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Stereophile  
High-End Show  
NYC - 2001



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*—Robert Deutsch, Stereophile, Vol. 23 No.6, on the Studio/100*



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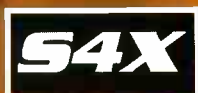
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— James T. Frane, The Audiophile Voice



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Data: [www.russound.com](http://www.russound.com)





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*Sound and Vision, December 2000*

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**'98 Editor's Choice Subwoofer**  
*SGHT, February 1999*

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*Richard Hardesty, Subwoofers Buyer Guide 2000*

*"The VTF-2 blasted out 20 Hz at 93 dB and delivered 107.1 dB SPL over the 25- to 62-Hz range - impressive for any sub, especially one with a 10 inch driver." ...*

*"There are subs costing twice as much that can't match this performance."*

*Tom Nousaine, Sound & Vision, May 2000*

*"If you want a subwoofer with maximum boom for the buck, it's hard to beat the offerings from Hsu Research."*

*Robert Deutsch, SGHT, December 1999*

*"Allied to this transparency, was a leap in dynamic range from the Quads...widest and deepest soundstage..."*

*Paul Seydor, TAS, #118*

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*Steve Guttenberg, Audio, November 1999*

*"101dB at 12.5 Hz, 110dB at 16 Hz, 114dB at 20Hz..."*

*Don Keele, Audio, August 1998*

*"Bargain of the Century"*

*Tom Nousaine, CSR, May 1998*

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# Letters

## **Gone But Not Forgotten**

Dear Editor:

I was very pleased to see that the demise of a once MacProud magazine has not deterred Prof. Lirpa from his life's work. I thought you would be interested to learn I own an amplifier that is perfectly matched for the Fire Cable.

I use a BIG tube power amp that was built years ago when the designer was in charge of, basically, everything at the firm. It is built around the legendary Model 807 tetrode rather than the 6550-type tube in common use now.

I think that my amp should be named after Loge, the demi-god of Fire, because of the 807's marked tendency for self-immolation. The Loge brings an unequalled sense of drama and excitement to the listening and viewing experience. Despite the fact that the 807 was designed more than 60 years ago, it is perfect for home theater. My Loge is placed on the floor between the speakers and just in front of the screen. While watching a film like "The Haunting," you can see the 807s flicker with each pulse of deep bass energy. In addition to the on-screen drama, you have the added suspense of wondering which 807 will go to Valhalla next.

The real fun comes when a tube goes supernova. In order to prevent the ultimate immolation scene, I must quickly shut off the power to the amp. This involves diving, Rickey Henderson-like, from my listening chair towards the amp. The trick is to execute this maneuver without breaking my leg while knocking over the coffee table or knocking myself unconscious by slamming into the amp. I leave it to you to judge how often I am successful. People who listen to sand amps have it too soft.

In the same issue, you published a ridiculous review of some SACD player which AMC implied was difficult to operate. "Compared to what?" I ask. I think he's just gotten cranky because he isn't drawing up battle plans on "Nightline" any-

more. But it won't be long. Wait until the administration decides to take control of the U.S. Senate. Then things will be back to normal.

Dave Brandt  
via e-mail

## **Beatles #2**

Dear Editor:

While I appreciated and agreed with your article on The Beatles 1 in the last issue, one important item was left out. Try the vinyl! I have a modest system (AR "The Turntable" with stock tonearm and an SAE moving-coil cartridge, Marantz CD-53, Nakamichi 630 preamp/tuner, Adcom GFA5500 amp and Tannoy PBM-8 monitors) carefully set up for near-field listening. While the CD sounded excellent, the vinyl nearly blew me out of my chair! The soundstage is completely different. While listening to the CD I felt like I was ... well, listening to a CD. When I put the vinyl on, the soundstage moved forward right up to my face. It was like being in the studio standing in the middle of the band. An awesome experience. Buy it and try it!

Scott Rubinoff  
via e-mail

## **Tony's A Treat**

Dear Editor:

The review of the 300il by Anthony H. Cordesman was an excellent summation of the unit. The description of the integrated amps features and strengths were written by a person who really Listened! I demoed the amp at my audio dealer & had a similar positive listening experience. Also, the review could be understood by a non-audiophile which was a welcome change of the usual technobabble. I own the companion KAV-280cd player & wrote it's first net review. I hope that you will review it also it is a first rate player equal of the highest praise. The reviews in your magazine continue to be top notch and enjoyable.

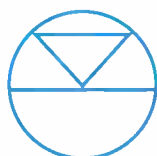
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# E DITORIAL

## D.M.C.A, Noise, & Obit

**I** DON'T KNOW WHICH was the more interesting story, but both of them twisted *my* head around several times. What was even more curious, whoever did the layout for page C7 of *The New York Times* of July 24th put these "strange bedfellows" articles cheek by jowl. The first was about Napster naming a new chief executive, choosing Konrad Hilbers, who had formerly been an executive at Bertelsmann, the German media giant which owns BMG Records and which was one of Napster's main antagonists in the lawsuit over sending of copyrighted songs over the internet.

The second story concerned an about-face by Adobe Systems which asked for the release of a Russian software programmer-hacker, Dmitri Sklyarov, whom the FBI had arrested at a hacker convention in Las Vegas for violating the 1998 Digital Millennium Copyright Law, which some civil liberties groups think is an unconstitutional restriction on free speech. Adobe had earlier filed a complaint against the Moscow-based firm, Elcomsoft, where Sklyarov works, because it was selling a \$99 piece of software that could be used to crack Adobe's e-book security. About 100 protesters had marched at Adobe's San Jose headquarters, and its officials had an eight-hour meeting with representatives from the Electronic Frontier Foundation. While Elcomsoft had stopped selling the software after being contacted by Adobe, Robin Gross, a lawyer for the nonprofit civil liberties group, said the group had been able to convince Adobe that supporting the prosecution would hurt its business. "It makes little sense for the U.S. attorney's office to ask taxpayers to foot the bill for a prosecution that Adobe doesn't even believe in," she commented.

### WOULD YOU BELIEVE?

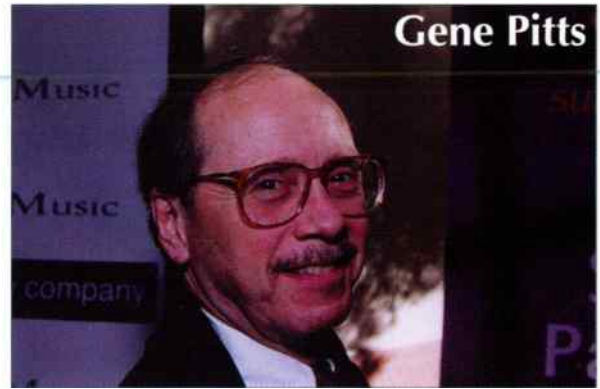
International Noise Awareness Day was last April 25th, and to call attention to this form of pollution, the House Ear Institute went out in the Los Angeles area and did some sound level measurements with a standard sound meter:

*Downtown Traffic* at a busy intersection with trucks and sirens, Alvarado and 7th, 78-90 dB-A;

*RED LINE METRO SUBWAY* at Westlake/MacArthur Park stop with trains arriving at platform, 70-81 dB-A, approaching train horn in tunnel, 85 dB-A;

*Recess in Schoolyard*, PB Catholic School, Occidental and Third, 67-77 dB-A, coach's whistle, 90 dB-A;

*Leaf Blowers and Lawn Equipment*, Larchmont, blower



89-92 dB-A, mower 89-95 dB-A; *Library*, very crowded reading room in the Santa Monica Public Library, Sixth St., 50-64 dB-A; *Night Club*, live folk-rock band at Rusty's Surf Ranch, Santa Monica Pier, 90-96 dB-A; *MOVIE THEATER*, "Spy Kids" at 9:00 p.m. showing, previews 75-80 dB-A, THX sound preview 90 dB-A, "Spy Kids" movie 52-78 dB-A, and *Construction Site at Night*, Santa Monica Blvd. and 2nd St., 10:50 p.m., Kobelco excavating machine and roadworks 75-89 dB-A.

Our thanks to "ProSoundNews" for writing up the effort. Check out the House Ear Institute's website ([www.hei.org](http://www.hei.org)) 'cause they've done good work in helping to protect hearing.

### 'NOTHER MAN DONE GONE

TAV hears that our "ally in good sound" Harvey "Gizmo" Rosenberg passed away due to a heart attack late in July. An self-styled eccentric in the grand British manner and "General Biter of the status quo," Harvey named himself Grand Mufti of the Thermionic Valve Religion and Grand Techno-Shaman of The Triode Guild. That is, he liked the sound of audio systems which used tube amplifiers. He also liked Indian motorcycles, sending out many packages and envelopes adorned with the Indian marque, almost as much as he like sticking pins in people's balloons. I never got around to kidding him that more hot air got into the atmosphere that way than because of his beloved tubes.





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## Bernard Kingsley

**L**AST FALL, AS WE WERE MOVING across town, my wife had enough of it. “You’ve got to do something about them.” She pointed to a stack of boxes holding hundreds of records (you know, LPs), and a few boxes of cassette tapes. “You hardly ever listen to them anymore,” she accused.

It was true. I did play some LP albums because it’s the only decent version I have. They have never have been replaced by CD because music companies don’t have an “upgrade” policy. When a new format comes out and you buy the same “album,” there ought to be a discount in price, an upgrade policy if you will, but there isn’t. I already have some music on both cassette and LP. I revolt at paying full price for yet another format change.

A large number of LPs never made it to the CD format. Quality of music doesn’t appear to be a criteria; Marshall Chapman’s *Jaded Virgin* had been *Stereo Review’s* record of the year back in 1978, but it’s not now available in any format.

In a few cases I insist on using the turntable for the audio quality (sound quality is still better on LP at times, and I found evidence for that), but while I sometimes miss the ritual of cleaning the record, using the de-static gun and taking care of the stylus, more often than not I tend to opt for the ease of CD. I do a lot of listening in the car, and CD is the logical format for that. So that was the answer! I decided to transfer most of the LP records to CD-ROM.

After some consideration, I decided that audio CD recorders were clearly not the solution. They are really designed to copy CDs. Make a mistake and all you’ve got is a gold or silver coaster. Those recorders also make it difficult to skip tracks and mix albums. Editing or cleaning up the signal is virtually impossible with them.

It turns out the computer is an ideal audio recorder. Not to everyone. People tried to talk me out of it. Gentry Lange, Product Manager of iObjects, Inc., passed on the suggestion that “At best, it’s still a lot of manual work.” True, but...

You can record an album or track on your hard drive, manipulate it till the cows come home and then burn it on CD as often as you want (don’t forget copyright laws though). Assuming you already have a computer, this is also a cheaper way to go! In the spirit of Yankee ingenuity, and some guilt over having splurged on a computer recently, I decided to do this project on the cheap. For many, the cost of the setup will be less than \$200!

I began by preparing the audio system located in my den, or SOHO. (Well, it is a small home office and SOHO sounds so sophisticated). The turntable was emitting an inconsistent signal and a local repair shop found that some wires had to be replaced. It turns out Technics still makes parts for the turntable. Indeed, they sell a similar turntable for disk jockeys! The computer was connected to the pre-amp, initially in the tape monitor loop, as any recorder would be. Before long I made my first test recording. This was definitely not the Holy Grail of high-end hi-fi. But then, in my humble opinion, neither is CD audio. My intent was to make listenable CDs at low cost.

Monitoring with headphones is essential to get good sound. I generally used my Audio-Technica phones for their efficiency, though the sound card was able to drive my Grados to reasonable levels. The phones were plugged into the soundcard’s output, allowing me to monitor the incoming sound as well as the editing process.

After some experience with a variety of albums, I rediscovered some favorites I hadn’t heard for some time. I also got to wondering how I could possibly have liked some of the stuff I had collected! Do tastes change or did I just get caught up with what was popular at the time?

On first effort, albums sounded good but not as I thought they should. I soon became aware of some limitations. To my surprise, audio levels are even more critical in the digital format than they are on tape recorders. A signal overload quickly reaches distortion and then starts dropping the signal altogether. My wife

noticed this immediately on some early efforts and thought it sounded like severe tape dropout.

Getting good level control helped, but the Windows line-level control meter isn't very precise and the on-board sound chip of my motherboard wasn't fully up to the task and tended to saturate quickly. I shopped around, read reviews and found that most sound cards are made for folks who like games. Prices on soundcards can range from free (after a \$10 mail-in rebate) to \$1,000 or more. I finally found a reasonably priced, audio-oriented soundcard from Philips. The Rhythmic Edge soundcard made an immediate difference. It's capable of 44,100-Hz and 48-kHz sampling. There are soundcards with sampling rates of 96 kHz for 24-bit sampling. Whether or not you will hear a difference in the sampling rates with LPs is another debate.

The Philips card's analog/digital converter was more forgiving of high signal levels than the on-board sound chip, but watching levels continued to be a critical part of the project. Using the preamp outputs was an option that allowed more

flexibility, but of course you can't then use its volume control for listening while recording.

I had planned to remove clicks and pops with an old MRM. You might remember the Garrard Music Recovery Module, Model 101. There never was a Model 102, which gives you some indication of its success, but actually this circa 1978 audio component does a decent job of cleaning up recordings. Most of my initial trial recordings were processed by the MRM.

The software supplied with the Philips card and with my Sony CD-RW drive was clearly not intended for extensive use of recording from line inputs and using .wav files.

Wav files are pretty much the standard for recording and I stayed with them throughout the editing process. Waves are PCM 44,100 Hz, 16 bit, stereo files with no compression. Essentially CD quality. The penalty is that the files will run around 10 MB per minute; a five-minute recording will easily exceed 50 MB. You can plan on anywhere from 400 to 650 MB for an album. Compressing the .wav files into MP3 files makes for smaller files,

but it's "lossy" compression; meaning that whatever is removed during the compression can't be restored.

There is, fortunately, some free (yes, free!) software available for line-in recording. Music Match Jukebox was the first program I tried. The basic program is free for the download. It can be set to record from the line-in and has one of the most useful features available, an adjustable setting for sensing tracks. With popular music, Music Match is usually able to determine when a track ends and another begins. It will then create a new file for the upcoming track.

The program does need some adjustment for many albums. The Beatles' maddening tendency to have short silences — or low level sounds — between tracks of the *White Album* never could be fully adjusted. Some acoustical records have momentary silences that will fool Music Match into thinking that a new track has begun. Forget about using this feature on most classical recordings. Still, it's a helpful feature much of the time.

You could burn your CD directly from MusicMatch, though only the upgrade version can do so at high speed. The upgrade (MusicMatch PRO) can also print CD covers. In my view, the upgrade is well worth the price. The major limitation is that neither version of Music Match has any real editing or "clean up" abilities.

I sometimes used Windows Recorder, which has a now-ancient but quite useful set of tools for rough edits such as deleting space before or after a recording. This editing effort caused a second unexpected expenditure. In my desire to edit large (180 MB) files in actual memory, I was "forced" to upgrade my computer's RAM to 320 MB. The additional memory definitely makes a huge improvement! Still, I have to confess, I could have done it without the upgrade. In fact, I tried the editing programs on a 128-MB RAM machine and things worked fine, though slower.

Editing got better when I downloaded programs dedicated for audio recording and processing. One of the programs, NERO, is really promoted and intended as a program for recording ("burning") onto CD, but buried in its options are some marvelous audio filters. When used judiciously, the built-in equal-

## ABOUT FILE TYPES

**T**HERE ARE MANY TYPES or formats of files used to encode audio on CD, but for recording line (analog) signals you will likely chose from one of three:

**WAV**—Files that end in the .wav extension have been around since Windows 3.1. Some recording software lets you chose resolution from 8-bit mono to 16-bit stereo, and the sampling rate from 8000 to 44,100 (audio CD quality). Most recorders (such as Music Match) just assume you want best quality when you use these wav. These files are relatively huge, running more than 10mb per minute.

**MP3**—Probably the most popular format today. Most recording software allows you to specify sampling rate or resolution, but these can be 44,100-Hz, 16-bit stereo. The file size is only about 10 per cent of a comparable wav file. However, there is no free lunch: MP3 uses compression, which does cause sound to deteriorate. You can debate forever over the importance of this loss. Some hardware CD and DVD players can now read discs containing MP3 files, allowing you hours of music on one CD-ROM.

**WMA**—Files ending in .wma are Windows media audio files. These are quite similar to MP3 in sound quality and size as well as adjusting resolution and sampling rate. To date, no hardware player can use them, but since most people use Windows, it's likely everyone can play them on their computer.

In close listening on a hi-fi system, or with headphones, most people can readily distinguish the uncompressed .wav files from the compressed file formats. It's much harder to hear a difference between MP3 and .wma. In fact, I can't reliably hear a difference between the two compression formats.

izer and the click and pop filter work quite well. In fact, the program equaled the Garrard at removing clicks. The idea of recording from the LP with minimal processing appeals to me. It's better to do filters and adjustments later, once a "pure" copy has been obtained and archived on the hard drive. The Garrard was taken out of the system and is now for sale!

If you buy Nero 5 in its retail box, you also get Nero Media Player and a program that prints CD covers and inlays. The player is a nice little unit as a player and also quite competent for recording. The Nero player doesn't catch pauses between tracks, and the "pause" button is disabled for recording, but it does have wonderful level meters — which finally gave me control over the signal equal to what I had on my three-head tape machine. Nero version 5.5 deletes the media player but instead offers a basic wave editor and recorder (also with good level meters).

The level meters led me to the visible conclusion that a few LPs had significantly more dynamic range than the comparable CD. I began to suspect this when I recorded an LP, later discovered that I had the CD version and compared the two. Some editing programs such as WaveRepair can read out the dynamic range of any recording, and this can yield surprises.

In order to find out just how good some of this audio software can be I concentrated on a few albums. Especially helpful was "Odyssey," a joint effort of A&M records and Altec-Lansing (the speaker manufacturer) produced in 1973. It contains demonstration cuts from 10 A&M records and features great dynamics and wonderful sound. A few tracks have scratches, click and pops; just enough to test the abilities of software designed to clean up that stuff.

While Nero's wave editor did a decent job of cleaning up, other, more-dedicated software was of more help. Clean, DartPro32, and GoldWave all have filters that can remove clicks and other noise.

A small program called "WaveRepair" was especially good for clicks and pops. It allows numerous settings for detecting record clicks, counts and locates them if you wish, deletes them on your command and restores them if you

change your mind. The program doesn't feature much on graphics; but runs lightning-fast and turns out to be extraordinarily effective. The filters are mild so that initial settings will minimize mistakes from overdoing it. I also found WaveRepair to be an excellent recorder with large peak-level meters and a much appreciated pause button. While this, and most other editing programs, does not pause at the end of tracks, it's relatively easy to find the start and end of tracks (using the visible wave) and saving each separately. Of course, here too, lots of RAM memory in your system helps.

All of the really good editing programs allow you to see a music signal (generally represented as a wave), highlight certain sections of the signal and process either the selected section or the entire recording. A few let you "zoom in" to that a section, allowing you to isolate a particular click or pop. You can either clip out the pop or have software smooth it out. Indeed, the author of WaveRepair, Clive Backham, suggests that one should isolate each individual click and "snip it out." His program can then repair the file somewhat. While I can see doing that for a treasured track or even a beloved album, I hardly have the patience or the time to do this for all the recordings I might make. For just one track of a

recording, WaveRepair registered 227 clicks. If you have time to manually check them all, you need a life! Still, you will want to eliminate some "critical" clicks. I found clicks are more annoying in my car than on my home hi-fi (perhaps because of the proximity of the tweeter, though my wife would claim the sound level is also a factor).

All of this does suggest that this is "a lot of manual work," but it really depends. If your intent is just to transfer LPs and tapes to CD-ROM, having them sound just like they would in their original source, the whole process can be easy. Nero and Clean! both have filters which, when set conservatively, will remove most errant noise. The user's manual of Clean! makes a good point in reminding us that LPs were always somewhat noisy and trying to get them down the CD noise floor will most likely lead to frustration!

A project like this does get you involved in listening to your old music again. You find yourself learning about the recording process, critically listening while sitting at a computer, and finally producing CDs that are a pleasure to listen to. In all cases, the CD sounded almost as good, and in a few cases, better than the current LP

Recording LPs can be a rewarding effort.

## ASSOCIATED GEAR

**Main Computer**—Custom-built with AMD Athlon Tbird, 700 MHz (overclocked to 800+ MHz), memory, 320 MB PC133; primary or "C" drive, Western Digital 15-Gig, IDE UDMA at 5,400 rpm with 2-MB cache; CD-RW, Sony CRX-140E; audio card: Philips Rhythmic Edge PSC 702; video card: Matrox Millennium G450 with 16-MB RAM; operating system: Windows 98, Version 2.

**Laptop**—Compaq Presario, 380 MHz AMD K-6-III CPU, with 128-MB RAM and ESS audio board.

**Audio Equipment**—Proton 2000 II pre-amplifier; Garrard Music Recovery Module MRM101; Technics SLP 1600 turntable; Stanton 681 EEE and Empire 490 phone cartridges, and Audio-Technica ATH P5 and Grado SR 80 headphones.

**Albums**—*Odyssey*, various artists (A&M SP 19009, 1973); *Buckingham Nicks*, L. Buckingham, S. Nicks (Polydor PD5058 1973); *Marshal*, Marshall Chapman Epic 1979; *Jaded Virgin*, Marshall Chapman (Epic 1978), and Al Kooper, Producer; *Stereo Review Record of the Year*.

**Private Recording**—Piano, Karlheinz Moeller-Rehm: J.S. Bach, *Prelude and Fugue in e flat minor* (BWV 853) and J.S. Bach, *Prelude and Fugue in b flat minor* (BWV 867).



# Burning The Burners

## Clean! and Clean Plus!

<http://www.steinberg.net/>

\$99.00 for Clean!, \$139.95 for Clean Plus!

Clean! software arguably has one of the best interfaces around. All the features are easy to find and the display is informative. The "Plus" version offers a phono preamp which is reviewed separately.

The program installs without hassle, commands are intuitive and results are very good. Filters for removing noise, clicks and pops are easily adjustable. The program leaves original files alone and creates new ones for its filters; a good idea except where disk space may be limited. Like most of these programs, the default filters are too aggressive, but since they are easily adjusted, this shouldn't be a problem. In a few cases the final recording distorted because using multiple filters and equalization raised the volume level too much. After you have created the files to be recorded; listen to them again!

Using the "project" concept, Clean! will allow you to start an album project, close it out and let you reopen it



## MEASURING THE CLEAN! PLUS PHONO PREAMP

### David Hadaway, of db Systems

I was asked by Gene Pitts to measure and evaluate the phono preamp which is part of the Steinberg "Clean! Plus" package, a program for transferring LPs to computer files while allowing tick and pop suppression and general noise reduction and processing.

The preamp is a dark red plastic box, 2½ by 3½ inches, with a captive cable for attachment to the computer's game port. It has two RCA jacks for the turntable plugs, and a cable with a 1/8-inch miniplug for plugging into the soundcard. There is also a "through-port" so you don't lose the game port.

Overall, the construction quality is excellent. The miniplug is gold plated (though I don't consider that type of connector reliable), the RCA phono jacks are gold plated (but not the center contact!), and the pc board appears to be epoxy fiberglass. The "shielded case" is achieved by sputtering copper on the inside of the housing. This is fine for the megahertz frequen-

cies found in a computer, but not very effective against 60-Hz pickup.

At first I was dubious about the performance obtainable from the 5 volts available from a game port, but then realized that there is on-board a Burr Brown d.c.-to -d.c. converter to generate an isolated +/-15 volts. This allows ample headroom. The audio path uses a pair of 833 op-amps, a dual low noise, low distortion chip from National Semiconductor.

With the exception of four capacitors, all components are tiny surface-mount type. This, with the dual layer board, makes it impossible to trace the circuit. And would-be modifiers would find only frustration.

There is a three-position switch for gain and a three-position switch for capacitance loading (100, 250, and 425 pF).

The frequency response measured +/-0.4 dB from 20 Hz to 20 kHz (the unit's spec'ed at +/-3, no frequency range specified). The distortion at 1 kHz measured 0.003%, which is higher than the 0.002 specified, and 0.008% at 20 kHz. Output clipping was 5 to 6 volts across the audio band. Gains were 35, 41 and 46 dB, fine for moving-magnet cartridges but not a moving-coil type.

Overall, an excellent performing unit (although the RIAA frequency response could be tighter) that would be competitive as a stand-alone unit.



later with all settings intact as you had left them. Nice. Still, I wish that the program's preference settings (as opposed to a projects settings) had more options. I accidentally burned a few CDs at 1x speed simply because that's the default of the program.

Clean! comes with a stand-alone editor (WaveLab Lite) which is good at recording and making manual edits. The accompanying printed manual (in the boxed version) is the most useful I have found for this type of program.

**DartPro32**  
<http://www.dartpro.com/>  
**\$99.95**



One of the company's older products; the interface is rather plain looking. The fact that it's older can be an advantage since it was designed for slower computers and ran very fast on the new equipment.

Default settings tended to be too harsh for filtering and de-clicking, but all settings offer numerous adjustments.

In fact, the filtering capabilities are so extensive that you are bound to find good settings for a particular recording. Yes, the many options can seem confusing, but once you become familiar with them you appreciate the flexibility.

Some editing commands were counter-intuitive to me and required more learning time. Recording was easy. Meters are good and the controls mimic those of a tape deck. If you take time to learn the program, you can make very good recordings using it.

One bit of caution: When you buy DartPro online, you are sent a key to unlock it. That key is based on the computer's bios; meaning it cannot be used or moved to another system without a license transfer disk (which you can create) or asking DartPro for a new key. I discovered this when I changed the bios settings to overclock my processor and thereby eliminated the registration code.

**Feurio**  
<http://www.feurio.com/>  
**\$29.00 download, \$39.00 on CD**



In many ways, this is the program from hell. On installation it gave dire warnings (written and graphic) of a large number of outdated drivers on my system. It offered to help me delete these "old" drivers. Evidently anything Feurio doesn't recognize is considered old, including my just-updated VIA PCI bus drivers, which are, well, essential. I ignored all the warnings and Feurio ran just fine. Still, Feurio gave me the impression of someone's unfinished software effort.

Feurio is rich with options and clear menus, but I would only recommend it to computer pros who are in love with the layout and ergonomics. Other programs priced only slightly higher do much of the same without the installation hassle.

**GoldWave**  
<http://www.goldwave.com/>  
**\$40.00 download**



Similar to WaveRepair, this program offers a lot more features and special sound effects. GoldWave is great for editing, but it does take something of a sledgehammer approach with filters and in de-clicking.

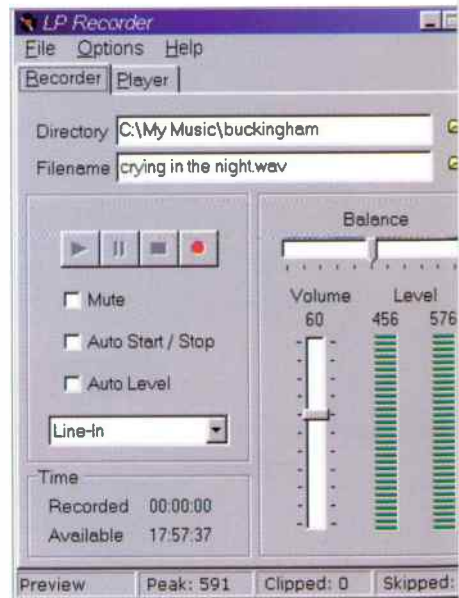
The graphics are garish and the menu choices obscure. There is a distinct difference, for example, between "Trim," "Cut," and "Delete," but you'll have to hunt through the help file to find it. The version I tried leaves some information coded in the .wav file including the "GoldWave" name. This wasn't a problem, but some editors caught this extraneous data and reported an error, though they opened and edited the files created in GoldWave.

GoldWave has a good, though unorthodox recording function. GoldWave insists on creating the large music file *before* you actually record. In theory, this makes things more stable, and yes, GoldWave makes very good recordings, but this technique limits the recording time at the outset and you must be careful to make the file large enough. If the file to be recorded can be created in memory (RAM), this is no problem. But on one of my older systems GoldWave tried my patience when it was glacially slow in creating the preparatory .wav file on the drive.

**LP Recorder**  
<http://www.cfbsoftware.com.au/>  
**upgrade to the full version for \$29.95.**

This small program is designed for recording LPs into one large file and then dividing the tracks into individual files. Controls were clear and very easy to use. I made some excellent recordings using LP Recorder. Metering is very, very good at catching peaks and allowing recording at just the right level. You can set the program to recognize silences, though the settings are a bit tricky.

The program is minimal; it will run well on even the most memory-aneamic machines. But given its lack of editing and filter capability, the price is a bit steep. Still, you might like the simplicity and quality of the LP Recorder.





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I initially obtained Nero for its reputation as a solid CD burner program for virtually all types of computer CDs, but the audio filters and abilities are what make it valuable in this review. Still, I must mention that NERO was the only burner program never to leave me with an unusable CD. In a few cases, it automatically dropped down to a lower write speed due to "media" difficulties. Other burners I had tried just created silver coasters in such media difficulty cases.

Installing the program prompted the suggestion that I change the physical setup on my system, moving the CD-Reader (not writer) to another controller. I initially ignored the suggestion and all worked fine. Later, on further research, I did open the computer and changed the cables to follow Nero's suggestion. There was a slight performance boost in copying from the reader CD to the writer CD just as Nero had claimed.

Like all music editors I tried, Nero takes some time to learn. In one "window" you can see the music as a wave so that spikes are easily observed. The editing ability worked great for removing noises, inserting silences and clipping off the start and end of a file (such as noise of the run-in groove). The filters allow some options and work well in moderate settings. As is the case with hardware tone controls, a little is enough! Setting the click-and-pop filter too high, or boosting bass too much added anomalies and noise to the music and, in extreme cases, caused dropouts. Fortunately, Nero added the ability to preview the changes you make to music. This preview ran faster on my system than the preview function of most other programs. Creating a LOT of filter settings (adding equalizer settings, inserting the click and pop removal function and adding a high-pass filter to remove subsonics) does create for a somewhat slower burn or file save. That's to be expected.

After naming the files and disk, Nero can create a cover and inlay for you to print. Much of the information used is auto-generated from work already done (such as naming files). This makes a homemade CD look more professional. The cover creator program is limited but works quite well.

The accompanying Nero Wave Editor (version 5.5) worked well with line-in recordings and had good level meters. I missed having a "pause" setting, so you either have to stop it after each track and rename a file, or allow it to very create a large file containing multiple tracks which later can be edited down.

Because the player/recorder is a stand-alone program and doesn't contain radio or other functions it is suitable for use on systems that are challenged with processor speed or memory. Editing capabilities of the Nero Wave Editor aren't as great as some other programs, but are probably adequate for many situations.

**MusicMatch**  
<http://www.musicmatch.com/>  
(free for basic, \$19.99 for PRO version)



This is the Swiss army knife of music software. MusicMatch can play and record most any file format. It includes a web-based radio, burns CD-Rs after you have created a play list and converts files from one format to another in a fast "batch" mode. You can download MusicMatch for free and upgrade it for only \$20.00. The upgrade allows for a few more options, most notably the ability to burn CD's at a fast speed.

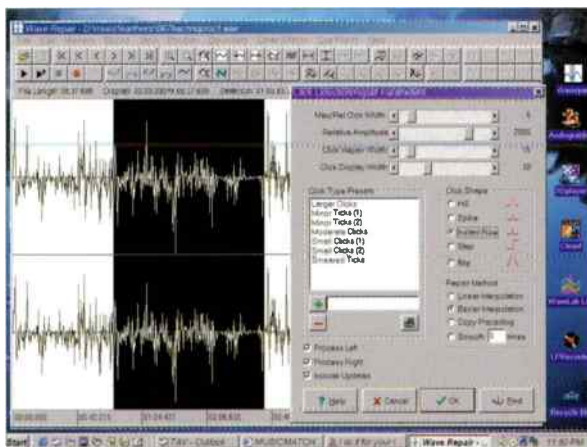
While the menus are clearly laid out in a simple design, there are a more options than anyone could initially guess. MusicMatch can sense the end of a song and create a new file for the upcoming track. Files are named according to track number so it's fairly easy to know what you are working with (track one though is usually worthless if you allow the run-in groove to be recorded). Sensitivity of the track sensor is adjustable though the default setting worked well most of the time.

Playback includes the option of viewing what we might call psychedelic images or dancing lights. If you don't want the light show, you can turn it off. Logic would dictate that this is where the record level meters should be for recording, but someone dropped the ball on that. No meters and no input level control on record. You'll have to open the windows line-in control. Still, for the vast majority of the pop albums I tried it with, the program worked well and allowed unattended recording. Just check those levels before you start. Despite all its functions and its file size, MusicMatch ran fast on both of my systems.

**WaveRepair**  
<http://homepages.nildram.co.uk/~abcomp/wavrep.htm>  
Registration costs US \$30.00.

I found this program to be absolutely indispensable and you should be downloading it right now. There aren't a lot of graphics or features, but editing is simple while extraordinarily flexible. You can zoom in again and again to find the specific click in the wave and once you do there are numerous options for removing or neutralizing it.

The automatic de-clicking filters are quite good and allow numerous adjustments, which can work on the entire file or a specific segment. The filters take a mild approach to the music. Indeed, everything about the



program suggests that the author loves LPs and is intent on restoring them without audible anomalies.

WaveRepair comes with recording capability and huge meters for monitoring. I was initially unenchanted by the program because its ergonomics and graphics are rather "blah," but I found myself going back to WaveRepair again and again for its wonderful editing capabilities. WaveRepair is also a good choice for systems with limited memory or processing power.

#### Recommendations

When you consider the price of music editing software just a few years ago, virtually all of these tested programs are genuine bargains. In some cases, I wish the designers had added just one or two more features but at these prices who can complain? Indeed, given these prices I would suggest that serious hobbyists obtain at least a couple of these programs since they have different features.

If you need a good CD burner program AND a decent editing/recording program, you can't go wrong with **NERO**. It ran without a glitch and produced very good copies. The CD, media player / recorder and manual may be worth the extra \$20.00 for the boxed version. The download version is a steal at less than \$50.00.

Close on its heels, and in some ways better, is **CLEAN!**, which offers a superb interface, good filters, a nice editor and a reliable burner. If you don't need Nero's ability to burn different types of (non-audio) CDs, the more music-oriented **CLEAN!** may be the program of choice. Yes, it's a bit pricey compared to the others, but it's also the most professional audio-oriented program in the group.

For simply copying LPs that have clearly defined tracks and level controls that you can easily set, **MusicMatch** works fine. The batch file conversion is wonderful if you plan to create MP3 files. The basic free version might be all you need, but if you want to use it as a burner, pay them the \$20.00. It's money well spent.

**DartPro** offers a less friendly interface than some other programs, but it does have numerous filters and adjustments without hogging a lot of windows and hardware resources. It ran fast even on the slower system. For many computer-performance oriented readers, that alone will qualify it for a trial run.

**GoldWave** is a useful program if you are willing to spend some time learning it. It is extremely useful for detailed editing. But **WaveRepair** offers many of the same features, runs faster and may be easier to use.

If you plan to record old albums that will require good click and pop removal, **WaveRepair** is the no-brainer decision.

## What they're all talking about



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# *Stereophile High-End Show New York - 2001*

Arnis Balgalvis

**S**tereophile magazine sure gave the electronics industry something to think about when they decided to skip their annual high-end show in 2000. Most everyone held their breath in the wake of that decision while inferences drawn by pundits throughout the industry were blown up into the usual predictions of doom. To their credit, *Stereophile* has more than made up for *The Millennium Skip* by putting on a tremendous exhibit just a year later. The “No Show” year could just be

what the industry needed — a little breathing room, so to speak. From what could be seen at the HE2001, the time available to regroup had been put to good use because an ample crowd of very interested consumers and enthusiasts could be seen eagerly filling all the exhibit floors of the New York Hilton.

This event was laid out very conveniently, though I could not quite see that picture at the time, being in the middle of the hustle and bustle of the show. All told, five floors of

the Hilton were involved, though some floors were more involved than others, either by greater density of exhibits or by having larger exhibit rooms and thus lending themselves to display of more extensive systems.

For example, the second floor had some all-out home theater displays from several large companies as well as an “audiophile supermarket,” where you could actually get to spend your money on LPs, CDs, and various accessories and tweaks.



The fourth floor had some very large suites and featured displays by several cooperative groups who had pooled resources in order to deal with such expansive and expensive spaces.

The rest of the show was on three additional floors where each display occupied a typical hotel room. Occasionally, several rooms were joined together to get the effect of a suite and this facilitated the display of products from such important area dealers as Innovative and Sound by Singer. Most displays were active, by the way. The show was open to the public on Friday from noon to 6:00 p.m., Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., and Sunday from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Ample hours, if one could get around. The press was granted early access to the exhibits on Friday from 9:00 a.m. until noon.

But anyone who thinks that the press corps somehow is given a great privilege with these extra hours is sadly mistaken. Arriving at this relatively early time provides in many cases a glimpse of last-minute set-up activities and incessant excuses about the various "unfortunate" states of the equipment break-in. One would think that after all these years of doing shows, those exhibiting would be better prepared.

From what I understand, *Stereophile's* hopes for attendees were exceeded by quite a margin. Far more people showed up than had been expected. That is good for statistics and the bean counters, but it was not good for the public especially on Saturday. To make things worse, former President Clinton was in the building to make a speech at some unrelated group that day, a teacher's union, I think, and this complicated the situation even more. Let me tell you, things were really crowded, and it was impossible to access some exhibits, with the regular floors (9, 10, and 42) really taking the brunt. At least on the second and fourth floors, many of us could resort to the stairwells using leg-power.

The way I see it, this situation would have gotten out of hand had it not been for two mitigating circumstances. First, a \$35 consumer-admission charge to a show this size is very steep. That's putting it mildly. To my mind, the industry should be working to attract new blood and

new enthusiasts. With a \$35 ticket price, many young people who might otherwise be interested are kept away. I can see, too, that the show charges the exhibitors very steep fees for displaying their goodies, but why take it out on the lowly attendee? A \$35 admission price tells me one thing about the attitude of the show management: "Forget about the future and any new prospects we might encourage to attend; let's just maximize the profits today and make the bottom line look good." Typical shortsighted yuppie tunnel vision. [Editor's Note: Tougher than that, Arnie. It appears that E-Map, *Stereophile's* owner, was under great financial pressure, such that any venture had to show a good profit, and the handwriting was on the office wall of any manager who didn't. Since you wrote this, E-Map has sold all its magazines to Primedia for \$55 million, a considerable discount from the amount that E-Map paid to Peterson for the group that included *Stereophile*. This propels Primedia into the really big time, but several parts are rumored to be for sale.— E.P.]

The second circumstance that simply had to affect Sunday attendance was Mother's Day. To me the evidence was clear — yes, I was there thanks to my wife who is exceptionally understanding when it come to things audio — the HE2001 Show was much more pleasant and very easily negotiable then. But from what a number of friends told me, not everybody who wanted to be there, was there.

#### The Show Proper

*Biggest disappointment: The HP System.* In a way it's their own fault. If you're going to promise something, you better deliver. The promise — "HP's best effort system." The idea

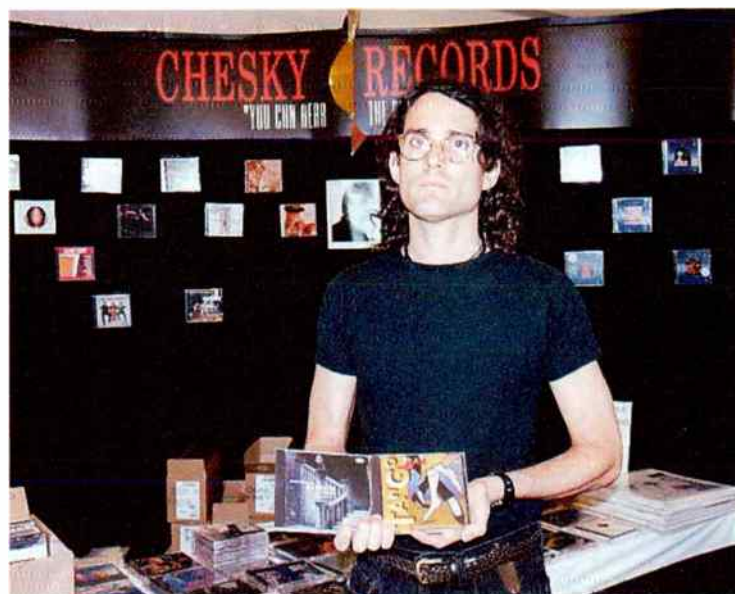


**Chad Cassim of Acoustic Sounds with Jimmie Lee Robinson, a guitarist on the label.**

was that the general public could get to hear for themselves the same system that HP has assembled as its ultimate at this time. It had Clearaudio's Master Reference turntable with the Master TQ-I arm and Insider Reference Wood moving-coil cartridge, Conrad-Johnson ART 2 preamp, Edge NL12 power amps for the woofers, VTL MB-750 power amps, Wisdom Adrenaline M-75 speakers, Nordost interconnects and speaker wire, with Burmester 969 and 970 SRC digital playback equipment, all listing out at some thing like \$236,000.

And you know what? It sounded OK, but very ordinary, no exceptional dynamics, very little low fre-

**David Chesky shows off some art from some new releases.**





**Lee Adams of Niro with one of the firm's very striking amp designs.**

quency presence, only superficial transparency, sub-par air and expansiveness, and a general lack of involvement in the music regardless of what was played in the carefully controlled presentation. The worst part is that I was not alone who had these negative thoughts — I heard a goodly number of other people expressing very similar disappointment about this system. And because of the prominent posture that the HP system had assumed at the show, it was a subject that would come up very frequently. [Editor's Note: I thought this system was enormously handicapped by room shape and the sheer number of listeners. It could not have been voiced with more than a handful, but when I tried it out, there appeared to be some 40 to 50 people inside the wider-than-long room. Not a fortunate or fortuitous circumstance. — E.P.]

By stark contrast, right next door, a walk into the *Talon* suite would immediately reaffirm for me that it is possible to achieve absolutely marvelous sound under the existing show condition. Here Michael Farnsworth, President, was introducing the new X versions of their Peregrine (\$11,500) and Khorus

(\$16,000) loudspeakers. Because these new *Talons* now have an even more unrestricted dynamic headroom than before, and also have been liberated of a significant amount of cabinet resonance, the music assumed a very natural incisiveness and neutrality. This speaker also presented a soundstage that was simply exceptional. Here I found myself drawn into the music, my foot was tapping, and I was gliding on the wings of the performance.

*Most Complete Company: Linn.* Who else does serious analog, serious digital, all their own electronics, and all their own transducers? Oh, I almost forgot — they also do their own recordings. Yes, analog and digital. So it was not a surprise to see them display home theater setups in addition to a very involved multi-amped loudspeaker setup driven by their remarkable CD12 player. I went away impressed by the sheer abundance of exceptional execution right across the board.

*Most Unforgettable New Product: Niro.* Consisting of a pre-amp and several power amp versions, these new electronics by Niro Nakamichi were absolute aesthetic knockouts. By the way, Niro is from the very same Nakamichi family who made cassette tape decks famous some time ago.

While the stunning appearance of these products was what really got me into the room initially, it was really gratifying to find out that the spectacular form actually had a function. Nakamichi-san has designed his products paying special attention to not only all of the electrical parameters, but also to the many mechanical concerns that he finds important as a mechanical engineer. Therefore, this is a two-pronged approach, where mechanical issues receive as much attention as circuitry concerns.

The Niro line consists of four products: A preamp, the Control Engine (\$20,000); an 80-wpc integrated amp, the Integrated Engine (\$9,850); a 150-wpc stereo power amp, the Power Engine ST (\$23,000), and a 150-watt monoblock power amp, the Power

Engine (\$22,000 ea).

*The Most Complete Music System: Red Rose Music.* I'll tell you, that Mark Levinson is really something. Here \$14,000 will get you every tweak, every cable, every stand, and all equipment including a Sony SACD player, an integrated amp, and a pair of speakers with ribbon tweeters. Take it all home, assemble it, and you are likely to enjoy music like you seldom have. I was impressed to no end when I finally got to hear the Red Rose Demonstration at the show. This was music personified. I can well understand the many positive accolades that have been coming Mark's way of late. While \$14,000 is not exactly chump change, remember that what Red Rose Music gives you is an absolutely full-fledged system for that money.

*The Most Welcome Product Reintroduction: Gryphon.* This true-blue member of the high-end community literally disappeared some years ago from everybody's radar screen after one reviewer in a major publication expressed some unfavorable opinions about one of Gryphon's power amplifiers. Now, the speaker manufacturer Dynaudio, a Danish company just like Gryphon, is going to use their well-established distribution network to put Gryphon back on the map. This company makes a full line of electronics including processors, preamps, and power amps. Their build quality apparently will continue to be at the same exceptional-to-die-for level as before, with some obvious updates to meet current needs of the customers. Good to have Gryphon back.

*The Best Home Theater Presentation: Krell.* Now that Dan D'Agostino has come out with the Linear Acoustic Transducer (LAT) loudspeaker line in addition to Krell's own DVD player using some of Faroudja's technology, there's no stopping him in the home theater arena. It is commonly known he has the finesse down pat when it comes to amplifiers, so having rounded out the lines to complete everything the results at the show were spectacular. Since everything starts with the source, Krell demonstrated that they were ready for all comers with their DVD player. The picture from a

Sony projector was simply stunning in its vivid resolution of details and faithful colors. Add to that, sound which offered no hint of distortion, which responded to every demand of the soundtrack, which seemed exceptionally extended in response at both ends, ... I came away overwhelmed. As good as the other displays were, Krell topped them all.

*Most Effective Cable Difference Demo: Nordost.* I just wish that more people could hear this demo, regardless if you are already convinced or still skeptical about the audibility of different interconnects. It was Lars Kristensen, Nordost's International Sales Trainer, who started by playing some music on a very modest system and then proceed to substitute one-meter interconnects going from a CD player to an integrated amp. This substitution was made three times, as he changed from their SPM to Quattrofil to Valhalla. What was remarkable during this demonstration was a degree of improvement that was clearly discernible with each substitution. There was no

magic, no smoke, no mirrors. No, it was not a double-blind test, nor even a single blind, but for me (and a number of others who went into the room later at my urging), it had

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**In the Talon suite, the new Peregrine and Khorus speakers sounded absolutely marvelous.**

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been a very worthwhile and educational way to spend the time. I liked the fact that Nordost only compared their own brands. By choosing *not* to involve other manufacturer's products, they avoided snide remarks about industry politics and God knows what else.

*Most Disappointing Press Conference: DVD-Audio.* When I saw the announcement of the DVD-Audio Press Conference, I confess I was excited. I thought, finally they are going to get off the mark and really get going. Not to be. The first bummer for me was that it was not

in their immediate plans to record new material using this new format. Instead, they are going to remix old material, that is tracks from such as Steely Dan, Blue Man Group, Van Morrison, Fleetwood Mac, etc., et al., into the 5.1 format, and let it fly. I think the balloon was completely punctured when one of the producers said: "... and I put the drums over here." And pointed to a rear channel. That was very annoying, especially at the time of the press conference.

Upon reflection, I realize what my problem is — it's, "I want it now!"

Not only that, "I want it ALL right now!"

Obviously, it has never happened that way, and it never will. What is important that all three of the producers who were at the press conference were excited about this new medium. It seemed that this was their new toy. Once the excitement dies down and some of the real possibilities are discovered by these creative people, we should be listening to some pretty exciting presentations.

But not right now. (Damn.)

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Volume 7, Issue 4

World Radio History

23



## Blues

Janis Joplin *Love, Janis*  
Columbia Legacy CK 85730

**L**OVE, JANIS was first a fine biography of Janis Joplin by her younger sister, Laura. It morphed, under Laura's encouragement, into a musical play written by Tony-nominee Randal Myler (author of *Lost Highway: The Music and Legend of Hank Williams* and *Ain't Nothin' But the Blues*). Built around actual letters from Janis to her family back in Texas, the play toured Denver, Cleveland and Chicago, and has been running off-Broadway in New York since April. Sam Andrew, original guitarist for Big Brother and the Holding Company, is the musical director, giving the play authenticity and credence (not the Clearwater Revival kind). The musical notably features, on alternating nights, two different singers performing Janis'

songs; imitating Janis night after night is a sure way to shred one's vocal chords. An actress, Catherine Curtin, plays the off-stage Janis — the human Janis as opposed to the Blues-Mama Janis. The album reviewed here is an outgrowth of the play, but is *not* a cast album. To be perfectly honest, I'm not really sure what it is, or why.

In part, it's a normal "greatest hits" package; there have been several released by Columbia/Sony Legacy. As a "greatest hits" package, it's a nice one, though short — only about 46 minutes of music. How do the producers fill out the rest of this 65-minute CD? With excerpts from Janis' letters read — no, *performed* is more like it — by Catherine Curtin. The mixing of

Janis' letters with her music might work in an off-Broadway setting, where stage presence, lighting and costumes can create a dramatic, audience-grabbing atmosphere, but what about on CD? Back to that in a minute. First, let's talk about Janis's music.

Has any singer ever conveyed more pain in one song than Janis Joplin did on "Ball and Chain?" Even Billie Holiday never plumbed these depths. The song uses a prisoner metaphor for love, but Joplin's emotions communicate not so much a jail as a mental ward. Dark, brooding psychedelic solos from Big Brother guitarists Gurley and Andrew create an atmosphere of Bedlam for bad acid trips, with Janis playing the role of a tormented but

lucid inmate locked in padded cell and straightjacket. I've played this album many times — at home, at work, on my MP3 player in between — and "Ball and Chain" never fails to make my skin crawl and spine tingle.

Janis always gave to a song more than she took, even with transcendent classics like "Summertime." A psychedelic blues-rock band doing a Gershwin pearl is a bad idea, but the arrangement by Sam Andrew and the vocal by Janis hold up amazingly well, even while the drug induced experiments of other San Francisco bands have come to sound "of a certain time and place," if not silly. In fact, the Big Brother sound of *Cheap Thrills* has stood the test of time better than Janis' later work, as good as that was. Ironically, by the time *Cheap Thrills* was released to huge commercial (gold in three days) and critical success, Janis was fed up with the band. The press tended to pick on the band's shortcomings while praising Janis as a blues goddess, and Janis was as much a junkie for press clippings as for heroin. Convinced that her talent had outgrown the limits of Big Brother (and maybe it had), Janis got out.

She managed two more great albums before succumbing to a dose of pure heroin, but listening to this 12 song package makes me realize that *Cheap Thrills* had a brilliance that went beyond even Janis' remarkable talents. The engineering of *Cheap Thrills* was a reaction by the band to its disastrous first effort, *Big Brother and the Holding Company*, released in 1967. Janis had pushed the band into signing a deal with funky little label, Mainstream; the recordings that resulted sadly destroyed the huge, feedback-charged sound of Big Brother live. The distortion-averse mixing engineer maintained that electric guitars sound better when plugged directly into the mixing board! The two cuts from that album included in this package, "Down on Me" and "Women Is Losers," are comically weak in spite of Janis giving her all.

Columbia Records coughed up big bucks to get Big Brother out of their contract, then assigned production duties for a new album to John Simon. Sam Andrew, Janis and Simon apparently butted heads over the band's sound and work routine.



For Big Brother, there was a fine line between magic and mediocrity; the magic happened in concert, so they wanted to record everyone playing together, live in the studio. For Simon, a talented musician but also a perfectionist, Big Brother was a producer's worst nightmare. Andrew thought Columbia "couldn't have found someone more unsympathetic to what we were trying to do." Janis, meanwhile, grew tired of trashing her voice take after take while the band experimented.

The band, to their credit, refused to knuckle under this time. Simon may not have understood them, but, to his credit, he produced the sound they were looking for. And what a sound! The album seems to be simply a live concert recording, but it was actually a carefully edited blend of mostly studio tracks. Live tracks from gigs in Detroit and San Francisco were used primarily as guides. Audience chatter was added. Bill Graham's famous intro, "Four gentlemen and one great, great broad," was post dubbed. The live sound of *Cheap Thrills* is a

forgery, but a totally seamless one, even more remarkable today than 30 years ago.

*Love, Janis* features three cuts from *Cheap Thrills*, two from *Kozmic Blues*, and four from *Pearl*. The songs are well chosen, but there is just not enough of the real Janis here. What we get instead is a dramatic reading of Janis' letters, mixed against a low-level bed of instrumental accompaniment. The "Janis" of Catherine Curtin starts out sounding stoned and childish, then ends up sounding weepy, drunk, stoned and childish. Such is the emotional arc of this performance. Never does she sound like someone you'd want to be in the same room with.

The real Janis of the letters is intelligent, perceptive, witty and a little cunning. She's not above shading the truth — or hiding the truth if it suits her. When she tells her parents that she's been laid up sick in bed for a week and a half, she had actually endured the complications of a difficult abortion. Curtin presents Janis as a wide-eyed innocent,

Photo: Herb Greene

which seems off-kilter right from the start. *Love, Janis* begins with an unnecessary intro from Curtin, who sounds like an announcer from a Pampers commercial: "Austin, Texas, 1965." Then we hear the first musical track, an amateur recording of a young Janis singing in an old-timey, Bessie Smith style. The producers have left in the real voice of Janis setting up the song: "Uh, this is a song called 'What Good Can Drinkin' Do?' that I wrote one night

after drinking myself into a stupor." The real Janis was many things, but a clueless innocent she was not.

Curtin's egregiously wrong-headed interpretation is demonstrated clearly when she reads this letter of December, 1966: "Dear Mother . . . Just a note to keep you informed. Played a "happening" at Stanford this weekend. It was held in the Wilbur Hall, & called — A Happening in the Wilburness. Cute." Curtin drops the word *cute*,

and reads the letter in a cloying tone of awe and amazement. We can take that word *cute* at face value or we can read into it a sardonic sense of humor. But however we read it, it negates Curtin's interpretation, so she skips over it. When you have to edit the actual letters to allow an actress's performance to make sense, something is very wrong.

Curtin adds a lot of useless stuttering to her readings — "um," "er," "well," etc. — trying to turn the letters into realistic dialog. It doesn't work. Letters are letters, and it's unfair to Janis' words to try to turn these well-written thoughts into stream-of-consciousness dramatic monologues. The bio, with more complete versions of the letters, is available on tape narrated by Debra Winger. Winger, a three-time Oscar nominee, plays it straight, reading the letters the way a normal person would read a letter out loud. She leaves the interpreting up to the listener, which is how it should be. It's infinitely more effective than the amateurish mauling delivered by Curtin.

Now that I've given Curtin a critical mauling, is there *any* way I can recommend this CD? This is an audiophile magazine, so how's the sound quality? To put it to the test, I compared "Get It While You Can" from three different releases: *Love, Janis*, the Super-Bit-Mapped gold CD of *Pearl*, and the three-CD box set *Janis*. The latter two sounded essentially identical, but the *Love, Janis CD* actually had slightly better sound: An irritating left channel hiss that could be heard through the piano intro was somehow tamed substantially without affecting the piano's timbre in the least, and overall the sound was more dynamic. Hats off to the *Love, Janis* remix engineers.

So yes I can, finally, recommend this new album, but only if you have a good CD burner. After listening once to the whole album, including the letters, to verify that you would never want to hear Curtin read the letters again, rip the 46 minutes worth of songs and file *Love, Janis* away for archival purposes. Then, if you really love Janis, do yourself a favor and buy *Cheap Thrills*; you'll have more than enough room on a 650 MB CD-R to include all its tracks on your new and improved CD.

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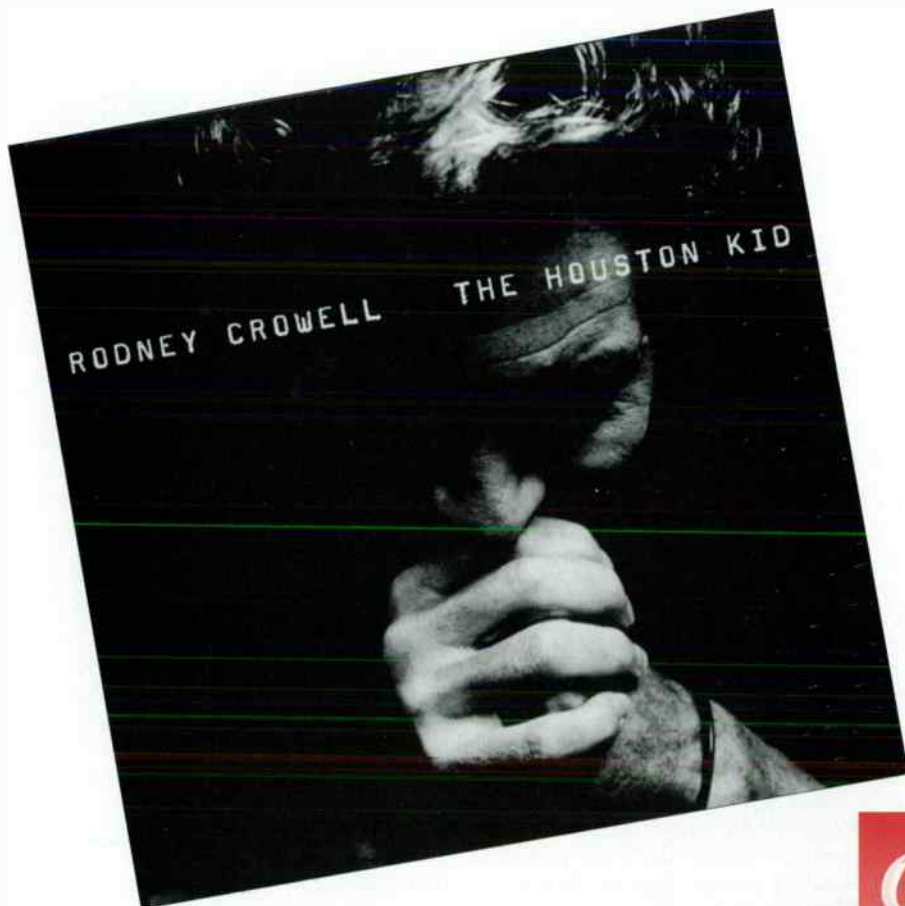
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## Country

Rodney Crowell *The Houston Kid*  
Sugar Hill SUG-CD-1065

**F**OR OVER 25 YEARS Rodney Crowell has graced us with a huge slate of brilliant songs. Scratching the surface a few are "Til I Gain Control Again," "Ashes By Now," "Shame on the Moon," "Victim or a Fool," "Ain't Living Long Like This," "Stars on the Water," "She's Crazy for Leaving" and "After All This Time." He's always had a knack for vivid imagery and lyrics both beautifully poetic yet conversational.

That said, his new album *The Houston Kid* is Rodney's finest, most-fearless work in a lifetime of great work. It is an album a major label would have tried to talk him out of doing. Since he was not tied to any label, he decided to record the album his heart longed to do: A song cycle about growing up in Houston with some songs autobiographical and some about people he knew about from way back when. Then he shopped the completed album landing it on Sugar

Hill, the same label that got Dolly Parton to do the bluegrass albums she always wanted to do but had never gotten around to.

Crowell wrote these 11 songs over a 25-year period.

"Banks of the Old Bandera," which Rodney calls "a simple study of the Texas hill country landscape and innocence lost," came first way back in 1976. In short order, he wrote "Telephone Road" describing life growing up on a major Houston thoroughfare that also housed a big chunk of the town's honky tonks and "I Walk the Line (Revisited)." "Line" describes in vivid detail the moment back in '56 when he first heard that Johnny Cash classic and how it transformed his life. He says he remembers nothing of the next six weeks, but he remembers everything about that moment.

"Line" provoked some spirited discussion between TAV editor Gene Pitts and me when we first

discussed doing this review. Gene doesn't really care for the song while I find it irresistible in both melody and lyric. The more I listen the clearer I see that big ol' Texas sky and country where it took place. Maybe Gene didn't approve how Rodney altered the original "I Walk the Line" melody for the new song's refrain. I suspect Gene thought that too much of a gimmick, but it kills me. Crowell got Johnny Cash to come in and sing his words for this flashback song. Cash reportedly bristled at the melody alterations, but he relented and did a bang-up job. [Editor's Note: Yeah, Michael, it seems to me to be a gimmick, which would be okay with me if Crowell had as much stature as Cash, but as it is, for me and I stipulate not for Michael, it takes an icon off the wall. -E.P.]

By the way, try to catch the video of "Line" on CMT or VH1 Country. It is a hoot using vintage

footage of the young Cash doing the song.

"I Wish It Would Rain" and "Wandering Boy" are tales of identical twin brothers who went separate ways. One went to California and became a male prostitute and junkie. After developing AIDS, he returned to his brother who took care of the stricken man. The brother in the meantime hated his wayward brother's lifestyle and had become somewhat homophobic. Love redeemed him so he could provide care when it was needed. The songs are placed consecutively for maximum contrast and impact. [Editor's Other Note: These two are my co-highlights of the album, by far the most affecting, so much so that long-time friend Michael had to remind me that there were other AIDS songs. Well, earlier maybe, but not better — at least not to my song sense. —E.P.] FYI, Rodney allows he heard the brothers' stories second-hand, and they might be apocryphal.

"Highway 17" is the tale of a family down the road whose father spent six years in prison for armed robbery. Rodney made up the piece's story of how he buried a huge stash of cash from his rob-

beries and how when he finally was sprung and went to retrieve it, Highway 17 had become a big divided road while he was gone, and the money lost beneath the road forever. He speaks this one, rather than singing it, to chilling effect.

"Why Don't We Talk About It" and "U Don't Know How Much I Hate U" both reflect Rodney's life now. He admits that about the former but says the latter describes a crazy, drunken uncle. I hear it and picture Rodney gazing at the home of his ex-wife Rosanne Cash. Either way it is light hearted and humorous., not at all truly menacing.

The finale "Love Is All I Need," says Crowell, came to him following a dream in which his late parents showed him around their new house and told him how happy they were. He wrote it in the morning, and it is the perfect coda to this often-harrowing cycle.

But what an exciting album! Recorded all around Nashville with trusted friends, like multi-guitarist Steuart Smith, bassist Michael Rhodes, keyboardist John Hobbs and a bunch more, the playing is sure and confident, with a bright aura of exuberance.

The songs come in a broad variety of styles. "Highway 17" is downbeat narrative while "I Walk the Line (Revisited)" is modern-day rockabilly. "U Don't Know How Much I Hate U" and "Why Don't We Talk About It Now" are driven by a psychedelic bouzouki to a full-speed-ahead pop sound 180 degrees from the gentle "Banks of the Old Bandera" and "Love Is All I Need." The album keeps changing sounds all the time keeping the listener perked and off balance. Excellent sound clarity and strong mix, too.

*The Houston Kid* is one for the ages, an album where everything came together perfectly allowing the artist to create a master work from events that happened over a lifetime. He did it on his own without record company types looking over his shoulder and second guessing every step of the way.

It is a perfect example of what I call "Purity of Essence," work done by an artist with no concern for commercial value or financial return. It's work he did because, as an artist, he needed to do it. At year's end expect to see Crowell's *The Houston Kid* on a lot of Best of 2001 lists — including mine.

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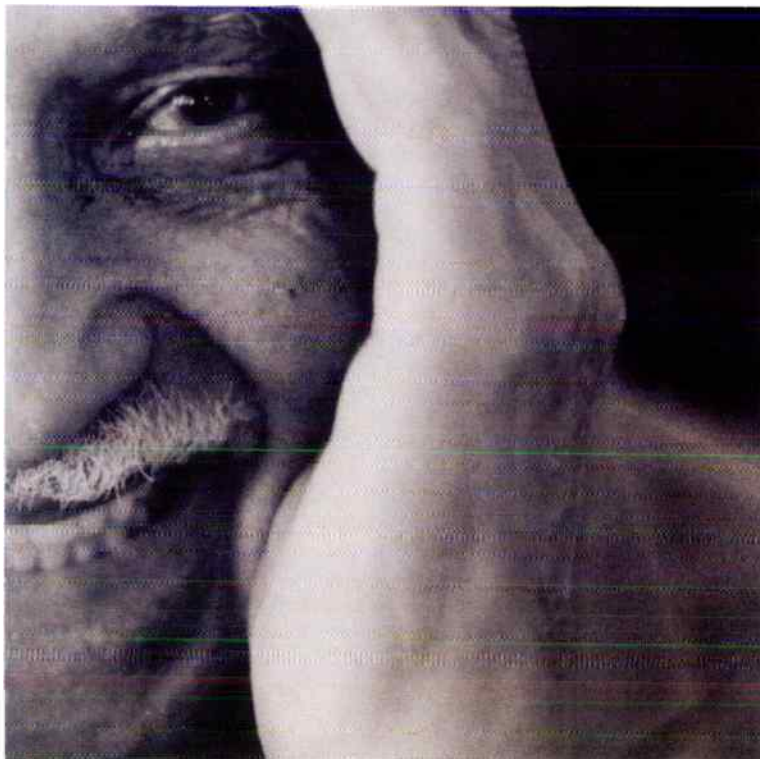
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## Latin/Cuban

Rubén González Chanchullo  
WEA/Atlantic/Nonesuch B00004X158

**I** SUPPOSE I WAS one of the first to own the “new classic,” *Buena Vista Social Club*. I’ve long been a fan of various Latin and African forms – and Afro-Cuban certainly fits into that broad scheme of things. Still, it was not just the promise of more Afro-Cuban music that compelled me to purchase *Buena Vista*. I was also interested in the fact that Ry Cooder had produced it. He’s always been swell at such exploratory kinds of work.

Well, needless to say, *Buena Vista* has been a smash hit; and as musically magnificent as it is, the album has also served the simple but important role of introducing many talented Cuban artists to contemporary American music lovers. Pianist Rubén González is one of them, and his new release, *Chanchullo*, is about as good as it gets.

First, a quick bit of history: Just prior to Fidel Castro’s regime in Cuba, the island country was under the rule of Fulgencio Batista, a selfish devil who had his enemies eliminated and picked his friends based on their financial contributions to his personal well being. While Batista lived in grandeur, he treated the Cuban people as something less than second-class citizens. Cuba increasingly became a tourist Mecca for the American gangster and gambling types during this era — 1933 through 1959 — and Batista, recognizing the racism of those tourists, ruled that only whites could patronize the country’s better clubs and hotels. The blacks, ironically the creators of the music the whites so adored, opened their own (less opulent) clubs. The Buena Vista Social Club was one of them.

It was there that González along with other artists on the *Buena Vista* CD often performed.

Well, the beginning of Castro’s regime was the beginning of the end for those clubs as Castro may be many things, but he’s not a racist. When he seized power, the special need for the Buena Vista Social Club, and others like it, ceased to exist.

González is an octogenarian. It’s hard to imagine anyone his age (and with arthritis, I understand) playing so deftly. I don’t want to dwell on his age, because that’s hardly my attraction to his music. But his playing often boils over with nostalgic themes that put you in a different time, and even a different place. (At under \$20, this CD is a fabulously cheap travel ticket.) The worst thing I can say about his age is that I am

saddened I discovered him past his prime.

Or did I?

*Chanchullo* is my second González CD and his most recent. I also have the inappropriately titled *Introducing Rubén González* that was released in 1997, just after the 1997 *Buena Vista* release. I say it's "inappropriately titled" because González, even though his exposure in the U.S. has been almost *nada*, has been playing and recording since the early 1940s. The liner notes attempt to justify the title by describing the release as González first "solo" album. Well, González isn't solo on the album. Let's just say that it's the first album to feature him and only him on the cover.

*Chanchullo* loosely translates to mean "fiddle" as in "fiddle around" or "fool around." I purchased the album, coincidentally, while doing just that. I was on a holiday in Zihuatanejo, Mexico. The problem is that the liner notes for this particular CD are, thus, in Spanish, a language at which I am embarrassingly unskilled.

Based on my exposure to González — meaning the aforementioned CDs plus the 1997 release of the Afro-Cuban All Stars

— *Chanchullo* is arguably his best work. Many consider the *Introducing* CD to be a masterpiece, and I won't take issue with them. Still, I think *Chanchullo* is in some ways better.

His fingers fly and float over the keys like an acrobatic bird — most notably on the pieces played in the traditional *son* and the elegant *danzón* styles. Okay, that's what you expect from this artist. I'll give you that. My argument is that *Chanchullo* is better in the respect that it does a better job of presenting González in a playful and artful spirit with other musicians. The *Introducing* CD is more sharply focused on the piano. It isn't fair to say this, but it's an analogy that makes my point: *Introducing* is a bit more like cocktail music, and *Chanchullo* is something you might reserve until after dinner. The recording quality of *Chanchullo* is a bit better as well. The two CDs share a number of musicians — Orlando "Cachaito" López on bass, Manuel "Guajiro" Mirabal on trumpet, Amadito Valdéz on timbales, Roberto García on congos and percussion, and Richard Egües on flute. On *Chanchullo*, Ry Cooder and his son, Joachim, are there for one cut.

In 1998, and unbeknownst to me until I started writing this review, González released a CD entitled *Indestructible*. I've not heard it and I don't personally know anyone who has.

But at the sites of the big cyber CD stores, the customer reviews are less than ecstatic. González has a lot of "import" recordings floating around out there too. If I bump into one of these recordings, I'll probably pick it up depending on the weight of my wallet that day. After all, I can't imagine González doing anything bad.

When Cooder brought the *Buena Vista Social Club* into being, it's like he put together two rabbits that were ready to mate. The result has been prolific. *Buena Vista* contributors Ibrahim Ferrer, Eliades Ochoa, Omara Portuondo, Compay Segundo, Barbarrito Torres and, of course, Rubén González have made albums of their own. They've reached artistic fame — and justifiably so. More than that, they've collectively gelled the awareness of their wonderful musical genre, a genre that at one time was in danger of being forgotten.

You'll thank Rubén for reminding you.

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## Michael Tearson



## Blues

Blind Boys of Alabama *Spirit of the Century*  
Real World 72438-50918-2-7

**T**HE BLIND BOYS OF ALABAMA are a certified Gospel legend, with a history stretching back over 60 years. They can still sing up a storm. *Spirit of the Century* is as much a smoking blues album as a sensational gospel program.

The lean, tough band places the music right in the blues. John Hammond on dobro and electric guitar and multi-guitarist David Lindley sizzle and sting. Chicago harmonica all-timer Charlie Musselwhite smolders. The rhythm section of drummer Michael Jerome and Pentangle alumnus British double bassist Danny Thompson provide the mighty anchor. Suffice to say the band is outstanding.

Eight gospel standards plus four recent originals from surprising sources make up the album. The standards offer some startling twists in the arrangements. Some are

sparse as can be: "Nobody's Fault But Mine" with Hammond's dobro and Musselwhite the only support and "Good Religion" with only the dobro. The finale "The Last Time," a hymn Mick Jagger and Keith Richards rewrote into a Rolling Stones smash in '65, is an a cappella showstopper.

But the most startling revelation is that beloved old war-horse "Amazing Grace." This one is completely transformed by moving from major to minor key. The familiar melody has been scuttled in favor of singing the lyrics over the melody of "House of the Rising Sun." The nifty ploy succeeds beyond any possible expectation.

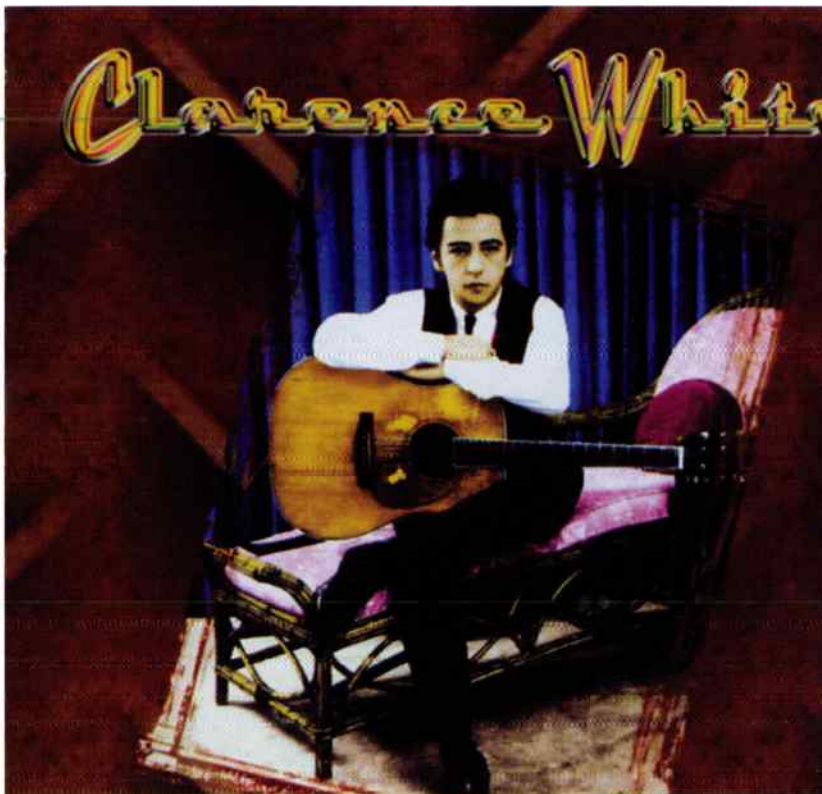
The originals are all recent: Ben Harper's moving "Give A Man A Home," Jagger/Richards' "Just Wanna See His Face" plus "Way Down In The Hole," and the very

traditional sounding "Jesus Gonna Be Here," both of which are by Tom Waits.

The sound crackles with excitement as the voices rumble and soar, while the instruments have excellent presence. Producer John Chelew has designed the album so there is no clutter or confusion to interfere with what are purely gut wrenching performances.

That the album is on Peter Gabriel's Real World label, normally a refuge of exotic, intense artists from cultures all over the globe, is quite telling. The label has never released anything remotely like the Blind Boys of Alabama. But that very fact recontextualizes them as the world class artists they clearly are.

*Spirit Of The Century?* It should have been *Spirit Of The Ages*. Brilliant album!



## Country

Clarence White *33 Acoustic Guitar Instrumentals*  
Sierra Records SZCD 26032-2  
P.O. Box 5853, Pasadena, CA 91117

**O**N MORE THAN ONE occasion I have made reference to the man I consider to be perhaps the most influential and innovative guitar player of all time. When reviewing other guitarists, especially within the bluegrass genre, it seems inevitable that Clarence White's name is mentioned as he played a critical role in influencing those who have become the current icons of new acoustic and bluegrass music. White is widely considered by many guitarists to be one of the most creative and technically proficient guitarists in bluegrass.

Clarence White was born in 1944 into a family of bluegrass musicians. The family band, the Country Boys, included Clarence, his father, uncle, and two brothers played throughout California at barn dances and other local engagements. During the mid-1950s, the ensemble began playing the coffee-house circuit. At the age of 10 Clarence was performing professionally. By 1963, the band had

changed its name to the Kentucky Colonels, and over the next few years the band recorded several albums featuring Clarence on guitar. Since most of the songs were instrumental, Clarence was able to sharpen his guitar skills and began the movement to escape the guitar's historical "rhythm pigeonhole" into more inventive use. The Kentucky Colonels were soon considered one of the West Coast's most important and influential bands.

After the Kentucky Colonels broke up in 1965 White began to concentrate on the electric guitar. He soon became one of the most popular session musicians in Los Angeles. Most importantly, Clarence would become one of the driving forces and major musical influences of the Byrds. With the exception of Roger McGuinn, White served longer with the Byrds than any other member. Sadly, White died tragically at an early age when hit by a car driven by a drunken fan in a parking lot after a show in Palmdale,

California on October 31, 1965 at the Azusa Bowling Alley.

There is a very sparse selection of White recordings available, especially for those following the bluegrass vein. This sad fact has prompted many enthusiasts to agonize while waiting not so patiently for any new release that comes along. Here is a long-awaited and very welcome issue for the many fans of Clarence White. This new compact disc release (taken from White's own personal tape library) features his lead flatpick guitar from start to finish on this all instrumental album. A bonus track of Clarence playing lead mandolin is also included! He made these recordings himself with rhythm guitarist Roger Bush in the early 1960s. The songs are short (mostly in the minute to minute and a half range) but each gives the listener everything he needs to know about the tune and White's interpretation. The material is all classic bluegrass and old-time traditional fiddle tunes that White

# Wish List

played so well including interesting versions of songs like "Footprints in the Snow", "I'm So Happy", and the superb treatment of "In the Pines".

The song titles are as follows: "Wildwood Flower," "Masters Bouquet," "Bury Me Beneath The Willow," "Black Mountain Rag," "Billy In The Low Ground," "I m So Happy," "He Will Set Your Fields On Fire," "Sugarfoot Rag," "Nine Pound Hammer," "Cripple Creek," "Under The Double Eagle," "Farewell Blues," "I Am Pilgrim," "Country Boy Rock & Roll," "Forsaken Love," "Falsehearted Lover," "Black Jack Davy," "Banks of the Ohio," "Jimmy Brown The Newsboy," "Sally Goodin," "Buckin' Mule," "Shady Grove," "Pike County Breakdown," "Old Joe Clark," "Arkansas Traveler," "Footprints in the Snow," "In the Pines," "Journey's End," "Pretty Polly," "Cotton Eyed Joe," "Clinch Mountain Backstep," "Randy Lynn Rag," and "Mandolin Medley."

A note to the guitar enthusiast, White uses his 1950's Martin D-18 on this recording, not the famous 1935 Martin D-28 Herringbone shown on the cover of the CD. This same guitar is now owned and played by Tony Rice.

The sound quality is good and rich for home recordings of that time. The CD also includes never before seen rare photos of Clarence, a statement of authenticity from the Estate of Clarence White and comments by Jerry Garcia, David Lindley, Albert Lee, Doc Watson, Tony Rice, Roger McGuinn and others. John Delgatto of Sierra Records is to be commended for this remarkable and significant album. A portion of the proceeds from the sale of this CD will be donated toward the purchase and installation of a permanent memorial marker near the site of White's untimely death. The location, in Palmdale, California, has now been transformed in a beautiful, peaceful roadside park.

White is considered by almost everyone to be one of the most innovative, creative and technically proficient flatpick guitarists in Bluegrass music. His influence in this genre has been profound, and his cross picking and sense of phrasing and syncopation are cited repeatedly by guitarists everywhere. This is certainly a "must-have" release for fans of the guitar and this great guitarist. (HCC)

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# Tango

Será Una Noche  
ma recordings M052A

**m**A RECORDINGS, like Waterlily Acoustics, has established itself as a small but solid audiophile specialty label. It proudly defies convention to practice minimalist techniques rather than multi-tracked close miking. Custom-built recording hardware is set up in ambience-rich venues to capture the spacious sonics exactly as nature intended. These venues, churches and monasteries, are chosen and matched to particular ensembles with the care of a location scout working for a major motion picture firm. Great pains are then taken to afford the musicians the broadest of creative contexts. This translates into highly unconventional and surprising musical explorations. They become the very lifeblood and propulsive motivation of their labels' missions. In fact, it is this very otherness of content (a combination of always-impeccable musicianship and a strong experimental factor that elicits various degrees of cohesive musical success depending on the occasion) that has become synonymous with what to expect from these folks. In Waterlily's case, the core flavor of the aural travails is one of East-Indian sensibilities. ma recordings has concentrated on Mediterranean and Balkan ventures but not exclusively so; this recording explores the Argentinean tango idiom in a nouveau context.

To describe the peculiar aroma of *Será Una Noche*, it helps to momentarily meditate on its cover art. The album depicts a spacious but faded hall sans the obvious reminders of previous dance galas, except perhaps for the old-fashioned but somehow classy ceramic chandeliers hanging from the ceiling. This palpable absence of any living thing — flowers, plants, a view onto a bustling landscape, people, anything — could suggest different stories. After listening, you'll likely look again and won't help but perceive the ghosts of various tango partners as they weightlessly float above the grounds of this hall. You'll watch them eternally engaged in their fluid yet angular motions, faces set expressionless save for a very focused intensity that breaks through the steady gazes like a smoldering fire. Such a private vision would be acutely fitting.

You see, the music on *Será Una Noche* is an attempt to deconstruct the tango idiom as epitomized by Astor Piazzolla. According to the liner notes, present-day tango in Argentina is in a state of decline. The major record labels avoid it, as do, consequently, the great masses of listeners. This current status of tango's desertification caused percussionist Santiago Vasquez to collaborate with ma recording's proprietor Todd Garfinkle. Both men

hoped to build an ensemble of musicians who might reinvent the genre by looking forward into the future. Quite a challenge.

What struck me as a result of this intention isn't so much a fully realized form of tango nouveau but rather a meditation on its many possibilities. Al DiMeola's tribute album to his friend Piazzolla, *The Grande Passion*, literally explodes with life, vitality and invention. On *Será Una Noche*, you'll encounter ghosts instead, whether of the dead or the not-yet-born is unclear. You'll barely catch hold of short saucy fragments of melodies as they're juxtaposed against the barest of rhythmic outlines. Sparse and minimalist motifs just suggest the mere spirit of the thing. You'll never encounter its red-blooded, fire-breathing incarnation because this spirit is never allowed to fully take physical form. It never assumes a body. It doesn't descend into all the passionate and mortal excesses of this most vibrant music of the Argentine *bordellos*. Instead, one feels teased along an endless mental *coitus interruptus* that occurs in the limbo of other-worldliness, neither quite here nor quite there.

In the opening "Malena" movement, for example, the atmosphere is set with flamenco-like *palmas*, jagged cello accents and the rhythmic underpinnings of guitar and

bandoneon. Then a recorder of all instruments begins chattering away in a semi-tangoesque tongue, recalling Picasso's monkey, which the master drew in mocking self-reference in his later work. This somewhat caricaturesque element provides an eerie counterpoint for the seriousness of Pedro Aznar's vocals (yes, he of prior Pat Metheny group fame). Instead of morphing into a fully fleshed-out rendition of tango nouveau, it becomes its abstracted echo instead, shifting from dream states into momentary visibility only to recede again into amorphous shapes. The German language has a word that captures this essence precisely — *Entfremdung*. The noun "Fremde" means stranger or alien. In this form, the word then signifies the (often-artful) process of stylistic alienation of a given pattern, not quite what the precise translation of "estrangement" would suggest.

"Soledad" opens with an ominous bass clarinet solo that gains gravitas from the audible space of a large hall. Pedro Aznar intones the melody in slowly evolving bits and pieces while the guitar enters to provide harmonic content and the cello acts as smaller bass à pizzica-

to. What's conveyed is a sense of melancholy flashbacks, as though the singer wandered the desolate halls of his memory palace and shifted from scenery to scenery in a long succession of abrupt visions. "Quedermonos aqui" uses special effects on cello and percussion to suggest the grotesque pandemonium of a Chinese Opera. It's filled with rustling branches and shrieking birds fluttering into the Heavens while the bandoneon conjures up faint echoes of tango dancers engaged in their ritualized eroticism-in-motion.

And so it continues. The entire album is suffused with a pervasive farce-like air of abstraction. It replaces the vibrant intensity of the real tango with a drier, more cerebral meditation upon it. Instead of binding together, it deconstructs into fragments. It then reassembles these fragments into a faint semblance that truly exists nowhere else but the half-live of empty halls. Those are filled with the energetic residue of the life that danced there before. Faint traces are now detectable only by the connoisseurs. The ensemble of Pedro Aznar (voice), Marcelo Moguevsky (clar-

inet and flutes), Gabriel Kirschenbaum (guitar), Gabriel Rivano (bandoneon), Martin Iannaccone (cello) and Santiago Vasquez (percussion and tablas) becomes the spirit catcher. The musicians reach into the ethers with their instrumental butterfly nets to grope for the intangibles. The fluttering specimens they capture soon die, only to be replaced by new ones.

As you would expect, the recording quality is stupendous. So is the playing. It's simply the type of music that requires a very tranquil setting in which to be absorbed. You'll also need a suitably contemplative frame of mind to accompany the musicians in their sketchings and fill in the large blanks they leave with your own imagination. If that sounds like too active a collaboration on your part, stay away. If, on the other hand, you enjoy not having everything spelled out for you, this might be the perfect background.

Daydream then of all the places that the tango, in its nouveau form, may still visit before it once again turns into a new and official art form.



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---*International Record Review*, October 2000

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# Bravo, Berlioz!



Benjamin Ivry



*Les Troyens*, LSO 0010 CD (4 CDs)  
*La Damnation de Faust*, LSO Live LSO 0008  
*Beatrice et Benedict*, LSO Live LSO 0004  
Sir Colin Davis, Conductor

**T**HE FRENCH COMPOSER Hector Berlioz (1803-1869) is one of the arch-romantic musicians of all time. His deeply emotional compositions such as "Symphonie fantastique," "Harold in Italy," " " and "La Damnation de Faust" can seem over the top in terms of scale and hysteria. Scaling the heights of poetic ecstasy one moment, he plunges down to the depths of despair the next. Inspired greatly by Shakespeare and Virgil's Aeneid, Berlioz seemed to even lead his daily life with these literary icons in mind. The love of his life, Harriet Smithson, was a British Shakespearean actress of with a nasty disposition, which did not make the composer's path any easier. Still, he seemed to learn from both triumph and tragedy, from the panache of the famous "Hungarian March" in "La Damnation de Faust" to the yearningly somber tones of his orchestral work "Romeo et Juliette." Berlioz was also a brilliant writer, and in his superb Memoirs he wonders whether music is greater than love, since "music can give an idea of love, but love cannot give an idea of music." Still, he concludes,

they are both "the wings of the soul," and in listening to his best recordings, music lovers are indeed transported aloft in an ecstatic way.

In one of the happiest recording projects in recent memory, the majestic London Symphony Orchestra has begun releasing its own performances, in which the players exceed their own usual superb standards. Three recent labors of love are concert versions, captured in excellent sound, of Berlioz operatic masterworks, "Beatrice et Benedict," "La Damnation de Faust," and "Les Troyens." No one rivals Colin Davis in this repertory — at over 70, he is still as zingy, peppy, and heroic as ever, with an added talent for occasional lyrical lingering. His classic studio recordings of these works, from around thirty years ago, are hereby improved upon both in terms of singing and intensity of performance.

Berlioz' grandiose epic opera about Aeneas and the siege of Troy was for many years considered unperformable. Its mighty musical demands on singers, orchestra, and chorus discouraged generations of

performers until such conducting pioneers as Thomas Beecham and Rafael Kubelik proved that not only was *Les Troyens* performable, but it was an essential component of French culture. Now, finally, we have the ideal *Les Troyens*, the opera recording for any Berlioz fan not just of the year, but most likely of the decade. Colin Davis has been passionately involved with Berlioz's music for a half-century, and has been conducting *Les Troyens* for nearly forty years. His combination of rhythmic zest, dramatic imagination, and the capacity to inspire orchestra and chorus to achieve their best, is truly incomparable. His 1969 studio recording of "Les Troyens" is a classic, although Philips has failed to keep it in print, despite the titanic performance of Canadian tenor Jon Vickers as Aeneas. Now, a whole new generation of singers led by tenor Ben Heppner as Aeneas, mezzo-sopranos Michelle De Young and Petra Lang as Dido and Cassandra, respectively, and in lesser roles, the excellent alto Sara Mingardo, tenor Toby Spence, and bass Alan Ewing make this the finest overall cast of



Les Troyens ever. Not only does this cast sing better, with fewer forced or outlandish musical effects, but they pronounce French better. Heppner is a fiercely concentrated hero, without Vickers' terrifying shouts, but impressive on his own account. A certain excitement or zing is present in every chorus, especially numbers like the Trojan March and Hymn from the First Act. Even a minor item like the Gauntlet Combat - Wrestler's Dance is dispatched with truculent joy. No one else, least of all the always cool and collected Charles Dutoit with inferior singers on a competing version on Decca, can rival this amazing achievement. Conducting this nobly inspiring has rarely been heard since the heyday of Toscanini, and the choral effects, not since the days of Robert Shaw. Knighthood is inadequate as an honor for Davis — the Brit royals should dub him a Lord based on this recording alone. Those worried about investing in four CDs can be consoled by the assurance that they will find no better four CDs of French music this year, or for the foreseeable future. Like Fritz Busch's recordings of Mozart operas from Glyndebourne, also based around live performances, this Troyens will by all evidence go down in history as a landmark in the history of recording.

"La Damnation de Faust" is a sharply intelligent retelling of Goethe's story (as opposed to the spun-sugar of Goethe's 'Faust' or the Italianate version in Boito's "Mefistofele"). The LSO really plays as if their lives depended on every note. In "Damnation," tenor Giuseppe Sabbatini is a robust Faust, while Albanian soprano Enkelejda Shkosa is a strong and convincing Marguerite. As Mephistopheles, bass Michele Pertussi indulges in the kind of ripe theatricality that golden age singers like the Frenchman Pol Plancon made unforgettable. As in any "Damnation," such as the recently published historical broadcast conducted by the matchless Pierre Monteux, a high point is the orchestral excerpt, the "Hungarian March." This thrilling showpiece is conducted with rare finesse and mastery by Davis, unlike the many conductors who just let the musicians play as loudly as possible. The

"Hungarian March" was very important to Berlioz — the story is that he set his "Damnation" in Hungary just to be able to use it, and in his Memoirs, there is a splendid account of the piece's first performance in Hungary, where it caused a mini-riot.

"Beatrice et Benedict" is a more quicksilver affair, with the glinting comic dialogues given an endearing sheen by Berlioz's sensuous melodies.

Shkosa is also a witty Beatrice, saucy without ever sounding shrill. Her Benedict is the suave African-

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### These three truly great performances of Berlioz works by Sir Colin Davis conducting the LSO.

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American tenor Kenneth Tarver, a Detroit native. The rich supporting cast for "Beatrice et Benedict" includes mellifluous Italian mezzo-soprano Sara Mingardo, stellar French baritone Laurent Naouri, and the gifted British bass, David Wilson-Johnson. Both 2-CD sets go to the front of any Berlioz lover's wish list. Even the program notes are superb, written by David Cairns, whose mighty two volume life of Berlioz was recently published by the University of California Press. There is no better way of preparing for Berlioz year in 2003 than getting to know these wonderful performances, along with an unforgettably dramatic and vivid version of the composer's "Symphonie fantastique" in the same LSO series (on LSO 0007). In his "Fantastique," with the "Damnation," Davis is worthy of comparison with the great Monteux, and there can be no higher praise for a Berlioz interpreter. The LSO has set an excellent precedent with these releases, and it is to be hoped that other brilliant but underfunded orchestras, like Britain's Philharmonia, will follow suit, now that major record companies seem unwilling or unable to invest in the future of symphonic playing. With musicians as great as the LSO virtuosos under the baton of Colin Davis, the idea that these not-to-be-missed performances might not have been preserved is almost too painful to contemplate.

Those eager to prep further for Berlioz year might sample such classic items as Davis' earlier recordings of Berlioz Complete Orchestral Works (on Philips - 2PB6 456143), a recently reissued *Symphonie fantastique* in the Philips 50 commemorative series (Philips - 2PM 464692), and an early *L'Enfance du Christ* with a stellar British cast led by tenor Peter Pears (on London/Decca Double Decker - 2LH 443461). Still, these lastingly admirable studio recordings — vivacious as they are — do not have the extra little jolt of energy that live performance brings.

Contrary to some suggestions, Davis is not the ONLY Berlioz conductor, of course. The great Frenchman Pierre Monteux's recently published "Damnation de Faust" (on BBC Legends BBCL 4006) communicates both Goethe's Teutonic pensiveness and Berlioz's gallic vigor, and the London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus follow his lead brilliantly in this 1962 radio broadcast recording in clear and direct sound. The cast includes the luscious-voiced young Régine Crespin as Marguerite, the stellar French baritone Michel Roux as Méphistophélès, and the tenor André Turp, who deals heroically with the demanding title role. Crespin's glamorous approach makes the humble Marguerite sound as if she were swathed in mink, but to carp at such lovely singing would be churlish.

More of Monteux's magnificent way with Berlioz may be heard on Pierre Monteux Conducts Berlioz (Pearl GEMM 9012). Monteux was born in 1875, only six years after Berlioz himself died, and so as a young musician worked with many artists for whom Berlioz was part of living memory. There is nothing like this kind of contact, combined with Monteux's magisterial musicality, to make for vivid and irreplaceable performances. Therefore these early recordings, in good sound considering their age, are immensely revelatory and must-hearing for anyone not put off by older-sounding records. A "Symphonie fantastique" of unmatched poetic verve, a heroic overture to "Les Troyens," and other delights await the listener.

*Vive Monteux and certainly Vive Berlioz.*



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Shostakovich, Sonata for Cello and Piano in D minor, op. 40 (1934)  
Prokofiev, Sonata for Cello and Piano in C Major, op. 119 (1949)

**P**ICTURE YOURSELF as a well-respected classical artist who plays with a major ensemble and is regarded by many as one of the finest cellists in the field. Then, include your spouse, who in her own right is a well-regarded concert pianist. Together you play several concerts around the world to critical acclaim and you decide you want to record.

What do you do? You may attempt to acquire a record contract from one of the major classical labels. What faces you then are

companies which are more concerned with record sales rather than quality performances. The major labels are "downsizing" the number of artists on their rosters, so there is more competition and the result is that the labels are looking for commercially exploitable artists for quasi-classical recordings. For many artists, the production and artistic content are almost wholly governed by the will of the record company, which seeks to groom its major investment to produce a hot seller. Add to this that fact that the record

company generally owns the recording and an artist rarely sees profits from the sale of their record and you have a bleak picture.

This was not the solution for cellist David Finckel and his wife Wu Han, an exciting concert pianist from Taiwan.

This duo embarked on a mission that would allow them to fulfill their own artistic sensibilities as well as production standards by creating their own label, one that's only available through the Internet ([www.artistled.com](http://www.artistled.com)) or at their per-

formances. One might easily think that this personal project on their own label could lead to a product of lesser quality than those produced by the major labels, but that is far from reality, if this release is indicative. With ownership of this mom-and-pop company, the duo gained the freedom to choose repertoire, record at their own pace, and to choose their own production techniques until they acquired the desired performance quality. While it cannot be said their six albums have sold millions of copies, the company is profitable and the artists are happy that they do not have to deal with the big record company machines.


Their current album, *Russian Classics*, features three of the most significant cello sonatas from the Russian repertoire of the 20th Century. For those unfamiliar with this repertoire, the three sonatas offered, while all very different, convey a grand Russian sensibility with the lyric lines and highly emotive passages that feel as though they are conveying a story through music. The liner notes of the album

supplied by British composer and musicologist Gerard McBurney are insightful and informative, presenting a broad mosaic about the true sense of each Russian composer and a descriptive essay on Russian composition style without being verbose.

Having listened to some of their previous recordings, I knew that I was to expect a strong performance from this duo. It is clear that Mr. Finckel and Ms. Wu are spirited and talented musicians, and their attention to detail and artistry is evident throughout the album, most particularly in their interpretation of the Rachmaninoff sonata. Finckel, cellist for the renowned Emerson String Quartet, plays with such sweeping lyricism that I returned over and over to the first movement of the sonata. At times during the second movement, the sense of the urgency inherent in the *Allegro* is equally captivating, as the duo smoothly makes the transfer to other energy levels in the more lyrical sections of the movement, a quality in their playing style that I find quite enjoyable. The sheer space created dur-

ing the *Andante* is wonderful and seems to go on forever, a truly pleasant experience. Throughout the album, Ms. Wu shows fire and fine technique that complement the lyric aesthetic of the cello. This recording is worth the purchase for the Rachmaninoff sonata alone, however the Shostakovich and Prokofiev sonatas are also quite enjoyable.

The recording was made in New York City at the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a landmark building renowned for its superb acoustic nature. There is almost 80 minutes of music on this album; all recorded in 24-bit, 96-kHz digital by Grammy Award nominee engineer Da-Hong Seetoo. The performances are all extremely natural and clean, far better than many other recordings of this nature. As with the other catalog items from Finckel and Wu, this album deserves a strong listen, but before cuing up *Russian Classics*, draw a cup of tea from grandmother's samovar and enjoy your musical voyage to the land of Gorky, the Tsars and the Russian soul.



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*Jazz*

David Matthews & The Manhattan Jazz Orchestra *Bach 2000*  
Milestone MCD-9312-2

**F**IRST OFF, it's David Matthews, not Dave Matthews. David is the jazz arranger-composer, keyboard player, and big-band leader; Dave is the pop musician.

Now that that's settled, David Matthews has this new CD with The Manhattan Jazz Orchestra. It's called *Bach 2000*, and guess whose compositions are given very successful and exciting jazz arrangements? No, not Zez Confrey, but good ol' J.S. Bach.

Matthews puts together slightly unusual instrumental combos in his big band — four trumpets; three trombones; a bass trombone; two French horns; a tuba; alto sax or flute; tenor or soprano sax or flute; a bass clarinet; a string bass, and drums — and no keyboard at all! Definitely unusual, but this CD is a winner. Previous jazz treatments of Bach included the Jacques Loussier trio's series of LPs released between 1964 and 1966, and the Modern Jazz Quartet's *Blues On Bach* from 1974. Both of these groups included a keyboard in their renditions of Bach and were small groups in comparison to The Manhattan Jazz Orchestra. Loussier and the MJQ were also more introspective and didn't get into the business of swinging hard. On the other hand, Matthews and the MJO go for swinging big-band treatments and achieve a nice balance between old and new, as well as between introspective and extroverted.

"Tocatta and Fugue in D minor," BWV 565, kicks off the CD in a rousing manner. Chip Jackson's walking

bass intro is right up front, then the band joins in to fill out and play the melody. Jackson's bass continues to drive the band during both his solos and section playing. Chris Hunger gets off an exciting and angular alto sax solo. The section playing and Matthews' complex but continually swinging arrangements makes this version of Bach's famous piece for organ a joy to just sit and dig. I didn't even realize Matthews had arranged all of the tunes on the whole CD (minus a keyboard) until I heard this piece several times. This is one very impressive accomplishment, Matthews. Bravo!

"Air on the G String" is done reverentially, with Bill Evan's soprano sax leading the melody. There's a nice warm, burnished trumpet solo, but unfortunately it's hard to give credit where due as the soloist isn't named in the booklet; of the four trumpeters on the album, I am only slightly familiar with Scott Wendholt's recent playing, but the publicist tells us that Ryan Kisor took this one. Bill Evans takes a tenor solo, too, and he's in sympathetic vibration with the G string. We come back to the subdued and pretty theme with Evans back on soprano sax and Hunger's alto behind him in the melody. Lovely and thoughtful!

"Kyrie" is done as a medium tempo blues and is reminiscent of a Gil Evans performance. Bill Evans solos on tenor and again he does a nice job. We also get a tasty trumpet solo, again from Kisor, along with some

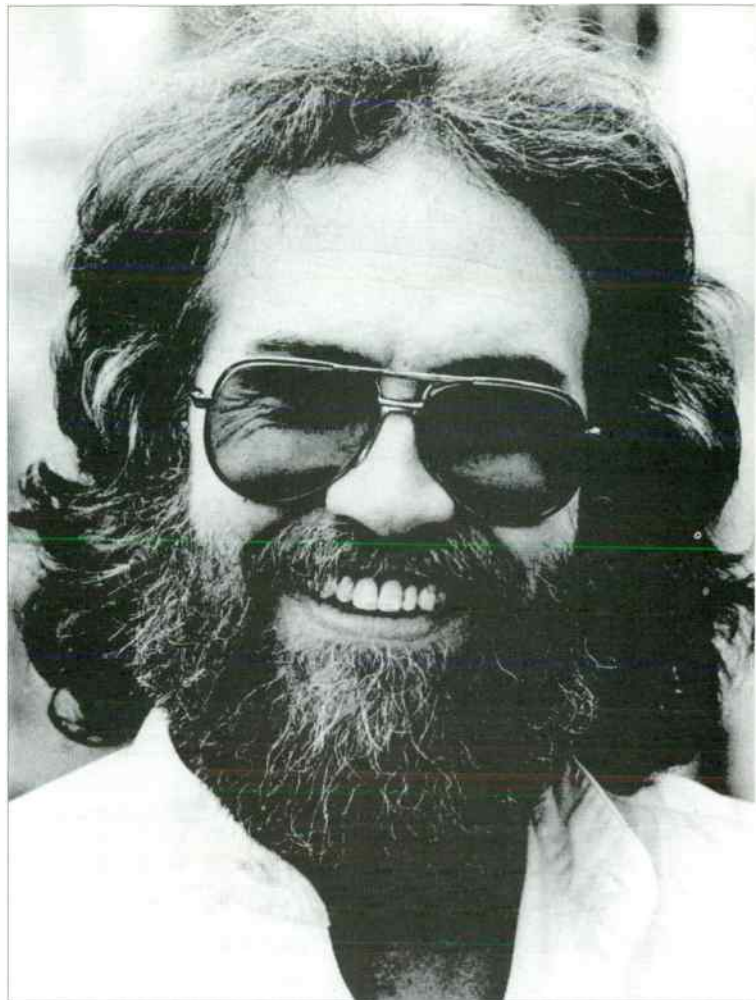
'bone work by Jim Pugh. This arrangement is closer to the Bach tradition than some of the others.

"Minuet (A Lover's Concerto)" is the same composition that was turned into a pop hit in 1965 by The Toys, a girl vocal group. It starts off with muted, slightly dissonant "toy" trumpets, but it soon starts to expand and get wilder, moving into adult emotions. Chris Hunger comes in with a knock-out alto sax solo, followed by some exciting section exchanges, which leads to a Bill Evans tenor solo that explodes into some very "out" playing. It is *Bach 2000*, isn't it? This is a real flag-waver. "A Lover's Concerto"? I believe they're doing it "in the road!"

With "Siciliano," we're heavily into Miles Davis and Gil Evans territory. There's a brooding open statement of the melody from Lew Soloff's trumpet, and then the tempo picks up. Soloff continues to solo very tastefully throughout the piece. This is another beauty.

On "Fugue No. 2," a counterpoint between an alto and a soprano sax, starts the melody and carries the theme, with accents by a trumpet and that ever-present and welcome bass clarinet. The solos start with a trumpet (Soloff's good) and some nice section exchanges into Bill Evans on tenor, who rides over section accents. We resolve with theme restatement. Tasty.

The CD's sound is fine, with bass up in the mix. The playing is uniformly very good and Matthews did a grand job of arranging. My only criticisms are relatively minor. I'd like to see some info on the soloists in the notes, since it is otherwise hard to tell with this big and complicated a band. If you see this CD in a store, don't let the generic budget-CD cover turn you off; there are no synthesizers or fusion attempts here. Simply one excellent big band jazz CD.



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**GUY KLUCEVSEK**  
FREE RANGE ACCORDION

Jack Skowron



*Jazz*

Guy Klucevsek *Free Range Accordion*  
Starkland ST-209

I GOT MYSELF into this. I reviewed Klucevsek's previous album, even though it falls somewhat outside my usual area of expertise, because I was drawn to its wacky, improvisational spirit (even though it had little true improvisation). This one is more difficult. Not that it is worse than the first, for it surely is not. It is, however, a more serious, even somber work. Some of the pieces deal with loss, mourning, genocide, retribution, and while Klucevsek's innate silliness is irrepressible, it serves here more as a respite.

We start with "Aeolian Furies," by Stephen Montague, which the composer states was inspired by the Furies, fleet-footed, avenging Greek-Roman mythological figures. It is starts off at an exhausting tempo, with Klucevsek racing along at top speed, ripping off triplets and syncopations. The piece has a few angry-sounding themes, highlighting the textural and power/dynamic capabilities of the accordion (and its player). Jerome Kitzke's "Breath And Bone" is an elegy to a percussionist friend of the composer. It features wordless yelping and percussion effects, along with a theme that reminds me of Deep Purple. The clash of simple themes, pretty melodies, complex, dissonant themes, and oddball effects is sad and disturbing. "Recitative," by Somei Satoh, a memorial prayer (for the composer's dad) moves very slowly, emphasizing silence and

prolonged sounds. It washes over you like waves on a beach, flowing in and then receding, and has a sad yet peaceful feel. Astronomical and meteorological phenomena inspired Lois V. Vierk's "Blue Jets Red Sprites," which also starts out slowly, with organ-like chords setting the mood. Some rocket-like low whooshes bring on a more uptempo section, then an ascending melody that is nicely developed (Klucevsek gets amazing sounds out of his instrument). Klucevsek's own "Three Of A Kind" is a grouping of three short pieces. "Coral Desert" begins with a lonely-sounding unaccompanied melody of flute-like high notes, which is then developed harmonically. "Organum" has a circular theme, and toys with differing time signatures in the melody and accompaniment, creating interest as they intersect. "AOK Chorale" (love that title) has a lovely, wistful melody, given some odd flavoring by the chordal accompaniment stressing dissonant passing tones.

Klucevsek's silly streak comes out on a B-movie theme Burt Bacharach would probably like to forget he wrote, "The Blob." With able vocal assistance by David Garland, he plays in various genres (tango, beer-drinking tunes, jigs, all played/improvised with aplomb) ("It's jointless, it's pointless..." "it tangos, eats mangos..."). The same composer's hit "One More Bell To Answer" is hard to recognize, being

played only on the highest notes for a chant-like, medieval quality. It's back to the tragic with Aaron Jay Kernis' "Hymn," inspired, according to the composer, by the Nazi Holocaust, with an assist from the Gulf war and the war in the Balkans. Organ-like dirges again swell, with disturbing dissonances. A softer but still menacing section follows, which eventually becomes attractive for a brief moment before those thunderous chords, swatches of note clusters and bellowing sounds return (the Auschwitz ovens?). We then reach a sad, resigned, theme on which to end. The final piece, "Boeves Psalm," has the kind of simple beautiful melody Klucevsek seems to find (composer Lars Hollimer dedicates it to his deceased uncle). Klucevsek builds up to a pipe organ like crescendo by the third and final chorus (I thought it obscure until I heard a version in a suburban Japanese restaurant — shows what I know of the real world).

Sonically, the album captures all the wheezing, huffing, booming, sweetness, delicacy and power of the instrument. On the down side, the instrument is too-widely spread across a large stage.

So, while this is certainly not the CD to pull out at your next party (unless you've got some very odd, possibly depressed friends), it's a thought-provoking, moving collection of thorny but interesting music.



*Jazz*

Roseanna Vitro Thoughts of Bill Evans:  
Conviction  
A Records AL73208

**D**ON'T OFTEN cover jazz vocalists. I mean, there were some great ones (identifiable by their first names: Ella, Billie, Louis, Sarah, Dinah), but most jazz singers are tethered by the lyric, while their instrumental counterparts can soar. Vocalese, that is the setting of lyrics to jazz composers' instrumental pieces, is also not my cuppa-joe (though there were some fabulous Eddie Jefferson and Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross examples). So, here's a singer I'm unfamiliar with, treading hallowed ground (Bill Evans' music), and the results are, well, delightful. She's ably assisted by pianists Mark Soskin, Fred Hersch, and Allen Farnham (all with Evans' influence to some degree) Eddie Gomez, Scott Lee, and Bob Bowen holding down the bottom end, and Adrian D'Souza on the skins.

"My Bells" has a lovely melody, a lyric about childhood and the loss

of innocence, and fine bass (Gomez) and piano (Soskin) solos. Ms. Vitro brings a jazz vocalist's improvisatory approach and a cabaret singers sense of drama. Love's transience inspires "Remembering The Rain," which has a melody of great beauty, odd twists, and wide, unexpected interval leaps (with the range of a sedate "the Star Spangled Banner"). The mock game show intro to "Funkallero" puts a funny spun on a song about existential ennui. Vitro really wails the last few choruses. She's accompanied by only Hersch on "Turn Out The Stars," who's appropriately "Evan-escant" on the intro. This sad tale of life after lost love is a perfect vehicle for Vitro. One of Evans' best-known and -loved tunes, "Waltz For Debbie," another bittersweet paean to childhood and its transience, is sung in a whispery, teary voice. The mood

elevates on the bossa nova "In April," with optimism and new love the order of the day (nice scat ending). Evans' adoring letter to his son, "Letter To Evan," features gorgeous chordal soloing by Farnham, and some lovely high notes by Ms. Vitro.

We hear the sound of the trio in the studio, It is well recorded, with wide dynamics and nice depth and staging. Vitro has a rich, nuanced voice, which is given its due by the mix. She does recall Ella in her range and pyrotechnics, but has a slightly rougher, more expressive sound, with minor imperfections in her voice (which she uses to her advantage) unlike Ella's glassy smoothness.

These are some nice sounds from a fine singer who seems to be attracting notice. I recommend it to both lovers of the vocal art and Evans enthusiasts.



**W**HAT WE HAVE HERE is the Rosetta Stone of modern jazz. All jazz (and much other music) from the mid-forties on springs from these dates, and everything since has either refined or rebelled against bebop's advances and conventions. When it was unleashed after World War II, it was quite controversial, with many "moldy figs" (Louis Armstrong among them) feeling the new music was too dissonant, too fast, and had "too many notes" (shades of "Amadeus"). By the end of the Forties, however bop was supreme. While there were many figures involved in this revolution, none was more key, or more revered, than alto saxophonist Charlie Parker.

Bebop was like a rocket, taking jazz rhythms, accelerating, streamlining and smoothing them out. Notes that were extensions of the chord previously thought to be dissonant made their way into use (flatted fifths, ninths, etc). Previously unmatched speed, fluency and virtuosity were called for. This eight CD set chronicles the main body of Parker's early (1944 - 1948) recordings for Savoy, Dial and some smaller labels ("Bird" recorded for Norman Granz labels after that until his death in 1955 at age 34). This material has been available previously, but is presented here in a well-organized fashion. It's also been taken from what's stated to be

"the best sounding sources." Alternate takes have been de rigueur since Bird began recording. Dial presented even scraps, solos extracted from takes, and released them in real time, that is, right after being recorded. Here, master takes are grouped first, and then the alternates. All of which makes for more interesting listening than with the usual convention of grouping all the takes of the same tune together. Novices should even consider listening only to the masters initially, then, when they're familiar those, move on to the alternates.

We give some dates with Bird as a sideman with Tiny Grimes and Dizzy Gillespie. The Grimes date is fun, the Gillespie's classic, with classics "Groovin' High," "Salt Peanuts," and "Hot House." As a leader, Bird introduces future standards "Billie's Bounce," "Now's The Time," and Parker's Masterpiece "Koko." Other gems include "Moose the Mooch," "Yardbird Suite," "Ornithology," "Klactoveed-stene," "Crazeology," "Parker's Mood," and too many others to list. We also have Bird on tenor as a sideman for Miles Davis on the Miles' first date as a leader, and a great Red Norvo date, which features a meeting of some swing giants with Bird and Diz in a melding of old and new jazz styles.

Sonics: It states in the booklet that some speed correction and

noise reduction were used. I compared some of these tracks with LP copies I have on Dial's "Moose the Mooch" and "Cool Blues" (Dial 901 and 905, reissued on Spotlight LP). I found the CD set to be cleaner, with better definition of highs (particularly cymbals), though neither is of audiophile quality. I pulled the Complete Savoy LPs box (Savoy 5500) and the differences were similar, but more pronounced. I listened and compared "KoKo" and "Parker's Mood," and found similar improvements in openness a clarity of instruments. I also thought the CD sounded more dynamic, with Bird's horn jumping out of the speakers. Bass was fuller, but less defined, sloppier, on the LP. On the down side, I found the CDs a tad harsh, either due to tape overload or some digitizing of the sound.

The packaging is attractive, being set up as a spiral notebook with CDs placed into "pages," reminiscent of 78 sets of yore. My beef (I have to have one) is that removing discs without putting your greasy paws on them is nigh impossible. The booklet has interesting essays, though some are up-dated versions of ones that originally appeared in the Savoy box. This material needs to be in the library of any serious jazz lover. If jazz is the high point of American art during this century, these dates are a high water mark in jazz.





*Jazz*

Bill Evans *Portrait In Jazz*  
JVC XRCO VICJ-60139

**T**HIS ALBUM, released in 1959, came fresh on the heels of Evans' stint with Miles Davis, and is the first to feature Evans' classic trio with Scott LaFaro (bass) and Paul Motian (drums). LaFaro was an irrepressible virtuoso, from a line of bassists stretching from Jimmy Blanton, through Oscar Pettiford to Mingus. Motian, disparaged at the time for being the weakest of the three, functions as the glue that holds the other two adventurous souls together.

While Evans' playing is "lyrical" (that is the most often used description of his playing style), that adjective misses the point. He had an incredible command of harmony, and would underline sweet lines with dense chords, which would shift almost imperceptibly.

Evans would pepper soft dissonances to make pretty lines piquant, the way horseradish adds interest to a well-made Bloody Mary. He had amazing variety of dynamics and attack, and could speed along the

keys or linger on one note, as the mood struck.

Highlights include "Come Rain or Come Shine," which starts with Evans playing a knotty chord-melody, stretching and compressing time. "Autumn Leaves" is here in two takes, one stereo and one mono, both featuring the group as Evans conceived it, with the bass a co-equal, commenting on the music, rather than just accompanying the piano. At some points they play in a round-robin style, taking each other's lines and completing them. "Witchcraft" has more of the kind of interplay between Evans and LaFaro that became their signature later. Evans is very theme-conscious, here using the ascending three notes that start the melody as a springboard. "When I Fall In Love," taken at a crawl, hints at the blues (often a byproduct of "falling"), while "Someday My Prince Will Come" is positively upbeat and optimistic. "What Is This Thing Called Love" is also upbeat,

and features interesting dynamic shifts and fast, streaming piano lines. Evans' "Blue In Green" is a lovely, modal piece (in Miles' book, as is "Some-day..."), which also appears in a fine alternate take (choosing the masters must have been a bitch). This tune again features much interchange between bass and piano.

Doing that audiophile rag: I compared this XRCO to an OJC release (OJC-088) on LP, and to the mid-eighties 18-CD box set, The Complete Riverside Sessions. The box set wasn't bad, but not quite as rich sounding as the other two. The OJC LP was fuller, but the XRCO had more depth, wider stage, and overall more resolution (this wasn't always positive as occasional tape dropouts and mike-leakage are audible). I have a complaint about the packaging; the original liner notes are included as a greatly shrunken copy of the LP jacket, illegible to my aging eyes. Still, it's a fine album, with great sound.



Jack Skowron

*Jazz*

Ben Allison and Medicine Wheel  
*Riding The Nuclear Tiger*  
Palmento PM2067

**A**S BILLIE SAID, "God bless the child who's got his own." Ben Allison's got his own. He's created his own, singular world in acoustic jazz. It's intelligent, catchy, aggressive, thoughtful, hummable, and quite theatrical (I could easily see him scoring movies). This world draws from jazz, classical, rock, and world music, emphasizing composition and arranging as well as soloing. Texture plays a major roll in the sounds of the group, with its unusual instrumentation (a septet with two sax, trumpet, cello, and rhythm) and unorthodox instrumental techniques. It adds up to music, which is interesting *and* enjoyable.

The title tune is aggressive and edgy. Two simple melodies are carried by soprano sax (Michael Blake whose tone is reminiscent of Steve Lacy's). His fine solo is over a chord sequence that sounds like something by the '80s rock group, the Cure. "Jazz Scene Voyeur" is a pretty jazz waltz, featuring Frank Kimbrough's piano, Ted Nash's tenor, and two lovely themes arranged against a variety of backdrops. Allison credits Mingus for inspiring "Love Chant Remix," and, while the theme does have some of Mingus' dark sound, the solo space is "Africa Brass" Coltrane (especially Michael Blake's improv). "Swiss Cheese D" was inspired by the colorful elocution of ex-Knick and New York basketball commentator Walt Frazier. The title describes both porous

defense on the court and the key of the tune, which races and bounces, has a one-on-one prepared piano and bass duet with a honking, impassioned sax (Ted Nash). It's a slam dunk.

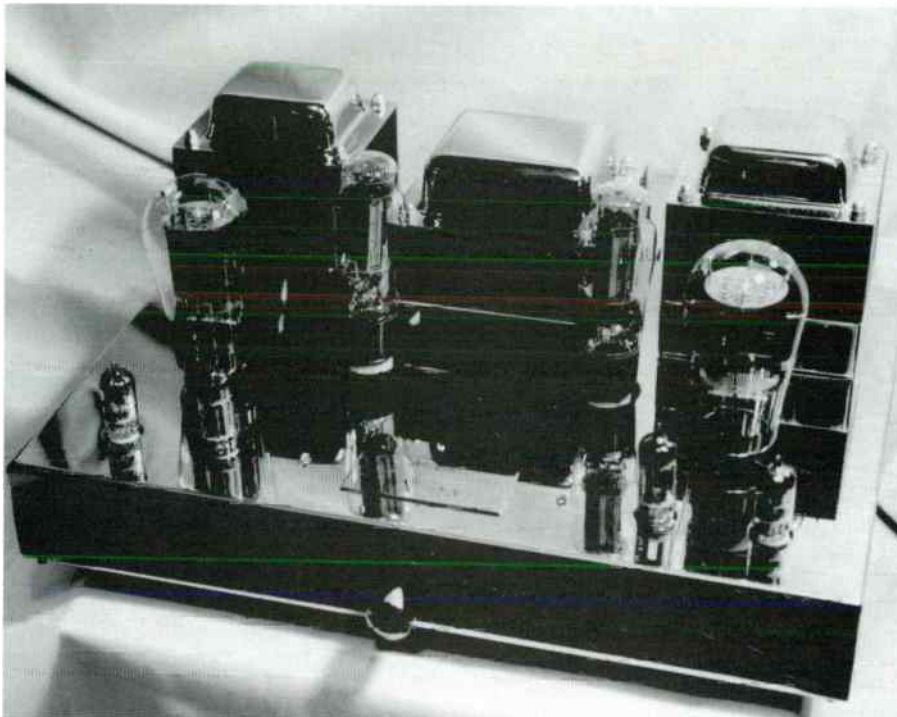
Cellist Tomas Ulrich is featured on "Charlie Brown's Psychedelic Christmas," a pretty ballad on which Allison toys with bi-tonality, giving a piquant flavor and a spacey feel to the tune. There's a great trumpet and tenor dialog here (Ron Horton and Ted Nash, respectively). "Harlem River Line" is urban and gritty; built on a funky bass vamp; this could be a theme for a New York cop show. Textures play a great part here, with arpeggiated horn lines, fanfares, a sax and drums duet, and a kaleidoscopic ending (drummer Jeff Ballard gets a taste here). "Mysterious Visitor" is derived from lines from the closer "Tectonics" and leads into it. The final track is an exciting, modal, North African sounding piece with a hot trumpet solo.

The sound on this compact disc is fine. The soundstage is wide with some depth, and the bass and other ensemble instruments have good tonality. Piano-bloat is occasionally heard, but for the most part the sonics are quite good.

This is another fine effort by a forward-looking musician-composer. You don't have to spend a lot of time analyzing these tunes, however, just dig.

# Art Audio PX-25 Power Amplifier

Chuck Bruce



**E**VEN BEFORE the Art Audio PX-25 power amplifier arrived for an extended listen for this review, this electronics line had already begun to trigger my curiosity during informal encounters at shows and a local dealer. When the unit arrived, it was immediately obvious that the PX-25 is no ho-hum knock-off of other single-ended, triode tube power amplifiers. The PX-25 is obviously lovingly crafted and beautifully implemented. It is Art's first entry into the ultra low power realm, and with the resurgence of high sensitivity loudspeakers, helped along by the continuing popularity of vacuum tube electronics, the PX-25 is a sweetheart that should do nicely in this niche. In this case, she's done up in a stylish,

brightly polished, heavy-gauge, stainless steel chassis, with chrome accents and open-mount tubes in ceramic sockets. She's a very sexy dame, indeed.

For a number of years, I have spent a good deal of listening time appreciating how involving music can be when presented via low-power, single-ended vacuum-tube power amplifiers, typically 10 watts or less. When paired with sufficiently efficient loudspeakers, amps using either 300B or 2A3 tubes seem to be particularly faithful to the music. They always seem to be especially ready references, regardless what other solid-state or tube gear is running in the listening room.

Therefore, I approached this Art Audio amplifier with strong curiosi-

ty about its sonics, yet admittedly I had a bit of skepticism because of the reputation of the Czech PX-25 power tube and its acclaimed performance beyond that of competing tubes in the similar power range. This is a tube that some folks swear bests the famed 300B. It is also a tube with which I was only slightly familiar. All this really twitched my eyebrows, because I rightly hold my WE 300Bs in very high regard.

I had also assumed that the current crop of designers had likely squeezed about all there was out of single-ended circuits and esteemed triodes, at least from those units priced within the atmosphere, i.e. my own budget and that of other "working" audiophiles. Subsequently, my encounter with the

attractive PX-25 actually caught me off-guard. Then again, I should have known better. The acclaim that this product line has garnered in just a few years from valid sources, is now validated by my own experience. I'm here to say, right up-front, this has been an intriguing eye- and ear-opener.

Art Audio-USA founder Joe Fratus, a devoted audio designer for over 20 years, is based in Cranston, RI. He and his associates there, in Raleigh, NC, and the UK have developed a line of several other amplifiers including the famed Jota, a 20-watt-per-channel, single-ended stereo unit. The PX-25 covered here is one of their newest products. Its output is rated at a very modest six watts per channel, yet one gets a quite robust audio presentation from these high-current power tubes. Monoblock and push-pull power amps are also offered in the Art Audio line, as is a moving-magnet / moving-coil phono pre-amp. All of Art Audio's products are tube-based, and from my observation, they feature top-quality parts and construction. I'm told that personal consultations with customers to match the right amplifier with the right loudspeaker(s) are integral to the firm's approach to the manufacturer-customer relationship.

## Circuitry and Background

This amplifier provides the full monty of attributes that devotees to simple and pure retro audio design crave. That is, the PX-25 gives its owner pure Class-A, auto-biasing, single-ended operation, with zero feedback, transformer coupling, and modest yet dynamic levels of power from an outstanding matched set of very capable output tubes. Input-signal drive and d.c. supply rectification are also handled by tubes. The PX-25 is a shining example of the tube-based section of the audio art; it will set music lover's hearts afire.

The PX-25 derives its name from the early 1920s-vintage, direct-heated triode tube that was originally manufactured in England by GEC and which remained in production through WW II. This was also the heyday of efficient compression drivers in speaker systems that were well served by low-power electronics. Thereafter, a range of more

powerful tetrodes and pentodes emerged and pretty well dominated audio applications until today.

In the new millennium, KR Electronics (formerly KR Enterprise) of the Czech Republic has reissued the PX-25 and is applying modern manufacturing techniques and inter-

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## I have found a special magic in the sound that comes from amplifiers like the Art Audio PX-25.

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nals of the tubes. KR is noted throughout Eastern Europe for its manufacturing of a broad line of commercial and consumer vacuum tubes. As powerful and versatile as the new multi-element vacuum tubes have evolved to be, it was and still is thought by many that the simpler three-element triodes produce the purest, most-faithful sound across the audio spectrum. It will be interesting, then, to see and hear what current practice and materials have done with triode sound.

The PX-25 is a high-Mu (gain), low grid-to-anode capacitance, high-anode impedance (higher than the 300B's), 5-inch tall, vintage-style, bulbous envelope tube (whew!). Its frequency response is specified as 9 Hz to 60 kHz, +/-0.5 dB. Furthermore, the factory's measurements say that this tube will maintain this linearity out to 100 kHz where it will still have less than 1 per cent distortion *in an active circuit*. These characteristics allow use of an output transformer with an extended bandwidth, one with response beyond what typical 300B or 2A3 tubes allow. Parts counts in these designs are remarkably low. In the ART circuit, the PX-25 B+ plate voltage is held to 360 V d.c., a bit below the design maximum, not only to assure linear operation, but extended life as well. My listening tests reveal that this tube is truly capable of maintaining faithfulness to the input signal. Both high and low 3 output-impedance versions of the PX-25 amplifier are offered at no extra cost. Appropriate selection will provide better voltage-gain matching with either super-sensitive (100-dB SPL+) or medium-sensitive loudspeakers. The manufacturer

recommends loudspeakers of 90-dB SPL or greater sensitivity, though I believe some rated below this level will perform just fine. Upon request, the ART staff will make recommendations as to loudspeaker selection. According to Art's Joe Fratus, the total project and combined development by himself, Tom Willis and David Gill required about 17 months. This includes time spent researching the actual tubes from Riccardo Kron of KR Electronics.

Faithful transmission of the audio signal to the loudspeakers requires an equally important element, the output transformers. Single-ended operation requires only one per channel, yet it is asked to do quite a lot, and every element must be carefully selected and tuned for optimum performance of these circuits. There is really no room for even a small error at this performance level and little (if any) correction circuitry could compensate for shortcomings. Both primary and secondary output transformer windings are commonly hand-wound by skilled assemblers, typically patient women with many years of experience. Selection of the correct mass and configuration of the high-silicon, grain-oriented steel in the core has been found to be equally important. Such attention to detail helps assure a linear transfer of any complexity of audio signal, however wide the band, with minimum phase shift, from primary to the secondary and then to the speaker load, whatever the frequency, voltage, current and operational temperature. All this while dealing with the often-complex loudspeaker impedance! These custom transformers must carry the full voltage and current swing without any help from a companion as in push-pull designs. It's all or nothing with single-ended circuits, and it better be right. The result is that the PX-25 is not an inexpensive, mass-market amplifier, yet the designers appear to want to give a lot in return. I see obvious attention to quality and detail, which bears this out.

## Use and Listening Test

The amplifier I received was already broken-in, so I did not have to "season" it for a couple of months for the components to settle as the manufacturer recommends

for totally new units. Thus, right out of the box, the PX-25 conveyed sweetness in the strings and faithfulness to vocal intonations that immediately made me pull out my favorite CDs and LPs, especially several reissues and test pressings from Classic Records. Included here is a special 45-rpm test pressing of an early Miles Davis recording. On replay, I was offered rich and speedy dynamic contrasts that only the best tube designs achieve, plus a resolution of detail and nuance that sets this amplifier apart.

With as much esteem as I hold for well-implemented solid-state designs, it still appears to me that basic triodes capture the harmonic structures and timbres of music as no other design does. For me, a special treat occurred when the PX-25 was paired with an extraordinarily good LP source; the synergy was truly magical. It's amusing to me that today's best solid-state offerings are often touted as having "that tube sound." It's remarkable how far around this circle we've come, just to get back to basics and rediscover that great analog foundation laid down in the 1920s.

We reviewers and critics have developed an ample set of superla-

tives to describe the best music and audio gear. Accordingly, some of us say that single-ended circuits, such as the PX-25, add their own harmonic textures to the music. Maybe so, yet these eras find no fault. In

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### **The PX-25 offers ample dynamics, but you'll know its a tube amp from its touch of warm sweetness.**

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any case, what we do know is that these difficult-to-discern, low-level harmonic distortions are largely even order in content, as are their clipping products. The PX-25 behaved admirably throughout its stay in my home, and even my spouse Joan thought it was a remarkable piece. This amplifier will only lose its composure when it is overdriven with slamming low bass notes into loudspeakers that have insufficient sensitivity or present impedance mismatches.

When all is said and done, what's really important is how the music makes you feel, how involving and engaging is it? Is it true to life? Does it seem near to the real

thing, heard live in a decent concert venue? Does it stir the blood? Are you enveloped by the wonder of it all? Is your acceptance heartfelt?

The Art Audio PX-25 is, indeed, capable of invoking these emotions in me, and I was happy it did so at my listening room for several months.

The ART PX-25's character is neither euphonic or more "vivid" than life, nor does it over-embellish musical content. Its presentation seems just right, with a mid-stage presentation and first-rate near-surround imaging with the best recordings. All the while you're offered ample enough dynamics to follow the most complex musical lines. Yes, you know its tube-based amp from its touch of warm sweetness that envelops the room, yet the PX-25 does not overly call attention to itself, despite its uniquely pleasant sound. You soon forget that this amplifier is outside the consumer mainstream; you just kick back and enjoy the music.

One nice operational touch: The PX-25 auto-bias circuit relieves the owner of performing this periodic task, just to keep the amp operating optimally or when installing new output tubes. And that, to me, is the way it should be, no worrying over the technology, just enjoy the outcome.

A memorable case in listening to the PX-25 is how the amplifier floated images of Heifetz's dynamic reading of the Bruch "Concerto in G Minor" (Classic Records RCA LP LSC 2652). The PX-25 reached heights of realism rarely visited in home audio. The character of the bow on strings, biting in one phrase, contrastingly delicate and subtle in the next, was as it should be. Guest listeners often were near applause after such a spin of this faithful analog source. And, yes indeed, I do still love spinning those glorious LP records.

This lovingly crafted six-watt wonder opened windows into the music that were quite remarkable. Several of the tunes I played are still stirring in my memory. Much of this character I attribute to the superb PX-25 triode output tube, resurrected to modern manufacturing standards, and its associated circuitry.

During much of my listening, the Von Schweikert VR-6's were my

## **N O T E S**

**Art Audio PX-25 Stereo Vacuum Tube Power Amplifier**, \$5,495.00 in polished stainless-steel, (\$5,000.00 in black chassis, with chrome plated accents, add \$200 for volume control). Art Audio, 34 Briarwood Rd, Cranston, RI 02920; phone 401/826-8286, fax 401/826-3903, e-mail catsarta@att.net; website www.artaudio.com. All tubes included. Weight: 55 pounds. Warranty: Three years, amplifier only, tubes are warranted separately.

### **Associated Equipment**

CEC TL1500 CD player as transport with Theta DS Pro Basic IIIa D/A converter; Audio Research Ref. II, Mark 2 balanced line preamp; Audio Research PH-3 phono preamp; Sonographe turntable with Benz-Micro 0.9 moving-coil cartridge; Von Schweikert VR-6 and Klipsch KLF 20s loudspeakers; Illuminations D-60 digital, Kimber KCAG, Tara Master, Decade, and Harmonic Technology interconnects; Audio Research, Kimber 8TC, and Esoteric Audio loudspeaker cables; KimberKord Mod. 10 Gold and Harmonic Technology power cords; Kimber Wattgate 381 power outlets; AudioPrism Quiet Line r.f. filter modules, and Tiif Electronics Mod 1060 power conditioner/filter. All of the active electronics are operated full balanced differential except the phono source.

main reference loudspeakers. They gave the amplifier quite a work-out, what with their nominal 4-ohm impedance and sensitivity demands, yet the PX-25 handled this loudspeaker with remarkable composure.

Another capable loudspeaker I paired at some length with the PX25 was the Klipsch KLF 20, a 100-dB SPL sensitive, 8-ohm, horn-and-cone tower loudspeaker of reasonable cost which I came to admire during the preparation of a TAV review I wrote a few years past. The PX-25's amicable character took to the KLF 20 like a duck to water, and held me and guest listeners in awe with its speed, dynamics, and tonal accuracy with every type of music we threw at it.

In this case, the amplifier appeared to have limitless reserves of power, invoking exclamations such as, "Is that really only six watts?" Oh yes, indeed folks, surprise, surprise!

Another loudspeaker, the Soliloquy 6.5 towers which I have listened to at some length was also found to mate well with the PX-25 despite a lower 92-dB SPL sensitivi-

ty. This speaker and amp combo offered an easy, smooth and detailed presentation, confirming this amplifier does offer the versatility to handle many sorts of speakers.

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**If my experience is any indication, then Art Audio's PX-25 may be a classic of the new millennium.**

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If you don't feel enough pants-flap bass with these lower power amplifier, then one might cautiously apply a powered subwoofer for the lowest bass (I did not use a subwoofer myself). I only recommend this if perfect integration can be achieved. The PX-25 is simply too good that you should allow it to be smeared by poor subwoofer or crossover integration. Otherwise, sit back and enjoy the sweet pleasures offered by the PX-25.

**Conclusion**

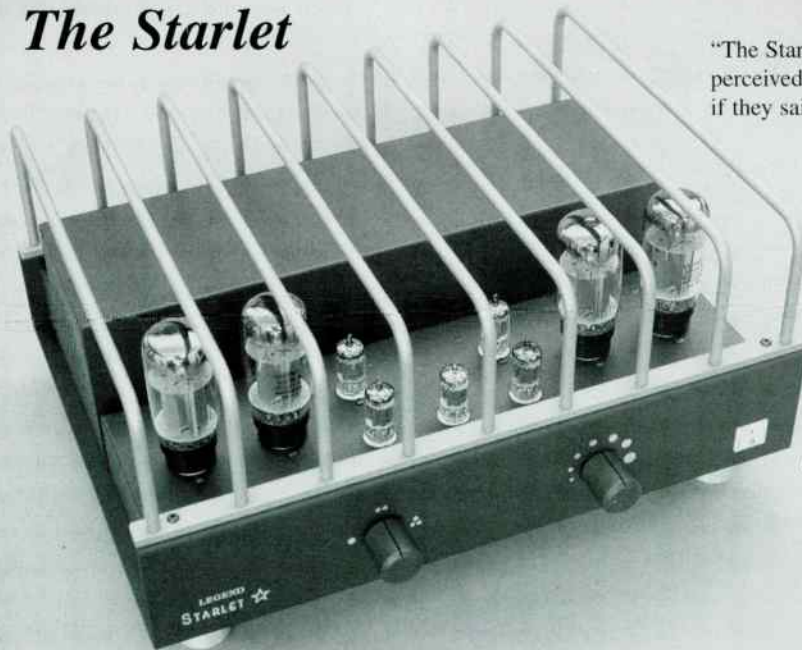
If my experience with this amplifier is any indication, it is likely that the Art Audio PX-25 may well take its rightful place among the classic

single-ended power amps of the new millennium. It may well become a legend in its own time. It offers enormous retro appeal, yet features modern design, fit and finish with carefully selected 21<sup>st</sup>-Century materials and parts. The sheer pleasure this amplifier will provide the listener who takes the time to mate it with an appropriate loudspeaker, confirms why we pursue this engaging pastime in the first place, at once discovering a unique blend of art and science which invokes deep emotion.

The PX-25 will support your enjoyment of both CDs and LPs, while not favoring intimate jazz or chamber ensembles over large classical orchestra or opera. No matter your preferences, even they run to classic rock such as the Eagles or the early '70s folk of James Taylor, is appropriately conveyed. And one ought not ignore the fact that Willie Nelson's warm and sweet Texas country twang is lovingly and accurately reproduced by this amp as well.

Sit back and enjoy this fine power amplifier, I feel sure it will not disappoint you.

*The Starlet*



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Ken Kessler  
*Ultimate Audio*, Winter 2001

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Chip Stern  
*Stereophile*, December 2000

The True Integrated Class 'A'  
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# Roksan Kandy Tuner

Don Scott



**Q**UANTITY FM-RECEIVING products, at down-to-earth prices, are being rapidly pushed out of the entertainment arena in favor of home-theater products, currently the bread and butter of most hi-fi manufacturers. Consequently, my purpose with this review and others to follow is to seek out the few quality FM tuners still manufactured. I don't intend to lower the performance bar to a point two inches off the ground in comparison to past high-performance tuners manufactured in the '80s by Sansui, Kenwood, McIntosh, and a few others. Hence, let me walk the Roksan Kandy tuner out in front of what I hope is a crowd of tough-minded readers, a stylish unit all dressed up in its high-peg garb and looking ready to rub elbows with the finest sounding components.

Roksan is noted for a wide range of products: Turntables and turntable power supplies, tonearms, cartridges, compact disc players and transports, preamplifiers, single and multi-channel amplifiers, loudspeaker systems, interconnects, and AM/FM tuners. The company has British origins with most products manufactured in Korea.

## Description and Features

Construction is rugged, using heavy steel, while the overall design is accented with an all-business, aluminum front panel, gold-plated RCA jacks on the rear, and a fused IEC power receptacle, allowing the power cord of your choice. The total package is deceptive of what lies inside — not much at first glance. However, one must remember that the highest-performing car

radios have half palm-sized AM/FM circuit boards that outperform 90% of the home audio tuners currently around. Therefore, peeking inside Kandy's athletic uniform and finding scanty guts should not disqualify this tuner and send you running for the smelling salts. This is an athlete, ready for performance.

On the left is a substantial toroidal power transformer placed far enough away (7 inches) not to induce hum into the main circuit board, which contains the basic FM circuitry and components: A highly sensitive and not so selective four-gang front-end, two 150-kHz ceramic i.f. filters, several high-gain transistors, and a stereo decoder that requires no adjustments for long-term stability. All these parts, although perhaps sparse, are of good quality. The AM section is

sub-minimal, one step above a crystal set.

The tuner sports a large display of selectable functions. There are 50 random presets with direct entry of selected preset number, as well as scan. What is missing that would add sweetness to the Kandy, at least for me, is selectable bandwidth and high blend. Operation is straightforward, except for one function: To change from mono to stereo, the "Band" switch on the tuner or remote must be clicked. In simpler terms, there is mono FM, stereo FM, or AM selection. There is no mention of how to select mono vs. stereo operation in the owner's manual.

### Going To Court

One judges FM audio by looking at what is best in reference to a reference tuner or receiver. With FM, there's never a comparison to an absolute, as when playing the same cut on a record or CD until an absolute evaluation is derived. However, for a skilled reviewer of any equipment format, phono cartridges for example, sometimes all that is needed is the sound in the first couple of grooves of a familiar record to judge the tonal worth of that cartridge. The rest of the listening is often to confirm what is already known. Likewise, one chord on a piano speaks volumes about that instrument. And the same is

true when judging the worthiness of an FM tuner. After 20 years of doing so and having at least 10 references on hand, a few flicks to familiar stations tells the story: Does the tuner under evaluation pull in the weak stations, does it overload on the strong ones, does it separate stations close in broadcast frequency, does it receive stations with good stereo separation and minimum noise, and does it offer the factors (proper tonal

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## While this may not be the ultimate FM tuner, it will give good performance with strong signals.

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balance, low distortion, and high dynamic range) that make up good sound? Further, would I want to listen to the Roksan Kandy over a long period?

In terms of r.f. performance, the Kandy has adequate sensitivity to pull in weak stations in mono, while its lack of high blend makes it noisy on fringe signals in stereo. It has only about 8–10 dB of adjacent channel separation, and therefore will not separate next-channel stations (88.3 vs. 88.5 MHz, for example) very well unless both are of moderate signal strength. A good indoor or outdoor antenna will bandage the above difficulties. The

tuner does, on the other hand, have enough selectivity to separate alternate channel stations well (103.3 vs. 103.7, for example) and did not have overload distortion on strong locals.

In terms of audio quality, the Kandy is not the ultimate by any means, but it does have kick-ass bass as evidenced on hip-hop formatted stations. It goes deep and dynamic with no trace of second- or third-harmonic bloom. The midrange appears correct about the critical 1-kHz hinge point of transmitted pre-emphasis and receive de-emphasis, giving natural vocal presentation. The highs do have moderate grit, mainly contributed to the compromise, single i.f.

bandwidth. However, they still sparkle when program content dictates. Although stereo separation is spec'ed at a lack-luster 35 dB, it is actually closer to 45-50 dB, presenting a good soundstage with dead-center common-mode material. Overall, rather pleasant FM listening flows from the Kandy's RCA jacks. AM audio quality on what few stations this tuner will receive is far above the usual mark, with no mud or drive-up-window distortion, rather a smooth, natural sound. I am certain some improvement in AM pulling power could be gained with proper alignment of this unit.

Also, while I am being picky about alignment of my review sample, there are two simple adjustments that should be checked in the front of the selling agent to avoid voiding the warranty. Adjustments marked "AM TUNED ADJ." and "FM TUNED ADJ." should be set fully counterclockwise, otherwise the tuner will only stop in scan or have stereo on stations close enough to read by their tower lights.

### Conclusion

There is no indication that the manufacturer designed the Kandy to clear the very highest performance bar. It did, however, design and build a product that will give good results for the semi-serious FM buff who lives in an area of strong or moderate signal strength stations and wants a tuner to compliment — at least in appearance — other members of a high-performance team. At \$595.00, the Kandy offers a good cost vs. performance value.

## NOTES

**Roksan Kandy AM/FM stereo tuner**, \$595.00, remote optional. Distributor: May Audio Marketing, 2150 Liberty Drive, Unit 7, Niagara Falls, NY, 14304-3708; phone 716/283-4434, fax 716/283-6264; website [www.mayaudio.com](http://www.mayaudio.com).

### Associated Equipment

Two Audiosource AMP ones, B&K Pro Five preamp, Amrita monitors, various speaker cables, Cardas and Twisted Pair Pdf interconnects, and Kenwood KT-8300 reference tuner modified by APS.

### Measured Specifications

FM 50-dB Quieting: Mono, 23 dBf, stereo 37 dBf; AM 500 uV/m; capture ratio: 2 dB, signal-to-noise ratio: 70 dB mono, 60-65dB stereo, alternate channel selectivity: 70 dB; adjacent channel selectivity: 4 dB; THD: mono/stereo 0.80%; stereo separation: 45 dB, 1 kHz (claimed 35 dB); AM suppression: 50 dB, 19- and 38-kHz kHz rejection: -55 dB; frequency response: 20 Hz to 15 kHz; power consumption: 6 W; weight: 26 pounds; dimensions: 4 x 19 x 14 inches; warranty: two years.



# The Henry Kloss Model One Radio From Tivoli Audio

Joel Shumer, photo & text



**I** DID A DOUBLE TAKE when I saw the ad. There was my old KLH kitchen radio, the one I've been using every day for the last 30 years. On and off, on and off, NPR in the morning while making coffee, music on WQXR or WNYC while reading the paper, sorting through the mail, or making a meal, NPR again while playing with the dishwasher. Four stereo systems in the house and it's this little KLH that I listen to most.

It took but seconds to realize that the ad was about a new "retro-radio" loosely based on the KLH Model Eight designed by Henry Kloss back in 1960. I guess I was hoping for a resurrection of the original. After all, Marantz, Quad, and McIntosh have reintroduced classic amplifiers from the '60s. But they were aimed at a very narrow niche market. Henry Kloss and Tivoli are hoping to appeal to a much larger public.

## Description

I opened the shipping box, the manufacturer's box, and took away the thick Styrofoam surrounds and there it was. "Oooh! But it's small," I thought. Advertising photos imply that the old KLH and the new "Model One" are similar in size. But at 8 by 5 by 4 inches, the "Model One" is considerably smaller. But what a gem! The walnut veneer on

my review sample is impeccable. It looks like solid wood. It feels like solid wood, and the cabinetry work is superb. The knobs, the vernier tuning dial, and the speaker grill all look first class. This radio would be at home anywhere, elegant in appearance in a posh CEO's office yet unpretentious on a beat-up desk in a college dorm.

Looking at the faceplate, a metallic screen on the left covers a single three-inch long-throw speaker which is ported through the bottom. Small rubber feet raise the cabinetry  $3/16^{\text{th}}$  of an inch, which seems sufficient to allow the porting to work effectively.

In the middle of the front panel, there is a rotary volume control near the top. Below, an LED lights when power is on. And below that there's a glowing diode that increases in brightness as one zeros in on a station. At the very bottom is a three-position rotary knob labeled "OFF, FM, AM."

The right side has a large vernier tuning knob. FM frequencies are inscribed in a 180-degree arc on the top. A complementary arc of AM frequencies completes the circle below. Rotation is geared down to a 5:1 ratio, making fine tuning easy and precise.

The back of the unit has a recessed panel for connections. A

detachable two-prong, 10-foot power cord also serves as an FM antenna. However, one can throw a toggle switch to "EXTERNAL..." and capture an FM antenna signal via an F-type connector. There are also three mini-plug connections labeled, "AUX IN, HEADPHONES, REC OUT." Detach the a.c. power cord and 12- to 16-volts d.c. can be used with an external source, intended for car or boat.

Usually a review will have a section at this point titled "Setup." In the case of the Model One, this can be pretty simple. Put it on a counter, plug it in, and turn it on. Positioning, however, can make a difference. More about that later.

## Use and Listening

The Model One is as easy to use as a radio can be. One click of the bottom knob and the radio is playing the same station, at the same volume level as when it was last in use. I do 99% of my FM listening to only three stations. One easily develops a kinesthetic feel for how far to rotate the knob when changing stations. But dialing in a specific frequency is also an easy matter. In part, this ease of use is why I like my old KLH so much.

The FM tuner section is outstanding. It produces a clean mono signal suppressing interference, noise, and

effectively pulls in weak stations. Selectivity appears to be high as well. There were no examples of one station's signal overlapping into another's. Of course, it's easier for a designer to work in mono but I wish that more of the component stereo tuners that I've used were as quiet and as noise free as this one.

The sound, considering the limitations of size, is quite good. Not surprisingly, there is little output below the upper bass. Response is bumped up around 150 Hz by several dB, giving the impression of more bass than is really there. But this can be a problem. If the radio is placed on the forward edge of a desk or table, the tonal balance is very good. Place the radio near additional boundaries, such as on a narrow bookshelf, a counter surface near a wall, or in a corner, and the bass begins to drum. Speaking voices become excessively chesty. The upper bass in some pieces of music throbs when it shouldn't. It would be nice if Henry Kloss had included a defeat switch on the back panel to smooth bass response. However, since most of this extra upper bass comes through the port in the bottom of the radio, the drumming effect can be lessened by placing several layers of face tissue between the bottom of the cabinet and the radio's supporting surface.

The midrange is unusually natural and uncolored. There is none of the plastic or metallic resonance found in many small radios. Upper frequencies are smooth but sound as if they are rolled off a bit and a little hooded at the very top.

I checked my subjective impressions of the radio's frequency response using a tone generator, microphone and SPL meter. The Model One was placed on the forward edge of a table with the microphone on axis and 12 inches from the unit's speaker. The mid-range

and highs from 300 Hz to 9 kHz measured an unusually smooth  $\pm 2$  dB. But measurements of the radio's upper half octave do not support what seemed to me to be subdued highs. Instead there is a gradual increase in output from 9 kHz to 13 kHz, and then output drops off

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### **The Henry Kloss Model One from Tivoli is a thing of beauty and practicality.**

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sharply. Move the microphone off axis and the response of this top half octave decreases considerably, down 12 dB at 45 degrees. This contributes to the sense of insufficient air at the very top. I realized that all of my critical listening was done with the Model One on a table or counter and with me standing nearby. When I sat, lowering my head to the height of the radio, and on axis, the sound became airy and open.

Bass was pretty much as I anticipated, except that the rise in output starts to climb around 250 Hz. I thought the rise might start a bit lower. The curve peaks at 135 Hz with a gain of +9 dB. That's quite a bump! Output then drops like a rock. At 100 Hz, it's back down to the midrange level and plummets another 20 dB by 80 Hz.

Measurements also support the "Kleenex fix" for a drumming bass. Two tissues folded into a two inch square and placed under the port at the bottom of the cabinet reduce output at 135 Hz by 3 dB. It's not a solution if the user hears no problem. Remember the Fletcher Munson curve? It was based on the premise that extra bass needed to be dialed in at low listening levels. The

Model One provides the extra bass and it does sound its best at lower levels.

Although the Model One can't be cranked to a high volume level, it can easily play at a level (peaks above 90 dB at a distance of one meter) that can overwhelm the noise floor of a boisterous refrigerator and a chugging dishwasher. Dynamics are severely compressed, but this can be seen as an advantage in a radio that won't be played at high levels, especially if it is used in a somewhat noisy environment.

In general, the sound, while not setting new standards for a table radio, is much better than merely average in both FM and AM modes. Often, it is said that it's in the midrange where the reproduction of music counts most. And here is where the Model One really shines. In midrange naturalness, Tivoli's Henry Kloss Model One can compete not only with any table radio but with the sound of far more expensive systems as well.

### **Summary and Recommendations**

The Henry Kloss Model One is a thing of beauty and practicality. It's visual design and artful use of walnut, cherry, and maple veneers make it the most attractive table radio I have ever seen. FM and AM tuner designs provide clean distortion free signals, which effectively suppress interference and cross talk from other stations. The overall sound is fine with two caveats. First, the Model One won't play much above moderate levels and sounds even better when played a bit softer. Second, if the Model One is placed on a surface near another boundary such as a rear wall or in a corner, the upper bass may become excessively boomy. (But don't forget the "Kleenex fix.")

There may be \$100 table radios and boom boxes that have better bass extension and can play louder. And they may play in stereo using a built-in CD player as well as AM and FM.

But if you want wood and not plastic, if you prize a smooth midrange, if smallness counts, if you like the retro look and absolute ease of operation, then Tivoli's Henry Kloss Model One is the way to go.

## **N O T E S**

**Tivoli Audio Henry Kloss Model One FM/AM mono table radio, \$100.00.** Tivoli Audio, phone 877/297-9479 (toll free), website . Cabinet size: 4.2 inches high, 8.3 inches wide, 5.2 inches deep. Finishes: Beige panel with walnut cabinet, cobalt blue panel with cherry cabinet, or dark green panel with maple cabinet.

# Aperion Audio 512D Loudspeaker

D.B. Keele, Jr.



**A**S A WELL-KNOWN loudspeaker engineer and reviewer, I am occasionally approached by inventors and would-be inventors of some new loudspeaker-related whiz bang that they claim might revolutionize the loudspeaker industry. Typically, the inventor has an abundance of superlatives on how good their idea is but are not forthcoming with any details on how the invention does what it does. This was the case when I first became aware of the

“DiAural” crossover a couple of years ago. It was in conjunction with a series of presentations put on by Ray Kimber of Kimber Kable for the world-wide audio press at his plant in Ogden, Utah demonstrating a loudspeaker using the new DiAural crossover. Kimber was very tight-lipped about crossover details except for those willing to sign a non-disclosure agreement. Unfortunately, I was not able to attend one of these original demon-

strations but was looking forward to possibly reviewing a loudspeaker using the DiAural technology in the future. That time is now. The subject of this review, the Aperion Audio 512D, incorporates a DiAural crossover.

The crossover, invented by Kimber Kable employee Eric Alexander, is being promoted by a new company formed by Kimber and *WordPerfect* founder Bruce Bastion called DiAural LLC. At the

time of the original demonstrations, some rather extravagant claims were being made about the DiAural crossover and some very-glowing listening reports were being written by the audio press. Claims for the crossover included elimination of so-called "Doppler encoding errors" that arise when a microphone records a wide-band signal with simultaneous high-level low- and high-frequencies signals present, elimination of crossover phase shift, increased speaker sensitivity, lowered distortion, improved on- and off-axis frequency response, lowered production costs through parts reduction, improved driver power handling, and elimination of the "degenerative effects" of capacitors (because they are not used in a DiAural design).

Since the original demonstrations, information is much more freely available because a U.S. patent has been issued on the crossover, and several manufacturers have been licensed to use the technology (including the manufacturer of the speaker of this review). A crossover designed according to DiAural principles uses only inductors and resistors in a capacitor-less series-configured circuit. The technique can be applied equally as well to two-way woofer-tweeter designs or more complex multi-way systems. Typical conventional crossovers, used in the vast majority of loudspeakers, use parallel-configured circuits that include both inductors, capacitors, and sometimes resistors.

The simplest DiAural crossover is a two-way design with the woofer and tweeter wired in series with an inductor in parallel with the tweeter and a resistor in parallel with the woofer. The inductor keeps low-frequencies out of the tweeter by shorting it out at low frequencies, while the resistor levels the impedance of the woofer, thus decreasing its inductive impedance rise at high frequencies. A DiAural crossover is inherently a low-order, gradual-rolloff, 6-dB/octave crossover that requires its drivers to have smooth well-behaved response over a frequency range much wider than the stated crossover points. The woofers' response particularly must rolloff on its own gracefully at higher frequencies because the crossover provides

minimal attenuation at high frequencies when compared to higher-order parallel-style crossover networks.

Aperion Audio (which was formerly named Edge Audio) is a DiAural licensee and offers the crossover in a small two-way, book-

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### **The Aperion was not a challenge to measure, and the DiAural crossover was gentle in its effects.**

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shelf-sized loudspeaker, the 512D, that uses a 5¼-inch cone woofer-midrange, and 1-inch soft-dome tweeter. In their line, the 512D is a multi-use design, acting as left-right speakers in a stereo setup, or left-center-right and surround speakers in a home theater system. Aperion Audio also offers two reasonably priced powered subwoofers specifically intended for use with the 512Ds, and sell their speakers singly or in several stereo and home theater satellite/sub-woofer combinations. They sell direct only via their web site ([www.aperionaudio.com](http://www.aperionaudio.com)), a very well organized and informative site, check it out) and offer a generous 30-day, no-risk purchase plan on all their products.

The mini-monitor-sized 512D is vented to the rear with a 1-inch diameter by 2¾-inch-long, slightly flared tube. They are small enough so that two of them can be held reasonably easily under one arm. The cabinet's are constructed of generous 1-inch thick HDF (high-density fiberboard) and covered on all six sides with real-wood cherry veneer. As a result, the systems are quite rugged and handsome and can be used both with or without grille, mounted upright or on their side.

The 512D's drivers are sourced from the Danish manufacturer Vifa, which supplies many U.S. high-end speaker companies and are pretty well known. The 512D's crossover is mounted on the inside of larger sidewall, and as expected consists of only inductors and resistors. Hookup is via a single set of non-bi-wireable, five-way, double-banana jacks on the rear. The DiAural crossover inherently cannot be bi-wired because of its series configuration.

## **Measurements**

I made various measurements of the 512D's with my TEF analyzer (an instrument originally manufactured by Crown, and now made by GoldLine, which is capable of making quasi-anechoic measurements in live rooms), including on- and off-axis frequency responses, right-left response matching, input impedance, and response effects of its grille, etc. Outside ground-plane curves were run to accurately determine the response below 100 Hz.

The 512D's one-meter, 2.83 V rms on-axis frequency response was reasonably smooth and fit a tight window of about +/- 2 dB from 90 Hz to 20 kHz. Most response variation occurred in the crossover region between 1 kHz and 6 kHz. Relative to the 1-kHz output level, the bass response was down 3 dB at 85 Hz, 6 dB at 70 Hz, and 9 dB at 55 Hz. At lower frequencies the response rolled off more rapidly. In a typical room, the system will exhibit more bass due to room gain and the additive effect of room boundaries. Its sensitivity measured 83 dB when averaged between 250 Hz and 4 kHz, somewhat lower than larger systems but on par with similarly sized systems. Referenced to its tweeter arrival time, its phase response was smoothly varying and better than most two-way systems because it exhibited significantly less phase rotation.

Out to 30 degrees off-axis horizontally, the frequency response was quite uniform all the way to 14 kHz. At 45-degrees off axis, its high-frequency response rolled off sooner — at about 8 kHz. Out to 20 degrees, its vertical off-axis frequency response exhibited a lot of variability in the crossover range from 1.5 kHz to 8 kHz. Fortunately, the above-axis responses were significantly better than the below responses. The "up" responses (tweeter side), although exhibiting significant variability from one 5-degree increment off-axis to the next, did fit a fairly compact envelope of about 5 dB. This means that although each individual off-axis curve was not as flat as it could be, on the average, its above-axis vertical response was quite uniform.

I investigated the system's acoustic crossover characteristics by

taking close-miked, near-field response measurements of the woofer and tweeter respectively, and of the total on-axis response with the tweeter wired in reverse polarity. This allowed me to access the individual driver's output contribution to the total acoustic output. Comparing the normal polarity and reverse polarity responses indicates the relative phase relationships between the woofer's and tweeter's acoustic outputs. Ideally, to minimize lobing error, the woofer and tweeter should be closely in-phase through the crossover region. When wired in reverse polarity, a large deep null should be evident at crossover if the drivers are strongly in-phase when wired normally.

The curves revealed that the 512D's crossover region was very broad and covered nearly a three octave range from 1 kHz to 7 kHz. This was primarily due to the woofer's rather-slow 6-dB per octave rolloff in the same range, coupled with a 4-dB peak at 5.5 kHz in its rolled-off response. The tweeter's response was roughly flat above 2 kHz, but rolled-off rapidly at lower frequencies. The outputs of the woofer and tweeter were equal at about 1.8 kHz, the measured crossover point. When connected in reverse polarity, the system's on-axis response exhibits a broad depression in the response of about 6 to 8 dB extending from about 1.5 kHz to 6 kHz. This indicates that the woofer and tweeter are not solidly in-phase but are within about 30 to 40 degrees of being in phase in the crossover region, which is not too bad.

When swept with a high-level sine wave, both driver's and cabinet were quite clean and vibration free, and the woofer exhibited a strong excursion reduction at 63 Hz, the tuned frequency of its vented-box. The woofer exhibited a generous 0.35-inch peak-to-peak fairly-clean excursion capability which when increased to 0.45-inch excursion generated quite audible distortion. Right-left response matching was good, being within a close 1 dB of each other. The grille did cause significant response aberrations with a 2-dB peak at 2.5 kHz and a sharp dip of about 7 dB at 5 kHz.

Between 20 Hz and 20 kHz, the impedance of the 512D was quite well-behaved, ranging from a low of 3.6 ohms at 55 Hz to a high of 13

ohms at 20 kHz. Below 200 Hz, the impedance exhibited the usual "two peaks surrounding a dip" characteristic of a vented box, but with very modest, low-Q peaks only rising to about 6 ohms. Above 300 Hz, the impedance smoothly increased with frequency, reaching a level of 13 ohms at 20 kHz. Absent was the usual high and broad resonant peak in the 2- to 4-kHz range typical of other two-way systems. The impedance phase varied smoothly and did not exhibit any extreme values over the whole measured range. Although its impedance drops slightly below 4 ohms, the 512D should be a easy load for any amplifier and typical cables because of its smoothly varying impedance and low-phase angles.

### Listening

For listening, I located the 512Ds in my room about two feet from the rear wall and three feet from the side walls on stands which raised their tweeters to ear level as I sat on my listening couch. I listened to them singly with and without a subwoofer, and along side my much-more expensive B&W 801 Matrix Series III reference speakers (about \$6,000 per pair). The B&Ws (with a sensitivity of about 86 to 87 dB) had to be attenuated some 2 to 4 dB to make their loudness roughly the same as the Edge Audio speakers.

The 512Ds are packed individually using silk-like velour cloth bags with draw strings, a nice touch! Their appearance when unpacked and setup was the equal of any small two-way I have seen, quite handsome. The 512Ds were driven by a Kimber-supplied pair of 4VS 3-meter long, stranded speaker cable (these cables are quite flexible and easy to hook up using the WBT bananas that can be tightened).

How did they compare sonically to the B&Ws? Not bad at all! The voicing of the 512Ds was quite similar to the B&Ws with a well-balanced and smooth overall sound coupled with an extended high-frequency response. Although the bass response of the 512Ds rolls off rapidly below 60 Hz, its bass to mid/upper-frequency balance was excellent. On program material with minimal energy below 60 Hz, the 512Ds sounded quite similar to the B&Ws with ample bass to balance the mid and high frequencies. They were not able to play as loud or deep as the B&Ws, of course, but could be played sufficiently loud to elicit "Turn that thing down!" comments from my spouse. When high-passed at 80 Hz and operated with subwoofer, they could play sufficiently loud to do justice to ZZ-Top, Kid Rock, or Brooks and Dunn!

The 512Ds' mid- and upper-frequency smoothness was not the

## NOTES

**Edge Audio 512D Loudspeaker**, \$189.00 each; also available in real cherry wood veneer. Aperion Audio, 15615 SW 74th, Suite 100, Tigard, OR 97224 USA, 503/598-8815, [www.edgeaudio.com](http://www.edgeaudio.com)

### Specifications

Rated Frequency Response: 60 Hz to 20 kHz,  $\pm 3$  dB.

Sensitivity: Not given.

Rated Impedance: 8 ohms.

Recommended Amplifier Power: 50 to 150 Watts.

Dimensions: 11 inches high x 6 inches wide x  $6\frac{3}{4}$  inches deep (27.9 cm x 17.1 cm x 17.1 cm).

Weight: 12 lbs. (5.5 kg) each.

Type: Two-way, mini-monitor bookshelf, vented-box system.

Drivers: 5[1/4]-in. cone woofer-midrange, and 1-in. soft dome tweeter.

Crossover Type: Series-configured without capacitors (a patented crossover type called "DiAural" by its inventors and covered by U.S. Patent Number 6,115,475 issued Sept. 5, 2000, invented by Eric Alexander and assigned to DiAural L.L.C. of Ogden, Utah.).

Crossover Frequency: Not given.

equal of the B&Ws (which are exemplary). Some tonality was evident on pink noise, whereas the B&Ws were quite neutral. When I did my pink noise "stand-up, sit-down" test, the Edge systems did exhibit noticeable mid and upper tonal changes between the two positions. In addition, while moving from sitting to standing or vice versa, a mid to upper frequency phasiness or swishyness was exhibited. This was presumably due to minor changes in mid- and upper-frequency response at the different listening heights. I did not find this effect to be noticeable on music, however.

Reproduction of male speaking voice was quite natural, and solo female singing voice was reproduced very cleanly without harshness. Loud Latin percussion was expressive, clean, and realistic, especially the wood block and shaker sounds.

The system could be overloaded when the program material contained high-levels of low bass below 50 Hz. It overloaded quite gracefully however, and the system gave a good account of itself bass-wise

when operated below this level. Proper high-pass filtering and its use with a good subwoofer completely eliminated the bass overloading.

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**How much does this patented crossover design contribute? Let me just say Aperion's 512 is a winner.**

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This is exactly how Aperion Audio sells the 512Ds, in satellite/subwoofer combinations. Don't get me wrong, however, the 512Ds operated very well by themselves at low to moderate listening levels on all but the very most bass-heavy program material.

Because of its similarity in voicing to the B&W systems, it was often hard to tell the difference between the systems in casual listening when listening to material with minimal low bass such as classical baroque material such as the *Goldberg Variations* by J.S. Bach arranged for strings, continuo, and harpsichord (Dorian xCD-9028, a favorite of mine).

**Summary**

All in all, the Aperion Audio 512Ds performed quite well in my measurements and listening evaluations, particularly considering their low price. They can easily be mistaken for much higher priced, small high-end systems, both sonically and visually. Operated without subwoofer, they would make an excellent choice for a dorm or small-room system. With the addition of a subwoofer, they can compete with much larger and expensive systems.

How much did the DiAural crossover have to do with how the systems performed? I'm not going to say. I'll let the measurement and listening results speak for themselves. Every speaker designer has his own set of design preferences that go into a final product when it comes to design details such as crossover style, box type, driver selection, appearance, cost, etc. No two designers will agree on all these issues. I believe it's the final product that should be judged on its own merits. According to my evaluation, I do know that the 512Ds are winners in my book.



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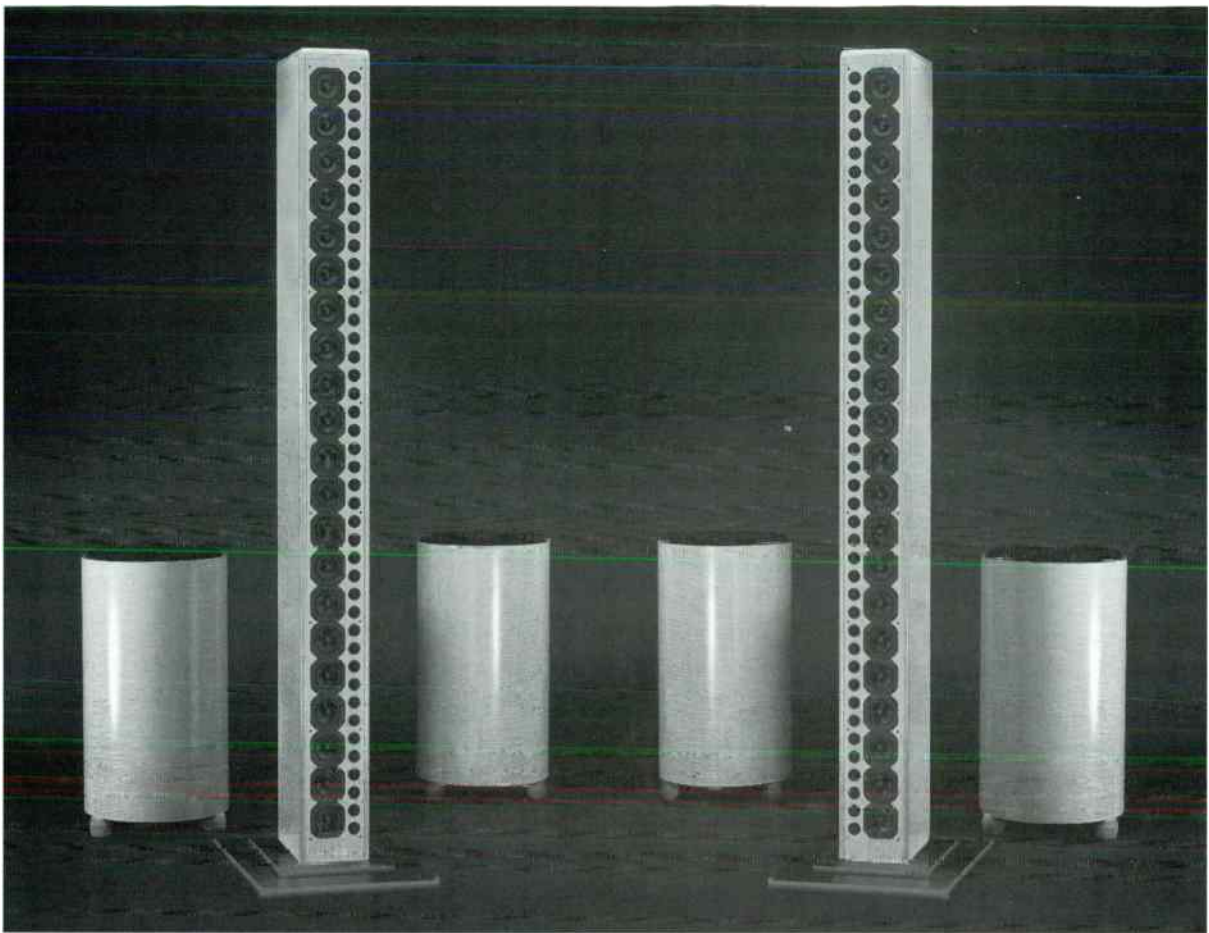
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# *Nearfield Acoustics PipeDreams Reference 21 Loudspeaker System*

Ross Wagner

[rosswagner@usa.net](mailto:rosswagner@usa.net)

**T**HE PIPEDREAMS "Reference 21" speaker system is the top-of-the-line offering from a brash, three-year-old Tennessee manufacturer, Nearfield Acoustics, whose mission is to build the world's best speaker system, and topple pretenders into a scramble for the runner-up position.

I will describe this remarkable system in detail and then reveal how the PipeDreams, finely tuned, have spawned a provocative speculation relating to the set-up of a bi-amped reference audio system. There will be many nay-sayers, and there may even ensue the kind of establishment-snit evoked by Galileo when he dropped two unequal weights from the top of the leaning tower (but I am getting ahead of myself).

The pipe dream of PipeDreams had its genesis at Melos Audio more than 10 years ago. And, not surprisingly, the concept for this all-out line-source design sprang from the active and creative mind of Mark Porzilli. When not designing electronics, or exploring the wilds of Alaska (he did, often), Porzilli built several PipeDreams prototypes using a multitude of two-inch Sawa-fuji planar drivers (meant for use in cars) coupled with ribbon tweeters from Pioneer. The crossovers were rough; cabinetry was rougher.

I recall my first audition of one of these prototype systems at Mark's studio apartment in New Jersey. The speakers, which had just been assembled, were spaced barely four feet apart, and positioned so far into

the room, that there was barely enough space for a listener or two. This, truly, was a "nearfield" set-up, with the greater part of the 30-foot room behind the speaker. The woofers were back there somewhere, along with the bed, the kitchen table and a pair of caged rabbits, munching on carrots, indifferent to the event at hand.

Mark fired up the system with Stravinsky's "Firebird." The gain was set high, for dramatic effect, I guess. With the first bass drum hit, clouds of white polyfill exploded from the ports of the woofers. (In his haste to complete the project, Mark had forgotten to use screens to block the ports.) Without a thought of pausing to make the repair, Mark cranked the gain to higher and high-

er levels, and more and more of the white stuff flew from the open ports, piling up on the floor. All the while Mark was dancing about, arms waving, urging the musicians onward. At the climax, the last bass drum hit nearly emptied the woofer cavities. We were left marooned in our man-made snowfield, laughing uncontrollably.

Those heady days were to end as financial woes swept over Mark's enterprise. Enter Craig Oxford, on a white horse, to carry the project forward. He founded Nearfield Acoustics with a determination to refine and perfect Porzilli's design, and bring it to market. Thus was born the PipeDreams system as we know it today. We will review the latest production model.

Now, I invite you to regard the PipeDreams system. Gape at the front columns, Kubrick-like monoliths (this is the year 2001, eh?) standing over eight feet tall, and sporting (count 'em) 21 four-inch mid-range drivers and 42 tweeters, arranged as a line source, for each channel.

Then examine the quartet of *Depth Charge* woofer cylinders, each with a pair of 18-inch drivers in push-pull configuration. One cannot help but be intimidated. (It is possible, using a high-speed Cray computer, to tote up the number of drivers: 134, I believe, but who is counting?)

These most recent production models sport a three-way switch at the rear of each column, allowing tweeter level adjustment over a 1-dB range (a helpful room-tuning feature in a system as dynamic and revealing as this one where 0.5-dB increments are easily discerned). A sophisticated and effective phase-adjustable stand-alone electronic crossover completes the system. Installation and set-up by factory personnel are included in the \$70,000 price. Add a thousand or so if your taste runs to exotic veneers unobtainable except by dispatching mercenaries into jungle war zones for that oh-so-special tree. As world-class speakers go, it is possible to spend twice that amount, but for the purposes of this review we will resist the temptation to treat this as a "budget system."

The PipeDreams, packaged up in some seven crates and weighing

1700 pounds, were delivered a week late by Delta's Gold Label service just before Thanksgiving. Two obviously overwhelmed delivery guys were at the front door. "Got any forklifts?" they asked hopefully. I looked around the front hall, the dining room, the kitchen. "That's a

the necessary tools to effect the installation. Three hours later, the job was complete.

One critical element of the system was missing, however. The bottom plates of the double-decker front column base plate assembly were not included in the shipment.

No problem, we agreed — we'll use just the smaller plates for the time being. (I was to learn much later how important the larger plates were to the sound of the PipeDreams system.)

In order to slide the 300-pound stele-like front columns across the polished wood floor of my 17- by 26- by 9-foot listening room, we affixed a 1/8-inch thick layer of felt to the bottom of the single base plates. That worked beautifully. The four-foot high woofers (each weighing 130 pounds) could be easily walked about using their three wooden feet as pivots. Using the continuously adjustable electronic phase-adjustment feature of the George Bischoff/Mark Porzilli-designed crossover, and adding a pair of Melos 400-watt HAT1000's (now re-manufactured by Melos Audio Restoration Inc. into a superb-sounding all-tube design promising bullet-proof reliability), Wadia 270 transport, Wadia 27ix DAC and a stereo bass amp that would be more at home at your nearby rave dance club, we had music.

So the design, as originally conceived by Mark Porzilli, and developed by Craig Oxford and George Bischoff of Nearfield Acoustics of

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## The PipeDreams are not lightweights — the seven-crate shipment weighed 1,700 pounds.

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negative," I said. Forlornly, they turned towards their truck to search for an alternative. One hand truck was the bounty. I found another in our garage, and there followed a succession of trips up the 75-foot front walk which would be the envy of any Barnum and Bailey clown act. The crates, some weighing upwards of 400 pounds, teetered crazily back and forth as the two men gamely balanced the consignment between the narrow lips of the hand trucks. By now it was dark, and a wet drizzle was beginning to freeze on the blue stone of the walk. Still the men carried on in a tradition more akin to an Everest climb than a routine delivery of goods. Two hours later their truck was empty and our foyer was full.

George Bischoff, Nearfield's expert in the eastern U.S., along with Mark Moschella of Westfield, N.J.'s SoundStage, a nearby PipeDreams dealer, showed up with

## NOTES

**Nearfield Acoustics PipeDreams Reference 21 Speaker System, \$70,000.00.** Nearfield Acoustics, 205 Powell Pl., Brentwood, TN 37027; phone 615/843-7473, fax 615/369-0719, website [www.nearfieldacoustics.com](http://www.nearfieldacoustics.com), e-mail [joxford@nearfieldacoustics.com](mailto:joxford@nearfieldacoustics.com).

### Associated Equipment

Versa Dynamic 2.3 Turntable, Lyra Parnassus cartridge (fully clothed), Wadia 270 Transport, Wadia 27ix DAC, Melos MA-333R Gold Reference preamp, Melos Audio Restoration HAT-1000 all-tube triode monoblock amps, Nordost SPM Reference speaker wire with Quattro Fil interconnects, Monster Sigma speaker wire and interconnects, Discovery interconnects, Black Diamond Racing Cones, AudioPrism ISO-Bearings, MIT Z-Series power conditioners (Stabilizer, Center and Isolator), 18-inch square patio blocks from Home Depot (\$5.00 each).



Nashville, Tenn., builds on a collection of classic principles of line-source-array speaker design, executes them to the nines adding a host of clever proprietary design elements to deal with the bugaboo of nodal aberrations, adds ultra-solid construction and bracing throughout, and launches Nearfield acoustics toward the Holy Grail of high-end audio.

Aside from the ability of a properly executed line-source to generate a convincing stage of sound, Pipe Dreams owe much of their ability to effortlessly produce awesome sound levels without apparent distortion, to the multitude of drivers, none of which need work very hard to create very clean, very high sound levels. Driver excursion is nearly nil, helping to keep distortion at bay, and speeding transients to your ears. (Not unexpectedly, break-in time is extended. The drivers continue to improve for months.)

Crossover points are neatly removed from the most critical listening areas by specifically designing the midrange drivers to operate from 65 to 5,500 Hz, a range of over six octaves.

Clearly this system is world-class in two vital areas — imaging and sound-stage. Many competing systems offer precise imaging and a wide sound stage, coupled with good depth and layering. Yet the PipeDreams reproduce musical instruments and voices with a flesh-and-blood reality that contrasts with the pop-up two-dimensional images of so much of the competition. Not only do the instruments and voices seem to be organic three-dimensional elements, but the space between them is filled with an airy plasma that suggests life itself.

This remarkable effect seems to survive even when wires and components are swapped and the system is fiddled with in ways that approach abuse. (However, do not expect to judge the PipeDreams by listening to the columns without the woofers. The superlative staging of the PipeDreams is not optimized until the woofers and columns are fully deployed and phase-adjusted.)

Furthermore, the excellent stage and imaging of the PipeDreams are *not* limited to a seated, centered “sweet spot.” Stand if you like. Or

plop yourself down almost anywhere in the area forward of the speakers and observe the imaging. It’s downright eerie, for example, to sit to the right of the right-most column and sense the entire width of the stage, presented as though you were seated on the right side of the hall. Not only is the perspective accurately presented, but one is able to peek into spaces behind

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## Instruments and voices seem to be organic three-dimensional elements.

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instruments not “visible” from the sweet spot. We experience an audio hologram, but unlike a hologram, the lifelike qualities of the instruments and voices, referred to earlier, are preserved. (I confess to often choosing a seat to one side, just for the listening pleasure.) Invite your friends; everyone can enjoy this speaker system at the same time. Oh, and did I mention that the slender profiles of the Pipes contribute to their dropping out visually, a feat they match in the audio realm as well. Properly set-up, there is a total disconnect between the physical presence of the Pipes and the sonic picture they convey. What a treat!

Subtleties of imaging surely vary from room to room and are dependent on the electronics and set-up involved. I was particularly impressed by the installation at the SoundStage showroom. There, a VAC (Valve Amplification Company) Signature 70/70 dual mono amp produced some of the best imaging I’ve heard from the Pipes. Proper instrument size was maintained throughout.

PipeDreams tend to place the music behind the front columns with exceptional depth, width and height. Those expecting the speakers to propel Brittany Spears forward to perform a lap dance while throbbing to “Oops, I Did it Again,” will be frustrated.

### Back To Base-ics

So far, so good. But there is more to assess than imaging and stage. How do the “Pipes” rate when it comes to transient response, overall

balance, dynamics and such? To be forthright, the Pipes were unexpectedly dark at first. Let ‘em break in, I thought. Two weeks went by. Not much improvement. I called George Bischoff. He reminded me to reserve judgment until the larger base elements were in place. (Remember, the larger slabs that form the bottom of the base unit assembly did not arrive with the speakers.) “OK,” I said, but I was still skeptical about the benefit of the extra mass in the base making much difference.

The lower base units arrived, 70-pound aluminum slabs finished in a black lacquer that would do justice to a Rolls-Royce. They were bolted forthwith to the smaller base elements already attached to the front columns. The extra mass did improve the sound. Yet, after several days of listening, I was not entirely satisfied. Again, I called George. He urged me to use the convenient screw-down spikes that are provided with the large base elements, instead of allowing the columns to rest on the felt pad. To keep the spikes from infiltrating the recently refinished oak flooring, we used felt-backed quarters (the new Delaware coins work best?).

Suddenly it was all there. Dynamics — top to bottom continuity — transients to startle even the most jaded audiophile — everything from the plunk of the most delicate string to the jolting snap of a world-class drummer’s rim shot. As impressive as the low end of this system can be in my listening room, it was out-done in this respect by the Wadia people at the 2001 Las Vegas CES. They used Jeff Rowland’s Model 12 amps, top and bottom, to achieve the best slam and low-end extension I’ve heard from the Pipes.

For sheer drama, latch onto “Poem of Chinese Drums” (Naxos), or get Burmester Demo Disk #3 with the drums and a lot of other good stuff. Strap yourself in, crank up the gain and prepare for an astounding audio experience. The impact, the tautness, and the attack of the drums energizes the entire room and house. To keep our china cabinet from self-destructing, the cabinet must rest on isolation blocks, and a dense container of Dap must be jammed between it

and the wall. With those improvisations in place, one can feel the floor, the room and even the stout wooden framework of the sofa pulse in sympathy with the percussion. I've experienced this sensation before, at a *live* concert of Baba Olatungi's group, augmented by eighty (that's 80!) accomplished students of the great Baba, each armed with a drum. In the wooden-floored hall at the summer home of Omega Institute in Rhinebeck, New York, the sound of nearly 90 drums almost certainly was picked up by seismometers in Murmansk.

But make no mistake, PipeDreams are more than a slam-bang system meant to impress your friends. A great strength of the PipeDreams system is its ability to reproduce the dynamics of micro-detail so essential to the enjoyment of any good recording. I am now listening to *Music of the Spanish Renaissance* (Naxos 8.550614). Voice (Shirley Rumsey), vihuelas, lute and Renaissance guitar are reproduced exquisitely, with the airy decay of each plucked string giving one an aural picture of Saint Andrew's Church in Toddington, Gloucester-shire where it was recorded.

At the noisy end of the sound spectrum, listen to "The Coal Train/Stimela" from Hugh Masekela's *Hope* CD. (Triloka Records TR8023-2 or cut #9 on Burmester CD III). The thunderous depiction of the steam engine is grist for the Pipe Dreams mill. It helps that the Melos Audio Restoration amps have the *gewalt* to get us through this segment without clipping. The result on the PipeDreams is a room-shaking, but beautifully defined presentation *without* diminishment of the stage depth, width or height. On this same cut, only moments later, the Melos Audio Restoration / PipeDreams combination reveals the muted spoken voices of distant musicians. Each of these voices is positioned laterally as well as front-to-back on the stage. Such remarkable subtlety contrasts with the *sturm und drang* of the train — all on the same CD, within seconds of each other. The PipeDreams breezing through it without a whimper. Wow!

May I digress for a moment? Reviews of audio equipment, this

one included, use live music as the ultimate reference. But let's be honest — **audio is as much about sound** as it is about music. (You heard it in this confessional first.) Lately, in conversations with Arnie Balgalvis, my fellow reviewer and club member, we have privately admitted to each other that some of the pleasure of this hobby comes out of the vis-

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### **In sum, the Nearfield PipeDreams are nothing short of stunning.**

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ceral pleasure of sound. In fact, I overheard a young woman recently at our local July 4 fireworks display, complain that the booms were not loud enough. "I want to feel them in my chest," she demanded. And so it is with audio systems. Admit it or not, most of us get a rush from sonics — pure, clean sound with well-defined and generous fundamentals.

I continue to tinker with the PipeDreams system. The 95-dB sensitivity of the columns telegraph even the most subtle system changes. You'll hear the rich and slightly forward qualities of the popular Harmonic Technology's speaker cable and interconnects. You'll notice the somewhat leaner but considerably more dynamic, transparent and detailed qualities of Nordost's SPM Reference speaker cable when paired with their Quattro Fil interconnects.

You'll especially notice PipeDreams' ability to define the upper bass areas produced by the midrange drivers of the front columns (down to 65 Hz), essential to producing the transient smack of all manner and sort of lower bass material. (I can almost hear, *in my mind's ear only*, the rich, spacious dynamics of Nordost's new Valhalla product. If only I could get my hands on that stuff.) Want to play with Tip-Toes; differences will be immediately apparent. If you want to mess with power cords and power-conditioning equipment, you'll quickly pick the best (MIT's "Z" system gear now leading the pack). And, of course, deficiencies among interconnects, amps, transports, DACs, etc. are revealed all too clearly for the comfort of many manufacturers.

Now, only days from going to press, I am lucky to be able to borrow a pair of Rowland Model 12 monoblocks, the same amp mentioned earlier as being used to great advantage in the Wadia room at CES. Driving the front columns, they performed with aplomb. However, when they were installed to drive the woofers, assigning the Melos Audio Restoration HAT 1000s to drive the columns, I experienced an epiphany. For months, the PipeDreams have been hinting at greatness. Yet, I couldn't get all of their virtues in play at the same time. Suddenly, like the moon passing to exactly block the sun while primitives (and the sophisticated) stare in awe, I experienced a celestial experience and for the first time realized that a bass amp, in a world-class bi-amp system, plays a much more important role than previously thought. (I can almost see teeth clench as my next paragraph is read.)

I am convinced that, in a bi-amped system with taut woofers and a precise physical relationship set between the elements of the system, the effects of the woofer amp can sometimes be perceived *octaves above the bass*. To date, I have tried four bass amps, and between them, I can hear differences in the character of soprano voices, the pluck of the string of a guitar, the air around instruments. Furthermore, these differences are *not* subtle. I am coming to believe that it is necessary to exploit the symbiotic relationship amps have with speakers since they may, collectively, affect the sound *over an important part of the audio spectrum*. Gone are the days of throwing a clumsy muscle-amp into the bass area. The bass amp, in the words of Muhammad Ali, must "float like a butterfly and sting like a bee." The bass amp must produce generous amounts of current *and* it must have finesse.

Thus far, several persons whose ears I trust, and who pooh-poohed this notion when I first presented it to them, have come by to hear it for themselves. No dissenters. All were baffled, and groped for explanations. What business does a bass amplifier, most of whose energy is confined well below 100 Hertz by an ever-vigilant crossover, have in profoundly influencing the charac-

ter of frequencies two or three octaves higher?

George Bischoff offers what might be part of an explanation, drawn from his experience as a recording engineer. He suggests that micro-detail from the bass area is crucial to the proper reproduction of ambient information of the recording venue. The taut PipeDreams woofers, he contends, can reproduce this micro-detail in the bass, and thereby contribute to the quality. I describe. George's comments seem apt as far as they go, but may not, I feel, sufficiently address the apparent effect of the woofer amp on these important frequencies. In conversations with friend Arnie, another explanation emerged: Given the ability of the PipeDream's "depth charges" to reproduce micro-detail in the bass area, it is reasonable to assume that they might also do a good job of reproducing all manner and form of distortion (harmonic, intermodulation, phase and otherwise) from the bass amplifier as well. The harmonics of these distortions, however low their level, could extend to these midrange frequencies and corrupt and color the sonic character of the system in this very important area. If this distortion is harmonic in nature, then it will be precisely where voices are pitched and the ear extremely sensitive. The result will be a profound change in the intrinsic sonic character of the system.

Two interesting explanations, but my hunch is that more will be said on the subject. Speculation and constructive comments from our readers are welcome.

In any case, it is likely that a buyer of PipeDreams will need to consider his choice of both amplifiers carefully if he wishes to optimize the system. (And remember to readjust phase when you change

amps.) Yeah, I can hear the groans out there as you realize that the old boat anchor bass amp you have in the closet may not do the job. Oh, what the hell, do you run your Ferrari on Exxon regular?

Do I have some reservations? Yes.

The system would be more user-friendly if the crossover were easier to set up, and if it would accommodate both balanced and single-ended interconnects. (Mod's in the works, I understand.) Additionally, because recording engineers have widely varying ideas of what a correct low-end level should be, I would welcome a finely-calibrated remote control for woofer level (with digital read-out, if possible, so I could make appropriate notations on each of my favorite CDs).

And, hey guys, an owner's manual would be appreciated, too, including suggestions for various speaker configurations, circuit diagrams and step-by-step instruction for crossover phasing (leather binding not necessary). My early production woofers evinced a problem with the veneer. I am assured by the manufacturer that a production change has addressed that glitch.

So, in sum, where does that leave us? As of now, the PipeDreams are nothing short of stunning, both in terms of appearance and sonics. With a careful selection of the best of present-day components and accessories, they can be superb.

As I become more and more aware of the excellence of the system, I can hear the Pipes calling out to the designers of electronics, digital, analog, or whatever. "Catch up, catch up," they say.

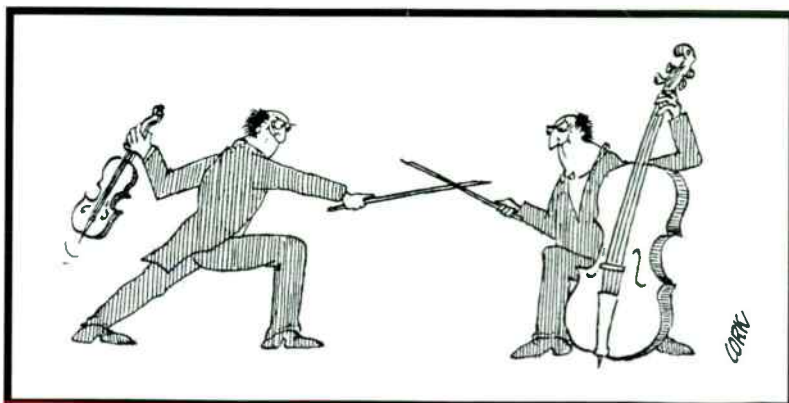
And when the rest of the industry produces better and better components, the Pipes will be there to show us their glory.

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### Let's Share

Aimster, Audiogalaxy, Gnutella, SearShare, LiveWire, iMesh, Open Nap Network, Napigator Software, Kazza-MusicCity, Tracker! Tracker!, Hot Wire!, etc. Got any for me?





## Photos Never Lie!

### The wonderful guards ...

at the *Stereophile Home Entertainment Show* at the New York Hilton even protected an "outside" magazine and its personnel when we braved the show floors on Mother's Day weekend.

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*This month, we've no winner of the Back Page prize of \$25.00 or a one-year subscription because this photo was taken by the editor. Let us publish your photo and it will earn you \$25.00 or a one-year subscription.*

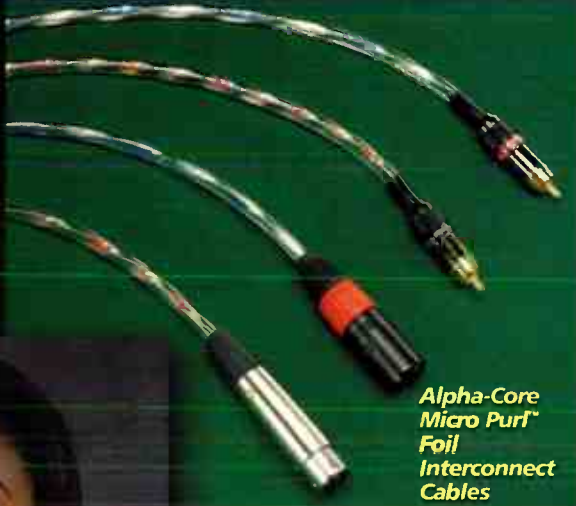
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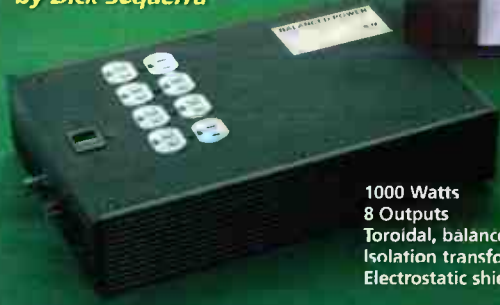
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Issue 33 November/December 2000



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