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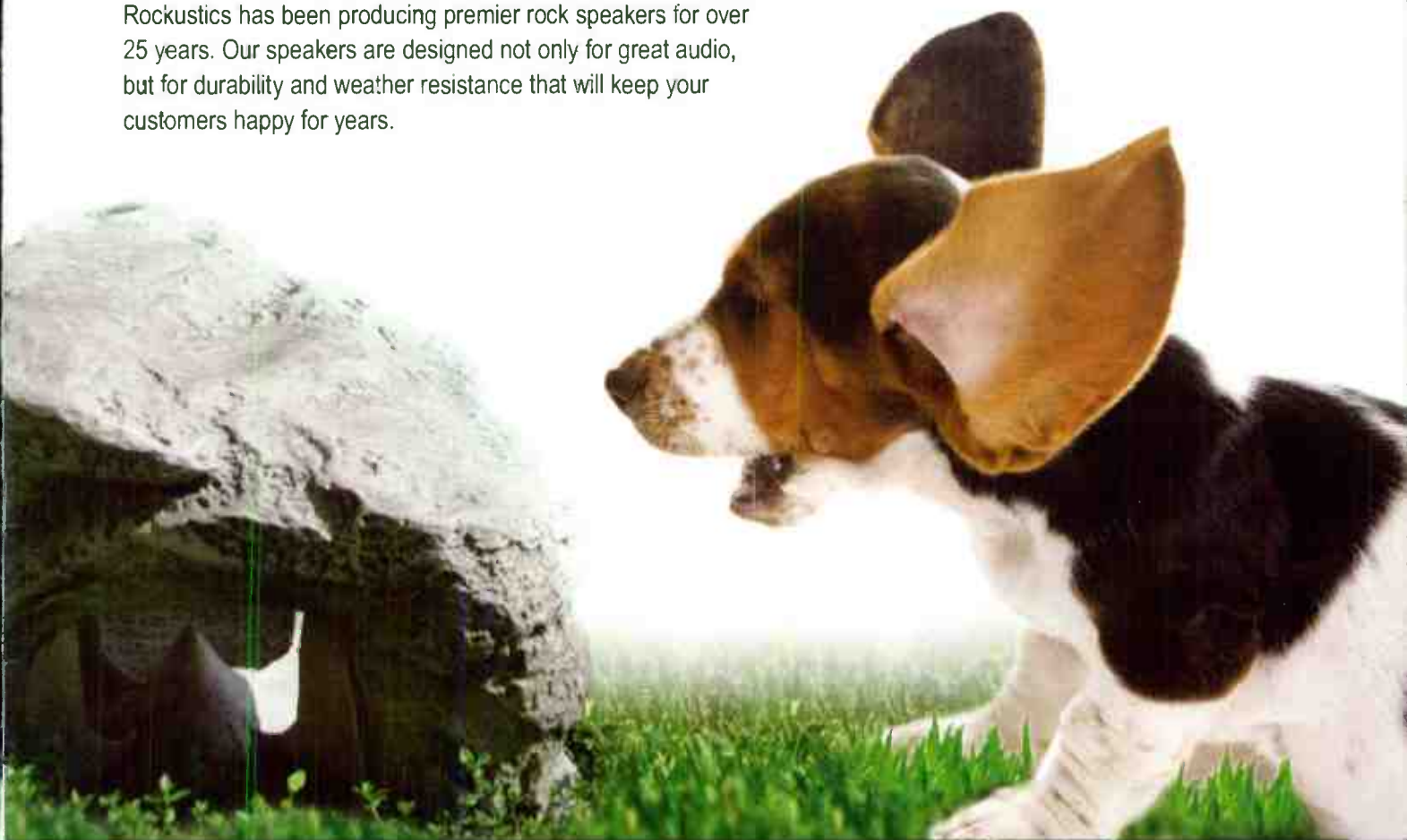


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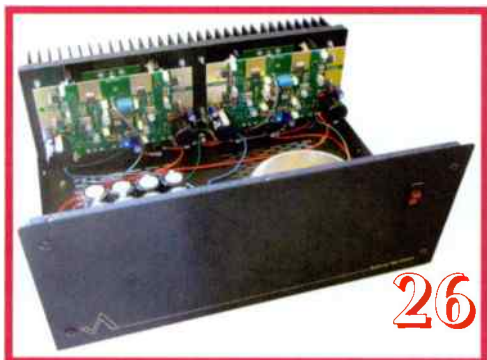
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Assistant Editor Tobias Mutter

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— Brent Butterworth, Sound + Vision, [www.soundandvisionmag.com](http://www.soundandvisionmag.com), February 2011

'If this sequence (Space Shuttle launch) on your present system doesn't induce panic about a subwoofer-induced-damage clause in your home owner's insurance, you need a better sub. Like the Hsu.'

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— Tom Norton, Home Theater Magazine, December 2011



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## Larry Klein

Longtime *Stereo Review* Technical Director and Editor



### Ivan Berger

**L**ARRY KLEIN, who for 20 years helped make *Stereo Review* a powerful voice in the high-fidelity community and a good magazine to read (and to write for), died January 9<sup>th</sup> in Dobbs Ferry, NY, aged 84.

When he started at *HiFi/Stereo Review*, as it was then called, in 1963, he'd been an editor since the year before the magazine was founded, first at *Popular Electronics*, then at *Electronics Illustrated*. When he left, in 1983, it had become the largest-circulation audio magazine in the U.S., at one time selling a half million copies a month. He commissioned or wrote hundreds of clear, knowledgeable, lively articles on audio and oversaw a stream of accurate, informed reviews. He also

was a friendly mentor to the writers who worked for him, trying whenever possible to make edits that the writer couldn't see, but sometimes pointing them out so the writer could learn from them.

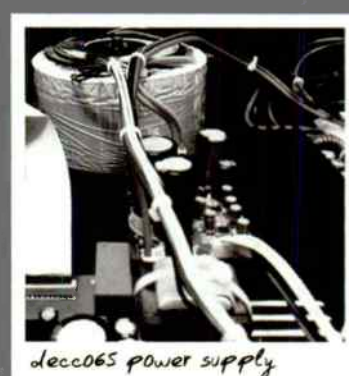
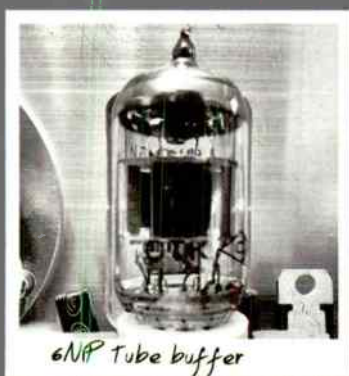
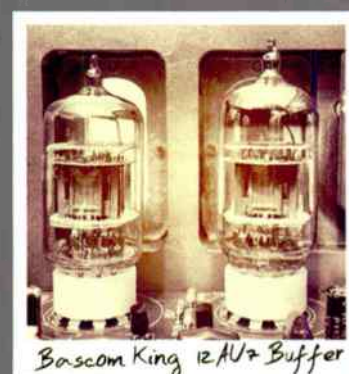
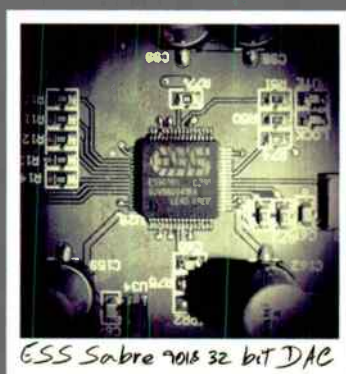
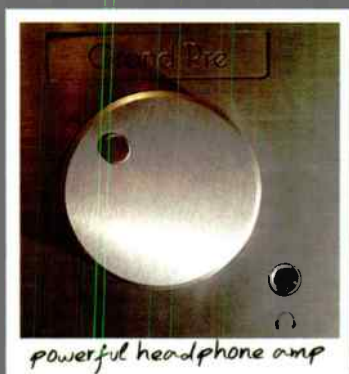
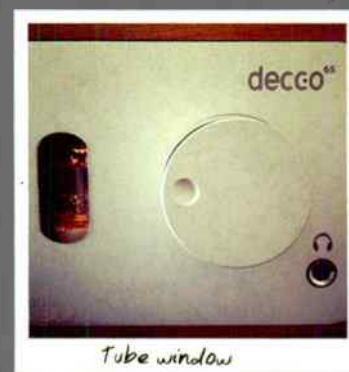
Larry's first jobs in electronics were with radio-repair shops, where he learned enough that when he joined the U.S. Army Signal Corps in 1946, he was immediately assigned to the White Sands Proving Grounds, working on instrumentation for rocketry, the forerunner of America's space program. After his discharge, in 1948, he moved to New York's Greenwich Village, studying psychology, sociology, and philosophy (which he later said helped make

him more analytical). He also worked as a serviceman for the Electronics Workshop (and hung out there with fellow audiophiles, still rare at the time), then as a technician, instrument troubleshooter, and technical correspondent for EICO, a maker of kit and assembled hi-fi gear and instruments, before becoming an editor.

After leaving *Stereo Review*, he wrote for *High Fidelity*, *Audio Times*, *Sound and Vision* (Canada), *Car Audio*, and other magazines as well as manuals and ad copy. He is survived by his wife Ellen, son Nathaniel, daughter Susan Shilling and her husband David, two granddaughters, and his former wife, Joan Sheckley.



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Stephen Mejias on [stereophile.com](http://stereophile.com) June 2012 Newport

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# *Visiting Louis Armstrong*



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I could scarcely believe my eyes when I opened up the file of photos to do the layout for this story. Louis Armstrong turns out to be a secret audiophile. Who knew?

Ricky Riccardi, Archivist at the Louis Armstrong House Museum, writes us that "Louis had been a reel-to-reel junkie since 1950, but he often used portable machines, mostly Grundigs and perhaps one Ampex. The set-up shown in the photos was installed in the fall of 1968, while Louis was in the hospital, and is still up. In fact, the den looks exactly the same today and is one of our most popular rooms."

The earphones appear to be the Model SP3/XC from Koss, but look at the built-in rack there in his den. Not one but two open-reel tape decks. The one on the right is probably a Tandberg Series 62, while the one on the left is another Tandberg, we believe the



Photo: Jack Bradley, Louis Armstrong Museum



Photo: Jack Bradley, Louis Armstrong Museum



Photos: Courtesy of the Louis Armstrong House Museum, save for the three by Jack Bradley.



Photo: Jack Bradley, Louis Armstrong Museum

The Louis Armstrong House currently and when Satchmo graced the stairs. The living room has a wonderful portrait of Armstrong. The publicity still of "Louis Armstrong's Hot Five, Exclusive Okeh Record Artists," is from around 1926 or so.





**“...the bottom line of any country in the world is what did we contribute to the world? We contributed Louis Armstrong!” - Tony Bennett**

Model 64. And who but someone who actively makes copies for himself and other audio-heads has TWO such machines and leaves a collection of 650 recordings.

Now, check out the state-of-the-art electronics. These photos are fuzzy but the tuner appears to be a Marantz 10B, while the pre-amp seems to be either a Marantz 8 SC or 7 SC. We're told there is a 240-watt Model 15 power amp somewhere in the back of the cabinet. Don't you just love it?

The Louis Armstrong Museum is located at 34-56 107th Street, Corona, NY 11368. Telephone is 718/478-8274. Hours are 10 am to 5 pm, Tuesday through Friday; 12 noon to 5 pm, Saturday and Sunday. Admission is \$10 for adults, \$6 for seniors, students, and children above 4.



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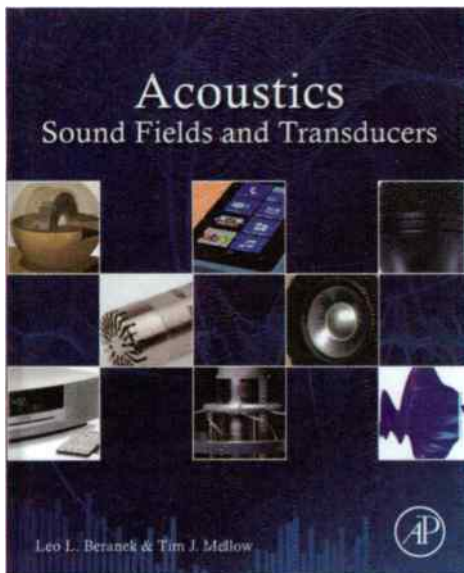
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# Designing Speakers



**A**COUSTICS: Sound Fields and Transducers is dedicated by the authors to engineering students, experimenters, consultants and anyone who designs audio equipment. It begins with the wave equation and sound fields in space and simple enclosures. Next follows means for representing acoustic masses, compliances, and resistances using circuits analogous to those in electric circuit theory. Microphones and loudspeakers are covered in detail. Emphasized are loudspeaker systems, including simple and bass reflex enclosures and horn loudspeakers. Treated next are special designs, in particular, transmission line enclosures including the Bose Wave® system, and cell phones. Sound in enclosures is treated extensively, starting with normal modes of vibration and continuing with sound fields in rooms ranging from living rooms to concert halls, including those for loudspeaker listening.

Leo L. Beranek



Dr. Leo L. Beranek was the founding president of Bolt Beranek and Newman (now Acentech, Cambridge, MA) a firm known world-wide for pioneering the field of noise and vibration reduction and auditorium acoustics. Beranek has published 13 books in the field starting with Acoustical Measurements and continuing up to his latest Concert Halls and Opera Houses. He has been acoustical consultant for many halls, the best known are Tanglewood Music Shed, Tokyo Opera City Concert Hall, Baltimore Meyerhoff Symphony Hall, San Francisco Davies Hall, Toronto Thompson Hall, Tel Aviv Mann Auditorium, Tokyo Opera House and Caracas, Venezuela Aula Magna. In 1954 he stated Beranek's Law, "If one selects his own components, builds his own loudspeaker enclosure, and is convinced he made a wise choice of design, then his own loudspeaker sounds better to him than anyone else's loudspeaker." Beranek is a retired professor at MIT. [www.LeoBeranek.com](http://www.LeoBeranek.com).

Tim J. Mellow



Tim Mellow was educated at Boundary Oak School and Lancing College before obtaining a B.Sc. in Electrical Engineering and Electronics from the University of Dundee, Scotland, in 1985. A career as a Design engineer at BICC, Marconi, Thorn EMI, Racal, VTech, and Nokia followed. Recently, he co-founded Mellow Acoustics Ltd with Philip Trevelyan to develop high fidelity loudspeakers and amplifiers. Tim takes a keen interest in music and plays the piano. He appreciates technology that brings musical performances to life, especially those which can no longer be heard live. Mellow Acoustics Ltd., Farnham, UK, [www.mellowacoustics.com](http://www.mellowacoustics.com).

*Leo L. Beranek and Tim J. Mellow are well known in professional sound and academic circles for their book Acoustics. It is, simply put, the state of the art. It is my pleasure to present a small portion of it, a condensed section on a fairly well-known type of loudspeaker system, the transmission line. This type of design is used in both the Bose Wave®, a moderately priced system, and in the Bowers & Wilkins Nautilus which is priced at the other end of the market. The book may be purchased on Amazon or directly from the publisher, Elsevier. Gene Pitts, Editor.*



**A** TRANSMISSION LINE LOUSPEAKER enclosure has a duct or a tube between the backside of a loudspeaker and an opening to the outside world. Sound is radiated both from the front of the loudspeaker and from the opening. If the length of the tube is one-fourth a wavelength [wavelength in feet = 1131 / frequency], a small movement of the loudspeaker diaphragm creates a large movement of the air at the duct opening. Thus, the enclosure causes a large response at the quarter-wavelength frequency and this permits a small loudspeaker (2-4 in. diameter) to radiate appreciable sound at frequencies down to 100 Hz.

But there is a problem. When the frequency is raised above the quarter-wavelength in the tube, the sound radiated from the tube opening, at multiples of whole wavelengths, becomes opposite in phase from that radiated from the front of the loudspeaker. Thus, a sizeable dip in the total sound radiated will occur. In practice, two solutions to this problem are employed. One is to use a digital signal processor (DSP) to change the phases and the other is to fill the tube with a light-weight sound-absorbing material. Both remove or greatly modify the "bumpiness" in the response curve.

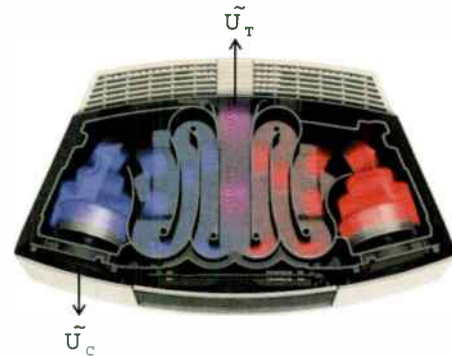
When the sound-absorbing material solution is selected, the tube is usually tapered along its length so that it acts like an inverse horn loudspeaker. While one can only speculate on the relative use of the DSP technique versus adding sound-absorbing materials in the duct, it is interesting to examine two well-known systems that use these techniques. We start with a circuit diagram that design engineers use for analysis.

Figure 1 (a) shows a substantially straight transmission line as used in Bose Wave® music system. (Courtesy of Bose Corporation.) Fig. 1 (b) shows a tapered transmission line. The Bowers and Wilkins Nautilus uses a tapered transmission line folded into a spiral.

The complete electro-mechano-acoustical circuit diagram for a transmission line loudspeaker is shown in Fig. 2 using lumped circuits, except for the transmission line which is treated as a two-port network and may be described by a suitable transmission matrix.

The mass of the loudspeaker cone and its voice coil are  $M_{AD}$  and the compliance of the suspension is  $C_{AS}$ . The cone radiates sound and this is represented by two elements, the radiation mass  $M_{A1}$  and the radiation resistance  $R_{AR1}$ . The area of the diaphragm is  $S_D$ . The damping of the source occurs mostly due to the electrical resistance elements. Note that a decrease in the resistance of the voice coil  $R_E$  and the output resistance of the amplifier  $R_B$  cause an increase in the overall damping of the circuit.

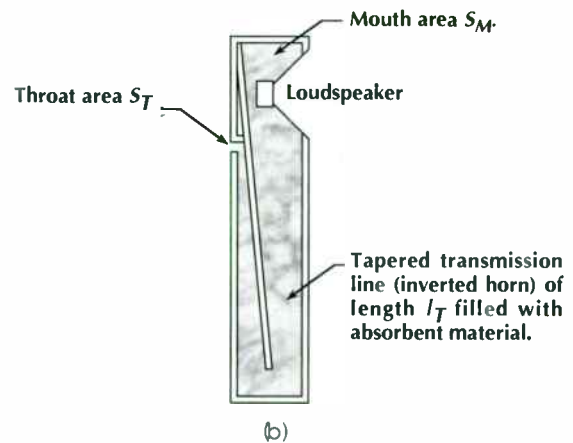
When the elements  $M_{AD}$  and  $C_{AS}$  resonate the current  $\tilde{U}_c$  becomes large. When critically damped, the response drops off 12 dB per octave above and below resonance. This resonance is at the lowest end of the loudspeaker's response, usually between 60 and 150 Hz. The expected dropoff in the response above the resonance frequency is counteracted by the rise in the radiation resistance  $R_{AR1}$  which equals 12 dB per octave so that the radiated response is flat up to the point where the radiation resistance no longer increases at



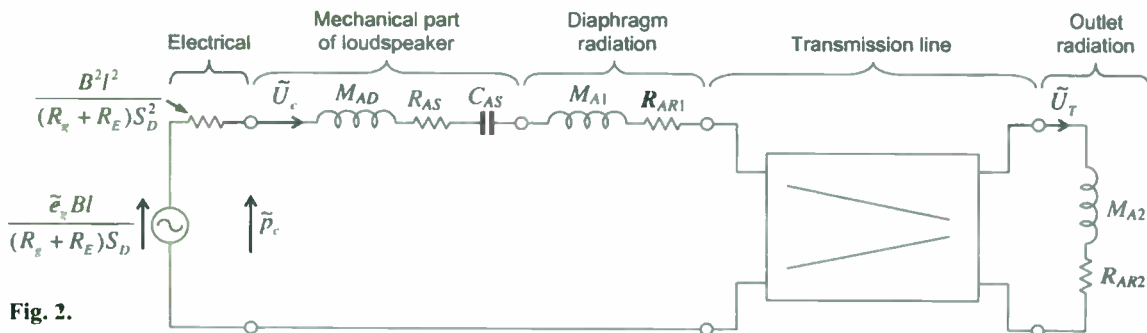
**Fig. 1-A - The Bose Music Wave® uses a transmission line that has basically the same cross-section throughout its length.**

this rate (when the diameter of the loudspeaker exceeds about 1/3 of a wavelength).

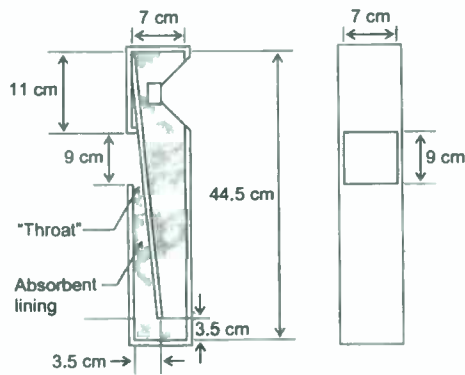
Let us look at the principal features of a transmission line loudspeaker that closely resembles the Bowers and



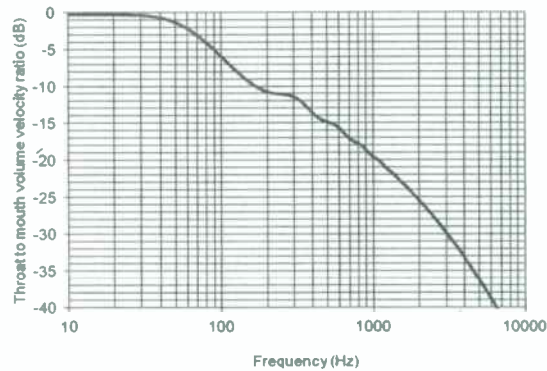
**Fig. 1-B - The B&W Nautilus uses a tapered transmission line folded to keep the height to a minimum.**



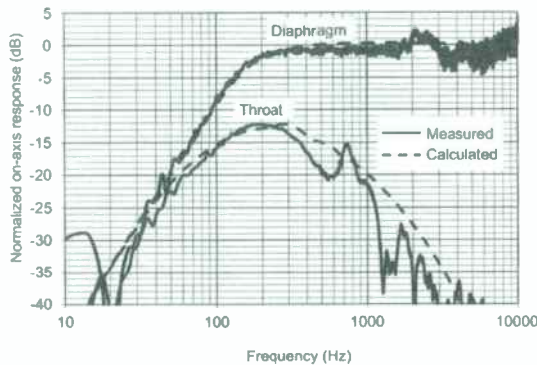
**Fig. 2.**



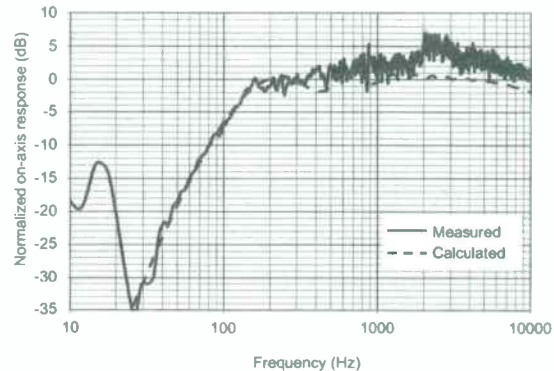
**Fig. 3 – Dimensions of a prototype for use in a trial analysis. Its working principle is the same as the B&W Nautilus.**



**Fig. 4 – Level difference, in dB SPL, between loudspeaker opening and port opening.**



**Fig. 5 – Comparison of radiated output from the speaker diaphragm and from the port.**



**Fig. 6 – On-axis response, measured and calculated.**

Wilkins Nautilus loudspeaker, as shown in Fig. 3. The exact details of their loudspeaker are not known so that the response we arrive at in the following example may be somewhat different from the actual response of their unit.

We start with a drive unit that has an advertised diaphragm diameter of 2.5 inches (6.4 cm). The duct behind is tapered, i.e. like an inverse parabolic horn, with a length of 62 cm. The ratio of the speaker outlet to the horn outlet is set at 4. This gives a "cutoff frequency" for the "horn" that is well below the lowest frequency of interest. If the transmission line is not filled with an acoustical absorbing material, the radiation from the port opening will completely cancel that from the loudspeaker opening at a number of frequencies in the otherwise flat region above the basic resonance frequency. In this example the transmission line is completely filled with a porous material made of loosely packed very-small-diameter wool fibers with a weight of about 1.6 lb/ft<sup>3</sup> (25 kg/m<sup>3</sup>). With this material in the tube, the difference, in decibels, between the sound from the loudspeaker opening and that from the port opening is shown in Fig.4. We see that the radiation from the port is weak and will not cancel out the radia-

tion from the loudspeaker. The result for our example is seen in Fig. 5. The upper curve shows the radiated sound from the loudspeaker and the lower curve shows the radiation from the port. At 140 Hz the ratio is about 8 dB.

When the two radiations are combined, a very smooth response is obtained as shown in Fig. 6. Obviously the response at 140 Hz is not increased by much, only about 1.5 dB. .

If less sound absorbing material is put in the tube, the response at frequencies just above and below 140 Hz would be greater, but the combined radiation from the two openings at the higher frequencies would become "peaky," so that the curve in Fig. 6 would be irregular.

The engineering design goal is to allow only enough "peakiness" that the irregularities will not be perceived by the listener. If the "peakiness" is great enough to give a substantial boost to the lowest frequencies, digital signal processing will have to be employed to make the total radiation adequately smooth with frequency.

The excellent agreement between the calculated and measured data in Figs 5 and 6 indicate that the analysis given here for a transmission line loudspeaker is a valid means for engineering design.



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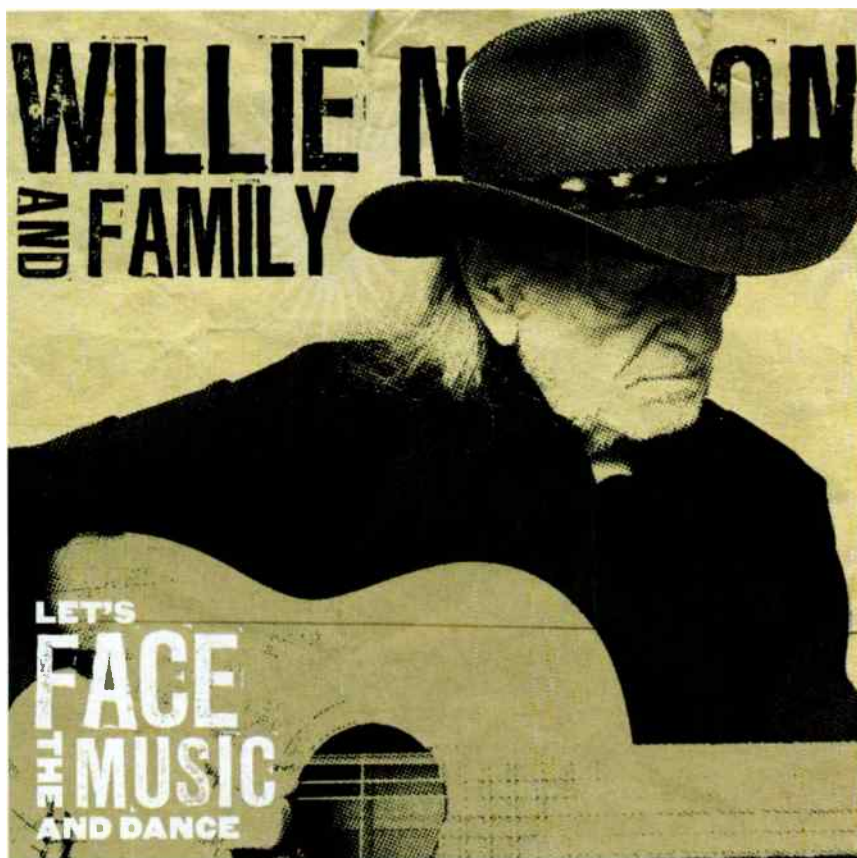
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World Radio History



Michael Tearson

## Prime Nelson

Willie Nelson & Family *Let's Face The Music And Dance*  
Legacy/Columbia 88765 42585 2

**W**illie Nelson turns 80 on April 30, 2013. I'll bet his picture is right there in the dictionary illustrating the definition of "ageless!"

Willie has returned to Columbia, his home from 1975 to 1993 after a 20-year absence. *Let's Face The Music And Dance* is the first fruit of this new deal, which will include both new and vintage releases, and it is trumpeted as the first of a yearlong celebration of Willie's Big 8-0.

*Let's Face The Music And Dance* is a really sweet album, a pleasure to listen to. Willie and his band just make it all feel so effortless as they glide through the 14 selections in the set. In fact, they are so smooth and play together so tightly, it almost feels like they work telepathically. That notion, upon thinking about it, may not be all that far from the truth. Willie's band Family has had the key players in place for decades, notably his sister Bobbie Nelson on piano, harmonica guru

Mickey Raphael and drummer Paul English. That long a partnership cannot help but informing their playing together. Add Paul's brother Billy English on electric gut string guitar and percussion, Kevin Smith holding down the bottom on a big old doghouse upright bass, and Jim "Moose" Brown on B-3 organ and you have a band for the ages. On several tracks Willie's son Micah Nelson adds percussion.

Still as powerful a unit as Family is, the true focus is on Willie's signature vocals and guitar stylings on his battered old guitar, which he lovingly calls Trigger.

The song list comprises mostly classic Tin Pan Alley songs that would have felt totally at home on Willie's first album of standards, 1978's landmark album *Stardust*. These include the title song, "You'll Never Know," "Twilight Time," "Walking My Baby Back Home," "I Can't Give You Anything But Love," "Marie (The Dawn Is Breaking)," "I Wish I Didn't Love You So"



and "I'll Keep On Loving You," all songs Willie must have loved for a lifetime.

Then there are the links to his country heritage: Spade Cooley's "Shame On You," Carl Perkins'

challenge you to tell the new from the vintage. That defines timeless.

As it happens I am writing this review on a drab, grey wintry day, and Willie Nelson and Family's *Let's Face*

---

**Willie Nelson's return to Columbia/Legacy becomes the occasion for his 80th birthday party. Congrats, Willie!**

---

"Matchbox," and "South of the Border" are given lightly swinging takes. Willie adds a fresh take of "Is The Better Part Over," which he first introduced on 1989's *A Horse Called Music*. If there are any real surprises here they would be the two instrumentals, both taken oddly enough from French sources: Django Reinhardt's "Nuages" (the French word for clouds) and "Vous Et Moi" by Claude Francois and Jean Bourtayre. These naturally feature Willie's playing at its best.

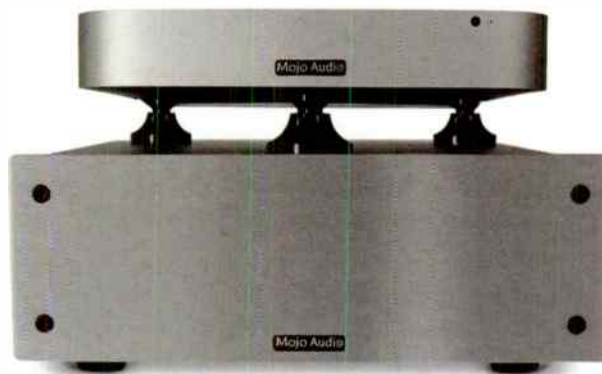
The performances through are as breezy as can be with the band in top form. Besides Willie on guitar, Bobbie Nelson on piano, Mickey Raphael on harp and Billy English, all have numerous spots to solo and shine. The result is more jazz than country, but that is nothing new for Willie & Family either. Willie's singing remarkably sounds utterly untouched by time. Listen blindfolded to selections from this new set and *Stardust* and I

*The Music And Dance* is making the day a delight despite the weather. It is prime Willie Nelson, as fine as anything he's ever done. That may be all you need to know about it.

**Michael Tearson** is one of the founding pioneers of Album Rock radio with a storied career dating back to 1967. Currently, he may be heard on Sirius/XM's Deep Tracks and Classic Vinyl channels regularly and BB King's Bluesville occasionally. Additionally he creates adventurous eclectic shows for [www.radiothat-doesntsuck.com](http://www.radiothat-doesntsuck.com) and Michael Tearson's Marconi Experiment on [www.iradiophilly.com](http://www.iradiophilly.com). In 1999-2003 he wrote a weekly column covering pro wrestling for the Philadelphia Daily News and has acted in over 50 films. In 2011 he recorded his first CD as a singer *Stuff That Works* available at [www.CDbaby.com](http://www.CDbaby.com).

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# MOVING IN BLUE

DANNY KALB  
*and friends*



Don Wilcock

*Blues*

Danny Kalb *Moving in Blue*  
Sojourn Records SR-035

**P**ROBABLY BECAUSE The Blues Project dissipated like sugar in strong tea in the late '60s, the blues-rock group's founder Danny Kalb's uniquely succulent guitar work has never been emulated by second, third and fourth generation rock guitarists the way other young white artists of the day were as they negotiated the tightrope walk between acoustic folk and blues guitar vs. electric rock guitar.

From San Francisco and Chicago to Boston and London, guitarists like Jerry Garcia, Elvin Bishop, Tom Rush and Keith Richards were building bridges over the troubled waters of a turbulent time, finding a musical bond between an emerging youth culture and aging blues and folk artists keeping alive the American songbook of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in a time of civil rights upheavals, Communist witch hunts, hot and cold wars, and the shaking loose of stringent moral values.

Danny Kalb was at Ground Zero for this movement in 1963, and in this his fifth solo album since the

premature breakup of The Blues Project more than four decades ago he comes closest to capturing the eclecticism, style and wistfulness of the Greenwich Village scene that he helped create.

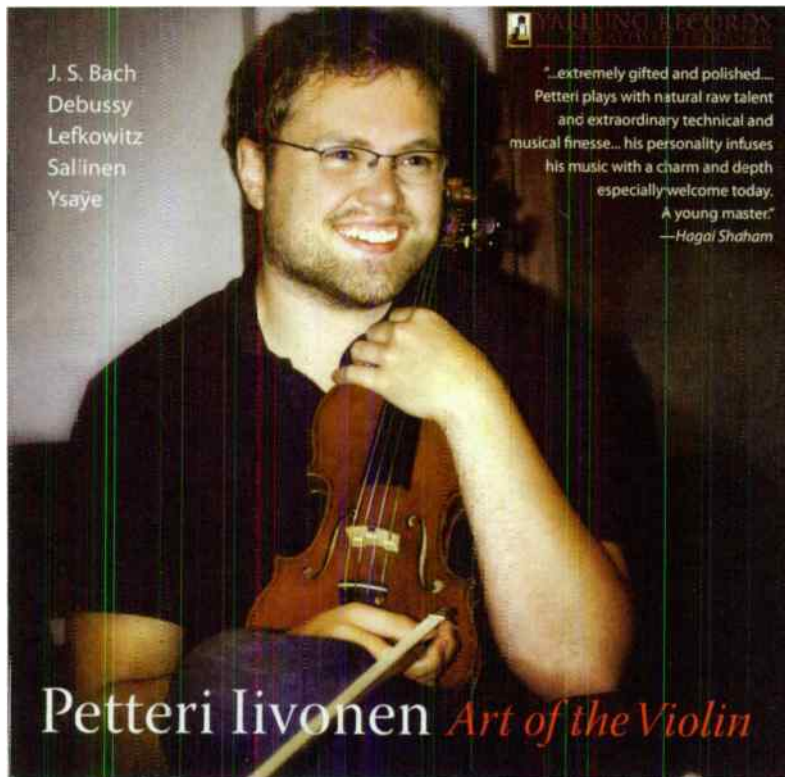
On 25 cuts that seem outrageously eclectic for today's average listener he tackles songs by iconic artists as varied as Hank Williams, Johnny Cash, Muddy Waters, and even makes overdone chestnuts like Big Joe Williams' "Baby Please Don't Go" and Muddy Waters' "Can't Be Satisfied" sound fresh. He pays homage to three contemporary folkies Dave Van Ronk, Tim Hardin and Bob Dylan. He even does a version of "Tryin' to Get to You" made famous by Elvis, and "Sally Go 'Round the Roses," a 1963 pop ballad by one-hit wonders The Jaynetts, the original produced by Abner Spector who was an A&R man for Chess Records in Chicago.

Add to that four originals and you have a potpourri that is not casual listening but is made consis-

tent by his exquisite picking style and driftwood vocals, which owe more to Dylan's coffee house period than a Grateful Dead rock concert, although his rocking version of John Lee Hooker's "Louise" and a spirited live take on Son House's "Death Letter Blues" almost come off as guilty electric pleasures for an audience that wasn't quite sure plugging in was "authentic" in 1965.

The cliché that old soldiers never die, they just fade away has not proven true for our American music heroes like Johnny Cash, Honey Boy Edwards, or Hubert Sumlin, nor will it be case for Bob Dylan, B. B. King, Buddy Guy or Danny Kalb. Like so many of his contemporaries Danny Kalb has come closer to universal truth the older he's gotten. Unlike some of them, he's had to come back farther from the edge of music's self-destructive impulses, the imploding dissolution of the Blues Project, decades of withdrawal from the scene, and a stroke. He still comes out swinging and has more yet to say.





## Classical

Bach, Debussy, Ysaÿe, et al.: *Art of the Violin*  
Petteri Iivonen, violin; Yarlung CD 05787

Piazzola, Schifrin, Ginastera, et al.:  
*Antonio Lysy at the Broad: Music from Argentina;*  
Brian Pezzone, Piano; Pablo Motta, Bass  
Yarlung CD 05787

IS THE CD a mature, nearly dead technology, with no innovations still to be made, or is it just coming into its own? Back around the turn of this century, I recall reading an opinion to the effect that for the CD, the best was yet to come. The reasoning was that the LP needed half a century to ascend to the heights it had reached in the year 2000, while at that time the Red Book disc had only had about 15 years to evolve. So, we could expect greater things to come.

Yarlung Records is making a strong case for that viewpoint. A relatively new audiophile record com-

pany located in Los Angeles (or rather at [www.yarlungrecords.com](http://www.yarlungrecords.com) since nowadays a company's "real" address is its virtual address, and isn't that why our century is neurotic?) Yarlung is issuing CDs that sound good enough to some ears to rebut the old arguments against the Compact Disc.

The two records under review more than make the point. The people I've played them for, including diehard *audiophilia nervosa* (and vinyl) types from the New Jersey Audio Society, have reacted very positively. Most of them with enthusiasm! And it doesn't take long ...

just a few seconds into a track and they're smiling and asking "Who is making these things?"

The answer in large part is, and here I think I'll get your attention, "Bob Attiyeh, Steve Hoffman and Kevin Gray." Attiyeh is the recording engineer on these offerings, and Hoffman and Gray are the mastering engineers. Anyone familiar with the audiophile side of the recording industry will recognize these as three of the "wish list names" you'd pick from if you were making your Dream Disc.

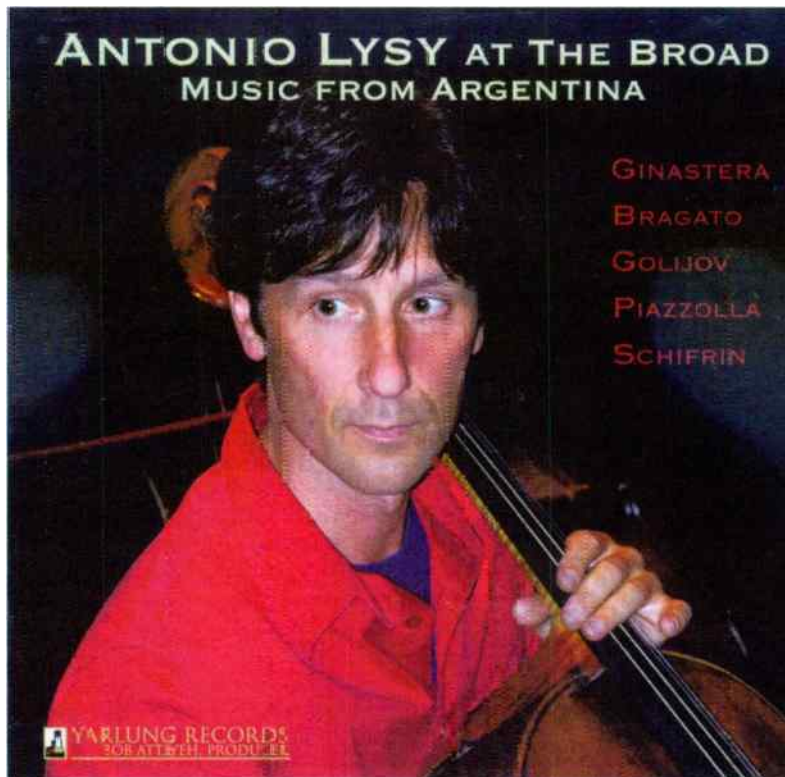
Attiyeh uses classy-looking gold sputtering on his CDs, minimalist

miking techniques and top-shelf mikes, including an AKG C-24 , to record at a super-high-definition 176,400 sampling rate and 24-bit data word. Then Hoffman and Gray master the CDs direct from the original media, dithering the signal back down to the Red Book standard of 44.1-kHz/16-bits, so we can hear the stuff on our existing CD players.

Try one ... you'll hear the sound quality right away, I'm sure. Even before your brain starts analyzing the soundstage, bass and treble extension, dynamics macro and micro, etc., you'll know you like it.

I am not certain whether the quality is a case of *more* (low level detail, presence, air, ambience) or of *less* (digital grunge and artifacts). Maybe both. But it's real!

As to the music, you won't get cheated there, either. Petterilivonen's violin playing is sure to charm, especially in the Debussy *Violin Sonata* with pianist Kevin Fitz-Gerald. The solo violin works he interprets also come across very well indeed, and I wouldn't be surprised if this young man, one of the "new artists" Yarlung is hoping will make a name for himself, actually does just that.

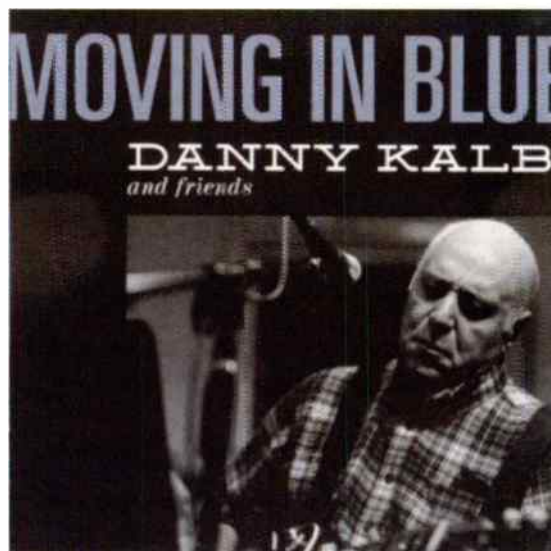


*Antonio Lysy at the Broad: Music from Argentina* is pretty close to irresistible musical. Cellist Lysy and friends make the music of their country sing beautifully. Some of the tracks, for example Piazzolla's

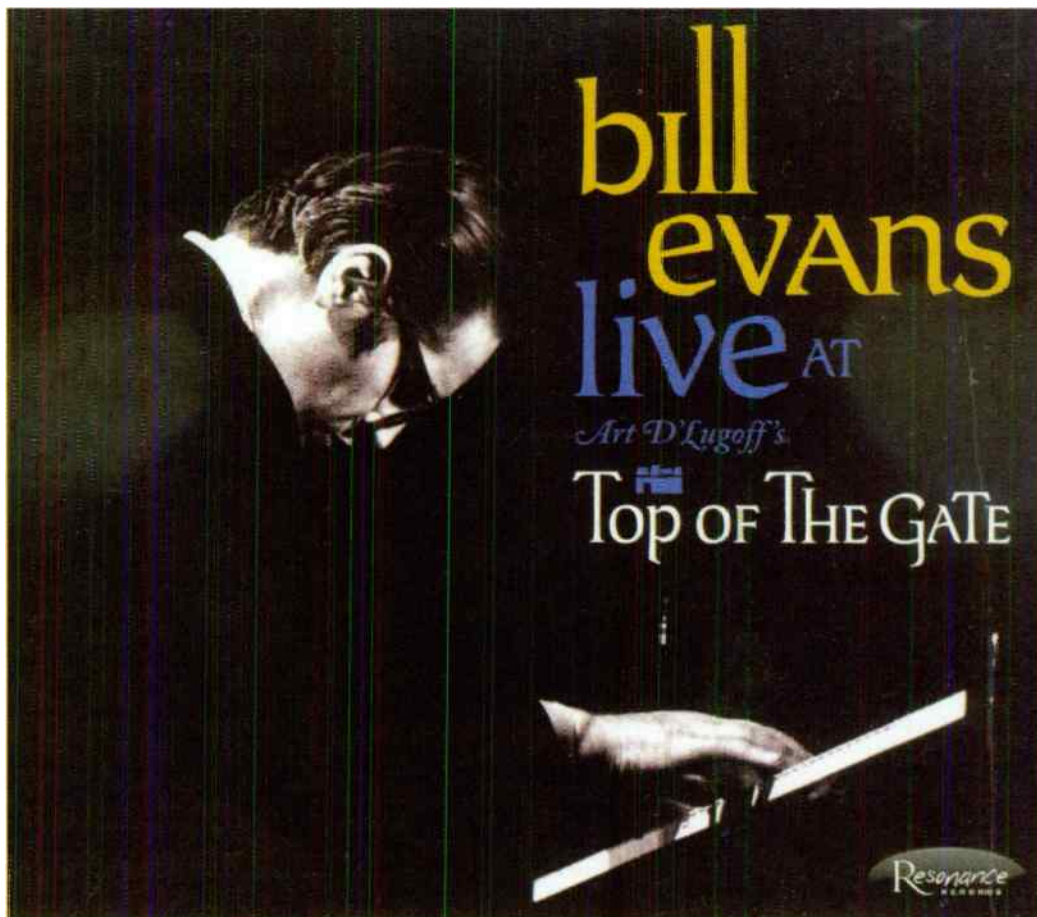
*Oblivion*, are haunting in the extreme. Others are more folksy. They're all great to listen to.

The good ship *Nervosa* has a new pennant flying from the mast. Welcome aboard, Yarlung!

Nearly 50 years on from his vital work in the Blues Project, Danny Kalb has released a great double CD of 25 songs. Some tunes come from classic bluesmen, such as Muddy Waters or John Lee Hooker, with others from Bob Dylan, Johnny Cash and Hank Williams. Better, there are a handful Danny himself wrote. Check out *Moving In Blue* from Sojourn Records. You can buy it at Amazon or at CDBaby.







## Seth Greenstein

*Jazz*

**Bill Evans: Selections from Live  
 At Art D'Lugoff's Top of the Gate  
 HCD-2012, Deluxe 2-CD edition;  
 HLP-9012, Deluxe three 12-in. 45-rpm LPs, HQ-180  
 HLT-8012, one 10-in LP (four songs)**

**I**N OCTOBER 1968, Bill Evans completed a two-week engagement at the Top of the Gate club in New York City with his bassist of about two years, Eddie Gomez, and a new drummer, Marty Morrell. Toward the end of the engagement, a young jazz aficionado and audio engineer fresh from Columbia University, where he ran jazz programming at the college station WKCR-FM, lugged a 50-pound reel-to-reel, two-

track tape recorder and four microphones to the Top of the Gate to record two sets from the already legendary Evans. That once-young engineer, George Klabin, is now President of Resonance Records, and from the crossing of these two paths some 44 years ago comes a "new" two-CD package (also available in multi-disc 180-gram vinyl) simply titled "Bill Evans Live at Art D'Lugoff's Top of the Gate."

There is cause to rejoice in the discovery. The quality of the recording reflects Klabin's skill as an engineer and as an improvisational technician. Despite initial rough spots on the opening tune, "Emily," the sound of the recording is surprisingly good. Compare the sound quality of the first and last tracks on disc one, and it is clear that Klabin made numerous adjustments on the fly in a challenging audio environment.

And, having made those adjustments, many of the tracks stand up admirably well against “professional” recordings of Evans trios in a live club setting. Because of Klabin’s close single miking of the instruments, Evans’s piano sounds a bit heavier on the midrange, but clear and well balanced. Gomez’s bass loses some of its resonance yet

angular beauty of Monk gives way to the softer, more lyrical Evans style, but Evans’s exploration of Monk’s rich harmony is no less intricate or intriguing.

The set earns a place of historical importance in the Evans discography as well. It is the first known recording of the trio with Morrell at the beginning of the longest rela-

revels in the purity of its melody; little embellishment is needed for Evans to reveal the glints of brilliance he saw in this Bacharach-David pop ballad. The set also features a rare Evans recording of “Mother of Earl.” There is only one Evans original composition in the set, but for reasons that require no explanation there cannot be too

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## **This live set bears all the hallmarks of why Bill Evans endures at the pinnacle of jazz improvisation.**

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gains a naturalness to the attack missing from many more formal live jazz recordings. Predictably, the limited number of microphones short-changes the drums, where snare and cymbals predominate, and the deeper tones of kick drum and toms are all but nonexistent on most of the tracks. There are the expected occasional background noises of clinking plates and glasses, and background chatter. And Evans’s announcements are too muffled to be comprehensible.

But the recording captures all the magic in Bill Evans’s musicality, and particularly the deepening partnership between Evans and Gomez. Even just a few months after the recording of the live Verve sets, “California Here I Come” (with Philly Joe Jones) and “At the Montreux Jazz Festival” (with Jack DeJohnette), the confident interplay between Evans and Gomez has advanced noticeably. Gomez plays inventively as Evans’ full musical partner, and the empathy between them, and the freedom each gives the other, is palpable and joyous.

Of the 17 tracks on the two discs, only three are played in both shows: One of Evans’s most performed ballads of this period, “Emily”; the Jerome Kern standard “Yesterdays.” and Thelonious Monk’s “Round Midnight.” There is no mistaking that the pianist is Evans and not Monk. The abrupt attack, crunching dissonance, and

tionship Evans had with any drummer. The liner notes indicate that the set contains the earliest live recordings of Evans playing “My Funny Valentine” and “Yesterdays,” as well as the only live recording of “Witchcraft.” The disc also features the first live recording of the Evans trio performing “Here’s That Rainy Day,” which Evans had just weeks before recorded on his then-unreleased solo album “Alone.” While the live and studio recordings show many similarities in his approach (including signature Bill Evans key modulations in the second and last choruses), the differences in the live track from the studio master and alternate takes demonstrate Evans’s improvisational originality. And his treatment of “California Here I Come,” just a few months after the live recording mentioned above, is already a tad slower with a more expansive reading. Liner notes include reflections from Gomez and Morrell, as well as commentary from Nat Hentoff, Gary Burton, and those involved in recording the session and production of the disc.

The sets feature several tunes well associated with Bill Evans’s trios, but with some welcome surprises. The familiar lilting waltz of “Someday My Prince Will Come” effortlessly alternates choruses in 3/4 and 4/4 time, sometimes a light waltz or a playful two feel, and then comes out swinging. The contemporary pop tune on this set, “Alfie,”

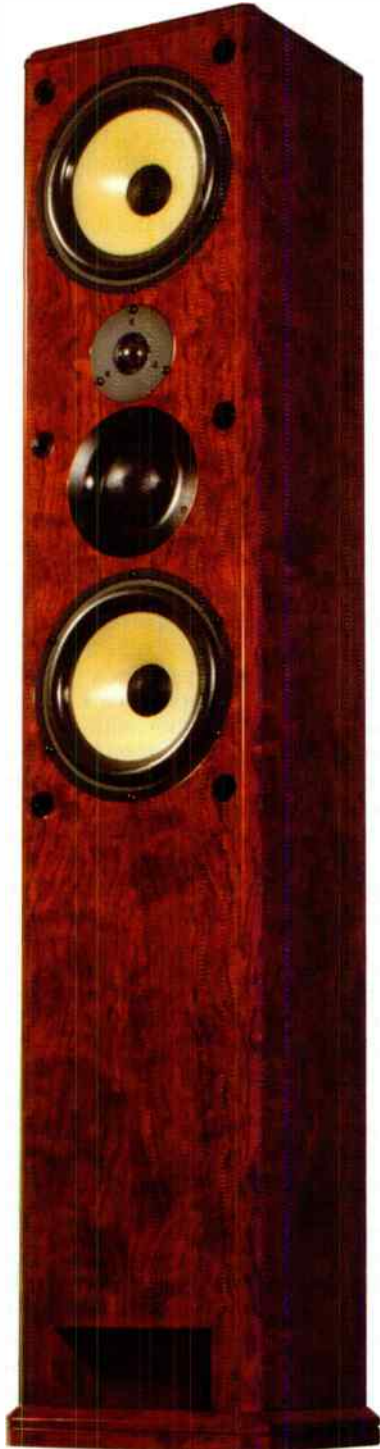
many recordings of Evans playing “Turn Out the Stars.”

What commends the set most is, of course, the extraordinary musicianship of the performers. The Evans trio beats as one, but in addition to the interplay of the ensemble there are delights from focusing on the excellence of each individual player. The recordings merit multiple listenings – to Evans’s right hand as he plays the melody or solos; to the diverse intricate harmonies and rhythms in his left hand comping style, to Gomez’s interpolations, and to Morrell’s ability to respond on a dime to the soloists’ flights.

In 1968, many contemporary musicians that, like Bill Evans, earned their reputations playing standards instead chased new sounds and styles. When Miles Davis left standards behind, he labeled his late 1960’s recordings, with justification, “directions in music.” Bill Evans didn’t need to *pursue* style. He *had* style. He *was* style. There is no artificial drama, no rote lines, no trick plays on these recordings. The talent, taste, and authenticity of Bill Evans never go out of fashion. His only direction took him deeper into the music. This live set bears all the hallmarks of why Bill Evans endures at the pinnacle of jazz improvisation. It may have taken 44 years to be released, but for the listener Bill Evans “Live at the Top of the Gate” is still right on time.



# *Induction Dynamics S1.8T Speakers*



## **Hugh Mandeson**

**A**FTER MANY YEARS of lusting after exotic speakers and drivers, I find I am most fond of the dome tweeter. Now you have to know that my first "real" speakers were a pair of Ohm F Walsh speakers I stumbled over at a bankruptcy sale when I was in high school. \$99 for the pair! They lasted 15 years and utterly spoiled me with their phase coherence and perfect dispersion. Now I have friends with Magnaplanars and Apogeos. I had some Infinitys with EMITs and with Walsh tweeters. And I also had some big Xstatic electrostatics for a while. I made some speakers with Heil AMTs, horn and piezic tweeters. Ribbon tweeters have eluded me so far, as have plasma. After many years of listening, my ears find the dome tweeter to be the best reproducer of high frequency material.

Editor Gene clued me into Phase Technology and Bill Hecht, the inventor of the soft dome tweeter. I researched it a little and found a great story. Bill made tweeters for Fisher home speakers and people kept pushing in the tweeters at showrooms and shows, so Mr. Fisher asked Bill to make some soft ones just for display

# Audio by Van Alstine The Vision DAC/Preamp and Synergy 450 Power Amp

George Graves



**A**UDIO BY VAN ALSTINE (AVA) started back in the dawn of the “high-end” movement by offering upgrade kits for the then newly defunct Dynaco Corporation products. After David Hafler eventually sold his next venture, Hafler Audio, Van Alstine added upgrades for those products as well. This upgrade business served Van Alstine well and he is still at it offering kits and upgrades which build on the strengths of these legendary products.

Along with upgrades to existing products from Dynaco and Hafler, the company started to design its own components and soon gained a reputation for making good sounding audio components in the USA without a lot of frills and extras, but presenting good value for the money and excellent performance. While Van Alstine still offers a number of interesting upgrade paths for both Dynaco and Hafler amps and preamps, it is their own line of solid-state equipment that we are interested in today.

As we move deeper into the age of digital audio, it becomes more and more difficult to avoid the conjoin-

ing of those two centerpieces of any modern stereo system, the preamplifier and the DAC (Digital to Analog Converter). Some DACs (such as the units from Benchmark) are primarily DACs with some of the functionality of a preamp and then there are integrated amps such as the Harman-Kardon HK990 (reviewed in these pages last year) that are complete pre/power amps with 24-bit/192KHz DACs built into them. Van Alstine’s The Vision is an attempt to put a high-quality 24-bit DAC into a state-of-the-art, solid-state preamp and to build a simple component that seamlessly integrates the two disparate functions into a single, easy to use unit.

At first glance, The Vision from AVA looks like a simple, fairly straightforward preamp. Unlike some of the more expensive units from competitors, the AVA unit looks relatively ordinary with its black satin front panel and plain black case. The front of the unit has, from left to right, a rotary source selector switch, a volume control, and a balance control. Then there is a large expanse of blank panel, on the top right of which is a lit, rocker-style on/off switch and a quarter-inch stereo

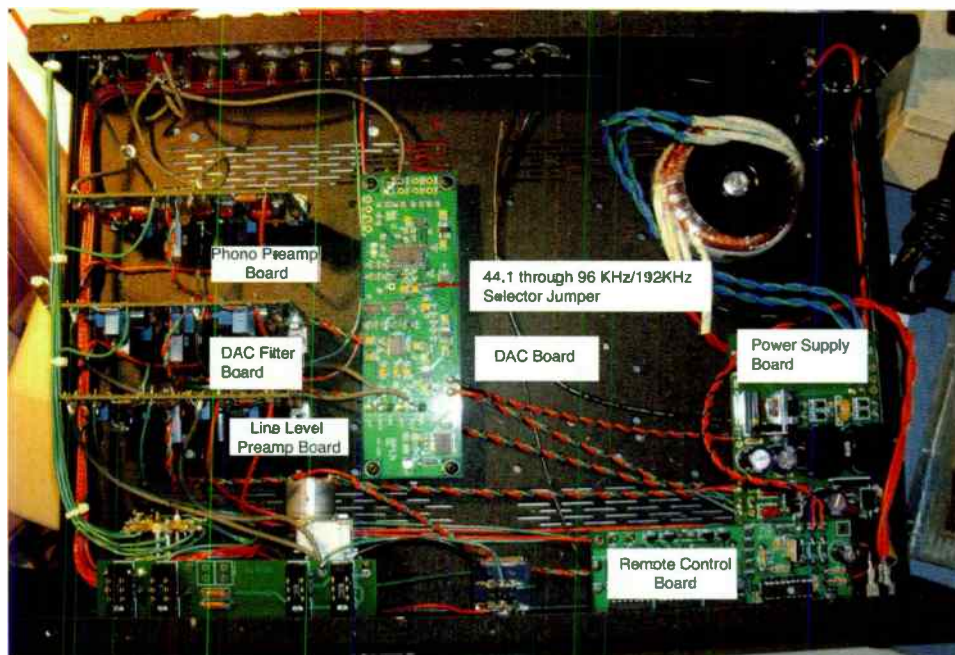


headphone jack. To the immediate left of the power switch is a red "jewel" which, which, I suspect, is the IR "eye" for the optional remote volume control (with which my review sample came equipped and is a \$300 build-to-order option).

Centered over the selector switch is a pair of push-buttons. The left most is labeled *Tape 1/Tape 2* indicating the presence of two separate tape loops, and centered over the volume control are two more push-button switches labeled *Mono, Left* and *Right*. That's it; there are no other controls or indicators on the front panel. In fact, The Vision preamp looks, from the outside, very much like all of the other solid-state, hybrid, or tube AVA preamps. The only exception is the

Insight+ EC solid-state preamp which adds a separate pair of tone controls and a switch to cut each in or out of the circuit. This commonality of chassis and front and back panels helps to keep costs low, but it also introduces some compromises that made operation of the digital section of The Vision somewhat awkward. More about that later.

On the back of the AVA preamp are located a very comprehensive set of nine pairs of I/O jacks. Looking at the back apron, on the right, is a pair labeled *Special In*; on my review sample, these corresponded to the optional phono preamp input. To the extreme right of those is a thumbscrew binding post for the turntable's separate ground wire. Ordering the preamp with the phono input option adds \$200. To the left of the Special inputs is a pair labeled *Tuner* and these are regular line-level analog inputs. The third pair of inputs is not labeled and have a miniature toggle switch mounted between them. These two inputs correspond to the selector switch position marked "CD" on The Vision's front panel. These two RCA jacks are NOT analog inputs, but are instead coaxial SPDIF inputs for the data output jacks on a CD player or other digital sound source. Since there are two of them, either one can be selected by the toggle switch located on the back panel between the jacks. This is so both a CD player as well as a music server client box such as the Logitech Squeezebox Touch or the Cambridge NP30 network player or equivalent. After the digital inputs is a pair marked *Spare* (which is another high-level input), then there are two complete tape loops which have buffered outputs (another \$200 option) and a pair of line-out jacks (ostensibly two of which go to the preamp and two go to the stereo subwoofer, if any). On the far left are a panel-type fuse holder, an IEC power cord inlet, and (surprisingly) a switch to lift the chassis ground in the case of a ground loop (unlikely, but nonetheless possible). This last addition is unusual, but welcome. Without it, someone suffering from a ground loop would have to resort to one of those awkward three-prong to two-prong a.c. cord adapters one buys at the hardware store.



## Operation

Mostly, the operation of AVA's The Vision is about as straightforward as a preamp can be. There are six "sets" of inputs from which to choose including *Phono* (in our review sample) and two tape loops. From then it's just right-to-left *Balance* and *Volume*. The review sample also included the optional remote control which allows volume to be adjusted from the listening chair as well as providing a mute switch to kill the audio altogether. I highly recommend this \$300 option if for no other reason than the convenience.

The I/O RCA jacks are of the high-quality, single mounting hole variety and this is very good. I can't tell you how many otherwise fine audio components are let down by the cheap circuit-board mounting type RCAs that break all too easily, especially when audiophile-grade heavy interconnect cables are employed.

As I mentioned earlier, The Vision preamplifier uses the same basic panel and chassis as does every other preamp made by Audio by Van Alstine. This lowers production costs and allows each unit to be more or less bespoke, with each unit being made to order. As you can see in the photo of the chassis, there are lots of unused mounting points, and the back-apron of the chassis has holes drilled in it to accept an additional number of RCA jacks as well as XLR balanced connectors (not used in the review sample). There seem to also be several cut-outs for more of the same type of sub-miniature toggle switches used to switch between the two coaxial digital inputs occupying input position three on the back apron. I bring this up because AVA has made some choices here, that while I see why and understand their thinking, I nevertheless believe that they have done their customers a slight disservice. It's one thing to save money and pass the savings on to the customer, which is, generally speaking, a laudable goal, but quite another to cause the user some inconvenience in order to save some money during manufacture.

I refer here to the controls for the digital inputs. The "CD" input jacks on the back of the unit are not designed to take the analog output of a CD player into the preamp, but are rather, designed to interface with

the input to the internal DAC board which gives The Vision preamp its *raison d'être*. Since these two inputs would be a left/right stereo analog pair input on AVA's purely analog preamp products, there are two RCA jacks available. Van Alstine chose to give the user a choice between two coaxial digital inputs, both of which feed the DAC board. It is the output of the DAC board which is selected by the rotary selector switch on

mode as opposed to the "correct," low-bit mode. His recommendation is to place the jumper in the 192-kHz mode and then just leave it there. So I did and all listening of digital music on The Vision preamp was carried-out with the DAC in the high-sampling rate mode. And he's right, I could hear no difference.

I'm still going to suggest that the digital input selector switch needs to be on the front panel, but this is a lot

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## The Vision's high-level stages take a back seat to no other unit at anywhere near its price level. It sounds great!

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the front channel. Between the two RCA digital inputs there is the small toggle switch I referred to earlier. In the "up" position, it selects the top-most digital input, while in the "down" position it selects the bottom-most jack. Thus, it is possible to permanently connect both a CD deck and a music server client such as a Logitech Squeezebox Touch or another digital music source to The Vision. While a nice idea, it is inconvenient have to reach behind the preamp and between the two closely packed coaxial RCA jacks to reach the switch to change inputs. If you have big fingers or big high-end cables (or both), it's tough

But this operation is child's play compared with the other "inconvenient" user adjustment that can be made to the DAC board on this unit. The DAC used by AVA is capable of doing standard 44.1 kHz through 96 kHz sampling rate (at either 16- or 24-bit) or 176.4/192 kHz sampling rate, but according to the supplied instructions, not at the same time! In order to change the DAC board over to handle higher than a 96 kHz sampling rate, AVA says that it is necessary to move a jumper located on the DAC circuit board itself. How do you do that? You do it by removing the chassis cover from the unit and moving a shorting jumper one place to the right to change the DAC chip from the lower sampling-rate operation to the higher sampling-rate operation.

What is required to remove the cover? Undo 16 tiny Philips-head screws and then the cover just lifts off! But here's the real kicker. The jumper is merely a shorting bar for two terminals. When the two terminals are not shorted, the DAC is in the 96 kHz and lower sampling rate mode. When the two terminals are shorted, it switched to the higher sampling rate mode. I was all ready to "ding" the company for the decision to not include a switch on the back panel (at the very least) for this until I started speaking with Frank Van Alstine about another issue. I causally asked him why they didn't mount a switch on the back of the unit and obviate the need for removing the cover. He told me that they couldn't do that because the jumper needed to be physically close to the DAC chip itself (ostensibly for noise reasons). Then he set off a real bombshell. He said that although the filtering won't be "ideal" for normal Red Book (16-bit/44.1kHz CDs), if you put the shorting bar in the high-resolution position (that's with the two pins shorted together), it will then play all bit-depths and all sample rates without further attention. He also said that nobody, so far, has been able to hear any difference between CDs played with the jumper in the high-bit

less of an inconvenience than is taking the top off the unit to switch sampling rates. Of course, unless Van Alstine starts shipping these units with the jumper in the 192-kHz mode as the default mode. As owners, most of us will still probably want to remove the cover at least once to set it to the high sampling-rate mode. I daresay that the great majority of us would take the cover off anyway, if only to look at the build quality and to see what we've bought. It's a guy thing.

### How Does it Sound?

In any audio component, it ultimately comes down to the sound. Ideally, an amplifying device should have no sound. Indeed, Stewart Hegeman, the man who designed the original Harman-Kardon Citation series of components in the early 1960s, once observed that an ideal amplifying device would be a "straight wire with gain." Unfortunately, in the ensuing half-century since Hegeman made that observation, we haven't yet achieved that goal, but we have come mighty close. Most modern solid-state amplifiers sound remarkably similar and are so neutral that any attempt by the audio press to characterize the sound of any one of them turn out to be gross exaggerations! Not that hi-fi writers are trying to mislead anyone, but the sonic differences between modern electronic components are so minuscule that in order to characterize them with mere words, the writer is pretty much forced to use a certain hyperbole just to get the point across at all. In fact, often ABX or double-blind tests ordinarily do not reveal any statistically reliable audible differences, and these differences only manifest themselves in long-term listening or near the limits of an amp's performance.

For instance, two modern amps might sound virtually identical at normal listening levels, and only exhibit any weaknesses when driving a difficult load or when asked to momentarily produce their maximum power. Obviously, the amp with the bigger, more robust power supply will sound the best under those circumstances. This general convergence of performance in everything from pre-amps to power amps to digital converters makes the reviewer's job increasingly difficult.

So it is with this Audio by Van Alstine The Vision preamp. This preamp is, unlike many of this company's offerings, 100% solid state. In fact it uses Burr-Brown operational amplifiers for all of its active circuitry. These op-amps (OPA627) and current buffers (National LME49600) are state-of-the-art ICs designed to have vanishingly low noise figures; fast, symmetrical slew



rates, and distortion figures so low that measuring them is a meaningless exercise. At one time, the highest possible performance was possible only with active stages made from hand-selected discrete components. This is no longer true as IC op-amps from the Burr-Brown and National Semiconductor branches of Texas Instruments are challenging the traditional wisdom that once gave discrete transistor circuitry a clear advantage.

the impact that I hear on the HK unit. On the new Hi-Q "XRCD24" release of Andre Previn and the London Symphony Orchestra's 1972 performance of the Tchaikovsky "1812 Overture" (HIQXRCD7), the cannon shots in the rousing finale lack the impact that they have through either the XA777ES's built-in converter or the HK990's converter. Otherwise, tonal balance from the mid-bass to the top is as good as any modern DAC and

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## The Synergy 450 gives you effortless power, with no strain, even at lease-breaking levels.

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With those high-performance op-amps and good quality caps and resistors, I would expect AVA's The Vision to be extremely quiet, even in *Phono* mode. With the Pro-Ject Debut Carbon and Ortofon 2M Red cartridge connected to the phono input, I heard no phono preamp hiss even with the volume much further advanced than anyone could stand to listen to music. At full gain, I could hear a slight hiss with my ear pressed up against the electrostatic driver in my Martin-Logan speakers. On *Line-Level* inputs, I could hear nothing. I'd say that's damn good performance but not unexpected. It's not just the active devices that have become mostly noise-free, it's the resistors as well. In the old days, the standard carbon-composition resistors used in electronics since the 1920s caused noise simply from the heat of current passing through them. This self-noise was characterized as a low-level, high-frequency hiss. Modern metal-film resistors don't do that and the result is a several orders of magnitude reduction in circuit noise.

There is a concept with which most designers are familiar called the threshold of human audibility. One rarely sees audio writers mentioning this because it tends to muddy the waters, but nonetheless, it does exist. Though our sensitivity to sound varies with frequency, and I'm not going to get into it deeply here; to generalize, let's just say that humans really can't distinguish noise + distortion that's much below about 110 dB. Since most modern electronics have noise + distortion that's either very close to that level or below it, then it becomes mostly a moot point. If you can't hear it, it doesn't exist, and with most modern electronics (amps, preamps, DACs etc.) hitting those numbers, then there's no wonder that it has become very difficult to impossible to differentiate between them.

Having said that, I'm going to try to characterize what I hear with this component. There are two aspects to The Vision's sound, the DAC and the analog section. And there are two aspects to the analog section as well, the phono preamp and the high-level preamp stages. The DAC section, as I said earlier, takes only coaxial (via RCAs) inputs. That means no computer interface (via USB) nor any Toslink optical inputs. Using the digital outputs of my Sony XA777ES SACD player and my Logitech Squeezebox Touch as digital sources, I was able to listen to the preamp's digital performance. Compared to my reference DAC (in my Harman-Kardon HK-990), the AVA's DAC gives up some textural refinement. While the sound is colorful and dynamic, there is a softening of bass in The Vision. It simply doesn't have

better than many. If you have yet to purchase a JVC XRCD24 either from JVC themselves or Hi-Q, do yourself a favor and try one. (Also, check Elusive Disc.) If regular CDs were all as good as the JVC XRCD system of disc mastering and manufacturing, there would have been no reason to develop either SACD or other so-called high-res formats!

The phono section of AVA's The Vision preamp is merely OK. It is not as good as, for instance, the phono section in my HK990 nor as good as the several (admittedly much more expensive) outboard phono preamps to which I have access. But, I must say that for the \$200 premium that this option adds to the Van Alstine's price, I don't think that you will do better. I know of no stand-alone \$200 phono preamps from the likes of companies such as Bellari, Pro-Ject, or Musical Fidelity that equal it for the price. You'd have to get up to something like the Parasound Zphono at \$350 before you would get better sound. What lets down most inexpensive phono preamps and preamp stages is not the frequency response. These days, most phono preamps have excellent RIAA accuracy (and this, more than anything, determines the frequency response of a phono preamp). It is the unit's textural retrieval that lets down most budget phono preamps. The better the preamp, the better it handles the information coming from any decent phono cartridge. For this evaluation, I used both the Ortofon 2M red (in the Pro-Ject Carbon TT) and my reference Grado Statement Master 1 in my JA Michell GyroDec SE turntable/Jelco 750-D tonearm combo. With both cartridges, I noticed a definite decrease in detail with The Vision's phono section, but I must say that I noticed an even greater reduction of textural retrieval with the highly regarded Musical Fidelity VLPS-II. So all in all, the AVA phono preamp is a decent performer, just not a stellar one.

Using my XA777ES SACD player as my "analog" source, I was able to get a pretty good idea of how the high-level stages of this preamp performed. In this respect, The Vision takes a back seat to no-one at anywhere near the AVA's price. This thing sounds great! Wonderful, tight bass that seems to go down forever, sparkling, clear highs, very low grain, with an extremely broad and deep soundstage. I was quite impressed. The aforementioned Tchaikovsky "1812 Overture" with Previn and the LSO had the bass impact that the same recording through the on-board digital processor lacked. The cannons firing in the finale actually made me jump. The Gordon Holt "goose-bump" factor was

there in spades. The Hi-Q XRCD release of Orff's "Carmina Burana" (also with Previn and the LSO) produced a wide and deep soundstage with excellent image specificity. To say I was impressed would be an understatement.

## The Synergy 450 Power Amp

Accompanying The Vision preamp was VanAlstine's new Synergy 450 Power Amp (225 watts per channel). Like its companion piece, above, the Synergy 450 is, cosmetically, a bit of a "plain Jane." The front panel is a satin-black anodized aluminum with but one control, a red rocker-style power switch. The company logo, in gold on black, is written at the bottom of the unit, and that's all there is to it. There are no meters, no lights (only the aforementioned rocker switch).

Around back, the 450 is likewise all business. The top three-quarters of the back apron is given over to heat sinks. This is a welcome departure from the standard solid-state amplifier designers' penchant for putting the heat sinks on the side panels of the amplifier. Not only does the amp look better without the massive heat sinks mounted on the sides (in a very minimalist way, sorta like the monolith in "2001, A Space Odyssey"), but it does make the amp easier to pick-up and move around. Believe me, we reviewers need all the help in that department that we can get. This amp weighs in at just under 40 pounds!

The bottom third of the amp has an IEC connector, a ground-lift switch, a main fuse, two output fuses, and on the extreme right a pair of single-hole mount WBT-style RCA phono-plug inputs. The middle of the lower apron has a pair of instrument-quality 3/4-inch, double 5-way hex-post speaker connectors for speakers.

Inside there is a massive toroidal power transformer and TO5-type double-die Exicon power MOS-FET output devices. These devices are standard on the 450, and an option on the 450's lower power sibling, the Synergy 300. Inside the build exudes quality. The components used and the build quality of such things as the printed

circuit boards are, obviously, the very best. The Synergy 450 might look unprepossessing, but this is a quality piece. So let's see if it "listens" as well as it is built!

## Sonic Impressions

I used the Synergy 450 with its companion piece, The Vision preamp, connecting the two together with a pair of 18-inch MyCableMart premium High-Definition interconnects ("Premium"! Sounds kind of silly, when you realize that these cables in their 18-inch lengths cost less than \$4.00 each.) For signal sources, I used my Toshiba laptop feeding an AudioQuest DragonFly DAC and running J. River's Media Jukebox.

Using music that I know well, such as the HDTracks' 24/96 "Getz/Gilberto" album as well as the Reference Recording HDX Sampler (originally 24/176.4 but down-converted using Korg's "Audiogate" software to 24/96), and the 24/96 eClassical.com download of Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" with Andrew Litton conducting the Bergan Philharmonic with Freddy Kempf on Piano (BIS-1940).

The first thing that struck me about this amp is its effortless power. From ppp to ffff (on the Gershwin "Rhapsody...") in a microsecond with absolutely no strain, even at lease-breaking volumes! The next clear impression is the total lack of any clue that I was listening to a solid-state system. Both the amp and the preamp are so neutral sounding that one can't characterize the sound as being from either the solid-state camp or the tube camp. This combo just lets the music through. Imaging was spot on. While the "Getz/Gilberto" is classic jazz soundstaging (three channel mono - with all players grouped either on the left, in the center, or on the right), the Gershwin and especially the Reference sampler threw a wide soundstage with realistic depth and height. Image specificity, is likewise excellent. With Professor Keith O. Johnson's minimalist miking technique, The Finale from Walton's "Crown Imperial" (Jerry Junkin/Dallas Wind Symphony) literally jumps from the speakers into your listening room. Instruments can be pin-pointed with layering front to back that verges on being holographic. Highs have that silken texture that is found in the best tube designs, but without the saccharine dullness in the upper registers that many tube designs have. But the Synergy 450 isn't powdery dry like many solid state designs either. The bass performance here is also exemplary, with that solid-state control that most tube amps lack. The bass is deep and powerful. In fact, the entire presentation exudes an air of effortless ease and composure. All of this plays to my overall impression of absolute neutrality. A very impressive power amp, indeed.

## Conclusion

The Audio by Van Alstine The Vision preamp and 450 Synergy Power amp are no-frills, mostly state-of-the-art preamp and amp that provide excellent performance for a very reasonable price. In the grand tradition of such illustrious forebears as Dynaco and Hafler, the AVA's equipment might not look fancy, but it delivers the goods. The preamp has a number of optional features, but one that I would certainly opt for is the remote volume control. As a "digital" preamp, The Vision is an excellent value, and if you put it together with the Synergy 450, you get an ensemble that has few peers at any price.

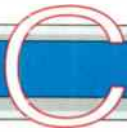
## NOTES

**Audio By Van Alstine AVA The Vision DAC/Preamplifier and Synergy 450 Power Amplifier**, The Vision, \$1599.00. Synergy 450, \$1999.00. Audio by Van Alstine, 2665 Brittany Lane, Woodbury, MN 55125-3022; phone 651/330-9871, fax 651/330-9822, avahifi@com-cast.net.

### Associated Equipment

Harmon-Kardon HK-990 amplifier; Sony XA777ES CD/SACD player; Denon DVD-758 Audio DVD player; J.A. Michele Gyro SE turntable; JELCO SD 750 tonearm; Grado Ref Series Platinum 1, Sumiko Blackbird, and Sumiko Blue-Point 2 phono cartridges; Otari DTR-85 DAT; TASCAM CD-RW CD Burner; Logitech Squeezebox Touch 700 Media Player, and Martin-Logan Aeon-i Speakers with Athena P-3 powered subwoofers.





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## Photos Never Lie!

### A New Meaning ...

... for the audio-word "Tweeter." I guess it's a new meaning; maybe you've seen this photo before. It was sent in by Terry Eckert of Las Vegas, an audio engineer for conventions and conferences including CES and other local events. I have thought we hi-fi buffs were referring to a high-frequency driver in a loudspeaker when we said "tweeter," but if this photo from Facebook shows our new paradigm, then we will suffer all sorts of politically improper jokes about "going to the birds" and "being bird-brained."

Gene Pitts, Editor,

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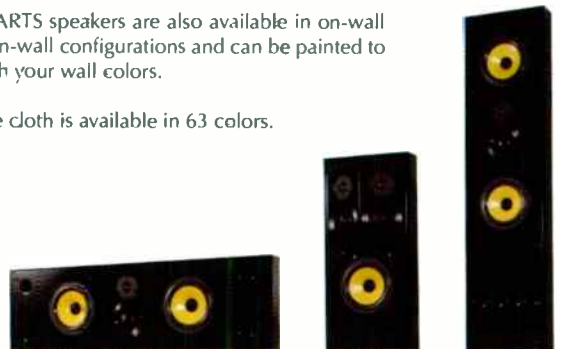
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