



audio

COURSE

Following the Audio Avant-garde:
Audience Speakers
by Jim Merod

Bam-bam! Avant-garde Territory Once Again

A guy schleps along month after month with nothing dramatic to report and then, wham! He's confronted by the Audio Avant-garde. In one sense, my second "close encounter" with the outer reaches of audio reproduction had a slow take off. It began twelve years ago or so.

Richard Smith and John McDonald at Audience frequently invited me, across many years, to drop by their work place to audition the newest iteration of their evolving line array speakers. On numerous occasions I did just that. In fact, the interview with Richard Smith, posthumously published several years ago in this journal, derived from one of those listening sessions.

Sadly, for Richard, my shared assessments of his line array speaker work was, for the most part, divided (on one side) by sincere encouragement that he and John not abandon their exhausting revisions and (on the other side) by somewhat discouraging evaluations.

Nevertheless, Richard—who was an indefatigable audio designer—remained optimistic, as he should have, and bravely focused on perfecting his speaker work. To his very end, Richard stayed firm and true to his belief that he was on the right path. One could hear justifications for his faith each and every time a new advance in the line array design was ready for auditioning.

It is a testimonial to Richard's career and to his partner John McDonald's loyalty and good faith (and astute judgment) that those long years of revision have now come to complete fruition with the additional work of Roger Sheker and new A3 drivers (to be discussed in a future moment).

My recent Audience "avant-garde" experience was prefaced a year and a half ago, at CES in Las Vegas, when I heard the large ClairAudient line array speakers at a level of performance that motivated me to publish a glowing review. Harry Pearson and I separately heard the Audience set up within half an hour or so of one another. I noted to Harry, soon afterward, that I heard a degree of audio transparency in the Audience speakers that outflanked any speaker I'd heard to date—at least, that outflanked any genuinely musical speaker, since on occasions I've encountered marvelously open and transparent panel speakers with restricted range that reduced the full measure of their potential musicality. Harry, as I recall, agreed heartily and noted that the ClairAudient line array actually revealed sonic details of his test disc (Holst's *Planets*) he'd never previously discerned.



That CES experience with the big Audience line array was just a warm up to my recent cavorting with their ultimate incarnation—an ultimate and wildly successful arrival at the threshold of musical sexuality.

Horrible term, right? "Musical sexuality"... but, then, that's exactly what, across nearly five continuous hours of hearing my own master recordings, I stumbled upon—as if a bulky old bloke, who lives with the demented illusion of his own permanently-arrested twenty five year old self, can encounter not so much his own youthful pulchritude as the never-waning seductiveness and vibrant sexual tug of live music created hilariously by great musicians and reproduced, hilariously with tactile force, by extraordinary (avant-garde) speakers.

That's what these newly crafted, supremely buffed and tweaked ClairAudient "LSA 16+16" bi-pole speakers concoct: tactile musical force of a sort that makes it impossible for any music lover not to be sucked in, swept up, and transformed emotionally into immediate proximity with surging musical grooves and lyrical kaleidoscopes of shifting melodic shapes.

If that's not an elegant, wholly innocent form of "musical sexuality," what the hell is?

Listening to these bi-pole speakers—no sub in the mix; Audiences' cables and mono-block amps plus an Audience preamp (fed by a seriously modified Denon transport)—was as close to a poignant aesthetic orgasm as anyone (at any age) is likely to blissfully endure in utter isolation. I'll note here that nothing stronger than somewhat exotic Belgian beer augmented my recent time with these alluring, mind boggling, thoroughly engaging and thrillingly lucid monster speakers, even though the occasion carried the surprise and slam of what I'm told *psychedelic sententia* offers an unwary witness.

Audience

web address: www.audience-av.com

