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Blackie Pagano excerpt

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We'll spare you the blow-by-blow, but one thing stood out: Halfway through the afternoon, when attendees had already heard at least a half a dozen different amps, a song by Beck began to play through the big demo speakers and all conversation stopped. You could see it on everyone's faces: This was right. This was music. This towered over everything we'd heard until then (or would hear for the rest of the day).

What overcame this loft full of goateed, black-leather-jacketed audio guys? A push-pull tube amp designed and made by Blackie Pagano, noted amp guru and J.C.'s cohost. And it was hung by a wire, suspended from the ceiling (I don't know why).

A few minutes later, Blackie's amp had me on the edge of my folding chair, enraptured by a Tom Waits song — and I hate Tom Waits (or at least I thought I did). It was more than just impressive — it was fun to be reminded all over again how overwhelming truly great music reproduction can be, even when you think you've OD'd on tubes and cones.

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