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Getting Into Rega with Roy Gandy

— Jeff Dorgay

What started out as a quick interview with Roy Gandy from Rega ended up being a couple of hours... He had to take his son (a Rugby player) to the hospital to have a cast removed, so we had to cut our talk short!

I managed to catch him after a particularly great day at the office, where he said they had a major breakthrough in electronics design that they had been working on for a few years, so he was in a great mood.

Here's a bit of what we discussed:

tone: Rega has had a period of what appears like steady growth, as you constantly introduce and refine your product offerings. Has there ever been a point where you just felt like forgetting about audio and doing something else entirely, or is this still a great day job?

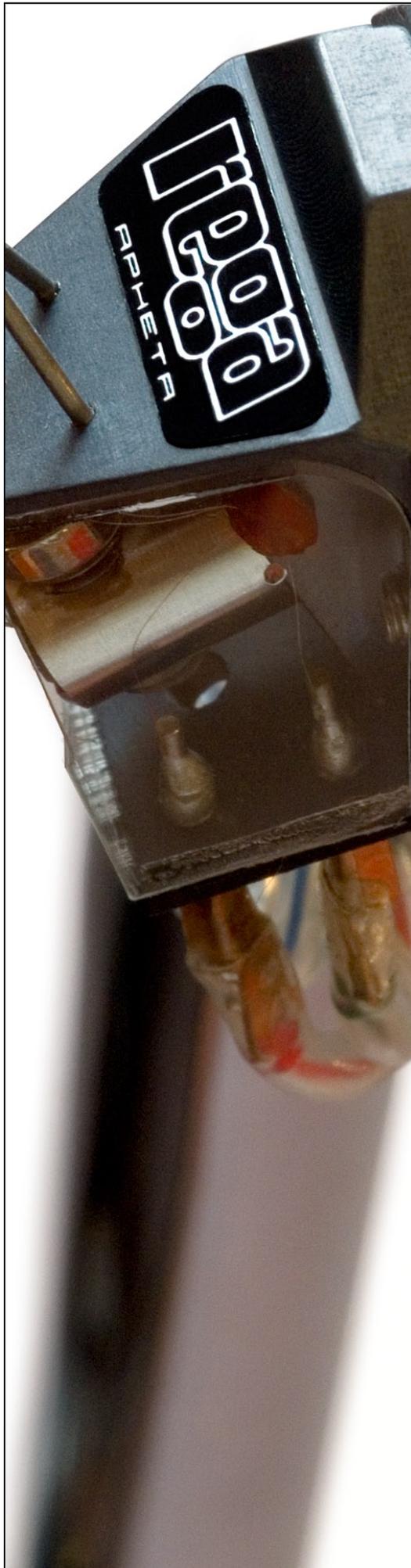
RG: Well, today was quite a good day, with a big breakthrough in circuit design that we have been working on for some time now. Today I'm ecstatic, but a couple of weeks ago, I was not in this good of a mood.

When you've been in business for 34 years, there are always ups and downs. We've had four major periods of restructuring over that time, and it is always about getting the people in the company to move along with the changes. (And people's resistance to change!)

But, we've always strived to make the best products we can, so this is still a very rewarding job indeed.

tone: I see that you started out as a number of the great designers in this industry, building your own gear. Have you kept any of your first projects in the Rega Museum?

RG: Well there are a few bits up in the loft of the factory, but the unofficial Rega Museum is in Denmark! They have something like 5 million people and more than one percent of the population owns a Rega product, making them the highest per capita Rega owners of anywhere on Earth. *(continued)*



We have a shop there that collects and keeps track of our older products. They even did an event to find the oldest Rega turntable one time. 29 people turned out for the event and one of the gentlemen actually had a table from our first year of production. He didn't want to give it up for a new P3, but eventually they worked it out.

Personally though, I'm not a collector. If I keep things, they are still in use. But various friends of mine have a lot of my earliest creations.

TONE: That in mind, is it pretty cool to look back and see the impact you have made on the audio industry? There are quite a few really happy Rega customers out there!

RG: I'm very happy that there are enough people in the world that recognize good sound quality and that we've been a part of it. But on one level, I don't really see us as a hi-fi company as much as a good engineering firm that happens to make audio components.

TONE: Were your parents involved in music or hi-fi?

RG: Both of my parents were artists and musicians. My Mom was a concert pianist with great technique. What she lacked in music reading skills, she more than made up with in her emotion. She's 94 and still going strong! My Dad was an operatic singer that back in my younger years was on the radio and could imitate the styles of the famous opera singers of the day.

TONE: Sort of like an Elvis impersonator?

RG: Exactly.

TONE: The history section of the Rega website mentions you starting out as a mechanical engineer. When did you start down this path?

RG: At age four, I wanted to ride one of my parents' bicycles, but they both had flat tires. My next-door neighbor showed me how to patch the punctured tubes and I got them going! Next thing, my Mom saw me riding around the neighborhood on her bike. When I was about twelve I used to adjust the tapets on my Dad's car and I moved on to harder tasks, like the clutch!

TONE: I notice your fascination with the bright lime green color! That has always been my favorite color as well and was thrilled back when the original lime green Planar 3's came out. I went to the dealer and traded up right away!! Any plans for bright colors in the rest of the turntable range?

RG: Well, I'm a mischievous sort of person actually. I've always liked that bright green color. As someone who takes a big interest in psychology, I've found that color is very easy to work around, but it is not popular in the West.

The bright green Planar 3 started out as a joke. Whenever we would ship out 50 tables or so, we would include a bright green one in just to see how it would go over. The guys in Denmark loved it, and apparently you as well! Later on, the bright colored range of tables really caught on quite well.

TONE: Can we expect the new P3 in colors? *(continued)*

RG: As soon as we get caught up with the current demand! Every now and then we produce our speakers in a bright color too. Just make a few and then we move on to something else.

TONE: Let's chat about the new cartridge, the Apheta for a minute. Are you pleased with the result?

RG: Over the moon, actually.

TONE: Is this produced in-house, or is it produced elsewhere?

RG: Like all other Rega products, it is built completely in-house. We started out thinking of sourcing it from another manufacturer, but we couldn't get exactly what we wanted. That's the problem with working that way. When someone else builds your product, you can't always get what you want, but what they want to produce. So we pulled it in house and are very pleased with the results!

We just shipped 150 units to our top distributors and are already backlogged on orders.

TONE: Can we expect an expanded model range of moving coil cartridges?

RG: I think as we study the current cartridge and how it is received, there is a good chance we will come up with another model in a few years.

TONE: After a full day at work, do you go home to music, or are you an "I like peace and quiet" kind of guy at home?

RG: I always enjoy having music on. I don't even watch television, except for the occasional F1 race. My son taped last week's race, (Spanish Grand Prix) but I haven't had time to get to it yet...

TONE: My kind of guy! Who's your favorite for winning the championship this year?

RG: I'm not a betting man, I'm just enjoying the way the field has become so competitive this year. Kimi Raikkonen is a great driver, but has had some mechanical issues, so we'll see.

TONE: Do you have an all Rega system, or do you have a mega expensive system, featuring other people's components?

RG: I listen to my own gear at home, because I'm always analyzing it, thinking of ways to improve it! But to clarify, I am not an equipment person at heart, I love music. That's why Rega products have never been very tweaky. I agree that you can hear a difference in sound by using a different pair of interconnects, or mains cable, but I want people to enjoy their music.

TONE: Do you still play the clarinet? Any other instruments?

RG: I quit the clarinet at 13, but still play guitar in my own band. I could probably still make a sound on the Clarinet though.

TONE: Who was your favorite Beatle? *(continued)*



RG: I love the Beatles, but don't have a favorite.

TONE: What is your favorite type of music to listen to?

RG: I enjoy a wide range of music. I look for artists with something really special in the way they go about it, that's what hooks me. It's the subtleties.

TONE: Do you have a pretty big vinyl collection?

RG: I wouldn't call it huge, probably about 4000 albums, but I've heard them all at least once! I do have the obvious favorites that have been played hundreds of times though.

TONE: Now that Rega has been offering CD players for a while, do you listen to a lot of digital personally, or are you still an analog guy at heart?

RG: Still an analog guy. I only have a couple hundred CDs and most of them are to listen to songs to play for the band. You know, it's a lot easier to repeat something on a CD player when you are trying to learn it!

TONE: What's your prediction for the future of the industry? Bright times ahead or gloom and doom?

RG: Well, a few years ago I might have been a bit more gloom and doom, but lately we are shipping everything we can make and our sales are up about 100%, so no complaints there. What I've seen over the years is that the retailers still doing a good business are the ones who have built a strong clientele and have taken good care of their customers, not necessarily the ones with the biggest ad budgets.

I don't know if you can necessarily drag people into this world. I think a lot of people just naturally gravitate towards it.

TONE: Enough about hifi gear, what do you really enjoy doing that is NOT hifi oriented?

RG: (laughing) Sex, food and wine, not necessarily always in that order! Seriously, I am a big food and wine lover. I also really enjoy spending a lot of time with our good friends.

TONE: And arguing about interconnects?

RG: No.

TONE: Do you do anything death defying, like ride fast motorcycles, race autos, or jump out of airplanes?

RG: I do like things that are a bit on the edge. A good friend and I used to run a rally car and we worked our way up to be ranked number 30 in England in our class. I enjoyed the communication between driver and navigator quite a bit.

We did not have the fastest car, but we were consistent and never broke down. That was the key to our success.

TONE: Sort of like Rega turntables.....

RG: Exactly!

TONE: Are your children interested in the family business, or have they taken entirely different careers?

RG: My oldest son just started working in procurement two weeks ago. I did not push him in that direction, but he has a knack for it and my employees actually insisted we get him on board. My other son (with the broken bone...) will probably be more the athlete.

TONE: So we can be assured Rega will carry on?

RG: Definitely. I have a fellow at the office who I've been working on. Perhaps in about 10 years, when I'm ready to hang it up, he will be ready to take over!

So, in Roy Gandy, we have a man who enjoys life, music and running Rega. I look forward to chatting with him again and taking him up on the invitation to come over and tour the factory! Stay tuned... ●



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