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World Radio History

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### MARKET SURVEY:

Stereo Amplifiers	Anthem MCA 2	Adcom GFA-5400	B&K ST1400 II	Acurus A100
Rated Power w/ch-8 ohms*	200	125	125	100
Rated Power w/ch-4 ohms*	350	200	185	150
S/N Ratio	122dB	>100dB	95dB	110dB
VA Rating (Max.)	800	960	450	450
# of Output Devices/ch	8	6	4	4
Balanced Inputs (Standard)	Yes	No	Yes	No
Trigger On (5-24V signal)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Auto On (music signal)	Yes	No	No	No
Warranty ≥ 5 Years	Yes	No	Yes	No
Weight (lbs)	36	26	1	19
Dollars/Watt	\$3.50	\$5.44	\$5.58	\$6.99
Amplification Type	Solid State	Solid State	Solid State	Solid State
Retail Price (US\$)	\$699	\$680	\$698	\$699

The information contained in this chart has been sourced from manufacturer brochures, web pages, reviews and physical examinations. It is accurate to the best of our knowledge, as of September 1, 1999. Sonic Frontiers International makes no warranty, either expressed or implied, as to the accuracy of this chart. Manufacturer specifications are subject to change. Contact them directly to confirm. This illustration is for comparison purposes only. \*Rated power achieved with a minimum of one channel driven. Note: The MCA 2 attains 190/270 w/ch (into 8 and 4 ohms respectively), both channels driven simultaneously, 20Hz to 20kHz, <1% THD.

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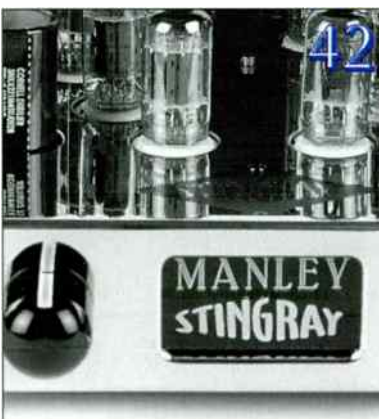
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ISSUE 6

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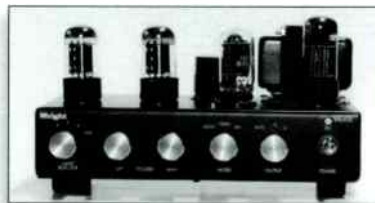
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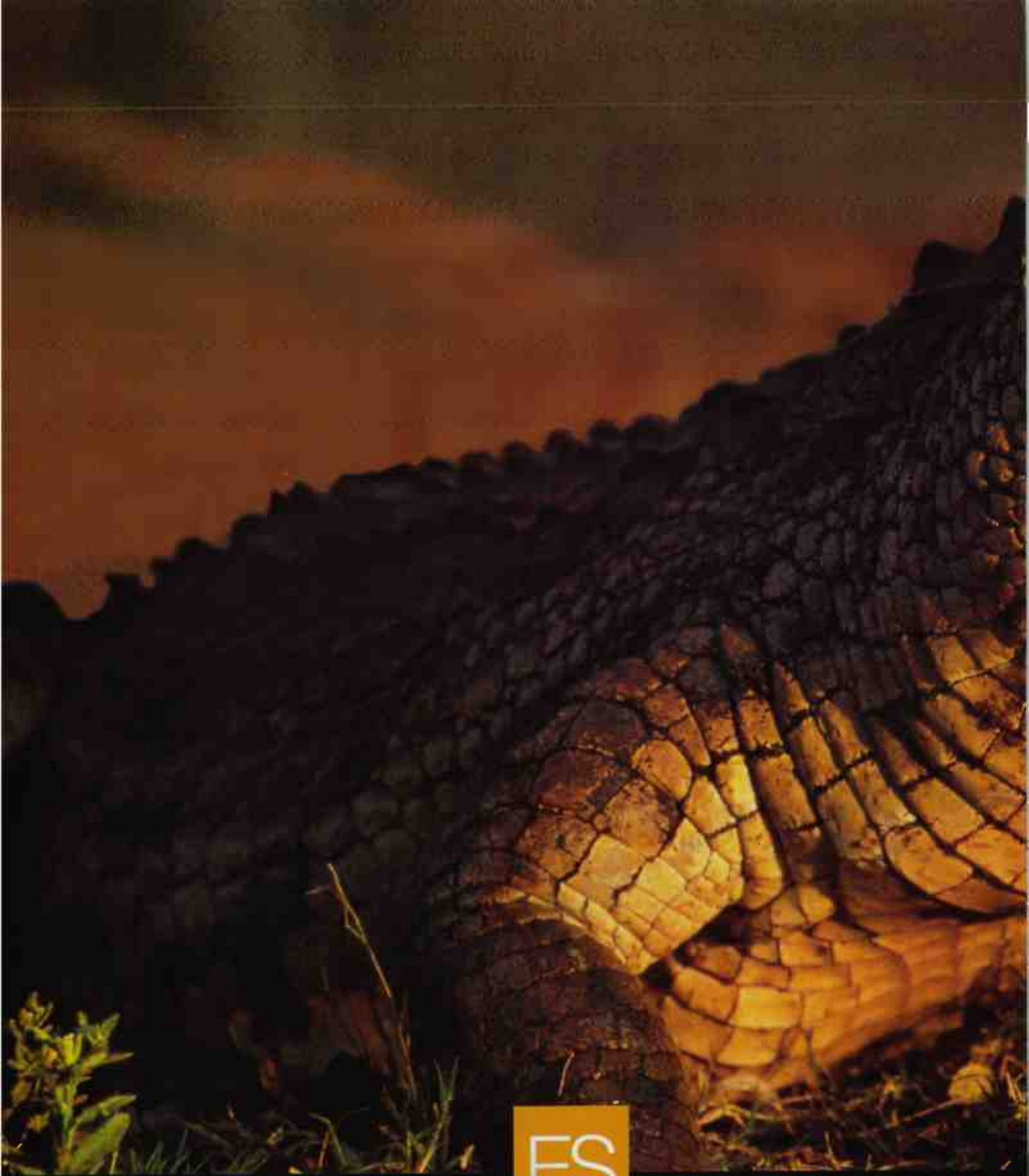


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# New Products

## The Quicksilver Audio Line Stage Preamp

uses just one 12AX7 tube per channel. The design goal is the clear, direct sound for which the firm has long been noted. Physical features include a remote volume control, which handles the motorized Alps precision attenuator, gold-plated RCA connectors with Teflon inserts, and an IEC-style connector for the a.c. power cable. The unit's circuitry offers wide bandwidth, which is spec'ed at 0.1 Hz to 60 kHz, and 18 dB of gain. Price: \$1,195.00. Data: 775/825-1514



## The Yamaha RP-U100 Personal Receiver

is, perhaps, the only true hi-fi component to treat the home computer as an important and serious audio source. It combines well-known audio and surround-sound technologies, such as Yamaha's Digital Sound Field Processing and Dolby Digital, with a computer interface via a Universal Serial Bus (USB). This allows the system to bypass the sound card, typically of lower audio quality than most hi-fi gear, and stream digital audio directly from the computer. In addition to control software that Yamaha provides, the system supports standard hot plugging and Plug-and-Play, thus optimizing the potential of Net-based music such as MP3, DVDs and CD-based computer games, and DVD movies. This receiver offers Virtual Dolby Digital which creates a three-dimensional sound field but uses only two speakers, an advanced technique based on Yamaha's sophisticated proprietary research into the sonics of clubs, halls, churches, and the like. Price: \$499.95. Data: [www.yamaha.com](http://www.yamaha.com).



## The B&K PT-3 AM/FM Tuner Preamp

is a comprehensive control center, virtually everything a preamplifier can be, together with a quality AM/FM tuner that includes a "set and forget" preset system. With each station or external source selected, the PT-3's presets will return the unit to the user's preferred settings for volume, bass, treble, balance, loudness, and headphone mode. The names of each preset and input can be customized so that the "power on" titles will display almost anything the user desires. The unit offers six audio inputs, variable-level high-pass and full-range outputs, an infrared input system, and can be upgraded to RS-232 control. Price: \$598.00. Data: [www.bkcomp.com](http://www.bkcomp.com).



### Richard Gray's Power Company

is said to quench a.c. line noise while improving delivery of high current on demand. Initial evaluations with a 27-inch Sony Wega TV show reduced "jitter" on station logos, improved coloration, and better three-dimensionality. We plan to run a full review shortly. Price: Model 400S, \$700.00.

Data: 800/880-3474.



### The Bel Canto SET140

is an integrated amplifier combining the same circuitry as their SET40, a 40-watt basic amp, with three RCA inputs and a remote control. The SET140's circuitry features wide-bandwidth, Class-A, single-ended triode operation, with zero audio-signal feedback and automatic tube biasing. Tube compliment is two 845 power output tubes and four 12AX7 driver tubes. Frequency response is 5 Hz to 40 kHz, +/-3 dB. Price: \$5,200.00.

Data: 612/317-4550.



# Q: How many subwoofers are in this speaker cabinet?





## Rude, Mean, and Square

Dear Editor:

Congratulations on a fine magazine. Great reading with good musical and equipment commentary.

Your Vol. 5, Issue 4 has only one reference to "rms power" (on page 6, the new product description of the GW Labs Model 270 power amplifier). Most audio magazines are loaded with references to this phony term. Therefore, I give you my compliments!

For those readers who don't know what's being talking about, rms (root-mean-square) is a term for describing the sine-wave voltage or current which produces average power. There is no such thing as "rms power" and those who use it are ignorant of the science of electrical terms. What most people really mean when they use the term "rms power" is "continuous average power."

Almon H. Clegg, Chairman,  
IEC SC100C Standards  
Committee for

Audio, Video and Multimedia  
Systems and Subsystems

*The Editor responds:*

Thanks for the nice words; hope we continue to please. However, I have to admit it, Almon, you caught me, as Paul Klipsch caught me on this one a couple of decades ago. A little further explanation for the non-technically oriented readers might be in order here, too. One doesn't measure "power," but instead measures voltage, and calculates the power from that voltage, at a defined level of dis-

tortion (say 0.5% total harmonic distortion) and with a specific load, e.g. an 8-ohm speaker, at a certain frequency or over certain frequency range. All those things *must* be there; otherwise, the person doing the spec can fudge the numbers.

## Dealer-ing

Dear Editor:

I couldn't believe it. I stopped by a local high-end store today for the first time in ages. I know everyone there, and wanted to tell them that, in my new guise as a reviewer, I wished to come by when I had more time to hear what their premier system sounded like. The owner said okay, but then spent five unstop-pable minutes going on and on about reviewers and how they hurt businesses and why I should not be a reviewer. I kept on trying to stop him so I could leave. I literally told him that I didn't want to continue the conversation, that I had come in with a positive attitude and wished to leave feeling similarly. He just wouldn't stop: Larry Archibald and politics, people laugh at reviews. "The people who buy from us don't read reviews; they just want to go home, turn on the equipment and enjoy music. Don't forget that the music is what's important. It's all about the music."

At one point, I even said, "Wait. Hold on a second. It's me, Jason. You know me. I've been here many times, and I've bought things from you. I'm still the same person. I haven't changed a bit." But he went on and on, ignoring my words and

body language. All this from a store owner whose manager praised to high heavens the Krell line until they stopped carrying it, after which he trashed it like crazy. It does make me wonder just whose integrity is ultimately at issue here.

Oh well. The positive thing I got from the experience was the need to emphasize that what I hear is totally system- and room-dependent. A good reminder. Helps a reviewer sound like less than God. And I also resolved to always make clear that the reason I listen to equipment closely is because of my desire and need to get closer to the heart and soul of the music and musicians I love.

I may go back to that store to listen. But next time, I'll take some very deep breaths before entering.

Jason Serinus  
healrnm@planeteria.net

## I Like It! I like It!

Dear Editor:

Great issue! Especially the MSB review! Who is that new guy, Driscoll, anyway? As to more review gear, I am new at this, so bear with me. Do I have to do anything? Do they ship to me or you? Again great issue.

Mike Driscoll,  
Agawam, MA

Dear Mike:

I assume that it's okay with you that I put this into our "letters" column. I should have phoned that other firm yesterday, after talking with my press contact on Friday; he has not responded to phone or fax liter-

ally for months. He had a full-time job with their parent firm prior to the acquisition and I believe he is wildly overloaded.... Hang tight. No, you don't have to do anything except if my contact wants to check you out—don't tell them what you're on parole for. Okay?

Best, Editor Gene,  
The TAV-ern

### Sense of Change

Dear Editor:

When TAV arrived in place of Fi, it started me thinking of all the names involved in my audiophile past. Magazines like *Hi Fi Review*, *Hi Fi Stereo Review*, *Stereo Review*. They weren't much but at the time what did I know? The original *Stereophile* which was converted into a technical journal by the lesser successors to JGH. *Sounds Like*, which rescued me from technobabble, and *Fi* which kept me afloat after *SL* sank. And now TAV which may eventually prove a worthy successor to the joy that was *Fi*.

And then there were the equipment names—Craftsman, Fisher, H.H. Scott, Marantz, Harmon Kardon, CM Labs, Nova, Krell, Altec, KLH, AR, Wharfedale, LWE, Apogee, Grey, Thorens, VPI, Pickering, Stanton, Decca, Signet, Genesis, Sony, SME, Well Tempered, Technics, Pioneer, Theta, Mark Levinson, Muse and peripherals from Advent, Koss, Phase Linear and Shun Mook.

And from all of the above came Phil's Laws about the reproduction of a music experience in the home:

1. Everything Matters.
2. Newer is not always better.
3. The room is at least as important as the equipment.
4. Recalibrate your ears with live music regularly (JGH).

For me, the loss of *Fi* magazine has been a very sad event. I wish only good things for all of the people who worked so hard to produce that fine publication. And I look forward with keen anticipation to all the things which I shall learn from TAV as we move on together. Thank you for reaching out to me.

Philip B. Fregeau  
via e-mail

### Better Base

Dear Editor:

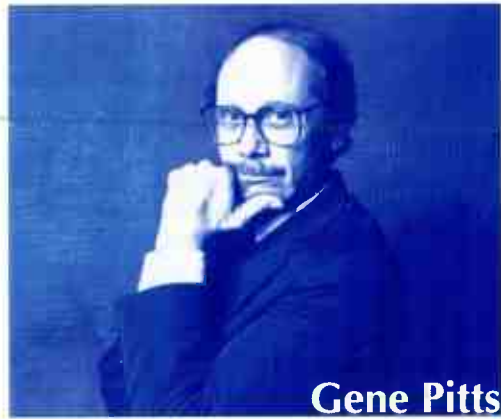
In Robert Perry's "FAX"ed cartridge review, he mentions using shims to get his Rega tonearm right. I think a better option is to use the VPI VTA base.

John Rader  
via e-mail

Visit [www.inductiondynamics.com](http://www.inductiondynamics.com) to find out!

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Gene Pitts

## Talking to Ourselves?



**Y**AHOO PUT OUT some very interesting figures not long ago concerning the penetration of computers and Internet use by eight "industrialized countries." Here are the nations with their populations (in millions) China, 1237; U.S., 270; Japan, 126; Germany, 82; U.K., 59; France, 59; Canada, 31, and Hong Kong, 6. I have to thank friend Almon Clegg for publishing this data in his "Tracks" column in *Replication News*.

It amazed me was how big the U.S. lead in percentage of Internet use was over the second place country, Japan, 50.5 per cent to 6.46 per cent. The U.K. was third at 5.37 per cent, Germany and Canada virtually tied at 4.73 and 4.3 per cent. Hong Kong was very distant at 0.36 per cent.

The U.S. also had the lead if one looked at the number of computers per 1,000 people, 499, as compared to second-place Canada's 400. While Hong Kong's computer penetration was high at 311 per thousand people, remember that their total population is relatively very low. France, Japan, and Germany were essentially tied at 272, 272, and 268, respectively. China has just seven computers per thousand residents. (Why, then, was that mystical sect, Falun Gong, or however it's spelled, thought to command such power through its e-mailings?) Darned if I know.

However, most discussions of the Internet and the WorldWideWeb carry assume the marketing and mail is going to the whole world. We can see from Yahoo's figures that isn't true, at least at present. But what about the future, when the Millennium of the Internet really gets rolling?

Since your crystal ball is at least as good as mine and maybe better, let's take a look at some further data Yahoo generated. They have a projection for the same Internet Eight countries of the number of users per 1000 people (is that one kilopeople? Is the unit of measurement U/kp?) for the year 2005. The U.S. is still going to be ahead of the rest, at 721; Canada second, with 665; Germany, 595; U.K., 582; France, 506; Hong

Kong jumps to 496, and leapfrogging past Japan's 381. While China will, Yahoo says, post the fastest rate of gain, it will still have only 27 Internet users per thousand people, up from its present 1.27 U/kp or about 18 per cent penetration.

I can't help but think that these rates of growth are so rapid as to simply clog the modems and methods we've used so far. We may well need something like e-Draino or e-Roto-Rooter in our toolkits to keep things moving at anything like the pace we now enjoy. There are, after all, technical limits to bandwidth and its application, though I recently read of a demo of satellite-enabled Internet Service that the participant termed "eye-popping" in speed. Surely, you all know the Sherlock Holmes stories of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. In several places, Doyle writes of the Imperial Mail service that delivers twice a day and sometimes same day within London. No mail service does that any more, at least not cheaply and not for the General Public's general consumption.

Is, then, the distribution of high-density program materials like music doomed to low quality? I think the answer is a definite maybe.

### Markings in the Water

The standard Red Book CD that we all know and love will start carrying a "digital watermark" as early as next Spring, the redoubtable Hilliary Rosen, president of the Recording Industry Association of America, said recently. Unlike the CopyCode System, which various record firms wanted to apply to the analog LP, application of the digital watermark ought not alter the sound.

### DEAR FRIENDS:

This is just fyi that barnes and noble's music website, of which I am associate editor, has been launched, and may be accessed at [www.bn.com](http://www.bn.com) and by asking for the music portion of the screen. There you may enjoy various interviews and reviews done by yours truly — happy reading!

All best regards, Benjamin Ivry

"The magic of the HD 600s  
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

## makes raves

The Sennheiser HD 600 is, quite simply, the finest dynamic headphone ever created. With its exceptionally smooth frequency response, remarkable clarity, and unparalleled comfort, it virtually speaks for itself. It's reassuring to know, of course, that everyone else seems to agree with what it has to say.

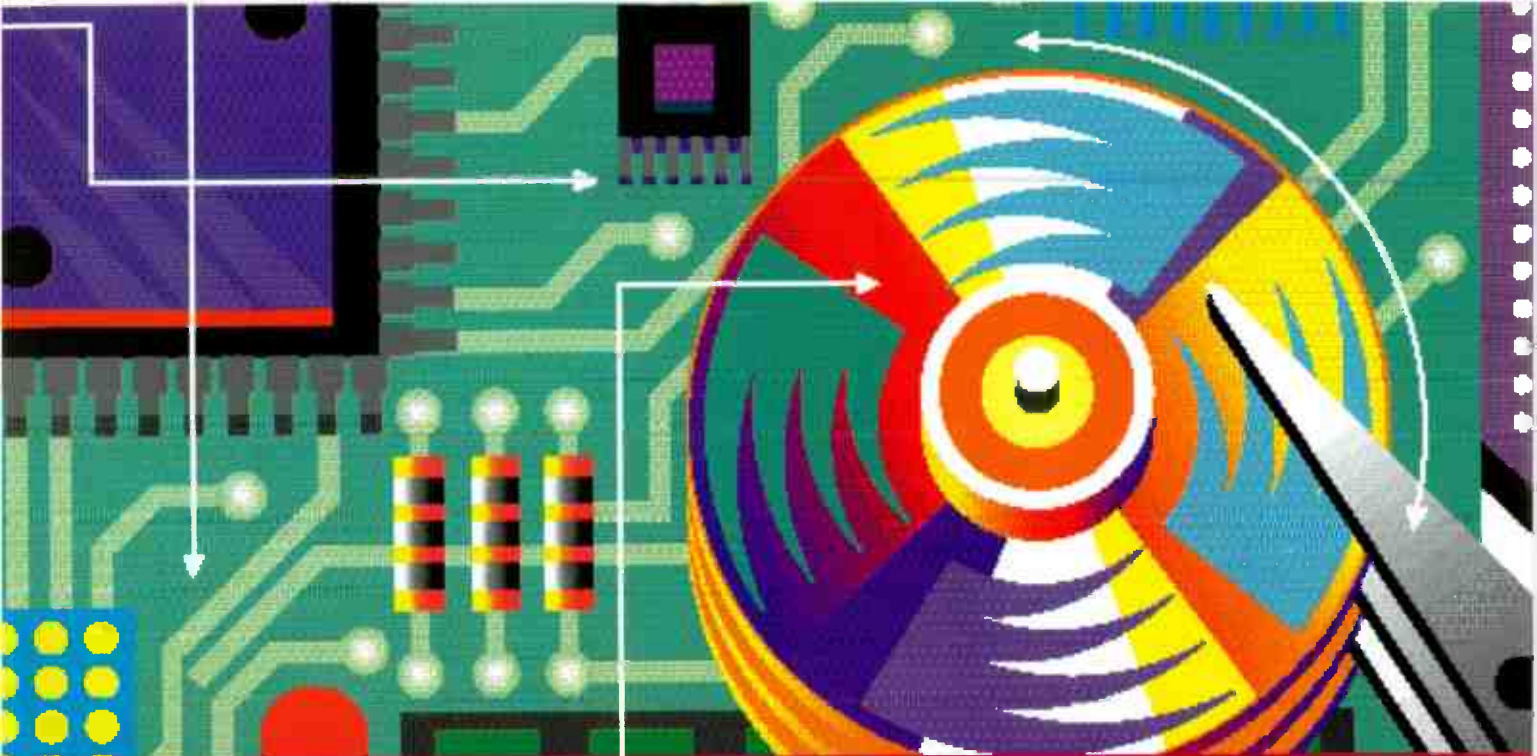
"...the Sennheiser HD 600s  
are a must-audition product—  
even, dare I suggest, a must-own."  
—Wes Phillips, *Stereophile*  
February 1998

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Manufacturing Plant: Am Labor 1, 30900 Wedemark, Germany



# MP3 4 U & Me?

Steven R. Rochlin\*

**I**F THERE IS ONE THING the Big Record Labels hate, it is not having *the* happening act. Backstreet Boys, N' Sync, Livin' La Vida Loca.... You know, products that accrue high revenue in a very short period of time. It is a "wham bam thank you ma'am" business where "live fast die young" seems desirable.

Problem is, no *real* culture is ever formed around the artists who have such a short shelf-life, so the "out with the old, in with the new" cash cow needs to be

*\*Chief washer of bottles and Windows, both 9x and NT, at his wildly wacky and truly wonderful website: [www.enjoythemusic.com](http://www.enjoythemusic.com).*

milking many times each year. Or how about Sony and their Mini Disc and now their SACD format? Anyone remember the Beta versus VHS debate of not that many years ago? While the public just wanted a standard format for recording TV shows, Sony was monopolizing Beta while JVC licensed many manufacturers to their VHS format.

If you are wondering what this has to do with music compressed to MPEG 1 Layer 3 standards (MP3), then you have not been paying attention to the present day culture while keeping your eye on past events.

Those on the cutting edge of

today's culture have been revolting against corporations and mainstream industry, while clinging tightly to their own groupings that offer music *they* enjoy listening to. This is one of the very few (and perhaps only) times where the public has spoken first within the consumer music field and the industry had little or no choice but to follow or be left out from winning the corporate grand prize (read: money).

It would be a disservice to discuss the success of MP3 without also understanding the causes and effects. Today, we have a generation of music buyers who



have been the object of marketers to from the moment the Huggies kept their bottoms dry. Later in life huge advertising campaigns tried to teach them that milk does their body good (must be eaten with a magically delicious cereal of course).

C'mon, anyone with half a brain knows the benefits of milk!

How many false heros and over-hyped commercial products can a generation swallow before revolting against the entire corporate marketing schtick? It only took a few short years for

Generation X (not to be confused with the Pepsi Generation or those really hip Gap dancers) to see that since the nation's youth have finally joined together, and to realize that MP3 can give them what corporations can—musical freedom! Ah, but the Major Labels have their own interests....

The interests we are discussing are not just financial, but also political in nature, as well as in some ways cultural. Imagine having a business structure that for decades has relied on a "food chain." This chain consists of making a music product (LP, CD, cassette, DVD, etc.), marketing the product through a decades-old and inefficient distribution chain that spends vast amounts of time and money sending this product with its related promotional gear to your local franchise store. The store then may need to warehouse and later redistribute the product to its own individual consumer retail stores. In the 90s, this would be considered a very highly inefficient supply chain.

On the other hand, via MP3, the Big Music Labels could min-

imize all the middlemen and also help chain stores through direct downloading and marketing of computer-based music. Image, however, upsetting literally thousands of people who have been on the payroll by giving stores the ability to directly download the data they need to sell product. Such a revolution-

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**My guess is that the success of MP3 shows that kids care more about the music than about sonics.**

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ary system also would mean that the most popular titles would never be out of stock since new CDs could be made right at the store's location! We must realize that these are very fragile middlemen distribution relationships that have helped Big Music survive over the years. Of course, the label owners and managers know they are missing the boat by not going with downloaded music, but the politics have them hog-tied. When it is time to release even a few records, the majors and others want to be able to protect their assets through some form of electronic encryption or coding.

Over the past few years many of the independent labels have been doing quite well with their bands. The major labels publicly admitted to me at the recent International Music eXpo (IMX) show that they are nervously scrambling to keep their foothold in the industry. They see youth as being tired of having the "commercial" music being rammed down their throats and also as now looking for music that better represents their individual culture. Sure, the Major Labels had their way

with the youth market for years and years, without so much as a speed bump, but then came the Internet Superhighway—a place where small communities thrive around websites that not only have associated chat rooms where other members "talk" to each other and where new music any member thinks is cool can be placed on the website for others to enjoy virtually instantly! Because of faster modems and smaller audio file size (due to the compression which is part of MP3), within a matter of minutes I can

be doing La Vida Loca while downloading Joe and His Craving Kitties sing the new web hit "Meow Meow Meow Meow."

Ok, so music via MP3 does not deliver perfect sound forever or even CD quality sound. John Towler rightly said in his review of the Diamond Rio in *TAV* (Vol. 5, No. 2) "Virtually every critic says that even at their best, an MP3 recording doesn't sound as good as the CD equivalent" and I agree with his statement—up to a point. MP3 can sound very good, but to fully enjoy the music from an MP3, you're faced with the problem that top-quality music encoding seems harder to find than top-quality decoders. The reason is that high-quality decoders are virtually free whereas the best encoders currently available cost money. Alas, many people seem to be happy with a "good for free" item than with a sonically better product that needs to be paid for. This also shows that just maybe, possibly, there might be chance that Jane and John Q. Public-Youth care more about *the music* than the quality of its reproduced sound. My

guess is that MP3 with its "good enough" sonics—plus its infinite customization of contents and re-record feature—is seen as a superior product in the youth market.

But you're right, I have thrown up the argument of CD sound quality, yet most people who have heard DVD-Audio or SACD usually can hear a vast improvement in the reproduced sound as compared to what they have heard on the majority of mainstream CD players. Sadly, we must keep in mind that the public does not generally buy their music on "audiophile-grade" CDs like those from Mobile Fidelity, dmp, Reference Recordings, Chesky, DCC, Analogue Productions and the like. For the general public, as Towler's review agrees, mainstream music's CD quality is the *de facto* Gold standard.

We also must realize how many places there are to download MP3 music for free over the Internet. Why buy the cow if the milk is free (got milk)? In fact, there are many, many Internet websites devoted to this compressed music format, and they carry name such as MP3.com and AMP3.com. How popular are these websites? According to the major Internet search engines, MP3 is second only to pornography (get the picture)! In fact, the MP3.com website is so popular and marketable in and of itself that, as I keyboard this article, this publicly traded company is selling for around \$40.00 a share!

Of course, we should not forget how Diamond Multimedia supports their now very popular MP3 Walkman-type unit, the Rio, by offering own website

([www.Rioport.com](http://www.Rioport.com)) thousands of songs (e.g. "Landlady" by Phish) in the MP3 format, too! In addition to their new Big Brother Rio500, Diamond's line includes the PMP300 original and a PMP300 Special Edition that comes with 64 MB standard and can be upgraded to 96 MB!

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### **Hillary Rosen of the RIAA: "Is the Internet rendering the traditional record business obsolete? Yes!"**

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Imagine what would happen in the marketplace if Sony gave away thousands of their proprietary non-standard SACD format discs with their SACD player. And right here is where the difficulty begins.... As more and more music becomes available free, the major labels *know* they are being left behind in a very big way. Let me simply quote the President of the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), Hillary Rosen, who said "Is the Internet rendering the traditional record business obsolete? Yes." After all, they have their own interests to deal with.

But there is more! Enter SDMI and Microsoft's Windows Media Player.

What the major labels are looking for, like a Gen-Xer getting lucky on a one-night stand, is protection. When it comes to digital files, protection comes by way of encryption encoding which scrambles the data so that an electronic key is needed to unscramble the data. Many major labels agreed upon an encoding scheme called Secure Music Distribution Initiative (SDMI) to protect their data. Of course, Microsoft, not wanting to be left out of the Music Money Pit (MMP to my web

friends), have devised their own way to stream protected data over the web using what they call the Windows Media Player (WMP). In fact, Microsoft recently released Version 4 of their protected music files encrypted for the WMP. The Microsoft scheme has officially beaten SDMI to the gates (as there are no SDMI-encoded music files available as of this writing). Then again being first is not a guarantee of being the best. Or even of being the win-

ning hog in the Music Money Pit! Within one day of the protected files for the Microsoft WMP being released, there were several software programs on the Internet that can strip the WMP protection away! In other words, it took hackers less than one day to release a program that can easily unprotect previously protected music files! Can SDMI be far behind?

The question seems not to be "if" but more of "when," since the U.S. Government virtually forbids un-decryptable data being sent over the web. This means that hackers already have a leg up on whatever encryption scheme is chosen for SDMI. G-d bless the U.S. Government and their \$400 ashtrays and \$700 hammers! I still can not help but wonder why the U.S. Government has any say whatsoever on something that is worldwide like the Internet. For me, it is a sad day indeed when the U.S. Government gets involved with the music we all know and love. I will not cover how the RIAA lost their lawsuit with Diamond Multimedia, as this was a well-publicized court decision.

I will only briefly comment about the upcoming successor

**M**PEG-1 (IS 11172-3) is the compression of audio signals by using high-performance, perceptual coding schemes. It specifies a "family" of three audio coding schemes called Layer-1, -2, and -3. Each number is a new family generation with increasing encoder complexity and higher performance. The three codecs are compatible in a hierarchical way. Layer-N decoder is able to decode bit-stream data encoded in Layer-N and all Layers below N. A Layer-3 decoder may accept Layer-1, -2 and -3, whereas a Layer-2 decoder may accept only Layer-1 and -2. An encoder is used to take an existing audio file and convert it to MP3 standards.

The encoder analyzes the spectral components of the audio signal by calculating a filter bank or transform and applies a psychoacoustic model to estimate the "just noticeable" noise-level. In its quantization and coding stage, the encoder tries to allocate the available number of data bits in a way to meet both the bit rate and masking requirements. In this way the human's hearing acuity is accounted for and then a mathematical formula based on this data assumes which parts of the music can be filtered out of the signal to help accomplish said data compression.

### **Techno Speak Explained: Wha'd He Say?**

MPEG is short for Moving Picture Experts Group which is working under the joint direction of the International Standards Organization (ISO) and the International Electro-Technical Commission (IEC). This group works on stan-

dards for the coding of moving pictures and associated audio. The experts in the MPEG community agree that successful high-quality audio compression is more challenging than video compression due to the human's higher sensitivity to sound than video. There are many different mathematical schemes used to compress audio files into an MP3 formatted file. Various parts of the music are taken out due to either redundancy or because it is claimed the human ear is not sensitive enough to detect certain parts of the audio signal.

Today, it is very easy to make the music you love into an MP3-compressed computerized audio file for Internet delivery. Compression is paramount, however, because, according to the MP3.com website, the Beatles' "Love Me Do" (using a 56K modem) would take more than 40 minutes to download the uncompressed file. In an MP3 compressed file, the download time turns into less than 4 minutes! MP3 files on average use a 12-to-1 compression ratio. Just like other digital formats, the sampling rate can be changed to give larger or smaller files as well.

To make your own MP3 file, simply download the software that is available free from many websites on the Internet or buy one of the popular audio conversion programs like those from [www.Dartech.com](http://www.Dartech.com), [www.Adobe.com](http://www.Adobe.com) and many others. Once you have the program loaded onto your computer, simply place a CD in your computer's CD-ROM drive and the program will guide you through the rest. This action is affectionately known as "ripping."

to MP3 which is called, what else, MP4. It promises to have better sound quality than MP3 yet offer higher compression at the same time. Thus, it looks like the public will have access to ever-smaller files, ones that sound better with each new compression scheme as time goes by. Approximately 70 per cent or so of the new MP4 format is being constructed by the geniuses at the Massachusetts

Institute of Technology (MIT) and can be seen at <http://sound.media.mit.edu/mpeg4/>. What we are now hearing from audio compression technology just a tip of the iceberg! Just wait until we eliminate our 56k modems and go to systems even faster than cable modems.

Once the speed at which we surf the web improves (right, wider bandwidth), we will be enjoying music and movies over

the Internet! There have already been successful trials of movies over the Internet. It is great to see that the public has spoken and the industry has been forced to listen. Today's sound might not be "CD-Quality," though one day—as bandwidth improves—it could be so much more. And to think we were here when it all began. Long live the Internet! As always, Enjoy the Music.

# Philips' Great Pianists Collection



WHEN PHILIPS CLASSICS, the Dutch-based record company, announced it was releasing a "Great Pianist of the 20th Century" series of 100 volumes, with each volume containing two CDs, from August 1998 through August 1999, popular reaction was oddly mixed. Some 74 pianists, dead and alive, were honored by inclusion, but a striking number of important pianists were excluded, and this seemed to get some consumers' goat, if the response on classical music web pages was any indi-

cation. A few buyers complained that even if the Philips series would contain 250 hours of music, no Great Pianist series that omitted pianists like Richard Goode, Arthur Loesser, Yves Nat, or Hartmut Holl could be considered complete. The choices are overwhelmingly male, with the curious omission of great women pianists like Annie Fisher and Marcelle Meyer. Any such great pianists grouping becomes a kind of canon or old boys' club for those who are "in," and the

executive producer of the series, Tom Deacon, offers the same essay in each volume, titled "Apologia" which is no apology at all but a proud claim of success at having united all the great pianists. This crowing is

Benjamin Ivry is author of biographies of Francis Poulenc (Phaidon Press), Arthur Rimbaud (Absolute Press/Stewart Tabori and Chang), and Maurice Ravel (appearing Spring, 2000 from Welcome Rain Publishers, New York). His poetry collection, "Paradise for the Portuguese Queen," from Orchises Press, has been well received. He also translates from the French (*Albert Camus: A Life* for Knopf Publishers).

partly justified for what is billed as the "first multi-label partnership in the history of the recording industry" involving 25 recording companies as partners, such as EMI Classics, BMG Classics, DG, Decca, Sony Classical, Vanguard Classics, Vox, Teldec Classics, and others. Given the general state of altruism and philanthropy in the record industry, to get all these companies to cooperate may be the biggest and most lasting contribution of all of the Philips series. But there is more.

Some consumers crabbled that most of what is in the Philips series has been available before, and this is true, although the company asserts that more than 25 per cent of the total has not appeared on CD before, which adds up to 3,808 minutes of music, but only a modest 90 minutes never was released in any form, even if these include such outstanding efforts as Clifford Curzon in two Mozart Concertos. But complainers should keep in mind that even if they recall seeing packagings of the same recordings by pianists like Rachmaninov or Schnabel elsewhere, that many labels with historic reissues series, like EMI, do a very uneven job of keeping these items in print. No sooner is a new reissue launched than it becomes unavailable, and indeed, some reissues only appear on EMI France, let's say, and never even make it to America.

A more legitimate complaint is the pompous tone of much of the Philips publicity, such as lists that strive for grandeur by adding middle names to composers who never used them professionally, like "Walter Wilhelm Giesecking" and "Dame Myra Julia Hess." This may give rise to parlor games where



friends might ask, before a Hess or Giesecking recording is played, "Is that Myra JULIA Hess?" or "Is that Walter WILHELM Giesecking?"

### A Classy Venture

However, all kidding aside, the Philips series by its sheer magnitude makes the consumer ask some fundamental questions about the purpose of historic reissues on CD. I have long felt that the publication of any CD today has more repercussions than book publication, as a CD is distributed internationally and remains in stores far longer than books, which are destined to be warehoused, or shredded and pulped, almost immediately. As such, an historic CD reissue gives a larger public awareness, presumably of a valued work of art or an outstanding performer interpreting unforgettable music. Sometimes the choice of performer or repertory may be faulty, in Philips reissues as anywhere else, but it seems to me that the art historian E.H. Gombrich's maxim applies here,

"There is no wrong reason for liking a work of art, only for disliking it." Gombrich was referring to liking or disliking a portrait by Rubens because it resembles your Uncle Harry, or reminds you of your boss, or whatever. If the emotion inspired by the artwork is positive, then this cannot be criticized, whereas if you summarily dismiss it for anecdotal reasons, this is bad. Whatever faults the Philips series has, and inevitably any such series has faults, being a human enterprise, it is a classy venture. It is not like the fly-by-night rip-off recording companies, some of them located in Italy, who reprint in horrible sound historic performances available elsewhere. The Philips series's greatest significance may ultimately be in its didactic role.

CBC Radio, Philips, and Minnesota Public Radio have produced 39 hour-long radio programs on the series. Tom Deacon and CBC host Eric Friesen present the weekly series on CBC, which has also started broadcasting in Minnesota and

on Public Radio affiliates. Given the dead and dying state of classical music radio in, let's say, New York, this is a great boon. (Those interested can read more about the radio series on the CBC web site at <http://www.radio.cbc.ca/programs/gp20c>). On the radio, these performances might reach a new public unaware of them, such as lazy music critics and over-stressed conservatory students too obsessed with practicing to buy and hear such performances.

They can only benefit from such exposure, not to mention the pleasure of non-professional listeners suffocated by a diet of the latest hotshot pianists, even if some of these are also included in the Philips series itself.

### **Too Big For One Bite**

By now I can imagine the reader asking, "Where's the beef?" or "Can we go to the videotape?": In other words, what about the recordings themselves? I cannot pretend to have heard all of them, but a fair sampling reveals much that is entirely admirable. Volume 15 is a rare find, unusual for the series, of the Soviet duo pianists Lyubov Bruk and Mark Taimanov in works by Arensky, Poulenc, Mozart and Rachmaninov. The Poulenc Concerto for two pianos is spiffy indeed, driven on in daredevil yet sober fashion by a great and cruelly neglected conductor, Arnold Katz, who has spent his musical career in Siberia. An Arensky suite played by the Bruk-Taimanov duo is alternately philosophical and dance-like, and a Rachmaninov suite aptly schmaltzy. Only a Mozart concerto for two pianos is a real disappointment, ploddingly heavy

and out of style. These brainy musicians had many strings to their bows. Taimanov is also known in chess circles as the Grand Master who lost humiliatingly to a young Bobby Fischer in the 1971 world championship final. Undaunted, Taimanov also

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## **Whatever faults the Philips series has, it is a classy venture.**

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wrote lots of books on chess and today still plays on the senior chess circuit, although his marriage to Lyubov Bruk broke up in the '70s. The CD booklet notes by Taimanov himself contain a glimpse of the human drama seething behind these performances, explaining how after the divorce, Bruk tried performing in another piano duo with the couple's son, and even in a trio with her son and daughter-in-law. But Taimanov was doomed to a limping solo career, as he explains: "I could not claim to have an exceptional role—I had given all my best years to the duet."

The combination of quality and the delight of discovery that one finds in the Philips Bruk-Taimanov release is unhappily too rare in the series. Volume 17, a Chopin compilation by the wild and woolly virtuoso Shura Cherkassky, has plenty of panache, however wayward some of the interpretations are. This release also boasts some of the most unconsciously funny CD booklet notes ever printed, when piano specialist Ates Orga asserts that Cherkassky's playing was unforgettable for its "iced runs and octaves raped by small hands at speed." I guess if you

or I had been "raped by small hands at speed," we'd find it unforgettable, too.

Volume 20 offers a selection of performances by Alfred Cortot, a great musician who paradoxically collaborated with the Germans during the World War II occupation of Paris as head of music for the Vichy government, systematically firing all Jewish musicians from orchestral jobs, and hosting parties for the Gestapo who presented him with gifts of music

manuscripts and art works seized from deported Jews and other foreigners. The extent of Cortot's villainy, published long ago in Jerome Spycet's biography of pianist Clara Haskil, has been further plumbed in a recent, if belated, Paris musicologist's conference on the role of music in Vichy France. In the Philips liner notes, Michael Steinberg at least mentions Vichy France, writing, "Unfortunately, his support for the Vichy government during World War II cast a shadow over his last years...." This certainly is inadequate for a musician who ruined so many other lives, but then Polygram, which owns Philips and Deutsche Grammophon, has yet to come to terms with the well-documented and enthused Nazi affiliations of some of its most prestigious artists who never apologized for their Nazism, like Herbert von Karajan and Karl Bohm, to name only two. It may be asking too much that a historical series like Philips Great Pianists take into account human, or inhuman, history, as well as music.

Returning to the cozier ground of musical evaluation, volume 22 offers an excellent

Schubert-Mozart recital by Clifford Curzon, with the two Mozart concertos conducted by Istvan Kertesz which had not appeared on CD before, and these are certainly worthwhile items.

Likewise, volume 28 presents the Frenchman Samson Francois, who was much loved for his funky lifestyle, as a virtuoso of substance abuse as well as the keyboard, and his spookily possessed readings of composers such as Ravel and Prokofiev. The grab-bag of performances here, including works by Mozart, Chopin, and Debussy, is less successful, since on standard, non-demonic works Francois is far less successful than with the more aggressive snippets by Prokofiev and Ravel here, which should have been expanded. Here is a case where a sampler approach was lacking in compiler's taste.

Volume 30, the great Polish pianist Ignaz Friedman, offers no such qualms, with everything he plays, including Chopin, Liszt, Mendelssohn, and Weber being fascinatingly masterful and illuminating. Unfortunately, volume 38, of the Lithuanian-born pianist Leopold Godowsky, is almost a total washout, as this performer did notoriously badly in studio recordings, despite a flourishing career. Some artists just do not record well, and Godowsky was one of them, which liner note writer Jeremy Nicholas manfully admits in his essay, however belatedly this admission may be for the buyer who has already shelled out hard cash for the two-CD set.

### Could Again

A good antidote to the Godowskian flop is, surprisingly

enough, volume 39, devoted to the Canadian pianist Glenn Gould. I can hear carpers complaining, "But Gould is available everywhere! Why do we need another Gould compilation?" It is true that Gould is very well represented in the Sony cata-

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**This series is indubitably a success, and one we should be grateful for.**

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logue plus some fairly gruesome live concerts published elsewhere, some not good at all, which all adds up to a Gould glut. What is the uninformed consumer to do? A good solution is Philips volume 39, which offers Gould playing some of the music he loved best, and therefore played best, by Berg, Byrd, Gibbons, Prokofiev, Scriabin, and others. There are few clinkers here, and the whole makes a convincing case for Gould as an artist somewhat like Bobby Fischer, who could be surpassingly brilliant when inspired and when not.

Volume 44 is the second one devoted to the Romanian-born Clara Haskil, with an endearing Schubert B flat sonata and some lovely Mozart. Unfortunately Philips showed no interest in recording Haskil when she still had the physical strength to really play Beethoven's sonatas which are nevertheless included here as belated offerings. Much missed are her Mozart sonata recordings with Arthur Grumiaux, probably the highlight of her discography, not to mention all the projects that Philips frustratingly vetoed, such as her desire to record Mozart concertos with Rafael Kubelik.

Philips' bizarre negativity to this gifted and tormented pianist, detailed in Jerome Spycet's biography of Haskil, is not amended by this helated release, however welcome the contents are.

There are no such problems with volume 65, the Romanian pianist (and friend of Haskil) Dinu Lipatti, who was perfection itself, so any choice of his recordings (with only one or two exceptions) must be satisfying.

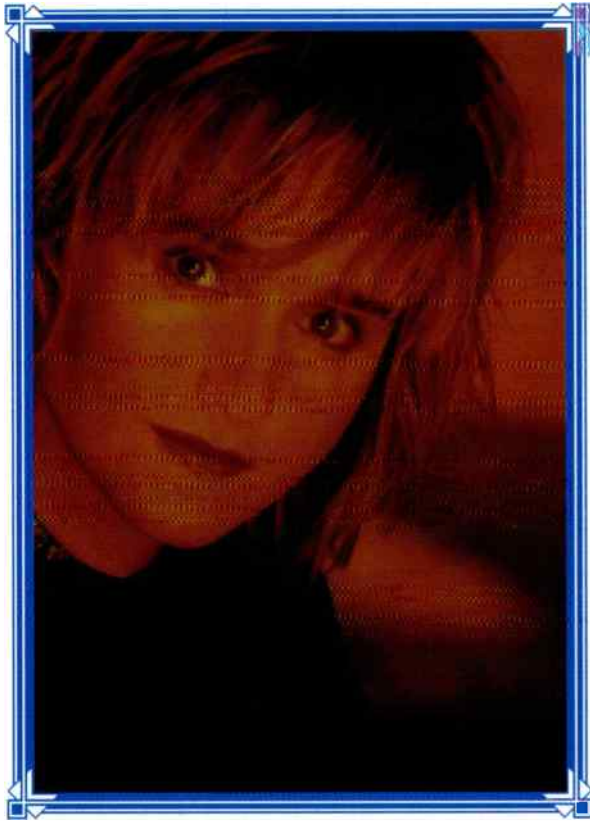
Likewise, volume 81 is of Sergei Rachmaninov, an inexhaustibly great musician, whose piano recordings are all worthy of the highest attention.

Another great Russian who has already entered the piano pantheon is the much-missed Sviatoslav Richter, whose Beethoven program in volume 83 is also greatly impressive. It makes an intriguing contrast to volume 89, of another renowned Beethoven specialist, Artur Schnabel, who can seem willful but is nevertheless immensely vivid and daring in a way few performers would want to imitate today. These are the sort of historic reissues for which one can only be grateful, as they certainly merit repeated hearing, and as such are a good investment, as opposed to that hot young new pianist being hyped by the publicity machine, whose interpretations may already seem to have faded from sight sometime next year. Indeed, the ultimate assurance of the historic series is that its contents are of lasting value, relatively permanent in the vale of tears called music history.

And by this definition, the Philips Great Pianists series is indubitably a success, and a series we should be grateful for.

# R

## ECORDING OF THE MONTH



Christopher Reardon-Noblet

Rock

Melissa Etheridge *Breakdown*  
Island 314-546 608-2

**B**REAKDOWN takes up where Melissa Etheridge's Grammy-winning 1995 album *Your Little Secret* left off—and that's in more ways than one.

The songs and arrangements—while they do rock, and rock well—are more organic, intimate and emotionally varied than with earlier albums. Etheridge has used a three-year layoff to refine her voice into a more expressive, colorful instrument. Her material is mature and sophisticated, yet is emotionally direct and more moving than ever.

Many of the songs rise through emotional climaxes into spiritually charged resolutions. Opening with the title song,

Etheridge speeds back to a lover who's jilted her: "I held back the world for you—ain't that enough?" That song's bookend, "Love beyond Death" is a romantic lullaby: "Lay down on your shoulder, surrender to the peace and go to sleep" Etheridge sings as the song builds to a swirling denouement. Other standouts include "Stronger than Me," a country-flavored lament, and "Angels Would Fall" and "Truth of the Heart" both co-written with lead guitarist Shanks.

But the finest in an album full of gems is "Scarecrow," a hymn for Matthew Shepard. The song opens in a roiling electronic mist over an anthemic, marshal drumbeat portending a harshly

sealed fate. By the time it ends, "rising above, all in the name of love," you can feel Shepard's spirit soaring above the sun-beaten ground and into a sweetly welcoming sky. Like the best rock—indeed the best art—this puts us in closer touch with our humanity.

*Breakdown* rewards repeated listening in surprising ways. It shook me and stirred me. It's Etheridge's best work yet. There's vastly more varied and layered instrumentation than usual from Etheridge, and co-producer Shanks. Mastered by Robert Ludwig, the sound quality fully serves the music. Etheridge's voice is emphasized in the mix and deserves to be.



# The people with the best sound systems in the world listen to Steve Davis.

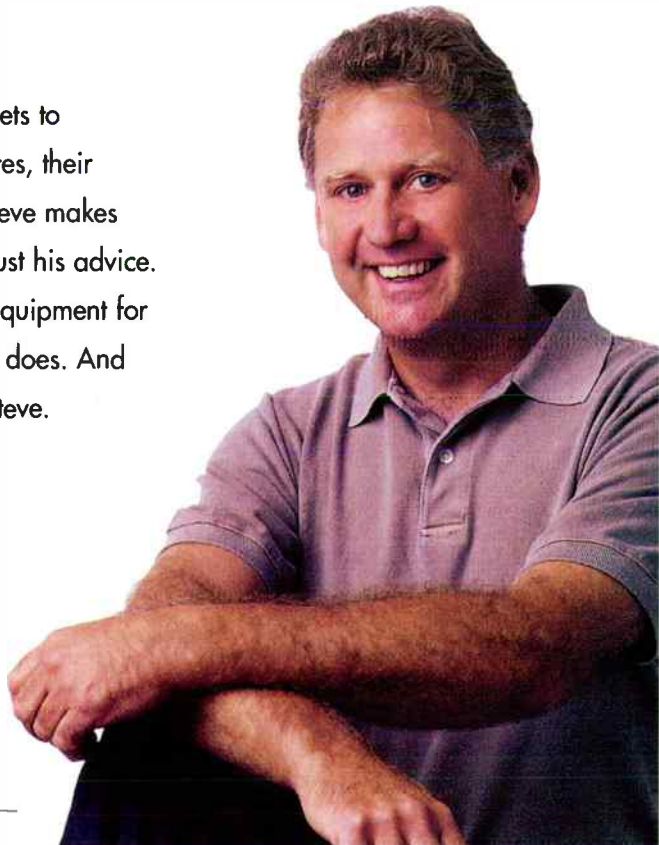
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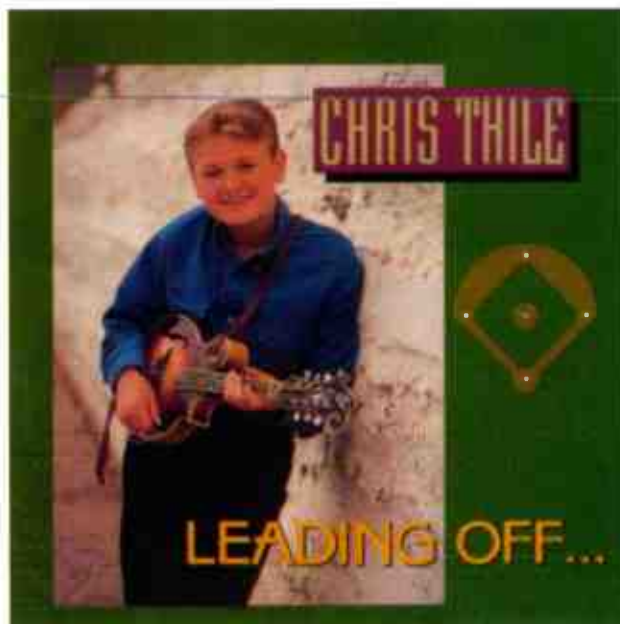
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## Country

Chris Thile: A Double Play  
*Leading Off*  
Sugar Hill Records SHCD-3828  
*Stealing Second*  
Sugar Hill Records SHCD-3863

**M**Y EXPERIENCE as a music critic has had its primary focus generally centered in the area of acoustic music. I have been on the review staffs of several acoustic oriented publications: *Bluegrass Unlimited*, *Bluegrass Now*, *Acoustic Musician*, and *Precious Memories*. While working with these wonderful magazines, I reviewed various LPs, CD's, and cassettes, many of which were poorly produced, amateurish attempts by many well-meaning artists to break into the music scene. Some of these publications wanted their reviewers to critique everything that he was sent regardless of its quality. Of course, my reviews were honest, although I frequently emphasized the good points and compassionately overlooked many of the flaws.

In contrast, writing for *TAV* has afforded me the opportunity to select recordings of special merit. Obviously, very few albums fall into the "perfect" category, but there are many albums that deserve to be shared with our readers. If you are like me, you constantly scour music magazines for reviews of those albums, which promise to be of superb recording quality, musicianship, and professionalism. How many times have you rushed to your local CD retailer, purchased the album "to die for," high-tailed it home, fought feverishly with the shrink wrap to liberate the jewel case from its protective shroud, nervously placed the disc in the player, quickly stumbled back to your "sweet-spot," softly pressed the play button, merely to find that the

reviewer's sentiments were nothing more than hype? It has happen to me on so many occasions, I don't care to think about counting up the total. Nevertheless, I admit that I continue to read all the reviews I can get my hands on. Audiophiles simply cannot shake this mysterious addiction to the elusive search for exemplary recordings.

More than a year ago, I sent Gene Pitts copies of two albums that I felt met the standards of *TAV*. He was quite impressed with these albums and gave me the go-ahead to review them. When I told him that the mandolinist on those recording was a mere 13 years old when he recorded his first album "Leading Off" in 1994, Gene was totally amazed. Since I feel they should be purchased as a set, I am going to review both of these albums together.

Chris' first album *Leading Off* is, quite simply, an amaz-

ing compendium of mandolin mastery. His technique, even at 13, is clean, quick and powerful, yet graceful and meticulously precise, like a watchmaker in a fast-forward mode. In addition to this mystifying prowess, he is also responsible for writing of the majority of the tunes on this album. Some of the songs were actually penned when he was a mere eight years old. On several of the songs he provides his own accompaniment with guitar, fiddle, etc., proving that his instrumental talents are not limited to the mandolin. On the remainder of the album, he is solidly supported by some of the finest acoustic musicians in the business. Overall, his first album is a masterpiece; it is finely crafted and polished with wonderful production.

Keeping in synch with the baseball theme of the first title, his second release is entitled *Stealing Second*. It also demands your attention and provides an

even closer look at his constantly evolving musical maturity. I lean toward Chris' first album as my favorite simply because of the beautifully innocent melodies but must admit that his speed and timing are more apparent in the second.

The sound quality of both albums lives up to high standards that the musicianship strives to achieve. It is evident from the first note of the first album that they have painstakingly mastered both.

Please don't get the impression that these CDs are the pretentious, show-off efforts of a child prodigy. To the contrary, they are the infant predecessors of what I hope to be the first of a formidable series of albums. According to Sugar Hill, they plan to issue his next release early next year as a member of the group Nickel Creek.

These albums fall into that must-hear category. I give them my highest recommendation.



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## Reggae

Peter Tosh *Scrolls of the Prophet: Best of Peter Tosh*  
Columbia/Legacy CK 65921

**Michael Tearson**

**W**ITHOUT PETER TOSH we might not have had Bob Marley. Marley, Tosh and Bunny Livingstone are the triad who founded the Wailers, and Tosh was the most musically adept of the three. It was Peter who worked out the band's harmonic patterns. Earlier Tosh taught Marley how to play guitar. Marley was the crux of reggae, but far from the whole show.

A good argument for that view is contained in this generous set's 15 cuts. Nine are drawn from Tosh's solo albums *Equal Rights* and *Legalize It*. His Rolling Stones Records album *Bush Doctor* provides two more including his memorable duet with Mick Jagger on "(You Gotta Walk and) Don't Look Back." One is from a 1981 album and one is a previously unissued outtake. The 1964 version of the Wailers' "One Love" provides nice perspective, while the acoustic live take of the

anthemic "Get Up, Stand Up" is an apt bookend to the electric version that opens the set.

The sound is excellent: Bright, clear and buoyant. It lets you ear surf freely on those seductive reggae rhythms.

Peter Tosh's solo albums always felt spotty to me, and I always wanted to like them more than I actually did. My respect for the man was that strong. Reissue producer Bruce Dickenson has done an excellent job in distilling them into a single 72-minute CD. All the right goodies are here with a couple nice rare ones and curiosities. This is a rare *Best Of* album in that it really does collect the best available material of an artist in one place.

Even better it manages to gel into a coherent and stimulating listening experience. This *Best Of* really is Peter Tosh's best solo album. And that's unusual in this world of packages.

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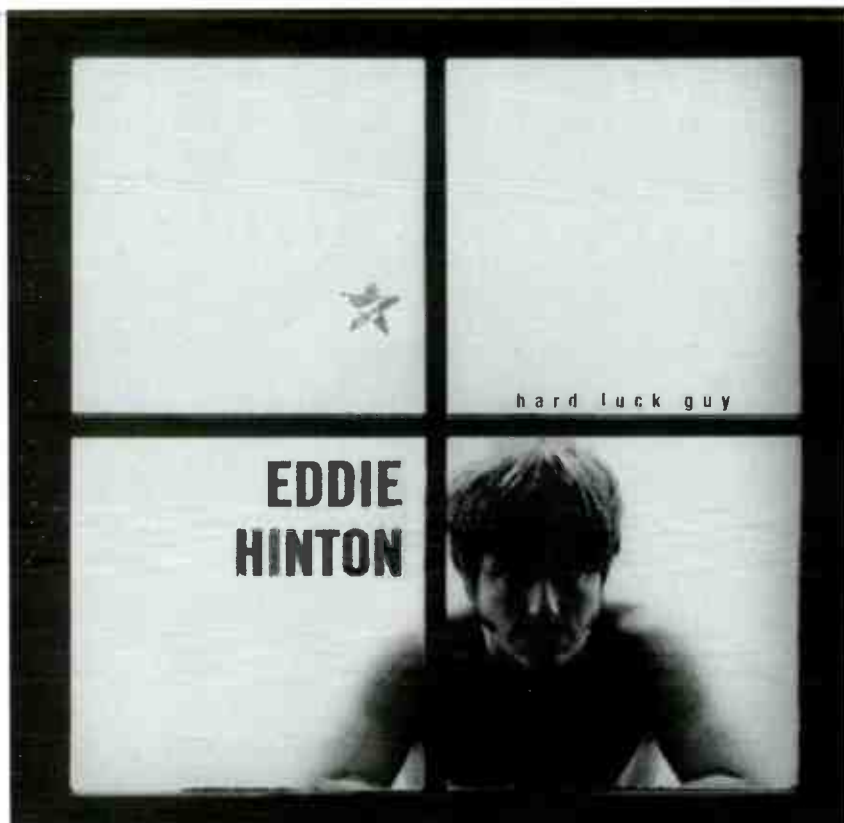
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Eddie Hinton  
*Hard Luck Guy*

Capricorn  
3145386552

**L**IKE DAN PENN—and Eddie would like his review to start like that, 'cause he really liked Dan Penn—Eddie was one of the select few Southern white boys who got their licks in Soul Music. Eddie hailed from Alabama and could sing in the style of Otis Redding without sounding exactly like him. Eddie also was a funky guitar player, fusing a rhythm part with melodic leads using a heavy tremolo effect, and was found on a num-

ber of the Soul and Pop records made in Muscle Shoals during the Nineteen sixties and seventies. He also was an estimable songwriter whose work was covered by artists such as Dusty Springfield and Bobby Womack. The man was, quite definitely, bound for glory.

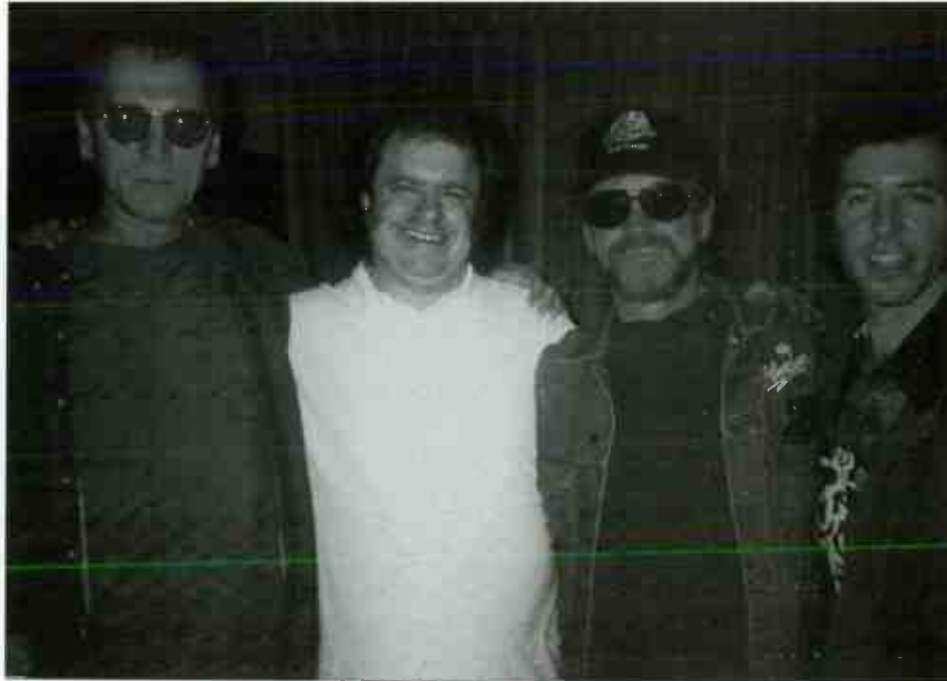
Unfortunately, something happened and Eddie lost his way a little bit, and then a lot. It was a shame what kind of shape he fell into, and when he died in

1995, it saddened and shocked all who knew him, this author included. I had the pleasure of working with him briefly in 1994 as I was producing an album by his songwriting partner Donnie Fritts, and Eddie sang and played on the record. He was talking about some recordings he had just finished, but nothing he did or said during those days prepared me for the greatness of his last work, *Hard Luck Guy*.

Of course, this posthumous work contains material from several different sources, so one is given recordings that encompass two decades. The startling thing is that you pretty much have to look in the booklet to know for sure when things were done. The guy didn't really change his sound or approach from 1977 to 1994—it all hangs together without the winds of fashion blowing it to and fro.

Songs like "300 Lbs. of Hongry" sit with "Ol' Mister Wind," each showing its classic timelessness. There is one thing missing, however; there is a demo of a song called "Nothin' In The World That A Man Can't Do If He Puts His Mind To It" that is flat-out the best thing Eddie ever cut and it isn't on this album.

Aside from that, this is a near-perfect Eddie Hinton album. Too bad he's not around to tour it.



**The Club Scene:** Don Nix, Eddie Hinton, Donnie Fritts, and the author Jon Tiven.  
Photo by Sally Tiven.

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The Inner Ear Report - Vol. 10, #1

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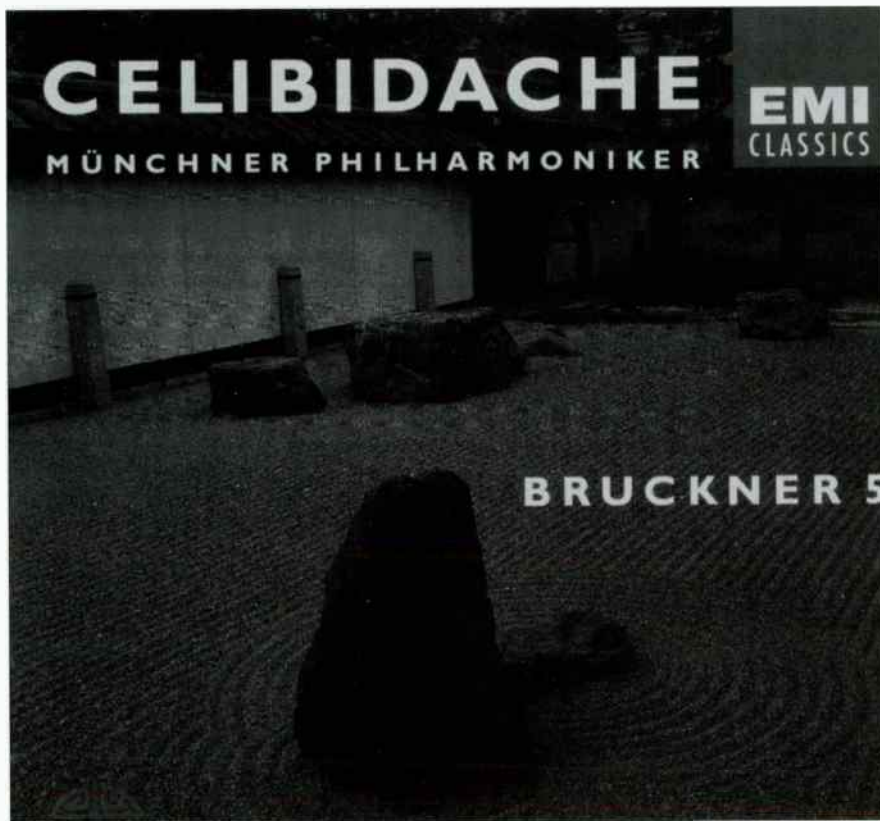
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Ross Wagner



*Classical*

Bruckner *Symphony 5*  
Sergiu Celibidache, conductor  
Münchener Philharmoniker  
EMI Classics 7242 5 56691 2 4

**T**O BE FRANK, I'd never warmed up to Bruckner's music—until I heard this EMI Classics album.

I had found the Bruckner symphonies to be overly long. When a late Bruckner symphony was scheduled in our series at Carnegie Hall, I knew there would be no intermission, and I knew to decline the Pepsi refills with the pre-concert snack. I knew, further, that I'd better get to the men's room just before

the music began or suffer the consequences.

Aside from the above-mentioned logistical problems of sitting through a live performance of a Bruckner symphony, I had musical reservations as well. I was never able to get past the surfeit of crescendos, and I dreaded the repeated assaults of wave upon wave of overblown brass.

But now I must confess, listening to this recording of Sergiu

Celibidache conducting Bruckner's *Symphony No. 5* was a pure pleasure.

"Sergiu who?" you ask. Let me explain.

The late Romanian conductor Sergiu Celibidache (say SAIR-jiu Chay-lee-bee DAH-kay) was a maverick and a cult figure in the music world for many decades. He was considered by music cognoscenti to be the consummate interpreter of Bruckner symphonies, along with another



cult figure, conductor Günter Wand.

While Europeans have heard broadcasts of live Celibidache concerts, most Americans have not. "Celi" steadfastly refused to allow his performances to be pressed into vinyl or digitally encoded onto CDs. According to Paul Moor, who gave us a fine profile of the conductor in Vol. 4, Issue 4, of this journal, Celi considered recordings as mere "masturbation, substitute gratification." Each live performance, according to Celi, was a one-time event suitable for that time and place only. So no "sounding pancakes," thank you.

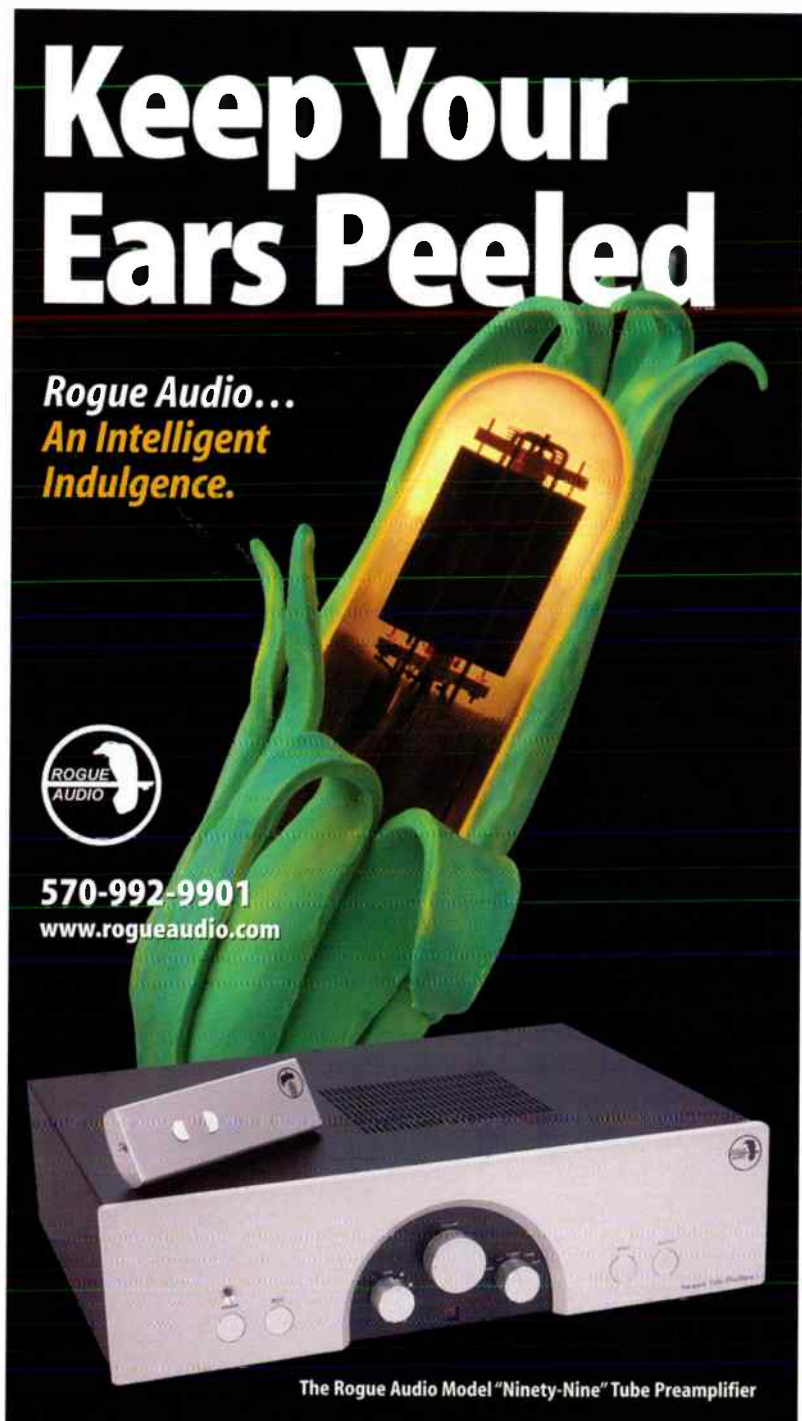
After his death in 1996, Celi's survivors were besieged by recording companies for rights to convert the concert tapes into CDs. You can readily imagine the persuasiveness of their arguments. Ultimately, with a promise of maintaining the highest quality and with acceptance of a proviso that profits would accrue to two Celibidache charitable foundations, the family allowed EMI to release 11 titles—but no Bruckner was among them. We would have to wait a bit longer to hear Celi's legendary performances of Bruckner.

At long last, with this release of the Bruckner Symphony No. 5, we, who have never experienced a live performance of this masterpiece under the baton of Maestro Celibidache, can begin to sense what all the fuss was about. And I'm pleased to report that this DDD recording is very good indeed. According to Moor, Celi's radio broadcasts had been carefully and lovingly recorded, just in case a release was authorized. We are the beneficiaries of this foresight and expertise.

In this performance we hear a master conductor in full control of a musical event. There is a feeling, a rush, I've sometimes experienced during a live concert, a signal that something very special is going on. I want the music to go on forever, and at the same time I'm eager to compare impressions with my

fellow concert-goers. Since we are in the realm of a CD, and these observations will be in print, I can realize the luxury of both wishes.

I'm particularly drawn to the quiet, introspective sections of this work. Bruckner likes to contrast pizzicato in the violincelli against single woodwind instru-



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The advertisement features a central image of a green corn cob with a glowing yellow-orange circuit board inside, symbolizing the 'ears peeled' theme. Below the corn is a silver and black tube preamplifier. The background is black with white and yellow text.

ments and horns or silky strings for these moments. In this high-quality recording, the attack of the pizzicato is very life-like. Heard on Pipe Dreams speakers, the reverberations are perceived bouncing off the distant walls of the concert hall. This is a spatial tour-de-force which reinforces the feeling that one is involved in a live event. The many crescendos, alas, still bother me, even though Celi is said to observe a strict rule of not allowing more than one *fff* per movement. Yet, in the fertile valleys between the mountainous crescendos lie what are for me the greatest joys of this truly fine recording.

In the first and second movements, Bruckner is especially generous in providing us with many visits into the symphonic valleys, pianissimo segments

which are enriched with nuances of musical change. Celi makes a special effort to reveal every bit of Bruckner's musical genius from these deceptively simple passages. It is in these subtle and intricate passages that

---

**Formerly, I avoided performances of Bruckner but Celi has won me over.**

---

this EMI recording shines, revealing a depth of detail that one would not expect in a mere broadcast recording.

Some might say tempos in Celi's interpretation of the Bruckner Symphony 5 are "slow". "Deliberate" would be a better word, I feel. Celi fondles every note and phrase, holds it to the light, and illuminates its

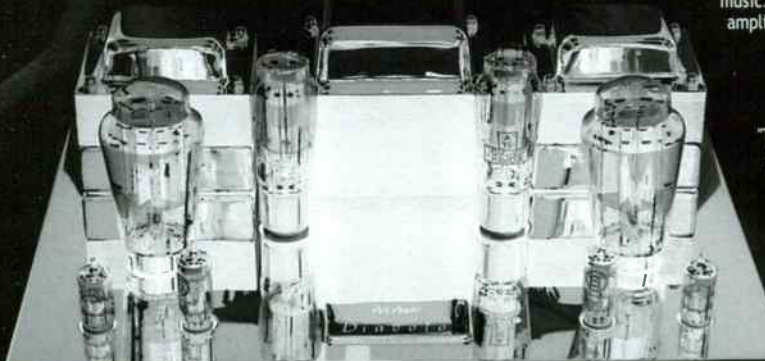
beauty—all of this while maintaining the line and continuity of the work. It may sound counter-intuitive, but under the baton of Celi, the languid pace is a means of increasing tension and heightening the excitement as the conductor drives the symphony towards its climax.

Now that Sergiu Celi-bidache's legacy of silence has been broken, we have a remarkable "sound pancake" with which to savor Celi's genius,

for now and for generations to come.

Near death, Celi was asked again about the broadcast recordings. Would he relent and allow CDs to be issued? He was quoted as saying, "Do what you like."

Well, Celi, a grateful musical world can say, "We like what you did."



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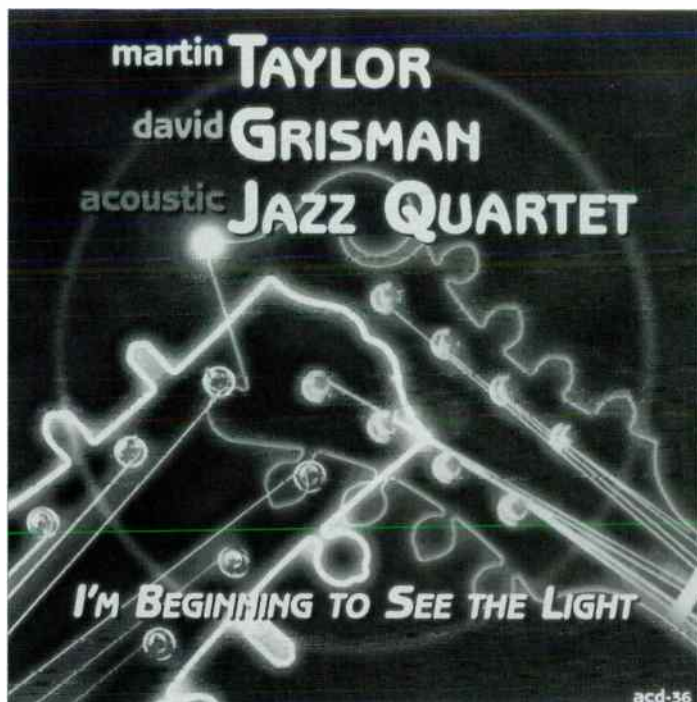
-Les Turoczi,  
The Audiophile Voice,  
Vol. 4, Issue 6

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-Aaron M. Shatzman,  
The Absolute Sound,  
February 99, Issue 116  
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Michael Tearson



**B**RITISH JAZZ guitarist Martin Taylor and mandolin wizard David Grisman teamed up in '95 for *Tone Poems 2*, a fabulous album of duets. This new album is a sequel that augments the sound with bassist Jim Kerwin and drummer George Marsh.

The album is purely acoustic, lending the 12 selection set a sweet air of intimacy. It carries from the opening bars of the opening title track through to the end of the finale "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered." The tempi are relaxed and easy going, allowing lots of room for soloists Grisman and Taylor to improvise and interact with grace and wit. Playing slowly proves to be a huge boon here.

I've always felt that playing fast most of all requires dexterity, while playing slow requires

much more attention. Each note means more, and the silences may mean the most of all; there is no room for silence at top velocity.

Suffice to say that the Quartet excels at what they do here, namely playing standards like "Autumn Leaves," "A Foggy Day," "Cheek to Cheek" and "Lover Man." And they do it delightfully at a most comfortable pace. However, when called upon, these players can fly with the best of them.

As has become the usual standard for releases on Grisman's Acoustic Disc label, the CD's sound is simply outstanding. Every nuance of the wooden guitar, mandolin and bass plus the subtleties of the percussion lightly applied are all crystal clear. Balance and mix are excellent, and this masterful album has a very rich presence.

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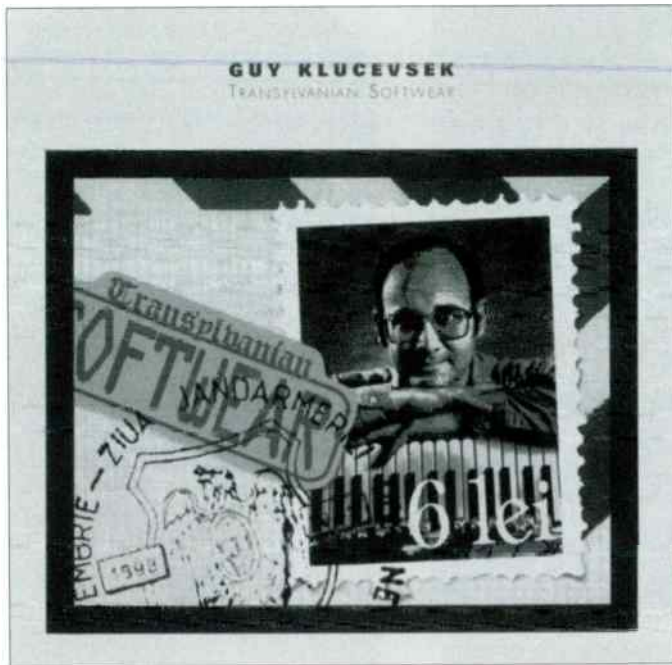
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Guy Klucevec *Transylvanian Software*  
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## Jazz

**W**HAT'S BLACK AND white and squeezed all over? That previously unhip but recently rehabilitated wheezy bag of wind, the accordion. Guy Klucevec is accordionist of choice of those Downtown avatars of the new and now, like John Zorn and Dave Douglas (his work on Douglas' "Charms of the Night Sky" is amazing). On this newly released CD (previously issued on John Marks Records) he showcases his skills on that rarely heard gig, the solo accordion date.

The title tune is based on Hassidic wedding tunes, odd meters shifting under the romantic themes. "Viavy Rose Variations" is based on some lovely Madagascar melodies, again with irregular meter (beats get dropped and added often—Klucvec is fond of these, which are common in Eastern European music). The tune recalls in turn Parisian Café

music and, during some exciting improvisation, Mariachi music. Textures and dynamics vary dramatically, ending in organ-like chordal swells. John Zorn's "Road Runner" is hilarious, featuring a cut-and paste approach juxtaposing snippets of music from Warner Bros. cartoons with short dissonant bursts.

Humor is an important part of the mix, sometimes reflected in the titles ("My Right Foot, on the Other Hand", "Eleven Large Lobsters Loose in the Lobby"), sometimes in the concept ("Bustin' Broncos in the Balkans" is a minor tune in 13/8 meter over which he deadpans "yippie-kai-yay"). So is world music, sentimentality, improvisation, a pop sensibility, and a willingness to experiment coupled with a lack of pretension. His rhythmic facility overcomes the accordion's tendency to "oompah". He has a keen rhythmic sense, using irregular

meters, and can be smooth as a hot knife through butter, or as fast as raging rapids (or "oompah" when appropriate). The final tune, Fred Frith's "Disinformation Polka", starts with a tentative melody, which builds into a powerful series of bursts from the accordion, punctuated with shouts of "Hey" (Frith, when asked about a possible political meaning to the title, replied, "No, it just reflects the fact that I have no idea what a polka is").

Nice sound, as you'd expect from a John Marks recording, though I felt the accordion was spread too wide. The wheezy tonality, with many very high frequency overtones, is captured very nicely, as is the "air" of the studio. (I haven't heard the original disc for comparison).

I had fun listening to this album. It's clever, catchy, original, self-deprecating approach is as refreshing as a dip in a stream on a sweltering day. Way cool.

# Accuphase DP-65V CD Player

Basacom H. King



**I**T HAS ALWAYS been a pleasure for me to get a piece of Accuphase equipment to review. This is because their equipment is so very attractive, solid, and well-made, and generally it sounds very good.

The DP-65V under consideration here has quite a few interesting features, in addition to being a gorgeous looking piece of equipment. Although it looks more or less like a conventional CD player, it is actually made up of two separate sections

combined in one enclosure: The CD transport occupies the center section while the digital processor section is halved and placed in the remaining two outside parts of the internal volume. (Editor's Note: This is actually not as horsey as it might sound, what with sloppy editing, and actually could reduce contamination of the signal in the processor.)

Inputs and outputs provided on the rear panel include RCA phono unbalanced and XLR bal-

anced audio outputs, Toslink and RCA S/P DIF connectors for digital input and output. The processor section has the ability to accept external digital inputs. A digital input allows the user to enjoy the top-level performance of the processor section also with other components that can supply a digital signal, such as another CD transport unit, DAT recorder, minidisc recorder etc. For utmost flexibility, the input can handle both optical and coaxial connections.

Internal processing of audio data is designed to manage all data from these inputs in 24-bit format. Because of these separate external digital inputs and outputs, the DP-65V permits external equalization devices (such as the company's DG-28 Digital Voicing Equalizer, also an interesting unit) to be placed in series with the CD transport output and the processor input.

Unusual in the DP-65V, is the ability to accept two optional plug-in boards through *Option Boards* slots on the rear panel. There are five of these optional plug-in boards available; single BNC coaxial input, single ST type HPC optical input, combination input/output with XLR connectors for AES/EBU, combination input/output with RCA and Toslink connectors, and a combination input/output with ST type HPC optical connectors. These plug-in boards are also optional parts for the company's DC-300 digital preamplifier product.

The D/A converter in the processor section features the high-precision MMB principle developed by Accuphase. Four D/A converters selected according to strict sound quality criteria are connected in parallel, resulting in dramatically improved linearity, THD, dynamic range, and signal-to-

noise ratio. Digital inputs allow use of this ultimate D/A conversion system also with external components.

Audio output level, controlled by the supplied remote control, is said to be able to reduce the level to -40 dB without loss of signal quality.

The CD transport side of the DP-65V is impressive as well. For example, it uses fully digital circuits for mechanism control. This allows optimizing servo performance for each individual disc, assuring improved operation stability and a drastic reduction in error rate. The laser pickup is an ultra-compact type with integrated r.f. amplifier, and all actuators are driven by balanced circuits which do not conduct any current to the ground line. The tray lock feature firmly secures the tray during playback, eliminating mechanical resonances, which maintains the high purity of the digital signal.

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# NOTES

**Accuphase DP-65V CD player**, \$6,200.00. AXISS Distribution Inc. 17800 South Main St., Suite 109, Gardena, Calif. 90248; phone 310/329-0187, FAX 310/329-0189 E-Mail : axiss@compuserve.com, Accuphase web site; <http://www.acuphase.com>.

## Associated Equipment

Additional digital equipment used to evaluate the DP-65V included a Counterpoint DA-11A CD transport, Genesis Digital Lens Classe DAC-1 D/A converter, and a Pioneer DV-414 DVD player for playing 24/96 audio discs. For playing vinyl records, I used a Kenwood KD 500 turntable fitted with an Infinity Black Widow arm and a new Win Research SMC-10 moving-oil cartridge playing through a Vendetta SCP-2C phono preamp. Additional signal sources included a Nakamichi ST-7 FM tuner, a Nakamichi 1000 cassette recorder, and a Technics 1500 open-reel recorder. A First Sound Reference II passive preamplifier fed the power amplifier in use via one-meter interconnects. Various interconnects were used to connect up the analog sources. Power amplifiers used were a Tact Millennium mk2 digital unit, my own pair of Quicksilver M-135 mono tube amps, a pair of Quicksilver Silver 60 mono tube amps, and an Arnoux Class-D digital switching unit. Speakers used were B&W 801 Series 3 and Genesis APM. Speaker cables were a six-foot pair of Kimber BiFocal XL. Illuminati AES/EBU DX-50 balanced cables were used for connecting the Counterpoint CD transport to the Digital Lens and from the Lens to the D/A converter or the digital input of the Tact Millennium. Various other digital cables were used for unbalanced coaxial connections.

## Listening Test

With such technical credentials as these, how does the DP-65V sound? In a word, mighty fine. My current digital reference consists of a Counterpoint DA-11A CD transport feeding a Genesis Digital Lens jitter reduc-

ing device. The output of the Lens then drives a Classe DAC-1 D/A converter. When I compare the sound of this arrangement with that of the analog outputs of the DP-65V, the DP-65V has more apparent definition and is a little brighter and more aggres-

sive. As is most frequently the case, this kind of characteristic in a component helps some CDs that tend to be a bit soft and undefined to sound more real and the difficult-to-play, edgy ones a little harder to take. For those CDs, I preferred the sound of my reference setup. I am not talking about a huge difference here. I liked the sound of the DP-65V a lot. It is clear, dynamic, with a great sense of space and dimensionality. When using the DP-65V as a CD transport with its digital output fed into the Digital Lens, which allows switching between its digital inputs, the sound was very close to that of the Counterpoint transport.

The DP-65V performed perfectly during the review period and was a real pleasure to use. It's CD drawer action and front panel controls were smooth as silk. The remote control permitted switching between the internal CD output and the external digital inputs. Being able to control and reduce volume by using the remote was a real convenience for me.

In conclusion, I found the DP-65V to be a fine piece of equipment that produced first-rate sound. I surely enjoyed my time with it in my system. Being of such fine construction, it should give years of musical enjoyment. I recommend giving one of these a serious audition.



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# Aiwa AM-F70 Portable MiniDisc Recorder

Gary Krakow



**M**INI Discs did not have an easy birth. There were LPs and CDs and Compact Cassettes—and even DATs. And, at the exact moment in time MiniDiscs were introduced, Sony's CD development partner, Phillips introduced the DCC, the Digital Compact Cassette.

LPs were on the way out, CDs were on the way in, Cassettes were on the way up, DATs were hampered by SCMS (Serial Copy Management System) copyright recording restrictions, and DCCs sounded better than MiniDiscs.

Actually, the first round of MiniDiscs sounded horrid. But, a decade or so later, the Sony people are having the last laugh. MiniDiscs are the hottest audio devices in the Far East; they're gaining popularity in Europe, and starting to make inroads in the United States.

Why? Because they now sound pretty good.

MiniDiscs themselves are about half the size of CDs. They can be used to record and playback up to 74 minutes of stereo audio information. As much as the longest CD. (Actually, MiniDiscs can hold 148 minutes of mono information.) MiniDiscs offer quick random access to any song on the disc (unlike having to wait for a tape to find the right spot). Pre-recorded MDs are purely optical, read-only media. The blank discs you can use to record and playback are magneto-optical.

MiniDiscs cram that amount of information on such a small disc by using a technique called ATRAC (Adaptive Transform Acoustic Coding), which compresses the information to one-fifth its original size. Over the

years the sound resulting from the ATRAC coding has improved to the point where the MiniDisc is now competitive to CD.

Sony claims, and rightly so, that MDs are not meant to compete with CD in quality. They've aimed for Compact Cassettes, and Sony is right on the mark. The MD's small size (2-5/8 inches square) makes them perfect for portable devices. And, that brings us to Aiwa's AM-F70 portable MiniDisc recorder.

The device itself isn't much bigger than MiniDisc storage box—3-1/8 by 25/32 by 3-7/8 inches. It weighs in at 6.5-ounces with its chewing gum-sized, rechargeable lithium-ion battery pack. It comes with an external battery pack that holds three AA batteries. When you add all those batteries together, the Aiwa can record for up to 16



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hours or play for up to 40 hours straight. Headphones are supplied, along with an a.c. adapter (and battery charger), plus a little felt-like carrying bag.

The AM-F70 has all the bells and whistles one would want (and some you don't . . . such as bass boost circuitry) from a small recording unit. You can

record from analog, digital and microphone sources. Playback is analog only. MiniDiscs allow you to edit and combine tracks with ease. The Aiwa is not an exception. There are also functions that allow you to name the disc and each track on it.

Recording and playback functions are easy to figure out. If

you're dubbing a favorite CD or music from any source, the Aiwa can be placed into a "Sync" mode. Start playing back the original material, and the MiniDisc recorder will follow. CD dubs will contain all track info from the CD; you're on your own with track names.

As with all MiniDisc machines, keep your Operating Instructions Manual by your side for the first few weeks. Each machine (component or portable) has a differently placed and named set of keys to perform the device's many functions. Some operations need an exact sequence of key pushing to make things happen. Small, portable devices such as the Aiwa have small multi-function keys that necessitate frequent trips to the manual. When you have a few machines around, those manuals stay in open view nearly all the time. Try to add a name or name each track on a disc and you'll understand what I mean. In its defense, the Aiwa has a wonderful "jogging" dial device that makes some of the functions easy to handle.

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## So, How's It Sound?

But, as with any audio device, the proof is in the sound. I listened to the Aiwa though the supplied headphones, as well as through a pair of Grado SR-60 headphones. The headphones were auditioned via the jack on the Aiwa's remote control unit and directly into the output jack on the AM-F70. I dubbed CDs via an optical link to my CD deck, and through analog outputs from my Advent pre-amp/power amp combo. My speakers are bi-wired, specially modified Celestion 700s. Analog connections were with Monster Cable Interlink 400MkII interconnects and generic mini-to-RCA cables.

Without anything else to compare it to, the Aiwa is impressive. Smooth highs, and extended low end were my comments. But, although I liked it, I thought the sound seemed to have a kind of hollow quality in the midrange, and seemed slightly rolled-off in the higher octaves, from what I remembered about other MD machines I've auditioned. It sounded that way through both sets of headphones and my component system.

So, I brought out my trusty Sharp MD-MS702 portable MD recorder. After auditioning a number of units last year for my MSNBC.com column, I purchased the 702 because it was the best sounding portable at the time. It still is the best sounding portable I've auditioned. On disc after disc, the Sharp conveyed a more open sound, more air around each instrument, less

constricted in the midrange, and presented a better soundstage than the Aiwa, or any other portable (recorder or playback-

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**Aiwa's AM-F70 MiniDisc recorder has lots of features and very decent sound.**

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only unit) I've heard. I listened to a number of MDs I've recorded, and even some pre-recorded ones. In particular, the first track (Variations sur "Le Carnaval de Venise") on Wynton Marsalis' Carnival MS (Sony SM 42137) was proof positive of the differences. Listen to the interplay between the trumpet, the harp and the glockenspiel. You'll understand exactly what I mean.

But, when you compare both discs recorded on either portable to the original CD, you understand that no MD sounds

quite like the original. The CD sounds best. And, depending on the source material, the Aiwa sounds very good on some, the Sharp sounds better on others. And the same goes for any good, modern-quality MD component deck. Recordings made on the deck sound better than the same material recorded on either portable.

The Aiwa AM-F70 has a MSRP of \$345.00 Despite my relatively minor reservations, it is capable of making recordings that are less expensive, easier to edit, and a lot more portable than home CD recorders. They sound good too! And, until someone comes up with a portable CD burner, MDs will be the medium of choice. Cassette freaks beware; devices such as the Aiwa are making your beloved music format obsolete.



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# Manley Labs Stingray Integrated Amplifier



**T**HE MANLEY STINGRAY integrated amplifier is unique both in its attractive styling and in several aspects of its design and component parts. Under the leadership of CEO, EveAnna Manley, working in concert with her astute team of engineers, Manley Labs has come up with a very unusual tube-based integrated amplifier that physically mimics the shape of the aquatic sea creature after which it was named.

First, I must tell you that if you are expecting the Stingray to be wimpy or delicate because it was designed by a woman, you will be wrong. Basically, the Stingray exhibits a certain machismo to its appeal that is

undeniable. No, it's not a full-race Corvette, but under its stainless-steel "hood" lies a little "engine" that WILL! As it happens, the unusual dimensions of the chassis and the layout of the components were initially chosen to optimize its performance.

Let me assure you, there is nothing fishy about the Stingray. When I hooked this amp up to my Eminent Technology LFT-8a speakers, I didn't expect it to drive them successfully, because of the low-ish 83 dB/W/m sensitivity of these speakers. However, I must say that up to moderate volume levels the Stingray amp performed like a champion.

Manley says the secret's in a new output transformer design which was enthusiastically conceived by "Hutch" Hutchison and Michael Hunter. Armed with an extensive technical library and on-premises transformer winding facilities, they returned to more traditional thinking about transformers, but with a few clever twists. Measuring, listening, testing and tuning led to a decision to replace the venerable 15-year-old input stage with an fresh, innovative contribution from Paul Fargo. Separate left and right silver-contact selector switches (for the four stereo line inputs) deliver the music signal

to premium Noble balance and volume controls before hitting the first 12AT7WA input tubes. In effect, this is a very high quality passive preamplifier.

Following the 6414 driver/phase splitter, the trusty EL84 output stage (four tubes per channel) yields 50 watts per channel of ultra-linear push-pull power. However, the amp can be (factory) strapped for triode operation which yields 25 watts per channel. Individual bias for each tube is easily adjusted using the trim-pots and test points, conveniently located on the top of the amplifier. The ray's power supply is extra-rugged and stiff, a Manley hallmark.

The Stingray is quite the dapper. The proprietary audio connectors are gold-plated over brass with a Teflon dielectric; an IEC receptacle located at the rear of the amp allows the use of after-market power cords. Stingray's sleek chassis is made

from highly polished stainless steel, which will not rust or peel, like some conventional chrome-plated units. Hand-turned, high-luster control knobs (made at Manley's in-house machine shop) appoint the CNC machined faceplate, which is plated with 24-karat gold. This results in a finish that is not only elegant, but durable as well.

### To The Staging Lanes, Rev 'er Up!

Taking the Manley Stingray to the local drag strip, my "fuel-delivery system" was a Parasound D/AC-2000 converter with Parasound's C/BD-2000 transport, "gassing" the Stingray via Full Spectrum Audio Signature interconnects. WireWorld Equinox III speaker cables delivered the "horsepower" to my Eminent Technology LFT-8a speakers. The ETs were used with add-on Walsh-type super-tweeters by George

Mueller. Later on in my evaluation, I used the Stingray with the same source components to drive the electrostatic midrange/tweeter panels of my InnerSound Eros speakers. There the Stingray took the place of my current favorite amps, Monarchy SM-70s (used as monoblocks).

Starting with the lower octaves, this gutsy little amp delivered firm, extended bass, that sounded "real." While many amplifiers deliver copious quantities of bass, few of them render sound like the actual bass instruments they're trying to reproduce. The Stingray is one of the few amps I've heard that lets the listener believe that an electric bass, drum kit, or the lower registers of the piano could have been produced by the actual instruments.

Another facet of the Stingray's bass presentation that impressed me, was its transition from the

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mid-bass to the upper bass—the area that affects male vocal reproduction. To check this out, I played a few tracks from The King's Singers' *Good Vibrations* (RCA/BMG 09026-60938-2). This album really blew me away, because the different sections of the chorus, particularly the bass and tenor, sounded exceedingly natural, while the disc had the best reproduction of the hall ambience that I can recall hearing. On their cover of Billy Joel's "And So It Goes," the interplay between the singers was riveting, with the mid-bass to upper bass to lower midrange transitions virtually seamless. The bass and tenor vocalists had the perfect amount of "chestiness" to keep the presentation sounding natural and convincing. It wasn't too dry and it wasn't too "DJ-esque."

For a dose of kick drum and electric bass, I chose Erykah Badu's "Rim Shot," from *Erykah Badu Live* (Kedar UD-53109). The drum was very dynamic and very clean while the electric bass breathed a butt-gripping

growl that smacked authenticity.

I found the midrange reproduction to be just as generally liquid and smooth, with a very good sense of nuance. Not only were vocals well served, but complex instruments like the piano were handled with partic-

---

**All in all, the Stingray is a great little amp—either manly or gentle as needed.**

---

ular aplomb. For example, on Gershwin's *Rhapsody In Blue* (Delos DE 3216), the notes of the piano seemed to have just the correct proportions of attack, sustain and decay. With lesser electronics, this piano can sound hard or glassy and the notes may not be reproduced with the proper amounts of attack and decay. With the Stingray, I found the character of the piano to be melodious and seductive—just how the instrument sounds in a live venue. Yet the notes were clean and distinct and didn't smear together.

Additionally, the lower registers were just as convincing, exhibiting the weight and body commensurate with the instrument. In fact, at one point, my wife remarked about how true to life the piano sounded—and she was listening from the bedroom at the other end of our ranch-style house AND ON THE NEXT FLOOR UP!

Reproduction of strings, brass, and woodwinds proved equally competent. Listening to "The Royal March" from *L'*

*Histoire du Soldat* (Everest EVC 9049), the woodwinds acquitted themselves especially well, while the solo violin and the brass were rendered with their inherent sweetness and natural ease. This amp offers a good degree of immediacy and intimacy, never sounding sterile or mechanical.

The Stingray's treble reproduction was also noteworthy. On tracks like US 3's "Tukka Yoot's Riddim" (Blue Note CDP 0777 7 80883 2 5), the brushwork on the cymbals was detailed and extended, yet non-fatiguing. In my view, this is exactly how it should be on this recording. There was no hardness, edginess or overbite. Also, it seemed that high frequency percussion instruments such as maracas, shakers and even zydeco washboards, exuded a wealth of detail without stridency. Triangles and cymbal crashes on symphonic works were rendered very life-like and natural.

The soundstage was expansive and images were placed with a good degree of precision. I have heard some amps produce a touch more depth to their soundstage, but who can say whether this is accurate or

## NOTES

**Manley Stingray Integrated Amplifier**, \$2250.00 (tape or pre-amp outputs add \$100 each pair). Manufacturer: Manley Laboratories, Inc. 13880 Magnolia Ave. Chino, CA 91710; phone 909/627-4256, Fax 909/628-2482 web site: <http://www.manleylabs.com>. Warranty: Five years parts/labor on amp, six months on tubes with proper registration.

### Associated Equipment

Parasound D/AC-2000 D/A converter with Parasound's C/BD-2000 CD transport, Full Spectrum Audio Signature interconnects, WireWorld Equinox III speaker cables, Eminent Technology LFT-8a speakers (with add-on Walsh-type super-tweeters by George Mueller), and midrange/tweeter panels of InnerSound Eros speakers.

an "effect" of some type? Also, I've heard some amplifiers provide a slightly more precise focus, with the trade-off being that they tend to sound slightly more etched.

Regarding the area of system dynamics, the macro-dynamic envelope of the feisty Stingray was very impressive (especially in view of the very difficult speaker load it was driving!). I didn't discern any noticeable compression on *sforzandos*, and from the deft level of nuance it provided on the piano on *Rhapsody In Blue*, I have to give it high marks for its expression of micro-dynamics, too.

The above paragraphs were written in the context of the amp's sound with the ET speakers. When powering the electrostatic panels of my InnerSound Eros speakers, the Stingray didn't fare quite as well, as the sound through the Eros was a bit brighter, particularly in the



lower treble. Cymbals and other high frequency percussion instruments were a little more splashy than with my reference

amps. As I recall, I got similar results in the treble using a Music Reference RM-10 amplifier a while back; but the RM-10

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was not as powerful nor could it match the extension and punch of the Stingray in the bass. The bottom line here, is that the performance of all amplifiers is load dependent, and the character or personality of a given amplifier, will change a bit in accordance with the load that your speakers present (not to mention the inherent frequency response deviations and differences in room acoustics). For that reason, I always suggest that whenever possible, you audition *any* prospective amplifier in your own system, before committing to the purchase.

### Caveats?

I've already discussed the Stingray's sonic presentation in detail, so I won't repeat myself here, but there are a couple of small ergonomic "barnacles" that I should mention. First, the on/off toggle is on the back o' the 'ray and you have to feel for

it if you come at it from the front. Secondly, the dual-mono input selectors are located on the rear flanks (to shorten the signal path) and they are a bit inconvenient to reach as well. Third, although the binding posts appear to be of high quality, I'm not in love with their design. I don't like the way they hold banana plugs, as they are close enough together that spade lugs might short if not tightened securely. Lastly, the individual left and right inputs are far apart and at odd angles. This could make the use of some types of interconnects (those stiff, inflexible audiophile-types) a bit problematic, especially if you will be installing the amp in an enclosed or hard-to-reach location.

### Conclusion

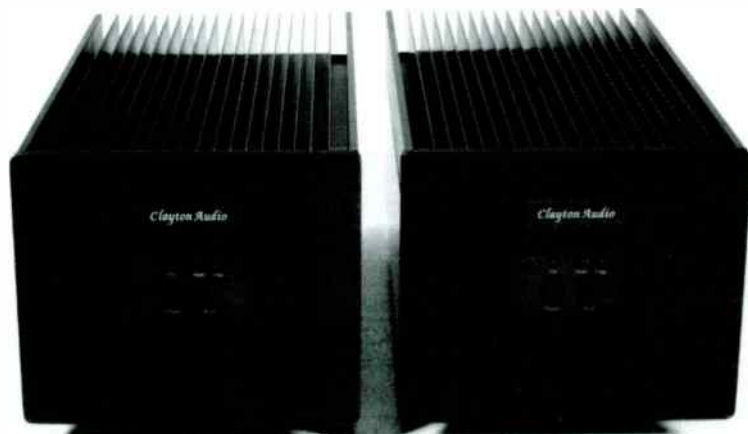
All in all, however, the Stingray is a great little amp. It's a manly beast, spirited and live-

ly, yet as gentle as the recording warrants. A lot of thought went into its development and this shows through in its gorgeous eye-catching styling and its sonic presentation. If you own inefficient speakers and like to blast them without caution in a high-volume acoustic venue, then you will need to buy a more powerful amplifier. Otherwise, this is a fine amplifier, that provides a generous blend musicality and resolution. With it, you may find yourself forgetting about the hardware and simply focusing your attention on rediscovering your collection of recordings. That happened with many of mine.

Plus, the Stingray really looks MARVELOUS! You could even mount it on your wall like a big-game trophy and tell your grand kids impassioned stories about the Big-One that didn't get away—minus the usual regrets.... Highly recommended!

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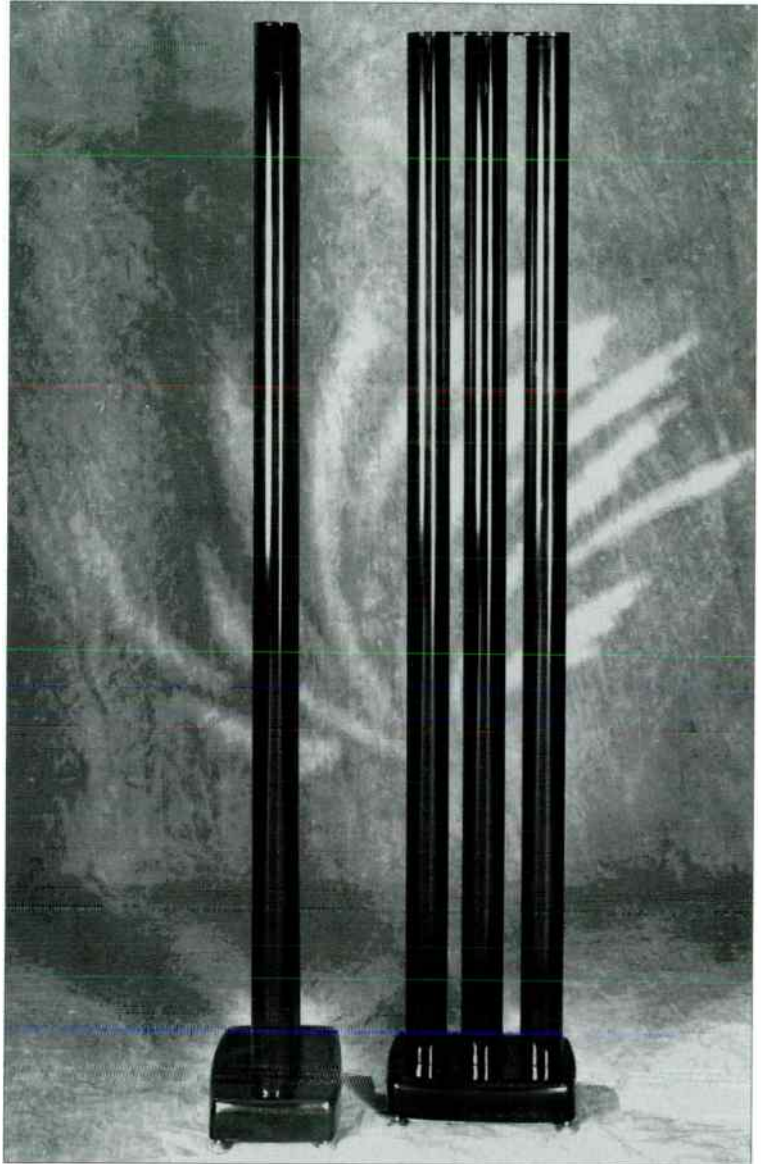
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# *Argent RoomLens Acoustic Room-Tuning Device*

Bill Brassington



**I**F I HAD TO DO IT all over again, and if I knew what I know now, the very first item that would go into my system is the Argent RoomLens tuning device. The most expensive equipment you can buy, even the top-rated

super "class A" gear, will not sound correct in a poorly set up room, one that has bad acoustics. A medium-priced system can sound three times as good in a properly damped room.

All of us audiophiles kind of know that, but continue to upgrade wire, speakers, processors, or CD transports. We like things that plug in, look sexy, and cost a lot of money. In this regard, we are all amateurs and

we are all barking up the wrong tree.

Don't make the mistake I made most of my career in hi-fi, thinking that "bigger and more expensive is better." Stop spending right now, and go into a stereo salon. Sit down and listen in a room that is properly set up, one using room treatments accurately. Then, take all those room treatments out and listen again. The before-and-after difference in your room sonics will be greater than an upgrade of electronics you can buy, regardless of price.

If the main part of what we audiophiles really have to do is treat the room, spending perhaps \$1,000 to \$1,500, then let's do that and do it first. The \$5,000 for wire and the \$7,500 for a CD transport can come later. Don't put the cart before the horse. I have gone into home where audiophiles have spent perhaps \$30,000 to \$80,000 on the "best of the best," and I have heard the worst of the worst standing waves; slap echo; first-, second-, and third-order reflections; bass suck-out; mid-bass overhang; brightness; etc., etc. And guess what? All this poor sound had nothing to do with the equipment. It was all due to the good old room or I should say, the bad old room.

Back in the '50s, when I worked for University loudspeakers, I should have learned and listened to what they said that there is good sound and bad sound, and good rooms and bad rooms. All it takes is to follow the recipe, and you'll get there more quickly and less expensively than you might think. Room treatment, guys, that is what it's all about. Start there first.

Of all the tweaks and room acoustic devices I have heard in my home (and that, by the way, is quite a few), no other device does it like the RoomLens from Argent. They are simply a revolution in changing the sound in my room for the better. Ric Cummings, one of the principals of Argent, is an innovator in this area and has built a company to be reckoned with.

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### **The RoomLenses are so much a tweak as a real-world working tool.**

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The RoomLens is 58 inches tall, 8½ inches wide, and 2½ inches deep and thus takes up very little floor space. Basically, the RoomLens has three long tubes fitted into Ric Cumming's "Dark Matter" bases which rest on four adjustable feet. Dark Matter is a dense polymer-based material, which Ric says has a "variable acoustical impedance," while the tubes themselves are packed with different amounts of fiberglass so that they have different resonance frequencies. This is something like the way engineers tune speaker boxes. The resonances of the three tubes are adjusted so that they act more like "a single broadband resonator," says Ric. At the top, the three tubes are tied together with a specially made bracket, while the bottom ends are covered over with a sort of mesh that reduces air flow.

Some 15 years ago, an acoustical room treatment company sent me some of their traps; I was flabbergasted with the positive difference it made when I placed them in the room.

For instance, as I walked around the room with the trap hugged to my body, I looked for where the most vibration came from in that spot in the room while I held them. I dropped the trap there, and it did the job, sounding the best. Unfortunately, when I got finished, the room looked cluttered. I have found a similar experience with the RoomLens, but when it all comes down to push and shove, the manufacturer suggests starting placements, so you really ought to experiment and see how your room loads up with them. However, I did find that the walking-around method worked pretty well.

I know audiophiles pretty well, and they all want to know what's new. They ask everyone they know, including me, "What can I do to get my sound better?" So I tell them about the latest new product and how much it costs, and they say, "Yeah, sure, but that's too expensive, that's too much money."

Well, take it from the ol' Brass Ear, save up \$1,200, buy the Argent RoomLenses, and forget every other piece of gear. This is a real-world working product that every serious listener really should have. Argent RoomLenses really aren't a tweak, but rather a really well thought-out product. I kid you not when I say that everyone's system should have them. I will stake my reputation as a serious audiophile on that for whatever that's worth.

P.S. Five listening rooms were used for auditioning the Argent RoomLenses. In each room, they received our club's coveted "100% Wow! Got to have that NOW! What's the telephone number?" award.

# NAGELING

## Ron Nagle

The expression on my wife's face told volumes. First, surprise, then a questioning gaze, then a glimmer to comprehension, and lastly, a smirk of "You've finally gone totally bonkers." As I loaded the unboxed "black bazookas" (they look like rocket launchers) into the back of our station wagon, I stammered "to tune my room."

I first became aware of the devices when I colleague, the cutting-edge and Right Honorable Knight Sir William of Brassington spake of them. It was at an Audiophile Society meeting. He was enthusiastic and informative, but at the evening's end, and even though my curiosity had been peeked, I left with more questions than answers.

I had my first real eyes-on look at the RoomLenses at Hi-Fi '99 in Chicago via the Cable Company's display. A bit later, another creditable audiophile friend offered to lend me his troika of tunes. This was fortuitous, indeed, for I was smack in the middle of an amplifier evaluation, and I had a problem. But tellingly, I didn't know it until I moved the Argent RoomLenses into the system.

Following the instructions, I placed one at the outside edge of each speaker, between it and the near wall, and was rewarded by magic. Without the sidewall reflections, the center stage became defined and the elements upon it assumed a measure of solidity and focus I did not think the amplifier capable of. Moreover, I was able to highlight areas in the rear sound field simply by doing the third RoomLens left or right behind the speakers.

This happened as I listened to Elton John. I placed a RoomLens just right of center-rear, and Elton's voice focused so that I now heard nuances of phrasing I did not know existed in the recording.

In the final analysis, I uncovered several good qualities these \$8,000 amps possessed and unhappily discovered that my room was a weak link. The effect of these devices in my system is predictable and repeatable, and, unlike pillows or traps, the more the better. You can move them about like chess pieces and discover precisely where room resonances lurk.

Wonderful, valuable tool. Don't know how I scraped by without them. Why didn't I think them up? I'm a believer. Tweak on, Bill.

## NOTES

**Argent RoomLens**, \$1,195.00 per set of three. Argent Cable, 69 Truesdale Rd., Tioga Center, NY 13845; phone 607/687-5066, fax 607/687-4452, e-mail [laudeman@worldnet.att.net](mailto:laudeman@worldnet.att.net).

### Brassington's Associated Equipment

JM Labs Mezzo Utopia and Apogee Mini Monitor loudspeakers; Meitner BiDAT D/A converter; Meitner CD transport; Audio Research VT200 amplifier; Harmonic Technology and Purist wire; ASC Tube Traps, Black Diamond Racing cones, etc.

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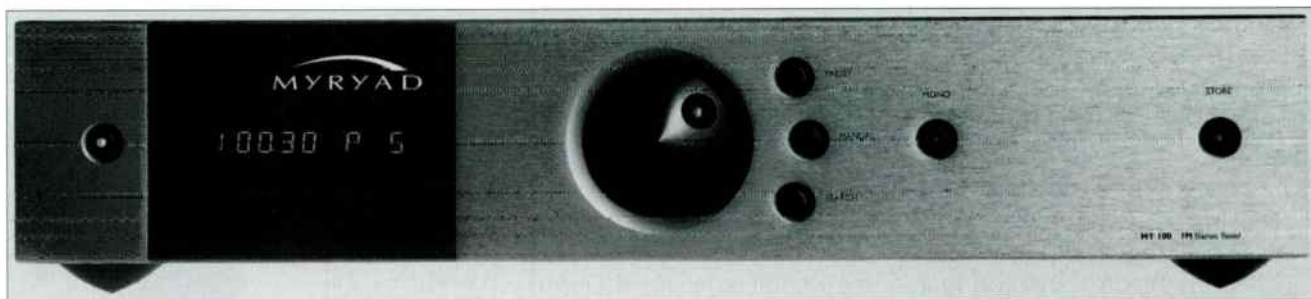
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# Myryad MT100 FM Stereo Tuner



“DAD, CAN I HELP you test?” my nine-year-old son asked, elbowing me aside. “Which button do I push?”

I was trying out the tuning pre-sets on the MT100 tuner that Artech had loaned *TAV* for review. “Turn the big knob, there’s a dent to put your finger in, until you get a station you want to keep. Then push the ‘store’ button on the right, then turn the knob again until the number you want to give the station shows on the display. Then push the store button again.”

In less than a minute, he’d mastered it and stored half a dozen stations, mostly loud rock, one that was playing a Beatles’ song, and WQXR because I told him they might play Tchaikovsky’s *1812 Overture*, which he is studying on the piano.

So much for the pre-sets being too difficult to figure out, and so I said to the Myryad marketing manager who’d called me up to make sure things were going okay. Of course, this nine year old was raised on computer

games, but even if you have trouble programming your VCR, there should be no challenge here.

The front panel of this tuner is a fine example of intelligent, ergonomic engineering. The single tuning knob is flush to the front panel, large and easy to turn, with an inviting dimple to rest your finger. There are three buttons to its right, arranged in an arc to match the curve of the knob, that control the tuning mode: Preset, manual tune, and seek. The stereo/mono switch is a quarter of the way from the right side of the panel, and the “store” button for the presets is on the right. The on/standby switch was on the left, and the tuning display next to that. There is a remote control, which works nicely, and interfaces to other units in the Myryad line.

I found the action of the manual “tune” to be too slow for my taste, and the speed of tuning seemed constant, no matter how quickly I turned the knob. A minor complaint and something one can live with, but I preferred the “seek” mode. Turn the knob

clockwise for a higher frequency, counter-clockwise for a lower frequency. Feel just two delicate clicks on the knob’s detents, and the tuner zooms in on the next station that has sufficient signal strength to be listenable. In pre-set mode, two silent clicks of the knob take you to the next higher or lower pre-set station.

I like the unusual look and feel of this unit. I still use a 15-year old tuner with a numbered dial that turns to indicate tuning frequency. Never really felt comfortable with a push button digital read-out, and digital tuners with a knob instead of buttons have never felt right. This unit gives you much of the visual and tactile feedback of an analog tuner. Maybe this should not be a surprise, because this is an analog tuner, albeit with a digital readout.

As shipped from the distributor, the Myryad came with a set of specs, but no description of the circuitry. The specs are impressive enough, as the published specs of every tuner seem to be these days, but I wanted to

know what was under the hood. A call to Artech, who distribute this English-built unit, and a circuit description was faxed to me.

"...a low noise dual-gate MOS-FET input amplifier, three tuned r.f. (radio frequency) stages and a buffered local oscillator . . . tuned by a crystal-locked frequency synthesizer . . . . The i.f. (intermediate frequency) signal is fed from the front-end to a three-stage, low-noise, discreet i.f. amplifier and linear-phase ceramic i.f. filters . . . high headroom to prevent overload. . . . The signal is demodulated using a double-tuned quadrature detector . . . . The demodulated composite stereo signal is passed through a phase-compensated "birdie" filter and on to a PLL (phase locked loop) stereo multiplex decoder integrated circuit . . . . Stereo multiplex pilot

tones are removed with a double-notch filter . . . ."

Sorry if I bored you, but this is music to my ears. A PLL! My system tuner uses a PLL, a technology declared obsolete in 1985, shortly after I purchased it. High-end tuners are returning to this method. With few excep-

**My Manhattan location gives even great FM tuners fits, but the MT100 rose to the challenge.**

tions, no digital tuner has ever sounded as good to me as a PLL circuit. One exception used a proprietary digital decoder methodology, different from anyone else's, that resulted in low distortion and greater separation than other digital designs. The other was very expensive and put together very carefully.

The trend in high-end tuners seems to be away from digital decoding and back to a PLL, and I think that says it all.

But back to the Myryad: The circuit described is not unusual, though the use of a discrete i.f. amplifier instead of a less expensive chip, among other things, testifies to the care given to the design. No double i.f. conversion, a communication-receiver technology that greatly reduces interference from things like electric razors and other appliances, but which can increase distortion.

Some FM tuners now use this trick, but not having listened to one, I can't say if it might sound better or worse. Certainly r.f. interference proved no problem for the MT100.

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Manhattan, I am at once blessed with a multitude of stations, some very fine but all cursed with the challenge of multipath interference. The Myryad certainly rose to this challenge.

Almost every tuner or receiver ever shipped comes with the ubiquitous folded-dipole antenna, an inherently flawed design. No allowance is made for the velocity factor of the twin-lead wire the antenna is made from, which slows the speed of radio waves in the antenna, lengthening it electrically. This can be compensated for by shorting the dipole at about 78% of the distance from the center on either twin-lead arm. If this isn't done, the mismatch of the velocity of the radio wave in the dipole not matching that of the radio wave in free space, results in a sort of multipath interference within the antenna itself. Not good, and a built-in handicap. But since this is what they supply with the tuner, this is what I used when I first set up the tuner.

For the first comparison listening test, I used the folded dipole for the Myryad and a simple rabbit ear antenna—no bells and whistles or knobs—for my reference tuner. I then swapped antennas for the second run.

Conclusions: The Myryad is the more sensitive tuner, which I

---

**The Myryad's selectivity is decent, without suffering the distortion that comes with very sharp filters.**

---

believe is due to the dual-gate MOS-FET input amplifier and the three tuned r.f. stages in the front end. This showed up most obviously with one station in particular that I like to listen to, WNYC. The Myryad could get a signal-strength of "3" with the dipole, but it was listenable only in mono due to multipath noise. My reference unit couldn't pick up this station at all with the folded dipole, though it could sometimes get it with the rabbit ears, but not reliably. The signal

barely moved my reference unit's analog meter, and even in mono the signal was noisy. (Time of day influenced this, with stronger signals late at night and early in the morning.) In the sensitivity department, the Myryad is all the tuner most people will ever need. Multipath noise in places like New York City is still a problem for the Myryad, and will be so for any tuner. It's a problem that can only be truly solved with a better antenna. Or moving to a suburban location.

The sensitivity of the Myryad is not the highest you can find, but greater sensitivity comes at the price of more noise and interference. A better antenna will make more difference anyway. The Myryad's selectivity is decent, but cannot be increased as it can on my reference tuner. But greater selectivity means sharper filters, which, in turn, means more distortion. The selectivity switch on my reference unit never improved reception in this comparison, but did noticeably increase distortion. So this "missing" feature wasn't missed.

My reference unit sounded sweeter, if less accurate, than the Myryad, at least on some stations, with some material. The Myryad occasionally had a harsher sound, particularly on the highly processed signals of popular music stations. They boost the highs, which gives an attention-grabbing but unnatural sizzle to the signal. The Myryad emphasized this indiscretion. On WQXR, the Myryad was noisier at the high end. (I had to crank up the volume a little to verify this.) I attribute this to the Myryad's double-notch filter, used to remove the 19-kHz mul-

## NOTES

**Myryad MT100 FM Stereo Tuner**, \$895.00. Distributor: Artech Electronics Ltd., P.O. Box 1980, Champlain, NY 12919; phone 514/631-6448, fax 514/631-1212, e-mail [info@artech-electronics.com](mailto:info@artech-electronics.com), website [www.artech-electronics.com](http://www.artech-electronics.com).

### Associated Equipment

Mitsubishi DA-F10 tuner, Dennesen Sirius preamp (modified, soldering iron in one hand, telephone in the other, as I talked to the designer; changed the d.c. servo feedback and input stage biasing), Hafler 220 amplifier (minimally modified), Snell Type K/II speakers (modified tweeter anti-diffraction rings added, a moderately modified Radio Shack passive subwoofer, with a custom-designed and -built crossover-equalizer (the main speakers are not in the signal path), and a homemade mono amplifier. It's not passive anymore.

tplex pilot tone. It is much sharper than the filter in my reference unit, and so more high-frequency information is preserved, unfortunately along with some noise. This disappeared for WQXR when I used an antenna which was designed to remove multipath signals. It seems that a superior circuit can sound worse with inferior material.

For those unfamiliar with the nature of multipath interference, it occurs when a radio wave is reflected off a building or a mountain. When it is reflected, its polarity is reversed, so a right-hand polarized wave becomes left-hand polarized. But the different lengths of the multiple signal paths result in phase differences between the signals, which shows up as noise when the decoded signal comes out your speakers. The change in polar-

ization does provide a means of reducing the distortion: use an antenna sensitive to waves of only one polarity. Another method is a directional antenna,

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**Until digital FM comes along, it's hard to imagine any FM tuner doing better.**

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so the multipath waves will be attenuated.

There is another way of dealing with multipath noise, but it is seldom employed anymore. A high-blend control, which can be as simple as switching in a capacitor between the channels, will blend the high frequencies, where the multipath noise is. Since this noise is out of phase, adding the signals together cancels it, and it disappears. The mid-range, where most of the

directional information resides, contains little noise, and is unaffected by the filter. The result is good separation without the sizzle from a poor signal. This is a worthwhile addition to any tuner, and would improve the usability of the Myryad tuner in distinct problem-reception areas like the one I live in. But my reference tuner doesn't have one either.

For my last round of listening, I used an antenna designed to deal with multipath distortion: An Archimedean spiral, about 14 inches in diameter. I designed and built it as a prototype for an engineering firm interested in indoor FM and TV antennas. Though it performs well, the size is a little larger than what the marketing geniuses say people will buy. Spiral antennas of this type are circularly polarized. This immediately reduces multipath signals by

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half. They are also somewhat directional, which helps further with multipath.

The Myryad performs brilliantly with this antenna. The high frequency harshness is gone, except where a station boosts treble to attract listeners, and there is a depth and sheen to the music that I demand for any extended listening. (Translation: Good high-frequency response without overemphasis.) Even the over-processed sound of a WJUNK didn't sound so bad. WQXR, when broadcasting live performances, is indeed a treat. All told, I received 22 stations that lit the stereo indicator. With manual tuning in mono mode, quite a few distant or low power stations could be heard.

With a decent antenna, the Myryad outperformed my reference unit. For those interested in an indoor antenna to decrease

multipath distortion and increase signal strength, I would recommend a half-wave, end-fed dipole; performance is good, and it is commercially available. The Magnum Sleuth is an example. For the sake of testing, I wish I still had the half-wave antenna I made out of electrical

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### **Worth the asking price? Well, I am certainly tempted to buy one.**

---

conduit and a junction box. With the quarter-wave matching section, it stood seven feet high and was as ugly as unfinished wallboard. But I am a married man; the nine year old I mentioned has a resident mother.

#### **Conclusion**

I believe this component offers all the tuner you could

ever want. Until digital FM transmission comes along, it's hard to imagine any product offering a significant improvement in what you hear in your listening room.

Is Myryad's MT100 worth the asking price? I am certainly tempted (but see the preceding paragraph.) If you live in an area that offers something more than top 40 FM (I think the 40 refers to "40-dB dynamic range"—but that's being optimistic,) and it's in your price range, you should consider it. The remote control, and the My-link connection allow it to interface with other Myryad components (an option I wasn't able to try this time around). This will create a seamless interface and a coherent look for those who desire a visual appearance every bit as pleasing as the sonic aspects of their sound system.

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# Whise Techtonic 130 Active Speakers

John Gatski



**O**VER THE PAST six years, I have tried a lot of speakers in all price ranges, and I must admit that powered speakers are not usually my cup of tea. Since I am an amplifier fanatic, I just

never never believed that the perfect amp could be put in the perfect speaker for the perfect price. In real world trials, I have heard speakers that have had good speaker design with the

proper complement of drivers, but amps that sounded hard. Likewise, I have heard some

*John Gatski is an avid audiophile and electronics gear collector. In his spare time, he is publisher/executive editor of Pro Audio Review.*

speakers where the amp was great, but the speaker had a lot of coloration.

The Australian-made Whise Tectonic EMFR130 full-range, active, reference loudspeaker (\$8,700 the pair) reviewed here is not perfect, but its amp and speaker design have a synergy that ended up pulling me in and leaving me with quite a favorable impression.

### Features

The 130 looks conventional at first glance, but a closer inspection reveals its uniqueness. The speaker contains four drivers: One 22-mm, soft-dome tweeter and two 100-mm mid drivers behind the grille and an internal subwoofer/bass driver located inside the cabinet. The patented Parametric Acoustic Model (PAM) subwoofer's bass system energy is projected from a vent

on the cabinet front near the bottom. According to the company, it can be used as an audiophile speaker or as a home theater speaker. Because of its size, horizontal use as a center channel would likely require careful placement.

Being an active loudspeaker, the internal "Zero Delta" amplifier section sports three separate 60-watt amps for each set of drivers and the subwoofer. Dynamic power is claimed to be

their respective drivers via an active Linkwitz-Riley three-way crossover. The version I tested came with the standard RCA connector input, though the owner's manual states an balanced XLR connector is an option.

The factory rated specifications list a frequency response of 28 Hz to 20 kHz, plus or minus 2 dB. Maximum SPL is said to be 115 dB. The cabinet comes in a variety of finishes, including two oaks, rosewood, walnut or black. It measures 820 mm high by 355 mm wide by 355 mm deep. Weight is just over 62 pounds.

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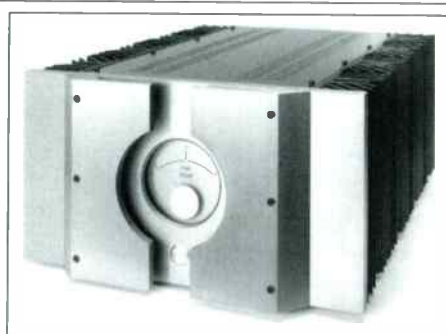
**This active speaker uses a patented subwoofer system to produce tight bass unmatched by separates.**

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500 watts. The well-made amp features toroidal power transformer, matched precision components, "Instant On" switching, and external rear-mounted heat sink. Frequencies are directed to

### Set Up

I set up the Whise Tectonic 130 tandem in my reference listening room. Although the speakers are more than 60 pounds, I managed to "walk" them in their shipping cartons



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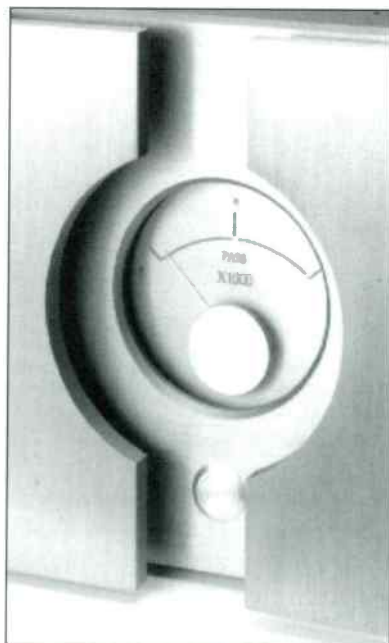
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# NOTES

down a couple of flights of stairs to the listening room. The grilles come installed upside down to protect the tweeters during shipping, and the set-up instructions remind you to invert them. In the correct position, the tweeter is covered by the grill. (Leaving the grille upside down with the tweeter exposed, I found the treble slightly more pronounced). I located the speakers about 10 feet from the listening chair and about seven feet apart; they were angled in slightly.

Since I almost always use my amplifiers for testing most loudspeakers, I had to reorientate my methodology; active speakers mean no amps or speaker cable. It also means, in my case, that I needed longer RCA line cables since the distance from the rack of source and preamp components is about 10 feet from the speakers'

**Whise Tectonic 130 Active Speakers**, \$8,700 per pair. Whise USA, 3375 South Hoover St., Suite J, Los Angeles, CA 90007; phone: 213/742-1908, fax: 213/742-1967, e-mail: fkoenig@tmhllabs.com.

location. That meant I could not use my shorter normal reference RCA connector cable, the

pair of MIT cables to link the preamp to the speakers.

The cable issue again reared its head with the power cords. The six-foot cables that came with the speakers did not reach my power strip. I found a pair of 10-footers that did the job.

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**Overall, this is a fine audiophile-grade monitor that looks good, too.**

---

## The Audition

Alpha-Core Goertz—a solid-silver, two-conductor ribbon cable. Nor could I use my Hosa Pro three-conductor silver XLR cables since the Tectonic did not have the optional XLR connector. I ended up using 10-foot

Time to hook it all together and start some serious listening. Mr. Editor-In-Chief Gene Pitts was pretty high on these speakers, so I used some of my tried and true premium components—a Pass Labs Aleph P

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Class A MOS-FET preamp, a Pass Labs DAC-1 20-bit DAC with Class-A MOS-FET analog circuitry, a Denon CD transport, a Sony professional DAT recorder, and Alpha Core Goertz solid-silver ribbon cable interconnects, which I have been using as my reference for five years.

Doing a burn-in required a constant preamp signal because the Techtonic EMFR130's auto-on feature would shut the amp off after 20 minutes with no signal present. I recommend that the company take a lesson from other audiophile and professional designers and also add a manual on/off switch for those of who believe an amp sounds better after a warm up (as I do).

The speaker exhibits almost no noise from its amp. Putting an ear to the tweeter was needed to hear an ever so slight hum. The first disc that I put one was my tried and true jazz violin ref-

erence, Johnny Frigo's *Debut of a Legend* (Chesky JD119). This was recorded by renowned recording and mastering engineer Bob Katz, and I still think this disc has an incredible sound stage as well as treble detail that few other CDs have equaled. Listening through the Whise Techtonic 130s, I was impressed at how much of the ambience and rich tone of the violin and the warm fullness of the jazz archtop guitar were reproduced. Another jazz CD that I am fond of using as a reference disc is an old recording recently remastered, guitarist Charlie Byrd's *The Guitar Artistry of Charlie Byrd* (Riverside OJCCD-945-2). This 1963 recording is just astonishing in its capture of Byrd's masterful, nylon-string guitar. The 130s relayed that positive attribute nearly as well my reference speakers, which have ribbon tweeters.

Another jazz CD that passed the test via the Techtonics was Joe Beck and Ali Ryerson's *Alto* (DMP-CD521). Noted recording engineer Tom Jung employed Sony's Direct Stream Digital process in this recording of Beck's unique alto guitar and Miss Ryerson's flute (with supporting percussion). Even with the mix-down to 16-bit CD, this recording has incredible sonic air and depth with shockingly low noise; the Techtonics had no trouble reminding me how good the recording is.

Turning to classical music, I sat back in my listening chair to an assortment of selections—but of course my Bach *Cello Suites* were first. Janos Starker's *Bach: Six Suites For Solo Cello Complete and Two Sonatas for Cello and Piano* (Mercury Living Presence 432-756-2). Starker's is the most passionate rendering of these pieces, and the engineers who made these speakers can

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be proud that their product conveyed all the warmth and richness of the cello's tones throughout. Classical piano and full orchestral recordings were similarly relayed with utmost precision by the Techtonic speakers.

Moving on to various pop forums, I sampled everything from country and compressed grunge to Bluegrass and straight-ahead pop vocalists. This wide variety of recording styles allowed me to determine if these speakers were as versatile as I suspected.

On the country side, I popped in a couple of country twangers, one old and one just a few years old. First, was the rerelease of Buck Owen's *Your Tender Loving Care* (Sundazed 6104). The treble-crazed Telecaster guitar and reverb-laden steel guitar playing on the ballads and the fast tracks were distinct and precise without harshness. In a modern tribute to that

Bakersfield sound, I also listened to a rendition of Marty Robins "Devil Woman," from Wylie and Wild West Show *Get Wild* (Cross Tree Records CTR9405). The long, subtle reverb of the steel guitar was heard as it usually is on good speaker systems.

I also found the Whise Techtonics to be up to the task in reproducing dense electronic pop music with relative clarity and at maintaining a tightness in the bass that speakers with separate amps have not been able to match. At times on music with a lot of treble, there was a touch of high-end emphasis, but for the most part they were smooth.

Although the speakers are admirable in their careful matching of drivers, crossover and amplifiers, there were a couple of things I did not like. As mentioned in the set up, I would like to see XLR connections together with unbalanced RCA jacks; the speakers are

already pricey enough that a couple of more bucks for two additional connectors ain't going to break the bank. A lot of powered speakers have them—pro and consumer. I would also like to see an off/on switch. With the auto-on feature, the amp goes off after 20 minutes and becomes cold. To keep it warmed up, I turned up the pre-amp to maximum in between listening sessions. Had to remember to turn it down before I hit "Play" the next time. Yikes!

### Conclusion

Overall though, I have to give the Aussie-designed Whise Techtonics a high rating. The engineering balance of amp and speaker has given us a very fine audiophile monitor that sounds excellent—and it looks good, too. Definitely recommended. As they say in Australia "G'Day."

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# Adcom GFP-750 Preamplifier



**M**ANY AUDIOPHILES view Adcom as a company that has always prided itself in offering rugged well-built products that could be counted on to deliver significant bang for the buck. Quite a few of us, guys who went the high-end route, owned a trusty Adcom GFA-555 power amp at some point along the way. It wasn't considered the most refined amp to be sure, but neither was it bad sounding and it provided plenty of power and slam for the comparatively inefficient high-end speakers of its time. Over the past decade or so Adcom has provided a line of electronics that have consistently garnered praise in the audio press, keeping their moniker alive in the minds of audiophiles and music-lovers alike.

To develop the circuit topology for this model, Adcom wisely recruited the very talented Nelson Pass. The genealogy of

the GFP-750 can be traced back to the Pass Labs Aleph P and a DIY project ([www.passlabs.com](http://www.passlabs.com)) called The Son of the Bride of Zen, which I'm told is not related to either the Son or the Grandson of Ampzilla--sheesh!

The GFP-750 preamplifier circuit has only one stage of amplification, i.e. the audio signal passes through only one transistor to the output when the circuit is active. In its passive mode, the GFP-750 is literally just a volume potentiometer with input switching. The circuit topology would be called a differential amplifier with active load, or in other words, a differential, pure Class-A circuit. No global feedback is used.

The active devices used in the circuit are HEX-FET transistors IRF9610 and IRF610 made by International Rectifier. HEX-FETs are a type of MOS-FET built with IR's patented fabrication

process. There are six of these devices in each channel in the GFP-750. Two are used as the differential pair, two are used as the active load, and two are used as current sinks to pull the Class-A current through the differential pair.

In addition to having both passive and active circuit options, the preamp can be used in either balanced or unbalanced configurations. There is one set of balanced XLR-style input connectors labeled "CD" and one set of RCA-input jacks designated as a "CD" input. Either of these inputs can be utilized, but only one set at a time. There are four additional pairs of RCA inputs as well as a processor loop for connecting a surround sound processor. Outputs include two sets of main outputs on RCA jacks, a tape output, and one pair of XLR-type balanced outputs. A female IEC-

type receptacle is provided for the a.c. cord.

The front panel contains four rotary control knobs: One selects stereo, mono, or channel reversal; the next is a five-position input selector; the third is for balance, and lastly we have the volume control. Three centrally located toggles switch between active and passive modes, power on/off, and the external processor loop feature.

A small slim-line infrared remote control is included. With it you can adjust the volume and the balance, mute the sound, or select any of the five inputs. Also, the external processor can be selected via the remote.

Reading through the published specs I was happy to see that the "A" weighted signal-to-noise ratio (S/N) was extremely low, greater than 102 dB down, which is about as quiet as it gets in a consumer audio preamp. My highly efficient InnerSound Eros speakers signified their thanks by the lack of audible hiss emanating from the electrostatic elements. The S/N and distortion figures are a bit lower for the balanced circuitry than for the unbalanced, indicating that the unit's performance is optimized for balanced operation. This was more obvious in looking at the graphs that accompanied my test sample than from the published specs. Both THD and IM distortions are very low in either case.

The output impedance is less than 1200 ohms at the balanced outputs and less than 600 ohms at the unbalanced outputs. This is sufficiently low to ensure negligible high-frequency roll off with long cable runs driving most modern amps. However, if you're using primarily the pas-

sive mode of this preamp, it's best to keep the interconnects as short as possible.

Power consumption is 30 VA, the weight is a solid 15 pounds and the maximum chassis dimensions are 4.15 inches high x 17 inches wide x 12 inches deep.

### Set-Up

To put the GFP-750 through its paces, I used it in two different systems. I tried both the pas-

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## Over the past decade, Adcom's electronics have consistently garnered praise from audiophiles.

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sive and active modes of operation and I used the unbalanced as well as the balanced inputs and outputs.

My source components were the same for either system. I used the Townshend Audio Mk III Rock turntable with a modified Rega RB-300 tonearm and a Transfiguration low-output moving-coil cartridge. This fed a custom AHT/P phono stage which I connected to the "Tuner" input on the Adcom. My digital source was the Parasound C/BD-2000 transport coupled to a Parasound D/AC-2000 processor via a Harmonic Technology digital cable. In this system, the GFP-750 was substituted for an AHT tube line stage. The amplifiers were the Monarchy SM-70s, used as monoblocks to feed the electrostatic panels of my InnerSound Eros speakers. The InnerSound bass amp drove the woofer sections.

In my alternate reference system, the Adcom fed a Sonogy Black Knight amplifier, which drove Eminent Technology LFT-

8a speakers. Custom-made Walsh-type tweeters were switched in and out with the ETs, so that I could better gauge the Adcom's high frequency performance.

### The Sound

My initial impression of the GFP-750 was that it was a touch bright throughout the treble spectrum. However after a few weeks of break-in, this slight brightness seemed to diminish.

Later, when I switched from the WireWorld Equinox III interconnects to Kimber Kable Hero balanced interconnects, the high frequencies abated a bit more to the point where, if anything, the treble spectrum

became just slightly reticent (comparatively). This had the effect of showcasing the beauty of the Adcom's grainless midrange reproduction, while retaining slightly soft detailed and focused highs. Hmmm.

I can recall playing the late Harry Nilsson's "Remember," (Warner Sunset/Atlantic 83153-2) from the *You've Got Mail* soundtrack album. At that time I was using the Eminent Technology speakers. Harry's vocal was locked into center stage, a few feet behind the speakers, perfectly focused I mean rock-solid, without the slightest tendency to wander. To the far right and left at the outside edges of the speakers, the harmonious strings of the Pop Arts String Quartet came to life with noteworthy precision. Chris Spedding's bouzouki, a long-necked mandolin-like instrument, added its own unique flavor to the sound.

In fact, a couple of days later, I had a non-audiophile friend over to listen and I played him

the same cut. After listening attentively for a short time, he turned to me with a puzzled look on his face and asked where the other (surround) speakers were! I explained that there were none and he looked at me like I was pulling his leg. Suffice it to say that the Adcom throws an expansive three-dimensional soundstage that is very precise in locating instruments and performers.

Moving the unit to my primary reference system with the InnerSound Eros speakers afforded me an opportunity to play with a suspension system for the Adcom. Originally, I set the unit atop a Townshend Seismic Sink which was sitting on my concrete floor. My impression of the sound was quite favorable.

In looking back through my notes I see a recurrent theme. The sound was superbly focused. Lyric comprehension and inner detailing (especially true in balanced) were among the best I had experienced in the system. It appeared that the passive mode of the Adcom held a slight performance edge over its active stage. The soundstage dimensions were very close, but I thought that the bass went a little deeper and that the sound was even more focused and transparent through not by much.

The only thing I could point to as being slightly off the mark was that the presentation was just a bit dry, devoid of the harmonic lushness that tubes can impart, perhaps related to a slightly recessed lower midrange region. This was true of both passive and active configurations.

Going to Foreplay's album of the same title (Warner Bros. 9-

26656-2), I was surprised at how dynamic and lifelike the instruments sounded. Playing track 9, "October Morning," the kick drum almost blew me out of my seat toward the finale where the band's really kickin' it. I swear I got the same kind of a rush I get when I hear a live band. It was that dynamic and forceful.

My vinyl sounded great too. Playing "*L'Histoire du Soldat* from *Igor Stravinsky Conducts 1961* (Columbia MS 6272), I was very taken with the natural

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**In my listening notes, the superbly focused sound is a recurrent theme.**

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timbre of the violins and the brass. The interplay of the instruments from their respective positions in the soundstage was somehow more involving than I could recall from my past listening sessions. I think that this was due to a combination of factors, such as an improved sense of overall dynamics, a lower noise floor, low distortion and timbral accuracy.

On George Gershwin's "*Rhapsody in Blue*," from *Dayful Of Song* (Delos DE 3216), the nimble finger stabs of Andrew Litton on the grand piano were rendered clearer, with less homogenization. One could easily hear the sharp initial attack of the hammer hitting the string, which was impressive in itself, but combined with the full glorious decay of the notes it proved to be very involving. Going to "*An American in Paris*," from the same CD, the cymbals on the left channel were very distinct and airy and reached way back to the rear of

the soundstage. This was clearly the best I had ever heard them sound. I was definitely hearing many of the subtle nuances of this recording that I had not detected previously.

**But...**

Although I don't have many nits to pick with the Adcom's sound, I can find something to criticize about some of its control features. My InnerSound speakers are very efficient and the Monarchy SM-70 amplifiers have unusually high input sensitivity. What happened is that turning the GFP-750's volume control to about the 8 o'clock position (practically off) resulted in moderately LOUD listening levels in my room. The passive (no-gain) mode worked a little better I could get past the 9 o'clock point with that. In most (less sensitive) systems, higher volume settings should be the norm.

Also, I found the unit's remote to require a bit of practice, dexterity and patience. The rotary volume knob is motor-driven and it doesn't start turning the moment you press the button, nor does it stop rotating the moment you release it. For me, this resulted in a series of up and down adjustments to hit the exact volume level I was aiming for. As I recall, the Krell KAV-250p with its electronic volume control and sequential LED readout had a greater range of adjustment toward the lower volume settings and was easier to operate with its remote. But, of course, that's a much more expensive unit.

Additionally, you can not see the setting of the volume or balance knobs from across the room. There is no line or indica-



tor light that can be seen from distances of more than a few feet. My solution to that was to cut two small strips of Peter Belt's 'phile-foil and stick one to the face of each knob to show the location of the indicator groove. This worked

well and who knows, the mystic rainbow foils might have improved the sound a bit as Belt claims....

### The Final Analysis

The renowned design skills of Nelson Pass combined with Adcom's no-nonsense approach have produced an affordable winner. Despite my couple of small nit-picks on the ergonomic short-falls of the GFP-750, I must admit that this is a very exceptional preamplifier. It is solidly built, includes infrared remote control and both passive and active operating modes, not

to mention balanced and unbalanced circuitry. For the low price of only \$1250.00, one would expect a preamp offering all these features to be sonically compromised in some way. I'm happy to report that this is NOT the case.

A slightly recessed lower midrange was my only real sonic complaint. Truth be told, it is more likely that my reference tube preamp is a bit warm in this area and that I've become accustomed to its more romantic presentation.

I am quite confident in asserting that the GFP-750 is an outstanding piece of audio gear. If you're in the market for a line stage preamplifier and you're thinking, "Perhaps a nice Mark Levinson, or maybe a new Krell..." do yourself a favor and couple the Adcom name to that train of thought.

**Adcom's GFP-750  
is an outstanding  
piece of audio gear.**

## N O T E S

**Adcom GFP-750 preamplifier**, \$1250.00; Adcom, 10 Timber Lane, Marlboro, NJ 07746; phone 732/683-2356; fax 732/683-2358; website [www.adcom.com](http://www.adcom.com).

### Associated Equipment

Townshend Audio Rock MK III turntable; modified Rega RB300 tonearm; Sumiko Transfiguration moving-coil cartridge; AHT/P custom phono stage; Bylux Dedicated powerline conditioner; AHT tube line-stage preamp; Sonogy Black Knight and Monarchy Audio SM-70 (as bridged monoblocks) amplifiers; InnerSound Eros speakers; WireWorld Equinox III, Harmonic Technology Truth-Link and Full Spectrum Signature interconnects; WireWorld Equinox III and Sonoran Desert speaker cables, and Full Spectrum Exotic, Clayton Audio and Monarchy Audio a.c. cords.

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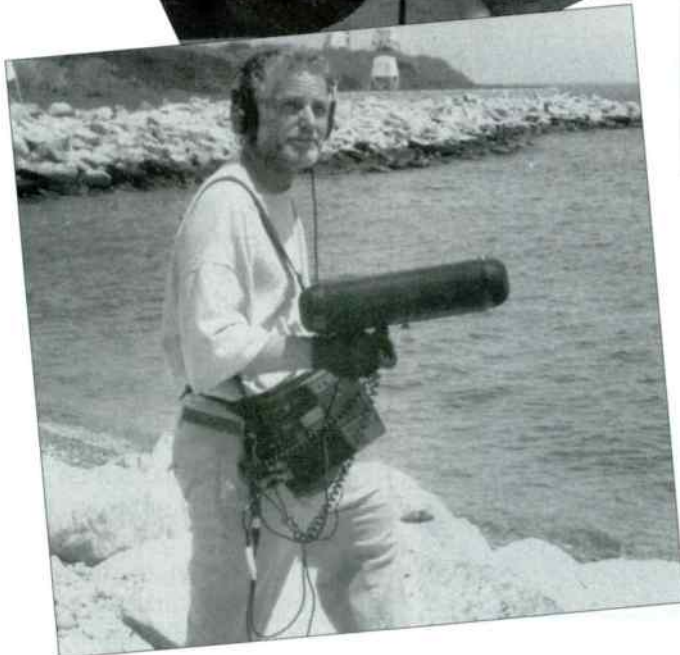
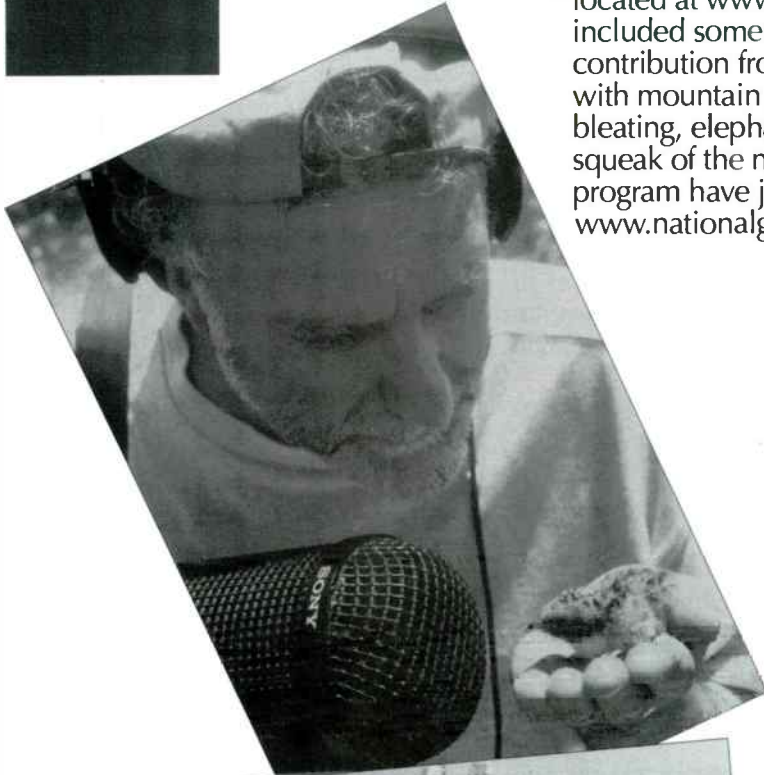
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←————→  
**Flash!**

Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab has announced its closure after 22 years of making some of the very best LPs, CDs, and cassettes. Herb Belkin, the co-founder, had sold the business upon his retirement five years ago. We'll miss 'em!

# B ACK PAGE

**J**IM METZNER's *Pulse of the Planet* radio program aired its 2,000th show last October 29th. I think of Metzner as one of the world's pre-eminent authorities on ambient sounds, and his series which began with an environmental focus now includes science, technology, and culture. Each two-minute program is heard daily on more than 300 commercial and public radio stations worldwide. You can find out which radio station, as well as other information, by checking their website which is located at [www.pulseplanet.com](http://www.pulseplanet.com). The 2,000th show included some of Jim's personal favorites and included a contribution from primatologist Jane Goodall together with mountain gorilla barks, ant stridulations, camel bleating, elephant seal rumbles, and the "infamous squeak of the naked mole rat." Sound samples from the program have just started up in streaming audio at [www.nationalgeographic.com](http://www.nationalgeographic.com). Go listen. -*The Editor.*



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Home Theater, Feb, 97



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—Joseph M. Cierniak

The Sensible Sound, Issue # 60



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—Julian Hirsh

Stereo Review, Dec. 96

*\*Strictly speaking: for 20 years until patent expires.*



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