

## Hierarchy - Where to start

Dave Gordon, Brand Ambassador

A few years ago, our chief engineer asked for a new pair of small speakers to put on his bench to replace an ancient pair of well-worn Fultons. A pair of PSB Alphas would be perfect, compact and a great value.

Instead of dropping them off in engineering when they arrived, we stuck the Alphas on a pair of stands in our large sound room, hooked them up to some serious electronics, and fired up the system. With modest expectations, we were unprepared for what we heard. The sound was beyond surprising, it was shockingly good, with an engaging presentation that was very natural, clear, and with excellent imaging. They *made* music!



Very few owners know what their Alphas are capable of because they're normally hooked up to inexpensive electronics, maybe a modest integrated amp, not reference-level electronics. In our sound room, we were hearing the performance these speakers were capable of delivering.

Among the lines I sold in retail back in the '80s, Linn (which manufactured only turntable and speaker systems at the time) insisted the most important component was the source, not the speakers as most people thought. They said if you lose information at the source, you can't get it back farther down the line. In those days, you began with the phono cartridge, then the tonearm/turntable, then the electronics, then the speakers. It made sense and still does, even if most people want to start with the most personal choice of all, the speakers.

Our experience with those \$280 Alphas reminded me that Linn's contention was correct. Today we have access to so many wonderful high-resolution analog and digital sources: You don't want to lose the information (the music!) in the pipeline to your speakers. Start with a great source and feed it to the best preamp you can get because a great amp can't compensate for a mediocre preamp—it just amplifies what it's fed. It seems so simple, but the preamp makes an incredible (and immediately obvious) difference. Then, find the best amplifier you can get your hands on to feed your speakers what they deserve, all of the musical information possible. Then relax, enjoy the music, and forget about the hardware.

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3900 Annapolis Lane North | Plymouth, MN 55447 USA | T :763.577.9700 | [www.audioresearch.com](http://www.audioresearch.com)