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solid tech

Rack of Silence

as reviewed by Marshall Nack



With this review, Marshall Nack joins Positive Feedback Online as an Associate Editor. Formerly a Senior Editor with The Stereotimes, Marshall brings with him many years of experience in fine audio, and five years of editorial work at ST. We welcome him to the editorial community of PFO!

MARSHALL NACK'S SYSTEM

LOUDSPEAKERS

Kharma Ceramique 3.2, Talon Audio ROC sub woofer.

ELECTRONICS

von Gaylord Audio (formerly Legend Audio Design) LAD-L2 Signature line preamp, von Gaylord Audio Nirvana Mk II mono-blocks. Electronics in house recently or now: Lamm L2 preamp, Lamm ML1.1 mono-blocks, Master Sound 845 mono-blocks.

SOURCE

Linn LP12, LINGO, EKOS tonearm, ARKIV II cartridge, American Hybrid Technology Non-Signature Phono Preamp modified by Walker Audio, Extremephono Limited Edition and Graham IC-30 Arm Cables. CEC TL1X transport, Zanden Audio Model 5000 Mk III DA converter, von Gaylord Audio 2 chassis prototype DAC.

CABLES

Interconnects by Harmonic Technology, Stealth, von Gaylord Audio and Omega Mikro. Also in house now; Harmonix and Argent Pursang. Digital Cables by Stealth and Von Gaylord Audio. Also in house now; Harmonix, Argent Pursang. Speaker wire by Harmonic Technology, von Gaylord Audio and Harmonix. Also in house now; Argent Pursang. Power Cords by Harmonic Technology Magic, Omega Mikro, Golden Sound and Shunyata. Also in house now; Argent Pursang.

ACCESSORIES

PolyCrystal Racks and cable supports, Mapleshade Component Support System and Rack of Samson, Solid Tech Rack of Silence, Golden Sound Acoustic Discs, DH Squares and DH Cones, Walker Audio Tuning Discs and Valid Points for LP turntable, Harmonix RFA-78i Room Tuning Discs, RFS-66ZX Tuning Feet, RF-900 and RF-999MT Tuning Spike Bases, Acoustic System Resonators, Argent Room Lenses, Echo Buster and Sonex acoustic panels, Accuphase PS-500, Von Gaylord Audio "Live Performance" and Shunyata Hydra power conditioners, API model 110 conditioner for sub woofer, Furutech e-TP80 and Ensemble Mega PowerPoint outlet strips.

Note: this article was originally intended as a follow-up to the Rack of Silence review posted on *Stereotimes* by Greg Petan. (Interested readers who would like to read this prior review can find it at www.stereotimes.com/acc120503.shtml.)

Assembly

The Solid Tech Rack of Silence (ROS) arrived in two surprisingly compact and lightweight packages: a large cardboard tube for the four uprights and a medium, component-sized box for the struts and hardware. Everything was well packed, but I had imagined a full-sized four-shelf rack would arrive in something bigger and heavier. The surprise was that the ROS is shipped as a partially assembled kit.

The kit wound up taking my wife and I the better part of an evening to assemble. Maybe we didn't read the instructions as thoroughly as we should have; make sure you do. After the first column you get the idea and it becomes easier, but the instructions were sketchy and that first column wasn't easy. An exploded diagram showing all the parts, their names and how they all fit together would have been helpful. Warning: ALL PARTS ARE COLOR CODED AND MUST BE ASSEMBLED ACCORDINGLY. Each piece is machined to fit its color-coded mate, and identical looking parts with different colored stickers are not interchangeable.

The ROS Personality

I first moved the von Gaylord Audio CD transport from the Polycrystal shelf where it had been sitting on Combak RFS-65 footers and placed it on the top, heavy-duty shelf of the ROS. Yeah, there were obvious differences.

On *Dance of the Night Creatures* (Mapleshade MS 06032), featuring trombonist Thurman Green in small group jazz combos, the sound became complex and more interesting, also weightier with a darker tonal balance—quite the opposite of lean. When I heard Hamiet Bluiett come in and with his baritone sax solo a minute or two into the first track, uh-huh, there was no doubt—this was sound you could sink your teeth into. The sax itself was bigger and engaged you with enhanced body and presence. Macro dynamics had more authority, but at the same time little events were better defined. Ditto for the drum-kit occupying the deep right corner of the stage and the trombone dead center on track two. The enhanced body was accompanied by lots of little events becoming audible, and together these filled up the soundstage with a thick density of info. I like to think of it as becoming kind of chewy, with all kinds of interesting things going on.

Next, I moved the power supply for the von Gaylord Audio pre-amp. Mezzo soprano Anne Sofie Von Otter exhibited much the same metamorphosis on *Anne Sofie Von Otter sings Offenbach* (DG 289 471 501-2), her body became fuller and warmer, and also more lifelike. The ROS adds a taut kind of flesh throughout the frequency spectrum, not the fatty or overhanging kind. Instruments gain body mass and, logically enough, their images also get bigger. They are stable and don't move about in space, but they are no longer pinpoint. This took a while to get used to, but now I'm certain these bigger, more massive images more closely approximate the genuine thing; after all, there ain't no pinpoint imaging in the real world, is there? On the rare occasions when I have heard actual imaging, it's always been a diffuse kind. After you get used to this, pinpoint imaging seems like a reduction and unrealistic.

In both of these selections, one of the biggest changes was a tonal shift to the midrange. Apart from the well-known adage that the music lives in the midrange, this is a welcome thing because most of us have too much treble energy. I dealt with this problem by using a Shakti Online on the power cable to the pre-amp. After the ROS brought it in line, I was able to remove the Shakti and let some of the treble back. I do enjoy removing these various sonic band-aids; if you choose your components wisely they will sound better singing in their unadulterated voice, all else being equal.

These effects brought to mind the Shunyata Hydra power conditioner. With its noise suppression and velvety deep black background, the Hydra presents instruments in greater relief and allows low-level information to come to the surface, while giving them more mass. Ditto for the ROS.

I have to say there were exceptions. The Electrocompaniet EMC1 UP CD player, used as a transport, was artifact free and midrangy when placed on the ROS. Back on the Polycrystal shelf sitting on its built-in footers, it was not as smooth and not as neutral, but there was greater low-end slam and more treble. All in all, the Electrocompaniet

EMC1 UP sounded more enjoyable on the Polycrystal rack. In this case, the component already had a lot of midrange energy; putting it on the ROS enhanced what was already sufficient, and it became too much.



Feet of Silence

The Feet of Silence borrow design elements from both the ROS and the DOS. Like the ROS, the FOS use a stainless steel ball bearing as the point of contact with the component. On the ROS, the ball bearing is secured with a wad of Blutack on the crossbar. On the FOS, the ball bearing is fixed in an aluminum tube with its own damping. And, like the DOS, it has a suspension that needs to be tweaked. The FOS suspensions use rubber 'O' rings in place of metal springs. Depending on the weight of the component to be supported, you reduce or increase the tension on the FOS by adjusting the number of 'O' rings, or use a different gauge 'O' ring. The distribution of the component's weight might dictate more tension under the transformer area of the chassis, for example. You'll know you've achieved the correct suspension when the FOS displaces by 3 to 5 mm as you seat the component on it.

Using the FOS on the ROS does another tonal shift back to the frequency extremes, while giving big gains in articulation and focus. The von Gaylord Audio power supply literally opened up with more texture and sparkle when I put FOS under it. Similarly, the CEC TL1X CD transport sounded great on the ROS, but I detected that midrangy cast again and an associated congestion. Putting it on the FOS resulted in a transformation. Like the von Gaylord power supply, it opened up, with gobs more transparency, definition and dynamics, throwing images that floated in 3-D space.

When I removed the FOS from under the Lamm L2 pre-amp control chassis, still leaving FOS under the power supply chassis, the sound was looser, more relaxed, more diffuse and, of course, had more midrange. There was more distance between you and the performance. Sometimes this is just what the system needs. I liked to listen to the Lamm L2 both ways. For me right now, I'm liking the enhanced midrange of the ROS without any FOS. Note: the Lamm's two chassis weigh in under 20 Lbs each and may not have been heavy enough to distend the FOS sufficiently.

The Feet of Silence used by themselves apart from the ROS can have very positive results. Swapping the FOS for the Harmonix Combak RFS-65, my reference footers, was essentially a lateral move. They sounded different under the Von Gaylord pre-amp, but both were very good. I found the same results with the Von Gaylord Audio Nirvana Mk II mono blocks; both footers were very good. For me, this means the FoS are competitive with the best support devices available.

Setup Tweaks

After assembling the ROS, there's still a good bit of tweaking to be done. If you opt for the Disks of Silence (DOS) footers, which replace the standard, rigid footers at the base of the four columns (a strongly recommended option), you need to mass load the rack. The key to getting the most out of the ROS with the DOS is to understand



that it is based upon spring suspension. The DOS has a bunch of coiled metal springs that need to distend properly for it to function as designed. About 90 lbs minimum and 200 lbs max will do the trick. I found loading it with 100 lbs or more worked best. Without the proper weight and correct tension on the springs in the DOS, the resonant frequency of the ROS will be within the audio band—not good. By the way, there is no minimum required weight for each fixed shelf, but they do max out at 85 lbs, while the heavy-duty shelf has a 170 lb limit.

The Rack of Silence with four fixed shelves and Disc of Silence footers under the columns, as used here, is fairly rigid. Putting some FOS under a component made it susceptible to environmental shocks, visible in it's jiggling, and raised my anxiety level about accidentally bumping into the rack and dislodging a component. Nothing ever happened, thanks G_D, but extra vigilance is required.

Conclusion

At the moment, I have three racks. Each has its own characteristics, and each sounds different. The Polycrystal tends to emphasize frequency extremes and thin the midrange, while enhancing definition. Overall, it gives a thinner, more focused sound with pinpoint imaging. The Mapleshade Rack of Samson, made from solid maple slabs, lends the characteristically pleasing acoustic properties of the wood, while cleaning up mid-thru-upper bass resonances. The Solid Tech Rack Of Silence is a radically different design than those conventional racks. It employs a theory of resonance control based on light mass and various suspensions. You'll have to put aside your preconceived notions about mass loading and approach this project with an open mind. I found it to greatly enhance instrumental body, fullness, detail retrieval and dynamics, while sounding quieter, more artifact free. Realism and presence were improved and this heightened my involvement in the music.

Depending on the component, you'll find each rack has usefulness. I like to keep all the phono gear on the Rack of Samson. And the Electrocompaniet EMC 1 CD player preferred being on the Polycrystal. But most gear was happiest on the Solid Tech Rack Of Silence.

Apart from its unusual and esthetically interesting appearance, noted by fellow scribe Greg Petan in his [review](#), the Rack of Silence is a serious tool for the audiophile on the edge. Used with or without the Feet Of Silence, it brought improvements beyond what my other racks offered, improvements that I wouldn't want to be without.

Marshall Nack

Basic Rack of Silence (with four shelves)

Retail: \$1470 to \$1899.

Options:

Feet of Silence: \$300 (set of three) \$400 (set of four)

Disc of Silence: \$190 (set of three) \$250 (set of four)

Overall Size: 21" W x 27" L x 35" H

Weight: 35 pounds

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