

FANE CRESCENDO AE DRIVER

A Conversation With Tim Pratt And Fouad Abidi



Tim and Foo.

There's not much more in the way of quick, easy, and relatively cost-effective tone exploration we love more than to check out what certain speakers (or in the case with what our friends across the pond call "drivers") do as the final filter. With that in mind, there are a couple of elements to the process that can make things a bit more enjoyable. For speed and simplicity, it helps to have clips for connecting the jack wires. Solder is always going to be more "bomber" for long-term and gig-worthy rigs, but for rapidly making changes, it is not. Also, a small battery-powered screwdriver helps speed the removal and replacement of back panels. Third, find a speaker cable that has female connections on both ends, which then allows you to route the speaker in your combo amp to one of the many currently offered amp and cab switchers from companies like DeLisle, KHE, MESA/Boogie, and Weber that allow for loads of routing flexibility. Some now have the option to place an attenuator in a loop, which then can be used for the specifically selected amp. A footswitch allows for quick A/B comparisons of different speakers, and that's the gold. Some can recall exactly what they heard with accuracy when it comes to speakers or pickup and tube swaps, but for these ears, we need instantaneous back and forth, as our minds are experts in fooling us.

If you've been with us over the last year or so, you're familiar with our regard for the Fane A60 speaker, which has moved around but found a home for the last few months in the Bartel 1x12, Mark's stock offering for his amplifiers. It also kills in a Tweed Deluxe. A conversation with Fane's Tim Pratt, Head of Marketing and Fouad Abidi (Foo), Lead Engineer, follows, where we explore their relatively recently released Crescendo AE (Anniversary Edition). A high-powered and innovative driver that became a product line by name back in the '60s. Made famous by many of the British players back in the day, often found in Hiwatt cabinets, the Crescendo A's and E's were somewhat revolutionary in that they had glass fiber voice coils which allowed them to handle significantly



The Crescendo AE.

more power and run cooler compared to the standard paper formers found in many offerings back then. Sit back, grab a pint and enjoy.

TQ: Welcome back, Tim and Foo. We've been playing and really digging your Crescendo AE in a number of applications and feel as though we have a pretty good handle on how this speaker performs in a variety of scenarios. Tell

us a little bit about the original Crescendos and what those drivers were all about.

Tim: It's somewhat tough to say because the examples we've had over time have been played quite heavily. However, the common characteristic is that they tend to be very open, clear, and clean.

TQ: Lots of headroom.

Tim & Foo: Yes!

TQ: It was often said that David Gilmour used Crescendos in his 4x12 Hiwatt cabinets back in the '70s. Is there validity to that?

Tim: Yes, [it's my impression] Dave Gilmour did use them. From historical knowledge, connections and mystique around his tone, we believe he used both the Crescendo A, as well as the Crescendo E models. Specifically, at what point in time and on what tours is somewhat hard to pinpoint. We are led to believe he was a big fan of the Fane tone. We've spoken with many pros over the last decade specifically about Dave and his affection for Crescendos, and what comes back is that he preferred the basket style that is used on the new Crescendo AE. That style began with the Fane Crescendos in the '80s. It's all the stuff of legend and elusive knowledge, isn't it? Guarded wisdom.



Fane 4x12 vintage Crescendos.

TQ: Was the A an alnico magnet and E the ceramic version?

Tim: No, they were both ceramic-magnet speakers, with the E rated at 150 watts and the A rated at 100 watts. There were also many, many variants of the Crescendos, so you could think of it more as a naming convention and line of speakers, as opposed to just a standard model or

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two. There were different modifications made to the drivers for various OEM manufacturers and amp companies like Hiwatt. They would order custom Crescendos optimized for their tone that they'd load into their cabs. For example, the edge treatment to the cone varied across speakers and years, and thus, that's why it's difficult to pinpoint a specific set of qualities around the tone of what is considered an "original" Crescendo.



Example of a vintage Crescendo cone.

TQ: Tell us about the impetus for reprising the Crescendo, and what was the process you all went through to voice the Crescendo AE?

Tim: We'll start from the beginning. This whole project dates back to around 2010. It was Neil Barnes, our Sales Director, who had always been passionate about the Crescendo product and so we began looking into the old ones. We knew what the recipes were and what parts were used, many of which are no longer available. The decision was made that we couldn't necessarily exactly match the component specifications of a brand-new Crescendo from 50 or so years ago, given we didn't have any new ones in a time capsule, and that, combined with the sourcing challenge, saw us put the project to the side. A few years ago, we got things restarted and Foo was tasked with leading the charge.

Foo: We have an archive of historical components that are primarily handwritten documents. Upon going through them we were able to highlight what was and what was not still available. That became our starting point. Some of the components, like the aluminum dust cap, had to be made from scratch. We looked at the materials in the spider and the impregnation of those materials, meaning the weave, the resins, and the compliance (stiffness). Of course, the cone material is something closely investigated, considering, too, that some of the materials are no longer available or material ingredients have changed over time. We did our best to match what we could, which became a process of iteration and trial with many sets of ears.

TQ: Were there particular examples that stood out to you that were used for the iterative process? Were they E's, A's or both?

Foo: Yes, we have a few different variants of the A's and E's. So, it was a case of listening through them and picking the nice flavors that we liked about each.

Tim: We also then shared the samples out to various partners of ours for their input and feedback, especially those who had a good handle on the old school Gilmour sounds, but also more modern players, too.

Foo: Everyone has their own somewhat unique opinion of what the old Crescendos sounded like, here's where OEM variants can come into play. We listened to these guys and tried to incorporate their thoughts in and input into the new design, as well.

Tim: That's where it comes to the point where we said, okay, we have somewhat of a baseline for the old, but that's when we started to think and discuss, do we want to necessarily recreate the old Crescendo tone 100%, which could be a near-impossible task, or do we try to incorporate something new, as well?

TQ: What words would you use to describe the voice of the new speakers?



Crescendo AE on the production line.

Foo: With Fanes, we're trying to find the right presence in the midrange. It's what Fanes have always been known for: midrange clarity. Staying true to that whilst keeping the tonal character open and airy.

TQ: We most certainly heard airiness and a creaminess to the midrange, but it's not timid. The new Crescendo AE is somewhat close in appearance to our '80s EV12L and also in terms of the power handling and massive size of the ceramic magnet, albeit the basket material and shapes are quite different. However, it seems to end there, as they vary rather dramatically in their voice. Where the EV is very wide-spectrum, solid lows, crystalline highs with a somewhat lightly pronounced midrange, the Crescendo AE has more complexity happening in the midrange frequencies, with a more rolled-off low and high end. It's still clear across all of the frequencies but does a nice job of delivering the mids as you describe. It's not as easy to tell that the dust cap is aluminum as it is with a JBL.

Tim: If you A/B the new Crescendo with the vintage Crescendos, you will definitely hear that the newer ones have a bit more openness in the midrange.

TQ: Okay, so safe to say that perhaps the vintage A's had a bit more of a notch in the mids, where the new AE may be a bit wider?

Tim: Sure, that's a fair way to put it, at least to my ears.

Foo: Then, of course, you have to consider the cabinet size, material, configuration, covering, etc. as that all factors into what one hears.

TQ: For sure and we're reminded of that time and time again. The type of back, open, closed, oval, etc. also

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make huge differences and as Chris Benson reinforced, the room and where the amp sits in that space contributes to what we hear. We tried the Crescendo AE first in a Tone Tubby 1x12 oval-ported oversized pine cabinet with Tolex, which inherently adds air to almost every speaker we put in it. We then loaded up the Benson Monarch Reverb Plus fabric-covered combo cab, which had previously had the stock ceramic Weber and then the EV. That amp allows us to go full distortion spectrum at less than ear-piercing volume so that we can get a great sense of what the speaker does, from crystalline clean to *Van Halen II* tones. The Crescendo AE didn't have any weaknesses across that range, to our ears, and really shined with what we'd call moderate breakup, where pick attack is in control of the hair on the notes.



Crescendo basket.

Tim: The key for me is to make sure that you have nice balance across the tone, nice bass, nice top end, and keeping the midrange full. With different amps, you've got different signature tones. If an amp is somewhat sharp in the top end, it will often come through the speaker, and we consider that, too, when trying to tame the top-end sound. It doesn't jump out too much and pierce your ears. That's the key part of the Fane tone, which is maintaining that balance. You want the amp to sound like itself and not have the speaker color what the amp is giving, and at the same time you want a speaker that delivers its own flavor. It's a dance.

TQ: We also played it with a Germino LV55, a Mitch Colby-built Park 1800, the Bartel Sugarland, and the Milkman JG40. It was really cool as a second 1x12 in combination with the JBL and JG40. Our buddy Stephen preferred the Fane over the EV12L and the Weber ceramic Blue Dogs with the Germinos and Park cookin', which is high praise, given we've always both loved the EV with those amps. Are the cones made by Kurt Mueller like back in the day?

Foo: Yes, they're Kurt Mueller cones, and we did quite a bit of back and forth with their archive, comparing it with our archive and historical data in order to tie down the specification and pulp formulation.

TQ: As far as the material, you mentioned the spider and changes to the material there. Can you get pretty close to the older ceramic magnet formula?

Foo: Yes, the ceramic magnet material is the same. The key is to get the flux right, the actual strength of magnetism within the voice coil gap. The originals specified 20,000 gauss.

TQ: How would you describe what the aluminum dust cap does, in terms of tone?

Foo: It helps out with the top-end frequencies. Your higher frequencies emit from the center of the coil, and that dust cap can add some sparkle. Adjustments to geometry and weight, even the vent size and shape, all add their own characteristics to the overall tone.

TQ: Are there any amplifiers that come to mind that you'd suggest are a great match for the Crescendo AE?

Tim: From the feedback we've gotten so far, it seems to be working well in a number of different-style cabs and amp setups, from old school Hiwatt styles or vintage AC-30 types to metal tones. There's a YouTube reviewer named John Browne, who leans heavy in the metal world and put up some clips through a number of gained-up amps, and it seems to work well in that world, too. He says it's become his favorite speaker. I also just spoke with an Italian guitarist who is a bit of an aficionado in the David Gilmour and Pink Floyd world, and he's said that he loves the speaker in his Hiwatt 1x12. As an aside, we have had early-days conversations with Hiwatt about them using the Crescendo AE in some of their offerings.



On the production line.

Foo: We specifically tried to stay away from pigeonholing it into one amplifier type because we know folks will stick them into a multitude of amps and cabs. Just trying to stay true to that old heritage tone. And each to their own, as far as what they hear and what they do or don't like. It really just comes down to that.

TQ: The only challenge with mounting them in a 2x12 or 4x12 is weight. They're beasts.

Foo & Tim: Yes, they are!

TQ: So many players love adding a bit of British flavor to their black-panel and tweed Fenders, and with that we found a nice match with both our '64 Vibrolux Reverb and 20-watt Tungsten Crema Wheat. Do you anticipate, as with the Ascension Series, that they'll be other Crescendo speakers produced?

Tim: I think at the moment it's a "Watch this space." For now, we're focused on the launch of this Crescendo AE and looking forward to understanding how the market reacts to it. [Ed note: Shipping began August 2025.] The more information we have and feedback we get, the better informed our decision making becomes. Understanding what players want and what they like

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helps us nail things down with a model or to gain insights for new ones.

Foo: Players have been asking for a new Crescendo for a long, long time, so we feel like we're giving them what they've been asking for, at least our version for now. We hope it continues to go well as far as what feedback we've gotten.

TQ: Some speakers we find need much more of a break-in period than others—like the A60, which we thought sounded fantastic right out of the box. What would you say about the Crescendo AE? Have you found it to open up or settle in over time, or does it get to its voice pretty quickly?

Foo: I'd say it gets there pretty quickly; we've had a lot of input that it sounds great out the box, too. Every speaker takes some time to break in, and for me there are no shortcuts. The best way to break in a speaker is to play your guitar through it. People do use various tactics and other methods but playing them is the best way for them to soften to their natural state. The ones that take longer are typically built with stiffer components. With this design and, as you mention, the Ascensions Series, we believe they settle quite quickly. We think they sound pretty good right out of the box and just get better with some play time.

TQ: Is there anything else that you'd like to mention about the Crescendo AE?

Tim: I think we've covered it, and just to reinforce the point, this is a modern take on a classic driver, not necessarily a re-production. We think something new in its own right keeps things fresh and with that we're not trying to play too much to the heritage of the old. Folks seem to like it and are excited by what they're hearing and feeling, which is a nice validation for us.

Foo: Lots of others have tried to re-create the Crescendo, and whether or not they've succeeded, we'll leave to the discretion of the market. We tried to take the best bits of what we liked about the originals and incorporated those elements.

TQ: How does one go about getting their hands on these speakers in the United States and internationally? Is it through Dave at Avatar?

Tim: Yes, Avatar Speakers for those in the States, and they carry both 8-ohm and 16-ohm variants for manufacturers and individuals. For Europe, we also distribute through Germany's Tube Amp



Production line, pre-dust cap.

Doctor. For all other international orders, we ship directly from our U.K. headquarters, where we also provide OEM supply and design services.

TQ: How many folks at Fane are within the acoustics side of the business.

Tim: We're quite a small, close-knit team of 10 in the U.K. factory.

TQ: It's nice that it's small, where you can really focus and have dedication to the craft.

Tim: One of our main ethos is that Fane is a British brand and has been around since 1958. We're still under British ownership, and we make everything by hand in the U.K. With the Pro Audio driver brand, there is work done out of China so that we can hit certain price points, but we want to keep British manufacturing alive within the acoustics division as much as possible, handmade in the U.K., tone, and everything we think that comes from that.

Foo: Consistency and quality are the main things when it comes to control of manufacturing, and being a small and focused team lends itself well to that outcome.

TQ—Scott Ulrichs

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FANE CRESCENDO AE REVIEW

Dimensional Drivers From Across The Pond

Moving speakers around among many different amplifier combos, styles, and sizes of cabinets is somewhat analogous to soldering the same set of pickups into different guitars. The resulting dimension of sound and the way the air is pushed will likely lead you to conclude that in both scenarios, each variable represents itself. Said another way, you'll hear both the characteristics of the speaker and the cabinet just like you'll hear the guitar come through, no matter the pickup and vice versa. The ratios of each's influence can vary of course, but this reality is reinforced for us time and time again, which makes for incredibly fun exploration and experimentation.



Mounted in a Benson Monarch Reverb.

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With EV12L and Celestion G12H30 Anniversary.

The Fane Crescendo AE is, for us, a big, bold, beautifully round-sounding speaker that will crunch and bite if asked to. The EQ curve as discussed with Tim and Foo is a more shallow curve with an extremely musical midrange compared to, say, the wider full spectrum of the EV12L or another of our perennial favorites here, the Celestion G12H 70th Anniversary. We absolutely love the speaker in a brighter amp, like our 20-watt Tungsten Crema Wheat, Adam Palow's take on a Tweed Deluxe. That circuit can get wooly and lose some low E and A definition in a beautiful, saggy way when dimed, but the Crescendo rocked in that amp, and we didn't have to roll the tone below noon to take the edge off, as we often do with other speakers in that spot. We also put the Fane in our benchmark oversized pine 1x12 Tone Tubby as a second cab to the Milkman JG40 combo with a JBL K120, and it was a nice marriage in complementing the EQ spectrum. In and out and back into the Benson it has gone, and each time we marvel in how well this speaker does clean, pushed clean, and driven saggy Plexi tones. Amazingly well-rounded and unlike some American-style Alnicos that we've only found to work well in black-panel circuits, the Fane can play a chameleon-like role. The speaker is beautifully made, with its powder-coated cast-aluminum gray chassis/basket and aluminum dust cap. The 2" voice-coil former is made just like they did back in the day, with glass fiber wound with copper, which was a Fane innovation allowing for greater power handling, reliability and heat management.



In Tone Tubby 1x12.



In Tone Tubby 1x12, no back panel.

If you're looking for a relatively high-efficiency speaker that will elegantly handle the full gamut of clean and distortion, possibly as another flavor for your 1x12 combo or cabinet, the Crescendo AE is a winner. It's not light, but as Uncle Larry says, "Big tone is heavy and hard to carry. Always will be!" **TQ**—*Scott Ulrichs*

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ROBERT KEELEY STRIKES AGAIN Talking Stereo Modulation



Robert's office.

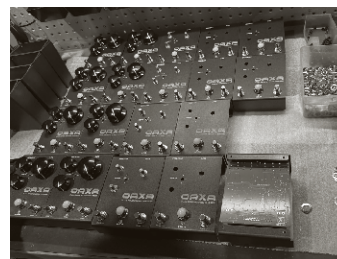
We continue to sing the praises of Robert Keeley and his team as they just keep cranking out killer pedals that are simple to use and make us play differently because of the effect. For us

they're big kid toys and oh how they put a smile on our faces. We recently spent time with the Oaxa Dual Phaser, Rotary and Nocturne Reverb stereo pedals and caught up with Robert to learn more.



Nocturne, Rotary, Oaxa.

TQ: Hi, Robert. It's really great to finally meet you, as we've enjoyed our Keeley-modded TS-9 and Phat Mod Blues Driver for 25 years. Hard to believe. It's a ton of fun running the Oaxa, Rotary, and Nocturne in stereo. There's nothing like that modulated sound coming from multiple angles and two amps. What was the impetus for the Oaxa, and how does it differ from your other phaser offerings?



Staging Oaxas.

The driving force behind coming out with the Oaxa is that I now have this award-winning platform on which we've put the Halo Core, ZOMA and Rotary pedals that are loved by players like Trey Anastasio.

It just made sense that we'd have a stereo phaser on this platform too. We had Daniel Donato come by to check it out, given he has his Cosmic Country signature phaser with us, and we know how big a fan of that effect he is. He feels some compression from his signature phaser, which he likes, but was not getting from the Oaxa, so we had Aaron Tackett, our DSP programmer, add that secondary function. It's a way, via one knob, to manage the level of compression and

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