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**Equipment Reviews:**  
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Aurum Cantus Leisure 2 SE Speaker  
Elac CL 310i Jet Speaker  
B&O Beolab 5 Speaker  
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VOLUME X,  
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# New Products



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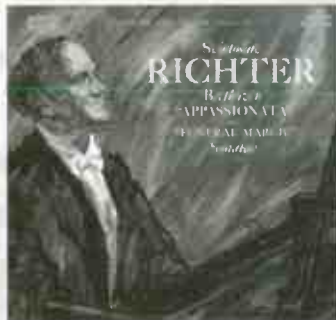
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## L ETTERS

### History

Dear Editor:

My thanks for your prompt response to my request for the missing Vol. 9, No. 4 issue. I especially enjoyed the reports from last year's high-end hi-fi shows and the excellent reviews of the Audiofon releases.

You asked about my Upper Montclair years and allow me to offer a somewhat lengthy explanation. I was a chemist for the Inmont Corporation (absorbed by BASF in 1985) for 45 years, from 1945 to 1990. I started in Manhattan and then spent time at several New Jersey locations. In 1972, I was given a "permanent" assignment to the labs at the corner of Broad Street and Route 3 in Clifton. The first affordable house that would accommodate my seven-foot Steinway and a large array of electronics was a ranch-style house on Carlton Drive. This also allowed me to walk to my office.

I decided to resume piano lessons after meeting a well-known teacher in Montclair, the late Barbara Lounsbury, who lived on Plymouth Street until the mid-1980s. Through her, I met most of the local and visiting musicians. My offers to tape record their performances were eagerly accepted and my recording hobby began to occupy much of my spare time; I used a Revox A-77 and a Tandberg TD-20.

In 1990, I took advantage of an early retirement package offered by BASF; I was 62 at the time. I realized that my pension would not allow me to continue paying New Jersey income and property taxes. Most of my friends in the area had moved on and I was persuaded to move to a township west of Allentown, PA, by some old friends who had moved here.

The downside for me is the lack of other audiophiles with whom I can share my extensive collection of recordings in all media. My main interests are classical and jazz. I only get to exercise my tape decks once a year, when I record the annual piano recital of students of Bea Allen of Bethlehem, a superb teacher who studied at Julliard.

Ken Bownes  
Allentown, PA

### The Editor Replies:

Okay, all you audiophiles in eastern Pennsylvania; send me a note and I will pass them on to Mr. Bownes. Everyone that sends me one will get a free one-year extension on their subscriptions. Perhaps these guys could organize a club.

### Underestimated Variable

Dear Editor

The Fletcher-Munson phenomena have profound effects on component voicing in a home listening situation, and I think they are very underestimated. Unless you listen to reproduced music in the 90-dB SPLs range, some 10 dB or more of bass will not be as "loud" or audible or apparent to the listener who will also think he's got a prominent high-mid peak at 3 to 5 kHz. This makes music sound bottom-less and glaring.

Thus, a loudspeaker that is voiced by its designers at the factory at 90-dB SPL will sound fine when you listen to it at that level, but it won't sound fine if your normal listening room level is in the 70- to 75-dB SPL range. If "the Fletcher-Munson blues" have struck you, a reggae album will seem to have lost all deep bass and guitar solos or Bob Dylan's harmonica will become prominent and rather piercing. On the other hand, a speaker factory-voiced at 75-dB SPL will sound good and full at this "normal" level and appear to have prodigious bass output at 90-dB SPL. I think this is why most people turn the volume up anyway!

This effect should be taken into account at all stages, I believe, during component voicing, monitoring, mixing, remastering, and so on. If you don't, balance problems will arise.

Audio critics like to argue over the audible effects of a  $\pm 0.25$ -dB variation in a component's response curve while at the same time totally neglecting this 10-dB or greater variation in what they perceive as "normal." And this is precisely what the Fletcher-Munson curves describe!

Would a 75-dB SPL standard level be a solution? Could someone comment on the subject?

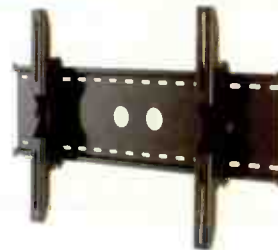
Robert Laberge,  
Ville de Québec, Canada

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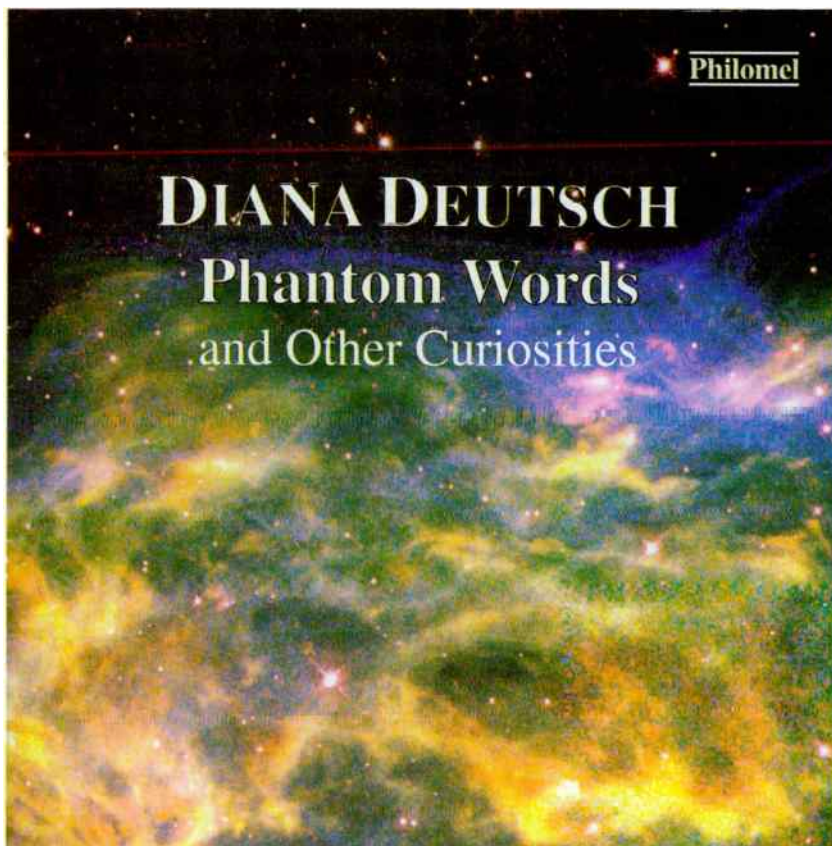
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## Books

Eugene Pitts

### Test CD

Diana Deutsch  
*Phantom Words and Other Curiosities*  
Philomel Records 002

I COULD SCARCELY BELIEVE my ears. I had just tuned into WNYC, one of New York City's public broadcasting AM/FM stations, and there she was. My long-time friend, Diana Deutsch, was being interviewed on a show named "Radio Lab" by Jad Abumrad, the regular host of the show, about her latest heavy-duty research into yet another area of psychoacoustics she'd apparently discovered.

But this extremely smart and pretty lady wasn't really being interviewed, she was singing. I thought to myself, "This must be a hobby because she's a tenured full professor of psychology at the University of California, San Diego. This is like Barbra Streisand going down to the local Karaoke bar and ...."

But all she sang were the same four words, over and over, "...sometimes behave so strangely," and then she sang just the last pair of the four words, and they became something like a chorus, "... so strangely, ... so strangely, ... so strangely."

"What crazy-making thing has she gotten into now?" I said to myself as Abumrad interrupted to talk about Prof. Deutsch's latest demo CD, "Phantom Words and Other Curiosities." I was thinking about her earlier CD, "Musical Illusions and Paradoxes," and the Eva-Tone Sound Sheet that she and I had driven ourselves crazy with, trying to get the thing to sound right, trying to get the pitch correct, and trying to keep the background noise down. But, in the end, I think it had been wonderful for an ordinary, consumer, newsstand magazine to include a demonstration of cutting-edge psychoacoustic research, a presentation quirky enough to unhinge

everything you think you know about how you hear.

The demo I have just cited can probably be done with other word sets, though I haven't done it. It was enough just to hear friend Diana do it. So what was she doing? She'd very probably call it something other than what I will, which is pointing at the nearness of ordinary speech and singing. There are stories about the Greek poet Homer being able to recite the entire *Odyssey* or *Iliad* over consecutive nights, picking up where he'd left off the previous eve, and almost always, someone new to that idea, asks "How could he remember that much stuff?" I've always thought it was because he was singing it "... so strangely, ... so strangely."

Another area Prof. Deutsch covers in this CD she terms "memory for musical tones." If you play two tones close together in time, and without a lot of background noise or other interference, it is pretty easy to tell whether the two tones were the same or not. But, if you play the two tones two weeks apart, then it is hard to tell if they were the same or not. It's also harder a short time later if there are several tones in between the two you're testing for. "Who cares?" says you. Well, you'd better care if you want to choose between two loudspeakers for your audio system and can't play them moments apart, back to back, level matched, with the same music! And yet, I have heard other reviewers say that Brand X's Model A speaker sounds just like that maker's Model B, and this guy's listening sessions were a year apart. I have done this myself, and had my personal BS Alarm go off on the way home from the event because my logic stank. But Diana will make you prove

your music memory, but you don't have to do it out in public (like most editors have to do) since her CD has tests you can do in private. (And you *know* how much editors *hate* to get shown up on such tests.)

Let me just quote from her bio: Professor Deutsch's research investigates the way people perceive and remember musical patterns. She has discovered a number of musical illusions, including the octave illusion, the scale illusion, the glissando illusion, the tritone paradox, and the cambiata illusion, among others. One characteristic of Deutsch's illusions is that there are large variations between listeners in how they are perceived. For some of the illusions (such as the octave and scale illusions) disagreements tend to arise between right-handers and lefthanders, indicating that they reflect differences in brain organization. In contrast, differences in perception of the tritone paradox are related to the geographic region in which the listeners have grown up, and so to the language or dialect to which they have been exposed, particularly in childhood. Deutsch and her colleagues have explored in detail the characteristics of these illusions, and the reasons why they occur.

Deutsch is also investigating perfect pitch, the ability to name a musical note (like C or D#) when it is presented in isolation. This ability has been considered to be very rare. However, Deutsch and her colleagues have shown that speakers of tone languages (Vietnamese and Mandarin) use perfect pitch in their speech, and they are extending these findings to the question of perfect pitch in music.

Further areas of Deutsch's experimental and theoretical research include relationships between speech and music, the characteristics of short term memory for

pitch and timing, the way we perceive musical patterns and store them in memory, relationships between handedness and musical ability, and the perception of ambiguous speech sounds.

## Publications

Musical Illusions and Paradoxes. La Jolla, Philomel Records compact disc, 1995.

The Psychology of Music (Ed.). San Diego: Academic Press (1st Edition, 1982; 2nd Edition, 1999).

Grouping Mechanisms In Music. In D. Deutsch (Ed.) The Psychology of Music, 2nd. Edition, Academic Press, 1999, pp. 299-348.

Processing Of Pitch Combinations. In D. Deutsch (Ed.) The Psychology of Music, 2nd. Edition, Academic Press, 1999, pp. 349-412.

The Puzzle Of Absolute Pitch. Current Directions in Psychological Science, 2002, 11, 200-204.

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**A**LL **AUDIOPHILES** probably know by heart the 1958 recording of Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* played by the Minnesota Orchestra and conducted by Antal Dorati using the legendary Mercury Living Presence one-microphone technique (it's still available on Philips 434360, hint, hint). The Minnesota Orchestra, seconded by the Brass Band of the University of Minnesota, thereby gained a kind of audio immortality, but truth to tell, a whole lot of better music has also been well recorded by the Minnesota Orchestra, and this includes many items now once again available on CD in the stellar Living Presence reissue series.

Now in its centennial season, *Minnesota Orchestra at One Hundred: A Collection of Recordings and Broadcasts*, a 12-CD set, reminds us of that ensemble's serious musical chops and many of the live broadcasts included therein, originally on Minnesota Public Radio, are in excellent sound too.

The Minnesota Orchestra was founded in 1903 by the German-born conductor Emil Oberhoffer (1903 - 1922), who also established the local conservatory. Called the Minneapolis Symphony until 1968, the group quickly matured into an outstanding regional orchestra. Oberhoffer left no recordings as a conductor, but the group's second music director from 1923 to 1931, Belgian-born Henri Verbrugghen (1873-1934), a fiddler whose conducting talents were little more than an average *kapellmeister's*, did. Fortunately, some unusual repertory choices are included here, even if in challenging sound, despite the best efforts of the brilliant producer of the first six CDs in this set, Dennis Rooney. A real revelation, however, comes



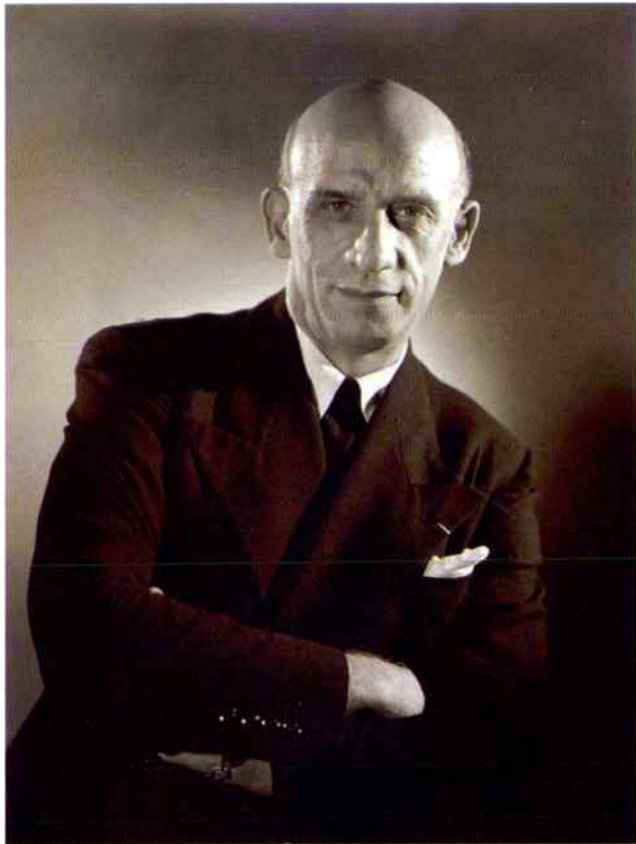
# Turns 100

from the group's third conductor, Eugene Ormandy (1899 - 1985).

The Hungarian-born Ormandy stayed in Minneapolis for six years in the 1930s, until he was offered the bigger plum job of conducting the Philadelphia Orchestra, previously the fiefdom of Leopold Stokowski, a job Ormandy kept for the next half-century. However, the young Ormandy was rather different than the serene and sometimes semi-detached conductor who made so many Sony recordings in the 1960s and 1970s. The Ormandy we hear on these brilliant early reissues is an ethnic middle European with a real taste for Hungarian and Romanian rhythms. Hence, his versions of music like Enesco's *First Romanian Rhapsody* and Kodály's *Háry János* suite have appealing authenticity.

The rare repertory continues with Ormandy's version of the zesty *Polka and Fugue* from the neglected work by modern composer Jaromír Weinberger, *Schwanda the Bagpiper*. A major work recorded by Ormandy and his ensemble is Schumann's *Fourth Symphony* to be heard here. Dennis Rooney, in his highly interesting CD booklet notes, suggests that Ormandy may have been inspired by Arturo Toscanini's conducting of the same work, and indeed there is a parallel vigor and intensity, even if Ormandy does not quite match Toscanini's spiritual majesty (since Toscanini never recorded this specific work, any comparisons are necessarily imprecise).

In 1937, the marvelous Greek conductor Dimitri Mitropoulos (1896 - 1960) took over the orchestra for a dozen years. The life of this saintly musician has been ably recounted in *Priest of Music: The Life of Dimitri Mitropoulos* by William R. Trotter (Amadeus Press), which makes for eye-



## Mitropoulos

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opening reading about the American orchestral scene. A powerful Mendelssohn *Third Symphony* and Liszt *Rhapsodie Espagnole* for Piano and Orchestra with expert soloist Egon Petri are admirable examples of Mitropoulos' art, even if a heavy transcription of Bach's *Toccatà, Adagio and Fugue* by Leo Weiner comes across as fairly indigestible.

When Mitropoulos moved on, the Hungarian Antal Dorati (1906-1988) led the group from 1949 to 1960, arriving from the Dallas Symphony with the well-earned reputation of an orchestra-builder. As a jack of all trades, Dorati greatly increased the number of recordings made by the orchestra, even if his interpretations on this set are sometimes bested by other versions, like his reading of Debussy's oft-recorded *La Mer* or Falla's *Second Suite from the Three-Cornered Hat*. For a 1957 Mozart *Piano Concerto no.25*, the fault is not primarily Dorati's but that of his elderly soloist, Ernő von Dohnányi (1877-1960), captured decades past his best as a player.

Fortunately, there is also some welcome rarer repertory here, and Dorati shines in the American composer Roger Sessions' vivid *Suite from the Black Maskers* and the little-performed Alfredo Casella's idiomatic *Suite from La Giara*, welcome additions to these composers' discographies, originating from live performances for radio KUOM. Similarly, a live version of the underplayed *Second Suite* from Albert Roussel's *Bacchus and Ariadne* is large-scaled and sweeping in effect, among Dorati's best efforts. Dorati, a prolific recording artist, had never otherwise recorded these works with the Minneapolis group. Fans of *recherché* material will also thrill to Dorati's inclusion of Dvorák's *Slavonic Dance Op. 46, No. 1*, in a live broadcast from Iran's Golestan Palace, recorded during a 1957 tour of the Middle East and discovered as a tape copy from Iranian Radio at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. by the intrepid and dauntless Dennis Rooney.

When Dorati left the Minneapolis Orchestra, they were lucky to find the magisterial Polish conductor Stanislaw Skrowaczewski (b. 1923 in Lvov), who led the group from 1960 to 1979, to replace him. A world-class interpreter of the symphonies of Anton Bruckner, Skrowaczewski shows his best stuff in a brilliant performance from 2001 of Bruckner's *Third Symphony*, in superb sound from Minnesota Public Radio. There is also a lucid transcription by Skrowaczewski himself — himself a skilled if rarely-performed composer — of Bach's *Toccatà and Fugue in D Minor*, as well as an older performance from the 1960s of Beethoven's *Violin Concerto* with the fat-tongued Russian soloist David Oistrakh.

There are a few iffy performances here by composers who were not also great conductors (Aaron Copland and Igor Stravinsky) included, no doubt, for "historical reasons." Among the other few disappointments are conductors who cannot match the level of the rest of this set. These unfortunates — ranging from cool to just plain ungainly — Include Neville Marriner, Charles Dutoit,

## Verbruggen





## Dorati

David Zinman, Valery Gergiev, and Leonard Slatkin. But they are quickly forgotten when we hear the truly outstanding performance of Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony conducted by the German maestro Klaus Tennstedt, another live recording from Minnesota Public Radio with admirable sound (Robert Wilkins produced discs six through 12).

Tennstedt (1926 - 1998) was a tormented artist who, apart from many European responsibilities, was principal guest conductor at the Minnesota Orchestra from 1979 to 1983, but had many troubles both physical and emotional. This Beethoven symphony was performed after he came back from two hip replacements and radiation therapy for throat cancer, and rarely did his health permit a vivacious later performance such as heard here. Less idiomatic is a Tennstedt performance of 1981 of Glinka's *Ruslan and Ludmila* overture, which retains a certain Teutonic squareness which Tennstedt surprisingly managed to avoid in his performance of German music.

The Brit Neville Marriner led the orchestra for seven years, from 1979 to 1986, and was followed by the Dutchman Edo de Waart, from 1986 to 1995. De Waart was like his compatriot Bernard Haitink in offering solid, reliable performances rarely charged with electric energy, although de Waart's Mahler *Fourth Symphony* here, a live broadcast from 1997, gains greatly from its mezzo-soprano soloist, the ethereal Susan Graham.

The orchestra's next conductor, Japanese-born Eiji Oue, despite a long list of recordings with fine sound from Reference Recordings ([www.referencerecordings.com](http://www.referencerecordings.com)) is locally considered a disappointment. Although he stayed for seven years, until 2002, Oue produced oddly hollow interpretations, and some critics claimed that his "talent was stretched thin" by the various duties of musical directorship. While Minnesotans preferred the ebullient Oue personally to de Waart, who was described as a "stern Dutchman" and who fired some lesser musicians, something was clearly missing, as indeed it is in the single item from Oue on this set, an only middling Tchaikovsky Fifth Symphony.

Happily, the future of the Minnesota Orchestra is currently in more skilled hands, the veteran Finnish conductor Osmo Vänskä having accepted the music directorship very recently. Vänskä has a long list of acclaimed recordings on the Swedish BIS label ([www.bis.se](http://www.bis.se)), and in a recent Manhattan performance with the New York Philharmonic, he showed himself capable of a light, buoyant classical style. Already enamored of their new conductor, the Minnesota orchestra has already produced a Vänskä action figure in his honor, a bobble-head — or more precisely speaking, a bobble-arm doll which is a must for any Christmas gift-giver who knows a fervent collector of toys which represent bespectacled Finnish conductors. More seriously, Vänskä's performance on this set of selections from Grieg's *Peer Gynt*, a work he clearly knows backwards, has just the kind of energy and vivacity needed to further spark a distinguished American orchestra to even greater achievements.



## Ormandy



# Consumer Electronics Show 2004 High End at the Alexis Park

Arnis Balgalvis

**T**HE 2004 CONSUMER Electronics Show (CES) was the show of all shows from several standpoints. This edition was declared to be the all-time attendance winner when the final tally of 129,328 was announced; the number of exhibitors increased as well, from 2,283 to 2,491 companies. It should be noted that the "company count" would be even higher if one added in the exhibitors at The Home Entertainment Show.

Compared to last year, it means that 12,641 more attendees (or "technology executives" in the parlance of the Consumer Electronics Association, which puts on the show) descended on Las Vegas for this year's consumer electronics extravaganza. I'm not surprised and had a feeling that this was going to be a big show as I wandered along all those miles of aisles of the Las Vegas Convention Center (LVCC) and found this year's masses more densely packed than ever. In addition, we're now talking about 1.38 million net square feet of exhibit space; when things look crowded, it means a lot of folks are in attendance.

Another thing, the taxi lines I saw and experienced at the LVCC were the longest in my memory and a number of other people reported the same



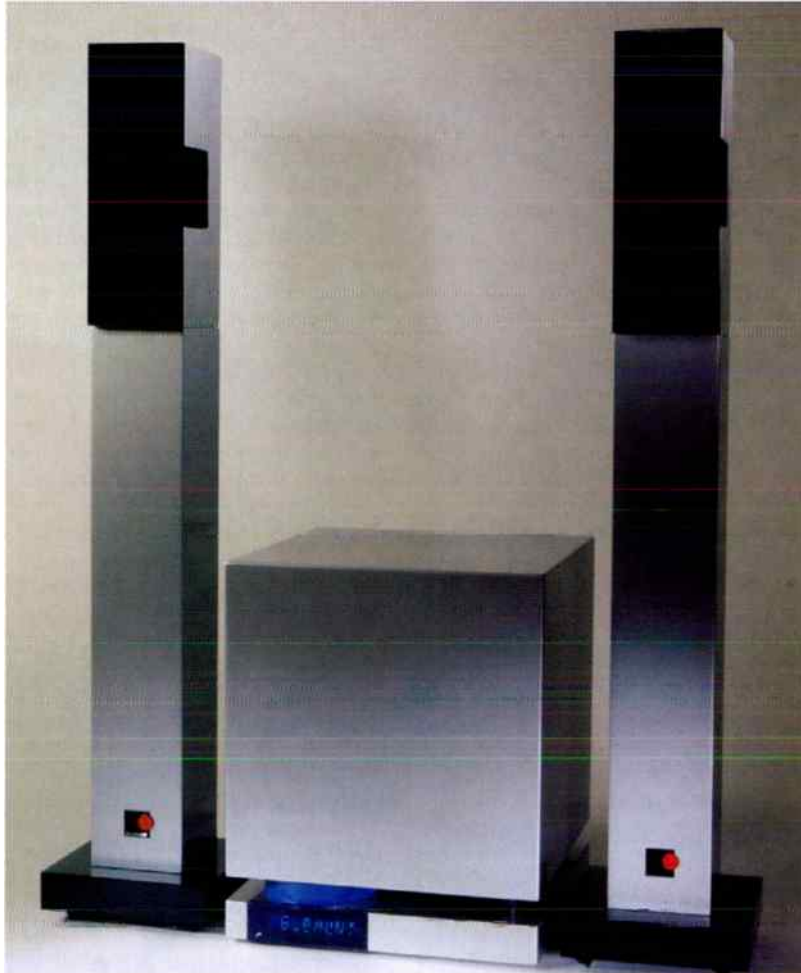
thing. The shuttle buses – an indispensable convenience for a venue this huge – rarely had empty seats when departing. You just had to be patient and wait as scores of disappointed visitors had to wait for the next bus.

But never mind the crowds. As far as I was concerned, the 2004 CES was a delight. Everywhere there was a hustle and a bustle; an excitement and energy in the air. And Alexis Park, my assignment, was no exception. It was very busy many times to the delight of the exhibitors. This added to the feeling of adventure as I tried to visit as many of the displays as possible and find the places with the great equipment and the good sound.

But in the background not everything was serene and not everybody was content. At this CES the problem for the exhibitors was logistics, since the CEA had ordained that for 2004 no exhibitor vehicles were to enter Alexis Park. For all previous shows, the manufacturers could park their vehicles near their rooms and unload and carry their equipment into their exhibit space. But not this year. Vehicles carrying equipment had to go to a distant designated area and wait while CEA-hired porters did the unloading and transporting of the equipment. Obviously, an inefficient tactic. Several exhibitors voiced their frustrations and disappointments to me. On top of that, I saw two shouting matches where a CEA person was confronted by an exhibitor.

This awkward arrangement appears to be a bad move on CEA's part. Especially since T.H.E. Show is right next door at the St. Tropez. It would not surprise me if T.H.E. Show gets quite a bit bigger next year, should the access policy for exhibitors remain as it was at the Alexis Park.

Now, the Alexis Park is CEA's official venue for high performance audio, and my portion of the show report will be about Alexis Park only. At least that's what my good ol' editor indicated was his desire when he doled out assignments. That's a good thing – it is not humanly possible for any one reporter to adequately cover all the venues, and Las Vegas has gotten worse each year in this regard. So paring down assignments to something manageable is good for the reader as well as for the reporter.



The reader gets more-thoughtful coverage and the reporter gets a chance to concentrate on his task at hand.

As you will see not every exhibitor will get mentioned. By leaving out a number of displays I do not mean to imply that they were "not worthy." First of all, I did not get a chance to even visit quite a few contenders. But I will not go by hearsay, regardless of how reliable I think the source is. Second, there just is not enough space to cover everyone. But there were a few developments that I will just mention briefly because they deserve to be noted.

**Element** introduced a new, and very elegant and great sounding satellite and subwoofer system (\$5785 with stands); Jurgen Reis, the Chief Engineer of **mb1** played for me their new 121 speaker (\$9800) very successfully; and Thierry Budge, formerly of Talon Audio and Wilson Audio, has formed a new company **Escalante Design** with a \$4400 bookshelf speaker system, the Pinyon, being their first product.

What follows now are the

**The Element Family system, \$5785 with stands.**

exhibits at the Alexis Park which stood out to me. As you will read, these systems were the exhibits that I found to be most interesting, displays that created excitement and had an element of entertainment. The order is random, so do not try to assign any significance to the sequence.

**Avantgarde and Balanced Audio Technology (BAT)** roomed together and produced an absolutely exquisite presentation. I remember being in awe of the sonic immediacy I heard here. The music was right there, breathing and alive. Every nuance seemed to be present and accounted for, a very memorable experience. In the large room they showed the Super Duo 2.2 (\$34,970) which consists of an Avantgarde Duo 2.2 in Blue, with two sets of Blue Sub 225s. The deal here is that the Duo 2.2 speaker system was rounded out with an additional Sub 225 per channel, which are there, as Jim Smith, the U.S.

importer, explained, not to produce more or deeper bass, but voiced to produce the same bass level, resulting in vastly reduced woofer cone excursions.

BAT had brought every one of their top-of-the-line pieces to the show. That lineup consisted of their VK-D5SE CD player (\$6000), the VK-51SE preamp (\$9000 with remote), VK-P10SE phono stage with Super-Pak option (\$8000), and a pair of the VK-75SE power amps (\$8500 each). I should mention also that power conditioning was performed on a number of the BAT components by an outfit new to me, at least, **Running Springs Audio**.

Avantgarde also had a smaller room and it was singing. Here, they showed the DUO 2.1 in red with a Nextel Sub 225 powered woofers (\$17,970). The amp used there was the Avantgarde 27-watt, solid-state, stereo integrated Model 5 (\$3,970). The new Esoteric UX-1 with the G-0s Master Clock Generator as the source. More about the Esoteric components later.

In direct contrast to the grandeur of equipment outlined above, was the introduction of the **Reference 3A Dulcet**, a mini monitor. The Dulcet uses a 5-inch main driver that is mechanically grounded to the cabinet and a very sophisticated 1.2-inch soft-dome tweeter. The

**Jeff Rowland hefts his "baby" amp, which itself can "heft" 500 watts into an 8-ohm load.**



crossover is as minimalistic as can be — the main driver is connected directly to the power amp, while the tweeter is saved from the LF information by an oil-filled capacitor. They rate the sensitivity at a reasonable 87-dB SPL for one watt at one meter. The Dulcet is phase aligned using a slanted front baffle and mirror imaged with outside placements of tweeters. The size is 7-1/2-inches wide, 12 inches high, 9-1/2-inches deep (bottom), 7 inches deep (top) and comes with dual bi-wire five-way binding posts and solid billet copper jumpers. Each speaker weighs 15 pounds. And the price? \$1695! No, stands are not included.

But the sound emanating from this little gem was astounding: Loud, clear, and extremely transparent. I happened to be approaching the Antique Sound Lab room when I heard an organ recording. I'm telling you, I was convinced I was going to see a huge speaker in the room. But no, here's this mini monitor playing its heart out without hesitation or whimper, at a level that was completely filling the room. Not a suite, but the regular Alexis Park room.

The system Tash Goka has assembled consisted of the following components: A Copland CDA 822 CD player (\$2500), an Antique Sound Lab Passive T-2 autoformer/switch based preamplifier (\$749), and their AQ 1009 845 DT, 60-watt mono power amps (\$5595), with Chang Lightspeed Music-Link interconnects (\$200 per 3-foot pair) and Speaker-Link cables (\$200 per 8-foot pair). All components were connected to one Chang Lightspeed CLS 9600 a.c. line filter (\$795).

Jeff Rowland created quite a buzz with his "little" Model 501 power amplifier (\$6700 the pair). "Little" and power amps really do not equate, do they? Well, they do, when Jeff is involved. Picture a stack of normal 8 1/2 by 11 sheets of paper, three inches high, or visualize a phone book. That's about the size of one of these amps, because Jeff's Model 501 is dimensioned 8.5 inches wide by 13 inches deep by 3 inches high. It weighs 15 lbs. This baby will put out 500 watts into 8 ohms and 1,000 watts into 4 ohms. And listen to this: Peak output current is more than 45 amps, frequency response 5 Hz to 45 kHz, +/-3 dB, the common mode rejection

ratio is better than 90 dB from 20 Hz to 20 kHz, damping factor 1000 with an 8 ohm load, and the amp has a dynamic range of 120 dBA. There are very few power amps out there that will replicate those specs, and all the rest of them will be much bigger and weigh quite considerably more.

So what's going on here? ICEpower technology, that's what! According to Jeff, this is neither Class D nor any other conventional switching technology. What Jeff Rowland is doing is licensing this methodology from ICEpower and, to the best of my knowledge, is the only one who has developed it to an unprecedented level of refinement, thus making an amp suitable for high end audio applications. At this time Jeff also introduced his new integrated amp, the Concerto (\$5900), which also uses ICEpower technology. The third piece unveiled here was the Concert preamp (\$3900) to complement the 201 power amp already on the market as well as the 501.

And the sound? Absolutely great! The system consisted of the Accuphase DP85 SACD/CD player, a Transrotor turntable with a modified Rega tonearm (\$2000) with a PhaseTech cartridge (\$1950), a JRDC Cadence phono stage (\$3600), the Concerto preamp (\$3900), and the Focal/JMlabs Nova Utopia loudspeakers, while cabling was by Kimber Select.

Another marvelous-sounding room was set up by **Ayre Acoustics, Inc.** All the electronic equipment was Ayre's own and was designed by Ayre's main guy, Charles Hanson himself. This was a clear case where the whole was bigger and better than the sum of its parts. The only borrowed items were the Clear Anniversary turntable, a Graham 2.2 arm, and a Benz-Micro LP cartridge and some Cardas cables; everything else was pure Ayre. For analog lovers they had great news: Ayre introduced the P-5x Phono Preamplifier (\$2350) which features adjustable gain and cartridge loading. The digital source gear was the CX-7 CD player (\$2950) which "Up and Oversamples" to 1.4112 MHz at 24 bits, while the rest of the chain was comprised of the K-5x preamp (\$2,950), and the V-5x (\$4500) 150-watt power amp. Cabling for the most part was made up of the Ayre Signature series interconnects, while

the speaker cables and the power cords were from Cardas.

The icing on this cake was the speaker system, the Avalon Acoustics Eidolon Diamonds (\$33,995 per pair). If you look at the cost of this Ayre system, in audiophile terms, the thing that stands out is the relatively modest pricing of the electronics. OK, so they used a 34K speaker system. But Charles did want to show what his components can really do and the Diamonds certainly can do just that.

And they did. The sound of the Ayre room was exceptional. And addictive. I did not want to leave this place of sonic bliss – I wanted to just stay there and continue to listen to this stunning presentation. It was Ayre who was responsible for me missing some of the other exhibits. But guess what — I'm not a bit annoyed.

Having read some very positive statements regarding the InCognito loudspeaker from the Danish company **Peak Consult International**, and being already familiar with the highly regarded **Stereovox** cables, I

was very eager to visit a room where, wonder of wonders, both of these products were on display.

What I heard was the Peak-Consult Empress loudspeakers in Beech wood (\$22,495 per pair) powered by the following electronics: Lamm ML 1.1 monoblocks (\$22,690 per pair) and L2 Reference preamp (\$13,690), Classé Omega SACD-1 player (\$12,000).

The Stereovox LSP-600 loudspeaker cable (3.0-meter pairs will

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**Ayre's suite had great sound, using gear with modest prices, except for the \$34k Avalon Eidolon speakers**

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run you \$8,150), SEI-600 single-ended interconnect (6.0-meter pairs cost \$12,500), BAL-600 balanced interconnect (1.0-meter pair is \$2,500) completed the cabling requirements. The following ancillary equipment helped to fine tune the room and support the electronic gear: Eighth Nerve "Response

Controller" room tuning devices, a Bright Star "IsoRock 3 Reference Platform," Stillpoints isolation feet, and Sanus rack and amp stands.

I have to confess that, upon first finding out the prices for these particular components, I was taken aback. This was a lot of money. That's not even counting the Peak-Consult Grande loudspeakers in Rosewood (\$31,995 per pair) sitting on the side which I did not get a chance to hear. But I need not have been concerned because the sound was gorgeous! It was precise yet fluid. Extension galore over the whole audio spectrum with abundant space and abundant resolution. But best of all, what I heard was music. It was easy to get immersed in sounds that had this much of a

ring of truth.

I certainly was glad I stopped in at the **Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab** room. How so? Well, they had something completely new there, their own loudspeakers. MoFi has decided to throw their hat in the loudspeaker ring with the introduction of two models: The OML-1

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bookshelf (\$1299 to \$1800) and the OML-2 Tower (\$2799 to \$3500). The price ranges depend on the finish of the loudspeaker. With Jason Ressler, the Director of Product Development, doing a very thorough presentation, I just sat back and took in the sounds. After a reasonably long listening session to the OML-2 Tower, I can tell you that this MoFi venture had the earmarks of a successful effort. Using my own test tracks, the sound was broad-band, with imaging and dynamics in the great category. Its ability to sort out musical complexities was outstanding.

**Rockport** and **Parasound** was another pair of companies that had teamed up to great effect. Here Andy Payor had set up the Rockport Merak II atop the new companion woofer section being introduced, the Sheritan II (about \$20,000 for both). Both sections being driven by the exceptionally well received JC-1 monoblock power amplifiers (\$6000 the pair). The circuit design of the JC-1 is the handiwork of none other than John Curl while the component selection and mechanical design is by Bob Crump.

I did learn a very important user fact regarding the JC-1. John Curl confirmed that the JC-1 should be allowed to burn in for an inordinately long time, something like numerous weeks, as they need that long to settle in to their best performance mode. And, no, he does not know how to shorten this burn-in period. He said that if he knew how, he'd do it.

On the morning of the last day I visited the **emmLabs, Tenor, and**

**Classé amplifiers, a precautionary diversion to prevent "cultural myopia."**

**Kharma** room. What a way to start the day! Consisting of the new emmLabs two-channel CD/SACD transport and the DCC2 CD/SACD DAC/preamp (\$10,000), the new Tenor 300Hp, 300-watt hybrid monoblocks (\$34,000 per pair), and the Kharma Enigma (\$36,000) along with the Kharma's own speaker cables. All my notes say is "Super Sound" and I'll leave it at that.

This was Tenor's introduction of the 300Hp hybrid monoblock

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## Off-site demos are usually a pain, but Classé's amps were worth the trip to the Mirage.

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power amplifier. "Hybrid" here means that they are using tubes for the signal stages, while MOS-FETs are relegated to the power output stage. Using the same technology, Tenor also make this amp in a stereo version but on a single chassis. That's the 150 Hps, which is capable of putting out 150 watts per channel. I have found that all three of these companies pride themselves on superb workmanship and that was evident here in spades.

I really lucked out this same morning because the **Wadia** room was another exciting demonstration of great sound that can be achieved today. They were demonstrating their new 931 Digital Controller and mono 921 Digital Processor DACs (\$24,000 to \$27,000 for the three pieces) or Decoding Computers as Wadia likes to refer to them. Wadia has taken the concept of separates to the next logical step and designed DACs dedicated to each of the two channels. Someone was probably thinking that since we have monoblock power amps and dual-mono preamps, why not DACs? As you can imagine, all the Wadia conveniences are there on the 931 Digital Controller including numerous input configurations to accept any digital input. Of course, there's ClockLink for locking all digital components to a single clock, and the variable analog output making it possible to skip the preamp and drive power amps directly.

The rest of the system was made up of a few premier components such as the Wadia's own 270se CD

transport (\$9950), the Jeff Rowland Model 302 stereo power amp, and the Avalon Acoustics Diamond speakers. The sonics on exhibit were of a very high order. Weight, impact, space, detail, transparency; I just could go on and on, these attributes were all there in excellent form.

Besides Alexis Park I also visited a few off-site displays. For example, at the Mirage Casino, **Classé** unveiled their new line of components featuring a very sleek look. Basically, they took the two sides and the front panel and made them into a single sweeping section which starts at the left rear and continues all the way around to the right rear.

The side and front areas are still flat, but are joined by the two front corners in an elegant round manner. On the front portion, they have a narrow horizontal strip at the lower part of the panel, while a large rectangular area adorns the front on the left side. The whole effect is quite pleasing to the eye and at the same time creates a distinguished and unique look for the new Classé line. Of course, I expect the performance to remain at the exalted level that Classé has managed to achieve, or very likely go above it, if we can judge by what they have demonstrated in the past.

A **Teac** press conference where they introduced several new digital playback components from their high-tech **Esoteric** division proved to be a delightful event for me. Having previously had the opportunity to experience their superb sounding and exquisitely built P-70 and D-70, Teac's statement-level standalone CD transport and DAC, I was eager to attend this press conference to learn what Esoteric was up to for the future. I was not disappointed – this was time well spent. One of Esoteric's claims to fame is their VRDS CD transport turntable mechanism; VRDS stands for Vibration-free Rigid Disc-clamping System. Well, they went one better and developed a next-generation VRDS transport, one that can handle the high speed requirements of SACD and DVD-A. In addition, Teac announced a much more nimble laser pick-up lens and sled structure, which, in combination, are claimed to reduce tracking



errors dramatically. The two new products, available in the second quarter, will be the X-01, an SACD/CD player (\$13,000), and the UX-1, a Universal Player (\$13,000).

To get the most out these two playback components, Esoteric also introduced an ultra-stable Master Clock Generator, the G-0s. How stable? How about 0.05 ppb? (Yes, that's parts per billion.) This master clock unit intended to feed an ultra accurate clock to the X-01 and the UX-1 units to reduce jitter problems by keeping timing errors at a minimum. As you can well imagine, these two new players have many other improvements in a number of critical areas that, due to space limitation, are too numerous to list here. But be on the lookout for these exciting offerings from Esoteric.

For me, the most interesting aspect of going to the CES are the people, which, of course, in most cases includes meeting the equipment designers. This year was especially rewarding for me since I got to spend time with a number of technical stalwarts, one of which stands out from the rest. Meeting

Greg Timbers, the Chief Development Engineer for the Harmon Consumer Group, was a rare and rewarding highlight. For me, it was special because he was

**Teac's Esoteric division offered a very interesting Compact Disc transport and DAC.**

responsible for the design of the JBL K2 loudspeaker line, which includes the remarkable K2 S9600, a speaker system which has aroused a lot of my curiosity.

Greg is generally considered as JBL's dean of engineering, and I was fortunate to be able to have him share his insights, hearing his CDs, playing my CDs, all along exchanging ideas about sound, loudspeakers and music. And that went on for roughly two hours at the JBL exhibit in the Hilton Hotel where Greg had set up a 5.1 surround-sound demo in this typical hotel suite. Using some very modest electronics, he displayed the JBL Array speakers: four 1400 Arrays for the front and

rear, an 880 Array for the center, and 1500 Array Sub. Sure, the surround demo was very remarkable – one of the best ever – but the understanding I gained regarding JBL loudspeaker system design – the K2 S9800 in particular – was absolutely priceless.

Of course, there was lots more to see and do. I suggest that anyone who attends a CE Show should take in the car accessory exhibit area for a real fun digression. This is CES at its most intense. Many refer to the exhibits at the Convention Center as the zoo. Well, if that's the zoo, then the automobile sound and accessory area is the jungle.

We have chosen, those of the two-channel persuasion, to sit in a room, most of the time alone, and take in imagined benefits of the coloration of our choice. If not that, then we can dream of the next possible permutation in this pursuit of the lost chord.

In closing, I did experience one bitter disappointment at this CES – I never got to see the bikini babe at the Gilmore loudspeaker exhibit. Bummer.

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**PBN**



# T.H.E. Show: Where the Sound Was?

**T**OME THERE WAS AMPLE good sound at the CES 2004, and as a matter of fact, I thought it was some of the best Show Sonics I have heard under these always difficult show conditions in recent memory. So, let me give you some of my favorites, at least in the area Editor Pitts assigned me. The Home Entertainment Show which was located at the St. Tropez and the San Remo hotels, featured a variety of engineering and product styles and accommodated fat and thin wallets alike.

The new **Soaring Audio SLC A300** is a solid-state A/V power amplifier which provided what I think was likely the most dynamic and exciting amplifier presentation

at the show, particularly so given its mid-level price point of \$3,400. It was also the quietest amp I've ever listened to, with hum specified as being 120 dB down from peak output. This amp gives you total silence between notes as well as a presentation of soundstages or recording venues that were truly surreal. The input circuit includes the firm's patented "SLC" (which stands for Signal Loss Compensator) as well as smoothing circuitry; there is a pair of level controls with LEDs to indicate the proper setting in relation to the preamplifier's input signal level. An output level control is also provided for optimum loudspeaker drive. This amplifier is also a purist ideal to use in driving direct from a

CD player or other line-level source. Even though rated at a conservative 150 watts into 4 ohms and 100 into 8 ohms per channel, the amplifier audibly seemed much more powerful than these ratings would indicate. Paired with a set of Magnepan 3.6s, performance was stunning, without any solid-state stridency or harshness. It appears that Dr. Bill Avery and his inventive cohorts from Sparks, Nevada, are producing a solid statement here.

My favorites in the compact and cost-effective loudspeaker category was the **Usher S-520**, a two-way bookshelf or satellite style speaker priced at \$280/pair. Demonstrated by themselves on stands in what might be termed "stand-alone mode," their imaging, accuracy, neutrality and depth of field place them among the very best at any price point. When paired with the Usher SW-102, a 10-inch subwoofer with integral 60-watt amplifier which goes for \$570 MSRP, the three-piece ensemble offered an orchestral soundstage and scale that was a jaw-dropper for value. The fit and finish of the Chinese-made wood cabinet is also first rate. I saw several listeners emerging from the





demo with eyes ablaze and exclaiming, "Did you here that bass and imaging?"

Another showstopper in the cost-effective category were the new "Acephalic" line offerings from Buggtussel, highlighted by the **Somu** tower loudspeakers. Standing at 46.5 inches tall, and said to achieve 91 dB SPL with one watt, these three-way, five-driver towers were launched at \$1,000 per pair. They use a finely crafted wood finish with electromagnetic shielding for A/V use. Employing modified transmission-line venting, the new Buggtussels effectively demonstrate that high-end performance can be had at real-world prices. Also showcased by Buggtussel was their new **EBB-150** solid-state, 150-watt power amplifier. This robust new amplifier offers up to 500 watts into 2 ohms to drive the most difficult speaker loads and was introduced at \$5,000.

Another impressive loudspeaker launch was Albert **Von Schweikert's** new **VR4 Jr's**. Priced at \$3,995 per pair, these three-way mid-size towers produced as much bang for the buck as any at the show in this price range. The articulate VR 4 Jr's offered precise imaging and all the right spatial cues to convey the best in a variety of recordings. Fit and finish is superb with top drivers and parts complete with rear firing ambience tweeter.

Industry veteran **Steve McCormack** gets high marks for his versatile remote controlled **MAP-1**, a solid-state, six-channel analog pre-amplifier. With easy-to-use, built-in, set-up calibration for each channel, it removes much of the difficulty in correctly setting surround audio channel balance. The unit also supports ambience retrieval that may be activated to generate a center channel output and extract ambient information for the rear channels for two channel sources. An optional phono card is also available. In live demo, the McCormack only requires 5 minutes or less to set-up from your listening chair. It has more modes than I have space to convey here. Suffice to say the MAP-1 is a real winner sonically and technically for multi-channel lovers at \$2,495.

In the upper end of the price spectrum, Acarian Systems offered up the **Alon Proteus**, which are large-scale (65 inch tall) tower loud-

speakers listed at \$45,000 per pair. These were powered by a pair of the phenomenal **Antique Sound Labs Hurricanes**, 200-watt mono vacuum tube amplifiers listed at \$4,400 per pair. With visitors begging for more, designer and accommodating host Carl Marchisotto gladly spun some of his favorite CDs and LPs well into the evening. This system produced, I do believe, the finest piano recreation I've ever heard at this or any other show.

Another statement in sheer dynamics was one by the **PBN Olympia LX** solid-state power amplifier which offers the rarely seen 75-ohm inputs for optimal signal transfer from the companion **lightspeed** preamplifier. Priced at \$20,000 and \$16,000 respectively, these electronics were showcased with PBN's **EPX** three-way tower loudspeaker featuring eight 10-inch woofers (four per cabinet). Mounted in a vented isobaric configuration, the EPX drivers lived up to their reputation for tight and controlled bass.

Well, that's all that stingy Editor Pitts says I have room for. The Home Entertainment Show obviously had quite a few other pieces of gear that were worth listening to, but perhaps you should go to the show yourself. You might even get Editor Pitts to give you some space to write up your choices next year.

**Albert Von Schweikert**



# HSU

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# LVCC

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# Vanishing Audiophile



**E**ACH YEAR, THE LAS VEGAS CONVENTION CENTER (LVCC) contains the bulk of the Consumer Electronics Show exhibits. But this is a vast complex with several “halls.” You can’t see from the end of any one of them to the other end; big! Most everyone is lost within, consulting show guides, squinting at aisle numbers. Located about a mile east of The Strip, busses from all the mid- and top-level hotels carry attendees to this center of the electronic spider web named the CES.

LVCC attendance numbers mirror the volume of sales and the areas of interest in electronics for the entire world. The largest commercial mass merchandising companies display here. We’ve been passed by, we high-enders, as if you hadn’t noticed. “Audio components” now occupy only about a quarter of one LVCC hall and not all the “audio manufacturers” there are of Blue-Blood high-end pedigree. Video-related audio is king, followed by computer-related equipment and applications, followed (perhaps) by car audio, followed by office equipment and accessories, followed by true high-end audio.

Several Asian speaker manufacturers each had over 30 models on display, ones of all shapes and sizes. They are purchased for style and finish

Russell Novak

rather than sound. Prices are negotiated in bulk, pick 12 from column A and 6 from column B. One sees former high-end companies which have been bought and sold, remodeled, and sold again, perhaps a dozen times. DCM was there and they were once a much-loved high-end firm. The man in the booth had barely a memory of the DCM Time Window speaker, one of the earliest affordable high-end speakers, whose design had advanced the notion of time alignment.

Then there are large companies that have moved into video and mostly out of high-end audio. Video spawns success in the 21st Century as population demographics change and our "yoot" prove incapable of entertaining themselves with serious music. But there are some companies that have held onto their roots, some others that have continued to devote money to research and development in audio. Some others have expanded into video without abandoning audio. And I did find a few interesting items to report to you.

**TARA Labs** is one such firm. Primarily known for interconnects and speaker cable, design emphasis in recent years has been to isolate the wire conductors away from the dielectric. In the RSC Generation 2 cables the rectangular conductors are suspended by their edges inside of hollow tubes. In The Zero the conductors are further isolated in a vacuum and the cable shielding is completely decoupled from the signal path. The design reduces cable capacitance to a mere 3.5pF/foot.

TARA also has a line of A.C. Power Screens, featuring noise canceling "balanced power" in their AD/10B (\$2495) and IDAT (\$3495) models. Quoting Tara's chief engineer, Gary Lambert: "Technical Power is the official term to describe a.c. supplies that offer the 120 volts in a balanced format. Simply put, the primary winding (input) of a transformer is plugged into the 120-V a.c. wall socket, and the transformer secondary winding (output) presents the a.c. as 60-0-60, in three wires. One 60-volt wire is the 'live,' the center (or 0 volts) is the 'ground,' and the third wire, also 60 volts, is the 'neutral.' Note that now neutral has become live also. Any noise that is present on the 120-volt a.c. line, is also present on each of the 60 volt lines, but out of phase with each line, and therefore is cancelled. The electronic component plugged into this system, still 'sees' 120 volts a.c. between neutral and live, but now has a.c. power with a substantial reduction in a.c.-borne noise." Very nifty concept, TARA. I hope to talk the editor into letting me review this equipment.

**Krell** continues to innovatively support the high end, even as they have branched out into home theater. New this year is the Resolution Series Loudspeakers in three models, all featuring a dual concentric ring tweeter featuring an integral "waveguide." All crossover components are mounted on 1/8-inch epoxy glass circuit boards and the multiple potted polypropylene capacitors are wired in parallel to minimize inductance and resistance. The Resolution 1 (\$11,000) is a 4-way, five driver, floor standing system; the Resolution 2 (\$8,000): a three driver, 3-way floor standing system; the Resolution 3 (\$4,000): a two-driver, 2-way stand-mounted monitor.

Exhibits on the floor of LVCC are usually "dry," but I had the pleasure of hearing all three models at the home of Dan (CEO and Chief Designer) and Rondi D'Agostino when they hosted the NYC area audio



**One Sirius dog!**

societies. The sound was superlative and I think slightly more forgiving than the LAT series, though the Resolution models incorporate the design principles and techniques of the top-of-the-line LAT speakers.

**WireWorld** is an interesting smaller company that manufacturers, you guessed it, interconnects and speaker cable. But they have produced something else that is very interesting. A free CD Comparator Disc features test tracks made with some expensive name brand cables as well as their own models. One listens to a reference track and then switches tracks to reference the colorations added by the different wires. Test details are on the CD and it can be ordered by visiting <http://www.wireworldaudio.com>. This product is not new, but David Salz says that a newer disc will be produced "later this year" with 20 of the current models from his competitors. David feels that inductive properties of wire determine the main differences in what we hear. He also feels his wires do best on this test, of course, and they are priced way under the name-brand models.

The Comparator Disc raises a question though, as to what philosophy is the correct one when assembling an accurate stereo system. Let's begin with an imperfect speaker – and they are all imperfect. If one is assembling a system to live with for some years, does one select "most accurate" when choosing associated components, or does one select components with "complementary colorations" in an effort to get the most accurate and musical final sound? That debate should go round and round for the next few decades and this disc will get you thinking about it again.

**JM Labs** had their magnificent line of speakers on display, though unfortunately this was again a "dry" display. The new Diva Utopia BE caught my attention both for design and price - \$10,995. It's a three-way bass reflex design, tall, slimmer than JM Lab's other models, with two side-firing 8" woofers and a low frequency -3dB point of 35 Hz. It has a beryllium inverted dome tweeter, only 25 microns-thick with 3/4" coil and "Focus Ring" magnet system. A special design 6 1/2" midrange and a front firing port complete the design. What is important about this model, I believe, is that it gives the audiophile with a moderate size living room

and a more modest budget (as these things go), a chance to enjoy the Grand Utopia sound without the budget busting and the room placement problems of a very large speaker.

**Sumiko** had a magnificent display of the many products they distribute in the U.S. Foremost among these is the purely gorgeous Sonus Faber Amati Homage loudspeaker (<http://www.sumikoaudio.net/amati.htm>). Made with 21 layers of maple laminations, the speaker is a sight to behold in person. It is a three-way system with a bottom end at 24 Hz, yet the cabinet is only 47" tall with a narrow front baffle (11") so it could be accommodated in a moderate size room for a mere \$24,000.

Sumiko also distributes Vienna Acoustics speakers. While there were no new models in the line this time around, I can testify to the musical satisfaction the Strauss model has given me after being selected for my brother's home theater room. At \$5,995 it features a silk dome tweeter, two 7" midrange drivers, one operating across the full

midrange, and one that blends the lower mids with the 10" side firing bass driver. The Vienna line is at once accurate, yet forgiving of less than optimum material – definitely on the musical, rather than the clinical side of the spectrum.

Sumiko also gets plenty of kudos for continuing to support analog playback and demonstrating that support on the LVCC floor. Pro-Ject

considering other similar designs and should be investigated by all record lovers considering a new turntable.

Remember when the sound of wire was all the rage and wire shoot-outs were a common occurrence at audiophile meetings? Well, The Great Wire Shoot-Out didn't happen at CES this year. Audioquest, Straight Wire, Monster Cable, and others all had huge displays with dozens of cables in plastic bubble packaging, and most of it was for video. All advertised design innovations, but the products stayed, pretty much, in the plastic bubbles. Except for Kimber Kable, who also exhibited at the Alexis

Park, where designer-driven high-end is still king, major wire manufacturers failed to push the superiority of their product with live demos. So you know what? There's nothing to report, no claims to verify. Most wire guys are tied up in video and don't think we audiophiles are worth cultivating with live demos of music. And that's all from the vast and endless floor of LVCC. Can anyone see the exit?

## Despite taking a back seat to home theater recently, the audio category at the CES did show some interesting items.

Audio Systems showed five turntables from the Debut II at \$279 with arm and Ortofon OM-5E cartridge through the Perspective (\$1,299 for a complete turntable/arm system with Swiss bearings), and the RM9 system at \$1,499. The belt-driven RM9 has the motor and power supply isolated on a separate chassis from the platter, premium Swiss bearings, and a carbon fiber tonearm. The price is reasonably low

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# Misty River@T.H.E. Show



**I**T'S HARD NOT to respond to the warmth and love the four women of Misty River pour into their music. On their albums they post the legend "Compelling harmonic voices where folk, country and bluegrass converge into Americana." A very apt, very telling description! (Editor's Intro: These are the ladies whose entrancing music beguiled T.H.E. Show-goers at the San Remo Hotel during January this past "Annual Electronics Convention" in Las Vegas.)

I prefer Misty River's Live at the Backgate Stage, a much (excuse the expression) livelier performance than their fine studio debut. On the live set Dana Abel (accordion, guitar), Chris Kokesh (fiddle), Laura Quigley (upright bass) and Carol Harley (guitar, banjo) really emerge as a tight, strong unit playing songs they obviously love a lot. Each woman takes turns singing lead and all add lovely harmonies. Their instrumental work is subtle and on the mark.

The live set's program includes only one original among the 17 selections, Dana Abel's "Misty River," a sweet, peaceful song about nature and friends. Their selections reveal favorite writers as

*Live at the Backgate Stage  
Misty River MRCD 002  
Rising Misty River MRCD 001*

## Michael Tearson

well as key influences. There are two Gillian Welch songs and one each by Kate Wolf, Tim O'Brien, Carter Stanley, Rory Block, Shawn Colvin and Lyle Lovett among others. They also offer a pair of traditional songs. Producer Billy Oskay and engineer Bob Stark have done a wonderful job capturing the live ambience and performance sound making Live at the Backgate Stage a most rewarding album.

On the studio album, Misty River mixes four originals with six covers including Townes Van Zandt's "If I Needed You" and Tom Paxton's "Last Thing on my Mind" as well as the traditional "Trees They Do Grow High" and "Little Sadie." Chris Kokesh offers three songs: The clear-eyed "Only Love," the rueful "Mother, Mother" and the end of childhood song "Real as a Dream." Dana Abel's "The American Dream" is a sad waltz about a man whose hopes and dreams fail him.

Rising also has great warmth in its sound and finely detailed performances making it a warm introduction to a young group whose vision and aims are already fully formed and nicely achieved on the record.

Misty River makes music I delight in welcoming into my home. Their obvious camaraderie, their smooth and assured picking and singing, their song choices all signal a bright future.

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## Rock

Carrie Newcomer *Betty's Diner*  
Philo 116 71 1 245-2

**C**ARRIE NEWCOMER'S songs and voice become ever richer with kindness and warmth. *Betty's Diner* is a 15-song retrospective of her seven albums since 1994 and three songs of new material specially done for this release.

After listening to *Betty's Diner*, I was much surprised that Carrie Newcomer had not blipped my radar until now. I hadn't really connected with any of her albums before this. Thus, this is both a backwards and forwards looking album and is my first real dive into her work.

The new songs come first, and they won me over completely.

The opener is "Toward the Horizon" and it takes place when the world is opening up again after the final breakup of a long-term relationship. That is a time when looking ahead begins to take place more often than looking back. It's also when a fierce optimism might begin to take hold. I found it a strong song, with a strong arrangement and a strong performance.

But for this reviewer the other two new songs came as sucker punches. "Betty's Diner" limns a really fine small town diner where you've known the waitresses and the other patrons and their stories. It's a place where the waitresses regularly dole out random acts of kindness with the meals. "Bowling Baby" is sung by that geeky guy behind the bowling alley counter who assigns lanes and rents the shoes. He sings of his unrequited crush on a sharp lady bowler. Now, I live in South Jersey, diner capitol of the world, and I am also a league bowler. Carrie is singing about people and places I know. And she nails them.

"I'll Go Too" glows with the kindness of the selfless helping hands we get far too infrequently from angels walking among us. "When It's Gone, It's Gone" is about pieces of our past which have vanished but we still remember and feel. Alison Krauss' angelic voice adds a perfect high harmony to "The Gathering of Spirits," a know-

ingly fond song about reunions. "When One Door Opens" is about acceptance, not about "getting what you want, but wanting what you get."

Carrie has a dusky, comforting voice one cannot help accepting as a friend, especially when you consider what she is singing about. The arrangements range from stark and sparse (guitar and piano for "Bare to the Bone," guitar and cello for "Hold On," guitar and voices of Carrie and Jennifer Kimball for "The Yes of Yes") to full pop settings. Carrie feels comfortable at all stops. Her support and production are always classy, sure-handed. The growth and evolution Newcomer has gone through in making her music over the years is palpable. She keeps getting better. And she was a good one to begin with.

I'm glad TAV's Gene Pitts assigned me *Betty's Diner*. I might have missed it and missed welcoming Carrie Newcomer's excellent work. I might not have made this new musical friend.

Michael Tearson

# Classical

Mary Fahl *The Other Side of Time*  
Odyssey SK 89892

MARY FAHL'S VOICE is an unforgettable instrument. Her husky contralto has matured and darkened since her October Project days a decade ago. Her musical palette had broadened, too.

Even though she stretches impressively with the 11<sup>th</sup> century Arabic flavored "Ben Aindi Habibi" and "Una festiva lacrima" from Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*, at Mary's core are American song forms dating back to Stephan Foster lending her songs a timelessness. Fahl operates with a fierce intensity that paradoxically lends her singing a sense of calm. Jeffrey Lesser's production is finely tuned to take her songs safely into the realm of the grand to just short of grandiose. The songs' inherent dramatics help keep them in perspective.

Mary's best songs are absolutely riveting. "Going Home" from the film *Gods and Generals* sounds centuries old with the peal of truth, a perfect song for that Civil War epic. "Raging Child" is precisely the music seeking to tame the raving beast. Its chorus might keep ringing in your ears for days. The genial "Annie, Roll Down Your Window" is an epistle that reads like a précis for an opulent Merchant-Ivory *Room with a View* type of film. "Paolo" is a prayer for aid from a lost lover. The closing "Dawning of the Day" is utterly hypnotic. It

is a traditional song with some of the loveliest lyrics you could find.

Whether stark and moody like "Dawning" or orchestrated lushly with a Mark O'Connor violin solo like the stately "Going Home" or pulsing like "Into the Great Unknown" or "Raging Child," *The Other Side of Time* has delicious sound. Listening is an aural equivalent of that sinful dessert you broke rules to treat yourself to: Rich, filling and dangerous to have too much of. Producer-engineer Lesser was an inspired choice to helm this project. He is finely attuned to grandly melodic music with lots of textures like Mary Fahl's material. She learned much from her time in October Project and has grown impressively since last we heard her. Excellent album!

*The Other Side of Time* reintroduces Sony Classical's Odyssey imprint. It will be home to future pop oriented productions from the division. Mary Fahl is the perfect artist to debut the new incarnation.



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Pat St.John



**Pat St.John** is heard nationally on Sirius Blues 29 Monday thru Friday 6:00 p.m. to Midnight ET, and he's also the channel's programmer. Pat also does shows on "Classic Vinyl" (14) and "The Vault" (16). On weekends, he's on New York City's WAXQ (Q104.3), the number one Classic Rock station in America. For additional data on Eric's Crossroads Guitar Festival, visit these sites: PatStJohn.com, claptononline.com, ericclapton.com, repriserecords.com, and Sirius.com.

## Blues

Eric Clapton *Me and Mr. Johnson*  
Reprise/Duck 48423-2

**F**INALLY, FINALLY, I get to talk about Eric Clapton's new album, *Me and Mr. Johnson*. Composed entirely of songs by the legendary and mythical Robert Johnson, you've probably been hearing "If I Had Possession over Judgment Day," on the radio; it's one of the 14 RJ songs that comprise the CD. And it's a disc you really should have, if you have any feeling for the blues; it's varied as can be, given the fact Clapton focuses in to cover about

half of Mr. Johnson's entire output on record. And roughly half of the *other* half of the titles Eric has recorded on different albums in different groups. This new CD, I must tell you, is a wonderful album and I highly recommend it.

I got a hold of the album as part of my day gig at Sirius Satellite Radio quite a bit ahead of its actual release date, but I couldn't air it until that date — way it works. I was also told that Eric was coming



to our studios on February 28 to use our air waves to make the first U.S. announcement of his Crossroads Guitar Festival, which will be held June 4 to 6 in Dallas. This will be a one-time, first-of-its-kind festival with workshops, clinics, and exhibits created for music enthusiasts who will come from around the globe, and it will culminate in a June 6 concert in the Cotton Bowl by the largest gathering of guitar greats ever assembled. Featured artists will include Mr. Eric, Carlos Santana, Otis Rush, Buddy Guy, ZZ Top, Robert Randolph, James Taylor, Larry Carlton, Steve Vai, Eric Johnson, B.B. King, Hubert Sumlin, Sonny Landreth, J. J. Cale, Joe Walsh, and many other fine guitarists. The house bands on the three stages will be none other than Booker T & the MGs, Jimmie Vaughan's band, and The Eric Clapton Band. Not a small event. The announcement of the festival was to be made by Eric and I got to interview him about it. Sounded like a fun assignment, and it turned out that way, I think for both of us. But after we did it, what happened next was *really* something.

Eric doesn't grant many interviews, but he did something next that I'll never forget, joining me as a *guest DJ* on my Sirius blues show to talk about his favorite players of all time, those he idolized, those who influenced him, the ones he knows or knew, and the ones he never met. And it turned my show for the evening of March 19, 2004, into "Me and Mr. Clapton," a *six-hour* session with the two of us talking about the blues and playing tracks by hot blues musicians such as Freddie King, Jimmy Reed, Muddy Waters, Albert Collins, Johnnie Johnson, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Buddy Guy, Jimi Hendrix, Little Walter, and B. B. King — just the cream of the greatest blues players. I managed to sprinkle in some of Eric's music (since I was at the control board), but it was understood between us that we weren't really there to discuss "Eric Clapton." I did lead him into stories about Freddie

King being the first one to really teach him how to play the electric guitar, and he also talked about Jimi Hendrix, for whom truly great blues came so easily. But Jimi lost interest in playing blues, as many of us know, and Clapton thinks that was a tragic loss. He told me about headlining a show with Stevie Ray Vaughan, about being in his dressing room with a video monitor

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**This is one very hot CD, but Clapton's Crossroads Guitar Festival is certain to be even hotter!**

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showing Stevie Ray's performance. Eric turned down the sound level since Stevie was so good that it made Eric wonder why it was Vaughan didn't have top billing. Clapton said that to this day, he regrets turning that monitor down. These fine stories all turned the show into the most comfortable radio program I've ever done, no plugging or promoting, no selling or hyping *anything!* Just a simple, relaxed, and *pure* discussion of the blues and the musicians who play it. (Since Sirius is a subscription based service, there weren't even commercials to get in the way). Yes, we talked about Robert Johnson, but we didn't talk about Eric's new CD. In fact, we didn't even talk about the "Crossroads Guitar Festival" in Texas, even though it's to raise money for the *Crossroads Centre Antigua*, the treatment and education center founded by Clapton in 1997, and now an independently run entity.

Eric said on the program that as far as the "legend" of Robert Johnson goes, "you really don't know what to believe any more." Eric mentioned a book called "Escaping The Delta: Robert Johnson and the Invention of the Blues" by Elijah Wald, an author and musician, who says in his book that in Johnson's day, Robert Johnson really didn't amount to very much, and if he had never existed, it might not have made a difference in the evolution of the blues or rock'n'roll, except for all these stories about him. Eric took a stand on this, definitively stating that the first time he heard Robert Johnson, he was first "caught by the voice, and what Johnson had that his contem-

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poraries didn't seem to have quite so much of, was an incredible vulnerability." Eric said "I heard his feelings through his singing ... he sounded raw to me, and then when I listened harder and looked at what he was doing with the guitar, I was almost repelled by the complexity of it, and I made up my mind that I'd never be able to do that." Eric showed such reverence and respect for Mr. Johnson, calling what he did with his guitar "impossible stuff."

Well, over the years, Eric has indeed recorded many Robert Johnson songs, and now he's done 14 more, so it turns out that he *has* learned to "do" the impossible. He's a modest man, but I'm thinking "this is Eric Clapton telling me these things, 16 Grammys, the *only* three-time inductee into the Rock'n'Roll Hall of Fame, etc!" I had to stop and think what it meant when this guy said "when he *first* heard Robert Johnson ..." Eric's had a lot of practice over the years, so he's definitely up to the task.

On this new collection, Eric uses his full band: Steve Gadd on drums

and Nathan East on bass. Additional players are Billy Preston on Hammond organ and piano, Andy Fairweather Low and Doyle Bramhall II on guitars, and Jerry Portnoy on harmonica. Drummer Jim Keltner and bass player Pino Palladino make appearances as well. Not a bad group here to record "impossible stuff!"

Co-produced with Eric by Simon

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**Eric definitely plays in the blues tradition on *Me and Mr. Johnson*, taking most tracks a bit slower than Johnson did.**

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Climie, my favorites here are "32-20 Blues," which is given a real boogie-woogie treatment, of course "Possession," and "Last Fair Deal Gone Down," as they're the most "rockin" tunes on the disc. However, even the tunes that are more faithful renditions just sound wonderful in the fuller sound these songs have with an entire band and modern recording techniques. "Stop

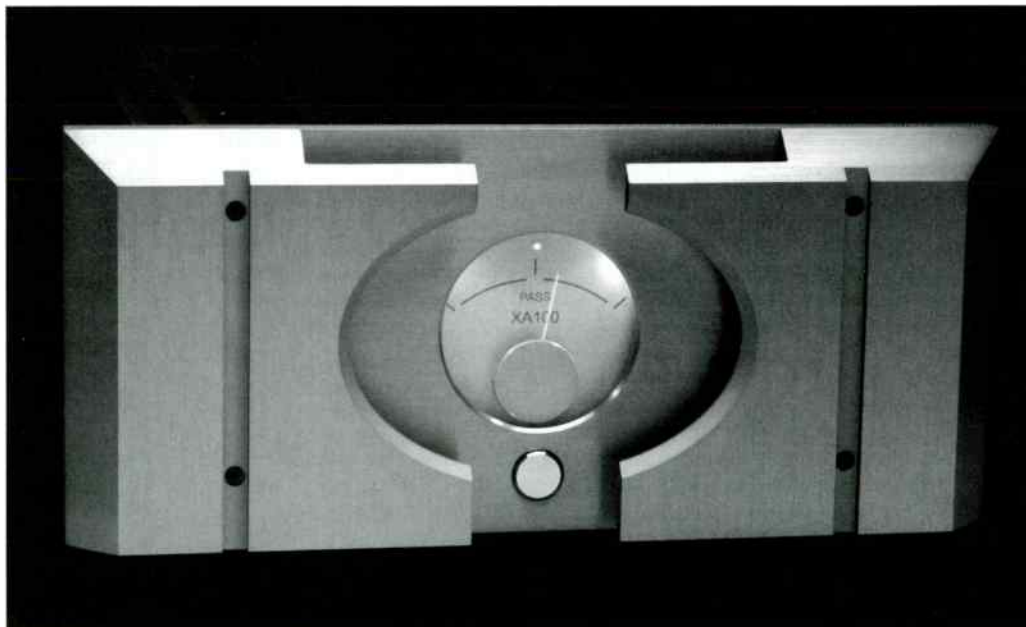
Breakin' Down Blues" and "Hell Hound on My Trail" are as satisfying as the rest of the others really, and "They're Red Hot" is an out-and-out honky-tonkin' romp.

But know what? This is an *Eric Clapton* album, with him interpreting the music of one of the small handful of major influences on his music, perhaps even the number one influence from the list, so how could it get any better? It's my opinion that he made this album more for himself than anyone else, either to prove to himself that he could do it, but it could also be a collection of songs he felt should be given an update, done this way, or maybe it's just an album *he* wanted to hear.

Either way, I think it's a great album. I had a feeling I would, 'cause I've been a fan of the blues as much as I've been a rock fan, and a fan of Eric's since the Yardbirds days.

As I'm writing, I'm excited about going to Dallas for the Crossroads Guitar Festival itself to provide anchor coverage of the event, as Sirius is now a sponsor of the event.

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# Blues

Tinsley Ellis *The Hard Way*  
Telarc CD 83608

Donald E. Wilcock



**I** OFTEN THINK ROCK AND ROLL angst is wasted on the young. The roar of some kid's anger is amplified by his gear. Unplug the guitar, and the message disappears like smoke in a wind storm. Blues, on other hand, is often understated. Read between the lines and feel the pain in the delivery, and you realize that rendering of the song itself may be the thin line that separates its author from action that could land him (or someone else) in jail, a hospital or the morgue.

Mix rock with blues (as handled by a "12 Pack Poet" to borrow a title from Tinsley Ellis's 10th solo album in 21 years, *The Hard Way*), and you have a very volatile combination. I've always admired Tinsley for his straight-forward attitude about what he does. He doesn't claim to be a blues artist. He rocks, and if the labels that record him — Alligator, Capricorn and now Telarc — have a major blues component, and if his fans happen to also like B. B. King, that's fine, too.

Call it blues. Call it rock. Call it blues-rock, but however you categorize *The Hard Way*, make no mistake about it, this is an adult album. And I don't mean adult in the smarmy "adult bookstore" context. More than half the songs on this album deal with the kind of relationships that can get you killed. "Let Him Down Easy," for example, is about a guy trying to give his woman advice on how to get out of one relationship, so she can start

another with him. He is trying to tell her how to do it in a way that the other man won't go postal. But he's already having second thoughts about who's to blame for the problems she's having with the other guy. "I'm starting to think it's you," he says in a predatory voice in between screaming guitar breaks. *[Editor's Noise: Being as how the "Postal Incident" occurred here in the New Jersey town where this magazine is published, Donny, I*

*think this USPS reference is "unfortunate" at best.]*

"Me without You" showcases an uncharacteristic caramel delivery of both vocals and guitar work in a Robert Cray vein. "I'm still hung up on me without you," Tinsley sings on the hook. His woman once again is still with the other man. She calls Ellis "Mr. Wonderful" but only when she's stoned. "I'm still waiting for the telephone at night," he admits, but "my love is off the hook."

The titles tell the stories: "And It Hurts," "My Love's The Medicine," "Her Other Man" and "The Last Song" as in, "This is the last love song I'm gonna write about you and me."

Ellis was born in 1957 and lists his childhood influences as The Yardbirds, Cream, the Stones, and The Animals. Those were his (and many other guitarists') introduction to such seminal figures as Freddy King, B. B. King, Albert King, Otis Rush, and Magic Sam, but on this, his first self-produced effort, Ellis dips into an even deeper well for inspiration. Bobby Rush, "The Chitlin' Circuit King," characterized the wa-wa pedal as a device invented by the white musician to emulate the black musician, but that it in turn had been co-opted by the black musician to turn the tables on whites. *[Witness Jimi.]* I argue that Tinsley Ellis is going around the table yet again, a white musician inspired by black musicians using a tool invented by white musicians to emulate blacks in the first place.

You with me? Ellis uses a lot of wa-wa. And yes, "The Last Song" has all the big fat and foreboding sounds of every '70s rocker who wanted to carry Led Zeppelin to the next level of bombast. And yes, "I'll Get Over You" lays in the same pocket as Sly Stone or even the Temptations. But he's also dipping into Jimmy Reed territory with some fantastic Sean Costello harp work on "Fountain of Youth." And on "12 Pack Poet" he explores that unholy alliance between Mississippi hill country drone and Allman Brothers southern rock that the Mississippi All-Stars plumb.

This album plays like a southern jukebox caught in a part of town that can't decide or maybe doesn't care which side of the tracks it's on. Little matter. It's a dangerous place to be alone and underage.

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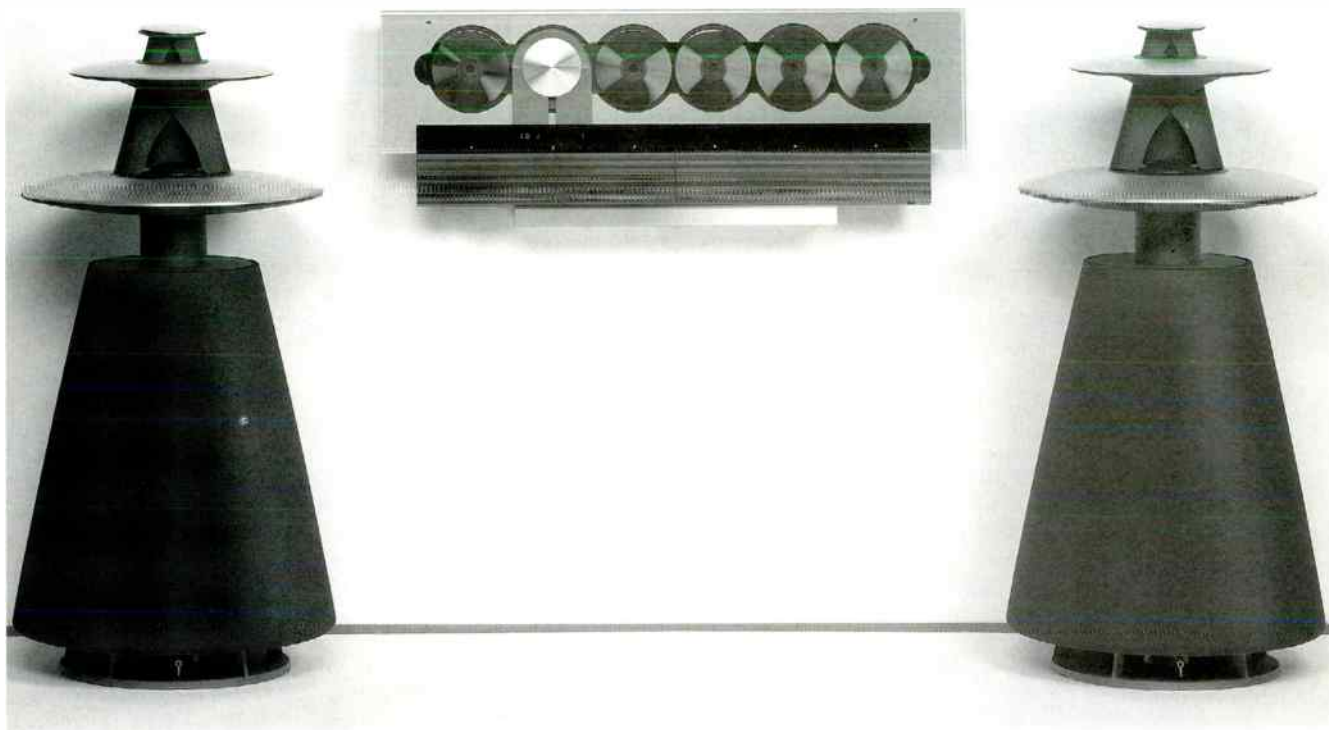
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NEW ADDRESS

# Bang & Olufsen Beolab 5 Loudspeakers

Bascom H. King



**T**HE BEOLAB 5 is a radically new speaker design from this well-known, old-line Danish audio and electronics firm and the system utilizes a number of new and interesting technologies. The first of these, and one which is quite obvious just from looking at the speakers, is their use of a new acoustic lens design by Sausalito Audio Works. Both the mid and tweeter speakers have their own appropriately sized and shaped lenses, and this results in a wide and uniform dispersion over 180

degrees. This design is said by B&O to allow the user to place these speakers just about anywhere as well as for the listener to sit almost anywhere in the listening room, and in spite of any room modes, the sound will be the same. This characteristic is, in itself, not altogether new, as a number of speaker designs have had omni-directional (360 degree) dispersion and also made rather similar claims. We shall see what this dispersion characteristic is like in my listening area.

There are two other drivers in the Beolab 5; a 6.5-inch mid bass unit and, at the very bottom, there is a long-throw 15-inch woofer. Amplification is built in and uses four ICEpower amp units, one for each driver in the system. (Editor's note: These ICEpower switching amps are themselves an important story, and from one point of view, are what make this speaker possible. Check out their background at the B&O website. *Gene Pitts*) Power output of these amps is prodigious,



providing some 1000 watts each for the woofer and mid-bass drivers, and 250 watts for each of the mid-range and tweeter drivers. The net result of this four-channel amplification is the ability to produce concert hall peak sound pressure levels in the 115- to 120-dB SPL range – LOUD! The electronic crossovers, input selection, and digital input volume control are accomplished by the system's on-board digital signal processor.

Another quite unique and important feature is the built-in bass calibration microphone system, again a design item necessary to the actual operation of the system. If one presses on the plate on top of the tweeter section, a measurement routine is started. That routine first measures the woofer with the measurement mike in a position close to the woofer. After this first measurement, the microphone is extended out further away from the woofer, and another measurement is made. By comparing these two measurements, information about the room modes is obtained in relation to where the speakers are. Equalization is then applied to the woofer and mid-bass units, and B&O claims this reduces the variation in response at the listening position. (See the sidebar for a bit more detailed discussion of how this is done and what happens.)

When setting up the Beolab 5s, one has to program the remote control for one of several operational options, one of which is the default setup for connecting to B&O source electronics, while the other two are for non-B&O electronics. There is a suggestion in the manual that a "sync" connection is to be used between the two speakers to insure that the two volumes will track, though a cable for this purpose wasn't supplied. What is supplied are two pairs of cables, one for connecting to B&O electronics, while the other consists of a pair of RCA male-to-male cables for connecting your own analog source to the Beolab 5s.

Deciding which of the two non-

B&O source options to use might be a bit confusing; one to be used if there is another B&O audio system in the same room and the other where you may have a B&O television in the same room. I chose this later option and things worked out OK operationally.

The first pair of these speakers I received were "engineering samples" or "pre-production" units, and –wouldn't you know? – one of them had a 20-dB hole in the frequency response at 300 Hz. And this unit sometimes would not accurately control all the ranges so they would decrease in volume together – sometimes leaving the tweeter or the woofer playing alone. Nevertheless, I did get a good idea of the potential of these most unusual-looking speakers. I was promised a new production pair somewhere around the first of December, and unannounced, they did arrive exactly on the first of December. By this time I had gotten good at packing and unpacking and I quickly had the new pair up and running. Unhappily, no remote was supplied with either pair of speakers. I had asked for one for the first pair and I held onto it, to get the second pair operational.

Putting the speakers in the "forward reference position" in my listening room, I went through B&O's bass calibration procedure for both speakers, and then I measured the in-room response at my listening position using my MLSSA measurement system. I was amazed at the 1/3-octave smoothed response which was quite smooth over a very wide range, from about 200 Hz up to about 15 kHz. Above that upper frequency, the response started to roll off. I had expected that the step response would be time- or phase-aligned, given the DSP generation of the crossover filters, but it was not. (Editor's Note: The term "time alignment" is trademarked by Edward Long, who sometimes writes for this magazine. *Gene Pitts*)

Bass response was pretty good at the listening position with quite flat response down to 20 Hz; the only anomalies I noted were a 40-Hz null in the left channel and a mild 100-Hz area peak in the right channel. This is somewhat better bass response than I get with my B&W 801 Series III speakers in the same position. With the B&W speakers, I use a Genesis G928 subwoofer to

## NOTES

**Bang & Olufsen Beolab 5 Loudspeakers**, \$16,000.00. Bang & Olufsen America, Inc., 780 W. Dundee Rd., Arlington Heights, IL 60004, phone 847/590-4900, fax 847/255-7805, info 866/520-1400, website [www.bang-olufsen.com](http://www.bang-olufsen.com).

### Associated Equipment

B&W 801 Series III on Anchor stands, Genesis G928 sub woofer, PS Audio HCA-2 power amp, Quicksilver Line stage tube preamp, First Sound Reference passive preamp, PS Audio Lambda Two Special and CEC TI-1X CD transports, Genesis Digital Lens, Perpetual Technologies P1-A/P3-A up-sampler/D/A converter, Kenwood KD-500 turntable with Infinity Black Widow arm and Win Labs moving coil cartridge, and Vendetta SCP-2C phono preamp.

augment the low end. The B&Ws are about as smooth as the Beolab 5s in the mid and high end, above about 1 kHz.

## Listening Performance

My first listening impression of these B&Os was of their overall similarity to the sound from my B&W 801 reference speakers. What also surprised and pleased me was that the sound staging was so very similar, inasmuch as both speakers easily "disappeared" into the soundstage. I should say here that the 801's are noted for this important characteristic, and thus present a tough mark to match. Both were good at painting a believable space with good positioning of instruments with many pieces of source material. Some of the source material I use sounds overly "right/left" on the B&Ws speakers, and they sounded that same way with the Beolab 5s as well. The tonal balance of the Beolab 5s was quite accurate and this helped in creating a convincing illusion of real instruments playing in real space. There is a tendency, more pronounced seemingly in the first pair, to be a little brash with some program material when source material gets loud in the mid and upper mid range frequency ranges.

On the dynamic range front, these babies from B&O do rock! They play very loudly with no apparent strain – much more loudly than I would want to play them for most material. Drum solos and percussive works are absolutely startling in the realism of reproduction. I have been quite happy listening to my music on these speakers. That little bit of irritation on some material really has not been a bother.

All the above comments are based on using the analog inputs. One nit about the analog inputs is that there is no provision for changing the absolute phase. With an analog feed, the speakers do maintain correct acoustic polarity. This could be a problem for a preamp like my Quicksilver line stage which inverts the signal polarity at its main outputs. That is, one could not maintain overall absolute polarity of the acoustic output using such a preamp unless there was a place or switch somewhere earlier in the signal chain to do so.

In connecting up the Beolab 5s for digital input, I first daisy-chained

them together, with sourcing them from the coaxial output of my Genesis Digital Lens and using some non-r.f.-type low-capacity, shielded cables. With this signal feed, the sound was noticeably more transparent, with more air and space around the music, and offered more definition and detail. I then changed to a Y-adapter at the Digital Lens coax output and fed equal length Monster Video Cables to both speakers. I noticed little difference in the sound. This result does make some sense to me, as there is a much simpler signal path in the digital connection mode; the analog connection had the signal sources going through my

Quicksilver line preamp, essentially operating as a switch box and feeding its "tape out" through a three-meter pair of interconnects into my First Sound Reference passive preamp, and from there into the Beolab 5s through another pair of long but low capacitance cables.

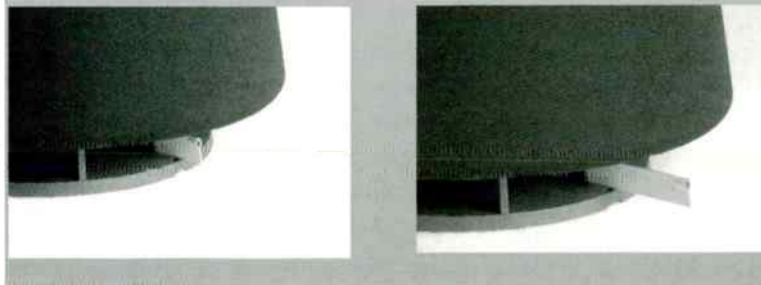
In conclusion, I feel that the Beolab 5s are very good loudspeakers. I truly enjoyed my time with them and was sad to see them go. While they do have a fairly stiff list price, you should realize that you don't have to buy a power amplifier to drive them, the price of an appropriately good power amplifier being a significant fraction of the Beolab 5's price.

## The ABCs of it

Bang & Olufsen's Adaptive Bass Control is a room adaptation system based on measurement of the acoustic radiation resistance as seen by the system's bass drive unit in two situations: A reference loudspeaker position in a reference room and an actual loudspeaker in an actual room. The measurement takes place between 20 Hz and 500 Hz. A digital 16<sup>th</sup> order IIR filter is then designed to ensure the same acoustic power output in the actual situation as occurred in the reference situation.

The measurement of the acoustic radiation resistance is based on measuring the sound pressure at two positions differently spaced from the diaphragm of the loudspeaker bass drive unit. Both microphone positions are in the near field of the diaphragm, at 6 cm and 10 cm distance. The sound pressure at both positions is measured using the same microphone, which is moved between the two microphone positions by a motor. This enables the measurement to be self-calibrating with respect to the microphone characteristics. The knowledge of the measurement data of the reference loudspeaker in the reference position in the reference room is in the DSP program running on the actual loudspeaker unit to be calibrated in a position in the listener's room.

As a result, the ABC system generates an equalization filter which yields a much more constant timbre between different listening rooms and loudspeaker positions at low frequencies. An additional advantage is that ABC improves the timbre everywhere in the listening room – it is not limited to a predetermined listening position. ABC filters are significantly different from filters in systems that are based on sound pressure measurement at a preferred listening position. ABC filters are dominated by boundary effect and room modes and are very similar to filters obtained from average sound pressure levels measured across many listening positions.



# Elac CL 310i Jet Speaker System

Bernard Kingsley



**I** HATE BEAMING. I hate it to an unusually high degree, probably a lot more than you do. Unfortunately, I often had to live with it. You know, beaming is when a loudspeaker delivers the high frequencies in a very narrow area. The listener may sit in the system's "sweet spot," and as long as he sits reasonably still, everything is fine. But if Mr. Listener moves, the sound stage is spoiled.

Lots of high frequency drivers beam, to varying degrees, even in the best-designed speaker systems around. A few years ago, the Boston Audio Society listened to some speakers that were absolutely gor-

geous, but had the toughest beaming problem I have ever heard. These were the Mach 1 speakers, and they were quite musical, delightful and engaging, but, even while sitting in the sweet spot, I found that a head movement of only a few inches shifted the sound-stage dramatically! A few BAS members suggested that things might be a bit better with different speaker placement, but maybe not.

There have been a variety of ways to get around the problem. Some companies, such as Snell, use a back-firing tweeter which disperses high frequencies to the system's rear to off-set the front-side beam-

ing. Ohm and Infinity have used variations of the Walsh driver which looks like an ice cream cone and disperses sound in a circular pattern. Back in the 1970s, ESS used the Heil air motion transformer (AMT) driver with great success. (Editor's Note: It is my recollection that the ESS AMT system was the first speaker that Dick Heyser tested for *Audio*, and the review appeared in the fall of 1973. I believe that this system's anechoic response set an unmatched record for flatness throughout my 25 years there. *Gene Pitts*)

I mention all of this because the speakers under review manage to



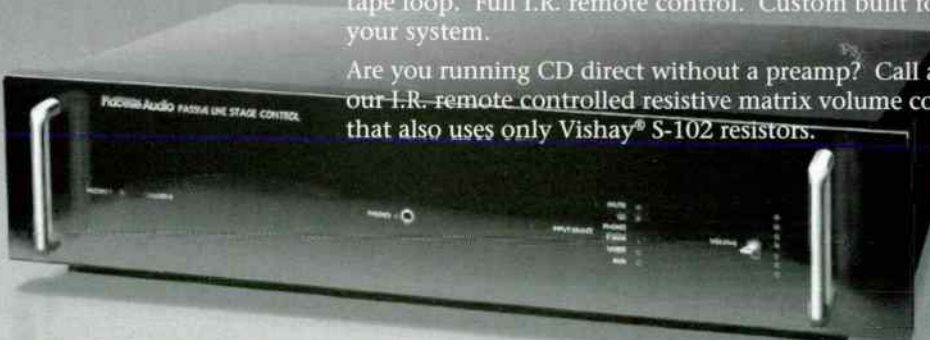
avoid the plague of beaming while delivering some superb high frequencies. ELAC is a German company which has produced audio gear since the late 1940s. Some may remember turntables and cartridges coming from this company before the Japanese wave hit us. Currently they produce an interesting line of very high-quality speaker systems.

The 310i Jet is a small speaker, just less than five inches wide, about 11 inches long and about 8 inches high. They are made from quite heavy extruded aluminum and are offered only in a metallic silver finish though the wood-box Elac systems do come in colors. ELAC sells matching stands which place the speakers about 27 inches high and are a good match aesthetically. The stands allow you to hide cables and can be filled with sand or lead shot if you're a purist. They have the same high-quality aluminum finish as the speakers. The speakers can be set on a shelf, but I believe the stands contribute to the quality of the sound. Most people who saw the speakers and stands considered them to be strikingly attractive.

On unpacking, my first impression was that the speakers were heavy for their volume and seemed to me to be beautifully constructed. Tapping on the speakers revealed a solid build with no obvious resonances. What was also immediately obvious to me is the quality of the craftsmanship. I placed the 310i Jets on their stands, and used the supplied floor spikes.

I listened before I even bothered to check the specs and was immediately greeted by a wonderful widely dispersed soundstage. It turns out the 310's use a version of the Heil air motion transformer tweeter which has been adapted and improved upon by Elac. A Mylar foil membrane is driven by a strong magnet system using neodymium rods. According to Elac, use of these neodymium magnets in the driver provides linear transmission up to 30,000 Hz. This AMT high-frequency driver is mated with an "aluminum sandwich membrane" woofer which measures about three inches in diameter. Crossover is at 3300 Hz. Elac manufactures all its own drivers, so this isn't one of those situations where they looked around to see what they might get.





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There is a rear port and this design contributes significantly to bass. One can feel the air motion if you place your hand over the port, but unlike some other speakers, during music I didn't hear any tell-tale "chuffing" sounds from the port itself.

The speaker is equipped with bi-wiring / bi-amping terminals. This two-way, bass-reflex system is rated at four ohms with minimum impedance of 3.3 ohms at 265 Hz. Most decent amps shouldn't have a problem with that, however this speaker will sound better if you drive it with

something stronger than a Les Cheapeaux brand home theater receiver. Frequency response is rated at 42 to 30,000 Hz. Sensitivity is rated at 86 dB SPL for one-watt input. The instruction manual includes information in several languages. There is adequate discussion of cables, speaker placement and general specifications. The German language section covers home theater setups as well (maybe they assume folks in the U.S. won't use the system for that).

I initially set up the speakers about 90 inches apart and 15 inches from the rear wall. The side walls were at least five feet away. For the first few weeks I just listened casually to a variety of sources including an FM tuner and TV monitor. These speakers were immediately a pleasure. Their wide dispersion is wonderful for long listening sessions or when two people want to share the pleasure (as was often the case). The soundstage was steady as rock. The speakers delivered an open soundstage, one that extended well beyond the speakers to the side and similarly offered considerable depth.

I don't generally believe it necessary to "break in" equipment and the editor may chide me for mentioning it now, but the fact is, these speakers improved over the first few weeks. There was, to me, more clarity in the midrange over the initial time, most noticeable on female vocals.

The CL 310i's provide more bass than we have a right to expect from any driver or system this size, and the rear port is quite active. The bass was generally solid, without exaggeration or smearing, though on a few recordings there appeared to be a slight rise in the neighborhood of around 60 Hz. This was never obtrusive and was ameliorated somewhat by moving the speakers forward toward the listening position. I later hooked up a Hsu subwoofer, crossing it over at 70 Hz, and I never heard the anomaly again. As expected, the Hsu extended the bass significantly. I was also able to move the speakers forward to about 18 inches from the rear wall. The Hsu mated well with the Elac speakers, but I should point out that ELAC manufactures its own subwoofer though I did not have the opportunity to test it. (Maybe next time, eh, Mr. Editor?)

## N O T E S

**ELAC CL 310i Jet Loudspeaker**, \$1,700.00 per pair; optional stands, \$350.00 per pair. U.S. distribution by Trian Corp., 5819 Hwy. K, Waunakee, WI 53597; phone 608/850-3600, fax 608/850-3602; e-mail sales@trian.com, website www.triancorp.com.

### Associated Equipment

I used a variety of equipment with the Elacs, but most often it was an AudioSource Amp Two (120 watts per channel into four ohms), Cambridge Audio tuner T500, Proton AP 2000II preamp, JVC XV N50 DVD/CD Player, Toshiba 36HFX71 HD monitor, Pioneer DV563 SACD/DVD Audio player. Elac does not recommend any specific cables though they do suggest a minimum section of 2.5 square mm with cable runs longer than five meters. I used high-quality unbranded 16-gauge copper cable with five-foot runs.

Much of my listening consisted of standard CD and DVD-Audio recordings I knew well or, in some instances, recordings of works I had recently heard in live performances. Not that I think speakers can or should sound like a live performance; just that live is a good reference point. I have just a few SACD discs which I also listened to.

Symphonies sounded full with wide dynamic range when the sound levels were up appropriately. I noticed this especially when listening to some Haydn symphonies shortly after hearing "the real thing" in concert.

I did find that the ELACS sound significantly better when given some power. At low sound levels, they are quite good, but such levels simply don't reveal what these speakers are capable of. At higher SPL levels, the detail remains amazingly clear, and these speakers can reveal the best of recordings which offer a wide dynamic range. No, you don't have to blast them to levels that would break your lease, but you might want to play them loud enough to make you grateful that you have friendly, understanding neighbors.

Reproduction of high frequencies was always clear, and displayed no harshness when the source was good. While the smooth high frequencies might be the first thing you notice, I should point out the Elacs also have a wonderfully clear midrange. Violins and cellos sounded delicate on my Haydn and

& Found (CD 32 Jazz 32020) and the Michelle Willson recording *Wakeup Call* (Rounder 11661-9639-2). I had recently seen the band and the sax player, Scott Shetler, sounds almost as fantastic on CD as he does live.

I was often struck by the way these speakers delivered the resonance of instruments such as the piano and managed to produce such realistic vocals on recordings such as the Norah Jones CDs. Tracy Chapman has made a comeback in my home recently and the Elac speakers fully revealed her wonderful voice and the crisp percussion on this fine new CD.

Elac has provided me with some wonderful hours of listening. The CL 310i's sound exceptionally good by themselves with more than adequate bass for many listeners, though I suspect that ardent audiophiles will accompany them with a subwoofer. Such a combination will easily rival speaker systems costing considerably more while pleasing and surprising you with a wide stage, wonderful dispersion, great dynamics and zero beaming. I love these speakers.

**I love these speakers;  
they've provided me with  
some wonderful listening.**

Boccherini concerto recording (EMI 5165235).

To me, the mix on the Neil Young *Harvest* DVD-Audio is a considerable improvement over the CD and LP versions. The bass is tight on this version, without being overpowering. This recording still shows some limits on high frequencies and it becomes yet clearer listening on the Elacs that the problem was in the master recording and not the speakers or player.

The saxophone had just the right "bite" on the Houston Person's *Lost*

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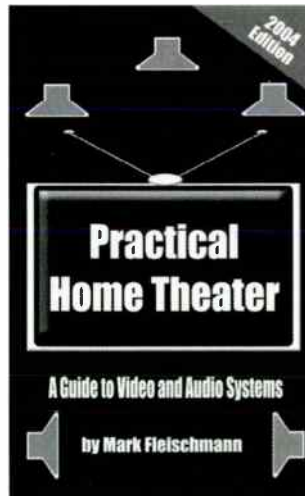
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# *Lexicon RT-10 Universal Digital Disc Player*

Anthony H. Cordesman

**I** SUPPOSE THAT A TRUE high-end audiophile would be willing to buy the best individual DVD player, DVD-A player, SACD player, and CD player. With an ardent audiophile's real dedication, he would find space for these four different units, and even wrestle with the required sets of cables. In practice, however, most of us want a life that is a lot simpler, particularly when HD-DVD threatens to make every existing DVD player obsolete in a few years. The same will also be true for current AV preamp configurations if the audio industry ever gets its act together and actually standardizes on a secure digital link for DVD-A and SACD that eliminates the present need for 5.1 analog stages in the player. And then there also is the little matter of whether DVD-A and SACD will really become viable formats with standardized speaker numbers and placement, bass management, speaker distance settings, etc. While as a reviewer, I do need more than one digital source component, but I cannot bring myself to recommend this to you.

The Lexicon RT-10 is clearly the type of digital signal source the industry should focus on. It can play virtually any 5-inch optical disc, including CD, CD-R, CD-RW, Video CD, S-VCD, and MP-3. It can also play SACD, DVD, DVD-Video, DVD-Audio, DVD-R, and DVD-RW. This doesn't cover the HD-DVDs to come, but there is no standard and no one knows when such players will be available. The Lexicon RT-10 comes as close to "one box fits all" as anything you can buy.

The Lexicon is not the only unit with these capabilities. In fact, it uses the same basic mechanism and some of the same electronics as the Pioneer DV-47A/47i and the Onkyo DV-SP800. The Lexicon RT-10 does, however, make a much more serious attempt at being a "reference quality" unit, albeit at the rather considerable list price of \$3,495.00. Not cheap, although still less than many quality D/A converters for CD and cheaper than some quality SACD players. Most importantly, it is the best universal

or combination player for DVD-V, DVD-A, SACD, and standard CD that I have encountered to date.

## Video Quality

The video quality of the Lexicon RT-10 is as good as that of any unit I've encountered that does not incorporate advanced video processing. But let me tell you a little secret. Many very reasonably priced DVD players now provide you with very high quality video. The Pioneer DV-47A, a moderately priced unit, has excellent progressive scan capability, handles video conversions smoothly, and has component outputs. It also can be tweaked to improve the picture by matching video settings to your specific display and lighting.

Moreover, no matter what you pay, no DVD player will ever be better than the DVD standard permits, and unhappily the video quality of most DVDs falls far short of this standard. Video buffs may get excited about the technical details of slightly jagged edges or technical performance on test discs, and certainly you do want the best DVD video you can get.

All you have to do, however, is look at any DVD movie with distant scenery; take the classic film "Last of the Mohegans." You'll quickly realize DVD simply cannot resolve enough detail to match the three-dimensional quality of film and robs long distance shoots of much of their impact and beauty. The same is true of apparent depth and fine detail. Take a look at the lines of British soldiers in the more distant battle scenes in "The Patriot" on any large screen TV. Sorry, but the image looks totally unrealistic. Is DVD better than VHS, Beta, S-VHS, or laserdisc? Hell, yes! But, I am a movie buff, I work with television, and I've spent years in photography. To me the differences between the "very good" DVD video images from most discs and players and the state-of-the-art performance from cutting-edge players with test DVDs is visually unimportant. The best in DVD still lags far behind the picture quality of movies, the new HD movie tapes or HDTV. Putting it simply, DVD needs to be replaced by HD DVD as soon as possible.

All that said, however, if you still want the best you can get, the

Lexicon RT-10 will give you outstanding video performance with the usual DVD test discs. If you want technical bells and whistles, the RT-10 has progressive-scan component video output, 12-bit/108-MHz digital-to-analog con-

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## Lexicon's RT-10 takes the digital side of DA conversion close to state-of-the-art limits.

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verters, and pro type BNC component video output connectors.

I also have a Pioneer DV-47A and an Onkyo DV-SP800, but the Lexicon provides a better picture. Not dramatically better, but better. It also has a more robust output i.e. is more ground-loop resistant and can drive longer cables, while being less sensitive to the differences in those cables. One of the differences you pay for in the RT-10 is a new analog video filter after the video D/A converters; it uses discrete parts and is designed to minimize phase error at high frequencies. The RT-10 also has a special high-speed video amplifier to drive the BNC component video outputs.

The RT-10's menus allow you to make a very wide range of detailed video adjustments, and its video memory locations to allow use of different video displays. While the picture is best using BNC connectors and cables, the RT-10 also has component video outputs with RCA connectors, two composite video outputs, and an S-video output.

## Overall Audio Quality

I suspect most readers of this magazine will be more interested in the audio quality of the RT-10 than the video quality, and I should note that the RT-10 takes the purely digital side of DA conversion just about as far as the state-of-the-art permits. It has built-in 24-bit/192-kHz digital-to-analog converters for all six analog output channels to allow high-bandwidth formats, such as DVD-A and SACD, to be reproduced in full resolution without any reduction in the sampling rate or digital word length.

The RT-10 also features three S/PDIF digital audio outputs. One AES/EBU, one coaxial, and one

optical connector allow for external decoding and processing of CD, Dolby Digital, dts, and PCM sources. For most users, this means that the sound quality for these sources will be determined by the sound quality of their AV processor, and I should note that RT-10 is a very good transport for this purpose. A handful of extremely expensive CD transports sound slightly better with particular CDs, but these differences are minor. The fact is that all modern DVD transports deliver a very high-quality digital signal.

The RT-10 provides a slightly better digital sound quality in my system using its AES/EBU output than I get from the Pioneer DV-47A or the Onkyo DV-SP800, but this may simply be because an AES/EBU output works better in my system. If you have a high-quality AV processor and do not intend to use the analog outputs of your player or intend to listen to DVD-A or SACD, then you are not going to hear much difference. This is particularly true with the few 24-bit/96-kHz stereo recordings around if your AV preamp processor can play them. A few firms like Chesky and AIX still sell such recordings and they are at least as good through a top AV unit as any SACD or DVD-A products I have heard to date.

If you do care about DVD-A and SACD sound, it's a different story. The RT-10 does not have a digital output for DVD-A and SACD, like the proprietary ones developed by Meridian, Pioneer, and Denon. It does, however, have a set of six-channel analog outputs driven by a custom high-speed audio amplifier using discrete components instead of an op-amp in the analog outputs. A conventional transformer power supply is used for all the audio circuits, instead of a noisier switching power supply.

In short, the RT-10 is much more sophisticated in those performance areas that good ears, time and experience have shown matter most to sound quality.

## CD Sound Quality

One of my key tests for every DVD player and AV preamp/processor is to put it in my stereo reference system and compare it directly against the sound of a Mark Levinson 360S DA Converter. By

this standard, the RT-10 is not at reference quality, but on the other hand you must be really willing to buy one of the most expensive CD DA converters on the market. While the CD sound with the Levinson is better than the RT-10's, it is also better than the CD sound with any other AV processor I have heard, other than the Mark Levinson Model 40 and – more arguably – the Meridian 861. If you compare the 360S with the RT-10, the sound of the 360S is more detailed, and this makes the bass sound more deep. The 360S does a better job of defining the rhythm line in the upper bass. Midrange detail is slightly better, with clear low-level detail, better definition of dynamic detail, and more realistic musical harmonics. Upper octave detail is cleaner as well. Overall dynamic contrasts are clearer, and the sound stage (in terms of imaging, depth, and width) is resolved slightly better. Really complex musical material such as grand opera and ultra-complex symphonic music like the Saint Saens Third Symphony and Mahler's Eight Symphony are better defined, a bit more detailed, and more realistic.

There are, however, two critical points here. First, you are far more likely to listen to a CD through the digital processing of your AV unit than through the audio outputs of the RT-10. Second, I need to emphasize my use of the term "slightly." The Mark Levinson 360S DA Converter by itself costs a lot more than the Lexicon RT-10, even ignoring the cost of the heavily tweaked transport I use. The 360S had damn well better have superior sonic performance.

More importantly, the Lexicon RT-10 still has rather superior CD sound quality and Meridian makes the only other DVD player whose CD sound that I can praise to the same degree. (It, too, is more expensive than the RT-10.) Moreover, no combination or universal player I have heard competes with the RT-10 in its ability to get a musically convincing balance of timbre, detail and transparency, micro dynamics and dynamic life, and soundstage realism.

Far too many DVD players have at least a slight glare in the upper midrange or some hardness that

may appear to give reproduced sound more punch, but ultimately is fatiguing and never occurs in live music. Many current players also slightly blur bass detail, making truly deep bass harder to hear, as well as blurring percussion and

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### **More importantly, Lexicon's RT-10 offers superior CD sound quality.**

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plucked notes from a bass viol. Far too often, such players also take some of the life out of the music. In addition, sudden dynamic contrasts are somewhat deadened. The same is true of the smaller changes in loudness that constantly occur in music.

The Lexicon RT-10 may make some compromises in sound quality, but these are certainly minor in comparison and they never get in the way of the music. It is obvious that someone at Lexicon still does listen to live music and the RT-10 is "voiced" to be realistic, rather than dramatic.

I should warn you that this does not mean that the RT-10 has the slightly recessed midrange that some tube and tweaked CD players use to bring out an added impression of "depth" or soften the inherent upper midrange harshness common to the vast majority of today's close-miked or over-processed or over-mixed CDs. The RT-10 isn't euphonic. What it is, however, is very good. Not absolute reference quality, not perfect, but truly very good.

### **Dolby and dts**

The analog audio outputs of the Lexicon RT-10 do a good job of reproducing Dolby and dts movie sound tracks, and Dolby and dts music. The 5.1 analog outputs of the RT-10 will sound better with Dolby and dts than the analog outputs of a mediocre or poor-sounding AV preamp processor if they are played straight into an AV amp using the level and balance controls of the RT-10. I doubt, however, that many serious users are going to put up with this awkward arrangement.

My real advice is, don't use the analog outputs of the RT-10 for this

purpose. It simply does not make sense, even if your AV preamp processor has a 5.1-channel input circuit which bypasses the D/A converter and the complex processing circuits in most such units. It is almost impossible to set a DVD player to make the sound field as good as the settings in a really good AV preamp processor. The direct digital input will almost always be more live and detailed, and if you have a 7.1 system, you simply are out of luck with the new soundtracks with rear channels.

The iron law of upgrading and investing in a surround-sound system is to first get a truly high-quality AV preamp processor. (And, incidentally, Lexicon makes some excellent units.)

### **DVD-A Sound**

The best case for using the 5.1-analogue outputs of the RT-10 is that this technique allows you to listen to DVD-A and SACD. Before I get to specifics, however, I should make something very clear. There is as yet no compelling reason to rush out and buy a DVD-A and SACD unit based on playback quality. I have heard a few really good surround DVD-A and SACD discs, but they exist, however, as a small minority. Far too often, as well, their musical content is mediocre. This, however, is only the start of the problem. Many are remasterings of old recordings, often mixes of different sessions of old recordings made with different equipment and not always from the master tape.

Not only are many poor analog originals being sold in DVD-A or SACD format without clear warning on the label, but so are many early digital recordings that are similarly strikingly inferior in sound quality. Some DVD-As are also being sold that actually use CD (44.1 kHz) levels of digital processing. There also is no way to know how good the electronics are in the recording chain even when the recording is a new release, and too many newer recordings are mastered with recording electronics which fall short of the state of the art.

The surround-sound stage is usually about as natural as a two-headed snake. In many cases, you also find that the so-called 5.1 standard has been abandoned and there's no

warning on the label. You open up the box and you have a four- or six-channel recording with no center-front signal. The LFE channel is being constantly abused with excessive bass or used to provide "height" data, instead of deep bass, without there being a clear warning on the booklet.

I know of no conceivable technical reason that DVD-A and SACDs should cost more than CDs at the best of times. The worst of times come all too often. You have at least a 50% chance of getting something that is no better than CD quality and you often get a product that sounds much worse. These problems are also more serious with DVD-A recordings than with SACD recordings. [Editor's Note: I don't argue with Tony often, but the mastering of both DVD-As and SACDs costs four to six times what CD mastering does, and there are huge additional costs from dual-layer SACDs and the difficulties from low penetration of both formats i.e. dual distribution.]

All that said, I have still found that DVD-A can be better than CD and at least as good as SACD. My prior experience in reviewing the Meridian 800/861 combination and in listening to studio playback of DVD-A has shown me that DVD-A can be better than the CD of the same recording, and the RT-10 can produce cleaner sound with DVD-A than CD. If you want to sample this new format, the RT-10 is a very good way to do it.

There also are a few labels that I have found you can trust. AIX records ([www.aixrecords.com](http://www.aixrecords.com)) offers naturally recorded DVD-As in stereo and surround sound at 96-kHz/24-bits, plus the same performance on the other side in dts 5.1 and Dolby Digital with both stage and audience surround sound. The performance quality tends to be a bit ordinary, but the sound quality is very good to terrific and this comes through quite clearly when this DVD-A is reproduced through the RT-10.

One example of an AIX recording that I use as a reference is *Zephyr: Voices Unbound* (AIX 80012). Both the 96/24 stereo and the DVD-A surround on this disc are excellent. If you play the DVD-A bands back through the RT-10,

complex voices come through with a level of clarity and musical detail that give even simple songs such as "Month of Maying" a very natural feel. The stereo and surround versions also have more realistic vocal sibilants than the dts 5.1 version, and are free of the slight upper midrange hardness or dulling that has affected most Dolby digital music until very recently.

Another example is the AIX recording of the Brahms *Piano Quintet in F-Minor, Op. 34*, by

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## While most high-resolution DVD-As or SACDs don't sound better to me, I have found a few that are good.

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Dolores Stevens and the Ives String Quartet (AIX 80005). The detail and harmonic integrity of the piano is excellent, and so are its dynamics. Strings are highly detailed without a trace of unrealistic harshness or slight dulling of the upper midrange and treble.

Another label that I have learned to trust is Tacet ([www.tacet.de](http://www.tacet.de)), which produces classical DVD-As that are straight 96-kHz/24-bit 5.1 recordings with a sonic perspective that is generally more "stage" or immersive than "audience" or performers in front. The overall sound quality, however, is very good. I used the same Tacet recordings as a reference with the RT-10 that I used in a recent review of the Meridian 800/81 combination, and the RT-10 did a very good job of getting the best out of the Gade Trio recording of the Mozart Flute Quartets (TACET DVD D107). There are CDs with "digital flutes" which really get on my nerves, but the flute on this recording is very musical. And the violin and cello here have the kind of musicality lacking in far too many digital recordings.

The RT-10 produced the same level of performance with other Tacet recordings, ranging from Bach motets (Tacet DVD 108) to Mendelssohn string octets (Tacet DVD 94). Voices had unusually natural timbre, detail, and detailing of individual voices was very good. String sound again outperformed that of most other CD recordings, and the sound staging was natural

enough that it contributed to the music, rather than detracted from it. This was helped by the fact the Lexicon RT-10 allows very good adjustment of speaker size, output level, and speaker distance – on DVD A.

Chesky is a label you can virtually always trust, although the *Chesky DVD-Audio Collection* (Chesky HE726) requires a really good player before you can hear any improvement over Chesky CDs. (Bands 1 and 4 are particularly good). The Chesky live recording of Bucky Pizzarelli in *Swing Low* (Chesky CHDVD222) is both a very good recording and a very demanding one because this recording is a bit forward and can have too much upper midrange data on some systems. The DVD-A

version sounded much more like the master tape on the RT-10 than is the case with most DVD-A players. The Lexicon RT-10 also was consistently musical where many competing DVD-A players add a slight edge.

I have yet to find any DVD-A recording of mainstream pop music which really sounds better than CD on my reference system, although the surround mixes of many such DVD-A recordings have less aggressive and more natural upper midrange timbre. There are, however, a growing number of pop recordings that are as good in DVD-A as CD.

Faith Hill's *Cry* (Warner 48001-9) is a good case in point. The surround imaging may be a bit arbitrary, but when the DVD-A is played back through the RT-10, it is slightly cleaner, more dynamic, and more involving than the CD and the bass is more convincing. Deep bass is very good, and the overall sound excellent with control, detail, and dynamics. My only caution here is that far too many pop DVD-As are worse than the CD, in part because of remasterings with truly annoying surround imaging. (I can also assure you that the sampling rate in the DVD-As issued so far have nothing to do with practical sound quality. I have yet to hear a pop 24-bit/192-kHz DVD-A that is as good as the best 24-bit/96-kHz DVD-As – although this may well be because there are so few DVD-As within such a format.

To sum up, the RT-10 is not quite up to the reference sound quality of the Meridian 800 and 861 combination in playing back the best DVD-As – although you must keep in mind that the Meridian 800 is a far more expensive player and does not play back SACDs. The RT-10 does, for its part, have the smoother and most natural midrange of all the pure DVD-A players I have heard so far, and I am including here the DVD-A and SACD combination players. The Lexicon's deep bass and bass definition are slightly better than anything I've heard other than the Meridian 800 and 861 combination, and its upper midrange and highs have a musically natural timbre and clarity of detail, while much of the competition has a bit of edge and smearing of detail in this region. There are differences between the RT-10 and

Pioneer's Elite DV-47A or Onkyo's DVSP-800, but not "killer" differences; for me, however, the RT-10 is better in the areas that count most.

If you want to experiment with DVD-A now or in the very near future, the Meridian 800 and 861 may set the reference standard, but the Lexicon RT-10 is very good and much more affordable.

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**As with DVD-A, the best in SACD is worth searching for, and the RT-10 does a good job in both areas.**

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**SACD Sound**

I don't share the admiration many of my colleagues have for SACD, though I do believe that the best SACD stereo recordings have a cleaner upper midrange and treble

than the very best CDs. However, I find this true only when the recording is excellent musically, when it's mastered with the very best in equipment, and when the SACD is made with the most advanced digital equipment available.

By and large, the best in CDs (and there are far more fine CD recordings than there are equally good DVD-As or SACDs) sound at least as good as these high-resolution formats, while the dynamics, deep bass, and deep bass contrast from my Mark Levinson 360S sound better than those of any SACD player I have yet heard. Alternatively, I have not yet

heard any evidence that the state of the art in SACD is better than the state of the art in DVD-A or 24/96 stereo. I also have some serious reservations about SACD surround which I do not have about SACD stereo. It may well be the recordings, but the best SACD stereo is cleaner and more open than the best SACD surround.

Like the best in DVD-A, however, the best in SACD is still worth searching for, and I found that Lexicon's RT-10 was a serious rival in most respects to dedicated SACD players such as the Sony XA777ES. The SACD sound of the Lexicon RT-10 has very good low level musical detail, together with a superior level of transparency in the mid-range and upper octaves. It performed very well indeed with both classic stereo SACDs and demanding jazz recordings like Beck and Ryerson, Alto (dmp SACD-06). The natural sound of Jacintha's voice makes *Autumn Leaves* (Groove Note GRV-1006-3) one of my favorite recordings, and the RT-10 gave this recording more natural dynamics and a cleaner bass line than the Sony, although the level of midrange and treble transparency was not quite as good.

I did have a problem in assessing the limits of the Lexicon RT-10's performance with multichannel SACD. I would love to say that there were a lot of multichannel SACD recordings that tested the limits of what SACD can do, but there aren't. Far too many are either mediocre in musical terms or raise questions about their sound stage that are answered in the jewelbox insert booklet.

**N O T E S**

**Lexicon RT-10 universal CD player, \$3,495.00.** Lexicon, Inc. 3 Oak Park, Bedford, MA 01730-1441, phone 781/280-0300, fax 781/280-0490, e-mail info@harmanspecialtygroup.com, website www.harmanspecialtygroup.com.

**Associated Equipment  
AV System One**

Lexicon DC-10 DVD/SACD/DVD-A player; Meridian 861 AV preamp-processor; Lexicon MC-12B AV preamp-processor; Theta Dreadnaught II amplifier; Infinity Intermezzo speaker system with four 4.1T towers, two 2.6 rear speakers, and 3.5C center channel; Revel B-15 subwoofer; Zenith P60W38/38H plasma TV; Zenith HD-520 receiver; Mitsubishi WS-65907 HDTV rear projection television; Kimber and Wireworld video and audio interconnects, and Kimber, Wireworld and Discovery Cable speaker cables.

**AV System Two**

Onkyo SPDV-800 DVD/SACD player; Onkyo TS-RX-800 AV receiver; Polk LSi-25, Lsi-15, LSC five-channel speaker system, plus Polk 650 subwoofer; Kimber and Discovery video and audio interconnects, and Kimber and Discovery speaker cables; Sony XBR-400 HDTV monitor; Pioneer PDP-HD 4330 plasma TV, and Samsung SIR-TS160 HDTV tuner.

**Reference Audio System**

Van den Hul Black Beauty, Sumiko Celebration, and Koetsu Onyx phono cartridges; VPI TNT turntable with HWJr II tonearm; Pioneer Elite DV-47A SACD/DVD player; PS Audio Lambda CD transport (modified); Mark Levinson 360S DA converter; Pass Xono phono preamp; Pass X0 stereo preamp; Pass X600 power amplifiers; Dynaudio Evidence Temptation and Thiel 7.2 Speakers; Kimber XL, Transparent Audio Reference XL, and Wireworld Supereclipse and Eclipse interconnects and digital cables.



If you are lucky enough to listen to exceptional SACDs like the Gaudeamus recording of *Sacred Feast* (dmp SACD-09), however, you'll find the RT-10 rivals the Sony XA777ES in many respects. Like the Sony, the RT-10 sounds somewhat different in the multichannel mode as compared to standard stereo. SACD multichannel recordings usually sound somewhat warmer but less detailed in the upper octaves than their stereo equivalent do as well as presenting less imaging detail. The result, quite frankly, is more realistic in terms of live listening. Real world music has a striking lack of energy in the upper midrange and treble range or imaging detail compared to what has become common in modern recordings.

In terms of the differences between these two units, the Lexicon RT-10 provides a bit more overall detail in the midrange than the Sony XA777ES at the cost of a bit less detail in the upper midrange. I also preferred the bass energy and detail of the RT-10, although my listening panel felt that it was the bass of the Sony that was more natural.

These same differences emerged during my listening to a range of recordings as broad as the Midori, Imai & Eschenbach recording of Mozart's *Sinfonia Concertante* (Sony 9699-89488-6, the Cincinnati Symphony version of Berlioz *Symphony Fantastique* (Telarc SACD 60578) and the Bucky Pizzarelli recording of *Swing Live*

(Chesky SACD 223). The SACD and DVD-A versions of this last recording are, incidentally, of roughly equivalent sound quality although there is a slight difference in soundstage perspective. In both cases, the interplay between clarinet, guitar, and percussion had a natural energy and life missing in most Compact Discs.

If you are looking for other examples of high quality SACD surround recordings to justify your purchase of the Lexicon RT-10, I have to confess that I am biased by the fact I am one of the four living people in the world that still buys classical recordings. You might, however, at least try joining me and here I recommend Pieter Wispelwey's cello recording of Tchaikovsky,

## Truth in Labeling

**T**HE RECORDING INDUSTRY is simply wonderful at attacking audiophiles for "pirating." No one can review a broad selection of DVD-As and SACDs, however, without becoming aware of the fact that the recording industry seems to have a total lack of integrity in labeling its own products.

Virtually all DVD-A and SACD recordings suffer from grave problems in the way they label their covers, folders, and content. Far too often, the end result is misleading to the point of being shameful. If the recording industry is to give the consumer the information that he or she deserves, all DVD-As and SACDs must meet the following standards.

It is dishonest not to clearly label a recording made as a reissue as a reissue and to not show the recording date on the back of the DVD-A and SACD. There may be a case for such reissues – although I have yet to hear this when the CD version is remastered with care. The buyer should, however, know that the recording is an old one.

It is dishonest to issue recordings made with older equipment, and lower sampling rates, as if they were state of the art DVD-As and SACDs. The labeling should clearly state how the recording is made and the sampling rate for DVD-As.

It is contemptible to use a non-standard surround format and not warn the buyer on the label and not explain the set up differences in detail in the folder. Departures from the 5.1 surround like four-channel surround, using the LFE channel as a height channel, etc. should be clearly labeled and described, not buried in the folder or not reported at all.

The recording's use of the LFE channel should always be labeled. If it needs to be manually turned off for use with full range speakers, this should be

clearly labeled. If there is no LFE data, or it is used for other purposes, this should be labeled.

The folder should include detailed set up instruction for all non-standard recordings.

The folder should include a diagram showing the intended layout of the instruments and voices so the user has a map of the intended soundstage. It should not be left to the buyer to guess.

The equipment used in a recording should always be described in the folder, as well as the miking technique.

It should always be clear whether the method of surround recording is true surround, front with ambience, immersive, remastered from stereo or quadraphonic tapes, or simply invented.

The recording should never have a loud surround track with massive bass of the kind common on many DVD-As. Some are at a speaker-damaging higher level than the material. All are a sign of an incompetent and tasteless set of production values.

All recordings should have a test tone for all channels and for the bass. I find variations of several DB are common between the set up test tones on players, and far too many recordings have a unique channel balance. The buyer should always have the option of setting up the channel balance and bass management exactly as the recording was intended to be reproduced.

There will always be those who play with bass levels, fake surround effects, and sell over-priced crap. I don't see why the recording industry should be surprised at the slow take off of DVD-A and SACD when it shows so little concern for the audiophile. Or, how it can complain about piracy when it has so little practical integrity?

Saint Saens, and Bruch (Channel Classics CCS SA 16501); Hillary Hahn's violin recording of Brahms and Stravinsky *Violin Concertos* (Sony SS89649); and Robert Spano and Atlanta Symphony recording of Vaughn Williams' "Sea Symphony" (Telarc SACD-60588).

There are, however, options in other areas. For example, David Johansen and the Harry Smiths (Chesky SACD 225) is a very natural blues recording. Joe Beck and Ali Ryerson put in a very good jazz guitar and flute combination on *Django* (dmp SACD-13), although this is an egregious example of a badly labeled recording (the subwoofer channel can only be used as a full-range height channel or center-surround; how can the same channel be used for both?), and you have to read the all-too-fine print inside the booklet to find this out.

None of these recommendations are likely to represent the ultimate state of the art in multichannel recording, but they all are musically involving, their overall sound quality is high, and they provide a feeling of space and ambience that most

two-channel stereo recordings do not. They all illustrate the potential of multichannel SACD and, yes, they also confirm my previous comments about the sound quality of the Lexicon RT-10.

As was the case with DVD-A, the Lexicon RT-10 is not the absolute state of the art. It again, however, is

---

**The Lexicon RT-10 is exactly what real-world audio-videophiles need. Highly recommended!**

---

very musical and allows you to explore the best in SACD sound, and it does this at a relatively modest price. My only reservation is that it does not have a "speaker distance" setting that works in SACD. This is correctable by playing the 5.1 output through your AV pre-amp/processor and using its sound level settings. I have yet to hear enough soundstage precision in a multichannel SACD to feel this matters very much.

**Summary Judgments**

If you are feeling truly rich, can ignore the fact that today's units probably have a limited useful life span because of HD-DVD and new connection systems to come, then by all means, spend a fortune on separate CD, DVD, DVD-A, and SACD components. You can get better performance than the Lexicon by paying a great deal more and your investment might be the true state of the art for a few months.

For most real-world audio-videophiles, however, the Lexicon RT-10 universal digital disc player is exactly what they need. It is a high performance unit in every respect. It is also as expensive

an investment as any one ought make until the software and hardware industries get their acts together on new standards for HD-DVD, DVD-A, and SACD and such products actually become available.


The Lexicon RT-10 is the best combination player yet, and delivers very good performance for money. Though not quite "ultimate reference quality" in performance, it is "reference quality for the sane." Highly recommended!



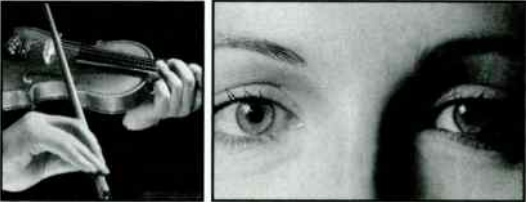
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**RT 800**

# Xin Super Mini Amp



Smaller than an Ipod ...

**S**OME PRODUCTS SOLVE problems and this one does a superb job of that. Many of us listen to small portable players or computer sound cards, and almost as many refuse to use those horrible headsets which are almost invariably supplied with these items. Substituting some reasonably good headphones is only a partial solution, however; the small players simply can't drive better headphones to adequate sound levels. The Xin Super Mini Amp solves this problem nicely by boosting the device's output substantially.

Since it's supposed to work with small devices, the Mini Amp is, as the name suggests, small. We are talking *inches* and *lightweight* here. About 2.5 by 1.9 x 0.6 inches and 2.5 ounces including the batteries. The amp uses three AAA batteries and they seemed to me to last a long time (darn it, no, I didn't time them). Directions for the amp are a bit confusing, being limited to a single sheet of paper which actually covers several versions of the Mini Amp model. Currently, you can get

the amp with a digital or analog volume control. The unit I reviewed was digital, controlled with two very small buttons for up/down volume. There is a blue power light to let you know that the amp is on. Cables and other accessories are available at [www.fixup.net](http://www.fixup.net).

The amp has an input (gold plated mini jack) for your device on the top and an output for the headphones on the bottom, an arrangement which seemed counter-intuitive to me. There is also the volume control and *on/off* switch. In most cases I set the volume on the Mini Amp and then further controlled volume from the player or computer I was using.

I initially attached the amp to a Panasonic SV-SD80 MP3 player and then a Sangean DT110 portable radio. The Panasonic's sound was especially improved using BeyerDynamic and Grado headphones. Carrying another component was a minor problem, though I could see it might be more difficult if I had been running or jogging

strenuously (I'm not the type). But the Mini Amp addition wasn't a bother even while walking briskly or moving around and sitting on a subway.

Having found it so successful with portables, I decided to try using the Xin Super Mini Amp with my Turtle Beach computer soundcard and was pleasantly surprised. The Turtle Beach had sounded ok, but the Mini Amp made a big difference. I found that even my Grado headphones sounded more open and detailed, and there was suddenly ample bass from the MP3 files which previously simply couldn't be delivered with the existing player. I believe the Xin amp delivered only what the device provided, adding or subtracting nothing.

The manual suggests that break-in period for the amp makes a difference, though I confess I didn't hear it. From the start, the sound from portables was quite open, with significant headroom and solid bass. It was difficult to crank up the volume enough to *really* run out of headroom, though clipping did happen in a soft manner at totally loud levels. There was good detail in the music I listened to, but of course the feeding unit, be it a portable device or soundcard, will need to be of decent quality to being with. All of mine do supply good quality, just not power, and I would now have problems listening seriously to any of these devices without the Mini Amp.

Which suggests that you might want at least two of these .... I plan to make the Mini Amp a permanent addition to my computer sound.

## N O T E S

**Xin Super Mini Amp**, \$149.99. XY Computing and Network, 618 Ninth Street, No. 23, Davis, CA 95616, USA. Phone 309/276-0248, e-mail [sales@fixup.net](mailto:sales@fixup.net), website [www.fixup.net](http://www.fixup.net).

### Associated Equipment

Portables: Panasonic SV-SD80, Sangean DT110. Computer: AMD XP1900 with Turtle Beach Santa Cruz soundcard and LITE-On LTD 163 CD/DVD player. Headphones: BeyerDynamic DT131 and Grado SR 80.

# Aurum Cantus Leisure 2 SE Speaker

Ron Nagle



**L**ISTEN UP! This is what I have been trying to tell you, the entry level price for good speakers and tube electronics is coming down like confetti at a ticker tape parade. Like I told you before, "It's a no-brainer, Bunky!" And now, at last, I may be able to afford to participate in my favorite hobby. And, how is that so, you might ask?

Well, it's the Chinese Connection. Okay, so this is not exactly the hottest news flash, but the hundreds of millions of Yuan the world's most populous country has sunk into upgrading their manufacturing facilities are becoming evident in a handful of products made to a higher standard of quality.

One entrepreneur and design consultant told me that on one of his visits to China, he watched a team of Italian engineers install a \$1-million, computer-controlled, wood veneer-making machine in a Chinese speaker manufacturing facility. Quoting said entrepreneur: "They ship raw logs in at one end of the factory and finished speakers come out the other end." The basic economy of the whole country is moving from an agrarian base to manufacturing, a fact which is pretty well-known.

And so it goes that a speaker made in Shandong Province, China, can evolve into something so good that it can compete with just about any other high-end loudspeakers in the world-class marketplace. Somewhere along the line, the Chinese must have learned the difficult and exotic art of designing and marketing a quality speaker for the American market. And in so doing, they seem to have also learned to build first-rate manufacturing facilities and to use cutting-edge methods and materials, not to mention the talents of speaker design consultants such as Joseph D'Appolito and Phil Jones.

## The Box

The Aurum Cantus Leisure 2 SE (Special Edition) is a two-way design utilizing the OEM G-2 Aurum Cantus aluminum ribbon tweeter and a 5.2-inch mid-woofer with a high-performance composite cone made of carbon fiber and Kevlar. The tweeter is rated out to 40 kHz and the low end is spec'ed as being 3 dB down at 55 Hz, the cross over is said to be at 2500 Hz, and sensitivity is given as 87-dB SPL for 1 watt at 1 meter. The speakers are made as a matched pair; my sample pair both had the same serial number, K00123. The front baffle is slanted backward to help in aligning the signal arrival of the two drivers. The matching gloss black leather and lacquer stands had a height of 24 inches, and listening position proved not critical. Tapering upward from a 9-inch wide and 11-inch deep base to a 6 3/8-inch wide top, the non-parallel sides of these 25-lb. enclosures seemed to my knuckles to be unusually dense and inert. My sample was a two-tone design, with gorgeous Brazilian Rosewood veneer and black piano lacquer over MDF. The port is in the rear panel which is lacquered black and has very nice, heavy-duty, gold-plated binding posts mounted on a thick

aluminum badge plate. The appearance, the fit, and the finish all are luxurious and scream quality! I was very interested to find out that this speaker and the better-known Red Rose Rosebud 2, which retails for \$3,500, are both made in the same Jin Lang Audio Co. factory in China. They share many things in common: The Aurum Cantus-sourced aluminum ribbon tweeter and a very similar mid-woofer, both use a ported enclosure of the same volume, and according to Red Rose, both drivers are "unavailable elsewhere."

### Prefacing your Predilections

This speaker won't fit as comfortably into everyone's system as it did into mine; ideally, I suppose, you ought to value some of the same things I do. But my job as a reviewer must be to allow you to understand and thereby match this speaker to your listening preferences. And that means telling you about my reference system. For starters, I have it set up on the short end of my rectangular living room, and their small size makes speaker placement much easier. Obviously, this two-way speaker is not full range; the lowest octaves of the musical spectrum are not strongly reproduced. Utilizing a test CD and a Radio Shack meter at my listening position, I measured a 40-Hz signal as being 7 dB lower than at the midband 1-kHz reference point. Now, that's still useable output but the 80 to 125 Hz range was up by 5 or 6 dB, so the system is not flat. This sort of response is intended, I believe, and mimics the bass response of my old British Chartwell LS 3/5A mini-monitors, which I still remember with great fondness. When I listened to a Frank Sinatra cut, *What's New*, from his album *Only the Lonely* (Capitol/Alliance-48471), I found the reproduction lacked just a bit of the cut's characteristic chest resonance to warm the sound of Frank's voice. As you might suspect, this is one of the response tradeoffs that speaker designers have to make to get the impression of low bass out of a small box. I should quickly note that this characteristic is not noticeable when listening to female vocalists.

Ranking second on my list of tradeoffs is an increasing tendency of the tweeter to beam as you get into higher frequencies. But this happens well above the vital midrange and far beyond the area of the human voice. This will not be a problem if you're like me and sit pretty well on the central horizontal axis of the speakers. In some situations, you may need to toe-in the speakers a bit.

The last and smallest nit I wish to pick concerns the efficiency of the mid-woofer driver. Like many dynamic units, it appears to need a good dose of power from a healthy amplifier to get it playing properly. This will not be a problem if you use a good amp with the system, and I do think that overall the designer of the Aurum Cantus has done a good job integrating these two drivers.

### Are You Compatible?

For me, this speaker fits very comfortably within my requirements. I am not an audiophile who demands lots of bass since my musical reference is and always has been the sound of a human voice. There may be those who could tell you when an oboe is off-pitch, but that's not me (thank goodness). I am a confirmed electrostatic speaker advocate; give me the openness and air, the effortless speed, the liquid ease which allows micro

dynamics to breath and me to believe. Paint the stage before me both wide and high, and with so many layers of depth, that I might step into it and dwell therein. Nothing else compares, nothing else is so seamless (save maybe a ribbon).

But consider this speaker. Like other small two-way speakers, they have the elusive ability to disappear, but not before they open the door upon a vista of sound. When I pushed up the volume well past my usual comfort level, the character of the ribbon never hardened or became strident. This driver has one quality I value greatly; it gets out of the way of the performance, it allows an intake of breath or an inflection of emotion to come through.

## NOTES

**Aurum Cantus Leisure 2 SE Speaker**, \$1,499.00 per pair. Kellsie Audio and Video Designs, 106 Hitching Post Lane, Yorktown Heights, NY 10598; phone 914/455-2138; e-mail info@kellsieavdesign.com. website www.kellsieavdesign.com.

### Associated Equipment Home Theater System

Hitachi TV, Coda Continuum 4-3-2 four-channel power amp for FL, C, and FR speakers, two Marantz MA800 mono block amps for LR and RR speakers, Sony SDP-EP9ES digital surround pre-amp, Infinity Prelude Composition speakers for all three front channels, QPS rear speakers, Sunfire MK2 LFE True subwoofer, and Echo Busters room panels.

### Stereo Reference System

Cambridge Audio Discmagic-1 compact disc transport, Cambridge S-700 Isomagic D/A converter, Art DI/O up-sampling A/D and D/A converter, Marantz DV8400 Universal CD player, Audio Research Classic 60 tube power amplifier for main speakers, Hafler 500 Mos-Fet power amplifier, Krell KAV 300iL integrated amp, Gradient crossover, Audio Research SP-9 MK-3 hybrid tube/Mos-Fet preamp, Quad ESL-63 speakers rebuilt and modified with dedicated Gradient woofers, Onix Grandmaster speaker cables to Quad panels, Esoteric Ultrathin cables to woofers, and AAD E-8 150-watt, self-powered woofer.

### Accessories

Isatrol 20-amp a.c. line conditioner with one-amp conditioner between an isolation transformer and digital components; ferrite beads on all interconnects and line cords; Room Tunes corner and ceiling panels; Argent Roomlens, Gryphon diffusion panels, interconnect cables from Monster (various), Nordost Red Dawn, Audio Research Litzline, Audiobahn half-meter digital, and Wireworld Eclipse-2; Wireworld 10-gauge a.c. power cord; Radio Shack SPL meter; Rives Audio Test CD, and a comfortable chair.

As a short experiment, I tried an American Acoustic Development (AAD) 8-inch powered subwoofer I had purchased for bass reinforcement in a home theater system. This didn't work out very well, and most of the time it seemed to me that I had just muddied up the lowest part of the midrange and the bass. I now believe that it would be a very difficult task to accurately match a subwoofer to this speaker.

Additionally, I tried the Aurum Cantus speakers with three different power amplifiers. The first was my highly modified Hafler 500 Mos-Fet power pumper, which was not bad but the combo had a fine grainy haze that overlay most of performances. The nature of that "haze" became evident when I switched to the Krell KAV 300iL integrated amplifier which painted a convincing midrange image, combining detail and speed, and highlighting exactly what these ribbons do best, all of this overlaid upon a darker background. With the Krell, the bass became taut and was better controlled, plus the two drivers seemed a closer match than they had been using the Hafler.

But in the end my trusty Audio Research Classic 60, a tube/Mos-Fet hybrid, won the top prize. I know some audiophiles would not agree with my preferences. After all, you would have to trade off the speed and bass control of a Krell to get the delicacy and subtle harmonic warmth of the CL60 treble and midrange, but this is where the human voice comes alive. Size does matter; you will find it very easy to adjust bass vs. treble balance as I did by moving the speaker's position relative to the rear wall.

Using my patented "Scale of Good Things," I have saved this speaker's best for last, namely *imaging!* This is an absolute requirement for me. The Aurum Cantus

speakers have the ability to project a convincing soundscape, one both that is both wide and deep, and one that seems to defy room boundaries and the diminutive size of the system. I dimmed the lights and began a new existence in a time when the music was live, magically dissolving the walls around me so that I was transported into the performance. At such moments, I require little else.

## Final Note

Now as it happens, every once in a while I find something that is really notable but relatively unknown. It might be very unique or practical and useful, or provide genuine value. It is with great personal satisfaction that I can let you in on it, because then I have done my job as reviewer. This is one of those times; this is a very fine \$1,499 speaker that could easily sell at twice that price. Henceforth, I will keep one eye focused on the Pacific Rim and the other in this bailiwick. Here is just one example of the many wonderful things out there that those two big commercial-conglomerate audio magazines will never find out about.

As you might have guessed by now, I purchased these speakers. As a matter of fact they were such a perfect fit into my system and preferences, that I mailed out my check before I finished writing this report. I hope that your musical taste runs roughly parallel to mine. If that be anywhere near the case, then I believe that the three of you will live happily ever after, and that you ought call the distributor post haste and arrange an audition.

P.S. I would like to acknowledge the input of friend and colleague Senior Editor Russ Novack and his Golden Ears.

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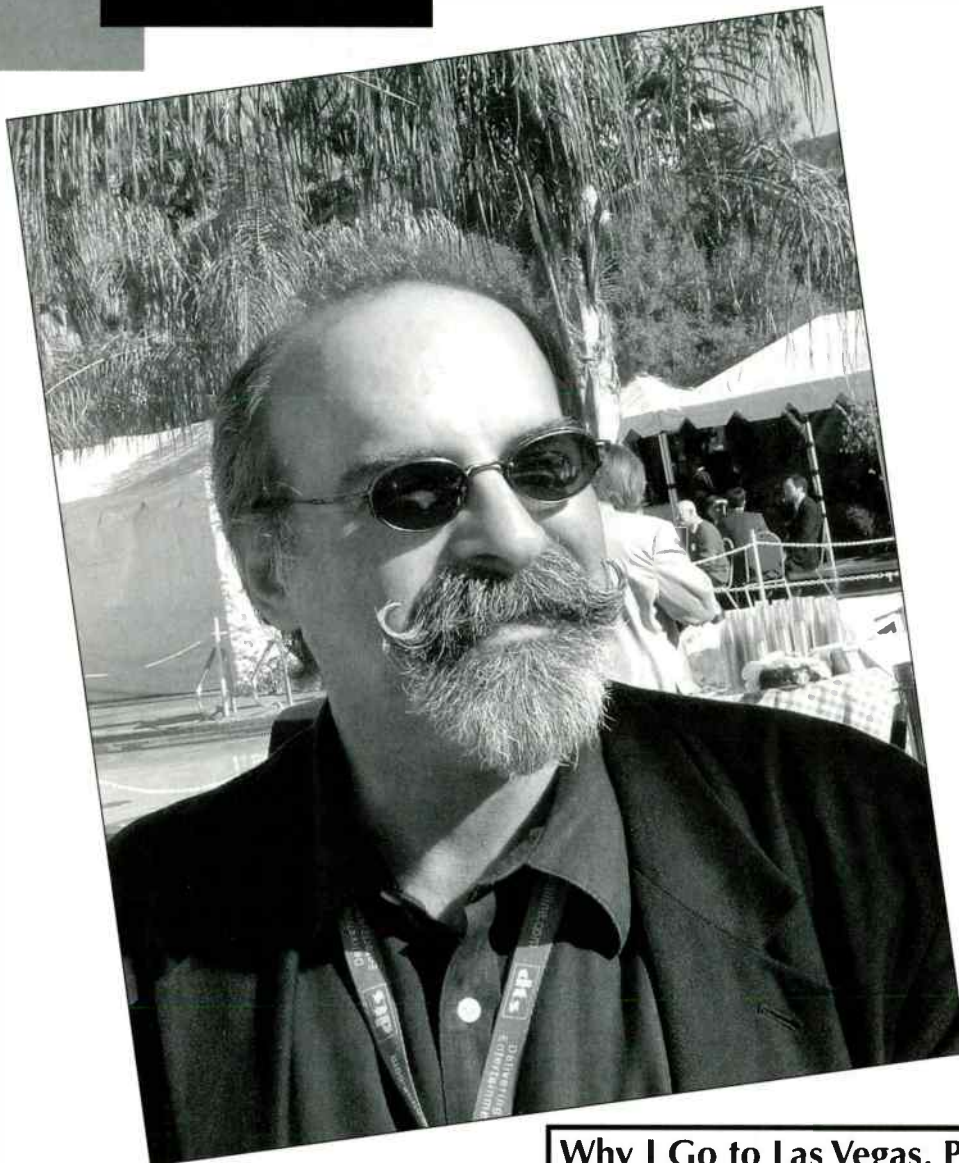
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## Photos Never Lie!

### Why I Go to Las Vegas, Part II . . .

At first, I thought it would be fun to have a "Name That Fuzzy-Faced Editor" contest, but then I realized that, despite his inherently retiring and reclusive demeanor, too many people would recognize this "Seldom Do Well," ex-pat Yank turned British audio journalist, Ken Kessler. So, here's the contest, which Caribbean pirate is Kessler impersonating?

Gene Pitts, Editor  
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