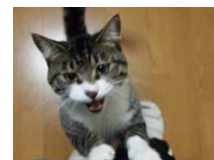


## Tonochi's Audio Room – Supplemental Info

### The Best Audio System



2019/09/19

#### Which audio system is the best in sound quality?

Every audio system introduced here has been selected by Tonochi with his arbitrary and biased view. There are no detached criteria.

#### Opportunities of Audition

I've been living in the suburb of Tokyo since my childhood, so I've had so many opportunities to listen to audio systems. It is countless times if I sum up those opportunities.

I auditioned audio systems at places such as:

- Storefront or listening room of audio shops
- Showroom or listening room of audio manufacturers
- Audio related events such as International Audio Show
- Music related events such as record concerts and music seminars
- Jazz cafes
- Homes of audiophiles

I have much experience with these situations.

During my youth (1970s), audio was booming unprecedentedly. There were lots of places where I could experience hi-end audio in my range of activities, such as audio shops provided with a listening room, showrooms of audio makers, jazz cafes, and so on. I often visited those places, as high-end audio systems sounded better than mine.

After graduation from university, I seldom visited such places, but I resumed it after I was acquainted with some audiophiles in the late 1990s. I went so often in the late 2000s, because I intended to buy high-end components to replace my Gaudi system with them. I auditioned so carefully by using my CDs and SACDs.

#### The Best Audio System in Sound Quality

Here I introduce the best audio system in sound quality among the systems I have listened to in my audio life.

I was so surprised when I listened to it. I felt like listening to a real live performance. Incredibly (actually, it isn't so incredible), it wasn't an audio system of an audiophile or an expert, but owned by a music lover.

The system's owner is the head of a music lovers' club "Music Travel". It was used at the record concert held by Music Travel at Koshinkan in December 2014. Koshinkan is an educational facility of Mizuho Municipality in Tokyo. It is located near my home.

I got permission from the owner to post the information on the system including some photos.

#### *Components*

- Analog disc player (ADP) : Pioneer PL-30DL II
- Cartridge: Victor (JVC Kenwood) Z1-S
- CD player (CDP): Yamaha CD-S300
- Integrated amplifier: Victor (JVC Kenwood) A-X5D
- Loudspeaker: Victor (JVC Kenwood) [no model number]
- Speaker cable: Hitachi Cable OFC cable [unknown model number]

All the components but the CDP were middle-grade components in 1980s. They were not customized with the only one exception that a terminal board was attached to the back panel of the loudspeakers.

#### *Description of the Components*

The outline spec of each component is not what I heard from the owner. I got the information online, mainly at the website "Audio no Sokuseki" (<http://audio-heritage.jp/>). The photos are ones I took in the second Music Travel record concert I attended. The system configuration was different from my first experience. I don't have photos of Z1-S, CD-S300 and OFC speaker cable.

ADP: Pioneer PL-30DL II

An ADP that consists of a direct-drive turntable and a static-balanced tonearm. It went on sale in 1980 for the list price 59,800 yen. It is a very standard middle-class player in '80s.



Middle-grade ADPs in '80s look like a quality player. PL-30DL II looks more expensive than my Technics SL-1200GR.

In this photo, the cartridge is not Z1-S. I think Z1-S had better sound quality.

Cartridge: Victor (JVC Kenwood) Z1-S

A budget cartridge that was often equipped with JVC players in '80s. The stylus is conical. The owner said he hadn't changed the stylus.

CDP: Yamaha CD-S300

This CDP is new. It is still in production (as of September, 2019). The list price is 41,000 yen. If I remember correctly, the price was 69,800 when it was released.

Amplifier: Victor (JVC Kenwood) A-X5D

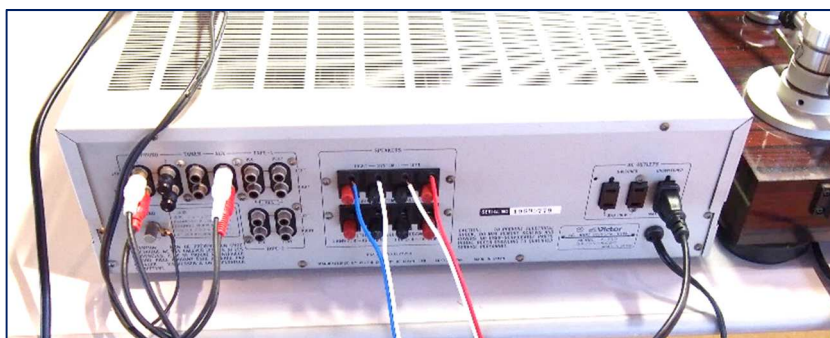
An integrated amplifier whose selling point is its simple circuitry. It was released in 1980 for the list price of 69,800 yen. The output power is 75W+75W. It employs 'Super-A' technology, which means a kind of non-cutoff amplifying stage. It was the state-of-the-art technology around 1980. Victor claimed this amp had both high sound quality of class-A amp and high efficiency of class-B amp.



The front panel is simple, yet elegant. It looks like a higher-graded amp.

Switches and knobs that are used less often like the tone control are hiding in the rid at the lower part of the front panel.

The player placed on the amp is a BD played of Pioneer. It substituted a CDP.



The back panel of the amp.

The RCA jacks are not gold-plated. The speaker terminals are push button type, which is typically used in budget amps.

Loudspeaker: Victor (JVC Kenwood) [no model number]

The owner said it was originally the loudspeaker of Victor's systematic component stereo (this explains it has no model number). It is 3-way speaker system and all the LS units are cone drivers. The woofer seems to be 30cm (12") in diameter.

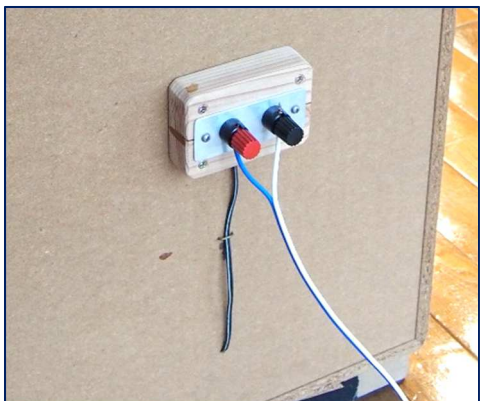


Unlike other loudspeakers in '80s, the LS units are aligned vertically. The typical layout in those days is that the tweeter and squawker are shifted left or right hand. But that layout brings about blur sound image and unstable localization. Probably, this loudspeaker's layout is intended for cost reduction, however, it turns out to contribute good sound quality.

Adjustable attenuators were popular in those days, too. But this loudspeaker doesn't have attenuators. This is also good for sound quality.

The positions of the tweeter and the squawker in front-back direction seemed to be aligned. It is easy since both are the same cone type.

It's interesting that the simple design for cost reduction leads to high sound quality. It is common with Tonochi's design policy, "cost reduction is the most effective way to improve sound quality."



The handmade terminal board attached on the back panel.

It seems that this loudspeaker didn't have terminals originally. The original cable is rather thin.

Speaker cable: Hitachi Cable OFC Cable [model number unknown]

This OFC speaker cable was popular in '80s. This is the first OFC audio cable in the world, if I remember correctly.

### *Room acoustics*

Koshinkan is a facility that was originally an old building of a silk raising farmer. It's been renovated into a café (the ground floor) and a multi-purpose hall (the second floor). The hall is compact and the capacity is only 70 persons, but its acoustics is excellent typically as a wooden building.

For further details, visit Koshinkan's website:

<http://www.koshinkan.jp/>

### *Sound quality*

I was so surprised, or even shocked, when I attended the Music Travel's record concert for the first time. The sound was so realistic that I felt it was a live performance.

From then on, I repeatedly attend their record concerts held at the Koshinkan. But the sound changed a bit due to replacement of the components, and the sound quality deteriorated a little bit.

The review below is my impression at my first experience. Needless to say, it's my personal impression.

The first half of the record concert was a CD concert. The CD was an album of piano tunes composed by Chopin. I don't remember the title, but I think it was an album of a pianist who won the International Chopin Piano Competition (Yundi Lee?).



It made me feel like listening to a real live performance, though I had taken many opportunities to listen to live piano performance at Koshinkan and was used to true piano sound.

The reproduction of the piano sound is hard for audio equipment. The piano sound is somewhat mysterious. You don't feel it's so loud even when you're near the piano, while it reaches a faraway position. And it is shiny and brilliant. The replay on audio equipment often loses these characteristics.

It was my first time in my long audio life that the replay sounded like a true piano sound.

The second half was a vinyl concert.

The sound was so clear and transparent. Stereo imaging was good, and localization was stable.

This experience gave some shock. Until then, I believed true hi-fi could be realized only by a multi-amplifier system. I completed the squawker amp, MA-215 Arabesque, next year (2015), and it made improve the sound quality of Gaudi. Thanks to this fact, I came to believe multi-amplifier system is the best once again. And, I know there are still some problems to solved in Gaudi system. That means Gaudi can be improved more by solving the problems.

I can scarcely keep my belief. On the other hand, I can't help being interested in the fact that the mono amp system composed of the old middle-class components is almost a complete hi-fi system.

Probably, simplicity is the key. The middle-class components are simple in their circuits and mechanisms. They don't have excessive features and performances unlike hi-end audio equipment, while they inherit essentials of higher-class models. Besides, Japanese audio equipment produced in '80s have very high quality.

## Other Excellent Systems

I've encountered excellent audio systems at audio events or something like that. But it is difficult to evaluate an audio system at a venue of an event like an audio show, because the music source is unfamiliar in many cases and it's difficult to sit at the best listening position.

If you rent the audition room of an audio shop or go to a jazz café during off-hour, you can audition their audio system thoroughly. But I haven't encountered anything special on those occasion.

In my youth, I wasn't skilled and Gaudi wasn't completed. I often went to Jazz cafés and listened to jazz, because their systems were far better than Gaudi. But I listen to jazz on Gaudi these days, because it is better now.

### *Audio System I Encountered at Vacuum Tube Audio Fair 2011*

I explain an excellent audio system I encountered at the Vacuum Tube Audio Fair 2011 by searching my memory, since I lost my memo about the audio fair. I hope I remember correctly. Just maybe, it could be the Vacuum Tube Audio Fair 2009.

The president of Mactone himself was demonstrating his product, when I dropped by Mactone's room. His system sounded so good.

The amplifier was Mactone's top-grade model. It was an OTL tube power amp, in which 8 vacuum tubes were used in parallel on the final stage. The loudspeakers were Tannoy's high-end model. He said they were his own. I don't remember the model number, since I'm not familiar with commercial products. Tannoy's time-honored 15-inch, 2-way coaxial unit was used on the loudspeaker.

The sound was so transparent for a tube amp. I felt every signal in source was precisely reproduced. It was my first time to feel so when it comes to tube amps, except my NOBODY tube amps.

However, the amp was huge and ultra-heavy. Besides, it emitted high heat. It's impossible to install it in an ordinary room. It has nothing to do with me.

The venue of the Vacuum Tube Audio Fair was Akihabara Sampo Kaikan. It was an old building. The rooms were not spacious, the ceilings were not high. The acoustics wasn't good at all, but truly excellent audio equipment sounds good in such a poor environment.

### *Audio System I Encountered at Internal Audio Show 2003*

I saw the audio system at Esoteric's room. The loudspeakers were Avant Garde DUO, and the amplifier and the player were Esoteric's highest-grade models.

This sounded very vividly. Especially, vocals sounded just like a singer was singing in front of me. It was a rare case that I encounter such high-quality system in an event. I was surprised.

I had read an article of a newspaper that said about the audio maker, Avant Garde, but it was my first time to listen to its loudspeakers. And, it was my first time to know a loudspeaker that sounds exactly the same as fine phrases written in its catalog.

At that time, I seriously thought of giving up Gaudi and buying Avant Garde instead.

However, the Avant Garde DUO didn't sound that good when I took another opportunity to listen to it at the International Audio Show 2004. Moreover, it sounded bad when I listened to it at a Jazz Café some audio and jazz expert ran. I was disappointed.

Later, I learned Avant Garde DUO needs a spacious room, and my room was a bit too small. I decided not to buy it.

By the way, Avant Garde's highest-grade model was 'TRIO'. I didn't like it from the beginning.

## Wrap-up

Here I introduced the best and the second-best audio systems among numerous systems I've ever listened to.

Likable audio systems to me tend to be simple; they don't have unnecessary features, mechanisms and circuits, and don't pursue excessive performance. I feel middle-grade systems sound better than hi-end systems.

I picked the two high-end systems as the second-best. They both were demonstrated in the venue of the shows. In that situation, the music source wasn't familiar one, and there was a crowd around me, and it was impossible to take the best position. There's possibility that I would find any shortcoming if I audition them in a good listening room.

So far, I haven't been impressed so much by audio systems owned by audiophiles.

In the first place, I think many of audiophiles deny hi-fi. For example, some say, "Hi-fi is boring. It's better to make my original sound" or "I am an audiophile, not a music lover." Especially, many of DIYers don't stick to sonics itself but to particular mechanisms or circuits. For example, some DIYers adhere to backload horn speakers with a small LS unit, and some are particular about vacuum tube amplifiers, and so on.

Audio systems owned by such audiophiles tend to produce very characteristic sound. In other words, 'peculiar' sound. I'm not familiar with such sound.

Of those audiophiles, some have a subsystem other than his strongly characteristic system, and the former is used for **listening to music**. I prefer the subsystem to the main system.

It is matter of hobby, so I don't deny building an audio system that fits to the owner's taste. But I am more of a music lover than an audiophile, if anything. I stick to hi-fi. I want to achieve **true hi-fi** with Gaudi II.

[END OF DOCUMENT]

NOBODY Audio

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