

IN SEARCH OF THE TRUTH

The harmonious procession of sound events can have amazing results: It can bring grown men to tears, unite huge crowds of people, make someone happy and even heal illness, but it can also frustrate. Especially, when the sound of an instrument is entirely different than the desired original, and in spite of ever better equipment, the results always hit the same limit.

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This is something many audiophiles experience. They make improvements to achieve a more authentic music reproduction, but after a while, the feeling that the sound isn't as it is supposed to be returns. Then comes further optimisation and compensation, and in the end, the whole can become a very costly affair. Certainly, there are also those hi-fi aficionados who simply want to have whatever is new and great, however, most just want to enjoy their music as close to the original as possible.

"No sound – just music" is Thomas Schlipper's motto. He, too, is one of those audiophile seekers, who have never succeeded in surpassing that "certain point of elation". To him, it was the constant feeling that something just wasn't right. To get to the root of the problem and to school his sense of hearing, he began to observe himself while he was listening, so to say: He began paying attention to what he was thinking while listening to music.

For instance, if you stop to listen to a good busker, your consciousness will always try to complete this image when you later listen to a recording of the same music; it will try to assign the sounds to certain instruments and to reconstruct the moment of the recording. The brain is basically switching into a correction mode – and how can it switch off and relax while doing that?

Even as a teenager, Thomas placed his boombox inside his wardrobe, because the sound was better that way. Later he realised that even with high-end stereos, every little change had an effect, be it a different surface, a different arrangement within the room, even a different power chord – all of those factors influenced the sound of music. Sixteen years go, he was finally fed up with investing ever more money in new appliances and instead decided to find a solution to his dissatisfaction in the



way his stereos were set up. In this, it became important to him to really understand all the effects properly and for the next two years, he learnt what he could about the physics and mechanics involved, how resonances were transmitted and influenced, and which materials complemented each other to achieve the best effects. The optimal result he pursued in this was not whatever sound he liked best, but instead that which resulted in the maximum amount of neutrality, to come as close as possible to the truth, to the unadulterated playback of an audio recording.

At first glance, it seems as if he was looking for the Holy Grail among hi-fi systems, however, the first product Thomas Schlipper developed was "only" a base. A plain, yet elegant stand for loudspeakers, that is hardly visible underneath their housings. Its effect, however, justifies its use in any case, because it completely decouples the speaker from the surface underneath, eliminating resonances like impact sounds or vibrations of the floor entirely. At the same time, the loudspeaker is connected with the "écho LS" to benefit from its "frequency-neutral feedback interface". Interesting is the use of slate, which makes this feedback coupling possible in the first place, due to its layered composition, and which at first sight seems to be the key factor. However, a closer look reveals the actual technology – whose material combination with the slate leads to the desired results.

Initially, when he founded his Subbase Audio Manufacture in 2008, the self-taught audiophile was able to benefit from the fact that there were surprisingly few other suppliers for audio

set-up systems. However, it is above all his philosophy and the quality of his work that cause his customers to keep coming back to him, with the result that he was able to grow his company slowly but steadily to become a known quantity to other audiophiles. The small difference is that he does not have the same pressure to sell large quantities, like most other companies – which means he does not have to keep launching new products with ever new effects. Instead, his standard demands he find the perfect all-round solution for each customer, leading to his work being hugely appreciated. His philosophy is to hold to what he promises. And even though he doesn't depend on it anymore, he has kept his day job as IT consultant, to gain more independence.

The search for a truthful sound began with the aforementioned bases, in a reaction to significant sources of errors independent of the individual hi-fi components. Since then, the product range has grown to bases for appliances, grounding blocks, frequency generators and of course audio boards that are constructed to be frequency-neutral. The bases and the audio boards are manufactured individually – adjusted to the number of levels and length of each stereo-system, as well as to the room in which these are located. Due to their interestingly patterned wooden surfaces, they are visually very appealing and look as if they were indeed made from tropical woods. However, Thomas sets great store in local craftsmanship and therefore uses only local tree species for his veneers, which then receive their amazing patterns as a result of a special bonding method.

In actual fact, he has a very good, respectful and friendly relationship with all his master craftsmen, as a result of which he can depend on not only the relatively fast realisation of special designs, but especially also on the perfection of their work. Because even though his Subbase Audio Manufacture is basically small and manageable – his father being an inherent part of the company – his customers can definitely expect nothing less than perfection. Construction of components and parts, as well as their assembly takes place in his workshop in Neuss. Thomas not only develops and constructs, he also packs everything himself to ensure his products arrive safely with the customers, whether they are located internationally or nationally. And if a customer desires it, he even delivers his creations personally, sets them up and adjusts the system perfectly. And as aforementioned, he is not focused on selling products, but on his overall concept, as well as first and foremost – the music!

A personal meeting and an appraisal are usually the beginning of his acoustic journey. And it really doesn't matter, what kind of components are present – it does not have to be the latest or most expensive high-end system; even slightly dated stereos benefit from the changes Thomas Schlipper is able to effect. However, customers should consider whether their existing system is worth the costs generated. Overall, resonance is the big topic, and how homogenous or beneficial they are. Loudspeakers are the last link in the chain, which is where Thomas begins prospecting for errors. Even very small details can effect

huge differences, for instance by regulating the torque of case and chassis screws. This results in cancellation frequencies which Thomas is able to adjust by ear, intuition and experience. Once this is done, he checks each component, as well as all power and signal cables, to determine what results can be achieved at what cost. Lastly, Thomas takes the room itself into account. However, he does not want to change the room, because even acoustically “bad” rooms can present music that is without fault rather well. But once again, small details can have a big impact on the holographic depiction of the music, like a reflective instead of absorptive wall decoration.

Even the radiation exposure of our modern world distorts a space's soundscape significantly. After all, it is the air that transports sound – at the same time that it carries the radio waves of mobile phones and internet. After his various apprenticeships to industrial mechanic, industrial sales representative and IT consultant, Thomas not only spent a lot of time learning about physics, but also underwent an additional course as construction biologist, specialising in radiation protection. At Subbase Audio Manufacture, all this knowhow is merged. And even if some of his efforts appear slightly over the top even to some audiophiles, his customers definitely appreciate his deep understanding of the entire causal relationship.

The music most of us listen to is basically a signal on top of which plenty of errors accumulate as soon as it is replayed.



Many systems and components even add their very own style and under the guise of optimising, compensate by adding converse effects. So, when one component of a well-adjusted system is exchanged for a new one, an entirely new effect may occur. Thomas does not take any personal preferences into account when he consults and does not try to convince his customers towards certain decisions. Instead, he brings out the best in the components present to make the listening experience as authentic as possible. He basically neutralises the stereo system, so it can simply reproduce tones, instead of manifesting itself. In his entire career, he only encountered one case where a component had to be exchanged. In fact, the effect this optimisation creates is definitely audible and discernible, not only to audiophiles, if you are willing to listen and know the difference between live and recording.

To Thomas Schlipper, it is an affair of the heart to enable music enthusiasts to playback music in an unadulterated, truthful way. Improvements happen bit by bit, as long as the customer wants, and until the customer is satisfied. But even then, Thomas likes to stay in touch and is ready to advise when new components are added.

In the end, Thomas can of course not determine where the absolute truth lies. He follows the instrument's credibility to

get to the truth, resulting in a complete picture and satisfied music lovers.

PS: In case you were wondering what this likeable music nut from Neuss likes to listen to when he's at home: Mainly Jazz. Dustin O'Halloran, GoGo Penguin, Alfa Mist are his current favourites, but thanks to his customers, he is constantly encountering and learning to enjoy new music genres.

www.subbase-audio.de

