

On Sunday, May 19, 2012, the monthly meeting of the Audio-Video Club of Atlanta was held at the Virtual Properties Realty Training Room in Duluth, Georgia. This meeting featured a presentation by Ken Green (member of the club) on streaming audio. There was also a brief status report from the ripping CD working group. There were a total of about 35 people present.

First up was our president, John Morrison, who handled the announcements and the business side of the meeting. Seeing some new faces in the audience, he asked how many folks were there for the first time, and five raised their hands. It turns out that all of these new attendees had read the Stereophile announcement of our meeting and had decided to come. This means the club will make every effort to announce our meetings in Stereophile, but they do have a three month lead time which means the meeting subject and location must be set up well in advance. John talked about a possible silent auction meeting in June, the July meeting with Jim Smith at a local dealer location, and the August 19 picnic at Avatar Acoustics.

The main presenter, Ken Green was up next. He discussed and demonstrated the many audio streaming sites that are now available on the internet. His handout showed five sites that for a modest annual fee allow one to stream almost any music of all genre's to your computer for listening. These sites do not feature high quality sound (like HD tracks) but do have the advantage of allowing you to search for and play almost any song you choose. Iron Butterfly's "In A Gadda Da Vida" was chosen first, and there it was! Another unusual selection was "Red Solo Cup", a humorous song about how many parties use these for adult drinks.

In order to listen, we used a system comprised of an older Dell laptop running Windows XP, an inexpensive USB DAC by NuForce, a passive preamp (homemade), the latest design tube amp from Sam Papadas and Ed Stiles (a modified Dynaco Stereo 70), and a pair of Nola Contender speakers being reviewed by Chuck (company had to change their Alon name, so they used Nola which is Alon backwards), and also an Oppo 93 Universal player to run comparisons from.

We did some listening comparisons between streaming audio and the same music provided from FLAC downloads, and/or the original CD or SACD. This gave the attendees an opportunity to hear the differences, if any, in these different musical formats. The streaming audio was definitely of less quality than the CD or higher quality formats. There were also differences heard between the SACD and FLAC (24 by 96 download) version of one piece.

Dennis then gave a brief report on what the CD Ripping working group has been doing and what initial reactions they had to share. They have looked at three free versions of CD ripping software, Exact Audio Copy, Foobar 2000k, and JRiver Jukebox. All three do a good job of ripping. Although the ripping study is not complete, rips with Foobar and JRiver seem to sound a bit better to two of them who have completed the ripping assignment. Slower ripping speed seems to create better sound (less errors maybe?). This could also be due to other variables such as CD-ROM quality (there are "high quality" blanks on the market). It seems that ripping to a regular (spinning) hard drive has less quality than one going to a solid state drive. Also, electrical connections may make a difference, as well as the quality of the USB cable. The working group is continuing their experiments to find the best combination to perform rips.

There was no raffle at this meeting. John did present two "special" nametags to Jennifer (who brings the refreshments) and to Meg Stiles for their long-term support of the club.

The club thanks Ken Green for an excellent presentation (despite some technical glitches which were handled very well), giving us a great afternoon of learning and listening, and more thanks to Virtual Properties for the use of their training room, and to the volunteers who helped set up.

Thomas Horner
Secretary, A-V Club of Atlanta