

Common Misconceptions of HiFi

1. You need vacuum-tube amplifiers

A lot of people think that tubes are better... “What about vacuum tubes” you may ask. We are frequently asked why we do not carry vacuum-tube or *valve* amplifiers. It is not as if we do not know about vacuum tubes; when Creston built his first HiFi in 1955 transistors had not even been invented yet. He fully understands the characteristics of vacuum tube amplifiers. While it is true that very early transistor amplifiers did not sound good, that is ancient history. We have proven over and over to ourselves and our customers the fact that the best amplifiers are indeed solid state. They are in everyway musically superior. Our position is that we are not here to produce various interesting sounds to suit people’s tastes; we are in this for the music and we want to enable our clients to get the fullest emotional intent the composer wanted to convey through the performance by the musicians and to have the music sound as real as possible!

It is easily demonstrable that vacuum tube amplifiers do not retain the full pitch relationships and rhythmic coherence of live music*. By the same token it is easy to understand why audiophile hobbyists are fascinated with vacuum tube amps - they are quaint, interesting-looking and the “works” are out in the open. In addition you can change sound characteristics by trying out different tubes. We have no quarrel with someone’s hobby but that’s not about music - it’s about playing with sound. We *are* concerned that well-meaning audiophile friends advise people to buy vacuum-tube amplifiers when they are shopping for a HiFi. Audiophiles are willing to deal with the serious reliability issues associated with these units. In fact it’s kind of *fun* to boast to your buddies that your amp “blew-up” last night while you were listening to it. We know from experience that most customers are most definitely not amused at the inconvenience and expense involved in owning tube equipment. Indeed, virtually all of the (solid-state) Naim amplifiers we sold in the early 1980’s are still in daily use by their owners and when we hear those systems it makes us feel very good - they still sound better than almost everything on the market today.

*After putting many systems together since 1955, Creston still was not able to consistently construct systems that sounded musical. Sometimes they did and sometimes they didn’t and he could not figure out why. Shortly after Creston and partner Mark Heaston started Concert Sound in 1981 they were invited to become Linn/Naim dealers and were invited to the Linn and Naim Factories in Glasgow, Scotland and Salisbury, England. Both companies had decided that the only way they could improve the music reproduction of their systems was to rethink the parameters by which they would evaluate them. They realized that most of the terms used to describe HiFi systems, such as “imaging”, “soundstage”, “depth”, “smoothness” etc... were non-musical terms. Audiophile terms have nothing to do with music and simply describe artifacts of the recording and play back

process and are not evident when listening to live music. They seem innocent enough, but Linn and Naim found that attempting to emphasize those factors always led to diminishing the system's ability to faithfully reproduce the two musical factors: the *TWO FACTORS* most apparent in live music!!! They shared with their dealers their method of judging their equipment, which was easily demonstrated to the customer. Taking from their voyage to Linn and Naim, Creston and Mark decided to look at music reproduction only from the standpoint of the same two parameters:

1. Pitch Resolution (keeping the tune)
2. Rhythmic Coherence (keeping the beat)

Thereafter, systems sold at Concert Sound were entirely capable of faithfully conveying the emotional intent of the music.

2. **HiFi's cost too much**

During the Viet Nam war years home music systems de-volved into just another mass-produced segment of the home appliance business. Previously, in the 1950's, the HiFi system was considered in the same light as a fine piano for the home. It cost as much as a piano, because craftsmanship and ingenuity have inherent value.

We believe that there is real value in having music in the home. Grand pianos cost between 60 and 80 thousand dollars. Our good friend David Willey read that 85% of grand pianos are in homes where no can play the piano. With a good HiFi, everyone in the family can enjoy good music. We think that our real competition is not other audio shops, but television. Most people say that they really don't listen to music any more; we believe that this is because the systems that they are trying to play music on are hopelessly incapable of playing the tune, therefore they give up and watch TV. Who wants to listen to a pitiful attempt at playing music in your house? By having good HiFi in your home you will quickly begin to experience music in a most gratifying way.

3. **It's too complicated**

When HiFi began in the 1950's, systems were very simple to use and easy to setup. However, over time the audio industry's ability to profit from gimmicky features rather than doing the necessary things to provide good sound proved too tempting for manufacturers. Today when you walk into most HiFi shops audio buzz words are thrown at you like tomato's and you are expected to play along and be interested in how the "technology of the week" is going to save you from bad sound. We do not believe this is how HiFi should be presented.

Our systems are designed with usability in mind. All of our systems consist of just three elements:

1. The Source(s)
2. The Amplifier(s)
3. The Loudspeakers

We insist on all the components having simple controls - no more, no less... For example most electronics these days have tone controls, equalizers, loudness buttons, “surround modes” and so on....

We intentionally take a simpler approach. Our electronics only provide a source or input selector and a volume/balance control. Our turntables are simple, high-resolution straight-forward designs. The CD players have simple remotes for easy playability. Our loudspeakers are pleasingly simple designs and of reasonable size.

4. I don't think I can hear the difference

One of the long-standing “urban” legends in the audio industry is that you will only appreciate a HiFi if you have a “golden ear”. This could not be further from the truth. One of the first things to realize about “golden ear” audiophiles is that they are not really listening to music - they are listening to SOUND! This type of listening, though interesting in a hobby setting, has nothing to do with good musical reproduction in your home.

We do not expect our customers to be audio “connoisseurs”. What we do hope is that they are really excited by the prospect of having realistic music reproduction in their homes. We are completely open to demonstrating the way to tell the difference between good and bad music reproduction. As stated earlier this is easily accomplished by showing you how to listen for the “tune” and “beat”.

5. I just like music - I don't need special equipment

Another common misconception is that people think we listen to six special “audiophile” jazz records on our big expensive HiFi's and do not listen to REAL music.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Our systems are designed for musical enjoyment, not for the reproduction of sound. Our dedication to this is evident through our fanatical pursuit of systems that can keep the “tune” and “beat” in the same way that good musicians do. A common result of someone finally getting a great HiFi is that their musical tastes broaden to many different kinds of music. The reason for this is that when a system is doing a poor job, one tends to play familiar music. It takes too much effort to continually mentally repair bad attempts at playing music to explore anything un-familiar.