

This interview was conducted in early 2013 by the journalist Matjek Isak after reviewing the Passion 650 Power Amplifier. It is a long interview and gives great insight into the man behind YBA.

Interview with Yves-Bernard André

How did it all start for YBA Audio?

It started in 1981 in Paris and the name is coming from my initials: Yves-Bernard André

Why the name?

In fact, I was working for some very well known hifi companies like Goldmund and Audax and I decided to create my own company with my ideas of business.

When did you get "hooked" to the music and hi-fi?

I was 16 and was playing oboe. I was not recognizing and listening to this instrument because of the poor sound qualities. My father was playing violin. You can imagine...

What made you move into creating amplifiers?

To try to be as true as possible with all my knowledge (I was working in the most well known university which is the Ecole Polytechnique). I wanted also to be as simple as possible in the design to be capable to evaluate each part. As simple as possible is not so easy because you have not to be too simple. Simple does not mean simplify, but optimize. This last idea is coming from Einstein and it was a line to follow all along my life.

What was your entry to high-end industry?

It was first a loudspeaker with a patent about "simulation of an infinite baffle". The first pair was for my parents.

Would you consider yourself as an audiophile?

No, I am a music lover. I think that music can bring the same feeling and quality of pleasure as human love or sharing an excellent bottle of wine with some very good friends.

Who were your inspirations, products and people, that made biggest impact on you (and still are)?

Sorry, but nobody. I discover in working very hard and making a lot of experiments, spending full nights with solder and listening!!!

Kindly list all of the present products from YBA Audio?

Currently in 2013 there are 13 products – Signature line has 3, Passion line has 4, Heritage line has 3 and Design line has 3. There will be one addition to the Passion line and a new Genesis line with three products late in 2013.

Would you say that YBA Audio products share the same recognizable sound across the range?

Yes, and it is not so easy. I try to get the best with a certain amount of money. Then we can say that the differences are like if each time of improvement, you take away one cotton to be nearer from the music and have more emotion.

Please elaborate more on your top of the range Line. This are your state of the art amplifiers. What makes them so special?

The purpose of a hifi system is to reproduce music and not to be a scientific instrument !!! It is why I am listening to every Signature unit personally before it is released for sale. It is also a product with the minimum of compromise.

Please tell us more about your unique internal design?

It is a totally symmetrical design with only active components on the way of the signal. No passive components. A lot of components like connectors, transformers, wires, solder are made in France on YBA specifications.

Why do you think YBA Audio products are beloved by many audiophiles?

YBA is a key line since a long time and the designer has been involved without any problems since the beginning of the brand. This is quite unique.

How did you managed to get recognised so quickly?

I took a long time before launching a product in the market and I put myself at the place of the customer : will I buy this product ?

Made in China designed in France?

Today this is the most economical way to produce our products if we are to be competitive. YBA is manufactured by who we consider to be the best in China. They produce my designs and I specify many parts to come directly from France. I personally listen to the products in China before they are released.

Would you say that even your entry range can perform very good with the state of the art products from other manufacturers?

Yes, especially if the system is carefully installed. The schematics are the same in the entire line. I have a know-how of 42 years of audio design and I have still the passion.....

Can you kindly tell us more about your view of "the real sound"

I don't know what a real sound is frankly, but I do know what is emotion and pleasure.

What would be the ultimate high-end audio design?

Something which is disappearing behind the music, something that you forgot: A small, cool, reliable, silent and easy to use product.

What do you think about upcoming digital revolution?

If it is for increasing the pleasure, why not, but I am not so sure.

Any plans to introduce any new line of products outside of current products?

We are always working on new products and of course we will release something new when I am happy with the finished designs

How important is the right room setting for ultimate reproduction?

It is not so important, but if you have the choice, then do it well with the right advice. I have designed quite a significant numbers of rooms especially for audio in my life and it was a good opportunity for me to be able to do this

It must be great feeling to know, that your products helped people enjoy the music worldwide?

Yes, it is really an important point for me and I knew my best friends through this field. Real high end people are often high end people in their life.

What product of yours you're most proud of?

Signature series without a doubt. It was designed in 1988 and that same design was still in production in 2008.

Can we hear your thoughts about tubes vs Transistors?

Tubes are sounding very good, but it is like cream always on your cake. Transistors are very difficult to master, but if you succeed, it is the best.

How about Class D?

I tried a lot of pieces, but it was not my taste. It is less expensive to produce, no need for big heat sinks, small (good point), cool (good point), but a big problem with the sampling frequency. After a huge effort you can get a sound result, but I feel with some lack of life, something artificial.

What would you say that sets YBA Audio above other manufacturers?

We continue with the same basic very successful designs and build on those.

Would you say, that one's love for music reflects in his product?

Certainly in my case.

Prices can go quite high within high-end. Where is the border line between luxury and real high-end?

The border line is the price you want to give to the quality of your emotion and the choices of your life. A wife can cost a lot of money, a jewel can cost a lot of money!!! An expensive product is not the best for everybody.

There is the high-end and ultra high-end. What is the difference in you view?

I don't know

Are high prices a must for some of the top class products?

Certainly not. We make products for the customer to enjoy. If he buys the best he can afford then for him it is a top class product.

What importance do you give to the use built in elements? Is there a need of exotic parts?

Yes, because today, all components are optimized for computers domains and not for audio.

Is classic music the top most test material for state of the art reproduction?

Everything, but especially voices

What is your opinion on digital music revolution and the birth of MP3?

Forget the MP3; Concerning the digital revolution, we have to make the same way than analog. Interesting challenge...

How to draw the line between, resolution, transparency and musicality when building the system?

You have to be careful with all sorts of distortions like, thermal, electromagnetic, vibration and electrostatics distortions. An all life is not sufficient. Make the simplest design.

What is the reference for you when designing any products?

Emotion, then it needs time to take a decision. Sometimes, it is like Ying and Yang in the Chinese philosophy. You have to choose between two ways, and both seem good. I like to stay modest and I don't know everything. I like to learn and make experiments even if it demands time and money.

Is there a need for a high prices in high-end?

Not really, the price is the result of time for designing and producing the product, the quality of the components. It is the result of a labor and not the fruit of the hazard !!!! It allows your company to continue to exist and make the after sales service.

Who would you say is exactly an audiophile?

Everybody, especially the women.

Do you think digital will ever come close to analog?

Yes, with a lot of effort and care, like analog also.

Best system ever heard in your life?

A system in the south of France and in Taiwan, both using my old Gala speakers. It is so real that we are feeling uncomfortable. The human presence of the system is disturbing.

Do you still believe in European quality and how world responds to this?

Actually yes, but other countries are also making quality products.

YBA Audio philosophy?

Simple and musical for a long time. A product which is making music today, will make music tomorrow, next year and in 10 years, because the music is not changing. A YBA product which was making music in 1986 like the YBA integer is still making music today.

Would you say that high quality is more affordable today or you have to pay premium price for best components and sound?

I am not so sure. Listen to an old system of the 50's and you could understand my answer. Listen to some mono recordings.

What is the definitive goal of YBA Audio?

Pleasure and happy customers who did not regret to have bought YBA products.

What is your opinion on rising sales of vinyl?

If people buy, it is their choice. For me it is marketing... I have 5000 LP in my home.

Do you think analogue master tape quality can be matched within digital domain?

Yes and I made personally some recording analogue or digital to compare; I made a living experiment in Singapore, some years ago and people were blown away with the result; they could not say which one it was.

Who are your musical inspirations?

Everything if I feel emotion.

Is it possible to achieve concert feeling within high-end audio?

Yes, very rare and with good friends

Is there a place for mystics in audio or simply good and great engineering?

Yes, because we are not machines; it is like in the human love.

Who would you say typical YBA audio customers are?

A guy for whom it is not so important to show off and who wants to have emotion in listening music. Somebody for whom the music is more important than the technique and who does not want to change his system every year.