

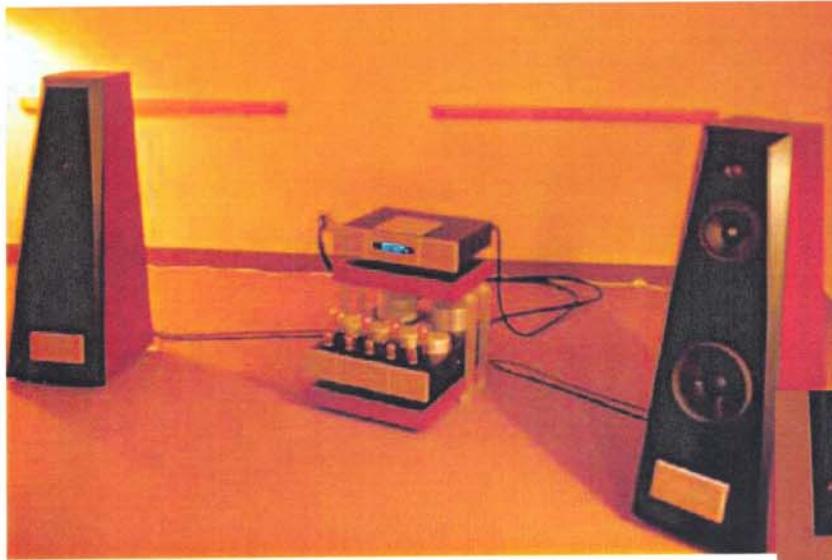
► and Kronos integrated. The Metis is a remote control, tube line-stage but arrives complete with an internal, solid-state phono-stage. In the UK, supplied with a machined metal remote handset, it is going to cost \$995. The Atlas is a traditionally styled, open chassis push-pull power amp, based around a single pair of

that contains three-way, active, tube cross-overs along with six channels of amplification. The tweeters and midrange units of the dedicated floorstanding speakers are fed by single-ended 300B amplifiers, while two solid-state channels handle the bass. Fit, finish and presentation are all first rate, and like many interactive

simple merely made it more intriguing. I'm hoping to renew my acquaintance on home turf, something which I'm seriously looking forward to. Hopefully Aurum can overcome the traditional hi-fi prejudice against one-brand/one-time solutions; they certainly deserve to. In the meantime, consider this as B&O for people who want the convenience but do actually care about the sound. It's not small, but it is seriously clever.

What did we learn today?

We learnt that the long-harboured suspicion that the real action on the other side of the Atlantic is happening North of the



EL34s a side. Complete with a valve cage, this will set you back \$1300 on this side of the pond. The Kronos simply takes the Atlas chassis and adds a volume control and source select to the front panel. The sound at the show was exactly what you'd expect – sweet, open and quick. When it comes to entry level high-end I reckon Rogue are back – and with a bang!

However, there was one other really impressive product, or rather, system, on show. First raved about in prototype form by RSF in last year's show report, the Aurum Acoustics system is finally nearing production – and it's unusual to say the least. Front-end is the Integriss CDP, a combined CD player and pre-amp. This then feeds the power-amp section, a single chassis

systems, material value is also exceptional, if the company hits its projected pricing.

Listening to the Aurum system, it fools you at first into thinking that it's a little slow and lazy. It's not. It's actually so relaxed and unforced, so devoid of edge or strain that you're not getting the normal cues that you expect from a hi-fi system. There's no stridency to suggest pace or urgency, no grain or glare to infer drama or leaps in level. Instead the system takes almost anything in its stride, sounding spookily realistic on vocals in particular. Sonically, this was one of the most rewarding sounds at the show. That it came from a system that was both innovative and in a weird paradox, conceptually complex yet physically



border contains more than a grain of truth. We learnt that although RSF lived in Montreal for several years, he still can't find the main landmarks. And finally, we learnt where we'll be at the beginning of April next year. Why don't you join us – Montreal is well worth the trip. ▶

Montreal's Le Festival Son & Image

Robert Harley

Montreal's annual Le Festival Son & Image brings together lots of new gear, great sound, and a huge number of audio and music enthusiasts. Although the organizers added "& Image" to the show's name some years ago, this was very much a music-oriented, two-channel high-end audio show. After hearing so much buzz about this show for years, I made my first trip to the Canadian northeast to experience it firsthand. Here are the highlights.

Discoveries

No matter how many hi-fi shows I attend, I never fail to come across brands that are new to me and which seem to offer great promise. I'll tell you about the three products that stood out for me.

Real innovations are few in high-end audio, but a new playback system from a start-up Canadian company called **AURUM ACOUSTICS** combined not only innovative thinking, but beautiful execu-

tion to produce one of the two best sounds at the show. The Integris Active 300B system is a CD player with source switching and volume control, a power amplifier with four channels of 5W 300B power and two channels of 100W solid-state amplification, and a crossoverless loudspeaker. The system is tri-amped, with one 300B output tube driving each midrange and tweeter, and the Bryston-designed 100W transistor amp driving the woofer. The crossover is implemented at line level in the power amplifier. This means the 300B output tube is connected directly to the driver voice coils, with no inductors or capacitors in the signal path. This is a brilliant concept, delivering the benefits of 300B amplification without the limitations of the tube, mainly the need for high-sensitivity, high-impedance loudspeakers, soft bass, and a frequency response that changes with the loudspeaker's impedance curve.

Active loudspeakers have many technical advantages but, with few exceptions (Meridian's DSP Series, for example), haven't been commercially successful. The Aurum Acoustics approach makes the system seem, look, and feel like a conventional system, yet realizes the enormous technical superiority of line-level crossovers and tri-amping.

Listening to this system was a highlight of the show. The sound had an immediacy and directness that was so involving. Even standing up in the back of the room, I heard a magical sense of life and palpability. After being bowled over by some quiet acoustic music, I suspected that the system may be limited by the 5W amplifiers. The designer had no qualms, however, about letting me play my own CDs and control the volume. Surprisingly, the system played as

loudly as one would want, with no sign of strain. In addition, the bass was deep and extended, with excellent control and pitch definition from the sealed-cabinet loudspeakers. This is something special.

Shipping in July, the complete system consists of the \$11,000 (Canadian dollars) Integris CDP and \$30,000 Integris Active 300B.



The Aurum Acoustics system brings a fresh new idea to music system design.

Best Sound of the Show

WILSON AUDIO produced the show's best sound in a structured demo featuring the MAXX 2 driven alternately by **SPECTRAL** and **MARK LEVINSON** electronics. Helped by a large room and terrific musical selections, the MAXX 2 had staggering dynamics and lifelike timbres. It was a different presentation from the Aurum Acoustics system described earlier, but each had its own special qualities.

has left the audio world a richer place for his part in it—and a poorer one for his passing on March 31. It's safe to say we won't see his like again.

UNITED KINGDOM *Paul Messenger*

One of the more interesting exhibits at Sound & Vision 2005, the recent Bristol hi-fi show (reported in full last month), was Exposure Electronics' new 2010S CD player. On the face of it, there was nothing unusual about the 2010S—specialist hi-fi companies have been making CD players for 20-odd years by buying in the various elements from a number of suppliers to create their own recipes. But whereas it used to be easy enough to source a complete high-quality CD transport, the advent of DVD and SACD have led to the replacement of CD-only drives by multifunction DVD/CD/SACD versions, which some believe represents a significant compromise.

Finding it impossible to source a complete dedicated CD mechanism of sufficiently high performance and reliability, Exposure Electronics investigated the possibility of building its own transport, using such building blocks as were still available as well as the resources of its Malaysian parent company, where necessary, to develop its own elements and pull the whole thing together.

Three billion or so CDs were sold over the past decade, and Exposure believes that the format still has a long, bright future as a core medium for two-channel music. Their numbers looked pretty good, suggesting that an anticipated tooling investment of around £35,000 could be amortized over five years, with further bonuses if other small, specialist brands decided to purchase the complete disc drives. Myrral has already confirmed its interest, and others are now evaluating the possibility, including brands based outside the UK.

The project has proved complex. Fortunately, the core Sony laser-motor assembly that was part of the now-obsolete BD25 mechanism formerly used by Exposure is still available from its original manufacturer in China. Exposure has developed its own chips to process the laser-read data and, by separating the bit-processing chip from that driving the display, has actually improved the drive's audio performance. The display is sourced from

INDUSTRY UPDATE

Futaba in Korea, the sled mechanism from yet another Far Eastern source.

While small, specialist hi-fi companies remain vulnerable to the effects of the rapidly changing technology cycles found in the wider world of consumer electronics, Exposure's initiative illustrates that, with the application of imagination and ingenuity, it's still possible for hi-fi manufacturers to survive and prosper among the mass-market sharks.

CANADA: MONTREAL

Robert Deutsch

The crowd looked like the ones you see at those Boxing Day Doorbuster sales. But the people lining up in the corridors of the Montreal Delta hotel a good half hour before the show opening of the Festival SonImage (FSI) were not looking for \$29.95 DVD players; they were there to see and hear high-performance audio equipment. And that's exactly what they got. With 2005 marking its 10th year, FSI has emerged as second in North America only to Primus's Home Entertainment shows, and while it has expanded its coverage to include video/home



Eli and Orla Gershman with the Black Swan.



Derick Moss of Aurum Acoustics with the Integris Active 300B and Integris CDP.

theatres, the emphasis is still on audio, mostly of the two-channel variety.

Finished-just-in-time products are a great audio-show tradition, and the outstanding exemplar of this tradition at the 2005 FSI was the **Gershman Black Swan** (\$36,000; speaker prices are per pair and, unless otherwise specified, all prices are in Canadian dollars). According to designer Eli Gershman, he'd finished the Black Swan only the day before the show. It strikes me as the best-looking Gershman speaker yet and, based on what I heard at FSI, probably the best-sounding one, too. Its interesting physical design has a midrange/tweeter module "straddling" the woofer box rather than being placed on top of it. Not quite as freshly made but still new at FSI were the **Chord One** CD player (\$7395) and **ProAc Studio 140** speaker (\$3800), both North American debuts, and the **Rogue Audio Metis** preamp (US \$995) and **Atlas** power amp (55Wpc, US \$1395), which had their world premieres.

The **Aurum** Integris Active 300 loudspeaker was introduced in prototype form at the 2004 Consumer Electronics Show but has since undergone some significant evolution. The availability of a new, 10" SEAS woofer with better performance than the earlier 12" version has allowed a reduction of the cabinet size, with attendant technical and aesthetic advantages, and Aurum now puts the Bryston subwoofer amplifier module in the same chassis as the 300B amp that drives the midrange/tweeter module. This unique product now sounds ready for prime time, and while \$30,000 is not cheap, it's a fully active "turnkey" system that includes all the cables; all you need is a preamp and source—or, as Aurum would prefer, their Integris CDP CD player-preamplifier (\$11,000).

A line of audio electronics I hadn't heard of before was **Chapter**, whose product literature claims that it's "the British high-end audio manufacturer." I guess Linn, Meridian, Cloud, Musical Fidelity, etc. don't quite cut it. However, I will say that the Elan X Baby speakers sounded very good indeed driven by the Chapter Perseus preamp (US \$9500) and Couplet power amp (US \$12,000).

One company that has a legitimate claim to being considered the British speaker manufacturer is **Tannoy**. For a while, it seemed that audiophiles considered Tannoys too old-fashioned, but

Enjoy the Music.com Classic

Le Festival Son et Image de Montréal 2005



Rick Becker



Aurum Acoustics sent me an invitation be sure to visit their room again this year. I've raved about them in the past, and this year they've outdone themselves again. The system is entirely their own. The head-end is a CD player/dac/preamplifier, which feeds a 300B tube amplifier, which powers the mid-tweeter section of their loudspeaker. The bass driver is powered by an internal solid state amplifier. This year they reduced the size of the woofer from 12" to a much

superior new 10" Seas driver, allowing them to reduce the overall size of the speaker cabinet. Without checking my videotape from last year, I would have to say the change is both obvious and welcome. This was one of the very **Best Rooms** at the show, based on some listening from my reference compilation CD. Of particular note was the orientation of the rig in the room. I've commented in the past that rooms set up on the diagonal, rather than parallel to the front wall, often sound better in the square rooms at shows. (This year I did not see very much set up on the diagonal). In a rectangular shaped room, Aurum set up their rig on an angle to the long front wall, but not even close to the diagonal, as you can see in the photo.

Enjoy the Music.com Classic

Le Festival Son et Image de Montréal 2005 Phil Gold Part 2

The debate between the advocates of tube and transistor electronics will continue for many years, but in my view the differences between the sounds is narrowing. Tube designers work hard to extend the frequency bandwidth while transistor designers make efforts to avoid a cold hard sound and to tame the nasties sometimes associated with crossover distortion and other such silicon artifacts. Not only is the sound converging, but more attention is being paid to cosmetics so that sometimes it is hard to tell from a distance if an amp is tube or silicon based. Some designers even combine both technologies. Musical Fidelity have used a series of non traditional tubes in their products, such as the Nu-Vista and Tri-Vista series, while David Berning showed here a prototype preamplifier using a tube based switching power supply.

Perhaps the most extravagant attempt to narrow the gap between tubes and transistors is the Integris Active 300B from Aurum Acoustics of St John's, Newfoundland. I have seen prototypes from Aurum at CES the last couple of years, but now we have two shipping products. The Integris Active 300B (\$27,000 US or \$30,000 Cdn) is an active speaker system with 3 drive units and a central stereo amplifier with active crossovers. This may be the first active tube based speaker system, and the designers, led by Derrick Moss, aim to get the very best performance out of the 300B tubes by eliminating the passive crossover between the output stage and the drivers, allowing higher output levels and a broader bandwidth than otherwise possible. The 300B tubes are not used beyond half their rated power so tube life should be extended.





The second component is the Integris CDP (\$10,000 US or \$11,000 Cdn) which incorporates a high-end top loading CD player and an 11-input active preamp into one rather large box. The transport is the Philips CDPro2M and the digital processing comes courtesy of Anagram Technologies of Switzerland. Certainly the sound in this room was top notch with precise imaging with no sense of strain even at high volume. The bass response was extended yet relaxed, which contributed to a most musical performance.

Gold, P. (2005, April) Les Festival Son et Image de Montréal 2005 Page 2. *Enjoy the Music.com*. Retrieved on April 8, 2005 from <http://www.enjoythemusic.com/montreal2005/phl2/>.



AVTOUR
'05

Montreal, Frankfurt, and Indianapolis...
The SoundStage! Network will be there!



FACES & PLACES

Series 2

All prices in Canadian dollars unless otherwise noted



We have seen and heard the Aurum Acoustics complete system evolve, and it is now near complete production and sounding better than ever. [The Integris CDP CD player](#) (\$11,000) acts as source for the Integris 300B active speaker system, which includes SET tube and solid-state amplification (\$30,000). The outcome is a musical and dynamic system.

Mickelson, M. (2005, April) Faces & Places Series 2: AVTour '05. *The Soundstage! Network*. Retrieved on April 8, 2005 from http://www.shows.soundstagelive.com/shows/avtour2005/ml_facesplaces_2.shtml.



AVTOUR
05

Montreal, Frankfurt, and Indianapolis...
The SoundStage! Network will be there!



SHOWSTOPPERS

Series 2



The Aurum Acoustics Integris CDP is a preamp and CD player in one. It features a modular and upgradeable architecture and uses an Anagram DSP module. It costs \$11,000; look for an *Ultra Audio* review later this year.

Mickelson, M. (2005, April) Showstoppers Series 2: AVTour '05. *The Soundstage! Network*. Retrieved on April 8, 2005 from
http://www.shows.soundstagelive.com/shows/avtour2005/mlt_showstoppers_2.shtml.



Montréal 2005

Day three

The Newfoundland company Aurum was back at the show, and it's clear that its founder, engineer Derrick Moss, has not just sat around in the past year. The Active 300B system, consisting of two large speakers, six amplifiers (four of them single-ended tube designs) and an electronic crossover, has matured to the point where Moss is ready to actually put it into production. The system was being driven by Aurum's Integris CDP player/preamplifier. We've said before that Moss was on to something, and hearing the evolved system confirms it. The player/preamp (C\$11K) is superb, and the active system will be a force to be reckoned with.

Rejskind, G. (2005, April). Montreal 2005: Day Three. Retrieved on April 8, 2005 from
<http://www.uhfmag.com/Montreal2005/day3.html>.

10 January 2005

Making Sense of the **CES** Consumer Electronics Show

John Broskie

Aurum Acoustics produced some of the most civilized, refined, and ear-pleasing sounds that I heard at the show. How did they do it? 300Bs, four in fact, one per amplifier. The Integris Active 300B is a system of loudspeakers and an SE amplifier for each tweeter and midrange, with an internal high-quality solid-state amplifier sourced from Bryston for each woofer. In other words, no crossover within the speakers, as the crossover is built in the amplifier chassis. Because the tweeter amplifier will seldom be asked to clip, the sound from the SE 300B is greatly magnified, sounding more like 200W monoblocks. At \$30,000 CDN, this system is not cheap, but it was splendid.

Broskie, John. (2005). Making Sense of CES. *Tubecad.com*. Retrieved January 10 2005 from <http://www.tubecad.com/2005/January/blog0028.htm>



CES 2005

by Roger S. Gordon

Aurum Acoustics Aurum had a complete captive system—CD player/preamp, amps, cables, and loudspeakers. The amp is actually a four-channel unit with two channels driven by 300B tubes (two per channel) for the midrange and treble and two channels of Bryston-designed solid state to drive the bass. The prototype that Aurem exhibited at CES 2004 had impressed me. The sound was also impressive this year. The CD player/preamp should be available for sale by the time you read this. The complete system should be ready for sale toward the end of 2005. This is an excellent example of what can be done by taking the complete system approach.

Gordon, R.S. (2005, January ?). CES 2005 Show Report. *Positive Feedback Online*. Retrieved on January 21, 2005 from <http://www.positive-feedback.com/Issue17/ces05rg.htm>