2 ways to look at that, Fred: 1. A newbie may be easier to excite than a jaded audiophile and hence easier to please, 2. A newbie may not know what they want, and be indifferent to the nuances of the system, whereas an experienced audiophile will know exactly what they like, and look for that, and be pleased with at least some of the systems. My own experience with newbies has been that they are totally indifferent to systems, and as such, are harder to please, since they don't really WANT to be pleased.-akhilesh

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