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STEVE HUTT

R&D MANAGER, EIGHTEEN SOUND

How did your career in the audio industry begin?

I started a small personal service sound company to supplement a meager musician's income. I became enamored with point source systems, but since none of the drivers accessible to me were powerful enough in a 30-litre box I figured I'd build my own. Beta testing on live gigs for years, my rental systems used drivers I designed. It was great fun and eventually I had a small loudspeaker manufacturing company, selling systems for installs all over the world.

Has audio been a lifelong passion?

I think I leaned into the audio industry rather than falling into it. I was driven by that loudspeaker size versus performance conundrum and developed a 'need to know'. I set out on a quest and I'm still on it.

What is the best thing about working in audio?

Diversity. There are different segments of audio... You have content creation technologies and on the playback side you have consumer, automotive, OEM and pro. Each is a distinct market with different technology expectations and requirements; they all have real engineers and physicists, musicians and sound guys. After my automotive stint I consulted in consumer and worked with suppliers in Asia. Pro is where the santoprene hits the road and real contributions are respected. I'm very happy to be back in pro but generally, the best thing about working in audio is diversity.

Tell me more about your role at Eighteen Sound?

My main R&D role is to manage the 'D', which is simple enough. Just take the project roadmap and organise the resources to make the development happen on schedule. The fun part is the 'R', we're investing heavily in new FEA and measurement tools and expanding lab space with a new anechoic chamber that will elevate our engineering rigor.

What makes Eighteen Sound different?

Fearlessness. Since the beginning, we've built loudspeakers as good as they get with true value. What sets us apart is a willingness to lead. We've just introduced a new coax motor topology with four-inch low frequency voice-coil and a four-inch compression
driver that sets a new performance bar in this category.

How has the release of the ND4015Be four-inch Beryllium diaphragm driver pushed Eighteen Sound forward?

Diaphragm materials have a profound influence on the sound of loudspeakers, particularly mids and highs. Beryllium has properties that make it very effective in compression drivers but it's not just the material, it's how it is designed into the assembly, and then how production processes manage consistency. The market response to this driver has been so amazing we've followed with a three-inch beryllium driver and of course, we are developing other interesting driver materials.

Where would you like to see technology take the sector?

'More from less' is the true path forward. Not just to be green with a smaller footprint including truckload, but it is important for quality of sound. One way to get there is to improve coupling between the loudspeakers and electronics. Though we don't manufacture electronics, this is a philosophy and opportunity that we are embracing by designing for the amplifier-loudspeaker union. Our latest foray in this direction is our iD Series. Going forward the Eighteen Sound technology roadmap carves out a path that continues to serve traditional interests while blazing an innovation trail where our target is not blindly bound to be a 'status-quo' transducer, but focuses solutions on the preferred outcome - sound in air.

Do you have any secret passions?

It would be fun to spend more time creating music. I haven't really taken advantage of the digital recording tools that are so prevalent but the thought lingers in the back of my mind. How hard can it be?

What are the three things you can't live without?

Family, a piano and humour.

Tell me something about yourself that might surprise people?

I am not very tall.