

JBL SYNTHESIS

BY GEORGE MCCLURE



EXPERT ENGINEERING. ADVANCED CALIBRATION. UNMATCHED SOUND.

JBL Synthesis is a complete turnkey system for your home theater or media room. Utilizing the most advanced electronics and loudspeakers, JBL Synthesis' carefully selected system integration dealers create a completely customized system tailored to your room's size and acoustics. Once installed, each system is expertly cal-

ibrated to guarantee exceptional performance for each and every seat.

Every component of a JBL Synthesis system is engineered to perform in perfect harmony, so you can enjoy the most realistic listening experience possible. We recently visited with Jim Garrett, Senior Director, Product Strategy & Planning at HARMAN Luxury Audio, to get the lowdown.

GEORGE MCCLURE: JBL is a very iconic brand. Please give us a brief history of JBL before we get into talking about JBL Synthesis systems.

JIM GARRETT: JBL started in 1946, but our Founder, James B. Lansing, moved here to the Los Angeles area around 1927 and eventually started working on loudspeakers used for the early talking motion pictures in the thirties.

When motion picture companies started looking for something better for sound, they put together this team of people that created what was called the Shearer horn, and James Lansing was involved in that. That was one of the first commercial cinema speakers, a big two-way cinema speaker, and they won an Academy Award for that. That's kind of where things really started. So JBL's been around since the dawn of sound in motion pictures, and ever since then.

GEORGE: That's certainly a unique story.

JIM: Yes, it is. Then JBL Synthesis was founded in 1992. A lot of people were using JBL products on the professional side, you know, content was being captured and edited and played back on JBL, whether it was in the movie theater itself or in a post-production studio. And the A-listers, the directors, DPs and those guys that were doing the screeners at home wanted something better for their home systems.

That's kind of how JBL Synthesis began and became a residential outcropping of what we had done on the professional side.

GEORGE: I seem to remember that JBL was tasked with doing the first THX-certified systems with Lucasfilm back in the day.

JIM: Yes, we were the first THX home cinema system at that time to really kind of push the boundaries of what was capable from a home audio system

GEORGE: Tell us about your background and role with the HARMAN Luxury Audio Group.

JIM: I've been with Harman for 15 years, all of which has been with the Luxury Audio team. JBL, JBL Synthesis, ARCAM, Revel and Mark Levinson. So I've been involved with the strategic direction and the product development responsibilities for JBL Synthesis since

starting in 2010. I'm very much involved in the brand, all of the products that have come to market from it, the strategy, the direction that we've taken the brand in. And then of course my entire career has been spent in the AV industry for over 30 years.

Much of my role is in managing the product development team and liaising with engineering to make sure that the trains run on time for the projects that we're developing. I coordinate with the marketing team and the PR teams to make sure that our messaging is on target. I coordinate with the sales teams in order to make sure that we're creating the right products and maximizing our sales opportunities in the regions.

GEORGE: Your hobbies inform your day job and vice-versa, right?

JIM: Correct. I'm a musician, or as some people say, I'm a drummer and I hang out with musicians. And that is my job on the weekends playing live music in

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JIM GARRETT
SENIOR DIRECTOR
PRODUCT STRATEGY & PLANNING
HARMAN LUXURY AUDIO



my band. So for me, my hobby informs my day job, if you will. Another part of my story is that my college degree is in film and television production. And I'm still a huge fan of films and TV. So, for me, creating products to share the love of music and film with the world is a fantastic gig to have.

GEORGE: That's great. So, I know that JBL Synthesis takes a whole-system approach; what are some of the advantages of that in creating a custom home setup?

JIM: Well, it's exactly that. The fact of Synthesis is that it's not really products.

We don't sell individual products, per se — we sell complete system solutions. They're a collection of products that were designed and engineered to work together as a system right out of the gate. So, we eliminate any of the guesswork that was in it. It's the ultimate performance that you can get because it was all developed to work together. You're not taking, you know, brand X for the electronics, brand Y for the speakers, and brand Z for the room calibration. And that's where we've got an advantage, because everything's designed and engineered to work together. Then we go in and do the custom calibration once the system

is installed in the room. The tuning is consistent across any JBL Synthesis system, whether it's small, large, or anywhere in between. The other big advantage is of course our JBL loudspeaker technologies that are used in Synthesis systems. We're using patented compression driver technologies, our high-definition imaging horn geometries, and advanced woofer motor structures. All of that is an advantage that we have on the acoustic side that gives us a leg up over the competition.

GEORGE: Tell us about the JBL Synthesis certification program.



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A JBL Synthesis system is something to be experienced — it's really life-changing for a lot of people. I just did a demo here at our Northridge campus, and these folks were listening to songs and movie clips that they'd heard countless times before. They were like, 'I heard details that I've never heard before. I've never experienced bass like that. I've never experienced that level of surround before. This is better than my local movie theater. I didn't even know this was possible!' ”

JIM: We started a new certification program about two years ago. One of the things you get the benefit of as a dealer is that we can help specify systems. And if you do it the way we recommend in terms of using the right products in combination with each other, making sure they're installed properly and then ultimately making sure they're calibrated in tune to the HARMAN target curve, then that meets our certification standards. So basically, if you're a dealer, you can have a certified system in your showroom that says, "Hey, we meet the stringent standards of the factory". For the consumer, if you've had an integrator put one into your house that meets

all our criteria, we make a rack plate that goes onto your electronics rack that says you have a JBL Synthesis Certified System. There are two levels: Certified System and a Certified Elite System, depending on the channel count and the extensive nature of the calibration that's required to do it.

GEORGE: So, what makes an Elite system?

JIM: We have some 16-channel processors right now, and more elaborate processors that go up to 32 channels and use a different EQ methodology. So, the Elite systems right now are limited

to those with that higher channel-count processor and that more advanced calibration. And then the 16-channel or less systems would be considered part of the standard certified program.

GEORGE: For systems of this quality, I assume most dealers are coordinating acoustic room treatments and then you help get everything dialed in with some type of DSP (digital signal processor)?

JIM: Yeah, it's a combination of things. A lot of the HARMAN research that we've done over the decades as to what makes good sound goes first and

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foremost into the positioning of the products, the placement of the products in the room itself. And that becomes far more critical, certainly on the low end, the bass notes, which is where the room itself tends to dominate the sound. The research that we've done into the use of multiple subwoofers and where and how to position them in a room will help in advance of doing the actual tuning and the calibration of the room itself so that we're spending less amplifier power on EQ, because that, of course, the more EQ you put in there is going to take out some amplifier headroom capability of the system when you're boosting, you know, specific frequencies or trying to address the tuning of the system itself. So that part of it I think is addressed by the

science that goes into the Synthesis product itself. Patented acoustic technologies combined with the science of where and how to place products in the room along with the final calibration and tuning, which puts the final touches on how the system sounds in the room. And we're going to do that in collaboration with the system integrator.

Of course, there's going to be some acoustic treatment likely in the room itself, whether some sort of absorption, diffusion, whatever has been done in the room, or even if it's just, you know, what's the room itself like, hard or soft floors, is there squishy furniture in there, are there heavy drapes and things that are sucking up acoustics

in the room? Or is it a bright and lively room? And that's more the case now, too, as we get into shared, multi-purpose spaces. Not so much dedicated home cinemas so much as it is, media rooms, if you will, or multipurpose spaces in the home where living is going on in the home.

GEORGE: I'm glad you touched on that, because that was going to be my next question. It seems that some people still want a dedicated theater room, but the trend seems to be towards more multipurpose rooms.

JIM: Yeah, for sure. I think COVID certainly amplified a lot of that as people were home and you couldn't go to concerts, sporting events, movie theaters,

“ We are the audio solution in the room. So, all you need to add is your sources (cable/satellite box, Apple TV, Blu-ray player, music streamer etc.) whatever your video display is, whether it's a flat panel display or a projection system, and you build the room around it, with your seating, your lighting, your control, all that sort of stuff goes around it. ”

etc. And so, people were looking to elevate their home entertainment experiences. But it is exactly that. I mean, these are systems for home entertainment. They're for gathering, for shared experiences. And it's not just movies, of course, it's TV shows, sporting events, you know, the Super Bowl or World Cup or a Formula1 race. It could be concert events, it could be gaming with your kids. If you've ever gamed on a system like this, it's next level fun! So, it's a place where people are going to want to hang out at your house, your family will want to gather at your house

around these systems, because you get that shared experience.

GEORGE: You've touched on this a little bit already, but there's really something to be said for having electronics that are specifically optimized for the speakers in a system.

JIM: Absolutely — you're definitely going to get the ultimate performance that way. And it does take a lot of the guesswork out of it and the unknowns of, say, how's this speaker going to work with this amplifier or this proces-

sor and, how's this subwoofer going to work with this full-range loudspeaker? Those things are eliminated in our system. So it is that guaranteed level of performance. And then the patented JBL technologies are, as I mentioned before, kind of what puts that over the top. We're one of the few companies that can truly offer a single-brand solution. We are the audio solution in the room. So, all you need to add is your sources [cable/satellite box, Apple TV, Blu-ray player, music streamer etc.] whatever your video display is, whether it's a flat panel display or a projec-





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GEORGE: What is the latest and greatest from JBL Synthesis?

JIM: Well, we’ve kind of expanded the brand both ways. We went up with some flagship speakers that we’ve been demonstrating at shows, and we upgraded the Eargle Theater here on the Northridge campus with those, the SCL-1 along with matching SSW-1 subwoofers. So those have been super exciting because it just takes performance up another level and kind of separates what we can do from any of our competitors.

On the opposite end, we’ve expanded down with a portfolio of in-wall and in-ceiling speakers that were introduced just a couple of years ago that let us create systems that are smaller in budget and in scale that can work in smaller rooms. And that allowed us to open up the market for Synthesis systems on the smaller end of the scale. That makes Synthesis available to folks who maybe don’t have the space or budget for one of our larger systems. It’s also a great solution for homes that do have a larger Synthesis system and want to enjoy that level of quality in other areas, like an office, bedroom or kid’s playroom.

GEORGE: Is there anything else you’d like to leave us with?

JIM: Just that a JBL Synthesis system is something to be experienced — it’s really life-changing for a lot of people. I just did a demo here at our Northridge campus, and these folks were listening to songs and movie clips that they’d heard countless times before. They were like, “I heard details that I’ve never heard before. I’ve never experienced bass like that. I’ve never experienced that level of surround before. This is better than my local movie theater. I didn’t even know this was possible!” For me, always an enjoyable part about it is to just help people experience what is truly possible and how much better things can be for their home entertainment.

