

TORONTO

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OCTOBER 17-19, 2025

audiofest

le pouvoir de la musique et de l'audio

PMA MAGAZINE

the power of music and audio

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HAS THE
SUN FINALLY
SET ON THE
AUDIOPHILE
HOBBY?

22

POSTCARDS
FROM
LONDON
16

WHAT IF HI-FI
COMPANIES
ACTUALLY FUNDED
THE MUSIC
THEY LOVE?

20

OZZY,
WILDMAN
SURVIVOR
25

05 EXHIBITORS LIST

07 EVENTS

12 EARVANA FEST

14 FLOOR PLANS

FRONT COVER: KONDO AUDIO NOTE ONGAKU INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER
(AVAILABLE AT WYNN AUDIO - BALMORAL & CARLYLE)

Celebrating Sound Excellence



WORLD
PREMIERE



MAYFAIR ROOM

Welcome to the world of Audiofest

We're thrilled to have you here to explore everything the Toronto Audiofest has to offer. Take this opportunity to discover exciting musical moments, connect with fellow audio enthusiasts, and experience the equipment of your dreams across our many exhibitor rooms.

This year, there's so much to see and do. Earvana Fest is back for its second year, letting you dive into the world of headphones and personal audio like never before. NEW this year, Pitcher Perfect Pairings offers an exclusive evening where craft beer meets exceptional sound. You can also meet industry leaders, explore hundreds of brands under one roof, and witness world premieres— products making their global debut right here at Audiofest.

Music comes alive at Audiofest with live performances throughout the show. Don't miss Anne Bisson, Jazz Singer; Guy Bélanger, Harmonicist; and Vincent Bélanger, Cellist, sharing their artistry in select rooms across the Audiofest.

Supporting local retailers—whether in-store or online—remains more important than ever. Every choice you make helps strengthen our community. And above all, remember that music is the perfect way to relax, gain perspective, and escape, even if just for a moment, from the pace of daily life.

Finally, a gentle reminder: in the rooms, please speak softly. After all, we're here to listen—and let the music do the talking.

The Audiofest Team

Table of contents

05	Exhibitors List
07	Events
09	Brands List
12	Earvana Fest
14	Floor Plans
16	PMA / Guy Bélanger, Postcards from London
20	PMA / What if Hi-Fi Companies Actually Funded the Music They Love?
22	PMA / Has the Sun Finally Set on The Audiophile Hobby?
25	PMA / Ozzy, Wildman Survivor

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Exhibitors List

a

Accuphase	Bristol B
Acora Acoustics Corporation	Plaza A, Bristol B
All That Jazz	2_10
Altitude Audio	321
ANKits for DIY	2_12
Anne Bisson	2_3
Anthem Electronics	Ascot
Artysan	Knightsbridge
ASONA Ltd	Earvana Fest
Atoll Electronique	346
Audeze LLC	Earvana Fest
Audio by Mark Jones	Easton
Audio Eden Ltd.	219
Audio Excellence	Bristol B
Audio Group Denmark	Carlyle, Sutton B
Audio Sensibility	2_6
AudioGroup	Earvana Fest
Audio Note UK	Dixon
Audio-Technica	Earvana Fest
Audiovector	446
Auralis Distribution	443
Axiom	Atmosphere North

b

BayBloor Radio	Earvana Fest
Bliss Acoustics	Plaza B
BLOK	Windsor
Bluesound	Windsor
Bowers & Wilkins	337, 339
Bryston	Atmosphere North
Burmester Home Audio GmbH	439, 441

c

Cardas Audio	Mayfair, 321, 441, Sutton B, Earvana Fest
Charisma Audio	2_2
Corby's Audio	Bristol A, Carlton

d

DALI	Windsor
------	---------

e

Earvana Fest	Sutton A, Sutton A Foyer
Entracte Audio	360
Eon Art Canada	Mayfair
EQ Audio Video	Sutton B, Sutton C, Earvana Fest

e

Erikson Consumer	219, 325, 437
Essentia Technology Inc.	Carlton, 2_1
Executive Stereo	437
Expo ,«I Love the Fab Four»	Lobby

f

Fezz	446
FiiO	Earvana Fest
Forte Art & Music	Earvana Fest

g

Gershman Acoustics	Mayfair, 343
Golden Ear	Kent
Grado Canada	Earvana Fest
Gramophone Audio Distribution	Lounge
Gutwire	343

h

Hearken Audio	351
Hegel Canada	356, 357
HIFIMAN	Earvana Fest
HIFIPRO.CA	346

i

IsoAcoustics	446
--------------	-----

j

Joseph Crowe Custom Audio Products	345
JVCKENWOOD Canada	Sutton C

k

Kennedy HiFi	445, 446
Kevro International Inc.	Sutton B
Kimbercan	Bristol B, 445, 446

l

Lenbrook Americas	Windsor room
Linsoul Audio	Earvana Fest
Liptons AVU - Powered by Paradigm/Anthem	Ascot
Lumin	343
Luxe Sound	Earvana Fest

Exhibitors List

TORONTO
audiofest



m

MACO	354
Marantz	337, 341
MoFi Distribution	349
Mon Acoustic Inc	439
Motet Distribution	Bristol B, Dixon, 445

n

NAD Electronics	Windsor
Noble Audio	Earvana Fest
Nordost	437
Northstar Audio	351

o

O'Neill's Creation Workshop	Earvana Fest
Opal Audio	Earvana Fest
Oracle Audio Technologies	Mayfair

p

Paradigm Electronics	Ascot
Pass Labs	343
Passionaudio.ca	441
Paul McGowan Signature Series	445
Playback Distribution	426
PPA Distribution	Earvana Fest
PS Audio	445
PSB	Windsor

q

Quebec Acoustique	Earvana Fest
-------------------	--------------

r

Rega	Lobby, 363, Sutton B
Roksan	Windsor

s

Saturn Audio	Bristol A, Carlton, 2_6
Sennheiser	Earvana Fest
Siltech Cables	343
Six Acoustic	2_8
Solid Meubles	Mayfair
Sonic Artistry	Plaza A
Soulfi Audio	Earvana Fest
Sound United	337, 339, 341
SPL	Earvana Fest
Stéréogroup	Lobby, 363

t

The Chord Company	227
The Speaker Shop	2_8
TIGLON Co., LTD	2_2
Toronto Home of Audiophiles Ltd.	343
Tri-Cell Enterprises	219, 321, 351, 446
Trutone Electronics	363

v

Vinyl Sound	325, 349
-------------	----------

w

Whammerdyne Heavy Industries	354
Wynn Audio Corp.	Carlyle, Balmoral

Opening hours

FRIDAY	11 AM – 8 PM
SATURDAY	10 AM – 6 PM
SUNDAY	10 AM – 5 PM

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Our Upcoming Dates

MONTREAL
audiofest

Hôtel Bonaventure
March 20-22, 2026

TORONTO
audiofest

Westin Toronto airport
October 16-18, 2026

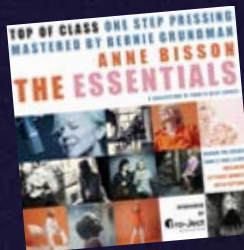
EVENTS

TORONTO
audiofest



Anne Bisson

Friday & Saturday at 3 PM – Sunday at 1 PM, Mayfair Room
Friday 5 PM – Saturday 1 PM, Plaza B Room



Guy Bélanger

Saturday 18th, Lobby



Richard & John Grado

Saturday 18th, Earvana Fest



MEET & GREET

TAF EVENTS



Gala 80s

Industry Only



Earvana Fest

Sutton A » Earvana Fest



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Brands List

2xHD	Earvana Fest
432 EVO	351
7HZ	Earvana Fest
Aavik	Carlyle, Balmoral, Sutton B
Accuphase	Bristol B, 343
Acora	Plaza A, Bristol B
Acoustic Revive	Carlyle, Balmoral
Advance Paris	321
Aidas	Plaza B
Allnic	Mayfair
Analysis Plus	Earvana Fest
Angela-Gilbert Yeung	360
Angstrom	2_8
ANKits for DIY	2_12
ANK Professional Builds	2_12
Ansuz	Carlyle, Balmoral, Sutton B, Earvana Fest
Anthem	Ascot
Antipope	351
Apple	Sutton C
Arcam	325
ArcTec Berlin	Earvana Fest
Artysan	Knightsbridge
Astell&Kern	Earvana Fest
ATC Loudspeakers	Lounge
Atoll Electronique	346
Audeze LLC	Earvana Fest
Audience	Sutton B, Sutton C, Earvana Fest
Audio Group Denmark	Carlyle, Balmoral, Sutton B
Audio Physic	321
Audio Sensibility	2_6, Bristol A
Audio Solutions	Plaza B
Audio-Technica	Earvana Fest
Audio Note UK	Dixon
Audioquest	Easton, 363
Audiovector	321, 446, Sutton B
Aune	Earvana Fest
Auris	Earvana Fest
Avid HiFi	Sutton B
Axiom	Atmosphere North
Axxess	Carlyle, Balmoral, Sutton B, Earvana Fest
Baetis Audio	Bristol A
BLOK	Windsor
Bluesound	Windsor
Børresen	Carlyle, Balmoral, Sutton B
Bowers & Wilkins	337, 339
Bryston	Atmosphere North
Burmester	439, 441
CAD	321, 351
Campfire Audio	Earvana Fest
Canor Electronics	Lounge
Canton	437
Cardas	Mayfair, 321, 441, Sutton B, Earvana Fest
Castle Speakers	349

Cayin	Earvana Fest
Cen. Grand	Earvana Fest
Cerwin Vega	2_8
Charisma Audio	2_2
ChordElectronics	325, 437, 439
Coherent Loudspeakers	Bristol A
Critical Mass System	Carlyle, Balmoral
Crystal Cable	Carlyle, Balmoral, Sutton B, Earvana Fest
CSPort	Plaza B
Cusis	2_1
DALI	Windsor
Dan Clark Audio	Earvana Fest
Davis Acoustics	346
Dela-Melco Music Servers	Lounge
EarMen	Earvana Fest
EBI Audio Khumar	Plaza A
Ecoute Audio	Earvana Fest
Effect Audio	Earvana Fest
Eletech	Earvana Fest
Elysian Acoustic Lab	Earvana Fest
EMT	Carlyle, Balmoral
English Electric	227
Entreq	2_6, Carlyle, Balmoral
Eon Art	Mayfair
Epos	360
Erzetich	Earvana Fest
Esprit	426
Etsuro Urushi	Plaza B
Eversolo	445
Ferrum	Earvana Fest
Fezz	321, 446, Earvana Fest
FiiO	Earvana Fest
Final Audio	346
Fink Team	360
Fliepers	Earvana Fest
Focal	Sutton B, Earvana Fest
Fono Acustica	Carlyle, Balmoral
Forté Ears	Earvana Fest
Fosi Audio	Earvana Fest
Furutech	2_6, 325, 349
Gershman Acoustics	Mayfair, 343
Geshelli Labs	Earvana Fest
GFN Classics	Earvana Fest
Gold Note	321
Golden Ear	Kent
Goldring	Carlton, 2_1
Grado	Earvana Fest
Graphite Audio	Plaza B
Grimm Audio	Easton, Plaza A
Grumpy Goose	Earvana Fest
Gutwire	343
Hana	351
Hegel	356, 357

Brands List

Hemingway Audio	Plaza B
Hiby	Earvana Fest
HIFIROSE	349
HRS	219, 321, 351
HYPHN	Sutton B
I/k Audio	351
iBasso	Earvana Fest
Ictra Design	Plaza B
ifi	Earvana Fest
Ilumnia	351
Innuos	363, Sutton B, Sutton C, Earvana Fest
IsoAcoustics	363, 446, Sutton B
Isotek	349
Java HiFi	426
JBL	325
JL Audio	Sutton C
Joseph Crowe Custom Audio Products	345
JSikora	Plaza B
JVC	Sutton C
Kaleidescape	Sutton B, Sutton C
Kalista	Carlyle, Balmoral
Karan Acoustics	Carlyle, Balmoral
Keces Electronics	Lounge
Kharma	219, 321
Kimber Kable	445, 446, Bristol B, Sutton B, Earvana Fest
Kiwi Ears	Earvana Fest
KLH	325
Kondo Audio Note	Carlyle, Balmoral
Kora High Fidelity	Plaza A
Kuzma	Bristol A
Lab 12	321
Laiv Audio	Earvana Fest, 443
LampizatOr	354, 441
Linnenberg	351
Lumin	2_6, 219, 343, Bristol B
Luna Cables	Plaza B
Luxman	Easton
Lyra phono cartridges	Easton
MACO®	354
Magnum Dynalab	Atmosphere North
Marantz	337
Marantz Horizon	341
Mark Levinson	219
Marshall	439
Marten loudspeakers	Easton
MasterBuilt	351
Matrix Audio	441, 443, Earvana Fest
MAX Cap	2_8
MAX Fidelity	2_8
Melco	343, 360
Melody Wings	Earvana Fest
Merason	321
Métronome	Carlyle, Balmoral
MEZE	439

Michell	2_1, 437, Carlton
MICHI	Sutton B
Milty	2_1, Carlton
MitMat	363
Modhouse	Earvana Fest
MoFi Electronics	349
MonAcoustic	439
Monitor Audio	363, Sutton B, Sutton C
Moondrop	Earvana Fest
Musical Fidelity	Sutton B, Sutton C
NAD Electronics	Windsor
Naim	Sutton B, Sutton C, Earvana Fest
Neotech	2_6
Noble Audio	Earvana Fest
Nordost	437, Plaza A, Sutton B
O-Bit Audio	Carlyle, Balmoral
O'Neill's Creation Workshop	Earvana Fest
OePhi	321
Onix	Earvana Fest
Opal Audio	Earvana Fest
Oracle Audio	Mayfair
Orchard Audio	Earvana Fest
Panamax	Sutton C
Paradigm Electronics	363, Ascot
Pass Labs	343
Pathos Acoustics	Earvana Fest
Paul McGowan Signature Series	445
Pilium	Plaza B
PMC	426
PS Audio	445
PSB	Windsor
Puritan Audio Labs	Lounge
Q Acoustics	2_1, Carlton
QED	2_1, Carlton
Quad Electronics	349
Quadraspire	426, Sutton B, Bristol B
Raidho Loudspeakers	Lounge
Reed	351
Rega	Lobby, 363, Sutton B
Ricable	Earvana Fest
Rockna	351
ROKSAN	Windsor
Rotel	Sutton B, Earvana Fest
Saturn Audio	2_6, Carlton, Bristol A
Sbooster	2_6
Seismion	Plaza A
Sennheiser	Earvana Fest
Sensible HIFI	Sutton C
Shanling	Earvana Fest
Shokz	Earvana Fest
Silent Angel	2_6, 426
Siltech Cables	343
Six Acoustic	2_8
Solid Meubles	Mayfair

Brands List

Solid Steel racks	Easton
Solid Tech	343, Sutton B
Solidsteel	325, 349
Sony	Sutton C
SOtM	2_6
Sound Kaos	351
SPL	Earvana Fest
Starke Sound	443
Stax	Earvana Fest
Stewart Filmscreen	Sutton C
Swiss Cables	Lounge
Synergistic Research	219
Takumi	321
Thales Audio	Carlyle, Balmoral
The Chord Company	219, 227, Sutton B, Earvana Fest
Thieaudio	Earvana Fest
Thiele Audio	Carlyle, Balmoral
Tidal Audio	Carlyle, Balmoral
Tiglon Japan	2_2
Tough Nut Isolation Accessories	Bristol A
Trafomatic	351
Trilogy	321
Trinnov	Sutton B, Sutton C
Uberlight	Plaza B
URC Automation	Sutton C

VIABLU	354
Vicoustic	Sutton B, Sutton C
Vimberg	Carlyle, Balmoral
Vinnie Rossi	Carlyle, Balmoral
Vioelectric	Earvana Fest
Volumio Music Streamers	Lounge
Wadax	Plaza B
WAY Cables	Plaza B
Weiss	343
Whammerdyne Heavy Industries	354
Wharfedale	349
WiiM	437
Wireworld	Earvana Fest
Wolf Von Langa	441
Wonder Audio Lab	2_2
Yeti Acoustics	351
Yukiseimitsu Audio	Plaza A
ZiiGaat	Earvana Fest



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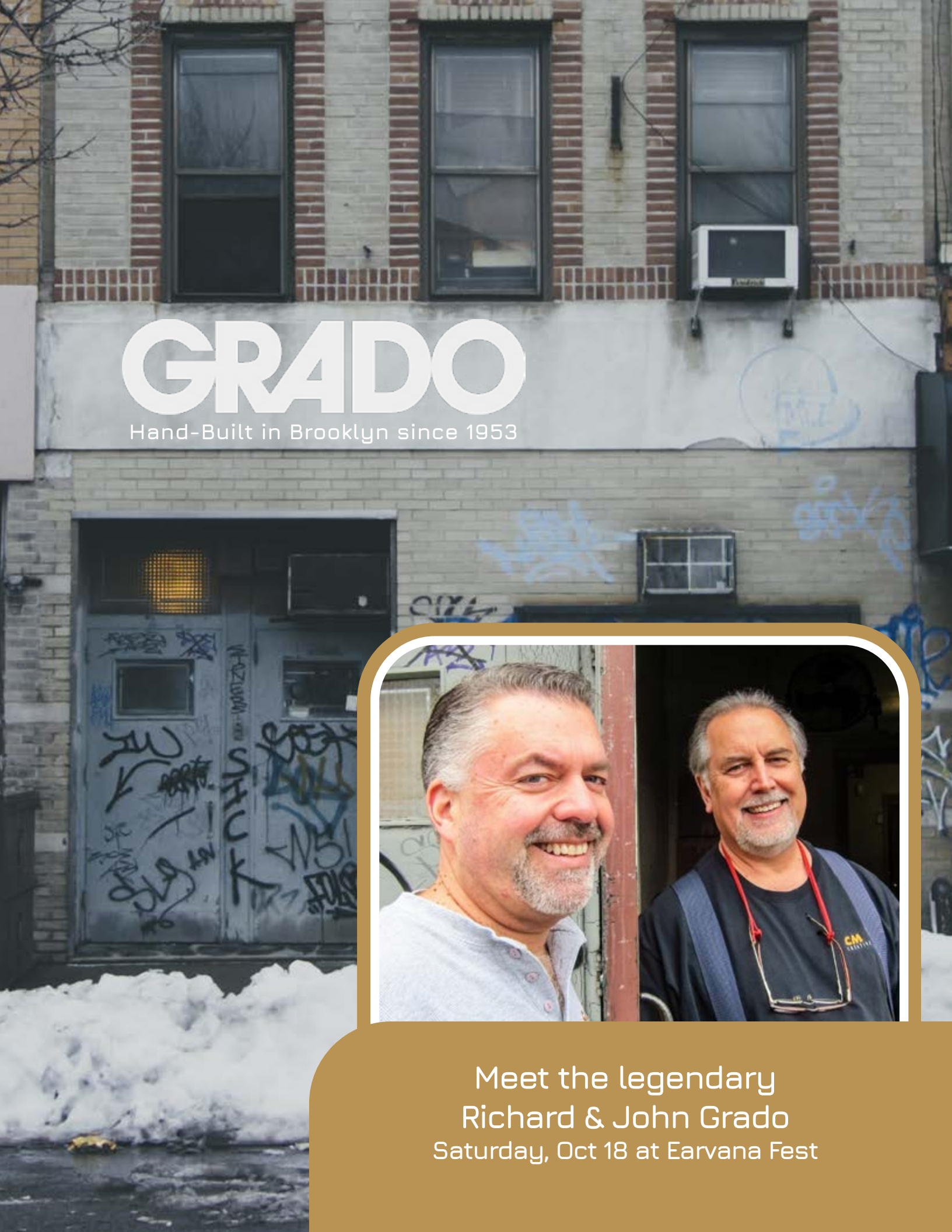


SUTTON A

2xHD
7HZ
Analysis Plus
Ansuz
ArcTec Berlin
ASONA Ltd
Astell&Kern
Audeze LLC
Audience
AudioGroup
Audio-Technica
Aune
Auris
Axxess
BayBloor Radio
Campfire Audio
Cardas
Cayin
Cen. Grand
Crystal Cable
Dan Clark Audio
EarMen
Ecoute Audio
Effect Audio
Eletech

Elysian Acoustic Lab
EQ Audio Video
Erzetich
Ferrum
Fezz
FiiO
Fliepears
Focal
Forte Art & Music
Forté Ears
Fosi Audio
Geshelli Labs
GFN Classics
Grado Canada
Grumpy Goose
Hiby
HIFIMAN
iBasso
ifi
Innuos
Kimber Kable
Kiwi Ears
Laiv Audio
Linsoul Audio
Luxe Sound
Matrix Audio

Melody Wings
Modhouse
Moondrop
Naim
Noble Audio
O'Neill's Creation Workshop
Onix
Opal Audio
Orchard Audio
Pathos Acoustics
PPA Distribution
Quebec Acoustique
Ricable
Rotel
Sennheiser
Shanling
Shokz
Soulfi Audio
SPL
Stax
The Chord Company
Thieaudio
Vioelectric
Wireworld
ZiiGaat

The background of the entire image is a photograph of a brick building. The upper part shows three windows with dark frames. The middle section is a light-colored concrete or plaster band with the word 'GRADO' in large white letters. Below this is a brick section with a door covered in graffiti and a small window above it. The bottom of the image shows a pile of snow on the ground.

GRADO

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Saturday, Oct 18 at Earvana Fest

Floor plans

TORONTO
audiofest



lobby level



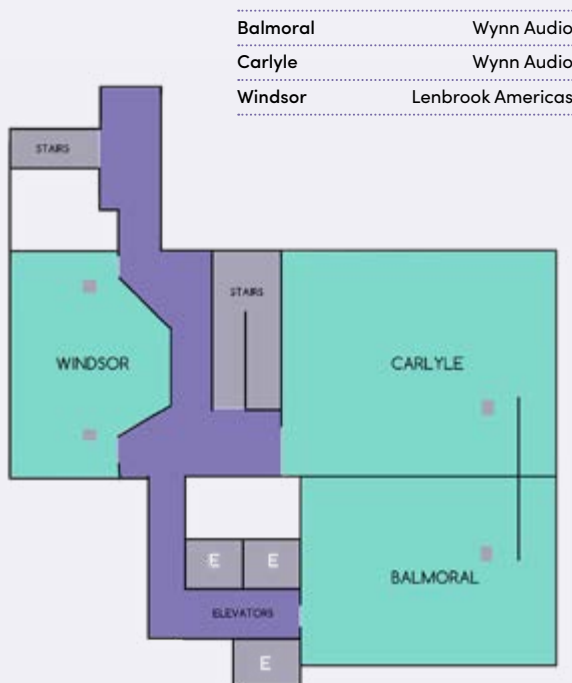
Atmosphere North	Bryston
Dixon	Audio Note UK
Easton	Audio by Mark Jones
Lobby	Rega Expo "I Love the Fab Four"
Sutton A	Earvana Fest
Sutton B	EQ Audio Video
Sutton C	EQ Audio Video

level 2



Ascot	Liptons AVU	219	Audio Eden
	Powered by Paradigm/Anthem	227	The Chord Company
Bristol A	Corby's Audio	2_1	Essentia Technology Inc.
	Saturn Audio Ltd.	2_2	Tiglon Co., LTD
Bristol B	Motet Distribution		Charisma Audio
Carlton	Essentia Technology Inc.	2_3	Anne Bisson
	Corby's Audio	2_6	Audio Sensibility
	Saturn Audio Ltd.	2_8	Six Acoustic
Kent	Golden Ear		The Speaker Shop
Knightsbridge	Artysan	2_10	All That Jazz
Mayfair	Cardas Audio	2_12	ANKits for DIY
	Eon Art Canada		
	Gershman Acoustics		
	Oracle Audio Technologies		
	Solid Meubles		
Plaza A	Acora Acoustics Corporation		
	Sonic Artistry		
Plaza B	Bliss Acoustics		

lower level



Balmoral	Wynn Audio
Carlyle	Wynn Audio
Windsor	Lenbrook Americas

Floor plans

level 3



The Lounge	Gramophone Audio Distribution
321	Altitude Audio
325	Vinyl Sound
337, 339, 341	Sound United
343	Toronto Home of Audiophiles Ltd.
345	Joseph Crowe Custom Audio Products
346	Atoll Electronique Canada HIFIPRO.CA
349	MoFi Distribution Vinyl Sound
351	Hearken Audio Northstar Audio Tri-Cell Enterprises
354	MACO® Whammerdyne Heavy Industries
356, 357	Hegel Canada
360	Entracte Audio
363	Trutone Electronics, Rega

level 4

426	PlayBack Distribution
437	Nordost Executive Stereo Erikson Consumer
439	Burmester Monacoustics
441	Passion Audio
443	Auralis Distribution
445, 446	Kennedy HiFi
446	IsoAcoustics Tri-Cell Enterprises





Postcards from London

Guy Bélanger's New Album Adds to The Legacy of Abbey Road Studios

To mark his 50th year in music, Guy Bélanger recorded *Postcards from London* at Abbey Road's iconic Studio 2 — an audacious dream brought to life by producer Jean Ouimet and a tight-knit Quebecois team.

BY MICHEL PLANTE & ROBERT SCHRYSER

To mark his 50th career anniversary, harmonica player Guy Bélanger received one of the greatest gifts a musician could dream of: the chance to record his 10th album, *Postcards From London*, at the legendary Studio 2 of Abbey Road, accompanied by his band and young sound engineer Charles-Émile Beaudin.

As you might have guessed, very few Quebecers have ever set foot in this historic London studio. Much of it has remained unchanged since the Beatles' last recording session. Even "Mrs. Mills—the Steinway Vertegrand upright piano heard on "Penny Lane" and "With a Little Help from My Friends" in 1967—still stands proudly in the studio.

How does one add their own page of history to these walls that have seen and heard everything—or almost? Just think of Alan Parsons, David Bowie, Pink Floyd, Amy Winehouse, Massive Attack, Oasis, Nick Cave, Shirley Bassey, Tony Bennett, Lady Gaga, not

to mention the Fab Four, and so many others who became legends.

It all begins with producer Jean Ouimet, who thinks big for Quebec artists and believes that with "I should have's," no page of history ever gets written.

Besides, the story of Abbey Road Studios is inseparable from that of recorded music. In 1929, when recordings were still being made acoustically with a large wooden horn and wax discs, the Gramophone Company saw an opportunity and began searching for a site to support the new electrical recording industry. They found a nine-bedroom house with a large garden in St. John's Wood, northwest London, and purchased it for £16,500 before spending two years building the world's first purpose-built recording studios.

On November 12, 1931, at the opening ceremony, the Gramophone Company had already merged with the Columbia Graphophone Company to form the famed Electrical and Musical Industries (EMI).



Sarah Tremblay and Michel Plante, owners of PMA Magazine and co-sponsors of *Postcards from London*, were present at the album's recording at Abbey Road Studios in January when they received a call informing them that British audio manufacturer Rega Research might be looking for a new Canadian distributor.

Two days later, they were at the company's headquarters in Wales with a business plan. In May, joined by three partners, they became Rega's new Canadian distributor.

As a gesture of gratitude for their involvement in the *Postcards from London* project, the duo helped create a limited-edition Rega Guy Bélanger turntable, derived from the P2 model.

It is available for CA\$1099, exclusively at Hi-Fi Pro.



Jean teamed up with René Moisan of Productions Bros, who co-produced all of Guy's albums, including this one, and who handles distribution in record shops and on streaming platforms through his Bros record label, as well as with Mario Gagnon, a hi-fi industry veteran and a longtime co-producer with whom he had already collaborated back in the Bob Walsh days, to bring this project together. Mario had the intuition to invite Sarah and me — my spouse and business partner — to join as sponsors. He started the conversation on a street corner on Ontario Street, and we had already agreed by the time we reached the other side of the road. It was a no-brainer!"

Only one more sponsor was needed to meet the budget, and that turned out to be audiophile and master brewer Sylvain Robitaille, who joined the group.

Thus, Guy Bélanger became the third Quebecer to record at Abbey Road. Daniel Lavoie recorded there in 2024, as well as the duo 2 Frères, who that same year re-recorded an acoustic version of their song "Croire en nous."

Several video clips are available that capture what Guy and his impeccably prepared musicians experienced. After just four days, they left the studio having recorded 10 songs, proud to have etched, if not a full chapter, at least a paragraph into the history of Studio 2.

Michel Plante and Sarah Tremblay are the owners of PMA Magazine and the Montreal and Toronto Audiofests.

I had the pleasure of attending the listening party for the launch of Guy Bélanger's new album, *Postcards from London*, at Hi-Fi Pro, an audio store just east of downtown Montreal owned by Mario Gagnon, one of the album's producers. All the major players—those who made the record happen—were there, mingling and savoring the moment, including the man without whom this project would never have happened: Jean Oumet. The album was his idea, and he's the one who got the ball rolling. When I asked what inspired him, Jean replied, "I was inspired by a conference given by Mylène Paquette, the first person from the Americas to row solo across the North Atlantic, from west to east."

He continued: "She spoke about daring to realize your wildest dreams. That made me wonder—what would my own wildest dream be? For me, it was booking Abbey Road and producing an album with a Quebec artist!"

The album's sponsors were also there, PMA Magazine's Michel and Sarah, and erstwhile microbrewer Sylvain Robitaille, along with a couple of media types, including yours truly, and the core band members who were easy to pick out from the crowd because they looked cooler than the rest of us.

Where the album hit home for me musically, and compelled me to write this review, was during the listening portion of the event. I sat among other guests in a warmly appointed, cozy listening room and listened to the LP version of the album through a hi-fi setup consisting of a Stable 33.33 turntable with a Hana EL cartridge, an Atoll SDA300 integrated amp, a pair of Muraudio SP1 speakers, with interconnects by Atohm and speaker cables by Nordost.

The music sounded great, sonically and creatively—filled with memorable riffs, top-tier playing, and tunes brimming with vitality. But mostly, what caught my attention were the frequent musical moments in the album where everything—the swelling mass of notes, the fusion of creativity and skill, the *vibe*—came together in ways that made the music seem to have taken on a life of its own. During such passages, I would look up from my notepad and just stare at the system, self-aware that I was witnessing something special—magical, even.

To begin with, this band is tight. They play like blood brothers. You can hear their synergy right out of the gate, on the up-tempo opening track, Maceo Parker's "Uptown Up," with its stop-on-a-dime chorus beat and alternating solos that swoop in and out of their lush environment like banshees in the world of *Avatar*. The musicians play off each other like telepaths.

Individually, each musician is a stand-out. Band leader and harmonicist Guy Bélanger sings deftly on the album—he takes the lead on a couple of tracks—but it's his harmonica that takes center stage. He's so fluent in the instrument's language that it almost sounds human when he plays it, both tonally and emotionally. He has absolute control over it. One second, he'll blow out something gruff and menacing; the next, as pure as a hymn from a choirboy soprano—and the transition between the two is utterly smooth. But whatever he plays, hard or soft, it always sounds lyrical and expressive.

Another band member whose talent for musical expression seems to transcend the instrument itself is guitarist Rob MacDonald, who displays uncommon grace, composure, and fluidity in his technique. Like Guy, he plays his instrument as if it were a first language, using it almost like an interpreter. But it's the lyricism and soaring arcs of his solos that make my head spin and my heart ache.

Pianist-organist Yves Frulla is another master of tone and expressiveness, laying down chords and trickling notes in rich, kaleidoscopic patterns. Drummer Dan Legault is unflinching in his beat, which he adorns with intricate fills that add character and a spring to the music. Bassist-singer Alec McElcheran delivers an articulate, sinewy undertow that helps keep the music afloat, plus he's a good singer; his voice is appropriately bluesy—a bit raw, a bit deep, with a swinging sense of timing. My only regret is that he sings on just one song, "Think it Over," which also happens to be one of my favourite tracks on the album.

In fact, I have a lot of favourite stuff on *Postcards from London*—track-wise and moment-wise—even on the less bluesy numbers like the Guy Bélanger-penned "London Fog" and the David Ratté and Andréa Bélanger tune "The End of the Beginning," both of which are written in a more meditative, evocative style while featuring great solos. And that's another of my favourite things about this album: the solos. The album is full of them, and they all sound heartfelt, almost spiritual.

As you listen to the album—and I'll extend this thought to the handful of guest musicians who contributed to some of the songs—you can tell the players are giving it their all and having a blast in the process. While it may be a blues-based album, a joyous, celebratory spirit runs through it.

"Postcards from London" is a snapshot of a band firing on all cylinders. Although I've already heard the album a dozen times or so, I'm still discovering new things in it with each listen. It's not just a wonderful blues album—it's a wonderful album, period.



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What if Hi-Fi Companies Actually Funded the Music They Love?

The hi-fi world gets a wake-up call as this piece slams the disconnect between lavish audio gear and underfunded artists—urging brands to fund music creation, not just polish playback of the same old tracks.

BY OLIVIER MEUNIER-PLANTE

Let's just say it: the hi-fi world has a bit of an image problem. Not in the sense that anyone doubts the technical wizardry of its gear, but in the glaring disconnect between the high-minded pursuit of audio purity and the somewhat grim reality of the people actually making the music.

Because while audiophiles are busy chasing lossless nirvana through equipment that costs more than a semester at Juilliard, the artists they claim to revere are often stuck crowdfunding studio time or whispering their vocals into a refurbished SM58 in someone's closet.

And yet, at every industry event, what do we hear? The same well-worn demo tracks wheeled out like aging lounge singers who know exactly what side their bread is buttered on. Yes, yes, Diana Krall sounds great on a \$40,000 rig. But maybe—just maybe—it's time for some new material.

Here's a wild idea that shouldn't be: what if hi-fi companies actually supported the creation of music? Not just the playback of it. Imagine if every one of these audio titans sponsored a musician. One artist. One year. That's it.

It's not radical. It's math. Marketing budgets get blown on glossier brochures and sleeker Instagram ads. Redirect a slice of that into funding actual albums—the kind designed to sing on high-end systems—and suddenly you're not just selling a product. You're shaping the culture around it.

The payoff? Immediate and everywhere. An artist backed by a hi-fi brand gets a platform, resources, and the freedom to create without the existential threat of rent looming overhead. Instead of praying their latest track doesn't disappear into the Spotify abyss, they get to make something ambitious, knowing someone actually believes in the end result.

For the company, the benefits are just as compelling. Commission exclusive performances, build immersive listening events, release albums that are more than sonic wallpaper—make the art as sharp as the tools that play it. This isn't charity. It's brand alignment with substance.

And here's the added twist: fans notice. If a beloved artist is championed by a hi-fi company, that company isn't just another logo—they become part of the narrative. A potential ally. When those fans start thinking about upgrading from their earbuds, guess which brand they'll remember?

Then there's the delicious irony: give musicians access to the kind of gear normally sequestered in the homes of acoustics-obsessed retirees, and suddenly they're not just recording—they're experimenting. They're pushing the boundaries. Instead of cramming their sonic ambitions into tinny laptop mixes, they're sculpting immersive soundworlds meant to thrive in high-fidelity. Ambient suites with terrifying precision. Jazz with the spatial nuance of a live set. Pop tracks that use spatial audio not as a gimmick but as architecture.

Oh, and bonus: more music gets made. Fresh music. Weird music. Gorgeous, experimental, messy, transcendent music. The kind that reminds people why sound matters in the first place.

Some companies are already catching on. Forté, for example, sells high-end gear through forte-distribution.ca and supports original music via fortearmusic.com. Audio Note UK has a long history of recording and releasing music that reflects its audio philosophy—Vincent Bélanger's "Pure Cello," for instance, was engineered specifically with their sonic ideals in mind. Meanwhile, Moon by Simaudio has backed emerging artists through its MOON Music Prize, helping produce debut albums with proper studio time, vinyl pressings, and the kind of care audiophiles claim to value. They aren't just selling hardware; they're backing the creative force that gives it purpose. It's the kind of common sense decision that feels like it should've been industry standard from the start.

So what's everyone else doing? Still chasing the holy grail of sonic purity while ignoring the holy mess of creation. Still polishing the same jazz standards while the next great album dies on someone's hard drive.

Here's the truth, in case it got buried under a pile of speaker specs: without good music, your immaculate setup is just a shrine to silence. The gear is only as meaningful as the art it serves.

So if the hi-fi world wants to matter in the long run, it needs to stop being a museum and start acting like a patron. Fund the music. Sponsor the chaos. Be part of something that actually lives.

It's time to prove the passion isn't just for the gear but for the music itself. And if companies like Forté can do it, then everyone else is out of excuses.



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Has the Sun Finally Set on The Audiophile Hobby?

Veteran audiophile Robert Schryer reflects on whether the sun has truly set on the hobby, acknowledging generational shifts and rising costs while highlighting a quieter, evolving passion for sound that still runs deep.

BY ROBERT SCHRYER



It's an oft-repeated refrain: *"Audiophiles are all old people. If the hobby can't draw young people soon, it's going to die."*

Other remarks often cited as evidence of the hobby's slide into irrelevance include: *"Prices for audio gear are through the roof"* and *"It's just a hobby for gullible people."*

How true are these statements? Or, are they taken out of context? As someone who has been an audiophile for over 30 years, I want to share my honest opinion about the state of the hobby today, as I see it.

First, some background: the audiophile hobby took off in earnest during the '70s and '80s. That's when audio shows and audiophile recordings were a *thing*, magazines like *Stereophile* and *The Absolute Sound* were gospel, and aficionados discovered an unprecedented wave of cool gear from the likes of Totem, Revolver, Musical Fidelity, Shure, and Acoustic Research—equipment that could extract musical magic from recordings in a way mainstream audio couldn't.

This was a time when owning a system was still something people aspired to, social media didn't yet exist, and the CD player had just been released. Not everyone who listened to music or owned a system became an audiophile, of course. But some, enchanted by the experience of hearing their favourite recordings through specialized gear, did.

Unsurprisingly, this specialized equipment tended to cost more than the mass-market alternatives sold in box stores. But for those who cared, the premium was worth it.

Which brings me to one of the common gripes laid against the hobby: the high cost of

today's audiophile gear. It's normal, of course, in every sphere of goods to pay more for better quality—watches, wine, furniture, food, bicycles, you name it. Audio is no different, especially when the gear is handmade, employs premium parts, is the product of a master designer, or is built in a country with higher costs of living.

That said, I agree that prices for some products, to paraphrase *Star Trek*, have gone where no prices have gone before. But there's a reason for this, and it has less to do with the audiophile hobby itself than with today's market. For many companies, it's financially safer to produce a handful of products aimed at the wealthy—who may or may not be audiophiles—than to chase volume sales at razor-thin profit margins.

Another accusation leveled at audiophiles is that they're too easily swayed by dubious manufacturer claims about a product's performance or technology. My response is that the hobby, by its very nature, is driven by hope—the hope of finding better sound. For an audiophile, that doesn't necessarily correlate with better measurements. Tube equipment, for instance, measures poorly by most standards, yet it's revered for its reproduction of tone, texture, and instrumental body—qualities many believe bring an organic vitality to music and encourage long, focused listening.

If you value lab measurements over the listening experience when assessing gear, you may be an audio enthusiast—just not an audiophile, as the latter is rooted in the subjective experience of listening.



Does this occasionally make an audiophile gullible or prone to unrealistic expectations? Probably. No audiophile auditions a new component hoping it'll sound worse. As seekers of the best sound, audiophiles are idealists. The hobby isn't a scientific pursuit—at least not from the consumer's side. Just as you don't need to be a painter to enjoy Salvador Dali or a chef to enjoy fine cuisine, you don't need to be an electronics engineer to enjoy high-quality sound. You simply need to care about it.

That said, a measure of objectivism has crept into the hobby—and for the better. After years of being told by manufacturers why their product is superior or how innovative it is, audiophiles have grown more skeptical, more curious about design choices, and more interested in how things actually work. Today's audiophiles are, in general, better informed about product design than ever before.

Does the audiophile hobby seem to consist mainly of people of a certain age? Yes—for two reasons I can see: First, it takes a slowing of pace and a recalibration of one's attention span to be able to sit still in front of a system and do nothing but listen intently to music—no easy feat in today's overstimulated, multitasking environment.

Second, young people interested in audio don't necessarily want to be associated with their father's old-school hobby. Filled with a vital generational sense of purpose, young people want to be their own thing—their own movement—and

to eventually establish their own legacy. The opposite of doing all that is irrelevance.

So instead, they reside in the second stage of an audiophile's evolution—between the initial musically awakening one and the audiophile one. This is the playing-with-gear phase, where people discover a range of versatile, good-sounding, well-measuring gear priced for the everyday worker and often originating from Asian countries. Sound quality becomes a consideration, if not yet a way of life.

Not everyone in this second stage will self-identify as an audiophile. But those who value the listening experience over measurements, feature counts, or low prices are the ones most likely to progress into the audiophile stage.

The signs are there: plenty of audio shows, longer-living enthusiasts, and vibrant gear-curious communities, including, by my last count, nearly twenty Facebook groups dedicated to hi-fi, some with tens of thousands of members worldwide. Even the trolls who crash audiophile forums are proof of the hobby's continued vitality—and evidence that the audiophile hobby wasn't just incredibly influential but is still relevant.

The audiophile hobby isn't dead; it's shifting with the times. You don't even have to call it the audiophile hobby, or yourself an audiophile, if you don't want to. But you know what they say about a rose being called by any other name.

And this stage is a growing, fertile breeding ground for audiophiles. The Internet, to an unprecedented degree, is teeming with audio-related videos, threads, reviews, forums, with young-ish people, gauging by the media content, enthusiastically engaged not only in talking about audio, but about sound quality.



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A photograph of Ozzy Osbourne with long dark hair, wearing a black shirt, with his arms outstretched in a dramatic pose. The background is dark with red stage lighting.

Ozzy,

Wildman Survivor

After cheating death for decades, Ozzy Osbourne exits this world the way he lived in it—loud, chaotic, and unforgettable. Mark Lepage traces Ozzy’s transformation from bat-biting wildman to cultural institution.

BY MARK LEPAGE

“My first job there (at the abattoir in Birmingham) was emptying sheep’s stomachs of the puke. The stink was unbelievable. But you get used to it.” — Ozzy

Yes, that might prepare you for inventing heavy metal.

The most flattering thing you can say about any outsized personality is, had he not existed, you’d have had to invent him. The most accurate thing? Your imagination would have failed. Enter John Michael Osbourne, and exit Ozzy.

After cheating Death for 20 years, Ozzy Osbourne of Black Sabbath and solo career, gave up the ghost. Kicked the casket. Caught the tour bus to the Choir Invisible. Shook hands with the Whoever. But never mind the exhausted earthly casing—what of the corpus? What about the songbook, the art, and the legacy of a persona?

Ozzy Osbourne is the unlikely journey from working-class car-horn tuner and, yes, abattoir killa from miseryguts, Birmingham to frontman of the band that brought The Devil and his Downtuned Guitars to every parking-lot stonerfest in the Western world. And being blue-collar, did it the deadly fun way.

Made the unprecedented U-turn from maniacal metal drug addict to lovable Reality TV whack-daddy. Even more so, did not merely launch a solo career—initially dismissed as a lurid gag—but one that went on to outsell

his Sab releases. He once tuned car horns for a living, and his keening voice even sounds like one—and this was all him trying to sound like the *Beatles*, for gosh sake. He became a One-Namer who was bigger than the heavy metal genre he helped invent. So... how?

Black Sabbath was never my band, although I saw them in any number of iterations with a number of singers, but there is no arguing the enduring impact. Before that band, the heavy downer in your life was probably your duvet. Sabbath—Tony Iommi, Bill Ward, Geezer Butler and Ozzy—legitimized basement rotting, blacker-than-black everything, scowling about like the world’s most put-upon teen, and of course, all the Lucifun. They brought the Dark to your Living Room.

We can argue about the greatest Sabbath riff, but why bother? It’s this one, from their 1978 tour before the “Nashville Cocaine Incident” and Ozzy’s subsequent sacking:

“Snowblind” is not simply about being on drugs, it is the *sound* of being on drugs, which makes you feel like *you* are on drugs. I will paraphrase a long-ago *Youtube* commenter under the video, who pointed out that Ozzy’s intro to the song is not, strictly speaking, in Earthling—but that his ensuing vocal is as “pure as a mountain stream.”

Hey. Perhaps “pure” is not the word we want here. The long, fractured pathway to becoming a pop culture icon is many a zigzag, strewn with broken bottles, vials, and



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janky decisions. And luck. In the words of the French proverb, *there are more old drunks than old doctors*. Purity isn't the word.

Survival is. Ozzy had more opportunities than most—hell, *generated* more than any had before to become a casualty or a caricature. So he just became the latter—only more so. And that changed everything.

And so it went in the '70s, and beyond. Roll call:

Ozzy passing out in the wrong Nashville hotel room in 1978 after a coke binge with David Lee Roth, forcing Black Sabbath to cancel the gig (and eventually fire him); Ozzy onscreen, pouring orange juice all over the counter making his botulism breakfast in Penelope Spheeris's immortal film *The Decline of Western Civilization Part II: The Metal Years*; The Dove Decapitation; the Bat Bite (*and what kinda fan brings a bat to a concert? An Ozzy fan, that's who*); at least 10 rehab stints that we know of, or he remembered; a drunken blackout arrest for "attempted murder" of his wife. He was even denounced as a "poor example" by Bill Cosby.

And who doesn't like to eat some bat once in a while, amirite? Have a dozen ghastly rabies injections? Why not. Let's get out there where the lights flicker, the road darkens and the crazed gambling begins—with your career, money, sanity, your soul. However, Ozzy was turning caricature into something... higher. A different category.

"Crazy Train" was a sports arena anthem long before "Welcome to the Jungle," and it is useful to consider how that might have unfolded without Ozzy's crazed gaze from 100 million t-shirts in every mall headshop. Ozzfest brought metal even further into the mainstream, under the banner of, not "Metal", but his name. There is a difference between pioneering something (Sabbath) and becoming its face.

It's not just about fraternizing with the mainstream. Sure, Alice Cooper could hang with Groucho Marx and John Lennon, appear on Hollywood Squares, and golf with Arnold Palmer. Could he be the guy who didn't care

about any of that? Could he star in a reality TV series, *The Osbournes*, which I once referred to as *The Partridge-Eating Family*?

Speaking of Alice—I recall an interview with him during the rise of the Marilyn Manson panic, with pop cultural gatekeepers in a tizzy over the "danger" he represented. The Antichrist lyrics, the Bible-shredding, the pole-axed contact lenses—surely nothing so diabolical had ever happened before!

"It's an act!" Coop said. But you never got that feeling with Ozzy. Acting *out* or acting *up*, sure. Marketing, undeniably. But for all the capes and wide-eyed Beelzebub-eyed glares, the Prince of Darkness was not fake, for good or ill. The Dove, the Bat, and all of that. His entire career was a kind of rolling car wreck that subverted the mainstream. Until it became it.

It is not conceivable, for me right now anyway, that we will witness that again. A lifer who risked his life any 597 times to sing crazy music with lyrics more plaintive than you remember, encouraging everyone in the audience to "go crazy" for no reason other than to do so.

And then there is the final show, *Back to the Beginning*, in Birmingham, certainly the heaviest metal bill in history. The princelings were there for the Prince.

Reflect on the image and sound of a man with Parkinson's disease and a dozen screws in his spine, who laboured through emphysema, hoisted up on a throne to bid farewell when he could not bear to. At that final Black Sabbath show, there were blown cues in "War Pigs", etc., but also genuine emotion. What other sector of the arts would draw a gathering of 40,000, with every massive disciple and inheritor of the honoree paying homage onstage—while an infirm man allows you to witness his shedding or metamorphosis from a punished bone machine, just 17 unknown days to go, in celebration of the sensed end of his time?

With the riffs, bass, and drums still absolutely blasting?

The answer, as always, is None More Black.

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