



Howard Bardach, the Audio Specialist.

# A Sound All His Own

An interview with  
The Audio Specialist:  
Howard Bardach

BY AMY LYONS

**H**oward Bardach fell in love with sound at an early age. As a kid, he tried his hand at various musical instruments but he says, "I never had the patience for all the rehearsing." Neither string strumming nor hi-hat hitting stuck with Bardach, but his sense of patience surfaced elsewhere, in the often-unstable world of small business ownership. After high school, he went straight to Los Angeles Trade Technical College and received his C.E.T. certification from the International Society of Certified Electronic Technicians. For more than three decades, Bardach has

owned The Audio Specialist, a store situated on a posh patch of real estate along Ventura Boulevard in Studio City.

The small outfit is packed to the brim with all manner of audio and video components, from turntables and amplifiers to speakers. Bardach prides himself on personalized service, repairing and restoring quality components and professional equipment.

And it seems that a commitment to producing hi fidelity sounds runs in the Bardach family. Sigmund Bardach,

Howard's father, was an audiophile and electronic engineer who worked for the radio and audio manufacturer, David Bogen Company in New Jersey, later landing in the San Fernando Valley as head of the only West Coast warranty department of Harman/Kardon.

Thus, Howard proudly walks in his father's footsteps as a seeker of crisp, superior sound. While the apple doesn't fall too far from

the tree, over the years Howard has faced challenges in sound production of which his father likely never dreamed. He also took to the airwaves in the late 1980s, appearing as a regular on the KPFK's "In Fidelity," giving maintenance and technology tips on home entertainment components and all things sonic.

*Record Collector News* sat down with Bardach recently to discuss the ins and outs of his thirty-year devotion to audio.

**RCN:** Did you get into this business because of your father's influence?

**HB:** I love music and I love electronics. Those are the two main things that drove me to open my business, and my father's influence helped. I was very focused, but rehearsing on instruments just wasn't for me. I knew early on I wanted to go to business school and start my own business. But at the same time, while I loved electronics, I didn't want to just

**"When you look at vinyl, some people have said it's on it's way out, but they have made more advances in the recording chain and the playback chain than ever."**

be that electronics nerd, so I kept my love of music in the mix. My father was an avid music lover also, and I'm grateful that he passed that down to me. Music was always being played in our home when I was growing up.

**RCN:** What kinds of music did your dad like?

**HB:** Number one for him was classical. He was from Vienna, Austria, so he was born in the capitol of classical music. He also liked jazz.

**RCN:** Are your musical tastes the same as your father's?

**HB:** I have a more diversified taste, but I'm really grateful to my dad for always having classical music on in the house. I like classical, jazz and good old rock 'n roll from Humble Pie to Led Zeppelin to Buffalo Springfield. My favorite is Crosby, Stills & Nash. Music is a really good addiction and a therapeutic one.

**RCN:** Where did you start your business?

**HB:** I started in my parents' garage in North Hollywood. I was given advice by a very successful person in the audio business who advised against starting my business out of a storefront. I was 21, I had no credit...so I started in my parents' garage and I worked there until 1982. In 1982 I moved to an office building on Laurel Canyon near Victory, across the street from the old Lamplighter. In 1989, I moved to a storefront on Tujunga right down the street from Vitello's restaurant. After the Northridge earthquake, I was looking for new space. I never thought in my wildest dreams that I'd end up on Ventura Boulevard. I have been here since 1995 and it's like a dream come true.

**RCN:** People come to you to buy equipment, get equipment repaired...

**HB:** A lot of them are also coming to me for advice after they have been screwed by eBay. I also get very young people who want to get educated; they don't know what a record player is but they want one, or they think they can just hook it up to their receiver and it will just start working. They think it's just like an iPod. But when you are interfacing older technology with current technology, it takes a few more steps.

**RCN:** So, you gave advice on a radio show and you seem to like giving advice to your customers...

**HB:** When I was on the radio show I got letters from people from all over. Even though I was always shy as a kid, I feel at home talking on a microphone. It was a lot of fun. When you work and work and work you have to find your time to have fun or it just comes to you. With me, it just came and I felt very lucky. It is very gratifying to know that you can help people and get some exposure at the same time.

**RCN:** Do you cater to vinyl enthusiasts?

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**HB:** Very much so. I also work with a lot of studio people and entertainers.

**RCN:** Do you sell new and used components?

**HB:** Mostly used, and I'm very selective. If someone wants something I don't have, I'll do my best to get it in. With the economy, last year, it was getting really depressing and scary because people were coming to me desperate to sell their stereo equipment. Luckily, that has slowed down.

**RCN:** What are some of the biggest changes you have seen in terms of the way people listen to music?

**HB:** Many people have a hard time knowing what to listen for, but when they listen to a record, especially if they don't have a trained ear, they tell me time and time again that there's something special about the sound. The majority of kids 18 or younger only listen to their iPods and their MP3s. But then you have people a little bit older who have been exposed to different ways of listening to music. When they go back to vinyl, they hear something special. It's not just records, it's the old reel-to-reel tapes, cassettes... each medium is just different. When you look at vinyl, some people have said it's on it's way out, but they have made more advances in the recording chain and the playback chain than ever. There are advances in the phonograph cartridges; the quality of the turntables... but then again, a high quality, brand new turntable is really expensive.

**RCN:** So, would you say most of your customers are coming to you for turntables?

**HB:** Yes, that's where I really try to fill in a gap in the market. The turntables right now that are brand new are either really cheap and low quality or really expensive. There is nothing in between. Years ago, there were



Howard Bardach has always loved electronics and music.

plenty of good turntables that were well priced. That's where I come in. When you come to me, I am going to show you a range of really well built turntables starting at around \$100. I won't even touch an all-in-one box because they sound horrible. The biggest part of the business right now is record players. The country is in terrible shape but people want to listen to records.

**RCN:** What kinds of things are people bringing to you for repair these days?

**HB:** Speakers, keyboards, amplifiers, pre-amps, professional and consumer equipment. And, of course, record players.

**RCN:** Is there anything you won't repair?

**HB:** TV sets. I used to repair them all the time, but now you can buy a 32-inch television for a few hundred dollars. Who in their right mind is going to pay the labor to get a TV repaired? It's cheaper to just get a new one and people know that.

**RCN:** Do you think this store location will be your home for a while?

**HB:** I certainly hope so. Location is everything and I couldn't ask for a better spot than Ventura Boulevard.

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