

MILANO HI-END – 2006 EDITION

Report By Igor Zamberlan

During recent years, Milano Hi-End has always had the bad luck – from the standpoint of the flow of visitors, and not that of the climate of the city where it's accommodated – of taking place on a Sunday when the city has been shot down to traffic. Things went well this year: the driving ban was lifted. And even though the weekend was very cold, there wasn't the snowfall that made Sunday's show last year somewhat intimate (with people worried about getting trapped inside). So this year, visually as well as in terms of organization, the attendance was significantly higher than in recent years. From a qualitative viewpoint as well, I believe the show was better. I felt I was witness to a better handling of the exhibitions and the systems making music in the waiting rooms, as well as to a more mature public. Maybe the Bebo Moroni spread in our Hi-End Magazine a few numbers back had an impact. Or, lastly, maybe some cultural headway is being made regarding the fact that a show isn't a competitive event for playing on equipment set up to go at it in an unfamiliar room in a four-hour slot, hooked up to an electrical network in a hotel or a conference hall, but rather an occasion to meet with other enthusiasts – including recording technicians who, based on my experience, are also first and foremost the ones who nurture hi-fi – and to take in what's new and interesting, to find out if something deserves to be listened to and evaluated under more controlled conditions, so as to sniff out market trends. Naturally there is no shortage of reasons for interest. Other than what the photo captions describe, I'd like to recall two other things. Above all, I noted a certain effort devoted to the acoustic treatment of the rooms. Obviously some were using the DAAD from Acustica Applicata (for example in the Mantra Sound room, where it made its mark as constantly one of the best outfits around, no matter what show it's in, or the Mad for Music room, another great place). The extremely interesting Zainea Rounddiffusors could be found in the Sound of the Valve room, inspired by concepts totally unlike those on which your standard acoustic treatment systems are based. Elsewhere there were the Assorbimi panels from Labirinti Acustici, who also set up its own stand. Omicron introduced a new acoustic treatment system as well, made of polystyrene (!? I hear you say: but this thing is a tuned cavity system...). In the GTE room, the one with the monstrous DA converter (see box), there were the devices and full treatment from RTFS, another German manufacturer that, the same as GTE, was making its debut in our country. Of course these rooms have problems of various types, depending on the floor where they're located and the furnishings they use. In fact, on the upper floors, beside the rooms you almost always find a row of low metal cabinets. They resonate, which isn't pretty. At least one demo, the one from LP Audio, was severely hampered by this problem. Despite the efforts of the capable distributor, the system was evidently slowed down by transients and rendered sluggish. You can still understand the potential, the really high potential, of the Audio Ars and Viola Audio Labs electronics, and the exceptional EgglestonWorks Andra II equipment (to be tested very soon), but you'll certainly risk being disappointed. Moreover, almost every room, in particular those on the first floor, suffer from reciprocal "losses", so much so that some exhibitors agreed to take turns with the demo. I personally feel that this is the right thing to do, because it's not particularly bothersome to visitors and makes it possible to get the best enjoyment out of the sound systems. **And the most outstanding systems?** Well, the one from Hi-Fi Center, with the "little" omnidirectional MBLs (tested by Andio Morotti in our Sound Fidelity Guide no. 4 on minidiffusers), which demonstrated the usual attributes of charm and workmanship typical of this brand and the demos of the Sopegno brothers: **the one from GTE, which produced sound of the highest quality in terms of crispness, neutrality and openness;** the one from Mantra Sound, with the new Daiko diffusers and Audio Consulting electronics, was confirmed. Also confirmed was the one from Omicron and Extreme Audio, this time using the fantastic EMM Labs source and the equally extraordinary Lamm electronics. Another one confirmed was the Silco room, able to draw music from the full YBA system, not matter it does it (as always, the Minimum diffusers were impressive). A wonderful performance was turned in by the DP Trade/Grandinote system, with its Italian-made integrated circuit connected to the Dutch Kharma diffusers, which had been heard a week earlier in the FdS room. Soon to be tested again in these pages are the exceptional Ceramique 3.2 diffusers, with a second listening for the outstanding integrated A Solo. The WLM diffusers in the Best Audio&Video room were extremely interesting, using electronics from New Audio Frontiers. The results obtained by Mad for Music were very, very convincing, in particular – for my tastes, in this room, under these conditions – with NuForce providing the finale. Now don't accuse me of fawning, don't say that I'm acting under stable orders (I'm even a little embarrassed about what I'm getting ready to write: I'm totally against any form of self-aggrandizement), but my heartiest congratulations to the engineer Chiappetta for having brought out – for our sister outfit Costruire Hi-Fi, and at a assuredly competitive price in view of the results (an understatement) – a montriode amplifier with the 300B capable of being convincingly driven by the Avalons in a room of this size, which have never been a "relaxing" load for an amplifier. In short, there's no shortage of items to pique your interest (the arrival of a certain number of class D amplifiers should also be pointed out), and those who braved the ice and cold to get to the Jolly Hotel made the right choice. See you next time around!



DP Trade e Grandinote: un connubio che sta cominciando a farsi notare. Diffusori Kharma CE2.3 – novità del costruttore olandese, con un nuovo tweeter in ceramica custom –, lettore CD BAT, filtro di rete e cablaggio Shunyata e integrato Grandinote per uno dei suoni più credibili della mostra.

GTE Audio e RTFS: del DAC vi raccontiamo nell'incorniciato; il resto del sistema, per un suono preciso e dinamico, era costituito dai diffusori Focal/JMLab Grande Utopia, da un prototipo di finale della stessa GTE e da un lettore universale Denon modificato.



I diffusori sono i più piccoli, ma quello del sistema MBL della sala di Hi Fi Center resta un grande suono, con la delicatezza, il dettaglio, la capacità di illudere ed emozionare che chi frequenta le mostre conosce da anni. La sala dei fratelli Sopegno è uno degli appuntamenti da non mancare a qualsiasi fiera.



Mad for Music: sorgenti Einstein, Wilson Benezch (e Micro Seiki vintage), preamplificazione Mad for Music e Audiopax, finali Mangules e NuForce (presto in prova questi ultimi), diffusori Audiopax, cablaggio Ecosse, filtri di rete Systems and Magic. Notevole, davvero notevole. Uno dei migliori.



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GTE Audio Trinity DAC

A company that chooses to make its 2006 market debut with a DAC is rather strange. If it does so with a DAC priced at €50,000 (that's right, five zeros after the five) there must be something special to say or point out, or else it has been created by a bunch of loonies. In the case of GTE Audio, a chat with the company's owner and designer (a firm that all the same has access to part of the technology used in this DAC because its main division works with automation) convinced me that the first hypothesis is the right one, with just a smidge of the second one that serves to make true what the first hypothesis has suggested. The Trinity is a DA converter with three chassis, which itself is weird (although the new top-of-the-line Wadia is similarly configured). There's a central chassis, a type of control unit for the entire system, intended to precondition the digital signal, separate the two channels and send the volume commands to the two units that handle the actual digital/analog conversion.



The Trinity DAC central unit. There are two more chassis, which are also triangular!

I was shown the signal graphs before and after the central unit was conditioned (which can also be seen at www.gte-audio.com). It was quite convincing, even though strictly speaking there was no jitter measurement (the sound was also very convincing, despite 10 meters of T0slink optical cable...). Moreover, conditioning is entirely analog. The signal is sent to two monophonic digital/analog converters (as those of the TEAC Esoteric "monster") through an AES/EBU interface installed on the proprietary multipolar connectors (in addition to the digital signal, commands from the central unit must also pass through). Every DAC unit applies a new conditioning to the digital signal, identical to the one created by the central unit, so as to subsequently reduce jitter. Next, a patented process, LIANOTEC, is applied to the signal, which in practice is linear oversampling done with similar procedures. To put it very simply, a synchronized analog-conditioned signal is sent to the DA conversion chips, and a number of conversion chips at least equal to the oversampling factor one desires to utilize in this procedure must be used. In this top-ranked version, LIANOTEC makes use of sixteen DA conversion chips per channel (with eight oversamplings and two chips in parallel per channel). Burr-Brown/Texas PCM1704 machines are used, selected and connected – or better yet, grouped. The LIANOTEC is, however, disabled if the incoming signal to the central unit is at a frequency of 192 kHz (GTE Audio loves DVD-Audio, to the point where its site includes an updated list of DVD-As with a 192k stereo track). Nor is there anything normal about the DAC outlet: there's no analog filter, as such, but rather a system with discrete operability capable of supplying 1A of 600 Ohm current and an outlet transformer. It also has a virtually perfect ladder attenuator. Instrumental performance is record-breaking, with a noise floor of less than 150dB. In addition to being very original, the chassis shape is also functional when it comes to performance: cards are mounted on the side walls of the triangles, for example.

A top-notch product, virtually an exercise in technology and reserved for the very few: As for us – virtually all of us – we'll have to wait till prices drop to more human levels. The door is now open to this, according to the white papers on the GTE site.

Notes:

LIANOTEC is for all data streams from 44.1kHz/16bit to 192kHz/24bit always on. The digital filter is disabled for 176.4kHz/24bit & 192kHz/24bit recordings, that means neither digital nor analogue filtering.