

ANALOG CORNER

BY MICHAEL FREMER

THIS ISSUE:
Room treatments
from Stillpoints.

The Sound of Nothing

In their quasi-religious pursuit of sonic purity, some audio enthusiasts are obsessed with keeping things simple: single-tube, single-ended-triode amplifiers; single-driver, crossoverless speakers; even DACs fitted with “vintage” Philips TDA1541A Crown non-oversampling chips, and some without anti-aliasing filters—never mind such products’ serious shortcomings,

sonic and otherwise.

I occasionally favor this principle of less is more—for instance, less of my room’s acoustics interfering with the loudspeakers’ output produces more accurate sound from my system, and I’m all for that. However, getting the room out of the sound is never a simple task—and is especially challenging for those whose systems must share a multi-use space with other family members or roommates.

Almost 20 years ago, shortly after moving into this house, I sought the assistance of RPG Diffusor Systems’ Dr. Peter D’Antonio. Using his Room Optimizer software, we settled on an assortment of his BAD diffusors and Abffusors—wall- and ledge-mounted devices designed to solve a room’s measured problems and manage basic acoustical issues such as the first reflections of soundwaves off of sidewalls.¹

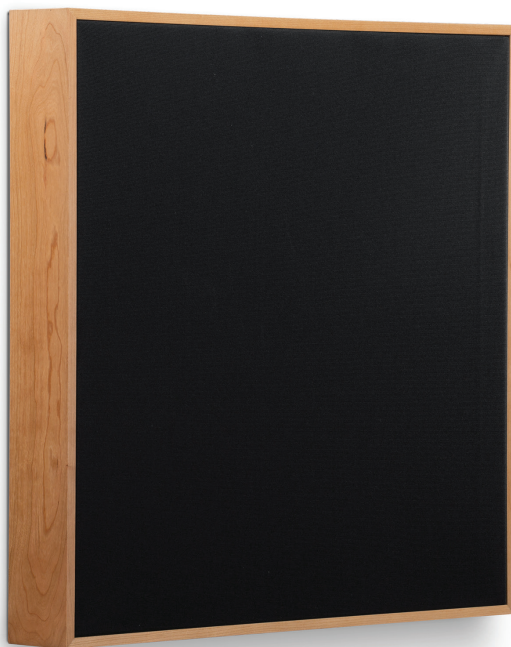
A look at RPG’s website today (www.rpgacoustic.com) makes what I installed all those years ago look somewhat primitive, but I still find it efficacious.

More recently, Synergistic Research’s Ted Denney added his tiny HFT horns. To those who laugh: they work.²

A few years ago, Stillpoints sent me four of their Aperture room-treatment frames (\$749 each), for which they’ve been granted two patents.³ Each Aperture is an absorber, a diffuser, and a resonator in a single frame—22" square by 3" thick and looking like a picture frame. A stacked pair on the front wall behind the speakers blocked the room’s only window, but the dramatic improvement in sound made it worth the loss of light. In my February 2015 column I wrote that the Apertures made room

boundaries seem to disappear, “greatly enhancing center-image stability, solidity, and focus—areas where I’d thought no improvements were possible,” given the other room treatments already in place.

Recently, Stillpoints announced the Aperture II (\$800 each), which, among other things, moves the screen structure forward so that it’s flush with the surrounding wooden frame. They claim that this makes it possible for the Aperture II to capture more air movement. It definitely improves the appearance of what already was an attractive acoustical treatment; it’s now available in a wider variety of frame finishes and screen fabrics. The Aperture II also feels somewhat lighter, and a new hanging system makes it easier to mount on a wall—or, as I discovered, on other manufacturers’ acoustical treatments.



I replaced the stacked pair of original Apertures with two IIs. To catch first reflections, I used a third Aperture II to replace a door-mounted RPG BAD Diffusor panel—its back surface was worn out, and it had been falling off the door. For balance, I added another Aperture II at the right speaker’s first-reflection point by hanging it directly on a large BAD Diffusor. I sat the remaining two Aperture IIs on the floor, where I’d originally had a pair of first-generation Apertures that were too heavy to easily hang. This took all of half an hour, after I’d listened to an hour’s worth of records and files via Roon and a recently purchased dCS Vivaldi One disc/network player.

As good as the original Apertures were, the IIs were better. Center images set up with greater authority than before against even “blacker” silences. This produced intense center-image layering, even with rock albums I’ve played a hundred times, such as the Kinks’ *Lola versus Powerman and the Moneygoround, Part One* (LP, Pye NSPL18359). In “Strangers,” written and sung by Dave Davies, along with a 3D image of his voice connected to a head was the sensation of being able to hear the walls of the vocal booth behind him, and his words were easier to follow in this somewhat reverb-drenched mix. The illusion of my room’s sidewall boundaries disappearing became even more convincing, with no price paid in terms of “dead room” overdamping.

Last night I went back in time, to February 1978, and “watched” Leonard Bernstein conduct the Vienna Philharmonic in Beethoven’s Symphony 3, from a superb reissue on vinyl of his final cycle of the symphonies, recorded live in Vienna (9 LPs,

1 I wrote about RPG Diffusor Systems’ Room Optimizer in November 1999: www.analogplanet.com/content/analog-corner-52.

2 I wrote about Synergistic Research’s HFTs in my February 2015 column.

3 I wrote about the Stillpoints Aperture in February 2015.

Deutsche Grammophon 479 8721). My room dropped away. I was in Vienna's Musikverein. Stillpoints' Aperture II panels made suspending disbelief in time travel and teleportation far easier,

and that late-evening excursion affirmed why I got involved in this crazy hobby in the first place. The Stillpoints Aperture IIs are easy-to-recommend producers of nothing. And unlike

many of the acoustical treatments used in recording studios, the Aperture II is living-room friendly, available in various combinations of fabrics and woods, or even with artwork you supply.

Stillpoints Aperture II

Editor:

Stillpoints wishes to thank Michael Fremer for his time and efforts with regards to his review of our Aperture II acoustic panels.

Indeed, Michael captures the essence of why we named them *Apertures*: "Center images set up with greater authority than before against even black-

er silences. This produced intense center-image layering, even with rock albums I've played a hundred times." Like all Stillpoints products, the information retrieval brings you closer to the recorded event as Michael aptly describes: "My room dropped away. I was in Vienna's Musikverein. Stillpoints' Aperture II panels made suspending disbelief in time travel and teleporta-

tion far easier, and that late-evening excursion affirmed why I got involved in this crazy hobby in the first place."

We at Stillpoints made our products exactly for those late-evening excursions.

Safe travels!

*Paul Wakeen
Stillpoints*