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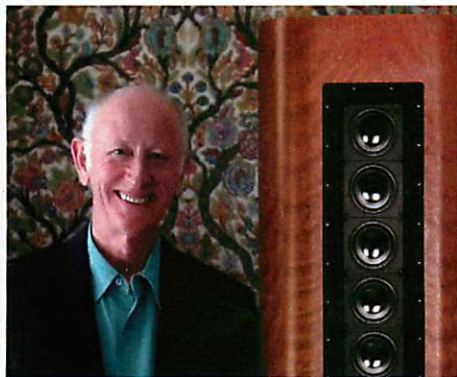
12 Questions for John McDonald, President, Audience

How did it all begin for you? From the music side or the electronics side?

Not including the Big Bang, it all began for me in the early 70s, simultaneously with the great 70s music revolution, with Bose 901 speakers, a McIntosh amp, and a Dual turntable/Shure cartridge.

What was the system you dreamed about as a teenager?

As a teenager the best I was aware of was Allied and Heathkit!



Audience designs loudspeakers as well as cables. Has what you've learned from one informed the process of designing the other?

To the extent that cables or loudspeakers are more refined individually, they become better tools for the evaluation of all other products. Specifically, however, since wire is an integral part of loudspeakers, experience with wire has directly assisted in developing loudspeaker drivers and internal speaker wiring.

What does the concept "high-end" mean to you?

To me, high end implies products that are designed to meet a high standard of performance rather than designed to meet a price point or marketing scheme. I expect high-end products to have excellent build-quality. And most importantly to me, high-end products should convey the soul of music with a high degree of refinement. At Audience, the golden rule is "first, do no harm," defining harm as any deviation to the original recording. So high end to me and to the Audience team is about staying true to the music. Sound-sculpting should be left to the recording artists and engineers.

What's the least understood aspect about cables?

Probably the least understood aspect about cables is the price and how cables make a difference in a sound system. A pet peeve of mine are the naysayers who solely rely on measured specs to make the case, essentially, that all cables perform the same. I personally rely on test equipment that is capable of processing and storing a lifetime of sensory information: the human brain and hearing system. Especially if trained, "we" can detect sonic nuances that no man-made device is yet capable of deciphering. Test measurements are great; they get you into the ballpark; however, they are not the game.

What is the first thing you listen for in a system?

Naturalness in every aspect—most importantly, tonal balance, spectral integration, and lack of distortion. In other words I do not want to hear the sound system, I want to hear the music. However, I am a resolution fanatic, so my attention probably goes there first. Even though I do not feel that resolution is the most important element in all sound systems, veiling, or the lack thereof, is what I notice most readily.

What side of the argument do you come down on; analog or digital?

I enjoy both formats with some preference for vinyl.

What's the most important issue a buyer should understand before assembling a system?

I feel that the most important issue to understand is that price does not necessarily correlate with quality. Also, synergy among components is important, i.e., don't assemble a system from a menu of good reviews.

Best unsolicited advice to audiophiles from an industry pro?

Trust your ears!

What are the greatest challenges that confront the high-end industry?

Currently in the U.S. the challenge is the shrinking number of high-end audio dealers. At the same time, it is relatively easy to build an audio component and hang a sign on the door; thus, the supply side of the market is ever increasing.

Outside of Audience what does John McDonald do for fun?

Number one is spending time with family and friends. I am an avid organic vegetable gardener and am learning watercolor painting.

What still inspires you about your work?

The music, the music, the music. It is always a thrill when a new idea, an advancement, enables "us" to come closer to the music. That is what Audience is all about. We strive to remove the veils between music and listener—not to color music but to get out of its way. **tas**