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## CES 2010 Press Coverage

### Stereophile website

[http://blog.stereophile.com/ces2010/vital\\_vtl/](http://blog.stereophile.com/ces2010/vital_vtl/)

### Vital VTL

*Posted Tue Jan 12, 2010, 5:24 PM ET*

*By Jason Victor Serinus*



What a relief to revisit VTL electronics, and breathe in the mellow midrange of jazz vocalist Johnny Hartmann singing on the Original Recordings Group reissue of *I Just Dropped by to Say Hello*. There's a beauty and timbral truth to VTL electronics that you do not hear from many tube products that cost more than the 50,000/pair Siegfried monoblocks, and far more than the wonderful VTL MB450 Signature Series II monoblocks.

Following in the footsteps of Michael Fremer, one of many *Stereophile* reviewers who visited the room, I listened to Hartman and mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato on both amplifier pairs, switching between the top of the line TL-7.5 Reference Line preamplifier Series II and the new, internally retrofittable phono stage of the TL-5.5 Series II Signature preamplifier

As you might expect, the more expensive electronics boasted a lusher and smoother midrange. But despite different topologies and tubes, and a major switch between Nordost Odin and Valhalla power cabling on the amps, both preamps radiated the wonderful, gracious, impactful sound that defines the greatness of VTL. I'm eager to hear this set-up again in a larger room that can do the mighty TAD loudspeakers full justice.

**Postscript:** Wait. I need to revise that. On Saturday, I stopped by the VTL room again to snare a bottle of water. Seated before the system, way at the other end of the room, was VTL's Russian distributor, playing a CD I haven't played in years: the out-of-print recording of Alfred Schnittke's *Gogol Suite* that I believe was issued by Sheffield Labs. This is the recording that turned me on to the fantastic side of Schnittke's music.

Anyway, I had no idea how much dynamic range this recording has until I heard it on the big TADs and VTL MB450 Signature Series II monoblocks. With the volume turned way up, the impact was tremendous. Equally tremendous was how nothing flinched. Nothing except Bea Lam, half of the Bea Lam/Luke Manley team that is VTL, who braced herself during the climaxes. But the equipment sailed through with not a bit of distortion. Marvelous. Classical aficionados—search for this recording. I actually have two copies, one of which I hope to remember to carry to the *Stereophile*-sponsored Axpona show in Jacksonville in March. It will make a perfect demo.

**Post-postscript from Brian Damkroger:** Being most interested in analog, I asked Bea to play an LP, that system being a Spiral Groove SG-2 turntable, Tri-planar tonearm—my reviews of both are scheduled for the April issue of *Stereophile*—and Lyra cartridge, a Skala or Helicon perhaps? The setup fed VPI's TP-6.5 Signature Phono Stage. Very, very nice, but the ambient din really made it hard to enjoy the performance. The remote-adjustable loading feature of the TP-6.5 is something every serious phono stage should have. Obviously, I need to buy a TP-6.5, so this is shaping up to be an expensive trip. Bea also suggested, in her extremely polite and gentle way, that I might consider upgrading my VTL Ichiban amps to a pair of the MB450 monoblocks. To review the plot line, the Ichibans are a 20-ish year-old set of mono amps that have been updated multiple times. I think of them as equivalent to the now-discontinued MB750 Signature model. Bea tends to think of them as "FrankenAmps." This trip is getting more expensive.

## SoundStage link

[http://www.soundstagenetwork.com/lasvegas2010/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=58:vtl&catid=38:standout-demos&Itemid=37](http://www.soundstagenetwork.com/lasvegas2010/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=58:vtl&catid=38:standout-demos&Itemid=37)

## VTL

We've heard TAD's Reference One loudspeakers (\$60,000 per pair) at many shows, but never with VTL's equipment. The result in Las Vegas was thoroughly impressive -- deep, tight bass; superbly extended highs; and a midrange presentation so vivid and detailed that voices sounded lifelike.



We had VTL's Luke Manley play tracks with male and female voices, on both CD and LP, and the sound was outstanding regardless of the source. In fact, other than the room being a little small, which is what you'd expect in a hotel-room setup, there was little to criticize. This is the kind of system most audiophiles would dream of having in their home.



The most surprising thing was the amps VTL was using. We *thought* that we were hearing the large, black Siegfried mono amplifiers that the company is known for; instead, it was the much smaller, significantly less-expensive MB-450 Series II mono amplifiers.



The rest of the components included a VTL TL7.5 Series II preamplifier, TP6.5 phono stage, Spiral Groove SG-2 turntable, dCS Paganini DAC/player/clock/link combo, and Nordost cabling.

Great work VTL!

UHF Magazine (Canada): <http://www.uhfmag.com/Vegas2010/day4.html>

At VTL, Luke and Bea Manley were showing their new version of their preamplifier, now with the (tube) phono stage built-in. They ran a comparison of this with their top preamplifier and outboard phono stage. The lower-cost combination was very good, and even sounded a little warmer, but with the warmth came what seemed, by direct comparison, like a blunting of the highs. The "big iron," as Luke called it, let us hear more of the music. Switching the huge Siegfried monoblocks from tetrode mode to triode put the cherry on the sundae, with impressively solid percussion and fine transients on plucked bass. There was, of course, still all the power you could reasonably want, though Luke said he prefers tetrode mode for the *really* dynamic recordings. Both the Spiral Groove turntable and a dCS Paganini player were used for the comparisons. This was one of the good rooms