



Istanbul, March 20th, 2007

I love my 10 year-old sweater. It keeps me warm. I do not itch, nor do I sweat. I do not even feel it is on me most of the time. It is not nylon, nor does it have polyester or any of those man-made fiber stuff inside. It is cashmere, I am grateful to those who has gave it as a gift on my birthday.

I am close to my 3rd birthday in my audiophile life. Today, I feel more conscientious of the term 'synergy', and I believe in 'truthful modification'. Most of my audiophile colleagues and myself believe in correct internal designs of components, the shortest possible signal path, an undeniable constraint of choosing an amplifier design which has to match your speaker, acoustic constraints, electrical isolation & refinements (not emphasizing any filters – except for isolation transformers), and correct mechanical isolation.

There are certain facts about a system.

- Only a system that has a basic synergy should be modified.
- A correctly modified system becomes more sensitive to any changes in cabling, electricity or isolation
- Your ear-brain reference changes from High-End to Top-End with a more sensitive system.

The term modification does not only refer to a change *within* a component. External moves, such as a mechanical isolation improvement would also have a critical impact on the final performance. Therefore, through a correct isolation step, you 'modify' the final performance to utilise the optimum inner strength.

Mechanical isolation has been one of my final resorts in fine-tuning a system. Remember the voodoo in trying to scientifically explain the process of a burn-in period. Some hypothetically struggle on how the dielectric field becomes homogeneous around the capacitor, resistor, wire, or solder.

A similar mystery is there for mechanical isolation as well. Whatever you put beneath your component, your system would reflect. For instance, you put a metal sheeth beneath your pre-amp, and the outcome performance will be somewhat metallized. Try granite, and an incredible shift and dryness will appear. How about pressed wood? Oh, you will certainly quadruple the dryness and the low-level detail will disappear along with a mellow midrange.

There is a fundamental understanding in isolation. The internal vibrations of a component, or the air vibrations (sound waves) that affect the component should be correctly transferred to the ground. From a wider perspective though, one should take into account mechanical

grounding, independent grounding, material resonance, acoustic resonance, subtle energy transfer, spatial pattern distribution and energy transduction. Just as an expert friend put it, the experiments should revolve around the energy transfer at a level from the macro to the nano.

In a mediocre HIFI system, you will not hear too much of a difference. In the high-end level though, it will affect you and force you to purchase – say – a professional rack. Buying a rack may be a good idea, but it will limit you with the rack's own sound. Many audiophiles I know of usually change powercords, interconnects, speaker cables, tubes or acoustics elements to reach to a satisfactory performance level after buying a rack. Therefore if you buy a rack (and nobody has a right to criticize you for buying a rack), you will (most probably) fine-tune your gear around the rack manufacturer's resonance understanding.

In the top-end level, if you are sure of the internal performance of your gear, then the chances are you will build your own rack. If your reference point is your own gear, (front-end, amplifier, speakers and your cabling) then you would like to treat your components with your accumulated isolation knowledge.

Some audiophiles claim that manufacturing floating rack platforms (rack platforms that stand/float on a special blend of sand, totally separated from the main rack body) is the only option for true isolation. Some would prefer non-floating racks/boxes, a standard carpenter job. The rack platform material differs for many audiophiles. For instance, some use natural wood, some marble, aluminium or other composite materials. The majority of audiophiles I know treat each component separately. The understanding behind is simple. The cymbals or guitar chords/strings are metal. Why not enjoy the metal alloy, aluminium or marble beneath a DAC or a pre-amp to truly reflect the high frequencies? At the same time, enjoy unpressed natural wood beneath the amplifiers or even the speakers (with the condition that they stand very tight on the wood platform). Therefore audiophiles may choose to utilise a *COMBINATION* of different materials as rack platforms under different gear – according to their preference.

There is another group of audiophiles whose understanding is to *ONLY* use wood beneath their gear. Among the wood types, rosewood, cherry or the exotic ebony are the most popular, where they claim to reach the ultimate musicality while not trading off the fundamental audiophile base, such as dynamics range, depth, low-level detail, the critical liquidity and/or the realism in high-frequency. There is no end to exotic moves, therefore I will not go further into the popular designs of custom-made wood platforms too much..

Today, I would like to concentrate more on *WHAT* to put *ABOVE* the rack you build. Within an optimum rack system, (with a neutral and hopefully natural performance) in top-end gear, you will hear the performance of these units.

But unfortunately, the story is more complicated due to the following reasons:

- The neutrality is subjective therefore my reference is debatable for others.
- Each chassis design is different. The vibration resonance of a copper chassis is different than the aluminium, which is different than pure iron. Therefore the outcoming performance of an isolation device would incredibly vary from system to system.

Therefore, in order to find out the truth, *TRY* and find out for yourself. (I know I sound like Krishnamurti!) Nobody has the 'ultimate' solution for your entire system. Only you will find your own 'resonance' within the audiophile world.

Just a reminder:

There is no perfection, there is no absolute in a high-end system.



There are so many brands out there. I would like to review the below, which I have been curious about for along time: I will keep the ideas short, hoping I do not create any prejudice among you valuable audiophiles. These are just *my* findings...

<http://www.isocleanpower.com> Isotip SI (300 Euros set of four)

<http://www.combak.net/feet&bases/FEET&BASES.htm> Tu 210 zx Tuning feet (810 Euros set of four)

<http://www.starsoundtechnologies.com/> Audiopoints (135 Usd Set of 3)

<http://www.symposiumusa.com/rollerblocks.html> Rollerblock Series 2+ (500 usd set of three)

<http://www.neuanceaudio.com/> Platform 200 usd.

www.nonamehifi.com Resonance Balls (110 usd Set of Four)

www.eichmanncables.com Toppers (xxxx usd Set of Six)

The Test:

Within my test today, I have three American, two Japanese, one Australian and one locally manufactured isolation device.

My own racks are fairly neutral, where I use 97 % natural wood – Canadian Maple, 2% metal and 1% of other composites: My stands are made of pure Canadian Maple and beneath each stand, I use Soundcare spikes. Beneath my speakers, I use my beloved Cerabase steel/ceramic base from Finite Elemente.

I have already isolated my 47labs transport and DAC with a Nuance platform, now I would like to try these test units BENEATH my pre-amp. The pre-amp section - in my opinion - needs the resonance fine-tuning the most. Therefore I have tried each of these units one-by-one beneath my pre-amp.



Albums Auditioned:

Auditioning has been attained with Two Tracks:

'Twilight Glow' Michel Camilo & Tomatito - Spain Again

Piano: Michel Camilo, Flamenco Guitar: Tomatito (2006 Universal International Music, LC 00699.0602498781364)

'Anda Loco' Renaud Garcia-Fons Trio – Featuring Kiko Ruiz & Negrito Trasante, Arcoluz

Five String Double Bass: Renaud Garcia-Fons, Flamenco Guitar, Kiko Ruiz, Negrito Trasante – Drums, Percussion



System:

My philosophy is based on the shortest possible signal path, and robust synergy within and among components.

Digital Front-End: 47 Labs Transport and Gemini DAC

Pre-Amplifier: Mastersound Preamp.

Internal wiring is special production Jena labs wire, specially manufactured and matched SilverGold Mundorf capacitors, NOS Kondo resistors, and Tubecap power units, Double cryoed – custom manufactured Yamamoto Sockets with 1960's NOS Telefunken ECC82 tubes. All modifications have been designed by Topline Audio. <http://www.toplineaudio.com>

Amplifier: Mastersound 845 Parallel Single-Ended Monoblocks. Exact same modifications as the pre-amp stage designed by Topline Audio, Electro-Harmonics 6sn7 Tubes, and 845 Metal Plate power tubes,

Speakers: Focal Diva Utopia Berrylium.

Cables: Digital: Harmonix HS-101

DAC – Preamp: I have two cables, sometimes preferring copper, sometimes the silver. For Copper, my most recent choice is the Echole Obsession series, purest copper path I have ever witnessed. <http://www.echole.com>

In certain instances, depending on my taste, I use silver. I prefer the famous Kondo KSL – LP Rohs interconnect cable. <http://www.audionote.co.jp>

Preamp – Poweramp: : Echole Obsession series, purest copper path I have ever witnessed

Poweramp – Speaker: Kondo KSL SP-z speaker cable series, no further comments needed for the silver of Kondo I guess.

Powercords – Kondo KSL Lpd for Transport and DAC. The rest is DIY cables using Oyaide connectors of M1 and F1.

Findings:

Isoclean ISOTIP SI. Units constructed of compound materials ranging from very hard, hard and soft to dampen and absorb micro mechanical vibrations. The end product being the results of numerous experiments and listening sessions.

Pros: A fairly improved focus, a fairly improved depth in the stage. Micro-details are relatively the same.

Cons: A sense of dryness appeared. Low level details disappeared slightly and low level performance decreased. My system is no longer liquid and the life-like performance has slightly disappeared.

I will give out a rough comment. If your system is too bright or you have uncontrolled bass, Isotip units may be a resort.

Harmonix Tu 210 zx Tuning feet: 'Harmonix tuning feet are the first step towards perfect sound. Placed under CD players, turntables, preamps, power amps, speakers, and other equipment, these remarkable devices eliminate electronic and mechanical distortion to bring out a depth of sound you didn't even know was there.

A very elegant design. An aesthetic beauty for a price of 800+ Euros. These units are especially offered for usage beneath tube pre-amps or power amps.

Pros: Focus and the feeling of depth in the soundstage increases incredibly. The soundstage has widened outside the speakers at least 40 cm from each speaker. I would say that the soundstage has widened 20% compared to my original setup. Transparency has slightly increased as well. Resolution has increased significantly. The sizes of the instruments are considerably bigger. There is control.

Cons: A slight dryness in lower mids and a slight loss of bass. Perhaps the composite brings a very slight edginess. I am not too sure on a dynamic range improvement since my experience is towards a slight dryness in the lower frequencies. Bass is not punchy as expected but smaller in scale and definitely controlled (contrary to all instruments appearing 'bigger' in the soundstage).

This unit serves perfectly well for midrange and upper extensions in my system, but my overall set-up is simply *not synergic* with these feet. Perhaps with some authoritarian and ultra-transparent setups these feet may serve well.

The Original Audio Points by StarSound: The unique design of AudioPoint displaces the focal point of resonant energy to a virtual point below the tip of audiopoint.

I have the non-threaded 1.5 aP1D size.

Pros: A fairly improved soundstage; not a significant improvement in stage width and depth. Resolution has slightly increased, though.

Cons: Transparency has slightly decreased. I should perhaps use the threaded versions and critique the unit later-on. I have suspicions that my pre-amp is not heavy enough (just 10 kg)

to give enough pressure to keep the audiopoints truly stable. No significant change has occurred with these units.

SymposiumAudio, RollerBlocks Series 2+: *'Ball-bearing isolation devices can make improvements in system performance unmatched by other isolation devices. SYMPOSIUM introduced the bearing isolation device for active components with the original ROLLERBLOCK in 1997. Constantly improved since then, we make the finest bearing isolation devices anywhere - because when it comes to bearing isolation for audio and video, we wrote the book.'*

Pros: Amazing focus and truly improved soundstage. Harmonics are delineated and individualized. Transparency very high. There is a feeling of a relaxed ambiance in the midrange. Highs are very crisp and clear. Soundstage has expanded 15 – 20% both in the width and depth. Low-level detail is there.

Cons: The punchy feeling is slightly low. The highs may sound bright to some. In general, my definition would be a slight analytical performance. For a dull and bodily system, these may serve perfectly fine. My past experience has served well in the front-end and pre-amp section.

Neuance Platform: *Neuance is a high performance accessory isolation platform of exceptional expressiveness, custom-fitted to replace the stock shelving of your existing rack system or used as a free-standing table top platform. The unique low mass, rapid dissipation design augments your components' own resonance control functions. Neuance preserves the pace, rhythm and timing of the original musical performance, offering an organic, natural and balanced presentation. The result is a product that reveals the music's dynamic, kinetic and emotional qualities.*

I currently use it beneath my 47 labs Flatfish Transport and Gemini DAC. A perfect fit. Also strongly advised by Kiuchi-san of 47 Labs.

I have tried a second Neuance platform beneath my pre-amp.

Pros: Musical. Very organic. The instruments have more body, especially in the lower extensions. Soundstage has slightly improved. Two simple words to define this platform: palpability and coherence in the final outcome.

Cons: Too musical. An upfront midrange has blurred the inner-details. Other than that, the emotion is there. But I am positive that a second platform is beyond my system synergy. Therefore this is not the perfect choice for my pre-amp, unlike my front-end.

A very interesting platform indeed. May create marvels in many systems. A must-try.

Nonamehifi Resonance balls:

Our fellow audiophile has come up with Pendula wood of which I have been very curious to experiment. Standing on ceramic concave platforms, these wooden balls are very stiff.

Just like the previous devices, I placed three of these under my pre-amp. Two in the front and one in the rear. After correct positioning, I raise the pre-amp for a second time, wait until the balls are centered on-axis in the ceramic holder, then finally place the unit for a more-centered and relaxed floatation.

Pros:

Very Musical.

Soundstage has improved some 10% in depth and width. Correct size of each instrument relative to each other. A controlled and tight low-level detail. Realistic bass performance, sufficient impact. Punchy. Harmonics with speed and clarity...

The violins are not analytical and does not aggress my beryllium tweeters nor do the vocals 'shout'. 'A general calmness without effort' is how I would describe the Pendulas. Doing a wonderful job beneath my pre-amp, I would describe these units as a good overall performer.

Cons: I have detected a feeling of 'compression' especially in the very bottom frequencies. Perhaps a compression and slight loss of dynamics between 70 Hz and 30 Hz. Except this finding: it is a 'no-sound of her own' product. I mean, no considerable 'wood-sound'. I will benchmark this unit with some of the most expensive and exotic wood isolation devices in the future. I will receive the famous SHUNMOOK Ultra resonators (higher in price though, 1000 usd a set of three) in the near future, and will make a comparison with these units.

In the top-end, I will have enough alternate isolation devices to extensively critique the NonameHifi Pendula, but in a standard hi-end synergy, I would say a must-try.

Yes, the sound is musical with the Pendulas, but let's see what the Shunmook will bring,



Eichmann Technologies. Topper Resonance Control Device.

For so many year, we audiophiles are forced to look at the feet of components, spikes or the racks, for resonance. The few times I have checked the top of my units are when I had placed Shakti Stone or similar units for electromagnetic interference or refinements.

Adrian of Eichmann Technologies has been kind enough to send me the 'Topper' device for trial. At first, you are urged to place them beneath the components. 6 units come with each package. Right out of the package, I have placed 4 units on top of my pre-amp, and 2 on top of the power transformer of the pre-amp.

Very Elegant looking aluminum pieces indeed. The claim from Eichmann Technologies is also appealing and logical. The unwanted standing waves and the critical frequencies produced by the speakers, literally 'shaking' the component is neutralized with the toppers. Afterall, the accumulation of standing waves, attenuating standing waves, and disrupting the transference of resonance to component areas are known to be critical drawbacks for any hi-end system. Let's see how it performs:

Pros:

An AMAZING product.

Very Silent background. Truly, amazingly silent. The speakers have further disappeared; within an expanded of the soundstage. The instruments in the stage has the correct size and positioning. Michel Camilo on piano presents himself with more body and inner harmonics. It is in the bass performance where you see a life-like performance. The Five String Double Bass of Renaud Garcia-Fons has the utmost inner details with liquidity not present before. The Diva Utopias are forcing the lower limits of 30 Hz. Indeed, there is inner dynamics, palpability, coherence in all frequencies. I am speechless.

Cons.

None. This is the sincere and objective opinion of three audiophiles of Istanbul HIFI Club and myself. We have all kept our opinions to ourselves until the end of the performance in order not to influence the other.

One has to be careful how to place them though. For instance, 3 units is not enough for my pre-amp. The Pre-unit requires four. The power transformer of my pre-amp requires 2 toppers, not more. Interesting. One has to try the exact position on the component and also decide how many to use on each component. I have not tried them on my speakers. I will purchase two more sets to find out if any further improvement will be attained.



When I take the Toppers off my system, the focus blurs a bit, the pianos become thinner and since the bass performance is lowered, the highs; - upper mids and highs - becomes 'shouty'. The Toppers are a part of my system from now on.

Let's see what will happen when the legendary ebony comes beneath the components, with the Toppers on the top.

Some would claim true ebony design has the most musical and organic sound. Well, organic. Like cashmere. I love my cashmere sweater. I do not itch, nor do I sweat. I do not even feel it is on me most of the time.

Wishing for a truthful and true auditioning experience...

Kerem Küçükaslan