

inches, this 50 pound beauty will do 300 watts into 8 ohms. The MX-R uses a massive linear power supply, is fully balanced and uses a zero-feedback topology. Available now at \$15,000.00 a pair.

**Boulder Amplifiers, Inc.** unveiled their new 800 Series line that includes the 865 Integrated Amplifier (125 wpc), the 810 Line Preamplifier (\$8,000.00), and the 850 Mono Power Amplifier at 200 watts into 8 ohms (\$5,000.00 each). Drawing on the technology and the polished physical presentation of their more exotic brethren of the 1000 and 2000 lines, these new additions were likewise elegantly executed. The best part was the sound. I was completely drawn in by the sophisticated and effortless presentation that could be enjoyed on the very revealing B&W 801D loudspeakers. A special pleasure through and through.

In another part of the park **Esoteric** was showcasing their expanding product offerings. Hot on the heels of last year's absolutely stunning unveiling of their P-01 and D-01 (\$50,000.00 total) premier playback components, Esoteric introduced the P-03 transport (\$13,000.00) and the D-03 stereo D/A converter (\$13,000.00). Though priced at a more comfortable level, the 03 series retains many of the advanced technology aspects and the ethereal elegance of the 01 series components.

On top of that, the new 03 pieces offer increased flexibility. For example, the P-03 transport will put out, not only an 8 times up-converted 24/172.4 signal, but it can now handle the DSD 64f sample rate as well. Flexibility is outstanding with AES/EBU, dual AES, RCA digital and Toslink in/out connections. For DSD data transfers, the choice of the IEEE 1394 "Firewire" route or their own ES-LINK is provided. To get the most out of the P-03/D-03 tandem, Word Clock synchronization from the Esoteric G-0s will be accepted on 75 ohm BNC inputs on each unit.

Played back on the marvelous Aerial 20T loudspeakers, using the Esoteric Class A monoblocks and the ARC Ref 3 preamp, the sound was exceptional.

Esoteric also introduced a new "Aesthetic Lifestyle" series consisting of the SZ-1 Super Audio CD player, the UZ-1 Universal Player, and the AZ-1 Digital Integrated Amplifier. These components have been designed to a very high technical standard, and come packaged in a strikingly elegant 77 mm high chassis design. The pricing is very accessible.

**Jeff Rowland Design Group** used this CES to introduce a new stereo power amplifier, the Model 102. Using Jeff's version of ICEpower technology that has been the basis for the success of the C201 and C501 models, this little darling will put out 100 watts per channel into 8 ohms and 200 wpc into 4. The \$1,490.00 price is darling also. This year **JRDG** showcased great sound yet again by getting the Magico Mini loudspeakers (\$22,500.00) to sing absolutely delightfully. Up front Jeff had the Ayre CX-7e player and his own Synergy Ii preamp with the flagship JRDG C203 (\$15,000.00) power amps driving the speakers.

**Pioneer** really got my attention with their new EX Speaker Series. And why not? Andrew Jones of TAD played a significant role in the design and development of these stunners. According to Andrew, this series has been "developed from the knowledge gained in designing the TAD Model 1." What piqued my interest, however, was the sound. These speakers conveyed the



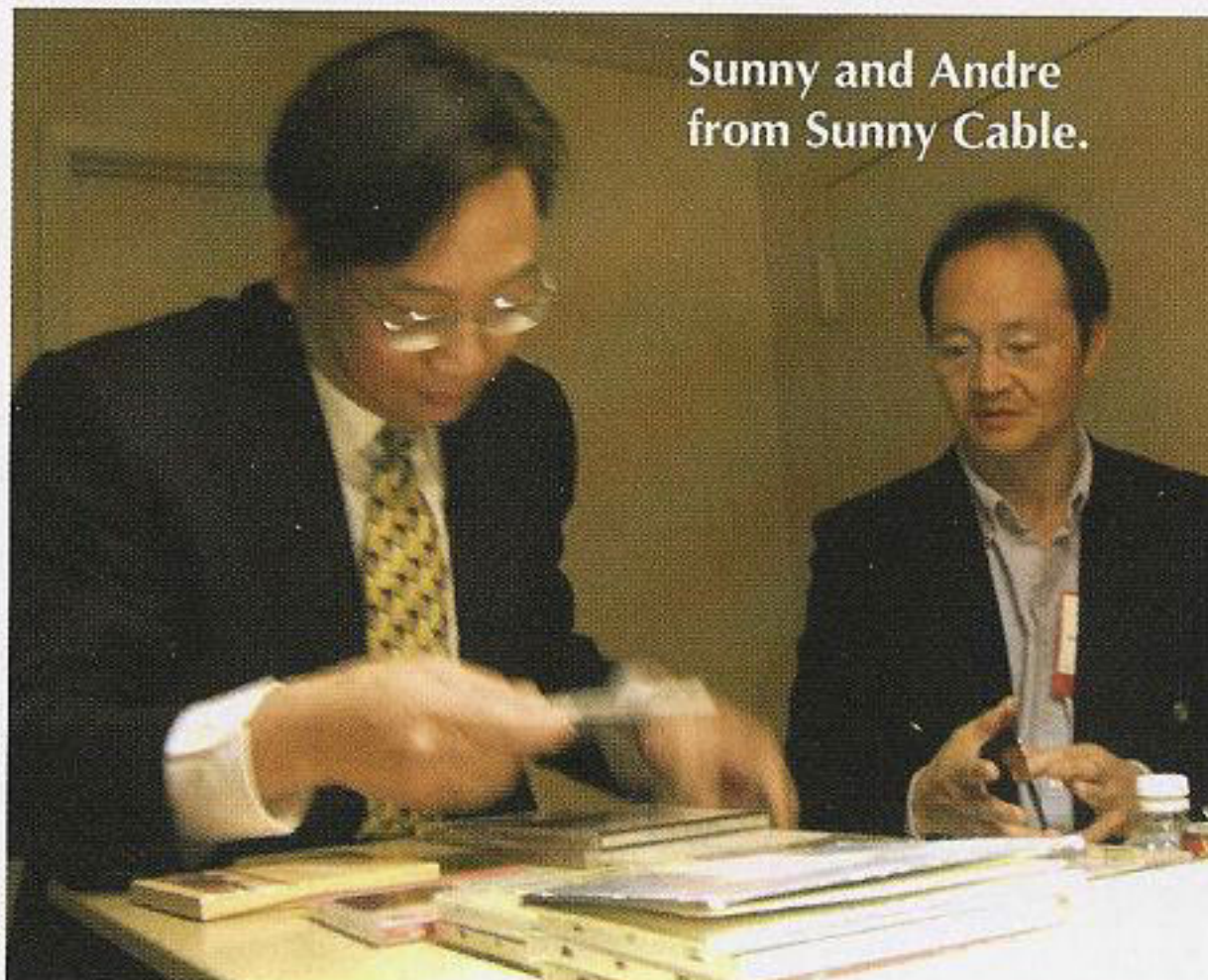
**Threshold S/350 Stasis amplifier.**

music in a very poignant and involving manner. Pinpoint imaging; solid, extended bass, and tremendous dynamics all gelled to draw me into the performance. Large amounts of credit for this great sound has to go to the auxiliary gear: **Bel Canto's** CD-1 CD player for source material (\$4995.00), their PRe3 line-level preamplifier (\$1695.00), and their new ICEpower Technology REF 1000 monoblock power amplifiers (\$1995.00 each).

For handling the mids and highs, the EX Series uses a slightly modified midrange driver of the Coherent Source Transducer (CST) that had been developed during the TAD- M1 project. While the concentric beryllium tweeter remains unchanged, magnesium has been substituted for the midrange diaphragm in this iteration. For bass an 18-cm driver with an Aramid cone was designed from the ground up. The S-1EX, their top model, sports a CST driver and a pair of the 18 cm woofers, all time aligned along a curved front panel in an absolutely striking enclosure. Internally bracing abounds, and all parallel walls are avoided to produce a very inert enclosure. At \$9,000.00 per pair, judging from what I heard and saw, these speakers are a runaway bargain.

**Sunny Cable Technology**, a relative youngster in the business, introduced several speakers to add to their extensive cable repertoire. According to Sunny Lo, the designer, his speakers use the "back-to-basics" approach concentrating on two main considerations. First, he time-aligned the areas of the cones that emit the sound and not the voice coils as is the more common practice. And second, Sunny focused on the speed of the electrical signal as it travels through the cabling and the crossover to the drivers.

The enclosure, housing a 15 inch paper cone woofer, is basically your rectangular shape with only



**Sunny and Andre from Sunny Cable.**

Photos: Ross Wagner



The Pathos Endorphin CD player.

Photos: Ross Wagner

the front baffle portion, where the tweeter and the paper cone midrange drivers are placed, being slanted back.

I must say I was pleasantly surprised by the sophisticated level of reproduced sound emanating from these very straight-forward speakers. And when it came to large scale dynamics, no other demo was as impressive. I did not hear such clearly defined low frequency impacts delivered with such resounding force and potent power anywhere else this year.

Andrew Jones of **TAD** introduced the Model 2 loudspeaker in yet another dazzling demo adding to the saga of continuing consistency. The Pass Labs preamp and power amps for bi-amping, the Pacific Microsonic DACs and the magnificent hi-rez software were there as successfully as in years past.

Citing streamlined production reasons for this new design, the model 2 replaces the Model 1. Not to worry, the 165 mm Coincident Source Transducer (CST) beryllium midrange/HF driver is still at the heart of this new iteration along with the same two 10" bass drivers. However, the 8" mid-bass driver has been eliminated making the Model 2 a three-way system.

Dispensing with the difficult to manufacture vertically stacked CNC routed cross-sections of the Model 1, the model 2 uses walls comprised 1/16 inch laminations. The 2" thick curved side panels consist of 16 lay-

Mike Hobson of Classic Records.



ers of MDF, while the front and back panels end up being built up to a 4" thickness. Also, the head holding the beryllium CST driver is now an integral part of the cabinet. Total weight is 300 pounds per side. Projected price is \$40,000.00 a pair.

Here's an exclusive from **TARA Labs**. Matthew Bond announced the release in the coming year of the 0.3 and the 0.5 series interconnects. Based on the same vacuum-dielectric technology that is used in their exquisite The Zero series, these two new levels will be available at a significantly lower price point than their famous The Zero. With an unprecedented lowering of the capacitance to below 4 pf/ft, The Zero stands alone. Not surprisingly, this kind of performance comes at a price where a 1 meter pair will set you back \$12,800.00. The price for a 1 meter pair of The 0.3 is projected to fall in the \$7,000.00 to \$8,000.00 range while The 0.5 should be around \$5,000.00.

**Threshold** announced the reissue of the classic STASIS s/350 solid-state stereo power amplifier. This nominally rated 150 wpc at 8 ohms and 300 wpc at 4 ohms design is offered at only \$2,000.00. Retaining all the many original features, such as RCA and balanced XLR inputs, all discrete components, high-current A/AB output stage bias, all presented in a strikingly executed but robust package, this to me represented one of the best buys at this show. How is all that possible? Though designed in the USA, the S/350 is hand assembled and tested in China by Threshold International LTD.

The **Usher** suite was one of the most memorable at the show. For example, their top of the line Be-20 speaker was being sold for \$16,000.00. To be sure, 16K is not chicken feed. But having heard this speaker sound fabulous, I could not believe that they sell this 270 pound, 14 by 35 by 55 inch beauty for only 16 grand. After all, Joseph D'Appolito did the design, it features Beryllium cones for both the tweeter and the midrange, comes with a pair of 11 inch woofers, all in a gorgeous, exceptionally well finished cabinet. Something like that stands out as a clear-cut bargain. And the rest of their very impressive line-up, that also includes a whole range of electronics, is priced in the same cost-effective manner. Something is really going on here.

Garth Leerer of Musical Surroundings hosted a spectacular display. What got my juices going here were the new K1 speakers from **Vivid Audio**, a new company based in South Africa, and the new **Pathos** Endorphin CD player. Talk about a presentation with exceptional visual and sonic appeal.

The Vivid speakers, the work of Laurence Dickie the same man who designed the B&W Nautilus, have received a lot of attention in the British press. For the Vivid line Dickie designed a set of aluminum oxide drivers that are housed in a molded enclosure comprised of a complex loaded carbon fiber filled polymer. Though very unconventionally shaped, it is an acoustically inert enclosure. The claim to fame, however, is drivers that behave as pure pistons yet have minimum moving mass. The goal was to have no diaphragm break-up within a range that extends at least two octaves above *and* below their intended crossover points of 900 and 4000 Hz. For example, the tweeter's first break-up frequency is 44 kHz, while the midrange first starts to misbehave at 20 kHz. A set of 158 mm metal cone mid/low frequency drivers complete the dri-