

THE AUDIOPHILE VOICE

"...by audiophiles, for audiophiles..."
Volume 7, Issue 3; \$6.95 US; \$8.50 CAN

Hi-Fi In Montreal



**Bob
Marley
& The Wailers**
"Catch A Fire"

The Leonard
Bernstein Legacy

Reviewed 4 Speakers

Dynaudio 42, Totem Arro, Christian E6 Studio & B12WP sub

2 AMPS

Krell KAV-300iL Integrated
Grand Signature

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New Products



The AIWA XP-MP3 Portable CD Player

was obviously designed by someone who actually has used similar units because the features are simply right for those who want music on the go. It offers MP3 play from either CD-R or CD-RW discs in addition to playing standard audio CDs. The unit will display ID3 tags, and offers a fixed/variable bit rate (32 to 320 kbps), E.A.S.S. Plus on audio CD playback, three-point LED battery indicator, multi-bit dual D/A converter, and — get this! — can be used with rechargeable batteries. It comes with a car kit that includes d.c.-power and cassette adapters. Price: \$240.00. Data: www.aiwa.com

The DH Labs Cables



now include the Q-10 speaker cable which features a multi-gauge, four conductor design. Featuring exceptional flexibility in a wide variety of applications, the cable includes two 12-gauge and two 14-gauge conductors, which are the electrical equivalent of a 10-gauge cable. It can be orders as a standard single run, as an internal biwire, or as an external biwire. Price: \$10.00 per foot plus termination. Another new cable, the Air Matrix interconnect uses the firm's proprietary new air-Teflon matrix dielectric which is actually 60 per cent air and provides stable dielectric performance up to 17 GigaHertz. Fully shielded with a low-capacitance design, these interconnects are terminated with custom-machined RCA or XLR-type connectors. Price: \$195.00 for a one-meter pair with either RCA or XLR termination.

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Tony's Crystal Ball

Dear Editor:

I enjoyed Anthony H. Cordesman's Jules Vernesque voyage into the not-so-distant future of audio ("High-End Audio in The Year 2010"; Vol. 6, No. 6). But I nodded my head most vigorously when Mr. Cordesman confessed that friends in the industries be references in the article had suggested that 2010 might be an optimistic date for much of his futuristic imaginings to come true.

Even with my respectably powerful hard drive, muscular corporate server and high-speed T-1 access, I'm happy to tell anyone who'll listen that the 'Net ain't quite as advertised even in 2001. Oh, the internet is ripe with promise and the future does hold many marvelous possibilities for all things online. But even when bandwidth manages to get to a place where music delivery will be of a quality acceptable to most audiophiles, such "music on demand" technologies won't be without the requisite quirks (if you think those "connection unexpected quit" windows are frustrating now, wait 'til one pops up in the middle of Mendelssohn's Sextet in D Major).

But that commentary falls somewhere between no-brainer and nit-picker. The point I'd like to make by way of a contribution to Mr. Cordesman's self-initiated debate is one about human nature.

As an advertising and marketing professional, I think a central truth of "consumer" and thus human behavior was ignored in making statements like "By 2010, we will have largely ceased to use any form of commercially packaged disc or consumer-owned medium."

People like their belongings, their things. They like to pick these things up. Polish and clean them. Show them off to friends and warn the kids not to touch them without permission. It's called pride of ownership. Somehow (and this applies to both software and hardware), this versatile but largely intangible future of multi-terra-byte storage

chips and all but invisible components, violates the consumer human's basic nature. Perhaps especially the nature of the typical gear-crazed, disc-collecting Sound-Hound.

There is something soulless and sterile about the A/V future described in Mr. Cordesman's tome, an aspect almost ghostly. And it all adds up to a market failure in my opinion.

Will we be able to create and use the sort of technology discussed in that article by 2020 or 2030? Sure. But decades ago, the clever people at Betty Crocker had the "technology" to market cake mixes that required only that the user add some milk. A flop of historic proportions followed. The successful re-launch of the same product differed in only one area: The directions which now required the home chef to add two eggs along with the milk.

The analog here is simply that doing things because we can doesn't mean anyone wants them. And I'll bet that people who love to get the best out of recorded music, like people who enjoy baking cakes, want to get their hands dirty now and then. Thanks for a great read.

Jim Bosha
Via e-mail
Darien, CT

Computing The Gear

Dear Editor:

It was interesting to read Bascom King's review of the Eminent Technology LFT-11 speaker system. I had not seen one on this product since the review in the 3/97 issue of FI. I thought your readers might be interested in my usage of this system, which has been running since mid 1997.

By way of contrast, my main system consists of the full-range M-1 ESLs built by Sound Labs driven by the pentode / triode Fourier Sans-Pareil OTL amps (200 wpc nominally). I can also include the Muse 18 S/W for enhanced sub, 24-Hz output, when I am willing to trade off some transient response for low

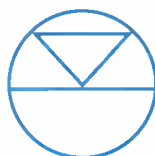


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response. The amplifiers are driven by a Reference Line Passive Precious Metal preamplifier. Signal sources are either the Sony 777ES SACD machine placed on a Bright Star Single isolation platform or the Revox B-795 linear tracking turntable on Bright Star Gemini 2 dual isolation platform along with the Pass Labs Aleph Ono phono amplifier. Power is conditioned for most components via the P.S. Audio P-600 except for those insatiable Fouriers that are run off the Richard Gray 400Ss. The whole system is tied together with Monarchy cables. I hope I did not bore the readers with this, but let me tell you that this system is no slouch in the dynamic range area.

I also use the Stax electrostatic Signature II headphone system with tube drivers. When this is driven by the Sony playing the new generation of binaural CDs (20-bit resolution, Neumann head, direct to disc), the effect is truly incredible. Idiomatic as what I am about to say is, I sometimes think the sound is as good as a live performance. This sound is good! If someone cannot as yet afford both a headphone system and a room system (and with the stock market in the shape it currently is, few sensible people can), I strongly recommend a good headphone system first. Another advantage is that it will place much less strain on your relationship with your wife and neighbors, as only you can hear it.

Anyway, back to the point. I had known Bruce Thigpen (the man behind Eminent Technology) distantly for some time before reading the *FI* review, because I had considered purchasing his large planar panels at one time. The novel part of his planar magnetic panels is that they are push-pull or double ended, just like ESLs. Many planar panels are single-ended, which means the linear region is not as great, and thus tending to limit linear dynamic range. When Thigpen told me that his small computer units are also push-pull, I decided to try them. He suggested the Acurus A-80 solid-state power amplifier, which he also provided. Since I spend so much of my time in front of a computer (I am involved in technical sales and support for the microwave Industry including products such as wireless, radar, military, etc.), it was ideal to

have a system that sounded decent right next to where I spend most of my work day. It seems impractical to run the big system for that large a portion of the day, consider-

It's the music and the gear that are important, not the magazine!

ing the electrical power used by all those tubes and the resulting PG & E bill (not to mention that the amplifiers are also pretty good room heaters), and equally impractical to use my headphone system (as I am on the phone a lot).

As Mr. King did, I also used a receiver. An interesting adjunct for this system is the Pioneer DRM 6324X, a CD changer. It runs on a SCSI interFace, and is convenient as it utilizes magazines that hold six CDs. Therefore, between the FM receiver and the ease of changing magazines, I can have a wide array of program material at my fingertips.

As I write, I am listening to Joshua Bell's Sound Track from the *Red Violin* running on the Pioneer, and from my vantage point right in front of the monitor, it sounds very good. This system does not, of course, compete with my headphone system or with my big system. I wanted something that was simple and reliable and easy to control, and that sounded better than most of the computer systems available. This system easily meets those criteria, and, as Mr. King did, I heartily recommend Mr. Thigpen's equipment to anyone with similar needs.

I meant to write earlier that the physical quality of the magazine (color integrity, type and thickness of paper, etc.) is appropriate for the fact that *The Audiophile Voice* deals with quality products. It is a quality publication. I think you should consider shipping it in a protective cover. I, for one, would be happy to pay the increased cost for the plastic cover. I bet many others would also, especially those that keep the magazine for reference.

Aaron Shipow
Darien, CT

The Editor Responds:

Thanks for your comments. We did use a plastic bag for the first

year or two, but stopped when we realized how much it was adding to costs. But I especially appreciate your comments on quality — that is what I'm trying to do. While we can ask the subscribers about plastic covers, the accepted wisdom in magazine publishing is that they won't pay the freight. We take some care with the front covers, but under the circumstances, they really aren't good enough or important enough to frame. And that's the cutting edge.

Beatles #1

Dear Editor:

I just read TAV's review of the Beatles *1*, which I own, both on LP and CD and would like to add my thoughts. First, I have been an avid Beatle fan since day "one" (no pun intended), and was 14 in 1964 when they landed here, and have grown up with them, their music and lifestyle paralleling my own.

Since I heard my first Parlophone import back in the sixties, I knew the U.S. Capitol releases were botched from the start, and were done, at least early on, without George Martin's input, having reverb added, etc. I made it a mission to get all the British releases on Parlophone, which I still have.

The *1* collection is something any Beatle fan should have, and does sound much, much better than the early CDs. But, I have a copy of *The Beatles — The Collection* released by Mobile Fidelity, which used only the original stereo masters, and the difference in comparison to the *1* digital remaster is stunning. However, *1* was obviously done with some sort of noise reduction like Sonic Solutions to get rid of the last bit of tape hiss, of which there was almost none on the masters, and in doing so, a lot of the "breath of life" was also removed. The last bit of "there" is not there, and it sounds like something is missing along with the hiss, like room ambience and some low level details. I am disappointed that someone decided to alter these fine recordings to make them "better," and would rather have heard them as they were intended by George Martin.

So, if the listener can find a used *The Collection*, pick it up. It seems to be still the reference, as far as

sound quality, and can be found if one looks hard enough, and the pockets are deep enough (it is usually around \$400 to \$1000).

I made a CD copy of a set on my Pioneer CD recorder, which does its a/d with a Burr-Brown a/d converter at 24-bit word length, and 96-K sampling, and the CD copy sounds, to these old analog ears, almost a perfect match for the LPs in a direct a/b comparison.

Now, if Steve Hoffman at DCC could do a CD remaster of the original tapes, then we would have something — probably a new reference, short of being at Abbey Road with the 15 i.p.s. masters spinning, something I long to hear, but will never, I am afraid. Highly recommended.

Mike Colwell
via e-mail

Reviewing Cordesman

Dear Editor:

Anthony Cordesman has no need to apologize for his review of the Sony SCD-777ES SACD player (Vol. 7, No. 2). I purchased my machine a few months ago, at about 50 per cent of the original cost. I wanted it primarily as a CD transport to feed my Assemblage Platinum DAC with

D2D up-sampler. For that purpose, it is excellent, outperforming the Pioneer mechanism of the Theta Carmen. (Of course, I couldn't resist picking up some SACD discs to try.) My impressions mirror most of Cordesman's point for point. The Assemblage DAC, up-sampled, outperforms the Sony analog output in almost all respects; the bass is deeper, the transients are better, dynamics superior, and transparency heavenly. The Sony's own DAC with CDs is quite good, but is not up to present standards. This makes one wonder, as Cordesman did, how much better SACDs might be if played through a good external DAC.

The other part of his review was a critique of the SACD discs themselves, and I must again agree with Cordesman that the choices of Columbia, Telarc et al. are strange. I have never liked Telarc's *Carmina Burana*, and the SACD does little to help that recording. Some of Sony's old recordings were not that good to begin with, and others are strange choices for showing off the new medium. Why in heaven's name does one need SACD to play Willy Nelson's *Stardust*? Ditto for Rebecca Pigeon or Sarah K, in my opinion.

The same complaint could be made about the first two-channel DVD-Audio discs; why bother?

Still, and here I depart from Cordesman somewhat, both SACD and DVD discs present a much more relaxed, analog-like experience with recordings. The Columbia classics sound infinitely better than their earlier LP incarnations. The nasties long associated with CD (midrange glare and coarseness) seem to be completely gone with the SACD processing. I am anxiously waiting for more great recordings from the likes of Delos, Telarc, Mercury, MA, and RCA in the SACD format. If what I suspect is true, much of my LP collection may find itself unused.

Having said all this, the Sony 777ES is selling at street prices less than \$2,000 these days. The Sony DAC is not bad, and the transport is superior. It may not be quite fair to compare this unit to the likes of Mark Levinson or, for that matter, Assemblage, given the considerable price differences.

As for the universal complaints about the Sony transport's snail-like pace, ain't we spoiled?

Herbert Barringer
via e-mail

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The RIAA Bit My Napster

OKAY, NAPSTER IS ON THE ROPES, reeling from the March 6th injunction by Federal Judge Marilyn Patel that it stop the exchange of digital files of music where the copyright is owned by major record companies. Judge Patel had called the file exchange a "wholesale infringement of copyrights." However, the horse is still gone, even though the door's locked. Maybe the horse was never there.

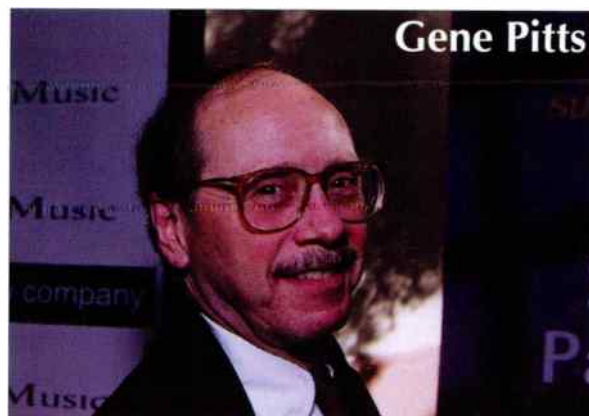
Frankly, I think the decision is confused. I think it's about money and to whom the sources of money belong. It's about not understanding what a fair and reasonable use is. It's not about reaching a fair and reasonable understanding about how sale is different than loan or trade when it comes to copyrights. It is a high Romantic notion, one that in great part traces its origins back to *La Bohème* and Merger, that artists deserve something special in the protection of their rights to their works. Essentially, I'm saying copyrights should be regarded as the same as patent rights, and one should pay attention to the fact that the rights to most of today's music, especially the most popular music, DO NOT belong to the people who wrote it. Did you know, for example, that the rights to The Beatles catalog aren't owned by the surviving three plus Yoko, but rather by Michael Jackson, who scarcely needs the money?

While I doubt that many people did it, it has been possible to copy in the home ever since one could trundle two Edison cylinder machines up to one another and point one horn into the other. And that is well over a century ago. Maybe you know of an infringement lawsuit over that; I don't.

It's like the record firms never heard of libraries about which no publisher of books or magazines ever complained: "They've got 999 library card holders, so they've got to buy 999 subscriptions to my magazine!" Do the record companies complain that the libraries lend out CDs and more than one person listens? Do they seriously contend that libraries cut into the sales of CDs?

Or this about this scenario. Wife comes home with a magazine from the newsstand and her daughter reads an article, after which the Thought-Police come and arrest her for copyright violation.

Or maybe there needs to be "One-Person" and "Three-Person" and "10-Person" and "Unlimited" Listening Licenses for new CDs. Or maybe you need to pay a higher price for the CD if you intend to listen to it more times or years than some other piece of music. I can just hear the opera guys now: "No, you have to pay



a larger Listening License Fee for Puccini than for Wagner." Right, but you'll have to pay me to listen to

In magazine publishing, an industry that dates back to Gutenberg, who lived a few hundred years earlier than Edison and Berliner, we're proud of our pass-along readership numbers and actively try to publicize them.

I just had an argument about all this with a guitarist and record producer I know better for his record reviewing capabilities. He's written up discs for me for about a quarter century while he helped make records for other folks. Our conversation started out to be about his purchase of a CD burner which he wants to use to make copies of his demo CD-Rs. He says he's losing money because of Napster and that he thought "the record industry was down," particularly in his area. Since I thought I'd seen statistics to the contrary in the newspaper, I checked the Recording Industry Assn. website where I found year-on-year figures ending in June 2000.

The majority of areas the RIAA reports on (cassette, vinyl EP/LP, CD single, cassette single, and vinyl single) are down, but the industry as a whole is up 4.1 per cent. Besides, everything else is dwarfed by the size of CD sales, which grew six per cent in units and almost 10 per cent in dollars. The total dollar value for CDs was thought to be over \$5,681 million during the first half of 2000, up from \$5,171 for the first half of 1999. The next biggest segment was cassettes which dropped by 37 per cent from \$482 million to \$303 million.

Under the "statistics ALWAYS lie" category comes DVD growth, which is up a whopping 71 per cent year on year. Maybe I'm missing something but this Johnny-Come-Lately pulled in only \$35 million for the first six months of last year versus \$23 million in 1999, while units went from 800,000 to 1.4 million. This is about one-third of one per cent of CD sales, and while I will stipulate that their rate of sale is growing, it will be a very long time before they outsell their older brother if those numbers are accurate and hold up.

Other interesting ripples in the digital pond include an agreement among Sony, Universal, and Yahoo (!) to sell, for as-yet undetermined prices, subscriptions which would allow access to songs via streaming from the internet. The announcement said downloaded songs would not initially be transferrable to a portable device or onto a CD-R. Another subscription idea surfaced when EMI, Bertelsmann, and AOL Time Warner announced a similar deal with RealNetworks.

Didn't CBS and RCA have subscription-based LP and CD clubs? Wonder what happened to them? Maybe it's just that old marketing ideas never die.



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Mike Driscoll

with assistance from Steven Berg and Craig Schiff

IT WAS ON A FRIDAY afternoon, at about 1:00 p.m., and I was sitting on the bench at the customs station on the Canadian side of the border between the U.S. and its normally friendly northern neighbor. I had been told to park my car and come inside to speak to a border inspector. At the drive-up window, I had told the woman that my two friends (Steve and Craig) and I were going to Montreal to attend Le Festival Son & Image, a high-end audio and video show. She had never heard of this event, and apparently, thought it suspicious enough to detain us at the border. The inspector inside had never heard of the show either, nor

had he heard of *The Audiophile Voice* (sorry, Editor Gene). And when he spoke to each of us in turn, in order to see if our stories matched up with one another, there was a tone in his voice that made us think he felt he was consoling a slightly ill and very dysfunctional child.

Eventually, the authorities decided that we were no threat to Canada's national security — after all, who but blithering, self-absorbed sound-freaks could make up a story like the one we told? — and let us through. At first, I was quite annoyed at this treatment by the Canadian officials, but later, as I

calmed down, I realized that they probably stop everyone who looks like my friend Steve.

The city of Montreal was digging out from what seemed, to my Massachusetts-trained eyes, to be a blizzard of major proportions. For Montrealers during late March, though, it was probably business as usual. The show was held at two hotels in downtown Montreal, the Delta and the Four Points, located right across the street from each other. At the Delta, 10 floors were devoted to exhibits, while 5 floors at the Four Points were being used.

The sound quality in the exhibit rooms was generally good to fair,

given the realities of shows of this type. I can't imagine how frustrating it must be for exhibitors to haul their equipment to one of these events, set it all up in a strange room with unknown acoustic qualities, and try to wring the best sound they can out of it all. Compounding the problem for some was the home theatre exhibits. It's not easy to concentrate on listening to music while Arnold is making a racket in the next room, blowing away the bad guys with his pocket cannon. Analogue was virtually absent from exhibits at both hotels. Even though some turntables were in evidence from Rega, Linn, and a few others, only one or two of the rooms we visited actually had a table up and running.

There was some exceptional sound to be heard, however. At the Delta, there was lovely music by Lyle Lovett in the room featuring Vandersteen 2CE Signature loudspeakers, with McCormick electronics, and a Gamut CD player. On the third floor, Enigma loudspeakers, driven by a Roksan amplifier with a signal from a Rega Planet CD player, also sounded wonderful. This system displayed a wide and deep soundstage, and very musical sound on The Cowboy Junkies *Trinity Sessions*. Vassan Loudspeakers from Belgium were coupled with a CD system from Perreaux, and an amplifier from the same company. I always thought Perreaux equipment looked as though Salvador Dali had designed it for a painting called "The Persistence of Melody." Rogue Electronics were doing a great job sending the blues through Spendor loudspeakers, inspiring Friend Steve to say, "The blues and tubes, they just go together!" Spending a half-hour or so in this room was a pleasure, and welcome relief from some of the perfectly awful music being used for demo elsewhere. Audio Harmony demonstrated in their room how their device works to help solid-state gear sound less ... well, um ... solid state. All present agreed that the improvement demonstrated was not minor.

Other interesting sounds at the Delta came from, of all things, a speaker made to hang on the wall and impersonate a picture and frame. These speakers were from

Wharfedale, a firm with a long history of making standard box speaker systems, and had remarkable presence, full and tight bass (through a dedicated sub), and displayed a soundstaging and depth that was amazing, at least to me. I had never heard these qualities in a speaker of

Le Festival Son & Image
14th edition
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March 23 - 25, 2001

this type before. They could be just the thing for the ... er ... domestically challenged audiophile. Jean Marie Reynaud loudspeakers played very nicely using an Audion 12-watt single-ended tube amp for power, and made my favorite bluegrass CD sound great.

After a full day at the Delta, we decided to leave the Four Points until the following day, and retired to the Econolodge, which, as I was to find out, featured the "shower from hell," apparently designed by Torquemada for use during the Spanish Inquisition. This insidious device ran at full hot or full cold, but would resist every effort to maintain a temperature that wouldn't either freeze you or give you third-degree burns. After about 10 minutes of this torture, I ran from the bathroom, immediately and loudly confessing being a heretic. A fine addition to the delights of this wonderful hotel was that it featured, of all things, a disco! Our unsuccessful attempts at sleep were accompanied by the constant "thud, thud, thud" of over-amplified bass.

At the Four Points the following morning, the first thing that really grabbed me was a pair of speakers by Tondino, The Coax 1. Great sound, but, unfortunately, no U.S. importer as of yet. A number of great sounding rooms were using amplification by Audio Aero, a company I was not familiar with, but will certainly be on the lookout for in the future. Combined with the Meadowson planar magnetic loudspeakers and Audio Aero Capitole preamp, some fine sound was being produced. Audio Aero also showed up driving the Lamhorn 1.8, which uses a Lowther-like single driver

with a "whizzer" cone at its center. The tiny Tetra Bullits speakers produced sound all out of proportion to their small size, also driven by Audio Aero amplification. Some wonderful sound was also heard coming from the Gershman room, courtesy of a Kova Cosmos amplifier, Meridian CD transport, Sonic Frontiers DAC, and the Gershman Opera Sauvage speakers, a very large system which looked, to me, a bit like an Egyptian Sarcophagus. HMT showed a prototype loudspeaker which was said to have a 96-dB SPL sensitivity, is diamond shaped, and looks really cool, even though we couldn't hear it actually play music.

The Association Montrealaise des Audiophiles had a room of their own, set up to show off the equipment their members had designed and built from scratch. None of it was hooked up, but it made an impressive display. These guys are serious audiophiles, and it looks as though they could show our own Audiophile Society a thing or two. They get back to the basics, design their own circuits, and in general, just have fun with their hobby. Isn't that what it's supposed to be all about, having fun?

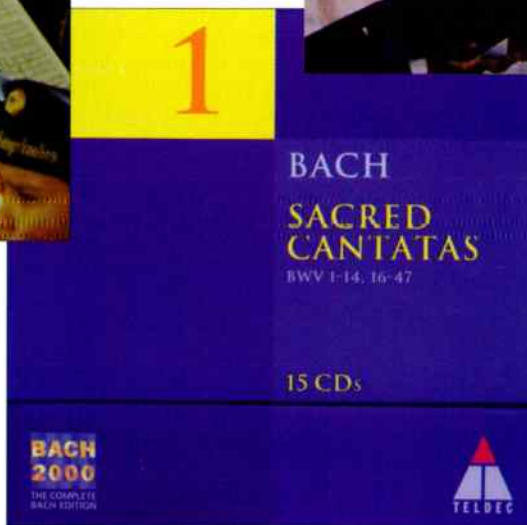
One thing I noticed that almost all the rooms had in common, was the lack of very much acoustic treatment. Also that than a few of the rooms sounded excessively bright, possibly for that reason. As I noted before, there was also a lot of home theatre, which, in general, I avoided like the plague, because it's not really "my thing."

The best sound I heard — and my companions seconded my choice — was in the Rogue-Spendor room mentioned above. This modestly priced system, which seemed well matched, didn't "fight the room," as so many of the more expensive systems did.

We left the city of Montreal with a good feeling about the future of high-end audio. In spite of the negative attitude of the gloom and doom crowd, from what we saw and heard at this show, the hobby has a long and prosperous future ahead of it. We didn't see the Canadian Border Inspectors when we went back — or maybe they didn't want to see us.

Cathedral Sparrows

Benjamin Ivry



A NEW RELEASE, *Blue Bird*, is sung by a group of boy sopranos drawn from the cathedral choirs of St. Paul's, Salisbury, and Westminster Abbey. The disc includes a number of church compositions, in flatteringly resonant acoustics, by the Irish composer C. V. Stanford and "O For the Wings of a Dove" by Felix Mendelssohn. Excellent solo singing, as on the present disc, is particularly admirable since boy choirs are at many obvious disadvantages: Little tykes are difficult to train, they are prey to all sorts of childhood diseases, they usually travel with difficulty, and just as they are acquiring

full musical understanding, their voices break and most can no longer sing. For these reasons, many early music groups renounce the use of boy sopranos for concerts and recordings, even in works like Bach Cantatas where they play an essential role.

Those boy choirs that have surmounted these great challenges deserve the international renown they have won. The Vienna Choir Boys alternates tours of four different groups, and continues to do so despite recent multiple changes in musical leadership. Other great choirs that maintain their reputations include the Cathedral School

of Montserrat, Spain, the King's College Choir, Cambridge, the Tolzer Knabenchor, the Texas Boys' Choir, and the Regensburger Domspatzen. This latter group has a particularly apt name in German, meaning "cathedral sparrows." In religious music, from the Middle Ages to the Victorian Anglican repertory represented by Stanford, boy singers can have an emotional tug that it is difficult for women singers — even those trying to imitate the sound of boys — to match.

Anyone who has taken a long car trip in the presence of young-uns knows the extraordinarily commanding quality of a tiny tot's voice



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as it sails out to be heard. Even when not being annoying, a child's voice is simply more difficult to ignore than an adult's, and canny composers through the ages have exploited this property. At the end of Bach's "Saint Matthew Passion," in a chorus thanking Jesus for his sufferings, when the boy soprano stands amid the adults to echo the same message, somehow the words coming from the mouth of a babe add extra resonance. But Bach was not just a master of the use of boy voices in the humble and innocent mode. He also wrote spectacular soaring choruses for them, as in Cantatas 31 "Der Himmel Lacht" and 50, "Nun ist Das Heil und die Kraft." As sung by the Vienna Boy Choir conducted by Nikolaus Harnoncourt on the Warner/Teldec complete Bach cantata series, these are unforgettable examples of gravity-defying musical performance, the apparent total fearlessness or the absence of nerves of pre-teens. A boy choir can sound like a tough gang of little monsters, as in the mocking choruses of the "St. Matthew Passion." Yet another lasting Vienna Boy Choir triumph is on BMG, singing the Mozart Requiem conducted by Hans Gillesberger. Here the boys squalling out the voice of fate is especially impressive, and aptly Mozartean. After all, Mozart's "Magic Flute" contains music of ultimate wisdom and authority written for Three Boys, who are often cast on recordings with solo Vienna Choir Boys.

This fascination with the boy soprano voice is nothing new. Last year an Englishman, Ernest Lough, died at age 88. In 1927 Lough had recorded Mendelssohn's "O For the Wings of a Dove" as a boy soprano for HMV, an immediate bestseller which by 1962 had sold over one million records. Still the world's most famous boy soprano soloist (Pearl has reissued a CD of his greatest hits), Lough was merely the tip of the iceberg. To show the degree to which boy sopranos were present in the British consciousness, in 1945 on the BBC Radio just before Winston Churchill gave his VE Day speech, boy soprano Derek Barsham was asked to sing Elgar's "Land of Hope and Glory." A new series of three reissue CDs, *The*

Better Land, focuses on British boy sopranos in the era between the two world wars. These releases, master-minded by archivist Stephen Beet, struck a solid chord with the public and sold thousands of copies of each volume. A few surviving boy sopranos from the era, now senior citizens, reunited to give an adult concert in London, well-attended and applauded by their fans from a half-century before. (For more info, contact Stephen Beet at e-mail address StephenRBeet@aol.com or by post to Stephen Beet, 14 St. Andrew's Mansions, Dorset St., London, W1H 3FD, England).

Beet's research, apart from striking a real chord with international listeners, points to a few differences between the golden age of boy choirs and today. In the 1920s, a

"Against all expectations, the child's voice unleashes passions . . . it delights some and exasperates others."

choir director named Dr. Buck used to inspire his choristers at Norwich Cathedral to better understand the hymn "Without Thee All is Dark" by locking them into pitch-black cupboards. He also gave the boys water pistols filled with port wine which he instructed them to shoot into their throats in order to give better-lubricated performances. Obviously such tactics — whatever good results they may have obtained — would be unacceptable today. Equally unacceptable might be the quantity of highly sentimental ballads and the like recorded by the



boys in the 1920s and 1930s, of the sort Beet himself dubs "real tearjerkers." Informed listeners of the time had little patience for this stuff: In January 1929, *Gramophone* magazine wrote of a recording by Master Freddy Firth, "He is practically free from priggish affectation, and from real vices and cheapness. Though he doesn't slop over with insincere sentiment, there are some who will say he is not sweet." Another *Gramophone* magazine critic wrote in April 1932 of a recording by young Denis Barthel, "I can almost say that this is the first boys record to stir me out of apathy."

Even such tough critics had to admit when a rare child prodigy was capable of artistry to rival any adult. Master Billy Neely, a Brit whose career flourished around 1950, recorded songs by Arensky for HMV, accompanied by the noted *lieder* pianist Gerald Moore,

DISCOGRAPHY

Blue Bird: Boys Air Choir, music by Stanford, Mendelssohn, et al.
Justin Time JTR 8486-2

(For availability, see the website www.justin-time.com)

Sacred Cantatas J.S. Bach, Vienna Boys Choir

Teldec 3984-25706/7/8/9-2

The Better Land: Great Boy Sopranos; Vol. 1, 1914 – 44; Vol. 2, 1930 – 50, Vol. 3, 1927 – 69

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 first time ever



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and took vocal coaching from the eminent singer and teacher Elena Gerhardt. Another highly trained boy soprano, from the late 1930s, Denis Wright, also recorded with Gerald Moore and made frequent concert appearances with well-known concert virtuosos like the pianists Eileen Joyce and Harriet Cohen.

Most composers who used boy voices, Bach first and foremost among them, used them as vehicles

for religious devotion. The same is true of great choral directors, like David Willcocks, whose tenure with the Kings College Choir produced magical recordings for EMI of the Fauré *Requiem* and of Charpentier's *Messe de Minuit*. The Texas Boys Choir's eminence may be a surprise to some, but is the direct result of two excellent Hungarian teachers, disciples of the composer and teacher Zoltan Kodaly, who developed many methods for teaching music to children. With this basis, the current director, George Bragg, was able to carry on a great tradition. Part of the Texan achievement was also no doubt a matter of discipline. Ex-boy soprano soloist Donald Collup recalls his first solo outing with the Texas Boys Choir in the 1960s at a Christmas Eve service. Young Collup knocked over his overloaded music stand, and

recalls: "After the crash, George Bragg walked over to me and whispered 'This is not the Fourth of July.'" (For more Collup-iana, see his website www.collup.com)

However far-ranging the achievement of boy choirs, they seem to flourish whenever an excellent teacher and a group of talented youngsters gather together. There is always optimism for a new golden age of boy choirs. Current pop favorites like the country-western singing tyke Billy Gilman and a tiny Euro-schmaltz advocate, Michael Junior, are mere place-holders for the real thing. The last internationally renowned boy soloist, Aled Jones, dates back to the 1980s but the tradition is by no means over. A wise French choral director at Versailles, Olivier Opdebeek, recently asserted that boy choirs are "fragile like great vineyards, boy choirs have great vintages and fallow years." Yet there will always be the draw of the voices themselves, as Opdebeek states: "Again all expectations, the child's voice unleashes passions. Pure, fragile, it delights some and exasperates others." The many who are delighted have every reason for optimistic belief in a fine future for boy choirs.

What they're all talking about



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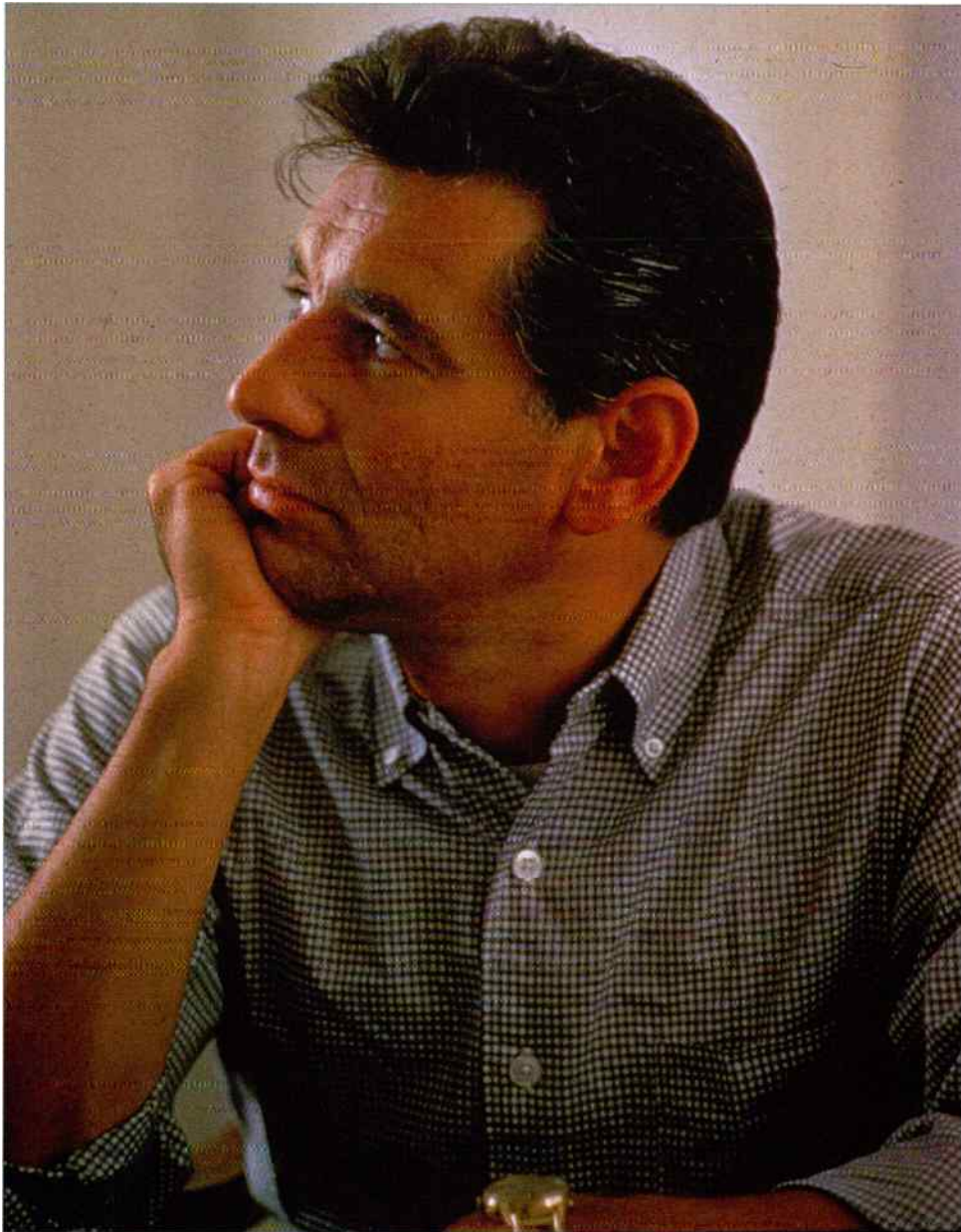


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What Bernstein Left Behind

Benjamin Ivry



THE CONDUCTOR, Broadway composer, and musical pied piper Leonard Bernstein (1918 - 1990) is still a vivid presence among us. There is no point in comparing him to other conductors, past and pre-

sent, since none of them had the range of activities he did. The New York Philharmonic has never really managed to replace him after he left its musical directorship in 1969 to devote more time to composition.

Although the Philharmonic has been producing archival sets for some time, only now has the obvious Bernstein tribute appeared. The 10-CD set (NYP 2003/13 available by phone at 800/557-8268, priced

BERNSTEIN'S 10 BEST

1. Carl Nielsen, *Symphony No. 3*, Sony SMK 47598

Royal Danish Orchestra

An electrifying 1960s visit to Denmark produced this landmark performance which is still a cause for thrills among Danish music lovers.

2. Verdi: *Falstaff*, Sony M2K 42535

Bernstein's track record with opera was spotty, with uneven recordings of "Carmen," "Fidelio," and "Der Rosenkavalier" on the debit side. Still, this early "Falstaff" benefits from the presence of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, the baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau in a genial mood in the title role, and a stellar group of supporting singers including Rolando Panerai, Gerhard Stolze, and Erich Kunz.

3. Beethoven: *Symphony No. 9*, Deutsche Grammophon 2GH 429861

Members of the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Dresden Staatskapelle, Kirov Theatre Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, New York Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestre de Paris, Bavarian Radio Chorus, Dresden Philharmonic Children's Chorus, Berlin Radio Chorus members.

When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, Bernstein leapt into action and performed concerts of Beethoven's Ninth with a galvanized pickup group of orchestra players from across Europe, and four excellent vocal soloists. The excitement is still tangible.

4. Bernstein: *Songfest*, Deutsche Grammophon 447957

This is probably Bernstein's finest classical composition, a collection very American songs set to moving and often humorous poems, and interpreted by a group of singers fully aware of the Bernstein sensibility, especially the refined bass Donald Gramm.

5. *Great Marches*, Sony SMK 63154

Part of the great pleasure of attending a Bernstein concert was in watching the conductor strut his stuff. He really thrilled to the march repertoire, this collection of bonbons by Sousa, Elgar, Prokofiev, Wagner, and others is a delight.

6. Bernstein: *Trouble in Tahiti*, Sony SMK 60969

This one-act opera about marital trouble in suburbia is still fresh and witty, perhaps because it is so entrenched in 1950s conventions, made ever-familiar in a world of TV reruns of "I Love Lucy" and the like. The scene for mezzo-soprano, "Island Magic," about a trashy Hollywood movie, is a typically Bernstein show-stopping combination of Broadway panache and classical polish.

7. Mahler: *Symphonie No. 4*, Deutsche Grammophon 2GH 423607.

Concertgebouw Orchestra

Bernstein was a famous Mahlerian, although fine conductors before and after him have made as memorable recordings of the symphonies. In Mahler's Fourth, Bernstein made a real innovation by using a boy soprano for the voice of an angel. The Concertgebouw is one of the finest orchestras he ever worked with, in addition, making this disc a must for all Mahler fans.

8. Mozart: *Great Mass KV 427*, Deutsche Grammophon 2GH 431791

Bavarian Radio Chorus, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra

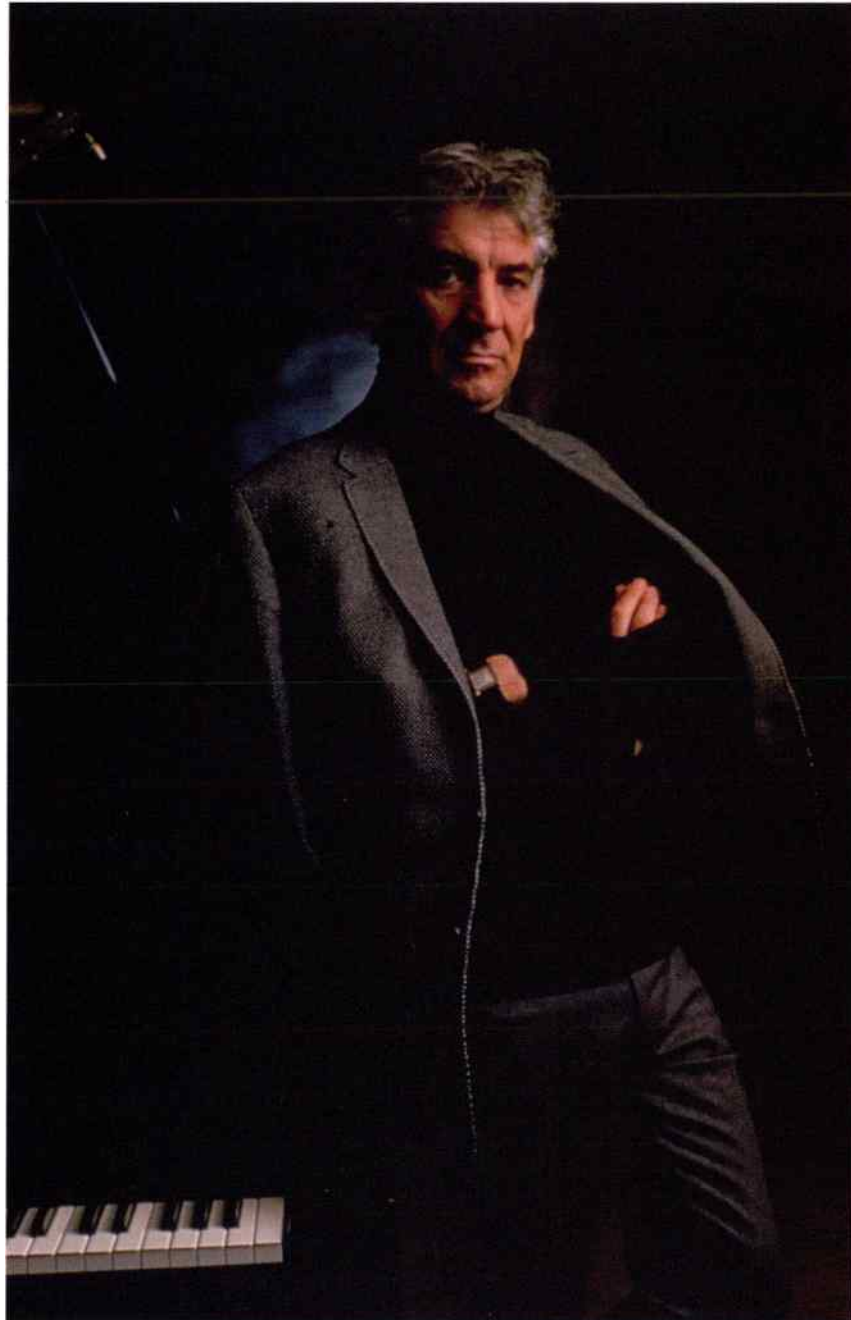
Bernstein was not an "authentic" Mozartean, but he could be a very fine one. Passionately involved in the music, he brought out the theatricality of works like the Great Mass or the solo vocal work, "Exsultate jubilate," which benefits here from the crystalline pipes of American soprano Arleen Auger.

9. Bach: *St. Matthew Passion*, Sony SM2K 60727

What, an abridged St. Matthew Passion sung in English? Purists may shudder in horror, but this Bernstein recording has remained in print ever since it was first published in the early 1960s. A highly dramatic and expressive version, this version of Bach's Passion reflects an old and grandiose tradition of performance. Unfortunately, Bernstein never rerecorded this work, as his record company stuck with the original instrument crew for this repertoire. New York Philharmonic soloists like oboist Harold Gomberg and flutist John Wummer outdo themselves.

10. Beethoven: *Symphony No. 9*, Deutsche Grammophon 2GH 410859

Yes, it's another Beethoven Ninth, an ideal work for Bernstein in its showy glamour and choral sentiment, "Seid Umschlungen, Millionen," (Be Embraced, You Millions) which was at the heart of Bernstein's motivation for performing. Here, the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, Vienna Singverein, and soloists, especially bass Kurt Moll and soprano Gwyneth Jones, provide plenty of excitement.



at \$195.00) consists of never-before-available live recordings of repertory from Mozart to Stravinsky. Gapers at the Bernstein bins in CD shops who marvel at the hundreds and hundreds of titles available may wonder why we need more Lennyphilia. Like all musicians, Bernstein must be judged by the best he left to posterity, and some of these newly published archival recordings are certainly among his best.

They include a brisk, high-stepping Elgar "Cockaigne" overture and dynamic excerpts from Wagner's "Gotterdammerung" with the stalwart soprano Eileen Farrell. Bernstein had made studio recordings of other works by Elgar and Wagner, but they were slow and

heavy, the kind of funeral march approach he often favored after 1978. In that year, his chain-smoking wife Felicia died of cancer and Bernstein loudly resolved to "kill himself with cigarettes," a destiny it took him a dozen years to accomplish. His subsequent health problems were sometimes reflected in performances, casting a pall that made slow tempos almost unendurably languid.

By contrast, these Philharmonic archival gems are spiffily energetic. They feature works he never recorded elsewhere, or waited until too late when he was fatigued. Examples are winning readings of Paul Hindemith's "Mathis der Maler" Symphony and Benjamin

Britten's "Spring Symphony" which have rarely been put across with this kind of infectious charm. Even more remarkable are the world-premiere performances here of works like Hans Werner Henze's 5th Symphony and Charles Ives' 2nd Symphony. Bernstein reminds us of his uncanny gift of conveying to an audience why he loved a piece of music and to persuade them to love it, too. This rare gift even extends to challenging works like Edgard Varese's clangy "Arcana" and Pierre Boulez's arid "Improvisation sur Mallarmé I."

There are missteps here, such as his ill-advised attempt to play a tinny harpsichord in Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No.5 or the Bruckner Sixth Symphony that's hampered by too much urban angst. The compilers, led by archivist Sedgwick Clark and a number of Philharmonic execs, probably went overboard in including Bernstein's spoken introductions to a variety of avant-garde pieces, where the *spiel* is often longer than the music, and sometimes even harder to take. But overall this set is a revelation of unsuspected quality from a performer who never hid his talents under a bushel, and a sign that the Bernstein we thought we knew reserves some posthumous surprises still.

Other record companies may be getting the same idea, for example Deutsche Grammophon, which routinely recorded Bernstein's later performances and issued a vast quantity of them, edited and with studio retakes tacked on. Their new commemorative six CD-set, "Leonard Bernstein: The Legend Lives On" (DG 469 460-2) contains a never-before-released Mozart Piano Concerto No.17 which Bernstein leads from the piano with real panache and style. It had been buried until now in the archives of Deutsche Grammophon, who could not figure what to add to it in order to fill out a CD. Such are the vagaries of the music industry, which can obscure a musician's full legacy.

On a personal level, the waters are even murkier. Bernstein's complexity and contradictions have baffled a series of biographers. A dotting husband and father, he also led an exuberant gay life. Clearly containing multitudes, he also had less admirable sides, revealed in books

like William Trotter's recent biography of Bernstein's conducting mentor Dimitri Mitropoulos (Amadeus Press). According to Trotter, Bernstein obtained the job of music director of the Philharmonic by complaining to the orchestra trustees that they could not hire a homosexual like

Mitropoulos for the job!

This story has a mirror-image in Albert Fuller's new memoir of the arts patroness Alice Tully (University of Illinois Press), which explains that the Juilliard School of Music trustees revolted in 1970 when it was suggested they name the "known homosexual" Bernstein as acting president of that prestigious school.

The new Philharmonic edition is a happy occasion to turn away from such turmoils and scandals, and focus on what Bernstein will be remembered for: his great and irreplaceable musicality. The rest, and anecdotes will surely continue to be endless, are mere accessories to great musical accomplishment. Bernstein's social behavior, telling harelip jokes with gusto at the dinner table, for example, could make

some over-serious people underestimate him as a talent. The classical music world contains many such sober-sided people who expect a great conductor to always act like one. I well recall a dinner at Bernstein's house in the early 1980s, in the company of some

other puzzles flew around the table in between courses which were served by an over-stressed household staff. Indeed, one employee had a fit of hysteria by the evening's end, and Bernstein had to comfort her while she awaited her car ride home. The point is that off the podium, Bernstein was as

impulsive as most biographies state.

However, no biography of Bernstein has avoided a pesky moralistic and judgmental tone. With the passing years, perhaps it will become clearer that with Bernstein, one element was

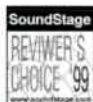
in fact inseparable from another. Just as one cannot separate the classical composer from conductor from Broadway talent, one cannot really separate the husband and father from the gay man, or from the wild child. With Bernstein, it was and is imperative to either take him or leave him. Today's music lovers, starved for the kind of musical excitement he brought, would seem all the more ready to take him, with all his complexities and contradictions. Bernstein really did contain multitudes, and we are only beginning to appreciate their full extent.

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friends who had been working on editions of some of his works. Bernstein was in a turmoil, having just finished his recording of "Tristan und Isolde" and written his still-underrated opera "A Quiet Place." He was particularly smarting from the reviews of the latter, yet launched into his dinner with a voracious appetite, including a way of eating corn on the cob that seemed ill-suited for someone with as dignified a title as "Conductor Laureate". While Bernstein did balletic deep knee bends to help digest his heavy meal, word games and

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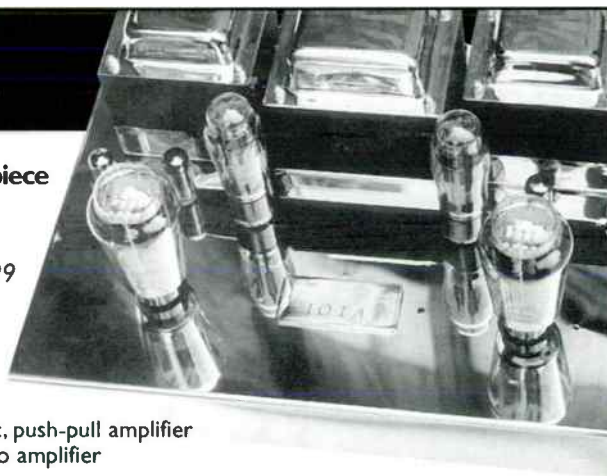


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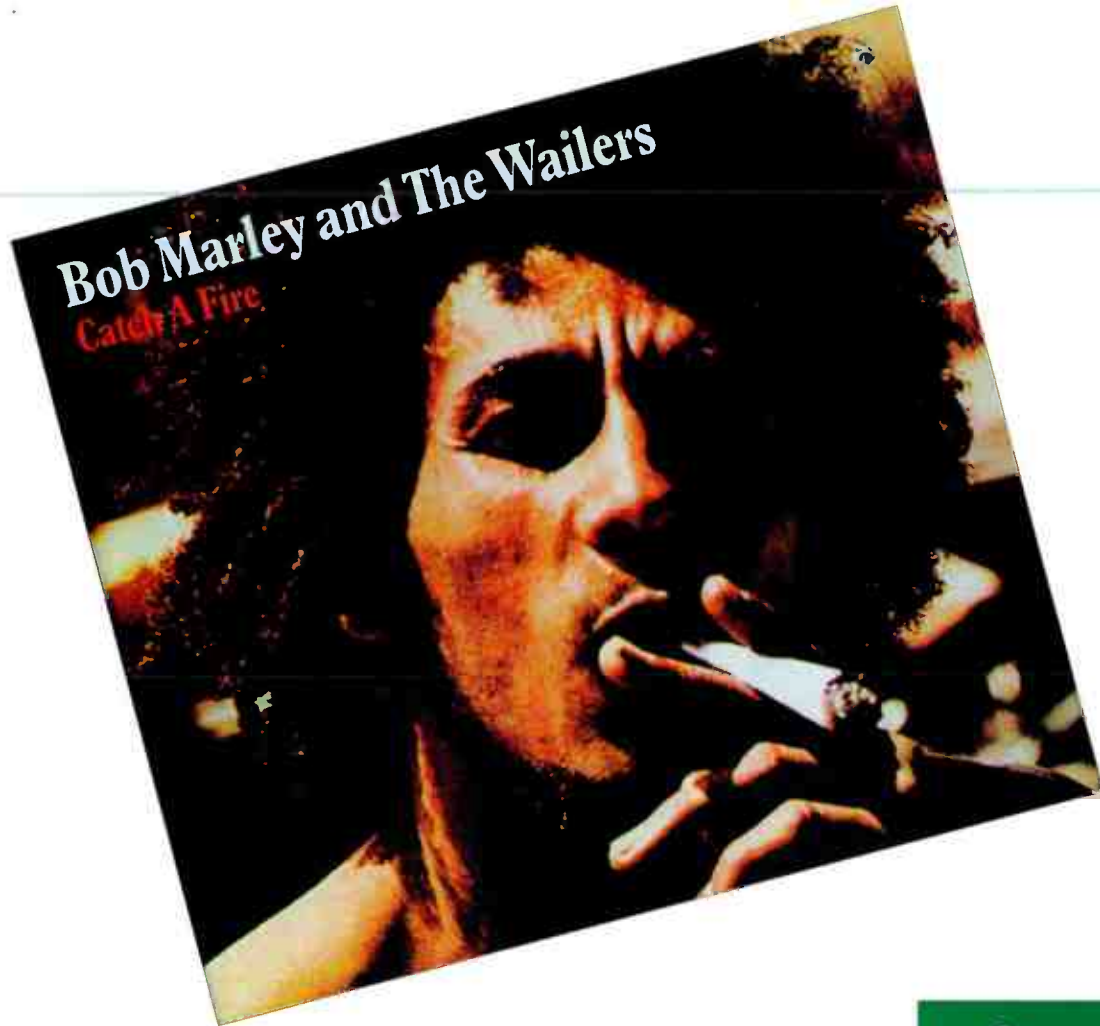
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Michael Tearson

Reggae

Bob Marley & The Wailers *Catch A Fire*
Island 314 548 635-2 (Deluxe Edition)

CATCH A FIRE was the album that took Bob Marley & the Wailers out of Trenchtown in Kingston, Jamaica, and introduced them to the world. Even though they had been recording since the mid '60s, this album was their first to receive worldwide distribution. According to Richard Williams' notes, it was also the first reggae album to be recorded as an album rather than being put together from a collection of singles.

Island Records founder Chris Blackwell, a scion of the Crosse & Blackwell Blackwells, was the catalyst. He had spent the best portion of his life up to then on the island, and he took on the crusade of exporting Jamaica's unique music to

the world. His first Island success had been the 1964 Millie Small hit "My Boy Lollipop." Later he produced the film *The Harder They Come* starring reggae singer Jimmy Cliff. The soundtrack album is a major landmark in reggae history. After Cliff ankled Island for EMI Blackwell had to develop Plan B.

Blackwell met Marley and his band in 1972 and he swiftly signed them advancing 4000 British Pounds for them to record *Catch A Fire*. The idea was to take the Wailers' tracks and overdub some rock elements to make the finished product more approachable to a rock audience, as Blackwell put it to create "more of a drifting, hypnotic feel than a reggae rhythm." The

hope was that the rockers would recognize in Marley a kindred rebellious spirit.

The key additions were Wayne Perkins' guitar, Tyrone Downie's organ and John "Rabbit" Bundrick's keyboards. These were done with Marley's acquiescence and understanding that the resulting album could open whole new audiences for him.

This Deluxe Edition is a two-CD set. Disc 2 is the album as originally released on Island. Disc 1 features the tracks without the overdubs plus two extra tracks omitted from the release, "All Day All Night" and "High Tide Or Low Tide." "Tide" did see release on the Marley boxed-set *Songs Of Freedom*.

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The sound transfer on both discs is outstanding. It is rich and full-bodied with that terrific booming bass so central to the classic reggae sound. Clarity is superlative.

There is not a whole lot of point in critiquing the songs. *Catch A Fire* is the recognized classic that put Bob Marley and then-bandmate Peter Tosh (writer of "Stop That Train" and "400 Years" here) on the map and cemented reggae's position as a vital musical form. Songs like "Concrete Jungle," "Stir It Up," "Kinky Reggae," "Slave Driver" and the Tosh songs have become oft-covered reggae bedrock. But some thought and perhaps meditation comparing the two versions of the album is clearly in order.

The revelation here, and not a very surprising one at that, is the power and directness of the unadorned Jamaican recordings. The earlier versions have lots more space between notes. They are much more streamlined and pack a huge wallop.

The released album is busier. The overdubs fill a lot of space. By design, they smooth out rough edges and prettify the album for ears trained on rock. However, they do not blunt the Wailers' passion one bit.

Some will prefer one, some the other. Both have serious merit. Nearly 30 years on the purity of the originals feels more powerful to me. But back then the "sweetening" helped suck me into that alien world on the vinyl. Unaccustomed to the peculiarities of reggae, they helped bridge me to the then exotic and new sound. Having both versions of the album in one package now is a treasure.

The packaging is outstanding. It resurrects the long since deleted design of the first Island pressing. Williams' notes are terrific as they illuminate the reissue as they explain how the album came to be and how it felt upon initial release when Williams was an editor of *Melody Maker*, England's leading music weekly.

Catch A Fire (Deluxe Edition) is instantly essential. Even if you have the original, you will have to get this package for the unadorned Jamaican version. Bob Marley & The Wailers remain reggae's best band ever, and *Catch A Fire* (Deluxe Edition) provides ample evidence why.

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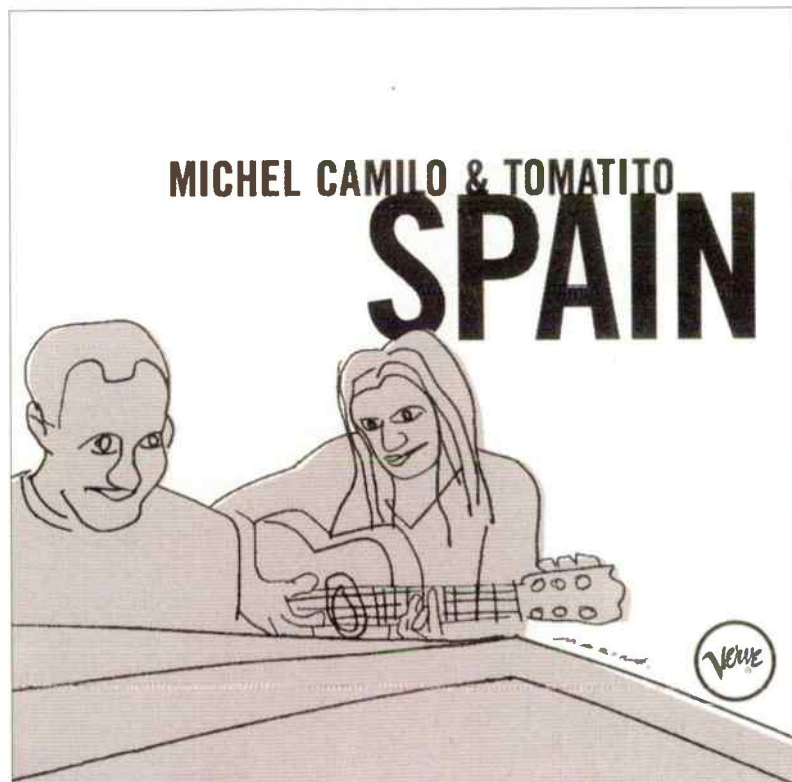
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YOU WERE FORTUNATE, indeed, if you found yourself in Spain this past April, in either La Coruna, Leon or Bilbao. Or if your musical travel itinerary will include The Montreal Jazz Festival, July 4; Barcelona and Madrid, July 12 and 13; The North Sea Jazz Festival in The Hague, July 14, The Montreux Jazz Festival, July 18, or the Umbria Jazz Festival in Perugia, Italy, July 21.

If so — don't read this review.

You either have already imbibed the magic, in which case the words will seem shallow. Or, you will do so shortly in a live setting so keep the element of surprise aflame! In either case, congratulations, for living in Spain — I envy you — or for having such an extravagant bank account that allows intercontinental concert attendances.

For the rest of us, this CD is one of those rare coincidences of the celestial constellations. They usually give birth to Czars, dictators, saints or major rascals (like the editor of this magazine). And yes, on occasion, truly inspired and profoundly surprising musical magic.

This is a recorded collaboration between Michel Camilo, jazz pianist extraordinaire, and José Fernandez Torres, otherwise better known as Tomatito ("the little tomato") who is one of the most revered Gitano flamenco guitarists of contemporary Spain. Camilo, who studied at the Conservatory in his native Dominican Republic and also attended Mannes and Juilliard, had his Carnegie Hall debut in 1985. Since 1988, he's enjoyed a string of highly successful releases which

were at the top of the jazz charts for weeks. Tomatito was the guitarist of choice for *flamenco cantaor* sensation Camaron de la Isla before the latter's untimely demise and can be enjoyed in a *nuevo flamenco* setting on Milestone's *Barrio Negro* (MCD-9205-2) and Nuevos Medios' *Guitarra Gitana* (NM 15694).

The joining of jazz and flamenco music was attempted at least as early as 1959 or '60 when Gil Evans and Miles Davis recorded *Sketches of Spain*. John Coltrane followed suit with *Olé* a year later, and Chick Corea contributed *My Spanish Heart* in 1976, and there were various parallel experiments between saxophonist Pedro Iturralde and Paco de Lucia. Later, in 1989, Gil Evans was scheduled to arrange and produce *Jazzpana* but died before

the project got underway. It eventually passed to Vince Mendoza and resulted in a 1993 release that garnered two Grammy nominations. This project brought together Michael Brecker, Al di Meola, Steve Khan and Peter Erskine on the jazz front, while singer Ramon "El Portugues," guitarist Juan Manuel Canizares, Jorge Pardo and Carles Benavent led the flamenco battalion. It took until last year for *Jazzpana II* to be released, and with an entirely new cadre of players headed by Gerardo Nunez and pianist Chano Dominguez.

Why all this history? Mainly to show that while attempts to fuse jazz and flamenco styles have been made, the ones that turned heads were few and far between.

Enter *Spain*, a kind of culmination of this musical amalgam. Like mutating DNA, the hybrid threw off various offspring throughout its evolutionary cycle. Some were challenging but of limited appeal. Some were stillborn, outright failures. The crossbreed eventually arrived at something readily accessible yet brimming with artistic creativity, something profound enough to withstand repeat listenings while being pared down to the bare essen-

tials. These are all signs of artistic maturity; one eschews flamboyant showmanship for integrity's sake.

Spain opens with a melodic meditation on the famous *Concierto de Aranjuez* (originally for guitar and orchestra) by Joaquin Rodrigo. It then segues into a brisk rendition of Chick Corea's famous "Spain" theme. Consuelo Velázquez' "Bésame Mucho" becomes a dazzling eight-minute exploration of the work by Camilo, with Tomatito applying some very jazzily phrased counterpoints. Later on, the traditional fast-metered *flamenco bulerías* pattern receives a stunning makeover in Tomatito's "A mi niño José." Camilo's jagged piano chords take the place of traditional *palmas* (foot stomps and cajon percussion), while Tomatito's guitar follows the rhythmic complexities of flamenco compas.

Both artists possess amazing physical dexterity across their respective keys and fret board. Still, the deeper tenor underlying even their most-flashy or virtuoso exploits is a lyrical playfulness. The music stays light on its feet. It's an exploration of the soul of the respective idioms rather than a celebration of the musician's more extrovert

chops. This provides the material depth and invites numerous revisits. One doesn't burn out on shallow speed wizardry across the scales. Rather, one feels invited to enter a mood and simultaneously gets an appreciation of the consummate artistry that draws a complete portrait with a few simple lines.

Listen to the seductive rhythms of the gypsy tangos and the dreamy slow-motion excursion of Camilo's own love theme "Two Much." Groove to the jauntily rollicking "Para Troilo y Salgán" and the straight-ahead hard-driving jazz chaser "La Vacilona" with its shifty syncopations. *Spain* simply is a full-bore assault at musical reference material. While it may not be so well recorded as to make the Chesky brothers nervous, certainly it will make you and your well-dialed-in system very happy indeed.

Now cut to standing ovations in your mind! What did you mention about needing a personal pilot for your Jetstream to deliver you and yours to Montreux, Switzerland in mid-July? Count me in. Just don't expect any action on my part on the eve of July 18. I'll be at the Jazz Festival enjoying these two artists live.



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THIS CD IS THE SECOND release from a band that is drawing increasing attention from bluegrass fans. Their first, reviewed by yours truly in Vol. 6, No. 4 of *TAV*, was recorded in the "usual way" for a modern recording, that is, it was multitracked, with the vocals added at a later date. The musicians were each in their own cubicle, mistakes were overdubbed, and the final product mixed down to stereo to produce as "perfect" a CD as possible.

For this release, Karl and the band wanted to go back to the early days of bluegrass recordings, and record in the manner used 50 years ago, as far as is possible. They think that some of "the feeling" of the music was being sacrificed in the pursuit of technical perfection; I couldn't have said it better myself! The sessions were recorded "live" in the studio, with no overdubs, all the musicians performing the music just as they would on stage. Three RCA ribbon microphones were employed, one each for left, right, and center, with one more mike, an Audio Technica 4033, on the bass, to be mixed in as needed during final mixdown. According to an e-mail correspondence I had with Jake Jenkins, Big Country's banjo player and, apparently, the technical guru for the band, this bass mike was mixed in very sparingly, only as needed to give the bass the needed presence in the recording, with only a touch used on two cuts. Jake also said that the ribbon microphones used were an RCA 77, 44, and a 4A28, that the CD virtually "mixed itself," and that the only processing used was a tiny bit of compression. This extra effort to keep things simple shows in the finished product. This is one fine-sounding disc! The music ain't half-bad either; in fact, it's great!

Highlights of the album include "Cold, Cold Love," written by Jake, who picks banjo in the true Earl Scruggs tradition. Jake also penned "Jakebrakes," a classic breakdown, which uses a technique by which the fifth string of the banjo is tuned down, and then back up by ear. Karl's son, Kris Shiflett, who is also the group's bass

player, contributes "It's Fall Again," a slow, pretty tune that showcases a possible latent, but major bluegrass songwriting talent. Karl wrote two of the numbers here, "The Day I met an Angel" and "Since You've Gone Away," the latter featuring some great twin fiddling by the group's regular fiddler, Kirk Brandenberger, and guest Jimmy Campbell. The same pair fiddle their way through "The Old South," written by mandolinist Lyle Meador. Brandenberger also shares the fiddle work, this time with Chuck Westerman, on "Now that You Have Me (You Don't Want Me)," an old Josh Graves tune. Lyle Meador also contributes the rockabilly flavored "Juke Joint Boogie," which serves to showcase his lightning quick mandolin work. The album ends, as most of Shiflett's live performances do, with a gospel number, "Standing in the Need of Prayer."

Sound quality on this disc is first rate, the movement of the musicians as they approach the microphone, and then move back, readily apparent. Attack of the banjo and mandolin is crisp, and decay of the notes suitably lifelike. The recording is as clean as can be, and the tone and timbre of the instruments extremely realistic. All that said, however, what makes this recording special is the music and its effect on the listener. This is infectious music, and I challenge anyone to come away from it with a bad attitude on life. The whole point of recording this album in this manner was to communicate the wonderful, joyous feeling which infused early bluegrass music. At that goal, *In Full Color* succeeds mightily.

The day before I finished this review, I once again had the opportunity to see this group perform live in a small church hall. As great as this recording is, it doesn't hold a candle to the live show this band puts on. As I said in my previous review, get out and see them live if you can. It's an experience you won't soon forget, almost like traveling back in time to the days of Bill Monroe, Lester Flatt, and Earl Scruggs.



Old-Timey

Songcatcher
Music From and Inspired by the Motion Picture
Vanguard 79586-2

THE STUNNING PLATINUM success of the *O Brother Where Art Thou* soundtrack made it inevitable that more music in that old-timey, pre-bluegrass vein would become available. And that there would be more soundtrack music in the style. *Songcatcher* is somewhat similar, but I must note that the album was recorded before the *O Brother* album appeared. Most of the music here is traditional, but a few more recent songs appear as well. Two "Score Suites" present some of David Mansfield's ominous background music, and Emmylou Harris' stunning "Barbara Allen" receives a full production. It appears in the film over closing credits.

The key difference between the two scores is that the *Songcatcher* album is virtually entirely voiced by women. And what a line-up! Rosanne Cash offers a lovely "Fair

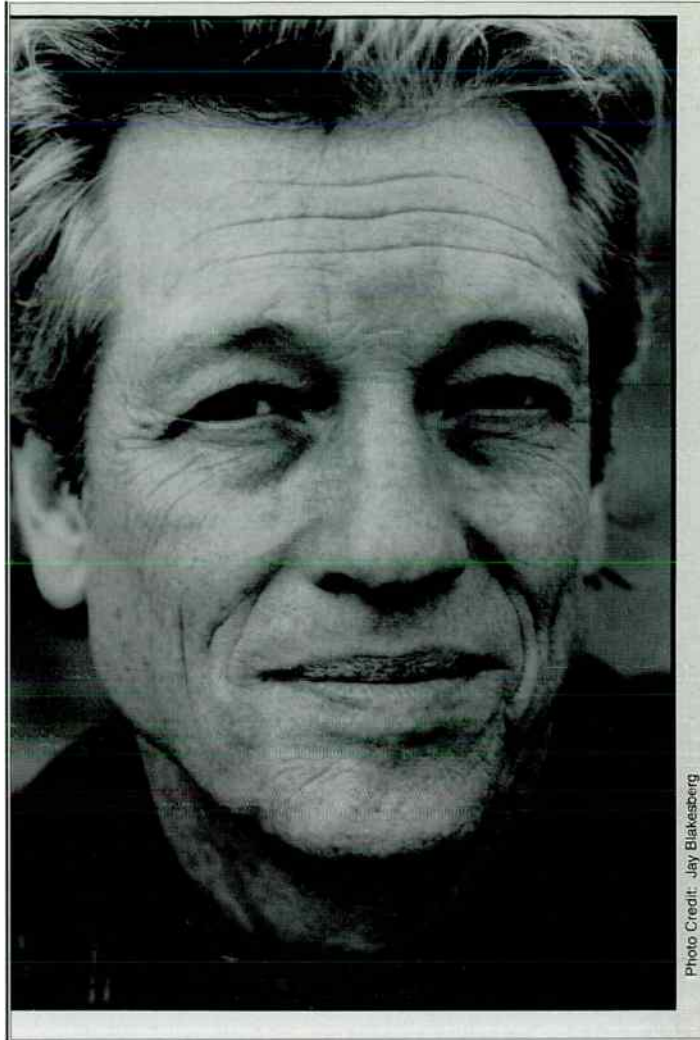
and Tender Ladies." Iris DeMent's unique voice haunts "Pretty Saro" backed only by Mansfield's lonely mountain fiddle. Allison Moorer's "Moonshiner" and Sara Evans' "Mary of the Wild Moor" are riveting. Even more so is the a cappella trio of Gillian Welch, David Rawlings, and David Steel take of the mystic murder ballad "Wind And Rain." Deana Carter's "Cuckoo Bird" is charming while Maria McKee's "Wayfaring Stranger" features her best recorded singing ever.

More recent songs are Dolly Parton's "When Love Is New" sung with Emmy Rossum and played by the same crew Parton used on her two recent bluegrass albums. Patty Loveless offers Patty Ramey's "Sounds of Loneliness," and Julie Miller strips down her "All My Tears" to the bare bones of banjo, guitar, fiddle and harmonium.

The two "Score Suites" are something of an intrusion, but they appear late in the album. However mournfully lovely, they do interrupt the flow of mostly traditional songs. Between the two suites is an a cappella "Conversation with Death" by Hazel Dickens, David Patrick Kelly and Bobby McMillan, the same song Ralph Stanley sang as "O Death" in *O Brother*.

Sound throughout is excellent. Every little nuance of the voices and wooden instruments is clear. The uncredited mastering job is superb making this a wonderful listening experience. The voices are gorgeous, the songs well chosen and cast.

Highest recommendation to anyone who liked the *O Brother* album (and there are over a million of us), and for anyone at all interested in the roots of country music.



W*ICKED GRIN* is a very offbeat album for blues singer John Hammond. It is an album of 12 Tom Waits' songs and one gospel song produced by Waits himself. From the sound of the album, Waits relished casting a different voice into his songs. Hammond and Waits have known each other for ages and occasionally worked together. Their mutual respect and fondness allows the album to soar.

Waits' songs have always sported idiosyncratic rhythm, melody and time signatures. His lyrics have been bizarre from the beginning. He populates his songs with some very odd people often lowlifes. Some are murderously dangerous, some sweet.

Hammond's laconic delivery suits Waits' sly, deceptive vehicles beautifully. The lean band does a wonderful job on Tom's loose-limbed songs. Larry Taylor (Canned Heat's original bassist), percussionist Stephan Hodges and harmonica great Charlie Musselwhite all played on Waits' Grammy-winning *Mule Variations*. Sir Douglas Quintet alumnus keyboard wizard Augie Meyers fits like a glove. Waits' guitar on nine selections and piano on two add authenticity. He also sings on the gospel finale "I Know I Have Been Changed." And, of course, Hammond adds a lot of his own guitar and some harmonica, too. Hammond responded to the fellowship and intimacy of the sessions with great performances.

Nothing here is flashy for flashiness' sake; nothing is tossed off carelessly. All involved work together in the best interest of the material. The sound is vivid and deceptively warm. Unquestionably a dark, sly album, *Wicked Grin* has real depth. Showcasing the bluesier side of Waits' songwriting, the wry humor and deep pathos shine through.





Folk

Geoff Muldaur *Password*
Hightone HCD-8125

FUSION, OR CROSSOVER, implies sell-out, placement of commercial considerations over musical ones, and watering down of the "real deal." Geoff Muldaur, whose previous CD, *The Secret Password*, I reviewed in these pages, has real fusion down. While he deals with roots music, not jazz, he integrates seemingly incompatible elements without diluting the core passion of the music. He has a great ear for tunes to cover, and a good sense of when to take liberties and when to remain faithful to the original. To these, he brings two fabulous instruments, his guitar and his voice. He can sing in a wispy tenor, using a wavering falsetto, or belt out rock, blues, or gospel with powerful authority.

"Kitchen Door Blues," an allegory about mortality, has a delicate guitar arrangement and pretty licks (David Lindley guests). "Drop Down Mama," written by "Sleepy" John Estes for whom Muldaur seems to have an affinity, melds funky drums with an old-time string band. Clare Muldaur (Geoff's daughter?) sings lead on "At the Christmas Ball"; she has fine pipes and reminds me of Maria (her mom?). The tune has a rowdy, sacreligious, drunken take on Christmas, and the arrangement is a cross between ragtime, old-time

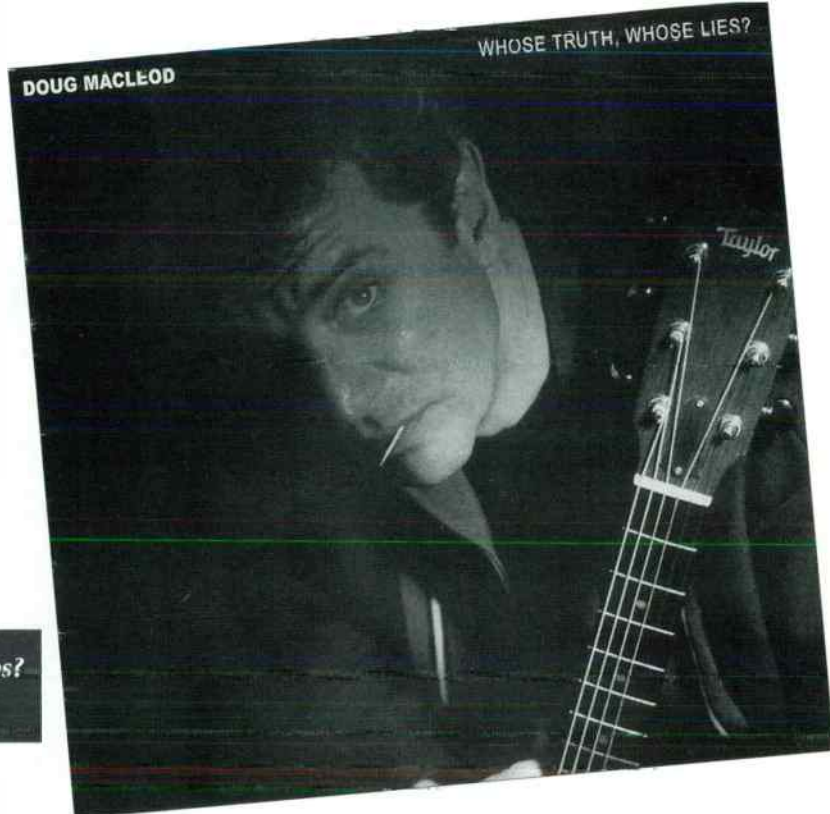
country, and Dixieland. (Richard Green's fiddle and Roswell Rudd's tail-gating trombone are outstanding). More traditional country gospel comes next, with "Wait 'til I Put On My Robe." The McGarrigle sisters help Geoff try to get across to the other side, and it is moving. Muldaur finds the sad, lovely ballad in Charlie Patton's "Some Of These Days (I'll Be Gone)," while avoiding pathos in the tragic country waltz "Mary Of The Wild Moors." A rockin' gospel groove drives "Trouble Soon Be Over," and Muldaur's singing here is powerful, indeed. "Light Rain" is a soft acoustic blues, and "Prairie Lullaby" is a lovely country lullaby to a child. The latter's arrangement is most interesting, with violin, clarinet, bassoon, and French horn intensifying the sleepy mood. He sings with a tender vibrato, and does some fine, delicate yodeling. "K.C. Moan" is a train song arranged for jug band (John Sebastian, with whom Muldaur played on his terrific "J Band" CD, guests on harmonica), with a very large chorus singing and humming lovely harmonies (sounds like it was mixed to mono). Muldaur is in quivering voice, with a haunting falsetto. We're singing about that world a-

comin' again on "Beautiful Isle of Somewhere," a turn-of-the-century (20th) style piece with violin, clarinet, bassoon, and French horn accompanying Muldaur, who sings it like a crooner from the early 1900s. It's controlled and stately, with a ragtime feel (minus the syncopation) and contrasts nicely with the earlier rocking gospel numbers.

We end with "Got To Find Blind Lemon, Part two" (Part one ended the previous CD). I was somewhat hard on the earlier version in my previous review, but I've come to really love it. The song and singing are evocative. I like how it stretched over two discs, like an old 78, and the guitar really captures Blind Lemon (it's the best sounding track; vocal and guitar are quite lifelike).

This is no sonic demo record. As noted above, it is inconsistent, varying from poor to quite good. The stage is narrow and shallow, never extending beyond the speakers. Some of the multi-tracked instruments get buried in the mix. Still, Muldaur's voice is well rendered, and the sonics don't detract from the great music.

Another great effort from a '60s folkie who's kept the faith and continues to look for new things to say about "roots" music.



TALK ABOUT PERFECT timing! I received this CD from Fearless Leader Pitts a few days before the recent Presidential election, and didn't have the opportunity to listen to it until the following week. Upon hearing the title cut, I thought that Macleod must be psychic. The song asks, "Who can you believe? One politician made a promise. The other one says 'It ain't true,' they're fighting amongst themselves, at the expense of me and you. If I did my job, y'all, the way the fools do theirs, I'd be begging in the street, no one in my life would care." The song also takes a swipe at lawyers, and the escalating level of violence in our society. That's a lot of ground to cover in 4 minutes and 13 seconds!

Macleod is an accomplished musician who has a long history with Audioquest records, and his releases have always combined extremely high standards of recording quality with a very high level of musical acumen. I recall hearing him perform at one of the *Stereophile* shows, I think it was 1995 in Los Angeles, and being very impressed with both his songwriting and performing skills. A visit to his

website, www.dougmacleod.com, was extremely informative, revealing that Doug won the W.C. Handy award for his first album. This CD continues that tradition, with 13 songs, running the gamut from blues to folk, with some bluegrass tinged country as well. He wrote every song here, either alone or in collaboration, and the songwriting is first class. "Norfolk County Line," a beautiful, slow country tune, displays exceptional lyricism, as well as great duet singing from Macleod and Janiva Magness, the tune "recalling someone who was a friend first, and a lover second."

In "Can't Give Me Nothin' (I Ain't Already Had Before)," Macleod deals with the superficiality of his attraction to a woman who seemingly had everything, but, as it turned out, had nothing much beneath the surface. "Saint Louis On My Mind" is a traditional blues which finds Macleod thinkin' "about my sweet river woman, thinkin' about my last good time." As an aside here, can anyone tell me why the majority of blues songs, at least seemingly, open with the lyrics "I woke up this mornin'"? Just wondering.

Some of my other favorite cuts include "Rise Up," which is all about how what is in the past is over and done with. You can't change it, so accept it and go on. "Sweet Ride" is, as the liner notes tell us, not about a car. "Time For A Change" addresses the feelings you have when you know that it's time to leave someone you've been with for a long time. You've been hurt badly, but you are still in love. Still you know that it's "Time For A Change."

The quality of this recording is, as I mentioned before, exceptional, which is the norm with AQ. All the audiophile bases are covered, with a wide, deep soundstage, air, atmosphere, and a clean job of recording, with a very natural sound. Macleod's guitar is captured with appropriately sharp attack, and the decay gives a good idea of the recording venue's acoustics. This disc was produced by Joe Harley, and recorded using Sony's DSD technology, together with ADC's and DAC's custom designed by Ed Meitner. A very musically-involving, well-engineered, and well-recorded CD, and a "must hear" for any audiophile or blues fan.



Rock The Band

Michael Tearson

Music From Big Pink *Capitol* 72435-25390-2-4
 The Band *Capitol* 72435-25389-2-8
 Stage Fright *Capitol* 72435-25395-2-9
 Cahoots *Capitol* 72435-25391-2-3
 Rock Of Ages (2 CDs) *Capitol* 72435-30181-2-3
 Moondog Matinee *Capitol* 72435-25393-2-1
 Northern Lights - Southern Cross *Capitol* 72435-25394-2-0
 Islands *Capitol* 72435-25392-2-2

CAPITOL RECORDS has remastered and re-released one of the most beloved and honored catalogs it owns: The Band. They had been Bob Dylan's erstwhile backing band when he went electric (check out Bob Dylan *Live 1966: The "Royal Albert Hall" Concert*, Columbia C2K 65759, for the evidence). But 1968's *Music From Big Pink*, named for the pink house in Woodstock where the band rehearsed and several members lived, was a shocker in those wide-open psychedelic times. The album's economy and

stark conviction completely went against the grain of the times. Songs like "The Weight" and "Chest Fever," driven by Garth Hudson's swirling organ, seemed to emanate straight from the heart of America then and still do. Together with the country chestnut "Long Black Veil" and Dylan's "This Wheel's On Fire," "Tears of Rage" and "I Shall Be Released," *Big Pink* packs as mighty a wallop as ever.

Their second album, *The Band*, broke them wide open. It still feels like one of the most perfect albums

ever, its 12 songs each a gem. They are so strong that I use this album to show why the random button on a CD player is a valuable feature. Switching the order around here only deepens the album as songs take on fresh subtleties when their context is changed.

The legend continued with *Stage Fright* (seen as a slight let-down then, but better than most other bands' best), *Cahoots*, the sizzling live *Rock Of Ages*, the jukebox album of oldies *Moondog Matinee*, the under-rated *Northern Lights* -

Southern Cross and finally *Islands*, a contract completing album of leftovers with some new songs. Even *Islands*, the weakest of the bunch, contains some excellent material, and maybe some of your favorites.

Throughout the sound is spectacularly improved, revealing lots of little touches I never quite caught before. The A/B tests I did with the re-releases and the previous CDs confirmed my instincts. Each re-release contains a superior Rob Bowman essay relating how the album came about.

Best of all, all eight releases have copious bonus tracks to make the new package even more appealing. *Lights* and *Islands* each have only two extras, two alternate versions on *Lights* and one alternate plus the single only "Twilight." *Stage Fright* adds 1 alternate, two alternate mixes and a radio commercial for the album. Nice but not too compelling.

The others are meatier. *Cahoots* adds an alternate: "When I Paint My Masterpiece," an early attempt at "Endless Highway" plus outtakes of Dylan's "Bessie Smith" and "Don't Do It" from Marvin Gaye's song bag.

I had especially awaited *Moondog Matinee* to see what outtake oldies would appear. The five outtakes and another "Endless Highway" do not disappoint at all. The Band adds "Get Up Jake" plus alternate takes that reveal quite a bit

It's wonderful when a group like this gets such fine reissues done!

about the group's evolving creative process.

The other two carry mother loads.

Big Pink adds nine tracks: Two alternates and seven outtakes of songs never previously released. Thrilling listening.

The biggest bump of all comes with *Rock of Ages* recorded in New York December 28 - 31, 1971. To make the occasion special The Band engaged Allen Toussaint to create some of his typically brilliant horn charts packed with ear tickling New Orleans syncopation and counterpoint. His charts were used on half the songs at the shows.

The original two-LP set barely fits on a single CD, so the 10 bonus tracks appear on a second CD, a 45-minute bonus. Six feature the Band without Toussaint's horns. The final four are the December 31 encore when The Band coaxed Bob

Dylan out of seclusion for a then-rare cameo performance. Together they did a sizzling "Down In The Flood," "When I Paint My Masterpiece," "Don't You Tell Henry" (the only time Dylan ever did that song live) and a majestic "Like A

Rolling Stone." The Dylan tracks are worth the price of admission all by themselves.

Rock Of Ages has always been one of my favorite live albums, particularly because it does bring freshness to the songs they played. Adding the bonus CD and you can make a strong argument for *Rock* as the single most definitive Band album.

When an artist or group in a Big Label's back catalog is served so respectfully and righteously, it's a quite wonderful thing. Capitol has achieved just that with its reissues of The Band's eight albums. Essential listening.

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Pop

Anne Sofie von Otter and Elvis Costello
For The Stars
 Deutsche Grammophon 289 469 530-2

WHEN THE GREAT STARS of opera record their side projects or pop songs to show the rest of us they are "just folks," most often the results are at best mixed. Many times the raw power of the vocalist's instrument simply overwhelms material best served by intimate and delicacy. Often these singers cannot check the "WHOOO" in their voices at the studio door. This makes it hard to escape the impression that these projects are a form of slumming.

Not so for Anne Sofie von Otter's pop album; *For the Stars* is a totally different animal.

The key is producer and collaborator Elvis Costello who wrote or co-wrote nine of the 18 songs, five of them specifically for this release. His

Michael Tearson

"No Wonder" and "For the Stars" bookend the set. The adventure-some Fleshquartet set music to his words for "Rope" and "Just a Curio," while cellist Svante Henrepon scored "Green Song." The four older Costello songs, "Baby Plays Around," "I Want to Vanish," "Shamed into Love" (written with Ruben Blades,) and the Burt Bacharach collaboration "This House Is Empty Now," are all from the more challenging, thorny end of Costello's song pool.

Two others are lifted from the Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds*. Ron Sexsmith's crystalline "April After All," Jessie Mae Robinson's astute "The Other Woman" which Nina Simone used to do, Tom Waits' "Take It With Me," and "Broken Bicycles" medleyed with Paul McCartney's "Junk" and the stunningly gorgeous "Like an Angel Passing Through My Room" from ABBA's *The Visitors* album complete the set list.

Von Otter's voice, of course, is an amazing instrument. Here she displays a keen sense of restraint as she treads softly over the set's

cabaret-oriented material. She never oversings. In most songs she really gets under their surface to plumb their depths.

I expect to come back to this album frequently when I need a dose of dark tranquility.

The carefully wrought arrangements offer considerable help. Not surprising considering the album was recorded in Stockholm's Atlantis Grammofon AB. These arrangements balance an airy lightness, out-of-the-box adventure and well-deployed lushness keeping the listener off balance with the sheer diversity of sound.

Costello sings duet parts on five songs and acquits himself quite well indeed, his rougher, more man-nered voice providing a sharp contrast von Otter's smoothness.

Save for Steve Nave from Costello's band, The Attractions, and percussionist Michael Blair, all

the players are Swedish. One very notable contributor in ABBA's Benny Andersson who plays keys on his "Like an Angel" and accom-dion on "Broken Bicycles."

Not everyone will be won over by *For the Stars* as easily as I was. The album's daring and willingness to venture into places new to both Costello and von Otter charmed me totally. It offers a heady brew of civility, daring and nerve.

Over the years Elvis Costello has been eager to attempt wildly varying genre pieces from the high energy punk power of his earliest records to the Stax-Volt soul sound of his *Get Ready* to his one-off country album *Almost Blue* to collaborations with the avant-garde Brodsky String Quartet and Burt Bacharach. In fact for the material he wrote with Bacharach he did two albums, one straight pop renditions, the other jazz versions.

I suspect *For The Stars* is one achievement he is most proud of, and he should be. He has coaxed out of the luminous Anne Sofie von Otter an album I expect to return to frequently for years to come when I need a dose of dark tranquility.

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R'n'B

**Don Covay Mercy/See-Saw
Koch 8186**

DON COVAY is not the best-known of all the soul greats, but he may be the greatest songwriter cum stylist of them all. When you first hear his voice, the initial reaction is "Wow!, he sure sounds a lot like Mick Jagger!" and then you realize that The Rolling Stones' frontman patterned much of his approach after Don's. If he had only created the personality-filled lower register and the trademark falsetto Jagger got so much mileage out of, that would be enough, but Don also had a career filled with amazing records, wonderful songs, and groundbreaking productions, all self-produced! So much should have reserved him a spot in the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame. Unfortunately, Don's singles success never translated into making him a household name, and he is better-known as a songwriter than as an artist.

The folks at Koch have seen fit to release his first two LP albums together on one CD so listeners can enjoy the master artist at his best — these are some of the most exciting and enjoyable rock/r&b/soul records ever made.

While most of his contemporaries were leaning heavily on horn sections and "sweetened" recordings, Don kept his sessions raw. Guitars dominate, along with the cooking rhythm section led by Bernard Purdie and Don's collaborator Ronnie Miller (alternately Duck Dunn and Al Jackson on parts of *See-Saw*). I will own up to being a friend of Don's, so I am a little biased, but I enjoyed his music long before I came to know him and enjoy it still. Don told me that Jimi Hendrix was the guitarist on "Mercy Mercy" (confirmed by several other sources), and again, Don exerted his musical influence on that stylist; there's a bootleg disc available of Jimi's first gig with The Experience, and one of the songs they storm through is that one. Many other songs on this disc should be familiar to fans of Aretha Franklin, Stevie Winwood, Solomon Burke, The Small Faces, Steppenwolf, Paul Young, and The J. Geils Band, all of whom took these albums as jumping off points for their own repertoire. Don has been a choice among musicians, even when the general

public hasn't flocked to the stores to purchase his latest.

Don's music is sometimes a challenge to categorize. Although he is essentially a soul artist in every sense of the word, there is very little difference between his type of soul music and what was considered rock 'n' roll during the period these records were made (early to mid-Sixties).

Also, record companies liked to differentiate between singers, songwriters, and producers; Don did all three, and this made him more of a threat to the powers that be at Atlantic. He wasn't the throatiest singer on the roster, but his vocals were always full of fire and emotion. And Don was not afraid to experiment on a record or use his sense of humor to musical advantage.

The word *genius* is thrown around the music industry, somewhat gratuitously at times, but Don Covay has genuinely earned that title. Any fan of contemporary pop, rock, or r&b music should make this disc an essential purchase for their collection — it is *The Real Deal*.

Jack Skowron

Photo: Steve Maruta



Jazz

Sonny Rollins *This Is What I Do*
Milestone MCD-9310-2

SONNY ROLLINS is a national treasure. At 70 years of age year, he's a link to the early boppers, having played with Monk, Bud Powell, Max Roach, Charlie Parker, and many other modern jazz legends. This septuagenarian's energy hasn't flagged, his inquisitiveness and drive to be a singular voice has remained unquenched. In recent years Rollins on record didn't match Rollins live. The groups he recorded with, and the material he recorded, were not quite up to his '50s material, but his live dates still had him out-blowing everyone. Of late, however, he's been careful with material and brought in known jazz figures to record with. On this date, his regulars (Bob Crenshaw, bass, and Clifton Anderson, trombone) are augmented by drummer extraordinaire Jack DeJohnette, (Perry Wilson hits the skins on two tracks), and fine pianist Stephen Scott.

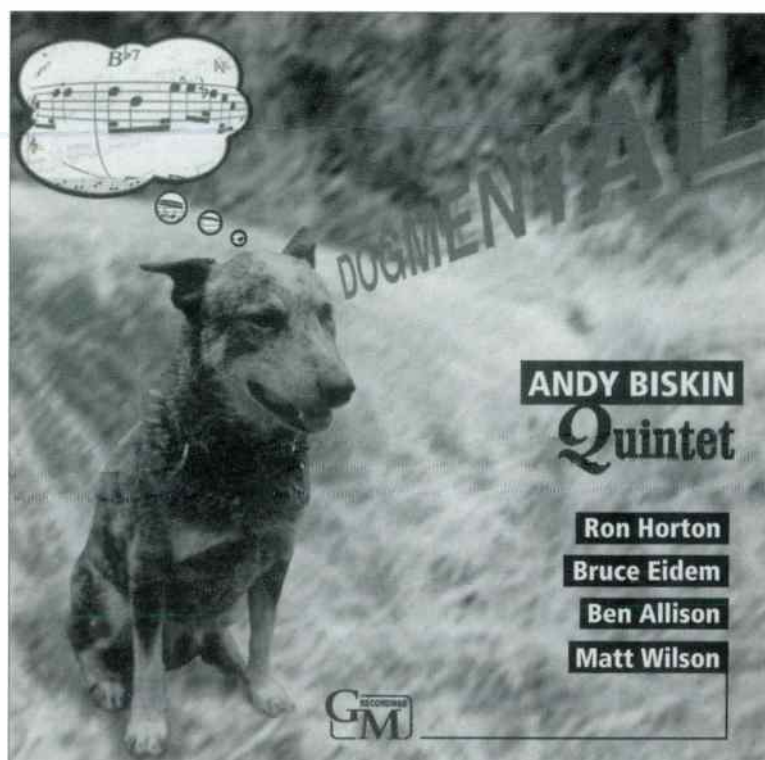
The opener, "Salvador," is a strong melody over a Caribbean rhythm. Rollins has explored these

since "St. Thomas" in the '50s. He works himself in slowly, building up intensity in the second chorus, and taking off by the fourth chorus, streaking about, riffing, wandering in and out of the chords (Rollins is one of the few who can do this without calling any attention to being "outside"). I should say a word about Rollins' sound here. When he first came up, he had his own take on Coleman Hawkins' sound. Now he is sui generis; he has a metallic sheen, can bite like a buzz saw, or float out wildly like he's inhaled helium.

"Sweet Leilani" is a sweet gospel-flavored waltz built on a blues turn-around. Rollins maintains the mood with sustained cries and long, passionate phrases brought to you by circular breathing. "Did You See Harold Vick?" is a funky vamp with an undistinguished melody, on which Rollins pulls out all the improvisational stops. He blasts, interpolates melodies ("All God's Chillun' Got Rhythm" and "Space Is

the Place" among others), and uses the simple two-chord canvas to explore tonality and harmony while keeping the joint jumping. "A Nightingale Sang in Berkely Square" is a lovely ballad, which Rollins elaborately embellishes and embroiders more than he uses as a base for improvisation, though Scott has a nice spot. A late night, afterglow feel pervades "Charles M," and Rollins makes like blues-saxers Stanley Turrentine or Arnette Cobb, blowing the Shinola out of his horn. Bass, piano and trombone also get in fine solos on this one. We end with "The Moon of Manakoor," a pretty waltz that Rollins squeezes for every drop of emotion.

Sound is very good. The engineers allow one to hear the wail of Rollins, and the amazingly varied textures of DeJohnette's cymbals are a knockout. There's a nice, open, spacious feel. So, if you are bored with the flavor-of-the-week, get with a real classic that hasn't lost much, if anything, over the years.



THIS IS THE KIND of left-of center, offbeat disc that gets me excited to be a music fan and reviewer. Biskin, previously unknown to me, plays a mean clarinet (heavily influenced by left-of center figures like Jimmy Giuffre and Pee Wee Russell). He also is a fine composer and arranger, with a range that suggests, Duke Ellington, Jack DeJohnette's Special Edition, Raymond Scott, and Jelly Roll Morton, but in a modern context. He is also wildly humorous, which is a rare commodity in music. While loaded with careening rhythms and off-notes, the music works because of his composing and arranging skills and his ability to invoke many emotions, not just humor. There is often a sudden shift in tempos, an off-beat accompanying line, a juxtaposition of wildly divergent yet compatible musical lines. He has a *muy simpatico* cadre, with (on 11 of 15 tracks) Ron Horton, trumpet; Ben Allison, bass, and Matt Wilson, drums (the last two bandleaders who I have enthusiastically reviewed previously in these pages). Andy Eulau plays bass, and Bruce Hall, drums, on the remainder, with Bruce Eidem's trombone on all tracks.

The opener, "Laughing Stock," sets things up, with the melody being stretched and squished into different shapes. Pee Wee Russell's influence is strongly felt on "Field Days," with its sophisticated melody ending on one "wrong" note, while Eidem does a fabulous "Tricky" Sam Nanton with his growling 'bone. The Klezmer/Eastern European feel of "Sad Commentary"

yields to a round-like hand-off of musical lines. The title track features a peppy "A" theme, and a strutting, bluesy "B" theme, growling trombone, shifting rhythms, pleading clarinet, and a fun bass solo (not something you can say for most bass solos). "Little Elsa" has an Ellingtonian feel, while "Rondel" starts off as an odd march/waltz (pretty, though) and changes feel numerous times, becoming a drunken strut. "No Bones" alternates Latin, bop and "other" sections. Eidem displays fine chops, while beneath Biskin's fine solo, the rhythm section falls all over itself. Trumpet-laying Mariachi. Ellington, Monk, and Pee Wee Russell all meet on "Table Manners". "Brunching at the Bistro" is a catchy, but slightly demented theme, with funky rhythms drifting in and out, the rhythm section entering and exiting wildly, and a "B" section that is all chugging rhythm. Horns enter during each other's solos with wacky commentary. "Flim Flam" sounds like a circus march gone amok, then becomes an Austrian beer-drinking song. Biskin's solo here is quite virtuoso then Horton rocks on his trumpet. "Off Peak" ends with a typical bebop line played by the very untypical trio of bass, clarinet, and trumpet, and shows they can certainly play changes.

Sound is fine, with good spatial and tonality cues. Stage is deep enough, though somewhat narrow, and Matt Wilson's splashes of color are great to listen for. A fine, fun, funny, engaging album, this is. A good time will be had by all.

Dave Marcus

Jazz

Erick Storckman Scrapbook
Twin Rivers TR 221
Twin Rivers Music, P.O. Box 85,
Highland Mills, NJ 10930
845/928-8732



ERICK STORCKMAN offers *Scrapbook*, an autobiographical showcase from this trombonist. He composed 10 of the 11 tracks on this CD and arranged all of the music. The compositions vary in style and mood. His trombone playing is impressive as is his mellifluous tone. I easily heard the influences of his acknowledged inspirations, Tommy Dorsey and J.J. Johnson. He has a big, smooth tone throughout the full range of the trombone.

The septet assembled here is mostly drawn from Storckman's band-mates in the excellent Diane Moser's Composer's Big Band. Included here are Marty Fogel, tenor sax; Rob Henke, trumpet; Ton Colao, alto sax, and Barbara Allen, drums, with the addition of Mitch Schecter on piano and Mike Carino on bass. The compositions appear to give us a chronological overview of Mr. Storckman's life, from childhood in Indiana to adulthood in Verona, N.J.

"Ghosts," with its heartfelt vocal and lyric, seems to be Storckman's personal purge song of the scrap-

book. If you like the singing of Jack Sheldon or Chet Baker, you may like Storckman's. I'd prefer he use his 'bone to do his singing, regardless of how sincere or heartfelt he sounds. Despite an unfortunate fade-out ending, the tune is made memorable by Marty Fogel's melancholy and affirming tenor solo.

"Barbara" has an affectionate, sensitive melody, and is nicely arranged. I'd have liked a shorter piano solo, though that pretty melody is the dominant thing here.

"Our Man in Verona" is a hip jazz samba with a catchy melody. It sounds like it could have been from Ike Quebec's *Soul Samba* session on Blue Note, which is to say I like the melody and the performance. Storckman and Colao take very swinging solos. This is a standout track, sensual and swinging.

"Where Have You Been Hidin'?" is a jump novelty tune with a vocal by Storckman. His voice is well suited to this tune. Playing at being an old man, he urges himself to "get out and play." It's cute good-time fun. On "Where Are You Now?,"

we again have the sincere vocalist and I'm hiding under the couch. Sorry, Erick.

"Indiana Medley" combines "On the Banks of the Wabash" and "Back Home Again in Indiana," the two obvious and traditional songs for a player of jazz who grows up in Indiana. Storckman's medley starts out nostalgic and stark, with piano and trombone, then goes into a full Latin swing section. Rob Henke jumps in with a pleasingly hot solo followed by a still-warm Storckman, and finally a solo by Fogel. There's a short piano solo, and then Storckman returns with "Indiana" to take them out over the other horns. It's like a sandwich of white bread, with mayo, onions, and peppers; different but not really satisfying.

The CD is well recorded. It presents a personal portrait of a fine trombonist and, despite my reservations about the vocals, it's an enjoyable listening experience. It makes an emotional connection on a personally revealing level, and has a dash of hot sauce put in for good measure.

BAIKIDA CARROLL

MARIONETTES ON A HIGH WIRE

OMNi
ToNE

Jack Skowron

Jazz

Baikida Carroll *Marionettes On A High Wire*
Omnitone 12101

THE FEATURED ARTIST on this disc, while far from a household name, has performed with famous artists, like David Murray, Carla Bley, Jay McShann, and many others, and written for stage and screen. This is a collection of his compositions played by a fine band.

"Ebullient Secrets" is an up-beat, attractive tune, written over a piano vamp reminiscent of "A Love Supreme," with pianist Adegoke Steve Colson doing a strong Tyner to tenor sax Erica Lindsay's smoother, softer 'Trane. Carroll takes the intensity up another notch, fluttering and spraying notes at a rapid clip, sounding like a cross between Miles Davis and Don Cherry, but with more chops. "Griots Last Dance," dedicated to the aforementioned Cherry, has a knotty, circular melody, and features Lindsay in a Dewey Redmond bag, with Colson playing in a post-Cecil Taylor / Myra Melford mode and an intense, piercing Carroll solo. A nervous, edgy march, "Marionettes on a High Wire" has a

delicate trumpet and drums duet and ventures gingerly into free-jazz territory. Colson's solo, while in free time, nicely explores the theme (with fine solos by the rest of the rhythm: Michael Formanek, bass, and Pheeroan akLaff, drums). Carroll is in an early Miles bag on the lovely ballad "Miss Julie" (feels like "My Funny Valentine," though it's musically distinct). Tyner again hovers over "Our Say," though it's muscular yet delicate and reserved multi-part theme is all Carroll. Woody Shaw and Ira Sullivan used to write up-tempo post-bop like "A Thrill A Minute". Carroll's trumpet races over the changes, streaking, and jabbing. Dedicated to Carroll's grandmother, "Velma" is pretty, assured, and warm; it has interesting and unexpected twists and turns, as do most of the tunes. The tenor sax is reserved, circling and exploring, while Carroll is also in a reflective, probing mood. "Flamboyne," dedicated to Julius Hemphill, starts out as a free trumpet and sax duet, then the band slowly enters, creating a

funny, off-kilter pulse under an Ornettish theme, while trumpet and sax continue their dance. "Down Under" has an attractive, circular theme, with an emphatic trumpet solo, introspective sax, and bouncy bass. The just-under-two minutes "Cab" is a fun jaunt through jazz history, travelling from stride (good rendition by Colson, though not quite as idiomatic as, say, Marcus Roberts), to early-swing sounds a-la Cab Calloway and John Kirby, through post-bop.

Sonics on the CD are OK, with a wide stage, though instruments, particularly bass, seem to be slightly softened.

This wasn't one of those love-at-first-listen CDs for me; the complex nature of the tunes (not so much the structures, as the melody lines) necessitated quite a few listens for me to assimilate and appreciate well. Like a drive on a windy mountain road, however, the new vistas peering out on each turn are quite unexpected and beautiful. Take a few spins for yourself.



classical

Antonio Vivaldi, *Gloria and Magnificat*
Concerto Italiano, Rinaldo Alessandrini, conductor
Opus 111 1951
(Dist. by Harmonia Mundi)

RINALDO ALESSANDRINI is one of Italy's most promising young musicians. Featured in dozens of fervent and lively recordings on such labels as Opus 111 and Harmonia Mundi, he combines talents as harpsichordist and choral conductor. From Bach to Frescobaldi, Monteverdi to Orlando di Lasso, Alessandrini has presented all-Italian teams of musicians and singers in lively, juicy performances. His most recent recording, of Vivaldi's ever-popular "Gloria" for Opus 111, has real virtuoso daring-do. Listeners familiar with such best-selling versions of "Gloria" such as the great choral conductor Robert Shaw's on Telarc, will be amazed at the rapid opening tempo Alessandrini adopts. It sounds almost unsustainable, but the virtuosic Concerto Italiano prove themselves fully up to the challenge, and the results are exhilarating.

Alessandrini places himself in stark contrast to the Anglo-American performing traditions of Vivaldi and other early Italian music. His approach could be called more hot-blooded, more passionate, or just plain more Italian. During a recent pause in his far-flung worldwide tours, Alessandrini graciously responded to some questions about his artistry.

He notes that many recordings of early Italian music were made by British ensembles that sounded lifeless due to an artificial lack of vibrato in the singing. Alessandrini states, "I think it's absolutely natural for me, as an Italian, to find the Italian voice an ideal means for expressing Italian vocal music. An interpreter's taste is strongly linked to one's origins and cultural surroundings. That said, I've always enjoyed working with musicians of any nationality and I've especially appreciated singers like Emma Kirkby, Nigel Rogers, and more recently, Deborah York."

One of the bright lights on the new Vivaldi "Gloria" recording is a much-acclaimed young Italian contralto, Sara Mingardo. Some early music conductors prefer countertenors in vocal parts originally written for castrato singers like Vivaldi's, but Alessandrini disagrees: "The only recorded document of the castrato voice is of the turn-of-the-century Sistine Chapel singer Alessandro Moreschi. Quite apart from questions of musical quality, the sound of his voice indicates with absolute clarity that the castrato voice had nothing to do with countertenors. The castrato voice is a strange mixture of the voices of a woman and child, with

the body resonance of an adult. Moreschi's voice was pure, trumpeting, and above all true. No countertenor sings like that. I personally prefer a woman's voice, as much closer, physiologically speaking, to a castrato's. It's also more historically based — women have always sung in theaters, sometimes even replacing castratos, as in the operas and oratorios of Handel performed in London."

However, in sacred polyphonic music by Palestrina and Victoria, Alessandrini "absolutely cannot stand" women's voices. Countertenors did sing this music originally, and so they are appropriate. However, whether male or female singers tackle this music written for castratos, they have to confront the fact of the old singers' immense lung capacity, daunting even for today's most accomplished vocalists. With a singer like Mingardo, this sort of problem seems to vanish. He has accompanied Mingardo on fortepiano at a number of concerts of Schubert and Mozart songs, which he calls "exciting experiences." He'd like to do similar concerts of *lieder* by Schumann, Brahms, and Fauré.

Unlikely to be typed as a performer exclusively of early Italian music and Bach, he has also con-

ducted Mozart and Mendelssohn, and in July he will conduct Rossini's opera "La Scala di seta" in Italian music festivals. He confesses to being especially excited about conducting opera "because I love the theater, rehearsing with singers, and working on the psychology of characters. By the time of stage rehearsals, we can really live through the completely "false" dimension of opera, and make it into an "absolute truth." Among his

dream operas to conduct are Monteverdi's "Orfeo" which he hasn't tried yet, as well as works by Handel, Vivaldi, and Rameau. He was recently delighted to lead Monteverdi's "Poppaea" at the Welsh National Opera.

He has recording plans as well. At the end of February he recorded madrigals by Marenzio, and in October the early Handel oratorio, "Il Trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno." A long concert tour

will follow. Plans are already fixed for recordings of Italian cantatas by Handel and motets of Alessandro Melani.

Handel, a composer he previously neglected, poses some special performance problems, Alessandrini feels. The works are strictly linked to theatrical language and demand supreme vocal ability. Performers need vocal agility, a taste for elegant ornamentation, and powerful expressivity of the kind that set 17th-Century audiences afire with excitement. Alessandrini thinks that modern performers, himself included, have a long way to go before they can successfully perform Handel's operas using 17th-Century musical approaches.

This sort of challenge is what spurs him on to improve on his already extraordinary achievements. An avid reader of musical history, Alessandrini is an unusually incisive writer of CD booklet notes. He has fascinating insights on the lives of composers he has recorded, like the notorious Gesualdo, who killed his unfaithful wife. Alessandrini remarks, "Today we know that Gesualdo was probably homosexual and a masochist. What can be heard in his music is a devastating feeling of pain and pleasure, from an enormously lonely and isolated human being. Unlike Monteverdi, Gesualdo's music was not meant for a precise audience. We can sense behind the notes the desperate cry of a solitary person incapable of leading a normal life."

More normal in every way was Johann Sebastian Bach, whose anniversary year Alessandrini celebrates with a new CD of Bach's gamba sonatas for Harmonia Mundi. Alessandrini says, "Bach always merits a celebration and this is merely one more occasion." He adds that his favorite wish for Bach year was "the discovery in some library somewhere in the world all Bach's orchestral music which has been lost to us."

Even though this did not, in fact, occur, this desire proves that however far Alessandrini has come in his skyrocketing musical career, he always has room for more wishful thinking. And music lovers who enjoy his splendid new Vivaldi "Gloria" will have their own wishful thoughts about more distinctive Alessandrini performances captured in sympathetic sound by Opus 111.

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Krell KAV-300iL Integrated Amplifier

Great Things Do Come in Small Packages



KRELL's KAV-300iL integrated amplifier is a brilliant piece of audio engineering. It is compact, superbly styled, highly functional, and provides some of the best sound quality available at any price. Best of all, it is a true high-power amplifier that can provide 200 watts into 8 ohms and 400 watts into 4 ohms. It will drive even demanding speakers to provide the kind of bass, dynamics, and peak listening levels that make music truly exciting and involving. Its predecessor, the KAV-300i, was a very good amplifier that provided "Krell sound" at an affordable price. The KAV-300iL is a great amplifier that deserves to be an audio classic.

I am, in fact, having trouble putting this amplifier in perspective. It retails for \$3,250. This level of dollar outlay makes it an expensive product by most standards, but a cheap one by the top-of-the-high-end price standards set by Krell. I'm not sure whether to say that it sets a new, if expensive, standard for integrated amplifiers or is a "bargain" Krell.

At the same time, the KAV-300iL performs as well as some outstanding separate preamps and power amplifiers, and provides an extraordinarily compact size for anything approaching its sound quality. It has a matching CD player, the KAV-280cd, and in any space-limited system, there is nothing I know of that can touch it in terms of providing superb styling and superb sonic performance in a small package. The KAV-300iL weighs a hefty 30 pounds, but only measures 17.25 inches wide by 3.5 inches high, and 17 inches deep. It provides true high-end quality that you can easily

carry under one arm or put discretely on a small shelf. Even the remote is one of the smallest and best-styled remotes I've ever encountered; it's designed to control both the KAV-300iL and a CD player.

What I am sure of is that this is not just another very good audio product that I am hyping because I happen to be having a good day! The KAV-300iL is a far better design than the KAV-300i that Krell first introduced around five years ago; here are a few reasons why:

1) The surface-mount technology first used in the Krell Current Tunnel (KCT) designs allows more components to be fitted into a smaller space and accounts for its more compact size.

2) The KAV-300iL builds on Krell's experience with its new Full Power Balanced (FPB) amplifiers and seeks to provide the same kind of speed, detail, and control.

3) The KAV-300iL adds 50 watts per channel. More importantly, it now employs a much more robust power supply with an 800-VA transformer to ensure it has outstanding dynamic and bass performance.

4) The KAV-300iL uses the fully differential complementary output circuitry used in the FPB amplifiers.

5) The gain stages use what Krell calls the Krell Current Mode, a

proprietary Krell circuit that operates the audio gain stages of the KAV-300iL in the current rather than the voltage domain. This is circuitry Krell developed for its reference Class-A preamplifiers, and Krell says that it helps explain the outstanding speed and detail of the KAV-300iL's sound.

6) The preamplifier section is fully balanced from input to output, including the volume control.

The Krell KAV-300iL's sound stage is impressive, with 3D imaging that is stable and realistic.

7) The volume control operates in the analog mode, but a convenient digital readout is provided.

No one who listens to the KAV-300iL is going to treat it as a downscale product. Instead, it is clear that Krell has taken technology from some of the most respected separate components in the high end and "integrated" them into its integrated amplifier.

The KAV-300iL also provides a very good assortment of features for a product of its size without giving up simplicity or overcomplicating

the signal path. Aside from a convenient remote control that operates slowly enough to allow precise volume settings with considerable ease, the KAV-300iL offers several worthwhile features:

A) One set of balanced XLR-type inputs;

B) Three sets of unbalanced RCA inputs;

C) One set of unbalanced inputs and outputs for use with a tape recorder;

D) A set of RCA outputs so that it can be used as a separate preamplifier;

E) Front panel volume, input selection, and tape selection controls;

F) Mute switch and LED indicator;

G) Front panel display of the volume and channel balance levels;

H) Level up and down switch buttons;

I) A tape processor loop and tape-select switch button for tape playback and comparison with the original signal source (the inputs to be taped can be selected separately from the input being amplified);

J) A theater throughput mode that allows the sound from a home theater A/V preamp or processor to be passed through the amplifier with no change in gain;

K) Unusually good shielding; it is relatively insensitive to hum from nearby components;

L) Handy 12-volt trigger inputs and outputs for remote power on and off switching;

M) RC-5 input for ease of custom installation., and

N) A standby mode to ensure full performance immediately after the unit is turned on.

I should also note that the visual styling of the KAV-300iL is also exceptional. As most audiophiles know, Krell is designed, manufactured, and marketed (especially marketed) by an extinct race of aliens from the Forbidden Planet. It is scarcely surprising, therefore, that Krell is famous for thick front panels, brooding gray and black colors, massively sized cabinets and heat sinks, and a sense of dark mystery. The KAV-300iL has a burnished aluminum/stainless steel look that gives it real distinction. It has a lightness and openness to its design which is a real departure for Krell — a little like a sudden conversion

N O T E S

Krell KAV-300iL integrated amplifier, \$3,250.00. Krell Industries, Inc., 45 Connair Rd., Orange, CT 06477-3650, phone 203/799-9954, fax: 203-891-2028, e-mail krell@krellonline.com, website www.krellonline.com

Associated Equipment

Downstairs: Revel Salon speaker system; van den Hul Black Beauty, Sumiko Celebration, and Koetsu Onyx phono cartridges; VPI TNT turntable with HWJr II tonearm; Mark Levinson 360S D/A converter; Theta David DVD/DVD-A/CD transport; Pass Xono phono preamp; Pass X0 stereo preamp; Pass X600 power amplifiers, and Kimber and Transparent Audio Reference XL interconnects and speaker cables

Upstairs: Thiel 7.2 speaker system; Audio Alchemy, PS Audio, and Pioneer CD/DVD transports; Sony 777ES SACD player; Perpetual Technology P-1A and P-3A D/A converter and digital processor; McIntosh MR-71 tuner; Pass X1 stereo preamp; Krell MDA300 power amplifiers and custom-rebuilt modification of McIntosh tube amplifier, and Discovery Cable and Kimber XL interconnects and speaker cables.

from Mahler to Mozart. Seriously, it is a truly attractive new look.

What I find most impressive about the KAV-300iL, however, is the sound. I auditioned it at length with my own reference Revel Salons and Thiel 7.2s, and with a friend's Quad ESL-63. I also tried it with the Spendor BC-1. These are very demanding and revealing speakers, and the Thiel 7.2 and Spendor BC-1 are moderate to demanding loads. The power of the KAV-300iL is not a matter of test bench figures. It can easily handle very demanding orchestral, rock, and classical material at very high volumes, even into demanding loads. Dynamics are excellent, and even the deep bass of the KAV-300iL comes surprisingly close in power and extension to Krell separates.

The KAV-300iL does not have quite the ability of Krell power amplifiers to make music seem as if it appeared out of total silence with a combination of sweetness, air, and immense detail and do so without adding either warmth or brightness to the sound. It does, however, come surprisingly close. If you are familiar with the sound of the Krell preamps and amplifiers—costing well more than three times the price of the KAV-300iL, you will recognize all of those same basic characteristics that make up the “Krell sound.”

The sound stage is very impressive. It is both wide and deep, and the KAV-300iL is capable of depth that is rare in components of any price. The imaging is three dimensional, stable, and as realistic in placement and the size of voice and instruments as the recording permits. I was comparing SACD, DVD-A, 96-kHz/24-bit, and CD sound during the time I was reviewing the KAV-300iL and I was repeatedly struck by how good the sound stage in the KAV-300iL really was and how close it came to the performance of my reference components with even the best reference recordings and source units. (For what it's worth, the KAV-300iL's combination of detail, transparency, and a highly revealing sound stage helped convince me that most currently available DVD-A players and software do not come close to living up to the technical potential of the medium, while the new SACD

recordings seem to be getting steadily better.)

I'm always leery about mentioning specific recordings in reviews. I don't really judge equipment by a few recordings or even in terms of performance with reference quality recordings. I judge by extended listening to a wide range of material of

**Dynamics are excellent,
and even the deep bass of
this integrated is very
close to Krell's separates.**

varying quality because I believe this is how most listeners actually use their equipment. At the same time, I was reviewing an extremely powerful separate power amplifier from another manufacturer while I was reviewing the KAV-300iL, and I heard the same degree of problems in the Credence Clearwater Revival *Chronicle* LP (Fantasy Records, 1976). The same nasty touch of equalization or natural boost to the upper midrange, the same studio bass with too much upper bass energy and too little deep bass. At the same time is a lot of detail and complex sonic interplay on this record and the KAV-300iL brought it out even in the loudest passages. Just for fun, I made a similar comparison of the Krell KAV-300iL to its high power competitor in auditioning some of the late Bert Whyte's recordings on Everest. The Krell KAV-300iL proved to very musically involving with zero listening fatigue. Its performance with such recordings may sound slightly warm, and have a middle of the hall soundstage perspective to those audiophiles who like a bright, forward, and open sound. To me, it was intensely natural and came very close to its competitor even in reproducing very high power contrasts. (A key recording at issue was the Stokowski and the New York Stadium Symphony's performance of Strauss's "Don Juan," "Til Eulenspiegel," and "Salome" (Elektra/DCC LPOZ 1002) The same was true of the KAV-300iL's reproduction of the deep bass and dynamic contrasts on bands one and eight of Jennifer Warnes' recording of *The Hunter* (Private Music 01005-82089-2).

Are there some downsides to the KAV-300iL? Of course, there always are to every product! But, its limitations are minor compared to its virtues. The bass performance is a little short of amazing for a product of its size, but it does not provide the truly awesome deep bass of Krell's massive Class-A power amps.

Dynamic contrasts and high power transients are not quite as clear as those reproduced by Krell power amplifiers or other top power amplifiers. There is a touch less sweetness and air in the sound of the KAV-300iL than in Krell separates.

Speaking myself, It would be nice for the KAV-300iL to include a phono stage, although phono stages seem to be vanishing from virtually all modern U.S.-made integrated amps and most preamps. I guess I'd like another balanced input but largely because I do a lot of A-B testing, but I can't think of a reason why the average real-world audiophile would really need one.

I also encountered a few more hum problems than usual with the kind of trick audio interconnects that float or partially float the ground at one end, although these will not occur in most systems or with any of the interconnects I regard as top quality and technically serious designs. The KAV-300iL dealt easily with any speaker cable I could throw at it and got the best out of each design. It's a really good product in terms of real-world immunity to amp-cable-speaker interaction problems.

No, you don't get 12 grand's worth of Krell sound quality for slightly over 25 per cent of the price, although you probably do easily get more than 80 per cent of the sound quality. (The editor will explain the scientific rationale for quantifying these percentages in an extensive sidebar with full color graphics). [Editor's Intrusive Note: Only after the reviewer explains the recent Iranian election with full-color photos of Imam Khatami.] You also get a superb product that even the most demanding high-end audiophile must both respect and enjoy. The KAV-300iL is a minor masterpiece even by the extraordinarily demanding standards of today's high end, and it really deserves a close audition. A lovely piece of gear!

Sunfire Cinema Grand Signature Bob Carver Signature Edition Five-Channel Amplifier

John Gatski



BOB CARVER has always had a knack for coming up with innovative, good-sounding amplifiers. From the Phase Linear amps of the 1970s, to the Carver "cube" amps of the 1980s and other designs through the '90s, they have always delivered as promised. With the Bob Carver Sunfire Cinema Grand Signature, I believe Bob has made his best amp yet.

Features

The \$3,750.00 Cinema Grand Signature Edition contains five channels and is designed for high-

power, multi-channel applications such as home theater and high-resolution multi-channel audio from Super Audio CD (SACD) and DVD Audio. The amp features five "normal" voltage-source speaker outputs (with output impedance at 0) and three current source-speaker output jacks (with output impedance at about 1 ohm) for use with ribbon speakers, planar speakers or electrostatic speakers.

The current source output stage is said to "coax forth a sensuous, delicately detailed musical voice, long associated with low-powered

tube amplifiers." For bi-amping, the voltage source is recommended for the bass and the current source outputs for the treble.

The amp is claimed to crank out 405 watts-per-channel into 8 ohms with all channels driven at 0.5 percent distortion or less. At 4 ohms, the power doubles to a whopping 810 watts per channel. All this power for five channels is contained in a chassis of typical stereo amp proportions: 19 inches wide by 6.5 inches tall by 17-inches deep. The weight is an amazingly low 57 pounds! The massive power output

is the result of a power supply with an innovative tracking converter. But more on that later.

The amp is attractive with a black, brushed aluminum finish. On the front panel, a dimly lit meter indicates energy reserve in joules — 500 joules is the normal operating level, with the needle moving to the left when under heavy power demand. Around back are two pairs of five-way binding posts for the front-left, front-right and center channels. One pair is for voltage-source, the other for current-source output. The rear channels outputs are voltage source only.

The input jacks include unbalanced RCA and the professional-style, XLR-type, three-conductor cable inputs, which tend to be less susceptible to noise in longer runs, as well as allowing better common-mode rejection. A small, rear-mounted toggle switch switches on the amp on. The first position puts it into an "Auto-On" mode — where the output is only engaged when audio is present from the preamp; the second position puts the amp into the "Continuous-On" mode.

The Sunfire Cinema Grand Signature is shipped with a glass platform to ensure adequate ventilation from the bottom.

Circuit Highlights

According to Carver, the amp contains a high-grade power transformer and filter capacitors that supply about 500 joules of energy. But instead of needing the typical 90 volts on the "rail" to get 400 watts per channel (and wasting a lot of the energy as heat) as in a conventional Class-AB amplifier, the Sunfire needs only six volts above ground zero to ultimately get the 300 watts plus per channel.

This seemingly impossible feat is accomplished, according to Carver, by the tracking down-converter, essentially another power amplifier itself. The down-converter enables the amp to transform high voltage and low current to low voltage and high current. Thus, the end result is said to be huge amounts of high power into low impedance loads and the amp runs "cold" in the process, which makes it more reliable.

Carver, in a recent white paper, explained the design: "The down-

converter tracks the audio with the six volts always above it. The down-converter input is a Class-A Motorola transistor. The output of the transistor drives a Texas Instruments PWM digital comparator. The output of the comparator drives an H-P HCPL-2611 precision opto-coupler, which 'level shifts the digital control pulses of the gates to 12 HexFets.' The final output is 'smoothed' into varying tracking

After warm-up, I was impressed with how transparent, detailed, and smooth the sound was.

voltage by the main energy storage down-converter. About 12 dB of feedback from the final 6.8-microFarad energy-storage capacitor is fed back into the input stage. A Shotky diode provides the energy return path for the HexFets side of the down-converter inductor."

Carver applies his craft elsewhere in the circuit as well. The input stage is a low-noise FET operational amplifier operated in a forced Class-A, single-ended mode. The output of this stage drives a balanced Class-A level shifter and a balanced voltage stage that can swing the full rail to 250 volts, peak to peak, as needed. The output is heavily biased into Class A for small signals and Class AB for large signals.

Parts are selected, according to Carver, for their particular effectiveness. The digital clocking functions, for example, use Mos-Fets for their robustness. The main amplifier output section uses 40 heavy-duty, bipolar transistors, as Carver sees bipolar transistors as more linear for output. Class-A premium parts are used throughout the amp design, including heavy glass-epoxy PC board, metal-film resistors, and film-device capacitors in the critical audio path.

The Set Up

I first installed the Sunfire Cinema Grand Signature in my home theater system, which includes a Panasonic A300 DVD player, Carver Dolby Digital pre-amp, Audio Control Bijou 5.1

equalizer, an RCA DirectTV/Dolby Digital output receiver, Westlake LC8.1 front-left and front-right speakers, Westlake LC6.75 center speakers, and NHT rear surrounds. The subwoofer is a Paradigm Servo 15 powered subwoofer. I used Alpha-Core's premium, solid-silver interconnects from the preamp to the EQ and from the EQ to the Cinema Grand. I also used Alpha-Core solid-copper speaker cables.

(By the way, I believe that the Alpha-Core cables are as transparent as interconnects can be and recommend them highly for audiophile, home theater and professional applications.)

I switched the Sunfire's little toggle switch to the "on" position. However, this tiny power switch, which has to be switched on by reaching behind the amp, is the only item I did not like about the Sunfire. I would rather have a large, conventional rocker switch on the front. End of knit-picking.

I measured the individual channel levels and matched them using an Audio-Control real-time analyzer's decibel function and a 5.1 audio measurement signal disk. As proof of Carver's design success, one only has to feel the Sunfire chassis. Even with no external heat sinks or fan, this power behemoth never gets hot; it only gets a little warm.

After set up and an hour of warm up, I sat down with a handful of DVDs, the remotes and away I listened. I first listened to some music in standard two-channel mode (using the amps voltage-source outputs), with the DVD player as the CD source. I immediately was impressed with how transparent, detailed and smooth the Sunfire amp was. This amp really sounds audiophile! Classical, pop, jazz, acoustic music — the Cinema Grand Signature delivered with the proper verve. I tried a recently remastered version of the Eagles *Greatest Hits* and could easily and definitely hear every bit of extra detail the new mix reveals.

For DVD movies, I viewed the Arnold movie *Eraser*, which has a great soundtrack that includes some subtle sounds for a change, as well as the usual dynamic booms, crashes and explosions. The rendering of subtle treble effects was effective

with the Sunfire amp: The decaying reverb tail of bullet cases ejecting, glass breaking, etc. There is no smearing of the sound with this amplifier. Since I run my Westlake front speakers full range (only the .1 bass-effects channel go to the sub), the bass was firm, tight and loud — as one would expect from an amp in this power genre.

My initial opinion was corroborated by a viewing of the James Bond movie *The World Is Not Enough*. It, too, revealed the opened-up sound stage of underlying sound effects. Dialog-wise, the voices were natural and dynamic, and they could be heard can clearly understood through the turbulence of intense sound effects.

Since this amp has power to burn, I turned it up as loud as I could stand. With average levels at 80 dB and peaks in excess of 100 dB, the Sunfire Cinema Grand Signature delivered without any hint of strain. In most home applications, you would be deaf if you made a serious attempt to run this amp out of gas.

I also hooked up the amp to my main audiophile system to check

the voltage-source versus current-source audio aspects of the amp. As an extraordinary source, I used a Sony SCD-777ES Super Audio CD player, and played some DSD-based SACDs. This is also, in my opinion, one of the best sounding

If this review seems positive, it is. The amplifier's performance cannot be faulted.

16-bit CDs players I have used.

Again, I used Alpha-Core interconnects and speaker cables. In this system, the amp drove a pair of Legacy Classic II ribbon tweeter tower speakers. I used two preamps — a Pass Labs Aleph P Fet unit and one of Legacy's high current preamps.

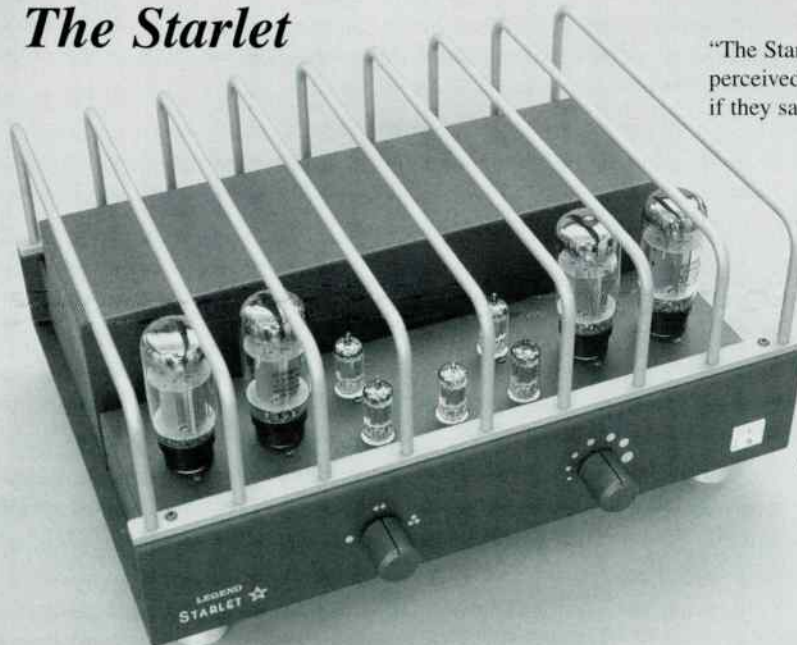
Grabbing several samplers of SACD music, mostly classical and jazz and my reference jazz CDs, I sat down to listen. I listened in both the current-source and the voltage-source output modes, trying to find aspects of the resulting sound I could attribute to one or the other of

these modes. In the end, I found myself preferring current-source output for jazz and classical and voltage-source for pop, more densely recorded material. In either case, the Sunfire sonics certainly qualify as audiophile, and had no problem driving the 4-ohm ribbon tweeter-based Legacys to high volume.

Conclusion

If it seems that this review is positive, it is. Though I had a couple of small ergonomic quibbles (the tiny power switch on the back panel, and I'd like some carrying handles), the amp's performance cannot be faulted.

As a serious home-theater multi-channel amplifier and as a detailed, easy-to-listen audiophile amp, the Sunfire Cinema Grand Signature should be strongly considered by those contemplating an amp purchase. With its unique design, attractive looks, and excellent sound, I believe it is an ideal amp — for not only conventional DVD DTS/Dolby Digital movies — but also for the multi-channel SACD and DVD audio, which are just around the corner.



The Starlet

“The Starlet offers so much in the way of perceived value that I wouldn't have balked if they said it cost another \$1,500.”

Ken Kessler
Ultimate Audio, Winter 2001

“The Starlet is just about everything one could wish for in a high-quality, relatively affordable, all-triode tube integrated amplifier... she should reward you with performances worthy of a true diva.”

Chip Stern
Stereophile, December 2000

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Dynaudio Audience 42 Speaker

Mike Driscoll



IT'S THE AGE-OLD QUESTION for budget-conscious audiophiles: How do you achieve high-quality sound in a music system without having to sell a kidney in order to pay for it all? I am here to tell you that it can be done.

For the past couple of months, I have been doing most of my listening through a very modestly priced pair of loudspeakers made by Dynaudio, the Audience 42s, using a 40-watt integrated tube amplifier from Jolida, their SJ202a. This combination costs less than \$1,500 retail, far less than what many audiophiles spend on just interconnects or speaker cables! An entire system could be put together around these two products for about \$2,000, which, I am told, is the most money the average music lover believes he or she *ought* to spend on a system. If the general (listening) public had any idea of the level of musicality attainable at this level, the purveyors of mid-fi druck would have to find another line of work.

For the past eight weeks or so, I have used these diminutive speakers from Dynaudio with a wide variety

of associated equipment, from 25-watt tube amps to 125-watt solid-state units, and with a variety of source units, both digital and analogue. No matter what they were paired with, the speakers always sounded great. Don't misunderstand; these speakers are the products of good engineering, but they won't perform magic, even though their sound may fool you into thinking Dynaudio has somehow gotten around the laws of physics. There are limits to the low-frequency response of the 42s, ones imposed by their size, which mainly centered on the bottom couple of octaves. Therefore, these are not the ideal choice for a person whose music collection contains a great deal of pipe organ. They did, however, at least in my listening room, produce reasonable output into the mid 50-Hz region, and (using the *Stereophile Magazine* test disc) had diminished, yet audible output into the high 40-Hz region. I have to say, I almost never missed that last octave or so, except when I tortured the Dynaudios with a CD of Saint-Saens' *Symphony #3* (organ). With chamber music, blues, jazz, blue-

grass, even most symphonic music, the bass they produced was certainly adequate, if not prodigious. While playing a CD of Holst's *The Planets* (London 417 553-2), a rather unfortunate early digital recording, which nevertheless has a prodigious bass, I was actually startled by the fullness of low-end response from these little monitors. (And that's the end of my knit-picking, friends.)

Setting Them Up

I initially positioned the Dynaudio speakers in roughly the same position in my listening room normally occupied by my Mirage M3si's, that is 6 feet from the back wall, with 5½ feet between the pair, leaving 5 feet from each speaker to the side wall. The speakers were toed in so that only the front of the cabinet was visible from the listening position, which was 6½ feet back from the speakers. I played with moving the Dynaudios in small increments forward and back, as well as increasing and decreasing the space from the side wall. I also tried varying degrees of toe-in, but they ended up sounding their best

right back where they started, so that's where I left them. When I first received the speakers, I had no stands on which to place them, but Wayne Yee, an audiophile friend of mine, had a pair of prototype stands he had built, and lent them to me for evaluation. I was later able to use a pair of Target stands for comparison. I actually preferred the sound of the Dynaudios when they were used with Wayne's sand-filled stands. I cannot give any details of the design of the prototypes, as Wayne has sworn me to secrecy, since he hopes to someday market his rather unique design. All I can say is that they appear to work exactly as they are supposed to.

In *Full Color* by Karl Shiflett and the Big Country Show (Rebel REBCD1772), a CD which was recorded using a basic three-mike setup with one more mike (used sparingly) on the bass for fill, was recorded "live" in a studio, with no overdubbing. The musicians move forward to the center mike to play or sing their featured part, then move back and to the side in order to allow the next man his turn. The front-to-back movement was clearly audible through the Dynaudios. The sound of the acoustic bass came through extremely well. Attack and decay of the banjo were reproduced with aplomb, and tonal balance top to bottom seemed very natural. Likewise, the piano on *Live at the Blues Society* by Sunnyland Slim (Mapleshade 56302) sounded very natural and "right."

The famous air-conditioning duct on "Mining for Gold," from The Cowboy Junkies *Trinity Sessions* (RCA 8568-2R,) was audible, and right where you'd expect it to be. Likewise, the tambourine on Holly Coles' "Heart of Saturday Night," (*Temptation*, Metro Blue CDP7243 8 31653 2 2,) my favorite Tom Waits song, was suitably far back in the soundfield. Well-recorded orchestral works, such as the Mozart Symphony #29, by Jane Glover and the London Mozart Players (ASV CD DCA 717), displayed a very large, deep, and well-defined soundstage, extending wall to wall, well to the outside of the speakers.

The general tonal balance of the Audience 42 was neutral to very slightly tipped towards the highs, at least in my room and system. That impression seemed to carry through

when they were used with the other equipment, but high frequencies were not overemphasized. The aforementioned Karl Shiflett CD, I have noticed, reveals any glare or undue emphasis in this region, and in repeated playings, it proved to my satisfaction that there aren't any problems in that area from this loudspeaker. Pace and rhythm, two areas which contribute mightily towards the elusive "musicality," were maintained as well as I have ever heard.

Overall, I often found myself wanting to forget taking notes, and just settle back and enjoy what I was hearing. Dynamic range was astounding for such a small speaker. Whether being driven by a 25-watt Signature Sound tube amp or 125-watt R.E. Designs solid-state monoblocks, they never seemed to be over-driven or, for that matter, did they ever seem *hungry* for more power. The more clean power one can give them, however, the happier they seem.

The Match-Ups

I was particularly impressed with their performance with the Jolida SJ202a, a 40-watt tubed integrated amp. This combination did not, of course, equal the level of sound quality achieved by many systems

costing thousands of dollars more, but I have heard many much more expensive systems that didn't equal the sheer musicality of this pair. It's all in component matching, and this particular one seems to be a match made in heaven, at least for cash-starved audiophiles looking for great sound. An excellent starter system could be built around these two components, and upgrades made at a later date to the electronics, as the speakers are good enough to be used with, and reveal, the merits or deficiencies of much higher priced ancillary equipment.

Although not a videophile, I do have a stereo TV in my soundroom, against the back wall, midway between my loudspeakers. When I rent movies, I play the sound through my system, in stereo only, no 5.1 or any of that. I have found that with surround-encoded soundtracks, surround material will be thrown against the sides of the listening room, to my left and right, giving a sort of "passive" surround effect. The Dynaudios reproduced this effect extremely well, so well in fact, that I heard sounds coming from well behind me on some soundtracks. Upon playing a "home movie" that I made at Mid-Ohio racecourse, the video and audio seemed perfectly linked. In one

NOTES

Dynaudio Audience A42 Loudspeakers, black ash, cherry, rosewood, \$699.00 per pair; white, \$769.00 pair. Dynaudio North America, 1144 Tower Lane, Bensenville, IL 60106; phone 630/238-4200; fax 630/238-0112; e-mail sales@dynaudio.com; website <http://www.DynaudioUSA.com>.

Associated Components

Mirage M3si, Definitive Technology BP1, and Reference 3a M51 Aura loudspeakers; R.E. Designs LNPA 150 monoblock amplifiers with Vishay resistors; Anthem Integrated 1 amplifier; B and K Pro10 mc Sonata and Audible Illusions Modulus 3a preamplifiers; Cal Delta CD transport; MSB Link DAC; Phillips CDR 760 CD recorder/player; McCormick SST 1 and CD players; R.E. Designs custom-built DAC; CAL Sigma DAC; VPI HW19 Jr. turntable; Audioquest AQ6 tonearm; Sumiko Blue Point Special phono cartridge; Cardas Ultimate tonearm cable; Kimber PBJ and JPS Superconductor interconnects; custom-built interconnects using Belden cable; Discovery 123 and JPS Superconductor BiWire speaker cables; Sanus Component Foundations equipment racks; Tiptoes; Vibrapods; Sumiko Arm Wrap; homemade air-suspension isolation shelf; homemade sound absorption panels, and other assorted tweaks and gizmos.

sequence, the Indianapolis-type cars are seen at the start coming from far back at the left of the screen, and come then forward and to the right, disappearing off the screen at front right. The sound during this sequence followed the action perfectly, actually jumping forward of the speakers and up the right side of the room, following the exact path of the cars. Anyone intending to use these speakers in a video system should know that since they are not shielded, a sensitive monitor might like it if they are kept some distance away. (This would seem to be required for my "passive" surround effect anyway, as this only seems to work when the speakers are placed well out into the room.)

The Audience 42 uses a 15-cm mid/woofer, and a 28-mm soft-dome tweeter, with a crossover point of 1.8 kHz, and first-order filtering on both woofer and tweeter. Dynaudio says that the speakers can handle up to 150 watts maximum. They are a ported system, and are supplied with foam plugs for use when the speaker must be used close to the back wall. Literature e-

mailed to me from Dynaudio gives details about several features of both drivers, such as the large 75-mm voice coil on the woofer, said to increase cooling, as well as the long 3.2-mm voice coil on the tweeter, intended to allow a lower

claims, and my listening sessions indicated, at least to me, that whatever Dynaudio is doing, they are doing it right!

It always seemed logical to me that any company manufacturing their own drivers, provided they are sufficiently good at it, should be able to wring the most out of those drivers in a finished speaker system. Dynaudio, of course, has a long and well-earned reputation for building some of the finest drivers, ones used by speaker manufacturers worldwide. The performance of the Audience 42 certainly supports my theory. They are great loudspeakers to build a starter system around or for high-end audiophiles to use in a second system. They also make a great recommendation when friends and acquaintances ask for advice on what to buy at a reasonable price. At \$699.00 a pair in rosewood, cherry, or black ash wood grain vinyl, or \$769 in white, these speakers are an absolute steal, and are worthy of consideration even if your budget can accommodate something more expensive. I highly recommended them.

**I highly recommend these
small speakers; whatever
Dynaudio is doing,
they're doing it right!**

crossover frequency, minimize IM distortion, increase power handling, decrease power compression, and also allow use of the low-order crossover. The system also uses vented magnets for high power handling, low Q, and low resonance frequency, among other claimed advantages. The voice coil of the woofer is wound around the magnet instead of being inside it, and the use of two magnet rings allow for less time distortion, it is claimed. Not being schooled in the intricacies of speaker design, I am in no position to dispute any of these



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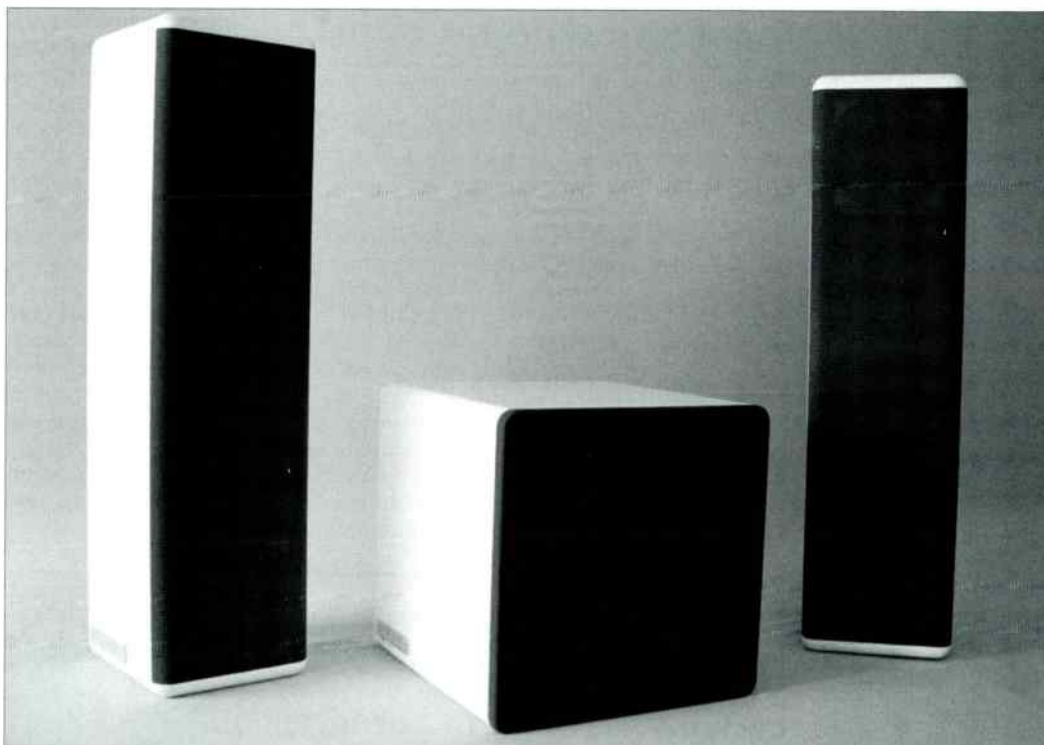
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Vince Christian Model E6 Studio Speakers And Model B12 WP Woofer

Karl Lozier



MY INTRODUCTION to Vince Christian speakers began during the 2000 CES in Las Vegas. I was discussing music and recordings with Jan Mancuso, the personable and knowledgeable representative of Reference Recording Company. As I was about to depart, she asked me, "Have you listened to Vince Christian's speakers?" "No," I replied. "Why do you ask?" She explained that she and her husband, Ric, knew Vince Christian well and had had the good fortune to be around during the speakers' developmental stages over the previous couple of years. I've found her thoughts on various aspects of Reference's recordings have nearly always been "spot on" with my own, so when she said that I should give Vince's speakers a listen, I

went straight to Vince Christian's room at the Alexis Park Hotel. She was right then and the speakers' were still right when I next heard them at this year's show. Vince had taken some time to iron out details of producing them in quantity with consistent quality. Not long ago, I heard there was a production line sample ready to ship to me for review.

The slender Model E6 cabinets contain a "timed" D'Appolito arrangement, with exaggerated driver spacing; Christian says he uses this positioning so that the sound from the midrange and the tweeter arrive at the listener's position at the same time. Correctly done, the resultant sound should be clean and clear, with no leading or following edge from either the tweeter or the

midrange. Another advantage of this design is that the speaker can be turned on its side if you desire to use it for a center channel.

The midrange units are a pair of five inchers with woven carbon-fiber cones. The tweeter is a 28-mm soft dome type. While 28 mm mathematically translates to 1-1/8th inches, some in the industry regard such a speaker unit as a 1½-inch tweeter; I have no idea why. The crossover is set at a very high frequency; when quizzed, Vince said it is at an extremely high 8.2 kHz. At that frequency or even an octave lower, it would be more common to use a smaller, wide-dispersion "super tweeter" unit, which would typically have wider dispersion. One would also expect better transient response as a result of the

lower mass that a smaller unit normally has. When I asked Vince about this, he said, "It sounded better."

To my ears, these loudspeakers do sound good, really good, whether they were designed by following well-known engineering formulae or preconceived set of design ideas, or simply by listening and trying different techniques and parts. Even after finding out exactly where the crossover frequency was, I was usually not able to detect it; there is a very seamless transition between drivers.

Without lab gear, it is difficult to measure absolute sound pressure level (SPL), but I believe Vince's figure of 92.5 is close to the mark and is certainly higher than today's average. Internal damping is done with polymer panels. The usual knuckle test resulted in a satisfyingly dead thud.

I find the appearance of the Vince Christian Model E6 speakers very appealing. The combination of slim (very narrow) and relatively tall (30 inches) I find esthetically pleasing, particularly combined with the subtle grey finish of the enclosures which have removable darker gray fabric grilles. Taste in such things is very personal, but I've gotten a bit weary of black boxes fronted with black grille cloth, ditto for white. Christian will give you whatever you desire, though it may be a slight extra cost. Matching stands are very sturdily built, unobtrusively slender, and accept the adjustable machined-aluminum feet.

The accompanying Model B12WP, which Vince accurately calls woofer, almost meets criteria for a subwoofer as I have used and measured some "subwoofers" that do not go as deeply or cleanly into the bass range as this one does. In my listening room, response is basically flat and very detailed down to an honest 26 Hz. It is a rare musical recording, indeed, that has significant response below 32 Hz. It is a typical cube shape, uses an acoustic-suspension design, and is a bit less than 14 inches in its dimensions. It houses a 12-inch woofer and dedicated 150-watt amplifier. By the time you read this, the amplifier will have been changed over to a relatively new "switching" design, which may result in a slightly more

detailed bass quality. The current design, however, is no slouch in this regard and appears superior to most woofers designed for home theater use, which usually are designed more for quantity of bass than quality. My sample B12WP had a manual on/off switch; automatic on/off is

The key word I'd use to describe the Model E from Vince Christian is musical.

to be included in the newer version. Adjustments are the usual ones; gain and high-end roll-off or crossover frequency. As it was designed to be part of Christian's system, I think there's too much adjustment range which might allow casual users to mess up overall sound balance. The suggested crossover frequency should be clearly marked and he could even have used an indented "hold" position for use with his speakers. While there are no user setup instructions yet, fortunately connection is simple and straightforward. [Editor's Note: Christian tells us that "Quick Start" instructions are at the printer as we go to press. — E.P.] Though I felt no great need with these speakers, I would have preferred a tweeter adjustment control (as I do for all speaker systems); plus or minus one decibel would be sufficient here. Proper balance between the main speakers and the woofers is, typically, not as easy to find as you might expect if you've not experienced such a subwoofer or other multi-piece systems. In home theater source material, a bit of excessive bass output may often be inherent in something like a movie soundtrack album, as filmdom apparently thinks it makes the experience a bit more exciting. For serious music lovers, excessive bass ruins the experience by covering up detail and taking away the sense of realism at the same time.

Listening Test

Since I found Vince Christian speakers via Jan Mancuso of Reference Recordings, it seemed appropriate to being by using some of Reference's excellent CDs to evaluate them. (Actually I usually

use some RR recordings for any equipment reviews and their superb Copland album RR-93CD has recently become a reference disc for me. Try the last track, which is the last movement of his Fourth Symphony, turn up the volume and stand back.) After break in, I put on one of my favorite "fun" recordings, Fredrick Fennell conducting *Boardwalk*, RR-62 CD. Much of this release reminds me of Fennell's famous recordings he made for Mercury 40 years ago. His conducting style appears to be just as vigorous and youthful as ever despite the

fact that he's now in his 80s. The Reference disc is a varied collection of pop music ranging from *America the Beautiful* to *Belle of the Ball*. The essential musicality shone through for the speakers on all 18 selections. Some of the pieces are orchestral show-off (typical encore selections) items. At times, there was a tiny hint of rounding or blunting of the leading "edge" of notes from the brass sections, but there was never any noticeable loss of musical detail. Some high-frequency percussion transients revealed the same quality. All in all, the effect was to make the listening experience more relaxed, even when compared to many systems at double or triple the price of the loudspeakers under review.

There are two tremendous drum strokes on the second selection, Gliere's *Russian Sailors' Dance*. Here, the Vince Christian woofer was very clean, musical and detailed, though it didn't explode with the impact and air moving ability of my reference Genesis Model V speakers. All in all, however, I don't think many music lovers would be unhappy with the performance of the B12WP woofer. During some critical listening sessions I deliberately had the Christian woofer turned off; sometimes things are more readily apparent that way and on some recordings, I did not miss it at all. Its response cleanly extends to the bottom of the usual orchestral range. A handful of superior recordings can test its limits briefly, but only you can decide how important that is.

Based on my experience in my listening room, here are my suggested starting setup parameters for the Vince Christian speakers. Separate them by 5½ to 8 feet between their

inner sides. Have both the rear panels 3½ to 6 feet out from the wall behind them. Toe-in was not critical but after experimenting, I usually wound up with them aimed at points six inches or so out from each of my ears. When you're close to correct, they'll reward you with as much soundscape depth as you're likely to hear this side of a dipole or bipole speaker. If there is a corner within seven feet or so of either main speaker, first try placing the subwoofer there and aiming it in the general direction of your listening position. The gain control will need to be reduced because of the efficiency (room gain) in the corner. That position often works very well for woofers or subwoofers, but not for the main or full-range loudspeakers. Don't use only one or two recordings to decide placement for woofers and don't use loudness or level as the only criteria.

After a recent vacation trip, I decided to listen *only* to the Vince Christian systems after returning home, with no comparison listening evaluations. It didn't take long to be reminded of the key word "musical" when thinking about this system; I could easily substitute "natural sounding" or simply "relaxing." And I mean *all* these words are meant to be complimentary, very complimentary. I had recently listened extensively to Classic Records 24-bit, 96-kHz remastering of *The Weavers Reunion at Carnegie Hall 1963*, Classics DAD 1041. It is essentially the equal of the original LP. Good with all kinds of music, perhaps these loudspeakers' real forte is reproducing the human voice. Whether it was the Weavers' Pete Seeger familiar rasp or Ronnie

Gilbert's beautiful alto voice, each was rendered with great ease by the Christian speakers with no hint of edginess or exaggerated top-end.

I've known a number of people who believe that applause reproduction can be a good indicator of sound quality. The reasoning usually goes something like this, "Applause consists of hundreds or thousands of individual transients (hands clapping) and the more the individual handclaps that are distinctly heard, the better the transient response, sound detail and quality are." My impression was that I was not as aware of quite as many individual handclaps as I have heard from this fine Weavers CD with a few very expensive loudspeakers. Does that make any difference to you? It may well be more important that I was never aware of the disappearance of any musical instruments or notes even when they were at low levels in the recording's background.

Next, I grabbed *From the Age of Swing*, Reference Recording No. 59 CD. After a couple of cuts, I was totally relaxed. The combination of an ultra smooth group of performers playing old standards, on a beautifully smooth recording with a relatively distant microphone placement plus the smooth sweet Model E's response is almost guaranteed to relax anyone after a tough day at the office. It is true that this recording is not a stringent test for evaluating a high-end loudspeaker system. The Vince Christian system sailed through with no fault audible to my ears. Classic Records 24/96 DAD remastering of the well-known soundtrack album *Casino Royale* (DAD 1033), though differing in a

few ways from the original LP, is a particularly fine workout for a speaker system. Excellent transients abound in many cuts with particularly fine and lively brass reproduction. The same qualities are found in the famous Dusty Springfield vocal, *The Look of Love*, a fine recording of her uniquely husky voice which has received some rave reviews. One writer mentioned that Dusty had turned or spun around while singing this song and that it was apparent, but only if your system was of sufficiently high definition. And, of course, that would have to include exacting setup of your tonearm and cartridge combination since an LP preceded the Compact Disc.

So what do you hear when you listen very attentively? When she "spins around," is her voice "out of phase" when her back is toward the microphones? You'll have to decide for yourself. As usual, the Christian Model E6 speakers sounded natural, relaxed and very smooth on this vocal. On the purely instrumental sections, there was again the minute or very subtle rounding of the leading edge of sharp transients. The result was an "easy listening" quality but with a touch less of the excitement and feelings of dynamic energy that come with high-adrenaline reference monitors. This is a speaker for those who like music rather than the razor-sharp images of ear-burning demo systems.

Summing Up

All this leaves us with the very musical sounding Model E6 speaker system by Vince Christian. Its size and shape make for unobtrusiveness. The gray color of the nicely finished cabinets and stands is a plus in my book. Room placement is not as critical for listening enjoyment as it is with many loudspeakers. Ultimately, any speaker's sound quality is highly dependent on the source material fed to it, but this system never seems to exaggerate these flaws or be ham-strung by them. Yet if you wish it to be an evaluation tool, it will clearly reveal differences between other components but without overemphasis.

Let me end by saying that Christian's Model E6 deserves my pet audio appellation, the one that I wish I could use more often when reviewing equipment: "It speaks with one voice."

NOTES

Vince Christian Model E6 Loudspeakers, \$3,200.00 pair; **Model B12WP powered bass**, \$2,300.00 each; S15L support (stand) for Studio Model E6 speakers, \$800.00 pair. Vince Christian, Ltd., P.O. 800, Mass Landing, CA 95039. phone 831/455-9308, fax 831/455-0650, e-mail vcldt@redshift1.com, website www.vincechristian.com.

Associated Equipment

Genesis Model V loudspeakers, Herron VTSP-1A stereo preamplifier, Herron M150 power amplifiers with 2001 updates, Denon Model 5000 DVD / CD / HDCD player, PS Audio Power Plant, Kimber Select 1011 and 1021 interconnects, Kimber Select 3033 loudspeaker cables, Vibrapod and NavCom Puck isolators with Christian-supplied aluminum feet for all speakers.

Perpetual Technology Exact Power 2000

Ron Nagle



THE PURSUIT OF AUDIO perfection may be likened unto the use and abuse of haute couture fashion down through the decades; like you, I can define many of the fads and threads woven into the fabric of high-end equipment. They may have been in vogue back then, but now retrospection reveals so many of these items were simply temporary.

For this report, we shall follow the thread back through the maze to search for the elusive black velvet background of silence, the Legendary Grail of High-End Knights. Looking back, some things were valid enough to effect permanent changes in our systems, while others were just passing phenomena that were very hard to explain. Examples of the first could be the adoption of balanced signal lines and the associated active circuitry adapted from professional audio, while the latter might be items I call "things you stick on circuit boards."

Firmly believing that most high-end systems are adversely affected by the grunge the power-generating people pump into our homes, I decided to narrow my focus and take a look for a cure, being mindful that it can be fraught with fakery. There are more than a few things that work by electronic voodoo, by cryogenic processes and a clicking clock or two. In days of yore there were blocks of iron, coils of wire

and capacitive storage cans. These we placed into the line between wall outlets and our amps to cure the Mortal Sins of component cost cutting internal to their power supply generation.

Over the years devices, whatever you choose to call them, conditioners, shapers, filters, habilitators, have become ever more sophisticated active sensing devices, with some of them seemingly possessing a rudimentary form of intelligence.

As the state of the art advanced, very small and fast circuits would not tolerate things as they were. And so an industry grew replete with its own trade publications which refers to itself as the "Power quality industry".

Big-head me roamed around the high end at the Las Vegas CES 2001. I was going to enlighten the readership as to all the devices used to chase the wall nasties away. "The Big Picture" I intended to paint soon had me staggering under the weight of brochures, pamphlets, books from companies and places I never heard of. So to illuminate my point, let me leave the Sistine Chapel ceiling for somebody else to paint. Instead I'll show you a snapshot of a real-world product.

Inquisitive, Not Inquisition

The sophistication of the Exact Power A.C. Correction System is what peaked my curiosity. (Let me

paraphrase the company's literature about the circuitry.) "This active design uses an error-correcting feed-forward circuit that eliminates any time lag associated with measuring the regulated a.c. output. It continuously compares the instantaneous a.c. input waveform to a pure amplitude-stabilized a.c. reference which is phase-locked to the input line waveform. This is done utilizing a differential amplifier whose output drives a high-efficiency power amp. This, in turn, drives a transformer that will add or subtract to the incoming a.c. voltage, depending on the polarity of the signal from the differential amplifier. The speed of this design is theoretically unlimited and can correct high frequency (sub-cycle) disturbances in the incoming waveform. Since no global negative feedback is utilized, oscillation and attendant instability problems are simply not a factor. Additionally, the Exact Power system outputs a regulated 120 volts, with a full-load, continuous output of 2,000 watts and a rated peak output current of 40 amperes."

Exact's 2000 is housed in a black-anodized aluminum box measuring 17 inches wide by 13.2 inches deep by 3.5 inches high and weighs 35 pounds. At the rear of this chassis are six a.c. outlets and an IEC socket for a detachable power cord. The front panel has a rocker power switch and three diag-

nostic LED indicators, red indicates high input-voltage surges (above 130 volts) when the 2000 shuts off power output to protect equipment plugged into it; green indicates normal function, and yellow indicates that the input voltage has dropped below 80 volts and the Exact Power can no longer regulate it.

Filtering Facts

How do you review a conditioning device like the Exact Power 2000? Think about it, either your system sounds better or it sounds worse. If it didn't do anything at all, you wouldn't have anything to talk about, at least that's what I thought.

But let me tell you right here, right up-front, this box made a significant difference. The music from my system layered itself over that ever-so-desirable very calm, very black background. It is that quality that can keep one listening deep into the music, enveloped in the performance until the wee hours draw nigh.

I recall the times past when I did just that and I wondered why, thinking I was the only one who kept such Knightly vigils, but that was before experience grew me. Remember, I can only relate my experiences in a very specific environment. Maybe that lady on the third floor turned on her microwave oven at the same time 4D started the dishwasher? With those and other potential disturbances in mind, I tell you I detected none of that. Whether it was high noon on a Saturday or early a.m. on Tuesday, ne'er a difference did the hour make. The detail and nuance continued, everything was right.

The Down Side

I wish ardently there wasn't one but that would be a lie. Alas, the first unit I received had a short life. I had a glimmer of the possibilities and then the amber warning LED came on and stayed on (even with nothing plugged into it). Mind you, this happened for no reason, the unit had been shut off for three days, nothing out of the ordinary occurred.

I contacted the designer, Greg Scott at Atlantis Power Quality Systems, Inc. He proved to be a very affable person, and after I described the problem, he agreed the unit had malfunctioned. He informed me that I received a very

early version (serial number 1011) and subsequently the problem had been corrected in production. In short order (three days later) I received a replacement Exact Power 2000.

The newer version had undergone what is apparently a significant redesign. I noted the following: Weight of the new unit is 49 pounds, up from 37.5 pounds; case is now 5 inches from rubber feet to top cover, an increase of 1.5 inches, and depth from front panel to rear now 14.5 inches, increased by 1.3 inches.

The new 2000 version now sports eight outlets, instead of six; the front panel now has beveled edges and the rows of ventilation slots along the bottom edge have been eliminated. The supplied owner's manual appears the same as the original manual, so the physical dimensions do not apply, and I suspect the electrical specifications at the back of the book need revision as well. Internally, the new and larger circuit board has been (I'm struggling for a word here) beefed up. Topology appears different, too, but in operation the 2000 offers the same circuit functions.

Starting All Over Again

I fired up the new 2000 and as with most new out-of-the-box audio components, it didn't sound right. It took a couple of hours for the Exact to heat up (burn in) and the sound stage to define itself. Initially, there was a blurred sluggish quality that gradually dissipated and attack and transient speed increased. Finally, I was able to see into the music and define the space and separate the performance elements. And lest I forget, as before, all is wonderfully quiet and the grainless black background is oh so very seductive.

And oh, how I wish that was the all of it and I could sign off right here. You should visualize that all my equipment is plugged into two power strips, filling a total of 12 a.c. receptacles, and then the two strips are plugged into the Exact Power 2000 a.c. correction device. At this point, when my system is switched on and I'm sitting and listening, I see the front panel yellow LED is on and it's about half its normal brightness. Worry sets in. The owner's manual says that means the device is in by-pass mode and is no longer regulating.

Using my digital voltmeter, I measure voltage at the wall. It's averaging 118 volts down from 122.5 volts. The Exact is outputting a fluctuating up and down 119 volts give or take two or three tenths of a volt. According to the book that is not the 120 volts $\pm 1/2$ per cent specification (close but no cigar).

The system sounds okay. But sitting and looking at that amber glow on the box on the floor between me and my Quads bothers me. So the LED is about half on. Doesn't that mean the device is only operating at half the right level?

I get up and mute the preamp out, and then switch off my Audio Research Classic 60 driving my Quad panels, the amber LED dims. Next I flip the power switch on my Hafler 500 driving my Gradient subs and the "ominous" amber glow is gone.

I thought that my system is apparently drawing too much power and is loading down the Exact 2000's circuits. I made another phone call to designer Greg Scott to tell him my observations, and he reassured me that the unit is operating and fully functional. While my system is, indeed, drawing a lot of current, he states the output voltages will be within spec between 118.8 and 121.2 volts. That's a margin of ± 1 per cent. Not the spec. in the manual.

Okay. At this point, the voltage variation thing has been put back into its properly small perspective, and I have conceded I shouldn't be so nit picky. But still, I don't want to sit and look at that damn amber LED on the front panel. If the function is not somehow compromised, then why is it on? I do not like ambiguity. If it's on and I mean fully on, then it will alert me that something has gone wrong. If not, then leave me to my musical reverie. If you're going to use warning indication, let the amber LED warn you that you're drawing a lot of current. And then at some threshold bang! on comes the top red LED. Now the unit is out of the system and in "bypass" mode. Voila, then we have no ambiguity.

Brian's System

I'll be as brief as possible and just tell you what happened. With much effort, I dragged the Exact Power 2000 18 blocks to my friend's apartment where he has an



it on letting it warm up and head for the chips and dip in the back of his three-story brownstone. As is usual, fellow audio-philos bring out their reference CDs and cue up to get them played.

Midway I ask out loud, does anybody notice a big difference in

audio/video 5.1 surround-sound system, with four-channel main amp (150 watts per), a 42-inch TV, Infinity self-powered left and right towers with center-channel speaker, and a Carver subwoofer. (Phew!)

Brandishing my trusty voltmeter, his wall voltage measured 123 volts ... with no load. We plugged all his gear into the Exact and started up the system, playing James Taylor's Live at the Beacon Theater fairly loud. Wall voltage dropped down to 117 volts. Output at Exact fluctuated by tenths of a volt above and below that point (that's not the spec.) The front panel amber LED is not on and normal operation is indicated by the green center LED.

My friend Brian says he can detect no change either way good or bad in the systems audio or video

performance. I'll have to trust his ears. Right now I'm on unfamiliar turf.

It's nigh onto 22:30, so when he suggests we hook up a signal generator and inject a frequency sweep in the Exact's power cord then look at the output on a dual trace scope, I demur. Says I, "Let's rebox this thing and carry it down your stairs." And so I roll it on my luggage cart 18 blocks through a damp drizzle back to my own apartment. Thank you very much, but enough is enough, I'll trust my ears.

Dave's System

It's the third Sunday of the month and time for the Gotham Audiophile Society meeting. Purposefully I arrive early and plug everything in Dave's system into the Exact. I turn

the sound of Dave's system? In response, I gather blank stares and little if anything else. As for me, I do hear a difference. It's better, it's a tad quieter. I know this system, I've listened to it critically for a long time now. Toward meeting's end with about six stragglers in the living room, I quickly turn off his equipment and restore its plugs back to the wall a.c. outlets.

Again I turn and ask, "Do you hear a difference?". Now all save one ventures the opinion that it sounds different, "more blurred" and comments like that. All agree, it's a subtle change. The last guy with a tone of disdain in his voice declares, "I'm not going to put any filters in my system." Oh, lest I forget, there are no amber lights, with Dave's system of one preamp, one power amp, and a CD player.

NOTES

Perpetual Technology Exact Power 2000, \$2,499.00. Perpetual Technologies, 368 S. McCaslin Blvd., #189, Louisville, CO 80027; phone 303/543-7500, fax 303/543-7200, email sales@perpetualtechnologies.com, website www.perpetualtechnologies.com.

Associated Equipment

SOTA Sapphire II with electronic flywheel with a custom high-current power supply; Grado Signature tonearm; Sumiko Bluepoint Special and Monster Alpha One moving-coil phono cartridges; SOTA clamp and acrylic mat; Adcom GFT-1A tuner; BIC FM antenna; Magnavox CDB-624 CD player; Sonic Frontiers Ultra Jitterbug; Assemblage DAC-1 and 2 processors; Audio Research SP-9 MK III preamplifier, Audio Research Classic 60, Hafler 500, Heathkit WM-5 amplifiers; Quad ESL-63 speakers with Crosby grills and Gradient SW-63 subwoofers; Arcici Deadhead turntable stand with Airhead isolation platform; VPI 16.5 record cleaner; Radio Shack SPL meter; Esoteric Ultra Path speaker cables; Monster M1000 II and Audio Research Litzline interconnects; Islatrol a.c. line filter; VPI bricks, and Argent Room Lenses.

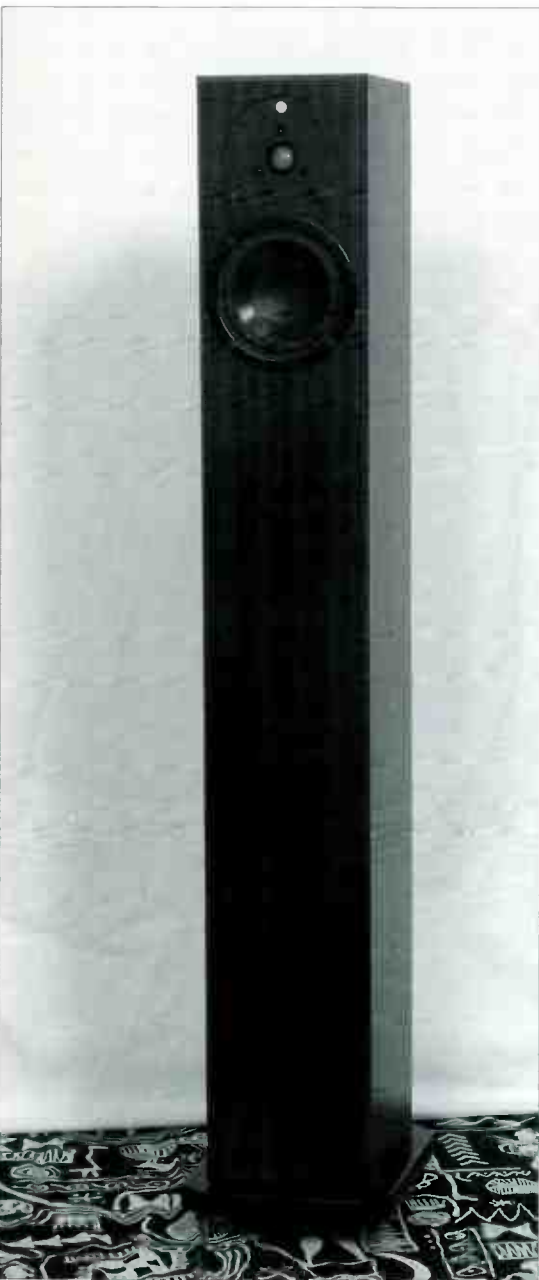
Last Note

Remember, you can sink an anchor into reality if you keep one thing in mind, and that is there are few or no universal fixes in this hobby we love. That should leave your mind open just enough to accept change and wary enough to filter out bullshit. Also be aware that the \$400.00 power cord you just bought might not work with your amp or in your buddy's system or even on another component in your own system. But that doesn't mean it doesn't work. Somewhere.

The final lesson must be how variable the effects of any device can be. You must not be deterred, use your own judgment. The results can make it all worthwhile. P.S.: You can audition the Exact Power 2000 in your own home for 30 days with no obligation, no conditions.

Totem Acoustic Arro Loudspeakers

Dan Pond & Dwight Miller



DAN: HAVING HAD the chance some years ago to listen to the Model 1, I became a fan of Canadian speaker manufacturer Totem and an admirer of the level of sonic performance they're able to deliver in a small package. Having now gotten to spend some "quality time" with the reincarnation of the \$1100, two-way, 5-inch wide x 34-inch high Arro, my admiration grows further. Totem leader Vince Bruzzese's Arros went straight to my heart and, more importantly, straight to the soul of the music.

As I was getting things set up, my wife walked by and exclaimed "What cute little things!" Since I'd heard such exclamations from her in the past, I quickly checked my garment closures and, finding all in order, realized she was instead making a comment about the diminutive Arros. For those of you who live alone, her remark may properly be translated as "I hope he likes these speakers; compared to the things he usually brings home, these are nearly invisible." And, as it turns out, they not only vanish visually, but sonically as well.

Dwight: This, admittedly, is my first experience with the little

upright upstarts. With the right wood finish, these little honeys should fit into any décor, and I predict a high Decor-Score. They'll be good not only for style, but for technical performance as well. Vince claims he can put the Arros behind a couch and they'll still fill the room with sound. As far as visual effects go, the Arros remind me of the forest animals and native warriors in a Doolittle painting; you know they are there in the foliage, but you just can't see them without working at it.

Beginning first in my bedroom system, I was immediately amazed how they put a much sharper point on the music than my Meadowlarks. The lean, clean tonality implied an upward shift in frequency response, but there were no obvious soft spots throughout the entire spectrum, and the bass was surprisingly punchy. They threw a big "stage" into the room that I could walk through without directional "hot spots." Those new tweeters have enough presence and dispersion to light up every corner of the room. Sitting outboard of the right speaker, I could distinctly hear details in the left channel, despite being twice as far away.

Dan: While the intensity balance shifts as you move from the center position, and the sharpness of the images also diminishes somewhat, the tonality remains constant and the sonic performance first rate, so you won't have to feel — or feign — guilt for not surrendering the sweet spot to your significant other. Although the Arros delivered fine performance most anywhere I placed them (and, as "cute little things," they're wonderfully easy to move about), I preferred the combination of tonal accuracy, image clarity, and soundstage size achieved with the speakers toed in slightly, about 13 inches from the side walls and 3 feet from the back wall (actually, bookshelves). The result was a roughly 9-foot equilateral triangle between / among me and the Arros and, so positioned, they delivered that "magical something" that provides the basis of real communication between artist and listener. For example, when Ted Hawkins (*The Final Tour*, Evidence ECD 22004-2) sings "I got what I wanted, but I lost everything I had," you not only hear every nuance in his sweet-raspy "Sam Cooke-as-senior citizen" voice, but you also feel his anguish over the turn of events in his life.

Dwight: To an engineer, that "magical something" you referred to might be the result of a unique design approach and fastidious attention to detail. Vince explained how he formulated his own tables for tuning the bass-reflex port to avoid the usual peak in the mid-bass. He uses variable-density MDF to avoid standing waves, veneers both inside and outside surfaces of the cabinet, lock-miters joints, and interlocks internal bracing to create a light, rigid, monocoque structure that provides quicker response than transmission-line designs. He even coats the internal surfaces with thick borosilicate paint to provide extra damping which results in a virtually constant Q factor. The real magic comes however in matching his drivers, providing a skosh of crossover correction, and designing his cabinet to virtually eliminate phase differences. The result is a "point source" radiator that is free of time-domain problems. The proof is in the listening — these babies image

like Star Trek's holodeck almost regardless of placement.

Dan: As would be expected, different speaker positions emphasize different performance attributes. For example, increased bass (albeit not necessarily of improved quality) can be attained with the speakers nearer the back wall, and sharper imaging can be traded off with soundstage

Unless you're intent on spending thousands more on loudspeakers, you should give the Arros a try.

width by altering the degree of toe-in. In our room, the bass response was both richer and more tuneful with the Arros out from the back wall and without the optional sand/lead dampening we'll discuss later, and we found that the Arros can certainly "get down" when the material calls for it. A good test here are the two versions of "I Want to Tell You 'bout That" on McCoy Tyner's recent release (*McCoy Tyner with Stanley Clarke and Al Foster*, Telarc CD 83488) on which Clarke plays acoustic and electric basses, respectively. The Arros easily conveyed all the harmonic complexity and expressiveness of the former, while delivering in spades all the "funkified" slam of the latter. Although you can indeed shake the windows and walls with the Arros, I suspect many TAV readers will value other performance capabilities more highly, and it will be a matter of personal preference and synergy with system components which determine proper location and mass loading for Arro owners.

Dwight: I ran them side-by-side with the Thiel 3.6s and these little pups had more bark and bite on top. I had to go from 2/3 pentode to 2/3 triode on the Baron to get a tonal spectrum that didn't push me out of the living room. The Arros were more sharp in the highs, a little less tonally balanced, and at times more metallic sounding than my ears are accustomed to. I must admit, though, that although the mix was upstream of neutral, the high end was as clear and transparent as a quartz crystal. On some

music, like my all-time fave Andreas Vollenweider, the supersonic tweeter emphasized the attack on the strings of the electric harp quite nicely. However, this ability became a liability with some artists, e.g. Mark Knopfler and Lyle Lovett sounded a tad more nasal than usual. I ran them at full triode power for the rest of my audition, and remained surprised at how there was no rounding off the sharp edges of anything I played.

The cabinet construction and finish are both first-rate. Totem obviously also put some money into the drivers and passive components. They developed their own tweeter for this version of the Arro, which has been available for about a year and a half, and according to Vince, this is its maiden voyage on the review circuit. He is particularly proud of his crossover, which features expensive Solen air-core coils wound with oxygen-free Litz wire, and four metal-encapsulated paper/foil bypass caps, all hand-wired with silver coated, Teflon-insulated, oxygen-free copper. No home hot-rodding needed with these top-shelf innards — the drivers hand off frequency bands as smooth as a Carl Lewis baton relay, and sound as one.

Dan: I thought the mahogany veneer, with its beveled edges at each corner, was particularly well done, and the speaker cable binding posts — two sets to enable bi-wiring — are substantial and of good quality. In fact, they're *too* substantial; my cable spade lugs were too narrow to fit properly. Additionally, although knurled finger knobs would be fine in an application in which one could actually get one's fingers on the knobs, the Arro's recessed binding posts make it impossible for me to sufficiently tighten down the speaker connections by hand, so I found banana plugs to be a useful accessory.

Although the lower third of the cabinet is an open chamber — thereby enabling owners to improve stability and affect performance by adding sand (about 12 pounds per speaker) or lead shot — I did most of my listening without such added mass. Actually, based mostly on audiophile lore and the purported "well-known benefits" of mass load-

ing, I had intended to add sand immediately upon conclusion of the break in period. However, since I began my serious listening by being seriously pleased with the Arro's sonic performance, I delayed (and delayed) doing much of anything that wasn't readily undone. For example, I moved 'em around, angled 'em in and out, added one and, then, two pairs of "beaks" (bullet-shaped alloy accessories said to favorably affect tonality), but changes which didn't soon enhance my enjoyment were soon rejected. (This includes the beaks, from which I discerned little effect and about which I'll say no more.) In fact, I confess to frequently reverting to my audiophile/listener behaviors instead of taking a more cerebral, reviewer/analyst approach. In short, the sans-sand Arros very effectively delivered the music, so I just sat back and listened.

Dwight: Since neither of us has children nor large dogs running about, there was no concern about the Arros being toppled over, although I suspect my two cats took some shots at them while I was at work. Because you relayed the Arros to me with the sand already installed, I did all my listening *avec* sand which, together with the wider plinth-with-spikes base, added to both their sonic and physical stability. Also, having heard some absolutely holographic presentations in rooms at the CES set up by

Mike Vans Evers, the master of perfecting or eliminating resonances, I played quite a bit with the beaks (both pair) to get optimum treble performance. However, my experience was identical to yours — no discernable differences.

It takes a duet with James Taylor to get Mark Knopfler to sing his best on the title cut from his latest *Sailing*

Unless you're intent on spending thousands more on loudspeakers, you should give the Arros a try.

to *Philadelphia* (Warner Bros. 9 47753-2) album. The Arros kept their identities neatly sorted out as surveyors Mason and Dixon on their way to America by allowing me the pleasure of studying the fine details of their respective tone, pronunciation, and resonance. When installed in the big rig, Jesse Cook filled the entire house with his flamboyant neo-classical *cum* Spanish guitar licks from his *Vertigo* album (Narada 72438-45988-2-2). The harmonics of the string strikes were powerful enough to be heard in the back rooms. I have no idea how Vince gets the 4.5-inch woofer to produce such realistic bass — it must have something to do with that monocoque design and the rear-facing port about a third of the way down the enclosure. No one-note

bass here! Bass response was surprisingly powerful and even-handed. The company specifications for the Arro s suggest a low end of 40 Hz is attainable, and after listening for about a month, I would not doubt that figure.

Dan: As you know, my reference system tends more towards "musical" than "analytical," so that, for example, when listening to the early passages of Sonny Boy Williamson's "The Sky is Crying" (*Keep it to Ourselves*, Analogue Productions 036) my Dunlavy's clearly deliver a soft cough somewhat distant to the mike. But with properly positioned Arros, this soft cough became a distressingly phlegmy rattle that nearly sent me running for a flu shot! In my system, the north-of-the-border trio — Classé electronics, Museatex speaker cables, Totem speakers — were superbly synergistic. However, given the ameliorative impact of the Arros on my Classé's soft sound, folks using electronics or cartridges which lay to the bright or white side of neutral might do well to audition Arros carefully to see if things start sounding fatiguing or harsh up top. Amazingly, the Arros failed only twice to perform smoothly through dynamic passages — giving forth something of a tearing sound despite modest listening levels — both times on seemingly docile recordings: Paul Bley's solo piano on *In the Evenings Out There* (ECM 78118-21488-2) and the alto sax on John Basile's *The Desmond Project* (Chesky JD156).

NOTES

Totem Acoustic Arro Loudspeakers, \$1100.00 per pair. Totem Acoustic, Inc., 4665 Bonavista Ave., Montreal, Quebec H3W 2C6, Canada; phone 514/259-1062, fax 514/259-4968, e-mail lucy@totemacoustic.com, e-mail <http://www.totemacoustic.com>.

Associated Components

Dwight's big rig has an EAD digital source, Audible Illusions line stage, current delivery via a retubed Mesa Baron feeding Thiel 3.6s, all connected with Siltech and moored by Sound Anchor. His bedroom system comprises Golden Tube Audio SI-50 integrated amp, Audio Refinements Complete CD, Meadowlark Vireo speakers, Kimber interconnect and speaker wire, Discovery power cord on amp, and ceramic isolation feet under all.

Dan's system consists of an Immedia-Grado combination to handle analog signals, Sony CD player, Classé amplification, Dunlavy speakers, and cables by Yamamura, Tara, Audiotruth, and Meitner.

Dwight: North-of-the-border synergy, eh? While listening did you ever get an urge to drink a Labatts and go play some ice hockey? Readers should note the power-handling limitations of the Arros (80 watts), their 87-dB SPL sensitivity, and choose their amplification carefully. Given the lean and clean tonal balance and the stratospheric tweeter response, the Arros should mate nicely with solid-state components that are on the warm side of neutral and very accurate on top (as your experience with Classé gear bears out, Dan). However, given the power limitation and the attractive price point of \$1100, some buyers might assume that a nice mid-fi

solid-state amp of about 50 to 100 watts would be appropriate for the Arros, but wait just a minute! Many amps of that description do a poor job of reproducing the upper reaches of the spectrum and introduce sonic artifacts that the Arros will not only reproduce with aplomb, but slap you about the head and ears with. If you can't find a sophisticated solid-state amp, a better choice might be a 40- to 75-watt tube amp with some kick in the bass. The Legend Starlet comes to mind. Dan, now having heard the Arros, I would have loved to hear them with the Legend Starlet, as you suggested a few months ago. To my ears, these Arros were made with triodes in mind.

Dan: The one area in which I couldn't achieve entirely satisfactory performance was in definition of musical details in the lower registers during complex passages; that is, when there was seemingly too much going on for the Arros to parse. A stunning torture test that I use for this is the "Japanese Drums" track on Kitaro's *Asia* LP (Geffen GHS 24087). The best systems clearly distinguish the different tonality achieved by each instrument and musician; with the Arros (as well as many larger, and much more expensive speakers), these distinctions weren't quite so evident. It is possible that bi-wiring this system would alleviate this modest deficiency, but I lacked the provisions to test the theory.

I don't mean to imply the Arros are speakers only intended for solo voice and guitar; not by a long shot. They performed marvelously well on the Kronos Quartet's LP *In Formation* (Reference Recordings RR-9) and served ably on Junko Onishi's *Cruisin'* (Blue Note CDP 7243 8 28447 2 3) which combines some wonderful acoustic bass work by Rodney Whitaker with a substantial dollop of deep, left-hand piano by Onishi. They admirably displayed the intricacies of the large band on Lyle Lovett's *Live in Texas* (MCA MCAD 11964) on which my Dunlavys give the impression of Lyle and his powerhouse female vocalist, Francine Reed, being full-size and in our room, but which, by contrast, the Arros invoked a strong recollection of the live performance at which my wife and I were seated about 20 rows from the stage.

Dwight: I was somewhat surprised that both of us liked the Arros despite their conventional 2nd-order crossover design. Between us, we have three pairs of time-coherent speakers, Dunlavy, Thiel, and Meadowlark (not to mention you formerly owned Thiels and Quad ESL-63s), whose first-order crossovers preserve the phase of the electrical signals to the various drivers. I have listened to many expensive (dynamic) speaker brands that do not employ time-coherent designs — only five or six do — and have found the music they produce to be tiring, sometimes after only a short period. I have listened to the Arros for four weeks, and not once have I felt that any timing distortions interfered with the enjoyment of the source material. The drivers in the Arros were seamlessly coherent at all times.

Dan: As you've noted, I'm a former ESL-63 owner, and remain an ardent fan of full-range electrostatics. I bought, and love, my Dunlavy SC-III's because, among other noble qualities, they deliver a reasonable approximation of the speed, transparency and, especially, coherence that 'stats provide. I found the Arros to also do a pretty good '63 imitation — very high praise in my book — and suspect that many 'stat lovers will find them as easily acceptable as I do. Moreover, they deliver a disproportionately large degree of the performance and musical satisfaction afforded by my Dunlavys than would be predicted by the substantial difference in price. Unless you're intent on spending many thousands more for speakers — or fear your significant other will comment about your "cute little things" — giving these Arros a test flight is a must.

Dwight: Vince got this new version of the Arros straight. Although they are a little bright for my system, these little Arros will be right on target for a lot of buyers. Given the high-quality parts and meticulous craftsmanship, there can't be much profit margin built into the price of \$1100.

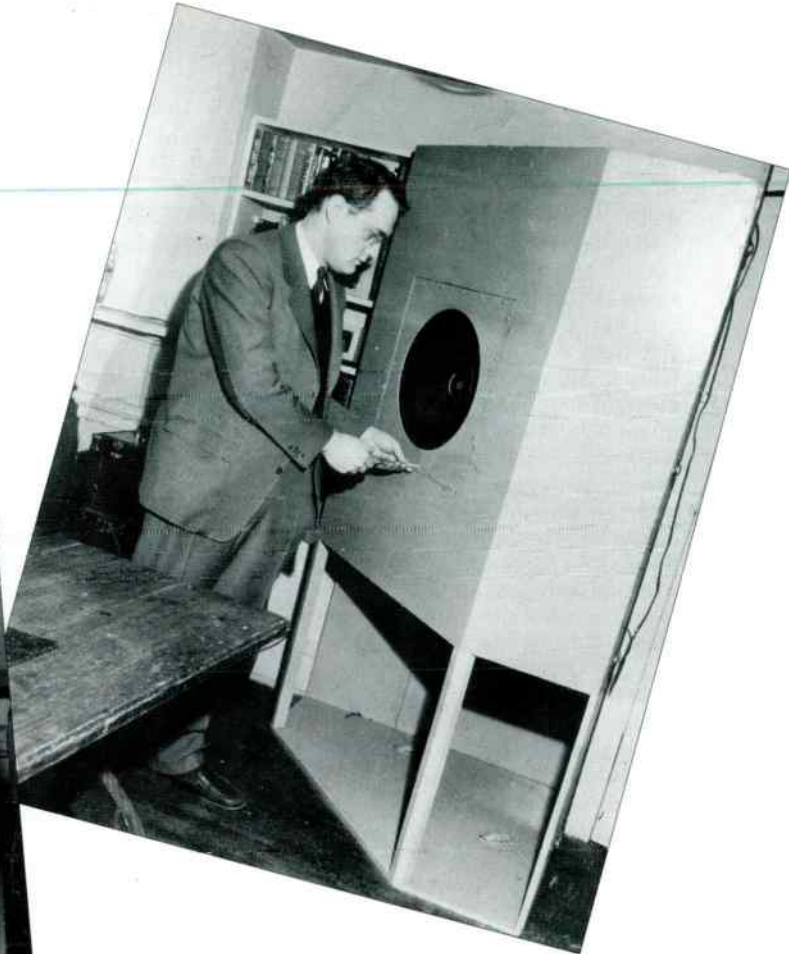
These mini-Totems are an absolute steal, and with the right system components, can give their owners sound quality achievable only by spending two to three times as much.

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HOT FLASHES!

Expomark, a unit of Audit Bureau of Circulation, one of two major firms that verifies magazine circulation, says a grand total of 126,730 attended the 2001 Winter Consumer Electronics Show. The CEA, which hired Expomark, says this is an all-time CES record total. I wouldn't bet on the total or on the record but there were a lot of people at the Show, just as there were at *Stereophile's* NYC show in May.



The Way It Was!

Gosh, this guy looks like Superman ...

but, of course, he isn't George Reeves, however much he looks like the "mild-mannered newspaper reporter, able to lift HUGE speakers with a single arm...." Actually, this guy is Howard Sterling, founder of New York City's Electronic Workshop, in some Associated Press photos from the 1950s. His firm made an early preamp-control unit and power amplifier and sold them from Sterling's shop on Bleeker Street. Later, under the company name Waveforms, Sterling made a miniature audio oscillator and a.c. voltmeter, OEM-ing 50 to 100 of them to DuMont Labs. That BIG cabinet was a trial run at a system enclosure for Harry Olson's RCA LC-1A 15-inch duo-cone driver; it was TOO big. Only two of these Wavehorns were built, but this horn went down to 27 Hz, ± 2 dB. The Baby Wavehorn, flat to only 41 Hz, was much smaller and took up much less floor space, so Sterling's firm was able to sell some of them. The open-reel tape recorder is an Ampex Model 400 which uses 15-inch reels and ran at $3\frac{3}{4}$, $7\frac{1}{2}$ or 15 inches per second.

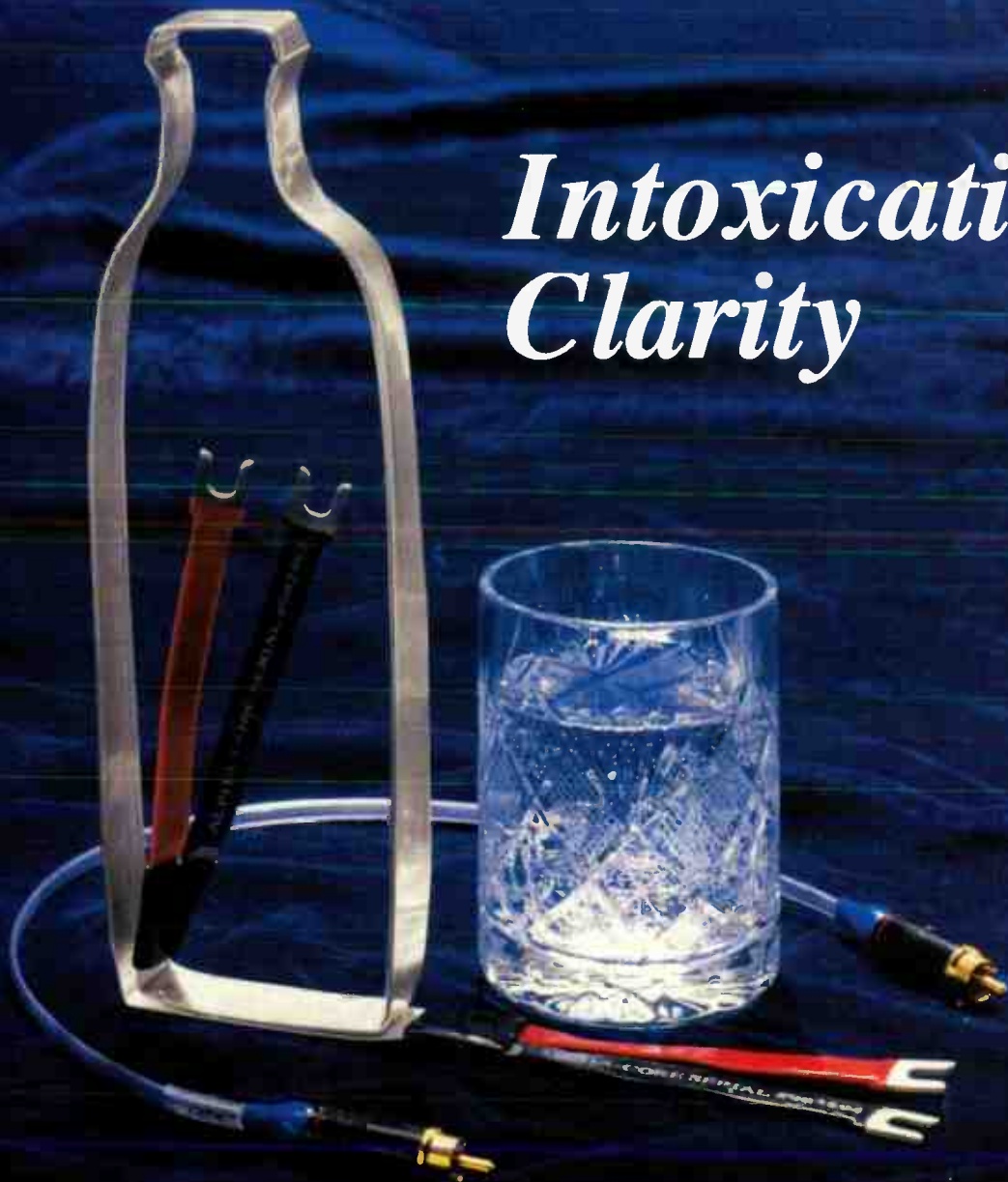
This month's winner of the BackPage prize is Charles Graham, who worked with Sterling at Waveforms, doing everything but design and production. Let us publish your photo and it will earn you \$25.00 or a one-year subscription.

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