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Q&A

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How and when did your interest in high-end audio begin?

I developed a serious interest in the subject when I had an epiphany during the development of GaN (gallium nitride transistor) technology while working at International Rectifier (now Infineon, following its acquisition in 2015). The reason for this was straightforward: The performance we observed from early GaN MOSFET prototypes was significantly superior to that of the best silicon-based MOSFETs. This led me to embark on a sort of Quixotic mission to eliminate the stigma of "bad sound" associated with Class D amplification. Basically, I knew it was possible to create a perfect amplifier, and it was time to de-stigmatize Class D. Along with that, I wanted to get rid of huge heatsinks, short-lived vacuum tubes, and other outdated technologies still used in audio products, as well as the bias in audiophiles' minds about "tube amplifier sound."

When did audio develop from a hobby to a career? What kind of preparation did you have to make that commitment?

Like most people of my generation, my hobby (it was love at first listen) started very early, when I was a geeky young student in the final decades of the last century. It remained a hobby, sometimes very neglected because of the time and financial commitments needed to nurture it properly. As an electronics geek, I also built various things and experimented with "innovative" ideas, usually ending up with a pile of scraps hidden in garage drawers. My studies in physics, followed by power electronics, and then my chosen professional career path in the semiconductor market (which lasted many decades) were instrumental in laying the necessary foundations for any technically driven endeavor.

What components made up your first high-end system? And what was your ultimate "dream system" at the time?

Well, that is an embarrassing question, especially considering the nonexistent funds I had when I first contracted the audiophile sickness. My first system was a gift from my father for my graduation, consisting of a Thorens TD166 turntable, an AKAI 400DS open-reel tape recorder, and a Hirtel2020 amplifier (an Italian brand of the 70s), with a pair of three-way speakers I built myself. At the time, my dream system would have been a Marantz amplifier, a pair of AR speakers, a Revox or Technics open-reel, and a Denon turntable—all products out of reach for a penniless student in high school.

Did anyone in particular inspire you in this direction?

Well, my initiation to music and to the "mystery of electronics" was from my father with his fantastic 1967 acquisition of a beautiful Grundig stereo console. I have always been driven by my passion to merge perfection and beauty in the art of audio reproduction. That was the motivation behind AGD Productions, Inc. In the high-end audio market, many great designers have created beautiful products, intending to deliver the best possible experience in the reproduction of music. I was confident that I could make my own contribution to the high-end market, just as these famous engineers and entrepreneurs had done with their beautiful creations.

Are there any interesting trends you see on the audio horizon?

In the field of amplification, I see two major trends that, if properly developed, could significantly improve the quality and affordability of high-end audio. Both trends are fundamentally linked to Class D topology, focusing on efficiency (and size) and maintaining an unaltered signal path from source to speakers. This means the signal remains in the digital domain through PCM to PWM direct conversion, removing the need for DAC stages and additional analog PWM converters, possibly with open-loop or minimal negative feedback. Easy to say, not so easy to do in a way that delivers better and more natural sound.

What are the greatest challenges facing the high-end industry.

I think the biggest challenges in the high-end industry (and this is true in any market) are the demographic shift and the waning of a specific musical culture. If the number of buyers decreases and there is no "cultural" interest anymore, then any product dies.

What do you believe were the keys to your success?

Success?

What inspires you about your work?

The relentless search for better designs, circuits, and products is ultimately rewarded when someone shares their wonderful experience of rediscovering sounds and feelings they've been missing for a long time, now accessible again thanks to a small, unique, Art Deco-style amp that removes the fog and layers of "dust" from the reproduction of their favorite songs or music. Sometimes I think our business is truly about the "rediscovery of lost emotions" rather than the selling of electronic devices. tas