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Regards,  
May Belt.

## **The Genius Loci Mystery: Speculations on Domestic Listening, Room Energies, and PWB Products.**

*This article follows on from my earlier pieces in Music Web International ( [Read This Facing North](#) and [Hunting the Snark](#)) which describe a series of remarkable improvements to domestic audio and video performance from a wide range of equipment after using products from PWB Electronics in Leeds, UK. The PWB approach to audio improvement depends on the assertion that a huge raft of adverse energy fields are present in all listening environments – including some built in accidentally to the equipment itself – which impair our abilities to perceive the genuinely high standards of performance available from even the cheapest audio/video gear. Based on my latest experiments with PWB products, this article explores the relationship between the listening environment and accurate perception of audio and video a little further.*

People who know my earlier articles for MusicWeb International about PWB Electronics, will realise I hope, that I'm a keen enthusiast for Peter and May Belt's ideas about sound and vision in the home. And while not having quite the zeal of the most dedicated Beltists who report to the PWB news group/ news letters - I have recorded my positive experiences with PWB products reasonably methodically for the past three years.

Early on in the course of my experiments, I quickly became pre-occupied with the question of whether there were upper limits to the improvements expected and once asked Mrs Belt what she thought about this. 'Common sense would say so,' she answered in an e-mail, and then added, 'But common sense says our products can't possibly work.'

### **Upper Limits Revisited**

It's ten years since I last changed my speakers and I recently investigated new ones. Floor standers would look nicer than the old ones I thought, and so off I went to – unashamed plug – Audio Destination in Tiverton, Devon; the only truly excellent hifi shop within 50 miles of my home. After less than 10 minutes of listening, a clear choice was made easily, Focal JM Labs Chorus 836 Vs - these are big chaps sure enough but as Gilbert Briggs of Wharfedale used to say way back in the middle ages, 'Good big 'uns beat good little 'uns, any day of the week.'

Now, it's important to add here that the ideal sound in my head - when it comes to listening to recorded or broadcast music - comes from a combination of years of reviewing live concerts and opera coupled with recollections of the Bowers and Wilkins P2 Monitors I owned thirty five years ago. They were big chaps too, but I kept them for ages until their Fane 'Ionic' tweeters finally gave up the ghost. It's fair to say that absolutely no other speaker has sounded so natural to me since; they really did sound like a live performance, at least in a fairly large room.

My pipistrelle - eared spouse agreed about the new speakers. The Focals were remarkably lifelike in the shop, and they sounded so good straight out of their boxes when delivered to my home that Mike from Audio Destination was very impressed indeed. Having warned me that the drivers would need hours of running in, he couldn't quite explain why the sound was so rewarding in my living room as soon as the speakers were fired up for the first time. I could of course (I said smugly to myself): the room has been thoroughly 'Belted' as had the amplifiers and the signal sources.

An additional curiosity though was that I also bought a cheap FM tuner after choosing the speakers, because my elderly PWB-treated NAD machine had died a few weeks earlier. I expected that the new tuner would need 'treating' in the same way that had so successfully 'improved' the white-goods store DVD player, described in a couple of previous articles, but this proved to be completely wrong. The new tuner also sounded good as soon as it was switched on, slightly better if anything than my alternative radio source, the digital signal from my Sky box. So far so good I thought. QED.

### **The 'Sound is in the Room'**

A phrase used consistently by Peter and May Belt to describe what happens when people use their devices and free tweaks is that the 'sound is already in the room.' What they mean by this is that essentially all audio and video equipment is producing far better results than most of us can imagine, ranging from the extremely cheap kit available in mass markets these days through to the most expensive 'high end' equipment and components. All of it – without exception – underperforms according to PWB.

Why we don't notice this is extremely simple, according to Belt theorising. *All* audio/ video equipment and *all* listening environments are beset by adverse energy fields which actually interfere with our abilities to *perceive* A/V performance accurately. Some fields are classically electro-magnetic in origin, but others apparently are not – they emanate instead from traditional building materials and organic matter like house plants. PWB products counteract these energies and allow the listener to hear (or see) things as they truly are. *Nothing* else changes at all – not the equipment nor measurable electronic / magnetic performance. The products simply help us hear (and see) what's already happening more accurately.

If I remember rightly, Quad Electronics used to claim that their equipment gave results 'closest to the original sound,' and my PWB experiences have made me think rather carefully about that. Shortly after considering how only my *perceptions* change after 'Belting' my environment, a particularly burning issue became, 'Which sound is it that's already in the room? And for that matter, which *room* is it that we're talking about here exactly – the recording location or my own living room? 'In short, I began to wonder a lot about the nature of this 'lifelike' reality that I value so much, when I judge audio equipment to be good or bad.

To explain what I mean, let's fake an opera (Sorry, Gerard Hoffnung.) It's obvious that the sound sources in an opera house are all over the place, rather than beamed through a pair of loudspeakers – or even from five for people who like surround sound. The orchestra is in the pit, the singers are behind them on stage and the listening environment itself is often enormous. Live music often has a huge dynamic range too, and if the hall acoustic is any good you can literally hear everything from *pppp* to triple *forte* without strain and with easy

clarity. Leaving aside that some venues are badly engineered for a moment (and remembering too that at least one member of the PWB discussion group has improved his perception of Covent Garden by furtively Belting his immediate environment) there's apparently a world of difference between what we might expect to hear at a live performance and what we can obtain from even the best and most faithful recordings. So what price 'reality' from opera discs and broadcasts when the recorded or broadcast sound is piped into a room only 16 foot square with a particularly low ceiling?

The answer of course, is that good domestic sound gives us *an illusion* of the actual performance rather than replicating it exactly. Strictly speaking, when we say that the 'sound is in the room' – and that we don't hear it accurately before the room is Belted – we actually mean that the information we need to create a *persuasive illusion of reality* is already available to us. Or so it seems to me.

To my mind, this way of thinking about what recorded or broadcast sound does for us is very significant indeed, because it shifts our attention away from the mere mechanics of audio/visual reproduction to working out our *personal preferences* when we listen (or view nowadays thanks to DVD) to recorded or broadcast music. Working out what we *want* from hi-fi gear may be very important in the search for satisfaction.

### **Anomaly**

Curiosity killed Schrödinger's Cat - well, not exactly but you'll probably know what I mean - and though highly satisfied with the new speakers from the outset, after a couple of days it was hard to resist the 'I wonder' thought creeping ever more persistently into my mind. As I had done with my old speakers when I first sampled PWB's Morphic Green Cream, I applied a minuscule amount of this magical substance to only *one* new speaker terminal to see what would happen — and since this had worked spectacularly well first time round, I expected a similar improvement.

Not so however – although not *sure* would probably be more accurate. The 'treated' speaker 'sound' was certainly different but whether it was 'better' was distinctly hard to say and the only thing beyond doubt was that the stereo perspective had changed markedly. Step Two soon followed: a micro-dab of MGC to the same terminal on the untreated speaker after which the stereo snapped into place immediately. To my horror however, the airy 'reality' that the speakers produced initially, also disappeared and instead of 'live' music, I felt I had a recording. It was a good recording certainly, but the sound wasn't 'real' any more.

Since people often say that the positive effects from PWB applications take a while to settle in, I persisted with my listening. For two days, I put up with the 'inferior' experience and eventually could stand it no longer. With immense relief, I found that cleaning the creamed speaker terminals immediately restored earlier glories and I was able to enjoy relaxed listening again. As I think about it now, the sense of *relaxation* that often accompanies the removal of barriers to perception after 'Belting' seems to me to be a hallmark of the successful post-Belt experience, just as much as the resultant improved perceptions of sound and vision.

### **The Genius Loci Mystery**

*Genius Loci; a guardian spirit of a place, or a special atmosphere found in a particular location*

Music critics get very good seats –one of the better perks of the job – because a review based on anything less than decent listening conditions obviously isn't worth much. Interestingly, we are rarely too close to the orchestra or the stage in an opera house, but neither are we too far away. This results in not being deafened but we can always hear all the notes – and sometimes all the words in operas though it's surprising how rarely that happens these days.

Visitors to my house are initially surprised at how quietly I play my music through my new giant speakers – they look rather like the monoliths in *2001* – driven by the meaty Chord amplifiers. But they're also impressed by the clarity. When everything's working properly, people don't hear *speakers* at all: instead they get a 3D sound stage well behind the speakers which makes the room seem larger and locates the musicians accurately. 'I never knew CDs could be so good,' is a fairly typical response.

Following on from the 'problem' caused by the Morphic Green Cream, I tried a few other Belt experiments just out of interest. A bit of Cream Electret here and there on the speaker casings, untying the established reef knots in the speaker cables (these knots in pairs of audio cables do generally improve performance, but I thought I'd just check) and then adding the PWB Inside Foils successively to each of the speakers' three reflex ports – which had also produced spectacular results with my old speakers. In all cases the result was the same as before: the 'sound' jumped 'forwards' by several 'feet' and everything became much, much too loud for my taste - like sitting on the conductor's knee, if you see what I mean.

The Occam's razor approach to explaining why the new speakers didn't respond well to Morphic Green Cream or the other Belt techniques, would be that beyond a certain quality level, PWB products have diminished or even deleterious effects on my equipment's performance, but I can dismiss that fairly easily. Firstly, while the JM Lab Focals are certainly not cheap, they are driven by Chord amplification of which both components, pre-amp and power amp, have responded extremely positively to moderate 'Belting.' Similarly, my principal disc player - the excellent Primare DVD 30 universal disc machine – has responded equally favourably. Build and design quality - or cost, for that matter, which sadly does not always equate with quality – are clearly not the important variables here.

Instead, the additional fact that the new cheap and completely untreated tuner also performed brilliantly from the minute that it warmed up, suggested a different explanation. While the 'treated' listening environment itself – coupled with the presence within it of much successfully 'treated' equipment – seemed the most likely vector for the anomalous (though very importantly *reversible*) experiences I was having with the speakers – I began to think that I had indeed reached some kind of upper limit in what I could usefully gain from further 'treatments' - possibly because of some peculiarities that I have noted before about my house.

As I have reported elsewhere, much of my cottage is almost 400 years old and it is surrounded by other old houses. It has a significantly 'friendly' feel to it, an impression confirmed by visitors over the past sixteen years. This is something of an oddity in itself, because although the beams and inglenook fireplace are certainly attractive visually, the house's location makes it particularly dark inside, even in summer when the living room is only bright in late afternoon and the evenings. But while some dark old places feel forbidding, the cottage makes people welcome.

It seemed reasonable therefore to speculate that some environments are not quite as beset by adverse energies as others seem to be: moreover, it seemed even more reasonable to suspect – within the contexts of the notional energy fields proposed by Rupert Sheldrake – that the sheer age of most of the building materials in my cottage, meant that they have not been 'polluted' by modern technologies to anything like the extent of more recent buildings. And even if they have been exposed to electricity and its many manifestations through modern technologies, this can only have taken place in quite recent history, certainly a good deal less than half of the building's life. My stone and cob cottage might even have built in *resistance* to adverse energies. Or so I began to think.

As further proof that Belt techniques are hugely effective however, shortly after I had sorted out the speaker problem in my mind, I changed the wooden unit supporting my television set, Sky Box and DVD player for a new and larger unit, hand-built from pine. The old one had been extensively treated, even Quantum clipped and foiled when Mrs. Belt kindly let me borrow the clip for research purposes. The result of the change was disastrous. Everything (and I mean everything) about the audio-visual performance fell apart immediately: the TV looked terrible, and the prized sound already described simply vanished. The whole system was unbearable until the new unit was thoroughly creamed and fitted with that most mysterious of all Belt 'devices' - the pin-pricked paper rectangle, animal and aspirin tablet combination, (See [Hunting the Snark](#)) which is so useful for dealing with the energy fields in wood. AV bliss is restored now, happily.

### **Speculations**

What I think at present, is that my new speakers are not certainly not 'unbeltable' in any sense whatever, but that my *preferred way of listening* means that what I have gained so far from dealing with the room energies in my house, has allowed me – completely accidentally by repeated trial and error - to 'tune' (or even 'attune') the entire situation extremely closely to the 'sound in my head' developed over long years of listening. Importantly, it seems likely that in other environments and for people with different expectations from their domestic AV equipment, the undoubted and repeatable changes to the new speakers may well be *improvements*, just as most of the many PWB experiments that I have carried out personally so far have felt to me.

Having said this however, and noting the enthusiastic cumulative improvements reported in the news group by so many PWB users, I don't think I'm finished yet by any means but I do still wonder if:

- a) Certain locations may have more extensive and powerful adverse energy fields than others.
- b) Whether there may be positive energy fields in some particular locations as well as adverse ones.
- c) If older and more matured building materials may 'remember' positive energies in some way which combats the flood of more recent influences.

It does seem possible therefore that the energy-field modifications generated by PWB products can sometimes change perceptions so markedly that in some situations they begin to provide a mismatch with the sounds that we have in our heads, because different people clearly do listen differently to others. I want to stress though, that this conclusion has nothing whatever to do with either the undoubted efficacy of PWB products in general or the supposed quality of the equipment treated with them. The £25 treated DVD player that I have

reported on before still sounds amazing and produces such extraordinary pictures that it's sometimes difficult to distinguish between it and the Primare.

For the time being though, the situation at home feels as if the 'sound in my head' now matches the 'sound in the room' to an extraordinary degree – far better than either my wife or I had ever thought possible. This does suggest some kind optimised balance between my AV expectations and room energies and also (maybe) that little more needs doing. Perhaps there really is a benevolent *genius loci* of some kind in my house (built into its structure and fabric possibly) after all. But there are other PWB products to try of course, and maybe there are factors that I've overlooked as yet. The adventure will certainly continue.

***Bill Kenny***

**Footnote:** I'm told that the older definition of *Genius Loci* - an actual benevolent spirit in a place - is still a widely held belief in Scandinavia and Iceland, where the spirits are called 'House Wights.' The wights are treated with great respect by many Nordic people apparently. More things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio ?

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