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Reviewer: John Potis

Analog Source: Rega P9 turntable, RB1000 & Hadcock GH Export arms, Benz Micro MC Silver, Rega Super Elys & Garrott Bros Optim FGS Cartridges.

Digital Source: Accoustic Arts Drive 1/ Audio Aero Prima SE DAC, Musical Fidelity A5 CD player [in for review]

Preamp: Bel Canto Pre2P

Power Amp: Art Audio Carissa, Bel Canto e.One REF1000 and Canary CA 160 mono blocks, *Musical Fidelity A5 integrated amplifier* [in for review]

Speakers: Hørning Perikles, Anthony Gallo Acoustics Reference 3, Ohm Acoustics Walsh 4 with 4.5 mk.2 upgrade

Cables: JPS Labs Superconductor and Superconductor FX interconnects and speaker wire, Furutech Digi Reference digital

Power Cords: ZCable Heavys & Black Lightnings and Cyclone, JPS Power AC, Analog AC, Digital AC and Kaptovator power cords

Powerline conditioning: Balanced Power Technology 3.5 Signature Plus with 30-amp ZCable Cyclone cord

Sundry accessories: Vibrapod Isolators and Cones, Ultra & Heavy ZSleeves, Viablue QTC spikes under speakers, Auric Illuminator

Room size: 12' by 16' with 9' ceiling

Review component retail: Sound Mechanics MC88 wood cones - \$240 set of three; C100 metal cones - \$240 set of three; C101 metal bases - \$95 set of 3; Performance Series Platform - \$1295

"There's some really worthless crap out there." In just one line, that's how I used to sum up my experience with cones. Based on experience with a few useless products, I long ago pronounced the whole genre of cones worthless. But as in many facets of life, the more you know, the more you realize you don't know and hasty generalizations and one-liners often paint with too broad a brush. Today I'm here to admit that there's a lot about this stuff that I just don't

know. But I'm learning.



Sound Mechanics MC88 Cones and C100 Spikes

When I was approached by Sound Mechanics distributor Joe Cohen from the Lotus Group, I was skeptical but intrigued. I learned that the MC88 footers and C100 cones are more about resonance tuning than coupling or decoupling. The MC88 is actually made from wood (black wood in this case but the company makes cones from several varieties), a material I'd never experimented with before. And it's not solid wood at that. The MC88 is filled with what are said to be 10 types of metallic sands. Each footer in the set is filled with a different mix, clearly visible through a little window at the top of the cone. Forget the marketing scribes' favorite and most meaningless claim to having a patent pending. Any charlatan can apply for a patent and use that application in their marketing material. Have you ever read an announcement declaring that said pretender had his application *rejected*? In the case of the Sound Mechanics products, a patent for their process was not only applied for but granted: US patent No.5169104.

The C100 cones are very different but work along the same doctrine. Constructed of brass, the C100 is also filled with metallic sands though they appear to be different - a finer 'grind' from those within the MC88 cones.



Theoretically, this means that each cone has different damping characteristics and will therefore attack a different set of frequencies as they dissipate different spectrums of energy. This is about tuning. As the best system tuners can tell you, there's no one-size-fits-all solution. What effect the MC88 and C100 cones will have can't be absolutely predicted any more than one can predict what wires or cables -- or CD player for that matter -- will best suit your system. As I moved the cones from component to component, their effects varied in terms of magnitude or even sonic transformation, though I'm told that with a larger sampling of gear, trends do appear.

One knows intuitively that the wooden MC88 will behave differently from the brass C100. Wood cells, like individual chambers, intrinsically act as dampers. Wood absorbs vibrations and also transmits part of the energy. The brass cones transmit more energy than the wood and the particles within act more as dampers. As the individual resonance of the brass cones will vary less than the wood, I'm told that they are more predictable but also, that there is only so much variance in behavior between wood samples.

That doesn't sound like the most auspicious of introductions, does it? Once you accept these truisms, you'll find yourself much more open to the Sound Mechanics' possibilities. One thing I can predict is that, unlike the aforementioned worthless cones of the past, products from Sound Mechanics will have an affect. My experience is that the effects aren't really subtle either. You'll

hear *something* going on. And if my experience is indicative, the chances are much greater that they'll work for you than against you.

Yes, that's right. There's also the chance that they can work against you.

My Bel Canto PRe2p loved the MC88 cones. The combination produced better bass with more authority, better articulation and more highly articulated textures. Through the midrange, the MC88s produced a lower noise floor that allowed greater retrieval of midrange details and more expressive micro-dynamics. Suddenly relatively obscure details floated to the surface of the music while the music had more snap.

My Accoustic Arts Drive 1 CD transport wasn't as enamored with the MC88s though the C100 cones proved to be just what the doctor ordered. With the brass cones under the transport, I observed the aforementioned changes to the sound but to a smaller while still significant extent. However, its effects spilled over into the areas of soundstaging and imaging. Image focus increased nicely and the soundstage became both deeper and wider at the rear of the stage. Under the Audio Aero Prima SE DAC, both footers were effective but just not to the same degree as when used under the transport and preamp. For the next several months, I used the MC88s under the Bel Canto preamp and the C100 cones under the transport which not only elevated its performance but aesthetic as well. The C100 cones look great under the Accoustic Arts.



One fine day, the Musical Fidelity A5 integrated amplifier and A5 CD player arrived at my door for evaluation and for the first time, I experienced the MC88s and C100s working against me. Under the amplifier, the MC88s produced increased bass amplitude but the quality was loose and woolly. Not good. Midrange performance didn't change much but there was an addition of upper midrange grunge that made leading edges abrasive. Donald Fagen's *Kamakirad* [Reprise 9 45230 2] became grainy and difficult to listen to. The opening drumbeat on "Trans-Island Skyway" was loose, lumpy, fuzzy and decidedly without a sense of timing. If I bumped up the volume in an effort to allow the bass to energize the room, the grunge in the upper midrange became aggressive, necessitating the backing off on the volume control. The C100 cones didn't fare nearly as badly but if they produced any benefits, I couldn't spot them.

Lest the reader begin to become turned off by my experience with the Musical Fidelity components, I would hastily remind him that the point here is that these footers have real impact. They work. They may not always work positively with all components, but they work and while they didn't work with the Musical Fidelity products in my room, on my floor and equipment rack, they could indeed work in yours. We are, after all, talking about system synergy and tuning here and your room and your equipment rack are very much part of that system. When the Sound Mechanics footers are acting synergistically -- which they definitely do under my own gear -- they are so good that they earn a very strong recommendation for you to try them. Obviously, like any cables, wires or components, you'll have to require an evaluation period from your dealer before you commit to a purchase. While this review appears in 2006, for reasons I'll get to next, the MC88 cones and C100 spikes were among my best finds for 2005. Their benefits were *that* captivating.