

sensuous and subtle



...such is the TACET sound, says „Tonmeister“ Andreas Spreer, who since 1989 has been the owner of the classic label TACET. In this field, surround recordings and the use of tube technology are of crucial importance to him.

With TACET's clear profile Andreas Spreer has filled his market gap very effectively: many of his more than 180 recordings received awards. The entire catalogue is marketed worldwide.

The interview with Andreas Spreer took place after the High End 2006.

Interview: Norbert Lehmann Photographs: TACET

NL: How would you define audiophile sound?

AS: Audiophile literally means 'friendly to the ears'. Which is trite. For who may claim that music shouldn't be friendly to the ears? In our case, the word 'sound' also constitutes a simplifying summary. In the first place, sound is born through the composition, the interpreters, the instruments and the room and only then through microphones and equipment. – In my view, the job of a „Tonmeister“ is to help the interpreter (i.e. the performing artist) reveal the structures and ideas of a composition, encourage him to present a personally convincing interpretation with no fear of emotions and finally capture the acoustic product in such a way that the ideas of the composer and the interpreters can later originate in the listener's head again. Sound or even 'audiophile sound' as a mere collection of tones and harmonics – this is way too small for me.

NL: What can the listener expect emotionally with a TACET recording in the TACET Real Surround Sound?

AS: If he has understood that music coming also from behind means no threat, the door to an incredible wealth of deep-felt emotions is wide open. This may even culminate in an ecstatic dance between the loudspeakers. But don't worry: other than drugs, the TACET Real Surround Sound

is absolutely harmless to your health! And you can also turn it down to a background level.

NL: How has, in your opinion, the classic market evolved in terms of content? Is there a change of taste that you can also tell by the demand for your products?

AS: So far I haven't noticed a substantial change of taste in the audience. This is also shown by the fact that our very first productions dating from 1989 still sell well. But the offered sound mediums do change. In 1990 there were no DVD-Audio or SACD. Now they exist and they are in demand.

NL: Are you still searching actively for new artists or do you gradually meet your capacity bounds? How high is the artists' fluctuation with TACET?

AS: There is a long-term co-operation with nearly all our artists. We have an exclusive contract with the Auryn Quartett just like with the Abegg Trio (30 CDs!). Of the Koroliov series (13 CDs) #9 is out now, we have made five recordings with the Sächsische Vocalensemble and already seven with the Polish Chamber Philharmonic. With all these artists we have many more projects and plans going on such as the Brahms quartets with the Auryns, Beethoven's piano sonatas with Evgeni Koroliov, the completion of

Beethoven's symphonies with Wojciech Rajski and his Polish Chamber Philharmonic etc., so there will be little room for other ensembles. Right now, a series with a large first-class symphony orchestra would be desirable. We do have some contacts, but nothing is definite yet.

NL: How important is the latest recording technology of the day?

AS: TACET produces CDs, LPs, SACDs and DVD-Audios. I'm always interested when there's something new in the recording technology. Pretty often, however, the alleged novelties are not a forward, but a backward step. My favourite microphone, the Neumann M49, was designed in 1949. I don't know which younger microphone should perform better in any way with regard to my field of activities. Which is why we still hang up two M49s as main microphones in the centre position with almost every TACET recording. Another example: The surround recording. It was clear from the beginning that we would break new ground with the TACET Real Surround Sound. As a consequence hereof, we could even create the Moving Real Surround Sound – and both are unthinkable without new developments in the technical domain. Strictly speaking, it's just the other way round: without certain technical innovations there would be no Moving Real Surround Sound at all. I

have also a wishlist of technical supplies that do not yet exist, but they would help me a lot ...

NL: Do you record using tube technology exclusively?

AS: It's a long story with those tubes. It began around 1978 when I was still a student. Together with a friend I acquired a Neumann U47 which was a legend already at that time. When founding TACET back in 1989, I already owned two U47s plus two M49s.



Andreas Spreer during a recording in 2001

The M49s have long become some kind of extended ears to me, and they appear on almost every TACET recording. Around 1997 I was wondering if it might be possible to make a complete production without using solid-state technology, i.e. solely with tubes. The result was called 'The Tube' (on LP L74, CD T174 and SACD S74). Meanwhile there are quite a few of this kind. In the course of time the collection of tube microphones and tube amps grew larger and larger, until at some point the tube components were even in the majority. On this occasion I'd like to make one thing clear: of course, there is more than one way to skin a cat. You can make splendid recordings with solid-state technology. But this goes for tubes as well! And with these it's more exciting. Tube devices are often old and thus a bit more capricious. You've got to herd them like a flock of sheep. Sometimes one of them makes a crackling noise or you notice a hum at first somewhere. Then you've got to react fast to prevent such faults from going onto tape or HD. This can be pretty

exciting when recording a large orchestra! But as a reward you'll get a sound which – especially after its conversion into the incorruptible digital world – produces an imperceptible variability of the sound vibrations, a kind of natural or analogue factor that is just beautiful. As if the devices were breathing.

NL: Are all of your recordings in surround now?

AS: Practically all recordings are also cut in surround, with only very few exceptions. By the way, the surround

recordings are also made using mainly tubes. Which does not mean that we no longer produce stereo recordings. On the contrary, there is a stereo version of all surround recordings.

NL: When recording you monitor the signals only through headphones. How do you cope with the reduction of your surround recording to two channels?

AS: With every recording there is a stereo mix (mostly with just two microphones) that gives me precise information via headphones about the acoustic and level conditions in the recording room. This is where the dialogue with the artists is based on – what was fine, what needs to be redone etc. All the remaining channels destined for the surround mix are only controlled occasionally. When we're recording an orchestra, there are always two of us. My partner checks the individual channels, I listen to the stereo signal and on that basis I conduct the recording. For such tasks a familiar quality headphone set like the MB Quart Phone 400 will do

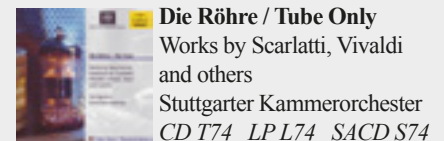
the trick for me. It's very neutral and it's also pleasant to wear.

NL: How important is the quality of your monitoring equipment?

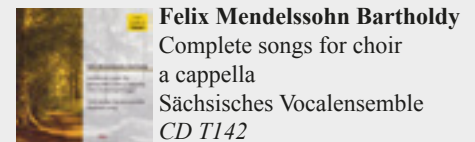
AS: Extremely important, of course. It mustn't colour the sound and it needs to be low-distortion, overload-proof, low-noise, low-hum etc. All these things are provided by many modern headphones and preamps. Furthermore, clarity of sound helps us irrespective of the frequency response. Here we find big differences. The Linear has all the necessary qualities and in addition it has a certain bell-like character, a clarity and directness that doesn't sound artificial. Its sound is true and my reference for dynamic headphones. ■

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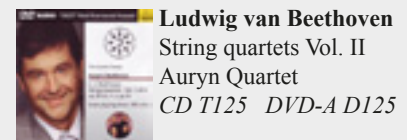
Selected recordings:



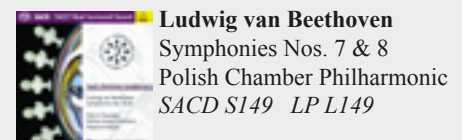
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Polish Chamber Philharmonic
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"My reference for dynamic headphones." Andreas Spreer, TACET