

Affordable\$\$Audio

Issue Thirty-Five: November 2008

Yamamoto Sound Craft Audio Bases By Anthony Nicosia

anthynicosia@affordableaudio.org

PB-9 \$40 set of four

Ebony cones

Diameter (34mm) height (19mm) height of pin (5mm)

PB-10 \$35 set of four

Ebony cups (can used with PB-9)

Diameter (34mm) height (12mm) depth of the form department (3.5mm)

PB-20 \$55 set of four

Ebony cones

Diameter (41mm) height (21mm) height of pin (5mm)

PB-21 \$50 set of four

Ebony cups (can be used with PB-20)

Diameter (41mm) height (14mm) depth of the form department (3.5mm)

PB-18 \$65 set of four

African Ebony cups

Height (18mm) 42mm square

PB-22 \$12.50 set of four

Southeast Asian ebony triangular audio bases

Size (38mmX25mm) height of the base (18mm)

MGB-2 (Isolation Devices) \$310 per set of four/ \$240 per set of three

African Ebony audio bases

Outside dimensions: diameter (49mm) height (45mm-37mm)

MGB-1 (Isolation Devices) \$410 per set of four/ \$320 per set of three

African Ebony audio bases

Outside dimensions: diameter (59mm) height 58.8mm-47mm)

Yamamoto Sound Craft Corporation

Email address: shige-y@mh1.117.ne.jp

Web address: <http://www2.117.ne.jp/~y-s/index-e.html>

North American Importer for Yamamoto Sound Craft: Venus Hi-Fi

Email address: info@venushifi.com

Web address: <http://www.venushifi.com/>



Shigeki Yamamoto is the founder of Yamamoto Sound Craft Corporation and credited with the creation of all their products. His company is well known in Japan for the manufacturing of high-end audio accessories and valve amplifi-

cation. Aside from their sonic virtues I found Shigeki Yamamotos products beautiful to look at as well as nice to touch being that they are made of exotic natural wood. To give you an idea of the scope of this company's interest, they make of course Audio Bases but also equipment racks, speaker stands, tube amps, preamps, phono stages, head-phone amps, a new DA Converter and yes even speakers.

I have had some sort of audio bases under my equipment for over 10 years now. Some were home made, some improvised, while still others were store bought. While I do feel that having some form of isolation device under equipment will have a positive impact on the sound, I have never been bowled over by the changes brought upon by any of them. For my turntable I placed Black Diamond Racing Cones directly under each of the three factory supports, which then rested on some solid brass cylinders, which I had custom made. Those brass cylinders again rested on a large square piece of 1½-inch thick solid maple butcher block, which sat atop even more brass cylinders that finally rested on top of my Salamander Audio Rack. This multi layering of bases was to a degree successful in that it did stop the cartridge from skipping when I approached the turntable. The sound also seemed to smooth out and improve but not in a dramatic fashion. Other Black Diamond Racing Cones were used directly under other components in my system as well as one set of Audio Prism IsoBearing (Isolation Globes). Before this there was a time when I used bicycle inner tubes throughout my entire system, which were partially inflated and used as a resting place for all my different audio components. Oh yes let us not forget the numerous hockey pucks that I once purchased as well as arrowheads screwed into the bottom of various equipment with the tip pointing down. Throughout all these experiments I felt that the Black Diamond Racing Cones and the Audio Prism IsoBearing products worked best with my particular system. I never regretted buying either of them in fact those are the devices that I finally settled on for use in my review system before coming into contact with the Yamamoto Audio Bases.

Yamamoto audio bases are beautiful to look at, feel nice to the touch and have a pleasant natural all wood scent. What a great product, having something for each of three different senses to enjoy. Of course I am going to walk us through a review of all the eight Yamamoto products listed above. Among those products reviewed today it is my honor to be one of the first to discuss Shigeki Yamamoto's new MGB-2, a somewhat smaller and less expensive version of their top of the line MGB-1 audio base.

While I do believe that isolation devices can be beneficial towards an improvement in the sound of an audio system I feel that it is necessary to place them in numerous places throughout rather than just under one part of the audio chain. It seems to me that the cumulative effect these products have is much greater than the results I heard from any one particular product or any one place I used them under. The only exception there was with my turntable but we shall discuss that later in the review. Yamamoto Sound Craft Audio Bases sounded wonderful in my audio system and I am very glad to have them there. Although once I placed them underneath components I missed their feel, smell (you have got to put them close to your nose to smell the wonderful natural wood scent) and looks. Shigeki Yamamoto communicated to me via email that only about 1/1000th of his companies business comes from America. That hopefully will change as more of us become aware of the many wonderful products that he has to offer. It certainly is a shame that large numbers of us in America have yet to discover all that he has to offer as the Japanese have so wisely done.

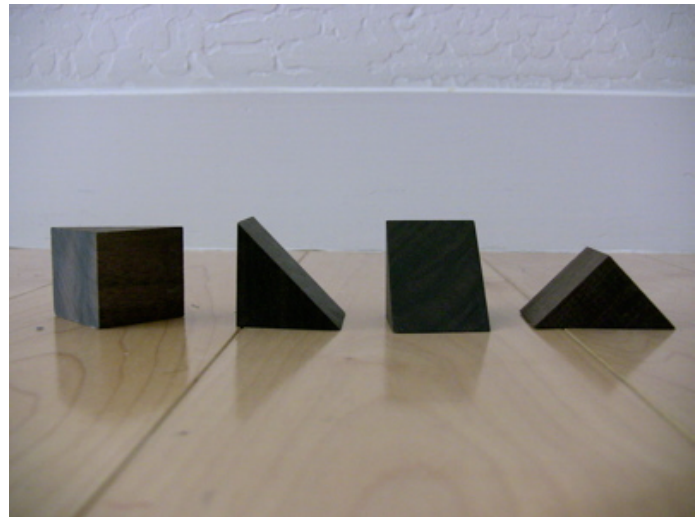


To start out with let us discuss the use of African ebony, or more appropriately named African Black Wood, used in the production of the PB-9 and PB-10's. The most famous use for this wood is in the production of woodwind instruments. It is primarily used in top quality clarinets and praised for its ability to produce beautiful tones. You may of course use these two separately, the PB-9 with its points to support equipment and the PB-10 under components with spiked feet (as it has holes to contain them). It is recommended by Yamamoto Sound Craft that for best results they be used together which is of course the way I tested them. Please note that the PB-20 AND PB-21 are the same, as the PB-9 and PB-10, only slightly larger to accommodate heavier components. They again were tested the same way, together as one unit. The PB-20, like the PB-9, had spikes and the PB-21 as did the PB-10 had a concave indentation. Their use is primarily recommended for source components, preamps and power amplifiers. All of the above products are round and circular in design.

I played excerpts from, The Ultimate Luther Vandross CD to first familiarize myself with the untreated sound of his music. After about two hours playing time I felt the system had been fully warmed up so I inserted the Yamamoto Audio Bases into the equation. I started by placing four PB-9 and PB-10's in combination, with the PB-9's on top, under my Samsung HD-841 universal CD/DVD player. The Samsung is very light in weight and therefore a good companion for the PB-9 and 10's. The nice thing about the Yamamoto Bases is that I knew right away that a change had taken place. I did not have to readjust my speaker position, (a lengthy process as they weight 180 lbs each) move my listening chair, try various CD's and records or change my amplifiers and preamps while straining to hear changes that I hoped would take place. Rather I could immediately feel that the pace and timing had improved as well as the overall impact of the music. I attributed this to the ability of the audio bases to remove unwanted noise from the playback thus allowing more of only the music to be heard. When I changed over to the PB-20 and PB-21's, doing the same testing I did not notice any further improvement but rather the same high level of involvement as with the PB-9 and PB-10's. That was of course to be expected as they are supposed to have the same effect, the difference being they are designed to work on heavier components where the 9 and 10's could not be placed.

Now we are going to move onto a uniquely shaped device in the PB-22, which unlike its predecessors, is made with Southeast Asian ebony and is triangular in shape. This triangular shape allows for its use with a variety of different angles beneath components in order to fine-tune the particular audio equipment on hand. Not only is it fun to play with, but also at \$12.50 for a set of four, it is appropriately priced for budget minded audiophiles. The PB-22 is recommended for use under amplifiers CD players and speakers. It was pointed out to me by their website that this wood is also used in the necks of guitars and violins being selected for the quality of the sound it produced. For the purpose of this review I tested a set of four under a floor standing speaker. Moving into my home theater set-up I replaced the cones under my center channel speaker with a set of four PB-22's. Immediately I noticed an improvement in the clarity of the Charlotte Church CD as I listened to her sing, "Just Wave Hello". Both the bass and midrange gave me the impression of added strength and clarity. The PB-22's did this not in a superficial way but rather quite naturally, as if that was the way it should have sounded from the beginning. The bass sounded clearer and tended to emanate out further from the speaker.

This definitely felt to me to be an improvement over listening with just the speaker on a bare floor or even when used with different manufacturers cones underneath.



Looking now to the PB-18, made from African ebony; it was different in that it is a square receptacle with a triad of ceramic contact pads underneath. Each PB-18 has indentations for use with metal spikes and are suggested for use with speaker stands and equipment racks. The ceramic contact pads are used to provide additional stability when used in contact with the floor. Again I placed these in my home theater set-up leaving them under the cones a normally use with my center channel speaker. Here I again listened to Charlotte Church sing, "Just Wave Hello". I felt the same positive result as with the PB-22's but even more so. Her voice was powerful and full while the chorus in the background had a smoother more detailed layering effect than when played without the PB-18's. Music in general was more pronounced with rather than without the bases. Instead of the music emanating from a localized point at the speaker it seemed to come from well outside of its immediate center. Like I said similar results were obtained with the PB-22 but the PB-18's did it just a little better for me. Both though smoothed out the music and made everything more enjoyable to listen through.

Lastly, we have two very similar isolation devices, the MGB-1 and the new MGB-2. The MGB-2 is for use with smaller components, as it is a miniaturized MGB-1, in both size and price. They are both designed on the principle of a floating apparatus with magnets of opposite polarities facing each other in the top and bottom of the bases. There is a Teflon tube connecting the bases and there are triads of ceramic contacts on both bases of the MGB-1, like those found on the PB-18. The MGB-2 however has no such ceramic contacts.

The MGB-1's bases are made of African Blackwood for the highest level of vibration control. This wood is also found in the construction of oboes, clarinets, bagpipes and wooden flutes. There is a PBS video called, "The Tree of Music" which talks about the African Blackwood's place in making woodwind instruments. Those of us who have heard the beautiful mellow tones coming from a clarinet solo on jazz pieces can attest to its role in making fine music. Each base

is recommended for use to support 2 to 10kg of weight. Therefore if you buy the three-piece set use it for 6-30kg products and the four-piece set for those weighing 8-40kgs. If your component is even heavier then the use of five or more MGB-1's will be needed. When using them on an unstable area, such as a thick carpet, Yamamoto Sound Craft also makes cherry tree laminate bases. These bases are labeled the B-45, B-60 and B-90 and vary in size to help accommodate your audio needs. Unfortunately I did not have any of these around for evaluation purposes. What I did though was to place four of them under my Oracle Delphi MK1 turntable and I am happy that I did. The most startling effect took place when I placed them there as I listened to record after record just to be sure I was correct. Finally settling on James Taylor's Walking Tall album I fondly played the song, "Let It All Fall Down" with James Taylor singing lead and getting a little help from his friends with the background vocals. His friends being the incredibly talented group of Carly Simon accompanied by both Paul and Linda McCartney. Here the MGB-1's seemed to erase all smear from my vinyl playback system as the music sounded clearer and more distinct with incredible silence between instruments during passages of no music. I could not ask for more from my turntable, as I believe the MGB-1's coaxed all they could out of it. For me this is where they would stay, if I had only one set with which to use, as it had such a great impact there.

The MGB-2 isolation devices differ from the MGB-1's in that they are composed of African ebony not African Blackwood. As mentioned earlier this wood is also used in the construction of woodwind instruments. They are designed to support a weight of between .9 and 3kg's each. According to Yamamoto Sound Craft, while the MGB-1 will not sound at its best with lighter weight components the MGB-2 feels right at home there. Again if four bases are used the product weight can be from 3.6 to 12 kg's in weight and with three-pieces 2.7 to 9kg's. As with the MBG-1 use of the B-45, B-60 or B-90 cherry tree laminate bases may be necessary when used on certain surfaces to increase stability. I placed them under my turntable just to see the differences that the MGB-2's would produce using the Oracle as my source reference. No question the turntable seemed to work well in combination with the MGB-2's but not to the same degree as I thought the MGB-1's did. Still if I were on a budget and this was in my price range I would not hesitate to place them there, as they are excellent. Feeling that the MGB-1's were to remain, at least for me in my review system, under my turntable I proceeded to place the MGB-2's under my Monarchy Audio SM-70 Pro power amplifier. The amp weights only 24 pounds and as such was an easy load for the MGB-2's to handle. The combination of putting the MGB-1's under the turntable and MGB-2's with my power amplifier was just right for me. Perhaps it was the synergy between the audio bases I do not know. I tried the MGB-2's under my CD transport as well and they did a great job there too. I must tell you that whether I placed them under my amp, turntable or CD transport the MGB-2's were a joy to have. However since the other audio bases were already in place throughout my system, and doing such a good job, I decided to leave the MGB-2's under the Monarchy amp. So little gear so many audio bases, what a wonderful problem to have. Actually that was not a problem just one of those joys of deciding where to put what and with which



equipment. The nice thing was that as my mood or the music changed I could always tweak things just a little by changing bases or angels of the base (with the PB-22), even going from using three to four or four to three audio bases. All of these Yamamoto Sound Craft products had a common theme in that they seemed to create a sense that the sound was less smeared thereby making the music so easy to listen to. Bass was always clearer, feeling more pronounced, as well as mid-range vocals that took on a more commanding sound to them.

Shigeki Yamamoto has done a superb job with his audio bases and I believe they have improved the sound of my review system to the point where I would not ask any audio base to do much more. These are very fine products that I felt had quite an impact on improving many aspects of the sound quality of my audio system as a whole. Rather than using one or two individual bases, from the fine collection of Yamamoto Sound Craft products, I would not hesitate to buy an entire setup for use under all my components. Viewed as a set, and considered by me as one component, I felt together they achieved excellent results as they fine-tuned my audio system taking it to even greater heights. It was as if I had assembled a large group of some of the world's finest musicians to play together in an orchestra rather than one or two musicians trying to perform an entire symphony alone.

For those on a budget the PB-22's wins my award for Yamamoto audio bases, as they are only \$12.50 for a set of four, which is about \$3.13 each. If weight did not become an issue then I could see outfitting an entire system based on this product alone being a quite satisfying experience. If I could spend a little more though I would not hesitate to purchase some PB-18's at \$65 for a set of four. They are more costly but the slight improvement was worth it for me. Either way I would feel I came out a winner, owning either the PB-18's or the PB-22's as both are fine products. With the PB-9 and PB-10 versus the PB-20 and PB-21 the only choice here would be the weight of the equipment used as the determining factor in which one to purchase. Again I would use both coupled together as recommended by Yamamoto Sound Craft rather than separate them. Finally moving onto the newest edition to the group, the MGB-2, this is a superb device and a big step up from the previously mentioned items. It has found a home under my amplifier, as the amp is just small enough to be used with the MGB-2. This was a tough choice though as it also sounded superb under my transport and turntable. I felt that the MGB-2s only competitor was the MGB-1, which I consider Yamamoto Sound Crafts ultimate audio base. Never has my turntable sounded so relaxed, yet detailed, as when used with four MGB-1's. The difference it made within my system was anything but subtle and I was extremely pleased to have it there.

In summation these truly are inexpensive devices that deliver the real goods while allowing you the option to experiment with them in so many different ways. The review ended with me still trying countless different combinations and enjoying every moment of the process. The interesting and most wonderful part of all this is that there are more Yamamoto products out there for testing. Brian Bowdle of Venus HiFi, the North American Importer for Yamamoto Sound Craft, was a great help in advising me how to set-up the various Yamamoto products. You may view these audio bases/isolation devices when visiting his website at <http://www.venushifi.com/companies/yamamosoundcraft.shtml>. Talking to him on the phone was a pleasure as he was both enthusiastic and knowledgeable as he explained that the dense woods help make these products less prone to resonance. One thing that particularly caught my eye was the beautiful wood audio racks and speaker stands. During your visit to the website please also take note of the Yamamoto amps and preamps as they are visually stunning with their use of real wood trim which houses what I understand are world class audio products. It is a shame that almost all of Yamamoto-Son's sales are to people living in Japan and I hope this will change very soon. I would like to take a moment to thank Shigeki Yamamoto for making such fine audio bases, and at reasonable prices, available to those of us throughout the world. This certainly is a job well done.

The Listening Environment:

As for my listening room, I have so far keep it quite simple as far as any acoustic modifications are concerned. My wife has allowed me to take over our living room being that the only non-audiophile guests we have go to other areas of our house. Their visits usually center on the family room, dining area, backyard (when we barbecue) or home entertainment room for movies. She is not so keen however on any acoustic looking invaders entering our house at this time. The listening room is 18 feet 8 inch long by 13 feet wide. The room's cathedral ceiling starts at 8' high then slopes upward to 13 feet at its peak in the middle. Flooring is a soft hardwood covering with an oriental rug placed dead center in between (but not under) the listener and the audio system. There are no doors that open or shut into other rooms also there are two large openings one facing the speakers and the other to its side and slightly in front of the right speaker. As for my audio equipment it is tucked nicely inside of a Cherry Synergy Twin S30 Salamander audio rack.

Review equipment:

Monarchy Audio SM-70 Pro Amp
 Oracle Delphi Mk I turntable with custom made interconnects
 Grace 707 tonearm with Denon 301 II MC cartridge
 Whest PhonoStage.20 + MsU.20 power supply
 Sony DVP-S7700 CD/DVD Player (used as transport only)
 Monarchy Audio Dual 20-Bit D/A Converter
 Samsung DVD- HD-841 Up-Converting Universal Player
 Legacy Focus 20/20 speakers, Klipsch Klipschorn speakers
 PS Audio UPC-200 Power Center
 PS Audio Power Port Receptacle
 Blue Circle BC86 MKIII power line pillows (2)
 PS Audio Transcendence Silver interconnects
 Anti-Cable speaker wire 10 foot pair, Anti-Jumpers for Legacy speakers
 Anti-Digital Interconnect single-shielded 1.5 meters in length
 Monarchy Audio AC-1 power cord one 6 foot length (2)
 Tek Line PC-8 Signature Power Cords (2) 6 foot lengths
 Mr-Cable Musician power cord 9 foot length
 PS Audio Lab Cable II power cord 3-foot length
 Cherry Synergy Twin S30 Salamander audio rack
 Copyright 2008 Affordable\$\$Audio. All Rights Reserved.