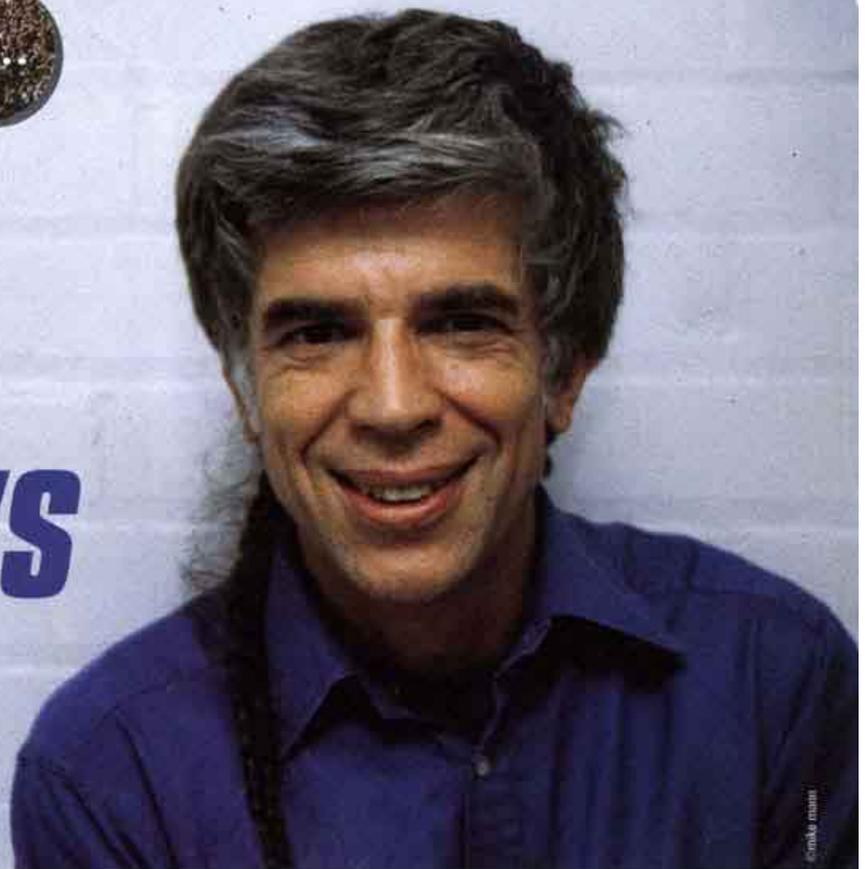


an audience with...

Tony Andrews



If anyone in the live sound industry can claim to have been there, done that and worn the T-shirt, it is Tony Andrews. Mike Mann tracked down the 51-year-old loudspeaker guru in deepest, darkest Surrey.

For someone who has spent a lifetime listening, Tony Andrews is a great talker. Though deeply committed to his quest to design the ultimate loudspeaker, he also finds time to take a keen interest in philosophy, social history and (amongst other interests) windsurfing. His first love, though, is sound — a passion that developed in the late 1960s and has remained undimmed since then.

"It was a combination of hearing the first stereo sound whilst exploring uncharted areas of the mind," he admits when quizzed about his beginnings in the business. "I just loved it and realised that it would be fabulous for a whole audience to hear a band or records in stereo together." Records? Isn't the essence of live music that it should be — well, live? "No, I'm not bothered whether it's live or recorded. Sound itself is what I like — it's an arena where minds can really meet. The communal buzz that you get with an *en masse* experience is what it's all about."

This, then, may explain Andrews' continuing interest in current music — which has kept pace with the dance scene since the days of the Stax and Atlantic dancehall sounds. Funktion One, the company that Andrews has run since his split with Turbosound in 1992, is now closely associated with major dance events, having provided a crowd-stopping VIP tent system for this year's Homelands festival as well as early contributions to Glastonbury and a recent installation in Ibiza.

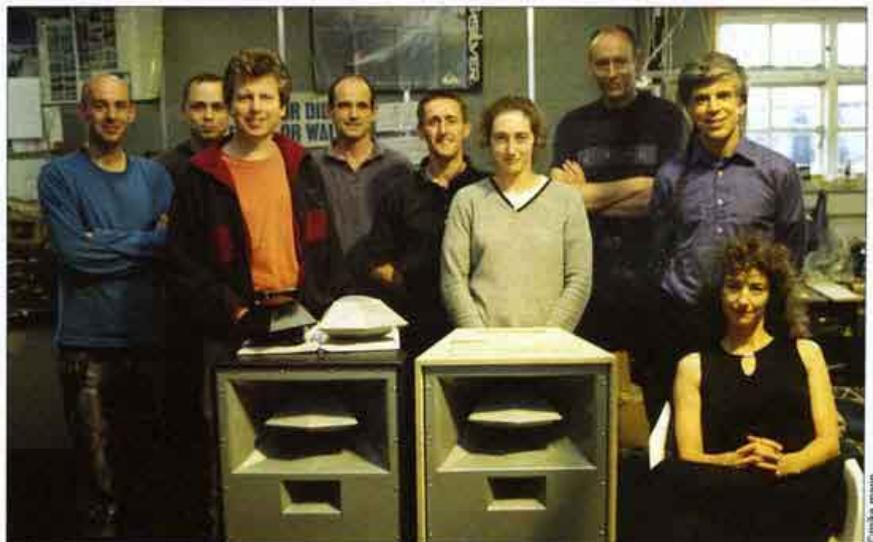
"The Homelands gig was a great day for me," he recalls. "When you hear music as though it's for the first time, then you know you're getting it right. Similarly, Underworld at Glastonbury was a great

event; one of those times where everything just goes into flux and the vibe takes over completely. The whole of the Glastonbury festival used to be like that, but now it's just cashpoints in the middle of a field."

COSMIC MISSION

Andrews embarked on what he calls an "alchemical path" by working with the likes of Hawkwind and the Pink Fairies, largely because of his political

aspirations of the time. "Even then, there were a lot of people in the industry who were on a business mission. My mission was more cosmic," he laughs. Andrews hooked up with Tim Isaac (now a major part of ATC) and established a bond based on shared experience. "What Tim and I had in common was that we were both experimenting with mid-range cone drivers," Andrews elaborates. "Both of us hated the sound of compression drivers working down to



The Funktion One Team: (L-R) Steve Fisher, Danny Strowger, Toby Hunt, Yann Favret, Martin Wall, Emma Newton, John Newsham, Ann Andrews and Tony Andrews.

AN AUDIENCE WITH... TONY ANDREWS

800Hz and we knew we could arrive at something better. There were some nice 15-inch drivers and enclosures around, including the RCA W-bin and cabinets from Vitavox, but it was the clarity in the vocal region that was needed."

His early designs found favour with such names as Jefferson Airplane and Ricky Farr, during which time Andrews met John Newsham. By the late 1970s, Turbosound was born, initially as a rental company. "We were working out of a shed at my brother's place at Ridge Farm," explains Andrews, pointing out that despite its humble presence, the acts on Turbosound's books included such giants as Santana and Status Quo.

Despite the commitments of regular touring, Andrews continued to develop the 'Festival System'; a large-scale array based on dual 18-inch bass bins, 2 x 10-inch low mid drivers and a central high-mid and HF section. Its first outing was at Glastonbury in 1979 where it performed to expectations, but when split up and taken into smaller venues, previously undetected manufacturing problems became apparent and the system was given a lukewarm reception.

"At Glastonbury, no one spotted that the people who had built the boxes hadn't joined the waveguides to the driver baffle — effectively, the whole thing was acting like a giant whistle," says Andrews. He is still highly critical of those individuals responsible, but admits that his insistence on rebuilding the entire system during a gig was a great test of his relationship with John Newsham! Even though Andrews had had no input into the construction of the faulty cabinets, the episode led to an irreparable rift with Tim Isaac. "One positive result of this was that it pushed me into working with drivers, because it was believed that they were at the root of the problem."

FORMATIVE YEARS

Andrews' research was to be a leading factor in the formation of Precision Devices, which still provides drivers for a variety of PA and studio products. Meanwhile, Alan Wick (who had joined as a partner as part of Turbosound's diversification into manufacturing) had been checking out the competition in the States. "Alan had seen the Clair



The Festival System with Status Quo at Wembley Arena in 1979.

Brothers system, with everything in one box and integrated flying hardware. We felt we could produce something that was just as easy to use, but which would sound much better. This eventually became the TMS-3."

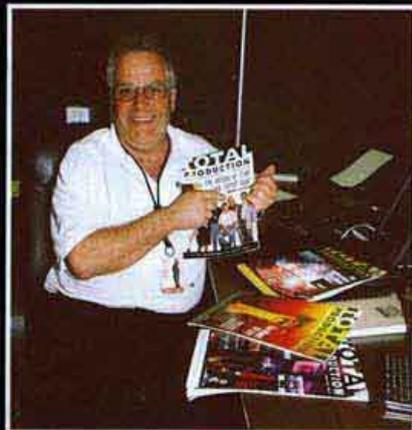
The TMS-3, which launched Turbosound in the US, was to prove the catalyst for the company's development into one of the world's foremost loudspeaker manufacturers. However, it was not the business angle that interested Andrews. "I was always convinced that we could do more technically, but I wasn't focused at all on the business side. I had lost control to people who had convinced me that they had better business skills and there was nothing I could do about it."

Following a period of growing unrest and the purchase of Turbosound by AKG, Andrews left to form Funktion One. He immediately set about addressing a problem with his latest design, the

Flashlight system. "The trouble with Flashlight was that, once again, you needed so many cabinets to create the right coverage in a small space. To get round this, we developed Floodlight — and for the sake of all the customers who had bought the long-throw system, we did a licensing deal with Turbosound."

NEW BEGINNINGS

Andrews' new company was to be the antithesis of all he had experienced for the past 10 years. Research takes precedence over profit, the company's workers are all profit-sharing partners, and the relationship with customers is a personal one. "In many ways, we're back to where we started — doing business with friends the way we want to." Andrews is unfazed by the accusation that this is an uncompetitive attitude: "It seems we still have a natural audience," he says. "There are like-minded



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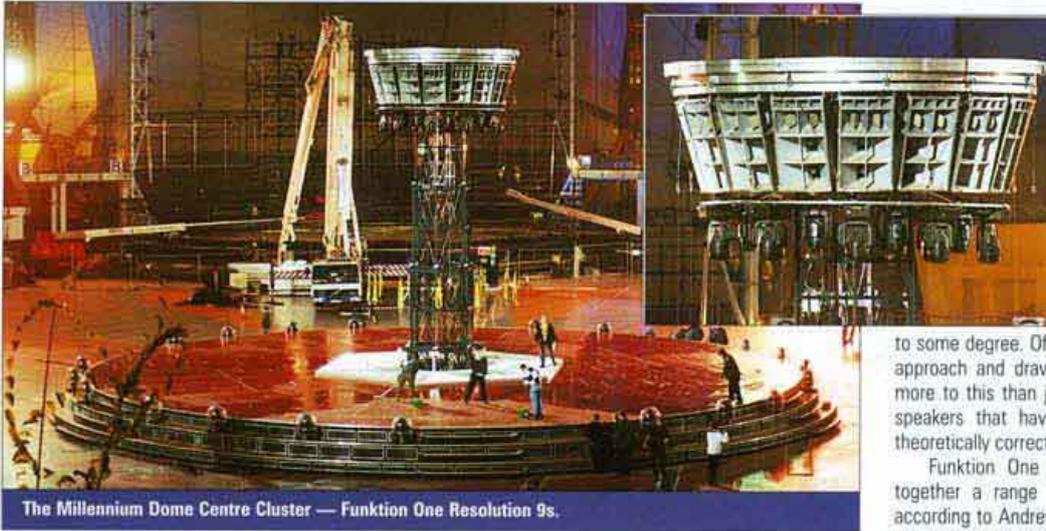
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The Millennium Dome Centre Cluster — Funktion One Resolution 9s.

evolved it, and not jumped on every new fashion that came along."

BOXING CLEVER

Despite the inexorable march of technology, Andrews' own design methods have changed little over the years. "We work on a box largely by trial and error, but with so much experience between us we can sense what will work

to some degree. Of course, you can adopt the linear approach and draw the cabinet first, but there is more to this than just science. There are plenty of speakers that have very flat responses and are theoretically correct, but they just don't sound right."

Funktion One has taken six years to bring together a range of speakers that does justice, according to Andrews, to the listeners' ears. "It can take months or even years of listening to something before I'm happy," he says. "It's a circular process — you have to leave things and come back to them fresh. Every so often you respond emotionally to what you're hearing, which is the sign of good sound."

The company has also spent an unusually long time beta testing its new Resolution product range with a select group of users. "As far as I'm

people out there who do care about what a system sounds like. Whether everyone else agrees doesn't really matter."

Though Funktion One's reputation has led the company into some highly prestigious work, including supplying the central system for London's Millennium Dome, it is other, smaller projects such as the Soundfield dance events that conjure up more pleasant memories for Andrews. "The dream of producing real surround sound has been there as long as I've been involved with audio," he explains, "but we normally get a very diluted version of it. What we are trying to achieve is solid imaging — so solid you can climb on it. That is what people who don't understand what they're hearing want. As soon as they hear something that is really good, they appreciate it. At the Homelands gig, we achieved more with four Resolution 9 loudspeakers than was done with 54 at the Dome! In fact, I finally heard what too much pure sound feels like. It hurts in a whole new way, because it's not the distortion that you are hearing. There is a very fine line between sufficient stimulation and overdoing it."

Andrews is scathing about the industry's tendency to produce "me too" products, but blames this on the fashion-consciousness of users. "Initially, it was almost impossible to get the early Turbosound gear accepted, but once it was, we couldn't make it fast enough. Everyone wanted it — which always results in ideas being copied. These days everyone's into line arrays. Christian Heil has done a

good job of using an old technique but in a very new way. But now it seems that every speaker manufacturer has to have at least one line array system to sell."

This, of course, begs the question — will we see a Funktion One line-array design? "No, there has to be someone who's doing something else! We're the only team that has stuck with the same concept and



Funktion One Resolution 2s — destined for rental company Blue Box.

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concerned, the longer we spend beta testing a system, the better. Otherwise, we're guilty of foisting our half-finished concepts on an unsuspecting industry. They innocently pay their hard-earned cash, and if it doesn't work we've broken faith with them. Problems in the field destroy your reputation and lower your own self-esteem."

Andrews has mixed feelings about the path that the audio industry has taken since its inception. "In some ways it's become worse. There has always been an over-infatuation with the bells and whistles that sound people use. Technology isn't the only answer. In fact, it often seems that the level of technology that goes into something is in inverse proportion to the creativity shown by the people involved. On the other hand, the fact that people of every age group have now grown up hearing good quality sound is very important. People want more sound wherever they are, and the demand for quality is escalating. We have come a long way even in the last 10 years — but there's still a very long way to go with it."

And what of the future? Has the concept of a bent piece of cardboard being shoved around by a magnet finally reached the end of its evolution? Andrews says not: "There is something intrinsically funky about a cone loudspeaker. None of the alternatives that have ever been developed even comes close. We've tried electrostatics, flat panels, alternative material, but it always comes back to paper. It's organic, it's unpredictable." Which, as with Tony Andrews himself, is perhaps the biggest clue to its success.



Effects position at the Dome with Resolution 9s and additional mid/hi enclosures.

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