

# The audiophile voice

## The Wallflowers (Breach)

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On Hold

### Reviews

Linn Classik, NBS Cables,  
Kenwood 'Net CD Changer,  
I-Jam MP3 Player, Purist Cables  
PS Audio Power Plant, Analysis Plus Cables

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Volume 6, Issue 5

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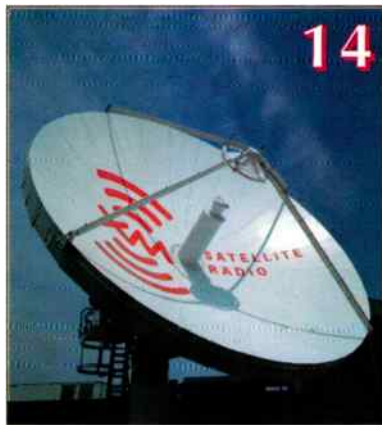


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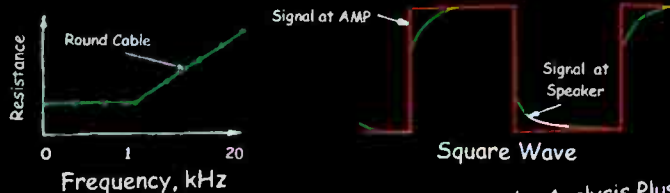


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Executive Editor Arnis Balgalvis  
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Russ Novak  
Cover Artist George Angelini  
Additional Art Sharon Pitts

#### CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Frank Alles, Bill Brassington, Chuck Bruce, Hector Chrest, James Dowd, Howard Ferstler, Jim Frane, John Hellow, Benjamin Ivry, Lewis Lanece, Karl Lozier, Ron Nagle, David Nenzler, Christopher Noblet, Arthur Paxton, Clement Perry, Robert Perry, Joel Shumer, Michael Tearson, Jon Tiven, Les Turoczi, Ross Wagner, Jerry Walsh, and Bill Wells.

#### ADVERTISING DIRECTOR

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

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#### PRODUCTION OFFICES

215 Glenridge Ave., Lower Level  
Montclair, NJ 07042  
973/509-2009  
FAX 973/509-2032  
E-mail: [epitts@ix.netcom.com](mailto:epitts@ix.netcom.com)  
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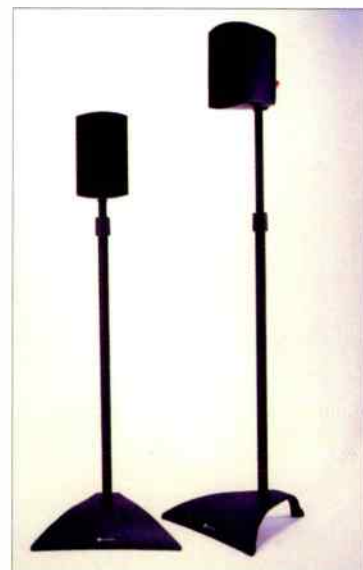


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Data: [www.del.denon.com](http://www.del.denon.com)



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# LETTERS

## The Sport, Revisited

Dear Editor:

Today I am writing to state my music listening pleasure has been rekindled. I have replaced my preamp and power amp with a Jeff Rowland "Concentra" integrated amp. Also, I replaced 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. Music listening is a great pleasure.

I believe more now than I did before, that a two-channel "music listening system" of good, better, and especially best quality will sound better than the "popular" surround systems. Further, the audio industry should strive to produce high-quality recordings and music-listening equipment so that we may enjoy the art of music. The industry must maintain high standards. New technology must maintain high standards and not resort to compromises that make the product only "good enough for the mass consumer." I believe many audiophiles are concerned about music listening and many music listeners are not concerned about audiophiles, but we all would miss high-quality recordings.

My system has been evolving for 40 years. In the past few years my approach has changed dramatically from "system listening" to "music listening." I attend live symphony concerts regularly, an opera now and again, plays, and listen to jazz. Live music is hard to duplicate. The pleasure of listening to a recording can be enhanced

when the recording and playback system are of good, better, and best quality.

I would like equipment reviews on music listening equipment that has music listening as a part of the design parameters. I believe most audiophile gear is designed this way. I would like the reviewed gear to be affordable. I am not looking for the esoteric. The Arcam CD 23 CD player is one review I would like to read. I am hearing good things about this player. My CD player is the next item I will replace.

Bill Brancheau  
Via e-mail

### Editor's Note:

We apologize to Mr. Brancheau and to our readers for publishing a version of Mr. Brancheau's letter in our last issue, Vol. 6, No. 4, that was shorted too severely in an effort to make it fit the space available. In short, his message was edited out, so we are reprinting the entire letter here.

## Subwoofer Enhancement

Dear Editor:

I read with interest the report on the Velodyne HGS-15 subwoofer. My own experience with Velodyne has always been very positive. They make a great product and Howard Fertler did a credible job of testing it.

My point is that he overlooked the greatest virtue of a single subwoofer; room placement. When setting up a system for optimum performance, the propagation of low frequencies is always compromised by the dimensions of the room. Standing waves and reflections will often times render a subwoofer woefully inadequate. Moving the subwoofer around in the room to an optimum loca-

tion will do wonders for the system performance, especially as the playback room gets smaller in size. In fact, in small rooms the standing waves become less of a factor and the mere pressure created by the subwoofer pressurizes the room when properly placed.

Thanks for letting me add some enhancement to the overall good review of the Velodyne product.

Almon Clegg  
Consultant to the Audio Industry  
Via e-mail

## Bonetone Boner

Dear Editor:

Regarding your review of Mike Hart and the Bonetones, please clarify if possible how to order this CD. While you supplied an address to order from, if I send a check, to whom should it be payable? Will they even accept a check? Do you have an email address?

Dave Bascom  
Via e-mail

The reviewer, Mike Driscoll, responds:

Dear Mr. Bascom:

We very much appreciate getting your query. Their e-mail address is bonetone1@aol.com. Checks may be made out to Mike Hart.

## The Miles-Trane Box

Dear Editor:

I enjoyed the review by James Rozzi of this terrific CD set. I immediately purchased it and I'm still listening to it. The remastering work is incredible. It is easily the best yet of these great reissues. Thanks for the info and review.

Frank F.  
Frank's Sound Room  
Via e-mail





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## The Essential Stevie Ray Vaughan

Craig L. Hopkins

Review by Stefan Pitts

Published by the author, who is president of the SRV Fan Club, P. O. Box 2019, Cedar Hill, TX 75106, website [www.SRVfanclub.com](http://www.SRVfanclub.com). 250 pages, almost 500 photos, many in four color. \$39.95.

IN PURSUIT OF ALL THINGS that fulfill my passion for good music and good sound, I came across a book about *The Audiophile Voice* cover veteran and legendary blues guitarist Stevie Ray Vaughan. Written by Stevie Ray Vaughan fan club founder and president Craig L. Hopkins, this book is a precious and extensive look into everything Stevie. Entitled "The Essential ...," it covers a great deal more than just the essentials with its in-depth coverage of the life and work of the Texas blues master.

Opening with remarks from people like bass player Tommy Shannon and Stevie's mother Martha Vaughan, the book's tone is truly touching, and it pretty well keeps that attitude through to the end. Indeed, Hopkins examines more than just Stevie's amazin' playin'; he examines Vaughan's life and spirit. The all-inclusive chronology of Stevie's life goes back to

1954, when he was born, and continues through many stops during his elementary school days in the '60s. However, special attention is given to 1974, the year Stevie got his "Pride and Joy," the '59 Fender Strat also known as "Number 1," to his 1986 appearance on *Saturday Night Live*, and to 1999 when his first four albums were remastered and rereleased.

One of the major highlights of this book is its wonderful collection of interviews from such artists as (I hope you don't mind a little name dropping) B.B. King, brother and blues great Jimmie Vaughan, Lonnie Mack, and Kenny Wayne Shepherd, as well as a scorching selection of long out-of-print interviews with the man himself, Stevie Ray. Hitting on several heavy-duty issues, from his childhood and roots to his sobriety and his influences and opinions of other great musicians, the discussions pull no punches. For those of

us guitar players who have sought to capture and use that elusive SRV sound, there is a very special interview in which Stevie himself discusses his gear.

Another highlight of this book is the extensive look at the mountains of memorabilia made in Stevie's honor. There are many pages of color plates of magazine covers, set lists, concert posters and many collectibles with Stevie's likeness. The memorabilia section even includes helpful guidelines for collecting, covering items from autographs to guitar picks.

Though not a straightforward biography, this book can easily be considered as a strong resource for anyone interested in Stevie. It has hosts of information that could prove a great challenge to compile on one's own. Its easy and open format as well as its collection of information make it a great buy for any avid Stevie fan.



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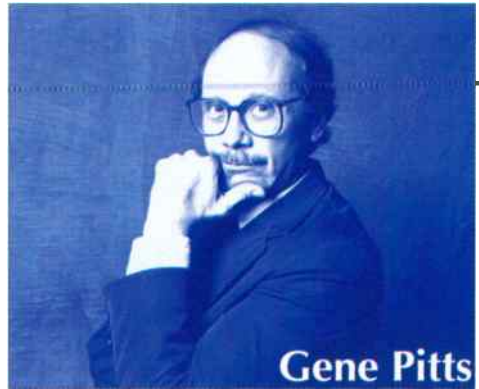
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## “...Not All Criminals”

**T**

HIS CERTAINLY LOOKS like a good time to be a lawyer, what with all the scrambling and fussing between the two major political parties over the Florida vote count. Almost lost in that momentous uproar are some other courtroom and boardroom decisions that will certainly affect the music community. You probably noted them in passing, but taken together — without the distraction of screams of “Foul” from the political court — they can easily be seen as pitched battles in a heavy war over how, and for how much, we will get our music in the future.

In yet another move toward “consolidation with a strategic partner” in Big Music, EMI (which does *not* stand for English Music Inc.) is now in talks with the German mega-media-mover Bertelsmann, which, of course, already has a music group. This comes soon after Bertelsmann’s investment in Napster and despite EMI’s continuing merger talks with Time Warner, which — not incidentally — also has a music group. Both these mergers are expected to be objects of rather intense anti-trust reviews, both here and abroad.

Early in November, two executives from Bertelsmann’s record division, BMG (which does *not* stand for British Music Group), resigned, shortly after the Napster investment was announced. Curiously, despite the investment, BMG and other labels are still suing Napster, though Bertelsmann has agreed to drop its part of the suit if Napster keeps its promise to become fee-based, track customer use and compensate the labels. I keep wondering what I’d have done, facing such heavy legal guns. Tough decision, but more horses than the one named Napster escaped from that barn.

“They can’t all be criminals,” was the ringing quote from Bertelsmann’s chairman and chief executive, Thomas Middelhoff, at the announcement of his firm’s deal with Napster. He was referring not to the file-sharing websites, but to the 38 million users of these technologies. “This is a call for the industry to wake up.” Well, yeah, wake up and realize “that your children are no longer

under your control,” to quote media-pundit Bob Dylan. Another fine line from Dylan about business vs. art: “They got a lot of knives and forks on the table and they’ve got to cut something.”

One other escaped horse is Scour which got sour grapes from both the music and the movie industries because of its search engines that allowed users to exchange music and video files. Sued but not relishing a long and expensive legal battle, Scour filed for bankruptcy. But in a move some wag captioned, “If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em!” Scour’s assets were sold to Listen.com for \$5 million and 527,000 shares of Listen stock. Some five per cent of Listen.com is owned by the Big Five record companies, and the site’s president was quoted in *The New York Times* as saying he wants to work with his record company investors to put together a fee-based business.

Wonder what’s going to shake out for horses named Gnutella, Aimster, Macster, et al.? I think it’s just got to depend on a new way of doing business by the record firms. I don’t mean developing a new product, that is LPs instead of 78s, or CDs instead of cassettes. These are simply different forms of packaged goods. Guys like Middelhoff are, I think, pointing in the right direction, and it’s firms like Tower Records, HMV, and Virgin that are going to lose out in the Digital Revolution. Just as the U.S. versions of record clubs are almost totally off their earlier game.

Music is fundamentally an impulse buy. “Give it to me quick.” Delivery via the ‘net is faster than snail-mail from any club or even driving out to the mall. We music-loving consumers have had the ability (if no longer the right in this upside-down digital age) to copy in the home ever since we put two cylinder machines next one another.

The question is, “Why should I buy from the record company what I can get for free if I borrow from a friend?” The answer ordinarily taught in business school is give ‘em an exclusive value-added feature, and in this case of distribution via the ‘net, it would be better sound for a fair price. How ‘bout it, Big Five? Er, Big Four?



**In·te·grate'**: make into a whole by bringing all parts together.

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World Radio History

# Satellites Soar For Future Broadcast



**I**N THE HEART of a refurbished, 100-year-old printing building in Washington, D.C., officials of XM Satellite Radio, Inc., in September took a step into the future. They turned on a radio and received music.

While that may not seem exciting, the signal was one that XM broadcast in digital form, “bounced” off a borrowed K-band satellite orbiting in space and reconstituted into music back at the studio. It’s not the final radio technology, or even the ultimate wavelength, but for North American drivers the signal marks the future for national, uninterrupted radio reception.

In early October, XM performed its signal bounce again, this time in Detroit and under the auspices of Delphi Automotive Systems, an automotive supplier which expects satellite radio to be big in cars.

XM and its competitor, Sirius Satellite Radio, Inc., based in New York City, both believe that drivers will be among the most enthusiastic customers for their proposed subscription radio services.

The services are expected to bring to radio what cable television brought to the broadcast TV industry: a plethora of dedicated specialty channels speaking to strong, aggregated national audiences.

FCC authorization for the services freed space on the 12.5 megahertz “S-band” for satellite radio in the early 1990s, but seven years of industry lobbying and legal challenges delayed introduction of what was then known as CD-radio.

At this point, Sirius and XM officials doubt other broadcasters will be able to enter their market niche due to high startup costs and a web of technical and industry alliances that have set a standard for satellite radio receivers.

**One of XM’s big satellite dishes, focal point of the new digital broadcast technology.**



Together, the two companies have placed more than \$2 billion in capital behind the idea, lining up strategic investment support from both the auto manufacturing community and makers of radios.

Two radio-broadcasting satellites belonging to Sirius this summer roared into orbit at the tip of Russian Proton rockets launched from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan, with a third to follow in November.

Sirius CEO David Margolese said each satellite, costing about \$100 million to build and another \$140 million to insure and launch, needs to undergo a month-long "burn in" and testing process 27,000 miles above the earth before the network can begin live, 24-hour broadcasting. Sirius satellites will use an elliptical orbit over the continent to give full North American coverage, with each satellite positioned to handle eight hours of programming.

"You feel a sense of gratitude when it goes up," Mr. Margolese said of the successful launches, which he and Sirius staff watched over closed-circuit television. "A rocket launch, unlike most things in this world where you have an illusion of a degree of control over what your endeavor is all about, the rocket launch is something where even that illusion of control is stripped away."

For XM, the first of a two-satellite system is to launch before the end of the year from Sea Launch Consortium's converted oil rig launch platform located in the Pacific near the equator. XM's satellites will stay in a geostationary orbit, keeping station over the continent, Sea Launch has had three successful satellite liftoffs, most recently placing PanAmSat 9 into orbit in late August, and will put XM's two satellites into geostationary orbit.

"It is the most powerful commercial satellite available today at about 15 kilowatts. You need a lot of power in order to make sure you can deliver a strong-enough signal," said Hugh Panero, XM president and CEO.

XM on Wednesday held open house at its Washington facility in a reviving industrial district, a \$60 million renovation project which is self-labeled as the largest digital studio in the U.S.

XM employs 125 people to operate 82 fiber-optic digital broadcast



booths, and a staff of 350 is expected by summer.

"We believe our service will complement local radio, which obviously has a unique, local hook to its service line. People will still turn in to AM and FM to get the local news and the local traffic," Mr. Panero said.

Sirius has 150 employees working in 150,000 square feet of studios located in New York City, where Mr. Margolese believes the company will benefit from the proximity of other broadcast companies and a concentration of performance artists

**It took a full-scale space shot to put the Sirius satellite in orbit.**

for the content needed to fill 100 channels of largely advertisement-free music, talk and other programming.

"In Manhattan, you get all kinds of people who are really specialists in all kinds of niche markets, genres and formats. We spent a lot of time getting that right," he said.

Carmakers, meanwhile, are saying they expect some 2001 model-year luxury cars to carry the satellite



**Delco-Cadillac did a trial run at putting together an in-dash radio.**

receiver systems needed to operate the hot new radio services. General Motors and Honda of America have lined up with XM; Ford, DaimlerChrysler and BMW have

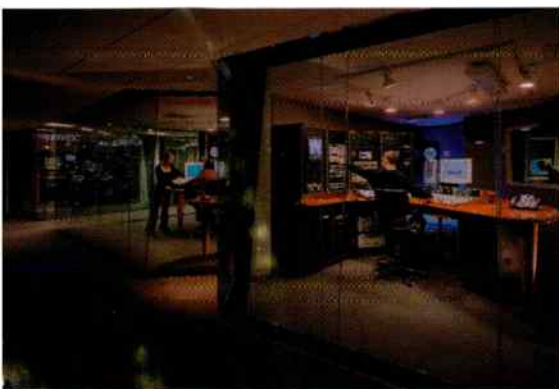


**Sirius offered this artist's conception of an in-dash car unit.**

chosen Sirius as their strategic partner for this area.

"The most important thing is, we think it's something our customers want, and will want more of in the future," said Ford Motor Company's Phil Wright.

While confirming that early entry would be on top-of-the-line cars and light trucks, Wright said



**Broadcast studios at Sirius are state of the art.**

automakers expect the prices for satellite radios to drop rapidly once the computer chip sets that enable signal processing reach true mass production. Current systems involve a radio with a separate "black box" chip set with a wholesale cost of \$300 or more, but soon the chips will be incorporated directly into car radios. At that point, automakers expect the wholesale cost of satellite radios to reach a desirable \$75 to \$80 per unit price.

"Eventually, you're going to see this thing more as a standard equipment item, certainly on higher series or packaged with different options. As the cost of the hardware comes down, it becomes more affordable."

That reduction in price may not be for several years, though, and in the meantime satellite radio is expected to be a prestigious addition to driver comfort.

On the cars, a palm-sized roof-mounted antenna and a radio selector button for satellite radio in addition to standard AM and FM will be among the few marks heralding the high-tech option. A larger liquid-crystal display on the radio unit itself will be able to show more information than current AM/FM sets can give, including a readout of song title, record label and artist to go along with the fadeout-free, interference-free digital broadcast signal.

Achieving a national signal will mean some innovative use of technology, such as a "buffer" of stored broadcast information being kept by the car's radio. Mr. Panero, at XM, says that company's two satellites will broadcast identical signals, skewed by several minutes. That will allow receivers that may have "missed" one signal due to interference, such as being in a tunnel or behind an intervening mountain, to pick up the second signal during four minutes of stored content, then re-synchronize and continue uninterrupted play from the broadcast again.

"If you go under an overpass,



**This is one of the ideas for an at-home digital radio from XM.**

you will be able to have consistent delivery of the signal," he said.

In urban areas and other locations where satellite signals may be blocked or bounced by terrain or tall buildings, local ground-based repeater networks will augment the satellite signal.

Automakers expect consumers to be delighted by a radio service that doesn't cut off after 20 or 30 miles of driving, and they are eager to participate in satellite radio because it answers their desire to get involved in a continuing business relationship with car owners beyond the sale of a vehicle.

While subscribers will initially get satellite radio as part of their car purchase or lease, at some point the subscription will need to be renewed, and carmakers expect to participate in the revenue stream. Renewal time could offer selling opportunities for related services, add-on entertainment, security or maintenance features.

Mr. Wright, at Ford, says that company may eventually bundle Sirius satellite radio with its "Wingcast" entertainment and communications offerings. Wingcast, announced July 31, is a joint venture between Ford and Qualcomm. GM has not said whether it harbors the same thoughts for its OnStar communications and emergency services system, but the similarities are striking.

"They want to maintain and develop a very intimate relationship with the customer," said Mr. Panero of automakers. "In the past, they have foregone participating in the cellular (telephone) or even the radio business — and they have been responsible for creating some of the environments where these businesses thrived."





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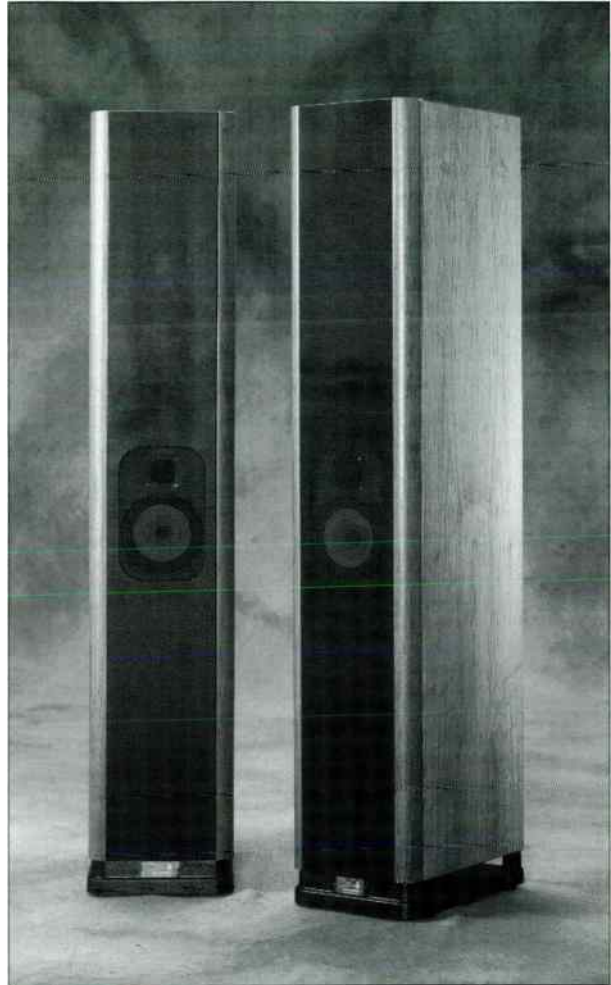
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# What's Really Goin' On In Audio Today?

Kevin Gray\*

**A**S A 40-SOMETHING audiophile and mastering engineer, I find myself constantly questioning where we're really headed in audio. Remember the old expression "Question Authority?" Over the years I've seen a lot of technologies come and go. It seems that every time something new comes along, the "new" is embraced and the

"old" is thrown out the window. And then there was quad. It died deader than the proverbial dodo. Anybody out there have a 5.1 system? Hmmm. I guess the dead just resurfaces as something else. The problem, as I see it, is releasing of new technology before it's ready.

I remember the transition from tubes to transistors. In case you're a

relatively new audiophile, that happened about a decade before the transition from transistors back to tubes! None of the early solid-state

*\*Kevin Gray has worked as a mastering engineer for 28 years and is currently an engineer at Future Disc, where he masters both LPs and CDs.*



amps sounded as good as the best tube gear. Early on, I do remember a very well-known reviewer (he shall remain nameless to protect the guilty) claiming that a new (1966) solid-state amp sounded better than his (tube) Marantz Model 9s. This particular solid-state amp is now universally recognized as sounding pretty awful. I'll bet that reviewer hopes nobody digs up that review.

Now, I love Marantz 9s. I think they were one of the best-sounding amplifiers ever made. I don't think they are more accurate, over-all, than the very best solid-state amps, but they do some things better. But, get this, a friend of mine is *selling* his Marantz 9s because they don't have the "tube magic," as he calls it, of his new single-ended triode amps. (Now that's some kind of weird "full circle!") I've always wanted to own a pair of 9s; I just hope I can scrape the money together fast enough.

In the early '80s, along comes the CD, and LPs get "trash canned" faster than you can say "perfect sound forever". But ... about four or five years after most of these revolutions (pun slightly intended), a funny thing happens. The audiophile picks up a piece of his old gear and plugs it back into his system. (This assumption is based on the audiophile being a packrat like me.) Low and behold, a strange thing happens. That crappy piece of old gear that he was so happy to replace, produces magic! How could he have missed it before? If this has never happened to you, you either never tried it or you're in denial. Have you listened to an LP lately? Now please don't get me wrong, I'm not advocating returning to cylinders, acoustical recordings or wire recorders. There are limits to these examples.

Mastering engineers were aware of the limitations of the CD before it ever hit the street. We had been using digital recorders for a few years. I really don't want to watch this happen all over again, but I fear that is just what's happening. All

this nostalgia brings me to the latest in audio software, SACD and DVD-A. The jury, which hasn't even heard the case, is already in: "SACD is perfect." I know because I read the audio trades. However, let me let you in on a little secret. I had the opportunity to compare a half-inch, 30-ips analog, direct-to-two track

---

### **Maybe the problems with digital audio can be fixed, but until then just give me a glass of single-malt and a good LP.**

---

master through the SACD-Meitner encoding system, and guess what? SACD audibly degraded the sound. I know, I heard it with my own ears, as did a couple other engineers. Then we compared the same source through a Pacific Microsonics Model One HDCD A-to-D converter, which runs 24 bits at 88.2 kHz. Guess what, nobody could repeatedly tell which was which. (This is not to be confused with a HDCD encoded CD, which would be down-sampled from the 24/88.2 data). It seems Keith Johnson and company at PM have really done everything right in this device.

Let me clarify one more thing. I'm not saying that SACD is awful. But it does change the sound in subtle ways. Is DVD-A better? I don't know yet, but if processed with a Pacific Microsonics A-to-D, I think it would be. That brings up another point. Not all 24/96 A-to-D converters are created equal. My old Wadia WA4000 with 16 bits at 44.1 kHz actually sounds BETTER than some of them.

How's that for a "can of worms?" Scary, isn't it? Let me also add that I'm sure SACD sounds better than 16/44.1, but I'll be forever haunted by that comparison ... especially if SACD beats out DVD-A. I spoke to a number of engineers at the recent Audio Engineering Society convention (Doug Sax of The Mastering Lab/Sheffield fame among them) who feel that 24 bits at 192 kHz on DVD-A is the way to go. And to add

injury to my insult, Stanley Lipshitz presented a paper at A.E.S. explaining why SACD type one bit systems don't work. As with most of his highly scientific technical papers, some of the "nitty-gritty" is over my head. Dr. Lipshitz seems to thrive on making waves in audio circles, but whether you agree with him or not, when he writes a paper, the audio community listens.

While on the subject of A.E.S., I had the opportunity to see and hear the latest thing in analog recording. Yes, analog tape is still very much alive. The latest, hottest item is one-inch, two-track. Yes, ONE INCH. One inch tape was originally developed to record EIGHT tracks! Both ATR Service's Mike Spitz and EAR's Tim de Paravicini are building these monsters on the venerable Ampex ATR100-series transport. ATR Service offers tube and transistor versions and the EAR version is all tube. I heard a master played on the Class-A solid-state version by ATR Service, and I must admit it was quite impressive. Since analog tape has never really died, I guess you might call this a transfusion ... or maybe CPR?

Getting back to DVD-A, there is another "wrinkle." The DVD-A camp has come up with a "watermarking" scheme for combating piracy. This signal is embedded in the digital code, but present in the analog domain as noise. This noise varies in amplitude with the audio signal. This is necessary, for example, so that the watermark can be detected via airplay, etc.

Some have said it is more than merely audible, that it sounds lousy! So what now? It is not mandatory for labels to employ this, but you can bet the "majors" will. Let's hope they can fix the problem. Otherwise we might find that CDs actually sound better than their new counterparts! Maybe Sony can fix the problem with SACD. Who knows?

Until that time, give me a glass of Macallan single-malt scotch and a good LP.

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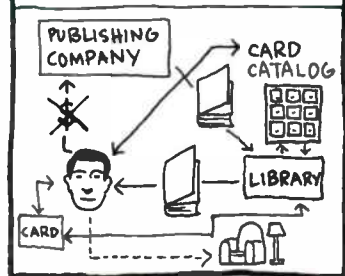


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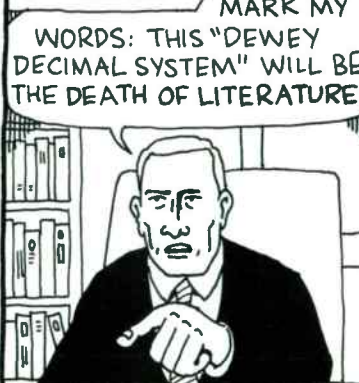
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# Re- member- ing



Benjamin Ivry

## Gaby Casadesus

A FEW YEARS AGO, I met pianist Gaby Casadesus, who died about a year ago at age 98, at her home on the rue Vaneau in Paris's bourgeois 7th arrondissement. She had lived there since moving in as a 21-year-old bride, and had survived the death of her son Jean in 1972, quickly followed by the demise of her famous husband Robert, some say of grief after the loss of their son.

Despite these woes, the slim and elegant 93-year-old woman gave the impression of a slightly fatigued 70-year-old lady. She spoke of her plans for learning new repertoire, notably the piano preludes by Olivier Messiaen. Inevitably she referred to the past, such as her studies with the noted pedagogue Louis Diémer, who retired from the Paris Conservatory in 1918. Her 1921 diploma, she proudly asserted,

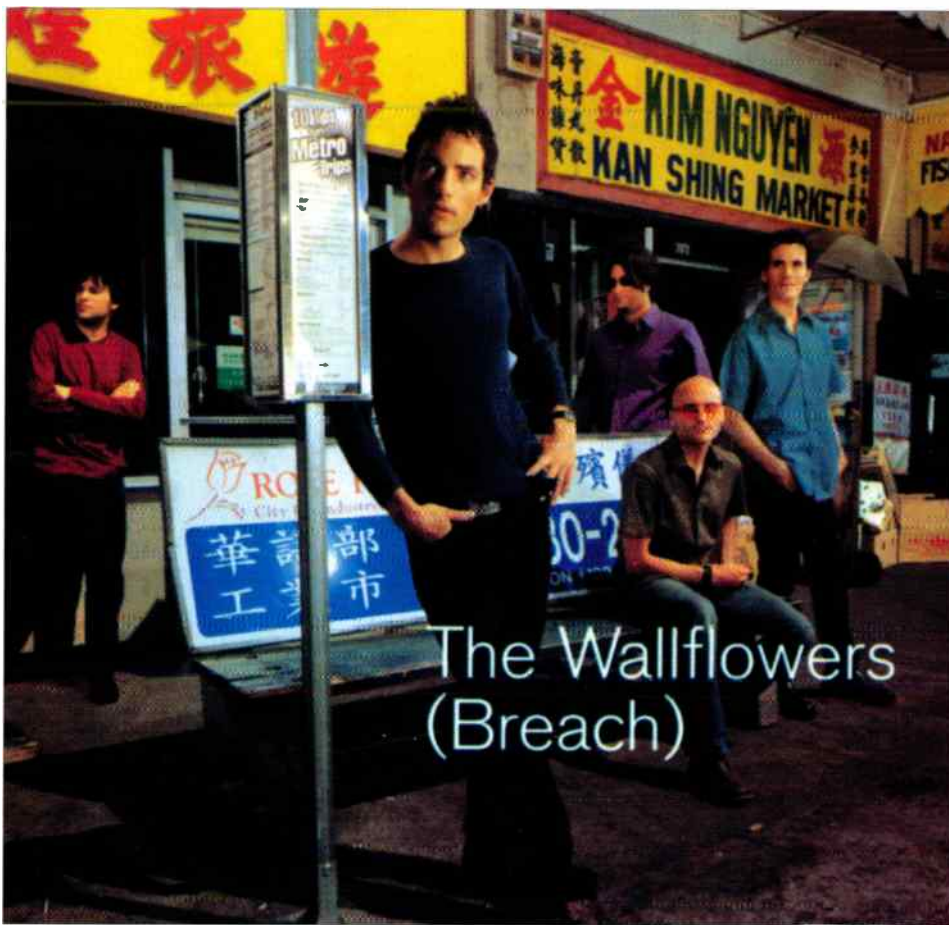
was signed by the school's director, Gabriel Fauré.

There was a certain vertigo in speaking to someone who had worked with these people so very long ago, but Gaby Casadesus was the personification of cheery aplomb and self-effacing but strong musicality.

Happily, some recent CD reissues are reminders of her artistry.

Philips's two-CD tribute to Robert Casadesus in their Great Pianists series (Philips 456 739-2) does not contain a photo of Gaby, but she is delightfully present in duets like Debussy's "En blanc et noir" and Fauré's "Dolly" suite, recorded in 1963 and 1959 respectively. The Debussy is colorfully played, belying the original title "In black and white" and the Faure is given loving warmth and tenderness, an ideally affectionate view of

this music. More dignified and formal are performances of Bach by the Casadesuscs, joined by son Jean, as reissued by Sony (on SBK 67179). In Bach concertos for three pianos conducted by Eugene Ormandy and Pierre Dervaux, the whole family displays cohesiveness and rigor, virtuosity and flexibility. Totally "inauthentic" as they might be according to today's original instrument fans, this is nevertheless Bach performance of great delight. An irresistible encore is provided by Gaby Casadesus as second pianist in 1978 to her student Philippe Entremont's version of Saint-Saens' droll Carnival of the Animals ( SBK 47655). An all-star cast including flutist Alain Marion and cellist Yo-Yo Ma are led by Entremont and Casadesus in this gallic romp, in an example of wit and joy triumphing over personal tragedy.



## The Wallflowers (Breach)

Mark Block

# Rock

The Wallflowers (*Breach*)  
Interscope 0694907452

IF THE FIRST single from (*Breach*), "Sleepwalker," isn't the best song of the year, it certainly has the cleverest line: "Cupid don't draw back your bow / Sam Cooke didn't know what I know." The reference to a song from 1961 is indicative of leader Jakob Dylan's respect for rock history, even if the metaphorical arrow is guaranteed to sail far over the heads of his mostly young audience.

I ignored The Wallflowers four years ago when *Bringing Down the Horse* was on its way to multi-platinum status (eventually selling six million copies worldwide). My perfunctory assessment of Jakob Dylan back then: Springsteen without the intensity. Indeed, Springsteen has

performed live with The Wallflowers, and listening to The Boss sing "We can drive it home / with one headlight" then launch into a fiery guitar solo is a lesson in how to turn a nice song into a stadium-shaking anthem.

It's a lesson, however, that Jakob Dylan doesn't want or need to learn. His charisma comes not from bulging neck veins and athletic stagecraft, but from smoldering, blue-eyed good looks and heart-throbbing sincerity. Dylan lets his songs (not to mention his blue eyes) speak for themselves, and the collection here on (*Breach*) speaks well enough to deserve our undivided attention. In fact, Jakob's career may soon force us to put the "Bob" back

in front of Dylan. (Earlier in this paragraph I dropped the "Jakob" without thinking twice.)

As the son of the most revolutionary rocker of all, Dylan is surprisingly approachable, traditional, and even (dare I say it?) commercial. "Hand Me Down" would have fit right into a Jackson Browne or Eagles album from the early seventies; the David Lindley-esque lap steel on this track strikes me as a clear homage to Jackson Browne's oeuvre. "Up From Under" evokes acoustic Springsteen. "Sleepwalker" sounds like a good Tom Petty track; appropriately, Heartbreakers Mike Campbell and Matt Chamberlain back up The Wallflowers throughout (*Breach*).



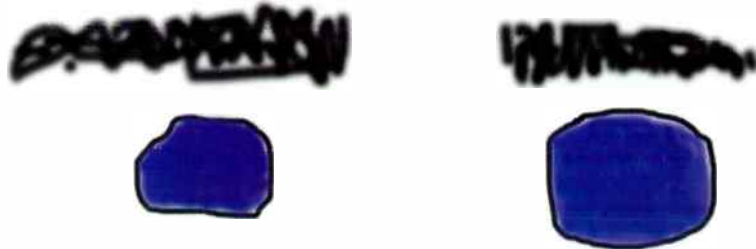
Why "breach?" The title turns out to be a clever conceit on the part of Dylan. The word has a multiplicity of meanings, all alluded to in the songs: A difficult birth ("I've Been Delivered"); a breaking out from below the surface ("Up From Under"); a violation of the most fundamental trust ("Hand Me Down"), and a painful emotional estrangement (every song to some extent, from the first cut, "Letters From the Wasteland," to the last, "Birdcage"). Both thematically and musically, The Wallflower's (*Breach*) is a compelling collection.

Production chores have shifted this time from T-Bone Burnett to Michael Penn, husband of Aimee Mann (among other accomplishments) and if I were to make one suggestion to Dylan, it would be to take lyricist lessons from Mann. Although the melodies on (*Breach*) are often wonderful, and an overall improvement over his earlier work, he can be a sloppy writer. Song structures seem almost arbitrary, with rhythms and rhymes changing from stanza to stanza; it's either artfully complex or just lazy. The rhymes are so inconsistent that it's impossible to tell whether verses ending in "damned" and "quicksand" are intended to form a poorly rhyming couplet or not. And in spite of the many intelligent, insightful moments, the album is overly focused on two related emotions: bitterness and self-pity. I don't know why Dylan feels sorry for himself, but I hope he's gotten it out of his system now. Although (*Breach*) is a great album, I wouldn't want The Wallflowers to make another one like it.

For engineering, Dylan and Penn stick with Grammy-winning veteran Tom Lord-Alge (not to be confused with brother Chris), and his work here is a bit of a disappointment. Clearly mixed to favor mid-fi video, portable and car playback, the sound is just tolerable on a good reference system. In a 1992 interview, Lord-Alge said that he uses "quite a bit of compression in the work that I do, so I'm a big fan of the old vintage compressors." I don't think he's changed his style much, because a heavy fog of compression and upper-midrange brightness dominates (*Breach*). While it sounds wonderful on my Rio MP3 player, it's not flattered by a high-end rig. The one exception is

the hidden track at the end of the CD, "Baby Bird." The song begins with the sound of a cheap, somewhat muddy music box, and gradually becomes clear and bright as Dylan sings "Baby bird / Come back home / Baby bird / you were never

When I reviewed Bob Dylan's *Time Out of Mind* a few years ago, I remarked on the sad irony of the son's Wallflowers album outselling the father's transcendent classics. Now I'm thinking that it's not sad at all, because Jakob Dylan is a very



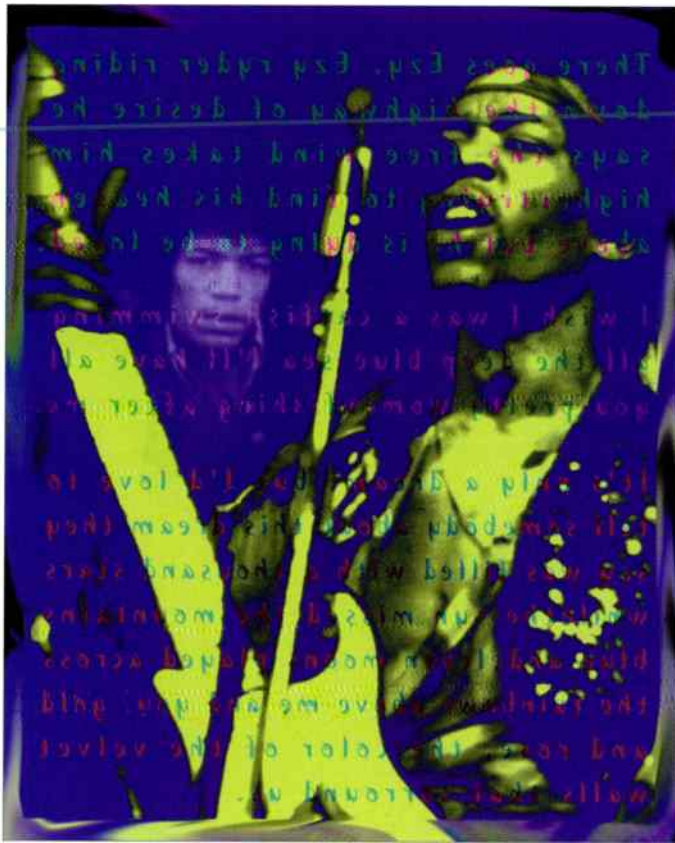
really on your own." It's a lovely, moving song of redemption and a hopeful end to an otherwise acidic song cycle. The sonic morphing is a nice studio trick that actually has a powerful emotional effect — one that's ordinarily totally lost on a mid-fi system.

talented singer / songwriter who is upholding the traditions his father started when he plugged in at Newport and changed the course of music history. The Wallflowers are bringing good rock to a younger generation, and about that I don't have to think twice: It's all right.

## GETTING IT!

**P**ERHAPS out of some misplaced snobbery, I never got into The Wallflowers when *Bringing Down the Horse* was hot a few years ago, so I went out to buy it for comparison purposes. There are three large record stores on New York City's Fifth Avenue near my office, and all three had *Breach* only. I even asked the sales help to check their stocks for the previous album, but no one went beyond looking over the CDs I had already looked through. One clerk pulled out a misfiled Waitresses album, held it up to me face and announced, "There it is," as if I had blindly skipped over it. Back in the office, I fired up Napster for the Mac and downloaded a few hit tracks from *Bringing Down the Horse*, including live versions. Do I feel guilty for depriving The Wallflowers of their royalties? Yes, but not as guilty as Interscope Records should feel for not keeping a multi-platinum album on the

record store shelves when the follow-up is released. (Editor's Note: Hey, Mark, I call the high-end version of what you experienced the "light under a bushel" marketing style; the fewer the number of people who know about a product, then the better it is—in the marketing guy's opinion. When I was trying to get 35-mm photos to illustrate this review and help the cover illustration, I found that Interscope's NYC phone was "not in service at this time. No further information is available." Their parent, A&M, turns out to be located in a different California city than is shown on the back of the CD, but when contacted, their Publicity Dept. was kind enough to give me The Wallflower's NYC publicity team. Calling them led me through a maze of phone "push 1 for an even longer wait cue" choices and finally to "Leave your name and phone number, but don't call us back if you don't get what you asked for.")



## Rock

The Vinyl Jimi Hendrix  
*The Jimi Hendrix Experience*  
 MCA LMCA 112316-9  
*Axis: Bold as Love*  
 Classic Records 612003

**J**IMI HENDRIX recorded for only four years. He began in London at the DeLand Lea Studios on Sunday, October 23, 1966; the last studio recording was on Monday, August 24, 1970, at his Electric Ladyland Studios in New York. The last recording was live, just six days later, at the Isl  of Wight, August 30, 1970. Hendrix died Friday, September 18th, 1970.

It's amazing to realize how much material, what a wonderful body of work was created during that short time — just four LPs, *Are You Experienced*, *Axis: Bold As Love*, *Electric Ladyland* and *Band of Gypsies*, (which doesn't include the pre-fame LPs he did as a sideman with Curtis Knight, Little Richard, the Isley Brothers, et al.). However, since his death, there have been over a hundred releases, mostly by Alan Douglas, who originally controlled the catalog, and more recently by the Hendrix family. These releases have ranged from straight re-releases, out-takes, and live recordings. When we consider artists like Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck

and Alvin Lee have been actively recording for 30 years and *they* don't have that much product, Jimi's total is even more astounding. One of the few artists to have more is John Lee Hooker and he has been recording since the 1940s.

If Hendrix had lived, I believe most of this material would not have seen the light of day. You might disagree on the point, though with both "Chas" Chandler, Jimi's producer, and Hendrix gone, we'll never really know....

The proliferation continues; and in the past year, we've had two new vinyl offerings, *The Jimi Hendrix Experience*, a Hendrix Family release, and *Axis: Bold as Love* (in mono), which comes from Classic Records.

*The Jimi Hendrix Experience* is an eight-LP set in a purple, crushed velvet box. Each of the eight sleeves has remarkable pictures of Jimi Hendrix and the Experience. The vinyl is 180 grams of good quality. There is a great 38-page booklet with unbelievable pictures and a

forward by Dave Marsh. It contains a track breakdown with the personnel who mixed and engineered and the origin. There are also a few paragraphs written about the making of each track. The booklet, on its own, is worth having. The biggest compliment I can give is — if Jimi were around, he would be blown away.

Let's break into the music on *Experience* — most has been heard before on LPs such as *War Heroes*, *Hendrix of the West* and other posthumous releases. However, Jimi Hendrix's engineer, Eddie Kramer, remixed many of the tracks from the original tapes and made them sound like the originals. Eddie did engineer the bulk of Jimi's work and he is a great engineer. He did not go the route of Alan Douglas, trying to change them with over-dubbing and other questionable things.

All the tracks on these LPs are either an alternate version of songs, tracks that were recorded that never came out on the original four LPs or live versions. Jimi was at his best



live. He was easily the best improviser in the business.

I am not going to analyze each track, as I think Eddie Kramer got the most out of what he had to work with and every track will be of interest to any Hendrix fan. There is nothing like listening to *Experience* on vinyl. There is a distinct openness and energy that digital cannot duplicate.

George Marino and Eddie mastered the record at Sterling Sound and they did a good job. One has to remember *The Jimi Hendrix Experience* is a compilation LP and the sound varies. Although not perfect, this collection is far more than we should expect this late in time.

The packaging of Classic Record's reissue of *Axis: Bold As Love*, (mixed in mono) also on vinyl, closely resembles the original except it has a glossy cover that gives it a European look. The record was produced by "Chas" Chandler and engineered by Eddie Kramer (as was most of the material on the new *Experience* box). The one big difference in the two projects is that *Axis: Bold As Love* was done as a studio

LP and sequenced by Jimi Hendrix at the height of his career — no guessing involved.

Ironically, when it first came out it was available in mono both in the UK on Track Records and in the U.S. on Reprise, but there was not much interest in a mono mixed album at that time. This release from Classic Records is a classic, and includes some of the best Hendrix work, *Six Was Nine*, *Spanish Castles Made of Sand*, and *Little Wing*, in case you've forgotten.

The first time I heard this *Axis* re-release, I was in Infinity Records, a great record store on Long Island. The sound blew me away even though it was being played on a modest system. (Most of the time I don't pay attention to the ambient music when shopping for records.)

There was a lot of experimenting with phasing on the record and Roger Mayer, who invented the Fuzz box, started developing equipment for Jimi and had a lot to do with refining his sound. Another interesting note about *Axis: Legend* has it Jimi Hendrix lost the tapes with the mixes of side one the night

before they had to hand in the masters. "Chas" Chandler, Eddie Kramer and Jimi remixed it in 11 hours the next day. How did they do a stereo mix *and* a mono mix in 11 hours?

The sound just pops out of the speakers, the mono mix is much more centered and has more resolution, you can almost touch the guitar and vocals. The pressing is superb. They did an incredible job in the mastering. I own every incarnation of the Jimi Hendrix LPs and this is the finest. I think Bernie Grundman did a magnificent job mastering this from the original mono masters. It has a very warm sound, truly a great sounding record.

Just when you think you have every Hendrix record ever made, two more come along, *The Jimi Hendrix Experience* and *Axis: Bold As Love*. Any audiophile or Hendrix fan truly ought to have these two, and I wonder how much more those four years will produce. I hope any new releases will continue to be on vinyl so further generations will know how a Jimi Hendrix record really sounds.

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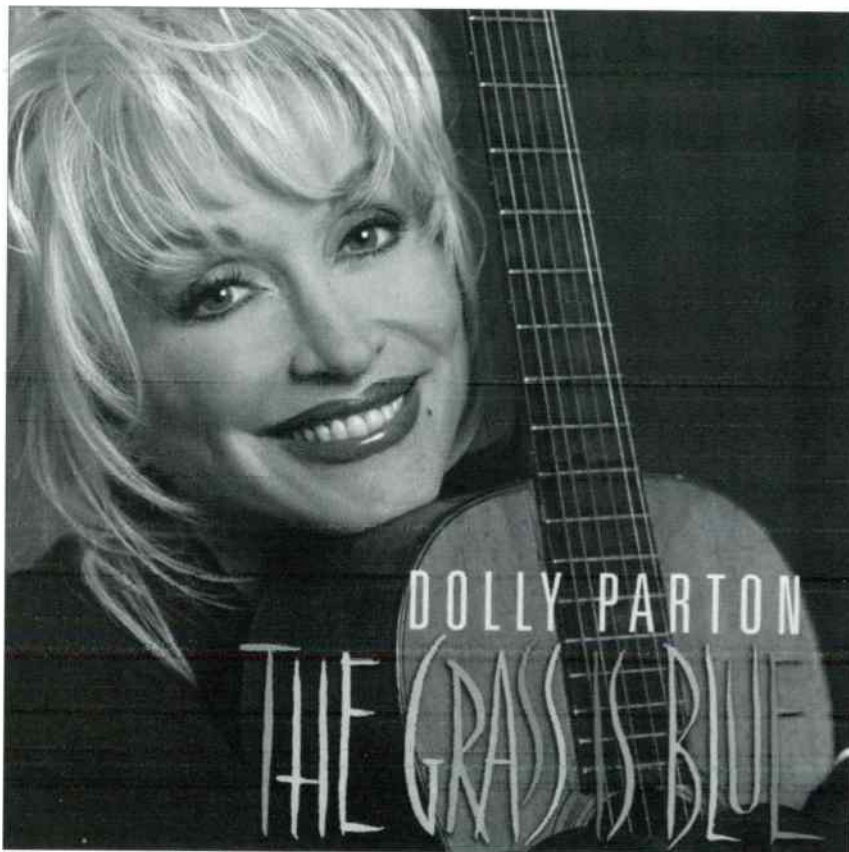
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Michael Tearson



## Bluegrass

Dolly Parton *The Grass is Blue*  
Sugar Hill SUG-CD-3900

IT IS MORE THAN a little ironic that now I am a couple of years removed from a 30+ year career in FM rock radio, the music I am listening to for pleasure has changed completely. Much to my own surprise, I find myself drawn ever more to bluegrass. I suppose that the purity of both the music and the musicians' intent and commitment to the form has a lot to do with that.

After 30 years as a leading country music diva, Dolly Parton has just made her first bluegrass album as a nod to some beloved music she grew up on. *The Grass Is Blue* is brilliant on all counts. The slip-cased packaging is very classy and

the photos are gorgeous. Technically, the sound is fabulous. The musicians' performances are state of the art. And Dolly has never sung more fiercely or with more conviction.

Dolly reminds us what a maverick she has always been right from the opening number, a spectacular take of "Travelin' Prayer," a song by that noted bluegrass piano man Billy Joel. After a slow, mournful fiddle and mandolin intro by Stuart Duncan and Sam Bush, the song kicks straight into overdrive. Parton's "pedal to the metal" full-throttle vocal blows these old ears away. Her phrasing is just plain bril-

liant. The Alison Krauss / Dan Tyminski harmonies are lovely, and Jerry Douglas' dobro and Jim Mills' banjo are huge forces. The tempo drops back for a joyous run through of the Louvin Brothers classic "Cash On The Barrelhead" and Hazel Dickens' "A Few Old Memories." Again, the band is terrific and harmonies by the Claire Lynch / Keith Little and Patty Loveless / Rhonda Vincent duos are special. The Lester Flatt gem "I'm Gonna Sleep With One Eye Open" receives a solid, gritty treatment, while Johnny Cash's "I Still Miss Someone" has only rarely been caressed more lovingly. Dolly gives the traditional



"Silver Dagger" a bravura vocal performance laced with trilling adornments with her own ghostly harmonies overdubbed. (Editor's Note: To my ears, this is the highlight of the album, and it alone is worth whatever you pay your CD sales outlet for the whole disc.)

The set also includes four excellent Parton originals, all of them heartbreak songs. The breakdown-paced "Steady As The Rain" is a showstopper. "Endless Stream of Tears" is a fierce cry for redemption. Though a new song, "Endless..." sounds like an authentic traditional piece. "The Grass Is Blue" is a sweet, sad tune about the aftermath of a break-up. It wouldn't surprise me at all to learn that Dolly wrote the song backwards, getting the title first. The breathlessly hopeful "Will He Be Waiting For Me?" may be my favorite of this CD, as it relates the burning ache for reunion with a spurned lover. It has a great melody and an unforgettable chorus buoyed by airy Lynch / Little harmonies.

The album closes with an acappella quartet reading of "I Am Ready," a hymn written by Dolly's sister, Rachel Parton Dennison.

*The Grass Is Blue* is an end-to-end thriller, and I will be brash enough to call it Dolly Parton's best album ever. I am delighted to have just learned that a sequel is in the works. Producers Steve Buckingham and Jennie Carey and engineer Gary

feel of an album Dolly has wanted to make for years and that no record company would let her make. It also feels like a liberating experience, and she responds with her best vocals ever. Naturally, it doesn't hurt a whit that the players are at the top of the Nashville A list. As is usual for bluegrass, there are no drums or other percussion anywhere on the album, and they are not missed. Bluegrass has such drive and built-in percussiveness that drums are not needed.

This one's an album for the ages. For a fan of bluegrass, it is a must. But for a listener curious about what this bluegrass stuff is all about, it is a perfect introduction. If you like what you hear here, let me recommend a pair of other recent releases. Rhonda Vincent who sings harmonies here has a sensational album on Rounder called *Back Home Again* that is a fitting partner to Dolly's album as it is equally well executed and equally adventurous. And Ricky Skaggs' Skaggs Family Records has just released the delightful *Big Mon*, a tribute to Bill Monroe, the man who wrote the book on bluegrass.

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**If you ever wanted to find out what the fuss about bluegrass is, buy Dolly's *Grass Is Blue*.**

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Paczosa have done outstanding work here. The performances they have coaxed are utterly inspired, and the technical aspects of the record are brilliant. The sound has both great clarity and uncommon presence.

I have always maintained that acoustic instruments benefit the most from digital recording as their overtones and the feel of the room both come alive. This happens all through the album as you really get that live in your room oomph.

Dolly Parton's *The Grass Is Blue* is a major milestone in a justifiably storied career. It has the sound and

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**T**HIS THOROUGH-GOING documentation of the early days of stereophonic sound reproduction may turn out to be historic in its own right. There may be other 12-hour stereo CDs available for commercial purchase but I have not run across any. If this was a DVD, it could contain 72 hours of stereo music! This feat is accomplished by encoding the original analog stereo tapes, made during the 1950s, using MP3, a popular sound compression program. In case you are over 21, MP3 is the Internet program of choice for downloading rock and hip-hop tunes for free into PCs or portable MP3 players.

This CD has to be played on a PC or MP3 player. The output of the PC should then be connected to the input of the best stereo reproduction system you have. I tried three-MP3 software DACs: Winamp, Real Player G2 and MP3 Windows Media. The first two I downloaded, free, from the web as recommended by Balkan Records in their notes. I used a new Dell laptop as the CD player and connected its sound card into my high-end, all-digital, multi-

channel system. The results were not encouraging. The fidelity was okay, but with both laptop MP3 programs, there was a pop, a gurgle or tick every few seconds. But when I used MP3 Windows Media on a Compaq Presario, I heard no such artifacts. I wish I knew what causes such glitches, but I don't. If MP3 Windows Media is the same as Winamp, then the difference must lie within the computers.

Although I have heard some pretty good demos of MP3 audio quality, I have never taken the technology too seriously where classical music was concerned. The lack of a remote control to step between selections and fast forward has to be balanced against the program note file that is attached and the video file that can be viewed to see the tape jackets.

But let me tell you that the sound on this disc is nothing if not spectacular from almost any point of view. As far as my ears could tell, there was little compression distortion, the frequency response was as wide as any CD, and there was no audible noise. The bulk of the tracks

are derived from master stereo magnetic tapes made in the early '50s before the stereo LP was launched. Most of them come from the collection of Robert Oakes Jordan, a veteran recording engineer operating out of Chicago. The tapes are of early AM/FM stereo broadcasts, TV/AM stereo broadcasts, and many primordial demo tapes used by RCA, Westminster, NBC, Bell Sound, Ampex, and others to help their dealers sell stereo tape players and then their catalogs of prerecorded reel-to-reel stereo tapes.

Make no mistake; the 15- or 30-IPS machines used in those days were of extremely high quality. The other point to observe is that they used only a single pair of spaced directional microphones. They did not have stereo mixing consoles for spot microphones or artificial reverb machines, pan pots, etc., and so could not monkey with the master tape before, during, or after the recording session. Also, these demos were recorded live and spaces and venues are all natural. What I am leading up to is that the stereo imaging is better on these



tapes than on 90 per cent of the LPs and CDs I have heard since then.

I have one caveat, however. To properly hear what these early pioneers accomplished, you should listen to these cuts with VMaX, the Lexicon Panorama mode, the Carver Sonic Holography option or an Echobusters Reality Buster. The microphone technique used in those days engendered an exceptionally wide stage width. But the crosstalk inherent in the usual home stereo triangle will limit the image width to the space between the speakers and cause other imaging errors. It would be a shame not to hear these musical excerpts in all their full-width glory.

The other notable fact of historic interest is that most of the musical demo excerpts are of classical music. Even the popular music ones are of large orchestral sounds and might properly be called "light classics." The tapes include some verbal introductory descriptions of the history of sound recording and the advantages of stereo over mono. The Gold Standard in those days was concert hall realism. Many of them claim to have finally achieved it. They then hit you with a sample

of full orchestral music such as Espana or Berlioz to prove the point. (Actually, it doesn't take too much to add surround concert hall ambience to their exceedingly wide stage, and I auditioned most of the tracks this way to do this review.)

Of course, being an early form of

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sales pitch, there are a plethora of trains, planes, racing cars, trucks, a ping pong game, roaring lions, Grand Central Station, an indoor swimming pool, walkabouts, a roller coaster, parades, a subway, a rocket launch, thunder, two nickelodeons, a horse race, a bowling alley, a construction site, and elephant roars. But many of the musical excerpts are delightful and often serious. I was startled to hear a performance of Prokofiev's Overture on Hebrew Themes with a horn instead of a clarinet. The Thus Spake Zarathustra organ is also well repre-

sented on an Ampex demo tape and this was long before 2001 and Stanley Kubrick. The Omegatape demo, track 30, a rendition of 'Chinatown', has the orchestra in-phase but the vocalist out-of-phase demonstrating why multi-miking is not a good idea now or then. The Wurlitzer organs never sounded better.

Balkan specializes in CDs of Serbo-Croatian folk music. How they got into this historical stuff I don't know. But this compilation is such a delight that I would urge Balkan to issue this set in a standard CD format. I would limit the CD edition to just the stereo items. There are some five hours (out of the twelve) of the mostly mono Mirage Radio Show with a magical restoration of three very early Caruso recordings, one with Nelli Melba. Some other low-fi mono cuts that are of lesser or no interest to me (and I would suspect most audiophiles) could also be dropped from the CD. Five CDs of the best stereo tapes for the same price of \$29.95 or a little bit higher does not seem too impractical to me. Keep the 1933 Mayor Cermak funeral inadvertently AM broadcast in stereo, however.

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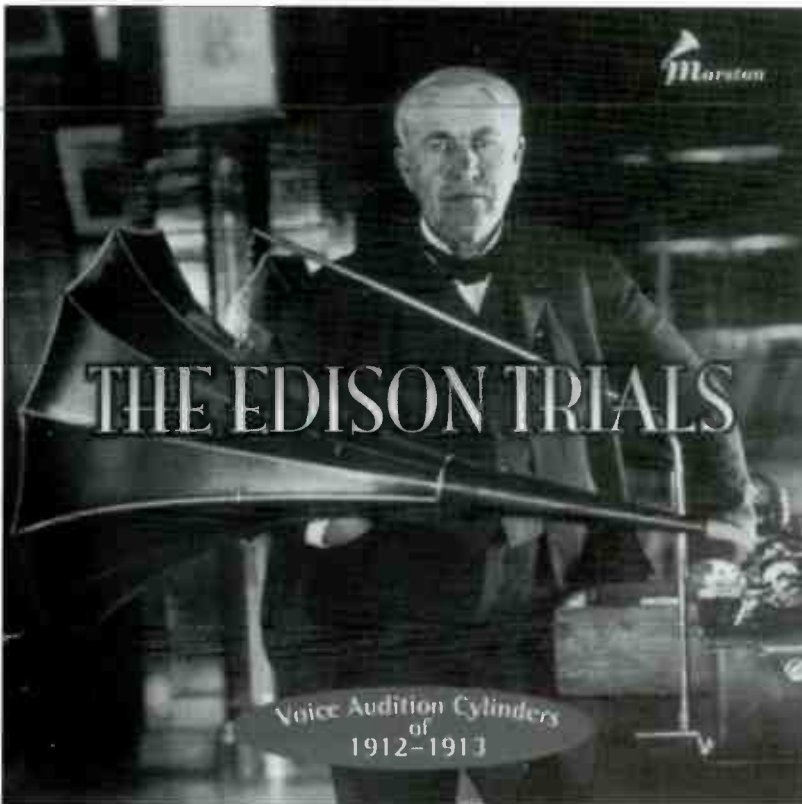
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## Historic Vocal

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**W**HILE TAFT WAS still president, Edison decided to get into the quality, flat-disc business in a big way. But Victor and Columbia had all the big opera/vocal stars like Caruso, Melba, Galli-Curci, McCormack, Chaliapin and Tetrzzini under contract. Today, when the classical record business is so small compared to pop rock and hip-hop, it is hard to appreciate that Victor alone sold over 50 million acoustic Red Label classical 78s before the switch to electrics and radio ended the acoustic era.

Many believe that the first 20 years of the last century were a golden era of classical singing. On the evidence of these Edison voices and the Victor catalog, it seems to be so. I think this was an unavoidable process of natural selection. This was a time, before microphones, when the entire pool of individuals with good voices could only get into classical music training. With rare exceptions, it was too soon to earn a living being a

Marlene Dietrich, a Bing Crosby, a Bessie Smith or even a Maurice Chevalier. In the 1890s singers learned to sing the classics or light opera and then had concert careers or they sang in cafes and didn't.

So Edison sent his minions to Europe to collect samples of operatic voices that he would promote in America if they sounded good to him. The two-minute cylinders were diligently made in central Europe, mostly in 1912, and sent to him for review, luckily, not via the Titanic. He likely played them less than once, wrote notes indicating that he didn't like any of them, and that was essentially the end of Edison as a force in the record business. However, the cylinders were well preserved at the Edison National Historical Site and not played again until lent to Marston to process for this digital release.

There are some 77 voices represented. There are tenors, basses, sopranos, and altos. They sing, mostly gloriously, the music of

Verdi, Puccini, Donizetti, Bellini, Wolf, Gounod, Bizet, Meyerbeer, Leoncavillo, Massenet, Thomas, Saint-Saens, Grieg, Mascagni, Catalani, Delibes, Boito, Rossini, and Wagner. There are also a few Neapolitan bon-bons thrown in. There are very few duplications and the choice of music is very high-brow, at least by today's creeping crossover standards. They sing overwhelmingly in French, Italian, or German, and since libretto transcriptions were commonplace in those days, so Wagner might easily come out in French or Italian.

One voice is better than the next. Most of the basses sound better to me than Feodor Chaliapin, the star bass of the Victor Talking Machine Co. None of the tenors is as good as Caruso but some of them come close and could easily have been used in a Ten-Tenor extravaganza. Most of the sopranos are fabulous and make Nellie Melba seem like dry toast (rather than peaches) and Luisa Tetrzzini seem like a



squawking chicken, in comparison. In a majority of cases, these cylinders are the only known recording of their voices.

An American tenor, Francis MacLennan, was good enough to sing the American premier of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* in Carnegie Hall in 1921 but not good enough for Edison. Luigi Montesano was a bass who sang at La Scala, The Metropolitan Opera and The Chicago Opera. Edison wrote "Tremolo bad, coarse, guttural, very uneven volume, not wanted." The tidbits in the program notes are fascinating. There is the Jewish contralto, living in Germany, whose fate after 1933 is unknown. Giulia Battaglioli-Leotti, is one of the best sopranos in the set. Edison remarks "Very little tremolo — Even and fairly pure scale...Could only use her in emergency — she is best so far but not very promising." However, he liked the tenor, Egidio Cunego, whom I suggest you avoid.

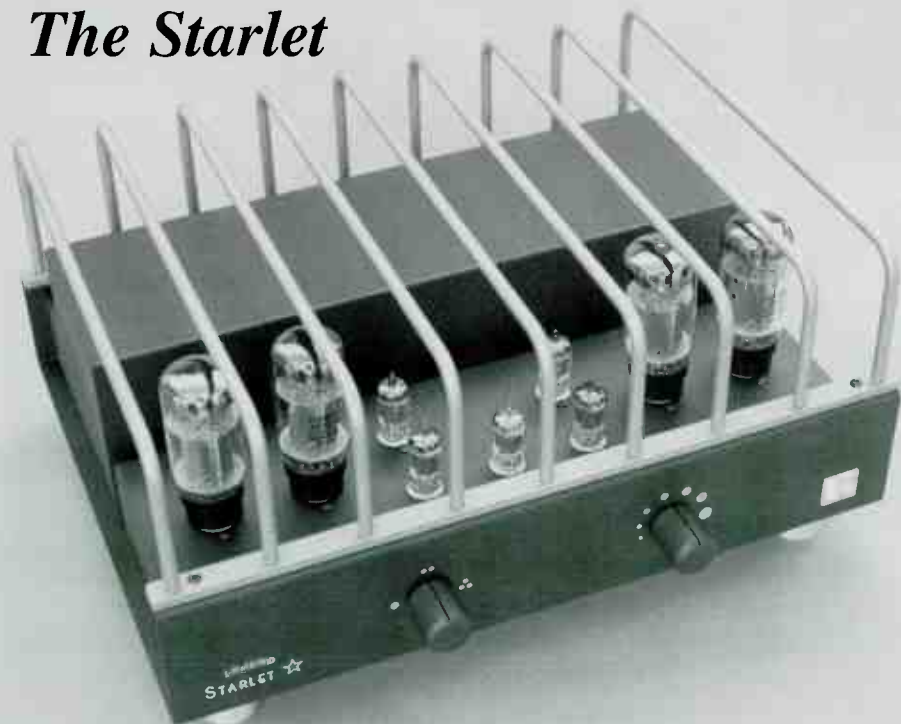
There is the Micaela of Mme. Willaume-Lambert which should not be sampled unless you enjoy pain, as well as Adelaide Andreyeva Von Skilondz, although widely recorded during her career and the teacher of Elizabeth Soderstrom and



Kim Borg, sounds as if Florence Foster Jenkins must have been her favorite pupil. Finally, a performance of the Evening Star aria from *Tannhauser* by the bass, Friedrich Weidemann, is worth the price of the set. Weidemann was widely recorded on other labels and sang

the world premier of *Kindertotenlieder* in 1905 with Mahler conducting. Of course, Edison did not sign him up either. But despite Edison's hearing problems, and thanks to Ward Marston's technical wizardry, we can now sample and enjoy all of these unique vocal auditions.

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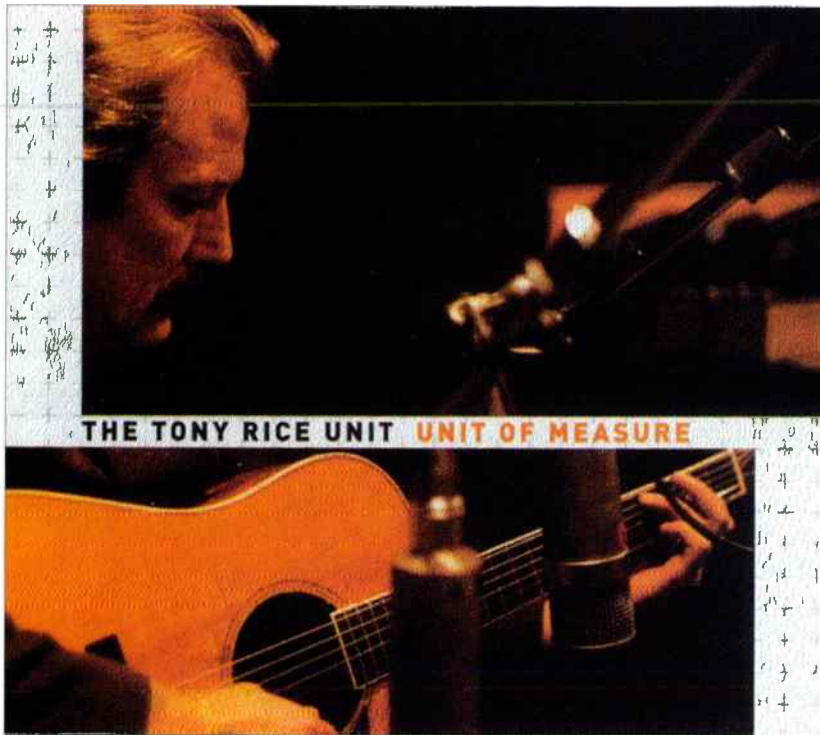
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## Hector Chrest

**T**HOUGH THE YEARS, I have developed an immense appreciation for the Bluegrass genre. The mood of expression and sense of musical freedom for which bluegrass artists have long been noted have captivated my interest and respect. The album that created that spark was the 1977 release by The Tony Rice Unit called *Manzanita* (Rounder CD 0092). This album is considered by many one of the most influential albums of bluegrass history. Unlike previous bluegrass albums, this release lacked the normally present banjo, although it highlighted the impeccable guitar mastery of Tony Rice. Previously, the guitar only provided the rhythm for most bluegrass songs; Rice, influenced by the late Clarence White, brought the guitar to his group's forefront. *Manzanita* and subsequent TRU albums have offered increasingly better levels of musicianship and production technique.

Rice's latest addition, *Unit of Measure*, is a gorgeous reaffirmation of the *Manzanita* phenomenon. With the capable assistance of Tony's brother Wyatt (guitar), Ricky Simpson of the Lonesome River Band (fiddle), Jimmy Gaudreau from the group Chesapeake (mandolin), and Ronnie Simpkins of the Seldom Scene (bass), Tony Rice offers a beautiful collection of 10 songs. The album revisits some of the same territory covered by The Unit throughout the years, but is significant in that it showcases the seemingly unlimited improvisational skills of each of The Unit's members.

The first selection, "Manzanita (1st Variation), is a musical feast that explores the boundaries of the original version but faithfully maintains the musical integrity and melody of the song. Other songs on the album include "The House of the Rising Sun," the hauntingly beautiful "Shenandoah," Django

Reinhardt's "Swing 42," and a live version of the bluegrass classic "Sally Goodin." Together, these songs combine to create a sensible mixture of bluegrass, jazz, swing, and new acoustic music. The sound of Tony's D-28 Martin is presented here with wonderful presence and clarity. The overall recording is superb and worthy of merit. Even the live version of "Sally Goodin" (recorded at the Stewart Theater, North Carolina State University) is very "alive and exciting."

Most Tony Rice fans are aware of his battle with a chronic vocalcord condition that has prevented him from singing on his latest albums. I understand that at this point much of the physical vocalcord damage has been undone and that he is beginning to rebuild his voice. I look forward to future albums that will display both his guitar and vocal talents. I wish him great success. Heartily recommended.





Mike Driscoll



UNTIL A COUPLE of years ago, I had never heard of Greg Brown. Then I saw him perform at a folk festival. You will note that I said "saw," as for one reason or another, I found it very difficult to make out any of his lyrics. Whether it was the sound system, the general level of background noise, or a combination of the two, he just didn't make an impression on me. Then, last September, fearless leader Pitts (Uh, Mike, that's "handsome," rather than "fearless," okay? —gene pitts.) handed me a copy of *Covenant*, with the suggestion of a possible review. After one listen, I thought, "Possible? Try to stop me from writing one! I LOVE THIS DISC!" First of all, there is Brown's songwriting. He writes all of his own material, and he is a true craftsman. Next, his voice is a sort of deep growl, which a friend of mine likes to compare to Tom Waits. (I don't see the similarity, as Brown's voice has a sweetness to it when he gets up into the higher registers, not that he really gets all that that high.)

The songs are all about love, but they are definitely not "silly love songs." (©Paul McCartney, Inc.) Rather, they speak of love gone bad, love lost, love unrequited, love imagined, you get the idea. They tend to be dark sounding, personal statements about the strongest of all emotions. The only two songs on the disc that don't follow that pat-

tern are "Lullaby," which is told from the standpoint of a long-married man, who is still madly in love with his wife. "We've been married all these years, we know each other deeply. Oh my dear, oh my dear, you still make me sleepy.... In your arms I sleep so fine, so well do you meet me. And you can wake me any time, oh babe, I ain't that sleepy." The other, is "Walkin' Daddy," which is either written to his father or his Father, take your choice.

Have you ever heard a song for the first time, and gotten the feeling that, somehow, the writer had been thinking of you? That he had an uncanny insight into your life, and your feelings? Such a song, for me, is "Real Good Friend." "I can't say hold me, I wish I could. I'm feeling so cold, and you're looking so good.... I can't say come to me, but I can't say leave. One thing I can say, I can say believe. Believe I'll love you, until the end. As long as I'm living, you got a real good friend." This one song, at least for me, makes this disc worth the price of admission. (OK, OK, as a reviewer, I got the disc free, but if I HAD to buy it, it would be well worth it.)

"Blues Go Walkin'" is a song in traditional blues form. "Don't fall in love, or your blues will go walkin' 'round." "Living in a Prayer" is about someone who is running from his past, except for one part of it.

"Every time I turn around, some ghost wants to but me a beer. I feel like I'm living in a trashy novel, where plot is the only thing.... You should be here, I should be there." In "Blue Car," Brown sings that "some things, baby, I guess they just ain't meant to be," and his blue car is a "good old car, but the clutch is a little loose, and the brakes are screaming a song called what's the use." The final, hidden bonus track, is a song called "Marriage Chant," where he sings a litany of things that are wrong with marriage, such as, it is silly, and you fight every five minutes, but then says, "I wish I was married ... to you."

The sound on this disc is first rate. (I figured I should say at least something about the sound, you know, to keep all the real audiophiles interested.) Brushes used on the drums on a couple of cuts come through clearly, and with lots of detail, as does Brown's fingerwork on the frets of his guitar. You can clearly hear his fingers sliding up and down the neck of his instrument. Soundstaging is good, with adequate width and depth, but, as I have said before, IT'S THE MUSIC, STUPID! This CD gets the Mike Driscoll seal of approval, which is nothing like the Good Housekeeping seal of approval, and actually has nothing at all to do with seals. BUY IT! You won't be sorry! Did I say that I love this disc.



Dave Marcus

*Jazz*

Bob Mintzer Big Band

*Homage to Count Basie*

dmp CD-529

**B**OB MINTZER'S 15TH CD since 1986 is this *Homage to Count Basie*. It's made up of eight tunes, five associated with Basie and three Mintzer originals. All are arranged by Mintzer in an appropriate style. The band is a 17-piece traditional complement, and as one expects from dmp, this *is* an audiophile recording. As a matter of fact, it's a "live to two-channel, Direct Stream Digital" recording by Tom Jung, the master recordist behind dmp.

Mintzer's original "Havin' Some Fun" leads off the CD, and it's just as it's titled. A lilting theme in the Basie-Hefti style, punctuated by an effervescent tenor solo by Mintzer. "April In Paris" is not the flag-waver that Basie made of it. Instead, it is a nice, warm arrangement with the alto-led saxes stating the theme after an impressionistic lead-in. I felt the first five minutes of this six-minute-long performance could have easily been used behind a modern dance interlude in a film. Phil Markowitz stimulates your imagination with his dancing piano solo. Then the whole band comes in and we shift mood to a more modern era and a sonic tip of the hat to Basie's version and a subtle finale.

"One O'Clock jump" is the only tune originating from the first Basie Band, the 1937 version with Lester Young. All the other tunes are from Basie's '50s unit with Neal Hefti—or at least sound like it. I think the '50s sound works better for this band. It's a long jam performance, and I started to feel like I was watching *The Jerry Lewis Telethon*. This tune is just too affixed in the past for me.

Mintzer's "Lester Jumps Out" is a bouncy, swinging original that could pass for a Hefti original. Phil Markowitz tastefully opens the tune, then the band slides in for a bit, and just before the close, Mintzer takes a jaunty solo. He's reminiscent of Dexter Gordon also of John Coltrane in his sound and style. Trumpeter Scott Wendholt, who clearly admires Clifford Brown and Booker Little, takes a stand-out solo. In fact, everyone acquits themselves very well. A nice performance.

Neal Hefti's "Cute" utilizes flutes and muted trumpets to carry the theme. Gee, that melody sounds familiar. I get a kick out of it. Scott Wendholt is back, soloing on muted trumpet, and he's playing mighty good. Scott Robinson follows with a

forward-moving tenor solo, Michael Davis does a nice turn on trombone, and we're back to that catchy theme. I liked this one.

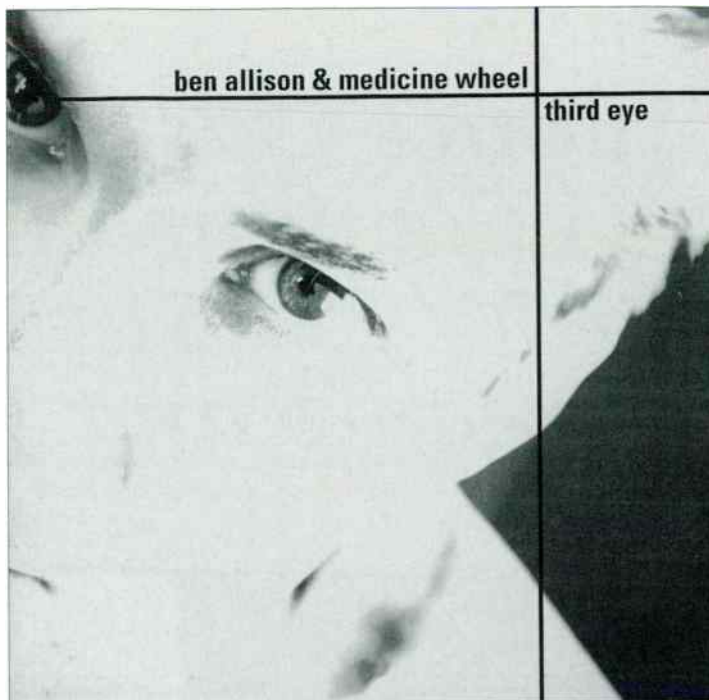
"Home Basie" features Mintzer taking a spirited solo over the beat that spirits usually produce. This would be the Cosmo Kramer turn-out number at Seinfeld's wedding.

I compared "Lil Darlin'" to Basie's original version. I missed Freddie Green's guitar driving the rhythm and linking the solos. Wendell Culley's original muted trumpet solo surpasses in execution and style the open trumpet solo on this re-make. The mood and the arrangement is deferential here, but the original is just so delicate and warm. A nice try but not quite up to the original.

I like Mintzer as a soloist and composer-arranger. I feel Phil Markowitz was perfectly suited for the job at hand. I like most of the soloists

This CD has rich, detailed, dynamic sound with just the right amount of ambience and spatial layering. It's another state-of-the-art recording from Tom Jung. If you like well-recorded big-band jazz, you can luxuriate in this CD.





Ben Allison and Medicine Wheel *Third Eye*  
Palmentto PM 2054

Jack Skowron

**T**HERE'S A LOT of interesting jazz out there right now (much of it being released by small, independent labels. This is the second disc from this group, a medium-sized, shifting aggregation of eight musicians. Ben Allison, a bassist, formed the Jazz Composers Collective in New York in the early '90s and is part of The Herbie Nichols Project, which has recorded for Soul Note. Like Nichols, he has a penchant for interesting compositions, with multiple sections, intros, and codas.

From the opening seconds of "Four Folk Songs," it's clear something unique and special is happening. An unusual ostinato (where the bass sounds kalimba-like) with kaleidoscopic swirls of notes leads to a funky riff, then a lovely "C" section of bowed cello and soprano sax. Michael Blake solos on soprano, playing some "outside," then a brief reprise of the opening impres-

sionistic chord riffing. Herbie Nichols' lovely "Love Is Proximity," a simple, floating melody over a complex, shifting chord bed, changes moods often, and features fine solos (Frank Kimbrough's piano, Blake and Allison). "Kush" takes us to North Africa (by way of the Delta), driving hard, with an intense oud solo (Ara Dinkjian). The punny "Random Sex And Violins" is a dark, lyrical, Booker Little-influenced tune (fiery flugelhorn solo — not what the instrument is known for — by Ron Horton). On "Mantra," Allison utilizes many effects, hitting his bass with a drumstick, and having Kimbrough play both prepared piano (with a cymbal) and toy piano during the head. The tune shifts meters, even abandons meter for its last few measures. While this may sound over-busy or academic, Allison's ear for drama and lovely, hummable melodies

maintains an organic flow. "A Day in the Life of Man Ray" turns this on its head, utilizing the harmonies of Ellington's "Azure." while the melody is mostly pared down to shimmering arpeggios (there's a melodic bass solo by the leader). "Andrew" is a lovely ballad, while "Hot Head" and "Pot Head" are the same tune yin/yang style, the former agitated, up-tempo and aggressive, the latter a dreamy reprise in slo-mo.

The soloists are all fine, with improvising being closely tethered to the compositions (the composing and arranging are paramount). Sonics are quite good, instruments being widely spaced across the stage. Instrumental timbres, while ok, are not up to the best I've heard.

A fine effort from a talented musician, composer, and arranger. Get ye forth and purchase. And when you get home, play ye it!

# *Linn's Classik, A Combined CD Player, AM/FM Tuner, Preamp and Amplifier*



**I**F IT LOOKS MID-FI, has the bells and whistle of mid-fi, and quacks like mid-fi, then it must be a mid-fi component. Right? A casual look at Linn's Classik might suggest just that. Give the Classik a chance to start "quacking" and it soon becomes apparent that this little black box from Scotland belongs in

another category. What elevates the Classik above mid-fi products is the care and thoroughness of its operational design, its solid build quality, and a preamplifier/amplifier with power and sound quality that are most definitely not mid-fi. With these sonic strengths Linn's little multi-function component is quite

able to compete with some of the big guys in the high-end arena.

## **Description**

The Classik "feels" heavier than its 13 pounds, but this may be a sort of illusion because of its small volume, about the size of a three-inch stack of LPs in their dust jackets.



Linn has built the Classik into the same handsomely crafted, black alloy cabinet that has been their mainstay for more than a decade. Within this relatively small space are housed an AM/FM tuner, CD player, clock/timer, preamplifier, and a 75-watt-per-channel stereo amplifier. (Linn rates the amplifier section as 75 wpc into 4 ohms, 50 wpc into 8 ohms.) But, unlike Ford's original Model A, the Classik is available in more than traditional black. Finishes also come in Pacific blue, Arctic white, silver, and Atlantik green. (Instead of "traditional black" shouldn't Linn's name have been "basiK blaK?")

The front panel consists of an LED display screen, 11 control keys, a quarter-inch headphone jack powered by the preamp, a CD drawer, and an on/off power button. Except for the initial setup, the panel controls can be ignored in favor of the remote. Even the power button can be switched on and forgotten since the unit pulls less than three watts in "stand-by" mode and can be fully activated with a touch of the remote.

The rear panel has a receptacle for a removable, grounded a.c. power cord and Linn supplies one that's six feet in length. Next to it is an a.c. power output socket that is switched and can be controlled by the Classik's internal timer. An adapter for American a.c. plugs is needed but not supplied though one is available from Linn. Speaker terminals look solid and conform to EEC (European Economic Community) standards. Included with the Classik are eight foot runs of their proprietary speaker cable, terminated to fit.

Below the connections for supplied FM and AM antennas are five pairs of gold-plated RCA sockets. Three are for high-level inputs and are marked "AUX," "Tape 1," and

"Tape 2." Outputs are "Tape 2" for line-level pass-through or recording and "Pre" providing a preamplifier output for an external amplifier.

The two-by-eight-inch remote reflects the care and thoroughness of Linn's design. The 52 buttons

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### **Care and thoroughness are what distinguish Linn's Classik from the usual all-in-one units or systems.**

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seemed daunting at first but they are logically grouped and easy to read, with each button controlling a single function. Using the remote couldn't be simpler but more about that in the "Operation" part of this review.

#### **Setup**

The Classik can be placed almost anywhere. From the front of the faceplate to the rear panel 12¾ inches are need. Better add another 2½ inches for connections including the fairly stiff power cord. The top is a solid sheet of metal — no slots, no louvers, no worry about dust or accidental spills. And despite the lack of heat dissipating vents or external heat sinks the Classik runs cool. After hours of use at moderately loud levels it barely got warm to the touch.

Part of the initial setup includes setting the clock, selecting radio frequencies for the presets (there's room for 80), and possibly changing factory settings for the mute threshold in the tuner section and initial volume levels for the tuner and CD when they're first switched on.

Once the setup is complete, the Classik should simply be left with the front panel on/off switched on. Even if a.c. power is interrupted, time, presets, and settings will remain in the Classik's memory for several hours.

#### **Operation**

Everything can be controlled with the multi function keys on the front panel but it's a pain. In practice the remote is much, much easier. Press "TUN" and the most recently used radio station ramps up to a preset volume level. Change stations through the presets or by scanning via the "SCAN" button or use "TUNE" and "+/-" buttons.

Press "OPEN" for the CD transport, and the tuner ramps down quickly and the CD drawer slides out. I like

that. With remote in one hand and a CD in the other, the drawer opens, ready to receive the next CD as I lumber out of my listening chair to change discs. Each touch of the "DISPLAY" button changes the display — frame-shifting from a listing of track and index numbers, elapsed track time, remaining track time, elapsed CD time, and remaining CD time. There are the usual bi-directional skip and search functions, but there is an index function as well. Tracks can also be selected using the numerical keypad on the remote. The "INTRO" button can be used to preview a CD, playing a few seconds of each track, and there are repeat, shuffle and random play options. Very flexible indeed

The preamplifier section has even greater flexibility. Volume is controlled by plus and minus buttons. Changes are made in single-dB increments and are displayed numerically. Push "MUTE" and volume quickly ramps down to a zero setting. Push "MUTE" again and just as quickly volume climbs to its former level. Buttons marked "L" and "R" are used to change balance over 18 graduated steps. Bass and treble controls are included and these circuits are bypassed in the null position. Centered at 31 Hz and 6.4KHz respectively, they can be increased or decrease up to 14 dB in 2-dB steps. Like the other con-

trols, the display screen provides a numerical image of the selected setting. The remote also permits choosing among the three external line level inputs in place of either the self-contained tuner or CD player.

Inserting a standard headphone plug into the quarter-inch jack on the front panel switches off preamp and amplifier outputs while maintaining operation of all the front-panel and remote controls. The Classik can also be used as a clock/alarm/timer, turning the unit on and off as well as switching the back panel's a.c. outlet. I set the clock but I did not evaluate the timing features.

### Listening

Linn could not possibly hope their Classik would be widely accepted based on build quality, compactness, ease of use, and flexibility alone. If it didn't sound right Linn would have nothing more than some tasty frosting slathered on top of a stale, tasteless cake. Fortunately, Linn has built a preamp/amplifier that that does just what it supposed to do. It sounds right. Listening to the Classik's preamp/amplifier, sep-

arated from the built-in tuner and CD player, makes one realize just how good this section of the unit is. It mated well with a every line-level source unit I tried and with a variety of speakers including WATT/Puppy

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## While my Audio Research system does do a better job overall, I was truly beguiled by Linn's Classik.

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V.1s, Quad Pro 63s, Rogers LS3/5As and Linn Kans. Grado Signature HP 1000 headphones were equally distortion free and more than adequately powered by the Classik's preamplifier section.

The sound of the Classik's preamp/amplifier has none of the harshness often associated with solid-state components. Slightly recessive on top, warm and smooth in the mid-range, it sounds more like my Audio Research tube gear than any transistor amplifier I have used. Bass is firm, rhythmic, and transients are crisp. Overall, one could live with this preamp/amplifier and not feel that some part of the

musical presentation was annoyingly lacking. Listening for extended periods felt relaxed and satisfying, in part because there is nothing irritating or fatiguing about the sound.

After several weeks of using the Classik happily and exclusively, I did a side by side comparison with \$8,000 worth of current production Audio Research amplification. It was only then that I realized how beguiled I had been by the Classik. Clearly the Audio Research equipment was superior, and superior in every important sonic parameter, but that doesn't negate the simple truth that the Classik is able to amplify music honestly and provide a rewarding, involving listening experience.

The built-in CD player, as described in the "operation" part of this review, has as many features as anyone could hope for and then some. By running another CD player into the Classik's auxiliary input and playing identical CDs simultaneously in each unit, it was possible to switch back and forth for comparison purposes. Since the Classik allows the user to set volume levels for each input independently level matching, while switching between the two, was no problem.

The Classik's CD unit handily beat the respected Optimus CD 3400. When a comparison was made with Linn's recently discontinued Karik/Numerik and the discontinued Audio Research CD1/DAC2 the Classik's CD player fell short. The Classik presents a comparatively flat image, lacking the rhythmic cohesiveness of both comparison units, and the smooth airiness of the Karik/Numerik. However, it's easy to be spoiled by the sound of the Audio Research and Linn players, which cost over \$6,000 each, three times the cost of a Classik. The CD part of the Classik is perfectly satisfactory but it is not blessed with the

## NOTES

**Linn Classik AM/FM, CD, Preamplifier/Amplifier** with handset, \$1950.00. Imported by Linn, Inc., 4540 Southside Blvd., Suite 402, Jacksonville, FL 32216. Telephone 904/645 5242, fax 904/645-7275, internet <http://www.linn.co.uk>.

### Associated Equipment

Linn Karik / Numerik, Audio Research CD1/DAC2, and Optimus CD-3400 CD players; Audio Research LS16 preamplifier; G&G Discoveries custom passive preamp, Audio Research VT100MKII and Sunfire Signature amplifiers; Quad Pro 63, Wilson WATT/Puppy 5.1, Rogers LS3/5A, and Linn Kan speakers; Joseph Grado Signature HP 1000 headphones; Linn and Music Meter RCA-type interconnects; Audio Research balanced interconnect; Tara RSC Master Generation 2 and Linn speaker cable; ASC Tube Traps; C&G Discoveries PonTunes, and Target stands.



unusually fine sonics found in the preamp/amplifier section.

Remote in hand, the tuner section is also very easy to use. Push a single button and the user can switch from listening to a CD to the last used AM or FM station. The AM section, with the supplied antenna, is adequate. Period. Fine for picking up strong signals for news, weather and traffic reports. But then again so is a kitchen radio. The advantage here is being able to use a preset on the remote, press a button, get the desired station, and then go back to the previous program material.

I used the FM section with the supplied dipole antenna extensively. It was used as intended, integrated with Classik's amplification, and as a tuner, using the Classik's tape output into my main system. The FM sound was clean, clear, free of whistles and birdies. At a distance of some 20 miles from the Empire State Building's broadcast antenna, I was able to receive strong clear signals from favorite stations.

It's difficult for me to evaluate the FM sound. When WQXR or WNYC played a CD that was also in my collection, I would often load my copy into either the Classik's CD player or an attached auxiliary CD player. The sound of the CD on the FM broadcast was consistently inferior, but not objectionably. Is this the result of the station's CD player and the chain of components between studio and the receiving tuner or is it caused by limitations of the Classik's FM section? I can't answer that question, but the bottom line for me is that I can listen happily to the FM section, either as part of the Classik or as a tuner feeding my primary system, and happily listen for hours without fatigue or irritation.

### Summary and Recommendations

It should be obvious that I like Linn's Classik. I intend to purchase the review sample and use it as the heart of a secondary system, a

bench-mark reference for preamp/amplifiers under \$2,000, and as an evaluative tool when it is necessary to precisely match or replicate volume levels. Linn has high hopes for the Classik's success. They envision it widely accepted and as they put it, placed "in a kitchen, bedroom, living or student room." Based on this audition Linn's goal seems quite reasonable.

Anyone who is interested in the concept of a fine-sounding preamp/amplifier combined with a competent CD player and clean, distortion-free FM tuner with adequate AM should start looking and listening here. The Classik's many features, including tuner presets, clock/timer, balance, and treble and bass controls, all logically laid out on an easy to use 52-button remote make using the unit a joy. My Classik was hand assembled at Linn's factory, just outside of Glasgow by Esther Caldwell. Then she tested and safely packed it for shipment. Thanks Esther, for caring.



**MOON**

"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.**

"Simaudio deserves recognition as a solid state brand of first rank, alongside well known luminaries such as Jeff Rowland, Krell and Levinson." **Moon P-5 & W-5 - International Audio Review #80 - 1999.**

"The Simaudio Moon P-5/W-5 is truly a worthy world-class reference-level 'statement' design package." **David Robinson - Positive Feedback - Vol. 8 #2, 1999.**

"I can enthusiastically recommend the Moon I-5 one of high-end audio's undiscovered gems." **Robert Harley - FI Magazine - February 1999.**

"The I-5 is a high-quality integrated amplifier that will appeal to anyone looking for a taste of the best." **Doug Schneider - Soundstage! - May 1999.**

"The key components to its sonic character are openness, rhythmic liveliness, and freedom from noise." **P-5003 - Neil Gader - The Absolute Sound - no. 121**

"... This is the cream of the crop so far. At its price, it is definitely one to check out." **I-5080 - Steve Lefkowitz - Listener Magazine - Summer 1999.**

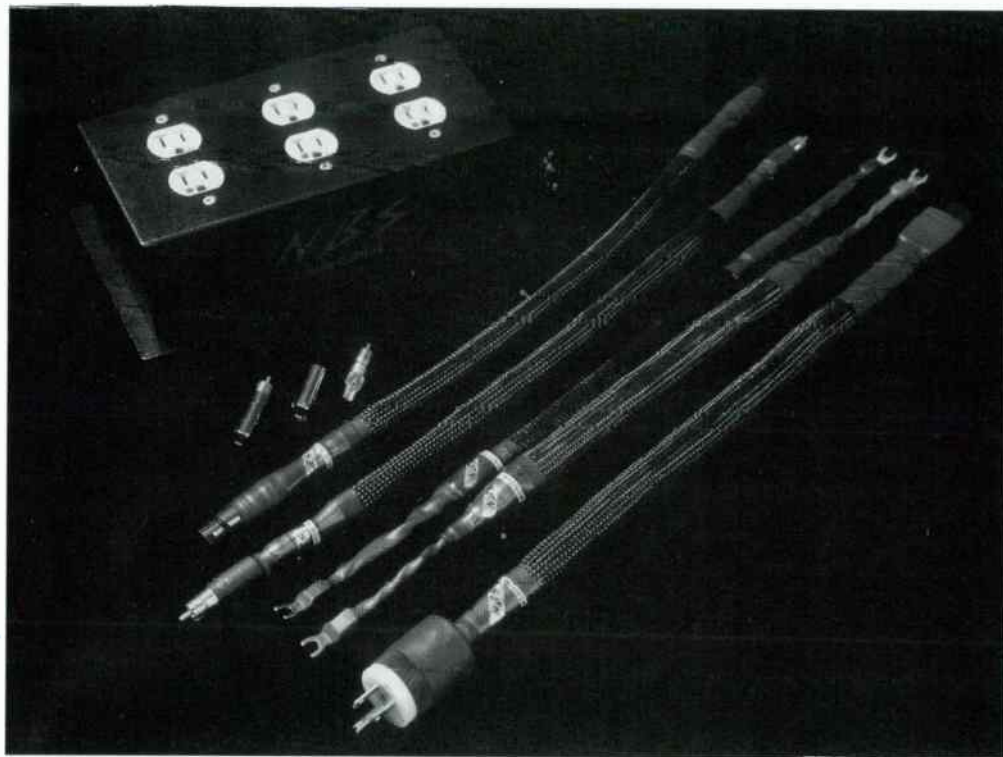
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# NBS Monitor II Audio Cables

Bascom H. King



**P**RIOR TO GETTING these NBS cables for review, I had some more casual experience with them in systems using Arnie Nudell's Genesis speakers at the Genesis factory and at CES shows. Since I was very impressed with these systems and they used NBS cables exclusively, I wanted to try out some of the firm's digital cables to see what they might do in my system. When I contacted Walter Fields, proprietor of NBS, about a loan, he suggested that it would be more meaningful to experience a complete set. This meant power, audio interconnect, speaker, and digital cables — the whole shebang. NBS, like most cable companies, offers various grades with corresponding pricing. The price for a

complete set of top-of-the-line NBS cables is truly astronomical. When Mr. Fields asked me what the rough value of my system was, he said his Monitor II cables would be appropriate; this is two levels down from his top grade, the Monitor 0 line.

What I received were 6 a.c. power cords, an a.c. outlet box called the NBS Black Box, a pair of six-foot speaker cables, two pairs of one-meter unbalanced interconnects, two one-meter AES/EBU balanced digital cables, and a one-meter unbalanced digital cable. The invoice for these Monitor II cables, on review loan, was some \$17,000!

I then set about installing all of these wires in my system. The NBS Black Box was used to power my

signal-source gear which consisted, initially, of a PS Audio Lambda II Special CD transport, a Genesis Digital Lens, and a Manley Labs Designer Reference D/A converter via three of the NBS a.c. power cords. A PS Audio Power Plant P300 provided the a.c. power for the Black Box using another of the NBS a.c. power cords. For my initial listening and breaking in, I decided to use my Quicksilver Audio M-135 tube amps and my usual system pre-amp, a passive First Sound Reference II. The remaining two a.c. power cords were used to power the power amplifiers directly off the wall outlets. Connections between the CD transport, the Digital Lens, and the D/A converter was with the



balanced NBS cables. Audio connections between the D/A converter out to preamp in and preamp out to power amp ins were with the unbalanced NBS cables. Loudspeakers were Genesis APM-1s.

After powering the system up, I just started to play various pieces of music, not really knowing what to expect but, of course, hoping for great things. After listening for an hour or so, it struck me that this combination of known equipment was sounding mighty good.

After listening critically for another week or two, it struck me that the system was sounding very good, indeed. Compared to the way my system sounded with the odd assemblage of cables I'd used before, there generally was greater smoothness and freedom from irritation, with more resolution and inner detail. I felt I was enjoying the music more. For instance, on one of my current favorite CDs, Peter Paul & Mary's *In The Wind*, Warner Brothers 9 26224-2, more inner detail was apparent in my favorite cuts, "Polly Von" and "Freight Train." It was easier to separate voices when things got complex.

I noted a similar effect on other current favorites like Gillian Welch's *Revival* (Alm Sounds AMSD-80006) and Crosby and Nash's *Another Stoney Evening*, GDCD 4057. In one of my reference CDs, *CD No. 10 Test* from the January '98 *Revue Du Son*, a French hi-fi magazine, cut 16 has some great sounds of an orchestra tuning up. I could easily hear more deeply into this recording and make out more of what the various instruments were doing.

Further along in the review period, I added some new gear from Perpetual Technologies, their P-1A resolution enhancer and upsampler. I used the P-1A to upsample the 44.1-kHz data stream from my CD transport to 96 kHz. The upsampled output was then passed to either

their P-3A D/A converter or an experimental 96-kHz D/A converter. Additionally, a Manley Labs Wave tube preamp was used with Quicksilver Silver 60 mono, tube power amps to drive Thiel 7.2 speakers. With this arrangement, and using the NBS cables, I again got the impression of superior sound with great resolution, space, detail, and musical enjoyment.

Frequently, one gets a better measure of a component's sonic attributes when it is removed from one's system. When I packed up the NBS cables and went back to my previous cables, there was some sonic letdown to be sure. One of the things I noticed about my system without the NBS cables, was that when I sat in my usual focused listening position, the apparent frequency balance was more prominent in the lower midrange than when I listened elsewhere in the room. This made some of my classical guitar CDs sound considerably less realistic, though this was ameliorated somewhat by changing the speaker cables from Madrigal Labs HF2.5C to my prior reference Kimber Bi-Focal XL. Oh, well, back to mixing and matching of system components and cables to chase the best sound. All in all, I must say, it was with some regret that I had to send the NBS cables back.

At one point in the review period, I asked Walter Fields for some

more technical information on his cable making philosophy. To my surprise, he refused to give any more information beyond that in his literature. The cables appear to be well made using high-quality connectors. One thing about these cables — they are quite stiff and, as a result, can be quite difficult to connect and route in tight confines. Unusually, the NBS speaker cables are two separate wires with no means to hold them together as a pair. The return wire, identified with black sheathing at both ends, is about one third the diameter of the hot wire, identified with red sheathing at the ends.

Although the sonic improvements made by these cables was noticeable and significant, the matter of their expense related to sonic improvement surely must be considered. On the one hand, one might easily say it is crazy to spend this kind of money for cables! But, on the other hand, if one considers cables as a system component and compares their expense to, say, an excellent high-end power amplifier, the expenditure makes more sense.

In conclusion, I felt the sonic improvement of the cables might be comparable to that of a superior power amplifier. For those with the wherewithall and inclination to have a superior sound system, the NBS line of cables can assist in their quest.

## NOTES

**NBS Monitor II Audio Cables, [WALTER—Help on the prices here; thanks. Gene Pitts]** NBS Electronics, Inc., 155 Fifth Avenue South, Suite 455, Minneapolis, MN 55401; phone 612/332-2973, fax 612/339-8750, e-mail [nbscable@nbscables.com](mailto:nbscable@nbscables.com).

### Associated Equipment

PS Audio Lambda II Special CD transport, Genesis Digital Lens, Manley Labs Designer Reference D/A converter, PS Audio Power Plant, Quicksilver Audio M-135 tube amps, First Sound Reference II passive preamp, and Genesis APM-1s loudspeakers.

# I-Jam IJ-101 MP3 Player



**T**HAT WAS MY FIRST comment on unpacking the I-Jam IJ-101 player. Now, you wouldn't think that FM is a big deal, but have you noticed, very few CD or MP3 players include a radio. Which is a shame, after all, you can't (or don't want to) listen to prerecorded stuff all the time and in my section of the country, it's absolutely essential that you keep up with what the Red Sox or Patriots are doing. The inclusion of FM is surely no major additional cost or space, but really adds value in a portable unit. To prove that point, the IJ-101 is claimed to be the smallest MP3 player on the market today and I believe it. Making it any smaller would get in the way of managing controls.

The IJ-101 is one of the new breed of players which can play

back MP3 music files downloaded from the Internet and transferred to the player. It's similar to a Walkman-type product, but has no moving parts and therefore runs quite efficiently.

There are three downsides to all of these devices so let me get them out of the way.

There's only so much music you can carry. The IJ-101 comes with two tiny (about the size of a thumbnail) memory modules ("media cards") which each hold 16 mb of memory. An impressive amount of ram for the size of the chip, but still, that might only hold anywhere from four to eight songs, depending...

1. The music quality is highly variable. Don't be misled by the fact that it's "digital". Somebody created that MP3 file and the skill,

compression and components used can make a huge difference.

2. You have to have an "interface," something to hook up to the computer so that you can transfer files and you'll need to install software drivers.

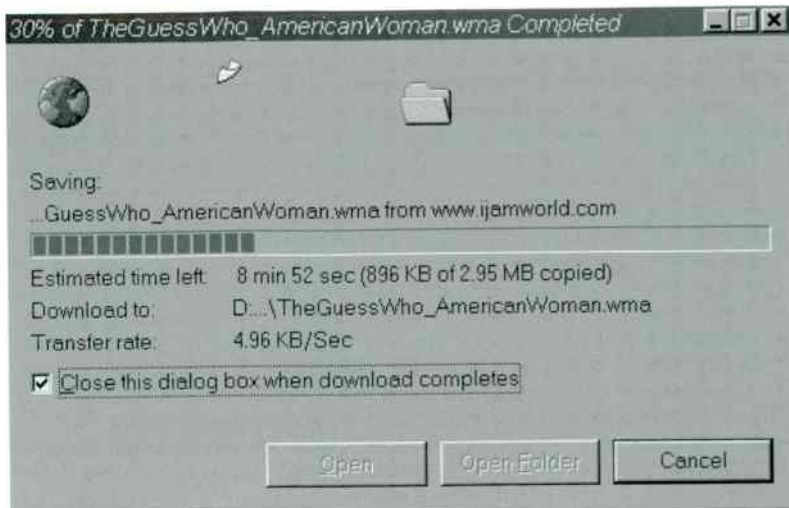
My version of the I-Jam IJ-101 player came with a parallel interface, probably because virtually all computers can use this. Price for the I-Jam on the Internet is \$219.00. If you have a newer computer which has the Universal Serial Bus (USB) get that version of the I-Jam by all means, even though it's priced \$30.00 higher. A USB connection is simpler to set up and maintain. Rather than actually connecting the player to the computer, you must connect a Media Card reader. The memory cards are loaded through



this reader and can then be plugged into the player. Additional cards can be purchased for \$49.95 or \$79.95 for two. Note that these cards are so small, that writing something like track titles on them is almost impossible. And they can literally fall through the cracks (as I discovered on my deck).

I connected the I-Jam "interface" media card into the parallel port behind an aging Pentium 200 computer. An extra LPT socket attached to the cord (and not mentioned in the manual) allowed me to continue to use one of the other devices that I usually attach (my video camera and my printer.) This was much appreciated. It was also necessary to plug a connection into the keyboard port (a provided splitter lets you connect your keyboard as well).

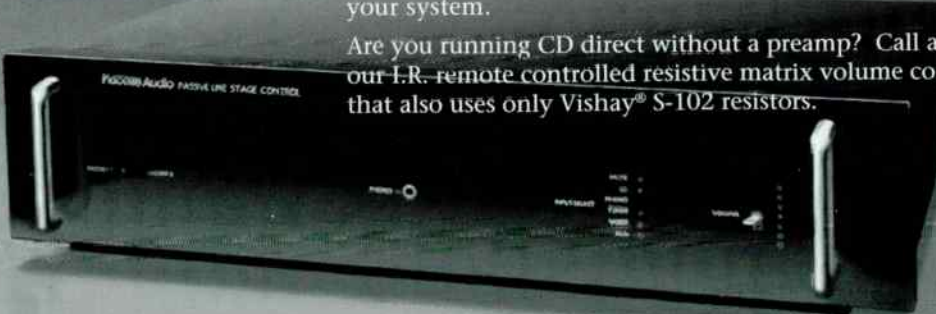
Software included is an MP3 file player (MusicMatch Jukebox V.4 ) which can play, record and connect to the Internet to download files. The installation CD launched immediately on insertion, recognized the



media card reader, and installed the drivers and programs. Things went reasonably well until the final setup when the mouse locked up. However, I was able to use the keyboard to shut down Windows and allow a restart. On startup, all drivers were recognized and all software was working. The Media Card holding the memory chips assigned a drive letter, and I was able to drag MP3 files directly to the card.

**Downloading The Guess Who's American Woman. The I-Jam produces the best sound of any MP3 unit tested so far.**

Transfer was at somewhat glacial speed. This system was being stressed to its limit on file transfer and recording though playing mp3 files worked fine. An install on a laptop with an AMD 380 CPU set up completely flawless and faster.



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Indeed, I have found laptops to be ideal for connecting these players. A brief install on a desktop machine with an Athlon 700 got the software running even faster. The included software was easy to operate and had a good help section.

I found the I-Jam player to be a delight to use. The controls are logically placed and intuitive to use.

Two large, gold buttons control FM/MPG play and Start/Stop. Six buttons on the front are used for volume, forward, backward, A to B segment, repeat and random play. A power switch on the right is used to turn off the unit. A LCD display shows status but is just barely adequately lit in the dark.

FM is better than one might think

if you manual tune. The stereo and seek thresholds are set too high for all but local stations, but I found that by manual tuning I could get stations 40 miles away. Quality was good for casual listening.

I listened to the I-Jam with a variety of music and found the reproduction to be the best I have heard from any portable MP3 player. Vocals are natural, bass is solid and volume range was more than adequate for any headphone I tried. The supplied headphones are a notch or two above those usually supplied with such units (though my Grado SR 80's still added some bass). Sound quality was shifted somewhat towards the high frequencies, though not unpleasant. When there was good high frequency content the player made the most of it, but some MP3 files downloaded from amateur sites sounded a bit shrill.

This player could extract excellent sound when MP3 files were properly created. Classical music displayed excellent dynamic range, noise (what noise?) was unobtrusive and horns had a nice bite to them. The manufacturer claims that this is because of a new, embedded digital audio software (Dadio Digital Audio Software from iObjects ). While I can't tell you that this software is responsible for it, I can tell you it sounds great.

I showed the player to a lot of people and, without exception, everyone liked it. My son thought it was ideal for use while running and exercising. Most people asked where you could buy it and only those who aren't familiar with computers were put off by its required interface. The I-Jam may not be perfect, but it's as close to it as any MP3 player has come!

Information on "Dadio" is available from Objects: <http://www.iobjects.com/>

Player information and prices at <http://www.ijamworld.com>.

## MUSICMATCH JUKEBOX

The I-Jam player came with version 4 of MusicMatch Jukebox, a software program designed to play and record MP3 files. You can get a free copy of version 5 from their website [www.musicmatch.com](http://www.musicmatch.com), as I did after using version 4 for two weeks. An even more comprehensive player/recorder (the "Plus" version) is available for \$19.99. The site also includes lots of files for download.

The Music Match Jukebox is a solid entry in the MP3 player software market. Like most, it almost insists on connecting to the internet immediately, and if you don't watch your setting carefully you will have given it permission to upload information about your listening habits.

The threat to privacy and involuntary dial up having been defeated and dealt with, I found the player well laid out and easy to use; on my Athlon computer. I didn't dare install the beast on my older systems. While not quite as massive as the Windows Media Player, the MusicMatch still requires some significant processor power. Some of the download may be due to cosmetics: the program includes several "themes" so that the interface colors can be changed.

I downloaded some MP3 files from the web site the player led me to as well as other sites.

While there is no shortage of MP3 files available for download, think twice before you do. A classic rock song can require 10 to twelve minutes to download. A few sites let you line up a whole "shopping basket" of MP3 files and you might consider downloading those in the dead of night.

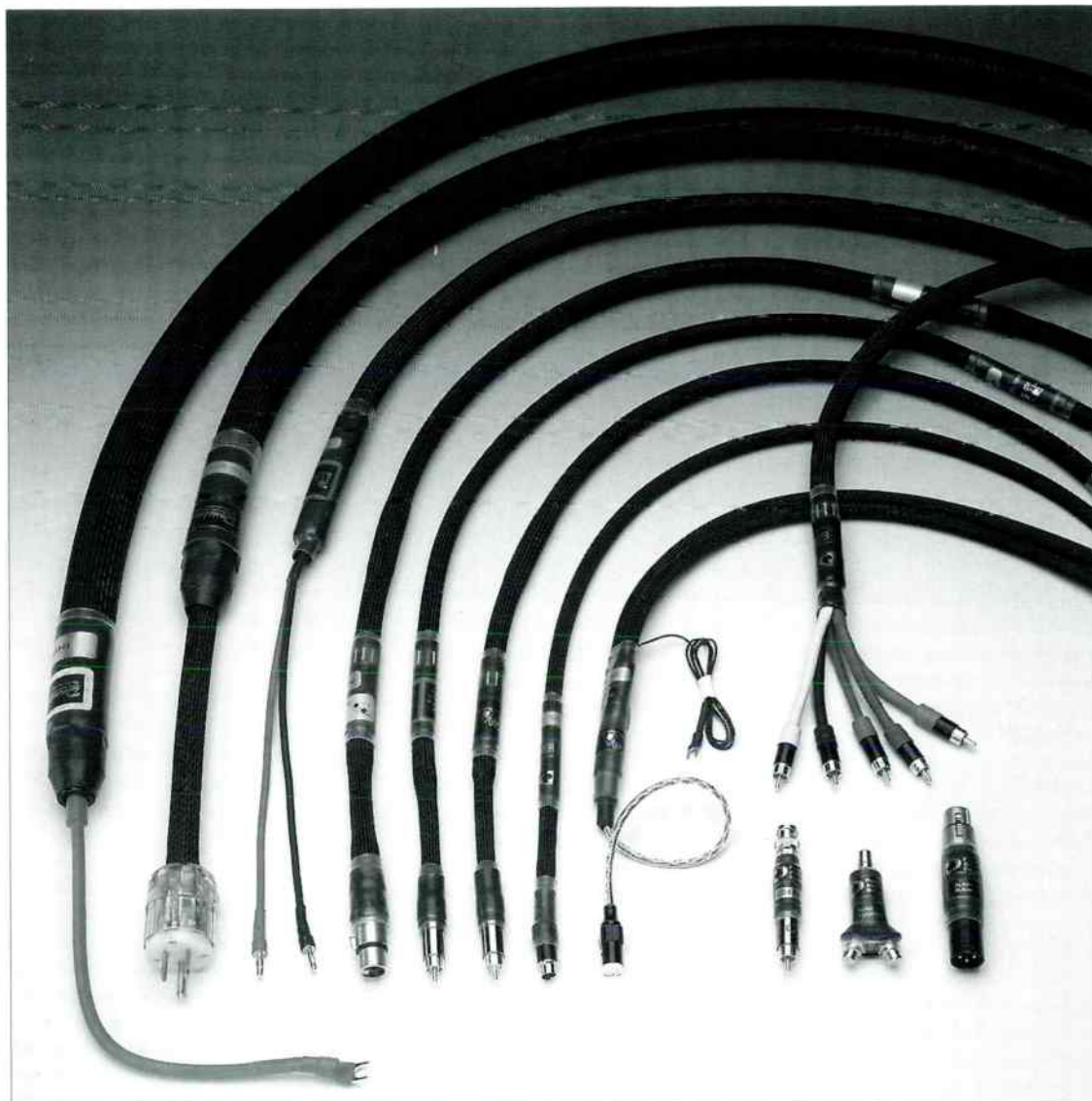
The MusicMatch was easy to use for recording from the line-in, where I had limited input quality and for converting and copying music files. I found it allows for several recording quality settings including 160 KBPS with oversampling, 128 KBPS, and 64kbps.

Recording results were pretty good, considering the input. Copying music files and converting formats yielded impressive results at the higher rates. You'd be hard pressed to hear the difference between 160 and 128, but with the I-Jam player I could hear clearly hear the difference between 128 and 64kbps. Unfortunately, all too many MP3 files available on the Internet are recorded at the dismal 64kbps.

I used the MusicMatch Jukebox, Microsoft Windows Media Player 7 and Winamp, ([www.winamp.com](http://www.winamp.com)) to listen to a wide range of music. I slightly prefer the interface of the Windows Player but found no consistent difference in listening quality among the players. Those who use geriatric computers or just want programs that respond quickly might prefer Winamp, which is quite modern, has a garish interface, is a smaller download, and a much faster running program. I ended up assigning most music associations to Winamp because of its speed. I just hate clicking and waiting!

# Purist Audio Dominus Cables

Karl Lozier



“Hi, I’m Jim Aud, president of Purist Audio,” announced the voice through my phone. “The editor of *The Audiophile Voice*, Gene Pitts, said you would review any of my products that I send to you.” “If Gene said it,” I replied, “then that’s correct.” “What’s the length of your wires and cables?” Jim continued. “Which ones?” I quickly queried,

“the interconnects or the loudspeaker cables?” “All of them,” said Aud, “from the wall outlets to all the equipment, from the tonearm out to the preamp and everything else connected to the preamp and, of course, the speaker connections,” he responded. I complied and mentioned in closing, “Don’t rush, I’m not through with another review,

which I have to complete that before starting anything else.” “Fine,” he answered, saying he wanted his products reviewed as a system, not individually. Three days later, a very heavy air freight package arrived at my office; it resisted my first effort to move it. The package contained only Purist cables and wire products.



Close up inspection revealed impressive products. Phrases such as "heavy-duty," "professional" and "impressively high-tech" passed through my mind. Connectors were superbly finished and properly correctly fit all my equipment, no sloppiness and no excessively tight connections. The cabling (the stuff between the connectors) is basically all black, covered with an apparently extremely tough and durable 3M-treated, black-nylon mesh material. Its surface finish is relatively shiny, call it semi-gloss. Most of the cabling in the Purist's Dominus line is approximately 1¼ inches in diameter. Fortunately for my installation, the last few inches at the connectors are very flexible, and this is also true of the power cords. Be forewarned, however, the main body of these cables will not make a 90-degree turn in a short distance. With a lightweight piece of equipment (such as some DVD or CD players or cassette tape decks), attempting a short-radius turn may result in substantial movement of the equipment! This may be partly due to hydraulic pressure. Huh? These top-of-the-line, obviously labor-intensive cables are unique in at least one characteristic. Under the mesh protective layer are two vinyl layers. Between them, Aud's cutaway illustrations show a "fluid shield," (thus my tongue-in-cheek "hydraulic").

To quote from the Purist literature, "these cables are unique in the use of a fluid-filled outer jacket to surround the conductors.... The proprietary fluid within this jacket provides both airborne and mechanical isolation, helping to filter out unwanted electromagnetic fields and radio frequency interferences (e.m.i. and r.f.i.)" At a recent CES, when I asked Aud if the fluid contained metallic ions, he said, "Yes." When I asked if he would say

which ones, he replied, "No." Some other cable companies have the same goals, reduction of r.f.i. and e.m.i., typically they use two different and separate approaches to tackle this pair of problems. The Purist Dominus series adds braided

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### **One of the main design goals for these cables is reduction of r.f. and other interference.**

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alloy shielding in both their RCA (unbalanced) and balanced interconnects. The power cords substitute foil shields for braided, and then "frost the cake" with an integral magnetic field control device. All these designs feature extremely complex combinations of metal alloys (including silver, copper, gold and platinum), cryogenic treatment, and multi-gauge conductors in both solid core and stranded. There is a wealth of detail and thought in these Purist Audio products; be advised that the firm offers six more-moderately-priced product lines in addition to the Dominus.

At about the same time I received the Purist cables, I had just restarted a review of several Reference Recording's CDs, so it seemed to make sense to focus on those recordings for my listening sessions with the Purist cables, though I also used other favorite CDs as well as three LPs. Listening results were consistent, regardless of the kind of music being played, from large-scale classical (*Mephisto & Co.* RR-82CD) to vocals (*Postcards* RR-61CD) to big-band and swing (*From the Age of Swing* RR-59CD) or solo instrumentalists (INK 96/24 super audio disc Chesky DVD-179). In order the preceding performers are the Minnesota Orchestra, the Turtle Creek Chorale, Dick Hyman and Livingston Taylor.

The first thing I did after installation was to "break-in" the cables with Purist's System Enhancer Revision-B, a CD the firm developed for that specific purpose.

I first installed Purist's Dominus interconnects between all my audio equipment, and then replaced all of the removable power cords in my system with the Purist a.c. power cords. Listening results were most impressive. The resulting sound appeared richer and fuller with a notably quieter background. My belief is

that the credit for this result goes to their all-out shielding efforts, though I've never been previously aware of interference problems in my location. Using their system of cables resulted in an unusually smooth and sweet high-end, with this effect starting in the upper mid-range. Well, was the resulting sound almost perfect? Perhaps not, but it sure was good, really good!

Foremost, I am a music lover, preferring live classical sounds most; I believe Jim Aud is as well. Corroborating evidence for this reviewer was his use of Roger West's superb Sound Labs electrostatic speakers at the last Las Vegas CES with results that would warm the cockles of any concertgoer's heart, despite a room too small for optimum results. I'm under the definite impression that Jim has regularly and meticulously developed each aspect in his cable system over the years. I can easily visualize him tweaking each one, night after night, to get as close as possible to concert hall realism. Aud's Dominus line is not for a beginning audiophile attempting a satisfying sound system; more nearly, it's for finishing touches to a top-flight system aiming for a reasonable semblance of concert hall sound in the home listening room. If you're trying to wring-out the last speck of detail that might be lurking in the

background of some favorite recording, disappointment is possible. If your system is now sweet and smooth sounding and "placing you where you want to be in the concert hall," Purist's Dominus cables might result in some displeasure by moving your location a few rows further back in the hall. But if you believe your system may be affected by interference, you will be well advised to try this Purist Audio Design line. For those audiophiles ready to put the finishing touches (at least for the moment) on their music reproduction system, the Dominus cables almost demands your audition.

After I had finished my listening to the Purist Dominus cables and pretty well thought out the report in my head, I continued to listen for several days just for pure musical enjoyment and relaxation. I then dismembered the system, so I thought, and repacked the Purist cables in their original carton. But there was significant space left over in the carton!

I had forgotten two pieces of the system, the phono cable, the

turntable-to-preamp run, and the a.c. power cord which was still in my PS Audio Power Plant. I don't know if this was a Freudian slip or the beginning of serious memory loss problems. However, I was unable to resist (same line I used

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**The resulting sound was richer and fuller, with a noticeably quieter background.**

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back in my dating days) and went ahead and listened and compared this duo separately. The use of the Dominus phono cable alone added a bit of richness and very definitely sweetened the high end, noticeably ameliorating edginess present in certain LPs. As a gross over-simplification, the Power Plant takes the alternating current (with all its possible faults) converts it to d.c. and regenerates new (much improved fault corrected, filtered, voltage stabilized, etc, etc) a.c. to components plugged into it. I knew that no matter how good an a.c. power cord

could be it would not change, much less improve, the effects/sound offered by using the Power Plant with its furnished power cord. Only my DVD player and preamp were connected to the Power Plant. Using top quality CDs and DVDs, some with 96-kHz / 24-bit signals, there was a difference and it was an improvement! I was so surprised that I asked my wife, to come in to the listening room. I simply said to Pat, "I'm going to change something and it might alter the sound." No clues of any sort! She heard a change every time I changed the power cord, not knowing which was which, but she consistently described the resulting sound in a manner that matched my unspoken conclusions. I knew what to expect by then but she was listening "blind." Scientific result, no, but I was most impressed.

When I asked PS Audio, their condensed explanation was that the Power Plant has a fixed amount of improvement, and if Purist's Dominus power cord was beginning with, say, 12 decibels less noise pickup or improvement, it would be audibly additive to the Power Plant. Now, weeks later, my wife and I repeated this comparison, and we paid close attention to exactly what differences we were hearing. There was more fullness overall (part of her "mellow description"), even less apparent background noise (part of my wife Pat's "clearer sound"), and very noticeably better transient response. Jazz singer Diana Krall's hard consonants and sibilant sounds were much less strident; I would think measurably so! A common aside to this effect is less harshness (the other part of Pat's "mellow" description). I guess I was still a bit skeptical even after hearing the effect repeatedly. I may not be able to surrender these final Dominus cables back to Purist Audio.

## NOTES

**Purist Audio Dominus cables:** One-meter with RCA interconnects, \$5,000.00 per pair; 1.5-meter speaker cables, \$10,460.00 per pair; one-meter phono cable, \$5,400.00; 1.5-meter a.c. power cord, \$1,565.00. Purist Audio Design, P. O. Box 125, Clute, Texas 77531, phone 979/265-5114, fax 979/265-1211, website [www.puristaudiodesign.com](http://www.puristaudiodesign.com), e-mail [purist@puristaudiodesign.com](mailto:purist@puristaudiodesign.com)

### Associated Equipment

VPI Mk 11+ turntable, SME MK IV tonearm, Grado "The Reference" phono cartridge, Pioneer DV414 player, Audio Research SP-8 MK II preamp with Musical Concepts Platinum line stage modification, BEL 1001 MK 111 monoblock amplifiers, Genesis Model V speakers with 800-watt servo amp and eight-woofer bass system, together with miscellaneous tweaks including Sims Navcom Pucks and marble slap for turntable, Nitty Gritty Model 2 record cleaner, Isobar Ultra Model 6 surge suppressors, PS Audio Power Plant.

# deHavilland Aries Single-Ended Triode Amplifiers

Bill Wells



**L**ET'S GET IT STRAIGHT right from the get go: Basically, I am a sucker for tube amplifiers. However, the irony is that, for the most part, I have had more success using powerful solid-state amps in my particular reference systems. With the various complex, multi-driver, dynamic loudspeakers that I've used over the years, I have found solid-state amps basically yielded more control with these speaker systems, thus rendering higher degrees of accuracy than when using a tube amplifier.

I say this based on experiences with a variety of superb tube amplifiers from well-known companies such as Audio Research, Balanced Audio Technologies, Bel Canto, and Sonic Frontiers. Each of these amplifiers had a somewhat different design, yet they shared many of the same wonderful attributes of tubes. In each instance, I found many things to admire about their performance and overall simply loved listening to music with them in my system. Given this reality, why

change, right? Let me offer a bit of perspective regarding this issue.

Over the course of the past year, I attended many live concerts. Generally speaking, to my ears, I find that the sound produced with tube amps in my home system often is closer to what I hear at these various jazz sites (i.e., the "real" thing). I should add that most of the live music I experience is primarily acoustic jazz, sometimes with electronic keyboard instruments including the wonderfully full Hammond B-3 organ. There are also plenty of vocals and occasionally some high-spirited fusion.

Also, the venues where I do most of my "live" listening are relatively small and thus do not require particularly high sound levels or significant amplification to make the music come to life. One place is a bit larger, but is an absolutely wonderful acoustic environment and treats live music superbly.

Many times over the years, I have gotten caught up in the debate

over which is better — solid-state accuracy or tube musicality.

Enter the deHavilland Aries single-ended triode monoblock amplifiers into my world and once again my long-term love affair with tube amplifiers has been rekindled. Having had experiences with a wide range of high-end electronics and loudspeakers, what I now profoundly understand is just how important component matching is to effect the greatest degree of musical satisfaction from a given system. With the deHavillands, that was much the same as well.

When the Aries monoblock amplifiers arrived at my home, I really had no idea of what to expect. I had heard very nice things about these units so I was very curious to find out more about their "superior sonic performance." As the two boxes were delivered, I found out immediately that these babies had some heft to them. Their multiple transformers are neatly placed on the rear portion of the



chassis and present a very solid feeling when attempting to remove them from their shipping boxes. Once removed, the Aries appear to be assembled in a tidy fashion and have a clean, uncluttered look. With the three tubes in place and no protective cages, they have a mild retro look — nothing fancy-smancy or too plain Jane. The front panel sports the name deHavilland in bright red, accompanied by a toggle switch and two amber lights — one glowing immediately when the power is turned on and the other glowing once the amp moves into operational mode.

Fortunately, the amps are securely packaged in their shipping boxes with an appropriate strap that anchored them on the inside for an added measure of safety. I thought this was a nice touch to help prevent possible shipping damage. Since deHavilland sells these units factory-direct, the potential buyer can feel secure that units shipped from the factory will most likely arrive to their home safe and sound.

I should mention that the Aries amps have adjustable bias that allows the user to tweak the amp to his listening pleasure. According to the instructions, there is a preferred range to run the bias. However, if the listener wishes to warm up or thin out the sound a bit, the plate current can be adjusted to accommodate. This can be helpful given the overall sonic character of a given system. Additionally, each unit sports a little round black knob that allows the user to adjust the feedback loop. This is made available to allow tweaking vocals if one so chooses. Typically, once I set things — I tended to leave these settings alone primarily for consistency and to avoid confusion.

After unboxing these amps, checking over the instructions, getting the tubes properly placed and

checking the bias, my first inclination was to install them in my reference system for auditioning purposes. However, based on their relative power rating, I assumed that ultimately this would not be a fair test as well as possibly not providing me with the very best system configura-

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### **DeHavilland's Aires can handle a wider range of speakers than I would have assumed at first.**

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tion to assess their overall sonic capabilities. Fortunately, my reference loudspeakers are reasonably efficient with a relatively benign impedance load. As a result, the Aries amps were surprising comfortable in this setting and I was able to quickly start enjoying the music they produced.

Inasmuch as I have been a long-time user of the quite powerful solid-state BAT monoblocks, I wondered whether the deHavillands were up to the demands of my reference speakers. These Aries amps performed similarly to other relatively powerful tube amps I've tried with my reference speakers previously.

So, in order to offer the Aries even better speaker matches, I auditioned them with a number of other high quality loudspeakers. Generally speaking, I found the Aries pretty much up to the task of adequately driving different speakers. This has helped me to realize that the Aries amps are actually more adaptable to a wider range of loudspeakers than perhaps I would have assumed in the beginning. Interestingly, at least in the case of the deHavilland Aries amps, size and power ratings alone do not seem to matter a great deal.

One of the very nice design features of this pair of Aries amplifiers

is that they had the firm's optional stepped-attenuator volume controls conveniently placed on the front panel. In this way, you can feed the input source directly to the amps. Pretty simple and totally straightforward. Not only does this seem to have immediate sonic benefits, if you are a CD-only user, you can actually save considerable money by eliminating the line stage for your system. Throughout my listening to the Aries amps, I primarily used CD as the input source. Although I briefly used my outstanding BAT

linestage to very good results, it did seem to be a bit of overkill since this particular linestage costs almost twice the Aries amps.

Beyond that, the overall convenience and sonic performance obtained by running digital directly into the Aries quickly won me over. As such, I found no reason to include an active linestage with these amps. With this setup, the sound was simply cleaner, a bit more spacious, seemingly more powerful, and definitely more controlled. I'm not quite sure just what was happening here, other than obviously eliminating another component and additional cabling from the chain, but I can say without any hesitation that I believe the Aries amplifiers were operating closer to their optimum performance level when used in this manner. Also, the noise floor of the Aries seemed to be quite low, even when driving my larger, more complex loudspeakers. Having lived with some very quiet solid-state amps for quite a while now, I found myself quite impressed with the Aries in this area. I just did not find anything objectionable regarding their noise floor.

OK, so what do you get musically with the single-ended, triode deHavilland Aries monoblock amplifiers. Well, to begin with, I found the sound produced by them

to be very life-like and convincingly real. In fact, it once again made me very much aware of the limitations of many solid-state amps in terms of sheer musicality. To say that the Aries have some very special musical qualities is almost an understatement. Perhaps this would not be the case when using the Aries on all types of music or when mating them with particularly inefficient loudspeakers or ones with difficult impedances. However, with continued auditioning, I found them to render a musical quality rich in harmonic structure, superb with detail, outstanding in its reproduction of musical timbre, relatively quick and agile in reproduction, and clear in bringing forth musical nuances.

Fortunately, the Aries amps do not seem to be possessed of the so-called tubey sound. For the most part, they offer a relatively high degree of music accuracy. Reproduced music through the deHavillands can often be quite satisfying musically and easily sweep the listener to a wonderful level of listening enjoyment. Switching input sources with these amplifiers can be quite revealing. For instance, moving from the competent but older Rotel CD player to the new

BAT CD player, the Aries amplifiers quickly made the differences apparent. The combination of the Aries with the BAT CD player (also a tube based product) provided a very effective musical combination and was my preferred setup.

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**At a price of only \$3,995  
direct from the factory,  
the deHavilland Aries are a  
bargain among triode amps.**

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Likewise, the Aries amplifiers were able to quickly let me know the quality of various recordings. In particular, more naturally miked recordings sounded absolutely superb through the Aries. Try listening to *Lonely Woman* by the Frank Kimbrough Trio on the Mapleshade label with the Aries. The tonality of the piano along with the wonderfully articulated acoustic bass comes through in fine fashion. Percussion on this recording also comes through clear with cymbals shimmering as they should. Another of my favorite recordings is Mary Stallings *Fine and Mellow* on the Clarity Recording label. Through the Aries amps, Stallings vocal intonations become clearly distinct and

you are able to easily follow her movements through the various phrasings. Along with this, the reproduction of the acoustic bass performance is convincing, with all of this instrument's proper weight and warm harmonics.

Another of my favorite recordings is Milt Jackson's Quartet playing *Mostly Duke* on the Pablo label. In particular, the musical performance on the selection titled "The Summer Knows" can reveal quite a bit about an amplifier. On this particular cut, Milt plays the vibes in his typically subtle but powerfully dynamic manner. Through the Aries amplifiers, Milt's performance comes through in a manner that actually surprised me because of its being so full and enjoyable. Additionally, Ray Brown's acoustic bass sounds authentic, every bit like it should. In my experiences thus far, the Aries do not wimp out on reproducing music and, when matched with appropriate speakers, these amps can offer surprisingly good results, making the listener simply want to continue stuffing their favorite Compact Discs into the player.

Throughout my listening with the Aries amplifiers in place, I became very much aware at how well they reproduced a fairly wide variety of instruments, particularly piano, saxophone, acoustic bass and any other instruments with strong harmonic overtones and structures. I was happy that this included male or female vocalists. Listening to the wonderfully spirited Gene Harris Quartet on his CD titled *Brotherhood* really provided a demonstration of how well the Aries could track the different instrumentalists and provide a clear listening path to each. On the cuts titled "The Brotherhood of Man" and "The Sidewinder," this quartet really picks up the pace, with Harris'

## NOTES

**DeHavilland Aries Monoblock Amplifiers**, \$3,995.00, factory direct. DeHavilland Electric Amplifier Co., 1701 Santa Rosa Ave., Santa Rosa, CA 95404; phone 707/527-5000; fax 707/527-5009, website [www.dehavillandhifi.com](http://www.dehavillandhifi.com).

### Associated Equipment

B.A.T. Vx50 Se Line Stage; BAT VK-1000 solid-state monoblock and Bel Canto SET-80 monoblock amplifiers; BAT CD-5 Se and Rotel 990 CD Players; ESP Concert Grands, Silverline Audio SR-15, and Coincident Triumph speakers; NBS Statement interconnects and speaker cables; ASC Tube Traps; Richard Gray's Power Stations; Solid Steel equipment rack, and Sound Anchor speaker stands.

piano remaining a dominant and clear voice throughout. The Aries amplifiers put the music right out front with a glistening aspect to the sound that made the listening oh so very enjoyable.

Putting the Aries to the test in a different way, I popped into the CD player a new and exciting musical CD by Pancho Sanchez titled *Soul of the Conga* on the Concord Jazz label. This CD contains some very interesting Latin jazz including dynamic percussion along with Joey DeFrancesca on his luscious Hammond B-3, accompanied by trumpet master Terence Blanchard and a host of others. The Aries rendered the music on this disc in fine fashion, and again I was somewhat surprised at how well these monoblocks handled the music's various nuances. Although I haven't written much here about the transient response and speed of these amps, music such as that contained on the Gene Harris and Pancho Sanchez CDs made it clear to me that this was another area where the Aries excelled.

Beyond the tonal characteristics of the deHavilland Aries amps, their performance in the area of staging was rock solid. Images were perceived to be in their proper place, without wandering. This, along with a clear sonic picture, allowed me to listen deep into a sound stage that was fully developed and not thin or anemic in any way. Music seemed to come forth with a life-like quality and also to possess its proper body or weight.

Here is the only fault I can find with the deHavillands. Compared to my reference system, including those big, powerful solid-state amps and large full-range speakers I keep mentioning, the sound produced with the Aries was not quite at that level. I do think, however, that if you give the Aries amps a proper match with appropriate loudspeakers, some good source material, and

the listener is definitely in for a treat.

At the suggested selling price of \$3,995.00 per pair, factory direct, the deHavilland Aries amplifiers are worth your serious consideration. They are not overly tweaky; they sound pretty darn good and appear to be reliable as well. Additionally, their size does not belie the power

that they provide, and based on my experience can work in a number of high-end systems. Given the full plate of positive characteristics, I believe these amps are something that audiophiles and serious music lovers should definitely look into, especially if you are in the single-ended triode camp. Simply put, these babies are good, really good.

## STAND ALONE TOTEM Holography



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# Analysis Plus Hollow Oval Speaker Cable



**I**N THE SHORT TIME I have been writing articles on things audiophile, I have been dreading the first time that the Awful Editor from Oz would force me to write about speaker cables. (Incidentally, that's HBO's Oz, not Dorothy's.) I've been terrified that my old shop-worn ears just couldn't hear any difference. The mags are full of "wires is wires" philosophy contradicted by articles detailing tonal differences in cables. Sure, I bought the Monster cables back in the early '70s and I kept the same cables for 20 years until my audio re-awakening five years ago. Then I went totally NAIM and that included their requisite NAIM speaker cables. Black, stiff and just plain ugly, I dutifully installed these Naim cables and enjoyed my new audio system immensely.

When I installed Cary 2A3 monoblocks amps, a trusted audiophile friend told me that I "wasn't doing the tube amps any favors

using the Naim cables." This led me to call to the Analysis Plus people where I spoke to Steve Pennock. He arrived at my office with a trunk full of impressive testing gear and some sample cables, some by Analysis Plus and some by competitors. The testing gear was brought up to the office and we began to put test signals through the wires. I watched the oscilloscope with intensity and sincerity but I really had no knowledge of the measurements involved. I nodded knowingly. I could see that the competitor's wire seemed to "bevel" the square signal knocking off mostly the lower and upper corners. The Analysis Plus cables seemed to retain far more of the parent signals orthogonal geometry throughout the wave. We measured with test gear. We did not do any listening. It was decided that I would get a set of Analysis Plus Hollow Oval Silver cable.

The cables arrived in a beautiful wooden "presentation" box. Burnt

into the back of the box was the cable builder's name. It was an impressive package only diminished by the fact that the box smelled like a beer bar after a 21st birthday party. The Silver cable is small and oval in shape about 0.5 by 5/16 inches in overall dimensions. It's heavy and pliant which results in a luxurious feel. The spade lugs are machined from copper and plated with silver and are a little thick and short for my taste but very expensive looking and surprisingly heavy. The Analysis Plus cable has the look and feel of jewelry. Being relatively small and pliable it is easy to lead this cable around furniture discreetly. There is just no way my wife will permanently live with such prominent speaker cables snaking across the space she still thinks of as the "living room." Science has no chance pitted against my wife.

I really didn't A-B the Analysis Plus cables against my Naim cables when I installed them. I had lived

with the Naim cables for a long time. I thought the sound was better but I had been predisposed to expect that. I felt good about having the Analysis Plus cables in the system and began showing them off proudly to my friends. I'm the type who likes to personally tune his own skis before each ski outing despite the fact that I'm totally mired in the world of "intermediate skier." I also keep a long bottom scrubbing brush on the dock next to my sailboat so I can give the bottom a scrub each time before I go out. I like knowing that I have done my best to insure optimum performance from my gear. I feel the same way about these speaker cables.

I just feel better listening knowing that I have gone to this length to insure optimal performance in this area.

Still, skeptical that I really could hear a difference, I assembled a team to assist me with the evaluation of the Analysis Plus cables. The team consisted of: my youngest son Spike, who's brutally objective and has ears so sensitive he can hear a flea fart; Paul Scott, piano tuner/technician, cellist and the holder of a degree from Harvard in Ethno-Musicology including studies on the neurophysiology of music at the graduate level, and Connan Price, a stand up bass player and audiophile from Seattle's Hawthorne Stereo. Connan walked into my friend's room and said after 12 seconds of listening, "Your speakers are out of phase." Connan's focus when addressing sound comparisons is usually on "musicality" and, like Paul, he has the musicianship to back it up. I trust Connan's ears. Connan and Paul also have one other thing in common, they both like my cooking. So after a hardy meal of my justly famous Swiss Steak, we retired to the listening room for a session with speaker cables.

I chose to use the Cary 2A3 monoblock amps with the Cary pre-amp for these tests. I have faith in my Naim system, but I've been in love with these Cary amps since they arrived. Their level of detailed

and dynamic presentation seemed to me to make them ideal for this job. The Naim gear doesn't work for switching speaker cables — or any other type of interconnect. Naim is adamant that you use their wires. Their amps only allow connection with banana plugs. Obviously, this is smart marketing on Naim's part but awkward for a reviewer. Cable interface problems aside, I still

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### **Initially, I was skeptical that I could hear differences between cables, but in the end I did.**

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would have chosen to use the Carys for this test; These are awesome amps.

I had the Naim NACA 5 series cables on hand so we used them as test sample B. Test Sample A was beautiful and impressive, measuring 1-1/8th inches in diameter, and came from a high-end competitor. All cables length were identical. All cables sets had been well broken in, although I'm still mystified about the physics involved in that process. Hell, I'll go along with just about anything that makes this sport more involving. The Analysis Plus and the sample A cables were about the same price, while the NAIM cables are considerably less expensive. We had each chosen a CD that we thought would be the most revealing of cable differences. Paul brought *Jean-Baptiste Lully, Grands Compositeurs Baroques* on the HM Plus label. Conan brought two, The Jayhawks' *Smile*, on Columbia, and Gillian Welch's *Revival* on the Almo label. I chose Francis Cabrel's *Hors Saisons* on Columbia. The Jayhawks were there because their CD had some really low bass and was punctuated with rock "slam." The other selections were consistent in the degree of detail and three-dimensionality (i.e. room ambiance) that they all possessed. In retrospect, I suspect we could have chosen a wider variety of music, although now I appreciate the degree to which a reviewer's ears can fatigue

during tests like this. Reality is that I don't think we could have sustained our focus given two or three more musical examples. Spike, my son, bowed out from the tests early. I think the general level of "geekiness" was just too much for him.

The Analysis Plus cables were in place when we started, so we listened to them first. We started with Paul's Baroque CD. The ensemble is a small group with strings, organ, and two vocalists. The music is delicate with a deep soundstage and the vocals well up-front in the mix with the organ pushed into the back and off to the side. The sound was wonderful, warm and soft with

creamy vocals. During a few of the tuttis from the string sections, the sound did seem a little distorted. I have come to associate this with certain CDs. Paul was very sensitive to this. The other CDs revealed the same satisfying sound but none of the same level of distortion that we heard in the Lully CD. We all heard the same nice sound I had grown accustomed to in the past few months. This was our first go round, so we had nothing for comparison at that point.

Next went in the competitor's cables. Big and bulky, these cables snaked their way across the floor in a most obtrusive manner that I kind of liked. Unfortunately, my wife, Jill, walked in with Lorrie, Paul's wife, and we quickly got an earful of why we wouldn't be living with these anacondas. My wife's a good sport about these things. She'll go along with just about anything but I knew I would be pushing it with these fire hoses. But they looked sooooo cool. We began listening with the last CD we had heard with the Analysis Plus cables, the Gillian Welch CD. The difference was astounding. We all just looked at each other simultaneously sort of and said, "Wow!" It was as though someone had removed cotton wool from my ears. That's the way Paul put it and Connan and I agreed. Cables A opened up the floodgates on so much detailed information. The organ that had been in the back-

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ground on the Lully CD was now much more up-front and you could hear the pop of the stops. The Jayhawks' CD had a real bite to the lead guitar lines. The sample A cables had a very bright sound. So much so that I began to fear that they might well be too grainy to listen to for extended periods. They had the

"Immediate Excitement" factor down pat, but the edge or graininess might get to me in a while. Connan did not think they were as musical as the Analysis Plus. Paul just went into fits of joyous laughter he liked Sample A so much. He began telling us exactly what model of mike was being used. These cables are what you would want to team with a dark-sounding system. I guarantee they could bring a dark system to life. But in my system, however, maybe too much liveliness.

Throughout the tests, it appeared that none of us had any sonic revelations from below the midrange. All three cables delivered satisfying bass consistent with the individual overall character of that cable. Of course, I have to admit to keeping my sub woofer hooked up through the tests and this may have affected that result but I was interested in a "real world" test.

We next tried the Naim cables. The black, ugly-looking, stiff Naim NACA 5 cables with their requisite ugly banana plugs. Connan sells Naim gear so he knows these cables and thought it was important for us to include them in the test. We started with the last CD we had played with Sample A cables. Again, the

result was astounding. The Naim cables sounded very dark and closed in, almost muffled. Detail we had heard with both other samples just disappeared. You could hardly hear the organ at all on the Lully CD. As we went through the other test CDs, the results were the same. The Naim cables sucked the excitement out of the music.

My friend had been right. I certainly was not doing the

## Cable A had more top end than the AP cable, but the APs would be easier to use every day.

tube amps any favors with the Naim cables.

The three of us went through this series of listening tests three times: Playing the specified tune off each CD three times for each cable. It was a long night and I'm fairly convinced that I began to suffer some ear fatigue towards the end. As we went through the CDs for the third time, I began to notice that the characteristics I was so certain I heard the first time through were now less pronounced. Maybe it was just a function of fatigue after this much hard-focused listening. Maybe it was a function of "reality" setting in. I'm going to call it fatigue. I remain certain that the differences I heard initially are real and palpable.

At the end of the night we all had different opinions. Paul was cradling the big Sample A cables in his arms and whispering sweet nothings to them. He called me the next day to tell me the experience had been one of the most eye/ear opening audio experiences he had ever had. Paul was totally won over by Sample A. Connan was not. He found Sample A too hard, too bright and too detailed beyond musical

## NOTES

**Analysis Plus Hollow Oval Speaker Cable**, 8 feet, \$499. Analysis Plus, Inc., 106½ E. Main St., Flushing, MI 48433; phone 810/659-6448, fax 810/659-8101, website <http://AnalysisPlusInc.com>, e-mail [inquiry@AnalysisPlusInc.com](mailto:inquiry@AnalysisPlusInc.com).



content. Often, he felt, this brightness came across as graininess. Connan clearly preferred the Analysis Plus cables. He felt they sounded more like live music.

I was torn. I liked the fireworks of the Sample A cable. This is a cable I would choose to use if I wanted to show off the system. However, given that the majority of time I listen at relatively modest levels while I'm reading or thumbing through catalogs, over the long haul I'd be better off with the Analysis Plus cables.

There is that strange sensation you get with some gear that you are "listening to the gear" and not the music. That's the way I felt with Sample A. While all the cables had their own distinct "color" signature, the Analysis Plus cables seemed to have less of it. Maybe Sample A let more of the sound through, but it was almost the same effect I have experienced with some less-than-successful DACs. It's a lot of detail, but would live music sound like that? I think not. I know not. While this degree of top end detail is seductive to my 54-year-old ears, it really does not sound like live music.

The big unanswered question in my mind was, "How would my Naim system sound if I were able to plug in these different cables?" Right now, I'll stay with the tube system, but when I do go back to the solid-state Naim system, I'll try this out. I called Dave Dever at Naim in Chicago. He told me that the Naim cable is more inductive and that's because there is "no output inductor in the amp." He thought that hooking up sample A or the Analysis Plus cables with the Naim gear would produce an overly bright sound. But it would not do any damage.

All in all, it was a fascinating experience. I now know I can hear differences between cables. I now know that yes, changing cables can change the sound. I now know that I have just one more thing to worry about when I sit down to listen and relax. One more thing to get between me and my music — sometimes.

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# Cary CAD-2A3SE Amplifiers

Robert Perry



I'M NOT NEW to tube amplification. I have lived with numerous tube-powered guitar amps since 1962. I still have two. But the warmth and other tonal characteristics I look for in guitar amps in most cases involves distortion, and this is the last thing I wanted in a stereo amp for serious audio listening. So you can imagine, despite reading volumes on the benefits of tube amplification, I was skeptical as I approached my first tube stereo amp experience.

I was so excited. It was a disaster. The little black 300B monoblocks from Brand X were everything I had suspected. In a word,

"mushy." They had no real power, no top-end definition, and no bottom end. You couldn't tell if the bass was a bass fiddle or a Fender Precision. They made horrible noises during warm up and continued to make a "whoosh" noise before the music started. I tried them with my KEF Reference Two speakers, as directed by the editor, and I also plugged them into my Soliloquy SM-2A3 speakers that had been specifically intended to be used with low-powered tube amplifiers. Ironically, they sounded worse with the Soliloquys. The revealing and detailed nature of these monitor-sized speakers exaggerated all the

deficiencies of the amps. I was really frustrated and disappointed. I went back to my NAIM gear with the thought that if I had to live with those Brand X tube amps, I would have to find another hobby.

Then the Cary CAD-2A3SEs arrived. These are the lowest powered of the Cary monoblocks, a single-ended, triode, Class-A design with 5 watts per side and designed specifically to complement the Soliloquy SM-2A3 speakers. It's a matched set by design. Visually and physically, the Carys were strikingly different from the 300B amps. The Carys are big, heavy and beautiful. My wife is rarely moved by stereo gear but even she voiced her approval of the look of these amps. They looked like an engine sitting atop my rack. I carefully set them up, inserting the tubes into the amps and paying attention to exactly which tube

went into each amp. These designations are carefully noted on each tube box. Still, aesthetics aside, I remained skeptical and I almost had

hours. I think they sounded good right out of the box.

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**One of my audiophile buddies says the Carys give the best sound I've ever had in my room.**

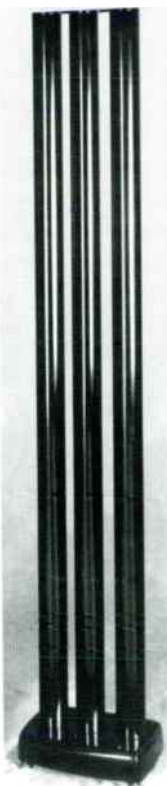
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a "why am I doing this?" attitude. But they did look really sexy.

I turned on the amps leaving them on "standby" for five minutes. They were perfectly silent. My initial assumption was that they were broken! I was using the Cary SLP-50A preamp this time. I had used my NAIM NAC 82 preamp with the 300B amps. Now I was totally tubular. The manual called for 100 hours of "break in" time for the amps but I noticed in my notes that I quit logging time played at 31

### The Sound

Wow! The first impression was one of a ton of effortless power. That's right. These 5-watt amps sounded and felt powerful. In fact, I never hooked up these tube amps without experiencing that initial "Wow!" I did not have my subwoofer hooked up so the monitor-sized Soliloquys were not going to give me any deep bass regardless of the amplification. The high end was crystal clear. The vocal range was warm but certainly not mushy and ill defined. These were very satisfying amps. I spent the next two months playing everything I could think of through this system, with and without the subwoofer. I brought in my audio friends and dazzled them with the effortless power of these Cary amps. They sounded great at low volume



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and played loud enough for me to listen to music while I washed my car. If I had to live with these amps for the rest of my life, I'd be perfectly happy. One of my audio pals said he thought they gave the "best sound you've ever had in this room". I still get a kick out of saying, "Hey! It's 5 watts". However, as powerful and dynamic as these amps are with the Soliloquys, they are totally inadequate hooked up to my KEF Reference Two floor-standing speakers.

You hear detractors say that they don't want to have to "fiddle with tubes." I found that I enjoyed the little ritual when I came home from work. I would turn the amps on immediately, leaving them on standby for five minutes then turning off the standby for the next five minutes. I left the preamp on all the time but turned it to "mute" when I wasn't listening. The 10-minute warm up gave me time to change clothes and put away the day's groceries. I found the whole thing satisfying and a way of simply increasing my involvement with my gear. Surprisingly, the rest of my family had no problem observing the same steps. Just as clearly, my wife liked these amps.

I did find that my NAIM speaker

wires were not doing these amps any favors. The sound was good, but at the suggestion of the Cary rep, I replaced the NAIM wires with Analysis Plus, solid-silver, hollow oval wires. These are beautiful

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### **These amps pull you into the music; they're deep and transparent.**

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speaker wires, pliant and heavy in the hand, kind of like jewelry and gave a sense of added detail to the sound. I'm a big believer in the subliminal effect of "pride of ownership," and in this area, these Analysis Plus wires deliver big time. My only problem with these cables is that the beautiful wooden "presentation" box they came in smelled bad.

After two months I figured I had better make another try with the 300B amps and this time I would use the Cary preamp instead of the NAIM preamp. Incidentally, I found that with the Cary tube preamp driving the amp that drives KRIX speakers in my family room, I got far better sound out of those speakers, i.e. more "lively," more excit-

ing. I came home early one afternoon, poured a lemonade and replaced the NAIM gear that had been in the system for a few weeks with the Cary gear. I was listening to the first CD when my wife came home and settled down at the table in the family room. "Would you like some music back here, dear?" I asked. "Sure," she said. I put on a CD that was one of her favorites, some Irish woman singing over-produced airy-fairy music. Immediately she spoke up, "Did you change something? This sounds really good." You've got to hand it to the wives, sometimes. Here I sit straining and trying to concentrate on what I perceive as minuscule audio differences and she spots it after 30 seconds of music! "It's the tubes again, dear."

Perhaps I had been unfair to those 300B amps by using the NAIM preamp, I thought. So I hooked up the Brand X amps with the Cary preamp. Not! The 300B amps sounded even worse now that I had become accustomed to the sound of the Carys. I hated the Brand X amps. It was becoming visceral, personal. The Carys quickly went back into the system.

The Carys pull you into the music. The first word in my notes is "deep." You might call the sound "transparent." There is real punch to dynamics. I eventually added my subwoofer to the system and the amps delivered all the bass I could want. I don't think the bass is as tight or as defined as it is with my NAIM gear, but the difference is very small and I'm starting to think the bass of the Cary amps may be more lifelike. Keb Mo's "Come On In my Kitchen" showed great dynamic punch and snap with the tactile sense of his finger-style guitar playing. The Carys do image better than my NAIM gear.

### **Voices ... For Fun**

## **N O T E S**

**Cary CAD-2A3SE Amplifier**, \$3,495.00 per pair. Cary Audio Design, Inc., 111A Woodwinds Industrial Ct., Cary, NC 27811; phone 919/481-4494, fax 919/460-3828, e-mail info@caryaudio.com.

#### **Associated Equipment**

Naim Nap 250 power amplifier, Naim NAC 82 preamplifier with two HiCap power supplies, Naim CDX CD player, Naim Black Snake and Kimber Cable interconnects, Linn LP12 turntable with Valhalla and modified Rega RB300 tonearm, Lyra Clavis deCapo MC phono cartridge, KEF Reference Model Two loudspeakers, Soliloquy SM-2A3 loudspeakers with Analysis Plus Silver Oval and Naim standard speaker cables.

For fun, I thought I'd try and see what Elvis sounded like on these amps. It was like the finger of God reaching out. The resonance of the Elvisian tones purely breathed life. "You're So Young and Beautiful" was my favorite cut on the RCA CD Heart and Soul. If Elvis sounded this good, how would Buddy Holly sound? Playing my regular CD cut of "True Love Ways," I was blown away by the overall fidelity of this recording. I had never heard it better. I was filled with awe of this mid '50s recording session.

One Saturday I was invited to Hawthorne Stereo to hear a maxed out NAIM system with their new \$20,000 amp powering their \$11,000 new speakers. I took my Buddy Holly CD. We played it on the NAIM \$12,000 CDS. We sat and listened and marveled at the sound of the old cut. But I left satisfied that I would return home to

equally as satisfying a sound. Maybe I was just fooling myself. Maybe my room at home is better suited to the smaller Soliloquy/Cary

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**If this hobby is about  
having fun, then the Carys  
are great amplifiers.**

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combo. Maybe I can't afford a \$20,000 amp.

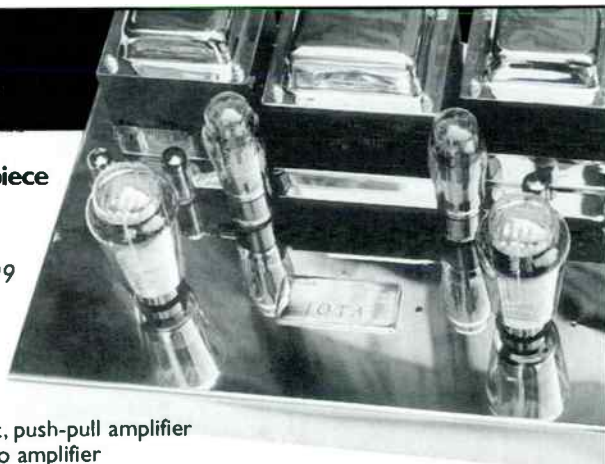
For vocal purity, it's hard to beat Israel Kamakawiwo'ole's CD Facing Future. "Izzy" was a 500-lb.-plus manic depressive who finally let that get the better of him. He died young but left us with one of the most hauntingly beautiful voices I have ever heard. His instrumentally sparse and breathy rendition of "Somewhere Over The Rainbow" will bring tears to your eyes when you picture this mammoth man


singing it, "If bluebirds fly, then why oh why...." There is not hint of grain in the vocal range with the Carys, but there is no sacrifice of vocal definition and detail.

My favorite CD for auditioning gear over the last year has been the Francis Cabrel CD Samedi Soir Sur la Terre on the Columbia label. No, I don't speak French but that has not prevented me from loving this CD. The sound of it is fabulous. The music is a cross between jazz/pop/folk in a particularly individual way. The playing is frugal with none of the musicians suffering from "diarrhea of the fingers." The music is full of spaces and air and punctuated by extremely tasteful playing. Cabrel's voice is earthy, without being rough, and very effective when he sings octaves with himself. The highs on this CD are provided by percussive triangle accents that are crystal clear and

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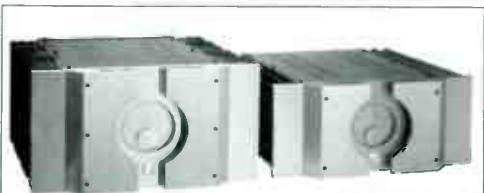
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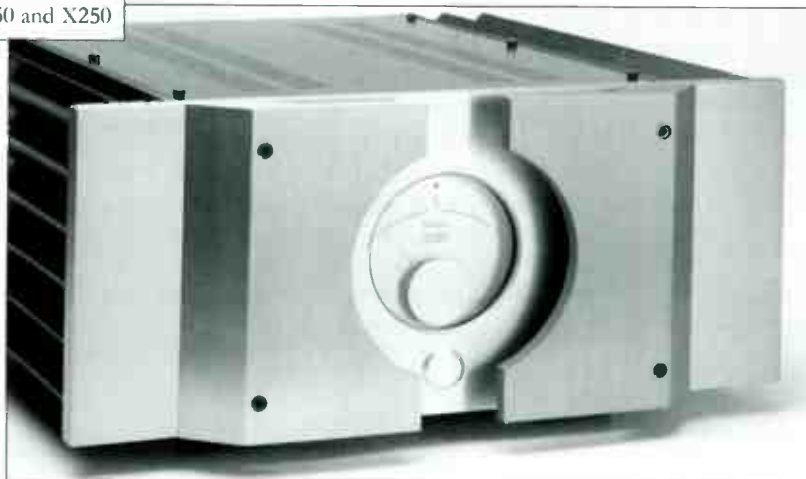
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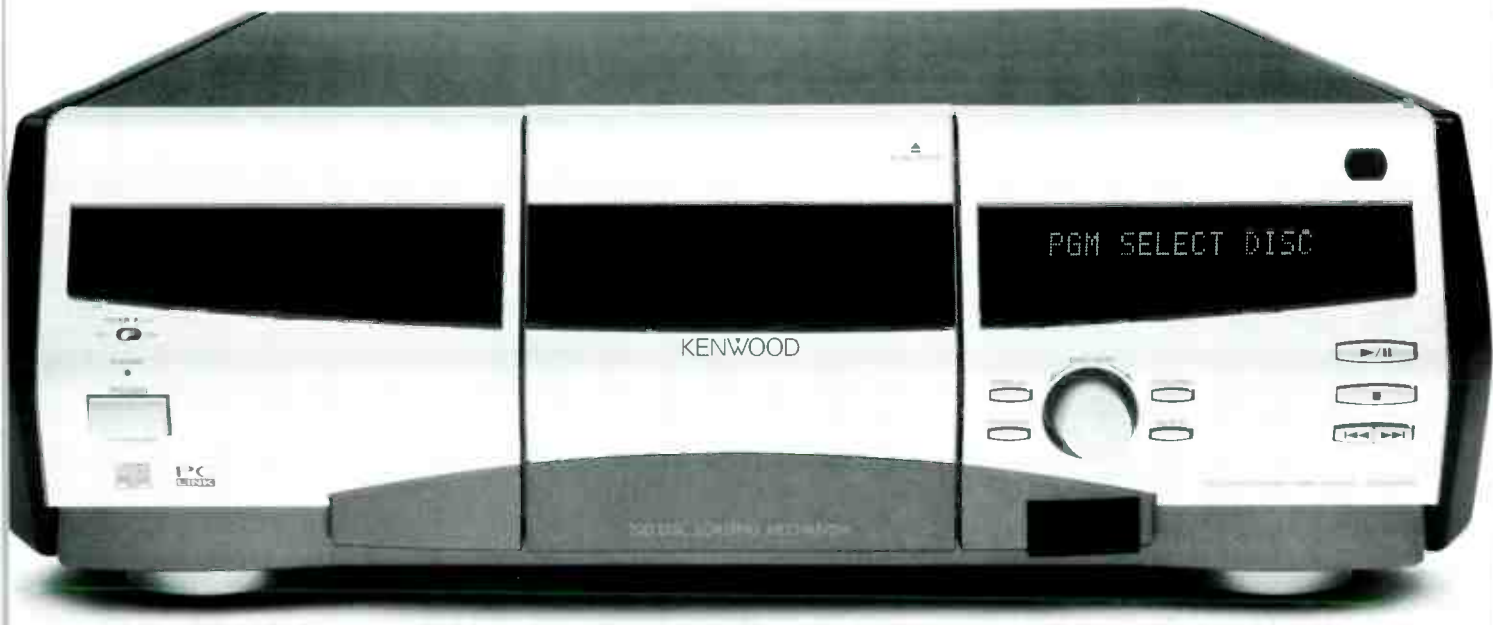


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# Kenwood CD4700M CD Changer

James T. Frane



**I**MAGINE A CD CHANGER that not only holds 200 CDs that can be played in any order you wish, including random. Imagine also that, with the help of your home computer, this CD player can download from the Internet all the available information in their database about the CDs you have in the machine. The CD player will then display the CD name, artist, name of the track that is playing, etc. Well, you can stop imagining, because Kenwood has such a CD player in their Model CD4700M.

The CD4700M is large for a CD player, measuring 18-15/16 inches wide x 6-7/16 inches high x 19-1/16 inches deep, and weighing 19.8 pounds. Most of the space inside the unit is taken up by the carousel. You load CDs through a hinged, drop-down door on the front of the

machine. Immediately to the right of this door is a rotary "disc skip" knob used to step the carousel tray forward or backward to allow precise access to the numbered CD slots. CDs are inserted and rest vertically in these slots. The slots provide just a minimum of lateral stability, hence Kenwood's caution not to move the machine with CDs installed. Each slot is numbered (1 through 200) for ready identification of a CD's location. The carousel rotates automatically when the door is closed so that the machine can, in turn, grab each CD, move it out of the carousel into the play mechanism to identify it, put it back, and go to the next CD. If the machine's memory contains information about the CD, such as title, artist, etc., that information will be displayed in the window to the right of the door.

On either side of the "disc skip" knob are buttons to turn on the display, select random play, confirm (no explanation found in the manual). Farther to the right are the play/pause button, stop, and track forward and backward buttons. On the far left of the faceplate are a timer on-off switch, and the power on/standby switch (when the red LED is on, the unit is not on, it's in standby mode, ready to be turned on. When the LED is off, the unit is on).

Two remote control units are supplied. One is a small, hand-held type with operating functions and alphabet keys. The other looks like a cordless computer keyboard. Both communicate with the 4700M via infrared beam. Either remote can be used to type in information about the CDs loaded in the machine.

The keyboard remote is supplied so that the user can make entries faster and more conveniently than with the small remote. It is intended to be used where the internet download of information via "PC Link" is not available (again, see sidebar for more on this).

Kenwood supplies a cable to connect the 4700M with a PC, a dual cable with RCA type phono plugs for analog connection to a preamp or receiver, and control cables for connection to other Kenwood equipment. The back of the 4700M has connections for the control cables, phono plug analog outputs, and a digital optical output connection.

## Testing

I have a couple of discs I use to assess CD player capabilities. *CD-Check* (Digital Recordings DR2002) is designed to test a CD player to determine to what degree it reproduces all of the information on a CD. Manufacturing errors, damage and artifacts on a CD reflective surface can cause problems in disc play. *CD-Check* has 5 levels of increasing error severity. The first level represents the minimum sound reproduction / error correction criteria. When a player cannot pass a level, it generates clicks, interruptions, or skipping as it fails to compensate for the built-in errors. Level 2 represents average performance, Level 3 is good, Level 4 is very good, and Level 5 is excellent. The 4700M could pass only the first level. Subsequent levels generated audible clicking noises through the speakers.

The second test CD is entitled *My Disc: The Sheffield / A2TB Test CD*. Tracks 34 through 40 contain the same music as Track 33, but recorded at decreasing recording levels, from -10 dB to -70 dB. The last level of music can still be heard on an excellent system. Background noise became evident starting at -40

dB. At -50 dB, the background noise was as loud as the music.

## Listening

I played a number of CDs switching between my Sony single disc player and the 4700M. The music ranged from jazz, including instrumental and vocals to classical to older rock. The sound was slightly thinner with the 4700M with all types of music. Music was less involving on the Kenwood, with somewhat less depth and openness. The 4700M also rolled off the upper end of the spectrum a bit. The differences were small, but readily identifiable. The Kenwood had a slightly lower sound level output than the Sony. As always, I adjusted the preamp volume control to match levels for my listening comparisons to make the judgments more accurate.

## Conclusion

I'm not surprised there are some compromises in error correction and sound inherent with a 200 CD

capacity changer compared to a single play unit in the same price range. My error correction test shows that damaged CD playing surfaces may result in noise and dropouts that would not happen with the Sony, which played all but the last error track without noise.

On the other hand, the Sony is limited to one CD, and is not set up to store CD label, artist and track information in memory, as is the 4700M. The Sony is also slightly more expensive. It is not reasonable to expect from the 4700M the same level of playback competency as the Sony.

I take great care to protect and maintain the surfaces of my CDs in like new condition, so I did not experience any dropouts with the 4700M. If your CDs are in good condition, and you really should try to keep them in good shape, I think the 4700M will play them without incident. Its sonic differences would be less noticeable with a system that is not so revealing. In any case, they were small differences.

# NOTES

**Kenwood CD4700M CD Changer**, \$700.00. Kenwood USA Corp., P.O. Box 22745, Long Beach, CA 90801-5745; phone 310/639-9000, internet [www.kenwoodusa.com](http://www.kenwoodusa.com), e-mail [inquiry@kenwoodusa.com](mailto:inquiry@kenwoodusa.com).

### Associated Equipment

My system consists of a Parasound HCA 1000A power amp used interchangeably with a Carver TFM-55x amp, Carver CT-17 preamp-tuner used as a preamp, Parasound P/PH-100 phono preamp, Denon TU-767 tuner, Thorens TD320 Mark III turntable with a Grado Prestige Red cartridge, and Sony XA20ES CD player. Speakers were Mach One model M-Two 2-way speakers used with NHT SW3 subwoofers run in dual mono and separately driven by an NHT SA-3 power amplifier with integral electronic crossover. The Mach Ones were run full range, and the NHT low pass control was set to about 40 Hz. Interconnect cables were by Mach 1, Gotham, WireWorld, and Monster Cable, and speaker cables were Mach 1 to the NHT subwoofers and Kimber 4PR or Original Monster Cable to the Mach Ones. I used a Radio Shack digital sound level meter to match levels between CD players, and an ADC 2/3-octave analyzer.

# DOWNLOADING DATA

WITH USE OF AN Windows-based PC compatible personal computer (Mac software is in the works) and Internet access you can download the Netnamer software from Kenwood's web-site <www.kenwoodusa.com>. With the Netnamer software installed on the PC and the 4700M connected via cable to the PC, the user logs on to the Internet and accesses <gracenote.com> and its Cddb2 database. You then click on the "Review All Discs" button (on the PC screen) and if the information pertinent to your CDs in the 4700M is in the database, the CD title, artist and names of each cut are downloaded into the 4700M's memory for each CD. Downloading worked fine. If information is missing from the database, Gracenote encourages the user to add it for others to access. The download feature is designed to relieve the user of the task of typing CD song titles, etc. into memory. (Editor's Note: The www.cddb.com site can be accessed separately, and Leo, The Screen Saver on TechTV, nee ZDTV, says that custom jewelbox inserts can be made with software in the site, though I didn't find it in a quick search.)

I had a few difficulties with the downloading process, most of which were not Kenwood's doing. The 44-page owner's manual devotes approximately 25% of page 7 to this feature, which I found to be inadequate. You must have Windows 95 or 98, available memory of at least 32 MB, and a Pentium or newer CPU. I borrowed the requisite equipment, and proceeded on my adventure. The software is free, but at a price. You are asked [and REQUIRED] to pro-

vide a lot of personal information for Kenwood's database before you can make the download. Some is rather benign, but other data, such as age, birth date (at least they didn't ask for the customer's social security number), and income are getting a little too personal. On the other hand, absolute accuracy is the user's decision. Kenwood does have a privacy policy for the information requested and posts it in the site. It states that they will not share the data with a third party, and only want it to learn more about the people who buy Kenwood products in order to better meet customers' needs.

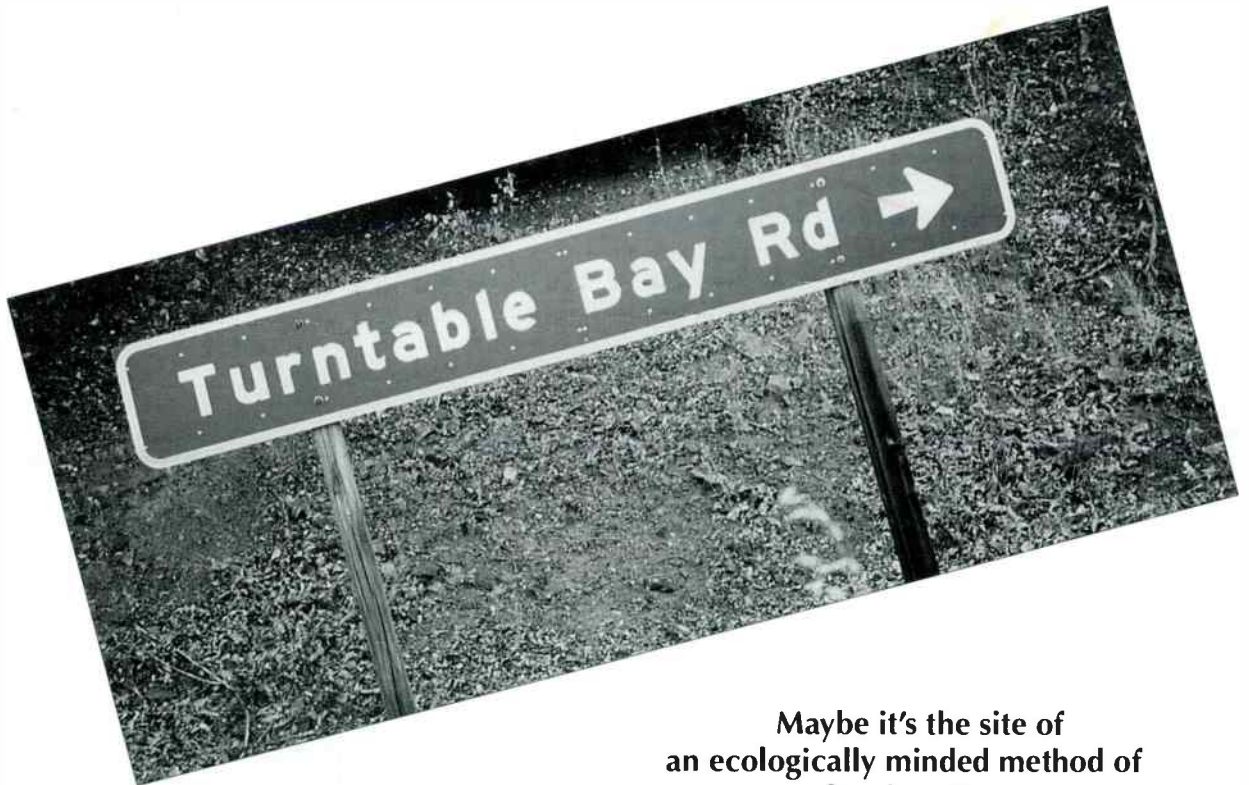
The process is: You are asked to provide a screen name, enter all of the information, then verify it is correct on the next screen, and then, if your screen name is not already taken, you can proceed. If the name was used by someone else, you are taken back to the first screen, to enter a new screen name, scroll down, verify information accuracy, and then through the cycle again. It would be helpful if the validity of your screen name choice were assessed at the beginning. After about four laps though this, I arrived at the download screen. The download itself went smoothly. The files are compressed and require you have unzipping software; e.g., Winzip or equivalent, to decompress them, along with sufficient memory for this function. When the files are decompressed, you can proceed. The cable between 4700M and PC has to be installed, some CDs loaded, and the software started which connects you to the Gracenote website and their CD database.

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# Now, Why Would a Road Go There?



## The Camera Never Lies!

Maybe it's the site of  
an ecologically minded method of  
cleaning LPs?

Or maybe it's where Old Turntables  
go to die and are buried in bays  
in the walls of Rotundas?

Or maybe it's where scratched  
Howlin' Wolf LPs spin their last  
"whale"?

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*MIKE KANAI of San Francisco sent in this photo and is the winner of our bi-monthly contest for photos relating to hi-fi or records. Turntable Bay is at Lake Shasta in northern California. 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.*