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Vol. I, No. 2

Spring, 1992

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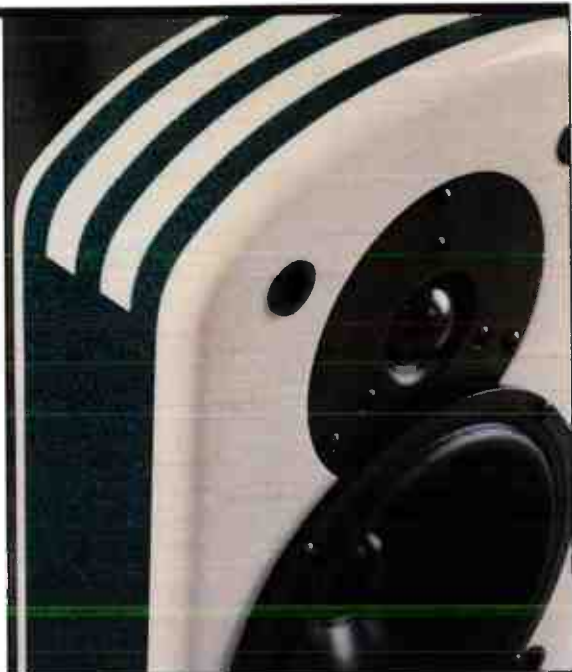
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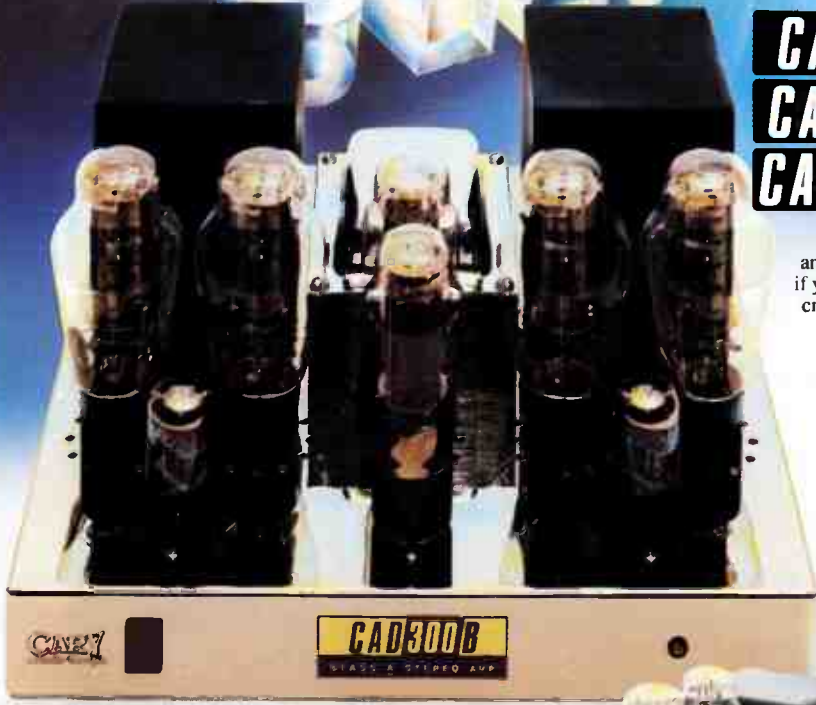
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# The audiophile voice™

PUBLISHED BY THE AUDIOPHILE SOCIETY \*...BY AUDIOPHILES FOR AUDIOPHILES\*

Vol. I, No. 2

Spring, 1992

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## A Tremendous Success

I am delighted and proud to report that the first issue of *The Audiophile Voice* is a resounding success and has been widely acclaimed for the quality of its style and writing. We printed and distributed 10,000 copies for our first issue and we are virtually sold out, and subscriptions are coming to us in a steady flow. In this short space of time we are already reaching figures beyond our most optimistic expectations—and the magazine has been out for just a few months!

Another source of pride is that this is the accomplishment of The Audiophile Society, the parent company of *The Audiophile Voice*. It was done with the enthusiastic support of the society and the happy participation by many members in every area. It was the support of The Audiophile Society that has made this such a successful magazine.

It is because of this support that we have been easily able to make some internal changes. Myles Astor and his wife Lisa have decided to leave their positions on the magazine. They have earned our admiration and gratitude for the enormous amount of work they put in to make the first issue a great success, and we wish them well in all their future endeavors. Lars Fredell has given up his position as Advertising Manager. He, too, had made an enormous contribution in time and effort to the success of our first issue, and earned our heartfelt thanks.

It's a pleasure to introduce our new Editorial Staff. Mark Block and Russ Novak are now our new Senior Editors. Both are trained in journalism, are Audiophiles, and have experience in high end reviewing. Paul Lupie has assumed the position of Managing Editor. His responsibilities include interfacing with all facets of *The Audiophile Voice* publishing function, as well as editing the classical music section and doing equipment reviews as well. Mike Tantillo will take on the responsibility of Advertising Manager, a job which has been handled up until now by Paul. All of the editors will have several members on their staff to share the work load.

The Audiophile Society and *The Audiophile Voice* are quite aware of the responsibility we have undertaken to continue our commitment to the high-end community. We are enthusiastic and dedicated to publishing this magazine. Quality is what high-end is about, and that is what The Audiophile Society and *The Audiophile Voice* will continue to deliver.



Hy Kachalsky  
Founder and President, The Audiophile Society  
Editor-In-Chief, *The Audiophile Voice*

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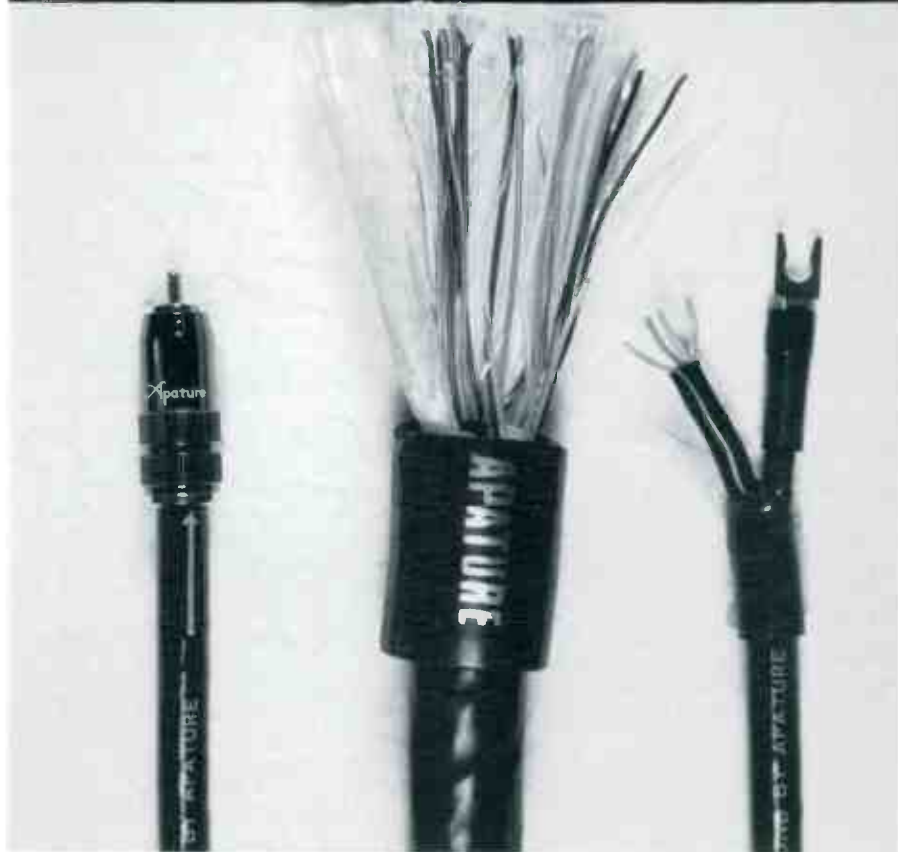
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—Leo Fung — Audiophile Magazine  
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—Wing Cheung — Audio Technique  
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# Hy's and Lows

## One Man's Opinion

by Hy  
Kachalsky

Vol I, No. 1, the premier issue of *The Audiophile Voice*, apparently was one of the big hits of the WCES at Las Vegas. It took everyone by surprise that the Audiophile Society would, or even could, produce a magazine of such high quality in style, content, and writing.

While we knew that the vast majority of audiophiles who had never heard of us, would be pleasantly surprised by *The Audiophile Voice*, we knew that the high-end industry, with whom we had developed cordial relationships, would expect no less than the best. After all it was no accident that we called ourselves The Audiophile Society and emphasized devotion to the highest quality in the reproduction of live music.

It seems to me that the most important question you should ask of us is, who are we and why are we writing this new magazine? These questions go to the heart of the matter of the philosophy and purpose of *The Audiophile Voice* and a review of the history of the Audiophile Society is essential to provide meaningful answers.

When I founded The Audiophile Society in Oct., 1979, my 50th birthday, I invited all the rootless, lonely, wandering audiophiles to join us as they made their weekly treks to the major high-end audio stores in the Metropolitan NY area. We had very few friends to share our discoveries and opinions with, and practically no one had a positive Mate Acceptance Factor (MAF). The sound of our systems was always greeted with, "Oh, it's so beautiful. Could you turn it down so we can talk?" So we had a passion for music

and the fidelity of it's reproduction, but hardly anyone to share it with.

The design philosophy of the club practically wrote itself. We had to provide a home and a family union of audiophiles. Aside from the bonds of friendship, caring, and respect that developed over the years, we found that we could talk to each other as trusted friends and understand and respect our different opinions.

Aside from teaching each other during our meetings, we also found a willing multitude of high end manufacturers eager to be guests at our meetings to explain their design philosophy. It has been an enormously educational experience.

In the 13 years of our existence the list of guest speakers has grown to a virtual Who's Who of high end audio. And in our 13 years we have matured into a sophisticated, knowledgeable, and highly experienced group. Our talent is deep and wide and each meeting is a new learning experience.

We are dedicated to the music and it's reproduction, but the heart and soul of The Audiophile Society is our sense of caring. We care about each other. In our devotion to our obsession with perfection, we are always having fun. Humor abounds and we tease each other all the time. And while we vigorously pursue a high level of sound, we achieve a pretty high level of humor too. But above all we appreciate anyone or any product that enhances our enjoyment of music. That's why we have had such wide support from the high end. We root for them all the time, and they appreciate our support for their efforts.

So now, what kind of magazine would the Audiophile Society produce? To begin with, quality is the most essential factor in "audiophilia" and therefore in our magazine. Yet, quality is the eyes (or ears) of the perceiver. Who are we to

dare to write such a magazine? After all, we're only amateurs.

We are, but only in the sense that we make our living doing other things. But if you look at the two other meaningful high end publications (*TAS and Stereophile*), there are very few "professionals" among them either. Most are in our category - audiophiles who have paid their dues through years of listening, experimenting, and being educated. Amateurish is something we will never be since quality is our goal. Our idea of an amateur is Bobby Jones, one of the world's greatest golfers, or Teofilio Stevenson, the great Cuban Olympic Heavyweight Champion.

Most important though, is that by applying the same philosophy of the Audiophile Society to *The Audiophile Voice*, we believe we can develop a readership, throughout the country and internationally, which will find a home with us. After all, we are you. We want to speak to you, share with you, and have a great time doing it.

Most of the comments we have gotten refer to how refreshing, readable, and enjoyable our first issue was. Well, like typical audiophiles, we're going to keep tweaking it. Our market is you, the audiophile. We don't represent you, but we are you. We hope that you will see our magazine as yours and *The Audiophile Voice* as your voice.

## *In Memoriam Ben Rose*

In the short time I knew Ben we became very close. If you needed a true friend, this was the guy. I spent many hours listening to music with Ben at his home, sharing thoughts about high-end equipment. He was always open minded and very positive in whatever he said. We talked about everything, and also spent quality time talking about our sons and how much we loved them. Ben was great to talk to. He loved people; never said no to anyone. I would say that Ben was one of the kindest, nicest people I knew. There's a sadness in my heart when I think of Ben, because I really miss him. But I know he's with God now, and that makes me smile. God bless you, Ben; we love you.

I can now finally say that when listening to Ben's system I often heard a little brightness, and the midrange presented itself a little too forward. The bass was also a sloppy and weak. The soundstage seemed to be a bit compressed, and there was a honking in the upper frequencies. Other than that it sounded great. Ben, I hope your not listening, but if you are, I'm only kidding. I bet the music is glorious up there. Enjoy. You deserve it.

*Bill Brassington*

# In Memoriam

---

You are holding in your hands the realization of a dream; the dream of our "Chief" and dear friend, Hy Kachalsky. *The Audiophile Voice* and The Audiophile Society were given life, energy, and the impetus to succeed by Hy, our founder and leader. On March 30, 1992, Hy was taken from us after waging a courageous fight against cancer. As we wrestle with the pain of his passing, we are inspired and more determined than ever to carry on and expand his work.

I can't remember being *acquainted* with Hy; from the first time we met some six years ago, he embraced me as a friend. That was Hy's way. At each monthly meeting he opened his home to members of the Society, to the high-end community, and to those newcomers who sought to experience a part of his special world. For me, the meetings were an oasis, a haven to which I escaped from the mundane routines of work and where I was surrounded by friends who cared and shared a common interest.

I was one of "the boys," as Hy called the editorial staff, and felt privileged to work closely with him on the myriad of tasks needed to produce *The Audiophile Voice*: Late nights, "Pizza or how 'bout Chinese?," em dashes, Mahler or Ella, "What about the ads?," "How are the subscriptions doing...?" I will always cherish those production hours I shared with Hy.

In this *Memorial* we invite you to take a brief sojourn into the magical world of Hy Kachalsky, and share our fond memories of a most remarkable man, and a most cherished friend.

*Paul Lupie*

Dr. Chaim (Hy) Kachalsky, a private psychiatrist who used his love of audio to elevate an audio club into a major lobbying force in the audio industry, died Monday, March 30 at his home in Harrison, New York. He was 62 years old and died of cancer after a long illness.



PHOTO: ROSS WAGNER 1992

Prior to the inception of the Audiophile Society, many high end audio equipment owners were not organized into clubs. Hy met many different audio enthusiasts at high end stores, but there seemed to be no single place where they could meet. On his 50th birthday, (October 31st, 1979) Hy gave himself two gifts: a pair of Hill Plasmatronic loudspeakers (helium tanks and all!) and a party. He invited all the audiophiles he encountered at local Westchester audio stores, (Lyric Hi-Fi, The Listening Room, Ear Drum, and Audio Experts) and made them an offer they couldn't refuse: start a club or society for high end enthusiasts. Hy set the design for the society: it was based on a love for music and a genuine admiration, sharing and enjoyment between audiophiles.

Under Hy's direction, the Society took shape. His house, a large two-story New Rochelle home with a partially assembled airplane in the back yard (his son Alan is a pilot) became the "clubhouse" where members met each weekend to test audio gear. Even though it was large, the house could only accommodate about 45 people at a meeting. Thus, the "full membership" was limited to that number, although the club allowed for many associate members. An executive committee was formed, with duties involving the monthly bulletin, collection of dues, inviting lecturers from the industry and the production of the Audiophile Society Minutes. Hy felt strongly that the meeting lectures and business activities be recorded so that out-of-town associate members could share part of the meetings. For the first three years, there was a formal annual meeting, with a plaque awarded an outstanding audio designer or writer. Although this tradition has not continued, plaques were made and awarded to Saul Marantz, Julius Futterman, and Gordon Holt.

Hy's constant contact with manufacturers through these meetings had a number of benefits. Audiophile Society members had the unique opportunity of meeting well-known designers and hearing about the latest products, often months ahead of articles appearing in *The Absolute Sound*, *Stereophile* or *Audio*. Starting with David Berning, the list of lecturers involves all of the major high-end designers, including Dan A'gostino of Krell Industries, Mark Levinson of Cello Audio, William Z. Johnson of Audio Research, Michel Reverchon of Goldmund, Jason Blum of Apogee, Kenneth Harris of VAC, Ivor Tiefenbrun of Krell, Ross Walker of Quad, Chris Russell of Bryston, and Robert Carver of Carver, to name just a few over the years.



Much of Hy's success came from the force of his personality. He had an amazing store of jokes and one liners. He was very quick in repartee, and one of his favorite activities was to trade "one-uppers" with other society members. Over the years, he developed a stand-up routine for the first half of each meeting, when his monologues would hold the group, often 70 or more people, spellbound for over an hour. Over and over, he reinforced his principles: audiophiles needed to meet, share experiences, and develop life-long friendships.

In the past year, Hy set about to broaden the activities of the Society by turning the Audiophile Society Minutes into a national magazine, *The Audiophile Voice*. Despite his illness, which produced fatigue, bone pain, and drowsiness, he assembled a group of talented volunteers to write, edit, and produce *The Audiophile Voice*.

Born in Brooklyn New York, he grew up there. At Syracuse University, he earned a bachelor's degree. He served in the Navy as a Lieutenant and then attended medical school at Downstate Medical Center. He completed his training in medicine and psychiatry at Albert Einstein College of Medicine, and became the director of the Department of Child Psychiatry at New York Medical College in Valhalla. After leaving this position, Hy went into the private practice of psychiatry in Rye, New York and continued to supervise psychiatry residents at New York Hospital-Cornell University, Westchester Division on Bloomingdale Road in White Plains, New York.

He was married for 41 years to the Estelle Schnieder Kachalsky. Besides his wife, he is survived by his son Alan, his daughter Ellen and 2 grandchildren, Mindy and David.

*Larry Greenhill*

The most influential men in this world are those who motivate and inspire other men. Hy Kachalsky was such a person. He was the godfather of all audiophiles. Hy did not possess great technical ability in electronics; he wasn't a tweek. He enjoyed people. He had the special ability to discover and draw out the unique talents in each person. Through friendship, humor, and open-heartedness he developed a vast network of friends that included most of the audiophile world. The Audiophile Society, which he founded, loved him and he had but to pick up the phone to any manufacturer to get a guest speaker for the club, secure a favor, begin a new project.

Through his influence many promising new products from unknown designers were introduced to the audiophile world. He brought people into the fold with his warm, expansive personality, making his house available to everyone. It gave him pleasure to be in company and see others enjoying themselves.

Hy Kachalsky never admitted the severity of the illness that afflicted him because he didn't want to burden his friends or disrupt his greatest project, this magazine. He kept "the boys" around him during his final weeks, even in his final days, working late at night on this project, wanting us back early the next morning. He got relief from the pain he bore by seeing our small successes as we neared completion. We worked in his bedroom because he wanted to continue to be part of everything. On 3/28 he finished his last review and took some serious pain medication. We finally moved our things out of his room. The next morning he remained asleep most of the time. His relatives were called, yet he still wanted us there. He called me in to make sure we were still working in the dining room. I told him the magazine was finished; he needed to hear that. He passed away 3/30/92.

Hy was a psychiatrist and therefore understood men and their motivations. Unlike many, he believed in religion and I believe this gave him the humility to understand men at the deepest level. Hy told me he would live to age 85 and then renegotiate with God. God, in whom he emphatically believed, took him early.

*Russ Novak*

I hope you've seen Ross Wagner's beautiful photograph of Hy Kachalsky in this issue. Look again. Does his character come through? Does his spirit show? I hope so, because it can't be put in words. How does one explain that this funny little guy with the lumpy, boxer's pug and prodigious paunch was one of the most beautiful people on earth? And one of the most courageous.

Those of us who had the pleasure of knowing Hy and the honor of working closely with him will always be in awe of his boundless enthusiasm and optimism, which never flagged in the face of a terribly painful illness. Several times he sat his editorial staff down and reassured us: "Look, don't

worry about me. I'll be OK." As his condition worsened we frequently asked him, "How are you feeling?" His inevitable, cheerful response: "A little better today, thanks." He wasn't really lying, you know. I think each day he found something in life to feel better about. Not a bad attitude for all of us.

Several years ago, after my first Audiophile Society meeting, I had the strange urge to write Hy a letter. Letter? Hah. A diatribe, more like it, about some of my frustrations with the high-end audio scene. My wife read it and said, "Who is this guy, you're audio psychiatrist?" I did not know then that Hy *was* a psychiatrist. It just seemed like he'd be a good listener.

The perceived abuses I wrote about seem in retrospect foolishly naive; worse, I unwittingly trashed someone who was a personal friend of Hy's (he had friends *everywhere*, as it turns out). But Hy called me on the phone and told me he *loved* my letter and wanted to publish it in the Society Journal. He also told me to write more—write about anything—but just keep writing.

I now see that there was no way on god's green earth that my immoderate piece was ever going to see the light of day. It is not the Society's style to be immoderate or harsh. My letter didn't run, but I felt positive about Hy's reaction to it. It was Hy's way of getting me to do better.

I used to live in an apartment on the Upper West Side, and like most Manhattanites I didn't have a car. It was a pain in the butt having to bum a ride up to Westchester for the monthly meetings, so I used to call Hy and ask him if he knew anyone coming up from the city. He always gave me a name and a phone number, and the guy would inevitably turn out to be someone who hadn't been going to meetings lately. Hy noticed those things. It was a good plan; I'd get a ride and a recalcitrant member would come back to the fold. Unfortunately, it was left up to me to talk the guy into it. I usually failed, but I loved that Hy kept trying.

Hy was the kind of guy who constantly took chances on people. He believed, with an almost religious faith, in the potential for change and growth in individual human beings. Sometimes we came through, and sometimes we let him down, but nothing ever shook his abiding faith and optimism. It's what made Hy ... Hy.

He was one of the most colorful and ingratiating individuals you could ever meet. Yes, he was a charmer, but in the best sense of the word, because he used his powers of persuasion to nurture people. He could charm the proverbial birds from the trees, but he never put them in cages. He asked them simply to sing a few songs for his friends. Then he asked them to learn some new material and come back in a month.

The club and the magazine he founded will continue—diminished of course, but strong in the kind of optimism learned from Hy. I think we're feeling a little better today, thanks.

*Mark Block*

**B**lessings come in many forms. Good health, happy homes, and good relationships are some of the more obvious manifestations of good fortune.

I consider myself particularly fortunate for having had the opportunity to be closely associated with Hy during the course of helping him manage the Audiophile Society, and also for having been his friend. It was a rare privilege indeed to have been able to observe this exceptional man going about accomplishing wonderful things to make this a better world for all of us. His zest for living and his love of life will always stay with me. I cannot think of anyone else who better exemplifies the contribution that a caring and concerned person can make. He will always serve as an example to me that an individual can make a difference.

Anyone who has had the opportunity to associate with Hy is truly fortunate. He was a very special person who exuded kindness, caring, and intelligence. Above all he loved people. He wanted to meet them, to talk with them, and to be with them. Always.

What set him apart, however, was his ability to give of himself to others. He shared his house, his encouragement, his advice, and his ideas and dreams with everyone. That's why, with the support of his equally loving wife, Estelle, almost every monthly meeting over the more than twelve years of the Society's existence took place at the Kachalsky home.

Hy was a man who greeted everyone with a smile and a warm embrace. When he said "Welcome!" there was no doubt he meant it from the bottom of his heart. His friendly manner and wonderful sense of humor put people at ease and allowed them to be at their best. Since he was there for everyone, those around him were induced to follow his example. As a result, the Society came to be renowned for its friendly setting and open forum, with a guest list of presenters that reads like a Who's Who in audio. It is easier to name the few who have *not* been there than it is to list those who have.

What made the Audiophile Society special was the people it attracted. I know that in some circles the Society has a reputation for wealth and elitism, but that was never Hy's intent. What may not be obvious except to those who have been around for a longtime is that the makeup of the Society was always changing. For example, I can think of only three active charter members now. And yet the natural course of events has caused the membership to revolve around a very homogeneous group of people—which is exactly what Hy was shooting for all along.

It can't be denied that the Society attracted some very well-to-do members. After all, this was a High-End Society as well. When Ken Kessler was our guest (put up, like numerous other presenters, by Hy and Estelle) it turned out that while all of Great Britain did not have a single Infinity IRS speaker system, three of these systems were owned by Audiophile Society members. At the same time many members own systems of modest proportions. It is to Hy's credit that he attracted a wide variety of people from all walks of life, and from many different racial and ethnic backgrounds. He always emphasized that it is the fellowship and musical enjoyment that counted. That is part of his legacy.

Hy's desire to help people is legendary. He was generous to a fault—any equipment or recording was there to be borrowed only for the asking. Of course, no records were kept and Hy would often have to resort to pleading with the membership to have his property returned.

The desire to help went far beyond something so mundane as equipment. He was always ready to listen to people's problems and to give counsel. I know of countless situations in which Hy stepped in to share his knowledge and expertise not only as a psychiatrist, but as the wise person that he was. He always wanted to help any way he could.

That Hy was a great leader was a foregone conclusion. While he handled his helmsmanship with the confidence and flair expected of a leader, he also had a particular knack for delegating responsibility. The reason Hy got people to do things was not only because he had remarkable leadership qualities, but because he inspired everyone. His devotion to music, his unabashed enthusiasm for all things audio, and the energy displayed pursuing these loves of his life were unmatched, and served as examples for others.

He knew how to encourage and was quick to give praise. And he had the wisdom to convey the good sense of the tasks at hand. The result was that what we did was fun. I for one know how easy he made it for me to go out and get the job done. I always had the feeling that despite everyone's hard work, the Society ran by itself. Hy made it look easy.

It is difficult to imagine an Audiophile Society meeting without him on center stage in his living room, leading it in the fun-filled, educational and always entertaining manner unique to Hy. That's when he was in his element—that's when he was having the time of his life.

I am certain that without Hy, our very informal Journal could not have been turned into the respected publication that *The Audiophile Voice* is today. No, he did not do it all by himself, as he was quick to point out. But without Hy's guidance and perseverance there would be no such publication.

It was Hy's vision and leadership that took the society to the prominence it has today. And it will be his inspiration that will allow all of us to continue what he started.

I consider myself very fortunate, that our lives were intertwined so rewardingly all these years. I am a better person for having had Hy as a friend. Fortunately, he touched so many other lives in much the same way. How lucky we all are.

*Arnis Balgatois*

Hy and I go back a long way, to the early days of Albert Einstein medical school where we met in the Department of Psychiatry. His was a fine intelligence hiding behind the facade of a breezy Brooklyn kid. It was always his special strength that he met his peers and teachers as equals, while his patients were treated with the utmost kindness and warmth.

As Hy advanced in his development as a first-class psychiatrist, he also became freer to express his other human dimensions. Without question, his greatest strength was his emerging capacity as a charismatic leader in his professional and leisure activities. I was always most impressed by the fact that in spite of his clear awareness of whatever it was he was doing, he was unaware of the profound effect he was having on the people he inspired. He was always pleased when I would point this out to him.

This brings up another facet of his being - his enormous capacity for childlike awe, amazement, and curiosity. He retained this capacity for wonder and openness to the world throughout his life.

We were both, not so coincidentally, interested in hi-fi from the very early days, when it was hardly identified as a legitimate pursuit and when stereo was no more than a dream.

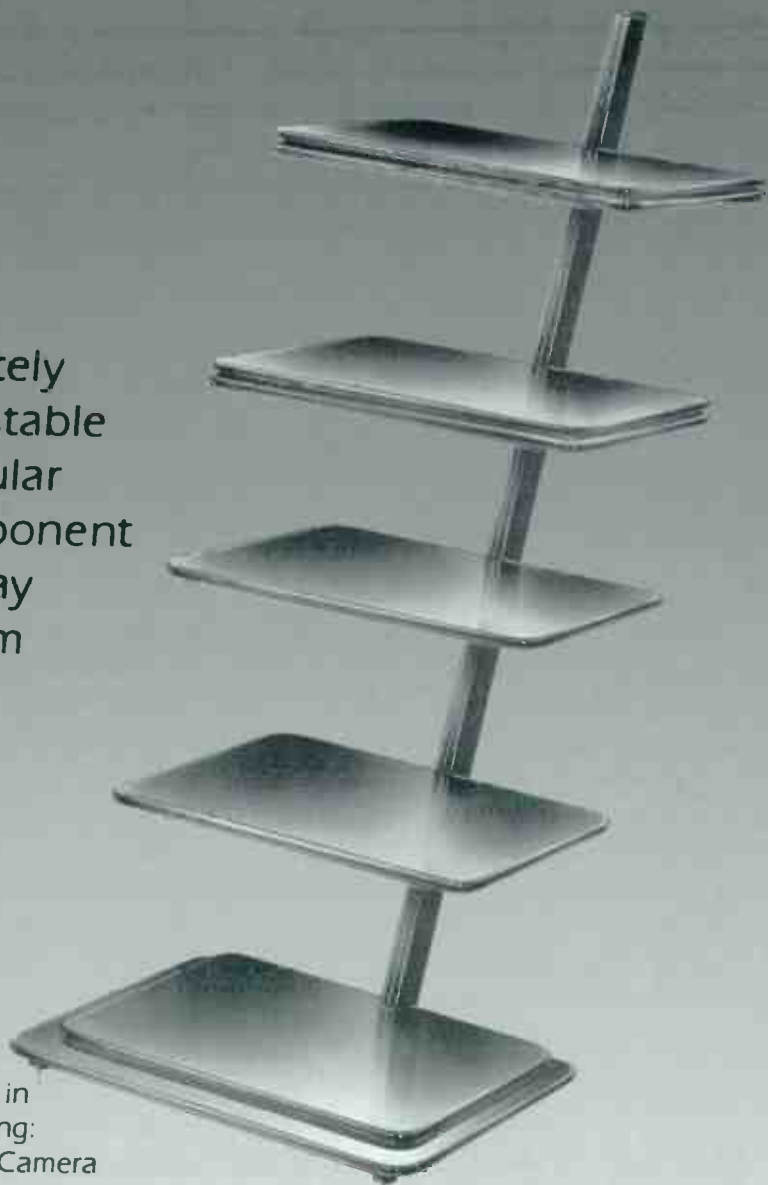
Hy had a legitimate interest in music that he expressed throughout his life. Music was his undergraduate major in college. He never became a virtuoso player of an instrument, but he had a true-pitch appreciation of quality performance and reproduction. His drive for excellence expressed itself in whatever he did and owned. I remember when, at an early CES show and before he became widely known as president of the Audio Society, a phono-cartridge maker challenged Hy to an A-B test of two of his cartridges that avowedly had only minor differences. Hy never missed in telling them apart. As much as anything, I was always impressed by his confidence in his ear and his ability to tell the difference.

What I will miss most, however, was Hy's ability to fill the room, wherever he was and whatever he was doing. He was there. When Hy was around, you never felt lonely. He radiated an aura in which you could feel safe and alive. Whether we agreed or disagreed, it was always "con Brio."

*Leon Yorburg, M.D.*

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# Tice Pulse Technology

*Russell Novak*

It's kind of sad really. George Tice just wanted to show me that his machine could make a difference—any difference. Just so people would know that he wasn't a fake. Mired in disputes and controversy in the press, he wanted to offer access to his work to dispel some of the misinformation. We are the first American publication to take him up on his offer.

For those audiophiles living on another planet, Tice Audio has been marketing a "treated" electronic clock which, when plugged into the same wall outlet that supplies power to your stereo, "improves" the sound. Other "treated" products, interconnects and power cords, are just out.

The level of the debate has not been whether Tice Pulse Technology (TPT) products improve the sound, what the mysterious "treatment" is, or what effect it has on wire. The debate, incredibly, is over whether or not George Tice is hiding diodes or other devices in his clocks to cause effects on the sound or conversely, if there is any effect at all. Is George a charlatan? Are audiophiles so incredibly gullible they think they hear things when they don't? Is Tice cashing in on this gullibility?

I found some the answers to these questions early this fall during a one day visit with Tice at the secret location of his TPT machine. I ran some tests and brought back the evidence. The focus of this article will be to report on the empirical results of these tests. But first we should briefly look at some of the history and issues in the controversy.

The first Tice product was the Power Block. It received nearly unanimous raves in the audio press. It is an AC line

conditioner which supplies a purer power source to your audio equipment with beneficial sonic results. It is not a product which uses TPT (Tice Pulse Technology), having been designed before the first experiments in that area. It sold well and established Tice as a major high end audio manufacturer.

Tice is a compulsive electronic experimenter. He was the kind of kid who would go to his father's cellar and start mixing things together to see what would happen. As an adult he has continued this wide-eyed, impulsive approach to experimenting, never avoiding something because of the rule books. He's a person who tries things out of curiosity and then seeks an explanation. He began to experiment with (here's the big secret): an intense pulsed magnetic field and its affect on matter. Asked why he thought to use audio materials in his experiments, he replied simply that audio is the only thing he ever thinks about.

He built a machine, then upgraded and enlarged it. It has some 2300 combinations of settings between its variables. Tice found he could produce sonic differences when he treated wire and then inserted that wire into an audio system. The most common and desirable effect is to lower the apparent noise floor. Treated material can also alter perceived frequency response depending on the settings of the machine; however, Tice does not contour frequency balance in his products.

Hearing beneficial results and knowing of a group in California who were experimenting along similar lines, Tice sought to share knowledge and explore a business arrangement. When talks went nowhere, Tice knew he had to market his product quickly or risk a competitive advantage. And this is

where he made a mistake. He marketed a clock.

But the TPT technology and the "effect" it causes lies in the treatment of the material and its use in an audio system, not in the mechanism itself. In an industry filled with skeptics and critics, he made himself vulnerable in many ways.

People laughed at the idea of a clock improving a stereo. People could suspect hidden devices within the clock. They could assert the hypothesis that the run-of-the-mill components within the clock could alter the sound of a stereo. One could resent the price hike from a \$30 clock to a \$350 tweak. And on and on.

And there is a larger problem, the scientific one. Science recognizes that the properties of matter may change within a magnetic field, such as a Magnetic Resonance Imager causing organic cells to resonate. Science does not recognize that the properties of non-magnetic materials may be *permanently altered* when exposed to and then removed from a magnetic field. In the case of the TPT products under examination here, we are dealing with *non-magnetic* materials, i.e. copper wire. So if Tice's machine can effect permanent change, then the recognized boundaries of physics are wrong. Right? A hard pill to swallow.

Now, if you have a product which purports to accomplish something based on phenomena not recognized by science, you can't patent it. That's a no-no, like trying to patent a teleportation device. You can't protect yourself and your invention. You have to keep it secret: the location, what it is, what it does. If a high-end audio publisher shows up at the doorstep of your factory and wants to see the machine, you decline to show it and risk his animosity. Politics.

More problems. If people are going to shell out \$350 they want an explanation

of what it does. The press wants an explanation. Your dealers want an explanation. They don't want to look like dunces in front of their customers. Tice didn't have an explanation. He is not a scientist. He doesn't *know* what the effect is on the molecular or sub-atomic level. He *thinks* he knows, but he can't prove it. Big Mistake Number Two: he supplies an explanation.

"Programmed electrons"—George Tice at an Audiophile Society presentation. Then later: "TPT is a material treatment system which significantly reduces electron noise. Normally, electrons flowing through a conductor move in a somewhat random and chaotic manner. TPT enables electrons to move in a more direct path eliminating their chaotic movement and the electron noise it creates"—Tice Audio Products advertisement.

You decide. Or better yet, don't decide. Wait and see what science may bring in the decades to come. In the meantime, the only thing of concern to the audiophile considering an upgrade to his system is the before and after, the with and without, the empirical evidence. And that's what I came to talk about.

I had heard the effect of the clock and told George about it. He invited me to see his machine and bring my own materials for treatment so I could be assured that he wasn't playing tricks. Tice states that just such an invitation has been extended to and rejected by others in the high end audio press. I had to sign a confidentiality agreement that I would not reveal the location of the machine, give a physical description of it, describe the treatment procedure, or other technical details.

We began the day at the Tice factory where I inspected the production facility and was given a preview of some new Tice products that should just be hitting the market as you read this. Over lunch I got a blow-by-blow de-

scription of the problems and politics involved in the history of "the clock" and we then proceeded to the secret location of his TPT machine.

George's reference system, over which I would initially be listening to verify results, is very elaborate and requires a long description. Using CD's as the source, the signal was generated by the Esoteric P-2 transport feeding the Theta Generation II Digital Processor using Tice's DC1 solid core digital interconnect cable. Interconnects to the Rowland Consummate preamp (and throughout the rest of the system) were Purist Audio Design Maximus (the "water" jacketed cable).

The system is bi-amplified. Atmosphere MA-1 mono tube amps have been modified by adhering E.A.R., a vibration dampening material, to the chassis and adding a .5 farad power supply reserve per amp. Above 100 Hz the sound is handled by BSL speakers which have two 6" drivers operating full-range and without an internal crossover. These speakers seem exceptionally coherent and detailed. They sit on a marble platform with 125 lbs of weight on top to aid in stability and vibration dampening.

A modified Rane crossover handles four bass channels only. There are two bass units per side. Custom built 1.5" thick cabinets built of composite board house two 8" Eton woofers per side. These woofers are built of very rigid materials and are able to supply speed and transparency to the bass. They are driven by Adcom 565 amps modified by doubling the power supply. Janis W-1 subwoofers are driven by an Audio Research D 350 and balance the Eton's speed with heft and weight.

Speakers were connected with Tice 416 solid core speaker wire (experimental as of 10/3/91), TPT treated. The AC supply for the front end was purified by a Tice Power Block and a TPT Line

Enhancer (a product scheduled to take the place of the clock, but which will do exactly the same thing.)

Well, any system which takes that long to describe has enormous potential to get screwed up. I can tell you though that it is one of the three best systems I have heard. The small size of the listening area undoubtedly limits the size of the resulting soundfield, but this system is analytical to a "T" and very musical. Fear of being woofed out of the room by the four bass cabinets proved unfounded.

George feels that his TPT technology can improve a given wire's performance by about 50%. An interconnect still needs to be designed properly, but even a poor wire's performance can be improved. Tice does not claim to be able to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

As stated previously, George had asked me to bring my own materials so that I could be assured he wasn't playing any tricks. As item number 1, I used two pair of homemade interconnects made from Canare L-4E6S microphone cable. This cable consists of two twisted pairs of stranded wire, shielded. I had grounded the shield at one end only, making the cable directional, and used gold plated RCA jacks at each end. These cables were already "broken in" as they had been running some of my less critical components—cassette deck, tuner, and the like for about one year. This cable has a neutral frequency balance and fails mainly in passing the degree of soundstage information exotic cables do.

We adjusted the system for appropriate volume and bass level and then left it there for the rest of the afternoon. I selected Keith Jarrett's "Meaning Of The Blues" (*Standards, Vol. 1*, ECM 1255) as the track I would return to in assessing any changes. This trio recording has lots of piano overtones, brushed cymbals and snare drum, well defined bass,

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and because there are only three instruments, it is easy to place the exact location of sounds within a few inches.

I then familiarized myself with the sound of the system with one of the pairs of Canare cable between the analogue outputs of the Theta decoder and the preamp. "Not bad" compared to the Purist Audio Design, but the PAD cable was more dynamic. The Canare was able to generate a little information slightly to the outside of the speakers. The rear of the stage was truncated to about a five foot spread between the speakers.

We then laid that cable aside and took the duplicate pair of Canare cable into the la-bor-a-tory to do the dirty deed. Into the TPT machine it went. I kept my eye on George to make sure he didn't have a duplicate set of cables up his sleeve. Fire and flame, wind and rain, a few minutes later, out it came. Inserted into the same position as the untreated pair, I listened closely. I thought I heard something and reinserted the untreated cable, then went back again to the treated. By that time there was no mistaking the difference.

It's a different way of hearing sound. The effect of the TPT treatment is not a frequency related phenomena when correctly applied, and frequency related differences are what we are used to listening for. Instead, the background just seemed quieter, and from that quiet (or because of it) bloomed a more spacious, dynamic sound. The instruments stood out more, appeared more holographic in presentation and seemed richer in character. The rear of the soundstage now ran into the rear corners of the listening area and I was able to specifically place information farther to the outside of the speakers at the front.

That same pair of Canare interconnects went back into the machine with George purposely adjusting the dials for extreme values. This time the highs

were completely rolled off and the rear of the soundstage was again truncated more extremely than with the untreated pair. My heart sunk. I had to acknowledge that the machine could make differences, which was George's purpose in having a demonstration, but I wanted to make off with a free treated pair.

Fortunately George gave this same pair a third treatment, a refinement of treatment #1 in the machine settings which returned all the assets of the cable previously listed, but better. More solid information in the corners and smooth feathery, harmonious highs very noticeable in the cymbal work.

Returning to the untreated Canare caused the sound to have a less dynamic, "dirtier", "smokier", or "grainier" sound. Frequency balance remained the same, the cable was just less "live". This same comparison has been repeated several times on my home system with the same result.

I need to digress here to make two points. First, the original TPT product, the clock, worked through the AC power supply. It was merely plugged in to the same outlet as the system components and the "effect" came up comparatively slowly, about 15 minutes. With interconnects, speaker wire and such, TPT is directly in the signal path and the effect is immediate. The earlier in the signal path you place such a treated component, the greater the total effect for the obvious reason that it will carry it's effect downstream.

Second, we need to briefly look at Tice's development process for a product. Tice states that a TPT product, properly designed, will not affect frequency response, and I also reported that I heard frequency balance changes with treatment #2 of the Canare cable (see above). This seeming contradiction is worked out in the product development stage according to Tice.

After selecting the power cord, interconnect, etc. which shows the proper design and quality of sound untreated, Tice will then treat it many times while making adjustments to his machine and listening between each treatment. With some 2300 settings possible, Tice is still experimenting on the total range of the machine and, of course, each article will vary in composition and mass to further complicate the situation.

He's got a big black notebook with the results of his experiments which will get him in the ballpark when presented with a new article. He states that months of experimentation on his and other friends' reference systems is necessary prior to finalizing a product. The ultimate goal is to get the lowered noise floor and dynamics without affecting frequency.

Pardon the digression. We now moved to speaker cable. Some 12 gauge zip cord (Esoteric Audio Speed Cable) was cut up with some cheap spade lugs soldered at the ends. This was connected to the BSL speakers which, you will remember, handle the signal from 100 Hz up. Untreated, this cable sounded dull and "sandy". The highs were "spitty", not clear. The soundstage was only as wide as the drivers at the face of the speakers.

Treated, the cable improved in the same ways as the interconnect above. That indefinable dirtiness was reduced, the noise floor lowered, and the soundstage spread out somewhat at the rear, almost to the corners. The zip cord was a good illustration of Tice's 50% rule: it didn't sound great even after treatment, only improved.

The fundamental premise of this article is that the reader can trust the writer to be accurate in his reporting and to be honest. If you have had trouble with TPT technology all along, you may not have gotten this far. If you are still with me, be forewarned that what I am about

to relate will further strain our relationship.

TPT can affect the sound of CDs. George invited me to bring some CD pairs and he would demonstrate. The day before visiting the lab I dropped in at the Tower Annex and picked up some cheapies. First was a Nimbus Sampler, 1988 (NI 5092) and second, *The Music of Purcell* (Vanguard VCD 72013). Both were brought to the lab still sealed in plastic. George cautioned me that he could only promise to affect changes in the CDs, not that I would like what he did.

My notes and subsequent listening on my own system reveal that the TPT affect on CDs is more subtle than working with wires. I have also found that the differences in TPT treated products are more easily discernible when listening to small ensembles or soloists, rather than full orchestras. Less "busy" presentations take better advantage of the lowered noise floor. And that, as with the wires, is what I consistently heard from treatment to treatment with CDs. No changes in soundstage were noted in any of these comparisons.

On the Nimbus CD I initially picked a segment of Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony. Treatment #1 lowered the noise floor relative to the untreated CD, the highs sounded livelier, but also more steely. Treatment #2 rolled the treble slightly. For Treatment #3, George shot for an extremely bright high end. My notes don't reflect being knocked over by the difference. Treatment #4 was a return to T2, and that difference I noted. Later, on my own system, I compared treated and untreated Nimbus Samplers using a Rachmaninov solo piano piece to better advantage. The treated CD is slightly more dynamic, has the lowered noise floor, and a slightly rolled treble.

The first and last treatments of the Purcell/Vanguard CD provide a better ba-

sis of comparison. Track #3 features a small string ensemble and two voices. The untreated CD seemed somewhat dull, both in the treble and dynamically. It had lispy sibilants and generally lacked "life". Treatment #1 boosted the highs somewhat resulting in better articulation in the voices, and as usual, the lowered noise floor made the instruments seem to bloom more. Treatment #2 was interesting. It boosted the highs even more and made the sibilants very "sshhy", while at the same time making the midrange sound dull. Treatment #3 was a return to T1 and the differences held up upon further review while writing this article.

CD treatments are not slated to be a product from Tice Audio. It is economically impractical. George's purpose was only to demonstrate that his machine could make a difference.

Ok! AC power and signal wire might be changed by a "treatment". But how could this be possible with an optically read medium consisting only of dark pits against a shiny aluminum background? At first I hypothesized that the treatment might make the aluminum background brighter, increasing the contrast and making the information easier for the laser to read. That might cause a difference in the sound. But it wouldn't explain the ability to contour frequency.

Maybe TPT permanently reduces the static charge on treated materials. I don't know. I just know what I heard and am reporting it to you.

"Wire has noise", said Tice. That, finally, is the way I subjectively heard it. By lowering the noise floor, the treatment seems to enhance many other aspects of performance: richer, more dynamic, more lifelike and spacious sound. Sounds seem to emerge from a quieter background with a more holographic presentation. I don't want to seem bombastic, because it's subtle. You've got to learn the difference, but once you hear it you'll hear it every time.

I take no position on the controversies surrounding George Tice, his relationships with the audio press, his marketing strategies, and I am certainly no scientist. But, I can tell you that there is a real machine, it does do something, and he didn't (couldn't) cheat on our experiments because he left the selection of materials and all the moves up to me.

We often seem insecure in our pursuit of musical pleasure. It's the toughest thing in the world for an audiophile to buy a product based exclusively on listening. Yet, devoid of supporting scientific theory, this is what the TPT products demand of us.

There are forthcoming products from Tice Audio in interconnects, digital interconnects, speaker wire, power cord, and a substitute for the clock called The Line Enhancer. If they don't work for you, Tice has always guaranteed your money back.



## How to Read a Rave

Mark Block

**A**t a recent Audiophile Society meeting, in the midst of a hot 'n' heavy, knock down drag out debate over ... Gee, what *was* it we were arguing about? Oh, it doesn't matter ... one of our more well informed members mentioned that a certain brand of cable was the best he'd heard. He then added that most dubious and dreadful of audiophile compliments: "It's ruthlessly revealing." Mental "red flags" popped up all over the room, and said member, realizing the implications of his words almost as soon as they had left his absentminded mouth, back-peddled furiously (yours truly's foremost form of exercise). Our fearless leader Hy, voicing my own thoughts, said that when a product gets described that way he knows to stay the hell away from it.

This incident got me thinking about how experienced audiophiles respond to the descriptive language of hi-end what might be referred to as "Stereospeak." It occurs to me that after years of reading the hi-fi pundits and getting burned big-time for big bucks by components that get ecstatic notices but make us lose our interest in *music* reproduction, many of us have developed a sixth sense about certain aspects of High End equipment reviewing. Quite simply, it's an ability to read between the lines, to interpret the Stereospeak clichés, translating them from the purple prose of navel contemplation into the "ruthlessly revealing" language of consumer advice.

I'd like to present my own apocryphal example:

The Accuspec 2000 is a device so perfectly neutral [**thin, lacks warmth**] that further improvement may have to await a learning period on the part of

our ears; indeed, it could require months or even years to take full measure of the shocking transparency afforded by this revolutionary design [**the improved Mk.II version will be released at the next CES**].

Transients are delineated with lightning quickness and stunning impact [ticks and pops on records sound like fireworks and gunshots]. Ruthlessly revealing [**no comment**] of software shortcomings [**99% of your record collection will be unlistenable**], the Accuspec can tantalizingly lay bare the nits and nuances, the nooks and crannies, of microphone pick-up patterns in ways that will leave you utterly impressed [**and ultimately depressed—because your favorite records will sound so unnatural and uninvolving**]. Make no mistake, this is maximum information retrieval [**your ears will overload before the second cut**].

Because of its own lack of discernable character [**it's missing something, don't know what**], the Accuspec will tend to "show up" other components in the playback chain [**you think your system sounds pretty good? Just drop in the Accuspec and think again**]. It absolutely, repeat *absolutely must* be used with only the finest associated equipment [**other equipment must have counterbalancing colorations**].

For example, the Tiramisu II cable that had been previously thought to possess a lusciously sweet

t midrange of true reference caliber [**the reviewer has had a "permanent loan" of \$2000 worth of wire for almost a year**] can now be recognized—thanks to the Accuspec—as having a noticeable cinnamon or perhaps coffee-colored deviation from the musical truth at both

frequency extremes **[a rival magazine just reviewed the cables and raved]**.

Although the alluring Accuspec is clearly a breakthrough product, destined to become a classic **[do not, under any circumstances, rush out and buy it]**, I could perhaps speculate on some areas **[he's about to hedge]** in which some small improvements may be made **[definitely hedging]** when the uncompromising standard of live music—as opposed to other components—is used as a reference **[hedging like crazy]**. Compared to the real thing, the Accuspec lacks that last degree of coherency **[music sounds canned]**, drive **[no foot tapping here]**, immediacy **[no goosebumps either]** and transparency **[not a characteristic of live music but who cares? It's an easy concept to grasp; we all intuitively know what it means. There are always more veils to lift]**. This, however, is hair-splitting **[when the next flavor-of-the-month comes along, major failings will be found, and this cover-your-ass hedging will be mentioned prominently in an "I told you so manner"]**.

The Accuspec 2000 is physically striking **[so ugly only the designer's mother could love it]**, electronically impressive **[puts out an electromagnetic field that has been shown to cause cancer in lab animals]**, sonically a knock out **[your ears will bleed]**, and fairly priced **[less than a new BMW]**. Highly recommended **[listen for yourself at a dealer you trust]**.

**M**y cynicism here does make exceptions for some reviewers, including, of course, all fellow Audiophile

Society members who dare put pen to paper or digit to data processor. Furthermore, I believe I've detected a laudable trend on the part of many reviewers to give priority to musical values when evaluating the latest components. Of course, like all good things it will probably be carried too far. I can almost imagine reviewers counting their goosebumps in order to rate components: Class B=55gph (goosebumps per hour). For the time being, however, it's a healthy thing—an audiophile laxative for years of accumulated bullshit jargon.

Nothing is sadder than a ten thousand dollar system that sounds cool and clinical and "ruthlessly revealing" (although a recording studio would be the perfect place for such a beast). Believing that your system is absolutely accurate when your favorite records sound like dreck is cold comfort indeed. Accuracy is like a religion; it's the opiate of the audiophile. It's built upon faith—not upon anything knowable—and that's one of the things that makes us so endlessly argumentative (and our hobby so curiously fascinating). But isn't enjoying the music what we're really about? I think so.

Now, if you were to read that component A features "state-of-the-art inter-transient silence along with the uncanny ability to shine a spotlight on the deep recesses of the soundstage," while component B "is not tops in any one area, but it does allow one to enjoy—and discover insights into—record after record without the slightest sense of strain or fatigue," which one would you buy?

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## Obscura

by David  
Nemzer

**The Weavers: Reunion at Carnegie Hall 1963**  
Analogue Productions APF005  
Distributed by Acoustic Sounds  
P.O. Box 2043, Salina, KS 67402  
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"When I hear America singing, the Weavers are there."

Carl Sandburg

It's late one Saturday evening in 1980. I'm reading the *New York Times* theater section (serious *Times* readers get the paper the night before to get a jump on ads for theater openings and to get the first look at an NYC treat—the used high-end audio ads in the classified section).<sup>1</sup> Anyway, in the *Times* are the first ads for the annual Thanksgiving–Christmas concert season, and staring me in the face is the notice for the Pete Seeger Carnegie Hall concert for Thanksgiving WITH THE WEAVERS!!!

Now friends, caps are in order here because this is, for old time folkie liberals, a miracle unfolding. The Weavers were the biggest thing in popular folk music in the late 40's and early 50's, and were all but buried by the McCarthy leftist witch hunts of the 50's. Although the performers survived professionally, they did so (with the exception of Pete Seeger) in relative obscurity. Few records were made by these gifted performers (more on that later); they spent most of their professional lives involved with the production of other people's records and, as musicians, behind the scenes as back-up performers. Pete Seeger continued to be a spokesman for unionist, environmental, and

other left-leaning political and social causes.

Given these facts, you can imagine the scene at the Carnegie Hall box office that Sunday morning: long lines of old time folk fans, burned out old leftists and long-haired liberals—people who had probably not been to Carnegie Hall since 1963 when the Weavers last performed. Tickets were an immediate sell out, but it was nothing like the scene there on the nights of the two concerts, Nov. 28th and 29th, 1980. There were people running around in front of Carnegie with wads of money in each hand pleading for tickets. There were parents and grandparents dragging protesting children into the theater ("Grandpa, what's the Weavers?" or "I wanna go home and watch wrestling on TV!").

Inside the theater the place was buzzing with an energy that was electric, because *the Weavers* were back for a show after being lost for almost 20 years. How would they sound? How would they look? Well, I can tell you that it was a great emotional and musical experience, with all the audience involvement usually associated with a Seeger/Weavers concert. It was recorded and sold as *The Weavers Together Again* (LOOM Records 1681) but it's only worth buying for the emotional value, as it was poorly recorded.

What is worth *every penny* of its cost is the new remastered presentation of that elusive, magical piece of vinyl produced by Vanguard, *Reunion at Carnegie Hall 1963*, now given to us as a gift by Chad Kassem and his Analogue Productions. This elusive recording, in its original pressing, is such a rare bird that even I—with a reputation to maintain as a vinyl detective of the first rank—have never seen it in less than destroyed, over-played condition (and

1 Sadly, a service printed only in the local tri-state area..

then only in mono—folkies were idiot member of the “Mono is good enough” club). Actually the only reason this recording has had any legs at all is HP and his “Super Disc” list. Placement of the original Vanguard (VSD 2150) on “the list” has made an impossible find that much more difficult.

Well my friends, for me the search is over, because Kassem has given us a gem of remastering by Doug Sax—a piece of vinyl produced with prime attention to first class sound. (Recognition should also be given to the cover and inner sleeve, which are of the first rank, and to the inclusion of the original jacket notes—a relief from the usual long-winded descriptions of audiophile re-recording techniques.) This recording is not to be believed; everything you’ve read about the clarity and information-resolving powers of Carnegie Hall is here to be heard, and on this recording it is the audience that provides as much of the information as the performers on stage.

There must be dozens of recordings of live performances at Carnegie Hall, and if you *listen to the hall* as it is recorded you can hear striking similarities in the presentation of the hall reverb and audience sounds (clapping, singing, coughing, rustling). I’ve often wondered how much of the sound similarity in different recordings is due to the possibility that the house mikes were used for overall ambient sound, and that some artists may have used house mikes for instrumental recording as well. What is clear to the listener of this Weavers recording is the amount of information—and *musical* information specifically—captured on the original tapes, and how Kassem’s team has recaptured it for this record.

All you have to do is listen to the Vanguard re-issue of the mid 80’s to hear what we’ve been missing—for me about 75% of that phenomenal hall warmth, that specificity of information

as best put forth in “Rambling Boy,” one of my personal “what to listen for” favorites. First you have Seeger’s voice, guitar, and place in space as he sings—all in perfect balance. Even more astounding is the detail retrieval of the audience singing—you could spend hours counting all the individual voices that stand out with amazing clarity; listen to the female members of the audience as the warmth and sweetness of their voices and emotions ring clear in your ear. It’s strange that the producers chose to have so much of this responsive singing in only one channel, but it’s totally magical in its impression.

For those who cherish information over music, the retrieval of the sounds in the audience (coughing, movement in seats, rustling of paper wrappers, etc.) is all *there* in detail that will astound you. Get a doctor friend over and you could get a diagnosis of the type of infection exhibited by one particular audience member. Really, it’s captured *that* clearly on the master tape. Other cuts provide nearly as much detail, but for me this is the best single piece on the album.

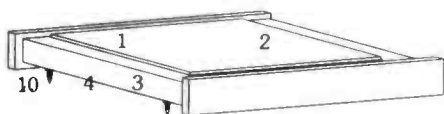
The ensemble singing is also wonderful—spacious, clean and warm, with a nice chesty tonality from Lee Hayes (bass) and Ronnie Gilbert (who remained, throughout the history of the group, the lone female member). Her voice is tender with feeling and conviction. Trust me people, I’m *not* being too emotional with my descriptions, for these singers sang as much with their beliefs as with their voices; they were a deeply committed group of political performers. While listening to this record with friends, there were times when the more conservative members of the listening group had to be restrained in camisoles<sup>2</sup> lest they hurt themselves in their rightist responses to leftist lines. While listening to “Guan-tanamera” we almost had to call in the National Guard to quell the disturbance! It’s a wonderful recording of a

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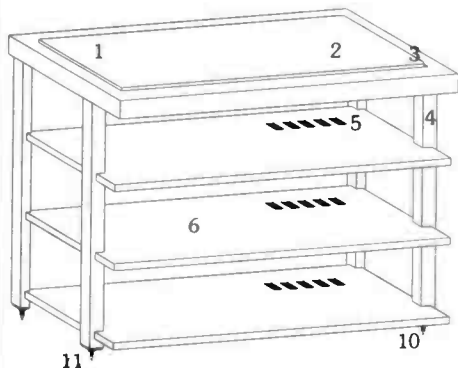
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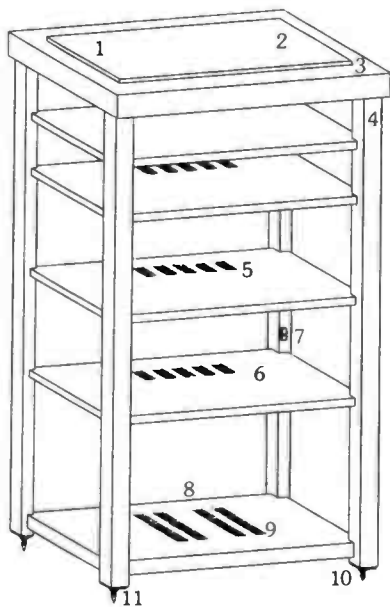
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lovely melody that Pete and Ronnie deliver with great conviction.

Other songs are equally well sung, "San Francisco Bay Blues" and "Goodnight, Irene" being excellent examples—"Frisco" for its solo instrumental exchanges and general rousing vocal interplay between Pete and Erik Darling, and "Irene" for that wonderful audience response, not to mention the individual vocal solos by the Weavers. Friends, this record is a gem, and there isn't a doubt in my mind that it's one of the best Carnegie recordings ever to make it to vinyl. If you own a turntable you better own this record, and like me you better buy two copies because you will soon wear out the first. It's that good. Really!

There are a number of other Weavers recordings, and while the effect their singing can have on the listener is carried through successfully for the most part, none is the equal of Kassem's Analogue Productions release. First, you must know that all the other Weavers recordings on Vanguard (with the exception of Vol. II of the above concert) had only four members performing. There was never a bass used in their other recordings, so that bass plucking foundation is not heard. Also missing is the individual delineation of the harmonizing voices, which is so much a part of the magic record being reviewed here.

On the records that feature Erik Darling instead of Pete, the instrumental balance and presentation is different (don't read this as worse) because the two men had widely different styles of playing. Seeger was the master of the twelve string guitar, and Erik the banjo (although Pete was no slouch in that department either). Actually, Seeger wrote some of the best books on how to play guitar and banjo, but Erik Darling was the better technician.

Darling made recordings on Vanguard as a soloist, and also with the group

The Rooftop Singers. These recordings are both in stereo and mono, but you shouldn't pass up the mono-only recordings as they are excellent sonic reproductions of his banjo, guitar, and voice. The songs selected are fun, wonderfully performed, and you'll never hear better folk recordings. Darling also had a recording on Electra.

Ronnie Gilbert likewise did a few recordings for Vanguard in the early 60's, and they make good listening if you can find them. In the past few years she has done some work with Holly Near, and still tours with her. Fred Hellerman, to the best of my knowledge, never made any solo recordings, but I do recall seeing his name occasionally as a back up and/or studio musician on assorted albums. Lee Hayes made one record for Vanguard as a member of the Baby Sitters.

That leaves Pete Seeger. It would take a magazine in itself to describe his countless records on numerous labels (strangely, none on Vanguard); the most accessible are those on Columbia and Folkways, with a few on Stinton. Many of these recordings are of live performances, and the best are on Columbia (some of those appear in more complete renditions on CD). Probably the most famous Seeger concert recording is his solo concert at—you guessed it—Carnegie Hall, entitled *We Shall Overcome*.

Erik Darling took over Seeger's position in the Weavers when Pete departed. Some believed that Seeger left the group in order to save the other member's careers, as it had become fashionable to persecute Seeger for his political beliefs. While it didn't save the Weavers, it didn't hurt Seeger's career either; he continued to perform and be political as ever. You may dislike him for his view of the world, but no one can fault him for the conviction he felt, or how he used music to convey those beliefs to the world.



On the Vanguard cover of *The Weavers On Tour* (this was the companion to the first *Weavers at Carnegie Hall* album circa 1955) is the definitive quotation to identify the Weavers and their music. It's by Carl Sandburg: "The Weavers are out of the grass roots of America. I salute them for their great work in authentic renditions of ballads, folk songs, ditties, nice antiques of word and melody. When I hear America singing, the Weavers are there." A deserved bow to the Weavers for their contribution to the American spirit, to good old HP for keeping the interest in this recording alive but ever so elusive, and to Chad Kassem for making this excellent recording finally available to us all to experience.

### Selected Discography

As with the recordings of Mercury and RCA, the records of the Weavers and their members were issued in a very short span of time. With exception of one by Erik Darling on Electra Records (and lost in the bowels of my collection), all recordings were done for Vanguard Records. Pete Seeger had contract commitments with other companies, and the majority of his recordings are on Columbia, Folkways and other labels, but none on Vanguard. Note that the majority of these records were issued in Mono only, but hall/ambient information is excellent. Being folk recordings, care was taken to record instruments with their characteristic attack and tone.

### The Weavers

*The Weavers at Carnegie Hall* (1955 Concert). Vanguard VRS 9010 (M)  
*The Weavers on Tour* (1955 Concert). Vanguard VRS 9013 (M)  
 These two records were Vanguard's first for the Weavers and capture the original group at their emotional peak.

2 Straightjackets, to the uninitiated.

The records contain the group's most popular selections, and while these Mono recordings don't come close to the Analogue Productions issue of the '63 reunion concert, they are a must—both for the performance as well as for understanding the emotional connection a performing group can have with an audience. These records were among the first offered of live concerts, and that added to their appeal to the public.

#### *The Weavers at Home.*

Vanguard VRS 9024 (M) VSD 2030 (S)  
*Travelling on with the Weavers.*  
 Vanguard VRS 9043 (M) VSD 2030 (S)  
 Their first two stereo issues and studio recordings. No audience and it shows, as the emotional lift isn't there. Performance more refined, and no audience/hall noise to distract the listener.

#### *The Weavers at Carnegie Hall Vol. 2.*

Vanguard VRS 9075 (M)  
 The first full recording with Erik Darling replacing Pete Seeger in the group, at once altering the group's sound and politics. Instrumental balance and presentation change greatly as Darling's playing dominates the group's sound.

#### *Reunion at Carnegie Hall 1963.*

Vanguard VSD 2150 (S)  
 A great record if you can find it in stereo (just about impossible). However, with the release of the Analogue Productions re-mastering, the search has ended; the original has been bettered.

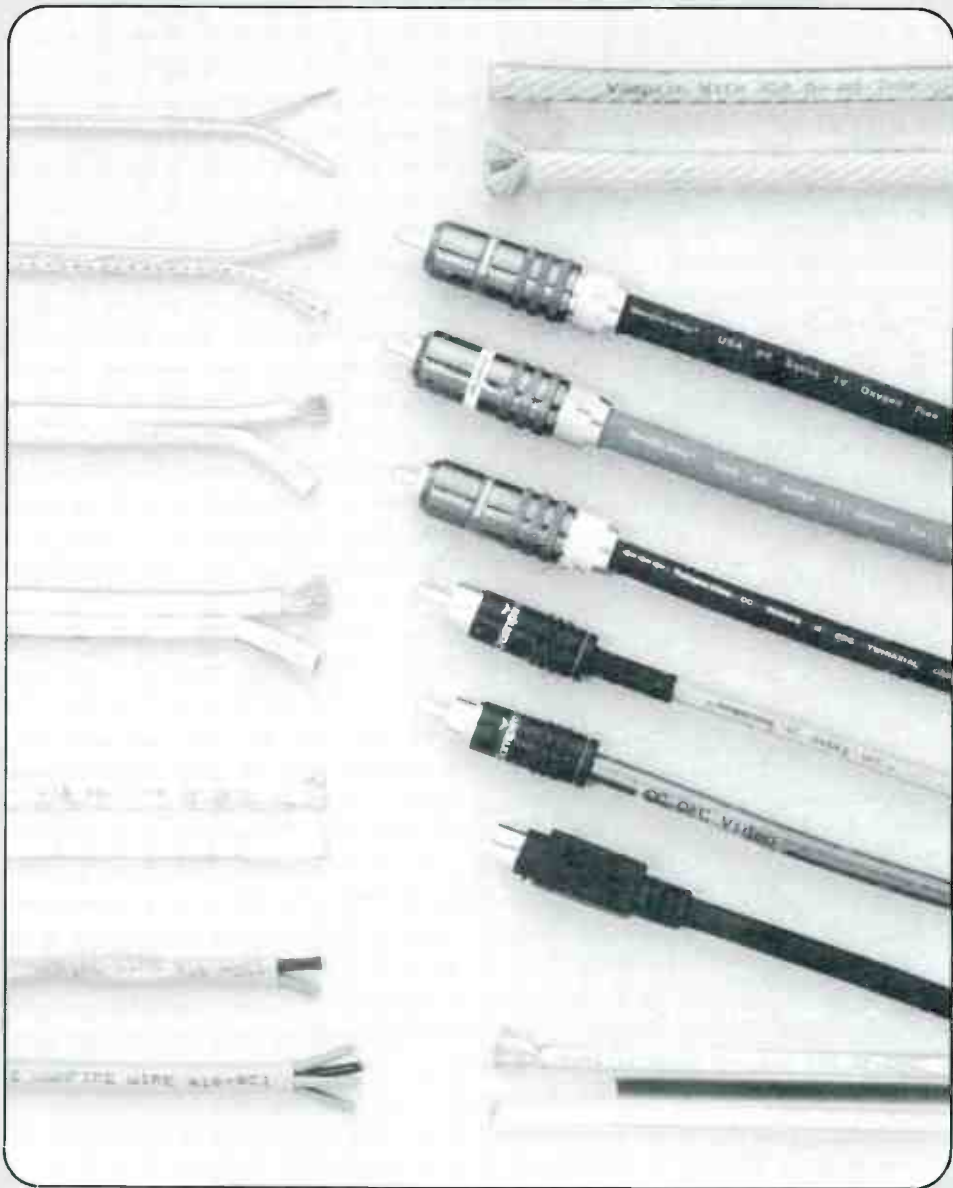
#### *Reunion at Carnegie Hall 1963 Vol. 2.*

Vanguard VSD 79161 (S)  
 More of the above, and strangely not the equal in sound. Probably the tapes were messed up and/or the cuts not as good.

### Ronnie Gilbert

*Come and Go with Me...Ronnie Gilbert.*  
 Vanguard VRS 9052 (M)

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*Alone with Ronnie Gilbert.*

Mercury Records SR 60917 (S)  
Just found this one! Done in the popular Mercury division, and it's amazing how a company that did such great things on their classical label could not do the same with popular. A middle of the road presentation of songs by Hellerman, Dylan, Phil Oaks, and even Richard Rodgers! For Ronnie fans only.

### Erik Darling

*True Religion.* Vanguard VRS 9099 (M)  
*Train Time.* Vanguard VRS/VSD 9131  
Darling's first solo recordings, and really his best work. Great performance on banjo, guitar, and twelve string guitar. Darling's unique high pitched voice a pleasant compliment to his playing.

*Walk Right In, the Rooftop Singers.*  
Vanguard VRS 79123 (M/S)  
*Good Time!, the Rooftop Singers.*  
Vanguard VRS/VSD 79134

Two very listenable recordings by Darling and his group. Nice sound and typical of what Vanguard was trying to do to expand folk recordings beyond the folk crowd.

### Lee Hayes

*The Baby Sitters.*  
Vanguard VRS 90042 (M)  
Hayes only recording outside the Weavers. Fun for children at the time, and noted for the debut of then folk singer now actor Alan Arkin.

### Pete Seeger

What can I tell you, these records are still locked up in Mom's house and I

lost the key. [David, next time try, "My dog ate 'em." We'll expect a full report by the end of the semester. *Ed.*] There are numerous recordings of Seeger and you can't go wrong with them for the music of America, both mainstream and political. He has done all the concerts, sung with all the great folk people, gave voice to political songs more than any other folk performer, and has been a strong environmentalist for decades. His better records are on Columbia, Folkways and Stinton. You will find him on numerous records throughout the folk oeuvre, appearing with other performers from Joan Baez to Arlo Guthrie. If you can, ignore the politics [I don't think Pete Seeger would want listeners to ignore his politics. We need not apologize for liberalism and environmentalism, particularly during the 50's and 60's. *Ed.*] and appreciate his humanity.

## Spring Recipe\*

### LIVING PRESENCE PUDDING

1 stick butter  
1 cup firmly packed dark brown sugar  
1/3 of 28 ounce can tomato puree (plain)  
1/4 cup water  
2 cups cubed—no crust—white bread (must be cheap!)

1. Place cubed white bread in 2 quart covered dish.
2. Melt butter and pour over bread.
3. In a saucepan, add water to puree and then add brown sugar. Cook (covered) five minutes at a low simmer.
4. Pour puree mixture over bread cubes. Cover and bake for forty five minutes at 350°.
5. When done, uncover and whisk briskly for a minute.

Note: this is the "original pressing" recipe. For the lighter tasting "second pressing" version, substitute light brown sugar for dark, and butter-blend for straight butter. The resultant pudding is lighter in appearance as well as taste, but the color of each version is a dead ringer for the two different shades of Mercury maroon. Superb as a dressing on fowl of all kinds.

David Nemzer

\* Reprinted courtesy of our sister publication, *The Audiophile Stomach*.



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## Part II: Three More Great Romantic Ballets

Al Simon

### Adolphe Adam, *Giselle*

This ballet is generally recognized as the masterpiece of the French Romantic Theater and has remained in the repertory of virtually every major dance company since its initial performance at the Paris Opera in 1841. Indeed, it is often said that as Hamlet is to the actor, *Giselle* is to the prima ballerina.

This analogy reflects the challenges of both the choreography and the emotional demands placed upon the ballerina. Her acting requirements range from that of an innocent young girl to insanity and death in Act I; then to intensely lyrical and emotional dancing as a ghostly apparition in Act II. Based upon a story by the French poet Heinrich Heine, the ballet relates the story of girls who died before their wedding day and whose love of dancing dooms them never to rest. Their apparitions rise from the grave each midnight, forcing any man encountered to dance with them until they die from exhaustion. Although the musical structure is not as complex as Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* and *Sleeping Beauty*, it nevertheless is a masterpiece of poetic and lyrical writing with the music and storyline perhaps more integrated than any other major ballet.

As with many nineteenth century ballets, the original score for *Giselle* has undergone drastic changes since the initial performance. A significant amount of music has been deleted and contemporary productions generally follow the more abbreviated version choreographed by Marius Pepita for the Mary-

insky Theater, Leningrad, during 1884-1889.

The 1960 recording by Anatole Fistoulari with the London Symphony (Mercury SR2-9011), reissued on Golden Imports (Philips SR1-77003), reflects the Pepita revival and is a relatively fast paced, sharply defined interpretation, much in the Dorati mold. Tempi are exact, climaxes dramatic and exciting. Soundwise, the Philips reissue falls slightly short of the original but both recordings have exceptional clarity and dynamic range, good soundstaging and depth, with your seat as usual next to the conductor.

The 1970 release by Richard Bonyngé with Monte Carlo Opera Orchestra (London CSA 2226) is, in my opinion, a recording of historical importance. Beautifully interpreted with intense lyricism and feeling (Bonyngé has a natural affinity for music of the French Romantic Period) coupled with excellent natural sound, the recording purports to contain all the music Adam wrote for the original production and, indeed, is forty-five minutes longer than the Fistoulari version. Admittedly, some of the additional music is repetition, but other restored sections, upon reflection, appear integral to the storyline.

In 1987, Bonyngé rerecorded the entire music with the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden (London CD417 505 2) with no loss of his magic touch and as far as I can detect, no essential difference in interpretation. Sonically, the CD version falls slightly short of the original, appearing to have been somewhat minimally miked, resulting in occasional loss of instrumental definition and doubling in the lower frequencies.

But this is a performance for the purist and is recommended if you are unable to acquire the 1970 release. For those interested in an abbreviated version, I strongly suggest the beautifully played and well-recorded single disc re-master of the 1962 EMI release by Robert Irving, past Music Director of the New York City Ballet, with the Philharmonia Orchestra (Classics For Pleasure 41-4505-1).

### Leo Delibes, *Coppelia*

This is a fun ballet and like *La Fille Mal Gardée*, should be seen by people who have not been exposed to this dance medium. Based upon a story by E.T.A. Hoffman and choreography by the French master Saint-Leon, the premier in Paris on May 25, 1870, was an immediate success and remains as a repertory staple today. There have been some changes to the choreography, perhaps most notably by Marius Petipa for the Maryinsky Theater production in 1884, but there has been no essential alterations to the Delibes score, so well is the music and storyline integrated.

Briefly, the plot revolves around the lovers Swanhilda and Frantz. He becomes infatuated with *Coppelia*, who in reality, is a mechanical doll constructed by one Dr. Coppelius. Swanhilda, entering the clockmaker's house, discovers the truth and dresses up in *Coppelia's* clothes. Meanwhile, Frantz confesses to Coppelius, his love for Coppelia, who then gives him a sleeping potion and attempts, by magic, to transfer Frantz's "Life Force" to the doll. Swanhilda, seeing the potential humor in the situation, obliges Coppelius by "Coming to Life", entertains with several dances and then seemingly out of control, proceeds to attack and break the other mechanical dolls. However, all ends well as Coppelius is compensated for his loss and Frantz, embarrassed by the situation, marries Swanhilda.

Delibes' score contains a wealth of charming melodies and lively rhythms, all beautifully orchestrated with extensive use of percussion. It is not symphonically structured and any attempt to overdramatize the music simply compromises its lightheartedness, charm and inherent comedy. Both the Dorati recording with the Minneapolis (Mercury SR 2-9005, reissued on Golden Imports SRI2-77004) and Ansermat with L'Orchestre De La Suisse Romande (London LL-1717-18) meet this criteria.

The Dorati interpretation is fast paced and very exciting, but nowhere are the lyrical qualities of the music neglected. The characters spring to life much like the animation achieved by Dorati and Monteux in their recordings of *Petrouchka*. The Mercury sound, as usual, is close up with excellent charity, definition and soundstaging.

The Philip's release also has excellent sound. Ansermat's performance is somewhat more lyrical, but like Dorati, does not fuss over the music and the interpretation is equally animated. The London sound is simply gorgeous, rich and lush, but with instrumental clarity so essential in keeping with the storyline. And here, I am referring to the mono-version; assuming there was a stereo release, it should be even a greater winner.

For the most part, the 1979 reading by David Zinman and the Rotterdam Philharmonic (Philips 6769035) is well interpreted and played, but there are sections where the phasing is too drawn out, others where his tempi seem questionable. Soundwise, the recording is uneven with a bloated mid-bass that, at times, masks the cymbals and triangle. Occasionally, there are passages of ear-shattering exaggerated high frequencies.

The 1986 recording by Richard Bonyngé and National Philharmonic (London CD 414502) is the only version listed in the current Schwann which is

unfortunate, since both the performance and sound disappoint. With tempi that are too slow and fussy in spots and an overly dramatic interpretation throughout, I feel that the charm and comic spirit of the music is emasculated. The London sound is generally grainy and laid-back, the bass lines relatively weak, tympani, at times, barely audible and soundstaging in the vertical plane constricted.

The Jean Mari recording with the Paris Opera Orchestra (EMI Classics For Pleasure CFPD 4712) is above average relative to performance and sound, but does not generate sufficient excitement to this listener. Overall, both the Dorati and the Ansermat performances are the cream of the crop and well worth the effort to acquire.

### Leo Delibes, *Sylvia*

It may seem incongruous to review a ballet which has no full length recording listed in the latest catalog, but omitting this absolutely beautiful music from a review of Ballets of the Romantic Period would, in my opinion, be a major disservice. I also am dictated by the hope that a new complete recording is on the near horizon or that the two deleted versions discussed below may be either reissued or discovered in dark recesses by enterprising audiophiles.

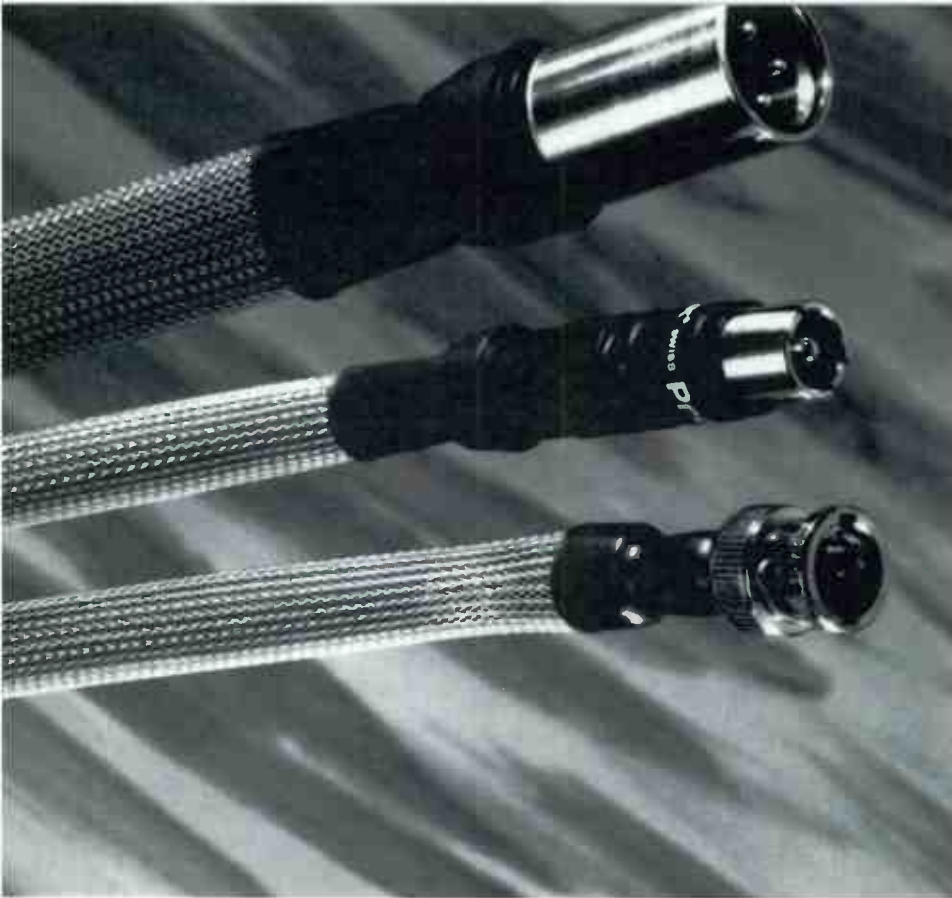
First performed at the Paris Opera in 1876, the ballet was well received, remaining in the repertory until 1894 when the scenery was destroyed by fire. The great impresario Diaghlev restaged the ballet in Russia (1901) with no success, despite choreography by Ivanov, while the version reconstructed by the eminent British Choreographer Sir Frederick Ashton in 1952 also is not widely performed. Whatever the reasons for lack of stage popularity, the

music stands as a masterpiece of rhythmic melodies and intensely dramatic writing.

Beautifully inventive and orchestrated, highly symphonic in nature with Wagnerian overtones, it would not be out of place in the concert hall. Indeed, Tchaikovsky wrote that if he had known the Delibes score, he never would have written *Swan Lake*, I often use such selections as the Pas Des Ethiopiens, the Marche Et Cortege De Bacchus and the nearly six minute final apotheosis as "Sonic Hi-Fi Spectaculars" for demonstration purposes.

The 1958 recording by Anatole Fistoulari and the London Symphony (Mercury SR 9006), reissued on Mercury Golden Imports (Philips SRI 2-77005), is beautifully played and interpreted with sharp, well-defined tempi and forward thrust similar to what one would generally expect from a Dorati performance. The sound of the Philips reissue does not quite match the original Mercury Recording but still has exceptional clarity, excellent dynamics and soundstaging with your seat, as usual, next to the conductor.

*But* —the 1974 recording by Richard Bonyge with the New Philharmonia (London CSA 2236) not only equals the Fistoulari performance, it is one of the most naturally engineered pressings I have encountered. Recorded in Kingsway Hall, London, the strings sound like silk, the brass section glows with richness, the bass drums are naturally thunderous while the cymbals shimmer. Retrieval of hall ambience is spectacular and soundstage height, width and depth exceptional. A true audiophile recording, well worth an exhaustive search for this treasure in my opinion.



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# Early Twentieth Century British Music

Kevin Carter

Although music can stand well on its own merits, absent any historical context, I find that my classical recordings take on a new dimension when listened to in connection with their historical and musicological roots. Although jacket notes (Who reads those?!) can be very instructive, they are limited by the space available for them.

Twentieth century British music has always been well-received in this country and is frequently programmed and recorded by American orchestras. Often, however, the best performances and best sound are to be found on British record labels. Some of these labels specialize largely, if not exclusively, in British music. What follows is a brief overview of British composers of this century and the labels that will give you an introduction to their music.

The path of British music from antiquity to the present day is dotted with periods when scarcely a major work survived. These are punctuated by times during which British music has flowered well beyond its geographical borders. Such a period began after the end of the English civil war (early sixteenth century) and again at the end of Queen Victoria's reign around the turn of the present century. The first cited rise in the stature of English music is attributed to such composers as John Taverner, William Byrd, Orlando Gibbons, Thomas Tallis, John Dowland, and, perhaps the most famous, Henry Purcell. The last generation to take part in this fruitful period included William Boyce and Thomas Arne, in the mid-eighteenth century.

At the same time, a few prominent composers from the Continent had an impact on music in the British Isles. George Handel was the most influential, having resided in London from 1712 until his death in 1759. During this time he composed mostly operas and oratorios, perhaps the most famous of which is *The Messiah*.

Joseph Haydn visited London twice, in 1791-1792 and again in 1794-1795. While there, he composed several works including his last twelve symphonies, as well as arranging British folk-songs for music publishers.

The youngest son of J. S. Bach, Johann Christian, spent the last twenty years of his life, from 1762-1782, in London. J. C. Bach wrote and oversaw the performance of several symphonies and light operas in London, but was never the success that Handel was some years earlier. Although they all played an important role in musical life in Great Britain during their tenure there and the tradition fostered by Handel's oratorios persisted throughout the Victorian period, none of these quintessentially German/Italian composers had any lasting influence on British music in general.

What happened after this? Music historians put the responsibility for the 150 year long artistic hiatus onto the effects of the Industrial and Scientific Revolution. As England gave birth to the Industrial Revolution, she also aborted the musical development of the preceding 250 years.

Prior to Purcell's time, music had been an amateur pursuit that was usually conducted in a domestic setting. However, at the onset of the eighteenth cen-

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ture it had become a more public and professional endeavor. Such undertakings require considerable infrastructure for their realization. They rely on printed music, numerous performers for orchestras, and concert halls. All of these things are provided for by money that is derived from the paying public. It has been said that the England of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century was a nation of shopkeepers. There was little time for the musical arts in the commerce-minded emporia and sweatshops of Dickens' time and therefore, little money to support the arts.

What little music that has been recorded from this interlude is fairly tame, stern stuff, often of religious inspiration. William Bennet, Charles Stanford, Hubert Parry, and Alexander Mackenzie composed under the influence of these social and artistic circumstances.

Bryden Thomson has given us a partial survey of Stanfords *Symphonies and Irish Rhapsodies* with the Ulster Orchestra in fine sound on Chandos. His *Clarinet Concerto* is paired with that of Gerald Finzi on a Hyperion release (A66001).

There is one composer who stands somewhat apart from these Victorian stalwarts. Although he is well-known for his operatic collaborations with W. Gilbert, early in his career Arthur Sullivan composed more serious music. His *Irish Symphony* (EMI ASD2435) was met with enthusiastic acceptance at its premiere and stands on its own today. However, Sullivan seemed to have spent most of his creative currency on the music for the operas. It is safe to say that most, if not all, music composed in Britain during the nineteenth century was eclipsed by that of Wagner, Brahms, Dvorak, Tchaikovsky, Schumann, Verdi, and Schubert.

The present renaissance in English music can arguably be considered to have begun with the performance given by

Hans Richter and the Halle Orchestra of the Elgar Enigma Variations in mid-1899.

Edward Elgar entered the musical scene as a composer with next-to-nothing in the way of formal musical training. Yet he produced music that was free of the insipid sentimentality that so pervaded Victorian compositions. His early pieces were vivid, imaginative works of genius that were straightforward enough for the audiences of the time. Several of his more serious works, *The Dream of Gerontius*, *Falstaff*, *The Apostles*, *The Kingdom*, and the *Second Symphony* were not appreciated fully in their time, although they reveal a deeper dimension to Elgar's genius.

The most complete traversal of Elgar's works is available on EMI conducted by Sir Adrian Boult. The sound on these recordings is of mostly good to excellent quality and the performances are, as a whole, without match. Many have been rereleased on CD. Performances of the symphonies conducted by Boult are also available on Lyrita (SRCS.131) in excellent sound. Bryden Thomson has recently completed a new recorded account of the two symphonies on the Chandos label. They are excellent performances, as well, with Chandos' usual reverberant, expansive sound.

At the same time as Elgar, another largely self-taught English composer was receiving first performances of his works in England. Frederick Delius spent most of his adult life in France, although he lived for a short time as a young man in America. He was deeply influenced while there by Negro spiritual singing. Indeed, Delius' music found its most ardent champion in the conductor Sir Thomas Beecham after the latter heard a performance of *The Florida Suite* (SG7193), which is Delius' impression of former slaves singing on an orange plantation in Florida.

Delius, like Elgar, was skilled at orchestration and wrote fresh, clear music that contrasted sharply with the Victorian parlor music of the time. He wrote four operas of any consequence, a series of short orchestral pieces, and a number of choral pieces.

His orchestral compositions are the most frequently performed and convey tranquil, slightly sad impressions of Nature. Beechams performances of these pieces (EMI ASD357 or Capital SG-7116, SG-7193) are really exquisite, and the sound is eminently listenable. A collection of more recent renditions by Sir Neville Marriner are obtainable on Argo (ZRG 875). The sound here is not up to the standards of the early Argos, but is still worth the listen for the fine performances.

Several British composers of the early twentieth century became involved in a folksong movement that began in 1903. Much of the most popular British music from this period is based on or derives sections from folksong melodies that were collected throughout the English countryside by Percy Grainger (really an Australian), Ralph Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst, and others. Most of this quality had left music composed in Britain after 1920, but it had a profound influence on the early works of Holst, Vaughan Williams, and George Butterworth.

Holst rarely incorporated folk melodies into his compositions, but rather drew on their purity and simplicity for inspiration. For ten years, beginning in 1905, the religious tradition expressed in Hindu literature influenced his music. Four choral hymns composed to texts from the Rig- Veda are given a haunting performance by the composers daughter, Imogen Holst, and the English Chamber Orchestra on Argo (DNF6). The recording is an outstanding example of early Argo, with precise imaging and loads of depth.

I currently am without a copy of any recording of the most famous of Holsts works, the *Planets*. Because it is a fine work, it has been recorded at least 30 times in the LP era. My favorite, before I tired irreversibly of hearing it, was the Boult performance with the New Philharmonia Orchestra from 1967 (EMI ESD7135). Although the sound is only average EMI, the performance is very atmospheric.

Several of Holsts smaller works for orchestra have been collected on four Lyrita records. Two Lyrita discs (SRCS.37 and SRCS.50) contain performances of the *Fugal Overture* and the *Japanese Suite* by Sir Adrian Boult and the London Symphony Orchestra. A number of shorter pieces are performed by Imogen Holst and the ECO on Lyrita (SRCS.34 and SRCS.44). All are worth the search for the music and the very detailed sound.

Vaughan Williams is best known in this country for his nine symphonies (primarily the London and the Pastoral) and his orchestral rhapsodies and fantasias. He composed for over six decades and left behind a wealth of music to attest to his form of intuitive genius.

The symphonies range in style from the early ones, influenced by the folksong movement, to the later ones, written in a more modern idiom. Vaughan Williams shorter orchestral pieces are a varied lot. Many derive directly from the folksongs collected by him and others (*Norfolk Rhapsody*, *Fantasia on Christmas Carols*, *Fantasia on Greensleeves*, *English Folksong Suite*), while the others sprang forth from various sources of inspiration (*Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, *The Lark Ascending*, *Serenade to Music*, *Fantasia on the Old 104th Psalm*). In addition, Vaughan Williams wrote a variety of other works, most worth searching out.

Only Sir Adrian Boult, Sir John Barbirolli, and Andre Previn have recorded

the complete set of Vaughan Williams symphonies. Bryden Thomson is currently engaged in a project with Chandos to do so, as well. *The Sea Symphony* is a grand choral piece of uneven construction. Even so, it merits hearing for the sheer effort of will that must have been required to seam it together.

*The London Symphony* is the result of a suggestion by Vaughan Williams' friend Butterworth that he write a symphonic poem about London. That it evolved into a symphony is apparent from a certain lack of cohesiveness. It does not lack for momentum and holds the listeners attention through the performance. Sir John Barbirolli's account of the London (Vanguard SRV-134SD) stands above the rest in its ability to create the atmosphere of London in the music. Sonically, the competent performance by Vernon Handley (Classics for Pleasure CFP 40286 or Musical Heritage Society MHS 4659) is superior.

No version of the *Pastoral Symphony*, or indeed of the 4th, surpasses the interpretation offered by Sir Adrian Boult (EMI ASD2393). In fact, it was Boult who premiered the Pastoral, the 4th, and the 6th. The Pastoral is the first VW symphony that hangs together well as a unified piece. It is a dark, but beautiful symphony.

The 4th Symphony was written after a pause of ten years. It is a passionate, violent work that seems to reflect the rise in political passion in Europe at the time (1931). The release of pent-up energy is palpable in Boult's performance (EMI ASD2375). That the composer wrote another five symphonies after the age of seventy is remarkable, but these are a subject for another time.

Among the rhapsodies and fantasias, *Thomas Tallis* and *Lark Ascending* stand out. They both represent the brilliance of VW at his best. *Thomas Tallis* is an early work that is perhaps one of VW's most performed works. Many record-

ings exist, but none have the appeal of Sir Neville Marriners reading (Argo ZRG 696). The mystery and age of the original church music is kept intact, but the tempo is maintained such that one is propelled into a state of dreamy repose. If only the recording were up to the standard of the performance (It's not so bad.).

*The Lark Ascending* is a poem by George Meredith, of which VW's music is an interpretation. It is a lovely work and is lovingly performed by the same forces on Argo (ZRG 696) with Iona Brown as the violin soloist. This record is a must-have in any VW collection.

Several lesser-known British composers of the era were unaffected by the discovery of folk music. Arnold Bax and John Ireland wrote music in a somewhat more modern style than their elder colleagues. Bax was relatively prolific, with four tone poems, seven symphonies, and several miscellaneous orchestral pieces to his credit. His early works, including the tone poems, were effused with Celtic influences. Mystery and dream fantasy elements abound in his romantic compositions. Anything but superficial, Bax's music requires an investment to realize the beauty that exists beneath the surface.

The symphonic tone poems, *In the Faery Hills*, *The Garden of Fand*, *November Woods*, and *Tintagel*, are the most accessible. They have been recorded by Boult (Lyrita SRCS.37 and SRCS.62) and by Bryden Thomson (Chandos ABRD 1133, ABRD 1091, ABRD 1066). Both are worth a listen or two, with the nod for clarity going to Lyrita, although the live acoustic in Ulster Hall lends enjoyment, as well.

A full traversal of the seven symphonies has been recorded by the same two labels. The Bax symphonies are considered by some to be as significant as those by Sibelius. They cover the full

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range of emotions with surprising intensity. Both sets are recommended.

John Ireland was trained at an early age as a pianist, but turned to composing and studied with Stanford, as did Vaughan Williams earlier. Ireland wrote many shorter orchestral pieces, piano works, and several volumes of songs. Many of these were captured for our enjoyment on a series of Lyrita recordings (SRCS31/32/36/45/59/64/66/87/88/89/98/118, whew!) and some can be had as Musical Heritage Society reissues, as well.

Several of them are very fine compositions, but my favorite Ireland work, the Piano Concerto in E flat, can be found on Lyrita (SRCS.36) and Unicorn-Kanchana (DKP 9056), This is a delightful piece. It was written for a young pianist with whom Ireland was smitten. It is said to be the embodiment of what she meant to him. Upon hearing this music it becomes obvious how much she must have meant!

All of this musical activity spanned barely thirty years, beginning in 1899. The meaning of the expression, the English Musical Renaissance, should be clear now. Much world-class British music has been written in the past sixty years, as well. I hope to review some of this in the future.

**Frederick Fennell**  
**Eastman Wind Ensemble**  
**Percy Aldridge Grainger,**  
*Lincolnshire Posy*; **Hill song No. 2;**  
**Vincent Persichetti,** *Symphony for Band*;  
**Aram Ilyich Khachaturian,** *Armenian Dances*;  
**Walter Hartley-Concerto for 23 Winds;**  
**Bernard Rogers,** *Three Japanese Dances*  
**Mercury Living Presence**  
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**H**ow many of us can recall the days when we were handed a clarinet, trumpet or French horn and found ourselves performing in the high school concert band? Well, this magnificent new Mercury Living Presence release easily conjures up all of those faded images albeit on the somewhat more accomplished level of the Eastman Wind Ensemble with Frederick Fennell conductor. The sonic qualities that have spread the Mercury name far and wide—tremendous dynamic range, presence and clarity—are in abundance on this wonderful compact disc reissue. Originally issued in 1958 as *Winds in Hi-Fi*, (SR-90173) this disc opens with the *Lincolnshire Posy* by Percy Grainger (1882-1961). Scored in 1937 the *Lincolnshire Posy* is a collection of folk-songs heard by Grainger during his travels with the strong color and at times the rich lustiness of English folk singing.

For those wishing to experience the greatness of the Mercury/Eastman sound right away, let me direct you straight into the fourth movement of the suite, "The Brisk Young Sailor" (returned to wed his True Love). Notice the weaving of the clarinet and bass clarinet lines against the slower moving folk melody. The delineation of the parts against the rich woodiness of the clarinet timbre make for some of the finest moments in recorded sound. Another such special moment occurs in the work's finale, "The Lost Lady Found" (Dance Song). What begins as a simple six-note motive gradually builds to a tremendous fortissimo climax. The resulting "tidal-wave" of sound at the movement's conclusion (with chimes, bells et al) will leave the listener breathless.

Following Grainger's "Hill Song NO. 2" we come to the *Symphony #6* or *Symphony for Band* by Vincent Persichetti (1915-1987). Persichetti, who for many years taught composition at the Juilliard School of Music, composed the *Symphony for Band* on commission from the

Washington University Chamber Band. Originally issued in 1959 as *Diverse Winds*, (SR-90221) the sonic quality is once again up to Mercury's high standards. Notice in the work's first movement, in which much of the thematic material of the symphony is presented, the clarity of the exchanges between brass, timpani and percussion. The simplicity of the third movement "Allegretto" demonstrates the beauty of Persichetti's block-like wind scoring.

After the *Armenian Dances* by Aram Ilyich Khachaturian (1903-1978) and the Concerto for 23 winds" of Walter Hartley (1927- ) the disc concludes with the dynamic "Three Japanese Dances" by Bernard Rogers (1893-1968). the work's final movement "Dance with Swords" has been a calling card to audiophiles for many years now. The highly aggressive wind and percussion writing is relentless throughout this movement and combined with the outstanding Mercury sonics the overall impression of the movement is one of two "samurai" engaged in a battle to the death.

In closing, one can say that the elements of outstanding repertoire combined with legendary sonics have made this a recording that will continue to endure in the years to come. And yet, there is one element we take for granted in listening to the major orchestras of the world record and re-record the standard repertoire: youth. The enthusiasm and vitality brought to these performances lifted the splendid compositions off the printed page and, with the genius of Mercury Living Presence sound, brought the spirit of the occasion right into the listening room. In summation, a splendid musical event, and an unqualified recommendation.

George Mardinly

**Joseph Canteloube: *Songs of the Auvergne***

**Natania Davrath, soprano**  
**Pierre de la Roche, Conductor**  
**Analogue Productions, APC 002,**  
**Serial #0606**  
**Distributed by Acoustic Sounds**  
**Box 2043, Salinas, KS 67402-2043**

Analogue Productions has done a wonderful job with this "all tube" remastering of the 1972 Vanguard classic *Songs of the Auvergne* arranged by Joseph Canteloube (1879-1957). Sung by the highly lyrical soprano Netania Davrath, these fifteen simple peasant songs speak of love in all of its various guises. In content, the songs are in many ways quite unique. Rather than simply using the vocal line to explain the emotional content of the text, Canteloube contrasts the vocal part with several cadenza-like passages in the flute, oboe and clarinet parts. Oftentimes the woodwind writing is used to express the character or flavor of a song in a manner not hinted at by the vocal line. At other times the woodwinds acts as an interlude leading the listener from one song to the next.

As much as I enjoy the entire performance, I must say that this recording truly comes to life in the fourth song, "Chut, Chut". There is a moment in the middle section of this song where the key and the musical meter change quite abruptly. The rising vocal line in contrast with the descending passage in the celesta (a bell-like keyboard instrument) make for a moment that is indeed magical. The sound exhibits a tremendous sense of air and buoyancy.

Another such special moment occurs in the eleventh song, "Lou Boussu" (The Hunchback). One may well purchase this recording solely on the merits of this lovely, humorous song. The lyrics tell us of the beautiful, young Jeanneton resting under a shady apple tree. Sud-



denly, along comes a hunchback hoping to win over the heart of the young maiden only to find his love goes unrequited. Everything seems to come together in the lovely song. The humorous text, the "coy" interpretation by Ms. Davrath, the magnificent sonics and splendid music making provides moments that overwhelm the listener.

The final song on this recording, "Brezairola" (Lullaby) is a beautiful evening song. Very much in the tradition of the late romantics (G. Mahler and R. Strauss) this is a song which speaks of "scattered light" and "long shadows". This *Berceuse* literally melts away as Ms. Davrath sings of the sleep that brings rest to a young child. At the very end of this piece, the listener is left with a musical question mark as the soprano

sings: "Here it is, here it comes, and the child is falling asleep. Ah!".

Need I say in closing that this wonderful recording should find its way onto the "must find" list of every serious music lover. Chad Kassem and his associates at Acoustic Sounds have reason to be proud about this important production. Plaudits must also go to the folks at RTI for the fine pressing quality of the vinyl and finally to Doug Sax for his remastering of the original Vanguard material. From what I understand, Acoustic Sounds is making *Songs of the Auvergne* available on only a limited basis. With that in mind do obtain this recording before it is too late.

George Mardinly



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## Part II: Original Jazz Classics

### The Last Analogue

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Russell Novak

I'm sad to report that unless you pick up the phone this minute, the last all-analogue jazz recordings will slip through your grasp. As of this date, 2/18/92, Fantasy Records reports to me that they cannot get any further records pressed and that, when current stocks are deleted, titles will be dropped from the catalog in the vinyl format.

In our first issue I had begun a series looking at the Original Jazz Classics re-issue series from Fantasy Records which presented some of the greatest jazz classics ever recorded in an all analogue format. I had hoped to take a leisurely stroll through the original labels which make up this series<sup>1</sup>, but now urgency must take the place of analysis.

I'll attempt to give a brief run-through of the best of the remaining 400 or so issues (who's he kidding?) and give a brief recap of the recommended Riversides covered in the first installment.

If you do what I say you will be warm and well fed all your life. When you die you will be inducted into Vinyl Heaven, even if you have been sinning with CDs, and your angel friends will play their harps for eternity. If you *fail* to do what I say, you will be cold and hungry all your life and will be consigned to spend eternity in Bronx tenement basements with the cockroaches and your music will be reduced to 1s

and 0s which will forever clatter irritatingly in your ear.

First, phone or fax Muse Records, which has been selling OJCs for \$5 a piece for the past 2 months and attempt to order the titles recommended here<sup>2</sup>. Second, phone the Fantasy Records order dept. Get a catalog and attempt to order any titles (at list price - \$6.98) not available through Muse<sup>3</sup>. Third, inspect your catalog when it arrives and order everything by anyone you even think you've heard of. Fourth, scour your record stores for albums with sexy covers.

The OJC series has excellent surfaces and the recordings are tastefully miked<sup>4</sup>. How can you loose? We'll never see them again.

### THE PRESTIGE OJCs

**Kenney Burrell & Donald Byrd, *All Day Long* (OJC 456), *All Night Long* (OJC 427)**

Prestige Records and Blue Note Records recorded many of the same artists, nearly concurrently, during the '50s and through the '60s. If an artist had a contract with either company he would nominally be called the "leader", the date would be registered under his name and he would draw in his artistic friends from the other label.

In the jam session format Prestige specialized in, "leadership" was only marginally important. Each major

1 Contemporary, Fantasy, Milestone, Pablo, Prestige, Riverside and others

2 Muse Records, 160 West 71 St., New York, NY 10023; phone: 1 800 635-8180 fax: 1 212 873-2020

3 Fantasy Records, 10th and Parker Berkeley, CA 94710; phone 1 510 549-2500

4 Sid Marks, of shaded dog and Living Presence fame, thinks that OJC 231, Thelonious Alone in San Francisco (Thelonious Mone) is the best sounding piano jazz recording he's heard.

participant got to solo at equal length. Since numbers were rarely arranged by the leader and had little rehearsal, each member could affect the final mood and structure. This format lead one jazz writer to observe that Prestige was like Blue Note without the rehearsal. The two labels had other similarities. Their artists played "post bop" and blues based jazz and many of the sessions were recorded in the same studio by the same engineer—Rudy Van Gelder.

A jam session has obvious assets and vulnerabilities. Spontaneity of artistic creation always captures the listener and lifts the music to new levels if the musicians are unrestrained by written arrangements. But if it isn't happening, the musicians can lapse into playing clichés.

These Kenney Burrell (guitar)/Donald Byrd (trumpet) dates fall into the former category.

### **Ray Bryant, *Alone With The Blues* (OJC 249)**

Let's see. How can I describe Ray Bryant's style on the piano? Well, he is a modern pianist capable of playing in any idiom, but his touch on the keys is blue and lonely. He sustains his notes longer than more percussive pianists like Monk, so his harmonic textures are denser although he is playing simpler lines. His attack on the keys is careful, but confident.

Traces of Earl "Fatha" Hines and the stride pianists are instantly heard in Bryant's playing. You get a feeling of place, continuity, and a psychic familiarity with the material. You're listening to our cultural history.

And there couldn't be any stronger setting for Bryant than a solo piano album of the blues. The solos on "My Blues" and "Rockin' Chair" summarize all

blue piano played anywhere with enough inventive flourishes on the keyboard to keep it constantly fresh. I give the album my highest recommendation, but don't expect razzle-dazzle. Expect an emotional caress. Listen with your fist around a whiskey.

### **Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis With Shirley Scott, *Cookbook, Vol. I & II*, (OJC 652, 653)**

In hundreds of small jazz bars across the country in the '50s and '60s, the organ took the place of a larger ensemble, initially for space and economic reasons, later because it had become a style of jazz unto itself. The organ was frequently fronted with a tenor sax for a 'fire in the ashes' kind of sound. Cold outside. Late Saturday afternoon in February. A clear spot rubbed out on the bar room window. Schlitz beer.

Shirley Scott became one of the earliest exponents of the jazz organ. Her playing is tasteful, mellow, soulful. The sudden attack and repetitive figures designed to build tension, which were developed years later by Jimmy Smith, Richard "Groove" Holmes and others, are not present here.

Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis (tenor) is a wild, gutbucket soloist who spent many years with Count Basie. He also recorded many tenor chases (cutting sessions, soloing contests) with Johnny Griffin. At his best he sounds loose jointed, as though he is losing control of his solo and he generates a lot of excitement. Davis and Scott make a great pair and are joined by a solid rhythm section and Jerome Richardson on flute.

Listen especially to "The Rev" on volume 2. Davis does an excellent imitation of a preacher: invoking, growing, pleading, and finally preaching solid blues based jazz.

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**Miles Davis, *Cookin'* (OJC 128), *Relaxin'* (OJC 190), *Workin'* (OJC 296), *Steamin'* (OJC 391)  
**John Coltrane, *Lush Life* (OJC 131), *Coltrane* (OJC 020), *Standard  
 ard Coltrane* (OJC 246), *Black  
 Pearls* (OJC 352)****

Here are two titans of modern jazz who reached full musical maturity on Prestige Records. After Miles cut his teeth with Bird, and after he collaborated on *The Birth Of The Cool*, and after he spent a couple of years fighting an addiction problem, he landed at Prestige. It was there that he first recorded with his classic quintet (John Coltrane, tenor; Red Garland, piano; Paul Chambers, bass; Philly Joe Jones, drums). All Miles' side men recorded as leaders subsequent to the success of the quintet - such was the influence of this unit in jazz history.

John Coltrane played on dozens of Prestige jam sessions and joined Miles after Miles had recorded about half a dozen albums for Prestige and the two men perfected their craft together and reached full technical maturity in the mid to late '50s.

That is not to say that they reached full *artistic* maturity at Prestige because, separately and together, they developed several innovative styles of jazz after they left. Coltrane developed the avant garde and Miles ended his useful career with fusion.

Conservative jazz lovers need not worry about purchasing these recordings. The music contained herein is fully accessible to the average person and it's great music. I know one old fogey who is sampling Coltrane for the first time (after being frightened off by his Atlantic recordings) to his great delight. Each of the albums listed above contain classic recordings including a healthy number of standards.

All the Miles Davis recordings are in mono as are some of the Coltrane cuts (he recorded these in the 1957-1958 break between mono and stereo), but they are all at least good hi-fi, naturally miked. The Coltrane rhythm section was the same as Miles', except for Art Taylor on drums for most recordings.

**Eric Dolphy, *Outward Bound* (OJC 022), *Out There* (OJC 023), *At The Five SPOT Vol I & II* (OJC 133, 247), *Eric Dolphy & Booker Little Memorial Album* (OJC 353)**

Eric Dolphy was a highly expressive artist who had one foot in the avant garde lead by Coltrane, but remained a lyrical, full bodied soloist who developed long flowing lines in his improvisations. He liked to play with pitch and find notes not commonly associated with a given key. Dolphy played alto sax, flute, b flat, and bass clarinet. He found new sounds and used tremolo and glissando in combination with a textured tone on his instruments to create constantly changing layers of sound.

Listening to Dolphy is like slowly painting a picture of fragile elements. Listen to "Fire Waltz" on OJC 133. With constantly varied colors, splashes of paint are thrown on the canvas, while a pulsing rhythm section drives in 3/4 time. We also get the services of Mal Waldron (piano) and another under appreciated jazz musician, Booker Little (Trumpet).

The last three albums listed were recorded live by Rudy Van Gelder on the same date (1961) and reissued as *The Great Concert Of Eric Dolphy* (Prestige P34002) in a boxed set. The sound is good, but lacking in air; instruments are not too forwardly miked (for a jazz album). If you haven't heard Dolphy before, be sure to pick these up.

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### Don Ellis, *New Ideas*, (OJC 431)

This album has an unusual front line of Ellis on trumpet with Al Francis (vibraphone), and Jaki Byard (piano), causing the abstract compositions to have a otherworldly quality to them. "Despair To Hope" was inspired by a John Cage concert in which *indeterminacy*, the random appearance of sounds, provoked the feel and content of the solos. Ellis used the framework of emotions described in the title to move the composition forward. "Imitation" is a four part canon without chord progressions. The bass introduces tonal centers around which collective improvisation takes place.

Such experimentation was to become the hallmark of Don Ellis' career. Juggling time signatures, pitch, and composition structure propelled Ellis' groups to constant invention and be among the most successfully experimental of their day. Ellis went on to lead a big band and sold a lot of records on Columbia. This album provides a good bridge between mainstream and experimental music.

### Gigi Gryce, *The Rat Race Blues*, (OJC 081)

Gigi Gryce studied classical composition at Boston Conservatory, played flute, alto, clarinet, and piano, gigged with Tadd Dameron, Max Roach, Howard McGhee, and Horace Silver. I believe his classical composition helped him put more direction in his recordings and in the tunes he arranged and composed. This album, while essentially a bop quintet date, maintains interest more easily than the run-of-the-mill jam session.

Gryce had settled on alto sax at this point in his career and he had the services of Richard Williams, an under-re-

corded and excellent trumpet player. The session cooks. "Rat Race Blues" is played very fast and has excellent soloing on all fronts. "Boxer's Blues" has a plaintive feel with Gryce coaxing the melody, drawing out the phrases for maximum dramatic impact.

Every tune on this album is excellent, as are the sonics. Unlike most multi-miked recordings, this one seems to place more air between the instruments and the cymbals are not too forwardly placed. Buy this one.

### Coleman Hawkins, *Soul, At Ease With Coleman Hawkins, Hawk Eyes*, (OJC 096, 181, 294)

Coleman Hawkins "invented" the tenor saxophone in the early '30s - that is, he was the first major influence on the instrument. He also turned out to be the longest lasting and adaptable as he moved through the swing, bop, and modern eras.

Hawkins maintained a consistently high standard on his solos, rarely displaying indifference to his work. "Hawk" had a big textured tone and an extroverted style. He could be tender when he played ballads, but it was not a wispy, ethereal tenderness; more like the warm comfort of someone older, wiser, stronger than yourself.

Why pick these particular albums? I like ballads and the first two feature them. *Hawk Eyes* is more representative of his uptempo work. All of "Hawk" is good and there are 13 in the OJC catalog.

### Richard "Groove" Holmes, *Soul Message*, (OJC 329)

This album is just plain fun. Holmes played jazz organ and recorded many

albums in the mid '60s when soul based jazz was having a renaissance. The album features a hit rendition of "Misty" which made the charts in an abbreviated form.

Those not familiar with how a jazz organ is played will find this interesting. Unlike this instrument in classical music, jazz organ has a sudden, powerful attack. Over a groovin' guitar and drum rhythm section, notes are thrust at the listener in a percussive manner and little figures are repeated in quick sequence to build tension. The rhythm section doesn't let up. Your head nodding and foot tapping won't stop either and the organ fills the room.

**Lee Konitz, *Subconscious-Lee*,  
(OJC 186)**

Recorded in 1949 & 1950, this is not hi-fi. "Users of wide range equipment are advised to adjust their controls to the RIAA curve."

These are classic recordings, so you won't want to skip over them. Konitz is playing with legendary pianist Lennie Tristano on four cuts with Billy Bauer, guitar; and Shelly Manne, drums. On additional cuts from this album, Warne Marsh is added on tenor and Sal Mosca replaces Tristano.

This was the first recording session for Prestige and is one of the earliest examples of what became Cool Jazz. Tristano formed his own school of jazz with these players. They were a closely knit group, almost a cult, with the same outlook on the music scene. At one point both Tristano and Konitz shared the same analyst, Tristano's brother. Tristano and his disciples single-mindedly pushed the frontiers of jazz, experimenting with contrapuntal playing while improvising, each musician playing in different keys on some tunes.

Konitz played alto and had a light, fast tonal quality which matched the breezy quality of the uptempo numbers. This is introverted music in the sense that, while avant garde for the time, a small area of musical structure is mapped out and then thoroughly explored. The music flows in long lines with little emphasis on dynamics or rhythm. The drums and bass are not allowed outside certain boundaries and the listener is forced to focus on the melodic inventions. These and the 1949 Capitol recordings, are the ones which made them famous.

**King Pleasure, *Annie Ross, King Pleasure Sings/Annie Ross Sings*,  
(OJC 217)**

King Pleasure (Clarence Beeks) was the pioneer of a unique style of jazz singing in which lyrics were developed for, and emulated, jazz solos. "Red Top", a reference to heroin addiction, is based on a Gene Ammons solo in the same tune. "Sometimes I'm Happy" is based on a Lester Young solo, and so forth.

The sound is bop oriented, the lyrics coming fast, loose, and hip. "Jumpin' With Symphony Sid" is here and evokes a clear picture of the jazz scene in the early '50s. The style was called "vocalese" and was picked up later by the new group, Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross.

Annie Ross is here for her first recorded excursion in the style doing "Twisted": "My analyst told me/That I was right out of my head/The way he described it/he said I'd be better dead, than live/I didn't listen to his jive/I knew all along/He was all wrong." Annie has much the same carefree delivery as King Pleasure and has an impeccable sense of timing, which is something this music demands.



I need to also recommend *GOLDEN DAYS*, (OJC 1772) which contains King Pleasure's 1960 re-working of his most famous tune, "Moody's Mood For Love (I'm In The Mood For Love)", which is based on the James Moody solo. The 1000 series of OJCs are digitally remastered, sell for a dollar more, and are pressed on high quality vinyl. They feature some of the rarer items in the Prestige catalog. I guess a digital re-master is better than nothing.

### THE CONTEMPORARY OJCS

Contemporary Records, a west coast label, had the highest quality sound of any of the labels in the OJC series. The sound is warm and well balanced, each instrument appears intimate in the room, but are not too closely miked. The surfaces are immaculate on the originals and on the OJCs.

The label has been accused of being a "white" label, that is, recording with white musicians for white tastes. While the label did have more white jazz artists than the east coast labels, that is due more to choice of musical style and geography. The label recorded primarily, but not exclusively, the West Coast Sound, aka the Cool School. Based in Los Angeles, the West Coast musicians could get work in the movie industry and not have to depend on clubs and recording dates for income. That was a big advantage and allowed for the development of the unique style. But first, let's look at some of Contemporary's Afro-American artists.

#### **Sonny Rollins, *Way Out West*, (OJC 337)**

This is a March 1957 date, one of the earliest stereo recordings. The sound has made it one of the recent darlings of the high-end set and while it is artistically excellent, it is not one of "Newk's" best. I need to refer the reader to *Sonny Rol-*

*lins Vol. I & II, A Night At The Village Vanguard*, and *Newk's Time* on Blue Note (BST 81542, 81558, 81581, and 84001), to *Saxophone Colossus* (Prestige OJC 291), and to *The Bridge* (RCA APL1-0859), as containing Rollins' most exciting work.

Rollins is a very intense player with a large gruff tone on tenor sax. On his best stuff he can work himself into a controlled frenzy, slicing and dicing a theme into a hundred fragments after running through the opening recitation of the melody. As much as I like Coltrane, Rollins' solos seem to communicate on a more personal level.

On this recording, only "Come, Gone" approaches this level of excitement. But why quibble? You've got an artistic genius on an average day and great sound too. I should also add that there are many Prestige/OJC issues in the OJC catalog. They are all in mono, but are all worth exploring. Stay away from the much more commercial Milestone originals.

#### **Hampton Hawes, *All Night Session*, Vol. 1-3 (OJC 638, 639, 640)**

As the title implies, this material was recorded in one night in 1958 and issued in the order the tunes were recorded, without editing. The sound is Contemporary's best.

During this period Hawes was a modern bop pianist who showed great promise. He's in a quartet setting here with Jim Hall, guitar; Red Mitchell, bass; and Bruz Freeman, drums. If you listen to the three records in succession, you get a real feel for the constantly shifting variations and moods of the pianist in a way you can't listening to one side at a time. You hear unusual elements in his playing which foreshadowed later change.

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His influence is clearly Bud Powell, but in later years he became more experimental and he can be heard in creative veins on *Spanish Steps* (Black Lion BL-122) and *As Long As There's Music*, a duo date under Charlie Haden's leadership (Artists House AH9404).

**Andre Previn, *Pal Joey* (OJC 637), *West Side Story* (OJC 422), *Like Previn* (OJC 170)  
Shelly Manne, *Vol. I: The West Coast Sound* (OJC 152), "*the Three*" And "*the Two*" (OJC 172)**

In August, 1956, Shelly Manne and His Men (with Andre Previn) recorded the music to *My Fair Lady* (OJC 336). It became one of the best selling jazz albums of the day and started a fashion of interpreting the music of the stage, film, and television in a jazz setting. The music is accessible because the listener can follow the melody and it is inventive enough to not be merely a run-through of the score. In addition to the above named scores, *The Bells Are Ringing*, *Peter Gunn*, *Lil' Abner*, and *Gigi* were recorded. In many ways *My Fair Lady* doesn't work as well as the ones recommended. The Lerner & Lowe music is too overtly show-bizzy ("Get Me To The Church On Time") to be adaptable to jazz. Rodgers and Hart and Leonard Bernstein are much more adaptable and interesting.

After Previn's formal classical training as a young man, he spent years writing, arranging, and playing jazz. He's very good. He had a liquid tone on the piano and used a stuttering attack on the keys, playing short clipped notes in

critical passages in rapid succession, creating a feeling of angst.

*Like Previn* is typical of his trio settings, of consistent quality, but no number particularly stands out.

Shelly Manne was a pioneer in the West Coast sound. He played on hundreds of dates beginning in the late forties and on into the seventies. *The West Coast Sound*, 1953, in remarkable hi-fi sound for the time, shows him in a small band setting with some major soloists: Art Pepper, alto; Bob Cooper, tenor; Jimmy Giuffre, baritone; and Bob Envoldsen, valve trombone.

Manne is a very busy drummer, setting up a layer of brushed snares and cymbals to cushion the whole ensemble. True to the west coast roots, the sound is "cool", controlled dynamically and involved with exploring melody and harmony.

*The Three And The Two* is interesting because it sets Manne up in duo and trio settings with Shorty Rogers, trumpet; Russ Freeman, piano; and Jimmy Giuffre, reeds.

Finally, to recap the recommended Riverside OJCs discussed in our first issue: Bill Evans, OJC 068, 210, 140, 434; Thelonious Monk, OJC 064, 026, 254, 206, 362, 231; Tadd Dameron, OJC 143; Chet Baker, OJC 207, 087; Kenny Dorham, OJC 028, 134.

That's it! There are many more jazz classics in the OJC catalog and they are on vinyl for the last time. My advice is buy now, listen later.

**Mary Stallings, *Fine and Mellow* - Mary Stallings, vocals with jazz quartet; Ed Woods, producer; Bob Porter, recording engineer; Tim de Paravicini, disc mastering. Clarity Recordings CNB-1001 (vinyl) and CCD-1001 (cd); P.O. Box 411407, San Francisco, CA. 94141-1407 CD:\$20., two record, single sided, one step plated set \$50., standard LP \$20.**

God, what have we done that you have bestowed these blessings upon us? Two releases within a few months of REAL JAZZ VOCALS with INTELLIGENT LYRICS, NO FUNKY BEATS, and NO ELECTRIC PIANO. Vocals are not supposed to be recorded any more, especially jazz and classic popular vocals. The proponents are dead or in their 70s. God, you must have made a mistake.

Yet here it is, a really good artistic performance on an audiophile label, and a jazz performance to boot. It can join the recently issued, well reviewed Shirley Horn recording *You Won't Forget Me* (Verve 847 482-2) in it's level of artistic achievement. It has earned a place on the shelf with my music collection, not with my audiophile trivia.

I hadn't heard of Stallings before. Like Shirley Horn, she is a well seasoned jazz pro who hasn't come to the attention of the general public. She is apparently a San Francisco based club singer who has traveled with the Count Basie band and sung with Dizzy Gillespie. She recorded once before, in 1962 with Cal Tjader (available again on Fantasy Original Jazz Classics series, OJC 284). Her talent deserves the exposure this recording will give.

Church-based singing has been the nearly universal training ground for African-American jazz singers and you can hear it here in Stallings's phrasing

and inflections. Her voice is warm and strong, but when the pitch and intensity demand, she also has a high pitched, thin quality reminiscent of Esther Phillips.

Stallings is clearly thinking and interpreting the lyrics rather than just flouncing along with the beat. On the superb ballad "If You Went Away" (on CD only) Stallings extends her phrasing slightly behind the beat to draw the listener into the lyric. This tune became the "forgotten masterpiece" of the project. Recorded at an earlier session in one take, it was remembered only by the artist when it came time to select the songs for issue. It was then "found" by the engineer while going through his tapes. It's a good thing since it's the best piece on the cd.

On Gigi Gryce's "Social Call" (CD only) she sings with a bright, bouncy style suitable to the tune's feeling and meaning. Compared with Ernestine Anderson's "hit" recording from 1955 (Savoy 2231), Stallings takes it at a faster pace and has more inflection in her voice.

Stallings takes the tempo at half the pace of the rhythm section on Harold Arlen's "Out Of This World", thereby causing her voice to "float" in an other-worldly way. You don't get bored listening to this recording due in part to her artistry and in part to the use of less often recorded material. Two more ballads, "You'll See" and "Lazy Afternoon" and an uptempo Cole Porter tune, "Dream Dancing" complete my list of the 6 best tunes from the sessions.

Picking either the CD or the record is a problem. Because of the desire to cut the record at a high level using no compression or limiting, the timing is down to 15-17 minutes per side. Four tunes are left off the record, only one of which has little artistic merit ("Sunny"). But the record sounds slightly better and is available in a two single-sided-record package or in the standard LP format.

What the vinyl retains to some extent, but not to the extent desirable, is the air and ambience of the room which has been almost completely expunged on the cd. Producer Ed Woods felt the reasons for this were two-fold. First, the studio itself was somewhat dead and was packed with people during the date. Second, Woods feels that CD technology (as opposed to digital recording and digital tape playback) removes this kind of ambient detail. The recording was made to digital master tape using the Sony F-1 process and Woods states the ambience ques are still there upon tape playback.

Other people have had the opposite experience with the F-1 process, feeling that it squashes low level detail. Whatever the cause, lack of ambience information is the major fault of this recording. That's unfortunate because it has many other good qualities.

The sound is warm and clear. Instrumental placement is natural in that all instruments retain a realistic size and placement in relation to each other. It was recorded in a 20' x 30' x 12' studio with two B&K 4133 microphones (flat from DC to 40k) with custom built microphone preamps and power supplies. Clarity silver AC power cords, this company's specialty, are used throughout.

The fact that only two mikes were used to record both a quartet and a vocalist is unusual and helps achieve the natural perspective of Stalling's voice. Vocalists are almost always given their own mike which results in oversized mouths between the speakers.

The main selling point of the CD is that it is a "First Generation Direct Master CD". To quote Clarity, "This compact disc was made directly from the first generation metal master eliminating two metal steps in the CD duplication process, the mother and the stamper." Whether this has tangible benefits is impossible to say since I have no normally

manufactured identical CD to compare it to.

I have an audiophile switch in my head. When I'm listening to music it's "off" and I just enjoy the music. If you're the same, get the cd. You'll be getting three very desirable extra tunes. But if you're going to sit there and sweat and get nervous because you can't hear the back of the room, get the record. A half teaspoon of ambience is better than none.

Ed, give unto Caesar that which is Caesar's. Give unto God that which is God's. Give us an all analogue recording chain for your vinyl issues.

Performance: A Sound (vinyl): B  
Sound (CD): B-

Russ Novak

**Donald Byrd, *Getting Down To Business*, with Joe Henderson, Orin Keepnews producer, Van Gelder engineer. Landmark, (LCD - 1523 - 2).**

Donald Byrd is a name that's been on the jazz scene for quite some time. This album has a very appropriate title in that Byrd quickly displays his talent and knack for doing just that....Getting Down To Business.

Backed by a cast of top notch performers, such as Kenny Garrett (alto sax), Joe Henderson (tenor sax), Al Foster (drums), Donald Byrd (piano) and Peter Washington (acoustic upright bass), Byrd lays down some very deft tracks of solid jazz. Throughout the entire album Byrd is heard switching between trumpet and flugelhorn. You may recall the drift into fusion that saw Byrd achieve top ratings on the charts, along with acquiring gold records, back in the early 1970s. Well, now he's back into familiar territory and providing straight

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ahead acoustic jazz sounds. The music is varied and diverse in its approach with a little something to catch the interest of most listeners.

On this album, Byrd opens with a very effective piece titled "Theme For Malcolm". It's a composition by the group's pianist and has a nice funky, catchy swing to it. The piano work mixes very well with Byrd's sound and provides a nice rhythmic pace. It makes me feel encouraged by this young artist's work. I'm sure we'll be hearing more from him in the near future. As we then cruise into "That's All There Is To Love", we get to hear Byrd provide us with a pretty ballad using a muted trumpet. The backing on this selection, is very nice and lends a soothing, effective, and alluring sound that keeps everything in a rather mellow and delicious mood.

Byrd then switches back to a style reminiscent of his early days, providing us with music possessing a stronger pace. It is a hard-bopish style which he learned when he was with Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers. It continues to serve him well today.

A bonus track on the CD is a familiar tune by Duke Ellington titled "I Got It Bad And That Ain't Good". Byrd and the others perform it in a very nice fashion with each member displaying their wares. Moving along, we are treated with some very nice trumpet/sax interplay. It's got that kind of familiar jazz sound - you know, that unmistakable up-front mellow presentation with all instruments blending, bending but maintaining their separate identities. When the acoustic bass speaks up and gives forth notes which walk up and down the bass scale, you know you're home - home in a true acoustic jazz setting. Not only does it sound right, it feels right as well.

On "The Onliest", a Byrd composition, he seeks to connect to Monk and clearly

develops a different mood - albeit entertaining and enjoyable. In fact, it's a perfect prelude to his closing cut, "Around The Corner" (written by and featuring saxophonist Joe Henderson). This number is uptempo, rhythmic, and totally mainstream jazz oriented. It cooks and is definitely in the hard-bop vein. It's also very accessible and won't leave you stranded in the esoteric outer reaches of jazz mania. It's solid, straight-ahead and one of those kinds of pieces likely to be heard live at a jam session...if you're lucky! Despite my tendency to drift toward the melodic, lyrical, and sweeter side of jazz, all I can say is...*"YES"* when I hear a piece like this.

The recording quality on this CD is pretty good although just a little hot and slightly smeared on the opening cymbals (you know, the kind with the ringing rivets). The overall tonal balance throughout seems natural, with no unwanted "in your face" effects. The mix also seems pretty natural and authentic. The miking is also done reasonably well and captures the natural sound of these acoustic instruments: no blurring, no unnatural echo or reverb, no overlaid mixes - just straight to the point and uncomplicated. Staging is good with instrumental image placement portrayed realistically.

All in all, this is a good jazz album with some fine performances by the various band members. If you're looking more for mainstream acoustic jazz than Top 40 pop-oriented, synthesized sound - you will surely appreciate this album. It is one of those albums which will, with repeated listenings, provide new levels of interpretation for each track. It works for me and I believe most mainstream jazz aficionados will get into it as well.

*Bill Wells*

**Jimmy Smith, *Fourmost*. Eric Miller, producer, Angel Balestier, engineer. Milestone (MCD-9184-2).**

For a long time, I have been an avid jazz fan with a real appreciation for musicians who play the electric organ. Most of the earlier jazz, which featured this instrument, was down-home, gut bucket, bluesy, soulful and just plain good. Unfortunately, much of today's contemporary jazz has gone the route of hyped-up electronic fusion versus a more traditional, straight-ahead, mainstream approach. Along with this shift has been the advent of various electronic instruments (i.e., keyboards, synthesizers, and drum/rhythm machines, etc.), and other related gimmickry. As such, it seems like the much heralded organ playing of the past (especially the type heard on the wonderful Hammond B-3) has dramatically changed...and not necessarily for the better!

Fortunately, some of the better veteran players are still around and continue to produce good music. This album, titled *Fourmost* is such an effort. It is a solid jazz recording featuring the renowned organist Jimmy Smith accompanied by sidemen who should not be strangers to the jazz aficionado. Joining Smith are the jammin' Stanley Turrentine on tenor sax (my man!), the ever present and funkily eloquent Kenny Burrell on guitar (do it Kenny!) and the sho-nuff gettin' down Grady Tate on drums (and vocals no less!). This is a live recording from one of New York cities' better know jazz clubs, one that I frequented while living in nearby northwest New Jersey.

What makes this album so good is not only the music but the feel which is brought about by many years of experience and jamming by these artists. Each player is quite adept at improvisation

and provides a rich and convincing narrative. For me, their blend of styles is very refreshing and comforting, particularly in light of the seeming onslaught of youngbloods in the industry (often stemming from what seems to be an over fascination and celebration of youth). While I am all for new and emerging talent, I also recognize that talent alone cannot fully replace the overall benefit of many years of experience. Each of the artists, on this album, has been around a good number of years and their combined talent and experience make for some very interesting, and often compelling, listening.

So, what we have on *Fourmost* is one of those special times when four masters play together almost perfectly throughout the one hour recording (well OK, 56 minutes to be exact). The tunes are from Ellington (Duke and Mercer, that is), Gershwin, Rodgers and Hart, Jobim and one each by Smith and Burrell. Folks, get ready! This is real organ-based jazz which sounds totally unlike much of the newer pop-styled, synthesizer oriented music of the 1970s and 80s. In fact, what you will hear on this album is music reminiscent of what was being pounded out profusely in the 1960s. It reminds me much of the jazz I was raised on, primarily during my college days in the 60s. For me, just listening to these artists is a relief in that it feels both familiar and comforting.

The music on this album is bluesy. It pumps, grinds, has a straight-ahead driving sensation that will let you just lay-in-the-cut (so to speak) and jam! Nothing is overstated, nothing gets in the way or is confused. There are always four artists in front of you laying down some consummate jazz tunes. Just listening to the sophisticated interplay between these four masters is special. Each seems to know instinctively when to chime in and do their part. I sure miss being present at this most assured jamming jazz set when it was recorded live.



Listen to Smith jump all over the keys, in his very typical, but stylish, manner (check out "Summertime" on this album and you will get an idea of what I mean). Or check out how Stanley Turrentine grabs at those classic deep growling tenor sax sounds, throughout various cuts on the album, and how he really opens up and blows hard (especially on "Things Ain't What They Used To Be"). After doing so, you should know better why I say I missed being there live for this particular recording date.

The track titled "Soulful Brothers" seems to epitomize the artists' relationship as Kenny Burrell leads off with some seriously bluesy guitar improvisation. He is joined shortly after by Smith's signature organ-grinding antics, then by Turrentine's wailing saxophone and light staccato-like rambling and romping. Throughout all of this, Tate has provided and maintained a steady beat. Many of you will be as surprised as I, with this fine drummer's admirable vocalizing on the classic and very pretty "My Funny Valentine". Tate's voice is rich, warm, and intimate. He seems to be right at home with this recording's overall mood and he adds another dimension to the performance.

Another very tasteful presentation is that of Jobim's "Quiet Nights of Quiet Stars" which has each artist offering some serious licks throughout. Near the conclusion of Smith's hard driving organ(izing) solo, you will hear him shout "Oh My God" which gets close to how this music may move you. Hey folks, and especially you jazz lovers, this is good stuff. Not your typical studio fare. Just solid, gut tingling, ear pleasing, jammin' jazz from a group of cats who have long been on the scene, although not always in the forefront or lime-light. Listening to this album usually inspires me to go back and listen to recordings from their early days. When I do I am usually quite satisfied but still, I look

forward to more from them in the future.

This compact disc is recorded well with the instruments done very naturally. No boomy bass, zippy highs or loose, hyped-up percussion. Even the two electric instruments (guitar and organ) are recorded very naturally, as you would expect to hear in a typical night club setting vs a concert hall environment. It has a good "live" recording feel to it without any really intrusive crowd noise.

Soundstaging and imaging provide a very realistic portrayal of the actual recording site, which I am very familiar with both acoustically and visually. The miking on Tate's voice is perhaps a bit closer than usual

(but only on track #6). Overall, it seemed to add an extra sense of intimacy not usually found on live recordings and therefore was not objectionable.

All in all, I really like this album. For those of you familiar with Smith's playing and style, I definitely recommend it. It's not a ground breaking album, but a very solid, straight-ahead jazz piece nonetheless.

Bill Wells

**Nancy Wilson, *With My Lover Beside Me*. Barry Manilow and Eddie Arkin, producers, Don Murray, recording engineer. Columbia (CK48665).**

**M**y fascination with this particular artist started a good number of years ago. Actually, it was in the early 60's during my beginning college days. At that time, Nancy Wilson was an emerging but superbly solid vocalist who had caught the eye (oops...the ear) of a number of established performing

musicians as well as attracting a growing following of fans.

In those earlier days, Ms. Wilson produced a good number of albums and I, along with her many other fans, were never at a want for available material from her. For those of you who are not very familiar with her voice, and/or style, she has often been referred to as the "Singer's Singer". This is a well deserved complement and merely begins to touch on the essence of her true gift and talent.

Her style is to present the listener with an elegant, classy manner of singing. Additionally, Ms. Wilson is the consummate of class on stage. Her appearance all so well fits her sound and to say that she can easily captivate her fans is to put it mildly. Often, as neophyte college preps, my friends and I would spend critical study time just listening to her albums and fantasizing about her. Since that time, both her voice and looks have changed and largely in positive ways. Always a good sounding, good looking person, she has matured in such a way that the long-term fan will seldom, if ever, feel a need to reach back for her earlier sound (or looks for that matter). Fortunately, she is still "Nancy", Ms. Wilson if you will, and I am most pleased to have made her acquaintance (obviously from a distance. In fact, quite a distance to be truthful!).

With this latest album, Ms. Wilson has teamed up with Barry Manilow for some very lush, romantic music. The music cannot be labeled as real traditional, main-stream, straight-ahead jazz, yet it is certainly not in the pop vein as you perhaps might expect from Manilow. This album is also refreshing in that it is reminiscent of her earlier works. she does not attempt to be an R & B or pop diva as in some of her recent sessions. It could have something to do with the fact that the lyrics are from a past master of song writers, Johnny Mercer.

The songs on this album, excluding The Epilogue by Manilow featuring both he and Ms. Wilson together, have been treated to a very enchanting arrangement by Manilow. He also produced the music for the entire album. His collaboration with Nancy Wilson was a good stroke of business. The lyrics, the music, the arrangements, and especially Ms. Wilson's voice, all fit so well together that despite the album only being 39 minutes, the listener likely will not complain. The 39 minutes that are on the album are 39 very good minutes of singing (and listening).

The album title definitely reflects the mood. It is not merely pure syrup, as one might expect, but it is definitely on the lush, mellow, and romantic side. Some fans may want more of Ms. Wilson's ability to deliver strong, potent, torch-like stretches during this outing. Personally, I very much appreciate it for what it is—a very nice sounding album that once again gives me one of my favorite artists to savor. If I wanted more torch singing from Ms. Wilson, this would not be the setting for it. In fact, I believe it would destroy much, if not all, of the mood created. It is a very polished, smooth, sophisticated, elegant and ultimately a very, very satisfying set.

On the title track, and throughout much of the album, we hear Nancy's elegant and seductive vocalizing along with some very nice musical background. Some of the arrangements offer a sweet and slightly up-tempo pace. On these, Nancy stretches out a little more, but with very classy restraint. She keeps herself from any undesirable shouts or scream-like qualities which would be out of place in this setting.

On the beautifully serene "When October Goes", Ms. Wilson also displays an exquisite style with her delicious singing of a poem written by Mercer. It is done in a very melancholy yet pretty style (somewhat reminiscent of Frank

Sinatra's treatment of "It Was A Very Good Year" done many, many years ago). This particular song is one of the best on this album due to its ultra sensuous treatment. Immediately following is "Love Is Where You Find It", which is done in a superb manner where Ms. Wilson sings the first minute and a half or so accompanied by solo classical guitar. She is then joined by larger scale instrumentation which once again so aptly complements her voice. It simply makes you want to start the entire cut over and listen again. This is pretty work, very pretty work.

On "I Can't Teach My Old Heart New Tricks", the pace picks up again, but only slightly. It's rolling rhythm makes you want to sing along and join in the lyrics. It is a light-hearted number and serves to kind of break things up a bit without changing the mood established early on. On track #6, we once again find Ms. Wilson in her wonderfully harmonious and tender mood. The accompaniment is a simple background, primarily acoustic piano—later joined by synthesizer, and one that does not intrude at all on Ms. Wilson's vocal presentation. Nice stuff and oh so pretty. Track #7, "When The Meadow Was Bloomin'", has a much bluesier approach with Ms. Wilson singing in a begging, pleading tone yet consistent with the other numbers. Her voice is full, rich, velvety and yet superbly articulate. Her voice is truly a wonderful instrument and is served very well on this particular number.

The next two songs offer Ms. Wilson in different styles again, one being very tender and sensitive, the other more light hearted and uptempo. The latter providing a nice, slightly swinging rhythm that will have the listener moving right along with it. Both numbers drift comfortably into a reprise, of the

opening number, and gives a sense that the last 35 minutes or so of listening are about to come to an end. Only the final number, which is an epilogue, featuring Barry Manilow and Nancy Wilson together allows the mood to continue through a brief recapture of the previous numbers. Although I am a total and absolute Nancy Wilson fan, I did not object to this duet with Manilow, (of whom I'm not particularly a great fan) to close out such an exquisite set. In consideration of Manilow's fine overall arrangement and orchestration of this album, the finale seems fitting and appropriate.

In terms of sound quality for this particular CD, I find it to be very well done. The miking of voice, along with the instrumental mix, is done very professionally (as I would expect from Manilow). Soundstaging and placement of individual performers seems very realistic with Ms. Wilson holding center stage throughout most of the works on this album. The overall sound is warm and full but also with lots of clarity and articulation. Is it perfect? No. Is it as good as analog? Not really. However, it is good. In fact, it is very good. Very good indeed!

Finally, if you are a Nancy Wilson fan, this album is definitely recommended. If you are not so familiar with her previous works, I believe this is a pretty good place to begin. She has a gorgeous voice, an appealing style and provides an elegant, sensuous approach to her songs that makes the listener simply want more. To the musical professionals she may truly be "A Singer's Singer". But to those of us who simply buy and enjoy her music - she is also most aptly described as "The Lady of Song".

Bill Wells

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# Rock

**John Prine, *The Missing Years***

**Oh Boy Records OBR-009CD**

**Producer: Howie Epstein.**

**Engineers: Joe Romersa and Ed Sealy**

John Prine had the misfortune of being one of the first in a long line of singer/songwriters touted as "the next Dylan." Prine's first album in 1972 was a classic. Since then he has survived without really flourishing. The rough-hewn voice and quirky, oddball stories clearly fit the Dylan mold, but Prine comes off a little more country and a lot more down to earth—closer in spirit to Jimmy Buffett and Steve Goodman. Songs like "Hello In There" and "Angel From Montgomery" have now been covered often by other artists, even achieving something of a "Standards" status. It's nice stuff—but certainly without the revolutionary courage and timeless resonance of Dylan's best.

His latest, however, is an important artistic breakthrough, and deserves to be a commercial one as well (fat chance). The album title refers to the thirty years missing in the historical record of Christ, with Prine imaginatively filling in the blanks, but it could just as easily pertain to the last fifteen years of Prine's own life and career. Where did this album come from, and why did it take him so long? If Dylan had recorded this material last year, we'd all be hailing it as a brilliant change of direction, his best work since *Blood on the Tracks*, blah, blah, blah. Dylan, however, could never have written songs with this kind of clever wordplay, or songs with insights so crystalline and immediately compelling. And Dylan could never have written songs this warm, gentle and gracious.

Although Prine's twangy, nasal singing and guitar-based country/folk style do invite comparisons to Dylan, his witty skill with lyrics places him within the Pop Pantheon much closer to Randy Newman: "Sally used to play with her hula hoops/Now she tells her problems to therapy groups/Grandpa's on the front lawn staring at a rake/wondering if his marriage was a terrible mistake."

Particularly reminiscent of Newman is "It's a Big Old Goofy World," with a notably wry and dry perspective on this goofy life: "Mind all your manners/Be quiet as a mouse/Some day you'll own a home/That's as big as a house." Cynical? Yes, but any trace of bitterness or blackness in Prine is swamped his considerable good humor, making for a very "I'm OK, you're OK" listening experience.

Of course, the words don't mean nuthin' without the music, and the music on this album is exceptional. There are enough beautiful melodies here to fill a greatest hits package. It's hard to select standouts because there are so many, but I must admit that the ballads are something special—*cherish* is the word that comes to mind. When Prine sings "All The Best" it's goose bump time for me: "I wish you love/And happiness/I guess I wish/You all the best/I wish you don't/Do Like I do/And ever fall in love/With someone like you."

Another lovely song is "You Got the Gold," but one with a feelgood rather than melancholy slant on life: "Life is a blessin'/It's a delicatessen/Of all the little favors you do/...'Cause you got the gold/Gold inside of you/...Well I got some/Gold inside me too." Phil Everly's golden harmony on this cut adds a shimmering sparkle to the already polished glow.

More ear-catching flashes are added by the star-studded cast of rock luminaries who provide Prine with both moral and

musical support. Heartbreakers Benmont Tench and Mike Campbell are on hand here, with fearless leader Tom Petty himself taking a crack at background vocals on "Picture Show." (Interestingly, it was Petty and the Heartbreakers who backed up Dylan on tour several years ago.) Bruce Springsteen, Bonnie Raitt and Christina Amphlett also take their turns at the mike, and one of my favorite LA session wild men, David Lindley, pops up on a variety of instruments throughout the album.

Sound quality is superb, though no model of transparency. Recorded in Los Angeles, it was mixed in Nashville (often a good sign), and the sound is clear and well balanced, with a full mid-bass, a warm lower midrange and smooth highs. The only obvious flaw is one speck of digital distortion in the slightly excessive reverb on "Jesus the Missing Years." Most highly recommended.

Mark Block

**Elton John, *The Complete Thom Bell Sessions***

**MCA Records MCAD-39115**

**Producer: Thom Bell.**

**Engineer: Don Murray**

Elton's original EP, *The Thom Bell Sessions*, was one of my favorite records back when I was first discovering the promise of entry level high end equipment. It frequently occupied the place of honor on my mortite-packed Kenwood KD-500. Containing just three songs, "Mama Can't Buy You Love," "Are You Ready For Love," and "Three Way Love Affair," it was as close as you could get to a perfect record—not a bad squiggle in the groove.

Leroy Bell and Casey James did the song writing, the Spinners provided some super soulful background vocals,

and the illustrious Thom Bell arranged, conducted and produced the whole shebang. Elton was dropped into this tasty Philly stew and managed to blend in with seeming effortlessness. One credit on the jacket, however, left me with a faint sour taste: "Remixed by Elton John and Clive Franks for Frank N. Stein Productions, Ltd." Was Elton unhappy with the Thom Bell mixes?

As it turns out, he was. Elton had recorded enough tracks for a full album in Seattle, and Bell took them to his Sigma Studios in Philadelphia for additional recording and mixing. According to Philip Norman's new *Elton John* biography, the album as finally delivered was thought to be "overproduced and 'too sweet'." It was shelved for two years. Then in 1977, at the height of the disco single craze, Elton remixed three of the tracks, and the resulting EP became a huge hit in the States and the beginning of a comeback for EJ.

This CD was released four years ago, but it didn't interest me at the time; I'm not in the habit of replacing my old records with remastered CDs. I didn't notice the word *Complete* in the title, and didn't realize that it contains three tracks not on the original EP (bringing the album length up to 35:03). When I stumbled across the CD last month and noticed the extra songs, curiosity got the better of me.

The bad news is that the new songs are just OK—pleasantly lightweight Philly soul, but not quite up to the level of the original three. The worse news is that the mixes used on the original EP are not the ones used on this CD. The bass on the CD has been rolled off, instruments have been spread wide across the soundstage, balances have been altered, and extra background vocal tracks not heard on the original have been mixed up (pun intended) so loud that they literally bury Elton's lead on "Are You Ready For Love."

Most distressing is the edit at 5:25 into the song, which removes about 30 seconds worth of a wonderful instrumental build. The missing music follows an abrupt transition to a drum solo; the mighty groove stretches out like a rubber band, gradually doin' The Tighthen Up (this may be a musical mixed metropolis metaphor—apologies to Houston and Philly—but Thom Bell did produce some of Archie Bell's later records) as each instrument returns to the jam. The build was at the core of the song's structure; it was the calm at the center of the whirlwind, setting up a pace that made the climax that much more dramatic. Without it, the song seems paradoxically longer, the ending interminable. These are not the complete sessions after all.

My first assumption was that the Thom Bell mixes (rather than the Frank N. Stein remixes) were inadvertently used in the CD remastering—a logical assumption given that the Spinners are at times featured more prominently than Elton himself, and Elton presumably never bothered to remix the three songs left off the EP. I decided to write a nasty letter to the project coordinator for MCA, Andy McKaie, using words like *appalled* and *false and misleading*. Mr. McKaie was gracious enough to write me back, explaining, "Elton John had the master prepared and shipped to me for digital remastering... it was Elton and his people who really controlled the musical end—right down to approving the reference discs."

OK, Mr. McKaie is off the hook, but I still say the credits are false and misleading: "Recorded Autumn '77, Remixed January '79." These are simply not the '79 mixes. I can only conclude that Elton is a neurotic tinkerer and wasn't satisfied with his own '79 remix. What we may have here is simply a case of creative second thoughts. So much for the record company doing the right thing and getting the artist involved in the digital remastering.

To further confuse the issue, however, the original '79 remix of "Mama Can't Buy You Love" *was* used on at least three other CD releases: *Elton John's Greatest Hits Volume III 1979–1987* (Geffen 9 24153-2), the four CD boxed set *To Be Continued* (MCAD4–10110), and a Warner/Chappell music publishing sampler that I use in my film editing work (not for sale to the public). Why put the oddball, alternate mix on the *Thom Bell* CD, but not on the boxed set, where it would fit right in with that collection's demo tracks and live recordings?

My advice for lovers of the original: hang on to your turntable. For Elton John completists, the CD provides a fascinating but ultimately unsatisfying alternative.

Mark Block

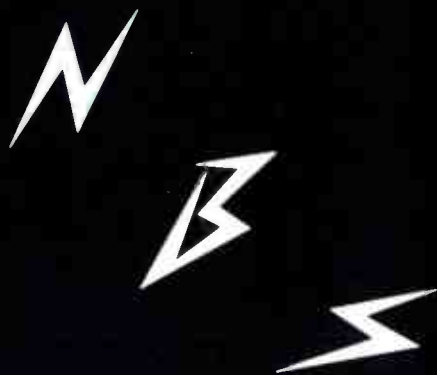
**Willie Nelson, *Who'll Buy My Memories (The IRS Tapes)*  
Sony Music Special Products  
A22323**

**Producer: Willie Nelson & Bob Johnston. Engineer: Larry Greenhill & Bobby Arnold.**

A highlighted blue banner on the credit page proudly proclaims that this album comes to us "From The Willie Nelson/Internal Revenue Service Tape Library." Some outfits cut their losses and retrench during a recession; the IRS seems to be expanding into bold new areas.

As you probably know, Willie got himself into a big pickle when the IRS decreed that the tax deductions his accountants had been taking for him were not kosher. Seems that these accountants—at one of the largest, most conservative and respected firms in the U. S. of A.—let Willie put a few barrels of money into shaky tax shelters. Unfortunately, what appeared to be

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nice, tight loopholes in the law turned out to be gaping holes in the roof through which the feds came a-pourin'. Talk about rain on your parade!

Piddling little deductions, now disallowed, had accumulated over the years, growing into penalties and interest charges to the tune of 170 million pennies from heaven. Not a favorite Willie Nelson tune. Willie was held accountable for his accountants' miscouunts, and thus we were spared a potentially less enjoyable IRS release: *The Price Waterhouse Choral Sing April 15th Favorites*. Willie's profits from the sale of each CD or tape—about a buck or two after Sony's cut—go to pay off this dam-busting debt. The cover, by the way, features Willie wearing a frozen smile and a sweatshirt that reads "SHIT HAPPENS."

The album consists of 25 little Willie Nelson originals, "little" because each one is only about two or three minutes long. If you don't like a particular song, you don't have to wait long for a better one. Featured players are Willie-his-bad-self and nobody else. Just a guitar, a singer, and his songs. Stripped of the pedal steel guitars, the fiddles, the harmonicas, the honky tonk pianos and other vestiges of the Bob Wills sound that has defined "Country and Western" music for almost half a century, the tunes take on a pure, plaintive, folksy quality. This is not merely Country music; this is beautiful, timeless musicmaking.

Willie's voice, of course, is another matter. Distinctive, yes. Beautiful, no. His infamous reedy tenor is definitely a "love it or hate it with no in-between" kind of deal. I love it, but people with better taste than I vehemently disagree. Screw 'em.

Thematically, the album is a meditation on love lost, with maybe a subtext of money lost. The double entendres are inescapable: "The worst is over and I've

stood the test/It should be easier now/They say everything happens for the best/It should be easier now." Or, "Someday, somehow, I'll make a man of me/And I'll build me back, the way I used to be/Much stronger now, the second time around/'Cause what can you do to me now." Again, "This would be the perfect time to die/I'd like to take this opportunity to cry." One of the song titles says it all: "Wake Me When It's Over."

Among of my favorites is "Lonely Little Mansion," a goofy, cornball tune that's so sweet and pretty it wins me over every time I hear it: "I'm a lonely little mansion for sale/And for someone I'd fit just like a glove/I'm a lonely little mansion for sale/Furnished with ever

If this sounds like a big ol' pig out in a sty of self pity, I guess it is. But sometimes that's OK. The album also contains touching, precious gems like "Yesterday's Wine," which I propose as The Audiophile Society theme song: "Your presence is welcome with me and my friends here/This is a hangout of mine/We come here quite often and listen to music/Partaking of yesterday's wine." The simplicity, directness and thematic coherency hearken back to Willie's mid-seventies period. I'm reminded of "Blue Eyes Crying In the Rain" from *Red Headed Stranger* (1975). In fact, the title track from his 1976 release, *The Sound In Your Mind*, is included in this new collection.

The sound quality of this production is absolutely superb—probably the best I've heard from the Internal Revenue Service. Seriously, the recording is very un-processed. No compression, no weird EQ, no electric instruments, no digits and no Dolby (for those CD fans like me who don't mind a little tape hiss for nostalgia's sake). Although the songs are quiet, the CD has been mastered at a fairly high level, and the dynamic range is subjectively very impressive. Inner (or micro) dynamics

are also displayed in abundance. Willie's acoustic guitar, which sounds as if it hasn't been re-strung in about 20 years, comes across a trifle too lean on my Acoustats, but has just the right amount of body on my friend Dave's Avalons.

Engineers Larry Greenhill and Bobby Arnold have done an admirable job. It's a very simple recording (but sometimes simple stuff is the easiest to louse up) and it really shines on a top class system. So will you buy Willie's memories? It's for a good cause, and the next time you're feeling down in the dumps, you may want to put it on and listen to somebody who *really* has problems.

Mark Block

**Sarah McLachlan, *Solace*  
Arista 18631-2  
Produced and recorded by Pierre Marchand**

The voice is quite beautiful, an eerie cross between Jennifer Warnes and Joni Mitchell, with more than a few hints of Sinead O'Connor (AKA "the bald chick"). The reference to perennial audiophile favorites Jennifer and Joni is apropos, for this disc is remarkable from a sonic standpoint, but not for the reasons you might expect (like dynamics, depth of image, purity of the soprano vocal—the usual suspects).

Although good in all those areas, what makes this CD noteworthy is the quality of the bass, which is exceptionally extended for a pop record. This is only the second non-classical CD that manages to drive my Acoustat speakers into a static discharging frenzy (the other is Enya's *Watermark*). Bass freaks with truly full-range systems should try out cut #6, "Back Door Man," for a gut churning, foundation shaking experience. Those with fragile old Quads

shouldn't even let this disc in the house, much less in the CD player.

Sarah is a native of Halifax, Nova Scotia, and was only 23 years old when this, her second recording, was released. The songs are seemingly autobiographical, the lyrics like poetic diary entries that could have found their way more easily into a college literary magazine than a pop album. You know the type—dreamy thoughts about love, relationships, the meaning of it all, and the navel as a microcosm of the universe.

I could be cruel and quote some out of context here, but I think that's unfair. Songs are meant to be sung, not read. Suffice it to say that these do indeed sing better than they read. Aw the hell with it—I'll stoop to being cruel and unfair just this once. Here's an excerpt from a song called "Lost": "By the shadows of the night I go/I move away from the crowded room/That sea of shallow faces masked in warm regret/They don't know how to feel, they don't know what is lost/Ohh...." And ohh, it gets worse: "But I don't have a hold on what is real/Though we can only try/What is there to give or to believe/I want it all to go away I want to be alone." Ohh the regret, the pain, the angst, the alienation, the existential torment, and especially the youthful self-absorption of it all.

It won't appeal to everyone, but if this is your cup of chamomile, fair enough. I admit liking Jackson Browne, so nobody's perfect. In fact, I actually like Sarah McLachlan, now that I've played the album through a few times. Just be forewarned that she writes heavy stuff, without a trace of leavening humor.

The first song, "Drawn to the Rhythm," is an atmospheric but catchy ode to the joys of sex on the seashore. After tumbling to the tides, however, Sarah is drawn away from the rhythm and into precious little musical moments that don't quite amount to real songs.

In that respect, Sarah is not unlike Jane Siberry or Robin Holcomb—effective in small doses, but too medicinal to take in large gulps. As the album wears on it wears thin. At least producer Marchand has the good sense to end the album with a smile, courtesy of everybody's favorite fey musical mystic of the 60's, Donovan. Sarah's version of "Wear Your Love Like Heaven" brings a ray of sunshine to an otherwise dark and fog shrouded listening experience.

Mark Block

### Enya, *Shepherd Moons*

Reprise 9 26775-2

Producer: Nicky Ryan. Engineer: Nicky Ryan & Gregg Jackman.

**A**long comes a new album by Enya—that glowing Gaelic gal of my dreams, that angel of New Age—and I'm utterly seduced. Reduced, truth be told, to a wide-eared simp with the cognitive ability of a cantaloupe. What is Enya's music like? It's syrupy. It's sappy. It's precious like a swaddled infant. Listening to it is a bit like sucking on a warm bottle of sweetened condensed milk. But I admit it, I'm a happy little sucker.

One might think of Enya's music as church hymns from a religion in an alternate universe, a world in which Christianity and paganism blend harmoniously, and a young girl with a synthesizer programs the choir. Half the songs are in English, the rest Gaelic, with one oddball in Latin (for those aging Catholics who liked their Masses the way God meant 'em to be—incomprehensible). A lyric sheet helps one understand her English, which is so bizarrely accented and thick (or as Enya would say, "dtick") that you'd swear she's learned the language by taking a correspondence course on her home planet, wherever that may be.

But it's a cold, hard man indeed who won't feel moved when Enya warbles such lusciously poignant, breath taking songs as "How Can I Keep From Singing?" The lyrics, by Trad. (whoever he is), go something like this: "No storm can shake my innermost calm/While to that rock I'm clinging/Since love is Lord of Heaven and Earth/How can I keep from singing?" It's the secular, 90's equivalent of Judy Collins doing "Amazing Grace."

The album opens with the title track, a beautiful instrumental with a haunting tune of the type Mark Knopfler might write for a film score. Multiple pianos—left, right and center—sometimes double up on the melody, and sometimes play only pieces of it, allowing the combined forces to carry the theme. It's the kind of music you can just let wash over you in warm waves, or can dissect sonically and revel in its quirky complexity.

On other cuts Enya plays the same sort of tricks with her vocals, building entire orchestral sections out of simple whispers and sweet, breathy oohs and aahs. She could turn humming into a symphonic artform. There isn't a single cut that isn't pretty. When the CD ends I find myself thinking, It's over already? Is that it? Where are the bad parts?

*Shepherd Moons* is structured suspiciously like Enya's previous effort, the enormously popular *Watermark*, and indeed she comes very close to repeating herself. (Is repeating a masterpiece such a bad thing? Only in that one misses the pleasure of surprise and discovery.) Nicky Ryan once again produces, and Roma Ryan once again provides the lyrics. A lovely clarinet solo on "Angeles" sounds very much like the one in "On Your Shore" from *Watermark*, but this time it's performed by Roy Jewitt rather than Neil Buckley.

Likewise the Uilleann Pipes on "Smaointhe" are now courtesy Liam



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Lewis Lipnick - *Stereophile*, Vol. 14 No. 8, August 1991

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O'Flionn rather than Davy Spillane. The players change, but Enya is calling the shots. The recording studio has changed also, and the new album is tad thinner and frostier. The subterranean bass of "Watermark" is absent, but the lighter balance here is well chosen and pleasant.

If you're the type who longs for real acoustic instruments in real space, then BEWARE. But if you merely long for luscious music beautifully crafted, and you don't give a flying Flynn if the music is predominantly electronic, then let Enya be your shepherdess; follow her to a world of Celtic charm, femininity, radiant beauty and unique inspiration.

*Mark Block*

Flash:

Just received a three-song promo tape from Sony containing songs by a new group—Sandbox. The group's album, *Regression*, is due to be released the first week of April, so it should be in the record stores by the time you read this. What does it sound like? Like ... can it be? ... Bob Dylan singing a funereal "I Can Hear Music"; like a new Dylan

song called "Lord, You Ain't Heard Nothin'" featuring a gospel choir; like Brian Wilson doing "Blowin' in the Wind" to a "Be My Baby" beat!

A few off-the-record calls to music industry insiders confirmed my suspicions: Sandbox is a new Wilburys-style collaboration; this time Dylan teams up with fellow 60's survivor (just barely) Brian Wilson, with none other than teenage genius Phil Spector handling the production. Old-time Spector regulars like Leon Russell, Sonny Bono, Glen Campbell and Herb Alpert lend their services to this all-star effort.

Judging by the off kilter nature of the songs on this promo tape, the band must have checked their egos at the door—along with brain cells, if there were any. How these sessions were kept under wraps I'll never know, but the record is an instant camp classic

**Correction:**

Last issue I referred to the Doobie Brothers as a band from the South. The Doobie Brothers were in fact from California—and *northern* California at that.

## The Theta DS Pro Generation III

Shannon Dickson

*Shannon is one of our earliest subscribers and we are pleased to present this report which shows talent for reviewing and listening. It contains some of the earliest information available on the Theta Gen III. We are working to obtain one for review.*

I was taken aback recently when, half-way through a rather enthusiastic conversation regarding the merits of Theta Digital's new flagship processor, Russ Novak asked "How about writing a comparison between Theta's previous top model, the Pro Gen II, and the Gen III upgrade?" After a brief neuronal short circuit, the split brain monkey appeared with the left half whispering, "Yeah right!! May I see your credentials please?"

Well let's see ... dedicated music lover, light on electronic engineering, avid reader of all things "high-end", majority of discretionary income finds its way to Tower Records or some equipment dealer ... your regular gen-u-wine Joe Audiophile. Hardly the specs needed for the definitive analysis of Theta's most sophisticated new processor! "OK, alright", the right brain kicked in, "... but you don't have to be a phi beta kappa from db University to convey the astonishing improvements the Gen III brings to digital music playback. Just tell 'em what you feel and let Bob Harley, Arnie Balgalvis, or some other honcho fill in the blanks." So Here goes.

Theta Digital, as most of you know, introduced the first outboard digital processor over five years ago and has been at the forefront of innovation along with several other top companies, pushing the blistering pace of digital evolution. Their previous top model, the widely acclaimed DS Pro Generation II,

was introduced approximately two years ago and set new standards of transparency, transient attack, and soundstaging capabilities in the digital world. By making several smaller improvements in the Gen II over the past year or so, i.e. improved power supply grounding and the introduction of a fully balanced signal path, Theta was able to hold it's own and remained an excellent value in the arena of top dog megabuck processors.

With the introduction of great sounding units from Audio Research, the fabulous #30 from Levinson, and announced updates by Wadia and Krell, I was more than interested in Theta's plans for their Generation III unit. As a satisfied owner of a balanced Gen II, I was hoping their commitment to an upgrade path for current owners could be maintained. I wasn't disappointed.

In mid January, after 10 long days of separation, the Theta arrived in it's new incarnation as a balanced Gen III with AT&T ST output; my Theta had also been sent for the glass optical addition. Physically the unit looks, at first glance, exactly like the Gen II. Close observation revealed a new face plate with reasigned switches. Gone is the option between 2 different algorithms (this feature was also eliminated on later additions of the Gen II). Instead we find a power switch, phase reversal, tape loop selector, and a new input switch to select between 3 digital inputs in addition to the tape loop. I selected AT&T as one input option; the other two are high quality rhodium plated RCA's from Cardas.

Before placing the unit on my rack I couldn't resist a peek under the hood. The Gen III innards maintain three separate sections for power supply, digital board, and analog output boards, each

enclosed in a faraday cage of steel with a zinc and copper laminate. I understand some minor improvements were made to an already excellent four transformer power supply. The big changes, however, are up top with an entirely new processor.

Some major changes on the digital board include a new digital input receiver. Theta has replaced the usual Yamaha chip with a new, more accurate one by Crystal that meets Theta's requirement for very low jitter. Another big improvement is the use of "gate array" technology employing two programmable large scale integrated chips, one to replace a whole board full of IC chips and one for more accurate clock function. These "gate array" devices are far more precise in handling the necessary logic functions to control the data stream coming from the input receiver in addition to greatly shortening the circuit path. The net result is a much cleaner digital signal with less jitter feeding the digital reconstruction filter computers.

Theta continues to use the Motorola 56001 DSP computers with their complex proprietary algorithm, one for each channel, to recreate the music waveform. With the Gen III however, a third 56001 computer is included which adds 50% more computing power along with a second EPROM algorithm chip that further refines and develops the shape of the signal in both channels. The greatly enhanced digital waveform then travels to the analog output section.

The new analog boards (there are two complete boards in the balanced model) are teflon for lower noise and contain two of the new 20 bit Burr Brown PCM 63P-K co-linear DAC's (total of 4 DACS in balanced option). The K series is the best of the PCM 63P group of Burr Brown chips. These new DACs have excellent low level linearity and do not require LSB bit trimming in order to achieve this level of performance.

Hence they won't drift off of trim over time, increasing zero cross distortion, as older multi-bit DACs have been prone to do. The result of this innovative new design is a DAC whose low level performance is on a par with the very best 1-bit devices, but also has the greater extension and dynamic punch of the best multi-bit DACs. All this is coupled with long term performance stability.

The rest of the analog boards are filled with first class parts like Vishay, Wima, and two of the highly regarded Buf-03 buffered output devices per board. From these boards the Gen III puts out a 2 ohm, 7 volt output to either a pair of single ended RCAs or a set of XLRs for the balanced unit. Obviously there is plenty of meat to the Gen III upgrade; now for the gravy.

I connected the Theta Data transport to the new processor with the AT&T glass cable and ran a balanced Maestro interconnect to one of the balanced inputs on a Rowland Consummate preamp. Incidentally, to get the most out of the Gen III, you must use a preamp with a true balanced input as the two halves of the balanced signal are not summed on the analog boards of the Theta. Other components in the chain were two Rowland Model 1 amps in bridged mono running balanced from the Consummate and driving a pair of the excellent ProAc Response 3 speakers with bi-wired Maestro cable.

After an hour warm up I slipped Make Garson's *Oxnard Sessions* (Reference Recordings CD RR-37) into the transport and pushed play. Now mind you, I was hoping for good things, but right off the bat I couldn't believe the increase in resolution over the Gen II. As a result, a level of inner detail was revealed that I had never heard before on this and other CDs. This is *not* just cold analytical detail however. It is accompanied by an amazing dynamic swing that, coupled with this greater resolution of inner texture, conveys a rich emotional

feeling to the music like I've never heard from digital. It really is amazing what this processor is able to portray. I know that this level of performance will come as a revelation to many who had written off digital as hopelessly incapable of supplying this kind of warmth and meaning to music.

The entire frequency range of the Gen III is improved relative to its predecessor. The lower register has tremendous punch and extension while revealing the harmonic structure of bass notes very realistically. The midrange is richer and warmer with a truly tangible sense of inner detail and texture that will draw you into the music every time. The upper frequencies are even more open and extended than the excellent job done by the Gen II. Gone is the last vestige of grain and hardness that could sometimes be heard with the Gen II. Instead, there is a delicate airiness to the high end that I find wonderfully soothing.

Theta has always been known for great imaging and soundstaging. Here again the new processor will simply amaze you. I think it's largely the combination of resolution with dynamic range (both macro and micro). The three dimensional placement of instruments along with an uncanny sense of air around the notes, distinctly separates the performers resulting in a "you are there" presence that I have never experienced before from recorded music (then again, I haven't spent long hours listening to a Rockport Sirius turntable either).

I could go on, but I think the overall impact, which is the result of all these attributes, is a wonderful, believable sense of presence. I can say this to you after eight weeks of literally rediscovering my entire CD collection. I still have to pry myself out of my listening chair when it's time to sleep.

Is the new Theta Generation III the best processor currently available? I'll leave that to others to decipher. The level of sheer musical enjoyment it confers tends to make such attempts at comparison beside the point. At \$5000 for a balanced Gen III (\$4000 for single ended), it represents a true bargain when other top drawer units range up to three times that amount. Those Gen II owners looking for that next step toward Hi-Fi Heaven, will have a hard time getting a better return than with the Gen III upgrade.

If you have a regular Gen II, you can move up to a single ended Gen III for \$1,250. If you have a balanced Gen II, you can convert to a balanced Gen III for \$1,750. Try to spring for the balanced unit if you have a balanced input on your preamp or are contemplating buying one in the near future. While the single ended version sounds terrific, the balanced version is well worth the additional cost.

1992 seems to be shaping up as the year when the words "digital" and "musical" can finally go hand in hand. I'm hoping that many of the advances found in the Theta Generation, the Levinson, and other top processors will find their way into more and more A to D converters throughout the recording industry. That will be good news for everyone. In the meantime, Theta's new flagship will show you how good your existing collection of CDs can sound.

**A note on digital cable.** Theoretically the AT&T ST interface at 56 Mhz risetime is too slow to accurately transmit the bitstream from the transport. I've heard figures of 330 Mhz and up being required for best linearity.

The big problem with digital coax cables is the noise and particularly the reflections and degradation from the connectors, be they RCA or XLR. A balanced type cable with low noise and excellent connectors may indeed be better



than the AT&T. The ultimate might be an optical system with 300+ Mhz speed.

Directly comparing Theta's well made digital (coax) cable to their glass optical output, I prefer the AT&T. The coax sounds wonderful with an even greater sheen on the top end. The AT&T however, is not lacking in upper frequency detail though it is slightly softer.

The difference is in soundstaging. The AT&T seems to add more bloom and body to the images in a very believable fashion, while the coax seems a bit more recessed and smaller. If you decide on the digital coax approach, use the best cable you can find.

**The Theta DS Pro Generation III Digital Processor, Theta Digital Corp., 5330 Derry Ave., Suite R, Agoura Hills, CA, 91301; 818 597-9195, fax: 818 597-1079. Mike Mofat, designer.**

Reference system: Theta Data digital transport, Rowland Consummate preamp, Rowland Model 1 amps (bridged), ProAc Response 3 speakers, Straightwire Maestro interconnect (balanced) and speaker cable.

## Purist Audio Design Colossus Cable

*Bill Brassington*

I would like to start off this review with a gripe. One of the most annoying things happening to me nowadays is when so-called audiophiles come up to me and state opinions on equipment they haven't heard yet—they learned all about it from someone they trust, and feel that if the other guy liked it, then that's good enough. The rumors start spreading about a piece of equipment and how it's good or no good: the bass is rolled off, or the highs are too bright, etc., etc. The manufacturer now has a good or a bad rap and hardly anyone has even heard the product.

For god sakes, if you are going to put your reputation or opinion on the line about a piece of equipment, at least personally listen to it before you say anything. I once bought a pair of speakers based on what I read and what three people (Golden Ears all) told me. Need-

less to say, I brought them home and they sounded terrible. Trust your own ears!

What I write is my opinion developed after hours of careful listening, but please, if at all possible, listen for yourself before forming an opinion. And thanks for listening.

Now on to the cables: Purist Audio Design—who are they? Oh, they're probably just another company selling esoteric wires to audiophiles who think they can hear big differences in sound between cables, and they're probably getting rich real quick in the process. If you think that, you'll be missing out on a great new advancement in cable design and sound!

Its nickname is "The Water Cable," and when audiophiles first saw it, they said things like: "Hey Bill, I hear it's very liquid sounding!" And "Can you play

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with it in bathtub?" Or "What happens when it gets cold? Does it sound hard?" Even "Does it sound better if you put goldfish in it?" They laughed at the Wright Brothers also!

Recently I've been getting to meet some real down-to-earth audiophiles and manufacturers, like Bob Grost of Unity Audio and Jim Aud, founder/owner of Purist Audio and designer of the Aqueous, Maximus, and now the new top of the line Colossus cables. When I first talked to Jim in Texas, the one thing I never forgot was the telephone bill. We must have talked all night! If I were to give a nickname to Mr. Aud, I guess it would have to be "Gentleman Jim," 'cause that's what he is, a perfect gentleman: laid back, soft spoken, sincere, and a great listener—something I appreciate, being a salesman by trade myself. Jim is also a bundle of technical information, most of which I don't understand.

The Colossus interconnect and speaker cables, the latest products from the Texas Water Cable Company—sorry, Purist Audio Design—are making a big splash in the high-end marketplace. The interconnect comes in both balanced and single-ended configurations; having equipment designed to use balanced connections, I of course chose to go that route.

Considering all the cable I've owned and heard—from Radio Shack wire to \$4000 (for eight feet) high-end speaker cable—the Purist Audio Colossus is the winner. Why? 'Cause it sounds the best to me, pure and simple. But this is dangerous speaker cable. It takes a long, long time to break in—maybe 150 hours or more—and Gentleman Jim Aud gives a money back guarantee, no questions asked. The problem is you could spend big bucks buying it, get it home, hook it up, not like it at first, and send it back!

I myself was ready to send it back even though I had been warned to let it break in for a long time. We audiophiles want instant gratification. Sound familiar?

When I first installed it the midrange was good, but the highs were too bright and the bass too loose. So I let it cook! The "Miracle Wire" is what it should be called, or maybe the "Patience Wire," 'cause six days later I'd have sworn that somebody had come in and swapped my whole system for something better.

Jim Aud has been developing and perfecting his liquid jacket cables for the past six years. A longtime audiophile and electrical engineer, Jim discovered that submerging his cable in a special mixture of fluids not only lowers the noise floor but also filters out unwanted electromagnetic fields and RFI from AC power cords, D-A converters, static electricity, and other sources, as well as airborne and mechanical vibrations. Through extensive listening tests, Jim established that the cable inside the fluid filled jacket sounds significantly better than the same cable outside the jacket, proving that the fluid does indeed provide a definite sonic benefit.

In addition, much design work has gone into other areas of the cable's construction. Computer modelling was used to create a custom metal alloy that allows maximum conductivity in the audio frequency regions. Silver solder is used on each electrical connection and the cables are highly resistant to oxidation, due to the materials and the self-contained environment. Excellent flexibility is provided without inducing mechanical stress, which insures that the sonic quality will not be degraded by bending and twisting. The manufacturing environment is carefully controlled, the cables being hand fabricated and tested by specially trained technicians to insure superior consistency and reliability.

So what has all this attention to detail resulted in sonically? Neutral is the most appropriate word I can think of to describe the Colossus. Other top-of-the-line cables sound colored in one way or another by comparison. Instruments and voices that sound somewhat vague with other cables appear defined, fo-

cused and detailed with the Colossus. For example, on Amazonia (Chesky JD-45) Ana Caram's vocal is pinpoint sharp and naturally detailed with superb ambient information. You can even make out the smile forming on her face as she sings the beginning part of "Cigano." Other cables just don't get you this involved in the performance.

Other cables do reproduce the three-dimensional stage captured by Telarc on the Fauré Requiem, Op. 43 (Robert Shaw, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, CD80135), but only with the Colossus cables could I hear, for the first time, the harmonic overtones and individual delineation of the voices. The chorus was no longer an indistinct mass, but was rather a group of individual voices, vivid and rich in tonality.

Natural harmonic overtones not audible with other cables were easily perceived with the Colossus. Listening to the first cut, "Ionization" on Percussion Music (Electra Nonesuch 979150-2), I found the overtones of the lion's roar, suspended cymbals and Chinese blocks to be incredibly vivid. Soundstage depth and width also seemed to increase dramatically. Drums and other percussion instruments, rather than appearing to be on one plane, were for the first time perceived correctly in various places around the front, middle and rear of the soundstage. Bass notes were taut and well defined, with excellent impact.

Warren Bernhardt's Heat of the Moment (DMP CD468) provides another telling example of the vividness and punch offered by the Colossus cables. A perceptibly lower noise floor along with grunge free high frequency transients allows the performance to be reproduced with superior energy and dynamics.

Right now, this is a hard-to-beat, serious, world-class wire. This opinion has been rendered without haste; I have been to about eight homes where we played with the wire against top-of-the-line competi-

tors, and in every case but one the Purist came out on top.

Listen folks, I've read comparison test reviews on wire and I question just how valid they can be, with all due respect to the guys doing the reviews. In my estimation, system interfacing plays too big a part. I pride myself in having a high resolution, well-respected system. I've tried a lot of wire in it and right now the Purist Audio Cable sets new standards.

In case you guys are waiting to hear all the audiophile buzz words I haven't used yet, here they are (and every word is true): unsurpassed accuracy; low noise floor; luscious sweet highs; romantic but balanced and natural midrange; three dimensional soundstaging; deep, dynamic bass with definition, pitch, clarity and very fast attack; exceptional rhythm, pace, drive and bounce; rich harmonic overtones with oodles of detail.

But remember, don't believe me until you hear it for yourself! See if you think it's as good as the "Brass Ear" says. This is clearly the finest cable I've come across, but if it's too expensive, listen to its lower priced brothers, the Maximus and the Aqueous. They are also superb!

**Purist Colossus interconnect and speaker cable; Purist Audio Design, P.O. Box 125; Clute, Texas 77531 Price: \$1000 (1 meter balanced interconnect); \$995 (1 meter unbalanced); \$1200 (5 ft. pair speaker wire).**

Reference system: Krell MD-10 transport; Theta DS Pro Gen.II processor (balanced); Sequerra tuner; Krell KBL preamp (line stage); Krell MDA 500 amplifiers; Unity Audio Pyramid speakers (balanced bi-wired); Purist Audio Design Colossus balanced interconnect. speaker cables and AC line cord; Monster Cable Tranquility Base; ASC Tube Traps; Tice Power Block.

# Unity Audio *Professional Application Reference Monitor (PARM)*

*Hy Kachalsky*

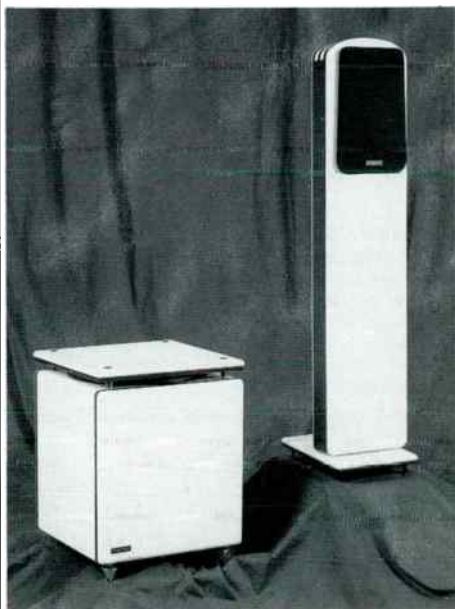
For fifteen years I've owned dipole speakers. My feeling was that they gave me the most natural—that is, closest to live—sound attainable. Not only was there an absence of "boxiness", but the sound was gorgeously open, transparent, and clear, with terrific definition. Vague imaging and soft bass, unfortunately, were also part of the bargain. For a long time I was willing to enjoy the positives and live with the negatives. I've been through the Maggie 1Cs and 1Ds, Plasmatronics, the original three-panel Apogees, the Scintillas, and finally the Divas with and without the DAX—and loved them all, especially the Diva/DAX speakers.

Aside from the sonic deficits—no gut shaking bass impact, and mediocre imaging—there were also serious problems only peripherally related to sound quality. You see, 99% of the Audiophile Society meetings are held at my house. Most amplifiers, and particularly tube amplifiers, had great difficulty driving the Divas to the levels needed on meeting nights when the room is full of sound absorbing audiophiles who like their music realistically loud. This was inherently unfair to many manufacturers. It's tough when your home system must serve as the reference system for everybody!

But good things have been occurring in the development of dynamic speakers. Dave Wilson and his WATTs demonstrated how cone speakers could achieve incredible imaging along with a remarkable openness and transparency. The addition of the Puppies made this a wonderfully full-range speaker (though

expensive, and with some problems in the bass and upper midrange areas—largely alleviated in the latest versions). This speaker was followed with others from Mirage, Avalon, Hales, Genesis, Unity Audio and Sequerra, among others. All of these moving coil speakers avoided the problems of boxiness and veiling. They were able to perform with a clarity, spaciousness, and openness new to dynamic speakers.

I was first drawn to the Unity Audio speakers at the Chicago CES show in 1990. They were in a very small room and used electronics that I had never heard of. Although I felt the associated components were impairing the sound, my impression was that this was a potentially fine speaker. By the Spring of 1991, Bill Brassington had also discovered Unity Audio; he purchased a pair



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of Pyramids, and his review appeared in Vol. 1, #1 of *The Audiophile Voice*.

Although the Pyramid is an excellent speaker, it was the Professional Application Reference Monitor (PARM) that intrigued me. Not only did it meet the Audiophile Society's special requirement of being an efficient, easy load to drive, but the modular subwoofer/satellite design meant that we could easily move them in and out of the listening room. However, these certainly are not valid criteria for rating a speaker system—the name of the game is how they perform. In this case, one cannot separate the performance from the painstaking investigation that went into their design.

Bob Grost, an audiophile electrical engineer, spent several years in research and development on this speaker system, and he has come up with some unique and innovative ideas. Starting with the bass section, he felt that most systems could not reproduce the lowest octave in sufficient quantity. He thus developed a system with, according to Grost, "High efficiency bottom octave performance and practically no resonances."

He uses two identical woofers operating in phase acoustically, thus doubling the output. The cabinet, in order to be as mechanically inert as possible, is constructed of Fountainhead material. The resulting specs are impressive: "a woofer system that is a 14" cube with an internal volume of 17 liters that is -3db at 23Hz. Efficiency is 91 db 1 W/meter." Jim Aud (Purist Audio Design), who engineered the woofer crossover currently sold with the speakers, has measured response in his room flat to 22hz.

The crossover for the satellites is an intriguing element of the speaker and one of the reasons it sounds so good. It is a "balanced" crossover in the sense that each component present in the positive

signal path is also present in the negative signal path.

In a traditionally designed crossover, positive impulses travel down the "red leads" from the amplifier and pass through component parts, such as capacitors in the crossover, before being launched by the driver. Since capacitors are energy storage devices, a slight time delay is encountered. However, when a negative impulse is generated, it travels down the negative side of the crossover, which has no component parts. A time delay difference is therefore created and causes a smear between the positive and negative signals.

In the Unity Audio Design, with identical parts present on the positive and negative sides, the time constant is the same, and eliminates this overlap.

The satellite crossover is also unique in that it corrects for time smear in the wave launch characteristics of the dynamic drivers. In a midrange driver, for example, the higher frequencies are launched from the center of the cone and the lower frequencies are launched from the perimeter. Unity has created a mirror image time delay in the crossover which is related to frequency. All frequencies are therefore launched at the same time.

Eliminating these two major areas of time smearing allows this dynamic speaker design to be much more transparent, while retaining the advantages of dynamic drivers: small surface area compared to electrostatics, and dynamic range.

The crossover is a first order 6 db/octave design on both the positive and negative sides. An impedance path error correction adds another 6db per octave, resulting in an effective slope of 18 db/octave—the optimum slope for driver linearity.

The satellites have an identical mid-range driver just off the floor and facing to the rear at the back of the cabinet. This driver provides a "dummy load" for the crossover to correct for the phase abnormalities of the front facing midrange driver. It flattens the impedance curve and presents a uniform load to the amp.

The two satellites measure 8.5" x 38.5" x 3" deep. This size is the minimum required to get the tweeter and midrange drivers up to ear height and hold them rigidly in place while minimizing diffractions off the front baffle. Fountainhead, for those not familiar with it, is an artificial stone substance which is available in a variety of natural colors and textures. It is nearly inert acoustically and so provides a non-resonant structure for the tweeter and midrange whose critical frequency range provide 90% of our musical information. Construction using Fountainhead is the other major feature which allows this system to have low distortion and coloration.

The woofer cabinets measure a modest 14" x 13.5" deep x 17.5" high for the amount of sound they produce. All four structures weigh "a ton"—we're dealing with stone remember. Get a friend to help. Placing the woofers in relation to the room and the satellite cabinets will require experimentation. In one set up in another home, they sound best against the wall and almost in the corners. In my home they sound best standing against the wall, but well out from the corners. In a third home with the same speakers the woofers sound best well out from the wall, only a couple of feet in back and slightly to the outside of the satellites. Listen for continuity between deep and upper bass as you experiment with placement.

Keep in mind that this is a \$15k speaker system, not the most expensive but certainly well up in the heavens of "Ultimate Illusion". So after this big build

up, how does it sound? Not so fast. Have a little patience with this system because it will take about 48 hours or more to acceptably break in.

The first thing I noticed was clarity from top to bottom; the words, the tonality, the interplay of the various instruments and/or voices are clearly and cleanly delineated. Soundstaging is as realistic as it gets in hi-fi. Belafonte Returns to Carnegie Hall (Mobile Fidelity MFCD 782) for example is reproduced as authentically as I've ever heard, with Belafonte practically a physical presence in the listening room as he walks around the stage in "There's a Hole in the Bucket."

Whereas the Divas are imposing and evoke the expectation of a large, authoritative sound, the PARM satellites and woofers are small, so the large, weighty sound and expansive but accurate soundstage come as a surprise. Imaging is precise and to my mind more natural than the WATT/Puppies, whose imaging is perhaps too prominent and dominating.

The frequency response is inherently smooth, and it can even be tailored to your taste by adjusting the level control on the crossover. This essentially raises or lowers the bass response—which can be quite dramatic or subtle, depending on how judiciously you use it. It works very well, but I would sure wish it was remote controlled. It would make life much simpler.

Tonality, transient response and dynamics are all flawless. While any well-recorded CD will demonstrate these virtues, a listen to both discs of Pink Floyd's *The Wall* (Columbia C2K 36183) proved most educational. It simply was awesome and astounding. I could raise the bass to where you would hear it live, or lower it to more tasteful levels and still get plenty of gut reaction—but with an increase in clarity across the rest of the frequency spectrum.



Now for a cautionary note. When I was using the Purist Audio Design Maximus interconnect there was a slight brightness in the upper midrange when playing digital sources (much lessened with analog). However, by replacing the Maximus with Colossus interconnect, there was a marked change for the better in all areas, but particularly in the upper midrange, which became sweeter and deliciously natural. This speaker is extremely revealing of any flaws in the signal sent to it, so a system built around the PARMs should contain only components of equal quality (good advice for any system).

In conclusion, this speaker system from Unity Audio is worth every penny of its price—and probably could even sell for more. Its design and construction are top-notch and luxurious. When you get this thing going right you're going to be one happy audiophile camper. It does

so many things right and so little wrong that it will give you many years of enjoyment. And the highest praise I can give this product is that I bought it.

**PARM speaker system price:  
\$15,000**

**Unity Audio  
29261/2 W. St. Joseph Highway  
Lansing, MI 48917**

Associated components:  
Krell MDA-300 amplifiers (four);  
Krell KBL line stage preamp, with KPA phono stage;  
Krell SBP 64X digital processor;  
Krell MD-10 CD transport;  
Purist Colossus interconnect and speaker cable; Tice Power Block.

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## The Jadis Defy 7 Amplifier

Mark Block

Here's the ultimate test of a new component: plug it into your system and listen to several hours' worth of certified, audiophile-approved, editor's choice blockbusters. Determine that they do indeed sound impressive—better than ever. Now put on a few recordings you know to be sonically flawed. If you still hear the imperfections but the music sounds a lot better than you thought, then you've got a great piece of gear, and you're making a very worthwhile upgrade.

My first Ittok tonearm had this effect. So did my old pair of Krell KMA-100s, and likewise the CAT preamp. I'm happy to report that the Jadis Defy 7 passes this test with flying colors. The Accuracy Gurus would have you believe that if a component makes poor recordings sound good then it must be "euphonically colored." To me, that's like saying a great bottle of wine makes your food taste more delicious than it really is, so only plain water should be served with a meal. The way I look at it, the right wine brings out the best in the food; by all means keep that Cabernet coming.

In my system, the Defy 7 replaced a Krell KSA-80B. To prefer one to the other is a little like choosing between a French Premier Cru, cellared for thirty years but just reaching its peak, and an austere, powerful, complex and barely ready to drink California Cab. The analogy applies not only to sonic flavor, but to philosophy as well—Cal Davis style science versus the artistry of Latour—with Krell's Dan D'Agostino choosing an all out, state-of-the-art technological blitz, and Jadis' Jean Paul Caffri emulating the tried and true, revered designs of Mac and Marantz.

I've been a Krell man for years; it was a Krell amp that first convinced me that the expense involved in high end equipment can really be money well spent. Many years ago my friend Steve loaned me his old Krell KSA-100 while he went away on vacation (yes, he's a very good friend to have). I hooked it up, listened for a few minutes, and thought: Sounds nice, but not that much better than my moderately priced amp; I can live without it.

Two weeks later Steve took it away, my own amp returned to active duty, and devastation reigned. My amp (even after hours of warm-up) now sounded pathetic! How could I have accepted mediocrity for so long? The revelation hit me like a bombshell, exploding my budget-minded complacency and ignorance. I had learned that I'm not very good at quick audio judgments, and I bought a pair of KMA-100s the next week (four years later downsizing to a KSA-80B for space reasons).

And now history repeats itself, only this time I'm thinking, How could I have lived without tubes for so long? The answer is easy. I've been using Acoustat full range electrostatic speakers (first 2+2s, and now Spectra 22s). Intellectually it was hard for me to accept that tubes could work properly with these low efficiency, low impedance panels.



A fellow Audiophile Society member ("Hello, my name is Bill, and I'm a speakerholic") who goes through speakers the way Wilt Chamberlain goes through women, has confirmed my impression that Acoustat makes some of the most power hungry beasts around. The Spectra 22s drop below 2 ohms in the high treble, so they're not only inefficient but major current suckers to boot, causing even the Krell to clip on occasion (most easily on the Reference Recordings CD *Dick Hyman Plays Fats Waller*).

You would think that a 100 watt tube amplifier could not possibly be up to the task of getting the best from these full range electrostats. Think again. After living with the Defy 7 for about a month, I put the Krell back in the system. The tight, iron fisted control of the Krell was immediately apparent and much appreciated, but I was also struck by something unexpected. The Krell sounded kind of ... is it possible? ... LAZY. Slow. Undynamic. Incredible, but true. The Defy 7 really is a special kind of tube amp.

In fairness to Krell's current product line, I should mention that I brought the Defy 7 over to Russ Novak's place, where we had a shoot out with his Krell KSA-250 through Mirage speakers. Russ' Krell sounded plenty dynamic, and seemed to mate better with his passive preamp than did the Jadis. [*With a 10k resistor, the passive unit is an impedance mismatch for the Jadis. - Russ*] My conclusion is that the older KSA-80B may have been a little underpowered for my Acoustat speakers.

However, that still doesn't explain how the Jadis, with only twenty more watts into 8 ohms and fewer still into 4, can sound so powerful and electrifying. I shudder to think how good the system would sound with a pair of Defy 7s strapped for mono; with 200 watts of tube muscle per side, we'd be taking no prisoners. I don't fantasize about this

very long, however, because I can't afford it and even if I could my wife would not be amused.

Tube amps are, of course, expected to sound soft in the bass and rolled off in the highs. Given the 2 ohm treble impedance of the Acoustats, it's not surprising that Jadis is guilty of the latter in my system. The result is that metallic overtones so important to the realism of cymbals are slightly diminished.

On the other hand, recordings that are harsh and bright to begin with, such as Joni Mitchell's *Night Ride Home* (Geffen GEFD-24302), become sonically bearable and musically captivating. I should mention also that after cleaning the tube pins (and, naturally, all the RCA connections) with Kontak, much of the high frequency overtone content that I assumed the Jadis was incapable of delivering to the Acoustats came flooding back but without sacrificing the lovely listenability that I had come to depend on.

A further improvement was wrought after importer Victor Goldstein suggested I treat my CAT preamp with his Harmonix (AKA Combak) tuning band—sother CAT owners of Victor's acquaintance having been suitably blown away by these little thingamabobs. If you don't know what I'm talking about, consult the January 1992 issue of *The Absolute Sound*.) I'm a skeptic at heart, and I would relish the opportunity to debunk another Peter Belt-like audiophile delusion. Unfortunately for my skepticism and fortunately for my system, this Combak stuff actually works. Bass became noticeably more tuneful and detailed, and even the high frequencies seemed less smeared and blurred. It also became apparent after several weeks that the "system tune" was more stable, less inclined to sound different from night to night. The improvement in my preamp made the Defy 7 sound all the more impressive.

Have you ever noticed that if a phono cartridge, CD player, or solid state component tends to roll off or soften high frequencies, it will usually sound flat and undynamic? Apparently the leading edges of transients become rounded off or otherwise reduced in intensity, thereby causing a lackluster presentation. Tube components, however, somehow manage to avoid that trap, perhaps due to a compensatory presence region sparkle.

The Defy 7 is certainly a component that falls into the camp of sweetened highs, but I can detect absolutely no loss of dynamic contrasts. If anything, just the opposite. The spectacular dueling guitars on Strunz and Farah's *Primal Magic* (Mesa R2 79023) provide a telling test of the Defy 7's capabilities. The plucked strings positively bristle with energy, crackling with a fire that burns holes through the generously bassy wall of rhythm.

In the lowest nether regions of the bass I cannot vouch for the Defy 7's strengths, or lack thereof. Although my speakers measure flat to about 30 Hz in my room, subjectively they don't sound anywhere near that good. When they attempt to reproduce super low bass, like the synthesizer on the opening cut of Enya's *Watermark* (Geffen 9 24233-2), they merely emit static discharge noises.

We all know that most rooms cause a hefty low frequency uptick in the measured response. I firmly believe that this room reinforcement can never fully compensate for the rolled off anechoic response of bass-shy mini-monitors and electrostatic panels. The Acoustats are lacking in low frequency oomph no matter what they measure, and are further hampered by a leanness in the upper bass/lower midrange. What the Jadis brings to the party, however, is a certain rhythmic brawn that allows the listener to grab onto and follow the beat.

The title track from Bonnie Raitt's *Nick Of Time* (Capitol CDP 7 91268 2) features a gently loping bass line that never fails to grip me when I hear it through a Krell/Apogee combination, but always seemed to be missing something through my own Krell/Acoustat system. The Jadis brings it on home. Likewise, the monstrously good bass of the Nile Rodgers-produced *Family Style* (Epic ZK 46225) by Jimmie and the late Stevie Ray Vaughan comes through with great authority and slam, but also with a tunefulness that leaves the mid-range clear and unimpeded.

Micro dynamics in the midrange region is another area of strength. Subtle vocal shadings that reveal the emotional intentions of a performer are consistently and painstakingly exposed by the Defy 7. A slight crack in the voice, an almost subliminal vibrato, a soft sigh, a syllable enunciated or dropped, a breath taken or not taken—these are the things you notice for the first time when hearing music through the Defy 7. Consider "I Can't Make You Love Me" from Bonnie Raitt's *Luck Of The Draw*. The song is a moving tear-jerker about unrequited love. But listen carefully, to the nuances of the vocal performance and hear the surprising strength behind the pain and hurt.

I've always had a tough time figuring out what Ry Cooder was up to on "Rally 'Round the Flag," a slow, bluesy variation on this old Civil War era number from his 1972 album *Boomer's Story*. Released as it was during the Vietnam War, I always had a suspicion that there was a large dose of cynicism in Ry's selection of this song—that he was turning it inside out and making it into an anti-war, protest song. Through the Defy 7, however, I hear none of that. What I do hear is an overwhelming weariness of voice that is sad, touching, compelling, and finally uplifting. The beautiful slide guitar solo near the end is startling in its peaks of energy, and yet so subtly detailed in the quiet mo-

ments that you can practically count the steel wraps on the strings as the bottle-neck glides across. The Defy 7 is a revealing amplifier, yet warm and not the least bit ruthless.

Imaging? Did someone say imaging? Must I go into that? This is a Jadis. Nuff said.

What apparently makes the Jadis products so special are their transformers. Proprietary in design and hand wound in France, they are what set Jadis products apart from the competition. Impressive looking, too, although their size tends to dominate the amp's styling to an unfortunate degree. Throw in the chrome plated chassis, a plain black perforated cage over the tubes, and some glued-on plaques with old-fashioned lettering and you have a design which looks outdated but without any retro pizzazz. I recommend removing the protective cage; the amp sounds better, runs cooler and looks sharper. Tube fetishists will think I'm nuts for saying this, but I don't think the amp is particularly attractive, and so I prefer to keep it out of sight.

Construction quality is barely adequate. The weight of the transformers squashes the stock rubber front feet, and yet the bottom panel is too flimsy to give support to the set of four rigid Harmonix/Combak feet recommended by the manufacturer. Cone shaped isolation devices may work in some set-ups, although I'm content to use Navcom pucks. Victor Goldstein assures me that the Harmonix feet have worked impressively in dozens of other Defy 7 systems, so perhaps I didn't try hard enough. Look for a follow up next issue.

The archaic styling of the Defy 7 is purely intentional, of course, and probably appeals to most Jadis customers. The name Jadis translates in French as "the way it used to be," but it also means "magic" to those audiophiles who have heard about or heard with

their own ears the intoxicating purity of the midrange in all Jadis amplifiers. However, the name Jadis has also come to mean "fragile," as the delicacy of the sound seemed to be matched by a delicacy of the electronics. You know what I mean—poof go the tubes, taking with them large chunks of unprotected circuitry.

When Victor Goldstein took over as U.S. importer four years ago, he vowed to make the Jadis name stand for something new: reliability. The Defy 7 was introduced a year later, and with the help of virtuoso violinist and electrical engineer extraordinaire Da Hong Seetoo, Victor set about making the Defy 7 bulletproof. Power tubes (12 in all) were changed from EL 34s to 6550s, with a very low bias of 25 to 30 mA. Each tube was individually protected with a fuse and a bypass capacitor to insure that nasty DC surges from an unfriendly preamp won't damage the tubes; likewise, a self-immolating tube won't spread destruction to its neighbors.

Extra storage capacitors, Cardas wiring and other Da Hong touches were found to bring sonic benefits, and Victor saw to it that all the changes would be incorporated into production units by the Jadis factory. Additional refinements to the amp were introduced early this year (starting with serial #400). Local feedback was added, and now the amp runs pure Class A up to about 60 watts into each channel. Older Defy 7 amps can be fully updated by Da Hong.

Many good designers like to run their tubes at the recommended voltage limits in the belief that tubes sound their best when pushed. The Jadis amp flies in the face of this philosophy. As a result of its very conservative bias, the Defy 7 (not unlike the current Supreme Court) should give unvarying service for a long period of time. This is important to a Krell man like myself, who doesn't have the slightest bit of interest in frequent tube swapping. I just want

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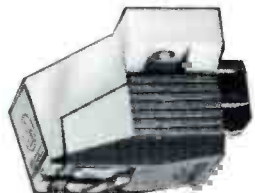
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to turn it on and not worry about it. I have enough things to worry about—the state of my amplifier tubes is not one of them.

People you should worry about. Stereos you should enjoy hedonistically. If you cringe a little every time you turn on the power switch, half expecting a puff of blue smoke, you've got a problem. Here's what I do: find it, feel it, flick it, forget it (and I don't want to hear from any psychiatrists about sublimation).

Tubes should last you two or three years (assuming several hours a day use). Re-tubing runs, at current prices, about \$350, and should be performed by your dealer. Matched sets of 6550s are critical, as each bias pot trims three tubes. Victor Goldstein provides his dealers with tubes that have been run in for 100 hours at the factory, measured, and carefully matched.

The Defy 7 has already earned all the accolades and attention that an audio product needs. It's got the reviews, it's

got the reputation. The one thing new that I can add with this review is that it can handle just about any speaker you care to throw at it. It should be on your short list of amps to audition no matter what speaker you own.

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## The VPI HW-19 Mark IV Upgrade Kit

*Earl Stevens*

Once upon a time, a time lost in a haze of Hafler, Dynaco and Thorens, a still youthful audio hobbyist and music lover heard the siren call of that most seductive allure, the QUEST OF HIGH END AUDIO. That pursuit must lead, as does sitting too close to the TV, to compulsive behavior, poor posture, and a total loss of any sense of value. It's a lifestyle capable of separating the acolyte from his noble goal, the glory of music. In my head rang "the words", words that many saw but few dedicated their existence to. Words that lead to Audiophilia: "build a better front-end and it will play!"

I did and I was ensnared in that ever upward spiral. This is how it began.

I bought a V.P.I. HW-19 MK II in 1985. It was grand. It made my records sing. Fitted with a Grado Signature Tonearm and a Grace F9E I was fulfilled. As time passed, changes of equipment, replacing a PAT 5 preamp with a PS Audio Source, exposed areas of performance in the MK II that I had previously overlooked: a sandy texture in the highs. Fine sand it is true, but sand nonetheless. There was also a noise floor which remained constant no matter which disk I decided to spin. Since the dynamic range of vinyl varies it had to be an artifact of the turntable.

However V.P.I. had not forgotten me. They offered a succession of upgrades, reasonably priced, that kept pace with my system, always providing enough detail to keep my records fresh. But of late I became aware that a number of new turntables, pricey by factors of 2 or 4 or more, V.P.I.'s TNT included, had rendered my MK III dated. What to do?

Ring....Ring....Oh hello Hy.... Would I like to play with a V.P.I. HW-19 MK IV upgrade kit (we talk funny, don't we?)....Is this a trick question?

In time it arrived in a very large box which disgorged a massive black acrylic platter with lead dampening, a large, interesting bearing/spindle assembly, four heavy suspension springs and a new drive belt. The instructions appeared sketchy, but the hardest part of the job was unhooking my MK III and getting it on the worktable.

The conversion took about twenty minutes. After removing the armboard to protect the innocent, I lifted the platter from the spindle being, careful not to spill any of the bearing oil. The next step was removing the three screws securing the bearing assembly (don't lose those screws). At this point, lift the plinth out of the base and place it on raised supports. I used bricks. Remove the springs from the base and replace them with the new units. Keep track of the color coding and follow the instructions. The matching pairs go in diagonally opposite corners. The rest is easy.

Would you believe that at this point you are more than half way done? The new bearing is placed in its hole, lined up, and bolted in. I hope you didn't lose the screws. Place the plinth back into the base and remount the arm board. Then adjust the springs to level it with the edge of the base. Keep the platter aside, as the added weight makes everything more difficult until the turntable is back in its rightful place at the head of the system.

Take the opportunity, as I did, to make sure all the mounting hardware and wiring are secure. I also re-set up the tonearm, an biannual event in my house. Adjustment of the tonearm is a necessity under any circumstance, as the new platter is about five-eighths of an inch thicker. I let the turntable set until the next day to allow the springs to settle. Use the down time to clean all your connections, terminals and jacks. Do not forget to dust under and behind everything. As Mom always said .."dust can be dangerous." Ah choo! Ah choo! Bless you and for goodness sake get on with it!

You bet. It is time to take notice of the metamorphoses that had taken place. What I had before me was now a V.P.I. HP19 MK IV, a thoroughly modern high-end turntable that still looks like what the rest of the world expects a record playing machine to look like. It's a reasonably sized, handsome package consisting of a commanding platter supported on a highly reflective plinth. The plinth is a complex sandwich of dampening material, stainless steel, and a half inch slab of acrylic. The arm board, of the same substance, attaches with six hex bolts, making arm mounting a fairly painless task. V.P.I. will pre-drill the hole of your choice.

A massive motor assembly is mounted independently of the spring-suspended plinth/bearing/platter unit and provides the driving force via a clear round belt. This solitary connection between motor and platter is protected by a easily removed, raised cover of matching acrylic. Speed change is effected by manually moving the belt between two pulleys on the motor shaft, unless you employ V.P.I.'s Power Line Conditioner which allows you to vary speed electronically.

All these goodies are housed in a real wood base available in walnut, oak, blackened oak, or a sexy black piano finish. The base includes adjustable feet



set in screw-thread holes, a nice touch that allows easy installation of screw-in Tip Toes. Also available are heavy dust covers of differing height. These are not the molded types that generate more problems than they prevent, vibrating with every sound. The unwanted energy is transmitted into the base on hinged units and into the tonearm if you keep the cover on while playing. Since I share my abode with cats I find a substantial dust cover a necessity.

V.P.I. provides an accessory reflex record clamp made from the same material as the platter which, to me, sounds better than the two piece item that came with my turntable. At last all is in readiness. I sit back relaxed. Is it record yet?

Well, not quite yet. A test spin proved disappointing. The lower treble and upper midrange were grainy. That first impression also included a wavering bass. I let the unit run-in a bit. The burn-in on my rig involved only the belt and bearing assembly since my motor had seen use. After forty-eight hours the impact of the MK IV upgrade began to make itself felt, with more real improvement heard over the balance of a week of continuous operation. Several months of almost daily use has indicated the need for a warm-up of about one LP. Two is really better, but by the end of the first I find myself deeply involved with the music and forget about the sound. So how does it sound?

Thought I forgot about it didn't you? I chose four records that I am very familiar with and used them for comparison during the break-in period interspersed with other material. I am buying more records now than I have ever done before (the challenge of the search, the thrill of the find, the glory of the acquisition). And now the list please! Prokofiev: *The Suite from the Love for Three Oranges*, Mercury SR90006; Ives: *Holidays Symphony*, Turnabout TV3410463; Buxtehude: *Preludi, Corali & Contate*, Harmonia Mundi VST6055; and my fa-

vorite voice check, Prokofiev: *Peter and the Wolf*, London SPC21007 featuring Sean Connery.

After conversion, the bass had a satisfying fullness that only improved as the machinery settled in. The sense of power generated by full orchestras would, alone, be enough to sell me a MK IV. Forty-eight hours later the character of the balance smoothed out, the tempo solidified, and the grain in the lower treble was dramatically reduced. The Prokofiev on Mercury took on a seamless texture with a slam I had never experienced on my system before. The "feel" of two opposing orchestras on the Ives' solidified. You more easily perceived that you were at a parade ground with one band coming toward you while another, playing a different tune, was going away.

Still, it was while I was listening to the less complex Buxtehude that I first became aware of a substantially lowered noise floor, a factor that contributes to the more realistic floating of the dissonant Ives passages, allowing more low level ambience information to help set the soundstage. If this was as good as it got the upgrade would be good value for the asking price. There's more?

A peck more than I expected. The cumulative effect of the lower noise floor and an apparent escalation in dynamic range took me quite by surprise. The improvement did seem greater than the sum of it's parts. So what's the story? Not that I was complaining, mind you, but I had wasted lot of time with some of my "audiophile" records (you know the ones; great sound but uninvolved performances) trying to hear what was happening. At this juncture a light bulb went on in my head.

I pulled out two of my musical favorite "non-audiophile" records: *The Three Penny Opera*, MGM E3121 (yes, mono) and *Duke Ellington*, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Decca DL710176. Sur-

face noise plagues each, noise so pervasive that it was difficult to listen to one side at a sitting. On the Mark IV the surface noise was still there, but the music soared. The stronger bass, the lower noise floor, and the seamless highs interacted to alter the tonal balance, reducing perceived prominence in the presence range. I was listening through the noise. What a treat it was! How does a new bearing and platter accomplish a trick of this magnitude? Read on. I'll tackle that one later.

By the end of a week of break-in I could not believe I was listening to the same "Capehart". Sean Connery on "Peter", was sounding more manly than I have ever heard him. Overall coloration was lower, especially in the "chest" region of the midrange, a shortcoming I had previously credited to my speakers. The high frequency extension was improved, decay of triangles and other treble percussion on the "Love for Three Oranges" was superb.

My personal requirements in music reproduction require a good "sound stage". The old "Voice Of Music" provided width and the MK IV improved on that slightly, but the frosting on my audio cake was the substantial improvement in "depth-of-field". I cannot find a better phrase to describe a combination of low frequency ambiance and firmer imaging that allows you to see more clearly into the corners of the performing space. It is like someone turned the light on at the rear of the stage and allowed visual clues to aid your ears.

Let us imagine a real theater, proscenium arch, wings and the stage rear consisting of a backdrop, not a wall, the wall being at the rear of the backstage area. This presents one of the problems of live opera recording, a frequency dependent perceived depth to the stage. The backdrop reflects the upper midrange and treble notes but allows the bass to pass through and bounce off the rear wall, re-entering the stage area

through the backdrop once again. The reflection is later in time and reduced in strength by the double filtering effects of the backdrop. You normally hear this as a muddy band of frequencies, a discontinuity similar in sound to a poorly executed crossover.

"Depth-of-field" is an effect that can easily be discerned during the overture to Donizetti's *Lucia* on Mercury SR2-9008. The kettle drums seem to be positioned at a different location in the theater than the strings and their image is less positive than the strings. With the MK IV this phenomenon is much clearer, the separation of the low frequency reflections from the drums are easily heard. It is still disconcerting, but it is understandable.

Another recording with an open acoustic is *J.B.*, a play by Archibald MacLeish on RCA L.D.S. 6075. On these "shaded dogs" the voices of Christopher Plummer and Raymond Massey startle as they move about a multi-height stage devoid of the traditional architecture. The voices are alternately distant in a vast space, then intimately close. The V.P.I. MK IV handled this as well as I have ever heard. The sense of space and real time movement were a substantial improvement over the MK III.

Which brings me to pace and integration of rhythm, an area that current state-of-the-art turntables have only recently brought to the fore. A newly acquired record, *Hines '74* on Black and Blue 33.073 WE341, a French import, is a case in point. On the MK IV the distinct rhythm of each trio member (Earl Hines, Jimmy Leary and Panama Francis) remains distinct yet integrated. I know that makes no logical sense but listen to the first cut on side B, "Makin' Whoopee". If your "Crosly" gets it right you will know it. Otherwise it is time to audition a new front end. This record is still available. It has silken surfaces and the music, ah the music. Support analog today! If you are still reading this you

should be putting your money where your turntable is!

The performance of the V.P.I. HW-19 Mark IV has been brought very close to the TNT in a component that remains traditional. The technology applied would appear obvious, an increase in platter mass. But this alone cannot account for the substantial improvement made in an good existing design. My vote is that the unique bearing and platter de-coupling, transplanted from the TNT, handle extraneous vibration better than other systems. The substantial added mass not only improves rotational stability, affecting timing and pace, but also creates a black hole to absorb the unwanted harmonics and vibrations generated at the record interface.

An O-ring isolates the platter from the spindle, greatly reducing a feedback cycle usually present at this junction. The coupling of the platter to the bearing is accomplished by three round tip toeish like projections that sit, sharp side down, on a support platform machined as part of the spindle structure. These combine to allow less nasties to re-enter the playback path, accounting for the reduced noise level, both at low and high frequencies.

The previously wussy bass reproduction in my room (the notes were present but the power was absent) was a function of cancellation. We all talk about synergy but seem to forget it also has a dark side. The reflection time and resonant frequency of the MK III platter could have an off setting effect when combined with the resonant frequency of my cartridge/tonearm, preventing full development of the existing bass.

Why is it that at a concert when the music is really wailing you never see anyone playing air bagpipe? Do I have an answer? No. Do I have a conclusion? Rest assured.

I cannot speak for anyone but myself. Still on my "Stromberg-Carlson", in my castle, you could not have convinced me of the improvement that the V.P.I. HW-19 MK IV would make. These were not subtle improvements. Several folks familiar with the kit are still convinced that I had done other tweaks to enhance the results. Not so. This is a product that will cause very little disruption to your set up and pays benefits out of proportion to the cost. Harry Weisfeld is owed a debt of gratitude for keeping costs low and remembering that many audiophiles and music lovers must live in the real world. This is not the best turntable in the world, it is just one of the best. However when price is considered it is on a very short list indeed.

Ring... Ring... Oh hello Hy... Yes I'm done with the review... What took me so long? You can't review when you're listening to music!... Send it back?... You mean return the kit?... Is this a trick question?

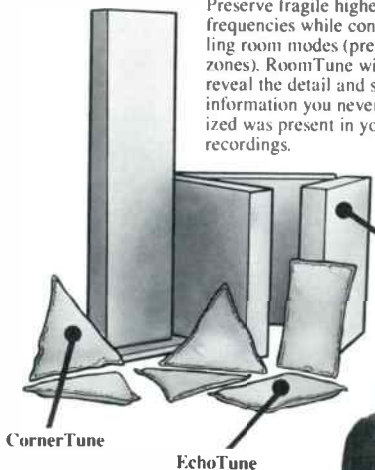
Associated equipment used in the review begins with a Nitty Gritty 3.5Fi record cleaner. Groove demodulation provided by Clearaudio Goldmund, directed by a Grado Signature Tonearm. A V.P.I. Power Line Conditioner and a Bob Young Line Filter keeps the current coming. Signal is routed by a Micro-Link out of Straight Wire driving a Klyne Audio Arts 5a preamp supported by a Tice Micro Block. Straight Wire Maestro leads to an Electron Kinetics Eagle 2c which provides the motivation for the speakers of the house, Sequerra Future Sonic MK II's via Kimber Kable 8TC. Everything uplifted by little and big pointy things, slabs of stone, butcher block and proprietary cable supports and other tweaky things too numerous to mention.

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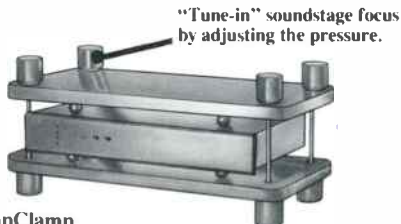
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# The Mirror Image 1.1s+ Amplifier

Russell Novak

This is a beguiling amplifier. During the 6 weeks I had this amp in my home I learned to appreciate its sweetness, its precision in developing a soundstage, and its ability to present delicate details.

The Mirror Image 1.1S+ is a high bias, class A/AB design stereo amp rated at 200 watts/channel into 8 ohms (400 into 4 ohms, 800/2 ohms). The front end uses FET to bi-polar transistors while the output uses MOSFETS (16 per channel). The FETs are matched to within three decimal places and the amp is dual-mono throughout (literally "mirror imaged" in layout) except for the transformer where each channel has its own secondary windings for the maximum channel separation possible without a second transformer.

The amp is DC coupled so there are no capacitors in the signal path to degrade the sound. Neither are there fuses or other protective devices in the signal path. Protection circuitry consists of a servo loop which detects DC offset and shuts down the channel if it exceeds 130 millivolts at the input or 4 volts at the output.

The power supply is a 1.6 KVA toroidal transformer and 196,000 mfd capacitance. The 1.1S+ is fan cooled which saves weight and expense in heat sinks. The fan is nearly silent and was never noticed during use. The unit draws cool air from the back and expels fairly warm air from two side vents. It runs in class A up to 35 watts/channel, then converts to class AB, which means that virtually all your listening will be in class A.

The front panel (in silver or black) features LED warnings for clipping, tem-

perature, and DC. Nothing ever lit. The unit seems completely stable. The rear panel has both balanced and unbalanced inputs and two switches to select the input impedance: 600 ohms (balanced), 3K, or 50K. The binding posts for the output are positioned to allow working with stiff speaker cable. One could wish for two sets of binding posts since so many audiophiles are bi-wiring these days.

John Celmer, President of Mirror Image, stressed synergistics in combining the parts in each stage of the amp, saying that individual parts which may measure "best", may not sound best together. He was unwilling to discuss what other design features or innovations gave the MI its sonic signature, feeling it best to retain a competitive edge.

The system through which most of the evaluation was done, my home system, consists of Mirage M-1 speakers, MIT 330 & 750 interconnects and speaker cables, an Audio Research SP9 preamp, a Mirror Image .2P balanced preamp with phono stage (on loan), and a "passive preamp" consisting of a single 10K resistor in the signal path. The front end consists of a VPI Mark II turntable with Sumiko Blue Point cartridge, and three generations of Musical Concepts cd players: Epoch III/624, Epoch II/60, and the earlier CD-1 with updated "crown" D/A chips.

The amp was put into two other systems to check my impressions: a Soundlab A-1/Wadia 2000/passive preamp system, and a Wilson Watt/Puppy combination with the Theta Generation II digital processor with built in stepped attenuator and Audio Purist Design interconnects and cables.

What did it sound like? The first thing I found out was that this is an accurate amp. It easily reflected changes in the system components which preceded it and I was able to isolate certain characteristics which remained the same from system to system.

The first and easiest thing was to simply install the unit into the existing system. This proved OK, but slightly too bright to be musical. The line stage of the SP9 Mark I, I eventually concluded, is too bright to be musically satisfying in long term listening with this amp.

Next I moved to balanced wiring with the Mirror Image .2P preamp. A smooth, silken richness in the midrange became the predominant characteristic with smooth but subdued highs. Changing to unbalanced wiring with the same preamp proved this sound to be characteristic of the preamp and not the wiring scheme.

This was a much improved sound, but with my speakers in my room, it proved too dark. Detail emerged from a dark background with a creamy, silken quality which I felt was not present in the music. This combination will be better suited for fast, bright, speaker/room combinations where it will be very appropriate and sound fetching. You owe it to yourself to listen to this configuration with your speakers.

Ultimately I chose a passive preamp where a single 10K resistor in the signal path is the only component. Level is varied by bleeding off excess voltage. For records, the phono stage of the SP9 was fed, via the tape outputs to the passive unit.

I never, at any time, on any material, grew tired of this amp. Many of the usual clichés apply: neutrality, naturalness, the ability to listen for long periods, etc. But the truth is that music is always "on" in my house and any idiosyncracies will begin to wear on me

quickly. Nothing did. The amp remained consistently enjoyable.

Some specifics. From the midrange through the mid-treble the amp allowed the sweetness in the music to come through. This quality was present on all three home systems the amp was auditioned in. This sweetness is not a sugar coating, but a quality which enhanced the presentation of delicate details, a transparent sweetness which illuminated the music. I felt relaxed and caught myself smiling in enjoyment and congratulating myself on the sound of my system.

I could hear no problems in the treble region where transistor amps have traditionally irritated the sensibilities of tube fans. The Wilson Watt/Puppy combination was the most revealing in this regard. These speakers have a slightly elevated treble response in comparison to the Mirages and the Soundlabs, but my notes indicate that the treble response with the Mirror Image was smooth to the upper extremes.

The midrange remained rich on all three systems. The 1.1S+ with the passive preamps was able to reproduce lots of harmonic information not present otherwise. *Nunc Dimittis* (Geoffrey Burgon: Cathedral Music, Hyperion CDA66123) is a recording which borders on brightness, so any tendencies in this regard are revealed quickly. The 1.1S+ never went glassy in the midrange. The massed choral voices were well articulated with midrange body and well controlled sibilants.

Frank Bridge's *The Sea* (vinyl, EMI ASD 3190) is another good test for midrange richness, harmonics, and sweetness in the treble region. The 1.1S+ was able to "float" the orchestral sections in space, the ability to define harmonics helping to separate the images within the orchestra. The strings were smooth and the solo instruments appropriately rich in their presentation within the body of

the orchestra. Harp, flute, clarinet, seemed lifelike.

The bass on the 1.1S+ is warm and full and also well extended. My observations with the Mirage and Soundlab systems were that the amp could add this warmth without sounding boomy or offensive. On classical music this sound adds body to the orchestra. On popular music, the listener is much more dependent on the mix and needs to listen to music which is typical of their collections to make a determination.

A good measurement for me is "Never Let Me Go" (Keith Jarrett, *Standards Vol. 2*, ECM 1289 or 825015) where bassist Gary Peacock takes an extended, closely miked solo. The mix is strong in the bass, so if your system has a tendency for too much bass, this recording will let you know. On the Mirage M-1s in a 13 x 19 foot room the bass came real close to too much. Too much for some guests in my home.

Bass was no problem at all in a 16 x 25 foot room with Soundlab speakers. Regardless of system and room matching problems, the 1.1S+ was easily able to separate and articulate bass information and get down into the lower octave without strain. It's simply a matter of whether this much is too much for you.

In the Wilson Watt/Puppy/Theta digital system the 1.1S was compared with a pure class A transistor amp which retails for about \$2000 more. Bass from both was completely acceptable to my ears with the class A amp being even tighter and deeper at the expense of some warmth. On "Blues In The Night" (Frank Sinatra, *Only The Lonely*, (Capitol CDP 7484712) Sinatra's voice was somewhat more chesty with the Mirror Image, yet each sound, heard on its own, was musical.

The soundstage the 1.1S+ throws is another strength. In my room with the M1s standing 6' out from the wall and

2' from the sides walls, the perceived image was 6-9' deep depending on the software. Ambience cues and some instrumental placement could be heard to the outside of the speakers.

The rear plane of the soundstage went from corner to corner in the room with good localization of sounds running from left to right. Along the front of the soundstage, the perceived origin of the sound came from a point about 9" to the rear of the speaker face.

Lesser amps in this setup put the music at the face of the speaker and truncate the rear of the soundstage to a center image or something of less than optimum width at the rear wall.

The amp fills the space within the soundstage well. The center image was tight. Orchestral sections and individual instruments each had their own space and were three dimensional. The presentation was pleasurable enough to drift off into the music without anything to interrupt the mood.

An interesting question was raised at Lars Fredell's house (the Wilson/Theta/passive attenuator setup) with regard to bass warmth and soundstage specificity. As noted previously, Sinatra's voice on "Blues In The Night" was more chesty with the 1.1S+ than his normal amp. Lars heard this as a less localized presentation of the voice, and Sinatra did appear to be coming from a larger area at centerstage. I heard it as a phenomena also dependent on frequency distribution.

Hypothesis: if one could subtract some of the warmth and bloom in the bass, would the localization of sounds become more specific? Put another way, can bass warmth infusing the sound in a room defocus sounds at higher frequencies? I think a good part of the answer is yes. In any case this was not a matter of extremes, but underlines the necessity of careful system matching.

Another phenomena heard at Lars' house was the effect of placing the amplifiers on a platform he had built combining mass, tiptoes and absorptive materials. The degree of specificity in the soundstage and the amount of material put into the rear corners was distinctly affected by whether the amps were on this platform. His more expensive amp put more information there, but the improvement in the Mirror Image when placed on this stand was significant. "Go after resonances, Russ", said Lars, whose great grandfather was Horace Greely.

One last observation on the 1.1S+. It can unravel complex orchestral passages to a surprising degree. I've got this one positively egregious recording of organ, percussion, brass, and bass (*The Cat*, Jimmy Smith, Verve CD 810046-2)

which has a lot of gluttonous crescendos I had attributed to the recording itself and to the digital transfer. Well, it's still bad, but it's a lot more listenable due to the MI's ability to handle complex passages.

At \$4945 this amp fits in nicely between the value-per-dollar amps and the ultra expensive high-end. For sound it definitely leans toward the latter group, giving you a good taste of what the ultra high-end does. Plus its got this transparent sweetness I love.

**The Mirror Image 1.1S+ stereo amplifier, \$4945, Mirror Image Audio, 30 Ward Road, Lancaster, N2ew York, 14086. Tel: 716 681-2763 Fax: 716 681-2763.**

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## Esoteric P-2 Transport & D-2 Converter

*Bill Wells*

One of our more heavily addicted vinyl junkies tries to make peace with digital technology.

Okay, okay! I can already hear you saying, "Bill has sold out! He's taken the plunge, completely abandoned analog and has gone strictly digital!"

Well, dear readers, that's not totally true. What I am doing presently is exploring this relatively new medium (at least to me, that is). This undertaking is not necessarily for comparative purposes but more for practical reasons. I have been, and probably always will be, a devoted analoger despite the current technological shift to digital. I'm sure many of you are also devoted to analog

LP playback, and likewise do not welcome it's demise. So just what are we to do when the production of vinyl LPs is vanishing.

There are a number of really fine analog playback products still available, but clearly the future is not in the direction of continued analogging. Being an avid reader of magazines such as *Billboard*, *Downbeat*, *Jazziz* and a number of other music industry publications, I am totally dismayed at the profound fact that LPs are no longer being routinely produced for current releases. Yes, there are still some convoluted ways that you can obtain some of these releases on vinyl. But who needs the hassle? When you hear something new and interesting, that's when you want it. Not later! Having to seek out alternatives to the local record store can prove



to be very time consuming, expensive and frustrating.

Despite the fussiness, frailty and often inconsistent sound due to various environmental conditions (i.e., temperature, humidity, dust, static electricity, etc.) the analog LP is simply more musical. But I am also a pragmatic realist, and view the (digital) future with enthusiasm, anxiety and hope—hope that analog-like performance can someday come from this new medium. Unlikely, you say? Well, perhaps. But maybe ... just maybe.

This is not meant to be a debate between the two mediums. Simply, it is a matter of trying to identify what is realistic and practical for the consumer today. Many new entrants into high-end audio will likely purchase digital products as their primary—indeed only—playback source. And current analog-oriented audiophiles will be introducing into their systems CD players that should at least serve the music well and provide musical enjoyment in their homes.

It is at this point that the Esoteric (a division of TEAC) P-2 transport and D-2 converter entered my life. Both the P-2 and D-2 are hefty in terms of weight, at 29 and 24 pounds respectively. Both measure almost identically and appear to be twins, especially from the front. Both are finished in a lustrous champagne hue. And both units have worked flawlessly since they were initially set up in my system (which impresses me greatly insofar as this pair has traveled around the country and has been in at least three different sets of hands over the past year).

The features on the front panel are pretty straightforward, although those



“iddy biddy” buttons ain’t so great. The P-2/D-2 can accommodate multiple coaxial cable hookups with a front panel selector switch. This allows you to easily try out several different digital cables at one time and quickly compare them to one another. It’s a very nice feature, and far more important than I had originally imagined. While the price for these two products is high, they exude quality, provide flexible functionality, and have been wonderfully reliable. “Way to go TEAC!”

Quite frankly, these products are a significant improvement over my current one box CD player. And much to my surprise, they have allowed me to enjoy music via digital playback much more than I would have imagined. This fact is both good and bad news. The good news is obvious; the bad news is the price: \$8000 for the pair (each piece costing \$4K). I am acutely aware that my entry into top-notch digital sound is at a very high price point.

Admittedly, my analog front end (full Versa Dynamics 1.0 turntable with a Benz Micro MC3 moving coil cartridge) was quite pricy. But what this front-end system represented was the *latest* step in my ever progressive movement toward optimizing my LP playback system. From my early days with Thorens, Linn Sodek, Micro Seiki, SME, Zeta, and Syrinx (and who knows how many cartridges) all the way to the Versa, each product provided great anticipa-

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tion and big fun as I stepped my way forward (inched is more like it) to better and better sound.

*[What you're saying is that progress in CD playback has been much more rapid than the progress that took place with LP systems. Isn't that encouraging? If the Versa and the Benz had been available in 1978 you could have skipped over the Linn, etc. and enjoyed better sound a decade earlier. On the other hand, perhaps ten years from now you'll look back on the Esoteric system as the Linn of its day—a breakthrough but not the be-all, end-all.—Ed.]*

Now let me describe to you how I not-so-patiently stepped my way along the digital playback road, finally arriving at the P-2/D-2 combination. I started with an established one-box product, the California Audio Labs Tercet MKIII CD player (with optional digital output). I have lived with this product for a good number of months and continue to be impressed with its overall performance. It has received favorable reviews in other audio publications and is a reasonably priced high-end digital product (\$1295 retail). Although the Tercet was a very decent sounding unit, it in no way caused me to consider abandoning my LP playback system.

On the positive side the CAL unit worked perfectly right out of the box and did not exhibit as much digititis as I had heard from earlier one-box CD players. Dynamics were handled quite impressively, and it provided a very palpable presentation of acoustic sounds. Separation, imaging and sound-stage width were also very good, although depth was somewhat foreshortened. It was quite believable and very respectable.

On occasion a slight hardness would occur during certain passages, particu-



larly with hard struck keys on the right hand side of the piano, or most keys on the vibraphone. Try listening to Milt Jackson's CD *Mostly Duke* (Pablo 2310-944-2), particularly track #3, "The Summer Knows." Jackson's superb solo work displays a rich and engaging tone on the vibes. His approach of striking the vibes hard to produce a wonderfully resonant quality is also unfortunately accompanied by noticeable hardness. Using the masTER MAT from MAS did improve this situation somewhat. It also improved dynamics, dimensionality and bass extension, and helped the music to come to life a bit more.

By first employing the Tercet as a complete CD player, and then later as a transport for the Esoteric D-2 converter, I was establishing a baseline reference for myself regarding the sonic performance of these various digital components. And as much as I realized that this latter hybrid arrangement was an overall improvement, I also realized that I was just getting my feet wet. I was likewise becoming less skeptical and not nearly as resistant as before.

After having my appetite sufficiently whetted by this latest change, I was then supplied with the highly regarded P-2 transport. Substituting the P-2 for the Tercet provided many subtle but at the same time very important improvements. It was now time for me to determine if digital playback could do an

adequate job in providing the essential platform by which reproduced music would be well served.

Just how much Esoteric's special Vibration Free Rigid Disc Clamping System (dubbed V.R.D.S.) was responsible for this improvement, I don't know. The full CD sized clamp (housed within the unit) supposedly holds the CD firmly in place. Additionally, it is gently tapered to correct for CD warpage or physical distortion. The benefits claimed for this clamping system are a reduction in mechanical vibrations and a more precise reading of the data pits by the laser. (By the way, although I could not use the very effective masTER Mat from MAS, which worked with superb results on the CAL Tercet, you can use various types of CD rings on the P-2 without a problem.) A more powerful motor is also used to drive this heavyweight "turntable" assembly with greater torque. Sounds like impressive stuff, right? But does any of it really help? Well, I believe it does.

The first thing that I noticed when the P-2 was substituted into my system was a greater sense of authority and drive. The rhythmic pacing of music seemed more accurate—accurate in a way that simply let me follow the beat more easily. Not only was I hearing the rhythm, I was now easily sensing and feeling it as well.

My musical tastes run heavily to traditional, main-stream acoustic jazz. It is essential to get the rhythmic timing right to fully appreciate the visceral impact of this type of music. The P-2 excels by helping you feel a part of the music. On more contemporary fusion, such as the Yellow Jacket's hard kickin' album *The Spin* (MCA 6304), you will be treated to some joyous and very recognizable instrumental thumps, bumps, grunts, growls and the like. The realism of these sounds through the P-2 speaks highly of its structural and sonic integrity.

After observing this timing phenomenon, I became quickly aware of the P-2's outstanding dynamic capability. It seems to handle the loudest and softest passages with equal ease, and can also manage sudden shifts in level very impressively. Quite frankly, I didn't realize just how good the P-2 was in this regard until recently when I received the new Convergent Audio Technologies Signature preamp. One of the more arresting qualities of the new CAT is its tremendous dynamic presentation. Again, a listen to the Yellow Jackets album *The Spin* will easily reveal the CAT's and the P-2's performance in this area. With the CAT Signature in my system, I became even more aware of the P-2's lack of congestion, constriction and confusion, adding up to a superbly realistic dynamic presentation.

Tonally, the P-2's midbass and mid-range are full and rich, with the mid-range sounding relatively liquid. This quality, along with improved articulation across the frequency spectrum, gives music a very authentic sound. The lower frequencies sound deep and full, and have good detail along with proper weight. No apparent resonance accompanies music in these lower registers. Listening to acoustic piano on Andrew Hill's *But Not Farewell* (Blue Note 7-94971-2), or Pat Coil's *Steps* on Sheffield Labs (CD 31), I got an even better sense of the overall tonal purity. There is a richness and harmonic bloom to the piano on these recordings that verifies the P-2's overall authenticity.

Through the middle registers voice is also handled with aplomb. Sarah Vaughn's wonderfully rich vocals on *Crazy and Mixed Up* (Pablo 2312-1372) and Aaron Neville's pulsating tenor on *Warm Your Heart* (A&M 75021-53542) were both delivered in a convincing and life-like manner. The trebles through the P-2 are reproduced well, although a mild (very mild) crispness can be detected. This condition was observed with numerous recordings, but

the degree was quite minor. Compared to the CAL Tercet—as a CD transport only—the P-2 handled the upper frequencies more naturally and with noticeably fewer sonic aberrations. (By the way, the Tercet MKIII that I used during this review has been superseded by a slightly more expensive, higher resolution unit with an improved laser drive mechanism, now dubbed the MKIV.)

The P-2's degree of resolving power (inner detail) was outstanding, and again outdistanced the much less expensive and now outdated Tercet. Sounds were clear and very well defined, with subtle musical nuances much more evident. In terms of openness, the P-2 is quite capable of conveying a sense of air and spaciousness. Despite these sonic attributes, I never achieved the level of ambiance retrieval obtainable with the better LP based systems. Quite frankly, I'm not so sure that what's missing isn't more a byproduct of the recording process as opposed to the hardware. In any event, the P-2 develops a very wide and reasonably deep soundstage with very discernible textural layering in both dimensions.

Again, when the new CAT preamp was installed, these attributes became even more evident. On Take 6's debut album *Take 6* (Reprise 9-25670-2), just listen to the layering of voices (both to the sides as well as front to back). The P-2 is very convincing in this regard. And, while the soundstage is very open and large, it is not thrust forward or thrown in your face.

Overall, the P-2 is a very fine performer indeed, and is a joy to listen to (and through). While it bested the far less expensive CAL Tercet's transport mechanism, the differences were not dramatically better point for point. What I found was that the cumulative effect of all the P-2's strengths produced a more convincing and musical portrayal of recorded sounds. Again, those specific areas of improvement, such as bigger

soundstage, improved dynamics and increased resolution of inner detail, simply make the music seem more real.

"OK, enough already," you say! What about the companion D-2 digital-to-analog converter? After all, isn't that the real brain of this digital playback system?

I started with the D-2 fed by the Tercet's digital output, so when I substituted the P-2 I had a pretty good handle on the D-2's overall sonic character. Physically, the D-2 has a complement of four inputs: two for coaxial connections and two for optical. Unfortunately, these optical connections are for the sonically inferior Toslink cable. In my opinion, the Esoteric system would benefit from the superior AT&T type glass fiber.

A mute switch is located on the front panel and is controllable from the remote. Other features included on the D-2 are a phase switch (also controllable from the remote), a display panel dimmer control, and an on/off control (again, located on the remote). The display window shows the input source (1 through 4), the sampling frequency, a de-emphasis indicator, and a variable output level indicator in dBs. This unit is very well made and, like the companion P-2, operates flawlessly.

Sonically, the D-2 came across as very competent and musical. Rather than being ruthlessly revealing (you know, TOO much detail), it seems to be slightly euphonic. But, I might add, in a very musically satisfying way. Its somewhat forgiving nature ameliorates, to a degree, some of digital's negative artifacts. With the D-2, depth is not really what it could or should be. In that respect it's in the same league as many other digital processors—most if not all of which seem to fall short of really good analog/vinyl playback. What you get instead is a situation in which sounds seem to lack air, natural rever-

beration and the ability to hang in space with natural decay. Instead of hall ambience, a quiet emptiness exists.

Unlike the P-2, the D-2 is slightly lean in the upper midrange and a bit lacking in dynamic punch. The D-2, however, is definitely not hi-fi-ish. The relative lack of grain tends to kind of seduce you into the music. Is this always so bad? I don't think so! But because of this somewhat euphonic and slightly subtractive nature, the real hard-core, dyed-in-the-wool audiophile may not be satisfied. It is possible to get a more transparent, detailed sound with other processors, but that may not always be so good. If it's done strictly in a musical way, yes. But if added detail comes across hi-fi-ish, then no way!

Personally, I am hearing more dramatic differences in CD quality than I ever did with LP—and I complained a lot then as well. All of this recording inconsistency is easily noted with the D-2, even though the presentation is smoother, mellower and more relaxed. The D-2 makes varying source quality actually easier to live with. Along with this, the trebles seem slightly attenuated, lacking the ultimate degree of detail and resolution—but not overly so.

Curiously, TEAC supplies the van den Hul D-102 MKIII digital cable with their products. From my experience, these cables are polite and relatively inoffensive. In fact, they often make CD sound more listenable! Out of curiosity, I substituted digital cables (coax, 75 ohm) from both XLO and NBS. Compared to the van den Hul, it was no contest! Both the XLO and NBS cables brought about very significant improvements in the critical areas of inner detail, resolution, dynamics, soundstage size and dimensionality. As a result, I quickly retired the manufacturer's supplied cable to the shipping carton. With this change, I found myself enjoying the D-2 far more so than before. In fact, the improvements were so noteworthy that I was

forced to reassess my earlier observations; the D-2 had more sonic potential than I initially realized.

My earlier concerns included the dynamics and palpability of acoustic sounds. For the record, I am a lover of mainstream jazz, and have great affection for such wonderful instruments as upright acoustic bass, piano and sax (preferably alto or tenor). I also appreciate percussion, but more as a complement to other instruments. With a variety of good jazz recordings, the D-2 now acquitted itself admirably. Bass reproduction was very authentic, being authoritative, tactile, warm and full, yet in no way loose or out of control. The outstanding jazz album titled *Extensions* by the Dave Holland Quartet (ECM 841-7784) sounded particularly impressive. *Alive* by the Chick Corea Akoustic Band was also very engaging, with dynamic piano work, lively acoustic bass, and full force, solid percussion. In these areas, the P-2/D-2 combination is superb and will likely please many who relish really good, powerful bass performance.

Additional improvements in resolution and inner detail resulted in subtle musical nuances and clues becoming more evident, but not in a distracting manner. Compared to analog, however, there was still a bit left to be desired. Don't get me wrong. Things were getting better and I was pleased, yet my ears kept wanting more. Not more slambam, in your face detail, just more of the natural presentation of musical sounds that would allow me to more completely focus on the music and not the hardware.

Later, I was able to obtain one of the AC Power Cables from NBS. Swapping this cable for the D-2's stock cord, the sound became instantly more dynamic, and the entire background became somewhat quieter. Also, where I had previously felt depth to be somewhat

foreshortened, the entire soundstage now took on larger, deeper proportions.

Switching this cable over to the P-2 resulted in similar improvements—greater dynamics, even better rhythmic drive and pitch accuracy, and an overall quieter background with an accompanying soundstage enlargement. No shifts in tonal balance were observed with these cables in place, and the entire musical picture became noticeably cleaner and clearer with even better focus.

My assessment of the D-2 is that while it's somewhat euphonic (but only very slightly so), the sum of the parts is far more significant than a microscopic analysis and explanation of the individual pieces. All in all, the D-2 is a surprisingly pleasant and very easy to listen to digital processor. It is much more musical than analytical, yet it does not give up much in this regard. Various little musical subtleties and sonic nuances may seem to be missing at times, but thank goodness it does not add any undesirable digital artifacts to the overall sonic picture.

So where does this leave us? Well, in my opinion the P-2/D-2 combination represents a definite step in the right direction for digital reproduction. For those who simply wish to sit back, relax and enjoy the music, the Esoteric system could be just the ticket! But at \$8000 retail for the pair, the price of admission into high-end digital playback is pretty stiff. Question is, where do your *musical* priorities lie and how much of a financial commitment are you willing to make? Personally, I have really enjoyed the P-2/D-2 during their stay at my place. In fact, it has been often very hard to spend a lot of time critically analyzing their sonic performance. Typically, I found myself simply listening to music with them. How odd! I sincerely hope the next set of digital playback products that comes my way will push me even further along the musical enjoyment continuum.

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What I got with the P-2/D-2 combination is just what I had wished for—a peak into the possibilities of high-end CD playback. And, guess what? The view ain't all that bad! No, I am in no way converted away from top-notch analog. In fact, I still very much revere it. However, it looks like the recording industry doesn't plan to cooperate, so that's that. As I said earlier in this review, I am a pragmatic realistic, and one who knows when to say uncle. Also, I am a person who is a devoted music lover, so as far as the technology goes—analogue or digital—I'm not sure whether I really care one way or the other. But perhaps the time is getting very near for all of us, including the hard-core analogers, to reckon with reality. For me, all is can say at this point is...er, ah, well, darn it ..."UNCLE!!!"

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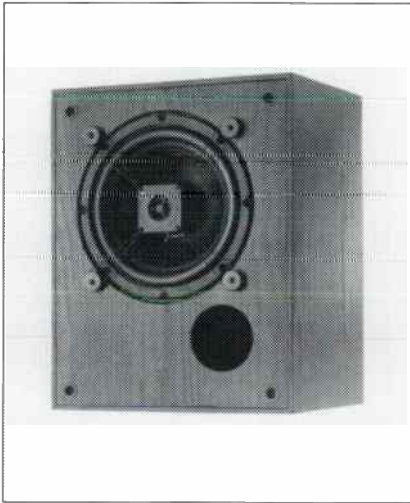
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## The Sonographe SD22 CD Player

Mark Block

The new Philips 1-bit chips are cheap, available and perform as promised without any special coaxing. But unlike the young ladies for whom Reverend Jimmy Swaggart has a pitiful affinity (who also fit that description), the Bitstream chips are finding their way into some very classy places. Krell, Theta, and others are using them as a way of keeping prices down on their exotic decoders while remaining uncompromising in those areas where the designers have the most knowledge, experience and expertise—the analogue circuitry.

Likewise, at the entry level of single-box players, high end companies can perform their analogue wizardry on mass-market Philips 1-bit machines, knowing that the built-in DACs are first rate. The repackaged budget players can therefore offer a consistently higher level of sonic performance at prices that are the same or even lower than just a few years ago when 14 and 16 bit DACs were the only game in town.

Such a machine is the Sonographe SD22. Priced at just \$895, in the thick of the densely populated, entry level high end area, the SD22 is an attractive but thinly disguised Philips player, for better or worse. The "for better" part is Philips' well-deserved reputation for more pleasing sonics than the Japanese equivalents. The "for worse" part is the (again deserved) reputation for poor mechanical reliability and design.

It's not that Europeans can't match the Japanese in getting a sophisticated

piece of equipment off a production line. It's that when they do it they charge twice as much (See Lexus and Infinity vs. Mercedes and BMW.) Thus, a thousand buck Philips player (such as the old 960 that I use now as a transport only), approximately matches a \$500 Japanese player in terms of construction quality.

If you want high-end sound without going the megabuck transport/processor route, modified Philips players such as the SD22 are a great way to go. The experienced engineers at Conrad-Johnson have designed their own analogue filters and buffers, and added discrete FET circuits with low impedance, regulated power supplies. Damping has also been added to the disc clamping system.

The remaining mechanical/structural integrity problems can be addressed by the customer with a new product called the AmpClamp, \$99.95, from the fertile genius of RoomTune titan Michael Green. When clamped down around the Sonographe player, the loading drawer stops making the typical Philips groaning and shuddering noises, and starts sounding (dare I say it?) almost Oriental. Quiet, businesslike, inscrutably competent. A good omen.

The folks at Conrad-Johnson suggested that the SD22 would benefit from the



AmpClamp and although the player sounded fine without it, the AmpClamp seemed to wring out a bit more bass definition, dynamics, and instrumental focus from this otherwise excellent player. The bulk of my serious listening, therefore, was carried out with the Sonographe, as the filling in an AmpClamp sandwich.

I was a little leery of putting the AmpClamp together, having heard rumors to the effect that hours of seemingly endless frustration, possibly leading to suicide, were in the cards for the intrepid amp clamping audiophile hobbyist.

Mentally steeling myself for an exceedingly painful but unavoidable task, I found the adventure something of a let-down, as it took me only fifteen minutes to perform what realistically could have been a five minute job, had I not had to chase the little black marbles around the floor after several slip ups (and if I hadn't crawled around on all fours, I wouldn't have discovered the dust balls and spider webs that needed cleaning up. Do I fire the maid, or thank her for staying away from my stereo room?).

In any event, the AmpClamp construction project really wasn't so hard, and I think marbles are a brilliant, if difficult, way of achieving the effects of Tip Toes without the scar-producing points. I should mention that the marbles did create four shallow dimples in the top plate of the Sonographe unit. The cosmetic damage could conceivably take a couple of bucks off the resale value.

The output of the SD22 is significantly lower than normal (by 10 dB, according to the instruction manual), which means that a passive preamp or volume pot would not be recommended unless your speakers are extremely efficient, or the input sensitivity of your amp is high and your room is small. In my 13' x 18' room, a direct connection to the

Jadis Defy 7 produced a comfortably loud volume and a remarkably pure, sweet sound. The spaces between instruments were dead quiet, instruments were well focused, and an overall absence of harshness was noted.

So who needs a preamp? You do, unless you want to fall asleep every night listening to beautiful but totally uninvolved sound. Hooked up to an active preamp, the SD22 comes alive with dynamics and detail that just can't be had passively. Indeed, why in the world should a maker of great preamps design a CD player with enough output to drive an amp directly?

As a result of the SD22s lower output level, your volume control will be used more often in its midway position—where it's more linear, and where it probably spends most of its time when the turntable is playing. In a system balanced around a moving coil cartridge's low output, this player will fit right in without too much twitching of the volume. On my CAT preamp, 11 to 12 o'clock provided a loud level, which is about where a low to medium output moving coil cartridge likes to hang out. My stock Philips player gets real loud about three or four click stops lower (10 o'clock is as loud as I can stand).

Time out for a pet peeve: there seems to be some sort of demented race to get output levels of CD players and processors ever higher and higher—up to levels that are unusable and potentially overloading into active preamps. Why? Perhaps because A/B comparisons always favor the louder component, so if your player is just a little louder than the next guy's, then you have a better chance at winning the shoot-out at the audio salon. The conrad-johnson people are to be applauded for making a player with an output level designed to work best in your home rather than the dealer's showroom.

Ergonomics are mediocre but not disqualifying. Several buttons, such as the ones for Open/Close and Pause, are tiny—about the size of a good nail head (which would be fine if my forefinger was the size of a good hammer) and awkward to locate in the heat of a frenzied listening session—like when you've just finished listening to Mahler's Third and you just can't wait to pop in a new CD of the Fourth.

The attractive Sonographe faceplate, attached to the player at the four corners by allenhead screws, can bend slightly when squeezed by the AmpClamp. Too much pressure and the faceplate warps it enough to foul the buttons that poke through. Better just leave the player's buttons alone and operate the controls through the handy remote. I set a personal record by skipping through an entire Wilson Philips CD in under a minute, in the process spraining my forefinger on the "Track Skip" button, but saving myself a painful listening session. (God, remember sitting down to a bad record and listening all the way through, too lazy to get up, hoping that the next cut would be something worth hearing?)

One aspect of the SD22's design that could have a negative impact on sales is the lack of a digital output. Those audiophiles looking for a player that could continue to serve as a transport when they upgrade to a stand-alone processor can cross this machine off their list. The RCA jacks for the analogue output are quite flimsy, so frequent cable swapping is best avoided. A stiff, heavy interconnect such as Cards Hexlink should be used only if carefully supported by cable ties.

The sound is pretty typical of the modified Bitstream players I've heard. In other words, for the money you probably can't do better. As many of you may know, the secret is out on Bitstream. When compared to the best

multi-bit ladder DACs, the highs sound soft, lacking ultimate resolution.

The Sonographe player, however, is not competing with the Wadias, Krells, and Thetas of the world. It's competing with other 1-bit designs, and is intended to live harmoniously in a budget High End system. In that context, the fact that high frequencies are smooth but a little soft is probably a plus. Any tendency towards metallic hardness elsewhere will be ameliorated by the Sonographe SD22. Of course, when you want metallic hardness—such as on cymbal crashes and brass fanfares—you won't get it as dramatically and realistically as you should. On the other hand, it's a rare (and expensive) system that can sound metallic and enjoyable at the same time.

I believe in doing the most important evaluations with my feet, rather than my head. Tapping a foot to the beat is a more important analytical criterion than educated guesses about accuracy. Who am I, therefore, to criticize something for being supposedly "inaccurate" (in this case, soft) in a portion of its frequency range? I admit to making the assumption that the higher resolution (and higher priced) processors are more accurate, but that assumption is unprovable and immaterial. A far more meaningful assertion is that the top of the line Thetas and Krells are more exciting to listen to. They make the music sound better.

Getting back to the Sonographe SD22, I have no doubts that the sound of this player can be appreciated over the long haul. It's smooth enough to avoid listener fatigue, but incisive enough to prevent boredom. Compared to my Philips 960, which was a thousand dollar player in its day, the Sonographe comes out ahead, with less thinness and more ease. Compared to one competitor's similar (but more expensive) Philips mod, I found it difficult to choose between the two. A brief audition of a Ro-



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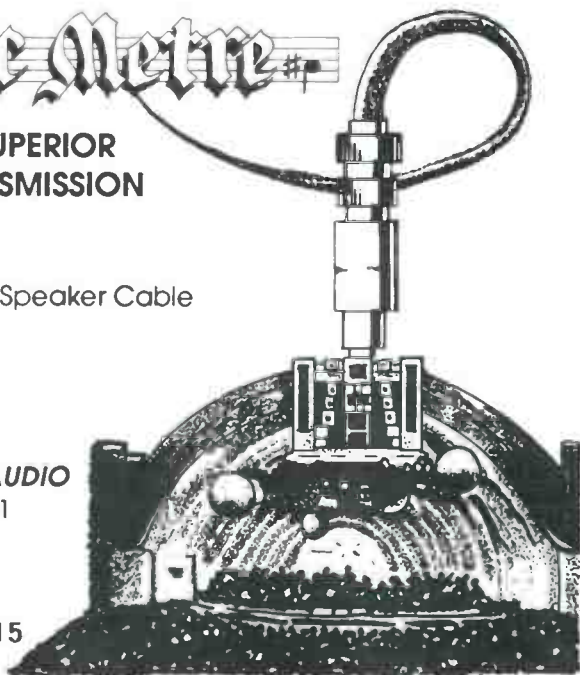
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tel player modified with a tube output stage left me even more impressed with the Sonographe, which was significantly more extended at the frequency extremes and dramatically more dynamic.

Just for fun I made one seemingly off-the-wall comparison. Knowing of Theta guru Mike Moffat's discovery that laser disc players make outstanding transports for CDs, I tried out a \$700 laser disc combi player from Pioneer featuring the Japanese equivalent of 1-bit processing. Would the robustness of the Pioneer's transport outweigh the Sonographe's more refined output circuitry? The results were a mixed bag. On many jazz and small scale classical CDs I preferred the Sonographe for its midrange delicacy and treble smoothness. It had that much sought-after ability to sound easy on the ear but finely detailed.

Rock and New Age discs revealed, however, that the laser disc player had both more extension and greater control in the bass. The "Airhead" track on Thomas Dolby's *Aliens Ate My Buick* (EMI-Manhattan CDP-7-48075-2) was deeper and punchier in the bass through the Pioneer. James Taylor's "Carolina In My Mind" (Warner Brothers 3113-2), a track that can sound tubby and bloated in some systems, was appreciatively leaner and tighter, with the bass much more controlled. Hmm. When the recording is deep and tight, the laser disc player sounds bassier than the Sonographe, but when the recording is a little loose and ill-defined, the laser disc player seems to be leaner, but without giving up extension. I don't understand it, but I like it.

The same effect was heard on The Penguin Cafe Orchestra's *When In Rome...* (Editions EG EEGCD 56), particularly on "Air à Danser." The boominess heard with the Sonographe was held in check by the Japanese combi player. For what it's worth, the Pioneer also had greater image height. If I had to choose one player to live with, I'd probably take the Sonographe, giving greater weight to its mid-

range purity and higher resolution, but it would be a tough call.

As good as the Sonographe is, however, there's no getting around the fact that it falls short of the more expensive processors in ways that are musically significant. I've been listening lately to Bonnie Raitt's *Luck Of The Draw* (Capitol C2-96111), and in particular to "I Can't Make You Love Me," a lovely ballad from an album that, like her previous Grammy winning smash, just grows and grows on you. Bonnie pours considerable emotion into this smart, powerful tear-jerker.

The vocal has been engineered with just a trace of excessive brightness, while the backing band is very natural and unhyped. Bonnie's vocal phrasing is, as usual, subtle but intelligent, and a lot of the emotional content is carried in the details. A system that reduces the brightness makes the band sound dull and removes much of the musical power of the vocal performance, and yet a component that adds any brightness makes the singing unbearable.

With the SD22 I found the overall sound to be a little polite, not quite as dynamic as it could be. The vocal is lusciously smooth, but lacking in some of Bonnie's natural hoarseness. The entrance of Bruce Hornsby's piano should give you tingles; with the Sonographe it's just there. Some bass notes are bloated and lacking control. Overtones of the piano and air around the brushed cymbals are diminished. The transparency that a top processor can bring to the party just isn't here.

On the positive side there is no brightness or glare, but I believe the microphone and the mixing engineer captured more nuances in this recording than the Sonographe is able to retrieve. But hey, if budget equipment was as good as the megabuck stuff, we'd just spend our extra money on silly things like food and clothes and school books for the kids.

I should mention at this point that Sonographe makes some very reasonably priced matching components to go with the SD22. The SA150 amp is a substantial 135 watts per channel at an almost insubstantial \$995. The companion line stage FET preamp, model SC22, sells for \$695.

Pulling out the new Aaron Neville album *Warm Your Heart* (A&M 75021 5354 2), I tried the handsome Sonographe preamp in conjunction with the CD player and was shocked by the superb sound quality. By the second cut, "Everybody Plays the Fool," I confess to feeling briefly panicked by the thought that the 8k I spent on my CAT and Theta front end may have been riches poorly spent. Aren't the differences here pretty subtle? By the time Aaron got around to Jimmy Buffett's beautiful "La Vie Dan-sante," however, it became clear that the music was lacking in warmth, bloom and rhythmic flow. The magic had danced out of my system. Switching back to my CAT/Theta combo put a big smile on my face. Transparency and "palpable presence" returned. Life was good again.

But if you should decide that you need a CD player and \$895 is quite enough to spend, thank you very much, what can you expect to get for your 895 hard-earned Washingtons? With the Sonographe you get a high quality Bit Stream player that sounds better than an unmodified, mass market machine. The

lack of a digital output may disqualify it for some, but at its price point I don't think you'll find a player that sounds better.

And one other thing: you're getting the support of conrad-johnson, one of the most reliable companies in High End audio. That's nothing to sneeze at. I even think the good Reverend Swaggart should pick up one of these babies the next time he's out to buy some satisfaction. The enjoyment he gets out of his more usual amusements would pale in comparison to the kick he'd get out of cousin Jerry Lee cranked up on a Sonographe system.

**The Sonographe SD22 CD Player**  
**\$895**  
**conrad-johnson group**  
**2800R Dorr Avenue**  
**Fairfax, VA 22031**

Associated components: Theta DS Pro Generation II digital processor, Philips 960 CD player, Well-Tempered Turntable and arm, Sumiko Blue Point cartridge, Convergent Audio Technology SL-1 Reference preamp, Jadis Defy 7 amp, Acoustat Spectra 22 speakers, Cardas Hexlink V interconnect, Audio-Quest Midnight speaker cable, PS Audio Power Sonic isolation transformer, Room Tunes, TDK and Radio Shack ferrite noise filters, Sims Navcom feet, Combak tuning bands.

## California Audio Labs *Sigma* Tube D/A Converter

J. D. Cantrell

**A**udiophiles have always made me nervous. I admit it! This has been the case for over twenty years: endless

hours of diatribe over what I perceive as minuscule sonic differences. Recently my audiophile phobia has become worse. Insecure vinyl junkies are constantly bashing CD, and it's become

a bore. We all know that records have the sonic edge, but unless garage sales excite you, LPs just aren't readily available. Audiophiles claim to be musically driven but all they talk about is hardware. We've all heard audiophiles prattle on for hours about the quality of jazz recordings, and then go buy Chesky's CDs for their exulted sonics when they could have selected a Blue Note for the music! The truth is I just don't understand them.

I added CD to my system about 3 years ago after I purchased a Virtuoso Boron phono cartridge for my Sota Sapphire/Sumiko "The Arm" turntable combination. I loved that cartridge! It really got into the soul of jazz, rock, and R&B. At the same time, I learned from Sumiko that I should get 1000 hours out of the cartridge before it needed replacement. \$900.00 for 1000 hours—such a deal! *[I find that the "hours of playing time" gauge is almost an irrelevant indicator of cartridge life because the diamond is rarely the first part to wear out. That (dis)honor goes to the suspension, which dries up in anywhere from nine to fifteen months irrespective of usage.—Mark]*

This made me realize that, in reality, I was paying almost \$1.00 to play a record. This didn't set well. I realized then that if I spent two grand on a D/A converter (which I fully realized would not be the sonic equal of the turntable) it wouldn't wear out or degrade, and would have some resale or trade-in value when something significantly better was introduced. The key word is *significantly*. A used cartridge isn't even a good paper weight. Thus I entered the digital era.

I can't imagine buying any equipment without the opportunity to try it without obligation for at least three or four

days in my own home. Although the recommendations of a dealer are important, the customer deserves an opportunity to evaluate how a component will mix with an existing system and environment. No component stands alone. I have used my Arcam Black Box 2 and Delta 170 MKII transport since their introduction and have been generally pleased. I've had the loan of Wadia 32's, several Thetas, an Altis Reference and Aragon D2A, all of which were better than my Black Box 2 or Black Box 3. Yet when I returned to the Arcam equipment I never felt deprived.

Recently I've had the opportunity to listen over the long term to California Audio Labs' "Tube Analogue Processor," the Sigma, a product that has forced me to change my expectations of digital playback.<sup>1</sup> Technically the Sigma is an interesting design. CAL has implemented a 12AX7 output stage fed from a Crystal CS4328 Delta Sigma D/A IC running at 64 times over sampling. I understand that this DAC is to be used in upcoming products from B&W and Roksan. Parts quality seems high, and judging from a quick look at motherboard the circuit appears to be nowhere near as complex as the full-blown processors designed by Krell, Wadia, or Theta.

The aspect of the Sigma's sound that was immediately apparent was a dramatic lack of "crud". I'm not talking about subtle removal of so called "veils." If the Sigma was subtly better I wouldn't have bothered with it. I'm talking about a dramatic reduction in what I will refer to as digital noise. My personal experience with CD leads me to believe this digital noise is what is so objectionable to vinyl advocates. The absence of digital noise allows the music to stand free from the speakers with pre-

1 It is my understanding that CAL will be bringing a matching transport to market in 90 days for approximately 750—should be interesting considering how important the matching of transports to specific D/As is. By the way, all CAL products now carry a three year guarantee. Good move CAL!



cise location and clarity. Overtones previously masked by digital playback restrictions are clearly audible.

Another important aspect of the Sigma's sound is its ability to reproduce each instrument's individual dynamic range simultaneously. Most digital playback systems reproduce the dynamic range of the ensemble as a group. In other words, the music gets louder and softer in toto. With the Sigma the piano, for example, is allowed to get louder or softer while other instruments remain at their appropriate individual levels. Each instrument's dynamics are separate and distinct. They don't blend together. This separation of individual dynamics is a hallmark of live music and a major breakthrough for digital.

In addition to what I believe to be a new level of musical clarity for a digital product, the Sigma has one of the largest, most accurate soundstages I have ever experienced in my listening room. An example of the Sigma's prowess can be easily heard on Keith Jarrett's album *The Cure* (ECM1440 849 650-2). This live recording made at New York's Town Hall clearly demonstrates the clarity and precision that I feel is such a breakthrough. The resonant sound of the wooden stage floor is clearly audible. The environment of Town Hall is presented as an important part of the musical experience; the listener is drawn into the music in a compelling manner. Gary Peacock's bass and Jack DeJohnette's drum kit each have their own space and stage position. The wooden sound of Jack DeJohnette's drum sticks striking cymbals is clearly articulated to even the most casual listener.

I don't believe the Sigma's soundstage presentation is a function of my specific room or the interface with my MFA Luminescence equipment. This spectacular imaging was reproduced on three other audiophile systems in which I had inserted the Sigma. The soundstage had a uniform width starting outside

the speaker locations and continuing backwards without truncation or taper. This soundstaging also created a sense of height that highlighted the cymbals' shimmer in a manner that I found particularly realistic. Most of the jazz that I hear live is performed in small clubs at close distances (30' or less from the drummer) and I have often been surprised on how the sound from cymbals seem to rise vertically from the drum kit. The Sigma consistently reproduces those phenomena. Space, air, and dimensionality all create involvement for the critical listener.

Timing is another facet of music reproduction that adds personal involvement and enhances the authentic experience. Music is about tension and timing and the Sigma excels in letting the listener participate in the musical experience. This processor is active like the music itself, not passive. When I used the Altis Reference, a Bitstream processor, I was very impressed with its purity of tone. I could listen in rapt attention for hours—involved but passive. Music should be anything but passive. Listening to the Theta processors can easily be described as "air guitar and bogeying." Purity versus power. The Sigma has the best of both worlds; all music becomes more involving, emotional, and realistic

Nowhere in the entire sphere of audio critique is there a more personal preference than in the evaluation and assessment of detail and vocal reproduction. I think this is directly related to where you sit in the hall or club when you listen to live music. I personally prefer not to have it "thrown in my face," yet I like to sit in the first third of the audience seating area. I want to hear everything in perspective. Nuance is nuance. Small but musically important details are just that—small. The wooden sound of drumsticks is not as obvious in life as the brass sound of the cymbal, and this balance must be maintained. A lot of high-end equipment, some of it very ex-

pensive, makes nuance larger than life—HI-FI.

In a related vein, I substituted a Golden Dragon 12AX7 (known for top flight sound and very tight quality control) for the stock 12AX7 supplied with the unit. The physical construction *appeared* to be identical. The sound, however, was not. At first I was impressed with the Golden Dragon. It appeared to be more extended and apparently more detailed, but soon the enchantment was replaced with fatigue. The sound was "in my face" and hi-fi-ish. This is in no way to be construed as a negative appraisal of the Golden Dragon products, which have been receiving nothing but well-deserved, universal praise. *[Until now! Personally, I appreciate the extra detail that these tubes offer—but then I sit in row F at Carnegie.—Mark]* In my system I simply preferred the stock Chinese tube.

Vocalists are well served by the Sigma. During my evaluations I particularly enjoyed listening to Bonnie Raitt's duet with John Prine on "Angel From Montgomery" from *The Bonnie Raitt Collection* (WB 9 26242-2). And I can't imagine Shirley Horn having any objections to the Sigma's reproduction of her voice on *You Won't Forget Me* (Verve 847 482-2). Simply wonderful music. For a real change of pace I tried the strange but compelling live music on *The Nina Simone Collection* (Deja Vu 5104-2) This last CD has great music that overcomes awful sonics. I've seen it in local stores for \$4.99.

Is the Sigma perfect? Of course not. I'd appreciate deeper bass with more sock.

The addition of an AT&T optical interface and a balanced output would improve any digital system's resolution, including the Sigma's. Because I listen to a great many vintage transfers I find the absence of a phase switch a real drawback. In addition, I think the typeface on the faceplate had to be personally selected by Helen Keller. Ugly! The price? Beautiful: at \$700, it's \$200 less than my Virtuoso Boron phono cartridge. On the whole, the Sigma is the most musically involving digital experience I've had the pleasure to live with. In fact, the biggest complaint that I have about this product is that it is very hard for me to read when it's playing. I find I just can't concentrate; I have to put my book down and listen!

**CAL Sigma Tube D/A Converter**  
**California Audio Labs**  
**16812 Gothard Street**  
**Huntington Beach, CA 92647**  
**Price: \$695**

My system consists of: Sota Sapphire MKIII Turntable/Sumiko The Arm/Virtuoso Boron Phono Cartridge; Cal Sigma; Arcam Delta 170MkII, CD Transport; MFA Luminescence Pre Amp; MFA 120 Power Amps (octal front end); Celestion SL700se Speakers; Magnum Dynalab 101 FM Tuner; Finco 4G Antenna; Nakamichi 480 Cassette Deck; Proprietary silver interconnects cables using WBT terminations; van den Hul 352 silver speaker cables 4' long bi wired; WBT terminations, amps located at each speaker; separate 20 amp circuits for preamp and each power amp.

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## Big Foot and Little Rock Is Not A Buddy Movie

Russell Novak

On a crisp and clear NFL Wildcard Playoff Saturday I arose early, dreading the prospect which lay before me. Stumbling to the kitchen I brewed a pot of Bustelo, a Puerto Rican espresso coffee which is made extra strong and mixed 50/50 with simmered milk.<sup>1</sup>

Sitting on the couch in the living room I allowed the Bustelo to raise my heartbeat to normal and began to contemplate the physical problems involved in placing these latest review products, Big Foot and Little Rock, on my equipment rack. I rebelled and began ruminating.

The life of a reviewer is difficult. You have to lug home large boxes from Audio-ophile Society meetings early in the morning, find a parking space at 2:30 am in Brooklyn, drag the stuff into the elevator and into the plush confines of your Park Slope apartment. You have to shift items in and out of your equipment rack, plan new cable routings, crawl around on the floor a lot. You hardly get to listen to music any more. You're always taking notes on some new variation of what you're reviewing. Life is really hard.

By this time the Bustelo was coursing through my veins and I summoned the strength and the proper attitude to arise from the couch and approach the large box which contained Big Foot and Little Rock, a component isolation system from Bright Star Audio. The manufacturer had

thoughtfully provided a 5 gallon bucket of #30 grade California sand at a UPS cost of \$20 just so this dimwitted reviewer could properly implement his product. For, you see, Big Foot is a sand-box onto which you place your component and Little Rock is an artificial rock slab which is placed on top the chassis to better couple the unit to the sand base and lower it's resonant frequency.

I won't keep you in suspense. This is the greatest single improvement in tweaks I have heard—fully the equivalent of up-grading a component.

How many times have we heard that damping vibrations will improve the sound of our systems? How many times have we given only token attention to this truism? How often have we heard the extent of improvement possible if damping and isolation are done correctly? How many times have we been motivated to redesign our equipment racks without compromises? This product caused me to rethink and redesign my installation immediately upon hearing the results of



1 Add three level coffee measures of Bustelo (grind the whole beans, if you can find them) to a small pot with 16 oz of cold water. When the ooze begins to boil, strain the mixture through a Melita coffee filter. While this is dripping through, warm 16 oz of whole milk until it simmers and just begins to boil and add that to the coffee.

This brew has a lightly sweet, mocha flavor. It's strong and rich, but smooth. For a treat, add a small amount of sugar and a dash of cinnamon.

but one Big Foot/Little Rock combination on the CD player alone. But first there are considerations and planning. If you're not ready to contemplate things on this scale, have some Bustelo.

### SIZE CONSIDERATIONS

I choose to deal with this subject first because it is the first issue you will face. Big Foot is a tray standing on three rubber feet. It is 21" x 19.5" x 4" tall. You will need a shelf 17" front to back to accommodate the unit's rubber feet with the 21" side facing the front, 18" front to back with the other orientation. Inside the tray is a bed of sand about 2" deep (about 40 lbs) and atop this sand bed rests a plinth on which your component is set. The plinth measures 18.5" x 17". That should be large enough for almost any component's feet to rest on.

Little Rock is an artificial rock slab which rests on three rubber feet to allow ventilation and measures 10" x 14" x 2.25" high. This rests on top of your component and weighs in at 23 lbs.

Add 6.25" to the height of each component. Your shelf must also accommodate the width and depth of Big Foot as described above. The rubber feet may be repositioned according to the manufacturer without sonic consequence or even removed. That will save you .375" in height. If there are no ventilation holes on top your component you can save another .375" by removing the feet from Little Rock, although the screw holes must then be sealed with epoxy since Little Rock contains powdered metals. In fact, if there are no ventilation holes, you can couple Little Rock to the chassis with a sheet of vinyl plastic to increase the vibration damping benefits.

Size considerations will either have you thinking about redesigning your rack or scrapping the whole project. Don't do it. The sonic benefits are too great to avoid the work. Of course, if you are considering these units for supporting mono-

block amps on the floor near your speakers—no problem! Or if considering a top shelf placement only for say, a CD player, again—no problem! The improvements gleaned from even this minimal approach will convince you to forge ahead with more grandiose schemes.

### FUNCTION AND APPLICATIONS

Big Foot and Little Rock (hereafter know as "the system") functions in three ways. First, structural vibrations carried to your component by the equipment rack and floor are eliminated (turned into heat) by the sand bed. Second, airborne vibrations hitting the chassis are absorbed by the sand bed, reducing their net effect. This is accomplished because Little Rock, sitting atop the unit, supplies mass which lowers the resonant frequency of the chassis and enhances the coupling between component and the sand bed. This causes vibrations to more readily leave the chassis and be absorbed by the sand. To this end the manufacturer recommends against using devices which would interrupt this transfer such as tiptoes or sorbothane between the chassis and the sandbed plinth.

Third, vibrations generated by the equipment are channeled to the sandbed in the same way airborne vibrations are. CD players and turntables are obvious examples. Electronics benefit also. Tubed equipment is often very microphonic, equipment with large transformers or cooling fans generate vibrations. Even the sound of the mighty (and heavy) Krell KSA 250 benefitted from an isolation platform (homemade) at a friend's house. Bottom line: I'm isolating every critical component.

Little Rock does one more thing besides helping to couple and damp the chassis. It has a hollow pocket inside which is filled with mixed non-magnetic metal particles which help stop RFI and EMI from traveling between components.

The manufacturer recommends using them under speakers. I couldn't test this application because my Mirage M-1s are a physical mismatch for the system, as is my Krell KSA 250 which is too deep to fit the plinth. I'm having units custom made for the Krell and my VPI turntable (a standard model should shortly be ready for VPI), but haven't received them yet. Therefore listening tests were done with my CD player and preamp.

### SONIC BENEFITS

My initial listening tests were done with the system isolating a Musical Concepts modified Magnavox 460 CD player with the "crown" D/A chips, low impedance power supply, and Mor-tite damping inside the chassis.

What the system did to the sound of this unit was not subtle. I never needed to go back and forth questioning what I heard, although the improvement lies in an area difficult to communicate with language. Coherence. The instruments are more precisely defined, emerge from a quieter background. Instrumental tone is more natural, relaxed, and distinct. The "naturalness" and ease of the sound was ultimately what impressed me most.

Soundstage became broader along the rear wall, smack into the corners. It removed a lot of digitalis: the silvery hash associated with some CDs and also a lot of digital glut heard during crescendos of large orchestras.

The Faure *Requiem* (Colin Davis, Philips 412 743-2) is a "soft" recording in a reverberant space, very romantic sounding. Within that reverberant space I could better make out placement of voices and instruments. Whereas before only ambient sounds came from the rear corners of the room, I could now hear specific sounds.

During Mahler's 2nd (Klemperer, EMI 7 69662 2) I heard detail within the orchestra which had previously only been part of the general sound, little string figures and other details. The tympani rolls were never as deep or well defined.

These kinds of results were repeated on CD after CD. Even Martin Denny's bird calls (remember him?) seemed real. Replaying the taped notes I made during setup and first listening revealed the excitement of discovery: "There's absolutely no mistaking what's going on here...there's no going back."

How about on a piece of electronics? On an Audio Research SP9 (Mark I) preamp, the system eliminated about half the brightness which had become an annoying coloration of that unit since mating it with a Krell KSA 250. Strings sounded less screechy on Bridge: *The Sea* (EMI ASD 3190) and Moreran: *Symphony in G minor* (Mobil Fidelity MFSL 1-524). Sound stage deepened and widened, tympani rolls got tighter and deeper. Improvements were obvious, just not as obvious as with the CD player.

### SET-UP

Get yourself a 5 gallon bucket of #20 silica sand or sterilized children's play sand. Place Big Foot in position and pour about half of it in. Big Foot comes with a template which is drawn back and forth across the tray, smoothing and leveling the sand. Add additional sand as needed. Don't add too much or you will be continuously drawing the excess back and forth across the top.

The plinth is then set in the center of the sand and pressed partially into it. Use a carpenter's level to check for final orientation. Foam strips are supplied which fit between the plinth and the tray edge which seals in the sand and gives the unit a finished appearance. Avoid sneezing into the sand and if you have cats, kill them.

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Place your component on the plinth and place Little Rock on top of it so as not to plug up ventilation holes and preferably to cover the transformer. You're ready to rock 'n roll.

### DEVELOPING AN OPERATIONAL PLAN FOR VIBRATION CONTROL

Low frequency vibrations such as foot-falls and thumps are a pain in the ass for turntables, but are not the most pernicious or damaging type for the overall sound quality of the system. It's the mid and high frequency vibrations which arrive structurally and through the air that cause ongoing microphonics, oscillations, and mistracking in both the digital and analog mediums.

In severe cases this is heard as a general muddying up of the sound or a rise in background noise. Most often though, it is noted in it's absence when an improvement in the isolation of a component occurs. More detail is heard, not because more detail is there, but because more detail is freed from the hitherto un-noted background noise. Dynamics are improved because the sound stands in starker contrast to the quiet.

Isolation becomes more effective the closer it gets to the component. This stands to reason. If, for example, we rely on an acoustically dead rack or stand we are still not preventing airborne or self-generated vibrations from affecting the sound. The Bright Star Audio isolation system fits neatly with this philosophy since it absorbs vibrations at the chassis.

The adventurous can usually glean further enhancement by lining the inside of component chassis' with Mortite, a substance made for caulking windows which remains permanently soft and is easily found at hardware stores.

Tap your component. Many of the most expensive ones vibrate excessively.

Open it up and apply Mortite wherever it will not be in contact with heat or obstruct the mechanical functions. Conversation with Barry Kohan, President of Bright Star, confirmed that this approach would be perfectly compatible with their own isolation system. Components which are already well built and don't vibrate when tapped may show little if any improvement.

Having dealt with isolation in the immediate environment of the component, we are now free to design our racks for 1) rigidity and 2) flexibility without depending on them completely or exclusively for isolation.

My own approach, one which allows for the flexibility needed when one is constantly changing components and is also low in cost, is the old cinderblock and board motif, but with a new wrinkle.

From the ground up the unit consists of four tiptoes, a 1.5" thick limestone slab damped on the underside with Mortite, wide and deep enough to accommodate two columns of cinderblocks and my Krell. The amp is placed in the middle with a column of cinderblocks on each end. 18" boards are placed across at appropriate intervals and are deep enough to set Big Foot (Feet?) on. Cinderblocks come in three widths so you can match them to the height of your components.

Now the new wrinkle. George Tice gave me the idea of using vinyl strips to interleave between each brick and board interface. This is the material that you see hanging in car washes. It's about .125" thick, semi flexible, and is easily cut with a straight edge and exacto knife. It is perfect for filling in the slight irregularities between the bricks and boards and damps resonances perfectly. The structure is super rigid with lots of mass. With the bricks and boards painted the unit doesn't look bad at all.



Constraint layer damping, using two different sheets of material for the shelf with, say, a layer of this vinyl in between would make an even deader shelf. This would be unnecessary in my view as Big Foot will provide 95% of the resonance protection.

The fact that the Bright Star Audio Isolation System provides that much protection is reassuring for those audiophiles who want real furniture in their living rooms. The contraption described above is in no way necessary to achieve great results from Big Foot/Little Rock.

What, you may ask, of tiptoes, sorbothane pucks and other gadgets? In response I would ask another question. How do they work and where do you use them? Tiptoes for example. Do they act as diodes and funnel energy away from a component or do they decouple a component? Or both? Sorbothane absorbs vibrations, but it also shears, has lateral movement. Do sorbothane pucks therefore aggravate the problem of self generated and airborne vibrations?

To be sure, I have heard improvements in sound using other isolation products. But I have the feeling that we may be tuning our components instead of isolating them. I have never heard the degree of improvement I heard with Big Foot and Little Rock. They are worth the effort you may have to expend to accommodate their size.

At winter CES I became aware of two new products. Big Foot II is slightly smaller than Big Foot at 19.5" x 17" x 3" high. The Rack Of Gibraltar is a very solid, welded equipment rack (not tested) with 4 shelves and floor spikes.

**Little Rock Isolation Pod: \$99 in "dark (grey) granite", \$114 in black granite. Big Foot Isolation Platform: \$149 in granite, \$175 in black granite. Big Foot II: \$139 in granite, \$165 in black granite. The Rack Of Gibraltar: \$1495 in granite, \$1595 in black granite. Bright Star Audio, 2363 Teller Road #115, Newbury Park, California 91320 805 375-2629**

## Interconnect Cable Survey

*Mark Block*

Choosing interconnect cables remains one of the most contentious areas in audiophilia. Differences between wires are inherently system dependent and oftentimes quite subtle, particularly on quick A/B tests. The seemingly minor audible deviations from neutrality may or may not be significant when it comes to long-term listening enjoyment, and it's damned difficult to figure out which cables are going to stand the test of time. Many have had the experience of being initially thrilled with a cable only to real-

ize a month later that the system had been sounding crappy for, oh, Jeez, just about a month. *Quel coincidence!*

Then there's the issue of price: the difference between a very good cable and a great one is often hundreds of dollars—dollars that could perhaps be better spent elsewhere (like at Carnegie Hall). My conclusion is that although there's no good way to buy cables, the best way is through a two week audition, a concept pioneered by The Cable Company. I've checked out a number of interconnect cables this way, and I'll be happy to add to the already contentious

atmosphere by reporting my observations here.

I've ranked the cables in order of preference, with a few words describing the sound I heard with my equipment. Much to my chagrin, I found that the most expensive cable sounded the best in my system by a wide enough margin that I bought it. The remainder of the rankings were quite surprising, and will certainly raise the hackles of some manufacturers. The manufacturers, however, should be used to this by now; it seems that every cable test becomes controversial.

Cables are just so inherently system dependent that I can't see getting all bent out of shape over any one person's findings. If a broad consensus develops that a particular cable sounds good in a number of systems, then it's certainly worth checking out. Add my evaluation into your info bank, but don't bank on my conclusions—there's no guarantee that the cables I prefer will work best for you. This is where a helpful dealer (or more likely, The Cable Company) can come to the rescue.

The question arises, Is there a way to predict which cables will be most accurate in a given system? Since the electrical characteristics of a cable—resistance, inductance and capacitance—are measurable, and the electrical characteristics of the preamp, amp and speakers are likewise knowable, the frequency response deviations caused by a particular cable should be (and indeed are) eminently predictable. Wouldn't it be a great idea for The Cable Company to plug all this data into a computer program so that recommendations can be made on a scientifically objective basis?

Yes it would, except for the fact that most of us aren't listening for the most accurate cables; we're listening for cables which make our systems sound better. Predictable frequency response

errors (sometimes amounting to swings of several dB) and bandwidth limiting effects (which can protect equipment from distortion-producing ultrasonic garbage) may actually be beneficial to the overall sound. This is the "Expensive Tone Control" theory of cables.

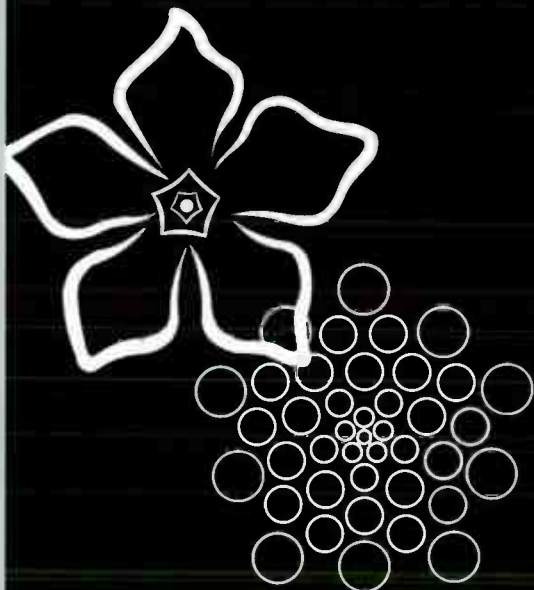
Furthermore, it's a matter of audiophile gospel that there are many audible differences not taken into account by the measurement fetishists—the meter maids. I remain agnostic on the issue. I certainly hear things that don't sound like tonal balance inaccuracies, but I wouldn't bet the Defy 7 on the meter maids being wrong.

For me the most important sonic characteristic of cables, aside from frequency response, is in the area of dynamics. Some cables seem to give the sound more punch and drive than others—a higher "jump factor" and more toe tapping, if you will. Such cables make all music more enjoyable, pure and simple. One thing I don't hear is an improvement in imaging that can't be better described as "greater transparency."

For example, an instrument that's placed deep in the soundstage won't sound any deeper with better cables, but it will sound clearer and more lifelike; the illusion of depth will be more convincing. Most properly screened and halfway neutral cables will be pretty good in the imaging department. However, the active electronics, the speakers and the room play a much more important role. In sum, the three criteria I use in judging cables are: tonal balance, dynamics and (to a lesser degree) transparency.

Although I tested the cables in the CD to preamp path, the bulk of my listening was done with the cables in the preamp to amp connection. The one monkey wrench in this comparison is that I changed amplifiers between cable trials, so I've noted whether the auditioning was carried out with my old

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Krell KSA 80B, my new Jadis Defy 7, or both. The rest of my system consists of a Philips 960 CD player, Theta DSP Pro Gen. II processor, CAT preamp and Acoustat Spectra 22 speakers.

At the end of each two week trial period (there were three) I put the cables through a tape loop bypass test, using the tape selector at my preamp as an A/B switch. Although this changes the electronic conditions of the cable interface (the tape loop is not the same as a preamp to amp interconnection), it's a good confirmation of some tonal balance irregularities. As I noted earlier, the differences between cables are more subtle on an A/B switch test than during extended listening sessions.

### THE GOOD

Cardas Hexlink Five: Great cable. Very dynamic. Full in the bass, very smooth in the midrange. Friends warned me it would be veiled in the high frequencies, but I disagree. It's very transparent. The cable most like no cable at all. High goosebump factor. (Jadis) \$499 (all prices are for a 1 meter pair).

AudioQuest Emerald: Smooth, relaxed, neutral. Punchy in the bass, good sense of dynamics and pace. Almost as good as the Cardas for a lot less money. (Krell & Jadis) \$250.

Cogan-Hall Reference: Nice, neutral sounding cable. Too thick and rigid to fit in the tight confines of my equipment rack. (Krell) \$370.

### THE NOT SO BAD

XLO type 1: Very smooth in the midrange, but no warmth in the bass. Odd, slightly bright highs. Not nearly as dynamic as the Cardas Hexlink. I'm disappointed. I expected great things from this cable; instead, I would rate it merely good for the price. (Jadis) \$275.

Cardas Quadlink: Neutral from the midrange up, but too lean and lightweight in the bass for my taste. Doesn't have the punch and dynamics of the Hexlink. (Jadis) \$189.95.

Museatex Meitner: Fairly well balanced. No major flaws. Detail, transparency, low-end weight and dynamics are OK, but not up with the best. (Krell & Jadis) \$130.

DNM: Midrangey but smooth. Rolled off at both ends and average in dynamics, but can give a nice laid back quality to an otherwise forward, in-your-face system. Unshielded, so it sounds hashy if used near equipment that throws off RFI. (Krell & Jadis) \$85.

Purist Audio Design Aqueous: Very different sounding from the others. Is that good or bad? Smooth midrange. Good dynamics. Lots of air and upper harmonics. Very detailed. High frequencies sound a little off. An excess of upper harmonics seems to add a bright, foggy veil to the sonic picture. Perhaps accentuates flaws in my system. (Krell) \$259.95.

### THE UGLY

AudioQuest Lapis: Zippy sounding. Adds snap to transients. Also adds sibilance to vocals. Irritating in the long run. I liked the cheaper Emerald interconnect much better. (Jadis) \$400.

Straight Wire Maestro: Bright, zingy, downright nasty. The worst sound I've ever heard from my system. (Krell) \$272.

The most common excuse for a bad sounding cable is that it wasn't "burned in" long enough. According to my tuned in, turned on and burned out brethren, one hundred hours or more is required.

Because the XLO and Purist Audio cables described above were fairly new

when I got them from The Cable Company, and because my first impressions were at odds with the positive word of mouth within The Audiophile Society, I burned them in with pink noise (from a test disc set on repeat) for four days, sampling the sound each day with a music selection or two in order to catch the expected improvements. I didn't hear any, but it seems I won't have to turn in my reviewer's credentials for saying so; Robert Stein of The Cable Company subsequently informed me that all of his cables are burned in before being shipped out for trial.

Another interesting excuse for quirky results in multi-cable listening sessions comes from Cardas, who claims that moving a cable can have temporary

deleterious effects on performance. I think there may be something to this—but if so, what can you do about it, other than throw up your hands and give up?

By the way, before you get serious about evaluating a selection of cables, *clean the connectors*. I recommend the Signet SK302RCA Contact Cleaning Tool. These clever little plastic do-dads are hermaphroditically shaped to fit both the male and the female sides of the connection, and do a miraculous job of removing oxidation with absolutely no fuss. The Cable Company (telephone 1-800-FAT-WYRE) charges all of \$9.75 to try a pack of four, and the first pack comes free if you buy some cables.

## A Survey of Products from NBS, Purist & XLO

Bill Wells

Remember the old adage, "Children are meant to be seen but not heard?" Well, that's pretty much how I feel about the various audio cables needed throughout my audio system. In fact, if left to my wife—and, I suspect, many other wives and significant others as well—you wouldn't see them at all ... the cables, that is!

Over the past 24 months or so, I've gone through my share of cables, with each brand displaying its own sonic signature. Many of them were good (some were outstandingly good) but, nonetheless, their sonic signatures eventually intruded to such an extent that I often found myself focusing on the colorations of the cables rather than listening to the music. When that happened it was time to part company with those particular cables, and once again another frustrating search ensued.

As a weary audiophile cable-chaser, I must thank people such as Jack English, who undertook a unique, intriguing and laborious cable survey in the now defunct *Sounds Like...* magazine. While Jack and his compatriots did not attempt to proclaim any one cable an absolute King of the Hill, they did reach some interesting conclusions. "In My System" became their familiar audio anthem and alarm, alerting readers that all was not quite kosher when crossing over from one set up to another. Cables, it seems, are highly system dependent.

Recently I've had the opportunity to test some of today's newest entrants in the "Great Cable Race". The cables in use the longest at my place are from Jim Aud of Purist Audio Design in Clute, Texas. These products have often been referred to as the "Texas Water Cables" due to their unique design: the inner audio cable runs through a fluid-filled clear outer jacket. On hand were the lat-

est versions of their top of the line Maximus interconnect and digital cable. (Unfortunately, time ran out before I was able to thoroughly audition the digital cable. More on this later). The next cable to enter my home was manufactured by NBS Audio Cables in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I auditioned their Reference Standard digital cable, AC Power Cable II, Serpent speaker cable and King Serpent interconnects. The most recent cables on the scene came by the way of the XLO Electric Company, based in Rancho Cucamonga, California. Their Type 1 unbalanced interconnects and Type 4 Digital interconnect were both auditioned at length.

Unfortunately, each of the above cables required a significant amount of break-in before even remotely starting to sound the way the manufacturer intended. In addition, they all seemed to incur some instantaneous deterioration when moved (for instance, when unplugged and reinserted). On the advice of each manufacturer, and based on my own personal experience, it seems best to put them into your main system and simply leave them put! Most of these cables need a minimum 48 to 72 hours for initial burn-in, with often 100 hours or more required before they really sound their best.

### NBS

First up are the NBS cables. In terms of sheer musicality and overall listening enjoyment, these cables (in my system) are very compelling. What they provide is a sonic picture without any glare, hardness or brightness. They do not intrude on the music. In particular, the NBS King Serpent interconnect is very transparent, open and allows a significant increase in resolving power. This quality seems to extend across the entire listening spectrum, with no noticeable bands of emphasis or de-emphasis.

Furthermore, these interconnects handle transients with suitable speed, and

are very dynamic over the entire listening range. They have the ability to free up the system of any constriction. This greater sense of dynamics, along with the much higher resolving power, really opens the soundstage. Background noise is quite low, with no apparent loss of ambiance or hall effects. There is a perceived increase in body with various instruments, particularly acoustic types, which are presented with a natural tactile quality, making recorded music seem more rich, lush and liquid—more real. *The Blessing* by Gonzalo Rubal Caba (Blue Note CDP 797972) is a superb recording to demonstrate these sonic attributes.

These cables are also very extended. Bass is superb, being deep, powerful, full and clear. The midrange is beautiful—lush and liquid but also natural and neutral sounding. The highs are sweet, smooth, clean and articulate.

Adding the NBS Serpent speaker cables (bi-wire set used in my system) seemed to really let my amps open up and relax. These cables provide a very quiet background, and are quite dynamic. Their sound, like the interconnect's, is very low in coloration and quite neutral. The tactile quality was very evident again, along with enhanced articulation and resolution. The music is served very well by these neutral, powerful and articulate sounding speaker cables. Listen to the superb Chesky recording by McCoy Tyner, *New York Reunion* (Chesky JD51), to note the superb natural acoustic sound.

However, the real surprise was yet to come. Enter the NBS AC Power Cable II. It uses the IEC 3 prong female connector, and was easily substituted for the manufacturer-supplied detachable power cord. Quite frankly, I wasn't prepared for the change rendered by this cable. The improvements were immediate; none of that dreadfully long break-in. It's simply a matter of plug in and play. As a bonus, I found that it does

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not seem to be system dependent; it should benefit most, if not all, systems.

Specifically, what this cable did was to provide a cleaner, clearer sound with an increase in dynamics, and a more open (wider and deeper) soundstage with an even quieter background. It reminds me of situations in which a component's power supply is significantly beefed up, creating an immediately noticeable improvement. This power cord breathes new life into the component(s) to which it is attached.

The last product from NBS that I tried was their Reference Standard digital cable (75 ohm coaxial). This latest all-out effort eclipses (but does not replace) their previous top of the line digital cable. The sound with this cable was very dynamic, clean, quiet, and smooth, with very good resolution and extension at the frequency extremes. The tonal balance was quite neutral and linear, with proper weight, balance and dimensionality on instruments and voice. Overall the sound was extremely musical. It had superb inner detail, outstanding bass, very natural and convincing mids, along with a very realistic, focused soundstage with good depth and width. For good examples of these various qualities, try Warren Bernhardt's album *Heat of the Moment* (DMP C468) or Dave Holland's outstanding quartet on *Extensions* (ECM 841-778-4).

### Purist

After a long—and I mean really long—break-in (Jim Aud suggested that the Maximus requires close to 200—yes, that's right, 200—hours before optimal performance!), the first thing I noticed was that my system sounded very quiet. Specifically, the noise floor had been lowered considerably, but without making the system darker. Musical sounds were quite evident and distinct, with very good resolution and inner detail. Sound emerged from this very quiet background with more obviousness, not just greater clarity. This effect was not accompanied

by any brightness. In fact, the cable is quite the opposite of bright. It's very smooth and slightly soft on top, but not enough to sound rolled off.

The Maximus cable is not hi-fi-ish, but instead is very musical (not in any pejorative sense, but in the sense of being relaxed and enjoyable). It has an overall character that favors a naturally smooth presentation. Harmonics and musical overtones are rendered in a rich but not overly lush or dull manner. The Howard Arlen/George Van Eps album titled *13 Strings* (Concord Jazz CCD-4464) provides some fine examples of the qualities. Also, overall instrumental dimensionality is easily perceived.

Soundstaging is quite good, due in large part to the reduced noise floor and overall quieting. Depth, in particular, and to a lesser extent width, is noticeably increased. With the Maximus, front to back perspective was rendered with a very authentic illusion of how instrumental placement may have been intended and/or arranged during recording. I do not profess to know what every recording engineer has in mind when an album is created. However, I believe I have sufficient experience in a wide array of live music venues to have a good sense of what soundstaging is all about, and whether components or cables attempt to get it right. The Maximus interconnect cable seems to do its job as intended and should reward most users with a multitude of sonic virtues. All in all, I found this cable to be very musical and totally non-fatiguing.

### XLO

Finally, we get to another one of the latest "new kids on the block". Roger Skoff, formerly a *Sounds Like...* staff writer, has entered the Great Cable Race by recently forming his own cable company called XLO Electric. XLO has several types of cables available, including a digital cable, a special phono cable, two versions of speaker cable and several different



line level interconnects. The latter are made available as either shielded or unshielded. The cables reviewed here were the unshielded line level interconnects and digital cable.

What XLO may be best at is extracting hidden treasures from some of the better systems that have loads of potential and just need that final touch to breathe life into them. This is *not* just a situation of improved clarity, inner detail and resolution.

The sound with XLO is very articulate and transparent, taking on the character of whatever component(s) is just ahead of it. The high degree of transparency, along with fast, dynamic transients, gives the listener a very clear sonic picture to peer into. To get a grasp of these cables' dynamic capabilities, try the Yellow Jackets album *The Spin* (MCA Records 6304), which is loaded with explosive, hard-hitting transients and solid percussion throughout.

Initially, I had several components just ahead of the XLO in the chain that possessed a bit of brightness and/or hardness. Although it was relatively minor (and not *that* noticeable), these cables quickly exposed the culprit(s) in my system. Fortunately, I was able to substitute various components (in particular, Ken Stevens' latest all-out preamp effort, the CAT Signature) and most of the brightness (and hardness) subsided. My system then took on a richer, but very detailed presentation and I was once again enjoying the music.

Also, I found that once I put *all* XLO cables in my system (line level and digital link), and simply left them alone to settle in for a period of time, the overall sound improved significantly. It wasn't orders of magnitude better, but it was far greater than a subtle change.

As I have said before, the XLO is like a clear glass window; anything on the other side better be nice looking. If not—

watch out! The overall tonal balance of these cables is pretty linear, although a slight thinness is detectable in the mid to upper bass region. This is not necessarily significant, and actually enhances articulation in this region. Low and mid bass are very extended and powerful. The midrange is open and clear, with good resolution and inner detail. Highs were linear, and transients fast and dynamic. Soundstaging was wide open, with very good instrumental layering and depth.

My next cable for auditioning was the XLO digital cable. After running this cable for approximately 48 hours in one system, and then for over 24 hours in my main system, I now had a digital cable with many very positive attributes—speed, clarity and great dynamics. It also sounded very linear across the entire frequency range. Soundstaging was truly sensational; listen to the Grammy winning acapella group Take 6 on their debut album *Take 6* (Reprise 925670-2) to discern the layering of voices and the very specific placement and positioning of the different performers. The bass was also excellent.

Although there were no problems when using this cable in a system with interconnects other than XLO, I will say however that I *much* preferred the XLO digital cable in my system when matched with its companion XLO interconnects. Given a reasonable amount of time to settle-in and stabilize, the XLO offers up a wealth of musical detail that may otherwise go unnoticed. Specifically, the digital cable sounds fast, super quick on transients, very articulate, clear, open and very extended. By using the XLO throughout, there is a synergy which greatly enhances overall system performance.

### Conclusion

For now, I am reluctant to choose any one set of cables as the clear winner from this small stable of thoroughbreds.

Each company has presented a uniquely different product for consideration. Because each audiophile's particular audio system configuration (solid state vs tube, analog vs digital, etc.) will greatly influence cable sonics, the user should make his/her own choice based on their own preferences.

As for me, I well know my overall musical preferences and sonic tastes. Acoustic jazz is *my* favored musical passion. I like instruments (and voice—perhaps the very best acoustical instrument ever, and one that I dearly treasure) to be fully fleshed out with a rich, liquid, lush and natural sense and sound. In this regard, I also know which cables work best for me, in my system. I can only wish you luck on *your* search. And happy Listening!

### Postscript/Addendum:

In my efforts to play it safe (!) regarding a selection of my favorite cable(s), the editor has sort of yanked my chain and challenged me to deliver the message. I will do so, and further stress how and why I made this choice.

If you recall, I stated early in this review that I found the NBS cables to be musically compelling in my system—compelling in much the same way as the Pro Ac Respons 3 speakers. (Although these babies have not been reviewed in these pages, other publications have captured the essence of their exquisite musicality rather accurately.) It is the overall mix of sonic virtues that leads me to this conclusion.

These cables simply allow me to thoroughly get into and enjoy the music. I guess I really have made a choice after all!

**NBS Reference Standard Digital:**  
\$800 for 1 meter.

**NBS King Serpent Interconnect:**  
\$1600 for a 1 meter pair.

**NBS Serpent Speaker Cable:** \$150 per stereo foot.

**NBS AC Power Cable:** \$450 for a 6 foot run.

**Purist Maximus Interconnect:**  
\$599.95 for a 1 meter pair.

**XLO Type 1 Interconnect:** \$275 for a 1 meter pair.

**XLO Type 4 Digital:** \$150 for 1 meter.

Associated equipment used during cable evaluations:

Convergent Audio Technology Signature preamp; Audio Research LS1 Line Stage; Audio Research Classic 120 monoblock amps; Versa Dynamic 1.0 turntable/Benz Micro MC3; Oracle Delphi IV/SME type V tonearm/Benz Micro MC3; Esoteric P-2 CD Transport & D-2 D-to-A converter; Audio Research DAC1-20 D/A converter; California Audio Labs Tercet MKIII CD player; Symdex Epsilon Signature Speakers; Pro Ac Respons 3 loudspeakers; Cardas Hexlink Golden Series V interconnects & phono cable; Straight Wire Maestro interconnects and speaker cable; VPI Bricks; MAS masTER mat; Goldmund cones.

## The Duo-Tech Cable Enhancer

*Russell Novak*

What a good idea this is. I and many other audiophiles who find the job of breaking-in cables tedi-

ous, have wished for something which would send a signal through cables and interconnects without having to play the system all day and night for days at a time.

Implicit in this ritual exercise of "burning-in" cables is the belief that this process does, in fact, help the sound. The results usually attributed to this burning in process are smoother highs, richer sound, and deeper, tighter bass. So on and on we go: playing the system all day while at work to break-in new speaker cables; running the CD player or tuner for days to break-in new interconnects.

Now we have the Duo-Tech Cable Enhancer to do this for us. It's a little 5.5" x 4" x 2" box with phono jacks on its sides. Both ends of interconnects are plugged into the box following the orientation of the arrows on the chassis which show correct signal flow. For speaker cable, two attachments are added to the sides of the unit which convert the phono jacks to binding posts to accommodate spade lugs or banana plugs. A minimum of 48 hours is the recommended burn-in period, during which a 10 volt, pulsed, wideband, digitally generated signal, is sent through the cable. In the present model, only unbalanced interconnects can be treated. I would urge a modification of the unit to also accommodate balanced cables.

Michael Lau, an Asian audiophile, is the inventor and Bill Sizemore is the American distributor for a company which also imports toys. Sizemore is very enthusiastic about the product and cooperated fully in sending us two units in time to do a review just before deadline.

Like much of what high end audio is based on, we trust our ears to tell us the value of a product or procedure, since the correct scientific explanation is usually lacking. Burning in cables is one such phenomena, as are unmeasurable but audible differences between components. Many times it is a mistake to try to supply explanations for these phenomena. The audible changes are real, but if the proposed "explanation" can be disproved, it causes us to question the reality of what we hear and supplies ammunition to the audio reactionaries.

Duo-Tech supplies several explanations for why their product works and what it does. They believe that in a new or incompletely burned in cable, mechanical stress from handling and trapped gas inside the cable (I assume they mean inside the copper) mask low level detail by causing phase distortion, as well as magnetic and electrical interference.

They claim that a signal sent through a cable releases trapped gasses. They state this signal will also relieve mechanical stresses in the delicate stranded structure of the metal and allow the signal to pass with less interference, thus preserving the purity of the phase and bandwidth relationships. And naturally, since the signal generated by the Cable Enhancer is much stronger than the wire will see from components, it will do a better job of burn-in. They say that until the introduction of the Cable Enhancer, no one has heard a truly burned-in cable.

Duo-Tech believes so strongly that mechanical stress can "ruin" a burnt-in cable, they warn the user not to wrap cables too tightly, or to twist and bend them. Such handling would necessitate another burn-in procedure and shorten the life of the cable.

The traditional theory for cable (and component) burn-in is that it better "forms" the metal to act like a capacitor, taking and releasing electrons (signal) as they moved along the component path. This theory is not mentioned in the Duo-Tech literature. I find Duo-Tech's explanation speculative. Bill Sizemore told me they can't really prove what is going on at the molecular level, so the whole discussion becomes moot. The proof is in the hearing.

In the first half of my test I used two cables: MIT 330, well broken in from years of use, and some new homemade cable, not used at all, made from Canare microphone cable. One pair of each was broken in for 60 hours. One pair of each was left untreated.

When inserted in the system, one pair at a time from the CD player to a passive attenuator, there was a very slight smoothing of the high frequencies. I had to go back and forth a few times with the untreated cable samples to make certain of my observation. *This held true for the new cable as well as the MIT 330.* I immediately began to question just whether the break-in theory for cables was valid, or whether I had been fooling myself all these years. It was one thing for the extensively used MIT to show little improvement, it was another for the unused Canare wire to sound almost the same.

I decided to break-in an additional pair of each type to complete the chain between the CD player, passive attenuator, and the amp. After another 60 hours to break in the new pair, I brought over a friend with two more pairs of used MIT 330 and we ran the comparisons again.

This time the effect was more obvious, *but not pronounced.* The Duo-Tech had definitely lessened the amount of energy in the mid-treble area.

My friend heard it as more significant than I did. He felt it was important information—feathery touches which helped to define the instruments in space. I found it a close call, but took his point. Some people have criticized the MIT for being a little bright and thin in the treble. I have heard this problem on occasion, but it never bothered me since my system has *no* tendency toward brightness, the instruments emerge from a darker background than most systems. In this type of system the effect of the Duo-Tech on this cable could be heard as a loss.

Moving to the Canare cable, we both agreed that some graininess associated with it was improved and the cable suffered no information loss, in fact the

treatment made them into a very nice sounding pair. At no time, with either cable, did I hear any soundstage related phenomena which could not be attributed to change in frequency emphasis.

Use of the Duo-Tech is therefore *applications dependent.* If your system has a tendency toward brightness and especially if the fault lies in the interconnect or the speaker cable, don't hesitate to use this product. But since it is not a universal cure for every situation, don't use it unless the need is heard.

My thinking is bolstered by the report of a reviewer in another magazine who used (for part of the review) Thiel 3.5 speakers and a CD source. This would certainly indicate a borderline brightness problem and indicate a beneficial application of the Duo-Tech technology.

We also have the convenience factor to consider. It's so easy to hook up your cables to the machine and forget them.

I'm going to turn over these machines to other reviewers for additional comments in the next issue. Because we promised the manufacturer a review in this issue, I've only had a little over a week to play with them and have not tried them on speaker cable.

**Model CE1000 Cable Enhancer,  
\$179., Duo-Tech Corp, 37396  
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Oregon 97055**

Reference System: Mirage M-1 speakers, OCOS parallel wired, Krell KSA 250 amp, passive attenuator, Musical Concepts modified CD player on Bright Star Audio Isolation System, MIT 330 interconnects.

## Book Review

*The Wood Effect* by R.C. Johnsen

Sam Burstein

This soft cover book of slightly more than 100 pages discusses in a narrative style the history of absolute phase error within the world of recorded and broadcast music. This is a book written by a person who has a religious mission to perform. And that mission is to pound into your head the gremlin of all gremlins in audio: absolute phase error. The message is brought home to you page after page.

In many ways this book follows a non-standard format. For example, there is no table of contents or index. There are attempts by the author at humor—page 78 is left intentionally blank so as to allow concentration while reading page 79. On the other hand, Johnsen looked like he was getting serious when he introduced a theoretical model of system response in Chapter 8 (he has a degree from Harvard in physics).

Johnsen starts off trying to establish a statistical framework for evaluating a systems response to an input signal. The discussion is, like the topic itself, something like a random walk. The length of this chapter is just three pages including the famous page 78. On the last page of this chapter the author goes off on a toot. Several of the other chapters appearing in this work are also so short as to beg the question: Why a chapter does this section make? Fortunately there are bits and pieces of genuine interest in this work. One beautiful statement appears at the top of page 9:

*"When instruments produce compression waves, loudspeakers must speak likewise."*

This says it all. The Wood Effect is attributed to Charles Wood who was at

the Defense Research Laboratory of the University of Texas in 1957. Wood, using a sinusoidal wave form that is partially clipped over one half of the wave form's period, found that the timbre of the signal did not remain the same when the leads of the headphones were reversed.

Much of the effort in this book focuses on the lack of the recording industry's concern over the maintenance of absolute phase from the moment a sound is captured by the recording microphone until reemerges from the loudspeakers in your listening room.

Chapter One delves cursedly into the early history of music's reproduction. Chapter Two, also an introduction, starts the main theme of the book—phase polarity. In the next chapter, Johnsen leads the reader through the question of polarity and its attendant claims of audibility or non-audibility by citing, on page after page, authors, journals, and excerpts pertaining to this question. Near the end of the chapter, phase designations of modern recordings and playback equipment that processes information while introducing phase errors are discussed. Chapters Four and Five include, among other topics, attempts to standardize and test for polarity of recorded sound. In chapter Six, Johnsen presents a striking result of his polarity studies:

*"Wherever records originate, their polarity overall is split 50/50."*

Being technically as well as pragmatically oriented I found the most interesting chapters to be Seven and Nine. In the former, the author connects, finally, the concept of phase inversion to a discussion of audible effects from real world speaker systems. And in the lat-

ter, lists of records with notations as to polarity are provided. The lists are both surprising and interesting.

If you have difficulty getting involved in the early chapters, take heart. The material gets more interesting as you progress. Johnsen makes a strong plea. We should all listen.

I felt so sorry for the poor demon "phase inversion", blasted by Johnsen throughout the entire book, that I kept reminding myself of a useful technological application of the concept of absolute phase inversion.

A company called Noise Cancellation Technologies in New York, using a real-time microprocessor, was able to demonstrate that noise (particularly of the long wavelength type) could at least be partially canceled by introducing mirror images of waves that are already present in a given acoustic space. The microprocessor uses an analog-to-digital converter to transform the noise picked up by the field microphone. The digital data input stream is processed by the microcomputer which forms a data stream with inverted polarity. This output stream is fed to a digital-to-analog converter which then drives a conventional loudspeaker. The sound waves produced by the speaker differs by 180 degrees from the original sound wave. The phase inverted sound wave entering the noise field combines with and at least partially cancels the original sound wave.

There are a number of reasons why the Noise Cancellation Technologies process is more successful with the longer wavelength components of the noise field. The shortest wavelengths (highest frequencies) are the most difficult to cancel precisely because of their spatial distribution. A microphone and corresponding speaker would have to be present at many points within the sound field to achieve cancellation of the high-

est frequencies present. For the longest wavelengths (lowest frequencies), however, the number of microphones and speakers required are minimized. And where most of the energy in the sound field is contained in the lowest frequencies, the process is most successful.

Where is phase inversion cancellation used? Wherever a reduction in the ambient noise level is desirable—usually where the presence of industrial machines produces unacceptable levels of noise for human consumption. Concrete examples where "anti-noise" system have been used are in aircraft cockpits, submarines, industrial environments containing heavy machinery, and automobiles. The last example is currently being pursued by Lotus Engineering in Great Britain. Lotus will offer their anti-noise system, played through a multi-speaker stereo system, to all auto manufacturers within 2 years. When their system goes into production, Lotus expects the cost to be on the order of several hundred dollars (excluding the stereo system). The performance of the system varies with the particular automobile (because resonance characteristics vary from one auto to another), but in the best case to date the noise reduction of the internal "boom" was 27 db with more typical reductions measured in the 10 to 20 db range.

Getting back to the Wood Effect. The text ends penultimately with an epilogue and ultimately with an appendix containing excerpts from interviews at the 1987 Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago, where the author asked the question of many popular figures in high-end audio: "What do you think about absolute polarity?" For the many interesting answers to this question, as well as others, I refer you to R.C. Johnsen, c/o The Modern Audio Association, 23 Stillings St., Boston Mass. 02210. The cost is seven dollars postpaid.

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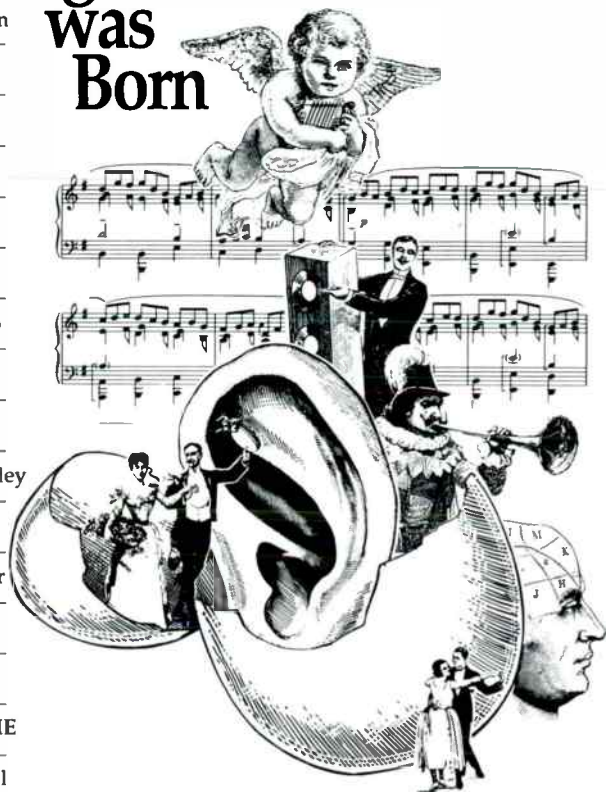
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# Live From The Audiophile Society

**O**ur debut issue featured twelve months of Audiophile Society meeting reports, and we have nine lively write-ups for you this issue. Next time around you'll see six, at which point we'll be fully current; the write ups can then be more timely and the coverage a bit more thorough. The Society holds eleven meetings a year, so a maximum of three reports per issue will be the norm.

*The present overabundance requires an explanation. Last year's edition of the annual Audiophile Society Journal was canceled when we embarked on the adventure of creating a new quarterly publication, The Audiophile Voice. By the time our first issue was ready for layout, we had quite a backlog of meeting reports. The choice: kill twelve old ones and start our first issue with the most current items; or publish everything, condensing reports so that we could squeeze a few extra into the initial issues. We chose the latter because we feel strongly that the high-end wisdom imparted by the esteemed musicians, manufacturers and journalists at our meetings does not grow old in merely one year. So in fairness to our guests, and with the best interests of our readers at heart, we proudly present the next batch of meeting reports, covering January through September of 1991.*

**George Tice, Tice Audio Products  
Reporter: Bob Serino  
January 18, 1991**

**T**he meeting included a somber note. The membership was informed of the passing of our dear friend Chuck LaMonica. We will always remember him as one who was full of life and energy. I personally will miss his wonderful sense of humor and the boundless energy and enthusiasm he brought to all his projects. His contributions to the society included a reded-

ign of our journal and many hours of subcommittee and executive committee work on behalf of all the members. A short prayer was said, and some pleasant memories of him were exchanged by the members. Chuck, you will always be with us in our hearts. Rest in peace.

After a short break George Tice was introduced. George has been a member of our society for many years, and although this was his first formal presentation, we have long known of his products. George's Power Block and Titan have gotten rave reviews everywhere.

George first got into the business after hearing Sal Demicco's power cord improve the sound of his audio system. From that point on George became obsessed with enhancing his system via filters, transformers and the like. George began looking at power conditioner specifications and found that they had no relation to sound quality—so he developed his own set of parameters that *were* important for audio equipment. He then assembled a power conditioner for his own use which included a customized transformer that used feedback and feedforward within the transformer itself.

George found that a metal case greatly degraded the performance of his transformer, and this led to his designing a specialized plastic case. An interesting point is that his Power Block radiates a field no greater than a power cord, which either says a lot for his Power Block or very little for power cords. George explained that use of the plastic case has been a manufacturing nightmare, but that it is critical to the design.

The Power Block is extremely effective against frequency harmonics of the 60 Hz power line wave. George feels that with his Power Block in the system, resolving

power improves to the point that one can hear everything in the circuit, including capacitors and their manufacturing vagaries.

George does not believe in grounding the Power Block. He feels that ground has become a great source of noise ever since computer and data storage devices began dumping garbage into it. A discussion of grounding then ensued. The only consensus reached was that when it comes to grounding there are no hard and fast rules, except that the power block sounds worse unless the ground is floated.

A two-box arrangement was chosen because of the constraints of shipping such a heavy piece of equipment. Each transformer is rated at 2.2 kVa to give a total 4.4 kVa rating. Tice also makes a Micro Block, which is a smaller version of his Power Block, for use with front-end equipment. Its quality is identical to that of its big brother. It should also be noted that the Micro Block allows for phase correction.

The presentation generated many questions, and discussion was both lively and informative. Unfortunately, the time consumed in the process prevented a continuation of the discussion of George's his newest product, the Digital Clock, which had been the subject of a meeting in October of 1990.

**Brian Cheney, Itone Audio  
Clark Johnsen, The Listening  
Studio**

**Reporter: Leon Yorburg**

**Date: March 1, 1991**

**I**t should be noted that the weather bureau has no record of snow on this date going back many years! How, you may ask, is this pertinent to a hi-fi meeting? We have here a good illustration of how myths are started. Listen.

Brian's appearance here tonight is not his first at our club; that first presentation was at my house on City Island in the early 1980's. No one knew that a record-breaking snowfall of over 12 inches was just beginning on this very evening. Clark Johnsen had come from Boston early that afternoon with a friend. Brian flew in from California, and his plane was diverted to Baltimore because of the weather. He proceeded by train to New York City, and from there to my house on another train. By the time he arrived, about 7:30, the snowstorm had taken on significant proportions.

Another guest speaker, an amplifier designer, never quite made it across the George Washington bridge and spent the night in his car, as we learned later. The only other person to make it in was the president of our club, Hy.

In retrospect, it can be seen as testimony to the wisdom and good judgement of the high-end coterie that nobody else came. At the time, however, we thought the members were chicken not to have shown up. We then proceeded to be snowbound for three days, and by the end of that time Campbell's soup was looking good. We did, however, get to know each other rather well.

The reason for this reminiscence is to explain why, to this day, we think of Brian as the Snow King, and also why we would not have been surprised to see it snow tonight.

Our club, by way of honoring the presenters, takes them out to dinner before each meeting. On returning to the house for this meeting, we found quite a few members were already assembled. Brian viewed this as an opportunity to start talking about his speakers. This, of course, would have disrupted our usual format in which club business and news, including new audio experiences, are presented first. Hy stepped in to gently but firmly regain control of the meeting.

I mention this incident because it represents, in a way, a similarity between Brian and his Super Tower III speaker. Both, if given a chance, tend to dominate and take over the room—Brian by dint of his personality, his speaker by its bulk and height (6'-6.5").

Since the meeting was held at this reporter's house, there was a big investment in seeing that things went right. With Brian and Clark, however, this may be an unreasonable expectation. Not that anything went wrong, but let us just say that these are two "different" people. They both present a minority, idiosyncratic viewpoint, albeit skillfully and wittily.

Brian, in his top of the line speaker, has followed the idea of multiple, identical speakers covering the different parts of the sound spectrum. For example, his latest monster is a vertical array with one super tweeter, four tweeters and four midrange drivers. In a separate array are a total of four 10", 12" and 15" cones, covering mid to sub-bass. Then there is a 15" passive radiator loading the box. Thus, there is a total of 13 active and passive cones, plus one ribbon super-tweeter.

It is perhaps noteworthy that Brian's very first designs were intended to create full-range sound in a discotheque. In a way, he has stuck with this goal. He is not creating the ultimate in transparent, weightless sound. But what he does do is palpable, moves floors, and kicks ass. This is the way I like it, even though it is not an admired audiophile goal. However, to get this and still maintain lucid transparency takes you into a much higher price class.

Clark Johnsen's presentation focused on identifying the absolute phase of a recording so that, if necessary, a phase correction can be made in playback. Many preamps have a switch for this purpose. Clark has written a booklet on the subject, *The Wood Effect*. Several club members bought copies at the meeting. Although correct phase is a subject that doesn't, on the face of it, sound tremendously interesting, Clark is

witty, an indefatigable punster, and always comes from an unexpected direction. Afterwards, we listened to a variety of recordings, mostly from Clark's library.

### **Steve Geist, Linaeum Speaker Systems**

**(with Paul Paddock & Steve Haessler)**

**Reporter: Lewis Lanese**

**April 6, 1991**

The Linaeum Speaker System is certainly visually imposing if nothing else. But it certainly is something else. Such was the reaction of many of the members at the special Saturday evening meeting held at the home of Ben Rose. "Home" is also the location of Harlequin Audio, Ben's high end emporium in Bayside, Queens. [See Bill Brassington's tribute in this issue.]

Linaeum's Steve Geist (with help from Paul Paddock and Steve Haessler), presented the Model 9, which includes two line source panels, each about six feet high, and four cylindrical subwoofer towers about the same height. The prototype was developed in 1982.

The basic 6" high driver is composed of two unique plastic cylinders driven by a magnetic structure. The driver's mass and compliance are said to change with frequency. The large panels have nine of these two-cylinder devices stacked vertically and covering 125 Hz-20,000 Hz, flat within 8 dB, with slight inductance and a non-reactive impedance of 5.6 ohms. Output is a very high 98 dB at one watt.

"It was a challenge to match the subwoofer," Steve Geist observed. Each bass tower has two 8" woofers mounted centrally and facing each other. Phasing and time alignment have been carefully considered. The 36 dB per octave, 125 Hz crossover is adjustable to accommodate different tastes.

The Lineaum Speaker System, Steve noted, is a true line source dipole. Highly desirable horizontal dispersion characteristics are advantages of a line source; vertical dispersion, of course, is limited. The system is contoured to provide natural sound, without added zip or zing, and is adjustable for different environments.

The Lineaum crew suggests bi-amping the speakers with an amplifier of at least 100 watts (solid state) for the woofers and 15–300 watts for the midrange/treble panels. Different configurations of panels and woofer towers are available. Baffles may be ordered in wood or acrylic. Smaller, more conventional speaker systems are available—for example, one 6" cylinder driver with a 8" woofer in a transmission line enclosure.

How did the large system sound? Steve followed his verbal presentation with a demonstration of the sonic capabilities of the system. That this is a very smooth sounding, serious speaker system demanding an extensive audition and careful consideration there is no doubt. That very large line source speaker systems are not for everyone is also not in doubt. It's very much a matter of "horses for courses."

**Jim Aud, Purist Audio Design**  
**Robert Grost, Unity Audio**  
**Reporter: Irwin Elkins**  
**April 19, 1991**

This was the second meeting of our Society at Ben Rose's Harlequin Audio Studios, situated in an attractive residence on Long Island. "Ben's Place" was an ideal demonstration site because of the beautifully constructed studios, which complimented the audio demonstrations. Harlequin Audio is a very classy high-end outlet for some of the best equipment around.

Jim Aud of Purist Audio Design came to our meeting with an extremely interesting

demonstration of the latest developments in cable technology. With his excellent background in electrical engineering and nuclear physics, he gave a lucid history of cable manufacturing, paying particular attention to problems such as solder deterioration, excess oxygen entering the cable as an impurity, and excess noise. He spoke of his own research into oil-based cable, heavy water cable, and the use of chemical stabilizers. He also experimented with new metallurgical materials, cryogenics, and then use of liquid as a shield to either reflect or absorb noise and airborne vibration.

In 1985 he developed the Maximus Cable, which features a dark liquid shield and separate positive and negative wires. The liquid absorbs a large amount of RF noise, but not all. The liquid also helps protect against low-level radiation. Many members were eager to assess the cable in their own systems, and the use of the cable in the Harlequin Studio demonstration didn't lessen anyone's enthusiasm. We hope to get reports from the membership as they experiment with this innovative approach.

Robert Grost then gave a very entertaining and knowledgeable dissertation on speaker design based on his in-depth experimentation at Unity Audio. His philosophy was basic: examine how the ear hears and how music is experienced by listeners, then let that dictate the design.

He rejected ribbons and electrostats because they necessarily resonate—at infinite rigidity there would be no sound. Dynamic drivers, on the other hand, can approach the theoretical ideal of the perfect piston—they can operate like drum heads launching waves of sound on a single plane. Robert found, however, that the current technology in crossover design is flawed. Experiments with pulse testing, shapes, and inverse time delays were begun to find a way to launch frequencies on the same plane.

The result was the creation of balanced electronic crossovers with truly phase coherent time delay characteristics. The sound quality was in many ways that of a planar speaker. The question became how to present music to the ears which reproduces the "concert experience." The ear needs to perceive sound as natural in a 180° sound field, with details coming from the direct sound, and ambiance through room reflections. This is what produces imaging and tri-dimensionality. You can't have a speaker that "beams."

The Pyramid Signatures brought to the meeting by Mr. Ghost were truly spectacular. There was excellent transient response with a wide sound stage, extraordinary detail in the instrumentation, naturalness, and a non-fatiguing listening experience. The speakers responded well to a variety of musical sources. We have a real winner here, and we congratulated Mr. Ghost on his superb presentation and outstanding speaker.

### **George Bischoff, Melos Electronics**

**Reporter: Les Turoczi**  
**May 17, 1991**

The meeting was held at Hy Kachal-sky's home and opened by Hy with his usual gracious and humorous style. Hy revealed an interesting philosophical treatise—a perspective that has its effects in the world of audio at least as much as it does in the larger world. Namely,

#### **According to:**

##### **Taoism:**

Shit happens.

##### **Confucianism:**

Confucius say "Shit happens."

##### **Buddhism:**

If shit happens, then is it really shit?

##### **Zen:**

What is the sound of shit happening?

##### **Hinduism:**

This shit happened before.

##### **Islam:**

If shit happens, it is the will of Allah.

##### **Protestantism:**

Let shit happen to someone else.

##### **Catholicism:**

If shit happens, you deserve it.

##### **Agnosticism:**

What is this shit?

##### **Atheism:**

I don't believe this shit.

##### **Judaism:**

Why does this shit always happen to us?

##### **Jehovah's Witness:**

Let me in your house and I'll tell why shit happens.

##### **Rastafarian:**

Let's smoke some of this shit.

##### **Audiophile:**

My system sounds like shit.

The main business of the meeting then transpired as Hy introduced the guest speaker of the day, George Bischoff, President of Melos Electronics. George named the main personnel of his company, giving due credit to the relative roles they play. Melos, a small electronics firm in New Jersey, makes a wide array of audio products, mostly of tube design, which cover a broad range of price points. The importance of being music lovers and dedicated audio hobbyists, as central to the company philosophy, was well noted.

George brought four of his top of the line, 400 watt triode, high voltage monoblock amplifiers to the meeting and concentrated on these items for his presentation. Triode design was described in some detail, emphasizing electronic as well as sonic characteristics. George then concentrated on the Melos application of the triode design, which produces high amounts of power with especially great dynamic range.

While George preferred not to call his amplifier a "hybrid design," he did note that MOSFETs are employed to drive the tube screens at high voltage and thus serve in the self-biasing of the tubes. This style of combining transistors with tubes was, according to George, Melos' way of building tubed amplifiers that "even transistor-lovers could live with." All monoblock amplifiers from Melos are delivered in full-balanced format from input to output; impedance values can be specially ordered from the factory based on the needs of the audiophile's speakers.

George concluded his presentation by briefly referring to some of the other products in the Melos line, including their newest entry, a line stage preamplifier scheduled to be introduced at the June 1991 CES. The importance of musicality in Melos products was incorporated into George's final comments.

A broad-ranging question and answer period followed. Points covered included an expansion of the concept of using both transistors and tubes in amplifier designs. George made it clear that the MOSFETs he employs are used merely for buffering and not for gain. The voltage swing is done totally by tubes. "We're using parts where they work best!"

Design and quality of the output transformer vis-a-vis speaker demands also came under energetic discussion. Melos incorporates toroidal output transformers in their amplifiers, a decision resulting from research on their part in which wattage rating and efficiency came into serious consideration; great benefits for bass response resulted from this approach to transformer applications. The issue of quality control, especially for small electronics firms, was dealt with through a few interesting stories touching on factors such as regional variations in line voltage and the negative impact those problems have on tubed amplifier designs in particular. Balanced vs single ended circuit designs also received some discussion.

George then entertained a final question about circuit topology/configuration, noting that his triode design is class A for the majority of its power range, then shifting to class AB under higher power demand. This subject evolved into a deliberation on the nature of music/power relationships.

At the end of the presentation, the society membership had the opportunity to evaluate these massive, fine looking Melos triode amplifiers through Hy's Apogee Divas and his normally associated Krell equipment.

**Lewis Lipnick, Stereophile**  
**Scott Wensel, Mosaic Records**  
**Mike Green, RoomTunes**  
**June 21, 1991**  
**Reporter: Russell Novak**

Our first guest, Scott Wensel, presented the work of his company, Mosaic Records, which packages the complete works of jazz artists on a specific label or during a specific period of their lives. The issues come in boxed sets (limited editions) with extensive documentation in booklets packaged with each set.

Sound quality has been high with these sets, and pressing quality on the vinyl is near flawless. It is almost impossible to assemble the work of the artists issued by Mosaic Records. These sets may represent the last chance for many collectors. Thelonious Monk, Stan Getz, Chet Baker, Johnny Hodges, Cecil Taylor, Count Basie, Stan Kenton and many more are represented in the Mosaic catalog. Two club members testified to the quality of this company's product. Catalogs are available by calling (203) 327-7111.

Mike Green of RoomTunes gave a brief preview of some of his new products. On display was his \$129 AmpClamp, a product that isolates electronic components from vibration. Mike also plans a product which will allow the user to better me-

chanically isolate speaker drivers from spurious vibration. Mike will give a full blown presentation at a future meeting.

Lewis Lipnick, contrabassoonist for the Nation Symphony Orchestra and equipment reviewer for *Stereophile*, was the featured speaker for the evening. He is also a self-described “burned-out audiophile” after 21 years of experimenting with every “lunatic fringe” product in an attempt to get hi-fi to mimic real music.

The vast discrepancy between live music and reproduced sound was Lewis’ basic theme for the evening. He recommended that each audiophile learn to play an instrument in order to provide insight into this discrepancy and also understand how emotion enters into a performance. In lieu of a major investment in a musical instrument, Lipnick recommended a \$25 plastic alto recorder and a Trapp Family Method Book to learn to play—the best investment you’ll ever make in audio.

Mr. Lipnick also has an audio consulting business, and makes clients attend live performances prior to his working on their systems. It has been said often, but it’s still true—live music is the best reference for accuracy in your system. The problem is that trying to achieve a live sound will mean continual frustration chasing the Holy Grail.

What we do not hear in reproduced music, compared to live music, cannot be quantified with the present state of science. Accuracy in reproducing music in your home is further complicated by the sound of the hall it was recorded in, the placement of the mikes, the humidity and temperature (which affects not only the instruments, but the way sound travels through the air), the poor quality of the recording equipment, and even the reeds, mouthpieces and bows the players use.

Mr. Lipnick then gave a live demonstration on the bassoon to show the effects of using different reeds. The stiffer reed, with less mass at the center and more at

the sides, produced more of the upper harmonics of the note being played; a softer reed, with more mass at the center, produced a higher proportion of the fundamental note, making it sound richer. Each type of reed is appropriate at different times, the stiffer reed allowing the bassoon to have better definition within a large orchestra, and the richer sounding soft reed showing better in chamber music.

Lewis used this demonstration to talk about the importance of pitch definition in evaluating equipment. He stated that when home systems seem to lack clarity or focus, and have an inability to separate the individual voices within the ensemble, it is because the loudspeakers are not getting the pitch right. The human ear cannot key only on a fundamental tone. We need to hear higher harmonics in order for our brains to sort and place the fundamental. This makes pitch definition all the more important because we need to reproduce the complete harmonic structure.

Surprisingly, Mr. Lipnick said he heard better pitch definition from digital sources than from analog, and also said that tube equipment was better at reproducing harmonic structure than transistors.

Finally, he dealt with the issue of reproducing a “soundstage” in the home. He pointed out that microphones are frequently placed close to the instruments, where the sound is fuller, better defined, and exaggerated in the depth perspective. Audiophiles who strive for distant placement of the stage in their living room (because that is how they hear it from their listening position in the hall) may be introducing inaccuracy to the system.

Discussion went on for some time after Lewis’ presentation was finished; he told stories of conductors and recordings, and answered questions. The Audiophile Society wishes to thank Lewis Lipnick for an excellent and informative evening.

**John Celmer, Mirror Image Audio  
Reporter: Ron Carlen  
August 2, 1991**

John Celmer, President of Mirror Image, sent two of his model 1.1S+ stereo amplifiers to Hy's house a week before the meeting. This provided time for them to be properly set up and broken-in for the presentation. The system was connected with the Purist Audio water cables.

After an introduction by Hy, John provided a brief history of Mirror Image Audio. The company was first established in 1984 by two engineers that built all of the amplifiers by hand. The original designers did not have the capital and marketing expertise to develop the product in the market, and could not meet any demand to produce the product.

John acquired the company from these engineers about two years ago along with other investors. These two designers are now involved with the company on a consulting basis but no longer have any financial interest in the company. John and the other investors have capitalized the company, which now has about 20,000 square feet of manufacturing space. They have developed their own in-house design capabilities, and the amplifiers were immediately improved before production resumed.

John noted that the general design philosophy of the amplifiers is to produce high current with a wide bandwidth and a tube-like sound. All of the amplifiers have single ended and balanced inputs. The Model 1.1S+ amplifiers are 200 watts a channel into 8 ohms, 400 watts into 4 ohms and 800 watts into 2 ohms. The retail price is \$4945 each. Mirror image is also producing the model 1.1M mono block for \$7690 a pair. These mono amplifiers are capable of delivering 1600 watts into a one ohm load.

The amplifiers dissipate a significant amount of heat and are fan cooled. The fans are variable speed, temperature controlled and are extremely quiet. The stereo amplifier is built like a dualmono unit. Although it has one toroidal transformer, it has separate windings for each channel. The amplifiers have left and right indicators that identify if the amplifier is clipping, if either side is running too hot, or if there is DC in the output.

The amplifiers have a servo to shut down the output in an overload situation. John had additional protection circuitry designed into the amplifiers as soon as he bought the company. Previously, the amplifiers potentially could have damaged speakers before the fuses would blow. They use various speakers at the company to evaluate these amplifiers, including Apogee and several electrostatic speakers.

At the June CES, Mirror Image Audio introduced a new line of digital to analog converters. The digital to analog (D/A) converters are a ladder DAC design. The DAC and filters were all designed in-house. There is a separate DAC for each channel. Each of these DACs is actually comprised of two complementary DAC—one that switches the positive portion of the waveform and the other the negative portion.

They are currently building three different types of D/A products. Model .2D is an implant in the .2P preamplifier, which is what was presented at the meeting. It has both a coaxial and an optical input. The model .3D is a free-standing converter that can work with any preamplifier. If used with the .2P preamplifier, it shares the same external power supply. It has three coaxial and two optical inputs. The .3D costs \$3990 with its own separate power supply.

Finally, they are making the .4D, which is a digital preamplifier with its own single ended and balanced outputs. It has two fiber optic and three coaxial inputs. This



converter/preamp is priced at \$5135 with a separate power supply. Each of these three converters has the same 20-bit 8 times oversampling concept. Therefore, the sound quality of each is identical. The D/A converters are upgradeable; if they develop an improvement in technology, the DACs can be changed at the factory.

The .2P preamplifier is a DC coupled preamplifier with balanced and single ended outputs. The preamplifier comes with two pairs of single ended and two pairs of balanced outputs. They are shipped with one pair of outputs in phase and one inverted for bridging purposes. They can be switched back internally for bi-amping.

The power supply is separate and may be used to power other Mirror Image products. The preamplifier has a high quality double shielded volume control with mechanical steps. The .2P phono module has two separate phono stages which accommodate both moving magnet and moving coil cartridges. The .2P preamplifier sells for \$2860 and you can purchase the phono module for an additional \$795. The .2D D/A converter that plugs into the preamp is \$1985.

Questions were raised about John's reference to the tube sound for his amplifiers. John explained that they have not done anything special to achieve this. The amplifiers have a bipolar front end with MOSFET outputs. He attributes the sound to the proprietary circuitry they have designed. John claimed that the amplifiers do everything the other high power amplifiers do, but with a more tube-like sound. One of the areas they have worked on to get certain qualities is the damping factor of the amplifier.

To obtain the tube-like quality in a system, you must use low capacitance, low resistance speaker cables. Anything else will be detrimental to the sound of the amplifier. John noted that he had much exposure to tube equipment from his father who was an audiophile. John currently owns and enjoys several pieces of tube

equipment. His major problem with tubes is that after you properly match all of the tubes and optimize their performance, their deterioration begins. At some point they will need to be replaced. Consequently, he decided to focus solely on transistor designs.

Arnis Balgalvis raised the question of whether the "tube sound" is by definition, a coloration of the sound. John noted that what he meant was that his amplifiers do not have the glare that certain transistors seem to impart. He stated that, in his opinion, the Mirror Image Audio amplifiers control this far better than his competitors. Accordingly, he feels these amplifiers are more tube-like than the other transistor amplifiers his product competes with.

A lively discussion ensued regarding what it means to be more "accurate" and whether being more tube-like was accurate. Rather than creating the coloration of a tube sound, John stated that he has diminished, if not totally eliminated, certain negative

characteristics of transistors from the sound of these amplifiers. John clarified that he did not mean to imply he is trying to emulate tube sound. Instead, he is trying to design in the best virtues of tube equipment into his solid state product.

**Victor Goldstein, Jadis  
Howard Mandel, Altis  
Reporter: Ron Carlen  
September 20, 1991**

Fanfare International is the representative and importer of several high end audio products, including Jadis. Jadis is a French company that manufactures tube preamplifiers and amplifiers, and recently entered the market with a digital to analog converter. Victor Goldstein, president of Fanfare International, was the Club's guest this evening.

Victor explained that over the past three years, he has attempted to alter the perception of Jadis products in the United States. Although they are using vacuum tubes, Fanfare International has demonstrated that the products are reliable and can compete with the other high end electronics manufacturers in the U.S.

While name "Jadis" means "the way it used to be," Victor noted that Jadis has decided they need to look at the way it is going to be in the future. This led them to explore digital technology.

They chose to produce a one-bit system for digital to analog conversion. They selected Howard Mandel to be the U.S. partner in the production of their converter. Howard developed the digital board that is proprietary to the Altis processor and, simultaneously, Jadis produced the analog stage and the power supply. This collaboration resulted in the Jadis JS1 Symmetrical Converter and power supply that were presented at this meeting. This processor retails for \$9500.

Victor turned the meeting over to Howard Mandel to discuss the technical details of the product. Howard explained that the processor contains a two DAC, dual Bitstream, dual differential processing board. It utilizes Philips DACs. It is almost identical to the board he is using in the Altis Reference Bitstream Decoder. The power supply constructed by Jadis is very large for this circuit. It has a 400 VA toroidal transformer that drives four 50 VA transformers that power digital left and right and analog left and right circuitry in the processor.

The converter has two coaxial inputs and a fiber optic input made by Honeywell that is not compatible with the AT&T standard. It does not automatically choose the sampling frequency from the input. You physically have to open the top of the converter and set the sampling frequency on each separate input. You then select the input you want to use on the front panel. The analog portion of the box con-

sists of tube electronics. It uses two 12AU7s followed by two 12AX7s. Howard explained that while designing the processor, they made at least ten different boards with different layouts to find the best sounding board.

The processor is totally upgradeable, either by changing the entire board or inserting new DACs. Howard noted that in the next year Jadis will introduce a top loading CD turntable, which will be manufactured by Altis.

Howard moved on to describe his CD turntable and power supply, the Altis Audio Ltd. CDT-1, which sells for \$2995. It was constructed around a CDM1 MK2 Philips drive. The unusual feature of the CDT-1 and Jadis processor is that the drive and converter "talk to each other". In addition to the digital data coming from the turntable to the processor, there is other information transferred back and forth that checks the clock speed and timing and makes sure the bits are properly aligned before the turntable actually plays.

After starting the turntable, it will take a few seconds before it begins to turn. During this delay, the clocks in the turntable and processor are being aligned. Although the CDT-1 can be used with other processors, this function in the turntable will only work with the Jadis processor. Any other processor will ignore the digital subcode information. If someone already has a converter and wants to use the Altis CDT-1, Altis will supply the appropriate converter plugs to match its fiber optic connector to the input on any digital to analog converter.

The ability to align the clocks in the turntable and processor lowers the jitter level. The lower the jitter, the better the sound will be since more information will pass through. Jitter is also reduced in the CDT-1 by using discretely regulated power supply stages for the servo and for all other active circuits in the transport. This ensures a constant flow of current to all circuits involved in retrieving data from the

disc. The clock in the turntable is a digital counter made for telecommunications equipment.

The turntable sits on a sprung suspension that decouples it completely from the chassis. Howard stated green paint, rubber rings or any other audiophile tweak are no longer needed when using this turntable. He attributes this mainly to Philip's recent developments in drive technology and the suspension of his drive.

An inquiry was made questioning the benefit of the Jadis processor over the Altis Reference Bitstream Decoder that costs approximately \$6500 less than the JS1. Howard explained that one significant difference was the Jadis power supply. He felt it was the most dramatic part of the processor. It is an extremely tight and well regulated supply with very low resistance. It is probably six times bigger than it needs to be. Secondly, the asymmetrical tube output design is quite unusual. The tube section has a tremendous amount of output power and voltage swing. Overall, Howard believed the Jadis processor provided a sound closer to analog than the Altis processor.

The meeting continued on discussing the advantages and disadvantages of producing converters with ladder DAC versus Bitstream technology. With the current state of the art of ladder DACs, Howard believes there is little difference in the results that can be obtained from either technology. However, a very good ladder DAC is much more expensive to make than a bit stream circuit.

**John Hunter, Sumiko**  
**October 11, 1991**  
**Reporter: Russ Novak**

The October meeting of the Audiophile Society featured a presentation by John Hunter, President of Sumiko. This company distributes

many high end audiophile products including Ocos speaker cable, Magnum interconnects, Navcom Silencers, and at this meeting John presented the Sonus Faber Amator loudspeakers and the new SME Turntable.

First however, the subject of Ocos speaker cable arose. This is a cable which many of our club members have chosen for their own systems. Because it is a unique design, a transmission line with special terminations, there have been many misapplications of this product. John therefore wanted to pass on three tips on it's proper use.

First, traditional bi-wiring will not work properly with Ocos because connection to a treble or bass speaker only partially terminates a full bandwidth signal and causes increased intermodulation distortion. John advocates a method called parallel wiring in which two cables are used, but are connected at the speaker as if they were one wire. On speakers which are bi-wireable, two cables are connected to the bass terminals and jumper wires are run to the mid/treble terminals. Since Ocos is a 10 ohm transmission line, parallel wiring will lower the impedance of the wire to 5 ohms. This will be especially compatible with a speaker of a slightly higher impedance. Parallel wiring will maintain the proper phase relationship of the signal.

Some speakers may already be impedance corrected such as Vandersteens, the B&W 800 series, and large KEFs, so the use of the transformer terminations of Ocos is not advised as it will create an undesirable RC network.

Second, when Ocos is dropped into a system, it is typical to expect some additional physical work in speaker placement. Usually the speakers will need to be moved farther into the room by about 20-30%. The key to knowing whether this is necessary is if the sound is too dry, uninvolved, unemotional, or somewhat lacking in bass.

The speakers may also need to be moved farther apart. If the center image is not focused and instruments seem to be swimming, not placed well in the stage, and have too midrange, the speakers should be moved farther apart until the stage resolves itself with sharp focus.

These changes are necessary because when you change cable, you change all the time relationships in the system. You must go back and resolve, in systemic fashion, the changes you have made.

Third, the printing on Ocos speaker cable should be connected in the direction of the signal flow with the "O" toward the amplifier and the "S" toward the speaker.

John then moved on to the new SME Turntable. This is a superbly machined \$15,000, 131 lb 'table with combination hung and fluid damped suspension. John described the turntable as "radically over-engineered" for quality and this results in a very quiet background and excellent pitch definition. It is also a user friendly turntable for setup and day to day use.

The 'table utilizes a record clamp which is so effective it creates a vacuum hold down condition without the use of a pump with its attendant hoses and noise. The SME is belt driven and uses a very large motor manufactured in Japan which includes a 78 rpm speed. The SME was admired by club members for its craftsmanship and sound during the demonstration later in the evening.

Mr. Hunter then presented the Sonus Faber Amator loudspeaker. This speaker is built in Italy and the name translated means "handcrafted sound".

These small speakers have a very large sound. The cabinet is made of 1.5" thick solid wood struts which interlock vertically to form the cabinet walls. Fashioned in this way the cabinet is self damping and extremely rigid. The speaker is ported at the back and the front baffle is 2" thick ultra dense particle board finished in

natural leather which Sonus has found to compliment the tweeter.

The Sonus Faber philosophy is to combine the absolute best drivers available with a simple 6db per octave crossover which has the most natural sound and pulse replication.

The tweeter is the Dynaudio Esotar soft dome which is a \$330 OEM cost to the factory compared to the average tweeter which may run around \$30. It is hand built over a 3 1/2 week, 100 man hour period to the highest specifications.

Sonus and Dynaudio selected a soft dome tweeter over a metal or hard dome due to some weaknesses in the execution of hard dome design. In a hard dome the whole dome is driven at all frequencies although there are multiple radiation points off the dome as you increase frequency. This causes ringing, time smear, and changes in phase angle. The Dynaudio tweeter is designed to decouple as frequency increases so that at 20k you are not driving the full dome, only the coils and the perimeter of the speaker.

In spite of the small size of these speakers they enjoy a large room. The best John has heard them in was a 30' x 22' x 15' room with very rigid walls. John emphasized that smaller Sonus Faber models represented one sound with different applications for smaller rooms and that a less expensive model might actually do better in your own room. The Amator is \$4500 and later that evening he also demonstrated the Minima.

The sound from both speakers was large, spacious, had superb soundstaging, and was very musical. The SME turntable served as the analogue source for the evening and had as much to do with the final sound as the speakers.

The Audiophile Society wishes to extend its appreciation to John Hunter and Sumiko, Inc. for the presentation.

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| 1. February 6, 1937   | <b>Aida</b>        | Cigna ( <i>debut</i> ), Martinelli, Castagna, Pinza, Morelli-Panizza Conducting. Original Transcription.               |
| Duration: 3 hours     |                    |  |
| 14. February 13, 1937 | <b>Manon</b>       | Sayao ( <i>debut</i> ), Rayner, Bonelli-DeAbravanel Conducting. Original Transcription.                                |
| Duration: 2 1/2 hours |                    |  |
| 40. March 29, 1952    | <b>Alcestis</b>    | Flagstad ( <i>farewell</i> ), Sullivan, Valentino-Erede Conducting. Original Transcription.                            |
| Duration: 2 1/4 hours |                    |  |
| 83. November 29, 1941 | <b>La Traviata</b> | Peerce ( <i>debut</i> ), Novotna, Tibbett-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-Gui Conducting. First Generation copy from London. |
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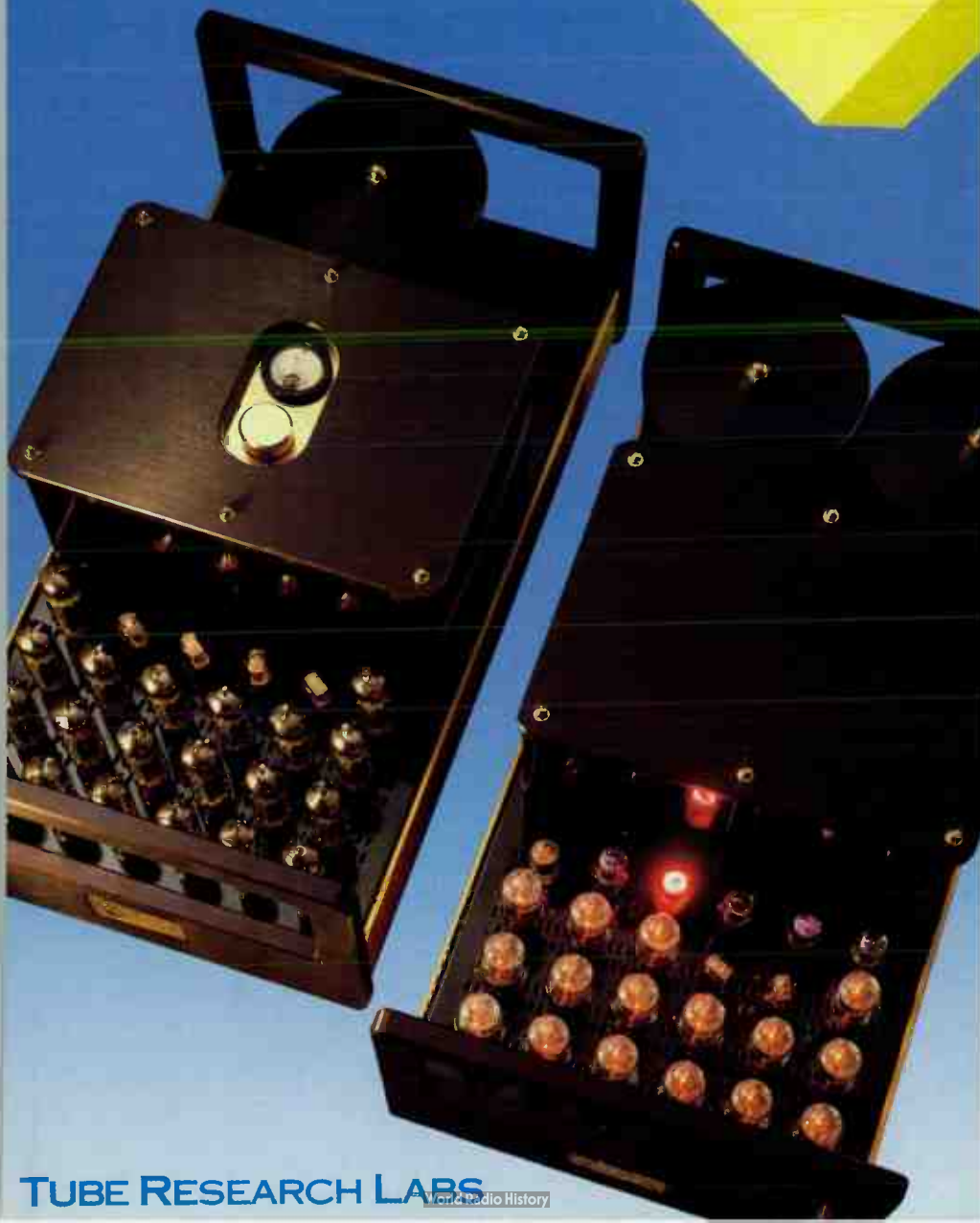
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