

NOLA au CES 2014



The Audio Beat

For the second year in a row, the award for Best Sound at the Show goes to **Accent Speaker Technology Ltd.**, makers of the **Nola Concert Grand Reference Gold** (\$197,000 per pair). On the third day of the gathering, legendary loudspeaker designer Carl Marchisotto, assisted by Audio Research electronics and a United Home Audio Phase 11 (\$28,000) master tape player, put on the sonic equivalent of a Fourth of July light show. Voices and chords appeared all over the place: Michael Jackson called from offstage way over there; Santana toted his

wailing guitar from deep right-center to main microphone; a member of an African chorus hovered spookily over Paul Simon's shoulder; previously unheard saxophone toots emerged from deep in the mix of "Black Magic Woman"; Stevie Ray Vaughn's guitar chords exploded and then wafted overhead. The whole time, my eyes were as wide as Little Joe's watching Shane unload a six-shooter.

A million thanks to Uncle Carl for disdaining audiophile-approved lute and bodhran recordings. The Nola system played everyday music, with volume cranked up to 11. Amazingly, Carl and I were able to converse without shouting because the distortion was so low. We discussed how the imaging aspects of high fidelity have fallen behind close-up clarity as a goal of loudspeaker design. Minimonitors are winning market share, but is the thrill of hi-fi lost in the process? I recall hearing a pair of Quad ESL63s for the first time forty years ago. A jazz ensemble was standing behind, in front of and alongside the speakers. I was smitten for life and vowed then and there to "see" concerts at home. Over the years, however, I seem to have lost the way. As advanced digital processing churns out more and more information, the imagination is left to idle. Musical events are less viscerally entertaining than before. Imaging has shrunk to a highly revealing but flattened panorama.



Brave-hearted Mr. Marchisotto is out to change the tide. Not only his Concert Grand Reference Gold but all of the speakers in the Nola line project a high degree of holography. While some dimensionality is common to all good loudspeakers, the CGRG goes a lot further by constructing a sonic diorama. If the Holy Grail of hi-fi is the perception of a three-dimensional performance, Nola speakers assuage the mind's eye better than any others at this time. ~ Jim Saxon

"While I was in the room copies of masters of The Beatles' White album were playing, and "Ob La Di Ob La Da" and "Dear Prudence" gave me the unmistakable sensation of sitting in the control room and watching the Fab Four on the other side of the glass... As good as the original ConcertGrand were, Carl Marchisotto has made incremental yet plainly noticeable improvements to this outstanding, and unquestionably world-class, speaker system."

Paul Bolin

the absolute sound[®]

Best Sound (cost no object):

Nola Concert Grand Reference Gold loudspeakers, Audio Research amplification, and United Home Audio analog (tape) source components. This system could—and at times did—offer believable glimpses of the real thing, and who could ask for more? ~ Chris Martens



"The UHA Phase 11 OPS tape deck was the most realistic front-end I heard, and when combined with the awesome NOLA Concert Grand Reference Gold loudspeakers, Audio Research tube electronics and Nordost Odin cables, the sound was sublime" *Jim Hannon*