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Volume 6, Issue 4

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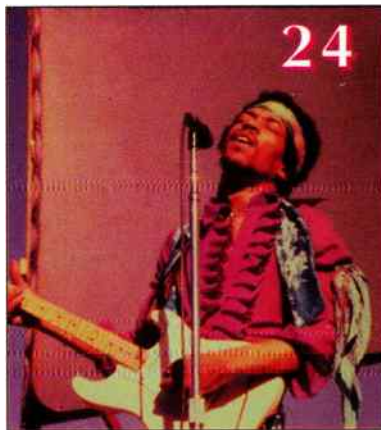
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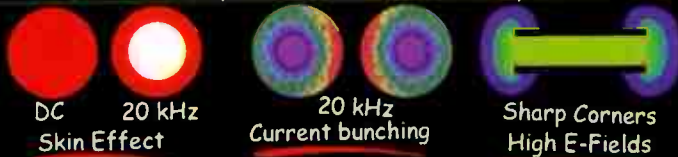
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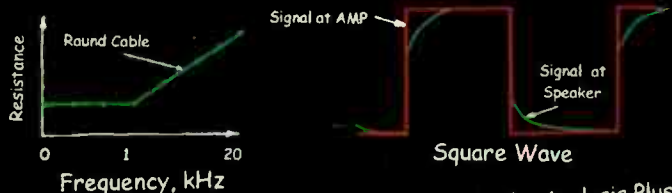
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Price: \$3,000.00

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L ETTERS

The Right Term

Dear Editor:

Just a brief e-note about Eric Busch's "How Low Can We Go" article: Mr. Busch consistently makes reference to "subsonic" relative to low bass sounds. I believe he means "infrasonic". Subsonic is below the speed of sound in air, while infrasonic is a frequency lower than the audible limit.

Jim Frane
San Francisco, CA

Busch's "Low Bass Article

Dear Editor:

You published a great article, Eric Busch's "Low Bass on CDs: How Low Can You Go?", in the last issue (Vol. VI, No. 3). I'm a confirmed bass lover — the musical kind, not the artificial stuff Hollywood puts out. My system is two-channel stereo with Audio Research, Bryston, Theta, VPI, and Thiel 3.6 speakers. Wouldn't allow surround sound in the home if it was given to me.

I know there are low notes my system won't produce, but I think I've reached the lower limits of my room capabilities. I have found many of the events the Eric has catalogued, but have a question and an addition.

An addition: Cut 20 of Reference Recordings *Star of Wonder*. In the third verse of "O Come All Ye Faithful" sung as an anthem, the organist pulls out the really low stops. The events are fleeting because the eighth notes don't permit the pipes to fully fill the church before the organist has moved to the next note, but there are some very low notes there.

A question: I'm very familiar with Flim and the BBs *Big Notes* but have yet to find a system that can handle

the bass in cut 11, "Born To Love You." I have taken this disk to a number of hi-fi dealers and have yet to determine if the implied low synth is truly there but beyond the capabilities of anything except maybe the Duntechs. Maybe the recording capabilities at that time (the '70s I think) just couldn't capture it and I'm hearing all there is.

I tried this cut on B&W 802s about 12 years ago at a dealer in Morristown, NJ and felt a vibration without much sound on my eardrums. This was probably the result of standing waves in the listening environment. From your article, Busch seems to have the equipment to analyze what's really there and I'd love to know what's really going on in the "software." Hope he has the time to follow up.

Don Mawhinney
Mount Kisco, NY

The Editor responds:

Thanks for your kind words, Mr. Mawhinney. There really isn't a "low-frequency limit" on what low musical notes a system can put into a listening room, at least not one imposed by the room itself; this is one of those audio red herrings. Think about what frequencies you can hear using headphones, certainly ones well below the wave length equivalent to the distance inside an earpiece. The question is which notes the room's standing waves interfere with, and where in the room they do their dirty deed. I asked Tom Jung, who did the work on *Big Notes*, to comment on the low notes on "Born To Love You:"

"Not much to say about "Low Bass" other than *Big Notes* track 11 ending has synthesizer low frequency fundamentals ranging from about 22 to 37Hz. Not many speakers are

able to reproduce the low end of that range.

Schweitzer 78s For Sale

Dear Editor:

In going through some stuff, I found a set of old 78-rpm discs in decent condition: Volume I of Albert Schweitzer playing Bach organ music. They were recorded in London and are on Columbia.

I no longer have a 78-rpm record player so I am wondering is this worth anything to anyone?

Bernard Kingsley
bkingsley@att.net

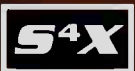
The Sport

Dear Editor:

My music listening pleasure has been rekindled: I replaced my pre-amp and power amp with a Jeff Rowland Concentra integrated amp and my old cables with Tara Labs RSC Air Ones. Now, the recorded music I listen to has inner detail, a realistic soundstage, and — most of all — a musical sound. I am fortunate to have a wife who understands how much I enjoy music, and we agreed to purchase a higher level of audio gear. Listening to music is such a great pleasure!

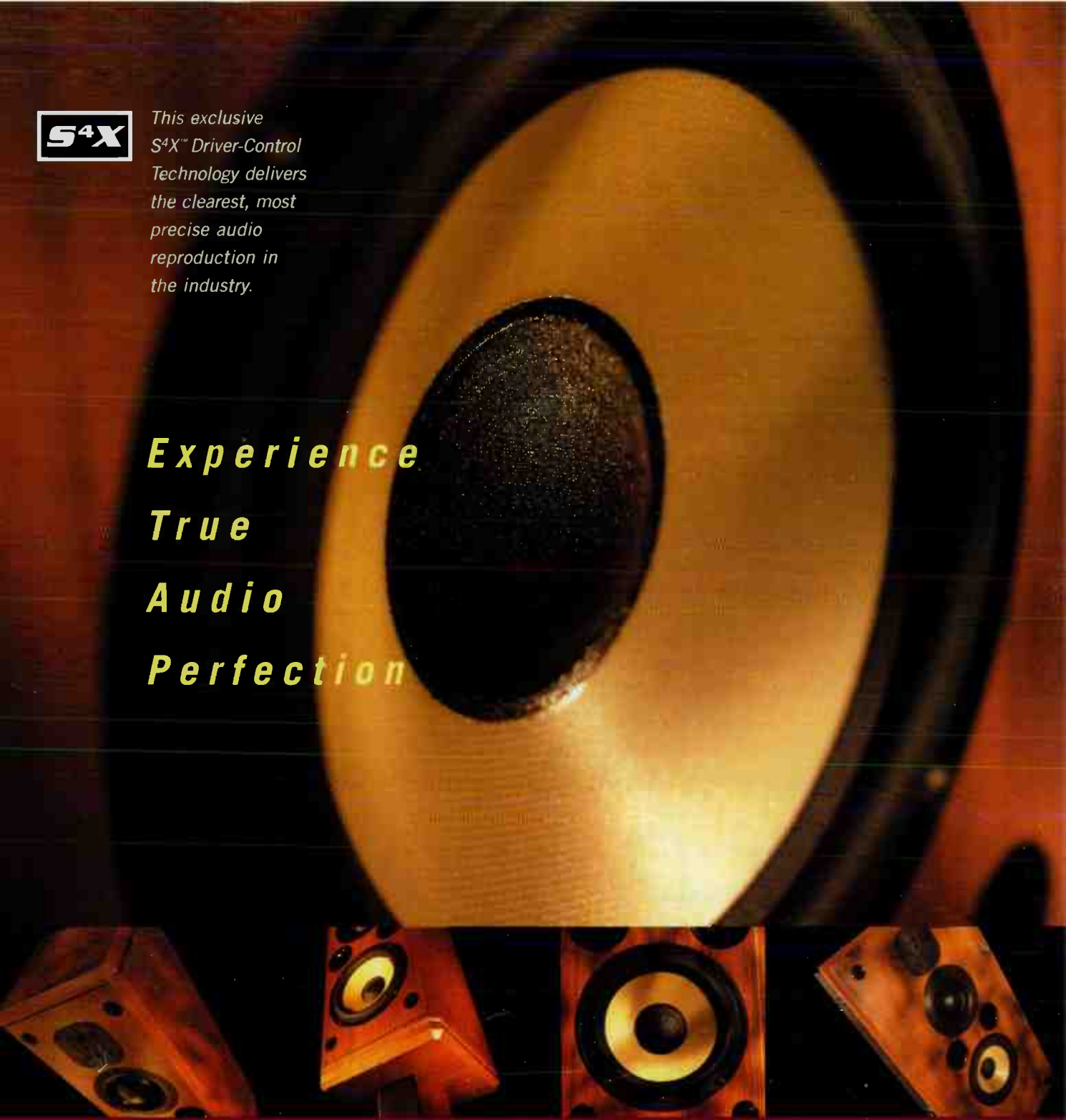
I believe that a two-channel music listening system of top quality will sound better than any of the popular surround systems. I believe many audiophiles are concerned about music, but most music lovers not much interested in audio gear. I'd like to see you review gear that is less esoteric and more affordable. The Arcam CD 23 CD player is one review I'd like to read, as I keep hearing good things about it and my CD player is the next thing I will replace.

Bill Brancheau
via e-mail



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The Dorian Saga

Benjamin Ivry

I HAVE LONG FELT that the publication of a CD is as culturally noteworthy as a book's publication. Not only are CDs distributed internationally, which cannot be said of books, but they are kept in stock far longer than books in most stores. Even in remote suburban chain stores, shoppers can find unusual and interesting historical CD reissues,

whereas the corresponding book choices are the most dreary and mediocre bestsellers. Part of the reason may be easy storage of CDs, but another is the energy and imagination of small CD companies, which produce new and delightful material. Since 1988, one of the most ambitious and accomplished of these has been Dorian

records, which has produced over 250 often remarkable CDs.

Back in 1985, Craig Dory was working in the Exploratory Systems Development section of AT&T Bell Labs, while a friend, Brian Levine, was the assistant director for the Alliance for Children in Ontario, when they decided to found a new recording company. Both had firm

Dorian Co-founders Craig Dory (left) and Brian Levine at the Troy Savings Bank Music Hall.

connections to music, Dory as independent recording engineer and producer for a number of major labels and radio stations, while Levine worked as North American agent for French organ virtuoso Jean Guillou. Both men agreed that usual recording standards left much to be desired, and there was room for less-than-familiar repertoire to be preserved in state-of-the-art sound. Dory and Levine began with an elevated view of the purpose of recording, far beyond the mere preservation of whatever performers might feel like creating on a given day. Instead, they aimed for "timeless" documents.

A vast number of approaches and categories of music were tackled, with a surprising degree of success: Early music, acoustic-folk, orchestral, chamber, brass ensemble, choral, lieder, Americana, Judaica, jazz-world, and Latin American music are some of the multifarious kinds of music produced by Dorian, revealing a flabbergasting ambition and appetite for work in a small firm. (Their full catalog may be obtained by calling 1-800-dorian-6 or on the company website at www.dorian.com.)

Part of what makes such industry possible, although by no means the only part, is their choice of recording venues. Dorian was founded in Troy, New York, in order to be close to one of the legendary acoustical venues, the Troy Savings Bank Music Hall.

The Magic Hall

In 1875, a new concert hall was inaugurated in Troy, New York. Perched atop the Troy Savings Bank, it was called, reasonably enough, the Troy

Savings Bank Music Hall. Some 106 feet long, 69 feet wide, and 61 feet high, the hall was designed by architect George B. Post, a student of the noted acoustical designer Richard Morris Hunt, who was hardly known for a string of acoustic miracles. Indeed, Post's Chickering Hall in Manhattan, while resembling the Troy Savings Bank Musical Hall, has much inferior acoustics. In fact, during the Troy Hall's first years, critics complained about the acoustics, and only in 1890, when a new Odell concert organ was installed, did the sound improve — for reasons that are still not clear. An earlier failed attempt to improve matters occurred in

Dorian's great sound is often attributed to their use of the Troy Savings Bank Hall but success wasn't automatic.

1883, when 100 metal cylinders, two inches wide and six inches long, were pounded into the ceiling, apparently to little avail.

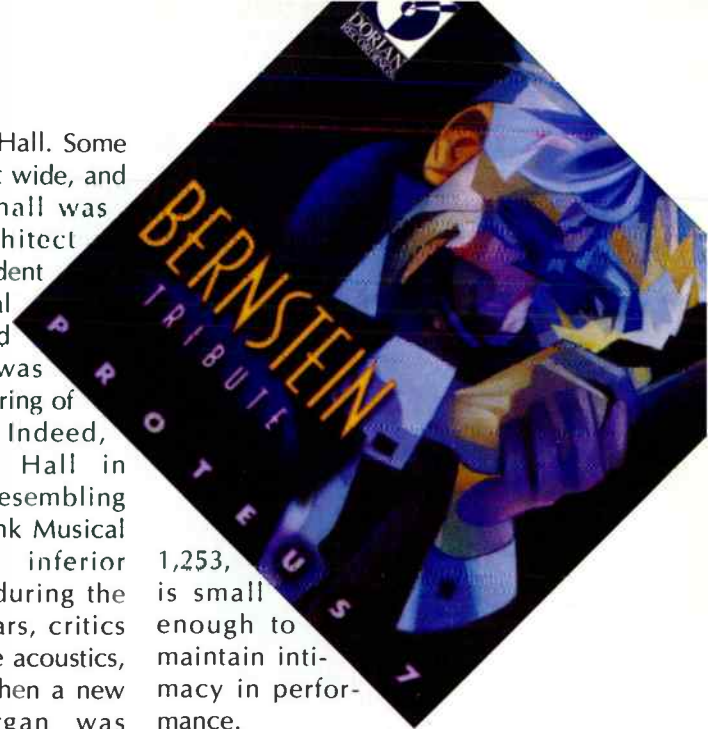
Specialists in acoustics have tried to puzzle it out, if only to be able to duplicate the effect elsewhere: The Troy Hall is mostly made of wood, suspended within a stone shell. Substantial spaces above the ceiling and below the floor leave room for resonance. The hall's vaulted ceiling is also thought to diffuse the sound, adding warmth. A shallow stage with a hard back wall helps the music project to the audience, who sit on stiff leather-on-horsehair seats, instead of softer ones that might absorb and dull the sound. The seating capacity,

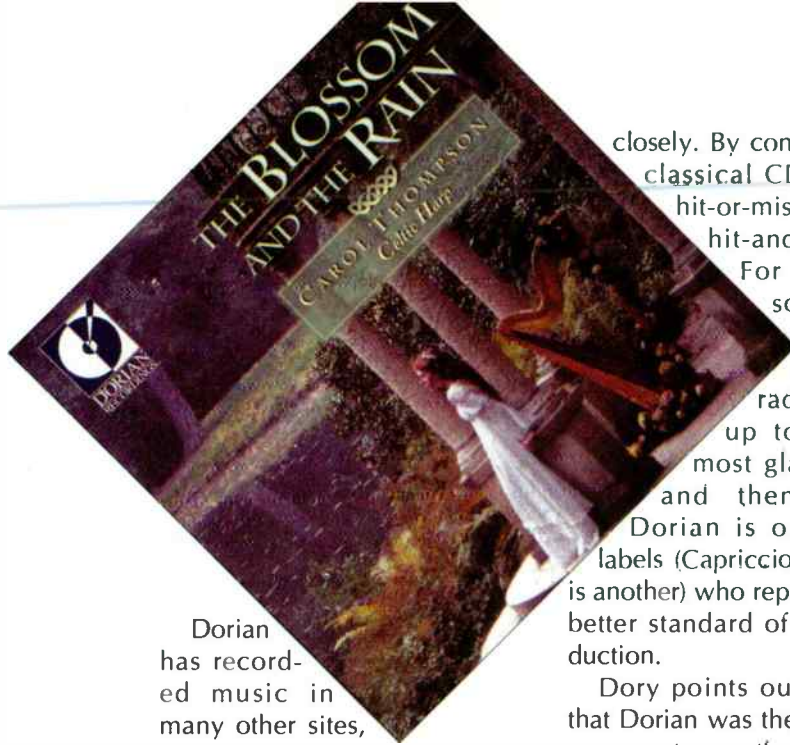
1,253, is small enough to maintain intimacy in performance.

Whatever the reasons behind the sound, star virtuosos would make special trips to perform at Troy, because of the quality of the hall. So that over the years, this medium-sized manufacturing town saw the cream of the crop of touring virtuosos, including Paderewski, Rachmaninov, Myra Hess, Rubinstein, Kreisler, and many others. Conductors

like Fritz Reiner and George Szell would bring friends to experience the acoustic, although paradoxically, the Troy Hall is possibly too intimate for the sound of a full orchestra playing. A typical trick to impress tourists is to herd visitors into the balcony, and drop a pin onstage, where it falls with perfect audibility.

With a full yearly performance schedule of over 150 annual concerts, with artists from Dave Brubeck to Judy Collins, apart from classical events, the Hall got a real shot in the arm when Dorian decided to set up a permanent base there. They have a permanent control room built into the hall, and they store equipment there as well.





Dorian has recorded music in many other sites, from Paris's St. Eustache church to the Zurich Tonhalle, but they are most identified by far with the fabulous Troy Savings Bank Music Hall (anyone passing through the region should call for a schedule of events at 518/273-0038 or check out their website at www.troysavingsbank.com/tsbmhall.htm)

What Dorian Does with that Fabled Acoustic

Given the acoustic, Dorian has been freed to innovate with techniques to capture sound with the highest fidelity: they have innovated in the use of fiber optics instead of the usual wire analog microphone cable. They developed an exclusively digital 20-bit recording process. Craig Dory told an Italian sound magazine not long ago that part of the motivation behind the company's founding was the "mediocre production quality of most classical recordings." Working repeatedly with the same artists on different projects, often in the Troy hall, they can refine their microphone placement as they get to know an artist and his/her repertoire more

closely. By contrast, a lot of classical CDs are more hit-or-miss, not to say hit-and-run affairs. For budget reasons they are often captured on the radio, touched up to cover the most glaring errors, and then released. Dorian is one of those labels (Capriccio in Germany is another) who represented a far better standard of artistic production.

Dory points out with pride that Dorian was the first label to use a custom outboard A/D converter, back in 1988. They were

Dorian was the first label to use a custom outboard analog-to-digital converter.

also the first to put microphone preamps and the A/D converter onto the stage, to be near the microphone to minimize the mike-level cable runs. By early 1989 they were using digital fiber-optic cable to the control room. The same year, they became the first classical label to buy a Sonic Solutions editing system. Three years later they were the first label to use only 20-bit recording and production with their own custom A/D converter. And the same year, they obtained another first by buying a Nagra-D digital recorder; it was used to record 20-bit sessions directly to hard discussing the Sonic System.

All this means that from their start, Dorian was a state-of-the-art company and that even as they keep improving and staying up-to-date, their oldest recordings still sound admirably fresh and even better than what some

of the giant companies are churning-out even today. By now, Dorian's A/D converters perform at the 24-bit level, Dory explains, and their post-production techniques assure this quality is maintained until the 24-bit digital signal is transcoded to 16 bits for CD mastering. The A/Ds are produced especially for Dorian by converter guru Vince Capizzo, scaled especially for the company.

They try to use only multi-directional microphones, Dory's favorites, and usually only two of them. They never use electronic "sweetening" of the basic recording, working with hall choice and microphone choice and placement. Indeed, the results are so good with patient application and resourcefulness that no sweetening is necessary, let alone desirable. No electronic manipulation, apart

from editing, is used. More or less, what you hear is what you get at a Dorian recording session. And microphones are the alpha and omega of recording quality for Dory, what he calls the "limiting step." He bemoans the fact that apart from spy agencies, no one seems to be developing new families of microphones, such as utopian ones that use "a reflected laser to look at Doppler shifts on the diaphragm."

Looking to the future more than to the past, Dory nevertheless confesses a fan's admiration for the historic accomplishments of engineers like Bob Fine, who created the Mercury Living Presence series, and Rudy van Gelder, the great jazz engineer.

Delving into the Dorian Backlist

Whatever the well-meant preparations, the proof of any label is in what it produces, and

few companies, even among the majors, have matched Dorian's varied output over the past decade. They have garnered rave reviews from some of the most careful listeners: One New England sound archivist remarks, "I think the whole catalog is an impressive and useful body of work, especially from an independent company, and shows admirable thought and care from whoever runs the company ... the sound from the Troy Bank is unusually good." The artists sound good, too.

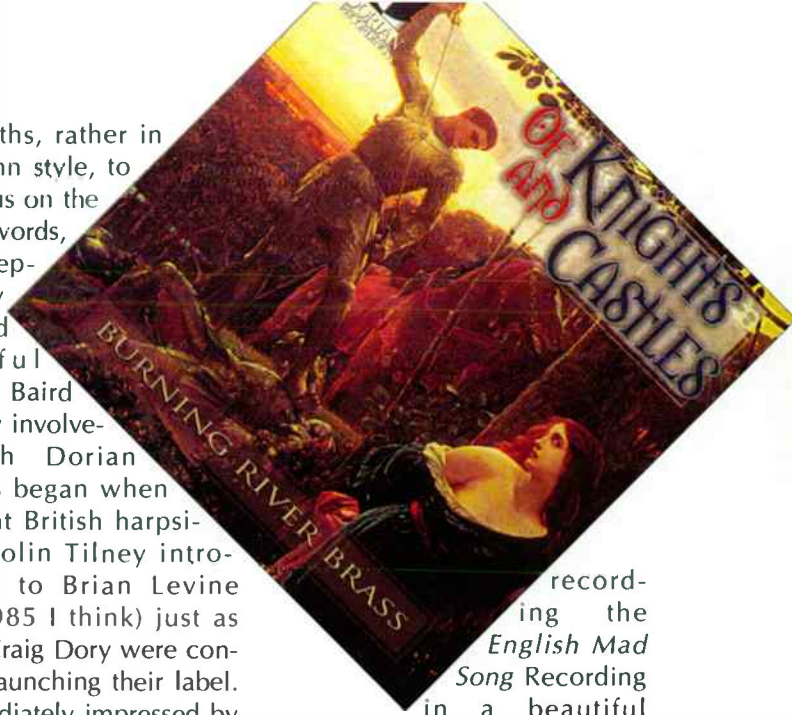
The lovely and intelligent soprano, Julianne Baird, is more than a mere songbird: A professor of music at Rutgers University, she has contributed chapters to scholarly tomes like "Performer's Guide to Seventeenth-Century Music" and edited the 18th century music text, *Introduction to the Art of Singing* by Johann Friedrich Agricola (Cambridge University Press). An attractive young blonde, she surely deserves to be famous outside a fervent coterie of fans, like the critic-turned-conductor Will Crutchfield. Her recital of Mozart songs (on DOR-90173) exemplifies some of her best virtues: a strong sense of scale and taste in how much vibrato and bel canto approach these intimates work can take. Baird has said that she was inspired to take up singing after hearing opera sopranos like Mirella Freni and Maria Callas, yet on this CD she more resembles a lieder giant like Lotte Lehmann. Baird does not try to sing "Abendempfindung," a metaphysical plaint that looks death in the face, in long comfortable breaths, as some singers who value a bel canto effect above all else. Instead, she takes fre-

quent breaths, rather in the Lehmann style, to put the focus on the individual words, for an exceptionally moving and thoughtful impression. Baird recalls, "My involvement with Dorian Recordings began when the eminent British harpsichordist Colin Tilney introduced me to Brian Levine (around 1985 I think) just as Brian and Craig Dory were conceiving of launching their label. I was immediately impressed by Brian's encyclopedic knowledge of the history of recorded sound, his attention to detail in choosing repertoire and putting together those beautiful program booklets. Later when I met

Mikes are kept to a minimum, usually only two, and great care is paid to placement.

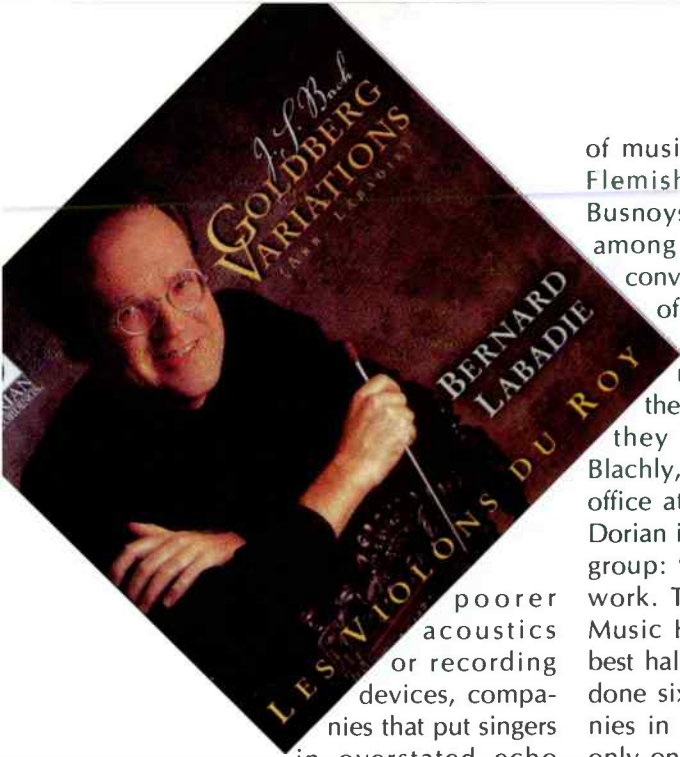
Craig what emerged was quiet and intense devotion to achieving the most beautiful and true recorded sound possible. It was not just that Craig had the most finely tuned and discerning pair of ears I had ever encountered, but that he was determined to leave a legacy of excellence and would leave no stone unturned in order to achieve that goal."

Working with Dorian on a series of recordings, including *Songs of Love and War* (DOR-90104), *English Mad Songs and Ayres* (DOR-90105) and *Musica Dolce* (DOR-90123), Baird soon found that the label's special approach and in-depth understanding matched her own high standards. Baird states, "What perhaps stands out in my memory is that in the middle of



recording the *English Mad Song Recording* in a beautiful cathedral in Toronto, our efforts were stymied by interference of the CNN tower with Craig's mikes. We had no choice but to abandon the location, and with short notice the only relatively "noiseless" church we could find was a suburban church — entirely carpeted and with what I thought were very dead acoustics. But Craig's spirit was not to be denied. A truck turned up at the church with yards and yards of plywood which was used to "line" almost every available carpeted surface, and presto change-o ... Craig created an sound-alike for the Cathedral acoustics that we had been forced to abandon."

Such smarts in an emergency, however lifesaving for a performer, are of course not evident to a listener. The ultimate quality of a recording like Baird's Mozart songs is discernible in the listening, the caressing naturalness of the Troy Savings Bank Music Hall acoustic sound just right: As with any ideal acoustic, the music sounds right, without drawing special attention to itself or distracting from the music. Only by comparison with



poorer acoustics or recording devices, companies that put singers in overstated echo chambers, can we fully appreciate the quality here. And this very discretion suits the Mozartian performance here itself: The accompaniment by Colin Tilney on the forte piano, noble in its very politeness, offers perfect support. Indeed, Tilney is the Sir Adrian Boult of accompanists, combining elegance and gentlemanliness in an old world style — his own knighthood is long overdue. Moreover, in a solo CD of Bach Toccatas, (on DOR-90115), Tilney shows he can burst out into more individually spiky playing when left on his own.

Baird and Tilney are but two artists that Dorian has brought out the best in: One of the early music world's most praised choral groups in Pomerium, led by the multi-talented Alexander Blachly, who is also a baritone, director of choral music at Notre Dame University, and one-time LP annotator for Nonesuch records. The mannerist *Revolution* (on DOR-90154) a selection of works by Monteverdi, Gesualdo, and others, as well as a program

of music by the 16th century Flemish composer Antoine Busnoys (on DOR-90184) are among the most passionately convincing choral recordings of recent years. Pomerium sings with fervor, with a real symphonic grasp of the sonic potential of what they are interpreting. And Blachly, on the phone from his office at Notre Dame, says that Dorian is an ideal partner for his group: "They do really superb work. The Troy Savings Bank Music Hall is one of the very best halls we've sung in. We've done six CDs for other companies in four different churches, only one of which was comparable in acoustic qualities, the Ascension Roman Catholic Church on 107th street between

The fine acoustics in a Dorian recording are best appreciated by comparison to poorer CDs.

Broadway and Amsterdam in New York." Blachly notes that Deutsche Grammophon recently produced four CDs with Pomerium, which included the superb *A Musical Book of Hours* (DGG 289 457 586-2) recorded in the aforementioned Ascension Church.

However, a personal website by one of Pomerium's singers, Kurt Owen Richards (at the whimsically titled website, www.chantboy.com) offers amusing insights about recording sessions with and without the Dorian treatment. Owen states about Pomerium's CD of Dufay's music (on DGG 447773) that "the recording venue was not ideal — echoes kept coming back flat, making tuning close to impossible. Despite all this, the chant is quite good." However, about

another DG release, *Creator of the Stars* (on DGG 449 819-2) Richards is hilariously pitiless, calling this Christmas CD "f**ked up by the DGG producers (they put reverb on the master takes, what idiots!). To correct their mistakes they played it back in some church in Germany and recorded the playback in the acoustic. The end result actually works."

The innocent consumer would have no way of knowing about these travails.

Yet the absence of such antics at Dorian sessions must surely encourage the artists and engineers, putting the final product at less risk. Lest Dorian's professional reliability and responsibility suggest a humorless or sober-sided approach, let it be said

that the past decade has seen them produce a delightful series of ribald and/or risqué songs, presented with just the right measure of lightheartedness,

while retaining musical quality. *The Art of the Bawdy Song* (on DOR-90155) is performed by The Baltimore Consort and The Merry Companions, a vocal group that numbers Alexander Blachly among its singers. They perform numbers like Purcell's rude tavern song "Pox on You" with its lines, "You stomach's too queasy/ cannot I belch and fart/ you coxcomb, to ease me?/ What if I let fly in your face?" with gleeful abandon, and with appropriate sound effects. Many producers might be able to record early instrumental music ably, but only a select few can ideally capture the noise of passing wind, as on this raucous disc. Indeed, one feels glad that Tipper Gore and other advocates of clean lyrics for America's youth limited their attentions to rapstars and the

like, and never got to the early music bin in record shops.

This life-enhancing taste for bawdry also extends to other Dorian releases, like *The Sport of Love* (on DOR 93175) performed by Musica Antigua de Albuquerque, and *O Lusty May: Renaissance Songs of Spring*, by the Toronto Consort (on DOR-93172) where once again the vividly celebratory music is given spanking-new interpretations and that makes it seem ever-fresh. One wonders if this humor around bawdry might even have played a small part in another, quite different release, of three Haydn symphonies conducted by the accomplished German maestro Christof Perick (on Dorian 90168). Perick is an accomplished and much-admired conductor, who was born with the name Christof Prick, a noble German appellation. Only when he began touring to English-speaking countries did he find that his

name on posters seemed to evoke curious mirth; so, the extra "e" was added, and his international career continued to grow. The booklet notes for the Dorian Haydn release call Perick "one of the fastest rising" of conductors, a phrase which would have been difficult to apply to the old version of his name, even given the label's proven fondness for the occasional ribaldry.

Dorian seems able to adapt its careful approach to nurturing artists on discs like Chatham Baroque's *Danse Royale* (on DOR-90272) and The Terra Nova Consort's *Renaissance en Provence* (on DOR-90269). Both recordings capture a vivid theatricality that makes such zesty early music groups such a popular attraction. Moreover,

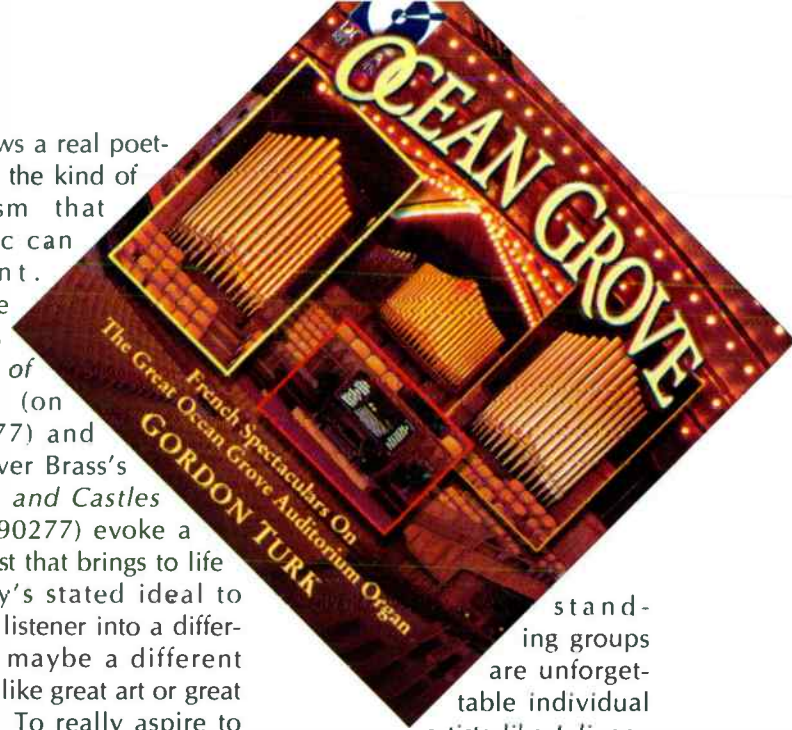
Dorian shows a real poetic sense for the kind of romanticism that such music can represent. Discs like Altramar's *Cross-road of the Celts* (on DOR-93177) and Burning River Brass's *Of Knights and Castles* (DOR-xcd-90277) evoke a fabulous past that brings to life Craig Dory's stated ideal to "propel the listener into a different place, maybe a different time, much like great art or great literature." To really aspire to "fait rever," as the French say, or make listeners dream, is a difficult task indeed. But few can hear a recent release, *Midnight*

Perhaps the most-remarkable artist on the Dorian label is Czech pianist Antonin Kubalek.

Sun: Traditional Nordic Melodies, (on DOR-93195) by the Ensemble Polaris, a Toronto-based group, without feeling that one has really gone on an expedition to the Land of the Midnight Sun, with rather happier results than greeted many other Polar explorers.

Dorian's interest in evoking space and time in its repertoire extends to a daringly original collage of medieval, baroque, and modern music by a Quebec-based group, La Nef. Their *Perceval: The Quest for the Grail* (on DOR-90271) stars the much-admired young Canadian countertenor Daniel Taylor, notable for his human sound, unlike other falsettists who sound either like divas or soaring songbirds.

But along with these out



standing groups are unforgettable individual artists like Julianne Baird, Colin Tilney, and perhaps the most remarkable of all, the Czech pianist Antonin Kubalek. This fine artist has the entirely

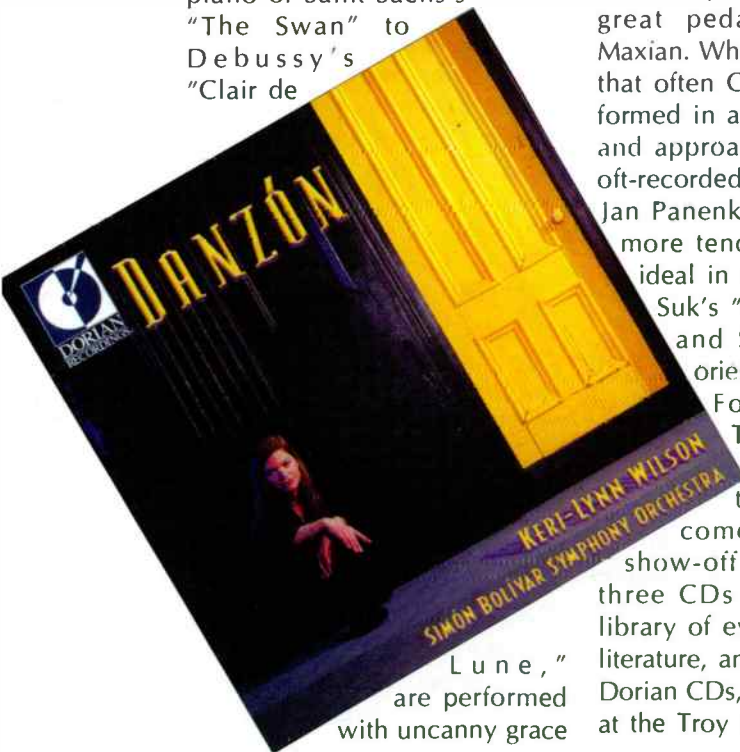
deserved distinction of being the only performer who Glenn Gould produced a recording for, of Korngold's *Second Piano Sonata*. A distin-

guished performer in his homeland until he emigrated to Toronto in 1968, following the Soviet invasion of his homeland. There he worked much with another distinguished Czech emigre, Karel Ancerl, who led the Toronto Symphony Orchestra for some years. Gould said that his playing provides "a rare mix of improvisatory freedom and structural control: With such rare playing, one's grasp of the musical architecture is enhanced precisely because of the rare spontaneity through which it is realized." Gould could be eccentric about some of his musical enthusiasms, over-praising Petula Clark and Barbra Streisand's *Classical Barbra* album, but about Kubalek he was precisely right. At 65, he is one of the most distinguished pianists currently



active, along with such greats as Andras Schiff and Richard Goode, whose musicality is so exemplary that it almost defies description.

In a most endearing recent CD, *My Gift To You* (on DOR-90218) he dedicated a fine program of musical evergreens to his young daughter Karolina, born in 1994. Works from Godowsky's transcription for piano of Saint-Saens's "The Swan" to Debussy's "Clair de



Lune," are performed with uncanny grace

and deft affection. In two equally irresistible collections, *Czech Miniature Masterpieces* (DOR-90121) and *Memories of Bohemia* (DOR-90185) Kubalek does his home-land proud in interpretations of music by Suk, Janacek, Smetana, Dvorak, Fibich, Martinu, and lesser known masters. The dance-like grace and elegance of touch are supreme in these performances, perhaps a legacy of

Hall with the company's customary clarity and naturalness of sound.

But Kubalek is not merely an interpreter of rarities and his country's music. On two Dorian CDs (DOR-90141 and DOR-90159), he has preserved enchantingly dancing versions of Brahms's piano music. Here in the *Waltzes and Intermezzos*, where his competition includes such giants as Goode and Rudolf Serkin, Kubalek shows his full mettle. He is a truly majestic performer, whose rare quality was perfectly understood by Gould.

Ultimately, it is these achievements of permanent

Lovers of good music and good recordings, not just classical music, owe Dorian great thanks.

Kubalek's studies at the Prague Academy of Music with the great pedagogue Frantisek Maxian. What is extraordinary is that often Czech music is performed in a kind of spiky tone and approach, such as by the oft-recorded chamber musician Jan Panenka. Kubalek is both more tender and bel canto, ideal in such works as Josef Suk's "About My Mother" and Smetana's "Memories of Bohemia in the Form of Polkas." There is also a basic modesty here, in that the music comes first, not some show-off technique. These three CDs should be in the library of every lover of piano literature, and like all Kubalek's Dorian CDs, they were recorded at the Troy Savings Bank Music

value by Kubalek, Baird, Blachly and so many others—I have not even mentioned the admirable Rembrandt Trio—by which Dorian must be judged. For preserving so many wonderful performances, often by artists like Kubalek who might otherwise not have had the chance to record this repertoire under ideal conditions, we owe them thanks. By placing their faith in young and untried groups in the Dorian discovery series and other initiatives, they have contributed to the continuing vitality of the classical music scene. It is so easy, and even lucrative, for journalists to announce the "death" of classical music, that such heroic and rewarding labors as the decade plus of Dorian reveal are especially to be praised. Long may they wave!



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Out-takes on Napster, MP3, Metallica, RIAA, etc.

Editor's Note: *Because of his experience in digital formats while working at AT&T Bell Laboratories and his founding and operating an audiophile-oriented record company, Craig Dory has a nearly unique position from which to comment on the rapidly changing Internet music or MP3 scene. Growing faster than even the DVD field's unprecedented explosion, Napster (and Gnutella and Scour, et al.) are thought by many to be the leading edge of a new way of distributing music, via the Web, and not as a piece of packaged plastic through brick-and-mortar stores like Tower or even from virtual stores like Amazon or EveryCD.com. We've seen the reaction of the Big Record companies, lawsuits, via the Recording Industry Association of America, that have led to big fines.*

Let's see what Craig Dory thinks about these various things:

TAV: What do you think of MP3 as a format?

DORY: It's an okay format for sampling, and I'd use it on my own for sampling, but it's not a true high-fidelity method. It compresses, it squashes the dynamics. It's poor on high-frequency content for me; all the air and stereo separation get reduced substantially. If you use a good encoder, a Fraunhofer, say, one with state-of-the-art algorithms, you can do decent job.

TAV: Do you think it's an "adequate" replacement for, say, prerecorded cassettes?

DORY: This would be a sideways move to me, rather than an up-grade in quality. The cassette system always has wow and flutter, they wear out, there are sun effects that result in shell warping, the recording ages and in the end self-erases off the tape (starting with the high frequencies), and of course the system squashes dynamics. If you used the best cassette deck,

with Dolby C noise reduction, and used the best tape, with a great source, that would probably do the best way to go.

However, with MP3, the user can't do anything. One good thing is that the format doesn't deteriorate. A good MP3, done well, will be the same five years from now; a cassette will start to deteriorate today, when it's made.

TAV: Do you think there is potential in future MP3 development that might result in "MP4" or "MP5"?

DORY: From what I understand, this is possible, but I've been concentrating on making recordings and running a record company, and have left the floating of technical possibilities to other guys and companies. We're open to pretty much any system that work well for the public's ear, however, as well as his needs and wants.

TAV: Would you ever distribute your recordings over the Internet—if you could be assured that the end user would receive a quality recording, as good as a CD?

DORY: Yes, we use sampling now, but electronic distribution is inevitable, though I will have to wait and see how it works for us as a business tool. One big question that needs answering is whether it is just another distribution channel, which we believe, or will it take over and become dominant. The real question is what it will be best applicable for? My feeling is that CDs with lots of sales, pop and country for example, will be the ones that will still be sold at Tower, The Wiz, etc., but that the smaller-selling CDs will find increasingly more space on the Net. Back-catalog CDs can easily be available from Amazon, with their virtual warehouse, but the record company will have to do a lot of filling and attention. However, what you're talking about

was studied when I was at AT&T Bell Labs, that is having a very high speed, broadband fiber-optic network going to very high speed computers in homes. We thought that to support the installation of the fiber-optic network, the installing company would need \$100 to \$150 month in individual sales per month, at least back in the mid-80s, and it could be double or triple that now.

TAV: You're aware of Napster and Gnutella and how they act as exchange agents for recordings. Isn't this just a case of the law and of business plans not keeping up with technology and innovation, as there was when CDs or video cassettes were introduced? What's your reaction to what they're doing? What about the copyright infringement lawsuit by Metallica against Napster?

DORY: Yes, it's copyright infringement in my opinion, but

I am not a lawyer. I'm very glad that the RIAA is addressing this. Such distribution devalues music, to the point such that the MP3 user feels the music is worth nothing. This is a moral issue for me. Distribution like this denies remuneration to the authors or copyright holders.

TAV: Won't the big losers in all of this be brick-and-mortar stores like Tower and Virgin?

DORY: It's possible, but look at the last 10 years of brick-and-mortar retailing. There were very few deep-catalog stores 10 years ago, really just Tower and later Virgin. Now, there are Barnes & Noble, Borders, HMV, and many other, more localized deep-catalog stores who are having to work hard because there is a lot of competition in this area. What they are selling, however, is pop stuff, country-western, recordings that put up big numbers and get lots and lots

of support from the big record companies.

So, it's crunch time for classical releases, and labels like Dorian can't do back catalog any more, at least not in traditional ways. We have to find new methods. Once a title is out there for a while, unless it gets "legs," that is it sells well for a couple of years, it's hard to break even with it. The initial bump with a classical disc isn't as big as with pop, and there are many classical labels that don't make it even with "name" orchestras. If you're a label like Dorian, you have to figure out what to record and offer, to define yourself in a way the record buyer quickly understands and will buy. We consider ourselves a repertoire label that also sounds good, not the other way around.

TAV: Many thanks for your help on this sidebar. You've said many interesting things.

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Internet Audio On Hold

Bernard Kingsley

IN THE EARLY DAYS of hi-fi, audiophiles built their own stuff. Men (and yes, it was and still is almost exclusively a male endeavor) went to places like Allied Radio stores, bought tubes, speaker cones, circuit boards, and such, and then built audio equipment in their hobby room or basement. This went on for years because "building your own" was rewarding and the result was very enjoyable music (though not necessarily high

fidelity by today's standards). Legend has it that the hi-fi industry emerged from this, but legend is wrong.

We are in pretty much the same state today when it comes to Internet use for audio. To enjoy Internet audio, we buy custom computers or more likely build or modify our own. Few "off the shelf" computers at Circuit City, Best Buy or CompUSA really meet the demands of Internet audio. So

the hobby crowd will get the latest processor, buy and install more memory (RAM), a larger hard drive, a faster modem, the best soundcard, a CD Burner (recorder), and the dedicated software. Then we're ready to go. Sort of. Lots of folks think that the Internet Audio Revolution is starting here. But that's wrong too.

Truth is, we are a long way from popularizing Internet audio applications. The problem isn't

audio quality, though that's what most of the fuss seems to be about. Audiophiles will invariably find fault with the quality of the music reproduction and yes, Internet audio formats are a fertile field for that. But even at their crudest, audio formats such as MP3 encoding offer reasonably good sound quality and arguably better sound than anything those hobbyists had in the 1940s and 1950s. It never kept anyone from listening and enjoying the music. On most equipment, the sound is actually pretty good.

The real problem isn't Internet access either, though that's not as great or widespread as most people think. Surveys often assume that if you have a computer with Microsoft Windows 9x and a modem, you have Internet access. But lots of those computers are in offices where audio use is, let us say, limited. And not everyone at home will sign on to an Internet service. Many of those who do often just use the Internet for email or "looking around." That's useful, but doesn't make someone Internet savvy.

That's hardly a good start for dealing with the formats. How many people do you know who actually know an *.MP3 from a *.wav from a midi file? Go on, take a random survey in any mall. Not many know about the formats and fewer folks in the mainstream actually download those MP3 files or anything else for that matter.

The Internet Service Provider (ISP) I work for finds that fewer than 5 per cent of its subscribers actually try to build a home page, and a recent survey says that only about 3 per cent of us get most of our news from the Internet. Many Internet users are so gun-shy that they insist on

using the "original" software found on the computer as they bought it. They absolutely refuse to install updated software for fear of something going wrong. (Actually not all that unreasonable given Windows 9x's characteristics). The notion of installing the audio software, adding the requisite hardware, figuring out the formats, finding the audio web sites and downloading the

files on the present day 56k (if you are lucky) connections seems daunting because it IS daunting to most people.

And to be blunt about it, what music files exist on the web at this point are mostly novelty items. The majority are samples or lesser known cuts from popular albums. Sure, you can download quite a lot of audio files (fewer if you care about copyright protection) and transfer them to your CD burner. But that doesn't give you as much as you might think.

Make a list of your favorite music selections, take any six at random and then, again randomly, place them on a CD. What have you got? Not much, really. The result will probably be jarring and bumpy.

There is a creative aspect to sequencing music selections so that you end up with a product



you can repeatedly listen to. The Internet doesn't help with that and some of our personal creativity in that regard is lacking.

At present, Internet audio is mostly confined to a select small group because most people don't have the interest, skill, aptitude, and, most of all, the time to deal with all of this. Much the same way most people ended up NOT building their own hi-fi and instead listened to those horrible table radios.

Which brings us back to the real hi-fi revolution. It happened not when folks built their own audio components from scratch, but when skilled people like Saul Marantz and Avery Fisher started building complete, ready-to-use equipment for others. No assembling, no wiring, no adjusting, no fiddling around with it (okay, some folks did fid-

dle around and improved on it, but you know what I mean). The point is that it finally worked right out of the box. Try that with a computer.

And the same thing happened on the software side at about the same time. It had been tough to listen to an "album" or concert when you had to change disks (they were spelled with a "k" then) every few minutes. I think the disk changing was more of a hassle than the scratchy sound you got from them.

Convenience and Sequencing

A bit like today's four-minute MP3 files, recorded music didn't take off until we had long-play records or a reel-to-reel tape recorder. As soon as the equipment was easy to use and the software was ready and convenient, audio and the use of music in the home exploded exponentially.

That growth benefited everyone, including the kit or from-scratch builder. More equipment. More records (software). More choices.



As soon as there is a true mass market for music on the web, we will get more music on the web. We'll get the popular, in-demand album cuts or maybe whole albums. And links on MP3 pages will point to more MP3 pages rather than places to order CDs by mail.

Before we are ready for the Internet audio revolution two events must come about:

Software AND hardware have both got to become easier to use.

With audio and computers, we are making painfully slow progress when it comes to usability, and that must change. Yes, soundcards are getting better. Yes, Windows 98 took a feeble step when they included Internet radio capability in the Internet Explorer. Yes, Apple is making some inroads into video by promoting and selling systems which allow for video editing. (Actually, the video capability does audio as well, but it isn't advertised that way and generally not used that way.)

However, the fact remains that the present use of audio on a computer is cumbersome and certainly not user-friendly for most people. That hurts all of us.

There is a programming opportunity here if someone will just see it. Maybe someone reading this article will.

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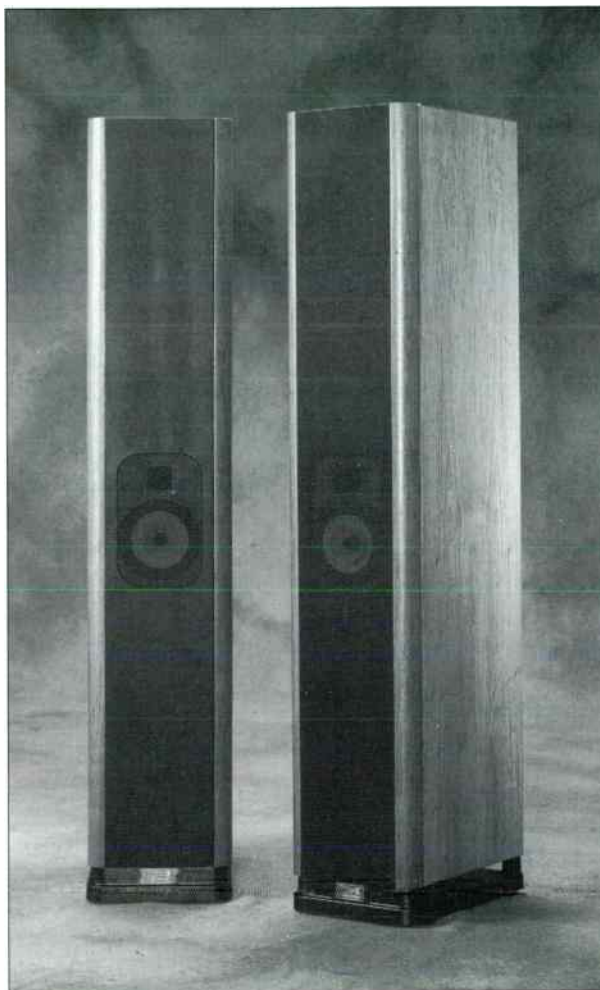
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EVER SINCE the Hendrix family regained control of the recordings and estate of Jimi Hendrix, they have provided a steady stream of releases that have both restated and expanded the legacy of this startling and revolutionary performer. They started with straight reissues of the monumental first three albums: *Are You Experienced*, *Axis: Bold As Love* and *Electric Ladyland*. Then came an expanded *Band of Gypsies*, a release of the never-completed *First Rays of the New Rising Sun*, an outtakes set called *South Saturn Delta*, a “best of” compilation and several live sets including an expanded re-release of Jimi’s BBC Sessions plus an ages overdue CD debut of Hendrix’s legendary Christmas medley. A pair of videos have also appeared.

The most ambitious project is the brand-new purple velvet-wrapped four CD set, *The Jimi Hendrix Experience*. It is a mother lode of 56 selections, only 12 of which have been previously released. Six of these 12 are making U.S. CD debuts, and five of these six emanate from the *Hendrix In The West* album.

The package was assembled by Janie Hendrix, John McDermott and Eddie Kramer. Kramer, the studio engineer for much of the original Experience sessions, has been de facto curator of the sound for the *Hendrix Experience* reissues. For this release, he executed transfers and occasional remixes of live tapes as well as remixes for finished studio recordings and finished mixes for unfinished studio tracks.

Experience is no mere artist retrospective; this is a much deeper investigation that gathers alternative versions, many of them preliminary takes, and live snapshots. For me, who has lived intimately with Jimi Hendrix on record through more than 30 years of doing FM rock radio, the box is crammed with revelation after revelation. Jimi Hendrix was as important an artist as any who emerged from the psychedelia of the late ‘60s. As a songwriter, he took bold and unprecedented steps. As a guitarist, he remains unequalled for sheer daring and pure talent. His influence caroms on into this very day, with current rock guitarists attempting to expand on what Jimi did way back then. His records have weathered the barrage of time excellently, and

sound as fresh now as they ever did earlier.

The thrills begin with the very first track, an alternate take of "Purple Haze." After those instantly identifiable opening guitar riffs, different lead guitar plus lead and backing vocal tracks alter the song palpably. A completely suitable ending for the song had not yet been developed, so the track just falls apart at the end. But this cut sets the tone for the whole set, priming the listener for the unexpected delights to follow. Right away the clock goes even farther back, to Paris' Olympia Theatre on October 6, 1966, the fourth performance ever for the nascent Experience

band (Hendrix on guitar and vocal, Noel Redding on bass, and Mitch Mitchell on drums), which does thrilling versions of the Howling Wolf blues "Killing Floor" and "Hey Joe." They sound raw and brash, a not yet fully realized band, but all the ingredients are there in these riveting performances.

An extended work tape of "Third Stone from the Sun" has Hendrix and manager Chris Chandler recording the spoken lines which would be woven at half speed into the finished product. Hendrix's infamous proclamation "You'll never hear surf music again" is put into a new perspective by the never-before-heard follow-up line "Sounds like a lie to me." "Taking Care of No Business" is a funny blues workout. A preliminary harpsichord-driven "Burning of the Midnight Lamp" and a mono mix of "If Six Was Nine" (with different guitar and backing vocal tracks) are fasci-

nating. The June, 1967 Monterey International Pop Festival takes of the blues "Rock Me Baby" and Hendrix's astonishing reinvention of Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone" show how the young band had



reached full maturity just nine months after those Paris tracks.

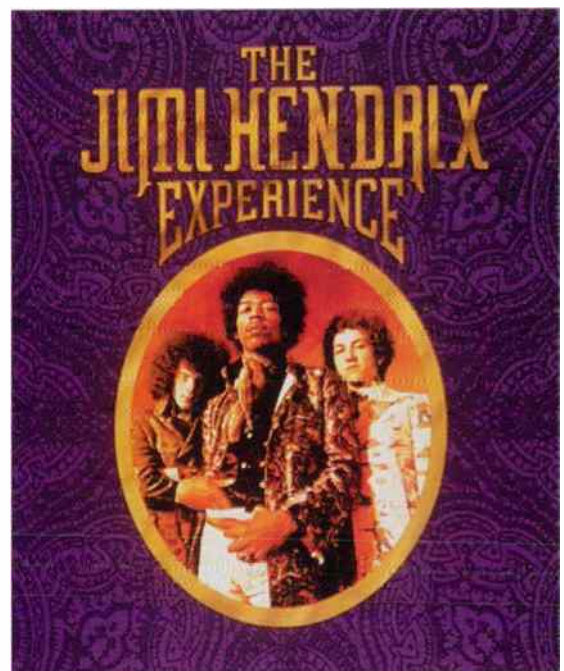
Stockholm concert takes of "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" and "Burning of the Midnight Lamp" (keyboard free) were both previously available in the long out-of-print Stages box.

There are gorgeous early instrumental takes of "Little Wing" and "Bold As Love," the latter stretched out to seven breathtaking minutes. A 1967 take of "Sweet Angel" is the earliest known version of the tune known later simply as "Angel," one of Hendrix's most beloved love songs. A March, 1968 "Fire" is from a Clark University concert that has been issued as an "authorized bootleg" on Experience Hen-

drix subsidiary Dagger Records (for more Dagger info call 1-888-EXP-JIMI). The "Gloria" included here is a different one than the one on the old *Essential, Volume 2* album.

There is a phenomenal 1969 re-recording of "Stone Free" 2½ years after the original. It was targeted for the fourth album but was unheard until now. Another brilliant one is a nine-minute live in Hawaii medley of "Hey Baby/In From the Storm." The "Slow Blues" that closes the final CD runs just 1:45 minutes before it suddenly ends, but it is the very last multi-track studio track Hendrix ever did. Its sudden and premature end is an apt metaphor for Hendrix's own too brief life.

Eddie Kramer's work on the sound of the entire set is little short of brilliant. Granted some of the very early live recordings suffer a tad from source limita-





booklet really helps bring a sense of what was going on while these tracks were being recorded. John McDermott's fabulous track-by-track annotation and an excellent Dave Marsh overview essay flesh out the roughly chronological progression of the music.

Admittedly, *The Jimi Hendrix Experience* is not the place for a beginner to seek a proper introduction to the wizardry of Jimi Hendrix. That's accomplished better by going to the *Best Of*, and even better yet by revisiting those first three albums and *First Rays*. This one is for the devotee who knows Hendrix very well and wants more even at this late date. That sort of fan won't be at all disappointed with *The Jimi Hendrix Experience*. It really is a mother lode.

And from the hints of the Experience Hendrix brass, there is plenty more in store for years to come.

tions. However, Kramer's light-handed touch throughout is excellent. His remixes of live Monterey and Isle of Wight recordings do not change what was already there, but they do bring a subtle dollop of added clarity and punch. His studio session remixes are nothing like the ham-handed overdubs Alan Douglas foisted on Hendrix fans

in the past. Kramer remains true to Hendrix's own vision and intent, perhaps as only someone who worked with him as extensively as Kramer did could. The purple velvet box is suitably garish and decadent and adds a tactile dimension. The package helps set the tone by evoking some flavor of the period that the sessions came from. The

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Comedy

Stan Freberg: *Tip of the Freberg*
Rhino R2 75645



SATIRE IS WHAT closes on Saturday night. That's what they used to say on Broadway. But certainly nobody who ever said it, ever spoke to Stan Freberg.

Freberg has a strong claim to the title of the Greatest 20th-Century American Satirist in Any Medium. He is an electronic age heir to the mantle of such names as Jonathan Swift and Mark Twain, H.L. Mencken and Ring Lardner, great satirists all. This new boxed set celebrates nearly 50 years of Freberg's work on records, radio and TV.

His first record was the 1951 soap opera spoof "John and Marsha." The only dialogue was the names of the two characters as they moaned back and forth, thus telling a wild and racy story, particularly considering the era. That record's success led Freberg to a wildly successful series of smash hits that lampooned the era's hits and trends. He took on calypso in "Banana Boat (Day-O)," Lawrence Welk in "Wun'erful, Wun'erful," the new threat of rock and roll in "Sh'Boom" and "The

Great Pretender," and the overdubbed magic of Les Paul & Mary Ford in "The World Is Waiting For The Sunrise." Each of these (except "Wun'erful") is a brilliant and imaginative extrapolation on the original hit. All these and many more are included here.

Freberg went on to satire other media including the *Dragnet* pastiche "St. George and the Dragonet," the spoof of Drew Pearson & Edward R. Murrow "Person to Pearson," "Tele-Veesion" about that new threat to American homes, and the classic "Green Chri\$tmass" which is still played widely every holiday season.

In 1957 Freberg was tapped to fill in for Jack Benny's radio show when it went on summer hiatus. As fate had it, this was the very last network radio comedy show. Several highlights from that summer are in this set.

In 1961 Freberg produced what many call his masterpiece: "Stan Freberg Presents the United States of America: The Early Years." It was intended to be a trilogy, but "Volume 2: The Middle Years" never got around

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Summer 2000, Vol. 4, No. 2



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to being done until 1996. Both albums are richly and deservedly represented here.

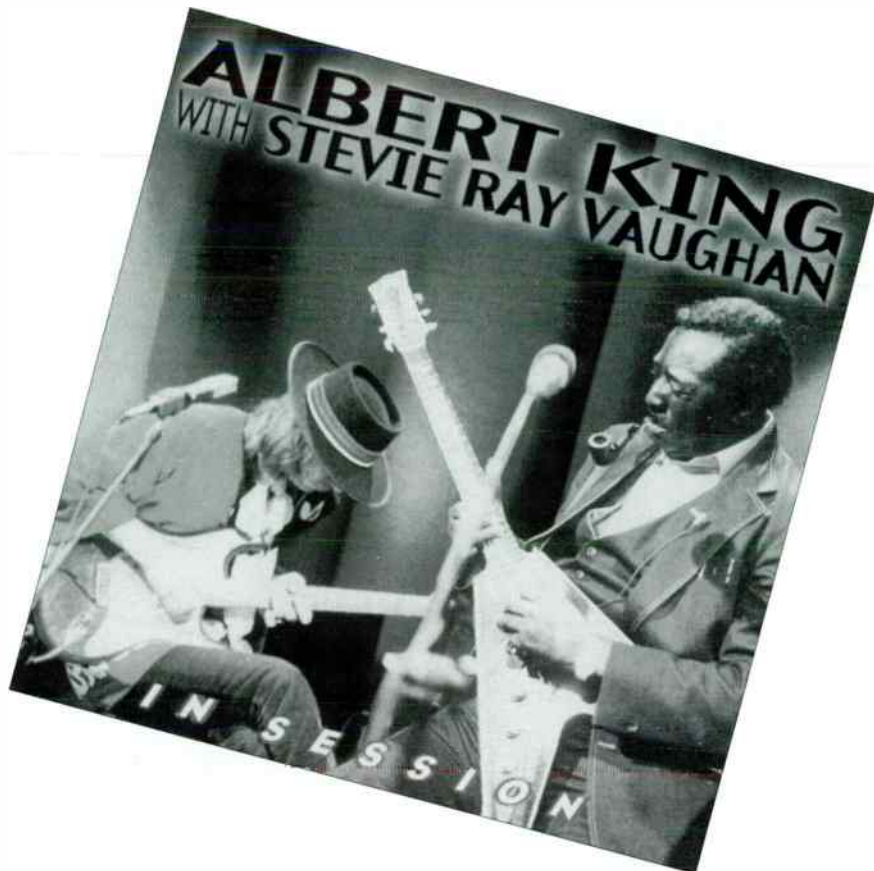
Perhaps Freberg's most memorable and subversive work was in advertising. In the hard-sell '50s, he pioneered the use of humor to sell with spectacular results. Disc 4 is largely given over to this facet of Freberg's work as it gathers more than 40 of his best spots. Clients as diverse as Prince Spaghetti, Chug King Chinese Food, National Council of Churches, Pittsburgh Paints, and the U.S. Army are all represented in this set. The remainder of the disc is given over to syndicated radio commentaries of the 90's, bits from Stan's brilliant one-shot 1992 NPR/BBC Radio production "The New Stan Freberg Show" and "The Conspiraski Theory" which was newly recorded for this box.

As an additional filipp a nearly 20-minute video tape is enclosed. It features some of Stan's most memorable TV commercials. Pay special attention to the sixth bit on the tape, a 60-second Geno's Pizza Roll spot that lampooned the Lark Cigarette "Show Us Your Lark Pack" campaign. This is one of the most loaded minutes of television ever done. And don't miss the hilarious cameo of Clayton Moore and Jay Silverheels in character as The Lone Ranger and Tonto.

What a lavish and loving retrospective this box is! Even by Rhino's normally very fine standards, this one is something special. The packaging is clever and innovative, the booklet brilliantly written and assembled. The selections are exhaustive. The decision to group them together by genres (early records, radio bits, U.S.A. bits, ads) is a cagey one that pays off handsomely. Thus, the set plays logically instead of by strict chronology.

Tip Of The Freberg has assumed an honored and active place in my library. Yes, some of the humor is dated, but even the dated material still has a sharp bite and does more than just nibble on its targets. Freberg's work tells reams about the eras in which the work was produced, usually more than the originals since his satires also communicate the responses that the originals provoked.

Tip Of The Freberg truly is an epic package of a true American original.



Blues

Albert King
with Stevie Ray Vaughan
In Session
Fantasy SCD-7501-2

ONE COULD BELLYACHE that Albert King created a tremendous body of work during his lifetime that was greatly underappreciated and that only now after he's gone, does he have a best-selling album. And one could complain that it is only due to Stevie Ray's presence on this record that Albert will sell, and that the album has come out on a label which can be little lax when it comes to paying royalties. All of this is tempered by the fact that both Stevie and Albert play extraordinarily well on this set, regardless of some tuning problems—Vaughan pushes King to actually play aggressively, and King's presence inspires Vaughan to rise to the occasion.

Of course, it is remarkable that Stevie Ray Vaughan has become the once-in-a-lifetime blues icon that he has, to the point where his mere

presence on a disc can bring such attention to one of his late heroes seven years after both of them have passed on. King created the style which is still seen as the model for blues players like Otis Rush and Robert Cray, and was a strong influence as well on the first generation of British blues guitarists such as Paul Kossoff, Eric Clapton, and Peter Green.

As for this particular jam session, it has some fire from time to time, and it has other moments which are simply very good. At this point in his career Albert King was too often prone to performances that were less than stellar, and Stevie's attendance definitely prodded the master to turn the heat up a notch. I witnessed some Albert King shows during this period which weren't exactly legendary when it came to

Albert's work ethic—he literally would spend the first 15 minutes onstage lighting his pipe and tuning up. So the fact that Albert delivered even an approximation of the goods at this television taping session in itself was extraordinary. It's no surprise that Vaughan dominates the disc as a player, but everybody gets their licks in here, and nobody goes home licking his wounds.

And anytime a blues album sells a lot of copies, it's good. But are there better blues discs out this year? New blues artists with great music who are being neglected? Without a doubt.

Is this disc a "must have" for blues fanatics? Only if you already own two out of the following: *I'll Play The Blues For You*, *Live Wire/Blues Power*, and of course *Born Under A Bad Sign*.



Blues

B.B. King and Eric Clapton *Riding With The King*
Reprise Duck 47612-2

A DREAM COLLABORATION. A blues summit. That is what a duo album by B.B. King and Eric Clapton looks like on paper. In execution it turns out to be a bit less. (Editor's Grump: It's unfortunate and unhappy how often these blues summit recordings come up short in the end.—Gene Pitts)

The first clue is the cover photo shot. B.B. and Eric are cruising in a top-down Cadillac convertible taking a cue from a line in the John Hiatt penned title song: "Every woman, child and man/.Gets a Cadillac and a great big diamond ring." Tellingly, a black-suited Clapton sits at the driving wheel, his white Fender riding shotgun, chauffeuring a tuxed-up and beaming King sitting in back with his guitar, Lucille.

The album appears on Clapton's imprint, and the band is Clapton's band.

These guys do know their blues. Since Eric's all blues *From The*

Cradle album which has become the all-time biggest selling blues album, he has been playing more blues than in ages, and his band is honed razor sharp. Members include guitarists Andy Fairweather Low and Doyle Bramhall II, the bass drums team of Nathan East and Steve Gadd, Tim Carmen on Hammond organ, and former Crusader Joe Sample on assorted keyboards. This is a veteran unit, and they have no shortage of confidence. They know that their job is simple and straight-ahead, to feature the headliners, and they do that well. Susannah and Wendy Melvoin add backing vocals to six of the set's 12 tracks.

In the tandem of Clapton and King, there is a fundamental conflict of style. Sure, both are great blues players, but their styles are quite different. Clapton is fluid, and he loves those long, florid runs with lots of notes. King is more staccato or spit-fire, as he shoots those piercing

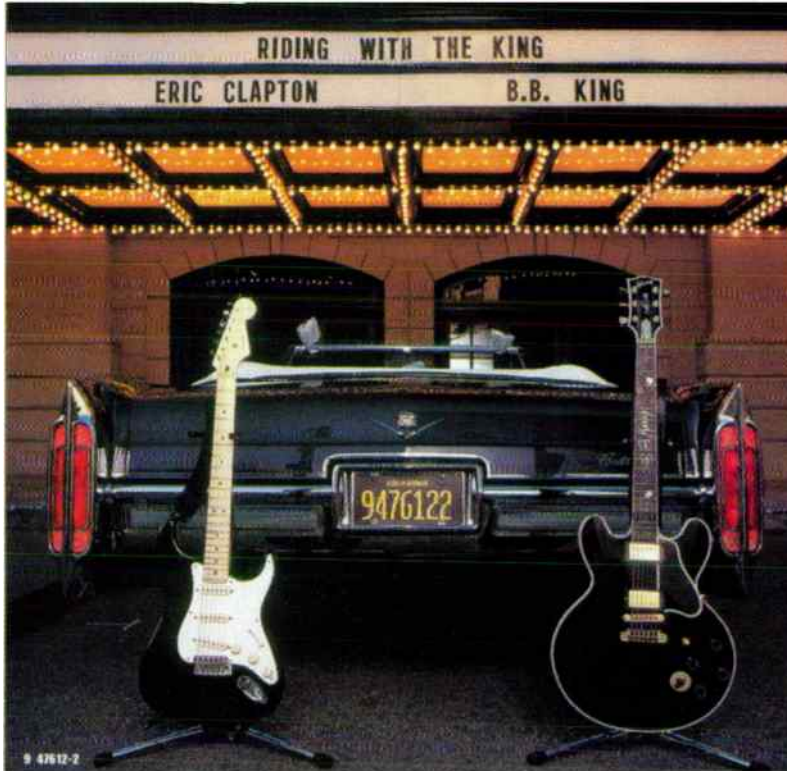
notes like precisely aimed bullets. The contrast does make it pretty easy to determine who's playing what parts, and it does lend more variety to the set.

It is as singers, rather than guitarists, that the guys really do not mix well at all. Fortunately there is only one song in which they sing in unison a great deal, the opening title track. For the most part, the singing simply is distracting. The songs work best either when B.B. sings solo or when the two trade lines or verses. These are the pure blues songs. The other items, pop songs like "Riding with the King," the two Doyle Bramhall II songs, and the mid-tempo shuffles "Marry You" and "I Wanna Be" all sound less confident than the true blues pieces, serviceable but nothing to get excited about. They give "Hold On I'm Coming," perhaps the archetypal soul-duo song, a 6½-minute reading with a tempo that's a bit slower than the Sam & Dave

original. Though their version simmers nicely it never reaches a boil, and at 6½ minutes it does feel pretty long.

The real oddity of the album is the closer, the Johnny Mercer and Howard Arlen classic "Come Rain Or Come Shine," complete with a subtle, sweet, smart Arif Mardin string chart. Best bet is that B.B. made the call on this one, as he sings most of he lead, and he really puts his heart into it. I'd also guess that King has loved this song ever since he was very young. Here, it is a slow stopper.

The best of the pure blues are the four vintage B.B. songs that are covered: "Ten Long Years" which brought down the house on B.B.'s classic *Live At The Apollo* album some 35 years back; "Days of Old," "Three O'clock Blues" and a seven-minute "When My Heart Beats Like a Hammer." Clapton returns for "Keys to the Highway," the traditional song popularized by Big Bill Broonzy which he had earlier recorded with Derek & the Dominos. A scorching take of Charles Singleton's "Help the Poor" and a stripped down acoustic version of Maceo Merriweather's "Worried Life Blues" finish out the set.



As noted, the performances soar highest when they are just the blues. The pop songs are more problematic with the Bramhall and Hiatt songs just feeling too dense and forced. "Hold On I'm Coming" probably looked like a clever idea, and it probably was a lot of fun to record, but coming off the record it drags.

Make no mistake. *Riding With The King* is not a bad album. It will probably end up as the second-biggest-selling blues album ever, after *From the Cradle*, but unhappily it just isn't the masterpiece or instant classic I was hoping for. Well-executed but it is nothing like a blow-away.

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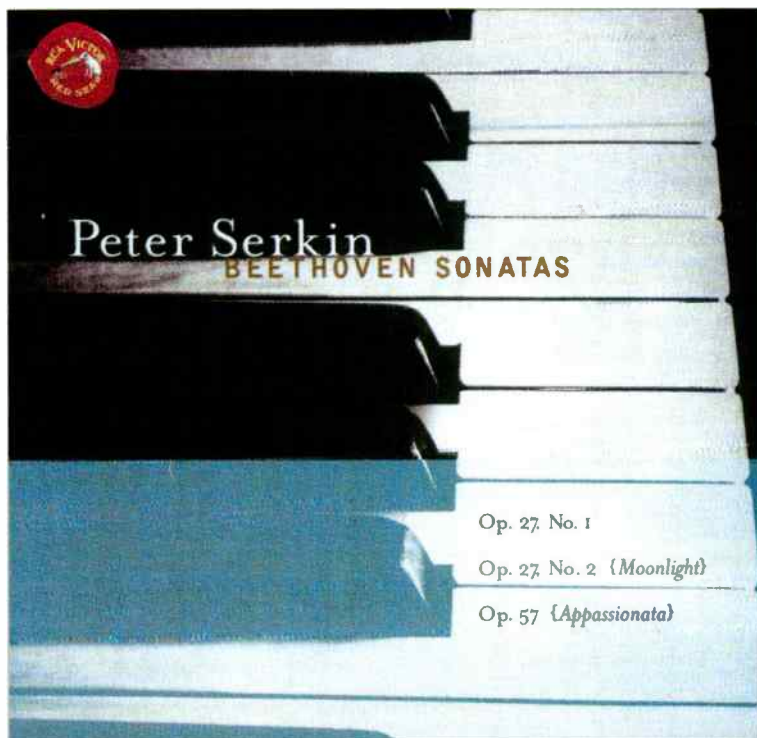
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Classical

Peter Serkin, piano: *Beethoven Sonatas*

Op. 27, No. 1

Op. 27, No. 2 "Moonlight"

Op. 57 "Appassionata"

BMG 09026 63668 2

CHOOSING A CD of Beethoven's ever-popular piano sonatas in audiophile sound would appear to be an easy task. Bins in CD shops are overflowing with performances by every keyboard wannabe, however, few if any have the prestigious lineage of Peter Serkin, 53, the grandson of legendary violinist Adolf Busch and son of world-renowned pianist Rudolf Serkin (1902 - 1991). The two elders were among the founders of Vermont's great Marlboro Music Festival, currently celebrating its 50th anniversary.

Since childhood Serkin studied not just with his father, an intimidating expert, but also with pianist Mieczyslaw Horszowski and even the flutist Marcel Moyse. With a passion for learning from his elders akin to that of Murray Perahia, Peter Serkin adds a seriousness of temperament summed up by a single fact: He routinely refuses any contact with journalists, a decision one can only sympathize with. Given the current miserable human and musical qualities of most professional music hacks in America, Serkin can only be congratulated for his sensitivity. He records widely, not just for major companies like BMG but also smaller labels like Boston Records, where he participated in a

delightful recital, "Musique française" (BR1022CD), playing works by Poulenc and Saint-Saens with real brio. Among other recent highlights of his discography, strongly recommended, are Brahms violin sonatas with fiddler Pamela Frank (London 289-455-643-2); Bach keyboard works (BMG 68594-2 and 68188-2), and a recital with oboist Alfred Genovese (Boston Records 10022CD). Still remembered for his recording of Messiaen's "Quartet for the End of Time" as part of the chamber music group Tashi, Serkin has persisted in recording a good amount of contemporary music, even managing to find exuberance in the muted works of Toru Takemitsu (DGG 453495-2).

Indeed, one of Serkin's most precious traits as a pianist is the sense of joy he conveys in a wide variety of music. In Beethoven, he seems to follow the example of his father when young, before the rigors of exile and tragedies of WW II seemed to harden Rudolf Serkin's approach to his specialty, German classical music. Peter Serkin retains a tenderness, a gentle sense of searching that is more akin to Horszowski, whose own well-centered balance was so keen that it lasted through a record-breaking performing career that lasted from

child prodigy to age 101. In the three Beethoven sonatas in the new BMG recording, Peter Serkin is probingly inquisitive, but never seems over-macho or self-consciously virtuosic.

Beethoven originally dedicated these sonatas to women he admired, like the Countess Giulietta Guicciardini. Serkin performs these works as if recounting them to a woman, with a certain intimacy and emotional directness that suggests a rare talent for communication between the sexes. His family life, as devoted husband and father of five children, may explain in part this emotional acuity. Whatever its source, it is in distinct contrast to the aristocratic sovereignty of his father Rudolf, who as an exile helped form the vastly exclusive aura around the annual Marlboro event. With the snootiness understandable in refugees — who either rejected or were rejected by their countries of origin — the Marlboro team was merciless in deciding which musicians were welcome, and which were decidedly not welcome. This hard-headed judgmentalism lies underneath the rather disingenuously jovial public image of Marlboro, with photos of grand old musical stars washing dishes in the cafeteria and the like. Many a

talented musician has been turned away from Marlboro as unwelcome, hence the ones we do hear from, such as the ever-grateful Yo-Yo Ma, are all the more ardent in their enthusiasm.

Peter Serkin's CD is recorded with this same sense of a personal statement, no doubt in part because he served as co-producer with Philip Traugott. Sound engineer Kevin Boutot used 20-bit technology for a satisfyingly non-showy sound portrait, and while these excellent performances were recorded back in 1995-6, they had to wait until now for release. Two of the sonatas Serkin tackles here, the "Moonlight" and "Appassionata," are among Beethoven's best-loved and most-recorded. In the "Moonlight" sonata, Serkin sets a deliberate pace at the beginning, establishing a musingly philosophic tone to the interpretation. His "Appassionata," while fully up to the mighty technical challenges of this titanic work, retains a human directness that is most intriguing, an interpretation to live with, to hear and rehear.

This is in contrast to Sviatoslav Richter's terrifyingly Michelangelesque "Appassionata" from 1960, recently republished in the Philips Great Pianists series (on Philips 456 949-2). Richter, in a reading full of thunder and lightning, gives the impression of playing the piano better than any human before or since. Insofar as Beethoven was a brooding superman of music, Richter's view is astonishingly right in its speed, force and sheer guts. Serkin, while clearly a keyboard master, does not stretch for titanic status. In the "Appassionata" finale, he maintains a strong sense of rounding off the forms of musical phrases. The listener's jaw does not drop open in amazement as with Richter, but the result is still admirable, like Horszowski's Beethoven, which resembled his Mozart in civilized classical balance.

In this way Serkin's Beethoven may be compared to the "Moonlight" sonata as played by Emil Gilels, recently republished on an RCA collection, *Emil Gilels the Giant* (on BMG 74321 75523 2). The choice of playing Beethoven like a violently inspired genius or a balanced, harmonious expresser of emotions is a highly personal one. It does not seem linked to history, as famous historical Beethoven interpreters like Artur Schnabel could be as wild and woolly as the best of them. Some recent reissues, in acceptable sound considering that

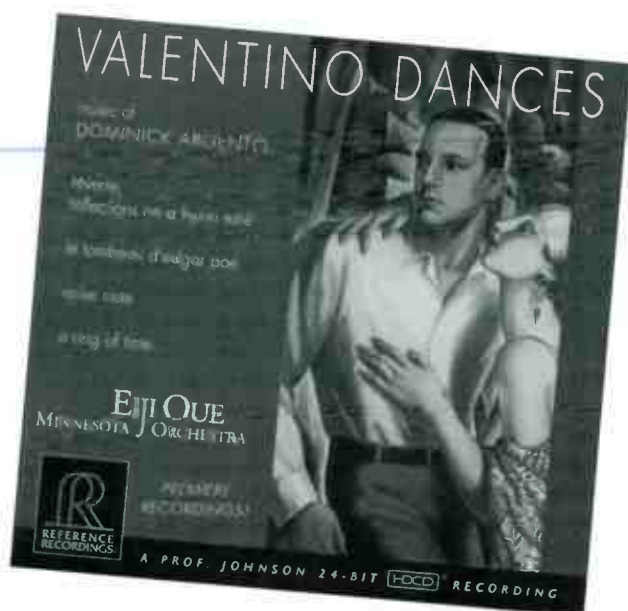
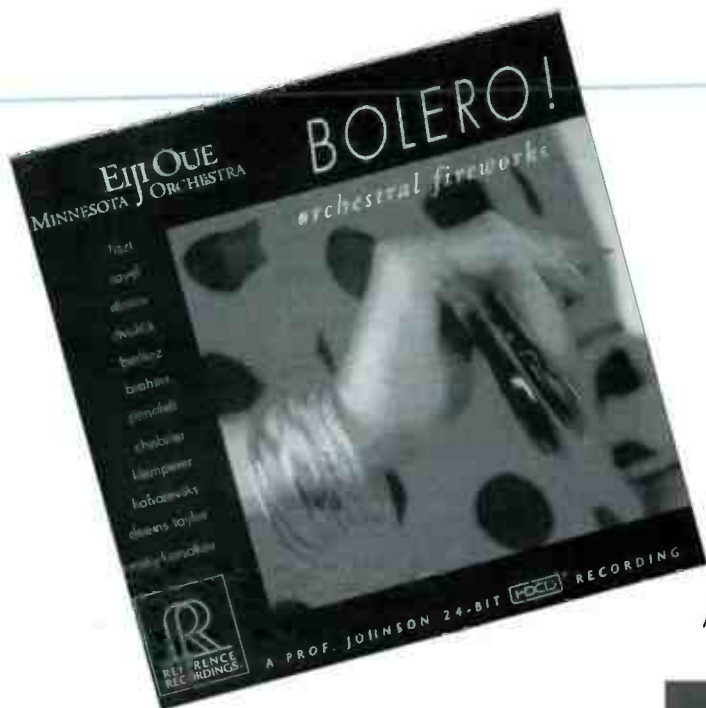


the original recordings date back to the 1920s, are by Frederic Lamond and Ignaz Friedman. Lamond, a much-praised student of Liszt, recorded the "Appassionata" in 1927 at age 59. The result is fleet and fiery, seemingly spontaneous. This unpremeditated quality is also present in Ignaz Friedman's 1926 "Moonlight" sonata, newly available in the Philips Great Pianists series (Philips 456 784-2).

Back in this golden age of pianism, it was perhaps possible for musicians to seem to improvise these great works as they went along. Today, perhaps the best that listeners can hope for is a lovingly contemplative reading along the lines of Peter Serkin's. His interpretation is clearly among the finest today, along with Richard Goode, whose live Beethoven performances far outclass his somewhat disappointing recorded cycle from the 1980s on Nonesuch, produced by the over-fastidious Max Wilcox. Maurizio Pollini is another grand interpreter of Beethoven's sonatas, who on a given day, can give the impression of playing them better than anyone else on earth. Serkin, without as vivid a theatrical flair as Pollini and

Goode, still offers solid musical and emotional values in his recordings. Unlike his father, he looks likely to remain loose, and not stiffen up with maturity. A different personality, life history, and surroundings may indeed make Peter Serkin a more lastingly satisfying virtuoso than Rudolf, some of whose late work, like the Mozart concertos recorded with Claudio Abbado, are painfully unworthy of his legacy. Peter Serkin's batting average as he enters his 50s is already better than his father's, and it must be remembered, that the elder Serkin was a great pianist indeed in his preferred repertoire, such as Beethoven and Brahms. Because of the golden age he worked in, Rudolf Serkin was able to make recordings with partners unmatched today: His early records with Adolf Busch and the Busch Quartet of Schubert, his amazing Beethoven Fourth Piano Concerto conducted by Arturo Toscanini — these are justifiably legendary performances. His son's wider diapason of musical interest offers a new complement to the family's genius, and this is a rare accomplishment indeed in interpretive art. Bravo Serkin, father and son!

Photo: Kathy Chapman



Arthur Paxton

Classical

Bolero! — Orchestral Fireworks

Reference Recordings RR-92CD

Valentino Dances — Music of Dominick Argento

Eiji Oue, Minnesota Orchestra

Reference Recordings RR-91CD

ARE YOU BORED with the *Bolero* and tired of all those tangos? Actually, the possibility of Ravel's *Bolero* suffering from overexposure would have perplexed the composer who, a couple days before the premiere sighed: "This is a piece the big Sunday concerts will never dare to include in their programs." Written for dancer Ida Rubenstein, who depicted a fiery Gypsy tabletop dancer, *Bolero* is one of the few Ravel compositions originally written for orchestra. Indeed, Ravel insisted "it is not a composition, but an exercise in orchestration". Aside from the hypnotic rhythm, gradual crescendo, and mayhem at the end, it is the vivid settings of Ravel's sinuous line that has kept this work on the front burner. A passage halfway through demonstrates Ravel's ingenious orchestration, the Minnesotans' unity of execution, and the recording's uncanny realism. Here, a few diverse instruments (horn and piccolo in double octaves with a hint of celeste?) lose their individual identities to the illusion of an organ stop - hollow yet bright - a sound so three dimensional and

solid you could get up and walk around it. The E-flat clarinetist and trombonist particularly distinguished themselves, but it is the Keith Johnson's recording that sets this *Bolero* apart.

The Kabalevsky that opens the disc promises to deliver on the cover's claim of "orchestral fireworks", but this disc is actually a cleverly assembled selection of orchestral dances, and a number of these are quite gentle. Along with the *Bolero*, these dances are conspicuous: Brahms' *Hungarian Dance No. 3 in F*, Dinicu's *Hora Staccato* (piece in the style of the Romanian dance, used by every TV juggler before the appearance of post-modern knife catchers like the Flying Kara-mazovs), Dvorak's *Slavonic Dance op. 72 #2* (the inspiration for Nino Rota's melancholy *Godfather* music?), Berlioz's *Dance of the Sylphs*, Otto Klemperer's *Merry Waltz* and Chabrier's *Habanera*. OK, Rimsky-Korsakov's *Flight of the Bumblebee* is more of a chase than a dance, but it is nicely set up by a veritable infestation: Deems Taylor's musical

metamorphosis of Louis Carroll's magical bugs including the bee-elephant, snapdragon fly and very large talking gnat. Do they dance? Jarnefelt's *Preludium*, part of a five-part serenade, clearly is inspired by 18th Century dance forms and textures. "The Dance" is the last thing one thinks of during the ruminative introduction to Liszt's best-known tone poem, but since *Les Preludes* derives from Lamartine's vision of life as a series of preludes to death, can we not see this work as the dance of life? Kabalevsky based his opera *Colas Breugnon* on a work by Romain Rolland who praised the music (including the *Overture* played here) as "full of life, brightness and movement".

While *Flight of the Bumblebee*, *Les Preludes*, *Habanera* and *Bolero* are audience favorites, this disc may be of particular interest to listeners seeking obscure or forgotten nougats. Among the lesser known compositions included here, the biggest surprise is *Merry Waltz*, a buoyant confection by a man better known for his baton work with such heavies as Bach, Beethoven and

Mahler. Klem-perer's work may even be described as one part Mahler and three parts Strauss, Johann Strauss.

Throughout, the listener enjoys the performance from a seat that delivers mid-hall resonance, with firm presence and remarkable transparency. Ample ambient reflections warm and smooth without obscuring. Triangle, cymbals and xylophone emanating from deep in the soundstage are brilliantly defined. That Oue deftly balances solo lines with inner voices and accompanying textures, could easily be taken for granted, but these are always musically proportioned and clearly projected. Quiet passages may be projecting at a somewhat high level, perhaps due to my lack of a HDCD decoder, but nobody should pass up this stunning recording for lack of such equipment. The highly readable liner notes discuss each of the twelve compositions, offering plenty of anecdotal tidbits, yet don't suggest any theme or intent for the collection as a whole. Perhaps it's obvious this is a sampler disc with all the benefits (contrast, variety) and draw-

backs (aversion to immersion) inherent in the genre. The cover's castanets and scarlet background beckon to those willing to try classical music if assured it won't be heavy or drab. Sated aficionados will find some tasty surprises, and everyone can bask in the sumptuous sound.

**Bored with the *Bolero*?
Tired of all those tangos?
I don't think you will be
with these from Reference.**

Remember how a good fireworks display saves the best for last, and watch out for the bass drum shock waves at the end of the *Bolero*.

All right, I dissed the *Hora*, and revenge has been extracted: The jugglers' tune is stuck in my head and will not depart.

From the table-top *Bolero* to the taxi dancer's tangos: If the "orchestral fireworks" are actually dances, *Valentino Dances* (the CD) is largely a selection of suites. In offering five works by Dominick Argento who is

composer laureate with the Minnesota Orchestra, this disc too is a kind of sampler. The ten minute title selection is actually a synthesis of music from *The Dream of Valentino*, one of Argento's 13 operas. The tangos that swoop and strut through *Valentino Dances* depict scenes from the life of Rudolf Valentino, dreamboat of the Twenties. This highly theatrical music embodies risk and sensuality, while reflecting the way celluloid characters of the silent era were obliged to boldly dramatize their emotions. William Shim-mel's vividly reedy accordion sounds both timeless and bracingly modern. Piano, saxophone and percussion add to the orchestra's Technicolor palette. The opening music recalls the soaring movie scores of the thirties and forties, then suddenly the protagonist (as accordion) intrudes with a cadenza that leads to the first tango. Sudden shifts between sunny nostalgia and melodramatic eruptions suggest overheated temperaments. A faint hint of irony pervades, yet Oue and the orchestra pounce on the drama and passion built into the score.

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The Moon P-5 has transparency, very low noise and flexibility of control... and should be considered among the finest line preamps available today... The Moon W-5 is one of those few amps that can convey a real 'jump' with no loss of detail or focus." **Kalman Rubinson - Stereophile - March 1999.**

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Reverie, Reflections on a Hymn Tune is the same length as *Valentino Dances*, but in aiming higher is probably less of an instant crowd-pleaser. Music that occasionally recalls the more congenial side of Hindemith or even Roy Harris, moves in a "spiritual progression from doubt through indecision, to acceptance – from dimness to brightness", finally coalescing on the Easter Hymn, *Ellacombe*.

In mining the gloomy depths of Poe's psyche, Argento has reached even greater heights.

Le Tombeau d'Edgar Poe is a suite using music drawn from the acclaimed opera *The Voyage of Edgar Allan Poe*. This music depicts aspects of Poe's life and includes a setting of his *Annabel Lee*, a poetic cry of grief for his beloved, Virginia, who died at 23, a decade after their wedding. Argento has created an

intensely romantic work, luminous in its evocations of the "this kingdom here by the sea". Certain coloristic effects are stunning, but more fundamentally, the phrases, through their harmonies and contours cast a dramatic spell. The string sound is smooth and deep, and the trumpet's elegiac solo is spun gold.

Argento's score places the singer offstage, though I can imagine him sounding even more effectively plaintive or disembodied. Incidentally (back to *Bolero*) Ravel once told the *New York Times* that his greatest teacher in composition was Edgar Allan Poe.

The fourth work, *Valse Triste* is a miniature in gauzy string textures.

A Ring of Time, composed in Florence where clock tower bells punctuate the hours, celebrates the Minnesota Orchestra's 70th anniversary. Of the eight existing movements for large orchestral forces and strategically placed percussionists, the four that depict the seasons of the year are recorded here. *Spring* is dominated by romping brass. In *Summer*, organic patterns of stasis and lyrical flow, culminate in a powerful climax.

Fall finds swirling filigrees of piano, mallet instruments and shimmering high bells making way for a mawkish march, which is itself overtaken by an amorphous Ivesian background. The austere *Winter* landscape is initially nothing but bell. Slowly, the orchestra enters, reaches a blaze of sound, and dies away. The final "bell" is a tolling harp.

By now it is clear, Argento's style is not so much eclectic as flexible. His language is all of a piece and readily serves a range of contexts and moods. The music occasionally suggests a particularly lyrical Korngold or Herrmann (two masters of orchestral writing tapped by the megalith of American drama, Hollywood). Yet Argento has so assimilated any influences, that his music is like a new voice we have always known. Each of these five varied works is a recording premiere. In offering only music by a contemporary composer (however communicative) this disc is a bold move. Fortunately, Argento's music is performed with panache and is beautifully recorded — bravo! Now bring on the whole *Dream*, all of the *Tombeau*, and the rest of *A Ring*.

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Classical

J. S. Bach Brandenburg *Concertos* Nos. 1 - 4
Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra,
Gerard Schwarz, Cond
Seraphim Classics 73281-2



THE BRANDENBURG CONCERTOS of Johann Sebastian Bach have a very humble but noble beginning. Christian Ludwig, the Margrave of Brandenburg, a minor German prince who collected music, was the dedicatee of these works. Bach's music caught his ear and he commissioned Bach to write a set of concertos.

After two years, Bach delivered the goods with his famous self-effacing caveat—he asked that the Margrave “not judge their imperfections too harshly,” and discover the “profound respect and the very humble allegiance that they seek to convey.” Whether the Margrave ever heard the concertos is another story. In any case, he probably had no idea these brilliant pieces dedicated to him would be so popular hundreds of years later.

The current Schwann catalog lists more than 70 recordings of the Brandenburg's, some new and some

old, some with scaled-down arrangements using “period” instruments, and some with full orchestra, each bearing the distinctive mark of its conductor. This is a reissue of a 1980 recording by Gerard Schwarz and the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra. While spatially satisfying and overall quite musical, it lacks just a tad in the high end. The violins, especially in the first concerto tend to be somewhat recessed. Nothing is unusual or outlandish here; Schwarz is straight-forward in his interpretation, so if you like your Bach straight up, as I do, you won't be disappointed.

Schwarz keeps his musical forces together with confident technique and consummate musicianship. The selling point of these concertos is that everyone in the orchestra has a chance to dig in and make incredible music together. Three of the Brandenburgs (Nos. 2, 4, and 5) are textbook examples of the Concerto

Grosso, a technique using a small group of soloists (winds, strings, etc.) who traded licks with the orchestra and shared the spotlight.

What makes these particular pieces so enduring is their inexhaustible flow of melody and endless imagination, to say nothing of their rhythmic drive and sublime inspiration. As he did in so many other forms, Bach took his music to the edge, calling forth new techniques and bold musicianship from his players. Schwarz is known primarily for championing the work of American composers, notably on the Delos label, so his Bach might be something of an aside. Even then, his interpretation is focused, dynamic and vigorous.

How nice of the Margrave to let us all benefit from Bach's timeless gift.

Terry Joy is Operations Coordinator and Classical Music Host at KUNR-FM in Reno, Nevada.



Bluegrass & Jazz

The Karl Shiflett and Big Country Show
Rebel REB-CD-1752

Mike Hart and the Bonetones: *Showdown*
Danger Dog Records, 1015 Palmer St.,
St. Augustine, Fl. 32095

Mike Driscoll

THE LINER NOTES for The Karl Shiflett and Big Country Show CD say that if one word could be used to describe their live show, it would be “retro.” I first caught them live last year, at a little church in South Hadley, Massachusetts. The stage was adorned with only a single microphone, with the call letters “WSM” on top, and a banner advertising “Martha White Flour.” The band took the stage, wearing identical baggy black suits, except for Shiflett himself, whose suit was

gray; all wore two-tone black-and-white shoes that would look at home on Gomer Pyle. Shiflett explained that the group would attempt to recreate a bluegrass show as it might have been 50 years ago. They played with a consummate musicianship, each band member rushing up to the single microphone to play or sing their featured part, then pulling back to allow the rest of the group to crowd around for their parts. Shiflett himself has a rather unique way of pulling back

from the mike, then, flexing his long legs, gliding up to sing his part. It’s all great fun! This CD attempts to capture a bit of that live experience, and, for the most part, succeeds. They are, first of all, exceptional musicians. There isn’t a flubbed line or misplaced note, live or on disc. Most importantly, the music is superb. The disc opens with the old bluegrass warhorse, “Don’t Let Your Deal Go Down,” and I’ve never heard it played better. Shiflett’s voice is perfect for bluegrass,

sounding like a hybrid of Hank Williams and the veteran western "sidekick" actor, Pat Buttram (Haney on the old "Green Acres" TV show.) The band is as tight as they come, band members seemingly reading each other's minds.

Other favorites of mine on this disc include "Where The Smoke Goes Up, And The Money Goes Down," a great country tune that wouldn't be out of place on a Merle Haggard album, and "The One I Love Is Gone," a Bill Monroe song that Monroe never recorded and personally gave to Shifflet.

The sound on the disc is clean and very well recorded, but don't expect a wall-to-wall soundstage. The musicians cluster together towards the center of the stage, moving forward and back, in a very convincing recreation of the live show. This is a great recording of a great bluegrass band, and I highly recommend it to fans of the genre. If you ever have the chance to attend one of their live shows, do so. It's the next best thing to having a time machine.

My Introduction to the music of Mike Hart and The Bonetones was unusual, to say the least. In real life, I work as a medical professional in a group home for developmentally disabled adults. I will, at times, bring CDs to work, for the enjoyment of residents and staff alike, so my coworkers have a pretty good idea of my musical tastes. One afternoon, my house manager played a CD, and asked me if I could identify the band. After listening to a few cuts, I replied that I could certainly identify a few influences, however the identity of the band was a mystery to me. "That's my brother's band," she said, "Mike Hart and the Bonetones!" I asked her how I could obtain some of their CDs, and she had Mike send a couple up from his home in Florida. The two discs Mike sent, Showdown and Everybody's

Human, taken together, show both the blues and jazz sides of this combo. "Showdown," is, I believe, the better of the two discs, and it leans heavily towards the blues side of the band's personality. In an e-mail, Mike told me that his main musical influences have been "all of the Kings, B.B., Albert, and Freddie," as well as Coltrane and Miles. His son's name is Davis. The disc opens with the title track, a great blues rave with very tasty harp and sax breaks. Mike himself has a great voice for the blues, rather rough hewn, like the music itself, reminding me a bit of Robert Lucas. The second cut, "We Get in Trouble," showcases the group's other vocalist, James Whitfield, whose voice is smoother and more reminiscent of bluesmen like B.B. King. Guitarist Hart shows a great proficiency, as do all the group members on their chosen instruments. My favorite cuts include "Laughed Like a Jackass," with its "Moondance" rhythm a la Van Morrison and a great break on flute by Dick Kraft, and "Doing Me Wrong," which features extremely nice harp work by Jerry Norris. My absolute favorite, however, is "Testosterone Blues," with Whitfield doing his best B.B. on lyrics like "A man gets to thinkin', but it sure ain't with his brain."

The liner notes that "all songs and arrangements are by Mike Hart," and also indicate that the recording was done in analogue, then digitally mastered. The sound is clean as a whistle, with fairly good depth for a close miked studio recording, but as with the Shifflet disc, it's the music that is the draw, not the sonics. Highly recommended for fans of the blues, and I would say that, even if his sister wasn't my supervisor! Mike and the Bonetones' discs can be ordered from Mike Hart, 1015 Palmer St., St. Augustine, FL 32095, for \$20 including shipping and handling.

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Robert Deutsch, SGHT, Dec 1999
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Don Keele, Audio, August 1998

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Jazz

Miles Davis

*Relaxin' VIJC-60125 (Prestige 7129), Workin' VIJC-60126 (Prestige 7166),
Cookin' VIJC-60127 (Prestige 7094), Steamin' VIJC-60128 (Prestige 7200)*

*Miles Davis and the Modern Jazz Giants
Prestige 7150 (20-bit edition)*

*Miles Davis & John Coltrane: The Complete Columbia Recordings, 1955 - 1961
Columbia 65833 (six CDs)*

THE MUSICAL UNION of trumpeter Miles Davis and saxophonist John Coltrane had an auspicious beginning, but few listeners other than the intuitive trumpeter himself could have foreseen the historical implications. At the time of their first recordings, Miles was already the man of the hour; Coltrane was virtually unknown. Yet, their off-and-on association over the next seven tumultuous years yielded a startling musical progression and some of the finest jazz ever recorded. The Miles-Coltrane Quintet (briefly expanded to a sextet) was at the

absolute cutting edge. As they progressed, so too did the art of jazz.

While still in his teens, Miles had been elevated to stardom during his nearly two years as a member of the Charlie Parker Quintet. Coltrane's climb was more gradual. With a resume mediocre by comparison, listing basic sideman stints with Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson, Earl Bostic, and Johnny Hodges—all saxophonists themselves with little need of anything more than horn section work from the young tenor man. Coltrane's limited, pre-Miles recorded output is most notable for

a few mediocre sides on alto with Dizzy Gillespie.

Miles had reasonable success leading loosely organized all-star sessions with Thelonious Monk, Milt Jackson, et al. during his pre-Columbia, five-year contract with Prestige Records (1951 to '56). Columbia's George Avakian approached Davis as the trumpeter left the stage following his dynamic, legendary "comeback" performance at the Newport Jazz Festival of 1954. Although Davis was still under contract, negotiations ensued. Serendipitously, it was only then

that Davis had begun leading his first stable working band of Sonny Rollins (ts), Red Garland (p), Paul Chambers (b), and Philly Joe Jones (d). Prior to any recording, Rollins moved to Chicago and was replaced by Coltrane.

Avakian recorded the quintet in 1955 under terms that none of the material done for Columbia be released until Davis' Prestige contract expired in 1957. This agreement proved advantageous to Prestige owner Bob Weinstock, who recorded the quintet in 1956, then began a paced release of Miles Davis albums at the start of Columbia's first ad blitz.

Davis took advantage of Columbia's big budget by taking as much time needed in the recording studio to produce masterpieces. Although five Prestige albums feature the same Miles and Coltrane quintet heard on the earliest Columbia sides, the differences in production are readily audible. Always cost-conscious, Weinstock brought the quintet into Van Gelder's studio only twice for what have since been termed the "marathon sessions" of May and October, 1956. Because the quintet had been playing the Café Bohemia steadily, their nightly repertoire of standards and originals spun out effortlessly, captured complete with the errors associated with club performance. No alternate takes were recorded; no editing was done.

Even so, the albums, *Relaxin'* (Prestige 7129), *Workin'* (Prestige 7166), *Cookin'* (Prestige 7094), and *Steamin'* (Prestige 7200) are staples in the Prestige catalog—all garnering four or five stars in Downbeat. These albums were released on CD in the 1980s through parent company Fantasy as part of the Original Jazz Classics (OJC) series, but recently have become available through JVC as part of their quickly growing XRCD (Extended

Resolution Compact Disc) catalog. The 20-bit K2 Super Coding of the XRCDs provides the ultimate listening experience of the Prestige material. The sound is warm and round, without the strident highs or boomy lows heard in some of the most recent 24-bit remastered recordings from the same time period. In a

Miles Davis Fans, take note of these wonderful releases!

nutshell, the sonics of these present releases could scarcely be better; the balance and tone of the instruments preserved intact.

One quintet cut from those 1956 recording sessions remains available only on an altogether different album. Prestige released an exceptional reading of "Round Midnight" on Miles Davis and the Modern Jazz Giants (Prestige 7150), possibly as a marketing strategy (capitalizing on the quintet's popularity) for that conceptually different LP. Available through Fantasy as an OJC and now as a high-end CD (Prestige 50th Anniversary Special Commemorative Edition), the album's one cut alone typifies the difference a remastering engineer can make. Unfortunately, this classic rendition of "Round Midnight"—albeit remastered via the same JVC 20-bit K2 Super Coding process as the XRCDs—blanches by comparison, even to the OJC version. The clarity of the ensemble has been diluted, the balance much too heavy in the bass.

Throughout his tenure with Columbia, Miles released only the very finest material from each session. Anyone with even a mild interest in straight-ahead jazz will be familiar with several cuts from these albums: 'Round About

Midnight, What Is Jazz, Jazz Omnibus, Milestones, Someday My Prince Will Come, Miles & Monk at Newport, Jazz at the Plaza, Jazz Track, Basic Miles, Black Giants, Circle in the Round, Newport Jazz Festival Live, The Columbia Years 1955-85, and Kind of Blue. The latter—certainly one of the finest jazz recordings ever made—stands as the number one LP on the Billboard Jazz Chart.

So, why purchase a pricey boxed set of material you may well already own in some format? Naturally, 'cause you don't own it all.

Over a dozen previously unissued takes from those sessions are included ("Two Bass Hit"—two takes; "Ah-Leu-Cha"—two takes; "Bye Bye Blackbird;" "Tadd's Delight;" "Dear Old Stockholm;" "All of You;" "Sweet Sue, Just You"—three takes; "Straight, No Chaser;" "Milestones;" "Little Melonae;" "Fran-Dance;" "Freddie Freeloader"—false start). As a plus, the discs are interspersed with illuminating studio chatter.

The classic *Milestones* LP is issued here for the first time in stereo, just as it was recorded (a perplexing fact). The *Kind of Blue* sessions, previously released at faster-than-real-tempo are at correct speed and pitch here (as on the gold Mastersound CD edition). The extensive liner notes are insightful, including essays by producers and surviving sidemen. The 20-bit SBM or 24-bit HDCD remastering practically places the quintet or sextet—comprised of Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Cannonball Adderley, Hank Mobley, Red Garland, Wynton Kelly, Bill Evans, Paul Chambers, Philly Joe Jones, and Jimmy Cobb—in your listening room. In a nutshell, the release by Columbia of this six-CD set marks the very first time this amazingly beautiful music has received its complete and just due.



JAZZ

Christy Baron
Steppin'

Chesky Records
JD201

PICTURE A SMOKE-FILLED club where all the young and hip are sipping on their glasses of wine or martinis, talking about their latest Internet venture while waiting for Mr. or Ms. Right to come along. In the corner of the club stands a songstress crooning popular songs from such unlikely sources as The Beatles, Prince, Stevie Wonder and other pop icons but doing them in a jazz setting with her faithful quartet. This songstress could easily be Christy Baron, a self-proclaimed jazz-oriented vocalist who has adapted many songs from various pop arenas to fit the jazz world.

On her current album, "Steppin'" on Chesky Records, Baron expands upon the concept by including elements of R&B, electronica and world music and creates an interesting hybrid sound that explores and experiments with textures and colors. David Chesky has enlisted the help of Didier Rachou to bring a more cutting-edge sound to this album. Together, both producers and Baron have created an album without borders. It is truly different

from her debut album "I Thought About You" (1997), also on Chesky Records, in the sense that the jazz idiom is not the primary focus here.

Baron shows here that she is equally comfortable working within an R&B style by interpreting classic tunes like Billy Preston's "Will It Go 'Round in Circles" and Heatwave's "Ain't No Halfsteppin'." She creates a cool-sounding R&B feel with an infusion of percussion and jazz. In "She's Not There," Baron transforms this classic Zombies tune, a smash rock hit during the British Invasion, into a steamy R&B groove full of tropical percussion and lush harmonies.

Baron and Rachou make a unique choice of intertwining Tuvan throat-singer Akim Funk Buddha with myriad Asian and tropical percussion instruments, electronic sampling, gongs and chimes on the classic Beatles tune "Tomorrow Never Knows." This sets an ethereal other-worldly tone in the beginning of the song—as if time was just standing still. A sense of urgency comes over the mood when very

aggressive percussion (shades of electronica) is introduced towards the end.

Of special note on this album is the poetic tableau of Manhattan in "Delays on the Downtown Six" performed by David Johansen of Buster Poindexter fame. It is dark, steamy, funky and angry, many of the reactions one might feel while waiting on the platform for the train. This is one of two original songs written by Didier Rachou and Lucy Lean for this album.

As with many of the recordings on the Chesky label, this album sounds realistic and intimate. Rachou and Chesky have done a great job in capturing the essence of Baron's approach to the music. This is truly an eclectic album that may surprise many listeners. Christy Baron has stepped boldly into this interesting collection of modern songs and approaches them in a different light. In "Steppin'" her shoes seem comfortable, as are these innovative interpretations of the songs in this latest offering on this listener.

Velodyne HGS-15 Subwoofer



LIKE HIGH-QUALITY subwoofers. I like them for several reasons.

First and foremost, a good sub gets you into the bottom octave in a way that most full-range speakers simply cannot match. There may not be a lot of strong bass below 40 Hz with many music recordings, but with some there is plenty, and when plenty is there, I want to hear it. In addition, while most movies do not have substantial bass below 40 Hz, some do, and those often have it loud enough for a good subwoofer to make a difference.

Second, a good sub takes the heat off your main speakers (their woofers, of course, but also the woofer/midranges if those main speakers are two-way models), and also takes some pressure off your main-channel amps. This reduces distortion and increases headroom in the area well above the bass range.

Third, the woofers in a pair of spaced main-system speakers have the potential to produce the same inter-woofer "suckout" artifacts that are related to the kind of boundary-induced nulls that you get when a woofer is at just the wrong distance from one or more nearby large walls. The problem becomes doubly bad if the distance from one or more boundaries to one or more main-system woofers is equal to half the distance between those woofers.

Installing a mono sub and crossing it over at just the right point (above the frequency where spaced woofers in full-range systems would produce an inter-woofer suckout null, and/or where they might also interact with

a large boundary or two (or three to create additional, possibly doubled-up suckout nulls) will smooth out the bass in the range between 40 and 70 Hz. Note that one reason that using two smaller subs may not be as good as using one big sub is that they may also create inter-woofer suckout artifacts.

So, a big, competent sub, properly located, will do more than simply get the bottom octave.

Anyway, this is the fifth Velodyne subwoofer I have formally reviewed over the past few years. Previous models I have checked out include the FSR-12 (a sample of which I own), the F1800RII (a sample of which I also own), the non-servo CT-150 model (lower in price than the more upscale Velodynes, and also different, because it is a ported system with a less comprehensive servo circuit), and the HGS-12, which is a kind of shrunk-down version of the HGS-15.

Now, there are subwoofers and then there are SUBWOOFERS. Most so-called subwoofers do a fine job of dealing with the bass over the 30- to 80-Hz range, but most of those run out of steam when the going gets tough down really low. Even generally excellent small-ish subs like the HGS-12, HGS-10, and FSR-12 Velodynes, although quite good at reasonable listening levels, and able to cleanly reach the bottom of the bottom octave as long as the volume-level requirements are not too extreme, are not really able to shake the rafters in a large room.

In addition, subs like the Atlantic Technology 272 PBM, B&W ASW 2000, and smaller Sunfire model, as

well as any THX-certified subs that I know of, although able to play very loudly and authoritatively in some respects (certainly with home-theater program material), are not able to produce the kind of super-powerful, ultra-low-distortion low bass that the really big-league players can. (The THX models are purposely rolled off below 35 Hz for reasons that involve room gain.) For really serious, big-room work, you need models like the top Hsu and Paradigm models or the top two Velodyne models.

Yes, Velodyne has two models that I would assign to the "prestige" class of subwoofers: the killer HGS-18 plus the HGS-15 that I am reviewing here.

I say "prestige" for two reasons other than the fact that the bigger one costs nearly three grand and the HGS-15 comes in at nearly \$2500. One reason is the ultra-low distortion that these subs exhibit. Of course, the two other Velodyne servo models, the HGS-12 and HGS-10, also have very low distortion, and so there has to be a bit more to the prestige angle than just the lack of sonic colorations that these speakers exhibit.

So, we come to the second reason: The fact that the two units can keep distortion low, while at the same time they are able to generate rather impressive sound levels. The HGS-18 is the undoubted champ in this category, but the HGS-15 is a killer, too, although it cannot achieve the maximum levels of some other killer subs.

Connect Here

There are four different ways to hook up the HGS-15, and in this respect it is only slightly different from most other subs, including most other Velodyne models.

First, you can install it between the preamp-out and main-amp-in jacks if you have separates or if you have a receiver or integrated amp that has pre-out/main-in jacks on the backside. If you hook it up this way, you would set the crossover in/out switch on the subwoofer's back panel to "in" so that the HGS-15's own crossover would roll off the low signals to the satellites and at the same time roll off the higher-frequency signals to the sub.

The sub's internal, high-pass filter operates in a first-order mode (6-dB-per-octave slope). The internal, low-pass filter is a second-order item that initially has a 12-dB-per-octave slope that ultimately steepens to 48 dB per octave, due to a non-defeatable filter above 150 Hz that is designed to keep the sub's class-D amplifier from emitting any hash at higher frequencies. (This filter works even if the sub is set to "bypass.") If your integrated amp, receiver, or processor is set up to do surround

sound, you would configure it to send the bass, including low-frequency effects (LFE) to the main channels. That way, the bass would be shunted to the subwoofer by the sub's own crossover system.

Second, you can use an outboard crossover between the preamp-out and main-amp-in connections and operate the sub with its crossover bypassed. If you do this, the crossover controls on the sub have no effect (they are bypassed), although the level and phase controls will still work, and you will use whatever controls your outboard crossover has to handle the distribution of frequencies to the sub and the satellites. In a home-theater

rig, you would again set your processor to send all the bass to the main channels, and the outboard crossover would then route it to the subwoofer.

Third, you can use the crossover built in to your surround processor (if you are installing the sub in a home-theater system) and output the bass to the sub via the processor's subwoofer output. If you hook the sub to a mono-sub output on your processor, you can run the shielded cable to either the left or right input of the subwoofer, because all bass-input signals are summed to mono by the subwoofer's electronics, anyway.

As with the outboard crossover, you would operate the sub in its crossover-bypass mode and let the processor's crossover call the shots. However, to best make use of this kind of arrangement, you would configure your processor to send the system bass to its subwoofer output and operate the main and all other channels in their "small-speaker" modes. This is the best way to do things with a sub as potent as the HGS-15, since in all but the largest systems in the largest rooms it should be able to deal with all the bass any program material would be able to generate on any of the channels, and do so better than any reasonably affordable satellites.

Finally, you can hook the sub up via its "speaker-level" connections. This means that you would run speaker leads from your main amp to the sub and then run additional speaker leads from the sub to your main satellite speakers. This almost seems like a silly way to hook up a subwoofer as potent and upscale as the HGS-15. However, if you had the sub working with a set of satellite speakers in a distant part of your house, this could be your best hookup option.

This is because you could route the long speaker leads to the sub and then route shorter ones from the sub to the satellite speakers. The alternative, and admittedly more "purist" approach would be to run the speaker leads directly to the satellites and then route a long shielded cable to the sub from the processor. If you

There are subwoofers and there are SUBWOOFERS! Velodyne's HGS-15 is one of the latter.

opted to use the sub's own crossover, you would have to run a pair of shielded leads to the sub and then another pair back to the power amp. This is an awkward proposition in a distant hookup, and so under such conditions a purist approach might not be the best thing and speaker-level hookups would be easier to deal with.

Before going over what I discovered from both measuring and critically listening to the HGS-15, we need to take a fast look at the unit's rear panel.

First, we have a bass output-level control that covers a very broad range. A large range is necessary, because

the sub has to be able to work with satellite speakers and satellite amps of often very widely varying efficiencies, sensitivities, and outputs. Then we have a variable low-pass control that allows for settings between 40 Hz and 120 Hz. For the most part, you will probably find that it is best to set this control at 90 Hz, or lower, in order to keep potential mid-bass artifacts out of the sub.

While setting the level and crossover controls by ear can be done (after all, we ultimately want our system to satisfy our ears), it can be more quickly done by means of a good test disc and meter. I recommend the Delos *Surround Spectacular* set (DE-3179), which has a test disc with some very useful set up and level-matching sequences and system-evaluation tests, as well as a second disc with some demo-grade musical sequences. Perhaps the best simple meter to use is the little analog job that you can find at Radio Shack. The Delos disc actually tells you how to effectively use this meter to set up a proper subwoofer-satellite balance.

Then we have a two-position high-pass control: 80 Hz and 100 Hz. The higher setting supposedly is best used with really small satellite speakers, because it will minimize the amount of energy that their smallish "woofers" might receive. However, I have used Velodyne subs with some pretty small satellites and I have yet to see any woofer/mid driver overload result from using the 80-Hz setting, even at fairly high levels. This was the case, even though the high-pass slope is only 6 dB per octave, as mentioned previously. I would only use the 100-Hz slope if the satellite had an inherent peak in the 80-90 Hz range that might be somewhat tamed by the higher setting.

Besides the high-pass switch, there are four miniswitches that one will find to be very important when setting up this sub. First, we have a 0/180-degree phase switch. Second, we have a subsonic rolloff switch (15 Hz or 35 Hz). Then, we have the crossover in/out control mentioned previously. Finally, we have the power

auto/on switch. There is also a main-power switch that is separate from the auto/on function switch.

OK, the phase switch is rather easy to figure out. You want the sub to be in phase with the satellites at the crossover point, and the function of this switch is to see to it that this is the case. In theory, when in phase, there will be a smooth transition. Also in theory, if the phase is wrong, there will be a suckout dip at the crossover point that will be impossible to eradicate with the level control or crossover-point controls.

Unfortunately, phase is tricky and if the sub is in phase with the nearer main-system satellite at the

crossover point, it will not be in phase with the more distant satellite. So, you kind of have to wing it with phase controls and use the setting that best splits the difference. (Continuously variable phase controls can possibly do this better, but even those end up splitting the difference.) The best way to do this is to get a really good test disc, such as the Delos *Surround Spectacular* set that I mentioned previously. It has a series of subwoofer-blend sequences that will help you set phase by ear, and set it even better with the Radio Shack meter I also mentioned previously.

If you do not have such a disc, you can adjust phase by having a helper operate the switch with bass-potent program material playing. Have the helper flip the switch back and forth at your command as the music plays, and opt for the setting that delivers the richest output in the bass range. This is more difficult than you might think, because the only frequencies where the differences will occur are around the crossover point, and they may be quite tricky to pinpoint. Get the Delos disc and do the job right.

As I noted above, the subsonic rolloff switch allows for either a 15-Hz or 35-Hz option. One would use the lower setting if they wanted the very best in super-deep-bass performance. For me, this is the reason someone purchases a sub in the first place, and so that is where I would leave the switch. However, some individuals might consider the 35-Hz setting if their main interest was video program material (which rarely has substantial content below 30 Hz), and they wanted the sub to parallel the home-theater guidelines set up by the Lucasfilm THX people.

Regarding those THX subwoofer parameters, I should note that the Velodyne subs are not actually THX certified. However, the low-bass roll-off parameters set up by Lucasfilm are not proprietary, and any sub manufacturer can configure his product to mimic them. Indeed, those parameters were themselves probably the result of

**There are so many ways
this sub can be integrated
into your system that it
should be an easy task.**

independent research by people like Louis Fielder and Eric Benjamin in the 1980s. The idea was that below about 30 to 35 Hz, most listening rooms augment the low bass at about 12 dB per octave. The THX parameters are designed to complement this rolloff and the result is theoretically flat bass down really low.

In practice, I find this simply does not work to good effect. The compensation is only going to sound proper subjectively at really high listening levels. At the levels where most of us listen most of the time, the very low bass needs more augmentation. In addition, a somewhat elevated bass output down really low can enhance the degree to which we perceive a "large room" when we listen (in our small listening spaces) to recordings made in large concert halls or which are designed for playback in large movie theaters. So, I think the 15-Hz setting is best for all sources.

As noted, the sub actually has two power switches on the back. One is the main-power switch that cuts off the juice as thoroughly as unplugging the unit. The other is a special "auto/on" switch that allows you to use some fairly refined turn-on procedures.

The auto/on switch is a common feature on subs these days. In the "auto" position, it allows the user to power the sub from a remote receptacle. The sub is turned on by any reasonably strong input signals and will stay on as long as those signals continue. When you cut off the input to the unit, the sub shuts down about 15 minutes later, all by itself.

If the switch is set in the "on" position, you can use the sub's remote control to turn the power on and off. (The sensor for signals from the remote is located on the sub's front panel, behind the removable grille screen.) Actually, as long as the sub's main-power switch is in the on position, it will actually be in a standby mode all the time. So, when you use the remote control to turn power on, you are simply switching from standby to on. The same goes when the switch is set to auto and a signal source turns the sub on.

One minor problem with either of these features ("auto" or remote-controlled "on") is that the sub may be turned on by line surges, and would also be turned on if the power went completely off and then came back on. If you have an air conditioner or stove or electric dryer or some other appliance that cause such momentary power fluctuations, you may discover that they will occasionally cause the sub to turn on and then turn off a few minutes later. What's more, if the switch is set to the "on" position, rather than auto, line surges may occasionally turn the sub on and it will stay on

until you turn it off yourself with the remote. Of course, Velodyne subs are not the only brands that may react this way to line surges.

Now, I live in a part of the country that has some pretty nasty lightening storms at times, and this means that we can get some very healthy line surges, indeed. Consequently, I do not particularly like my subs to be in any kind of standby mode when this sort of thing is happening. I also do not like them coming on by themselves when the line voltage momentarily acts up. I will admit this is fairly unusual.

My solution to this with all my subs is to leave their main power and auto/on switches in their respective

"on" positions, and then plug the sub into a switchable surge protector. If the sub is close to your equipment console, you can possibly have the turn-on switch there. If not, you would have to remember to switch it on with a switch that is closer to the sub. You can always tell when the sub is active, because there is an attractive blue light on the bottom/right part of the panel when the sub is powered up.

I mentioned the remote control and I will note here that the Velodyne unit is about as flexible as one can get. It has a power-on button (not needed if you use the remote-switch trick I noted above), a mute button, a + (plus) button, a - (minus) button, and a reset button.

The mute button allows you to cut off the sub to see just how much it is contributing to the program. However, it is important to remember that it is not a bypass feature. The high-pass filter is still in operation, and so you will not be comparing the sub to the way the satellites would sound if the sub were not hooked into the system at all.

The +/- buttons are handy, because they are essentially a pair of refined bass-level controls. There is no indicator to show what levels you have set (the range is +/- 6 dB), but the reset button allows you to immediately return the setting to the one you selected on the back panel with the sub's volume-control knob. This control is not going to be of much use to musical purists, who set their speakers for flat output and then let the recording determine bass levels, but it can come in handy when switching over to home theater program material, where one might temporarily want a bit of additional bass punch down low.

Finally, The Bass-Off

I hooked the HGS-15 into my main system, in place of my regular F1800RII model. The room is approximately 3400 cubic feet in size, being roughly 22 x 18.5

I think the best way to set up a subwoofer is to use Delos' *Sonic Spectacular* and a Radio Shack meter.

feet, with an 8.5-foot ceiling. Four-foot bookcases line most of the walls, and they are filled with books and recordings. It is a combination home-theater and music-listening room that I had specially built on to the house for that purpose years ago.

Initially, I used the Linkwitz-Riley crossover in my Phase Coupled Activator (the PCA device contains both a bass synthesizer and an electronic crossover, completely separate inside

the chassis) set to a fixed crossover point of 90 Hz. I like this crossover, because it allows me the option of bypassing the subwoofer completely, in order to compare its impact against any satellites I might be reviewing. Later, I hooked up the HGS-15's own crossover, with the high pass set to 80 Hz and the low pass set to 70 Hz. This allowed for a nice blend, given the different slopes.

In both cases, the overall sound from the combination of my Allison IC-20 main speakers and either of the two subs was essentially identical. With all typical program material, be it music or home theater, both subs

sounded terrific. Both were also able to rattle pictures on the walls with ease.

In addition to standard classical and pop-music fare, program material included several killer-bass recordings,

including St. Saens' *Symphony Number Three* (Philips 412 619), Respighi's *Pines of Rome* (London 410 145), Mendelssohn's *Organ Works* (Argo 414 420), and Flim and the BB's *Big Notes* (DMP 454). I also tried a

music DVD recording, *James Taylor Live at the Beacon Theatre* (CMV 50171). There are some fairly subtle, but also very deep bass passages on track 8 of this DVD.

Finally, to separate the men from the boys, I also tried out a real subwoofer killer called Bass Mekanik: *Quad Maximus* (Pandisc 8848). In addition to having some super-deep and super-strong bass-synthesizer music, this disc also has some individual test-tone sequences that run from 10 Hz to 100 Hz, in 1-Hz intervals. Those can be helpful to those looking to see what their subwoofer or woofers can do down really low, although I should point out that below 40 Hz the

signals on the disc roll off just a bit in amplitude, making it necessary to apply compensation if one intends to use it to plot response curves.

In any case, I can say without reservation that the HGS-15 is a match for the F1800RII in any way one could care to compare in that room. I believe that to display a difference one would have to go to a room that was in excess of 4000 cubic feet, and would also have to play some truly killer-bass recordings in that room.

Musically, in my main listening room, these subs were identical. This stands to reason, because their crossovers are essentially the same, the distortion levels up to the smaller sub's maximum are essentially the same, and the placement in that room was also the same.

However, I must admit that I never fully trust my impressions of subwoofers with musical program material, and so I also ran a series of near-field measurements. I found that with a proper 80-Hz crossover slope at the high end of its range, the HGS-15 was flat down to 25 Hz, with a

The choice of 15- or 35-Hz subsonic rolloff gives the choice of SUPER deep bass or merely very deep bass.

NOTES

Velodyne HGS-15 Subwoofer, \$2,499.00. Velodyne Acoustics, 1070 Commercial Street, Suite 101, San Jose, CA 95112

Associated Equipment

AudioControl SA-3051 real-time analyzer, Allison IC-20 loudspeakers (main system), modified Allison AL-125 loudspeakers (small system), Allison LC-120 loudspeakers (four main-system surrounds), NHT VS-1.2 center-channel loudspeaker (small system), custom-made, 8-driver center-channel speaker (main system), Velodyne F1800RII subwoofer (main system), Hsu TN1220 subwoofer (center on main system), Velodyne FSR-12 subwoofer (small system), Yamaha DSP-A3090 processor/amp (main system), Yamaha DSP-A1000 processor amp (small system), Panasonic DVD-A120 player, Pioneer, DVD-700 DVD/LD player, Pioneer CLD-D503 LD player, Samsung DVD-905 player, RCA 5231 DVD player, AudioControl Phase Coupled Activator (includes Linkwitz-Riley crossover), dbx 120 subharmonic bass synthesizer, dbx 4BX expander, dbx 3BX expander, Carver C-1 preamp, AudioSource Amp One, Memorex TM4510 45-inch rear projection TV, Sharp XV-H37 LCD front-projection video projector, Carol Wire Company 12-gauge stranded speaker wire, Radio-Shack "Gold" interconnects (most of them custom sized to minimum required lengths), and assorted Panasonic and Toshiba hi-fi VCRs.

mild rolloff beginning at that point. At 20 Hz, it was 3 dB down. This curve was essentially identical to what I have measured with my F1800RII, and also very close to the curve that I ran on my FSR-12. When installed in a corner location, subs of this quality will generate very uniform response right down to 20 Hz. and below.

I also ran some maximum-output tests at 31.5 and 20 Hz. Each sub was located in the left-front corner of the main listening room, and the measurement microphone was at the listening couch, slightly left of center and about 17 feet from the corner. This is the arrangement I have used for all my subwoofers' maximum-output measurements, so I have achieved consistent results between models..

At 31.5 Hz, the HGS-15 could reach a maximum level of 110 dB. Remember, this is not some 1-meter measurement; this is 17 feet from the corner. As a point of reference, the F1800RII could hit 114.1 dB, the FSR-12 could hit 104.5, and an HGS-12 that I also had on hand could hit 107.8. Two other subs that I have reviewed previously that also did quite good were the Paradigm Servo 15 (112.2 dB) and Hsu TN1220 (112.1 dB). All of these subs were clean at these levels.

At 20 Hz, the HGS-15 could reach maximum levels of 104 dB. Again, remember that this is not some 1-meter measurement. We are talking 17 feet from the corner. The F1800RII could hit 110 dB, the FSR-12 could hit 97, and the HGS-12 could hit 100. At all lev-

els, these subs sounded clean with the input test signals, and this is proof to me that up to their respective maximum levels, these subs are sonic clones of each other. The differences between them, as I also discovered with musical playback materials, mainly involve maximum-output differences, not sound-quality differences.

As a further point of reference, I will note that the Paradigm Servo 15 and Hsu TN1220 could both hit 110 dB at this 20-Hz frequency, although neither were quite as clean with this test-tone input as the Velodyne models. With music, however, the differences between all these subs were pretty much inconsequential, at least up to the point where each of them ran out of maximum-output steam.

I also installed the HGS-15 in my smaller system (in a 2000 cubic-foot room in another part of my house) and it essentially sounded the same there as that system's usual FSR-12 model. The HGS-15 is an overkill item in a room this small, however, and one of the smaller HGS Velodyne's would work just as well as the HGS-15.

The bottom line with the HGS-15 is that it is a world-class subwoofer by any rational standard. It is as clean as any other Velodyne servo sub that I have reviewed, and that essentially means that it will reproduce musical or home-theater soundtracks with subjectively zero distortion. The program material itself will have more audible distortion than this subwoofer will.

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J. A. Mitchell Gyro SE "Spyder Edition" Turntable

George M. Graves



IN 1971, I WENT to the movies with friends to see Stanley Kubrick's "A Clockwork Orange." Near the beginning of the film, our "hero," played by Malcolm McDowell, goes into his bedroom for "a bit of the ol' Ludwig van." As he pulls a mini cassette out of its box to pop it into his player, I noticed in the background of the shot the strangest

looking turntable I had ever seen. It was extremely "high-tech" looking (although, in 1971, I wouldn't have known that term), with what appeared to be brass towers arranged in a circle where the platter should have been. The towers were cylindrical, tapering at the top to a truncated cone, and tipped with what looked like small rubber pads

for $\frac{3}{4}$ I guessed $\frac{3}{4}$ the record to sit upon. I was so taken by this unusual looking device that I spent the rest of the film wondering what the devil it was. There was no internet in those days so I spent the next few months pouring over back issues of *Audio* magazine, and perusing the other magazines in the racks at my local bookstore for a clue. Then, I

stumbled upon a copy of a British hi-fi magazine, and there, on the front cover, was a picture of this very turntable. It turned out to be built by a small British firm called J. A. Michell Engineering Limited. I never actually saw one of these in the flesh during that period, but I never forgot it.

Fast-Forward almost 30 years to the "post vinyl" era, and I find myself needing to replace my venerable Thorens TD-160 Super with something that rumbled less. My main speakers, a pair of Magneplanar MG-IIICs, while not exactly deficient in bass, nonetheless rolled off in the bottom octave steeply enough so that the Thorens' rumble (which was always noticeable) didn't really bother me. Not, that is, until I obtained an excellent Yamaha servo subwoofer. Then my Thorens began to bother me A LOT.

I have a large vinyl collection, mostly classical, which stretches back to the '50s and '60s, so I didn't have any trouble justifying to myself that the time had indeed come for a new 'table. I started looking at back issues of various magazines, searching the internet, and eventually stumbled across the Michell Gyro SE in a recent issue of Hi-Fi News

and Record Review. I remembered that old Michell in "Clockwork" which so took my youthful fancy all those years ago, and decided to read the review which turned out to be very positive. Thus motivated by both the looks of the beast and the

The Michell turntable has no base in the usual sense of the term.

favorable press, I went on the internet to see if I could track down an American importer for the thing. I finally found a company called Artech Electronics Limited, in Montreal, Canada, with American offices in Vermont. An e-mail to them was followed by several phone calls and a funds transfer, and soon I had a J. A. Michell Gyro SE on its way to me.

I received the table about a week before Christmas (Merry Christmas, George), and started to set it up. The table comes disassembled, and the only tools required to put it together are a center bubble-level and a coin such as a quarter or a half-dollar to tighten the bearing down (it has a

large slot for such a coin.). The other needed tool, an Allen key, is provided by the manufacturer.

Artech (or is it Michell?) encloses a set of instructions, and these are not too difficult to follow, but I would like to have had an exploded diagram of the table included. The instructions had no pictures at all, but being fairly mechanically inclined, I was able to figure it out. (I suspect that Artech wants the dealer to set the table up.)

This turntable is extremely modern in its appearance.

One is struck instantly by the total lack of a turntable base in any normal sense of the term. It does not look like other tables, although there are relatively new tables from both Wilson Benesch and SME as well as the venerable Oracle from Canada which similarly dispense with the rectangular and often box-like base traditional with most turntable designs. The SE starts with a large, thick piece of acrylic plastic, shaped roughly like a three-pointed star. This piece of plastic, which Michell calls a Spider (the spider part of "Spider Edition"), takes the place of the large rectangular acrylic base plate in the more expensive GyroDec Mk IV. In fact, the lack of a base plate and the attached clamshell clear acrylic dust cover are the only differences between the SE and the Mk. IV models. (Since I don't like this type of dustcover for turntables, I purposely did not buy the GyroDec Mk IV. Whether open or closed during play, these covers act as big, resonant, microphonic membranes which attract airborne vibrations back to the turntable, negating all of the precautions for avoiding feedback designed into the table.) The spider serves as locating supports for the three cone-shaped feet and the suspension towers which rest on them. Suspended from the towers is a large machined casting which is

N O T E S

Michell Gyro SE turntable, \$1,595.00. U.S. distributor, Artech Electronics, Ltd., P.O. Box 455, Williston, VT 05495; phone 514/631-6448, fax 514/631-1212; e-mail info@artech-electronics.com; website www.artech-electronics.com.

Associated Equipment

Sumiko Blue Point Special phono cartridge, AudioQuest PT-7 tonearm, VTL-150 monoblocks for midrange and highs, Denon POA6600A "Stasis" monoblocks for bass and mid-bass, Audio Research SP9 Mk II preamp, Magneplanar MG IIIa speaker, YST-6W150 servo controlled subwoofer, AudioQuest Blue and Monster Cable M1000 Interconnects, four 15-foot Monster Cable M1 speaker cable on the Magneplanars.

circular with two other, smaller circular appendages cast with it. This is the actual base for the turntable and arm mount. The center of the largest circle has a machined hole where the cast-in "spokes" meet in the center to mount the turntable bearing assembly and the smaller circle to the right-rear is where the "arm board" attaches.

This leaves another smaller, hollow circle on the left side of the turntable. This circle is designed for the large cylindrical, and very powerful, Papst motor to sit in and has a large enough inside diameter so that the motor does not touch the "well." The motor is designed to rest on whatever surface that the entire turntable sits on, and thus is not an integral part of the turntable assembly, but is a separate entity. In this regard, the motor well "locates" the motor in a precise manner next to the platter rather than the location being arbitrarily left to the owner.

The actual platter is probably the most unusual looking of all the components which make up the Michell. It is constructed of a one-inch thick, 12-inch diameter piece of black plastic which I am told is composed of acrylic, vinyl, and car-

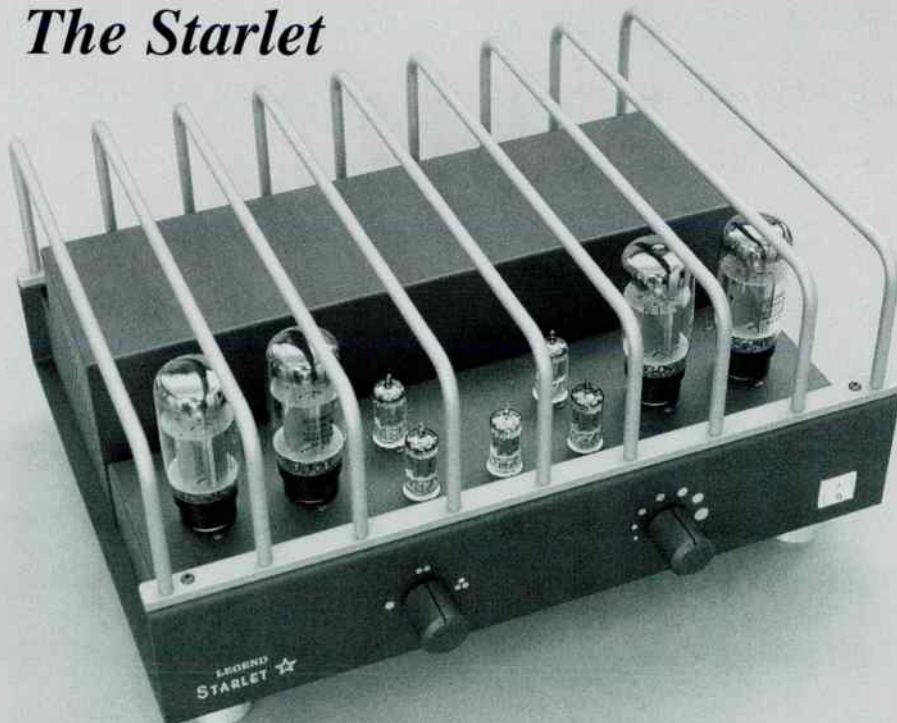
drical weights arranged around the periphery (similar to the original Michell configuration seen in "Clockwork Orange," only, this time, they're inverted). These add moving mass to the platter (bringing its weight to about 7 pounds.), and give the platter a very low center of gravity with respect to the inverted bearing.

The bearing on this table is unique, I believe. A familiar thrust bearing in most ways, it is inverted in this design to put it above the majority of the platter's mass. One would suspect that this could make bearing lubrication difficult, and, indeed, it could, but Michell has found a very clever solution to this potential problem. At the bottom of the bearing is a well that is filled with a synthetic oil. The bottom of the bearing sleeved housing turns in this oil sump, and an "Archimedes screw" arrangement "pumps" the oil up to the bearing surfaces. There is an off-

Each Michell Gyro SE turntable is made to be used with a specific tonearm.

bon. The edge of the top rim is cut back to allow the outer bead of an LP to clear the platter; this mechanically couples the record surface more securely with the platter and allows the disc to lie absolutely flat when the reflex clamp is applied. The periphery of the platter disc is grooved to accept the o-ring belt, which connects to the motor. On the underside of the platter, there are six attached gold-plated cylin-

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center return hole at the top of the shaft—which allows the oil to run back down into the well. This prevents the bearing from running in the stagnant bath of oil that occurs with non-inverted designs and thus it helps keep the oil from coagulating as it ages and gets dirty. Since the bearing surfaces are not sitting in a puddle of oil, they are always getting bathed in fresh, re-circulated oil. An ingenious arrangement, to say the least.

The “arm board” of this deck, like everything else, is unique. First of all, its not a board at all, but rather a large, round, “hockey-puck” post made from a solid billet of aluminum. One must order the Gyro SE armboard for the specific tone-arm that one is planning to use. This is because the suspension of the table is designed in such a way that the weight of the arm plus the weight of the arm board must always equal exactly 1 kilogram (2.2 pounds.). Thus, a heavy arm is supplied with a thin arm-mounting board and a light arm comes with a thick one. Correct height is assured by three acrylic “washers,” which are of varying thickness depending on the thickness and weight of the arm post. One of the side benefits of this arrangement is that one doesn’t have to drill the mounting holes or measure the distance from the spindle to the arm. This is done at the factory, and all the user need do is drop his arm in the provided hole, sure in the knowledge that it is correct. I ordered my SE with an arm board for an AudioQuest PT arm, and the screw holes were even correctly tapped for the supplied AudioQuest screws. No hex nuts required! Extra arm boards are available from Michell and Artech for just about any arm one would care to fit and cost \$100.00 each.

After assembly and leveling, the first thing I noticed about the table

was how fast the thing comes up to speed. Used to the tiny “clock” motors employed by most belt-drive tables like ARs, Linns and Thorens tables, I was literally taken aback by the torque and power of the big German Papst motor supplied with the Gyro. The platter gets up to

If you’re looking for a new turntable, put the Michell on your short list.

speed in less than a revolution, and does so without any apparent belt slippage. The motor, which has an integral green (but alas, not lighted), power switch on its top, is designed to operate on 19 volts, split-phase a.c., and a separate 40-VA (!) toroidal transformer connects to the motor with a high-quality Mini XLR connector. An optional-100 VA, crystal-controlled, 50-Hz power supply is available for another \$900.00. The advantage of this option is that by slowing down the motor by 20 per cent, motor noise is reduced and the crystal-controlled oscillator in the optional supply gives a far cleaner a.c. signal to the motor while supplying more current. A new 50-Hz pulley is also supplied with this power supply upgrade; this changes the belt ratios back to those required to give 33.3 and 45 rpm at the reduced motor speed. Also, because the frequency is crystal controlled (and not locked to the a.c. line frequency), it is possible to change speed with a switch on the supply, rather than moving the belt to another step on the pulley. But at 45 rpm, one would lose the advantage of the 20 per cent reduction in motor speed by speeding the motor back up 26 per cent! So I think that one would still be better off physically moving the belt

to the 45-rpm step on the pulley than electronically speeding the motor back up. I have not auditioned this unit, and therefore cannot comment on its affect on the Gyro SE’s sound.

The Michell uses a reflex clamp to secure the record to the platter, and in my opinion, it does a very good job, holding at least as well as any screw clamp. When the record is secured to the table, it mates very intimately with the platter surface, and no mat is used (in fact, a mat would be counterproductive in this design).

The Sound

Well, enough about the aesthetics and design details of the Gyro SE, and on to the sound.

This table is dynamite. It is, in my opinion, a much better table at its price point than either a VPI HW-19 or a Basis 2000, both of which I have had in my system at one time or another. First of all, the build quality is quite a bit better than what one would expect at this price, but mostly, the engineering of this turntable really works toward getting the most from one’s vinyl collection.

With my AudioQuest PT-7 arm and my Sumiko Blue Point Special cartridge fitted, my first impressions were extremely favorable. I had expected this table to work better than my old Thorens, but not this much better. I was somewhat afraid that my cartridge and arm combination were less than an ideal match because of the apparent amounts of warp-wow and eccentricity-wow I was experiencing with the same arm and cartridge setup on the Thorens. However, it must have been something else, because these characteristics were GONE. The ensemble is extremely stable speed-wise, and even fairly noticeably warped records exhibit no hint of

the dreaded warp-wow. The PT-7 arm and the Blue Point Special cartridge are magic together, and this turntable gets the most from them. The Gyro SE has an incredibly open sound, with the music emanating from a velvet black background which is startling at first to anyone who has not experienced it. The quiet opening of the "Fountain of the Valle Giulini at Dawn" from Respighi's *Fountains of Rome* (Reiner, Chicago Symphony, RCA Victor LSC-2436), one of the great blockbuster LPs of all time, made me wonder if I had turned the cuing lever far enough to actually lower the stylus into the groove. It's THAT quiet. Bass is very tight and deep, with good weight and no pronounced resonance problems which would bespeak a less than effective suspension and record dampening and would make the 'table susceptible to low frequency feedback. The Ormandy/Philadelphia Orchestra reading of *Also Sprach Zarathustra* by Richard Strauss (Angel DS-

37744) recorded just before the Maestro retired, has one of the most pronounced sustained low-C organ pedal note on record. The Gyro is definitely a winner here. The delineation between the organ note and the rest of the ensemble is simply superb. For the first time, on this recording, I was able to actually hear the bass viols doubling with the organ, instead of just "assuming" that I was hearing a combination of pedal organ note and bass viols.

The midrange on the SE is just right, not too forward, and there is no midband suckout that one often hears on turntables due to platter resonance. John Coltrane's tenor sax (Crescent, Impulse IMP-200) is palpable in a way that one never hears on CD. Mellow and reedy, it's never too forward, maintaining just the right balance from top to bottom. The soundstage is about as good as it gets. It's wide and deep, and has good height. I hear a smidgen of foreshortening at the very edges, but

much less than I have experienced with other tables that I have owned or tested. Because of the table's velvety black background, low-level detail is stunning, and ambience sounds more like a live microphone feed than a vinyl record. The top end is likewise lucid and clean. The strings on the newly mastered 45-rpm, SINGLE SIDED (!) reissue of Fritz Reiner and the Chicago Symphony's *Spain* (RCA Victor LSC-2230 from Classics Records) just soar. No metallic bite, as with the BMG CD reissue, just pure sweet strings with great delineation between string and bow resin.

I highly recommend that all vinyl junkies get a "fix" of these Classic Records reissues before they are gone. Only 500 copies of each title were struck, and although expensive (I paid \$60 for the *Spain* album), they are well worth the expense. Are they as good as the original RCA LSC? Well, no, I don't think so. Sadly, even though RCA and BMG have taken very good

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World Radio History

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care of their master tapes, the years have not been especially kind to them. These discs do some things much better than the original, and do other things not as well. All I can say is that they are MUCH better than the CDs mastered from the same session tapes and, at \$60 each, are certainly cheaper than many near-mint copies of the originals. By the way, don't even bother to look for the 45-rpm Reiner / Respighi. It's long gone.

The only drawback that I can find to this turntable is a slight lack of dynamic shading. I think that a friend's Linn LP-12 (with the same arm and cartridge as mine, I might add) gives better contrast between passages of different loudness. However, this is offset somewhat by the SE's astounding sense of rhythmic "correctness." The Linn simply doesn't "boogie" like the Michell. This is especially noticeable on the newly remastered Impulse 180 gram vinyl pressing of John Coltrane's *Crescent*. The cut named "The

Drum Thing" is a fantastic test of the dynamic shading and rhythmic performance of any table and it shows both the Gyro SE's strengths and weaknesses simultaneously.

All in all, if you are looking for a new turntable, you should definitely put the Michell Gyro SE on your short list. If your eyes don't cause you to fall in love, then your ears certainly will. Perhaps even better, your record collection will thank you. The Gyro SE allows a good arm and cartridge combination to retrieve about 97 per cent of what's in a vinyl groove, and believe me, that the other three percent will cost you plenty to get at. If you can live in the 97th percentile, or your budget can't take the strain of that last 3 per cent (and few of us have one which can), then the Gyro SE is certainly a more than worthy contender. Michell has a history of providing upgrade paths for all of their record decks, and the SE is no exception. Owners of older Gyros can upgrade to the newer bearing

and platter design, and those of you who opt for the SE can purchase the aforementioned power supply upgrade and can upgrade the SE platter to the much more expensive Orb platter (\$750.00) as well.

The AudioQuest PT series of tone-arms is a good match, but a Rega RB-600 would be good too. As far as cartridges are concerned, the Sumiko Blue Point Special works well, but a Benz Micro Glider would be another good choice here.

As for this reviewer, I'm going to eventually go for a VPI JMW-10 arm and one of the new Blue Point Reference cartridges due any time now from Sumiko. I'm told it's the best thing under 2 grand out there.

Oh, yes, what about a dust cover? Well, I had a local plastics shop make me up a beautiful clear acrylic cover out of quarter-inch Plexiglas. It sits on my lead-topped turntable stand and is completely removed for playback. It cost me of \$85. It was an inexpensive present to the Michell.



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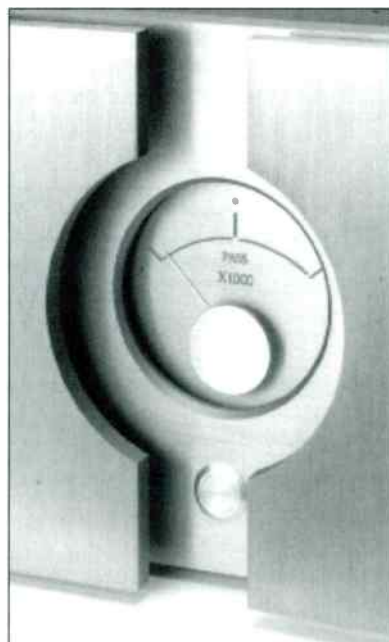
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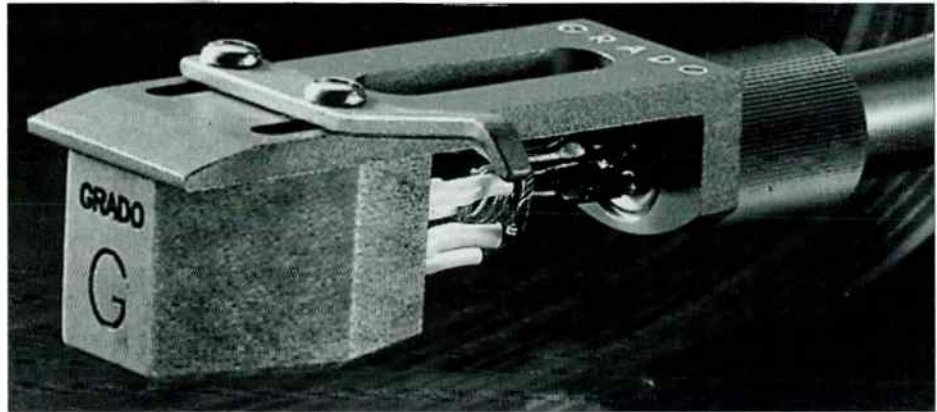
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Grado The Reference Phono Cartridge

Karl Lozier



THE GRADO COMPANY, founded and led for decades by music lover and operatic tenor Joe Grado, qualifies as one of the finest of the old-time audio companies. Grado's phonograph cartridges have always deserved their reputation as being "very musical" sound reproducers, and the company has typically offered a wide choice of models, at differing price points, with sometimes confusing model designations. Joe Grado has been credited with being the first person to offer an audio product with the "signature" model designation, which seems appropriate since he personally worked on and "tweaked" his entire line of products. I still have a fine performing TLZ V Mk II which was the penultimate model, topped by the XTZ V Mk II. (Contrary to unfounded rumor, Joe did not retire because he had "run out of alphabet.")

The leadership baton passed to nephew John Grado with the continuing benefit of John Chaipis' engineering. There has been a great deal of advertising and underground or word-of-mouth hype regarding moving-coil phono pickup cartridges for many years. This hype has crept into review articles in some audio and stereo magazines. The articles often implied that moving-coil cartridges are inherently better than moving-magnet or moving-iron types and just have to be more expensive. In other words, "if it's not a moving-coil design and very expensive it can't be really good," goes much of the continuing hype. Well, just in case you didn't know, here's today's food-for-thought tidbit; Joe Grado was the inventor of and granted patents for stereo moving-coil phono cartridges. He also collected royalty payments

from companies making moving-coil cartridges. This should make some audiophiles start wondering why Grado doesn't make or sell that type of phono cartridge.

Replacing the Signature series is the Grado Reference series. It consists of four models ranging in price from the \$300 Platinum Reference to the \$1200 The Reference model. Overall, all four appear to be identical, yet very different from the standard series and all other earlier models from the Grado company. Very close inspection, aided by a bit of magnification, revealed the stylus assembly in the Reference uses the so-called nude mounting technique (no erotic thoughts intended) to reduce moving mass, as opposed to the conventional adhesive technique in the Platinum model. Cantilever lightness has always been considered better in phono cartridges. In addition to moving mass, differences include stylus shape, construction and cantilever materials. John Grado says there are eight differences in the generating assemblies of the Platinum and The Reference models.

The cartridge is encased in an attractive wood body and is very easy to mount to the tonearm, thanks to a pair of threaded holes in the top of the body that match the holes in nearly all tonearms and headshells. Let's call it almost klutzproof. Something unique in my experience with moving-magnet or moving-iron cartridges, is that all the Reference models feature a nonremovable stylus assembly. This is another part of Grado's continuing effort to take their basic design to its ultimate realization. In this case, the idea is to eliminate any possibility of play or movement of the assembly in the body

or independent vibration of the stylus assembly. I can personally attest to the fact that a number of years ago some of the now older audiophiles tried to accomplish the same goal by simply gluing the stylus assembly to the cartridge body. Other popular tweaks included putting putty-like materials (Blu-Tac and Mortite were preferred brands) between the cartridge and the headshell before tightening the mounting screws; some buffs could not resist dabbing the putty on areas of the headshells that appeared susceptible to vibration. Ah yes, those were the good, old days, my friends.

Output of this flux-bridge cartridge is extremely high compared to typical moving-coil models, about that of a moving-magnet type. This level of output should easily drive any preamp or receiver that has a standard MM phono input. Most LP records were tracked easily at or just below 1.5 grams, and I believe this is what the Grado firm recommends. However during the listening tests, I simply felt more comfortable using 1.7 grams, and at that tracking force all my LP records were tracked beautifully. In fact, I've never had better or cleaner tracking of my favorite discs. Though definitely not a necessity, I did use a small amount of viscous damping with my SME Mk IV tonearm as I do with most phono cartridges. I had mounted the Grado with the top of the cartridge parallel with the record surface, as recommended. Very small changes in the vertical tracking angle resulted in only very slight changes in sonic signature of quality. This fact indicates to me that the stylus is probably not a severe fine-line shape (shape or radii are not specified by the firm). Such radical designs are usually very critical in regards to VTA (vertical tracking angle) changes. As is my norm, I used less than the recommended anti-skating force. Medium-mass tonearms (approximately 10 to 15 grams) should work best with The Reference pickup. Low-mass arms in general are not stable enough or sufficiently free of resonances to allow maximum performance with top-quality cartridges like this one. Higher mass arms would likely cause problems because of the relatively high compliance of the Grado. This relatively high compliance is at least partly responsible for the Grado's unusually extended bass response flat to 20 Hz or below without the typical mid- or low-bass emphasis you get with many, if not most, moving-coil models. Moving-coil cartridges' bass can be "bigger and more exciting," but such sonics usually are neither as accurate nor as extended into the bottom bass range. With the Grado The Reference and a really good speaker, the beautiful but often subtle differences between light taps on a bass

drum, pulses of deep synthesizer bass, light touches on an organ pedal, and the plucking of double bass strings become easily audible. This is just one example of great detail retrieval by a first-rate phono cartridge, and all of it happening in the bass range.

Next time you're listening to classical music and some low-level deep-bass notes come along, see if you can tell which instrument is playing for certain. Sound reproduction is usually compromised in the range immediately above or below (sometimes both) a resonance. Tonearm-cartridge combinations always have a fundamental resonance as determined by the compliance of the cartridge and mass of the arm. A resonant frequency between 8 and 12 Hz is often considered an optimum design goal. A lower frequency will tend to create stability problems (a reason for tonearm damping) or over-drive other components; amplifiers and speakers do not like being fed a high-level signal at 6 Hz for example! A higher frequency resonance will definitely result in exaggerated bass response.

Audiophiles often prefer the emphasis created by many moving-coil pickups. Speakers with clean extended bass response are often rolling off rapidly at or near 40 Hz; the emphasis helps fill out the apparent bass response. Exceptions are some of the really expensive loudspeaker models; others are extended but not clean and detailed. This Grado, used with a good tonearm-turntable combination, will give clean, extended, and detailed bass, as opposed to the sound resulting from added bass due to resonances, with concomitant smearing and loss of detail. Beware, as much as ever, underperformers are still common with tonearms and turntables. The design criteria for tonearms and turntables are seemingly simple and straight-forward mechanical engineering requirements, but full realization is seldom met until many seemingly minor changes are introduced over a period of time. Such is often the history behind upgrades to tonearms and turntables.

Quality of bass reproduction was very important for the classical choices I made for the last listening sessions: Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet*, RCA LSC 2565 a "shaded dog" 1S/1S stamper; Tchaikovsky's *Capriccio Italien and Marche Slav*, London CS 6038 (also repressed as *The World of Great Classics*, Vol.8), English Decca SPA 108, Respighi's *Feste Romane* (Roman Festivals), London CS 7043 or English Decca SXL 6822 or as half-speed remastered Mobile Fidelity SL-1-507, Saint-Saens' *Symphony #3* (The Organ Symphony,) HMV Greensleeves Series ESD 7038, and Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*,

Grado is an old-line firm long known for their very musical phono cartridges.

Columbia MS 6634. Performing Romeo and Juliet, Munch and the Boston Symphony are well served here by legendary recording engineer Lewis Layton, who does a transparent job. The lusciously sweet string tone (almost perfectly reproduced by The Reference) is what music director Richard Mohr usually strove for, but he's not listed with Layton on the jacket this time. I consider this to be one of the top 25 great RCAs. Lovers of this music know that the melodic strings get punctuated at times by drum strokes, which are deep as well as full and enveloping; here they are very well recorded and solidly reproduced by The Reference with no hint of boom. The Grado handles all this very naturally with no apparent faults and also renders outstanding reproduction of the *pizzicato* playing near the beginning of the overture. The flip side contains a fine rendition of *Til Eulenspiegel* featuring particularly outstanding dynamic range. Kenneth Alwyn made his recording debut more than a third of a century ago with this outstanding London recording. This is as good as it gets with the early famous blue-back recordings. I know, you never heard of him, and I haven't either since this recording, which also has the ubiquitous *1812 Overture* on the flip side. I have the acknowledged great versions of the beautiful showpieces (I kind of grew up with Dorati's) *Capriccio Italien* and *Marche Slav*.

Alwyn's conducting results in great performances, better than most in nearly every respect and surpassed by none! The Grado cleanly reveals fine brass reproduction in the *Capriccio* and simply beautiful deep bass string sound (quietly at times) in the *Marche*, just to mention a couple of the many examples found on this LP. I've seen this recording in one guise or another at record shows and yard sales quite often. Get it if you find it, I almost will guarantee it. Maazel's fine performance of *Feste Romane* is frosting on the cake for a high-level knock-out demonstration of London's best post blue-back recordings from the mid seventies. The Decca jacket says 1976 (my guess is early sixties for the Alwyn). I don't typically listen to this music for pleasure; for Respighi, I'd probably put on Reiner's *Pines* or *Fountains*. But this music should delight audiophiles; it has most everything going including loud and low-level drum strokes. The kitchen sink is missing, a high-level deep organ pedal is not. It can rattle any framed photographs hanging on your walls if your system is up to the task. The Grado assures it can be done cleanly and without boom. For more organ reproduction superbly recorded, get the Saint-Saens symphony as listed above. Yes, the finale on side 2 is the famous audiophile legend. But I'm telling you that side 1, with its beautiful string tone and no harshness nor steeliness plus superb low-level deep (really deep!) bass, is one of the greatest stereo recordings ever made, period! In addition to pre-

dominately low-level, subtly beautiful music, there is gorgeously reproduced higher level sound about half way (visually) through the side. Then about two and a half minutes from the end of side 1, you get to either test your system or simply revel in some of the very best sound ever, plus the deepest bass your stylus has ever encountered. This pedal note seemingly has a fundamental between 16 and 24 Hertz. It's almost as if you can count the individual cycles even though sound is not really loud. If this deep pedal response gets much louder, your speaker is just doubling (and giving you severe second-harmonic distortion) or your cartridge and arm combo is resonating. At one time this recording was also available, I believe, on the Kapp label with at least similar sound quality. You'll find out why this is a continuing favorite of mine or you may find out you need to upgrade some of your components.

Trying the above-mentioned Rachmaninoff recording, which I mainly use for personal listening pleasure only, now gave me greater pleasure. With the Grado, the high end became smoother and sweeter with even more subtle detail. This is technically not a great recording but The Reference helps get it to the "very good" category. Few Columbias are significantly better. The soloist is definitely highlighted, as usual, perhaps to compensate for the lack of visual clues. There's something to this; try listening with your eyes closed at a live concert. Combine Graffman's best playing and Bernstein's sympathetic accompaniment with this outstandingly beautiful music and you may get carried

NOTES

Grado The Reference Phonograph Cartridge, \$1,200.00. Grado Laboratories, 4614 7th Ave., Brooklyn NY, 11220. phone 718/435-5340, fax 718/633-6841.

Associated Equipment

Grado The Reference and Platinum models, Shure V15VxMR, phono cartridges; SME MK IV Tonearm; Kimber TAK AG Tonearm cable; Audio Research SP-8 MK 11 preamp with Musical Concepts Platinum modifications; Kimber KCAG interconnects; BEL 1001 MK 111 monoblock amplifiers; Kimber Select 3033 loudspeaker cables; Genesis Model V loudspeakers; Sims NavCom puck isolators; Nitty Gritty Model 2 LP record cleaner; Isobar Ultra Models 4 and 6 surge suppressors.; Rev. Will B. Dunn spiritual advice, and Cheatum, Leavum and Howe legal advice.

away, as I often do. You won't realize this LP is not technically quite the equal of the others I've mentioned but you may play it more often because of its innate musical beauty. Try it; it's easy to find.

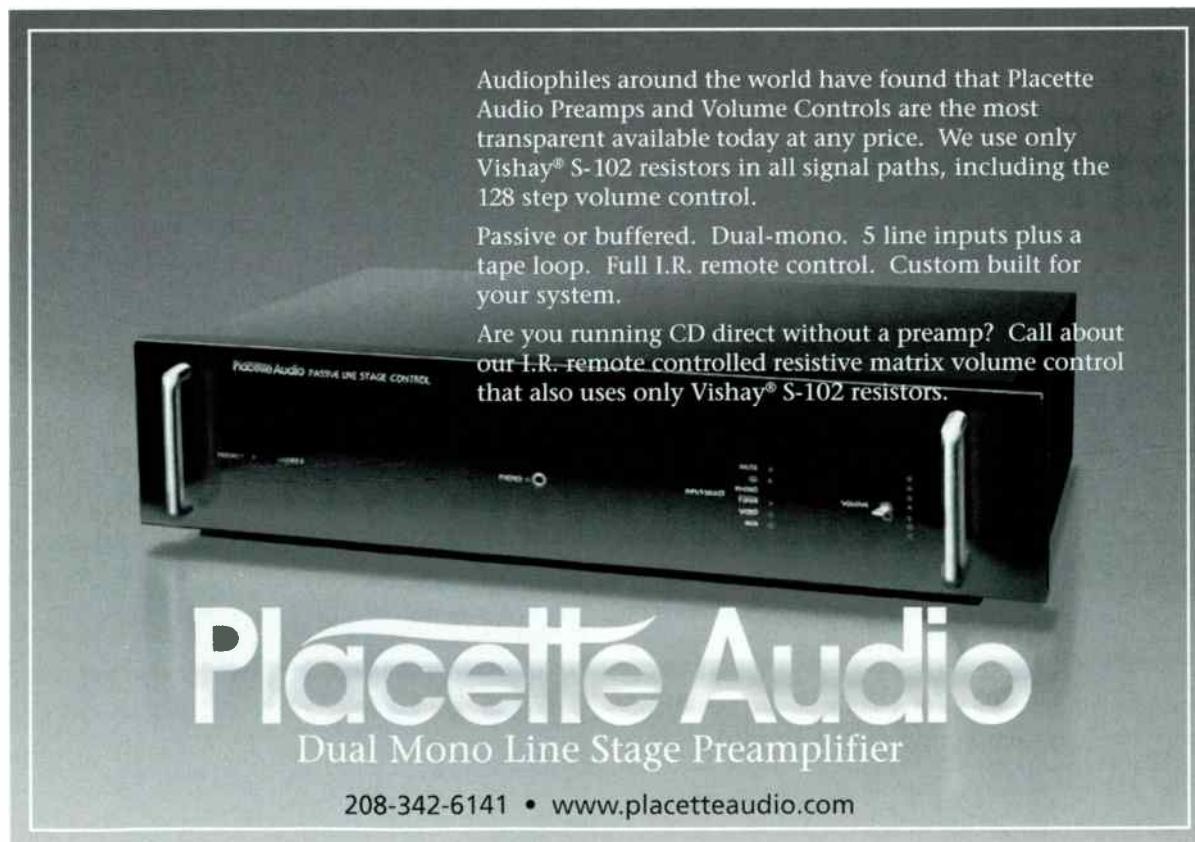
My collection of theater and soundtrack recordings, I figured originally, would be a good way to cover both male and female vocals at the same time. Well, I'm going to do more investigating; many of my favorites are pretty old and The Reference clearly reveals the engineers then were not paying as much attention to the job as the engineers handling the classics. I was surprised to find a very pleasant exception. *My Fair Lady*, Columbia OS-2015, recorded in London in 1959, started off with poor and irritating sound in the overture. An earlier, 1956 mono-only version, also an original cast Columbia album, offers far superior sound in the overture. Fortunately, all the vocal selections were very pleasing and well recorded considering their age, very early stereo done 40 years ago. I still get a kick out of Stanley Holloway's numbers and his unique gravely voice. There are about 10 truly outstanding songs in this musical, and I don't remember any musical with more really memorable songs. Julie Andrews voice is also well handled by the Grado, smooth and sweet. In transparency and three-dimensionality, the recording is just not the equal of the better vocal recordings done more recently. For example, I recommend Sarah Vaughan's *Crazy and Mixed Up* album, Pablo 2312-137, an excellent jazz

recording for comparison. With its far greater dynamics and closer mike placement, the Grado handles it all with ease. Even at high levels, I'm not aware of any obvious failings, as was true with classical recordings.

A significant subtlety was that, while it can take 40 or more hours of use for a cartridge to reach maximum performance, The Reference by Grado took a few hours at most. The Grado certainly has full-range response and then some; the bass extension and detail is particularly noteworthy and without added emphasis when partnered with a really good tonearm. The Grado's midrange is very natural and neutral, as shown by the excellence of its vocal reproduction and abundant detail. The treble range might seem a bit subdued or a touch too sweet or forgiving to some listeners, but the great amount of subtle, unforced detail apparent with critical listening tells me that "it must all be there." The only things missing might be unfortunate additions, ones you don't want, like resonances or distortion.

Grado's much cheaper stablemate, the Platinum offers a similar tonal balance with less apparent detail. A new and very expensive (\$2,500.00) model, The Statement, is a different design and has very low output. All these models have available factory checkups when desired, at very modest cost.

The Reference receives a duo of accolades from me. I want to use it on a regular basis and I am going to continue to use it.



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Christopher Reardon-Noblet



WE ARE IN SERIOUS TOY COUNTRY here, folks.

When I first lifted the Sony MDR-DS5000 transmitter out of its box and placed it on the bureau in our bedroom — and then started pulling wires out behind the TV, my wife and cat both eyed me suspiciously.

"Are you putting stereo equipment in our bedroom?" Having nearly taken over the living room and established a year-round camp in the family room, I had perhaps sensitized her to the sudden appearance of unfamiliar hardware.

"Wireless headphones. I can watch movies while you sleep. If we get another set, we can watch loud movies while the kids sleep." Unspoken was the number of times we had to frantically search for the remote to turn down the sound when scriptwriters had decided to substitute obscenities for intelligent dialogue or when the protagonists decided to mix genes.

"Didn't you have one of those wireless headphones before?"

An earlier setup I had bought via mail order required me to plug phones into a mini-jack on a battery-powered reception box that sat on the bedside table or — more usually — on my lap, pointed at a set-top infrared transmitter. I'd plug the phones in then sit very still. If I

moved my head too much, the signal would disappear or — worse — the device would fall off the shelf, waking those who were sleeping and interfering with essential domestic harmony. The signal was also as noisy as a Cuisinart, the device only transmitted in mono, and as often as not, it would produce a signal in only one ear

"This one is going to be much better," I said, hopefully. I pulled the 175-pound Sony WEGA XBR television out on its shelf to the point where I could reach the RCA output sockets at its rear.

"Be careful. It's going to fall over."

"Naah." With the owner's manual in one hand, I strained to reach the back of the set, using my sense of touch to figure out where to plug in the two interconnects. This position — "Flamingo Searches for Her Young Among the Lotus Blossoms" — is one of the three classic audio-maniac yoga postures. (Of the other two, one is the more common "Stillness at the Center of the Universe," assumed for seeking the ever-elusive "Sweet Spot" and which, if performed too frequently, may result in partial paralysis of the upper extremities. The third and rarest, if only because it is achieved at great personal cost, is the "Death of the Sparrow," a yogic posture realized at the sacrificial altar of the belt-

drive turntable upon the excision and bloodless sacrifice of a precious cantilever and stylus to the merciless Sock God.) What a hobby, huh?

More mirth ensued as I wrenched the cap for the Toslink interconnect off the back panel of my DVD player and routed it out through the little hole in the back of the cabinet to the bureau, where the Sony MDR-DS5000 base station awaited.

Then I hitched up the Sony base station to the interconnects and plugged in the wall-wart. I installed two fresh AA batteries in the headphones; I didn't want to wait for the supplied Sony rechargeable batteries to charge up. The MDR-DS5000 thoughtfully comes accompanied by a charger that holds four batteries in all. Presumably this would be for professional musicians or compulsive television watchers, as normal batteries last a long, long time.

I turned on the base station/transmitter. Wow! Cool! It looked positively monolithic — even menacing — with its bands of red LEDs up and down each side (or alternately, on its top and bottom). The unit can be placed on its side, but then you'll have to cock your head sideways to read the displays correctly.

A green light signals the base station is on, then red lights indicate whether you've switched it to the analogue or digital Toslink inputs. The third button, labeled "Effect," is for choosing music or Dolby Virtual listening. A fourth button, "Output," allows you to select the "Decode Mode," either Dolby Digital or Dolby Surround decoding, or the simulated "virtual" output, another series of lights surround a dummy head indicating whether you're listening to 5.1, three or two channels.

Really comfortable are these headphones. Really important is this, because if you're using the phones to watch a movie, they're going to be on your head for a long time. They are fairly light, actually, considering they contain two batteries, volume and balance controls and what appear to be four receptors for the infrared signal, enabling you to turn your head or twirl around the room if you must, without even briefly losing the signal.

BTW, you will need a way to turn the sound of your television off without reducing the signal to the headphone amplifier/transmitter. That shouldn't be a problem with modern sets, or if you have the Sony hitched up to an amplifier, receiver or VCR. Also, do NOT attempt to play DTS-encoded material via the DS5000 phones; instead, go find the brand-new Sony HDR-

DS5100 phones that were just announced in September at the custom-installation show. The capability of the new advanced-logic 3D processor, the key element in Sony's Virtualphones technology, has been increased from 44 to 125 million instructions per second in the new model, even though it should be priced at the same \$499.00. You probably will only get a lot of noise with the older phones, as the MDR-DS5000 does not decode DTS. It seems like Sony's made a good move here, adding a major feature at no extra cost.

The first time I used the phones, I took advantage of the opportunity to watch *Pulp Fiction* — I'd determined that my children should not be exposed to it or even learn of its existence — but since I'd read the screenplay several years previously, I had an itch to see it. My wife was sleeping peacefully beside me. I'd forgotten about the scene where John Travolta turns around to talk to the gangster in the back seat and — when the gun went off, I shouted and jumped about six inches off the bed, waking up my wife. The Sony HDR-DS5000 phones had let me get that far into the movie.

I live in Los Angeles, home to the American movie industry — land of Academy Award screenings, first-generation director's prints, and audiences that expect properly focused viewings of fresh movie prints accompanied by top-notch sound reproduction. I have served my time in Westwood (and New York's Siegfeld theater), and I can tell you that that beyond the aspects of room-shaking subterranean effects, if you close your eyes and listen carefully to the sound in such theaters, it is almost always not in the same league as you can realize with your well set up two-channel home system.

Nor, more to the point of this review, is the sound reproduction in most high-end commercial cinemas as good as you are likely to hear via the Sony MDR-DS5000 headphone system.

Case in point, taken from satellite broadcasts of two movies that I watched on successive nights. In the masterfully recorded *End of Days*, the acoustic transitions from location to location are handled as deftly as the visual and dramatic shifts. On a Manhattan street setting, the Sony MDR-DS5000 lets you hear the high, almost ethereal echoes of the street noises that one hears at street level unique to the huge, vast concrete canyons of New York City. When Gabriel Byrne (aka Satan) enters a cushy Manhattan restaurant, literally as he opens the door from the street, the velvety, warm, cushioned, humming acoustic of the place billows out, damping the street echoes and enveloping Byrne's char-

These Sony phones are coherent and clean, quite neutral in sound, and have good dynamics.

acter in the aural equivalent of haute-cuisine aromas. As much from the sound as from the golden glow of the interior, you can feel the wealth, importance, comfort and self-regard of the diners. When Arnold Schwarzenegger gets into a car, you can hear that some below-the-line sound effects specialist spent a significant amount of effort to get the interior of that car just right. If you've ever seen and heard a rough-cut preview of a motion picture, you know that the sound is as rough and disjointed as are the visuals. It takes real craft by dedicated artisans to put you convincingly into a "real" place acoustically — much more than just slapping on some background noise. The sound technicians who worked on *End of Days* have accomplished that, and the Sony MDR-DS5000 is capable of telling you that in no uncertain terms.

The phones are also capable of realizing the mediocre sound engineering and production in another big-time movie, Stanley Kubrick's swan song, *Eyes Wide Shut*. Watching this movie while listening through the Sonys got me thinking: How much does the quality of sound (as in attempting to fidelity to

the depicted environment — as opposed to the bang-zoom of special effects) contribute to the suspension of disbelief and thus audience pleasure in movies? Not having a mega-kilobuck home theater system, I couldn't answer that question previously. Certainly, with these phones, I feel I'm not missing any of that important stuff.

Now to the requisite comparison part of our review, dear reader. I found the Sonys to be very fine performers in a variety of contexts other than cinematic: While listening to CDs, LPs, and MP3s via my iMac computer. Which brings to mind one marvelous advantage: Owning the MDR-DS5000 headphones, you will never again have to assume the yogic position of "The Steer Lassoed at the Western Rodeo" as audio maniacs and even less sophisticated types (i.e. computer nerds) experience when they get out of their chairs after a two-hour session, head for the loo and nearly decapitate themselves while dragging their CD player, preamplifier, computer or whatever off the shelf, crash/bang onto the floor.

I compared the Sonys with the Sennheiser HD-600, Grado SR-80 and Phillips SBC-HP900 head-

phones, all at different price points, of course, and with very different sounds to them. In stereo music listening, the Sony actually gives up fairly little to the best of them. It is coherent, clean, quite neutral, dynamic, and second only to the Sennheisers in apparent frequency extension. It rivals the Sennheisers in terms of comfort, with the added benefit, of course, of being cordless. You literally have to walk out of the room before you stop picking up signal. The phones just basically go when you leave the room — most excellent for a late-night run to the refrigerator during intermission of *Lawrence of Arabia*.

To summarize, an in-room system may well give you better spatial effects — if it's properly set up and the acoustics are dealt with — and bootie-shaking bass. But an in-room system is hardly likely to give you better sound quality unless you spend a lot of money on equipment and room treatment. I far prefer to spend my money on seeing movies and buying vinyl and CDs and having the best two-channel set-up I can afford.

From that standpoint, the MDR-DS5000 is an outstanding bargain, as it gives much of the pleasure of an expensive multi-channel in-room system at a small fraction of the expense. And in raw terms of value for money, you are getting a headphone amplifier, stereo infrared transmission system and remote phones with RCA and Toslink inputs, volume control-equipped headphone socket (for using a set of corded phones), and digital multi-channel decoding and simulation systems, all for \$499. In other words, this is a fairly priced product. Indeed, unless you are a fanatic or use phones as a professional to monitor recording, the Sonys could very easily serve as your only set of headphones. That is, unless your spouse wants a second set of phones for herself.

NOTES

Sony MDR-DS5000 digital surround cordless headphone system, \$499.00. MDR-IF5000 (additional) headphones, \$150.00. Sony Electronics, Inc., One Sony Way, Park Ridge, NJ 07656; phone 201/930-1000, website www.sony.com.

Associated Equipment

PS Audio P-300 Power Plant, modified Sony CDP-XE1AS CD player, Thorens TD-320 Mk III turntable with Shure V15-5mxr cartridge, Music Hall MM-5 turntable with Goldring 1012 GX cartridge, Luxman LV-110 tuner, Thorens MM-10 phono pre-amp, Cary Audio Design CAD-300SEI integrated amplifier, Sennheiser HD-600 headphones, Grado SR-80 headphones, Phillips SBC-HP900 headphones, Kimber Silver Streak interconnects.



Bill Brassington

Piëga P10 Loudspeaker System

MY OLD FRIEND, music lover and manufacturer now retired, Jason Bloom of Apogee Electronics, gave me some of my greatest moments in listening to the recreation of recorded music. His speakers were simply magic in that they had the ability to draw you back into the memory of your last live musical event. It is—or was—one of the world-class speakers of our time. Another speaker in this class comes to mind, David Wilson's Watt Puppies. When set up properly, and that wasn't easy, it was another showstopper. The Spica two-way mini-monitors combined with a Janis subwoofer was pure listening enjoyment. Let's not forget Von Schweikert's VR6, engineered to perfection by my dear friend Albert. Last in this list but not least, Julius Carlos's Verity Audio Parsifal almost does everything right in conveying great sound to your ears.

I have owned all these speakers, as well as too many more to mention, in my 43 years of hi-fi listening. They are just marvelous transducers. So how can we learn anything more about good sound or does the whole process stop here? If you quit reviewing and don't go to live music performances, then I guess your last speaker is your best one. That goes for processors, amps, preamps, and all the other types of gear. So, keep on trucking and keep your mind and your ears open, of course. Never say never, drop the ego and enjoy

what's now out there. The science never stops, especially in Switzerland.

Piëga, remember the name. On second thought, remember the sound. You may hear a little of each of the speakers mentioned above coming out of the new Piëga P10. It gives me all of the music the other great speaker manufacturers have in their recipes, plus some. The P10 is simply one of the best and most properly balanced speakers out there. Piëga has it all (words you love to hear): Transparency of the best ribbons, midrange to set it apart from the boys, bass that is just there, a crossover you can't hear, a cabinet that is state-of-the-art in not being audible, and a fit-and-finish that is first rate.

The price for this speaker in this class is a giveaway—a bargain, a new discovery, something of special merit, \$9,500. Right down to their smallest speaker, every one of them will not leave your home for a long time, that is if you like true music, not just in-your-face sound. What a wonderful product, not at all well-known in the States, but certainly often heard and heard of all over Europe — not a small company by the way!

The last speakers I owned were the JM Labs Mezzo Utopia from France. This company also deserves high recognition for their ability to produce music that transports you in space, giving you serenity and relaxation. Ping-pong sound stag-

ing reaches out and gropes. The guitar in-your-face sound is slowly going by the wayside for this old pro reviewer. JM Labs, for me, when in my home, were right up there with the best of the best, a speaker hard to let go of and tougher to beat. In other words, leave it alone, Bill, sit back and retire. Lew Lanese, another old pro reviewer, begged me for three months to allow him to bring down his Piega P10 that he's first heard at the Consumer Electronics Show for a listen. I'm so tired of listening and not enjoying, evaluating and not relaxing, that I kept telling Lew "No!" Two weeks later they were brought to my house! One week after that, I said, "How did they do this? It gives me a little bit of every one of the best speakers that I've ever owned, a recipe in sound that will be extremely hard to beat in the future."

But if I put all the buzz words in the world and all the hi-fi audiophile jargon down on paper to try to describe this marvelous transducer, they still wouldn't do the job. How do you know what I'm hearing? Anyway, everyone always says he's got the best loudspeaker

that's out there and swears it's *the* reference to which all others are to be compared. Everyone hears differently! Just remember that. Each person has a different room and different associated equipment, so who's going to be the final judge in what you like, some reviewer or your own precious ears.

Here's what I'm saying. Get an old guy like me to review, one who's been to every show, has run one of the biggest hi-fi stores in NYC and Westchester, worked for a speaker manufacturer for some years, been to almost all the private homes of audiophiles who have the best systems out there, and gone to speaker manufacturers plants for demonstrations. I can't list all the speakers I've heard; he list would go on forever and ever. But I can say I've been around good sound all my life. I believe my credentials are real!

So, forget the fancy reviews, with the fancy words, and make it your business to write down the brand and model of this speaker and then go find out where you can personally hear it (they're new in this country). The Piega P10, at \$9,500 just about says it all in what you can

hear today in an average home and be transcended and left alone just to listen to great sound and music. Never mind the hype and big systems that rarely ever work in a normal room.

Question: Did I hear in the P10 "superb pace, rhythm, harmonic correctness, the correct tonality and timber or hear the second violinist cough, four minutes and seven seconds into the third track?"

Please, give me a break! Where do these words come from, who makes them up and how do they know anyway? Were they playing in the orchestra or were they there at the time of the recording or did they write the piece themselves?

The P10 just sounds right. What can I say? Listen for yourself, you're the boss, enjoy. For me they're a break through in speaker design and in listening!

NOTES

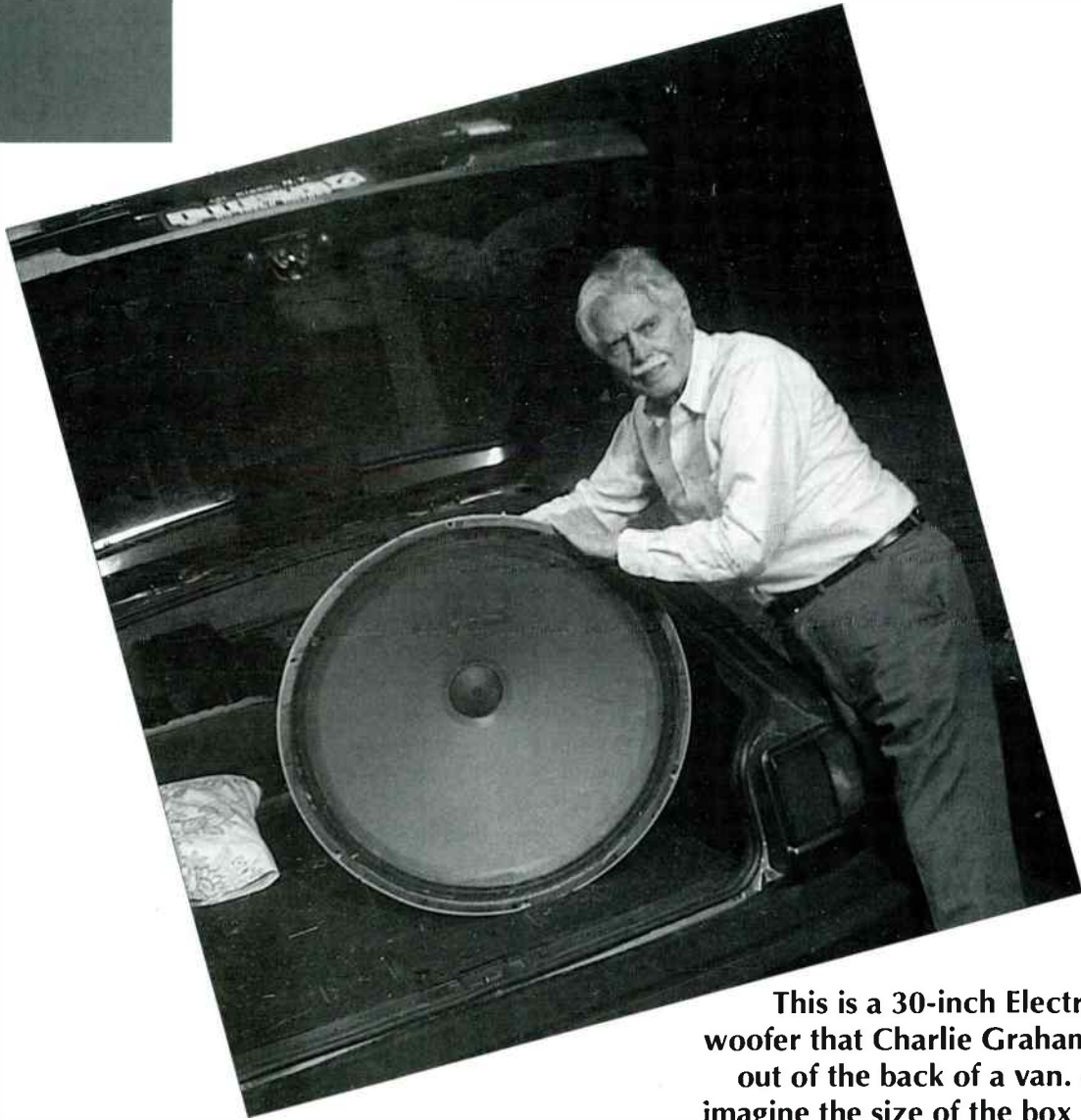
Piega Reference Loudspeaker, \$9,500.00. Manufacturer: Piega SA, Bahnhofstrasse, CH-8810 Horgen, Switzerland; phone, 41/1/725-9042; fax 41/1/725-9192. U.S. Distributor: Pro Audio Ltd., 111 South Dr., Barrington, IL 60010; phone 847/526-1660, fax 847/526-1669.

Associated Equipment

Meitner BiDAT D/A converter and CD transport; Balanced Audio Technology VK-50SE preamp; Balanced Audio Technology CD player; Balanced Audio Technology VK-500 amplifier; Argent Room Lens, Echo Buster and ASC Tube Trap room treatments; PS Audio Power Plant; Richard Grey's Power Company, and Harmonic Technology wire.

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B**ACK PAGE****Is it really that big?**

This is a 30-inch Electro-Voice woofer that Charlie Graham is hefting out of the back of a van. Can you imagine the size of the box he'll need? As big as the van! No, Charlie doesn't dry-clean suits with it, by blowing dirt out with a sudden gust of sound.

The Camera Never Lies!



CHARLIE GRAHAM, author of *A Great Jazz Day*, which is available from *The Jazz Store* (800/558-9513), is shown in this photo and is the winner of our bi-monthly contest for photos relating to hi-fi or records. Let us publish yours and it will earn you \$25.00 or a one-year subscription. Sorry, we cannot return unused photos unless they are sent with a stamped self-addressed envelope.

Send your pix to: The Editor, *The Audiophile Voice*, 215 Glenridge Ave., Lower Level, Montclair, NJ 07042.

See Bob Rock.

The new Sunfire *True Subwoofer* by Bob Carver has received reviews that are redefining the subwoofer industry.

*There has never been a subwoofer like it!
There will never be a subwoofer like it!**

*It's a small eleven inch square
bass cube, and it shakes the
walls and rattles the
rafters. It has its
own built-in two
thousand, seven
hundred watt amp!*

**Trust Bob.
It Rocks!**



SUB REVIEWS



"The True Subwoofer is an achievement on par with the space shuttle and the twinkie."

—Al Griffin

Home Theater, Feb, 97



"Talk about floor shaking bass...turned up to maximum level, I don't think there was anything in the house that wasn't shaking, including the concrete foundation!"

"Don't, I repeat, don't even think about purchasing another subwoofer without giving the Astonishing True subwoofer a listen."

—Joseph M. Cierniak

The Sensible Sound, Issue # 60



"The lowest, flattest, deepest bass I have EVER heard or measured."

—Julian Hirsch

Stereo Review, Dec. 96

<http://www.sunfirelabs.com>

Bob Carver's
Sunfire
from his mind ... and soul

*Strictly speaking: for 20 years until patent expires.



the Serpents are Coming

Alpha-Core's new, sturdy speaker cables, are round not flat like our famous GOERTZ cables, and their names allude to their shape and heft and shimmering, speckled pattern. Each cable contains four solid film insulated conductors in the form of a flat sandwich, which is twisted and embedded in crystal clear high grade polymer.

The newcomers are true low inductance, low impedance cables, retaining the sonic characteristics of the original GOERTZ designs, but the twist further enhances noise rejection ensuring that no RF interference enters the feedback loop.

Python: 10 gauge, corresponding to our popular GOERTZ MI2, but with its four individual conductors may also be terminated for 13 gauge bi-wiring.

Boa: 7 gauge, will co-exist with our big boy, GOERTZ MI3, but may also be terminated for 10 gauge bi-wiring.

Both cables are available in OFC copper and solid fine silver or as hybrids with two solid silver conductors on the outside and two copper conductors inside. Initial auditioning of Python/Hybrid indicates that paralleled it provides the subtle silver signature without glare and excessive brightness, while configured for bi-wiring with silver for the mid and highs, and copper for the lows it offers a cost effective alternative to all silver cables.



Prices: 8ft pair with Silver Spade terminals

OFC Copper	Python MI2	\$282	Boa MI3	\$482
Silver/OFC Copper	Python/Hybrid	\$814	Boa/Hybrid	\$1650
Solid fine Silver	Python AG2	\$1346	Boa AG3	\$2818

Try any Alpha-Core cable totally on us. We'll charge you after 30 days only for what you keep.



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