

# **STEIN** *Music*

## **A Few Words About The Steinmusic Harmonizer System**

Press quotations about a very  
efficient tool to improve room  
acoustics ...



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## Steinmusic's H2 Harmonizer, Magic Stones and E-Pads:

A Review by Clement Perry  
The Stereo Times 05/2010



Holger Stein, designer, inventor, and owner of Steinmusic, has quite a few products to his credit. These include amplifiers, turntables, CD players, loudspeakers, cables, and some unusual tweaks, like cable and LP demagnetizers. Stein's a one man show. He's the German equivalent of Japan's Ken Ishiguro (Mr. Acoustic Revive). I recall seeing Stein's Masterclass electronics at the Munich High End Show. And I actually met him at this year's CES where he was just there walking the show. He never mentioned any of his products to me then or anytime thereafter. To my mind, that alone spells class and confidence, particularly in an industry where self-promotion is the norm.

Here in the states, Steinmusic has remained in obscurity for the five years since its launching (Stein himself has been around the industry a lot longer). And while brand appeal is a steep (and necessary) uphill battle for any startup company, his latest tweak – the Steinmusic H2 Harmonizer – may be the ticket Holger Stein is counting on to make him High End audio's newest darling. This is its first public review.

My interest in the H2 Harmonizer was piqued when Norbert Mundorf of MCap Capacitors fame (photo above on my left shoulder), was seen walking around providing demos at the recent Audio Expo of North America (APOXNA) held last month in Jacksonville, Florida. I didn't need to hear it at this show for me to know there was something special about it. If Norbert Mundorf is walking around with a product he's personally endorsing, then I'll easily give it a try. After spending five-days in Istanbul with Mundorf, mostly in intense

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discussions and demanding listening sessions I discovered he's the real deal when it comes to both music appreciation and listening experience. The listening sessions went into the wee hours of the morning and were unforgettable. If you see Mundorf or Frederik Caroe (of Duelund Denmark) walking the halls offering demonstrations of products...trust me, it's got to be worth a listen.

The H2 Harmonizer (H2 hereafter) consists of two cubes about 6" square. Each is assigned a designation, H2A and H2B, located on the underside. If you're the obsessive-compulsive type, you can purchase two H2As if necessary, but only a single H2B is required. The rear of the unit accepts power from a 12-volt wall-wart or a battery and has a light switch and an intensity adjustment knob. The light switch is useful to anyone who chooses to use the 9-volt battery option and wants to prolong its lifespan by disabling the LED on the front of the unit. There is no on/off switch.

How the H2 actually works is proprietary, and Stein insists on keeping its inner workings secret. Stein says, „The H2 stimulates the oxygen's molecules in a way that improves its viscosity thus allowing it act much more effectively.“ The info that arrived with the H2 reads, in part, „The basic principle is similar to a catalyser. Technically it works with capacitively activated crystals. The air molecules inside of the listening room are jogged through the loudspeaker and thus transmit the

sound information. In order to elongate the air molecules from their rest position it is necessary to spend energy first. It is much easier to move them if once moving. This phenomenon is similar to static and dynamic friction. To force a heavy piece of rock to move is not an easy task. But if it is once moving it can be much easier shifted further. The Steinmusic Harmonizer is working very similar, but rather at a level of ethereal states...."

The H2A is placed at two adjacent walls of the listening room, preferably near the loudspeakers. The H2B is placed somewhere near the listening seat, and opposite the H2A. Like the Acoustic Revive RR77, the H2 is sensitive to placement. But it is not a fancy pulse generator. I own and use several RR77s and although they've increased my musical enjoyment by their influence on sound stage and dimensionality, in a side by side comparison with the H2, their impact is hardly noticeable.

### **There's more...**

Steinmusic Magic Stones are 1 1/2" triangular shaped polycarbonate "stones" designed to be used in conjunction with the H2 Harmonizer and purporting to intensify its effectiveness. They are ideally located at about 5-feet off the floor on the wall between your loudspeakers; behind your listening seat; on the ceiling (if possible, between your listening seat and the loudspeakers); on the edges of the loudspeakers - above the tweeters - and lastly, in the corners of your room.

Steinmusic E-Pads are small (1" long by 1/2" wide) self-adhesive devices which Holger Stein says offers a "radical sonic impact on the reproduction of music." The E-Pads work at molecular level on whatever material it is applied to. I tried the E-Pads on almost everything in my listening room, and although they may work as the manufacturer claims, I couldn't hear a difference.

But what about the H2 Harmonizer combined with the Magic Stones? In a word, ASTONISHING! I've a single H2B and two H2As (set at an Intensity level of 11 o'clock as recommended) and ten Magic Stones. And it took me all of 30 seconds to detect something unusually sweet about the top end. And there's a much more obvious sense of bloom around instruments as well. I haven't changed any of my electronic components upstairs in years and am so satisfied with their sonic performance I don't plan to, yet this stable environment began to sound very unfamiliar - and incredibly for the better. High frequency decay and shimmer to instruments like cymbals and strings sounded freer, faster and clearer - unlike anything I've heard before in this room. Experimenting with the Intensity knob to 12 o'clock exaggerated the effect and thus destroyed the illusion of real instruments playing in front of me. Returning back to the recommended 11 o'clock position snapped everything back into focus and once again the top-end turned ultra-liquid. In no time, I found myself once again scratching my head in amazement.

Listening to the H2, I get the sensation that I'm listening at a different altitude but instead of feeling that annoying pressure I usually get in my ears at 35,000 feet, it's the complete opposite - I feel an intense freedom of pressure. Strange but true. Bass is faster in its ebb and flow, with greater clarity and articulation. As a result, voices possess a more authentic timbre and are realistically enhanced on a three-dimensional plane in way that was exhilarating. On Individuality (Can I be me?) CD, Rachele Farrell sounded a tad forward, yet rounder with greater bloom around her magnificent voice. Simultaneously, she seemed further distanced from her band-mates with no embellishment or exaggeration in size whatsoever. In short, dynamic-wise, my room sounds like someone or something removed the corners ceiling and floor. Voices simply

soar higher via the H2s, with less restraint and more realism. I am still trying to make sense of the whole thing as I write this.

It's amazing to think a system as tweaked out with products such as room correction (Behold), Acoustic Revive RWL-3 room panels, one dozen of Franck Tchang's Gold Resonators, Shakti Stones and two-pair of Hallographs not to mention the age-old Argent Room lens, would benefit from a device that makes claims about stimulating oxygen molecules!

### **Taking the show on the road.**

David Caplan is the co-creator of the Shakti Hallographs and is a tweakaholic if there ever was one. I'm talking about a guy who's using eight sets of Hallographs in his listening room. Now, Caplan lives in Brooklyn, NY which is about twenty-minutes from my home. I called him to ask if he'd be interested in hearing something remarkable, and he was. I arrived with not a mention of the H2s (fearing he'd Google the damn things), we listened for a good thirty-minutes as we always do when I pay Caplan a visit. Then I asked if he'd install the Magic Stones in the same positions as I did in my home. After completing that task, we installed the H2A behind his audio rack and the H2B near the listening couch. I asked he put on some familiar music and just listen. I could see Caplan's eyes widen in disbelief...in about thirty seconds! He adores his Apogee Stage loudspeakers which I think have seen their best days because, for me, they simply lack dynamics and bass authority. (This is not a secret. It's well documented that the Achilles heel of open-baffle, dipole based designs is bass and dynamics.)

Well, the first improvements we noticed were bass and dynamics. I would have never believed this degree of improvement possible. Not in a thousand years. They were so noticeable and obvious that we both felt giddy over the results. Whenever Caplan and I talk, he always stresses

over and over „it's all about the room and addressing distortions.“ Well, he hit the nail on the head this time.

### **Theory versus Reality.**

I have a hunch as to what the H2's doing. To my ears, if there's some truth to Stein's claim of the manipulation to air molecules, then the H2's impacting right at the reflective surfaces; the ceiling above, behind my head, and in the corners. This makes it much closer to a type of room correction device than anything else I can imagine. I've tried basically everything else under the sun when it comes to taming a room, and the H2, to my ears, sounds closer to room correction than anything else I've encountered. Sounds crazy? Yeah, I think so too. A friend hypothesized if the H2 was working on the listener rather than the room. My answer was, then why do you sound the same to me when we talk but the music is so different? (and no we did not go to the corner of the room and try listening to our voices.)

I don't want to delve too deeply into comparisons, but I will say here for the record that I've not heard anything passively affect a room like the H2. If there's such a thing as a de-pressure device, then that is what it sounds like to me. The H2, in my opinion, is nothing short of breathtaking. There will be more discussion of this innovative product in the not too distant future. My impressions are solid, they're still early as I've had the unit for less than a month. As time and settle-time continues, I hope to report more on what differences were observed, if any.

The Steinmusic H2 Harmonizers and Magic Stones have changed my idea of what is sonically possible in the here and now. Their impact is powerful enough to rival the Bybee Super Effect Speaker Bullets, Frank Tchang's Acoustic Resonators, and Shakti Hallographs.

*Clement Perry*

## A Smooth Ride on the Tweak Highway – The Steinmusic Harmonizers:

A Review by Dan Secula  
The Stereo Times 04/2011



the **Stereo Times**  
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I was absolutely delighted recently, to find it was now possible to make truly significant improvements to ones high-end system without having to swap out a single component!

I'd describe myself as a confirmed skeptic whose open mind is not as wide as some. Actually, I'd consider mine to be only slightly ajar. My first inclination to anyone claiming a „better mousetrap,“ is for them to prove it and let the chips fall where they may. I can attest there are many ways to enhance the musicality of our beloved systems but all tweaks are not equal. Manufacturers and users of tweaks often claim fantastic sound improvements to a system. During my fifty years of enjoying great sound and music, I have to admit to taking the bait at times, i.e. getting the latest products from Bybee, a set of Argent Room Lenses and an assortment of other gizmos, including expensive AC conditioners and power cords. I too, experienced varying degrees of success along the way, but I'll admit to having always enjoyed the inexpensive tweaks the most (yeah, enhance the sound but leave my wallet intact!).

The heart of my reference audio system consists of the reference Behold BPA768 [replete with room correction and CD transport], the Nova Physics Memory Player – replacing my former \$40k Esoteric transport/DAC combo, Dynaudio Temptation loudspeakers, and Bybee power conditioning and cabling throughout. My room is 15 feet wide by 25 feet deep with a vaulted 15-foot ceiling. I am thrilled with the performance my system provides. In respect to tweaks, I usually

don't go looking for the next best thing, but if something conveniently presents itself, I am open to investigating its merits.

My good friend, Clement Perry (CP) at Stereo Times, who I like to call “the man with golden ears,“ phoned me a few months ago to say he was extremely excited about a new tweak product he had just reviewed. He explained that it was a system consisting of three, small black boxes called Steinmusic Harmonizers. When I questioned CP on how the Harmonizers worked he explained (as best he could) that the Harmonizers, „... energize the room's air molecules, placing them in a kinetic motion. This effect translates into an improvement in what one hears from their system,“ said CP. Needless to say, I can't print my response to this explanation. Let me just add though that I told him I needed to be convinced in my own room with my equipment. Did he really expect me to believe that bunch of “you know what?” My Bullsh\*t antennae went on full alert. Must have been a few days later when CP arrived with three small boxes containing the Harmonizers. Two of the boxes were 4.5 inches. The Harmonizers (as we call them) came designated as “A” and “B” type boxes, respectively. An extra „A” box allows you to, „triangulate them around the listening room, thus obtaining more coverage,“ says designer Holger Stein. Two is the least expensive and the most practical (for comparisons sake I asked that he bring a third box). The Harmonizers can be

powered by either plugging them into an AC outlet or by way of ordinary batteries (4 AAA) when the best location may not have an AC outlet nearby (smart). CP also had with him twelve Magic Stones which are said to work in conjunction with the Harmonizers. These little triangular shaped accessories, not bigger than a piece of candy (1.5") are supposed to be placed in the corners of your listening room to help activate the air molecules.

The Harmonizers are not anything close to affordable. At about \$1k a pop for each box, I think they're hellishly expensive, even for what they claim to do. CP got started by simply placing two "A" Harmonizers behind the loudspeakers and a single "B" Harmonizer in another corner behind my listening seat. I then proceeded to play some familiar, well-recorded music tracks, sat back in my sweet spot and began to listen. I was immediately taken aback by the transformation of sound that began as soon as the music started up, but thought it was my imagination. So then I listened to another song, then another. The sensation that something special was occurring never went away. First, there was an enormous increase in the size and layering of the sound coming from around, in front of, and behind my loudspeakers. The Harmonizers created an even better holographic effect on the soundstage compared to what I formally had. There was much more of a "wall of sound" sensation to the music. Image specificity was so dead on, my loudspeakers seemed to be merely incidental and had nothing to do with the source from where the music had emerged. The music sounded even more natural and tonally authentic. No undesirable artifacts were introduced whatsoever. My room was transformed into something completely different: a higher plane of reality was achieved. It was as if the walls moved back and the room got larger. I heard spatial cues along with macro/micro dynamics that placed me much closer to the original

recording's venue, rather than my listening space. The effect that these Harmonizers created allowed me to have a clearer picture into the recording engineer's style and technique. The better the recording the more pronounced the layering and depth were. To date, my system sounded extremely satisfying for my tastes prior to the introduction of the Harmonizers. Personally, I would have never believed this level of improvement was possible to experience here in my own living space.

CP didn't have to ask me what I thought. He could easily read my reactions as he chuckled sitting off to the side. When I did decide to voice my satisfaction, all I said was, „I now understand your enthusiasm about the Harmonizers.“ CP certainly hit a grand slam by recommending this product. Hearing is believing. For those of you who readily dismiss this kind of stuff, all I can say is have a nice day and continue what you're doing. But if you too keep your open-mindedness door slightly ajar, you deserve to give the Harmonizers a trial run in your system. The thing I find myself doing the most since the Steinmusic Harmonizers have made their way into my home is sit back and enjoy my vast music collection like never before. Oops, there goes my phone again... Might be CP with another one of these tweaks.

*Dan Secula*

## Take Two – Life with the Steinmusic Harmonizers

A Review by Ron Cook  
The Stereo Times 04/2011



While I am a long-time audiophile, it has been some time since I've put pen to paper to focus my thoughts on the high-end audio world. What has prompted me to do so now is to tell you, my fellow audiophiles about several products that I have used lately that have "shaken my world" as to what is possible in reproducing music in a home environment. The following review pertains to one of these products – the Steinmusic Harmonizer System.

I'm aware that most audiophiles are, justifiably, skeptical of any piece of gear or equipment that is touted as a game-changer, but, as you will see, that is exactly what has happened for me and would likely happen for you also should you elect to give this product a try.

Since I am probably unfamiliar to almost everyone reading this, here is some brief background on yours truly. I have been an audiophile since the late 1960s and have gone through a myriad of loudspeakers, amplifiers, pre-amps, cables, etc. etc. over the past 40+ years. I have owned a number of reference-quality products including the Dynaudio Evidence Master loudspeakers, Mark Levinson Reference No. 32 preamp, Mark Levinson Reference No. 33 amplifiers, Transparent Audio Reference MM interconnects, Opus speaker cables, and so on.

Like most high-end junkies, I had been on an unending quest for „perfect“ sound, which, inevitably leads to honorary membership in the 'component-of-the-month' club. In recent years, the fever had somewhat abated and, for some time now, I

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had been living quite happily with the following system that includes the Focal Nova Utopia Be loudspeakers, Mark Levinson No. 33 amplifiers, VTL 7.5 preamplifier, Mark Levinson 31.5/30.6 transport/DAC combo using Transparent Reference MM. My modest analog rig includes the VPI Aires turntable, JMR arm, and Benz Micro Ruby II cartridge. There's an assortment of tweaks that adorn my listening space too.

Up until now, I've always felt I had an excellent sounding system. What I have recently achieved, however, is an even greater illusion of being in attendance at a live musical performance. These performances range from great to astonishing depending on the quality/excellence of the specific recording/engineering.

It is worth repeating this point – for the first time in over 40 years, I don't feel I'm listening to good sound coming out of a system, rather, I'm listening to a performance closer to the original recording space (the system is really "not there" at all). In fact, it appears somewhat irrelevant to the illusion of this live performance! This illusion, by the way, is something so unshakeable, that a number of audiophile friends have been literally shocked by its power. It is not subtle, and is quite apparent to golden ears and casual listeners alike (my spouse for one – lol). Any comments that I, or others, might have about sound these days tend to be about recording and/or site criteria, i.e. close

vs. distant microphone placement, large vs. small hall, etc. Frankly, I never knew that this level of involvement /performance was possible in my home.

So, how have I achieved this level of performance? Basically, through significant improvements in two major areas: (1) acoustic treatment and room correction, and (2) "tweaks" of various types. Again, the following commentary pertains only to the Steinmusic Harmonizers (Harmonizers for short). I intend to discuss room correction and other tweaks in a subsequent article hopefully sooner than later.

Let me get right to the bottom line first. I am so flabbergasted by what the Harmonizers do that I can't imagine any system – no matter how good – that would not be significantly improved by them. The good news is that this is extremely simple to do, just buy 'em, plug 'em in and listen. The bad news – they aren't cheap. That said, I do not know of, or have experienced another passively-based tweak with this level of improvement regardless of cost. In that sense, the Harmonizers are probably the most impressive tweak I have ever purchased.

At this point, you must be wondering what these things actually DO. Well, honestly, the science is beyond my ability to truly understand and/or explain, so, I'm not even going to try. All I can say is that the results are REAL. While the Harmonizers don't produce a sound of their own (no sound at all, in fact), they allow you to hear your system in an entirely new way. To try and capture in words, how this actually "sounds," let me create this imaginary, hypothetical scenario: say you have an otherwise excellent system which is being constrained by a low-power solid-state stereo amp. Imagine, then, substituting world-class tube mono amps with 1,000 watts per side. What are the changes you would likely hear? If you said tremendous increases in: soundstage air and bloom;

effortless dynamics; holographic and palpable imaging; transparency, etc., as well as somehow allowing individual instruments to sound MORE individual and 'like' themselves, you would be right - and you would also be describing what the Harmonizers did in my already excellent system. These Harmonizers literally created a new paradigm in what was possible in my listening room. By the way, I am using two "A" and two "B" Harmonizers, as well as ten Magic Stones in my room. Your requirements may be different, depending on room dimensions.

I imagine that if you tried to summarize what the boxes do in a couple of words you might say, "spatial enhancement." To me, this is hardly adequate. They are supposed to allow sound to actually "flow" better than it otherwise could and, thus, infuse the music with a much more relaxed "feel." They do this and more. By allowing the entire soundstage to expand and breathe, they allow you to hear individual sounds within that soundstage with less effort. If you then clean up that huge space by using a good-quality power conditioner, the result is simply stunning and the "thereness" factor goes through the roof! I find it difficult to explain this exactly, but it seems that the more confusion you remove from the soundstage, the more ambiance and air you create. The instruments or voices that exist in this improved space now become so clear that they simply sound more real and less like electronic representations.

Let me attempt to describe these changes in terms of the music itself. Take, for example, one of my favorite jazz discs, Clark Terry's Live At The Village Gate [Chesky JD49]. This is a live recording whose first track, "Top & Bottom," opens with someone announcing, "Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr. Clark Terry." The instant I heard that announcement I knew this was going to be good. The sense of being in that room with the audience was much

greater than ever before – you could really hear the room. When the band kicked in, it was as if I had been transported back in time to the original event. The palpability of the instruments themselves – Clark Terry’s trumpet, Jimmy Heath’s sax, Kenny Washington’s drum kit, etc. - was amazing, with each musician clearly occupying his own space within the context of the room, and, as noted, these boxes allow you to hear their instruments in a way that makes them sound richer and more like the real thing. On track 2, “Keep, Keep, Keep On Keepin’ On,” the crowd joins in singing with Terry during an intro to the tune. Once again, the sense of being “in” that crowd is so strong that you just want to join in and sing with them! As a professional drummer, I am also particularly sensitive to the sound of recorded cymbals, so another aspect of how the sound changed was most intriguing to me. While Washington’s cymbals became cleaner, clearer and more discernable, they also took on a more delicate sound in the sense of less unnatural sizzle being replaced by a more natural shimmer and fuller-bodied overtones.

This phenomenon occurs with vocalists as well. Voices are much more lifelike and present and take on a more relaxed naturalness. This sensation of presence and of a being at an event is so strong that it caused my wife to comment on it (and that is a BIG deal, believe me). She has listened to the many iterations of my system over the years and, while appreciating the sound, has rarely commented on it. She is a music-lover, not an audiophile, but, she can really hear with the best of them. She was recently listening to Sinatra’s recording of “What’s New” from his CD *Frank Sinatra Sings For Only The Lonely* [Capitol CD CDP7484712]. When the song ended she turned to me and said “I feel like I want to walk up to him and ask for his autograph.” I couldn’t have said it better.

By the way, another plus is that this type of improvement is one that is consistent across every recording or sound that comes out of the speakers no matter what the source. Even movie dialog is more intelligible!

### **Conclusion:**

In the world of the high-end, every once in a while, a product comes along that is so inherently good in what it does that it literally, “changes the game” in some meaningful way.

The Steinmusic Harmonizer System is such a product. One thing is certain; this is not a tweak that you have to listen to for days in order to determine if you REALLY hear an improvement in your system. This type of change hits you like the proverbial “ton-of-bricks.” It’s simply magical.

If you are thinking about changing any of the components in your system, I would suggest you try and hear what these boxes do first. You may be so (pleasantly) surprised at the improvement, that you may just forego what you thought was a necessary upgrade – or at least postpone it until you can get the smile off your face!

*Ron Cook*

# A Uniquely Original Approach to a Better Sounding Listening Room

A Review by Wayne Donnelly  
enjoythemusic.com 04/2011

This is the kind of review I especially enjoy. Effectively, one that describes such unique products offer challenges and rewards beyond the norm of reviewing standard product categories. On an evaluation of a preamplifier or amplifier the writer can draw on past review experiences to at least set a frame of reference for the current subject. But that is far from the case here. As my second decade of audio reviewing nears, nothing I've previously encountered has prepared me for how Holder Stein's remarkable products so effectively enhance the beauty and emotional connection I experience during each session with my audio system.

Most audiophiles would acknowledge the adage that the listening room is the key element in the sound of an audio system. But few of even the most ambitious systems I have encountered include substantial room treatment, and those systems typically fail to achieve their full sonic potential regardless of the cost of the equipment. They are compromised by frequency peaks and dips caused by the room's uneven interaction with the output of the loudspeakers.

Room treatments essentially fall into two categories, active or passive. Active electronic products, connected within the signal path, range from the graphic and parametric equalizers that have been around forever to more sophisticated recent DSP-based room correction products. All of them work by modifying the system's frequency curve. Passive room treatments typically involve bulky traps and diffusers, commonly fabric-covered cardboard and foam structures designed to absorb and redirect the output of the speakers to

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produce a smoother and better balanced octave-to-octave frequency spectrum.

Confession time. Until a couple of years ago I was among the audiophiles who resist using traditional room treatments, either active or passive. Years ago I had dabbled with equalizers, but found the products of the 1980s demanded too many trade-offs. While I might accomplish some desirable frequency shaping, the positive benefits were offset by phase anomalies, and all too often undesirable degradations of tonal beauty and transient impact resulting from inserting typically poorly engineered equalizer designs into my „purist“ signal path.

As for conventional traps and diffusers, I've resisted cluttering my room with dust-catching big traps and panels. Now, décor has never loomed large in my priorities, and none of my listening rooms has ever been in danger of appearing in House Beautiful or Architectural Digest. But adding those honkin' big uglies into the visual mix has had zero appeal. Moreover, my two cats would think they'd been transported to a wonderful world of oversized scratching posts! Finally, none of my listening rooms over the last 25 years has been a rectangular box, a shape that tends to emphasize audible room boundary effects; each has been shaped so that standing wave problems were minimized and heavy-duty room treatments have not been required to achieve reasonably well balanced sound.

There are of course many other forms of passive room conditioning, including among others African ebony Mpingo disks, RoomLens plastic Helmholtz resonators, Shakeri Holographs, and the Synergistic Research Acoustic ART resonating bowls I wrote about in December 2009 (more on those below). Over the years I have tried all of the aforementioned unconventional products, and others as well. Some gave me good results, some didn't, and some yielded ambiguous results. But the one thing that has been consistent is that for any room-tuning product that falls outside the generally accepted active electronic and passive trap/diffuser approaches, there is always a sizable and highly vocal number of audiophiles who reject such unconventional thinking out of hand. Nothing activates the „snake oil“ chorus more predictably than products whose rationale relies on concepts not covered in high school and undergraduate physics textbooks. I suspect that these Steinmusic products will evoke a similar reaction in many. My goal is to make a sufficient case for them to encourage more listeners to broaden their horizons, open their minds, and judge unconventional products by their sonic results.

The Steinmusic system confounds easy characterization. The Harmonizers are electronically active, but they are not connected within the system's signal path. Changing the Intensity level quite audibly alters the in-room sound, but that interaction is strictly with the room itself, not the electronics of the system. But the Magic Stones, which are equally important to the effect, are totally passive devices. I have not previously worked with any similar combination of active and passive room tuning elements.

In mid-2010 my friend Jack Bybee – another creator of sonically superb, scientifically valid, but often misunderstood off-the-beaten-track audio accessories –

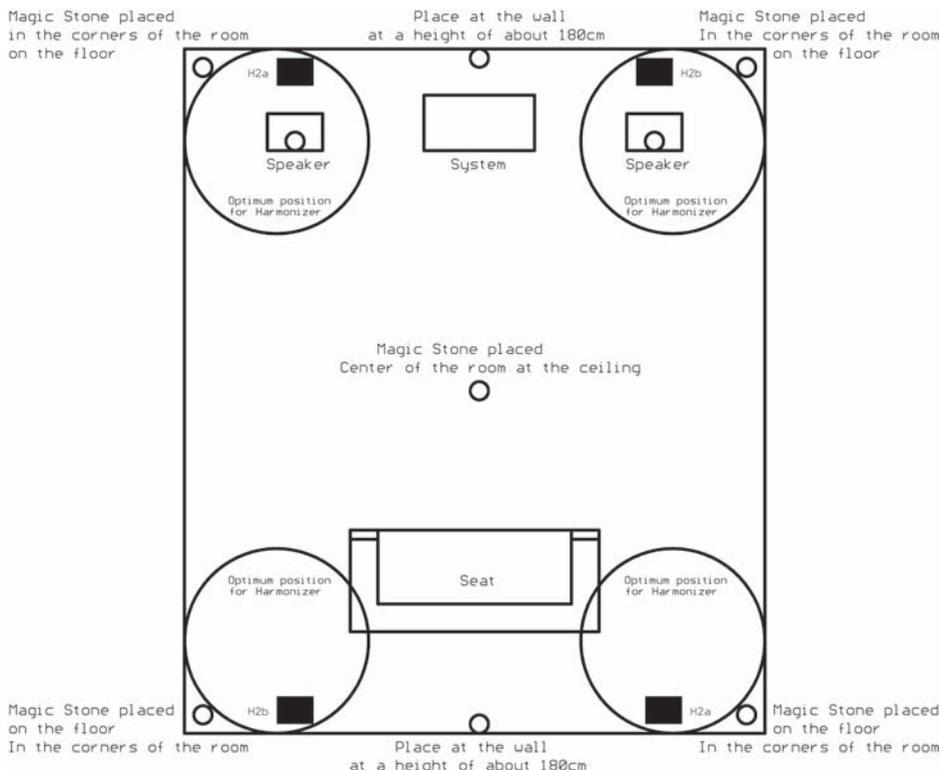
excitedly described to me some black boxes and small resonant pieces whose deployment had dramatically enhanced the beauty and musicality of his already superior audio system. Jack is not prone to hyperbole, so based on his enthusiasm I contacted Holger Stein and requested review samples of his H2 Harmonizers and Magic Stones. A few days later the parcel arrived from Germany and the adventure began.

### **Physical Description & Room Configuration**

The shipping carton contained four 5 x 5 x 4 inch, beautifully painted black MDF cubes, a 12V wall-wart power supply for each cube, and a set of 10 small rounded, triangular-shaped pieces – the Magic Stones – to be distributed through the listening room.

The cubes are the H2 Harmonizers, marked either H2A or H2B. Each Harmonizer has a blue LED on the front panel to indicate that it is getting power. The rear panel has an input jack for the wall wart, an ON/OFF toggle for the LED (and to turn on or off an internal 9V battery if that power option is chosen over the wall warts), and an Intensity knob with a rotational range from 7 to 5 o'clock. Inside is space for the 9V battery and a small electronic circuit. There is no visible difference in the appearance of the circuits in the H2A or H2B Harmonizers.

There are three basic options for configuring the Steinmusic Harmonizers. The listening room's size and the system's electronics and speakers may perform well with two (1 H2A and 1 H2B), three (2 H2A and 1 H2B), or four (2 H2A and 2 H2B) Harmonizers. The deployment of the Magic Stones need not change because more Harmonizers are in use. The following room diagram illustrates recommended placements of the Harmonizers and Magic Stones. You can see that in the four-cube setup the



H2A and H2B Harmonizers are paired in diagonal relationships. That principle holds true for the two-cube and three-cube layouts; however, in all cases some experimentation with the precise locations of Harmonizers and Stones will help the listener optimize the entire configuration for best results.

At the beginning of this process I had no idea which of the above – described setups would work optimally in my room. I set about methodically to try them out, starting with the simplest two-Harmonizer version (1 H2B behind the right speaker and 1 H2A behind the listening seat on the left side). After working with that configuration for almost two weeks, I went to three Harmonizers (1 H2A behind the left speaker, 1 H2A behind the listening seat on the right side, and 1 H2B behind the listening seat on the left side), and

subsequently, when I felt I had gotten the best possible results from that rig, on to the four-Harmonizer version depicted in the room diagram.

The changes in sound resulting from those progressive stages did not happen in linear and predictable ways. I was very pleased with the initial two-Harmonizer setup. I could hear small increases in clarity with two Harmonizers even before I placed the Magic Stones in the recommended locations. However, putting the Magic Stones in place immediately raised the quality of sound, confirming that they are essential to the concept.

Adding a third Harmonizer did not initially make things better. With one Harmonizer located behind the left speaker, it took a while to find the best locations for the second and third Harmonizers at the listening end of the room. I settled on

placing the second H2A about six feet to the right of and five feet behind my listening seat; the single H2B was placed symmetrically on the left. Even then, I found the improvements from adding the third Harmonizer to be relatively minor. Had I been stopping at that point I would have gone back to the two-Harmonizer setup, not having found that three Harmonizers produced an improvement worth the cost of the third cube. (Let me say here that other users report excellent results with three Harmonizers. The point is that each listener must listen carefully to dial in the Steinmusic system for a particular room.)

Going to four Harmonizers proved the right choice for my room. The Harmonizers and Magic Stones were placed in the relationships shown in the room diagram above. A few weeks into the review, Holger Stein sent me a few different-looking Magic Stones: white, round-shaped with curved star-like arms radiating from the center. He advised that the qualities of those pieces should be very close to the original Magic Stones. I did not substitute the new Stones for original ones, but simply added them into the whole configuration. Adding more Magic Stones enriched the naturalness of vocals and clarified pitch definition of lower frequencies. And about a month after that, I received five new pieces, labeled Magic Diamonds: shallow cone-shaped pieces with greater mass than the Magic Stones. Adding them to the mix—three at about head height across the wall behind the speakers, two on the wall behind the listening seat, further enriched vocal and instrumental clarity and provided more sense of weight and substance, especially for piano, low strings and brass. Making those changes on the fly I learned that while the basic set of Magic Stones work very well with the Harmonizers, adding more of those passive resonant elements made things sound even better.

### **Digression: Juggling Unconventional Room Treatments**

In December 2009, in the final „Accessories“ chapter of my three-part narrative on building a reference system, I reviewed the Synergistic Research Acoustic ART system, another unconventional room treatment that has generated controversy and disbelief among many audio skeptics. I suggest that readers interested in creative approaches to room tuning read that review. The Acoustic ART and Steinmusic systems operate differently from each other as well as from conventional room treatments, and both are intended as complete room tuning solutions. One cannot reliably evaluate one of those systems while the other is simultaneously affecting the total system response.

My solution was first to disable the Acoustic ART system – very easy – and for three evenings in a row listen in my now-untreated room in order to reestablish in my mind and ears the sound of my system without any room tuning elements. That sound was pretty much as I remembered it: good, but lacking the full harmonic richness and spatial depth and resolution I had gotten used to with the Acoustic ART elements in place. Then, starting from scratch as it were, I went through the progression described above before settling on the four-Harmonizer configuration with additional Magic Stones and Magic Diamonds. The following listening comments first discuss the results with the fully configured Steinmusic system, and then what happens when both the Steinmusic and Acoustic ART systems are employed simultaneously.

### **Listening to The Four-Harmonizer Steinmusic System**

Once one has satisfactorily placed the Harmonizers and Magic Stones, the next step is to set optimally the desired Intensity level, using the rotary knob on the rear of the Harmonizer. Stein suggests 11 o'clock

as a good starting place, and that turned out to be nearly ideal. Compared to the sound of my untreated room, activating the Steinmusic system immediately resulted in a warmer overall acoustic and enhanced intelligibility of vocals. There was also considerably greater detail retrieval, with much improved capturing of ambient sounds – I was suddenly hearing the odd chair squeak here, the clicking of woodwind keys there. But I wanted to hear what would happen if I cranked up the Intensity level, so I moved the settings on all four Harmonizers to 3 o'clock. It was immediately clear that the higher setting was too much. The sound had originally been relaxed and engaging. At the higher Intensity setting, that sense of ease and naturalness yielded to an unpleasantly edgy quality to everything. The gorgeous brass tonalities on the new Harmonia Mundi release *Sound the Bells* now sounded distorted, and the leading-edge transients made me wince. I got similar results with solo piano, and even with soft acoustic guitar. I started backing the Intensity setting down, going progressively to 2, 1, 12 and, finally, 11:30 o'clock on the dial. For my system in my listening room, the 11:30 position offers the best combination of attack and relaxation, and there it has stayed.

The Steinmusic effects restored much of the acoustic warmth and harmonic richness that was lacking in the untreated room. But even more dramatic was the striking increases in the intelligibility of vocals. I have probably listened more than 100 times to Patricia Barber's wonderful *Modern Cool*, on both SACD and vinyl. One of the things I love about this great artist is her impeccable diction; one can generally understand her lyrics without need for reading the texts – except for moments here and there where her Quintet is wailing and things gets complicated. But I found that the Steinmusic rig made even those more-difficult-to-follow sections much clearer and easier to comprehend fully.

I found that increased intelligibility with singers ranging from Bruce Springsteen to Emmylou Harris to Renée Fleming to Thomas Hampson, with all those disparate artists suddenly easier to comprehend than ever before, even when the Acoustic ART system had been in use.

This sense of reduced distortion and improved intelligibility was equally evident in instrumental music. On symphonic recordings, inner voices were more easily discerned within the full orchestral texture. On one of my most demanding jazz LPs, Gil Evans' *Out of the Cool*, I could now hear a startling increase in micro-detail that had previously remained somewhat buried in the mix. These qualities, I think, are the most distinctive characteristic of how the Steinmusic system enhances the total music listening experience.

Having gotten a good fix on what the Steinmusic system was doing to my room, I was now ready to re-activate the Acoustic ART system and see what the combination would do. Would they work together or fight each other? Both systems had independently delivered more beautiful tonality, richer and more complex harmonics, and above all more emotional connection to the music than my untreated room. I restored the resonating bowls of the Acoustic ART system to their locations and started to play the stunning CSO Resound SACD of Ricardo Muti conducting the Verdi Requiem – a complicated mix of large chorus, orchestra and soloists, in a performance I had heard live in Orchestra Hall.

To my utter delight, this magnificent performance was now more compelling than ever. The Synergistic and Stein systems together produced a huge but precisely delineated image-specific soundscape, seeming to develop at once an overwhelming sense of scale in the big dramatic passages and enhanced intimacy in the quieter moments. There was a new and emotionally stirring bloom

to the music. Reviewer cliché warning: that first night I could not bring myself to shut down the music and go to bed until after 3 a.m.

In trying to sort out what each room treatment is contributing to this marvelous overall effect, I think the most important contribution of the Steinmusic system is to reduce distortions – even those that may go unrecognized until they are eliminated and thus conspicuous by their absence. Yes, the Steinmusic elements do add warmth and harmonic richness, but it is the accurate rendering of details and ability to eliminate subtle forms of distortion that are their greatest achievement.

What the Acoustic ART adds to that mix is wonderfully enhanced tonal warmth and harmonic complexity – as if my listening room has morphed from sounding like a pretty good concert hall – e.g., Orchestra Hall here in Chicago – to the warmer, richer and more exciting acoustic of, say, Boston’s Symphony Hall.

So, how does one choose between these two room treatment concepts? Neither system is inexpensive, nor cost alone will probably limit music lovers to one or the other. I feel fortunate that I have both and that they are so compatible, but what would be my choice if I had to choose between them? It is a very tough call, but with my back to the wall I guess I would opt for the Steinmusic system. The deciding factor for me is that stunning increase in intelligibility of vocal and instrumental detail, coupled as it is to most impressive spatial enhancements. But I’m really glad I can keep both!

### **What’s Happening In Those Harmonizers?**

Normally this section would come near the beginning of the review. I have left it until now for different reasons. It deals with concepts in physics that are beyond my ken, and that some readers

may find confusing. I think this product is such a remarkable and groundbreaking development that I wanted first to describe its effects before attempting to explain them. And, finally, part of the explanation I can offer is speculation, and has not been verified by the company, which has chosen to keep technical details proprietary.

The PDF Steinmusic manual for the Harmonizers describes their function as „elongating the air molecules“ – i.e. „charging“ the air in the listening room in a manner that facilitates the transmission of musical energy through the room. It seems to be suggesting that this charging of the air molecules means that when the speaker output enters the listening room space it does not have to overcome the inertia of uncharged/un-elongated air in the room.

I spoke with Holger Stein at the RMAF in Denver last year, and we have had a number of telephone conversations. He also sent me an e-mail in which he described the inspiration for this system as having been motivated by hearing subtle changes in the acoustics of a room in which some pieces of quartz had been placed. Quartz can be cut and shaped, and has highly resonant properties. Although he has not confirmed this theory, I suspect that the Magic Stones and Magic Diamonds are composed of quartz that has been tuned to resonate with the emanations of the Harmonizers. (In that respect they function similarly to the resonating carbon steel bowls used in the Synergistic Acoustic ART system.)

I mentioned near the beginning of this article that I heard about Steinmusic from Jack Bybee, who has been a practicing theoretical physicist for over half a century. At that time Jack confessed that he did not understand just how the Steinmusic system did what it did. But Jack’s mind never stops working, and he has discussed

this question with other scientists. The consensus of those discussions seems to be that although we are dealing with areas of quantum physics that most of us don't understand, the scientific principle at work is valid. Recently Jack mentioned that one of his friends and science peers (who owns and loves the Steinmusic Harmonizer system) believes that each Harmonizer circuit contains a quartz element whose vibrations are set to predetermined frequencies, and that the resonances that they project into the room are regulated by setting the Intensity knob. Again, Holger Stein has not commented on this theory, but it makes sense intuitively to me. It is clear from all my usage that the Harmonizers are projecting some kind of resonant energy into the room, which excites the passive Magic Stones/Diamonds and makes the room's air more receptive to the energy of the speaker output.

Ultimately, whether these theories are right or wrong is immaterial to me. The audible evidence that the Steinmusic Harmonizer system is a superior room conditioning product is inarguable, and the ability to achieve a glorious-sounding listening room without the need for those big ugly traps and diffusers cinches the deal!

*Wayne Donnelly*

„I have just installed something called Stein Music Harmonizer in my system. To say the least it has the greatest impact sound improvement wise, of anything I have ever been associated with. Words just do not describe the magnificent improvement it has on my system and all others that have tried the Stein Music Harmonizer. I have a master's in quantum physics and this system defies all logic of any known physics that I know of.“

*Jack Bybee, Bybee Technologies*

„I know you already realize my enthusiasm for the Harmonizers, but this could be the best audio improvement I have ever heard!“

*Mark Bartlett, Audiocominternational, United Kingdom*

„The effect in my one showroom after an initial setup with the Harmonizers and Magic Stones left me absolutely delighted. This is a difficult room acoustic wise, but the depth and width of soundstage even with the first setup and no experimenting, was just wonderful... also the micro detail just flowed. Any good speaker should disappear, but with the Stein Music products, they do not even exist such is the musical presentation.“

*Geoff Fairlamb, StereoMusicality, South Africa*

„The first weekend's listening tests were fascinating!“

*Wayne Donnelly, Enjoythemusic.com, USA*

„High frequency decay and shimmer to instruments like cymbals and strings sounded freer, faster and clearer – unlike anything I've heard before in this room... Bass is faster in its ebb and flow, with greater clarity and articulation... In short, dynamic-wise, my room sounds like someone or something removed the corners ceiling and floor. Voices simply soar higher via the H2s, with less restraint and more realism... The H2, in my opinion, is nothing short of breathtaking.“

*Clement Perry, chief editor of Stereotimes.com*

„My... speakers never sounded better.“

*Sam Tellig, Stereophile*

Many musicians already profit from the advantages of the Steinmusic Harmonizer System, whether in their piano or music room. It became an essential tool for those where music takes a serious role in their life. For example David Chesky from Chesky records uses a set of Harmonizers for his enjoyment by getting a better access to the musical statement.

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**Editor's Choice! 2010**

**STEIN** *Music*



# STEIN *Music*



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