

YOUR WORD

Readers' letters

BEHRINGER SOUL

Re: Gotta Have Soul? (Issue 52) – Firstly, I have to say, love the magazine a lot. We subscribe at work (Darwin Entertainment Centre) where I'm the FOH engineer. Just wanted to write in and make a quick point about your Behringer article.

I agree with you for the most part, but I couldn't help but think of the old blue 16-channel Behringer I have at home. I do live dubs here in Darwin and I've been using the old Eurorack mixer I bought when they first came out. It cost a lot more than they do these days and I admit that this is a vital part of the argument. But, a Mackie of the same vintage and some current Spirit mixers we have here at the centre don't have the sound I need for what we do. I firmly believe this cheap little mixer has 'soul'. In fact, I've grown to really love this thing to the point where I've gone to the trouble of servicing it regularly and doing a few little mods. If I lost it, I'd be mortified – if it means this much to me, then it must have character and soul.

Send onto Uli this information if you get time, maybe he might revert some of their current design ideas to days gone by (or stop cutting the corners integral to the blue Eurorack sound)...

Justin Moon

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Re: Gotta Have Soul? (Issue 52) – Watched your video diary. Enjoyed it. Had a question, though. You mentioned how Behringer had some quality issues in the beginning. What you didn't mention, is Behringer's rotten reputation for stealing proprietary information and manufacturing clones of other's R&D. It has lost large lawsuits with both Mackie and Aphex for outright stealing and copying. Many in the pro audio community won't have anything to do with them for these reasons. This is not private information but has been published many times over the years.

I've heard that Mr. Behringer has just told the litigants to sue and has made money despite losing these lawsuits. He just makes more than he loses. I cannot support that kind of organisation with that attitude.

David Danský
Performance Sound Designer & Mixer.
Hollywood, CA

At the risk of seeming long-winded, explaining Behringer's side of things requires me to go into some detail.

1.) Legal Cases: The Aphex case is around 20 years old, so it's quite understandable that the facts have become mixed with fiction. Back then I had a little garage company and believed Aphex's patent was invalid due to prior art and advise from a lawyer. At that time there were several companies who produced those exciters, such as Akai, SPL, D&R, etc. Hence I did not stop production and rather filed for invalidation, which triggered a court case that lasted several years. Later, I also filed for my own patent application for circuitry that made the harmonics processor level-independent (Patent DE3904425), an invention that was sponsored by the reputable Fraunhofer Institute, which invented MP3. To cut a long story short, the court decided that Aphex's patent was valid and unfortunately my own patent would also infringe. I simply lost the case and paid for damages. Concurrent with our case were allegations that the Aphex patent 'inventor' Kurt Knoppel had stolen the patent from someone whom he worked for as a treasurer. But I even heard that Aphex themselves were sued by Harvey Rubens who claimed his VCA patent was infringed. Just Google 'Aphex Harvey Rubens' for more details. Concerning Mackie, all I can tell you is that it was a dispute over trade dress and IP. Behringer definitely did not lose any case against Mackie, as can be confirmed from the public record. However, our settlement agreement does not allow any party to disclose details. After Aphex we never lost an IP case again, a far cry from David's allegations.

2.) How Behringer designs products: Our R&D department, which I head, is one of the largest in the MI/Pro Audio industry. With over 200 engineers operating in Germany, USA, Philippines and China, Behringer R&D includes some of the finest DSP, analogue and digital system, speaker, instrument amplification, mechanical, PCB, process and quality engineers anywhere—truly a dedicated and sophisticated team that I am really proud of. Our technology portfolio contains around 20 patents with many more applied for. We constantly release revolutionary products such as the digital EQ DEQ2496, the modelling amp V-AMP or the digital mixer DDX3216, which took over five years to develop. We spend more money on R&D than in any other Behringer department... because R&D is truly the heart and soul of our engineering-driven company. How else would we be able to release up to 200 new products per year? When you look at our product range, you will find many product categories, such as mixers, processors, speakers, etc. that are common with our competitors. While our

look might be similar to other's products, what's 'under the hood' is quite different. For example, to design mixers is not rocket science since analogue designs are relatively generic. But what makes the difference in a Behringer mixer is the choice of components and the fact that we make so many of these components ourselves: from prosaic parts like switches to our outstanding V888 transistor used in our mic pre's. Lower costs are merely a side benefit of vertical integration and high-volume production. Because we produce millions of products a year, quality must be Behringer's main focus. Designing and building everything we can ourselves—right down to the pulp in our speaker cones—is the best way to ensure quality and cost control.

Do we look at successful products in the market and then follow? Yes, of course, as do our competitors. But it makes no commercial sense to release a product with identical performance, features and price. Powered by over 200 R&D engineers, the Behringer approach is to offer better audio performance, feature set, plus design each product to be produced at lower cost.

3.) Intellectual Property. It's important to understand that IP (Intellectual Property) legal cases are very common in any industry. Just look at recent cases with Gibson versus PRS, Microsoft, Blackberry, etc. These guerrilla tactics are especially common in the US where legal fees are sky high and each party has to pay its own legal fees regardless of the outcome of the case.

Plus, IP is a grey area, as it deals with patents, trade dress, copyrights, designs etc. where not much is black and white. This, along with the fact that IP litigation is often used as a tool to push a competitor out of business, are reasons why there are so many cases in this area of law.

There is a common misunderstanding about copying and reverse engineering. While 1:1 copies are clearly illegal, reverse engineering is an ethical and legitimate way to design, one that is used by major corporations every day. Remember that technology is generally public domain (unless protected by patents or copyrights). This is the basis for any industry to evolve, and you'll surely find the latest BMW or Mercedes' workbench and vice versa. We definitely look at our competitors' models—just as they learn from us. In fact, when you walk around trade shows, Behringer is among the most imitated manufacturers. Where legal, we have no problem with this. Neither should our competitors. The

following article gives you some valuable background information: www.ischool.berkeley.edu/~pam/papers/l&e%20reveng3.pdf

4.) Why are our products so affordable? We have tools that allow us to efficiently design massive libraries of everything from analogue and digital circuitry designs to DSP algorithms. This provides us with economies of scale in our product designs, and reduce time-to-market tremendously as well as cost. We strive to use the same components in as many designs as possible, cutting inventory, carrying costs and providing more buying power. It has always Behringer's philosophy to pass on those benefits to our customers and offer high-quality products for musicians that don't have deep pockets. This has undoubtedly made enemies among competitors who do not have the same commitment to vertical integration, economy of scale or dedication to their customers.

Uli Behringer

Chairman, Behringer

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NUMBED BY GEAR

I have a subscription to AudioTechnology, and have just received issue number 53. As I started to flick through it, I became aware of a feeling that I have every time I open a new issue. I'm always excited to see the new arrival in my letterbox, yet after a few pages I feel, well, numb. I thought about it, and decided I would give you some feedback. It was then that I saw the exchange of emails between Uli Behringer and Chris Holder. I was very interested because it actually ties in perfectly with why I feel 'numb' when I start to flick through each new edition.

I'm a musician, first and foremost. I've set up a small home desktop recording environment – iMac, PreSonus FireBox, Logic Express, one dynamic and one condenser mic, and Behringer monitors, MIDI keyboard, DI box as well as a Behringer bass amp. (I've been playing bass for over 25 years. I love it – I love my Fender and my Rickenbacker and I'm fiercely proud of their quality.) But when it came to some parts of the home studio, I had to go with Behringer because of the price. Behringer unfortunately does suffer some ridicule amongst musicians/studio weeps/audiophiles – it's the 'poor player's' choice. Well, for mine, it works, and it does a better job than a lot of big name brands could produce 25 years ago. Okay, so it may not be high quality by today's standards, but I stand behind my Behringer equipment.

But why do I always feel uneasy when flicking through each new AudioTechnology? Well I think it's because I shouldn't really be reading it. I should be reading 'Home User Technology'. 99% of the products advertised and reviewed in the magazine cost bucketloads – no, truckloads – of cash. I will never need it, never see it, never afford it, but I look at your magazine and I want it. If I was to respond to the advertising/reviews in AudioTechnology, I would be broke before the items arrived.

Yet, with my meagre home set up, I can produce sounds on par with those produced by the bankrupting equipment. Honestly, with my set up I could reproduce the single my band recorded in 1987, which was done on a 32-track desk, mixed in another studio and mastered in yet another.

Jim Rothery

What we're talking about here is the distinction between 'Pro', 'Semi-Pro' and 'Enthusiast'. And, like any discipline, the pro gear comes at a premium. If you can pull a mix that sounds as good as Chris Lord Alge (see later this issue) with cheap gear then, quite frankly, you're a genius. Has the gap narrowed between the quality of pro equipment and semi pro/enthusiast gear? Absolutely! Unquestionably! Indubitably, even. So, like you, I'm very grateful I can buy a great mic for under \$500 or a sound card for under \$1000, but (also like you) it doesn't preclude me from lusting after a \$3000 preamp. Admittedly, AT does review pricier gear more than, say, the UK or US home studio mags. And that's because we're not just a home studio magazine – we cover live sound and pro audio as well. That said, all the gear you've got in your studio set up we've reviewed at one stage or another, and we'll continue to highlight affordable gear just as much as the more boutique items. – CH.