

Figure 4. Wilson Audio X-1 Grand SLAMM II loudspeaker.



including every imaginable manner of cable (interconnect, that is), ranging from oxygen-free copper to silver and more exotic conductors in round, wrapped, braided, super-flat, and even liquid-shielded insulators. Visitors could also browse a variety of component stands, stereo furniture, and room-treatment accessories (bass traps and diffusion panels).

#### *The Golden Note Awards*

In conjunction with the annual HiFi events, the Academy Advancing High-Performance Audio and Video presented its Golden Note Awards for audiophile-component design and recording. This year's winners included the Z-Systems Audio Labs RDP-1 preamplifier/equalizer winning for the best audio-processor design; Krell Industries with two awards for its KPS-25s CD player and preamplifier (best audio digital source design) and the 650M power amplifier (best solid-state electronics design); Meridian's 566.24 DAC winning in the converter category;

Conrad-Johnson's ART preamplifier for best tube design; and Wilson Audio's X-1 Grand SLAMM II as the best loudspeaker (see Figure 4).

There were several lasting impressions of this event. The strongest of these was that there is indeed a large difference between what we defined above as the stereophile and high-end categories of music-reproduction equipment. Someone once defined the difference by stating that high-end components are designed more by ear than by test equipment. In fact, there are well-known examples of components that deliver awe-inspiring results on the test bench, but quite uninspiring results in the listening room. (The opposite—equipment with less-than-optimal measurements but very musical sound—can also be found.) The other primary impression we were left with is that high-end audiophile equipment must be evaluated more like musical instruments than as technical devices. The issues of component matching, room configuration, and the appropriateness of the reproduction equipment to the musical material are all important considerations, and there is also an element of personal preference and listening style that should not be overlooked.

In closing, the reviewers encourage *Computer Music Journal* readers to inform themselves as to the state of the art in audiophile sound reproduction, and have set up a special World Wide Web link page for high-end audio references; it can be reached from the main *Computer Music Journal* Web links page at <http://mitpress.mit.edu/Computer-Music-Journal/CMJ.links.html>. The 1999 Home Theater and Specialty Audio Show will be held 11–16 May at the Palmer House Hilton in Chicago, Illinois, USA.

### **The Second Santa Fe International Festival of Electroacoustic Music**

The College of Santa Fe, Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA, 3–5 April 1998

*Reviewed by Brian Belet  
San Jose, California, USA*

The electroacoustic community, while growing, remains relatively concise, and through electronic mail and other electronic means of communication, fairly well connected. As a result, it is not necessary to only assemble in the major metropolitan centers for our professional gatherings. Santa Fe, New Mexico, proved to be a great setting for this festival, offering adequate transportation, comfortable lodgings with a definite Santa Fe flavor, congenial hosts, friendly colleagues, and an interested audience. The College of Santa Fe is a combination of old and new buildings; the old, including the facilities for the Contemporary Music Program, are remnants of a mid-century military post. In the midst of these seemingly less-than-perfect facilities, Steven M. Miller and David Dunn have created a program that, as demonstrated by this festival, is alive and well and heading into a productive future. Without a traditional proscenium stage, the concert room was utilized as a flexible black-box hall, which is actually the best performance setting for most electroacoustic as well as much contemporary acoustic music.

For its second year, the festival programmed music submissions during two-and-a-half days of concerts. Additional works were programmed for radio broadcast prior to the festival weekend. Despite the pressures of excessive submissions, the festival maintained a relaxed schedule, which contributed to the success of the weekend.



#### Friday, April 3

Following registration and an informal reception, the opening evening concert presented ten tape compositions. This concert format remains controversial, both within our field and for the general music audience at large. As for myself, I have always found it exhilarating to sit among a larger group of people in a concert setting with only the music as a point of focus. This is often the best way to experience electroacoustic music, with the aural information paramount, and no distractions from the visual domain. The company of friends, colleagues, and strangers also creates a larger social community that remains essential in any concert context.

Curated and produced by festival host Steven M. Miller from an international pool of submissions, the concert included music by Bill Alves, Linda Antas, Ricardo Dal Farra, Douglas Doherty, William Meadows, Maggi Payne, Mary Lee A. Roberts, Carter Scholz, Pete Stollery, and David Stout. The performance room was carpeted, *sans* chairs, with four

loudspeakers arranged around the room in the traditional quadraphonic layout. Encouraged by Mr. Miller, most of the audience reclined on the carpet and listened to the music in near darkness; any direction could be interpreted as “front” or “left” at each listener’s discretion.

#### Saturday, April 4

Festival host Steven Miller presented an afternoon overview titled “The History and Development of Tape Music,” with recorded examples of the compositions discussed. With the recent publication of Joel Chadabe’s *Electric Sound* (Prentice-Hall, 1997), this area of electroacoustic music has become an active area of interest with most composers. Mr. Miller’s topic served as the catalyst for a lively discussion with the attending audience, which included Chris Mann, David Dunn, and students from the Contemporary Music Project. Mr. Miller clarified that tape music is simply a media designation and is not an aesthetic genre. Even though magnetic tape is no longer the sole medium used for this music, Mr. Miller prefers the term “tape music,” and maintained it for this discussion. (I would prefer another term, but do not yet have it.)

Mr. Miller set the beginning of tape music 50 years ago, on 3 May 1948, with Pierre Schaeffer’s *musique concrète* composition, *Railroad Study*. While this is the generally accepted origin of such studio-generated music, David Dunn offered an earlier date that is not currently included in the official histories. He reported that during the 1930s, old recorded-sound discs were manipulated and mixed while a new collage disc was cut in real time in Germany and the Soviet Union. While no published documentation or physical discs remains to verify this activity, Hindemith

referenced this development in his diaries. Certainly this is an aspect of early electroacoustic music that demands further research.

Steven Miller then outlined the early French and German approaches of the 1950s. The early Tokyo and American centers were discussed, and James Tenney’s *Collage #1/Blue Suede* (1961) was noted as the first tape composition to include a pop music source, making a significant sociopolitical statement that continues to this day as one of the signatures of the multifaceted American school. Synthesis developments of the 1960s and computer music processes of the 1970s were discussed, with magnetic tape being then relegated primarily to a storage and playback medium. Mr. Miller concluded that tape music remains alive and well in a variety of contemporary uses.

The evening concert showcased improvising electroacoustic artists from New Mexico. The four performances were each approximately one-half hour in duration. Unfortunately, three of them were too long for the musical content presented (this remains a problem with a great deal of contemporary music, in both acoustic and electroacoustic media). Contemporary Music Program students Shawn Lee, Aaron MacDonald, and Greg Moser presented a retro low-tech ensemble of live input, tape loops, and analog control, with a considerable level of machine hum (which did get annoying after the 10-min mark). The John Cage-influenced aesthetic and low-tech approach are valid statements in this time of sophisticated equipment and techniques, but the overall presentation suffered from naiveté and perhaps a too-casual performance approach.

Michael Kott strolled through the audience as he performed his elec-

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trified cello using a guitar strap and FM wireless transducer microphone. While displaying real performance chops on his instrument with exquisite timbral control, the performance suffered from a simplistic and predictable arch formal structure, overt Phrygian modal gestures, and considerable problems with the MIDI program patches and changes.

Steve Peters's instrument consisted of tree branches with contact microphones, water bowls, empty bowls, water dripping through dry twigs, and bowed plants, subjected to various delay and reverb processing. These structures generated incredible sounds, mostly indescribable. Suffice it to state that the sounds were alive, they spoke directly and powerfully, and they provided rich sonic resources for the composer to shape. Near the end of the performance, Mr. Peters added accordion and harmonica to the ensemble, which detracted from the preceding magic. The composition was complete with the organic assembled instruments, and I found no need for the stock reed timbres and gestures.

The final improvisation was J. A. Deane performing on trombone. Using only electronic feedback and delay, Mr. Deane relied on his acoustic trombone skills, which were devastating. His combination of performance skill, timbral and gestural balance, and concepts of formal design created a composition that merited the 25 min that this performance occupied.

#### *Sunday, April 5*

Invited artist, Chris Mann, discussed his aesthetics of art, and read a selection of his shorter works. This event was most timely due to the release the same week of the double CD, *The Frog Peak Collaborations Project* (Frog Peak Music, 1998). For Mr. Mann, the only difference be-

tween music and language is that music does not involve ethics, being inherently abstracted from any specific sets of meanings. He considers improvisation a form of synthesis; as an innovator, he is interested in music he does not yet like. I also took this to mean music that he does not yet understand, as this guides my artistic aesthetics as well. Such a view of music includes, even demands, choice, and creates a state of constantly evolving positive conspiracy.

Chris Mann kept his severe aesthetic focused while maintaining a friendly and genuine rapport with the audience: these two aspects do not have to be mutually exclusive. His discussion and readings, all part of a larger performance context, were a highlight of the festival.

Following Chris Mann's presentation, the two CDs from *The Frog Peak Collaborations Project* were performed in a random selection, with the afternoon concert ending once Mr. Mann's original soundfile (the source of the project) was performed. John Cage would have been pleased: after about a half-hour of mostly 1-min reconstructions, the source track came up. The concert balance was maintained.

The concluding evening concert was dedicated to live electroacoustic music. This media designation runs the gamut from live acoustic performer plus tape to live acoustic performer with electronic processing to live computer performance, and all three were represented on this concert. The author's *[MUTE]ation* began the concert, with the composer controlling real-time software synthesis (Kyma system running his program, COMP2) using a multiple slider controller. This was followed by Clay Chaplin's *Brenda's Truthful Hanging* for processed voice and samples and slider controller. Jim Mobberley's *Icarus Wept* was mas-

terfully performed by Keith Benjamin. Structured for trumpet and tape, this composition, even though it used the "old-fashioned" paradigm of live instrument and tape, proves that good composing and good performing remain successful regardless of genre, media, or context. *Hollow Ground II*, for soprano and tape by Tom Lopez, followed, intoned by Larisa Montanaro. Robbie Hunsinger performed her own work *Cleared* for oboe and electronic processing, with extensive use of multiphonics and other extended techniques. Douglas Repetto's *Harmonica + Squiggy* was improvised by the composer, using harmonica and real-time processing with his own program, squiggy. The concert concluded with *Gestures, Tactile and Tethered*, featuring composer Kojiro Umezaki performing on shakuhachi with DSP processing.

For this concert, five of the seven works were performed by the composers. This is an interesting and expanding development that echoes an earlier time in our history when the definition of a musician automatically included composition and performance (as well as a wide range of other related activities). With new performance paradigms arising almost daily, it was notable that three of the computer-performance "instruments" (Belet's, Chaplin's, and Repetto's) included the Peavey PC-1600 MIDI slider controller (Belet, Chaplin, and Repetto). While used for quite different aural results in each of these three works, the unit's flexibility and ease of use (for both programming and performing) created a practical unity that added an interesting aspect to the evening.

#### *Postscript*

This festival was notable for several reasons. Steven Miller was willing to focus on a limited set of electroacoustic areas, which is helpful for

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both listening and discussion. The number of compositions selected for performance was relatively small, so a correspondingly small group of composers attended as the nucleus of the event. This prevented the festival from becoming a herd of composers, each vying for center-stage prominence. Rather, the festival maintained an intimate (i.e., chamber-festival) feel, with all concerts held in a small room with the equipment and performers on the same floor level as the audience. All of the composers easily exchanged ideas without egos dominating the social scene. I found this to be extremely refreshing, and ultimately great fun. By the time the final concert concluded on Sunday evening, I was able to return to my hotel and then depart the next morning still enjoying the experience of hearing music, which is unfortunately not the case with all conferences and festivals. (Who among us has not left a multiple concert event just plain sick of hearing too much music in too short of a time?) Chris Mann was both intellectually stimulating through his presentation and a pleasure to meet. He epitomized that to which all contemporary artists should aspire: in his art he is rigorous (brutal, if necessary) and uncompromising, while, as an individual human being sharing space on this planet of complicated social entities, he is kind and generous. As a case in point, my 13-year-old son accompanied as my technical assistant, and Mr. Mann made special efforts to include Jacques as a welcome member of the festival audience and participant in the discussion sessions. Steven Miller and his entire team at the Contemporary Music Program of the College of Santa Fe are to be congratulated for hosting and producing such a meaningful event. It

will remain a high point in my memory of festival/conference events for many years to come.

### **Two Reviews of Synthèse 98: The 28th International Festival of Electroacoustic Music**

Bourges, France, 29 May–7 June 1998

*Reviewed by Ludger Brümmer  
Essen, Germany*

Can one think of any other festival that would perform 157 compositions that were almost exclusively for tape? The International Computer Music Conferences, for example, focus more on live electroacoustic music than on tape music. The problems of tape music have often been discussed in this journal; despite the ongoing sophistication of the tools used to create and perform live electroacoustic music, tape music is still a specific genre with a unique aesthetic style. Often, festival programmers include live electroacoustic music or instrumental music to help the “underprivileged” tape music. The Synthèse Festival in Bourges is one of the rare occasions, by now a historical institution, where tape music is treated as a musical form with the highest artistic potential, and listeners are able to concentrate purely on the audible information. This festival was also one of the first to diffuse the sounds using an array of loudspeakers.

There are two or three concerts of tape music each day, separated by performances of dance, video, or live electroacoustic music. Instead of getting tired, I found that the more tape music I heard, the more attention I was able to focus on the sounds, and I became increasingly able to judge the quality of the formal layout of the pieces. At the

same time, I became more impatient with poor temporal structuring and with stereotypical sonorities. I write this to encourage organizers to include tape-music concerts in their programming, rather than trying to make such concerts “more interesting” by including other media. It may be that such additions make it difficult to switch attention from one listening context to another, and ultimately distract the listener from the sounds themselves.

The concerts at Synthèse 98 were presented in five different spaces, each equipped with a specific diffusion system. These ranged from a small museum hall, surrounded by pictures of Maurice Estève, to a large theater hall with a multispeaker environment and a futuristic performance interface built especially for this purpose, known as the Cybernephone. Each of the concert spaces had its own charm, and it was astonishing that, regardless of size, each sounded very clear and differentiated, for the most part. The selection of loudspeakers for the requirements of the room was very well done; no doubt the long experience with these spaces makes this level of diffusion quality possible. Besides the general evaluation of the sound systems, a specific preference in the character of the sound projection was detectable. This preference relies on the structural details of the sound; in other words, the acoustics are focused onto the high frequencies and must be placed, as a consequence, in a field of lower dynamics. Only the large setting of the concert hall has a rich bass and lower frequencies, enabling higher dynamic levels.

The concerts and informative events were pleasantly spaced throughout the day. The pieces at the Musée Estève, for example, were presented in a soft dynamic range. Only