

ON THE RUN

From humble beginnings with an old BSR radiogram, Neville Roberts describes the evolution of his system to the present day...

My first venture into the delights of audio started with a BSR mono valve radiogram, courtesy of my parents. It had a BSR autochanger, complete with a crystal cartridge of unknown origin. Early experiments included the connection of a Collaro Studio mono valve tape recorder, the construction of an infinite baffle external loudspeaker (fitted with an old Wharfedale drive unit), and the installation of a Stanton magnetic cartridge. Fitting the cartridge necessitated building a two-transistor RIAA magnetic preamp (powered from the valve heater supply) and (I now cringe at the thought) fitting a heavy-duty counter-balance spring to the BSR tonearm to get the tracking weight down into single-figure grams! Well, my pocket money wouldn't stretch to anything better, but I had now been bitten by the Hi-Fi bug.



Years passed and when I finally started earning money, the top priority was saving for a proper system. Having experimented with a home-made Haffler box, I ventured into the realms of quadraphonic sound with the purchase of a Marantz 4230 integrated tuner-amp and the ubiquitous Garrard SP25 fitted with a Shure M95ED cartridge. I could now enjoy my friend's recording of Mussorgsky: Pictures at an Exhibition - the Tomita synthesizer version with the 'Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks' running around the room!

The Shure M95 became a V15; the quadraphonic era passed and 4x12 watts per channel wasn't enough to drive my LNB Paralab 20 transmission line speakers, even bridged to 2x30 watts, so the Marantz was relegated to being a tuner and pre-amp, driving a homemade stereo power amplifier. The SP25 was replaced with a Technics direct-drive turntable fitted with a Mayware Formula 4 unipivot arm, a Fidelity Research FR1 Mk 2 moving coil cartridge and matching transformer. Elements of my current system started to appear here with the Mayware arm, shortly to be followed by the construction of a pair of the Chris Rogers' PRO9-TL transmission line loudspeakers, as per the article published in the October 1976 issue of Practical Hi-Fi and Audio. I still think the Kef B139 is the best bass driver ever made!



The system remained fairly static for many years until I started the move back to valves with the building of a WAD K5881 in the late '90s. A sequence of upgrades ensued, both to the components within the various items and to the items themselves, in order to arrive at the system as it is today.

On the left of the photo, the WAD 300B PSE monoblocks can be seen, resplendent on their own purpose-built MDF support unit. They drive the PRO9-TLs beautifully, one of which has sneaked into the photograph from the sitting room. Apart from the speakers, the whole system resides in the adjacent study affording excellent acoustic insulation for the record deck from the speakers. I also have a

pair of home-made eighth-wave transmission line speakers for use in the study – for details of these, see the Hi-Fi World October 2005 issue!

Above the eighth-wave speaker are a pair of Sennheiser HD580 headphones that are driven from the WAD Headphone II unit. Above the headphone amp sits the three units of the WAD Series II modular preamp, and below is a Yamaha T-700 tuner which, although bought in the '80s, still sounds great. Below the tuner is my old friend, the Njoe Tjoeb 4000 CD player with valve output and all the upgrades, which gives my record deck a run for its money. Nevertheless, the deck (an Origin Live motor and Ultra power supply partnering the Mayware Formula 4 unipivot arm fitted with a Lyra Clavis DC moving coil cartridge) is still on top – both physically and as my premier source! Also going strong after over 20 years are a Pioneer CT-F850 cassette deck and a Sony TC-377 reel-to-reel tape deck for my legacy tape format recordings.

It might appear to be a bit of a hotchpotch, but the whole system hangs together surprisingly well. Thanks to significant investment in the 'innards' of many of the items, such as paper-in-oil capacitors, Mullard and Siemens valves, as well as the set of four 300B TJ Premium Mesh plate triodes glowing away on the monoblocks, I have a system that really does bring my recordings to life and transport me to the concert hall in the comfort of my sitting room.

So I seem to have come full circle – once again, nothing but valves between stylus and speaker with not a transistor in the way!