

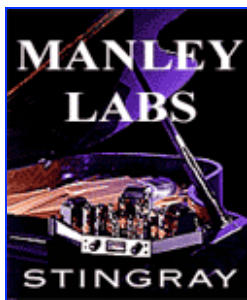


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Enjoy the Music.com

# John Bau Interview Spica Loudspeaker Fever

by Oswaldo Martinez



Twelve years ago when I was involved in high-end audio sales I was introduced to a wondrous little loudspeaker, a product that redefined what was sonically possible in an affordable loudspeaker design.



Spica TC-60

These magical reproducers threw an immense and layered soundstage that was not only large in size, specially when one considers their relative diminutive size, but far wider and deeper than many "money-no-object" designs of the day. Imaging was rock solid and with a midrange reproduction that was (is) to die for. And all this, while maintaining an utmost sense of sheer musicality. Oh yeah, they retailed for \*only\* \$550.00 buckaroos. Needless to say, I was hooked.



This unassuming wondrous little speaker system was the brainchild of loudspeaker designer 'extraordinaire' John Bau and it was the venerable Spica TC-50.

To date, I have owned three of his designs; TC-50's, their replacement -- TC-60's, and as of late, the floor-standing flagship model Angelus or Angeli -- or how a lovingly dubbed them many years ago -- The Flying Nuns! (look at their picture and you'll see why!) :-)

In any event, (and to make a long story short), in the mid 90's Spica was bought by electronics giant Parasound and eventually \*and so very regretfully\* shut down as the marketplace leaned ever more towards the home theater experience and away from high quality two-channel audio.

Regardless, in the years since Spica's demise music lovers around the world (as well as industry insiders) have wondered what ever became of the man behind the company that brought us such beloved music reproduction instruments - John Bau.

But now, and only through this exclusive Enjoy the Music.com interview, John Bau answers some of the questions that everyone wondered about for so many years.

OM: I have owned TC50's, still own TC60's (TC50's on Tabasco! :o) ) and have recently acquired an Angelus pair from an old acquaintance. It brought back such fond memories! I'm crossing them over at 100hz with a Janis System 3a sub. VERY NICE!

JB: Sounds like a nice combo. With their gentle roll off on the low end, the Angeli should mate well with subs. The TC-60 is still my favorite, but mating with subs isn't that great due to the ported design.

OM: Man! If you only knew how many people I have blown away with my TC60's or how many music lovers I turned into happy Spica owners!!! \*And this is in the last five years now(!)\* well after the company was shut down by Parasound (was it them?).

JB: Yes, it was them.

OM: Are you any longer involved in the audio biz in anyway, shape, or form?

JB: Only incidentally. My company is called Precision Audio Services, but primary I deal in used electronic test equipment. I also build some custom microphone preamps, do the occasional hotrodding of recording gear, and a little bit of live recording (great recordings of marginal local ensembles...!)

OM: If not yet, do you have any plans to get back into it? (so many people wonder about this -- inquiring minds want to know) :)

JB: No, those days are gone - I lost interest once audio became a video accessory.



**Angelus 1**

OM: Could you provide me with any Angelus specs?

Unfortunately I've purchased them used without any boxes nor manuals and I was curious as its specs and brand/type of drivers it uses (you never know if I may need to replace them sometime).

JB: I'm going to have to do some digging for this. I didn't keep any manuals, etc. Engineering data is buried in some box somewhere in the garage... Except for the SC-50 and TC-60, all our drivers were made by Audax of France (Polydax in the US). The Angelus and TC-50 woofers were discontinued long ago, and are no longer available and no equivalent known - both were quite unique. Parasound sold the remaining stock of TC-50 replacement woofers to someone in Indonesia shortly after they closed us up, probably to make a run of TC-50 knockoffs. I do still have some replacement diaphragms for some of the tweeters, tho.

OM: Any recommendations for upgrades or modifications for any one of your designs?

JB: For TC-50 and Angelus; replacement of the electrolytic caps with film types will help (they start going south after a decade or so anyway). Exact design values should be used (not the values printed on the parts; we batched all our components to better than 0.1% groups, and paralleled them to achieve exact values). I'd have to dig up the schematics to find the target values. Conversion to bi-wiring would help as well. That requires some ground trace mods to the xover, though. Maybe some additional bracing between back and baffle would help too. I don't recommend replacing the inductors, as aircore types would have to be humongous to achieve the same high Q of ours, and the resistor values in the circuit are all dependent on the residual resistance of the coils. Besides, all the coils and resistors are non-ferrous and quite linear within the speakers' power ratings.

OM: What kind of music/equipment did you use for your reference system to voice your products?

JB: I didn't "voice" my designs to any reference system. All designs were fresh from the ground up, and the only "references" were the transfer function target

responses derived by my computer modeling. Little or no tweaking was done once each subsystem was optimized. We did have a variety of amplifiers, etc. around but never had a competitor's speakers in house for "sonic cloning." Someone was propagating the rumor that I used Quads for voicing, but it's not true; the only time I ever listened to Quads was at a trade show. Everything was designed by intentional engineering. The computer modeling was thorough enough that anything that would even come close was bound to sound good...! My only regret is that I never pursued a design capable of higher SPL's. But at the time, drivers that could do that AND meet my other requirements simply didn't exist at reasonable cost.

OM: Do you have any other speaker designs in the works (i.e. in your head?)

JB: There were a couple designs that I did for Parasound at the end that never were produced: one that was to come in at the ol' TC-50 price point; a coaxial center channel speaker; a speaker wire design which I call "tri-wire" which embodies what bi-wiring is supposed to be without creating more problems; and there was a resonance-free helical transmission line subwoofer that never saw daylight. Besides that, my imagination isn't wandering in that direction anymore.

O.M: Mr. Bau, I have to be honest with you, there's still a huge following of your designs.

JB: Yes, there still seems to be some happy and loyal fans out there... always gives me a warm feeling.

OM: It would be great to find out if you are considering reviving Spica if legally possible, of course.

JB: Not a chance... I've had several offers to do so, but politely declined. My main interest was pursuing two-channel holography at a reasonable cost, and there's simply not a market for that anymore. Besides, I no longer have the facilities to do proper acoustic testing, as I sold my old lab building - a large measurement room is essential.

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