TUBES for EVERYMAN

AUDIO RESEARCH’S VS110 & SP16L

ESOTERIC UNIVERSAL DISC PLAYER

ROSEANNE CASH INTERVIEW

AMPLIFIERS:
Phono
Anni
Solid
Inter
Whether it's music you love or the arts, sports or the theater, the encore system has what it takes to reproduce the live experience faithfully. For over 20 years Energy's engineering history has taught us how to obtain audiophile quality sound from smaller speaker designs. Speakers you can live with in your home, they integrate with your lifestyle, not detract from it. Speaking of style, you won't compromise sound quality for style, and neither do we. The encore has won awards the world over for its accurate and faithful reproduction of music and home theater experiences, as well as its innovative industrial design.

Now the encore system is available in the sleek new Maple Silver finish, as well as the gorgeous Burnished Ebony High Gloss, further enhancing your style choices. Raise your performance to a new level, by visiting the nearest authorized Energy Speaker Systems retailer, and auditioning the encore system... today!
At the heart of truth lies a natural purity. Spawned from a passion for truth, the new Contour S 3.4 fuses the most advanced driver technology - incorporating the new Esotec tweeter and two new 17cm MSP mid/woofers, with a highly advanced crossover and innovative new baffle construction - with Dynaudio's legendary Danish hand-craftsmanship. The result is an elegant loudspeaker delivering an unmatched level of quality that reproduces music in whole, bringing to life the essential nature of sound, pure and true. The heart of truth: The Contour S 3.4
Perhaps it's the air in San Francisco, or more likely the fact that exhibitors and attendees were equally upbeat, but I came back from Home Entertainment 2003, held at the grand old Westin-St. Francis Hotel days before I write this month's column, jazzed. I was one of 15,123 consumer, international press, and trade attendees, according to the official stars, and we were treated to more than 100 exhibit rooms showing and demonstrating 225 brands of audio and home-theater gear. Stereophile's full report will appear in our September issue.

As well as the gear, Showgoers enjoyed great live music from pianist Robert Silverman, violinist Arturo Delmoni—the two joined forces for an impromptu but thrilling performance of Beethoven's "Kreutzer" sonata on Sunday morning—the Kevin Jones Band, Billy Bacon & the Forbidden Pigs, Ecstasy in Numbers, Dressed for Radio, the Hacienda Boys, Noah Wonthrson and Wild Child Butler, the Carl Saunders Sextet, Josh Jones, Free Peoples, Melora Hardin, and the Daniel Glass Trio, culminating in a great set from guitarist-songwriter Richard Thompson. My thanks to music editor Robert Baird for helping put the concert program together, and our thanks to all the companies who sponsored the music: Acoustic Sounds, Delphi, Diversity Records, Immedia, John Marks Records, Mountain View Stereo, Very Tall Records, XM Radio, and especially Dolby Labs, who picked up the tab for the Thompson concert.

Dolby is a major proponent of DVD-Audio, and Richard Thompson's classic 1991 Capitol album, Rumor and Sigh, is now available on DVD-A. Of the two hi-rez media, it was SACD that I heard most often in HE2003 demo rooms, but my personal best sound at the Show was provided by two-channel DSD recordings played back on a Tascam DS-D98 HR tape deck. Using widely spaced omniribes with a carefully shaped vertical baffle between them—a technique he calls Iso-Mike—Ray Kimber, of Kimber Kable, had captured student ensembles with astonishing clarity, excellent imaging, superbly natural dynamics, and simply breathtaking fidelity.

Of course, Ray had used small-capulse omnis like the Earthworks and DPA models, which inherently have wide bandwidth, low coloration, and excellent linearity. He also used minimal signal paths and zero signal processing, both of which undoubtedly contributed to the excellence of what I heard in San Francisco. But I have listened to a lot of digital of all flavors over the years, and there was a rightness to the sound of Ray's DSD recordings that is universally absent from CD sound.

I might be wrong, but I don't think it was the DSD encoding itself; I've heard the same quality from high-sample-rate, wide-bit-depth LPCM as used on DVD-A. This improvement over CD seems unmistakable. I fail to understand, therefore, why the "know-everythings" who seem to dominate the Internet newsgroups continue to insist that even 16-bit/44.1kHz PCM encoding is better than is required, and that the reasons for the introductions of SACD and DVD-A have everything to do with the desire of record companies to sell their customers the same back catalog at a higher price and nothing to do with enhanced sound quality.

Yet every time I have done comparisons using my own recordings, the result is always in favor of the hi-rez media, even when I don't know which version is playing. For example, I mention in my review of the Monitor Audio Silver S2 speaker in this issue (p.79) some mixes I had prepared following a trip to South Dakota the week before the Show, during which I had recorded male-voice choir Cantus. Because my Brooklyn neighbor Wes Phillips had been at the sessions, I asked him to come over and take a listen. I played him first some "Red Book" versions of two Cantus songs on CD-R: low-pass-filtered, decimated, dithered, and downsampled to 16/44.1 from the 24/882 masters on my PC's hard drive. "Pretty good," he felt. (He subsequently used one of the songs as test material at HE2003.) But then I played him the original hi-rez WAV file from the PC, using the same DAC at the same playback volume (the two versions of the data had identical peak and mean levels): "Ah, yes. That's the sound I remember from the Washington Pavilion." I also had no problem identifying the two versions by ear, even though my HF hearing cuts off sharply above 16kHz these days. In particular, we independently felt there was a more solid quality to the stereo imaging on the hi-rez version, a more focused sense of the hall acoustic.

This seems a universal reaction to the quality offered by hi-rez digital. In the May 2003 issue of the UK's Hi-Fi News, John Crabbe, discussed a letter from an Alan Mosley suggesting that while Mosley could not associate a cleaner, more extended HF with the higher sampling rate, he did detect a "dramatic improvement" in stereo imaging. John wondered if this was connected with better wavefront reproduction. I think it stems from the higher sample rate, which allows the brain to better localize the phantom images resulting from the information reaching the ears. (Psychoacoustic research indicates that the brain can detect differences in the arrival times of a sound at the two ears smaller than the ear's steady-state bandwidth would suggest is possible.)

There is an alternate explanation for the Cantus comparisons: that the mathematical reduction from 24/882 to 16/44.1 had itself degraded the signal's imaging potential. Because I had only a couple of days between my return from South Dakota and my departure for HE2003, I couldn't prepare the "Red Book" version in real time, using the dCS 972 I use for my mastering. Instead, I used Cool Edit Pro's sample-type change algorithm (set to its highest quality). But I had done such comparisons when I prepared the CD masters for Robert Silverman's complete set of Beethoven piano sonatas three years ago with the dCS 972, and the difference was the same: the higher sample rate gave more solid, more tangible imaging.

As far as I am concerned, the case is proven in favor of the new media. When I can put some of my hi-rez recordings on DVD-Audio or SACD, you'll be able to hear those differences for yourself.

Jackie Augustine

This issue of Stereophile was the last to be published under the aegis of Jackie Augustine, the magazine's Group Publisher since its acquisition by Petersen Publishing in June 1998. Jackie left the company following Home Entertainment 2003, so this seemed an ideal opportunity for me to say Thank You to her, both for reestablishing our Show since she became its administrator in 2000, and for helping me keep Stereophile's editorial ethos intact through the past five years and three corporate acquisitions. I wish her well in her future endeavors.

1 The Iso-Mike recordings are naked rather than nude, to use the metaphor I developed in last month's "As We See It." Two-disc CDJ transcriptions, namely "bleeding chunks" but including Morten Lauridsen's delightful "Bratig" for choir and piano, are available. Send a check made out to Weber State University for any amount—the university's music college's only program—towards Kimber Kable, 2752 South 1900 West, Ogden, UT 84401. Tel: (801) 621-5530, Fax: (801) 627-6980. Web: www.kimbek.com/isoMike.htm.
Features

The Sound of Silence
Returning to a project they began six years ago, Roseanne Cash and husband John Leventhal make the album of her career.

Equipment Reports

48 Audio Research VS110 power amplifier (Robert Deutsch)
48 Audio Research SP16L preamplifier (Robert Deutsch)
59 Mark Levinson No.436 monoblock power amplifier (Larry Greenhill)
69 Esoteric DV-50 CD/SACD/DVD-A/DVD-V player (Paul Bolin)
79 Monitor Audio Silver 2 loudspeaker (John Atkinson)

Follow-Up

76 Classé Omega SACD player (Paul Bolin)
87 Grace Design 901 headphone amplifier (John Atkinson)
89 Meridian 800 DVD-A/DVD-V player (Kalman Rubinson)
89 Meridian 861 surround-sound controller (Kalman Rubinson)
93 PBN Montana SP3 loudspeaker (Barry Willis)
Columns

5 As We See It
John Atkinson returns from Home Entertainment 2003 with thoughts on music and high-resolution audio.

9 Letters
This month readers mourn the loss of David Hafler. They also applaud JA’s technical prowess, KR’s surround-sound column (for the most part), and MF’s love for two-channel, while others continue a somewhat heated (and personal) debate over JA’s product coverage policy. You be the judge!

Get on your Soapbox! Visit www.stereophile.com

13 Industry Update
High-end news, including dealer-promoted seminars, plus: The passing of Dynaco founder David Hafler, music-sales numbers in the UK, news from Digital Audio Disc Corporation/Sony, RIAA 2002 consumer profile, partnership for Macrovision and Microsoft, online music sales, digital radio in the UK, and the Anatone phone stage. Want to know more? Go to the “News Desk” at www.stereophile.com for up-to-the-minute info.

23 Sam’s Space
Sam Tellig gives a listen to the Cary CAD-805 10th Anniversary Edition monoblock power amp.

29 Analog Corner
This month Michael Fremer listens to phono preamps from Hagerman, Acoustic Signature, EAR, EMM Labs, and Conrad-Johnson, along with a turntable from Music Hall, and a platter mat from Living Voices.

37 Listening
Art Dudley cooks up another scheme to entice and enthral readers...a review of the Musical Fidelity A3.2 integrated amplifier, as well as a listen to the new Naim Nait 5.

99 Building a Library
How did a bunch of geeks (and proud of it) from New Jersey become one of rock music’s most influential guitar bands? Matthew Fritch surveys the amazingly long and varied recorded legacy of Yo La Tengo.

105 Record Reviews
August’s “Recording of the Month” is Led Zeppelin’s new three-disc, live collection How the West Was Won. In classical we have two new recordings by Russian conductor Valery Gergiev. In rock/pop there are recent releases by The Dailers, Idlewild, and The Windbreakers. And in jazz a new series from reissue specialists Mosaic Records is spotlighted.

116 Manufacturers’ Comments
This month we hear from Liam Products and Cary Audio Design.

122 Aural Robert
Classical music labels in trouble? Going out of business? Nah, the First Edition label is just gettin’ started.

Information

120 Audio Mart
96 Manufacturers’ Showcase
116 Dealers’ Showcase
119 Advertiser Index

"On the Web"
Join Stereophile webmaster Jon Iverson as he brings you all the latest in industry insights, audiophile viewpoints, and magazine highlights. If it’s not in print it’s on the site, if it’s not on the site...well you get the idea.

Get the latest at www.stereophile.com

Staff

VP/Group Publisher..............Jaequeline Augustine
Publisher......................John B. Coulter
Editor.............................John Atkinson
Music Editor..............Robert Baird
Managing Editor.............Elizabeth Donovan
Production Manager........Pip Tannenbaum
Senior Contributing Editors...Sam Tellig, Martin Colloms, Michael Fremer
Editor At Large..............Art Dudley
Copy Editor....................Richard Lehnert

Contribution Editors (Music)
Paul Bolts, Lonnie Branwell, Brian Damborg, Robert Deutsch, Shumann Dickson, Larry Greenhill, Jon Jeremey, Larry Laskin, Jon Marks, Paul Meanger, Robert J. Reina, Richard J. Rosen, Kalman Robinson, Markos Sauris, Chip Simpson, Peter van Willemen, Barry Willis

Test & Measurement Consultant........Paul Miller

Advertising Sales
Eastern Advertising Manager: Keith Pray
110 Fifth Avenue, 5th Floor • New York, NY 10011
(212) 229-4846 • fax (212) 886-2810
e-mail: keith.pray@PRIMEDIAmag.com

West of the Mississippi: Brian George
110 Fifth Avenue, 5th Floor • New York, NY 10011
(212) 229-4868 • fax (212) 886-2810
e-mail: brian.george@PRIMEDIAmag.com

Classified Advertising: Lattura Hardy, New York, NY (212) 462-3332 • fax (212) 462-3959

Primedia, Inc.
Chairman (Interim)..................Dean Nelson
CEO (Interim).......................Charles C. McCurdy
Chairman.........................Beverly C. Chell

Primedia Consumer Media & Magazine Group
President & CEO..................David C. Ferre
Chief Operating Officer...........Daniel E. Adams
Executive VP, Consumer Marketing/Circulation............Steve Aron
Sr. VP/Chief Financial Officer.............Linda C. Jenkins
Sr. VP, Mag. Production & Distribution............Kevin Milligan
Sr. VP/CIO, Information Technology..............Debra C. Robinson
Sr. VP, Human Resources..............Kenneth P. Slivton
Vice-President, Consumer Marketing...........David Bull
Vice-President, Business Development............Jaisa de Souza
Vice-President, Direct Response & Classified Advertising............Carolyn N. Evermore
Vice-President, Single Copy Sales..............Thomas L. Frangband
Vice-President, Manufacturing, Budgets & Operations...............Lisa Gallis
Vice-President, e-Commerce..............Saul Pudlin

Primedia High Tech Group
Vice President, Comptroller..................Stephen H. Binder
Vice President, Production...............Michele Illissor

Important Telephone Numbers
Subscriptions: Inquiries, missing issues, address changes, problems, US & Canada..(800) 666-5746 or e-mail: subscriptions@stereophile.com
International (800) 666-5746 or e-mail: subscriptions@stereophile.com
Nonsubscribers: Information, advertising, rates and Policies, business sales.........(212) 886-2809
Editorial: (212) 229-4896
Editorial fax: (212) 886-2809
Online: (800) 666-5746 e-mail: subscriptions@stereophile.com
Accessing the website........www.stereophile.com
Reprints: (888) 237-0955
For more information about PRIMEDIA Specialty Group, Inc., visit our website........www.primediagroup.com

© 2003 by PRIMEDIA Specialty Group, Inc. Printed in the USA
August issue on sale July 22, 2003
“... neutral, natural, convincing ... the Paradigms reveal all.”

- Nicholas Bedworth, The Perfect Vision on the Studio/100

www.paradigm.com
Enlightened
Editor:
David Hafler’s demise is deeply felt around the audiophile community. He probably motivated enthusiasts to join this hobby more than any other manufacturer. I enthusiastically use some of his kits, built by me around 1966…and still working perfectly!

The man was surely enlightened.

Carlos E. Bausá

bausec50@yahoo.com

Informative
Editor:
John Arkinson’s June “As We See It,” about compression and peak limiting, could not have been any more informative or to the point. If the CD layer of hybrid discs is going to be “****ed up” in order to make the SACD layer sound superior, then the value of SACD itself is called into question, along with the integrity of the manufacturer.

The real benefit of our new digital technologies is that CDs could sound quite wonderful if done right. The difference in how well the entire process is executed is a far greater difference than the difference in playback format. It would therefore be a great service to humanity if you could regularly include RMS power measurements and clipped-sample counts in your magazine’s CD reviews.

Dick Moulding
Northampton, MA

Satisfying
Editor:
It was great to read Kal Rubinson’s new multi-channel column (“Music in the Round”) in the June issue. I’m pleased Stereophile is taking a step in the direction of surround sound, and I agree wholeheartedly that, properly done, surround is a better, more satisfying, and more natural listening experience than old-fashioned two-channel stereo. And of course I was pleased to read his enthusiastic comments about our “fantastic” Immersion, the first commercial DVD-Audio release.

Tony Steenland
www.starkland.com

Informed
Editor:
At last, Stereophile publishes an informed column about multi-channel sound! (Kalman Rubinson’s “Music in the Round,” June 2003). I have felt that Stereophile has been hoping that the whole idea of multi-channel sound would just go away — “the magazine is called Stereophile, for crying out loud — if two speakers were good enough for all these years, then there’s gold enough for the future (not to mention the investment required for some of those Class A speakers, difficulty with WAF, etc.)."

Okay, this is tongue-in-check (sort of). But it is true that The Absolute Sound, while not as good a magazine, has been doing a much better job of covering multi-channel and high-resolution digital than Stereophile. I even subscribed, just to keep up. (I have been a subscriber to Stereophile since the early 1980s, so my loyalty is not in question.)

I, like many of you out there, have been hoping for something better than CD for a long time. It is true that the best LPs are better than just about any CD, but LP is a fragile medium with short playing time, and lacks portability. I also have some pretty horrendous-sounding LPs in my collection.

I have been following the SACD vs DVD-Audio debate keenly and was hoping for high-quality universal players to eliminate the format anxiety. However, I had yet to even hear an SACD or DVD-Audio disc until just over a year ago, when I visited one of my local audio shops (SF Stereo, in Mountain View). They had only a few SACD discs on hand, none multi-channel. What I heard was [Miles Davis'] Kind of Blue in both SACD and CD format. While the SACD was marginally superior, I felt there was more difference in the CD version from what I heard at home over the same speakers (B&W 804s), due to the amplification (Musical Fidelity is my own good, but not as good, Bryston), than there was going from two-channel CD to two-channel SACD.

Then I moved to a new home, where I had a home-theater system installed. Just for the heck of it, I added a $200 Sony SACD player (favorably reviewed in TAS) to the system and acquired a few SACDs. The result was amazement at the difference multichannel reproduction makes to the sense of space and of being there. As an example, the SPS Media recording of Mahler’s First Symphony was simply the best, most realistic recording of an orchestra that I’ve ever heard. I know the orchestra, the hall, and the music well, and this recording put me right there in Davies Hall, almost halfway up in the orchestra section.

My home-theater system is good-sounding but not perfect (nor is the room or the speaker placement). I have become a true believer in multichannel sound, and I am focusing most of my new purchases of recordings on multichannel releases. I am also upgrading my audio reference system to multichannel. This is an interesting process, and one full of mystery. Most manufacturers optimize their gear and their marketing for home theater — not a bad choice, but one that leaves doubt for a multichannel audiophile. Also, I cannot understand why manufacturers like dCS and Musical Fidelity are still supporting two-channel SACD. It broke my heart to see that MF’s Tri-Vista SACD player is two-channel.

A colleague of mine who shares similar musical tastes (and owns the dCS gear) has Wilson speakers and loves them. For the heck of it, I went to the Wilson website and was surprised to find a wide range of speakers for both audio and home theater. I sent them an e-mail about optimization of multichannel audio, and they replied with an offer to set me up with a telephone call with Peter McGrath, who is now director of sales for Wilson and, as far as I’m concerned, an audio legend.

Peter and I traded e-mails to schedule a time, and then he spent over an hour with me talking music, multichannel sound, recommendations for gear, etc. He and I both expressed sentiments of amazement and dismay that the broad audiophile community just isn’t getting it yet with respect to multichannel. I am grateful to Wilson for setting this up, and to Peter for spending the time. It was a most interesting conversation.

Letters to the Editor should be sent as faxes or e-mails only (until further notice). Fax: (212) 886-2809. E-mail: STLetters@Primediagms.com. Unless marked otherwise, all letters are assumed to be for possible publication. In the spirit of vigorous debate implied by the First Amendment, and unless we are requested not to, we publish correspondents’ e-mail addresses. Please note: We are unable to answer requests for information on specific products or systems. If you have problems with your subscription, call toll-free (800) 666-3746, or write to Stereophile, P.O. Box 53117, Boulder, CO 80322-3117.

Letters

Stereophile, August 2003
an “OUT OF THIS WORLD” experience

“MOON”... the leading edge in music & film reproduction

INTERNATIONALLY RENOWNED

WWW.SIMAUDIO.COM
Letters

Saddened
Editor:
Upon receiving the June Stereophile, I was deeply saddened to see that your magazine has succumbed to the "dark side," otherwise known as "multichannel sound."

The last bastion of two-channel selling out! Don't you guys get it? We don't want that bastardized music format! Leave surround sound to the video geeks! Death to surround sound! Long live two-channel!

Ken Alter
ronin524@voyager.net

Getting it right?
Editor:
At last, somebody wrote it: "To me, it's more important to get what's in front of me right than worrying about what's to the sides and behind" (Michael Fremer, in his review of Musical Fidelity's Tri-Vista SACD player, Stereophile, May 2003). It is a pleasure to hear Michael support my belief that a two-channel stereo system is the best audio playback system.

Though I have been enjoying music on my two-channel stereo system for 27 years, I did set up a multichannel surround-sound system based on a 933MHz Pentium III PC, a Creative Audigy Platinum EX 24-bit/96kHz soundcard, an Inspire 5.1 Digital 5700 amplifier, and a 5.1 speaker system. My family uses this system for listening to the multichannel music recordings, watching VCD and DVD movies, and playing computer games. As Barry Willis wrote in his May 2003 "As We See It," that is what multichannel audio systems are intended for.

Djyj Santoso
Jakarta, Indonesia
DjyjS@kapco.com

The last refuge?
Editor:
Mr. M. Dekort's political diatribe in the June issue of Stereophile ("Letters," p.9) has no place in a forum dedicated to the audio arts. And may I suggest that if Mr. Dekort wishes to protest against a voting decision made by a country's leadership, he leave us audiophiles alone and begin a crusade for the removal of the Statue of Liberty, which was, after all, a gift from the French.

Robert Schryer
Montreal, Canada
rschryer@newlinepub.com

The editorial depths
Editor:
Congratulations, John Atkinson, for your editorial response to Mr. Dekort's letter in June (p.9). With this response, Stereophile has reached the editorial depths found in the New York Times, or being displayed in our once-great allies such as France, Germany, and Russia.

It's one thing to have an honest disagreement with someone or even an ally, but it is another thing to openly hostile to our nation and to our nation's interest, as France has been recently. Let me remind you, Mr. Atkinson, that even prior to 9/11, our nation has been at war with global terrorists, including those who financially and/or materially aid these terrorists. France, Germany, and Russia have actively supported regimes that assist terrorists. It is fair to point out that the Taliban was financed and provided with arms by the US.

It's no secret how much of the population in these countries feel about America, which may even include manufacturers of stereo equipment, and I for one haven't forgotten this "minor" fact. Yes, Stereophile's editorial decisions may choose to ignore these truths for whatever orientations you may consider as appropriate. As for me, I didn't appreciate the tone of Mr. Atkinson's response to the above letter, and when subscription-renewal time comes around, I will make my appropriate response.

Ron Swatek
ronsw@earthlink.net

For the benefit of those who missed the text that so upset Mr. Swatek, it was my response to M. Dekort's demand that this magazine stop reviewing French components. I will repeat it: "I strongly feel that a magazine's editorial decisions and review conclusions should not be affected by the nationality of the products' manufacturers, any more than they are by their manufacturers' and designers' races, religions, politics, genders, and sexual orientations."

Those who, like Mr. Swatek and Mr. Dekort, feel that such tolerance on my part is out of place in today's political climate, are welcome to read magazines other than Stereophile. If they still harbor a faint desire to subscribe to this magazine, they should note that, as I am of French extraction through my maternal grandmother, my views on audio are undoubtedly suspect. But as for Brian Miller's echoing of Rick Santorum's recent pronouncements on the role of government in America in the next letter, words finally fail me!

--John Atkinson

Two legs good, four legs bad?
Editor:
In his response to M. Dekort's June letter, labeled, strangely, "Animal Farm," John Atkinson stated, "...any more than they are by their manufacturers' and designers' races, religions, politics, genders, and sexual orientations." How does "sexual orientation" fit with the others listed? So if a manufacturer or designer is a known pedophile or, as he labeled it, they like the "animal farm," this doesn't affect Stereophile's decisions?

Sorry, sexual orientation does not belong in the list you compiled.

Brian Miller
Michigan
brianm@earthlink.net

Those little silver bastards
Editor:
Regarding Art Dudley's review of the Linn Klimax preamp and power amp in June, let me get this straight: the need to push Play twice "for the first [CD] you play in any given listening session" is "one more reason to hate the little silver bastards." Is that correct, Art? It's not the fault of the Linn engineers and how they designed the amplifier's sleep mode? It's the fault of those damned CDs? Got it.

Oh, look! There goes logic, sailing out the window once more, flapping its merry, distorted way to mono tube land, where "digital" is just another dirty word that is never mentioned in polite company, and God smiles down on all that groovy vinyl. I suppose Dudley still watches movies at home on VHS tape, too, rather than use those dastardly DVDs. Oh, wait—maybe he doesn't even own a TV, he just basks in the warmth of the glowing tubes of his AM radio. Love that "residual hiss of some tube phono preamps," too. Ha ha ha ha...

Terry Hertzler
terryh@es.com

According to the A.C. Neilson Company, in a report made public in 1991, the average contemporary television viewer will watch 8000 murders and 100,000 acts of violence before completing elementary school (assuming they're capable of completing it at all). It isn't much of a stretch to assume that most of these people will grow up to be prickly, touchy, humorless adults with an exaggerated sense of the importance of their own (typically intolerant) points of view. By contrast, some educators estimate that the average book reader will experience at least 5000 examples of the ironic use of overstatement or exaggeration in literature, and at least 2000 examples of self-deprecation, by the time they graduate from high school, and thus will tend to recognize humor when they see it.

--Art Dudley

The writer we need
Editor:
Congrats on your addition of Art Dudley to Stereophile's writing staff. He is exactly the type of writer that the twisted world of high-end audio journalism needs.

Thad Arts
Lincoln, NE
thad6000@hotmail.com
occasionally you end up surpassing even your own expectations...

The $\text{r} \text{evolutionary new}$

WATT/Puppy System 7
US: PHILADELPHIA

Barry Willis

All of us at Stereophile were saddened to learn of the death of audio pioneer David Hafler on Sunday, May 25, from complications of Parkinson’s disease, at St. Agnes Hospice in Philadelphia. Hafler was 84.

Hafler had an enormous influence on several generations of audiophiles and music-lovers. A graduate in mathematics from the University of Pennsylvania, he served as a communications specialist in the Coast Guard during World War II. In 1950 he founded Acrosound, a transformer manufacturer, and in 1954 he founded Dynaco, a name that became synonymous with good sound and good value. Hafler’s entire career was built on the concept of providing great performance at an affordable price.

His second company’s “Dynakits”—preamps and power amplifiers in kit form—were assembled by hundreds of thousands of enthusiasts in the 1950s and 60s, when audio was primarily an engineering hobby and most good-sounding gear was built by its owners. Several Dynaco products from the period are still regarded as among the best ever made, including the ST-70, a 35Wpc stereo tube amplifier with a highly efficient push-pull output circuit. The ST-70 was the prototype for most similar designs that followed from other companies. The Dynaco Mk.II, a 50W amplifier, was featured in a media display in the Smithsonian’s Museum of American History in Washington in the 1990s. (A detailed history of Dynaco can be seen there.) Hafler sold Dynaco to Tyco in 1968, but stayed on in an advisory capacity until 1971.

In 1972, Hafler founded the David Hafler Co., continuing the tradition of inexpensive kits, but also offering pre-assembled products. The company produced many near-legendary preamps, among them the DH-101 and DH-110, and a line of MOSFET power amps, including the DH-200, DH-220, DH-500, and XL-280. These were among the earliest high-power amps available at accessible prices.

Relatively easy to assemble and elegantly designed, Hafler products spawned a secondary industry in audiophile modifications, including the well-regarded work by Musical Concepts. Always pushing the boundaries of audio reproduction, Hafler did some of the earliest experiments in surround sound and ambience retrieval, including popularizing an ingenious method that extracts the difference signal from a stereo pair by wiring a third speaker across the hot leads.

Hafler sold his namesake company in 1987 to the Rockford Corporation of Tempe, Arizona, where it is still based. The Hafler Company makes audio products primarily for the professional market, where the brand is valued for its excellent sound and reliability.

Hafler’s name is permanently etched into the history of audio — along with those of Saul Marantz, Avery Fisher, and a handful of other pioneers who built the industry in the mid-20th century. David Hafler was inducted into the Audio Hall of Fame in 1984.

Hafler was buried Tuesday, May 27, at Mount Sharon Cemetery in Springfield, Delaware County, Pennsylvania. His wife, Gertrude Schwinger, to whom he was married for more than 60 years, died in 2001. Hafler is survived by daughters Joan Cole and Diane Marinoff, his son, Eric, and by five grandchildren and two great-grandsons.

UNITED KINGDOM

Barry Willis

Retail sales of recorded music in the United Kingdom sagged by an unprecedented 13% in the first three months of 2003, according to figures released May 14 by the British Phonographic Institute (BPI). British music fans spent £216 million ($351 million) in the first quarter of this year, compared to £249 million ($404.6 million) in the same period a year ago. In unit sales, albums in the UK declined only 4.8%, to 44 million, but prices dropped 9.4%. UK album sales totaled £200 million ($324.9 million); singles were off 42%, accounting for only £16.2 million ($26.3 million).

BPI executive chairman Peter Jamieson blamed the drop on file-sharing, CD-burning, commercial piracy, and

Those promoting audio-related seminars, shows, and meetings should fax (do not call) the when, where, and who to (212) 886-2809 at least eight weeks before the month of the event. The deadline for the October 2003 issue is August 1. Mark the fax “Attention Stephen Mejias, Dealer Bulletin Board.” We will fax back a confirmation. If you do not receive confirmation within 24 hours, please fax us again.

Attention All Audio Societies: We don’t have room every month to list societies. If you’d like to have your audio society information posted on the Stereophile web site, e-mail Chris Vogel at Listantiphon@hypermart.net and request an info-pack.

Please note that it is inappropriate for a retailer to promote a new product line in “Calendar” unless this is associated with a seminar or similar event.

PUERTO RICO

• Friday, August 1, 6–9pm, and Saturday, August 2, 4–6pm: Digital Paradise (San Juan) will host Mark O’Brien and Nick Fitzsimmons of Rogue Audio. The open house will feature Rogue Audio’s mighty new Zeus amplifier, as well as other Rogue Audio products. For more information, please contact José at (787) 765-5010.

Stereophile, August 2003
More configurations than Mr. Potato Head."
declining prices. Commercial piracy has reached epidemic proportions in Britain, as it has in the rest of Europe. BPI officials believe that the availability of pirated music has doubled in the past two years.

US: TERRE HAUTE
Michael Fremer
Digital Audio Disc Corporation (DADC)/Sony Disc Manufacturing (SDM) celebrated 20 years of optical disc production with a May 2 get-together attended by top state and local politicians, Sony executives from around the world (including Sony America chief Andrew Lack), and members of the press. The occasion also marked the introduction of the factory's first hybrid SACD production facility.

Established in 1983 by CBS/Sony in an abandoned, leaky vinyl pressing plant, the refurbished factory began CD production in 1985 with a manufacturing capacity of 300,000 discs a month. Appropriately, the first CD plant in America commenced production with Bruce Springsteen's Born in the USA. Today, in addition to CDs, the expanded plant — the world's largest producer of pre-recorded optical media — manufactures CD-ROMs, DVDs, SACDs, and DVD players. On a 24/7 schedule, the factory now produces 850,000 CDs and 1.1 million DVDs each day (Spider-Man was pressed here); the 2.3 billionth CD was scheduled to have rolled off the lines by the time you read this. Single-layer SACD production commenced in 1999.

On a well-supervised tour of the full-service factory, journalists were shown the pre-mastering room, where operators prepare audio, video, and other forms of digitized information for glass mastering, plating, and pressing—a process very similar to LP production. We weren't allowed into the clean-room facilities where that key element in the production chain takes place, but they did let us onto the enormous main floor. There, clattering automated replication machines (proprietary to the plant) stamp pits into polycarbonate, sputter reflective materials onto discs, sandwich the various layers, and silk-screen the colorful label sides of CDs, DVDs, and, now, hybrid SACDs. Except for the bonding of the dual layers, the production of hybrid SACDs looked indistinguishable from how the other discs are made. The difference between this plant and even the most modern LP pressing facility is like the difference between a Japanese bullet train and a steam locomotive.

We got to see the offset facility where the CD booklets and liner notes are printed, and a DVD packaging line: discs are inserted automatically into trays, and all of the other familiar elements in a DVD package are added in fractions of a second. We even saw the machine that slaps that almost-impossible-to-remove white seal on the edge of the package. More than one of us was tempted to take revenge on that punishing robot, though of course it wouldn't be necessary if so many people weren't thieves.

The first discs to roll off the new hybrid SACD assembly line will be Bob Dylan's Planet Waves and Blonde on Blonde.

After the tour, journalists and others were taken to a tent in front of one of the buildings and treated to lunch and speeches from politicians, including Indiana Governor Frank O'Hannon, Terre Haute Mayor Judy Anderson, and DADC/SDM's chairman and CEO, James M. Frische, who has guided the company's phenomenal success from day one. The highlight of the presentation for me was a succinct, impressively informed speech by Michael Mitchell, VP and general manager of the factory, who is responsible for all plant operations related to optical disc production. Mitchell touched on all aspects of the business in his speech, giving some of the less technically and financially informed in the audience a primer that was as entertaining as it was informative. I was told afterwards that Mitchell wrote the speech himself.

Mitchell, who joined Sony in 1984 as part of the plant's startup engineering team, holds eight patents relating to electronic optical disc and production technologies. When, afterward, I congratulated him on his speech, he told me that he was a reader of Stereophile and S&HT, and that in his spare time he played with tube amplifiers. Before joining Sony, Mitchell worked for Martin Marietta Aerospace (now Lockheed Martin), producing flight hardware for the Space Shuttle program.

The first discs to roll off the new hybrid SACD assembly line will be Bob Dylan's Planet Waves and a new edition of his Blonde on Blonde, with both 2- and 5.1-channel mixes replacing the original single-layer stereo SACD.

US: YOUR LOCAL MEDIA STORE
Barry Willis
Rock still rules: The Recording Industry Association of America's (RIAA) 2002 consumer profile shows that rock is still the most popular genre, with 24.7% of consumers claiming it as their favorite. Rock has been No.1 every year since the RIAA began surveying consumers in 1989. The rap/hip-hop genre is a strong second, having been voted most popular by 13.5% of US music fans. R&B/urban music and country music were tied for third place, each with 11.2% of the market.

Pop is now the favorite of only 9% of music lovers; religious music ranks sixth, with 6.7% of the market. The US music business took in $12.6 billion in retail sales in 2002, a drop from the $13.7 billion reported in 2001.

The RIAA survey supports other such studies in finding that women buy slightly more recorded music than do men: 50.5% vs. 49.5%, respectively. In opposition to the music industry's received wisdom that young people are the most ardent buyers of music, the survey found that music fans over the age of 45 were the largest segment of the market: 25.5% of the total. The 15–19 age bracket was the second-highest music-buying group, at 13.3% of the total.

Traditional music stores continued to give ground to big-box retailers and discount outlets: 50.7% of the survey's respondents said they do the bulk of their buying at such places, with only 36.8% buying from record stores. Online sales accounted for 3.4% of all purchases last year, an increase of 0.5% over the previous year.

The vast majority (90.5%) of all recorded music sold was in CD format, although DVD-Audio releases were said to account for a surprisingly high 1.3%. Over 500 DVD-Audio titles are currently available, compared to 400 at the end of 2002, while 800 SACDs have been released. It was rumored strongly at the time this issue went to press that at least one record company, most probably Warner, would be following the marketing lead represented by SACD's hybrid, dual-layer discs by releasing dual-sided DVD-As this month, with Red Book CD data on one side.

US: CALIFORNIA
Jon Iverson
At one time, the music industry was considered a cultural force. It could excite the public and change the course of history, even provoking some governments to attempt censorship. These days, the record labels themselves are
acting more and more as a police force, looking for ways to restrict and control how music consumers behave.

The new SACD and DVD-Audio formats, with built-in watermarking and other copying and use impediments, were supposed to do the trick. But with sluggish consumer acceptance of the new formats, labels are hedging their bets and looking for more ways to restrict how CIs are used.

The latest CD-restriction contender to step into the ring is Macrovision, which announced in April that it has entered a licensing agreement with Microsoft. Under the terms of the new deal, Macrovision says it will provide record labels worldwide with the capability to design and produce "dual session" music CDs containing both "Red Book" audio files, which play on traditional home and car stereos, and what it terms "second session" files, which can be played and stored on some consumers' PCs and portable devices.

According to Macrovision, the advantage of the agreement is that it provides record labels access to comprehensive copy restriction, authentication, and digital rights management (DRM) technologies for their music CDs from one source for worldwide deployment. Macrovision says it already has agreements with replicators in North and South America, Europe, Asia, and Australia.

Macrovision says its approach still allows consumers to make personal copies of music CDs while restricting content with "multi-level security features" to address file-sharing. Similar to an approach used by competitor S unmcom, playback of Macrovision CDs on PCs and transfer to various portable devices are said to be enabled using the Microsoft Windows Media Data Session Toolkit. Macrovision's technology, called CNS, is claimed to secure the "first session" data and authenticate that the CD is in fact an "original copy." Once the disc has been authenticated, the company says that second-session files can be played, stored, or exported to approved portable devices.

Macrovision's copy-restriction and rights-management technologies are well known to video enthusiasts. The company claims that, to date, its technologies have been used on roughly 5 billion DVDs and VHS cassettes, and that CI5s has been used to restrict more than 100 million music albums.

THE INTERNET
Barry Willis

The proportion of music sold online is apt to increase substantially in the next few years, if the initial success of Apple's iTunes music service is any indicator. The computer pioneer's online music store sold 2 million songs in its first 16 days of operation, with more than half sold as full albums at $10 each, the remainder as individual songs at 99¢ each. The service has 200,000 tracks available from all the major labels, at present only for Mac users; a Windows version is to be launched later this year.

Meanwhile, on May 28, exactly 26 days after the launch of Apple's downloadable music service, Seattle-based RealNetworks, Inc., announced its own new music service—one that undercut Apple's 99¢/track price by 20% as well as opening up the concept to PC owners. RealOne Rhapsody, an outgrowth of RealNetwork's recent acquisition of San Francisco's Listen.com, offers a huge library of more than 330,000 tracks available for on-demand listening, and more than 200,000 available for permanent download and "burning" onto CD.

The fee? Only 79¢ per track, "the lowest per-burn price available to US consumers through any of the new generation of digital music services," according to an official announcement from RealOne. With pricing substantially better than Apple's, Rhapody is available to the 97% of the online market who have Windows PCs. "We want to draft off the attention [Apple's iTunes have] gotten before they come out with a Windows service," RealNetworks' vice president Dan Sheenan told David Bank of the Wall Street Journal. "We are especially excited about the availability of burns to CD for a mere 79¢," said RealOne senior vice president Merrill Brown. "We believe this is a great offer to consumers who are now realizing the power of online music services." The launch (or, more properly, re-launch) of the Rhapody downloads service means that RealNetworks will no longer promote MusicNet, a joint venture of AOL Time Warner Inc., Bertelsmann AG, and EMI Group PLC, the Journal reported.

The Rhapody subscription service costs $9.95/month, with a 14-day free trial. The service enables subscribers to "burn full albums or custom mix CDs, build their own custom Internet radio stations, listen to professionally programmed stations, and browse extensive music information and editorial recommendations," the announcement stated. Prior to its acquisition of Listen.com, RealNetworks already had more than a million subscribers to its other services.

With iTunes Music Store and Rhapsody, the race for online music fans has just begun. As reported May 26, Santa Clara, California-based Roxio, Inc. agreed to acquire presplay, the other music-industry-backed online music service, from backers Sony Music Entertainment and Universal Music Group (UMG) for approximately $12.5 million in cash and 3.9 million shares of Roxio stock. Best known for its Easy CD Creator CD-burning software, Roxio has an installed base of about 100 million consumers who use its products.

The deal will boost revenues this year at Sony Music and UMG. Investors also liked it, pushing Roxio's stock up from $6.90 to $8.09/share in the first day after the news broke—a 17% jump. Roxio acquired the Napster name and assets at a bankruptcy sale in November for a reported $5 million, and plans to pump an additional $20 million into relaunching the brand as a legitimate music service by March 2004.

Pressplay will continue to operate on a $10/month subscription basis until the Napster relaunch, and will then be phased out. Most of pressplay's approximately 80 employees will work for the new Napster. Pressplay president and CEO Mike Debel has assumed the same roles with Napster.

Roxio executives explained the Napster acquisition as simply leveraging a well-known brand name. Studies the company conducted showed that 97% of music fans recognized Napster, but only 12% knew of pressplay. "The Napster brand name emerged; it became a phenomenon," said Roxio CEO Chris Gorog. "Napster has incredibly high name recognition...Napster means online music," agreed Larry Kenswil, president of UMG's ELabs online division. At its peak in 2000-2001, Napster had between 60 and 70 million users worldwide. The pressplay purchase gives Roxio access to the Sony and UMG catalogs, which between them account for as much as 40% of available recordings.

The irony is that Napster was forced into bankruptcy by unrelenting legal pressure from the music industry. Terms of the Roxio deal will make Sony and UMG minority shareholders in the new venture, with rights to derive as much as $6.25 million in revenue from the new Napster service. The exact business model is still in the planning stage, but will likely mirror that of iTunes. The biggest obstacle facing the venture will be convincing consumers that Napster no longer means "free."

The Roxio-Napster deal surfaced al-
An offer that is music to your ears. $1000 of free SACDs.

To celebrate the release of the dm38 stereo power amplifier, Halcro has this special offer for the months of July, August and September.

Now you can get all the best features of our monoblocks in a single stereo unit. No other amplifiers on the market deliver such low levels of distortion, with clarity throughout even the most harmonically complex pieces. Signal interference is virtually eliminated, unearthing ambient inner detail on your favourite recordings. A lower noise floor brings you more dynamic range and improved soundstaging. Top-end, mid-range and bass are life-like and uncolored. The result is pure music, completely natural and non-fatiguing. The dm38 stereo power amplifier brings you closer to pure stereo than ever before.

And if you order any dm38, 58 or 68 power amplifier between July and September, you will receive a voucher for $1000 of SACDs of your choice redeemable at www.acousticsounds.com. This offer is for USA and Canada retail customers only and is limited to one voucher per customer.

USA: +1 (949) 488 3004  Email: admin@halcro.com
International: +61 8 8238 0807  Website: www.halcro.com

“Halcro’s dm58: The Best Amplifier Ever!”
Stereophile Magazine, October 2002

UNITED KINGDOM • GERMANY • GREECE • JAPAN • RUSSIA • SPAIN • ITALY • BRAZIL • KOREA • CANADA • TAIWAN • THAILAND • POLAND • ROMANIA • FRANCE • SINGAPORE • MALAYSIA • HONG KONG • SWEDEN • TURKEY • USA • INDONESIA • SWITZERLAND • AUSTRALIA • PORTUGAL • PHILIPPINES
They Laughed when Dennis Had introduced the Cary CAD-805 in 1993

“If either of these amplifiers is RIGHT...the other must be WRONG.”
~ Stereophile, January 1994

When Dennis Had introduced the Cary Audio CAD-805 in 1993, some hi-fi writers puzzled...scoffed...measured...and laughed. But those who listened, loved it—like Sam Tellig in his March 1998 Stereophile column:

“The palpable presence of the musicians. The exquisite low-level detail. The perfect timing of the attack and decay of each note. The truth of timbre and sheer beauty of the music.”

In a 1994 cover story, Stereophile put the CAD-805 up against a highly regarded, solid-state amplifier. “These are very fine test-bench results,” wrote Thomas J. Norton—not about us, but the other amp.

Fast-forward to November 2002, John Atkinson chose the CAD-805 (now the Cary CAD-805C Anniversary Edition) as one of the 100 products he feels to have been “the most important since 1962.” He called the amplifier “gorgeous-looking and sounding.”

Who has the last laugh? Maybe you! Audition the Cary Audio CAD-805C Anniversary Edition at your Cary dealer now. Bring your favorite recordings and your own ears.

By the way, how many amplifier models are still in production after ten years? How many may still be in production ten years from now? Count on a Cary Audio Design!

CARY Audio Design
1020 Goodworth Drive • Apex, NC 27539 • Phone: 919-355-0010 • Fax: 919-355-0013 • www.caryaudio.com
most simultaneously with the release of a Microsoft-funded study reporting that the
computer is increasingly the heart of most consumers’ home entertainment
systems. Two days after the Roxio news broke, Seattle-based online music and
video provider Loudeye Corporation announced that it had signed a digital
distribution agreement with British record company EMI Group. The deal
will eventually give Loudeye access to more than 140,000 recordings from
3000 artists on the Blue Note, Capitol, Virgin, and EMI labels. Wall Street Journal
commentator Mathew Curtain characterized the Loudeye/EMI deal as clear
evidence of the music industry’s sudden recognition of “digital reality.”

It is often said that downloading music from the Internet is the 21st-century
equivalent of FM radio broadcasts, from
which people could sample tracks before
buying an album. It comes as no surprise,
therefore, to learn that commercial radio
is feeling the pinch. Reuters reports that
US radio advertising revenues were off
2% in March, an effect of the war in Iraq.
The Radio Advertising Bureau, a trade
group of more than 5000 US radio sta-
tions, stated that local advertising rev-
ences declined 3% while national revenues
rose 4%. March was a blip in an
otherwise bright picture—for the quar-
ter, local ad sales were up 2%, while
national ad revenues rose 8%

3.5% of all adults
in the UK are using
Internet radio.

US: FEDERAL COURT
Barry Willis
Federal judges have issued somewhat
conflicting rulings in the ongoing legal
dispute over illegitimate file sharing. As
the situation stood at the end of April,
individuals may be held responsible for
copyright violation, but the services they
use in the process may not.

In an ongoing case in Washington,
DC, a federal judge has rejected a con-
titutional challenge brought by Veri-
zon Communications, Inc., to avoid revealing
the identity of a broadband customer
accused by the music industry of being a
“node” for massive file-sharing. On April
24, US District Judge John D. Bates ruled
that First Amendment protections con-
cerning anonymous expression don’t conflict with the 1998 Digital Mil-
leuniunm Copyright Act. The DMCA
allows the music industry to subpoena
Internet service providers to reveal the
names of suspected music pirates with-
out requiring a judge’s signature.

A day after the Washington ruling, a
federal judge in Los Angeles ruled that
the companies backing file-sharing ser-
dices Grokster and Morpheus aren’t
liable for the illegal copying of music
and movies done by users of their ser-
dice. The entertainment industry was
stunned by a 34-page ruling issued by
US District Court Judge Stephen
Wilson, who determined that Grokster
Ltd. and StreamCast Networks, Inc.
(distributor of Morpheus peer-to-peer
software) were not more responsible for
copyright violation than Sony Corpora-
tion was by introducing the video-
cassette recorder into the consumer
market in the late 1970s.

Wilson cited a 1984 Supreme Court
ruling that absolved Sony of copyright-
infringement charges brought against it
by Walt Disney Company. Just as Sony
had no control over the ultimate use of
its machines, neither do Grokster or
StreamCast have control or responsi-

bility for the use of their systems. Pro-
viding the means to perform a crime is
not in itself a crime, Wilson ruled. Legal
scholars might like to compare this rea-
soning with that used to levy punish-
ment on the tobacco and gun industries,
both of which have been found respon-
sible for the uses to which their prod-
ucts are put.

Parting shot: Venture capitalists who
backed Napster, the startup blamed for
launching the music industry on its three-
year downward spiral, are now them-

selves the targets of copyright-violation
lawsuits brought by the same companies
that crushed Napster in an overwhelming
onslaught of litigation.

On Monday, April 21, Universal
Music and EMI filed a lawsuit in a
Northern California federal court against
Hummel Winblad Venture Partners and
two of the San Francisco firm’s general
partners, Hank Barry and John
Hummel. The suit against the venture
capitalists seeks $150,000 per copyright
violation, as well as unpublished punitive
damages. Plaintiffs charge that through
a $13 million investment in Napster in
May 2000, the firm sought to profit from
Napster’s “massive” infringement of
copyrighted works.

Bertelsmann Music Group was also a
plaintiff against Napster, but settled early
and made its own investment in the ven-
ture, hoping to leverage Napster’s tech-
ology for its own online music service.
Napster was bankrupted by the cost of
its legal defense, and Bertelsmann was
subsequently sued by its music-industry
colleagues, presaging an executive turn-
over at the German media conglomerate.
At its peak, Napster had more than
60 million users.

US: YOUR LOCAL HIGH-END
STORE
Jon Iverson
April brought several important execu-
tive changes to the audio industry.
On the 15th, PSB Speakers an-
nounced David L. Smith’s appointment
as director of product development.
Formerly president and chief engineer
of Snell Acoustics, Smith will be respon-
sible for guiding product development
on all PSB loudspeakers, including

Stereophile, August 2003
Do you want a major improvement in your audio/video system?

If you want to realize the full potential of your AV system, Nordost cable is the only choice. Derived from technology developed for the aerospace industry, Nordost's unique designs and proprietary Teflon extrusion process produces a level of performance our competitors can only dream of. Nordost's cables are superior in all aspects of measurable performance, such as capacitance, inductance, signal speed and durability. The result is an audible improvement in sound quality and stunning picture quality.

Don't compromise the performance of your system with inferior cables. Make your weakest link your strongest link with Nordost cables.

Nordost Valhalla Cables
Winner of The Absolute Sound Golden Ear Awards 2000
"Let me put this as plainly as possible. The Valhalla system from Nordost is the least colored and most neutral cabling ever to hit the marketplace." This stuff costs the proverbial Midas ton, but it's probably going to rank up there in the stratosphere after all of today's competing models have been replaced several times with newer and 'improved versions.'" "A triumph pure and simple." Harry Pearson The Absolute Sound Issue 127 used with permission.

Editors Choice and product of the Year
Hi Fi+UK
Editors Choice and Award Winner Hi Fi News 2002

"These are sensational cables, and you'll love what they'll do for your system. The Valhallas get my very highest, most unconditional recommendation." Brian Damkroger, Stereophile, November 2001; Recommended Component, Stereophile, April 2002

NORDOST
MAKING THE CONNECTION
200 Homer Avenue, Ashland, MA, 01721 1-800-836-2750
high-performance products and specialty items for the custom-installation market. PSB products have a well-earned reputation for excellent value.

"I am very pleased to be joining PSB," Smith stated. "The company has a great reputation worldwide, both for its high-quality, reasonably priced products and as a place actively engaged in innovative design. I look forward to collaborating with founder and chief designer Paul Barton and the rest of the PSB team on many upcoming and exciting new products." Smith has 25 years of experience in loudspeaker design. Prior to his tenure at Snell, he held key positions at KEF, McIntosh Labs, a/d/s, and other high-end audio companies.

One of Smith's primary objectives will be "to increase the pace of product development and develop more innovative products, while maintaining PSB's traditional integrity and sound quality," according to Gordon Simmons, president and CEO of the Lenbrook Group, owner of the PSB brand. "We will also increase PSB's investments heavily into new areas, especially custom installation," Simmons added. This year, the Pickering, Ontario–based PSB celebrates its 30th anniversary.

Also on April 15, Onkyo USA named John Arce director of sales. A 30-year veteran of the audio industry, Arce (pronounced ar-se) most recently spent five years with Yamaha, preceded by 10 years at M&K Sound, where he was vice president. Arce began his career in the audio industry in the 1970s as a salesman at Pacific Stereo, moving from there to Fisher Electronics and, later, to cartridge manufacturer Pickering.

"John will be a great addition to the Onkyo sales team," said Onkyo USA president Kevin Miyagi. "We were impressed with the breadth of his sales management experience. His efforts will help our dealers and representatives grow with Onkyo as we increase our market share and reach."

Atlantic Technology also has a new director of sales. On April 8, the Norwood, Massachusetts–based loudspeaker and electronics company announced the promotion of Victor J. Moorhatch to the position of director of sales and training. Moorhatch has been with the company for over five years and was previously the national sales manager.

Two degrees of separation: Like David Smith, Moorhatch did a stint with a/d/s, as director of sales for the Apogee loudspeaker division. He also held national and regional sales positions with PSB Speakers, NAID, and Kloss Video Corporation. "Victor has been a key catalyst in Atlantic's growth over the past five years," said Atlantic Technology board chairman Peter Tribeman. "His proven ability and 30 years' experience in consumer electronics sales make him an integral part of our plans for continued expansion in the home theater and custom installation markets."

**UNITED KINGDOM**

**Paul Messenger**

I doubt that any readers will have heard of a small UK startup operation called Anatek Audio (www.anatek-audio.co.uk). I hadn't myself until late last year, when an unsolicited integrated amplifier turned up without warning. Despite the amp's unprepossessing appearance, I was intrigued enough to plug it in, connect it up, and give it a listen.

I was unexpectedly impressed by the sound made by the Anatek Audio A50. It's designed by one Clive Read, who has spent a lifetime in industrial electronics but only recently turned his hand to audio. He claims an original (and patented) output configuration that apparently combines the advantages of cool-running class-A/B operation with class-A's freedom from crossover distortion. However it works, the A50 sounds rather good; I wish it well.

I write this piece not to dwell on the A50, but to discuss another component that Anatek is introducing, one that is possibly unique in hi-fi. It's a phono stage of decidedly specialized application, specifically designed to operate only with high-inductance moving-magnet cartridges.

I've been using low-output moving-coil cartridges now for longer than I care to remember, and have little experience of current MM types. Indeed, the two MMs to cross my path most recently have both been low-inductance models, from Grado and Rega, and I have a long-ingrained suspicion of the way high-inductance types deliberately use a tuned resonance to maintain their high-frequency response. However, there are still many such cartridges around, from brands such as Ortofon, Goldring, and Shure, as the ads in Stereophile reveal.

That tuned HF resonance and its associated subsequent sharp rolloff above it also worried Clive Read, and he resolved to do something radical about it. Tradition has it that MM cartridges operate best into a highish impedance load of 47k ohms or higher—68k ohms used to be recommended for Shure V15s—so that the phone preamplifier measures and amplifies the changing voltage. The high-frequency resonance occurs through the interaction of the inductance of the cartridge and the capacitance it sees in the connecting wires and preamp input, and this resonance is in practice damped by the 47k ohms load impedance. The difficulties and uncertainties arise because of variations in inductance between different makes of cartridge, and a similar unpredictability in the amount of capacitance provided by the cables and input.

Read's original solution is to amplify the current from the cartridge rather than the voltage, which means making a preamplifier with an input impedance of close to 0 ohms. This removes the cable capacitance from the equation (both ends of it go to ground and resonance does not occur). Consequently, no damping resistor is needed, and the frequency response can extend to the cartridge's mechanical limit.

The down side—and possibly the reason this approach hasn't been tried before—is that the combination of the DC resistance and the cartridge's inductance will introduce a low-frequency rolloff. For example, a cartridge with 500 ohm coils and an inductance of 500nH will start rolling off the low frequencies below 160Hz. The Anatek solution is to build an adjustable low-frequency boost into the preamp, in order to cancel the cartridge's low-frequency rolloff and give a more flat response.

The tricky part comes in devising a simple method for setting up the preamp's LF boost to accurately counter the rolloff points of cartridges with different parameters. The requirement is to measure the cartridge's resistance and inductance so as to calculate the boost turnover frequency (done by a phase-comparison method using an oscillator). From the user's point of view, however, it's a simple matter of a two-position switch, with each position having an associated pair of LEDs and a knob that's adjusted until both lamps are off.

A prototype phono stage arrived from Anatek, together with Read's own Goldring cartridge, and, after a quick listen, I was impressed. While I haven't undertaken a full evaluation, the prototype works well, delivering a sound that was much better than my prejudices had anticipated, with notably low noise, vivid dynamics, and an essentially neutral balance. I can't say for certain that Anatek's approach to a moving-magnet phono stage is totally original, but I've not encountered its like before, and reckon it makes a good deal of sense, both theoretical and sonic.
Tube or not to be?

Introducing the new iTube from Innersound.

(question answered)
"If either of these amplifiers is RIGHT...the other must be WRONG."

Editor John Atkinson wrote that cover line for our January 1994 issue (Vol.17 No.1). Two amps shared the cover. Each was reviewed inside.

Dick Olsher, aka Toob Man, did the honors for the Cary CAD-805, while Thomas J. Norton considered the solid-state Krell KSA-300S. TJN performed test-bench measurements on both amps.

The face-off was fascinating: Subjective vs objective. Tube vs solid-state. Retro vs modern. Monoblock vs two-channel.

"These Krels are the best-sounding preamplifier and power amplifier I have heard in my system," Tom trumpeted after measuring the KSA-300S (he auditioned it with the matching KRC preamp). He commended the amplifier's "very fine" test-bench results.

As for the Cary CAD-805, TJN called its test-bench results "mediocre." He summed up his feelings thus:

"The CAD-805's somewhat nostalgic-inducing design is reinforced by its measured performance — an updated nostalgia, to be sure, but updating can only bring us so far in what is basically a half-century-old design concept, one long since abandoned for what would appear to be very good objective reasons."

But DO didn't surrender to Major Tom:

"Admittedly, this 211-based, single-ended amplifier is not a stellar test-bench performer. Yet, equipped only with a sophisticated integrated test and evaluation system (i.e., two ears), any audiophile worth his or her salt should have no problem discerning the 805's magic."

As editor, what was JA to do? If one amp was right, the other must be wrong. Right?

Not so fast. "Both these amplifiers might be right," I suggested to The Chief, shortly after the reviews ran. There was an advantage to having been an English major at college, I explained. I can hold two opposing beliefs at the same time — thanks to a tolerance of "cognitive dissonance," imparted by none other than T.S. Eliot.

Don't get me wrong — some amplifiers are obviously more right or wrong than others, by objective or subjective standards. Some amplifiers even manage to measure well and sound good at the same time. But, as one European amplifier designer with an advanced degree in electrical engineering once told me, this business of one approach to amplifier design being right and another being wrong doesn't work for him.

For instance, he continued, a circuit could work well on paper and measure superbly on the test bench but not please the ear. Another circuit might measure less well but sound far better. And two amplifiers that use totally different topologies might sound equally right. Or wrong.

Another amplifier designer told me he "reckoned" that all amplifiers are wrong in that none gets close to reproducing — or re-creating — the sound and experience of a live musical event, especially the dynamics. Musical perfection is an elusive goal, he said, that always slips infinitesimally out of reach. But a designer could get ever closer to that elusive perfection.

"[T]he perfect amplifier would leave no evidence of its existence other than the fact that the varying voltage representing the music signal has been made larger, resulting in truly musical sound from your speakers," wrote JA in that very same, January 1994, issue of Stereophile.

But as soon as you try to make the music signal larger, things happen. Distortions creep in — through the mains, through the power supply, through mechanical vibrations (as Yves-Bernard André has demonstrated), and a host of other ways. Maybe, to achieve a "truly musical sound," one should aim for good distortions that help battle the bad ones. It's not Yves-Bernard's point of view or, obviously, TJN's or JA's. I'm not even sure it's ST's point of view. Ask me tomorrow.

That "cognitive dissonance" crap wouldn't cut it in Apex, North Carolina, the town outside Cary where Cary Audio Design is now located, so I didn't bring it up with Cary's Dennis Had.

Dennis likes to try things. He has produced dozens of different designs, mostly tubed. He's made flea-powered single-ended amps and high-powered push-pull workhorses. He sells assembled amps and kits. I'm not sure if Dennis could do this if he believed that one design made all others wrong.

It's always fun to talk with Dennis. One time he phoned me all aroused about an inexpensive speaker he'd bought at RadioShack, while his wife, Donna, was busy shopping at the mall. You do this to the speaker, you do that to it, he explained. The result, he swore, was wonderful. "Nothing like a good, cheap 15" paper-cone woofer," he assured me.

I've had my fun in return.

"Your amps are too powerful, Dennis! Never mind 8W, 10W. How about 3W, 5W? The less an amp amps the better the amp will be." This led Dennis to design his SE-2A3 monoblock, a 5W wonder that was probably ahead of its time. Hey, Dennis, bring it back with the new 2.5V TJ Mesh Plate 300B tubes!

If you ask Dennis about his favorite

signal 6SL7
Starting about control the wired which with car has price
versary on $7495/pair, costs Sam's er ended according Norton
50 — after January 1994 cover line, is still around — updated and improved — after a decade. Too bad Tom Norton is now so busy as editor of Stereophile Guide to Home Theater, or he could put the Cary CAD-805 Anniversary Edition monoblock power amp through its test-bench paces. A return to retro, and déjà vu all over again. Krell amps are still flourishing, too — likewise, better than ever — [though the KSA-300S is long discontinued. — Ed.]

The CAD-805 started out, in 1993, at $7495/pair, and the Anniversary Edition costs $11,000/pair — which means the price has gone up by less than half over a decade. Not bad, considering inflation and product enhancements.

Now you get a chassis and top plate finished in Jaguar Anthracite Black, with a clear-coat finish. The old girl looks better than ever — like a vintage car tricked out to perfection. This amp has been detailed.

Some history might be appropriate on this 10th Anniversary occasion, which I'm sure TJN will celebrate, too:
The CAD-805 got its name from the single 805 output tube around which it was designed. This radio transmitter tube might have scared potential customers with its anode plate cap, so Dennis had quickly replaced it with a hatless 211 radio transmitter tube, a variety he knew well from his years in ham radio. This was the version that DO and TJN had the food fight over in January '94.

The original CAD-805 had four tubes — three in the signal path. Starting as the signal came in, a single 6SL7 dual-triode input tube provided voltage gain. This was coupled to the control grid of an EL34 pentode tube wired as a triode. The EL34 produced about 4W of audio power to drive the control grid of the 805 or 211 via an interstage transformer. This was how the CAD-805 made it up to its rated power of 50W, or more or less.

The amplifier operated in class-A1 up to about 25W, capacitor-coupled, the EL34 delivering no grid current to the output tube. Beyond 25W, the drive signal from the interstage transformer kicked in, sliding the amp into class-A2 and causing the output tube's grid to turn positive and draw current. As power went up, so did distortion, and the 805 or 211 output tube became less and less linear.

I think this nonlinearity is what caused TJN to consider going out and buying a Krell. Meanwhile, most Cary listeners might be so 'jammie in by the time the CAD-805 pushed into class-A2 that they might never notice the increased distortion.

The fourth tube — the one that really caught the eye — is the 1629/6UT "cat's eye" in the center of the amp's faceplate. Dennis once told me that the tube was there for entertainment.

"This tube's fluorescent target indicates the effects of a voltage change," he explained. "The target operates at a positive voltage and so draws electrons from the cathode. When the electrons strike the target, they produce a glow on the fluorescent coating. When the eye is completely closed, you're at full power."

More changes were to follow.

Just as DO's review appeared, Dennis changed the driver tube from an EL34 to a 300B. The output tube remained the same until the CAD-805C, introduced in January 1997, when the 211 was replaced with an equally venerable 845. I caught up with this version a year later, in March 1998 (Vol.21 No.3).

One of the things that struck me immediately about the "C" version was the 805's immediacy and soundstaging. Perhaps turning to the 845 output tube had something to do with the 805C's spectacular spaciousness. Dennis sure thought it did.

The Cary CAD-805C was magic. Even JA thought so — not that 50-50 John left on so quickly. But by November 2002, his grid current had turned positive. JA selected the Cary CAD-805 as one of the 100 greatest hi-fi products of the past 40 years: "While not the first modern tube amplifier with a single-ended output stage, Dennis Had's gorgeous-looking and sounding 805 is the culmination of all that this retro technology has to offer," he wrote.

The "retro" (heh-heh) CAD-805 was tied for 37th place with the Halcro dnm58 monoblock power amp. In fairness, a Krell amp — the original KSA-100 — made the list, too, tied for 16th place. I might have selected the KSA-50 or KSA-80.

The CAD-805's Tenth Anniversary Edition is old and improved — rather like me. I mentioned the Jaguar Anthracite Black finish. This alone might be worth a thousand bucks. But there are other enhancements.

Up until the "C" version, the CAD-805 needed a lot of input voltage for full output. You definitely needed an active preamp to get the most from this amp. Now, according to Dennis, there are basically two input stages. The first 6SN7 tube — not a 6SL7 — acts as an "onboard preamp," he told me. The second 6SN7 works as a low-impedance driver to run the 300B. The result: more gain. The Cary CAD-805 Anniversary Edition requires only 0.75V drive for full output.

Both 845 and 211 output tubes are provided as standard. The user can have fun with both and then choose — all that's required is to set the switch on the top left of the amplifier. With the 845, Dennis says, the CAD-805 will deliver 50W. With the 211, the amp is good for up to 70W. But when you switch tubes, take care that the output tubes have fully cooled down, which can take up to half an hour. And be certain the amplifier is off — it, unplugged. You can not change output tubes on the fly.

The driver tube is a 300B, its bias set at the factory to 60 milliams. The user should check this in his or her own setting. Line voltages, of course, can vary. If you change 300B tubes, you have to re-bias. A very elegant, analog bias meter is provided. No re-biasing is necessary when going from an 845 to a 211 output tube, or vice versa. My review samples came with TJ Meshplate 300B tubes (the 5V version) manufactured in China, as opposed to Western Electric 300B tubes made in the US.

I didn't have a chance to use the review pair with WE 300Bs, but my experience with the TJ tubes was such that I didn't feel shortchanged. The TJs have received some acclaim on Internet bulletin boards. In the Cary CAD-805 Anniversaries they sounded sweet, dynamic, and detailed. They were also very quiet.

"The front portion of the CAD-805 is, in essence, a 300B single-ended amplifier," said Dennis. "The sound of a 211 or 845 output tube is different from that of the 300B — less elegant. But we get close to the absolute purity of the 300B because we're using that tube as a driver."

"There is one thing that the CAD-805 does that's superior to a 300B-based amp. The CAD-805 produces life-size images. It makes everything huge. If you then go back to an amp that uses the 300B as an output tube, then I think you'll miss that life-size image."

I asked Dennis what accounts for that life-size image.

"The greater power of the 211 or 845
Exceptional Sound. No Exceptions.

Rotel's RSP-1066 preamplifier-processor set a benchmark for home theater reference in the under $2,000 category. Robert Deutsch, from Stereophile's Guide to Home Theater* said "The RSP-1066's surround-sound performance was comparable to any of the more expensive pre-pros I've had in my system...it's another winner!"

*Volume 9 - No. 1

Now, Rotel's new RSP-1098 takes audio and video to a new performance level. Featuring all of the latest home theater formats, along with upgradeable software, high definition video switching, input video sampling to component output, multi-source, multi-room operation, and a front panel TFT display that lets you calibrate your system even with the TV off, the RSP-1098 is the perfect choice for exceptional home theater performance.

Hear it at your authorized Rotel dealer.
output tube, as opposed to a 300B, as we discussed. But also the lack of feedback. In order to produce life-size images in your home, the No.1 requirement is that there be no feedback of any nature.

"The reason I originally put the feedback-control switch on the 805 is to show people the negative effects of negative feedback in terms of the presentation. A tube amp should not have feedback. If engineering practices are followed in a proper design fashion, there is no reason for feedback. But then people ask, 'How are you going to lower the output impedance?' Well, you don't!

"Let's talk in terms of a bass guitar or a kettle drum, or a piano for that matter. When you hear it live, it doesn't just attack and stop. There is decay. With feedback, you lose the decay. Purists will say that you need to control that bass driver. Well, yes and no. You can over-control it and lose the decay and room effects."

Other features of the CAD-805 Anniversary Edition include a "new and improved" output transformer "to yield full bandwidth coverage at full power output." According to Dennis, the 805 Anniversary "plays deeper bass with more driver control"—a claim quickly verified with my review pair of Triangle Magellan speakers. Snazzy WBT speaker binding posts are supplied as standard.

The 805 Anniversary has outputs for 4, 8, and 16 ohm speakers. I'm not sure there are many 16 ohm speakers these days, but the tap is there to try—and who knows what you might hear? Don't necessarily assume that a nominal "8 ohm" speaker will sound best off the 8 ohm tap.

The CAD-805 arrived with good timing—except, perhaps, for the lack of Western Electric 300B driver tubes. When I receive them, I'll write a "Follow-Up." Meanwhile, I'm in no hurry to return the TJ Meshplates.

I had several preamps on hand, but decided to use my passive Purest Audio Systems P5000SE "preamp." My CD player, for the most part, was the Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista. Analog took a brief vacation in our living room—but not for long! Speakers, until I had to surrender them, were the Triangle Magellans—a $32,900/pair luxury. I ran the amplifiers in, playing music, for at least 100 hours. I won't obsess about interconnects and cables—catch as catch can.

Even before the amplifiers had been run in, I heard that typical single-ended harmonic purity and immediacy. It's hard to put one's finger—or test-bench thumb—on the single-ended sound, but it's distinctive and somehow very musical. Single-ended tends to sound less contrived—less like hi-fi and more like music. Every audiophile worth his or her salt should spend some time listening to, if not owning, SETs.

What a great single-ended triode amp can deliver is a certain sense of ease—related, I'm sure, to its harmonic presentation. It's as if all the harmonics are precisely in register. A SET amp is a push-pull design can be like listening to the Chicago or Boston Symphony as opposed to a second- or third-rate ensemble. The timing is just right. And by that, I do not mean tapping toes, but rather that harmonics seem to be in proper register, as they are in real life. Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong, Bing Crosby, Jascha Heifetz can rise from their graves and play for you live. That's the magic of single-ended triode. The magic of the CAD-805 Anniversary was that it supplied this magic, along with enough power to drive most loudspeakers in most rooms.

Single-ended power seems different from push-pull power—whatever the test-bench measurements say. Take a 50W conventional push-pull tube amp and play it alongside the 50W CAD-805 Anniversary and I think you'll hear what I mean. The Cary sounds big. Very big. Rather like a 150W or 200W push-pull tube amp.

SET amps tend to fill in and flesh out the sound—even with vintage recordings. It's simply amazing how good some of those Bing Crosby or Duke Ellington recordings from the late 1930s can sound. Or your Elvis or Buddy Holly recordings from the '50s.

Single-ended amplifiers tend to handle microdynamics particularly well—those subtle differences or shadings in dynamics. Perhaps some flea-powered SET amps better the CAD-805 Anniversary in this regard, but not by much. Meanwhile, the flea-powered amps, while sounding more immediate, can also sound dynamically constrained.

I think where the CAD-805 Anniversary improves over previous versions is in its ability to stretch the magic of SETs—to provide the immediacy, delicacy, and microdynamic magic of the flea-powered wonders with enough power so that one is not limited to super-sensitive loudspeakers. It will be interesting to find out how very-high-sensitivity speakers fare with the CAD-805 Anniversarys, however.

The CAD-805 Anniversary improves on the CAD-805C, which I owned for several years, in another respect: bass performance. The bass now seems more extended and tight. The CAD-805 Anniversarys could deliver the bass notes with the Magellans with great authority, if not the ultimate control of a big solid-state amp. If you want everything, go to a concert.

I cranked up conductor Paavo Järvi's recording of Berlioz's Symphonie Fantastique (Telarc SACD-60578). The Carys opened up, spatially and dynamically—with better bass control than I remember from the CAD-805C. Sure, I loved the sound of my Sun Audio SV-2A3, rated at 3.5Wpc, too. But while the Sun could shine at low to moderate volume levels, the Cary CAD-805 Anniversary could really open up. I know, I'm comparing different types of amps at different prices. And I do love the Sun—even though it's been dropped from "Recommended Components."

Like the Sun—okay, maybe almost like the Sun—the CAD-805 Anniversary clearly showed the superiority of SACD over CD. Assuming you can get anything on SACD worth listening to. Assuming the SACD was well-recorded. Assuming the performance venue and the musicians could yield a great performance. Assuming yadda yadda yadda. Some SACDs, including some classical releases, sound pretty crappy.

One that does not is a disc that features violinist Yesko Eschenzay and conductor Mario Boni with the Concertgebouw Chamber Orchestra (PentaTone PTC 5186 001). The works are by Mozart, Schubert, and Mendelssohn. With the Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista CD player and the CAD-805 Anniversary, the violinist was just...there.

Shortly before I completed this column, Richard Kohlruess, of VMAX Services, came to collect the Triangle Magellans and ship them to the Home Entertainment 2003 show. My wife, Marina, was especially sad to see them leave.

"The whole house looks empty," she said.

Indeed it did.

In place of the Magellans, I had the JLab Cobalt 816S speakers—small floorstanders that stand 38.5" high and...
cost $1895/pair. Of course, they sound-ed smaller than the Magellans; and, for a few days, it was difficult to get accustomed. But the CAD-805 Anniversarys seemed to make this small speaker seem much bigger than it is.

I had fun with the CAD-805 Anniversarys, and I expect to have even more fun with them in the months to come. I especially enjoyed being able to switch between the 845 and 211 output tube — "a doodle," as the British like to say, meaning "a breeze." But be sure to unplug the amps and let those output tubes cool down!

Cary's CAD-805 is still one of the 100 greatest hi-fi products of the past 40 years.

I expected to like the CAD-805 Anniversary better with the 845 output tube than with the 211. But once I'd let the tubes run in, damned if I didn't prefer the 211. It wasn't a question of power, for me, although Dennis said that the 211 can deliver more power than the 845. It was a matter of slightly better bass control and somewhat improved resolution. The 845 seemed a little soft and fuzzy. The 211 sounded more authoritative, assured, and revealing.

Dennis was not surprised. He called the 845 tube more "romantic," the 211 more "dramatic."

"I'm not sure why this occurs, because the 845 in a test environment has the same frequency response as the 211. But in actual listening, the 211 seems to offer a more precise presentation. Here is a situation where we are not able to prove that on the test bench, but it shows up when you listen.

"Now if one were to have bright-sounding loudspeakers, and particularly very sensitive loudspeakers — 92dB on up — then I would recommend using the 845 tube. Some of these high-sensitivity speakers seem to sound very forward. The 845 produces a laid-back sound that's available to the user at the flip of a switch and a twist of the socket."

Be advised that both tubes can start out a little noisy. I've encountered this before, and it's not necessarily a cause for alarm — apparently, gases need to be burned off. The 845 tubes I received with the CAD-805 Anniversary were absolutely quiet, but the 211s misbehaved slightly. One of the 211s liked to squeak during the first 60 seconds of turn-on. Then it would quiet down. Then the other 211, previously quiescent, went through the same squeaking routine. None of this lasted for more than a minute, and there were no alarming bangs or pops — just squeaks, squeals, and tiny farts. After a few weeks, both 211s powered up quietly, like little children who had been toilet-trained. Tubes are almost human — a good part of their charm.

The CAD-805 is still one of the 100 greatest hi-fi products of the past 40 years. Even JA thinks so. John? Tom? (Heh-heh.) It's one of these very rare products that seems to get so many things right, outshine and outlast the competition. There's not another amplifier you can buy that is quite like it. It has a soul. It has humanity. It may have its flaws, but every hi-fi product does — including those that measure perfectly.

A visiting hi-fi manufacturer, not connected in any way with Cary Audio, saw the amps on our living-room floor and looked on in admiration: "They're classics," he said.

Indeed they are.

Assuming you can afford them, should you buy a pair of CAD-805 Anniversary amps? I don't know. It depends on your speakers and your priorities. Some speakers and some rooms may simply need more power. You may want even more tightly articulated bass — or whatever. Tubes may give you the heebe-jeebies.

But I'm sure of one thing: Any audiophile worth his or her salt — thank you, DO, for that cliché — should make it a point to audition this amp. Even JA came around, eventually — and this was before the Anniversary Edition.

One more anecdote.

At one of Stereophile's hi-fi shows — or maybe it was at CES — I was all fired up about getting a pair of CAD-805s to audition. Then I encountered my confrère Martin Colloms — according to his card, he is a "chartered engineer" (BSc, IEEE). Martin is usually a very straightforward, serious, test-bench sort of chap. I wish I possessed such credentials. I could have pursued a proper career.

"Martin, you have to hear these!"

Being a good sport, Martin accompanied me to the Cary exhibit. He was flabbergasted. He didn't know what to make of the CAD-805s. I believe that he called them "curious antiquities," or some such.

But much to his credit, Martin suspended his disbelief and actually listened. That is what I recommend you do with the CAD-805 Tenth Anniversary Edition.
Rediscover your classics with one of our classics

"...there's one area of its performance that makes other cables fall flat by comparison: the Kimber's uncanny sense of side2side and front2back dimensionality. The KCAG just killed everything else I've tried in this respect, and endowed the system with an amazing sense of real instruments sitting in real space. No other interconnect has been able to match the KCAG for throwing up a vividly detailed and totally believable soundscape..."

Stereophile – Vol. 16, No. 7

KCAG

Kimber Kable

Also available in a “six-wire braid” version known as the KCTG

THE ART OF CONNECTION

- Five way post with two piece tightening nut for secure attachment of spades without tools.
- Easy upgrade to most standardized binding posts. Dual termination of crimp or solder to suit your needs.
- You will recognize the masterful design and appreciate the high conductivity. This is the connector you and your system have been craving.

801-621-5530
www.kimber.com

Attain a Higher Level of Fidelity

WBT
•801-621-1500
•www.wbtusa.com
In my March 2003 review, I wrote that the SME 30/2 turntable’s combination of attributes “might just make it the finest turntable in the world.” Earlier in the review, I’d said, “The SME 30/2 is perhaps the most tonally neutral turntable I’ve ever heard. Only the Rockport System III Sirius, which includes an integral tonearm, is in the same league, and it doesn’t stand up to the SME’s low-frequency extension and solidity.” I wrapped up the review with: “Overall, the SME Model 30/2 is the best turntable I’ve heard.”

Since then, I haven’t heard the end of it. It didn’t help that the editor put “WORLD’S BEST LP PLAYER” on the cover. Thanks, boss. [You’re welcome Mikey. —JA.] Lost in most of the e-mails I received were the words “might just make it,” “perhaps,” and, especially, “overall.” Considering its price ($25,000 without tonearm), size, simplicity, ease of use, and stupendous sound, the SME 30/2 is, overall, the best turntable I’ve auditioned. But do its build quality and design sophistication match those of the Rockport System III Sirius? No. I never said that they did. And, yes, I was indeed speculating about the bass issue—I didn’t have both tables in-house at the same time, so I made what I consider to be an informed guess, my memory aided by CD-Rs cut using the Rockport. That’s something I have to do all the time—unlike some other reviewers I know, one of everything I’ve ever reviewed is not in the next room. If I had to choose one turntable, which do you think I’d pick?

On a related subject, after reviewing the SME 30/2, the Avid Acutus, and V.Y.G.E.R. Atlantis and returning to my reference rig of Simon Yorke S7 turntable with Graham 22.2 and Immedia RPM-2 tonearms, I wasn’t disappointed. I still love it — especially when fitted with an outer ring/weight machined for me by Sound Engineering (e-mail: Bob38138@aol.com). Like Clearaudio’s stainless-steel Outer Limit (which does not work on my ‘table), this custom ring fits over the record and does for a record’s outer rim what a weight over the spindle does for the center: flattening warps, damping the vinyl, and adding a flywheel effect to the platter. Prices vary with the turntable to be used. (Sound Engineering also makes other analog accessories.)

More Phono Preamps!

Hagerman Technology Bugle: For $125, Hagerman Technology sells the Bugle, a battery-operated phono section that’s ridiculously good for the money. You can even buy it as a “half-kit” circuit board with plans, for $25; for another $25 you can buy the parts from Digkey. You play with various op-amps (they mount on plug-in sockets) and resistor brands—all of which, of course, sound different. There’s a place to solder in loading resistors of your choice. Because the Bugle uses a split, passive RC-type equalization network, it’s easy to optimize it for alternative EQ curves such as pre-1955 LPs or 78s. Hagerman calls this AnyEQ; you’ll find everything you’ll need to calculate resistor values for various curves at www.hagtech.com/equalization.html.

The Bugle can be built with 40, 50, or 60dB of gain (mine was configured for 60dB), but there’s one drawback: the estimated life of the two 9V alkaline batteries is around 16 hours (there’s an On/Off switch). However, a new plug-in power-supply option ($25, half-kit only) solves that. And the Bugle comes with a 30-day money-back guarantee. You can’t go wrong.

The Bugle sounded very quiet, surprisingly somewhat warm yet reasonably detailed, and a bit woolly. I ran the $4500 Lyra Titan (as well as more appropriately priced cartridges) into it, and you know what? It wasn’t bad! Images lacked pinpoint specificity, and transients were a bit softened, but for $125—or more than twice that—the Bugle was quite a credible performer. Also on Hagerman’s website was a new $895 transformer-based step-up (12, 18, or 24dB gain) that makes the superb-sounding all-tube Trumpet ($1895, reviewed in the December 2002 “Analog Corner”) friendly to MC cartridges. I tried the Trumpet with a very expensive Audio Tekne transformer, and the results were Class A. Hagerman’s own combo of transformer and Trumpet, for $2790, should be a sweet performer.

Acoustic Signature Tango: Up the ladder we go, to the Acoustic Signature Tango ($599). The German turntable manufacturer’s entry-level phono preamp features an onboard dual-12VAC/500mA off-the-shelf power supply with IEC AC jack. The main chassis, nicely machined from aluminum, includes a pair of rear-panel DIP switches that permit a wide variety

**Analog Corner**

*[Stereophile, August 2003]*
Introducing the THIEL CS2.4

THE NEW CS2.4 IS THE RESULT OF THIEL’S 25 YEARS OF EXTENSIVE EXPERIENCE IN DESIGNING HIGH PERFORMANCE LOUDSPEAKERS FOR HOME MUSIC AND VIDEO SOUND SYSTEMS. Since 1977, THIEL has pioneered phase and time coherence, anti-diffraction baffle design, low-distortion, short coil motor designs, single coil coincident drivers and other innovations that reflect our dedication to the highest quality sound reproduction. The result is significant sonic improvement in each new model, including 16 “Product” or “Speaker of the Year” Awards, and 19 Innovations Design and Engineering Awards. The new 3-way CS2.4 is part of the next generation of great THIEL loudspeakers, making it an ideal choice for both your music and movie needs.

CS2.4 PERFORMANCE FEATURES:

• Specially designed coincident tweeter/midrange array provides 3-way performance without the need for a high-frequency electrical crossover network
• Fully realistic, 3-dimensional imaging, unconstrained by speaker placement, provided by trademark time and phase coherence
• Extraordinary clarity and detail provided by ultra-low distortion short-coil, long gap, copper-stabilized driver motor systems
• Dynamics improved by uniform, resistive load and high efficiency, especially when used with lower power amplifiers
• Exceptionally natural tonal response provided by extremely rigid aluminum driver diaphragms and sophisticated crossover design

THIEL Celebrating 25 Years of Ultimate Performance Loudspeakers

Contact us for a free 44 page brochure and the name of your nearest THIEL dealer.

THIEL • 1026 Nandino Boulevard, Lexington, Kentucky, 40511, USA
Telephone: 859-254-9427 • Email: mail@thielaudio.com
Web: www.thielaudio.com
of moving-coil resistive loadings (10, 100, 1000, and 47k ohms) and moving-magnet capacitive loadings (50–300pF in 50pF steps), as well as a choice of MM (48dB) or MC (64dB) gain. It’s nice having the DIPs on the outside! The Tango’s op-amp–based circuit, built on a dual-sided PCB, includes a 61Hz rumble filter that helps prevent woofer-pumping subsonics from soaking up valuable amplifier power.

The Tango is in the same league and price range as the excellent Lehmann Black Cube: very fine performance for the price. It did nothing particularly wrong, and quite a bit right. It was quiet, well-organized, and rhythmically taut, with good extension at both ends, but was somewhat brighter and more forward than the Cube — even when driven by a loaded-down (100 ohm) MC cartridge. Your choice of Tango or Cube will depend on the rest of your system, especially your cartridge. The Tango’s presentation was somewhat forward spatially, though not at all bloated, in-your-face forward or fisheye-lens distorted. The build quality and appearance are very good.

When I first reviewed the homelier Lehmann Black Cube, I hadn’t heard anything that good for so little money, and I gushed accordingly. However, that ratio of performance to price is becoming more common in phono preamps, so don’t take my current lack of gush to mean that I think the Tango isn’t as good. It’s every bit as good — but to raise goosebumps, you’ll need to spend more.

**EAR 834P Deluxe:** I’ve been meaning to review this Tim de Paravicini design for years. Finally, egged on by readers, here goes.

Double your money and more than double your pleasure with EAR’s now venerable but still vital 834P, a three-tube (12AX7) moving-magnet stage that also has, for moving-coil use, a pair of step-up transformers (3–50 ohms) available at the push of a button. The 834P in basic black will set you back $995; the chrome Deluxe version costs $1295 (I’ve seen it discounted to $995). However, I can’t guarantee that these prices will be current by the time you read this; the dollar has been plunging of late. It will be difficult for importers to hold the line on prices.

You can run any cartridge you like into the 834P — its noise level is relatively low, with just a bit of “tube rush” well below normal signal level — but get to 0.25mV and you’re pushing your luck. But there was no problem with MM or high-output MC cartridges, of course. I had great results with newer low/medium-output cartridges such as the Lyra Titan and Transfiguration W.

The 834P’s sound was absolutely gorgeous in the midband, with a touch of “golden glow,” and an overall spaciousness and enticing musical wholeness that let me sit back and get lost in whatever was spinning on my turntable. Apparently you can swap sonic flavors by changing the frontmost of the three tubes, but Stereophile’s policy is for its reviewers to review what they get. Besides, the stock sound was so satisfying that I kept the 834P cranking for well over a week without pain.

The 834P’s bottom-end delivery was well extended though a bit loose, if only slightly so. If you’re using small two-way speakers whose midbass has not been bumped up, it could be ideal, but even in a full-range system, I didn’t find the bass blubbery or overripe — in fact, it had a believable physicality that could make me think solid-state bass sounds a bit too tight and overwound. The 834P’s high-frequency extension and transient performance perfectly balanced its bottom: not sharp and etched, of course, but not soft or overly romantic, either. You’ll need to have the ideal cartridge to optimally balance the 834P’s virtues — a slightly sharp, fast-sounding cartridge should really get this thing singing.

Do you want a big, expansive soundstage populated by lush, full-sounding images? A rich picture you can sink your cars into without feeling as if a velvet cloth is muting cold pleasures on top? The 834P will give you that. As much as anything, what you’re buying is the design expertise of Tim de Paravicini, whose experience and knowledge in building very expensive products has now resulted in one of the best-balanced, highest-performing, under-$1000 hi-fi components I’ve heard.

**Emmeline XR-2:** Can you buy more detail, transparency, and rhythmic snap without losing any of the EAR’s tubey richness? Yes, but you’ll spend more to get it. I would have said “much more” had I not then encountered Conrad-Johnson’s EV-1 ($1495) — but first, the EAR 834P’s solid-state counterpart, the Emmeline XR-2, manufactured by Ray Samuels Audio, an online company selling a wide line of tube and solid-state preamplifier products.

The solid-state XR-2 includes a robust regulated power supply connected via an umbilical cord to the juice-supplying end. The MM/MC phono section, based on the Analog Devices AD1797 op-amp chip, is configurable by internal DIP-switch loadings of 30, 50, 80, 100, 475 ohms, and 47k ohms. It also has a pair of resistor sockets so you can load your own. The quality of construction looks high — especially the superbly finished “clamshell” chassis work — and with a price of $1050 and a money-back guarantee, I figured, why not check it out?

I’m glad I did. The XR-2 was just on the solid-state side of the EAR 834P’s tubed personality: tighter and somewhat drier in the bass, very good extension and control, leaner in the midband, a bit too lean in the midbass, more...
For more than 30 years, Mark Levinson® amplifiers have impressed music lovers worldwide with their precise balance of power, finesse and beauty. The new **N°400 Series Multi-Mono Amplifiers** carry on that tradition with better sound, more muscle, and flexibility than the 300 Series amplifiers they replace.

Rated at 200 and 400 watts per channel respectively, the N°431, and N°432 dual-mono amplifiers benefit from massive independent power supplies and balanced voltage gain circuitry that allows them to generate a more precise signal with less noise. Both possess a bottom end authority that takes command of the music with astounding confidence, dynamics and ease while critical midrange performance is improved with more body and dimensionality.

The introduction of the **N°433**, triple-mono amplifier later this year adds multi-channel system capability to this impressive series. All three models carry the refined, sculptural look that sets Mark Levinson apart from all others.

Visit your Mark Levinson dealer soon to experience the difference a balanced approach to design can make.
sharply drawn on top, and with greater transient snap. Overall, it drove
the music with greater focus and a more tightly wound
spring, but not to the point
where it sounded relentless. Its
high-frequency transient perfor-
mance brought an excitement to
percussion instruments that
the more laid-back 834P didn't,
though the XR-2 couldn't match
the EAR's lush, luxurious mid-
range. Just as the 834P didn't
sound excessively "tubey," the
XR-2 didn't sound markedly
solid-state. Tube-lovers won't go
for it, despite its good behavior
and black backgrounds, just as solid-
state partisans won't go for the 834P,
despite its accomplished bottom-end
performance and wonderfully rich mid-
band. This same debate plays out in far
more expensive gear—between, say,
the Manley Steelhead and the Pass Labs
Xono—and there's no resolving it.

Overall, I absolutely loved the
Emmeline XR-2 and was immediately
impressed with its rhythmic drive and
confident musical personality. With its
subjectively quiet noise floor, it was im-
pressive at resolving low-level detail, and
its dynamic performance was exuberant.
Any analog fan going from any of the
$500-$600 phono stages I've tried to
the XR-2 will immediately know that the
extra money has been well spent. The
XR-2 allowed the Transfiguration
Temper W's high level of transparency to
express itself, while floating finely focused,
richly textured images on an impres-
sive volume of air. The XR-2's portrayal of
depth was outstanding, and it pushed
the front of the stage forward in an
exciting manner while not neglecting the
backdrop. And it's rated at 70dB of
gain in MC, so you can throw any cartridge
at it with confidence.

Compared to more expensive phono
stages, of course, the Emmeline XR-2
missed a few things. Its development
of harmonics was somewhat limited, but its
biggest shortcoming was a sin of omis-
sion: a midbass leanness that stunted the
development of the kind of effortless,
coherent soundstage you get with more
demanding, expensive phono sections. The 834P
did a better job in this regard, but erred a bit
on the side of too much warmth. The
XR-2 shortchanged instrumental textures
somewhat, but, like the 834P, did nothing terribly wrong.

If you're using small two-way speakers
that cheat the lack of LF extension by
bumping up the midbass, you might find
the XR-2 a perfect match. Its performance
is very satisfying for the price,
and its build quality appears to be very
high. If you're looking for something
for $1000 or so, I confidently recommend
the Emmeline XR-2. And because
the op-amps are socketed, you can
try various brands of op-amp to
tailor the sound to your liking—like changing
tubes in the EAR 834P.

**Conrad-Johnson EV-1:** More expensive doesn't necessarily mean better,

though it does more often than not, including this time. Conrad-
johnson's tube-driven EV-1 ($1495) is a scaled-down version
of the far more expensive Premier 15, which I reviewed in July 1999.
With today's higher-output MC cartridges, the EV-1's 50dB of gain
doesn't present a noise problem, but I'd be careful with 0.25mV
low-output MCs. The zero-feedback circuit uses two 12AX7s, a
5751, and a 12AU in the input, gain, and cathode-follower stages,
respectively. C-J's own polypropylene and polypropylene caps litter
the circuit board, which is also populated by top-shelf resistors.
Internally mounted 10P switches provide loading options of $000, 500, 1k, 9.6k, and 47k
ohms. I preferred 47k ohms for the Lyra
Titan and Transfiguration Temper W
cartridges, though Transfiguration rec-
ommends loading the W way down.

If the whole purpose of a phono pre-
amp is balance, then the EV-1 scores
100%. I don't see how anyone hearing
it wouldn't warm up to the EV-1,
whether using an MM or an MC
cartridge. Even if you're lucky enough

to own far more expensive and (in some
ways) more accomplished phono sections,
I think you'll fall hard for what the
EV-1 manages.

I got a 1800-mg test pressing of Ian and
Sylvia's fabulous-sounding *Northern
Journey* (Vanguard VS1 79154) from
Cisco Music's Robert Pincus, and used it
throughout this series of auditions. The
EV-1's rendering of this rich-sounding
recording combined the warmth and
midband richness of the EAR 834P (but
with a more nimble lower midbass) and
the forlornness of the Emmeline XR-
2. Sylvia's voice has a bit of hardness in it,
and that came through. Ian Tyson's
voice is just the opposite—warm and
mellifluous—and that was transmitted
as well. At the same time, the guitar
and autoharp had just the right transient
snap, neither brittle nor soft, and the
stand-up bass had excellent definition,
texture, and extension.

Solid-state advocates still might not
be convinced, but as one who tries to
toe the middle line, I found the EV-1's
tonal, textural, and rhythmic balances
nearly ideal. It may have masked a lack
of ultimate top-end extension and
sheen with a slightly prominent upper-
midrange "push," but whatever was
going on, the effect was to provide a
sonic cushion for my head to rest on.

But don't worry—even if I could
sink into that pillow, the EV-1 never put
me to sleep. Every time I went back to the EV-1, I found it difficult to concentrate on analysis, tossing it away in favor of the music's transmitted emotion. The EV-1 had a magical ability to make musical lines flow with relaxing, velvety ease, which is not to say that it emasculated music designed to grate. Still, I wouldn't use the EV-1 with an overly warm system, as it already tended toward that side of the tonal continuum. While it might not give you all of the Premier 15's textural resolve, nuanced dynamic expression, and overall harmonic sophistication, the EV-1 gives more than a taste of these for roughly a third the price. The most expensive phono preamp in this survey is, in some ways, the biggest bargain.

**Music Hall MMF-9 turntable**

The top of Music Hall's turntable line uses the same outstanding tapered carbon-fiber Pro-Ject tonearm as the Pro-Ject/Sumiko RM-9 'table, which I wrote about in the January "Analog Corner." (See that column for more details about the design.) It also uses the same inverted thrust bearing with Teflon ball that fits in a brass boss (sleeve) that is fixed to the bottom of the same acrylic platter as is used in the RM-9. And it uses the same outboard motor sitting on a platform riser, and the same square drive belt.

There are differences between the $1495 RM-9 and the $1695 MMF-9, however. The MMF-9 uses a much more refined-looking and nicely finished "three-layer cake" plinth system with Sorbothane filling (actually a series of small discs), whereas the RM-9 uses a rounded slab of MDF slightly larger in diameter than the platter. The MMF-9 has an electronic speed control that switches between 33⅓rpm and 45rpm at the push of a button, and drives the motor at 50Hz. (Running the motor at a slower speed is claimed to make it quieter.) A larger drive pulley compensates for the speed differential. The RM-9 uses a more conventional drive system, and a two-step pulley for 33⅓ and 45rpm.

The MMF-9 includes a dustcover; the RM-9's is a $100 option. The MMF-9 includes a Ringmat Developments XLR mat of cork and paper; the RM-9 has no mat but includes a substantial record weight (the Ringmat is not designed to be used with a weight). The MMF-9 sits on three adjustable cones and includes an integral bubble level, the RM-9 on three Sorbothane feet. Finally, the MMF-9 comes with a Music Hall Maestro cartridge ($550 when bought separately), a modified version of Goldring's Eloica high-output MC fitted with a Vital line-contact stylus. The RM-9 is sold sans cartridge. Some dealers sell the MMF-9 without the RM-9 for $1495, same price as the RM-9, though it does come with the dustcover. Just the facts, ma'am.

The MMF-9 is a far more handsome and elegantly finished turntable, and adds more features at no extra cost to the basic components of the RM-9. It also ran at as close to 33⅓rpm and 45rpm as any fixed-speed turntable I've reviewed: 1000Hz was 1005Hz. (The RM-9 ran slightly less than 1% slow.) For the extra $200 you also get a very accomplished cartridge.

I broke in cartridge and 'table with a few weeks of endless spinning and non-critical listening before sitting down to assess the sound of the MMF-RM-9. I didn't think so, and that made the Sumiko boys so happy. I preferred the richness and "give" of the Perspective, and suggested putting the difference into a good cartridge.

This time, the question is: Is it worth another $500 to go from Music Hall's MMF-7 to their MMF-9? The quality of the components, particularly the arm, is higher, and the cartridge is a small but significant step up, but I'm not sure the difference in sound is worth the difference in price. My sonic memory had me preferring the bit of warmth and "give" the MMF-7 had over the MMF-9. Depending on the rest of your system, you might not agree. Your other choice at this price is the Rega P25, which I think still has the best tonearm, though the Pro-Ject has adjustable VTA — and, of course, the MMF 'tables include good cartridges. If you're shopping in this price range, it's clearly a buyer's market. If the sound suits you, here are three good choices.

Finally...

I have found (or should I say, I was sent for evaluation) the best platter mat I
have ever tried. The Living Voices Mystic Mat features a gel-coat carbon-fiber skin on bottom, a layer of ceramic textile, and a 2mm skin of CF polyurethane foam on top. It’s not too thick, and very light — only minimum VTA adjustment, if any, need be made when you switch from your normal mat.

The Mystic is designed to be used with a clamp, and I found it the ideal mat to use with an outer record ring. I normally use a carbon-graphite mat, but the Mystic blackened the spaces between notes, and seemed to allow a lushness and depth to develop that I hadn’t had before, while causing no sonic damage in terms of transient speed and detail. My sample was not perfectly flat, which is a serious flaw, but my use of the outer ring did flatten it out perfectly over time. I’m sure you can put it under some books or some other weights (not too heavy, though) to get it to lie perfectly flat. It’s used rough-side up, but don’t worry — it won’t cause any damage to your records.

It will dent your bank account, however: the Mystic Mat, which Living Voices claims is difficult to make, costs $300. But if your experience with it is like mine, you’ll agree that it’s worth the money. A real find, and highly recommended.

In Heavy Rotation

1) Richard Thompson, The Old Kit Bag, Diverse 180gm LPs (2)
2) Yes, The Yes Album, Atlantic/Rhino 180gm LP
3) Ian and Sylvia, Northern Journey, Vanguard/Cisco 180gm LP
4) John Hammond, So Many Roads, Vanguard/Cisco 180gm LP
5) Cat Power, You Are Free, Matador 150gm LP
6) The Microphones, The Glow Pt. 2, K-records 150gm LPs (2)
7) Ry Cooder & Manuel Galbán, Mambo Sinuendo, Perro Verde/Nonesuch LPs (2)
8) The Police, Ghost in the Machine, A&M Chronicles SACD
9) Alison Krauss + Union Station, Live, Rounder hybrid SACD
10) Yo La Tengo, Summer Sun, Matador 150gm LP

Visit the re-launched www.musicangle.com for full reviews.
Many speakers can accurately play back music. Our new 6.1 can recreate the power and impact of the performance. The volume of the hall. The enveloping sound stage. The complete emotional experience of live music.

Reason.

The 6.1 Speaker is the latest refinement of Arnie Nudell's vision of absolute fidelity.

Naturally, it's a dipolar design with high frequency ribbon transducers. Each 6.1 has an integral, 500-watt, servo-controlled subwoofer that can pressurize your listening space with bass down to 16Hz.

This low frequency extension combined with low distortion is fundamental for the recreation of large acoustic spaces.

Each 6.1 System cabinet is comprised of 24 subtly-angled pieces, resulting in an enclosure that is vibration and resonance-free with no right angles.

Choose from Cebuano Rosewood, Pomele Sapele or Olive Burl.

Call us for your nearest Genesis dealer or visit our web site for more information.

absolute fidelity™
Hurt not the earth, neither the sea nor trees...

— Revelation 7:3

Not long ago, my wife and I were sitting around the kitchen table — actually one of those huge, empty cable spools, which we stole from a construction site, brought home, and decorated with a candle in a Chianti bottle — thumping through our old copies of Mother Jones, The Nation, and Listener and talking about how much we miss Al Gore. After a while, the conversation shifted to our jobs, and as I scratched my goatee and adjusted the beret that covers my bald spot, I wondered aloud: "What else do you suppose I could do to annoy Stereophile's most self-serious readers?"

Janet tugged at the collar of her black turtle neck, took a long, thoughtful drag on her French cigarette, and peered at me over the rims of her Wayfarers. "How about devoting an entire column to a crazy tweak for their CDs — something that doesn't work, and that ruins all their discs, to boot?"

"Like spraying them with a popular vinyl protectant?"

"Yeah, that's the ticket!"

"Nah. Not one single person would fall for something like that."

"Hmmm," she mused. "Why don't you take a side in the DVD/SACD debate? It doesn't matter which side you take — you're bound to annoy somebody."

"Nope. They only pretend they care. Any true audiophile is happy to buy both formats." I sighed.

"Well," she said, "you could fill up your column with lots of leftist political propaganda."

We paused, looked at each other in silence, then broke into a laughing fit that lasted a whole minute.

After the hilarity subsided, I lit another Gauloise and shook out the match. "I know just what to do..."

**Musical Fidelity A3.2 integrated amplifier**

The Musical Fidelity A3.2 is a better-than-average integrated amp, and it's somewhat underpriced at $1495. I also like its styling: The A3.2, like most other MF products, is among the few hi-fi components on the market that look original without being weird or obvious about it. Pressed further, I'd say that Antony Michaelson, CEO of Musical Fidelity Ltd., is by far the finest amateur clarinetist I have ever heard, and one who understands the importance of instrumental color at the heart of Mozart's music. Andy Statman wishes he had tone like Michaelson's.

I'll also admit: Before I actually listened to the A3.2 — my first Musical Fidelity product — I was torn between I've heard, and it isn't even my favorite $1500 amp, but it's very good.

During its time here, the A3.2 expressed a strong preference for classical music, for two apparent reasons. For one thing, the amp sounded very clear, open, and extended, especially in the trebles. I don't think you'd consider it bright — the A3.2 was well-balanced in my system, with deep, tactile bass to balance out the strong highs — but with any more treble extension than it has now, you might.

The amp did justice to "difficult" instruments, catching both the timbre and, more important, the distinctively unnuanced playing style brought to the baroque violin by Marianne Rorez in Affetti Musicali's 1998 two-disc set of Biber's Mysterien Sonaten (Winter & Winter 910 029-2), a peerlessly beautiful recording in every way. The A3.2 also seemed to capture just the right "hooting" sound of the organ continuo, not to mention the characteristic hall sound.

But the A3.2's remarkable clarity and extended top end created something of an obstacle to enjoying indifferently recorded rock. On World Party's Bang (Ensign/Chrysalis 321991 2) — which is only moderately badly recorded, and not terrible by any means — the crisper guitar lines, cymbals, and even vocal sibilants were harder to take than with my usual single-ended triodes or vintage Naim amps.

Nor was the A3.2 any better than average in its ability to keep bass notes from pulling back on and even lagging behind the beat — which is to say, even allowing for the Quad's own shortcoming in this sense, the A3.2's bass was a bit disappointing. Pitch definition and clarity in the lower registers were actually very good, but a touch of overhang in the bass gave the appearance of slowed tempos — as on "Kingdom Come," from the above-mentioned World Party record, a very upbeat 4/4 number with a double-time drum part (an especially revealing test for bass overhang). But
except for that bit of sogginess in the bass, the A3.2 did not distort tempos, leaving me open to the suggestion that I was hearing nothing more serious than an imperfect match between the MF and the Quads.

Throughout the rest of the spectrum, the amp was unmistakably and gratifyingly fast. It did a fine job with pitch relationships. Decay or "die-away" was fine through the mid-frequencies and highs. And its stereo imaging was nothing short of superb, with the best sense of presence I've heard from an amp that doesn't use tubes or work in single-ended mode.

Even if it failed to convey all the prurient thrills of bongo-bongo music, the A3.2 more than made up for it in the way it handled musical drama of a more cerebral sort. Loudly recorded voices are, for me, the most demanding test of an amplifier's power output, and the A3.2 did a splendid job with my favorites by Wagner (Solti's Ring, Kempe's Lohengrin) and Puccini (Antoninelli's La Bohème, almost anyone's Turandot). In fact, the last recording I enjoyed with the A3.2 was that nice Mahler Fourth with Fritz Reiner and Lisa Delta Casa (RCA LSC-2364 in a good Classic Records LP reissue), and while the crescendos therein are less than Wagnerian, they're sufficient to trip up a lesser amp. The A3.2 sailed handily.

Also apart from that slowish bass, music of virtually every stripe sounded unusually clear and right through the Musical Fidelity. Instruments and voices were appropriately colorful, with excellent texture and a good sense of presence in the room. For whatever reason, percussion instruments in particular sounded rich in overtones through the A3.2: There was a lot going on in every drumbeat, even with indifferently recorded pop. Listening to Roxy Music's Stranded, I was reminded of how drummer Paul Thompson was said to have coated his snare-drum heads with electrician's tape — because through this amp, it both sounded and felt as if he had.

All in all, it's hard to listen to an amp like the A3.2 and still think pleasant thoughts about "lesser" electronics, not because the Musical Fidelity is a better value at $1500 than, say, the NAD C320BEE at $400, but rather because it has certain qualities that I don't usually think to ask for from inexpensive or even moderately priced amplifiers: color, drama, presence, and a very satisfying sort of clarity. If you have only $400 to spend on an amp, buy that NAD and wear it proudly — but avoid listening to an A3.2 while you're at the shop.

How does Musical Fidelity achieve this kind of performance in a single $1500 box?

In recent years, Musical Fidelity made their name with electronics that use nuistors — high-impedance subminiature tubes that turn up most often in old garage-door openers — as voltage amps. But the A3.2 doesn't have any of those, or any other kind of tube: All its amplifying devices are discrete transistors, and most of these are the kind that have been around for more than a decade or so.

Musical Fidelity's designers have instead torn a different page from the tube cookbook: Rather than follow the high-end herd and use huge banks of reservoir capacitors in their power supplies, MF does what most smart makers of single-ended triodes (SETs) do: They use big frame-style chokes to smooth the last bit of AC ripple from the amp's working voltages. The result is arguably a faster power supply, with performance characteristics — and an overall impedance — that is more appropriate to the demands of a constantly changing musical signal.

Like all of Musical Fidelity's products, the A3.2 is also fully dual-mono, from the AC that goes in to the AC that comes out, and that undoubtedly has something to do with the amp's good stereo imaging capabilities. On the down side, that also calls my attention to what I consider the A3.2's most egregious failing: its lack of a balance control, or even separate level controls for the two channels. That, along with the lack of a mono button, borders on the unforgivable in my world-view, and while I don't want to turn into Mister Cranky One-Note so early in the game, the truth is that I'm turning into Mister Cranky One-Note. Having said that, it's still inexcusable.

But just when I feel a good suck coming on, the A3.2 kisses and makes up: Here is a rare contemporary integrated amplifier with five line-level inputs — and a phono section that you don't have to ask for as an option. Not only that, but with the push of a button, the phono section toggles between low-gain and high-gain configurations, to suit moving-magnet and moving-coil cartridges. When it came to the latter, I preferred using my Audio Note AN-S2 moving-coil step-up transformer with the MF's low-gain setting over using an MC cartridge straight into the MF set for high gain — but, like the Bagel set-

Naim Nait 5

Just think about it: Naim has made a Nait integrated amplifier for 20 years now, with no sign of giving up. Will there be a Nait 10 by the time my daughter graduates from high school?

Cooked up at a time when the hi-fi world was just shaking off its long affair with specsmanship, the Nait of 1983 was among the first forks in the road for audio enthusiasts who were unused to trusting their ears: Two decades of buying only mass-market junk left them hungry for better sound, but here was an amp that promised better music.

To be blunt, the distinction was lost on some people, who were sure they wanted something bigger, more powerful, and more expensive than the Nait. Of course, looked at another way, it's equally fair to say that a lot of malcontents like me bought the Nait just because it went against the grain. In that sense, it also helped that it was ugly, and it helped that the 16Wpc Nait was "underpowered."

And there you have it: The first pre-SET blow against the empire of excessive power, itself another bit of oily residue from the 1960s and '70s. That era left some people believing that output devices, be they tubes or transistors, exist to squirt watts into hungry speakers, and that better and more expensive amps are the ones with more transistors or tubes, for the squiring of more watts. Ay-yi-yi.

Smart audiophiles know that an amplifier and a loudspeaker work together as a variable-speed AC motor, as
...incredibly simple

Batteries on a Cable? The world of audio/video cables has long been famous for hype and mystique ... and for sometimes profound and important variations in performance. Into this clutter of both reason and irrationality, AudioQuest introduces an astonishingly simple solution to a universally acknowledged problem.

From the occasional “flat earth” engineer to listen-in-the-dark music enthusiasts, the effect of insulation on performance is universally acknowledged. The technical term “dielectric” exists because no insulation (other than a vacuum) is perfect. All insulation is a dielectric when in the presence of an electric field. The difference between an ideal, perfect insulator and a dielectric is distortion and loss.

AudioQuest’s patent pending Dielectric-Bias System (DBS) puts all of a cable’s dielectric into a comparatively high voltage DC field ... continuously from the time the cable is terminated. The exceptionally simple design puts a wire down the middle of the cable which is simply an extension of a battery’s anode. This wire is attached to positive (+) at the DBS battery pack, and not to anything else. It is not in the signal path and has no interaction with the signal.

Depending on the model of interconnect (analog or digital) or speaker cable, an existing shield or outer spiral of conductors is used as the DBS cathode by connecting it to negative (-) at the DBS battery pack. In some models there is no preexisting outer conductive layer, so a shield-like conductor is added solely for use as the ground plane of the DBS system. For all the models which have dual purpose outer conductors, it is mere coincidence and cost-saving that these conductors are able to serve simultaneously as DBS cathode, and in their normal function as shield or negative conductors. The negative side of a battery is nothing; it’s just an empty reservoir. Again, there is no interaction with signal flow and no extra connections are introduced to the signal path. The battery(s) are doing no work and last as long as the ones on a storage shelf, though the DBS pack includes a button and LED so that one can confirm battery status.

The benefit of maintaining a bias on the dielectric at a substantially higher voltage than is ever maintained through normal use is dramatic. Even a cable which has the loudest music or pink noise continually traveling through it, never has fully formed dielectric. If you have ever experienced the significant performance difference between a product when it was new or not used for a couple of weeks, compared to two weeks later ... simply imagine the same improvement doubled or tripled!

There is no new language to this phenomenon. It is simply more of the same. I hope when you have the opportunity to experience AudioQuest DBS cables your response will be the same as mine when I put the first prototype in my system; “Ahhh, thank you!”

Sincerely,

Bill

...incredibly effective
HIGH DEFINITION

I

If you are like most music lovers, you probably own a large collection of CDs. Is it 500, 1000, or 2,000 discs? Now think about what kind of dollar investment they represent. At an average of $14 per disc, it is $7,000, $14,000, $28,000, or more! If you are like us, you are going to keep those discs and listen to them for a very long time. It only makes sense that you will want to extract as much information from your CDs and have them sound their musical best by investing in a machine that is devoted to the highest-performance compact disc playback, without compromise: the CD3 player-transport.

What sets the CD3 apart from the so-called “combination” players on the market—whether DVD or SACD based—is that the CD3 is designed to do one thing superbly: to play back normal “redbook” music CDs, CD-R and CD-RW discs with maximum fidelity and full musical expression. The CD3 will not play back DVD video, DVD audio or SACD-only discs because it is our firm belief that the convenience of multi-format playback sacrifices sonic performance in the CD format. And, most customers and music lovers have extensive CD-based collections that continue to grow, so the priority on playback quality in this format, in our view, is eminently justified. While using the latest 24/192-capable Crystal DAC, the CD3 does not upsample, because our empirical research shows sonic compromise is unavoidable due to sample rate manipulation and approximating errors. The engineering focus of the CD3 is to maximize performance with the prevailing music format by keeping the overall player design simple, reliable and optimized for the one task it must accomplish.

To this end, all the components used in the CD3 have been carefully selected and in many cases refined for best performance. The laser mechanism is Phillips’ best cast-metal Pro 2 model, mounted to a massive machined base for maximum rigidity and lowest jitter. The top-loading, sliding access door is smooth and ergonomically elegant, allowing installation in equipment racks between shelves. The Crystal Semiconductor 24/192 DAC was chosen for its resolution and musicality when matched with our fully differential, Class A J-FET analog output stage. Massive regulated power supplies—using industry-leading capacitors for both bulk supplies and bypass functions—are like those found in our world-class preamplifiers.

Primary control functions of the CD3 are accessible by buttons on the front panel and by the handheld remote control, which also has additional capabilities. The CD3 also has a Standby mode, so it is kept ready for maximum sonic performance. Digital outputs include AES/EBU (BAL) and SPDIF coaxial (BNC), while analog outputs include both SE and BAL. Since the CD3 is a top-loading design, a proprietary, self-centering magnetic clamp is included.

The CD3 will impress you with its effortless, natural and liquid presentation. Dynamics are extreme when called for, yet nuanced and supple. Soundstage architecture and image focus are the best we have heard from a digital source. The purity, air and presence of the musical event are retrieved to a degree many didn’t think possible within the CD format. This truly is the most natural, coherent and involving CD player we have ever experienced—and we believe your conclusion will be the same.
in a toy car: As you squeeze the button and voltage goes up, the motor goes faster and tries to draw more current. That’s the limiting factor—current: Apart from the physics of “road-holding,” top speed is reached when the system as a whole hits the current ceiling. And so it goes in home audio: You turn the knob on that preamp and the voltage goes up, stimulating the loudspeaker into ever greater excursions—and as that happens, the loudspeaker attempts to draw more current. If the output devices of the amplifier are capable of passing more current, then the loudspeaker can play louder with no more distortion than before, all other things being equal; when the output devices reach a point where they can’t pass more current, the ceiling is reached.

Some facts: Two complementary pairs of TO3-style transistors can pass more current than one. A transistor can be made to pass more current if it is properly heatsunk. Heatsinks cost more money than transistors bought in bulk, and training a human to apply just the right amount of conductive paste between a heatsink and a transistor costs even more. (File under: If you think education is expensive, wait’ll you see what they’re charging for ignorance.) Four transistors cost more than two. And: Everything sounds different.

That all makes it sound as if you could save money by making a generally lowparts-count amplifier that has limited output power but that’s also capable of passing higher amounts of current for brief periods of time—say, the instantaneous demands of musical transients—by virtue of canny design, careful construction, and maybe even the judicious use of bandwidth limiting. Such a thing would stand a good chance of being transparent, fast on its feet, and musically competent overall. That’s exactly what Naim did in 1983 with that first Nait.

Now, three iterations later (the company skipped over the Naim Nait 4, owing to the negative connotations that number carries in some key markets), they’ve released a refined version of the same thing in the Nait 5.

I’ll get my reservations out of the way first:

1) The Nait 5 neither comes with a phono section as standard, nor can one be installed as an option. The only thing the LP-lover can do is to buy the company’s own (quite good) $350 Stageline outboard phono preamplifier (or something else from someone else).

2) I don’t like the styling of the Nait 5 anywhere near as much as that of the original: I’d much prefer something smaller and uglier.

3) Although the Nait 5 does have a balance control—a superb, electronically controlled, remote-only balance control, at that—it lacks a mono switch. Whine, whine, whine.

That said, the Naim Nait, whatever its number, remains one of the most reliably musical products in all of perfectionist audio. The 2003 model had the same pitch certainty, rhythmic insistence, and real, organic sense of musical flow as any of its predecessors, which is to say that this $1550 integrated amp could teach most of its competitors, regardless of price, a few lessons on how to play music.

And despite my preference for the older one’s funky looks, this newest Nait is a better-sounding product. If you haven’t heard a new Naim amp in a while, let alone a new Nait, you’re missing something special. I’ve long appreciated the Naim approach to music reproduction, even as I’ve acknowledged their flaws, including a rather flat, spatially neutral perspective on stereo recordings and a tendency to sound a bit gray and colorless compared with other amps. Yet even this newest entry-level Naim mocked those preconceptions: a colorful and downright juicy-sounding amp whose stereo imaging was likewise (surprisingly) good. Instruments and voices sounded whole and well-rounded, with a decent sense of depth when called for. It was also a bit more extended in the highs than my own older Naim gear—not as much as the Musical Fidelity A3.2, however—giving the Nait 5 more air and sparkle than previous versions ever had.

But most of all, the Naim’s way with PRAT—e-speak for the interrelated concepts of pace, rhythm, and timing—remained. I heard it in Chris Stamey’s great song “The Company of Light,” from Fireworks (RNA R2 70766): When the tambourine entered for the first chorus, the Nait just locked on to it with its rhythm jaws, all the while doing justice to the slappy but precise sound of the drums, with just the right timbre and the right amount of die-away. This wasn’t just good sound—it was good music-making.

“Hurt not the earth…”

Alexis Arnold, a much-loved Naim employee who passed away some years ago, once told me about an ad campaign she’d cooked up but that never saw the light of day: a series of color photographs of flora and fauna in the Amazon rainforest, framed by the words “It’s a jungle out there...and Naim electronics help keep it that way.” The point being that the output stages of Naim’s amplifiers traditionally—some might say notoriously—operate in class-B rather than class-A or A/B, and, as such, they consume less electricity, especially at idle.

It was a joke, of course, meant in good fun: a company of nonconformists calling attention to their products by taking a poke at their own nonconformity. (And as we watch our natural resources disappear, let us also mourn the passing of self-deprecation, that quality which, like compassion, curiosity, and intelligence itself, is most hated by those who are least capable of it.) So it goes: Ads that don’t really sell products seem to go well with amps that don’t sound like other amps, not to mention technology that everyone else disdains. I know good sound when I hear it, but I’d be lying if I said these qualities don’t appeal to me, too.

Last night, my wife and I were sitting around in our black turtlenecks and beards again, this time moaning about Gene McCarthy. The conversation turned to music, but when I played a CD through the Naim Nait 5, the conversation stopped.
Check out our F.A.T. Amps

Fast Analog Transform (F.A.T.) technology was created to maximize the performance of the new high resolution audio formats. Our F.A.T. amps are available in both five and seven channel versions in power levels ranging from 125 watts to 300 watts per channel. Listen for yourself and see what a F.A.T. amp can do for your audio or home theater system.

Remember: Power never becomes obsolete.

For more information and a chance to win a free amplifier go to www.adcom.com/fatamps
BACK FROM A NEAR VOCAL DISASTER, ROSEANNE CASH AND HUSBAND JOHN LEVENTHAL WORK OUT THEIR OWN RULES OF TRAVEL.

by Robert Baird

On this night the wisecracks, not to mention the music, were working for Roseanne Cash. Her voice, until recently little more than an ominous croak, was ringing true. The crowd was blissfully adrift in, to put it mildly, adoration. Shouts of “We love you Roseanne!” rang out after nearly every song.

The confident smile on her face, and her easy and, alternately, funny and telling between-song repartee, made it clear that Cash, who’d been away from live performing for awhile, was finally feeling in control again.

Near the middle of her second show this spring at Joe’s Pub in New York, Cash and her band, led by husband-guitarist John Leventhal, launched into “Rules of Travel,” the title tune from Cash’s latest album. These intimate live performances, held in a friendly venue near her New York home, were meant to tune up the band, and to give Cash the confidence she’ll need for the upcoming tour in support of Rules of Travel, her first record since 1996’s bare-bones Ten Song Demo, and her first proper studio album since 1993’s The Wheel.

After Leventhal had worked his way through a tasty solo in the guitar break of “Rules of Travel,” Cash flashed a snarky wifely smirk and quipped into the microphone, “Not bad for someone with a college education.”

As the audience roared, even the normally staid and low-keyed Leventhal had to crack a smile in her direction and shake his head, as if to say: And we were worried? Roseanne Cash is back.

In the now oft-recounted tale, Cash has come through a particularly nasty version of every singer’s most frightening nightmare: polyps on the vocal cords. Although she began, six years ago, with a small polyp on her cords, Cash’s condition worsened considerably, when she became pregnant with her and Leventhal’s son, Jake. In what seemed like no time, she had what Leventhal calls “a Ping-Pong ball” in her throat.

“The very beginning, when I lost my voice, I thought I had allergies or laryngitis and I’d be fine,” Cash says during a recent interview in the Manhattan offices of her label, Capitol Records. “Then I had to do this show in Northern California, a big benefit for a hospital or hospital corporation, a black-tie
Balanced Audio Technology is pleased to introduce the VK-6200 multi-channel home theater and surround music amplifier. This stunningly beautiful design can be configured with two to six channels of amplification. Each channel is a true monoblock, zero-feedback circuit that features a dedicated power transformer. More importantly, the VK-6200 yields the open free-breathing sound that has garnered BAT worldwide recognition. Outstanding for music! Superb for home theater! The VK-6200 is yet another masterpiece from Balanced Audio Technology.
thing. I got more and more panicked, and when it came time to do the show, I couldn't sing. I had to do the whole show just kind of croaking and making jokes like, 'Is there a doctor in the house?'

“When I got back [to New York], I went to see this voice specialist, and she said that I had a polyp. Now, I wasn't scared, because I know tons of singers with polyps. It's the singer's curse. I knew James Taylor had this surgery twice. Julie Andrews was also going through this at the same time that I was. I didn't want surgery, but I thought, no big deal, I'm going to have this baby. I'm not going to be working anyway.

“After the baby was a year old and my voice still wasn't back, then I freaked out. I couldn't even talk.”

Fortunately, before Cash went under the knife, her doctor happened to attend a seminar, where she heard evidence about a suspected connection between polyps and the hormones produced by pregnant women. She counseled Cash to wait and see if the growth would go away without surgery. Strangely enough, Capitol didn't drop Cash; even wilder, they kept putting checks in the mail. Meanwhile, after two years of not being able to sing or even speak in a normal tone, Cash was feeling the pressure.

“I went through this whole thing about what it would mean to lose my voice. I was surprised because I always consider myself a writer. It was a big shock to me how central [singing] was to my identity and my self-esteem.”


After two and a half years, in early 2000, Cash's voice began to return. Work with a voice coach followed. “It became clear to me that her voice not only came back, but there was a kind of resonance that wasn't even there before,” Leventhal says. “Her voice now, and I think the record shows it, is even better than it's ever been.”

Cash's recovering voice meant returning to work, specifically to the four or five unfinished tracks she and Leventhal had worked on in 1997–98, before her voice disappeared. Self-conscious about trying to sing again, and finding it hard to plug back in to the songs she'd left three years before, Cash slowly began to reconnect with the project.

“John was much more there than I was,” she says. “He was overdubbing guitars, thinking about arrangements, doing this, doing that, and I was like, 'Help me. Help me get plugged back in.' And he did.”

The result may well be the finest collection of songs and performances Cash has yet recorded. The first verse of the first song, “Beautiful Pain,” written by Craig Northe (The Odds) and featuring a guest vocal by Sheryl Crow, includes such lines as “Do you want to be honest or do you want to win?” It establishes right away that some things about Cash haven't changed: she's still obsessed with relationships and the toll they can exact from the human heart and spirit. Another highlight, from another pen, is “Hope Against Hope,” by Wallflower Jakob Dylan and singer-songwriter Joe Henry.

But it's Cash's originals that shine brightest. “Closer Than I Appear” is almost buoyant. Her re-recording of “Western Wall,” perhaps her best-known song, and one nailed by Emmylou Harris and Linda Ronstadt in their *Western Wall: The Ties That Bind,* is pristine and moving. It's there because it's her husband's favorite Cash original, and because he felt she could bring more out of it the second time around.

“September When It Comes”—co-written, as are three others here, with Leventhal—features a duet with Cash's father, Johnny Cash, who cut his part at his Cash's Cabin home studio in Hendersonville, Tennessee. The elder Cash has been in ill health in recent years, suffering from diabetes and autonomic neuropathy. The death in May 2003 of his wife, June Carter Cash, has further shaken his health. His daughter says that, although she could tell he was not feeling well the morning he began work on “September,” he soldiered on bravely, eventually coming up with a poignant vocal contribution very much in the vein of his latest album, *The Man Comes Around.*

But it's in “Rules of Travel” itself that Roseanne Cash hits her highest mark here as a songwriter. The track begins with Leventhal playing simple introductory chords on a vox, then opens up into a pop masterpiece complete with an enormous, hook-filled chorus and a masterful bridge.

“These songs are more generous than I was able to be at 25 or 30 or even 35,” Cash says. “It's not so much navel-gazing. There's more looking out at the world and wanting to be of service. If it's not a service of some kind, even some small emotional service, then it's just narcissism.”

Born in Memphis, Tennessee in 1955, Cash is the daughter of Johnny Cash and his first wife, Vivian Liberto. Following her parents' divorce in 1966, she shuttled between...
California and Tennessee, and along the way studied drama at Nashville's Vanderbilt University, and with famed acting coach Lee Strasberg at his school in California. In the late 1970s, Cash moved to London to work for CBS Records. In 1978, she recorded Roseanne Cash, now long out of print, for the tiny German independent label Ariola. A year later, at 23, she signed with her father's label, CBS, and cut Right or Wrong, which featured a now famous (infamous?) photo of a barefooted, rather fetching Cash reclining across a bench.

"I was a baby!!! [laughter] Did John tell you what he said when he saw that picture? Like before we met? He told some guy, 'Yeah, I really want to find out more about this girl.'"

Cash went on to record several albums that became milestones in Left-of-Music—Row country-rock music, including Seven Year Ache (1981), Rhythm and Romance (1985), and King's Record Shop (1987). In the 1990s, as her relationship with her first husband, singer-songwriter Rodney Crowell, deteriorated, Cash veered away from country to become a darker, more cutied balladeer and explorer of the inner self. Interiors (1990), with its cover photo of a short-haired Cash evidently in pain, is full of harsh introspection and angry accusation; for many listeners, it remains her most committed artistic statement. Her final Columbia album, The Wheel, was released in 1993, and the upbeat tunes — including the transcendent title cut — hinted that Cash had laid many of her demons to rest. In 1995, she signed with Capitol.

Over time, Cash has penned a number of, if not hits, then classic album tracks, including "The Wheel," "Seven Year Ache," and "Blue Moon with a Heart Ache." In 1985, she won a Grammy for Best Country Vocal Performance, Female for "I Don't Know Why You Don't Want Me," a tune she incredulously explains was based on the disappointment she'd felt when, a year before, she'd been beaten out for a Grammy.

In 1990, Cash and Crowell divorced. Not long after, Cash met New Yorker John Leventhal. Their marriage has made for a powerful pairing. After John Lennon and Yoko Ono, Buddy and Julie Miller, Richard and Linda Thompson, and a few others, the history of popular music isn't exactly overpopulated with couples in which husband and wife are equal partners, both mature musicians who actively collaborate in each other's careers. Strangely enough, several have occurred in the same family tree: first, when Sara Dougherty married A.P. Carter. Then granddaughter June Carter married Johnny Cash, and finally Roseanne Cash married Rodney Crowell, and later Leventhal. Theirs is that rare marriage in the popular music world: one that works both on and off the stage.

Cash's Rules of Travel is the most immediate and irrefutable proof. Even more than a potent collaboration between a husband and wife, the album brings together the gifts of two of the rock/pop world's more distinctive talents.

"It's just me and John doing our acoustic George and Gracie thing. That's what he calls us, because eventually we start sniping at each other—good-naturedly. A little bickering is always good for the show!"

On Rules of Travel, however, it's clear—assuming you know, say, Shawn Colvin's catalog—that while the voice is Roseanne's, the production and arrangements are pure Leventhal. Throughout the album, Leventhal's smart, uncluttered production style, which stays out of the way and lets both songs and singers speak for themselves, is an equal part of the album's appeal and power.

"I'm still kind of an old-school guy: let's sing the vocals. Can you sing the song or not? I'm happy to whack up tracks all day, but they don't mean much to me unless it's a compelling song and the vocal is really great. What's a great vocal? On any given song, any given day, any different arrangement, any different singer, it can mean a different thing."

A New York native, Leventhal has played guitar for a variety of acts, including Jackson Browne, Willie Nelson, and Bruce Hornsby. He's produced albums for Marc Cohen, Rodney Crowell, Kelly Willis, Joan Osborne, and Loudon Wainwright III, but he hit one out of the park with his very first production job—Shawn Colvin's debut, Steady On, won the 1989 Grammy for Best Contemporary Folk Album. Eight years later, after he and Colvin had ended their personal relationship but had resumed their professional partnership, Leventhal worked on her radio hit "Sunny Came Home" (from A Few Small Repairs), which won 1997 Grammys for Song of the Year and Record of the Year. Slowly but surely, Leventhal has become one of his generation's more accomplished, knowledgeable, and actively intelligent producers. As an arranger he has few peers. A fan of country and American roots music, he also has a pop sensibility that serves him and the artists he works with well.

"It's (being a record producer) is an amorphous job description. It can be somebody who knows when to order lunch at the right time to somebody who kind of does everything. I tend to be in the second category, but I don't feel compelled to do that. I'd be more than happy to be the guy who orders lunch at the right time, given the right project. I tend to be a guy who comes in and who has a lot of ideas about arranging. I play a lot of instruments as well. And I can engineer."

Leventhal's engineering skills have been learned mostly on the job, via trial and error. He feels his lack of formal training
keeps him on his toes, makes him spontaneous, and leads him into creative places that most producers don't or won't go.

"If it's a good idea, it still gives me the feeling I got when I was a teenager and this was all a complete mystery and I didn't know what I was doing, but still connected with it on some visceral level.

"I still get wisps of that when I come up with a song and I'm not being rational about it, not being conscious about it, but it's just kind of flowing out — when it's something that has been tunnelled down the roads of experience and musical knowledge and technical knowledge.

"It's a balancing act. When you make records, you have to be somewhat aware and use your experience and conscious mind. On the other hand, you want to balance it with spontaneity, and whatever it was when you were 14 years old that made you want to listen."

On the now-inevitable debate whether or not to use the ProTools recording software, Leventhal is a traditionalist who prefers instead to invest his money in a growing collection of tube microphones. When I visited his studio in New York's Lower East Side, he'd just bought two mid-1960s Neumann tube mikes. "I had to listen to 12 or 13 to find two that I liked, and the two that I got are completely different from one another."

He has similar feelings about the controversy closest to audiophile hearts: analog versus digital. "I can almost guarantee you of this: If you're just listening to music on a sonic level, and saying things like, 'Oh, it's so harsh, and it would be so much sweeter and smoother if it was analog,' then you're missing the point. I can almost guarantee you, if you had a great song and compelling vocals, you're going to be moved by it whether it sounds like shit or whether it sounds great. And in some ways, if it sounds great it even might be a distraction. The aesthetic of music, how it's recorded and presented... there are so many variables.

"I don't have a strong aesthetic about tubes. That whole thing — digital-slash-analog, tubes-versus-transistors — I think there's validity to the differences. I can hear the differences, but I can think of 20 other things I'd rather talk about that have more impact on me as far as making records goes."

According to his wife, Leventhal is a producer even when he's at home. "It's how he lives in his head. When he's falling asleep at night he's composing, he's creating voicings, he's doing arrangements, he's shifting chords — constantly. I mean, he actually plays guitar in his sleep. Sometimes when I'm awake I see him playing guitar, his hands moving like this [plays air guitar]."

In talking to husband and wife, it's clear that their marriage and the respect they have for each other's musical abilities are what have given Rules of Travel its creative punch, and have fueled Roseanne's return.

"I'm enjoying it for the first time in 20 years," she says. "I've enjoyed aspects of it before, and I've enjoyed certain performances, and I've enjoyed certain successes. But the whole ball of wax I haven't enjoyed until this record. I think it's because I'm older and I don't have that fear that success is going to destroy me that I used to have. Or the fear that it would take my family apart. You know, all my childhood imprinting about this is what fame and success does to you, and which I tried to avoid at all costs, and so went into my career totally ambivalent. But now I don't feel anything can dismantle me."
For those who frequent the audio discussion groups on the Internet, the method by which Stereophile selects products for review seems to be a continuing source of fascination and conjecture. Supporters of fledgling manufacturers—whose products these Webcrawlers just happen to own—rail against the rule that products to be reviewed in the magazine must have at least five US dealers. Some suggest that Stereophile's selection of review products is all about catering to advertisers and friends in the industry, a process that seems intended to exclude their favorite products from consideration.

In fact, selecting products for review is not all that different from what any audiophile goes through in selecting products for audition and possible purchase. For me to consider reviewing a product, I have to feel that it has the potential of sounding good and that Stereophile readers would be interested in hearing about it. As part of the selection process, I talk to people in the industry and audiophiles, look at ads (in Stereophile and elsewhere), check out the Internet buzz, and even read other magazines to see if there's something interesting that I've missed. Once I've identified a new product that I think would be worth spending some time with, I check with editor John Atkinson about the appropriateness of the choice, and, contingent on his approval, contact the manufacturer to see if they will provide a review sample.

I became aware of the existence of the Audio Research VS110 and SP16L when, during a recent vacation in France, I picked up an issue of Revue du Son et du Home Cinéma that had a review of the VS55, the other amplifier in Audio Research's new line. My French is not good enough to understand all the fine nuances of expression, but the review was obviously a very positive one. There was also reference to a favorable review of the SP16 (the line-plus-phono version of the SP16L) in the previous issue of the magazine.

My plan was to review the VS55. JA approved the project, but Terry Dorn, Audio Research's VP for Sales and Marketing, suggested that I review the VS110, which has the same topology but with more power and, according to him, even better sound, and which had not yet been reviewed. I liked the bit about "even better sound," but had some concerns that this amplifier's 100Wpc might not be the best match for my +100dB-sensitive Avantgarde Uno 3.0 speakers. However, Dorn assured me that the VS110's noise level was low enough not to be a problem, and that one of their dealers also sells Avantgarde and has reported no compatibility problems with either amplifier. While I was at it, I thought I might as well review the SP16L, the preamp designed to mate with the VS55 and VS110.

**Description and Design**

**VS110:** If you were to ask the average audiophile to describe what a "tube amplifier" looks like, I suspect the answer would pretty much fit the Audio Research VS110. There's a chassis of generous proportions, with the eight 6550EH output tubes given plenty of room for ventilation. There are three transformers (one for power, one per channel for output) of very substantial weight, proprietary units built to AR's specifications. The output tubes are made by Electro Harmonix, the "elite" division of Sovtek, and cone as four matched pairs. The five 6N1P input/driver tubes are partially recessed into the chassis, and have damper rings on them.

The VS110 comes without a chassis cover, which is just the way I like it, but people with overly inquisitive small children and pets may want to order the $250 perforated cover and mounting hardware. The chassis has small slots for inserting the supplied plastic alignment tool, which can be used to adjust each

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VS110: Tube stereo power amplifier.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tube complement: eight 6550EH, five 6N1P.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power output: 100Wpc (impedance not stated) (20dBW).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bandwidth: 10Hz-40kHz, -3dB.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency response at 1W: 0.8Hz-40kHz, -3dB.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Input sensitivity: 1.1V RMS (28dB voltage gain into 8 ohms).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Input impedance: 100k ohms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damping factor: 11.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Output polarity: noninverting. Overall negative feedback: 12.7dB.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risetime: 10μs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noise: &lt;0.2mV RMS, 103dB below rated output (IHF weighted, input shorted).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power-supply energy storage: 332 joules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dimensions:</strong> 17.5&quot; W by 7.9&quot; H by 19&quot; D. Weight: 61lbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Serial numbers of unit reviewed:</strong> 52302310 (listening), 52102319 (measuring).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Price:</strong> $3995.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| SP16L: Tube line preamplifier (optional phono stage is available). |
| Tube complement: three 12AX7EH. |
| Frequency response: 1Hz-60kHz, +0/-1dB at rated output, <0.5Hz |
| and >100kHz, -3dB. |
| Distortion: <0.007 at 2V RMS output. |
| Voltage gain: 11.5dB main output, 0dB preamplifier, 0dB Record output. |
| Output impedance: 260 ohms maximum load of 20k ohms and 1000μF maximum capacitance. |
| Output polarity: noninverting. Maximum input: 3.5V RMS. |
| Rated output: 2V RMS into 100k ohms. |
| Maximum output: 15V RMS at 1% THD at 1kHz. |
| **Dimensions:** 17.75" W by 5.2" H by 10" D. Weight: 12.6lbs. |
| **Serial numbers of unit reviewed:** 72502110 (listening), 03102103 (measuring). |
| **Price:** $1995. |
| **Both:** Approximate number of dealers: 55. Warranty: 3 years, limited, tubes: 90 days. |
| **Manufacturer:** Audio Research Corp., 3900 Annapolis Lane North, Plymouth, MN 55447-5447. Tel: (763) 577-9700, Fax: (763) 577-0323. Web: www.audioresearch.com.
Audio Research VS110 power amplifier & SP16L line preamplifier
output tube's bias. The measurement points are banana jacks at the rear of the amp. The bias is a nominal 65mA, which represents conservative operation. Following the recommended 20-minute warmup period, I checked the test voltages with a digital voltmeter and found that they were all within about 5% of the specified 65mV DC. I waited another hour or so, then adjusted the bias potentiometers to bring the voltages even closer to spec.

The power switch is conveniently located front-and-center (no reaching behind); the chassis rear has RCA input jacks (no XLRs), three pairs of 5-way binding posts (marked 0-4-8 ohms), an IEC AC socket, and two 12VDC remote-control jacks. The amp's four feet are oversized and more compliant than the norm. The VS110's finish suggests a high-quality product assembled with care and precision.

According to Terry Dorn, the VS110 uses a straightforward push-pull triode input/driver feeding a partial-cathode-coupled output stage of the type used in AR's classic D115 and D250 amplifiers, updated with the best in contemporary high-quality components. One significant difference between the VS110 and earlier AR designs is that this one uses many smaller, faster, high-purity Nichicon capacitors rather than the larger single capacitors used in the older designs. Unlike the amplifiers in AR's VT and Reference series, the VS110 is single-ended rather than balanced in operation. (Some people, like my esteemed colleague Martin Colloms, might consider this an advantage.)

SP16L: If Audio Research's VS55 and VS110 amplifiers have the prototypical "tube amp" look, their companion SP16L line-stage preamp hardly looks like a preamp at all, and certainly not like one from Audio Research. Unlike the traditional AR preamps, this one has no knobs, just six soft-touch buttons for Power, Input selection,
B&W Bowers & Wilkins

> ABSORBED

Dissolved with every beautiful note.
I'm where I want to be.

Listen and you'll see.

www.listenandyouwillsee.com

To hear B&W loudspeakers and find your nearest dealer call (978) 664-2870 or visit our website.
There is only One Laser Turntable!

No Needle, No Wear!™

Absolutely contact free optical pickup system. Play a record thousands of times with no damage to the record.

Play records like a CD player. Put the record in the front loading tray, sit back, and enjoy the performance. Skip from track to track, fast scan back and ahead, and pause (hover) with the new Remote control feature. Front panel buttons for local control.

5 laser beams. Two beams read the stereo sound, two find the left and right shoulder of the groove, and one to focus on any thickness record. The Pickup head is linear tracking. The reader is always positioned orthogonal to the groove to replicate the exact tracking of the record cutter. No inner-groove distortion common with conventional tone arm tangency error.

Accurate sound reproduction! The LT reads only what the cutter put on the record. Cantilever resonance, moving coils and magnets, inertia, and mass produce their own sound. The LT has no coloration added and reproduction is the closest possible to the master tape. Response is 10 Hz to beyond 25kHz. No needle velocity rasp and needle scrape sounds.

No acoustic feedback due to sound from your speaker striking the turntable and mechanically picking up the vibrations. The LP is safely in a drawer and the laser reads only the modulation of the groove.

Belt driven turntable. Since there is no mechanical cartridge to pick up vibration from bearings and motor, any rumble you hear may come from the cutter turntable. Only light beams read the groove. Computer controlled servo for absolute speed accuracy. Speed variable between 30 RPM and 50 RPM in 0.1 RPM steps.

Independent left and right lasers produce superior stereo separation. Greater than the capability of the cutter at all frequencies. Absolutely no sound coloration. You hear what is really on the record . . . . perhaps for the first time!

Plays warped and rippled records (up to 5mm deviation) and in some cases even broken records.

Our new models featuring full remote control will be shipping on August 1, 2003. Prices starting at US$10,500.

And more, and more, and more . . . . visit our website for the full story!

Loricraft Professional Record Cleaning System

Although the PRC3 may be three times the price of the popular “wet system” cleaner, there are several design advantages that produce truly superior results. At $1795 this professional product compares directly to the $5500 record cleaner (also made in England using the same design scheme).

Nothing cleans records better than the Loricraft! The story is so big you should visit our website for the complete details. Ideal for serious record collectors, studios, archive libraries, and used record stores.

Please contact us for a deluxe brochure, and a FREE demonstration CD with direct playback comparisons between a conventional system and the Laser Turntable. Our mailing includes info on the Loricraft.

SMART Devices, Inc. - Norcross, GA - (800) 45-SMART - email:HTinfo@smartdev.com
Processor Bypass, Volume up/down, and Mute. A set of green LEDs indicate status, including the level selected. (It half-expected the LEDs to flash up and down with the volume of music.) All of these functions, plus Mono/Stereo, are available on the remote control. There is also a 12V trigger output to turn on power amplifiers, including the VS55 and VS110.

The look may be different, but the SP16L's design and construction quality are pure Audio Research. Gain is provided by three 12AX7EH tubes from Electro Harmonix. There are eight high- and low-voltage regulators, a high-energy storage plate supply, patented DEC filter-cap decoupling, high-performance input-selection relays for short signal paths, and a 70-step, digitally controlled, analog-switch stepped attenuator with 0.5dB steps and typical 0.25dB tracking. (The SP16L has no balance control, so the accuracy of L/R tracking is particularly important.) When the power is off, microprocessor memory retains the input last selected.

Dual low-impedance cathode-follower outputs permit driving two power amplifiers simultaneously. Like the VS55 and VS110, the SP16L is single-ended only. The preamp is also available in a version with an integral phono stage as the SP16, for $2495. The phono stage is suitable only for moving-magnet or high-output moving-coil cartridges, not low-output MCs such as my AudioQuest 7000nsx, which is why AR sent me the line-stage version for review. Construction quality is up to the usual high AR standard, with expensive board material, extra-thick circuit traces, and machined RCA jacks.

**Setup**

Some amplifiers are highly sensitive to tweaks of various sorts, their performance changing significantly with small changes in setup. Although the VS110 was not immune to tweaks, their effects were much more subtle than I've found with other amps. I placed the VS110 on

---

**Measurements**

of the distortion products accompanying a 1kHz tone is shown in fig.4. This measurement was taken into an 8k load rather than 100k ohms, which is why the sum of the distortion products — 0.0105% — is higher than the measured THD at 1kHz in fig.3. The second harmonic is the highest, at ~80dB (0.01%), with then the third and fourth increasingly lower in level, which is the recommended behavior for good sound quality. (The low-frequency spurious evident in this graph are due to a ground loop with the measurement computer that I couldn’t eliminate, and should be ignored.)

Despite the increasing level of THD above 10kHz seen in fig.3, the SP16L offered low levels of intermodulation distortion with the demanding full-scale mix of 19kHz and 20kHz tones (fig.5). Even into the 8k ohm test load used, the 1kHz difference product lay at ~88dB (0.0041%). Overall, this is excellent measured performance; other than its lack of ability to drive unrealistically low load impedances, nothing reveals the SP16L's use of tubes. The preamplifier's low level of noise, sensible gain architecture, and correspondingly high dynamic-range capability are particularly commendable.

The VS110 power amplifier had an input impedance of around 100k ohms at low and middle frequencies, dropping to a still high 80k ohms at 20kHz. It will therefore be a good match with the SP16L. The voltage gain into 8 ohms was 28.35dB from
the PolyCrystal amplifier stand that I normally use, and it looked immediately at home. Placing three Aurios MSB Pro component supports under the amplifier resulted in the sound becoming a bit more open, but only by a very small amount—much less than I’ve found with the Audiopax Eighty Eight or the Air Tight ATM-211.

The VS110’s small tubes come with damper rings already installed, so there was no chance for me to try the Duende Criature tube dampers, which I’ve found effective with other amplifiers. (I was not about to remove AR’s rings to try a different set!) Even the VS110’s stock AC cord seemed to work just about as well as my aftermarket cords from TARA Labs and PS Audio. I routinely use a PS Audio High Current Ultimate Outlet to supply AC power to amplifiers, and this worked well in the VS110’s case, with some small—that word again—improvement in signal/noise ratio, and no apparent restriction of dynamics.

When it came to setting up the SP16L, I must admit that I did not go through a careful comparison of various AC cables, supports, and power-line conditioners. Instead, I decided to keep these contextual variables constant by using the TARA Labs Decade AC cable, placing the SP16L on the Aurios MSB 1.0 support, and plugging it into the PS Audio P300 Power Plant set at the P2 Multiwave setting—all the same accessories and settings as I normally use with my reference Convergent Audio Technology (CAT) SL-1 Ultimate preamp. A brief listen to the SP16L without any of these tweaks (stock cable, no component supports, plugged into the wall) showed that the tweaks did improve the sound, but, as with the VS110, the tweaks weren’t in the category of “must use if you want to know what this product is capable of.”

**Trouble is my middle name**

Regular readers of Stereophile might think that reviewers are engaged in

---

**Measurements**

![Fig.6 Audio Research VS110, 8 ohm tap, frequency response at (from top to bottom at 2kHz): 2.38V into simulated loudspeaker load, 1W into 8 ohms, 2W into 4 ohms, 4W into 2 ohms (1dB/vertical div, right channel dashed).](image1)

![Fig.7 Audio Research VS110, 8 ohm tap, small-signal 10kHz squarewave into 8 ohms.](image2)

![Fig.8 Audio Research VS110, channel separation (10dB/vertical div, R-L dashed).](image3)

![Fig.9 Audio Research VS110, 4 ohm tap, THD+N (%) vs frequency (from bottom to top at 2kHz): 2.38V into simulated loudspeaker load, 8 ohms, 4 ohms, 2 ohms.](image4)

![Fig.10 Audio Research VS110, 4 ohm tap, 1kHz waveform at 2W into 4 ohms (top), 0.049% THD+N; distortion and noise waveform with fundamental notched out (bottom, not to scale).](image5)
some sort of a contest to determine who has the highest percentage of malfunctioning review equipment. In fact, there is no such contest, but if there were, the last few amplifiers I've had for review might very well put me in first place. But since the VS110 has such “battle-ship” construction, and worked flawlessly for several weeks, I thought that maybe the jinx was broken.

Not so. One morning, I turned on the system and the right channel had a much higher level of noise than the left, a difference that had not been there before. Reversing the inputs made no difference, so I knew I was dealing with an amplifier problem. I checked the output tubes' bias settings, and found that the bias voltage for one of the tubes in the right channel read “0.” Something was clearly amiss. (Interestingly enough, the right channel sounded otherwise okay, just more noisy.)

I called Terry Dorn at Audio Research, who consulted with their technical staff, and reported back that the problem was probably a tube that had arced and taken the cathode resistor with it. “We check our tubes thoroughly, but tubes are still tubes, and this can happen.” Rather than send the amplifier back to the factory, Dorn suggested that I take it to a nearby AR dealer, American Sound of Richmond Hill, Ontario. AR would send them the parts needed to effect the repair.

That's how it worked out. According to Michael Thompson, American Sound's ace service technician, the problem was, as suspected, a tube and a blown resistor; once those had been replaced, everything was fine. To make sure that the arcing would not recur and that all the tubes in that channel would be matched, Audio Research sent an entire set of replacement output tubes for the right channel.

When the VS110 was returned to me, I checked the bias voltages, and all were spot-on. More important, the right channel no longer had a high noise level, and,

bling the current) doubled the mid-band THD, while changing to the 8 ohm tap and keeping the output voltage the same (not shown) also increased the THD+N, from 0.025% to 0.035%, with similar but smaller rises seen below 100Hz and above 5kHz. Fig.10, however, shows that the spectrum of that distortion is heavily second-harmonic in nature, which tends to be subjectively benign.

At high levels and low frequencies, whether the second or third harmonic was higher depended on the output tap used (figs.11 and 12). But, as with the SP16L, the ordered way in which harmonics decrease in level as they increase in order is apparent, at least with the 4 ohm tap (fig.12). Only on the punishing HF intermodulation test did the VS110 stumble, the 1kHz difference component lying at -60dB (0.1%) even at 1W output (fig.13). Increasing the output power just below visible clipping on the 'scope screen with this signal—90W into 8 ohms from the 8 ohm tap—increased the 1kHz component to -40dB (1%). And even at 1W, I was bothered by the sidebands that appeared around the primary spectral components, spaced at power-supply–related frequencies.

Finally, figs.14 and 15 show that the VS110 more than meets its specified output power as long as the transformer tap is matched to the load. The 1% THD clipping point was reached at 135W into 8 ohms from the 8 ohm tap (23dBW), and at 120W into 4 ohms from the 4 ohm tap (17dBW). (The AC wall voltage was 124.1V for these measurements.) But into loads that are significantly lower in impedance than the transformer tap, the distortion increases dramatically at powers well below the actual clipping point.

The VS110's measured performance strongly indicates that it is very important that the correct output transformer tap be used for its owner's speakers. When that is done, and HF intermodulation apart, the amplifier gets a clean bill of health.

—John Atkinson
as far as I could tell, sounded the same as the left. The VS110 was problem-free for the rest of the review period. The SP16L functioned flawlessly at all times.

Sound
A principle long recognized in audiophile circles is that a given component's contribution to the sound of a system depends not only on the component's overall sound quality (i.e., the extent to which it is transparent to the signal), but also on the way it interacts with other components in the system. Component A may sound terrific in System X but not in System Y; Component B may not work well in System X but may sound just right in System Y. The presence of this type of interaction doesn't necessarily make it impossible to evaluate components—but it certainly complicates the reviewer's life!

Early on in my evaluation of the sound of the new Audio Research components, it became obvious that I was going to have to pay more than usual attention to the matter of component interactions. I began by introducing the VS110 into the system, using my long-term reference CAT SL-1 Ultimate preamp and Avantgarde Uno 3.0 speakers.

The last power amplifier I'd had for review was the Audiopax Model Eighty Eight (Stereophile, May 2003), a tube amplifier of unusual design that sounds quite wonderful with the Avantgardes—an unfailing musicality in its harmonic balance, and minimizing harshness and distortion in the source. My only criticism of the Audiopax were that high-level dynamics were a little muted, with some effect on the music's pace, and bass extension was not the best I've heard with these speakers.

As it turned out, the most immediately obvious differences on changing over to the VS110 were in dynamics and bass extension. The VS110 has 100W compared to the Audiopax's 25W, which is a substantial difference, but the Avantgarde's sensitivity is over 100dB, so one would think that anything beyond a handful of watts would represent overkill. Still, the difference was there.

While the VS110's tonal character did not resemble that of a solid-state amplifier, its dynamic authority with the Avantgardes recalled high-powered solid-state amps like the big Krells or Brystons, and its bass extension similarly resembled its solid-state brethren. “Exciting,” “taut,” “crisp,” “dynamic,” and “fast” were some of the adjectives that occurred to me to characterize the sound of the VS110. Large-scale orchestral pieces, such as the Russian sonic spectacles on Vodka & Caviar (Delos DS-3288), played at a realistic level (in this case, loud) were simply... well... spectacular.

However, an area of sonic performance where the Audiopax was still superior was in the natural quality of harmonic textures: the famed “magic” midrange quality that's the traditional flawlessness of the Audiopax's signal. The VS110's preamp/room-correction unit, said that he felt the Audiopax amp had a more “lovely” sound than the Audio Research. The Audiopax was certainly kinder to recordings that were on the harsh side, the AR having a slightly forward quality in comparison: more revealing of faults in the source, but arguably more accurate.

The comparisons between amplifiers were made with the CAT SL-1 Ultimate preamp. Although the SL-1/VS110 combination worked well in general terms, there was a bit of preamp noise apparent (it disappeared when Mute was engaged), which made me wonder whether these components were ideally synergistic. My next step was to substitute the SP16L for the SL-1 Ultimate.

That done, the first thing I noticed was that the preamp-originated noise was now virtually gone: whatever noise that was present was low enough that I had to go within a foot of the speaker to hear it, and muting the preamp output had almost no effect on it. I suspect that this difference between the two preamps was due to the fact that the SL-1 Ultimate has a gain of 26dB, whereas the SP16L's gain is only 11.5dB. When I combined the SL-1's high gain (attenuated, of course, by the volume control) with the VS110's slightly-higher-than-standard 28dB of gain, and listened through the high-sensitivity Avantgardes, it's no wonder that the preamp's residual noise became audible. The SP16L's lower gain brought the noise down to a more manageable level.

The other effect of replacing the SL-1 Ultimate with the SP16L was that the sound became a little softer and more forgiving, while continuing to evoke the strong dynamics and extended bass that characterized the SL-1/VS110 combination. In absolute terms, the SL-1 was more transparent and more extended at the frequency extremes, but the SP16L/VS110 combination “clicked” in a way that was more enjoyable on a wider range of recordings, such as those close-miked Varése Sabarande show-music CDs, which can sound pretty fierce in a highly analytical system.

The SP16L's remote control was convenient to use, the available volume steps sufficiently small to dial in the ideal level for each disc. In this respect, the SP16L was superior to the CAT SL-1 Ultimate, whose larger volume increments sometimes made me choose between a level that was just a bit too low and one that was just a bit too high—and, of course, the CAT lacks a remote control. However, while the SP16L's volume control

---

**The SP16L/VS110 combination “clicked” in a way that was enjoyable on a wide range of recordings.**

---

**Associated Equipment**

**Digital sources:** PS Audio Lambda II CD transport, Perpetual Technologies P-1A/ModWright P-3A digital processors.

**Preamplifier:** Convergent Audio Technology SL-1 Ultimate.

**Loudspeakers:** Avantgarde Acoustics Uno 3.0, PSB Stratus Silverti.


**Accessories:** Argent Room-Lenses, Monolithic Sound P3 power supply, PS Audio P300 AC synthesizer (preamplifiers, source), PS Audio High Current Ultimate Outlet (amplifiers), Bright Star Little Rock (atop CD transport), Shakti Stone (atop Monolithic Sound P3 power supply), VPI DB-5 “magic bricks” (atop Perpetual Technology digital processors), Arcici Suspense Rack, Vistek Aurios 12 MIB & Aurios Pro MIB component supports, PolyCrystal amplifier stands, Furutech RD-2 CD demagnetizer. —Robert Deutsch
provided, as claimed, excellent left/right tracking throughout its range, I was sometimes bothered by the lack of ability to adjust channel balance. It's not that unusual for recordings to have a channel imbalance; with the SP16L you just have to put up with it.

A somewhat dubious perk associated with being a reviewer is that you're sent CD samples from audiophile record companies—"dubious" because, more often than not, I don't much care for the music and/or the performances on these recordings, and end up listening to them mostly out of a sense of duty. There are, however, exceptions.

A recent exception was a release from Fidelis Records, a company I had not heard of before, of Tchaikovsky's The Seasons, arranged for piano trio by Alexander Gedike and performed by the Tchaikovsky Chamber Music Society. Violinist Atis Bankas, cellist Teymour Sadykov, and pianist Galina Zisk may not be household names, but they're all fine musicians, and the music itself—also new to me—is attractive enough to rival Vivaldi's better-known variation on the seasonal theme. The recording was done in a small church in purist mode, using equipment from Tube Research Labs. Played through the system with the SP16L/VS110 in the chain, the recording had presence and immediacy, with very natural timbres and a good sense of ambience. The subtle interplay among the three instruments was communicated in a way that was easy to follow, and I found myself listening to the music rather than the sound—the hallmark of equipment doing its job right.

Welcome to the real world
As much as I love the Avantgarde Uno, I know that this speaker's high sensitivity and powered subwoofer present an unusual load for an amplifier, so conclusions drawn about the performance of an amplifier using this speaker may have limited generality. To address this issue, I borrowed a pair of conventional dynamics speakers and put the various combinations of amps and preamps through their paces. The speaker I chose was the PSB Stratus Silveri ($1700/pair), a floorstanding three-way that's a more compact version of the Stratus Gold, rated Class B in "Recommended Components." I chose the Stratus Silveri because I've always admired PSB designer Paul Barton's work but hadn't had the occasion to audition one of his products in my system, and the Stratus Silveri has a small enough footprint that I could place a pair of them in my listening room without having to remove my carefully set-up Avantgarde Unos. The Stratus Silveris were placed in front of the Unos, so that they subtended the same angle.

Putting aside for a moment the discussion of the sonic differences between the preamps and power amps, I was very impressed with the Stratus Silveris. While these speakers lacked that "alieness" and sense of unstrained dynamics that the Avantgarde Unos are capable of, the sound was smooth and open, with a wide and deep soundstage, and bass that was surprisingly extended considering the fact that the speakers' positions in the room were not ideal for bass response.

Back to the electronics. As it happened, the first combination that I tried was the SP16L/Eighty Eight. This worked well in certain ways, the highly musical sound of the Eighty Eight making the usual positive impression, but the maximum volume attainable with this combination fell short of what I consider acceptable. With some music, I could have the preamp volume set at the top of its range and the sound, while fairly loud, was not as loud as I would sometimes want to have it. This was not primarily due to the limitation in the Eighty Eight's output, but to the limitation in the maximum output of the SP16L. I was able to get greater maximum volume by driving the Eighty Eight with the SL-1 Ultimate. I got substantially greater maximum volume still by combining the SP16L with the VS110, or by using the SL-1 Ultimate/VS110 combo. (Those Stratus Silveris can play pretty loud!)

The explanation for these interactions is actually rather straightforward, and has to do with the gain and maximum output level of each preamp, these factors interacting with amplifier gain and speaker sensitivity. As noted above, the SP16L has a maximum 11.5dB of gain, whereas the SL-1 Ultimate's gain is 26dB; their maximum rated outputs are 15V and 50V, respectively. Combine the 11.5dB gain of the SP16L with the 18dB gain of the Audio-Technix Eighty Eight to drive the 89dB sensitive Stratus Silveri, and you may have enough volume for the realistic reproduction of chamber trios or solo violins, but not for large-scale orchestral music, big-band jazz, or rock—especially if you have a large listening room (mine is only 14' by 16' by 75').

But change just one of the components in this mix to a unit with significantly more gain (14.5dB more from the SL-1 Ultimate, 10dB more from the VS110) and everything is hunky-dory. The SP16L/VS110 combination gave a particularly good account of itself, producing a lively, fast, dynamic sound, with the VS110 maintaining good control over the Stratus Silveris' woofers.

Conclusions
Audio Research has been in the business of producing tube-based audio electronics for more than 30 years. Although their line includes solid-state products—such as the 150M digital multichannel amplifier, premiered at the 2003 Consumer Electronics Show—the SP16L and VS110 are very much in the tradition of AR's classic tube gear, updated with modern advances in design and components. AR products tend to retain their value, a fact related not only to their sound quality but to the company's continuing support for all of their products, past and present. (Owners of the SP3 preamp, introduced in 1972, can have it factory-updated for $795 to a level that's said to approach AR's current preamps.)

If I had to compare the appeal of the two products, I'd say that the honors are pretty evenly split, the VS110 having potentially broader applicability. This is a truly excellent power amplifier that combines the musicality of tubes with the dynamics and bass extension that characterize the best solid-state, and enough power to drive most speakers to satisfyingly high levels. The SP16L is very good, too, its somewhat laid-back character complementing the VS110's slightly forward quality in a way that's synergistic. In matching the SP16L with other equipment, the factors to watch are amplifier gain (loudness may be limited if the gain is much less than the industry-standard 26dB) and source output voltage (the SP16L's maximum input level of 3.5V is lower than the outputs of some "hot" digital sources).

Individually and, especially, in combination, the Audio Research SP16L and VS110 offer first-rate sound and outstanding value from a company that's one of the leaders in tube audio electronics.
Multi-Channel Sound with a 2-Channel Soul

Bel Canto technology is leading home entertainment to a clearer more defined future. Introducing a complete line of ground-breaking components including: the innovative PRe6, two and multi-channel control preamplifier; acclaimed eVo2i integrated amplifier, award winning eVo2, eVo4, eVo6 amplifiers, up-sampling DAC2, revealing PHON01, and the 2003 Innovations Award winning PRePro home theater processor.

Experience LP, CD, DVD, DVD-A, and SACD in both multi-channel and 2-channel play back the way they were meant to be heard.

Extraordinary clarity from eVolutionary vision™

bel canto

Learn all about Bel Canto components, visit: www.belcantodesign.com

Acoustic Zen

In life, there is compromise. In love, there is compromise.

Music no compromise

Stereophile Recommended Component 2003

Acoustic Zen Technologies
800 Los Vallecitos Blvd Suite P
San Marcos, Ca 92069

Phone: 760-471-4899
Fax: 760-510-9188
Email: infozen@acousticzen.com
Web Address: www.acousticzen.com

Stereophile, August 2003
Mark Levinson No.436 monoblock power amplifier

All high-end audio companies turn over their product lines periodically. Even those amplifiers I have depended on as references go out of production. If my discontinued amplifier remains a part of my reviewing setup, readers purchasing the new model may not get the results I describe. Thus I am compelled to get a review sample of a new amplifier or speaker, and hope for the best.

Such was the case with the Mark Levinson No.334 amplifier (reviewed in September 1999, Vol.22 No.9), which has been my reference dual-mono, solid-state power amplifier for the past four years. I was concerned when Madrigal Audio Laboratories discontinued their entire 300 series of dual-mono amplifiers, but Madrigal's Kevin Voecks reassured me that they had a suitable replacement in the No.436.

**Cool New Design**

Up to now, Madrigal Audio Labs has resisted configuring their audiophile amplifiers into more compact chassis, because that would require cooling fans, which could make enough noise to distract the listener. Their Mark Levinson 300-series amplifiers had deep, massive chassis with curved front panels, silver-accented art deco curves, and sharp heatsink fins on each side. Those beautiful bulges and the amps' convection cooling meant they couldn't be stuffed into confined spaces.

But the market in high-end audio amplifiers is now driven by the requirements of home theater. Installers and customers favor amps that can be stored in racks in closets. And home-theater systems require odd numbers of channels that don't match the dual-mono approach of my previous reference, the No.334.

Madrigal has developed the single-channel Mark Levinson No.436 as a low, flat, rack-mountable unit. Although the No.436 is as wide as the No.334, it's 3” shorter, 2” deeper, and 24lbs lighter, while rated to deliver almost three times the power. Madrigal even supplies equipment racks, made specifically for the No.436, that provide conduits for dressing interconnect and speaker cables.

Gone, too, are the No.334's external heatsink fins. These fins were designed to expose a large area of metal to the air, for the passive dissipation of heat through convection cooling. But additional time and labor, hence cost, were necessary to match the colors of the heatsinks. Switching to internal sinks eliminated this requirement, lowered costs, and made it possible for the No.436 to be housed more compactly.

The No.436's thermal-management system uses crosscut heatsink extrusions mounted in a tunnel on the side of the chassis and cooled by "whisper" fans. The heatsinks are visible through a 3" by 10" rectangular opening in the amplifier's top panel. A nearby 10" by 10.25" meshed screen opening in the top panel over the main circuit boards provides additional ventilation. The low chassis, relatively flat front panel, mesh covering, and internal heatsinks seem more like elements of Japanese design than of a high-end American amplifier.

**Description:** Solid-state monoblock power amplifier with one pair Madrigal speaker binding posts, one 3-pin XLR balanced input, two 1/4” minijacks for remote turn-on, one RS-232 port on RJ-11, two Mark Levinson communication ports on RJ-45, and two PHAST communications ports on RJ-45. Rated power output (20Hz–20kHz, ≤0.3%, THD, FTC): 350Wpc into 8 ohms (25.4dBW), 700W minimum continuous into 4 ohms (25.4dBW), 1400W minimum continuous RMS power at 2 ohms (25.4dBW). Frequency response: 20Hz–20kHz, ≤0.2dB. Output impedance: <0.05 ohm, 20Hz–20kHz. S/N Ratio: better than –89dB (ref. 2.83V). Damping factor: >800, 20Hz–20kHz into 8 ohms. Power consumption: 100W in standby, 180W at idle. Current draw at rated output at 120V: 8.5A (350W into 8 ohms), 14.6A (700W into 4 ohms), 25.6A (1400W into 2 ohms). **Dimensions:** 17.75” (455mm) W by 7.65” (194mm) H by 20.2” (518mm). D. Weight: 85 lbs (38.6kg) net, 95 lbs (43.2kg) shipping.

**Serial numbers of units reviewed:** 1001, 1002.

**Price:** $6250 each, $12,500/pair. Approximate number of dealers: 85. Warranty: 5 yrs. transferable from authorized dealer.

**Manufacturer:** Madrigal Audio Laboratories, 2081 South Main Street, P.O. Box 781, Middletown, CT 06457. Tel: (860) 346-0896. Fax: (860) 346-1540. Web: www.madrigal.com.
DEBUT VACUUM + VECTOR TONEARM: THE ULTIMATE RECORD PLAYER

26 CLINTON DRIVE, HOLLIS, NH, 03049 TEL 603.889.4776 FAX 603.889.5402 E-MAIL BASISAUDIO@CS.COM

THE PERFECT COMBINATION
Harmonic Technology has exclusive distribution rights for "Single Crystal" Furutech products in Canada and the United States.

"... I preferred listening through the Harmonic Technology cable."

Michael Fremer
Stereophile
April 2003

THE PERFECT COMBINATION
Harmonic Technology has exclusive distribution rights for "Single Crystal" Furutech products in Canada and the United States.

"... I preferred listening through the Harmonic Technology cable."

Michael Fremer
Stereophile
April 2003

FURUTECH

13200 Kirkham Way Unit 100 Poway, CA 92064 USA • Telephone: 1-858-486-8386 FAX: 1-858-486-6633
e-mail: info@harmonictech.com website: www.harmonictech.com
At lower operating temperatures, the heat differential inside the chassis produces enough of a chimney effect — pulling air up through the chassis — for the fans to remain switched off. At higher temperatures, the fans are turned on by a thermostat, and have a continuously variable speed to keep noise to a minimum. The fans are at the back and front of the heatsink channel; when activated, they blow air toward each other, causing turbulence. This in turn draws cool air into the top of the amplifier through channels of the heatsink tube, which exits from the top of the heatsink. The airflow streams through the tunnels, isolated from the amplifier circuitry to keep dust from being drawn into the amplifier's center.

**Description**

The No.436's signal-handling and communications are managed from the rear panel. There can be found Madrigal's custom speaker binding posts, a three-pin balanced XLR input connector, an RCA single-ended input connector, and an IEC AC receptacle for the detachable power cord. For balanced operation, the tiny U-shaped shorting pin connecting pin 1 (signal, ground) to pin 3 (signal, inverting) of the XLR connector — to reduce noise pickup during single-ended operation — must be removed. Other manufacturers, such as Bryston, use a more convenient rear-panel switch for converting from single-ended to balanced inputs. Mark Levinson (and Krell) owners must keep track of these tiny pins, which can disappear quickly into the folds of a carpet if dropped.

The rear panel also has control ports that allow the amplifier to be managed by a central control system. If the amplifier is to be placed inside a cabinet, the 3.5mm minijack can connect to an external infrared receiver module. DC trigger-voltage inputs and outputs are handled by separate 3.5mm minijacks. The six-pin RJ-11, RS-232 port allows the amplifier's software-controlled operating system to be updated. This port can also be connected to a master control system such as an AMX or Crestron. The No.436 also supports two-way communication with a home automation system via two eight-pin RJ-45, PHAST-compatible ports.

**Circuitry**

The No.436 shares many design features with the dual-mono amplifiers in Levinson's 300 series. This includes robust, low-impedance power supplies and balanced circuit technology derived from the Mark Levinson No.33 and No.33H monoblocks. A soft-clipping circuit reduces the audible effects of amplifier clipping or overload. A special turn-on circuit prevents sudden thumps.

---

**Measurements**

One difference between a modestly priced amplifier and something like the Mark Levinson No.436 is that the latter will run forever without overheating. Following the usual preconditioning period of driving one-third power into 8 ohms for one hour, the No.436's internal heatsinks were too hot to touch, but its cooling fan hadn't come on, and its chassis was merely warm.

The voltage gain was the same through the unbalanced and balanced inputs, at 26.75dB into 8 ohms. (Pins 1 and 3 of the balanced XLR jack were shorted with the supplied jumper when the unbalanced RCA jack was used.) Neither input inverted absolute polarity, and the input impedance was to specification over most of the audio-band, at 49.5k ohms unbalanced and 99k ohms balanced. This did drop at 20kHz, however, to 18.3k ohms and 36.6k ohms, respectively, but this is still high enough not to give problems with preamp matching.

The output impedance was 0.09 ohm at 20Hz and 1kHz, rising inquiesitively to 0.11 ohm at 20kHz. (This figure includes the 6' of speaker cable used in the testing.) As a result, the Ohm's Law modification of the No.436's frequency response by the speaker impedance will be minimal. This can be seen in fig.1, where it reaches a maximum of ±0.1dB with our simulated loudspeaker. The amplifier's bandwidth is wide, with no rolloff visible at 10Hz and the ultrasonic output 3dB down at 149kHz, this is true for both inputs. The No.436's reproduction of a 10kHz squarewave is therefore nicely square (fig.2).

The signal/noise ratio (ref. 1W into 8 ohms) was excellent, at 76.8dB, unweighted wideband, this improving to 90.3dB when A-weighted. The plot of the Levinson's small-signal THD+noise percentage against frequency (fig.3) shows almost no change with load impedance, other than the degree of the very slight rise above 20kHz. The absolute level is very low, and is actually dominated by noise below 10kHz. The waveform of that distortion at low to moderate output powers is pre-

---

Fig.1 Mark Levinson No.436, balanced frequency response at from top to bottom at 2kHz: 2.83V into simulated loudspeaker load, 1W into 8 eohms, 2W into 4 ohms, 4W into 2 ohms (1dB/vertical div., right channel dashed).

Fig.2 Mark Levinson No.436, small-signal 1kHz squarewave into 8 ohms.

Fig.3 Mark Levinson No.436, balanced THD+N (%) vs frequency (from top to bottom at 2kHz): 2.83V into 8 ohms, simulated loudspeaker load, 4 ohms, 2 ohms.
THE MAGIC OF TUBES...STARTING AT $1,595.00

UPGRADE YOUR MAGNUM dynalab TUNER!

DYNALAB.COM
Toll Free: 1-800-551-4130

www.mагиумдинаб.ком
Email: info@magnumdynalab.com

8 Strothearn Ave., Unit 9, Brampton, Ontario, Canada L6T 4L9 • Tel: (905) 791-5888; Fax: (905) 791-5583

PASS
Pass Laboratories
PO Box 219
Foresthill, CA 95631

530.367.3690
www.passlabs.com
and damage to components from the current inrush as the power supply's large filter capacitors charge. All sensitive voltage-gain stages are fully balanced and independently regulated. Adaptively biased output stages give the No.436 many of the benefits of class-A operation without its having to dissipate huge amounts of heat. The No.436 includes S-series printed-circuit boards made with Arlon 25N composite, as in the Reference No.32 preamplifier. Arlon 25N gives PCBs a lower, more stable dielectric constant, said to result in better electrical isolation of circuit stages and better sound.

The power supply is dominated by a high-capacity (2372VA), low-noise toroidal transformer. Four large, triple-bypassed, low equivalent-series-resistance electrolytic filter capacitors provide a total of 80,000uF of energy storage. Madrigal uses heavy bus bars of oxygen-free copper and high-frequency power-supply bypass components to lower the No.436's power-supply impedance. Its power supply allows the No.436 to act as a voltage source, doubling the power every time the impedance load is halved—assuming your electrical circuitry will support the current flow. The No.436 can draw 25 amps at 120V from the wall when driving a 2 ohm load to its full power rating of 1400W.

The output stage has eight matched, complementary pairs of TO-3P bipolar output power transistors, these clamped to the heatsinks with an aluminum bar. This stage runs at relatively low temperatures due to the wide spacing of output transistors along the current-gain circuit board, and to the internal heatsinks.

The No.436 includes extensive protection from internal or external component failure. Fault conditions monitored include the presence of DC at the output, corrected by servos up to ±1V of DC offset. Thermal sensors switch off the No.436 when the heatsink temperature exceeds 85°C. Excessive current draw, such as a short across the speaker terminals, or abnormal AC line voltages—i.e., outside the 108–132V range on a 120V line—turns off the amplifier. Other switches, located inside each transformer housing, disconnect power if the transformer overheats. Soft-clip circuits prevent the output devices from saturating, preventing the high-energy, high-frequency ringing artifacts generated by hard-clipped output transistors from reaching and damaging loudspeakers.

The No.436 amplifier has Sherman-tank construction, an overkill power supply, and the best components money can buy. Its simpler internal construction has eliminated the time-consuming disassembly required to replace internal components of the

---

**Measurements**

dominantly third-harmonic in nature (fig.4), though the second harmonic makes an appearance at high powers (fig.5). Intermodulation distortion with the demanding one-to-one mix of 19kHz and 20kHz tones was fairly low (fig.6). Though it was hard to measure, the amplifier's protection circuitry cut in after less than a couple of seconds of driving this signal at more than 100W into 8 ohms. In fact, any continuous high-frequency signal activated the protection if it approached 100W for more than a few seconds. While I can confidently predict that the No.436 will never see this combination of signal and level with music, this behavior did make me wonder if Madrigal's engineers were merely being overcautious—probably a good idea, given the possibility of the No.436 being used in fit'n'forget custom installations—or hiding something. But such suspicions are undoubtedly unfair.

One thing's for sure — the No.436 is a powerhouse. When I performed the measurements, my wall voltage was, admittedly, rather high: 126.9V AC, dropping to 123.7V when the amplifier was clipping into 2 ohms. But fig.7 shows that it delivered no less than a continuous 500W into 8 ohms at 1%THD (270dBW), 890W into 4 ohms (26.5dBW), and 1.5kW into 2 ohms (25.75dBW). All of these figures are well above the amplifier's specified powers. Peculiarly, this graph reveals that, at high powers, the No.436 is actually more linear into 4 ohms than it is into 8.

The Mark Levinson No.436's measurements reveal it to be a thoroughly modern solid-state amplifier.

—John Atkinson

---

Stereophile, August 2003
300-series amplifiers. It comes with a five-year, nontransferable warranty, but it's built to last a lifetime.

Setup
My listening area is a lightly damped, 5400ft³ room 26 long and 13' wide, with a 12' semi-cathedral ceiling. One end of the room opens onto a 25' by 15' kitchen through an 8' by 4' doorway. I set the No.436S behind the speakers, which were placed 5' from the back wall and 5' from either side wall. Each amp was placed in the middle of a stack of amplifiers, to approximate a closed-in rack setup. Even so, I never heard the fans come on during my long listening sessions.

I attached the spade lugs for the Pure Silver Cable speaker cable to the No.436S speaker binding posts, which are widely spaced to meet the European CE regulations. I tightened the connections between speaker cable and amplifier using the large, curved wing nuts attached to the posts.

The No.436S's turn-on sequence is simpler than the No.334's. The No.436S has four operating states, and Off. The Power pushbutton, which connects the amplifier to the AC mains, is on the front panel (the No.334S was on the rear). Pushing this puts the amplifier into Sleep mode and turns on the "small" power supply for its control circuits, and makes the front-panel LED glow steadily but dimly. The No.436S is put into Standby mode by pressing a larger front-panel button, labeled Standby. This charges the main power supply and stabilizes the amplifier circuits, draws as much as 100W, and makes the front-panel LED blink slowly. After two seconds, or two blinks, a second push of Standby toggles the amplifier into On mode, producing a bright, steady glow from the LED. To put the amplifier back to Sleep, press Standby steadily for two seconds.

Sound
Listening to the No.436S was an unusual pleasure. It provided the same open, detailed, lush, sumptuous, warm sonic signature I associate with the No.334.

The No.436S provided the same open, detailed, lush, sumptuous, warm sonic signature I associate with the No.334.

Loudspeakers: Quad ESL-989, Revel Ultima Salon, Innersound Eros Mk.III, Totem Acoustic Model 1 Signature.


Associated Equipment

**Analog source:** Linn Sondek LP12/Lingo turntable, Linn Ittok tonearm, Spectral moving-coil cartridge.

**Digital source:** Krell KRC-28 CD transport, Sony CDS-C555ES multi-channel SACD player.

**FM tuners:** Day-Sequential FM Reference Classic, Magnum Dynalab MD-102 with Model 205 Sleuth RF amplifier, Fanfare FT-1A, McIntosh MR-78, Sony ST-5000.

**Preamplification:** Krell KCT, Sony TA-P9000ES, Mark Levinson ML-7A with L3A moving-coil phono stage; Margulis phono preamplifier; Duntech MX 10 moving-coil preamplifier.

**Power amplifiers:** Krell FPB 600c; Bryston 7B-ST, 7B-ST, 14B-SST.

1 During the upgrade of my No.331 to No.331.5 status, it took me more than an hour to dismantle the amplifier to install the new front panel. I had to remove the top and bottom panels and the voltage amplifier boards to access the screws securing the front-panel switch. I very much depended on the detailed instructions, color pictures, and special tools included in the upgrade kit, but even so, taking the No.331 apart and rebuilding it was like solving a puzzle. The No.436 is much simpler.

**The bass response also had considerable pitch definition and even imaging. The distant, ethereal drum pulses in "Silk Road," from 1 Cling's Of the Marsh and Moon (CD, Chesky WO144), were set perfectly in the song's soft, rainy soundscape; the deep, defined bass notes on "Use Me," from Patricia Barber's Companion (CD, Premonition/Blue Note 5 22963 2), recorded live at the Green Mill, Chicago—or "Like Lj," were stunning in the drive, tightness, and pitch definition of Michael Annope's string bass, Ruben Alvarez's bongos, and Eric Montzka's drum kit.**

Bass lines were easily resolvable. The deep pedal notes on Jean Guillou's transcription for pipe organ of Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition (Dorian DOR-9017) were clear and defined. Glen Moore's plucked double-bass notes on "The Silence of a Candle," from Oregon's Beyond Words (CD, Chesky JD130), had taut, well-damped tonal steps.

Playing Stravinsky's Firebird Suite (tracks 3 and 5) or Rite of Spring (tracks 21-24) from Eiji Oue's recording with the Minnesota Orchestra (CD, Reference RR-701CD), I was able to easily distinguish the overtones of the bass-drum head from those of the timpani.

The No.436S's dynamic range was every bit as impressive as its bass response. Like the Krell FPB 600c and the Bryston 7B-ST, it was capable of reproducing full-volume percussion without compression. Dynamics are what make Tito Puente's samba solo on "Tito," from Arturo Sandoval's Hot House (CD, N2K 10023), so exciting. Over the

---

**Mark Levinson No.436**

---

**Larry Greenhill**

---

**Stereophile, August 2003**
Bryston 7b-STs, Puente’s rimshots were as fast and explosive as gunfire. I could easily hear when each of the drums in his kit had different placements across the soundstage, as well as differences in head sounds when two different drums were struck simultaneously. During Patti Austin’s solo, “Only You (No Sc Tu),” the No.436 gave the singer the pleasing forwardness and wide dynamic range also heard with the Bryston 7b-ST. Austin’s effortless dynamics were involving and downright pleasurable.

The Mark Levinson No.436 is so good I’m not going to miss the 334.

The No.436’s midrange had the usual Levinson warmth and forwardness, which added to the enjoyment of my favorite recordings—the hot, sizzling trumpets on Oue’s Rite of Spring, for example—but it was vocal music that benefited most. Whether it was Marc Anthony’s delicate tenor mixing with Ruben Blades’ baritone on “Time is an Ocean,” or Paul Simon’s clear, powerful tenor singing “Trainways Bus” (both from Simon’s Songs from the Capeman CD, Warner Bros. 46814-2), or the blending of Emmylou Harris’ and Buddy Miller’s voices in “The Maker,” from Spyboy (CI), Eminent EM 25001-2), or the Thompsons singing “Dimming of the Day” on the Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood soundtrack (CD, DMZ/ Columbia CK 86534), the No.436 was second to none in its rendering of warm, seductive vocals.

The pair of No.436s projected a huge, wide soundstage and pinpoint, three-dimensional imaging. This was just as true with my Quad ESL-989 speakers as with the small Totem Acoustic Model 1 Signature two-ways. An LP of Shostakovich’s Symphony 6 (RCA LSC-3133) projected a wall of sound while capturing the lush midrange dynamics and timbres typical of the Chicago Symphony under Leopold Stokowski. Mary Gauthier’s voice on “A Long Way to Fall,” from Fifth and Fire (Signature Sounds 1273), was immediate and holographic. The No.436s rendered great depth and space surrounding the singers on Cantus’ ...Against the Dying of the Light (CD, Cantus CTS-1202). And Emmylou Harris’ voice was luminous and transparent on “Prayer in D,” from Spyboy.

And the highs? The No.436 had an extended, translucent, sweet treble register driving the Inouesound Eros Mk.III electrostatic speaker. This combination revealed the cymbal sheen on Wynton Marsalis’ “The Resolution of Romance,” from Standard Time Vol.3 (C1, Columbia CK 46143); the sizzling cymbal work on “The Mooche,” from Jerome Harris’ Rendezvous (CI, Stereophile SP103-2); the extended, translucent sopranos of the Harlem Boys’ Choir singing “A Call to Arms” on the Glory soundtrack (LP, Virgin 90531-1); and the shimmering tonality of guitar strings when Piedmont blues guitarist Eta Baker plays “I Get the Blues When It Rains,” on Railroad Bill (C1, Cello Music Maker 91006-2). And the No.436s helped the Revel Salons create a three-dimensional illusion of a waterfall spilling into a pool when playing I Ching’s “Running Water,” from Of the Marsh and Moon.

Conclusions

The No.436 takes the Mark Levinson amplifier line back to its earliest origins in pro audio, when founder Mark Levinson designed equipment to go on the road and record live sound. While it is the most powerful amplifier in the 400 line, the No.436 is half the weight of its dual-mono predecessor, the No.333. And while it continues the black-and-silver theme of the previous generation of ML amplifiers, the absence of those earlier amps’ bulging curves and design accents makes the No.436 trimmer, lighter, and more subdued in appearance. It also continues the Mark Levinson credo of ruggedly designed audio products with high price tags: a pair will set you back $12,500. For that you get an amplifier whose power and headroom ratings are greater than those of all but a few more expensive flagship monoblocks, including Krell’s Master Reference and Levinson’s own No.33.

The Mark Levinson No.436 retains the No.334’s terrific soundstage depth, deep-bass capabilities, midbass punch, and ability to drive 2 ohm loads. It’s clear to me that the No.436’s trimmer chassis, cooler operation, and convenience give the owner even more value than earlier ML amplifiers, and that it represents evolutionary progress in practical amplifier design. I recommend it without qualification. Kevin Voeks was right: the No.436 is so good I’m not going to miss the 334.
Acoustic Signature Tango $600
I preferred its additional clarity, for example, to the
Lehmann Black Cube... The Tango's balance of
strengths allows the gist of the music to come through
and I never found myself musically frustrated by any
aspect of its performance. Quite the contrary: the
experience of the old "chills down the neck" - Gordon
Holt's test of musical realism... occurred again and
again in my listening tests. www.stereotimes.com
HOW SMART ARE YOU?

Get your Ph.D. for $3,000.

Introducing the battery-powered Sutherland Ph.D. Phono Preamp.

"The Ph.D. is stunning, absolutely no noise and very liquid sounding. Actually it sounds like tubes with the speed of solid state. Played an old copy of Steve Lawrence on Coral Records and it blew me away...I love the battery idea, no plugs, power supplies, or noise. Tell Ron Sutherland he's a genius. You can quote me, I mean it."

Harry Weisfeld, Owner of VPI Industries

Hear the music, not the noise.

AC power lines create noise. Period. There's only one feasible way around that annoyance. Batteries.

BINGO! Designer Ron Sutherland brings us a new battery-powered phono stage with smart circuitry that allows this preamp to turn on and off automatically, thereby maximizing the life of your batteries.

One of the noisiest components in your home stereo is the incoming AC power. Even if it were delivered to your home as idealized 60 Hz sine wave, it would not stay that way long. The audio power amplifier does not draw current from the power line evenly. There is a large current spike drawn when the sine wave reaches its voltage extremes, while at other times current draw is essentially zero. High frequency harmonics and noise are introduced into the same power line that's used for sensitive phono preamplification.

The Ph.D. doesn't even have a power cord. Instead, 16 alkaline D cell batteries line the sides of the chassis.

After about 800 hours of playing time (roughly half the life of a cartridge), a red light will indicate that your batteries are running low. Replacements cost about a buck a piece.

The Ph.D. turns on the moment your stylus is stimulated. From there, the unit automatically looks for a signal every half-hour for just a fraction of a second. If it doesn't find a signal, it will stay on for an additional half-hour with a yellow light indicating that it is preparing to turn off.

What's more, the Ph.D. has four different loading options and gain-stage settings that are simple to adjust.

There's never been anything quite like the Ph.D.

Ph.D. Dimensions: 17" wide x 4" high x 14" deep
Esoteric DV-50 universal player

Ever since the introduction of high-resolution digital formats, audiophiles have been waiting for the smoke from the format wars to settle. What would the winning software be? DVD-Audio? DVD-Video? SACD? 24 bits at 96kHz or 192kHz? As new formats struggled to establish themselves, upconverting technology became commonplace for the playback of the familiar 16-bit/44.1kHz "Red Book" CD format. What to do? Invest large amounts of cash in a system that played "Red Book" (maybe with upconverting, but if so, by how much?) and one other format, and hope that you've bet right? And what about movies on those new-fangled DVDs, Tex?

The answer was obvious: a universal player for everything— all music and movie formats— in one easy-to-use, high-performance box. But the wait for this long-rumored Philosopher's Stone of digital media seemed like Vladimir and Estragon's for Godot endless.

After that eternity, the sun began to break through the clouds. At the September 2002 CEWA Expo in Minneapolis, I first set eyes on the Esoteric DV-50 digital player. After examining its solidity and noticing that its faceplate contained the logos of nearly every digital format known, I immediately hit on Joe D'Angelo of TEAC America for a review sample. Joe agreed, and after some production delays back in Japan, a snazzy new DV-50 arrived in early 2003.

You'll notice that I've mentioned TEAC. As you may or may not know, Esoteric is TEAC's nameplate for its no-holds-barred high-end gear, and is something of a company within a company. It's been a while since any gear special enough to bear the Esoteric label has been exported to the US, but it was determined by the Japanese powers-that-be that the DV-50 was more than worthy of the designation. Serious audio types have often wondered why the major Japanese consumer-electronics firms so seldom turn their enormous resources and platoons of top-flight engineers loose to design to the limits of technology and sonic excellence. When the bean-counters are set aside and the engineering staff is unleashed, wonderful things can happen in even the largest of corporations, as proved by such components as Sony's SCD-1 SACD player — and the Esoteric DV-50.

**Tom Swift ain't got nothin' on this**

Describing what the DV-50 does and how it does it takes some 50 pages in the extremely comprehensive and high-complex owners' manual. Focusing on the Esoteric solely as an audio component makes the task of description only slightly less daunting.

The first thing I noticed was that the thing is built like an aircraft carrier and weighs over 46lbs. Once it's muscled onto a stand of appropriate strength and solidity, it's apparent that, despite the DV-50's vast capabilities, its front panel is straightforward and easy to master.

The real programming complexity is in the video functions, the menus for which are displayed on your TV or video monitor. I jury-rigged a video cable out of a long interconnect and plugged it into my 32" Sony WEGA TV to make sure that all of the audio-related menu items were configured correctly for maximum sound quality on the Setup Navigator, then left well enough alone. The hefty, well-made remote is no more or less complex than that of a typical high-quality DVD player, and was fairly easy to get used to for audio-only use.

While the DV-50's clean, well-organized front panel contains nothing unfamiliar to the audiophile, the rear bristles with connections. The happy DV-50 owner can select balanced or RCA "high-quality" audio outputs on sturdy, tight-fitting jacks, then mosey on over to the video options, which in-

---

**Description:** Universal multichannel SACD/CD/DVD-A/DVD-V player with choice of 6x oversampling FIR and upsampling RDOT low-pass digital filters, three digital outputs (not SACD), full set of video outputs, and both balanced and unbalanced analog outputs. Maximum output level at 1kHz: 2.34V RMS (unbalanced), 5.1V RMS (balanced). Output impedance: 450 ohms (unbalanced), 665 ohms (balanced). No other specifications supplied.

**Dimensions:** 17.5" W by 6.5" H by 13.6" D. Weight: 46lbs.

**Serial number of unit reviewed:** 200005.

**Price:** $5500. Approximate number of dealers: 100.

**Manufacturer:** TEAC America, Inc., 7733 Telegraph Road, Montebello, CA 90640. Tel: (323) 726-0303. Fax: (323) 727-7656. Web: www.teac.com/ConsumerAudio/index.html.
Introducing: Legacy Speakers
musicdirect is very proud to offer you the complete line of Legacy Audio products! Legacy speakers are used worldwide by reviewers, mastering engineers, and audiophiles who are looking for (or should we say listening for?) the most accurate musical reproduction possible. From the amazing bookshelf-sized Studio, to the Whisper, a true reference speaker, Legacy Audio speakers define holographic imaging, deep bass power and astounding musical accuracy. We encourage you to audition a pair in your system and hear for yourself how Legacy transforms the way you listen to music! Call us or check out our web-site for complete product descriptions and pricing.

Critics and music lovers agree: Every Legacy speaker represents the finest craftsmanship and performance levels possible to fit any budget. With a variety of available hardwood veneers and finishes, your musicdirect sales associate can help you find the right speaker for your listening room, musical tastes and decor. musicdirect guarantees your complete satisfaction!

musicdirect has all the recordings reviewed in this issue available now! The most complete selection of Stereophile's "Records 2 Die 4" anywhere!

Our weekly newsletter will update you on the finest hardware, accessories, and newest music releases plus exclusive specials. Sign up @ www.amusicdirect.com
include standard (RCA jack), S-video, D-video, and three-jack component-video outputs. Also provided is a full set of 5.1-channel audio outputs, as well as optical and coaxial digital outputs. The DV-50 can thus be used as a transport driving an external converter (for non-SACD) sources only; there is no FireWire output, should you so desire. The Esoteric can do very nearly anything except refresh your drink. My colleagues over at Stereophile Guide to Home Theater will positively plotz over this thing.

What it plays and how it plays it
Grab a beer and a sandwich—this will take a while.

As an audio-only player, the DV-50 will play any "Red Book" CD, any DVD-Audio CD (single- or dual-layer), linear or packed PCM digital audio, all SACD's (single- or dual-layer, stereo or multichannel), and MP3 files burned to CD-R or CD-RW with 44.1kHz or 48kHz sample rates. I may be missing something here, but you get the point. The only audio-related feature you don't get is HDCD decoding.

The DV-50 includes massively powerful upconversion/digital filtering facilities. A front-panel switch lets the user select between two different filters or combine the two. The first filter, identified as FIR (presumably for Finite Impulse Response) provides a fixed 8x upconversion, yielding rates of 352.8kHz for conventional CDs and 384kHz, 768kHz, or 1536kHz for DVDs, depending on whether the latter was mastered at 48, 96, or 192kHz resolution. This filter is described in the manual as having "a sharp roll-off and firmly defined bass characteristics."

The second filter, called RDOT by Esoteric, "uses fluency theory" and "has a slow roll-off and natural extended audio characteristics." This filter provides frequency multiplication (upconversion) to a 705.6kHz rate with conventional 16/44.1 CD's, and upconverts DVD to 768kHz. There is some

Measurements

The Esoteric DV-50 had a maximum balanced output level at 1kHz of 5.05V RMS for CD and DVD playback, 5.11V for SACD. The unbalanced output was a little less than half this at 2.34V, which is an audible 14dB greater than the standard CD output. The output impedance was moderately low across the audioband, at 448 ohms unbalanced and 664 ohms balanced. Error correction was good, the player coping with gaps in a CD's data spiral of up to 1mm in length without audible glitches.

The frequency response for SACD playback (fig.1) extended above 20kHz, but showed that the ultrasonic rolloff mandated by the SACD license prevented high levels of RF noise from affecting the playback system. The response can be seen to be 3dB down at 62kHz. For CD and DVD playback, the response depend-

Fig.1 Esoteric DV-50, SACD frequency response at -3dBFS (right channel dashed, 1dB/vertical div.).

Fig.2 Esoteric DV-50, CD frequency response at -12dBFS into 100k ohms with FIR filter only and de-emphasis (bottom), without de-emphasis (top), and with FIR+RDOT filters (middle above 7kHz). (Right channel dashed, 0.5dB/vertical div.)

Fig.3 Esoteric DV-50, 1kHz squarewave response with FIR filter only, 48kHz sampling.

Fig.4 Esoteric DV-50, 1kHz squarewave response with FIR+RDOT filters, 48kHz sampling.

Stereophile, August 2003
dizzying number-crunching going on inside the Esoteric.

The real fun is reserved for RDOT+FIR, which combines the two filters' processing power and, it is claimed, sonic characteristics. RDOT+FIR gives you Land Speed Record upconversion rates of 14112kHz for conventional CDs and 1536kHz for any DVD-based audio format. Six sapphire-blue lights on the front panel tell you how much upconverting horsepower has been selected with the RDOT/FIR/Both switch. Insertion of an SACD—even a compatible, dual-layer SACD/CD hybrid—causes the DV-50 to default to SACD mode.

The hardware that accomplishes this mind-bending mathematical predigitization is a set of four D/A converters—two per channel in a balanced, differential configuration for increased accuracy in signal tracking. The conversion chipset is controlled by a “high-precision crystal controlled oscillator” and master clock located on the audio PCB. The clock controls the “entire DV-50 system to eliminate variances that produce jitter.” The PCB itself is a four-layer glass-epoxy construction providing separate paths for power, grounds, and audio. Further appurtenances include a high-slew-rate op-amp from National Semiconductor “to perform current/voltage conversion on the current output from the D/A converter IC,” and an Analog Devices chip for “synthesis of differ-

### Measurements

have found (see “As We See It”).

Fig.5 shows spectral analyses, performed with a swept 1/2-octave band-pass filter, of the DV-50's output while it decoded data representing a dithered 1kHz tone at -90dBFS from CD (16 bits, top below 6kHz), SACD (DSD, top above 6kHz), and DVD (24 bits, bottom). The increase in bit depth drops the noise floor by around 15dB, implying DAC resolution at around the 19-bit level, which is excellent. (Ignore the slight peak in the DVD traces around 16kHz, which is due to interference from the TV monitor I was using to navigate the Chesky test DVD's track menu.) The SACD traces overlay those of the 24-bit DVD below 1kHz, but above that frequency they start to be affected by the medium's rising noise floor. As a result, and as I've noted before, SACD actually has less dynamic range than CD in the audiodband above 6kHz or so. As with other SACD players, the DV-50's ultra-sonic noise peaks at around -45dB between 80 and 120kHz (not shown).

The Esoteric's DACs offered excellent linearity, any error in CD playback remaining below 2dB to -110dBFS (fig.6). For SACD playback, there was less than 2dB error down to -120dBFS, with just +6dB of error at -130dBFS. The player's low analog noise floor meant that its reproduction of an undithered 16-bit sinewave at -90.31dBFS was nigh-on perfect (fig.7).

As is increasingly the case with audio components from large corporations, the Esoteric DV-50's linearity was beyond reproach. A full-scale 1kHz sinewave was reproduced with just 0.0007% THD (true sum of the harmonics), and, as fig.8 shows, even then it was the benign second harmonic that was highest in level, at -105.3dB! This didn't change signifi-

### Esoteric DV-50

Stereophile, August 2003
ential audio signals and as an active low pass filter.\footnote{1}

Other especially thoughtful touches include a soft finish on the disc tray to avoid scratches, and three integral hardened-steel, Tiptoe-like feet complete with attached cups — and even thin, soft, sticky-backed felt discs to stick on the cups to prevent damage to the surface this brute is sitting on. And, hallelujah, those 30-second waits for an SACD-compatible player to boot are only a sour memory. It took the DV-50 only about five seconds to determine what kinds of data were present on a disc and boot up.

Lots of Listening

After some brief, get-acquainted listening, I burned into the Esoteric DV-50 with a week’s worth of brown noise courtesy of the Ayre/Cardas IBE System Enhancement CD, as is my standard practice for all solid-state sources and preamps. This treatment had the usual benefit of smoothing out the player’s sound and getting it ready for the serious business to come.

First on the to-listen-for list were any differences among the upconverting filters. My test tracks, all from CDs, were: “Anyi,” from Bert Jansch/ It Don’t Bother Me, Transatlantic ESMCD 407 (UK); “Take Your Clothes Off When You Dance,” from Frank Zappa’s You Can’t Do That On Stage Anymore Vol.6, Rykodisc RCD 19569/70; “The Construction of Light,” from King Crimson’s live Heavy Construction, DGM DGM0013; and the first two movements of Vaughan Williams’ Sinfonia Antartica, Naxos.

cantly with the Esoteric driving a demanding 600 ohm load.

The intermodulation behavior depended on the digital filter in use. With just the FIR filter, a full-scale mix of 19 and 20kHz tones gave a difference component of around –107dB (fig.9), though the higher-order components at 18kHz and 21kHz were a little higher in level. (Note also the slight swell in the noise floor around the two primary components, which might well be jitter-related.) With the RDOT filter, the slower low-pass rolloff results in a much higher level of the aliasing component at 24.1kHz with 44.1kHz-sampled program material (fig.10). However, the inevitable in-band aliasing products all remain below –100dB, which is excellent. (For a different story, see the measurements accompanying my review in May, p.81, of the Ayre CX-7 CD player, which features a similar choice of digital filters.)

Finally, I examined the Esoteric’s susceptibility to word-clock jitter by performing a narrow-band spectral analysis on its analog output while it played back a CD-R containing a high-level tone at exactly one quarter the sample rate, over which had been laid a low-frequency squarewave at the LSB level. (The latter signal exercises the maximum number of bit transitions.) The result is shown in fig.11. The actual jitter level was quite respectable, at 495 picoseconds peak-peak, with data-related jitter (red numeric markers) relatively low, other than the sidebands at the

---

1. For the videophile, the DV-50 provides progressive-scan video through a 12-bit, six-channel DAC engine (with nonsampling) from Analog Devices. It will play single- and double-sided, single- or dual-layer DVD with Dolby Digital, MTS, MPEG, or Linear PCM digital sound, MPEG-2 video, and DVD-R and DVD-RW discs. Sorting out the significance of all of this makes my two-channel-audio head hurt; I leave it to the folks at the Guide to elaborate further.
8.550737. I fed each filter the same set of music, playing each test track back to back through all three filters, then moving on to the next track.

The results were consistent: All of the filters offered very good sound, but the maximum upconverting steadily provided the most complete and continuous presentation. Images were invariably rounder, better-focused, and more like the sound of an analog master tape — the latter still being the highest-resolution medium I have heard.

With the Bert Jansch track, the solo acoustic guitar sounded a bit darker through the FIR filter, and gained clarity and articulation with the RDOT filter, particularly on the raghú bandos, where Jansch flicks his fingers downward over the strings. The RDOT+FIR built on this by presenting a greater sense of the presence of the entire instrument and the man playing it, to enticing effect. On the Zappa piece, L. Shankar’s violin had a fuller, more present sound, with superior definition of his bowing effects, and Vinnie Colaiuta’s drums had better sock and definition through the RDOT+FIR. What’s more, there was considerably more air around Ed Mann’s vibes. The increase in resolution of the choir in the Vaughan Williams was uncommonly apparent — the voices had much more individuality and distinctiveness, and the space surrounding them was much better defined. The rearmost corners of the stage were more evenly “lit,” and the presentation, as a whole, was far more of a piece.

The breadth of the DV-50’s dynamic range was also enhanced by maximum upconversion, particularly in the bass range. Kick drums and orchestral bass drums had more force and firmness, as well as more definition. It was also interesting to note that the filters produced slightly different timbral presentations, though why this was so I do not know. The FIR setting was consistently the darkest of the three, with somewhat less sharp differentiation of timbres and less resolution deep into the stage than in the other modes. It’s particularly odd to me that the FIR filter, when combined with the RDOT filter, gave the most balanced and revealing overall performance, but perhaps it was a case of the whole being greater than the sum of the parts.

The differences were not as drastic going from RDOT to RDOT+FIR as from FIR to RDOT, but the increase in perceived resolution should be significant in any topnotch system. After my experiments, I occasionally switched to the lower-rate upconversion settings, but serious listening was always done in RDOT+FIR.

After settling on a preferred upconversion option, it was time to get down to the nitty-gritty of the Esoteric’s sonic particulars. Its overall timbral balance was highly transparent and revealing. On the chamber-orchestra version of Rodrigo’s Concierto de Aranjuez, a guitarist Nikolaus Kraft, and Nicholas Ward conducting the Northern Chamber Orchestra (CD, Naxos 8.550729), the intricacies of the smaller ensemble’s textures through the DV-50 were outstanding — the woodwinds, long a problem with digital, were especially persuasive.

The Esoteric’s balance was not un forgiving or ruthless, but it didn’t go at all out of its way to hide flaws in the
recording. Philip Glass's Akhnaten, conducted by Dennis Russell Davies (CD, CBS 42457), contains much music of almost unearthly beauty and delicacy, but it is an early digital recording, with all the negatives that implies. The DV-50 let the music flow without concealing the weirdly "plasticky" and slightly veiled sound that is part and parcel of this CD.

On the Jerome Harris' Quintet's Rendezvous (CD, Stereophile STPH013-2), Harris' amplified acoustic bass guitar had a wonderful roundness and warmth, and Art Baron's plunger-mute solo toward the end of "The Mooche" raised the hair on the back of my neck with its convincingness. The only other place I've heard Stanley Clarke's bass parts in "Justice's Groove," on East River Drive (CD, Epic EA 47489), reproduced with the same fidelity as through the DV-50 is when I've tried a few of them on my Alembic Stanley Clarke Signature bass through my 1970-vintage Hiwatt tube amp.

The Esoteric's spatial presentation was a little more upfront than the Classé Omega's, but somewhat less so than that of the Ayre D-1x. Overall, it was slightly forward of dead-neutral, but the effect was nothing more than a pleasing sense of closeness to and involvement with the musical event. Dynamics were always first-rate, with bass dynamics standing out for special commendation. The rolling thunder of two drummers and two bassists on King Crimson's roaring Vrooom Vrooom (CD, DGM DGM0105) was delivered with enough energy to satisfy even the Beavises and Butt-heads of the world. Nor was the delicacy of solo instruments shortchanged—Bert Jansch's acoustic guitar had a subtle and shaded delicacy reminiscent of analog.

The DV-50 was uncannily true to the subtle timing relationships that are the heart of good small-group jazz.

Resolution was outstanding on all types of music. Working out the richly multilayered intricacies of Brian Wilson's Pet Sounds Live (CD, Sanctuary 84556-2), the DV-50 was right at home. Moving to the luscious, intricate sounds of Leopold Stokowski conducting Lizst's Hungarian Rhapsody 4 (CD, RCA Living Stereo 61503-2), or the even more delicious sonics of Bantock's Celtic Symphony (CD, Hyperion CDA664501), the DV-50 provided all this audiophile needed.

Associated Equipment

Analog sources: SOTA Cosmos Series III, Clearaudio Champion 2 turntables; Graham 2.2, Clearaudio Unify tonearms; Dynavector XV-1S, Benz L2 cartridges.

Digital sources: Classé Omega SACD/CD player, Ayre D-1x DVD-V/CD player.

Preamplification: Manley Labs Steelhead, Aesthetix Io Signature, Rhea phono stages; Mark Levinson No.32 Reference, VTL 7.5 Reference, BAT VK51 SE, Aesthetix Calypso line stages.


Loudspeakers: Calix Phoenix Grand Signature.


Soundstaging was steadily as deep, high, wide, and handsome as the sources would permit. On such spacious pieces as the Bantock, and "Papisco" from Future Sound of London's The Papua New Guinea Translations (CD, Jumpin' and Pumpin' CD TOT52), that meant mighty impressive.

The DV-50 communicated an exceptional sense of music's flowing lines and real meanings. I'm a big fan of the voice of Fairport Convention's Simon Nicol. He is far from a technically flawless singer, but his gentle, rough-hewn baritone connects with me on a directly emotional level as do few male singers; Nicol is invested in every note he sings. Fairport's Old, New, Borrowed, Blue (CD, Green Linnet GLCS 3114) is not an audiophile recording, and I suspect that it was done direct to an ADAT in a no-frills style, but hearing "Crazy Man Michael" washed all the silly "audiophile" issues away. To hold one's own on a song originally sung by the peerless Sandy Denny is no easy thing, but one this heartbreaking ballad, Nicol does just that. And the following bawdy knees-up, "The Widow of Westmorland's Daughter," was as much pure fun as the "Michael" was a slice of exquisite sadness.

With the Jerome Harris CD, the DV-50 was uncannily true to the subtle timing relationships that are the heart of good small-group jazz. "A place for everything and everything in its place, at exactly the right time," was the motto for music through the Esoteric DV-50.

Let's You and Him Fight
For the last year-plus, Classé's fabulous Omega player has been my reference for all digital playback (reviewed by Jonathan Scull in November 2001, Vol.24 No.11). The Omega convinced me that SACD is the real future of high-resolution music reproduction, and has been a constant in my listening for reviews and for pleasure. So, of course, I had to compare the Omega and the DV-50 head to head, principally in SACD mode. The competition was done with the incredible VTL 7.5 line stage (review to come), and both players were hooked up with either Nordost Valhallia or Acoustic Zen Silver Reference interconnects. (I used identical cables with both players during comparisons.)

Listening to the same pieces back to back on the Classé and the Esoteric was fascinating. The Classe's presentation was less forward and its images were a tad rounder, more palpable and
upconverting mode (to 24/192), the Classé had a few squillonths more pal-
pability and timbral richness, but the
Esoteric dug more spatial resolution and
sheer information out of the pits. To my
ears, the Omega ultimately sounded
more like a superb LP played back
under perfect circumstances, while the
DV-50’s sound was more like that of an
analog master tape. Heads, you win;
tails, you win.

The Whole Shebang
The Esoteric DV-50 is the most fun you
can have with digital music playback
short of the dCS trio reviewed by Mike Fremer
in April 2003 (Vol.26 No.4). Given that the
dCS gear costs about six
times as much as the DV-50, the
Esoteric is a screaming bargain, especial-
ly considering its hyper-advanced tech-
nology, bulletproof build, and
exceptional sound. You can even play
movies on it.

The complexity of the DV-50’s com-
puting power is the antithesis of the
“keep it simple” philosophy that, to this
day, is the easiest path to the best sound,
but there’s no arguing with Esoteric’s
extraordinary results. One word sums
up the DV-50: “Bravo!”
It's hard to imagine improving on a product like the Acoustic Signature turntables. Their high level of quality and sophistication is hard to find, and improvements on such high quality products are even more rare. The new MAMBO from Acoustic Signature, however, has pushed the envelope even further. Twenty brass cylinders are pressed into the new Silent platter and each one is additionally isolated by 2 rubber o-rings. The resulting flywheel effect creates greater inertia and also nearly all ambient vibrations are absorbed. To learn more about the new Acoustic Signature masterpieces please contact:

www.needledoctor.com • 800.229.0644

No compromises. That's the essential theme of Wilson's WATCH system for Home Theater. These new speakers feature the same rock-solid cabinet construction and world class drivers found in all Wilson models and will integrate flawlessly with all of their lines. Come in today to hear what an "over-the-top" Home Theater system sounds like. CSA's team has decades of experience listening to their customers and identifying the best options for their consideration. Planning a new system? Upgrading an existing one? Call us to discover a new level of service, the best brands, and an attentive, knowledgeable staff that loves music (and movies!) as much as you do.
Monitor Audio Silver S2 loudspeaker

While audio writers find the siren song of cost-no-object components an ever-present temptation, I do ask Stereophile’s reviewers to be on the lookout for affordable products that sound better than they have any right to. So when I listened to an inexpensive system based on Monitor Audio’s Silver S2 loudspeaker and Musical Fidelity amplification at Home Entertainment 2002, held at the Manhattan Hilton in May 2002, I followed my own instruction and asked the US distributor of this English model to send me review samples.

The Silver S2 is a nicely finished speaker with elegant proportions. The unbraced cabinet is made from 3/4" MDF, veneered on both sides and lined with foam. The crossover is mounted to a printed circuit board behind the two pairs of binding posts. The drivers are connected with fairly heavy-duty cable, and the connections are soldered, a nice touch at this price level.

The two magnetically shielded drive-units are mounted vertically in line. As well as cast chassis, they feature diaphragms formed from an aluminum-magnesium alloy that Monitor Audio calls “C-CAM.” The 1" tweeter has a protective mesh grille, the woofer a flared cone with a bullet-shaped dustcap and a half-roll rubber surround. The woofer’s nominal chassis diameter is 7"—quite large for a two-way design.

System
I played vinyl on my Linn Sondek/Cirkus/Trampolin/Lingo (new version)/Ekos/Arkiv LP player, which sat on a Sound Organisation table and was amplified by a Linn Linto. CDs were played on a Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista 3D player, and a Mark Levinson No.31.5 CD transport driving a Mark Levinson No.30.6 D/A processor via a Kimber Illuminations Orchid AES/EBU data-link. I also used a Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista SACD player and a Technics DV-1 A10 D/A10 Audio player, the latter’s digital output feeding the Levinson via an AudioQuest SVT-4 S/PDIF link.

A Mark Levinson No.380S preamp fed Mark Levinson No.33H or Linn M2.1 monoblocks via 5m balanced Madrigal CZ Gel-l interconnects. The Levinson source components were connected with 0.5m lengths of Ayre’s Cardas-sourced balanced cable, while DiMarzio unbalanced interconnects were used for the Musical Fidelity and Technics players. Speaker cables were AudioQuest Gilbaltar, AC cables were Synergistic Research Designers’ Reference2 and PS Audio Lab Cable. A PS Audio Power Plant 300 running at 90Hz supplied power to the preamp and digital players. AC power comes from two dedicated 20A circuits, each just 6" from the breaker box. An amplifier was plugged into each.

Sound

The Silver S2s sit on 24" Celestion Si stands, the central pillars of which were filled with sand and lead shot, and I discarded the bulky fabric-over-wood-frame grilles for my auditioning. With the speakers sitting in the same posi-

---

**Description:** Two-way, reflex-loaded, stand-mounted, magnetically shielded loudspeaker. Drive-units: 1" (25mm) dome tweeter, 7" (178mm) cone woofer, both of C-CAM aluminum-magnesium alloy. Crossover frequency: 3.2kHz (measured). Frequency response: 40Hz–30kHz, ±3dB. Sensitivity: 91dB/2.83V/m. Nominal impedance: 8 ohms. Power handling: 100W continuous.

**Dimensions:** 14" (360mm) H by 8" (200mm) W by 10.5" (270mm) D. Weight: 15lbs (7.4kg) each.

**Finishes:** Warm Beech, Black Oak, Natural Oak, Rosemah veneers.

**Serial numbers of units reviewed:** 1691/92.

**Price:** $749/pair. Approximate number of dealers: 250.

**Manufacturer:** Monitor Audio Ltd., 24 Brook Road, Rayleigh, Essex SS6 7XL, England, UK; Tel: (44) (0)1268-740580. Fax: (44) (0)1268-740589. Web: www.monitoraudio.co.uk. US distributor: Kevro International, Inc., 902 McKay Road, Suite 4, Pickering, Ontario L1W 3X8, Canada. Tel: (905) 428-2800. Fax: (905) 428-0004. Web: www.monitoraudiousa.com
Our Customers Are “Special”

And they want the coolest stuff NOW. So we have most every hi-fi model in stock. No need for long waits and special orders.

We're talkin’ today, baby.

“Spent $20K at another store... and got this. It sucks. Went to Upscale Audio. System still sucks. But a higher level of suck.”

Upscale Audio retubes more high end gear than anybody. Strong attention to detail, including a $21,000 FFT analyzer and custom built test gear. Names like Mullard, Telefunken, Siemens, Svetlana... you name it.

See pictures on our website! And remember... we DO NOT use your amp as a tube tester.

IN STOCK NOW: TRIANGLE, LEXICON, AH! TJOEB, AUDIBLE ILLUSIONS, BALANCED AUDIO TECHNOLOGY, AVANTGARDE, ATMA-Sphere, CARY AUDIO DESIGN, AUDIO ELECTRONIC SUPPLY, ANTHEM, B&K, SUNFIRE, MEADOWLARK, PSB, TANNOY, BASIS, AESTHETIX, NAD, PLINIUS, PS AUDIO, MANLEY, BASIS, BENZ MICRO, SOLOQUOY, BELL CANTO, BENZ, KIMBER KABLE, NORDOST FLATLINE, COINCIDENT SPEAKER TECHNOLOGY, CHANG LIGHTSPEED, REGA, NITTY GRITTY, DH LABS, SILVER SONIC, ACOUSTIC ZEN, AND UNISON
tions as the Earthworks monitors that I reviewed in June and that had preceded them in my listening room, my initial impressions were positive. Although the Monitor Audios offered nothing like the vividly clear view into the recorded soundstage that the very much more expensive Earthworks had done, the English speakers offered a noticeably bighetered sound.

The most obvious characteristic of the Silver S2's sonic signature was its mellow treble. When cymbals were recorded too "hot"—as they are in most rock—the Monitor Audios made them sound acceptable. But when cymbals had been recorded with a more natural high-frequency balance, as on Ry Cooder and Man-

uel Galbán's Mambo Sinuendo (CD, Perro Verde/Nonesuch PRCD 300999), some of the instruments' top-octave air was suppressed. And old recordings of uncertain pedigree, as on Keith Richards' superbly eclectic The Devil Music blues compilation (cover-mounted a while back on an issue of UK magazine Uncut), were a little on the lifeless side. But so tired am I of the rather relentless highs that rock engineers seem to feel mandatory—as on Fleetwood Mac's new Say You Will DVD-Audio disc, for example (Reprise 48394-9)—that I can put up with a speaker not having enough energy above 5kHz much more easily than I can one that has exaggerated highs.

The overall level of coloration was respectively low, taking the speaker's $750/pair price into account. There was a touch of "bite" occasionally audible in the mid-treble as added sibilance, but not so much as to distract from the music. The upper midrange was clean, though piano sounded rather uneven, some notes sounding more "hooty" than others. Well-recorded orchestral recordings such as July's "Recording of the Month," violinist Rachel Podger performing Vivaldi concertos (CD, Channel Classics CCS19598), again sounded a little on the warm side. While this was not unpleasant, the Silver S2's upper midrange definitely lacked clarity, though there was nothing specific that I could put my finger on.

**Measurements**

The Monitor Audio Silver S2's sensitivity was slightly above average, at an estimated 88dB(1)/2.83V/m, but this is a significant 3dB lower than the specified figure. The speaker's plot of impedance magnitude and electrical phase (fig.1) shows that it drops to 4 ohms in the midbass and lower midrange, but is otherwise a reasonably easy load for the partnering amplifier to drive. The saddle centered at 42Hz in the magnitude trace reveals the tuning frequency of the rear-facing port, while the small blip in the curve just below 20kHz suggests that the metal-dome tweeter's diaphragm resonance lies a little lower in frequency than is usual for the type.

Although not visible at the scale this graph is reproduced in the magazine, some minor glitches in the traces between 250Hz and 600Hz indicate the presence of cabinet vibrational resonances. However, with the exception of one mode at 560Hz, which could be detected at its strongest on the sidewall (fig.2), these were all low in level. The 560Hz mode is high enough in frequency that its audibility will be questionable. However, listening to the cabinet sidewalls with a stethoscope revealed a mode around 260Hz to be continually excited on music, which might lead to the lack of lower-midrange clarity I commented on. Also of concern in fig.1 was the sharp notch at 1.5kHz in the impedance-magnitude trace, which implies that something peculiar is going on. The double-humped nature of the curve in the region of the crossover frequency also suggests the presence of either some sort of equalization network or, more likely, a high-order filter such as an elliptic.

Looking at the individual responses of the drive-units and the port (fig.3), the woofer's output features a sharp notch between 4kHz and 5kHz, above which a series of peaks marks an otherwise smooth rollout.

---

*Fig.1* Monitor Audio Silver S2, electrical impedance (solid) and phase (dashed). (2 ohms/vertical div.)

*Fig.2* Monitor Audio Silver S2, cumulative spectral-decay plot calculated from the output of an accelerometer fastened to the cabinet's side panel. (MLS driving voltage to speaker, 7.55V; measurement bandwidth, 2kHz.)

*Fig.3* Monitor Audio Silver S2, acoustic crossover on tweeter axis at 50°, corrected for microphone response, with the nearfield responses of the woofer and port plotted below 300Hz and 1.5kHz, respectively.
This was partly because the effect was very recording-dependent. The superbly natural-sounding SACD of Dennis Russell Davies' somewhat cautious performance of Holst's The Planets (two-channel mix, Chesky SACD 234), for example, sounded much cleaner than I was expecting from my prior listening to the Channel Classics Vivaldi, though this might well have something to do with the composer's very open scoring for the enormous orchestral forces demanded by this work.

That the Monitor Audio speaker's upper bass was a little exaggerated was confirmed by listening to the half-octave warble tones on Stereophile's new Editor's Choice CD (Stereophile STPH016-2), which also revealed the Monitor Audio to reach down to 50Hz, with some energy still audible in the 31.5Hz band. This is respectable low-frequency extension for what is basically a small speaker. The pink-noise track on this CD indicated that listening height was quite critical. The balance was fullest on or just below the tweeter axis, while a hollow coloration developed if I could see the top of the Silver S2's cabinet. I suggest high stands.

Perhaps it's down to that larger-than-usual woofer, but the Silver S2's strong suit was its dynamics. Toward the end of the review period, music editor Robert Baird lent me Led Zeppelin's How the West Was Won live album (Atlantic 83587-2). Like Robert, I have long thought that it was John Bonham's stickmanship that propelled the Zeppelin to greatness; it has similarly long concerned me that someone who could so catastrophically fail as a human being could produce such sublimely intelligent, well-crafted drumming. Putting on his Moby Dick solo, I kept reaching for the volume control, at first to restore some of the missing air, but then because, the louder I played the track, the better the Monitor Audios seemed to like it.

And even at ear-bending levels, the speakers didn't blur similarly pitched drums. Bonzo's low toms are not tuned much higher than his big ol' kick drum, yet even as he thundered flams from the kit, the tonal differentiation between those low-pitched drums was preserved.
something that is quite rare in inexpensive small speakers. The double bass on Mambo Santanna had good weight without sounding too boomy.

Stereo imaging was stable and well-defined, with good depth apparent. Peculiarly, there was more depth than I am used to on my own recordings, the Monitor Audios pushing orchestral images further behind Hyperion Knight’s piano on my Gershwin CD (Rhapsody, Stereophile STPH010-2) than they had been in reality. During the final auditioning session, I listened to some 24-bit/88.2kHz test mixes of a new recording I had made in May of Minnesota male-voice choir Cantus in the superbly supportive acoustic of the fairly new Washington Pavilion in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. To cover my bets, I used six mikes: near and distant pairs of spaced omnis and a central pair of cardioids. Over the Monitor Audios I kept going for a drier mix, with more of the cardioid feed apparent, than I did with the Dynaudio Confidence C4s I reviewed back in March. What sounded right on the Silver S2s lacked enough envelopment over the more neutrally balanced Dynaudios, or even over the Spendor S3/5ses that Art Dudley reviewed in July and that had briefly paid a visit to my listening room.

**Summing up**

As I have commented before, the trick for the designer of an inexpensive speaker to pull off is to balance the tradeoffs so that, while his design will have some faults compared with cost-no-object models, none of these will be severe enough to interfere with the listening experience. Monitor Audio’s designer appears to have done this with the Silver S2. While the speaker does have an identifiable character, being balanced on the warm, mellow side, this is probably a good thing, given inexpensive electronics’ tendency to have glary trebles. While I had some criticisms—that hoity cabinet bothered me perhaps the most—the Silver S2 never gave less than enjoyable results, and is very well-finished considering its affordable price. Well worth a listen.

---

**Monitor Audio Silver S2**

shows the complex sum of the nearfield responses (added together, taking acoustic phase and the different distance of the woofer and port from a nominal farfield reference point). The low-frequency -6dB point coincides with the port tuning frequency of 42Hz, but a slight energy excess in the upper bass is visible. Together with the overall depressed level of the tweeter, this will give rise to the warm, rather mellow balance I heard. Note the peak at 4kHz. This was not apparent in the individual drive-unit outputs, but is real nevertheless, and is evident in Monitor Audio’s own measurements of the Silver S2. I wonder if it correlates with the touch of mid-treble “bite” I occasionally noticed.

Lateral dispersion (fig.5) was fairly even, the 7” woofer beaming a little lower in frequency than the smaller-diameter units usually used in two-way designs, and an off-axis flare apparent between 5kHz and 6kHz. The tweeter’s top octave is also suppressed to the sides, adding to the rather airless highs. In the vertical plane (fig.6), large suckouts develop in the crossover region if the speaker is listened to much above or below the tweeter axis, and, again, the tweeter gets quite bouncy in its top octave. Even so, the Silver S2’s spatially averaged room response (fig.7) is remarkably even for such an inexpensive speaker. The slightly suppressed tweeter balance is evident in this graph, as is the somewhat elevated lower midrange, both correlating nicely with my impressions of the speaker’s tonal balance.

The Silver S2’s step response (fig.8) holds no surprises. Both drivers connected in positive acoustic polarity and some ringing due to the 20kHz tweeter resonance is apparent. The cumulative spectral-decay plot on the tweeter axis (fig.9) is marred by ridges of decayed energy at 3.9kHz, 5.4kHz, 78kHz, and 20kHz, all but the last presumably stemming from the woofer’s metal cone.

---

*John Atkinson*
CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL

LPs & SACDs

Creedence Clearwater Revival
LP = AAPP 8382
SACD = CAPP 8382 SA

Bayou Country
LP = AAPP 8387
SACD = CAPP 8387 SA

Green River
LP = AAPP 8393
SACD = CAPP 8393 SA

Willy and the Poorboys
LP = AAPP 8397
SACD = CAPP 8397 SA

Cosmo’s Factory
LP = AAPP 8402
SACD = CAPP 8402 SA

Mardi Gras
LP = AAPP 9404
SACD = CAPP 9404 SA

Pendulum
LP = AAPP 8410
SACD = CAPP 8410 SA

$25 each

WWW.ACOUSTICSOUNDS.COM • 1-800-716-3553

NOW ON 45 RPM

the best jazz ever

Analogue Productions is releasing the TOP 25 titles from Fantasy, Inc., keepers of the world’s mightiest jazz catalog. Sign up now to reserve your set!

• Never has such a set been available on 180-gram vinyl cut at 45 RPM and limited to 1,000 numbered copies of each title.

• Using only the original analog master tapes, the renowned team of Steve Hoffman and Kevin Gray will remaster and cut all of these titles at AcousTec Mastering, and the vinyl will be pressed at Record Technology, Inc.

“...I think you will find that this new series is going to be the most pure and dynamic re-creations of the original master tapes we have ever heard.”

—Steve Hoffman, Mastering Engineer

FIRST TEN TITLES AVAILABLE NOW

Two titles released each subsequent month

1. Count Basie & His Orchestra
   LP = AJAZ 2310-901
   $50.00

2. Duke Ellington Quartet
   Duke’s Big 4
   LP = AJAZ 2310-703
   $50.00

3. Willie Dixon & Memphis Slim
   Willie’s Blues
   LP = AJAZ 7079
   $50.00

4. Beb Webster At The Renaisance
   LP = AJAZ 7846
   $50.00

5. Sonny Rollins
   Saxophone Colossus
   LP = AJAZ 7079
   $50.00

6. Gene Ammons
   Boss Tenor
   LP = AJAZ 7110
   $50.00

7. Count Basie Meets Oscar Peterson
   The Timekeepers
   LP = AJAZ 7114
   $50.00

8. Cannonball Adderley With Bill Evans
   Know What I Mean?
   LP = AJAZ 9433
   $50.00

9. Miles Davis
   Cookin’
   LP = AJAZ 7130
   $50.00

10. Verve Guaraldi Jazz Impressions of Black Orpheus
    LP = AJAZ 9896
    $50.00

11. John Coltrane
    Soultrane
    LP = AJAZ 7114
    $50.00

12. Sonny Rollins Quartet
    Tenor Madness
    LP = AJAZ 7047
    $50.00

13. Wes Montgomery Full House
    LP = AJAZ 7335
    $50.00

14. Lightnin’ Hopkins with Sonny Terry
    Last Night Blues
    LP = AJAZ 1129
    $50.00

15. Miles Davis
    Bop' Groove
    LP = AJAZ 7099
    $50.00

16. Coleman Hawkins
    Night Hawk
    LP = AJAZ 7016
    $50.00

17. Thelonious Monk
    Brilliant Corners
    LP = AJAZ 7099
    $50.00

18. Art Pepper
    Meets The Rhythm Section
    LP = AJAZ 7352
    $50.00

19. Chet Baker
    Chet
    LP = AJAZ 7128
    $50.00

20. Bill Evans Trio
    Moon Beams
    LP = AJAZ 9439
    $50.00

21. Sonny Rollins
    Way Out West
    LP = AJAZ 7079
    $50.00

WWW.ACOUSTICSOUNDS.COM • 1-800-716-3553
FOR THE FIRST TIME, these Original Jazz Classics have been issued on 180-gram virgin vinyl pressed at RTI.

Mill Jackson & Wes Montgomery Bags Meets Wes LP = AAPJ 234
Miles Davis and the Modern Jazz Giants LP = AAPJ 347
Sonny Terry Sonny Is King LP = AAPJ 521
John Coltrane Coltrane LP = AAPJ 710
Bill Evans Trio Moon Beams LP = AAPJ 434
Bill Evans Everybody Digs LP = AAPJ 668
Miles Davis All Stars Workin' LP = AAPJ 123
Ella Fitzgerald Fine and Mellow LP = AAPJ 129
Ben Webster and Joe Zawinul Soultrane LP = AAPJ 109
Wes Montgomery Full House LP = AAPJ 106
Willie Dixon and Memphis Slim Willie's Blues LP = AAPJ 501
John Coltrane Standard Coltrane LP = AAPJ 246
Johnny Griffin The Little Giant LP = AAPJ 136
John Lee Hooker That's My Story LP = AAPJ 538
Coleman Hawkins Night Hawk LP = AAPJ 420

Chet Baker Chet Baker In New York LP = AAPJ 207
Gene Ammons Blue Gene LP = AAPJ 192

180-GRAM LPs $20 each
Sonny Rollins Quartet Tenor Madness LP = AAPJ 124
John Coltrane Soultrane LP = AAPJ 7142
Sonny Rollins and the Contemporary Leaders LP = AAPJ 340
Thelonious Monk and Gerry Mulligan Mulligan Meets Monk LP = AAPJ 301

1-800-716-3553

JAZZ LPs and SACDs from Eighty-Eight's Records exclusively available from ACOUSTIC SOUNDS

Will & Rainbow Over Crystal Green LP = AEE 7001 SACD = CEES 8801 SA
Grady Tate Sings All Love LP = AEF 7002 SACD = CEES 8802 SA
Joe Chambers Urban Grooves LP = AEE 7003 SACD = CEES 8803 SA
Ravi Coltrane Mad 6 LP = AEE 7004 SACD = CEES 8804 SA
Clark Terry & Max Roach Friendship LP = AEE 7005 SACD = CEES 8805 SA

Eddie Henderson So What LP = AEE 7006 SACD = CEES 8806 SA
Marlena Shaw Live In Tokyo LP = AEE 7007 SACD = CEES 8807 SA
The Great Jazz Trio Autumn Leaves LP = AEE 7008 SACD = CEES 8808 SA
Roy Haynes Quartet Love Letters LP = AEE 7009 SACD = CEES 8809 SA

Eliza Fitzgerald Sings the Cole Porter Song Book LP = AVER 4001
Eliza Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong Ella and Louis LP = AVEE 4003
Eliza Fitzgerald & Count Basie On The Sunny Side Of The Street LP = AVER 4001
Louis Armstrong Meets Oscar Peterson LP = AVER 4002

Eliza Fitzgerald Sings the George and Ira Gershwin Song Books LP = AVER 4002
Ben Webster Quintet Sacred Concert LP = AVER 4003
Ben Webster Meets Oscar Peterson LP = AVER 4004

Gerry Mulligan The Concert Jazz Band LP = AVER 4005

Duzy Gillespie An Electrically Ev'ning With The Duzy Gillespie Quintet LP = AVER 4006
Stan Getz and Charlie Byrd Jazz Samba LP = AVER 4007
The Oscar Peterson Trio Night Train LP = AVER 4008
Stan Getz & Joao Gilberto Getz/Gilberto LP = AVER 4009
Jimmy Smith The Cat LP = AVER 4010
Wynon Kelly Trio Smokin' At The Half Note LP = AVER 4011
Cal Tjader Soul Burst LP = AVER 4012
Luiz Henrique Bara Limpa LP = AVER 4013

1-800-716-3553 www.acousticsounds.com
Highly Recommended Products From A Trusted Name: Audio Advisor

Established in 1980, we are the industry's oldest, largest, and most trusted direct mail high-end audio retailer. Call us toll-free at (800) 942-0220 to consult with our highly experienced sales staff, or visit us online for over 2,000 audiophile/home theater products including:


Worldwide delivery available. All products are covered by our 30-Day Satisfaction Guarantee. Or visit us online at www.audioadvisor.com

Call (800) 942-0220 For More Information. Call (800) 451-5445 For Our FREE 112-page Color Catalog.

Audio Advisor, Inc. • 4717 Broadmoor SE, Ste. A, Kentwood, MI 49512 • Phone: (616) 656-9584 or (800) 942-0220 • Fax: (616) 656-9592
Grace Design 901 headphone amplifier

After John Marks enthused over the $1495 Grace 901 headphone amplifier in March (pp.45-47),1 he shipped the review sample (serial number 9085) to me. He wanted me to listen to the unit for myself, not only for pleasure, but also so I could decide whether his recommendation of a Class A rating in our April "Recommended Components" listing was appropriate.

Using two pairs of Sennheiser HD600 headphones, one fitted with the stock three-conductor cable, the other with balanced, dual-mono Clou cable, I compared it with my sample of HeadRoom's BlockHead ($3500), purchased following Jonathan Scull's rave review in July 2002.

To cut a long story short, JM was right. The Grace 901 has a rich, full-bodied presentation that fully justifies a Class A rating. Perhaps the balanced BlockHead edged slightly ahead in ultimate resolution, but at a considerable price premium. And the Grace's 96kHz-capable data input makes it a one-box solution for digital playback, eliminating the need for one pair of possibly pricey interconnects.

But echoing JM's enthusiastic enthusiasm was not the prime purpose of this "Follow-Up," which was to add some measured data to the magazine's database. For balanced analog signals, the 901 offered a maximum gain of 9.5dB in its Low gain setting, 20.1dB in High, allowing the stepped volume control to be used in its optimal range regardless of the sensitivity of the headphones used. There wasn't an exact unity-gain setting; it lay between the control's 4:00 and 4:30 o'clock positions. Neither set of analog inputs (balanced, pin 2 hot, or unbalanced), nor the digital input, inverted the 901's polarity. The input impedance at 1kHz measured a usefully high 19.7k ohms unbalanced, 39.5k ohms balanced.

The 901's output impedance measured a very low 1.4 ohms across most of the audioband, this rising slightly to 1.85 ohms at 20kHz. (This figure includes the series resistance of the leads connecting the unit to my Audio Precision System One.) The Grace should be able to drive long leads and all headphone models without breaking a sweat. (For the technically minded, its output stage uses an Analog Devices AD815 balanced line driver, capable of sourcing a minimum of 500mA.) The maximum output level into 150 ohms was the same in both High and Low gain conditions: 11.9V at 1% THD (fig.1), which will be more than enough to drive all available headphones to gray matter-compressing volumes.

For analog inputs, the amplifier's frequency response was flat to 200kHz, its channel separation approaching 100dB (neither shown). The A-weighted signal/noise ratio with the input shorted but the volume control at its maximum (ref. 1V output into 150 ohms) was an excellent 93.3dBA in the Low gain condition. This worsened, as expected, by 10dB in High, and by another 20dB when the A-weighting filter was switched out of circuit to give an unweighted measurement bandwidth of 10Hz-50kHz. Distortion was extremely low into the laboratory 100k ohm load, and worsened only very slightly into 150 ohms, at low frequencies and above the audioband (fig.2).

Fig.3 reveals that the highest-level component of that distortion at low frequencies was the second, at -80dB (0.01%); all other harmonics approached or were below -100dB. Intermodulation distortion was also vanishingly low under normal conditions. To generate...
the spectrum shown in fig.4, where the 1kHz difference component reaches a minuscule -96dB (0.0015%), I had to drive the 901 into 600 ohms—almost into clipping.

This measurement was taken using 24-bit digital data as the source. The Grace 901's digital circuitry is based on the Crystal CS43122 chip, a 24-bit, 192kHz-capable DAC with a specified dynamic range of 122dB. (The CS43122 uses a delta-sigma architecture with 5-bit internal words to achieve this performance.) With the High gain setting and the volume control at full, the output stage clips at -75dBFS for digital input signals. This is academic, considering that, at that point, the listener would be standing several feet from the headphones. With the Low setting, the maximum output level at 0dBFS was 8V RMS.

The frequency response at the 44.1kHz sample rate (not shown) was flat within the audioband, with 0.1dB drops apparent at 10Hz and 20kHz. Surprisingly, the infrasonic response was slightly more curtailed at a 96kHz sample rate (fig.5). The ultrasonic response continues the slight 20kHz droop to reach -0.5dB an octave higher, with then a steep low-pass rolloff evident.

Fig.6 shows my usual spectral analysis of the DAC's noise floor, using a swept 1/3-octave bandpass filter, while the DAC decoded 16- and 24-bit dithered data representing a 1kHz tone at -90dBFS. The

---

**Fig.4** Grace 901, analog input, HF intermodulation spectrum, DC-22kHz, 19+20kHz at 12V into 150 ohms (linear frequency scale).

**Fig.5** Grace 901, digital input, frequency response at -12dBFS into 150 ohms, 96kHz data (right channel dashed, 0.5dB/vertical div.).

**Fig.6** Grace 901, 1/3-octave spectrum of dithered 1kHz tone at -90dBFS, with noise and spuriae, 16-bit data (top), 24-bit data (bottom). (Right channel dashed.)

**Fig.7** Grace 901, departure from linearity, 16-bit data (2dB/vertical div., right channel dashed).

**Fig.8** Grace 901, waveform of undithered 1kHz sinewave at -90.31dBFS, 16-bit data.

**Fig.9** Grace 901, waveform of undithered 1kHz sinewave at -90.31dBFS, 24-bit data.

**Fig.10** Grace 901, high-resolution jitter spectrum of analog output signal (11.025kHz at -6dBFS, sampled at 44.1kHz with LSB toggled at 229Hz). Center frequency of trace, 11.025kHz; frequency range, ±3.5kHz.
increase in bit depth doesn't lower the noise floor by as much as the very best D/A's around — such as the Weiss Me
da, which Kal Rubinson reviewed in February 2003, or the dCS Elgar, which Michael Fremer reviewed in April. It also unmasks some very slight power-supply noise at 60Hz, 120Hz, and 180Hz. But the 901 is a) a headphone amplifier, and b) its price is a small fraction of those cost-object behemoths.

The 901’s linearity error (measured with dithered 16-bit data representing a 500Hz tone) was vanishingly small to below ~110dBFS (fig.7), and its re-
production of an undithered 1kHz tone at ~90.31dBFS was essentially perfect (figs.8 and 9).

I assessed the Grace 901’s immunity to word-clock jitter with the Miller Audio Research Jitter Analyzer. Fig.10, a narrowband spectral analysis of the 901's analog noise floor while it reproduced a high-level tone at 11.025kHz, over which had been laid a 229Hz squarewave at the 1 LSB level, shows that the only sidebands of note were those at ±229Hz (red “3” markers), and that even these were low in level. The jitter level was a very low 190 picoseCONDS peak-peak. This figure was ob-
tained with the 901 fed 44.1kHz data from a PS Audio Lambda CD transport via an S/PDIF link. Using a TosLink optical cable increased the jitter to 240ps, which is still very low, implying that the Grace’s data-receiver circuit has good jitter immunity.

Like its sound quality, the Grace 901’s measured performance belies its $1495 price. Nice. Very nice. —John Atkinson

The Meridian combo surpassed anything I'd heard before from DVD-A.

Now I can look back and see what I missed. I failed to take the time to audition the Meridian electronics with my own amps and speakers, and I had no discrete, uncompressed multichannel discs. At the time I was preparing that review, DVD-Audio and SACD were only talked about, not yet experienced. This time around, things were differ-
ent. First, I ran the 800-861 with my refer-
ence stereo system and with my multichannel system, each consisting of amps and speakers with which I’m inter-
imely familiar. Second, this most-recent
version of the 800 player is equipped to play DVD-A discs and to send the high-
resolution signals, stereo or multichannel, to the 861 processor in digital format via Meridian’s MHR protocol.

For multichannel, this is implement-
ed with three-two channel digital inter-
connects between the 800 and the 861. This makes Meridian one of the first firms to permit all-digital processing for volume, channel, and bass management without additional D/A and A/D conversions. A few other manufacturers have developed comparable proprietary methods, and soon there will be a wide-
l y implemented industry standard for this to appear in all such devices. In addi-
tion, these v.3 editions of the Reference series offer upsampling of all sources.

Like the first time around, Meridian delivered, installed, and set up the 800-
861 in my stereo system. They were

M M R R e e d d i i t t i t i t t u u l l b b s s e e n n o o d d t t a a w w m m e e d d w w t t h h t t h h c c o o n n F F o o c c t t f f r r a a n n i i t t d d l l o o m m m n n b b o o b b l l c c k k s s, n n B B e e c c a a n n e e, o o r r C C l l a a s s e e d d C C AM M-3355

monoblocks, and the Revel Ultima Studio loudspeakers. A Sony XA-777ES SACD player and Sonics Frontiers Line-
3 preamplifier were the alternate route.

The performance of the Meridian 800-861 was as remarkably excellent as before with all sources — even redigitizing the Sony’s analog output — and all power amps. I expected that. What was new was the 800-861’s ability to play DVD-Audio discs, and in that capacity the pairing also excelled. Playing stereo DVD-A tracks, the Meridian combo surpassed anything I’d heard before from DVD-A. Indeed, its superb stereo performance confirmed my status as a noncombatant in the war of the DVD-
A and SACD formats.

A good comparison was afforded by the simultaneous release of Ray Brown’s Soulard Energy on SACD (Groove Note 10153) and DVD-A (Hi-Res HRM2011). The DVD-A arrived first, so I’d played it many times before the SACD arrived. When I finally got to compare them (DVD-A via Meridian, SACD via Sony), I was hard-pressed to decide on a preference. Sure, I could just discern a little more “airiness” with the SACD, and, at times, a little more “palpability” with the DVD-A — but I suspect there were just too many variables at work for me to assign the cause of these minor differences.

But the “Red Book” CD track on the Soulard Energy SACD, played and upsam-
pled by the Meridian, was as magnifi-
cent and detailed as the more advanced formats. Particularly with reissues, but sometimes with new releases as well, the Meridian 800-861 made a strong case for the total adequacy of “Red Book” C1. Detail, mid- and high-frequency smoothness, and overall balance were nigh impossible to fault. Of course, that assumes decent recordings, such as those mentioned above and below. In fact, whether I used the 800-861 as a player feeding the Sonic Frontiers Line-3 or I drove the power amplifiers directly from the 861, the 800-861 brought out the best from all CDs.

However, the Meridian combo revealed that, with more recent recordings, the new media had a considerable advantage over CD. The 24-bit/96kHz stereo track of Bucky Pizzarelli’s Swing Live (Chesky CHDVD222) was both transparent and very direct. Compared to the stereo track on the SACD (Chesky SACD223) via the Sony XA-
777ES, the DVD-A via the Meridian 800 seemed to lack a little sizzle, but was
Over the past five years we’ve seen and heard a lot of headphone systems that try to convert 5.1 (“surround”) signals—designed for speaker-based systems—into a coherent headphone-based home theater experience. Despite the occasional enthusiastic review, we find that these systems are usually a mix of limitedly effective localization and fatal sonic flaws. For example, extreme left/right localization is often convincingly out-of-your-head, but center imaging appears too diffuse, or appears to come from just above or behind the listener. In addition, designers often try to enhance the realism of the listening experience by using simulated reflections and reverberation to try to emulate a psychoacoustic “room.” Unfortunately, this approach serves mainly to create annoyingly artificial colorations.

Our experience indicates that it’s pretty difficult to solve the very complicated head-related transfer function (HRTF) that makes speakers sound like speakers. Flashy, whiz-bang audio processing just isn’t very pleasing in the long run. The way to go is using well-executed, technically accurate, subtle corrections, and that’s exactly what you get with AKG’s new Hearo 999 headphone surround processor. This unit is actually capable of providing headphone processing for a variety of sources, but its strong point is its ability to provide a believable and articulate digital surround home theater experience. It’s so organic and natural that we occasionally have to flip the bypass switch and listen to the obviously incorrect unprocessed signal to appreciate how much work the 999 is doing.

To put it simply: we love this box. We listen at our desks at work; we listen in the living room in front of the TV; and we even watch movies in bed with a portable DVD player (a totally great way to watch a movie!). In each case we find that the 999 delivers a naturally engaging and immersive experience. In fact, we often find ourselves getting so wrapped up in the film we’re watching that we forget we’re supposed to be evaluating. That should tell you something right there—the most important characteristic an audio product can have is the ability to do its job so well that it disappears and simply provides the listener with a direct, organic connection to the material.

Of course, we’re pleased as punch to be able to carry this product and give it a hearty recommendation. Why? Well, because we are...

**Obsessed Headphone Geeks at Your Service.**

www.headphone.com

HeadRoom Corporation 2020 Gilkerson Drive Bozeman, MT 59715 800.828.8184 outside US 406.587.9466 fax 406.587.9484
a bit more revealing in the midrange of most of the instruments. Subtle details of what was going on off-stage were slightly more apparent (and often distracting) on the SACD. Through either machine, the CD layer of the SACD suffered by sounding more closed-in.

Moving the 800-861 to the multichannel system meant a fair amount of hefting and schlepping and wiring and reprogramming. With long-distance guidance from Meridian, I manipulated the setup options on my laptop and uploaded them to the 861. Although I used the presets that Meridian had provided, I soon found that I needed to switch quickly from direct to Trifield without passing in sequence through all of the 861’s DSP options. Trifield, a proprietary Meridian DSP mode, extracts mono and surround components from a stereo source, but in a way that I found superior to Dolby Pro Logic for music. In a multichannel system, Trifield offers control of image width, surround low-pass filtering, and center-channel equalization. So I highjacked the unused LD and VCR2 input buttons by copying all the CD and DVD settings to them, but with Trifield, rather than Direct, as the default DSP setting.

Also needed for this system were additional cables. I used Solution six-channel cables from RS Audio Cables. These, like the Harmonic Technologies I used for the other multichannel players, are nicely color-coded and let me wire up, error-free, in no time at all. Their spring-loaded Canare RCAs made a secure fit at the Meridian and power-amp ends. The power amps used were the Bryston (9B-ST) or the new eVo6 powering Paradigm Reference Studio 60s, 20s, and CC speakers, with a Paradigm Servo-15 subwoofer on the bottom. The 861 was programmed for precise time alignment and amplitude balance among the speakers, and allowed me to adjust crossover and bass management independently for the main, center, and rear channels. Everything seemed just right, and it made for consistently satisfying listening.

But as great a delight and discovery as multichannel was, the Meridian combo added the icing to the cake. I began with the Simon Rattle/BPO recording of Mahler’s Symphony 10 (EMI 4 9394 9), which, for the first time, fully justified the manner in which the multichannel mix had been done. Prior to this, the changeover from stereo to multichannel opened up the space, but the ambience seemed a bit overdone, the bass a bit lumpy. With the 800-861 and either power amp, there was consistency from top to bottom, and the hall ambience was prominent but not excessive. In fact, the rear channels seemed louder but more integrated than with other players or processors.

Jumping back to the 18th century, I reveled in the theatrics of Handel’s Theodora (MDG 932 1019-5). The sense of place (a live performance at the Stadthalle Wuppertal) was very strong, but the distinctions and balance among orchestra, chorus, and soloists were excellent—the overall effect was simply thrilling. I followed up with MDG’s DVD-A sampler, Breakthrough... into a New Dimension (MDG 906 1069-5), which contains 14 marvelous demonstrations of multichannel sound, including an excerpt from Theodora, and only the Widor Toccata disappointed. But even that one ain’t half bad, and, after all, might be a fine realization of the sound of an organ with which I am not familiar.

What I can conclude is that the Meridian Reference 800-861 made all of the multichannel DVD-As I had, as well as my system itself, sound better than ever, and certainly equal to what I get from SACD. Not being a format ideologue, I pick discs for their music and performance. Unfortunately, there are all too few multichannel DVD-As for me. Most of the music I like is still only on CD or SACD or, surprisingly, stereo-only DVD-A. But even there, the 800-861 excelled and surprised. As a straight two-channel CD or DVD player, it was unsurpassed in my limited experience, but Meridian’s Trifield DSP often added an irresistible frisson of spaciousness and presence.

The opening track on the demo disc from German drive-unit manufacturer Manger, “Musik wie von einem anderen Stern” (Like Music from Another Star), is of church bells recorded fairly close-up. They have great presence in stereo, but Trifield took me into the belfry. Positively hair-raising! The effect on real music was, generally, marvelous. Livingston Taylor’s “Isn’t She Lovely,” and his a cappella “Grandma’s Hands,” whether from the Manger CD or the Chesky originals, are often used for demos because of the impressive delineation of the central voice in a realistic acoustic. Trifield solidified Taylor without adding unnatural weight, while opening up the ensemble space beyond what stereo can do.

The final track, “Jazz Variants,” from the O-Zone Percussion Group, is taken from Klavier KD 77017 and was, in Trifield, the best demo of impact and
transient performance I'd heard in a long while. Every instrument was hard and tight and, when played with force, could be felt. Trifield freed the sounds from the positional constraints of the stereo pair and enhanced the presence of the ensemble to formidable levels. What a kick!

The Trifield magic didn't always work. While extremely effective in increasing the presence and spaciousness of Freddie King's Texas Cannonball (Hi-Res 72435-37924-9-7), especially his cover of Bill Withers's "Ain't No Sunshine," it did little for Leon Russell (Hi-Res 72435-37925-9-6). Since these discs share much in their original production, as well as their transfers to stereo DVD-A, I was surprised that, in Trifield, King's deeper voice was enhanced and his guitar fairly leaped from the speakers, while Trifield made Russell sound thinner and smaller.

But perhaps the best demo of Trifield was with an SACD from Pentatone Classics. This label uses a fixed array of five microphones approximating the spacing of the five speakers of a multichannel home system. Thus, the L/R channels on the multichannel tracks are pretty much the same as the stereo signals on the SACD and CD layers. Haenchen's performance of Mahler's Symphony 5 (Netherlands Philharmonic, Pentatone 5186 004) is a full-sounding but graceful and somewhat angst-free performance. Aided by the rich acoustic of the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, it sounds great in multichannel SACD via the Philips SACD1000 and the McCormack MAP-1 preamp. But I was amazed when I popped the disc into the Meridian, played the "Red Book" CD layer via Trifield, and heard an entirely equivalent and satisfying soundfield.

Note that I said that the Trifield effect on CD was "equivalent," not "equal," to the SACD playback — there was more specificity in the direct and ambient sounds of the multichannel track. Nonetheless, until the resounding applause at the end of this recording, I think many would accept the Trifielded CD track as the real deal.

My only complaints about the Meridian Reference 800 DVD-Audio player and 861 surround-sound controller are that the remote control is not as well-designed and friendly as the system deserves, and that the system twice required me to reboot it in order to clear up control problems. These are minor issues. The point is that, playing CDs and DVDs, the 800-861 combo performed and sounded as transparent and natural as any other player system in either of my systems. The Trifield DSP is a greatly advantageous feature that deserves more recognition. I felt confident that whatever little silver disc I put into the 800-861, it would sound superb. Short of adding an SACD transport to the generous chassis (I won't hold my breath for that), the only conceivable improvement for the superb Reference 800-861 combination would be to reduce its price so that many more people could enjoy it. — Kalman Robinson

PBN Montana SP3 loudspeaker

It's astonishing to realize that it's been more than six years since I reviewed PBN Audio's original Montana SP loudspeaker, for the January and June 1997 issues of Stereophile. The march of progress has been generally beneficial — for me, for Stereophile (whose website turns its sixth anniversary), and for PBN founder and chief engineer Peter Noerbaek, whose product line in that period has grown from three speaker models to eight. Corporate PBN now includes Sierra Electronics, manufacturer of three different power amplifiers and one purist preamp, and the PBN Custom Shop, which designs and manufactures speakers and subwoofers for theaters, recording venues, and architectural installations.

PBN's second major revision of the SP is better than the original in every respect — and bigger, having gained 1" in height, 3" in width, and 1 1/4" in depth. It's also 10lbs heavier, tipping the scale at 90lbs (41kg). The new driver complement includes larger, 7" Vifa, midwoofers and a 1" fabric-dome tweeter, and the crossover has metalized polypropylene capacitors, said to improve upper-octave transparency. Some specifications, such as the 90dB/W/m sensitivity rating, remain the same, but others have improved: the SP3's power handling is rated at 180W vs the original's 160W, and the low-bass cutoff is now specified at 30Hz vs the original's 35Hz. The top-end specs have been scaled back to 22kHz from 30kHz, and the price has grown $500, from $3495/pair to $3995/pair.

Apart from the new driver complement and larger cabinet volume, the SP3's biggest departure from the SP is its flared rectangular port, which is on the front baffle rather than on the back. (I believe all Montana speakers are now ported in the front.) This allows the speaker to be moved closer to the wall without generating overly boomy bass from loading effects.

Like the first two pairs of Montanas I reviewed (the EPS model covered in the November 1999 Stereophile), as well as the large KASes I owned for the better part of two years and the custom-made pair of Montanas that replaced them, the SP3s required a long break-in period — basically, about a solid month of nonstop exercise — before they began to open up. When I asked Peter Noerbaek how he determines a product's ultimate sonic signature, he said that he lives with each prototype for many months before settling on a final design.

The long break-in presented a bit of a problem for me when I took delivery of the speakers last fall. Robyn and I had bought a 35-year-old house just a few months before and were in the midst of remodeling. (We still are.) I didn't have the space to devote to the SP3s, and was reluctant to expose their beautiful zebrawood finish to daily showers of wood chips.

Follow-Up
Save 55% on Factory Refurbished Hafler P3000 Power Amplifiers

List Price $780  
Sale Price…  
$349.95

This is EXTREME VALUE! The Hafler P3000 Trans•Nova Power Amplifier maintains the legendary Hafler tradition of Audiophile sound quality at the affordable price of only $780. At only $350, there is nothing that will come close to the P3000. The P3000 is designed and built in the USA, and comes with a 3-year Factory Warranty. It’s Dual Mono Power Supply and MOSFET output devices produce a healthy 150 WPC in stereo, or you can bridge it for an amazing 400 watt mono block! Other features include separate -15db input sensitivity controls, front panel LED status monitors, 5-way binding posts, balanced XLR inputs, detachable IEC power cord, and a chassis ground switch to properly eliminate ground loops. It all sounds too good to be true, and unless you act quickly, it may be. Quantity is limited to stock on hand only, so visit us at www.hcmaudio.com, or call Toll-Free 1-800-222-3465

AudioQuest GR8 SST Hyperlitz Speaker Cable CLOSEOUT!

- SST Spread Spectrum Technology
- 8 Conductor Hyperlitz Design
- Helical Array Geometry
- LGC Copper Conductors
- Cold Weld Termination
- Beautiful PET Outer Sleevings
- Top Line P8MS Spades or BFA Bananas

The AudioQuest GR8 is an excellent sounding cable in all areas. The midrange has a very smooth and lifelike quality, while the most minute details in the high end are revealed with great accuracy. And then there is the bass, the foundation of all music. With its special bass conductors, Helical Array geometry, and its huge aggregate size of 10AWG, the GR8 delivers a tight, detailed, and thunderous bottom end. We are offering the GR8 with several termination options, and in any length you need. For more information on the cable and termination options, visit our web site at www.hcmaudio.com, or call us Toll-Free at 1-800-222-3465.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Sale Price</th>
<th>List Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 foot pair</td>
<td>$99.00*</td>
<td>$340.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 foot pair</td>
<td>$119.00*</td>
<td>$420.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 foot pair</td>
<td>$139.00*</td>
<td>$500.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 foot pair</td>
<td>$159.00*</td>
<td>$580.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We ship anywhere in the world!

www.Sonichorizon.com  
www.hcmaudio.com

Toll-Free 800-222-3465 & 877-234-3465  
Local 530-891-8326 • Fax 530-345-7269  
2725 Hwy 32, Suite C, Chico, CA 95928  
e-mail: sales@hcmaudio.com
and plaster dust. I'm willing to subject my own stuff to some abuse, but loaner gear? Never.

Into the breach leaped my buddy Carlos Shelton. A lifelong audiophile, Carlos volunteered to break them in for me in the safety of his Tiburon hillside home. He played them several hours per week, using them as the front left and right speakers in his cozy home-theater room. The weeks stretched to months, the winter holidays came and went, and he even rode with me on the long drive from San Francisco to Las Vegas for the Consumer Electronics Show, all the while saying little about the Montanas except to mention how beautiful they looked.

Then, one day in February, Carlos remarked that he thought the SP3s were really beginning to come into their own. What followed were several extended listening sessions at his house, first in his home theater, later in his large, open-ceilinged living room. In the home theater (at 12' wide by 14' deep), the Montanas hugged the front wall, flanking a 42" Toshiba high-definition television. The source was a Marantz DV-8300 universal disc player feeding a McIntosh HMT-100 home-theater receiver. The electronics were impeccable, and movies were delightful, but the SP3s really came to life only at music levels at which they overwhelmed the room. After repeated trials, Carlos and I agreed that his recent-edition Red Rose Rosebuds, on dedicated stands, were a better choice for his small room, which dictates a nearfield listening experience.

With his wife, Lucy's, approval, we set up a second system in Carlos' big living room (20' W by 25' D by 14' H), with some of the best stuff in my collection: a SineLock power conditioner, a Red Rose Silver Signature Model II power amp, Tom Evans Designs Vibe preamp (one of the most transparent audio products I've ever encountered), and an inexpensive but surprisingly good Sony SACD changer, the SCD-CE775. We used Kimber Kable Hero interconnect throughout, with 10' lengths of Monster Powerline 2 speaker cable energizing the Montanas.

Visually, the SP3s were gorgeous additions to the room's tropical décor — even Lucy agreed. Sonically, they were stunning. Here they could really breathe, and we had a choice of positions for them and us. The SACD rerelease of Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald's classic Louis and Ella (Verve 314 543304 2) brought the two jazz greats right into the room with us, their vocal interplay as warm and inviting as a glowing hearth on a cold winter's night. My standard pop and jazz test selections were revealed in their seductive entirety — the thumping hedonism of the B-52s' "Good Stuff," the melancholy angst of Fiona Apple's "Never is a Promise," the sheer exuberance of the Scott Hamilton Quintet's "I've Found a New Baby." The SP3s seemed to breathe music rather than labor to produce it. This effortless quality is a Montana family trait.

The SP3s were a joy with almost every type of music we tried — pop, classical, jazz. Their soundstage was consistently wide and deep, with an ephemeral quality that contrasted nicely with its apparent stability. Bass-heavy recordings, such as Bryan Ferry's Taxi (Warner Brothers), Toni Braxton's "Unbreak My Heart," or Haddaway's long-running dance hit, "What is Love?", were good — there was plenty of low to mid bass — but lacking that convincing last bit of power at the absolute bottom. Most music-lovers wouldn't object to this — in fact, as Carlos pointed out, it could be perceived as a benefit — but rap, dance, and action-movie fans will want to augment the SP3s with a high-performance subwoofer. The little 10" Earthquake sub, now discontinued, is a good match; the amazing James EMB-1000 might be even better. That combo would satisfy the most demanding user without alienating a décor-conscious spouse, although pushing it too hard might draw complaints from the neighbors or a visit from the police.

Strength and grace are a seductive combination. The SP3 offered up the essence of the music with all the punch, air, and detail audiophiles demand, and all the soulfulness music-lovers need. It is ideal for rooms of medium to large size, and its slim profile and elegant finish will be compatible with almost any style of decorating.

I was delighted to discover that Peter Noerbaek hasn't rested on his laurels. I confidently renew the Montana SP3 on my personal list of recommended components.

— Barry Willis

**The SP3s were a joy with almost every type of music we tried — pop, classical, jazz.**
Fried.....at last

Free yourself from the constraints of ordinary “box” speakers.

Featuring true transmission line enclosures and series cross-overs, our speakers benefit from 30 years of evolutionary design.

Experience yourself enveloped in the musical space...FRIED, at last.

Dealer Inquiries Invited.

Visit www.friedproducts.com for more information or call 269-697-0237

FRIED PRODUCTS

NOT ALL BALANCED POWER IS EQUAL

(Ours is)

Model Q650

"... the sonic performance of Equi=Tech products are in a class by themselves."

- Stereophile Magazine, June 2003

Equi=Tech

"The Pioneer of Balanced Power"

Toll Free: 877 • EQUI TEC H www.equitech.com
WHERE SIMPLICITY RULES

Our goal is simple... To attain state-of-the-art acoustics that convert your listening room into a multidimensional sound stage.

Our method is elementary... To deliver immediate absorption and diffusion of echo, bass boom and distortion.

Our offer is uncomplicated... To provide a unique line of acoustical treatments that are affordable, attractive and highly competent.

ECHOBUSTERS
DECORATIVE ACOUSTICAL TREATMENTS
Doing business worldwide since 1996.
1-888-ECHO-BUST • 1-631-242-6100
www.echobusters.com E-mail: info@echobusters.com

Manufacturers' Showcase
Advertising

A TRULY BREATHTAKING PERFORMANCE WHICH MUST BE EXPERIENCED.

Introducing the new GAP 828 speaker from GERSHMAN ACOUSTICS

GERSHMAN ACOUSTICS
TEL: (905) 669-5994 FAX: (905) 669-1941
www.gershmanacoustics.com

BLUE CIRCLE
Simplicity Artistry Music

The Music Ring Balanced Power Conditioner

Find out what your system is really capable of...plug it into a Music Ring.

magic
(there, no said it)
merlin
music systems inc.
Tel 585-367-2390
Fax 585-367-2685
Post Office Box 146
4705 South Main St.
Hemlock, NY 14466
info@merlinmusic.com
www.merlinmusic.com

phone: 519-469-3215
fax: 519-469-3782
email: bcircle@bluecircle.com

Blue Circle Audio
RR #2
Innerek, Ontario
Canada NOJ 1M0

www.bluecircle.com

Stereophile, August 2003
97
Enjoy

NEW HYBRID Power Amplifier
300 watts mono
150 watts stereo

Tenor
514 938-5556
www.tenoraudio.com

Single Ended 18W x 2 non-MFB
6C33C-8 with Custom-made OPT
4x2 Full-range Drivers with Solid Hardwood Enclosure

Almarro Products
www.almarro.com

Earthworks Sigma 6.2

Clean, Time Coherent Response from 40Hz to 40kHz
Earthworks Sigma 6.2 recreates musical soundfields
so perfectly that they will bring all of the music
into your room! Satisfaction guaranteed!

Earthworks Audio Products
PO Box 517 Wilton NH 03086 USA
603-654-6427 www.earthworksaudio.com

Matched sets of 2, 3 and 5 available in Black finish or solid Cherry
Ask about our introductory deal with 33 day money back guarantee.
YO LA TENGO

Most indie-rock bands worth their faded, tight-fitting, ironic T-shirts would recoil in horror and flee screaming from the thrift store if you told them their career arcs would one day resemble that of a Phish or an NRBQ. Yo La Tengo, on the other hand, would smile beatifically at the suggestion. Maybe it's because the group is from Hoboken, New Jersey (not known as the hippest New York City 'burb), loves to perform covers (the somewhat frumpy-looking band spends more time grooving to records than grooming to them), and takes its name from the exhortation of a New York Mets outfiel-
der. YLT's performance over almost two decades is best described in other baseball terms: inside pitches and a high batting average.

The band's core is singer-guitarist Ira Kaplan, a former Village Voice music critic and sound man for Hoboken club Maxwell's; and Kaplan's wife and drummer, Georgia Hubley. From the outset, Yo La Tengo has appealed to rock snobs and cultural in-joke literati. Just consider the classified ad the group placed in the Voice in 1984: "Guitarist & bassist wanted for band that may or may not sound like the Soft Boys, Mission of Burma and Love." At the time, only the glasses of those with deep record collections would've been fogged by such an invitation.

That Yo La Tengo has spent its career recording for independent labels in some ways guarantees its hip-priest status — not to mention its low profile. The band often tips the location of lost musical gold via left-field cover versions and is therefore a prime example of a "critics' darling," if only one could forget the snide implications of the term. Speaking of critical favorites, YLT's sophropic pop- and feedback sound most often draws comparisons to the Velvet Underground, with undercurrents of the Kinks (for their sing-song melodies) and Sonic Youth (for their feedback-laden noise explorations).

As for its batting average, Yo La Tengo shares more with the Velvets than a fondness for rhythmic repetition, dry vocal delivery, multiple bassists, and a career-long progression from folk-pop to avant-garde. With either band you could close your eyes, pick an album, and be rewarded with indelible songs. YLT records prolifically; between LPs, the group has churned out singles, compilations, EPs, even a film soundtrack. It's speculation, but it may be Kaplan and Hubley's marriage that has made YLT's output a stable, monogamous, premium blend of romance and noise.

Yo La Tengo debuted in 1986 with Ride the Tiger (Coyote TTC 87125; President Yo La Tengo (1989, Coyote TTC 88142), reissued by Matador on a single disc in 1996 (OLE 206), have Yo La Tengo beginning to find its own brand of noise. Schramm left after Ride the Tiger, and both of these albums showcase Kaplan as a more confident—and sometimes fretboard-strangling—guitarist, as the band pared down from quartet to trio. For the most part, it's goodbye twang, hello Velvet Underground, not only via a cover of the early Velvets tune "It's Alright (The Way That You Live)" on New Wave, but also the guitar-feedback adventurousness of such President tracks as "Barnaby, Hardly Working."

The production on this pair of albums was an incremental improvement as well, with former dB's bassist and producer Gene Holder (who also filled in as YLT's bassist, which had become a revolving-door position) nicely pan-
Andy: Geoff Poor, please?
Geoff: This is Geoff.
Andy: Hey, Geoff! The new VK-250 ($4,995) and VK-600 ($7,995) amplifiers are simply amazing. Imaging, tonal balance, dynamics, wow! Class A all the way.
Geoff: Tell me something I don't already know.
Andy: Ok, how about the problem with the VK-600 SE?
Geoff: What problem?
Andy: What problem? The problem that the VK-600 SE ($11,500) is actually better than the VK-600!...It's too good to just be a "600 SE". Maybe it ought to be a "VK-700".

You know, it seems like everybody has a signature edition, but the only real difference is the faceplate and trim.

But with the VK-600 SE, you get an amplifier which sounds more powerful and musical than the VK-600.

Geoff: Thanks! At BAT, SE means something. It's special.

And our SE upgrade program means that your customers can maintain their investment in BAT and still upgrade without having to sell or trade their components.

Andy: Well I've got bad news - there's a better amp than the VK-600 SE.
Geoff: Oh Yeah?
Andy: Yeah, two VK-600M SE monoblocks!
Geoff: You got me. How many do you need?

At Sound By Singer all you need to do is listen.
band for a handful of shows in 2000), and the Flying Burrito Brothers' "Tried So Hard." Especially gratifying are the wonderfully catchy versions of pop songs by The Scene Is Now ("Yellow Sarong") and songwriter Daniel Johnston ("Speeding Motorcycle"). Guitarist Dave Schramm returns for Fakebook, which Gene Holder produced, and Al Greller is the album's bassist. More so than on the group's previous records, Fakebook features astute vocal harmonizing by Kaplan and Hubley, and the warm space created by the acoustic instrumentation is a welcome reprieve.

Jumping a few years ahead, the band's next mostly-covers effort was the two-LP/CD Genius + Love = Yo La Tengo (1996, Matador OLE 194), which also contains previously released B-sides, out-of-print material, and rare tracks. There are cover versions of songs by Wire, John Cale, the Ramones (a Muzak version of "Blitzkrieg Bop"), and the Velvet Underground. The original tune "Demons," sung by Hubley, first appeared on the soundtrack to I Shot Andy Warhol, a 1996 film for which Yo La Tengo was enlisted to portray a Velvets-like Factory house band. Also present is an alternate take of Fakebook's "Speeding Motorcycle," featuring the helium-voiced Johnston singing along via telephone. Johnston, who suffers from mental-health problems, would subsequently enjoy some minor attention in alternative-rock circles, in part due to YLT's endorsement. The YLT originals on disc 1 of Genius + Love span 1988-1995 without much filler, but disc 2 is all instrumental and mostly overkill. Many tunes are embryonic versions of album tracks or half-realized studio experiments; and do you really need to hear an instrumental version of "Blitzkrieg Bop"?

Another tribute-oriented effort (I wasn't kidding about the "second career" thing) arrived via the Little Honda EP (1998, Matador OLE 295). The band revs up the Beach Boys' "Little Honda" and takes it for a joyride, alongside material by Sandy Denny, Gram Parsons, and standbys the Kinks. Also included, for comedic value, is an inept, slapdash live version of Queen's "We Are the Champions," recorded during one of the WFMU pledge drives.

In the scheme of things, May I Sing with Me (1992, Alias A021) might be most notable for the arrival of—finally—a permanent bass player. James McNew came to Yo La Tengo from Boston indie group Christmas; with Kaplan and Hubley (who named their publishing company Roshashauna Music), every day since has been like Hanukkah. With the stopgap covers album out of the way, May I Sing picks up on the electric-guitar-noise adventures and concise pop detours; on guitar, Kaplan begins to evoke Neil Young as much as Lou Reed, but when he strays too far from the song structure (as on the nine-minute "Mushroom Cloud of Hiss"), he finds a comfortable rhythm section to return to. May I Sing was produced by, again, Gene Holder, this time with Boston-based engineer Lou Giordano who previously worked with Christmas as well as Paul Westerberg and Sugar.

The Upside Down EP (1992, Alias A026) contains two different versions of the title track, neither of them the one found on May I Sing with Me, and "Summersquash" unveils YLT's unofficial fourth member: the Acetone organ. Whether played by one of the trio or having its keys taped to create drone notes throughout live sets, the Acetone signaled a crucial shift in mood.

In 1993, the prevailing musical winds in alternative rock either smelled like post-
grunge, secondhand Nirvanas power-chording their way up the charts—or, on a less commercial level, like lo-fi indie, as Pavement, Sebadoh, and Guided By Voices crafted their tape-hissing four-track recordings. But that year Yo La Tengo entered its “blue period,” a phase that saw the band emboldened by the influence of such British shoegazers as My Bloody Valentine, and druggy psychedelia like Spacemen 3, Painful (1993, Matador/Atlantic OLE 069) and Electr-O-Pura (1995, Matador OLE 132) both feature flanged-out guitar leads over gauzy, carefully constructed backdrops. Painful, especially, can feel like a morphine drip, with its somber overtones, slow tempos, and the emergence of Hubley’s whispery lead vocals on the ballad “Nowhere Near.” Two versions of the original “Big Day Coming” suggest not so much a dearth of material as a wealth of interpretation from a band stretching its compositional legs and becoming adept at (for lack of a better term) jannring.

Electr-O-Pura rocks considerably harder while retaining Painful’s shimmery vibe. Songs often build to string-scrapping climaxes at the hands of Kaplan, and there’s also the concise, melodic “Tom Courtenay,” a 1960s pop ditty complete with “ba-ba-ba”s. This album is Kaplan’s guitar-hero turn, as he makes like a one-man Crazy Horse through fully electrified and sometimes downright skronky solos. Equally as impressive are the strobe-light rhythmic workouts “False Ending” and “False Alarm,” both demonstrating how the Hubley-McNew rhythm section can pull the listener into a trance. Electr-O-Pura could be considered the first album that’s distinctively Yo La Tengo and no one else. All of a sudden, they’re miles more tuneful than Sonic Youth, more musically polished than the Velvet Underground, and more soulful (gasp!) than their indie-rock contemporaries.

It was during this hazy-pop era that the band began its run with Roger Moutenot, who has produced every Yo La Tengo album since, and whose Nashville studio, Alexander the Great, has hosted Friedy Johnston, Sleater-Kinney, and Joseph Arthur, among others. Moutenot has a knack for capturing warmer, softer sounds (the Acetone, pedal-steel guitars, and maracas, for example), and he must be patient as a saint: YLT is famously fussy when it comes to audio technicalities (remember, Kaplan used to be a sound man). Whatever foil Moutenot provides for the band, it seems to be working.

Rock is littered with bands who’ve spent entire careers looking, in the words of Tom Waits, for the heart of Saturday night; what Yo La Tengo often does best is evoke Sunday morning. Warm, modernly groovy, and relentlessly romantic, I Can Hear the Heart Beating as One (1997, Matador OLE 222) is YLT’s most complete statement and their best album. Like the patchwork valentine that adorns the face of the CD, Heart pieces together all of the band’s lovable strengths: the summery fuzz-pop “Sugarcane” eclipses “Tom Courtenay” as YLT’s most radio-ready, guitar-driven single; “Stockholm Syndrome” is McNew’s finest moment, as the bassist takes a Neil Young–like falsetto turn at the voice mike; and the last song, Hubley’s cover of Anita Bryant’s “My Little Corner of the World,” seals the deal, neatly and sweetly recalling Moe Tucker’s “After Hours,” from The Velvet Underground.

Heart earned mainstream respect as well: Matt Groening had YLT perform the theme song for an episode of The Simpsons around this time, and Mr. Show comedians David Cross and Bob Odenkirk appeared in the video for “Sugarcane” (in which the unassuming trio is sent to “rock school” to study hair-metal posturing). The attention was well-deserved: I Can Hear the Heart Beating as One is a classic album that shouldn’t be qualified by the terms “indie,” “alternative,” or “critically acclaimed.”

The Autumn Sweater EP (1997, OP) simply showcases the album version of “Autumn Sweater,” a standout track on Heart. The stomping drumbeat, warm organ hum, and middle-section breakdown made it the first Yo La Tengo song to practically beg for a remix, and Chicago post-rockers Tortoise, techno artist nu-zig, and British shoegazer idol Kevin Shields (of My Bloody Valentine) obliged. The remixes are sonically advanced, Tortoise employing only samplers (no computers) to achieve their cut-and-paste results, and Shields warping Kaplan’s vocals—but all the bells and whistles modernize the guts out of the original.

After you’ve made your masterpiece, what do you do for an encore? How about a moody, atmospheric think piece whose title quotes intergalactic jazz freak Sun Ra? And Then Nothing Turned Itself Inside-Out (2000, Matador OLE 371) is that and quite a bit more. If Yo La Tengo had already gone through its blue period, And Then Nothing delves into a cave of deep azure. It takes confidence to open an album with a 6:30 track that’s hushed and ghostly (“Everyday”), and it’s outright ballsy to continue whispering your way through 77 minutes of atmospheric love songs. A few tracks do pick up the snail’s pace—the shuffling, Latin-beat “Let’s Save Tony Orlando’s House” and Kaplan’s token uptempo rocker, “Cherry Chapstick”—but And Then Nothing mostly echo-heavy guitars and organs

**Building a Library**

102

**Stereophile, August 2003**
doing the subduing. The last album’s wild romance has turned to intimacy, as best evinced by “The Crying of Lot G,” Kaplan’s near-spoken monologue on monogamy (“I wonder why we have so much trouble cheating each other up sometimes”). It’s no coincidence that, for the tour supporting And Then Nothing, Yo La Tengo offered seating at venues for the first time. Completely devoid of angst and anger, this is a Y2K-for-lovers album that instills a profound sense of calm and comfort.

Three instrumental outtakes from And Then Nothing form the basis of the Danelectro EP (2000, Matador OLE 484). As on Autumn Sweater, three re-mixers — perhaps selected more for their current underground popularity than for their affinity for the material — have a go at the songs. Q-Unique (of the Arsonists) is the most egregious, treating “Danelectro 1” to what unimpressively sounds like new-age hip-hop; elsewhere, laptop-electronic artists Kit Clayton and Nobukazu Takemura get more creative by executing glitchy, dizzying ProTools run-throughs.

It’s almost unbelievable that it took so long for someone to commission Yo La Tengo to score an entire film, but it finally happened with The Sounds of the Sounds of Science (2002, Matador OLE 549). These eight instrumental numbers accompanied French director Jean Painlevé’s series of underwater films depicting marine life — mating jellyfish, time-lapse images of growing coral, and such. Titles include “Sea Urchins,” “Shrimp Stories,” and “The Love Life of the Octopus.” Much of Science sounds like easy-listening music heard through a deep-sea diving helmet: reverberating, ethereal, psychedelic. Of the score’s live-performance premiere at the San Francisco International Film Festival, Kaplan wrote:

“It’s unlike anything we’ve ever done. I don’t think anybody who shows up high will regret it.”

The band decided to have a little more fun with the Nudist War EP (2002, Matador OLE 568), offering one song on a percussion-driven cover of the title track, by Sun Ra. The levity is absurdly heightened on Version 2, on which a child’s choir sings “Nuclear war / It’s a motherfucker, don’t you know / Push that button, your ass got to go.” (YLT got parental permission for the children to sing the expletives.)

You might expect an album with a title like Summer Sun (2003, Matador OLE 548) to be a car-stereo-blasting, beach-party rocker, especially considering Yo La Tengo’s tendency to go left when they’ve been heading right. You’d be wrong. Summer Sun is an album by a band clearly bored with rock’n’roll. YLT will seemingly do anything to avoid repeating itself, which explains the 10-minute “Let’s Be Still,” inflamed by improvisational jazz and featuring New York City avant-garde players William Parker, Daniel Carter, and Roy Campbell Jr; the near-hip-hop “Moonrock Mambo”; and a multi-rhythmic instrumental freakout, “Georgia Vs. Yo La Tengo.” But these are slight differences in what by now seems a constant theme for the band: playing quietly and singing even more quietly. Here, the choice of final song is eerie and foreboding: a cover of Big Star’s “Take Care,” Alex Chilton’s sentimental kiss goodbye to that band and its fans.

Could it be that, with Summer Sun, Yo La Tengo is going down for the last time? Highly unlikely. This band is a career for Ira Kaplan, Georgia Hubley, and James McNew, and following the group is a part-time job for its loyal cult. Yo La Tengo is about institutions: marriage, the fraternity of independent rock, and the live performances of a band that improvises, changes, and adapts. Regarding the last, Yo La Tengo could well haul around the world as a jam band for the rest of its days, but that, too, is unlikely. Though I Can Hear the Heart Beating as One might never be topped, the group’s recorded output is detailed, progressive, and always interesting. If you’re looking for exploding speakers and snarls, try 99% of the records made in the last 20 years. If you need to stock your record collection with romantic chemistry and palpable sonic evolution, Yo La Tengo has, to turn a phrase, got it.
WE ARE SERIOUS ABOUT MUSIC

At David Lewis Audio we don’t just carry high end. We are the Specialist in Ultra High End. We may be the most unique audio dealer in the country. We cater only to music lovers with the broadest selection of 2 Channel components. No one even comes close.

Our newly remodeled facilities include listening rooms on three floors. Listen in a relaxed and beautifully appointed environment. You’ll feel the excitement of a Hi-Fi Show, with the ability to see and hear a vast array of ever changing systems. There’s never been an audio store like this before. We promise!

No other audio dealer can lay claim to the commitment we have to the music listener and audio purist. We just love music. If you do too, please call or visit us.

You’ll be amazed. 2 Channel rules.

2 Channel is alive and well in Philadelphia.

- ACCUPHASE
- ACOUSTIC ENERGY
- ACOUSTIC ZEN
- AESTHETIX
- AIR TIGHT
- ALOIA
- ANTIQUE SOUND LAB
- ARCAM
- ART AUDIO
- ATLANTIS
- AUDES
- AUDICRAFT
- AUDIO PHYSIC
- AUDIO VALVE
- AYRE
- AYON
- BASIS
- BAT
- BENZ MICRO
- BOULDER
- BURMESTER
- CAIN & CAIN
- CHORD
- CLASSIC AUDIO
- CONNOISSEUR
- CONRAD JOHNSON
- CREEK
- DCS
- DIMARZIO
- DYNAMIC DESIGN
- DYNAVECTOR
- EGGLESTON
- ELAC
- FM ACOUSTICS
- GALANTE
- GAMUT
- GRADO
- GRAHAM
- GUTHWIRE
- HALCRO
- HERRON
- HOVLAND
- JEFF ROWLAND
- KEF
- KIMBER KABLE
- KLYNE
- KOETSU
- LAMHORN
- LAMM
- LEGEND
- LIVING VOICE
- LOTH - X
- LYRA
- MAGNUM DYNA LAB
- MARSH
- MBL
- METRONOME
- MONTANA
- MOTH
- MUSIC HALL
- NAGRA
- NITY GRRITY
- NORDOST
- NOTTINGHAM
- ODEON
- OMEGA
- ORACLE
- PASS LABS
- PIEGA
- PLATEAU
- PLINIUS
- PROAC
- QUAD
- QUICKSILVER
- REGA
- REL
- RETHM
- RUARK
- SALAMANDER
- SHUNYATA
- SILTECH
- SME
- SOULIOQUY
- SPENDOR
- TENOR
- THULE
- TRANSROTOR
- VAC
- VAN DEN HUL
- VERITY
- VIVA
- VPI
- VT
- VYGER
- WASATCH
- WAVAC
- WAVELENGTH
- WILSON BENESCH
- YBA
- ZOETHECUS

David Lewis Audio LTD
8010 Bustleton Avenue • Philadelphia, PA 19152-2802
(215) 725-4080 • Fax: (215) 725-4495
Recording of the Month

LED ZEPPELIN: *How the West Was Won*
Performance ****½
Sonics ***

Live albums get a bad rap for one simple reason: the sound is usually less than thrilling—poorly mixed, with limited dynamic range, the imaging of a tin can. The list goes on. Few live sets, including of jazz—which, given its improvisational nature, has more classic live albums than any other genre—have ever made an appearance as Stereophile “Recordings of the Month.”

Led Zeppelin’s new three-disc set, recorded at 1972 shows in Los Angeles and Long Beach, California, is not without sonic thorns. Most of the problems (as confirmed by the inestimable ears of John Atkinson) lie in the age of the source material. Time, likely exacerbated in this case by how these tapes were stored, will degrade magnetic tape. The set’s comically minimal single paragraph of liner notes provides virtually no information about how the tapes were recorded or remastered. Still, the sound has enough range and richness to support the inescapable conclusion that, for a time, the Zep was an astonishing rock’n’roll band.

Recorded just after *Led Zeppelin IV* (aka “Zoso,” a simplistic reading of the punic characters on the album’s cover) and just before 1973’s *Houses of the Holy*, these shows reveal the band at, if not their peak, then rapidly approaching it. The twin pillars of the Zep temple are in abundance here: the thunderous volume of a B-52 attack, and careening, driving, sometimes nearly chaotic arrangements of blues-based, proto-heavy-metal rock.

Unlike most rock bands today but very much like the Beatles, Rolling Stones, and most other British bands of their era, Zep’s music came from the blues; they’d spent time studying and worshiping at the temple of Willie Dixon, Howlin’ Wolf, and John Lee Hooker. Hooker’s “Boogie Chillin'” is here inserted into “Whole Lotta Love” along with long quotations from “Let’s Have a Party,” by Jerry Leiber (of Leiber and Stoller fame), Gene Pitney’s “Hello MaryLou,” and bluesman Jimmy Olsen’s “Going Down Slow.” Dixon, who alleged that his “You Need Love” was the basis of “Whole Lotta Love” (his lawsuit against the band was settled in 1987), is represented here by this set’s closer, “Bring It On Home.”

Because Zep was home to four gifted musicians with very strong personalities, arguments over which was the star, the glue that held it all together, inevitably crop up when listening to a set like this. The majority of fans will side with Robert Plant or Jimmy Page, who wrote the bulk of the band’s material. Vocalist Plant, with his high, bizarre, asexual purr, exposed midriff, and thrusting hips (think Spinal Tap’s cucumber scene), was the band’s eye candy. Bassist John Paul Jones, whose keyboards were a sort of stealth instrument, was Zep’s quiet, steady presence. Guitarist Page is one of his or any generation’s finest guitar players, and here he tops himself in almost every song. His slow blues on “Since I’ve Been Loving You” is as flavorful as the folkly side he flashes in “Going to California,” or the full-on charge of “Black Dog.” Across this entire set, the ease with which Page switches between rhythm and lead is a wonder to behold. Strangely enough, it may be in “Stairway to Heaven” (which Texas’ Butthole Surfers turned into “Hairway to Steven”) that Page shows the most genius, turning that overblown chestnut—hoary even then—into a white-hot display that blends the song’s familiar, required turns, such as the opening descending chords of his solo, with new, hell-bent rages.

Me, I’ve always been a Bonzo guy. Dead way too early in 1980, at the age of 32, John Bonham and his often jazz-like drumming was, for me, the source of Zep’s much-touted onstage telepathy, the rivets that held the band’s mighty metallic frame together, and its most talented and sadly reckless personage. It was no surprise to me when, after his death, the survivors decided that they couldn’t go on as a band without him. While his solo on “Moby Dick,” which clocks in at 19:20, is light-years past the obligatory and much-ridiculed rock-band drum solo, it’s in tunes such as this set’s storming version of “Rock and Roll,” Bonham whipping the arrangement along before rolling out triplets at the song’s conclusion, that define how essential his contributions were. The Who may have overcome Keith Moon’s loss (a point still debated), but Led Zeppelin had no idea how to replace Bonzo.

In the end, *How the West Was Won* is about four very large talents coming into focus as one unit: the proverbially rewarding sum of the parts. But it’s also about the energy, and, as in all good live recordings, it’s about those moments of jaw-dropping supremacy that can’t occur in a studio—where there’s no crowd to impress, no groupies in waiting, no applause to feed on.

For visual confirmation of the band’s monstrous live persona there’s the simultaneously released DVD set *Led Zeppelin* which is a trove of Zep on film focusing on shows from Royal Albert Hall (1970), Madison Square Garden (1973), London’s Earls Court (1975) and Knebworth (1979). There are also several interview segments from Australian and American television. The package has been remastered under Jimmy Page’s supervision in Dolby Digital 5.1 surround, DTS, and PCM two-channel.

—Robert Baird
The Eighth Annual summer against hunger

10% of your audio purchases in August can be donated to humanitarian relief efforts.

Along with the other, more visible conflicts that have captured the headlines this year, the four year war in the Congo has taken more lives than any conflict since World War II, and is the deadliest war in African history. Across Africa the worst drought in two decades continues in Ethiopia. Worldwide, relief efforts are spread thin...

For one month each year the Cable Company, with the cooperation of our participating vendors, makes it possible for you to combine your passion for music with a passion for life.

All during August, make your best deal, then The Cable Company will contribute 5% of all of your purchases to CARE and to the International Rescue Committee. We are grateful to the underwriters below who will match this 5% contribution for your purchases of their products from The Cable Company (and UsedCable.com).

Underwriters:
The Cable Company
UsedCable.com
Acoustic Zen Technologies
Analysis Plus
Arcell, Inc.
Audience
Audio Desk Systems
Audioquest
Aural Symphonics/Univocal
Audios
Bybee Technologies
Camelot Technology
Cardas Audio
Echo Busters
Eighth Nerve
Essential Sound Products
Furutech
Gamy Music
GRADO
Harmonic Resolution Systems
Harmonic Technology
Herbie’s Audio Lab
Immedia
JPS Labs
Kimber Kable
Last Factory
Magnan Cable
May Audio
Nirvana Audio
Nitty Gritty
Nordost Corporation
PolyCrystal
Precision Audio
PS Audio
Purist Audio Design
Red Rose
Shakti Innovations
Shunyata Research
Silent Running Audio
Siltech America
Sound Anchors
Sound Connections Int’l
StraightWire
Synergistic Research
van den Hul
Wireworld

The Cable Company
125 Union Square, New Hope 18938 USA
Toll-Free: 800-FATWYRE (328-9973)
Telephone: 215-862-4870 • Fax: 215-862-4871
Visit our website at www.fatwyre.com
Email: fatwyre@fatwyre.com
Hours of operation: Mon.-Fri. 10am - 6pm
Sat. 11am - 5pm • Eastern Time
Thanks to Stereophile, The Absolute Sound,
audiorevolution.com, enjoythemusic.com, soundstage.com,
stereotimes.com and dmoos.com for their advertising support.
Ad design courtesy of Michael Stumpf & Associates.
Pre-press services courtesy of Tri-County Printers.
Valery Gergiev is one of the world’s most fascinating conductors partly because he’s so fallible. The combination of his swift ascent at the Kirov Opera and his bizarre inner need to do the work of three Daniel Barenboims has created a unique musical persona that doesn’t always have the checks and balances to ensure consistent quality. You can just imagine him inciting the excitement of recording executives over a historic meeting of the two orchestras he leads, the Kirov and the Rotterdam, for a joint performance of Shostakovich’s Symphony 7 (“Leningrad”). But while Gergiev the showman was firing on all cylinders, Gergiev the musical strategist was not.

This recording’s quality of special occasion was heightened by its performance date: a week or so after September 11, 2001. Given the travel difficulties of that time, Gergiev was lucky to even get to Rotterdam from America. Add to that the coincidence of the symphony’s content — Shostakovich’s musical response to the World War II horrors triggered by Stalin and Hitler — and the recording should have been, if nothing else, the document of a great occasion.

Gergiev should have foreseen the questionable outcome. Though cast in the traditional four movements, the “Leningrad” rarely hangs together as a symphony. Usually, it comes off as a compelling tone poem (the first movement) followed by three extended postscripts of far lesser quality. Those rare performances in which the symphony sustains interest and resembles a cohesive whole are those in which the conductor brings a rich personal emotionalism to the music, as did Yuri Temirkanov and Leonard Bernstein, and is working with an orchestra without the sort of institutional memory that dilutes the interpretive specificity. Gergiev could perhaps have accomplished this with his Kirov Orchestra alone. But forces as massive as these — while creating perhaps the most substantial sonorities the symphony has ever known — neutralize the details that can make the piece speak.

Gergiev was in the perfect position, however, to record a standard-setting performance of Prokofiev’s Alexander Nevsky cantata, which he has done — and has smartly paired it with the composer’s primitivist Scythian Suite, which receives a superbly colored performance. Gergiev’s chilling treatment of the unison sonorities that open Nevsky immediately establishes his mastery of the piece. There are also appropriate Russian heartiness and command of the language in the vocal portions, but the performance also taps into the atmosphere of Sergei Eisenstein’s eponymous, semi-propagandistic film, for which the music was written. In the “Song of Alexander Nevsky,” the choral voices have an artless, unruly quality. Mezzo Olga Borodina is on hand for “The Field of the Dead,” sounding like a truly sorrowful earth mother (think a Russian Ena from Das Rheingold).

The Achilles’ heel of so many Kirov recordings — the acoustic of the Mariinsky Theater, which can dull Gergiev at his most exciting — isn’t an issue on either disc. The Shostakovich was recorded at Rotterdam’s perfectly viable De Doelen, and the Prokofiev works, even more gratifyingly, are heard in concert recordings from the Moscow Conservatory and Finland’s Martti Talvela Hall.

— David Patrick Stearns
NEW audiophile recordings - call us or visit our website for our most recommended titles!

AUDIOPHILE LP’S $9.99 & UP!
Pink Floyd/Dark Side Limited Edition 180g LP
Norah Jones/Come Away With Me 200g LP
Gene Harris Trio/Plus One 2 45rpm 180g LP’s
Stan Getz/The Dolphin 2 45rpm 180g LP’s
Alison Krauss/New Favorite & Forget... 180g LP
Clair Marlo/It Let It Go Limited Edition 180g LP
Jacintha/Jacintha Is Her Name 2 45rpm 180g LP’s
Out of Print Reference LP’s $4.99 & up!

AUDIOPHILE DVD-A’s $17.99 & UP!
Eagles/Motel California DTS Surround DVD-A
Linda Ronstadt/What’s New DTS Surround DVD-A
Neil Young/ Harvest DTS Surround DVD-A
Bon Jovi/New Jersey DTS Surround DVD-A
R.E.M./Document DTS Surround DVD-A
The Band/Music From The Big Pink DTS DVD-A
AUDIOPHILE CD’S $13.99 & UP!
Burmester 03 Sampler CD
Dave Grusin/Discovered Again + Super xrdc24
Amanda McBroome/Growing Up... Super xrdc24
Sonny Rollins/In Japan Super xrdc24
Yamamoto Trio/Girl Talk Super xrdc24
Eiji Nakayama/North Plain Super xrdc24
McCoy Tyner/Echoes Of A Friend Super xrdc24

AUDIOPHILE SACD’S $14.99 & UP! Over 700 titles!
Rimska-Korsakov/Scheherazade M-CH SACD
Norah Jones/Come Away With Me M-CH SACD
Stan Getz/The Dolphin 2 M-CH SACD
Gene Harris Trio/Plus One 2 M-CH SACD
Rosemary Clooney/With Love M-CH SACD
Diana Krall/When I Look In Your Eyes M-CH SACD
Clair Marlo/It Let It Go 2 CH SACD
New Pentalone Classic M-CH SACD releases
New Audio Fidelity 2-CH SACD releases
New Concord Records M-CH SACD releases
Mahler/Symph No.3 M-CH SACD
The Kinks/Low Budget 2-CH SACD
Ray Brown/Solar Energy 2-CH SACD
LA/Just Friends 2-CH SACD
Rebecca Pigeon/Retrospective M-CH SACD
Patricia Barber/Cafe Blue, Modern Cool, Nightclub SACD’s
Rolling Stones/All 22 Titles 2-CH SACD’s
Peter Gabriel/All 11 Titles 2-CH & M-CH SACD’s
The Police/All 7 Titles 2-CH & M-CH SACD’s

Other available labels: All AR, Albany, Argo, Atco, Blue Note, Bluebird, Challenge, Cherkys, Classic Records, Decca, Delos, DMP, EMI, FIM, Hyperion, JVC, Linn, MA, MLS, Mosaic, Opus, RED Rose, Reference, Sony, Speakers Corner, Sundazed, TBM, TDC, Telarc, Vanguard, Water Lily & many, many more!
involvement, but this is not the case. Bass Robert Macdonald sings Jesus’ lines with utmost dignity and rich, dark tone; tenor Mark Anderson as Pilate begins sounding puzzled and moves into clean-hands irony as the situation becomes clear. The four voices of the Evangelist are ideally matched and sing as one; the instrumental soloists are similarly superb.

There are problems, however. This performance cuts 10 minutes off the 71 minutes of the ECM recording, and while Antony Pitts can’t be accused of treating the music lightly or with anything other than the respect and dignity it deserves, Jesus’ words, slow as they are, should ideally be slightly slower still to differentiate him from everyone else. On the other hand, the final eight-word prayer, which ends in a beautiful, life-affirming D-major chord, is taken far too slowly—the novice listener might easily presume that one of the two-long pauses is the work’s end.

But as one who has known Passet only from the Hilliard performance for 15 years, I’m nit-picking here; I dare say that novice listener will be bowled over by the work’s exquisite austerity in this performance by Torus Peregrinus. The sound is superb—spacious, clear, with pure silences and no artificial, “churchy” ambiance. If you don’t know the phenomenon that is Arvo Pärt, this inexpensive, stunning release of what may remain his masterwork will open your ears and your heart.

—Robert Levine

The disc opens with a one-two punch of Jim Lauderdale: the instant twang classic “The Way to My Heart,” and “Take It Back,” an almost pure shot of Bakersfield. The band contributes strong songs of their own, though. “Leave a Message Juanita” sounds instantly familiar, as though Richie Valens had commissioned a Leiber-Stoller tune, while “Uncool” channels “Ookie from Muskogee’s” befuddlement at modern notions of hip, adding more than a hint of a wink to Merle Haggard’s head-shaking sense of disbelief.

Guitarist Brian Hofeldt gets a chance to really stretch out with some James Burton-style Telecaster raves-ups in “Love Me Some Elvis,” a tongue-in-cheek tribute to the King. He also dazzles on a Don Rich instrumental, “The Happy Go Lucky Guitar.”

The band’s biggest stretch is the country-gospel album closer, “The Wheel,” which showcases The Derailers’ acoustic chops. Naturally, it’s not, strictly speaking, without a certain ironicelement: “You take the wheel, I’m tired of driving / Let Jesus show me the way.” The standout track, however, is “Genuine,” a collaboration between singer Tony Villanueva and the great Al Anderson (NRBDQ) that melds Beatles harmonies to the Owens sound with results that are pure pop paradise.

The sound is clean and tight, although producer Kyle Lehning does add quite a few musicians to the mix. It works, for the most part, but this is one of the tightest four-somes in contemporary music; one of the pleasures of hearing such a band is realizing how much music just four guys are capable of producing. It seems a shame to add any clutter.

That minor quibble aside, Genuine expands The Derailers’ already admirable track record with a disc that hints that they’ve got the stuff to stick around for the long haul. That’s definitely good news.

—Wes Phillips

**The Remote Part**

The Remote Part


Performance ****

Sonics ***

To the very British modern-rockers in Coldplay, Starsailor, Travis, *et al,* you’re all brutalizin’ me. And in a really polite way, too—those bands have one unassailable bumper crop of winsome vocals, tasteful guitar arrangements, massed-up-hair ballads, and vaguely emotional sentiments. In short, they’re the sonic equivalent of Hugh Grant. Idlewild, a Scottish quintet led by singer Roddy Woomble, would be rightfully lumped in the same import package were it not for the one quality that endears bands to American audiences: guts. That, and really catchy, lyrically anemic songs that transcend placement on a romantic-comedy soundtrack.

At first listen, The Remote Part is a consciously glossy third album that harnesses the former snotty, punkish Idlewild and gets it ready to ride the radio. The opening track, “You Held the World in Your Arms,” is a sympy blast of strings and big, wide-eyed choruses, and several later songs overdose on the heartfelt keyboards and gingerly plucked acoustic guitars.

It’s a polished, cuddly production that screams “British pop”—producer Stephen Street (Smiths, Blur) even steps in on one song here. Sometimes you just wish they’d brought in Steve Albini for a tutorial on live drum sound.

But The Remote Part is ultimately saved by Idlewild’s inherently thorny character. “Stay the Same” acknowledges the soft stuff as a career move, reclaiming the band’s early breakneck tempo as Woomble sings, “When I know that this won’t survive much longer / Unless we alter what we have / But then again, survival is not why we should stay the same.” Woomble challenges convention throughout the album; there’s a healthy dose of pub lit-
Musical Fidelity A308 Preamplifier. GoldiEars stumbles upon Three Bears Audio. Inside she finds the Kay preamp too bright and the Cee preamp too dark. The A308 preamp, Ah, just right. A beautifully delicate midrange from a brawny chassis. Remarkable value. Information unveiled and presented without undue adornment. Not for those wanting honey on their porridge. Sample the A308 Preamplifier in our acoustically-designed and meticulously constructed state-of-the-art listening rooms. As always, no hurry, no pressure.
ery and empty-glass romanticism heralded by an inside-cover inscription that reads “SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL POET.” It’s this brainy punk spirit—precious and self-aware as it is—that gives Idlewild a heartbreak worth listening to.

Matthew Fritch

To Understand: The Early Recordings of Matthew Sweet


Mike Ragogna, compilation prod.; various

engs. AAD? TT: 79:56

Performance ******

Sonic **** to *****

The Devil went down to Georgia, looking for some souls to steal. Well, actually, it wasn’t the Devil but Nebraskan Matthew Sweet, and it was cool he hankered for— the jangly, kudzu-laced cool of R.E.M. and the Athens pop scene. The budding songwriter would go on to become one of America’s most respectable popsters, and his 1991 Stones-go-powerpop hit “Girlfriend” quickly became a classic.

Powing this 22-song overview of Sweet’s pre-“Girlfriend” days is an early demo of that tune, titled “Good Friend” and arranged, rather revealingly, more along Big Star/garage-rock lines. The anthology stretches all the way back to 1983 and three previously unreleased tunes by Sweet’s underrated Athens combo Buzz of Delight, whose Let’s Active/db’s-influenced sound now comes off as surprisingly fresh in its quirkiness. Among the collection’s other rarities are the aforementioned demo, several B-sides, and the Appalachian folk-styled ditty “Tainted Obligation,” an oddball vocal duet by Sweet and Michael Stipe.

But some of the middle-period material, from 1986’s Insink, sounds impossibly dated. Such compression! Those grand keyboards! Those fat drums! These tracks make a strong case for Sweet being still a work in progress en route to his full artistic flowering in the next decade. His brief membership in the New York City boho-artrock ensemble The Golden Palominos is also documented, courtesy the rather forgettable “Something Becomes Nothing.”

It took 1989’s Earth, represented here by six tracks, for Sweet to find his footing. Backed by a diverse selection of players that included guitarists Richard Lloyd (ex-Television), Gary Lucas (Captain Beefheart), and Robert Quine (Richard Hell), Sweet ditched the sonic attentations and focused on the psyche-delic-edged folk- and pop-rock that had first inspired him to leave home and seek his place in the musical world.

Fred Mills

THE WINDBREAKERS, ETC.

Tim Lee & Bobby Sutliff, Together & Solo

THE WINDBREAKERS: Time Machine: Greatest Hits ’82—’02


Performance ******

Sonic *** to *****

TIM LEE: Under the House


Performance ***

Sonic ***

BOBBY SUTFILL: Perfect Dream


Performance ******

Sonic ****

Once upon a time, way down in kudzu land, there dwelt Mississippi’s Windbreakers, whose gifted songwriting axis of Tim Lee and Bobby Sutliff helped spearhead—along with regional kindred spirits R.E.M., Let’s Active, and The dB’s—the 1980s powerpop charge (key artifact: 1985’s Terminal, on Homestead Records). Since the band’s dissolution a decade ago, Lee and Sutliff have resurrected, and even reunited on occasion. Each now has a new solo album.

Bobby Sutliff’s Perfect Dream rings out loud and clear from the get-go with the “Feel a Whole Lot Better”-esque opening chords of “Mando.” A brace of other 12-string Byrdsian gems, plus the British folk-rock of “Kiss Me Goodbye” and the violined-and cello-laden baroque pop of “The Color of Your Eyes,” give ample testimony that Sutliff has yet to be ravaged by time. He plays all the instruments, and his trademark high, keening vocals are still as sweet as mint juleps.

Tim Lee’s Under the House isn’t a powerpop album per se, although it does have a pair of jangly odes in “Everywhere But Here” and “Highway Forty Nine.” Overall, though, there’s a more folkish, alt-country vibe at play, and Lee’s distinctive, ragged drawl is well served by such material as the moody swamp-pop of “Any Part of This” and the twangy/strummy ballad “Laura.”

If both comeback CDs give Windbreakers fans reason to cheer, the Time Machine retrospective merits marching hands and ticker tape. First off, you get two new songs produced by longtime collaborator Mitch Easter, of Let’s Active: Sutliff’s wistful, harmonypop title tune, and the shimmery 12-string jangler “Basket Case” (by popster Neilson Hubbard). Eighteen archival nuggets follow, reaching as far back as 1983’s Any Monkey with a Typewriter EP. The compilation wisely lingers on Terminal via six of the band’s most out-of-time cuts, including the dark, surf-tinged psychedelia of Changeless, and a garagey cover of Television’s “Glory” featuring Lee and Sutliff backed by L.A.’s paisley-pshccombo The Rain Parade. Those are followed by a few tracks apiece from the subsequent three albums: Run (1986), At Home with Bobby & Tim (1989), and Electric Landlady (1991). The cumulative effect of all this uncommonly sophisticated, well-crafted pop-rock is less a nostalgia fest than a call to arms for aficionados of the genre: Somebody reissue the entire Windbreakers back catalog pronto! —Fred Mills
GRACHAN MONCUR III & CARMEL JONES

Mosaic Select 1 & 2

GRACHAN MONCUR III: Mosaic Select 1
Grachan Moncur III, trombone; Lee Morgan, Woody Shaw, trumpet; Jackie McLean, alto sax; Wayne Shorter, tenor sax; Herbie Hancock, Lamont Johnson, piano; Bobby Hutcherson, vibraphone; Bob Cranshaw, Scotty Holt, Eddie Kahn, Cecil McBee, Larry Ridley, bass; Rashied Ali, Roy Haynes, Billy Higgins, Tony Williams, drums

Mosaic MS-001 (3 CDs), Alfred Lion, Francis Wolff, orig. prod.; Rudy Van Gelder, orig. eng. TT: 3:48:32
Performance **** 1/2 Sonics **** 1/2

CARMEL JONES: Mosaic Select 2
Carmel Jones, trumpet; Clifford Scott, Bud Shank, alto sax; Wilbur Brown, Hadley Caliman, Harold Land, tenor sax; Don Raffell, baritone sax; Lou Blackburn, Bob Edmondsion, Wayne Henderson, Tricky Lofton, Kenny Shroyer, Frank Strong, trombone; John Houston, Frank Strazzeri, piano; Jimmy Bond, Red Mitchell, Gary Peacock, Leroy Vinnegar, bass; Donald Dean, Ron Jefferson, Mel Lee, Nick Martinis, Leon Petitt, drums; Gerald Wilson, arr.

Mosaic MS-002 (3 CDs), Richard Bock, orig. prod., eng.; Bones Howe, orig. eng. TT: 3:14:30
Performance **** 1/2 Sonics ****


For 20 years, Mosaic Records, a mail-order-only label, has been the most ambitious, most scholarly, most consistent reissue program in jazz. Now, suddenly, with the appearance of these two three-CD sets in a new series titled Mosaic Select, a curve ball has been thrown. These are not elaborate boxes with 11"-square booklets full of session photos and in-depth essays by such major critics as Bob Blumenthal and Zan Stewart. At first blush, the Select sets look somewhat alarmingly like standard reissue stuff—ordinary jewel boxes with original cover art and original liner notes and...nothing else.

On the phone from the Mosaic offices in Stamford, Connecticut, producer Michael Cuscuna explained the genesis of the Select series. "It's an outlet for music that would not make sense as an individual reissue on a label sold through retail. It would lose money. But the economics are different for small sets sold through mail-order. Also, the Select series frees us up from the 'complete' promise of all full-scale Mosaic boxed sets. I can pick and choose. I've been dying to get to some of this stuff, like the Carmel Jones. It's been building up in me."

Like now, the early 1960s was an era in which the audience for uncompromised jazz was a small, closed circle. Unlike now, it was a time when there existed a jazz xen; albeit one largely limited to the two coasts of the US and a few major clubs and record labels. Within the community of that scene, it was possible for a new trumpet or a new trombone in town to cause a stir. For a brief period, in Los Angeles, Carmel Jones was the new trumpet in town. At about the same time, in New York, Grachan Moncur III turned heads as the first player to adapt the language of avant-garde jazz to the trombone.

For both, renown was brief. Carmel Jones made several recordings (as both leader and sideman) for Richard Bock's Pacific Jazz label, then came to New York in 1964 and joined Horace Silver's Quintet. He moved to Germany in 1965 and played in European radio orchestras until 1980. Then he returned to his native Kansas City, where he died in 1996. In the last 30 years of his life, Jones recorded almost not at all.

While Grachan Moncur III has remained active as a player, composer, actor, and academician, he is known almost entirely for the series of recordings he made for Blue Note between 1963 and 1967. The obscurity of his later years probably derives from the fact that he has chosen to remain in his native Newark, New Jersey. (Michael Cuscuna says that Newark "is about 3000 miles from New York.")

From the opening track of the Jones set, Duke Ellington's "I'm Gonna Go Fishin'" (from the 1961 debut album The Remarkable Carmel Jones), it is apparent that this trumpet player had it all: speed, a pure brass clarion attack, and melodic ideas like shooting flames, all suffused with lyric grace. If Jones was not on the level of his primary artistic antecedent, Clifford Brown, he was a special player, certainly the equal of his better-known hard-bop contemporaries Kenny Dorhain, Lee Morgan, and Blue Mitchell.

The three CDs contain five complete Pacific Jazz albums and solo after brilliant solo by Jones, some sweet ballads ("Come Rain or Come Shine"), and bolder burners ("Hava Na Gila"). On two of the albums, Jones is supported by little big bands. But his strongest work comes on quintet sessions with pianist Frank Strazzeri (always quietly on target) and the subtle, lucid tenor saxophonist Harold Land.

Of the six Blue Note albums covered by the Grachan Moncur collection, he is the leader on only two. The other four are Jackie McLean dates on which Moncur appears as a sideman. All six are tough, smart, hip Blue Note stuff, but with atypically barbed edges created by Moncur's interest in abstraction, and by the fact that this was the period of McLean's brief flirtation with the avant-garde. The side men are from Blue Note's world-class stable. Check out the epic act of the imagination set forth in Tony Williams' drum solo on the first version of "Saturday and Sunday." He was 17 at the time.

The dominant voice in this collection is the razory, belligerent, articulate alto sax of Jackie McLean. The hyperbolic gestures of free jazz, employed strategically by McLean, provide him with new liberties of expression, as in his sublime-and-maniacal solo on "The Breakout." Still, the purpose of this compilation is to keep the early work of Grachan Moncur in print, and his playing is fresh and fluent throughout. Solos such as the one on "Gnostic" display his instinct for establishing wide-open creative formats for himself (he floats in free air before his random patterns suggestively cohere) and others (Wayne Shorter and Herbie..."
Hancock are in a rarefied zone here, even for them). Moneur was known as an outcat, but he was deeply based in J.J. Johnson. His lines always sound orderly, even within such chaotic contexts as McLean’s wild “Conversion Point.”

It is easy to hear why this music had been “building up” in Michael Cuscuna. Mosaic Select 1 and 2 are scaled down from the label’s normal production standards, but the permanence of the music they contain is quintessentially Mosaic.

— Thomas Conrad

MATTHEW SHIPP & ANTIPOP CONSORTIUM

Two from Thirsty Ear

MATTHEW SHIPP: Equilibrium
Matthew Shipp, piano; Khan Jamal, vibraphone; William Parker, bass; Gerald Cleaver, drums
Performance ****
Sonics ****

ANTIPOP CONSORTIUM: Antipop Consortium vs. Matthew Shipp
Matthew Shipp, piano; Daniel Carter, trumpet; Khan Jamal, vibraphone; William Parker, bass; Guillerme E. Brown, drums; Beans, High Priest, M. Sayyid, saps, synth, programming
Performance ****
Sonics ****

Over the past few years, pianist Matthew Shipp has made one of the most dramatic transitions in jazz history. He began his career pursuing the free expression of avant-garde jazz, but evolved to the point where he considered even that genre too constrictive. He had actually announced his retirement before he was hired to curate The Blue Series for Thirsty Ear records, a label known for its recordings of experimental rock.

Working with Spring Heel Jack, DJ Spooky (check our his collaboration with Spooky, Optimetry), Roy Campbell, and his own longtime collaborator and bassist William Parker, Shipp has sought in The Blue Series to not only transcend but obliterate the delineations between jazz, hip-hop, ambient music, and experimental rock. He has deconstructed his playing to its most basic melodic elements, and stripped the harmonic structure of his compositions to the point where he now plays a new kind of modal groove music that places equal emphasis on the drone and the autonomy of the beats. In the process, Shipp has arrived at a new vision as dramatic as the breakthrough Thelonious Monk charted with “Round Midnight,” and that Miles Davis executed beginning with that composition and pro-
www.audiovideologic.com

Exclusive! PASS LABS Closeouts

Aleph 30

SAVE 30%
• Class A single ended amplifier
• 30 wpc. 8 ohms
• 45 wpc. 4 ohms
• XLR / RCA inputs
• New - Full 3 year warranty

X-1 Line Stage
Hybrid Cosmetics

SAVE 40%
• 2 chassis balanced line stage preamp
• New - Full 3 year warranty

X-ONO Phono Stage
Hybrid Cosmetics

SAVE 40%
• 2 chassis balanced phono stage preamp
• New - Full 3 year warranty

Dunlavy Closeout
CC-1 Two-way Speaker
The shielded CC-1 works equally well as a main, center, or surround speaker. Sonically identical to the famous SC-1av. 1 year driver warranty.

SAVE 50%

Wadia Special
861 CD Player
The Stereophile Class A recommended 861 cd player can drive your amplifier directly. 3 yr. factory warranty. Some territory restrictions apply.

SAVE 40%

Call for incredible price!

Six months no interest no payments financing

For years the two piece NHT SW-2Pi has been a favorite of audiophiles and reviewers alike. It features the SA-2 separate amplifier and the SW-2Si speaker cabinet for easy installation and better sound.

SA-2 Amplifier
• 120 watt audiophile quality amplifier
• Variable high and low pass crossover
• Speaker level or low level rca inputs
• Phase switch and auto turn on/off

SW-2Si Subwoofer
• 10" heavy duty polypropylene woofer
• Linear tight bass to 27hz—no boom
• Attractive black laminate finish
• 16" x 16" x 16" dimensions

Create your own qualifying Super Audio stereo or home theater speaker package and get the matching NHT SW-2Pi subwoofer shown above for as little as FREE! Go to our webpage for details. We are an authorized NHT internet dealer. Buy with confidence and full NHT factory warranty.

Subwoofer could be free!

SB-2
ST-4
SC-1
SW-2Pi

Audio-Video Logic
3025 100th St.
Des Moines, IA 50322
515-727-2279

• Atlantis • Audio Research • Audioquest • Billy Bags • Denon • Dunlavy • Grado • Krell • Lavan • Monitor Audio
• Monster Cable • Musical Fidelity • NHT • Nordost • Onkyo Integra • Pass Labs • Pioneer Elite • ProAc • PS Audio
• Rega • Sanus • Sound Anchors • Toshiba • Van den hul • Velodyne • VPI • Wadia • B&W* • Rotel* (*local sales only)
ceeding through Kind of Blue into his electron-funk experiments.

Shipp's own Equilibrium and his amazing exchange with Antipop Consortium, Antipop Consortium vs. Matthew Shipp, demonstrate how far Shipp has come with these experiments. The albums work well together back-to-back, with Shipp, Parker, and vibraphonist Khan Jamal making up the core group on both discs.

Equilibrium's title track begins on a contemplative note with a fugue-like piano melody from Shipp, who is joined by the shimmering tones of Jamal's vibes, Parker's sonorous bass, and delicate percussion from Gerald Cleaver. Shipp and Jamal interlace breathtaking lines as the piece breaks down into the bass piano-ostinato groove of "Vanap to Vibe," its cascading melody dancing along to the funk vamp. "Nebula Theory" employs Parker's wonderful arco technique in an otherworldly exchange with Jamal.

"Cohesion" is another funk vamp, underpinned by a stark, Monkish melodic phrase from Shipp. This is dense, emotional dance music, a trance groove remarkable in its effectiveness and moving inexorably toward a marriage with hip-hop beats. "World of Blue Glass," another beautiful piece, is followed by another groove, "The Root," and then "The Key," built around a simple melodic blues line from Jamal that strikes a golden Modern Jazz Quartet tone. The album finishes on the decidedly out note of "Nu Matrix," Jamal building the groove through overlays of electronically treated vibes and ambient sound.

Shipp has been experimenting with the possibilities of merging hip-hop and the avant-garde for several years now, and Antipop Consortium vs. Matthew Shipp features Antipop's Beans, High Priest, and M. Sayyid rapping and handling synths and programming along with Shipp, Parker, Jamal, drummer Guillermo E. Brown, and trumpeter Daniel Carter. "Places I've Never Been" picks up right where Equilibrium left off, except that the opening vamp is a harder, more pronounced beat, Brown slamming away on his kit. "Staph" introduces an even more aggressive synth beat under a spirited piano solo from Shipp.

"There are gonna be some very angry listeners," warns High Priest on "Slow Horn"; "this is that powerful..."
music.” Shipp pulls out all the stops on “A Knot in Your Bop,” showing his hand by extrapolating the theme from Davis’ “All Blues” against the raps as he plays Horace Silver–like gospel and blues figures. “SVP” is a sweet interlude with the melodic purity of a Chick Corea tune, Parker’s magnificent arco playing introduces “Coda,” and “Stream Light” is an elegiac piano piece from Shipp that sets you up for the cold, hard reality of the ghetto anthem “Monstro City.” The title of “Real is Surreal” says everything you need to know about this project. Hearing Shipp actually comp under the rappers is mind-blowing—he interprets the melodies and beats as a unified statement and matches them pianistically.

The album ends in a final, glorious battle framed by turntable scratches and highlighted by a frenzied, Cecil Taylor–like exchange between the musicians that resolves in layered samples that close the session with a weird, loop-like effect.

This is the music of the new millennium. Matthew Shipp projects the impression that he’s only just beginning to figure out the possibilities of this new musical synthesis. —John Swenson

Manufacturers’ Comments

Linn Klimax Kontrol & Klimax Twin
Editor:
The Klimax Kontrol preamplifier and the Klimax Twin power amplifier share the same styling and are designed to be complementary products, and we are delighted by Art Dudley’s review in June. Our engineers applaud John Atkinson’s accurate measurements and have addressed the points he made in the review in subsequent production. In particular, a simple software upgrade eliminates the switch noise caused when one switch too many was being activated mistakenly to mute the output when switching sources. This unnecessary action resulted in the noise John spotted in his measurements of the Klimax Twin. Products in the field are simple to upgrade.

Once again, thank you from everyone on the Klimax Kontrol and Klimax Twin design team at Linn for an excellent review and for your kind words of appreciation for these products. —Brian Morris

Linn Products

Cary Audio Design CAD-805
Editor:
WOW! Great review, Sam! I believe you are in “deep triode”!! I find it extraordinarily satisfying that audiophiles from all corners of the globe have come to love and appreciate the CAD-805 single-ended, zero-feedback triode sound. I am also honored that the CAD-805s have made their place in hi-fi history.

Thanks to all at Sterophile, and a special thank-you to Sam Tellig... you help make the audio business actually fun! —Dennis J. Had

President, Cary Audio Design

Cary Audio Design

Stereophile, August 2003
Dealers' Showcase

Your source for speaker building, repair, and modification supplies.

Hi-Vi Research
Focal • Scan-Speak
Tang Band • Peerless
Audax • Raven • Vifa
Bohlender Graebener
Dayton Loudspeaker

FREE CATALOG
1-800-338-0531
www.partsexpress.com

Replacement transducers for older Carver and Genesis speakers

275 Pleasant Valley Drive
Springboro, Ohio 45066-1158
Phone: 937-743-3800 Fax: 937-743-1677
E-Mail: sales@partsexpress.com
SOURCE CODE: SPM

Once Is Not Enough...

I really am not interested in making the quick, one time sale. Rather, I want you as a long-time repeat customer. Earning your confidence is the key to this philosophy. I do this by offering honest, knowledgeable service tuned to your specific needs.

Your goals determine our careful recommendations, not the equipment occupying space on the warehouse floor.

-Calen Carol

Jeff Rowland Design, Convergent Audio, Quad, Soliloquy, Totem, Michell, Plinius, Gamut, Spendor, Art Audio, Creek, Rega, JPS, Quicksilver, Aerial, Jolida, Basis, Pass, Dodson, Cary, Shunyata, Shanling, Alon, VPI, Sim Audio, Musical Fidelity, Audible Illusions, Graham, Tact Audio... and many more! We carry virtually all cable, cartridge and accessory lines.

P.O. Box 17562 San Antonio, TX 78217
(210) 805-9927 Fax:(210) 805-9928
email: golen@gcaudio.com
www.gcaudio.com

NEW DIGITAL STEREOPHILE

Now available in digital form for readers anywhere in the world!

Digital Stereophile
Delivered Right to Your Computer!

Stereophile is partnering with Zinio to deliver a NEW and exciting digital edition to our readers. You get the same great in-depth articles PLUS exciting interactive features that let you experience Stereophile in a whole new way.

Subscribe to the NEW Stereophile Digital Edition at www.stereophile.com

FEEL THE MUSIC!

NOW AVAILABLE
Joseph Audio
Sophia Electric

27 W. 24th St., Suite 502
NEW YORK, NY
10010

(212) 229-1842
by appointment

http://www.avantgardemusic.byz • thehornstore@aol.com

Stereophile, August 2003
### Lifetime Warranty!

**Thor Audio**

The "Mark 2" Series of Components!

Some of our fine retail dealers:

- **Audio Solutions**
  Burlington, Vermont 05401
  (also serving Quebec)
  802-651-0808

- **Perfect Note Audio**
  Westborough, MA 01581
  508-366-2023

- **Primus Audio Pleasure**
  Kansas City, MO 64015
  816-421-3655

- **Simply Music Design**
  McDonough, GA 30253
  770-229-6485

- **St Cecilia Sound Gallery**
  Tampa Bay, FL 33765
  727-443-0055

- **Westchester Stereo**
  Mamaroneck, NY 10543
  914-834-3999

Setting a new standard in musical "truth"; the Mark 2 series represent the finest tubed components available today! Using uncompromising quality in workmanship and parts, all components are hand-crafted & hand-wired. You will hear the difference immediately!
Acoustic Sounds ........ 68, 84-85
Acoustic Zen ............. 58
Adcom .................. 42
Almarro Products ....... 98
Alpha Electronics ...... 91
Audio Advisor .......... 86
Audio Connection ...... 118
Audio Nexus ............ 115
Audio Outlet ............ 92
AudioQuest ............. 39
Audio Research ........ 40
Audio-Video Logic ..... 114
AudioWaves ............ 113
Avantgarde Music & Cinema .... 117
B&W Loudspeakers .... 51
Balanced Audio Technology ... 44
Basis Audio ............ 60
Bel Canto .............. 58
Blue Circle Audio .... 97
Boltz Steel Furniture ... 72
Cable Company .......... 106, 113
Cary Audio Design, Inc . 18
CSA Audio ............. 78
David Lewis Audio .... 104
Dynaudio .............. 4
Earthsounds .......... 98
Echo Busters .......... 97
Edge Electronics ...... 98
Elusive Disc .......... 108
Energy Loudspeakers ... 2-3
Equi-Tech ............. 96
Fried Products .......... 96
Galen Carol Audio .... 117
Genesis Advanced Technologies ... 36
Gershman Acoustics ... 97
Goodwin's High End .... 110
Gutwire ............... 96
Halacro ............... 17
Harmonic Technology .. 60
HCM .................. 94
HeadRoom .............. 90
InnerSound ........... 72
Joseph Audio .......... 77
JPS Labs .............. 65
JS Audio ................ 119
Kimber Kable .......... 28
LAT International .... 119
Lightspeed Audio ...... 103
Magnum Dynalab ...... 62
Manley Labs .......... 96
Mark Levinson ........ 32
Merlin Music Systems .. 97
Music Direct .......... 70
Musical Fidelity/Kevro ... 124
Needle Doctor ........ 66-67, 78
NHT/Now Hear This .. 14
Nordost ............... 20
Paradigm ................ 8
Parts Express .......... 117
Pass Laboratories .... 62
ProMusica ............ 116
Reference 3A ........... 95
Rives Audio ........... 123
Rogue Audio .......... 47
Rotel ................... 25
Siletech ............... 77
Simaudio .............. 10
Smart Devices .......... 52
Sony Music .............. 27
Sound by Singer ...... 100
Tetra Audio........... 98
Thiel Loudspeakers ... 30
Thor Audio ............. 118
Toys From the Attic ... 116
Trigger (VMAX Service) ... 35
Tube Store ............ 91
Upscale Audio ...... 80
WBT-USA ............... 28
Wilson Audio ........ 12

Music Systems & Home Theatre.
MERIDIAN
Now Available!
800 series upgrade
New on display!
MERIDIAN Digital Theatre With New Version 3 861 Reference Processor
and 800 Reference Player, with DVD-A and 7.1 Upsampling!
New!
MERIDIAN 568 series II
MERIDIAN 598 Progressive DVD
New SST Amplifiers!
68-SST Multi-Channel Amplifier
New on display
New 400 series amplifiers on display!
N 431, N 432, N 433
N 383 Integrated Amplifier
N 360S Digital Processor
New N°390S CD Processor/Transport
N°380S Remote Control Preamp
N°32 Reference Remote Control Preamp
N°33 Reference Monaural Amplifiers

REVEL
THIEL
DYNASTIC
SUBWOOFERS
New on display!
Temptation, Confidence C2 & C4
www.jsaudio.com

LAT INTERNATIONAL
We are continually earning recognition for the highest performance to price ratio of all cable companies. Our customers tell us our cables are sonically equal to (or better than) those of any of the competition and at very moderate prices. Call for free product information that also includes literature that demystifies wire and cable technology.
Call 800 321 2108 Fax 856 428 1832
Some current dealers:
Audio Accurate 972 960 2911 EchoAudio 503 223 2292
Champlain Valley Spkrs. 505 332 0336 eAudiotnet 518 782 5489
Home Theatre Concepts 309 266 6640 Sound Waves 408 479 1733

LAT INTERNATIONAL, INC.
317 Provincetown Rd Cherry Hill NJ 08034
A subsidiary of LAT International Enterprises, Inc.
Visit us at: www.latinternational.com e-mail: latinternational@erols.com

Stereophile, August 2003
119
CD, LP and gear storage furniture
Factory direct since 1984
Free brochure (mention Stph)
Per Madsen Design 800-821-4883
www.rackitttm.com

THE AUDIO ENTHUSIAST
ANALOG SPECIALIST SINCE 1980

Stereophile Editor's Choice:
Sampler & Test CD

Order online at
www.stereophile.com

You've got a Class A audio system —
here are some Class A recordings to show it off at its best

- Stereophile's John Atkinson selects the best of his recordings from the past 10 years - from solo violin to jazz.
- 23 tracks of Stereophile's audiophile-approved recordings, every one recorded, edited, and mixed by the editor of Stereophile:
- 2 system diagnostic tracks
- 14 music tracks
- 7 test signal tracks

* Allows you to set up your system and speakers without test gear
* Hear recorded music as it was meant to sound, with natural dynamics and hi-rez sound quality

Arizona Hi-Fi
You know you want to call!
LARGEST SELECTION OF TUBE AUDIO EQUIPMENT AND TURNTABLES IN AZ.
www.tubeaudio.com
480-921-9961
Audio Mart

ADVERTISE IN THE
RECOMMENDED
COMPONENTS
(October) ISSUE!!

• It's easy! We can design your ad.
• It's effective! You will reach enthusiasts who actively look to our magazine for product purchase decisions.

LINE RATES:
$35.00 per line.
There are approximately 45 characters in a line (including letters, spaces, and punctuation).
5 line minimum.

DISPLAY RATES:
Contact Latarria Hardy at (212) 462-3332 or Latarria_Hardy@primediaucks.com.

PAYMENT:
All classified ads must be prepaid with order by check or credit card: MasterCard or Visa.

MAIL TO:
Primedia Magazines
249 W. 17th St., 4th Floor
New York, NY 10011
Attn: Latarria Hardy
FAX: (212) 462-3595

DEADLINE:
Ads are due on the first working day of the month, two months in advance of the issue in which your ad will appear. For example, if you want your ad to run in the October 2003 issue, you must submit it by August 5, 2003. No refunds.


QUAD SPENDOR: TALK ELECTRONICS, QUAD — Factory sales and service for Spendor and Talk Electronics. The factory-authorized US service center for Quad, with upgrades available. QS6/3 Audio Information and sales. Contact Mike or Randy. QS6/3, (540) 372-3711, fax (540) 372-3713, e-mail gsandd@air.com.

AUDIO ART, EST. 1976 — Edge-of-the-art audio components dedicated to serving music. Avalon, Pega, MartinLogan, Vandersteen, Jeff Rowland, Classe, Thetis, Audio, Basis-Ben, Aerial, Cardas, Kimber, Richmond, VA. Voice/fax (804) 358-3100, e-mail AudioArtUsa@aol.com.


SOUND LAB IN CHICAGO AND MIDWEST — Experience the ultimate speakers! Parasound JC-1 amps, TG Audio, Creative Cable Concepts, and more in a home environment. Ask about our free offers. (847) 382-4813, www.soundingaudio.com.

PRELUDE AUDIO CABLES—using only the best from Alpha, Belden, Canare, Cardas, & WBT for audio and video interconnects. We would never sell you a cable that we wouldn't own ourselves. Check us out at www.prerudeaudio.net. FREE Gift!


OPTIMUM CU® 12 GA SPEAKER CABLE — High-purity copper, 2999.95% w/62 stranded strands in each conductor. Delivers clear, crisp highs, increased bass. 15'-80' pre-cut lengths w/prepped ends, ready to install w/specs & inst. Low price! www.kleinsteich.com. (561) 696-2288.

Duesel USA omni-horn speakers Klismo USA finest tib gear www.hiendaudio.com
Experience the true sound of live music in your home.

WE CAN HELP YOU choose excellent-sounding, dependable audio equipment (plus video). We offer friendly, knowledgeable advice, years of hands-on experience. We carry: NAD, Parasound, NHT, Adcom, KEF, TARA, VPI, Argosy, Spendor, Salamander, Jolida, Cambridge, more. Real Brothers, 593 King Street, Charleston, SC 29403, (843) 721-7276, www.realbrothers.com.

MCCORMACK EQUIPMENT UPGRADES available from SME Audio. Outstanding upgrade options for most McCormack designs. Contact designer Tom McCormack at (706) 732-0332 or see www.SMEAudio.com.


Aural Robert
Robert Baird

H ere's a question I hear a lot these days, and spend no small amount of time pondering: When did classical music begin to fall out of favor, become an elitist pursuit, and cease to be part of this country's and the world’s common cultural lexicon?

This conundrum is posed against today's fairly grim backdrop: Orchestras are going broke; entire recording divisions, such as BMG/RCA's Red and Gold Seal imprints, have vanished; and kids in public school no longer have (as I had) the revelatory experience of hearing Beethoven's Symphony 6, "Pastoral," via scratchy records and bulky, industrial-strength record players.

One clue to the music's increasing irrelevance to John Q. Sixpack came out of a recent conversation with Matt Walters, managing director of the Santa Fe Music Group, which has recently begun to reissue the Louisville Orchestra's famous First Edition recordings.

An orchestra-owned label—a trend that's making a comeback these days—First Edition (aka Louisville Records) is most renowned for its commissions of new music, which began in 1948. Between 1954 and 1959, the orchestra, with the help of a $500,000 grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, commissioned, performed, and recorded the world premieres of 116 works from 101 composers.

I found it telling that, while the Louisville Orchestra was making these landmark recordings of "new" classical music by composers major and obscure from around the world, the band was unpopular in its own hometown. Louisvillians were no less in- tellectually inclined than elsewhere; they simply echoed the aesthetic currents of the time. Even then, classical music had ceased to be a living tradition in which new works could challenge the old masters.

"They weren't all thorny and grim," Walters says of the works commissioned by First Edition. "On a good day, these works were challenging and unusual. There wasn't anything too difficult. No [Harry] Partch, No [John] Cage. Most of what they commissioned and recorded is what I call "conservative modern.""

Brave soul that he is, Walters, who in the early 1990s oversaw the resurrection of Moe Asch's Folkways label under the aegis of the Smithsonian Institution, is excited about the rebirth of First Edition Records. He's already released eight First Edition CDs—original works by the likes of Walter Piston, John Corigliano, and Wallingford Riegger—and has readied another 75 discs' worth of material for future release. Although he plans to offer subscriptions, all First Edition discs will be available in stores via Harmonia Mundi distribution. While some of the works are ordinary and the sound quality varies the First Edition stash is one of the more important bodies of modern classical music ever recorded.

How the Louisville Orchestra came to be the unlikely bastion of modern classical music goes back, as is so often the case, to the vision of one man: Louisville mayor Charles Farnsley. Faced with an orchestra that was going broke, Farnsley decided on a bold plan: reduce the band to 50 pieces, forget expensive soloists, and, most radical of all, commission new works. Farnsley had a theory, according to Walters, that if they were going to go broke, at least they'd go down swinging.

The Louisville Orchestra used its dwindling resources to commission five new works a year, by the likes of Paul Hindemith, Virgil Thomson, and Darius Milhaud. Their pluck so impressed Columbia Records and its now mythical president, Goddard Lieberson, that, just as the orchestra was about to declare bankruptcy, he signed them to a three-record deal. Engineer Howard Scott, one of a small group of people at Columbia who had turned into reality the theory of the Long Playing Record, the 33 1/3 LP, was dispatched to Louisville with new Ampex tape recorders.

"Goddard called me into his office and said, 'You're the new head of our Masterworks division. You're going to Louisville to record that orchestra, and don't ask me for a raise,'" the now-82-year-old Scott says, cracking a smile under his prodigious handlebar mustache.

After the three Columbia LPs, Farnsley managed to corral for the Louisville orchestra the Rockefeller grant, which was later replenished by more Rockefeller money and a grant from BMI. The records were sold, six a box, via subscription for $795 per LP, at a time when LPs commonly sold for $3.98 to $4.98 each (they're now mid-price $159.98). Once the Columbia deal was over, the orchestra formed First Edition, with Scott—who'd since moved on to MGM and then RCA—as its chief engineer. The orchestra would rehearse a new piece of music during the week, play it in concert on Saturday night, and record it with Scott on Sunday morning.

Scott switched from recording in two-track mono to two-track stereo in 1957, to three-track stereo in 1959, and, later that year, to four-track stereo. All of the new First Edition reissues have been remastered under Scott's supervision to 24-bit HDCD.

Scott, nothing short of a legend himself, talked about what it was like to work for Lieberson, perhaps the most mythical label president ever. It was Lieberson, he said, who initiated the practice of employing lawyers and accountants to run record labels—key factors in the business's current diseased state. Lieberson did it, Scott says, because he believed neither group would interfere with creative decisions.

In Matt Walter's version of First Edition Records, the policy on creative decisions is simple: "I try to make records I'd want to buy."
SO YOU FINALLY HAVE YOUR GOLDEN SOUND SYSTEM.
IT'S YOUR LISTENING ROOM THAT'S THE PROBLEM.

UNTIL NOW.

Your room is our challenge. Here at Rives Audio, we offer services and products that evaluate, design and correct listening room defects ranging from very minor to the extreme.

By using everything from sophisticated software to dedicated hardware such as the PARC, we're driven to solve your toughest problems.

You've put a lot of time and expense into your sound system. Are you ready to give your room the attention it deserves? Call 800-959-6553, see www.rivesaudio.com or e-mail info@rivesaudio.com

"Befitting its pro-audio lineage, Rives' PARC appears to be bombproof. Its settings are accurately calibrated, and its excellent technical performance conforms to the First Law of Outboard Processors: 'First, do no harm to the signal.'"

— John Atkinson
Stereophile, July 2003

To see the entire review by Kal Rubinson, please go to Accessory Reviews: http://www.stereophile.com/show category.cgi?category=Accessory%20Reviews

Our most versatile product is the PARC (Parametric Adaptive Room Compensation system.) It's the only analog-based system on the market with adjustable notch filters that compensate for some common sources of sound degradation.

800-959-6553  www.rivesaudio.com or e-mail info@rivesaudio.com
The Musical Fidelity 20th anniversary Limited Edition TriVista Tube SACD and 300 Integrated Amplifier

At 350 watts per channel, the TriVista 300 is the most powerful integrated amplifier ever made. Using the 100,000 hour mil spec 5703 tube set, the 300 integrated sounds as delicate and smooth as any low wattage tube amp. Its proprietary solid state output stage ensures the best in control, resolution and frequency extension.

“For an amp with such evident power, it also does delicacy very well. This is no muscle-bound fatneck, it’s quite a sophisticate that has a way of playing music first and foremost.”
– HiFi World UK Jan 2003

“By any standards this is a remarkable amplifier and I have nothing but envy for the 500 lucky souls who will end up with one in their system.”
– Gramophone UK Jan 2003

The TriVista SACD up-samples standard CD’s from 16/44 to 24/192, making normal red-book CD’s sound very close to SACD’s.

“Musical Fidelity has delivered on its promise to offer virtual SACD performance from the humble CD”
– HiFi News UK Feb 2003

“Whatever other gear is used, this player always sounds more like analog than most CD players, in that all-important musical sense you get from vinyl”
– HiFi Choice UK Jan 2003

“...it’s an enticing sounding CD player—the best-sounding Musical Fidelity has come up with yet—and it’s an even better-sounding SACD player.”
– Michael Fremer, Stereophile, May 2003

MUSICAL FIDELITY
Live in your world, listen in ours.

www.musicalfidelity.com
For your nearest dealer, contact mf@kevro.com or 905-428-2800

Distributed in North America by Kevro International Inc.