

Happy New Ear!

Modestly priced gadgets to boost your home sound

Yes, it's 2021, and you're probably just completing your strangest holiday season ever. We all have a severe hug deficit, but just as big is the lack of live musical performances.



Paul Squillo

Fortunately for us, the gift that was born to replace those live events was the creation of plenty of online musical concerts, shows, and movies. Many of these concerts were performed by artists who normally would have been too busy with tours to create such events. Also, most of these shows were produced to appear and sound live—and that's a good thing for all serious listeners. Any broadcasts and recorded concerts done in real time without lots of editing are more exciting and feel more personal. Today's recording technologies make these virtual events sound even better than they would have if you'd been there live. Do look up your favorite artists to see what they produced for broadcast this season. If your system is up to it, you will be delighted by their work.

Last month, I promised to share a list of audio accessories that can make your high-performance audio-video system sound even better. Here's some good news: these gadgets will improve the sound and picture quality in all but the most primitive of music systems, and many of these important upgrades are very inexpensive.

Wouldn't you love to discover that some simple, inexpensive accessory could

transform your system? You owe it to yourself to see how much your basic audio video system can improve from these accessories.

♪ **Power conditioners.** Why? The AC power in your home is far from perfect. A good power conditioner is more than an AC outlet strip: it filters out the higher frequencies that will mess with your electronics, it may steady your voltage if it rises or dips, and here in the Midwest, it can keep your gear from being ruined by lightning. More elaborate power conditioners have another important benefit: they can absorb all of the high-frequency noise in your wiring that can adversely affect your family's health. I'll explore this area more thoroughly in a future issue.

♪ **New audio-quality AC outlets.** Why? They make a better connection than the standard-quality outlets, so you get the full punch of power whenever it's needed. When I worked in California, we represented an amazing \$110,000 pair of flagship speakers from Cabasse. These giant spheres on artsy twisted stands always reminded me of the old sci-fi B-movie *The Crawling Eye*. In their West Coast introduction, we used our top power cables for all eight of their amps, which cost over \$20,000! They sounded incredible compared to the stock power cords, but we switched back to the stock cables the next day. A week later, we got our first audio-quality AC outlets in, and surprisingly, through a couple of these outlets, at \$50 each, the amps' sound improved as much as it had with the exotic power cables! Who would have guessed how much our outlets were holding the amps back?

♪ **Audiophile power cables.** Why?



The performance of these \$110,000 Cabasse speakers was improved with a couple of \$50 audio-quality AC outlets.

More of the same. They give you a better connection and reject noise. I still find it fascinating that a \$50 power cable can make a huge improvement from the stock AC cord. More exotic AC cords can reveal yet another big jump in music quality. This is one of those items that I recommend trying at home first. If you don't hear an immediate improvement, run your system with one for a couple of days, and then replace it with your old AC cord and listen to the same thing. You will be amazed at the loss you hear. If you don't, then something else in your system needs to be tweaked first. Remember, every upgrade you make should give you an improvement that you can easily hear.

♪ **Speaker cables.** Why? There are many wire companies, and they often have opposing theories. Some are thicker, some thinner, some stranded, and some solid core, or both. Purity of the metal, crystalline structure, alloy, arrangement of the strands, it goes on and on. We try to find companies that follow the laws of physics, yet there are also some who seem to use black magic to make great-sounding cables. The bottom line is that each company listens extensively until it comes up with a wire that sounds the most "accurate" on their audio system.

Wires can improve the timing and detail, the dynamics, and almost every-

thing else. Try these out before you commit. Some are brighter or mellower and may be the perfect fix for the imperfections of your present speakers. Ideally, the new wire will be neutral, and its sophistication will reveal a whole level of musical nuance for you.

♪ **Audio and digital cables.** Again, trust your ears. Upgrade the cables of your best device first. It doesn't need to be expensive to make a significant difference, but you should easily notice the improvement.

♪ **Room treatments.** Room dimensions, the placement of your system in the room, and early echoes are all destroyers of your system's musical potential. Many of these side effects can be minimized with the right absorber or diffuser, or even just by changing where your equipment sits. Don't rely on a receiver or amp's room-correction program. Use it only after the equipment is treated right mechanically. If not, it could make your system sound worse.

•
You are now a seasoned listening expert. Just know that you're not alone in this exciting journey. An AV expert can help you pick just the right solution for each step upward.

Paul Squillo is CEO of Golden Ears, Inc.