

BRINKMANN

Real High Fidelity.



You're invited to read a detailed exclusive interview with Matthias Lück (co-owner from 2018) from Brinkmann Audio. Lück has also co-developed the Nyquist Streaming DAC together with Helmut Brinkmann.

About Brinkmann

For Brinkmann, "High Fidelity" stands as the ultimate pinnacle of achievable sound reproduction. Simply put, there is nothing better than "High Fidelity": after all, a facsimile can never sound better than the original. While some will argue that perfect music playback is an illusion, Helmut Brinkmann however, leaves nothing to chance as he works on perfecting this illusion, thus making music playback as real as possible.

How and when Brinkmann Audio was formed?

Brinkmann Audio was formed in 1985 by Helmut Brinkmann after he sold his previous company, Audiolabor. Helmut's loyal customers urged him to continue developing audio gear and Brinkmann was born.

Who would you say inspired you and your creations or still does?

Growing up, Helmut had many professional musicians in his circle of family and friends and they, in concert with the live music they performed daily, were and still are his primary inspiration. In terms of High End Audio, Mr. Görlich, Jörg Jeklin, Günter Pauler and John Curl were significant while Erhard Breuer, designer of the eponymous tonearm which Helmut used to distribute in Germany, was a particularly strong influence.

Do you see yourselves as audiophiles?

Yes, we're proud audiophiles but we're music lovers first. Even the very best HiFi gear is simply a means to the end of coming closer to the original performance. As it happens, great equipment can bring the listener much closer, which is why Brinkmann is devoted to developing components which improve the listening experience.

What is the difference between an audiophile and a music lover?

"Audiophile" and "Music lover" are not mutually exclusive terms. To us, a music lover is anyone who appreciates the art form which we call music. Audiophiles, on the other hand, are obsessed with accurately recreating every tonal, spatial and sonic detail contained in a recording. We have lots of music lovers among our customers, as well as so-called audiophiles, but the individuals who derive the most pleasure from Brinkmann Audio components tend to be both audiophiles and music lovers, as they're in the best position to appreciate the totality of what our products deliver.

Kindly list the current Brinkmann Audio products.

Brinkmann Audio is one of the few High End companies that design and manufacture every component in the playback chain, including both Analog and Digital sources. We offer a range of turntables including direct drive models Bardo, Oasis and Taurus, as well as belt-drive models Spyder and Balance. Brinkmann's three different tonearms--the

10.0, the 10.5 and the 12.1—are ideal matches for our tables as well as other brands. We also produce a cartridge, the PI, and a tubed power supply (RöNt III) as an upgrade for all of our turntable models. In terms of electronics, we offer the Nyquist Mk II Streaming DAC, the Edison MkII Phono Stage and the Marconi Mk II Line Stage. Our power amplifiers include the "Mono" mono blocks and the single-chassis "Stereo," which offers identical performance with half the power.

Is there a recognizing sonic DNA across all of the products?

Yes, we try to create a liquid, engaging and highly transparent sound that allows the listener to forget the equipment and fully experience the music. If you can "Hear" a Brinkmann component, something's wrong!

Tubes vs transistors. What is your take?

Tubes and transistors are different components and both have their strengths and weaknesses. We use both tubes and transistors, implementing each device where we think it works best. We do not use a tube to get a "tubey" sound, but we put it in places where they are best suited for the job, such as phase-inverters, where their instantaneous voltage amplification makes them more suitable than transistors in that specific application. The key is to use the device that is design-appropriate, not marketing-appropriate.

What is your take on exotic electronic parts? Do you implement them?

We use a lot of NOS (New, Old Stock) components. It doesn't mean they are per se better than new components, but there are many proven technologies that are not that commonly used in production of modern audio components--tubes or oil paper caps being prominent examples—but which often work best at a given point in our circuits. Helmut Brinkmann has always been obsessed with using the best part in every application, regardless of cost. If that means using extremely expensive Lundahl transformers in our Edison Phono Preamplifier, we do so. If, on the other hand, an inexpensive resistor produces the best result in another application, that's the part we choose.

How important is the selection of right materials and built-in parts?

It is probably the single most important thing we consider when developing a product. Helmut spends an incredible amount of time auditioning an array of components for every mechanical and electrical application. We never change materials or components without a reason. Sometimes we have to make a change, such as when a component becomes unavailable, but that usually necessitates additional changes, in order to restore the "Brinkmann DNA" to the sound of each product. It is like a wine cuvee; it is always the interplay of all the ingredients that determines what we taste.

How important are the measurements and the critical listening in creation of the high-end audio products?

Measurements are important to avoid fundamental mistakes and to ensure the circuit or product functions as intended; however, once we have achieved a performance baseline in terms of measurements, listening tests dominate. From selecting the right concept to choosing individual components to the final voicing, critical listening is involved in every stage of product development.

What would you say about the role of transparency and proper sound balance?

Transparency is critical but it seems to mean different things to different designers. At Brinkmann, "Transparency" is the ability of a component to completely disappear and get out of the way of the music; in other words, we hope our customers never hear our products once they're in the system!

Do you voice your products?

Yes. As per above, every part of every product is part of our voicing process. It is usually the most time-consuming part of the development process.

Do you manufacture everything in house?

Only when it makes sense. We manufacture all parts in house when we think we can do a better job. Close to our turntable production in Southwestern Germany, there is a wealth of high-tech industry with latest state-of-the-art machinery. We use trusted local suppliers to manufacture subcomponents for our turntables. Our electronics product is completely manufactured in-house (except the PCB manufacturing and SMD mounting, which is done by

a local supplier). We have long-lasting relationships with our suppliers and some of them are audiophiles themselves.

Does form follow the function with Brinkmann Audio?

Yes. Our design is purist and the sound is always most important, followed by simplicity and ease of use. We also think a product needs to please the eye, which explains the purposeful, uncomplicated clarity of our casework and controls.

You're not only well known as a turntable manufacturer. Please tell us more about your electronics.

Helmut Brinkmann actually started with electronics and only later in the history of Audiolabor started to design a turntable: the Audiolabor "Konstant". The first two products of Brinkmann Audio were a preamplifier with built in phono stage and the Balance belt drive turntable. Today we produce the entire chain of electronics from source (the Nyquist Mk II Streaming DAC) to power amplifiers ("Mono" and "Stereo"). Helmut Brinkmann uses tubes at specific parts of his circuits. Our DAC and phono stage use tubes in the output stage, the Line stage Marconi in the input stage. We also offer a tubed power supply call Rönt III which improves the sound of all Brinkmann turntables.

Do you think balanced topology is a must for best sound?

It all depends, there is rarely only one principle or path to perfection. Product development is much more complex than that.

How about Class A?

Again, it all depends. The topic is too complex for a single, universal answer.

What would you say is the most important part of the high-end audio system?

The system synergy and balance between all components. This is why Brinkmann produces every component in the playback chain.

How far can we push the technology in the service of better music reproduction?

Music reproduction will never replace a live performance, but it can bring us very close in terms of emotions and authenticity. Despite many decades of audio product development, components are still imperfect. Hence, Brinkmann does not see a limit in terms of potential improvements and we will continue to develop our products in the elusive quest for perfection

Analog vs digital?

Two different formats in their own right, each with its own challenges. Although analog is still the reference for us, we enjoy digital music. Most of the music today is recorded digitally and hence should be played back digitally. The challenge is to design and build source components which bring out the best in each format.

Would you say that high-end audio mechanical engineering is an art of its own?

Yes, and it's an underrated art form. Circuit design and mechanical engineering are two different disciplines but when it comes to developing a finished product, the design of the mechanicals (i.e., chassis, plinth, etc.) of an electronic product is as important as its electronics. Same goes for the motor control of a mechanical product like a turntable. So it is difficult to separate those and the choice of materials has a profound influence on the sound, both in mechanical and in electronic products.

What sets apart Brinkmann Audio from the competition?

We try to develop products, that customers could listen to satisfactory without longing for the next upgrade. Product longevity is very important for us. Our Balance has been in series production for 35 years and most of the refinements developed over the decades can be retrofitted to our earliest units. Most of our electronics have been in production for two decades. We have customers that use our products for over 30 years. All Brinkmann products are timeless designs, true heirlooms.

Who would you say are the Brinkmann Audio customers?

Music lovers and audiophiles alike: some choose us for musicality, some for our pristine sonics, some for both; additionally, we have many full-system customers who simply want to forget about the equipment and enjoy simple, artistically-beautiful equipment that brings them closer to cherished performances. These are our favorites!

What is the Brinkmann Audio's most proud achievement?

Our crowning achievement is that, after 36 years, we are still able to deliver products that enable music lovers to be emotionally connected to their favorite performances. We're also obsessed with crafting products that are non-obsolescent. We design our products more thoroughly than many manufacturers, so we rarely need to update or replace product; as a result, Brinkmann customers own truly timeless, investment-quality equipment.

It seems that vinyl is not going anywhere near to extinction. How do you see its importance?

I would agree. For us, it is certainly an important format and will continue to be. However, the vinyl market is small compared to digital formats. To enable our customers to enjoy their music the best way, we will continue to support and advance both analog and digital formats.

How far can we push the analog reproduction?

Both Analog and Digital have improved dramatically. Brinkmann Audio and other innovative manufacturers continue to push the envelope at the high end, while a few of the mass producers are now offering affordable products that capture the essence of High-End analog. The real message is that, as The Beatles sang: "It's getting better all the time!"

Are there still uncharted territories when it comes to the pushing further the performance of turntable?

Absolutely! We have a number of ideas which will surprise and impress even the most seasoned analog aficionados. Stay tuned....

Can you tell us more about your reference system?

We use full Brinkmann Audio systems with different loudspeakers. Among them the Vandersteen 7s, Revel Salon 2, Audiovector R8 Arreté, Lumen White Diamond Light and several older models from the 80s.

Would you say that the classical music the utter reference when it comes to Audio?

We would say that ANY music with which listener connects emotionally can serve as a valid reference.

What is truly a High Fidelity?

By definition, any component whose output accurately mirrors the signal fed to it is "High Fidelity." The real issue is, what do we mean by accurate? To be truly "High Fidelity" requires more than tonal accuracy: it must faithfully render dynamic contrasts, spatial cues, subtle details and every other sonic attribute contained on the recording.

What is high-end audio state of the art reproduction for Brinkmann Audio?

The same as it should be for any Manufacturer: for the equipment to completely disappear and bring the performance into the room with the listener.

Do you think that high-end audio system can finally mirror the potency of a live music?

It will never reach that point but that should not be the goal. The goal of a High-End audio system is to reproduce the recording as accurately as possible and so the recording, as well as the playback system, determines how closely the potency of live music can be mirrored. I cannot listen to Vladimir Horowitz live anymore, but I can listen to him on vinyl. A high-end audio system can give a similarly involving experience, but it will always be different from the original, live performance.

Can you comment about the current state of the high-end audio industry?

The industry is growing and I see especially in the less mature markets more young people being interested in audio. That is a very promising development. While there is more extremely expensive equipment than ever before, there's also much, much better gear at the entry-level which, combined with the greater accessibility to music provided by streaming, should attract more youths to the glory of High-End Audio.

How do you see the future of high-end audio?

Better and better products with higher sonic performance at both the entry-level and cost-no-object price ranges, combined with more intuitive operation, the ability to be integrated and controlled as part of "Whole House" systems, and greater ease of ownership. The best companies will figure out how to move beyond the "Men's Club" mentality and make the wonders of High End more accessible and desirable to non-audiophiles.

High prices. A must?

No. And yes. As we discussed earlier, reasonably priced gear is getting better and more affordable; however, at the top of the pyramid, prices of state-of-the-art components will continue to rise in proportion to performance, quality and aspiration. The hope is that state-of-the-art technologies continue to "Trickle-down" to more affordable product, thereby making better performance available to all music lovers, regardless of budget.

What can we expect from Brinkmann Audio in future?

Continuous improvement of our existing product portfolio and unconventional solutions such as the modular updates to our Nyquist Streaming DAC. Voltaire, our upcoming Integrated Amplifier, will be a monument to Brinkmann's ability to apply new thinking to advance the performance envelope.

Any last thoughts for our readers?

High End Audio has been our fascination, as well as our dedication, for the past four decades. We hope Mono and Stereo readers have the opportunity to hear, appreciate and enjoy the fruits of our labors: the matchless products of Brinkmann Audio.