

On Sunday, August 30, Sunday, September 20, and Sunday October 11, three meetings of the Atlanta Audio Club were held via "Zoom" calls due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The August 30 meeting featured Lyn Stanley as our presenter. About 25 were present on that call, which started at 3 pm and lasted until 4:30 pm. The second call featured Paul McGowen, CEO of PS Audio which started at 3:10 pm and lasted until about 4:35 pm, with around 20 participants. The third meeting featured Peter Ledermann and John Toney from SoundSmith. This meeting had about 30 attendees, and started about 3 pm and ended around 5 pm. Please note that this secretary did not attend the Lyn Stanley meeting (had a conflict), so the items from that meeting are from an audio recording of it made by one of our members (thanks David!).

Due to the nature of these meetings, these minutes will simply list items that were discussed in roughly the order they occurred.

Lyn Stanley Meeting on August 30, 2020

Steve Gooding (new president of the club) introduced Lyn. She went right into her presentation. Lyn gave us details about her newest release which will have only 300 units. It has 2 Blu-ray discs and one SACD disk. She had to pay up front for these to be produced, about \$110K, and the set will retail for \$150. Included in the set is information on how to set up your speakers for 5.1 channels and Dolby Atmos channels. She has entered this set into the "immersive" category of the Grammy's. To get the best sound for the two different versions, the set had to be mastered twice, one for stereo and one for 5.1 surround sound. An interesting note is that the Blu-ray shows Capital's control room while the recording was being done.

Lyn will have an upcoming album for the holiday season which includes both holiday songs and religious songs, with a Hungarian 40 piece string orchestra. It will be recorded and mastered mainly in Nashville but also at other locations due to Covid-19. She also has another project in the pipeline, which will feature "intimate" 1924 songs.

What is the best way to get her works, and how are sales?

Her income has dropped compared to last year due to Covid-19. Lyn praised our club (the "best club she has dealings with") for our support. She has lost a couple of distributors, but Elusive Disk still sells her albums, and of course her web site sells her items.

There was a discussion on how the recording industry works today. Lyn says there are only three major recording companies now.

Do you do streaming?

She put one album on Spotify, which has been streamed about 110K times. She is also on Tidal, which pays artists better than the others, as far as Lyn knows.

Question about post-production and mastering? What does she do after the music is recorded?

First, she had quality issues with RTI, so she has replaced them. There were too many customer complaints. She is searching for another pressing plant, and has found a small plant near Chicago. She is using another plant near St. Louis for her printed materials. She is very much into high quality control.

How did she meet Alan S. (mix engineer)?

He had natural ability to do the work. She hooked up with Bill S. (engineer) from Nashville. She needed to replace Alan who was getting too old (beyond retirement age) and too busy on other projects to work for Lyn. She prefers not to use any producer that does not allow her to talk to the engineers directly. That is because HER name is on the jacket!

Are the silver disks "stamped" or recorded one at a time during production?

Copyright protection requires one of the two. She had to pay extra for the production technique for doing them one at a time.

Other miscellaneous discussions:

Lyn moves around when she sings, which makes it harder to set up the lights for a video.

It takes a long time (longer than average) to get the quality she wants.

In the \$150 set, the Blu-ray has a separate audio track with program notes.

John asked about a "group" order for the \$150 set, and he will set this up for club members.

Covid-19 has made recording with many musicians much harder to do, since there are limitations on how many can be in one place at a time.

Lyn is also doing new arrangements of Christmas classics, such as the Little Drummer Boy for her upcoming holiday album.

Lyn would like feedback from the buyers of the \$150 set.

After Lyn left the meeting, Steve made a couple of club announcements:

Possible future meetings include PS Audio, Alan Jones of Hi-Fi Buys, and Soundsmith.

Even after Covid-19, we may want to live stream to YouTube and/or record meetings for viewing by members that are not in town or for later viewing. We could also use Zoom even after Covid-19.

PS Audio meeting on September 20, 2020:

This session was a question and answer format along with various discussions with Paul McGowen.

Are there any new streaming products on the horizon from PS Audio?

A new version of the DirectStream DAC will have streaming capabilities. Other products are also being developed. They are investing heavily in streaming (PS Audio has already been doing this for four years now).

Paul says that galvanic separation in products is audible, so PS Audio uses techniques to reduce or eliminate this.

Paul thinks MQA is not worth the effort. It is a "lossy" format, so he is not a fan of it. PS Audio added it to their products because of customer demand. Paul believes that MQA reduces the sound stage. Steve G of the club says he also hears harshness. MQA is not "truly" lossless, only analog to analog lossless. Paul likes DSD over PCM, even a hi-res PCM (24/192). DSD seems a "lot closer to analog".

Octave Records was created by PS Audio to record directly to DSD and they sell these on their web site.

Paul invited everyone on the call to visit the PS Audio offices and factory after Covid-19.

PS Audio has given their entire DVD and Blu-Ray library to charity, since they are no longer needed to demonstrate their products. Instead they stream the movies.

John M. (club member) mentioned that visitors to his listening room always prefer vinyl over digital. Paul responded that choices are made with the source in mind (preamps, amps, speaker setup, cables). A system "built" for vinyl may not sound "as good" when using digital.

PS Audio has gone from using dealers to direct sales. It was a hard transition, but it seems to be working very well, customers are happier. Customer now has a month to check out a new piece in their system,

with shipping paid both ways (if necessary). PS Audio also has a buy-back policy of old equipment. They may even do direct sales with speakers!

Paul is working on a book called "Audiophile Guide", which will be a guide for setup.

Discussion about one member's system that did not sound as good with PS's phono stage, and the member ended up with a tube phono stage. This is definitely a personal preference!

Challenge of pricing with US manufacture versus Chinese manufacture. The lower cost Sprout is made in China. It takes "work" to keep US costs in line. Paul mentioned that many individual components such as resistors, capacitors, etc. are made overseas.

For their new FR30 speakers, PS Audio had to have the cabinets done overseas. It would have been four times the cost to build these in the US.

PS Audio has a magazine called Copper to connect to the audio community without expecting returns. It is published every two weeks and is located on their web site.

John and Steve mentioned that we may want to buy a Sprout for the club for use in meetings when the presenter had no system. Paul suggested buying the Strata versus Sprout for our club, and offered us a good price, \$1500 for a Strata! Note: Later on, this was lowered to \$1000, many thanks to Paul for giving our club a great price!

Paul likes to bring high value products to the market.

The Infinity IRS 5 speaker system sounded great when Paul listened to them. Paul then mentioned that speaker placement is very important.

The new PS speaker line will have 7 models. The FR30 is \$15K per pair, and is the first one to be released. It will be in the middle of the new line. The drivers were designed from the ground up.

AC regeneration versus AC filtering. Filtering uses high impedance which can affect the sound, so PS Audio uses regeneration in its power products.

Soundsmith Audio meeting on October 11, 2020:

Peter Leddermann and John Toney from Soundsmith were the presenters, although most of the time Peter (chief engineer) was speaking.

It was announced that Mike Burns of Wolfsong Audio (local dealer) has offered 20% off Soundsmith cartridges for club members for the next 2 weeks.

Peter first gave us a bit of his background. He was always interested in science and then audio. He then went to work at a repair shop in White Plains, NY and then had other jobs in audio. He worked with Bozak (speaker designer). He also worked at the IBM Research Center in New York for 11 years. He has been with Soundsmith since the early 1990's.

John Toney is the marketing person from Soundsmith. He was retired but came out of retirement when Soundsmith hired him last year. He has been in sales for many years.

Peter first stated that audio playback is to capture the energy of the performance and then reproduce it.

Steve G (club president) then started asking prepared (from club members) questions, mainly for Peter.

Some philosophies of Soundstream and Peter?

They create products that folks will enjoy. They have about 13+ employees. They manufacture cartridges but also build replacement styli for Grace cartridges. Peter likes to study something and see where it can be improved. There is always pressure to get items to market. He noted that cantilever materials have not changed much for 40 years. He mentioned that there is a "dark corner" of styli design, what he calls styli "jitter". He also discussed how the Hyperion styli was actually born from cactus spines, a perfect material for styli.

How do you setup and care for turntables?

Test records that have anti-skating tracks have issues. Many of these are recorded at too high a level, which is good for hip-hop, but not for most other music. It should set to a 30-40% level, not 80-90%. Peter is not a fan of wet stylus cleaners. The epoxy that holds the stylus can be negatively affected by the liquid in the wet cleaner. Use "Blu tack" placed on the platter to clean the stylus. John added that the Blu-tack be placed on a piece of paper, plastic, or some other method used to isolate the product from the platter. After that, use the cuing lever to lower and raise the needle on to the Blu-tack several times. The platter MUST be stopped to do this.

What about optical pickups?

Bozak listened to one for 30 seconds and said it was not working. Record has to be pristine clean.

General thoughts and discussion items:

Equipment with a sound signature is not good. If cable makes a big difference, then the equipment is not neutral. They design equipment to be as neutral as possible.

Many visitors to their demo rooms are "wowed" by the sound in the room (feedback from visitors).

Moving coils hit their "design ceiling" 40 years ago (cannot go any further in design). The moving iron designs from Soundsmith are still evolving.

The MD80 loudspeaker years ago had excellent soundstage – the speakers simply disappeared. The Monarch and Dragon Fly speakers now produced follow that design principal.

Peter's design objective is to make mass as low as possible. Moving coils have much more mass than their moving irons. Peter showed us a photo of the two together, and the moving coil certainly had more material.

What do you get as you move up their product line?

There are differences in quality as one goes up their line (price). There is less mass and better stylus build as you move up the line.

Stylus "jitter" is reduced in their products, which distinguishes them from the competition.

New and change of product development is a very "slow" process. The product has to be marketable, so it requires thought as to what to spend time working on.

Soundsmith has record lathes. When Peter retires he will devote more work on these. Does not have the time currently, He has about 150 inventions on his "to do" list.

Not sure if this was discussed earlier. Has any work been done on an optical pickup? The idea is to replace the stylus with bouncing light off the grooves. Variations on the lights reflected position is proportional to the position of the light beam's tangential "point of contact"?

The records have to be super clean. DS Audio sells optical pickups, but they require a special phono preamp. It is hard to get these to work properly. Conventional stylus "mimics" the way the cutter changes the material as it cuts (the flexibility of the material itself), so it actually may be more accurate.

Technology and innovation is the motivating force for Peter. However, it is important to have the ability to produce the product with reasonable costs.

Should we replace the Grado cartridge used in the Club's turntable that picks up hum because of the way it is shielded?

Since it is a direct drive turntable, it needs a six-sided Faraday cage, which Soundsmith cartridges have.

How do you test your products?

Soundsmith has test records and production tests to make sure the cartridges are good. They have unique testing techniques. Peter does not trust his own listening, since it can change with mood, time of day, etc.

Where are the products built?

They are all US manufacturing, some employees work from home due to Covid-19. The parts are mostly US, but some have to be from overseas.

How do you audition your designs?

He uses Soundsmith equipment to listen with and an Oracle turntable. He uses "less than perfect" equipment and room to perform test listening. If they sound good there, it will be even better with better equipment and/or a better room.

Tubes "versus" solid state?

Tubes have even order harmonics, which sound better than the odd order harmonics found in solid state. However, remember that everyone hears differently. If the equipment sounds good to the owner, the owner is happy. Essentially "voiced" to the owner's listening preferences.

It is good to judge equipment by how it works under "stress". For example, a dynamic test of your cartridge. Channel separation is a very important measurement. It tells you a lot about the cartridge.

One can appraise products by looking at many reviews, but throw out the ones that are out of bounds.

We need to educate younger folks on the advantages of analog versus digital which they have always listened to. However, it is a matter of convenience versus quality.

We are losing a lot of "legacy" engineers, and they are not being replaced by new ones. Mentors for upcoming engineers is important.

Discussion on Peter's charity work:

"As a species, you are judged by how you treat the weakest among us." Their Direct to Disk Grace recording profits all go to help rescue kids from (essentially) "slavery".

After the presenters left at 5 pm, there were some club announcements:

The PS Audio Stratta was purchased to replace the club's integrated amp, we got a great price! The older amp was sold to a club member, so the net cost of this purchase was quite low.

The Lyn Stanley sets have arrived, and those who have heard them say that the sound and performance are excellent.

Alan Jones of Hi-Fi Buys is interested in doing Zoom meeting.

Minutes written by Thomas Horner, Secretary, Atlanta Audio Club.