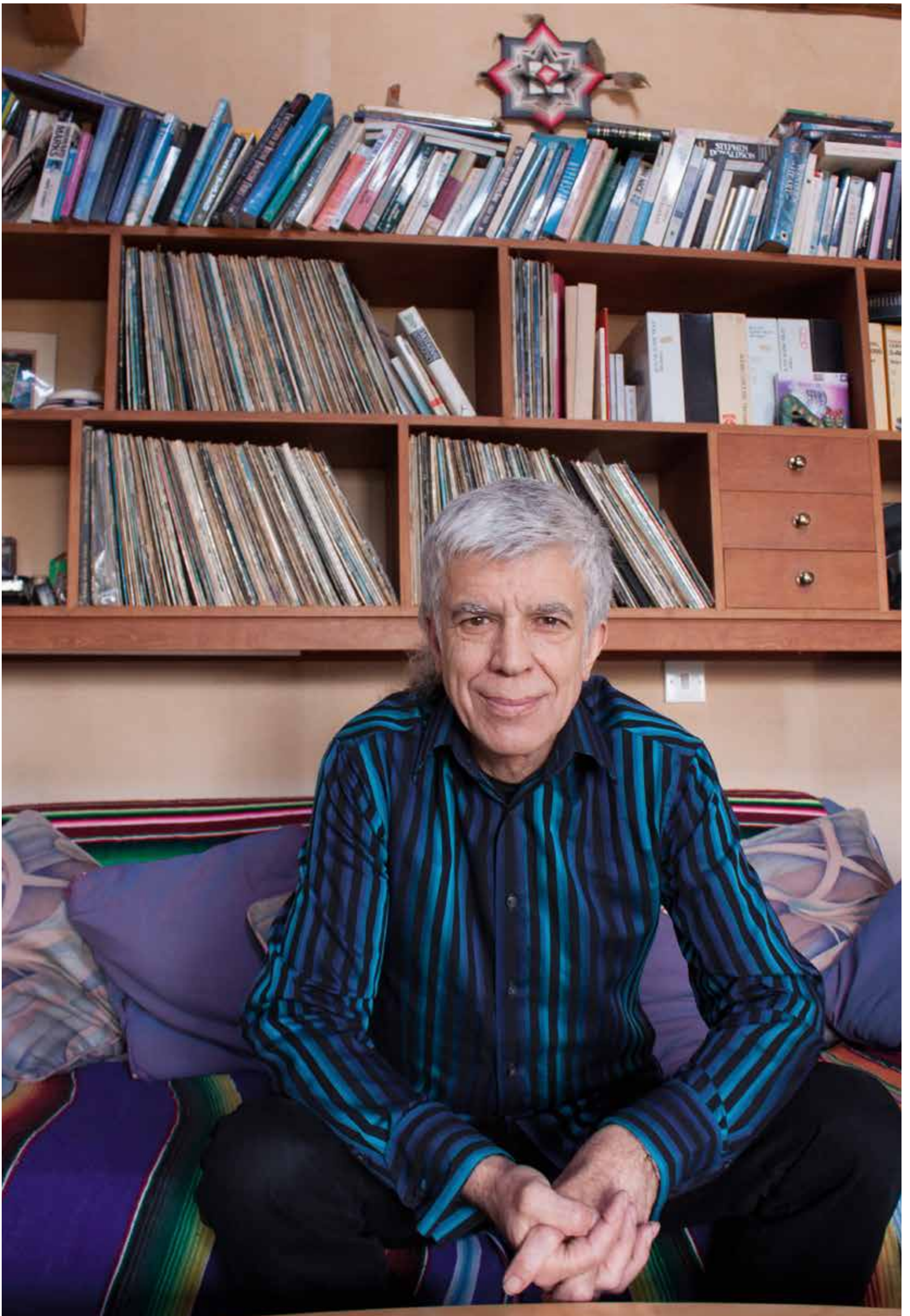

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TONY ANDREWS

Sound began as an interest, turned to love and then into passion for Funktion-One frontman, [Tony Andrews](#) and he has been sharing his commitment with the audio industry ever since. Michael Nicholson spoke at length with the sound guru about his colourful life experiences.





Tony with loyal friend and Funktion-One partner, John Newsham.

For someone who has done so much, not only in the context of professional audio but in life generally, Tony Andrews remains hungry. At 64-years-old, the man who gives real meaning to the word 'pioneer' could be forgiven for slowing down and letting his mind wander elsewhere. While his mind regularly takes flight into the wider consciousness, the speed at which he moves and the subsequent productivity show little sign of tapering off.

Let's be straight, you could write a book about Tony Andrews' life. In fact, Tony could write the book himself; and he might. This, after all, is one of the leading charges behind the first Glastonbury Festival, who has helped to define many aspects of today's audio industry, including its foundations, and who recently designed and built a bass horn the size of a house for the Sochi Winter Olympics. At *mondo*dr's* request, we spoke for more than four hours about the 50 years that have passed since Tony fell in love with sound. We went even further back than that. So, with a smidgen of trepidation and lungs filled with air, I'll try and give you at least a sense of how important he is to the historic fabric of the audio industry, to it currently and to its future.

"I'm really pleased I had a grammar school education. I didn't realise it at the time, but it was damn good," recalled Tony. "We were being programmed for the professions but it gave me a basis in physics, chemistry, geography, a bit of history, taught me how to write - grammar and how to spell - all the things that don't seem to happen now."

And outside school: "There were stations like Radio Caroline, Radio London and Radio Luxemburg - that's where we got all our music from. I had a tape recorder and recorded things straight off the radio. I discovered that if you took two wires off the terminals of the speaker, you'd get a better sound because it bypassed a microphone and a speaker. It was mostly soul music - Tamla Motown, Staxx, Atlantic - and the other side of it was blues."

Tony just happened to hit the sensory-seeking, formative years of his mid-teens at around 1963/64. By now, the lad who with the stiff education was finding ways of breaking out, looking for a space in which he could express himself and find answers to the questions flowing through his mind. All in all, it was a good time. "Discovering stereo was a bit of a revelation," said Tony. "That's when I decided I had to make myself some speakers and have my own stereo system. I was absolutely transfixed - the spaciousness, the sound stage, the dimension, the activation of all those things inside your head that you didn't know were there but actually are. That's at the root of it all." ▶

"I used to just sit in the middle and develop, if you like, my more cerebral side. I'd shut my eyes and just go into a whole other world. I was completely taken up by this and had some really informative experiences listening to music."

“I’d trust people and I’d trust they shared my values. That’s how bloody naïve I was. And then sooner or later something would go on, like the money would go sideways.”

By the late ‘60s, Tony was of university age. Having scored well academically, he duly took a place at Chelsea College of Science & Technology, where he studied Geology. It was, perhaps, his last act of conformity and it was a brief one at that. “I just couldn’t hack it. I was in the middle of Chelsea and this psychedelic explosion was going off all around me. So, after three weeks, I left.” Instead, Tony looked to experience as much hands-on stuff as he could. “I just wanted to learn as much as I could about physical reality. By getting hold of it, becoming competent at it and know what was going on,” he explained. All the while, his interest in sound, particularly stereo, grew into a love and an obsession.

“You’re supposed to position your speakers so that the angle between you and the speakers is about 60°, and there’s nothing wrong with that. But I wanted more dimension, so I put them at either end of the room. They were coming at me from either side about 10ft away. I used to just sit in the middle and develop, if you like, my more cerebral side. I’d shut my eyes and just go into a whole other world. I was completely taken up by this and had some really informative experiences listening to music.”

If you’ve ever seen Tony listening to a piece of music, you’ll recognise that description. Some things never change, while other things definitely do. “I find audio a very transporting thing - that will never leave me. It opened my mind. Everyone at the time was trying to be in a higher state of consciousness - it was understood as part of the youth culture of the time. Now we’ve got to contend with what kind of underpants brand we’re wearing and how many pictures we can take in the middle of the gig.”

Tony’s journey into audio, naturally, deepened. He was experiencing music in the live environment and exploring his own loudspeaker building curiosities. From those transcendental moments in his attic room to watching gigs and outdoor festivals, something didn’t add up.

“It wasn’t the hi-fi thing that I’d already tuned in to,” explained Tony. “That did become my mission - to get what I was hearing off these quite sensible loudspeakers, with a nice turntable, decent cartridge, etcetera - we needed that out there for the concerts. Then, in my simplistic terms, the people would have a commonplace to all expand their minds into. It was all about rock ‘n’ roll, for sure. We needed that sound but big. At the time, if you wanted a better sound system, you had to build it.”

So build it he did. There was the system for Pink Fairies, “with 15-inch



Tony and Ann have been together for 26 years, they married in 1997.

loudspeakers, much like a WEM (Watkins Electric Music) Column but we put some Goodmans Midax horns at the top. That was a really good rig for the time. We painted it pink - we were hippies.” The job he scored with a Scottish band called Clouds, which he secured thanks to the ‘lucky’ roadside repair on their Transit van. “I opened the bonnet, must’ve knocked a cable or something, got back in and it started. After that, the band gave me the job because I fixed the van.” (Tony’s passion for mechanics and powerful cars came later). He also worked with Piblokto! - Pete Brown’s band after working with Jack Bruce from Cream. By now, Tony was getting a name for himself. He was at the heart of a thriving music scene and was providing the technical knowhow and equipment to bands, while carrying out his own experiments (or R&D, if you like).

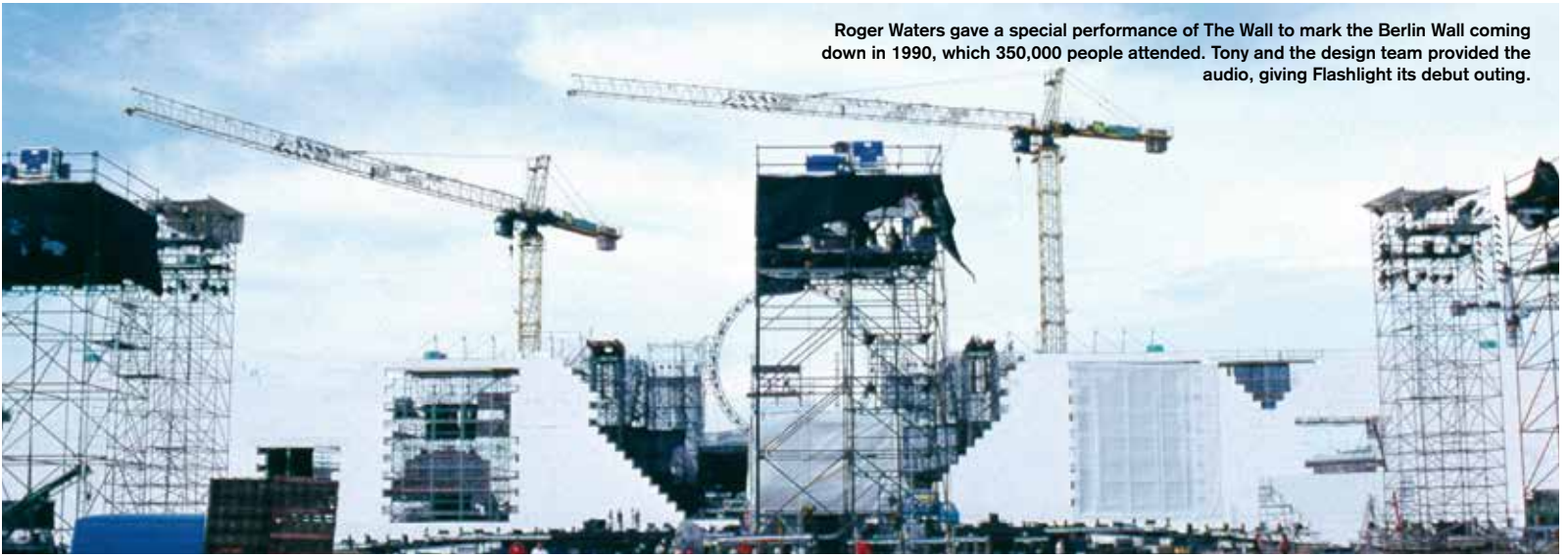
“They’d just show up at our place and ask for whatever they needed. Because I’d been working with the Pink Fairies and Hawkwind, who were at the hub of the Notting Hill Gate scene, which is how we all got connected with Glastonbury so early via Andrew Kerr, I just became part of what was going on. I could fix things; I could solder leads and sort stuff out because I was so practical. Electronics never really interested me that much but wood and speakers did - I was absolutely fascinated by the way they worked together to produce sound.

“We were mucking around with a speaker one day - my brother pointed it into the corner of the room, which, of course, killed most of the high frequencies and the mid, but I noticed that all the bass had come up. I thought, ‘where’s this extra energy coming from’ - it was kind of horn loading it. So, the next day, I’m in the garage making a corner of a room that fits around a speaker, but I decided to reverse the corner so that it pointed towards the driver. This was the beginning of the horn-loaded bass.

“I had met a guy called Muz whilst roadying for Pete Brown, who was friends with The Graham Bond Organisation, which was a pretty serious band at the time. Ginger Baker was the drummer and the bass player Pixie came down to try out the horn loaded bass - everyone was always looking for new stuff because at that point nobody had anything, there wasn’t a PA business. He starts slapping the bass and plaster comes falling from the ceiling - we think it’s the best thing in the world. I was getting very hooked at this point. We really got on to something with this bass and evolved it and that’s what I patented in ‘77.”

It was becoming clear to those around him at the time that Tony wasn’t willing to accept the status quo without at least questioning it. It’s a trait that has remained ►

Roger Waters gave a special performance of *The Wall* to mark the Berlin Wall coming down in 1990, which 350,000 people attended. Tony and the design team provided the audio, giving Flashlight its debut outing.



at the forefront of his pioneering escapades through the world of professional audio.

"I actively rejected all previous ideas of the way you do things," said Tony. "Just because something's been done for a thousand years doesn't mean it's right. Let me check it out for myself. If I agree with it, that's fine. But quite often when I check things out, they don't actually hold water. You'll find that about a lot of stuff. It definitely takes energy, fearlessness and the kind of mind, which I'd already started to allow myself, that doesn't balk at entertaining concepts that appear to be outlandish. As Einstein said, 'if at first the idea is not absurd, then there is no hope for it'. You do of course have to recognise the difference between absurd and stupid."

It's the philosophy that drove the first business ventures, Peace Sounds and Cosmic Boxes. Tony's reputation grew. "We had this two-by-15-inch bin at the time, which was an absolute killer. And we were making a living - just about. But all the while, I never really got dedicated to being a speaker designer, it was a means to the end of people getting in a field with a big sound system and having a good experience together."

Next came Sonic Trucking - a rental company that did big acts like Santana and Jackson Browne, which became one of the big players in the industry. "You know, I'd crammed a lot in," reflected Tony. "Just saying it now, I realise how much happened in such a small space of time." But it wasn't restlessness or fleeting aims on Tony's part - far from it. His objective throughout his career has been to make great sound and then make it even better. But some people's aims aren't quite as pure. "I'd trust people and I'd trust they shared my values. That's how bloody naïve I was. And then sooner or later something would go on, like the money would go sideways. Nine times out of 10, when something went wrong, the money was going sideways. You trust people, then they abuse you. You get pissed off and take your toys back. That's happened too often."

As his own understanding and passion for sound developed, and the subsequent product innovation reached new levels, the inevitability of a more strategic enterprise grew on the horizon. In 1978, that promise arrived when Tony partnered with Tim Isaac and John Newsham and formed Turbosound. They began designing, building and renting out their speaker systems. Around the same time, Alan Wick and partner Mark Hardy, together with Pete Brotzman, were running the Muscle Music rental company in London. "Turbosound was becoming very successful," explained Tony. "I was always engineering orientated, so I was looking

for a business partner and Muscle Music seemed like reasonable people at the time."

The companies merged to form the Turbosound Group Limited and for more than a decade, Tony's sound systems broke new ground while setting never before seen precedents in what could be achieved in live sound. His dream of matching those transcendental hi-fi moments in an expansive professional environment edged closer with products like the TMS-3 and the rest of the TMS Series that followed. The company collected a Queen's Award for Export in 1987.

Tony remembers how the quality standards were engrained throughout the design process. The sonic performance was fundamental but having been so submerged in the practical application of sound systems, the other production elements couldn't be ignored. "We got really good at woodwork. Everybody was making these flight cases that were horrible to work with and scratched everything. Whereas everything we did was completely flush and elegant. We put the handles on the inside of the case, so that nothing stuck out. We turned them around so that when they were left open, they didn't stick out and gash someone's leg. We were totally tuned in.

"We started to manufacture. That was going well. We came up with the TMS-3 when Alan Wick said you've got to get it all in one box, I'll give him that. So we did. And that was the TMS-3. It was a really heavy box but it was outstanding, for the day. There are still many in use all over the world today."

Then something changed, which was, perhaps, the earliest sign of things to come. Because they were supplying other rental companies, it was decided that the rental arm of Turbosound had to go. "Getting rid of the rental part of the company was a terrible thing for me. That's what kept us real and on the cutting edge because we were facing all the problems that you have to face when you do gigs. Everything that was Turbosound Rentals went across to Britannia Row, including our rental guy, Mike Lowe and equipment manager Pete Brotzman. That's a very sad story, that one."

Despite his fears, the company kept moving forward. But by the mid '80s, relocation was on the cards. "In '86, we moved the R&D here (Hoyle Farm, Dorking - Tony's home today and Funktion-One HQ). I knew things weren't right between myself and Alan Wick." Unbeknown to Tony and John, the company was being primed for floatation. The merger with BSS Audio and the formation of Precision Devices would add weight to what became the Edge Tech Group but when the crash hit in '87, going public or getting onto the USM (Unlisted

Tony spent six weeks building Glastonbury's Pyramid Stage in 1981.



The newly constructed Pyramid Stage at Glastonbury, 1981.



Tony and John at Tokyo Dome, Japan for Jamiroquai in 2002, with one of the large Resolution clusters used for the gig.

Security Market) became unattainable. Instead, a buyer was sought.

"All I wanted to do was grow the company, so it was good and solid," said Tony.

"We wanted to make great products and do things in a righteous way. So this idea of floating yourself and getting a load of money in was, as far as I was concerned, not a good idea at all. When it came to it, they couldn't float it because of the '87 crash, so they tried to sell the group. With BSS involved, John and I were outnumbered. We really tried to hang on to it but it was only a matter of time before they found a buyer. And that buyer was AKG."

There's no hiding how painful that memory still is today. "It was awful. I was an engineer - I wasn't watching. I just thought people's logic would be logical. If you make a deal to do something for each other, that's what you do. I never questioned it. It took me a long time to learn the ways of man. I'm still learning now.

"It was my baby and they had it. Without beating about the bush, I cried tears over the situation I'd finished up in. I really did. At the time, it nearly broke me.

There was just no way out, other than to re-invent ourselves. I certainly didn't sell out. The money that we did get out of it, because at least we had recognised shareholder rights, is some of the money we used to start Funktion-One. And, actually, it gave us the means to continue to be in this place and develop new ideas."

The final contributions from the technical team were the Flashlight system, which once again set new standards, and its more wide dispersion buddy, Floodlight. The latter actually arrived from Funktion-One Research Ltd. Despite the anger and hurt, they designed a new product that would aid the company from which they'd been pushed. "We developed it to go with the Flashlight," said Tony. "Frankly, I felt the job was half finished and I don't do half finished jobs. It didn't matter about the commercial implications - it was something I'd put into the world and I was going to make damn well sure that it was good. On a personal level, I was very unhappy but my duty was to the people and it always has been."

Something else happened during that elongated final chapter. Tony met a lawyer originally from Manchester, who worked for the firm he was using to secure R&D's relocation to Hoyle Farm. Her name was Ann. "I found her incredibly

"I was still trying to instigate that event where everybody comes together and something goes off. I'd experienced something in early house music, a euphoria that encouraged me in that endeavour."

Yann Favret, Tony and Steve Fisher - who sadly passed away in 2002 - plus cameraman John Newsham's shadow. The foursome climbed new heights during the '80s, including Mont Blanc in 1986.



straightforward to talk to - everything she said, I understood. We just got on really well. She helped us get Hoyle Farm and in the process became a friend. There were all sorts of things going on that meant that we kept meeting - I just decided I really liked her. Out of all of this, that is the one big area of emotional stability that's emerged and it remains that way. I think we're devoted to each other really, and that's that." Tony and Ann have been together for 26 years and married in 1997. Funktion-One Research Ltd was formed in 1992 by the old R&D team, which included Tony, John Newsham, Toby Hunt, Steve Fisher, Martin Wall and Yann Favret and of course the addition of Ann. Sadly, Steve passed away in 2002 and Martin left the company in 2010. The five remaining founders enjoy a special relationship. "We don't all think the same way," revealed Tony. "It's a very balanced approach to whatever we engineer. We've got totally different priorities, apart from making a good job. There's a common understanding that you do things that you can be proud of."

It took eight years for the first Funktion-One products to enter the public domain - at the Millennium Dome's opening party. In that time, they worked on "bits and pieces" that generated a revenue stream, while simultaneously researching "the next level". More avant-garde projects, like the Experimental Sound Field at Glastonbury in 1992, kept the creative spark lit and gave signs to onlookers that something was going on. "I was still trying to instigate that event where everybody comes together and something goes off. I'd experienced something in early house music, a euphoria that encouraged me in that endeavour."

It was the latest chapter of his tempestuous story with the UK's largest festival. He was there in '71 at the first Glastonbury and it was he who persuaded Michael Eavis to do another in '79 - encouraging him to involve many of the original conspirators and make it a regular affair. He also spent six weeks supervising and building the second Pyramid Stage in 1981 and with John Newsham provided and ran the audio for 13 years before handing it over to Britannia Row. For Tony, it had always been the perfect platform for free thought, expression and unity, but during a visit in the early '90s, he experienced a darker side of the event, which turned him off. It wasn't until 2007 that Tony returned to Glastonbury when Michael Eavis, in search of an improvement in sound quality, invited Funktion-One to do the Pyramid Stage. Unfortunately, several unholy forces conspired on the Saturday and confusion amongst the noise police meant the volume was dropped to unrealistic

"The Millennium Dome was a pretty good kick-off," he reflected. By 2000, Ann had quit the law firm and was fully involved, driving the company's success. "She's instrumental," stated Tony. "She runs the company."

levels. To make matters worse, the truth didn't come out immediately. Instead, the PA was blamed and despite an attempt by the festival's management to correct that narrative, the mistruth had already set sail.

It was a very low point for Tony. Funktion-One had grown into a very successful operation. The Resolution Series was taking the world by storm, finding its way into some very significant installations. But this was a kick in the teeth that felt particularly painful. An industry myth, 'that Funktion-One can't be used for live', grew a new leg.

"The very idea that different genres of music only work with certain sound systems is completely and utterly stupid," stated Tony. "Audio is audio and that's all there is to it. I don't know who is worst, those who started the lie or those who believe it. After all this is about the same design team that provided audio for one of the biggest concerts ever - 350,000 people at The Wall concert Berlin 1990."

Amongst Tony's highlights of the last 14 years is the Jamiroquai show at Wembley Arena in 2002. "It was an absolute triumph," enthused Tony. "It worked unbelievably well. I was so stoked that I crashed my Quattro on the way home, with our German distributor in the back. He still talks to me!"

"The Millennium Dome was a pretty good kick-off," he reflected. By 2000, Ann had quit the law firm and was fully involved, driving the company's success. "She's instrumental," stated Tony. "She runs the company."

"Sochi's an exciting application of our technology," he admitted. Funktion-One sound systems have been used at the Bobsleigh Track and at the Bolshoy Arena (**mondo*dr 24.2**). And 2013's 'The 10 Best Soundsystems in America' list from Beatport was pleasing. "Five out of 10 top club systems in North America - that's not just getting the number one spot, that's taking half of the places."

Of course, there's more to come. We've started to see the output from Tony Andrews 4.0. After all, this is the fourth generation - of knowledge, breakthroughs and discovery. Tony knows things now that he didn't know four years ago - take a moment to imagine what that means.

The new products have already started to emerge - additions to the Compact Series, the Modular Stadium Technology (MST) Horns, Bass Reflex Range and the PSM318 DJ monitor - and are carving out their own headlines. Then there's Vero - Latin for 'in truth'. The new live system will officially arrive this year. I ask Tony if he has a point to prove in the live environment. "Yes. Absolutely," he smiled. ■