

The World Summit for Thermionic Extremism

Luminaries at the Vacuum State of the Art Conference.

BY JAY FISHER

FOUNDED BY THE EXUBERANT Dan Schmale (aka Doc Bottlehead of Bottlehead, a tube audio manufacturer), the Vacuum State of the Art Conference is an international gathering of manufacturers and amateurs connected by one common bond: a love of tube audio. The 2003 event, a three-day affair held during October in Silverdale,

Wash., featured all things tube, plus an impressive selection of high-efficiency speakers, turntables, and other related equipment. The next event will be held in 2005 at a location to be announced. Three exceptional products displayed at VSAC 2003 continue to tantalize long after the tubes have cooled and will be of interest to any serious audiophile.



EXPERIENCE MUSIC 300B INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS

These heirloom quality integrated amps are encased in beautifully crafted wood chassis with retro styling reminiscent of radios from the Roaring '20s. The remarkable high gain of this amplifier's 6C45P driver tube spells simplicity for the listener, as each monaural amplifier obviates the need for a preamp. According to Experience Music designer Jeffrey Jackson, this feature is responsible for the transparency you find when listening to single-ended triode amplifiers with a simple signal path. At VSAC a pair of these 300B tube amps, driving enormous single-driver horn speakers, produced delicate sound with a huge dynamic range, backed by the effortless and robust power inherent in their simple topology.

*Experience Music 300B
Integrated Amplifiers, \$9,500 per pair,
www.experiencemusic.net*

2ND RETHM LOUDSPEAKER

The musical realism emanating from the Rethm room brought chills to many listeners. Rated by 6Moons.com as the “Best Sound of Show” and purportedly causing that reviewer to “have multiple out-of-body experiences,” the 2nd Rethm speaker is also a compelling piece of modern design that is suitable for any contemporary architectural setting. Its creator, Jacob George, says that Rethm’s mission is “to design and manufacture a product only if it is unique and radical—one that offers performance and musicality that is way out of proportion to its price.” Employing a single speaker—a modified Lowther DX4 full-range driver—the Rethm is a back-loaded horn design. With 100dB efficiency, this speaker, possesses the uncanny ability to produce a deep and realistic sound stage, retrieving detail that is simply startling and creating a supremely refined listening experience.

2nd Rethm Loudspeaker, \$6,480 per pair, www.rethm.com



VRS AUDIO SYSTEMS REVELATION MUSIC PLAYBACK SYSTEM

One product that made a most unexpected and impressive debut at VSAC is the antithesis of tubes, but nonetheless a perfect source for a tube-based system. VRS Audio Systems’ Revelation is a computer music server—a system that allows serious music collectors to copy their entire CD or vinyl collections to the machine’s hard drives (up to four), and play them back with sound quality that far exceeds most stand-alone CD players. The convenience factor alone is worth the price of admission, and possibilities for playback list management are virtually limitless—like having a digital jukebox with colossal storage capacity. But convenience, says VRS owner-designer Vincent

Sanders, was not the primary design objective. Rather, ultrahigh sound quality was the impetus behind the project. The system records compact discs or vinyl records at up to 32-bit/192kHz resolution (conventional CDs are 16-bit/48kHz). Wireless touchscreen control is an available option. Even hard-core vinyl record lovers were drawn in by the analog-like sound of the Revelation Music Playback System. The sound can be described as vinyl on steroids. ☐

VRS Audio Systems Revelation Music Playback System, price based on configuration, 702.524.7928



BELOW: RANDALL CORDERO