



# The Montreal Hi-Fi Expo

by Richard S. Foster

It's hard to imagine this show has been thriving for the last seventeen years! I don't know what the attendance figures were, but I will say this was a busy three days with plenty of great exhibits from around the world. The main venue was the Delta Hotel on Kennedy Boulevard offering ten floors of exhibits while a secondary hotel as the Sheraton Four Points just across the street was offering an additional five floors.

There were in excess of 325 manufacturers, distributors and retailers exhibiting their wares. The place was packed! If you'd like to take a look on-line at some of what was going on, then visit: <http://www.hifiexpo.com/>. My main task was to cover the Canadian manufacturing sector. Having not been at the show for about five years - and even then, not paying as much attention to what was going on in my own country - I was totally unprepared for the sheer number and quality of these products. There are some very innovative designs offering quality sound... and in many cases, at very affordable prices. The only major disappointment I encountered was that many rooms that were supposed to be open at 9AM on Friday for the audio press and retailers (the show opened at 1PM for the public) were still closed. This was a real bummer because it would have been the ideal time to spend some additional quality time with the exhibitors. Having said that,

many exhibitors were still setting up in the wee small hours of the morning, trying to get their rooms to sound right. One of the distributors/dealers I know told me they were up until 4AM working on their room, so perhaps it is understandable that some manufacturers opted not to open before the public arrived. That's got to be a hard call, because they certainly missed a great opportunity to impress the press.

Two of the Canadian distributors dealing on the software side of the business, May Audio, <http://www.mayaudio.com/mayaudio/home.asp> and Diamond Groove, <http://diamondgroove.com/> were both enjoying healthy sales. I know that May was selling CDs, but Diamond Groove, bless their vinyl loving hearts, were just selling black gold, which was moving out of their room at lightning speed. They even got me for a long out-of-print Mosaic box set of the complete Maddy sessions by Amos Milburn, new and unused. Thanks guys!

Speaker manufacturers as always, were present in abundance and I must say that in several cases

I was delighted to hear such excellent sound quality... especially under show conditions. But I'll come back to those. The product I was most smitten with was by a new Canadian company - and from Newfoundland no less - Aurum Acoustics, <http://www.aurumacoustics.com>. President and chief designer, Derrick Moss, has created and is manufacturing a fine sounding, stand-alone CD player/pre-amplifier (Integris CDP). His real wonder is the Integris Active 300B. Basically what we're talking about is an active loudspeaker system utilizing their special 300B amplifier for the midrange and tweeters while employing woofer amplification



Aurum Acoustics

by Briston. Believe me when I say I was drooling over the sound I heard in this room. I spent some great time with Moss early one morning as he put the products through their paces. I really didn't find the clogging colorations so



Arum Acoustics

Blue Circle Audio. <http://www.bluecircle.com> have been around the Canadian scene since 1991. Owner/designer Gilbert Yeung has done an excellent job of filling out his electronics catalogue since the days of his original product, the BC-3 line-stage. His product range consists of everything from hybrid amplifiers (tubes and transistors), line-stages whether they are dual mono, tubed or transistor, with a pricing structure that starts at

approximately \$1100CDN all the way to \$15,000CDN! Their amplifiers start at \$1995CDN and move right to the \$21,000CDN price point. A phono stage, integrated amplifiers, various power cords, interconnects, speaker cables, power line conditioners and

often associated with SET playback and because of the uniqueness of this design the woofers (in a sealed enclosure within the speaker system) passed my AC/DC Thunderstruck test with flying colors. Whilst they're still pre-production models, these products will be available later this year. The cost for the Integris Active 300B (amplification and speakers) is going to be approximately \$30,000CDN and the CDP will be \$10,000CDN. That allows you to include your favourite phono section with no digital spillage, and the flexibility of the CDP allows you to employ either single-ended or balanced connection. Cables for the speaker system are included, sourced from Cardas. This is a very innovative product and I am still trying to figure out if I can get these babies in my room for a test run when production starts. My biggest concern is going to be space... but out of my living room!



The Small Blue Circle

several other accessories complete a product list that encompasses in excess of 65 items! I spent some great time with Gilbert one morning and we listened to my test CD-R which compared the same tracks using the Helikon mono and Titan mono. Listening to the Martin Logan

Ascent-i loudspeaker system, the electronics consisted of Gilbert's BC28 (120 watts, stereo class AB hybrid power amp with 2-6922's at \$5195CDN), the BC3 Galatea Mk II tubed, dual-mono line-stage, (\$6495CDN) and a Wadia 302 CD player. The sound was open, airy and very accurate to these ears. I know this CD intimately and we were both able to clearly discern the differences between the two cartridges. I really liked what I heard and will spend some time in the near future discussing these electronics since I've had a chance to take a longer listen at home.

Sim Audio, <http://www.simaudio.com>, is not a name unfamiliar to readers of this magazine. Based in Quebec, they've built an international reputation by offering some fine electronic components, not only for two channel aficionados but also for those inclined to move towards multi-channel music or home theatre installations. I spent a few minutes talking with Lionel Goodfield, Sim's V.P. of Marketing who basically explained to me that the new toys on the block were their Moon Limited Edition Series. This currently consists of five products in two different categories. In the MOON Limited Edition Balanced Differential Music System we have the Eclipse LE CD Player, P-5 LE Dual-Mono



Fab Audio

Image, presented by the magazine of the same name, took up a good part of two hotels in downtown Montreal, and lived up to the Festival's reputation of being second in appeal only to the Primedia Home Entertainment shows.

A number of new products were introduced at Son & Image. A combination of preamp and power amp finished just two weeks before the show were **Blue Circle's** BC101 line stage and BC100 50Wpc amplifier, for \$2245 and \$1995, respectively. (Unless otherwise noted, all prices are in Canadian dollars; all speaker prices are per pair.) Designer Gilbert Yeung was on hand, wearing his distinctive "blue circle" foam headgear.

**Coincident Speaker Technology** had the Series II version of their floor-standing Partial Eclipse (\$4500), now completely revised from the original model: new tweeter (a special version of the famous Revelator), midrange, and woofer, with corresponding crossover changes. With a very useful 92dB sensitivity, the Partial Eclipse Series II sounded first-rate driven by Coincident's MP-300B amplifier (\$5200).

**Tetra** is a Canadian manufacturer of speakers whose early models I didn't much care for, but judging by the sound of the new Manhattan 120 (\$1900), a small two-way with minimalist crossover (just a single capacitor), they've come a long way. The speakers, driven by **Rogue** electronics, had a notably clear, open sound.

Another small two-way at around the \$2000 mark (\$2100, to be precise) was the **Reference 3A Dulcet**. This was one of the hits of the show — several people independently told me how impressed they were with it, and I had to agree: a very precise, spacious sound, and surprising bass extension (-3dB at 48Hz) for such a small speaker.

But many people would consider \$2100 too much to spend on a small speaker, no matter how good. For these folks, the Montreal



PHOTOS: ROBERT DEUTSCH

Reference 3A Dulcet loudspeaker

\$1975! It sounded amazingly good for the price. (But not, I hasten to say, as good as the system with the Reference 3A Dulcet.)

Another system demoed at the show that has to be one of the best values around was from **Newform Research**. This was a nearly complete digital system based on the highly regarded Newform R645v2 ribbon hybrids, biamped using a **Behringer** DCX2496 pro model crossover-equalizer and driven by the amplifier section of a **Panasonic** XR45 receiver (a digital amp that uses a Texas Instruments chip set). Not including a source (the show system used an inexpensive **Pioneer** CD player), the price is \$4664.

**Aurum Acoustics**, from Newfoundland, had some highly ambitious offerings that I'd first encountered at the 2004 Consumer Electronics Show: the \$30,000 **Integris Active 300B**, a tri-amped active speaker using amps powered by 300B tubes to run the midrange and top, and a solid-state amp for the bottom. Thoroughly reworked since CES, the **Integris Active 300B** now uses a **Bryston** amp for the bass and new output transformers made by **Plitron**. They also have the **Integris CD player-preamp**, which sells for \$10,000. The designs seemed well thought out, and the sound was quite promising.



Focal-JMlab distributor Daniel Jacques with the Electra 927 Be.

show had some very worthy products. **Odyssey**, headed by the ever-enthusiastic Klaus Bunge, had a system that included a passive line-stage preamp, amplifier, speakers, and cables (excluding only a source component) — all for

Among the big boys, the speaker that most impressed me was **Focal-JMlab's** Diva Utopia Be. Compared to the Grande Utopia Be, the Diva is almost sensibly priced (US \$11,500), and I find its proportions more attractive. Driven by **YBA** electronics, the sound of the Diva Utopia Be had a sound that was at once delicate and powerful.

For the tweekers among us, there were some intriguing products from **Gingko Audio**, who offer a variety of stands and vibration-control platforms made of acrylic, with elastic balls for isolation. Gingko's impressive demonstration used a vibration sensor attached to a component to show the reduction of



Odyssey Nightingale and Lorelei loudspeakers.



# Montréal 2004

## Day two



Aurum was back this year, after an interesting but possibly premature start last year. This Newfoundland company is offering something totally different from anyone else. Designer Derrick Moss has designed a pair of large three-way amplifiers accompanied by a large six-channel amplifier to drive them. The amp itself contains an electronic crossover, and so there is one amp channel for each driver. The midranges and tweeters are driven by single-ended tube amplifiers. The woofers (which come into play below 375 Hz) need more power, and are driven by solid state sections from Bryston.

The setup was much more complete and finished than last year, and it was accompanied by an Aurum Integris CDP, the \$10K CD player with gorgeous finish. The sound? Well, let's just say we're not prepared to bet against Moss carving out a niche for himself.

have a resonance of 19 Hz. This is of more than casual interest, because the resonant frequency is *also* the frequency below which response drops like a stone. Indeed, Verity claims response down to 15 Hz. It couldn't do that in a hotel room (nor in most rooms), to be sure, but I can testify it doesn't get timid as the music reaches for the lower octaves!

The oddest speaker display was that of Totem, which had used lights, cloth, and silhouettes to create a forest. Hidden behind one of the cloths was a pair of...Forest speakers. A small video setup was at one end. You can see it on page 30. Five stars for imagination, but just half a star for catering to visitors curious about Totem's new products.

Over at the Cyrus room, I had a good look at the new Cyruslink system, meant to store all your music and make it available throughout the house. Its heart is the C\$9500 Linkserver, which looks like a CD player, but contains a huge hard disc (up to 250 Gb).

I was surprised to see Bösendorfer exhibiting at the Festival for the first time. Yes, the legendary piano maker. It's not so well known that the company also makes loudspeakers. The demonstration was done with a video system, using the D-VHS high definition system. Both the video and the audio rather disappointed me, though that may reflect more on the people who had set up the room than on the actual performance of the Bösendorfer speakers.

I didn't have time to brave the long lineups for the demo of the Sensio 3-D video system, whose latest incarnation I had seen in Vegas. But the Montreal demo included one more key product: D-Box's Odyssée motion simulator chairs. Albert did get to see (and feel!) it, and reports that the combination was a memorable one.

I got to hear an exceptional demonstration of the Linn Unidisk player...not that I needed one, since by the time the Festival opened *UHF* had its own Unidisk. Past Linn rooms were rather reverberant, with too much surface and not enough furnishings. This time wrap-around curtains tamed the nasties. The Unidisk fed a Klimax Kontrol preamp, three Klimax amps (two monoblocks and a stereo amp, driving Akurate 242



speakers. An SACD version of one of the familiar Patricia Barber recordings sounded sumptuous.

The small Newfoundland company Aurum was back, with a more mature version of its unusual system: four single-ended tube amps for the midrange and tweeter, Bryston solid state modules for the bass, and electronic crossovers all around. Very nice. For good measure, Aurum had brought its own Integris CD player. I wouldn't be surprised if we

heard more from Aurum.

Most of turntables were playing at the show, including ones from Clearaudio, DPS, Roksan, and Pro-Ject, among others. Is vinyl dead? Sure...like tubes are dead!

Want more about the show? You'll find plenty of text and pictures on our site: [www.uhfmag.com/Montreal2004](http://www.uhfmag.com/Montreal2004).

By any standard, this was a superb show. Will we be back next year? Just try to keep us away!



FEATURE



orchestra. "The sound is dynamic, but without fatigue," he explained.

We entered another large room featuring the YBA CD player and amplifiers, and massive JMLab speakers. "I don't hear the speakers," whispered Michael. I was startled. "It's as if the music is right there, as if the speakers have disappeared". I got it.

We played the final song on the *Gladiator* soundtrack with the Living Voice OBX speakers, the Chord front end, amplified by Conrad-Johnson, and the music suddenly filled the large room. "These speakers are not too big," he said, "Yet they create a very wide image."

We spent a long time listening to different selections through the newly-introduced Aurum Acoustics Integris 300B active speaker system (including a stereo tube triamplifier with six-channel output), with an Integris CDP player-preamplifier. Michael asked to listen to *Sirens*, a track on another of his CDs, called *Mythos*. Both Jimmy and Michael were impressed with the abundance of detail, the extended dynamic range and

**Illustrations:**

*Above:* The Totem "forest," hiding an actual pair of Forest speakers. *At right:* The gorgeous Song Audio display, including the SA-1 line level preamp and the SA-300 MB single-ended tube monoblocks.

the rock-solid impact. Jimmy was then particularly drawn to another room where the Creek CD player reached us through Epos speakers. "One of the best systems for the price," he asserted. We listened to the haunting music of *The Sea*, the first track on the Trio Morcheeba's *Big Calm* CD. Both were speechless at the end. "We'll wait here," said Michael.

Another one of his favorites was the Chord array of sculptured components, from the DAC 64 to the 500 watts monoblocs and high frequency power supplies, playing through Neat speakers. As Lisa Gerrard's mournful voice rose in the quiet background, I could tell Michael was moved. "You can just close your eyes and..." He didn't finish.

We then had a superb example of quality LP reproduction with the Clearaudio turntable, playing *Funkjazztical Trickenology* through an Accustic Arts integrated amp and the stunning Acapella speakers. "Wow, that sounds great, we're right here with them," said both of my companions. "Turntables are back," I said to them, echoing what I had suggested to Gaetan earlier.

They looked around the room at the numerous turntable creations, including the sophisticated Clearaudio Master Reference.

As though to confirm that, we ended the audio tour with Austria's Pro-Ject Audio Systems turntables for all budgets. *Eric Clapton Unplugged* was on and we sat quietly, facing the large Magneplanars 1.6 QR panels. The sound was natural yet not spectacular, and my companions said nothing. The source was a Pro-Ject RPM9 turntable with its own carbon fibre arm and an acrylic platter. Added to it, for precision, was a Pro-ject Speed Box SE (a high precision, quartz-generated electronic speed regulator), a Pro-ject Tube Box (phono stage and voltage regulator) and Exposure preamp and power amp. "You know who are our best customers in Europe?" asked the representative as we prepared to leave. "They're 16-year olds."

As I've said, there was nothing in the sound that shouted "Here I am, look at what I can do, aren't you impressed?" Nothing, except the music.

And the fact that we could just reach out and touch Eric Clapton if we wanted.



FEATURE



# AV TOUR 2004

## SoundStage!<sup>™</sup> *live*



We photographed the Aurum Acoustics active speaker system at last year's Son & Image show, but this year's version is far more finished. The system (\$24,000 CDN) includes the speakers, Integris Active 300B amp and all cables. On top of the rack is the Aurum Acoustics CDP CD player/preamp (\$8000).

Schneider, D. (2004, April 2). Faces and Places. *Soundstage! Live* Retrieved April 2, 2004 from [http://www.shows.soundstagelive.com/shows/avtour2004/mtl\\_facesplaces1\\_1.shtml](http://www.shows.soundstagelive.com/shows/avtour2004/mtl_facesplaces1_1.shtml)



Canadian manufacturer [Aurum Acoustics](#) premiered an exciting concept whose time was yesterday but hasn't enjoyed full support until now - the actively amplified, tube-driven, tube crossover system's approach aka **Integris Active Loudspeaker System**.

Massive twin-channel monoblocks with integral thermionically actuated networks powered the two-way heads while rear-mounted Bryston plate amps in series with their own monos' networks gripped the woofers. Source component? The firm's own **Integris CDP CD-player/preamp**. Where the hell did this firm come from to so unceremoniously present us with a *complete* system seemingly out of nowhere? Have I been asleep behind the wheel? It wouldn't be the first time.

Already anticipating consumer demand, Aurum also showed a prototype stereo version of their direct-drive monos which houses four channels of amplification *and* the requisite crossover networks in one very deep chassis. The monos on display sported 300B triodes for the mid/hi drivers while the speakers proper were sealed designs with an anechoically rated response of -6dB @ 20Hz, all cabling Cardas with convenient Neutrik 4-pin XLR terminations. The Integris CDP [available in black or silver] uses Anagram's ATF 24/192mkII technology, a top-loading custom-suspended Philips Pro transport and offers very comprehensive connectivity. An integral DSP-executed multiband parametric EQ allows room correction while a phase correction protocol specifically for the Integris Active Loudspeaker System eliminates excess phase. Future upgradeability includes upgrades to full DSP-controlled active crossovers.

Your scribe exited this room muttering "Slam dunk squared" like a mantra to protect from hysteria and untoward excitement. Needless to say, with Aurum's permission, some lucky duck at 6moons simply *has* to look into this achievement to secure the firm the broader recognition it deserves just for concept and execution alone. Derek Moss [president of Aurum], consider this your invitation whenever you're ready to brave the scary new world of Internet audio reviewing.



APRIL 2004

## LES TUROCZI DOES MONTREAL

From the category of *interesting exhibits*, let's begin with the efforts of the folks at **Aurum Acoustics** of Newfoundland. This is a full-systems approach which includes a single box CD player/ preamp known as the Integris CDP and combined with an active loudspeaker/amplification package called the Integris Active 300B. All of it is attractively executed, reflecting strong attention to both design and implementation details. The CDP is a 24/192 upsampling player employing an Anagram Technologies-based processor and a Phillips CDPro-2 transport. Since it also serves as a full preamp, there are inputs for digital and analog sources along with many user-friendly features. Even the remote control is a step above normal, taking the form of the Harmony Smart State Technology H 748 device; a simple looking, complex functioning and clever solution for sure. The single chassis amplifier package provides triamplification as a hybrid concept combining tube and solid state sections. A Bryston-sourced stereo amp section operates the 12" bass drivers; each of midrange and tweeter sections is fed by its own 300B single-ended triode section; and all of this is presented in a large, clean-looking package. There is much to admire in this overall design but the sound is what counts. Here the complete Integris system provided effortless, clean, large-scaled reproduction. In spite of tweaking efforts from the Aurum staff, the hotel room was clearly generating some bass anomalies, yet it was possible to listen around some of that to realize that this was a well conceived, carefully built approach to high end sound. It was expensive, with a total price approximately the \$50K range. I would love to hear this in a better setting and think that the designer has put a lot of creativity, clear thinking and flair for integration into the grand effort.

Turoczi, L. (2004, April 2). Les Turoczi Does Montreal. *6Moons.com*. Retrieved April 2, 2004 from <http://www.6moons.com/industryfeatures/montreal2/montreal2.html>

## CANDYMAN DOES MONTREAL

Although this next room was way beyond the comfort zone of my usual budgetary stomping grounds, this demo was just too good to pass by without a -- very -- honorable mention.



As Srajan mentioned in his CES report, this concept of a high-end actively amplified tube/transistor speaker system for home use is long overdue. These large 3-way loudspeakers have sealed cabinets with an anechoic response of -6dB at 20Hz. A full Cardas cabling system is provided using Neutrik 4-pin XLR terminations for the mid/high drivers rather than conventional binding posts. The hybrid amp contains four channels of amplification and active crossover circuitry all in one chassis. The midrange and tweeter drivers are driven directly by single-ended 300B triodes, the woofers by Bryston-designed solid-state amps. There are no passive crossover components anywhere in the signal pathway between amp and transducers.

The Integris CDP sports Anagram's 24bit/192Hz technology, a top-loading Philips CDPro2M transport with magnetic disc clamp and a multitude of connection options. Provisions for DSP software updates are available via a rear panel COM port. A Harmony universal remote is included to control this system, and codes for thousands of products are available for download. This was one killer system! Considering how large these speakers were, I was surprised how well they aurally disappeared. Music playback was full-range and transparent. If I had the room for this system, I'd have begged Aurum's Derrick Moss for a review loan. I strongly suggest that my 6moons colleagues consider dropping Derrick an email, provided of course they have the space to do this exceptional system justice. However, Derrick did hint that smaller speakers may be available in the near future. Regardless, this was a great idea beautifully realized. The complete package including cabling retails for \$40,000.

# Enjoy the Music.com Classic

## Le Festival Son et Image de Montréal 2004 Page 2

Report By Rick Becker

**Aurum Acoustics** presented the latest evolution of their complete system package and the sound in this room was excellent. The Integris Active 300B loudspeakers includes monoblocks that put out 5 watts SET for the tweeter, 5 watts SET for the midrange and a built-in Bryston sourced solid state amplifier with adjustable bass loading for \$24K/pr. Their Integris CDP CD player/preamplifier resamples at 24-bit/192kHz, includes five digital inputs and goes for another \$8K CN. A remote control can change absolute phase in the digital domain. This is a feature I wish would become more commonplace, and available in more moderately priced equipment, for correct phase can make a huge difference in the playback of CDs. In the photo, Derrick Moss explains all the benefits of this full range (20Hz on up) system. Cabling was by **Cardas**.



# AUDIO WORLD



January 29, 2004

## High-End on the Rock (Newfoundland)

My friends in Newfoundland will probably kill me for this, but...

*[ aside for non-Canadian readers: Newfoundland is way east in Canada, remote and sparsely populated by most people's reckoning ]*

... St. John's, Newfoundland is not exactly a hotbed of high-end audio design and manufacture. Really not a likely locale at all, to find a start-up audiophile manufacturer with noteworthy new products that stand out from the crowd.

So I am quite taken aback to discover [Aurum Acoustics](#), a boutique hifi maker led by audiophile designer Derrick Moss.

Aurum seems to have made a bit of a splash with its first products, the Integris tri-amped active loudspeaker system, driven by purpose-built tube amps, when they were launched last year at a Montreal hi-fi show.

Aurum also attracted attention at the recent CES 2004 show in Las Vegas, where they demo'd the Integris loudspeakers, and also introduced an interesting new CD player ([Integris CDP](#)), with an integrated 10-input analog and digital preamplifier, featuring Anagram Technologies Quantum 24/192 processing and a DSP-driven parametric EQ and phase correction feature.

Elliott, K. (2004, January 29). High-End on the Rock (Newfoundland). *AudioWorld*. Retrieved on January 29, 2004 from <http://audioworld.com/cgi-bin/FrameIt.cgi?Url=http://www.audioworld.org/blog/kevin/000040.shtml&ConfigFile=FrameIt.cfg>



## CES 2004 Show Report

by Roger S. Gordon, CPA

**Aurum Acoustics** - Aurum Acoustics is a new company from Newfoundland, Canada. They were demoing prototypes of their two channel stereo system which consisted of their own CD player/digital preamp, two three way floor standing speakers, and amplification. Each of the six speaker drivers are driven by its own amplifier. The two woofers are driven by a Bryston solid state amp attached to the back of each speaker cabinet. Each of the midrange drivers and tweeters are driven by a single 300B vacuum tube amplifier. The four 300B amps were located on two separate amps which look like stereo amps except that each circuit is dedicated to a separate driver. On display as a static exhibit was one large piece of equipment that had all four 300B amps mounted on it. This should be available in the future. Wiring was by modified Cardas. The sound of the system was very impressive. Large soundstage, very detailed, and musical. Pricing is still tentative. The speaker/amps combo will probably be sold for \$25,000 to \$30,000. The CD player/digital preamp will probably sell for \$7000-\$8000. An unusual concept but one which makes a lot of sense if you are not a mix and match audiophile.

Gordon, R.S. (2004, January ?). CES 2004 Show Report. *Positive Feedback Online*. Retrieved on January 15, 2004 from <http://www.positive-feedback.com/Issue11/ces04rg.htm>



# show REPORTS

2004 CES "blur" of a show... Part 3 of many to come!

by Dave and Carol Clark



Aurum showed a speaker that is a full system of sorts. Each speaker has their own built in woofer amplifier, but they also come paired with an external 300B amplifier that drives the mids and tweeters individually. No crossovers are used and the sound was as coherent as get out. Aurum also has the Integris CD/preamplifier to fill out the chain! Really cool!

Clark, D. and Clark, C. (2004, January ?). 2004 CES "blur" or a show...Part 3 of many to come!. *Positive Feedback Online*. Retrieved on January 15, 2004 from <http://www.positive-feedback.com/Issue11/ces04i.htm>