

magico

QPods

as reviewed by Greg Weaver



From the Beginning...

Ever since my first run-in with now omnipresent isolation products, and the undeniable positive effects they can contribute to any fine audio system, I've been on board—and in a BIG way. I can't recall now, it's approaching three decades ago, which product came to my attention first in the summer of 1983, the Sorbothane™ footed Mission Isoplat or Steve McCormack's machined aluminum TipToes... both offered for enhancing the performance of your chosen turntable.

Without doubt, it was the latter trend setting, and in short order, *heavily* copied, TipToes that ushered in the real dawn and eventual reign of isolation devices/footers. Over the years, I've used many such devices, too many to recount, ranging from ridiculously affordable and excellent performing Vibrapods from Sam Kennard, to Alvin Lloyd's stirring materials sciences engineering achievement, the Grand Prix Audio APEX footers.



My original set of Tip Toes

I've been very impressed with the Magico Q series products I've been exposed to, and my role as a Judge for the CES annual High Performance Audio Innovations and Engineering Awards over the last four years has given me several opportunities to spend some time speaking with Alon Wolf. During one of these conversations, I came to learn that an isolation device had been developed coincident with the development of the award winning Q series of loudspeakers. So, when Alon Wolf and Irv Gross let me know that the new QPods were ready for prime time, I was ready to go and only too happy to be the first to get to experience these new devices in my system.

Infinite Space

If you've ever bought a Shure PA grade microphone, you'll be familiar with the sturdy and functional packaging in which the new Magico QPods ship. Safeguarded inside a black plastic clamshell case bearing the Magico name with their stylized M immediately above, two latches hold the two halves firmly together when closed, and open easily with a slight snap up and forward.

Once opened, the troika of QPods are found secured to a metal retaining plate, engraved with the words "Magico QPods," the serial number for the set (mine bore the number 00045), and the letters USA. This heavy mounting plate is wedged firmly inside the form-fitted, sturdy, protective dark gray foam, along with a large 3M microfiber polishing cloth. The top of the clamshell case is form fitted with similar dark gray egg-carton shaped sturdy foam.

Standing just one and one half inch tall, at two inches in diameter, they are a composite of layers of varying thicknesses and materials. The bottommost layer is a thin, black half-inch tall metal cylindrical section.

Immediately above is an eighth inch gap that reveals a copper-colored disc one-sixteenth inch tall, and just one and seven-eighths inch in diameter. Its smaller diameter creates the sixteenth inch recess between the bottommost black metal slice, and a second, five sixteenths inch tall black section sitting just above. This second black section discloses the commencing of the subtle sweep toward the conical top of the multi-composite sandwich. Sitting atop that second black slice is a burnished silver section that comprises the balance of the acute cone. In there somewhere are two blue rubbery discs that are only barely visible to the outside observer, both minimally below the bright copper disk or through the threaded receiver on their bottom.



As gorgeous to look at as they turned out to be effective at performing, each QPod has a threaded receiving hole in the center of its base, the very one that allows you to see the internal blue material. This allows them each to screw securely to three very short threaded bots protruding from the top of the black metal plate in the shipping case, thus assuring that there can be no shifting during shipment. They simply cannot be inadvertently dislodged, no matter how far they may travel, regardless of any vibration, shaking, jostling, or careless handling to which they might be subjected. Simple, no doubt, yet elegantly effective to my way of thinking.

As of this writing, there really isn't any detailed information available from Irv, Alon, or at the website. Here is what little is posted at the Magico site.

"Throughout the development of the Q Platform numerous advances in the area of resonance management were made. Originally developed for internal R&D, Magico is introducing the QPods to maximize front-end system performance. The pods themselves are CNC-turned and milled from hardened stainless steel, oxygen-

free copper, and hard black-anodized aircraft-grade aluminum. These materials create the constraining layers for the damping material that is alternately clamped between to create a single traverse-dissipating unit, which we call the QPod. Vibration wave propagation through the floor, stands, and the equipment itself is converted into heat energy through the side-to-side movement (known as "shear deformation") within each layer of the pod. By adding a multi-leveled constraining layer mechanism to equipment standoffs, electrical and mechanical vibration-induced artifacts are acutely reduced, ultimately resulting in marked improvement to signal fidelity."



Once they arrived, I was understandably eager to get these striking-looking isolating footers into play. They replaced a trio of what many would consider an exceptional and highly effective isolation coupling system from Grand Prix Audio. The [Apex](#) footers take a somewhat different approach, employing hand-laminated carbon composites for the outer skin and core/base that are high-pressure cured in a dedicated vacuum environment. These structural composite elements are then decoupled using a proprietary hi-tech polymer, one that GPA co-developed with aerospace applications and materials sciences engineers. Topped with either a steel (or an optional Silicone Nitride—which I'm using) ball-bearing tip, the Apex footers can be used as traditional component footer, or become the floor-to-column interface of any of the Grand Prix Audio equipment isolation support systems.

I employ two sets of the GPA Apex Footers, one under the three upright columns of my [Monaco Modular](#) component stand that supports my 'table, phono stage, tubed preamplifier, and optical disc player, and a second set under my optical disc player. I also use several of their [Formula](#) shelves, one under my 'table and one under my tubed preamplifier. The entire isolation system is comprised of three stands in all, one holding all my components and one for each of my monoblock amplifiers, and retails for just shy of \$15K. If you are not familiar with this system, you really should be. It is the most effective overall systemic approach I've yet experienced.

Knife Edge

That said, the sonic result of replacing the \$800/set of three GPA Apex footers under my optical disc player with the \$1310 troika of Magico QPods was, well, *dramatically* apparent! The first thing that practically leapt out at me is something that I would have to describe as an overwhelming sense of silence or calm. Prior to their insertion, the background fabric generated by my optical universal disc player had been remarkably quiet, affording a dense, dark, and unobtrusive background from which all music could emanate.



With the QPods taking their place, the degree of this backdrop of "darkness" was further, and dramatically so, diminished; the effect seemed magnified to a level of stark apparentness by the newly found and overwhelmingly remarkable background silence. Prior to their arrival, I honestly thought I had found the threshold. With the Magico QPods in place, I was hearing less "background" than ever, and in fact, a darkness that was considerably below what I thought could be wrought from my optical disc player!

Bass lines, while no deeper, were more vividly defined and delineated, with more apparent attack, and heightened definition of timbre and pitch.

Upper midrange through the lower treble region was deliciously more resolute. Timber was now somewhat richer and more faithful, with more perceptible bloom and body, affording a more luxuriant tonal texture as well.

Treble was breathtakingly resolute. Not overly detailed, but readily apparent, eminently focused, and plainly, clearly defined. Even on recordings on which I had assumed that cymbal mic'ing had perhaps been slighted, given their "murky" presentation, the newfound clarity was downright magical.

Soundstaging and imaging are markedly improved as well, with instrumental outlines being more clearly defined and instrumental size and location more accurately portrayed.

As significant an improvement as they wrought beneath my optical disc player, I couldn't wait to move them under my preamplifier, assuming that I might enjoy the benefit of their profoundly apparent improvements in clarity, focus, and naturalness applied to my entire system, and not merely the optical disc player.

Well, that move was well rewarded. In some ways, the resultant affects while under my tubed (including rectification) preamp were even more compelling. All of the above-mentioned attributes carried through, albeit to somewhat differing degrees. What was immediately most compelling, once again, was the profound and utter calm from which all music now emanated.



With this positioning, all sources now enjoyed a heightened degree of broadband musical clarity, sparking timbral truthfulness, enhanced resolve, pinpoint focus, as well as the most realistic and honest sized instrumental voices I've ever experienced from my system, and that has long been one of its strong suits. Music now flowed in an unimpeded, continuous, undeniably natural *stream*, more effortlessly than I've ever experienced from my system prior to their insertion.

The bloom of wooden instrumental bodies, from double bass to violin to acoustic guitar to grand piano, was much more compelling and apparent. That unmistakable "rasp" of the catgut of a bow exciting a string into motion was visceral, recording permitting. Further, the rhythmic components of the musical gestalt were somehow significantly facilitated, revealing previously undiscovered drive, released in a more unfettered and compelling manner.

Everything, from complex, driving arrangements to simple solo instrumentals, was now presented with a newfound degree of bloom, clarity, focus, and rhythmic coherence that was intoxicating. My already very engaging and musical system had taken a pronounced and stirring step closer to the musical reality that I've invested all this time and money chasing. Yeah, I'm impressed.

Take a Pebble

What settled on me after only a short time living with these remarkable devices is that they don't contribute or impart anything *to* the music. Their insertion is relevant not because they inject or impart a pleasant "seasoning" upon or to the musical flavor. Their contribution to the music seems to be a wholly subtractive process.

While that may seem an almost obvious conclusion on the surface, my experiences have proven that it is not the case with *all* such devices. Many lesser devices, while offering some degree of decreased harmonic interaction, may only have a significant clarifying effect on a particular bandwidth; worse, some can introduce their own form of sympathetic vibratory artifacts. While they clearly offer a noticeable change in the musical voice of the device to which they are applied, it is not *necessarily* a significantly more correct sonic result. In effect, the change some of these devices afford may be a result of a different *combination* of resonances,

simply a product of merely shifting the affected bands to a different range, or worse, combining their own influences with those of the device in question.

The QPods seem to work as closely to the fabled mechanical diode as any such device I've yet heard; they appear to be a one-way bridge draining unwanted internal vibrations *from* the isolated device, yet effectively preventing the reintroduction of external vibrations from crossing that bridge back into the isolated device.

Hoedown

Don't think of QPods as a magical band-aide to whisk away all the flaws and problems that may be rampant in an ill-conceived or haphazardly assembled system. They were not created to fix all your sonic woes.

What they offer is a way to refine and enhance an already well thought out and synergistic music (or video?) system by stripping away mechanically induced darkness, coloration, exaggeration, harmonics, and resonances. They are analogous to a mechanical magic wand that meticulously extracts vibrational and harmonic artifacts that slur, compound, or distort musical timber; artifacts that, left unaddressed, combine with the fundamental truths your system works so hard to accurately regenerate, conspiring to hide the musical truth, to camouflage the music, and to contaminate its clarity, drive, and naturalness.

To paraphrase the inimitable Bob Zimmerman, "The times, they sure have changed." From humble beginnings, heralded by gentleman genius Steve McCormack's unassuming but effective devices fabricated from a monolithic material shaped in a simple geometric solid shape, Magico's QPods have advanced the art by utilizing constrained layering of a number of remarkably engineered products applied in a variety of complex and compound shapes.

In the QPods, Magico has given the world an exceptionally well-designed device that offers that final "nudge" to an already fine system. They are extremely well conceived, meticulously engineered and executed, and unrelentingly effective. The last single item I added to my system that wrought such a wholesale and advantageous clarifying effect was the remarkable Audience adeptResponse 12-TS, a device that sells for over \$8000. If you have a system that seems to be just on the brink of awe-inspiring, I strongly recommend the Magico™ QPods and their transforming performance. I've asked Irv and Alon to send me an invoice! **Greg Weaver**

Retail: 3-pack - \$1,310, 4-pack - \$1,680

Magico

Berkeley, CA

TEL: 510. 649. 9700

web address: www.magico.net

GREG WEAVER'S SYSTEM

LOUDSPEAKERS

Von Schweikert Audio VR-5 Anniversary, Escalante Designs Fremont, Acoustic Zen Technologies Adagio, Buggtussel Somu, Buggtussel Circa.

ELECTRONICS

ModWright SWL 9.0 SE with Tung-Sol upgrade, Channel Islands Audio VPP-1 (passive) preamplifiers. Channel Islands Audio D●200 Monoblocks (Class D), Channel Islands Audio VMB●1 Monoblocks (gain-clone). DSA Phono ONE, ModWright SWP 9.0SE, Monolithic Sound PS-2 with HC-1 supply, and Channel Islands Audio VPP-1 with VAC-1 Supply phonestages.

SOURCES

Redpoint Audio Design Model D, Oracle Delphi Mk III/with Mk V suspension and other mods (including sapphire thrust plate), Tri-Planar Mk VII Precision arm, Origin Live Silver 250 Arm, Transfiguration Temper V, Clearaudio Virtuoso Mk II, Denon 103-D/with vdHul Mods, McCormack UDP-1 Deluxe.

CABLES

Von Schweikert Master Built Signature bi-wire speaker cables, Audience Au24-e speaker cables, Stealth Hybrid MLT and Acoustic Zen Hologram II speaker cables. Stealth Indra, Stealth Nanofiber, Stealth PGS, Audience Au24-e interconnects, Acoustic Zen Absolute, and Acoustic Zen Silver Reverence II interconnects. Acoustic Zen Absolute and Gargantua II power cables, Audience powerChords.

ACCESSORIES

Grand Prix Audio Monaco Modular Isolation System equipment stand. Formula Shelf, Apex Footers, Audience adeptResponse aR-12-T, Furutech eTP-80, Monster Cable HTS 800, Quantum Products, Inc. Symphony Pro's for power conditioning. Aorios 1.2 MIB, Extreme Phono Solid State Stylus Cleaner, VPI HQ-16.5, Nitty Gritty Mini-Pro, Audio Intelligent Vinyl Solutions, Buggtussel Vinyl-Zime, Disc Dr. Miracle Record Cleaner and Quick Wash, Xtreme AV Quicksilver Gold, KAB phono Tools, AudioQuest DM-100 demagnetizer, CornerTunes, Furutech RD-2 demagnetizer, Digital Systems & Solutions UltraBit Platinum and Gold, Audience Auric Illuminator, and Xtrem AV Liquid Resolution.