



In each issue of *Esoterica* we feature an outstanding hi-fi system and interview its owner, with a view to trying to get under the skin to discover what works and what doesn't. In this issue Stephen Dawson talks to David, who lives in Farrar, Canberra, about his passion for active loudspeaker systems and digital sources...

SD: *What led to you developing your new home theatre system?*

DF: Recently I have rekindled my interest in listening to music and became keen to establish a separate listening room—the one you are in now. This used to be two rooms—a formal living and separate dining room. As you can see I have combined these rooms to make a combined room. Additionally, as one of my passions is film, I decided to combine a serious music system with a theatre.

SD: *So your main driver was music, but you also wanted the system enabled for music, correct?*

DF: I couldn't see any reason why a theatre should compromise the quality of the sound—either from the main speakers or from the centre or surround speakers. I was determined that the overall quality of the sound would be high in either format.

SD: *How did you go about selecting a suitable system?*

DF: My starting point was to choose the speakers and then build the rest of the system around this decision—I spent some months auditioning speakers at various hi-fi retailers. As I was not starting from an exist-

ing high-end system this was somewhat of a journey as I lacked a good reference point. In hindsight I think this was a distinct advantage as I came to the project without any existing biases and without looking to build on an existing sound 'that I liked'. In reality my reference point was live music. I was amazed at the difference between various high end speakers—colouration as described by various salespeople and magazines. However from my perspective it seemed that you needed to choose what style of distortion you liked best! I quickly learnt that I wanted a speaker system that was as accurate and as natural as possible—as close to live music as could be achieved.

SD: *You mentioned before that you were re-discovering hi-fi—so how did you become interested in active speakers?*

DF: Some months after I started listening to speakers I chanced upon an article on active crossovers and subsequently found the reviews of the DEQX system. The 'story' relating to active crossovers and room and speaker correction seemed on the money. I was particularly interested that passive

crossovers can introduce another level of distortion as well as muddiness between the drivers at the crossover points. I then started to explore speakers that could be adapted to use active crossovers. This was a daunting prospect as it would largely mean entering the do-it-yourself area—an area in which I do not have the skills—nor do I have the background to develop the skills. However, I was prepared to go down this track after realising that I could find other people to assist. I therefore started to audition various speakers with the idea of sourcing these from the manufacturer for use with active crossovers. However, as you could imagine, it became even more confusing to try to audition speakers in passive mode for an active retrofit.

SD: *Did you look at NHT active speakers?*

DF: Yes—but the aesthetics quickly ruled these out. They would not have suited this room and, in any case, were ruled out by my wife. However, at this point I became aware of Legend Big Reds with DEQX active crossovers which had just been released. The Big Red reviews noted how accurate and natural



Equipment List

Front speakers: 2 x Legend Acoustics Kumbar Wirri (aka Big Red) two-way plus 500 watt active subwoofer

Centre, Surround Speakers:

3 x Legend Acoustics Kurre two-way

Home Theatre Processor: Integra DTR-7.8 (power amplifiers not used)

Amplification/Crossover/ESD:

- DEQX HDP-3-500 for the front speakers, with four outboard Hypex amps (each 200-watts into 8Ω) for the high and mid drivers (each speaker has a 500-watt active bass unit)

- DEQX HDP-3-300 for the surround speakers, with four inboard Hypex amplifiers (each 100-watts into 8Ω) powering each driver

- DEQX HDP-3-150 for the centre speaker, with two inboard Hypex amplifiers (each 100-watts into 8Ω) powering each driver

Disc Player: Oppo Digital DV-981 for DVDs (set to five channels for when the room is configured as a theatre)

Disc Player: Oppo DV-980 for SACD and CDs (set to four channels as the centre speaker is obscured by a couch when the room is configured as a lounge room)

Other audio source: Claritas Music Server (dual TV tuner, 4TB storage—also runs control software for DEQX)

Other video source: Foxtel IQ

Projector: JVC DLA-HD1

Projection screen: 292cm (115-inch) Stewart Filmscreen (Studiotek 130)

they were and, as this was my main objective, I was keen to audition them. Living in Canberra it proved somewhat difficult to audition a system—fortunately Legend arranged for DEQX to demonstrate these speakers in Sydney. I was delighted with the way the speakers auditioned—the Big Reds lived up to their reviews, easily outperforming other speakers I had auditioned and I was confident that they would meet my objectives without any compromises.

This also simplified the choices I would need to make—the hard work had already been taken care of—Legend had designed the speakers and optimised the crossover frequencies and slopes for the active crossovers, DEQX would supply the amps, and the installation would be performed by DEQX trained staff.

SD: How did you go about deciding on a configuration for theatre?

DF: Rod Crawford from Legend Acoustics suggested that I use Kurre (which have the same components as the top end of the Big Reds) for the centre and the two rear channels. At that point I decided (after much consideration) to purchase additional DEQX systems and amps for the additional speakers—so I now have three DEQX units and twelve amps! I could have dispensed with the centre channel and just used the Big Reds and rears, however I decided to use a centre mainly as a means of ensuring sound is centred for viewers sitting to the side of the room. I decided that the DEQX active crossovers were essential for the centre speaker as most of the sound comes from the centre channel during a film. Active crossovers may not have been necessary for the rears if I was using them only for movies, but the multi-channel sound from SACDs makes it definitely worthwhile.

SD: How did installation go?

DF: The system was installed prior to Christmas 2007, when Alan Langford from DEQX came down to Canberra to install the system. Alan was fantastic and calibrated each of the speakers, their placement within the room and then calibrated the system for the room. Alan's background in high-level audio also enabled him to assist with all the system integration issues in installing a theatre. It was really pleasing that there were no 'demarcation' issues—Alan went well past his brief—he ensured that all aspects of the system were fully operational and optimised before he left. Both Alan Langford and Rod Crawford are great to deal with—they worked very hard to ensure that the system lived up to my expectations.

The main issue I had with the installation was with ground loops coming from the projector, from the TV and FM antennas, and from the remote zones. These were

solved with the help of Alan. The solutions included driving components from the same power outlet, adding an earthing stake (the existing earthing was degraded), and installing ground loop isolators on the antennas and braid breakers on the Foxtel satellite leads (this required a multi switch and separate power injectors).

SD: I note that all your sources are digital. Many high-end listeners swear by analogue. Are you happy with digital?


DF: I guess I don't consider analogue sources as essential to listening to high quality music. My music collection is on CDs, SACDs and DVDs. SACDs are magic—it's hard to see how a top-quality SACD recording could be improved on. Good quality CDs are also fantastic, but the system shows up poorly recorded CDs; some are virtually un-listenable. In regard to the music servers, I believe that these have now reached the stage where high-quality components can deliver sound quality equal to a good CD player—and the output is digital to the Integra processor. I intend loading all my CDs on the Claritas Media Server. This has 4 terabytes of storage (it also is used to record video). The only problem is that the Music Server does not handle SACDs or the higher sound formats used in Blu-ray.

SD: And the rest of the system?

DF: The projector is a JVC DLA-HD1, which I believed was the best projector for the money available at that time, and matched the quality of the rest of the system. The screen is a custom 292cm (115-inch) Stewart Filmscreen (Studiotek 130). These are both mounted in the ceiling and retract out of sight.

SD: Are you happy with the result?

DF: This is a superb system. The music really comes alive, with a deep and wide sound stage. Even with my existing collection music sounds so new... with details that I was not aware of. I am spending a lot of time going back through my existing collection but I am already spending significant amounts on new music—particularly SACDs. SACD multichannel recordings provide a larger but even more focused sound stage. Listening to classical music the reproduction is so clean and instruments are reproduced so accurately they could be in the room. You really can close your eyes and imagine you are at a concert. The only downside is the need to upgrade my music collection. It's true that poor recordings become obvious, so I am now spending serious money building up an SACD collection.

One advantage of the DEQX is that the speakers can be adjusted to meet anyone's particular preferences—mine is to make the reproduction as natural as possible. 

Stephen Dawson



SOUND T

