



This article was kindly donated by Lloyd Walker, Walker Audio

### ***MY APPROACH TO LISTENING***

In the course of talking with customers and audio professionals, I've found that not everyone listens to music the same way. When I have described how I dial in a system or evaluate components, many people have commented that they never thought about it that way before. They found my method helpful and have come back later and told me that it changed the way they listen to music.

I do not claim to have “invented” or “discovered” anything here. It is just the way I've developed for myself that I've shared with other people. I know you enjoy music or you wouldn't be reading this. I hope that you find this information helpful.

Think of it this way:

Listening to music is like looking at a vineyard. Listening to the performers is like looking at the vines and seeing the quality of the grapes. Experiencing the emotion of the performance is like feeling the intoxication of the wine. What I mean by this is hearing the nuances, the special touches of each performer in the way they play their instruments or in their voices. These reveal the personality of the performer and express their emotional involvement in the music.

This analogy is a way of describing the various levels at which people listen to music. Many people stay focused as the vineyard level, attempting to take in all the music at once. This is fine for casual listening. However, it is almost impossible to discern subtle changes at this level. It is simply too much information for the human mind to absorb as a whole for any critical analysis.

When evaluating components, focus on the second and third levels – listen to the individual performers and experience the emotion. If the performers are talented and enjoying themselves and the recording is well done, there will be magic in the performance.

### ***NEUTRAL CABLES AND RESONANCE CONTROL ARE CRUCIAL***

The magic is in the performance, not in the equipment. The purpose of the equipment is to reproduce the performance as accurately as possible. The goal is to create a system that is capable of letting the magic come through.

You want to hear what your components can do without colorations being added. These colorations can help a bad recording sound better, but they will make a great recording sound boring and confused.

Many people keep changing their electronics searching for the “magic”. They spend lots of money, but never really get the sound they want BECAUSE they never really hear what their system is capable of. Resonance and cables are probably the two biggest culprits.

Cables can be very misleading. You want cables that are as neutral as possible. Many are designed to sound very sweet and bloated in the bass. Inexperienced listeners often like the fullness of the bass and do not realize that it is artificial – produced by the cables instead of the musicians. At first, you may think that the cables are getting a lot of information and are nice and inoffensive, but they distort the sound that your components are producing.

Resonance control is also very important. You want to stabilize your component and control the vibrations and frequencies that interfere with the music signal. When doing resonance control, be careful not to overdo it. Do it by ear. The bells, strings, piano, and horns will get sharper, faster with a clean, clear harmonic decay. Overdo it and the sound will be duller with reduced harmonics. If this happens, simply remove the last resonance control disc.



Even the finest components will not sound their best unless resonances are controlled and the cables can reveal their true sound.

### ***THE EVALUATION PROCESS***

Put on complex music – such as a well-recorded classical or complex jazz record. In the beginning, stay away from simple music, female voice, acoustic guitar and piano. You can come back to these in the final evaluation.

In the complex music, you will have a variety of musical experiences -- many instruments playing at once, quiet passages with emotional nuances, heavy bass and extreme highs.

When the music starts, each performer should be in his or her own space. Each note of each instrument should originate at the proper place and then converge. The bass will usually be located at the rear of the soundstage. You should hear the bass drums being struck at a distant location with the wave of the bass energy and sound emerging from that location.

When the music comes to a climax and everyone is playing with energy and the sound gets louder, you should still be able to hear each instrument in its same location, only louder. The soundstage should not collapse and move forward and become congested and blended with the bass becoming bloated and dominant up front. If it does, this is usually a sign that the cables are at fault. If the performers stay in place, but are out of focus (blurred, not distinct), your system needs resonance control.

Now, pay attention to the quieter passages or put on a recording with just a few instruments playing at one time with bells, cymbals, piano or horns. The sound should be sharp and distinct with a nice harmonic decay. Horns should have a sharp bite and ring to them. If not, you need resonance control and/or the cables are too slow and colored.

When focusing on the performers, listen for the body of each instrument. Listen for the timing and rhythm between the players. A lead instrument should be separate, yet integrated with the group. As you focus your listening on specific aspects, your senses will begin to pick up nuances in the performance that you never realized were there.

### ***TO SUM IT UP***

Getting your system to reproduce the emotion of the performance is not easy at first. It requires a step-by-step evaluation of each component. To fairly evaluate a component you will need to negate the inherent vibrations and resonant frequencies produced by every piece of electronic equipment. And you need cables that accurately reproduce the sound the component is producing. How can you judge a component if you are not really hearing what it can do?

Learning to focus your attention at the right level and removing the two major obstacles to accurate sound reproduction – resonances and colored cables - will allow you to more effectively evaluate your system, components, speakers, the placement of your speakers, and any other changes you make to your system.

### ***ADDENDUM: WHY MANY DEALERS DON'T DO "TWEAKS"***

So, you may ask, if all this is true why hasn't my dealer talked to me about this. In fact, you say, you asked your dealer about it and they told you it wasn't necessary. Welcome to the business of audio. We have had many dealers and manufacturers buy our Valid Points resonance control kits, Vivid, High Definition Links, and Omega Mikro cables for their systems at home, but won't sell them in their stores. There are reasons for this:

1. There is more money in selling the components. Dealers do not want the customer to think that the component needs resonance control, HDLs, or good cables to sound its best because this implies that the



component is flawed. The fear is that another dealer will tell the customer that their product is better because it doesn't need these things to sound good

2. It requires an investment of time to train the sales personnel and takes more time to explain to customers how to use them and why they work. For dealers that do set ups, these items require more time to install. It is much more time-efficient to sell "plug-and-play" components.

If you have questions about anything here, give us a call. We'll be happy to talk to you.