

Report on the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas (Ne, U.S.A.) on 7 januari 2014

Hans van Maanen

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Because Hans was in Las Vegas to present at the ALMA winter meeting anyway, he managed his agenda such that he could pay a one day visit to the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) there. The CES is probably the largest show for consumer electronics in the world and there is no way you can tackle it in one day. The show is held in three different (large!) buildings and includes about anything from washing machines to computers and from robots to giga audio systems. Hans focused on the "High Resolution Audio" discussions and the high-end audio systems. Yet he did not managed to see everything is to see on these subjects, also because the show is rather focused on trade and not on the consumer itself. In other words: the demo's were rather limited. But some interesting matters can be reported.

As far as "Hi-Res" audio can be mentioned that the developments are progressing in the right direction that more and more "Hi-Res" recordings become available as downloads. Also, the same recording can be obtained in different formats, from MP-3 to 192 kHz/24 bit or DSD. This makes it easier for the consumer to make a choice and to elucidate the differences for those who think that "Hi-Res" is just nonsense. Very interesting is the development that DSD files become available as downloads for the consumer and that also D/A converters become available which are able to handle this format (see below).

During one of the panel discussions on "Hi-Res", one of the panel members thought he would be funny by inviting everybody for a demo in his house in Holland, not knowing that a Dutchman was in his audience. When the panel discussion was done, Hans walked to him and told him that he accepted the invitation, which came a quite a surprise. But they agreed to follow up on this.....

Concerning the high-end equipment, a few developments can be reported. Hans' opinion on the vast majority is that is "more of the same". Only a few of the designs could not be placed under the subject of "coffins". Regarding the size of the equipment, it is obvious that the living rooms in North America are (a bit?) larger than in The Netherlands, because many systems are rather sizable. This holds both for the loudspeakers as for the amplifiers. When Hans' thought that several amplifiers at shows in Holland were rather big, these were dwarfed compared to some of the amplifiers, shown at the CED. See e.g pics. 6, 8, 12, 21 and 24.

Regarding the sound quality, Hans' opinion is that there was little of high quality. Sometimes the design was nice, but that was no guarantee for a good sounding system. Many systems were reasonable, but virtually none had the solid bass and the crisp, sparkling, high that Hans' is used to nowadays from his Temporal Coherence "Diamant" system. Often the high was either insufficiently present or too aggressive. And even large systems did not realize the solid bass. It sounded impressive with "music" from a synthesizer, but with classical music, the systems failed clearly. When "The night on the bald Mountain" from Mussorgsky was played, Hans' thought "You'd better not do this". The best sounding system Hans has heard was based on an ESS tweeter, combined with an alternative line-array for the midrange in combination with a couple of woofers, which was build up as a dipole radiator. See also pics 17 and 18, clearly an alternative approach!

One of the most beautiful pieces of equipment that Hans has seen was a D/A converter in a glass housing with a nice contour light. See pic. 10. Whether it sounds as nice as it looks is harder to determine. It can handle sample frequencies up to 384 kHz.

Hans also took pictures of amplifiers. Some use several power transformers (probably one per channel), one control amplifier realized the volume and balance control using relays, so "Temporal Coherence" is not the only one who uses this good idea.

Interesting is a compact D/A converter, the "Audio Gate" by KORG, which might be a good alternative for the Wadia converter. This converter can handle everything from MP3 to DSD and 192 kHz/24 bit. Hans made the contact and there is a representative in Amersfoort. Should be followed up.



Pic 1: The booth of fellow Technical Committee member Mark Waldrep.



Pic 2: The room for the “Hi-Res” booths, which showed to be far too small during the panel discussions.



Pic 3: The solution with a high “WAF”



Pic 4: Nice design, but not small and the high frequency range was virtually absent.



Pic 5: More of the same.....



Pic 6: Special design, quite big (also the electronics!) and not really well-sounding



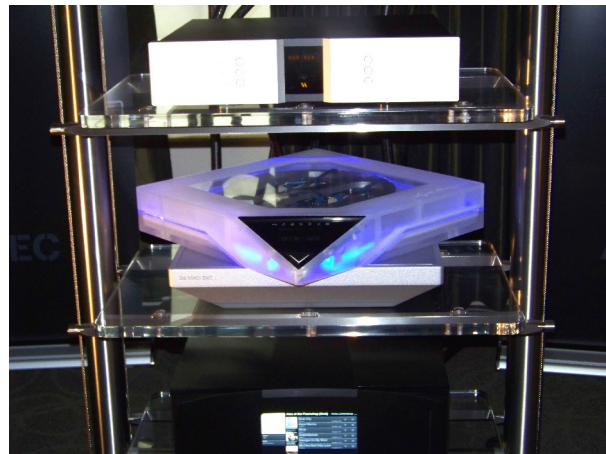
Pic 7: The loudspeakers were made by Wilson, the whole set did not really sound special.



Pic 8: Even more of the same.....



Pic 9: Let's go for a different colour..... Note the size of the electronics.



Pic 10: A beautifully designed, but not really small (almost 50 by 50 cm), 384 kHz D/A converter of Da Vinci.



Pic 11: Would this do for a divorce?



Pic 12: Eight loudspeaker units: how to get that ever correct? Also note the huge power amps on the floor.



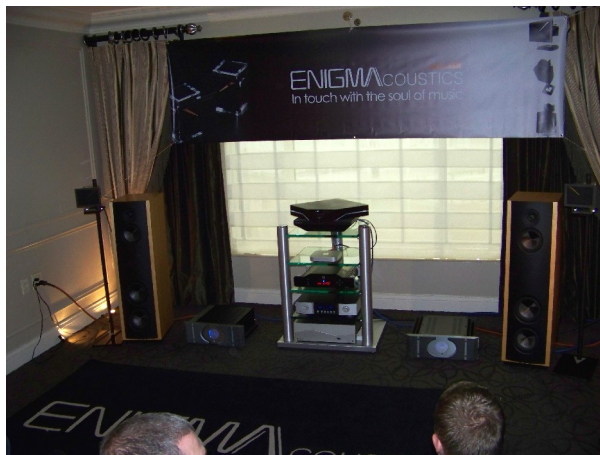
Pic 13: A 5.1 surround system using electrostatic loudspeakers. But even the “Dark side of the Moon” could not leave a good impression.



Pic 14 Sounded impressive with synthesizer, but “The Night on the bold Mountain” was rather like a cold shower.



Pic 15: A nice “building blocks” design which can be extended.



Pic 16: There was little enigmatic to this set-up.



Pic 17: The best sounding system, based on the ESS tweeter with a line source (!) for the midrange, driven by carbon fibers. Very different. See also pic. 18 for details.



Pic 18: Detailed picture of the system of pic. 17. The line source is made up by the four light emitting “sources” in the middle.



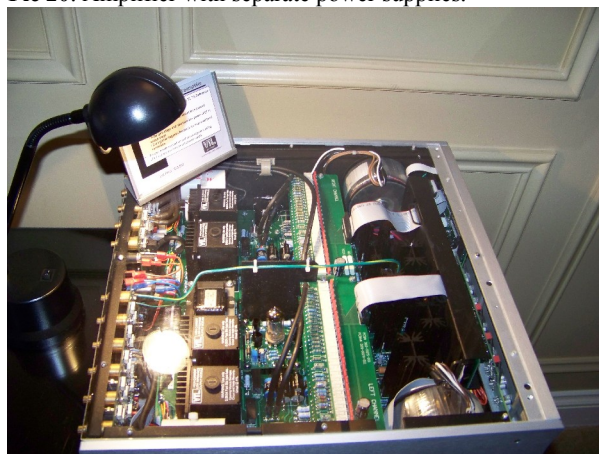
Pic 19: A nice piece of fine mechanics....



Pic 20: Amplifier with separate power supplies.



Pic 21: De loudspeakers use Lansche plasma tweeters, the highest frequencies sounded OK, the whole system was not really impressive.



Pic 22: The use of relays for volume control is also used by others.



Pic 23: When you think you've seen it all, you encounter loudspeakers with 12 (sic!) units each. Dit not sound unpleasant, but a more extensive listening test should reveal whather it also sounds realistic.



Pic 24: The loudspeakers were again “more of the same”, but you need to rent a fork lift to place the amplifiers.