

The Tradeoffs in Finding Musical Pleasure

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If you ask audiophiles what they're trying to achieve, many will tell you they want to reproduce a live musical event in their home, or be transported to the recording venue. Others may say simply they want to connect to the musical performer or performance on an emotional level.

What they will almost all agree on is that they're chasing after the sonic grail, wanting the most musically and/or emotionally accurate music system they can assemble. But, that's often where the agreement ends.

I've listened to a lot of systems over time, and they are all over the place sonically because we all make tradeoffs, known or unknown. One person loves mini-monitors, his buddy has big horn speakers, while another says "No way, give me my Quads!"

Same for electronics. That Mac 275 sure doesn't sound like a Bryston, and neither one sounds like a Boulder. All fine products, all different.

Some of the choices are made because of the listening room. Big, small, tiled, carpeted, arched, overstuffed, minimalist, bookcases, etc.

And, our musical tastes vary, from rock to classical and everything in between.

The reality is that we also have sonic tastes, sonic preferences. What is perceived by one person as a little too soft and laid-back may be divine to the next listener. The third person wants the deepest, most controlled bass and dynamics possible. And so on.

That's why there is so much disagreement about audio show sound: what is amazing to one person leaves another unmoved. Maybe it was the musical selection played at the time, maybe not.

What all of this leads to is sound you are looking for and the specific tradeoffs you are willing to make. Our goal might be that live musical event, but it is difficult and can get expensive. When everything is right and the music grips me, I'll sit there and think, "Can it get any better?" Usually it can, but does it matter if we are in musical bliss?



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