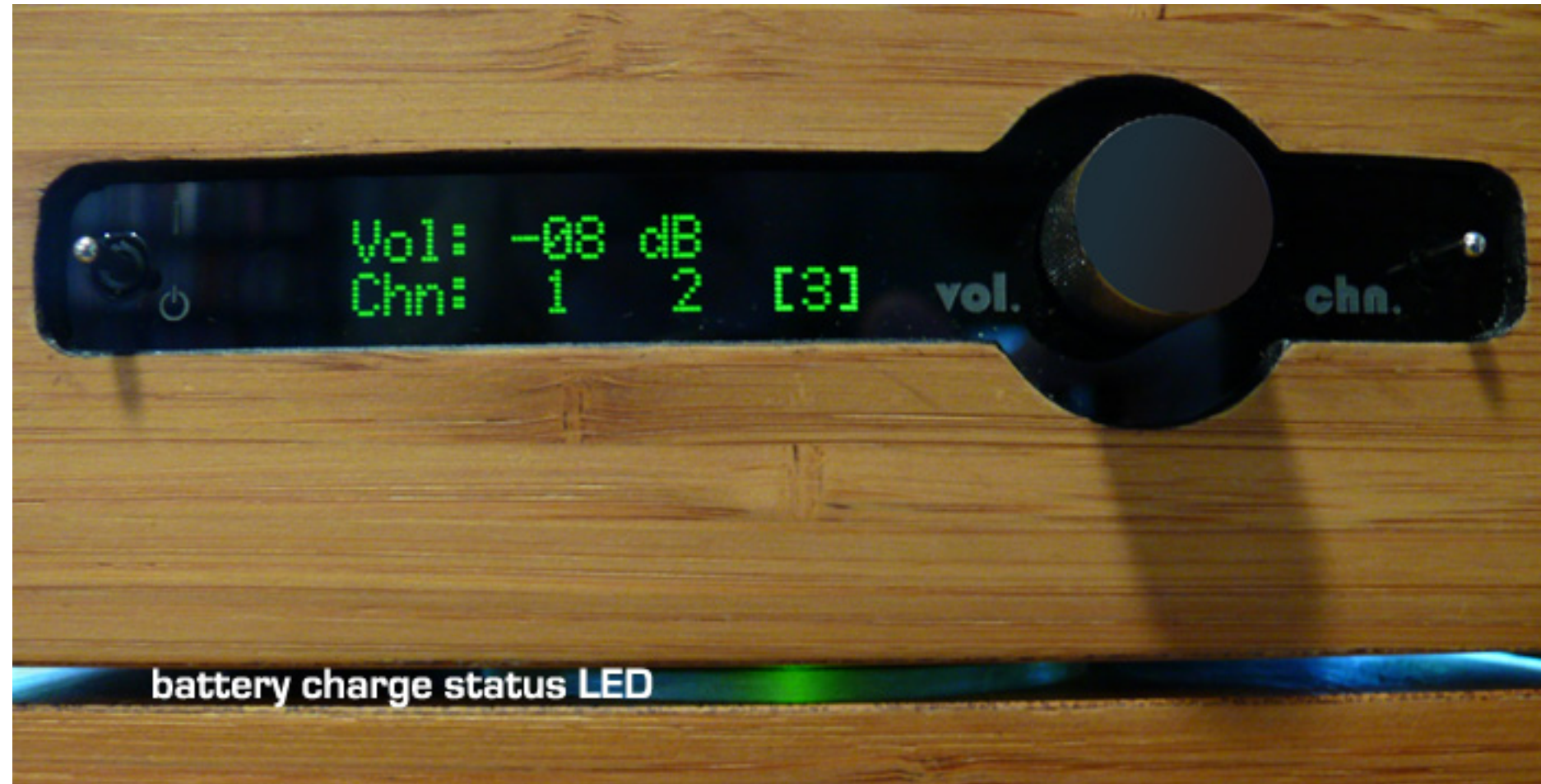


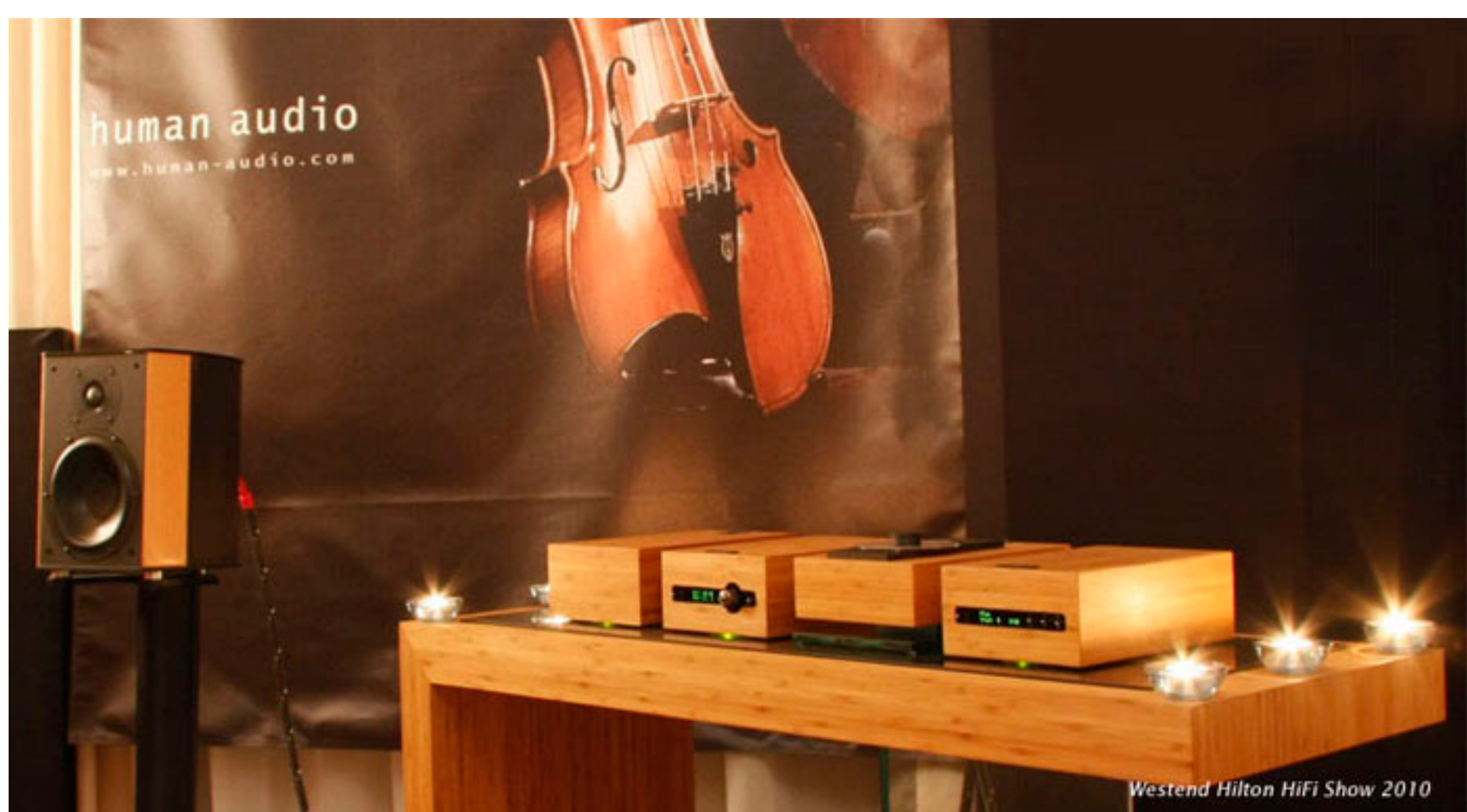
The universal charger's LED shows red when charging and green for complete. There's also a downfiring LED in the middle of the Acrylic front footer of each bamboo brick. Its glow reflects forward just enough to show green below the component for operational battery status, red as a warning that playtime is just about to expire. [My sample was encased in an earlier enclosure. The edging around the display has since improved a lot I was told.]



Channels are switched manually with a 3-pole toggle. It runs through the sequence left to right or right to left. The always-on green display confirms the active input with brackets around the corresponding number while the numerical volume display shows actual dB of attenuation. -62dB is mute, 00dB full power. The switched resistors click audibly from relay to relay as volume is changed. The attractive 8-button remote with embossed *Libretto* name is optional for the amp and only offers volume up/down.



Rear panel accommodations are basic. The mains charger seats in the top socket of the amp, the charger umbilical to the power supply in the one below. Then there is a beefier multi-pin lock-collar power umbilical that's long enough to stack the units or place them side by side as shown next. The orientation of the Euro-proof speaker terminals has their spade slots angled inward which gets a little crammed. I'd have the two left terminals angled outward to create more space. The right ones have to remain as is to clear the power/charger leads. The shipping carton is a special fabrication with wooden side handles and velcro flip lid, foam liners and cradles. It completes the organic theme of the Human Audio delivery.

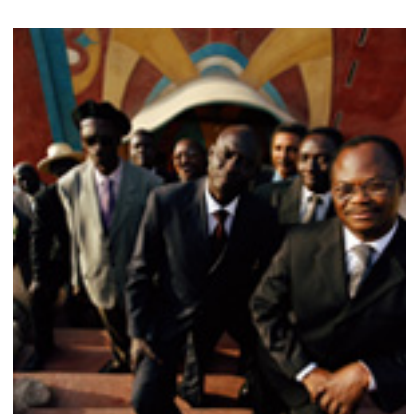


Though this amp is not expressively designed for this purpose, I had on hand a 50-ohm orthodynamic headphone of low 83.dB sensitivity that required high-output break-in. I thus stapped this HifiMan HE-6 to the Fortepiano's speaker outputs with a 4-spades-to-4pin-XLR leash. The Hungarian amp + power supply successfully tolerated this high impedance without any distortion, noise or signs of distress. Instead things sounded very good. I thus mention it as a possible application. Low-impedance headphones can be run balanced—i.e. with discrete left/right channel grounds—for which they only require a custom wire harness that terminates in spades or bananas. Headphones like AKG's 701/702, the three Hifi Man orthodynamic models and the Audez'e LCD-2 equivalent all sport disconnect wiring either via mini XLR or screw terminals. Rigging up a balanced replacement harness isn't difficult.



Of course speaker drive/listening is the main purpose of this amp so that's what we'll get to now.

Having *just* concluded the [Linnenberg_cdp3E/amp2S](#) review, switching over to the Fortepiano became an instant reminder. There's good reason why the recipe of class D + batteries—operating just as quietly. In very many cases they in fact offer higher resolution. This could suggest that their noise floors are lower still. I think when the batteries are properly chosen, the primary strongmen are low impedance and *current* delivery. This is true even of the ultra-compact batteries one finds inside portable headphone amps. The good pocket amps like ALO Audio's RxMkII always surprise how they can drive even counter-intuitive loads and never with poor bass. A second advantage of batteries not to be underestimated is performance invariability. Your DC components aren't susceptible to daily changes in utility power. While they don't necessarily sound better per se, they could well sound superior more often when comparable normal gear suffers AC-related compromises.



Proponents and makers of such amps always cite lower noise floors as primary advantage and rationale. I don't agree. While it's well possible that engineering them properly is more difficult, superior AC-powered components—let's disregard phono stages—operate just as quietly. In very many cases they in fact offer higher resolution. This could suggest that their noise floors are lower still. I think when the batteries are properly chosen, the primary strongmen are low impedance and *current* delivery. This is true even of the ultra-compact batteries one finds inside portable headphone amps. The good pocket amps like ALO Audio's RxMkII always surprise how they can drive even counter-intuitive loads and never with poor bass. A second advantage of batteries not to be underestimated is performance invariability. Your DC components aren't susceptible to daily changes in utility power. While they don't necessarily sound better per se, they could well sound superior more often when comparable normal gear suffers AC-related compromises.

A slew of descriptors like chunky, robust, thick, dense and burly offered themselves to describe the sound's friendly core flavor. The shadow side (there's always one) was clearly less information particularly upwards of the midrange. Accompanying that were a sense of reduced speed and edge-of-seat charge. The ability to mentally map the soundstage and walk around it like an amazingly detailed memory palace also diminished.

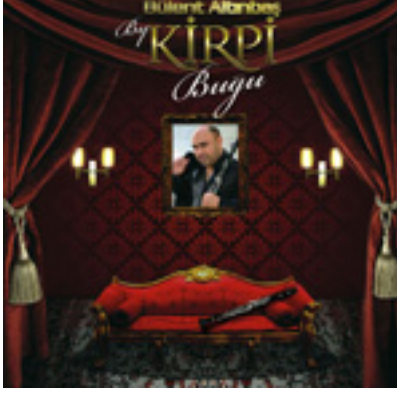
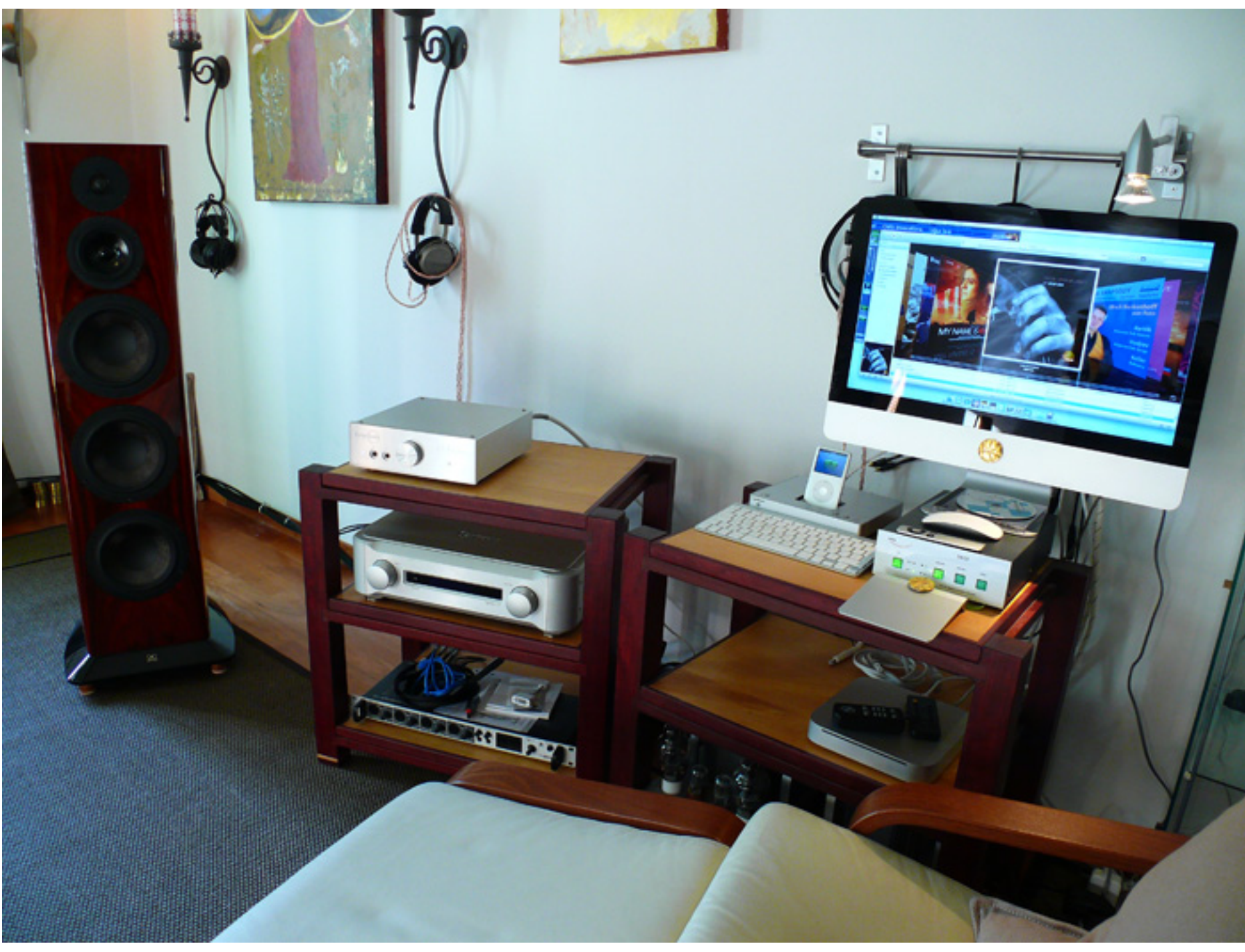


If to this picture we add a subwoofer but subtract some dynamic reflexes, we arrive at a strong parallel to the discontinued Zu Druid MkIV speaker [right]. With the Fortepiano I heard a very similar mix of image density and warmth embedded in minor opacity. It had the same shadowed top end and a strong emphasis on saturated colors with deep black tones and diminished air, sparkle and separation plus a feisty midbass.



To paint in broad strokes and generalities, sonically the Human Audio amp belongs to the current audio retro movement. Its supporters feel that modern hifi has pushed way too far into presence region/treble forwardness and attack sharpness whilst seriously shortchanging richness of tone and dynamic reflexes. A specific sentence in a recent email exchange with Vapor Sound speaker designer Ryan Scott—about a unique custom commission of a 1.1ft³ monitor with true 91dB sensitivity and very high SPL potential—captures part of this spirit: "Remember that 50Hz from a 10" woofer is *different* than 50Hz from a 5.25" woofer." In the vintage/retro speaker movement, cellulose-based big drivers of 10" to 15" diameters appear again used well into the lower treble.

This counters the prevailing trend of small 3" - 5" midrange drivers which are often made of far harder materials like Titanium, Magnesium and ceramics mated to Beryllium tweeters. Extrapolate from there to amplifier voicing. The Human Audio Fortepiano is a 10-inch paper-cone midrange run open into the treble bands coupled to a 15" woofer.



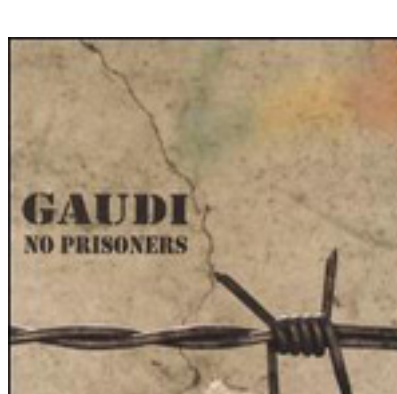
Confirmation occurs by way of how we involuntarily select what to play. My library is squarely built on music not sound. I despise audiophile pabulum. I much rather listen to an inferior recording of great music than a pristine album of bad music. What an amp like the Hungarian does is make you reach for lesser recordings because they become far more palatable. The cliché "I discovered my library all over again by hearing things I've never heard before" is stood on its head. You do discover it again. You do hear things you've not heard in a long time. It's simply not because a certain kind of detail resolution went up. It's because it went down. You don't *hear* more. You listen to more *recordings* and thus likely listen for more hours each day.

The extracted payment for more pleasure is homogenization of differences. Middling productions sound less middling, superior mastering jobs less superior. Competitive range shrinks in the same way that dynamic compression works in general. For music-first listeners such *compressed critical range* is absolutely brilliant. Their libraries will manage to drive up audiophile resolution and finesse without compromising the base recipe's friendly comfort factor. And before you ask, no I've not had any RWA on the premises sufficiently recently (certainly not in the present digs nor as any of the present LFP-V editions) to be at all comfortable commenting on how the Fortepiano might compare. I did make such an earlier comparison to the Firenze Audio equivalent. That I found to be a virtual stand-in for the RWA Signature 30.



Neither music-first nor sound-first needs and desires are more or less right. Neither are the components which cater to them. Even so it's plainly the case that more forgiving hifi is the more conducive to satisfaction. It makes for less fretting over the evils which are committed daily in the recording studios. The more magnification you apply on those, the narrower your path becomes. *Everything* becomes critical. That's usually the start of much frustration and expense. It's where music lovers turn audiophiles to eventually forget their beginnings and feel lost.

Ask yourself whether your love of hifi and music is primarily about criticisms or pleasure. It's really that basic. If you want to feel less forced into being permanently critical of the music you enjoy the most, a cleverly voiced component like the Fortepiano solves major issues. That's also what I regard as the secret behind RedWine Audio's success. As Mr. Rossi's audiophile sensibilities and circuit design chops mature further, it'll be interesting to see whether his creations become more critical in this regard; or whether they manage to drive up audiophile resolution and finesse without compromising the base recipe's friendly comfort factor. And before you ask, no I've not had any RWA on the premises sufficiently recently (certainly not in the present digs nor as any of the present LFP-V editions) to be at all comfortable commenting on how the Fortepiano might compare. I did make such an earlier comparison to the Firenze Audio equivalent. That I found to be a virtual stand-in for the RWA Signature 30.



Shifts: General attributes included being warmer, darker, blacker, very potent down low. With a high-output source like Burson's 10V-max HA160D the FortePiano/Duoforte combo was sufficiently powerful to raise the roof with 90dB speakers. Musical threads were compact/tight rather than fluffy/loose. Soundstage sorting was quite good but far from extreme. Layering and holography were stepped down. Transients were softer rather than incisive and steely. Tones were richly saturated with tube-reminiscent bloom. Plucked/bowed wires showed more resonant wood cavity than string action. The overall feel was relaxed not charged. The combo was clearly capable of great weightiness on bass beats and synth trickery. Voices were very material but not in high relief over against the background or as again speaking in generalities, the sound solo was more single-ended and more push/pull with the Duoforte PSU. That you can have it either way is trick and a unique feature for the Humans. [Their Scene open-baffle speaker below.]

Disconnecting the optional power supply shifted the warmth/weight vs. lit-up/energetic balance. This was unexpected though perhaps not so much in hindsight. The sound became lighter and more transparent. The top end opened up and airiness increased. Transients and definition firmed up while bass presence/gravitas shrunk and the presentation leaned out for more light, less mass. In the earlier Zu tie-in, the Druid's phenolic tweeter would have been upgraded to the TangBand ribbon of the Essence. While power output took an obvious hit to reduce the number of copasetic speakers and require higher settings on the dial, many listeners of more modern stripes should probably *prefer* the FortePiano solo. Being used to and fond of the higher lither resolution of my FirstWatt F5/J2 amps, I did. The upshot is, don't assume that more power and a beefier power supply (plus associated €990 expense) automatically translate into a universally applicable next step or final destination.



I found it quite fascinating how the smaller simpler shared power supply opened up the sound as it did. Unlike drummer Ken Micallef on staff, I was a trained clarinetist. I'm sensitive to instrumental elements played 'on the breath'. Those aren't limited to woodwinds. The phrasing of a violin can be just as bel canto. Here the Fortepiano solo was superior. Bowed cello had more *vocalise* elements and more rasp. While raw resolution still didn't match what an F5 delivers with a preceding passive pot—in my case a Bent Audio Tap X autoformer box or the StereoKnight Silverstone Balance still in from review—it was closer. Again speaking in generalities, the sound solo was more single-ended and more push/pull with the Duoforte PSU. That you can have it either way is trick and a unique feature for the Humans. [Their Scene open-baffle speaker below.]

Conclusion: Unlike their Libretto CD player which seems unique in a few ways, the FortePiano is 'merely' another successful iteration of low-power class D chips mated to DC power. That makes it no less compelling than certain serious precursors. The more organic packaging in bamboo or other woods is attractive for those who don't fancy metal boxes. Remote control over source switching and volume with numerical level confirmation ticks off expected 21st-century creature features. The optional PSU not merely increases output power but becomes a voicing feature. That operates quite similar to how Esoteric's C-03 preamp with opamp gain changes colors when its gain structure is set from 0 to 24dB.



Srajan Ebaen

Quality of packing: Very good.
Reusability of packing: Indefinitely.
Ease of unpacking/repacking: A cinch.
Condition of component received: 95%. Actual production supposedly has perfected the edging on the finish.
Completeness of delivery: Perfect.
Human interactions: Good and very friendly.
Pricing: Good value.
Final comments & suggestions: Strictly in the vein of Red Wine and Firenze Audio precursors but unique in its two-box architecture offers not only a two-step upgrade path but, as described, can noticeably alter the overall voicing of the performance.