

# THE AUDIOPHILE VOICE

"...by audiophiles, for audiophiles..."  
Volume 10, Issue 2; \$6.95 US, \$8.50 CAN

## Equipment Reviews:

Adcom 880 Tuner-Preamp,  
850 DVD Player & 7807 Amp  
PNF Icon Interconnects &  
Symphony Speaker Cable  
Omnivox Mobile Sound System  
Ayre CX-7 CD Player

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## THE Show 2004

## Laura Nyro: New Fillmore Concert Tracks

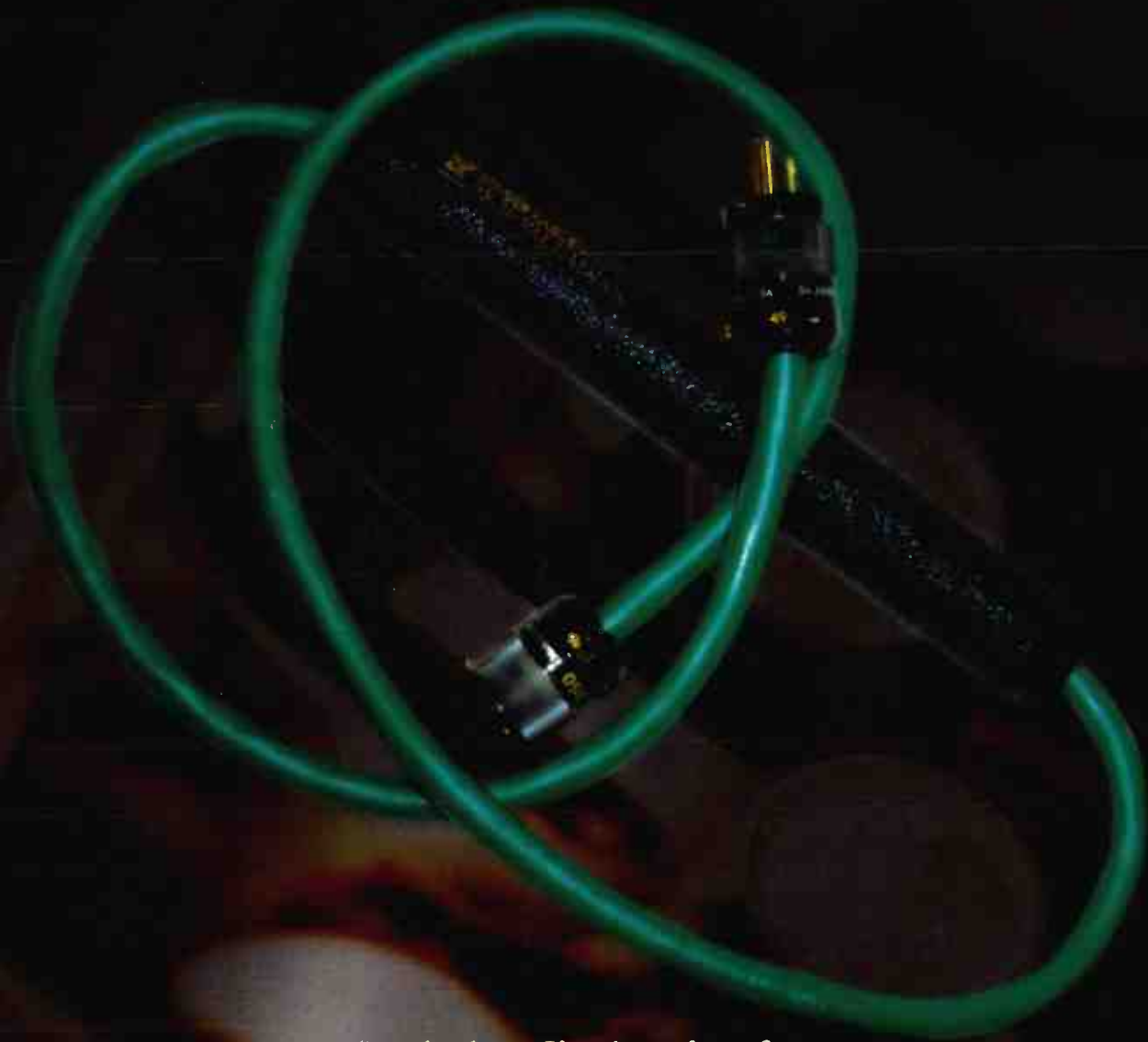


## 5-Fine-1's: EMI Classics

## Interview: Phil Ramone

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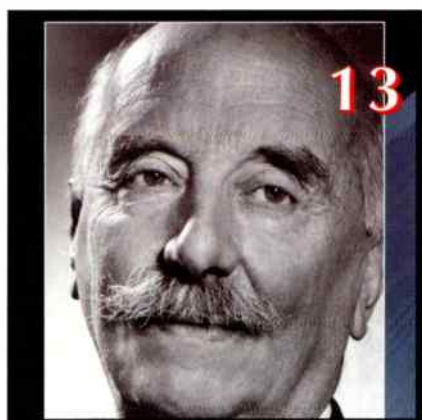
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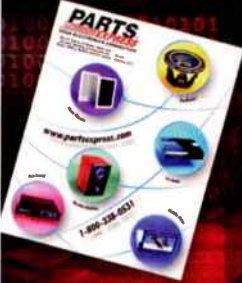


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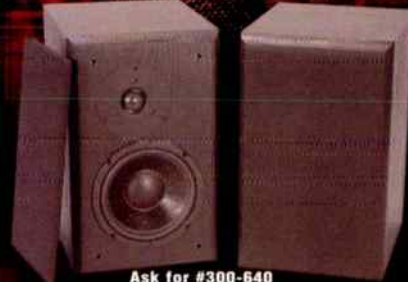
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# New Products



## The ZVOX Sound Console

creates the perception of a very large sound stage by using Phase Cue technology to mix standard "in phase" signals with "out of phase" signals. Many current TV sets include variations on this basic technology which has been enjoyed since David Hafler popularized it decades ago. Such systems were usually not properly developed, according to *TAV's* Editor, who heard the system at the recent *Stereophile* Show, because "they used cheap, bad-sounding speakers and they sounded like it. This is *not* the case with the ZVOX, which sounds quite good for the price. The sound field comes out and around the sides of the listener, giving a full half-sphere of decent sound. Quite cost-effective." The ZVOX is not intended to replace a true 5.1 or 7.1 system, but it does its assigned job very well.

Price \$199.99 each.

Data: [www.zvoxaudio.com](http://www.zvoxaudio.com)



## The Velodyne DPS Series Subwoofers

are a moderately priced, two-unit line which uses digital signal processing (dsp) in the firm's Digital Power Slot (DPS) speaker systems. The DPS-12 uses a 12-inch, forward-firing driver with an amp said to have 400-watts of "dynamic power." The DPS-10 has a 10-inch, forward-firing driver and an amp offering 375 watts of dynamic power. Both systems have digital control of their crossovers, equalization, dynamic compression, volume, phase, and protection circuits for outstanding performance with higher overall output, flatter frequency response, and deeper bass extension.

Prices: From \$499 to \$599.

Data: [www.velodyne.com](http://www.velodyne.com).

## The Denon AVR-2105 A/V Receiver

offers virtually all of the same cutting-edge features found in the firm's high-end A/V receivers while not cutting corners on desired basic performance. It offers seven channels of amplification, each of them at 90 watts, 20 to 20,000 Hz, with less than 0.05% total harmonic distortion. This receiver offers a completely up-to-date home-theater surround-sound system design, including the most popular 7.1-channel surround decoding, Dolby Digital Surround EX, DTS, DTS 96/24 5.1 for DVD-Video, DTS ES Discrete 6/1, ES Matrix 6.1 and Neo:6 Cinema & Music modes, and Dolby PLIIx. The "Auto Set-Up" feature analyzes and calibrates six essential settings: Speaker connection, phase, size and frequency response; channel level and time delay.

Like all Denon receivers, the AVR-2105 uses Analog Devices Hammerhead SHARC 32-bit floating point chips for the DSP work. Connections include three bandwidth-assignable component video inputs, while the AVR-2105 also features up-conversion of composite and/or S-video sources to component video

Price: \$649.00 each.

Data: [www.denon.com](http://www.denon.com).



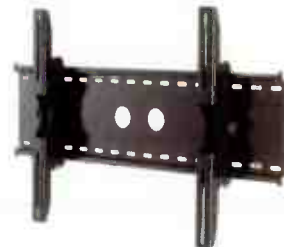


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## LETTERS

### Author, Author

Dear Editor:

Thanks for continuing to print my free classified ad ("Electronics Beginners!..."). It seems to have helped sell my book.

While I find many interesting things in each issue of *TAV*, I'd like to emphasize something that does not usually get much attention. Your equipment reviewers identify some excellent recordings that they use to subjectively evaluate components. Now, I know that the loudspeaker is not always the weakest link in the playback chain, and quite often the recording is really the weakest link. So I figured that you folks would select the best possible recordings in order to minimize any random variation in that factor, whenever you are evaluating amplifiers, speakers, etc.

Sure enough, I've bought some of the CDs that your component reviewers use, and they are among the very highest fidelity recordings that I now have. Some examples from Vol. 9, Issue 5 are:

Coleman Hawkins (sax), *Good Old Broadway*, JVC XR-0035-2

Gerry Mulligan (sax), *Dream A Little Dream*, Telarc CD-83364

Yo Yo Ma (cello), *Bach: The Cello Suites*, CBS M2K 37867

Murray Perahia (piano), *Brahms: Piano Quartet, Opus 25*, Sony MK 42361.

The music is exactly what I like, but what is particularly noteworthy about those recordings is that each has sections where there is a slightly raspy or buzzy sound, which is inherently generated by the musical instruments. Sometimes this is audible in live performances, but not usually in the playback of ordinary recordings. It is not at all unpleasant, and it is similar to a musician's "tremolo," but repeated at a higher rate (roughly three times per second, as I see it on the oscilloscope). I think this sort of thing is responsible for the "reedy" or "stringy" sounds that you can hear up close, during the live playing of a saxophone or cello, and it adds to the illusion of "being there." (Back in January 1978, I said almost the

same things about some especially good LP discs that I reported on in the old *Audio* magazine, which is now something of a classic and was also led by *TAV* Editor Gene Pitts.)

The playback of these four CDs never fails to impress visitors to my listening room, but more often I play them and others recommended by *TAV* when I am alone, with the lights out, basking in the illusion of a private concert. When my wife is working on our upstairs computer and hears the cello, she logs off and comes downstairs to share my enjoyment, and I guess that's the real test of a great recording.

Dan Shanefield,  
subscriber to *TAV*  
Princeton, NJ

### F-M Wife?

Dear Editor:

My wife's reaction to the Fletcher-Munson phenomena (F-Mp) has always been, "Turn it DOWN!"

I tend to listen to my system at a realistic volume that is louder than my wife deems comfortable. It seems that she's more sensitive to the bass than I am; especially when she is working in the kitchen, while I am listening in the listening area. I've also noticed that the bass is stronger in the kitchen; while the slightest mid-range noise from a pot or pan can overpower the sound of a symphony orchestra in the listening area. Such is life in a house with an open floor plan.

I remember that my first Hi-Fi, a portable unit made by Motorola with a Webcor changer, had both a bass and treble control. Back in the '50s that was the sign of a true Hi-Fi. The simple one-knob "tone" control was obsolete. People could now boost both the bass and the treble. (Nobody ever seemed to cut them.) Thus, they could compensate for the effects of the F-Mp depending upon the volume level at which they were listening. Eventually, someone came up with the idea of a "loudness" control, tied to the volume control, which would compensate for the F-Mp automatically. This worked fairly well in the old



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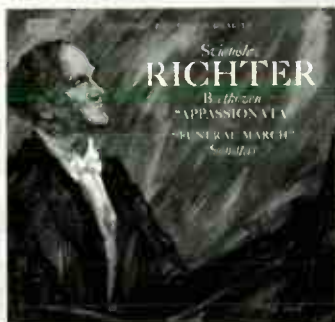
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consoles where all of the parts, including the speakers, were under the manufacturer's control. Unfortunately, in the component world, it wasn't that easy. Since various speakers have differing levels of efficiency, while different amps and pre-amps have differing levels of sensitivity and power output, the loudness compensation was not often a precise match, and usually made things worse. Fortunately, manufacturers provided an on/off switch for the loudness circuitry and its control, and most people, other than the bass junkies, left it off.

Currently, in the search for purity of sound reproduction, the audiophile trend is to have no type of equalization built into the system. Thus, Mr. Laberge and the rest of us tend to "crank it up" in search of the correct balance at realistic listening levels. This is not only dangerous for marital, or significant other, bliss, but it is also dangerous for the welfare of our ears. Continuous exposure to even the best music at 90-dB plus levels of sound will lead to hearing loss. (What did you say?)

This is especially true, I think, with the new Dolby Digital and THX standards for home video playback where the bass and treble con-

trols on most receivers are disabled. However, the standard 75-dB SPL level that Mr. Laberge mentions is, in this case, in force. As a result, I have learned to turn down the volume before the THX logo appears if I want to avoid my wife's ranting. Then I slowly crank it back up while she gets used to the volume of the music under the movie title. (Thank God for remote control.) I could use the "midnight" circuitry, which flattens out the dynamic range, however, that cuts into the effects of all the dynamics intended by the director. So, I take the chance that she won't complain too much when the loud sound effects hit us later on in the movie.

Unfortunately, there is no midnight setting for the stereo. We have gotten away from the dynamic compression of the LP in favor of the 120-dB range of the CD. This has had a dramatic effect on the dynamic balance reflected by the F-Mp. Yet, because there is no standard recording level and procedures in the audio world, such as those used by THX-certified studios, every time an audiophile fires up a piece of software, be it LP, CD, etc., it's a crap shoot whether it's going to sound balanced dynamically, tonal-

ly, and Fletcher-Munson-wise. Add to that the various factors encountered with the new multi-channel recordings and their various speaker placement and bass managements, it's no wonder that Mr. Laberge is pulling out his hair, along with the rest of us.

There is definitely a need for some sort of update in standardization in the audio recording and playback world. Just as the RIAA set a standard of equalization for the LP, one that allows everyone to forget that in the early years various companies had used different equalization; it needs to adapt a set of recording and playback standards similar to THX. Once the standards are set, creative designers will be able to come up with circuitry that will allow the playback equipment to adjust the sound of the recordings to fit the environment as well as the tastes of the listener. Many receivers are currently taking advantage of the Dolby Digital and THX standards to do this type of adjustment for DVDs.

I know that my 5.1 DVD audio and 6.1 DTSES recordings sound better through my receiver in the family room than they do played back through my much more

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expensive and powertu stereo system in my listening area. And yes, those same recordings tend to sound consistently better than most of my standard stereo recordings played back on either system. (I have a few "audiophile" recordings that are an exception to the rule.) Perhaps, the RIAA should consider adaptation of the Dolby Digital and THX standards. Maybe then, a loudness control would be more useful.

Frederick Hart  
Orlando, FL

## Try It This Way!

Dear Editor:

Anthony H. Cordesman's article on the Lexicon RT 10 disc player in Vol. 10, No. 1 tells us that there is no digital output for DVD Audio or SACD for more refined processing. In a sense that will soon change. MSB Technology, the makers of the Gold DAC and the esteemed Platinum DAC clocks digital data by means of an MSB network that they will install in any disc player for you. They told me that they will soon offer to install an MSB network that can be installed in a DVD Audio or SACD player that extracts the data directly from either of these formats and sends it in 196/24 PCM

to a DAC such as the Platinum with the jitter correction that the network performs. They claim that playing SACD or DVD Audio this way sounds better than it will through any player. Thus, the left and right channels can be conveyed to a Platinum DAC by way of a digital cable.

Also, there are two other developments that should improve upon the Platinum DAC. The first is an upgrade of the resistor ladders to all bulk-foil laser-trimmed resistors that are superior to the original resistor ladders. The second is that if you power the Platinum DAC with lead acid batteries, the sound is far superior to what you get even if you use the most expensive conditioning of your wall outlet power. This requires making a plug that connects the batteries to the filter capacitors in the power supply in the DAC. In short, batteries replace the rectified a.c. to run the DAC. The batteries are on a homemade relay switch that I made for this purpose. When the system is off, the batteries are charged by one battery charger on a timer.

In my dealings with MSB, when there was something not up to what it should be, they conscientiously

made good on it. In particular, when I sent them a laser disc player to have an MSB network installed, it was damaged in shipment. They paid above shipping insurance for me to suffer no expense in replacing my damaged laser disc player and they put the network in the new player for free. Not many companies would do that.

Two years ago *Stereophile* reviewed the Platinum DAC but they did not bother to try it with the MSB network in a disc player and someone should try it with batteries powering the Platinum. With the upcoming improvements you owe it to yourself and to your readers to give the Platinum with its new resistor ladders, an MSB network conveying SACD and DVD Audio and if you can do it, battery power.

Barney Vincelette  
via e-mail

### **The Editor replies:**

I'll think about this, but it has long been my notion that such aftermarket choices were a matter of liking redheads as opposed to blondes. I will say, however, that I have liked everything from MSB that I've listened to. The downside is that I've not listened to enough of of their gear to satisfy my "gear lust."

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# E DITORIAL

Gene Pitts

## Sharing & CD Sales

**D**OWNLOADING DOESN'T CUT into Record Sales." That's what it said, all right. It was as startling as finding your lottery ticket has won the Big Prize. I read *The New York Times* piece a second time, but I'd gotten it right initially. Some heavy-duty university professors, one from the Harvard Business School, had actually gone out and done the legwork to nail down whether sharing of music files actually does reduce CD sales.

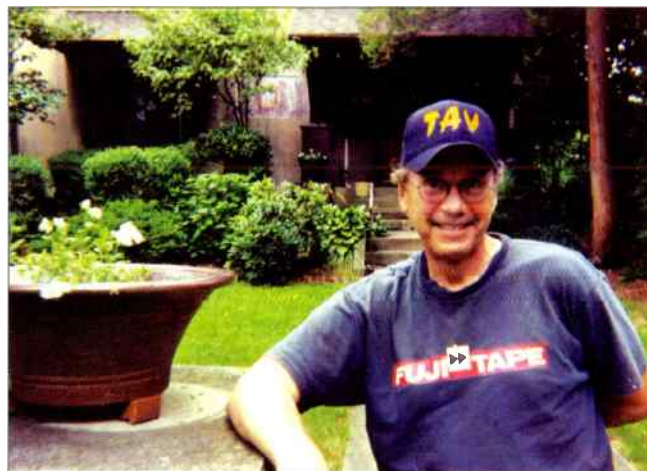
What follows is from their press release, and you can download a PDF from their site if you want to read the whole thing.

"This is the first study that directly compares actual downloads of music files and store sales of CDs. The authors, Associate Professor Felix Oberholzer-Gee of Harvard Business School and Koleman Strumpf, Professor at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, conclude: 'File sharing had no effect on the sale of popular CDs in the second half of 2002. While downloads occurred on a vast scale during this period – 3 million simultaneous users shared 500 million files on the popular network FastTrack/KaZaA alone – most people who shared files appear to be individuals who would not have bought the albums that they downloaded.'

"*File Sharing Cannot Explain the Decline in Sales of Music during this Period:* Our analyses show that there is no relationship between the number of downloads of a particular album and sales of this album. Even in our most pessimistic statistical model, it takes 5,000 downloads to reduce the sales of an album by a single copy. If this worst-case scenario were true, file sharing would have reduced CD sales by 2 million copies in 2002. To provide a point of reference, CD sales actually declined by 139 million copies from 2000 to 2002.

"*More Popular CDs Benefit from File Sharing:* The effect of file sharing on sales depends on the popularity of a release. For the least popular albums (with sales of less than 36,000 copies) we find a small negative effect. In contrast, for the top 25% of albums (with sales of more than 600,000 copies) we find a positive effect: 150 downloads increase sales by one copy. This effect is particularly important because the profitability of the music industry depends almost entirely on the success of the most popular albums.

"*File Sharers Rarely Download Entire Albums; They Download a Small Selection of Songs:* In this study, we track downloads of songs on 680 popular albums. All albums in our study were included in one of the Billboard Charts in the fall of 2002. Although these



albums do well commercially (the average release sells more than 150,000 copies), more than 50% of the songs on these albums are never downloaded. 75% of the songs are downloaded no more than two times, 90% are downloaded fewer than 11 times.

"*Songs from Top Current Albums Are Most Often Downloaded:* Not surprisingly, not all types of music are equally popular among file sharers. Songs from albums that are on the "Top Current" Billboard Chart are most likely to be downloaded. "Alternative Albums" are the second most popular musical genre among file sharers, followed by Hard Rock and Catalogue albums. The least likely to be downloaded are songs in the categories Jazz, Latin and New Artists.

"*Marketing Strongly Influences What People Download and What They Buy:* We find strong evidence that the music industry's marketing campaigns continue to influence what individuals listen to. For example, showing a music video on MTV increases both the number of downloads and legal sales of that release.

"*U.S. Has Largest Number of File Sharers:* 31% of all individuals who download music live in the United States. Other important countries are Germany with a 13% share of worldwide users, Italy with 11%, Japan with 8% and France with 7%. File sharers in the United States are particularly active. While they represent 31% of worldwide users, they download 36% of all files.

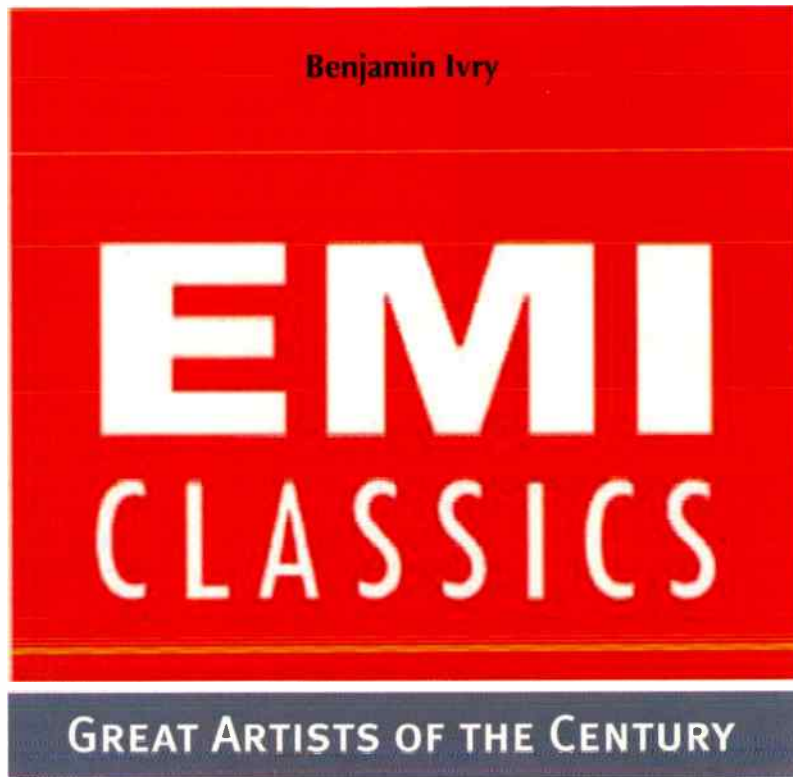
"*Germany is the Most Important Foreign Supplier of Music Files:* U.S. file sharers download files from all over the world. Only 45% of the files downloaded in the United States come from computers in the U.S. 16% of music files are downloaded from computers in Germany, 7% from Canada, 6% from Italy, 4% from the U.K. A legal strategy that focuses mostly on the United States is unlikely to change the supply of music files.

"*Why is this study unique?* Previous studies rely on surveys to assess the effect of file sharing on music sales. This is problematic because we don't know if survey participants truthfully respond to questions about an illegal activity. This study is unique in that it uses data from file-sharing servers, where we directly observe 1.75 million downloads during 17 weeks in the fall of 2002. Using statistical methods, we can then test if the sale of an album declines more strongly if that album is downloaded more often."

The full text of this interesting study is available at [www.unc.edu/~cigar/papers/FileSharing\\_March2004.pdf](http://www.unc.edu/~cigar/papers/FileSharing_March2004.pdf) or contact the authors: Felix Oberholzer-Gee, Harvard Business School, [foberholzer@hbs.edu](mailto:foberholzer@hbs.edu), 617/495-6770, 617/792-8508; Koleman Strumpf, UNC, Chapel Hill, [cigar@unc.edu](mailto:cigar@unc.edu), 919/966-4485.



5-Fine-1's



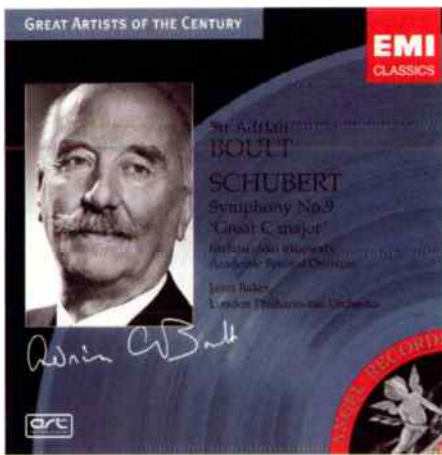
**E**MI'S LATEST DIP into its immense archive of historical recordings has resulted in newly remastered Great Artists of the Century series. Unlike the recent EMI Great Conductors series, which draws on a variety of recording company archives, the EMI Great Artists reissues are mostly a tribute to the EMI producers of the original recordings. The 25 initial reissue discs honor some hot young artists of indubitable value, like the Norwegian pianist Leif Ove Andsnes, as well as the pretty if superficial violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter, the sometimes humdrum British pianist Stephen Kovacevich, and the positively grating fiddler Kennedy. The older musicians include the soprano Maria Callas, still a bestselling artist 30 years after her death. The sometimes shrill Russian soprano Galina Vishnevskaya benefits from her status as the wife of the conductor/cellist Mstislav Rostropovich, who correctly rates his own Great Artists release. Other performers who rate EMI Great status include the lugubrious bass-baritone Hans Hotter, the glitzy Hungarian pianist György Cziffra, and the much-idolized but perhaps overrated cellist Jacqueline du Pré. Happily, at least five items in the series belong in every classical music collection, and the digital remastering makes them even more attractive acquisitions, especially to audiophiles.

Audiophiles are correct to look at historical material as a balancing act between the musical quality of a performance and the skills of the producer and recording engineer who preserved it. Happily, in the release of Adrian Boult conducting works by Schubert and Brahms Alto Rhapsody, there are no compromises to make on any account. The original EMI producer/balance engineer team from the 1970s is two skilled veterans affectionately nicknamed by audiophiles "the two

Christophers," Christopher Bishop and Christopher Parker respectively. The two C's turned out a series of spacious-sounding recordings, including a fine LP (EMI CSD 3779) of choral works by Thomas Tallis and William Byrd sung by the Brit vocal group The King's Singers. Bishop and Parker were also in charge of sonic matters for the classic cycle of orchestral works by Sibelius conducted by John Barbirolli, recorded in stereo from 1966 to 1970 and recorded in Kingsway Hall, London, and EMI's Abbey Road studio No. 1. Kingsway Hall used to be the leading classical recording venue in London, ruined in the early 1980s when the Methodist Church, the building's owners, offered to sell the place to Decca or EMI, who declined. The Greater London Council purchased it and ruined its acoustics, before it was demolished in the 1990s, and a four-star hotel took its place.

But in the 1970s when the two Christophers recorded Adrian Boult conducting works by Brahms and Schubert, Kingsway Hall was still in its glory, effectively communicating the nobility of the music and conductor. Adrian Boult (1889 - 1983) was the epitome of the Edwardian English gentleman. At one famous London concert when the orchestra faltered, Boult turned to the audience to say, "Entirely my fault, ladies and gentlemen." This kind of politeness was rarely necessary in Boult's splendid performances of composers like Elgar and Vaughan Williams, all Englishmen who lived before the U.K. became miniaturized in heart and spirit.

**Benjamin Ivry**, a contributing editor of *TAV*, is author of biographies of Maurice Ravel (Welcome Rain), Francis Poulenc (Phaidon Press), and Arthur Rimbaud (Absolute Press).



The sweeping performances on this CD include Schubert's big-hearted Ninth Symphony, the raucously joyful Brahms Academic Overture, and a moving Brahms Alto Rhapsody with Janet Baker as vocal soloist.

Boult was a master of the German repertoire, having studied with the legendary

conductor Artur Nikisch at the Leipzig Conservatory in 1912 – 1913, as well as the German composer Max Reger. He conducted, among many historic concerts, the British premieres of Schoenberg's Variations, Op.31, Mahler's Third symphony, and Alban Berg's opera "Wozzeck." Also admired as a pioneering champion of modern British music, Boult retired from conducting in 1979, aged 91, at the peak of his powers. If not a household name, Boult was indubitably a great artist of the century, if sometimes overlooked like other British performers of ideal skill and modesty, like the pianist Myra Hess. A reissue series like the present EMI one is ennobled by his presence.

Some of the producers who worked on these original recordings are happily still active, like David Mottley, who produced part of the fabulous reissue of concertos by Haydn and Mozart played by the Italian keyboard genius Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli. Mottley worked with the Dresden-born conductor Rudolf Kempe (1910 – 1976) on a much-praised, and still in print series of orchestral music by Richard Strauss.

Mottley was nominated for a Grammy in the late 1990s for a recording of Luigi Dallapiccola's modern opera "Il Prigioniero" conducted by Esa-Pekka Salonen on Sony Classical. By 1975, when he recorded the

Haydn Piano Concerto on this disc, Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli (1920 – 1995) had already begun to curtail his concert career due to uncertain health. But the perfection of his playing remained nearly until the end of his life. Perfection is an overused term in writing about music, but with Michelangeli, it is an apt work – he simply did not make mistakes, and infused 18<sup>th</sup> century music like Mozart and Haydn with melancholic grace and somber lyricism.

Unlike some other pianists famous for eccentricity, like Glenn Gould, Michelangeli's playing does not sound eccentric. The Mozart concertos recorded in the 1950s on this disc (producer anonymous) are miles from the tinkly, spun-lace readings of Mozart heard from the "pearly-toned" school of players. Without being in the least heavy or lumbering, Michelangeli managed to infuse these works with passionate drama. Born in 1920 in Orzinuovi, Italy, Michelangeli won the Geneva International Piano Competition in 1939, where one of the judges, the famous pianist Alfred Cortot, declared, "A new Liszt is born!" However, he was soon forced into the Italian Air Force during World War II, before making a great career in postwar Italy. In 1968 Michelangeli was driven from Italy after the government seized his pianos, when a company in which he was a partner went bankrupt. This picayune nastiness against a great artist guaranteed that Michelangeli lived in Switzerland until he died in 1995. The conductors on the present disc, Franco Caracciolo and Edmond de Stoutz, are hardly world-beaters, but the musicians play with involvement, clearly aware that they are participating in a special occasion. Inevitably the sound is clearer on the 1970s Haydn performance, but the Mozart concertos from the 1950s are magical readings indeed.

Among EMI classical producers, Walter Legge (1906 – 1979) was a kind of King Kong, autocratically signing and recordings all-time great performers like soprano Maria Callas and Legge's own wife, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf. Legge is so intimately associated with dozens of immortal artists that his own immortality is assured, despite abundant complaints from colleagues (and posterity) about his excessive fondness for Nazi and ex-Nazi musicians in the 1930s and postwar period. Recording Mozart's "Magic Flute" in Berlin in 1938 and 1939 in order to use the Berlin Philharmonic, EMI and Legge were told that the best singers they had cast for three star roles, of Tamino, Sarastro, and The Speaker, were all unacceptable because they were Jews. Amazingly from today's perspective, Legge and EMI went ahead with the recording with acceptably Aryan singers of lesser quality. The "Magic Flute" in question, conducted by Thomas Beecham, is even so considered a classic version of the opera.

After the war, Legge went out of his way to record unrepentant Nazis who were talented musicians, among them the pianist Walter Gieseking (1890 – 1956), who despite his great renown as a specialist in French music, immediately dropped "non-Aryan" composers like Debussy and Ravel from his programs when Nazi Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels gave the order to do so.

By the 1950s, the indisputably gifted Gieseking, master of keyboard nuance and digital command, had returned to non-Aryan composers, and this disc, produced by Legge and the veteran studio employee and conductor Geraint Jones, is radiant evidence of this

## My 5 Picks

**Schubert: Sym. No. 9; Brahms Alto Rhapsody, Academic Festival Overture.**  
**Adrian Boult, cond.; London Phil. Orch.**  
 EMI 7-2435-62792-2-3

**Mozart: Piano Concertos No. 13, 15, 23.**  
**Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli, piano;**  
 EMI 7-2435-62824-2-1

**Debussy: Suite Bergamasque**  
**Walter Gieseking, piano; EMI 7-2435-62800-2-1**

**Schubert: Winterreise**  
**Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, baritone,**  
**Gerald Moore, piano; EMI 7-2435-67928-2-1**

**Bach, Mozart, Schubert, Chopin:**  
**Besançon Festival, 1950.**  
**Dinu Lipatti, piano; EMI 7-2435-62820-2-5**



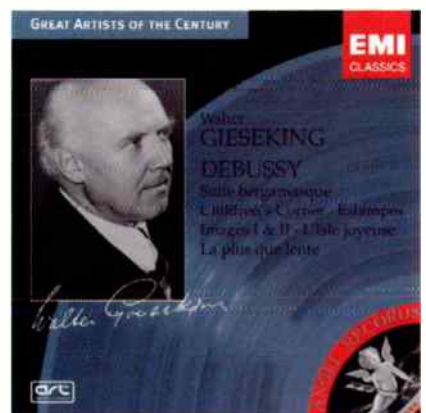
pianist's artistry. As a recent anthology, "Walter Legge: Words and Music" (Routledge, ISBN 0415921082) edited by Alan Sanders indicates part of Legge's power was verbal ingenuity as a journalist and fierce letter-writer. The editor, Alan Sanders, has also produced "Walter Legge: A Discography," an uncommon tribute to a remarkable career in sound recording, as well as the biography "Elisabeth Schwarzkopf: A Career on Record," which devastatingly deals with the German diva's Nazi past.

Legge was both gifted and merciless, and would famously require established artists to repeat the same musical phrase dozens of times until they performed it to his satisfaction. This was in direct opposition to the previous view of record producing, as propagated by earlier producers like Fred Galsberg, who believed a recording was a clear snapshot of a performance caught on the fly as the artist would have performed were microphones absent. Legge's approach was vastly more intrusive and attempted to alter and edit what artists might do, in order to make them sound different and presumably better on record. From the early 1930s until the 1970s, Legge was a power to be reckoned with, and some artists, after working with him for a spell, decided never again to subject themselves to Legge's brand of torment.

One such was the great German baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau (b. 1925) who became the most-recorded artist in the history of classical music, with over one thousand records to his credit, of everything from Bach to Zemlinsky. After getting started circa 1950 with Legge and the British pianist Gerald Moore, Fischer-Dieskau got fed up and by this 1962 version of Schubert's song cycle "Winterreise," recorded in Berlin, "Fidi" as the singer is known to friends, worked with producers Hans Ritter and Christfried Bickenbach.

The latter producer is particularly remembered for 1960s recordings with the legendary tenor Fritz Wunderlich, the Belgian conductor André Cluytens' recordings with the Berlin Philharmonic, and the distinguished Smetana String Quartet's versions of chamber music by Dvorák (Testament SBT 1075), Janáček (Testament SBT 1074), and Mozart (Testament SBT 1117 and SBT 1118). This chamber music experience stood her in good stead for the Schubert "Winterreise," a song cycle both intimate and epic in parts. Fischer-Dieskau would record no fewer than a dozen versions of this work at different times in his career. Perhaps the finest is currently unavailable, with the singer's longtime concert partner, the pianist Hartmut Höll. Some listeners may prefer a 1955 EMI "Winterreise," the singer's first commercial studio recording (although not his earliest surviving recording) because of his freshness of voice. Yet in as great a recording career as Fischer-Dieskau's, with so many high points and so very few low points, all of his work is worthy of attentive listening. Thanks to producers Hans Ritter and Christfried Bickenbach, this is possible under state-of-the-art conditions for the 1962 Schubert "Winterreise."

Of course, sometimes a historical performance is of such extraordinary interest that audiophiles would do well to accept a decent live recording by anonymous producers and engineers, which is the case of the last recital of the superb Romanian pianist Dinu Lipatti (1917 – 1950) at Besançon, France in 1950. Lipatti was an amazingly adroit pianist who made studio recordings produced by Walter Legge, but was such a perfectionist that his recorded legacy was small when he died of leukemia at the tragically young age of 33. The dramatic story of his last recital once again available in a digital remastering by sound engineer Ian Jones, is curiously not recounted in the EMI booklet notes. Shit full of newfangled cortisone treatments, paid for by prosperous musician friends like violinist Yehudi Menuhin, conductor Charles Munch and composer Igor Stravinsky, Lipatti decided to ignore his doctor's orders and perform at Besançon on September 16, 1950. Even though so close to death – Lipatti died a matter of weeks later – his artistry is as sublime as ever. The only sign of anything amiss is that Lipatti had to end the concert prematurely, before the last of fourteen Chopin Waltzes could be performed. Even this heroic, stoic detail is not mentioned by EMI, but speaks volumes about the courageous and sublime artistic legacy of Lipatti. Yes, the sound quality on this 1950 live recital is not in and of itself a reason to purchase this disc. But Lipatti's artistic message is an imperative one to anyone who cares in the least about music and believes in its transforming powers.



# The Stereophile Show: HE2004



Photo: Gene Pitts

**I**T WAS TITILLATION TIME for the audio and video buffs from the Big Apple and vicinity as their desires and temptations were tested and teased once again at the Stereophile Show, known this time as HE2004. As usual, it took place at the Hilton Hotel at 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 53<sup>rd</sup> Street, which is about as easily accessible a location as any in NYC. And access the place they did. According to the “official” attendance figures, a total of 14,937 visitors showed up, along with 2,500 members of the trade, and a press corps of 450. What awaited them were 200 brands of gear and assorted goodies distributed over 80 rooms. Let’s face it, this much renowned and desirable equipment in one place is very difficult to ignore if you’re an audiophile.

## The Sound of Music

I saw this show in a very positive light. There were numerous and quite remarkable exhibitions of great sound. And even above all those, there were a precious

few which outdid their neighbors and offered superlative performance. What follows is one man’s selection of the exhibits which offered truly outstanding sound.

The **mbi of America** suite on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor was far and away the most exciting presentation for me. I have to think very hard to remember when I heard sounds this loud *and* this clean. Of course, I certainly do realize that loudness is not everything, but the mbi sound was not just loud, it was controlled and refined. Dynamic contrasts were articulated in a refined manner seldom realized. The music could be very loud or very soft, with the greatest of ease. Bombastic is one thing, but when the sonics can also be doled out very delicately and gracefully, then the presentation becomes extremely exciting and enticing. Which was precisely why the mbi demo was a joy to hear.

The equipment responsible for this extravaganza was mbi’s 1621 CD transport (\$18,260) and a 1611D DAC (\$19,584), a 6010D preamp (\$16,940), a 9008 power



amp (\$18,000) per channel (each rated 750 watts into 4 ohms), and a pair of 101E loudspeakers (\$44,900), all wired with Wireworld's Eclipse V cables.

**Innersound**, a company initially known for their hybrid electrostatic loudspeakers, has undergone a very welcome metamorphosis. While the engineering is still firmly in the hands of Roger Sanders, the company is now owned by Gary Leeds. A new infusion of cash has expanded the product line to include electronics and has upgraded the firm's engineering capability as well as the appearance and industrial design capabilities of the products very handsomely. And from what I heard in their exhibits, the sound quality has certainly benefited significantly.

I spent the most time listening to Innersound's Kaya Reference hybrid loudspeaker. Priced at \$20,000 it includes a 600-watt woofer-amp per side, and at HE2004, it was driven by their own DPR-500 Reference power amps (\$13,000 the pair), with signals handled by their RCP-1 Reference preamplifier (\$12,000). A Linn CD-12 CD player and a Red Point "red" turntable with a Morch DP-6 arm and Transfiguration cartridge performed the analog source duties.

You may remember that I really liked the Innersound presentation two years ago at HE2002. Well, this time around, they outdid that high water mark. The sound in both rooms was effortless, transparent, and immediate with out-of-this-world inner detail. The Kaya Reference was the clear-cut preference for me. Don't ever tell me that electrostatics can't do dynamics – this hybrid design can rock with the best of them. The transition to the dynamic woofer was superb to my ears, something very hard to achieve since electrostatics, while being justly renowned for their speed and transparency, are usually quite difficult to match to a dynamic or moving-coil woofer driver.

As a matter of fact, I thought the low-frequency performance of the Kaya Reference was outstanding. I threw my hardest bass cuts from my reference CDs at this speaker, and it did not blink. Then later, when I asked for their equipment list to prepare this report, I saw that the **Rives** parametric room equalizer had been included to handle the bass range. Small wonder that the bass quality was so impressive.

In retrospect I should have been more inquisitive during the show because I did remember remarking to Gary Leeds about their minimal room treatment. And despite that potential difficulty, the sound of the Innersound exhibit excelled. To be fair, I do have to mention that, while my head did not have to be locked firmly in place, the sweet spot in this room was very limited. But once you were in the zone, it was heaven.

If you wanted big, majestic sound, comfortably filling a room that seated at least 60 people, you had to be at the **Sound by Singer** demonstration. First, Andy served up an excellent home theater demo, which was followed up by a two-channel audio extravaganza. At this exhibit, they played only those CDs and SACDs they had chosen, but this was understandable because of the many people who wanted to get into the room. Practically all exhibits that included home theater had to run their demos on some sort of schedule, usually in 15- to 20-minute intervals, so this involved standing in line. And that meant a crowd, and that meant no individual requests. This happened not only here at the Singer room, but at a number of other exhibits.

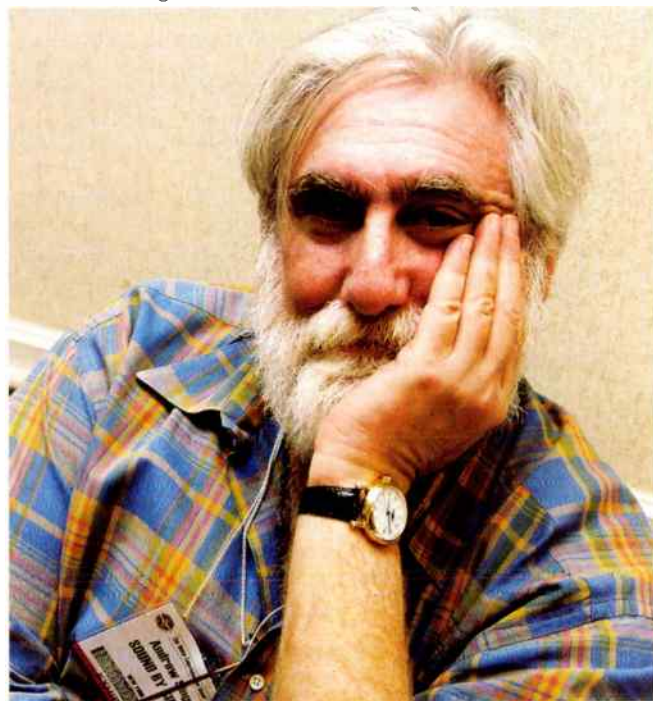


The gear Singer used consisted of a **dCS CD/SACD**

transport and D/A with **Balanced Audio Technology** electronics. The preamp was a VK-51SE (\$9,000 with remote) feeding two VK-150 SE (\$8500 each) power amps per side (for a total of 300 watts of triode-based power) for the upper frequency drivers. A VK-600SE (\$11,500) was used for bass drivers. And the speakers? A pair of **Focal-JMLab Grande Utopia Be** (\$85,000). The cables and power conditioning were supplied by **Shunyata Research, Inc.** It sure was a grand sound! Especially so if you were lucky enough to sit in the "sweet area". That's where the slam and the articulation were displayed big time, with imaging and dynamic contrasts clearly in the same league. In spite of the inherently limiting show conditions, this was a special exhibit, and one which presented a truly excellent opportunity to hear several legendary products.

**April Music** was another firm that gave us an exceptional display. In a very ordinary room they produced sounds that had me returning several times for additional auditions. The mag-

**Himself! The Sound of Singer, Great Thane of the Squared Union, He who is never at a loss for a price!**



Photos: Ross Wagner



**Jeff Joseph about to reveal where he's hidden the rabbit.**

net that drew me was the outstanding sound produced by components that didn't have outrageous prices. A South Korean company, April Music displayed their Stello line, starting with a CDT200 CD player (\$1,195) and a DAC/Preamplifier, the DP 200 (\$1,995). The DP200 is an extremely versatile component loaded with a wide variety of features. First off, it's a preamp with both single-ended and balanced inputs including one XLR and two RCA; outputs are one XLR, one RCA; and one RCA bypass for home theater). Second, it's a DAC sporting up to 24/192 selectable upsampling, with inputs and outputs supporting AES/EBU, SP/DIF, and Toslink. For another \$250, they'll put a phono module in for you.

For power amps they used their M200 monoblocks (\$2995 per pair) where each unit puts out 200 watts into 8 ohms and 350 into 4 ohms. For speakers they had chosen the WEGG3 Stelar 1 (\$5,500), a stunning three-way design from William Eggleston's new company. This impressed me as a very cost-effective system that displayed eminently solid performance.

As has become the norm, **Jeff Joseph and Eveanna Manley** teamed up to exhibit outstanding sound. Jeff Joseph has been winning the "Best Sound of Show" Award at quite a number of the recent HE Shows. This year there was no voting. According to Jeff's tongue-in-cheek ruminations, it's because of his success. As for me, I simply do not know how it's possible to pick one single room as "the best." I think it's a good idea not to have the voting mainly because of the inconsistent room-to-room conditions as well as the capricious and impulsive nature of the voting system. Then again, I'm not Jeff Joseph who is in business to sell equipment.

Nonetheless, the Joseph/Manley room hit the mark with great sound. It was dynamic, detailed and spectrally balanced over a wide range. Getting sound *that* right under show conditions deserves the stongest kind of commendation.

As MC, Jeff was his usually entertaining self, but this year he sort of pulled a fast one on the audience. First,

he told the audience that his demo system consisted of a Theta "Compli" transport (\$4,500) and Gen 8 DAC (\$10,000) and La Luce Table/spj\_arm (\$16,500), with Cardas Heart MC cartridge, for the signal sources feeding a Manley Steelhead preamp (\$6,900) and Manley Neoclassic 250 power amps (\$9,000). All this was connected with Cardas Golden Ref Cables, and then Jeff mentioned his new loudspeaker, the RM-55LE, which is priced at \$12,500. Other gear included Equi-tech Balanced Power power conditioning, Grand Prix Audio Stands, and Echobuster room treatment. By then, Jeff was ready for action, and he went on to play a cut or two of music; what I heard was rather good sound, but not great enough to rave about.

At that point Jeff pulled away a couple of black fabric covers from the wall behind him to reveal a pair of in-wall speakers, the Joseph Audio *Insiders* (\$1999 per pair), which had been playing driven by a 40-watt Manley *Stingray*, an integrated stereo tube amp. Well, Jeff, considering the circumstances, mission accomplished! Those in-walls of yours are really good. After the audience's astonishment died down, he went on to play both vinyl and CDs via the promised system, The Big Rig, with the sound taking on a significantly improved ring to it, which is what I was praising earlier as "outstanding."

Upon entering the **Gershman/Linar** room, I was struck with a certain sense of calm and relaxation. Yes, the music was playing, but it displayed a very effortless and pure character. Of course, I recognized the Gershman Opera Sauvage (\$23,000 per pair), a speaker that has pleased me very much at CES encounters previously. At this show, however, they were driven by a Linar Audiophile 2 stereo preamplifier (\$3,200) and a pair of Linar 500 mono power amps (\$4,200 each). The source was an Audio Arrow CD player.

After an extended listening session – my desire was incessant, I just kept needing to hear yet another selection – using my own CDs, I came away extremely impressed. Sure, the other times Gershman's sound has been quite excellent, but this time around it was truly magnificent.

Upon inquiry, I found out that the Linar amps have been designed by an old hand in audio, Victor Sima. Yes, he was the Sim in Simaudio Ltd. Having parted ways with them years ago, Victor now has his own designs and is using the Linar brand, as it is his new company. He explained that the present circuitry he has developed exhibits vanishingly low distortion without using any feedback. Victor emphasizes that this applies to just about any conceivable type of distortion, not just the common harmonic, IM, and TIM types. Having gotten an ample taste of his product, and having had a special speaker to deliver the results, I remain very impressed. We need to talk review here, Victor.

## Are We There Yet?

Before leaving the equipment – because I'm busting my word allotment set by my editor – I do have to mention one more display, THEMUSIC.com room. With, Antique Sound Lab Passive T-2 preamplifier (\$750) and their AQ 1009 DT mono amplifiers (\$5,600 a pair), and using Eichmann interconnects and speaker cables, topped off by the Reference 3A Dulcet speakers at full throttle, the components appeared to have a special synergy that resulted in exceptional sonics. The sound



at THEMUSIC.com was truly outstanding. The Dulcet happens to be a very special product. It had me impressed no end at the recent CFS and it did so again here at HE2004. At \$1,695 the Dulcet is a steal.

On the software side, **Groove Note** finally reissued one of my all-time demo favorites, *Tango* with Laurindo Almeida and Charlie Bird (GRV1021-3, a hybrid CD/SACD). Ever since I first heard it played many years ago by the late Jason Bloom of Apogee loudspeaker fame, I fell in love with the pristine presentation it offered. Now available in hybrid form and remastered by none other than great engineer Bernie Grundman, I feel it is now in its most exemplary version ever. Having listened to the Red Book layer, it now joins my list as one of a couple dozen of the cleanest sounding discs in my music library. Thanks, Ying Tan and Joe Harley for producing it.

In closing I want to point out that the companies I've mentioned here achieved sonic performances that stood well above those of the other exhibits I was able to audition. (Unfortunately, I could not set foot in some of the exhibits because they were over-crowded each time I tried to visit.)

Or, as was the case with the Albert von Schweikert VR4 room, even though I went there for a special early audition set up for several of the editors from various magazines, I never ended in a seat from where I could have been able to assess the sound properly. What I heard appeared to be very good, but I was not able to do a more complete evaluation because time ran out before I got my turn.

## Crowds and Concerts

My advice for visiting any HE Show in the future is to avoid Saturday if at all possible. Go Sunday, or take a work-day off and hit the show on Friday. Saturday afternoon was so crowded that I retreated to the CD/LP/Miscellaneous section on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor to rest up. Floors 6 and 7 were really hampered by lines waiting to get into some rooms making a jammed situation even worse.

For a really refreshing activity, go attend a few of the free concerts. I missed the biggie on Friday night in the Grand Ballroom featuring Joan Osborne, Tom Scott & The New York All-Stars, Carla Lothar, and Nicole Henry. Luckily I did catch a couple of other concerts.

An absolute delight was the harpsichord recital by Peter Sykes where he played J.S. Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. My position, just about right in front and about 20 feet from the instrument, allowed me to enjoy the intricate harmonics and intonations that Mr. Sykes elicited from his instrument for the hushed audience. They remained in this captivated state for the entire 45-minute performance.

The concert was sponsored by **Wilson Benesch, The Sound Organization, and John Marks Records**. Many thanks to them for reminding people what unamplified music really sounds like. This Saturday performance, I was told, had deliberately scheduled for 6:15 p.m. in the evening, a time when all the bombastic excesses of home theater had been silenced.

Another concert of a completely different ilk was a performance by the blues legend – no, make that a national treasure – Honeyboy Edwards. This took place during lunch on Friday and featured the 88-year-old, Mississippi born-and-bred blues artist. The HE2004



**Peter Sykes, harpsichordist, delighted his audience by playing Bach's *Goldberg Variations*.**

Show Magazine wrote in the announcement that Honeyboy "along with Robert Lockwood Jr., Pinetop Perkins, Henry Townsend, and Homesick James, is the last living link to the blues of Robert Johnson, Leadbelly, Son House, and Charley Patton." Honeyboy did a great job of taking us back in time with his captivating historic tunes. But it was a letdown for me, since just the night before, my wife and I had heard Honeyboy perform in Trenton, N.J. in an equally intimate setting, where he was really on. He chatted with the audience, he took requests, and he was having a great time performing. I heard later that Honeyboy had been disappointed by the lack of monitor speakers for him during the concert at HE2004. Despite my misgiving, the HE Show does offer visitors the chance to get up close to legendary performers and this should be encouragement enough not to miss out on these splendid concert offerings in the future.

All in all, it appears to me that these Home Entertainment Shows are a success. Apparently, the show owners think so too, as they have scheduled them to take place twice a year and on both coasts no less. While I will not go to San Francisco in the fall, I'm looking forward to next spring for some more fun right here in the Big Apple.

**At age 88, Honeyboy Edwards still plays the Delta blues in a heavy-duty style reminiscent of Robert Johnson, Leadbelly, Son House, and Charley Patton.**



Photos: Ross Wagner

# Master Class

## Exclusive Interview: Producer Phil Ramone

Larry Jaffee

**P**HIL RAMONE is a legendary music producer who's been at the helm on recordings by a who's who of 20th century popular music, the likes of Frank Sinatra, Billy Joel, Paul Simon, Burt Bacharach, Paul McCartney, Barbra Streisand and Tony Bennett.

Since the early 1960s, Ramone has also played an integral role in pioneering many of the recording industry's technological developments. His achievements include the first use of a solid-state console for recording and mastering; the first Dolby four-track discrete sound for the 1976 movie "A Star Is Born," for which he connected for the first time a movie studio and post-production facility via satellite; the first Dolby optical surround sound for the 1980 movie "One Trick Pony"; the first use of live digital recording for Joel's *Songs in the Attic*, and the first use of a fiber-optic system to record tracks in real time from different locations for Sinatra's *Duets I & II*.

Not surprisingly, another Ramone-produced album, Billy Joel's *52nd Street* (1978) was the first pop CD manufactured in Japan in 1982; he also produced one of the first music DVDs in 1997, *Dave Grusin Presents West Side Story*.

More recently, Ramone produced tracks for Rod Stewart's hit album *As Time Goes By ... The Great American Songbook Vol. II*, which debuted at No. 2 on *Billboard's* Nov. 8, 2003 "Top 200" chart. Format-agnostic, Ramone has remixed in 5.1 for DVD-Audio Paul Simon's *Graceland* and *Rhythm of the Saints* (both Warner), and also Bob Dylan's *Blood on the Tracks* in

5.1 for last year's Super Audio CD reissue (Sony Legacy); he was the original engineer on the sessions. (Ramone would like to see the DVD-Audio and SACD proponents make peace.) He's also producing the music for a forthcoming film about the late singer Bobby Darin, starring and to be directed by Kevin Spacey. Ramone, a nine-time Grammy winner, is chairman emeritus of the board of the National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences (NARAS), and serves as chairman of NARAS's Producers and Engineers Wing.

In this exclusive interview with Larry Jaffee, Ramone talked about why the industry must accept electronic delivery and resolve the current DVD-Audio vs. Super Audio CD debate.

Here are some of Ramone's observations:

- **On the challenge of file-sharing:** The music industry needs to embrace new business models. Young people's musical tastes are being fed a tremendous amount. Young people will accept almost minimal quality for the enjoyment of the time. [Downloadable] singles for a buck? Nothing wrong with it. Do the royalty structures get screwed around? Probably, but better that way than to have them blatantly taken away from you from a copyright point of view, a production point of view, and an artistic point of view. Can we remember back in the '60s when singles drove the market? Singles were an invitation, after hearing two or three of them, to buying the album. Yes, the impression that [Internet downloading is] all free has been a misnomer. How do you read-just music to people?

- **On how much time the CD has left:** God forbid you'd say today that the CD will be gone soon. [The music industry] had a 25-year ride on the CD. Not bad.

Larry Jaffee is editor of *Medialine*, a leading recorded media magazine.



They had 25 years on the LP. All of these inventions are part of our culture. I never thought that it was appropriate for us (the music industry) to stop each new invention. You can't put business and commerce over here, and the art over there.

- **On surround mixes as a selling point:** I've always maintained, in many ways naively, that when the quality is there, you gain a loyal audience. All I ask for is to let the audience experience home theater in a store, and let [surround] music be the demo. Just wait until they have the portable 5.1 headset version. I think all of this is making music appealing.

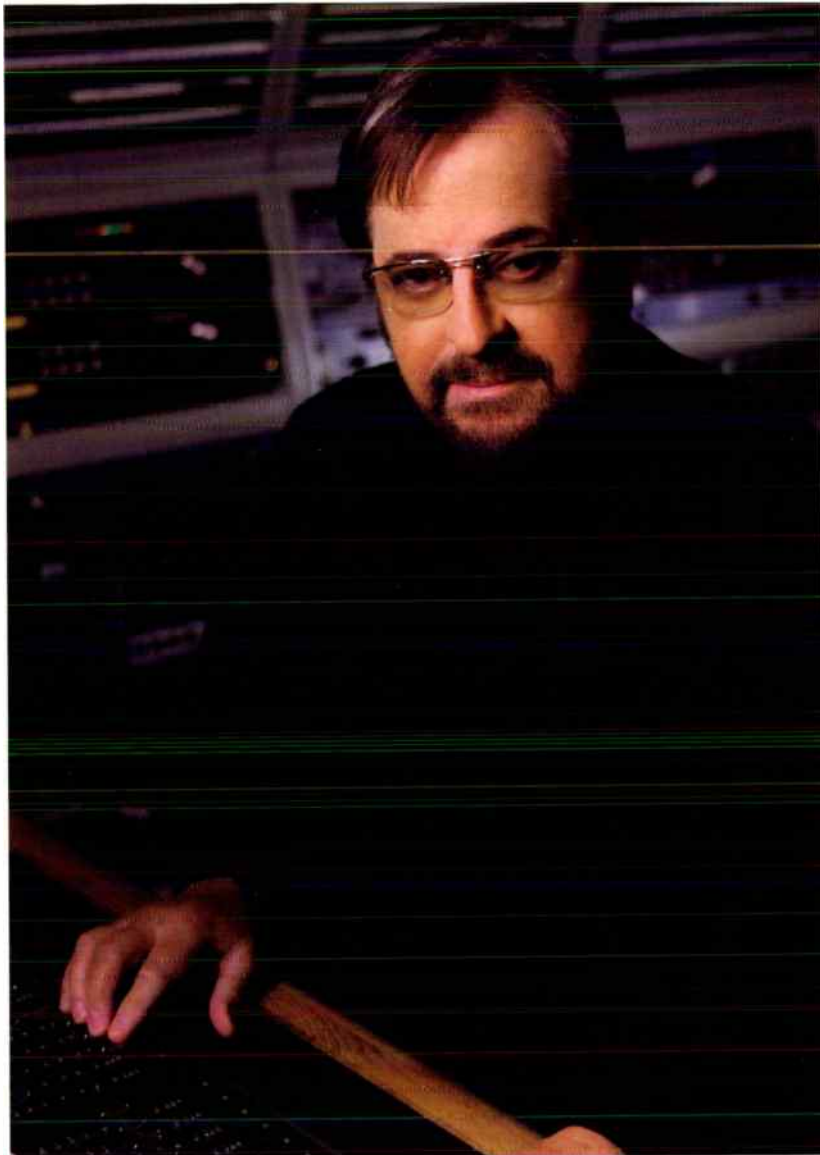
- **On what would help preserve physical media:** Both camps (DVD-Audio and Super Audio CD), if they were to join hands, would help the music industry solve a lot of its problems. The disc that could play one side DVD and one side CD is the obvious gift back to the consumer. The kind of disc that plays a visual and aural experience is critical.

- **On the quality of the first CDs:** Did they make bad, problematic CDs in the beginning? Absolutely. Some transfers from audio tape to CD were done carelessly, or had been done from a safety (master copy) that had been equalized for an LP. It took months and months for the record companies to realize that's not the master. Some used second-generation copy masters, which meant they were made for cutting-room purposes. So they had this ridiculous EQ, and then suddenly people were saying the CDs were "mean-sounding, brittle." Yes, of course. To this day, I'm very critical of how we transfer good control room sound to the audience.

- **On the critical nature of digital transfers:** The making of a CD is not just a transfer, but an art form. The people who make masters are very craft-worthy about how it gets to manufacturing. And now when you get to the 5.1, it's even 50 times more critical because the transfer of the original multi-track, if you don't do it yourself or supervise the process, could be off the EQ or the curve of the original recording. [The CD] is a compromise of what the original tape sounds like.

- **On remixing Bob Dylan's *Blood On The Tracks* in 5.1 nearly 29 years after he engineered the original recording sessions:** When I compared the original CD with the quarter-inch master tape, it was like night and day. Even the tempo and the speed of the tape accidentally in transfer went up an eighth of a tone. Well that's enough to make anything sound a little Mickey Mouse; the voice does go up. The whole CD was off for reference because of the generational thing that happens. These are just small, but very important points to why we must hand-care the new media.

It was a challenge to rehear it, and see what could have/should have been better. They (the sessions) were

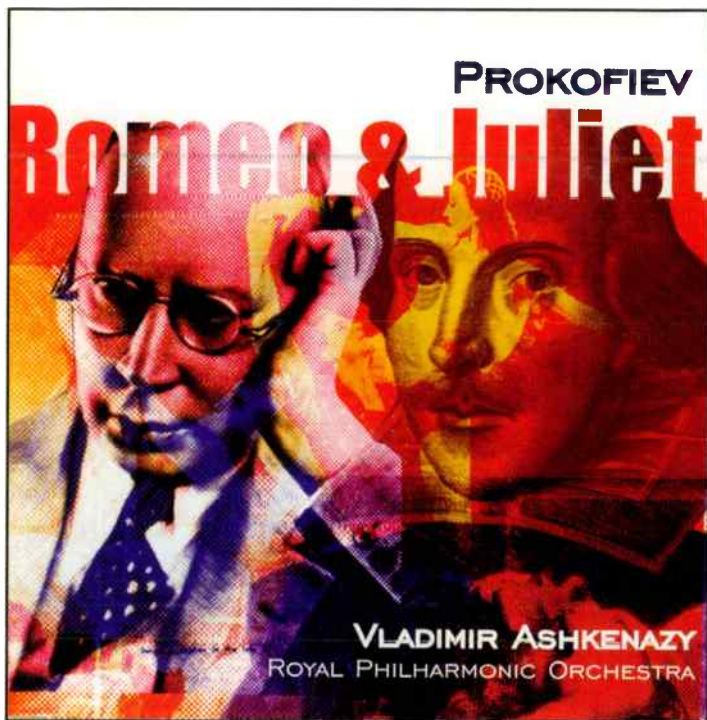


four nights of incredible music at the original A&R studios, which were once Columbia Records Studios, where Dylan would feel most comfortable.

[For the surround mix,] I spread the guitar the way it should be, him in the middle, and the bass player behind him. [It's as if] you're sitting 15 or 20 feet in front of Dylan. When you hear the Hammond [organ] or another guitar, it comes in appropriately in balance. Not to prove, "Wow, we got six speakers." It's not about that.

- **On how Billy Joel's *52nd Street* was selected to be the first CD in 1982:** I was in Japan the year before and had met with Sony, and came home with some classical records on CD. I was asked the question: "What would happen if CDs were presented in the U.S.?" I said, "Simply, it has to come into the pop market." Billy Joel was as popular as any artist you can think of. Sony was partners at the time with CBS, so it was a natural to have a CBS/Columbia act to be the first CD. *The Stranger* (also produced by Ramone) and *52nd Street* were both in consideration. The sound of the record was a factor.

Nobody knew if it would even translate well, and there weren't many people who had a CD player then. So we knew it would reach a very limited audience. But you had to start sometime. The rest is history.



Ross Wagner

## Classical

Prokofiev: *Romeo and Juliet*  
 Opus 64, Complete Ballet  
 Vladimir Ashkenazy cond.  
 The Royal Philharmonic Orch.  
 Decca B0000226-02

*"But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?  
 It is the East, and Juliet is the sun."*

**Y**OU WILL RECOGNIZE these words from Shakespeare's play, spoken by Romeo of his beloved Juliet. They might as easily apply to the recently released two-disc Decca Classics 2003 remastering of this fine 1991 recording. Whether considering the music (one of Prokofiev's most endearing compositions), the inter-

pretation or the recording quality, there is much to commend.

Happily, the liner notes include Prokofiev's scenario for each of the 52 elements of the ballet, along with incisive commentary by Christopher Palmer. Thus, those who wish to follow the story while listening may do so with ease. Be assured that, in spite of efforts by some to "Hollywood" the finale (that is, to make the music more danceable), the tragic ending is preserved. (In the liner notes, Prokofiev recounts efforts to do just that prior to the debut of the ballet in 1938.)

Or, alternatively, you may choose to settle back and allow the music to wash over you. Two hours and 20 minutes will never pass so quickly.

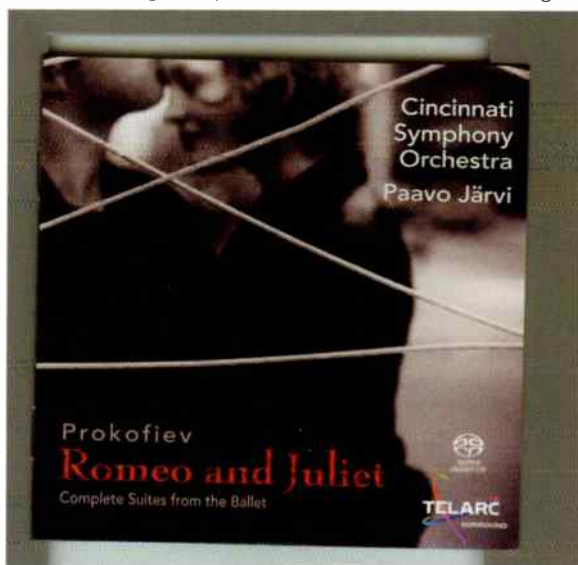
Ashkenazy and the Royal Philharmonic

have achieved a special synergy with Prokofiev's score. Although this presentation is symphonic, the dance qualities of the music are always in evidence; tender and lyrical, bold and dramatic, always eloquent and rhythmic.

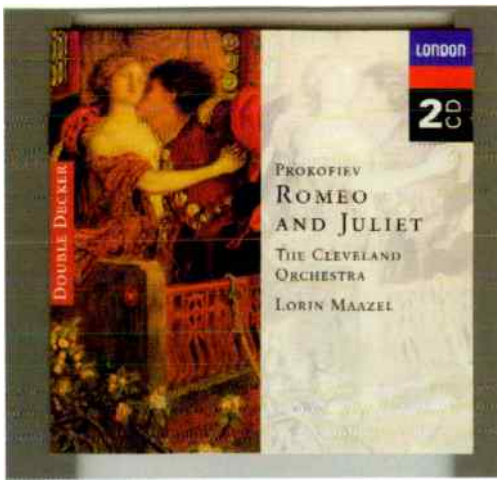
Count me among those who prefer the complete ballet score rather than any of the abbreviated versions or excerpts of this music, such as the Suite. For my taste, no part of Prokofiev's score is expendable. Whether it be the charming mandolin *aubade* (a song of lovers parting at dawn, disc 2, track 21) or the syncopated (Russian ragtime?) "Dance of the Girls with Lilies" which follows it, each element is an essential part of the whole. You might also listen for themes from Prokofiev's early Classical Symphony sprinkled throughout.

As to sonics — we are audiophiles, aren't we? — you won't be disappointed.

The original recording date, 1991, surely precludes the sweet and spacious two- or three-mike analogue efforts of the early sixties.







Yet the Decca engineers, in this digital recording, have given us acceptable depth and layering. Detail and nuance are abundant, as are dynamics. Special commendation for the whomp of the bass drum as well as from the tympani, both essential elements in the score. Upper strings could be sweeter, but in the context of an otherwise superior recording, this is forgivable. Prokofiev, it should be noted, makes extensive use of pizzicato among the celli and bass viols. You will be pleased to learn that the attack and textures of these sonic elements are well presented as are other aspects of the lower registers. Don't expect exaggerated bass booms; rather count on tasteful musical treatment from start to finish. And let's not forget kudos for lusty low brass.

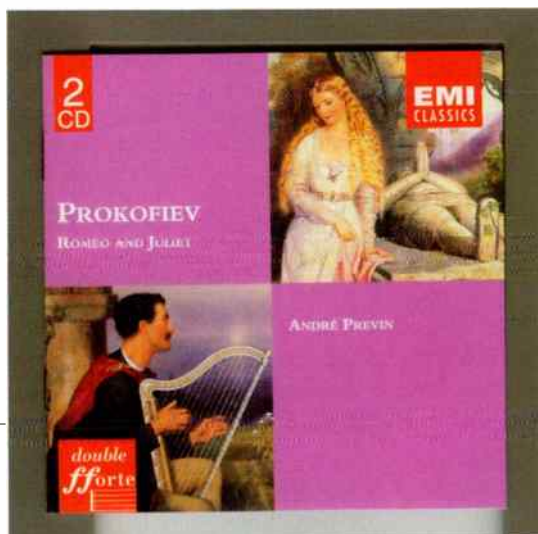
Perhaps the most dramatic tracks of the score are numbers 5 and 6 of the first CD. I'll defer to Palmer's commentary: "The Quarrel: Thirds, major and minor: spit and spite. Pyramids of chords ascend to the heights, descend to the depths. The Fight: The first Presto: flashing,

dashing semiquaver writing for violins (furioso), with not a split-second's let-up. Theme of heavy aggression in ugly-sounding horns and tuba."

Clearly, these are among the most demanding sections for your audio system and the engineers. The techies have done their job, and if you will now do yours, a treat is in store for you.

Note: Telarc has recently released an SACD surround version of the complete suites from the ballet with Paavo Jarvi and the Cincinnati (Telarc SACD-60597). This version offers superior sonics and the extra dimension of surround for those who place a premium on those virtues. Yet, as a musical experience with very good sound, my nod is for the Ashkenazy. Of course, one could be distracted by the classic ADD London (289 452 970-2) of the complete ballet with Lorin Maazel and the Cleveland Orchestra. And then there is the Previn version on EMI to consider.

So many choices. So hard to pick just one.



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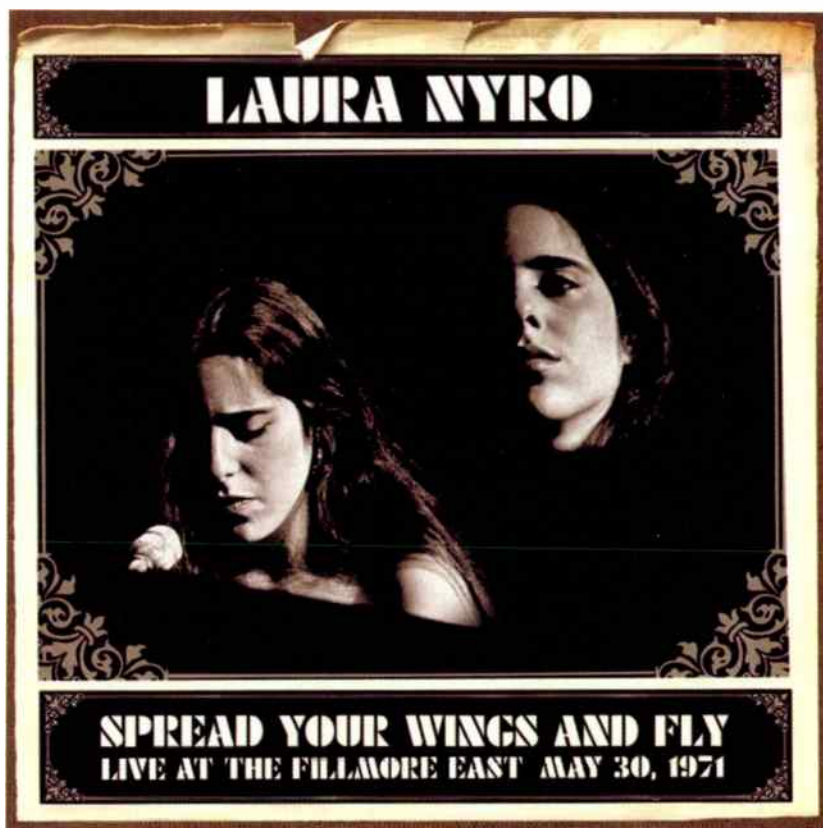
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## Rock

Laura Nyro  
*Spread Your Wings and Fly*  
Live at the Fillmore East, May 30, 1971  
Columbia/Legacy CK 92493



**L**AURA NYRO was absolute magic. Especially if you saw her play solo. Even more so if you caught her in her beloved native New York City. And the best was in a club.

This stunning release captures Nyro alone at the piano in her final Fillmore East appearance, barely a month before the venue closed. The only previous release of any of this show was on the recent reissue of her oldies album with Labelle *Gonna Take a Miracle* which included three tracks as bonus material.

As producer Al Quaglieri notes, the concert had only been preserved on a single tape machine. After all these years, the tape was in pretty poor shape. However, a heroic restoration effort has made the concert's release possible. Despite Quaglieri's disclaimer, the sound of the CD is quite fine. The very intimacy of Nyro's solo performance, just voice and piano, and the original three-microphone set-up made it relatively easy to capture a nice live mix on the fly.

Laura's performance is luminous. She couldn't be any more comfortable than she is with her hometown audience, and her rapport with them is tight. Even the inevitable if potentially embarrassing moment when someone in the crowd yells out "I love you" and she answers back "I love you, too" from the stage is warm and real.

Nyro's material that night was a nice cross-section of her work up to that time. From the then-current *Christmas and the Beads of Sweat* come "Christmas in my Soul" and "Map to the Treasure." She does classics like "Emmie," "Save the Country" and a medley of "Lu" and "Flim-Flam Man." She also medleys her own "Timer" with "Ooh Child" and "Up on the Roof." Other favorite oldies Laura does here are medleys of "Ain't Nothing Like the Real Thing" with "Natural Woman" and "Walk On By" with "Dancing in the Street."

Virtually all of these wonderful oldies reflect specifically on Nyro's New York rearing.

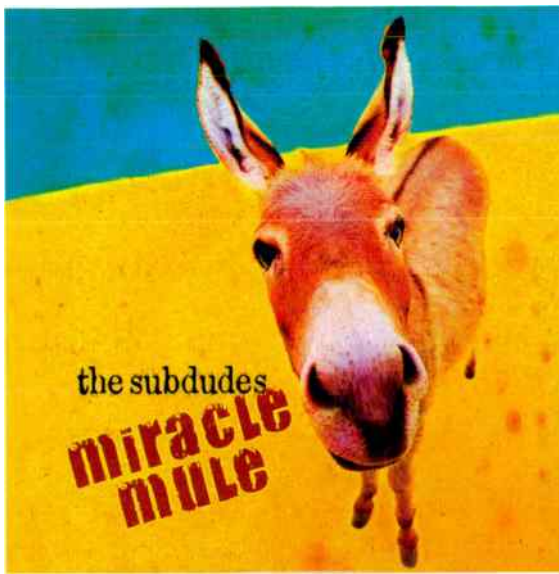
It isn't surprising she was doing all these old songs at that time since her next release would be *Gonna Take a Miracle*.

Of particular note are the Nyro compositions that bookend the set: "American Dove" and "Mother Earth." Both make their recording debut here. Thus, even the most devoted Nyro fan (and they do get very fervid in their appreciation) will find something new here.

Yes, Laura Nyro could be a most florid performer, one of the most self-involved of songwriters, but here she is at her very best. For Nyro fans, this Fillmore East concert is a must-have. If you never experienced her bewitching charm firsthand, buying this set, together with her two-CD "best of" collection *Stoned Soul Picnic*, might be a fine place to start.

Laura Nyro was an absolutely unique artist. With her passing in 1997 from ovarian cancer, she is gone and remains irreplaceable. She lives on gloriously with the belated release of this great concert.





**Michael Tearson**

**T**HE SUBDUDES broke up about eight years ago after a string of glorious, soulful, funky, smartly written albums of New Orleans-flavored music. Guess they discovered critical raves don't pay the bills.

The good news: The 'dudes are back in business. The better news: *Miracle Mule* is the best album they ever made. The jewelbox insert lists 12 songs, but with the hidden title track as the finale, there is actually a baker's dozen, and all are gems.

The Subdudes' music depends on classic New Orleans R&B syncopation and shifting textures. Tommy Malone still plays sizzling lead guitar when occasion warrants, and he is a fabulous singer. Piano man John Magnie also adds accordion and glockenspiel at the right moments. Drummer Steve Amedee is a great anchor with Tim Cook and Jimmy Messa splitting bass chores. The 'dudes have great musical empathy that lets the band bubble and swing.

Like a lot of New Orleans music, even the sad Subdudes songs sound happy. The seductive rhythms grab you as the band's performances hook you and make your grin shine.

"Known to Touch Me" is a spare, sweet little number floating on waves of accordion with a gentle surging melody that Malone's voice surfs. The yearning, impossibly catchy "Brightest Star" features

**Rock**

**The Subdudes *Miracle Mule*  
Back Porch 70876-18478-2-6**

guest player Freddy Koella on fiddle. Koella, currently on tour with Bob Dylan's crack band, also figures in "I'm Angry" where his blazing slide guitar duel with Malone will stop you cold.

The 'dudes recorded the whole of *Miracle Mule* live in the studio, where they were able to generate an organic band feel. Recording like this makes a whole lot of sense for them since the whole band is about playing together. Recording track by track could not possibly have felt this good in the end. The Subdudes and Koella produced the set with a smart, lively sound and that indefinable joy that can only come from playing as a unit.

The final "Miracle Mule" spins the tale of a mule that constantly beat quarterhorses in races between 1955 and 1958. Such a story is impossible yet true as the best horse-racing stories are. It also serves as a perfect metaphor for the group's appeal and its return. As the song says, "Only a fool would bet upon a Miracle Mule." But it also notes "the Mule was first to cross the line every time.

*Miracle Mule* will make you feel good with its music filling up the air around you. The Subdudes are a terrific band that has never received its proper due. Don't let that happen again.

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Michael Tearson

## Country

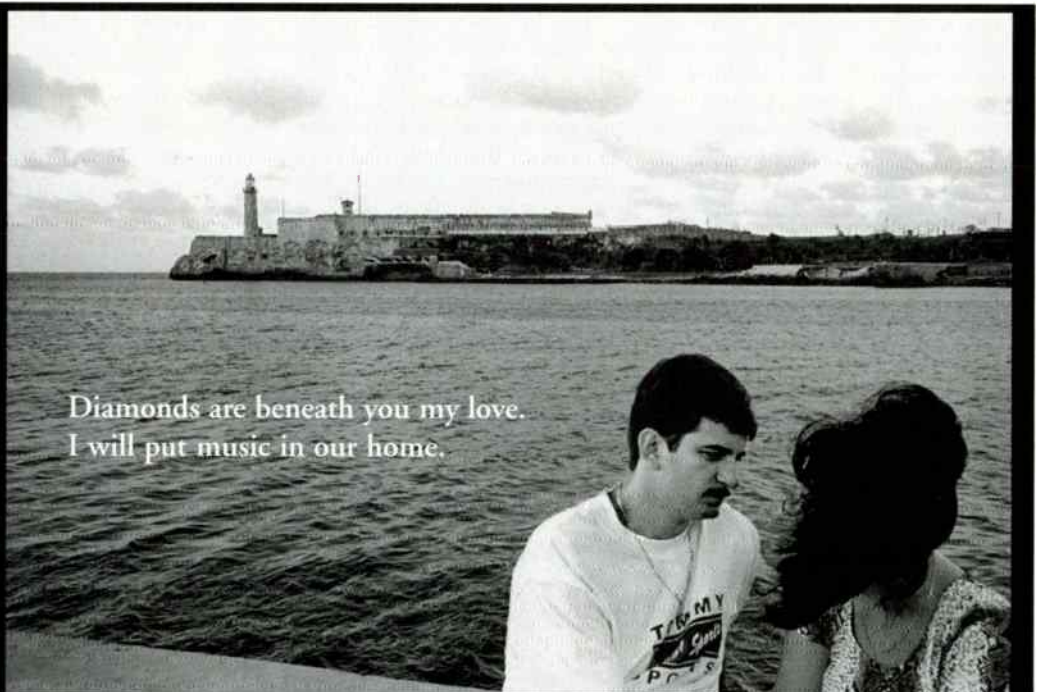
Loretta Lynn Van Lear Rose  
Interscope 80002513-02

**VAN LEAR ROSE, LORETTA** Lynn's first new album in eight years and the first ever where she's written all the songs, is a revelation in much the same way that Johnny Cash's first album with Rick Rubin was back in the early '90s.

Here Jack White, majordomo of the roots savvy White Stripes and fresh from his triumphant contribu-

tions to the mountain music score of the celebrated film "Cold Mountain," assumes the production reins. The startling sound he has given Loretta Lynn's songs is a huge part of the story. Where Rubin stripped Cash to the barest acoustic basics, White clothes Loretta's songs in raw, biting settings derived from hard-eyed "deal in the country" honky-tonk and full throttle '50s rock and

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roll. Heck, "Have Mercy" feels like '50s rockabilly heralded by screaming guitars as a pleading Loretta begs her man not to fall for the false charms of that other woman.

There are a couple of intimate acoustic ones, too. The wronged woman, an age-old staple of country and western, also appears in "Family Tree," the supremely sassy "Mrs. Leroy Brown," and the astonishing "Women's Prison." In "Prison" Loretta sings the part of a woman on Death Row for killing her errant man. When she softly sings "Amazing Grace" as she is being strapped into the electric chair at song's end, it is a quite genuinely chilling moment.

"Portland Oregon" is a duet with producer White. It opens with telegraph key guitar set against the wail of pedal steel for a classic retelling of a drunken one-night stand.

Many of Loretta Lynn's best songs have been autobiographical, and is again true here on *Van Lear Rose*. The title song opens the set with the story of how Loretta's daddy met and won her momma, the titular Van Lear Rose. "High on a Mountain Top" celebrates the down-to-earth joys of Loretta's hard-scrabble childhood as a Kentucky miner's daughter.

The finale "Story of my Life" is just that, done at a brisk pace in just 2:40, as Loretta relates how she met husband Doo, had a bunch of kids, moved to Nashville, became a star, and had her life made into the storied film "Coal Miner's Daughter." She even takes the

opportunity to wonder aloud where all the money that movie made went.

As always, Loretta's great humility and her sense of humor about herself are beguilingly appealing. Plus, her singing has never sounded so free, natural and relaxed. She openly shows us all the joy of making this record right there in her voice and in her songs.

The backing producer White has assembled couldn't be finer or more sympathetic, even as it challenges Loretta to sing for all she's worth. Jack White plays electric and acoustic guitars, organ and piano. Patrick Keeler and Jack Lawrence are a terrific drums/bass foundation. Dave Feeny adds pedal steel and slide guitars plus Dobro. Dan John Miller plays acoustic guitar and Dirk Powell adds fiddle,

bowed bass and banjo. Powell, who is another Cold Mountain alumnus, just released the terrific mountain music album *Time Again* (Rounder Select 82161-0519-2). On *Van Lear Rose* he adds authenticity to the proceedings. Together, the six pickers form a tight, supple unit as they navigate Loretta Lynn's songs, breathing vibrant life into them.

In the end *Van Lear Rose* instantly became my most-favorite Loretta Lynn album ever. It has none of the sweetening that made too many of her records mushy. In the songs' stark settings and powered by their sheer honesty, Loretta sings her heart out. Note that at age 69 Loretta's singing has lost nothing, make that NOTHING, to time. *Van Lear Rose* is one for the ages.

**Loretta is an icon of  
Country Music, but she's  
outdone herself on  
*Van Lear Rose*.**

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**RICHARD THOMPSON**



**The Old Kit Bag**

**Michael Tearson**

*Rock*

**Richard Thompson *The Old Kit Bag*  
 Cooking Vinyl/spinART 126**

**T**HE OLD KIT BAG is the leanest, fiercest album Richard Thompson has delivered in eons. He only employed two other musicians, double bass great Danny Thompson (no relation) and drummer Michael Jerome. Jerome and Judith Owen did all the backing vocals. Thompson plays guitar, of course, but also accordion, dulcimer, man-

dolin and harmonium. His multi-instrumentals are the only overdubs in a primarily "live in the studio" production.

That Thompson, Thompson and Jerome played together live is a prime ingredient in the album's charm and success. They display the chemistry and instinctive communication you only get when the



players can watch and feel each other playing together. The sparse guitar together with double bass and drums trio leaves Richard plenty of room to paint colors with his other instruments.

The album's raw-boned sound spits flinty sparks. It is sharp contrast to the thoroughly manicured production sound of Thompson's last several albums for major league label Capitol, notably 1999's *Mock Tudor* and 1996's *You? Me? Us?*

The smaller scale of the setting clearly reinvigorates Thompson. His singing and guitar here are edgier, nervier than his recorded sound has been in years.

The album's trump card is Thompson's strongest poker hand of songs in a decade. First out of the gate is one of the most riveting, "Gethsemane," an urgent song about how life breaks spirit one generation after another. The rocking "I'll Tag Along" revisits the theme of "I Want to See the Bright Lights Tonight." Dulcimer driven "One Door Opens" is a jaunty, deceptively joyous song about a lovers' break-up. "I've Got No Right

to Have It All" is an unexpected dip into cocktail territory. "Pearly Jim," the tale of a sleazy Hollywood player, is a turbo-charged rocker.

"Outside of the Inside" is a powerful piece of writing. Thompson cited the ghosts of Charlie Parker,

Thompson was freed to focus on music. Thus, Richard attains complete commitment to his performances and can attack the songs with utter abandon. Working in this spare a setting also suits Thompson's temperament both musically and spiritually.

*The Old Kit Bag* is a stunning return to the spitting, fierce Richard Thompson of his early solo work and his duet work with ex-wife Linda Thompson. How refreshing to hear and feel the fire in Richard's work here.

Just as spinART released the album they also issued a terrific five-song EP *Tracks* (spinART 131) with "I'll Tag Along" from the album and four live performances. Two are *Mock Tudor* songs "Hard on Me" and "Bathsheba Smiles." The other two come from music Richard made for a British TV special *1000 Years of Popular Music*: the Arabic flavored "Worldes Blis Ne Last" and George Jones "Don't Stop the Music." Proof Richard Thompson hasn't abandoned his eclectic tastes one whit. *Tracks* is a real find, a delightful adjunct to *The Old Kit Bag*. Well worth the search.

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## Richard Thompson's work is always worth searching out, but particularly so on *Old Kit Bag*.

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Albert Einstein, Shakespeare, Isaac Newton, Van Gogh and Botticelli in a tract about how revolutionary and free thought in both arts and science is nearly always reviled in every age. Its nervous melody contributes to the song's aura of malaise. The finale "Happy Days and Auld Lang Synes" is the sad tale of a couple breaking up at a New Years Eve party, each trying to maintain a game face.

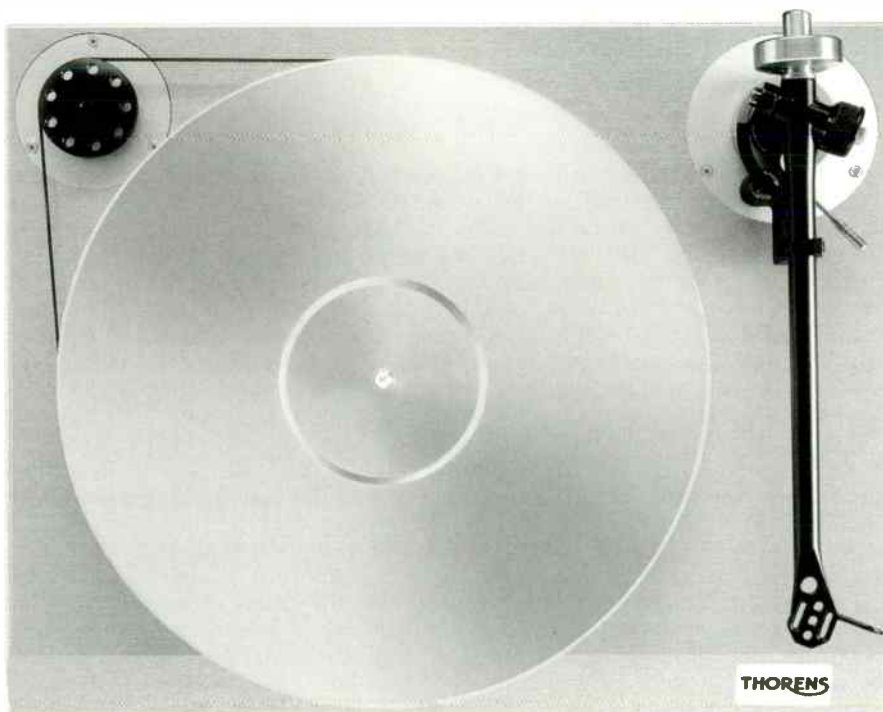
Chelew's taut production is marvelous. As he and engineer Jimmy Hoyson tended to tech details,

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**I T MUST HAVE BEEN** April 2003 when I went to see Procol Harum at The Bottom Line in New York City; they had a new album entitled *The Wells on Fire*. The lineup for that show was built around Gary Brooker, Mathew Fisher and lyricist Keith Reid, just like they were when they started! The show was great and the new album is very good. However, I had just read that Classic Records was putting out the first Procol Harum album on vinyl and, being a vinyl collector, it got my attention. This was the record that started me off as a Procol Harum fan. At that time, I didn't know about the Paramounts, a band which predated Procol Harum and had three future members.

Like most people in the U.S. who owned that initial LP, I had the version from Deram records that was electronically reprocessed stereo. Don't ask me why, but I didn't have

a mono copy or a U.K. pressing on Regal Zonophone.

The packaging on the Classic Records version has a glossy open-up or fold-out cover, and on the inside cover are pictures of the first two line-ups of Procol Harum musicians who appear on these recordings. There were no pictures of the band on the original package. A truly great package, Classic! Much improvement.

Classic has added some other goodies to this release. Perhaps most attention-getting is their 45-rpm version of "A Whiter Shade of Pale" backed by "Lime Street Blues," which was a non-LP track just like it came out in May of 1967. This is pressed on white vinyl. The next goody is a 12-inch version of "A Whiter Shade of Pale" both on 45 and 33-1/3 pressed on light green vinyl, all in glorious mono. The LP itself has two differences

from the original U.S. copy. They put on "Hamburg" instead of "A Whiter Shade of Pale" which was the follow-up single and a non-LP track. And they flip-flopped "Conquistador" with "Kaleido-scope." The music is just a masterpiece. For those of you not intimately familiar with the band, you might not know that their later orchestrated hit "Conquistador" came first on this LP in a non-orchestral version, which I like better.

As far as the sound goes, it's all in mono and so focused you can easily hear all the instruments, Robin Trower's guitar or Mathew Fisher's organ, and you really get a great feel for Gary Brooker's voice, which sounds like he is right in front of you. The pressing is done on Classics Quiex sv-p 200-gram vinyl, and is as quiet as it can get. Highly recommended in all aspects: Music, sound and packaging.



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World Radio History



Alfred Fredel

Jazz

Jaco Pastorius Big Band *Word of Mouth Revisited*  
Heads Up HU CD 3078

In the world of jazz, there have been many individuals that have changed the course of history with new ideas, innovations and styles. Each instrument has its icons; such as Dizzy Gillespie and Miles Davis on trumpet, Charlie Parker on saxophone, Buddy Rich on drums, Herbie Hancock on piano, just to name a few. Many of these players brought about a paradigm shift in the way they approach their instrument and the interpretation of jazz music. On the electric bass, the name that first comes to the mind of many musicians and jazz aficionados as one of the most impressive innovators for the instrument of all time is Jaco Pastorius. Jaco is perhaps single-handedly most responsi-

ble for bringing the electric bass to the forefront of modern jazz and fusion as a lead instrument. His technical ability along with his natural gifts that included double-jointed thumbs amazed those who heard him play. The recordings of him with *Weather Report*, as a solo artist and with *Word of Mouth* are standard issue in the listening rooms of modern jazz and jazz-fusion lovers around the globe. Yet like many of his predecessors, he led a tormented life that eventually led to his death. Such is the case with many of the greatest artists in jazz.

Jaco touched the lives of many individuals, including Peter Graves, who conducted and produced this album. Too often, those individuals

who have associated with Jaco have focused on his troubled life and his skills as a performer. In this recording, *Word of Mouth Revisited* by the Jaco Pastorius Big Band, attention has been paid to the wonderful compositions that Jaco has left as a written legacy. He was not only an extremely gifted player, but was also a wonderful arranger and composer. This album is a testament to his work. Each of the tunes on this album is complimented with the addition of some of today's hottest electric bass players, making this a truly special project. These notable bassists include Marcus Miller, Christian McBride, Victor Wooten, Victor Baliey, Jeff Carswell and several others who all trace their style



to or wish to honor Jaco Pastorius as an electric bass institution. In addition, the producers have included the voice of Jaco during recording sessions to set up some of the tunes, a special treat for those who want a small glimpse of the man who gave life to much of the music on this recording.

Right off the bat, the one thing that has stayed on my mind about this CD is that the album smokes! With some of the best jazz and session musicians in America involved with this project, it is no surprise. In addition, the folks at Heads Up have done a great job with the sound of this recording, giving the listener a well-balanced product that is also dynamic when it is required. Much credit should be given as well to Michael Bishop at Telarc International who mixed and mastered this recording.

Larry Warrilow, who has expertly crafted many of Jaco's tunes to fit more completely within a larger jazz band setting, created most of the arrangements on this album. I was particularly drawn to his arrangement of *Teen Town*, a tune that originally appeared on *Heavy*

*Weather*, a classic recording by *Weather Report*. This arrangement retains that "funky" and mysterious sound that fills the original tune while incorporating a solid brass section. In addition, Victor Wooten, the bass soloist for this track, plays

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**Jaco Pastorius is perhaps  
the guy who brought the  
electric bass fully into the  
forefront of modern jazz.**

---

with impact and complete command of his instrument; something that is crucial when attempting to play this intricate tune.

Another of my most "listened to" tracks on this tribute album is a Herbie Hancock tune called *Wiggle Waggle*. This was one of Jaco's favorite tunes and he is heard playing on this track. Taken from a live concert on Sanibel Island, the bass track was actually extracted and inserted; much like what was done with the Nat King Cole/Natalie Cole *Unforgettable* album. Jaco's playing is solid, filled with technical acro-

batics that made him a legend among electric bass players. The style is both aggressive and bold, signatures of his playing.

Finally, *Punk Jazz Revisited*, the last track on this recording by Marcus Miller, brings a totally new approach to this classic Pastorius tune. Presented in a more funk-influenced manner that brings this song a very strong R&B "feel", Miller makes the strong statement that Jaco's music transcends the realm of jazz. Using synthesized sounds for the bass as well as virtuoso playing, he presents this song in a playful manner, making it easy and fun to listen to while proving that he is simply a great musician, extraordinary.

If you are a fan of fusion, jazz or especially Jaco Pastorius, I urge you to take a listen to this well conceived album. From beginning to end, it will not disappoint the listener and shares a small portion of the body of work from one of the jazz world's greatest musicians that many times is overlooked. In addition to this, the recording quality is superb, which will make it a frequent visitor to my CD player.



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## World Beat

Mariza Fado Em Mim  
World Connection/Times Square TSQD 9026

**T**HROUGHOUT THE WORLD, many cultures have forms of music that are linked to their collective soul. *Fado* is to Portugal as the blues are to America, *rembetica* is to Greece, tango is to Argentina, and flamenco is to Spain. Each of these musical forms shares passion, melancholy, sorrow, jealousy, irony, satire and other complex emotions that are an artistic cry against the difficult existence of the peoples in these cultures. *Fado* first found favor among Portugal's homesick sailors and the urban poor of a country which

looks westward into the seemingly endless Atlantic Ocean. It is the music of smoky cafés and introspective thought, which combines a bittersweet emotional palette with examples of life's cruelties and love's intense power.

Amalia Rodrigues was the pre-eminent interpreter of *fado* in the 20th century and the undisputed queen of this musical form for over 50 years until her death in 1999. Rodrigues began her career in 1939 and her fame in Portugal can be equated to the appeal of Frank

Sinatra in America. Mariza has been compared favorably to Rodrigues, in that she also captures the true essence of *fado* while adding a new fresh approach to the music.

Mariza was born in the former Portuguese colony of Mozambique. She immigrated to Portugal with her family when she was five years old. Her family opened up a restaurant and *fado* house in Lisbon, where she first began to sing as a child. After following several other musical pursuits, Mariza realized that *fado* was always going to be a deep



part of her being and decided to take up the form professionally.

As one listens to Mariza's debut album, *Fado Em Mim*, you cannot help but feel the sense of longing, the unrelenting sadness (what the Portuguese call *saudade*), and the intensity inherent in the music. She presents the classic *fado* songs along with some original compositions with elegance, sophistication and passion. While some of her interpretations have an element of jazz in their delivery, she is true to the tradition and makes the poetry and the lyrics of each song the driving forces for the music.

She sings many *fados* that are associated with Rodrigues including *Barco Negro* (The Dark Boat) where she skillfully performs a cappella with a drum. Her voice soars in this song and there is no question that she truly has command of the words and music, while making the delivery of this *fado* truly uniquely hers. She offers two performances of *Loucura* (Madness), one with the distinct traditional sound of the Portuguese guitar (a tear-shaped, 12-stringed instrument) while the second (a hidden track at the end of the CD) is jazz influenced and uses a solo piano. Both of these performances are simply stunning and passionate with strong drama and emotional delivery.

My favorite *fado* on this album is *Chuva* (Rain), an original song that is a truly wonderful listening experience. This album shows that Mariza is beyond doubt one of the foremost heirs of *Fadista* legend Amalia Rodrigues.

This release presents a warm and realistic intimate setting to the listener. *Fado Em Mim* was recorded in Portugal and credit must be given to Fernando Nunes for a wonderfully engineered album. Also of note is musician Custodio Castelo, whose masterful performance on the Portuguese guitar projects the beauty and character of the instrument and helps to create the nostalgic and sad mood of the music. The support from this totally unique Portuguese musical instrument helps Mariza to communicate the passionate words in each song and to thrill the listener with her powerful voice.

If you are a fan of flamenco, *rembetica*, or tango, there is a strong probability that you will also embrace the wonderful sounds of

*fado*. You will find the sound of beautiful songs delivered with emotion, elegance and soul in *Fado Em Mim*. Mariza is the leader among the new *Fadistas* and has been proclaimed "Best *Fado* Voice" in her native Portugal. It is a wonderful listening experience and highly recommended.

Should you enjoy the sound of *fado*, there are other new artists within this genre that merit exploration: Misia, *Rituals*, Erato; Cristina

Branco, *Corpo Iluminado*, Decca, and Dulce Pontes, *O Primeiro Canto*, Polydor.

If you are interested in the legendary Amalia Rodrigues, there are literally hundreds of recordings available. A good starter compilation is *The Art of Amalia* on Blue Note's EMI Hemispheres label. This album is a slice of the artistic life of Amalia Rodrigues and may very well be a catalyst for further exploration of her work.

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## Jazz

Scolofoho *Oh!*  
Blue Note HCD 7243 5 42081 2 6

**T**HIS ODDLY NAMED GROUP actually is a "super group" composed of John Scofield, guitar; Joe Lovano, tenor and soprano saxes; Al Foster, drums, and Dave Holland, bass (hence the name). These guys have played with the best, and made very important and varied recordings under their own names. Lovano and Holland have recorded in every jazz context, from bop to big band to experimental music. Scofield played with Miles (as did Holland), but is known these days as a jam band player, while Foster has played with all the greats, including Sonny Rollins and McCoy Tyner. However, a band of leaders has some potential pitfalls; the players may not fully integrate strong individual styles that got them to be leaders in the first place. They may save their best material for their own dates or they simply may not mesh. Here, they truly do catch fire, coming up with a style of music that fuses interesting aspects of their own approaches. Compositions often morph midstream; what starts out as a bop tune may develop an R&B-style bridge, and knotty themes are often leavened with hooks.

The title track has a dark, shifting, boppish theme, with Lovano slithering and shimmying through the chords, while Scofield solo veers from metallic tone to Montgomery octaves. "Right About Now" has a slow, plaintive "A" theme, then a "B" theme which elaborates and extends the "A," and a "C" theme which features a catchy funky riff over four-to-the-bar guitar chords. Scofield plays a pleading solo, while Lovano digs in. Holland displays his chops on the opening of his composition "The Winding Way", then sets up the vamp over which this menacing tune rides. Scofield is edgy, Lovano aggressively over-blows on his fabulous solo, and the insistent rhythm (and the short "hook", which also serves as a transition between sections) is addictive. "Bittersweet" is a pretty bossa-style ballad featuring Lovano's soprano sax, while the upbeat "Shorter Form" features exciting, New Orleans style simultaneous soloing by guitar and sax as it ends. An Ornette Coleman/Prime Time vibe hangs over Lovano's "New Armstrong," with another powerful, strong theme, distorted

guitar (and the sax equivalent), rock vamps, and a hell-bent furiousness. Lovano's "The Dawn of Time," has a vaguely Latin theme, great melodic material that builds to one of those catchy "hooks," a bouncy Holland solo, tense, trebly guitar high jinks, and Lovano spitting out strong statements. "Brandyn," is the most boppish of the tunes, with fluid, high-speed guitar and soprano sax outings. Blue Note soul-jazz of the sixties inspired "Oh I See" (Hancock's '63 recording "And What If I Don't" comes immediately to mind); Lovano is oblique yet facile, while Scofield is probing, and Holland is soulful as can be.

James Farber is engineer, and he gets great sound on this "live to two-track" CD. There is nice width and depth to the recording, with drums far right, guitar to the front and left (and lack of the dreaded "drum spread"). Timbre of instruments, especially sax, suffers slight decrease and loss of immediacy, but when doesn't timbre take it on the nose. The compositions and playing, both in solo context and group interaction, however, are what make this a spectacular outing.





I LOVE FINDING CDs like this one; they're fun, out in left field, yet enjoyable, even funny. This great group is lead by Steven Bernstein, about whom there has been buzz for a while. After hearing Bernstein's "Diaspora Soul" and "Diaspora Jazz," and going to see his Millennial Territorial Orchestra (which is really three great outfits, and all of them are worth checking out), I was looking forward to this release by this provocatively named quartet (with many guests). It didn't disappoint.

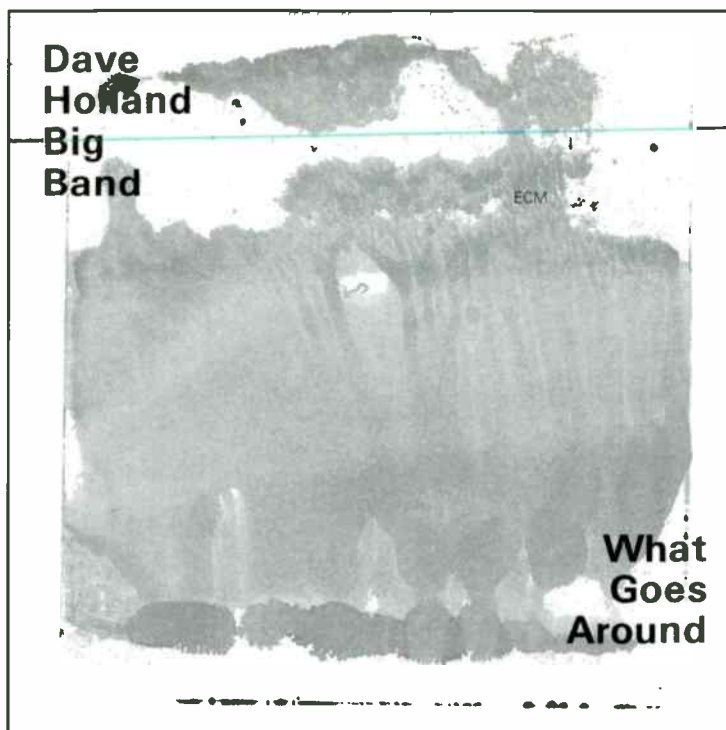
The short, bizarre intro (there are a number of these little strange transitional ditties) "Kitchen" comes on funky as all hell, with screaming sax, buzz saw trumpet (Bernstein's instrument, a slide trumpet, can burn a hole straight into your brain). The title tune begins with a '70s Miles-sounding electric piano, great wah-wah slide guitar (guest David Tronzo), and a plaintive melody over a dub beat. Basie's "Blue and Sentimental" is translated into Sex Mob-ese; it's funky, soulful, and dub inflected, and guest Roswell Rudd (a perfect fit) is gruff and low-down, and then moans his way through the pathos Basie only partly expressed on the original.

"Mothra" has a feeling of dread to it (dig guest Peter Apfelbaum's spacey melodic). Catchy, conversational trumpet is featured on the slow, soulful (and breathtakingly beautiful) "Slide Serenade"; Bernstein not being one for too much sentimentality, the bridge smokes like a four-alarm. "Norbert's Weiner" (shameless, these guys) starts out in an Eastern European *doina* style, then morphs into a tippy tango, with a (relatively) restrained "A" theme, (nice clarinet by guest Doug Weiselman), then a chaotic descending bridge during which everyone blares and shrieks, then back to tango. Next is old-style R&B on Professor Longhair's "Baby Let Me Hold Your Hand"; you know he wants more than hand-holding on this raucous outing with an extended Mob.

"Artie Shaw" features the base quartet, and gives Bernstein and Briggan Krauss (alto and baritone sax) plenty of room to stretch and squeal; it's oddly more Ornette than Artie. Rudd's free-time gully-low moaning, with commentary from Bernstein, opens "Call to the Freaks," which settles into a reggae-inflected blues with roots in Ellington's "Creole Love Song,"

minus the latter's gentility. The band starts out strong and builds. A percussive, atmospheric "Translation 3" fades into "Conk Busters," a rousing finale (think R&B numbers like "Shout," as interpreted by Ornette Coleman). More moody atmospherics become a bonus track that starts out as a march, fades to become Strauss' "Blue Danube," done energetically without irony (if Bernstein can ever be said to be completely devoid of such an inflection), then goes into another aggressive, tempo racing squall, then it's done.

This is a band that loves and plays all types of music Their Way (interestingly, the only genre omitted is that jazz staple, bebop). Bernstein likes things bordering on chaos, but resolution is always found. His slide trumpet sound favors passion and power over delicacy, and the band's approach mirrors this. Sonically, we do get a nice soundstage, real power in the horns, and a deep bass sound, though the sound is electronically processed at times, Reggae-style (doesn't bother me, but some may take offense). This band is exciting, fun (how often is that word applied to jazz these days?), engrossing, and a must-hear.



## Jazz

Dave Holland Big Band *What Goes Around*  
ECM 1777

**T**HIS IS THE FIRST album Dave Holland, renowned bassist, composer, and bandleader, has done with a big band. Listening to these results, I hope it's not his last. His *modus operandi* here was to start with his usual working quintet, and then layer orchestral sounds on top of that nucleus.

"Triple Dance" is dense, with much of its action happening in the nether regions. Gary Smulyan's baritone sax offers the theme and an energetic solo, with insistent trombones, then other brass, prodding him. Holland updates the Fletcher Henderson arranging style of writing for sections (trumpets versus saxes versus trombones), though Henderson wouldn't recognize these sounds. The next tune, "Blues for C.M.," was recorded previously by the small band. The slow, sensuous, slinky theme is beguiling, and the orchestra fleshes things out nicely. Vibist (and band regular) Steve Nelson, spins out off-beat lines, in and around the rhythm, while altoist Antonio Hart plays passionate, fluid lines. Holland is a monster bassist,

bouncing, jumping, and displaying his round, full, slightly cool tone.

A powerful ascending clarion call announces "The Razors Edge", which has a driving, Latinesque rhythm, and a fine blustery trombone solo from Josh Roseman. Holland is quite generous with solo time, doling it out to many different band members. The title track drapes a vaguely Eastern theme over a slow, funky vamp, and builds up to multiple explosions. Chris Potter's tenor and Robin Eubanks' trombone solo simultaneously (amazingly powerful) and singly, and the orchestra goes from whispering to screaming over the course of just a few measures. Whew. Drummer Billy Kilson, who holds the entire session together, gets some here, too. "Upswing" opens gracefully, and becomes a swinger with Afro-Cuban accents, and very boppish solos from Smulyan and trumpeter Alex Sipiagin. The soft, ethereal "First Snow" would have fit in nicely on a Booker Little album; the lovely, unusual harmonies and plaintive melody are captivating,

and the orchestration slowly builds to a crescendo without ever upsetting the mood. Holland opens "Shadow Dance" unaccompanied, playing fast and funky. He settles on the *ostinato-de-juer*, and Hart pulls out his flute, then alto sax, as the band digs in with muscular vamps. This is real head-bopping stuff, jumping from Afro-Cuban to 4/4 swing and back again suddenly enough to cause whiplash. Potter's tenor solo is packed with enough Coltrane quotes and licks to qualify as a tribute (though he doesn't sound 'Trane-ish). Hart and Potter solo in tandem fiercely, quotes still flying (casting a wider net now: Ellington, "Mary Hartman..."), and the band roars out.

Sound on the album is what people think of an ECM house sound, slightly dry, but open, airy, slightly distant sounding, with a VERY WIDE stage, and good depth.

Holland, already acknowledged for his many talents, adds big-band leading and arranging to his prodigious resume. The results are definitely worth checking out.



Jack Skowron

## Jazz

Ken Clark Organ Trio *Eternal Funk*  
Severn Records CD-0021

**T**HIS IS A FINE NEW recording of jam band music, combining jazz, rock and funk grooves, in a heady fusion that's body oriented. Clark is a ferocious improviser, squeezing every available ounce of juice out of his Hammond B-3, and he is ably accompanied by his merry band.

We come out burning, with "Eternal Funk," which calls to mind James Brown, Marvin Gaye, and the Allman Brothers in one rockin' track. Mike Melle's guitar paves the way for swells of cascading organ (dynamic shifts are extreme, unlike today's rock recordings). Without a pause, gears suddenly shift and we're in "The Curse," with chords and feel reminiscent of "Sonny," and with another '60s-'70s staple featured, the electric piano. "Duke Ellington Superstar" has a rockin' groove, scratchy guitar (Mike Mele,

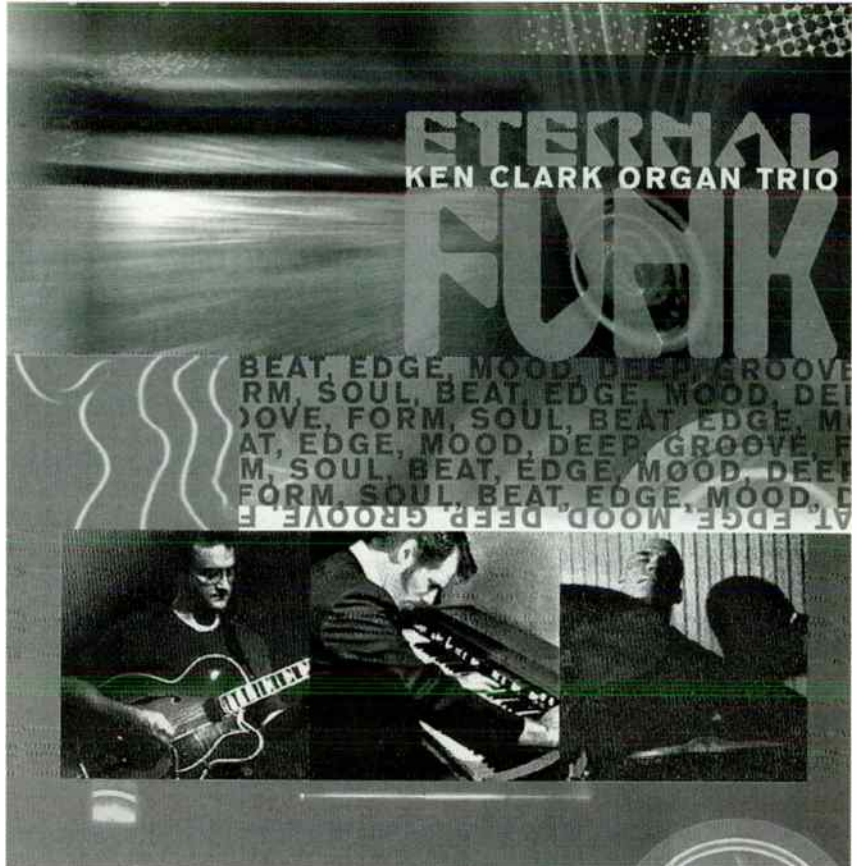
with mucho Benson in his behind), chords that recall (but don't replicate) "Caravan," and organ that builds to a mighty roar. Miles Davis' "Blue In Green," is slow, soft, sensitive, with probing guitar and organ that fills the soundstage.

The groove deepens on "The Doctor Is In," where a minimalist theme brings on maximal organ swells on the bridge (lots of Meters here). The guitar alternates clean and dirty lines while Clark starts with heavily syncopated lines, then lets his two hands do the walking on the bridge. "Right Now" brings the tempo up and rocks out, with Clark's organ fast, facile, and furious. The jazzy "Young One," a piece recalling Larry Young, lets Clark flex his bop muscles; he starts out soft, but quickly is flying, demonstrating that the modal and

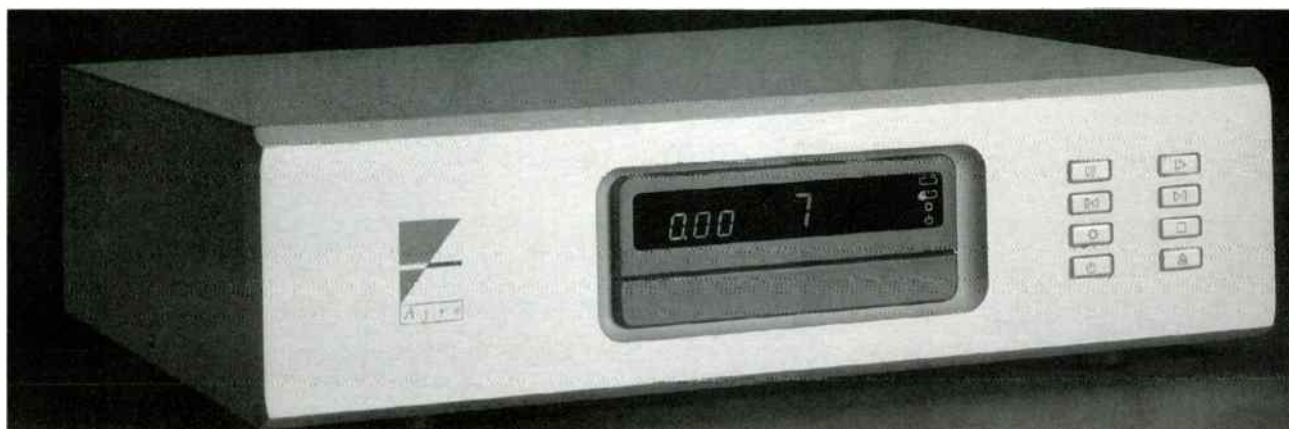
bop thing is no sweat (make that lots of sweat).

It's a struttin' groove for "Rhythm & Groove," with a bit of Spencer Davis' "I'm a Man" for good measure. Clark's touch here is nice, barely brushing the keys at first, then blasting with his right hand, with pretty counter-melodies played with his left. "On The Cuff" has more of a rock feel again, while "Truth Is" explores "out" territory with an atmospheric, moody, soft theme, and a jam with edgy guitar chords and organ blocks that are more sound than lines (this captures the feel of a Dead jam).

Sound is good—a nice dynamic range, great organ sound, and nice imaging. This is nice party music (for a very hip crowd), or fun for a party of one and some intense air guitar playing.



# Ayre CX-7 CD Player



Arnis Balgalvis

**C**HARLES HANSEN, Ayre's main man, is one very versatile designer. He belongs to that select group of individuals who are equally at home with loudspeakers, as well as with analog and digital circuitry. Now, that's certainly something to write home about.

Hansen is the one who first put Avalon on the map with the Ascent loudspeaker and later did them proud with the Eclipse loudspeaker, a piece of gear which was immediately given high ratings even before magazine reviews appeared. Some time after that he started Ayre and proceeded to intrigue the high-end community with innovative and well-regarded preamps and power amps. For many people, such achievements would be enough, but not for Hansen. His next move was into the digital world where he came up with the Ayre D-1x, their top-of-the-line, \$8000+ CD/DVD player. Though other designers have had a few years to catch up, many still regard the D-1x as *the* audio/video standard.

Consequently, when Hansen told me about his CX-7 CD player, my ears perked up. Ayre products have been consistently well received in the marketplace because they give the firm's customer very solid performance at very reasonable price points. Based on this track record, I simply had to pay attention. And when the CX-7's \$2950 price was mentioned, my interest really piqued.

## The Long and Short of It

The CX-7 is a handsome, single-box CD player. It has a two-tone, brushed-aluminum finish with a centrally located drawer and display on the front panel. By rounding the corners and the edges of the front panel, a clean, functional appearance is created. This styling is right along the lines of the rest of the new Ayre products including the AX-7 integrated amplifier, K-5x preamp, and the V-5x power amp.

The CD tray is located below a display which shows the track number, total disc time or time for the track, and various symbols to indicate function status, e.g. "Repeat" mode. A welcome feature for me is the ability

to turn the display completely off, a handy convenience when listening in dark or low-light conditions. On the right of the tray/display position, arranged in two columns of four, you find a set of eight rectangular push buttons that control the player. The remote control makes these tasks easier from your listening chair by offering most of these functions.

The rear panel reveals some welcome functional conveniences. Besides the analog outputs, appearing in balanced XLR and RCA modes, Ayre provides an AES/EBU digital audio output. After buffering and reclocking, this transformer-coupled output allows the CX-7 to be used as a pure transport to feed an external DAC or digital recording device. A rear panel switch will disable the digital audio output when not in use. In addition, there is a small two-position switch located next to the analog outputs, labeled "Listen" and "Measure." Here the user has a choice to select between two algorithms for the digital filter. The "Listen" position gives greater accuracy in the time domain, while the "Measure" position results in more accurate frequency-domain performance. I found that for my listening sessions the switch ended up in the "Listen" position.

With a weight of 25 pounds, the CX-7 is a rather hefty CD player. Being curious about the significant weight of the CX-7, I removed the top cover for a peek inside. OK, just as I expected! Two huge power transformers were located just slightly off center, toward one side of the player.

I can assure you that, having designed a power supply or two in my days as an engineer, that at the rated 40 watts of power consumption of the CX-7, these transformers are working without breaking a sweat. Over-kill in the power supply area has always been a welcome idea and it is sure good to see that Hansen chose to go with an all-out approach here.

Another welcome sight was the transport, a CD-ROM mechanism sourced from TEAC. This company's



Esoteric division is considered by many to be the leader in the transport field because of their work in creating and supplying the fabulously well-performing VRDS CD transports implemented in the highly regarded transport designs by Spectral and Wadia. Esoteric also recently introduced their own transport component, the P-70 along with a companion DAC, the D-70.

Technically, the CX-7 incorporates a number of uniquely sophisticated ideas. First off, Ayre designed and implemented their own clock circuit in order to more closely control the numerous parameters that affect clock jitter. Here's a small sample of what was considered: Crystal quality and loading, gain and bandwidth of the oscillator circuit, the printed circuit board layout, and the attributes of the power supply. Using a "store bought" sub-assembly would have compromised the low clock jitter that most think is essential for producing great sound.

Next comes the digital filtering. As is the case in numerous up-sampling designs today, the first digital filter in the Ayre player up-samples the 44.1-kHz data to 176.4 kHz. But there's more. First of all, Hansen emphasized to me, that this is a synchronous filter since it takes the 44.1 kHz to 176.4 kHz, which is an even multiple of four. This approach is better sounding than the very commonly found asynchronous filters which take the 44.1-kHz rate and up-samples it to 96 kHz or even to 192 kHz where again the multiple is not an even number. In the CX-7 design, Hansen continues by using a second digital filter and over-samples that output by a factor of 8x, taking the up-sampled 176.4 kHz to 1.4112 MHz. As a result, at this very high frequency, the reconstruction filter is very gentle, and this results in exceptional transient response.

For the critical digital-to-analog conversion process, Hansen chose a Burr-Brown PCM1738 DAC chip. This 24-bit component uses a resistor-ladder array to convert the upper six bits, while the remaining 18 bits are converted with a five-level Sigma-Delta technique at 11.2896 MHz.

For the next step, the I/V or current-to-voltage conversion, an Analog Devices AD844, a 2000 V/microsecond op-amp, is used. Even though this is an op-amp chip, one which was originally intended to be implemented with negative feedback around it, Hansen configured in each channel a pair of these AD844 devices in a proprietary design that avoids any application of negative feedback. Finally, for the audio output stages of the CX-7, two more AD844 chips per channel are implemented in a direct-coupled topology. Hansen, very proudly, pronounces the circuitry of the CX-7 to be completely without feedback of any sort. Further, not only is there no voltage feedback, Hansen says this circuitry also has no current feedback. He further emphasizes that this topology is direct coupled (i.e. without any coupling capacitors) and does not rely on any d.c.-servo techniques.

## Setting Up

Thankfully, the CX-7 is not a fussy component setup-wise. Which is as it should be, even for the advanced audiophile. Such a characteristic simply makes life that

much more simple. However, the CX-7 does need a fair amount of playing time initially before it comes into its own. I'm talking a good couple of hundred hours here. So don't rush to judgment too early. Since it sounds decent enough in the early stages of this process, the period can be put to good use listening to music.

I always like to experiment with supports for any component, but in the case of CD transports and players, such trials seem mandatory. I suggest you try different cones, pucks, or perhaps the more sophisticated accessories. Unfortunately, I cannot give you a definitive answer about what will work best with the CX-7 because the individual conditions for each set-up vary all over the place.

But, as I mentioned, the CX-7 is not too demanding.

It settled in very comfortably on my normal equipment rack without any problems. I got very good results using Ayre's myrtle wood blocks for support pieces. I would certainly suggest having these pieces on hand because I am not aware of another less expensive tweak in audio – the Ayre myrtle wood blocks have a list price of \$5 each!

I have become convinced that balanced connections are the best way to go, what with all the r.f.i. that's permeating all over the place due to cell phones, cordless phones, short wave communications, and satellite TV, not to mention the old standards such as AM and FM radio. Hence, I used the CX-7 predominantly with balanced interconnects from TARA Labs. For some time now, I have come to really enjoy the cables from TARA Labs. Their "ISM Onboard The 0.8" interconnects are superbly transparent, spectrally evenhanded, and exhibit exceptional transient performance. The TARA Labs "ISM Onboard The 0.8" is a component that, to me, is more neutral and revealing than any other cable that I have used in my system.

## NOTES

**Ayre CX7 Compact Disc Player, \$2,950.** Ayre Acoustics, 2300 Central Ave., Boulder, CO 80301; phone 303/442-7300, fax 303/442-7301; info@ayre.com; www.ayre.com.

### Associated Equipment

Spectral SDR-3000 Transport, SDR-2000 Pro Processor, Teac T-70 Transport and D-70 DAC, EMM Labs modified Philips SCDA-1000 player and EMM Labs DAC-6 SCDA and PCM D-to-A Processor, Jeff Rowland Design Group Synergy III preamp and Model 12 monoblock power amps, interconnects TARA Labs ISM Onboard The 0.8, and The Omega Speaker wire, Avalon Acoustics Eidolon Loudspeakers, Echobuster and ASC Tube Traps room treatment.

## The Sound of Music

The CX-7 ranks as one of the most satisfying components I have experienced. That's not to say it has the best bass or the best highs or the best staging. That's not what the CX-7 is about. Where this player excels is in the fulfillment area. This thing is just so satisfying. No, not "satisfactory". That implies being *just* good enough. What I'm referring to is being able to go to your system, feed the CX-7 a nice CD, sit back and enjoy the music. I'm talking gratification and contentment here.

In my case, the only interruption in this serenity was the requirement to change the CD. Otherwise it was a treat all the way – as in exceptionally smooth spectral balance, wide open stage, compelling transparency, riveting focus, and endlessly involving tone colors. The sound I experienced was inviting. And involving. And enjoyable.

The CX-7 will not bring attention to itself with a barrage of stunning aspects of performance. Its nature is not to flash brash attention-grabbing bursts of brilliance.

Instead, the CX-7 will draw you in, for keeps, time after time. This is a long-term affair here and not some one-night stand. What we have here is a real ability to communicate all the essential aspects of music without any sense of being short-changed.

I will not say that it is the best CD player on the planet. I have on hand a couple all-out playback systems including the EMM Labs SACD-1000 (modified) and their DAC-6 set-up, as well as the Teac D-70 and T-70 DAC and transport tandem. Each of these playback systems will set you back \$10,000 plus. And they do outperform the \$3000 CX-7. But where one might consider the CX-7 to be a benchmark is in the value area. With those expensive players, we are well into the price

range where an increase in dollars spent does not result in a commensurate increase in performance. We are well beyond that "knee" where we have to spend more and more for smaller sonic achievements. With the CX-7 in particular, I believe, we are still very solidly on the linear section of the value curve, and thus, its performance is very reasonable for the level of expenditure.

A word of advice when shopping and listening: Do not, for once, succumb to endless comparison sessions. Instead, just sit down and listen only to the CX-7 and do that for extended periods using some of your favorite music. It is in these conditions the CX-7 will shine.

Let me present to you a CD from the XRCD series from JVC, and first, let me say that if you are looking for a consistently great technical execution, this series – in particular, the latest ones from XRCD24 group – is in my experience, the most consistent label to give you such truly advanced presentations. And that's in addition to the very great variety of musical selections, both jazz and classical, and their outstanding performances and conducting.

I chose Richard Strauss' *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, with the Chicago Symphony lead by Fritz Reiner, JMCXR-0011. Here the string sections come across as exceptionally melodious, melding to resonate in a choir-like manner. The sound was massively spacious and exceptionally dynamic. The dramatic ebbs and flows of the music are eminently convincing due to the clarity of the presentation. The CX-7 appears to put the emphasis on the whole of the composition without short-changing any individual details. The instruments appear very carefully integrated to convey the sense of the ensemble. And, guess what? Before I knew it, I was INVOLVED.

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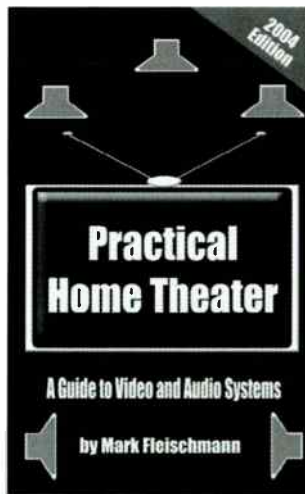
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The Four Seasons by Antonio Vivaldi (BIS CD-275) was next. Here the rich and refined bass, along with excellent definition, supplied an earnest foundation to the performance. The stage was wide and vivid, and remained steadfastly unflappable with prominent positioning of instruments. When things get going in the full-tilt sections, the situation does not get overwhelming and remains very controlled. There's an appealing sense of restraint – the idea of elegant comes to mind – reminiscent of a live performance. While there's a hint of a feeling that spectrally there could be more extension, the dynamics do not appear to be compressed during numerous displays of exuberance. The profusion of detail is an absolute delight.

And now, musically that is, for something completely different. This next CD comes from the group Black Light Syndrome formed by Terry Bozio, Tony Levin, and Steve Stevens; the CD has the same title and is from Magna Carta as MA-9019-2. For some real fun try cut 3. This dynamic blockbuster came across in all of its intended glory. These guys slam, bang and pluck seemingly everything within reach.

I have heard this CD on numerous systems, but I am still impressed by just how deeply I was involved with the music reproduction on the CX-7. I enjoyed this cacophony from beginning to end. This is one of those CDs that will be thoroughly punishing if the system falters. The CX-7, however, was absolutely marvelous at unraveling the essential pieces of this musical puzzle, to come up with an exceptionally satisfactory solution. The resolution exhibited is of a very high order. No matter how you look at it, be it speed, space, or dynamics, the CX-7 produced an exceedingly involving replica of the specific sonic event.

## The Finale

I could go on raving about the CX-7, but I could probably add very little of real worth to what I have already conveyed to you. The bottom line is that the CX-7 is an absolutely delightful product; my experience with the Ayre unit has been eminently enjoyable. Its charming musical manner won me over and had me thoroughly captivated.

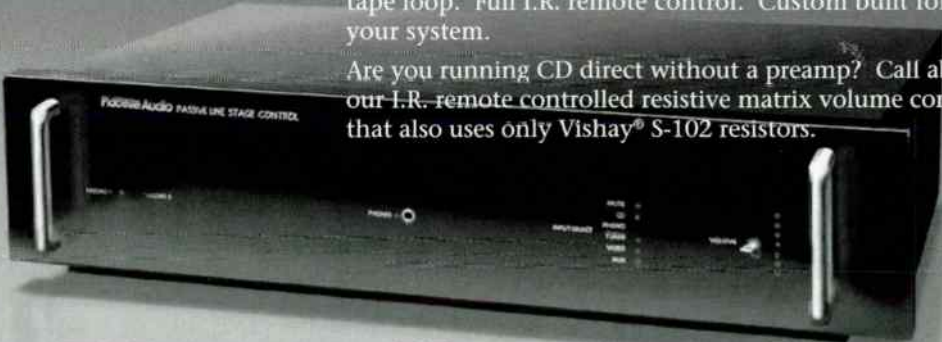
I therefore conclude that the Ayre CX-7 does its intended job in a stellar manner, far and away better than I had previously expected any \$3000 product to perform.

No matter how I look at it, I come back to the exceptional talents of Charles Hansen. To me, the Ayre CX-7 proved that all Compact Disc players which up-sample or over-sample are not the same, they are not created equal. Not by a long shot. Up-sampling and over-sampling theory and design are not the heart of this matter. That's because there are, obviously, digital methods, and then there are analog methods.

Digital equipment will be only as good as the associated analog execution in each case. No matter how sophisticated the digital designs and techniques may be, if the associated analog sections are not up to the task of revealing the merits of the digital portions, then all that digital work is for naught.

In the beginning of the review I said: Charles Hansen knows digital and he knows analog. Well, the CX-7 proves that in spades. I urge you to seek out a dealer for the Ayre CX-7 and listen for yourself. The CX-7 has my highest recommendation.

How high? Well, Charles, the check is in the mail! That way I'm sure that no one can take my CX-7 away from me.



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# Adcom GTP-880 Tuner-Preamp, GDV-850 DVD Player, and GFA-7807 Amplifier

Anthony H. Cordesman



**L**ET ME BEGIN this review with its conclusion, and let you get to the details once you have decided whether these products suit your needs. Adcom has presented us with one of the most powerful and dynamic seven-channel amplifiers currently available, the GFA-7807. It will produce both musical dynamics and the peaks of home theater sound with excellent transparency and detail, and thus it is one of the most exciting amplifiers on the market today. Adcom's GTP-880 is the companion 7.1-channel tuner/preamplifier. It has the same open, transparent, and ultimately exciting sound plus all of the features you are likely to need, including two external 5.1-channel inputs, so you can use separate multi-channel DVD-A and SACD players. If you are looking for an affordable combination of a multichannel tuner/preamplifier and an amplifier that can drive virtually any speaker around with all of the excitement and dynamics that the most demanding music and soundtracks require, well, I can't think of a better combination. The GTP-880 and GFA-7807 provide the life and sheer energy that receivers can't approach at very affordable prices.

Indeed, the GTP-880 may offer better value as an audio investment than the more-expensive AV preamps

and tuner-preamps, those which offer only limited improvements in sound. After all, how much do you want to spend at a time when changes in video connections are occurring so rapidly, and when there still is no standard for direct digital connection between an SACD and DVD-A player and a preamp, and when evolving HD-DVD may require yet more new interconnects?

The matching Adcom GDV 850 DVD and DVD-A player may be a bit less distinctive than its brethren, and does not include SACD play, which some will require. However, its video quality is exceptional, and it has excellent DVD-A sound. In fact, it is one of the few DVD-A players at an affordable level where the DVD-A sound is in any way better than that of DVD music or CDs. Given the generally mediocre sound of most combination SACD and DVD-A players, you may well choose to go with DVD-A or invest in one of the better sounding SACD-only players like the Phillips and Marantz.

I should stress that all of these units use bipolar transistors, and have the kind of upper midrange and treble detail and energy you expect from such designs. This means a trade-off in sound quality. You don't get the softness and sweetness of some past Adcom Mos-Fet





designs. They work best with speakers that do not have peaks in the upper midrange and treble, and they are so revealing that only clean source material sounds any good at all with such amplification. At the same time, buying electronics to compensate for bad speakers and bad source material makes little sense, particularly when gear like this from Adcom can get so much out of good speakers and good source material.

### GFA-7807 Amplifier

It may be a bit unusual to start with the amplifier, rather than the AV preamp, but it is the amplifier that does most to exemplify the "Adcom sound." It produces a solid 300 to 340 watts per channel, and if you don't think those few dB of added sound level really matter under practical conditions, I suggest you go and actually listen. Even with solo piano and chamber music, the dynamics with this amp are more natural and more life-like and the attack is more realistic. Move on to jazz bands, orchestra, opera, and rock, however, and the extra power really pays off. Lower powered units sound a bit muted by comparison and the more dynamic passages of music sound are far less natural.

That kind of power only matters, of course, if you have a clean recording, a good preamp and signal source, and, above all, speakers that can take it. I should note that there are many moderately priced speakers that simply can't handle today's dynamic ranges from either music or video sources. They begin to distort the sound or limit the output unless the volume is turned down, and too many conspicuously fail to keep up when they are mated with a really good subwoofer. You will want an amplifier like the 125-watt per channel Adcom GFA-7607 if you think your speakers ought to be fed limited power.

Amplifier power also has to be clean, that is have low distortion levels and a high signal-to-noise ratio when this sort of benchtest performance isn't provided at the expense of low-level sound quality. The Adcom GFA-7807 meets all of these tests. This may be a result of wide audio bandwidth (better than 100 kHz), which is intended to take advantage of the performance of the new high resolution audio formats, and which uses a minimum of reactive elements in order to optimize transient response. It may also be a result of what Adcom calls "Fast Analog Transform" technology, a direct-cou-

pled amplifier with a servo circuit that cancels d.c. offset.

Certainly, Adcom has not skimped on the power supply or construction. All channels are full mono designs, and each channel has its own secondary from the transformer and its own bridge rectifier and filter capacitor. Overall, the GFA-7807 uses two toroidal transformers and has seven secondaries, and has over 156,000 microfarads of power supply capacitance. This 128-pound amp is so solidly built that it ships in a wooden crate.

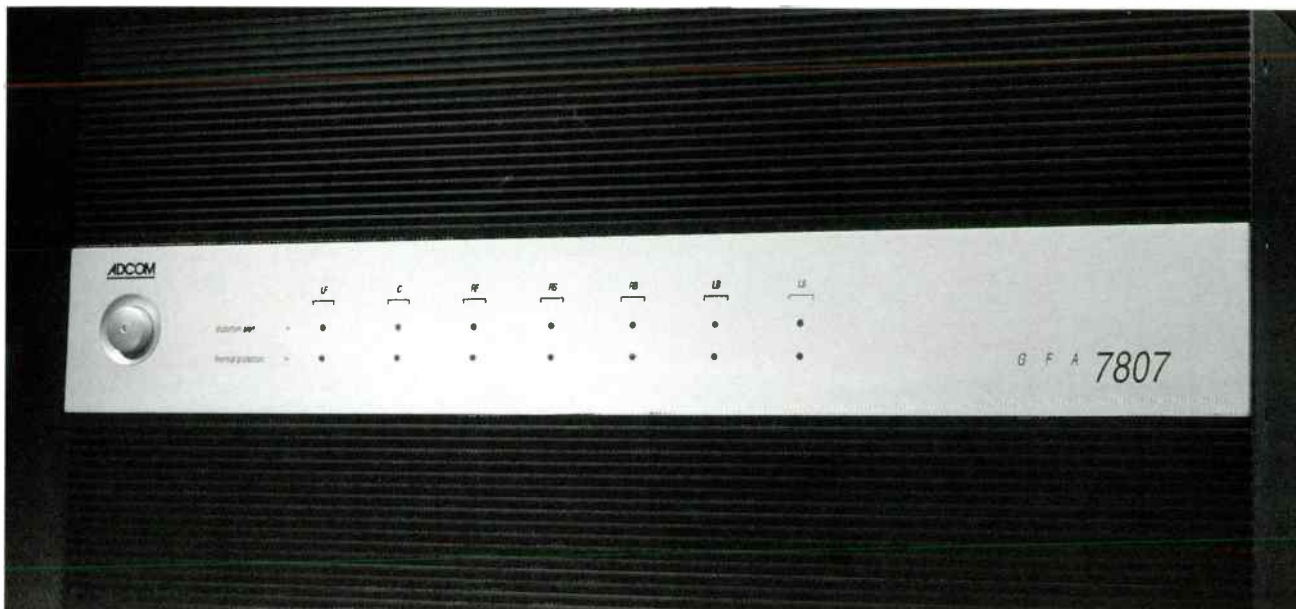
Couple these features with exceptionally good specifications for distortion and signal-to-noise, and the end result is one of the cleanest as well as the most dynamic amplifiers for surround-music or home theater that I've heard. The GFA-7807 is as revealing as the best mono or stereo bipolar transistor amplifiers, and has no trace of harshness. Low-level passages are very clean and musical, and the GFA-7807's ability to control a wide variety of speakers and get the best performance out of their mid- and low-bass is outstanding. This amp works well with all of my speaker cables and interconnects, as well as with a wide range of speakers. If there is a compatibility or interface problem, it won't be in the Adcom GFA-7807.

My only reservation is the one I mentioned earlier. This is a bipolar transistor amplifier, not a tube or Mos-Fet design. It will not have the sweetness or air of the best examples of these other technologies. It will reveal problems such as close miking and the excess treble energy in many modern recordings, not to mention any upper midrange or treble peaks in your speakers. Life and excitement come at the price of not being warm, euphonic, or forgiving, and if you need an amplifier with "pleasant" coloration to balance speaker problems, say, in a bright system, this simply isn't it.

### GTP-880 Tuner-Preamplifier

I'm not going to bore you with a list of features in this 7.1-channel AV preamp. Most are common to every decent example of the breed, and a full list is provided on the firm's website or in their literature. The Adcom GTP-880 does, however, have a number of features that make it stand out.

The video switching uses minimalist circuitry to get true HD video bandwidth of greater than 100 MHz.



Each analog audio source can be put into a stereo direct mode to bypass the internal ADC and DAC. It is the only AV preamp with two external 5.1 inputs with on-board analog-mode bass management, which last is critical to getting good results from the often arbitrary levels in the subwoofer channels on the surround DVD-A and SACD recordings. It has outstanding DSP processing and it can separately set the crossover for front, center, and rear speakers.

The Adcom GTP-880 has processing features designed to enhance musical realism, unlike far too many AV preamps which add some strange mix of features or sound that is arbitrarily labeled "concert hall," "brothel," "jazz club," "Night at Abu Ghraib Prison" or "musician-rendering plant." The best of these features is Adcom's proprietary 7.1m2 (7 point one, m squared) matrix. This derives a stereo signal to drive the surround back speakers, and can also drive the surround back speakers when an external 5.1 source is selected. The result is a natural ambience that reinforces the sense of space and depth in the sound stage, rather than collapse or destroy it.

As for sound quality, I tried the GTP-880 as both a stereo and surround preamp. Although it uses BiFET technology, it has virtually the same character as the sound of the GFA-7807, and has all of the GFA-7807's exceptional dynamic life and detail. Its midrange is well balanced, and without any exaggeration of the upper midrange, and low bass energy and detail are equally good.

Once again, however, the GTP-880 will not have the sweetness or air of the best examples of tube or MOS-FET designs. It has a slightly forward sound stage perspective, and while this is involving, it also comes at the

cost of a slight reduction in depth. Like the GFA-7807, its mix of timbre and energy will reveal problems like the close miking and excess treble energy in many modern recordings. It will be equally revealing of any upper midrange or treble peaks in your speakers.

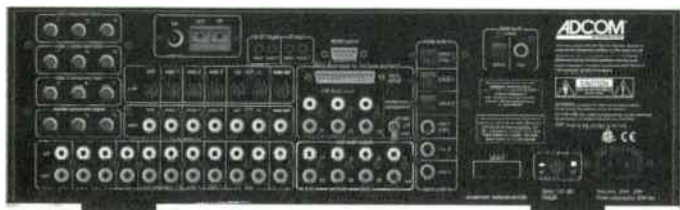
I should stress, however, that it avoids the dulling and compression common to almost all receivers (and far too many of AV preamps anywhere near the price class of the GTP-880). Music has air and life, and the excitement of a performance is preserved. This kind of open sound may not be every audiophile's desire but it is very close to the sound you hear in rows E-L in a live performance. It also ensures you can get the best out of soundtracks as well as music.

### GDV-850 DVD Player

The Adcom GDV 850 is not strikingly different from most DVD players in its class, but it does use separate linear power supplies with toroidal transformers for both audio and video. This is not the standard for most DVD players, and a linear power supply lowers the noise floor in both the audio and the video spectrum because there is no high switching frequency. It also makes the mechanism more stable and reliable, although it helps explain why the GDV-850 weighs a hefty 23 pounds.

As for performance, almost all of today's DVD players give a good picture, but the Adcom GVD-850 does even better than most. Its progressive scanning works exceptionally well and uses a field adaptive deinterlacing algorithm to smooth the image quality, and makes a true interpolation of data rather than use cut and paste technology. The resulting video output performs very well on test disks, and really shines with actual movies and works well with a wide range of TV monitors. Some much more expensive DVD players do no better in picture quality. Especially noticeable are its deep, convincing black levels and its superior progressive scan capabilities, which is especially noticeable when compared to some other progressive scan transports because it does not make the very visible field order errors that others are prone to.

Sound quality is equally good, although it is unlikely that you will use the analog outputs of the GDV-850 for





anything other than DVD-A. The resulting sound is going to be much better when playing back DVD-Vs and CDs if you feed the digital output of the GDV-850 into a top-grade AV preamp like the GVP-880 and take advantage of its processing features for stereo or surround listening.

The GDV-850's audio output stage does, however, use 24-bit/192-kHz Crystal DACs and has a true Class-A output stage. The end result is the same open and dynamic sound you get with the Adcom GTP-880 and GFA-7807, and one that has considerably more life than

many comparable DVD and DVD-A players, as well as cleaner and more dynamic low bass.

I have to say that the theory of DVD-A is one thing and the practice is another. In theory, you should get cleaner and more natural sound and a dynamic range approaching 144dB, some 48dB more than conventional CD. In practice, most of the recordings for sale are in no way superior to CD, Dolby DVD, or DTS-DVD for stereo or music surround listening. Aside from a few firms like AIX, Chesky, and Tacet, most DVD-As reflect relatively shoddy recording quality. Their LFE tracks have ridiculous amounts of excess musical energy, arbitrarily set low frequency channel levels, and they certainly do not have cleaner upper midrange and highs. (Partly, I suspect, because all too many DVD-As are processed at some stage through 44.1 or 48 KHz systems and at well under 24 bits). DVD-As also often have artificial sound stages that degrade, rather than reinforce the aesthetics of music. Riding a merry-go-round in circles around a calliope was only marginally more disorienting and one hell of a lot more fun.

And yet, there are those AIX, Chesky, and Tacet DVD-As, and a growing handful of others. When you have a good to great DVD-A, the Adcom GDV-850 comes through. It not only reveals that you can get a more natural ambience from a good surround recording, it shows that DVD-A can provide better and more natural upper mid-range and treble, more realistic harmonic detail, and more lifelike dynamics. Most DVD-A players make DVD-A sound better than CD only because they are mediocre CD players, and fall far short of the potential of the medium compared to the few great DVD-A players like the Meridian 800. The GDV is one of the few exceptions that has 5.1 analogue outputs that allow DVD-A to reveal its potential.

## NOTES

**Adcom GFA-7807 seven-channel amplifier, GTP-880 7.1-channel tuner-preamp, and GDV 850 DVD player**, \$3400, \$2400, and \$1000 respectively. Adcom, 8541 East Anderson Drive, Scottsdale, AZ 85255; phone 480/607-2277; fax 480/348-9876; website [www.adcom.com](http://www.adcom.com).

### Reviewer Reference AV System One:

Lexicon DC-10 DVD/SACD/DVD-A player.  
Lexicon MC-12B AV Preamp processor  
Theta Dreadnaught II seven channel amplifier.  
XA90PS, XA55cr Central Channel, XA1900 THX Monitor, K.5mk2 Monitor, and the ICS Sub24 Powered Subwoofer.  
Revel B-15 subwoofer.  
Zenith P60W38/38H Plasma  
Zenith HD-520 Receiver  
Kimber Select and Wireworld Eclipse video and audio interconnects, and Kimber Select, Wireworld Eclipse and Discovery Cable speaker cables

### Reviewer Reference AV System Two

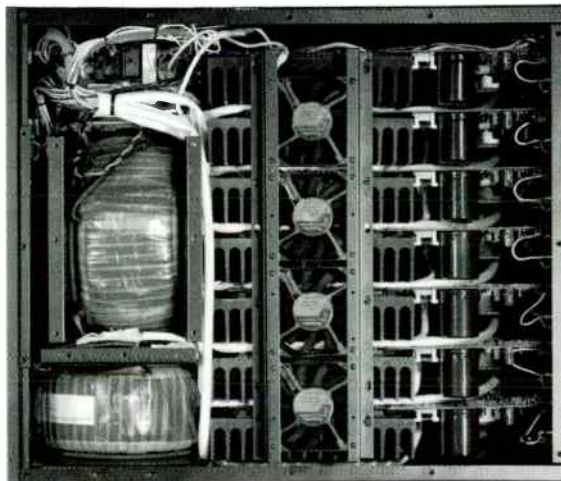
Pioneer 59i DVD/DVD-ASACD player  
Pioneer AV Receiver  
Polk LSi-25, Lsi-15, LSC five channel speaker system, plus Polk 650 subwoofer  
Kimber and Discovery video and audio interconnects, and Kimber and Discovery speaker cables  
Sony XBR-400 36" HDTV monitor  
Pioneer PDP-HD 4330 Plasma  
Samsung SIR-TS160 HDTV tuner.

### Reviewer Reference Stereo System

Van den Hul Black Beauty, Sumiko Celebration, and Koetsu Onyx Cartridges  
VPI TNT HX-X turntable and HWjr 12.5 tone arm  
Pioneer Elite DV-47A SACD/DVD player  
PS Audio Lambda CD transport (modified)  
Mark Levinson 360S DA Converter  
Pass Xono phono preamp  
Pass X0.2 stereo preamp  
Pass XA160 power amplifiers  
TAD Model 1 and Thiel 7.2 Speakers  
Kimber Select, Transparent Audio Reference XL, and Wireworld Super Eclipse and Eclipse interconnects and digital cables.

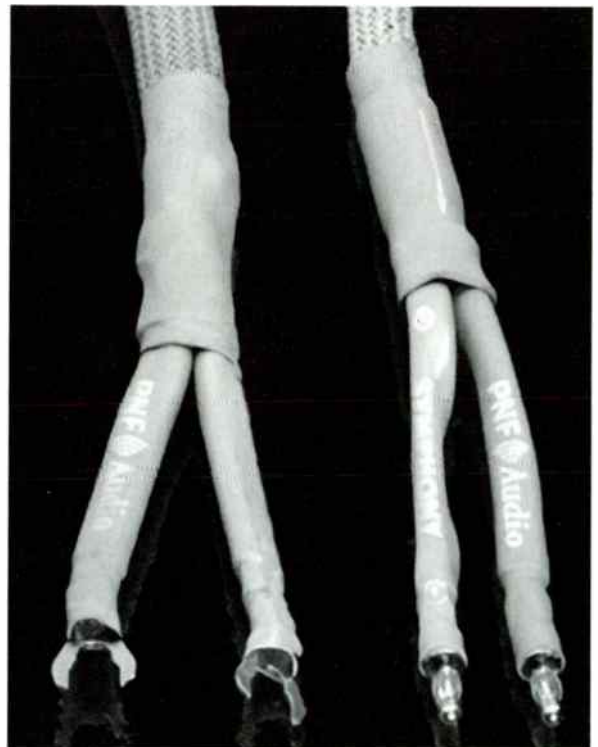
## Summing Up

Adcom is one of an all too limited number of affordable high-end manufacturers that really deliver performance for money. It does operate in a highly competitive part of the market and it is certainly worth auditioning a range of manufacturers, and listening carefully to make sure that Adcom's open and dynamic sound suits your taste. It is awfully hard to argue against a strong recommendation for these products, however, and each offers exceptional value for money.



# *PNF Audio Icon Interconnects and Symphony Speaker Cables*

Mike Driscoll



**R**EMEMBER THE FIRST high-end audio show I ever attended, one of the Big-S shows, and it was being held in San Francisco. I had been reading that other magazine in question for about five years or so, and had put together my first “high-end” system based in part upon their recommendations. Two things

that really grabbed my attention at that show were a tube amp called, I believe, the Shoreline 700, which was about the size of a small refrigerator, and the speaker cable in use in most of the rooms, which seemed to be generally the size of fire hose. At the time, I was using Monster Cable products for both speaker and

interconnect, and I reckoned they were doing a pretty good job. However, after talking with the “experts” at the show, I came away feeling that in order to maximize the sound of my system, I was going to have to spend at least as much on wire as on electronics. Thankfully, over years of careful listening, reali-



ty slowly took hold of my thought process, and I came up with my own ideas about "high end" wire.

Both speaker wire and interconnect cabling have, I believe, one simple function, that is, either to transfer the signal from component to component or transfer it from amplifier to speaker. In either case, it should change that signal as little as possible. You will often hear audiophiles talk about the "sound" of a certain wire or cable, as if one could hold the wire up to their ear and hear an actual sound. Or, maybe, that wires should act as tone controls. Wire has no sound, in and of itself. It can affect the sound of a system in which it is being used in ways that can range from subtle (most often) to large (rare). These changes in sound quality are caused by the electrical properties of the wire, that is, those standard things usually called resistance, capacitance, and inductance. The ideal wire affects the sound of the system in which it is inserted as little as possible. It basically should get out of the way and let the sound of the system come through.

(Editor's Intrusion: It used to be, perhaps 25 years ago, in that period when moving-coil cartridges were starting to be a BIG and sometimes wonderful hi-fi deal, that we editor and reviewer types would run into certain "high-capacitance" interconnects or certain head amps or phono preamp input stages which were too sensitive to capacitance, a "mystical" electrical property which I think of as being roughly equivalent to "how much static electrical charge." Something like feather boas charging more than cotton tee shirts. It's easily measurable, but in other units than inches. The point of this boring high school level lesson is that if there is too much capacitance, the high frequencies will go away, so that flutes or soprano voices can nearly disappear. And everybody can hear this all the time on almost any piece of music, blind-folded or not. BUT, all this roll-off came from a very simple electrical filter, one that you would learn to design during your sophomore year in electrical engineering college. —Gene Pitts)

But getting out of the way of the signal is what the PNF audio Symphony speaker cable did in my

audio system, and it did it extremely well. I used this cable both in conjunction with interconnects made by Kimber, JPS, AR, and Audioquest, as well as with the PNF Icon interconnect. Other speaker cabling I used was by Discovery and Kimber. I'll cut right to the chase here: The PNF speaker cable suited my system to a "T," both when I used it with the other brands of interconnect, but even more so

---

## I found these cables and interconnects detailed, transparent, and neutral.

---

when I coupled it with the Icon interconnect.

Listening to Handel's "Water Music" on Harmonia Mundi (HMU90780) by the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra led by Nicholas McGegan, the PNF cables allowed the dimensionality my system is capable of to come shining through. The depth and spread of the orchestra, as well as the acoustics of the recording venue, were both readily apparent. Diana Krall's new SACD "The Girl in the Other Room (Verve B0002293-36) was also able to show off all the warmth and detail that format is capable of. The differences between components were readily apparent when the PNF

cablings were in the system. The differences in presentation afforded by the Sony SCD DE 775, the Pioneer DV45a, and the Denon DVA2900, when playing the Krall disc, were easy to pick out, a necessary trait in any piece of equipment with reference-grade pretensions.

The new CD by Karl Shiflett and The Big Country Show (Rebel CD1792) is a lively, detailed recording that shows off this country/bluegrass band at its best. With the PNF cables in the system, the sharp attack of Jake Jenkins' banjo was almost startling, the recording showing a presence unsurpassed when any of the other cables were in the system.

Basically, what I'm trying to say here, is that these cables and interconnects are, at least given what else is in my system, very detailed, transparent, and neutral. All these are qualities I look for in a cable and interconnects, and I think you should too. Used together in my system, the PNF Symphony speaker cables and Icon interconnects allowed the strengths I demand in my components to come through unfettered. I certainly consider these PNF cablings to be reference-level, and at the price asked for them by the manufacturer, they turn into a real bargain. I urge anyone currently in the market for either speaker wire or interconnects to check them out.

## N O T E S

**PNF Audio Icon Interconnects and Symphony Speaker Cable**, Icon interconnects, \$199.95 for one meter, \$239.95 for two meters; also Precision-A interconnects and Precision-D digital interconnects; Symphony speaker cable, six feet for \$299.70, 10 feet for \$434.50, or 15 feet for \$569.25; also Symphony SL speaker cable and Sub Woofer cable. PNF Audio, 2598 Tuckahoe St., Franklinville, NJ 08322, phone 877/572-8346, website [pnfaudio.com](http://pnfaudio.com), e-mail [Tguida@pnfaudio.com](mailto:Tguida@pnfaudio.com).

### Associated Equipment

Mirage M3si loudspeakers, Sound Valves VTA70 tube amplifier, Jolida JD 202a integrated tube amplifier, ODL HT-2 solid-state amplifier, Audible Illusions Modulus and B+K Pro10mc preamps, Denon DVD2900 universal disc player, Pioneer DV45a universal disc transport, Sony SCD CE775 CD/SACD player, Margules Audio Magenta ADE24 analog-digital enhancer, VPI HW19jr turntable, AQ PT6 tonearm, Sumiko Blue Point Special cartridge, and assorted tweaks, cones, and footings from commercial and home-brew sources.

# Omnivox Mobile Sound System

Jerrod Lopes



I WAS EXCITED when the editor asked me to review the Omnivox. I've always been interested in nifty little gadgets like this one. I couldn't wait to get home and try it out. It turns out it was better than just a "nifty little gadget". When I opened the box and saw what was inside, thoughts of all the possible applications for just such a device filled my head.

Here's a little background on the technology involved in the design and development of this device. According to Omnivox, a trademarked technology called FeONic was developed by a U.K. center of excellence for the research and development of "smart materials". It uses a "smart material" known as Terfenol-D to produce sound from solid surfaces. A "smart material" is one that reacts in a pre-determined and reliable way to an external influence. Terfenol-D was developed for the U.S. military from rare earth alloys for use in sonar applications. Once declassified by the U.S.

military, the patents for the audio applications of Terfenol-D were developed. The first commercial audio product to be launched as a result of the patents is the Omnivox.

After taking the Omnivox system out of the black, plastic carrying case the maker thoughtfully includes as part of the package, I decided to first try it with a portable "walkman-type" CD player. Now I knew this was not exactly on top of the list as far as the manufacturer's ideas went for product application. Nevertheless, I set up the CD player, Omnivox, the outboard amplifier, and the included power supply on my desk. The idea here is to turn any solid horizontal surface into a loudspeaker. I was pleasantly surprised to hear music coming from my desktop, no matter which end of the desk I sat at, and sound distribution was even everywhere on the surface. I moved the Omnivox to several different locations on the desk, still getting even uniform

sound across the surface. I moved quickly to my kitchen table, which offered a larger, round versus rectangular surface, and is composed of different materials. Surprise, good and even sound was what I got. Again, I relocated the Omnivox to the edge, center, and just about everywhere on the kitchen table. There seemed to be little, if any, change in the amount and quality of sound reproduction. I thought of the many ways in just how handy this device could be in a wide variety of applications, and for just as wide a variety of users.

A couple of days later I took some friends out for a "practice" video shoot to familiarize them with some new equipment we would be using on a shoot later. When we got our footage and got back to the house, I thought, what a great time this would be to see what others thought of the Omnivox system. Instead of having to hunker around a tiny little audition speaker on the



camcorder, or needlessly waste hard-drive space on my editing system by capturing the "practice" footage, I plugged the Omnivox directly into one of the RCA audio out ports on the camcorder and placed the coil section to one side on the kitchen table. We were all happy to relax in our own chairs and still be able to hear everything the next guy could hear, regardless of our respective seating positions. This was definitely a lot better than crowding shoulder to shoulder around a tiny little built-in camera speaker. The Omnivox was a hit with everyone.

It is apparent to me that the best use for such a device would be in a conference room setting where computerized multi-media presentations may be shown. Utilizing the Omnivox, rather than having to lug around larger speakers, is a definite plus in my book. I am not one to give presentations via laptop computers in a conference setting, but I have had occasion to attend such events. It was always a bother when a neighbor at the table would block the loudspeaker, thus making much of the program unintelligible. Because the Omnivox achieves even distribution of sound over the

entire surface of the table, this isn't a problem. You just have to make sure there will be an outlet available for the "wall-wart" type power supply included with the kit.

For this type of application, the Omnivox should be quite sufficient in most cases. However, the sound quality of the device is not that of a full-range loudspeaker. Moreover, the actual tonal properties are governed mostly by what type of surface the device is operating on. Depending on the type of surface material and whether or not it is laminated, the surface density and porosity, its size and shape, and a myriad of other factors, you will

most definitely get different sonic characteristics. I believe it's much the same as putting any given speaker in a variety of different enclosures. While there were plenty of midrange and high frequencies present, there was little in the way of true bass or low-frequency reproduction. On the various surfaces I mentioned, I did notice some did reproduce some of the lower midrange frequencies present in the source material, but no really low bass. When getting these lower midrange frequencies, I did find that the entire reproduction would be relatively muddy and murky, almost devoid of the higher and lower

## NOTES

**Omnivox Mobile Sound System**, \$299.95. S3i Sound, 2500 North Loop Dr., Ames, IA 50010; phones 515/296-8030 or 800-327-7291, fax 515/268-4540 [www.s3isound.com](http://www.s3isound.com) or [www.omnivox.biz](http://www.omnivox.biz).

### Associated Equipment

Panasonic SL-SX390 portable CD player, Canon GL2 mini-DV camcorder, Canon XL1s mini-DV camcorder, Mac G5 computer, kitchen table, computer desk, and various other hard surfaces.

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octaves in the spectrum. It is as if a given driven surface acted as a band-pass filter with this device. Some surfaces were better than others and reproduced larger portions of the spectrum, but usually about 2 through 12 kHz was what I heard. Overall, most surfaces did represent the all-important 2-4 kHz range where vocal intelligibility mostly lives. Given the impression that the manufacturer intends this device to be used in a conference table setting, intelligibility is the key. Low

frequencies, such as pedal organ notes, are a moot point here.

I am a little disappointed that the system's portability is limited by a dependency on a.c. power outlets, and that the amplifier and voice coil section have not been integrated into a single unit, though this last may not be possible. I am not one for multiple pieces of equipment to hook up to a single end. I prefer the KISS method of operation whenever possible (Keep It Simple Stupid) to avoid confusion and a potential rat's

nest of audio and power cables. In addition, while the product's web site says the device can be used on walls, the documentation that came with the unit warns against using it on anything but horizontal surfaces. I did try it on vertical dry wall, and got about the same results as I had on horizontal surfaces, that is no organ pedal notes but pretty good mid and upper frequencies. Last but not least, it should go without saying that the unit cannot support stereo mixes, but it does present a quality mono signal.

As a practical matter, the Omnivox comes with a power supply that is adaptable to at least four different types of wall outlets. There's also a nice little velveteen pouch for the coil portion itself, a seven-foot RCA-connector cable for interconnecting the supplied amplifier and the coil, and the nice foam-rubber lined plastic case I mentioned in which to transport the unit and its accessories.

All in all, I give the Omnivox two thumbs up. It's been given an unusual job to do, and it does it very well. It is quite an interesting product, with an impressive list of possible applications, if you let your imagination run with it.

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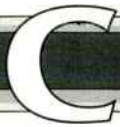
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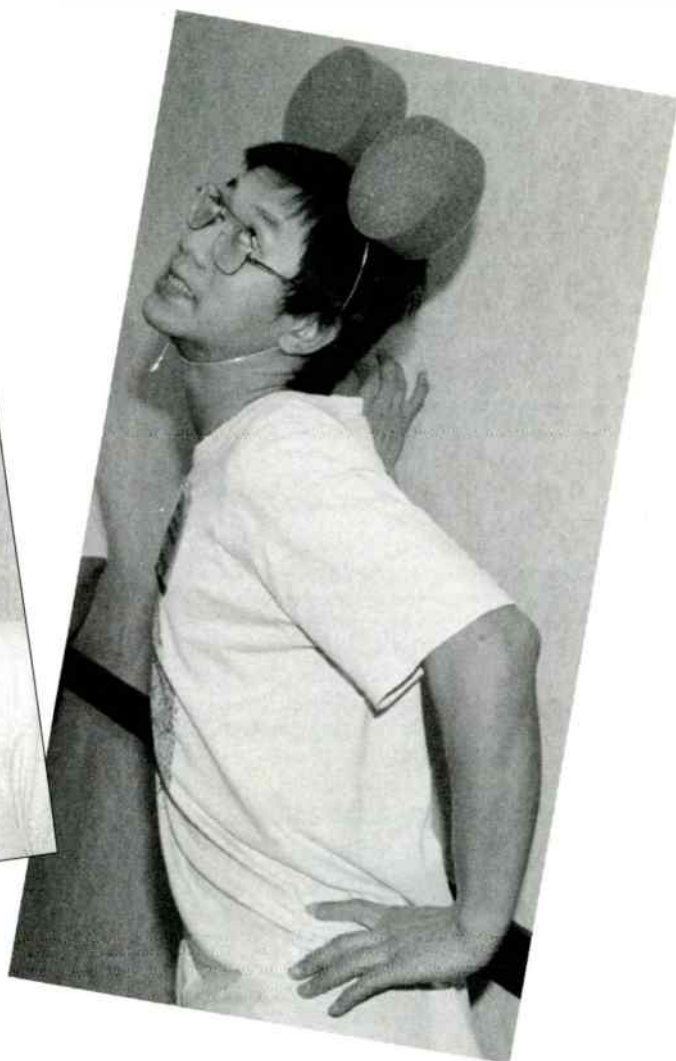
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## Photos Never Lie!

### Why I Go to HE2004, Part III . . .

Okay, okay, Gilbert, Hi-Fi Shows make us *all* a little crazy, but those ears aren't very... Seriously, Mr. Young of Blue Circle Audio found his styrofoam "ears" a good way to attract the press and trade into his firm's room at The Stereophile Show. And yes, the ears were blue. The nixie tubes on Steve Rochlin's "tube digital" watch were the standard color, however, even if his watch used Krusty The Clown brand batteries. Rochlin runs one of the more interesting websites, [enjoythemusic.com](http://enjoythemusic.com); check it out!

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