

The Sounds of Music by the Ears of a Music Lover from Portugal

Quite often love to music leads to another hobby – to becoming an audiophile. Don't be afraid of this term – this is quite healthy and even creative state. Antonio Melo Ribeiro, IT-director of RIMI Baltic Group and passionate music lover and keen audiophile from Portugal, told VIP Lounge about music and his attitude to sound. He believes that live and crystal pure sound is unthinkable without High-End class audio equipment. However this equipment must not only be bought but also properly adjusted to the surroundings. How? There are some specific laws and little tricks. Let's take a look at them on the example of Mr. Ribeiro.

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From Music to Sound

– I grew up in a music family, – says Antonio. – Nine of my close relatives – mama, five uncles and three aunts – used to play piano. They taught to play me. My grandfather had his own box in Lissabon opera. I used to attend it each time I had spare time since age of ten. So I love music since childhood.

A few years later – in the times of The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and The Animals – our music lover's father bought the first stereo system that already a student Antonio used to listen to for hours. Then there was the army. During these years one had to forget about music. And then dynamic working live began.

– I am a world level specialist in IT area, – without unnecessary modesty says Mr. Ribeiro. – Therefore I constantly have to work in different countries – in Portugal, Mozambique, England, Brazil, Angola, Canada, The Baltic States and other. Sometimes – for years. Far away from homeland in free time you have hardly anything to do: there are no friends, you don't know where to go. To get away from daily problems one vitally needs a hobby. Some do sports or go to the night clubs. But I prefer music – this is my permanent hobby. But to get maximum pleasure from it, one needs good audio equipment.

Searching for the Ideal

His first stereo system our hero bought when he was living in the Saudi Arabia. It consisted of Toshiba Aurex preamplifier, amplifier, tuner, tape cassette player and Marantz floor standers.

– At that time it was still American, but not Japanese Marantz, – highlighted Antonio. – The sound was very good. At least it was quite pleasant to listen to my that time favorites – Pink Floyd, Dire Straits and Bob Dylan.

The second stereo system was bought in Canada. At that moment Antonio got interested in classics and started to create his own music collection. The soul of the music lover audiophile longed for the ideal sound. The search for it took long years. However, as we know, the one who searches is the one who finds. Antonio found his High-End too. Today he has two unique elite class audio systems:

– The first one cost me 50 000 euro, – told Antonio. – I was working on it for a few years and it is located in my homeland – in Portugal. The second audio system is in Riga. Paradoxically, but even though it is much cheaper – only 13 000 euro – it sound better. Ideally. I collected it in some half a year.

VIP Lounge took a close look at the second stereo set.

Audio Perfection

The multiformat player Unidisk SC is the last Antonio's purchase.

It cost almost as much as the amplifier, loudspeakers, super tweeters and a subwoofer altogether – 4 700 euro. This is a player of different formats – CD, SACD, DVD and other, a converter and a preamp in a single box. It sound polite, neutral and brings nothing into sound. It doesn't have a personality.

Until this purchase Antonio had Krell processor that cost more than Unidisk SC, but it also required CD-transport, preamp and DVD-player! And here it is all in one box. Krell in contrast to Linn sounded a bit aggressive and was coloring the sound. Its owner didn't like and that's why he had decided to try some other players. The Scottish Linn he liked the most.

– It's the perfection... – comments his choice Antonio.

The Force Is in the Tubes

The second key element of the audio system is the tube amplifier:

– I don't think that amplifiers should sound like tubes or like transistors. They either sound or don't sound. The definite advantage of the tube amplifiers above the transistor ones is the even harmonic distortions that not only don't irritate a listener but are also pleasant to his ears. The transistors distort odd harmonics, they are unpleasant to listen to and they bring aggression into sound too. This is why I chose a double tube amp. However single-cycle tube amp sounds more tender and affectionate.

One should take into consideration that recently appeared the D class transistor amps with digital processors. They sound almost as good as the "tubes" and at the same time have the power of the transistors.

Crossovers are for the Deaf

And about loudspeakers:

– Good loudspeakers are the ones that without the crossovers, – considers Antonio. – Of the open type. They sound faster, cleaner and more natural. The musical stage is fantastic! While listening to the sealed type loudspeakers with the crossovers the musicians sometimes a little move on the stage, but with my floor standers such miracles don't happen. Each musician is fixed on its place during the whole track. And there are no any magical movements vertically, horizontally or in space. The stage is absolutely fixed.

Additional advantage: the open-type loudspeakers can be listened to from any place in a room. The stage remains on its place. But those ones, who listen to the ordinary loudspeakers, have to be tied to one point. That's their uneasy destiny, – says Antonio.

In Portugal music lover's opinion, it is best to listen to music with a subwoofer and the super tweeters:

– Subwoofer gives base, – states he. – If there is no sub, the stage becomes incomplete and part of the feelings from listening to music gets lost.

Having said this Antonio turned his sub off and it was hard to disagree with the High-End guru: it felt like the ground had suddenly gone from beyond the feet. But Antonio turned the sub on again and continued:

– I love to hear every little thing in music – from base to top. A sub gives base, the middle and the high frequencies – the loudspeakers, but for the super-high frequencies – from 20 000 Hz and higher – I use the super tweeters. On one hand, it is known that a human ear doesn't hear the frequencies above 18 000 Hz. On the other hand, the scientists proved long time ago that people listen to music not only by their ears, but by the whole body. They feel it. I strongly believe: to get the most from the music, it must be felt for 100%. My stereo system allows it. Because I have everything!

Room Tricks

High attention to details is not only watchmakers', but also dedicated to their hobby audiophiles' feature. These two groups unite one thing: precision. For the first group it's the precision of watches, for the second – immaculate precision of playing the favorite music. The sound gourmets are apt to so much to achieve their aim – they are even ready to change the world around themselves!

– Do you see this socket in the wall? – asks Antonio and answers himself: – This is not an ordinary socket, but the audiophiles' one. I replaced it myself. Then I listened to some music and heard the difference. The sound became more crystal and more detailed.

About replacing all wire I'm not even going to talk. This is simply natural! All the wires – the network ones, interconnects and the acoustic ones – I have only the sound ones. The wires that are supplied along with the audio equipment are not suitable for listening to music.

To get the power of higher quality is used a balanced isolation transformer. It evens the power of electricity supply network, destroys high-frequency noise and does a lot of other useful things.

A special CD-mat is purchased so that a laser reads CDs more precisely. It covers the CDs on top and after this the CDs can be inserted into CD-player. The mat is produced from the ultra thin plastic. It doesn't break and doesn't bend. But it does improve sound.

– I bought this thing in Germany for only 20 euro, – comments on his discovery Antonio. – This is a wonderful thing. Without it a laser reads not all of the ones and the zeros from a disc. But with it – many more. But probably not all of them anyway.

The vibration of the tubes negatively effects the sound. To minimize it special audiophiles' brackets are put onto them.

The classic of High-End genre is absolute isolation of every little thing. So we got to the isolation of the loudspeakers and the block equipment from the floor – from the source of the terrible vibrations that spoil the sound. Huge spikes the loudspeakers stand on take them away from the floor and make its influence onto the sound zero. The block equipment is set onto the vibroisolators that are made from special rubber and other decrementing materials.

And eventually the room where the miraculous audio system is installed is not a simple one either. The living room is decorated to minimize the influence of the elements of the interior to the sound:

– There is only the upholstered furniture that consumes sound, but not reflects it.

– The windows during listening to music are covered with the rolled jalousie because the window glasses are the strongest reflectors: the sound waves hit them and get back. As the result, at the same time can be heard the direct and the reflected sound. The latter should not exist.

– Straight behind the loudspeakers there are two Indian rugs that are made from skin and wood. Thanks to them the walls are screened. Just like the upholstered furniture, the rugs don't reflect the sound.

– In the corner there is a decorative partition to improve the frequency response curve.