



 **MARTYNAS JURKEVIČIUS**

 **KOVO 2, 2020**

 **INTERVIU**

 **0**

## Kult Magazine - Itai Azerad/Heaven 11 Interview

<http://www.kult.lt/itai-hazerad-heaven-11-audio-man-buvo-svarbu-sukurti-produkta-kuris-intriguojanciu-dizainu-sudomintu-zmones-geru-garsu-naujo-2020/>

People have different opinions on what “good sound” is. Of course, it’s subjective like everything else. How do you define it? What do you think is the most important when it comes to sound and sound quality?

If you play a song and the first thing you want to do is get up and fold the laundry, then you don't have good sound. Music should hold you. I'm not saying I'm hypnotized whenever my sound-system is on, but I do get lost in music when I let it. This could never happen on a Bluetooth speaker or soundbar.

In another interview you said that you respect artists and want to hear them as they intended it. For me that's a great philosophy, but most audio gear offer various adjusters and people seem to love it. Your comments?

If you seriously want to manipulate your sound, you should get an outboard EQ or do room correction, not rely on 'tone controls'. When you listen to sound engineers and mixers, they always talk about removing rather than adding frequencies to improve the sound. Really, all you're doing with these tone adjusters is degrading the sound, even when they're not in use! I wanted the amp to make music sound better, not worse.

The thing is, you're never going to satisfy everyone. Every design is a compromise. Good design is a compromise with a point of view. At the end of the day, it's better to do only a few things and concentrate on doing them well.

The third question comes from the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>. What's your definition of audio synergy? I mean it's very easy to get lost when there are so many gear options.

Audio Synergy is like a good meal. Every dish has to compliment the other; to play off each other. As you build your system, you should see how new components fit with the rest, do they help you reach your goal, the type of sound you're looking for?

OK, let's talk about Heaven 11 Audio. When did you start the journey? How was the idea born?

I've been a lifelong music fan. Actually, I discovered industrial design because of music: at my college library I picked up a book on the Bauhaus, thinking it was about the band Bauhaus.

In 2012, being unsatisfied with the products available in electronic stores, I found out about the "class T" (Tripath) amps online. it was a game changer for me. I was rediscovering the power of music. When my brother came to listen to my system, his reaction was "it sounds good but I would never put THAT in living-room." He was referring to the ugly little amp. Additionally, my friends were converting to Bluetooth

speakers: DACs, phono-stage, wireless complexities, they just saw home audio as just too complicated.

As a designer, that got me thinking: "what was it going to take to get people excited about home audio again?"

You started to raise funds on Kickstarter back in 2016 - 4 years in total. After lots of hard work, your baby was finally born. What's the mission of your project? you felt that market needed something different? Some shaking up? Is it about your passion for sound? Or both?

We live in the best of times for music lovers, we live in the worst of times. Streaming services provide us with all the music we desire, soundbars and Bluetooth speakers keep getting smaller and smaller, yet there is a growing disconnect between the music and music fans.

The gains in convenience have come at the cost of sound quality. People are forgetting what it feels like to be moved by music. Music has become sonic wallpaper, a background to other happenings. Active music listening is quickly becoming a thing of the past. Are you really going to sit down and listen to an album on a soundbar?

It was important for me to put out a product, that through its intriguing design, would get people curious about good sound, to make them hear what they've been missing.

Your 1<sup>st</sup> flagship product attracted me because of its cool design. Then I was astonished by the features - tube preamp, AptX Bluetooth, DAC - all in one...and it's a bit expensive. So, is this the new "Apple" of high-end audio?

Is a BMW more expensive than a Toyota? Same function, different performance. Billie is actually much cheaper than similar audiophile gear, because we're a new company. We feel we need to earn your trust.

Apple has made design part of the mainstream conversation again (I don't know how old you are, but when I was growing up, before Apple, computers did not look cool.) I wanted to make home stereos exciting again.

Today's audio gear is experienced as a necessary evil, like a WIFI router: you "set it and forget it". You put it somewhere where you don't have to look at it. It's a "utilitarian object".

Billie goes beyond that. The design is an homage to the iconic Hi-Fi heritage. I think that's important -the design history of an object. But mostly, good design should create a connection between people and products. It's not just what a product looks or feels like; it's how it works.

Billie is meant to be intuitive to use. It's beautiful and made to be displayed, not hidden. A displayed product gets more use; more use means more music. I believe that's a good thing.

The Billie Amp - tell the story? What was the hardest part while creating it and the most pleasant one? Why Billie?

Why Billie? In reverence to Billie Holiday. I also have an Iggy (Pop) and Lemmy (Kilmister) amps planned. Each amp will be inspired by the spirit of these musicians.

The most pleasant part of the work was the "teamwork". I enjoy working with craftsmen and engineers, to try to understand their challenges and to find solutions together. A designer loves problem-solving.

The hardest was the failures. Many, repeated failures. It was hard to get out of bed some days. I thank my marathon-running experience for that: when you feel like you can't go on, you just put one foot in front of the other anyway. The next thing you know, you're back in the race.

The work is mostly, and I cannot stress this enough, it's the repetition. Doing things over and over again, until you get them right. It's like polishing a stone.

What was the funniest comment you caught about Billie amp on internet so far? Any complaints?

I don't read comments on the internet. Some people get it, others don't. It's important to stay true to your vision.

What are your top-5 records of all time?

...Only 5!?

Marvin Gaye - What's Going On: can you imagine a world without this record?

Talk Talk - Spirit of Eden/Laughing Stock: technically 2 albums, but is it really? It sounds like it should have been a double-album. A complete reinvention of the band's sound, it's a fantastic swansong. This work reminds me of a quote by Stokowski: "A painter paints pictures on canvas. But musicians paint their pictures on silence."

Beach Boys - Pet Sounds: Yeah, I know, it's on everybody's else's list -because it's a masterpiece. I could do without "Sloop John B" though. I usually skip it.

Glenn Gould - Goldberg Variations (1981 version): math in music. A beautiful, perfect, performance. Of all the other performances I've heard, nothing compares. Angela Hewitt's version is a very close, very different, second.

The The - Mind Bomb: They were the 80's answer to Steely Dan. An amazing studio band.

### How about 5 songs?

The Rolling Stones - Can't You Hear Me Knocking (Sticky Fingers): Mick Taylor's solo is not the flashiest but by far the most soulful I ever heard.

Dexter Gordon - Tanya (One Flight Up): An 18-minute trip -all of side one! Repetitive, groovy, hypnotic. Again, I just love the sax solo on it.

Moodymann - I Can't Kick This Feeling When It Hits (Silent introduction): that track redefined the boundaries of house music. A classic.

AC/DC - Bad Boy Boogie (If You Want Blood, You've Got It): As soon as the first notes hit, the crowd goes wild. it's the most intense live performance on record and the band is in peak form on this album.

Billie Holiday - "Moonlight in Vermont & Cat Food" studio outtake (Complete Billie Holiday on Verve). I love studio outtakes and demos. There's an intimacy in the interpretations. It's like eavesdropping on an artist when they're playing for themselves - even if the sound is not that good! ;-)

### What was the 1<sup>st</sup> song that you tested the final product with?

"Meet Me in the Morning" by Bob Dylan, Blood on the Tracks. A good mix of electric and acoustic sounds. Another track I used was Wynton Marsalis' "The Party's Over": a lot of dynamics. Those trumpet high notes don't lie.