Swank and glamour are no-gos in Northern Europe. But the Scandinavians really know how to party. So it comes as no surprise if high-end components bear the name of a rock band – and hence that of a philosopher as well.
It was one of those weekends that are just right for work: The weather was so lousy that you never got the feeling to miss something. So I’d rather be going for this picture-perfect combo. But soon a first obstacle appeared: What if absolutely no associations with the product and its maker would come up? All the while I had to think solely of the philosopher Hegel.

And since googling for Hegel also revealed me more interesting facts about the man than the brand, a kinky but indeed interesting approach came to my mind: How would Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel have probably analysed his audiophile namesakes which, apart from the sheer size of the power amplifier, present themselves as rather inconspicuous? But I don’t have a clue if this route to a scientific attitude will lead to absolute knowledge as with Hegel or just end up in absolute chaos. Well, let’s see ...

The morning after: The crackpot idea has been buried, instead my head is spinning. Hegel, the philosopher, is hard to understand. Since my relationship with a girl who studied social education over ten years ago I hadn’t been in touch with such a strong stuff. Prudently I renounced a visit to the Hegel house in Stuttgart.

But then I finally got the eagerly anticipated input from the Scandinavians. I was amazed to learn why Hegel is named Hegel and how the company which is inseparably linked to live music came into being. The story is so fancy and exciting that I need to tell it to you in detail on page 75. Only that much: Hegel was a band and the proto amplifier a stage amp. Now I was no longer surprised at my sonic impression. But more on this later.

At the Hegel company value is placed on the statement that they don’t simply offer pre and power amplifiers in line with some popular recipe. Rather do the Norwegians follow a markedly autonomous concept. In the case of the P30 preamp the individual approach lies in the division of the circuit into two entirely separate blocks: The first preamp block contains a digitally controlled volume control with a subsequent voltage gain. The second unit takes care of the current gain which, due to its low-impedance RCA and XLR outputs, enables the P30 to easily handle long cables.

The physical volume control merely routes the requested level to a network of gigahertz-fast MOS transistors which send the signal through a network of resistors to produce the desired attenuation.

All in all, on its way through the P30 the music signal hence passes only two transistors and between one and three resistors. For the first time the “Sound Engine” technology, which we know from the power amps, is used as an alternative to negative feedback in the output stage of a preamp. Like all Hegel preamps the P30 uses separate power supplies behind the common transformer for the left and right channels to keep crosstalk as low as possible.

For a high dynamic range the Norwegians used balanced designs for all circuits between input and output. With the supplied RC2 remote control the user cannot only adjust the volume level, but also switch between inputs. The P30 offers both RCA and XLR connections. Inside a sophisticated power supply with a toroidal mains transformer and a lush armada of electrolytic caps is clustered next to

Hegel founder Bent Holter:

"In view of the financial crisis of 2008 I felt the time had come for Hegel to stand up and conquer the world."
the electronics with its discrete output stage. The overall finish of the two components is no doubt convincing, but gives hardware fetishists no reason to go down on their knees for worship.

In real life, however, the H4ASE power amplifier looks much more majestic than on photographs. Inside the amplifier, which is 21 cm (8 ¼”) high and over 50 cm (20”) deep, a mighty 2400 VA toroidal transformer provides a visual impact. Yet the particular thing about this 45 kg stereo power amp lies hidden in the Sound Engine concept that was patented by head developer Bent Holter. It uses a fast reacting detector for each single power transistor to generate and apply very precisely dosed correction signals right to the individual output stage with its high energy demand.

But at least the encounter with the preamp had a very silent quality at first. Upon turn-on the P30 fell into a quiescent state. A perceived eternity of several minutes elapsed until the electronics reached its operating temperature and the relays activated the output. Not much slower does the night-loving author of these lines pick up pace in the morning, either, when he’s given a start by some early riser over the phone. At least the preamp wasn’t in such a grumpy mood after awakening like me. During the first minutes after getting up, my voice always tends to sound a bit like Tom Waits. But the amplifying colleague needs some warm-up time, too: At the beginning of the listening check the H4A was totally silent now and left the sound transformation to the loudspeakers.

In practice this doesn’t matter anyway: With its explosive sound characteristic the H4A seduces the listener into an audio oil painting. The focus almost immediately centered on the toroidal mains transformer, occupying a large part of the housing. The volume is electronically controlled.

Quality before quantity: Behind the centre shadow we see the third foot which is typical of Hegel and ensures a safe ground contact.
When in the late 1980s some students in the remote Norwegian city of Trondheim form a thin Lizzy cover band, it’s rarely to make musical history. Strangely enough that the performance of the microelectronics engineer Bent Holter and his friends reached cult status in the Norwegian “Samfundet” scene. But things got even better: Today the name of the Hegel band decorates the otherwise very plain front panels of the amplifiers from Norway which are valued by insiders from all over the world.

Not only do they owe their name to the group, but their existence as well. Because the students needed new stage amps, yet were lacking the necessary wherewithal, Bent Holter offered to build his own which he named Hegel Audio. Rather a rock band I was adoring when I last enjoyed music so much.

Hegel Studies

If a band can’t afford to buy the new desperately needed stage amplifiers, this is usually the end. In the case of talented musician, bandleader and electronics engineer Bent Holter it was the onset of an unprecedented career.

By: Stefan Schickedanz

Our band Hegel needed new stage amps, but couldn’t afford to buy any. So I built my own.

When the students needed new stage amps, yet were lacking the necessary wherewithal, Bent Holter offered to build his own which he named Hegel Audio. He used one of the first computers for this purpose while a negative feedback circuit, which he had in his project which was ripe: “Hegel was supposed to get started and conquer the world.” So he hired more engineers and skilled sales force, which brought the company a considerable growth. Apart from the amplifiers, Hegel’s reputation is based today on excellent DACs.