

It's an exceptional event when World Renown Tenor, Francesco Meli, walks into a concert hall and Performs. Francesco is revered globally, as one of the most famous tenors, thank you Italy.



Francesco Meli is an internationally hailed Tenor and is recognized worldwide, from Japan to Great Britain, from Italy to USA. Francesco has been performing with all of the most respected directors from Riccardo Muti, Myung-whun Chung, Riccardo Chailly, Gianandrea Noseda, Antonio Pappano, Daniele Rustioni and Yuri Temirkanov.



Aida, Salzburg, 2017

Francesco Meli, the revered tenor that he is, listens to his beloved music on his high end audio system, as a form of the love of music and also as a form of perfecting his voice. Francesco Meli was in search of a high end audio system that would reproduce the live performance.

Francesco Meli listens to his favorite Artists at home to include his own performances, the classics, jazz, pop and more. For many years, he has used high quality systems in an attempt to get closer to the emotion of the live event that he knows so well, even from the side of the stage instead of the parterre.

In his many years of research, Francesco Meli finally found in Ayon Audio, the intimate sound that the Ayon is capable of. The live event for tone, detail, naturalness, harmonics, three dimensional warmth and natural presentation of the voices. All in all, he wanted to be able to close his eyes and imagine that he was sitting in the seventh row at the theatre or even better in the gallery.

The emotion that Ayon offers, coupled with the Live sonic performance, is a Must Have for a professional Artist such as Francesco Meli. This was the chemistry that drove Francesco to fall in love with Ayon Audio and to now become Ayon's ambassador.

AYON Ambassador

Ayon is not a kingdom nor a republic, but surely the homeland of the highest expression in high end audio performance. Ayon is an Austrian company, absolute in its mission and globally recognized in high end audio as a leader and an innovator. Ayon is located in Styria, Austria near Graz. Ayon Audio is based in the south of Austria, surrounded by woods and lovely green hills, in an enchanted place that emits peace and serenity.

Ambassador
Ambasciatore di Ayon Audio!



www.francescomeli.it/ambassador

Francesco Meli announced on his website that he is now a worldwide ambassador for Ayon Audio. He wishes to spread the news of Ayon's performance quality on every media channel, to include high end audio magazines, music magazines, newspapers, interviews and cultural TV broadcasts.

Simon Boccanegra act I

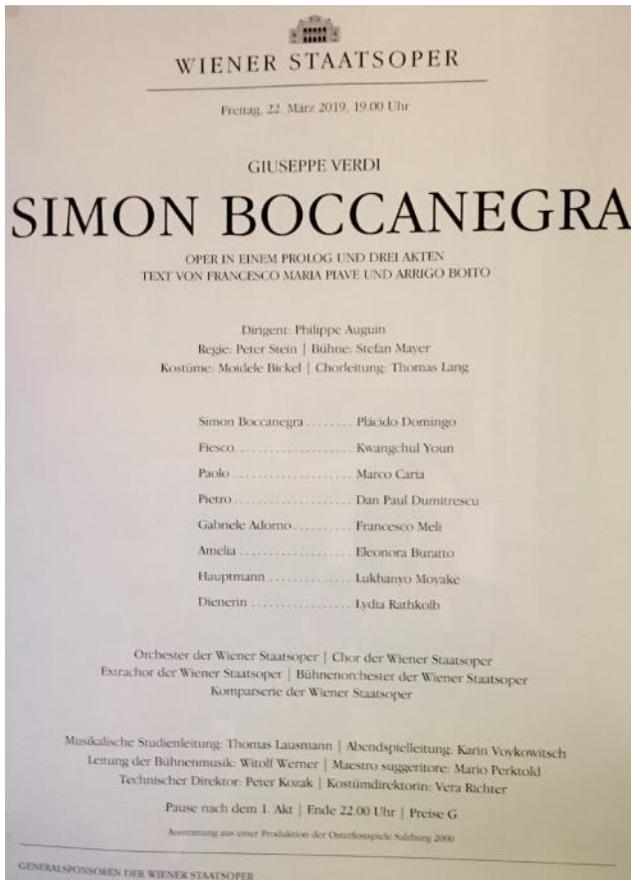
This is the report of an incredible weekend, divided into live listening at the famous Staatsoper Wien Theatre and the private listening sessions in the audition rooms at Ayon Audio in Austria. There was also a visit at the production site where Ayon Audio engineers their new products and new innovations in the pipeline. Production, assembly and testing is also performed at this facility.

The weekend starts at the Staatsoper Wien ticket office. An envelope is waiting for us with the tickets for Simon Boccanegra. (A Giuseppe Verdi opera, very complex and beautiful, but rarely played, unfortunately). We had fourth row seats, which is a luxury in the midst of Wien's aristocracy.



Staats Oper Wien

On the billboard, the main performers: Francesco Meli playing the part of Gabriele Adorno, Placido Domingo playing the part of Boccanegra, Eleonora Buratto playing the part of Amelia... another luxury. Orchestra e Chorus of Staatsoper Wien directed by Philippe Auguin.



Simon Boccanegra, Wien, 2019

The Wiener audience is anxious, the opera begins!

A rich choreography, spectacularly full of lights, fires, effects. The cast is truly high level, the story of Simon Boccanegra (Doge of Genua) unravels, chanted authoritatively, no pause and we have forgotten the 10 hour drive to reach Wien. We didn't even have time to eat anything, but who cares? We are in the mitteleurope middle point and the opera flows hypnotically, we don't even realize that the first act is ending, until there is a storm of applause.

Staatsoper Wien

Short break. We take the chance to peek at the orchestra pit, we are curious about the timpani drum located in a niche on the left corner of the stage. The niche amplifies the timpani sound... genius. We follow the crowd streaming back into the Wien Opera's foyer, a building showing off grandeur, difficult to describe. Golden stuccos, big and ambient, a little sign of decadence here and there, to be honest. Yet, she surely is a beautiful lady still in her prime... impressive to be conservative.



Parterre and galleries

Without taking history into account, rumours and all the mystery and intrigue associated with this theatre over the years, and all the celebrities attending the theatre, have made it famous. Then, we rush back to our seats. They wait for no one, and we would rather not see the second act from the bar's TV screens... even though a bit of hunger is gnawing at us.

Simon Boccanegra act II

The second act is the more choral part of the opera. The Genua people milling about and the city council is divided into different parties debating, animating the scenes with up to 70-80 performers on the stage. The energy released by those 80 Christians, summed up by the orchestra hammering in the topic moments, is something impossible to render with words. Even comparing with the best hi end audio systems, this is perhaps the most difficult parameter to emulate in a home audio system. Just for your curiosity, the 80 Christians are the Choir of the Wien Staatsoper—they are extra singers paid for this special breathtaking performance.



Wien Staats Oper chorus

The Simon Boccanegra is a complex and intriguing opera, of which we won't give away the ending. (Just in case, someone wants to see the opera or find a good recording to listen to comfortably in their living room.) Some interesting editions appear on EMI and Decca, then several Deutsche.

Backstage



Backstage (while the artists are still receiving the public hails in turns)

The opera ends. The performers come out through the curtains one by one and then all together to receive the audience's applause. One time, two, three, four times they are called back clapping and shouting "Bravo". On stage, the legendary Placido Domingo is waving to the audience. To some extent, one would bet that Placido would dominate the scene by divine decree. Instead, it is obvious how applause and callbacks on stage are addressed to Francesco Meli. Flowers are thrown onto the stage. In some cases, the main characters must run to grab them. (It's impressive how the Wien audience appreciated a widely Latin cast and their interpretation tonight.)



Francesco Meli and Placido Domingo embrace

Autographs and selfie requests follow that trend. A rich group of fans flowed to the backstage access and surrounded the main characters on the stage, behind the curtain. In effect, we are all frustrating the stage hands since, in the middle of such a chaos (between hails from the audience for selfies and autographs). The stage hands are trying to dismantle the scenes to leave the theatre ready for the next Wien's opera event.

Dinner at last

It would take us half of the day to discuss our dinner plans with the performers, but this is not the right place. It's interesting to note that the audience was so enthusiastic, yet the performers discussed each and every little imperfection that no one even perceived or noticed. Because of this, the opera lasted two more hours. Together with their notes and reciprocal sharing of the moments/dialogue, many things were subject to even minute improvements. (Let me just say... they are Martians...). Artistic research at its highest level for perfection. This takes us back to hi end audio... with Francesco Meli acquiring his Ayon Audio system and his desire to be the Ambassador to Ayon Audio. His compelling love of the Ayon Audio System, is such that he wants to spread the word and tell everyone about Ayon. His feelings and emotions when listening to his Ayon Audio system. It is profound.

Ayon Visit

The next day starts with our drive to Graz. 150 Km spent discussing audio technology and, in particular, the impressions of Francesco Meli on his newly installed Ayon Audio system. In general, we are talking about the Orthos mono amps, Black Arrow-S speakers and CD35, great system with extremely high performance.

Ayon's headquarters is just out of the city of Graz, in the south of Austria, in Styria. This region is dedicated to research and development for the Austrian brand Red Bull in F1... half of the local economy rotates around the F1 circuit and Red Bull's research effect on it.



Graz Hills

Ayon has crafted electronics and loudspeakers for over 25 years and is distributed in more than 40 countries. Production is located in three sites within 100-200 km from Graz (one for digital, one specializing in loudspeakers and one for amplifiers). In addition, Ayon also owns a tube factory in the Czech Republic (the famous VAIC Company). This is quite a long story and deserves a dedicated report in a different issue.

Ayon has a long lasting relationship with Stream Unlimited for their digital developments. Stream Unlimited is a spin-off of Philips' digital division that, in the 80's, developed the CD player. Some of the engineers of the historical team are still actively working at Stream Unlimited. We're not sure about all of them as over 40 years have gone by...

Stream Unlimited's innovations in digital integration is recognized worldwide and many hi end audio manufacturers go to SU for their digital developments. That's one competitive advantage for

Ayon Audio. While the other must work remotely, Ayon developers can drive to Wien for a meeting on prototypes and listening sessions, which are much more productive. The last production site is Ayon's headquarters in Gratkorn (near Graz). Quality control, research and development of new and future projects are done in Gratkorn.

At the last part of our trip, we are headed to Ayon's HQ. A lovely (and huge) villa atop of an amazing hill, immersed in green, surrounded by enchanted woods. (Which is absolutely breathtaking in the winter with snow.) At this location, Ayon assembles some of their models and performs quality control. It must be fabulous working in such a place: peace, silence, pure air, nature, the antithesis of the stressful modern life. (I am pretty sure that this inspiration is instilled in Ayon's products soul as well!)

The listening

From this point on, you can imagine Francesco Meli out of his famous tenor attire. He has transformed into a kid at the playground springing restlessly from one unit to the other, literally poking his nose inside each one.



After all, not everyone gets to see these God's gifts without their top chassis covers on! He's able to freely admire the level of the manufacturing inside...

In Ayon's test room, we were able to examine the Conquistador preamplifier. It is an amazing new Reference vacuum tube preamplifier (which is a huge technological achievement). In addition, the Reference CD35-HF Transport, DAC, Preamp, Streamer was shown and the new prototype of the Reference S-35 streamer network player, was available for viewing.

Units are spread out everywhere, others not in a prototype state, but already in the pre-production stage (practically finalized), and we are talking about some juicy news in the Crossfire arena.



Inner details of the Ayon Conquistador top preamplifier

Ayon's test room is acoustically treated with the well known panels from Sonitus Acoustics, and we see the fingerprints of Ayon's Italian distributor Hifi4music. Not a huge room, but it would be a fantastic living room in many houses.



The complete system (with some intruder used for some instrumental measuring)

The listening begins. Ayon uses high definition files, courtesy of some of the main labels. There's not the same maniacal tuning we know from at the Hifi4music music room in Pinerolo (Italy, north west midway from Turin to France). And for good reason: at Ayon, they continually test prototypes, modifications and in particular during the working days (Gerhard Hirt was telling us), is a continuous vascillation of technicians installing new components to test for even the tiniest modification. Not to mention the hundreds of hours Voicing all the models before production by Gerhard Hirt and his team. (For a quick reference, look at the pictures with dozens of transformers tested and knowing that you can choose only one of them).



The transformers test bench for the new mono amplifier (some of them are so cute to use them for decoration)

The listening sessions hypnotically flow before and after lunch. The new mono amplifiers have no declared power; Ayon says the power rating is “genug”, “enough” in German. The Conquistador drives them like an F1 driver and the Crane loudspeakers literally fly with their 94 dB of actual sensitivity, astonishing with ceramic drivers made to Ayon specs.

Some explanation is needed here too. Ayon’s drivers are the well-known Accuton products. However, they are made to Ayon’s specifications for both the LumenWhite and Ayon loudspeakers. The strict alliance between Accuton, Ayon and LumenWhite, allows Ayon to reach sonic targets that others can’t even dream of. With a real 94dB sensitivity, people can finally listen to a ceramic speaker with tube amps without any compromise and believe me, it makes an amazing difference! (What we heard in the over two hours dedicated listening was remarkable.)

The bass is steady and authoritative, powerful and precise. The Midranges are extremely important for a Tenor of Francesco Meli’s level. The voices were absolutely realistic and they were all sonically perfect. All the musical instruments and their musicians were in the room, uncanny – I could see them... The trebles were also present, but not cold (our ears did not have to strain to hear them), they were present and well balanced. Time alignment was perfect, the overall mixture was heart moving and enchanting. The three dimensionality of Ayon’s triode vacuum tubes have carved their own DNA—and are carved in our listening enjoyment experience.

The vacuum tube triodes that Ayon produces are manufactured at their factory in the Czech Republic. The Ayon AA62-B vacuum tube is a triode that is as refined as the 2A3, but without any of the bass roundness typical of the 300B, (300B tubby bass). Producing 3 times the power and not with gigantic tubes, but with normal sized triodes, this is how with 30 single ended watts and the right transformers, one can drive even difficult loads, speakers starting from 89-90 dB.

The speed on transients is astonishing, we are not used to such realism from tube amplifiers that are usually slow, not fast & tight as the Ayon. The slam, dynamics & control of the Ayon amplifiers was amazing. But surely, the divine 2 chassis pre-amplifier, The Conquistador, is doing part of the job...

Outstanding performance, with dynamics and realism similar to solid state, but all the warmth and naturalness of the tubes, there is no listening fatigue at all. It's as if Ayon took only the best part of each technology and merged them into an ensemble of amazing realism!



Production

The last part of the day was dedicated to a visit to the production line in Gratkorn, at Ayon's HQ's.



The matching of the famous AA62-B triodes

Ayon Audio has come up with a simple, but brilliant system: break in the tubes before completing the shipments; the tubes are then tested and measured and then matched. The tubes in the box follow a precise position and that's why they are identified with individual numbers. Each of them corresponds to a precise position described in the user's manual. This has to be done with precision. If you think about it, the fact that Ayon's amplifiers feature the auto bias function to align the bias setting of the amp tubes at each listening...

Then we saw the assembly of the new S-10 streamer and one of the integrated amps, the Spirit III. The most interesting thing, was seeing one of the mono amp prototypes that we just listened to, belly up on the bench for further modifications and tests.

The Ayon management told us that for some models, the R&D lasts for sometimes years. We're guessing that just to test all those transformers on the bench would take a year... Easy guys, they have practically finished it...

In the future, we will also visit the other production sites. It's impossible to see everything in one day. Particularly the loudspeaker production, their crafting and finishing quality, for years, has been truly excellent. (In fact, Gerhard Hirt told us that many companies asked for their support with wood-smiths and finishing.) That's it. We owe it to Ayon, to at least visit their woodworking shop and tube sites. We will arrange for another time.

The visit is sadly ending. We get back into the car to drive back to Wien with the unsatisfied appetite of someone who would have liked to try one more dish at the restaurant... but there will be another occasion. That's all folks from Wien and Graz.

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