

Comments on the Siegfried IIs

I loved my Siegfrieds.

So, how much *better* could the IIs be? Heh, heh.

In what follows I will do my best to count the ways, but, in case you want the bottom line now: Consider the characteristics of *any* particular note reproduced by the original Siegfrieds in a high-resolution system: tonal and harmonic characteristics, how that note is initiated, sustained, how it decays, etc.. Consider the sound of the *whole instrument* as it renders that note, and *how* that note is being played — for example, not just that a violin is being played, but *how* the string is being bowed, plucked and stopped (in some cases, even how the violin is being held). Consider the differences in timbres, colors, the textures among different instruments, and the space in which the note is being played. *Bottom Line:* The IIs do every single one of these things better than the original Siegfrieds. And on a gestalt level, the IIs provide a sense of limitless power, musical/harmonic authority, and ineffable nuance.

Audition “Crown Imperial” from the Reference Recordings set of the same name, in 24/176. Each of the many different wind instruments is heard floating in an enormous soundspace, and each is rendered with its characteristic timbre; e.g., the bite of the trumpets, the burr of the trombones, the strut of the tubas, the trills of the flutes and fifes. The swell towards the end of the piece builds with *no* sense of limit. Finally, the thunderous bass-drum crash that ends the piece virtually shook my listening room. (“The Firebird” on Reference Recordings *Stravinsky*, also in 24/176, provides similar testimony. However, with the Stravinsky one will hear the subtle textures of an entire orchestra, including the hammers of the celesta, the soft sounds of the bassoon, and the fluttering of the violins. And, at the finale, the bass drum *literally* shook my room.) The original Siegfrieds “did right” by these pieces, too. Yet, compared to the IIs, the originals lost energy and merged the voices of the different instruments as the music got louder. In contrast, the IIs continue to resolve every voice and every nuance of every voice, even as they soar towards the heavens.

A well-recorded piano recording provides an excellent way to assess the coherence of any given component under test, as well as its bandwidth and harmonic integrity. That was my intention in pressing start on Keith Jarrett’s *Paris/London Testament*, in 24/96. I have never heard Jarrett’s close-miked concert grand presented so realistically. But what carried me away was the way the IIs presented the range of Jarrett’s percussive technique: attacking the keys in one passage and gently teasing them in another. You will hear these attacks with new authority and harmonic texture; and, those notes won’t be lost when the next note is attacked, no matter how quickly or how hard. Gently teased notes reveal nuances, both percussively and harmonically. Pianoforte, indeed!

And, before I move on from nuanced notes on pianos: Philip Glass’ music has been criticized, by some, as being overfull of repeated arpeggios. These critics should listen to his piano *Etudes*, played by Glass, on the IIs, where, even in 16/44, each arpeggio is easily heard to be different in timing, subtle harmonics, or technique.

Bandwidth? I would not have faulted the original Siegfrieds for failing to produce the bottom- or topmost notes on the piano. Nonetheless, the IIs reproduce the frequency extremes — like everything else — with more clarity, energy, and authority than the originals. Another piano reference regarding bandwidth and harmonic integrity: "Nazareth", *Joel Fan* on Reference Recordings, in 24/176. Take note of the simultaneously struck bass and treble notes: the bass notes thunder and the treble notes ring concurrently.

Do you like rock-and-roll? I most certainly do. (And what a waste of Alexandrias and Siegfrieds not to play at least some?) Listen to "You Don't Love Me" by The Allman Brothers on ...*Live at Fillmore East*, in 24/96. The soundstage: On my system I *think* I can hear the crowd clapping *behind* me. Best of all, you will hear two brilliant electric-guitar players (Gregg Allman and Dickie Betts) solo on the same tune. Play it as loud as live. The IIs will not soften, flatten, or clip on you. The *only* distortion you will hear was created by Gregg and Dickie, and you will hear it, probably, just the way they wanted you to hear it.

Vocals: One of my long-time references is Van Morrison's *It's Too Late to Stop Now*, a double-live LP from 1973. Listen to one of the greatest rock/jazz singers of that era take your breath away as he sings, shouts, croons, scats, whispers, talks, stutters, grunts, pleads — he even holds the audience, about to explode in applause, at bay by remaining silent — in "Cypress Avenue". Hear Louis Armstrong's powerful, gravely vocal, including his devilish laugh, with new transparency on "St. James Infirmary" (LP: *Satchmo Plays King Oliver*). The power and nuance of the IIs communicate the hitherto unheard pain in the snarly delivery of Patti Smith on "Redondo Beach" (*Horses* reissue LP). And, speaking of pain, note how Joanie Mitchell softly flattens some of the notes on "Blue" as she weeps and wails through "Blue" on the *Miles of Aisles* double-live LP. Power and nuance.

I have no idea whether or not the IIs are the best amplifier to drive Alexandrias. However, the original Siegfrieds easily bested the Audio Research comparable Reference monoblocks driving Alexandrias (in different showrooms) when I bought mine in 11/09. What I can tell you is that if you own the originals, then get the upgrade, even if it takes a(nother) mortgage. And, if you auditioned the original Siegfrieds, loved their naturalness and musicality, but, perhaps, wanted more transparency, transient speed, musical authority, or power, then get to a VTL dealer to experience the IIs.

LBS, West Lafayette, IN; 10/3/2012

Electronics: VTL 6.5, 7.5III, Siegfried IIs

Analog: VersaDynamics 2.2, Titan i

Digital: Mac Pro, Weiss 202

Speakers: Wilson Alexandria IIs

Cabling: Transparent Opus (balanced) between preamp and amps, Transparent Reference (balanced) between DAC (6.5) and 7.5III. Silent Source Reference power cables.

Power Conditioners: Walker Velocitors.

Stand: Finite Elemente Pagode

Tweaks: Stillpoints Ultras