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The audiophile voice

Volume 5, Issue 4

"...by audiophiles for audiophiles."

**Linda Ronstadt &
Emmylou Harris**

**Western Wall
Wonderful!**

**Hi-Fi '99:
Show
of Shows**

**"Just The
Fax, Man!"
A Tale of
Two Phono
Cartridges**



**Reviews: Beming Siegfried Amp,
Enigma Oremus Speakers, Kimber
Speaker Wire, Sennheiser Headphones,
Greybeard Speakers**

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VOLUME V
ISSUE 4

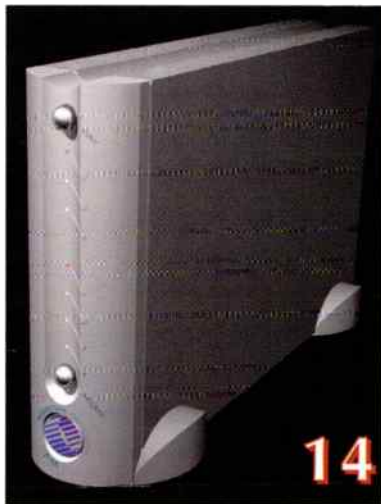
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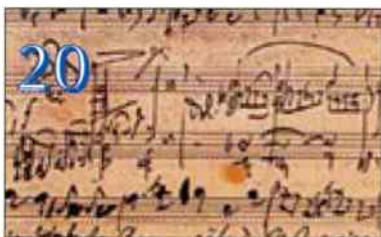
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is their midrange—a purity of tone...
that is quite special."
—Sam Tellig, *Stereophile*
February 1998

"WP, KR, and ST are unanimous
in calling these the best dynamic
headphones they've ever heard."
—*Stereophile Recommended Component*
April 1998



"...the Sennheiser HD 600s
are a must-audition product—
even, dare I suggest, a must-own."
—Wes Phillips, *Stereophile*
February 1998

makes raves

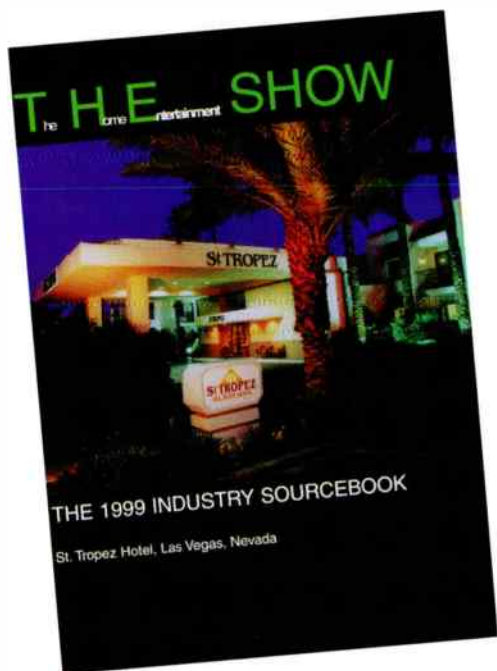
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Editor/Publisher Eugene Pitts, III
Executive Editor Annis Balgalvis
Senior Editors Mark Block
Peter Breuning
Russ Novak
Cover Artist George Angelini
Additional Art Sharon Pitts

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Frank Alles, Bill Brassington, Chuck Bruce, James Dowd, Howard Ferstler, Jim Frane, John Hellow, Lewis Lanece, Karl Lozier, Ron Nagle, David Nemzer, Christopher Noblet, Arthur Paxton, Clement Perry, Joel Schumer, Earle Stevens, Michael Teanson, Jon Tiven, Les Turoczi, Ross Wagner, Jerry Walsh, and Bill Wells.

ADVERTISING DIRECTOR

Alan Keister, 800/671-4030
FAX, 9-5, Eastern Time: 973/535-3210

THE AUDIOPHILE SOCIETY OFFICERS

Founder Hy Karhalsky
President
Vice President Bill Brassington
Treasurer Mike Kates
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Corresponding Secretary Mark Block

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PRODUCTION OFFICES

215 Glenridge Ave., Lower Level
Montclair, NJ 07042
973/509-2009
FAX 973/509-2032
E-mail: Epitts@ix.netcom.com
Website: Audiophilevoice.com
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New Products

The GW Labs Model 270 Power Amplifier

has been designed with a simple, purist approach, with functional styling and compact dimensions. Designer Godfrey Wong encourages the comparison of the Model 270 with any other power amp and suggests particular attention to three-dimensionality, transparency, liveliness, and openness of sound quality. Power output is 70 watts per channel, measured rms, from 20 Hz to 20 kHz, into 8-ohm loads, with THD+N of 0.65% at kHz. Input sensitivity is 0.775 V for 70 watts output into 8-ohm loads. Other features include triode input stage and drivers, ultralinear push-pull output, and custom double-C core output transformers. Price: \$1,800.00.

Data: 415/668-9003.



The B&W ASW 500 Subwoofer

is the latest model in the firm's ASW series of active subwoofers. Using a single 10-inch driver, the unit produces deep powerful bass that measures -3 dB at 32 Hz from a box footprint about 14 by 15 inches, with just 16 inches of height. A B&W innovation, the Flow-Port System, combines an unconventionally wide-diameter port with a mathematically derived pattern of dimples to control air turbulence and virtually eliminate port noise or "chuffing." The 70-watt on-board amp uses MOS-FETs and has been optimized for this application. The amp is highly linear, very stable, and is capable of extremely large current output. Price: \$450.00.

Data: 978/664-2870.



The Rogue Audio M-120 Monoblock Tube Amplifier

offers 120 watts of power and can be operated in either triode and ultra-linear configuration. The tube complement is four matched 6550/KT88 output tubes, two 12AU7 drivers, and a 12AX7 inverter. Rogue's "quality by design" philosophy is exemplified by the inclusion of custom-wound transformers, switches with silver contacts, polypropylene capacitors, and small tolerance metal-film resistors. Other features include slow-start turn-on for extended tube life, mechanically isolated transformers, and both 4- and 8-ohm taps. The welded-wire tube cage both protects the tubes and adds to the design aesthetics. \$2595.00 per pair.

Data: 610/760-1621



The Tributaries Silver Series Component Video Cables

are "true" 75-ohm cables intended for uses where many other makers use conductors that are typically 50 ohms. This mismatched impedance will often produce signal loss in high-resolution component video transfer and thus limit color accuracy. Prices: One-meter three-cable set, \$200.00; two-meter set, \$250.00; three-meter set, \$300.00.

Data: 800/521-1596.



The Accuphase C-290V Generation II Preamplifier

is the latest version of the firm's acclaimed line-stage unit and incorporates completely revised circuitry on a Teflon printed circuit board. The firm has long had an "underground esoteric" reputation among connoisseurs of fine Japanese electronics, and the C-290V preamp is company's finest offering. Price: \$14,995.00.

Data: 310/329-0187



The Parasound TDQ-150 AM/FM Tuner

offers outstanding reception and sound quality in a half-width problem-solving size. Features include 30 presets assignable to any combination of FM and AM stations, full-function remote control, rear-panel remote infrared connector, and a.c. line and d.c. triggering abilities. Capture ratio is 1 dB, stereo S/N ratio better than 74 dB, and stereo separation better than 50 dB. Price: \$269.00.

Data: 415/397-7100.



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ETTERS

Another "Rah!"

Dear Editor:

Thank you so much returning my phone call from last night, telling me about the procedures of how the *Fi Magazine* subscriptions were being transferred over to *The Audiophile Voice*. I wanted to say your writers seem like very nice people. Your *TAV Magazine* is very nice too; I like it. It's concise, precise, and has a very good feeling to it. It's to the point, simple, covers a lot of subjects, equipment and records. It's a very nice high-end magazine. I appreciate what you've done.

I also liked the people at *Fi Magazine*. They had a great thing going there. I was with them from issue No. 1 in January 1986. Very exciting magazine, very good. I hope that things work out for their staff. I hope we will hear from them later on.

Once again, I am enjoying your *Audiophile Voice*. It's a very well-structured magazine, and I wish you well with it.

Howard Rippele
Brooklyn, NY

Sub Assumptions

Dear Editor:

Today I received Vol.5, Issue 3 of *The Audiophile Voice* and a very nice letter from you explaining that your publication is assuming *Fi Magazine's* subscription responsibilities.

This is just a brief note to express my gratitude and appreciation to you. I was a charter subscriber to *Fi*, and relished every issue. I was extremely sorry to see it fail.

I have been a subscriber to *Audio Magazine* for many, many years. My current subscription will expire in December of 2005. You were a wonderful editor at *Audio*, and your sudden, unannounced departure was interpreted by long-time subscribers as a sign that things would probably go down hill from that point onward.

I'm so happy that you are now publishing and editing a magazine of your own, and I look forward to reading every issue. I already subscribe to *The Absolute Sound*, *The Perfect Vision*, *Ultimate Audio*, *Sensible Sound*, *Stereophile*, *Stereophile Guide to Home Theater*, *Audio*, *Stereo Review's Sound & Vision*, *Home Theater*, *Audio-Video Interiors*, *AudioMusings*, *Wide Screen Review*, *The Audio Critic* and a few other similar publications in the field.

But I can never get enough! I also peruse the websites of the various publications and do my best to keep up. We are lucky that *Stereophile's* show is held in Los Angeles every three or four years.

I don't mean to go on forever. I'm truly grateful to you for fulfilling my subscription to *Fi Magazine* with issues of *The Audiophile Voice*. You're certainly a gentleman and scholar!

Dr. Olin Wood
via e-mail

Thank You, Dave

Dear Editor:

Just received latest *TAV* issue along with your letter re: assumption of *Fi* subscriptions. Great idea and much appreciat-

ed. I thoroughly enjoy *TAV* since you took it over. I never thought *Fi* had much in the way of substance and having my *TAV* subscription extended is a nice surprise. Best of luck.

Dave Lewis
BBN Technologies
via e-mail

The Editor responds:

Thanks for your good wishes and warm comments; I appreciate them. However, I do have to take issue with the notion of *Fi* not having "much in the way of substance...." I think that they did several things pretty darned well, and that they should be congratulated for having gotten so far with a start-up venture. Even though they have ceased publication, as happens with the majority of new magazines, in the main their hearts were in the right place. Their difficulties are the same ones I still face, those of a new business, of a print publishing venture in the Day of the Internet and Websites, of stereo-oriented hi-fi publishing when much of the electronics industry has moved over to home theater, etc. Might look easy from the outside, but I assure you.... Further, it is becoming harder and harder to do this for pay with everyone else becoming his own Vanity Publisher or on the web using MS Publisher or Front Page. Even many pro graphic artists haven't learned the basics of type, i.e. which faces for headlines and which for text or how to specify type for maximum legibility. And I won't tell you which editors haven't bothered

to do the required reading about psychoacoustics, but you can learn about that in the "rec.audio.opinion" chatroom. And for those of you who don't know, "BBN" is Bolt, Beranek, and Newman, one of the country's premier acoustical consulting firms. Leo Beranek has written some of the best (but very dense to read) reference books for this field.

Thanks, Soundstage

Dear Editor:

I just saw at the *Soundstage* website that you have purchased the recently deceased *Fi Magazine* subscription list and intend to honor the outstanding subscriptions on a one-to-one basis. If this is true, what an incredibly honorable and gallant business move! I hope it works to great success for your current publication. I purchased *The Audiophile Voice* "off the rack" and was considering a subscription. It seems you have saved me the trouble and given reason to continue in the future because of your service-minded outlook along with the fine quality of the magazine. I look forward to receiving the official letter and first issue. Thank you!

Terry Rusch
Muskego, WI
via e-mail

Congratulations!

Dear Editor:

You've just scored big time by honoring the *Fi* subscriptions. I had just renewed my *Fi* annual subscription, but before any issues were sent the company went belly-up...without even an "I'm sorry." You've probably got a lot of us for life with your generosity. Thank you for showing us there are good magazines out there.

Richard D. Diamond, DDS
via e-mail

Agreeable Agreement

Dear Editor:

Your letter of June 1999 regarding the agreement between *FI* and *The Audiophile Voice* came as a pleasant surprise (given the demise of *FI*).

A year ago or so I bought a copy of *The Audiophile Voice* at the newsstand. I enjoyed that issue a lot. I particularly liked the straight-forward, ego-restrained and humorous writing style of the established corps of contributors. I had considered subscribing at that time, but for some reason, which I have forgotten, I didn't. I look forward to subsequent issues of *TAV*.

Greg Galloway
via e-mail

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Feedback on Reviews

Dear Editor:

As a former subscriber to *Fi*, I am happy to see that *The Audiophile Voice* will fulfill my subscription. However, I have some nits to pick (paraphrasing reviewer Peter Bruening) on your equipment reviews. It seems to me that your reviewers leave out critical information in their reviews. Two examples: First, in Peter Bruening's review of the Clearaudio Sigma Phono Cartridge, nowhere does he mention (or is it included in the "Notes") the cartridge's output or even the type of cartridge (mm or mc). Even if one knows that the Clearaudio is a moving-coil cartridge, is it a low output (0.3 mV), moderate output (0.7 mV) or high output (>1.5 mV) cartridge? This information is critically important to someone, like me, who has a phono pre-amp with only 44 dB of gain.

The second example is Arnis Balgalvis' review of the Wilson Benesch. While I don't expect lab tests, I would like to have an idea of the low-end frequency response of the speaker. And what about the tri-wiring? Is it required? If so, factor in another few thousand dollars for three sets of speaker cables to the \$11,000 per pair cost. Enough of the examples, I hope you see my point. I look forward to future issues (hopefully, with more "information" in the equipment reviews!)

Mike Ludewig
Bixby, OK

The Editor responds:

You're right about the nits, want an editing job? All the Clearaudio cartridges are MCs, with 0.7 mV of specified output, and Wilson Benesch's A.C.T. 1 is said to go down to 28 Hz, +/- 3 dB. So says *Audio's* last Annual Equipment Directory.

Vaughan-ofile

Dear Editor:

Just received your book in place of my *Fi*. Love it! Thanks for taking over. Inspired me to order all of the SRV remasters. BTW, can you point me to a site or information source where I can find out which Hendrix CDs contain his song "Killing Floor"? The BBC Sessions are only fair quality recordings and I know I've heard it on another disc (or had it on LP in the early 70s). Thanks in advance for the help and keep up the good work on the magazine.

Jethro J. Felton, III
via e-mail

The editor responds:

Sorry, but my 16-year-old guitar-slinger son and I don't think there is another version of "Killing Floor," but we're glad you like *TAV*, since that will help keep him in guitar strings for a while.

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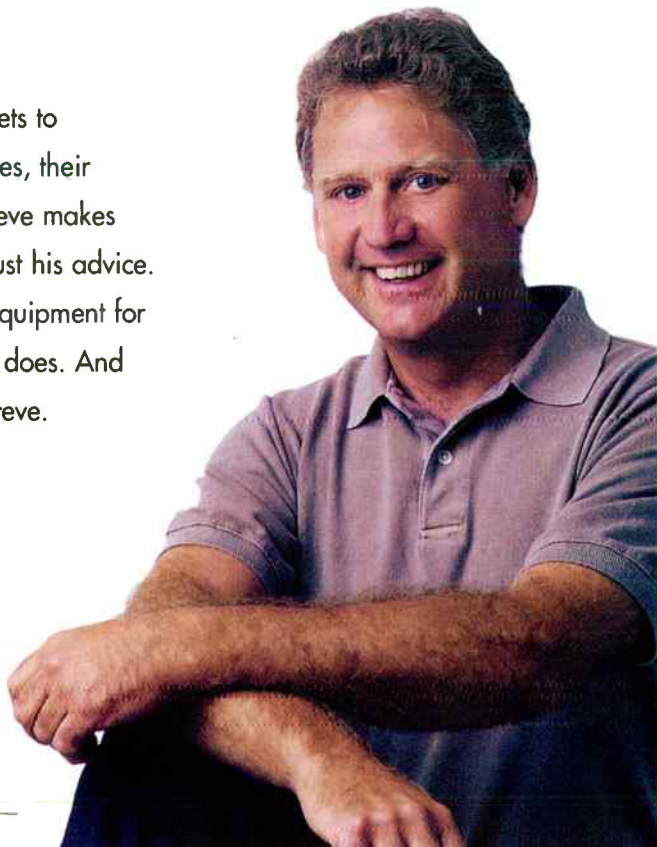
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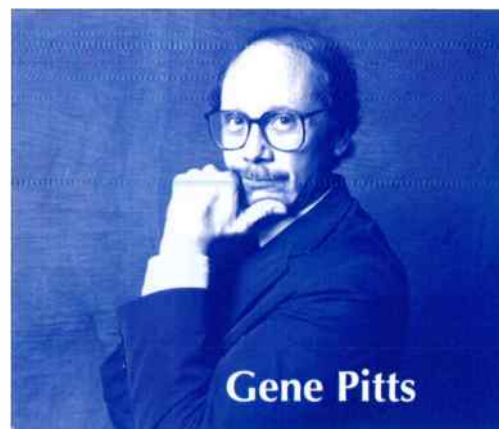
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Music on the 'Net



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HERE CERTAINLY is a lot happening over in Music-Ville, where the Big Record Companies have addresses. But it is the very active addresses of the MP3 sites on the internet that have these companies nervous.

As you will recall, we reviewed a Diamond Rio 300 MP3 recorder a couple of issues ago. These MP3 "music files" can be downloaded, for free, from a variety of sites on the internet, some of them authorized and some of them not authorized. Diamond won a lawsuit about the legality of selling such items as their Rio 300, and now have a "new and better" Model 500.

The situation, and the controversy around it, reminds me of how for decades Dead Heads would go to a Grateful Dead concert and make a recording right out in the open. Not only did the Dead allow this practice, which is the opposite of that of virtually all other Big Name Bands, and Big Records, they even gave the recordists special sites up front in which to make their "souvenirs."

But these days, the bands which "give away" their latest recordings over the 'net tend to be new to the music scene and *much* less popular than the Dead. In this sense, these samples are pieces of teaser-publicity intended to bring new fans to an up and coming band, who presumably will be making better recordings later on.

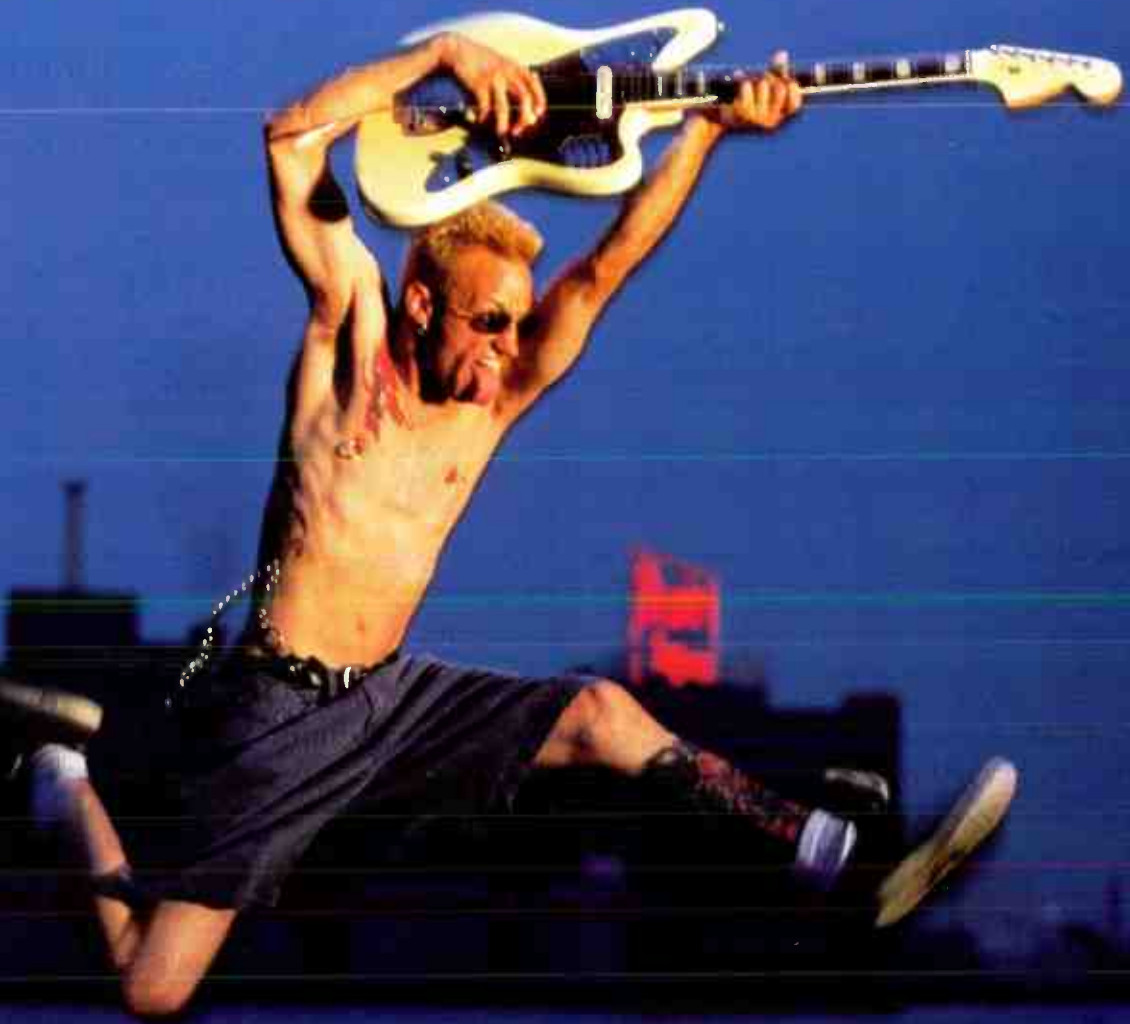
Some other 'net sites, however, make the most popular recordings available without authorization or payment of royalties, and that's what has the Big Record Firms nervous and unhappy and grumbling about "lost revenues and copyright infringement." They see themselves as being in competition with these sites in the distribution of the music that the sites have no right to do anything with. Big Records is probably right, but that still says nothing about whether MP3 recorders *must* have their okay to exist or whether the consumer, in the privacy of his own home and by extension over the 'net, has the right to "loan" a recording to another person. To say otherwise, is very similar to saying that a print publisher is due another "fee" if I reread their book or if my wife and I *both* read it.

However, this issue of "better recordings" has other aspects beyond just making songs that are more tuneful or have catchier words. Virtually every critic says that even at their best, an MP3 recording doesn't sound as good as the CD equivalent; I need a side-by-side comparison to hear this. So, why should a magazine like *The Audiophile Voice* review a product that isn't a contender for "Best of Class"? Well, I believe that this method of distributing music—via the internet—is considerably better and that it is one which is going to become extremely important very rapidly. There will soon be, I believe, a new and better business paradigm, one using the 'net for music distribution. These MP3 sites are a source of new and big business by Big Records, not mainly a copyright infringement or drain on revenues.

Recordings are, very often, purchased on impulse, but it is amazing to me how hard the record stores and record clubs make satisfying this impulse. One might even say that the venerable LP record and more recently the CD, at least insofar as pop/rock, country, and jazz go, make the purchase harder. That's because most people don't want eight of the 10 songs on such discs, those eight that justify the premium price. I'd rather pay more per song, to get only the two I want.

But rest assured, by about the end of the year, Big Records and Big Electronics will have teamed up with the 'net folk to keep full control of copyright ownership in *all* the 'net music distribution avenues. They're talking about things like a Secure Music Distribution Initiative, where only a small and limited number of copies could be made from a 'net music file. They are also discussing how back-catalog materials, older tunes but still in digital formats, would be handled by the new formats. I, for one, will insist that any new-format recorder I buy be able to record the digital data stream of CDs I presently own. Recording from an analog output isn't the way I want it. And the more-convenient digital format is worth the longer download time, even if there is some mild sonic degradation. It's faster than going to the store.

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The Show of Shows

Len Schneider

REMEMBER THAT OLD LINE about the socialite's nightmare: "What if I gave a party and nobody came?" No, I didn't hear that exact phrase while roaming the hallways of Chicago's Palmer House Hilton last May during Hi-Fi 99 but there were times when I wondered who had forgotten to mail

the invitations. The post-show press release seemed to confirm my observation about the low turnout in that it didn't list the number of exhibitors or attendees. That's a marked departure from prior practice. Interesting, no? This may indicate that the new regime (**E-map/Petersen**

Publishing) didn't want any comparison with previous (*Stereophile*-run) shows.

Corridors were actually walkable and most rooms weren't particularly crowded. The good news is that I got to see everything I wanted to see. The bad news is that there just wasn't that much of it—if you judge solely by quantity. On a quality and significance standard, however, there were some very interesting things hiding around those hallway corners.

So tag along. I think you'll enjoy the tour.

Before the Show: First Guns . . .

The most interesting development from an audiophile viewpoint was the pre-show press announcement by **Sony** and **Philips** that their new DVD-based **SACD** (Super Audio Compact Disc) technology would debut late this year with the Sony SCD-1 player retailing for \$5,000. We'll also have backwards-compatible hybrid discs with high-density DSD (Direct Stream Digital) data on one layer and conventional 16/44.1 (standard CD) data on a second layer. They'll retail for about \$25 each.

The SCD-1 is a breathtaking piece cosmetically—as it should be at the price. Sonically, it's a knockout also. Sony has elected to take the high road in introducing SACD to the U.S. market. Internally, the SCD-1's copper-plated chassis and meticulously-engineered power supply keep spurious signal leakage and residual noise as low as possible. The few selections we heard (over headphones and speakers) were simply spectacular. *[Editor's Note: The Wednesday evening shoot-out between of 16/44.1 vs. 24/96 vs. SACD using Waterlily's Philadelphia Orchestra recording by Kavi Alexander definitively decided the "quality" question in favor of SACD. —Gene Pitts]*

Surprisingly enough, the rival **DVD-A** camp did not have any formal showing, although Bob Stuart (Meridian's "Dr. Digital") presented technical information on MLP (Meridian Lossless Packing, a compression technique that's a required component of the new DVD-A specification) during a press luncheon just before the show opened to the public.

Of the two DVD-based formats, SACD seems to enjoy the clear edge in sound quality. However, DVD-A has enormous backing from the music industry and thus might emerge as the next mainstream format. Talk of a "format war" is probably misleading as some manufacturers have already announced plans to market "universal" players that will handle both SACD and DVD-A discs. If



Sony SCD-1
Super Audio Compact Disc Player

true, we'll be faced with a "let the best *music* win" situation where hardware takes a distinct second place. (We should be so lucky!)

. . . And Last Gasps?

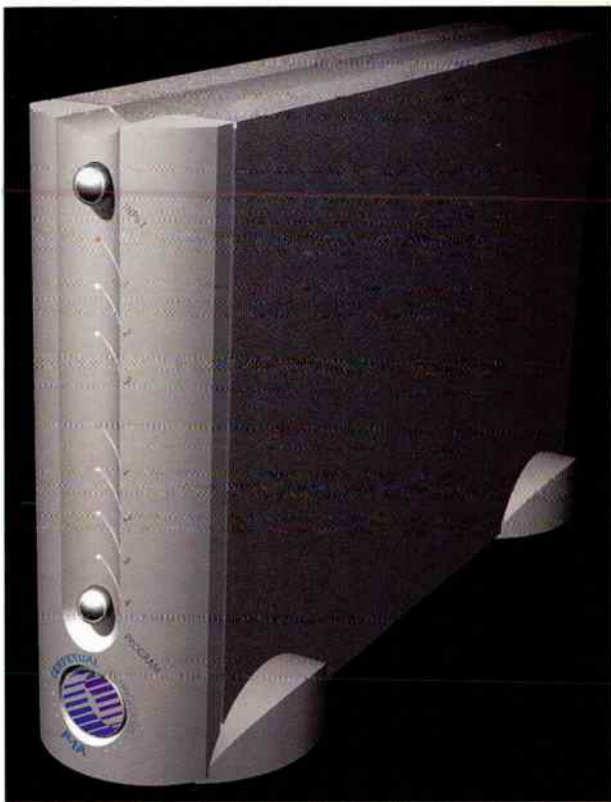
On the audio-for-video front, Dolby Labs showed the potential of their now almost-ubiquitous Dolby Digital format as part of a "for the show only" live-HDTV satellite feed from EchoStar. This was a truly interesting large-room presentation, not necessarily because of the sound quality (which was surprisingly good) but because of what it heralds for the future.

What I heard proved conclusively that Dolby Digital is far better than "just OK." In fact, when combined with DTS's proclivity for shooting itself in the foot more times than a suicidal centipede, this demo signified to me the end of DTS as a viable alternative to the Dolby juggernaut. That's a shame in some ways but it appears to be the reality. One pre-show conference presenter summarized the situation with—and I'm paraphrasing here—"At one point, DTS could have meant 'Dolby takes the shaft,' now it just stands for 'Don't tell Spielberg!'" (Steven Spielberg, *the* Steven Spielberg, is a major investor in DTS.)

Science—but Not "Weird"

Acoustics is the name of the real hi-fi game. And that means the important show news centered around rooms, loudspeakers, and how they interact.

One of the most interesting approaches to the problem of total system performance came from Mark Schifter's new company, Perpetual Technologies. (The peripatetic Schifter, as you probably know, was the driving force behind Audio Alchemy, a fondly-remembered supplier of inexpensive D/A converters and other digital processors.) Both of Perpetual's new products, the P-1A resolution enhancer and correction system



**Perpetual Audio's
P-1A resolution enhancer
and loudspeaker correction system.**

and the more ambitious DAW-1 "workstation," address real issues with technology that was simply unavailable to us at any price 10 years ago and "money pit" expensive until very recently.

The P-1A, which will retail for about \$950, is billed as a "jitter reduction and resolution enhancement" device designed to fit between a digital source (CD player, for example) and a D/A converter. To accomplish this, the source data is first locked to a crystal reference to minimize jitter at the P-1A's input and then upsampled to 24-bit words at a 96-kHz sampling frequency ("24/96"). If your D/A converter can handle that data stream, the P-1A leaves things as they are. If not, there's a down-sampling option to 20/48 for older D/As. Confused? Just think "video line doubler." Then think "audio." Now you've got it!

As attractive as some audiophiles will find the up-scaling process all by itself, the second P-1A function—loudspeaker correction—is actually far more important. To implement this, Perpetual is building an archive of MLSSA files that detail performance parameters—amplitude, phase, and impulse response characteristics—for many of today's speakers. With these in hand, Perpetual then constructs a corrective filter to compensate for a particular speaker's known anomalies. The filters, in turn, are burned into a socketed E²PROM IC located on the P-1A's motherboard.

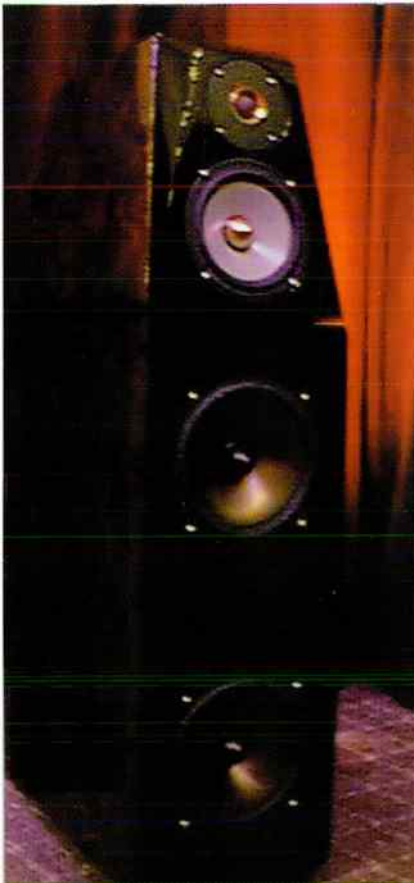
As you might imagine, you'll have to pay a bit extra for this capability—\$400 to be exact—but Perpetual will supply a kit (a "socket puller," new E²PROM chip, etc.) for the do-it-yourselfer. The fumble-fingered majority can simply send their P-1A to Perpetual for the upgrade.

Another optional function ups the ante even further. With a \$700 "room kit," you'll be able to correct room anomalies as well as compensate for speaker eccentricities! Although Perpetual isn't revealing all the details yet, the kit (a microphone, stand, RS-232 cable, and CD-R containing several test signals) has what you'll need to collect and send data to Perpetual for analysis. Here's how it will work: Play the CD-R, record about 90 seconds of your speakers' output as a WAV or AIFF file on your computer, then upload that file to Perpetual's web site along with an ID number. When you call back (give them about 24 hours to crunch your numbers), Perpetual will have prepared a room correction simulation for your review. Like what you see? Well, just download the room correction file and flash the E2PROM with the new code. You've now just corrected for early room reflections and standing wave patterns that affect almost every important sonic characteristic of your speaker/room combination!

Initially intended for two channel applications, Perpetual sees multi-channel capability, including Dolby Digital and DTS decoding, in the P-1A's future. The company also mentions HDCD capability but is a bit vague when asked how the unit will reconstruct the decoding instructions HDCD "buries" in a source's LSB sequence. (Adding, or "convolving," the original source data with correction codes would appear to strip the HDCD decode commands from the resulting data stream. We'll see.)

The engine for all this will be a 60-mHz, 32-bit floating point SHARC processor from Analog Devices. This hungry critter has an enormous appetite for digits—seemingly far more than is required for enhancement, speaker, and even room corrections. When pressed, Shifter just smiles a bit and stops talking. (You'll see some reports of a Motorola processor for this piece. They are wrong.)

Of course, you should be aware that there are no "magic bullets" here. Some situations will present problems that are beyond even this level of digital manipulation. A low-frequency room "suck-out," for example, may require far more of your amp—or of your speakers—than they have to give. Digits can't do *everything!*



Joseph Audio Pearl Speaker System.

mention a few caveats. First, Perpetual is a new company. There's no track record or real product—yet. The other caution is that the loudspeaker correction filters are dependent on Perpetual getting MLSSA files from the speaker's manufacturer. Some companies are very reluctant to share that data and you should check with Perpetual to make sure they have info on your favorite box before you fantasize yourself into blissful oblivion. (As of this writing, Schifter claims access to MLSSA files from 40 companies.)

On the other hand, Perpetual, even though the ink is barely dry on its corporate logo, has an interesting pedigree. Schifter and Peter Madnick, his techno-partner-in-crime, served up some tasty goodies while at Audio Alchemy. (Incidentally, the demise of that firm is a story unto itself—not a pleasant one either but it has little to do with these gentlemen.)

Evidence at the Pearly Gates?

I usually have a real ho-hum attitude to “statement” loudspeakers. After all, they're usually not real products for most of us. (Putting a pair of speakers in a sound room for the same money it

Perpetual's more expensive DAW-1 (about \$1700 with remote control capability when it graduates from “vaporware” status to the real world about October) carries this thinking even further with more switchable inputs, built-in D/A conversion, and gain adjustments. (Can you say “digital preamp,” boys and girls?) Enhancement and correction will be performed by an 80-mHz SHARC with conversion and level adjustments performed by selected Burr-Brown and Crystal Semiconductor ICs. A high-current, analog-output stage completes the picture.

Lest you trip over your tongue after reading this, we should mention

would take to put two very decent cars in the driveway is not a priority in my life—nor, I suspect, in yours!)

However, there were two products that stood out from the crowd this time. Both are upscale products and much higher in price than previous offerings from their respective companies. But both deserve mention.

The first of these is from **Joseph Audio**, a small New York-based company primarily known for its implementation of Richard Modafferi's “Infinite Slope” crossover designs. Over the years, Jeff Joseph's smaller loudspeakers have earned a sterling reputation for their quite convincingly natural presentation.

The Pearl, Joseph's new \$16,000 per pair flagship, stands just over a yard tall and sports four drivers: Two 8-inch aluminum woofers, a magnesium cone midrange, and a 1-inch, soft-dome tweeter. The heavily braced cabinet is nicely styled. Of course, you just might groan yourself into insensibility when you hear Jeff describing its “Pearlescent” finish!

I can't tell you if this speaker (named, I believe, after Jeff's mother) resulted from a testosterone-driven midlife crisis or simply the desire to do “more.” But I can say it sounded very good in a much-less-than-adequate Palmer House parlor room. Although I hesitate to use ill-defined terms, I will say that the Pearl pair appeared to let the music just flow into the room rather than pushing it rudely into my face. It was a most pleasant experience.

In contrast, the **Dynaudio** room was—how to say this politely?—*assertive*. In fact, there were so many air molecules rushing *out* of the room (holding their ears, no doubt) that I did not venture *in* until the third day of the show! The reason for my reticence was Dynaudio's Evidence, a price-bedaunted (\$85k the pair) assault on the concept dynamic range.

As one might expect from this very capable firm, the Evidence is impressive. Almost 7 feet tall, each enclosure holds eight drivers; four woofers in “two up and two down” configuration with two midrange drivers and two tweeters in a central, isolated module. I can't verify the claimed maximum SPL (126 to 129 dB!), but I can say these speakers were played at levels I will describe only as extraordinarily loud. But despite this overly cavalier approach to volume, I was nonetheless very impressed with the timbre and instrumental delineation delivered by these slim, somewhat austere Danes.



Waveform's Mach 17 Loudspeaker System

The Canadian Invasion

Every industry needs an iconoclast. The hi-fi biz, for example, has **Waveform's** John Otvos. Everything about this man, his company, and his products is, well, different. Passionate and honest (no, *scrupulous* is a better word), Otvos reminds me of The Shadow. He

knows what evil lurks in most speaker cabinets and has no hesitation describing it either. If the Mach 17, Waveform's premiere loudspeaker, wasn't as good as it is, you could dismiss this man as a Quixotic and dissonant grace note. But it is, you can't, and I digress.

If you haven't seen the Waveform name at your neighborhood sound emporium, don't worry—it isn't there! Otvos sells his stuff factory-direct (www.waveform.ca) as he found dealers somewhat disinclined to present the Mach 17's rather complex architecture (iconoclastic, remember?)

The Mach 17 is a tri-amp design so you'll need three stereo amplifiers and an electronic crossover to get it cranking. (Otvos sells a Bryston-made package that takes care of the electronic needs. You supply the source components and preamplifier.) Aesthetically, the Mach 17 is a bit ungainly [*Editor's Note: To "your" eye, Len.—Gene Pitts*], but Otvos doesn't really mind as the shape—a truncated pyramid for the dual bass drivers and an ostrich-egg sized module for the midrange and tweeter—evolved from very valid acoustic considerations. Sonically, the Mach 17 was one of the most satisfying speakers at the show. Clean and articulate, it projected a very stable image with layers of convincing detail.

Don't want the Mach 17's complexity? Maybe it's a tad too big for your room? Standing right beside it was the new Mach Solo, a down-sized version that is far less demanding of its electronic environment as well—a single solid-state stereo

amp will do very nicely, thank you. In addition, the Solo was, at least in my view, a more pleasing amalgam of basic Waveform design elements: The bass enclosure is narrower and the proportion of grill material to wood better. As for sound, the Solo showed its heritage with a presentation almost identical to the Mach 17. If it was less dynamic than its big brother, that difference was minor and probably due to its passive crossover and the fact that it was being driven with a single amp rather than the Mach 17's three. Although the Solo's midrange and tweeter are identical to those used in the Mach 17, the Solo uses a single bass driver instead of the 17's dual array. Still, bass response was extended and impressively free of the "thumpies" that plague many speakers.

For those with video on their minds, another new Waveform, the Mach MC, used a magnetically shielded version of the mid/high egg. The tweeter is the same as that used in the Mach 17 and Solo but the midrange is different. These weren't playing when I was in the room so I have no comment on the sound. And, yes, there is a passive subwoofer, the Mach MC .1, designed to mate with the MC for full range applications. To a certain extent, Waveform has suffered in the past from being a one-product company. With these new models, we hope to see (and hear) a lot more.

Paradigm, another north-of-the-border loudspeaker company—but far larger and better known—was rocking the rafters of a home theater demo craftily hidden behind an exhibit of products from their recently acquired Sonic Frontiers subsidiary. The cause of all the aural agitation was a modestly sized, self-powered speaker called the Reference Active 40. This little monster hides an electronic crossover and two amplifiers (125 watts RMS for bass/midrange, 50



Paradigm Reference Active 40 Loudspeaker

watts RMS for treble) inside a three-driver enclosure.

There's a lot to be said for active speakers in general. They use amplifier power more efficiently since there's no power-sucking passive crossover between amp and driver. They also offer the potential for more accurate driver blending as the internal active crossover can be tweaked and contoured to linearize driver response. As a final advantage, the close coupling between amp section and driver voice-coil means a higher level of articulation than you'll find with a conventional speaker. In the practical world, active speakers are more elegant, particularly for multi-channel applications. Their only drawback is that you have to plug 'em into an a.c. source as well as to a pre-amp or processor.

I found the Active 40's sound very good indeed. And at \$1,900 to \$2,100 for the pair (depending on finish), they present an economically attractive package as well. Although Paradigm has built an enviable reputation for more-than-decent sound at affordable prices, I've been occasionally put off by more "tizz factor" than I like for long term listening. But after playing these speakers at different levels, I have to report that Paradigm has apparently donated those high frequency nasties to charity 'cause I certainly didn't hear any here. In addition, the Active 40s were dynamic without being obnoxious; they "cooked" without spattering. Very nice.

Power, Power, Who's Got The Power?

Sometimes old names are good names, so I was happy to see **PS Audio** back in business. After a near death experience following acquisition by Threshold, Paul McGowan, the original "P" in PS, is back at the tiller. But this time, the company is doing something very different than the digital products (remember the UltraLink?) that were the company's stock and trade for many years.

Capitalizing on its less-well-remembered expertise in amplifier design, PS was showing a line power generators that offer some exciting promise. (Notice that I did not say power *conditioners*. There's a reason for this!)

Recognizing that most wall sockets are like spigots at the end of a very rusty water main, PS reasoned that conventional power conditioners were inherently flawed. Rather than just filtering dirty a.c., why not create a whole new source of it? To that end, McGowan combined a very low distortion a.c. generator and a stereo power amplifier to supply copious amounts of clean a.c. When



PS Audio P300 Power Plant
a.c. power generator

you remember that the standard a.c. line frequency—60 Hz—is well within the range of every audio frequency power amplifier, this approach makes a great deal of sense, doesn't it?

Available in power ratings from 300 to 1,200 watts, each Power Plant supplies locally generated, balanced, interference-free a.c. for all your system components. And it'll do it consistently even when the a.c. at your wall outlet drops to as low as 95 volts. Prices range from just under a kilobuck to \$3k. Not inexpensive, to be sure. But for some of us, this may be a very viable alternative as we search for better sound. No ears-on evaluation to report here, though, as the PS Audio display was passive. Although Paul was not talking about this at the show, a recent visit to his website (www.psaudio.com) revealed plans for a line of power amplifiers, too! (Just take out the Power Plant's a.c. generator and substitute RCA or XLR inputs and you're there!)

The Sore Feet Summary

Don't make the mistake of thinking this report was intended to be exhaustive. It wasn't. The show was a curious mixture of really advanced technology in the service of good sound and more than just a few ho-hummers that, frankly, I ignored. In addition, your editor (known to the trade as "Mean Gene") [*Editor's Note: With good reason, Len, and don't you forget it!—Gene Pitts*] didn't ask me to put fingers to keyboard until well after the show so this report is probably more idiosyncratic than it would have been had I known your eagle eyes would be glued to the pages. *Ulp!*

But I hope this short journey has given you an idea of the new toys you'll be able to salivate over in the coming year.

Next June, Home Entertainment 2000 (the show's new "millenium" name) will be held in Rye, New York, just north of the Big Apple. Hope to see you there.

“Just The FAX, Man”

*Detailing The Purchase of a Phono Cartridge
In Ten FAXes Twixt Writer and Editor:
Lyra Clavis de Capo Moving-Coil Cartridge
&
Rega Exact Moving-Magnet Cartridge*

Robert H. Perry

FAX Transmission

Attention: Gene Pitts

RE: An MC Cartridge!

From: Robert H. Perry

I assume that you will think this is a silly move, but common sense aside (as usual), I am determined to go through the moving-coil cartridge experience so I can better enjoy the cartridge tests in the magazines. I'm a little scared.

I'm patiently waiting receipt of an almost-unused Lyra Clavis de Capo (10 hours). The name makes it sound like a cartridge designed for the Mafia. We need some shims to adjust the VTA on my Rega 300B arm that has no VTA of its own. If

we can get the shims FedEx-ed to us, we should have the new cartridge up and running by Thursday night.

I do expect a delay. In the meanwhile, I am listening to nothing but vinyl in order to heighten my memory of my present cartridge, the Rega Exact. (Needle Doctor says he'll FedEx shims today, but I have no exact way of knowing if they will be the right size.

I can hear it now: "I just don't like the overall harshness of this new cartridge's top end." "Well, Bob, you realize that it needs at least another 50 hours to break in." And once again the hook is firmly set and the wallet reeled in. "Hell, it's an

\$800 experiment with a \$1,800 cartridge with only a few hours on it. The previous owner had too much r.f.i. trouble with the MC boards in his NAIM pre-amp. And what do I tell my wife: "It's just a used phono cartridge I wrote this check for, dear."

FAX Transmission

Attention: Bob Perry

RE: MC Cartridge

From: The Curmudgeon Editor

I do NOT think you are making a silly move re: the Lyra; it's a right of passage, like losing one's virginity or going out to sail for the first time or doing a first century on a bike. Not to be scared; should be a good amount fun, but over-rated, like going to your high school prom with your sister

What I think is "very unfortunate" is the Rega arm not being properly adjustable. But shims for what? The cartridge into the arm, i.e. washers to go around the screws holding the cartridge into the headshell? If so, I have bunches of these from bunches of cartridges, and I think they are all pretty well the same hole size. The previous owner of the cartridge could have wrapped the NAIM's MC boards in tin foil and maybe grounded that. It may alternatively be his cabling and won't necessarily be fixed by changing the cartridge. It's just that MC cartridges work at such a low voltage level and the level of the ambient r.f.i. is a MUCH bigger proportion of that, relative to moving-magnet types. Would be better if he found out what was causing the r.f. or what was taking it in like an antenna and then fixed that. Tough problem and may be outside his control, like living next to a Colombian drug lord or a prostitute that has an over-sized pimp.

FAX Transmission

Attention: Gene Pitts

RE: New/Old MC Cartridge

From: Robert H. Perry

Thanks for the MC encouragement. I'll report my findings. The shims are to go between the tone arm and the base, to allow the VTA to be adjusted. Rega has no built-in VTA adjustment. Aren't they famous for this idiosyncrasy?

According to Hawthorne Stereo, this client is at times a little impulsive and his comments may be less than totally reliable. He replaced the Clavis

with an Exact MM. If he continues to have problems, I'll suggest your fix. I have read of this elsewhere.

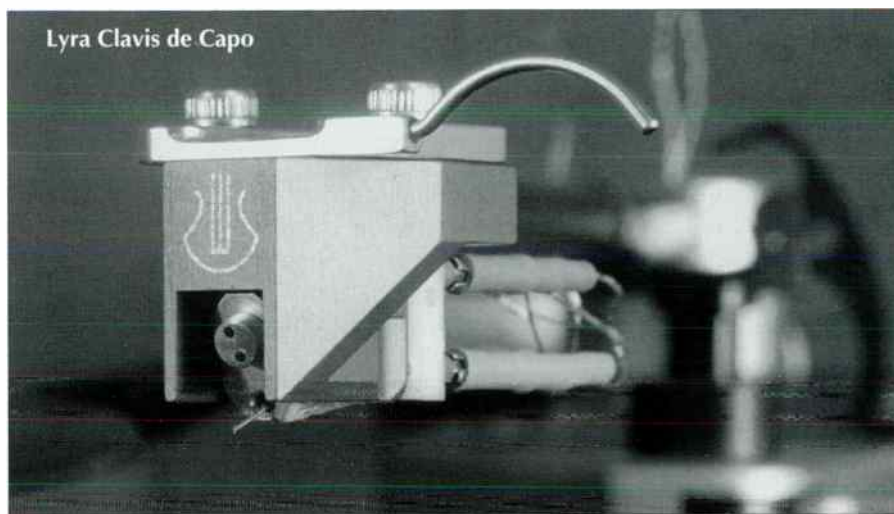
FAX Transmission

Attention: Bob Perry

RE: MC Cartridge

From: The Curmudgeon Editor

The more I think about that r.f. difficulty, the more I think it probably isn't radiating directly into the p.c. board, but rather is being caught, cat's whisker-like, at a junction of cable and connector. Back in the days of linear citizen's band amps, it was getting into my FM tuner that way. Simply twisting the plug on the tuner output jack so that



fresh metal made contact did the trick then, but I have normally used gold connectors ever since. I have tried many of the contact cleaners since; Caig's Pro Gold work well, but I seem to get even better results with Audio Spice's Sound Polish.

FAX Transmission

Attention: Gene Pitts

RE: New/Old MC Cartridge

From: Robert H. Perry

Listened to the new cartridge yesterday from 4:00 to 10:30 p.m. Here is my "review."

Installation went fine. It did require the thicker of the two shims I bought from The Needle Doctor to get the correct VTA. This required dismantling the arm. The good news is that my LP12 got a complete tune-up and a new belt. Turned out that the LP12 was way out of adjustment anyway—and need the tune-up. Sure, I could hear that.

The other good news is that the cartridge sounds great. I now know what they mean by "ris-

Photo: Alan Perkins@Immedia

ing high end" but I think this is a compromise. There is so much detail pulled from all the frequencies that the byproduct is this upper-end magnification. I have no problem with it during the music. I think it is balanced with low-end heightened resolution. This addition to the bottom end was a surprise to me. I am getting lows that I have never heard from my system before. Chet Atkins' *Our Man in Nashville* on RCA really goes low. Johnny Cash's voice digs deeper than I ever thought possible.

I think that clustered strings are a tough test for any system. I find they can be quite aggravating on some CDs and not much better on some LPs. I have a Japanese pressing of Mendelssohn's "Italian" Symphony. It was the first LP I put on when I got home with the new cartridge. It was simply stunning. The separation between instruments was pronounced and the clustered strings no longer had that mushy, homogeneous sound. I sat there listening to that symphony and thinking that my system had never sounded better and wondering if it could truly get any better than this (audio bliss).

I was listening to a John Martin disc, vocals and acoustic guitars, and all of a sudden I heard a weird noise coming from the left channel. As I listened carefully, I realized that the "buzz" was a cello, playing quietly in the background. I had never heard it before.

The Clavis de Capo is very revealing. Imaging is phenomenal and pinpoint in its focus, with instruments consistently projected beyond the spread of the speakers.

I did notice during an applause section on my *Bill Evans: Live at Montreaux* LP that the clapping sounded more like rain hitting a tin roof than hands clapping. I have no doubt that the Clavis is accurate but I do wonder if all the info presented is truly "music." I think this is something you need to accept as part of the compromise for achieving the revealing nature throughout the entire frequency range. The only way to really check this would be to A-B the cartridge with a live band!

During a saxophone piece I could even hear the slap of the pad on the hole of the sax! It really makes you stop in your tracks and marvel at the whole way a cartridge works. The more I think about the technology, the more amazed I am that it can deliver this detail. There is no question that I

am getting a degree of resolution that I have only before heard on CD. Presentation of dynamics is better than anything I have heard on my system.

This cartridge is a thing of beauty. The build quality is beautiful and the picture of precision. The stylus is so small that I can't even see it with my magnifying glass. I think I can almost see a small "lump" at the end of the cantilever. It's truly a little piece of industrial art.

I don't want to go back to the Exact, as much as I loved that cartridge. Right now, I am fairly confident that this change in my system has brought the most dramatic and pronounced sonic change so far. It has certainly put a damper on my craving for new speakers.

Like they say in the magazines, "I just started pulling out LP after LP, including ones I don't normally play." It was like listening to them for the first time.

I'm getting spoiled. I've spoiled myself. But you know, nobody else is going to treat me like this, so I might as well do it. I deserve it.

FAX Transmission

Attention: Bob Perry

RE: MC Cartridge

From: The Curmudgeon Editor

I am very glad that your new cartridge is turning out to be such a good thing to have done. So often, in my experience, things like this are just "different." But it's *not* "spoiling" yourself. Instead, it's just providing yourself what you deserve and need, something like the Minimum Daily Requirement specified for vitamins. That you do it for yourself is simply another way of saying that others can't read your mind—no?

What was it in your Linn that needed a "tune up"? I can see a new belt every so often, like a transmission tune-up in a car, but I can't think what one would adjust or check beyond that.

I think of "rising high end" as another sort of compromise, and maybe I've mentioned its opposites before, stamper loss and high-end loss from play. Both pull the air, i.e. the frequencies above 8 or 10 kHz, off the record by a scraping mechanical means. A rising high-end in a cartridge is a sort of mechanical tone control, at least in my book. I like them for older LPs, but many new recordings sound shrill and harsh to me with such a cartridge.

My new Lyra Clavis de Capo made a huge change in my system's sonics, but I could still be ecstatic with my Rega Exact.

HOWEVER, there is something else going on in your system, i.e. "low end heightened resolution" and "lows that I've never heard from my system before." The "new" cello buzz on the Martin should not have happened; increased emphasis, better resolution—sure, but no *new* instruments. Similarly, the "slap of the pad" on the sax piece. The sudden existence of something new on the LP bothers me. A different and preferable timbre in the applause of the Evan's "Live - Montreaux" is very understandable, though you make your comparison vs. a "live" band rather than, in my fashion, another cartridge's reproduction of the same track. Are you certain that it's just not hearing things as if for the first time, because of much-increased attention? That's what I'd suspect myself of doing. A sort of aural illusion is what I mean, i.e. the Exact does reproduce the cello buzz from the Martin, doesn't it?

Anyway, congratulations!!! I wish I could easily figure out how to put all this into print, to share with readers—maybe just edit out anything except for Clavis and Exact material. It is fascinating stuff to reread.

FAX Transmission

Attention: Gene Pitts

RE: New/Old MC Cartridge

From: Robert H. Perry

By "tuning up" the LP12, I meant adjusting the suspension to achieve that "even bounce."

I agree about "more attention". I am listening very, very carefully since installing the Clavis DC and that may account for part of what I am hearing. However, I think the level of resolution the Clavis brings does reveal new sounds on old records. Better? No, I don't really think so. And I assure you that I am the type who sits almost every night and listens to music. I did it with the Exact and I'm still doing it.

Is the Clavis better than my Exact? No. As you say, it's really only "different." I recognized that from the start. In fact, my appreciation of the Clavis DC led me to a new appreciation of the Exact. I love them both. It may be that the Exact was, in fact, "more musical" and closer to what we hear in live performances. Still, the Clavis DC is very exciting in its detail.

My move to the Clavis was never driven by any degree of dissatisfaction with the Rega Exact. In

fact, I had made a mental commitment to stay with the Exact cartridge for as long as it was produced. (I was not ready to trust an expensive MC cartridge to my shaky old hands.) The Exact seemed a very pleasant and exciting cartridge and, by a long shot, the best of the three other MM cartridges I had experienced. My move to the Clavis DC was simply to experience an MC cartridge. I would never want anyone to think I was unhappy with the Exact. In fact, I am already anxious to own one again and make the reverse comparison. I would recommend the Exact to anyone interested in an MM cartridge.

I know "different" sounds better. At least at first. There's no doubt the presentation of the Clavis DC



is an "in your face" type of sound, but I have always preferred a revealing, bright sound to a dull, subdued sound. I am convinced that this gain at the top is balanced with gain at the bottom. There is certainly the feeling of air and space between instruments. One of my friends thought the focus was too vivid and pronounced, but I attribute that more to speaker placement than the cartridge. One other audio pal is replacing his Lyra MC with an Exact. He wants more "punch."

What I do know for a fact is that I am enjoying my records more with the Clavis DC. This may be a psycho-audio phenomena but, hell, that's good enough for me. There is that strange satisfaction that some of us get from owning/possessing certain pieces of art. I like the Clavis partly because it represents a triumph in engineering and manufacturing.

My shaky old hands have become mysteriously rock steady.

If you took my Clavis DC away tomorrow and gave me back my Exact, I'd still be happy. In fact, I'd still be ecstatic! And furthermore, I would still

Photo: Jeff Hack@Hawthorne Stereo

have the feeling of better understanding what the audio critics are talking about when they review MC cartridges.

For now, I'm infatuated with the Clavis de Capo.

FAX Transmission

Attention: Gene Pitts

RE: 3 Month Follow-Up on Lyra Clavis de Capo

From: Robert H. Perry

It's been three months since I installed the Lyra Clavis de Capo on my LP12. I thought I'd let you know how we have been getting along.

I still buy CDs. In fact, I buy a lot of them. I also buy LP records. I play CDs at home when I am busy around the house. But, when it's time to sit down, relax and really listen to the music, I inevitably put on some vinyl. I try and listen to CDs. God knows, my NAIM CDX does a good job with them but my ears and my brain consistently ask for vinyl.

I try not to intellectualize this choice. I've read many technical explanations why LP records are "better," but I'm still not sure they are better. I think if I were asked to demo my system, there are several CDs I'd chose to play before I put on an LP record. But I do know that when it comes to the most serious listening, I play an LP record.

Last night, I put on an RCA Gold Seal recording of Jascha Heifetz playing the Tchaikovsky "Violin Concerto in D." Okay, I was reading a new magazine at the same time and sipping on a nice Washington State Chardonnay. During a section in the music where the orchestra drops out and the violin plays solo, I was struck with the pure and sweet sound of Heifetz, but when the orchestra joined back in, I was stunned with the richness and vivid contrast, i.e. tutti orchestra vs. solo violin. I put the magazine down and just listened. It was one of those rare audiophile moments of supreme satisfaction.

The Clavis de Capo has turned me into a zealot for better cartridges. All the speakers, amps and preamps in the world can't reproduce beautiful music accurately if the cartridge doesn't pick it up accurately initially. Probably the nicest compliment paid to my new cartridge comes from my audio buddy Jeff Hack. In his search for a new phono cartridge, he has continually referred back to my Clavis de Capo as his reference.

I'm getting along just fine with my new cartridge. There's hardly a time I walk by my system when I don't just go over and give the cartridge an "Attaboy!" glance.

FAX Transmission

Attention: Gene Pitts

RE: P.S. Dutch Convert

From: Robert H. Perry

My Dutch brother-in-law, Bram, knows everything. He's often wrong but stubborn anyway. We share little.

We do, ironically, share our taste in music. Bram allowed he was taking his turntable to his new lake cabin because he has a lot of LP records he'd still like to listen to and the lake place gives him the peace and quiet to enjoy them. He has a medium quality turntable, a Dual, I think. His cartridge went bad and would reproduce only one channel. He replaced it with a "\$40 Special."

"What the hell?" I thought. Doing my best "Gene Pitts III" imitation, I packaged up my Old Rega Elys cartridge, along with my alignment guide, and mailed it to him. My express instructions were that if he was not going to install the cartridge, I wanted it back.

Heard from Bram Monday. He had installed the cartridge. He was at the lake with his wife. Wife was puttering in the kitchen when Bram put on the first LP. Wife is not interested in music at all. Wife was amazed at the new sound coming from the old turntable. Bram let fly at me with a barrage of quasi-audiophile terminology praising the sound of the new cartridge.

I think I got his attention. I may have make a convert to audio

FAX Transmission

Attention: Bob Perry

RE: B-I-L Bram

From: The Grumpy Editor

Maybe I can even sell him a subscription. Or, better yet, convince his wife that he's a genius.

N O T E S

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ECORDING OF THE MONTH

Michael Tearson



Emmylou Harris & Linda Ronstadt
Western Wall: The Tucson Sessions
Elektra 62804-2
Various Artists
Return of the Grievous Angel: A Tribute to Gram Parsons
Almo Sounds AMSD 81124

FOR SOMEONE who had pledged to take it easy and mostly lay off work for a year or two, Emmylou Harris has been a whirlwind of activity. She is intimately involved in both of these new releases, her long-awaited duet album with Linda Ronstadt and the Gram Parsons tribute album that notes the 25th anniversary of his death. For the latter, Emmylou acted as Executive Producer, recruiting the artists and coordinating who sang what. She also sings three duets in the set. Which is not to mention the long-delayed *Trio II* album with Emmylou, Linda and Dolly Parton finally appeared earlier in 1999.

There is a significant difference between the music that Emmylou and Linda have recorded for *Western Wall* and what they recorded with Dolly as the *Trio*. As Emmylou told me, "With Dolly the music invariably veers toward the beautiful." Without Dolly on hand, Harris and Ronstadt are free to explore other types of songs that may be edgier, darker and more diverse.

The new duo album has 13 songs from a stunning variety of sources; Emmylou had a hand in writing three. Two older songs in the set are Jackson Browne's "For a Dancer," which here is dedicated to the memory of

Nicolette Larson, and Leonard Cohen's "Sisters of Mercy." Other writers represented include Rosanne Cash with the title song, Bruce Springsteen with "Across the Border," "Valerie" by Bruce's wife Patty Scialfa, and Sinéad O'Connor's lovely "This is to Mother You."

The sound is glorious. The audacious production is credited to Glyn Johns who has made many of the best-sounding rock records from the Rolling Stones' *Let It Bleed* on down. Johns' presentation of the voices way up front is glorious, as it allows full appreciation of the nuances of Ronstadt and Harris' incredible breathy phrasing. Instru-

mentation, as much as possible, was recorded live as an ensemble; it is spare and packs a strong impact. Percussion often involves unorthodox sounds that are sweet tweaks for this ear and I hope for yours

A critically important and easily overlooked aspect of the project is the sequencing of the songs. With the immense variety of the songs and their sounds, reaching a final sequence was a daunting task. But Ronstadt, Harris and Johns have succeeded in delivering a brilliant sequence as one song segues to the next, often executing hairpin turns of genre.

The dynamic and hard-hitting opener "Loving the Highway Man" by Andy Priebay leads to the rhythmic yet doleful "Raising the Dead," a Harris original that invokes the ghosts of Hank

Williams, Bill Monroe, Sam Cooke and Robert Johnson. Next is that gorgeous, heartfelt take of "For a Dancer."

Later David Olney's grim but artful "1917," featuring the voices of Kate and Anna McGarrigle, segs to Paul Kennerley's "He Was Mine" (a song that carries

Patty Griffin's terrific "Falling Down." The closer, "Across The Border," is another excellent choice. This track, as well as "For a Dancer," features Neil Young on harmonica and backing voice. Even the amount of silence between the tracks is measured carefully for proper impact and pacing.

Superb execution on all counts—song selection, singing, arrangement, production, sequencing—makes Western Wall a career high point for both Emmylou Harris and Linda

Ronstadt as much as it clearly was a labor of love and friendship.

The Gram Parsons tribute is equally a labor of love and respect. It simply could not have happened, let alone have achieved the excellence it does, without Emmylou's participa-

The Emmylou and Linda duo album has 13 songs from a stunning variety of sources, all given glorious sound by producer Glyn Johns.

the added irony of Kennerley being Emmylou's ex-husband), and this in turn leads to the edgy, percussive "Sweet Spot," an unlikely collaboration between Harris and Jill Cuniff of Luscious Jackson and "Sisters of Mercy," which again features the McGarrigles' voices, and



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tion. As the virtual and de facto curator of Gram's musical legacy, who better to gather artists and monitor the album's progress? Although she did not intend to do a track by herself, Emmylou did make herself available for participation. Thus she does sing three memorable and outstanding duets: The opener

"She" with Chrissie Hynde's Pretenders, "Sin City" with Beck in a bizarre waltz time that it never was in before, and the achingly sad "Juanita" with Sheryl Crow which was nailed in and put in the can in just a single take.


Other highlights include Elvis Costello's go at "Sleepless

Nights" by Felice and Boudelaux Bryant which is the only song here Gram did not write, Whiskeytown's show-stopping "A Song For You," the very stark Gillian Welch and David Rawlings take of "Hickory Wind," "High Fashion Queen" by Chris Hillman who with Gram founded the Flying Burrito Brothers in duet with Steve Earle, the Mavericks' tender "Hot Burrito #1," and the finale "In My Hour of Darkness" by the ad hoc Rolling Creekdippers (ex-Jayhawk Mark Olson and his wife Victoria Williams, Jim Lauderdale and Buddy and Julie Miller).

The only one I really have trouble warming to is the most radical one here, "Ooh Las Vegas" by Cowboy Junkies. Still I understand that what they were doing with the techno setting they have placed around the song is a sonic recreation of the 24/7 neon glare of that city that never sleeps.


Bud Scoppa's notes convey well the importance Gram Parsons' brief career has exerted on country music and his still-expanding web of influence. The packaging is wonderful with several rarely seen snaps of Gram and his Nudie designed wardrobe.

Tribute albums rarely generate anything very much more than tepid response from me. Almost always, a large percentage of their tracks simply suck. Not true here. The album radiates the love and respect that the participants have for Gram, his singing and his songs. Not one is a mere recreation of the original. Instead one and all have brought something personal to their performances and arrangements, and this nicely enhances one of the best, most heartfelt tribute albums I have ever experienced.



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Jack Skowron



GEOFF MULDAUR came up in the Sixties folk boom, playing with his more-famous wife, Maria, and the Jim Kweskin Jug Band. This album is a tutorial on indigenous American music, with background notes by Mary Katherine Aldin and personal commentary by Muldaur (reminiscent of scriptures and commentary). The tunes, eight covers and two originals, are given face-lifts, some the full makeover, others just a subtle nip and tuck. All through, the emotional content and vernacular remain amazingly intact.

Muldaur showcases his Tommy Johnson-style falsetto on Vera Hall's blues-drenched "The Wild Ox Moan." Gospel sounds buoy "This World is Not My Home" (love the background vocals). Leadbelly's version of "Alberta" comes in from the Bayou, while "Just A Little While to Stay Here," a second-line funeral march, is sung with only guitar backup a la Blind Willie McTell. A fabulous version of Sleepy John Estes' classic "Someday Baby" and Walter Johnson's slow, sad "I Can't See Your Face" are straight-ahead

blues. These are gutsy as they are arranged close to the originals, but hold their own in such rarified company. Fife and drum band, jazz and the Bo Diddley's hambone beat are mixed in a piquant gumbo on the "Chevrolet/Big Alice" medley, the first, the ultimate come on ("I'll buy a Chevrolet if you'll do something for me") leads into an intricate Don Pullen bop line which boogies like mad. When "Big Alice" starts, the track is elevated and energized, the way a certain itinerant Knick, Latrell Sprewell, injects passion and fire

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into a plodding offense (I've been watching one too many playoff games).

Muldaur's "I Believe I'll Go Back Home" is a credible take on the prodigal son theme, done Gospel-style with those fine backup singers. His "Got To Find Blind Lemon, Part One", while featuring Muldaur's (kinder, gentler) Blind Lemon guitar riffs, tells of a youthful, drunken road trip to nowhere; maybe a future recording of "Part Two" will tell why we should care.

My favorite track, "Mistreated Mama", is a modal hillbilly tune of betrayal arranged for two twangy voices, banjo, guitar, fiddle, dobro, clarinet (!), French horn (!!), and bassoon (!!!). The horns riff, shadow the melody, and play banjo-like triplets, lending a Jimmy Rogers feel, while the rough vocals maintain that hillbilly flavor. The instrumental break features a clarinet-fiddle melody, chiming dobros, and a descending "Rhapsody In Blue" chord sequence.

Muldaur's voice is an intriguing instrument; at once craggy, warm, and imprecise as an old down comforter, yet at times powerful, rich and melodic, with a tight vibrato. Guitarists Steven Bruton and Amos Garnett make notable contributions; Muldaur also plays fine finger-style blues.

Sonics vary, as dates with different size ensembles can. With the larger groups, the stage doesn't extend much beyond the speakers, while depth is decent, though not spectacular. Highs are slightly rolled off, while mids are well presented. The smaller groups, with one or two instruments, are better served; the piano-guitar-vocal "I Can't See Your Face" is eerily life-like.

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Michael Tearson

ROCK

Various Artists
Loud, Fast & Out Of Control

Rhino
R2 75704

IT WAS SUCH a different world in the '50s. No home computers, no VCRs or video games, no cable TV, no wireless phones or pagers. And the TV tune-show, "Your Hit Parade," was chock full of Perry Como, Patti Page, Vic Damone and their ilk.

Then came rock and roll. And nothing was ever the same again. Through a collection of 104 songs Rhino's four-CD boxed set *Loud, Fast & Out Of Control* chronicles the explosion that rock and roll wrought on the American psyche. You won't find polite teen idol types like Paul Anka, Fabian or Bobby Rydell here. This box is the real stuff, the music that scared the bejeezus out of Mom and Dad. [And some of us, too, Michael. - The Editor.] The upbeat moving and grooving sounds sent teens into frenzies, and there is nary a ballad to be found here. There is, however, a fascinating mix of hits and sizzling obscurities.

Each CD runs about an hour. It would have been easy to load up another 15 minutes per disc (as short as these things go that would be six or seven more songs each). I am certain that the greatest part of the explanation is economics; more songs would have translated into higher cost for the listener. Those mechanical royalties have to be paid! But there is another reason to limit the discs to about an hour. Any more could get exhausting for the listener. These platters just sizzle. Each one is a thrill ride as the well-known hits are balanced beautifully with the rarities that work as the set's spice. An extra 15 minutes per disc probably would have felt like too much. The sequencing is both very subtle and very effective. Subliminal storylines are infused this way, and the songs are considerably richer for the contexts in which they appear.

The sound is as excellent, which we have come to expect from Rhino. It is especially good given the restraints of the sources. Remember that these recordings are 40 to 50 years old, and many of them were recorded on less than a shoe-string. And can sound thin because of it. But what validates all this music is the undeniable energy and raw spunk that is what made them great in the first place.

Each CD has a title that also works as a loose theme for its programming.

Disc 1 is titled *Go, Man, Go!* and it is a perfect introduction to '50s rock and roll at its hottest. Eddie Cochran's "C'Mon Everybody" is the perfect opener, an anthemic call to arm for rockers everywhere. Chuck Berry's "Johnny B. Goode" is here, too. When I was in a rock and roll band, we used to do this one, and I would intro the

song with these words: "This is not the National Anthem, but this song is the American Dream." And I still believe it. Other manifestos in this program are Presley's "Jailhouse Rock," Jerry Lee Lewis' "Whole Lotta Shakin' Going On," "Put Your Cat Clothes On" by Carl Perkins, Joe Turner's "Shake, Rattle and Roll" with the original unexpurgated lyrics, "Come On, Let's Go" by Ritchie Valens, Fats Domino's "I'm Ready," and "This Is Rock & Roll" from the Coasters.

Some of the lesser knowns here are just as hot: Johnny Burnette's "Rock Billy Boogie," "Black Slacks" by Joe Bennett & The Sparkletones, and "Woo-Hoo" by the Rock-A-Tones. You might not have thought of "Jump, Jive an' Wail" by Louis Prima featuring Keely Smith with Sam Butera & The Witnesses as rock and roll. Strictly, it isn't. But with its attitude, it belongs.

Disc 2, *Flip Out!*, collects songs about parties—"Shakin' All Over" by the British Johnny Kidd & the Pirates, Wanda Jackson's raunchy "Let's Have a Party," Bill Haley's immortal "Rock Around the Clock," Screamin' Jay Hawkins' unbelievable "Little Demon"—and wild times—"Race With the Devil" from Gene Vincent & His Blue Caps, Chuck Berry's "Maybelline" and "Roll Over Beethoven," Little Richard's movie song "The Girl Can't Help It," Little Willie John's "I'm Shakin'," Jackie Morningstar's "Rockin' in the Graveyard," Larry Williams' manic "Bony Maronie." For roots, Wynonie Harris' 1951 classic "Lovin' Machine" is here, too.

Rebel Rock Out!, the third disc, opens with Cochran's immortal "Summertime Blues," still the best distillation ever of teen summer angst. Next come Little Richard's "Tutti-Frutti,"

"Raw-Hide" by Link Wray & The Wraymen, and Bo Diddley's ominous "Who Do You Love?" It just doesn't get more sizzling than that. And the pace never eases until the disc's end. Other chronicles of rock & roll life here include the Coasters' "Yakkety Yak," Perkins' "Blue Suede Shoes," "Oh, Boy!" by the Crickets, The Big Bopper's rollicking "Chantilly Lace," Ronnie Hawkins upping Chuck Berry's ante on "40 Days," and the 1951 Jackie Brenston smash "Rocket 88" which many still regard as the first true rock & roll hit. Obscure delicacies like Screamin' Jay Hawkins' bizarre "Frenzy," "King Kong" by Big "T" Tyler, Roy Orbison's very early "Go! Go! Go!" and Kid Thomas' "Rockin' This Joint Tonight" spice this set.

The final disc is *Untamed Youth!*, a collection of characters like "Charlie Brown" by the Coasters, Little Richard's "Good



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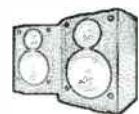


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Golly Miss Molly," the New Orleans legend of "Stagger Lee" by Lloyd Price, and Bobby Darin's "Queen of the Hop." Eddie Cochran's "Somethin' Else" is here, too, and it is a perfect summary of all the things that teens yearned for: The car you needed, the girl you wanted at a time when all things seemed possible. Jerry Lee Lewis' "Breathless," "Brand New Cadillac" by the menacing Vince Taylor & His Playboys, the wild "Mercy" by Lorrie & Larry Collins, "Tequila" by the Champs (including the future Seals & Crofts oddly enough), and the Johnny Burnette Trio's "The Train Kept A-Rollin'" all liven this disc with slices of how wild the rock and roll life could be, slides that terrified parents and school principals everywhere.

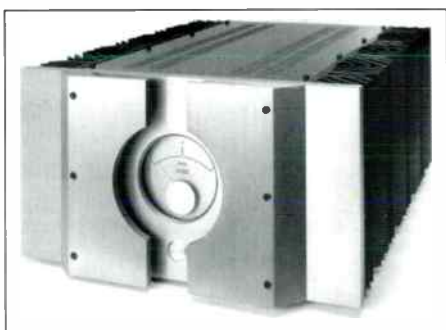
Each disc ends with a slower song for a bit of cooling down. But just a bit. Closers like Gene

Vincent's "Be-Bop-A-Lula," "Henrietta" by Jimmy Dee & the Offbeats, Link Wray's "Rumble" and "Harlem Nocturne" by the Viscounts, while slower, have all the heat of the rest. Closing the CDs this way is an inspired programming concept that allows the inclusion of four worthies that belong and otherwise might not have made it in.

Rhino's packaging as always is outstanding. That cover illustration of the leather jacketed tough and his chain-wielding buddy and switchblade-toting girl menacing the blond suburban couple is perfect. It sets the scene. The CDs in their jewel boxes bear revamped versions of classic labels redone with Rhino as the logo. Below in the tray are pictures of the originals on which the CD designs are based, while the outer cover shots are of the artists whose singles are shown in the trays. All in all, it's very classy.

The lavish booklet includes essays by producer of the box Gary Stewart, Michael Ventura and Billy Vera with song-by-song notes by the esteemed Colin Escott. Movie posters, lurid paperback book covers, and a gazillion artist shots are there, too.

I am just old enough to remember when Bill Haley's "Rock Around the Clock" zoomed up the charts. The songs included were a key part of the soundtrack of my childhood. I loved this stuff then, and I love it now. We have seen a lot of collections of '50s rock and roll, but Loud, Fast & Out of Control is the closest to the definitive collection we are likely to get. If you were there, you lived this music and you will love having it gathered together like it is here. If you weren't there, this collection will make you feel like you were. Highest recommendation.



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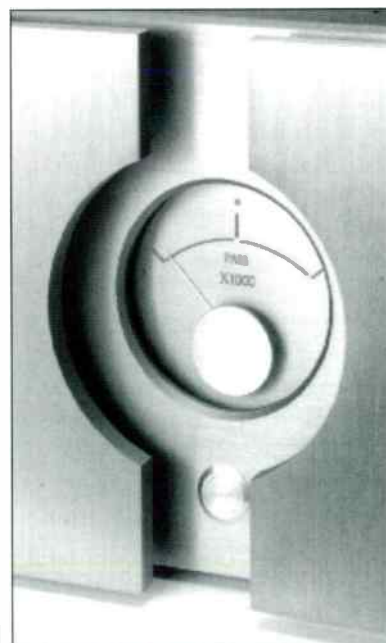
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ITALY'S CITIES and towns are sprinkled with fine old theaters, as well as centuries-old Romanesque and Gothic churches. Vacationing audiophiles, when wandering past these architectural relics, are encouraged to step in for a moment and listen. Chances are you'll hear music. Live music. Gorgeous music in wondrous settings.

You might hear an organist rehearsing for a recital. Or, if you're lucky, you'll find an instrumental group, perhaps with vocalists, preparing for a concert or a recording session.

Indeed, many of these historic structures are favorite recording venues, especially for music of the Italian Baroque which we hear on this new disc from

Virgin Veritas. This recording was made in Teatro Valli in Reggio (Emilia) by Musica Numeris, a small but quality-oriented European company doing 24/96 recording exclusively.

Recording in these cavernous old buildings can be tricky. Maintaining the sound of the space, without smearing detail in the wake of a substantial decay, is a challenge. Move the mikes in for detail, and say *arrividerci* to ambiance. Move the mikes back, ambiance and depth return, but detail is obscured by layers of echo.

In this recording of Caldera's sublime oratorio, *La Passione di Gesù Cristo Signor Nostro*, producers Nicolas Bartholomé and Hugues Deschaux achieve an almost perfect balance between

revealing the reverberant space of Teatro Valli (a medium-sized 18th-century hall with plain plaster walls and wooden flooring) and preserving every delicious nuance of voice and instrument. (Generous liner notes detail the roster of convincing period reproductions heard in this recording.)

As you might expect, the story line of this oratorio contains no surprises or twists of plot. We rely confidently on Caldera's genius, and the consistent artistry, restraint and good taste of all parties contributing to this recording to sustain our interest and delight our senses.

I encourage you to focus your attention on the recitatives which link the major choral and instrumental components of this

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story of the Passion of Christ. Don't care much for recitatives? You'd rather buy a disc of the choruses than listen to the whole oratorio? Don't want to bother with the small stuff? Well, as they say when you munch up to the crust of the bread and stop, "you're missing the best part." Recitatives are, I

must admit, an acquired taste (like broccoli or scotch whiskey). But they are well worth the effort.

Listen to cut 29. Peter (cast in this disc as a contralto), not quite singing but not simply talking either, carries the story line, while a harpsichord tinkles behind to the left and an

ancient-sounding cello groans off to the right. Earlier, in cut 4, we hear Peter say, "Oh God! I fear that instead of being comforted, I may hear them say that he is dead." This recitative is accompanied by solo lute until, at the end, it is augmented by several low notes of the chamber organ to darken the mood as the words "he is dead" are uttered. Simple, effective, elegant. In other recitatives, we hear the harpsichord and the violin as well. Whatever mix Caldera provides, these narratives simply could not be more beautiful.

You'll be pleased by the many arias and duets in this work as well, none more exquisite than cut 7, Mary Magdalene singing of her sorrow. This is Caldera's music at its best. Complex, sometimes dissonant (suggestive of Pergolesi), and tastefully ornamented by the soprano, Patricia Petibon, this level of musicianship explains why Caldera's appointment to the court of the Habsberg emperor, Charles IV of Vienna, endured 20 years. During that time, Caldera is credited with introducing the long song lines that are characteristic of the Italian baroque to northern Europe.

When the full complement of instruments is heard on this disc, especially when the chorus enters, the sound seems just a little congested, and depth becomes a tad ambiguous. Yet if I were to hear this disc in a larger listening room, I have a hunch these concerns would disappear. Amazing, how listening in a first-class room can reveal the merit of a recording.

Buy this disc. Relax. Settle in. Let the music wash over you. Not too loud, please. Your patience will be rewarded.

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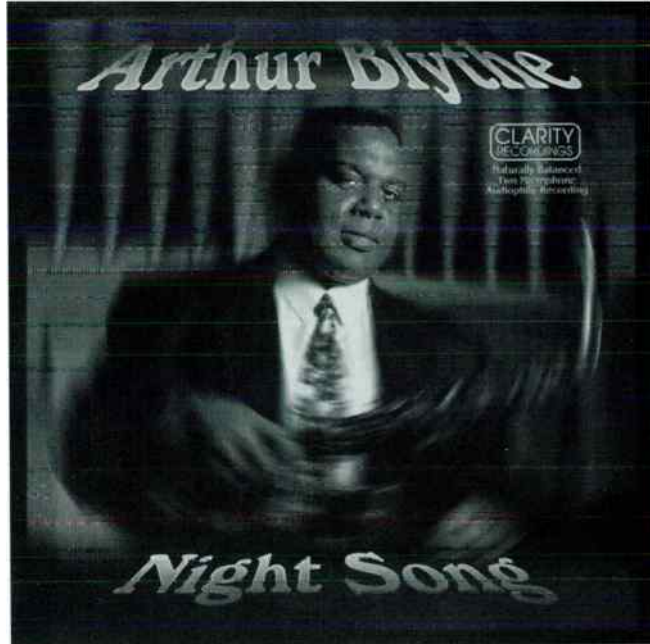
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WE HAVE HERE an audiophile recording of an adventurous jazzman. Blythe was one of the first jazzmen to vary his music not by fundamentally changing his style, but by varying its context, utilizing unusual instruments for color, and varying the size of the ensembles (this is now a common strategy in “downtown” circles). Tuba, vibes or marimba, and three hand drummers support Blythe’s unique alto stylings. This does interesting things. The absence of a chordal instrument opens things up harmonically (Gus Tsilllis’ vibes and marimba supply more color and propulsion than harmonic underpinning). The tuba has a flatter, rougher, weightier texture than a bass, and interacts with the front line more like another horn. Hand drums percolate evenly, unlike the explosiveness of traps. Blythe’s instantly identifiable, aggressive sound is pinched and slightly nasal on top, rich with

overtones in its middle range, and his high notes approach dog-only hearing range, making him an ideal candidate for audiophile treatment.

“Down San Diego Way” has the simplest, catchiest melody, which jumps out, picks you up, and forces you to dance (my five-year-old, who usually wants no part of Daddy’s music, whirls about singing this tune). Blythe’s solo explodes out from between the speakers, varying note textures and building to an exciting climax. “Ransom” and “Slanderous” have Blythe accompanied only by the drummers (their best sounding showcase), while he duets with the amazing Bob Stewart on “Cause Of It All.” The latter has Stewart’s tuba playing counterpoint and laying down split-tone chords as Blythe wails in his upper registers, then a cat-and-mouse chase segues into a blues. He covers Monks “We See” as a Caribbean shuffle, and

Strayhorn’s “Blood Count” on which the band interplay raises the intensity level to almost unbearable levels. Only two of the 12 tracks drag slightly under the weight of the band.

This is a two-mike recording, done in a church, and the sound is open, airy, with a deep, wide stage. Not all agree that this is the best approach to jazz (or rock), and while Blythe and Stewart’s complex sounds are served well, I feel the hand drummers as well as the vibe and marimba lose some impact. Interestingly, cymbals have proper splashiness and decay. There is also an aluminum CD of this album available, but I did not audition it. This is a fine place for the uninitiated to start, but there is even hotter Blythe out there (1995’s *Calling Card* on Enja and 1979’s *Lenox Avenue Breakdown*, which may be out of print). Still, this disc is rewarding sonically and musically and is thus recommended.

THE COMPLETE ANITA O'DAY
VERVE/CLEF SESSIONS

Joel Roberts



Jazz

Anita O'Day *The Complete Anita O'Day Verve/Clef Sessions*
Mosaic Records MD9-188

FOR CASUAL FANS, the short list of great female jazz vocalists typically includes artists so familiar they can be identified by first name alone: Ella, Sarah, Billie, maybe Carmen and Betty. But the name Anita—as in Anita O'Day—is usually absent from that list.

For a number of reasons, including, perhaps, her long history of personal problems and the unavailability of some of her best work on CD, O'Day, while far from obscure, has not enjoyed the adulation the jazz world often bestows on its elder, surviving stars. And a survivor

she certainly is—of drug addiction, prison, and countless changes in musical tastes.

But the time appears ripe for an O'Day revival and a re-examination of her important contribution to the music. She's the only one of the above-mentioned artists still alive, and

though mostly retired and slowed by age at 80, remains as bold and defiant as ever, according to a recent *New York Times* profile. A tribute concert for her was held in New York at this summer's JVC Jazz Festival, and there are rumors of a new recording project.

Best of all, Mosaic Records has just released a nine-CD collection, *the Complete Anita O'Day Verve/Clef Sessions*, that should help O'Day earn her rightful place in the jazz pantheon.

O'Day achieved her greatest commercial success in the swing era as featured vocalist with Gene Krupa's band, and then with Stan Kenton. But her artistic peak came during her decade with Clef and Verve from 1952 to 1962. Under the direction of Norman Granz and Creed Taylor, O'Day was recorded in a

wide variety of settings and paired with some of the top stars on the jazz scene, ranging from Oscar Peterson's trio to Cal Tjader's Latin-esque quartet to big bands led by Bill Holman,

**Like all great singers,
she makes every song
she sings her own.**

Johnny Mandel and Billy May, among others.

Like Ella Fitzgerald, her labelmate and occasional rival at Verve, O'Day made the transition from big band to jazz singer by merging the revolutionary, post-war sounds of bebop with the mainstream swing she'd sung in the '40s. And while no jazz singer has ever matched the sheer perfection of Fitzgerald's voice, O'Day does have a lovely

voice of her own; more importantly, she shares Ella's flair for improvisation as well as her uncanny ability to swing hard in any setting.

(If you have any doubts about O'Day's credentials as a bop singer, check out her entirely improvised, scat take on Gary McFarland's "Up State," or her version of Horace Silver's "Senior Blues," both on Disc VIII here, backed by a band featuring heavyweights Phil Woods, Hank Jones and Zoot Sims.)

Like all the great singers from Sinatra to contemporary artists like Cassandra Wilson, O'Day makes every song she sings her own. She plays with the melody, sings behind the beat, changes tempos, but seldom loses her way. While her song selection under Granz and Taylor was unexceptional, sticking mostly to well-worn standards, she



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never performs them precisely as written. Her Cole Porter and Rodgers & Hart tribute albums, despite merely adequate support from the May Orchestra, almost match Fitzgerald's state-of-the-art songbooks, and certainly provide a worthwhile alternative reading of those classic tunes.

When it came to probing the emotional depths of a song, O'Day exceeded the occasionally icy Ella Fitzgerald, and approached the most heartbreaking of all jazz singers, Billie Holiday. On ballads and blues, O'Day's vocal timbre and shadings strongly suggest Holiday, a point underlined on a splendid 1961 tribute to Lady Day featuring Ben Webster and Jimmy Rowles.

There are many more highlights to be found in this definitive collection of jazz singing. On a 1956 reunion album with

Gene Krupa's group, for example, she revisits the swing-era hit "Let Me Off Uptown," joyfully trading vocals back and forth with Roy Eldridge. A year later, on the classic "Anita Sings the Most" album, she somehow manages to keep up with an

O'Day's singing. Big-band sessions with Bill Holman, McFarland, Russ Garcia, and Johnny Mandel fare better.

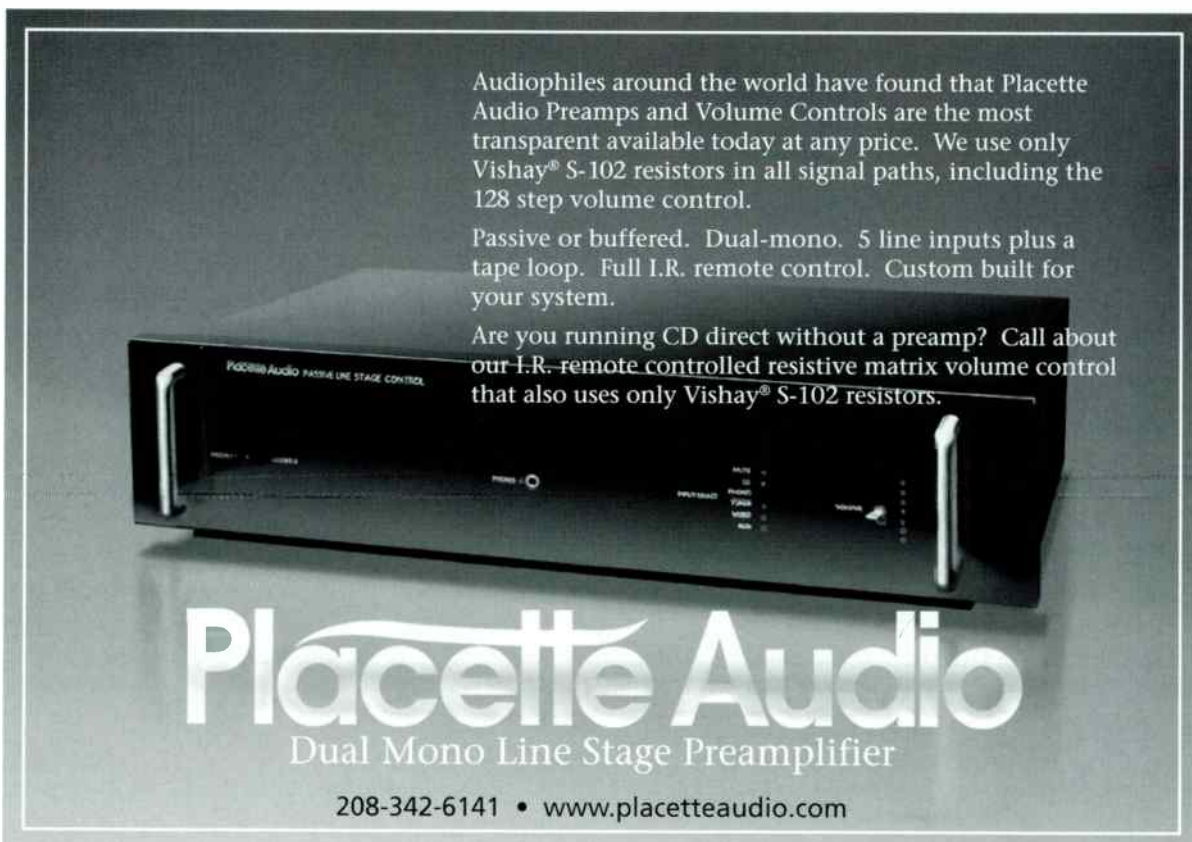
Sonically, Michael Cuscuna, Charlie Lourie and the gang at Mosaic have done their usual superb job of remastering from the original tapes. Although, as Cuscuna notes, some of the earlier sessions, from 1952, are not up to Verve's later recording standards. And a few sides are offered in mono, either because mono masters were the only ones in existence, or because they were found to be superior to the stereo.

As with other Mosaic collections, this one features an illuminating historical essay (by Will Friedwald), the finest in jazz photography (by William Claxton, Bob Parent, and Herman Leonard), and a full discography.

This definitive collection of jazz singing from Anita O'Day gets the typically great Mosaic production.

instrumental force like Oscar Peterson on a number of furious uptempo tunes. Then, in 1959, she slides easily into a more avant-garde setting with a nonet arranged by Jimmy Giuffre.

The only disappointments have more to do with unexceptional orchestral arrangements from Buddy Bregman, Marty Paich and Billy May, than with



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Berning Siegfried Power Amplifier



YES, THIS IS another single-ended triode (SET) amp review. And, yes, this product is a fine example of what can happen when art, science and engineering prowess meet face-to-face with a design philosophy based upon a real and intelligent love of music. No, the Siegfried is not your father's Oldsmobile!

The story starts by noting that the designer, David Berning, is no newcomer to the audio world. Many of us will remem-

ber a range of exceptional pre-amps and amps that have been on the scene for a long time. Better yet, most of even the earliest units continue to perform admirably, delivering to their owners much listening pleasure and worry-free operation. Berning's approach to product design and construction may be simply stated: he believes in solid, modern engineering principles, careful parts selection, meticulous assembly practices, a

respect for past discoveries, and then running everything as conservatively as possible. Occasionally, he innovates too, as seen in his Zero-Hysteresis Amplifier Series released in 1996. The Siegfried is the second amp release in this series. His novel approach to solving the serious audible distortions which come from hysteresis problems related to magnetizing current and transformer core saturation, evolved into the inven-

tion of an unusual impedance converter. This innovation utilizes a special switching power supply technology which performs the impedance matching function of the output transformer without hysteresis byproducts. These such novel treatments enhance the fun and joy of SETism while making certain that some of the technical bugaboos disappear.

For those interested in a thoughtful perspective on directly-heated power triodes and single-ended circuits, I heartily recommend Berning's two-page product literature on the Siegfried—much is said sensibly and concisely there about the topic. By the way, in addition to being a sharp engineer, I have had the pleasure of meeting and talking with David at Philly Triode Amp shows and happily discovered that he is also a quiet, gracious and interesting guy, with keen ears and a sharp focus on product value. Now, on to the matter at hand.

Features And Specs

The Siegfried is a single-ended, output-transformerless (OTL) triode amp and is available in two configurations. One version uses the Svetlana 811-10 output triode tube and is rated to produce, at the onset of clipping, 10 watts per channel at 8 ohms, or 12 watts at 6 ohms where the full power bandwidth is 0.2 Hz to 45 kHz; it is priced at \$5750. In this review, the alternative version was chosen (after a brief listen to both) and it is based upon the Western Electric 300B output tube; this configuration is priced at \$6950. The unit is equipped with an on-board level control, so if you only use one input source, a preamp is unnecessary. The look

of the amp is somewhat retro, but clean and tidy with a spiffy gold-plated brass tube cage; it has a footprint of 13x17x9 inches and weighs 18 lbs. I will spare you most of the technical details except to say that the amp employs point-to-point hand wiring in the audio circuits, has a tube complement

What's the lowdown on the Siegfried amp? Wow! Let me say it again, Wow!

per channel of a 6SN7 differential input, a 6SN7 balanced amplifier, a 6J5 follower-driver and the output triode. Incidentally, the WE300B version, evaluated here, has power output levels, at onset of clipping of 7W at 8 ohms, 5W at 16 ohms and 4W at 4 ohms. Output impedance is 1.5 ohms at 1 amp, 60 Hz; sensitivity measures 0.6V RMS for 10W output.

The Evaluation Process

For starters, anyone having even a small amount of experience with SETs will not be surprised to hear that careful speaker selection is critical. My resident Nestorovic System 12 satellite-subwoofer combo is rated at 92 dB sensitivity, so I thought it would be a good place to initiate listening tests. I usually biamp, using Nestorovic's NA1 tube amps on the satellites, and Eagle 400 solid-state monoblocks on the subs via a Rowland electronic crossover. By substituting the Siegfried for my tube amps, it was possible to get initial impressions via the satellites. Well, it was a beautiful surprise! Elegant, smooth,

detailed and informative music flowed, albeit it at modest sound levels. Again, this was only with the satellites playing, which, in my room usually seem useless below 75 Hz. True, there was no deep bass, but everything else seemed to have an inner light that I had not perceived to this degree before. After burning-in the Siegfried and sampling a variety of CDs and LPs, I needed to get back to full range sound, so I tried operating the combined satellites and subwoofers, which Nestorovic's speaker system does allow through

built-in crossover circuits. It was no surprise, again, to see that we were limited to very soft playback levels; this was just much too much to ask of seven watts per channel. The next step involved biamp, using the Siegfried on the satellites and my standard Eagle 400 amps for the subs, obviously adjusting gain via the electronic crossover. Now we were getting somewhere!

Yes, all of the anticipated midrange juice flowed, the bass improved, and things seemed quite enjoyable, even though loud playback was still not feasible. Now was the time to run through the usual test discs, you know the ones—Ella, Brubeck, Bill Evans, Holst, Stravinsky, the Three Bs, et al. Clearly a sense of ease and the directness of musical communication were obvious. There was no artificiality to the presentation style, no unusual anything. In fact, there was really very little to criticize other than the inability to hear things with proper gain levels through the midrange and on upward; my rig just needed more than seven watts to get to realistic sound pressures (do

remember that the bass was now being handled by my usual 400-watt Eagle monoblocks on the subs from 75 Hz down). I did dig further into my record collection to be sure that my general observations held up, and they most certainly did—on old-time shaded dogs, Mercs, ffr's, six eyes, as well as with new Reference Recordings LPs and CDs and Mapleshades, and such—thank you very much.

The Adventure Intensifies

Well, the playback volume story was just unsettling enough that an alternative speaker approach became necessary. Fortunately, the university at which I teach owns various PA systems and fortuitously for me one such package included an older pair of excellent fiberglass horn speakers based upon a 15-inch driver coupled to a 1.5-inch midrange compression driver mounted in the flare of the horn. My good buddy Steve, who is a close friend, listening partner, and an old sound reinforcement expert (harkening back to the days of big horn systems), was a monumental help in getting these horns into my system as substitutes for the Nestorovic satellites. These significantly sized units are not exactly beautiful, so the visual acceptance factor to just about anyone would be questionable. In no time at all we discovered that the midrange/tweeter drivers were not functioning at an acceptable level, so happily Steve dug into his arsenal of goodies and provided a pair of EV midrange/tweeter horns to physically/electronically strap on top of the other horn units, thus eliminating the questionable built-in midrange drivers. The accompanying photo should give a sense of this jerry-



rigged setup. Sizewise the main horns measure 42 inches wide x 32 inches high x 45 inches deep and the EV HR60/40 units mounted on top come out to 33 inches wide x 18 inches high x 24 inches deep. The general poop on this combo is that we have a horn system with a sensitivity of about 110 dB per watt at one meter, the 2.8-inch voice coil of the EV 299 high-frequency driver covers the 500-Hz to 15,000-Hz range, and all the magnets utilized throughout are Alnico (which some folks like Gizmo R. believe are the cat's meow for SET amps). Ugly to look at, for sure—but this installation would only last for a few days, so the visual disruption to my listening room was tolerable.

We listened to this horn setup using the Siegfried and were extremely encouraged by the difference in volume and the ease associated with the sound. After a bit more fiddling, we got the horn angles adjusted to focus the sound for ideal dispersion to the listening area, but even this rig needed bass augmentation from about 100 Hz downward so in came my subwoofers and the Eagle amps. We

Buddy Steve with horns: Is this the Do-It-Yourself-er's dream or what?

dialed those in to match gain levels to the horns and it was finally time to really get the low-down on the Siegfried amp.

Wow!

Let me say that again—Wow!

The quality of sound and the joy of the music were absolutely stunning. Big, well-executed fiberglass horns have a lot going for them. Too bad they're so ugly and way too big! The amp was revealed at last!

The transient speed, the intelligibility, the detail, and the lack of compression became so obvious so quickly that Steve and I were both taken aback. We couldn't wait to get from one disc to the next. Now, remember this is an amp review, so clearly the magic that was emanating from the system had doubtless much to do with the Siegfried's design and implementation considerations. Cassandra Wilson's "New Moon Daughter" took on a new level of clarity. "Pomps and Pipes" became enlivened. "Noyes Fluude" on the Argo LP just about jumped out at you, espe-

cially as the children's chorus marched around the church. Old favorites and new alike, landed on the turntable and CD player producing enjoyment worth writing home about.

Yes, there was ambience, soundstage depth, width and height, and yes there was a "you are there" sense that became inspiring. Happily the subwoofer bass performance was reasonably well matched to the horns, so listening to every type of music was a treat. There was plenty of playback volume for anything we tried. The Siegfried was doing a splendid job and it was almost difficult to believe this was all the result of just seven watts on the combo horns.

The Cherry On Top

One final twist was in the wings: I've reported, in other recent reviews in *TAV*, that I have been doing amateur recording for a while of a few local artists in my area. Included have been several pipe organ recitals, small jazz groupings, and an *a cappella* group, in particular, which is a marvelous ensemble of talented vocalists doing primarily Renaissance music. I have a well-regarded DAT machine and above-average microphones, which in combination are quite capable of getting the goods on tape. The Lyric Consort's vocalizing from a variety of different concerts was just unbelievable through the "Siegfried with horns" setup. It was as good as I have ever heard a live concert reproduced. For the sake of context, let me note that I make a point of sitting adjacent to the left mike stand, in the audience, during the performance rather than hiding away in some backroom or elsewhere. I know what the

music sounds like during the live event, and the ability to listen back and hear it at home has been most instructive as I have learned to fuss over microphone positioning, recording techniques, etc. This was the first time the intensity of the live event rang out with such purity; the lack of "stuff" between the performers and me was revelatory. Tonal structure, articulation, dynamics, transient speed, space—all of these were just glorious via the Siegfried amp. To be honest, in my humble opinion, if more commercial releases were recorded this simply and purely, we'd all be happier campers.

Well, obviously the time came to dismantle this borrowed setup. The amp went back to Mr. Berning, and the horns went to their respective homes too. In all sincerity, if the horns could have been made physically and visually acceptable, I would

have bought the Siegfried amp! I know there are several high efficiency speakers out there now, and some others are on the horizon. For those of you who already are on that path, I cannot say enough about how impressed I was with the Siegfried amp. If you look into well-made, neutral-sounding big horn speakers (especially of fiberglass design) and couple them to this amp, I feel confident that you will find the kind of musical magic that visited my home during this review.

While I regard my current sound system as quite competent, I know that there is more to the SET movement than sits on the surface. Maybe some genius will find a way to make the whole package work esthetically enough that I can soon revisit the joy that I experienced while evaluating the Siegfried amplifier. I hope this might be true for you too. Happy SETism!

NOTES

Berning Siegfried Power Amplifier, with 300B tubes and circuitry, \$6,950.00; with 811-10 tubes and circuitry, \$5,750.00. David Berning Co., 12430 McCrossin Lane, Potomac, MD 20850; phone/fax 301/926-3371.

Associated Components

Audio Research REF 1 (series II) line stage; Linn Sondek LP12 (with Lingo, Cirkus, Trampolin upgrades) and Naim ARO arm, plus, Spectral MCIIB moving-coil cartridge feeding an Audio Research PH3 SE phono stage; Naim CD2 CD player; Magnum Dynalab Etude FM tuner; Tascam DA-P1 DAT machine; Nestorovic System 12A Mk2 satellite and subwoofer speaker system; Nestorovic NA1 monoblock tube amps on satellites and Electron Kinetics Eagle 400 monoblock amps on subwoofers; Rowland SVX-3 electronic crossover; cabling by Cardas Hexlink for most of the system, with van den Hul's "First" carbon fibre wires for the phono stage. Each source component resides on a separate isolation device, "The Base". Dedicated a.c. power lines and acoustic room treatment round out the system.

Enigma Oremus Loudspeaker

Russ Novak

I BEGAN TO FEEL cumulative disgust when visiting the rooms at the last Consumer Electronics Show. The price of the hobby is staggering and what I was hearing was not significantly better than it was 10 years ago. How is this industry supposed to maintain the viability of the hobby if the admission price to the high end is \$6,000 and up? And if you want state-of-the-art? One new speaker is introduced at \$15K, another at \$50K. Where are the exciting products at affordable prices that will attract new generations of music lovers?

Or are we destined to fade away, a hobby of affluent, fat, middle-aged guys with a decreasing interest in music and

an increased ability to purchase expensive equipment for a precipitate display of wealth?

I maintain it should be possible to build a loudspeaker to sell for \$1,000 or under that would meet certain basic admission criteria for high-end sound: Natural and balanced frequency response along with freedom from box colorations. Forget the niceties of extended bass and ultra fast treble. Forget holographic imaging, though much of that could come cheaply as the result of simple crossovers and careful driver mounting. Just get me in the ballpark with two or three modestly priced drivers operating conservatively within their range in a resonance-free box.



Well, there was no such product at CES that I am aware of. Readers and manufacturers, inventors and designers, please feel free to contact me if you know otherwise. But the high end needs a \$1K speaker like the Thoroughbred Industry needs a Triple Crown winner.

This speaker I am reviewing is a partial solution to the problem. While it lists at \$1,695, a cool \$700 over the mark I've set, proper equipment matching will allow the reader to save much money on the total cost of the

system as we shall discuss later in the listening portions of the review.

The Enigma Oremus is a two-way mini monitor that retains all the benefits intrinsic to that design: Ease of placement in a room, good imaging, and few bass problems. As such, it should be of prime interest to audiophiles with limited space and new audiophiles who are looking to get high-end sound at a reasonable price.

Listening

The Oremus' sound first attracted me at the show because of its ability to get the difficult transition between the upper bass and the midrange correct without noticeable cabinet colorations. It also seemed friendly in the treble region with no over-etched quality that would restrict enjoyment of a wide range of program material.

This impression was maintained in listening tests in my home. It passed my Frankie Test, Sinatra's voice on "Good-bye" (*Only The Lonely*, Capitol 48471) was conveyed without hooding or too much warmth.

Measuring the speaker in my room showed it had exception-

per cent of your music is at 50 Hz and up and that you truly do not need the bottom octave and a half for completely enjoyable listening from the vast majority of software? Full bass foundation was heard on the soundtrack *Mulholland Falls* (Dave Grusin, MGM 0029732EDL) and all other material. It took the 20 and 30 Hz synthesizer rumblings on *Blade Runner* (Vangelis, Atlantic 82623) to make the speaker quit. But, hey, you can't get a 30-Hz tone at the price we're talking about, so read on.

The speaker seemed a midrange lover's Blue Plate Special. "Boulevard of Broken Dreams" (*All of You*, Diana Krall, Impulse 182), with its combination of female voice with piano, guitar, and bass, was rendered perfectly.

But as time went on, I began to feel that the sound, while not

This two-way mini-monitor offers all the benefits intrinsic to the design.

ally flat bass response (+/- 2 dB from 200 to 50 Hz) with the exception of a +4 dB bump at 160 Hz which is room position related. By 40 Hz, or just below an open bottom E string on a bass, it was down 10 dB, but that is to be expected from a mini-monitor of modest cost. Need I remind readers that 90

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centralized at the cabinet nor sounding as though the cabinet were contributing colorations, nevertheless was failing to achieve complete freedom and spaciousness in the room. The speakers' overall balance is on the dark side of neutral. That's a deficit for the reason given, but is an asset if you play material of less than the top audiophile quality, as one might with a large software collection.

Things like wind chimes, brushes on cymbals, and the "air" of a concert hall were diminished. For example on Valentin Silvestrov's *Symphony No. 5* (Sony SK 66 825) the fundamentals of the strings and harp were conveyed sweetly, but with the upper overtones diminished and immersed in a dark background. Closely miked brushes on snare drum and cymbals ("Never Let Me Go," Keith Jarrett, *Standards, Volume 2*, ECM 1289) had less than their

NOTES

Enigma Oremus loudspeaker, a bi-wireable, two-way design with 0.76-inch soft-dome textile tweeter and 7-inch polypropylene woofer; 8-ohm impedance; 87 dB sensitivity; 14 inches high by 7.6 inches wide by 10.68 inches deep; finishes in black, cherry wood, mahogany. Distributor: May Audio Marketing, 10524 Lexington Drive, Suite 300, Knoxville, TN 37932; phone 423/966-8844, fax 423/966-8833.

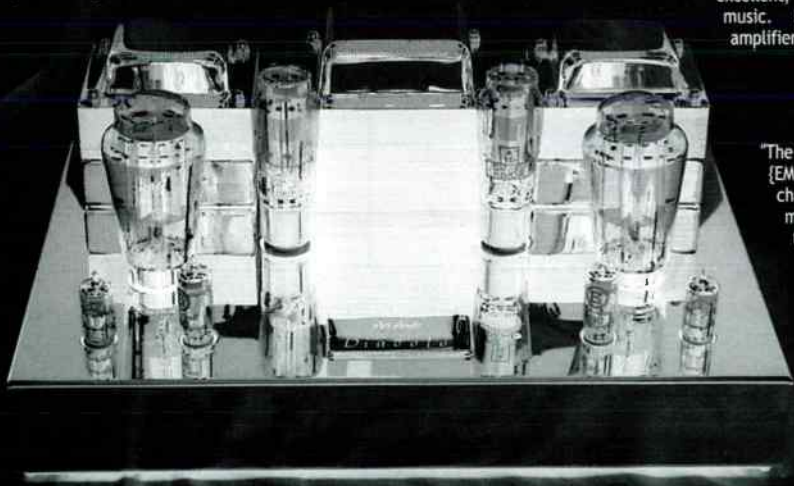
Associated Equipment

Krell 250 and Musical Design DM 100-B amps, Melos MA 333 and passive preamps and Melos phono stage, Monarchy DAC, Sonic Frontiers SFT-1 transport, Tara Labs Decade interconnect and speaker wire, Bright Star Audio Big Rock sand bases and Little Rock weights, and Acoustic Innovations sound absorbing panels.

expected degree of presence, and finally the "hang-time" of the piano overtones on "Suite Bergamasque" (Francois-Joel Thiollier, *Debussy: Piano Works, Vol. 1*, Naxos 8.553290) were reduced on this highly reverberant recording.

Matching Components

Now I just auditioned the system of a well-known audiophile with tube amps, who very coyly uses digital EQ to eliminate even the last vestige of upper treble edge. I feel trapped with that kind of sound. Give me full



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-Les Turczi,
The Audiophile Voice,
Vol. 4, Issue 6

"The Berglund/Bournemouth Shostakovich Eleventh (EMI SLS 5177) provides one of audio's greatest challenges... Too many components fail to maneuver through the demanding moments of this symphony without stumbling... Well, the "little" Art Audio, confronted by this test, not only retained its composure, but gave one of the best presentations I have heard."

-Aaron M. Shatzman,
The Absolute Sound,
February 99, Issue 116
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extension and let the treble nasties fall where they may. What I gain is that overused expression, "air" and a feeling of freedom and naturalness.

So the problem now became matching equipment to maximize the potential of the speaker. I had been using the Melos tube preamp and the Musical Design amp up to this point in the listening tests and I decided to insert some replacements. I first replaced the Melos preamp

with a passive (shunted bypass) "preamp" where the signal is passed only through a single 10-kilohm matching resistor and "excess" signal is bled to ground. A passive preamplifier always supplies a extra degree of transparency and it did so in this case, but the treble was not additionally extended. That reassured me that the Melos was not too "tubey," but that didn't really help with my immediate problem.

I switched wires, moving from the Tara Labs Decade to Cardas Cross interconnect and speaker cable. No go. It reinforced my experience with Decade as the most transparent and neutral stuff I've worked with. Other cables kept on hand at my house have been used mainly for "fixes" where a sound needs to be "changed."

Next a Krell 250 replaced the Musical Design amp. Where the Musical Design seems ideally mated to neutral to bright speakers (review under way), the Krell is very extended at the top end and very transparent and tightly controlled in the lower mids through the bass. That switch pretty much did it. Repeating the same material, I found that the brushes, wind chimes, air, and overtones all returned to reasonable proportions in the total sound scheme.

I learned one more thing from the Krell. The added power, 250 watts instead of 100, did much to improve the micro-dynamics of the speaker—the ability to differentiate and accent subtle level changes within the middle of the dynamic range. Ironically, this is heard as a *relaxed* quality, casualness of effort. Yes, 40 watts is plenty of power to play as loud as you want with these speakers, but my experience is that with all but the most efficient speakers, more is better!

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More Listening

With frequencies and dynamics to my liking, I began to experiment with the soundstage. In a 12.5 by 20-foot room, I placed the speakers six feet, 10 inches out from the short wall and the listening position was eight feet from the plane of the speakers (which were six feet apart). The Oremus has a very strong center image and excellent depth. The depth is good not only at the center of the stage, but extends well into the rear corners of the room, providing the desirable rectangular shape, instead of the usual upside down "V."

I was not able to locate instruments to the outside of the speaker using my usual references, even with the Acoustic Innovations absorbing panels used to kill early reflections off the side walls. But with the inextinguishable center image this speaker has, you can spread them very wide in the room to give the front width you desire.

The speakers cloth domed tweeter was fast enough to resolve and separate the fast string figures in the Allegro molto of Sibelius' *Symphony No. 5* (Simon Rattle, EMI 64122), but you must not expect the speed of a ribbon.

Conclusions

So how does all this benefit the reader? Well, first you can lop off the cost of an expensive preamp in your beginner's system if you don't need a phono stage. Second, you do not need to pay the megabucks for a tube amp or a solid-state wannabe. They'd be contraindicated here. Get yourself a high-powered, solid-state amp on the used market, a passive preamp, some neutral wires, and you can be in business for \$3K.

The Oremus will deliver a sound as comfortable as a broken-in loafer, usable with a wide variety of perfect and less than perfect software. You'll get a balanced natural sound with the right equipment matching, a large soundstage, and a foothold in the high end.

Postscript: Speaker Stands

Nizar Akhrass at May Audio Marketing supplied the new Atacama R724 speaker stands (\$475 the pair) for use with the Oremus. It's a very nifty product. Working from the carpet up, I found the spikes were long and thin enough to effectively penetrate the carpet, something that is not always the case with spikes. The base plate (made of lead?) is very heavy and lends stability.

The single center column is designed to be filled with sand for resonance damping and further stability. You insert a plastic bag (supplied) into a hole in the bottom of the column and then pour in the sand, tying the bag off when it is filled and tucking the end into the hole. This operation can actually be very neatly accomplished with the aid of a funnel of rolled-up cardboard and a scoop. I found 70 pounds (at \$5.00 for 100 pounds) did the trick. I do recommend bringing the columns out to the car, rather than bringing the sand into the house. The filled columns ain't gonna leak, but the bag of sand will.

The top plate is supplied with little mini spikes that will mass lock the bottom of the speaker to the stand. A nice little touch are the speaker cable guides at the rear of the center column. These allow the cable to "disappear" once it reaches the base of the stand.

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Kimber KS 3033 Loudspeaker Cable



CABLES OR WIRES for audio use have become increasingly controversial, at least in the "above-ground" press. Some audiophiles claim to hear changes or improvements equivalent to inserting a new speaker or top-notch amplifier when substituting one of the pricey new model cables. Others claim to hear little or no difference between brands or models from as much as 10 years ago, except for models obviously designed

to perform as tone controls. (Be extremely careful about using cables as a "tone control." This practice will nearly always return to haunt you.) Agreement only comes when price enters the discussion. Many wonder if new audio cable companies, with aggressive promotion, are simply trying to cash-in on what many perceive as outrageous prices. Average prices have skyrocketed; top-of-line models are about to go into orbit.

Newcomers to our hobby tend to accept this trend; veteran audiophiles are very skeptical and wonder if listening can possibly equal claims.

The underlying basic work started long ago, but the easily traceable heritage of the cables to be reviewed here started about five years ago. Ray Kimber decided to make his unadvertised "statement" to the audio business community. His "statement" was simply that if

the best loudspeaker cable possible is wanted, cost not a consideration, and conforming to all scientifically proven parameters, "here it is". It was dubbed "The Black Pearl." It was and still is mainly hand-made. The price is \$15,000.00 a pair and still requires time on a waiting list to obtain these hand-made beauties (they were never meant to be a very commercial product)! Ever seen an advertisement for them? Kimber eventually invented and designed a machine that could make comparable cables and dubbed them the Kimber Select series. The all-silver-wiring machine-made version of the Black Pearl is the Model KS 3038; it's less than half the price of the Black Pearl and claimed to be at least as good sounding. There is also a hybrid copper and silver version, the KS 3035. Demand remains strong for the "hand-made" Black Pearl, and I guess it may be the first "collectors-item" audio-cable.

Enter the new Kimber Select Model KS 3033 loudspeaker cable, basically an all-copper version of the "Black Pearl" and selling for about a tenth the price. I had been sent three models of Kimber's interconnects to review for *TAV*; Sean Casey, Kimber's representative, also sent a pair of speaker cables. The appearance of those cables is unusual to say the least. My first and continuing impression is of a retro-style vacuum cleaner hose, not the contemporary ribbed plastic hoses. At each end of the "hose" is an aluminum connection (like what a cleaning wand or brush would need). The insertions, at each end, are an extremely flexible pair of nine-inch long cables that look like the Kimber Hero

interconnects. In my sample, these were terminated by WBT expansion-lock banana plugs. These plugs are real jewels, easy to use, and give solid contact that is unlikely to loosen; call them confidence inspiring. Expanding or tightening by hand is intuitive with right-handed

Kimber's KS 3033 is an all-copper speaker cable with good sound and a moderate price.

threads (unlike the Kimber WBT interconnect's terminations). These nine-inch lengths of flexible terminations are standard for any and all lengths of Kimber Select loudspeaker cables. The middle (hose) section appears to be about one inch in diameter, much thicker than a garden hose. Using a Boley gauge, I measured approximately 26 millimeters, so you know exactly how thick it is. The thick "hose" section is the heart and soul of these cables. I wanted to say "secret" or "magic" about the hose section, but that's not true. Kimber Kable is still all about

proven science and cable theory, and they talk about things of such paramount importance as impedance, inductance, capacitance, etc. It is generally accepted that for all these cable characteristics, the lower the measurement the better. Unfortunately, some of these characteristics are mutually exclusive, i.e. lowering one raises another, at least for any typical cable geometry. The heart and visible secret of all of Kimber's Select series is that they do *not* feature typical cable geometry!

No hidden networks or response contouring boxes are used here. I thought that perhaps something unusual was hidden inside the hoses. That idea was wrong. I personally took x-rays of the hoses. Nothing was hiding inside. Actually they do not meet the common definition of "hose" because they are solid. They are made of a lightweight Sorbothane-like material and form the large, nonresonant core of these cables. In addition to other properties, the hoses eliminate or greatly dampen transmission of outside forces, even airborne ones. The decorative

N O T E S

Kimber KS 3033 Speaker Cables, \$1,550.00 per eight-foot pair. Kimber Kable, 2752 South, 1900 West, Ogden, Utah 84401; phone 801/621-5530, fax 801/627-6980, web site www.kimber.com.

Associated Equipment

VPI Mk 11+ turntable, SME Mk IV tonearm, Grado "The Reference" phono cartridge, Panasonic DVD-110A DVD player, Audio Research SP-8 Mk 11 preamp with Musical Concepts line stage upgrade modification, BEL 1001 Mk 111 mono block amplifiers, Genesis Model V with 800-watt servo amp and 8-woofer bass system, together with miscellaneous tweaks including Sims Navcom Pucks and marble slab for turntable, Nitty Gritty Model 2 record cleaner, and Isobar Ultra Model 4 and Model 6 a.c. surge suppressors.

“thread patterns” on the surface of the hoses are actually the strands of the conducting cables’ wires! They have a tough, transparent coating, forming a zigzag pattern, and do not run in straight longitudinally parallel lines. Try to visualize that these strands are at varying distances from each other, some as far away as an inch on the other side of the solid-core hose! I hope that our lead photo clearly shows this detail; as an infamous philosopher once said, “one picture is worth at least seventeen words.” As far as I know this is a truly unique application of cable geometry for audio use, as Kimber claims. Theoretically, this may give Kimber Select cables closer-to-ideal properties of impedance, inductance and capacitance without resorting to “black boxes,” compensating networks or meaningless graphs

and charts. This simpler way should be more appealing to any true audiophile; music lovers don’t usually care how the job gets done, so long as it gets done.

It was a breeze to hook up the Kimber Select cables. The extremely flexible terminations are very user-friendly. My first

fact I heard almost no difference of any kind compared to my personal standard cables. I did a quick double check with the same result. Then and there, I knew I’d be in for some really extended listening sessions—and I was. Mentally, I rationalized that this was a good result, i.e. now audiophiles don’t have to worry about cables offering increased performance at ever escalating prices—how nice to have hit a limiting plateau. So I thought at the time.

But time marches on. For the next few weeks, I

listened only to the Kimber Select loudspeaker cable. After that, I started doing comparative listening evaluations in an alternating pattern; if the Kimber Select started a session, it would end the next session. Something was happening. In my experience, break-in or burn-in of components results in changes

After lots of listening, I came to the conclusion I was hearing more detail.

listening impressions were surprise mixed with disappointment. One of the first things that registers with me when trying to listen to a new component is tonal balance (make your own decision whether or not to consider cables as a component). I didn’t hear a tonal (frequency balance variation) difference; in

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mainly related to frequency dependent (tonal) variations. That simply did not happen this time; tonal balance stayed pretty much (but not entirely) the same. During this time I bought four Mercury LPs at a record show. As a double check, I started using them plus two "new" pop recordings instead of my usual selections. The Mercurys were: Gershwin's *Rhapsody In Blue & Concerto In F*, SR-90002; *Marching Along*, SR-90105; Schumann's *Sym-phony No. 3 (Rhenish)*, SR-90133, and *Folksong Suites & Other British Band Classics*, SR-90388. This last recording turned out to be a bit of a gem in almost every respect. I'm very familiar with the music, which is basically light-classical in nature and very tuneful. Fredrick Fennel, the Eastman Rochester Orchestra and the unnamed recording

engineer all shine here. This disc is almost of demonstration quality, beautifully natural with an unusually satisfying and extended low-frequency response. If you find a copy of this album, do not look at the back cover for recording information until after

Love" and "What The World Needs Now" from Dionne Warwick's *The Collection*, Arista/Dione 1. The results of using these unfamiliar recordings duplicated the aural impressions I obtained from using my old favorites. An unexpected repetitious result was the sensation of relaxation. I simply and routinely felt more relaxed when listening with the Kimber Select KS-3033 loudspeaker cables. Searching for the answer to this phenomenon finally yielded results.

As a music lover, I want these cables; as a reviewer, I need them.

listening to the Vaughan Williams suite. See if you find it hard to believe what the cover claims; it certainly impressed me. The "new" pop albums and songs that entered the "fray" were "Autumn Leaves" and "Didn't Know What Time It Was" from Sarah Vaughan's *Crazy and Mixed Up*, Pablo-2312-137 and "The Look of

It became obvious that more detail was clearly getting through, even in musical passages that were far less than loud. Pointedly, other cables were audibly smearing these same passages. This smearing was mostly from the mid-range on up and not in the lower mid-range area on down. In isolated passages, at times there were

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slight changes in high frequency tonal balances, but it went both ways! In some passages, there was some added brightness while others became a bit sweeter or less bright. This was particularly noticeable with the female vocalists. Essentially the same results were obtained with two particularly fine CDs, Diane Krall *Love Scenes*, Impulse IMP-233 an almost retro album reminiscent of the '50s and *Symphonic Star Trek*, Telarc 80383. The Telarc album adds a few appropriate (to this old Trekkie's thinking) sound effects. These characteristics resulted because of my very extended break-in listening time. Be forewarned, if you have an opportunity to audition these fine cables, first make *certain* they've been thoroughly broken-in for at least 50 and preferably more than 100 hours. Later I received samples of the Kimber/WBT new sandwich-spade lug; it looks

impressive. Rest assured; if you prefer using spade lugs, you'll find that they sound at least as good as the expanding locking WBT banana lugs.

In summary, the Kimber Select KS-3033 loudspeaker cable offers a uniquely designed geometry. This approach is claimed to keep all negative characteristics of cable performance at extremely low measured levels. With the KS-3033, this translates into a tonal balance that is definitely in the neutral range, though a bit on the sweet edge of that narrow range. It is probably bested by both of its two more expensive Select siblings, though I've not listened to either one. Realizing that I've not had the opportunity (and what a daunting project that would be) to compare it with most of its serious rivals, the Kimber Select is possibly uniquely offering a smooth, sweet and yet extremely detailed

response. This very detailed response (after a long break-in time) does not result from any hyping in frequency response, nor underplaying the bass or warmth range. The response does seem to be very extended with no obvious contouring to make it sound so smooth. It is aimed at veteran audiophiles, as well as music lovers, grown tired of searching. It is doubtful that newcomers to this field will fully appreciate its qualities or realize that at its relatively high price, Kimber's Select may actually be a bit of a bargain. It does seem to complement Kimber's KCAG interconnect cable I reviewed recently very well.

First of all, I am a music lover; as such I want to use the Kimber Select speaker cables. As a reviewer I need the Kimber Select KS 3033 cables; they're a better tool. I intend to keep this pair. After all, Kimber's KS 3033 cables are my new reference.

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Brian Walsh

Greybeard KB/2/2 Loudspeaker



SEVERAL MEMBERS of the Chicago Audio Society got together last fall to audition a pair of Greybeard KB/2/2 speakers, on loan from the manufacturer. While vacationing in Portland, Oregon a few weeks before, I had visited the folks at Greybeard at their nearby facility and heard a prototype of their then-unavailable three-way speaker and was impressed.

Prior to the group audition, the speakers required the better part of 200 hours to break in.

They use the same basic Scanspeak seven-inch mid-woofer as some other well-respected speakers, such as ProAc, together with a one-inch Scanspeak silk dome tweeter. The cabinets measure $9\frac{1}{4}$ inches wide by $17\frac{3}{4}$ inches deep by $43\frac{1}{2}$ inches, are very rigidly braced, have a long downward-firing vent, and are constructed of a heavy composite of materials including either black ceramic tile or slate on the exterior. (Other finishes are available as

options; Greybeard says they don't use wood because it's not dense enough.) The crossover is in a mechanically isolated enclosure which serves as a support and elevates the tweeter to ear level. The speakers we auditioned were fitted with dual speaker terminals, with bi-wiring recommended. They're heavy

*Brian Walsh is president and founder of the Chicago Audio Society. His addiction to hi-fi and music began with playing records on his parents' tube console system and playing trumpet in high school and college bands.

(about 110 pounds each), and the structural rigidity and mechanical damping make the cabinets non-resonant, to reduce coloration by cabinet vibration. You may or may not like the appearance of the tile finish, which basically looks like black tile with black grout and personally, I would prefer them in granite, Fountainhead, etc. Greybeard showed a larger prototype three-way speaker at WCES '99 that had an attractive marble finish; we'll see if that comes to market. Incidentally, they won the Innovations 99 Design and Engineering Award for the KB/2/2. All their designs use removable acoustically transparent, sculpted foam grilles.

The KB/2/2's demand careful speaker positioning, yet the time is well spent. In my listening arrangement, they needed significant toe in, with the radiating pattern crossing just in front of the prime listening position, to get the best sound.

Other listeners with other types of rooms may find a closer, more parallel positioning more effective. As could be expected with speakers with narrow front baffles, imaging is outstanding and presents a fairly wide window, although sitting in the sweet spot has its rewards. The speakers need to be at least two feet away from the wall behind them, the manual explains.

The Greybeards work with solid-state or tube electronics; the manufacturer notes with some apparent pride that they are tube-friendly. Rated output ("sensitivity") of the nominal 6-ohm load speaker is 87 dB SPL

The Greybeard KB/2/2 speakers need careful positioning, but the work will pay off in good sonics.

(1W/1M), with 100 watts as the recommended power rating of associated amp or receiver (minimum of 30 watts for a tube amp or 60 watts for solid state, maximum of 300 watts). I used a pair of Atma-Sphere MA-1 OTL tube monoblocks, which put out about 100 watts each. Don't expect to be able to drive them with low-powered single-ended triodes—the crossover needs some muscle behind it, to avoid midrange suckout and potential loss of depth and detail.

So, How'd They Sound?

The resulting sound was open and full of vitality and rhythm. The KB/2/2 speakers ranked high in the "goosebump" department yet have little sound of their own. Highs are extended and clear while being relatively smooth, the midrange shows good definition and clarity, and the bass is relatively deep and well controlled—they claim 29

Hz (which I assume to be "in room," not anechoic). That's respectable for most speakers, very good for a single seven-inch driver.

On Al DiMeola's *Kiss My Axe* CD, all the impact and detail were there, with sharp focus. Track 12 has much of the sound coming from the left and right speakers while DiMeola speaks in the rear center. On some systems you won't hear or understand what he is saying, indicating smear-

ing of detail due to resonances and speaker radiating pattern anomalies. The Greybeards reproduced the words very intelligibly, once the speakers were positioned correctly in the room.

On the *Turtle Creek Chorale Postcards* (Reference Recordings), the choir voices were distinct, extending outside the speakers and well behind, with lots of hall ambience adding to the effect of being there. The King's Singers on *Good Vibrations* singing Freddie Mercury's "Seaside Rendezvous" were almost in the room, complete with kazoos—it was a hoot! Subtleties such as singers turning their heads, whispering, and so on were clearly audible.

The bass could be just a little fuller and richer to match the rest of the spectrum reproduced by the Greybeards. This may well be due to the inherent limitations of using a seven-inch driver—there's only so much air you can move with such a unit, and to get high playback levels and deep, authoritative bass, you must move a lot of air. These speakers won't fill a concert hall, yet they do well in small- to medium-size rooms. Bass freaks who demand thunderous pedal organ reproduction should probably look elsewhere,

N O T E S

Greybeard KB/2/2 Loudspeaker, standard version \$5,850.00 the pair; KB/2/2/se biwireable version, \$6,570.00 the pair. Greybeard Audio, P.O. Box 4505, Vancouver, WA 98662; phone 360/260-1147, fax 360/260-8417; web address www.gbaudio.com.

while those who feel that a strong open "E" on an electric bass is enough will find the Greybeard's bass to be articulate and natural. As noted above, the tweeter is smooth sounding, as exemplified by the reproduction of vocals and hall ambience. However, it is worth mentioning they may sound a little bright and forward with some amplifiers. Matching of amplifiers and cabling to the speakers is important.

With the right source material and components, the speakers just about disappear, but not totally. The limitations may be the drivers or the components in the third-order crossovers. At the same time they reveal the flaws of recordings pretty well, as well as flaws in the rest of the playback chain, but they do it a little forgivingly. I find this to be a characteristic of a fine component which lets

you forget about the equipment and enjoy the music.

What is so addictive about these speakers is their rhythm and pace—it is almost impossible *not* to start tapping your toes, nodding your head, or oth-

These speakers can be addictive; it's almost impossible *not* to start tapping your toes!

erwise getting involved in the music. I found this true for classical music as well as jazz and rock—they just kicked! This is an aspect ignored by too many designers and listeners alike, at least in the execution. It seems attributable to drivers with small radiating areas that are mounted in highly nonresonant enclosures. At least, that is what I've found.

When I auditioned the KB/2/2, the list price was \$5500 the pair. Since then Greybeard has revised the speaker and raised the price a little, offering it in the standard version with a single pair of speaker terminals for \$5850 and the KB/2/2/se biwireable version with upgraded wire and binding posts for \$6570. The cost is significant for a two-way speaker, yet the quantity and quality of sound produced compares well


with other speakers in the price range. The Greybeards are well worth auditioning, along with a relatively few others. The Model KB/3/3 has yet to make its appearance, but it is said to have bass extension to 20 Hz. I don't know how far off in the future it will be available, but it probably will be at a considerably higher cost. Might as well enjoy these in the meantime.

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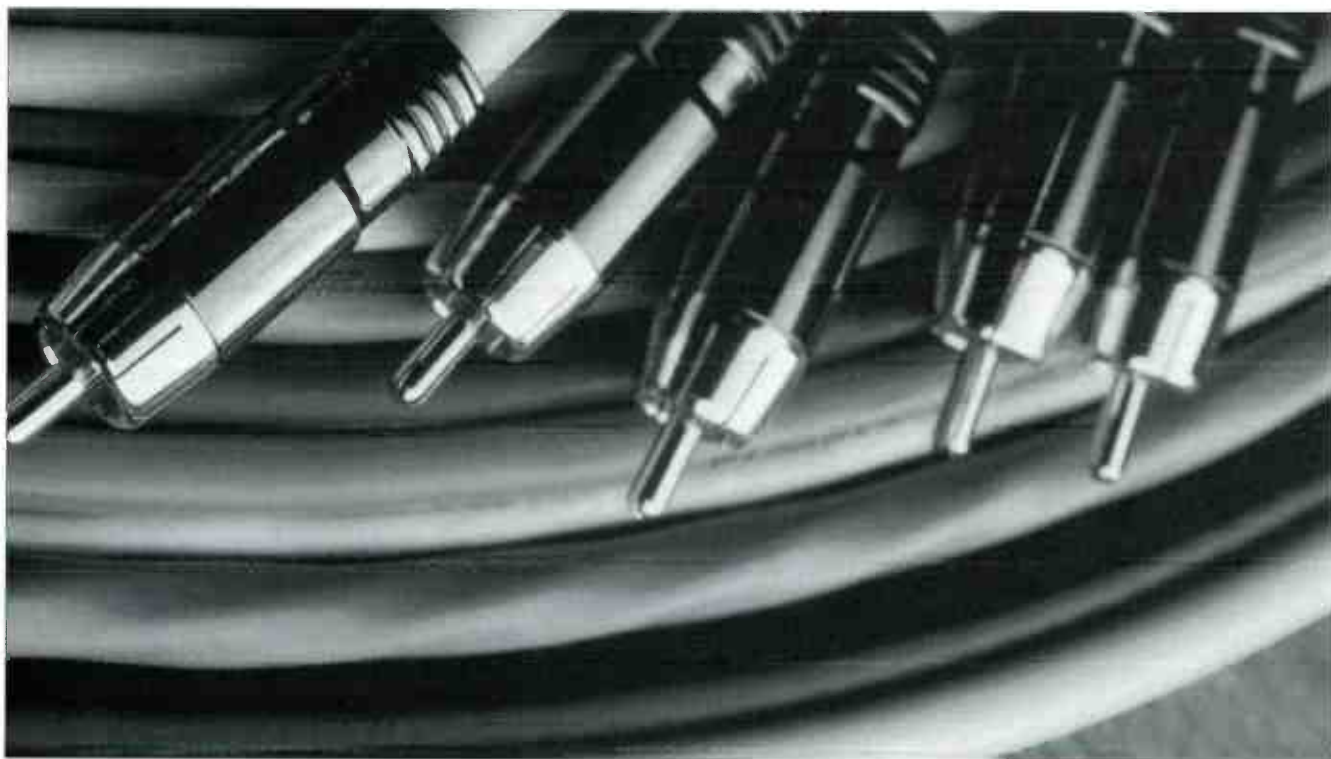
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HOW OFTEN do you read reviews of fancy designer cables or interconnects which seem to be the very thing you're looking for, except for their price? So far as I'm concerned, the cost of far too many cables in today's high-end market is absolutely ridiculous! Can you imagine prices at several thousand dollars per meter? They're out there, just take a look in *Audio Magazine's*

Annual Equipment Directory that comes out each October. In one place I see \$11,995 for a 10-foot pair; in another, I see \$50,000+ for a 15-meter set. Sorry, guys, instead of setting the industry on its ear, pricing like this has some of us turning deaf ears! I don't give a hoot what other reviewers say: If you think for one moment that the most expensive cable simply "has" to

be the best, you've been reading too many magazines and not doing enough comparison listening homework!

Perhaps some audiophiles are probably too rich to spend the amount of time we poor folks have to in our listening comparisons but I think some cable manufacturers are hurting this industry with their ever-increasing, stratospheric pricing poli-

NOTES

Barracuda cables, price depends on configuration. Manufactured and distributed by Custom House, 8 Matthews Dr., Suite 3, East Haddam, CT 06423; phone 860/873-9494, fax 860/873-2721.

cies. "Six nines," "pure silver," "OFC," "flat geometry," etc, etc, everyone has their own buzz words. I sound upset, don't I? Well, you would too if you had spent the time I have making these cable comparisons, only to find very small differences and very grandiose prices.

What's the limit to this monetary madness?

At a friend's house, I recently listened to a fancy cable set-up that cost more than 50 THOUSAND DOLLARS! The gentleman, who was auditioning these cables owned a pretty fantastic system, cables aside, but when he came to my house and heard my system, which uses very inexpensive Barracuda cables from Custom House, he preferred the sound of my system in many ways! When he finally asked me what cables I was trying out, he asked the fifty thousand dollar question:

"How much?"

I smugly replied, "Six hundred dollars."

"A meter?" he asked.

"No, the entire wire setup, including power cords!" I proudly announced. Well, friends, you could hear his skin shrinking about this time, while he was trying to disappear and hide.

That was the last time I saw or ever spoke to that gentleman. He hasn't returned any of my calls, but can you blame him? I certainly can't!

Custom House is owned by Bob Finch, one of hi-fi's true

nice guys, who is an avid audiophile as well as a home theater buff. More importantly, he designs cables that are very cost effective. I know plenty of guys who like to brag about making their own cables, but they don't make cost-effective cables like Finch's.

A couple of years ago I did a review of these cables which was intended for *The Audiophile Voice*. They were great sounding at the time, so I decided to follow up on Bob's latest work when I put together my new system. Mr. Finch has a new line out, called Barracuda, since he believes his new cables will "eat up" other higher priced cables for breakfast! We shall see, dear readers.

My system is composed of the great Von Schweikert Research VR-6 speakers ("Redefining Transparency" should be their motto), Ed Meitner's Museatex BiDat processor and transport, the Z-Systems preamp complete with digital equalizer, the HRS Harmonic Recovery System in conjunction with the TDS True Dimensional Sound Processor, and the mighty KR Enterprises VT800 mono block amps, which are the finest I've ever heard.

Previous cables in my system have been Alpha Core AG-1 Silver and the Renaissance Audio Water Cables also using pure silver conductors. These are both expensive, but are not outrageous i.e., they don't cost as much as a Mercedes, and especially "not outrageous" if

you consider they are made of silver. Their sound has been great in my system.

So how did the Barracuda cables sound with this killer rig? Very fine, thank you!

The first disc up was from the box set of *The Complete Recordings, Keith Jarrett Live at the Blue Note*, the tune was a composition by Jules Styne and Sammy Cahn called "I Fall In Love Too Easily," featuring Jack DeJohnette on drums and Gary Peacock on bass. Well, it didn't take long to hear what the Barracudas were doing right. This song has such a delicate and soft approach that you could cry, but I was simply floored when I heard DeJohnette quietly stroke the snare drum. The transparency of the small and quiet beats was amazing, not glossed over by the inexpensive cables. The overall speed and timing of the drums sounded "fast," but there was no messing around with the decay. The sense of focus to each note was dramatic as well, sounding as if each image was locked into place.

Keith Jarrett's piano is the obvious center of attraction on this record and, as is typical of other ECM recordings, sounds simply wonderful. However, some of his piano tones become "hard" when played loud. This might simply be Keith's attack on this live recording, but I found to my pleasure that the Barracuda cables seemed to downplay this "ringing." Definitely a bonus.

Although the imaging seemed fine, with nice focus, the size of the sound stage seemed to be slightly truncated or shrunken when compared to the huge stage generated by the Alpha Core AG-1 Silver wires. However, this larger and more

transparent image size comes at a price! Namely bigger bucks.

But the bass. Yes, the bass is where the Barracudas really shine, taking me completely by surprise. Man, the bass was great! This cable from Custom House has the ability to snap DeJohnette's playing right into focus, all the way down to the tight bass pedal. Peacock's bass now seemed easier to hear as well, the plucked notes now jumped out at me (with no artificial effect).

Quick and clean with no caffeine! With very low notes, there was no slowing down or blurring the speed of the bass as I've heard with lesser cables. The Alpha Core AG-1 Silver cables also avoided muddling the bass but did not produce quite the "popping out" effect on each bass note.

The imaging, soundstage, and focus produced by the

Barracudas are quite good, besting cables at twice their reasonable price.

So what doesn't it do as well as the Ten Grand Stuff, you ask? Well, maybe not surprisingly, the Barracudas don't sound quite as smooth as the

If you want cost-effective cables, ones that sound good and won't kill your wallet, look no further.

Renaissance Audio Water Cables, nor do they have the exquisite purity and proper tonal balance of the new Harmonic Technology cables, which might become the new "miracle" cable of the decade.

But guess what, the Barracuda isn't completely "blown away" by the hyper-expensive cables either, since they don't do anything terribly

wrong! And they're dirt cheap, *kemo sabe!*

I don't quite know what to think about the cable industry after auditioning the Custom House Barracuda cables. I have several friends who have thanked me several times quite profusely since I recommended these cables to them. Their systems are at the mid-priced level, so recommending these cables just made sense. But recommending them also made me a hero to these friends who also need money for some of the other things in their life—like food and rent!

Can you ask for a better deal than these cables? I really don't think so!

I am happy to say that these cables are, therefore, highly recommended for all systems in the low- to mid-priced (\$1,000 to \$25,000) categories.

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Sennheiser HD 600 Headphones

Christopher Reardon-Noblet

I HAVE SPENT a good deal of time with these headphones—a fair chunk of which has been in a highly critical mode, seeking faults or areas of vulnerability. The effort proved fruitless: By a distance—a good distance—the Sennheiser HD 600 is the best set of dynamic headphones I've ever used.

The Sennheiser HD 600 headphones is a professional device bred for musicians, producers and engineers. From an audio amateur's standpoint, however, these 'phones are an invaluable reference tool for system maintenance and improvement. In fact, they helped me analyze and make such improvements. They are unfailingly neutral and revealing, and at the same time—because of those traits—they can be an absolute kick when all you're doing is listening for pleasure.

These 'phones will not disguise response aberrations, coloration or other distortions in associated equipment. Yet, as accurate as they are in reproducing the offens-

es of other gear in one's system, they are rarely offensive on their own, at least in the varied circumstances in which I used them. They are always easy on the ears when played at reasonable volume levels, and indeed, if you use them with good ancillary equipment, you will have to be very careful with volume levels to avoid possible damage to your hearing. They sound so good that with, say, rock music you may easily be tempted to turn them way up—which is not a wise course if you want to avoid becoming a chronic tinnitus sufferer.

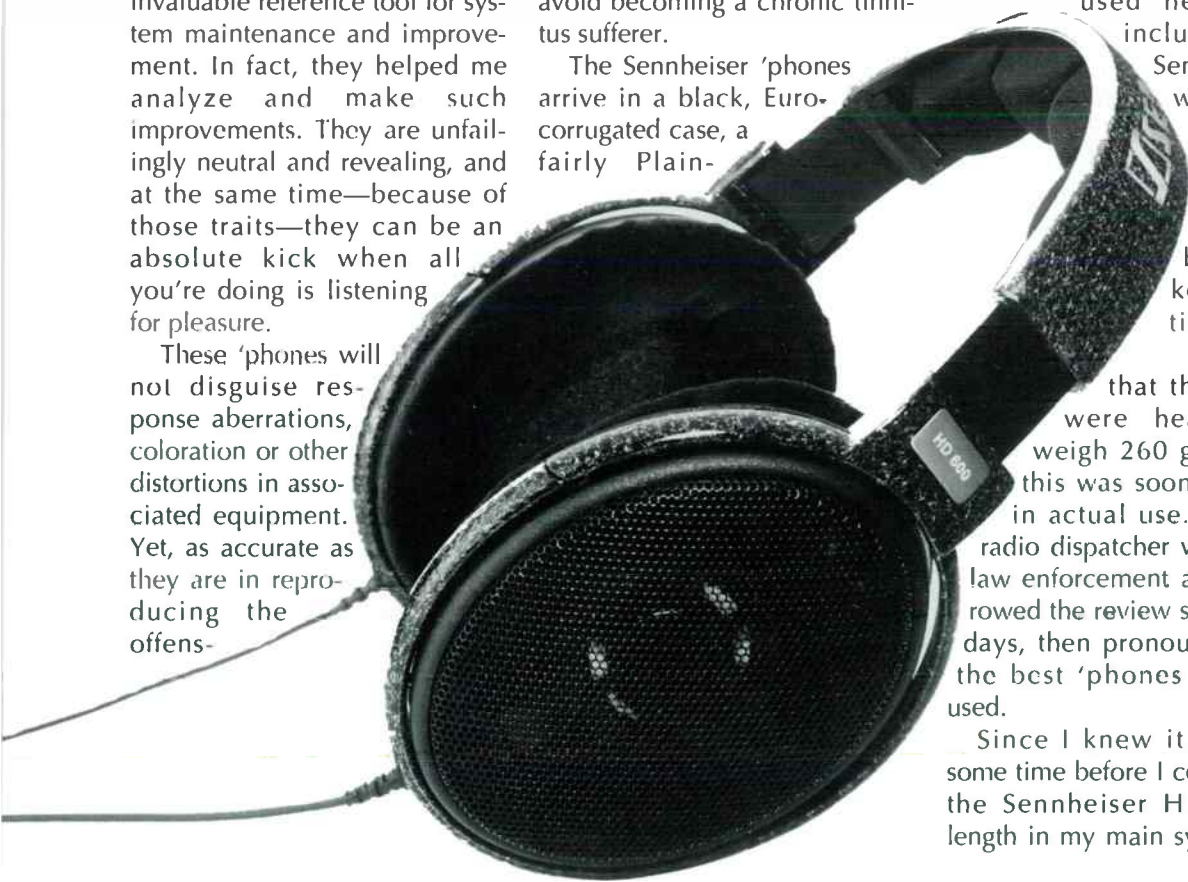
The Sennheiser 'phones arrive in a black, Euro-corrugated case, a fairly Plain-

Jane affair. I do admire a high-end company that isn't compelled to ensconce one of their premier products in ersatz luxury packaging. The 'phones themselves have a glossy, black/gray dappled or marble finish, with large, black, mesh-covered earpieces. The cord is Kevlar reinforced and, per the manufacturer's claim, does indeed have very low handling noise. The plug is a gold-plated miniplug with a quarter-inch adapter, also gold-plated. Intermittent contact—a bugbear with some well-

used headphones including older Sennheisers—was never a problem.

Placing them on the ol' brain basket, my initial impression was that the 'phones were heavy (they weigh 260 grams), but this was soon disproved in actual use. Indeed, a radio dispatcher with a local law enforcement agency borrowed the review set for a few days, then pronounced them the best 'phones he'd ever used.

Since I knew it would be some time before I could review the Sennheiser HD 600s at length in my main system, I put



them into service with as little regard one might show a \$20 set of earbuds. Portable CD player, portable short-wave radio, family room system, Walkman cassette player—the Sennheisers sounded good with any halfway decent source. No doubt, that was not Sennheiser's prime intention when developing these pro-quality headphones, but it's still a nice extra.

Listening to my Grundig Yacht Boy radio, I was delighted by the quality of the stereo FM sound available through its headphone output, a quality thoroughly belied by its tinny sounding external speaker. Listening to symphonic music was an emotionally involving experience—my personal touchstone for any sound reproducer.

They don't sound bad on El Cheapo equipment, but could they cut the mustard from an audiomaniac standpoint? Yes, indeed. With their wonderfully clear, open, precise, neutral and revealing sound, the Sennheiser HD 600s proved their value over several months as a serious tool for system improvement.

In fact, these 'phones posed a real challenge to the rest of my system. I was now able to hear through to the source as never before. On first plugging them into the headphone outputs of my Sony CDP-XA1ES CD player and playing The Corrs' "Talk on Corners" (Atlantic/143 Records/Lava 83106-2), I was astonished. The bass was of such a quality—what seemed like literally body-shaking impact—that I was sure I had left my main speakers and sub-woofer turned on. The Sennheisers' quality had deceived me. All by themselves, through the underrated headphone section of this underrated

player, I experienced the sense of a full-range speaker system complete with the bass as a bodily, not simply aural, sensation.

And yet . . . the midrange and treble seemed somewhat lifeless and flat. I had recently heard the same Corrs CD through a set of Philips' finest headphones (SBC HP900) via a Marantz. Initially,

**An absolutely
outstanding, altogether
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through the Sennheiser, qualities of intimacy and emotionality that I had experienced with the Marantz/Philips setup seemed somehow absent and the sound strangely uninvolved. Thus, I tried the world-class headphone output of my Cary CAD-300 SEI amplifier, connected to the Sony CD player by Kimber PBJ interconnect. The sound was equally disappointing, so I realized the problem clearly could not be attributed solely to the CD player's headphone output.

I switched playback formats and began listening to LPs on my Thorens TD-320 MkII turntable through the marvelous little Thorens MM 001 phono preamp into the Cary SET amp. There it was, the enjoyable sense of musicality that I always look for! Certainly, the Thorens table's faults were clearly revealed by the Sennheisers, but the experience was nonetheless highly enjoyable.

"Okay," I thought, "The problem must be with the CD player." This being my third player in a decade and with SACD seemingly right around the corner, I wasn't going to drop money on yet another new CD

player. Besides, the CDP-XA1ES is a close relative of the famed Sony CDP-715E, which some serious ears still consider to be truly outstanding in performance. You may sign off now if you wish, I'm a firm believer that unwanted vibration can have a significant negative effect on the sound of a CD player. No less a CD authority than Sony itself, in its 1994 Annual Report, attributed the improved sound in a new top-of-the-line CD player to improvements in vibration control in a transport mechanism (no mention of vibration's

effects on the electronics, by the way). I know the levels of corporate scrutiny such annual reports undergo, and if the Sony Corporation claims parasitic vibrations affect the performance of its CD players—well, let's just say their engineers have hard-earned experience.

In keeping with my budget audiophile beliefs, I had already suspended the player on a pneumatic sandwich of MDF shelf, inflatable vinyl airline neckpad, IKEA marble pastry board, four 3x3x1-inch slabs of industrial Sorbothane, and a heavy book on architecture. The book was by far the most expensive part of this not unattractive tweak sandwich.

Now I performed a series of operations picked up via gossip, technical articles, and various audio-maniac publications. From Europe, the finest imported Blu-Tak jammed into every nook and cranny of the CD player transport and chassis—thus ending my five-year Sony ES warranty. On with the headphones. "Yep, definitely better, but not in the Marantz Model 17 league."

Out to the local Best Buy for four sheets of Dynamat, applied

in double thickness to all accessible surfaces on the interior of the CD player. Check with the Sennheisers. "Wow! Sounds even better." I tap on the CD player case. In comparison with the former sheet metal clang, the result is a nice, dull thud—accompanied by a nasty little high-pitched ring! Off with the cover, and 15 or 20 minutes of tapping later, I identify the source of the buzz. On the main board, a capacitor and resistor, not quite touching, but vibrating against each other at the merest provocation. I bend them apart, tap the chassis and the ring is gone.

Finally, I deal with the issue of a half-foot of unshielded power cord snaking through the innards of my CD player before plugging into a circuit board near the transformer. How to deal with this possible radiating source? I reach into my trusty pile of ferrite clamps, picked up at a local electronic surplus store for two bucks a pop. I put clamps along the cord from where it enters the case to where it plugs into the circuit board. Then I add another small clamp on the short cable between the power supply board and the main circuit

board. Case back on, plug back in, I plugged the HD 600 headphones into the CD player.

"Holy Geez! Who said this was a budget player?" Music through the 'phones was now sounding great!

But there was a downside (there's always a downside). Now, my loudspeakers were sounding rough and uneven. To make a long story short, I first moved and rebalanced my main speakers and subwoofer, then upgraded and out-boarded the crossovers in my Mission 752 loudspeakers, and finally replaced the Kimber PBJ interconnects between CD player and amplifier with Silver Streaks. The sum of these changes made a marked improvement to the sound of my system—due in great measure to the use of the Sennheisers as a diagnostic tool.

And to summarize the characteristics of these truly excellent headphones: Clear, open, uncolored, dynamic, neutral, revealing. Not "unfailingly musical" (i.e., euphonic) but when the equipment through which you use them is properly set up, they are musical, indeed. An absolutely outstanding, altogether essential product.

NOTES

Sennheiser HD 600 Dynamic Headphones; \$400. Nominal impedance, 300 ohms. U.S. Distributor: Sennheiser Electronic Corporation, P.O. Box 987, One Enterprise Drive, Old Lyme, CT 06371; phone: 860/434-9190; fax 860/434-9022; website <http://www.sennheiserusa.com>.

Associated Equipment

Sony CDP-XA1ES CD player, Thorens TD-320 MkII turntable with Shure V15 cartridge, Thorens MM-001 phono preamplifier, Kimber PBJ and Silver Streak interconnects, Cary CAD 300 SEI amplifier, Alphacore Goertz MI1 loudspeaker cable, Mission 752 loudspeakers, REL Strata II subwoofer.

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Don Keele, Audio, August 1998

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C. Perry, Audiophile Voice, V4 #4

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THIS SPEAKER SYSTEM is an Imperial Model from Chicago's Jensen company and was built about 1955 in the proud corner-horn tradition. Others of this type include the Electro-Voice Patrician from Buchanan, Michigan, and the Klipschorn from the Klipsch company (perhaps obviously) of Hope, Arkansas. Hi-fi at this time was about high-efficiency speakers and low-output amplifiers. My father teamed this Imperial in a mono system with H.H. Scott tuner and amp which had been built up from kits. He doesn't use these three pieces any more, though at 84 he still appreciates good sound and good jazz, particularly in the form of pre-war Ellington Big Band.—*The Editor.*

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Home Theater, Feb, 97

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The Sensible Sound, Issue # 60

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Stereo Review, Dec. 96

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