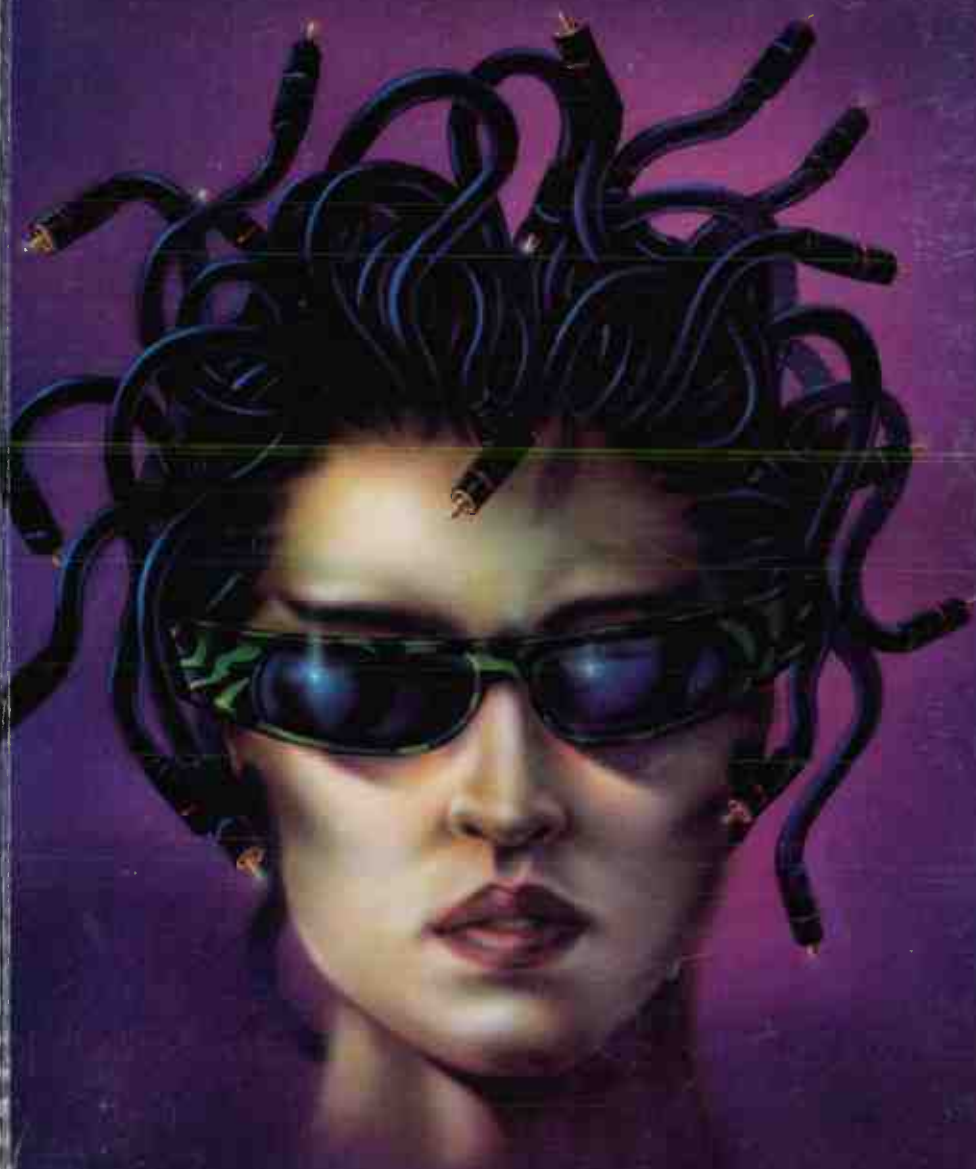


# The audiophile voice

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Vol. I, No. 1

Winter, 1991





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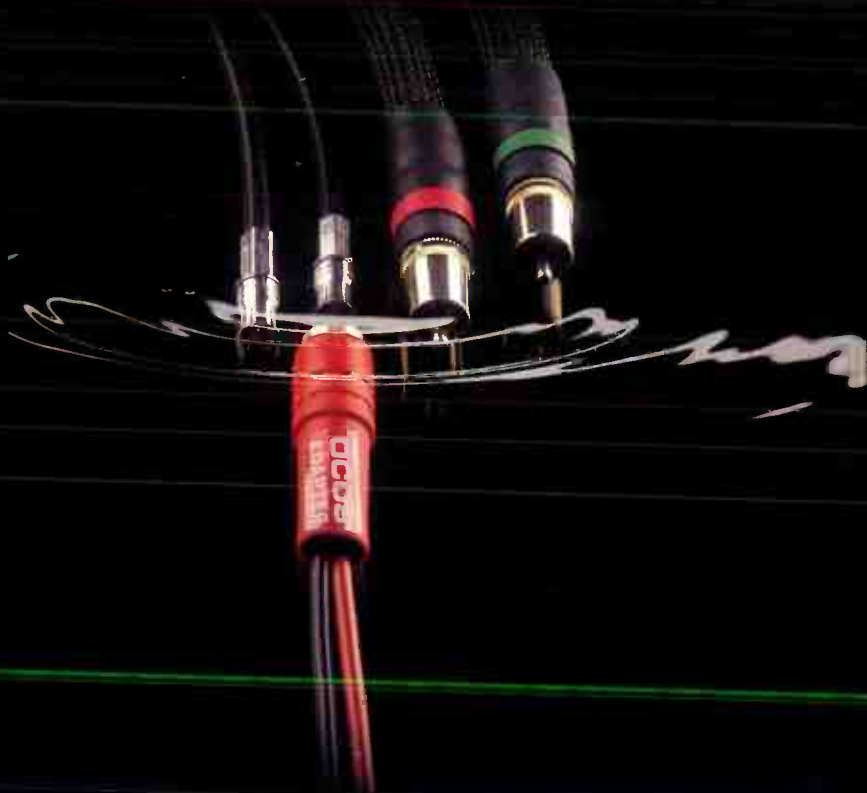
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# The audiophile voice

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Hy Kachalsky

EDITOR: Myles B. Astor

ASSISTANT EDITOR: Lisa Astor

TECHNICAL EDITOR: Arnis Balgalvis

SENIOR MUSIC EDITOR: Wes Phillips

ADVERTISING MANAGER: Lars Fredell

CIRCULATION / BUSINESS MANAGER: Herb Wolfe

EQUIPMENT COORDINATOR: Nino Benigni

DESKTOP PUBLISHING: Alan J. Macknin

GRAPHIC DESIGN: Debra Ann Lupie

FRONT COVER: Richie Fugetta

CARTOONIST: Stuart Goldberg

CONTRIBUTORS: Doug Blackburn, Mark Block, Bill Brassington, Sam Burstein, Kevin Carter, Jim Carvelas, Lars Fredell, George Graves, Elliot Kallen, Sam Katz, Tom Kelly, George Mardinly, David Nemzer, Russ Novak, Bill Rogers, Al Simon, Earle Stevens, Bill Wells

MEETING REPORTERS: Dave Calvello, Ron Carlen, Irwin Elkins, Larry Greenhill, Duncan Hartley, Paul Lupie, Bob Serino, Leon Yorburg

THE AUDIOPHILE SOCIETY OFFICERS:

PRESIDENT: Hy Kachalsky

VICE PRESIDENT: Arnis Balgalvis

TREASURER: Mike Kates

RECORDING SECRETARY: Larry Greenhill

CORRESPONDING SECRETARY: Jeff Newcorn

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Welcome to *The Audiophile Voice*

It is with great pride that *The Audiophile Society* welcomes you to our new quarterly publication, *The Audiophile Voice*, successor to our annual, *The Audiophile Society Journal*. I have promoted myself to Editor-In-Chief, which really means that, being 62 years young, I will provide the philosophical guidance, as well as the interfacing with the Executive Committee, and the membership of *The Audiophile Society*, so that there will always be a consistency of attitude and execution in the parent organization and the magazine.

As President of *The Audiophile Society*, I have selected Myles Astor to be the new Editor. He has been a Member of the society, as well as a member of the Executive Committee for several years, and is thus quite familiar with our philosophy. He is also an experienced audiophile writer. Most importantly, he is a talented, energetic, responsible and creative young man in whom I can have trust and confidence. I believe in him, and working with him in all the organizational areas, as well as content and attitudinal matters of *The Audiophile Voice* has strengthened my faith in him.

*Hy Kachalsky*

Hy Kachalsky,  
Founder and President, The Audiophile Society, Inc.  
Editor-in-Chief, *The Audiophile Voice*

*The Audiophile Voice* concerns itself with all aspects of High End audio. The magazine does not endorse or criticize products, dealers or services. Opinions expressed herein reflect the views of the authors and are for the information of members. Permission to reprint articles must be obtained through the editorial office.

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## Audiophile Agenda

Destiny definitely has a hand in some historical events. Take for instance the 1969 miracle Mets. Every break that could go their way did during that unforgettable season. Remember that catch by Ron Swoboda? How about the banner that hung from the upper deck at Shea that read God is a Mets fan?

Such is the case for *The Audiophile Voice*. *The Audiophile Voice* is an idea whose time has come. It was none other than Ken Kessler who 3 years ago suggested that we publish *The Audiophile Society Journal* more often (*The Audiophile Society Journal*, Issue 9, 1988). At that time, we just didn't have the manpower or the resources to publish the magazine more frequently than once a year. But circumstances change and we will now be publishing the magazine on a quarterly basis.

What is *The Audiophile Voice* about? In a single word-music. In *The Audiophile Voice*, music is accorded the respect it rightly and richly deserves. We are the only High End magazine where music comes before equipment. Music and equipment will be allotted equal space in each and every issue. There will be something for everyone in the music section. Analog and digital. New and old recordings. The latest releases on LP and CD. Classical. Hot Jazz. Cool Jazz. Rock. Alternative Rock. It will all be covered in *The Audiophile Voice*.

*The Audiophile Voice* will be unique, innovative, sensitive and responsible. All equipment will be reviewed within the context of its market niche. We will not be snobs and tell you that if you don't own the latest and greatest \$25,000 component, then you should be ashamed of your system. While I don't know anyone in their right mind who would turn down this \$25,000 component if it were given to them, the reality is 99.999% of us will never have that opportunity. Consequently, the real world objective is to as-

semble a system that allows one to enjoy the music. And if there are ways of inexpensively extracting more out of your system, all the better and you'll read about it here.

Perusing *The Audiophile Voice*, you'll note that equipment reviews are subdivided into The Ultimate Illusion, Upscale Audio and Bang for the Buck. The first section, The Ultimate Illusion, is reserved for equipment that is either the top of the line from a given manufacturer or is in our estimation state of the art. Next is Upscale Audio which will cover the bulk of the High End equipment out there in Audioland.

Finally, we come to the section that gives me the greatest pride as an editor-Bang for the Buck. The name says it all. A component that gives audiophiles the greatest value for the dollar. It's a fact that most manufacturers, given a large enough budget, can come up with great sounding equipment. But designing inexpensive, good sounding equipment is truly a feather in a manufacturer's cap and a credit to their ears! Bang for the Buck will cover musical, entry level equipment that doesn't require taking out a second mortgage on your home. All of the equipment in this section will be priced under \$1200, with a majority of it being under \$600. Furthermore, *The Audiophile Voice* writers have a love for budget equipment and that is clearly reflected in their reviews.

But my involvement with Bang for the Buck goes much deeper than the question of price vs perceived value. We (Audiophiles) must begin to take it upon ourselves to get more people involved in High End audio. As one manufacturer so eloquently put it: People don't move from rack systems to \$5000 components. If High End is to survive, much less prosper in the '90s, we must attract new people into the hobby.

Who are these people? How about the many music lovers whose only knowledge of audio equipment comes from mass market merchandisers or magazines such as *Stereo Review*? What about music lovers who don't have a lot of money to drop on equipment? For them, spending say \$800 on a

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Aragon 24Ksp	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	U.S.	\$1250
Aragon 24K	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	U.S.	\$1500 with phono

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component, is a major financial sacrifice. Yet why should they be denied or even told that they can't enjoy their music.

And finally, we have set aside space for accessories, an area that has been short-changed in the past. We will cover all types of tweaks that will help you to realize all the potential inherent in your equipment.

Another feature that is unique to *The Audiophile Voice* is Live From *The Audiophile Society*. This section features synopsized reports of presentations by leading High End manufacturers at the monthly meeting of The Audiophile Society. It is a rare opportunity to hear a designer talk about the developmental process and the final product. Here will be found presentations by leading High End manufacturers like Dan D'Agostino of Krell, Jason Bloom of Apogee, John Hunter of Sumiko, Howard Mandell of Altis and A.J. Conti of Basis. Future issues will feature Mike Moffat of Theta, John Celmer of Mirror Image, Victor Goldstein of Jadis, Mark Levinson (the man) and Bob Grost of Unity Audio.

As you read the meeting notes, you'll feel like you were present that evening! We hope that we will answer the questions you might have about these products either by the information provided in each piece or by the reading the questions asked during the meeting. By Issue #4, we will have 3 meetings per issue and the notes will be correspondingly expanded.

Want to read the latest breaking High End audio news or about interesting new products? How about what's in the pipeline to be released in the near future? Then be sure to read *The Audio Ear*. Here you will find the latest news about the people making the news, the equipment and what new records and CDs have been or are about to be released.

Each issue of *The Audiophile Voice* will also contain conversations or articles written by leading recording engineers. Issue 1 starts out with a piece by Bob Katz, the man behind the scenes at Chesky Records. Future is-

ues will feature conversations with Tom Jung of DMP and David Hancock commenting on where the industry has been, where it is and where it's going.

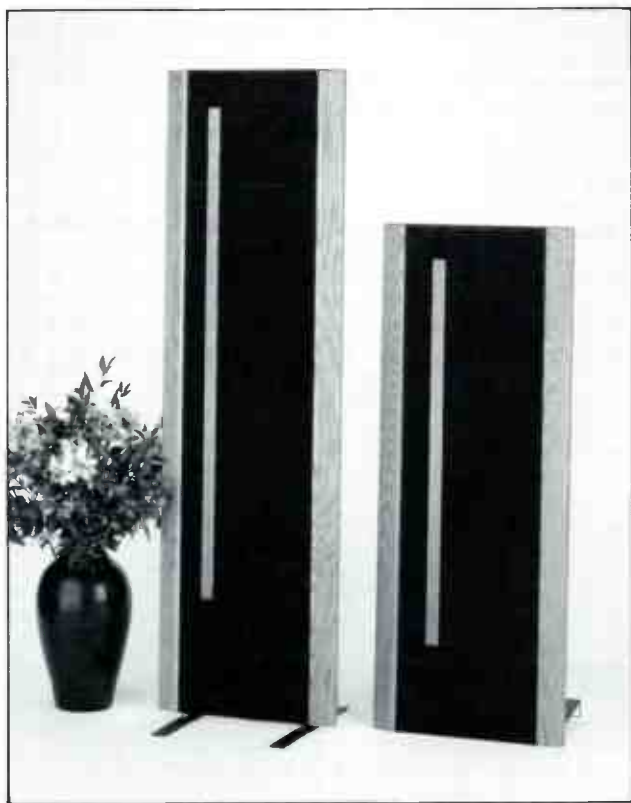
Putting *The Audiophile Voice* together has been an enlightening and rewarding experience. In particular, we are very excited about the crew that we've been able to assemble to write for the magazine. All of our writers have different roots. Some are members of *The Audiophile Society*, others have written for different magazines in the past, a few were downloaded from The Audiophile Network computer board and others are audiophiles we have met in our wanderings in search of the Holy Grail over the years.

Despite our varied backgrounds, we are all audiophiles and all share a love for the music and the equipment and a pursuit of the best sound possible. What's more important is that each writer has their own point of view. Whether we agree or disagree is unimportant. After all, it is naive to believe that there is any absolute. Life just isn't that simple. Rarely are things black and white; more often than not, there are shades of gray. For that matter, no two violins sound alike, no two halls sound alike, no hall sounds alike in winter or summer or for that matter, morning and afternoon. Designing a piece of equipment always involves trade offs. Some people value tonality, others detail. Some place dynamics at the top of the list. Others are imaging freaks. Our duty as members of the journalistic press is to convey these strengths and weaknesses so that when you listen to a particular component (and do listen for yourself!), you can make an educated choice.

Finally we want to hear from you! After all, we are all audiophiles! Let us know what you are listening to, share some of the tweaks you have done to improve your system and your recent experiences with equipment. Let us know what you think about the magazine and what you'd like to see in the magazine. This is your VOICE!

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World Radio History



## Chuck LaMonica (1934-1991)

In January 1991, Chuck and Elsa, his wife of 31 years, went to a Yo Yo Ma concert with Arnie and Aina Balgalvis. He loved the concert, and the company, and told Arnie, that it had been one of his most pleasurable experiences in a year. He and Elsa talked animatedly all the way home, and among the topics was the menu for the upcoming Executive Committee meeting. I had jokingly complained that everyone was serving bagels, cream cheese, lox, and white fish, which I considered Jewish cuisine, and since we often rotated the site of the exec meeting, I wanted our diverse ethnic members to serve their own ethnic food.

So Chuck was planning a terrific Italian breakfast to please, and surprise me, and start the movement for ethnic breakfasts. When they got home, he sat down on the couch to watch TV, and Elsa went upstairs to change. She came down to join him, chatting happily all the way, when she noticed he was sleeping, but seemed to be in an uncomfortable position. She was unable to awaken him. He had died after a wonderful evening of live music performed by a superb artist, in the company of cherished friends and a beloved wife.

Chuck grew up in Brooklyn, and later Queens. He was a graduate of Brooklyn College, in the days when that was one of the jewels of the City University system, and nationally recognized as a school of the highest quality. He had two passionate hobbies, photography and music.

Chuck left a successful business career to start his own commercial photography company. Naturally, with his impeccable taste, and attention to every detail, he was a resounding success. His photographs adorned the pages of many major magazines; the last cover of *Sounds Like...* magazine was his handiwork.

Chuck's musical passion led him to the world of Audiophilia, and he became a member of *The Audiophile Society* during the first year of its existence. He was so knowledgeable, helpful, constructive in all his actions that he soon became an integral part of the society. He was an important member of the Executive Committee and was the driving force and the creator of the new look of *The Audiophile Society Journal*, much of which is incorporated in the style of *The Audiophile Voice*. The last few covers of the Journal were his creations.

He was always enthusiastic of anything that helped get closer to the sound of live music. And he had such a wonderful, happy sense of humor. After I got over the shock of the news of Chuck's death I remembered that we would have to relocate the Executive Committee Meeting. Then I thought of a variation of the punchline of an old joke, "Does that mean we can't have the meeting at your house?" At first I was ashamed of even thinking of a joke at such a somber time, until I realized that Chuck would be the first to laugh at it (Elsa agrees). We all love Chuck and miss him. We, as a society, and as individuals have been enriched by him, and are forever grateful for having known him.

*The Audiophile Society* extends our heartfelt condolences to Elsa and their three children, Michael, Matthew and Amy Jane. I know he is always with you, as he is still with us. I believe he is still tweaking away, having a wonderful time in search of the perfect sound.

Hy



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## The Audio Ear

### High End News . . .

In a major shift in policy, the Electronics Industries Association (EIA) has announced that the public will be invited to attend the 1992 Summer, Chicago Consumer Electronics Show (May 28-May 31, 1992). While CES claims their change in policy was motivated by requests from large and small exhibitors, one can not help but believe that this change in heart was in part motivated by decreasing attendance at the show over the past several years. The first two and a half days will be for trade with the last day and a half opened up to the public. Admission to the show will be \$10 per day. If the Chicago Show is a success, can the Winter Vegas Show be far behind?

In a move that threatens to have real repercussions in the electronics industry and High End audio in particular, Senator Howard Metzenbaum of Ohio is presently sponsoring legislation before Congress called the Resale Price Maintenance Bill. Basically backed by mass market retailers such as Burlington and Wallmart, this bill challenges the legality of all manufacturers to market their products through selected stores. Metzenbaum's argument is that consumers will save millions of dollars by virtue of being able to price shop and encouraging more competition among retailers for a given product. However, the bill fails to take into consideration service requirement of retailers (such as High End dealers) and may threaten the viability of small entrepreneurial high end manufacturers. Picture it-buying your favorite tube or transistor amplifier from Sears!

You've heard of the Haas effect. How about the Louis Effect? Initially observed by George Louis, developer of Finyl, the Louis Effect describes a phenomena related to CD players where

the sound changes for some tin each repeat mode. Louis has not two to three minutes must be allowed between repeats before making any valid comparison...

### New Equipment . . .

I've got connectors on my mind? Two manufacturers have released new speaker connectors. New from Kimber Cable is a specially designed spade lug called the PostMaster. The PostMaster is a crimp terminal meant for use on five way binding posts. "Spring loading" coupled with a radial ridges results in better contact and a gas tight connection. Another feature of the PostMaster is a sandwich wafer design to damp external vibrations. The spade uses Kimber's special Ultraplate coating over OFC copper. Price is \$20 per pair.

Following up on the commercial success of the Edison Price binding posts, Eminent Technology has released a new type of speaker banana plug called the Music Plug. The new plug is made out of the same material as the EP binding posts (Cu/Te) and slips into the back of the binding post; the banana can be expanded to adjust the tightness of the fit. ET claims that there is actually more surface area contact with this banana than with the standard spade lug. Price of the new connector is \$12.50 apiece.

The bluing of CDs? Looking down the road a bit, several companies have been working on the development of blue lasers (diodes) to read compact discs. Since the blue laser is one-fourth the bandwidth of the currently used red laser, up to four times as much information could be stored on a compact disc. Any new generation player will be able to read the older 44 kHz discs. The obstacles are the cost of the new laser (blue lasers are inherently inefficient and require massive power supplies) and the "record" companies reluctance to go to a new format. Rumor has it that Luxman plans to introduce the blue laser into its



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players in the near future. Audio magazine, reporting on the development of blue lasers, dismissed the need for four hours of playing time as a "passing interest." Unfortunately they missed the entire point of the exercise! With a blue laser, one could quadruple the sampling rate (from 44 kHz) and still fit one hour worth of music onto the standard CD. And with Sony now being a major hardware and software supplier, a supply of new 176 kHz sampled discs should be no problem. Quadrupling the sampling rate could remove one of digital's major handicaps and take it the next step forward. Interesting ramifications for audiophiles, huh?

While we're on the subject of digital-how many people are becoming annoyed by the variation in cutting levels between CDs?

### **New Software . .**

Several High End companies have been quietly working behind the scenes to sponsor audiophile quality recordings and should be commended and supported in their efforts to provide audiophiles with good sound and performances. One company that has been quietly amassing a record/CD catalog is AudioQuest. Working with Kavi Alexander, Audioquest has now released its fourth production with Waterlily Acoustics with two more in the wings. In addition, keep an eye out for the forthcoming Jazz releases engineered by Pierre Sprey of Mapleshade Productions.

Which leads us to a new and relatively unknown company, Mapleshade Productions (released on the Musical Heritage Society Jazz label). Engineered by Pierre Sprey, these performances are recorded on a modified 15 ips Sony deck and transferred to the digital domain by Bob Katz of Digital Domain. Sprey's latest CD has won an award for engineering. Mapleshade's catalog consists of jazz and blues releases. For further infor-

mation contact Mapleshade Productions at (301)627-0525.

And other entrepreneurs have been striking out on their own, either recording new works, rereleasing older tapes or importing other labels. A short list of these companies include Rega (Music for Others), Roksan, Athena (see this issue) and Analogue Productions (Acoustic Sounds).

The latest High End manufacturer making their own recordings is Vacuum Tube Logic. These recordings are made using a purist audiophile method direct-to-analogue 2 track tape. Every piece used in the recording and playback chain from microphones to monitors is manufactured by VTL. Look for the first LPs to be available at the Winter CES show.

Many High End manufacturers such as Apogee, Audioquest, Conrad-Johnson, VPI (see this issue of TAV), Cardas and Vandersteen and the High End magazines, *The Absolute Sound* and *Stereophile*, have been involved in co-sponsoring Waterlily recordings. These recordings are all done with custom made electronics and microphones designed by Tim de Paravicini and recorded by Kavi Alexander. Each of these releases are being released in SOTA sound in both analog or digital format.

Let it be seen here first. Chesky Records, contrary to rumors floating around High End, has not forsaken analog. At present, their plans are to issue four analog LPs per year. The latest, Stravinsky's *Petroushka*, performed by Oscar Danon and the Royal Philharmonic and recorded by Kenneth Wilkinson for RCA is slated for release at the Winter CES show.

And in closing the first installment of *The Audio Ear*, a salute to the unknown audiophile whom I recently passed on the highway with the NY license plate, 20-20 kHz.

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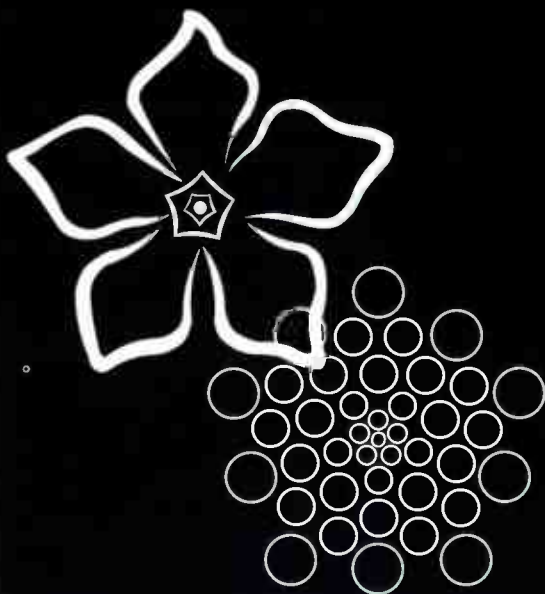


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**K**ee an eye (and ear) out for music reviews covering new LP and CD releases. Wes Phillips spins some selected releases from the second group of Linn Selekt records. Doug Blackburn on some LPs from Topic Records (imported by Music for Others/Rega). And George Mardinly on new LP releases from Analog Productions, North Star Records and Water Lily. Elliot Kallen covers some breakthrough CDs from DMP and Mapleshade Productions.

What's new in equipment? *The Audiophile Voice* takes a gander at the latest thinking in vacuum tube technology design from the establishment, Conrad-Johnson, and a new sweepstakes entrant, Valve Amplification Corporation. Myles Astor listens to Conrad-Johnson's no-negative feedback Evolution 20 preamplifier while Sam Burstein reports on a very interesting, 90 watt monoblock tube amplifier from Valve Amplification Corporation. On the solid state front, Russ Novak spends some time with the Mirror Image 1.1S amplifier. Earle Stevens gives his impression of the latest incarnation of the VPI 19 turntable. In *The Bang for the Buck* Section, Wes Phillips reviews both the modestly priced Celestion 5 speakers (\$500) and the new \$375 CD player from Parasound and Doug Blackburn investigates the inexpensive Corus Blue moving magnet cartridge from Roksan. Plus several surprises!

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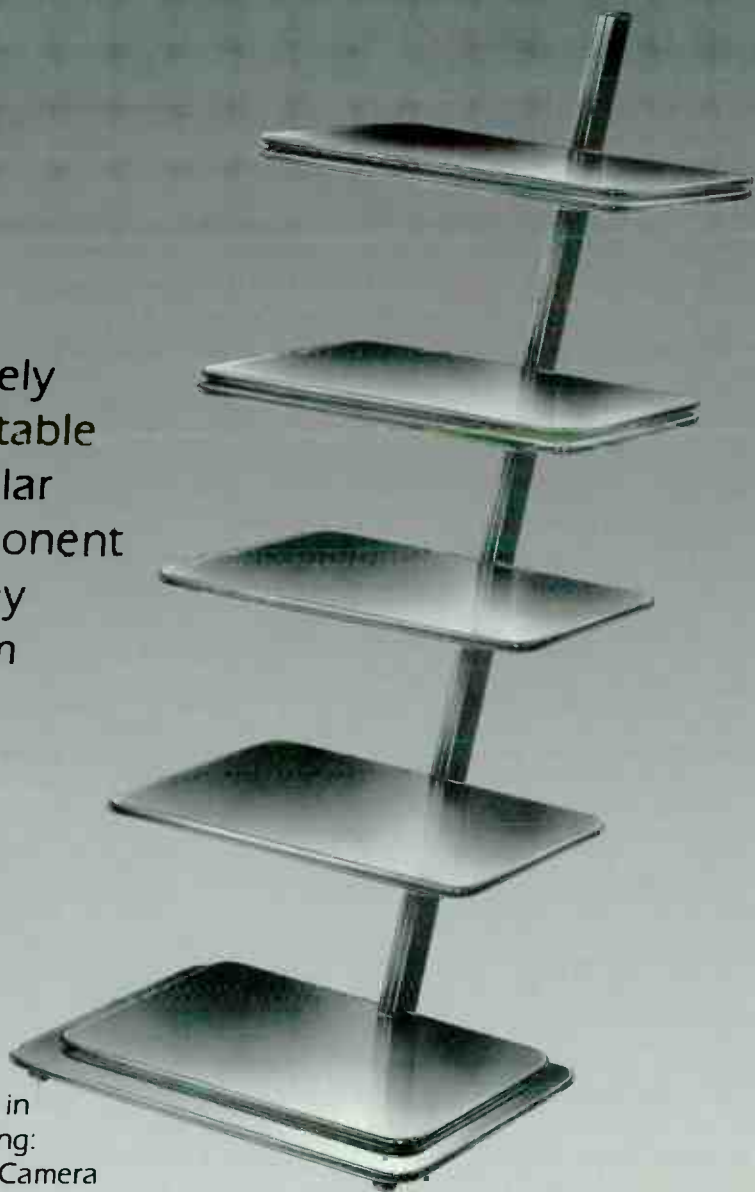
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## Hy's & Lows-One Man's Opinion

One night, several months ago, Estelle and I were dining out with some friends, our usual custom on a weekend, when it dawned on me that the food was, at best, mediocre. In fact, most of the restaurants had mediocre food, and I had lowered my own standards to accommodate to the social activity. The company was fine, I hadn't lowered my standards on that, and the service and ambience were also good, but I then realized that I had come to accept mediocrity. And this is in Westchester County, NY, one of the wealthiest communities in the country. When I mentioned it to my friends, they agreed with my opinion as well as my decision to eat only at places where the food was of higher quality, even if it cost more, or meant that we might have to travel further, *eg.* into New York City, where there are many superb eateries.

The more I thought about it, the more I was ashamed and amazed at how easily I had accepted this situation. And then I realized that this is the norm in our entire society. Not only is this the accepted standard, but in fact, our standards are getting worse. Not only is there an overall acceptance, with not enough protest, but hardly anyone seems to be willing to put in the effort needed to reverse the process.

Can you remember the last candidate for office that you believed was of outstanding quality? Isn't true that most of the time we are voting for the candidate who we believe is the lesser of two evils? And perhaps that's also true of the two major parties. We vote for them, not because we believe in everything they stand for, but because they are closer to our beliefs than the alternative, and we just have to accept their limitations. The truth is that neither party is truly satisfying. It seems abundantly

clear that more decisions are made for political expediency than for the ultimate good of the people, whatever that may be. Truth takes a back seat to "politically correct." And trust? Lots of luck!

Do not the same problems hold true for the role of the Press? How many reporters or TV anchormen can you point to as being of outstanding quality? How much of what you read in the press can you believe? And what takes first place in the TV or newspapers? Sex and violence, way out of proportion to its true significance in US or world events.

We want everything the "American Dream" promises, but without putting in the hard work necessary to achieve it. It's true that everyone is entitled to medical care. So what do we do? We limit the quality and services, and build a bureaucracy that is so inefficient and costly that while we may eventually end up with universal health care, we will drastically cut the quality of care. And we will get used to that standard, too.

We all know how important education is, and agree it should be available to all. So how have we attempted to solve this? Simple, just lower the standards and now everyone can get through school. So they don't know how to read or write. They get their degree anyway.

And what about the quality of the entertainment industry itself? What I seem to be witnessing is an appeal to the most base of human instincts, rather than an attempt to raise the level of human understanding, and appreciation of the beauty and truth and goodness that man is capable of achieving. Graphic depiction of sex and violence in all its forms is mandatory for a successful movie. Who cares what effect it has on the audience, as long as it is a financial success. Artistic appeal be damned, since that isn't what the people want. The more forceful the appeal

to the basest feelings, the more financially successful is the movie, the TV program, or even the music. I still have not gotten over the sickening sight and sound of Roseanne Barr singing our national anthem. Taste, reason, refinement and quality are no longer virtues to be cherished. Mass appeal and mass marketing are the order of the day. Pan et Circus is the accepted standard of life.

Why are we mad at the Japanese? Is it because they work harder, more efficiently, produce higher quality products and have beaten the Americans and Europeans at their own game? They learned from us. Isn't it about time we learned from them so we can produce better products than they do? But no, we don't want to make the sacrifices or the effort to put quality back into our products. This is true of the auto industry, and most of the electronic industry. But there is a ray of light which we should learn from. We sure beat the hell out of them in the High End audio industry! How come?

The most essential and fundamental concern in High End audio is the insistence on the utmost quality in the entire chain of musical reproduction. Quality is never to be compromised! The Audiophile, with a capital A, is the driving force behind the whole industry. Since we are the consumers who pay the money that makes it possible for the entire industry to exist and help it to thrive, it is our dedicated, if not sometimes fanatical, standards which keep everyone busy in the never ending quest for the impossible attainment of perfection.

High End dealers must pay careful attention to detail in order to make a quality presentation of equipment to please the Audiophile taste. Obviously this requires extra work and skill of the dealer. Selling to an Audiophile is not a quick or easy task and the true High End dealer deserves the higher prices

he must charge because of the extra time and labor, as well as high overhead and inventory involved. But I believe it is worth it for the dealer because not only will he please the Audiophile, but each Audiophile usually has a whole slew of non-Audiophile friends and acquaintances who are willing to trust his advice, and who we refer to our High End dealer friends.

High End manufacturers don't just design a piece of equipment and sell it. They design with care and purpose, test and retest, subject it to many hours of listening, under varied conditions, until their product satisfies their own high standard of performance, as well as their belief that it will also satisfy the Audiophile. Their market demands quality, their own egos demand quality and they do produce quality.

The same holds true for those involved in High End cables, accessories, mods, recording, *etc.* Quality is demanded by the Audiophile market and quality is what they try to produce. Their success depends on it.

So who is this mysterious Audiophile, with a capital A? First and foremost, he is a lover of **MUSIC**. That's right music, not sound. It is the impact of the high quality performance of high quality live music that brings the most emotionally and aesthetically satisfying experience. These experiences linger in our minds and hearts. They touch our very souls, as only great art can do, and we are enriched by them. The memory of these wonderful feelings stay with us and are forever cherished. And because of this love of the musical experience, the Audiophile, more correctly musico-Audiophile, seeks to recreate that experience. We cherish the quality of the live sound, as well as the quality of the performance. We therefore turn to the High End audio industry to satisfy our musical appreciation and to deliver the quality that we insist on. An audiophile, small a, is more interested

in the equipment, rather than the music. We Audiophiles love the equipment only because it takes us further on "the yellow brick road" to the wonderful live musical experience.

When I founded The Audiophile Society in October, 1979, it was at first a 50th Birthday present to myself. I had a few Audiophile friends, and it was so much more satisfying and enjoyable to experiment, tweak and hear all the new goodies with someone you cared about than to be alone. Isn't it much more enjoyable to go to a concert with good friends than to go alone? So I had a birthday party inviting not only my Audiophile buddies, but also the many other lonely Audiophile acquaintances I had met in my wanderings to the various High End dealers in the NY area. And it has been a party ever since. I decided to call our group The Audiophile Society because I wanted us to emphasize that we were an Audiophile, not an audio club, and without any geographic limitation, since Audiophilia is a specifically unique and universal characteristic. We all now have a loving family of Audiophiles, doing all the things we love together. We care about each other and have learned to trust each other. When disagreements or differences of opinion arise, we handle it with respect and sensitivity. It doesn't detract from our fondness for each other.

At our monthly meetings, we not only discuss the business of running the society but also share Audiophile information and experiences. The major event of the meetings is the presentation by our guest speakers. Our guests are usually prominent people in High End audio audiophile writers and publishers, and on some memorable occasions, recording artists with their instruments. They have distinguished themselves by the quality of their products, or their productions.

But the most important aspect of The

Audiophile Society, the heart and the soul of it, is the atmosphere that surrounds us in whatever activity we are engaged, be it the monthly meetings, the monthly Executive Committee breakfast meetings, or informal small group Hi-Fi listening and tweaking get togethers. Even though we are serious and dedicated Audiophiles, there is a good humored, caring, helpful, truthful and constructive attitude. It's a party, yet lots of work gets done at the same time. Since almost all the meetings are held in my home, which is the official society clubhouse, all the members feel at home being there, that is, the feeling is like having a happy family reunion.

Our speakers are treated like guests in a home. We are grateful for their generous contribution of time, effort and money to attend our meetings. We feel honored by their presence and are respectful, courteous and almost always develop a bond of friendship between us. And why not? While they need us for our purchases, we very much need them to provide us with the products that will enable us to satisfy our musical desires, naturally, until the next improvement becomes available. If the music is the performer we want to listen to, then the equipment is the instrument that brings out the voice of the music. As the performing artist tries to get his personal best instrument to play (eg. Guarnerius, Stradivarius, Steinway, Bosendorfer, etc.), so the Audiophile takes great care in choosing a system to satisfy their own personal tastes. Also, I have been impressed with the high percentage of people in the High End industry who would qualify as Audiophiles, and they share this kinship with The Audiophile Society.

We have always had a publication. Larry Greenhill began this tradition by publishing a monthly report of the meetings and notices of the next meetings. The Audiophile Society Minutes grew larger in scope and Larry decided to write only the monthly Bulletin in-



stead, which covers meeting and pertinent club notices. I took over the editorship of the Minutes, turned it into a quarterly, and as it grew I decided to make it an annual and change the name to **The Audiophile Society Journal**. This became a high quality magazine in its style, content, and writing. It required the efforts of more of our members and they came through beautifully. It was more expensive to produce so we got ads, at very reasonable rates since we are a non-profit organization with almost no overhead, and thus paid for the expense of the printing. Our Tenth Anniversary Issue in 1989 was the highlight of our endeavors. It was very well received by Audiophiles and the High End industry. Our society was stronger, healthier and even more fun than ever. Our relationships with everyone in the High End was at an all time high. So, was there a next logical step for us to take, or should we just let well enough alone?

For quite some time, I believed that there was a unique position we could fill that would be helpful in serving the needs and wishes of the Audiophile, as well as the entire High End industry. Myles Astor, a Full Member, and also a member of the Executive Committee was a great choice for Editor. He was ready, willing and very able to supply

the energy and creativity to make our new quarterly, **The Audiophile Voice**, a resounding success. The philosophy of The Audiophile Society which has proven to be so successful for the club, as well as our previous magazines, would certainly be an integral part of our new, more ambitious magazine, now renamed **The Audiophile Voice**. Our attitude is one of optimism, respect and appreciation towards everyone involved with the High End. It makes us happy when they are successful in advancing the quality of reproduction, and when, in our opinion, they fall short of their goal, we will be constructive in our criticism, and encourage them to do better. We are not competing with any other magazine and in fact we support their efforts and encourage them to strive to do better.

The better the entire High End industry does the more satisfying is our experience and the more enjoyable it is to be an Audiophile. We are not writing this magazine for money. We do it only for love. This is the magazine written by Audiophiles for Audiophiles. We do not *represent* the Audiophiles, we *are* the Audiophiles. We are The Audiophile Voice!

Hy

### B. V. Pisha (1916-1991)

Going to press, we learned of the passing of a dear friend and honorary member of *The Audiophile Society*, Barney V. Pisha. At the time of his passing, Barney was an Associate Editor of Audio, with whom he had a long and rich association. Trained as a physician, Barney's interest in music led him into a career as a pioneer audio writer. A devoted Audiophile, Barney was one of the early reviewers who considered listening to be as important as measuring.

Barney was always well informed, good humored and helpful to all who came to see him. He had a large circle of devoted friends who helped him throughout his long battle with Parkinsonism. Just recently, Barney called on me to arrange transportation to the November 15th Society meeting, showing his continued interest to the end in Audiophilia. His presence at the club and writings in Audio will be greatly missed. Our heartfelt condolences go out to his family.

Hy

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## The Audiophile Widow

I am shocked, shocked and appalled at the whimpering of some audiophiles over the price of equipment. These can't be true audiophiles. I live with one and know first hand that true nitty-gritty blooded audiophiles practice a little known economic fiscal policy which allows them to purchase any piece of equipment they are currently lusting after.

Here are some key elements of Audiophile Economics my hubby has recently invoked:

- Count income from any upcoming holiday such as your birthday, Christmas and Hanukkah (most audiophiles are multi-demoninational for fiscal reasons.) Yes...Valentines Day may be counted. After all what is more romantic than music?
- Count proceeds from the sale of your duplicate records. If the duplicate record is on Harry Pearson's Bakers Dozen, triple the expected value. It's OK if you've counted the sale of these records towards another purchase, because audiophiles can not bear to part with duplicates anyway. After all, what if someone found the one record you wanted and was willing to trade???
- Count any inheritance you may receive in the next few years. No, you may not help any elderly relative along.
- Count the income from bonuses you or any family member may receive in the next year. Yes, you can count your son's paper route income. No, you may not count your daughter's girl scout cookie sales earnings.

- Count the income from the sale of the equipment you wish to replace. Inflate this figure by 25% for optimism - maybe your local dealer will be in a good mood.
- Count the income from any odd jobs you may have in the future installing or choosing equipment for your friends. Of course, the equipment that you recommend is usually so expensive that your friend is broke and can never pay you.

The entire Audiophile Fiscal Theory however rests on one element, the CCF - the Credit Card Factor. After all, why should you do without your new toy until all the money you've raised trickles in. If you have charged all your cards to the limit, it is OK to apply for more. (A Sears credit card does not count. And a Bloomingdale's card only counts for a brownie point in the wife relations area.)

Someday my hubby will follow the more traditional Keynesian budgeting and cash flow. But for now, all he wants is a Jadis JA500 for his Birthday - or is it our Anniversary?

*Lisa Astor*

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## Achieving Depth Perception In Recording

*Achieving accurate depth perception takes a working knowledge of acoustic principles plus a good ear.*

The recording engineer should be both an artist and a scientist about his work. When he makes a new recording which he perceives as "better" (more pleasurable) than a previous recording, he should ask himself why? Perhaps the reason for the "better" recording was a changed microphone distance from the sound source. The engineer should then try to consider whether the proximity effect, the Fletcher-Munson effect, or some other documented acoustic principle entered into his "better" recording. Then, of course, he will take a tape measure and carefully measure the distance of the mikes from the source in order to duplicate the sound next time. Of course not! (I had to say that for fear that many of you would take the previous statement seriously.) A more realistic approach is to quantify his findings as best he can and then internalize them so he can continue with the black art known as Recording Engineering.

This article will show how several well-known acoustic principles, including the Haas effect, and the principles of diffusion, aid recording engineers in the pursuit of achieving a depth image in their artistic recordings. Remember however, that the ear is the ultimate judge of all recording quality. No matter how much we try to quantify, there will remain some mystery over why one recording gives us pleasure and another does not.

### Part One: The Perception of Depth

At first thought, it may seem that depth perception is simply a matter of the ratio of direct to reverberant sound in a

recording. On the contrary, it is a much more involved acoustic process. Our binaural hearing apparatus is largely responsible for the perception of depth. But recording engineers were concerned with achieving depth even in the days of monophonic sound. In the monophonic days, in general, halls for orchestral recording were much deader than those of today. The dead acoustic characteristics of Studio 8H at NBC are clearly audible on the early Toscanini/NBC Symphony recordings. That same studio is used today in television, and its short reverberation time can be heard on TV's *Saturday Night Live*, at least until the boom microphone moves out to considerable distance from the performers, when the apparent reverberation increases.

Why is it that monophonic recording and dead rooms seem to go well together? The answer is involved in two principles that work hand in hand: 1) the masking principle and 2) the Haas effect.

#### *The Masking Principle*

The masking principle says that a louder sound will tend to cover (mask) a softer sound, especially if the two sounds lie in the same frequency range. If these two sounds happen to be the direct sound from a musical instrument and the reverberation from that instrument, then the initial reverberation can appear to be covered by the direct sound. When the direct sound ceases, the reverberant hangover is finally perceived.

In concert halls (as opposed to rooms reproduced over speakers), our two ears sense the reverberation as coming diffusely from all around us, and the direct sound as having a distinct single location. Thus, in the performance space, the masking effect is somewhat reduced by the ear's ability to sense direction. In monophonic reproduction, the reverberation is reproduced from the

same source speaker as the direct sound, and so we may perceive the room as deader than it really is, because of the masking effect. Furthermore, if we choose a recording hall that is very live, then the reverberation will tend to intrude on our perception of the direct sound, since both will be reproduced from the same location—the single speaker.

This is the ultimate explanation for the incompatibility of many stereophonic recordings with monophonic reproduction. The larger amount of reverberation tolerable in stereo becomes less acceptable in mono due to the masking effect.

### *The Haas Effect...*

Helmut Haas, a German mathematician, is best known for his 1951 treatise titled "On the Influence of a Single Echo on the Intelligibility of Speech," which defined the Haas Effect. The Haas effect says that, in general, echoes occurring within approximately 40 milliseconds of the direct sound become fused with the direct sound. We say that the echo becomes "one" with the direct sound, and only a loudness enhancement occurs.

A corollary to the Haas effect says that fusion (and loudness enhancement) will occur even if the closely-timed echo comes from a different direction than the original source. However, the brain will continue to recognize (binaurally) the location of the original sound as the proper direction of the source. The Haas effect allows nearby echoes (up to approximately 40 ms. delay) to enhance an original sound without confusing its directionality.

### *...And Its Relationship to Real Rooms*

We may say that these shorter echoes which occur in a natural environment (from nearby walls and floor) are correlated with the original sound, as they

have a direct relationship. The longer reverberation is uncorrelated; it is what we call the ambience of a room. Most deader recording studios have little or no ambient field, and the very deadest studios have only a few perceptible early reflections to support and enhance the original sound.

In a good stereo recording, the early correlated room reflections are captured with their correct placement; they support the original sound, help us locate the sound source as to distance and do not interfere with left-right orientation. The later uncorrelated reflections, which we call reverberation, naturally contribute to the perception of distance, but because they are uncorrelated with the original source, the reverberation does not help us locate the original source in space. This fact explains why the multi-track mixing engineer discovers that adding artificial reverberation to a dry, single-miked instrument may deteriorate the sense of location of that instrument. If the recording engineer uses stereophonic miking techniques and a live room instead, capturing early reflections in a natural way on two tracks of the multi-track, the remix engineer will have an easier time adding artificial reverberation convincingly.

### *A Brief Summary*

In short: depth is perceived binaurally. Monophonic reproduction provides a very limited sense of depth perception due to the masking effect. Early reflections (up to 40 ms. delay) carry most of the distance and location information in a stereophonic recording. Later, diffused reflections are the reverberation; they give information about the size of the room and some information about the distance of the source, yet do not help us discern its direction.

### *Air Absorption*

Before we leave this topic, there is one



last contributor to the sense of distance in a natural acoustic environment and that is the absorption qualities of air. As the distance to a sound source increases, the apparent high frequency response is reduced. This is another tool which the recording engineer uses to change distance. An interesting experiment is to alter a treble control while playing back a good orchestral recording. Notice how the apparent front-to-back depth of the orchestra changes considerably as you manipulate the high frequencies.

## Part Two: Recording Techniques to Achieve Front-To-Back Depth

### *Minimalist Techniques*

In the December 1979 issue of *db* magazine is a compendium of minimalist microphone techniques by Bruce Bartlett. Bartlett describes the abilities (and inabilities) of various stereo microphone techniques to capture left-to-right placement of the instruments of the orchestra. To sum up, Bartlett proved (not to my surprise) that, in general, the stereo imaging accuracy of various "purist" (or minimalist) miking techniques deteriorates as the inter-microphone separation is increased. In other words, a pair of microphones spaced at 6 feet apart does not produce as accurate a stereo image as a "coincident" pair, with mike diaphragms located within inches of each other. Later, I will make a few observations on how the choice of a particular minimalist technique affects the perception of depth.

Referring to Figure 1, a musical group is shown in a hall cross section. Various microphone positions are represented by letters A-F.

Microphones A are located very close to the front of the orchestra. As a result, the ratio of A's distance from the back compared to the front is very large. (The back is about ten times the distance of the front in the picture.) Conse-

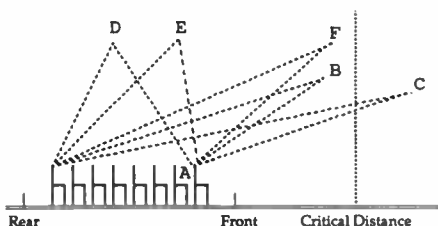


Figure - 1

quently, the front of the orchestra will be much louder in comparison to the rear. The rear instruments, at least because of extreme level differences, will seem farther back, and front-to-back depth will be exaggerated. There is much to be said, however, in favor of mike position A, since the conductor usually stands there, and he purposely places the softer instruments (strings) in the front, and the louder (brass and percussion) in the back, somewhat compensating for the level discrepancy due to location. Also, the radiation characteristics of the horns of trumpets and trombones help them to cover some distance. These brass instruments frequently sound closer than other instruments located at the same physical distance, which explains the common need in recordings to move the woodwind instruments closer to the microphone to obtain the proper balance. Surprisingly, your visual senses actually compensate for improper balances or distances at a concert; when we make an audio-only recording we do not have that luxury.

The other contribution to front-to-back depth is the larger ratio of reflected to direct sound for the back instruments. Relative reverberation contributes to the sense of front-to-back depth at mike position A or any other position.

The farther back we move into the hall, the smaller the ratio of back-to-front distance becomes and the softer the front of the orchestra sounds compared

to the level of the back. At position B, the brass and percussion are only two times the distance from the mikes that the strings are. This (according to theory) makes the back of the orchestra 6 db down compared to the front. Acoustics of the hall greatly change any decibel number quoted, since the more reverberant the hall, the less severe the level changes as we move farther back.

For example, in position C, the microphones are positioned beyond the critical distance in the hall. As soon as we pass the critical distance, further changes in level of front compared to back become much less apparent to us. If the front of the orchestra seems too loud to us at position B, moving to C will not solve the problem.<sup>1</sup> At position C we will probably hear about the same front-to-back relationship as at position B, except the entire orchestra will seem more distant and more overall room reverberation will be heard.

### *The Dimension of Height*

The dimension of height allows us to change the front-to-back perspective practically independently of the reverberation perceived. At position D, there will be no front-to-back depth perceived, since the mikes are directly over the center of the orchestra, equidistant from front or back. Position E is the same distance from the orchestra as position A, but being much higher, the relative back-to-front ratio is much less. At F we may find the ideal depth perspective and a good level balance between the front and rear instruments. If even less front-to-back depth is desired, then E may be the solution, although with more overall reverberation and at a greater distance. Or we can try a position higher than E, with less reverberation.

### *Directivity of Musical Instruments*

Frequently, the higher up we move in the hall, the more high frequencies we

perceive, especially from the strings. This is because the high frequencies of many instruments (particularly violins and violas) radiate upward rather than forward. The high frequency factor adds more complexity to the problem, since it has been noted that treble response affects the apparent distance of a source. Note that when the mike moves past the critical distance in the hall, a listener may not hear significant changes in high frequency response when height is changed.

The recording engineer should be aware of how all the above factors affect the depth picture so he can make an intelligent decision as to which mike position to try next. Or else he will find himself in the position of the 100 monkeys seated at 100 typewriters. Sooner or later they will manage to type all the works of Shakespeare. Similarly, sooner or later, left entirely up to chance, any recording engineer will find that ideal mike position. Hopefully, the good recording engineer will find it before the overtime costs bankrupt the record company.

### *Adding Ambience...And Other Ugly Things (or) Throwing The Minimalist Out The Window*

The engineer/producer often desires a sense of warmth, ambience, or even distance which is not being achieved by the mike position, although the position is ideal for relative front-to-back or orchestral balance and depth. In this case, moving the mikes back into the reverberant field cannot be the solution. Another case for increased ambience is when the hall itself is not the best site for recording. In either case, trucking the entire ensemble to another hall may be tempting but is not always the most practical solution.

Here, the engineer may decide to put up additional mikes to capture the hall ambience. You may have read about the sin of placing extra microphones.

The first potential problem is acoustic phase cancellation, caused by signals from an instrument entering two microphones at different time delays causing deterioration of the frequency response. This effect can range from subtle to serious; severe acoustic phase cancellation sounds like talking through a garden hose (in fact, the garden hose effect is also produced by multiple time delays). Another potential problem is the destruction of the depth image and the loss of a unified acoustic space caused by mixing in multiple microphones, each capturing its own sense of space.

The fact remains that ambience enhancement is desirable in many halls. When the extra mikes are placed purely in the reverberant field of the hall, acoustic phase cancellation does not occur, because the reverberant field is uncorrelated with the direct sound. The problem, of course, is knowing where the reverberant field is located. Careful listening is the rule. The ambience mikes should be far enough back in the hall, and the hall must be reverberant enough so that when these mikes are mixed into the program, no deterioration in frequency response is heard, just an added warmth and increased reverberation character. If the ambience mikes are all the way back in the hall and a deterioration of frequency response is heard, then the hall is too dead - because the so-called reverberation actually contains correlated reflections which cause acoustic phase cancellation (also known as a comb filter effect). The engineer should instead cancel using the ambience mikes, and either try moving his main mikes further back, changing their directional pattern, or even a different hall than the one he shouldn't have chosen in the first place.

Assuming the added ambience consists of reverberation, which is uncorrelated with the direct source, then theoretically an artificial reverberation cham-

ber should accomplish similar results to those obtained with ambience microphones. The answer is a qualified yes, assuming the artificial reverberation chamber sounds good and, consonant with the sound of the original recording hall.

What happens to the depth and distance picture of the orchestra as the ambience is added? In general, the front-to-back depth of the orchestra remains the same or increases minimally, but the apparent overall distance increases as more reverberation is mixed in. The change in depth may not be linear for the whole orchestra since the instruments with more dominant high frequencies may seem closer even with added reverberation.

The stereo image also deteriorates as ambience is added; the image becomes "washy" and instruments are harder to pick out. Many engineers use this to their advantage to create an effect much like being in the concert hall. Keep in mind that pinpoint imaging is generally not experienced in the typical concert hall. The recording engineer's style determines the picture he will paint, which can sound anywhere from hyper-realistic (with pinpoint imaging) to impressionistic (warmer, with slightly indefinite imaging) to completely abstract (I'll leave that to your imagination).

### Part Three: The Influence of Hall

#### *Characteristics on Recorded Front-To-Back Depth - Live Halls*

In general, the more reverberant the hall, the farther back the rear of the orchestra will seem, given a fixed microphone distance. I am intimately familiar with one problem hall whose reverberation is much greater in the upper bass frequency region, particularly around 150 to 300 Hz.

A string quartet usually places the cello

in the back, since that instrument is very rich in the upper bass region. The cello always sounds farther away from the mikes than the second violin, which is located at his right in the hall. Strangely enough, a concert-goer in this hall does not notice the extra sonic distance because his strong visual sense locates the cello easily and does not allow him to notice an incongruity. When he closes his eyes, however, the astute listener notices that, yes, the cello sounds farther back than it looks!

It is therefore rather difficult to get a proper depth picture with microphones in this problem hall. Depth seems to increase almost logarithmically when low frequency instruments are placed only a few feet away from the mikes. It is especially difficult to record a piano quintet there because the low end of the piano excites the room so much as to make it seem too distant and hard to locate spatially. The problem is aggravated especially when the piano is on half-stick, cutting down the high frequency definition of the instrument.

The miking solution I choose for this problem is a compromise: close mike the piano, and mix this with a panning<sup>2</sup> position that is the same as the piano's virtual image arriving from the main pair of front mikes. I can only add a small portion of this close mike before the apparent level of the piano is taken above the balance a listener would hear in the hall. The close mike does help to solidify the image and locate the piano somewhat. It gives the listener a little more direct sound on which to focus. More on multi-mike techniques shortly.

### *Very Dead Rooms*

Do minimalist techniques help when applied to recording ensembles in dead studios? Not much. My observations are that the purist coincident pair and other two-mike techniques which generally sound superior to me are not so obviously superior in a dead studio. A

recent experiment was made with a horn overdub (sax and brass section) on multitrack tape. The experiment took place at the facilities of the Institute of Audio Research, New York City, where I used to teach a recording course. Students at I.A.R. do have a bit more time to experiment with "exotic" miking choices than they would in the speedy outside world. I suggested that they try listening to a coincident pair placed so as to pick up a natural image of the horns. It seemed to us that in this dead room there were no significant differences between the sound of this "minimalist" sound and "multiple mono" close-up mikes! The close mikes were, of course, carefully equalized, leveled and panned from left to right. This was certainly a surprising discovery to me and it points out the importance of good hall acoustics on a musical sound.

Normally, it would seem that close multiple miking kills all sense of depth, and it generally does. But in the dead room, the more distantly placed coincident pair did not pick up a significant number of room reflections to provide a reasonable or even pleasing depth feeling. When the horns were monitored and mixed with the other tracks on the multitrack, the rhythm section effectively masked whatever room ambience that might have been perceived through the coincident pair. The differences between the two miking techniques then sounded insignificant to me. In fact, while this conclusion may sound like heresy to some people out there, I even found that the balance control flexibility provided by the multiple close mikes made them the superior choice in this room.

### *The Left-To-Right Picture*

Bartlett reports that the further apart the microphone pair, the wider the stereo image of the ensemble. Instruments near the sides tend to pull more left or right. Center instruments tend to go wider and more diffuse in their image

picture, harder to locate or focus spatially.

The technical reasons for this effect are tied in to the Haas effect for delays of under approximately 5 ms. *vs.* significantly longer delays. With very short delays between two spatially located surfaces, the left-to-right image location becomes ambiguous. Fusion does not occur. A listener can experiment with this effect by mistuning the azimuth on a two-track machine and playing a mono tape over a well-focused stereo speaker system. When the azimuth is correct, the center image should be tight and defined. When the azimuth is mistuned, the center image should get wider and acoustically out of focus. Similar problems can (and do) occur with the mike-to-mike time delays always present in spaced-pair techniques.

#### *The Front-To-Back Picture*

I have found that when the left-to-right picture is getting wider (due to an increase in intermike distance), the depth picture also appears to increase, especially in the center. This is probably due to the extra wide and diffuse center image. For example, the front line of a chorus will no longer seem straight. Instead, it appears to be on an arc bowing away from the listener in the middle. If soloists are placed at the left and right sides of this chorus instead of in the middle, a rather pleasant and workable artificial depth effect will occur. You should not overrule spaced-pair techniques on the basis of theory alone. In fact, two well-known practitioners of the spaced mike technique (Bob Fine, who used three equally-spaced omnidirectionals, and David Hancock, who uses two Figure-8 mikes spaced a few feet apart) have produced orchestral recordings which in my opinion equal the best ever made in terms of their imaging, depth and focusing accuracy.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Multiple Miking Techniques*

I have described how multiple close mikes destroy the depth picture; in general I stand behind that statement. But soloists do exist in orchestras, and for many reasons, they are not always positioned in front of the group. The engineer should make an effort to relocate the soloist closer to the front microphones when looking for a natural depth picture. But when the soloist cannot be moved, plays too softly, or when hall acoustics make him sound too far back, then a close mike or mikes must be used.

Check for frequency response problems when the close mike is mixed in. As noted before, the live hall is more forgiving and, if little or no acoustic phase cancellation occurs, the close mike can be used. The close mike (not surprisingly) will appear to bring the solo instrument closer to the listener. If this practice is not overdone, the effect is not a problem as long as musical balance is maintained, and the close mike levels are not changed during the performance. We've all heard recordings made with this disconcerting practice. To me, they make the soloist sound like he must be on roller skates because his distance changes at the whim of the recording engineer/producer!

#### *What About Delay Mixing?*

At first thought, adding a delay to the close mike seems attractive. While this delay will synchronize the direct sound of that instrument with the direct sound of that instrument arriving at the front mikes, the single delay line cannot effectively simulate the other delays of the multiple early room reflections surrounding the soloist. The multiple early reflections arrive at the distant mike and contribute to direction and depth. They do not arrive at the close mike with significant amplitude compared to the direct sound entering the close mike. Therefore, while delay mixing may help, it is not a panacea.



### *Stereo Miking a Soloist*

When the close solo mikes are a properly placed stereo pair and the hall is not too dead, the depth image will seem more natural than one obtained with a single solo mike. However, the advantages of stereo miking a soloist decrease in recordings made in dead rooms, for reasons mentioned earlier. (Blame it all on the Haas effect. He's very dead anyway.)

### *Influence Of The Listening Room Environment On The Depth Picture*

The listening (or control) room environment severely affects the perception of depth in a recording. Acoustic phase cancellation caused by sound bouncing off side walls, ceiling and floor deteriorates the stereo image and the depth image in a reproduction system. I have often found the beautiful depth image I have created in my recordings to be greatly reduced by poor living room acoustics and loudspeakers. An objective listening test has been devised for stereo imaging, called the LEDR test (this is available on Chesky Records JD37). If your reproduction system passes the LEDR test, and you have good open space and/or diffusors behind the loudspeakers in your living room, then you will be ready to enjoy the depth images painstakingly engineered into some of our finest recordings. Happy listening and happy depth perception!

Bob Katz

Bob Katz is a recording engineer and digital equipment designer in NYC. You many know him through the recordings he has done for Chesky Records and other labels. He is proprietor of Digital Domain, a CD mastering studio.

### References

1. "Critical Distance" is a term used in

Sound Reinforcement work; I believe it was first popularized or coined by Don Davis. It refers to the point in the hall where the direct and reverberant sound are equivalent or their ratio is 1.

2. Panning or panpotting comes from the term "panoramic potentiometer," which in recording consoles allows positioning a monophonic (single) source anywhere from left to right in the stereo image. The sonic result is a compromise compared to the truer stereo position that results from using two mikes in the first place.
3. Fine's legendary recordings for the Mercury Living Presence Recordings are well known. David Hancock's work for the Vox/Turnabout series can best be appreciated on a fine reissue pressing of the Dallas Symphony available from Athena Records.

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1. Bartlett, Bruce; "Stereo Microphone Technique."db, December 1979.
2. Burroughs, Lou; "Microphones: Design and Application," Sagamore Publishing, 1974.
3. Madsen, E. Roerback; "Extraction of Ambiance Information from Ordinary Recordings," Journal of the Audio Engineering Society, 1970 October. Contains an excellent explanation of the Haas effect as well as a description of a four-speaker ambiance extraction system that must be heard to be believed. (It is excellent).



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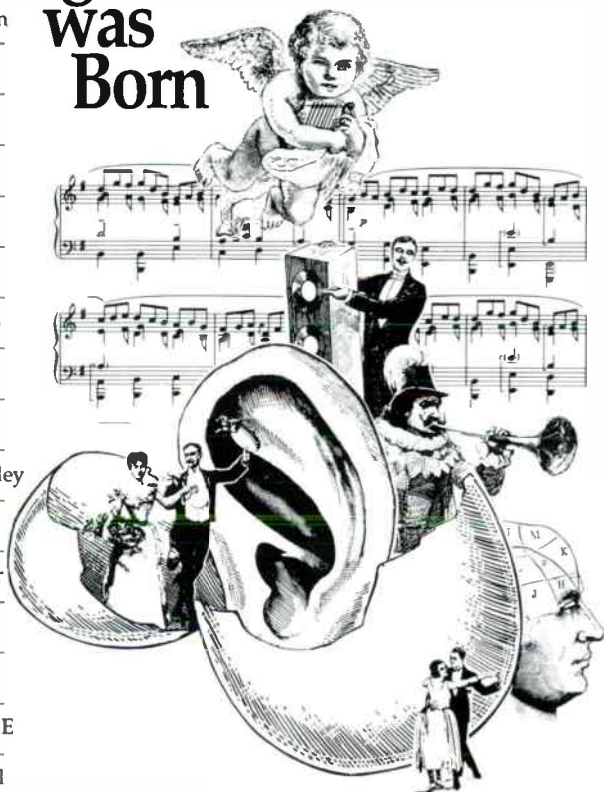
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### On Evaluating Equipment

Get that noise off and put on some classical music. Ah, that old familiar refrain, heard whenever audiophiles get together. You know the scenario: some baby boomer knucklehead like myself tries to put on the latest rock 'n' roll fave rave. I feel the same impatience when I'm at Carnegie Hall and the conductor tries to slip a twelve tone piece into the program; when I'm crosstown at Avery Fisher I feel that way no matter what the orchestra is playing. This brings up an important distinction. There is noise (music you don't like) and there is noise (bad sound). Which kind are we talking about when we demand that it be tossed off the turntable?

It's perfectly understandable that you can't force people to listen to music they dislike, but it's a pity that people can't be more eclectic (that's something like Catholic but with a little agnostic thrown in to make it interesting). To those with a low tolerance for rock, jazz, country and whatever else (even twelve tone), I say it's your loss. But to those who tell me I shouldn't put it on the Hi-Fi, who try to turn their intolerance into some sort of demonstrable superiority, I say go stick your CD in a cryogenic container (*ie.*, chill out). When it comes to recorded music, I maintain that classical recordings are just as likely-no, more likely-to sound like "noise" as rock 'n roll.

One philosophical justification for intolerance has been provided by **Stereophile's** J. Gordon Holt (whose ideas I otherwise have great respect for) and others, who claim that worthwhile assessments of accuracy can only be made using recordings of acoustical music. Electronic amplification befouls the instrumental source, they maintain, thereby dirtying the waters of accuracy. In the JGH Bible (Book of Genesis), am-

plification is the serpent in the Garden of Eden, creating audio's Original Sin. My own sympathies are with the serpent.

In the September '89 issue of **Stereophile**, I tried to argue that the waters of accuracy are hopelessly muddy, no matter what the source, so it ain't no sin to drink from the well-tempered well of "Switched on Bach." In truth, the actual serpent in this landscape is not the synthesizer hooked up to the keyboard, but rather that long cable snaking its way from the microphone to the tape recorder-for that is the connection that joins this unholy union, conceiving a very troubled offspring, Hi-Fidelity.

By way of offering an olive branch to JGH, I allowed as how his "goose bump test" (along with some seemingly flaky, flat-earther subjectivist criteria such as Ivor's infamous tune humming and foot tapping) makes a lot of sense-and any kind of music will do! I have a firm belief up in my soft head that you should evaluate Hi-Fi components using music you enjoy, even if it's, God forbid, electronic. If the music is capable of getting me emotionally involved, then it's a good Hi-Fi reference and ought to be allowed into any proper meeting of respectable audiophiles.

Although I've heard the "acoustical standard" concept used many times to justify a classical only approach to critical listening, I could point out that most rock records contain vocals, drum, saxophones and other unamplified instruments. The acoustical standard, strictly applied, is actually a more narrow attack on guitar and synthesizer based music. It means, apparently, that if I use a Rolling Stones record as a reference, I'm allowed to listen to Mick Jagger but I must ignore Keith Richards' contribution to the sound. I'm sorry but that just don't gimme no satisfaction.

My quibbles with JGH boil down to one indisputable fact. I can be sure of my emotional responses to music, whereas I can never be certain of my evaluations of accuracy. The "acoustical standard" rests on the premise that accuracy, above all else, is what we should be listening for. I call this the "accuracy fallacy." There's an absolute, logically indisputable limit to our knowledge of the sound of any recording-or microphone feed-and therefore a fundamental limit to our ability to judge accuracy. It's an inescapable interference between observer and observed, subject and object, measuring instrument and that which is measured, so I'll call it the "Audio Uncertainty Principle (roll over Heisenberg)."

I've had three subscription series at Carnegie Hall for over 10 years now. The one seating constant has been my throne in Row F, Center. This year I've added Row H; in the past I've had brief, unsatisfying excursions into M, Y and the balcony. I should also mention the inevitably disastrous adventures into the wilds of Lincoln Center. I know live sound well and love it (even, now and then, the Avery Fisher variety), and when I hear classical music on the stereo-any stereo-my initial impulse is often to get the hell out of the room. I must, sometimes consciously, tell myself to make allowances for the sound and concentrate on the music. The worst offenders in this regard are, not surprisingly, symphony orchestra recordings-precisely the kind of music that the "acoustical standard" proponents believe to be the toughest test of a stereo system. I agree, except I'll go one step further; it's too tough a test because even the finest systems fail miserably.

A few months ago, I was auditioning a wonderful system comprised of Krell electronics and Wilson speakers-WATTs, Puppies and WHOW. We put on the Chesky *Strauss* CD (Alpine) and the system sounded incredible. Wall to

wall width, infinite depth and startling clarity. Did it sound as good as the real thing? Not close. Not even on the same planet. I'm not the first to point this out but with live music you get more detail, more air yet paradoxically less brightness. Strings can be rosinny and stinging but without the harshness that accompanies those qualities in a recording. Sections of the orchestra can blend into lushness without losing individual nuances in a veil of foggy reverberation, as so often happens on record. We all know its true and for me it gets in the way. It's a roadblock I can't seem to get past.

Now for fun, let's assume a miraculous technological breakthrough: a perfect stereo recording played on a perfect stereo system. What would we hear? Confronted by the heavenly wonder of it all, I'd bite my tongue and refrain from pointing out that all of the hall sound is coming from the front and none at all from the sides and rear. Accurate? No, it's wrong, but that's stereo folks, and that's the primary cause of all the problems I've outlined above. Stereo microphones don't process the sound the way our brains do, so the perspective is always either too close or too distant-and if just right, too close and too distant.

Can we use classical recordings to make educated guesses about the accuracy of our playback equipment? Of course. But will that yield better results than using Rock and Jazz? I sincerely doubt it. Many of our most brilliant engineers and designers use rock 'n' roll music as their reference when making improvements in their products and I think that the results validate the approach.

My objections to the accuracy of stereo recordings have relatively little to do with "multi-mono" pop productions. The great sounding rock concerts I've been to I can count on the sticky fingers of one hand (one of those fingers is

counting a Jimmy Buffet show at, ironically enough, Avery Fisher Hall). Accuracy to a live event is not really the issue in rock 'n' roll recording, although accuracy to the timbre of the (electric) instrument(s) is. The rock bottom line is that for the most part, I find rock records more enjoyable than rock concerts. Am I missing anything when I put on *The Allman Brothers At Fillmore East* on the stereo? Obviously I miss the emotional kick of seeing musical inspiration happen right before my ears-of being once again startled by the brilliance of the late, great Duane Allman. But sonically the record (now CD) is just fine.

As Arnis Balgavis put it in his recent review of the Basis turntable in *Stereophile*, "let live music remain the Holy Grail that it is." Amen. Let's have a crusade not for the Holy Grail but rather for a little more tolerance of all kinds of music. I myself have been known to tolerate even classical music in my home; audiophile favorites *Cantata Domino* on Proprius; Vivaldi's *Lute Concertos* on Hungaraton; Leinsdorf on Sheffield; Anna Maria Stancyk playing Chopin on John Atkinson's recording-even Krystien Zimmerman on DGG (just to mention a label well know for its non-audiophile sound). Actually I could go on and on, so I don't want my prejudices to be mistaken for dogmatism. Of course, the records and CDs I've just mentioned are all capable of giving me an emotional charge-in spite of their unmistakable but unknowable departures from accuracy-so I'm back to giving precedence to my subjective criteria. As Obi Wan Kenobi might have told young Luke Skywalker, "Let the goosebumps be with you."

Mark Block

*Wes Phillips adds his two cents:*

All of us stereo nuts have accurate systems. If you doubt this just ask us, we'll tell you so. "Listen to that bottle break-

ing back there, sounds real huh?" "Check out how the helicopter spins around and then takes off." What all of us seem to forget is that there are different types of accuracy; tonal accuracy (the one we mainly pay attention to), dynamic accuracy (most systems fail this one), metric accuracy (does it swing in an appropriate manner) and articulation (are separate voices rendered convincingly?). So what are we saying when we all claim to have an "accurate" system. I mean besides "mine's better than yours?"

Most of the time we're discussing tonal quality and this is where the big debate over using non-Classical reference material is. For the most part I think that this is a real non-issue. If we are going to attempt to judge just the tonal reproduction of instruments, then we need to use a reference that is relatively ungimmicked. Acoustic instruments in a room work best because we have a real world model to compare our system's response to. Notice that I said acoustic, not Classical. If you don't listen to orchestras regularly, then the best recorded orchestra in the world won't help you set your system up. Use Jazz instead. Or Bluegrass, a Broadway show, barber-shop quartet... anything at all that you hear enough of in the real world to judge how close your system gets to it.

Now wait a minute, I hear all the rockers going, I listen to this stuff all the time. I know this difference between a Fender Strat and a Gibson Les Paul! Sure you do, I do too, but it don't mean doodely when we trying to judge tonal accuracy because there are too many unknown variables. The kind of strings being used, whether or not the guitarist uses a pick, the type of amplifier being played through, or even if an amplifier is used - sometimes guitarists play directly into the board, the use of distortion, flanging, or echo devices... all of this stuff changes the sound of guitars radically. So how can we judge what

that instrument is really supposed to sound like? In terms of tonality, we haven't got a chance. But that doesn't mean that we can't use rock to assess the overall ability of our system to reproduce music.

In terms of timing and articulation, that Rolling Stone's album might be able to tell us a lot. When Charlie, Ron, Bill and Keith lock into a groove, there are a lot of subtle timing relationships that are going on - that is, if your system is playing what they were playing. The ability of a stereo system to resolve the myriad of timing cues that occur in music is at the core of Linn's famous "tap your foot" test. I believe that the test has received much unjustified criticism. I could no more enjoy a stereo that could not pass this test than I could a Stones album that I couldn't dance to.

There's a lot of rock that could also be used to judge how well a system can handle the dynamic extremes, but many people get confused here. Typically audiophiles react to the word dynamics by pulling out the loudest most cannon laden recording they have and playing it at 110 db. Then, faces distorted by the gale force winds emanating from the woofers, they shout at you "how about those dynamics?" Indeed. Let us not forget that dynamic range refers to the spread between the softest decaying whisper of an echo to the loudest roar reproducible. I find far too many systems that are capable of extraordinarily loud response fall flat on their faces in reproducing the soft passages. And no matter what the type of music you listen to, one of the techniques that the creative artists use is contrast. Remove that from their repertoire and you have someone who is less capable of self expression. Even the sainted Jimi Hendrix, who lived and breathed loudness and distortion, turned it down occasionally.

Years ago, when CDs were first coming

out and I was in the throes of love with my first turntable, I remember being startled when my boss at Tower Records, Ray Edwards, told me that he liked compact discs. Now this is a man whose musical judgement is impeccable. He has heard almost any classical performer of note who has concertized over the last twenty-five years, knows the literature backwards and forwards and has a record collection that goes back into the 78 era in great detail. Ray challenged my smug emerging audiophile prejudices - to wit, that anyone who preferred CDs, solid state or convenience just wasn't knowledgeable or dedicated enough about music to get it right. With Ray, digitals attraction wasn't the absence of noise (he listened to 78s, remember?), convenience (ditto) or a desire to be up to date. As a pianist and student of the piano literature, CD was the first time that he had heard the piano emerge from a stereo with rock solid stability even down to the lowest, slowest passages.

This, I think is the greatest flaw in the concept of the great audio search for accuracy. We aren't all seeking the same thing. Not when we get down to particulars. Ben Holt once made a comment to the effect that he had heard many systems that he would not care to live with, but (almost) none that were unsuccessful when evaluated in terms of what they had been set up to do. ( He's referring to systems set up by audiophiles, not necessarily those by dealers or manufacturers). Most of us aren't able to be either as perceptive or as generous as Ben was, but it wouldn't hurt any of us to remember that in music, as in love, we may differ as to what the ideal is.



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| Duration: 3 hours     |                    |  |
| 14. February 13, 1937 | <b>Manon</b>       | Sayao ( <i>debut</i> ), Rayner, Bonelli-<br>DeAbravanel Conducting. Original Transcription.                                |
| Duration: 2 1/2 hours |                    |  |
| 40. March 29, 1952    | <b>Alceste</b>     | Flagstad ( <i>farewell</i> ), Sullivan, Valentino-<br>Erede Conducting. Original Transcription.                            |
| Duration: 2 1/4 hours |                    |  |
| 83. November 29, 1941 | <b>La Traviata</b> | Peerce ( <i>debut</i> ), Novotna, Tibbett-<br>Panizza Conducting. Excellent Copy.  |
| Duration: 2 1/4 hours |                    |  |
| 94. November 18, 1952 | <b>Norma</b>       | Callas ( <i>Covent Garden debut</i> ), Sutherland, Picchi, Stignani-<br>Gui Conducting. First Generation copy from London. |
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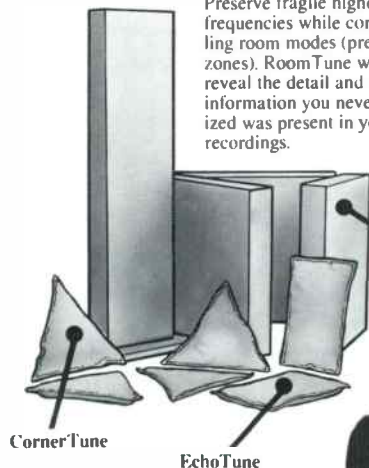
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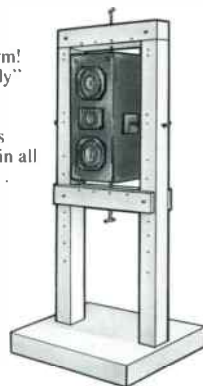
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## Classical Selections

**Benjamin Britten: "Les Illuminations" For Tenor and String Orchestra Opus 18, Variations On A Theme Of Frank Bridge, for String Orchestra, Opus 10. Benjamin Britten, Conductor, Peter Pears, Tenor, The English Chamber Orchestra; London-OS 26032 (LP), 417 509-2 (CD).**

On this 1967 London/Decca release we find Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears, along with the English Chamber Orchestra performing two of Britten's early masterpieces.

The *Variations On A Theme Of Frank Bridge* was commissioned by Boyd Neel for his orchestra's participation in the 1937 Salzburg Festival. *The Variations*, which took Britten a mere ten days to sketch, are based on a theme from Frank Bridge's *Idyll #2* for string quartet. This tribute to Bridge is somewhat more than coincidence, for Bridge was Britten's composition teacher and close friend.

Composed for string orchestra the *Variations* consist of an introduction followed by nine variations and a fugal finale. The listeners' perspective is clearly mid-hall, about twenty-five rows back. In traditional concert seating we have first and second violins to our left and cellos and contrabassi to our right. Seated slightly behind the cello section are the violas.

The *Variations* open with sharp pizzicato chords in the violins contrasted by a low 'C' pedal in the cellos and basses. Right at the outset, the sound is one of great acoustic space. Suddenly, Britten's string writing becomes quite linear in nature. Ascending 'fanfares' in the second and first violins coalesce into a powerful tutti passage while at the same time the basses maintain their

low 'C' foundation. It's rather uncanny but the sound quality is so good that one can easily detect the guttural quality of resin and horsehair on the steel strings of the contrabasses.

Many other wonderful abound in this recording. To wit-- variation number four, "Aria Italiana." Mid-way through the variation the first violins perform harmonics which have a wonderful singing like quality. In variation five, "Bourree Classique" we find ensemble writing very much 'concerto grosso' like in nature. The stark, block-like chords of the ensemble stand in clear contrast to the running figures found in the first violins and cello. Marvelously, half-way through this variation the concertmaster emerges as soloist in perfect proportion to the rest of the ensemble. Britten's writing stands in tribute not only to his dear friend, Frank Bridge, but clearly also to the genius of Johann Sebastian Bach.

The final movement "Fugue and Finale" is a veritable textbook of contemporary string writing. Britten's fugue subject, rather "nervous" in character, is heard four times as it makes its way through the entire ensemble. Ultimately, after much interplay, we hear Bridge's original theme soaring above the rest of the orchestra as it is carried by a solo first and second violin, solo viola and solo cello. At last, in what is almost a mixture of 'recitative' and 'aria' we hear Bridge's theme carried by first and second violins as a plaintive cry. Finally, nine measures from the end, the theme is but a skeletal, ghostly whisper intoned as harmonics. The very last measures of the work are pure "color," leading us back to the very same sharp, pizzicato chords with which the work began.

Following the *Variations On A Theme Of Frank Bridge* by two years "*Les Illuminations*," *Opus 18 for Tenor and Orchestra*, is a song cycle based on the poetry of Henri Rimbaud. *Les Illuminations* speaks

of Rimbaud's adolescent vision of a world rife with pettiness and corruption. The work opens with a fanfare for strings over which the tenor soloist declares: "J'ai seul la clef de cette parade, de cette parade sauvage." "I alone have the key to this parade, to this savage parade." The musical impression is one of a great portal opening up allowing us into a world filled with gypsies, master jugglers and fools. Peter Pears is wonderful with Britten's 'macabre-like' music. His vocal quality brings to the lyrics a detached, 'voice from another world' quality which Rimbaud's poetry demands. Throughout *Les Illuminations* the overall sound quality, is quite good, although I would not place it on the same level as the *Variations On A Theme Of Frank Bridge*. In many instances there is a loss of detail. Also, the recording has the rather annoying habit of "pushing" the solo voice forward when the soloist is performing (while pushing the strings to the rear) and then *vice-versa*, when the strings have their say. Yet, all things considered, this performance is to be treasured if only because it possesses the wonderful music making of Britten and Pears.

For those buying purely analog, do note that this recording is not too difficult to find. As a part of its ARDM or "Analog Digital Remastering Series" London has also made the recording available on the CD format (London-417-509-2). The program on CD is different from vinyl in that instead of *Les Illuminations*, the *Variations On A Theme Of Frank Bridge* are paired with Britten's *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* and a spirited performance of Britten's *Simple Symphony*.

How does the CD measure up against the original analog version? For me the analog is preferable. On compact disc the listener gets about seventy-five to eighty percent of the acoustic information found on the original analog recording. In essence, the overall 'finish' of the recorded sound is quite different.

With digital the nature of the sound is consistently bright. By "bright" I am referring to not simply shrillness but a 'sameness' to the sound quality. The dilemma is not unlike an actor reciting verse on a stage in which the lights are extremely bright regardless of mood. On analog, the sound is significantly truer to the many subtleties and nuances found in Britten's music. Simply put, the analog version is superior in that it gives greater clarity and makes far more musical sense. Also, somewhat disconcerting is the fact that the digital process alters the dimensions of the recorded ensemble. With the analog version our ears tell us we are listening to a chamber orchestra of some twenty to twenty-five musicians. On CD, the English Chamber Orchestra sounds inflated in size. The impression is that we are hearing a string section whose size is rather like that of a modern orchestra.

The current Schwann catalog lists eight additional recordings of *Les Illuminations*. Were I to consider an alternative performance, I would first look at interpretations by Robert Tear with Carlo Maria Giulini and the Philharmonia Orchestra (DGG-423239-2GC) and that of Felicity Lott with Bryden Thomson and the Scottish National Orchestra on Chandos (CHAN-8657). With the *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge* ten other performances are available. Those looking for an alternative might well consider Neville Marriner's recording on London (421391-2-LM), Boughton on Nimbus (NI-5025) or Thomas on Chandos (CHAN-8376).

Need I say in closing that this is one of those rare recordings in which two very heartfelt performances are paired with wonderful sound. Clearly, this is a recording to be savored.

**Sir Adrian Boult: *Concert Favorites*. New Symphony Orchestra of London; Elgar: *Pomp and Circumstance, March #1*, Mendelssohn: *Fingal's Cave Overture*, Mussorgsky: *Night on Bald Mountain*, Sullivan: *Overture di Ballo*, Liszt: *Les Preludes*, Tchaikovsky: *Nutcracker Suite*; Chesky Records JD 53 CD ADD.**

When I first put this compact disc on and listened, for a few moments, only one word came out of my mouth—"WOW!" Perusing the liner notes it became quite clear that this recording had all the right things going for it. Sir Adrian Boult in a program of what the English call "Lollipops," the Walthamstow Town Hall and the legendary team of Charles Gerhardt as producer and Kenneth E. Wilkinson as recording engineer. I very much enjoy the work of Lewis Layton and Robert Fine but without question, the gentleman who stood at the pinnacle of the recording engineer's art was Kenneth E. Wilkinson. Wilkinson's work was, to put it in a word—"ravishing." I have yet to come across another recording engineer whose artistry so brilliantly conveys the full size, strength, weight and authority of orchestral sound. Given the upbeat repertoire and the joyous atmosphere this recording offers, it is very easy for us to imagine that during the next seventy-three minutes we are in attendance at one of the "last nights of the Proms" at Covent Garden.

Sir Adrian opens his program with a headlong rush into Sir Edward Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance, March No. 1 in D, Op. 39*. This is brash, highly spirited music and the overall mood of this performance, even in the dignified middle section, is one of great enthusiasm. The Chesky brothers have done a wonderful job with the sound here. Listen to the very opening of the Elgar—the dimensionality between the brass fanfares

and the lower strings is magnificent. At the entrance of the first theme there is an attention to detail that is very much a characteristic of Kenneth Wilkinson's work. The orchestration here is for violins, in the lower register, combined with viola. Although there are several other instruments adding to the color here, the timbre of the violins and viola is clearly recognizable.

Following the Elgar is a fine performance of Felix Mendelssohn's *Fingal's Cave Overture*. The sound is quite good but it is not up to the level found in the other five selections. Could it be that the master tape of the Mendelssohn did not hold up as well as the rest? In any event, the performance is very good. After a demonic performance of Modest Mussorgsky's *Night on Bald Mountain*, a one in which the satyrs, ghouls and spirits of the night take the lead, we come to a work which I must admit is quite new to me.

Sir Arthur Sullivan's *Overture di Ballo* of 1870 is, as its name implies, an overture for a "grande fete" or "ball." Laid out in tripartite form, the overture consists of an introduction followed by a scherzo and concludes with a gallop. Personally, Sir Adrian's performance of this lovely work is the highlight of this altogether wonderful collection. The work opens with sharp, powerful staccato chords for the entire orchestra. After some delicate woodwind interplay, the first theme is introduced by first and second violins. Sullivan's string writing in this passage combined with Wilkinson's fine engineering make for some very special moments. The violin writing here is very "caprice" like in character and the many trills, ornaments and slight changes in tone color are perfectly captured. The soundstage, from both left to right and front to back, is enormous. Similar to the opening Elgar march, this is a performance in which it's very easy to close one's eyes and picture the entire orchestra in front of you.



The sound quality is so good that the listener can clearly hear the various orchestral choirs in their natural concert position.

Following a very powerful performance of Franz Liszt's symphonic poem *Les Preludes*, we come to the final offering on this recording, Piotyr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite*. *The Nutcracker* is the last of Tchaikovsky's three great ballet scores. "The Suite, Opus 71a," is interestingly the only one of Tchaikovsky's ballets from which he personally extracted a concert suite. Boult's performance is easygoing and faithful to Tchaikovsky's score directions. Unlike many other conductors, he does not push tempi or over exaggerate the orchestration for pure effect. One remarkable passage, and there are many to be found, is the middle section of the

"Danse des Mirlitons." Tchaikovsky's writing here is so simple and yet so effective. Over the interval of a fourth, (in the lower strings) Tchaikovsky has written an F# minor scale in the brass, later to be taken up by the strings and lower woodwinds. The effect created by this imaginative writing is one of great, menacing power.

In summation, I must say this recording represents some of the best sound I've come across on compact disc. As good as the Chesky's earlier efforts were, this present recording clearly is at an even higher level. One brief recommendation-make "Sir Adrian Boult, *Concert Favorites*" available on vinyl. In these, the last dry days of analogue, it would be nice to see something this good on LP.

George Mardinly

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## Al Simon Examines Two Great Nineteenth Century Romantic Ballets

Ballet as an art form, has long been an essential part of the artistic culture of Russia, France and Italy. Ballet's current worldwide popularity reflects an outgrowth of the revolutionary impact of music written for this medium by Adam, Delibes and Tchaikovsky during the nineteenth century, followed by a second wave of historically important works by Stravinsky, Prokofiev and Khachaturian. Generally speaking, a large portion of music written for ballet in the last century is non-descript, essentially a vehicle for dancers to display their technical virtuosity; little of it survives today. On the other hand, ballet divertissements were an essential requirement of French and Italian operas. For example, many of these interludes written by Rossini, Gounod and Verdi, remain in the current repertory of ballet companies.

Today, much less original music is written for the ballet. Choreographers lean heavily on existing compositions for new ballets. George Ballanchine, arguably the most important choreographer of the twentieth century and not arguably its most prolific, was a master in using music ranging in style from chamber works to symphonies and concertos as a vehicle for many of his over three hundred ballets.

Exposure and acceptance of ballet in America essentially began in the 1940's, largely due to the efforts of Ballanchine, founder of the New York City Ballet and Lucia Chase, founder of American Ballet Theater. Credit should also be given to the impresario Sol Hurok who introduced American audiences to world class Ballet Companies such as The Bolshoi and Kirov from Russia, The Royal Ballet Company from England, The Stuttgart from Germany and the

Royal Danish Ballet from Denmark in the 1950's.

This review focusses upon two of the most significant full length ballets of the nineteenth century. Two criteria were used to evaluate each recording. First, is the conductor's interpretation relative to tempi, mood, orchestral balance and dynamic shading consistent with the choreography and storyline. Second, to what extent have the recording engineers captured musical reality in the recording. In other words, do I feel transported from an aural experience into a seat at a live performance. Included in this review are some recordings no longer listed in Schwann but of considerable merit. Hopefully many will be reissued or at least, well worth the search. Finally, I may have omitted some recordings due to lack of familiarity. For this, I apologize and welcome readers comments.

*Swan Lake: Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky*

Aside from *The Nutcracker*, *Swan Lake* is undoubtedly the best known and most widely performed full length romantic period ballet. The famous Lake scene comprising Act II (which does not require the elaborate costumes and scenery used in Acts I and III) is a staple of many world class and regional ballet companies. Portions of this act have been utilized as background settings in numerous movie and television productions. There are probably few movie goers, at least older ones, who are not familiar with the haunting *Swan Lake* theme which often served to instill a dark, sinister mood in many of the great horror movies produced by Monogram and Universal in the thirties and forties.

Ironically, despite its worldwide popularity today, *Swan Lake* was a complete failure at its opening performance at The Bolshoi Theater in Moscow on March 4, 1877. Confronted with a score that was more symphonic in nature, cer-

tainly more complex, coupled with a second-rate producer and conductor, the dancers and orchestra members rebelled. This forced drastic cuts and revisions to the music despite its relevance to the storyline and the substitution of music by "non-entities."

By today's standards, this criticism is unjust. Both the music and story placed enormous demands upon all concerned in the initial production. The performers were faced with music that ranges from the deepest emotion and lyricism in Act II, to grand ensemble dancing in Acts I and III and culminating in the highly dramatic and intense music accompanying the final conflict between good and evil in Act IV. The ballet lay dormant for eighteen years until the great Russian choreographers, Marius Pepita and Len Ivanov, utilizing the original Tchaikovsky music, restaged the Ballet in 1895. This version met with immediate and undying success and is the version universally accepted today.

Briefly, the story of *Swan Lake* involves Prince Siegfried, who required to marry, happens upon Odette and her maidens, who having been transformed into swans by the evil magician Von Rothbart, only attain human form at night. Only by pledging his undying love can Siegfried break the spell. Siegfried invites Odette to a ball at which he will choose her as his bride. However, Von Rothbart appears at the festivities with his daughter Odile, in the guise of Odette (the two roles are danced by the same ballerina). In the famous, black swan Pas de Deux, the magician deceives the Prince into swearing eternal love for Odile. Realizing the trickery, Siegfried returns to the lakeside imploring the distraught Odette for forgiveness. What follows is nearly nine minutes of some of the most intense and dramatic music ever composed for the stage—the life and death struggle between Siegfried and Von Rothbart. The spell is finally broken by either Von Rothbart's death or the lovers taking

their own lives; the ending is left to the discretion of the choreographer.

Many recordings purport to contain all of the music Tchaikovsky wrote for the original production. Where the recordings primarily differ are in numerical sequence and the inclusion or deletion of some musical selections. With the major exception noted below, the performances generally follow the universally accepted 1895 Pepita-Ivanov restoration.

I will not dwell upon the virtues of Dorati as one of the most important ballet conductors of the past four decades but will simply state that his historic 1954 recording with the Minneapolis Orchestra (Mercury MG 50068-70) still evokes emotion, sensitivity and dramatic impact unmatched by most other performances. Recorded monophonically, the clarity, presence, depth and dynamic range rivals many stereo analog recordings, not to mention the so-called musicality of the digital format.

Ansermet also had an affinity for ballet music, but I cannot recommend his recording with L'Orchestra De La Suisse Romande (London CSA2204). The orchestral playing is excellent, the London sound spacious and natural and the tempi consistent with the storyline. But for some reason, the ballet is confined to two discs with some important music deleted and other selections emasculated. This is not a performance for the purist.

The 1973 recording by Anatole Fistoulari with the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra (London SPC21101-3) equals and in some respects, surpasses the Dorati version and is my personal favorite. Tempi are precise and sharp, dynamic contrasts well defined and together with a beautiful violin solo by Ruggiero Ricci in Act II, provide an intensely dramatic performance. (One historical note: The black swan Pas de Deux music is included in Act I and the Act III Duet replaced by the relatively

recent discovery of unpublished music which Tchaikovsky intended for the initial 1875 performance but remained unnoticed in the 1895 revival). The London Phase Four recording has excellent clarity, stage width, height and depth plus solid bass definition. My copy, at least, does not exhibit a rise in the high frequencies, a characteristic generally associated with Phase 4s.

It may come as a surprise to some people but Ozawa with the Boston Symphony (DG CD 415367-2) offers an intensely lyrical, passionate and dramatic interpretation in the tradition of the Russian Imperial School. In fact, upon relistening to the recording for this review, I was astonished just how closely the Ozawa reading matches my videotape of the Leningrad Kirov Ballet performance. The Boston organization is in more than top form and the recording has beautiful string tone, natural woodwinds, rich sounding brass and sharply defined but natural sounding tympani. There is good hall ambience, excellent stage width, height and depth. Unlike many DG recordings, your seat is mid-orchestra. If you can find the analog disc version (DG2709-099), the sound is even better. Overall, a real winner.

With the passing of Dorati, Ansermet and Fistoulari, the field of eminent ballet conductors with an extensive library of recordings has been largely left in the capable hands of Richard Bonyngue and John Lanchbery and in the latter's recent performance with the Philharmonia Orchestra (EMI CD 749171-2). Lanchbery does not disappoint. Compared with the Russian school which tends to over-emphasize the dramatic, British interpretations of the score (eg. The Royal Ballet) are somewhat faster paced and with more forward thrust to the music. His is a very exciting performance, well-played and the CD sound not dull nor overly miked. Dynamic range is excellent but the instrumental definition suffers during

excessively loud passages. Soundstaging and depth are quite adequate. The recording also includes the original Act III Black Swan Pas de Deux music.

Leonard Slatkin's approach with the Saint Louis Symphony (RCA CD 7804-2) is a little more analytical than the competition while conversely, some of the tempi are overly fussy. Slatkin omits the opening music and the third sequence of the "Dance of the Swans" in Act II and the false starts of the Waltz in Act III. Their omission are justified in the liner notes as being repetitious and having less validity in a purely aural presentation. While the recording has adequate soundstaging and depth, the overall sound is generally more sterile with less musical truth than other CD versions.

Even if the Dorati and/or Fistoulari readings are not reissued (hopefully with decent sound) or if you cannot locate the original recordings, Ozawa and Lanchbery offer first-rate performances. The final choice will be determined by the listener's preference toward either the Russian or British school of interpretation.

*The Sleeping Beauty: Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky*

Despite the initial failure of *Swan Lake*, Tchaikovsky welcomed the commission by The Marinsky Theater to score music for a second ballet based upon the well known fairy tale by Charles Perrault (1628-1703). Although the choreography was assigned to the Russian Master Petipa, Tchaikovsky insisted upon detailed instructions and precise requirements regarding mood, tempi plus the exact number of measures and length for each section of the ballet which he faithfully followed. What emerged was a wealth of melodies, symphonically structured as in *Swan Lake*. While a success at the initial performance in St. Petersburg on January 15, 1890, *Swan Lake* made little impression outside Russia

when danced at La Scala in 1896 or in an abbreviated form in New York in 1916. The ballet finally received acclaim in Europe after the 1921 Diaghilev presentation and in the United States after the first full length production in Philadelphia in 1937. Today, *Swan Lake* remains a ballet which remains in the repertory of most international companies.

Written in three acts and a prologue, the music conveys a wealth of lyrical, emotional and dramatic diversity. Highlights of Act I include the popular Waltz, the more than six minute highly dramatic and technically difficult "Rose Adagio" (during which Princess Aurora is "on point" for half the time) and the sharp, almost discordant music portraying the Witch Carabosse placing her spell on Aurora. Act II contains the lyrically beautiful music with a solo cello in the Pas D'Action scene where the Prince pursues the vision of Aurora. Other highlights include the emotional serenity of the "Panorama" scene in which the Lilac Fairy leads the Prince through the woods to the realm of Aurora. An intensely slow and dramatic buildup is climaxed by a thunderous clash of the cymbals as Aurora is awakened to close Act II. The final act includes exciting and quite varied character dances plus a dramatic Pas de Deux for the principals. Some critics have suggested the music is not the equal of *Swan Lake*; I will not argue the point other than to say that I disagree. Except for one major insertion noted below, all the recordings reviewed are essentially similar in both musical content and numerical sequence. All are based upon the 1890 Pepita version.

The 1955 release by Dorati and the Minneapolis Symphony (Mercury OL-3-103, Mono) is both a performance and recording of historical importance. It is beautifully interpreted, played and recorded with clarity and exceptional dynamic range. More I will not say; other thoughts about Dorati's performance

are expressed later on.

Compared with *Swan Lake*, Ansermet's recording with L'Orchestre De La Suisse Romande (London CSA 2304) is complete. It is a no-nonsense performance-rather straight forward with no fussiness in tempi. However, the lyrical and dramatic qualities of the music are not compromised. The recording is exceptionally musical with full rich sound, hall ambience and good soundstaging. All-in-all, well worth the price of admission.

The 1974 recording by Andre Previn and the London Symphony Orchestra (Angel SCLX-3812) is no longer listed in Schwann, no great loss in my opinion. Although beautifully played, tempos are not well defined, possibly due to the dull and distant sound. Brass simply do not extend above the strings minimizing the impact and drama of the musical climaxes.

John Lanchbery offers a magnificent performance with excellent playing by the Philharmonia Orchestra (EMI CD7-49216-2). His tempi are ballet oriented and he knows exactly how to interpret the music to fit the choreography and the varied moods of the storyline. The recording is rich sounding with natural string tones, exciting, glowing brass and sharply defined tympani. Soundstaging in all dimensions is superb. This would be my desert island choice except for the fact that Dorati strikes again.

Dorati's 1981 recording with the Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam (Phillips 6769-036 and CD 420792-2) is simply magnificent, surpassing his 1954 performance. The playing is imaginatively conceived with brilliant musical shadings, unbelievable capture of mood, appropriate tempi at all times and dynamic contrasts which excite the senses. An additional bonus omitted in the other recordings is a seven minute exquisite musical interlude with solo violin inserted during the scenery

change preceding the Finale of Act II. George Ballanchine also used this music between Scenes I and II of Act I of his New York City Ballet production of *The Nutcracker*. Dorati had a flair for the theatrics in his blood exemplified by the nearly five second pause in music after the cymbal crash when the Prince awakens Aurora with a kiss (the Guinness Book of Records for the longest ballet kiss??). Soundwise, the recording is ex-

cellent with superb instrumental definition and soundstaging; the Phillips engineers completely captured Dorati's dynamic contrasts. If you like *Sleeping Beauty*, this is the recording to own. Better yet, if you can, acquire the analog version.

Al Simon



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## A Blue Note Labelography

### Part I: A Brief History of Blue Note Records

There is a moment, a sudden rush of insightful recognition, that comes to some people without warning. In that moment, one experiences the thrill of connection; of knowing why they are here and what they are meant to do.

For Alfred Lion, that moment came when he was 16 years old, in 1925, at a concert in Berlin featuring Sam Wooding's swing orchestra. This concert of American Jazz was the spark that would fuel the fires of a lifetimes work.

Alfred devoured any and all information he could unearth about this new music. Five years later, on a business trip to the United States, he returned to Berlin with more than 300 Jazz albums!

1938 came and with the Nazi Party insinuating itself into the political and social fabric of Germany, Lion made the difficult decision to leave his homeland and take up residence in the United States. In December of that year, he went to the ground breaking "Spirituals to Swing" concert at Carnegie Hall. Lion was so taken with the music of Boogie-Woogie pianists Albert Ammons and Meade Lux Lewis that he arranged to take them into a New York recording studio two weeks later to capture their infectious magic on 12 inch, 78 rpm discs. That session, on January 6th, 1939 marked the birth of Blue Note Records.

Though pressed in small numbers, Blue Note 78s began getting rave reviews. With the release of Sidney Bechet's "Summertime," from a session six months later, Lion also had his first "hit" record. Lion felt it necessary to downplay the commercial aspect of the music and so stated his credo in Blue Notes's first catalogue with these words:

"Blue Note Records are designed simply to serve the uncompromising expressions of hot Jazz or swing, in general. Any particular style of playing which represents an authentic way of musical feeling is genuine expression. By virtue of its significance in place, time and circumstance, it possesses its own tradition, artistic standards and audience that keeps it alive. Hot Jazz, therefore, is expression and communication, a musical and social manifestation and Blue Note Records are concerned with identifying its impulse, not its sensational and commercial adornments."

There is no better definition of Blue Notes musical integrity nor a more apt description of the way in which Alfred Lion ran the company for almost 30 years.

In 1941, Lion's childhood friend, Francis Wolff, came to America and became his partner, weathering the struggles of World War II and the recording ban of 1946-47. They dedicated themselves to documenting the ever-changing face of the music; from the mainstream swing players, transitional stylists like Ike Quebec (who would later play a large part in bringing fresh new talent to the label), to radical Bebop architects like Thelonious Monk and Bud Powell. In the fifties, they brought "hard Bop" to the forefront via Horace Silver and Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers and later forged a Jazz-funk style with players like Jimmy Smith, Lee Morgan, Donald Byrd and Herbie Hancock that would forever be identified with the Blue Note label. During the sixties, they documented many important landmarks of the "New Thing" or free Jazz movement, including offerings from Ornette Coleman, Don Cherry and Cecil Taylor.

As much a part of the "Blue Note" sound as the music itself, Rudy Van Gelder's engineering helps define a classic Blue Note session. Van Gelder joined the label in 1953, while continuing sessions for other labels (including

many important Prestige recordings), initially using his living room in Hackensack, New Jersey for a studio!

Another aspect of the classic Blue Notes was their "look," thanks to the clean imaginative artwork of Reid Miles, who designed Blue Note's graphics for eleven years.

Regardless of stylistic inclinations, musicians universally appreciated the latitude and respect given their musical instincts by Lion and Wolff, often giving them better performances than other, less sympathetic, labels might get from them (one former producer for rival label Prestige Records admitted that "the difference between Blue Note and Prestige [recordings] is two days of rehearsal"). The players not only trusted Lion and Wolff's judgement but they also knew that, if Blue Note believed in you, you'd always have a place to express yourself through their records.

Blue Notes perceived decline during the late sixties and early seventies can be traced to several factors, not the least of which was Alfred Lions's failing health and gradual withdrawal from hands-on leadership of the label. One might also point to the sale of the label to Liberty Records in 1965 and its eventual absorption under the United Artists conglomerate. (To UAs credit, they did manage to put in motion an excellent reissue program in the seventies).

Francis Wolff stayed at the company's helm until his death in 1971. For several years, it looked as though the label would be trapped into reliving its past over and over through UA reissues, without new artists and talent to bring back the fresh creative spark that kept Blue Note vital. The label made a few half-hearted attempts at a creative comeback via several fusion and pop records, but found it difficult in their role as followers rather than leaders.

In the mid-eighties, now under the

EMI/Capitol umbrella, Blue Note began another extensive reissue series and, more importantly, a recommitment to the ideals that Alfred Lion brought to the label almost fifty years before. The Blue Note roster now includes a wide variety of styles, from the Pop/Jazz of Bobby McFerrin to the innovations of Charlie Haden's Liberation Music Orchestra; with exciting music from new faces like Geri Allen, Ralph Peterson and Kevin Eubanks as well as more established names like Don Pullen, John Scofield and Tony Williams, there can be no doubt: *Blue note is back and better than ever.*

### Part 2: A Blue Note Labelography

So, you want to BUY some of these classic Blue Notes but don't know which pressing is which and whether you're being ripped off or not?

Never fear, the path to enlightenment is less rocky and treacherous than you might think (at least in this particular instance).

The first piece of information you need is: When was the music recorded? (Actual release dates are a little more problematic; the session dates are usually an easier place to start). To help out with your quest, I strongly recommend **The Blue Note Label: A Discography** by Michael Cuscuna and Michel Ruppli (available from **True Blue Music**, 35 Melrose Place, Stamford, CT 06902, Greenwood Press, 1988).

Let's say that you're just run across a copy of Wayne Shorter's *Night Dreamer* LP. Armed with the above volume, you'll discover that the recording session that produced the album in question took place on April 29th, 1964. Keep that date in mind-we'll come back to it later.

The next clue is the LP's label.

Labels A and B are from a 10 inch 78

rpm disc and a 10 inch 33 1/3 rpm album, respectively. Note the "767 Lexington" address. This was kept on the label until Blue Note moved their headquarters in February of 1957, at which time the label was changed to reflect their new location, "47 W.63rd," as on label C. Bear in mind that, with many pre-printed labels in stock, Blue Note was still using some of the older labels for awhile after their move.

Labels D and E show the effects of frugal management. When Blue Note moved again in 1963 (to 61st Street), they dropped the address altogether, leaving only "New York, USA." This meant that future moves (as long as they were within the Big Apple) wouldn't require redesigning the labels! Labels D and E also show the difference between monophonic and stereo issues.

When Liberty Records bought them out in 1965, the legend "A Division of Liberty" was added (label F). Likewise, when the company was put under the broader umbrella of UA, this was changed to read "A Division of United Artists" (label G).

During the early seventies, the decision was made to modernize the Blue Note image resulting in label H, which pleased the Art Director, but raised the hackles of many a Blue Note purist (like yours truly!). Sometime before 1975, this was modified to the even less palatable label I.

With Blue Notes rebirth in 1984 came a return to basics, including the welcome reinstatement of the original blue and white design of the companies heyday, with the stylistically apt legend "Finest in Jazz since 1939" added. This is how the label looks today. (NOTE: For almost twenty years Blue Notes have been reissued in various forms throughout the world, most notably in Japan and France. Though these LPs are excellent in almost every respect, they are easily identified by close inspection of their labels.

So, back to that Wayne Shorter album.

Knowing that the original sessions took place in April of 1964 means that an original pressing will probably bear the "New York, USA" label of D or E (post '63 and pre '65).

Got it?

Another point: To determine if Rudy Van Gelder did the mastering, look in the run-out groove next to the label itself. Early Blue Notes done by the good Doctor (he was an optometrist in a former life) have the stamp "RVG," while later issues have "VAN GELDER."

Original Blue Notes from the fifties and sixties in mint condition are difficult to find and often command high prices (I was recently quoted a price of \$140.00 for a mint copy of Cannonball Adderley's *Something Else* LP!). Sadly, many jazz fans don't appear to be quite as careful with their LPs as are the collectors of classical music. That's not to say the music is impossible to find in listenable shape; good condition "Liberty" and "United Artist" label Blue Notes can generally be had for \$5 to \$15 if you look hard. Obviously, the more desirable the title, (i.e., John Coltrane's *Blue Trane* or Herbie Hancock's *Maiden Voyage*), the more you'll pay for a pristine original pressing. Garage and yard sales sometimes yield treasures, but a good, carefully run private auction (such as advertised in many classified sections), can often bear fruit where years of searching through dusty record bins might not.

Good Luck and Happy Hunting!

(I'm indebted to Michael Cuscuna, arguably the worlds biggest Blue Note nut and Charlie Lourie, both of Mosaic and True Blue Music, for imparting some of the more arcane tidbits of Blue Note label-lore. Thanks!)

Elliot Kallen



Label A



Label B



Label C



Label D



Label E



Label F



Label G



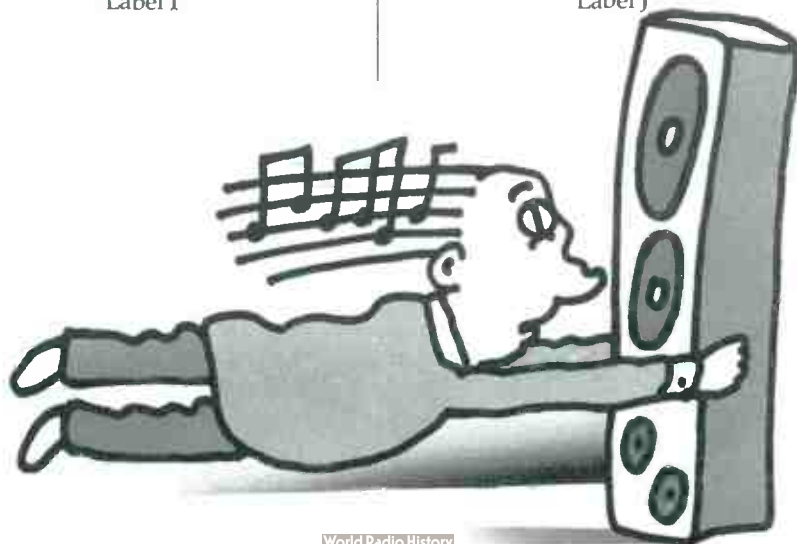
Label H



Label I



Label J





## With Passionate Intensity: The Collaborations Of Gil Evans And Miles Davis.

In 1959, a temperamental horn player and a reclusive pianist/arranger joined forces to make four unusual recordings. Two of these - *Sketches of Spain* and *Miles Ahead* - have become classics, and deservedly so. They are uniquely successful in melding the spirit of jazz with the symmetry, precision and emotional depth of classical music.

The arranger, Gil Evans, had fronted a band of his own during the thirties. He had never made it into the first rank with more enterprising-and perhaps less talented-leaders like Glenn Miller and Tommy Dorsey. By war's end, he was working for the innovative Claude Thornhill band.

Influenced as much by Ravel and Manuel de Falla as by Louis Armstrong and Jelly Roll Morton, the scholarly Evans was part of the "third stream," a short-lived effort to merge jazz with twentieth-century symphonic music. As a freelance arranger, he did significant work for Gerry Mulligan and Miles Davis, including two innovative tunes ("Boplicity" and "Moon Dreams") on *Miles' Birth to the Cool*, the 1954 Capitol album (T-1974) that's credited with starting the "cool school" of modern jazz.

During the heyday of bebop, Davis had been Charlie Parker's side-kick, room mate and secret benefactor.<sup>1</sup> By the early Fifties, he'd become a potent musical force in his own right. Already a jazz superstar, he'd been leading a succession of groups that included jazz giants like Art Blakey, John Coltrane, Sonny Rollins and Thelonious Monk.

In late 1959, Davis and Evans teamed up again. They were to create four startling Columbia LPs, each with a single

unifying theme, each merging intricate jazz, symphonic and popular elements, each breaking new musical ground.

On all four albums, Evans did most of the composing and arranging. Miles proposed the thematic content, did some arranging, contributed a few tunes, played some trumpet (mostly muted), and played a LOT of flugelhorn.<sup>2</sup> The bands consisted of about twenty jazz and symphonic musicians, with several shifts in personnel. The albums were produced by George Avakian and Teo Macero.

### \**Miles Ahead*\*

A huge critical success when it was released, many jazz critics still view *Miles Ahead* as the masterpiece of Davis-Evans collaborations. Evans linked ten relatively short and very diverse tunes, each a self-contained composition, each with a nice hook. Producer George Avakian called it a "kind of suite," but most of the transitions are little more than a thread of sound.

Unlike *Sketches of Spain* with its rigorous thematic unity, *Miles Ahead* was sourced in an amazing variety of places: "My Ship" was a Kurt Weill theater piece. Dave Brubeck wrote "The Duke," which has since become a jazz standard. "I Don't Wanna Be Kissed" was a pop tune. Delibes wrote "The Maids of Cadiz"; Ahmad Jamal was responsible for "New Rhumba." Davis wrote the less-than-modestly titled "Miles Ahead," and Evans himself penned "Blues for Pablo." Although the linkages are a bit flimsy, they are nicely done. And one has to marvel at his ability to lash all that diversity into a cohesive whole.

In contrast to their later collaborations, Miles' flugelhorn work on *Miles Ahead* is downright warm and sunny. In fact, if the album has a fault, it is Miles' tendency to float away great advantage on cotton candy clouds.<sup>3</sup> But whenever



that threatened to happen, Evans would bring him to earth with dark sonorities and chiseled orchestrations.

Evans had long since shunned the repetitive riffing associated with most big bands of that era-and, more recently, with "soul" bands like Booker T. and the MGs.<sup>4</sup> In a sense, *Miles Ahead* took up where Ellington left off, using an outstanding soloist against a backdrop of rich and subtle textures, of the kind usually associated with symphonic music.

Like Ellington, Evans would instruct the sections-or the whole band-to backup tempo numbers with dynamic, extended melodic commentaries. On slow tunes like "My Ship," he surrounded the soloist with molten figures that entered softly, shifted sonorities almost imperceptibly, lingered awhile, and then evaporated into silence. Often, a single horn or woodwind would back the soloist with an extended note or two, or play a simple countermelody. At times, Evans used all three devices simultaneously.

Evans' instrumentation was unconventional, too. The 19-piece group did not include a piano. To add melodic heft, he used low-register instruments that were unusual in a Jazz band in the late fifties: bass clarinet, bass trombone and tuba. He added French horns to the brass section. But, regardless of the innovations on *Miles Ahead*, Evans never failed to clearly state the cadence with bass and drums. The beat stayed on.

Although *Miles Ahead* only hinted at the scorching intensity that was to illuminate *Sketches of Spain*, intensity isn't everything, and *Miles Ahead* far surpasses the other three Evans/Davis collaborations in Jazz spirit. Fortunately, it's easy to get, having been digitally remastered on CD and LP (Columbia Jazz Masterpieces 40784). Unfortunately, the digitized sound quality is airless, two-dimensional and bass-shy, and the original six-eye analog LP (CS8633) is VERY

hard to come by. But, until I find a good analog, I can live with the CD. The splendid music making easily overcomes the barren sonics typical of these digitized **Columbia Jazz Masterpieces**.

#### *\*Porgy and Bess\**

In July, 1958, Davis and Evans went into the studio for the recording sessions that produced *Porgy and Bess*. Encouraged by Columbia, it was an interesting, if circular, choice: a Jazz version of a Jazz-inspired "folk" opera.<sup>5</sup> Undoubtedly the most intricate of the Evans/Davis collaborations, *Porgy* carried on with much of the verve of *Miles Ahead*, but with less sprightly enthusiasm. But the public like it even better: *Porgy* was Miles' best-selling LP until *Bitches' Brew* (CS8085) inaugurated his fusion period.

*Porgy and Bess* is not a jazzed-up interpretation of the Gershwin work. In fact, it's not really very "jazzy" at all. It's a complete recomposition that adds major elements and leaves much of the original, including "I Got Plenty of Nuthin," one of the opera's most popular songs. Davis and Evans, who worked together on the score from the very beginning, weighed in with several numbers of their own, all on the Catfish Row theme.

Although the Evans/Davis *Porgy and Bess* is beyond question a jazz composition, it deviates from the traditional big-band style even more than does *Miles Ahead*. During several extended passages, the bass and drums are silent, the cadence only implied. And there are some eccentric orchestrations as well: "The Buzzard Song," for example, is a mini-concerto for flugelhorn and tuba. Yes, tuba. Seems odd, but it doesn't sound odd at all.

If *Miles Ahead* was a string of glittering pearls, *Porgy* is a single gem with many facets, a remarkable consistent and pellucid example of jazz orchestration.

Davis never fails to play brilliantly. Despite the complex arrangements, he always keeps his cool, never lapsing into prettiness or melodramatics, even when tempted by theatrical numbers like "Summertime."

But *Porgy and Bess* is not without fault, at least on an expressive level. It has a sameness that gets tiresome, mainly because Evans tends to rely on tonal colors instead of melody, dynamics and cadence. Only "Summertime" and "There's a Boat That's Leaving soon for New York" ever really leave the dock. As much as I like *Porgy*, I hanker for more hooks and surprises.

Nonetheless, it's an album worth having. Jazz fans are not particularly inclined to part with early Miles Davis records of any description, so the Columbia six eye version of *Porgy and Bess* will be hard to find. But it may sound even better than my red-and-gold CL 8085, which, although not of audiophile quality, is spacious and well-defined, with above-average bass extension and detail. I haven't heard the CD, but I wouldn't expect much.

### *\*Sketches of Spain\**

Evan's arranging techniques were to serve as the perfect underpinnings for the most famous Evans/Davis collaboration of all, *Sketches of Spain*, recorded in 1960. Its introspective centerpiece, "Concierto de Aranjuez," is derived from the Adagio movement of Rodrigo's now famous "Concerto for Classical Guitar." "Concierto" is Miles Davis'-and Gil Evans'-most acclaimed work. One quickly runs out of superlatives to describe it.

The twenty-minute "Concierto" begins as a dark, brooding song. Backed by castanets, Davis plays the flugelhorn softly and in the low register, as though it were telling a sad, embarrassing story. As the work builds, clouds threaten, emotions rise, the music becomes more

intense, even sinister. The dialogue between the soloist and the twenty-piece jazz band sharpens and becomes more forceful. After the climax, Davis plays soft, muted trumpet and the mood is wistful. The work ends in retreat, on a sad, brave note that recaps the bullfight theme of the piece.

The temptation to compare the Evans/Davis version with Rodrigo's "Adagio" is irresistible. Rodrigo himself did not like the revision, and some critics felt its structure to be tentative. But on an expressive level, the Jazz Concierto wins hands down.

Rodrigo's original movement, though lovely, is static, a comfortable journey across a flat plain. It's easy listening. In contrast, the Evans/Davis version engages the listener in a shifting, highly-charged emotional experience.

Like a someone sharing an intimate confidence, the Evans/Davis "Concierto" commands undivided attention. Along with abundant rhythmic drive and dynamic range, its expressiveness is in nuance: dark, subtle colors, changing textures, long, sad whispers. These are deep waters, and the more revealing your system, the deeper you'll go.

There have been subsequent Jazz arrangements of "Concierto de Aranjuez," but none has been nearly so successful. Apparently daunted by the complex Evans arrangement, both Jim Hall (with Chet Baker) and The Modern Jazz Quartet (with Laurindo Almeida) chose to simplify the work, using smaller forces and leaving out the complex sonorities that Evans used to such great advantage.

It's amazing that Evans could extract such an accomplishment from a "pickup band" consisting of Jazz and orchestral players that happened to be in New York at the time. Composer Hall Overton called it "the toughest notation I've seen in a Jazz arrangement." Even

though all the musicians were accomplished readers, "Concierto" took eight recording sessions to complete. The orchestration is pure vintage Evans; it includes characteristic bass clarinet, bass trombone, bassoon and tuba, along with the usual brass and woodwind sections. He used the plucked strings of a harp to emulate the plucked Spanish guitar of Rodrigo's original "Concierto." Jazz players on the date included Ernie Royal on trumpet, Frank Rehak on Trombone, Paul Chambers on bass, Jimmy Cobb on drums and Elvin Jones on drums. Janet Putnam played harp. The balance of *Sketches* was recorded four months after *Concierto*. It consists of four additional works, also on Spanish themes.

Like "Concierto," "Will o' the Wisp" was based on an orchestral motif, the "Pantomima" from Manuel de Falla's ballet "El Amor Brujo." It's a simple back-and-forth melody, and the repetitions don't vary enough to keep things interesting. A nice coda to "Concierto," it doesn't succeed on its own. (In de Falla's original, it was a flamenco-suffused female vocal. Much better.)

The folk-based "Pan Piper" includes a repeated orchestral figure supporting Evans on muted trumpet. A snare drum contributes rhythmic energy, and Evans' crisp textures give the piece weight and volume. It's a pleasant excursion, but little more.

"Saeta" represents a religious procession. It begins with a march played on trumpets and snare drums. The parade halts. Davis plays a mournful song, "The Heart Pierced by Grief," backed by a sustained horn-and-woodwind chord and occasional march cadences on the snare. When the song is over, the march resumes, and the trumpets recede into the distance. It's very much Davis' show, and he uses the opportunity to render a touching evocation of Spanish mysticism.

"Solea" ("lament") could be a postscript to the *Concierto*. Once again, Evans makes full use of his orchestral forces to provide a stirring, flamenco-based setting for Davis' flugelhorn. But unlike "Concierto," almost the entire piece is spurred by the percussion section. Various ensembles carry the flamenco motif, which is occasionally punctuated by staccato jazz figures. Davis, in a sustained mood, soars above the rest with a gorgeous weave of blues and Spanish melodies. Next to *Concierto*, "Solea" is the richest and most intricately-textured work on the album. And its rhythmic intensity is unmatched.

For sheer emotional and mystical power, the Evans/Davis versions of "Concierto, Saeta and Solea" rival the works of Bach, Mahler and Barber. But "Sketches" was not universally admired by jazz critics; after all, nothing on the record could honestly be called jazz. On the classical side, critics gave "Concierto" low marks in comparison to the pleasant Rodrigo original. But over the years, "Sketches" has justifiably developed an enormous and passionate following.

In addition to being the most expressive of the Evans/Davis collaborations, *Sketches of Spain* is the most skillfully recorded. Davis is closely miked, as he should be for a work that is meant to be heard on such an intimate level. The recording has excellent depth and transparency, with the band receding into the hall, but still detailed and well-defined. The percussion instruments are particularly vivid. Overall, the sonics are a bit on the bright side, and the lower end is somewhat pallid. But this upper-mid emphasis and bass shyness is more on Than offset by outstanding imaging definition.

#### \**Quiet Nights*\*

The last and least of the Evans/Davis projects was *Quiet Nights* Columbia PC 8906. Getz and Gilberto had made

Bossa Nova a major craze, but it was strictly a small group phenomenon. Until *Quiet Nights*, no one had tried to orchestrate samba.

Intriguing-and commercially attractive-as the idea may have been, *Quiet Nights* was a commercial and creative failure. All thick textures and understatement, it's destitute of drive, structure and commitment. Even the unsigned liner notes are apologetic. It's a sluggish piece of work that demands enormous concentration and offers no commensurate rewards.

After *Nights*, Davis was furious. He hated the music and blamed his producer, Ted Macero, to whom he wouldn't speak for several years. Although they remained friends, Davis and Evans were never to work as a team again.

For good reason, the record is a rarity. It's currently out of print in every format except cassette. My LP copy is older "Nice Price" reissue. (It must be reported that even this floppy repressing sounds better, in non-musical terms, than the *Miles Ahead* CD.) Unless one is a neurotic completist, the record isn't really worth looking for, and I'm personally not interested in finding an earlier pressing.

Tom Kelly

- <sup>1</sup> Miles family in East St. Louis was quite prosperous and they sent him money. With these funds, he made "loans" to Parker, whose habit had outgrown his earning ability.
- <sup>2</sup> Miles is usually thought of as a trumpeter. But some of his best work has been on flugelhorn.
- <sup>3</sup> In some respects, the work resembles Louis Armstrong's early "Tight Like This." Both pieces run to dark emotions, both build in intensity and both are based on minor key, emotionally charged, Spanish melodies.

Miles once said of Armstrong: "You know, you can't play anything on a trumpet that Louis hasn't played."

- <sup>4</sup> "Repetitive riffing" is really a redundancy, alliteratively speaking. By definition, a riff is a repeated staccato figure (*ostinato*, to be technical), usually played by an ensemble behind a soloist. Along with bass and drums, these horn section riffs propelled many a big band. And some riffs were rewritten into melodies eg. *Satin Doll*.
- <sup>5</sup> A folk opera is an opera about folks, rather than by folks. That is, unless you consider George Gershwin to be a true man of the soil. Like Woody Allen. Or Oscar Levant.

### Miles Dewey Davis III May 26, 1926-September 28, 1991

The son of a wealthy midwestern dentist, Miles Davis never did what was expected of him.

As a bright and talented youngster, he dropped out of Juilliard to take up with junkies and hipsters. Scornful of classical music and white jazz musicians, he made some of his greatest recordings in collaboration with a white composer. In later years he abandoned jazz to play rudimentary music that alienated critics and fans alike. And, despite wealth and fame (and an idyllic childhood), he always wore a mask of bitterness.

It is through the lens of his music-especially his early music-that we can glimpse the man who lived behind the angry mask. These recordings reveal a very different Miles, a radiant soul filled with anguish and tenderness and subtlety.

Along with Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker and a handful of others, he left an indelible imprint on the music.

## Last Analogue - Original Jazz Classics

Jazz is the last major type of music to be deleted from the catalogs in the analogue/vinyl format. There is still time to acquire a significant collection of this music due, in no small part, to Fantasy Records. In the mid-seventies, Fantasy Records originated the "two-fer" and started an industry trend by selling a ton of double pocket sets at bargain prices. There has been some criticism of the "two-fers" for excerpting recording sessions in some of the volumes.

In 1985, Fantasy initiated the Original Jazz Classic (OJC) series; albums with the original art work and liner notes at a bargain price. The Original Jazz Series was also an enormous hit with Jazz collectors because they made available many deleted titles by major artists in the original format.

Six influential, independent jazz labels comprise the bulk of the series: Contemporary, Fantasy, Milestone, Prestige, Riverside and Pablo. The first five of these captured their own particular style of Jazz at the moment of invention when the ideas and performances were fresh. That fact is of enormous consequence since most audiophiles are only exposed to bland, reworked Jazz on audiophile labels. I've only heard one that was artistically meaningful—the McCoy-Tyner Chesky recording (Chesky JD51).

Fantasy has kept the remastering chain all analog for the vinyl editions of the OJCs (most are also available on CD). According to one of the mastering engineers, they have no plans to delete titles in the immediate future. But that doesn't mean you can be casual with your collecting.

The OJC series currently numbers over

525 albums. Records list for \$6.98 and are discounted to around \$5.50. It is obviously difficult to generalize about the sound quality of a catalog of this size and diversity, but one thing has remained consistent. The pressings are clean and the sound quality is close to the original issues. For the most part, these are simple, multi-miked studio recordings. The Riversides and Contemporarys generally have very good sound; the Prestiges are more variable.

### The Riversides

*Bill Evans: Everybody Digs Bill Evans, OJC 068; Waltz For Debby, OJC 210; Sunday At The Village Vanguard, OJC 140; Moonbeams, OJC 434.*

Bill Evans used to sit at the piano crouched closely over the keyboard, head cocked at an odd angle, hands apparently divorced from the body, his body superfluous to his intellect. What an odd introverted figure. The body language clearly indicated that he held his music above and separate from his personal life which was marred by drug abuse and illness.

Evans was sensitive and always thinking. He was a major force in Jazz in the late fifties and early sixties. The eight months he spent in Miles Davis' group in 1958 was, in a major way, responsible for the sound and concept (modal improvisation) of the *Kind Of Blue* album which marked Miles' zenith as an artist.

Evans' music can be taken on two levels. For the non-Jazz oriented listener it sounds like pleasant, affecting music: piano played in a trio setting, the sound of which is now part of our collective unconscious, accessible music to new Jazz fans. Familiarity with the style and the tunes brings a deeper level of understanding.

Evans was an impressionist, a romanticist, a lyricist. He played with a light touch on the keyboard and made heavy



use of legato-smooth playing in which the decay of one note is connected to the note which succeeds it. Little "space" is used in the way Windham Hill musicians use it. The music is harmonically and rhythmically dense, designed to fill and weave space.

This personal style lent itself to Evans being a strong exponent of the above mentioned modal playing style in which chord changes were limited to one or two per tune. This forced the musician to explore all tonal possibilities within that chord when improvising and it is what gives Evans' playing an introverted, self-exploratory feel.

The first few notes of "My Foolish Heart" on the *Waltz* album distills Bill Evans. I define truly affecting performances by their ability to raise the hair on my arms. This was and still is a hair raiser. So gentle, so emotional. It instantly draws you in and speaks to the heart.

The *Sunday* and *Waltz* albums were recorded live at the Village Vanguard on June 25, 1961. A few days later, Scott LaFaro, Evans' bassist, was dead. Listen to LaFaro behind Evans. He was no mere time-keeper. These are more like duets than piano with bass support. The Vanguard recordings are historically and artistically important. A bonus for audiophiles is that they are well recorded with beautiful piano overtones, delicate cymbal work and although multi-miked, they do present a soundstage to the listener.

*Everybody Digs...* was Evans' second album (1958, post *Kind Of Blue*) and marked his full maturity as an artist. A haunting original composition, "Peace Piece" is worth the price of admission. *Moonbeams* was Evans' first album after LaFaro's death. Chuck Israels had replaced him and tended to sublimate himself to Evans, forcing Evans to be more expansive and exert more influence over the trio. This is an all ballad

album and is important because it helped form Evans' post-LaFaro style. The studio miking on both is tasteful, although with *Everybody Digs...* you get some tape hiss. All the Bill Evans issues are good. Don't restrain yourself.

*Thelonious Monk: The Unique Thelonious Monk*, OJC 064, mono; *Brilliant Corners*, OJC 026, mono; *Thelonious Himself*, OJC 254, mono; *Misterioso*, OJC 206; *Five By Monk By Five*, OJC 362; *Thelonious Alone In San Francisco*, OJC 231.

There's this wonderful sequence in a 1958 CBS documentary, *The Sound Of Jazz*, where Count Basie is sitting next to the piano while Thelonious is playing one of his own compositions, "Blue Monk." Monk is dressed in an understated plaid suit, shades with bamboo stems, and a snap brimmed hat. His lips are pursed, his back straight. He is restless on his piano stool, fidgeting and jumping spasmodically when making chord changes. Monk's feet move sideways in jerky motions under the stool, keeping his own unique sense of time. He plays with physical emphasis, his shoulders supplying the power to strike the keys, not just the hands and wrist. New meets old. Modern Jazz meets swing.

Basie didn't quite know what to make of it and he didn't really like it. At first he kept a polite smile on his face. Politeness turned to disbelief and then humor as Basie looked over at his singer, Big Joe Turner, who was also puzzled. They burst into a laugh as Monk struck a dissonant chord as if to say, "this guy's getting over, getting paid for nothing...go with it, brother."

Monk was years ahead of Basie, years ahead of the bop artists with whom he was loosely associated. Monk heard things differently than everyone else and played what he heard without compromise. He was a great composer and his tunes have become part of the lexicon of jazz. "Round Midnight," "Off Mi-



nor," "Ruby My Dear," "Well You Needn't," "Straight No Chaser" and more were written between 1946 and 1952 and recorded for the Blue Note Jazz label with marginal sound. He spent the early fifties composing more and recording for the Prestige label.

He did not gain wide acceptance in the Jazz world until the mid-fifties, 10 years after he was first heard. It was while he recorded for the Riverside label that he was able to express himself best as a musician and it is with that label that we first hear him well recorded.

Where Bill Evans is romantic, Monk is emphatic. Where Evans plays with legato, Monk plays fractured lines, oddly broken up with lots of space between phrases. Monk swings like a stoic, relentless force - plodding forward, repeating phrases to build tension. His sense of rhythm was not the syncopation of the swing era. He was a different kind of modernist. No other musician would put the accents where Monk put them or phrased things the way he did. Yet the result is affecting. Every interpretation gives new insight.

Monk is not really hard to listen to. But that is coming from a Jazz fan and I sometimes forget how foreign Jazz can sound to those who haven't listened to it much. A good way to begin is to listen to Monk playing standards. *Thelonious Himself* gives easy access to Monk's music. If the listener knows the words or tunes they can pick up on what Monk is doing. Because this is solo piano, the lines are easy to decipher.

*The Unique...* does the same thing in a trio format with the great bassist, Oscar Pettiford. "Liza" is played straight for the first chorus before Monk displays some of his circumnavigated chord changes - nothing too radical and Pettiford lays down a firm foundation to keep Monk on track. That can't last too long however and by "Honeysuckle Rose," Monk is really cooking and

shows the wry side of his personality. "Darn That Dream" is a perfect example of how Monk would imply a chord or note by playing the notes around it. It gives the sound a hollow, strange feeling without being off key.

Of the albums featuring mostly Jazz tunes and Monk's own work, *Alone In San Francisco*, will provide an entry point-excellent solo piano. You can begin to get into the more abstract, open-ended structure of Monk's work. *Misterioso* is a live recording at the Five Spot Cafe in 1958 which features tasteful miking, lots of "club" noises and throws an intimate soundstage. It also introduces the listener to Monk's larger sized group recordings, this one being a quartet featuring Johnny Griffin on tenor sax.

*Brilliant Corners* and *Five By Monk...* are both studio recordings. The former is a mixed quartet and quintet featuring Sonny Rollins, Clark Terry and the infrequently heard Ernie Henry. The latter, *Five by Monk*, is a quintet with Thad Jones, cornet, Charlie Rouse, tenor, Sam Jones, bass and Art Taylor, drums. "Five by Monk" may be the most effective setting of Monk in a larger group. Rouse is loose as a goose from the start on "Jackie-ing" while Monk plunks out his chords in the background. "Ask Me Now" is a slow, lonely tune with beautiful solos by Jones and Rouse who have lots of room to develop their ideas.

*Tadd Dameron: The Magic Touch*, OJC 143.

Tadd Dameron led his own quintet with Allen Eager and Fats Navarro, toured with Miles Davis in '49, but is primarily known as an arranger and composer of some major jazz compositions. Some representative samples are: "On a Misty Night," "Hot House," "If You Could See Me Now," "Our Delight" and "Good Bait." Dameron was among the first big band arrangers to make use of the new "bop" style. However, his arrangements for bands do not sound

nearly so frenetic as the bop artists sounded in small groups.

In fact, each arrangement is well planned, a small jewel in which every melody has a logical conclusion and the writing for each section dovetails nicely with the whole. If you like order, you'll like Tadd Dameron. You'll get a feeling of familiarity with Dameron's work. It's an indication of the extent to which musicians borrow from the past.

His career through the fifties was frequently interrupted by illness and narcotics. In 1958, he received a long jail term but continued to write and arrange. When he was released, Riverside gave him this opportunity for a "come-back," a big band session with top soloists. Among them were Bill Evans, Johnny Griffin, Clark Terry, Charlie Shavers and Philly Joe Jones.

"On A Misty Night" starts off with some tight unison playing of the melody, one of those you've heard before and can't remember the title of. It then becomes the property of Johnny Griffin on tenor sax. "Fontainebleau" is a more cohesive statement of a longer composition which appeared on OJC 055, Dameron's impression of the french palace.

"Dial B For Beauty" is perfect Dameronia. It starts with flutes and piano trilling before the band joins in for a statement of the lovely theme. Joe Wilder's trumpet carries the tune gently out over a smooth orchestral bed.

This album is really a perfect summary of his career. In 1965, three years following it's recording, Dameron succumbed to cancer. Dameron can be heard on three other OJC reissues: *Mating Call* (OJC 212) with John Coltrane, *Clifford Brown Memorial* (OJC 017) and *Fontainebleau* (OJC 055).

*Chet Baker: In New York*, OJC 207); *Chet*, OJC 087;

*Kenny Dorham: Jazz Contrasts*, OJC 028; *Blue Spring*, OJC 134.

In the mid-to late-fifties there was much controversy in Jazz circles about the differences between "East Coast" and "West Coast" Jazz, "hot" versus "cool," "black" versus "white." Bop was played fast, strayed farther from the melody, was harder to understand. It's proponents were more sectarian, than the musicians and music of the swing era which bop had replaced. The swing era had been, after all, the country's "popular" music.

Jazz lost much popular appeal during the bop era. The art form had advanced too far past the public's ability to follow, not unlike the development of classical music toward more and more abstract expression. The West Coast style of jazz did not rectify this situation, but posed an alternative in the feeling of Jazz.

Just to carry the comparisons to an extreme, West Coast Jazz tended to be less dynamic, more controlled, more dispassionate (cool). More emphasis was placed upon composition, was played more often in medium to slow tempos and had an all around lighter feel than East Coast (bop and post-bop) Jazz.

Bop was 10 years old by the time cool Jazz came on the scene; it's practicing soloists more mature at this stage and the music itself placed more emphasis on fast individual expression. Many bop tunes were really total improvisations on the chord changes of other tunes-"I've Got Rhythm" being the prime example. More loosely structured, bop had a "hotter", more emotional feel and required quick thinking and technical skills honed to a fine point.

That's an extreme characterization because from the perspective of the nineties, both styles are part of the whole of the jazz tradition. The degree of cross-

fertilization between black/white, east/west, cool/hot musicians is staggering and nearly invalidates comparisons. For example:

Miles Davis, who up to 1949 was a blue-blood bopper, got together with Gerry Mulligan and recorded a little ditty called "The Complete Birth Of The Cool" (Capitol), the anthem of cool Jazz. Davis retained his cool vibrato-less tone for the rest of his career. Large numbers of musicians "crossed over" to record on each other's dates. Stan Getz, a "cool" musician, was influenced by Lester Young, a black swing era musician and eventually transcended categorization as did Lennie Tristano, Gil Evans, Mulligan, and others. Chet Baker (cool) and Kenny Dorham (bop) were superb musicians who, while centrists in their style, had the ability to cross-over and play in the other idiom.

Baker and Dorham had a similar smokey, warm kind of tone on the trumpet. Neither used much vibrato. Dorham added the ability to play slightly behind the beat, a device which draws the listener into the music in anticipation of the next note. When playing fast runs such as on "I'll Remember April" from *Jazz Contrasts*, Dorham sounds like he's on the edge of stumbling, which of course he isn't. Listening to the rhythm section and Dorham at the same time increases the feeling of speed. It's like being on the last car of a roller coaster getting whipped side-to-side and pulled along.

His smokey sound is also highly effective on ballads such as "My Old Flame", also from *Contrasts*. Baker is joined on this album by the great tenor saxophone player, Sonny Rollins. "Blue Spring" is one of my favorites. On this album, Dorham is joined by Cannonball Adderley on alto in a septet format. I have never been a fan of Adderley when he is leading his own group. He tends to play too many notes without direction or musical effectiveness. But

under the direction of others he turned in some fantastic solos - check his work with Miles Davis. He did no less well here, soloing effectively throughout.

This album was totally under Dorham's artistic control. Four of the six numbers are his compositions. Most tunes are taken at a loping pace except for "Spring Cannon" which is fast. The medium tempos allow all soloists to stretch out effectively.

Chet Baker was an expert at creating a mood. He was able to suspend notes in mid-air and almost stop time when playing ballads. He gained instant success for his early recordings with Gerry Mulligan in 1952 (*Gerry Mulligan/Paul Desmond*, OJC 273). "My Funny Valentine" was the first big hit for cool Jazz and these early sides remain remarkable to this day for the chemistry and mood they evoke.

Without Mulligan, Baker's career had many ups and downs, mostly downs. He was a stylist without a center of gravity and he had a drug problem. He occasionally would "sing" a chorus from his ballads in a boyish monotone which added a feeling of immature young love to the mood.

Those only familiar with Baker from the execrable playing and singing on "Let's Get Lost" really need to go back and listen to the real thing. *Chet*, an album of ballads with a group of west coast soloists with an east coast rhythm section really works. "Alone Together," "It Never Entered My Mind," and "You'd Be So Nice To Come Home To" take you right back to those halcyon days. It is the kind of thing you keep buying Chet Baker records for.

On ...*In New York*, a 1958 date, Baker shakes his west coast roots, surrounds himself with east coast musicians and swings. "Fair Weather" is a good up-tempo Benny Goodman tune which features aggressive soloing by Johnny

Griffin on tenor and Al Haig on piano. "Solar" has Baker sounding something like Dorham: smokey toned and slightly behind the beat. His abilities on this album and Dorham's abilities on ballads show just how much exaggeration there was in the west coast/east coast controversy.

There is much more vinyl to explore. In the next issue, we will examine some of the other labels being reissued in the OJC series in the next issue.

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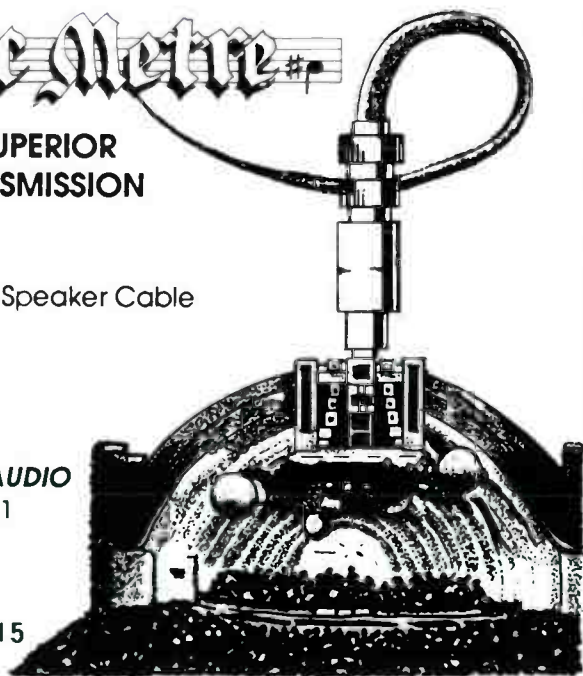
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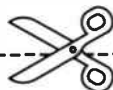
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## Rock Block

**Taj Mahal: *Like Never Before*. Producer: Taj Mahal, Mixed by: Michael Sena & Taj Mahal; Gramavision R2 79432 CD AAD.**

Only a few years ago, Taj Mahal - a musical National Treasure - was without a record label - a musical disgrace. Now in 1991 we're blessed with two releases in one year (on two different labels, no less). There may not always be justice in the world, but eventually what goes around comes around.

I caught Taj's live act several times at the Bottom Line in the mid-eighties. My recollection is that his backup band got smaller and smaller with each new gig (and finally non-existent). The music, however, was always mesmerizing. His bitterness is reflected in "Don't Call Us," the opening song of *Like Never Before*: "I was down and out, needin' a friend/ And you wouldn't help me put my life back together again/ Don't call us/ We'll call you." The overall feel of this new effort, however, is not at all bleak and blue. In fact, it's triumphant, aided immensely by cameo appearances from a host of notable back-up players: Hall and Oates along with the Pointer Sisters joining together in some fine harmonizing; David Lindley, Paul Barrere and Sonny Rhodes providing the tasty guitar licks; Dr. John and Mark Jordan pounding keyboards; Howard Johnson, the great tuba player from Taj's big band in the sixties, concocting the horn arrangements; and rap star DJ Jazzy Jeff doin' his thang with some nifty record scratching.

The album is eclectic to a fault, ranging from blues ("Blues with a Feeling") to rock ("Love Up") to pop ("River of Love") to the undecidable ("Squat that Rabbit"). I just wish he had given us a couple more new tunes instead of cover-

ing two of his old classics: "Cakewalk into Town" (a familiar audiophile demo favorite) and "Take a Giant Step." Although "Cakewalk" settles nicely into a joyous Dixieland romp propelled by Dr. John and Howard Johnson and "Giant Step" is very pretty indeed with an arrangement featuring African instruments, I question whether Taj is recycling the blues or simply repeating oneself.

**Taj Mahal: *Mule Bone*. Producer: Skip Drinkwater, Engineers: Phil Nicolo & Skip Drinkwater; Private Music 2081-2-P CD AAD.**

The Caribbean steel drum sound that Taj was so fond of in the early eighties is absent here. But there's a lot of beautifully crystalline, National steel bodies guitar pickin' - just think of it as a steel drum with strings! And if you're looking for a National guitar sound that will bring tears to your eyes and cheers to your ears, just crank up the first cut, "Jubilee," a sparkling and ebullient instrumental number. Traditionalists may prefer this album, which is Taj's music for the current Broadway play (with lyrics adapted from the writings of Langston Hughes), but performed by Taj rather than the theatrical cast. It's very bluesy and not the least bit show-tune. There are some great songs here. My favorite is "Me and My Mule": "My old mule has got a grin on his face/ Been a mule so long he forgot about his race/ I'm like that old mule/ Black and I don't give a damn/ You got to take me like I am." My one complaint: the CD is only 33 minutes long, including a "Finale" that sounds too much like filler to me.

Because *Mule Bone* is a simpler production, it's the better sounding of the two CDs. The vocal has a tad too much echo and the snare sound is a trifle fizzy (rather than truly metallic) but all in all it's pretty listenable. *Like Never Before* is a little more forward, a little more in-

your-face, a little more electronic sounding-particularly when the Art of Noise style synth horns inappropriately punctuate "Ev'ry Wind in the River" with their now clich-ed sound. Although the production is by no means demonstration quality, it's clear, punchy and quite enjoyable.

It's great to have Taj back in the good graces of the recording business. The next giant step would be to get him some airplay on some of those pathetic excuses we have for radio stations in this country.

**The Subdudes: *Lucky*. Producer: Robert Fraboni, Engineers: Mark Howard & Robert Fraboni; East West Records America 91671 CD (no mention of whether is AAD or DDD).**

This CD was a bit of a gamble for me. I'd only vaguely heard of the band but the name struck a chord as I came across it in my local record shop (that is "CD Emporium"). I picked it up and looked at the back cover. "Produced by Rob Fraboni," it says. Hmmm, that name's familiar. A Bonnie Raitt connection perhaps? Could be a favorable omen. So I bought it-mostly on the suspect assumption that a group with a clever name might also make intelligent music. In this case I got lucky. These guys are terrific.

Perhaps they should be called the Superdudes. This is the best white R&B band I've heard since the Radiators. The melodies are catchy, the beat funky, the harmonies sweet and the lead vocals sizzling hot. Instrumental accompaniment is keenly succinct, effectively varies and always perfectly on target. Tommy Malone and John Magnie share singing (and some of the song writing) duties and as soul stylists they fall somewhere in between Steve Winwood and John Hiatt, with maybe Mick Huck-

nell thrown in there for good measure. Nice folks to be measured against. Malone is also the band's guitarist, acoustic and electric, and he plays a pretty mean slide, sounding at times a bit like David Lindley. Magnie handles keyboards-often electric organ-with a laid back flair and a much beleaguered instrument that seems to be making a comeback these days, the accordion, is featured prominently and effectively, giving the band a certain Cajun "je ne sais quoi."

The other two members of the group are Johnny Ray Allen, who plays bass and also does much of the song writing and Steve Amadee, who wields a wicked drumstick. Or does he? Says here in the liner notes "tambourine, percussion and vocals." No drums? I listened hard-lotsa heavy thumping, some shaking and rattling, but damn, I don't think he's got a drum kit! It's a mite different but you wouldn't know anything's missing musically.

Only one song on the album is a cover-Al Green's "Tired of Being Alone." It's a knockout and it gives one a pretty good idea of this band's musical inspirations. Another indication of where the band is at can be found in the credits, where the Subdudes thank among others, Daniel Lanois, k.d. lang, Bruce Hornsby, John Hiatt, Melissa Etheridge, Peter Asher and St. Roch (Patron Saint of Miraculous Recoveries). I take it this band has a history. They're clearly not young kids trying to find themselves; they know what they're about and how to communicate it-with no small amount of punch and polish.

Curiosity got the better of me and after a quick phone call to the record company, I learned that the band members got together in New Orleans around 1984, calling themselves the Continental Drifters. Turns out the association I made to the Radiators is an obvious one: Tommy Malone and the Radiator's David Malone are brothers. In 1987, the

group toned its act down and came up with a name change befitting its newly subdued nature. They've since moved to Colorado to further mellow out but came back to the Crescent City-and to Lanois' private studio-for this recording (their second).

Fraboni's production is first-rate, with only a little mid-bass muddiness and bloat to mar an otherwise faultless sound. Although this bassiness may be due to the unusual nature of Amadee's percussion (a close miked tambourine played with stick, brushes and fingers), it's a relatively minor fault that also happens to plague the Dylan and Neville Brothers recordings made in the Maison Lanois. They must have some very tight-assed little speakers in the control room. This CD probably sounds great on mini-monitors with rolled-off, overdamped bass, but even on the he-man, muy macho speakers most of us have (because our you-know-whats are so small), the music has no trouble shining serenely through.<sup>1</sup> Whether you're feeling lucky or not, this album's a sure bet.

<sup>1</sup> Brains, Myles. Brains.

**Kirsty McColl: *Electric Landlady*.  
Producer: Steve Lillywhite, Engineers: Jon Fausty, John Brough & Alan Douglas; Virgin/Charisma  
91688-2 CD AAD.**

Musically, this may be one of the two or three best albums of the year. You want catchy tunes with clever lyrics? Kirsty McColl is your (land)lady. She's an important talent. But oh, there's a catch, a catch that will be for some, a lock-the-door-throw-away-the-key-and-forget-about-it catch, which I'll get into later. In the meantime, you know how you read these magazines (and by the way, do read this sentence in your best Andy Rooney voice) and all those music reviewers that tell you

that such and such a record is chock full of great melodies and you go out and buy the thing and all you hear is an out-of-tune singer with a voice that sounds like razor blades on a blackboard-backed up by alien guitar monsters from Mars? I hate it when that happens. Well, it won't happen with this album. Trust me. The checks in the mail.

Kirsty sings with a sweet, high, breathy voice and a pronounced British accent. Couple that with the immediately likeable, British invasion style hooks in many of the songs and you may at first get the impression that this is a retro-pop, girl group kind of sound. It's nothing of the sort. The lyrics are far too clever and the beat is very nineties'-ish, with Latin, Jazz and hip-hop influences. It's an unusual, remarkably attractive package.

And now for the catch: the sound. How do you describe the opposite of transparent? Veiled? Hazy? Bleached? Dry and colorless? Flat and compressed? Do you get the picture? How can a recording have such low apparent distortion and yet impinge upon the ears in so utterly retched a fashion? The answer is that this is a state of the art production from one of the acknowledged superstars in rock and roll engineering, Steve Lillywhite. Take a bow Steve and tell us about that new mixing console you're using (so we can track it down and blow it up into a million little op-amps).

I do, however, recommend this album, but suggest that you play it mostly on a Discman or in the car, where the sonics will be perfectly acceptable. The sound is so wrong yet the music is so right! If only the engineering was half as good as on the ancient Hendrix album to which the title makes punning reference. Such is progress in the world of famous recording studios. The oh-so-tragic irony here is that Ms. McColl is "in real life" (as Entertainment Tonight would say) married to Mr. Lil-

lywhite! Does this mean that-barring a divorce-we'll never have a good sounding record from this splendid artist? Kirsty, take my advice: save your marriage and your career. Marriage and business don't mix. Keep your husband; find a new producer.

**The Allman Brothers Band: *Shades of Two Worlds*. Producer: Tom Dowd & The Allman Brothers, Engineer: Jay Mark; Epic EK 47877 CD DDD.**

It was in 1971 that I realized music critics could not be trusted. Some dolt writing for *Stereo Review* panned *The Allman Brothers Band Live at Fillmore East*, saying, more or less, that the songs went on interminably. As King What-ever-his-name-was said to Wolfgang Amadeus, "Too many notes." My little epiphany was to be confirmed some months later when The Doobie Brothers first broke onto the scene and were compared favorably to the Allmans. They're both from the South and have the word "Brothers" in their names, so how different can they be?

And here I sit, twenty years later, enjoying the new Allman Brothers record, but thinking, "Jeez, some of these songs do go on too long, don't they?" Let's face it, I'm old, and so are the Allmans. Except, tragically, for two members of the original band: bassist Berry Oakley and founder Duane Allman, who died a year apart in eerily similar motorcycle accidents. It's sad, and unfair of me perhaps, but I cannot listen to a new Allman Brothers track, hear Gregg's soulful growls, Dicky Betts' sweet guitar licks and the innovative double drum sound of Butch Trucks and Jai Johanny Johanson (nowadays Jaimoe), without expecting Duane to magically make his entrance-hitting notes that are at once completely unexpected and inevitably perfect, thereby transforming the music and lifting it effortlessly heav-

enward (Wilson Pickett didn't call him Skyman for nothing).

But it doesn't happen and instead of brilliance we are left with ...we'll get to that in a minute. In the opening song, "End of the Line," Gregg confesses to his emotional dissolution in the years following his brother's death: "Oh, when I think about the old days/Lord, it sends chills up and down my spine." Fans of the group (and presumably, Cher), know what he's talking about and will be pleased that this new effort does manage to conjure up the spirit of the original band. Much like the winning comeback of Little Feat without the late Lowell George. Yes this new recording sounds like the Allman Brothers of old, but that is not to say it's as good. The Allmans have managed to regroup surprisingly successfully (especially given personal scandals fit only for the supermarket tabloids). But to say that this new recording sounds like the Allman Brothers of old is not to say that it's anywhere near as good. You don't lose the best all-around guitarist on the planet and ever fully recover.

The song line-up on *Shades of Two Worlds* features two Gregg Allman compositions and five written or co-written by Dickie Betts. Gregg's "Get on with Your Life" is a great, classic slow blues number and Dickie's "Kind of Bird" is one of his signature, if obligatory, jazz inflected instrumentals-sort of a cross between "Hot Lanta" and "In Memory of Elizabeth Reed," with a nod toward Charlie Parker. It's good stuff, but I don't hear a ballistic single like "Good Clean Fun" from last year's *Seven Turns* (the band's smooth re-entry into the music scene after nine years of being lost in space). The album ends with a Robert Johnson ditty, "Come on in My Kitchen," Fans of the lamented supergroup Delaney and Bonnie and Friends may recall this song being covered on *To Bonnie from Delaney*, in 1970, and a year later on the glorious sounding, all acoustic "Motel Shot," with none other

than friendly guitarist Duane Allman handling slide guitar chores. At first I thought it was sacrilegious that the latest Allman Brothers Band would try to one-up those exquisite versions, but this new variation—which features a mock gospel chorus, unexpected tempo changes and stylish finger picking from Betts and new brother Warren Haynes—is so beautifully warmhearted and well done that I can't help but forgive and even thank them.

Now for the best news. This recording (all digital by the way) has real bass, extended high frequencies, a transparent, relatively edge-free midrange and almost no muddiness to speak of. In other words, although it was produced by the venerable Tom Dowd, this is not the old Atco/Capricorn sound at all. Saint Duane be praised.

*Mark Block*

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## New Rock Recordings

**Chet Atkins: *Sails*. Producers: David Hungate & Chet Atkins, Engineer: John Mills (Tom Singers on "Up In My Treehouse"), Mastering: Denny Purcell, Georgetown Masters, Nashville; Columbia CK40593 (CD), FC40593 (LP).**

**Chet Atkins and Mark Knopfler: *Neck and Neck*. Producer: Mark Knopfler, Engineers: Mike Poston & Guy Fletcher, Mastering: Doug Sax and Alan Yoshida, The Mastering Lab; Columbia CK45307 (CD), 467435 1 (LP).**

One day you find yourself in the country and western CD section of the local discount emporium. Feeling the flush of a fully active "flight" instinct, you are about to make a fast break for safer territory when the "A" bin catches your eye. A Chet Atkins CD stares back at you. It has little letters, "C.G.P." after Chet's name. Curiosity overcomes "flight." What the heck does THAT mean? After thumbing through eight different CDs, you find one that explains it: Certified Guitar Player. Curiosity sated, the "flight" instinct kicks in and faster than you can say "Johnny Paycheck," you find yourself browsing through the baroque collections in the classical aisle.

Just a day later someone whose musical taste you have grown to respect gushes over a midprice Chet Atkins CD called *Sails*. Skeptical, you head off for the big sale at the discount emporium. Chet Atkins, a guitar player with a long, long history as one of country music's leading music men, has never exactly grabbed your attention in the past. You find a lone copy of *Sails* in the bin.

At home you cannot believe your ears. A Columbia CD that sounds pretty darn good. And the music is superb.

Soft, jazzy, pleasant, with an almost invisible country flavor way in the back there. All cuts are instrumentals. Chet Atkins got some excellent sidemen to help out on this album. For instance, Mark Knopfler of Dire Straits, Notting Hillbillies and movie soundtrack fame and longtime jazz great, Earl Klugh.

This CD continues to be a favorite, especially for those perfect laid back Sunday mornings with fresh fruit, sunshine, and no worries. The music will have (soft) jazz junkies jumping for joy. New Age aficionados adore it. Knopfler knuts will go knuclear over "Why Worry" of Dire Straits fame.

A year after finding *Sails*, *Neck and Neck* comes along. This time Mark Knopfler is along for the whole ride and gets shared billing with Chet Atkins. The CD is filed in "Rock," (ha!) because of the Knopfler connection. *Neck and Neck* is more and less than *Sails*. This time the country flavor is right out there in front. But on this CD it is not a Bad Thing, trust me. The dobro, pedal dobro and steel guitar are tasty, tasty, tasty. Knopfler's and Atkins' guitars interplay with inspiration. There is some good natured buddy-boy-style humor between the middle aged rocker and the older country gentleman. Chet's vocals are pleasant, laid back and comfortable as a 15 year old leather recliner.

The music on *Neck and Neck*, is a little country on cuts like "Poor Boy Blues," and "I'll See You In My Dreams." The country sounding guitars, rhythms, and vocals clearly define the flavor of these tunes without being over done. But the city-soft-jazzy flavor is evident on cuts like "So Soft, Your Goodbye," "Tears" (a Stephane Grapelli/Django Reinhardt song) and "There'll Be Some Changes Made." Here the changes in backing instruments, chords, and vocals result in a more urban sound.

The songs are split 50-50 between instrumental and vocal. Most of all, the



feeling of two superb musicians having a good time with each other comes through loud and clear. Jazz junkies will squirm through this one if the country flavor is a little too much for them. New Age aficionados will fidget their crystal amulets. But music lovers will savor 38 minutes of some of the best buddy-music on CD.

Sound quality of the *Sails* CD and LP is good in both cases. It is hard to pick a winner. The dynamics are pretty laid back effectively eliminating one of CD's usual advantages over LP. But the music is gentle enough that LP surface noise can be distracting. My LP is fairly quiet, but the CD still offers background silence that serves this music well. Yet the guitars on the LP sound just a little more natural than on the CD.

The *Neck and Neck* CD sounds even better than *Sails*. This is another recording with dynamics that are not terribly demanding. But the mixture of well recorded electric and acoustic guitars is musically satisfying. I count *Neck and Neck* among my better sounding "commercial" CDs.

The initially hokey sounding C.G.P. moniker isn't hokey sounding any longer. Chet Atkins is a talent to be reckoned with, and Mark Knopfler reckons with him just fine. Two certified good albums from the Certified Guitar Player.

This just in: Another musical omnivore friend on the left coast says Chet Atkins' *Guitar Quartet* is another winner. Stay tuned to these pages for a review.

**Marti Jones: *Any Kind of Lie*. Producer: Don Dixon, Engineers: Mark Williams & Don Dixon, Mastering: Greg Calbi/Sterling Sound; BMG/RCA 2040-2-R (CD), 2-40-1-R (LP).**

**D**on't bother reading this review. Finish the rest of the magazine, then go buy this album. For you skeptics who need convincing, I'll be brief. Other reviewers have commented positively on Marti Jones' music and the good sound quality of her recordings. But they miss the point. *Any Kind of Lie* is music to be reckoned with. It is long term relationship music. You'll listen to this music for the rest of your life.

Sometimes when you listen to music that is new to you, you embrace it immediately. It's as if you find a new piece for the partially finished jigsaw puzzle the music muse left in your head. This is one of those rarities.

Many Pop/Rock albums are made up of songs that feed off of each other. This may fool young unsophisticated listeners, but the rest of us cringe and whine, "Oh no not another one!" Marti Jones makes each song stand on it's own beat, er, feet. There is a thread connecting them, sure. But each is distinctive. Her music is rooted in relationships and experiences. Acoustic and electric instruments blend with real feelings and wit. The mix and mastering are well done. Played back on a nice system, the superiority of the sound compared to many pop/rock releases is amazing. Compare *Any Kind of Lie* to Linda Ronstadt's *Cry Like a Rainstorm, Howl Like the Wind* for instance. *Rainstorm...* is digital, nasty, flat, dry and harmonically dead. *Any Kind of Lie* is detailed, open, clear, harmonically rich and a pleasure to listen to.

You'll find *Any Kind of Lie* filed in the Rock section, but that isn't quite right. Like a lot of the best music, *Any Kind of Lie* crosses boundaries. Power-folk. Pop-rock-country-folk. Intimate rock. Marti Jones has chosen her weapon well. Marti Jones needs our support and encouragement so the moguls keep letting her back in the studio. If you really like *Any Kind of Lie* and want more Marti right away, look for her previous al-

bum, "Used Guitars," which is also Good Stuff but not quite as outstanding as *Any Kind of Lie*. Now, like I said before...finish the magazine, then go buy this music, OK?

**Van Dyke Parks: *Jump!*. Producer: Steve Goldman, Engineer: Rick Ruggieri, Mastering: Mike Reese/The Mastering Lab, CD Pre-Mastering, WCI Record Group; Warner 9-23829-2 (CD), 9-23829-1 (LP).**

**H**allelujah! The best Van Dyke Parks album is on CD. A remarkable album. Toe tappin', smile makin' music. *Jump!* has a theme, but rather than a story line, the theme is a time, a place, and familiar characters. All are supplied by Joel Chandler Harris' Uncle Remus fables. Van Dyke Parks cannily avoids doing what would have been a disaster, trying to tell the fables in songs. Instead, he uses the time, place, and characters to frame clever vignettes. You might expect the world of Uncle Remus to be conveyed through folky southern sounding music played on guitar, banjo, harmonica and bass fiddle. Parks includes those instruments, but goes in another direction entirely. The music is blown up bigger than life with full orchestration and lots of Parks' trademark add-ons. Just to give a flavor for the "size" of the music, here are the instruments listed: piano, bass, drums, guitar, banjo, mandolin, harmonica, harp, vibes, marimba, bells, timpani, cymbalom and steel drum.

The songs are upbeat, high energy numbers that your young kids will like. Just hope they don't notice the references to brothels and their employees which are done very cutesy using words that are not very descriptive. You didn't forget about the sex in Uncle Remus, did you? "Invitation to Sin" is the sole, slow paced number. The sultry sexy female vocal teases and cajoles.

Big music, like big crowds, can be hard to control. But Parks and Goldman keep things in hand. Sound quality is excellent by Pop/Rock standards. Detail holds up nicely during crescendos and there is a sense of space to the whole thing that is often missing on typical Pop/Rock recordings. The bottom end sounds rolled off somewhat on both the CD and LP, one of the few noticeable shortcomings.

There is no clear winner in the CD *vs.* LP wars. As is often the case, the LP has a little more warmth and inner detail while the CD has better dynamics and blessed lack of LP surface noise. The better dynamics are worthwhile with this music. And in spite of being less warm than the LP, the instruments on the CD don't sound less like real instruments. The LP is pretty hard to find, being out of print five years or more.

Other Van Dyke Parks albums are a mixed bag. I can't heartily recommend any of them to a general audience, but if you find *Jump!* interesting and wish to explore, my second favorite Parks album is the Caribbean flavored *Clang of the Yankee Reaper* (Warner 9-26185-2 (CD), BS-2878 (LP), 1975). *Clang...* is a nice sounding album as well. *Tokyo Rose* (Warner 9-25968-2 (CD), 9-25968-1 (LP), 1989), sounds like Parks has declared war on the Japanese; pleasant and nicely recorded music, bothersome message. *Discover America* (Warner BS-2589 (LP), CD # unknown but available, 1972) is really for fans only. I haven't heard the first Parks album, *Song Cycle*, released in the late sixties which is also available on CD.

**Brian Eno/John Cale: *Wrong Way Up*. Recorded at Eno's Wilderness Studio, Producers: Brian Eno & John Cale, Engineers: Brian Eno except Cale's vocals by Dave Young & 'Oz', Mastering: Stephen Marcussen/Precision Lacquer (US) and Tony Cousins/Townhouse (UK); Warner/Opal 9-26421-2 CD.**

If this review is in any way not enthusiastic enough or provocative enough to make you get this music for your own, I apologize in advance. I plan to do my best to limit any further-Eno/Cale deprivation.

This CD was first brought to my attention in an alternate reality known as TAN (The Audiophile Network, computer bulletin board, 818-988-0452, \$21 per year). One day, one of the more outspoken TANers said out of the blue, "Eno/Cale's *Wrong Way Up* is my favorite recording of 1990." Statements like that tend to get my attention. I thought this would be another chance to accuse him of having predictable bad taste. Within days I had my copy. There were no accusations.

Many have followed Brian Eno through the years either as fans or as bystanders, waiting for him to finally produce something up to his potential. I've been a little of both. Always feeling that he was capable of something special that he never quite delivered. His experiments and meanderings, while sometimes intellectually and artistically interesting, hold little of traditional musical value and do not bear up to repeat listens. Sometimes they were also deathly boring. I quit buying Eno music over 15 years ago because of the low satisfaction quotient. Oh, I listened to bit of the new stuff when I had a chance hoping to hear what I had been waiting for, but nothing made an impression.

*Wrong Way Up* is what both fans and by-

standers have been waiting for. Inventive without being dull, rock without the SOS syndrome (Same Old S\*!%). Fresh sounding without gimmicks that bore on repeat listens. Eno's finally hit the launch button. Listening to this CD for the first time made my (musical) year.

(Read in the voice and inflections of Andy Rooney till "stop") Ever wonder why so much rock music sounds so much alike? Can't these groups of people even be remotely unique? I wondered why, too. I asked some people who should know, "Why does this happen over and over again?" Here's what they told me: money men, it's all the non-creative types who have the control. White boys doing rap. Who's idea was that? Maybe I'm a sucker for art and creativity, Let's have an artistic coup and give the power back to the writer, composers, collaborators and musicians. {Stop}

Good rock music grabs me by a pleasure center they never taught about in 10th grade biology. And we all know about pleasure centers- they motivate you to keep coming back for more. This CD keeps me coming back for more. But if you like your rock "straight," this won't be your swig of Jim Beam out of the bottle. *Wrong Way Up* is rock to be sure, but with new flavors that will disturb "rockers" stuck in Def Leppard-Van Halen-Bachman Turner Overdrive-Boston Land. If your friends think of you as a bit of a musical space cadet, this is probably right up your corner of the universe. But, your friends will like it too, HA! Enomaniacs and Calemonsters, all!

Reviewers hell is trying to describe music in words. Pardon me while I tiptoe through the cliches and daisies for a few sentences. The music is upbeat and melodic. A wide variety of synthesized instruments and "treatments" are used to sculpt a sonic canvas that is different but accessible. The lyrics fit the songs so

well it is uncanny. I don't remember feeling this way about lyrics since the Beatles. Not that the lyrics are meaningful, but they are certainly mysterious in odd sorts of ways. What the hay-ill is a "termite of temptation?" "I am the empty frame of reason..." Oh yeah? Well, I am the empty tank of gas! So there! Sounds goofy out of context but fits the music supremely well. There's a guy at work who likes this CD too. We sometimes regale each other with snippets from one song or another, great fun.

The mix is dense with a variety of sounds populating the song-scape at any given time. For me, this makes for great re-listening. There is much detail and subtlety to pick up on, many threads to follow. This extra musical dimension keeps the music interesting and fresh even after it becomes familiar. In spite of Eno manipulating things within an inch of their lives, it all comes out sounding pretty interesting for what is essentially an all-electronic-instrument recording. Instruments listed in the booklet are: rhythm bed, pulse piano, organ bass, Scarlatti piano, fair-ground organ, harp, shinto bell, bending guitar, dark guitar, dumbek, tabla, wash guitar, little Nigerian organ, triplet guitars, snare, bass drum, rhythm guitar, guitar, keyboards, Indian drum, violins, horn, slide guitar, viola, bass, omnichord, high keyboard. Know what all those are? Me neither.

The sound quality is impressive for this type of recording. There is atmosphere and a soundstage of sorts. I can't say that the dynamics and frequency extension, high or low, are exemplary, but somehow you are impressed by those qualities after a listen at moderately loud levels. Perhaps it's a result of balance.

There are two cuts you will probably end up skipping on most repeat listens. Both are out of character with the other cuts. This'll bring the playing time

down to 33 minutes from almost 42 minutes. But don't fret. That 33 minutes is golden. One cut, "The River," sounds like Roy Rogers and the sons of the Pioneers. This is OK by me, but maybe not on this CD. The other cut is a John Cale tale titled "Cordoba." It is "darker" and slower than the other cuts. Neither of these two is bad, though some will want to assign "The River" to that category.

I saw a *Wrong Way Up* imported (UK) LP once. It was in San Francisco. The store wanted \$17 for it, new. My frugal audiophile persona prevented the expenditure. With all the electronic and digital trickery pokery on this album, the LP couldn't possibly sound any better than the CD. Why do I still wish I'd bought that LP? To the best of my knowledge, there was no domestic LP released.

*Wrong Way Up* is something special. If I could afford to give everybody a copy, I would. Brian Eno and John Cale get my highest praise for putting this creation together. If Grammy's were awarded for artistic merit and originality rather than pop chart success, Eno and Cale would have their hands full for this effort. Someday I'd like to personally thank Eno and Cale, *Wrong Way Up* is music I'll always enjoy.

Doug Blackburn

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culture." Both songs make extensive use of electronic sequencing and digital sampling. Heavy dance beats combined with electric guitar riffs allow these cuts to appeal to a wide variety of listeners. In addition to dance-oriented tracks, *Low-Life* contains the wonderfully rootsy track "Love Vigilantes," which tells the story of a soldier's wife who is misinformed that her husband has been killed while fighting abroad. The remainder of the tracks demonstrate New Order's unique ability to find a healthy balance between guitars and keyboards. One of my favorite tracks to this day is the instrumental "Elegia." This is a slow, powerful song with dynamic cymbal work that makes for a very emotionally involving piece.

Although I am a big fan of almost all that Joy Division and New Order have done, *Substance* and *Low-Life* are the logical choices for someone who is just beginning to explore British alternative rock. as a rule of thumb, the earlier Joy Division albums are likely to be the least accessible, whereas the later New Order material is likely to be the most accessible. Indeed, the last release by New Order, *Technique*, is quite commercial in orientation. this is not totally surprising because many of the post-punk bands have shown a pattern toward a more commercial orientation on their later efforts.

Sonically, three albums worthy of mention are *Movement*, *Technique* and *Low Life*. All for rock albums are very good, marred only by a slight metallic edge to the voices due to a bit of overprocessing. As in most rock records, each cut sounds different-like they were recorded at different places or at different times and these are no exception. While the CDs are good-the LPs are a bit better. In the case of *Technique*, it actually sounds like the CD was mixed differently than the LP. The low end on the CD sounds like it was boosted in direct comparsion to the LP release. The LPs have a more open, natural, detailed up-

per octave yet are less metallic sounding than the CD. As in most cases, the LP has greater harmonic integrity, better instrumental focus and staging. The CD sounds smoother, but in the long run, you realize that it is due to the loss of information. In other words, the CD sounds too smooth.

Let me recommend a couple of cuts for their sonics from New Order's albums. Try cut 5, "Elegia," on *Low Life*. There is a great soundstage, with wall to wall and front to back imaging. An eerie, ethereal feeling hangs over the soundstage. Guitars are nicely detailed and precisely located in space. The only thing marring the cut is the presentation of vocals which tend to be recessed and a bit over processed.

Another cut that is quite good sonically is "Vanishing Point" on *Technique*. It has the same outstanding imaging as Elegia, but the vocals are the most natural of all the cuts.

It may be no surprise to many of you, but I suspect that part of the reason that these recordings are so good is that they were recorded in Britain. British pressings as a rule are superior to their American counterpart, except in the case where they didn't have the original master to work off and used a safety. Now if QWest can give us a bit less processed sound, we would have some real sonic winners here!

Bill Rogers



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## Analog Focus

**Sergei Prokofiev: *Alexander Nevsky*.** Leonard Slatkin and The Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra, Claudine Carlson, Mezzo-Soprano; Athena ALSY 10003, Distributed by: Maildisc, P.O. Box 131588, Staten Island, NY 10313; Price: \$25 plus \$3 shipping (domestic)/\$10 (overseas).

**Virgil Thomson: *The Plow That Broke the Plain/ Suite from "The River,"*** Leopold Stokowski and The Symphony of the Air; Analogue Productions AP 001; Distributed by: Acoustic Sounds, P.O. Box 2043, Salina, KS 67402-2043; Price: \$25 plus \$3 shipping.

**J.S. Bach: *Six Sonatas for Flute*.** Gary Woodward, Flute, Grant Gershon, Harpsichord, Roger Lebow, Cello; Water Lily Acoustics WLA-WS-14, Distributed by: VPI Industries, 77 Cliffwood Ave., #3B, Cliffwood, NJ 07721; Price: \$24.99 plus shipping.

Now, in the third year of the vinyl winter, thousands of us sit in dingy listening rooms smearing green paint on shrunken disks to practice safe listening. Some record companies are emerging to save analog LPs. Some of the new LPs are from previously available material and some are new recordings. Athena's *Alexander Nevsky* was previously released on Vox/Turnabout (1975) in quadraphonic sound. The Virgil Thomson recording was originally on Vanguard (1960) and the Bach flute sonatas are brand new.

Prokofiev was asked by Sergei Eisenstein, the great Russian film director, to collaborate with him on a film in which the music would be as important as the

visual elements. The result was the classic film *Alexander Nevsky*. It turned out to be a true collaboration in that each man lengthened or shortened his work to meet the needs of the other. The final film is a masterpiece of integration in which the music fits the film as though it were an opera. Later, Prokofiev rewrote the music as a cantata for concert purposes. The cantata follows the gross sequencing of the film although individual sections were cut and reorchestrated. Some of the sections, particularly "The Field of the Dead," the orchestral song for mezzo-soprano, were resequenced. For example, in the concert piece the song has an A-B-A structure. The corresponding section of the film begins with the B section. The most spectacular section, "The Battle on the Ice," originally contained folk instruments which gave the scene an appropriately raucous effect. The cantata replaced them with standard orchestral instruments and the results are much tamer. The record jacket identifies its contents as the film score. It is not; it is the concert version.

I am a Leonard Slatkin admirer. I like his more recent Prokofiev's Fifth as well as his recordings of the music of Samuel Barber very much. He usually brings warmth, elegance, beautiful phrasing as well as excitement to a performance. Unfortunately, this recording was made in the mid-seventies before Slatkin had reached maturity. The playing and singing are all excellent, and much of this performance is pretty good, but some of it suffers from a boxy, measured kind of phrasing which robs the music of forward motion. This is particularly annoying in the uninhibited free-flowing "Battle on the Ice." I can almost hear the players counting.

Sonically, things are much better. The soundstage is broad and deep. Dynamics are wide and the bass is very powerful. Although the microphones are far away, the recording is full of small orchestral details that I thought would be

lost at this distance. I can hear no phase problems that betray that this was a quadraphonic recording. The strings are slightly veiled and the instrumental timbres are not as vivid as I would expect from an audiophile production. The mezzo-soprano sounds like she is standing in front of the orchestra which is where she should be. All of the recorded competition microphone her separately.

I compared this recording to several other *Newskys*. There are two great ones. The best combination of performance and recording is the one made by Mario Rossi, in the fifties (Vanguard VSD2051). Rossi's performance combines subtlety and excitement. He projects the sweeping lines and scale of this heroic work and some of the passages are revelatory. The sound on this early stereo disk is very good although the mono pressing is a little cleaner, has wider dynamics and deeper bass.

Thomas Schippers performance, on CBS (Odyssey Y31014), is in the same league as the Rossi. It is hard to believe that such high quality playing was done by the New York Philharmonic. CBS, however, ruined this recording with veiled, compressed, congested, highly colored sound.

The Svetlanov performance on Melodia (CO1379-80) is almost as good as the Rossi and Schippers. It is more straightforward, without being pedestrian, very exciting and well executed. There is a point in the battle section in which he inserts a brief pause which feels like a slap in the face. Melodia's sound is lackluster but listenable.

The most infuriating performance in the comparison was the Reiner (RCA LSC 2395). He plays the delicate parts beautifully. I particularly like the subtle detail and timbral distinctions he brings out as with beautiful string sound and growling brass, but he freezes in the exciting parts. It was also a mistake to per-

form this work in English. Russian fits this music like a glove while the English sounds forced. The sound on this recording has a beautiful burnished quality in the strings when things are at a moderate or low volume. At higher volumes, I detected some distortion.

Finally, Claudio Abbado on DG (DG2531202) turns in a very satisfying, exciting and beautifully played performance although he misses some of the delicacy that others find. The sound is recognizably DG being multi-miked and a little too highly processed.

The Analogue Productions music of Virgil Thomson is also music written for film. Both of the Thomson works were also rewritten for concert performance. Thomson's style is extremely conservative, strongly tonal and tuneful. These scores are full of well-known popular tunes, dance music and allusions to the simple hymns of 19th century America. Although both scores border on the simplistic, *The Plow that Broke the Plains* is slightly more adventurous in its use of dissonance and counterpoint. It is a meatier work than *The River* although I found that both works wear thin very quickly.

Stokowski extracts more from this music than Thomson put into it. Both works are caressingly phrased and each note, although clearly articulated, fits into the long lines of this music seamlessly. The *Symphony of the Air*, plays with extraordinary accuracy.

The sound on this record is wonderful. It is closely recorded, very transparent and beautifully balanced. Dynamics are wide and dynamic contrasts are breathtakingly subtle. The timbres of the individual instruments are vibrant yet blend well when the full orchestra plays. Despite the soundstage being a bit distorted because of multi-miking, I did not find this annoying. As in the Prokofiev, the additional microphones did not seem to cause phase problems.

There was some spotlighting of solo instruments particularly the banjo and guitar which seem to have taken up residence in my left speaker.

I compared this to two previous releases of the same recording. The original Vanguard (VSD2095) has excellent sound, but not as good or as transparent as this one. It also has far less bass extension. Interestingly, the multi-miking is not as obvious on the original. Instruments that were clearly spotlighted in the present release were located further back in the older release. There was an interim release of *The Plow that Broke the Plains* on a two-record *The Best of Stokowski* album (Vanguard VSD 707/8). The sound on this release is so bad that I would never have guessed that the original recording has so much in it. It is hazy and edgy and the strings sound like electronic sandpaper. The recording has almost no depth. This interim issue should be avoided. Based on the kind of improvement Analogue Productions can make, I vote for them to rerelease the Rossi *Alexander Nevsky*.

Bach's flute sonatas were not intended as a set and were written at various points in his career. There are five that are completely by Bach, one in which the parts were probably written by a student and one which may not be by Bach at all. Finally, there is one for solo flute. The present set omits the one that is probably spurious and the solo sonata. Of the remaining six, three are for flute and continuo (harpsichord and gamba) and three are for flute and harpsichord. The present recording presents the first three with a modern cello and the last three with the left hand of the harpsichord doubled by the cello. The flute sonatas present the lighter side of Bach. Although there are moments of dizzying contrapuntal skill, most of the time these sonatas have more of a ro-coco feel to them. Some of the sonatas are very serious -- the B minor sonata reminds me of the trio sonata in *The Musical Offering*.

The performances are beautiful. They are buoyant and bouncy and project the long lines and carefree spirit of these works. Gary Woodward, the flutist, changes the color of the flute to suit the mood of each phrase. There is particularly beautiful playing in the serenade-like andante in the E minor sonata.

The sound of the flute, as it is captured on this recording, is very lush and rich. It no doubt does the flute full justice. However, it is distantly recorded and exhibits problems encountered in many such recordings. Ears and microphones hear differently. When we humans go to a concert no matter how far back in the hall we sit, we completely integrate the direct radiation and the ambience. Reverberation characteristics are engineered into the hall to reinforce the sound which would otherwise be thin. Unless we are sitting in a poorly designed hall or in an unfortunate seat, we cannot hear the reverberation as a separate sound. On too many recordings, like many of those on Nimbus, Telarc, and this one, the ambience is not only discernable as a separate sound, it competes with the music for attention. This would be bad enough in an orchestral recording, but an echo ridden chamber music recording destroys the music's intimacy.

Side two of the review copy has significantly better sound than side one. The flute on both sides is about the same but the cello and harpsichord on side one is rather murky. The cello sounded disembodied as though notes were occurring by themselves without being played with a bow and the harpsichord sounded like it was struggling to get through. At first I thought this was a result of the echo, but when I turned the record over, both the cello and the harpsichord suddenly became very clear. The microphoning seemed to be the same on both sides. Suspecting a possible pressing problem, I acquired a second copy. They sounded the same.



I compared these performances to those by Jean-Pierre Rampal on an old Epic set (BSC 145). I prefer the present release in every way. Woodward's playing seems more spontaneous than Rampal and the music breathes more life. Rampal plays everything more evenly and is relatively unexciting. The engineering on the Epic errs in the opposite direction from the recording being reviewed. It is a dead studio recording and each instrument seems to have its own microphone. There is no sense of a shared space between the instruments.

Despite my complaints about these recordings, they are far superior to the kind of sound I hear on CDs. Even the highly processed sound on the Abbado *Nevsky*, which is typical of the

sound we bitterly complained about ten years ago, sounds better than what we are getting today from the major record companies. At least it sounds like a full sized orchestra instead of the miniature toy orchestras to which we are currently treated. And, although the dynamics are hardly a model to be emulated, they are far more subtle than those on current recordings. I applaud the effort on the part of these small companies to supply us with high quality vinyl. However, unless we can convince the non-audiophile record-buying public to exert pressure on the major record companies to release LPs, we are doomed to smear green paint.

Sam Katz



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## Obscura

### Solo Thompson:

*Strict Tempo*, Carthage CGLP

4409/Elixir LP1;

*Small Town Romance*, Hannibal

HNBL 1316;

*Across a Crowded Room*, Polydor

825-421-Y-1;

*Daring Adventures*, Polydor 829-

782-1 Y-1;

*Rumor and Sigh*, CD only, Capitol

CDP 7 97513 2.

### With Linda Thompson:

*Shoot Out The Lights*, Hannibal

HNBL 1303;

*I Want to See The Bright Lights To-*  
*night*, Carthage 4407;

*Pour Down Like Silver*, Island 9348.

My purpose in writing this column is to provide the reader with information about recordings that through passage of time or by error of reviewer omission have escaped listening. These recordings offer the following possibilities to the listener: hearing unusual instruments, familiar instruments in unusual settings and music that is well recorded and produced. I make this last point because there are those recordings in the world today that offer the most wonderful musical experiences and at the same time leave the listener sonically cold. I know it has happened to all of the audiophile community when they first entered the world of excellently reproduced sound. You love your new system, get out all of the old favorites and listen in dismay as they sound worse with every succeeding disk. Well, get them out of the closets because some of them can be saved anew. Try your car tape player, your Walkman or your office boombox. My point is get them off your reference system and love them again.

For me, music is an emotional experience that can sometimes transcend poorly recorded sound. One of the

great experiential recordings of all time is *Ketjak: The Ramayana Monkey Chant* - an experience to hear but please forgive the sound! To dismiss a recording because the title seems too obscure - or even funny - would be a mistake. I have recordings in hand that possess great musical value or sonic wonder and belong in every audiophile library - if you would just stop laughing long enough to listen to them. These recordings cover all modes of music and performance; vocal and orchestral, solo and group, classical and pop.

In the past four months Richard Thompson's work has been reviewed by almost every mainstream publication as the coming of the next great musical Messiah. Thompson's latest release, *Rumor and Sigh*, has been reviewed with great enthusiasm in *Audio*, *The New York Times*, *Musician* and other publications. His latest promotional tour for the above CD has had nothing but rave reviews and sold out performances. Now you might ask, why choose Richard Thompson for inclusion in "Obscura" history? Because Mr. Thompson has been a certified star for the past twenty plus years!

In his August 1991 *Audio* review, Michael Wright stated the following, "Just when the insipid homogeneity of most rock music makes you think this genre is dead, great art like this comes along." The fact is that since his teens (some 20 years ago), Thompson established his place in folk/rock history when he founded Fairport Convention who along with Steeleye Span and Jethro Tull were the cornerstones of British Folk/Rock music. Over the years, some of Richard Thompson's vocalists who have garnered some fame of their own are: Sandy Denny, Christine Collesler, Shawn Colvin and Linda Thompson. These women possess some of the best and most interesting voices in recorded folk and rock. They compliment Thompson's somewhat raspy voice and do great justice to the amazing lyrical

mind of this performer.

Many people feel that in pop music, Thompson's lyrics are unmatched for their wit and thought provoking ideas. Then again, some people (and some of his real admirers) feel that Thompson's thoughts are among the most bizarre in pop music today. He is capable of relaying to the listener stories of beauty, death, crime and romance in ways that few composers are capable of duplicating. In his review of the critically acclaimed 1982 release *Shoot Out Lights* Steve Simels wrote the following in *Stereo Review*: "Did She Jump or Was She Pushed" may be the best suicide song ever written and ditto for "Back Street Slide" on the topic of adultery. Suicide? Adultery? Pop music? Think a moment on this lyric:

*She was there one minute and then she  
was gone the next  
Lying in a pool of herself with a  
twisted neck.  
O she fell from the roof to the ground  
There was glass lying all around  
She was broken in a hundred pieces  
When her body was found*

*She used to live life she used to live life  
with a vengeance.  
And the chosen would dance the cho-  
sen would dance in attendance.  
She crossed a lot of people  
Some she called friends  
She thought she'd live forever  
But forever always ends*

*Did She Jump Or Was She Pushed?*

Yes, this is a lyric to a great piece of music! Try it and you will be confronted with many other songs of astounding, driving musical genius and great sound!

If you need further encouragement on this recording consider the following astounding facts. *Shoot Out The Lights* was issued in 1982 to the greatest reviews. It was the record of the year in *Rolling Stone*. It was the record of the year in

the *Village Voice* critic poll. It was the featured pop recording in most mainstream music publications of the day. It was one of the pop records of the year in *Rolling Stone's* top one hundred albums of all time! And where did it get to on the charts you might ask? Well, how about nowhere. Folks, it never made it to the *Billboard* anything. Actually, in spite of all the acclaim that most of Thompson's recordings have garnered, not one has ever made it on any chart anywhere!

Continuing right along into the nineties, Thompson gives us the following pensive lyrics to consider in "Psycho Street":

*A Man pushes a lawn mower two hun-  
dred miles on his knees to the tomb of  
the unknown gardener..  
Great one, he cries, I have done my  
penance,  
I bring my offering, grant me - grant  
me  
pest free roses....*

*...A man has an inflatable doll made  
that looks exactly like his wife.  
He murders his wife, dissolves her  
body in acid, and married the doll.  
Three years latter, he leaves her for  
another doll...*

Yes, I grant you, this is a crazy and bizarre song, but it's the last song on Thompson's latest recording, *Rumor and Sigh*. Before this track, you will find some of the most interesting music around today. Warm romantic ballads, haunting melodies that juxtapose with pure rock, poetic folk-like ballads and Irish accordion music. There isn't anything this artist is not capable of presenting in a beautiful and spellbinding manner. While you listen to the genius of his mind, you are also captivated by the quickness, intelligence and wonder of his guitar playing skills.

Thompson has long been thought of as one of the great guitar performers of the

modern pop era. The reason you don't know this is because he is thought of this way only by other professionals and Thompson groupies. Seriously, Richard's technique in producing music and sounds that are unlike any others using the same instruments has been featured in magazines like *Guitar*. Currently, Richard uses different Fender guitars and a Fender tube power amplifier. He doesn't believe in the "leave them deaf in the aisle" technique of playing. His solos are presented at levels you can listen to and appreciate. You can clearly hear what he is doing and while you probably will never have a clue to how he can do what he does you will marvel at how it sounds. Frankly, he is due all the praise he gets. Hopefully more people will expose themselves to his digit delights. Not being recognized as the giant he is, he doesn't have the opportunity to perform lengthy solos on his recordings. Don't get me wrong, what exists is wonderful, but it's still too short to appreciate what his capabilities. To hear more of Thompson you have to hear him perform live which is not easy since he plays in obscure places most of the time. Keep an eye open in your local underground rock newspapers.

A review of Thompson's recordings fully supports his nomination for one of the guitar greats. He is fully capable of virtuosity in all styles of play - rock, folk, delicate, driving, electric and acoustic. You name it, Richard can perform it. If your interests run towards full, pure folk style, then consider *Strict Tempo* - traditional and modern tunes for all occasions. Since then, he has gone more rock oriented but still maintains the strong bond to his roots of folk and ballads.

Recently, I had the opportunity to speak with Edward Haber who produced *Small Town* and also happens to be well known in New York folk circles for his fine radio programs of recorded folk music. Having produced some ex-

cellent and natural sounding recordings is an asset to any radio station but in addition, Haber is one of the editors of *Flypaper*, the international newsletter of the Richard Thompson fan club. Now you may think fan clubs are for the younger set but when you have professionals in the business championing Thompson, you really know that the man is worth considering. In talking to Haber, it's important to know that Thompson maintains a strong hand in the recording process. Most of Thompson's cuts contain no overdubs and are often recorded live as a group without sound booths for vocals.

Currently, Mitchell Froom records Thompson and has maintained a very natural balance in the past two or three recordings. In the latest, *Rumor and Sigh*, the artist is presented in his most varied best. Great rock is exemplified by "Read about Love" and "Why Must I Plead." Then there's a quick about face, "1952 Vincent Black Lightning" and "Mystery Wind" - my two personal favorites and so unique to this disc. I promise you'll repeat track them before the disc is finished - "1952" for its unbelievable guitar work (yes, no overdubs) and "Mystery" for its unique blend of sixties organ and nineties sound. Both show Richard at his best.

I could go on and on but I'd rather you listen to some of Thompson's records and CDs. To highlight some of the other albums, I strongly suggest thinking of them in two groups: Those produced after the breakup of his marriage to Linda Thompson and those produced before. There is no doubt that Linda Thompson was the best singer for Thompson's songs. An era in pop music ended along with the marriage. But at the same time Thompson's writing and performances took on a new and different life after the breakup. He didn't suffer artistically one beat. To this day Richard Thompson remains an enigma in pop music. I can't think of any other composer/performer who has contrib-

uted so much to music in the last twenty years and, until the last six months, yet remained all but unknown.

*Selected Richard Thompson Discography*

As you might suspect, little is currently available in vinyl but a good eye could locate Thompson in some used record stores. Almost all of his records (currently 15) have been issued on a variety

of labels. CDs are available for the majority of his titles - certainly the best ones. Also note that some albums have been reissued by Hannibal. Don't let that stop you as the reissues equal or better the original issues. Again, an example of a record company that cares about sound.

*David Nemzer*

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## The Wes' Side

**Handel: *Messiah*.** NICHOLAS MCGEGAN/Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, Sopranos: Lorraine Hunt, Janet Williams, Mezzo-soprano: Patricia Spence, Countertenor: Drew Minter, Tenor: Jeffrey Thomas, Bass-baritone: William Parker, U.C. Berkeley Chamber Chorus, Philip Brett conducting, Producer: Robina G. Young, Engineers: Peter McGrath, Hugh B. Davies; Harmonia Mundi USA HMU 907050.52 (CD & cassette).

Sometimes the lag between my writing something and your reading it is really frustrating. I want to just grab each of you by the lapels and convince you to go out and buy this recording *right now*. But by the time you read this, it will be Christmas and inferior performances of *Messiah* may have convinced you that you've heard enough to last you another year. Trust me, you have not.

The first and notable difference about this wonderful presentation of Handel's masterpiece is the effort that has gone into making it an "authentic" performance. In addition to performing with period performance techniques and accurately sized ensembles - both vocal and instrumental, McGegan has acknowledged that no single performance of Handel can be deemed definitive. The man just wouldn't leave his music alone. In the case of *Messiah*, which Handel composed to a libretto by Charles Jennens in a scant twenty four days, there is historical evidence for ten or more separate presentations within his lifetime. If the soprano wasn't up to performing "How beautiful are the feet," then he'd recast it for alto and chorus, or even - in one case - drop the aria completely and replace it with seventeen seconds of recitative. Apparently his li-

brettist was less than thrilled with much of his music and urged him repeatedly to reset passages. So the problem in performing an authentic *Messiah* is to determine which one is authentic? All of them, obviously.

Harmonia Mundi and McGegan have correctly chosen to utilize one of the inarguable advantages of the compact disc, its programmability. This recording allows you to listen to nine different versions of the piece, ranging from McGegan's "ideal" performance to the autograph score, the different inaugural performance and the Dublin performance score from 1761. Each of the three discs in this set (it is priced as two) contains the "ideal" performance in the first ten to thirteen tracks. This is the version that McGegan settled on as satisfying both authenticity and esthetics - this is what a fortunate eighteenth century listener might have heard had the instrumentalists and vocalists been up to it. To listen to this performance just program in those first tracks or use your remote once they've played. No hassle. If you want to hear a different version, refer to the clear charts that HMU have included in the booklet, every time there is an alternate to be programmed in, they have given the track number. It isn't difficult and they've even remembered that some CD players require additional buttons to program tracks above twenty, so each disc has fewer than twenty tracks. You also have the option of just comparing the alternative arias to each other. All of this can go far toward making you an informed listener.

But the obvious question is why go to all of this trouble? Because this is the most exciting, musically informed, best sounding performance of the *Messiah* that I've heard. Let's start with sound. You might have some idea how good this sounds by the three little words that mean so much: analog, Young, McGrath. Peter McGrath may be capable of making a recording that sounds



less than marvelous, but if so, he keeps them to himself. From his early work on Audiofon through all of the U.S. productions for Harmonia Mundi, his name on an album cover has always meant natural, clear, un-gimmicked sound. Likewise Producer Robina G. Young. This time they've outdone themselves. *Messiah* must be a devilishly difficult piece to record with an orchestra, chorus, and soloists. Getting any one element in natural perspective without over-emphasizing another is the hat trick. Boy, do Young and McGrath score on this one! Spacious, liquid, effortless, this disc is one for the reference pile.

If you're like me, you already have too many great sounding "reference" discs of great music performed by well meaning, but boring musicians. We won't mention names, but Lord knows, every audiophile has some. Sometimes we try very hard to convince ourselves that we love them. No problem here! You've probably also heard authentic performance recordings where the music seemed stiff, lifeless or thin - this has always irritated me, music so devoid of swing or fun would have never been popular enough to have survived two hundred years. Again, no worries!

From the delicate and nimble opening of the "Sinfonia" to the "Amen." McGegan and musicians respond to Handel's music with grace and passion. The Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra have so adeptly mastered period performance practices that the fact that we are listening to an "authentic" performance never intrudes onto our enjoyment. One of the sillier recent arguments against early music performance, is that modern musicians have become so skillful at period performance, that their eighteenth century counterpoints could have never played that well (and Shakespeare, I suppose, lacking a word processor never wrote as well as a modern author.) Playing on the level of this performance must have

inspired that charge.

The U.C. Berkeley Chamber Chorus deserves particular mention. Seldom have I heard a vocal ensemble sing with more articulation and grace than they exhibit here. Since so much of *Messiah* is carried along by the chorus, this is particularly pertinent. I've attended performances of the piece where the choral passages were so mushy and indistinct that they might as well have been in Italian. The singing here is exceedingly expressive and clearly enunciated.

The soloists here are remarkable and put to the lie the charge that early music singers are bland and emotionless. Lorraine Hunt sings with burning passion and purity that few singers in any style can match. Janet Williams and the luscious mezzo, Patricia Spence, also bring gorgeous voices and intensity to their parts. Drew Minter, counter-tenor, brings extraordinary grace to the demands of the work and makes a strong argument for the part being sung by a man, rather than a mezzo, since the additional vocal color is so effective. In short, a spectacular performance from all the vocalists.

This important, enjoyable, and remarkable sounding recording could not be more highly recommended. It is as close to perfect as I can conceive, for a work that isn't offered on LP (Come on, Linn. This would be the Selekt release that we are all waiting for!). So I urge you, and you, and you, to run right down to your record store and get this. This *Messiah* is the reason you have that stereo in the first place.

**Keith Jarrett/Michala Petri: *Handel Sonatas*. Keith Jarrett (harpsichord), Michala Petri (recorder), Producer: Manfred Eicher, Engineer: Peter Laenger; BMG Classics 60441-1 CD DDD.**

People chortle when they spot this disc. Why is Michala Petri, an acknowledged recorder virtuoso, performing sonatas for recorder and continuo with Keith Jarrett, a Jazz pianist noted for reaching into his instrument and manipulating the strings directly?

Not that it is unheard of for jazz keyboardists to venture into the classical realm. John Lewis and John Bayless have both started second careers beating up defenseless dead composers. Jarrett himself has recorded both books of Bach's *Well Tempered Clavier*, on harpsichord, and works by Lou Harrison on piano. It isn't unusual for Jazz players to be fascinated by the driving keyboard music of Bach, the tricky little devil, and the harmonic and technical requirements of Harrison's gamelan-influenced music are sufficiently removed from the classical mainstream to intrigue a jazz musician. What is it about this release that strikes one as odd?

The fact that he seems to be serious about this classical stuff, that's what. Michala Petri is a prominent, possibly the preeminent, recorder player (recorderist?) and the Handel *Sonatas* are pieces written for two virtuosos. They are recorder sonatas after all, and are written to be played by an accomplished instrumentalist supported by continuo. Typically continuo refers to accompaniment to a solo instrument and is played on harpsichord, lute, or organ - frequently the instrument is not specified. As written, it suggests a bare counterpoint to the soloist. It was understood, at the time, that not only would the soloist ornament the line, but that the continuo would provide counter melodies, emphatic repetition and ornamentation. In other words, the two musicians were expected to jam a bit, having been given the changes.

If you're at all familiar with the music of Handel, then you already know many of the motifs and melodies that

make up these sonatas. Handel was widely known to "borrow" melodic material, chiefly - but not exclusively - from himself, and to insert it into other works as needed. Once, when accused of having lifted someone's theme, he responded "But look what he was doing with it!" Although dating the solo sonatas is a bit difficult, it seems obvious that Handel wrote them relatively early in his career and then treated them as a melody bank, making withdrawals as he felt the need.

These are charming pieces, played appropriately. Michala Petri responds to Jarrett's sympathetic accompaniment with a deft reading of the pieces. Her tone is clear and pure. Her felicitous phrasing, the delightful interplay between the flute and harpsichord, and the overall good humor of the playing make this a delightful disc. Jarrett lives up to the challenge of ornamenting the soloist without ever overwhelming.

The recording engineer for the disc is Manured Eicher, of ECM fame, and he brings to the disc all of the strengths and weaknesses of that label's Jazz recordings. On the plus side, the instruments are recorded clearly and with a minimum of fuss. The balance between recorder and harpsichord is good - the recorder is strong and prominent, the harpsichord much softer and somewhat back in the mix as it should be. On the downside, the recording was obviously a studio effort (the booklet credits Jarrett's Cavelight Studios in New Jersey) and lacks any hint of room acoustics. If this had been recorded in a room conducive to chamber music there would have been nothing to fault in this offering. As it is the performance and the material still make it an extremely worthwhile purchase. Put it on at a low volume when friends are over and have a good conversation or meal to accompany it. It is what the music was written for and as such it is hard to beat.

**Dr. Michael White:** *Crescent City Serenade*. Dr. Michael White (clarinet), Teddy Riley/Wynton Marsalis/Wendell Brunious (trumpet), Greg Stafford (cornet), Freddy Lonzo (trombone), Steve Pistorious (piano), Walter Payton/Reginald Veal (bass), Herlin Riley (drums), Don Viappie (bass, banjo), Producers: Billy Banks & Brian Bacchus, Engineer: Scott Goudeau; Antilles 422-848 545-2 CD DDD.

**G**umbo, in New Orleans, is more than a dish. It is a metaphor for the cultural patrimony of the Crescent City itself; African, Caribbean, Mediterranean and finally American ingredients meld into a spicy, intoxicating brew. The power comes from the mixture of all of the influences.

The music is like that, too. The mixture of African, European, and American musics that we call Jazz is now somewhere near one hundred years old, and New Orleans has the strongest claim to being its birthplace. What makes this more than just a claim to history is that there are musicians still alive today who played with that founding generation and who are teaching young players to continue in the tradition.

This disc is a lively swinging tribute to that unbroken chain called traditional New Orleans Jazz. Dr. White has picked musicians ranging in age from 68 year old trumpeter Teddy Riley, who first started playing in the swing era, to much younger new traditionalists, as exemplified by Wynton Marsalis and much of the crew here. The disc mixes material penned by Jelly Roll Morton, traditional Jazz numbers, hymns, and four pieces written by Dr. White. Interestingly, the good doctor's pieces have the unstudied charm and feel of the traditional works, good stuff! The playing is assured and flowing, with the rhyth-

mic stop time pulse that defines the New Orleans sound.

Speaking of sound, this disc is natural sounding, with wide deep soundstaging. The executive producer, Brian Bacchus, and engineer Scott Goudeau certainly know what a Jazz band sounds like and have done an admirable job at reproducing it. The four different horn players all have distinctive and clearly discernable voices, the transient snap of the drums is well placed in space, and the woody breathy sound of the clarinet is captured in all of its mellow glory. And nailing it all down is a deep string bass.

More than the superb sound, more than the historical interest, this recording is worthwhile because it is fun, fun, fun. Everything else is lagniappe.

### Gumbo Audio File

Cook this while listening to *Crescent City Serenade* in order to add a little verisimilitude to the endeavor.

4 lb	Chicken, in parts
2 tsp	Cayenne
1 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> tsp	Paprika
4 cloves	Garlic, minced
2	Bell peppers, chopped
13 cups	Water
1 Stalk	Celery
3 lbs.	Okra, sliced
<sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> lb	Shrimp
1 Tb	Flour
2-4 cups	Cooled rice
1 tsp	Black pepper
1 tsp	Garlic powder
2	Onions, Chopped
<sup>3</sup> / <sub>4</sub> cup	Oil
<sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> lb	Kielbasa
2 Tbs	Parsley, chopped
2 lbs	Tomatoes, peeled & chopped
1	Bay leaf
1 Tbs	Thyme
	Salt to taste

- 1) Turn on your stereo & let everything warm up while you work in the kitchen.
- 2) Put salt, 1/2 tsp pepper, paprika, 1 tsp cayenne, garlic powder & thyme in bag. Shake chicken pieces in bag.
- 3) Heat 1/2 cup oil in large, heavy skillet and brown chicken thoroughly. Add 1 onion, 2 garlic cloves, and one bell pepper. Cook till vegetables turn soft, add 3 qts water and set aside to simmer.
- 4) Saute okra in 1/4 cup oil, stirring frequently until okra is light brown and seeds turn pinkish. Dust with 1/2 tsp cayenne, & 1/2 tsp black pepper. Add remaining onion, bell pepper, garlic and continue to saute until new vegetables are soft.
- 5) Dust with 1 Tb flour and cook for 1-2 minutes. Add tomatoes and 1 cup water. Simmer for 3 minutes.
- 6) Pour vegetable mixture into chicken pot and blend well. Add bay leaf and sausage. Set to simmer and go listen to Crescent City Serenade.
- 7) When you return, the okra will have thickened the gumbo. Now add the shrimp and let it cook while you serve out the cooked rice. Pour the gumbo over the rice and dig in. Laissez les bon temps rouler!

Wes Phillips

*Editor's Note:*

*Prior to printing this article, the Editor required Wes to provide a sample of Gumbo Audio. Coupled with the Doctor and delightful company, I heartily endorse this combination.*

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## Editors' Hit Parade

### Analog:

Ansermet Conducts Ballet Music	RCA Soria LDS 6065
Arnold: <i>Sym. #1</i>	EMI ASD 3823
Beethoven/Mozart: <i>Fortepiano Music</i>	Nonesuch H71377
Belafonte at Carnegie Hall, vol. II	RCA LSO 6007
Britten: <i>Rejoice in the Lamb</i>	Argo ZRG 5440
Charlie Byrd: <i>Charlie Byrd</i>	Crystal Clear CCS8002
<i>Clarinet Summit</i>	India Navigation IN1062 (1)
Duets: <i>Rob Wasserman</i>	MCA42131
Hamza El-Din: <i>Lily of the Nile</i>	Cardas Records WLA S11 (2)
Hovhaness: <i>Sym. #4</i>	Mercury SR90366
<i>Italian Harpsichord Music</i>	Wild Boar WLBR8001
Billy Jackson: <i>The Wellpark Suite</i>	Iona Records IR008 (5)
Ali Akbar Khan: <i>Maihar</i>	Cardas Records WLA ES 102 (2)
Mark Knoffler: <i>Cul</i>	Mercury 822 7691 (British)
McNeely: <i>Confederation</i>	Sheffield Lab 9
<i>Music for Strings and Percussion</i>	New World Records 319
<i>Musique Judeo-Baroque</i>	Harmonia Mundi HM1021
Ojebokoren: <i>Cyndee Peters</i>	Opus 3 77-04 (8)
<i>The Power of the Orchestra</i>	Chesky Records RC30 (3)
Rachmaninoff: <i>Symphonic Dances</i>	Athena ASLW 100001 (6)
Ravel: <i>Daphnis and Chloe</i>	Chesky Records RC15 (3)
Martin Simpson: <i>Sad or High Kicking</i>	Topic Records 12TS5468 (9)
June Tabor: <i>Aqaba</i>	Topic Records 12TS449 (9)
Thomson: <i>Plow That Broke the Plains</i>	Analogue Productions 001 (1)
Andreas Vollenweider: <i>White Winds</i>	CBS FM39963

### Digital:

Arnold: <i>English and Irish Dances</i>	Lyrita SRCD.201
Beethoven: <i>Violin Concerto</i>	Phillips 426 064-2
Boult: <i>Orchestral Favorites</i>	Chesky JD53 (3)
Copland: <i>Collection</i>	Sony SM3K46559
<i>Different Strokes</i>	DMP 485 (4)
Archie Edwards: <i>Blues 'N Bones</i>	Mapleshade MHS 5126954 (7)
Getz, Byrd: <i>Jazz Samba</i>	Verve 810 061-2
Hall: <i>Concierto</i>	CBS Assoc. ZK 40807
Horner: <i>Glory</i>	Virgin 91329-2
Clifford Jordan Quartet: <i>Live</i>	Mapleshade MHS 512629A (7)
Mahler: <i>Symphony #2</i>	DG 423 395-2
Morricone: <i>Mission</i>	Virgin 90567-2
McCoy-Tyner: <i>NY Reunion</i>	Chesky JD51 (3)
Pink Floyd: <i>Dark Side of the Moon</i>	EMI CP35-3017
Ramirez: <i>Misa Criolla</i>	Phillips 420 955-2
Kenny Rankin: <i>Because of You</i>	Chesky JD63 (3)
Respighi: <i>Pines of Rome</i>	London 410 145-2
Paul Simon: <i>Graceland</i>	Warner Bros. 25447-2

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## Krell MDA-300 Monaural Power Amplifiers

**Manufacturer:** Krell Industries, Inc., 30 Higgins Dr., Milford, CT 06460, Phone number: (203)874-3139. **Rated output into 8 ohms:** 300 wpc; **Input impedance:** 47 K, **Sensitivity:** 180 mV, **Source of supply:** Reviewer owned; **Price:** \$10,000 per pair.

When Myles asked me if I would like to review the Krell MDA-300 amplifiers I accepted like a flash. I figured this would be the easiest review I would ever write. You see, I've owned these amplifiers almost since the time they first came out, so I sure know how they sound and now all I have to do is write it down and voila, it's done, right? Wrong. As I thought about it, I realized that there were two problems standing in the way of a quickie write up.

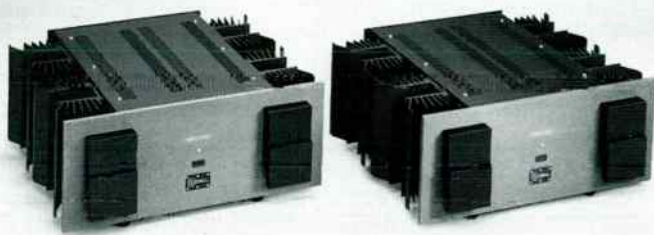
In the first place, this is a major review for the premiere issue of our new quarterly magazine, *The Audiophile Voice*. And Myles Astor, who is my appointee as editor, has me a little intimidated. When he and I talked over the instructions we would use as guidelines for the reviewers on how to write a review and what to include, it all sounded terrific. After all, we're now in the Big Leagues, 10,000 copies right off the bat and shooting for more. We're not just a 3500 copy annual, which looked great but was very informal. How informal? For example, I would say to Bill, who was in love again with another piece of equipment,

"Write me a review." And he would. In fact, all the reviewers were given the same instructions, "Write me a review." And they would. Some included more technical detail than others. I figured that was good enough, since we wanted our readers to use our reviews as opinions, not gospel. But now, I have to include technical information and data and take notes at all my listening sessions and include details about what source material I listened to and *etc.*, *etc.*, *etc.* My God, that's real work! But I have to back my editor, don't I? Besides, won't it make the magazine more credible? Ye Gods, I've created a monster! I'm hoisted on my own petard.

Secondly, who is going to believe anything I write about Krell, when every piece of electronic equipment in my system is Krell? Obviously I have a personal preference for these pieces of equipment and it's also true that Krell and Apogee mate very well together.

When I listen alone, or with a small group of buddies, I can get the warm, rich sound I like. On meeting nights, with anywhere from 40 to 70 people all over the place, the only place to get some sense of the sound is in the area from the couch down. In back of the couch the sound is inconsistent. So there is great fun had by all the members in knocking my system and/or the room. In fact, it's a club tradition.

The Divas with the DAX have been my



personal favorite for years. I have always preferred dipole speakers to cones, although recently some dynamic systems have sounded real good, *eg.* the WATT/Puppies and the Unity Audio Pyramids. So, who knows what the future will bring. At any rate, the Divas have a most natural and transparent quality that is magical for me. The music comes floating out, like it does in live music. The sound is clean, clear and remarkably defined. And it has awesome bass that leaves no doubt about the bottom octave being there. Some think that it has too much bass, but I don't. My only criticism is that it doesn't produce the gut shaking impact that cone woofers can produce, but then again they are extraordinarily clean and defined. There may be a slight tendency for the Divas to be on the cold side and they are power hungry creatures. They mate very well with Krell amplifiers. The resolving power of the Divas make them wonderful to use as an instrument for making evaluations. The evaluation of the MDA-300s were done on my system and the use of three other systems was to determine the versatility of these new Krell amplifiers.

The sound of the two pairs of MDA-300s was immediately and obviously better than the Krell KSA-250 amplifiers they were replacing. They clearly took me to new heights of musical reproduction. The soundstage was remarkably wider and deeper, with a clear layering of front to back depth. They seem to capture every aspect of ambience and imaging.

The highs, long an area of criticism by anti-Krellians, are much sweeter and natural, with no trace of glare, grain or coldness, unless it is in the source material. Listen to the CD from the soundtrack of *The Mission*, (Virgin CD 90567-2) when the entire chorus, especially the sopranos sing forte and staccato. Instead of a glob of hard, glassy sound, I was captivated by the intensity and drama of the music.

The bass not only had the tight control and definition so characteristic of previous Krell amplifiers, but it also had added warmth and tonal quality that easily revealed the supporting bass structure of the music. This was clearly revealed in the CD of the music from the soundtrack of *Glory* (Virgin CD 91329-2). The rat-tat-tat of the marching drums, is combined with the awesome bass that is clearly defined even to a half-note change of pitch.

The midrange was the greatest difference of all between the Krell MDA-300 and the Krell KSA-250. It was vibrant and palpable, with wonderful timbre. The *Misa Criolla* CD with a masterful performance by Jose Carreras, before he got sick (Philips 420 955-2), reveals every nuance of his voice, as well as the supporting choir and orchestra. The timbre, spaciousness and staging is spectacular. I hate to say it, but it had everything that gives tubes their dedicated following.

Dynamics and transients are clean and handled easily. These jewels never run out of steam, even when running the power hungry Divas. Don't forget that these amplifiers were being compared with the Krell KSA-250, an amplifier that sure ain't chopped liver. It has gotten rave reviews everywhere and I thought it was one of the great amplifiers of all time. It still is.

Anyway, I decided to lend a pair of amplifiers to Lars Fredell, Bill (Brassears) Brassington and Louie (Left Channel) Lanese, three member buddies, each of whom has been made famous (infamous?) by Sam Tellig of Stereophile and each having different systems. I figured that it would put the amplifiers through its paces with cone, as well as my dipole speakers and thus compare it in different environments and against at least one tube amplifier. The results were uniformly identical, first and most importantly to my ears, through my own system, since this is my review,

not theirs and also to the three others who had come to their own conclusions before I could get over to hear for myself. And they were the exact conclusions I had come to on my own system.

Lars is a perfectionist of the highest order. He has the best sounding pair of WATT/Puppies II that I have ever heard. If you want imaging, nothing does it better. There is no doubt when you hear this system that it is one of the best sounding anywhere.

Both Bill and Louie have Unity Audio Pyramids, which are open and transparent and are no slouches in the imaging department either. They have such an uncanny power of resolution and rightness that there are times when I feel I am right there with the musicians. Both Lars and Billy had been using the Krell KSA-250, as I had, until we compared it to the MDA-300.

Louis' reference electronics are the Croft preamplifier and amplifier and I was particularly interested in hearing the Krells *vs.* a fine tube amplifier, albeit much lower priced, in the home of a tube aficionado. The Croft is a highly respected tube amplifier. Even though it is rated at 90 wpc, power may have been a factor in the Unity Pyramid system. However, since we were using a Croft preamplifier, I would have thought that it would favor the all tube sound. It didn't. Louie's conclusion was that it was the first transistor amplifier he had ever wanted to own and in fact it was the best amplifier he had ever heard in his system.

The MDA-300 is built to the perfectionist standard we have come to expect from Krell. The front has a classy silvery grey chassis with large black handles, the familiar Krell logo, a black touch on/off switch and a sexy blue light when it is on. The back has inputs for RCA (single ended) and XLR (balanced) set-ups and two pairs of five way binding posts for biwiring configura-

tions, if necessary.

The manual is clear and concise. It says that "all heat-bearing structural components and external heat sinks were designed in-house to improve thermal tracking and cooling." I believe it but these babies still run hot. Automatic self-adjusting bias and DC offset controls are part of the design. Opto-coupled circuits constantly monitor the amplifiers performance and it also incorporates sophisticated protective circuitry.

This amplifier, true to the Krell commitment, is a Class A design. As with all class A amplifiers, they run quite hot. They require at least half a hour of warm up time before they come into their own; however, the MDA-300s really require several hours of playing time to sound their best. So be patient and you will be well rewarded.

Aside from the regular feet which are supplied with separate rubber bottoms for use on wood or other surfaces that might get marred, there is an optional set of Acoustic Mass Dampers (AMDs), which are custom machined stainless steel tiptoes that thread into the feet and decouple the amplifier from vibrations present in the supporting surface. I have only listened to the MDA-300s with the AMDs.

An innovative feature of this amplifier and responsible for the D in the model MDA designation, is the differential circuit, which utilizes the monaural and balanced design. Basically, this amplifier is designed to incorporate the speaker and speaker cable into the circuit. Quoting from an explanation by Krell, "Each MDA chassis is, in reality, two amplifiers: one for the non-inverting signal(+), one for the inverting signal(-). The outputs of the two channels drive the speaker, meaning that the speaker is being driven from two 'hot' outputs, as opposed to being driven from a hot and ground. This gives the

amplifier tremendous control over the speaker. Further, the speaker is not referenced to signal ground. By eliminating current draw from signal ground by the speaker, interaction with other component is suppressed." It sure works. The MDA also is designed with no feedback from input to output and there is also direct coupling of the entire signal path.

### Summary

The Krell MDA-300 is a beautiful piece of equipment which excels in every department. The depth and width of the stage are remarkable, as is ambience retrieval. Transient and dynamic response is natural and effortless. This amplifier is fast, clean and powerful. Frequency response, timbre and harmonics are wonderfully satisfying and the entire spectrum of sound is seamless and right. It handles complex musical material easily and without any loss of information. Bass and highs are superb. But the surprise is the warmth and presence in the midrange, all for the better.

Dan D'Agostino and his staff can be mighty proud of this product. This peach of a pair does everything with

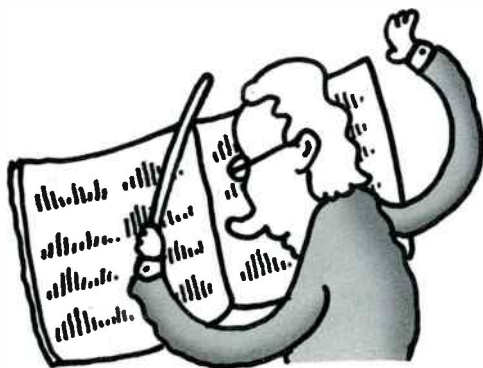
aplomb (I couldn't resist). In my system with the Diva/DAX combo my two pairs of peaches are simply stunning. If you can afford it, get it. I did. So did Bill and Lars. The MDA-300 is my new #1 state of the art amplifier because it has taken me a giant step forward in the reproduction of music. It's inKrellible!

What am I going to do now about being accused of being biased in favor of Krell? Problems, problems, problems!

Hy

### Reference System:

**Source, Analog:** Arcici Onyx Turntable/ET II/Koetsu Rosewood Signature; **Digital:** Krell MD-1 Transport, Krell SBP-64X Digital Processor; **Electronics:** 2 prs. Krell MDA 300 amplifiers, Krell KBL Line stage, Krell KPA Phono section; **Speakers:** Apogee Divas/DAX; **Cables, Interconnects:** Purist Audio Maximus (balanced); **Speaker:** Purist Audio Maximus; **Accessories:** Tice Power Block.



## Eminent Technology II Air Bearing Tonearm

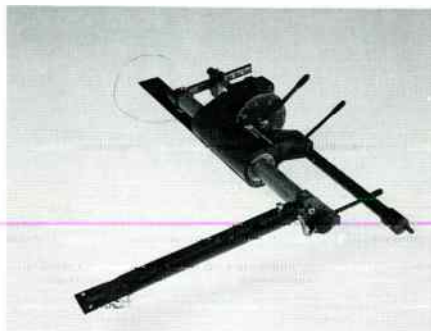
**Manufacturer:** Eminent Technology, 225 E. Palmer St, Tallahassee, FL 32301, Phone number: (904)575-5655. **Designers:** Bruce Thigpen and Edison Price; **Price:** \$1250.

## WISA Model 300 Air Pump and Surge Tank

**Distributed by:** Airtech Industries, 242 So. Dean St., Englewood, NJ 07631, Phone number: (201)894-5500; **Price:** \$500.

Like a fine wine, the Eminent Technology II Air Bearing Tonearm has matured over the years. Several changes in the design, execution and operation of the arm have occurred since its original inception. These include changes in the heat shrink surrounding the wand, a stiffer I-beam for MC cartridges, new internal wiring, internal damping of the spindle, an optional higher pressure air pump/surge tank, a damping trough and most recently and the subject at hand, a new manifold sleeve optimized for use with the higher pressure WISA pump.

Five minutes of listening was all that was necessary to ascertain that the combination of the WISA air pump/surge tank and new manifold bearing had dramatically improved the sound. The differences were so profound that this version of the ET should bear the designation ETIII or ETII MkII. There's a rightness to the sound of the latest incarnation of the ETII, the same sort of rush that you get when listening to real instruments. Almost every parameter by which we judge a tonearm's performance is dramatically improved. The latest version of the ETII exhibits major reductions in grunge and colorations



across the frequency spectrum, more extended and controlled lows, more extended and delicate highs, improved dynamics, greater instrumental focus and recovery of low level information. It appears that Bruce Thigpen has at long last succeeded in unlocking much of the arms untapped potential by combining the higher pressure WISA air pump/surge tank with the new manifold bearing sleeve.

Pairing of the original Takatsuki air pump with the ET tonearm was not made serendipitously; the pumps operating specifications were carefully considered when designing the air bearing arm. While there was no doubt that the addition of the higher pressure WISA pump markedly improved the tonearm's performance, its particular operating parameters were not a perfect match for the arm's original bearing. Recognizing the inherent virtues of the WISA pump, Bruce returned to the drawing board and designed an entirely new manifold sleeve reducing both the capillary size from 6 to 4/10,000ths of an inch and the inner bearing tolerance on radius from 7 to 4/10,000ths of an inch. As a result, the modified arm is now more dependent upon air pressure than flow rate. With the stock Takatsuki pump, the manifold pressure measures 2.5 psi; using the new bearing sleeve increases it to 6.5 psi. The same increase in surface pressure is found inside the air bearing. Stock surface pressure is 0.5 psi; with the new bearing and pump/surge tank,



it is now 2 psi. According to Bruce Thigpen, the combination of the WISA pump, surge tank and new bearing increases the bearing's stiffness by almost an order of magnitude, quite a substantial change. All that is needed to ascertain the increased rigidity is to move the arm. Its travel is much smoother and silkier yet you can feel less play.

The new sleeve is meant only for use with the WISA pump; it is not intended for and will not work with the Takatsuki pump. In addition, the new bearing obviates the need that some people found to use the stock pump in combination with the WISA pump. Installing the new manifold sleeve is only a 5 to 10 minute job, even for those prone to solder cotton balls to their fingers. What's more, this modification does not require any unsoldering.

Three important items to note after installing the new bearing. First, recheck the cartridge tracking force and antiskating and adjust if necessary. Any deviation from neutral balance will result in a shift of the soundstage from one side to the other. When the arm is correctly balanced, you should hear more center-fill. Second, it is more important than ever to use the in-line filter to avoid clogging the bearing's capillaries. Lastly, carefully listen to and readjust the cartridge's VTA. I found that on average that I dropped the arm 10/1000ths of an inch.<sup>1,2</sup>

Almost all of the sonic improvements in the latest version of the ET arm are described by three simple words, improved cartridge tracking. As a result, that imperfect medium, black vinyl LPs, sound much closer than ever before to the master tape.

The improvements begin with a decrease in grunge and correspondingly increased transparency. Grunge represents an additive coloration manifested by a thickness to the sound particularly, in the lower registers. It veils the stage

and spaces between instruments and obscures low level information. This is not found on the master tape and is one of the criteria that separates the men like the Rockport and Versa Dynamics turntables from the rest of the boys. Following the bearing change there has been an almost magical disappearance of a large proportion of the grunge and veiling from my set that I had previously attributed to other factors such as the speakers. This has been replaced by an enhanced sense of openness. The importance of the front-end or source material can never be overemphasized. No matter how long I'm involved in this hobby, it never ceases to amaze me the extent to which changes in the front end are magnified throughout the whole system.

One remarkable sounding record I've recently happened upon is the New World Records release entitled *Pulse, Music for Strings and Percussion* (NW 319) that features works by modern composers such as John Cage, Henry Cowell (from which the title of the album is derived) and Ruth Seeger. Coincidentally, this album was engineered by Anthony Salvatore. I'm sure that many readers will recognize his name from Tony's earlier work with Lewis Layton and RCA. My favorite piece on the disc is the John Cage composition entitled "Third Construction." One of the reasons for my ongoing love affair with the MGIIAs is how they disappear and present a large scale image, in particular their reproduction of vertical image height. After replacing the air bearing, there is a substantial increase in all three soundstage axes. This is the closest I have come to a real life image on my set. The bass drum is now more real than ever before. Gong, cymbals and tom-toms are more widely spaced with a vast increase in the amount of air between each.

The speakers completely disappear with an openness and airiness that stretches from the bottom to the top of

the frequency spectrum. I can literally reach out and touch the rear and side walls especially when the bass drum is being rubbed. As with master tapes, there is a preciseness of focus to instruments with each and every instrument occupying its own space. An inescapable conclusion, after hearing the new ET bearing, is that much of the grunge we've come to accept in our sets is cartridge mistracking. Taking this argument one step further, some mistracking may actually be identified as a euphonic signature in a cartridge. The bottom line is that mistracking is an additive coloration.

Low frequencies are more extended, tightly controlled and detailed. To take a line from Linn, the bass is more tuneful; by comparison, the unmodified arm sounds flat. On *Pulse*, the rubbing of the bass drum is much more extended and detailed. As a consequence, more harmonic information, resonances, decay of notes and spatial information are revealed. The bass drum displays a growl that was missing before. Dynamics are markedly improved with drums popping out and really making you jump. What's more, the system is able to handle larger dynamic swings with more aplomb.

The live bass clarinet solo ("Sweet Lovely") on *Clarinet Summit* (India Navigation 1062) brought tears to my eyes. I can not recall ever feeling more involved with the music. When Alvin Batiste is introduced on side one, you are now able to clearly hear that he begins to speak at some distance from the microphone. As he walks toward the microphone, his voice increases in clarity and level. On "Sweet Lovely," there is more breathiness and air rushing through the bass clarinet. At the same time, the bass clarinet has more presence. Each key fingering is cleanly reproduced. Prior to the modification, it was assumed that the movement in the image of the bass clarinet was due to his moving while playing. Now, you

can almost hear the air whip past the clarinet as he turns.

In the midrange, the new ETII with any of the cartridges in my stable (Benz MC3, Clavis, Benz MC100, Bluepoint) is sheer magic. In fact, some people are going to think that the arm now sounds thin. What they are really hearing for the first time is the absence of midrange colorations. There's a bit less of a lower midrange/upper bass emphasis that gives an unnatural chestiness to Jennifer Warnes' voice on *Duets* (MCA 42131). This has been replaced by a voice that at first listen seems slightly thinner yet is more natural and smoother sounding. At the same time, Jennifer's voice has increased in focus and dimensionality. Check out how she breathes out the words "day and night." Leave the arm on the record after the last bar of "The Ballad of the Runaway Horse" fades away and listen to the next cut. Dan Hick's voice has never sounded cleaner, exhibited more body or sound more falsetto. When he sings "wind don't blow that hard..." you can now hear him speed up to keep pace with the rest of the instruments (for those interested, Herb Alpert does the same thing with his trumpet on *Casino Royale*).

One of the hardest instruments to reproduce, the violin, now sounds quite respectable. Take for instance the David Abel/Julie Steinberg Brahms recording (Wilson 8722). Upper violin strings retain their character; what is absent and decidedly not missed is an underlying distortion that was actually cartridge mistracking. Abel's Guarnieri violin now possesses more of a wooden sound and discernable bowing detail than ever before. Harmonic integrity comes one step closer to what is on a master tape. Pay particular attention to subtle changes in tempo that were not there before the modification.

High frequencies are more extended without a corresponding increase in ele-

vation. Triangles on *Amanda McBroom* (Sheffield Labs 11) or tin can and cymbals on *Pulse* are more clearly delineated revealing more ringing. Each instrument now exhibits a more realistic decay time. The crash of cymbals on "Third Construction" hits you in the face without being hard or exaggerated.

Now for an additional \$450 (about 1/3 of the present cost of the arm), one can own a truly state of the art tonearm that does not take a back seat to any including the Air Tangent or the SME V. Current ETII owners using the WISA pump can obtain the new manifold bearing from Eminent Technology by exchanging their old pump plus \$50.

Not long ago I asked Bruce Thigpen what he would do to improve the design of his air bearing tonearm. His answer was that everything he would have done had been incorporated into the design of the Air Tangent (smaller capillaries, tighter bearing tolerances, greater bearing surface area). Bruce also added in passing that one of his goals has been to hold the arm's price under a grand. Kudos must go the Bruce Thigpen and his partner Edison Price for designing a true SOTA tonearm that is within the realm of affordability for many audiophiles.

Myles B. Astor

- <sup>1</sup> A tip for the dyed in the wool VTA fanatics. Buy a travel dial micrometer for the arm. ET manufactures a \$25 plastic adaptor designed to hold a travel dial micrometer atop the mounting pillar. A Mitutoyo micrometer with  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch travel calibrated in 1/1000th of an inch is more than adequate.
- <sup>2</sup> Readers using biampified speakers may want to readjust bass levels.

### Reference System:

**Sources, Analog:** VPI 19 MkIV Turntable/ET II Tonearm/Benz MC3, Benz MC100, Sumiko Bluepoint, Clavis cartridges/WISA + Surge Tank; **Digital:** Meridian 206/203, Musical Concepts Epoch II, Theta Pro Prime; **Electronics:** 2 conrad-johnson Premiere 4 amplifiers, conrad-johnson Premiere 3 and Evolution 20 preamplifiers; **Speakers:** Highly modified Magnepan MG IIIAs; **Cables, interconnects:** MIT 330 and CVT (tonearm to preamplifier), NBS Serpent, XLO, Audioquest Diamond; **Speaker:** OCOS, Audioquest Diamond, XLO Type 5; **Digital:** Aural Symphonics, Bitwise; **Accessories:** Goldmund cones, Lead Balloon, VPI Bricks, Amp Clamp, ASC Tube Traps, 2 prs. Tice Power Block/Titan, Hubble, Hospital grade receptacles, Kontak.



## Unity Audio Pyramid Fountain-head Signature Speakers

**Manufacturer:** Unity Audio, 27751 East California, Lathrup Village, MI 48076, Telephone number: (313)559-6662. **Designer:** Bob Grost, Frequency response: 28-25 kHz, Efficiency: 90 db, Nominal/Minimum Impedance: 7/5 ohms, Weight: 80 lbs; Price: \$5000.

What I liked best about my Kawasaki KZ-1100 was its sheer power off the line. It wasn't the best on back-road performance or high-speed comfort, but it was fast. What I liked best about my Honda Gold Wing was its smooth, high-speed ride and its ability to impart a feeling of safety to the rider.

Both of these bikes, and many more I have owned, did many things real well, but none of them approached my BMW R-100-S. It had the uncanny ability to give me "balanced" performance from top to bottom. Great around-town handling, great back-road performance and high-speed maneuverability. "Who cares," you might say? But all of this brings me to the Unity Pyramid Fountainhead Signatures.

On initial turn-on, the speakers sounded God-awful. It took a full week of "burn-in" before the speaker opened up and I was ready to rock and roll! At that point, I wanted to stay up all night and listen to every precious CD I owned-and did. Only four other speaker systems in my life have moved me in the same way; the WATT/Puppies, the B&W 801s and the Apogee Stages and Divas. I know that may sound like a lot, but I must have owned over 40 speaker systems in my home during the past 30 years.

Like many good speakers, the Pyramids need an amplifier capable of providing

at least 50 watts of power. They must be solidly spiked to the floor. The tone cones included with the speakers work fine on solid floors but have some problems on thick pile carpeting. Unity claims this problem will be remedied by the time this review appears. The speakers must be absolutely level and preferably at least three feet from the back wall in my room. Also, high humidity affects the upper bass.

The Unity Audio Pyramid Fountain-head Signatures are one of the very few speaker systems that I've owned that never draw any attention to themselves in any area of the musical spectrum. They are just about totally neutral and balanced in sound to the point of my not even being able to nit-pick (which we audiophiles love to do!)

Their ability to hold a pinpoint, solid image, even when placed 10 feet apart



(a la Lars Fredell), is a sonic marvel to behold. What a soundstage! Wall to wall, corner to corner and at least 20 feet front to back. No speakers that I have ever owned have been able to do that and hold a correct sized image in the sound field.

The preservation of tonality and harmonic integrity by these Pyramids is nothing short of correct. They are not bright, nor do they have deficiencies in the bass region. Everything just comes up right, whether listening at low or extremely high ones levels. Being so totally neutral, the speakers will give you just what goes into them. I've listened to hundreds of CDs and continue to be amazed at how the Pyramid shows exactly how the music was recorded. The Pyramids are similar to a recording engineer's reference monitor but without the overly analytical sound that gets to you in the long run.

Even during complex orchestral passages, the music is never compressed. Violins on Malcolm Arnold's, *Symphony No. 4 Op.71* (Lyrita, SRCD.200) always pass for what I call "analog sounding strings." They are not bright or harsh, are well placed and give a feeling of air around them. Not bad for a CD!

Listening to Tallis', *The Lamentations of Jeremiah* (ECM 1341, Track 9, Agnus Dei), the midrange is open and transparent, with no trace of congestion. Voices are distinctly separated. Tenors are true to timbre and harmonics without the hardness of other speakers that I have owned. This has been a consistent feature of these speakers. In my experience, only two other High End speakers share this attribute-the WATTS and the B&W 801s.

A good example of the Pyramid's ability to accurately reproduce bass is the Eric Kunzel recording of *Ein Strausfest* (Telarc CD 80198). The control of the bass is easily heard in the first track. Detail, clarity and impact are in a class of

its own and are the best I've ever heard in my system. Naturally, the better the source material and electronics, the better the sound.

There are two areas that I'd like to see improved-low end extension and the "warmth" region. First, the Pyramids don't have the deepest bass extension that we get from much more expensive speakers systems such as Unity Audio's own PARMs or the Apogee Divas or the WATT/Puppies/WHOWS, although it comes pretty damn close at least 95% of the time. Second, there seems to be a slight lack of richness or fullness in the mid/upper bass area that one would expect from a speaker of this caliber. On classical recordings, there a reduction in the solidity and the authority of the sound. This leanness is also somewhat amplifier dependent.

Some of the sound quality, comes from the way the Pyramids are built. The Fountainhead material (otherwise known as Corian) makes the speaker very solid and non-resonant. Another important consideration is that the Fountainhead material is available in a variety of different colors so you can satisfy the WAF (Wife Acceptance Factor). Internally, the speakers are braced to the point of overkill and use a special baffling system.

Unity's Pyramids are dual ported in the front; one for the woofer and one for the midrange/tweeter. The ten and a half inch woofer fires downward and, from what Bob tells me, only reads the floor, regardless of carpeting thickness. Another unique attribute of the speakers is that you can adjust the woofer height to allow correct interfacing with any room. The sound of the Pyramids belies their small size.

Jim Aud of Purist Audio Design had told me that the Unity speakers were forces to be reckoned with but I remained skeptical until Ben Rose (owner of Harlequin Audio in Bayside,



Queens) invited me to audition the Unity speakers and meet their designer, Bob Grost. Meeting Bob Grost for the first time was certainly an experience. When Bob did a somersault off the chair in the middle of the room, jumped up and did a rather remarkable Ronald Reagan impression, I knew he was my kind of guy. I remember thinking if his speakers are as good as his somersaults and impressions, I was onto one hell of a product.

Trying to get a curriculum vitae from Bob Grost is like trying to tap into a Pentagon computer. In desperation, I asked his wife, Kathy, for the dope on Bob's credentials. She told me that Bob is well known in the Midwest as a designer and researcher in the areas of acoustics and psychoacoustics. He taught acoustic and recording theory at the University of Michigan for nine years starting at the tender age of 19. In 1986, Bob joined General Motors to study the effects of automotive body structures on interior acoustics for Corvette division. Bob was then promoted in 1988 to Senior Project Engineer for Advanced Acoustic Programs. After a number of technological innovations in loudspeaker design, he left GM to found Unity Audio.

Unity Audio was started in the summer of 1987 as a custom system supplier. Two and one-half years were spent in the areas of market research, production and organizational planning and developing a business plan to ensure their success. Unity Audio was incorporated in October of 1989 and introduced their current speaker line at the 1990 Winter CES show.

The rest of the day was spent with Bob and Ben listening to the Unity Pyramids. At that point, I knew there was something in this product that was quite out of the ordinary. Some of the first things I immediately noticed about the Pyramids were their ability to disappear like a top of the line small monitor

loudspeaker, draw absolutely no attention to themselves and to stay "balanced" from top to bottom like my BMW R-100-S.

"Okay," I said to Bob. "Ship me a pair and I'll give them a whirl." Bob said, "Hey Bill, I don't know about that. You go through speakers like I go through socks." "Well," I said, "Bob, if they're as terrific as they sound here at Ben's, I just may keep them as a reference and be happy ONCE AND FOR ALL." (Hmmm...fat chance, I said to myself).

I also had the opportunity to hear these speakers in the home of Lou Lanase, a club member. Lou's current system consists of a tube amplifier and preamplifier. His listening room is wider and narrower than mine and Lou is somewhat limited in speaker placement due to the presence of a grand piano. Even with the speakers being placed approximately 10 feet apart, the soundstage was full and there was lots of air between instruments and voices. This leads me to the conclusion that the speakers will work well with other electronics and room situations.

You can't believe how stunning they sound on the best analog source material. Resolution and detail are right up there with the best of the best. The only speaker I can think of that might give you a drop more air and resolution is the WATT/Puppy.

Some people might want a little more bass, some may want more highs but be careful. What you'll end up with is not the perfectly balanced sound that comes from the Pyramid. The air and transparency suck you in, similar to the very best ribbons and planars I've heard. This speaker is also very holographic, something that I personally like. Delineation and detail within the three dimensional soundstage is almost scary. Presentation within the soundstage and stand-alone instrument positioning are awesome. The palpability of

voices in most recordings seems to be right on target.

The woofer is extremely fast and tight sounding and overall, the Unity speaker is very dynamic. It never drops out at high volume levels, even with the glorious, almost tube sounding, dynamic Krell MDA-300 monoblocks. My prediction is that this speaker will become one of the great hits in High End audio at \$5000 per pair (\$5150, bi-wired).

Listening very carefully is what it's all about. Have an open mind. Avoid fights with the wife. Center yourself in the sweet spot and listen late at night. Turn all the lights out; even close your eyes. But, please don't go out and buy another \$5000 speaker system without first listening to a properly set-up pair of Unity Fountainhead Pyramids. Every

time I think of what speaker I can go out and buy next (which I'm noted for), I come up with a big, fat, goose-egg. I just feel the Unitys take all the best attributes from the great speakers that I've owned and combine them into one fabulously, cohesive, musical sound.

Bill Brassington

### Reference System:

**Source, Digital:** Esoteric P-2 Transport/Theta Pre-Pro II Balanced (with special 32 step resistor volume pot); **Electronics:** Krell MDA-300 amplifiers. **Speakers:** Purist Audio Pyramid; **Cables, Interconnects:** Purist Audio Desin Maximus (balanced); **Speaker:** Purist Audio Design Colossus. **Accessories:** Purist Audio AC line cords, Monster Cable Tranquility Base, ASC Tube Traps, Tice Power Block.

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## Audioquest B-200L Moving Coil Cartridge

**Manufacturer:** Audioquest, P.O. Box 3060, San Clemente, CA 92672, **Phone number:** (714)498-2770. **Output:** 0.5 mV, **Stylus type:** Microridge, **Recommended tracking force:** 1.9 gms, **Weight:** 9.2 gms; **Price:** \$895.

To begin with, you should know that the Audioquest B-200L replaced my Carnegie I. And upon my initial listening tests it stole, albeit just partially, my love for that cartridge. The main area where the Carnegie casts its shadow over the AQ B-200L is in the midrange. I sensed that the Carnegie had more midrange body than the AQ B-200L and if that were not enough, the Carnegie has the uncanny ability to express musical contrasts more vividly within those frequencies that we associate with the midrange.

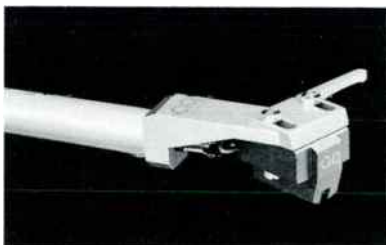
The beauty of long-term listening tests is that initial impressions can, and often do, change. In this case, the AQ B-200L over a period of several hours (and this is after perhaps 30 to 40 hours of listening mind you) just seemed to bloom throughout the midrange. A midrange depression that was initially present during the early listening sessions all of a sudden just vanished. I must say that it is somewhat disconcerting that an \$895 cartridge requires such a long "break-in" period.

The "L" in the model designation indicates that this is the low output version of the cartridge; its yield is approximately 0.5 mV. If your step-up device requires a greater level of input voltage, try the AQ B-200MH design. Its output

is triple that of the 'L' series (approximately 1.6 mV). The cantilever material for these cartridges is Boron and the diamond stylus is polished as a microridge. The body is machined out of a solid block and it is finished in sky-blue. And there is a limited warranty for one year rather than the usual 6 months. So much for the preliminaries.

I mounted the cartridge in my Goldmund T-3 arm. This is a tough arm to set up correctly for any type of cartridge for testing or otherwise. And what makes it such a tough job is getting the vertical tracking angle (VTA) right. I used a depth gauge to measure the vertical distance from the fixed top of the side walls of the T-3 to the adjustable rails which the arm-carriage assembly rides upon.

For final VTA adjustment, this cartridge was set so that the bottom of the cartridge body was parallel (by eye) to the record surface. The azimuth setting in the T-3 arm is fixed by the arm geometry. One could play with shims between the cartridge top and the cantilever extension of the T-3. I didn't because that would in-



roduce variations to the impedance path that the cartridge sees. In arms where the cartridge is held in a fixture which terminates in a cylindrical tube, the user need only rotate the tube and listen to the resulting change in the sound produced. For microridge tip cartridges, which the AQ B-200L has, azimuth settings can be just as important as the VTA. The best way to make this setting is not by eye alignment but through the use of an dual trace oscilloscope which can be hooked up (by summing the left and inverted right channels) to view the "best fit" null that can be obtained, as a function of the rotational angle.

To break in the AQ B-200L, the vertical tracking force was initially set to the manufacturer's recommendation of 2 grams for about twelve hours. After the break-in period, I tried several values of tracking force (VTF) all within the range of 1.8 to 1.9 grams. All VTF settings were calibrated using the Technics SH-50P1 stylus pressure gauge. For all my listening sessions, the cartridge was tracked at 1.85 grams. This seemed to be the best compromise in terms of transient speed and delicacy versus tracking ability.

The cartridge was electrically loaded to slightly less than 100 ohms through a slightly modified Vendetta SCP2 phono stage sporting a much heftier capacitive storage capability in the power supply. John Curl has, in addition, finished some recent design ideas and has incorporated them in the latest incarnation of the SCP2. The sonic results obtained through these changes are so significant that he will be required to relabel the unit as an SCP2-B. I will update you on the sonic changes associated with the latest version of this great phono preamplifier at another time, but you should know that the unit no longer inverts polarity, has significantly increased the energy in the upper midbass and provides even greater dynamic contrasts. But onto the Audioquest's contribution to musical reproduction.

The AQ B-200L has a definite constant sonic signature that is easy to label. Its strengths span the frequency regions that lie below the highest frequencies: the bass and midrange of the musical spectrum. The Audioquest is stunning in its dynamic reproduction of the upper bass and lower midrange frequencies. When compared to the Carnegie I, it is the clear winner for the midrange award. Although the cartridge is not open and airy like a Spectral MCR, it has the body and bass that is simply not present in the Spectral. And it is precisely for this reason that when these two cartridges were compared, I found

the top end of the Spectral overly "present," so to speak, and in that regard the cartridge may contribute to the somewhat whitish character that has always been the hallmark of the Spectral cartridge.

I've always found that live music does not allow you to separate the body of the music from its overtones. They are one and the same. The connection and mutual support between the two is continuous so that the ability to differentiate where one ends and the other begins is doomed to failure. Not so with the Spectral. The top end takes on a meaning unto itself, disembodied from the midrange, but always there when the music calls calling attention to itself as a result of being clearly separated from the fundamentals. This characteristic pinpoints the major flaw of that cartridge. On the other hand, the AQ B-200 does not cause fragmentation of music's spectrum. It presents a musical space that is continuous, from the lowest bass out up to the highest frequencies. This is one of the strengths of this fine cartridge.

Some listening guests, seated in the kitchen (which opens to the listening room), remarked that the female performers sounded as if they were literally next door singing. Violins sound sweet (Borodin's *Second String Quartet*, Melodia ASD4100) or can sound resinous and fiery (Shostakovich's *Tenth String Quartet* performed by the Fitzwilliams Quartet on Decca D188-D7). A constant character that you notice about the Audioquest is that the frequency response sounds flat at the top end. It is decidedly smoother than any of the other cartridges (Clear Audio, Shinon Red, Carnegie I, Spectral) I've had in my system over the last couple of years.

At the other end of the spectrum, the AQ B-200L has bass (*The Moscow Sessions*, Shostakovich's *First Symphony*, Sheffield Labs TLP 26) that is solid with impact guaranteed to give my Wilson

Puppies a workout. However, one doesn't get the same sense of dynamic range experienced at the top end. Connecting the two frequency extremes is a mid-range that is somewhat weak in providing a sense of layered depth. Read that as slightly weak. The AQ B-200L displays adequate depth, but not so finely delineated as with the Carnegie I, which was a smashingly unique achievement in the world of cartridges.

Brass as you would guess, having its signature defined so strongly through the superposition of the highest frequencies on the musical envelope, is less than strikingly recreated by the AQ B-200L. Listen to the *Yellow Dog Blues* album of the Don Ewell Quartet (Audio-ophile Records, AP-66). What you will hear on the second cut of side one is the full body of the trumpet but with rather less than the full detail of the 'spitting' tremolo. The Spectral, on the other hand, gets you closer to the musical performance by virtue of its sheer speed and resolving power at the upper frequencies. You can "hear" its super-charged engine racing down the high speed undulations of the record grooves. The Spectral, even with its 0 to 60 performance through the grooves of classical music, doesn't give you a greater "creature-comfort" musical experience than the Audioquest.

Other cartridges can tend, more or less, to lose that sense of stage. The Audioquest maintains the sound stage while performing through a wide dynamic range (Malcolm Arnold's *English-Scottish and Cornish Dances*, Lyrita SRCS 109, especially the *Scottish Dances* Op.59). The AQ B-200L images beautifully with excellent left/right channel balance. Although the Audioquest doesn't produce the air around separate musical voices, such voices are still precisely suspended in space, their position heard with certainty. The lack of air is due to a slight veil cast over the musical stage and the cartridges somewhat recessed reproduction of the very top octave.

Overall, the AQB200's tonal signature is very Koetsu-like—at least the older line of these fine cartridges.

I have been comparing the Audioquest with the Spectral MCR (although not the latest one) because the AQ is the best of all the cartridges I have previously used in my system and the Spectral has received such a strong review from other reviewers. In fact, the Spectral is a more expensive cartridge and so perhaps the comparison is not fair. But surprisingly, I have found the AQ B200L overall to be the more musical of the two cartridges. To be sure, the AQ B-200L is not as detailed as the Spectral (which provides this detail, unfortunately, only in the Hi-Fi sense), but the AQ B-200L has sufficient detail to give you a front row perspective on the musical stage. On the other hand, the AQ B-200L is overall a more musically satisfying cartridge with the richness of a freshly brewed first cup of morning coffee. And what's more, the AQ B-200L can be obtained for hundreds of dollars less than the cost of a Spectral MCR. I am using the Audioquest cartridge as my reference. You should seek out the AQ B-200L at your dealer and compare it to the cartridge you may now be using.

Sam Burstein

### Reference System:

**Source, Analog:** Basis Ovation Turntable/ET II tonearm/AQ B200 cartridge/WISA pump; **Electronics:** Jadis JA80 amplifier, Vendetta SCP 2A phono section; **Speakers:** WATT/Puppies. **Cables, Interconnects:** Purist Audio; **Speaker:** Purist Audio; **Accessories:** Goldmund cones.



### Audio Research Classic 60 Stereo Amplifier

**Manufacturer:** Audio Research, 6801 Shingle Creek Parkway, Minneapolis, MN 55430, Phone Number: (612)556-7570. **Designer:** William Johnson and Richard Larson, **Rated output** into 8 ohms: 60 wpc, **Sensitivity:** 550 mV, **Input impedance:** 100 kOhms, **Serial number:** 3914-6026; **Price:** \$3495 (single ended)/\$3645 (balanced).

Audio Research has caused quite a stir with the release of the Classic series of amplifiers, which marry solid state/tube hybrid circuitry with classic triode output tube designs. Audio Research, unsuccessful in their early attempt at solid state preamplifier design in the seventies, regained their prominence on the cutting edge of High End circuit design by returning to tube design. In the last five years, ARC has made some significant breakthroughs in combining the best qualities of tubes and solid state in preamplifier and basic amplifier designs.

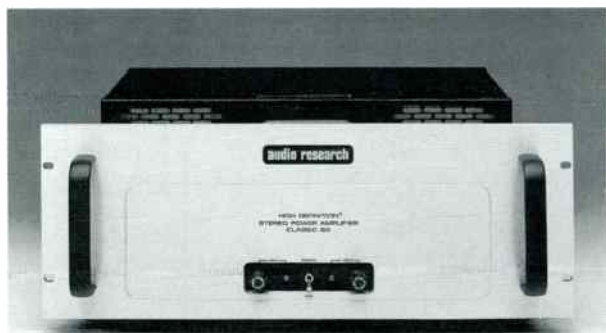
Audio Research's Classic 60 is second from the bottom of the power amplifier lineup, sandwiched between the Classic 30 stereo and Classic 120 monoblock amplifiers. The \$3495 Classic 60 is a stereo amplifier utilizing four 6550 output tubes per channel in a triode configuration while retaining partial cathode coupling. ARC claims longer tube life as well as less catastrophic tube failure in the triode as compared to pentode configuration. This is traceable to less stress being placed on

the tubes by connecting the screen grids to the plates. In addition, the amplifiers contain two internal cooling fans.

The Classic 60 incorporates a new circuit which automatically readjusts the tube bias and a servo circuit that continuously monitors and maintains DC balance in each pair of output tubes. A single bias adjustment is required and only when replacing tubes. The input stage of the amplifiers is hybrid, using semiconductors along with two 6FQ7 driver tubes in each channel.

Supposedly, the magic of triode output designs is derived from the very linear, low distortion operation of the tubes. The benefits are very low coloration, a musical presentation and very detailed articulation of low level detail; on the other hand, triode designs have usually have usually been associated with low power output ratings.

Let me talk a bit about power. I tried this amplifier with both the mid-range/tweeter panels of Infinity RS-1Bs (a notoriously inefficient and difficult load) as well as full range on the Mirage 460 speakers. I have listened to many solid state, tube and hybrid amplifiers in my day in my system and friends know that at times (many times, frequently, not all the time but damn close...) I like to crank up the volume. Consequently, I say with confidence that this amplifier does not sound like



sixty watts. When compared to the Quicksilver Monos on my own system and full range on a friend's Martin Logan CLS', it was clear that although the Quicksilvers appear to be more powerful than their sixty watt (pentode) rating would indicate, the Classic 60 was significantly more powerful. My conclusion here is, don't balk at the 60 because of its power. If you are amplifier shopping, the Classic 60 should be compared with pentode amplifiers of DOUBLE the power rating of the Classic 60.

Enough chit-chat: the sound. What I heard immediately was tremendous detail resolution, clarity, transparency, articulation, ambience retrieval, speed without hardness, delicacy and sophistication beyond any amplifier I have ever heard in my house or elsewhere. Subtle reflections within the concert hall stage and hall reverberation times were very obvious as was the ability to follow individual instruments through complex passages. One could even count the number of strings in the violin section of the orchestra.

Let me define what I mean by immediately. This amplifier requires a long break-in time before you can experience its magic, before it even sounds good. Out of the box, you will hear high frequency and soundstaging problems and nothing special on the detail resolution side. I received this unit after it had been playing for four solid days at the Las Vegas CES; consequently, I assumed it was fully broken-in. That turned out to be a bad assumption—it took a week and a half before the amplifier bloomed in my house (initially, I thought there was a problem elsewhere in my system). This happened on every single recording I tried. The amplifier presented a bit of a paradox; it greatly showed the vast differences in recording quality among discs (digital was stamped on the forehead in bright green on each of these beasts) yet it also made the poorer records more enjoy-

able. Yes, it simultaneously raised the enjoyability level of all recordings whilst widening the gap between good and bad, even the gap between early and late pressings of the same recording.

Revealing what's happening elsewhere in your system is an understatement here. With the Classic 60 you'll hear when your preamplifier tubes need changing, when your SRA is off and when your records are dirty. Its level of resolution and articulation will make it painfully obvious when you're listening to a bad orchestra. The thrill I experienced with this amplifier is akin to a moving magnet cartridge owner hearing a good moving coil in their system for the first time.

Articulation and detail resolution go hand in hand with the amplifier's second greatest strength, its midrange. The Classic 60 has the most luscious, enticing, seductive (but not relentlessly colored or euphonic) midrange I've ever heard (or even thought possible) from an AUDIO component. On Charles Wuorinen's *Bassoon Variations* (New World 209), the immediacy of the bassoon, harp and tympani on this chamber work is startling. Not only can you hear the pedal action of the harp but each skin and pitch articulation of the tympani.

Vocals, as you may expect, shine incredibly well on this amplifier, especially female vocals. You must hear the New World's rerelease of the mid-sixties recording of Jan DeGaetani performing George Crumb's *Madrigals* (New World NW357). This masterpiece was recorded by Roy Allison and originally funded by Acoustic Research as part of their contemporary music series. New World has now re-pressed this recording at Europadisc on audiophile quality vinyl and it is probably still in print (if you can find vinyl). I thought I knew this record like the back of my hand but I was so shocked by the entrance of the

soprano into my listening room that I damn near knocked over my tea.

High frequencies are gorgeously detailed, airy and extended but not bright, etched or metallic. Take the Hart/Wolff/Hennings recording, *Yamantaka, Vol. 1*, (Celestial Harmonies, CEL003). The overtones of these wonderful percussion instruments shimmered in space like beautiful butterflies as well as upper harmonics of Mickey Hart's subterranean bowed string instrument (the same one he shakes the room on Dave Wilson's Rhythym Devils recording).

The upper bass articulation of this amplifier is quite clean and fast and on the Mirages and the bass performance down to 40 Hz (the lower range of the Mirages) is quite impressive. Not as tight or as fast as some super solid-state amplifiers but just fine indeed for an amplifier equipped with glowing bottles. And I gave it some tough recordings. Grandmaster Flash's *The Message* discoblashed away with no problem in tightness, low frequency impact or articulation (Sugar Hill SH 584). The two toughest midbass tests I have are Weather Report's *Domino Theory* (Dutch CBS 25839) which features highly modulated electric bass passages by Victor Bailey as well as lightning fast synthesizer solos by Joe Zawinul that cover the 30 to 80 Hz range and Philip Glass' *The Photographer* (Dutch Epic EPC25480) whose rapid synthesizer arpeggios lag behind the beat on lesser amplifiers. The amplifier's articulation was excellent on both of these recordings.

The Classic 60 has two characteristic colorations that may not be to everyone's taste. To begin with, the midrange is just a bit forward, not unlike the characteristic of remixed European CBS pressings but not as serious as that. Those that like laid back tube amplifiers may be in for a bit of surprise here. But the amplifier still shines on the Infinity RS-1Bs which are very forward and some-

what metallic in this region. Secondly, the high frequencies, although extended, clean and distortion free, are not bright, not whitish but have a characteristic that is not unlike taking a picture on a bright sunny day with the F-stop open just a tad too much. Not bleached, just a bit more illuminated than the rest of the spectrum.

Both of these effects are very subtle and I am grasping for straws a bit here. While violins on *Sonatas d'Eglise* (French Harmonia Mundi HMC 11377) did seem a tad forward, they never lost their delicacy or threw the music out of balance the least bit.

The amplifier's soundstaging capabilities are spectacular. In addition to the stage being wide and deep (especially deep) on great recordings, the image specificity is razor sharp. Detail resolution capabilities of the amplifier enhances the staging in two areas: 1) Each instrument floats on a bed or air like never before and 2) the ambience retrieval is such that one hears the different reverberation times of an instrument sound source from side and a back walls. As each instrument in the orchestra obviously has a different reverberant characteristic, this enhances the sense of image specificity. And on well miked recordings, you can hear the size of the room and the reverberant characteristics of the room, especially on Dick Schory's *Bang, Barroom and Harp* (RCA LSP 1866) and George Crumb's *Makrokosmos III* (Nonesuch H71511).

Sometimes one is impressed by the dynamic capabilities of an amplifier on high level explosive passages and other times one is impressed with the way in which an amplifier unravels subtle low level nuances. One passage in particular (Crumb's "Third Movement") showed me the wonderful dynamic range capabilities of the amplifier. In it two blocks are struck with gradually increasing strength; each strike increases

in volume by precisely the same amount. I've only heard that in live performance of the Crumb. What is amazing about the Classic 60 is the way it handles all levels of dynamics from *ppp* to *fff* with equal strength. If you really want to lose it with this amplifier, if you want to revel in the detail resolution, transparency, dynamics, ambience retrieval, soundstaging, and overall musicality of the Classic 60, put on any Mercury Living Presence recording. This is a Mercury collector's wet dream amplifier. (Easy rental terms of my unit are available by the week, Sid.)

Electronic music? As if you are in the room. On Kraftwerk's *Musique Non Stop* (EMI EMI001), the resolution is so wonderful I imagined I was in the mixing studio and could almost see the engineer on the board panning the various synthesizers in and out.

Electro-acoustic music works well, too, such as the brilliant Tibetan Suite from Lucia Hwong's *House of Sleeping Beauties* (Private Music 1601). Here, Hwong blends voices and traditional Japanese string and percussion instruments with synthesizers and the sound on this well recorded digital recording was captivating.

I thought this reviewing process was going to be a short one as the revelatory nature of this amplifier was such that it was very easy to hear what was going on in my system. No chance. Instead, I found myself so drawn into the music that at times I couldn't bring myself to lift the stylus up from the record to go onto the next disc because doing so would make the music stop. On the opening passage of the wonderful Chesky Reiner *Lt. Kije* (Chesky RC 10), I found myself staring at that pianissimo entering snare and unable to move. The Classic 60 also revealed more of what wonders lurk in those old vinyl LPs. I feel like telling the world to get off its ass and get a VPI TNT or a Versa Dynamics turntable and spend the rest of

your life in used record stores, for those little silver beasts will not begin to tell you what this amplifier is capable of doing.

As far as interfaces are concerned, I believe there are many speakers that will work happily full range with the Classic 60 in most applications. I have heard the amplifiers work well full range with Martin Logan CLS', ProAcs and Vandersteens. On the other hand, I would not attempt running them full range on current hungry units such as Mirage M-1s or Magnepan MGIIIs but I suspect the biampified combination of the ARC Classic 60 and the Audible Illusions S-120 may be a Magnepan owners nirvana.

In case you haven't guessed by now, the Audio Research Classic 60 is the most significant upgrade I've ever made to my reference system and is the most significant product I have ever had the pleasure of reviewing. More importantly, this design enables Audio Research to join Vendetta Research and Koetsu in my own personal Audio Hall of Fame. Each of these companies has produced at least one design which has touched me in such a way that I long to hear every new design forthcoming from these creative artists.

Bob Reina

Bob Reina is a guest contributor for this issue having written equipment and music reviews for The Absolute Sound and Sounds Like.

### Reference System:

**Source, Analog:** Goldmund Studio/Syrinx PU3 Tonearm/Koetsu Rosewood Signature; **Digital:** Magnavox 582; **Electronics:** ARC Classic 60 amplifier, Perreaux 2150 amplifier (bass towers), Vendetta SCP2B phono stage/ARC SP11 MKII preamplifier (line stage); **Speakers:** Infinity RS1bs, Mirage 460s. **Cables, Interconnects:** MIT330SG; **Speaker:** MIT 750,

### Symdex Epsilon Signature Speakers

**Manufacture:** Symdex, P.O. Box 359, Gloucester, MA 01930, **Phone number:** (508)281-4447. **Designer:** Leland Wallace, **Frequency response:** 25-25 kHz, **Efficiency:** 88 db, **Nominal/Minimum impedance:** 8/4, **Weight:** 100 lbs; **Price:** \$3450.

The highly musical Symdex Epsilon Signature speakers have consistently received favorable mention by numerous members of the High-End press attending the summer and winter CES shows. In fact, the Symdex suite was where you could generally go, during these shows, to simply enjoy good music, relax and once again realize that it doesn't take a megabuck system to achieve a highly respectable sound system.

Presently, Leland Wallace is President and Chief designer at Symdex, a role that he assumed when Keving Voecks left the company in 1978. Lee started development of the Epsilon loudspeaker, a three way, vented loudspeaker in a single cabinet to replace the original Sigma/Omega combination in 1978. The first Epsilon debuted at the 1989 Summer CES in Chicago. I would say that the 11 year gestation period was well worth the wait. In a very real sense, you could easily say "You've come a long way, baby. A very long way!"

A musician (drummer) since the age of 12, Lee later attended the Berkeley School of Music. Lee is quick to point out that he is not a degreed engineer but feels strongly that his long term involvement with music has given him a solid approach to loudspeaker design. According to Lee, his primary design criteria is to produce a speaker that possesses a life-like quality to allow the listener as much musical enjoyment as

possible. He also feels that by closely following jazz, he has gained extremely useful tools (his ears!) to determine accurate sound reproduction of various acoustic instruments due to experiencing lots of unamplified live music. And although he says he uses some of the available modeling programs/techniques in his design approaches, in the end, he relies on his ears for validation.

The Epsilon's replaced the Avalon Ascent MkII's in my system. How did the Symdex's compare to the Avalons? Actually the Symdex's were far less critical for optimum placement. Although their tonal character was considerably different than the Avalons (which are extremely revealing of input sources and are highly articulate transducers), I found the Symdex's quite fun to listen to.

Immediately noticeable on the Symdex speakers is a full, rich tonal character; a sound that provides a sense of body, a tactile sense to the music. Acoustic instruments, such as piano, sax, upright bass and drums have a sense of weight that makes the music not only sound right but feel right as well. For those of you who have heard real acoustic in-





struments, not only live but at times up close and unamplified, then you surely are aware of the sense of body, weight and impact delivered by these instruments. The thing you don't want from your in-home audio system is one that is high on the wimp factor and leaves out this true musical quality. When you crank these babies up, it reminds me of the tape commercial where the listener is sitting low in a chair with his scarf blowing behind him, hair blowing and pant legs flapping. No, I am not suggesting that these speakers are intended to be played at loud volumes. What I am saying is that when, and if you so choose to listen loudly, you will not be disappointed. Your spouse, neighbors and pets may not be all that pleased but I can assure you that the Epsilons will not let you down.

Looking back at my listening notes, from the 1989 Summer CES when I first heard the Epsilons, my initial (and long lasting) impressions were quite favorable due to this warm, rich, full tonal quality. Quite interestingly, it is not a quality that completely dominates the sound obscuring other sonic strengths such as detail and clarity, but simply enhances the perceived realism of recorded music as it is reproduced in your home listening environment.

Through various encounters with these speakers, as well as extensive in-house auditioning, I have found the Epsilons to be compatible with a wide range of associated components. They don't favor a certain type of amplifier because I

have heard them perform quite favorably with solid state gear as well as tube units. Also, they do not seem to be particularly power hungry and are relatively easy to drive, although they are quite capable of handling lots of watts. So you won't have to break the bank in financing a really expensive amplifier. I'm not suggesting that they are like a starter set of speakers for the neophyte or budding audiophile. What I am saying is that given their overall strengths and faithfulness to the music, you can put these in your system early and enjoy them. As you improve your various components, you will simply enjoy them more without worry of early obsolescence.

There are most definitively more positive attributes for the Symdex Epsilons than weaknesses. Additionally, the few weaknesses that exist are relatively minor and to some degree can be minimized by system tweaking. The Epsilon's primary weakness was a bit of plumminess (additional roundness, if you will) in the midbass which never detracted from my overall enjoyment of listening to these speakers. This effect was largely dependent on the type of music being played and was more noticeable with large, full bodied sounding acoustic instruments (eg., acoustic upright bass, kick drums, etc.). What seemed to be contributing to this effect was a resonance in the woofer cabinet. Giving the cabinet, which houses the woofer, the old knuckle rap test illicit a noticeable resonance which surely adds to the midbass problem. Fortu-

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nately this problem was not so pronounced as to obscure the upper or lower bass. It did not bloat or add a heaviness to the midbass, simply a bit of additional roundness. The effect also changed as different solid state and tube amplifiers went into my system. Solid state units seemed to thin it out a bit with slightly better control, throughout the bass range; tube amplifiers (fitted with KT88s) seemed to increase this slight midbass warmth.

On the positive side of the ledger, my listening notes continuously remind me of how the speakers just do not seem to get in the way, which makes listening to reproduced music just that much more fun. The midrange, with its rich, full quality, is one of the Epsilons' greatest strengths. Along with this quality, you also get very good inner detailing and ambience retrieval. It is very easy to hear into the soundstage and pick up subtle clues regarding instrumental placement and/or movement of performers on the stage. For example, the Grammy Award winning male acapella singing group Take Six on their debut album (*Take 6*, Warner Brothers 25670) offers an interesting picture. Clearly, the singers are side-to-side on the stage but at times shift slightly forward or back, as well as up and down. On the Epsilons, this effect is quite noticeable with very discernable layering of the individual voices. The midrange provides a very intimate, lifelike quality and on this particular album; the performers really shine.

At times, the singers really get moving with various vocal gymnastics covering a very wide range, from low to high, and the Epsilons just sail easily along. When the singers are quiet and soft, the Epsilons present them to you just that way as well. The dynamic shifts are very noticeable - adding to the perceived realism of the performance.

Ernestine Anderson along with Ray Brown on bass, Monty Alexander on pi-

ano and Frank Gant on drums, serve up some delicious tunes on her album *Never Make Your Move Too Soon* (Columbia CJ147). Besides Ms. Anderson's rich, warm, sultry tenor voice, you also get a chance to hear some fine bass and piano work. Perhaps because of Lee Wallace's profound love of Jazz and real acoustic instruments, the Epsilons are totally at home with the music on this album. The vocals and piano are presented with the proper weight and power and both share a high degree of articulation. Ray Brown's big, warm, wonderful sounding bass speaks distinctly when it should but is often softly woven into the quiet spaces in between Ernestine's singing. Again, the Epsilons do a very creditable job in conveying the dynamic shifts along with the delicate nuances of the drummers' subtle, but very noticeable, brush work. I guess what I'm trying to deliver to you is a sense of how these speakers will let you just simply enjoy the music-period. Instruments and voices just basically sound right!

Overall, the midrange and treble regions are capable of delivering powerful dynamics, yet are noticeably sweet and extended. This extension is not brought about as the result of brightness but is presented very naturally. There is no etched quality to the highs, simply sweet, smooth and extended. All in all, this adds a quality to the overall sound that enhances the overall tonal balance and preserves the life-like naturalness of musical fundamentals and harmonics.

On more powerful music, such as fusion or heavy hitting R&B, the Epsilons likewise do a very good job. The transient attack of electronic instruments, used extensively in these types of music, is fast without noticeable overhang or smearing. Also, when things get really busy and loud (provided you have the right horsepower driving the Epsilons), the speakers simply get moving. They do not break-up or fall apart (even at

very loud levels) and just keep on pushing.

One particular Jazz/fusion album that I find useful in assessing a speaker's dynamic capabilities, is *The Spin* by the Yellowjackets. It has a lot of heavy hitting drum work, strong thumping on the electric bass guitar, solid striking on the electronic key-boards and a searing, soaring saxophone. This is an album to be played fairly loud to better appreciate the emotion generated during this recording. Recently, I had the opportunity to see this group live shortly after the release of the album. The show was very uplifting and based on the success of the album, they performed almost all of the cuts on the album. Listening to this album on the Symdex Epsilons provided a very solid recreation of the live event and although "ain't nothing like the real thing, baby" - listening to and through these speakers with this album in no way disappointed. The sense of power and dynamics that these speakers generate is truly a strong suit. Also, when things calm down and get quiet - the sense of inner detail is obvious and allows the listener simply to sit back and enjoy.

Very interestingly, the Epsilons rather clearly revealed the differences between the analog and digital pressings of this particular album. Although there is brightness on both mediums, the LP has more natural bloom and body which provides a more rhythmic pace to the music. The digital counterpart offers up the music in a way that is simply flatter in its dimensionality, punch and drive. Also, the brightness comes across in a more irritating way on digital. Plus, I believe that the overall full, rich tonal quality of the speakers actually toned down some of digital's problems and in a very real sense made them less objectionable.

In the critical areas of soundstaging and imaging, I consistently found these speakers to present a reasonable facsimile

of what you might expect to see (and hear) if the musicians were in front of you on stage. The positioning of the individual performers, and/or their instruments, was very easily discernible and with good recordings you are in for a treat. Again, I believe Lee Wallace's total familiarity with live music (both as a regular concert goer and playing musician) gives him a solid perspective on proper staging which he strives to accomplish this in his speaker designs.

There is one additional area of consideration that I feel needs to be dealt with when dealing with expensive High-End audio products, particularly speakers. This is whether a given product, which likely you spent a considerable amount of time researching, auditioning and evaluating will stand the test of time. By that I mean, as you change (and yes, hopefully upgrade) various components in your system - will your favorite loudspeakers provide you with even greater enjoyment than when you first purchased them? No one in their right mind would want to have to consider continually changing their speakers each time some other significant component(s) enters their system. And, insofar as evaluating speakers seems to be far more subjective (or at least I think so anyway) than many other components in a given system, it makes sense that likely the units you finally settle on will be with you longer than other system components. The trick then is to get something that largely fills the bill, for your personal tastes up-front, and then continually upgrade and refine your system to compliment your speakers.

So, in a nutshell, how do I rate the Symdex Epsilon Signature speakers? I would definitely say these speakers are worth serious consideration by those who really love life-like sounding music. No, they do not represent a product that does it all. But what they do, they do extremely well. And at a price that makes them highly cost effective. As I said earlier, choosing speakers is a very

subjective matter due to the listener's bias and varying tastes. And whereas I'm sure that my biases somehow creep into my overall observation and assessment of things - the one compelling force, in my overall evaluation of a given audio product, is my total love for music. Essentially, if a product helps me to enjoy recorded music in my home, then I'm happy. If it doesn't, then out it goes. The fact that I have lived happily with the Symdex Epsilon Signatures in my home for such an extended period of time should tell you something.

All in all, a significant accomplishment and I truly look forward to future product offerings and further developments from Symdex Audio Systems. These folks know music real music and after all, isn't that what it's all about any-

way?!

Bill Wells

## Reference System:

**Source, Analog:** Versa Dynamics 1/Benz MC3; **Digital:** Cal Audio Ter-cet MkIII, Esoteric D2 Processor, Audio Alchemy DDE v.1.0 processor; **Electronics:** Audio Research Classic 120s, CAT SLR1 MkII preamplifier, Audio Research LS1; **Speakers:** Pro Ac Respons 3, Avalon Ascent MkII; **Cables, Interconnects:** NBS Serpent, Purist Audio Maximus; **Speaker:** Pur-ist Audio Aqueous; **Digital:** Van den hul, NBS; **Accessories:** Tice Power Blocks.

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## Anodyne Adapt Tube/Hybrid Digital Processor

**Manufacturer:** Anodyne, P.O. Box 6227, High Point, NC 27262, Phone number: (919)884-7394. **Designer:** Scott Nixon, Decoding System: 20-8X; Price: \$2495.

If described as a noun, it could be: "A drug that allays pain." On the other hand, if it is an adjective, it might be described as: "Serving to assuage pain." Whatever it is, it's expected to bring the user some comfort or relief.

What I'm referring to here is not a new over-the-counter pain reliever, but rather two definitions of the word "Anodyne"

found in a popular dictionary. Scott Nixon, founder, owner, creator and main motor in the Anodyne Group must have snickered to himself when he came up with this nifty name for his digital audio processors.

Prior to describing the possible relief that the Anodyne Adapt D/A Processor can give some long suffering digi-ears, let me tell you a little bit about Scott Nixon's philosophy. Before I sat down to listen to the Adapt for the first time, I called Scott and asked him to describe his design goals, what he feels is particularly important in music reproduction and why. This, only to widen my own understanding of the processor I was about to evaluate.

"The musical presentation on the whole," said Scott. "It must be enjoyable

to listen to. Not Hi-Fi, jazzed up. Having heard countless live performances being recorded and the resulting master tapes, I know that recorded music can be both dynamic and relaxed at the same time. I don't want my equipment to lose, or add, any information. Detail is important - but it must be of accurate harmonic structure. Tonally, I tend to weigh things toward bass (26 years as a bass player!). If Anodyne errs at all, it would be toward a euphonic quality." He continued: "I use the tube section to add back second-order harmonic distortion to minimize the effects of odd-order distortion and hopefully end up with a neutral and natural tonal balance."

Now, let me get to the point of the Anodyne Adapt. The Anodyne is a vacuum

tube hybrid digital audio processor. It is a single box unit with what appears to be a brushed aluminum faceplate, slightly less than a quarter inch



thick. The top cover on the conventional metal case has some ventilation cutouts through which the glowing vacuum tubes can be seen. A handful of green LED's can also be seen on the board, presumably part of the circuitry. The backpanel has two sets of high quality RCA outputs, one is fixed (for use with an external gain control) and the other one is variably controlled by the internal volume pot (permitting direct coupling to a power amplifier). There is also a high quality RCA input jack.

Unfortunately there is no input facility for optical transmission of the digital signal. Also, I would have liked to see balanced outputs. Both perhaps cost-savings oriented omissions.



However, a minor detail, which clearly shows that Scott used his head and that little extra care when designing this product, is the layout of the backplate. The EIC power cord has been kept far away from the input and the outputs, which are also far apart from each other.

There are four switches and seven indicator LED's on the attractive faceplate. From left they are as follows: A rotary power switch; a touch sensitive mute switch; an analog mute LED (red) to indicate mute condition during the warm-up cycle; a LED (green) indicating de-emphasized recordings; a 32 K sample LED (green); a 44.1 K sample LED (green); a 48 K sample LED (green); a phase inversion indicator LED (green); a digital mute LED (red) which shows that the output is muted; a soft touch phase inversion switch which changes phase in the digital domain (the processor will mute momentarily when this is activated) and finally a passive level control connected to the variable outputs. The processor automatically senses, and adjusts for the correct sampling rate.

Notably absent from the functions is a balance control. I haven't asked Scott about this, but my guess is that he felt that a balance control might seriously compromise the sound quality. Many users will probably utilize a preamplifier and its controls anyway.

The Anodyne Adapt appears to be a well built and well thought out piece of equipment. The actual hook-up procedure is straight forward, namely, make sure that all connections are properly made before you power-up the unit. Since I run my system balanced, I was unable to use my normal interconnects between the Adapt and the MDA-300's. Fortunately Myles loaned me a pair of XLO's and a pair of Audioquest Diamond Hyperlitz. (The Adapt comes with its own digital link by Bitwise.)

The XLO's proved to be a disaster in

this particular instance. I tried for hours to get rid of a very pervasive and loud hum, but without much success (the same cable had worked fine in Myles' system). The XLO interconnect is unshielded and might be extra sensitive to outside interference, so it should be tried before purchased. However, I'm told it is quite good when it works in a system.

So, I changed to the Audioquest Diamond which turned out to be a very good match, indeed. This is undoubtedly an outstanding interconnect - but the price tag is also something else!

Before I give you my subjective impressions of the Anodyne Adapt, let me tell you just a little bit about my reference system and my listening biases. I switched to an all-digital front end in the early days of the Meridian-modified Philips CD-player era. This process was made easy by the fact that my once proud record collection, through various circumstances, had been rendered inconsequential (that's a polite way of describing the remaining pitiful bunch of remaining albums). So, I had little or no reason to look back before I jumped straight into the digital arena.

Sure, my ears suffered plenty of digital abuse over the years - something some of my friends gleefully point out whenever we disagree on matters of audio - but the absence of a daily analog comparison has made it easier to live with the digital stuff. I have, over the years, tried hard to assemble a good, well-balanced digital playback system which can give some measure of satisfaction.

I live in a typical New England colonial with an 18 x 24 foot family room over a two car garage. This family room has been turned into my version of a live-end/dead-end listening room (speakers are placed in the dead-end) with a wide floor-to-ceiling brick fireplace behind the listener, functioning as a diffusor.

Since I have written equipment reviews, news bulletins about the going on in the US Hi-Fi arena (especially the esoteric) and general articles on tweaking etc. for a Scandinavian magazine for years, I have had a steady stream of High End equipment and accessories pass through my listening room. Some were so impressive that "we just have to have them" as I pleaded with my occasionally rather resentful wife who instead eyes the tatty sofa in the listening room.

In setting up the system I have strived to eliminate as much vibration as humanly possible (not easy in a suspended wood structure). A combination of Goldmund cones, Navcom pucks and isolation platforms have proved useful. All cables are kept as far away as possible from each other - both A/C cords and signal cables. The listening room has several dedicated 20 amp power lines.

My listening preferences tend toward the detailed, information-rich, deep-and-wide soundstage presentations that I get from sitting fairly close to the performers at live events (I prefer listening near-field). Timbral accuracy and dynamics are very important to me.

The first impression, following the recommended hour or two of warm-up, is delightful - the Adapt really sounds quite good right out of the box. This is promising! The sound further improved, and the enjoyment increased, as time passed and after a few weeks I decided to sit down for some serious listening sessions. My estimate is that the Adapt had, at least, 75-80 hours of burn-time at that point.

Immediately apparent is the natural tonal balance of the Adapt. The bass is indeed plentiful, without being overblown. Just pleasantly massive and nicely controlled. The high frequencies are a little rolled at the top, but this is done so smoothly that it only takes a lit-

tle bit of the sheen away from cymbals, and some of the aggressiveness from brass. Many will feel that this is a euphoric blessing! The brass backing Harry Connick Jr. on *Blue Light, Red Light* (Columbia CK 48685) lacked a wee bit of bite to my ears though.

The midrange, however, is pure tube magic and possibly the best I've heard from a digital source. Absolutely beautiful! For years I've listened to "Innsbruck" (*Depth of Image*, Opus 3, track 10) through every CD playback system I have laid my hands on. This is a demanding choir recording, with pronounced sibilants of great nuance which are very difficult to get properly reproduced. It is also hard to get a balanced view of the choir in all three dimensions. Hyperbole is unnecessary here, I've just never heard this recording sound so good.

Unfortunately, the slight roll-off of the higher frequencies has an effect on the overall impression of clarity and focus when compared to some esoteric processors I've heard. In all cases, however, they cost twice as much or more. On the other hand, the very slight lack of clarity that I perceived could have been the result of the lack of the lower noise floor of balanced drive. This is somewhat immaterial since the Adapt compensates with a tremendous display of transparency and grain free smoothness in the midrange and bass. With a little more top end extension, this processor would be hard to beat at any price.

The Anodyne's transient attack and dynamics is compromised in a minor way by the its euphonic nature. Again, I suspect that the slight roll-off affects the sense of speed and attack on snare drums and cymbals. This is evident, but by no means upsetting, on percussion recordings such as the new, excellent recording from Digital Music Products called *Different Strokes* by Robert Hohner (DMP CD-485).

Not only is the midrange of the Adapt magical - but wait 'til you hear its soundstaging capabilities and resolving powers! This, I feel, is where its real strength lies. The soundstage it produces rivals any I've heard - digital or analog. It is wide and deep, with a surprising sense of dimensionality. Pay attention to the end of *My Blue Heaven* with John Pizzarelli (Chesky JD 38, track 4) and see if you can hear foot stomps and toe taps alongside your listening position and even behind you! Or, the full orchestra extending well beyond any room boundaries, with great accuracy of image, as exemplified in Strauss "Dance of the Seven Veils" (Chesky CD 36) or Sondheim's *Pacific Overture* (Book of the Month Records No. 11-7517, CD No. 2, mail order only) amongst many other.

The resolving powers of the Anodyne Adapt are also astounding. The amount of detail it produces ranks with the very best and most expensive processors available. Listen for the metronome in "I Should Care" (*Serendipity*, Reference Recordings RR-20). The metronome comes through very clearly as it is replayed to the musician, Michael Garson, through a pair of enclosed headphones. You can even sense how he is turning his head. Another example is the ease with which you can follow Rob Wasserman's breathing technique on track 4 of his *Duets* CD (MCA 42131). In the beginning he is inhaling with an open mouth, and exhaling through the nose - toward the end it is all going through his nose.

You might frown on these examples and wonder: "But, what about the music??" Rest assured - it is all there in splendid glory. The examples of non-musical sounds are only made to make a point or two. For pure harmonic integrity, listen to track 2 of the above mentioned Sondheim-recording. It starts off with some kind of bottle-percussion instrument, which is probably the best example of true harmonic bloom I have

heard recorded.

Now a bit about the man behind the Anodyne. Scott Nixon is no newcomer to audio. Born and raised in North Carolina he had an early career in graphic arts and professional audio, as a recording engineer and mixing/balance technician at live concerts. In 1980 he "slipped into" home electronics through his work in the technical department of an audio store.

Thanks to his background in professional audio, Scott took an early interest in the new digital technique and started modifying Philips CD-players. He re-worked the circuitry and included a vacuum tube in the design. Thus, in 1986 he shipped the first Analogic Design CD-players based on a 14-bit Philips product. He ended up shipping between 600 and 700 of these modified machines.

In 1990 Scott stopped modifying other manufacturers players, changed the name of his company to Anodyne Group (when I asked him what "Anodyne" stands for he said with a pronounced southern drawl: "It means a digital-to-analog 'thang') and started his own production of two digital-to-analog processors. One is a discrete solid state (FET) design without op-amps (\$1895) and the other one, called Adapt (the subject of this review), is a hybrid design incorporating a vacuum tube as a final filter and buffer (\$2495). A third model called Atas (\$2995), featuring an all-vacuum-tube analog stage "with absolutely no semiconductors in the signal path," is scheduled for introduction in late 1991. All of the Anodyne processors use the latest version Burr-Brown 20-bit DAC's.

In summary, this is a great piece of equipment and should signal the arrival of Scott Nixon to the highest echelon of new designers of the digital era. If you are in the market for a digital processor, at any price level - do your-

self a favor and include the Anodyne Adapt on your short list of products to audition.

My dictionary had two more fitting explanations of the word Anodyne. As a noun it is "something that soothes, calms or comforts" and if used as a descriptive adjective it is "not likely to offend or arouse tension." Right on, Scott!

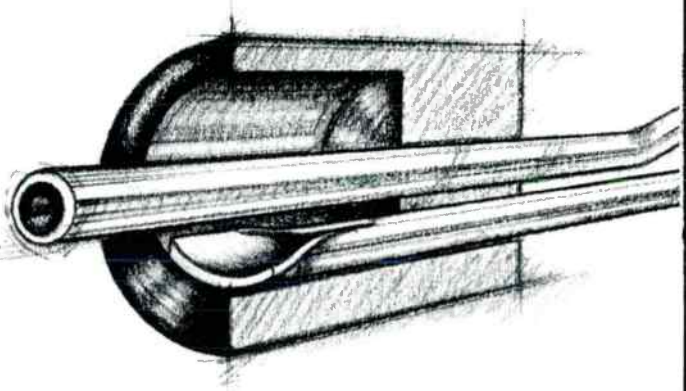
Lars Fredell

#### Reference System:

**Source, Digital:** Arcam Delta 170 CD Transport/Theta Generation 2 D/A convertor, Sony 75ES DAT player;  
**Electronics:** Krell MDA-300s amplifiers; **Speakers:** WATT/Puppies II; **Cables, Interconnects:** Purist Audio; **Speaker:** Purist Audio; **Digital link:** Purist Audio, **Accessories:** Goldmund Cones, Navcom.

# INTERMEZZO

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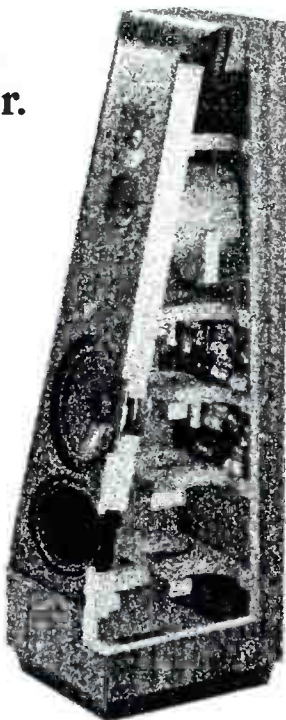
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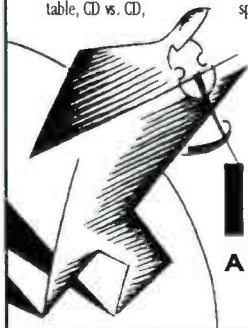
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## **Audible Illusions Modulus 2D Preamplifier**

**Manufacturer:** Apax Marketing,  
P.O. Box 8, Pleasanton, CA 94566,  
**Phone number:** (415)463-2380. **De-  
signers:** Art Ferris and Barry  
**Streets, Output impedance:** 1.2 k-  
**Ohms, Phono gain:** 28 db, **Line  
stage gain:** 30 db; **Price:** \$975.

As a fledgling hardware reviewer, I hesitated to argue with the editor. He sucked me right into it before I knew what was happening. My inner voice was screaming "Ohhhh nooooo" in its best Mr. Bill imitation, while my lips, tongue and vocal chords were producing a noise that Myles mistook as an affirmative of some sort. The conversation went something like this..

**Myles:** You're using the Audible Illusions preamp, aren't you?

**Me:** Yeah, that's right.

**Myles:** It's a pretty good pre-amp for the price isn't it?

**Me:** Oh yeah, it's so good it's blah blah blah gab gab gab excellent ramble ramble beat all the others bla bla bla musical gab gab... and so on for several minutes.

**Myles:** You know, more people need to know about this pre-amp. Why don't you review it for TAV?

This is where I lost it. Alarm bells went off, sirens sounded, just like the cartoon at the beginning of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* when Roger flies out of the hot stove, slips on a bar of soap and leaves a smoke trail several times around the room. Why the sirens and alarm you well might ask? It's a personal thing, maybe I should keep it that way. But, if

you insist...

Some time ago, I remembered reading an article by another fledgling reviewer for a magazine starting with "S" and ending with "The Final Word." He reviewed the speakers he owned. This piker had the nerve to ramble on about obscure speakers you couldn't even buy in a store and they had a name straight out of "The Time Tunnel." It took me some time to get over my early negative reaction. I find the piker, now, to be a pretty decent reviewer and newer models of those speakers are becoming something of a rising star in speaker heaven. But I had serious doubts at first. I made a solemn oath to myself that if I ever got in the position of being a reviewer that I would NEVER review a component I already owned. What reader would expect objectivity? Astute readers will not be fooled. They know that the reviewer will gush over his pride and joy. The review is ignored. Passed over as an anomaly, noise, distortion or aberration. I didn't want one of my first reviews to have to fight that losing battle.

Let's review: Myles asks innocent questions; Doug digs his own hole; Myles sucker punches; Doug has no backbone; Doug mutters something Myles mistakes for affirmative; Doug is trapped.

If I promise not to gush too much, will you read the review? You will?! Oh thank you, you've made my day! Your exceptional judgement will be rewarded. Gushing already, aren't I? Sorry. That'll be the end of it.

There are two things I want to say right up front: 1) this is not the best preamplifier in the world and 2) it may be the best performer in the circa \$1000 price range. I am bothered by the Audible Illusions Modulus 2D (AI2D) not being better recognized in the audiophile community. Not because I own one and think everyone should, but because this is a preamplifier the marketplace needs.

Most people have no reaction to it - negative or positive. They may be vaguely familiar with the name, but have no historic association with the name even though Audible Illusions has been around for more than 10 years producing tube preamplifiers at reasonable prices with performance you'd expect from more expensive preamplifiers.

The AI2D is the first affordable tube preamplifier I've heard that doesn't compromise the music in the "typical" tube ways. Before you throw the magazine down in disgust at this generality, let me explain. In comparison to better solid state designs at similar price points, tube preamplifiers have had some characteristics I haven't particularly liked. Not to say that the solid state preamplifiers don't have their own problems, they have different ones. Historically, tube preamplifiers have had some low bass roll off, less than the best controlled bass and low bass and some high treble roll off. In the past few years there have been more and more tube components at lower and lower prices banishing those "traditional" tube qualities, some more successfully than others. Of course I am also well aware of tube preamplifier's usually magical midrange which has been instrumental in keeping tube components audiophile favorites all these years. What I have really been looking for is a preamplifier that combined the best of tube and solid state qualities. The AI2D comes close to this ideal.

The sound quality of the AI2D is its best feature. There is a balance and rightness to the sound that is the hallmark of better High End components. I find other tube preamplifiers in the same price range to be very good in certain areas of audible performance, passable in others and deficient in at least one. The AI2D cuts a fine line and avoids obvious weaknesses. It does not have the most liquid midrange or the sweetest highs or most microscopic detail. It does have a midrange that is

smooth, well balanced and accurate. The Reiner/Chicago *Scheherezade* (Chesky RC4) violins are sweet, airy, and warm. Wire's 154 is hot and dry (Retro CD772362). Both are exactly as recorded. The AI2D's midrange and treble is more natural sounding than competitive solid state designs. Its low bass extension and control give the AI2D an advantage over similarly priced tube preamplifiers. In fact, the low end of the AI2D is so good that it sets new standards for mid-priced tube preamplifier performance. The AI2D also strikes me as more realistic and less euphonic in the treble than the other tube preamplifiers I've listened to, but smoother and less hot and dry than the solid state preamplifiers I auditioned.

I think it is important that once a reviewer describes differences between components, some description of the magnitude of difference is included. I can remember being suckered into expecting large obvious differences between two competing components and then not being able to hear the difference at a dealer demo. As far as the AI2D goes, the magnitude of the desirable characteristics compared to other competing tube and solid state preamplifiers is not huge. But the differences are readily audible in a good system with decent low and high frequency extension, provided there is a good analog or digital source and appropriate recordings.

I consider appropriate evaluation recordings to include orchestral, rock, solo, and choral vocals, acoustic jazz and a couple of wildcards representing whatever other kind of music you enjoy. The component that does the best job on all of those types of music is the one that gets my respect. Even if you never listen to classical music, auditioning a component using good classical recordings will reveal things about the performance of the component you would otherwise miss. This applies in reverse

to classical only listeners. The AI2D thrives on an omnivorous musical diet.

Bass performance is one of my hot buttons. The first thing I listen for when I audition tube equipment is its bass performance. I like the bass performance of the better solid state components. The AI2D does not disappoint. Bass goes deep and is well controlled. There is plenty of definition to resolve those interesting bass details that disappear on lesser components. The harmonics riding on synthesizer bass lines on Rick Wakeman's *Myths and Legends of King Arthur and the Knights of the Roundtable*, "Merlin" cut (LP SP4515) and Merl Saunders' *Blues From the Rain Forest* (Summertone CD-S2CD-01) title cut are good examples. Bowed acoustic bass is also reproduced better than competitive tube preamps. There is clear definition between the sound of the vibrating strings and the sound from the body of the instrument. Some other preamplifiers homogenized this quality making the acoustic bass sound not quite right.

Soundwise, the phono stage is exemplary. Low noise, good transparency, detail and soundstaging are readily apparent. The Sumiko Blue Point I've been using is a good case in point. This cartridge has been the subject of many tweaks aimed at making its impressive out of the box performance even better. Being an inveterate tweak myself, working on the Blue Point to improve it's sound was inevitable. The AI2D is revealing enough to permit audibility of changes to alignment, as well as physical changes to the Blue Point, ranging from super glueing the body to the P-mount to cutting away the plastic body entirely. The Roksan Corus Blue and Black cartridges (see Issue #2) also work well with the AI2D revealing a phono stage with little sound of it's own. A phono stage that reveals differences in cartridges pleasantly rather than ruthlessly. All three cartridges sound good, yet the differences in the sound of each was obvious.

The AI2D line stage was evaluated by comparing an Adcom GCD-575 CD player through the aux input and also directly into the amplifier. In early configuration, the AI2D line stage caused slight blurring effect on transients causing a small loss of detail compared to the sound of the CD player straight into the amp. Highs from the CD player were more pleasant through the AI2D, but more representative of what was actually coming out of the CD player when played direct into the amplifier. Some harshness was removed by the AI2D without affecting frequency response. This effect is very small in magnitude.

Updated to current AI2D production specs, the line stage picks up the lost detail. And does it so well that it is very difficult to identify any consistent superiority in detail connecting the CD player directly to the amplifiers. CDs are easier to listen to through the AI2D than when the CD player is connected directly to the amplifier. The onset of digititis is delayed substantially when the CD player is run through the AI2D line stage. This is definitely an advantage for digital sources. Curiously, play-



ing analog LPs through the AI2D reveals nothing I can identify as a related effect.

There is a musical quality very important to me that some reviewers neglect or underestimate. It has no "universal" name in common use. Some English reviewers call it rhythm and pace. Musicality has been used in some US magazines. One of the more irrepressible reviewers calls it "grabbing the monkey bone." They are all dancing around the same idea. That is, the ability of the component to convey the emotion of the musical performance. I am going to call this capability "RPM," for rhythm and pace musicality.

Over the past few years RPM has become more obvious and important to me. I don't recall the first time I heard a system that impressed with its RPM, but it wasn't that long ago. Once experienced, it is not something easily forgotten. Nor is it something easily done without. Systems with high RPM are nearly irresistible. You want to listen to music all the time. Your wife wants to watch *L.A. Law* together, but you NEED to listen to music. It's time to go to work, but you NEED to listen to music. It's time to go to bed, but you NEED one more album. Does this sound like anything else we are supposed to be saying "No" to? The AI2D, given a source, amplifier and speakers with RPM qualities will hold up its end of the deal admirably.

I've been known to say "Show me a rock recording with a soundstage and I'll show you a trick." So, turn to live acoustic music recorded in real spaces for a good test of a system. The AI2D abets the Vandersteen 2Cis in disappearing into the soundfield so completely that soundstaging becomes quite natural. Good orchestral recordings are reproduced with a decent spread of instruments which hold their locations tenaciously. Depth is not as pronounced as I have heard on some

more expensive preamplifiers. Yet given a recording with a good representation of depth, the AI2D clearly defines the front to back space and does so consistently through the recording.

The listening perspective of the AI2D is perfect for me. Not too close, not too far. Some preamplifiers with a more distant perspective aren't dynamic enough and wimp-out on rock music. Preamplifiers with closer perspectives do not sound natural when reproducing classical music, make rock too in-your-face and emphasize dynamics unnaturally.

Height in a stereo soundfield is something I'm not sure actually exists. I have heard it from time to time on some systems but I am not sure if it was wishful thinking, something real, or sound reflections in that particular room. The AI2D is no better or worse than good preamplifiers I have heard in other systems in this respect. Likewise, having the soundfield extend beyond the edges of the speakers would be nice to have, but I am still unconvinced the effect is real because I cannot reproduce it reliably on a variety of systems in a variety of rooms or even on the same system in different rooms.

### Conclusions

The AI2D preamp is a mid-price preamplifier bargain. Performance at the frequency extremes meets tough standards. Sound quality is well balanced, detailed and musical at the same time. The quality of components and construction is wonderful to see in this price category. This isn't a component that will wow your friends visually, but integrate it into a system with high RPM, put on The James Gang *Rides Again* (ABC LP 5711 or MCA CD D31145), crank the volume and watch the smiles as your friends say "AWW RITE DOOD!" The AI2D handles all musical styles well, making it the ideal preamplifier for a variety of systems. The weight, power and glory of Saint-Saens'



*Organ Symphony* (Louis Fremaux, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Christopher Robinson organ, EMI ESD7038) is handled as well as the delicate snare and cymbal brushing on Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue* (CBS Holland LP 62066).

In short, this is my kind of component; cost effective, high RPM with all kinds of music, revealing, dynamic, balanced top to bottom performance. I should also add that in one year and three months of constant use, this unit has been perfectly reliable. If you have been looking for a preamp in the \$1000 price range that combines the strengths of tube preamps with the strengths of solid state preamps, the AI2D could be just what you want. Give one a listen.

Doug Blackburn

#### Reference System:

**Source, Analog:** Phase Linear 8000 (modified)/Blueprint (nude); **Digital:** Adcom GCD-575; **Electronics:** Belles 150 amplifier, Audible Illusions 2D preamplifier; **Speakers:** Vandersteen 2Cis; **Cables, Interconnects:** Cardas 300B Micro (digital), Kimber KC1, **Speaker:** Kimber 4TC (Shotgun); **Accessories:** SuperVanderstands (spikes and lead/sand filled), Roomtunes, Navcom feet, VPI 16.5, Tweek, Cramolin, CD Stoptight, Tube Dampers.

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### Epos ES-11 Loudspeaker

**Distributed by: Music Hall, 108 Station Road, Great Neck, NY 11023, Phone number: (516)487-3663. Designer: Robin Marshall, Two way loudspeaker with minimal crossover network, Frequency response: 60-20 kHz, Recommended power: 20 to 70 watts per channel, Nominal/minimum impedance: 8/7 ohms, SN#: 2085 L&R. Designed to be stand mounted, dedicated stands are \$200; Price: \$850.**

Looking at the Epos ES-11, you might think that there was nothing to distinguish them from any of two dozen other loudspeakers costing between \$200 and \$2000. It's just another black box with two drivers and a port, right? Sorry, you're wrong again!

Well, not totally - it is a black box with two drivers and a port, but some innovative design features are incorporated in the box itself. The front and rear panels are molded from non-resonant plastic and are bolted to each other with threaded steel rods, clamping the medium density fiberboard shell rigidly between them. The box is satisfyingly dead when tapped. Because the front panel is molded, the woofer's basket is an integral part of the cabinet, an aid to mechanically grounding the driver. The downside to this is that if you blow a woofer, you will need to replace the entire assembly - a procedure that should not unduly increase either the difficulty or cost of repair according to importer Roy Hall. There are four banana sockets

on the rear panel, allowing you to bi-wire. Jumpers are included for those who choose not to. The speakers do not come with grills, but do come with hard plastic lids that can be popped on when the speaker is not in use, to protect the drivers from dust, cats and kids.

Internally the ES-11, like the Epos ES-14, has one design feature that has generated a lot of discussion - the "lack" of a crossover. What nonsense! Of course the ES-11 has a crossover. The parts list may only consist of a single capacitor connected in series to the tweeter, but the speakers are custom built for the box and the stiff surround on the woofer is designed to roll off response outside of its designated range. The reality of the Epos crossover is that it substitutes a primarily physical crossover network for the primarily electronic one found in most loudspeakers. This difference in approach seems to work very well for Epos, but does not necessarily indicate the one true way to design crossovers.

The manufacturing cost of the custom drivers probably cancels out the savings on parts. (I only bring this up because I used to work with a salesman who would sell against Polk loudspeakers, with their passive radiators, by exclaiming incredulously "You mean they charge you for a driver that they haven't even connected to anything?" I guess that the Epos will receive some of this).

At \$850, the ES-11 can be considered reasonably priced speakers, at least by High End standards. The real question is how do they perform in moderately priced systems? The answer to that question depends on how intelligently the system has been assembled.



Because of the porting, the Epos do not make major demands on amplification. They can be paired with inexpensive integrated amps such as those from NAD, Arcam, Creek, Linn, or Naim and sound excellent. Neutral receivers, such as NADs or Rotels would also perform nicely. In the realm of separates, your choices multiply prodigiously! Used low watt tube amps, the small Adcoms, B&K... the choices are endless.

BUT... and this is a big but - the source must be very good indeed. Now we're all sophisticated audiophiles here, this is a given, isn't it? Yes, of course it is, yet it can never be stressed too much. Unless the front end of your system is extracting the information from the software, there is no way that your speakers are going to be able to reproduce what has been recorded! These puppies will reproduce what you feed them fairly accurately, so if you give them lifeless, undifferentiated sound, they will bark it back at you.

The one constant in all of my listening to these loudspeakers was a high level of musical involvement. From genre to genre, source to source, I found my attention engaged not by how well they reproduced this instrument or that sound, but by the musical experience itself. The first day that these speakers were set up in my living room, I was determined not to listen critically until I had played them constantly for a few days running. In the middle of a New York July, "not listening critically" means leaving the air conditioner on. I busied myself bolting the supplied, and highly recommended, stands together and then leveling them. About twenty minutes of crawling around on the floor cursing as I ran two sets of speaker cable to the stands and I was ready to start breaking in the speakers.

I put on the first thing that came to hand, which was Dr. Michael White's *Crescent City Serenade*, an acoustic New Orleans Jazz album and sat down to

take care of some chores. I was not listening to music, I was providing some sonic wallpaper "just 'til the speakers break in." There was just one problem with that. I could not ignore the music. This stuff sounded great! The band was spread across my living room, the drummer was right back over there and I was fighting the impulse to second line around the living room! My wife entered the room and having expressed the opinion that she liked the record, sat down on the sofa and started to listen. She started to smile and her head started bobbing in time to the music. She too, had been snared!

It was ever thus. Each time I listened to these speakers, I found myself wanting to hear more and more music. Every disc suggested another record or cut that I wanted to enjoy. Looking over my listening notes, I am struck by the consistency of the language. Words like "articulate," "natural," and "wow" occur with frequency. I found these speakers essentially true to the musical intent of performance after performance.

This has a lot to do with how right they sound throughout their midrange. On vocals they really shine, being capable of resolving the expressive details that give life to inspired performance. Listening to The Rice Brothers, a vocal "newgrass" album on Rounder, I once jumped because my wife walked through the baritone.

Another "goose bump" experience was listening to Emma Kirkby singing "Columbia aspexit" on *A Feather on the Breath of God* (Hyperion CDA 66039 or Selekt A-9 for the LP). This is music by Hildegard of Bingen, first woman composer of record, and is ethereal, pure, and visionary. As portrayed by the Epos 11s, the other-worldly beauty of the performance was breathtaking. What these speakers do right is so true musically, that what they don't do right is relatively unimportant - and easy to ignore - because it doesn't affect the es-

sential truth of the performance.

Another thing that I found impressive was their bass response, given the relatively small enclosure. Mounted on their dedicated stands and properly placed in relationship to the rear wall, I found their low frequency extension surprising and free from the one-note bass that many tuned enclosure speakers exhibit. These are not speakers for bass freaks, they lack the authoritative low end that reggae fans and organ music aficionados require, yet they really do enunciate the low end very nicely. They aren't entirely comfortable at very high volume either. Although they handle orchestral tuttis and rock thrash well enough, they just aren't designed to deliver 110 db for hours.

If you are looking for an articulate, musically enjoyable loudspeaker in the thousand dollar price bracket and you have a quality front end, then I enthusiastically urge you to audition the Epos ES-11. Although the speakers are only \$850, I include the price of the stands in

the equation because they are essential to the performance of the loudspeaker. There are other speakers worthy of consideration in this price range, Thiel, Celestion, Linn, B&W, ProAc, Rogers and Magnepans are a few that come to mind. Ultimately the choice must be a personal and highly individual one, but full consideration must be given to any speaker this consistently engaging.

*Wes Phillips*

### *Reference:*

*Source, Analog: Linn LP-12/Itok/K18; Digital: Sony 605ESD; Electronics: Linn LK1 preamplifier, Adcom GFA 60 amplifier; Speakers: Linn Kans; Cables, Interconnects: Linn; Speaker: Linn; Accessories: AQ Sorbothane Feet.*

## The Academy for the Advancement of High End Audio

On October 20, 1991, the East Bay-Oakland hills area of Northern California was devastated by the largest wildfire in U.S. history. Thousands of people were left homeless, including at least two from the audio community.

Innovative engineer John Curl and Stereophile reviewer Kevin Conklin both lived in the area destroyed by the fire. John was out of town when the fire swept through his home and was not able to evacuate any of his belongings, which included an extensive collection of technical materials gathered over twenty years. Kevin and his family lived just down the street from where the fire started and escaped with their lives and the family dogs. Like John, they lost everything collected in a lifetime.

*The Academy For The Advancement of High End Audio* is attempting to help John and Kevin as they begin to rebuild their lives. Members of the audio community who wish to help should contact the Academy at (707)-542-7040 for further information.

## **Bluepoint Moving Coil Cartridge**

**Manufacturer:** Sumiko, P.O. Box 5046, Berkeley, CA, Phone number: (510)843-4500. **Designer:** John Hunter, **Compliance:** 15, **Stylus type:** Fine-line elliptical, **Output:** 3 mV, **Weight:** 5.9 gms; **Price:** \$125.

Two things come to mind when I hear the word Bluepoint. Yummy doodle oysters and purring, Siamese cats. Now I can add to that list, a most remarkable sounding high output moving coil cartridge from Sumiko. Yes, there are better cartridges out there in Audioland, but one will have to search far and wide to find one that delivers more bang for the buck.

Are you aware that most moving coil cartridges are not "true" moving coil designs? That is, the generator assembly consists of only a wire coil suspended between magnets. To do this, the coil is wound around a dissolvable material. Next, the supporting structure or material is removed and finally the coil's structure is preserved by treatment with epoxy. This method yields an extremely light weight generator assembly with one major drawback, an exceedingly low output voltage, typically less than 0.1 mV. Thus to increase the output of moving coil cartridges, designers have opted to wind the coil around a material, typically steel or some alloy thereof, to increase the magnetic flux density.

One unique feature of the Bluepoint is its cross-shaped armature structure. In most cross-coil moving coil designs, the windings for each channel are wound around a steel plate at a 90 degree angle to each other. A true cross-coil design, of which the Bluepoint is a representative example, has the coils wound around a cross-shaped plate. The advantages of the "true" cross-coil design are

that it is lighter than the conventional cross-coil plate design, it concentrates the magnetic flux in a region where it is most useful and owing to less crosstalk between channels produces separation numbers on the order of 40 db.

Then again, neither is the body stock. Two lead sheets are used to damp-the-off the shelf plastic body. A fine line elliptical profile stylus set in an Aluminum cantilever traces the groove modulations.

The Bluepoint's high output (3 mV) coupled with a recommended loading value of 47 K makes the cartridge an excellent match for preamplifiers, integrated amplifiers or receivers in its price range. Installation instructions are the most detailed that I have encountered. Cartridge alignment, setting vertical tracking force (VTF), antiskating (bias), azimuth, VTA (vertical tracking angle), cleaning the stylus (and record!) and the importance of regular fluxbusting are all covered in the accompanying instruction sheet.

A few tips to aid in obtaining all you paid for and more from the Bluepoint. To begin with, experiment with VTF. Sumiko recommends a VTF of between 1.25 to 1.7 gms. I found a slightly higher VTF of 1.8 to be preferable. At this weight, the Bluepoint exhibited less high frequency mistracking, a smoother frequency response and greater instrumental focus.

Next, make sure that the cartridge is securely fastened to the headshell. Tightening the p-mount to the headshell really improves the bass extension and the cartridge's ability to differentiate multiple, musical lines. Epoxying both the cartridge to the p-mounting and the p-mount to the headshell (doing so has the blessings of Sumiko) markedly enhances transient response, the ability to flesh out instrumental body and further smooths out the upper registers. After mounting, aligning and tightening

down the cartridge, use a toothpick to apply a thin line of 5 minute epoxy to the joint between the cartridge and the p-mount (be careful not to get any of the glue into the screw hole). In addition, a thin line of epoxy should also be applied to the interface between the plastic p-mount and the headshell. Then let the glue set for 24 hours. When the time comes to remove the cartridge, all you'll need is a sharp exacto knife or a single edge razor blade.

Finally, regular fluxbusting will keep the cartridge sounding tip top. Sumiko recommends demagnetizing the cartridge every 40 hours and I whole heartedly concur. In fact, fluxbusting is so important that each and every audiophile should add it to their list of weekly system maintenance procedures.

The Bluepoint is VTA sensitive, though not in the same league as the Benz MC3 or Clavis cartridges. High frequency tracking ability is the most noticeable sonic change engendered by adjusting the cartridge's VTA. The easiest way to obtain the correct VTA settings with the Bluepoint is to start with the back of the cartridge very low; then slowly raise the back of the cartridge. With the Bluepoint, symptoms of low VTA are: flabby bass, compressed dynamics and lifeless, uninvolved music. When the correct VTA is obtained, the back of the cartridge is still down quite a bit in comparison to the front. Getting the VTA down to the last 1/1000ths of an inch is a bit trickier because the Bluepoint does not really resolve that last bit of "lock-in" information as with the best cartridges.

Do not jump to any conclusions about the sound of the Bluepoint until it has been played for at least 50 hours. The very first thing that I noticed when playing the first record was that it sounded quite noisy. Thinking that maybe I had forgotten that this disc was noisy, I went over to the record shelf and selected a second disc. Like the first, it too

sounded noisy. This observation was consistently found with other records. Surface defects like pops and clicks were louder and more frequent with the Bluepoint than with my reference cartridges.

While the Bluepoint is clearly an outstanding performer, it does have three significant shortcomings. These are a reduction in the retrieval of low level information, instrumental harmonics and the decay time of notes.

The quality that really sets the Bluepoint apart from the competition is that it does not slow down or blunt the initial transient attack of instruments. Harpsichords sound like harpsichords not small pianos. Furthermore, the spaces between individual and groups of instruments or singers are not cluttered with noise. From listening to many cartridges over the years, I've noticed an inverse relationship between detail and harmonics retrieval. For example, cartridges that do an excellent job of reproducing instrumental harmonics sound like they gloss over detail and *vice versa*. The Bluepoint falls into the latter class exhibiting a high level of detail but some loss of harmonics.

Imaging is just a notch below the best cartridges; however, I did find that the cartridge tends to foreshorten the soundstage. The placement of instruments and instrumental focus is way above average. Another attribute of the cartridge is that it does an outstanding job of deciphering layered information, be it classical or rock.

Two records that I find invaluable in evaluating cartridges are the Nonesuch recording of Malcolm Bilson playing fortepiano (Nonesuch H71377) and the RCA recording of Julian Bream and George Malcolm performing Bach's *Sonatas for Lute and Harpsichord* (LSC 3100). What I listen for on these records are timbral accuracy, transient speed, instrumental focus and dimensionality



and how accurately the cartridge reproduces the relative loudness of each instrument. On the Bilson recording of Beethoven's "Moonlight," the Bluepoint gives a good portrayal of the three dimensional body and power of the fortepiano. Where the Bluepoint excels is in its ability to accurately reproduce transients, the speed of the instrument and separate out individual notes. The midrange has a low degree of coloration. Other similarly priced cartridges tend to do one of two things. That is, smear the individual note of the fortepiano, making it sound more like a piano than a fortepiano or exhibit an elevation in the upper bass/lower midrange area that adds a veil to the sound. Where the Bluepoint primarily errs in reproducing the fortepiano is in the retrieval and decay of higher order harmonic information.

Moving on to the Bream/Malcolm performance of Bach's *Music for Lute and Harpsichord* (3rd Movement-Allegro), the Bluepoint again excels in reproducing the initial transient attack of the lute strings and harpsichord keys. Each instrument occupies its own individual space with little noise or grunge between them. On the left is the lute and on the right is the harpsichord, set slightly back from the lute. While each instrument clearly has a three dimensional body, the Bluepoint does not completely flesh out each instrument resulting in some loss of feeling of the shape of the instrument and internal resonances. Instruments miss that precise focus, that last vestige of palpability. The Bluepoint also tends to add a slight upper midrange brightness to the lute and the strings are slightly rough sounding.

Listen for the "timing" between the harpsichord and the lute on the Vivaldi cut, *Sonata in C for Lute and Continuo* (1st movement). Each instrumental line is clearly differentiated yet there is a feeling of them playing together. In real life, the lute is a much "softer" instru-

ment than the harpsichord. Some of this difference in gradation is missed by the Bluepoint.

Ever notice how CES show reports have a tendency to neglect or minimize the importance of the software? The greatest satisfaction that I derive from CES is finding as many new or used LPs as I can. One gem that I discovered at the '90 CES in Chicago was the June Tabor album *Aqaba* (Topic 12TS449). Enough aural cues are provided by the Bluepoint so when June Tabor sings there is no mistaking that this is a real person. There is more than a mouth, there is a presence, a person with a body whose voice projects. Tabor's voice sounds mournful and sorrowful. Even the strings sound morose. Listen to her pause and wet her lips while singing. Each cut on the album sounds different; the engineers fiddled around with the amount of reverberation on her voice. While her voice is reasonably natural, there is a slight metallic edge and not as relaxed a feeling (smoothness) as is found with the better MCs. On the other hand, the slight trace of metallic quality never intrudes upon the music.

One of my favorite Opus 3 discs is the album entitled *Yuyichifa* (Opus #79-20). This collection of music from South America is especially useful to listen for transparency, timbre, and imaging. The Bluepoint's transparency is especially evident on the cut "La Charangita" (accent on next to last syllable). Instruments situated in the back of the soundstage can be clearly visualized. Individual instrumental and vocal lines are distinctly rendered. Lead and back-up singers are well separated, the lead singer being in the middle and back-up singers behind and slightly to the right. However, in comparison to my reference cartridge, the Bluepoint seems to slightly reposition the back-up singers. Returning to some records with lots of back hall information, it was obvious the Bluepoint slightly truncates the back corners of the stage, pushing in-

struments or singers on the outside edges of the backstage towards the middle of the stage. The large pan pipes are nicely focussed. As is the characteristic of the Bluepoint, there was some loss of delicacy, upper harmonic content and wooden quality of the pan pipes. Finally, the lowest registers of the drums are somewhat on the loose side and lacking in extension to the lowest octave.

What the Bluepoint does first and foremost is provide the entry level audiophile a taste of the magic of its more expensive MC brethren. Reviewers tend to lose sight of the fact that there are many audiophiles and music lovers that don't have a ton of money to drop on a system. For these people, spending \$500 on any one component represents a major financial sacrifice. Yet, why

should they be denied musical enjoyment. The Bluepoint is clearly the answer to these people's prayers. I have absolutely no reservations in recommending this cartridge to any of my friends and TAV readers who do not have a lot of money to spend on a cartridge. What's more, by the time this review appears, Sumiko should have released a "super" version of the Bluepoint that will reportedly address among other things, two short comings of the Bluepoint mounting and body resonances (it will be nude). And in the \$300 price range to boot! Make sure to stay tuned to the Bang for the Buck section for the next installment in the Bluepoint saga!

Myles B. Astor

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## Apure Accusound Speaker and Interconnect Cable

**Manufacturer:** Apature, P.O. Box 877, Bunnell, FL 32110, Phone number: (904)437-5530. **Price:** Interconnect: 1 meter, \$100, 2 meters: \$140; Speaker: 10 ft. pair, \$225.

Apature is known as a company which produces quality Hi-Fi products for rather modest prices. They've done it again with their Accusound silver wire interconnects and speaker cable.

The interconnects are made of eight solid core, silver plated conductors. Each strand is individually sealed in foam teflon and wound around a non-conductor core for magnetic control. The high level speaker cable is similarly constructed, but with sixteen conductors. All the wires are 20 gauge, a size chosen to minimize problems associated with both larger and smaller gauges. Apature feels that they have obtained the optimal frequency response with this particular mix of wire gauges.

Apature recommends biwiring the speakers so as to insulate the bass and midrange-treble conductors, thus further reducing the magnetic field effect. Each cable comes with a kit that includes a choice of hand soldered pins, spades or bananas.

Cuts from the the following CDs were used in these evaluations. To begin with, the *First movement (Leningrad or "St. Petersburg")* from Shostakovitch's *Symphony No. 7 Op. 60*. This is possibly the most thrillingly descriptive composition I've yet heard as played by the Chicago Symphony under Leonard Bernstein (DG-205587). Pure genius. Another was the Art Farmer-Jim Hall performance of "Pavane for a Dead Princess" (*Big Blues*, CBS Assoc. ZK 45220). In your room and gorgeous.

Bach's *Cantata BWV140 WACHET AVF* by the Bach choir of Bethlehem and Bach Festival Orchestra (Dorian 90127). Simply incredible music.

Soloists will melt your heart. Take for instance, the Tchaikovsky *Manfred Symphony* with Chailly conducting (London 421 441-2). Not perfect but very close. Schumann's *Violin Sonatas 1 and 2* with Krewer and Argerich are beautifully recorded and interpreted (DG 41935-2).

Although the Duotech Model CCE 1000 (see review, next issue) was used to break in the speaker cable (over a 48 hour period), I found that another ten hours or so was required to reach a proper level for evaluation. To be fair, 48 hours was the minimum recommended time suggested by Duotech to "burn-in" cables. It was also noted in the instructions that some High End cables may require more time. Another possibility is that the additional ten hours is simply the time required for the cables to mechanically "relax." As an aside, it's difficult to believe that wire which initially sound so bad will improve, but that's what happens. It takes 50 or more hours of playing time to reach the optimum. Once there, the Apature will please you.

With the Apature cable, the soundstage is deep and the imaging correct. Instruments are placed where they should be and staging is within a hair of my reference cables. Classical music is flattered by a soft, somewhat diffuse presentation, not unlike a large, lush concert hall. Masses of strings and voices are gorgeous and never harsh. If anything, the cable is slightly on the forgiving side. Voices are well focussed and very real sounding.

Higher frequency instruments, such as brass, are not quite as good, missing some of the higher overtones that help to properly define the instrument's timbre. As a result, jazz combos are not presented as well as classical instrument

groups.

If there is one area that could be improved, it would be the low frequencies. Low frequencies can be slightly ill defined and not up to the standards set by the cable in other areas. However, this quality can be minimized by careful speaker placement.

In a direct comparison with the Purist Audio wires, it's apparent that Apature does not capture the same amount of information (detail and harmonics). On the other hand, the Apature cable is also five to ten times less expensive less expensive than the Purist Audio cable. And for those who gasp at the price of High End cables, it's a tribute to Apature that they have come up with such a good sounding cable for a modest price. Furthermore, this cable's

slightly forgiving qualities will mate it well with components within its price range. Since I listen to classical music 90% of the time, I could quite easily live with the Apature Accusound cables. Highly recommended.

*Jim Carvelas*

### Reference System:

**Source, Analog:** SOTA Star Sapphire/ETII Arm/WISA Pump/Koetsu Onyx Signature; **Digital:** Krell MD1/64X Processor (AT&T digital link); **Electronics:** Krell MDA300 amplifiers, Krell KBL Line Stage, Krell phono stage; **Speakers:** Apogee Duetta Signatures; **Cables, Interconnects:** Purist Audio Maximus (Balanced); **Speaker:** Purist Audio; **Accessories:** VPI 16.5 RCM, Lead Belly.

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Positive Feedback Magazine

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—Leo Fung  
Audiophile Magazine, July 28, 1991

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### LaserGuide

**Marketed by:** AudioQuest, P.O. Box 3060, San Clemente, CA 92674, **Phone number:** (714)498-2770. **Designer:** Soudy Khan; **Price:** \$15.95.

As you might guess from the name, LaserGuide is a CD enhancement product. "So what else is new?" you ask. "There are tons of CD-enhancers on the market. Big deal!"

You're right, of course. There are now a multitude of various types of CD improvement kits sold by your friendly High-End dealer. We are swamped with CD tweaks from left, right and center, each one supposedly better than the other. The question is: Do they work and more importantly, why do they work?

All of these enhancement products may not make a difference in all systems or in many for that matter. In the end, it is surely determined by each individual system's resolving capabilities whether there is a perceptible change for the better or worse and how big is the change.

LaserGuide is an "optical treatment" for CDs and LaserDiscs. By filling in the imperfections in the surface of the CD's polycarbonate material, ie. making the surface flatter and more even, it enables the laserbeam to do its job better without as much unwanted refraction of the light. The laser beam is more intact as it enters and exits the polycarbonate and is therefore capable of delivering more information (data bits) more accurately. Ambient refracted light is said to be cut by up to 50 percent on LaserGuide treated CDs.

Bill Low of Audioquest declined to discuss the contents of Laser Guide due to its proprietary nature. However, from the back of the attractive blister package I learned that the key ingredient is a

high-grade silicone solution. Most of the optical enhancers available contain some form of silicone. Even Armor-All does. Judging from the rather superior performance of LaserGuide, there must be more to it than that. But Bill remains mum on this subject.

What you get for your \$15.95 is a black, two ounce pump spray which according to the folks at AudioQuest will coat between four to seven hundred discs. A little of this stuff goes a long, lo-o-ng way, so use it sparingly.

As it is, LaserGuide has turned out to be one of the better, if not the best, of all the CD enhancement products to appear on the market in recent years. "Says who?" you ask. "I do" is my reply, and it is based on the personal conviction that I have tried more of the likely (and most certainly also more unlikely) ways to enhance my CD's than most people would ever dream of doing.

Here's a little background. Late one evening a few years ago, I was sitting in my music-room listening to some music whilst reading about recommended components in *Stereophile*. Under the "Accessories" heading, I discovered that my neighbor Sam Tellig had recommended that Armor-All should be used to clean the label side of CD's. Quietly wondering what it might do to scratches on the playing side of one of my favorite CD's, I retrieved an old bottle of Armor-All from the garage.

Moments later on the phone: "Sam, you're a genius-try Armor-All on the playing side instead. It's phenomenal! What a difference!" (It didn't do any good for the scratches, though).

The rest is now infamous history in the CD tweakworld. Too bad ST gave the questionable recommendation to let Armor-All dry on the CD before polishing it off. This may indeed result in Armor-All flaking or clouding up the playing surface. If instead, it is wiped off imme-

diately it should cause no harm to the CD. I have several hundred CD's which were treated with Armor-All four years ago. To date, not a single one has shown any ill effects of this treatment.

Following the experience with Armor-All, I proceeded to try any and all potentially promising liquids, lotions, creams and pastes. Everything from Preparation-H to margarine found their way onto some of my CD's (in the name of science, of course) in a relentless search for the best enhancement/treatment.

However, all that is history now. With the arrival of Audioquest's LaserGuide, I have found a CD surface treatment that truly makes a significant difference for the better in my playback of those silvery rascals. My quest for the ultimate(?) solution has ended, at least for the time being.

I didn't follow the directions in all their elaborate detail on how to apply LaserGuide-I'm too lazy for complicated procedures (Do me a favor though, follow the directions-I don't want to feel responsible for what you do to your CDs). Instead, I simply held the CD in one hand and the LaserGuide bottle in the other, approximately 6 to 8 inches away. One pump, or even less, spread an even mist over the CD's surface. A piece of a many-times-washed cotton T-shirt is generally very soft, lint free and perfect for polishing CDs.

The first thing that you'll notice when you play a LaserGuide treated CD is a sense of increased clarity and dynamics. The sound "picture" pops in a different way, to use advertising lingo. You'll get a heightened feeling of presence. Both frequency extremes will appear more pronounced-without turning overblown or etchy.

When you settle down to listen more carefully for the changes brought about by the LaserGuide treatment, you might notice more inner detail, some-

what better focus and hopefully improved image dimensionality. I used the word "might" on purpose. This is where the resolving capabilities of your system comes in. To hear the improvements in clarity, dynamics and frequency response is pretty easy. Even an untrained ear could probably pick this up on a decent system.

To perceive the improvements in detail, focus and perhaps most importantly, image dimensionality, puts greater demands on the systems ability to "bone the fish"-to use a suitable metaphor. What I'm getting at is this. If your system has great powers of resolution, you'll find it very difficult to play CDs without first treating them with LaserGuide. This is where this particular product shines and shows its superiority over all the competing brands.

You'll get more instrumental "bloom," better impression of room boundaries, a sense of real depth ("the backstage lights up" as HP often says) and much better soundsource orientation (the distinction between the source of the sounds, and their echoes in the recording environment).

I'm not suggesting that only LaserGuide works and that the competition doesn't. What I am saying is that LaserGuide can work some serious miracles in a high resolution system-something that I have not yet found with other similar optical enhancement products.

A great tweak-try it!

*Lars Fredell*

### Kontak Cleaning Fluid

**Distributed by Sumiko, P.O. Box 5046, Berkeley, CA, (510)843-4500. Price: \$49.95**

#### **Act 1, Scene 1 : Confessional Booth, Our Lady of The Perpetual Change Church**

**Father Timbre:** So my son, you seem troubled. What is it that burdens your mind?

**Neurotic Audiophile:** Father, forgive me for I have sinned. Its been many months since I last cleaned the RCA plugs and spades in my stereo system.

**Father Timbre:** Well son, that is a particularly grave sin...I'll have to consult the Audio Bible for the appropriate penitence. Let's see...you shall read Hans Fanel's columns for six months and promise to clean all contacts with that Kontak cleaning fluid. It's really made a significant improvement in the sound of the church's electronic organ.

I've always been considered a fanatic when it comes to cleaning the connections in my system. Every month, like clockwork, I pull out the Gorham Silver Polish (paste form) from underneath the kitchen counter, steal a handful of my wife's Q-tips from the bathroom and attack the grime that coats AC plugs, tube pins and connectors. How often should one clean their connectors? That point is open to conjecture and clearly depends upon each individual's environment; I usually clean my set about every four weeks. As a result of cleaning my connections so often, I'm now able to spot an oxidized or dirty contact at fifty paces. These symptoms include a brightness (distortion?) in the upper midrange, a veil over the

soundstage and a loss of harmonic information and centerfill.

I must admit that in the beginning I was somewhat skeptical that cleaning with Kontak was any better than my store bought \$1.39 Gorham Silver polish. After all, cleaning is cleaning and perfect is perfect, isn't it? It didn't take long for that skepticism to disappear.

All cleaning was halted for two months to ensure that all the connectors were truly dirty/oxidized. The system was cleaned in discrete steps, beginning with the AC plugs, followed by the tube pins and culminating with the speaker, cartridge and RCA connectors. If you really want to go all out, clean the junction between the AC line and the AC wall receptacle as Doug Blackburn has done.

Before discussing the results of the listening sessions, let's talk a little about the Kontak Fluid itself. Kontak consists of two bottles, a cleaner and a sealant (whose function is to retard oxidation by adsorbing water). The cleaner, which is reportedly used to clean circuit boards, is nothing out of the ordinary—except that it's of an extremely high chemical purity. Several pipe cleaners are included to help in cleaning inside the female jack and the tube sockets themselves. The only other item necessary for cleaning are some Q-tips. While I haven't had time to verify this, Sumiko claims that one only needs to clean your connectors every six months after treatment with Kontak.

Believe it or not, cleaning the AC plugs and tube pins produced the most significant sonic changes. Four areas were markedly improved after cleaning the AC plugs: a reduction in hash from the upper midrange and beyond, a drop in the noise floor of the system, a tightening and increase in detailing of the bass frequencies and an increased sense of recording site ambience.<sup>1</sup> Low frequencies sounded like the amplifier had

been filled with high octane gas, being supercharged and higher revving. Cleaning the tube pins produced more of the same changes plus a greater sense of dynamic contrasts. While there was some further improvements wrought by cleaning the interconnects and speaker cables, the degree of improvement was not as large as the previous two.

Two records that I currently fancy are the Opus 3 recording, *Ojeboken: Cyndee Peters* (77-04) and the June Tabor album, *Aqaba* (Topic 12TS5468; distributed by Music for Others in the US). The immediate reaction when listening to the *Ojeboken* was that the cello exhibited a more wooden quality and the choir sounded more natural.

Individual singers and instruments were more clearly delineated because there was less noise surrounding and in-between them. After cleaning the tube pins, the cello exhibited a greater sense of dynamic contrasts. While the silver polish reduced the apparent sense of harshness in the upper midrange area, cleaning with Kontak extended the purity of the highs and provided more information without producing an etched sound. Not only is there air around and above the choir, but also between the back of the choir and the back wall.

On *Aqaba*, June Tabor's voice is surrounded by more air and added reverberation but is less hashy sounding. Cleaning with Kontak unmasks more harmonic overtones of Martin Simpson's guitar, intertransient note silence and natural decay.



There were two relatively minor drawbacks to using Kontak in my system. The first was that it took two sets of bottles to clean my entire system. This may not be representative of most situations as my system uses two large tube amplifiers (16 output tubes/8 driver tubes), a tube preamplifier (9 tubes), a multitude of connectors due to biamping and a few extra AC plugs with the Tice Blocks in place.

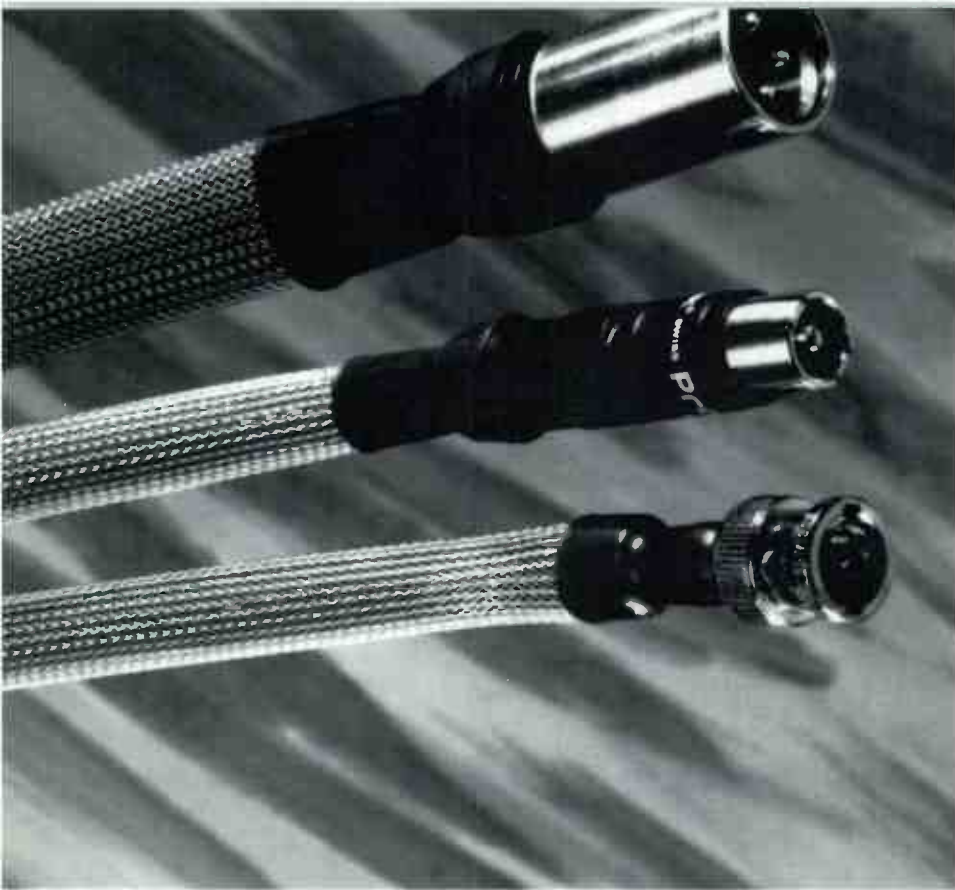
The other, a sonic characteristic, was the imparting of a slight dryness to recordings. On the other hand, this may be the removal of colorations that I was used to hearing.

Run, don't walk to your local dealer and buy Kontak. Kontak is one of the most significant and cost effective tweaks that

I've heard in my system in quite some time. Using Kontak shows you that there are a still quite a few frontiers left to explore other than room acoustics in audio.

*Myles B. Astor*

<sup>1</sup> Changes in the system's apparent noise floor is not a new phenomena if one has heard the Tice AC line equipment or changed AC receptacles (having replaced mine with high grade hospital quality receptacles). We should be concerned not only with the quality of the AC coming out of the wall but how well the equipment is able to draw upon and retrieve the wall current.



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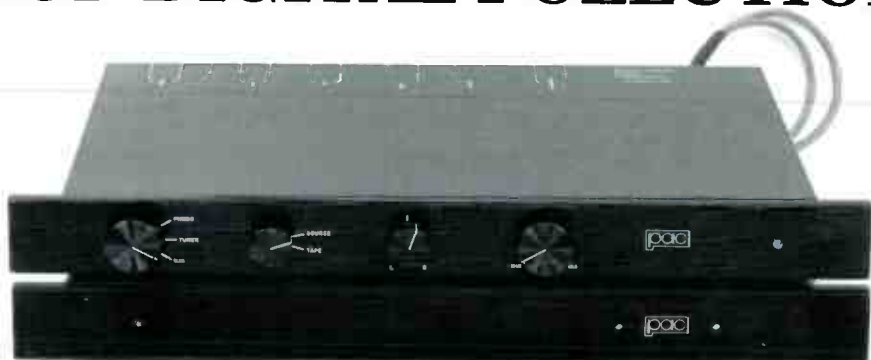
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**Sumiko**  
**John Hunter**  
**Reporter: Ronald Carlen**  
**January 26, 1990**

**M**ike Hobson, owner of Hobson's Ultimate Sound, introduced John Hunter, International Sales Manager for Sumiko. John's presentation began with an introduction to the Sims Vibration Dynamics products. The objective of these accessories (the new speaker decouplers were placed under Hy's Apogee Divas for this presentation) is to isolate each part of the stereo system from outside environmental vibrations resulting in improved sonics.

John led off with the theoretical advantages of decoupling as opposed to mass coupling (eg., tiptoes) for isolating components against vibrations. He noted that due to the very limited surface contact area of most mass coupling devices, they actually selectively decouple the speakers at different frequencies. Owing to the differences in weight among speakers, tiptoes are very imprecise devices. The Sims Silencers overcome these compromises by using a broad band, polymer material called Navcom. Its effective bandwidth is wider than any material currently on the market.

While on the topic of Navcom, John discussed a new product from Sumiko called Navcom Reference Rings. These damping rings consist of 1.2 gram pieces of Navcom, machined to very high tolerances, that are placed over the edge of compact discs. Navcom rings can be used in portable and car CD players as well as multiple CD changers that do not allow for the thickness of other rings. Besides the sonic benefits, the rings also protect CDs from finger oils and scratches and make them easier to handle. Although the rings can be easily removed and switched to another CD, this practice is

not recommended because the material will probably stretch or tear after several removals.

The current craze of applying green paint (CD Stoplight) to the edge of the CD was the next subject. John went into why the green coating on the edge of a CD improves the sound of the compact discs. Specifically, the laser passing through the CD causes an amplitude modulation distortion. When the beam of light hits the edges of the CD and is reflected back, there is a time based nonharmonic distortion that is read by the player. By placing a color around the edge of the CD that absorbs the frequency of light of the laser, this distortion is significantly reduced. As a result of their independent tests on the effectiveness of this treatment, the final version of the Navcom Reference Rings will be made in the appropriate green color. The rings are priced at \$19.95 per dozen.

The focus of the second half of the meeting was Sumiko's new interconnect and speaker cables. John began by explaining the background of Sumiko's new product, OCOS speaker wire (an acronym for optimal connection system). Traditional speaker cable theory assumes a lumped element, namely, a speaker at one end and an amplifier at the other; the cables in between have tuning characteristics that can be manipulated. The designers of OCOS cables attempted to eliminate the effect of the cable upon the sound. To begin with, they started with basic heavy gauge zip cord and ended up with a cable similar to Monster Cable. In an attempt to match the output impedance of the amplifier with the input impedance of the speaker, they started to cut the cable and insert resistive bridges every three or four feet. The designers found that the more closely spaced together were the bridges, the better the cable sounded. To simulate an infinitely close spacing of these bridges, they ultimately came up with a dielec-

tric that was conducive for making the cable. This resulted in a cable that has a very low impedance between the positive and the ground. Due to this unique design, the cable looks more like an interconnect than speaker wire; it's very thin compared to most speaker cables.

An inquiry was made as to whether the length of the cable would have an impact on the sound. John explained that they have experimented with various lengths between the left and right speakers and have not been able to notice any difference in imaging or detect any significant degradation in sound quality for lengths of OCOS up to 90 feet.

John also noted that OCOS takes about two hours to break-in electrically and about a week to mechanically "relax." He claimed that there were dramatic changes in the cable's sound quality during the first two hours.

OCOS wire requires special connectors made of silver plated over a rhodium base to attach them to speakers and amplifiers. There is a choice of two different connectors. With the "regular" red connector, the OCOS wire slips into one end; the other side has two bare wires for connection to the speaker or amplifier. The black connector is designed to work with dome tweeters. Each connector contains a RC network configured to eliminate impedance mismatches that might result in an artificial brightness with some dome tweeters. A two meter stereo pair of OCOS speaker cables retail for \$175 and increases by \$50 for each additional stereo meter. Regular connectors are \$80 per set of four and \$120 for dome tweeters.

The final product presented this evening was the Magnan interconnect cable. Magnan is a California based company that evolved out of the aero-

space industry. Dave Magnan has been investigating the time domain response of interconnects for many years. He has designed a cable that allows more information to arrive at the same time than any other cable being made. The construction of the cable is very complex. Each pair of standard four foot interconnects involves about four to five hours of work. A four foot pair of cables retails for \$595; add an additional \$95 for each extra foot. Construction-wise, the Magnan cable is relatively thick and moderately stiff. John noted that this cable requires a period of time to break-in before it sounds its best.

John also added in passing that Dave Magnan is continuously working on the cable and that what he had brought along was the currently production version the "Type V." However, when significant improvements are made, the product will be updated.

Hy generally operates his system with short speaker cables and long interconnects between the preamplifier and the amplifiers. John thought that with his products, it would be sonically superior, as well as more cost effective, to operate longer runs of speaker cables and shorter lengths of interconnects.

John covered quite a bit of territory this evening before the listening portion of the meeting began. He was upfront and certainly gave all of us pause about some preconceptions we had about our systems. All in all, it was a very exciting meeting with one of the leading High End companies.

**Basis Audio**  
**A. J. Conti**

**Graham Engineering**  
**Bob Graham**  
**Reporter: Leon Yorburg**  
**February 15, 1990**



**A**J. Conti, a mechanical engineer and a Hi-Fi retailer at different times in his life, created the Basis, and its junior, the Ovation, turntables. Tonight, he was discussing the Ovation.

It is not easy to describe A.J. in action. First, he is an utterly serious person who gives a steady, step-by-step presentation, without hesitation or pause. This lets you know clearly and unequivocally, what he hoped to achieve in designing his beautiful turntable. His account focussed on the mechanical accomplishments and innovations incorporated in his turntable. However, that the fact that its is also beautiful comes as a serendipitous reward. The esthetics of design are not mentioned by A.J. and while sound is the prime concern here, you could want this turntable solely on the basis of its looks.

The design of the Ovation relies on the same proven principles that were incorporated in the Gold Standard Debut model. It's nearly as massive, yet it convincingly conveys an elegant personality all its own. Just like its big brother, the platter is belt driven along its periphery. The platter material is acrylic, heavily doped with lead inserts for damping resonances. Ditto for the armboard, which sits recessed in the subchassis where it is supported by three precisely machined alignment pins. Each platter assembly is matched to a bearing resulting in rotational accuracies unavailable in the industry.

The platter and armboard are located on a two inch thick rectangular subchassis, also made of acrylic. The subchassis is suspended from each of its four corners. As in the Debut Gold Standard, A.J. again uses suspension cartridges to isolate the subchassis from acoustic feedback and other outside disturbances. Each suspension cartridge consists of a coiled steel spring immersed in viscous silicone damping fluid. A.J. claims that these two components come as close to theoretically

ideal behavior as can be expected. Thus hysteresis effects and other non-linearities are avoided.

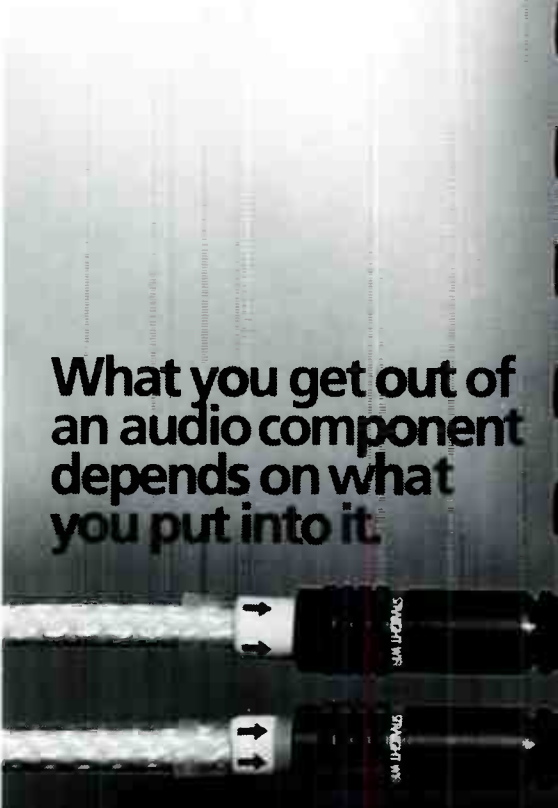
A.J. also pointed out that the turntable was designed to keep set-up time to a minimum. He claims it should be music-ready in under an hour. Of course, that's excluding the time required to mount the tonearm and cartridge. Coarse leveling is performed by adjusting the four threaded feet under the main chassis, while fine leveling is done with the threaded suspension cartridge anchored from above the turntable. We found out how massive this design is in real-world terms when A.J. told us the Ovation weighs in at a whopping 75 pounds.

In contrast to A.J., who is experienced in the business of Hi-Fi, Bob Graham is a new entrepreneur. His tonearm was only recently born and he was naturally very proud of it.

Bob Graham does indeed appear to have a very viable product here. The basic design is a viscously damped unipivot. The arm comes with a detachable arm-tube. An aerospace-quality connector is used for coupling the arm-tube to the main bearing assembly.

It is obvious he has surveyed the tonearm dilemmas well and selected "the best" features for his design. First off, he uses the SME cutout and mounting screw geometry. Secondly, VTA adjustment is by vernier control, with a scale for viewing the arm position. Third, azimuth is easily trimmed with a set of lateral outrigger weights used for horizontal balancing. All this is topped off with a very practical alignment jig used for positioning the cartridge properly during the mounting ordeal.

Not only is the stylus used as the reference for aligning the cartridge in the tonearm, but the jig deflects the stylus with about a 1.5 gram pressure to better simulate actual operating condi-



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tions.

We know sound is all-important in evaluating a tonearm. If it happens to look good also, so much the better. And if it is also easy to use, we are fortunate indeed. Bob believed in his own hype. He emphasized how easy it was to put his arm together, no matter what cartridge one uses. To demonstrate this, nothing was set-up in advance. All was to be done during show time, in less than 5 minutes. And, in fact, and to the amazement of all assembled, Bob put his entire arm together in a few minutes. The demonstration proceeded, in a tidal wave of awe and optimism. Rest assured, however, we must continue to bow to the powers that be. The tonearm didn't sound its best until it was tweaked and then it came into its own. An arm and cartridge assembly needs a lot of tweaking. There is no getting around it.

**Moral of the Story:** We should charge presenters for the opportunity to demonstrate their products to the club, on account of its being such a valuable experience!!

**Madrigal Audio Labs**  
**Jim McCullough**  
**Reporter; Dave Calvello**  
**March 3, 1990**

The society had as its guest speaker, Jim McCullough, from Madrigal. Jim had been our guest speaker on several other occasions and had come to update us as to the recent developments at Madrigal Audio.

The \$1500 Proceed CD player was designed with sonic integrity as a highest priority. It has an extremely unusual shape, being taller than it is wide or deep. The skeletal structure of the Proceed player was designed by an architect utilizing technology perfected in research designed to keep tall buildings

resistant to the effects of earthquakes, ie. there are multiple moments of inertia. Multiple small components are joined together creating a larger structural component, which has better damped high frequency resonance, while better evacuating the low frequencies from the entire structure.

Within the upright structure are several circuit boards mounted at right angles to each other. These boards are then mounted on top of the power supply and transport mechanism. Using a single circuit board would have made the individual components susceptible to noise, electrical interference and mechanical vibration. Placing the boards at right angles to each other was a cost effective and simple design solution to minimize component interaction.

A Philips-based CDM MkII transport was chosen for the Proceed CD player for its mechanical integrity. It was the third best of over 32 transports auditioned by Madrigal. They do however improve upon the mechanical stability of the transport by adding mass loading and vibration damping to the stock mechanism.

The decoder section uses a Philips-based chip to convert the RF signal from analog to digital. This chip is subsequently bypassed by a custom made RF filter and also used as a digital driver. In executing their design, Madrigal chose to take advantage of the individual merits of the Phillips chip while at the same time bypassing the inferior aspects of the stock circuitry with better quality components. A Yamaha-sourced chip is used only to receive the digital signal and pass it on to an NPC piece used as a digital filter and oversampling device. It is at this point that the digital signal is in its most fragile state. Therefore, the NPC output is hard wired to the D/A convertor. The Proceed player uses a very high quality, 18 bit, Burr-Brown D/A convertor.

Close attention was also paid to grounding within the player. The use of center point grounding minimizes noise contamination between various components within the player. The power supply has 11 individual stages of regulation.

Unlike the Proceed CD player, the digital processor was not built to a price point. The processor uses the same power supply and audio board but at the input of the D/A convertor are new, very expensive computer grade pulse transformers.

Compared to analog which is a voltage based format, digital is a time based format. These pulse transformers are capable of correcting time based errors, in effect improving the noise margin. Not having a transport or decoder section in the processor, the power supply is free of those requirements thus increasing thermal stability. The processor has four digital inputs as well as a digital pass through for transferring signals from one digital format to another. In the pass through mode, only the pulse transformers are in the circuit, which benefits signals transferred in the digital domain. The processor is available with single ended or balanced inputs. Estimated price will be about \$1500.

Madrigal should be commended for their commitment to improving the digital format. We look forward to hearing more from this company.

**Classe Audio**  
**Dave Reich & Glen Grue**  
**Reporter; Ronald Carlen**  
**April 20, 1990**

**D**ave Reich, President, and Glen Grue, Vice President of Marketing of Classe Audio were introduced as our guest speakers. This night marked Classe's third visit to the club, but the first to Rye. Glen and Dave began their

presentation by explaining how their products are developed. Dave is responsible for circuit design while Glen works on the features and the pricing for the market. A significant amount of attention is devoted to making their products musical. Glen and Dave noted that the best parts (capacitors, resistors, etc.) do not always work that well together. This is where extensive listening is used in the design phase.

Classe's product line consists of the DR-2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9. However, the main products being produced currently are the DR-5 and 6 preamplifiers and the DR-8 and 9 power amplifiers. At the meeting, they demonstrated the DR-6 preamplifier and a pair of DR-9 amplifiers driving DAX'd Divas. Glen thanked the owners of The Listening Room, Stuart and Ron, for providing the products for the meeting.

The same parts are used in the RIAA equalization and line stage stages of both the DR-5 and 6 preamplifiers—one percent metal film resistors and polystyrene and polypropylene capacitors. Both preamplifiers have toroidal transformers fully shielded in copper that are capable of delivering eight times the required power. Eight stages of regulation are used in the power supply. The higher priced DR-6 has a larger, separate power supply and some different parts (eg. capacitors). The resulting sonic improvements and higher cost warranted a new model designation.

About a year and a half were devoted to the development of the DR5 and 6 preamplifiers. Although Dave and Glen would not go into detail about the specific circuitry utilized, they mentioned that one of their design goals was to keep the signal paths as short as possible.

Each preamplifier offers the end user the choice of using either balanced or unbalanced inputs and outputs. The

balanced outputs utilize gold plated XLR connectors; the single ended input and output jacks are Tiffany gold plated. The model DR-6R comes with reference cables (both the AC line cord and the connector between the power supply and the preamplifier). The DR-5 retails for \$2100 and the DR-6 is \$3195.

The preamplifier automatically loads moving coil cartridges. One special feature of the phono circuit is that it compensates for electrical differences between the cartridge's left and right channels. The moving coil stage is an active circuit that varies the impedance and provides equal amplitude and frequency response to both channels of the cartridge. This stage also has variable gain with eleven possible settings using the precision resistor kit included. When using a moving magnet cartridge, these circuits are bypassed and there is a standard 47 K input impedance. The moving magnet stage has zero feedback and a passive RIAA network.

The DR-9 amplifier runs in Class AB and is rated at 150 wpc into 8 ohms. Due to its large power supply, it puts out four times this power in the mono mode. Used in the stereo mode, the amplifier's power will double into 4 ohms and once again into 2 ohm loads. Four bridged amplifiers were used at the meeting to drive the Apogee Diva speakers. Since the speakers are 4 ohms, each amplifier should yield its maximum of 2400 watts. The amplifiers were specifically designed to be bridged; as a result, bridging has no negative impact on the sound. It currently retails for \$3495.

Dave and Glen used 18 different pairs of speakers to evaluate their amplifier! These included products from companies such as Infinity, Apogee, Martin Logan and Duntech. In addition, they evaluate their products using several normal listening environments instead of one factory listening room.

The DR-8 amplifier is a 100 watt stereo model that sells for \$2495. It has similar circuitry to the DR-9; the primary difference is power rating. Both amplifiers have separately rectified power supplies for each channel, filtered by custom made capacitors and can be used in a regular (single ended) or balanced configuration. Direct current protection circuitry is included in both amplifiers and the DR-9 has a soft start circuit.

Dave noted that the "break-in" period for these amplifiers is generally 100 to 150 hours of playing. Although they do not run them for this long at the factory, they can be broken in by playing them at a whisper level.

The Classe Audio products are guaranteed for as long as the original purchaser owns them. Second and subsequent owners are covered for four years from the original date of purchase. However, the owner must pay to ship the unit to Vermont. Although the Classe is located in Canada, they use a location in Vermont for their U.S. shipping.

**Transparent Audio Marketing**  
**Karen Sumner**  
**Reporter: Irwin Elkins**  
**May 5, 1990**

Hy Kachalsky, paid tribute to all of the manufacturers and dealers who are true audiophiles who give unstintingly of their time to help our hobby flourish. Our society can never repay the generosity and true selflessness of such giants as Dan D'Agostino of Krell or Mike Kay of Lyric Hi-Fi or others too numerous to mention who are true audiophiles and gentlemen.

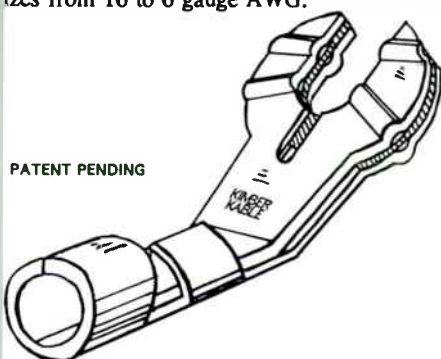
This served as a fitting introduction to another fine and generous person—Karen Sumner who has an outstanding background in the High-End industry. Her recent venture concerns some mag-



# NEW PRODUCTS FROM KIMBER KABLE

## PostMaster

KIMBER KABLE has recently developed a new spade type connector. It is called the PostMaster™. Available in both .33" and .25" stud sizes, the PostMaster fits most binding posts. The connector also accommodates wire sizes from 16 to 6 gauge AWG.



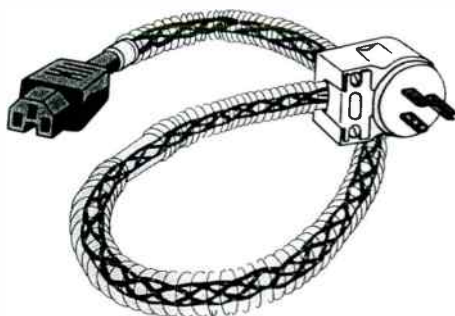
A unique feature of this connector is the compressible silicone wafer fitted between its two parts. The wafer is designed to maintain constant dynamic pressure on the binding post with only "finger tight" torque. This prevents contact loss due to vibration or temperature changes. The ridges on the contact area concentrate contact pressure for a gas tight connection.

Retail Price: Per Pair \$20.00

PostMaster-33	Ultraplate™
PostMaster-25	Ultraplate™
PostMaster-33B	Bare Copper
PostMaster-25B	Bare Copper

## PowerKord

KIMBER KABLE's new A/C PowerKord™ is designed to leave the magnetic field at the wall. This cable replaces the otherwise "weak link" between the wall and your equipment. The multi-conductor design divides the usually strong electromagnetic field into smaller fields, the braided pattern then cancels the fields. The braided design also eliminates interference from external sources such as nearby power transformers and other ordinary line cords.



The PowerKord™ is made with sufficient conductor to handle the power requirements of today's complex electronics. Attached is a hospital grade right angle or straight 110 Volt A/C plug (right angle shown above), and an IEC 15 amp female connector.

PowerKord™ 10 foot	\$175.00
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PowerKord™ 4 foot	115.00

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nificent cables for both budget and quality application.

MIT, which is one of the manufacturers that Karen represents, is one helluva high quality product. After Bruce Brisson left Monster Cable, there was a tremendous growth in "multi-path networks" that he had developed while at Monster Cable.

At first these nearly inch-thick reference cables (MIT 750) had to be tinned and trimmed at the laboratory. It was difficult getting it into dealers' showrooms. But the product was finally distributed and compared to the earlier efforts by Monster Cable.

MIT is a development and research driven company. Transparent Audio is the US distributor of the MIT cable. The research has gone beyond the market's ability to keep up with it. So it is a continual challenge from the marketing viewpoint to set new and higher standards, and unfortunately, higher prices. This is certainly a reflection of the cost of research and development on the attainment of higher performance. By 1985, a fabulous laboratory had been established to test the complex signal paths and time domains for the new MIT cables. For the past two years it has become possible to listen to the newly developed termination technology in the laboratory.

Karen went on to discuss the latest concepts in termination technology. She gave a lucid description of the complex signal path, attendant distortion, if any, in the bass region, and affirmed her belief that cables really make a difference. Good cables can clean up the after-effects of resonant node distortions. These and other problems are still being addressed by the audio industry such as differential inductances and unwanted resonances. MIT has been researching how to arrive at uniform inductance across the entire frequency bandwidth of the cable. And, equally

important, how do you make tenable compromises along the way-at a reasonable cost. It is not an off-the-shelf product. In order to develop acceptable time-frequency relationships, the company worked with high resolution instrumentation three years ago to verify the mathematical computer models for the ultimate cable. Constant improvements have been made over the past three years.

Karen described the basic cable configuration: twisted pairs of signal and returns wires and electrostatic shield. All very complex and very high-spec. Not many know how to make this product. What we have is an ideal delay line model to create the uniform inductance. Of course, optimum results are achieved at specific lengths. In order to create a wider bandwidth, the company pushed the technologies involved. The vari-length construction is used in all high resolution equipment. This is found in the MIT 330 and MIT 750 cable.

Questions were directed to Karen about the new cable. In response to a question about the prevention of aging in cables, Karen carefully pointed out that certain precautions are taken during the manufacturing process: the raw copper is covered immediately to prevent corrosion, the teflon dielectric is carefully peeled back at the termination point for thorough tinning, and heat shrunk plastic is used in covering as much as possible.

Karen's presentation culminated with coverage of the benefits of the pro-line, fully balanced cable used by major film studios and music companies such as Telarc and Harmonia Mundi. By pushing the technology to the cutting edge of the industry, it is easily seen that MIT cables truly deliver the promise of more effective performance from all of the components in the system. All of the research and development of MIT-so beautifully represented by Karen

Sumner-have created a really wonderful audio product.

**Krell Industries**  
**Dan D'Agostino**  
**Reporter: Larry Greenhill**  
**June 22, 1990**

### Lowering Prices through Automation

Dan opened with a description of the two latest, low priced Krell products, the \$1800 KSL preamplifier and the \$2500 KST stereo amplifier (rated at 100 wpc in Class AB- with the first 25 watts of power running in Class A). Dan explained that the more efficient, lower bias driven Class AB amplifiers don't require the kind of constant power needed for his Class A design amplifiers. Still, the KST amplifier borrows a lot of technology from Krell's top-of-the-line KSA-250.

Up to now, Dan was unable to build a low price amplifier that met his design criteria. By automating the assembly process using wave soldering, Dan has been able to offer the new, more powerful KSA-250 at the same price, \$5700, as its predecessor the Krell KSA-200. Dan explained that his newer amplifiers are constructed by machine, without any labor intensive, point-to-point wiring. The only wires in the entire amplifier are in the 900 VA transformer. Dan passed around the driver board and output stage of the KSA-250 and indeed, all components were directly attached to the PCB, which was free of point-to-point wires.

Dan claimed that his new KST series compares favorably, in terms of current and power, with a number of amplifiers in power output, yet costs one-third less. Krell's earlier amplifiers were just as labor intensive as the competition. By reducing labor costs, the amplifier can be built with higher quality parts. A company that only does wave solder-

ing runs all week; they can do our monthly run of 200 amplifiers in one day. Another virtue of wave soldering is that it minimizes unit to unit variation due to soldering technique.

To facilitate this process, Krell purchased a resistor preparation machine. All the resistors are cut and bent, oriented in the same direction, computer-inserted into kits and then handed to the company that stuffs and wave solders. The board is then placed in the machine and a wave comes up from the bottom which solders it. A major advantage to wave soldering is that all components are uniformly heated. One can tell a board has been wave soldered if the solder mask (green material) wrinkles because of the heat of the wave. The joints are real shiny, clean and solid. We get it back, test it and burn it in.

Krell currently has 65 employees. If Dan had to hire an additional 25 employees to do the soldering, he couldn't hold down the price of the KST and KSL. There is no sonic compromise, because the machine heats each part everything uniformly; human assemblers may overheat a particular part. Of course, one must inspect the solder bath and heat frequently. These techniques will be applied to the higher price line.

### The New "Affordable" Product Line

The new KST amplifier has a number of standard Krell features, including a bridging switch (400 watts in bridged mode) and a 900 VA power supply, so it doubles in power as the impedance of the load drops. The amplifier's maximum output is 840 watts in any mode: 840 watts into 4, 2, and 1 ohm loads. The KST-100 puts out more power than the KSA-80, sounds better, all because we saved labor costs.

Dan went into the design of the KST-100 (which stands for Krell Stereo 100)

that incorporates many of the features found the KSA-250. He did not want to use an "A" in the name, as it implied it ran in Class A. For example, the amplifier automatically adjusts its own offset bias. Like the KSA-250, it uses 4 power supplies for each channel, has the same input circuit as the KSA-250 (using only small signal devices).

The KST has a very interesting current mirror system in the gain stage, which allows it to develop a large voltage swing with small power devices. Other amplifier designs depend on different stages for current gain and voltage gain, claimed Dan. Standard designs use the front end for current gain, then go to the main drivers in the output for voltage gain. This means that there are two devices doing all the voltage gain, and these devices can create noise. The result of using a single device is that you get noise whenever a transistor is turned on ("stochastic noise"). When Dan listened to amplifiers for the first time, he could hear it. The Krell design replaces the single driver with 6 small transistors thus eliminating the "grain on top of the signal noise usually associated with a single device.

Another item of note is that the amplifier has a very strong thermal package. Everything is mounted on a huge L-bracket and heat sink with excellent thermal tracking. The KST is 50% smaller than one on the KSA-80, but 25% more efficient; the shape absorbs heat faster ("lower thermal resistance"). Bridging uses the plus signal from one side and the minus signal, not in the feedback loop. This eliminates the grainy and slightly larger than life characteristic of bridged amplifiers.

Krell's KST amplifier has no need for slow start circuits, ballasting, capacitors or coils in the signal path or resonators in the output. The KST is the first amplifier that Dan has built without a termination device at the output of the amplifier. This feature actually makes

the KST less sensitive to speaker wires that have driven other amplifiers into oscillation.

Dan also explained why every Krell amplifier has 4 speaker binding posts per channel for biwiring. The Underwriter's Laboratory now only approves threaded 5-way binding posts with 1/8" connectors. Apparently some applications use these posts for AC power; UL didn't want any confusion as to which were to be used for AC power. The binding posts consist of 5 carat gold plated over a one-eighth inch thick, beryllium-copper strip coated with cadmium. The Wego connector on the bottom of the board used for the transformer wiring really grips wire. A number 12 wire can be inserted in the connector, and it is gripped so tight that you can literally pick up the amplifier with the wire and the wire won't come off!

All of the amplifier's inputs are directly connected to the circuit board. Dan was asked whether he would anticipate any problems caused by plugging and unplugging the interconnectors over the long term. Yes, Dan answered, there would be a problem if the circuit board functioned as a mechanical shock absorber. However, the boards go into a back panel that is directly bolted to the back panel, so it can't go anywhere. It's exactly the same thing you would have if you hard wired it, the only difference is that it's mounted to the board. The hard part is that the metal work has to be so perfect, better than one five thousandths of an inch.

Each board takes 15 minutes to wave solder; it takes about an hour to build an amplifier to the box. The KSA-150 and 250 are not burned in their own cases. They are burned in on water-cooled monoliths, ten amplifier boards at a time. The self-adjusting bias and off-set are tested and then the boards are pulled off the monolith and bolted into the chassis.

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### Krell Digital

Krell Digital Products were discussed next. The new MD-2 transport sells for only \$2700. Krell saved money on the suspension (3 inch bored out aluminum blocks). They decided not to use the CD M-3 ROM transport in the MD-2, but rather the CDM-1 Mk II, the best audio laser you can buy from Phillips. The MD-2 doesn't have the cover of the \$5400 MD-1 unit but retains the same look and feel.

Customers can update the older 16 times D/A processor to the 32 times unit for only \$300. For the \$300, the customer gets a new digital board, a new audio board, a new front panel and a new back panel with balanced outputs—a real update. The 32 times is much better sounding than the 16 times oversampling unit.

### Exotic New Products

Dan stated that the next Krell products would be very exotic and pricey. Krell has been working on a new MDA amplifier technology, using the KSA-250 and the KSA-150. Each stereo amplifier can be converted to a more powerful monoblock amplifier, which will feature a truly balanced signal path, with the input and output balanced. Consequently, the KSA-150 becomes the MDA-300 and the KSA-250 becomes the MDA-500. The ideal amplifier should not care what speaker is there; it should be an ideal current and voltage source. As a result, the speaker becomes an integral part of the amplifier. Differential amplifiers are commonly used in precision test equipment because they are so low in distortion. They are two hemispherical amplifiers with a minus and plus amplifier and do not work unless there is something in between them. With most amplifiers, applying a signal would result in a signal at the outputs, even with no load. Not these MDA amplifiers. There is no signal at the terminals until there is a

load. Instead of having left and right, they have plus and minus. It will be as big an improvement as the KSA-150 and 250 were above the other amplifiers. The dealer will take care of everything; there will be new boards, and there are more parts (extremely parts intensive, totally different driver boards) and the monaural amplifiers will be more expensive (about \$350) than the stereo amplifiers.

The new Reference amplifier line will be expanded, so there will be three amplifiers. They will be smaller, and will come in modular sections, so that "one person will have to make 4 trips." Each unit has 120 output devices.

The club looks forward to each visit from Krell and is never disappointed. Tonight was no exception. One can not help but be impressed with the technological advances that Krell brings to the High End industry and we are all waiting for Dan's next visit to the club to hear about future Krell product releases.

**Arcici, Inc.  
Ray Shab**

**R. Sequerra Associates, Ltd.  
R. Sequerra  
Reporter: Earle Stevens  
July 20, 1990**

**Arcici**

Hy Kachalsky opened this portion of the meeting by commenting that we (The Audiophile Society) seem to spend much of our time on megabuck equipment and completely overlook the affordable gear that forms the basis of many a system. Hy then introduced Ray Schab, creator of Lead Balloons, Iron Clouds, dedicated speaker stands and many other affordable oxymorons.

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Ray was with us to introduce the Onyx turntable, a project that he has been working on for the last two years. At that time, Rod Herman, who had just left SOTA, teamed up with Tom Curruthers to work on Ray's concept of an affordable, neutral, suspensionless unit to fit the Delta Tower atop the Lead Balloon. The final product is an attractive, straight forward design based upon modern materials technology and sound engineering. The turntable's 1.125 inch plinth consists of alternating layers of metacrylate and Zorbex; the record is placed upon an acrylic platter with an extremely stable bearing. This assembly is powered by a shielded low torque motor. Weighing in at 42 pounds, the Onyx turntable combined with the Delta Tower make for a highly stable platform.

Continuing on, Ray pointed out that the Onyx turntable will accept every tonearm tried to date with the exception of the Air Tangent. Ray was then asked what considerations entered into the equation for designing a suspensionless table. He replied that using a constrained damping system such as that used in the Onyx eliminates the problems of spring vibration and resonance. Zorbex is ten times more vibration absorbent than similar materials so the trade-off favored the simpler design. The Onyx provides all the stability of a suspensionless unit with the isolation from footfalls offered by springs.

### Sequerra

Hy thanked Ray, stating that the turntable would be demonstrated after the next guest and introduced Dick Sequerra, a man who does not need an introduction. However, Dick insisted on one and at the risk of offending a guest, Hy obliged. The name Sequerra has been famous since the days of the Marantz 10B. Dick then moved on to speakers, one of Hy's favorites being the Pyramid 2+2 W. In fact, Dick had previously been a guest at the Society

giving an incendiary demonstration of the original Future Sonic Speaker system. The Met 7 went up in smoke during the demo!

Dick Sequerra opened his remarks by referring back to the Future Sonics system, stating that the new MET 7MkII and MET 8MkIIs were modern designs based upon that original concept. The MET 9MkII ribbon tweeters, have not as yet been released. His latest speakers are even more sensitive, on the order of 90 dB SPL/one watt/one meter. Consequently, they can be driven by even modest power amplifiers.

The MET 8MkII, the woofer unit, goes much lower than any previous Sequerra effort; the low frequency cut off is about 24 Hz. The low frequency driver is constructed from polypropylene, carbon fibers and paper. The woofer contains dual magnets and a die cast magnesium frame. Dick stated that earlier systems were designed with the problems of existing turntables and room sizes in mind. In real world rooms, extreme low frequencies are very difficult to manage considering acoustic feedback and standing waves. It is just not possible to develop truly deep bass under such conditions. Another design goal for the woofer was response speed; the new driver has a rise time of less than a millisecond. The MET 8MkIIs, which are available separately, are so fast that they will work with Quad 63s. Both units are very low distortion designs. The MET 7s, as a stand alone system, benefit from improved sensitivity allowing low power (20 watts or more) high quality amplifiers to be utilized. The combined systems require about 100 wpc.

The enclosures are sealed boxes. Cross-overs are first order with minimum time domain corruption. Dick does not recommend using an electronic crossover with his speakers. All the wire used inside the speaker is oxygen free copper. Inductors are fourteen gauge

air core chokes. Silver solder is used throughout along with proprietary polypropylene capacitors with oxygen free copper leads.

Responding to an earlier request to discuss the FM radio, Dick felt that its future was very dim. Direct digital broadcasting is already upon us; it is in use in Europe and undergoing tests in Canada. Only the United States is balking because we have yet to decide who will control the new media. However, two major broadcasters have applied for permission to run tests. It is feasible that we can expect small, reasonably priced units with keypad entry capable of 100 channel reception. The antenna would be the size of a man's hand and automatically track the satellite. The Canadian stations are using UHF transmitters. We are approaching a time when we must expect to see systems using new technologies, the equipment we are using today is almost as good as it can feasibly get. Dick then opened the floor to questions.

**Question:**

How does it sound (direct digital transmission)?

**Answer:**

Fantastic, just as good as the best CDs.

**Question:**

How about records?

**Answer:**

No, records still sound better. You have a limitation with CDs that people are trying to circumvent. The limitations are ones of the numbers of bits and the sampling rates that everyone is familiar with. There have been some very elegant schemes to fill in the missing pieces (a reference being made to the good design work of Dan D'Agostino). The results, however, fall short of analog master tape which, despite their problems, are not missing in-

formation. The stretching of the tape during recording produces incidental FM which is not a natural phenomenon, one that humans can hear better than almost anything else in the range of 1.8 to 4 kHz. Our sensitivity to this extends down to our threshold of hearing, 90 dB below program.

**Question:**

What ever happened to your big ribbon speaker?

**Answer:**

I disassembled it at the factory because it became a problem. People thought there was something wrong with the speakers we were making at the time because they did not sound like the big ribbons. The level of reality of the ribbon was such that the conventional speakers suffered unfairly by comparison. The price that we would have to charge for the ribbon was so high that it wasn't practical. I have since changed my mind and we will now be making them at \$125,000 per pair. I already have two potential purchasers.

**Question:**

Would you tell us a little about the design of the new big ribbon? Is it a full range ribbon?

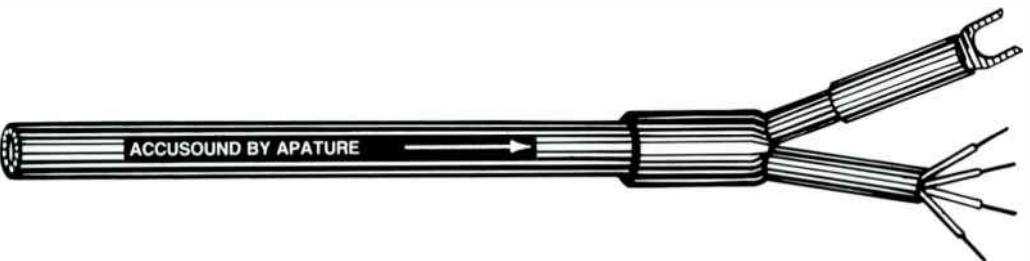
**Answer:**

No, it only goes down to 100 Hz. I use a corrugated ribbon placed in a tangential magnetic field, not like these (indicating the Diva's). The backwave is absorbed; the sound only radiates from the front. This speaker sports a very complex woofer system (dynamic) going down to 18 Hz. The system is eight feet high and weighs about seventeen hundred pounds a side. It has to be assembled on site because it can not be shipped. There will be one at the new factory in Connecticut for demonstration.

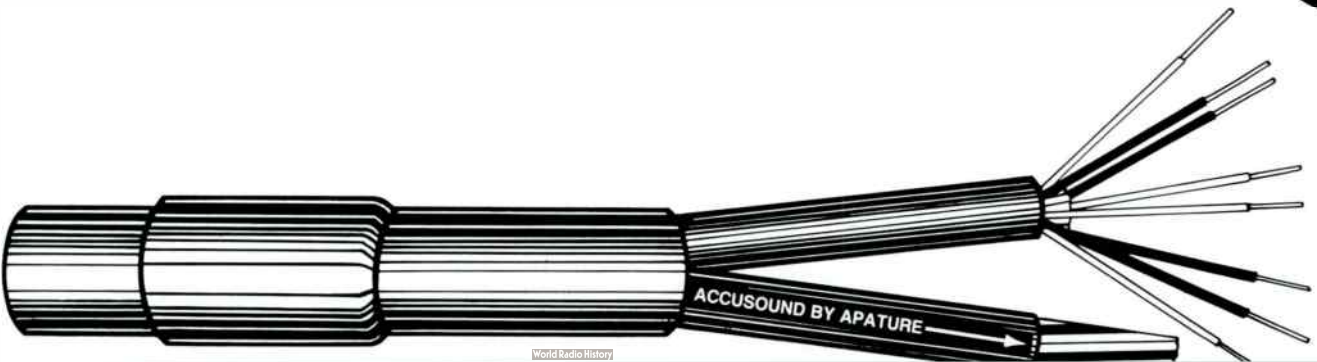
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**Question:**

Can we expect an invitation?

**Answer:**

Absolutely, there is enough room for everyone. The big ribbon isn't really practical except for the few. I may produce a smaller version that would be affordable, in the \$30,000 price range.

**Question:**

You said something earlier about electronic crossovers. Could you expand on that?

**Answer:**

Electronic crossovers do not correct for time domain, which is a fundamental problem with loudspeakers and some of the devices sound just terrible. Unless you can correct the time domain you are just kidding yourself. The time domain is conditioned by the driver placement, the mass of the drivers and so on. No two speaker systems are the same. If you made an electronic crossover that corrected time domain for one system, then it would not work for any other configuration. The cost of one off designs would be prohibitive.

And with the last question, Dick bowed out and gave the club an opportunity to hear his new speaker system. Perhaps the next time Dick visits us, he (or Hy) will have the "big" speaker system in place and we can all hear what's up Dick's sleeve in terms of an all out speaker system.

**Wadia Digital Corporation**  
**Warren Weingrad**  
**Reporter: Bob Serino**  
**September 15, 1990**

Originally scheduled for this date was a presentation by Warren Weingrad, Distributor of Wadia Digital

Corporations Products. While I'm certain that all members of the society looked forward to Warren's presentation, mother nature had a different feelings. Hurricane Hugo was blanketing the east coast with heavy winds and rains.

I remember braving the Friday evening rush hour traffic to Westchester. Compounding the journey was widespread flooding and numerous automobile accidents. All the way to Hy's I was hoping that somehow Mr. Weingrad's flight would be arriving after all or perhaps Hy would pull another magic trick out of this hat and have an equally engaging presenter on hand.

Upon arriving I found neither to be the case. However, the meeting that followed proved that Music Lovers Society could well be substituted for the Audiophile Society nomenclature. It was a memorable night of just talking to each other, and listening to good music. Maybe we should make this an annual event.

**Apogee**  
**Jason Bloom**  
**Reporter: Russell Novak**  
**October 5, 1990**

This evening Jason brought along Apogee's latest entry level loudspeaker-the Stage. At \$1995 and with a very even 3 ohm impedance across its range, the Stage may be the most practical ribbon speaker design yet.

Jason was very candid about discussing placement of Apogeess in the room. Where most speaker manufacturers will tell you their speakers sound good anywhere, Jason outlined specific requirements for his speakers. Furthermore, he emphasized that the owner must be actively involved in experimentation with placement, electronics and wires. Don't expect "instant gratifica-

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tion" from Apogees, but expect great reward for your involvement.

The minimum distance from the rear wall the Stage speakers must be placed is 3 feet; however, Jason's preferred spacing is 4 feet (measured from the top rear of the speaker). This will allow the speakers to recreate the proper ambient information and generate a holographic soundstage.

Apogees are not meant to be toed-in. Jason stated that a 3/8 inch toe-in would be acceptable if the speakers were placed 72 inches to 76 inches apart (measured inside edge to inside edge) if you needed to firm up the center image. The speakers should also be placed away from side walls by at least 2 feet, although Apogees are less sensitive to side wall placement than normal speakers.

Very heavy acoustic damping should be avoided, especially in back of the speaker. The Stages are designed for real-world conditions and utilize the rear wave off the back wall. Large glass areas present the opposite problem from heavy damping. Glass allows sound to actively ricochet and confuse imaging.

The Stage features an adjustable rake-back angle. By tilting the top of the speaker backwards or forward, high frequencies can be tailored for the room. The ribbon woofers in Apogees have a fast rise time and sound very clean. All-tube amplifiers are usually too slow for this speaker and can make the bass bloated. High current, transistor amplifiers rated between 70 to 200 watts per channel tend to produce the best results with the Stages. The designer emphasized again, however, that there are no absolutes and experimentation is the rule. For example, one member mentioned that he was currently using Conrad Johnson Premiere 5s (tubes) with Apogee Duettas.

Jason also spoke briefly about his Centaur model which debuted this summer. The Centaur combines a dynamic woofer with a ribbon mid-range/tweeter. Because the cone woofer is a point source, the wave is not utilized in the room. The Centaurs can therefore be more easily placed in a room 14 to 22 inches from the rear wall and may be the solution for people who cannot correctly place the all ribbon designs. Hy Kachalsky recounted auditioning this speaker and said the two disparate types of drivers mated very successfully. Mr. Bloom advises not to play the speakers too loud since above a certain volume you lose information by exciting room effects.

Apogee should be commended for applying their ribbon technology to a lower priced speaker. As good as the Stages are, it will be even more interesting to hear what Apogee has accomplished with the Centaurs when Jason returns the next time to Rye.

### **Tice Audio Products George Tice**

**Altis Audio  
H. Mandel & Gerry Osmond  
Reporter: Paul Lupie  
October 16, 1990**

### **Tice Audio**

**I**t was just two meetings ago that George Tice provided for the club, the first glimpse into TPT (Tice Pulse Technology). George took some plain Monster Cable Speaker Cable which was specially programmed using the TPT technology. The copper wire was unterminated at one end, the other had a standard AC line power plug. It was plugged into the same receptacle as the preamplifier and compared to an untreated section of identical Monster Cable speaker cable. We heard the difference. Today after additional test-

ing and research GT has developed the TPT Clock.

TPT is a new development in conductor technology. As electrons move through a conductor, "electron noise" is generated. This is analogous to AC power line noise (conceptually) but is a different beast. No power conditioner on the market, not even the Tice Power Block, can filter for this molecular phenomena. The effect of electron noise is further exacerbated by the random chaotic movement of the electrons in a conductor. This has been a problem in the broadcast and data transmission industry for years, but has been ostensibly ignored.

TPT is a technology that treats the electrons in conductive material. Any conductive material can be treated. So how does one measure TPT? "Only ears are available today," says George. This technology exceeds the current realm of scientific measurements. Financial constraints currently impede any research program that could be developed. But this in no way should cause us to close our minds and ears to what appears to be a significant improvement to any high resolution audio system. George said, "we have an answer searching for a question." He contacted physicists at Brookhaven Labs to get a handle on this technology.

The TPT "program" somehow reduces the randomness of the electrons in a conductor and therefore the overall electron noise. There has always been a direct correlation between noise and sound stage size, whether it is AC power line or electron noise, says George. Anytime you reduce power line noise, you increase soundstage. The same is proving to be true with electron noise and the TPT Clock. Tice states that the walls in the listening room seem to move back and out, rather than the instruments themselves moving out of place.

But why a clock, you ask? The clock simply serves as a medium, a messenger carrying the technology. The clock is not the important focal point, but rather the technology it carries. The clock was chosen because it saves Tice time and money, which translates to a retail price of \$350 for the consumer. Tice wanted to get the technology out on the street in as rapid and simple a fashion as possible. The clock that was chosen is a high quality digital LED AC operated clock. The TPT clock should be plugged into the same AC outlet your audio system is powered from. All electrons coming in contact with the clock will be treated and modified. Thus the effect of TPT takes a minute or so to permeate and energize your complete system. Conversely, if you unplug the clock it will take about ten seconds for the system to "consume" those electrons already introduced into the system that have been TPT modified. Optimum results are achieved if you verify polarity of the TPT clock line (polarizing instructions are included with each clock). Also, make sure you plug the clock into the outlet which your preamp is plugged into.

A few closing thoughts. Let's keep our minds open (thanks AB for reminding us). If an effect is heard, whether positive or negative, and lacks definitive explanation, we should feel free to experience it. In the case of TPT technology, George has gone out on a limb to present to us a technology that significantly changes the sound in an audio system. Even though it cannot be fully explained at this time, should we let that detract from the ultimate trial - the sound? I think not. George, thank you for braving the skeptics and being a pioneer in offering to us a reasonably priced tweak for our audio environment.

### Altis Audio

Early implementations of "1-Bit" converters have left most listeners less

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than impressed. Altis has made a successful attempt to implement a technology without sacrificing the ultimate goal, the sound. Bitstream technology carries with it the benefit of cost cutting. This of course is not bad. Small savings at the manufacturing level can translate to larger savings to the consumer. Bitstream technology significantly reduces parts cost and labor. This, however should not be the motivating factor in high end audio. Does bitstream technology, properly implemented, offer sonic improvements and better musicality than current state of the art R-2R ladder converters? Albeit that 1-Bit decoders will provide sonic improvements to low-cost CD players, but it must compete and exceed ladder converters for it to become the wave of the future. There is no clear indication at this time that bitstream technology is better than regular 16 bit processing. But once again the subjective nature of audio rears its head and it comes down to a matter of personal preference.

Currently the audio sample is made up of 16 bits of information. Ordinary 16 bit processors take these 16 bits as a group and puts them into a device known as a D/A converter. This converter puts out a voltage at approximately 44,000 times a second. This is known as the audio sample. "1-Bit" converters take this 16 bit word and processes each bit individually. This is sometimes referred to as processing in the time domain. The significance of this, simply stated; if you take in 16 bits and process them all at once, you need 16 circuits or devices that knows the value of each bit. It is difficult to get 16 devices to maintain accuracy. When you process one bit at a time, you are just using one device to produce a single voltage. There are no inaccuracies because it is relating to itself. Officially termed a switched capacitor network, it dramatically improves linearity. It is either a 1 or a 0, not percentages through 16 step voltages.

Altis Audio, owned by P&M enterprises, has shared technology with Philips on both A/D and D/A converters. Altis designed an A/D encoder chip for Philips and they in turn shared technology with Altis on their D/A encoder chip. Altis worked with Philips to improve this design. The chip series is the SAA 73xx series and encompasses five chips; 7320, 7321, 7323, 7350 and one yet to be named. Basically the algorithms differ on each of these chips. The chip used by Altis in their DAP and DAPR decoders is closest to the 7350, though it contains some proprietary circuitry. No filtration is done on the chip (as is required with say the 7321). Since all the filtration is done off the chip the sound can be better controlled. Currently Altis uses a 17 bit system (16 bit word and 1 bit for dither) even though the chip is a 21 bit device. The reason for this is that only 16 bits are currently encoded. Both of their processors will actually handle 20 bits of encoded data, so that when the industry goes to 18 or 20 bits on board in the recording studio, you don't have to make an upgrade.

Coming out of the digital CD player is a format known as Sony Philips Digital Interface - SPDIF. This is how it "talks" to other digital processors. The bitstream DAC does not know what SPDIF is. The AES-EBU specification or the I2S bus was developed as an international standard for one digital formatted machine to communicate with anybody else's. Altis has pioneered the use of this standard in their processor, and have copyrighted the data stream to make that conversion take place. Altis claims that this is critical to making the bit stream processor work. Converting the SPDIF format to the I2S format requires a tremendous amount of processing because the two formats are so dissimilar. If the I2s bus does not work well, the sound will be horrific. The hardware configuration is also slightly different in their decoders. They don't use ROM chips, they do not have a

computer processor nor do they use op amps. They oversample at a rate of 256 times, because of the way the data stream is broken down and resampled by the chip. This unusual process mixes SPDIF at 44.1 kHz and turns it into a giant bit stream at 11 mHz.

Altis has two decoders, the DAP and the DAP Reference. The DAP is a one chassis design with a single bitstream DAC. It has one very large toroidal transformer which is split into two power supplies, one for digital and one for the analog. The DAP Reference is a two chassis design. There is a transformer and power supply for the digital and a separate transformer and power supply for the analog. It utilizes two DAC's that are put in dual differential mode (they cancel each other out thus lowering noise). The result is a 6 dB gain in signal level with a 6 dB improvement in the signal to noise ratio, and 2dB for total harmonic distortion and dynamic range. Both units have a phase inverter switch. The DAP has two digital inputs, one electrical and one digital output. The DAP Reference has one optical and one digital input and one electrical and one digital output. Altis is planning to introduce a CD turntable in January 1991 featuring a yellow laser pick-up rather than a red.

In conclusion, I would say that Altis has provided the high end audio world with a valid implementation of Bitstream technology. Let's hope that if the industry should embrace this technology as a standard, it is because it furthers the state-of-the-art sound in digital processing and not because of cost or ease of implementation.

Howard stated that the primary thrust and goal of Altis is the final result, the sound delivered to the listener. The Gestalt of the music is of primary concern. This attitude should be embraced as prototypical when charting the unknown waters of a new technology. Good luck to Altis and their new product line.

## **Monster Cable**

**Noel Lee**

**Reporter: Irwin Elkins**

**November 16, 1990**

**M**onster Cable is a name of great prestige and accomplishment in the world of audio cable technology. Noel Lee, the "Head Monster," started with an introduction to some new Monster vibration isolation products. These were Monster Footers and the Tranquility Base, both designed by Rod Herman.

Noel pointed out that current polymer materials such as Navcom and Isotek (used by Monster Cable) provide isolation from outside vibrations by damping them and converting the energy into heat. Most polymer compounds provide only 5 db of vibration isolation; however, newer compounds such as Navcom and Isotek systems can provide up to 12 db of isolation.

As on the SOTA table, you are looking for isolation in both vertical and horizontal planes. Noel demonstrated a footer with "constrained layer damping." The sandwiched layers of plexiglass and Isotek tubing creates the suspension system. Depending upon the situation they are being used in, footers are made to support weights of 15, 25 and 50 pounds. The Apogees, for example, are sitting on the 50 pound footers/suspension. Instead of using spikes which couple the equipment to the floor, Monster Cable uses these refined suspension systems for perfect damping.

The problem defined: how to remove the vibrations from a system wherein the presence of an AC signal tone is generated. Vibrations can be removed through an isolation system which is effective down to the 10 Hz range. The Tranquility Base 2's are just being delivered to dealers and are reasonable priced. The ideal system uses the foot-

ers for 200 Hz and below and the Isotek 2 for the midrange (1500-2000 Hz). For the higher frequencies you are on your own. Of course, there is less energy at the upper end - the isolation is most effective at the lower frequencies. The debate of coupling *vs.* decoupling goes on.

The discussion then turned to Monster Cable's advances in the area of interconnect technology. Monster Cable's primary objective in designing a cable is neutrality and overall balance from top to bottom of the frequency spectrum. The M-1000 and Sigma cables pay particular attention to the aforementioned variables. Noel said that a good cable controls high frequency dispersions and flabby bass. Cables should be consistent from component to component. The element of predictability is important; coloring of sound is to be eschewed at all costs. Neutrality is the goal. What you hope to gain with a "balanced" cable is preservation of depth, ambience and soundstage of the original recording. More active information can then be passed through these low pass filter. The best you can do is minimize the distortions and vibrations for greater enjoyment. The Sigma and M 1.5 cables are designed for 8-12 foot length for optimum results. The Powerline 2 and Powerline 3 are designed for 20 feet; the interconnects 1.5 to 2 meters.

Noel then wrapped up his visit by talking about Monster's latest venture into the commercial arena of recording studios. Monster is trying to provide better sound for audiophiles by getting it right at the beginning-in the studio. He also mentioned the latest Amanda McBroom album which was remastered using Monster Cable instead of the stock studio wiring. If Monster Cable can make some inroads into studios, all audiophiles will be better off for their effort.

**Wadia**

**Warren Weingrad & Don Moses**

**Reporter: Duncan Hartley**

**December 8, 1990**

**W**arren Weingrad said that during the course of the last year he had been surprised to learn how close digital recording has come to the analog standard. One difficulty, however, that he mentioned is in driving interconnects. Warren said they had found some musical transients hit 10, 15, 18 or 20 V on organ pedals. With standard CDs, the players have been clipping into the interconnects and the inputs of the preamplifiers-- giving that muddled sound with a lack of imaging and separation. It has been found that capacitors make a significant difference and the current generation of capacitors is much more natural.

The TEAC CD transport was then discussed. Warren said that they were not sure why it sounded so much better than other transports, but it was certainly partly due to the retrieval of more information. Another reason he suggested was that TEAC offered linear tracking with no wobbling of the disc. Someday, Warren said, someone is going to find out mathematically why the TEAC transport (or others like it) do sound so much better. With the TEAC everything seems to be placed better. There is much better transient attack, staging, layering and depth. Instrumental signatures are more proper, and this is a remarkable improvement in quality.

At the beginning, digital recording and playback did not really work very well. The sound was two dimensional, thin and metallic. Developing a better CD player is something like trying to raise a perfect child. There are always areas of tradeoffs. The Wadia approach, and its patent position, is that the decoding algorithm that specifies the "perfect" reconstruction process of reconnecting the

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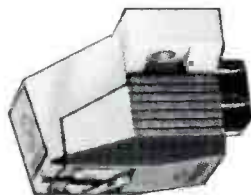
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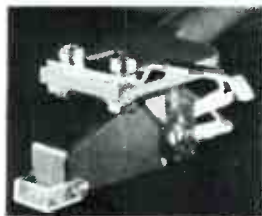
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sampling points is the most important area to focus on. How do you build an algorithm? The discreet numbers or samples must be smooth and continuous to be music. Wadia discovered that there was already a mathematical formula, called the LaGrangian, that could be used as a basis for reconstructing "where the music was" between the

dots. The shape must be right for each dot in order to be accurate.

Wadia represents what is needed-innovative approaches to solving the inherent problems in digital technology. It remains to be seen what other improvements in digital technology will be forthcoming.

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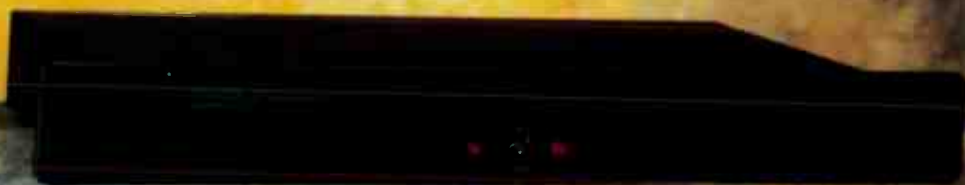
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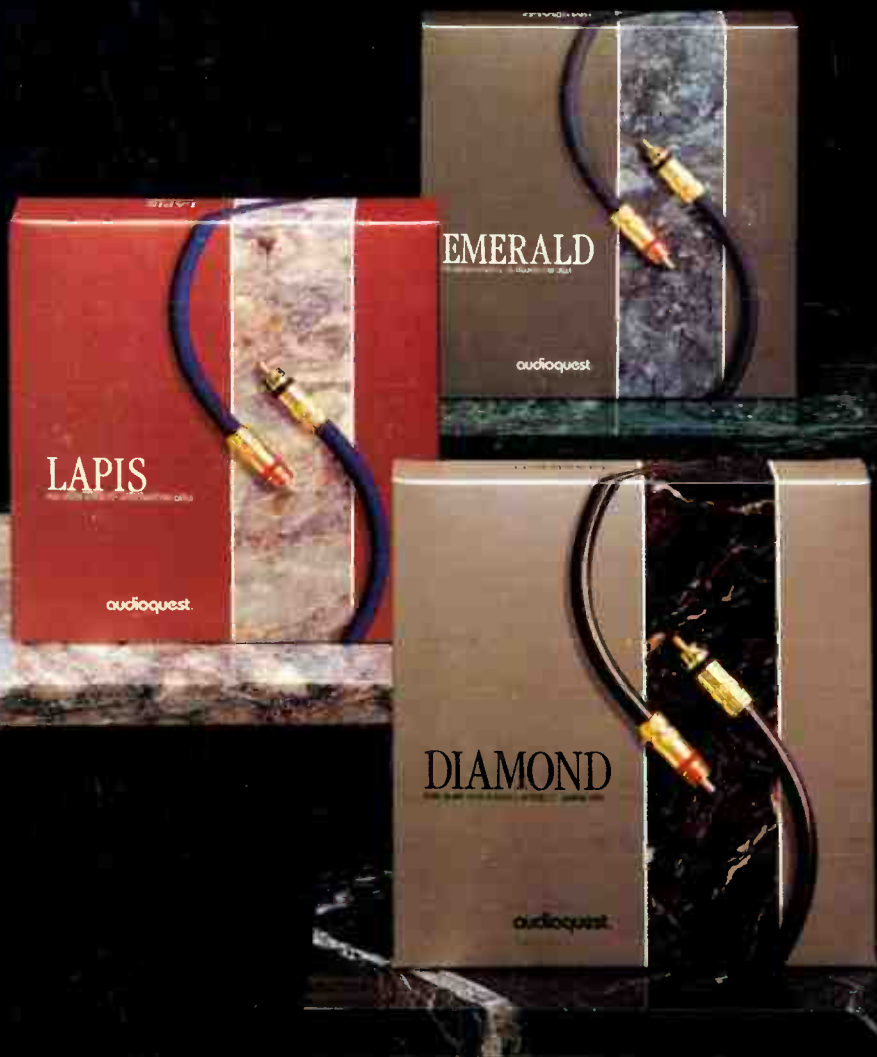
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