

## lastpage



This issue, Jerry Gilbert has been talking to...

# tony andrews

... the founder of Turbosound, now of Funktion One

## What were your qualifications for becoming one of the great bass bin system designers of the 1970s?

I was brought up on '60s soul music and '70s funk. Otis Redding, James Brown, Sly Stone, Parliament, Funkadelic and Bootsy's Rubber Band. Bass is a major part of the engine of rhythm, and rhythm is what turns me on. I have always instinctively known what I've been looking to experience - plus I was completely unfettered with prior knowledge of the then current acoustic rules. I was reading Geology at London University at the time!

## You grew up during the era of free festivals, making speakers for Notting Hill type bands such as Quintessence and the Pink Fairies, and with Tim Blake of Gong providing the 'Turbosound' name. Would you have been happier remaining at street level or is there an inevitability about evolution?

The time frame of this "street level" was occurring in the late 1960s when everything new and relevant was at street level. I enjoyed my time thoroughly, as the events occurring were focused on a mixture of political and metaphysical statements. I was a firm believer in the metaphysical and found myself supporting events like the Windsor Free Festival. It was at the alternative Isle of White Festival that I met the Pink Fairies and Hawkwind. As people liked the sound I was making I began to manufacture the equipment.

The early Glastonbury event of 1971 was also at street level and represented the zenith of thousands of people's spiritual aspirations. I remember it as a shining beacon in my mind which motivated me into persuading Michael Eavis to revive the Festival in 1979. I was also instrumental in constructing that wonderful pyramid which sadly burned down, as well as providing the sound system. Because it was still at street level the free exploration of the communal mind space was available and the 1979/80 events were brilliant, particularly Taj Mahal. But success brings attention, egos get pumped up and pretty soon the original mission is entirely forgotten. Sadly, the only thing left of me at Glastonbury is my equipment designs and there's now an almost total lack of spiritual purpose. To lose the power of communication at street level is not evolution, and so while change is inevitable, evolution is not. For myself, I will always be happiest maintaining a level of communication at street level as well as in the board room.

## Which of the early bands did most to spread the reputation of Turbosound. Would it have been

## Steve Hillage?

Yes, Steve was a great supporter in the early days, as was Tim Blake of Crystal Machine, Santana, Kool and the Gang, Status Quo, Culture Club, Aswad and Iron Maiden.

## The early relationship with Tim Isaac was crucial to the success of Turbosound Rentals. Would you say that losing that relationship was one of your greatest regrets? And if not, what has been?

Yes, I do regret the split between Tim and myself. Tim was a good engineer and a good soul. Worse though, was what I believed to be the squandering of Turbosound's momentum in the 80s and its eventual sale in the early 90s. The spiritual decline of Glastonbury wasn't much fun either.

## Turbosound was formed in 1977. Why did you find the need to structure yourself into a company at that time? Did it have anything to do with the involvement of Rikki Farr and the Festival System?

I'd had three companies before Turbosound - Peace Sounds, Cosmic Boxes and Sonic Trucking - so I'd already had experience of company structure. We did the 'Brown' system for Rikki Farr in 1977, which is what I believe John Meyer based his MSL3 on, and which eventually got sold to Hibino in Japan. The Blue Festival System is what we did immediately after leaving that situation.

## How and when did the Turbosound principle evolve?

My initial relationship with Tim Isaac in the early '70s was facilitated by our mutual dislike of bog standard 2in throat compression drivers running down to 800Hz, and as we had both been investigating cone drivers for the entire mid-range band, Tim and I decided to collaborate. He had one of the early waveguide designs and decided to put a wooden rolling pin down the middle, which gave an instant boost to coherency. We rapidly refined our shapes into the early Turbo devices. This occurred in the mid 1970s and there is no doubt that Tim and I were the first people to overturn the old paradigm of bin and compression driver by inserting good-sounding, horn-loaded, cone mid-range in between the bin and the compression driver. I continued to evolve these concepts, firstly during my period of ownership in Turbosound and now with Funktion One. That's a 25-year line of evolution!

## Which of your early designs are you most proud of having developed? Was every path you explored pre-

## ordained to lead to the invention of Floodlight and Flashlight?

I would say the 2 x 18in bass bin. If you are asking whether there was a vision giving cohesion to the research, then the answer is, yes. Flashlight and Floodlight are now ten years old - a generation behind - and people still tell me that during that period very few systems have caught up with it.

## Which of the early systems best stands the test of time?

For its sheer novelty, the Glastonbury Festival System of 1979. Although there were some horn-loaded systems around at the time - Dave Martin's Philishave system comes to mind - they were of inadequate sonic integrity and argumentative dispersion pattern when used in quantity. The Festival system had the big, fat, firm bass of the 2 x 18in bin I mentioned earlier, coupled with the unprecedented mid-range projection and clarity of the then new early Turbo devices. With its excellent size, weight and power ratio, it represented a paradigm shift in large scale PA design approaches.

## You suffered a nasty attack of corporate phobia round about the time that AKG took over Turbosound. How did you respond?

The pursuit of commercial health involves good natural instincts such as growth, preservation, keeping the company's endeavours commensurate with its resources. The problem is that the profit motive narrows the field of sensibility to such an extent that, despite the slickness of the marketing, the average corporate mindset is very limited and doesn't have the circuitry in place to allow it to be really intelligent. Maybe you would call this phobia, I call it frustration. The reasons I left were that certain factions of the new management decided that the R&D team was a troublesome expense and it would make commercial sense for them if we became independent. As we wanted to continue with our work, our way, we leapt at the opportunity because as an avenue of creative expression we believed Turbosound had been pretty well murdered.

Funktion One's plan focused around us having the time and resource to properly investigate the areas which were important to the achievement of a leap forward in performance. The licence deal with Turbosound over the Floodlight in 1993 was to ensure that end-users of Flashlight had proper access to this complementary medium-dispersion product. The design of Floodlight, and the axe-head technology incorporated within it, was the first result of our independence. If we had stayed in Turbosound I doubt that

the new management would have allowed us this prioritisation.

## Despite the success of Funktion One bass bins, you have maintained a low-profile until the Millennium Dome. What were you asked to tender for and on what basis did you win the contract?

Yes, you are right... but what an irresistible opportunity to try out some of the new products! We tendered for the loudspeakers for the central area show, supplying 96 x 218 bass bins, 24 x Resolution 4s, 52 x Resolution 9s, 48 x Resolution 9 high packs, all of which were self-powered. We won the contract on the basis that we met the audio and sonic criteria, the incredibly low weight of the enclosure/amplifier package, the extremely compact dimensions and a reasonable price. What amused me most was that after years of struggling with set designers trying to cover the speakers up, the futuristic look of the new waveguide designs was welcomed and incorporated into the set without scrim.

## Through it all, which pro audio peers have you most admired for their cavalier and empirical approach to product/system design?

I could certainly say that Dave Martin was cavalier in the positive spirit of its meaning. Christian Heil for persevering with the application of the line array principle into touring and install PA. Rupert Neve for his adherence to highest audio quality.

## What are the three adjectives that best sum up the spirit of the Funktion One design philosophy?

Fearless, holistic and visionary.

## When you're not locked in battle with the laws of physics what do you do to relax?

I hate to think of it as being locked in battle with the laws of physics. It's more about tuning into the ways of the universe, which I find relaxing anyway. As far as things not concerned with audio, I'm passionate about windsurfing (more tuning into the laws of physics) and getting out on the sea. I work out regularly at the gym and have a compelling relationship with powerful motor cars. Above all I like hanging out with my wife.

## Finally, it's been said a speaker is a speaker is a speaker. Is there anything further you can do to push back the envelope?

We feel we have done exactly that with our new Resolution series, but judge for yourself when it fully emerges. ☺