

SAM'S by SAM TELLIG SPACE

THIS ISSUE: Sam explores an alternate audiophile reality with the Passive Multivocal Resonator, and returns to Earth with the Skylan speaker stands.

Magic Beans, Resonators, & Stands

“Good morning,” said the butcher.
 “Good morning, sir,” said Jack.
 “Where are you headed?”
 “To market, to sell this cow.”
 “You’re in luck! Save yourself the hassle of going any farther.”
 And with this, the butcher pulled from his pocket five odd-looking beans.
 “What are these?” the butcher asked.
 “Beans, of course,” said Jack.
 “The most marvelous beans ever! If you plant them tonight, by tomorrow morning they’ll reach the sky. To spare you the bother of going all the way to market, I’ll trade them right now for that cow.”
 “Deal!” cried Jack, who was so delighted that he ran all the way home to tell Mom how lucky he had been.
 Jack grew up to become an audiophile.

The Passive Multivocal Resonator

It’s hard to believe that my late friend Lars left us nearly 10 years ago. June 28 will mark the decade since his passing.

Lars loved magic of any kind. My swell Swedish friend was an early fan of Shun Mook Mpingo discs, and among the first to be enticed by the Tice clock, which somehow set straight all the electrons flowing from your mains.

I write as neither believer nor skeptic. I see no reason to remove the Shun Mook Mpingo discs from my listening room, or the lookalike RadioShack alarm clock from our bedroom. I have SteinMusic harmonizers and other “treatments” in my listening room.

Lars would have latched on to the SteinMusic Harmonizers, if he’d found them before I did. Lars was a leader! He also would have flipped over the Passive Multivocal Resonator (PMR), from HighEndNovum, in Brachbach, Germany. It’s a plate, or bowl, 14” in diameter, cast from “bell bronze.” Some wags have taken to calling the PMR “the Magic Gong.” The basic economy version lies flat, unless you orient it vertically on one of those flimsy wooden stands once favored by Franklin Mint collectors—though a wooden stand would likely collapse under the PMR’s 15 lbs (7.5kg).

But you don’t want the basic model, and anyway you can’t get it here. The PMR Premium—the one you’re getting, if you’re getting one—has an integrated tripod stand, also bronze, that attaches to the bowl with a large bronze nut that looks like a phase plug and probably is. You need table or shelf space 14” wide by 9.5” deep to accommodate stand and bowl. The PMR Premium retails for \$2190. If you have *two* cows to sell, consider two for \$4380.

I found it awkward to place the PMR in my listening room, and even more so in our living room, where so much stuff already occupies anyplace the PMR might optimally sit—namely, between and behind the two speakers, at ear level.

Want to go completely mad? You can adjust the effect of the PMR (assuming there is an effect, which I do) by moving it forward or back. I borrowed an IKEA barstool from the kitchen for that purpose.

Achtung! Those edges are sharp—they can scratch wood and delicate finishes. Which presents another problem, to go along with one of positioning: If you use something to protect your delicate furniture from the PMR, might that



Wagner would be proud. The PMR resonator from Germany is cast in bell bronze.

protective material alter the Gong’s magic properties? As with Jack’s magic beans, it matters where you plant it.

No two PMRs are exactly alike, in the way that no two rifles, handguns, or manual typewriters are exactly alike. Surface imperfections (little dings and creases) are part of the charm—figuratively and, perhaps, literally.

There’s something almost pre-medieval about this thing. No, make that Bronze Age. Homer. Virgil. Echoes of Wagner.

Sure enough, each PMR begins as a “primitive model” that creates a “two-sand mold” for the casting of each unit. A bronze billet is heated to 2192°F (1200°C), then the molten metal is poured into the two-sand mold, creating “a fine crystalline structure of metal” as it cools.

When struck, the PMR rings like a bell. It *is* a bell. I’ve taken it into our dining room and used it to summon guests to dinner.

“The PMR can be placed almost anywhere in the listening room,” says HighEndNovum’s Michael Jungblut.

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As I moved the PMR forward, toward my listening throne, I thought the sound did change, becoming, if anything, slightly less bright or metallic. For me, the PMR imparted a bell-like clarity to the music, a richness of timbre that rang true. It burnished the sound, especially of brass instruments, but the sounds of woodwinds and strings, too, seemed enhanced—intensified, but not taken over the edge or made in any way shrill. Maybe I'm so old and deaf that I *need* such sonic enhancement. I was already crazed pre-PMR; now, more so.

According to Herr Jungblut, the PMR “produces only harmonics that are perceived by the human ear as pleasant and harmonious. . . . And by the way . . . bell bronze is the only material that can reproduce all overtones of the musical scale.”

I tried it on my wife, Marina, who, after 20 years with me, has heard it all. Without prompting, she said that she noticed more clarity, greater focus, more vivid sound, superior definition, and tighter, more extended bass. I turned up Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, and followed it with a

touch of *Tannhäuser*.

Recalling that our RadioShack alarm clock cost 1/20 the price of the apparently identical Tice, I hid me to Home Goods to look for a close equivalent of the PMR in some kind of metal. I turned up nothing. I'll return tomorrow.

Meanwhile, I could try to get a copy knocked off—*forged* (heh-heh)—at a local metalworking shop, but the bronze alloy wouldn't be the same. Nor would the dimensions, especially the angles. The knockoff would lack the ring of truth, and set me back several hundred dollars for what would end up a piece of scrap metal. Besides, *Stereophile* does not countenance counterfeiting.

Some background: Buffer Ergmann, of Laufer Technik, one of nine US dealers who carry HighEndNovum products, began talking up the PMR Premium before Christmas. “My” unit attended T.H.E. Show in Las Vegas in January, then came to me. By then, it was well run-in.

Ergmann arrived at my place with Walter Swanbon, of Fidelis AV, US distributor of Harbeth speakers and SteinMusic products, including the

Harmonizers. To some extent, this was a battle between two German tweak-meisters: Holger Stein of SteinMusic vs Michael Jungblut of HighEndNovum. I cheerfully pointed out that *three* tweak systems were involved—I never removed my Shun Mook Mpingo discs. There was tension in the air: competitive tweaks that may or may not complement each other.

I placed the PMR in my squarish music room (not a great place for bass). My trusty Denon DCD-1650 CD player served as a transport into my Musical Fidelity V-DAC Mk.II with Pangea power supply. Then my newly rediscovered Musical Fidelity X-PRE line stage with X-PSU power supply, unearthed in the otherwise disastrous wake of Hurricane Irene. Power amps were my Quicksilver Silver 88 tubed monoblocks. Speakers were Triangle's Comète 30th Anniversaire on purpose-made SkyLAN stands. (More anon on SkyLAN. Ireland. Canada. Sanity!)

Ergmann rummaged around in our backyard for a slab of slate. He then brought the Quicksilver amps forward to make space, and placed the PMR



The PMR Premium has an integrated tripod stand.

on the jagged slate. Our cat, Maksim, observed with great interest.

By the time Walter and Buffer had finished their setup, I was exhausted, and not eager to let on about anything I might hear—which, by then, was nothing

Buffer was irrepressible. “If you want to cancel the effects of the PMR, just place a towel over it!”

I dashed into the kitchen and returned with a towel.

He scowled. “Not a *dish* towel. Try a bath towel. Or beach towel.”

I complied. The bath towel dampened (it was wet) the effects of the PMR, but did not effectively remove it from my system. I had to wait for folks to leave. To nullify the PMR's effects, I had to take it into the dining room . . . and close two doors. This was how I latched on to the idea of using it as a Magic Dinner Gong.

With the PMR back in my listening room, I composed myself in peace for what I later told myself, and now tell you, I heard.

The PMR focused my soundstage. Pimped up my power, especially in the bass. Enhanced resolution, especially space. I could hear orchestra members and chamber players breathe, even burp, fart. The sound became single-ended-triode like. Instruments, especially brass and woodwinds, took on a vibrancy that

my young wife noticed right away.

Now, even more than before, my Quicksilver Silver 88 monoblocks displayed those startlingly lifelike timbres that I associate mainly with tubes. They quickened; I quaked. The Triangle Comète 30th Anniversaire speakers (not to be confused with the 25th Anniversaires) sounded more intense, more vivid—more at the edge, not yet over. I am fully aware that these speakers, with stands, cost about the same as the PMR Premium.

Too much clarity, too much focus from these stunning speakers from Soissons? I fiddled with the speakers so that their beautiful horn-loaded tweeters crossed well behind my listening chair. Then I eased my chair forward so that I was almost listening *through* rather than *to* the speakers.

I carried the PMR into our living room. Gad, the thing is heavy. And its edges *are* sharp—I almost cut myself. I had more problems placing the PMR between the two Harbeth Compact 7 ES-3 speakers (on Skyland stands), since other stuff was already there, and I couldn't move the table because it was loaded with books as well as equipment. My Sony SCD-777ES SACD/CD player served as transport into a Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista DAC, now a classic. I used my LFD LE 4 integrated amplifier.

My only problem was that the sound became so much more focused and dynamic, the bass so much better defined and extended, that I backed off on the volume for fear of clipping the little LFD.

I switched between our living and music rooms, schlepping the Magic Gong hither and yon, much to Marina's amusement.

Then I schlepped it into Marina's den: *her* room, *her* turf. I placed the PMR Premium in front of our Vizio TV from Costco, atop one of those sturdy Soviet wooden chairs that looks like a table.

"The table is too high, and your magic dish intrudes on the screen!" she exclaimed.

I borrowed the small stool that supports our cat's heated bed. (Of course, I had to return said bed to Maksim for the night.) Once again, the PMR enhanced the sound: better focus, more

spatial resolution. I could more easily follow dialogue in Russian movies.

Unprompted, Marina offered further observations. Having the PMR between the two loudspeakers was almost like having a center-channel speaker. It seemed to extend the bass of the excellent PSB Imagine T floorstanding speakers, just as it had with the Triangle speakers in the listening room and the Harbeths in the living room. It was almost like adding a subwoofer, without the usual sub *tsuris*.

I'll return the borrowed PMR Premium to Buffer Ergmann and Laufer Teknik's Sam Laufer. I want to hear how much I miss it. Or don't.

You'll probably have to go out of your way to hear a PMR. In addition to the nine US (and three Canadian) dealers, including Laufer Teknik, HighEndNovum's US distributor, highend-electronics Inc., can sell it online if no local dealer is available. Don't look for this thing in the catalogs of Audio Advisor, Music Direct, or Acoustic Sounds; there's no way it can be mass-produced.

If I understand Herr Jungblut correctly, the PMR complements but does not compete with, or counter, other tweaks. That's what I found.

Are you listening, Lars?