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AUDIO REVIEWS

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# THE APL HiFi CHRONICLES

## CHAPTER ONE: UA-S1

**Reviewer:** Srajan Ebaen

**Financial Interests:** click [here](#)

**Source:** Zanden Audio Model 2000P/5000S; Ancient Audio Lektor Prime; AMR CD-77

**Preamp/Integrated:** Supratek Cabernet Dual; ModWright LS-36.5 with PS 36.5; Melody 12A3; *Trafomatic Experience One* [on loan]

**Amp:** 2 x Audiosector Patek SE; 2 x First Watt F4; Yamamoto A-08s; Fi 2A3 monos

**Speakers:** Zu Audio Definition Pro; DeVore Fidelity Nines; WLM Grand Viola Monitor with Duo 12; Rethm Saadhana; *Zu Presence* [on review]; Mark & Daniel Maximus & Ruby Monitors w. OmniHarmonizer

**Cables:** Ocellia Silver Signature loom; Crystal Cable Ultra loom; Zanden Audio proprietary I<sup>2</sup>S cable; Crystal Cable Reference power cords; double cryo'd Acrolink with Furutech UK plug between wall and transformer; Stealth Audio Indra and Meta Carbon

**Stands:** 2 x Grand Prix Audio Monaco Modular 4-tier

**Powerline conditioning:** 2 x Walker Audio Velocitor S fed from custom AudioSector 1.5KV Plitron step-down transformer with balanced power output option; Furutech RTP-6 on 240V line feed

**Sundry accessories:** GPA Formula Carbon/Kevlar shelf for transport; GPA Apex footers underneath stand, DAC and amp; Walker Audio Vivid CD cleaner; Walker Audio Reference HDLs; Furutech RD-2 CD demagnetizer; Nanotech Nespa Pro; Acoustic System Resonators and front wall sugar cube matrix

**Room size:** 16' w x 21' d x 9' h in short-wall setup with openly adjoining 15' x 35' living room; concrete floor and ceiling, concrete/brick walls

**Review Component Retail:** \$5,000

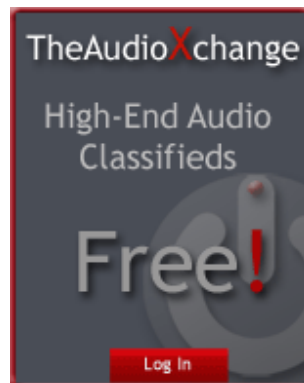
**Badabeep, badaboop - bring the gun, leave the cannoli**

Google for the Bada DC-222 amplifier. You'll instantly come across [pacificvalve.us](http://pacificvalve.us), [pacificaudio.nl](http://pacificaudio.nl), [ornec.com](http://ornec.com) and [destiny-audio.com](http://destiny-audio.com). All of them sell this machine for between \$599 and €548. Looking at their various photos, one discovers a shockingly hi-end made Chinese 4 x 12AU7, twin transformer'd hybrid integrated amplifier. It packs Toshiba transistors, Wima and Solen caps and 90/190wpc into 8/4 ohms while offering five inputs with record out, soft start and remote control. Despite the stout and quality construction, it sells for a surprisingly low price. Now our story takes an unexpected turn from suburbia to superbia.



After enjoying his early modified Denon which annihilated every digital he owned except for the famous Zanden, a friend of mine commissioned Alex Peychev of APL Hifi years ago to apply his expertise to a cost-no-object universal digital platform. The Bulgarian-born modifier already famous for his fix of the Meitner-adopted Philips SACD transport which left everyone else stumped had his eye on the crown jewel in Esoteric's line. The eventual outcome of this ongoing sponsorship -- between a patron to the audio arts and a crafty modifier given carte blanche -- became the New World Order series. Its present top incarnation is the NWO 3.0GO where Mr. Peychev guts an Esoteric UX-1. Post op, its digital engine bristles with 20 paralleled 32-bit AKM converters *per channel*; runs a custom ECC99 triode output stage; and adds precision analog-domain remote volume for direct drive to cover the most obvious bits. Esoteric's top brass has heard the Peychev makeover. Their collective response might be intuited in the fact that their newest D-05 converter has adopted the very same 32-bit AKM chip.

Alex isn't the only one to have benefited from my friend's sponsorship. I have recently been gifted with a surprise audio care package. It includes one NWO-3.0GO and one UA-S1. While I don't own dCS or Meitner like my friend to assess the player's standing in the current state of the digital art against those quantities, I do own the Zanden quartet, the AMR AM-77 and the Ancient Audio Lektor Prime. My friend's past tense Zanden ownership might make my own comparisons foregone conclusions. Other owners of the turbo-charged Esoteric are on record in APL's forum - on what they've owned before the NWO-3.0 dethroned it. Collective evidence thus far suggests that Mr. Peychev by now plays in a league of one. Certain owners feel that his best digital trounces even highly advanced vinyl.



Naturally, it's not in the world order of small boutique makers who sell everything they can make, waiting lists no issue, to accommodate casually curious reviewer requests. You might thus appreciate my excitement over being able to report on Peychev's very best effort. I already heard it in my friend's Swiss residence where we compared it to his laser turntable. Those vinyl-related rumblings do have serious and solid substance. And Peychev's latest version is apparently better still (the GO in the nomenclature of the NWO-3.0 is for "game over"). For today, we shall segue into the APL Hifi way of doing things with the UA-S1 integrated. As you will have guessed by now, it is based on the above Bada platform. Also offered are single-ended or balanced UA-M1 monoblock versions but our modifier alerts would-be owners that 6-8 ohm speakers are preferred then to avoid higher bridging distortion into 4 ohms.

The modified Bada is a very interesting and unusually *pure* platform. Post op, it combines a single tube voltage gain stage around two ECC99 triodes with a zero-gain, no-feedback bipolar power buffer (this machine shuns even local feedback). Stock, it's a more complex and conventional capacitor-coupled dual gain stage circuit with four 12AU7s. About what his modifications consist of in detail and toto, "the list is long but I rather keep it a secret" became the guarded answer. For history in a nutshell, Peychev summarized his ascendancy thus: "APL Hi-Fi was founded in 2003 after I decided to end my career with Sony Electronics Inc. where I worked for 8 years as a Sr. Electronics Engineer in the Broadcast and Professional division. I am used to millions of dollars in High-Def and Jumbotron installations so any consumer audio equipment (even the most complicated one) is like a 'baby toy' for me. This is probably the reason why I was the only one who managed to troubleshoot the Philips SACD1000 failures.



