

On Sunday, February 28, 2021, the monthly meeting of the Atlanta Audio Club was held via “Zoom” due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The meeting featured Mike Burns, owner of Wolfsong Audio dealership in the Dawsonville, GA area (north of Atlanta). Steve (club president) had a list of prepared questions from club members for Mike who also encouraged discussion of various related topics. The meeting was attended by about 25 participants. It started at 3 pm and lasted until 5 pm. Mike had prepared answers to many of Steve’s questions ahead of the meeting.

Due to the nature of this meeting, these minutes will simply list the questions and discussions in roughly the order they occurred.

Mike first gave us a quick history of his work in the audio field. He got into audio building Heathkit electronic kits as a teenager. He then went into insurance, then audio sales and repairs, then he decided to open his own shop.

Mike had a nice prepared video giving us a tour of the listening areas of his shop, one above his garage (specially built), and two others in his home (one 2-channel, the other a home theater setup). As the video played, he described the equipment we were seeing. This video demonstrated his vision that you should have your music “where you live”.

Mike described Wolfsong Audio as a “concierge” audio shop that offers in-home auditions and setup, one-on-one auditions in the store, in-home listening room evaluation, and offers equipment at all price levels.

The first questions asked Mike were about streaming “versus” physical media. Mike says that streaming and (especially) vinyl go hand-in-hand. You hear particular music on streaming, then you may want to buy it on vinyl. Streaming is reducing sales of CD’s, SACD’s, and DVD/Blu-Rays quite a bit since both are digital, and many stores that still carry these have a limited selection. On the other hand, record (vinyl) stores are increasing in number.

Mike stated that on-line sales cannot offer the same level of service as Wolfsong (or any other dealer).

What kind of equipment does he like? He likes equipment that has great price and performance, in other words has good value! He likes equipment that is “expressive, musical, and very importantly is reliable”. He wants the piece to work when you turn it on, every time.

Mike was asked if you should set up your system for analog or digital listening. He said it should do both!

Next was a discussion on how one can audition. Of course, in the shop. In home is the best way if you can (maybe not with very heavy speakers, for example). Once Covid-19 is reduced, audio shows can give you a taste of equipment you may want to consider. You want to play the music you like, not listen to the systems being shown with unfamiliar music or music that is not to your taste.

What new directions in audio do you see? There is a “new” direction in streaming – high-resolution. More streaming providers are offering this. Also, new amplifier topologies that sound as good as the current topologies. The use of Roon as a user interface for multiple streaming services. Wolfsong offers a service to help one set up a Roon system (interface) in your listening room(s). Later in the meeting several folks commented on the Roon advantages.

How do you allocate your budget between equipment, speakers, etc.? The important thing he thinks is the “sum of the parts” that make up your system. Each part must help the next piece sound good. He mentioned that speakers and phono cartridges have more “personal” differences for different users. He told us that the “budget” equipment from manufacturers like NAD and BlueSound offer very good “bang for the buck”.

Then Mike took questions from the meeting participants.

What about DiRac (room correction software)? Mike says it can make a difference if you use it correctly. It is similar to Audyssey. Some audiophiles think the music sounds better without Audyssey (or any room correction system) turned on. The use of DSP sound processing is becoming more prevalent as computing power increases that makes DSP no longer a "bad" word.

Mike mentioned that fully active speaker systems (amps built into the speakers) are becoming more popular.

Best streamer for the money? Mike thinks the BlueSound equipment meets that requirement.

Finally, Mike was asked about the issue he finds most often when evaluating a listening room. Nine out of ten times it is placement issues. Maybe too much room treatment or moving the listening (seating) location(s) or the speakers makes the sound better.

Toward the end of the meeting, Mike offered a pair of interconnects to the participant who could guess the number of tracks he has in his listening library (without going over). This secretary guessed 27,581 and won the contest. The real number is over 30,000.

The club thanks Mike a whole lot for his time and insights!

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