

Art Dudley

Weights, Crates, and Petty Hates

The 78rpm train has been derailed for the time being. The KAB Souvenir VSP Mk.II phono preamplifier, which I intended to review in this space, has yet to arrive from its manufacturer, owing to a delay in the availability of certain parts. The Elberg MD12 Mk.III preamp has yet to arrive from its manufacturer, owing to a recent redesign. The Sentec EQ-10 preamp is here but has a broken switch I haven't got around to fixing. The McIntosh C-8 preamp, a lovely vintage piece that's available for peanuts on the used market, is still undergoing renovation by someone who isn't me.

So I'm taking this opportunity to catch up on some of the smaller matters that have piled up in the last six years, none of which quite warrants a column of its own.

It tracks well at 31c

Ortofon, EMT, Denon, and Miyajima Labs all produce phono cartridges designed to play at downforces of 3.5 or more grams. Yet most tonearms aren't calibrated for stylus forces greater than 3gm, if they're calibrated at all. Similarly, most stylus-force gauges on the market peak out at 3gm—including my beloved Technics SH-50P1, which I've used for over 20 years. (The Technic adds insult to injury by altogether eliminating the 0.1gm calibration lines from their scale between 2.0 and 3.0gm; it's like going to Macy's for an expensive mummum and being told that they don't do alterations!)

Esoteric Sound, the phono specialists who've inherited the Rek-O-Kut mantle (I wrote about their Re-Equalizer II in last month's column), have a good, cheap solution: the Rek-O-Kut Stylus Force Gauge (\$24). It's a simple balance beam, such as the one that comes free with most Ortofon cartridges. But whereas the Ortofon scale is too tiny and ambiguous to be consistently useful—and it, too, tops out at 3gm—the Rek-O-Kut is big and easy, and it comes with a total of 5.75gm in plastic weights, for use in various combinations. Where that isn't enough, the manufacturer recom-



The Rek-O-Kut Stylus Force Gauge.

mends using various coins, the weights of which are listed on their website. I've found that three dimes and one penny come out to 9.25gm—perfect for EMT's 78-specific OFD 65i pickup head.

Serious Wood

A couple of manufacturers responded to my column of June 2008, in which I railed against the majority of audio-specific furniture as being ugly, stupid, or both. My opinion remains rooted to the spot, but today that majority seems somewhat less vast.

First came news of a furniture line by Anthony Abbate, who makes loudspeaker cabinets for DeVore Fidelity (whose excellent Gibbon 9 speaker I wrote about in my December 2007 column). Abbate's audio-furniture business, Box Furniture Co., specializes in multitiered wood racks that are stable and substantial without being unduly massive. Only premium hardwoods—

maple, anigre, and sapele are the main choices—are used for the frames, and the shelves are plywood with similarly nice veneers. All joints are mortise-and-tenon, and Abbate is working on a way to flat-pack the finished product for home assembly to keep shipping costs down. Catalyzed finishes are applied to all surfaces, although Abbate is researching the use of environmentally friendly water-based lacquers for future production.

I have an early Box Furniture creation here at home: a portion of a much larger modular rack that was made for a Consumer Electronics Show display. I think it's a beautiful thing—very Harvey Ellis in a 21st-century way (sans découpage)—and it's quite sturdy. More to the point, the Box Furniture table sounds good—or, rather, equipment placed atop it sounds good. Even my Linn LP12 turntable.

I also received a note from the unfailingly nice Jim Pendleton, whose Osage Audio, based in Missouri, offers a variety of accessories. Pendleton represents a cabinetmaker named Jeff Dicks, whose Audio Elegance furniture also places an emphasis on aesthetically simple, sturdy designs. Dicks' racks and tables are also modular without appearing clumsily so, and, in an especially nice touch, many of the Audio Elegance equipment stands incorporate a nicely concealed chamber for mass loading, should the user so desire. Audio Elegance also makes good-looking hardwood LP racks—also modular—to complement their equipment shelves. I can't imagine a better approach, especially for a freestanding record rack, whose every surface should be well finished. (Steel shelves are ugly, and probably mess with the sound, too.)

Audio Elegance offers three lines; in the upper two, Dakota and James River, only select hardwoods, softwoods, and multidirectional plywoods are used. Biscuit joinery is featured throughout, and finishes include catalyzed lacquers and hand-rubbed oils.



A three-tier Box Furniture Co. rack in sapele.