

Roots - An Analog Stereo Revival Part I

By Paul DiComo

What started out as a simple mission to retrieve a book from the den a year ago turned into a major project, the revival of an old hobby and countless hours of bliss, joy, even...love. When I walked into the den on that fateful day I realized that everything was covered in a layer of dust – it struck me that we hadn't used that room in months! During our child rearing years my wife and I used the den as a refuge. It is far from the bedrooms and has thick walls and doors so we could watch a movie in there on our big home theater system without waking the kids. It got a lot of use. But now that the nest is empty we only use the home theater system in the more convenient family room. We just didn't need two home theater systems anymore! What could we do with the under-used den?

I'm fortunate that my job gives me the opportunity to hear the audio systems of the most accomplished and respected audio journalists in the USA. Most of those systems have knocked my socks off, especially the two channel systems with analog sources—good old fashioned vinyl LP records. Comparisons I've heard between LPs and CDs of the same recordings have always impressed me. The LPs sounded more open, three dimensional, detailed and less fatiguing – more real. These experiences inspired me to turn the den into a two-channel listening room with a turntable as its main source. It was time to get back in touch with my two-channel analog roots.



It turns out I'm not alone. There seems to be a revival of interest in vinyl in the US as evidenced by the rising sales of records, the plethora of turntables and phono cartridges on the market as well as the number of new releases from youth-oriented modern bands that are releasing vinyl coincident with their CD releases – bands such as The Decemberists, Modest Mouse, Green Day and the reigning kings of modern rock: Radiohead. The vinyl revival has caught the attention of the popular press such as [CNN](#), [Popular Mechanics](#), [San Antonio Express News](#), [The Daily Northwestern](#) and many [others](#). One enterprising student in Holland even wrote a [Thesis on the topic](#).



Since I've assembled my analog two channel system I've taken great delight in opening up the minds and ears of visitors to my house. Neighbors, friends of my young adult offspring, relatives and acquaintances are all invited into the den to listen to the system.

Some of them laughed and made disparaging remarks when they saw my turntable and tube electronics; but all of them leave in a state of shock and awe—stunned by the lifelike, soul-stirring musical performance of my “old fashioned” audio system. I commonly get comments like “Dude, Jim Morrison was standing *right there!*” “I’m hearing instruments in the music I never knew were there” and simply “Oh my Gawd, who knew records could sound that amazing?” After the shock wears off some of them have asked “how can I get a system that sounds like that?”



In subsequent articles in this series I’ll detail how I went about assembling my two-channel system and give you advice on how you can go about adding a turntable into your audio system—affordably. I’ll discuss where and how to buy records and how to care for them. The enjoying part I won’t go into – I think you’ll figure out how to do that on your own.

What I won’t do is go off on any anti-digital rants. I love my iPod, CDs and digital audio in general. Digital has brought more freedom, versatility and convenience to the enjoyment of music than any prior technology other than possibly the transistor radio. But as a medium for plumbing the depths of musical enjoyment, involvement, even musical *understanding*, LPs beat digital media by a country mile. Let me show you how.

Paul DiComo is Definitive Technology’s Vice President of Marketing who caught the audio disease at age 10. He has yet to recover.