

PHOTO BY BOGDAN BOGDANOV



#1

MISHA KUCHERENKO



#2

## “COUNTERCULTURE MAVEN”

In its December 1988 issue, the American magazine *Interview* published its “Special USSR Section” — introducing its readers to some of the stalwarts of our country’s art and culture — for the first time in its history, in which I suddenly — as the protagonist of Michael Benson’s piece “CounterCulture Maven” — found myself in the company of poet and Nobel laureate Joseph Brodsky, chief choreographer of the Bolshoi Theatre Yuri Grigorovich, Gorbachev’s top foreign policy advisor Georgy Arbatov, famous renegade Russian historian Yuri Afanasiev, avant-garde music composers Alfred Schnittke and Sofia Gubaidulina as well as other Soviet (and anti-Soviet) cultural celebrities. Consequently, along with rock star Boris Grebenshchikov, rebellious musician extraordinaire Sergei Kuryokhin, the shining star of the unofficial Soviet art scene Sergei “Africa” Bugaev, outstanding dissident artist Ilya Kabakov, avant-garde fashion designer Katya Filippova and others, I also ended up among the key figures of the local counterculture.



#3

## JOHN PEEL

I met the famous *BBC* DJ **John Peel**, who introduced the world to such musicians as *The Fall*, *New Order*, *The Undertones*, *Billy Bragg* and countless others (recognized as a veritable “national institution” in Britain) during his first “official” visit to the USSR in 1987. He seemed to take a liking to me immediately, as it turned out that I embodied the very purpose of his *BBC World Service* “mass enlightenment” mission, when, tearing through terrible short wave radio signal interference from behind the “Iron Curtain” I learned by heart almost every word he spoke. He devoted almost an entire chapter to our relationship in his autobiography. I stayed at his house in Suffolk several times during my visits to Britain in the early 90s, and auditioning to an incredible amount of demo tapes by new bands that he received every day in his home studio and discussing their merits with him became a moment when, as they say, “a dream came true.”





#5

## DAVID MANLEY

A photo of a historic moment for me — March 18th, 1993. **David Manley** shakes my hand to secure the beginning of our collaboration to sale his gear in Russia at his house in Chino, California. Thus, as he has happened to be the only American manufacturer who didn't avoid the first Russian visitors to the *Stereophile-1993 Show* like the plague and immediately agreed to do business with us, this moment laid the foundation for my entire professional career in High End Audio (more information can be found at [WWW.MANLEYLABS.COM](http://WWW.MANLEYLABS.COM) and [WWW.VTL.COM](http://WWW.VTL.COM)).

#6



## PAUL KLIPSCH

This photo depicts the moment when High End Audio pioneer **Paul Klipsch**, figuratively speaking, “passes me the torch” of his generation’s audiophile values (pictured with my *Purple Legion*’s co-owner **Nikolay Schelok**). I have never been a huge fan of Klipsch loudspeakers’ sonic character, but, being fully aware of the company’s historical significance, *PL* became the company’s first distributor in Russia in 1994. By that time, it has already become a big corporation, with constantly changing — from a meeting to a meeting — *International Sales* representatives... Several years later we mutually agreed to part our ways and, after a few false starts in Russia, the company eventually found itself a more or less proper partner here — one of the largest local Consumer Electronics importers, which also has a dedicated audio equipment department (more information can be found at [WWW.KLIPSCH.COM](http://WWW.KLIPSCH.COM)).



#7

## EVEANNA MANLEY, CHRIS SOMMOVIGO

**EveAnna Manley** of *Manley Labs*, and **Chris Sommovigo** of *Black Cat Cable*, are my closest kindred spirits, associates, longest time business partners in the High End Audio industry and friends. I met EveAnna in 1992 at the *Stereophile Show* in Los Angeles, and Chris three years later (this photo was taken at the CanJam RMAF-2018 in Denver, Colorado). One of the divisions of *StereoPravda* still remains the distributor of *Manley Labs* consumer products in Russia, while Chris' cables have always been a "litmus test" for me: if using them made a given audio system sound better, it meant that I was on the right track — while, if the reverse happened, it meant that something in the system's set up was wrong. This is why we only use his cables in our *StereoPravda* "SPearphone" ear monitors: in order to be sure for all 100% that we use the best it can be sonically earphone connecting cable. He custom-makes them for us, what's more — like everything truly great — almost literally, "by hand" (more information can be found at [WWW.MANLEYLABS.COM](http://WWW.MANLEYLABS.COM) and [WWW.BLACKCATCABLE.COM](http://WWW.BLACKCATCABLE.COM)).



#8

## HARVEY "GIZMO" ROSENBERG

Out of all the books on high performance audio I've read, *The Search for Musical Ecstasy* by **Harvey "Gizmo" Rosenberg**, which he gave me at the *Stereophile Show* in 1994 in Miami, had the biggest influence on the contents and style of this tome. Several years later, I visited him at his house in Stamford, a small town in Connecticut, two hours from New York by train, to audition his own audio rig.

When Harvey prematurely left us following a heart attack aboard a plane on his way to yet another auditioning of yet another — naturally, tube! — amplifier in July of 2001, Barry Willis of *Stereophile* wrote the following in his obituary: "...In a field saturated with the overly serious and the self-important, he was always a welcome source of levity, who never hesitated to poke a hole in the balloon of pomposity..." (more information can be found at [WWW.META-GIZMO.ORG](http://WWW.META-GIZMO.ORG)).



#9

## MAGNEPAN

*Magnepan* truly is the “last of the Mohicans” (this ad picture depicts their current flagship “MG-30.7”). On the one hand, the company that was founded at the very inception of the current High End Audio industry almost fifty years ago, and whose all products are handmade “from scratch” in the US, is the quintessence of the phenomenon itself. On the other, it continues to hold on to its roots. When I am asked various questions about what High End Audio is about, I would just mention *Magnepan* loudspeakers and say: “This is where all the answers are”.

Including the answer to the question why achieving sound of an unusually high quality requires the equipment that is highly unusual in its appearance (and, by the way, this is only a necessary condition, not a sufficient one). (more information can be found at [WWW.MAGNEPAN.COM](http://WWW.MAGNEPAN.COM)).

#10



## MAGNEPAN #2

*Magnepan* loudspeakers are the rare embodiment of the “good old” American work ethic that still remains in some isolated enterprises. In response to my question about the 400 000 miles on the speedometer of his hard-working vehicle, **Wendell Diller** — their head of marketing — replied confidently that they will never pass the burden of their life style on the shoulders of their customers (see their “Frugality Is Cool” ad in January, 2011 issue of *Stereophile* magazine).

*The Beatles* sang “...can’t buy me love...” for a good reason, and in the same vein — “you can’t buy me a sonic nirvana”, as it’s not about money invested in the relationships per se — it’s about the accomplishments which are earned with an appropriate mutual effort. The same way, because they are already born as truly “labor of love” products, all *Magnepan* loudspeakers presume their potential customers’ reciprocal ability to fully appreciate their sonic excellence. And this is why, relative to their incredibly high sound quality, these loudspeakers are so “dirt cheap” (more information can be found at [WWW.MAGNEPAN.COM](http://WWW.MAGNEPAN.COM)).



#11

## MY OWN AUDIO SYSTEM #2

All my own home High End Audio systems that I've been using for the last quarter of century have been built around three *Apogee Acoustics* loudspeakers: "Mini Grand", "Studio Grand" and just "Grand", and all of them were "active" — two-, three (and a half)- and four-way respectively. The audio system pictured at its current owner's living room) is based upon "Studio Grands" operating in the "3.5"-way "active" mode (each monoblock power amplifier is connected to the tweeter, woofer and to each of the two subwoofer's dynamic drivers, the latter operate in the same frequency band, that is why the "3.5" specification). There are eight *Manley SET*-monoblocks in the system (built with a Soviet "GM-70" direct heated triode as the output tube, equipped with Japanese *Tango* output transformers, AC power transformers, inter-stage transformers and "chokes", the output ones are optimized to operate in the corresponding frequency band). The octal tube monoblock "active" electronic crossovers for the loudspeakers, with a suit of various adjustments, was custom-made for me by a local "vacuum tube craftsman", **Anatoly Devitchensky**.

#12



### MY OWN AUDIO SYSTEM #3

As always, my third — and the last — own home audio system was based on *Apogee Acoustics* loudspeakers, in this case, their humongous “Grand.” It was “active” four-way one: it used two built-in 500 W *Krell* amplifiers for the tweeter ribbons and the subwoofers, as well as two pairs of external *Audio Research Corporation* monoblock power amplifiers (Reference-210 and Reference-600). In the early 1990s, these loudspeakers were among the most expensive, if not the most expensive, commercially made consumer loudspeakers in the world. The total cost of the whole system exceeded the end of 1990-ies’ market value of my Moscow studio apartment several times (especially, if one includes the cost of room acoustical treatment devices from *Acoustic Sciences Corporation* to tame the sound of my “audio monk’s cell”). This is a photo of me (the *Apogee Acoustics* Russian distributor until the company was shut down in late 90-ies) and my “brother in arms” — **Philipp Demaret** — the former French distributor of *Apogee Acoustics*.



#13

## PHILIPP DEMARET

**Philipp Demaret** has been a legendary figure in European High End Audio in the 1990-ies. His claim to fame has been his Chateau De Flamarens in Lavaur, to the south of Paris, where audio systems of the highest caliber, assembled from components made by companies that he officially represented in France (*Krell, Apogee Acoustics, Audio Research Corporation, Magnepan, Wilson Audio* and others) were installed and ready for a demo in almost every room. This photo of *Apogee "Grand"* at Philippe's chateau was used by the manufacturer for the cover of their official brochure.

Another one of the "absolute" sound quality audio systems from Chateau De Flamarens — in this case, based on *Wilson Audio* loudspeakers and *Audio Research* electronics. In order for the loudspeakers like these to show all of their potential, the amount of effort to precisely set them up is not for the faint of heart (not to mention the monumental special effort required for the acoustical treatment of the listening room). Should one neglect to do all of this, the loudspeakers will never demonstrate what they are capable of and can become nothing more than an expressive monument to human vanity and greed (more information can be found at [WWW.EUROPE-AUDIO-DIFFUSION.COM](http://WWW.EUROPE-AUDIO-DIFFUSION.COM)).



MBL

In my opinion, any list of the most extraordinary examples of audio art will be incomplete without a mention of the German company *mbL*. They claim, reasonably, that acoustic waves under natural conditions propagate in all directions, which is why, at the music reproduction stage, they should also propagate in a radiation pattern of 360 degrees. With the goal of implementing this idea, *mbL* developed — “from scratch” — their own unique loudspeaker drivers, which they called “Radialstrahler” (and which audiophiles all over the world affectionately call “watermelons from Mars”). *mbL* produces the entire range of audio equipment, in every type of which the presence of the same uncompromising master is clearly felt. Again, if one agrees with my paradigm that “achieving sound of an unusually high quality requires the equipment that is highly unusual in its appearance,” then *mbL* loudspeakers fully comply with it (more information can be found at [WWW.MBL.DE](http://WWW.MBL.DE)).



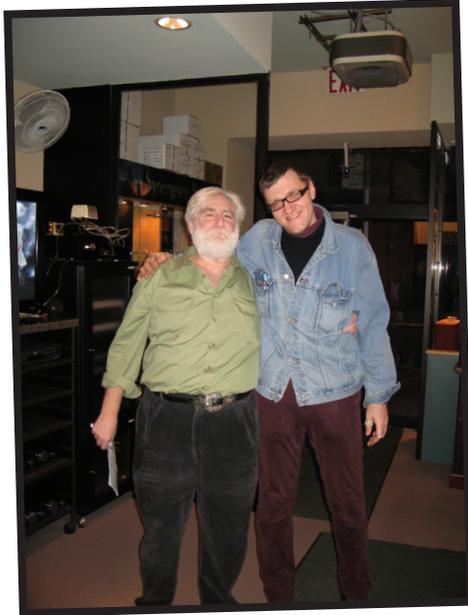
#15

## JOHN GRADO

**John Grado** is another rare example of a perfect embodiment of the old-school working ethics (pictured here at his workbench). His uncle, Joseph Grado, invented the very principle of moving coil cartridges in 1959. In 1991, John, being at the helm of the *Grado Labs*, added to the company's extensive phono cartridges' portfolio a line of headphones, which are widely recognized as some of the best in the world.

Visiting his factory — located in an inconspicuous little building in Brooklyn — around twenty years ago, I asked him: “John, why are you still in this, how should I put it, ‘facility’?”. “What do you mean?”, he replied. “I mean, why aren't you growing, expanding your production to eventually move into a bigger space?” To which he replied: “I've never even thought about it — simply because I do not want to lose control over my products' quality.”

And now the third Grado generation — John's sons Jonathan and Mathew — continue to “carry the torch” of the same family values (more information can be found at [WWW.GRADOLABS.COM](http://WWW.GRADOLABS.COM)).



#16

## ANDY SINGER

I bought my first truly high-end *Apogee Acoustics* “Stage” loudspeakers in 1991 at a New York audio salon *Sound by Singer*. Ten years later, I also bought my last *Apogee Acoustics* “Grand” over there. The owner of this establishment, **Andy Singer**, has been considered one of the most influential people in the global High End Audio for many years. Due to the strategic importance of his salon’s location and his personal influence, the fate of many brands was decided at his place in Manhattan, just outside Union Square. His invariably bold, on a brink of being arrogant, manners fully conformed to such his distinguished status. On the other hand, his unceremonious manners had a positive aspect: he was never afraid of being “politically incorrect” and always spoke his mind, saying out loud what others could only whisper to each other. For instance, in an interview I did with him for *Audiomagazin* in 2008, he had the following to say: “The worst thing ever happened to High End Audio is that we delegated the choice of equipment to the customers” (more information can be found at [www.SOUNDBYSINGER.COM](http://www.SOUNDBYSINGER.COM)).