Leviathan amplifiers

as reviewed by Jim Merod

Recently, responding to a reader's sympathetic outreach, I stopped by Acoustic Zen's spacious quarters in Rancho Bernardo to harass my old friend Robert Lee. The sonic maestro had been missing in action for nearly a year— missing, at any rate, my action just as I missed his. Robert was surprised at my announced invasion of his digs and so he did what Robert Lee might be expected to do on such a premonitory occasion.

"Have you heard my improvements on Crescendo speakers?" he asked. Since those behemoths were precisely why I'd dropped by, I broke the good news. "I'm here to request, formally and in person," I told him, "an opportunity to step my paw-prints on your enhanced Crescendos and find out what you've been up to all this while!"

Robert laughed at my gruff louty despite the fact that 2008 was not a good year, as we all know. The economy tanked worldwide, high-end audio took a plunge along with everything else. Reviewing expensive audio gear has become a little bit like handicapping gymnasium races at an old folks home. Nevertheless, in pursuit of Valacie Stevens' fatal the—the "the" that defines all others—I plow on as I reported to Robert because it's still there. Good sound, great music, great audio equipment is there to be heard. Great sound has not taken a holiday or put its vibe underground...yet. The world will regain strength and focus I hope. But, for the interim, I need fresh audio reproduction and new audio possibilities. Why? Because, that's what I do to keep my spirits high. Sounds does it for me...little sonic details awaiting discovery; gorgeous layered harmonies recorded well and reproduced with sonic love...those are particles of a world not to be overlooked or abandoned merely because some broke in New York ran $50 billion through a Pond sieve or Wall Street laid an egg...again.

Superior sound keeps a fellow safe inside himself when skies are falling. At least that's my mantra and it's worked for two-thirds of a century.

If part of my bad news for Robert Lee was a stentorian reach out to assure temporary possession of his giant sound boxes, the other part hinged on our uncoordinationed sonic agreement. There before me, in broad interior daylight on the Acoustic Zen campus, was the very set of Acoustic Zen Adagio speakers that I'd been listening to daily (for months) in the company of the no less impressive Red Dragon "Leviathan Signature" mono-block amps.

"What's with this pair, Robert? How come you've hooked your great little Adagios to those sexy wood-enclosed things—end-of-days?" Robert looked at me with that look of bemused inscrutability that I've sometimes accused him of offering in lieu of explanation. "Why not," he enthused, "they sound fantastic together!"

And so they do. And that's the bottom line of my belflawishment upon finding that kindred listeners truly are (against others) partners in the audio crime of hearing with acute similarity. And that's the inner truth of my long listening months with these genuinely powerful, truly musical Red Dragon

Partners in audio crime think alike. Let me put this another way: kindred listeners hear with remarkably acute resemblance. There's good news and bad news tucked inside such entanglement.
Therefore, my covert confession: that I've indulged myself in far too much listening with (and "to" or "through") these beautiful creatures—and the Red Dragons ARE, in fact, "creatures" of a different sonic sort, given their raw animal power—more like panthers than somewhat scary old "dragons." But I digress for the sake of truth-telling here because I find these amps, strapped with Kubia-Smith's Emotion speaker cables, to be magical.

The word that came to me as I received these drop-dead seductive amp-sculptures was that they were "quite good," not the final statement on micro-dynamic precision or upper register detail, but impressive and lovely audio companions that match up more than fairly well with many speaker loads because of the somewhat unusual raw power they deliver at (gasp) 500 watts per channel. These are digital amplifiers that can be, and have been, accurately compared to "the best SET amps"—ouch!

What, then, was this sense of slight reservation scratching at the underbelly of my opinion?

At the risk of making a summative judgment on the state of a global economy badly needing faith in the collective integrity of its best clients, borrowers, markets, creditors, banks, regulatory mechanisms (and, most of all, its teenage kids who want a first loan to buy a good old jalopy to kick-start life's carnival of delights), let me prevaricate. Or pontificate a moment by adding a quick revision to the wide-eyed optimism of a sentence past. Let scrap the whole faith in humanity thing and just move on to Todd Sinck's oldest boy's first car. The kid needs a loan, so let's pony up and keep the wheels that grease young love moving nicely along. Where's your glib "romantic" romance, anyway? Who the hell are you (you stingy SOB) to deny this kid bread to purchase his ride with a built-in CD player or a Bluetooth hook up for his iTunes?

Like I was saying, before I prevaricated, why the reservation (however faint) about amplifiers that kick ass and put a smile on everyone who's not your neighbor Joe-the-plumber? Doubtless Joe does not like Meier's Tenth or late Shostakovich played at histrionic volumes of slam and bolterous musical roundness. I never liked this crotchety neighbor guy anyway. I'm not really sure he's a plumber, after all. So the hell with him not getting the fact that these drop-dead gorgeous wood-cased behemoth amplifiers genuinely MAKE MUSIC. They give sound a tactile truthfulness, part suave lyric grandeur, part strum und drang.

Echote jurove! That could be their motto. So my theory about audio reviewing quibbles in the presence of such beguiling "real" music reproduction—global economic meltdown, global warming, global Armageddon, global anything, notwithstanding—is simply this: that high-end sonic reproduction equipment reviewers have been conditioned by the largesse of their innate, professional audio prejudices to differentiate at ever more refined levels of discrimination. The state of the art Bugatti Macro-Tube ZK Hi-Rev Amplifier has an ounce more upper level "juice" than all other not quite so well-kitted amp engines, you dig? So, come on. After all, really! You've got to hand it to those ZK Hi-Rev audio engineers. At $50,000 a mono-block set, those amplifiers take the nod for sheer juiced up audio shock value. A bargain, to boot, given their sonic horsepower and unrivaled jive/sai.dll quiet.

Perhaps I jest at my own expense, but my investment in such jest has a point not merely potemtical. The most elusive (potentially elagmatic) quality of music-making, audio recording, and alert listening and accurate reviewing is designated by the troublesome term miasculinity. Any word can become a bastardized ideological coin. Try these: Patriotism, Love, Freedom, Loyalty. And so, too, in the world of audio reviewing. Words are slippery when you have to press them hard to perfectly describe sounds—how, say, Art Farmer's flugelhorn sounds when compared to Miles Davis' sound on the same instrument. But, wait! They're not the "same" instrument. Art had home made for him by Conn, including his infamous "bumpet" (half flugel, half trumpet) three of which I saw him resolve one late afternoon in La Jolla several hours before he took the stage at El Moro's to try out. Miles usually used a Selmer, though he experimented with many trumpets and flugelhorns across the decades. Dizzy Gillespie did not like the feel of a flugelhorn, though Clark Terry virtually defined the most seductive and winsome (almost comic) use of that instrument. And there it is in naked brass. One horn does not "sound" like another for at least two paranormal reasons. First, the manufacturing of any instrument shapes its tonal range as well as the scope and reach of its overtones. Second, each horn player's embouchure defines an intrinsic sound that becomes that one musician's sonic personality.

My point is that any piece of audio gear approaching the elusive quality worth calling (i.e., accurately designated as) "musically" has an advantage over reproduction equipment defined by extremes of sonic performance—speakers that "stage" beyond all others or that owns that apparently flat dollop of dynamic "slam." Consider, in contrast, what you hear in a very good acoustic environment when a single instrument or ensemble (or, for that, an orchestra) plays with well-rehearsed musical integrity. That sound is difficult to snare...
The Red Dragons would not necessarily be the last word in the Ultimate, but they would certainly be the last word in the music you want to hear. They’re not the last word in sound quality, but they’re the last word in fun and enjoyment. And they’re the last word in value for money. They’re the last word in what it means to be a Red Dragon. They’re the last word in the Red Dragon experience. They’re the last word in the Red Dragon legacy. They’re the last word in the Red Dragon legend. They’re the last word in the Red Dragon tradition. They’re the last word in the Red Dragon heritage. They’re the last word in the Red Dragon history. They’re the last word in the Red Dragon story. They’re the last word in the Red Dragon tale. They’re the last word in the Red Dragon saga. They’re the last word in the Red Dragon epic. They’re the last word in the Red Dragon odyssey. They’re the last word in the Red Dragon journey. They’re the last word in the Red Dragon quest. They’re the last word in the Red Dragon pursuit. They’re the last word in the Red Dragon search. They’re the last word in the Red Dragon discovery. They’re the last word in the Red Dragon adventure. They’re the last word in the Red Dragon exploration. They’re the last word in the Red Dragon expedition. They’re the last word in the Red Dragon expedition.

Specifiers
- 1000W x 2 @ 4 ohms & 500W x 2 @ 8 ohms
- Damping factor 2000 into 8ohms load
- Neutrik Silver XLR Differential Inputs - 2V for full output
- Custom Cardas Patented Binding posts - solid copper with silver finish
- 24awg Silver Signal wire with Teflon jacket.
- Silver-plated copper internal speaker wire.
- Common mode and differential mode EMI filtration used throughout.
- ERS paper employed at key locations to absorb and diffuse unwanted EMI.
• >119dBA dynamic range

• dc - 38kHz frequency range

• High efficiency: 83% total efficiency @ 500W, 8Ω

• Environmentally friendly - very little power is wasted as heat

• 115V or 230V operation. Please specify when ordering.

• 10" x 5.5" x 14.5" (WxHxD), weight varies depending on wood used.

• Hand built with pride in the USA & carries full 5-year warranty

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