

50 Years And Not A Tad Bit Quiet

Musikelectronic Geithain GmbH Celebrates Its 50th Anniversary



On May 15th, I set out for Geithain, which is quite alien from the point of view of a Ruhr District denizen, following an invitation for the 50th anniversary celebration of the company. Together with other "illustrious guests", our main aim was to celebrate the one man who founded the company at the tender age of 18 in 1960: Joachim Kiesler. I am known for being an avid motorist, and so the poor weather conditions on the entire journey were a bit of a nuisance to me. However, just before I reached my destination, the clouds miraculously gave way to tender rays of sunshine, the heavy rain having stopped hammering against my windscreen. As if in anticipation of some special event, the weather god apparently showed humble acquiescence. I somehow had the impression that Joachim Kiesler had also a part in that – those who know him, acknowledge that he was able to artfully and with almost sublime creativity, clear many

a hurdle during the long history of his company. My travel destination is located somewhat south, pretty much in the middle between Leipzig and Dresden, and already looks back upon a proud history of 800 years. This unassuming town, with its approximate seven-and-a-half thousand inhabitants, lies in the beautiful federal state of Saxony, and is surrounded by a solid town wall dating back to the 12th century. In ancient times, this was probably good insurance against uninvited guests. Today however, the borough welcomes the historically-minded visitor with open arms to survey the recently reopened catacombs. The lovingly restored historic centre features the 14th-century building that the company Musikelectronic Geithain calls its home. This is the address of unquestionable importance for the



professional audio industry, as it is here where loudspeakers are still handmade from amplifier electronics to voice coil, without the support of outside suppliers. When I arrived, a considerable number of celebrants were already having refreshments and were inspecting the company premises. In the spacious listening room, which was – how could it not be – acoustically calculated by Joachim Kiesler himself and reconstructed by MEG, it was not the newest loudspeaker models that enjoyed the place of prominence; rather the historical studio loudspeakers from the earlier history of the company were the focal point.



Jovial evening gathering in the Geithain festival hall

Joachim Kiesler, being a passionate lover of classical music, is a true advocate of a clear and simple strategy in listening and measuring (in this sequence), who attaches little importance to colourful marketing singsong. Instead, he aims all the more for a loudspeaker design that will enable the listener to optimally appreciate "music and other sounds". Well, all those details were not the subject of the weekend – the company founder and his team just wanted us to enjoy the anniversary celebrations, including of course a couple of unavoidable technical discussions here and there. A tour of the company and a relaxed get-together were followed by a retreat to the local festival hall where a sumptuous dinner, good music, festive speeches and a warmly composed presentation about the eventful history of the company awaited us. For the following day, just to already mention it at this point, a visit to the Leipzig Gewandhaus concert hall had been planned for a concert with the MDR Symphonic Orchestra and a large choir. I believe, Joachim Kiesler's delight about this was doubled, as the Gewandhaus is like a second home to him.

History and Technology

On May 5, 1960, three gentlemen founded the PGH (trade production cooperative) "Fernsehen, Rundfunk, Uhren (Television, Broadcast and Clocks)" – a highly exotic mixture, which

went on to characterise the later direction of the company goals at the time of inauguration. Joachim Kiesler and two skilled watchmakers proceeded to write a great success story within twelve years, in which they raised the number of employees from five initially, to more than thirty. In the first years of its existence, the production cooperative worked exclusively in the area of service, however in 1966

Joachim Kiesler began to focus on development and design. In the year 1972, the cooperative was disappropriated and compulsorily nationalised, the significance of which is perhaps not well appreciated in this day and age. However, this 'opportunity' created the today still recognised name „Musikelectronic Geithain“, which then also included the small, but significant, addition of the letters VEB (nationally-owned enterprise). In the years following 1967, a remarkable range of in-house-developed products arose including: transistor microphone pre-amplifiers, power amplifiers, even two electronic concert and church organs, with one respectively two manuals, pedal and 37 stops, and diverse mixing amplifiers types. The year 1980 signalled the company's surprising entry into the loudspeaker business, with a spherical car speaker of the so-called 'Uni' 15 type. Up until the fall of the Berlin Wall, approximately 9 (in words, nine!) million such loudspeakers were produced, giving Trabi drivers an as yet never before experienced aural pleasure. In the same year started also the development and assembly of a comprehensive range of monitors for sound reinforcement, which is still up-to date and is constantly being further developed.

In 1984 the legendary BR 25 hi-fi loudspeaker came to the fore, a product that easily exceeded the international



'Historical' loudspeaker arrangement in the large listening room ...



Host Joachim Kiesler giving his anniversary address

standards set, with 650,000 units produced up to the fall of the Berlin Wall. Approximately half of them were distributed within the (former) Federal Republic of Germany. The volume of production required was beyond the capacity of the company itself, which resulted in the technology being sold a year later to the nationally-owned enterprise "Straton Fürstenwalde". 1984, and now we get down to the nitty-gritty, also saw the development of the first RL 900 broadcast studio monitor, which went in production subsequently a year later, and was used exclusively in all radio and television broadcasting corporations in the GDR.

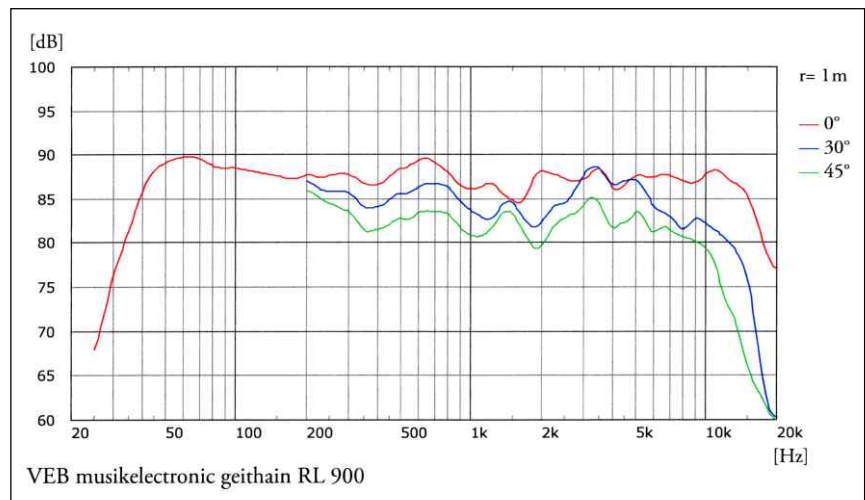
This loudspeaker already carries the now world-famous signature of the midrange/tweeter baffle, which is mounted in front of the woofer and provides a quasi-coaxial radiation. In 1987 the BR 27 and BR 37 were developed, two multi-way hi-fi loudspeakers, also produced at "Straton Fürstenwalde". In the same year, another loudspeaker, the BR 50, was created. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, a new chapter in the company history was about to be written, with the retransfer of ownership and the establishment as Musikelectronic Geithain GmbH. West German public broadcaster ARD shortly thereafter arranged a big listening test in order to nominate a new standard studio monitor, which resulted in the RL 900 being regarded as having the best transparency and directional accuracy.

From this point on, the small but highly innovative company took off on its triumphal course in developing further studio monitors of the RL series, which in the meantime can be encountered in the most renowned radio and television studios in Europe. Success followed success as Musikelectronic Geithain also conquered the hi-fi market, with audiophiles from all over the world today highly praising their products. One glance in the guestbook on the MEG Internet site reveals the effusive praise of enthusiastic home listeners. When Joachim Kiesler tells of the old GDR times, one understands quite quickly how difficult the general conditions for a

'businessman' during almost forty years must have been, realizing one's own ideas and reaching one's goals in spite of the strict regulations of the GDR State apparatus. If necessity be the mother of invention, one can only become more amazed at the lifelong achievements of this man. Conversational content ranging from the entertaining to the hilarious, as told in his indomitable style, could easily fill several enjoyable and suspenseful evenings.

The Bass Cardioid

2002, after the enterprise had already taken on a top position in German broadcasting, Joachim Kiesler presented a technology, as simple as sensational – the so-called bass cardioid. This development bases on a mechanical solution which eventually allowed providing a loudspeaker with a special directivity that even works for very low frequencies. In principle it is an acoustic or flow resistor which results in permanent cancellation of low frequencies by phase interferences and thus in an unsymmetrical directivity, with high rearward-directed attenuation. In consequence, the directivity at low frequencies is no longer spherical but instead cardioid. The advantage is the following: The reflections, which – usually starting from the loudspeaker reverse side – arise at the room surfaces, and result in wave cancellation at the listening place, will no longer occur. At a listening spot, which is located in a pressure minimum caused by destructive phase interferences, even equalization in the form of an increase



...with an original frequency response diagram from the old days

will not produce remedy. Then the result would be a low frequency boost at all other spots and therefore form an unfavourable proportion between direct and diffuse sound. The bass cardioid is an ideal tool that considerably facilitates loudspeaker positioning for the acoustician who is concerned with the layout of control studios and listening rooms. It permits significantly smaller wall distances, which is especially helpful in small multi-channel rooms that do not allow for loudspeaker-wall distances of more than one metre.

Personal Impressions

It is a special feeling to take a walk through the streets of Geithain in the early evening, and, as a child of the lively Ruhr Valley, to experience the rural ease of this small town. The more difficult it seems to imagine that behind century-old walls an enterprise remains hidden, that, although being a formerly nationally-owned company, has left in the dust many a competitor from the 'golden West'. MEG products today bear the characteristic of a "broadcast reference monitor" and impress with precise and authentic imaging qualities, as I can confirm from my own listening experience. Over the years, Joachim Kiesler has become a good friend of our magazine and it is no exaggeration to call him „loudspeaker genius“. I have been impressed particularly by his company concept to give young, talented and ambitious people guidance, in addition to placing them in positions of responsibility. Joachim Kiesler has assembled a young team around him, whose professional chances are found in the successful future of a rigorously, however very personally led manufacturing company. The jubilee celebrations were an impressive testimony of the family-like feeling between all employees, regardless of their position within MEG. Gerhard Steinke, a fellow-journeyman of Joachim Kiesler since the GDR days, in one of his usual speeches characterised by humour and appeal, honoured the life work of his friend. I have to admit, the mood felt a bit like an Academy Awards ceremony. It was definitely not easy to be a businessman in the GDR, as only two percent of the working population – the majority from the trade sector – were able to claim to be self-employed at all. Although Joachim Kiesler's enterprise was compulsorily

nationalised, he kept holding the reins thanks to his outstanding expertise and he "succeeded to stay independent enough to get away with his audacity towards the functionaries" (Source: Frankfurter Allgemeine newspaper). Knowing him and also knowing his stories, I can very well imagine Joachim Kiesler to have outmanoeuvred more than once many an important-looking 'leader'.

Acknowledgement from the Studio Magazine Team

The success of Joachim Kiesler after the fall of the Berlin Wall, but also of other companies located in the previous GDR, a success forged through expertise,

all criticism that his loudspeakers were 'too quiet', by demonstrating that a very loud loudspeaker can also suit any MEG quality standards. Naturally this product is also completely assembled in the Geithain manufacture. The directivity, optimised to large listening distances, ensures the familiar realistic stereo image, typical of the calibre of all Joachim Kiesler loudspeakers. The speaker features 1,000-Watt (1) and 500-Watt (2) Class-D power amplifiers that prepare the way for low-distortion 122 dB sound pressures, and of course also the bass cardioid and a rearward-directed attenuation of low frequencies of a good 10 dB. Joachim Kiesler does not create the impression at age 68 that he would ever like to go into retirement;



Joachim Kiesler

creativity, at high personal risk and with own initiative to develop business perspectives appropriated from the West, counters the unfortunately ongoing clichéd perceptions of the New Laender and their people. He has every reason to be well content with his achievements. Joachim Kiesler is both an original character and a person with a big heart. Above all, he is the man who has enabled world-class loudspeakers to come out of Germany. His latest work is the ME803K, with which he answered

and if he would, it is probable that he would continue to work towards the further refinement of loudspeakers behind the scenes. During a small tête-à-tête he revealed to me: „Fritz, we can now build digital crossovers that sound as good as analogue ones.“ And with a sly grin, he added: „Unfortunately, they are twice as expensive.“ The whole Studio Magazine team congratulates him here formally, once again, with heartfelt best wishes in the jubilee year of his operations!