

## Be Honest, Are You an Audio Lover, a Music Lover or Both?

I'm sure most people will read this and say duh, obviously both. Audiophiles are notorious for saying that they love music and the equipment is just a way to get closer to the music. In many circles, audiophile is not a positive term and often brings with it a set of haughty and out of touch people (usually older men) that say they love music but are honestly viewed as loving/lusting for the equipment much more than the music.

I was recently offered an alternative perspective for my views and beliefs as an audiophile. I was essentially challenged to elaborate on my position and beliefs as an audiophile and attest that I really loved music. It was rather eye opening and forced me to admit that my line of reasoning was not as sound (pun intended) and reasoned as I had thought.

So, what is music? What does it do or should it do for us? What has made music survive the ages and inspire people throughout time? A good friend shared that "music is a personal experience, it soothes, excites, energizes, makes and provokes memories, moves to tears, puts you in the present and has a magnificent ability to show up at just the right time to comfort." Why is it that I can play a song from my early teens and I can remember the vast majority of the words and the tune? Ask me logical facts or experiences from that time and good luck on having a keen memory. A teacher's name, the name of my pastor at church or my parent's friend's names, nope that is not going to happen. But a song which might have been on the radio for 8 to 12 weeks all those years ago and I can jump on the tune and recite/sing the vast majority of the words! Wow, what an impact the music has in our lives.

So, what makes music so special? What makes music something worth having in your life? Is the equipment essential to the enjoyment of the music? Do audiophiles put too much emphasis on the system/equipment and what we are hearing (details, soundstage, impact, PRAT, resolution) but not really listening to the music and the intent of the music? Is music about the left (analytical/logical) or right brain (creative/intuition) activities or some combination? Does it affect men and woman differently? Do we have different perspectives about music? Interesting questions and not easy to answer since it is an individual thing for each person.

I could really step out there and share a very gross generalization that seems reasonable to me. Let me start by asking a question. Why are the vast majority (probably 95+%) of audiophiles men? Why are the majority of these men audiophiles 40 years or older? Why do many women who love music and share an interest in our hobby not really like to be labeled audiophiles and would much prefer music lover? Do men approach this hobby using logic and as such look at the equipment as the means to enjoy music? Do women really care more about the music and how it moves them emotionally? An audiophile might know more about technology and engineering but it doesn't give them the right to judge how anyone else experiences music. Interesting comments and questions to ponder.

So, the issue is what is an audiophile? Maybe an audiophile should refer to your level of enjoyment and appreciation, and not to your level of investment in the gear or the purity of your recordings. Does good gear matter? Sure, I believe it does but it shouldn't be used as a litmus test on a person's sincerity for their love of music. The discussion with my friend would indicate

that she loves music and has a system that serves her needs to experience the music, period. Sounds pretty reasonable to me. Maybe we could say that anyone seeking a \$50 earbud upgrade, their first turntable, or a \$10,000 pair of speakers can figure into our definition. So really, defining the modern audiophile is about releasing the stigma and making it more inclusive, whether you're seeking to *improve the sound experience* for vinyl, Blu-rays, DACs, video games, Netflix, cable, streaming, or any combination.

Another definition could be one who loves audio and by default music. Well, we all know people who love the equipment, the stuff that makes the sound and defined as audio but do they really love the music? Do you know people who have a few hundred albums (vinyl, CD, tape, etc.) and don't ever seem to find anything new? Do they always seem to play the same basic music time and time again? Can you really be a music lover and never explore new musical genres, new musicians, new music that seems to move newer generations? When I talk to my friend she is much more intimate with the details of the groups, the songs, the words to the songs and the artists history within the bigger picture of music. My knowledge compared to hers is lacking. That doesn't make me a gear lover over a music lover but her depth, knowledge and insight are much greater than mine. Her focus has been on the music and frankly mine has been more on the equipment.

I have thought a lot about this topic and think that the equipment serves the music but only serves it in the sense that it can draw you closer to the music, the words, intent, emotion, etc. I hope that when I set my system back up in the new house that I focus as much on the music and the emotion of the music and less on the equipment. When I listen to music I don't want to just listen but truly hear and experience the music. I want to open my ears and experience the music not because it is technically perfect but to experience what the artist wanted to convey through their music, words, and emotions. Maybe more right brain and open to more of an emotional experience?

Try this thought experiment and see where you fall. Think of people and specifically yourself on a linear continuum from music lover (musicophile) to gear lover (audiophile). If you are really honest, where do you fall on this continuum? I found that I was closer to audiophile and further away from musicophile. I want to make a conscious effort to move closer to the musicophile although not abandon my audiophile roots. Each person has to decide where they fall and if they want to make any changes/adjustments. I was challenged and found that I really did not like where I was in relation to audio versus music lover. I just wanted to share my experience and challenge you to give this some serious thought and ponder where your priorities lay.

Good Listening,

Brian Boehler