



#33

YURI LAPINSKY – A PRISONER OF AUDIO

I met legendary **Yuri Lapinsky** at Gints Guks' birthday bash in May of 2019.

His way in audio started naturally for a boy of 14 behind the Iron Curtain, even if in his native Riga, Latvia, the epicenter of consumer electronics manufacturing in the USSR, due to proximity of the city to the “politically corrupted West”, the Curtain was, sort of, perforated.

Yuri has always been an avid music collector and has always strived to build the most outstanding audio gear — from developing his own technologies for optical-mechanical centering of vinyl records playback with its innovative moistening systems and to building a rig of 10 reel-to-reel tape recorders which he designed and built from a scratch (he even took into consideration the *Earth* magnetic field in its design).

As it was impossible to buy “unauthorized” by the Government Western Music in the USSR, Yuri built an enormous network of distribution of the best sounding music reel-to-reel tapes in the country. He would receive up to ten new LPs a day from all over the world, which he would copy on his tightly calibrated ten tape recorders' rig and would send out to his agents across the whole Soviet Union.

In 1980, the KGB caught him for this totally illegal activity, and he was sentenced to jail for two years.

Nevertheless, up to this day Yuri still continues to refine his art and continues to be the highest authority of the all things audio revered by a generation after a generation of audiophiles all over the former USSR.

#34



VLADIMIR LAMM

To me, **Vladimir Lamm** is a unique and distinguished figure on a worldwide High End Audio scene.

Having been in a state of awe and wonder at the whirlwind of events taking place around me during my first *CES* in Las Vegas in 1994, I attributed my first impression of Vladimir (based on our conversations there) to the insecurities of an unrecognized genius (especially because he was on foreign soil).

How wrong I was! And how time put everything in its right place! I simply had to gain a bit more experience to fully comprehend and appreciate how right Vladimir was about everything he told me then, and how difficult it is for really passionate people like him to get if not universal recognition but at least the recognition of their inimitable ways. This worldwide recognition of the unique sonic properties of *Lamm Industries'* equipment finally happened a mere few years after our first meeting with Vladimir.

In this book I would undoubtedly like to mention as many people from the former Soviet Union who had gained success and recognition in the field of audio as I can; and among those people the success of Vladimir Lamm is a “cherry on top,” not only in terms of his company’s decades of established worldwide distribution and commercial success, but also in terms of the exceptional sound quality embodied in his products’ very “body and soul.” In the heartwarming openness and the crystal-clear transparency of Lamm equipment’s sound I have always distinctly heard intimately familiar Russian soul’s motifs, and us, Russian audiophiles, cannot help but be very proud that one of us has been able to achieve all that (more information can be found at www.lammindustries.com).



#35

TCHERNOV AUDIO

As Russian distributors gained experience working with audio equipment of the highest caliber, while the unwavering spread and development of trade relations across the world was taking place, the most talented, successful and determined of them became manufacturers of world class audio products of their own. Among such manufacturers, *Tchernov Audio* (pictured — the founder and perennial CEO **Pyotr Tchernov**) stands out, as having just launched its premium cable audio/video products manufacturing under its own brand in 2001, they began to sell them across all continents — and in over fifty different countries — in 2002.

Despite the possible skepticism related to their “Made in Russia” origins, the unique *Tchernov Audio* cables were met with very enthusiastic response by both reviewers’ and the customers’ communities all over the world (more information can be found at WWW.TCHERNOVCABLE.COM)

In 2018, *Tchernov Audio* first introduced its no-holds-barred DAC “Apollo”, manufactured entirely in Russia as well. Every aspect of its design is based on the latest developments in digital technologies which allows the DAC to not only have the dynamic range of 145 dB but also an incredible musical resolution. As a result, this DAC demonstrates wonderful clarity along the whole frequency range and an astonishing effect of the “performers’ proximity” (more information can be found at WWW.TCHERNOV.AUDIO.COM).

#36



GRIGORY CHIKNAVEROV

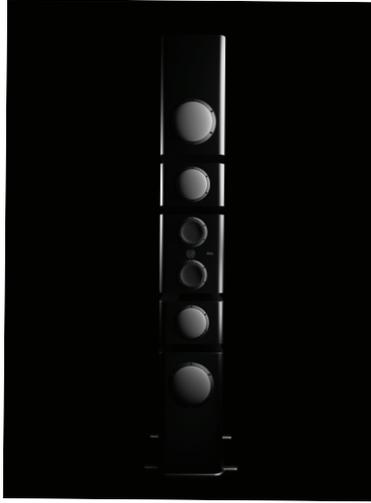
Due to the very nature of High End Audio — located at the “intersection of technology and art” — the role of the “Audio Auteur” has always been pivotal for all the twists and turns of its fate. Accordingly, all of its future prospects are related to the creative activity of its core community consisting of its most active and talented devotees.

Grigory Chiknavorov has made the entire journey in High End Audio — from being a hardcore “meloman” and audio geek ceaselessly upgrading all sorts of equipment during his youth to distributing in Russia a whole multitude of High End Audio gear (both by such established companies as *Dartzeel*, *MSB*, *Kimber Kable*, *EMT* and by quite a few of other small “boutique” firms from all over the world), as well as, eventually, manufacturing some of its own.

For the last ten years, Grigory, along with his Russian and foreign colleagues, has been developing a line of amplifiers and loudspeakers at his own facility just outside Moscow (and which includes three large listening rooms).

In the near future, he is also planning to build his own recording studio for producing reel-to-reel tape and vinyl recordings and, in the long term, Grigory has already set his sights on taking part in creating a concert hall that would fully conform to all of his sonic requirements.

There is no doubt that, while such ardent audiophiles as Grigory — fully obsessed with their passion for music and the equipment for its highest quality reproduction — continue to be active in the High End Audio industry, it will definitely continue to inspire (more information can be found at www.gong-av.ru).



#37

GROWUP

One of the Twelve Steps of “The Stairway to Audiophile Heaven” proclaimed in this book is this: “The point is not to make the right choice straightaway, but to make a choice that will then have to be made right over time.”

To give you an example of what I meant by that, the *GrowUp* loudspeaker system, developed by **Oleg Ryzhikov** and **Grigory Chiknaverov** in Russia, provides all the necessary tools for following this principle to the letter.

The modular design of these “active” loudspeakers allows to constantly increase their sonic potential by gradually adding new modules. For instance, beginning with an initial configuration, fully in line with the current state of the listening room (as well as financial means) of a given customer, he or she can then move towards a far more advanced variation of these speakers — by upgrading the module set and changing that previous configuration.

This transition can be done from the most basic module sets and configurations all the way up to the “ultimate” one, moreover — without incurring a loss by having to sell previously bought modules (by just adding new ones). What’s more, the integration of new modules into a complete acoustically coherent system takes place by simply adjusting overall settings in the system’s DSP menu.

All the power amplifiers are already built into each module, while all the module connections take place via a specialized interface, so the only wires going from these loudspeakers to the outside world are the AC power cables.

A ceramic “tweeter” is used in the most basic versions, while a diamond one is used in more advanced ones (more information can be found at WWW.GONG-AV.RU).

#38



G9 AUDIO

It really is true that, as they say, “The Russians are slow on getting into gear, but then slam on the gas.” And — I would add — often “drive faster” than everyone else.

Despite all the difficulties inherent in procuring electronic parts of the highest quality in the Soviet Union, audio of the highest performance level has never been dormant over there, and many remarkable engineers used their time off from work (usually “military industry”-related) to endlessly experiment and to constantly develop new ideas.

Following the collapse of the USSR and the liberalization of the economy, which allowed to realize even the most insane audio projects, the passionate pursuit of absolute sound quality gradually allowed Russian engineers to show the whole world what they are capable of.

G9 Audio is undoubtedly one of those companies founded by three veritable audio enthusiasts: **Vitaliy Smirensky** (also the owner of an incredible collection of rare and vintage audio equipment of all kinds), **Vladimir Dyachenko** and **Kirill Ostapov**.

This company has so many ideas it wants to implement that the list of audio products it manufacturers covers all categories of audio — from DACs, phono- and line- preamplifiers to power amplifiers. They all share a common thread — the highly original and unique ideas that are realized with the obsessed perfection. Which proves, yet again, that, if you let them do it, that Russians can be ahead of the game in audio as well (more information can be found at www.G9AUDIO.RU).



#39

GINTS GUKS

Gints Guks, or simply “Guk” (*left*), is one of the most fascinating characters with whom I’ve had a chance to work with and become friends throughout my entire involvement in High End Audio. Despite a slight tinge of the “freewheeling 90s” (when Guk, it seems, had to go through fire, ice and water in post-Soviet Latvia), he is a truly passionate devotee of audio art.

His right-hand (as well as left-hand) (wo-) man, constantly allowing him to maintain a state of balance, is his stunning assistant, **Monika Bokari**, who somehow manages to handle all of her responsibilities left and right: from purely business-related ones to expertly consulting Guk’s guests and customers on the minute details of some obscure music.

The showroom of Guk’s company, *Pro1*, located in his cottage outside Riga and constantly expanding, is a treasure trove of audio exotics of every kind: from *Steinway-Lyngdorf* systems to his own prototype of an incredible transformer-less tube amplifier, as well as a commercially produced under its own brand, *RixVox*, an audiophile-grade network music player (developed by a group of *Pro1*’s own engineers lead by **Aleksandr Anufriev** and **Andrey Tikhomirov**).

Pro1 is the distributor of over a hundred (!) of the most reputable High End Audio brands in the Baltic states. Wild birthday parties that Guk throws at his cottage are always events of an international scale, attracting a whole crowd of zealous audiophiles coming to pay their respects and have a great (as well as very productive) time (more information can be found at www.pro1.lv).

#40



VITUS AUDIO AND DANIEL NIEDINGS

Every industry goes around a few key world regions, both in terms of production and sales. For some reason, Scandinavia has been always such an important area for High End Audio. Even in the former USSR most of the best quality consumer audio gear was made in Near-Baltic republics of Latvia and Estonia. Could it be that endless sea shores of these countries inspire the archetype of sailing to some outlandish (music) terrains?..

Vitus Audio stands out as one of the most creative Danish High End Audio manufacturers. Under helm of its founder **Hans Ole Vitus**, the eponymous manufacturer crafts four lines of equipment — from affordable Reference Series to no-holds-barred by special order only Design Studio Series.

Obviously, the intensity of the creativity field radiated from Denmark is the most intense at nearby territories, this is why, one of the strongest International distributors for the brand — **Daniel Niedings' Audio Deluxe** — is from nearby Latvia.

The human bond between a manufacturer and a distributor, which includes sharing the same system of values, is only a necessary condition for the success of the distributor's business venture. As in High End Audio most of manufactures are specialized in only one type of equipment, therefore, leaving other obvious sufficient conditions aside, one of the most important ones for the distributor's overall success is its ability to provide closely matched lines of components from different manufacturers which allow to achieve their sonic synergy. From this very perspective Daniel chose the rest of the lines for his distribution operation: *Transrotor* turntables and *mbl* loudspeakers from Germany, as well as Dutch *Siltech* cables and Swedish *Marten* loudspeakers — all from Baltics' major maritime Powers, by the way (more information can be found at WWW.VITUSAUDIO.COM and WWW.AUDIODELUXE.EU).



#41

ALEKSANDR BALAYEV

In all the years I spent in High End Audio, I can count “revelation” demos which I heard with fingers on just one hand. Actually, such “catalytic” sonic experiences are determined to be so rare due to the industry’s declared paradigm of sonic absolutism. And as every absolutism creates a binary situation, in which there is no ambiguity or no gray area between sonic “one” and “zero”, then such expressions as “almost absolute sound” should be considered as an oxymoron.

My recent visit to **Alexandr Balayev**’s dedicated listening house (!), built on his estate just outside Moscow, proved this point once again.

Among other things, this visit proved that our prejudices are built out of the gray area of imperfection or incompleteness, and at Alexandr’s I had to reconsider my previous preconceptions about validity of quite a few audio solutions.

His system does include some unexpected conceptual fusions — like when the full range drivers in his loudspeakers (built by some German transvestite genius), which rely upon a long-forgotten field-coil principle of operation are fused with the latest generation no-holds-barred music network streamer. Or, like when Alexandr’s solid technical background of a University geology degree (which allowed him to build a large part of his gear by himself) is fused with his reliance upon an Extra Sensual Perception talent of his friend who instructs him (over the phone!) on the correct cables’ directions. Nevertheless, when you are listening to the enchanting sound of such a unique system, you are delighted to recognize that even if all of its meticulously crafted components (especially, the uppermost-quality listening room), however disparate, are in absolute technical and esoteric synergy with each other, what really brings it to life sonically is our innate catalytic mental power of absolute purity of intent. That fully palpable “flesh and blood” music aliveness, that I was so lucky — for once! — to hear at Alexandr’s, is exactly what that absolute sonic binary “one” is about.

#42



REFLECTOR AUDIO

In the former USSR the Near Baltic republics, and particularly the capital of Latvia – Riga, was the epicenter of the Soviet audio Universe. This is possibly why the place is still bursting with an abundance of creative energy in the field of designing and building some of the most revolutionary audio products.

An outstanding representative of the scene is *Reflector Audio* which manufacturer loudspeaker systems for professional and consumer markets. During one of my recent visits to Riga I was kindly invited by one of the company`s founders, **Evgeny Boguslavsky**, to visit their lab and to audition one of their systems (RA's another co-founder and chief "inventor" **Roland Yanevich** is pictured on the photo with their flagship Q1818 loudspeakers).

Reflector Audio has developed unique loudspeaker systems based on their patented concept that does not use enclosures, instead it relies on a mix of open baffle and horn technologies. with the lowest frequency response to be compensated with a dedicated DSP processing.

The third partner, **Viesturs Balodis**, puts it, "Due to the quality of all components in the system, smooth off axis response, concentric approach, time domain linearity and undistorted high *SPL* capability, '3D imaging' of open construction is unbelievable, with life like phantom sound sources freed in open air in the room around the listener, while many other traditional enclosure concepts somehow 'trap the sound' and give a slightly 'tunneled vision'."

However strange it could seem from the outside, the High End Audio and professional audio communities don't really overlap, both conceptually and technologically. Nevertheless, I can testify from my own auditioning of the *Reflector Audio's* system (mostly targeted at the professional audio applications) that its sound quality can teach a lot of lessons to the audiophile community, which on the whole does need that (sometimes, quite literal) low frequency kick in the butt provided by such extraordinary technologies to wake up to the sonic reality (more information can be found at WWW.REFLECTOR.AUDIO and WWW.REFLECTORAUDIOUSA.COM).



#43

KENNERTON AUDIO

On the opposite pole from huge corporations resides small boutique headphone manufacturers like *Kennerton Audio* from Saint Petersburg. It is another example of a reputable and enduring presence of Russian audio products in the highest tier of global consumer electronics market. *Kennerton Audio* manufactures a wide range of fully handmade headphones of the highest quality which are sold in every corner of the world. This photo depicts their closed back planar magnetic headphones called “Rognir”, which sound signature is almost indistinguishable from the one of the best open back headphones — quite an accomplishment: at all times and for all the headphone manufacturers that’s been quite difficult to achieve.

Despite his extremely busy work schedule **Valentin Kazanzhi**, the owner of *Kennerton Audio* always finds the time and energy to support me in all of my endeavors — not only with his words but also with deeds. Which is why in terms of my goals for the *StereoPravda* project not only is *Kennerton Audio* the best example to follow, but Valentin himself is — more than anyone else — unquestionably my closest “brother in arms” (more information is available at WWW.KENNERTON.COM).

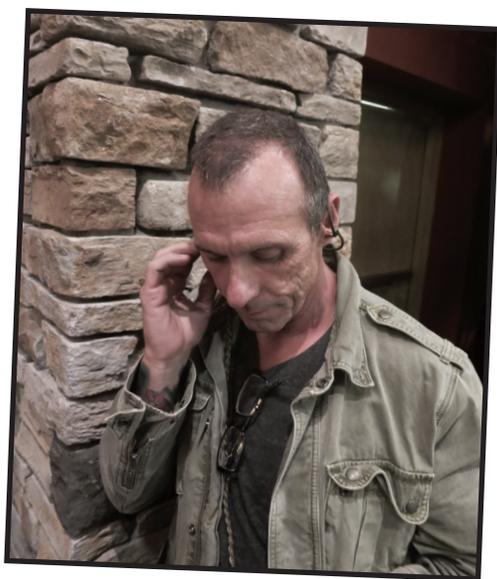
#44



MY INTERVIEW FOR WIDESCREEN REVIEW MAGAZINE

The unbelievable (for its time) sound of the *Etymotic Research* “ER-4S” made me reflect at length: how could one improve on it? Its creator, Mead Killion, always replied to my question with another question, “why do it at all?”. He regularly attended classical music concerts in Chicago concert halls, and what he heard there fully conforms to what he hears on similar recordings through the “ER-4S”... Moreover, a product to compete with “ER-4S” had not appeared in many years. Realizing that I would not get anything else out of Mead, eventually, I had no choice but to use my own “handy man” abilities. In late 2010, I got out the titanium casing that someone custom-cut for me at a machine tool factory; then, after several iterations, the idea of a deep fitting within the ear canal was added, then — the ear canal molds’ application was tried and discarded, then the ear canal’s “Second Bend” idea was implemented, and then I was off to the races...

The photo is that of the cover of July-August 2015 issue of *Widescreen Review* magazine — a historic one for me — which included an interview its editor, Gary Reber, conducted with me on the subject of our audiophile-grade *StereoPravda* SPearphone ear monitors. On Gary’s part, this was an extremely generous gesture: to allow me — who hasn’t yet fully thought out the idea of how I was going to set up the manufacturing process — onto the pages of his magazine, next to product reviews for such CE giants as *Sony*, *JVC* and others. Although, it was preceded by Gary’s careful auditioning of our flagship “SB-7”, still, this was, I think, very courageous of him. Although, it could be that what he heard during that auditioning probably did convince him that such an interview will be of interest to the magazine’s readership (more information can be found at WWW.WIDESCREENREVIEW.COM and WWW.STEREOPRAVDA.COM).



#45

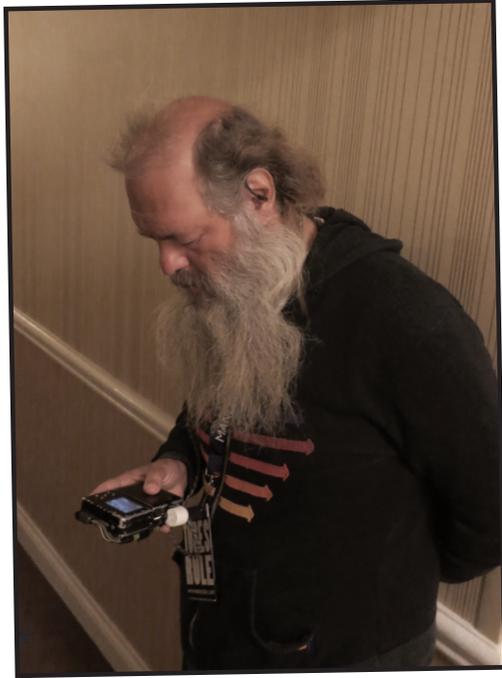
JERRY HARVEY

Despite the indecisive attempts of *Shure*, *Weston* and several other companies to enter the top tier earphone market in the mid-to-late 1990s, Mead Killion, with his single BA-driver *Etymotic Research* “ER-4S”, still dominated the global sales of the highest quality ear monitors. That is, until **Jerry Harvey** (*pictured*) came along and “grabbed the bull by its horns,” doing what I was expecting from *ER*’s founder Mead Killion all along. Namely, improving the sound of “ER-4S” by using multiple “Balanced Armature” driver arrays technology — either in the form of “universal” IEMs (In-the-Ear Monitors) with “universal” tips or “custom” CIEMs (Custom-In-the-Ear Monitors) — based on making individual ear canal molds.

Precisely because of pioneering the widespread implementation and commercialization of such ear monitor manufacturing technologies for professional and consumer use under the banner of his first company, Ultimate Ears, he became a trailblazer — and the “king” for several years — of the world market for the top sound quality ear monitors.

On this photo, taken in 2016 at the *Rocky Mountains Audio Festival* in Denver, Colorado, Jerry is auditioning the first production sample of our “SB-7” ear monitors. What he said afterwards can be found at the end of CHAPTER 7 (more information can be found at WWW.PRO.ULTIMATEEARS.COM and WWW.JHAUDIO.COM).

#46

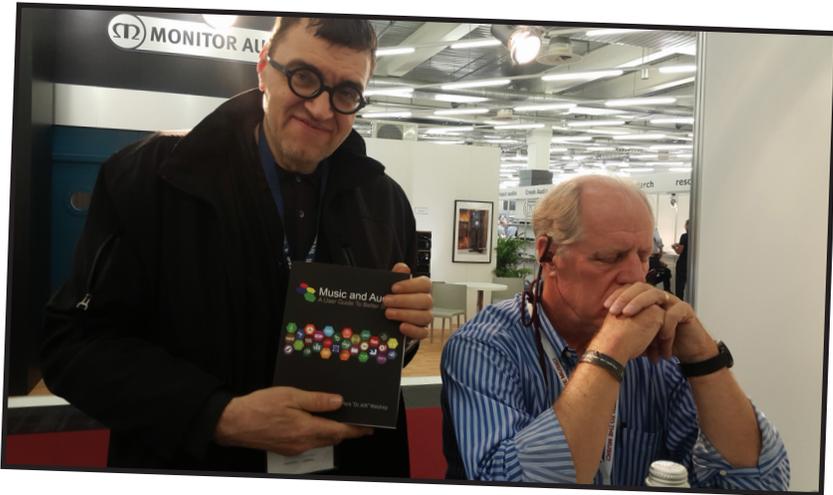


RICK RUBIN

Looking at the track record of the producer-extraordinaire **Rick Rubin** (*Metallica*, *Slayer*, *System of a Down*, *Johnny Cash*, *Rage Against the Machine* and others), it would never occur to anyone that he has always been a passionate audiophile. He never missed a chance to come to the annual *Consumer Electronics Show* in Las Vegas where he would go from a room to room attentively auditioning the sound of the demo systems.

On this photo, taken at CES-2017, he is listening to the entire song “No Worries” from Robert Glasper’s *Double-Booked* album (as “a close friend plays the drums on it”) through our *StereoPravda* “SPearphone SB-7”.

We later sent him a pair for a more detailed evaluation of their sound quality.



#47

MARK WALDREP

The whole of **Mark Waldrep's** extremely useful book, *Music and Audio: A User Guide To Better Sound*, a quote from which I use in the foreword to this book, is permeated with a sense of truth-seeking and a grudge for the excessive spread of disinformation in the field of audio. In the heat of the moment, he goes after many of the indisputable audiophile concepts that are taken for granted in High End Audio (such as "esoteric" cables, skepticism regarding practical usefulness of audio measurements and the audiophile priority of subjective sound quality evaluation). His *AIX Records* label is a treasure trove of multi-channel "hi-res" recordings, most of them made at his own Los Angeles studio (which, by the way, of all the facilities in LA where I did individual calibrations for my own *Smyth Research* "Realizer", gave me the calibration files that produced the most impressive 3-D sound rendering via the supplied *Stax* headphones). In this photo, taken in 2018 at the *High End Show* in Munich, he is auditioning our *StereoPravda* Spearphone "SB-7A" ear monitors through our own dedicated two-way "active" DAC/tone-control/crossover/power amplifier DACCA unit (more information can be found at WWW.AIXRECORDS.COM).

#48

HFN 2018

This is an article many of you, well mostly the companies actually, always anxiously wait for. This is the article in which we award the best gear of 2018. First up: My own selection!!

Best IEM (Price no objection): StereoPravda SB-7

The SB-7 for sure is one of the most unique looking universal IEM in the whole wide world. StereoPravda thinks outside of the box and it works, just try one with a good source and amp and you'll know why it's getting an award.

Review: StereoPravda SPearphone SB-7

STEREOPRAVDA



At the end of 2018, one of the most reputable portable audio Internet portals in the world, *headfonia.com*, published the list of its “Best Gear” annual international awards. Our *StereoPravda* SPearphone “SB-7” ear monitors won the “Best IEMs (Price no objection)” nomination.

It is hard for me to overstate the significance of this moment in terms of my whole journey in both music and audio. From listening to my favorite musicians on the long-wished-for Soviet-made *Akkord* mono vinyl records player for 55 rubles, bought by my mother from her annual bonus pay in 1972 — through the first attempts at reading every page of all music and audio magazines I could put my eyes on, as well as the first audiophile experiments — then, through decades of various professional activities in High End Audio — to, finally, the manufacturing of my own audio products which are gaining international recognition for their outstanding sonic properties.

I do not think that I would ever have had the nerve to write this book without having real audio products of my own behind me, the products in which all of the book's content is truly embodied and manifested — as only my own real *StereoPravda* earphones' and portable electronics' sound quality can serve as the very best estimation of how solid is the truth of everything that is written here (more information can be found at WWW.STEREOPRAVDA.COM).