

## High End 2018 • Back in the Munich Groove

by [Roy Gregory](#) | June 11, 2018

This year, the Munich High End show was back with a bang. After the flat feeling from last year, when the show seemed to suffer a severe (but understandable) case of the post-Brexit/post-Trump blues, it was back to business as usual. Numbers were actually slightly down, but then it's not so much about the numbers, but the feeling at the show -- and this year had a real buzz about it. The number of seriously ambitious (make that *totally over the top*) products on display had a comforting familiarity about it -- and some of them even sounded good! Horn speakers were back with a vengeance, and size certainly seemed to be no barrier to ambition. The trade days were especially busy, with plenty of business being done. If attendance on Sunday started to tail off, in part because of the unseasonable but widely forecast sunny weather -- meaning that you could actually get into some of the more popular rooms -- Saturday was heaving, resulting in a fifteen-minute wait just to get through the doors. Confirmation that the show will continue at the Munich MOC merely served to underline the show's status as the most established and important international event on the audio calendar.

Each show, and each Munich show in particular, seems to develop an almost independent, occasionally subversive subtext, an underlying theme that bubbles up from the audio industry's subconscious. Last year, that herd instinct could be characterized by the almost tangible air of anxiety and uncertainty. This year, despite the number of speakers you could live in and the systems with more boxes than an IKEA warehouse, the key underlying trend seemed to be one of downsizing, with noticeably successful systems on show from companies specializing in high-performance, high-value equipment rubbing shoulders with scaled-down offerings from those best known for unabashed assaults on the state of the art (as well as their customer's personal finances). If **Wilson Audio** has gone tabletop with [the TuneTot](#), they're not the only company looking to offer a taste of champagne sound on something at least approaching a beer budget.

If it's hard to get multi-cell horns to work under show conditions (and there was plenty of evidence of that in Munich this year) the sheer musical coherence of the Atlantis front-end, its spatial and temporal integrity, was a great place to start, aided and abetted by the musicality and natural warmth of the Fono Acustica cables and Engström amps. This was one stellar lineup that actually delivered stellar results.



There were two systems that achieved truly memorable results this year, the kind of results that you remember for a long time afterwards. Last year **Acoustical Systems** stunned everybody by showing their massive APOLYT turntable (€270,000). This year they went one better and played the beast, equipped with their own AXIOM tonearm (€15,800) and Palladian cartridge (€8800). Air-suspended and with an air bearing, the turntable offers a choice of belt or idler drive, with belt being selected in this case. Sadly (although perhaps not surprisingly given the weight and complexity of this monster) transit had taken its toll, neatly snipping two of the suspension hoses, meaning that the 'table was relying on its sheer mass and decoupled platter to isolate the record. Despite this handicap, it still turned in a stunningly impressive performance.

The system's electronics comprised their own EVOcator phono stage (€33,800) paired with a **Vitus Audio** SL-103 line stage (€21,000) and SM-011 monoblocks (€41,000/pair). Cables were a mixture of top-flight **AudioQuest** and Acoustical Systems' own designs, hooked up to the **Soundspace Systems** AIDONI speakers (€360,000/pair), on which Acoustical System's Dietrich Brakemeier had considerable input. Substantial three-way designs, with a horn-loaded AMT tweeter, flanked by open-baffle midrange drivers mated to a pair of sideways-firing 15" bass units, these imposing boxes deliver a claimed efficiency of 101dB, coupled to a bandwidth of 18Hz to 32kHz. Placing such large and potent speakers in a prefabricated booth was always going to be risky, but judicious application of acoustic treatment and the room's natural venting succeeded in offering up a genuinely remarkable performance of astonishing transparency, focus and stability. I don't think I've ever heard such planted images or such an incredibly grain-free blackness behind the instruments, while the acoustic space was seamless and expansive, with a real reach-out-and-touch quality. Not surprisingly, dynamic range was emphatically convincing, the presence, solidity and immediacy of the performers giving the music a rich, vibrant and vivid sense of life and vitality. Acoustical Systems have opened a purpose built studio to demonstrate the APOLYT, presumably in a system very similar to this and, if the show performance was anything to go by, it will be well worth a visit.