FROM AYRE, MARK LEVINSON, AUDIOPRISM

PLUS:
SINGLE-ENDED TRIODES, MP3, PHONO PREAMPS

HI-FI '99
HIGH END IN CHICAGO

STEREOPHILE'S NEW CD:
PINCHAS ZUKERMAN PLAYS MOZART
AERIAL ACOUSTICS

Exceptional Performance

P.O. Box 81248  Wellesley Hills  MA 02181  USA  Tel 781 235 7715  Fax 781 235 7715
the audiophile in the plaid shirt and gray Dockers had his hand up. Moderator Jonathan Scull handed him the roving microphone, and the Stereophile writers on the podium at HI-FI '95's Sunday afternoon "Ask the Editors" session shifted in their chairs. "This one's for John Atkinson," came the windup. The other writers relaxed; I started to sweat. Then the pitch: "How come Stereophile issues are so small these days?"

And as you can see from the letters in this issue discussing the 124-page July Stereophile (p.9), it is indeed true that the magazine's covers are closer together this year. But so are all the audio magazines' covers.

As I mentioned in July's "As We See It," the US high-end audio industry has been having an uncertain time of it since the Far Eastern financial crisis. That crisis was triggered by, of all things, the devaluation of the Thai baht in July 1997, which temporarily reduced the size of the industry's global customer base. Couple that with the current shift of the audio market toward home-theater sales, competition for leisure time and discretionary spending from the Internet and other activities, the audio industry's possible over-reliance on the baby-boom generation for customers, and the market confusion regarding new audio formats, and it should come as no surprise that specialty audio magazines, all of which derive a significant proportion of their income from advertising revenue, can't help but be affected by the financial temperature of the audio industry.

Stereophile may currently be publishing smaller issues each month, but both Fi and The Tracking Angle closed their doors in 1999; The Absolute Sound went out of business in early 1998 (though it has since been revived as a bimonthly with an injection of capital from new owners); The Audio Adventure renamed itself Play in the summer of 1997, then disappeared; and while Listener, Ultimate Audio, The Audiophile Voice, and The Sensible Sound are still publishing quarterly or bimonthly, they are doing so with limited advertising support. (That other purported quarterly, The Audio Critic, has managed to publish only five issues in the past six years.)

Even the other major monthly US players in our arena, Audio and Stereo Review, have downsized. Audio, for example, as well as publishing magazines with an average size of 96 pages in 1999 (compared with Stereophile's 180 pages), has reduced its publishing frequency from monthly to 10 issues per year. Stereo Review merged with Video magazine in February to form Sound & Vision, which also publishes 10 issues a year, and now devotes a significant proportion of its content to video, home theater, and "convergence" multimedia products.

Whatever the medium via which audiophiles choose to enjoy their music — be it two-channel or surround-sound, CD, SACD, DVD-A, MP3, LP, or whatever — you will be able to read about it and how to get the best from it in Stereophile.

Since Stereophile went from digest to full-size format in January 1994, its issues have comprised a mix of 50% editorial pages and 50% advertising pages. In the boom days of the mid-'90s, this led us to publish monster issues of up to 356 pages! However, with the reduced amount of advertising we currently feature, preserving this ratio means that our issues have been smaller than our owner, Emak Petersen, would like or feels appropriate to publish.

At a series of strategic planning meetings that took place in Santa Fe at the end of June, Petersen VP Jackie Augustine, who's in charge of the company's High Technology Group (of which Stereophile is part), decided to increase the amount of editorial content in Stereophile whenever necessary, starting with our August issue. Under the guidance of our new senior editor, Jonathan Scull (again, see this issue's "Letters"), the magazine's team of reviewers will be pursuing a more proactive strategy with respect to the components we choose to review. And the year 2000 will see further editorial improvements so that we can keep on giving our readers more of what they are entitled to.

As anyone who logs on to the Internet newsgroups knows, Stereophile's content and its editorial policies seem to be an endless source of curiosity for some people. Similarly, some of the magazines with which we share our enthusiasm for recorded music have recently devoted many column inches to what their editors and writers feel Stereophile is doing wrong. I generally do not respond to such criticism — what we do, and how and why we do it, should be apparent from reading any issue of the magazine. But as the sheer quantity of carping about Stereophile's 800-lb gorilla-like presence in the high-end audio community seems to be reaching critical mass, I have the following comments to make:

• When you read criticisms of Stereophile on the Net or in other magazines, consider the source! Despite what others might imply and you might read, this magazine's growth and success have been due to two simple things: J. Gordon Holt's vision in 1962 that the best way to assess audio equipment was to listen to it; and year after year after year of 60-hour weeks put in by the most dedicated and talented team of people with which I have had the privilege of working;

• Some industry commentators have conjectured that Stereophile's owner, Emak Petersen, wishes to dumb down the magazine. To reassure those with such concerns: I guided Stereophile's content for 12 years prior to Petersen's acquisition of the magazine, and, as the relevant Petersen manager, I will guide that content for many years to come. I produce the magazine that I personally want to read, and I intend to keep on doing so;

• Jackie Augustine, this magazine's executive publisher, believes in Stereophile's mission (and also continues the Stereophile tradition of working long, antisocial hours). Other than slight changes in course dictated by the inevitable changes in the high-end audio industry and the technology available to it, our goal remains the same: Whatever the medium via which audiophiles choose to enjoy their music — be it two-channel or surround-sound, CD, SACD, DVD-A, MP3, LP, or whatever — you will be able to read about it and how to get the best from it in Stereophile.
Features

54 Our Kind of Town! Part 1
Jonathan Scull, Kalman Rubinson, Robert Deutsch, and Chip Stern report from HI-FI '99, held in Chicago in May.

66 Bravo!
John Atkinson abandons his purist roots and records the 1998 Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival with close miking and multitrack recorders.

Equipment Reports

83 Jeff Rowland Design Group Coherence preamplifier (Shannon Dickson)
83 Jeff Rowland Design Group Cadence phono preamplifier (Shannon Dickson)
91 AudioPrism Mana Reference monoblock power amplifier (Jonathan Scull)
99 Mark Levinson No.334 power amplifier (Larry Greenhill)
105 Ayre V-1 power amplifier (Michael Fremer)
111 Soliloquy 5.3 loudspeaker (Kalman Rubinson)

Follow-Up

102 Mark Levinson No.331.5 power amplifier (Larry Greenhill)
108 Mark Levinson No.335 power amplifier (Michael Fremer)
Aronov is the

if you can tell the
differ
difference,

If you are that rare individual who knows what he wants and recognizes excellence when he hears it; who doesn't rely on someone else's opinion or guidance; who makes his own purchasing decisions; who has the power, who is a leader; who can afford the best; who is not afraid to spend less to get more... Aronov Audio has your amplifier!

Call 888-4-ARONOV for a brochure and the location of the dealer nearest you, or visit our web site at www.aronovaudio.com.
They tried to keep us from telling you...

The Anthem MCA Series of Multi-Channel Amplifiers.

Unique. The new MCA Series of multi-channel solid-state amplifiers do not share much in common with the competition — and it's not hard to see the differences in features and technical performance.

However, the ultimate test is in the listening — whether for the critical audio reproduction of your favourite musical performances, the near sensory overload created by a thrilling home theatre experience, or in taxing professional studio applications — our MCA Series amplifiers are up to the challenge. Representing the culmination of intensive R&D and exacting craftsmanship, the MCA amplifiers achieve cutting-edge performance and deliver unparalleled value.

To audition one of these unrivaled amplifiers, contact us for the Anthem dealer nearest you.

**The information contained in this chart has been sourced from manufacturer brochures, web pages, reviews and physical examinations. It is accurate to the best of our knowledge, as of June 1, 1999. Sonic Frontiers International makes no warranty, either expressed or implied, as to the accuracy of this chart. Manufacturer specifications are subject to change. Contact them directly to confirm. This illustration is for comparison purposes only.**
Enjoyed HI-FI '99
Editor:
I enjoyed HI-FI '99 in Chicago in May. I compliment you, your staff, and the exhibitors for a first-rate program. The concerts, in particular, were first-rate — I will certainly buy the Stereophile CD of the Antony Michaelson Clarinet Quintet concert when you release it.

Clyde A. Rhodes
Apple Valley, MN
crhodes@frontiernet.net

Although I did record Antony Michaelson performing the Brahms and Mozart clarinet quintets in concert at HI-FI '99, the Stereophile CD, scheduled for release this winter, will be from sessions recorded at Chad Kissem's Blue Heaven Studio in Kansas just before the Chicago show. —JA

How about more pictures?
Editor:
After reading Stereophile for the past few months, it has hit me what is wrong — there are no pictures, specifically in your product reviews. You will have an excellent and detailed review on a piece of hardware, but only one photo of the product. If you are reviewing a pair of speakers it would be nice to see a shot with and without the grilles, perhaps a back view, or maybe a close-up of a driver or port. Something that will give the reader an illustration of the workmanship or the finish. Perhaps even a wide shot of the speakers in the system they are being reviewed on.

Mark Grabow
East Islip, NY
markg@i-2000.com

Starting with our November issue, we will be including more photographic detail. —JA

Fat is where it's at!
Editor:
In today's society, thin is in. But I think that this catchphrase was in reference to humans, not magazines. Where is the rest of my July Stereophile?

Michael Fremer's excellent "Analog Corner" perhaps provides a reader's best clue as to what happened to the rest of the July issue. He concludes, "I'm over my word limit and I haven't gotten to..." Well, the rest of us haven't gotten to it yet, either.

This gives the word "corner" in "Analog Corner" an entirely new meaning! Come on, Stereophile, fat is where it's at! Please bring back the whole magazine.

Mal Fuller
Wolfeboro, NH

Where is the other half?
Editor:
What a surprise — I think I'm missing the other half of my July Stereophile. I've never experienced this! At any rate, if this is the complete package, I really feel sorry for the poor souls who dropped $6.95. I bet they're scratching their heads and thinking, "What is the value of a dollar?" I suppose it will come pretty close to getting you a gallon of gas — that is, unless you use "high-end" gas.

Karon G. Kollker
KarKol@aol.com

Bring back the nudie ads
Editor:
Now that your magazine has consistently shrunk in size, maybe you can start bringing back those ads from Cello and Energy that showed naked women. That way, when we're done reading those few pages, we'll have another incentive to want to reread what there is.

Rodolfo Bonnin (devoted subscriber)
Intem3@admin.fs.edu

See this month's "As We See It" for some discussion of this subject. —John Atkinson

Enjoys Stereophile
Editor:
I enjoy Stereophile. It has made me a better listener, helped me get the best out of my mid-fi system, and turned me on to some great music! Tweaking my speaker placement and rigging a homemade isolation base for my turntable have been the biggest help for my system. (Well, that and cleaning the contacts.) I could hear the midbass bloat when I switched phono cartridges, and knew to try moving my speakers out away from the back wall to even it out. Thank you, Stereophile — you taught me all this.

Stereophile introduced me to Tom Waits, Son Volt, Cassandra Wilson, and a John Marks Christmas CD. If I took the time to look through my records, I would have more to thank you for. I renewed my subscription today — it had run out, I didn't cancel in a fit of pique — and look forward to more from you on this wonderful hobby.

Trey Monroe
Trey@nashville.com

Time to rename Stereophile?
Editor:
I think that nothing better epitomizes the continuing decline of Stereophile into the silly morass of tweak audiophilia than the recent appointment of Jonathan Scull as senior editor. I would rather sit as office boy at the Journal of the Audio Engineering Society than reign supreme on the dunghill that has become Stereophile. Rename it TopTribe and complete the fait accompli!

Glenn O. Strauss
glems.t@nasa.com

Is Scull cheap?
Editor:
Now that Jonathan Scull is responsible for organizing equipment reports, does this mean that there won't be any reviews of modestly priced equipment in your magazine? We all know how much Scull loves to test megabuck equipment. All this from a guy who's too cheap to even pay for a ticket to see Jim Hall at the Village Vanguard.

Steve Wolfe
Norwalk, CT
wolfes@pb.com

Is Scull's derrière getting bigger?
Editor:
So Jonathan Scull arrives late for a sold-out jazz event at the venerable Village Vanguard, growls at his colleague for sen-
all theater. no gimmicks.

Funny, with all the synthetic effects and gimmicks available on today's A/V receivers - no one is talking about what really counts - delivering the best sound for the dollar. The NAD T770 surround sound receiver's unique design provides everything you need to enjoy a great movie or music. And, as with all NAD products, it maintains a reputation for true value, performance and simplicity.

NAD - to the rescue.

NAD T770 Surround Sound Receiver
70 watts into 8 ohms (all 5 channels), Motorola DSP processors, Dolby Digital and Pro Logic decoding, pre outs (all 5 channels), 5.1 input for external decoder; 5 video inputs, 2 video outputs, 3 digital inputs, 4 audio inputs, 2 tape outputs, E.A.R.S. (Enhanced Ambience Recovery System), Impedance Sensing Circuit (ISC) topology, remote control with NAD Link.
sibly getting seated, and ends up in the back row. From here we leap to an attack on home theater as something less noble than listening to old-fashioned two-channel stereo music.

There is so much in Jonathan's June "As We See It" to disagree with. Not every live music event is bereft of "wonder, emotion, and nobility," just as not every recording provides those qualities (in fact, most do not).

Further, others knowledgeable in such matters (J. Gordon Holt and, in the very same issue, Larry Archibald) predict the coming demise of stereo, as music recording mixers learn to use surround sound as their film brethren have. Why can't we enjoy both music and film? Mr. Scull has looked down from his perch before at those of us who try to capture the magic of classic films in the home. Not all of us watch junk, and many of us have extensive laser disc or DVD collections of wonderful movies that evoke wonder, emotion, and nobility.

Further, just because we pursue audio and video goals in multichannel doesn't mean we have abandoned stereo. I myself not only have a totally separate music room (thousands of music recordings, Maggigs, tubes, etc.), but I also have a separate system for my collection of 78s! And I have a mono Advent 400 in my bedroom and a boombox in my kitchen. I enjoy all this stuff, and certainly don't look down on those who singularly pursue stereo music perfection, or those who watch movies every night (I guess because I do both).

So, Mr. Scull, you can sit in your "jammin" in your Ribbon Chair and let your bigger-than-normal speakers get bigger as you fuss over the loaned high-end equipment, but let the rest of us pursue the many facets of this hobby without your sermons.

Richard P. Clancy
Ashland, MA
Ric_Clancy@harvardpilgrim.org

It's about the music!

Editor:
I have been reading with interest the many discussions on the goal of hi-fi in the reproduction of music. And the validity of recorded vs live music. And Jonathan Scull's impassioned June editorial comparing a disastrous dip into a live concert venue with listening to chosen performances on his "hyper-tweaked" system. And, finally, mention of the comparison of music to art (in some other publication). The concept that even the best reproduction of art is pale compared to the real thing has been extended to music as an argument that all recorded music has less value than the live performance.

Isn't there a single large fact missing from all this? Paintings and music are fundamentally different. While we can all enjoy a decent reproduction and get an idea of the artist's intent, we can also, with luck, money, time, and persistence, often enjoy the original.

But the musical performance is gone. No matter how good a person's memory, the few people who participated in it can only reminisce: "I was there..." Recordings, however, capture forever this transitory experience.

A recording, therefore, is all we have left of that unique performance, and makes it available to many. Even an imperfect recording serves a valuable purpose. Obviously, the better the fidelity, the more happy we will be. But who would want to trash all the wonderful musical performances available to us, even in such totally "alien" (to hi-fi enthusiasts) formats as player-piano rolls, wax drums, etc.?

Modern technology has given us methods of improving old recordings to a level of "listenability" that allows us to hear the music adequately. We can enjoy and compare multiple interpretations of works. By listening to the greatest soloists and orchestras of the past, we will develop a better understanding of the music and improve our critical faculties to the point that we can differentiate a good interpretation or performance from a less good one. This is obviously impractical with live music alone!

It often amazes hi-fi enthusiasts that many professional musicians have "crappy" reproduction systems (by hi-fi standards). Invariably, they will tell you they listen beyond the equipment to the music itself. Our auditory system (ears and brain) is wonderfully capable of filtering out the "noise" and focusing on the information, if we allow it to. So it is possible to enjoy an imperfectly reproduced performance. We just need to want to!

These ramblings might seem to be dumping on the hi-fi enthusiast. Not at all. The better the reproduction chain, the more information (music, ambience, etc.) will be retrieved. I have been hooked on hi-fi since my first Linn/Naim system, purchased in the late 70s. But the recording/reproduction chain is just a means to the end of listening to music. We should never forget that. Recorded music is all that the vast majority of people have access to, and the "live music only" egotists should remember this.

We need recordings! The better they are, the happier we will be. The better our systems can handle imperfect recordings and let the music come through, the better off we are. So, I will continue to read and enjoy the pages of Stereophile and its quirky bunch of reviewers (while constantly being frustrated by wondering which of the speakers is better, when similarly priced speakers are given glowing reviews by different reviewers in the same issue), and no doubt will be sucked into every high-end store I pass for a listen, often coming to the conclusion that the differences between good equipment are small, and unimportant when you look beyond them to the performance!

My personal feeling is that the more tolerant we are of imperfect reproduction and the more we train ourselves to listen through the reproduction errors to the music itself, the happier we will be. But without the original recording, all the high technology has no point. Better a scratchy mono 78 or an (eek!) 8-track than no music at all!

Doug Aitken
Houston, TX
daitken@sugar-land.madridsilk.com

Stop bemoaning your fate

Editor: I have been reading your magazine for about a year now, and if there is only one thing I’ve learned from you about the world of "high-end" audio, it’s that it’s doomed to die a slow and agonizing death. Instead of celebrating the joy of listening to good music through good equipment, your publication seems obsessed with dwelling on the impending death of the hobby that you are supposed to be encouraging. It’s almost as if you are counting down the days until your publisher inevitably shuts you down. Reading your magazine is positively depressing!

I gather that Stereophile is a highly influential journal for the audio industry, probably its premier publication. Why, then, are you discouraging people from getting involved in this rewarding hobby that so many love so much? I fear you are generating a self-fulfilling prophecy. Enough already!

I will now take my turn at the soapbox and tell you how to save Stereophile, and possibly the entire world of "high-end" audio. Your magazine and the industry fail with young(er) consumers like myself because you just don’t understand them. You do not market your products toward this group. The market has moved way beyond your silly obsessions (vinyl, tubes, classical music), yet you continue to focus too much attention on dinosaur technology and music. It’s not
The all new “e:XL” Series from Energy® Loudspeakers is a radical departure in speaker design, where high-fashion meets hi-tech.

The “e:XL” Series uses all new tweeter, woofer, baffle and cabinet construction technologies to vastly improve dispersion and combat distortion.

Naturally, for home theater lovers, this powerful, magnetically shielded line also features matching center and rear speakers making the assembly of completely timbre matched “e:XL” home theater systems, a snap.

Never before has this level of high performance sound looked so good — at such an attractive price!

“Not for those shy about wanting an extraordinary sound experience.”

John Tchilinguirian
Energy Chief Engineer

Listen to the full line of “E:XL Series™” speakers at your nearest Energy® retailer!

3641 McNicoll Ave., Scarborough, Ontario, Canada M1X 1G5 Tel. (416) 321-1800 Fax (416) 321-1500 www.energy-speakers.com
the 1950s anymore, folks! Follow these steps, and I guarantee you will dramatically increase your sales among young(er) consumers.

1) Waste no space on any product with a price tag higher than $10,000. What better way to turn off a potential new reader than to continue to highlight products they will never even hear, let alone purchase. Do you want to make a magazine for the 10 aging millionaires who can afford such equipment, or for the mass of people who just want something better than the crappy Bose system they saw at Best Buy? It is the search for something better that leads newbies to a publication like Stereophile in the first place. When they see reviews of $35,000 speakers being held up as that “something better,” I bet 99% drop your magazine and head straight back to Good Guys.

2) Stop pushing vinyl! Most of my generation have never purchased an LP! It is laughable and even bizarre that a certain narrow group of people continue to fetishize a technology that died 15 years ago!

3) Get rid of the tubes! When I first saw a picture of a piece of tube gear reviewed in your mag, I laughed out loud! It looked like something Dr. Frankenstein used to bring his creature to life. Most of my generation have never seen a piece of tube gear, have no idea that they are still being manufactured, and will never buy one.

4) Embrace multichannel home theater and shun stereo-only gear. Why on earth would anyone even consider buying a preamp that is not also a home-theater processor? Stop reviewing separate preamps and integrated amps. No one from my generation will buy a separate system for two-channel playback and another for home theater. However, we will buy a home-theater processor that can also be used for two-channel stereo. Recognize this distinction.

5) Embrace rock’n’roll, for crying out loud! Realize that the definition of “good music” is not necessarily synonymous with classical. In case you hadn’t noticed, “popular music” today is rock’n’roll, R&B, electronica, and even (brace yourselves) rap! Yet you continue to focus rather snobbishly on classical, as if this is the only legitimate form of “good music” suitable to be played on expensive equipment. What rock you do feature generally consists of Bob Dylan’s or Bonnie Raitt’s new CD, not anything that might be construed as new or cutting edge. Both your equipment reviewers and your record reviewers need a better understanding of what young(er) people are listening to.

If you continue to follow the path that you are on, I guarantee that your dire predictions will all come true. You are your own worst enemy. Yes, “high-end” audio as presented in Stereophile is, in fact, dying. However, people’s love of “good music” played back on a “good system” will continue. All you have to do is redefine what you call “good music” as well as what you call a “good system.” If your magazine in fact defines “high-end” audio, I say “good riddance.” Some other, more savvy publisher will come along with a better journal that eats your lunch. If you want to survive and grow, you will have to stop publishing a magazine for yourselves and start publishing one for your audience.

Stop bemoaning your fate and do something about it! Mark Lawton
Mark.Lawton@Dialogic.com

Is the end near?
Editor:
Is the end near for the High End? No! All you have to do is look on the Web and you will find plenty of high-end activity. Is the end near for your idea of the High End? Yes! You continually bemoan the lack of interest in our hobby, yet you continually review equipment that does not even fit the budgets of the very affluent. Two years ago, when I started to notice quality audio for the playing of high-quality acoustical music, I thought all the equipment was priced too high. Now I see that some things in life are worth the price of admission, but when you review speakers that are in the price range of a nice luxury car, then fail to mention that there are speakers in the price range of living-room furniture that will “blow them away,” you are spelling your own doom.

One more thing, and I will go back to listening to my cheap stereo, which sounds great. My hero, Sam Tellig, in the July issue has sold me out! He reports on an amp that costs $30,000. Sam, is there no end to this madness?

Jim Lee
(j a n e w a u d i o @ h o l l y s o u t h . n e t)

We need the High End
Editor:
I used to follow all motorcycle racing in my younger days when I had the time, had bikes, etc. I used to get every periodical out there and read them from cover to cover. Now I look to those previous moments when I can relax for a moment and listen to my hi-fi and read my Stereophile (damned multitasking). As a result, you and your compatriots are very important to me (and people like me) because you feed our interests—a real reason people get pissed when the magazine doesn’t arrive on time.

That’s why it’s vitally important to continue to test and report on the very best, and to use the best equipment to test the cheaper components. I see this as immersion. Without the benchmark, what will the reference be?

I have learned a lot from you all, which never would have happened if you hadn’t done the shows, reviewed the very best, and interviewed those in the know. Because of Stereophile, I know what to listen for when I make the 220-mile trek to Dallas to hear the next potential purchase.

Those who complain need to take a short sabbatical here in Bossier City, Louisiana. They will find, as I have, what it’s like to live in a vacuum—a wasteland. And then only then will they have a real appreciation for what you do.

Jim
Bossier City, LA
k32lewis@avix.com

Scientists vs audiophiles
Editor:
In George Reisch’s “Undercurrents” (Stereophile, July 1999) he asserts that the “prejudices” of the engineers and scientists who bash audiophiles are based on theoretical knowledge as opposed to the firsthand experience of listening to high-end systems.

It is my somewhat educated guess that if you took most of these dissenting scientists and engineers and sat them down in front of a good audio system, they would not be able to immediately hear exactly how or why it was good. It takes years of educating your ear to hear the fine differences in audio systems. Most of them would probably have difficulty telling the difference between cables. Remember back to when you first began trying to distinguish the differences between far more dramatic components like speakers. I think they’re defensive and frustrated, and, rather than admitting that something might exist that they’re missing, they dismiss the fact that anything exists at all, and say that we’re fools who are imagining it.

It reminds me very much of people who go to museums and have no idea why Picasso, Pollock, or Rothko are good painters. They’re seeing exactly what we’re seeing, but they’re seeing it quite differently. Many of these people (perhaps the educated ones are the most defensive) claim that the rest of us must be fools for valuing this art so highly. We have been hoodwinked. We cannot

Stereophile, September 1999 13

Letters
Letters

see that the emperor has no clothes on.

Some of these left-brain guys may not have very developed right brains. They may never be able to see why Picasso is a great painter or hear why a high-end audio system is worth the extra price we pay for it. Some people who are incapable of love deny that the rest of us might actually be able to feel it. You probably won’t convince most of them. However, I’m not saying you should quit trying. From time to time it is a wonderful experience to introduce someone to a new aesthetic experience.

David Del Bourgo
Woodland Hills
Ddelbourgo@aol.com

The future of audio is multichannel?

Editor:
I noted an attempt to relate to the advantages of DVD-Audio recordings in the June Stereophile. However, the equipment reviews were devoted to loudspeakers and obsolete two-channel equipment. As one of your earliest subscribers, I cannot justify continuation of my subscription after it expires this summer. The future of audio is multichannel, powered by one of the better receivers as the control center. Expensive CD players are antiquated, as confirmed to me by a large high-end dealer who is having trouble dumping his stock of these items.

Many people believe DVD players like the Pioneer PD-414 play CDs better than the esoteric stuff. I can attest to my personal experience: the Pioneer has bested both the inexpensive JoLida and a player in Stereophile’s Class A category. Why would anyone spend big bucks for no return?

I agree that the decade has spawned a Golden Age of Audio because the average consumer can get good sound at a reasonable price. It will be a matter of time for the newest formats to become more affordable. Meanwhile, I will enjoy playing a few music DVDs and hundreds of CDs through the various options offered by my Harman/Kardon receiver and PD-414.

Dave
ritadian@velocity.net

This, Bud, was for you

Editor:
I was pleasantly surprised on reading the letter of Richard J. Hardesty in the July Stereophile (p.10), for he voices some of the same thinking that I have expressed in my writings and individually to many people who contact me these days. For it appears that accuracy of reproduction, either as measured in the lab or as heard by auditors who are familiar with the values of live music, is no longer a desired end — this in an industry that started with the goal of creating greater accuracy in the reproduction of the classical repertoire.

I have not mentioned the ever-more-expensive “boxes” (which is all that most of them appear to be, falling into what I term in my writings “reactive” systems). However, I have talked with many people who are in and of the industry, and who uniformly mention that these new speakers sound “impressive” but hardly resemble the sounds and timbres of live instruments!

Mr. Hardesty mentions something I find most interesting: Not one of these speakers is time- or phase-accurate (or, as I prefer to say, “choate”). Yet over the years I have found, and can prove under laboratory conditions, that such accuracy is vital for the closest approach to “live” values. Among other matters about which I have written is that series crossover networks, provided the drivers are proper, produce the highest level of time accuracy — and, by actual measurement, more dynamic range — from a given program! This is easy to understand. Now, why didn’t any of these so-called advanced speakers show evidence of attention to the lack of compression that is possible today, more so than in the days of parallel networks, sharp or slow as they might be?

Among others in the industry are a few who answer my queries regarding what happens to these expensive and frustrating “advanced” designs. I am told that these speakers have the following histories: The first owner who purchases what seemed to be the new “hi-fi standard” grows disenchanted in a very short time, and moves onward. The result is a very large and constantly growing inventory of used loudspeakers among specialized dealers, who then resell them to the still-enchanted, who then become disenchanted, and it goes on and on.

Consumers who still manage to find me mention their disgust and disenchantment with an industry that has switched from a search for the “truth” in music to being just another consumer-product industry. As does Mr. Hardesty, I wonder whether this could be one factor in the obvious decline in the fortunes of the industry.

Irving M. (Bud) Fried
Wynnewood, PA

Mikey’s militant self-righteousness

Editor:
Reading “Letters” in the May Stereophile, I felt the need to comment on Michael Fremer’s militant self-righteousness. Michael, the whole MP3 thing is hardly an audiophile concern! How many people do you know who consider themselves audiophiles who have ever seriously listened to the format? It is obviously that the data compression involved in making an MP3 leads to less of sound quality and/or accuracy.

Get a little perspective Michael! Take a look around you and count the VPIs, Nagras, and Conrad Johnsons. For that matter, count the BMWs and genuine Sony Walkmans. It seems to me that with the possible exception of Sam Tellig and Lisa Astor, Sterophile writers have become so ensconced in their ultra-high end world that they can’t see anything else. Not only are they failing to take the “rest of the world” into any account, however minimal, they are also defending their ignorance with elitist zeal.

I still enjoy Sterophile’s comprehensive and plentiful equipment reviews — don’t cancel my subscription just yet. But if I want editorials on audio, I’ll go somewhere else, thank you. Perhaps the Times. Or better yet, Ultimate Audio magazine.

Matt Wimmer
wimmer@panther.middlebury.edu

Mr. Wimmer is an occasional contributor to Ultimate Audio.

—JA

Fremer vs MP3

Editor:
In reference to Mr. Fremer’s battle with certain New York Times writers to elaborate on MP3 technology’s sonic weaknesses (Stereophile, March 1999): Forget it, Mike — the vast majority of those who will use MP3 or similar technology will never notice, nor would they care about its shortcomings.

Face it — to the normal person high fidelity is anything noticeably better than AM on a cheap boombox, and the dream system is whatever is the most prestigiously badged receiver, CD changer, and speakers (12” woofer, please) that they could find on sale at the discount outlet. Really, as long as there is no glaring distortion (loud AC hum, for example) and there are a lot of knobs, a remote, decently loud midbass but not too much top octave, and the components say something like “Pioneer” or “Bose” instead of “K-Fi” or “Wal-Woo” on their fronts, then they have arrived. Remember, the dream system also needs to fit on the shelf or in the corner.

I think the allure of MP3 is twofold. First, it is free to those with the right computer, and we do live free stuff. And pirating is bad-boy fun! Second, it allows cybernerds a new collecting hobby. They
Meet B&W's new DM 600 Series 2 loudspeakers. The ultimate in high performance engineering without the high price tag. Quite simply, we completely re-engineered our most successful speakers ever, starting with our famous yellow Kevlar cones for superior imaging. Likewise, our revolutionary Nautilus tapered wave-guide tweeters have forever redefined high frequency perfection, especially at these prices. Even our crossovers have been upgraded to ensure vanishingly low distortion.

Wish you could hear more? Listen to them at your authorized B&W dealer.

“nothing short of miraculous.”
What Hi Fi? Awards

Wish you were here?
At Madrigal, the term Reference carries special meaning. In the literal sense, Mark Levinson Reference products serve as benchmarks. They are designed to be the best available in their product category — regardless of price. All Reference components feature a modular architecture that allows them to be updated as technology evolves. Our commitment to Reference product owners is now a matter of record. Audition Madrigal's benchmark components at your Mark Levinson dealer soon. It will change your point of reference.
are trying to see who can have the most singles archived, who was first to tag and distribute the new release from whomever, how well they have everything indexed and cross-referenced, and the like—sort of like baseball cards, or Beatles 45s back in the '60s. As far as fidelity is concerned, they probably don't even have time to listen to the stuff. When they do, it is on the computer with surround ambience and other manipulations.

The New York Times writers that MF engages are simply competing to scoop the new and cool, semi-underground, high-tech fad. They don't care to be critical reporters—they are new and cool. How can they afford to whine about the negatives? Given that MP3 on the computer with 3D processing sounds cooler than the old car radio or a $25 Walkman, then it is high (enough) fidelity.

I appreciate hearing about the new technology from an audiophile perspective, so thank you for the information. But let's not lose sleep over the NY Times. Be nice to them and maybe they will give us their old LPs. David Young

Michael writes more on the subject of MP3 in this month's Analog Corner. —JA

A musical mistake?

Editor:

I would like to start off by saying that I believe one of life's greatest pleasures is hearing a great pop song for the very first time. As one listens, each note seems to uncannily fall perfectly in place, and, as the chorus clicks in, it's like being hit between the eyeballs with a ball-peek hammer of joy...really.

I mention this because I recently picked up copies of Bill Lloyd's Set to Pop and Standing on the Shoulders of Giants, and though they are very good records and undoubtedly recommendable, I am a bit puzzled by Robert Baird's overwhelming enthusiasm for them (Stereophile, May 1999, p.145). More important, this has reminded me of how disappointing Stereophile's Rock section has become.

In his "Recording of the Month" review of Lloyd's SOTSOG, Mr. Baird makes suggestions for what is needed to create a great power-pop song and ends by referring to the "science" of pop music-making. I believe that his comments imply formulaic music-making by means of dropping known parameters into an equation to produce a desired result. I know he didn't quite mean it in that way, but the music being reviewed in Stereophile has become so homogenized that I couldn't help but see it from that perspective. The most important characteristic of a great pop song is its uniqueness. Bill Lloyd's songs are definitely catchy and smart, and let me make it clear that I really enjoy them.

But jangly 12-string guitars, backing-chorus "ah-ah's", and "Gee, aren't I clever" lyrics do not necessarily define a great pop song. The imagination of a pop song's creators to produce melodies and arrangements that stand out on their own, and to combine talented performances with distinctive singing and playing, make shaping a great pop song an elusive art. There was a small group of gentlemen back in London, England during the 1960s who were able to do this with a scary consistency. However, it still happens today, and quite a lot more often than I feel Mr. Baird would believe. Bill Lloyd may very well be a good pop-song writer, but he's not the only one, not by a long shot.

I find it ironic that an audio magazine would pose the question "Where is the next generation of audiophiles coming from?" would be so out of touch with the vast range of popular music available today. It seems one cannot read Stereophile's reviews without an obligatory reference to Texas, Louisiana, or Tennessee, and the cynicism directed toward any music that doesn't fall into this range of styles is puzzling. Mr. Baird obviously has his own preferences, which is more than understandable and respected, but I cannot help conclude that he views his own opinions on music as absolute, and feels contempt toward anything that doesn't meet his preferred tastes. I see a fortysomething who wishes today's music was like it was when he was younger, which seems reflected in the reviews that Stereophile prints.

Pop and rock music are defined by the time and the culture within which they are born. One can argue that a great piece of music is timeless, but it is always a representation of its own time. We may insist that the music we grew up with is and always will be great, but how do we react to the music our parents loved when they were young? I feel that Mr. Baird has mistaken today's music to be less than what it once was, when really he is simply no longer able to relate to that part of today's culture. I think that Stereophile should be more concerned about where music is going than pining over what it used to be. Henry Husar

Perhaps not

Editor:

I just wanted to thank Robert Baird for reviewing such an amazing album. My taste in music is hard to pin down, but I was impressed by Bill Lloyd's Standing on the Shoulders of Giants (Koch LOC-CD-8035). I teach high-school art, and I took the album with me to class this morning and had a number of students ask who it was, where I got it, and if there were other copies at the store. In the days before corporate radio and MTV, this is how I heard of new music. There is an audience out there for good music if young people know where to find it. Perhaps this is one of the goals of an audiophile—to share the knowledge of good music of all types. The album reminded me of so many different groups: the Windbreakers, Chris Isaak, and on and on. The recording quality is amazing as well. I guess the next task will be to find Lloyd's earlier efforts.

I doubt you take suggestions, but if you find the time, take a listen to David Sylvian's Dead Bees on a Cake. The sound is hard to describe—more like his earlier efforts—and the recording quality is great. Thank you again for the review.

Dan Kneger

Ok, we admit it, we're cheating.

We designed the Excalibur II to outperform our competitors' best offerings. Then, we shamelessly priced this cable at a mere $225.00 single ended.

We apologize if this offends your sense of fairness and good sportsmanship.

Toll Free 1-888-464-8202

ph 303-364-8202 fx 303-364-8102
e-mail sorcerer49@aol.com

1400 S. Union Blvd. Littleton, Colorado 80120
www.AudioMagic.com
The 3.3 Loudspeaker System

Design: Ultimate expression of NHT philosophy.
System accuracy: Acoustical accuracy rivaling finest audio electronics.
Resolution: Spatial/spectral soundfield fully responsive to recording.
Enclosure: Radical enclosure optimizes radiation over full audio frequency range.
Componentry: Individually matched components assure laboratory precision within 0.3 dB.

Jack Vad.

Knows a pure note when he hears it.

Now hear this.

For a NHT dealer in U.S. or Canada: 1-800-NHT-9993 • www.nhthifi.com ©1997 NHT
US: TEXAS
Barry Willis
Since the earliest days of stereo—the first experiments with more than single-channel sound happened back in the 1930s at Bell Labs in the US and EMI in England—recording and playback have been based on a horizontal model: left-center-right, left-rear, right-rear. “Laterality,” as it’s sometimes called, can be exploited very well in creating plausible sensations of spatial events, especially by film-industry sound engineers. The believable reproduction of music is considerably more problematic.

In the real world, sounds come at us from all directions—not merely from front, sides, and back, but from above and below as well. Psychoacoustics experts, forward-thinking engineers, and even some audiophiles have long recognized the absence of vertical information as one of the biggest obstacles to truly realistic sound reproduction.

Enter Tomlinson Holman. The legendary engineer—he designed the APT-Holman preamp and is the “TH” in Lucasfilm’s THX—is again pushing audio’s perennial envelope with what he calls a “10.2-channel” system. With twice as many channels as Dolby Digital’s 5.1, including two channels of ultra-low bass, Holman’s system encodes, decodes, and accurately corrects vertical as well as horizontal sound cues. Those who’ve heard his system have raved about its realism. Stereophile Guide to Home Theater’s Tom Norton, who heard a preliminary demo of the system at last January’s CES, said “It was the most amazing multichannel sound I have ever heard. I was simply in the space occupied by the performers, with no sensation at all of the locations of the speakers or the size of the listening room…there were live music recordings that sounded…live.”

In early July, Holman’s new company, Los Angeles-based TMH Corporation, conducted its first public demonstration of 10.2 at an electronics store in San Antonio, Texas. Approximately 100 people heard the demo at Bjorn’s Audio Video, an event deemed noteworthy enough to warrant a mention in the Wall Street Journal. TMH was due to conduct more demonstrations at locations throughout the country in the summer, in hopes of generating interest among consumers and manufacturers. This fascinating development promises to explore one of the last great frontiers in audio, and will be followed closely by Stereophile.

US: NEW YORK
Jon Iverson
The Internet is beginning to pose quite a dilemma for high-end audio manufacturers, especially ones with limited distribution in major markets such as the US. Do you risk alienating potential bricks-and-mortar dealers in an effort to gain widespread exposure by offering your products online? Or do you slowly build distribution through the traditional stores that for years have been high-end audio’s haven?

Several companies are now opting for an online strategy and have signed exclusive and selective North and South American distribution rights with CoolAudio.com. CoolAudio.com claims that by combining the convenience of the Internet with a local dealer/installer network, they’ll be able to provide sufficient levels of customer service and support, both on- and offline, for the audio and video home-entertainment market. The CoolAudio store was scheduled to go live in early August.

Manufacturers making the jump to online sales include Chord Electronics, Roksan, Wilson Benesch, BC-Acoustique, and Audes, an Estonian speaker manufacturer that uses a facility formerly used to produce Soviet MiG fighter jets. In addition to these brands, CoolAudio.com says it will also offer Toshiba and Harman/Kardon.

Although CoolAudio.com is headquartered in New York, fulfillment and customer-support operations are plan-

e-mail AzAudioS@aol.com.

CONNECTICUT
• For information about the Connecticut Audio Society, visit www.theatom.com/cas, or call Carl Richard at (860) 745-5937.

FLORIDA
• DIY Journal
• Saturday, August 31: The South Florida Audio Society is sponsoring a seminar featuring Mike vansEvers, who will demonstrate his company’s Pandora power cords, Spatial Lens, and Window System. For more information, contact Manny Acosta at (954) 436-3679 or mannyacosta@worldnet.att.net, or visit www.sfas.org.

ARIZONA
• The Arizona Audiophile Society sponsors monthly audio and home-theater meetings and events. For information, call (623) 516-4960, or e-mail AzAudioS@aol.com.

C a l e n d a r

Those promoting audio-related seminars, shows, and meetings should fax (do not call) Steven Stoner the when, where, and who at (505) 983-6327 at least eight weeks before the month of the event. The deadline for the November 1999 issue is September 1, 1999. Mark the fax “Attention Steven Stoner—Dealer Bulletin Board.” We will fax back a confirmation. If you do not receive confirmation within 24 hours, please fax us again.

ARIZONA
• The Arizona Audiophile Society sponsors monthly audio and home-theater meetings and events. For information, call (623) 516-4960, or e-mail AzAudioS@aol.com.

CONNECTICUT
• For information about the Connecticut Audio Society, visit www.theatom.com/cas, or call Carl Richard at (860) 745-5937.

FLORIDA
• DIY Journal
• Saturday, August 31: The South Florida Audio Society is sponsoring a seminar featuring Mike vansEvers, who will demonstrate his company’s Pandora power cords, Spatial Lens, and Window System. For more information, contact Manny Acosta at (954) 436-3679 or mannyacosta@worldnet.att.net, or visit www.sfas.org.

ILLINOIS
• Sunday, September 19, 2–5pm: The Chicago Audio Society is sponsoring Bobby Palkovic of Merlin Music Systems and Judd Barber of Joule Electra for a seminar at the Dance Building in Des Plaines. Nonmembers are welcome. For more information, call Brian at (847) 382-8433, or visit www.xnet.com/~bpwalsh/cas.html.
• Audio Consultants is sponsoring the following events. Call the appropriate stores for information and reservations.
An important event in music history occurred when Beethoven gave us his love letters in music.

Without a doubt, the most important event in the history of Cary Audio was the creation, in 1989, of the single-ended, class A, zero feedback triode amplifier: the CAD-300-SE. Ever since, the Cary sound has given a much greater meaning and purpose to music reproduction in homes throughout the world.

The distinguishing characteristic of the Cary sound is the ease, warmth, and emotional impact the music will have on you, the listener. Cary Audio is honored to help you share musical history.
ned in Seattle, Washington and Fredericksburg, Virginia. The company also states that it is building a nationwide dealer/installer organization to augment its service and support network.

The company claims its website will be designed for novices and experts alike, and “the product content will be free of technical jargon.” The site, currently under development, is planning to offer both real-time online and telephone technical support seven days a week. To this end, CoolAudio.com says it is actively recruiting a national network of audio/video dealers and system installers to support customers at the local level. The company’s intention is to offer on-site installation and repair services through affiliate “CoolDealers” and “CoolInstallers.”

UNITED KINGDOM
Paul Messenger

“Good grief!” was my and John Atkinson’s collective response, on hearing that Haymarket Magazines had purchased Gramophone Publications. Minds boggled at the very idea of the venerable old lady of classical-music criticism getting into bed with the much younger, altogether brasher, and unashamedly populist What Hi-Fi?, market leader among UK hi-fi mags. As Haymarket enigmatically put it, “With its emphasis on in-depth reviewing, Gramophone itself has great synergy with other titles in the Haymarket portfolio, such as What Hi-Fi? magazine.”

Further pondering and a few phone calls later, the prospect had become a lot less weird. In the short to medium term, at least, it looks as though Gramophone’s loyal readers can don their nightcaps in peace, secure in the knowledge that the new owner has no plans to monkey around with their favorite bedtime reading.

Founded in the early 1920s by author Sir Compton MacKenzie, in more than 75 years of successful operation under three successive generations of the Pollard family, Gramophone has earned an unparalleled reputation and success in its field. But it’s a success that a small, independent publishing house is ill equipped to exploit as the commercial world increasingly “goes global.” (The parallels with Stereophile’s recent takeover are obvious.)

Chairman Tony Pollard recently celebrated his 70th birthday, and is reportedly happy to take a well-earned retirement. His son, editorial director Chris Pollard, simply felt the time was right for Gramophone to become part of a larger group. Last year’s televised and Gramophone-sponsored Classical Music Awards were an undoubted success, but also proved rather a strain on the resources of an operation of modest size. Haymarket’s promotional muscle is much better suited to run and capitalize on such an annual event.

Unlike in the US, where subscriptions dominate the scene, British magazines depend heavily on over-the-counter newstand sales, and here the distribution strengths of a major player like Haymarket will be a major bonus—not just for Gramophone itself, but also for the various niche quarters the company produces, all of which operate profitably. When I mentioned Songlines, Gramophone’s new world/ethnic music quarterly, Chris Pollard said he reckoned this could end up being one of the jewels in the Gramophone crown. The first two issues were distributed only through subscriptions and record stores, yet completely sold out their 12,500-copy print runs.

Though Chris Pollard himself will be retained as a consultant, and hopes to play a part in transferring Gramophone’s corporate ethos to its new owners, he envisages playing a decidedly peripheral role from now on. However, there are no plans to change the current management or facilities, or move Gramophone from its new Sudbury offices in North London, all of which are parts of the deal. (In any case, no space is available in Haymaker’s Teddington headquarters near London’s Heathrow Airport.) Gramophone’s collection of 75,000 CD’s is also included in the sale, as an essential part of ongoing editorial activity.

The priceless and indisputably unique vinyl archive, however—currently housed in climate-controlled barns at the bottom of Chris Pollard’s garden—is being retained by the Pollard family. The plan is to find some way of keeping the Gramophone Collection together and making this invaluable resource more accessible to accredited academics and researchers, perhaps through the EMI Sound Foundation, the National Sound Archive, or another such institution.

US: VIRGINIA/CALIFORNIA
Jon Iverson
Some people news: Loudspeaker designer Bill Eggleson has joined Cello Technologies Corporation. He will oversee the development of a new line of no-compromise loudspeakers, according to a company press release dated July 1.

LEBANON
Tuesday, September 21, 7–9pm, Hinsdale, (630) 789-1990: John McIntosh of B&W Loudspeakers will introduce the B&W Nautilus series.

LOUISIANA
For information about Big Boys Audio Toy Society, New Orleans’ first and only high-end audio club, e-mail stockjoc@hotmail.com.

MINNESOTA
For information on Audio Syndrome (East Meadow, Nassau County), a monthly club catering to obsessive-compulsive audio neurotics from September through June, call Roy Harris at (516) 489-9576.

NEW YORK
For information on the monthly meetings of the Musicalaudiophile Society, the Audiophile Society, and the Gotham Audio Society, call David Nemzer at (718) 237-1094.

C A L E N D A R

Stereophile, September 1999
YOU DON’T HAVE TO DIE TO GO TO HEAVEN.

conrad-johnson It just sounds right.
Eggleston designed the Andra loudspeaker, which was voted Stereophile’s “Product of the Year” for 1997.

“I am very pleased to be a part of the Cello development team,” Eggleston said. “I look forward to the opportunity to expand Cello’s product line, and to further increase the company’s role as the technological leader in this area.” The highly regarded designer is no longer associated with Eggleston Works, the company he founded. Cello’s president, David Daniels, said landing Eggleston was a “significant step toward solidifying Cello’s position as the provider of the best loudspeaker technologies in the world.”

In addition to forging ahead with a new loudspeaker development program, Cello has a digital technology division in the Research Triangle of North Carolina, and demonstration centers in Aspen, Houston, Dallas, Ft. Lauderdale, Seattle, Los Angeles, and New York. The company’s factory remains in New Haven, Connecticut, where it has been since its creation by audio legend Mark Levinson in the mid-1980s. Now headquartered in Falls Church, Virginia, Cello Music & Film Systems Inc. officially changed its name on July 1 to Cello Technologies Corporation, “to better reflect the broad range of products and services we provide our clients.” High-end audio veteran Peter McGrath is director of business development.

In June, tube maven David Manley resigned as president of Manley Laboratories and assigned his total shares in the company to ex-wife EveAnna Manley as part of an agreement signed June 10, 1999. EveAnna Manley has officially assumed the duties of president, CEO, and sole owner of Manley Laboratories, Inc. A press release stated that David Manley is no longer associated or affiliated with Manley Laboratories, Inc., and that EveAnna has been de facto operating CEO of the company since David’s departure in 1996.

The company, which claims to have grown 75% over the last three years, manufactures vacuum-tube products under the Manley and Langevin brand names for both the consumer and pro-audio markets. Products developed by Manley’s design team, headed by Craig Hutchison and assisted by Baltazar Hernandez, include the Manley Voxbox, the Stingray Integrated Amplifier, and the Manley Massive Passive Stereoor Equalizer. Stereophile’s John Atkinson made use of the transparent-sounding Manley ELOP (ELECTro-OPtical) tube limiter during the mixing of the magazine’s recent Roundhouse jazz CD.

**UNITED KINGDOM**

**Paul Messenger**

Norman Mordaunt, the founder and inspiration behind the Mordaunt-Short loudspeaker brand and one of the pioneers of British hi-fi, died in April 1999. Born in 1911, Mordaunt was with Decca in the late 1940s, during the development of 33 1/3 recording and the LP, and worked with BSR and Tannoy before starting up the Mordaunt brand. Best remembered for his highly regarded Anundel loudspeaker with its Kelly ribbon tweeter, Mordaunt eventually teamed up with Rodney Short. He retired in the early 1970s, when Mordaunt-Short moved from London to Petersfield.

**US/JAPAN**

**Jon Iverson**

TDK introduced extended-capacity, 80-minute/700MB multimedia and music CD-R discs in July. The new discs add 50MB, or 6 minutes of stereo music capacity, to the conventional 74-minute/650MB CD-R disc. TDK says it is the first manufacturer to offer extended-capacity CD-Rs, and points out that it has been supplying recording studios with 80-minute CD-Rs for music-mastering applications since 1996. (Stereophile’s new 77+ minute Bravo! CD, for example, featured elsewhere in this issue, was mastered on a 700MB TDK CD-R.)

The company says its decision to bring extended-capacity technology to consumer markets follows the publication earlier this spring of updated industry standards (Orange Book, Part II) for 80-minute discs. The new CDR-80 (multimedia) and CD-TWIN-R80 (home music) discs differ chiefly from 74-minute discs in the pitch (fineness) of the data track inscribed on the disc. Since data recorded on a CD-R follow a single, spiral track from the disc’s center to its perimeter, a finer track pitch allows more data to be written on the disc.

This finer track pitch could make the 80-minute discs incompatible with some recorders and players. In addition, because some computer recording software does not support 80-minute/700MB CD-Rs, TDK claims that users might have to update their software accordingly, or contact the software manufacturer to establish compatibility. Both 80- and 74-minute Certified Plus CD-Rs use TDK’s

**PenNSYLVANia**

- **Thursday, August 26, 7pm**: Audio Images (2337 MacArthur Road, Whitehall) will host a seminar featuring Kevin Voeks of Revel Loudspeakers and Dana Carlson of Madrigal Audio Labs. Refreshments will be served. Please call (610) 437-1200 for reservations.

**Washington**

- **Thursday, September 9, 7pm**: The Pacific NW Audio Society and Wired Technologies are sponsoring a seminar on various audio/video topics, including THX, small-room acoustics, home automation, and future proofing. The event will be held at PAS’s Mercer Island location, 4545 Island Crest Way. For more information, contact PAS representatives at (425) 481-8512 or (425) 823-2538.

- **Stereophile** recording artist Robert Silverman will perform the Beethoven Piano Sonata cycle at Seattle’s Frye Museum on the following weekends (Saturday and Sunday): September 11 and 12; 18 and 19; 25 and 26; October 2 and 3. For more information, call the museum at (206) 622-9250.

**Canada**

**Fairview HiFi** (892 Brant Street, Burlington, Ontario), is sponsoring the following seminars. Please call (905) 681-1872 for more information:

- **Thursday, October 14, 6–10pm**: New home-theater separates from Anthem by Sonic Frontiers.

- **Thursday, October 21, 6–10pm**: Sonic Frontiers’ complete line of tube equipment.

- **Thursday, October 28, 6–10pm**: Naim Audio and JMLab Loudspeakers.

*Stereophile*, September 1999
REACHING BEYOND.

Again and again reviewers rate the performance of the PSB Stratus Series equal to that of loudspeakers many times their price - an out of this world value.

"The midrange was clean and uncolored, the stereo imaging well defined and stable, and the bass generous without being boomy...This is one fine design...The Gold is going to put a serious crimp in the sales of its more expensive competitors. Enthusiastically recommended."

John Atkinson, Stereophile, Vol.20 No.10
**US: SILICON VALLEY**

**Barry Willis & Jon Iverson**

MP3, the hottest upstart in the digital audio market, got a big boost in June when Diamond Multimedia Systems Inc. announced the next generation of its popular Rio digital music player, the Rio PMP 500, due to arrive in stores this fall.

At $269, the new PMP 500 offers several advantages over its predecessor, the PMP 300. The 500 can handle up to two hours of music in the MP3 format, or in several other formats, including Microsoft’s Windows Media Audio. The device will play copyright-protected tunes regardless of the standard that is ultimately adopted by the music industry, company officials claim. It’s also compatible with Macintosh computers. The first Rio worked only with computers running Windows operating systems.

The original Rio and the associated rage for downloading music from the Internet blind-sided the music-industry establishment in 1998.

At last June’s MP3 Summit 99 conference in San Diego, ReQuest announced the AudioReQuest, a stereo component resembling a CD player that the company says can store, organize, and play up to 150 hours (roughly 2000 four-minute songs) of MP3-quality digital music using a high-capacity hard drive. Designed specifically to connect with home-entertainment systems, the AudioReQuest is the first consumer product that uses the MP3 (MPEG I Layer 3 compression) format to encode audio CDs directly into digitally compressed music. The unit includes a CD player.

The company plans for the AudioReQuest to be available this fall at an estimated retail price of $599.95. ReQuest says that the player provides connectivity to MiniDisc, DAT, and amplifiers through digital inputs and outputs, and that it includes a remote. The recorder also has a line-in input, as well as a parallel connection for downloading digital music directly from a PC or the Internet.

The company website offers an explanation of how the new device hopes to deal with the thorny copyright issues that landed Diamond Multimedia, makers of the Rio portable, in court with the RIAA: “Unlike the Diamond Rio, we are not disputing the fact that we are a digital recording device. Although AudioReQuest digitally records music for archival backup purposes, we cannot be sued because we will fully comply with the Audio Home Recording Act of 1992 by paying the royalties associated with the product to the recording industry, which is reflected in the price of the product. We will also incorporate Serial Copy Management System (SCMS) verification into AudioReQuest, again to fully conform with the 1992 Recording Act.”

The last hat thrown into the digital download playback ring was that of Iomega Corporation, which on June 30 announced a three-way agreement with Liquid Audio and Internet music site Rock.com to develop technology that will turn the company’s popular Zip, Jaz, and Clik! drives into portable, copyright-secure music devices. “Iomega is excited to be a part of this groundbreaking solution to offer secure and portable storage for digital music,” said David Henry, an Iomega vice president. “With unique serialization on all 150 million Zip, Jaz, and Clik! disks in the marketplace, Iomega provides an excellent solution for devices requiring SDMI-compliant portable media.” 100MB Zip disks, which retail at about $15 each, can hold up to 20 songs, according to the announcement.

**THE NETHERLANDS**

**Peter van Willenswaard**

Before Philips sold its recording branch, PolyGram, to Seagram, the division had slimmed down its classical music recording facilities, not for quality reasons but for the sake of financial efficiency. Paul Messenger reported on the demise of the famous Decca Recording Centre in the UK (“Industry Update,” December 1997), and the Philips Classics recording operation in the Netherlands had folded by the end of 1998. After a two-year process of discouragement and controlled erosion, what remained of the Philips Classics staff took over the building and equipment in Baarn and now operate under the name Polyhymnia International BV.

But something very special had taken place between 1990 and 1995, when Philips’ early recordings of the Kirov Opera were made. Though Sarah Bryan Miller favorably reviewed a number of Philips Classics Kirov releases in the October 1998 Stereophile (p.155), she paid little attention to the recording techniques used. This is not surprising—almost no one knows how those recordings were made. The PolyGram management might have known, but they themselves didn’t understand why the Kirov recordings were so special, and so never mentioned it in their marketing. I knew only bits and pieces until recently, when I had a long talk with Onno Scholtze, Philips Classics’ main balance engineer at the time, who explained how the Kirov sound came into existence.
Up until 1990, Philips Classics' standard recording practice had been a typical multimike setup: cardioids, plus a wide-spaced stereo pair of omnis to add some sort of spatial impression. Over the years, however, Scholtze had become more and more frustrated with the limitations of this approach, and even more so after his occasional experiences with Jaap de Jong, a recording engineer whose self-designed and -built all-tube equipment featured (very unusually) passive mixing circuitry and unbalanced mike inputs and cables, and sounded disturbingly good.

Two other factors paved the way to the Kirov sound. First, after a change of management at Philips Classics, the new directors urged the recording staff to try to make better recordings, to make the Philips Classics label stick out among its competitors. Second, Kirov director Valery Gergiev had just come under contract with Philips Classics.

So when Scholtze went to London in 1989 to record Gergiev conducting the London Symphony in Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition, he hired — against the management's preferences — de Jong's equipment. The results were promising. But the real breakthrough came when Philips Classics decided to create a whole series of recordings of Gergiev conducting the famous Kirov choir and orchestra on their home ground, Leningrad's Mariinsky Theater.

When Scholtze first entered the Mariinsky, he was so impressed with the theater's magnificent acoustics that he decided to try a minimal mike setup: four omnis in a line in front of the orchestra, in an array called OHNO. This array, approximately 3m wide, uses a closely spaced stereo pair in the middle, placed 1.5m behind the conductor at a height of 3m. No equalization or compression are used — the four mike signals are fed straight into the recorder. As adjusting the balance is not possible in post-production, the orchestra has to get the sound right. For the Kirov sessions, the floor was covered with canvas to minimize unwanted reflections, the clarinet player was put on a wooden box to lift him above the orchestra, the basses were grouped around the right-hand mike, etc.

This is how Scholtze recorded Prokofiev’s Romeo and Juliet in 1990, a recording that proved very successful. To take things even further, Scholtze decided to hire de Jong's tube equipment again, instead of the Snider console used for Romeo and Juliet. The next recording was of Mussorgsky's Khovanshchina, in 1991.

As this was to be a live recording videotaped for TV, no mikes could be in sight. An OHNO array in the orchestra pit was already a problem, but what about the choir on stage? Scholtze and de Jong ventured a new variant: a second OHNO array, flat on the floor at the lip of the stage. These omnis would then operate as pressure-zone microphones, or PZMs. Originally, given the fact that this was a recording of a live performance, a multitrack recording had been planned to facilitate post-production. At the last moment, however, the Mariinsky's power supply proved too weak to drive the heavy multitrack machines; instead, a stereo mix was done on location, directly into a DAT recorder. However, because Scholtze fell ill on the eve of the recording, this heroic task was executed by one of his trainees, Erdo Groot. The Kirov sound was born.

For the recording of Prokofiev’s War and Peace (1991), Scholtze went one step further: he sank the microphones into the stage floor, which thus became an integral part of the recording system. Again, a direct on-location stereo mix was made.

Rimsky-Korsakov’s Sadko was next, in 1993. Like Khovanshchina, it was recorded live, this time in cooperation with Japanese broadcaster NHK for HDTV. The stereo TV mix was done on location and the stereo CD mix was done later, digitally, at the Philips Classics facilities in Baarn, Netherlands. NHK, impressed, copied the OHNO recording method and still uses it today.

In 1994 followed the live recording of Tchaikovsky's The Nutcracker (Viktor Fedotov conducting), and in 1995 live recordings at the Rimsky-Korsakov Festival (though only The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh was issued on CD). In 1995 Scholtze recorded Verdi’s La Forza del Destino in a unique version especially adapted by Verdi for the Mariinsky. In 1996 Scholtze was forced to retire from Philips Classics, but his former colleagues respectfully continued to apply his techniques in subsequent recordings. Philips had its own custom-built solid-state electronics ready by then, also of very high quality. Valery Gergiev continues to regularly record with Jaap de Jong.

To characterize the Kirov sound is not easy. How to describe naturalness? These recordings sound totally different from the usual multimiked classical recordings. You hear no microphones, only voices, instruments, and the hall. Listen to one of these Kirov recordings on a good playback system and a true theater ambiance floats in front of you.

The Kirov recordings are unique and irreplaceable, not only for the loving care given to the recording technique, but also because many good Kirov voices have since been lured away to the West, partially robbing the company of its original power.


And a later recording, one of my favorites, made in Baden-Baden by Jaap de Jong: Tchaikovsky, The Nutracker, 462 114-2.

UNITED KINGDOM
Paul Messenger

It doesn't seem like 25 years since speaker engineer Billy Woodman left Goodmans and moved to the West Country to found ATC, a company whose specialty has been the making of high-quality drive-units for the professional market. To celebrate its Silver Jubilee, ATC is introducing the SCM70 SL, which it regards as its first true audiophile loudspeaker. Many audiophiles have been happily using ATC’s big studio monitors for years, of course, and ATC makes real-wood-finish versions that look better in the home than pro-style textured black. But large stand-mount three-ways — like the venerable SCM50 and SCM100 — are awkward by today's aesthetic standards. ATC itself refers to these models as “utilitarian boxes [that are] visually and domestically obsolete.” Hence the new SCM70 SL, a 4'-tall, 70-liter floorstander that, although based on the company's core drive-unit technology, features radically new cabinetwork.
Berlioz wrote a masterpiece. We play it with the same passion.

A symphony worthy of the name.

High fidelity equipment worthy of the music.

Rotel's RCD-991, a CD player worthy of your attention.

Custom-wound toroidal transformers. HDCD® capability. Twenty-bit Burr-Brown PCM-63 D/A converters. Adjustable dither to fine-tune system sound. An analog stage carefully crafted from the finest parts available. Balanced and single ended outputs for maximum flexibility.

All this because Rotel listens. Just as Berlioz broke new ground in percussive orchestration, we break new ground with exceptionally detailed yet cohesive reproduction. Regardless of whose music you want to hear.

Berlioz and Rotel. Prize-winning compositions. Award-winning components.

Hi Fi Fantastique.

Audio Adventure's Manufacturer of the Year
Pop open the hood of our new audio/video controller and the heart of any techie is bound to skip a beat. But what's really exciting is what all this sensational technology does for the rest of us. Our AVC-2500 is the most advanced surround processor, dual-zone control preamplifier, D to A converter, and tuner available in one compact unit.

The AVC-2500 takes the challenge out of controlling complex entertainment systems. Take, for example, its ability to assign any digital source to more than one input. Switch from stereo music to a multi channel movie with no more than one tap of your index finger. And it gets even better. Now you can position your subwoofer where it sounds the best—even if it's close to your chair. Your sub's output is automatically measured and precisely delayed so it will arrive in sync with the other channels for pin-point accuracy.

Getting this much performance from your home theater has never been so intuitive or easy. For more information, visit our website. And be prepared to arouse your higher—and lower—sensibilities.

Parasound Products Inc. • www.parasound.com • 950 Battery Street • San Francisco, CA 94111 • 800-822-8802 • In Canada, call 604-988-2966
But while a better-looking speaker was one of the design aims, the SCM70's novel construction and semi-elliptical cross-section promise good acoustic performance as well. Extruded aluminum sections are used for the rear panel and radiused front edges, while the baffle, curved side panels, top, and base are of MDF, the base finished in molded Corian. The drive-units are ATC's Super Linear 12" bass driver, and new versions of the company's 3" soft-dome midrange and 1" soft-dome tweeter. The 70SL will be available in passive and — something of an ATC specialty — active versions, the latter with 200W/100W/50W amplification.

Initial production will be a limited edition of 50 active pairs, finished in silver and grays to mark the anniversary, at a UK price of £9500/pair. Other finishes will be available; you can probably specify a color to match your wallpaper, if you want.

US: GEORGIA

Barry Willis

Is there a computer in your audio future? Meridian thinks so. An expensive new flagship disc player hints at things to come at more affordable prices. Working at the far edge of the digital playback frontier, the UK company has just announced its 800 Reference, a new combination CD/DVD player, built like a computer, that should take digital audio and video playback to a new level.

Guided by AES Fellow Bob Stuart, chairman of the Acoustic Renaissance for Audio, Meridian has consistently worked toward extracting higher levels of resolution from encoded bits. Playback servomechanisms, control software, digital conversion, resolution enhancement, and digital interfaces have all been improved in Meridian's laboratories near Cambridge, England.

The 800 Reference is unique in claiming the absolute best performance from both CD audio and DVD video. A DVD-ROM drive is the heart of the machine, capable of reading CD, CD-R, CD-V, or DVD discs, and all decoding and data manipulation take place on replaceable plug-in circuit cards — as in a computer. A slot is also available for a second drive. (Dare we suggest that a DVD burner might one day occupy that spot?) Operating software upgrades will be available to owners, who can download the codes directly from Meridian's website into the 800 via an RS-232 connector on the back panel.

Stuart and crew say they have taken all the necessary precautions regarding the unit's mechanical stability. The company, however, stresses that the 800's vanishingly low specified rates of jitter and error are due to “three levels of memory-based de-jittering, as well as three layers of error correction, to guarantee the lowest jitter and highest data integrity possible.” The 800's memory architecture “completely eliminates” such problems, the company emphasizes. A key member of the DVD Audio Group, Stuart succeeded in having Meridian's Lossless Packing (MLP) system accepted as an industry standard; MLP has been selected as the definitive coding system for the DVD-Audio format, due next year.

Compatible with all digital surround processors and video-display devices, according to the company, the 800 will also work as a preamplifier with any of Meridian's Digital Active loudspeakers or can drive a power amp in a non-Meridian setup. Video capability is said to be as perfect as is now possible, with provisions made for upgradeability: “For the first time ever, movie buffs can achieve picture quality close to the original formats, bypassing all the degradations of analog storage…and video interchange.” Supported audio formats include Dolby Digital (AC-3), MPEG Surround, MPEG Extended for 71-channel movie sound, MPEG Audio, and DTS for movies, music and performance videos, and extended digital formats, including MLP and 96kHz or 88.2kHz 24-bit PCM.

The 800 Reference will accept any 800-series input card to configure it for high-quality two-channel use. The suggested retail price varies from $12,000 to $16,000, depending on configuration.

UNITED KINGDOM

Paul Messenger

The British hi-fi trade is mourning the recent loss of one of its best-respected dealers, Brian Peaston. With a personality as large as his enormous frame, Brian founded Holborn Hi-Fi in far-flung Aberdeen, in the north of Scotland, in 1973 — good timing on his part, as the North Sea oil industry was just beginning to boom. Health problems led to his retirement from the business last year. Still, the need to book two aircraft seats to travel down to London never deterred Brian from being fully involved in his industry. He'll be remembered as one who always made up his own mind, and was never shy of expressing an honest and forthright opinion.

US: BOSTON

Barry Willis

If Lydstrom, Inc. has anything to do with it, the next hot ticket in home audio won't be just another CD player, but a musical database manager capable of organizing and playing as many as 5000 songs, from CDs or from Internet downloads. The Boston, Massachusetts-based company announced June 30 that it has licensed Lucent Technologies' Enhanced Perceptual Audio Coder (ePAC) for inclusion in a product as yet unnamed but projected to be available by Christmas 1999.

The device is "targeted at the growing market for networked home entertainment systems," according to a news release, and will manage massive music collections "in a simple and intuitive manner." The Lydstrom device isn't a monster CD jukebox, but will archive music by copying from CDs, MP3s, or other digital audio formats. The resulting library will then be accessible via a touchscreen from "anywhere in the house," the company claims — anywhere, presumably, where there is an appropriate terminal.

"Media-less archiving" of music collections is another purported advantage, although the copies, no matter how compressed, will still have to have some sort of physical existence — presumably, on a hard-disk drive or some other type of rewritable storage. It's a tad hyperbolic to imply that music files comprising digital bits reside in the ether. That particular breakthrough is still in the distant future.

Lucent claims its ePAC is "the highest-quality digital audio codec in the industry." The Lydstrom system is intended to be used with audio equipment of higher quality than the sonic horrors attached to most computers. Company spokesmen say it offers a "true high-fidelity experience" — far better than MP3, according to Lydstrom's director of advanced research, Ashwin Kochiyil Philips: "Current implementations of online music utilize technologies such as MP3 that were never meant to render high-fidelity sound through quality stereo systems. ePAC helps us to create a high-fidelity listening experience, while still providing the greatly increased storage capacity that audio compression offers — something that has never occurred before."

Lydstrom is among the first companies to recognize the growing market for "consumer-friendly devices that can address the need for Internet/PC/home stereo convergence," according to Rachel Walkden, director of audio for
The Crowning Achievement from an Audio Visionary

The Limited Edition MC2000 Stereo Vacuum Tube Power Amplifier commemorates 50 years of American ingenuity and craftsmanship, while it celebrates the brilliant life's work of legendary McIntosh designer Sidney Corderman. The philosophy of the man comes through the product—the inherent warmth and sweetness of sound that only comes from a tube amp; the power and almost angelic purity from the dual monoblock design and dual independent power supplies; the inspired notion that the best ideas almost never come from a blank sheet of paper, but are built meticulously upon the best of the past. Far more than a great amplifier, this...is a piece of significant history.

This monumental McIntosh stands above the mass marketing feeding frenzy, as glowing proof that the Golden Age of the Tube is here, just as its father retires. And what a statement it makes: exacting attention to details never collected in one unit before. Ceramic tube sockets. Special long-life capacitors. Gold-finished chassis. Hand-selected KT88 tubes, "kid gloves", tools and polish arrive in a special presentation box. An engraved plaque bears the designer’s name, and a certificate authenticates production number and total production run. Performance? As Rolls Royce used to say, "adequate" for any reasonable demand. You would expect nothing less from this — the MC2000 — the Monumental McIntosh.
Lucent’s New Ventures Group. “The
quality benefits of ePAC over competi-
tive solutions become even more appar-
et when the music is played through a
proper stereo,” she says. “The combina-
tion of ePAC and Lydstrom’s next-gen-
eration player promises to set the stan-
dard for consumer home-audio conver-
gence devices.”

**US: VIRGINIA**

**Barry Willis**

The world’s third largest music company has thrown its massive weight behind Internet audio. On June 10, EMI Rec-
corded Music, a division of EMI Group plc, announced a five-year licensing agreement with Reston, Virginia-based
Musicmaker.com, a major custom CD compila-
tion service and digital download site. EMI has not simply made its enor-
mos catalog available to the service — it has also bought into Musicmaker.com with a 50% equity stake.

Musicmaker.com currently offers more than 20,000 licensed songs in three secure digital downloading for-
mat: Liquid Audio, Microsoft MS Audio 4.0, and Musicmaker.com’s own secure MP3 format, according to a com-
pany press release. Once an industry-
wide copyright-secure standard is final-
ized, probably later this year, more than 150,000 songs will be accessible at Musicmaker.com, making it the largest
music library in the world for custom compilation.

EMI is well regarded among music fans for the generally high quality of its recordings, which feature some of the
biggest names in the music business. Labels under the EMI umbrella include Angel, Capitol, Blue Note, EMI, Pri-
ority, and Virgin, an array encompassing almost every genre of music: pop, rock, jazz, classical, urban, dance, Christian, and country. The company has an inter-
national reach, with operations in more than 50 countries.

Raju Puthukarai, president of Musicmaker.com, said, “We are pleased that our first relationship with a major
music company is with EMI Recorded Music. We believe that the EMI partnership, combined with our exclusive
marketing agreements with Columbia House and others, will ensure that Musicmaker.com becomes a leader in the
digital distribution field. We are confident this is going to be an agree-
able and fruitful relationship.” Puthu-
karai was formerly president of RCA/BMG Music and Video Club, and president of Warner Music Media.

In related news, the Secure Digital
Music Initiative, a consortium of 140
music, software, and hardware compa-
nies, has made a significant move away
from its original intent to block the dis-
tribution of free music on the Internet.
It announced at the end of June that its
forthcoming specification for music software and hardware will accommo-
de the “legacy content” already in existence. There are reportedly as many as 500,000 songs available in the MP3
format, and they will continue to be available even as new, robustly encrypt-
ed music comes onto the market.

The Secure Digital Music Initiative arose after the Recording Industry Association of America lost its legal bat-
tle against the upload format. The consensus at SDMI is that MP3 music files are of such low resolution — despite claims of “CD quality” — that SDMI’s efforts are instead best directed toward copyright security for future, higher-
fidelity digital formats.

Leonardo Chiariglione, a Telecom
Italia SpA engineer who was a key de-
veloper of MP3, was recruited to oversee the development of the SDMI specifications, due to be released soon. “Record com-
panies realized that past is past,” he said.
“There is virtually no means to protect past content already out on the Web. This way, future content will be secured.”

MP3 will therefore be “grandfa-
thered in” to the industry’s next genera-
tion of digital audio products. A two-
phase strategy will allow portable
devices to play songs with or without
copyright protection. Later versions of
players, such as Diamond’s new PMP
500, will be required to block pirated versions of protected music.

Backers of the compromise solution
include major music labels Universal
Music, Bertelsmann Music Group
(BMG), EMI, Sony Music Entertain-
ment, and Warner Music (a division of Time Warner Inc). Standards for a screening technology that will let next-
generation devices know when an illegal
version of a song is being loaded are still under discussion. BMG recently an-
nounced its intention to sell music over
the Internet, and many companies are
rushing into the digital download mar-
ket with software and hardware, includ-
ing Microsoft, IBM, Thomson SA, Sams-
ung, Creative Labs, and others.

There is no doubt that the market for
digital music is enormous, with billions
of dollars in future business at stake.
Some observers note, however, that the proliferation of formats and devices
could backfire by creating confusion among consumers.
little compares with the power and majesty of an orchestra. And nothing
compares to the sonic picture of the event as stunningly portrayed by
the Grande Utopia or its sibling, the Utopia. The technological
breakthroughs that made them possible -W sandwich cone laminate,
Telar 57 high frequency driver and the luscious exotic hardwood
cabinets - are now available in three new Utopias - the Mezzo, the Mini
and the Sub Utopia. Smaller in size and scale, these new loudspeakers
carve the designation "Utopia" with their natural performance of music.
Batons are optional.
IVE watts," I exulted.
My friend Marc and I were listening to the latest version of the Audio Electronic Supply SE-1 power amplifier with upgraded transformers and KR 2A3 output tubes. Much to Marc’s amazement, this little 5W dynamo was driving the B&W 805 Nautilus speakers to reasonable sound-pressure levels. So much for B&W’s suggested minimum amplification of 50W.

Curiously, the SE-1 could sound quite dynamic, and just when you might expect it to run into trouble — with piano recordings, for instance. I’ll return to this in a minute.

Marc agreed: The sound was stunning. Great transparency. (Resolution=Innemid-acy=Transparency. At least in my lexicon.) Superb harmonic presentation. Surprisingly tight bass, as long as I didn’t crank up the volume too loud.

Could the owner of a B&W 805 Nautilus live with this little 5W amp? I think I could — if my living room were a little smaller than 13’ by 22’. Marc’s living room is.

“Roll over your Boulder!” I advised.

I was joking. Marc owns an older-model Boulder amp that he likes very much — and so, for that matter, do I. But Marc is considering the Audio Electronic Supply SE-1 for a second system in his spare room, or for his office.

I played the SE-1 for my pal Pavel, a big-time computer consultant who used to live in Moscow and now flies all over the world installing networks and debugging systems. Of course, Pavel is on the edge of all the latest technology, so I loved showing him the SE-1 with the 2A3 output tube, first introduced by RCA in the early 1930s. I demonstrated the SE-1 for him by running a patch cord from the soundcard of Marina’s Gateway laptop.

“What every computer nerd needs,” I told him. “This is the way to listen to Real Audio and MP3.”

“Ridiculous,” he said.

Ha! I put Dennis Had onto this caper. Had is the designer of the SE-1 — you probably know him from Cary Audio Design. Audio Electronic Supply is the division of Cary that sells directly to consumers — mostly kits, but built-up versions of their products, too. Had is now running an SE-1 directly off the soundcard of his iMac.

“If this catches on, you could sell hajillions of these,” I told him.

The first time I wrote about the SE-1 (Vol.17 No.1), I flipped over it. I wrote it up again just last year (Vol.21 No.5), when I first used the amp with a pair of Chinese 2A3 direct-heated output tubes. Now it’s like a whole new amp.

Old and improved

True, the SE-1 2A3 is a small amp. But the price is small, too — especially for a single-ended triode (SET) tube amp. And the base price has hardly budged since Dennis Had first introduced the amplifier five years ago, in 1994 — $699 for the kit, $800 assembled, with two 6SL7 input (driver) tubes but without output tubes. Options, however, have mushroomed.

To the base price, this old and improved version adds a headphone jack with switch (a good buy at $45), a matched pair of KR Enterprises 2A3 output tubes ($400 — ouch!), a 6AF6G green-eye tube ($45), a pair of 0.22μF, 600VDC oil caps ($60), and gold-plated copper speaker output posts ($31). A 4/8 ohm speaker switch is now standard. Total cost: $1280 kit or $1480 assembled, plus shipping.

You needn’t stop there.

You could go whole hog and get the ultimate version of the SE-1 for around $3000. This version has a vastly upgraded, fully regulated solid-state power supply on a special chassis, and larger transformers on the amp itself.

“A customer made me do it,” explained Had.

There have been lots of customers. First introduced in 1994, the SE-1 has become something of a cult classic with a worldwide following. So far, Audio Electronic Supply has sold nearly 5000 SE-1’s, all direct to consumers.

Not selling through dealers has its advantages — low price and honest trial (unless you buy the kit version) — and one disadvantage: You don’t get to hear it before you order, unless you hear it first at a friend’s. If you buy the built version, you can return it to AES (in original condition) after 30 days for a refund. You’re out only the shipping. But if you buy the kit, once you start working on it, it’s yours. If you get

---

1 Audio Electronic Supply, 111-A Woodwinds Industrial Court, Cary, NC 27511. Tel: (919) 460-6461, Fax: (919) 460-3028. Web: www.audioelectronicsupply.com.

Stereophile, September 1999
“The GCD-750’s D/A converter is first-class.”
Lawrence W. Johnson, for AudioVideo Interiors (January 1999)

“Vocals were simply terrific with the ADCOM.”
Wayne Garcia, Fi (February 1999)

“The GCD-750 simply sounded musical.”
Anthony H. Cordesman, AUDIO (March 1999)
stuck, you can have AES complete the kit for you for no more than the difference you would have paid for a built unit in the first place.

I know—kits are popular in some quarters. Had estimates that it would take a novice about 20 hours to build an SE-1 kit, for a savings of about $200. Ten bucks an hour? I'll let the skilled folks in Cary, North Carolina do the work, thank you—they know exactly what they're doing. It takes them much less than the 20 or more hours it would take me.

The new version of the SE-1 incorporates so many changes that it's virtually a whole new product, and makes last year's review obsolete.

The output transformers have been upgraded, for starters. Dennis Had explains: "The output transformers in the SE-1 are now wound in the same fashion as in the Cary Audio designs...in a bi-filar configuration, using wire with high-voltage acrylic insulation.

"In other words, the primary and secondary wires are wound together without separate insulating material between windings. This yields a much better coupling of the two windings. Of course, there are many times more primary turns of the smaller-gauge wire than the heavier-gauge 4 and 8 ohm output windings. The output-transformer core material is now grain-oriented silicon steel for low loss."

The power-supply transformer has been changed too.

In addition to the power-supply transformer, earlier versions of the SE-1 had a small, separate bias-supply transformer. In the latest version, the power-supply transformer has a separate winding to supply voltage to the bias supply. This freed up space inside the SE-1 for a filter choke on the high-voltage line.

"This choke lowers the noise floor and gives us a cleaner, more stable high-voltage supply," said Had. "This is desirable from an engineering standpoint, but I can't prove there are sonic benefits."

And a new output tube has become available that fits the SE-1 to a T: the KR Enterprises 2A3, made in the Czech Republic. Hitherto, if you wanted the SE-1 with 2A3s, you were limited to Chinese tubes. Actually, the Chinese 2A3s aren't so bad—and they're cheap. The generic versions retail for as little as $40 a matched pair. I've found them quite reliable, and very close in sound to the RCA dual-plate 2A3 tubes I have in-house.

The green-eye tube, too, is new—or old. It's a New Old Stock RCA 6AF6G. (With SET amps, new and old, backward and forward become confused. Progress sometimes means progress—advances in the wire used to wind the transformers, for instance—and sometimes regresses, as with KR's decision to build a monoplate 2A3 tube.)

"What does this green-eye tube do?" I asked Dennis Had.

He laughed. "Nothing. It sits there and beats to the music. When the cat's eye is fully closed, you have full output power. Five watts!"

"The tube has no other purpose?"

"Just entertainment value. It looks cool. I was able to get a supply of these tubes and I think they look neat, so let people enjoy them. They were originally used in FM tuners and tape recorders to indicate signal strength."

The SE-1 is unique in that you can use a pair of 300Bs or a pair of 2A3s without re-wiring—thanks to what Had calls a "dropping" resistor. The dropping resistor reduces the DC filament voltage from 6VDC to 5VDC for the cathode filaments of the 300B tubes. This same resistor drops the 6VDC to 2.5VDC for the 2A3 tubes. Automatically, all the user need do is readjust the bias on the tubes. You can switch output tubes in a matter of minutes.

You might order your SE-1 with a pair of KR 2A3 tubes and, let's say, a pair of brown-bottom Chinese 300Bs on the side — Combination No.7 on the SE-1 menu. (Just kidding.) But it is a good idea to have a pair of spares.

The new KR Enterprises 2A3 tube

Tube aficionados have long prized RCA's original monoplate 2A3 output tube, first introduced in 1933. These are quite rare, as RCA and other 2A3 tube producers, such as Sylvania and Raytheon, switched to dual-plate construction later in the 1930s.

The KR Enterprises 2A3 is the first true monoplate 2A3 tube in more than 60 years. As constructed by Riccardo Kron of KR, the 2A3 is basically a scaled-down version of his 300B. (Yes, I know—in tube history, the 2A3 came two years before the 300B. With KR, it's the opposite.)

Unfortunately, the KR 2A3 doesn't come cheap—$400 per matched pair, whether from distributor Welborne Labs (www.welbornelabs.com), Audio Electronic Supply, or other suppliers. That's 10 times what you might pay for a matched pair of generic Chinese 2A3s.

Tube basics

Perhaps we should pause for a quick review of basics; some readers might be new to single-ended triodes.

In a triode output tube—the simplest kind of output tube—there are three elements: the cathode, the control grid, and the plate structure. The cathode filament emits negatively charged electrons, the grid controls them and hence modulates the audio signal, and the positively charged plate collects them. Voltage applied to the grid determines how many negatively charged electrons jump from the cathode to the collector plate, or anode. (The AC audio voltage applied to the grid comes from the amplifier's driver stage.)

This is why tubes are called "valves" by the British: the control grid acts as a valve, "opening" and "closing" to modulate the audio signal. Thus the music is applied to the electrons emitted by the cathode.

So what is a direct-heated triode tube?

Cathode filaments are of two types: directly heated and indirectly heated. Direct-heated cathodes are in the form of filaments—consisting of a core of wire through which DC current is passed. All filament-type tubes have close spacing between the filament and the grid, which may be one reason for the special sound quality of such tubes. The filaments, by the way, are what make tubes such as the 2A3 and 300B look cool: long wires stretched like a tent and glowing red.

Indirect-heated cathodes consist of a cathode sleeve surrounded by a heater. No emission should take place from the heater.

As Dennis Had explained, in a dual-plate 2A3 there are two filaments, two grids, and two plate structures wired together. Had describes this garden-variety 2A3 tube as being like two small tubes in parallel.

Many SET fans know what happens when you parallel, say, two 300B output tubes. The power increases, but sound quality seems to suffer—almost imperceptibly, perhaps, but suffer it does.

But something else might be going on with the 2A3. Even the dual-plate versions, including the inexpensive generic Chinese 2A3, have a special sound quality that is quite distinguishable from that of a 300B—more full, more rich, less glare. I asked Had about this.

"The cathode filament in the 2A3 runs hotter than the cathode filament in the 300B. So you have a massive emission of electrons in the 2A3 flowing to a more closely spaced grid than on a 300B. The result is a more even flow of electrons from the cathode to the grid.

"There is also the matter of the differential between the cathode voltage and
YOU'RE LISTENING TO IT: RF interference in your AC line. If you could turn it off, you'd hear your system as it was meant to sound: clean, pure and pristine, with a background as black as a darkened theater and a soundstage as palpable as the real thing.

New ISM Power Products control RF and EMI with individual Ceralex™ units on the Live, Neutral and Ground lines. Unlike typical power conditioners, there are no low-grade transformers, so the design is compact and RF/EMI is absorbed without restriction of AC current flow.

The ISM Power Module™ ($395): for power amps, subwoofers and electrostatic loudspeakers. The ISM Power Screen™ ($695): separate analog and digital outputs for everything else in your system.

TARA LABS
The Cable Technology Leader
Phone: 541.488.6465
www.taralabs.com
the bias voltage on the grid. With a 2A3, the cathode voltage is 2.5V, and the bias voltage on the grid is 50V. With a 300B LX20, the DC run on the filament gives a cathode voltage of 5V, while the bias voltage on the grid is 110V. The lower voltages with the 2A3 appear to have an effect on sound quality.

**How the KR 2A3 came about**

At the request of a tube supplier in England, Riccardo Kron produced a small batch of monoplate 2A3s at his factory in Prague. Kron apparently thought the request rather odd. Why would anyone want his puny 2A3 when they could have his 300B, or his even more powerful 300B LX20?

Dennis Had wasn’t aware of Kron’s 2A3 — until he asked Kron whether he could produce one.

“I’ve already made some,” Kron replied. Like Kron, Had was more interested in the 300B than the 2A3. While Had designed the SE-1 so it could use the 2A3, he did so as an afterthought. A pair of generic Chinese 2A3 output tubes are really cheap, after all — less than half the price of the cheapest 300Bs.

It was yours truly who got Had fired up over the 2A3. I heard the special sound qualities of even the generic Chinese 2A3 and started badgering him about it. For a while, I wouldn’t talk with him about anything but the 2A3.

Had fessed up: he hadn’t listened much to the 2A3.

I kept badgering him. “Look, when Jean Hiraga and his crew at La Nouvelle Reine du Son compare SET amps, they keep raving about the special qualities of the 2A3 — even though Jean Hiraga called the 300B, ‘the tube of the century.’ When I put the 2A3 in the SE-1, I hear what they’re talking about.”

Finally, he listened.

Holy Cow! Now he was on the phone to me raving about the sound qualities of the 2A3. And this was before he found out that Riccardo Kron had produced a new monoplate 2A3.

**Best sound of the show**

“I should have known,” Had said. “My first amplifier design was a 2A3. I was 11 years old and I built the amp with money I had saved from my paper route. I entered the amp in my junior high school science fair: single-ended triode, class-A, no negative feedback.

“On my crude test equipment I measured about 2W of clean-sounding 442Hz test tone. The phono gain stage was a 6SL7 into a 6CS driver tube. Speaker cable was the cord from my Lionel train transformer.”

Yes, the project won Best Sound of the show. Actually won a blue ribbon at the fair.

Why the 2A3 tube? Because the Western Electric 300B cost $10 each in 1956!

Back to the present. Had got the new 2A3 from Riccardo Kron and modded a pair of his CAD-300SE monoblocks. This was the genesis of the Cary SE 2A3 monoblock amp, which I hope to get for review soon. That’s when Had really went wild over the 2A3.

So how good is the KR 2A3 tube? Alas, they’re worth the money. Although incapable of more power than an ordinary 2A3. With a pair of generic Chinese 2A3 output tubes, the SE-1 puts out about 4W. With a pair of KR 2A3s, the amp puts out 5W. There’s more resolution, more immediacy — or, more transparency — to the sound.

And that’s what makes the new version of the SE-1 so superior to the odd version with generic Chinese 2A3s: more transparency. Not just because of the tubes, but because of the upgraded transformers, too, which are now supplied as standard. This combination of tubes and transformers puts the SE-1’s performance in a whole other league. Class B, I would say, instead of Class C.

**Listening to the new version**

For most of my listening, I used the Rotel RCD 971 or the Micromega Stage 6 straight into a Purest Sound Systems Model 500 passive control unit. Speakers were the B&W Nautilus 805s and ProAc Tablette 2000 Signatures. I also used my Rega 25 turntable with Goldring G1042 cartridge and an EAR 834P phono stage.

Be very careful what you use going into the SE-1! Before, it didn’t matter so much. If you can live with no gain, a passive "preamp" might be the way to go — unless you want to spend big bucks for an active line stage. I note that Japanese triode fans tend to use passive control devices — Wavac and Sun Audio SET amps, for instance.

Well, the new SE-1 has triode magic in spades — much more so than before. This is great news for those who can’t or won’t spend big bucks on an SET amp.

There is that stunning SET immediacy, now with greater resolution. In another word, there is more transparency. It’s less “you are there” than “they are here.” The musicians are with me in the listening room, sometimes to such an extent that I feel I’m listening to them “live.”

Harmonic presentation — voices, woodwinds, violins — is so beautiful that you could almost cry. And might. Is what I hear too good to be true?

I do not believe that the SE-1 tends to make all recordings sound the same. Horns, for instance, in Georg Tintner’s Bruckner cycle on Naxos — the greatest recorded symphony cycle of recent years, I think — can have some real bite, especially when it’s the Royal Scottish National Orchestra playing.

Now…the surprises.

The SE-1 “works” okay with the B&W Nautilus 805, even though B&W recommends a minimum of 50W, not 5W. Yes, I did run out of power sometimes, and the sound could seem compressed during certain loud passages — in Tintner’s Bruckner, for instance. I got out my Sennheiser HD 600 headphones when I was really bothered by it. Most of the time I wasn’t.

Bass was surprisingly tight — not the “bass all over the place” of typical tube amps, even those with much more power. Sometimes the bass was shockingly good in its solidity, definition, and especially pitch. Don’t crank up the sound and expect miracles, however.

Does the amp clip?

Sure, it clips on loud orchestral passages — but gently, mostly noticeable as a reining-in of dynamics. If it bugs me, I turn down the sound or reach for the phones. Most of the time I can live with it. And on many recordings — chamber music, orchestral works for smaller orchestras — I often hear no compression at all.

Quite the contrary. Sometimes I hear (again) shocking dynamics, especially with piano recordings. You should hear the SE-1 on any good piano recording — pick your favorite. The sound is astonishingly real — harmonics and leading-edge transients.

What’s going on here? Somewhere, for however many immeasurable microseconds, the amp might be capable of delivering a great burst of power indeed. Dennis Had ascribes this to the high current flowing through the 2A3 — that massive emission of electrons.

It’s only on loud, sustained orchestral passages that the amp noticeably poops out. Anyway, you’ll be enjoying the quieter passages so much — the delicacy of the conductor’s phrasing, all the little recorded details you didn’t notice before, the ravishing beauty of the instruments — that you probably won’t care about limited power.

So is the SE-1 an alternative to, say, the Cary 2A3 monoblocks, of which I
Twenty years of avant-garde manufacturing and engineering enables KIMBER KABLE to offer the most significant ‘sane’ loudspeaker cables in High End audio.

The Monocle, BiFocal (biwire) and TriFocal (triwire) cables allow signal to flow untouched by external vibration and RF influences. Each model has been engineered and precisely manufactured by KIMBER KABLE to deliver the highest fidelity while maintaining a conservative price.

Visit our web site or contact us for more information and your nearest dealer.

Monocle X - $580 eight foot pair*
Monocle XL - $880 eight foot pair*

KIMBER KABLE
Revealing the Nature of Music
Since 1979

2752 South 1900 West • Ogden Utah 84401 • 801-621-5530 • fax 801-627-6980 • www.kimber.com
auditioned an early version?

No way.

There are some limitations to the SE-1. This is a small stereo amp, even when you tube it with 300Bs—one small power supply for two channels. The amp is almost, but not quite, the last word in resolution and overall transparency. Of course, you could always order the “ultimate” version of the SE-1, with separate, fully regulated power supply and bigger transistors, for around $3k.

Perhaps every audiophile should consider buying, if not building, an SE-1. I'm not kidding. I am far more excited about progress (and regress) in SET amps, including the SE-1, than I am about the prospect of more perfect digital sound forever. I think the looming battle of digital audio formats is mainly about who collects how much from patient royalties over the next 20 years.

If you're a student in a dorm room or you live in a small apartment, the SE-1 might provide all the power you need. Plus, you'll have a terrific headphone amp. Better to buy an SE-1 with 5Wpc than a mediocre amp with 100Wpc—you won't use most of those watts anyway. Don't forget: you're going to really listen to watts one through five. Watts six through 100 are there mostly in reserve. Better five great watts than 100 crappy ones.

You might consider the SE-1 for a second system—in a spare room, your summer cottage or city apartment, your office, or wherever. If it's a very small room, you're really in luck—this amp will probably spring to life dynamically, and you can experience for yourself what the single-ended triode phenomenon is all about. If you can't handle the fact of 5W, tell yourself you're buying a headphone amp. Then cheat: Try your amp with speakers.

Then badger your audiophile friends. This is how the SET phenomenon is spreading like wildfire. (SET is one of the few growth areas in serious, audio-only hi-fi.) Box up the tubes carefully for transport and take your SE-1 around—it's light, so you can easily schlep it. Hook it up to any speakers—the amp might poop out, but it won't blow up.

You could do what my friend Frank did: Buy an SE-1 for your girlfriend. (If you want to look macho, build it for her) There's no reason why single-ended triode must be for males only. Indeed, the qualities of SET are precisely those that might appeal strongly to female music-lovers: delicacy, nuance, harmonic accuracy, beauty. (SET amplifier manufacturers, like all high-end manufacturers, do a lousy job—or no job at all—of marketing to women.) Come on—do you have to be male to set the bias on a pair of output tubes?

You can also use the SE-1, as some audiophiles do, as a reality check. Does that powerful amplifier you own, whether tube or solid-state, sound all that good? It might—Marc's Boulder amp sounds just fine, but its strengths are different from what you find in an SET amp. Marc shouldn't roll over his Boulder, necessarily. Or how about that expensive new amplifier you're thinking about buying?

Speakers to consider for the SE-1?

The aforementioned B&W 805 Nautilus ($1995/pair plus stands), if you have a small room. Or the ProAc Tablette 2000 Signature ($1700/pair plus stands), which, despite its 87dB sensitivity, seems to work okay on so little power.

Better still, maybe, the Soiloquy 2A3 speakers, with a claimed sensitivity of 89dB and a nominal, SET-friendly impedance of 10 ohms, and which were specially designed to be used with a 2A3 amp: $1295/pair (add $300 for the very sturdy and handsome stands).

You might also use some highly sensitive speakers, like the various models using one of the Lowther drive-units. Ron Welborne of Welborne Labs offers a speaker, the Medallion II, with a claimed sensitivity of 106dB (available assembled or as a kit).

What to avoid with the SE-1? Four-ohm speakers—even though the SE-1 now comes standard with a 4/8 ohm switch. Also, any speaker with a widely varying impedance curve; you don't want an “8 ohm” speaker that dips much below 6 ohms, for instance. (The B&W 805 dips to 5.6 ohms, making it marginally okay—especially in smaller rooms.)

Also, avoid any speaker that “needs” to be played loud. You know which these are. They're big. They're expensive. They're recommended by Jonathan Scull. (Sorry, JS) Such speakers aren't going to go, anyway on 5W, although it's fun to try. And I've already encountered two “unlikely” speakers that work amazingly well: the Fidelio and the Parafial, both from Verity Audio.

Whatever speakers you choose, be advised that SET is just not about listening at loud levels. At the risk of repeating myself, SET is not about being “blown away.” It's about being drawn in. Seduced. Involved. It's about enjoying the quiet passages of a piece of music even more than the louder passages. It's about the magic of each moment.

When you put together a little system around the SE-1 (it more or less must be a little system), you're getting down to essentials: the simplest possible circuitry, including the direct-heated design of the triode output tubes; the lowest possible power without going to, say, a wind-up gramophone (“No Wpc!”) like my pal Val, who, like Marina's Uncle Sam, hails from Minsk. You can issue a stinging and well-deserved rebuke to those whose systems are... well, grotesque by comparison.

Compared to most systems, SET systems put things on a more human scale. SET systems make music; too many other systems make noise. SET systems can be small in size and relatively small in price—your hi-fi doesn't take over your room or your life. Hi-fi itself becomes less of a competitive sport and more of a civilized pleasure.

SET enthusiasts tend to be a different breed of audiophile: not only less competitive but less compulsively acquisitive, more likely to modify their equipment than change it, and at least as interested in the end—musical enjoyment—as in the means to achieve it.

Back to the SE-1.

Yes, of course, you can get better sound from a more expensive monoblock pair of SET amps—even more resolution, a bigger soundstage. But so what? The SE-1 sounds so good, looks so cool, and costs so little that you're almost certain to have fun with it. For every time you miss having more power, you'll probably have 10 instances where you groove on the fact that you're listening to single-ended triode. That's what this is about.

If you really fall in love with SET, you could get yourself a more “serious” amp and still keep the SE-1 for a second system or as a backup. Or as an amp to use with your computer.

I'm trying to interest Marina's Uncle Sam in an SE-1. Problem is, Sam never gets rid of any speakers. When he gets a new pair, he just adds them to what he already has—audiofiles from Minsk do have their eccentricities. Sam has speakers piled on speakers—speakers all around the room, actually. I'm not sure this would work with 5W.

As for Pavel, I doubt he'll ever go for something so retro. What if his computer colleagues found out what he was listening to?

That leaves Marc.

“Your son studies cello at Juilliard. Listen to the tonality.”

Marc shook his head. It's going to take him a while to believe that less is more.
Excuse us for being...
Simply Spectacular

We're Mirage®. We're known for our Bipolar and Omnipolar® speaker designs that revolutionized the high-end speaker industry. Now, Mirage® introduces the FRx-Series, once again establishing a new standard in performance and styling in the affordable speaker arena. See it. Hear it. At your Mirage® dealer today.

The New FRx-Series...

Simply Spectacular in Performance.
Simply Elegant in Styling.
Simply Affordable in Price.

See the Music!

Audition the FRx-Series at the authorized Mirage dealer in your area or look us up on the Web: www.miragespeakers.com
A Division of Audio Products International Corp., 3641 McNicoll Avenue, Scarborough, Ontario, Canada M1X 1G5
Telephone (416)321-1800  Fax (416)321-1500
A
fter I saw my MP3 e-mail exchange with the editor of the “Circuits” section of the New York Times in the February Stereophile, I began to think that publishing it hadn’t been such a great idea. If the exchange had burned my bridge to the Times, publishing it in this column had probably NATO-bombed it.

But eventually I made peace with my decision and forgot about it. Mikey vs the Times was a dead issue no matter what I did or didn’t do, and at least Stereophile subscribers got to read what happened. Some of you thought it made the Times look bad, some of you thought it made me look like a hothead.

So, after all that, after explaining to the “Circuits” editor that, whatever benefits MP3 offers, “CD-quality” sound isn’t among them, guess what appeared on the front page of the “Circuits” section of Thursday, June 17? An article titled “The Beat Goes On Line, and Sometimes It’s Legal,” by David Kushner, the lead sentence of which read “If there is a ‘Phantom Menace’ of the Internet, it’s MP3, the compression software that enables CD-quality music to be sent on line. Like the film, MP3 comes with a considerable amount of hyperbole, promise and, alas, science fiction.”

The guy labels MP3 “CD quality” and then writes about hyperbole! “CD quality” is the top banana, the commander in chief, the 300-lb gorilla, the Cadillac of MP3 hyperbole, Kushner. You butthead!

So of course I fired off another e-mail:

Editor:
David Kushner (“The Beat Goes on Line”) is correct in stating that “...MP3 comes with a considerable amount of hyperbole...” Ironically, the most egregious example of it can be found in his lead sentence, wherein he states that MP3 offers “CD-quality” sound. Right. And Hyundai offers “BMW quality” transportation because it has four wheels and an engine.

[At Hi-Fi ’99], I sat on a panel with Todd Moore, a representative of Diamond Multimedia, and he agreed that MP3 does not offer “CD-quality” sound. To anyone interested in a quality listening experience, MP3 does not even offer “near” CD sound, but that’s an argument in degree that will be settled only by the individual doing the listening.

Please stop printing blatant misinformation on this subject. Sincerely,

Michael Fremer
Senior Contributing Editor, Stereophile

MP3, though not of “CD quality,” is a good thing for spreading new music, and poses no threat to quality audio. In fact, it could end up helping.

A day after I sent it, I got an e-mail back telling me the section was “considering” printing my letter. That’s nice, but what’s called for as well is a “Correction” something like this: “An article in the June 17 ‘Circuits’ stated that the compressed digital format known as MP3 offers ‘CD-quality’ sound. This is not true. The ‘Circuits’ editor had previously been given this information, but chose to publish the statement anyway.”

That will never happen. The issue of whether MP3 is or is not “CD-quality sound” will be left as a matter of opinion. And that is too bad.

I’ve decided that MP3, though not of “CD quality,” is a good thing for spreading new music, and poses no threat to quality audio. In fact, it could end up helping. How? I think back to the 1940s (before my time), when AM radio meant a large vacuum-tube-driven console with a 10” or 12” ported speaker. The sound wasn’t “hi-fi,” but it was rich and mellow.

Can you imagine a middle-aged someone brought up on that sound encountering a ’50s teen carrying around a tinny, distorted-sounding six- or eight-transistor radio with a 1” speaker? “Sure, it’s portable,” the older would say, “but the sound is like fingernails on a chalkboard. How can you listen to that crap? No wonder you listen to rock’n’roll. You couldn’t hear jazz on that.” Sound familiar?

What happened when a generation brought up on those little tinny-sounding portables heard a real hi-fi? Right! The component boom of the ’70s!

Byrds update
The other day I received test lacquers of The Byrds’ Fifth Dimension and Younger Than Yesterday LPs from Sundazed Records. Like the first two (see the May “Analog Corner”), their sound was superb. Tomorrow I’ll be receiving actual 180gm test pressings—if the results are favorable, they’ll go into production immediately, and probably will be for sale by the time you read this. Watch for them.

But stay away from the Simply Vinyl Byrds LP reissues—they’re not cut from master tapes, and the sound on Younger Than Yesterday (the only one I’ve heard) was truly awful. The Sundazed reissues, cut by Joe Palmaccio at Sony Studios using a Scully lathe/Neumann cutter-head combo, are the real deal—and “a bitch to cut analog,” according to a Sundazed spokesperson.

Two budget phono sections compared!
Until now, the market for phono sections for less than $1000 has been owned, in my opinion, by the Lehmann Black Cube ($695—Stereophile October 1998, Vol.21 No.10). But the competition has heated up with the introduction of Musical Fidelity’s X-LP². And as I prepared for a shootout, what should show up but a new, improved Black Cube? The phono stage was set.

Both units were broken in using Thor Audio’s Phono-Burn, even though the Musical Fidelity unit arrived ready to play, according to MF’s Antony Michelson, who hand delivered it. After burn-in, both were left plugged in. The Black Cube was placed on Vibrapods.

The listening procedure was quite simple: I played each demo tune twice, once with each unit. Each phono section was set to 100 ohms input impedance and maximum gain for the two...
A unique Special Edition offering.

VK-50SE

Balanced Audio Technology is pleased to introduce its first special edition product: the VK-50se. The VK-50se features BAT's exclusive high-current, low-impedance 6H30 SuperTube. Eight 6H30's form a powerful gain-stage that is combined with larger transformers, upgraded power supply, Vishay Bulk Metal® foil resistor upgrades and more to create a new pinnacle of preamplifier design.

The 6H30 SuperTube: a BAT exclusive.

In simple terms, the 6H30 triples or quadruples all the "goodness' of the industry standard 6922. One listen will tell you just how good that can be!
low-output MC cartridges I used: an EMT TU2 special and a Clavis DC. Of course, I ensured that levels were equal for both, and made sure that each unit had a turn at first place in the rotation to account for sonic differences induced by vinyl fatigue.

I used Classic Records' 45rpm versions of Dave Brubeck's Time Out ("Take Five") and Also sprach Zarathustra (part one), MoFi's reissue of Getz/Gilberto ("Girl from Ipanema"), Janis Ian's Breaking Silence ("All Roads to the River"), and a mint British pressing of Elvis Costello's Punch the Clock ("Let Them All Talk"), among other selections. Audio Research's $6000 Reference phono section (currently under review) was my...reference.

The Lehmann Black Cube (Improved): When I took the new Black Cube out of its box I was surprised by how lightweight it felt compared to the original review sample. What had the designer removed?

He'd changed the case to nonmagnetic aluminum and simplified the construction, removing two side walls of the chassis bottom. Circuit changes include a reconfigured, higher-voltage power supply and a new, supposedly better-sounding op-amp by Burr-Brown to replace the original one from Analog Devices. (For more circuit details, see the original review.)

Once the Black Cube was broken in, I hooked it up with some trepidation. I'd raved about the unit in my original review, comparing it to phono preamps costing twice as much. Now, spoiled by the Audio Research Reference, I wondered if I'd gotten completely carried away in that original review. Oops.

It took only a few seconds of "Take Five" to wake from that nightmare. The new Black Cube was every bit as good as I'd said the old one was. It developed a soundstage off the speaker baffles where I'm accustomed to hearing it with more expensive phono sections, and offered a rich, sophisticated tonal balance similar to the ARCs. Sounding neither solid-state nor tubey, the Cube, like the phono section built into the Ayre K-1, sounded appropriately colorless yet sweet and full-bodied.

The $695 phono section's high-frequency presentation was open, airy, and free of glare and grain. It was credible, and listenable without reservation. The Cube's dynamic performance—particularly in the bass—was as good as I'd remembered it being. There was weight, solidity, texture, and a pleasing sense of control that let me relax into the music.

The Cube's spatial performance was surefooted, with outstanding image focus, appropriate size, and the kind of three-dimensionality and image layering one gets with far more expensive phono sections.

I chose Elvis Costello's "Let Them Talk" because of its musical complexity—there's a blaring horn section, an elegantly and appropriately large-sounding Bosendorfer piano, female background singers, and a driving drum-kit-and-electric-bass line, all expertly arranged and mixed by Clive Langer and Alan Winstanley.

The Cube delivered it all with certainty, separating the instruments spatially and tonally while portraying the music's dynamic rhythmic drive. No smearing, mashing, or mushing. The ARC Reference does it too, and even better—but look at the price difference!

The Black Cube was a tough, low-coloration act to follow—like closing for the Beatles—but that's where the Musical Fidelity X-LP was slotted to perform. On with the show.

The Musical Fidelity X-LP2 (A World Exclusive First Listen): I covered the $295 X-LP in this column a while back (November 1997, Vol.20 No.11), and though it impressed me as a good value for the money and as an appropriate replacement for the Audio Alchemy VAC-in-the-Box (though it lacked the VAC's gain and loading options) and was therefore recommended, I wasn't able to work up a great deal of enthusiasm for it.

The three-chassis X-LP2 ($800) is something else entirely. It's a pure-dual-monaural product, with mono tubular chassis and the outboard X-PSU power supply is essentially a large, high-current toroidal transformer with four sets of outputs. (This means that if you have another Musical Fidelity X-series product, you can plug it in as well.) I used the power supply with Musical Fidelity's X-24K 24-bit/96kHz DAC along with the X-LP2.

Compared with the X-LP, the X-LP2 is said to offer improved RIAA accuracy over a wider frequency range, improved signal/noise ratio, wider overload margin, and "perfect" imaging. According to the accompanying literature, the X-LP2 has "lower distortion, wider bandwidth, and better stereo separation than any cartridge on the market, therefore any sonic limitations are those of the cartridge, not the electronics." Hmm. Among the unit's more interesting specs is the high-frequency part of the RIAA
Audiophile dreams come true with the introduction of the Omega Series Amplifiers & Pre-Amplifier
Let your ears be the judge!

Classé

5070 François-Cusson, Lachine, Québec, Canada, H8T 1B3 • ☎: 514-636-6384 • ☏: 514-636-1428 • Web site: www.classeaudio.com
equalization, which follows the implied curve out to 100kHz.

The back of each channel of the X-LP² sports a pushbutton for switching between moving-coil and moving-magnet cartridges, an RCA output jack, and two input jacks: one each for MM and MC. There's also an MC loading switch that lets you choose between 100, 50, 25, and 10 ohms. Note that while 47k ohms is, of course, available at the MM input, if you wish to run your MC at 47k you're out of luck. (The same is true of the $6000 Audio Research Reference.)

The X-LP² more than gives the Black Cube a run for its money. Both offer very similar overall sonic presentations, though the X-LP² is slightly sweeter on top and a bit richer in the midbass, but not to the point of adding artificial warmth or a sluggish rhythmic disposition. Tonally, the X-LP²'s performance renders solid-state/tube comparisons almost meaningless—which is precisely what I can say about the Audio Research Reference. (Though with better tubed phono sections you get a quality that I called "traction" in my review of the Conrad-Johnson Premier 15, and more "bloom" and liquidity.) The X-LP² exhibited not a trace of hardness or etch on top, and the midrange was nicely fleshed out and harmonically complex.

The X-LP²'s rendering of Classic's 45rpm version of Also sprach Zarathustra bettered the Black Cube's, particularly in the string tone, which was gloriously lush and full-bodied. The Black Cube, which has somewhat tighter, "faster"

Musical Fidelity's X-LP² more than gives the Lehmann Black Cube a run for its money.

bass, did Costello with slightly more drive, though the X-LP² did a great job of separating the instruments in space, and of capturing the tonal essence and weight of the Bösendorfer. Both did "Girl from Ipanema" equally well, getting Stan Getz's feathery sax to float convincingly in three-dimensional space. Spatially, tonally, harmonically, and dynamically, the X-LP² sounds as if it's worth $1600, not $800. If you're considering spending $2000 or under, don't buy anything until you hear it.

Once I'd finished taking notes for this comparison, I ended up leaving the X-LP² in the system for over a week, so convincing and pleasing was its overall sonic presentation. I think it's in the same league as the Black Cube—and, for that matter, the $1200 phono-section option built into the Ayre K-1.

The X-LP² might sacrifice a bit of air, sparkle, and "speed" on top to provide richness and freedom from grain and sibilance, but overall it's a brilliant balancing act that provides absolutely stunning analog performance at a very reasonable price. $800 for a three-chassis, dual-mono design with an outboard toroidal transformer? How can you beat that?

Wrap-Up: Both the Lehmann Black Cube (www.hyendaudio.com) and the Musical Fidelity X-LP² (available only via mail-order from Audio Advisor, www.audioadvisor.com) have surprisingly sophisticated power supplies and very high build qualities. I can't recommend one over the other because I could live happily with either, but if you play mostly classical music, go for the X-LP²; if you listen more to rock and jazz,

"LOW POWER, MEET HIGH EFFICIENCY"
"HIGH EFFICIENCY, MEET LOW POWER"

Introducing a single-ended triode amplifier and a high efficiency loudspeaker designed together to defy the limits of music reproduction.
Boulder Amplifiers Series 2000

a new look

a bold feel

a fresh musical perspective

Systems starting at $100,000
VPI SDS Synchronous Motor Drive System vs Walker Audio Precision Isolated Power Motor Drive

Either of these motor drives will probably improve the sound of your turntable if it’s fitted with an AC synchronous motor, but in my listening sessions I found that they sounded different. Once the motor has reached its target rotation-speed, the SDS steps the voltage down from 115V to your choice of eight values. It comes factory-set at 72V—the lowest setting—which is optimum for VPI turntables. (The idea is to drive the platter at the lowest possible motor voltage for minimum noise and vibration.) But 72V proved too low for the small Simon Yorke motor, which operates at 96V via a step-down transformer and drives a 24-lb platter. I could hand-turn the platter to get it going, but just touching it would kill the sync and the motor would begin fibrillating. For some reason I could not program the SDS for 96V and have it “hold” the setting, so I waited for a second sample, I listened at 72V. The SDS ($1000) sounded slightly more liquid than the Walker drive ($1500), which had a slight overlay of grain, but the Walker stomped the SDS dynamically and provided blacker blacks and more solid imaging.

A second SDS arrived, set for 96V. This was sufficient to keep sync even if I touched the platter with my finger, and I conducted another set of listening comparisons. This time the two drives performed about equally dynamically, but the SDS retained its edge in terms of liquidity. It just sound sweeter.

Then, for some reason, the SDS reverted to 72V. By switching to 45rpm and then back, sometimes it would revert to 96V. But as I write this it’s back to 72V no matter what I do. Currently in the system, however, is the Basis Debot, which reaches and holds sync at 72V with no problem. The Debot seems to sound marginally better with the SDS.

Given the cost difference, I recommend the SDS, but I’m concerned about the voltage-drop problem if you plan on using the SDS with other turntables. So is Harry Weisfeld, who can explain it either. He’s working on it. If you’re a VPI owner, I’m confident you’ll hear a genuine sonic improvement well worth the $1000.

Coming

I owe you a cartridge survey that I hope to get to next time, along with a report on Classic Records’ spectacular-sounding 45rpm limited-edition reissues.

In heavy rotation here recently:
1) The Afghan Whigs: 1965, Columbia LP
2) Built to Spill: Keep It Like A Secret, Warner Bros. CD
4) Ghost: Snuff Box Immunence, Drag City LP
5) Jon Hassell: Fascinoma, Water Lily Acoustics CD
6) Freddie Hubbard: Open Sesame, Blue Note/Classic LP
7) Van Morrison: Back On Top, Pointblank CD
8) Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers: Echo, Warner Bros. CD
9) Tchaikovsky: Violin Concerto (Heifetz/CSO), RCA/Classic LP
10) Tom Waits: Mule Variations, Epitaph, 2 LPs (“recorded, mixed, and mastered analog”)

go for the Cube. But do yourself a favor and find a way to hear both—the rest of your system will help you choose.

“A Family of Winners

“As much as I liked Magnepan’s earlier version of this system, the 3.5, I have to say that the MG3.6 represents a serious and heady advance over its predecessor. Jim Winey has incorporated some of the tricks he learned (or returned to, as the case may be) in the design of the strikingly good Maggie® 1.6 and put them to good use here.”

“At an unbelievable $1475 the pair, this one (MG1.6QR) is going to knock ‘em dead.”

“In my 20 years of involvement in the audio hobby, I can’t think of another product that has offered as much performance for as little money as the MG1.6QR. Highly, very highly recommended.”
*Brian Damkroger, Stereophile, January, ‘99

...that’s what the (MG)1.6’s are—the best sound you can buy for fifteen hundred dollars.”
*Jon Valin, Fi magazine, July, ‘99

“...the newest model from Magnepan, the two-way, quasi-ribbon-sporting MG12/QR—which sells for the astonishingly benign price of $950 per pair—are among the most musically realistic sounding speakers I’ve heard of late. With that in mind, it’s hard to imagine large orchestral works being better served than they are by Magnepans, so lifelike and full-scale is the soundstage (which in my room was akin to first-tier, not orchestra, seating) and so effortless their ability to swing to full orchestral climaxes.”
*Wayne Garcia, Fi magazine, March, ‘99

*Quotes reprinted with permission

Visit our Website for special offers - www.magnepan.com
Dynaudio Tweeters are hand built under laboratory conditions in one of the coldest places on earth. They also feature our unique Magnaflux cooling system. The heat produced by the Dynacoil voice coil is dissipated to the magnet system through a magnetic-fluid cooling liquid. The magnets are tightly connected to the driver's aluminum front plate which dissipates massive amounts of heat to the outside. That's why a Dynaudio will stay cool - up to more than 1000 watts transients. We know. Do you?
Past. Hey you. Yeah, you... we know you're a tweaker. It's nothing to be ashamed of. You just wanna make it better, right? Even as everyone around you wants to know when enough's enough already.

While I've gotten less tweaky in my reviews, I still how to the tenets of resonance tuning. Given that tubes, capacitors, and even integrated circuits are microphonic, placement and support of audio gear is of paramount concern. I covered the basics of this two "Fine Tunes" ago, in July, but this month's column is for tweakers who'd like to understand more about the how and why of it.

It's a big world, Toto, and many listeners and manufacturers feel that resonance control of any kind, anywhere, is nothing but unmitigated malarkey. I believe otherwise. My best advice to both camps? Use your ears and hear what you will. What follows is the received wisdom on these matters, most of which I agree with.

First, consider the component you're dealing with. Is it a tube phono stage with a ultra-sensitive, low-level signal, or a line-level preamp/player/processor? If the former, you'll want to decouple the chassis from the environment—vibrations coming from buzzing transformers, spinning discs, turntable motors, footfalls, building shake, subways, passing trucks, and airborne acoustic mayhem produced by the soundfield in your listening area as it loads up at high volume. (Think of sound waves as water splashing around in your listening room.)

Sorbothane-type pucks are a pretty cheap means of decoupling the chassis—Vibrapods run only $6 each. K-A-B Electro-Acoustics offers relatively inexpensive Sorbothane II Sonic Domes® in three weight classes, or grab the Edmund Scientific catalog and order up a bunch of half-hemisphere Sorbo footers for even less. David Dlugos (planet10@pin.com) e-mailed a great suggestion for a cheap and effective footing system: Set your gear up on saw-in-half tennis balls!

But even in Tweak City, controversy reigns. Informed Sources characterize Sorbothane-type footers—ie, those that transform absorbed energy into heat—as holding and releasing captured energy, creating a ghost or time-smear effect on the sound. I tend to mount tube gear on various types of hard-material footers that couple the component to an energy-absorptive shelf of some kind. I use Bright Star air- and sand-filled products, Signal Guard II closed-cell foam stands, Black Diamond Racing shelves and footers, and a lot of PolyCrystal shelving and footers. (With PolyCrystal racks you can have your cake and eat it too; they're "delivery systems" for substantial resonance-absorbing shelving.) In any case, you can always try bubble wrap and/or a butcher-block equipment support as mentioned in July's "Fine Tunes." If you try bubble, remember its effectiveness depends on the mass of the component you're trying to isolate. If it's very light, the resonant frequency of the component/bubble wrap might be too high. But that can be fine-tuned by placing additional mass on top of the component.

If your equipment is solid-state, don't imagine that footering and shelving won't help. Is the component's chassis light and resonant when tapped, or does it have a heavy chassis and internal damping of some kind? If it's dense, like an amplifier, harder-material footers set into a solid platform would be best. A friend of mine dropped a small wooden cigar box filled with lead shot atop a fairly lightweight Arcam CD player, and coupled that to the MDF (medium-density fiberboard) shelf in his Target stand with original Mod Squad Tiptoes. Even he, a neophyte audiophile with Rotel two-channel/surround electronics, easily heard the improvement. But don't use so much weight that it deforms the case, which might interfere with the operation of the loading tray. As in all things, moderation is advised.

Along with PolyCrystal products and DH Labs ceramic cones, Tiptoes are an inexpensive way to go about mounting equipment, if you'll forgive the imagery. What material footer you try depends as well on the sound produced by a sharp rap o' the knuckles on the shelf. Do that a few times and try to make out if the resulting sound is ringy or resonant, or—better, of course—dull and inert. If it sounds solid, you might try a harder footer; if it's loose and rattly, a softer, Sorbo-thane-like footer might work best.

Other generalized mounting principles include placing one of three footers under the rotating mechanism of a CD or DVD player. For whatever reason, three footers usually sound better than four. (Well, three points do define a plane.) The chassis of some components are so live and resonant that moving the footers around can change the sound, as can the characteristic acoustic of the footer's material. (Hard materials give a faster sound, soft materials a warmer, slower one.)

One intriguing equipment-support product Sam Tellig wrote about last April seems to attempt to bridge the gap between devices that absorb energy and those that couple it to the supporting structure. Symposium Rollerblocks support components on ball bearings set in polished, oval depressions in the top of an aluminum block. Symposium claims that Rollerblocks drain internally generated vibes and decouple the supported unit at the same time. Hmmmm—this reminds me that the Forsell Statement amp has a small bag of ball bearings that sits atop the center front polished granite footer. The idea behind Forsell's balls—and, I assume, the Rollerblocks—is that allowing the chassis to resonate and move about slightly prevents the entire structure from oscillating, which it might do if overdamped and so adversely affect the sound.

You know what's coming: Try marbles, boys and girls.

1 Check out his systems, DIY projects, and the tennis balls at http://139.142.118.15/sites/diy/projects/did/system.html.
2 Yes, I do appreciate the irony of such sage advice coming from me, of all people—Mr. Moderation.
Finally, THIEL engineering brings you a true High Performance multichannel loudspeaker.

We proudly introduce the new **THIEL MCS1**

- Ideally suited for main, center, and rear channel use.
- Very high output, high efficiency
- Innovative coaxial/D’Appolito time coherent driver array and phase correct crossover design provide exceptional realism with any type of placement—vertical, horizontal, shelf, or stand.
- Superb THIEL manufactured ultra-low distortion drivers provide ultimate clarity.
- Beautiful hand crafted cabinetry integrates seamlessly into any room.

**THIEL**

*Ultimate Performance Loudspeakers*

Call or write for our 36-page full-line brochure, MCS1 design white paper, and the name of your nearest THIEL dealer.

**THIEL** 1026 Nandino Boulevard, Lexington, Kentucky, 40511 • telephone: 606-254-9427 • e-mail: mail@thielaudio.com • web: www.thielaudio.com
that there's no valid yardstick of progress that marks new ones as advances over the old. That is, the reasons scientists cite for preferring one paradigm over another actually belong to the different paradigms in question. If there are no paradigm-independent yardsticks (and Kuhn said there aren't), then science isn't really getting better as time marches on, it's just getting different.

Whether or not Kuhn was right about science, something like this has happened with turntables. The paradigm shift has been happening for years, but I had no clue until I chanced on a DJ expo here in Chicago. DJs don't just play records anymore—they play the turntable as a musical instrument in its own right. "Scratching" first hit the mainstream on Herbie Hancock's song "Rockit" back in the '80s. Since then, scratching and "beat juggling" have grown into an elaborate set of techniques for coaxing all sorts of sounds and beats from turntables. When paradigms shift, so do words—DJs are now called "turntablists," and they're a mainstay of hip-hop culture. (What's that? You're a middle-aged guy who wears Dockers and doesn't know a thing about hip-hop? Try www.hip-hop.com and check out the turntablism/DJ links.)

Turntablists do their stuff in clubs and at competitions (or "battles") like the one I saw. The scene is an odd blend of music-making and sport. As if arriving to play baseball (the uniform is baseball cap and baggy jeans), turntablists come well equipped. They've got LPs, their favorite "slip mat" (which loosely couples the LP to the platter), and a box that holds a small arsenal of headshells and cartridges. Standing behind a row of Technics SL-1200s (the 'table of choice'), two turntablists duel back and forth with 60- or 90-second performances. Judges pick the winner, who then advances to later rounds.

Beat jugglers commandeer a couple of turntables playing recorded beats. The trick is to vary their speeds and mix them into a pulsing symphony of drums and percussion, as if the contestant is conducting an entire rhythm section.

Scratchers concentrate more on one turntable at a time. As the record plays, they'll use their hands to stop, start, and rock the platter or LP at various speeds, often with one hand on a volume fader to control the sound's attack and envelope. Though I didn't have the best view, it looked as if they also tap and drum on the LP with their fingertips. The result is a loud, rhythmic collage of sounds—called "forwards," "scribbles," "moving scribbles," "chips," etc.—that grab your spine and rock it back and forth. It's hard to describe, but there's more than just rhythm in this wall of sound. A good turntablist creates tones, textures, and colors, and weaves them into the mix.

Is this a full-fledged paradigm shift? There's no question that turntablists are playing a game completely different from ours. If you haven't seen them in action, the way they manipulate platters and LPs will make you cringe. For audiophiles, turntables are delicate devices for extracting precious musical information. Good LPs—well pressed, well centered, and not warped—are rare and not to be drummed on. Once everything's set up, a turntable is a strictly hands-on affair. But for turntablists, it's essentially a hands-on affair. When I saw him, Q-bert (one of the scene's heavy hitters) hunched intently over an SL-1200. Sometimes he caressed it, sometimes his hands became a frenetic
100% LINN

New Linn amplifier technology leaves your performance, installation, air-con, mains supply, noise, weight and decor problems behind with better sound, more power, higher efficiency, smaller size, lighter weight, cooler running and hum and buzz free pitch accurate silent power.

THE LINN KLIMAX

LINN
the only sound®

Simply call 888-671-LINN or visit our website on www.linninc.com for reviews, dealer locations and information on Linn whole home multi-channel total entertainment solutions.
blur. He reminded me of Yo-Yo Ma making love to his cello. The sound was loud and bombastic, but just as riveting.

On the other hand, Kuhn's idea of a paradigm shift doesn't do justice to the logic and rationality behind this revolution in the history of turntables. In a way, scratchers and beat jugglers have solved basic problems in turntable design. From an audiophile perspective, these include pitch stability, surface noise, acoustic vibration, and noise from motors and bearings, all of which are based on one fact: turntables are mechanical devices. The point at which the music encoded on an LP takes flight into your system and begins its journey to your ears is a mechanical interface between a groove and a vibrating stylus. Designers strive to make this interface stable, and as immune as possible from interference. But sources of interference abound: bearings rattle, motors hum, and every part of a turntable vibrates, more or less. The ideal turntable is a paradox: a mechanical device that behaves (somehow) as if it were actually non-mechanical.

But if you look at a turntable as a musical instrument, not as a device for reproducing music, this paradox disappears. For turntablists, a turntable's parts buzz and vibrate just as they should. The stylus-groove interface shouldn't be purified and isolated—it should be skillfully manipulated and controlled, like the interfaces between fingers and guitar strings, or between a piano's keys and hammers.

A better metaphor is evolution, not sudden revolution. As turntables thrived in the land of audiophiles, some found their way into a different musical ecosystem, the land of hip-hop, where their musical potential was quickly recognized. The SL-1200 became the turntablist's standard partly because Technics put strobe markings around the platter's perimeter. Originally designed for monitoring platter speed and keeping it accurate, those raised dimples are a grippy surface for controlling the platter. All DJ turntables have them.

The SL-1200 may be the Adam and Eve of DJ turntables (to momentarily mix metaphors), but its progeny are mutating. Turntablists usually rotate their tables 90° counterclockwise ("battle position"), so that the tonearm is out of the way of their busy hands. Some manufacturers have responded by moving controls to the left side, where they're more handy. Another issue is skating force—a real problem for scratchers. When an LP's normal rotation is suddenly reversed, the skating force that was tending to rotate the tonearm inward (toward the spindle) reverses and pushes the tonearm outward. With these forces changing direction so quickly, tonearms can easily jump out of the groove. (Think of breaking a string in the middle of your guitar solo.) Ordinary antiskate mechanisms are no help because they apply a torque only in one direction. So far, the solution is to track at very high weights, typically 4–6 grams. Cartridges, stylus, and LPs aren't too happy about this, and die young.

Hoping that a better turntable will survive, Vestax recently tried to circumvent this problem. Since skating forces arise from offset headshell angles, they're making a 'table with a straight tonearm and headshell—no offset angle. This reduces skating forces and allows tracking weights to be smaller. The price of this, of course, is that the cartridge will no longer be at the optimal tangential angle to the record's grooves—but that's an audiophile thing, not a turntablism thing. Asking a turntablism whether his table is a "high-fidelity" component is as silly as asking a violinist if she plays an "audiophile" violin. Optimal groove/stylus geometry just doesn't matter.

Still, the evolution metaphor goes only so far. It doesn't show how the cultural and economic roles that turntables play have changed drastically and abruptly. As high-fidelity components, they ushered in the commodification of music and culture. From the 1950s through the early '80s, record companies got large and rich by selling us LPs that brought everyone from Miles Davis to Lenny Bruce to the Boston Symphony into our living rooms. We paid for LPs, turntables, and phono cartridges, but we were ultimately buying music, entertainment, and art.

Turntablists buy LPs and turntables, too. But they don't buy music—they make their own. Though I'm an outsider—not because of my Dockers, but because my hands would physically refuse to rock a platter back and forth under a delicate cantilever—it's clear that turntablists are proud to have invented a music that is new and all their own. They did it, moreover, using the goods (ie, turntables and LPs) of an altogether different economic and musical paradigm—one in which a performer's image and the marketing muscle behind it have more influence on success than creativity and talent. Even within hip-hop, turntablists struggle against the commercialism of mainstream artists, especially gangsta rap. The creative flame, they say, is turntablism, and they proudly keep it burning. This is not to say that they don't make and sell recordings—they do. The best turntablists are also employed by name artists like Beck and the Beastie Boys. But in its pure form—that is, public, spontaneous, and competitive—this music can't be bought or sold. You have to be there.

They may have found a new life in hip-hop, but the fact remains that turntables are nearing extinction in the world of high-end audio. I've said my goodbyes and wiped a tear from my eye. (It's okay. I'm over it now, thank you.) But it's nice to know that something remains the same, that the crowds and bombast of turntablism competitions are still connected with—indeed, grew out of—the audiophile's more tranquil reveries of yore. Having glimpsed the energy and enthusiasm of the turntablism scene, I'm sure there are countless 12-year-olds, forbidden to touch their older brothers' SL-1200s, who look at those gleaming tonearms with the same fascination I had for that old Marantz 'table. I became an audiophile. Maybe they'll become scratchers and beat jugglers. The allure of turntables hasn't changed much.

Your search for a reasonably priced slice of pure sonic heaven is over. Introducing the ASUSA K1011 single-ended fully integrated dual mono amplifier (no pre-amplifier necessary). Featuring 8 watts of zero feed back, 300B magic that is always a pleasure to listen to. Anytime... "Made in USA"

ASUSA
6717 NE 181st St, Kenmore, WA 98028
tel: 425-481-8866 fax: 425-485-3836
e-mail: asusa@earthlink.net
web site: http://www.as-usa.com
Our Kind of

Jonathan Scull, Kalman Rubinson, Robert Deutsch, and Chip Stern report from HI-FI '99, held in Chicago in May

Jonathan Scull: The Intro

I'm relatively new to the sites and sounds of Chicago, but I do love the Palmer House Hilton. It proved a gracious host to HI-FI '99—a faded rose with a blush of ruddy color still in its well-trodden, capacious corridors. Take a back elevator down to Street Level (wherefore art Trader Vic's, hah! and for a moment, as the doors slide open, it's 1930. The vast, comfortable lobby is a trip—its vaulted faux-Sistine ceiling arching high above always induced a state of peaceful reverie in me.

The main elevator bank handled the enthusiastic throng with room to spare. A good thing, because overall attendance was up compared with HI-FI '98, as reported by Reliable Sources. Thick, solid, old-fashioned masonry kept most of the sound in-room (except for Omnipresent Whomping Bass, of which there was plenty), but a few systems were plagued with a 40Hz resonance problem. And a number of installations sounded a bit thin, a common problem in hotel exhibits. Only Members of the Guild Master Tuners can overcome it.

The crowd was well informed and secure in that knowledge—an interesting contrast with the more angst-ridden Los Angeles group. Questions at the "Play the Editors" sessions were in all cases intelligent, provocative, and thoughtful. However self-serving the advice, I always exhort audiophiles to "arm" themselves by studying their hobby/passion before jumping in or upgrading. Read the reviews (ahem), visit retailers, and take the time to audition components. In short, use your head and your ears. This, I'm overjoyed to announce, is exactly how I found literally one and all of you I met during the busy public days in Chicago. A more upbeat, educated, and dedicated group of audiophiles there never was. In that way, HI-FI '99 was a quality affair from start to finish.

So let's begin our trek through the exhibits with Digital Kal, etc. On with the Show!
Town!

Happy Showgoers enjoy their music in the Joseph Audio/VTL room.

Dynaudio’s Evidence impressed the heck out of Larry Greenhill.

Stereophile, September 1999
Hearing is Believing... Feel the Emotions

Bryston's 9B ST delivers extraordinary quality to your entire home theatre surround sound experience.

Feel the emotions: be shocked, be happy, feel sad, scared out of your wits, surprised, be moved, be excited, feel like you want to cry with joy. The Bryston 9B ST amplifier will awaken all of your emotions in a simple elegant package designed to provide 5 channels of uncompromised sound quality.

Tel 1-800-632-8217  Fax 705-742-0882  www.bryston.ca
Kalman Rubinson: Digital Devices

These are interesting times for digital equipment, and HI-FI '99 bore witness to that. First, standard “Red Book” (16-bit/44.1kHz) CD technology continues to ripen—remarkably high-quality equipment and recordings were everywhere. Second, the impending new digital media, Super Audio CD and DVD-Audio, tantalized Showgoers with the promise of a new era of even better music reproduction through higher sampling rates and multiple discrete audio channels. (See sidebar, “Progress Report on New Digital Media.”) Third is the growth of advanced digital devices, which opens possibilities in room and source correction, new forms of amplification, and even power sources for all your components.

Marantz showed two new CD players: the CD-6000 OSE ($500), meant to replace the acclaimed and popular CD-675SE; and the more mainstream CD-5000. Both models will play CD-R and CD-RW discs as well as standard fare. Looking almost too sleek and uncluttered for its capabilities, the Marantz Reference Series DR-17 ($1500/black, $1600/gold) is the first home CD recorder to offer reliable HD-CD copying as well as playback. With convenient double-speed disc finalization, Philips’ latest Bitstream D/A and A/D, Marantz’s discrete output stage, and such attention to detail as a die-cast transport mechanism and audiophile-grade components, the DR-17 could be the ultimate “Red Book” device.

NAD’s Silver Series was appropriately teamed with PSB loudspeakers, and both were promising style and performance beyond their modest prices. While NAD’s S500 CD player ($499) already sports a 24-bit Crystal delta-
sigma DAC (fast becoming de rigueur), this elegant player is fully modular and can be easily (and cheaply) upgraded as the future demands. More exciting to me was the announcement that NAD’s extremely versatile Model 118 digital preamplifier has been reduced in price to $1000! It’s still the only Class C preamp in Stereophile’s “Recommended Components” with tone controls.

SimAudio Moon’s Canadian invasion of the High End continues with the Eclipse ($4995), another fully modular player. The Eclipse incorporates dual-differential 24/96 DACs and the Philips CDM12 Pro transport mechanism, but it also has a digital input (for, say, DVD), and promises upgradeability as standards evolve. The three Moons (CD player, preamp, power amp), teamed up with Gerschmann speakers, provided some of the most dynamic sounds at the Show.

Electrocompaniet introduced their first CD player, the EMC 1 Reference ($3995). This top-loading Norwegian beauty features a unique electromechanical system to isolate the laser pickup, and balanced 24/96 D/A converters. Of course, it’s modular and upgradeable. Teamied with Electrocompaniet’s Nenio amps (sure to be reported on by someone else), the EMC 1 and a pair of Alón Circes made for a transparent yet powerful system.

I got a chance to see, but not hear, the absolutely luscious Audio Refinement CD Complete player ($895). Based on designs by Yves-Bernard André and using a significant number of YBA parts, this is couture audio at a department store price.

Equally interesting was the new CD2020 ($850) from Magnum Audio. Although obviously based on a Philips machine, the CD2020 has a zero-feedback output stage and a sophisticated clock circuit with an independent power supply. These two players are ample evidence of the “trickle-down” effects in styling and technology that we’re seeing in fin de siècle “Red Book” audio.

The equipment rack in the Sumiko room was dominated by a new SME turntable and some big iron from Audio Research, but auditors were continually surprised to find that inexpensive Thule Audio components were driving the big Sonus fabers or the new Vienna Acoustics Mahlers. The Thule CD150B ($1500) was particularly delectable and stylish. Fully differential DACs and analog stages are mated to proprietary control/servo circuitry, and the sound…Well, let’s say that the performance of these wonderful speakers did not seem at all compromised.

Setting price aside, Gallic influence, through the person of Jacques Ridenteau, has produced the heart-stopping Oracle CD turntable. Shown just in prototype at HI-FI ’98 and at CES, the production version is a fitting companion to the Oracle analog turntable, which sat next to it. Both Oracles sang through VTL Electronics and Joseph Audio’s prototype Pearl loudspeakers.

It’s not clear whether one should think of Manley Labs’ new prototype, The Wave, as a DAC with analog switching, or as a line amp (do I have to call it a preamp?) with an added DAC. Nonetheless, this remote-controllable, tube-based component appears to be a sign of
the times, and, for $8000 or so, all a modern audiophile needs between source and amps. Four digital and four analog inputs, three sets of outputs, and a processor loop will be mated with a UA AES20/HD analog chip set (24/96 on the way) and tube stage. Remote control, too.

Of course, if you can settle for a passive line stage, one analog input, and only two digital inputs, you can get the cute Creek OBH-14 for only $350! Just a volume control, an input switch, and a 24/96 DAC—it’s the smallest do-it-all system control center.

Audiophiles found it hard to pass by the mb 1 demo without being enticed by the unique designs. On one side of the room was the top-end system in traditional mb 1 black and gold, with the imposing mb 1 101d Radialstrahler speakers being run from the luxurious 1621 CD transport and 1611 DAC. The top-loading transport has multiple outputs, and the DAC has multiple inputs and outputs along with optional volume control. On the other side was the new Arctic Line silver styling, represented by the new mb 1 speakers and 1500-series source components. I'm told that all models will be available in both styles.

It seemed to me that the most ubiquitous digital component at the show was the Mark Levinson digital processor (read: DAC), in its 360 ($4500) and 3605 ($7500) versions. With their 24/96 capability and software upgradeability (to 192kHz PCM sampling or DSD), these tiny DSP-based DACs seemed to be in almost every room not inhabited by a DAC manufactory. For those of us trying to make qualitative comparisons, that helped eliminate one variable.

Digital is sneaking into our systems in places other than players. Since the music is already digitized, why not deal with it that way as much as possible? Tact was doing just that. First, they announced their new RCS 2 DI Room Correction System ($2950), which permits the user to compensate for a room’s more pernicious traits, and to tune it subtly to taste. Five inputs and digital volume control are included. Second, Tact demonstrated a Mk.II version of their Millennium digital amplifier (upgrade is only $490). The new version sports a higher gain and output, and does sample-rate conversion for inputs up to 48kHz, with 96/192kHz and an inbuilt RCS module promised shortly. I could say that this was one of the better-sounding rooms, but in this case the room had less to do with the sound than elsewhere.

Taking a related tack, the Wadia 790 PowerDAC, shown in prototype at CES, was doing the heavy lifting in the Wilson Audio Specialties room, driving the newest WATT/Puppy speaker combo, the v.6. In this highly...

Progress Report on New Digital Media

The makers of many of the current CD players and DACs shown at HI-FI '99 were emphasizing their products’ potential for easy modification, via hardware modules or software upgrades, to accommodate higher sampling rates and new physical and data formats. But the show was boosted into the future at an opening press conference, run by Sony and Philips, to unveil the first commercially available SACD player, the Sony SCD-1, and to announce the impending release of 40 SACD titles from Sony, and Telarc, Mobile Fidelity, Delos, DMP, AudioQuest, and Water Lily Acoustics.

The thrust of the presentation by Sony's Mike Fidler was that SACD is the extension and successor to the CD as the “new reference standard in audio.” The initial SACD releases will thus be two-channel, to appeal to audiophile demands for audible improvements over CD without any lossy compression, ad hoc mixdowns, or video menus. In addition, a dual-layered disc with doubled playing time is possible. However, even the initial releases will be neither hybrid (to ensure compatibility with standard players) nor multichannel, and both issues seemed to be somewhat contentious, even among Sony’s partners. The lack of back-compatibility pretty much ensures that retailers will be faced with dual inventories and consumers with trepidation about what to buy in the short term.

Part of the issue is the concern about the further cost of a hybrid disc over what is expected to be an SACD price already in excess of $20 per disc! Paul Reynolds described Philip's operation of an SACD production facility and their preparedness to support the rollout of additional facilities as other producers come online. He did, however, acknowledge that while Philips had the capability to make hybrid discs, the incremental cost of the hybrid was significant at present. He predicted that it would drop as production and experience ramped up.

Telarc's Bob Woods expressed enthusiastic support for SACD's underlying DSD data formats and the medium's audible superiority. He also expressed some dissatisfaction over the restriction to two channels in the initial releases, since he believes in and has been recording in multichannel for some time. I think he's tipped into the growing desire for this among audiophiles (count me in that group). However, since there is no SACD player capable of playing more than two channels on the immediate horizon, Sony is hurrying to establish a foothold in the traditional high-end community with the two-channel SACD.

The SCD-1 was demonstrated by Sony and in many other rooms at HI-FI '99. Although slow to read and cue a disc (not unlike a DVD player), the SCD-1 gave a good account of itself with standard CDs, SACDs, and with the CD layer of hybrid discs. Brief comparisons using, among others, Kari Alexander's marvelous new Philadelphia Orchestra recording (Nature's Realm, on Water Lily Acoustics) in CD, SACD, and 24/96 DVD versions demonstrated the clear superiority of the SACD medium at both the Sony and E.A.R./Impact demo rooms. However, the CD version sounded so much better when I played it at home that my conclusions are guarded.

If you're an early adopter, the Sony SCD-1 is your machine. However, be advised that although the technology, quality of construction, and the thrill of the new justify its $5000 price tag, the SCD-1 won't handle more than two channels, and its digital output works only for regular CDs. Upgradeability? Undefined. Less expensive players are, of course, promised.
Creek’s OBH-14 DAC/preamp combines passive line stage, one analog input, and two digital inputs in a $350 box.

structured demo, the PowerDAC—which functions as an amplifier and was not much smaller than the speakers—offered control and finesse. Price to be determined.

Further tantalizing digital product, other than SACD or DVD-A, was presented by the ebullient Mark Schiffer of Perpetual Technologies, an optimistic company name if I’ve ever heard one. It might, however, be justified by the P-1A DSP System ($995), spoken of at CES but not seen until Hi-Fi ’99. Off the shelf, the P-1A offers DSP-based sample-rate conversion (I/O up to 24/96), PLLs, redocking and SRAM buffers for jitter reduction, and resolution enhancement via upsampling and four pre-programmed processing algorithms. The kicker is a $399 option that uses the powerful Motorola DSP56362 to implement specific impulse correction for speakers. Your speaker manufacturer provides the pulse response data, and the filter program is downloaded from Perpetual Technologies to the P-1A. Does it work? Well, switching the correction in and out with a pair of Vandersteen 2Ce speakers was convincing. The Vandy 2s are pretty good, but the P-1A correction kicked them up more than just a notch. Custom programs for many speakers, faster DSP, expanded memory, and even room correction are promised by this Swiss Army knife of digital processors!

Cohabiting with Perpetual Technologies was the resurgent PSAudio, now with one of its original founders, Paul McGowan, at the helm. PSA’s PowerPlant Series is a group of power synthesizers that generate a pure-sine-wave signal with which to drive components. (This is a report on digital equipment, is it not?) From the 300W P300 ($895) for source components and small amps up to the humongous P2000 ($4950) for almost anything that will run from a wall outlet, all four PowerPlant AC synthesizers provide balanced power while maintaining extremely low distortion and noise, and excellent frequency stability. The output can be adjusted up to 120Hz, with the modified power factor increasing the effective power supply in the attached components.

Robert Deutsch: Electronics Over $3500

While introducing the “Ask the Editors—Stereophile” panel, Jonathan Scull—making his debut at Hi-Fi ’99 in his full-time editorial staff role—described me as a reviewer with an affinity for moderately priced “high-value” equipment. It’s a description I agree with. Although I admire products designed without the constraint of financial considerations, my sympathy is more with manufacturers who try to provide the best possible products at prices most

Things were equally foggy in the DVD-Audio camp, as represented at the Stereophile press luncheon by Jordan Rost of the Warner Music Group and Bob Stuart of Meridian. Rost detailed all the wonderful capacity and flexibility features of the new medium, including still pictures, text, menus, video clips, and a DVD-ROM section with a click-able browser/launcher for accessing relevant websites. When asked about how these features will be used, he demurred and said that the spec merely provides the tools for creative artists to use as they see fit. Rost also emphasized the necessity of easy load and play, with simple CD-type navigation. As for the audio itself, the DVD-A can include combinations of up to six channels of 24/96 audio with Meridian Lossless Packing (MLP), two channels of 24/192 audio, and/or Dolby Digital. As with SACD, copy protection is to be presumed, though its exact nature is not yet completely defined. The degree of constraint on copying will be at the option of the copyright holder.

Stuart dwelt on the medium’s technical capabilities, describing how DVD-A provides not only a large capacity for many formats, but also a sufficiently fast stream of data for it to function in real time. He listed the various format capacities as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content format</th>
<th>Disc capacity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 channels (24/96 encoding)</td>
<td>86 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 channels (24/96 encoding)</td>
<td>100 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 channels + 2 channels</td>
<td>74 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(24/96 encoding)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 channels (24/96 encoding)</td>
<td>4 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 channels (24/192 encoding)</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 channel (16/44.1  encoding)</td>
<td>25 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A two-channel mixdown for multi-channel programs can be created on the fly in the player (PCM) or its parameters encoded by the mixing engineer at the studio (MLP). It does seem that this medium is extremely flexible, and even doubled playing times can be had with a dual-layer disc. However, although a hybrid DVD-A/CD disc playable on “Red Book” CD players is possible, Jost did not see that as likely, for reasons of cost. Thus, as with SACD, DVD-A vendors and purchasers will be faced with dual or triple inventory. But, Jost emphasized, future DVD players will all be universal players capable of handling DVDs, DVD-A, and CDs. In addition, he noted that current DVD-Video players can play DVD-A if a Dolby Digital mix is provided on the disc.

While Sony’s SCD-1 seemed to be in nearly every other room, the only operating demo of DVD-A I found was in one of the Pioneer/Elite rooms. All the equipment here was strange to me, from the quintet of horn-loaded Pioneer speakers to the prototype universal DVD player. The player was truly universal in that it was said to handle DVD, DVD-A (matrix!), CD, CD-R, and CD-RW! Strange and foreign it seemed, but only until I was wafted to Berlin to hear the Berlin Philharmonic perform a Strauss waltz in discrete six-channel sound from an experimental DVD-A. My brief exposure to this confection confirmed four things:

1) Regardless of sampling rate and technology, the smoothness and clarity of DVD-A (and SACD) are significant advantages on CD sound.

2) Discrete multichannel recordings done without gimmicky enhance the listening experience in ways that are both objectively and emotionally satisfying.

3) Discrete multichannel, more than high bit/sampling rates, will be immediately appealing to mass-market purchasers, who will ultimately determine which medium triumphs.

4) I want it! —Kalman Rubinson

Stereophile, September 1999
“Big bass, silky smooth top end, lightning fast response, great value”

“...this is unequivocally, and without a doubt, my favorite affordable home speaker system. In my opinion, there is no need to even audition these speakers. Just buy them!”

Joe Hageman, *Home Theater Magazine*

“As close as it gets”
people can afford. I'm particularly puzzled by stories I hear from manufacturers whose dealers tell them that their products sound great, but the fact that they're modestly priced means that they lack high-end credibility, and would sell better if their prices were higher! Doing a Show report on expensive electronics gave me an opportunity to see how the other half — no, make that "the other 10%" — lives.

Products from Nagra are certainly in the expensive category, but the quality of their design, parts, and workmanship is such that those who can afford these products undoubtedly get their money's worth. At HI-FI '99, Nagra had the VPA tube power amplifier ($13,200), MPA solid-state power amplifier ($12,000), and the new MPA integrated amplifier ($14,500). All lovely stuff, but the product that had me drooling (I was sorely tempted to slip one into my pocket when importer Steve Lee of Canorus was distracted) was the PL-P compact analog tape recorder ($9500). Using proprietary narrow reel-to-reel tape running at 33/4ips with no noise reduction, the PL-P is about the size of a hand-held computer. I expect Q to acquire one of these for James Bond.

mbl is best known for their omnidirectional 101D loudspeaker — the one with the midrange driver that looks like a watermelon. They're actually a full-range manufacturer, with a line that includes conventional box speakers, preamplifiers, amplifiers, and digital components. The system they had set up included the 101D ($35,800), 601CA preamplifier ($11,190), 9006 amplifier ($13,900), 1611 HR D/A converter ($14,100), and 1621 CD transport ($14,900). I'm still not convinced that you have to spend this kind of money to get good sound, but I have to admit that the sound in the mbl room was very good indeed: open and clear, with a notable absence of electronic/mechanical artifacts.

Literally priceless is the KR Enterprise 50Wpc Kronzilla integrated amplifier: It's produced in very limited numbers, with no set selling price.

Andy Bowman of Vintage Tube Services, surrounded by thermionic affluvia.

Steve Lee of Canorus, high-end distributor of Nagra.

Literally priceless is the KR Enterprise 50Wpc Kronzilla integrated amplifier: It's produced in very limited numbers, with no set selling price.

The Kronzilla is the monstrous KR 1610 transmitter tube, which I can imagine in a tubeophile's reenactment of the mugging scene in *Crocodile Dundee.* ("You call that a tube? This is a tube!")

**Herron Audio** aspires to an ambitious ideal: "to create the finest-sounding electronics available, without regard to cost or limits imposed by previous designs." The line includes the VTSP-1 line-stage preamplifier ($3650), VTPH-1 phono preamplifier ($2750 for moving-magnets, $3250 for moving-coils), and the M-150 monoblock power amplifiers ($5300), now in prototype form. The system — whose analog front-end featured a VPI turntable — did an outstandingly fine job of driving a pair of Alón Circe loudspeakers, but I wish that Herron Audio would avoid making exaggerated claims that are easy to disprove, such as "Music lovers...all agree that the new line of Herron Audio equipment can only be judged against the original musical performance." It's impossible to get all music lovers to agree on anything!

The Alón Circe was being put to good use in another system as well. This one used the new **Electrocompaniet** Nemo monoblock power amplifiers ($14,000/pair), with Electrocompaniet 4.5 preamp ($1995) and Electrocompaniet EMC1 CD player ($3995). The Nemo, originally designed to complement the B&W Nautilus loudspeaker (Jules Verne's estate was not consulted), is a fully symmetrical balanced amplifier capable of putting out 600W. The sound impressed me as being powerful — in an iron-fist-in-a-velvet-glove way.

Lamm's electronics were used in systems featuring speakers by **Nearfield Acoustics** (PipeDreams 15, $25,000) and **Kharma** (Ceramique 1.0, $14,000). In both systems, the amplification was handled by the Lamm ML2 single-ended triode monoblocks ($29,290/pair), supplemented in Nearfield's system by a Lamm M2.1 ($7545) driving the subwoofers. Lamm also had a prototype of the new LL2 line-stage preamplifier ($3990), to be available in August 1999. The sound was excellent in both systems. The ML2's output is just 18Wpc, but it certainly doesn't sound like that. Still, nearly $30,000 for a pair of low-powered SET amplifiers does not strike me as conspicuously good value — especially considering the fact that the ML2's output stage uses just a single 6C33C-B, a fairly inexpensive tube. The **Balanced Audio Technology** VK-60, which uses four of these tubes in a fully balanced configuration, produces 60Wpc and costs about $5000. It may well be that the Lamm ML2 is as good as some of its reviews claim; I have trouble seeing how the price is justified by the cost of materials and construction.

The **Audio-Valve** line of tube electronics from Germany is now imported by **Fanfare International.** Audio-Valve is not that well known in North America, but it's a mature company (their patents date back to 1982), and the products have a unique visual style. Demonstrated by the ever-dapper Victor Goldstein was a system consisting
“I was losing all my friends!”

Matt Polk, Speaker Specialist

When friends needed an audio system, they would turn to me for advice. I was happy to help; nothing thrills me more than helping someone discover the joy of great sound. I make no apologies: I’m an audiophile. When friends asked my advice, I steered them to the highest performance components they could afford, which was easy when things were just ‘stereo.’ I would recommend components, give some quick set-up advice, and everybody was happy.

Things got complicated when digital home theater came along.

The phone calls would come just as we were sitting down to dinner. ‘Hey Matt, what the %$#@ is bass management and how do I turn it on?’ Or, ‘Matt you creep, I need an electronics degree to hook this contraption up!’ Creep? Me? Ouch!

Obviously things aren’t as simple as they used to be.

Don’t get me wrong, I love digital surround technology, and nothing beats the excitement of a slick action flick on a great home theater system. But I got tired of making after-dinner house calls to hook up, set up, and explain how to use complicated home theater systems. Yet I couldn’t bring myself to recommend one of those ‘home theater-in-a-box’ systems. They may be easy to operate, but they fall far short of a ‘spine-tingling’ home theater performance.

I got thinking, ‘It doesn’t have to be this way. There’s no reason why you can’t have an easy to use, high performance home theater that quickens your pulse, tugs on your heartstrings, and gives you goosebumps.’

Shameless plug

So we set out to design a system that’s easy to choose, easy to set up, and easy to use—and still delivers no-compromise performance. Introducing something entirely new: the RM Digital Solution. It features award-winning satellite/subwoofer speakers, a Dolby® Digital preamp/processor, and a 500 watt multi-channel amplifier—integrated into a single system. We engineered the ‘high-end’ component electronics to work specifically with the speakers. By optimizing the complete system—from input to speakers—we not only made it easy; we also made it sound spectacular.

So now my friends get the simplicity and high performance they want, and I get to eat dinner.

NEW! The Polk® RM Digital Solution system combines award-winning loud speakers with a high-end, separates-quality Dolby Digital preamp/processor, and a 500 watt multi-channel power amplifier to bring you high performance, easy to use home theater.

Free stuff

Seriously, I’m really proud of the RMDS-1. It does so much—and does it so well—that I could talk about it for hours! Instead, call (800) 377-7655 ext. 101 for a brochure. I’ll also send you a free copy of the Home Theater Handbook. It’s full of unbiased advice on selecting and optimizing a component system, if that’s what you want.”

5601 Metro Drive
Baltimore, MD 21215
Customer Service (800) 377-7655
Monday - Friday 9:00am to 6:00pm E.S.T.
“Polk Audio,” “The Speaker Specialists” and “Polk” are trademarks of Britannia Investment Corporation used under license by Polk Audio Incorporated.

www.polkaudio.com
entirely of products imported by Fanfare: Audio-Valve Eklipse preamp ($2950) and Challenger monoblock amplifier ($7900/pair, 140W, each tube individually biased), Metronome Technology digital front-end, and a pair of Confluence speakers ($4800) from France. A very European, civilized sound.

Most tubes, this time from well-known thermionic purveyor VTL: the MB-750 Reference monoblocks made their public active debut at Hi-Fi ‘99. These are amplifiers of very high power (the model number refers to the output in watts), with double-decked construction, two-stage soft-start power up, and MIT caps in all signal paths. According to Luke Manley, the sound of the Reference Series is a good notch above the level of VTL’s Signature Series, and was developed through a design process that involved intensive listening tests. For an amplifier of this power, size, and complexity (twelve 6550 tubes per channel), $16,500/pair seems quite...reasonable.

Over at the other Manley stronghold, EveAnna Manley was proudly demoing The Wave, their funky-looking prototype D/A preamp/processor. It features analog and digital inputs, a straight-through path for analog signals, Ultra-Analog DACs for the digital ones, separate power supply, tube line stage, and remote control. A 24/96 digital board is in the works. And while driving a pair of ultra-sensitive Tannoy Churchill speakers with Manley’s 250Wpc monoblocks might seem like overkill in the power department, when you’ve got it, you might as well flaunt it!

Chip Stern: High-Value/High-Performance Electronics ($3500 and under)

As always, the art and science of listening was the key...listening to the music, listening to the equipment, listening to the room interactions—but mostly, listening to each other.

I knew we were on to something special in Chicago when an open-minded, sixty-something audiophile took the microphone at an “Ask the Editors” forum to urge Stereophile writers to reference more contemporary hip-hop and techno music in our evaluations (an experiment I’ve since eagerly implemented, with harrowing results). Afterward, an earnest, scholarly gentleman approached me on the podium, quizzical disbelief on his face:

“Excuse me, Mr. Stern, but did I once ride in your taxi?”

I strained to make the connection. “I think it was an $8.60 fare to midtown, and we talked about gear, right?”

His eyes widened. “Wow, you have a mind like a computer.”

“If I had a mind like a computer, would I be driving a Yellow cab in New York?”

Later that afternoon, when a young audio pilgrim peppered me with questions about upgrading his fledgling solidstate system with “those tube electronics you guys are always talking about,” I realized that Stereophile subscribers have been reading what we have to say most carefully as they set about upgrading their audio systems.

It’s precisely this friendly brand of give-and-take that characterizes the ongoing evolution of two-channel audio, and the manufacturers are listening just as closely to Stereophile readers as we are. High-value/high-performance electronics sang out to consumers in Chicago like canaries in a coal mine. Their message? For the High End to grow and prosper, it must become even more inclusive.

Nowhere is this fact of life more evident than in the burgeoning integrated amplifier category. Luke Manley introduced VTL’s remote-controlled, EL34-powered IT-85 at the Show. This sophisticated new design—a fast, fat-sounding 85Wpc—is chock-full of practicality, performance, and useful features for a modest $2500. As the concave control panel subtly implies, the IT-85 is essentially a VTL MB-85 piggy-backed on a full-featured, active line-stage preamp section. In fact, the IT-85’s pre-out is a cathode-follower buffer, and VTL has carefully gain-matched the IT-85 so you can mate it with the $1750 MB-85 power amp, effectively upgrading the IT-85 to a horizontal biamp controller and thus increasing efficiency and minimizing crosstalk. This double-barreled combo proved a commanding musical complement to the Joseph Audio RM22si loudspeakers.

Meanwhile, in the Manley room, EveAnna Manley perfected her radical DJ skills (“No hi-fi music after 3pm”) with an engaging demonstration that showcased the high-end prowess of her company’s futuristic-looking, $2250 Stingray— the Stealth Bomber of integrated amps. Thanks to a new, specially designed transformer, this quick, gutsy, high-sensitivity design milks 50Wpc out of four EL84 output tubes per channel in UltraLinear mode. Controlling the output stage of the Stingray with her fledgling Manley Wave—a hybrid tube preamp/DAC combo—Manley drove to perfection Tannoy’s imposing, super-efficient Churchill loudspeakers (they look like bulldogs but perform like greyhounds). Most tellingly, she made crafty, judicious use of ASC Tube Traps to enhance system synergy and counteract the beach ball-sized bass ballast and cranky audible resonances that
You can listen to “Louie Louie” every day for the next ten years and we guarantee you’ll break down before we do.

Ten-Year Limited Warranty
Parasound products have always had a reputation for superior quality and now our ten-year limited warranty backs it up. See your Parasound dealer or visit our website for the details on a warranty that’s sure to stand the test of time—and taste.

Parasound Products Inc. • www.parasound.com
950 Battery Street, San Francisco, CA 94111
415-397-7100 • In Canada, call 604-988-2966

flatline cable
SPEED • PRECISION • MUSICALITY

MAKING THE CONNECTION
"I agree with Inner Ear publisher/editor Ernie Fisher that the SPM is the finest cable available at any price"
BARRY WILLIS, STEREOPHILE, DECEMBER 1997

"I've never had anything quite like this happen during a review before - one product simply blows out everything else you have ever experienced before."
DOUG BLACKBURN ON SPM CABLES, SOUNDSTAGE, OCTOBER 1997

"Flatline trades not one iota of sonic prowess for its convenience. It is simply one of the most enticing cables we've ever come across."
***** WHAT HI-FI?

NORDOST
Nordost Corporation, 420 Franklin Street, Framingham, MA 01701 U.S.A.
Tel:001-508-879-1242 Fax: 001-508-879-8197
E Mail: nordostflatline@msn.com
http://www.nordost.com

Nordost (UK) Ltd., Unit 7, Aber Park Industrial Estate, Abergavenny, Gwent, NP7 7TS
Tel: 01352 730251 Fax: 01352 731273
were natural byproducts of the Palmer House Hilton's heavy-walled, thickly carpeted, unforgiving rooms. These rooms proved the undoing of many an exemplary system, and forced listeners to mentally subtract the acoustic gremlins from the gear's actual sound.

Meanwhile, throughout the Show, solid-state designers raised the performance bar significantly in a variety of integrated and separates packages. In the NAD/PSB suite, I was charmed and intrigued by the musicality and bang-for-buck prowess of NAD's L40 CD receiver ($599 separately, $799 when packaged with a pair of PSB Alpha Minis). The L40's elegant, understated big brothers in the Silver Series—such as the $2199, 100Wpc $300 integrated amp—sounded effortless and natural driving PSB Status Gold i loudspeakers.

Over in the Gersham Acoustics/SimAudio room I had the luxury of auditioning the exceptional new 80Wpc SimAudio Celeste I-5080 integrated amp ($1299), along with the entire range of Gersham loudspeakers—including the new SWX-1, a three-way system that couples the X-1 monitor to the matching SW-1 stand/woofer. In contrast to one-on-one shoot-outs with the Celeste's beefier brethren, the significantly more expensive Moon series separates (W-5 amp, P-5 preamp) not surprisingly offered greater heft and sharper resolution, but the I-5080 more than held its own in bass control, rhythm and pacing, harmonic accuracy, and sonic transparency, and threw an impressive soundstage with the imposing little Gersham Avant Garde's. And while the order of the day was clearly cost control—from the pure class-A gain stages to the use of discrete output devices for gain control—the Celeste I-5080 offers high-end build and performance at an entry-level price.

Elsewhere, an American company out of Indianapolis, Odyssey Design Group, has licensed technology from the German Symphonic-Line—the combo of their $1195 preamp and $1295 power amp (80Wpc) proved exceptionally dynamic and musical. Still, for me, the most memorable portion of this odyssey was their blissfully corny CD-R demo disc—a Zappa-esque collage of sound effects and wacky crossfades into musical highlights and lowlights that functioned as a two-minute paradigm of what your typical high-end audio show might sound like to visitors from Tralfamadore. May the face be with you.

How far have high-end designers come with solid-state separates, compared to our beloved tubes? Fellow 'phile Robert Deutsch urged me in no uncertain terms to make tracks for the Sumiko/Sonus Faber/Vienna Acoustics suite, where, much to my surprise, I saw a set of mighty Audio Research separates sitting in a corner, all dressed up with no place to go.

Meanwhile, the no-compromise Vienna Acoustics Mahlers and Sonus Faber Amati Homage loudspeakers hummed away contentedly courtesy of some impressive new Danish separates from Copenhagen designer Anders Thule (pronounced Too-lay) of Thule Audio. Said to be stable down to 2 ohms, the 150Wpc Thule PA-150 B amplifier ($1750) and PR-150 B preamp ($1500) feature differential circuitry and digital volume controls, so amplitude is controlled from channel to channel with pinpoint accuracy—hardly the stuff of budget electronics. As a rule, reference-quality speakers are pretty revealing of the quality of amplification; the Thule combo did its duty with imperturbable musical dignity and threw a fine soundstage.

I was pleased to discover that one of the leading names in tube electronics, Sonic Frontiers, has returned to the high-end fold as part of Paradigm Reference while expanding on its high-value line of separates under the Anthem banner. The Anthem line is the perfect complement to Paradigm's high-performance/high-value loudspeaker line, including their new home-theater surround-sound gear. The new Anthem MCA 2, 3, and 5 multichannel amps sell for $699, $849, and $1399, respectively, and can be run balanced or single-ended. And it's worth reminding consumers anew that Anthem's highly praised 200W hybrid Amp 2 ($1799), packaged with the Anthem Pre 2 ($1299), is one of the great values in high-end electronics.

Finally, Yves-Bernard André of YBA, one of the real visionaries of solid-state design, has distilled his technologies over the past decade until he can offer a comparable scale of high-end performance in a dynamic, remote-controlled, 50W integrated amp costing only $999—Audio Refinement's The Complete Integrated Amp.

In that spirit, André set out to update the original YBA 31JT amplifier and YBA 3P preamp. By deriving some circuitry from his top-of-the-line YBA Passion designs, his affordable new separates package, the YBA Combo 33, offers considerably more drive and dynamics at that magic $3500 price point. That's roughly $1000 more than the YBA Intégré DT integrated amp, which features a superb phono section, about which Sam Tellig has kvelled at length, and which is rated Class A in Stereophile's "Recommended Components."

Why pay for separates, you say? Only 50W, you ask? The Combo 33 puts out serious current, and really locks in the bass. While I was auditioning Ralph Towner and Gary Peacock's A Closer View (ECM 1602) with the JMlab Mini-Utopia loudspeakers, a visitor was heard to compliment André on the extension and impact of the matching subwoofer.

André smiled. "It isn't on."

Welcome to the High End, pilgrim. Go tell your Mama.

Next month: Best Sound at the Show.

< Sumiko's finest: John Hunter (left) and Stirling Trayle (right) with the Vienna Acoustics Mahler speaker.
John Atkinson abandons his purist roots and records the 1998 Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival with close miking and multitrack recorders.

BRAVO!
THE BEST OF THE 1998 SANTA FE CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

"There, that's where you should put the microphone — 5" from the end of my bow."

Holding his bow up at an angle, world-famous violinist Pinchas Zukerman was helping me set up my mikes to record the final concert from the 1998 Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, where he was to lead an ensemble in a performance of the Mozart G-Minor Piano Quartet. Pinchas Zukerman has been recording for 30 years, so I'd asked him if there was a mike position he'd recommend. He has found that the best position for a microphone (he prefers a Coles ribbon) to capture the sound of his violin is always the same: "If it works, why change it?"

This year's Festival, however, brought me face-to-face with an acoustic rendered newly uncooperative by noise from the air-conditioning system for the Museum of Fine Arts, of which St. Francis Auditorium is a part. The AC couldn't be turned off, the leasing arrangements for the museum's exhibitions of paintings mandating 24-hour climate control. My preferred purist, distant microphone technique, which I had used on Stereophile's three previous recordings of the Festival, would thus pick up too much of the AC's rumble'n'roar. Instead, I augmented a distant pair of microphones with individual mikes on each of the instruments. I was going to mix the eight channels down to two after the performances had been assembled, and try to minimize the noise in the mixdown with subtle use of appropriate filtering.

The main pair of microphones for the Mozart quartet and Elgar quintet were B&K omnidirectional, spaced 27" apart.

1 Festival (STPH007-2) features orchestral works by Copland, Milhaud, and Kodály; Semite (STPH009-2) chamber works by Mozart, Brahms, and Dvořák; Emote (STPH011-2) works for piano and string quartet by Brahms and Mendelssohn. All can be ordered from the Stereophile website: www.stereophile.com, or by calling (800) 446-3563.
Pinchas Zukerman is featured in Mozart's demonic G-Minor Piano Quartet. (Photos courtesy Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival.)

and angled away from each other. This array captures a terrific sense of the ensemble's "bloom," but the downside is that the stereo image is not particularly well defined. In addition, while the omni mikes have an extended low-frequency response, this readily picked up the low-frequency noise from the climate-control system pumps, which were mounted behind the stage. In the mixdown, I used the versatile rdp-1 digital preamplifier/equalizer from Z-Systems to filter out some of this noise, but it couldn't all be removed without affecting the tonal qualities of the piano and cello.

The main pair of microphones also picked up sound from the high-volume air-conditioning fans, mounted just outside the side door to the stage. This noise was too high in frequency to be filtered electronically, but the layers of heavy tape Wes Phillips applied to the door seals eliminated almost all of it. Unfortunately, fire regulations prevented us from applying this treatment during the concerts themselves; therefore, while the concert performances were captured on tape, all the performances on this CD were recorded after the audience had left.

For Marc Neikrug's Pueblo Children's Songs, much of whose music resides in the silences between the notes, the omnis used as a main pair still picked up too much intrusive noise. I therefore substituted a pair of directional cardioid mikes, about 10' away from and looking down at the stage. These were angled at 115° and had their capsules spaced by 7", the traditional ORTF configuration. This gives a well-defined stereo image, with good rejection of low-frequency noise. While the cardioids lack the bloom of the omni mikes, this would not be an issue with the intimate nature of the Songs, and freed up the natural-sounding omnis to use for Heidi Grant Murphy's voice.

For the close mikes, environmental noise would not be a problem, as it would be suppressed in comparison with the direct sounds of the instruments and voice. The piano was a magnificent New York Steinway D, its soundboard autographed by all the pianists who had performed on it, from Vladimir Ashkenazy to András Schiff. I picked up its sound with an ORTF pair of cardioid mikes placed about 15" above the piano strings and looking at the width of the soundboard. The outputs of these microphones were panned in the mixdown to full right and 20% left, so that their piano image coincided with that produced by the main pair of microphones.

For the violins in the Elgar and the violin and viola in the Mozart, a B&K cardioid mke was placed for each in the Pinchas
You're being robbed

Whether your system has a power conditioner, or not, you're being robbed.

Robbed of the potential in your AV system without a conditioner, robbed of the system's life if you do.

Introducing the PS Audio Power Plant series. Not a conditioner or filter, but an actual power generating station that creates perfect low distortion AC power.

A major breakthrough

What's inside the PS Audio Power Plant? A stereo power amplifier, driven by a DSP based sine wave oscillator.

Together, they produce a perfect AC power output that will drive your CD player, DAC, power amplifier, etc.

Enjoy the full potential of your system, without any downside. Remarkably better depth, bass, impact, slam and three dimensional imaging is yours with the Power Plant driving your AV system.

The Power Plant is brought to you by the folks committed to high end products without the high price. Paul McGowan, the co-founder of PS Audio is back.

For more information on the Power Plant and the NEW PS Audio, check out our website or call us.

PS Audio

www.psaudio.com

toll free 877-PSAUDI0 (877-772-8340)

Silver Tongue

The ability of these cables to recreate a sense of depth and space is exceeded by none that I evaluated. Roman Zajc, The Absolute Sound, July 1998.

Quiet, full-bodied, apparent DC to light extension, extreme high resolution, wonderful spatial qualities, these cables let the Jadis amplifiers be all they might. Jonathan Scull, Stereophile, March 1996.

Why play with firecrackers when somebody hands you dynamite?...The sound knocked me out. These Goertz speaker cables and interconnects just totally surpassed the quality of the cables I was using earlier. Clement Perry, The Audiophile Voice, Volume 3, Issue 2.

Is It Magic?

No, It's Physics.

(cited values of GOERTZ AG2)

Extreme Low Series Inductance.
0.020 microH/m
- eliminates high frequency roll-off.
Impedance Match.
2.5 ohms
- eliminates ringing and signal reflections.
Low Loop Resistance.
7.2 mohms/m
- for a powerful bass and mid-range.
Solid Ribbon Conductors.
0.010 x 0.75"
- eliminates strand interaction microphony.

Micro Thin Dielectric. 0.0012"
- minimizes stored charges.
- for a dead silent background and a fast burn-in.

The signal travels through GOERTZ cables at the same speed as in all other cables.

No garden hoses. No fire hoses. No strange boxes. No Snake Oil.

Available in high purity solid fine silver and oxygen free copper.

Alpha-Core, Inc.
915 Pembroke Street,
Bridgeport, CT 06608
Tel: 800-836-5920 (USA) 203-335-6805
Fax: 203-384-8120
Made in the United States - Patented Worldwide

www.alphacore.com
Zukerman position, looking down at the body of the instrument from about 4' above. An AKG dynamic mke was used for the viola in the Elgar, while the quirkily named Mitey Mike II—a tiny instrumentation omnidirectional microphone—was pressed into service for the cello, about 12' from that instrument's right-hand F-hole.

Very low-noise, transformerless solid-state preamplifiers from Millennia Media were used for the piano, violins, and viola, as well as for the main pickup in the Neikrug work. For Heidi's voice, the B&K omnis fed a tube preamp, again from Millennia—the Forsell M2a—while a Bryston solid-state preamp was used for the viola in the Elgar and the cello. Analog/digital conversion was provided by two dCS 24-bit two-channel converters, a Manley 20-bit two-channel converter, and the four 20-bit converters used in the Nagra-D recorder. All were word-clock-synchronized to the Manley at the CD's 44.1kHz rate, so that the digital data could all be properly aligned for the mixdown when it was uploaded to the digital audio workstation.

This meant that two disparate four-channel recorders could be used for the sessions: an open-reel Nagra-D and a Tascam DA-38. The latter uses Hi-8 videotapes and is normally an eight-track machine running at 16-bit resolution, but for this project it was converted to a four-track, 24-bit machine using the PrismSound MR-2024T "bit splitter." (For an upcoming Stereophile CD, I used a dCS 972 digital/digital converter in combination with the PrismSound box to use the Tascam as a two-channel, 24-bit recorder running at 88.2kHz sampling.)

Once the recorded performance had been assembled from the takes chosen by Marc Neikrug for the Elgar Quintet and Pueblo Children's Songs, and by Philip Traugott for the Mozart, my production philosophy was basically the same for all three works: mix the close-miked, individual sounds of the instruments and voice into the sonic picture as captured by the main pair, adjusting the level of each and its position in the soundstage to reconstruct what a listener would have heard.

For the mixdown, the eight tracks, all at 20/24-bit resolution and 44.1kHz sample rate, were kept in the digital domain using a Sonic Solutions digital audio workstation with 25 gigabytes of hard drive. I used the Z-Systems rdp-1 to apply as much filtering of the LF noise as I felt subjectively acceptable when the distant microphone tracks were uploaded to hard disk. I also used the Sonic's DSP to synthesize a 9Hz notch filter to reduce the level of some subsonic ringing from the Shure mikes—even with wind screens, the flow of cold air from AC vents above the
stage was causing some flapping of the mIKE diaphragms. If you have reflex speakers, you will see the woofer cones moving in response to the residual 9Hz signal.

The two-channel master sounded too dry if the distant mikes’ contribution was low enough to keep the residual air-conditioning noise at a suitably low level. I therefore used a judicious amount of artificial reverberation from a Lexicon digital processor. Again, the signal was kept in the digital domain and the reverberation parameters were carefully adjusted to match the natural ambient sound of the hall, to help blend the sounds of the close-miked instruments with the balance as picked up by the main microphone pair.

Close mikes, multitrack recording, equalization, artificial reverberation—as I said above, this is a big philosophical change from the purist, documentary approach I prefer for classical recording. It is actually the way rock recordings are produced. But, given the changes in the hall’s conditions and intrinsic sound, it was necessary.

For the Mozart Quartet, I chose a somewhat close balance, the brilliance of the sound matching the virtuosity of both the scoring and the playing. (My thanks to BMG’s Philip Traugott for his invaluable help and suggestions regarding the balance in the Mozart.) The crystalline clarity of the sound of Marc Neikrug’s Steinway is well suited to what might be regarded as a small-scale piano concerto. For the symphonic-scaled Elgar, I decided on more of a contribution from the main pair of omni mikes; hence, this work’s soundstage is not so precisely defined as the Mozart’s. The heavier-set, more Romantic nature of Elgar’s orchestration benefits from the correspondingly lusher balance, with the downside that slightly more of the low-frequency rumble can occasionally be heard.

In between these two larger-scale works is placed the delicious miniature of the Pueblo Children’s Songs, balanced at its natural level, with Heidi Grant Murphy’s liquid soprano set against the tapestry of Marc’s piano, its conventionally sounded notes punctuated by “stopped” notes.

*Bravo!* has been the most intensive of all of *Stereophile*’s recording projects, but I believe the sonic results reflect the superb musicianship captured on those magical Santa Fe evenings in July and August 1998.

—John Atkinson

**The Music**

**Quartet No.1 in G Minor for Violin, Viola, Cello & Piano, K.478 (1785)**

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)

In 1785, Mozart began work on a set of six piano quartets, to be brought out by Anton Hoffmeister, an eager young composer who made his money publishing music. The first of the cycle, K.478 in G Minor, was completed by mid-October of that year; a sequel in the key of E-flat followed in June.

Mozart never composed the four remaining works, and thus we have one of music’s great unanswered questions. Some would have it that Hoffmeister begged off after being scared by an article in the *Journal des Luxus und der Moden* that praised the new quartet (whether in G Minor or E-flat is not specified) for its “artful composition,” then gave it the kiss of death by adding that “[the work, which demands the greatest precision on the part of all four players, could only be enjoyed by musical experts even in perfect rendition.” Another theory has it that Mozart was too busy working on other things—*Le Nozze di Figaro*, for instance, and the piano concertos K.482, 488, and 491—not to mention his deep involvement with the Masonic order. Or it could be that Hoffmeister’s “payment” of two ducats (less than five dollars) for the G-Minor Quartet was a bit on the stingy side.

But back to the Quartet. If the E-flat Quartet is Figaro, the G-Minor is pure *Don Giovanni*. Nowhere is that more true than in the first movement—a piece of heroic strength in demonic G Minor, cut from the same cloth as the *Don Giovanni* overture. All four players plunge into the opening theme in vehement unison, the piano answering with an idea built with a descending scale and modulating. After a series of sequences based on the opening idea, the music moves to the relative major. Here the idea is reiterated in more lyrical fashion by the piano, buoyed by an Alberti bass, with a counterpoint melody from the viola.

The second subject, stated in thirds, is an idea characterized by rhythmic syncopations. Mozart introduces a third and fourth idea before the exposition section draws to a close. The development begins lyrically, then reaches dramatic heights as the strings finally state the rhythm of the opening idea while the piano punctuates with upward scales. Recapitulation is more or less standard, with everything reappearing in the G-Minor “home” key. There also is an extended coda based on the main idea, in which the piano takes its answers further and further afield tonally.

The *Andante* second movement provides soothing relief after the anguish of the first. Its initial theme, started by the piano and followed by all the instruments together, is based on the thirds of the first movement. Immediately thereafter an idea appears in running notes, forming a basic motion for the entire movement. There is no development section to speak of, but—as is the norm for Mozart’s slow movements—the recapitulation is embroidered modestly.

The *Rondo’s “Allegretto”* marking and the chromaticism of the main theme give an indication of Mozart’s mood here—mirth tinged by nostalgia. At one point there is a brief quota-

---

*CD cover painting: Dan Nanninga, New Mexico Dusk, #2 (1998).*

*The artist created this stunning new image for the 1999 season of the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival. It is available from the Festival as a poster and as note cards.*
Ok, we admit it, we're cheating.

We designed the Excalibur II to outperform our competitors best offerings. Then, we shamelessly priced this cable at a mere $225.10. We apologize if this offends your sense of fairness and good sportsmanship.

---

"In a couple of blind A/B tests, some of our panelists actually preferred the Complete to $6000 separates."

The Inner Ear Report—vol. 10 n° 3

Complete integrated amplifier $995

Audio Refinement
By Yves Bernard André

---

AVANCE USA Inc.
80 King Spring Road, Windsor Locks
CT 06096, USA, 1-888-245-7693
Internet: www.avance-international.com
E-mail: avance@internet.dk

The Sigma Series from Avance. Priced from $499 to $1,599 per pair.

---

U.S.A.: Audio Plus Services P.O. Box 3047 Plattsburgh, NY 12901
Tel.: 1-800-254-2510 / 1-800-663-9352 Fax: (450) 585-5862
www.audioplusservices.com
Canada: Plurison C.P. 537 Station Youville Montréal Qc H2P 2W1
Tel.: (450) 585-0098 Fax: (450) 585-5862
www.plurison.com
From the instant of a whisper
To the explosion of a passion
Between the notes
Time stands still

The experience of a lifetime
Every time
tion from a quintet by Johann Christian Bach. Most uncharacteristically for Mozart, this theme is alluded to but never developed, or for that matter even restated. This must have made the fastidious Mozart feel guilty, for he promptly made amends to his respected older colleague by devising a monothematic rondo (the D Major, K.485) that uses nothing but the usurped fragment.

— Harris Goldsmith

**Pueblo Children's Songs (1995)**
Marc Neikrug (b. 1946)

I wrote the *Pueblo Children's Songs* in July of 1995: Heidi Grant Murphy commissioned them to honor the birth of her son, Christopher. The texts were collected by my mother-in-law, a resident of Santa Clara Pueblo in New Mexico. Some of the songs are in English, with a few Tewa words; others are presented entirely in Tewa. Tewa is the language spoken by the six pueblos directly north of Santa Fe, as well as by one of the Hopi villages.

As an infant, each Pueblo child is taken outside early in the morning for a naming ceremony. A chant is sung to the rising sun in the four primary directions. On this recording, the first time the chant is sung, it is in English: the Tewa words used in the text are *Akhon Powi*, which means “Flower toward the South meadows,” and *Kauw*, “a dark green rock.” The second time the chant is sung, the chant is entirely in Tewa.

The “Chipmunks” song begins with a translation of its text — “Tiny saltlakes are sapping the ground, arguing. It’s time for me to lay you little chipmunks down to sleep.” The “Naming Chant II” is entirely in Tewa.

— Marc Neikrug

**Quintet in A Minor for Two Violins, Viola, Cello, & Piano, Op. 84 (1918-19)**
Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

In 1918, it seemed to Elgar that the world was crumbling. Four years of war had left him — as it had so many others — weary and numb from the crush of events. Many of his friends of German ancestry were given a bad time in England; others were killed or maimed in action. Socialism was on the rise in Britain, and the 61-year-old Elgar believed his beloved Edwardian world was drawing to a close. Surgery to remove his infected tonsils cured the problem of his unsettled health, but did little to alleviate his depression. His music seemed anachronistic, a remnant of stuffy conservatism in an era of polychords and dodecaphony, and he composed little of importance.

Thinking that a place in the country might offer some relief from London, that April the Elgars rented Drinkwells, a capacious thatch-roofed cottage near the West Sussex village of Fittleworth. The transformations in the composer’s physical and emotional conditions were swift and beneficent. The fresh country air, long walks, and freedom from the stress of city life restored him remarkably, and by summer he was planning four new works, his first important compositions since *Falstaff* was completed in 1913: a violin sonata, a string quartet, a piano quintet, and a concerto for cello.

Elgar began the Piano Quintet that summer and worked on it, along with the String Quartet and the Violin Sonata, for the rest of the year. (They were assigned, respectively, the opus numbers 84, 83, and 82.) He finished the Quintet early on, and a private performance was given in London on April 26, 1919 by the British String Quartet (Albert Sammons, W.H. Reed, Raymond Jeremy, and Felix Salmond), and pianist William Murdoch. The performance inspired George Bernard Shaw to write a long, admiring letter to Elgar — “the Quintet knocked me over at once,” he allowed — and served as the basis of a warm, lifelong friendship between the two.

The Piano Quintet received its public première at London’s Wigmore Hall on May 21. Alice Elgar commented in her diary about its “wonderful weird beginning … evidently reminiscence of sinister trees & impression of Flexham Park.” The first movement follows a fully developed sonata form framed by a ghostly strain that superimposes a processional of thematic fragments in the strings on a slow-moving piano chant melody.

The main theme, given in a newly vitalized tempo by the full ensemble, is marked by troubled sentiments and implied tragedy. The second theme appears in an unsettled major tonality after a tiny but distinctive passage of saccharine harmonies in the strings. The development section, launched by the recall of the chant-introduction, incorporates all of the principal thematic materials; then the ghostly processional hovers once again to bring the strange and haunting movement to a mysterious close.

The *Adagio* is tranquil and lyrical in its outer sections and more animated and rhythmically intense in its central episode. The finale returns to the woodland mood (and some of the thematic material) of the first movement, though it is more confident in nature and optimistic in outlook. In his fine biography of Elgar, Percy M. Young wrote that “in some ways, the *Adagio* may be ranked as Elgar’s greatest single movement,” and it held a special place in the composer’s affections as well. When Elgar became mortally ill in 1933, an executive with HMV Records made a special recording of the Quintet for the composer, and musician Billy Reed reported that “[Elgar] could not refrain from weeping whenever the slow movement was reached.”

— Richard E. Rodda

**The Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival Artists**

The artists on this CD are some of the finest chamber musicians performing in the US. Featured are: Heidi Grant Murphy (soprano) and Marc Neikrug (piano) in Marc Neikrug’s *Pueblo Children’s Songs*, Pinchas Zukerman (violon), Cynthia Phelps (violon), Eric Kim (cello), and Marc Neikrug (piano) in the Mozart G-Minor Quartet; and Jaime Laredo and Daniel Phillips (violins), Robert Rinehart (viola), Sharon Robinson (cello), and Joseph Kalichstein (piano) in the Elgar Piano Quintet.

Pinchas Zukerman (violon) was born in Tel Aviv in 1948, and began his musical training with his father, first on recorder, then clarinet, and ultimately violin. He came to America in 1962 to study with Ivan Galamian at Juilliard. As a chamber musician, he has collaborated with Daniel Barenboim, Itzhak Perlman, the late Jacqueline du Pré, Zubin Mehta, Jean-Pierre Rampal, Isaac Stern, the Guarneri and Tokyo quartets, Midori, Yo-Yo Ma, Emmanuel Ax, Yefim Bronfman, Ralph Kirshbaum, and Shlomo Mintz. Zukerman has conducted many of the world’s leading orchestras, including the Chicago, Boston, National, San Francisco, Montreal, and Toronto Symphonies; the New York, Los Angeles, and...
Another Accuphase Installation.

Unquestionably, the pinnacle of audio systems acquired by the truly discerning listener. Recommended and installed by select dealers worldwide. Whether you are considering analog or digital, the extraordinary equipment from Accuphase will exceed your highest expectations.

The DG-28 (shown) is the most sophisticated advanced digital voicing equalizer available. Utilizing ultra high-speed DSP technology, the DG-28 has the power to effectively reshape any listening environment.

For further information:
AXISS Distribution Inc.
Tel. 310-329-0187 • Fax 310-329-0189
www.accuphase.com

www.conradjohnson.com

Visit our website for information on our company and products.
Marc Neikrug (piano), artistic director of the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, is a pianist and composer of international acclaim. His compositions range from chamber music to symphonic works and opera, including Through Roses and Los Alamos. He has received commissions for: Prelude Children's Songs (1995) from soprano Heidi Grant Murphy, featured on this CD; Piano Concerto No. 1 (1996), from the Aldeburgh Festival; and Viola Quintet (1995), for performances by the Tokyo String Quartet and Pinchas Zukerman. His new violin concerto was performed by Pinchas Zukerman and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra in February 1999.

As a pianist, Neikrug performs regularly throughout the world, and has collaborated with Pinchas Zukerman for over 20 years. Together they have made numerous recordings for CBS and Philips, and have recently embarked on several ambitious projects for BMG Classics, including recording the complete repertoire of sonatas for violin and piano.

Cynthia Phelps (viola) has appeared internationally as soloist with the Minnesota Orchestra, Hong Kong Philharmonic, Orchestra Sinfonica de Bilbao, and San Diego Symphony, among many others. In coming seasons, she performs twice with the New York Philharmonic: in the Benjamin Lees Concerto for String Quartet and Orchestra, and in a new concerto written for her and Rebecca Young by Sofia Gubaidulina. She has been heard on NPR, PBS's MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour, CBS's Sunday Morning, Radio France, and RAI (Italy). She appeared on a Live from Lincoln Center telecast with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, and has toured North and South America, Israel, and Germany with Pinchas Zukerman and Itzhak Perlman as a member of the Zukerman and Friends Ensemble. She has also performed with the Guarneri String Quartet, and at the Schleswig-Holstein, Naples, Cremona, Marlboro, Seattle, La Jolla, Santa Fe, and Bravo! Colorado Festivals.

Following her solo recording debut on Cala Records, Phelps recorded concertos by Bartók and Serly in Spain. She can also be heard on the Marlboro Recording Society, Polyvico, Nuova Era, Virgin Classics, and Covenant labels.

Eric Kim (cello) was born of Korean parents in New York City. He grew up in Illinois, where he began his music studies at age 10 with Dr. Tanya L. Carey. He received his Bachelor and Master of Music degrees at the Juilliard School, where he studied with Leonard Rose, Lynn Harrell, and Channing Robbins. At age 15, he made his solo debut with the Chicago Symphony.

Now principal cellist with the Cincinnati Symphony, Kim has performed extensively throughout the US, Europe, and the Middle and Far East as a recitalist, chamber musician, and soloist with orchestra. He has appeared as soloist with the symphony orchestras of Cincinnati, Denver, and San Diego, and has collaborated with conductors Zubin Mehta, Jesús López-Cobos, and Sergiu Comissiona. Active as a chamber musician, Kim has performed with Emmanuel Ax, Misha Dichter, Philippe Entremont, Lynn Harrell, and Kathleen Battle, and recently made his Carnegie Hall chamber-music debut with Itzhak Perlman and Pinchas Zukerman, among others.

Heidi Grant Murphy (soprano) has appeared with the Metropolitan Opera, Salzburg Festival, Frankfurt Opera, Netherlands Opera, Theatre Royal de la Monnaie, and the Brussels and Santa Fe operas. She has been engaged as soloist with the Vienna and New York Philharmonics, the Chicago, Boston, San Francisco, St. Louis, Houston, Pittsburgh, and Atlanta Symphonies, and the English Chamber and Philadelphia Orchestras. Murphy's 1989 Metropolitan Opera debut was in Die Firma ohne Schatten. She has since performed numerous roles there, including Susanna in Le Nozze di Figaro, Pamina in Die Zauberflöte, Sophie in Der Rosenkavalier, Sister Constance in Dialogues of the Carmelites, Nanetta in Falstaff, Ilia in Idomeneo, and Faikermilli in Ariadne. She has sung the role of Celia in Mozart's Lucia Silla at the Salzburg Festival and with the Frankfurt Opera, and Sophie in Salzburg's new production of Der Rosenkavalier. Her appearance at the 1998 Festival was made possible in part by the Marvin Sloves Vocal Performance Fund of the permanent Endowment.

Jaime Laredo (violin) was born in Cochabamba, Bolivia. He has been engaged and re-engaged by all of America's major orchestras, including those of Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, New York, and Philadelphia, among others, with such conductors as Daniel Barenboim, Zubin Mehta, Seiji Ozawa, Leonard Slatkin, Leopold Stokowski, and George Szell. He has performed as soloist and conductor with the London and BBC Symphonies, the English Chamber Orchestra, the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, the Helsinki and Royal Philharmonics, and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. He has also received a Grammy Award and the Deutsche Schallplatten Prize for discs on the CBS and RCA labels, including the complete Bach Sonatas on CBS Masterworks with the
To stand the test of time, a building must be built on a strong foundation. Your system is built on a shaky AC power foundation. 

Meet 64 pounds of bedrock: The Power Wedge® Ultra.

The X Series:

Supersymmetric Design
US Patent # 5,376,899
2 Gain Stages
No Feedback
Flat to DC
156 dB (26 bit) Dynamic Range
X1000 1000W Mono
X600 600W Mono
X350 350W Stereo
late Glenn Gould.

Larcedo's most recent releases include the complete Schubert works for violin and piano with Stephanie Brown, and Virtuosi!, a collection of favorite violin encores (Dorian). Among others are Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante and Concerto with Cho-Liang Lin for Sony Classical, and all-star piano quartet recordings with Emmanuel Ax, Isaac Stern, and Yo-Yo Ma, featuring the music of Brahms, Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann, and Faure.

Who Did What, Where, When, and With What

Production: Marc Neikrug (Elgar, Neikrug) & Philip Traugott (Mozart), with Matthew S. Snyder (Neikrug)
Executive Director, Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival: Erich A. Vollmer
Engineering/Editing/Mixing: John Atkinson
Assistant Engineer: Wes Phillips
Piano Technician: Michael Blackwell
Page Turner: Kent Williamson

Recorded at St. Francis Auditorium, Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe, New Mexico, July 30 & 31, August 13, 16 & 17, 1998

Recording equipment: two Shure SM-81 cardioid microphones (piano ORTF pair, Mozart/Elgar; main ORTF pair, Neikrug); two Briel & Kjaer 4006 ½ omnidirectional microphones (main pair, Mozart/Elgar; soprano, Neikrug); two Briel & Kjaer 4011 ½ cardioid microphones (violins, Elgar; violin/viola, Mozart; piano ORTF pair, Neikrug); AKG D190E dynamic cardioid (viola, Elgar); Mitey Mike II (cello, Mozart/Elgar); Beyerdynamic, Cardas 300B, Canare, Conquest, and AudioQuest Lapis balanced microphone cables; Millennia Media HV-3B microphone preamplifiers (piano/main pair, Neikrug; piano/violin/viola, Mozart; piano/violins, Elgar; Millennia/Fossell M2a microphone preamplifier (soprano, Neikrug); Bryston BMP-2 microphone preamplifier (viola, Elgar; cello, Mozart/Elgar; Nagra microphone preamplifiers & 20-bit A/D converters (main pair, Mozart/Elgar); dCS 904D 24-bit, two-channel A/D converter (soprano, Neikrug; violin/viola, Mozart; violins, Elgar); dCS 902D 24-bit, two-channel A/D converter (piano, Neikrug/Mozart/Elgar); Manley 20-bit, two-channel A/D converter (viola, Elgar; cello; Mozart/Elgar); Meridian 518 Mastering Converter (reclocking); Apogee Wyde-Eye, Canare, and Madrigal AES/EBU digital cables; Nagra-D open-reel, four-track digital tape recorder (piano, Neikrug/Mozart/Elgar; soprano, Neikrug; main pair, Mozart/Elgar); Tascam DA-88 MDM recorder with PrismSound MR-2024T bit splitter, four tracks at 24-bit resolution (main pair, Neikrug/violins/viola/cello, Mozart/Elgar); BASF 931 (Nagra) & Sony P6-120HMPX (Tascam) tape; Mackie MS1202VLZ mixer (monitoring); Semheiser HD-580 & HD-600 and Stax Lambda Pro headphones; HeadRoom Max and Naim headphone amplifiers.

Editing, mixing, and mastering equipment: Sonic Solutions Sonic Studio v.5.2.1 eight-channel digital audio workstation with 24GB hard drive; Meridian 518 Mastering Converter (24-bit/16-bit conversion); Digital Domain VSP/S digital data switching unit; Dorrough AES/EBU level meter; Audio Engineering Associates Stereoscope; Lexicon PCM-90 digital reverberator; Z-Systems RDP-I digital equalizer/preamplifier; B&W Silver Signature loudspeakers & Revel Ultima Gem loudspeakers/Sub-15 subwoofer, driven by Mark Levinson No.33H amplifiers (mixing).

Our special thanks to: Steven K. Lee (Canorus); John La Grou (Millennia Media); Karen Richardson (Bryston); Dr. Glenn Zelniker (Z-Systems); Robert Kelly (Data Conversion Systems); Janice Smith (Prism Media Products); Kevin Voecks (Revel Loudspeakers); George Cardas (Cardas); Bill Low (AudioQuest); Bob Stuart (Meridian); Les Edelberg (Audio Power Industries); Bryan Shaw (Digital Brothers); Gretchen Grogan (Stereophile), and the staffs of Stereophile and the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival for their time and enthusiasm.
"You might, as I did, find the McCormack Power Drive DNA-0.5 nothing less than an Aladdin among amplifiers — a diamond in the rough."

Thomas J. Norton
Stereophile, February 1995
Vol. 18, No. 2

Mr. Norton's other comments:
"...my first reaction was 'Marvelous!'"
"...portrayal of a convincing soundstage was first-rate"
"...superb throughout the midrange"
"...bass was powerful, deep and well-defined"
"...it did virtually everything right"

Musical magic from an "Aladdin" amplifier. For $1495. If you think big sound costs big bucks, better think again.
received a 1992 Grammy nomination.
Rinchart is a member of the New York Philharmonic, which he joined in 1992 as a violinist. He has performed at Chamber Music Northwest, the La Jolla Summerfest, the Spoleto Festival, the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, and with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center.

Sharon Robinson (cello) gave her first concert when she was seven, and has since received numerous honors and awards. In the US, she has appeared as soloist with the National Symphony and Minnesota Orchestras, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the Baltimore, Dallas, Houston, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, and San Francisco Symphonies; and in Europe with the London Symphony and the English and Scottish Chamber Orchestras. She has been heard in recital throughout Europe, as well as in every major US city. Her festival engagements have included Spoleto, Mostly Mozart, Aspen, London’s South Bank, Madeira, Granada, Edinburgh, and Prague’s Autumn Festival, where she recently performed the Dvorák Cello Concerto at the famous Dvorák Hall.

Robinson’s recordings include the Vivaldi Cello Sonatas with Anthony Newman on the Moss label; a Grenadilla recording of solo cello works by Debussy, Fauré, Ravel, and Rorem; and a CD that is being reissued on the Arabesque label featuring duos by Handel, Kodály, Mozart, and Ravel performed with her husband, violinst Jaime Laredo.

Joseph Kalichstein (piano) was born in Tel Aviv in 1946 and came to New York in 1962 to study with Edward Steuermann and Ilona Kabos at the Juilliard School. His New York recital debut was so successful that Leonard Bernstein invited him to appear on CBS television with the New York Philharmonic in a special Beethoven program. He has since developed an exceptional reputation as both a soloist and a chamber musician. His concert and recital appearances have taken him to the great concert halls of New York, Boston, Cleveland, Chicago, Philadelphia, Berlin, London, Amsterdam, Brussels, Vienna, Barcelona, and Salzburg, as well as Australia, Scandinavia, Finland, Japan, Central America, and his native Israel. He has appeared with such conductors as Daniel Barenboim, Pierre Boulez, Sergiu Comissiona, James Conlon, James DePreist, Edo de Waart, Lawrence Foster, Erich Leinsdorf, Eduardo Mata, Zubin Mehta, André Previn, Kurt Sanderling, Leonard Slatkin, George Szell, and David Zinman.

As a soloist, Kalichstein has recorded for RCA, Erato, and Vanguard; recent releases include both Mendelssohn piano concertos (Nimbus), and solo works of Schumann and Schubert (Audiofon).
How to turn a $10,000 investment

People are unique. As much as we may seem alike superficially, our tastes, moods and styles vary as do the sands in the desert. That’s why the cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all sales approach just does not work. Bringing together people with the audio/video system of their dreams calls for a special sensitivity to our individual traits. That’s why at Sound by Singer we custom tailor our business to fit your needs, not the other way around.

Here are three ways that we make owning the world’s most enjoyable audio video easy.

How to Buy a $40,000 System for a $10,000 Investment
- Nobody can get the gear you want into your home easier than Sound by Singer. Our Leveraged Buy-In Program lets you get what you want now with a limited initial investment. You can buy your dream state-of-the-art component surrounded with blue-chip demo components (fully warranted, of course) which you can trade in item by item towards your next desired component for up to two years from the date of purchase. Our payment plans fit your needs and your planned expenditure.

Real Values for Used Equipment
Trade-Ins
- Tired of trading in equipment at 25% of retail value? Sound by Singer has a way to help realize cost savings of up to 45% and help save the world at the same time. Call for details and a quote.

The Best Customer Demonstrator Plans in the Business
- Our customers don’t have to regret the road not taken. With our Zero Error In-Home Demo Plan, you select the two products you really want to compare. Buy both and evaluate them for up to seven days in your home and return the one you don’t want for a full refund. With our Preferred Customer Demo Plan, we can arrange an in-home Demonstrations for any of the components we have on the floor.

At Sound by Singer, we make your audio dreams come true!

DELIVERY • Super System Set-up • Custom Installation
• Audio/Video Cabinetry • Home/Office Trials • Now 6 Months 0% Interest Financing!

AUTHORIZED DEALERSHIPS: ACOUSTIC ENERGY, ADA, API Power Wedge, AudioQuest, AUDIOTRUTH, AVALON ACOUSTICS, H & K, BASIS, BENZ MICHEL, Cal Audio Labs, Cardas Audio, CARY AUDIO, Chang Lightspeed, CLEAR AUDIO, AUDIO TECHNOLOGY, Creek, Crestron, DAY SEQUERRA, DCS ELGAR, Demo Elite by Pioneer, Epos, FANFARE, FAROUDJA, FORSELL, Gallo Acoustics, Gear Design Group, INNERSONG, Jolida, JM LABS UTOPIAS, KAYE AUDIO ART INDUSTRIES, KRELL, MASTER REFERENCE, Linn Products, Loewe, LARA CARTRIDGE, Monster Cable, MUSE, NAD, Parasound, Polycrystal, Proton, Rega, REL, RUN SCHOEER, SIRIUS, SME, Solid Steel, Sonance, SONIC FRONTIERS, Sound Anchors SYNTERISTIC CABLES, Target, THETA DIGITAL, TRANFORMATION CARTRIDGE, Velodyne, VERITY PARSHFAL, VPI, WELL-TEMPERED, Wire World, YAMAHA

Bold Listings available in New York City exclusively at Sound by Singer.
I went into a $40,000 system!

*Home Theater Design

Our Service Programs

Singer.

HIGH-END Audio/Video Done RIGHT

18 East 16th Street New York NY 10003 (212) 924-8600

www.soundbysinger.com

We're in The Bell Atlantic Yellow Pages
$1100/pr.
40Hz to 23kHz ± 3dB
proper placement

$3000/pr.
<33Hz to 20kHz ± 2dB

Please contact us for your nearest authorized dealer.

Readers and Reviewers Agree!

Best Sound of the Show
Hi-Fi '98
&
Joint Winner
Amplification Component
Of The Year
Stereophile Magazine 1998

The VTL Wotan
MB-1250
Monoblock

"...the Wotan is capable of reproducing the most delicate music with convincing nuance when called on to do so, as well as responding to the call for sheer power and utmost control. Tight deep bass and an astounding lack of apparent effort in the most challenging passages convinced our crew that this was one of 1998's best."...

STAND ALONE
TOTEM Holography

Optional Totem "Beak" tuning system
- discover its amazing ability on any speaker.

Discover...
Absolute reality... Musicality...
Rhythm... Speed...
AND SOUL SECOND TO NONE
AT ANY PRICE.

ACOUSTIC
4665, Bonavista avenue, Montreal (Quebec)
H3W 2C6 CANADA
Tel: (514) 259-1062 Fax: (514) 259-4968
www.totemacoustic.com
Jeff Rowland Design Group Coherence preamplifier & Cadence moving-coil phono stage

The Jeff Rowland Design Group has long been renowned for the exquisite quality of its chassis. The company was one of the first to promote fully balanced topologies in preamplifiers and amplifiers in the high-end market, one of the first to offer a sonically acceptable remote control, and one of the few to offer a battery power option for their amplifier line.

In the past few years Jeff Rowland has revamped his entire product line in an effort to elevate performance to the highest level. For his new preamps, he has reexamined mechanical, thermal, electrical, and interface parameters in order to minimize the impact of vibration, electrical resonances, excess energy-storage effects, and susceptibility to the performance-degrading impact of RFI/EMI. At the same time, the products had to be both buildable and serviceable, if not exactly “affordable,” while possessing the Rowland Group's

**Coherence:** Three-piece solid-state, transformer-balanced, line-level remote-control preamplifier. Inputs and outputs on XLR connectors (pin 3 wired as noninverting). Volume control range: 63.5dB in 0.5dB steps. Preset gain range: 0–20dB. Frequency response: 0.5Hz–160kHz, −3dB. Channel separation: >110dB, 20Hz–20kHz. Input impedance: switchable between 18k and 600 ohms. Maximum input level: 13V RMS (0dB gain). Output noise level: 12μV, 20Hz–20kHz (0dB gain). S/N ratio: >96dB. Power supply: AC-assisted, microprocessor-based rechargeable battery power supply, using two 12V, 7.2 amp/hour, maintenance-free, lead-acid batteries. Battery service life: 5–8 years. Power consumption: 40W max, 10W nominal. **Dimensions:** 17.5” W by 3.7” H by 5” D (with power supply). Combined weight: 83 lbs. **Serial numbers of units reviewed:** C0080 (Coherence), D0080 (power supply), auditioning; C0585 (Coherence), D0585 (power supply), measuring. **Price:** $14,500 with power supply.

**Cadence:** balanced moving-coil phono stage with internal step-up transformers and four levels of selectable cartridge loading/amplifier gain. Frequency response: 0.5Hz–180kHz (RIAA accuracy guaranteed to within 0.1dB, 20Hz–20kHz). **Dimensions:** 17.5” W by 3.7” H by 5” D. Weight: 35 lbs. **Serial number of unit reviewed:** P0048, auditioning; P0216, measuring. **Price:** $3300. Optional standalone battery power supply, $3400; optional standalone AC supply (if Coherence not used), $950. **Approximate number of dealers:** 35. **Manufacturer:** Jeff Rowland Design Group, P.O. Box 7231, Colorado Springs, CO 80933. Tel: (719) 473-1181. Fax: (719) 633-4158. Website: www.jeffrowland.com.
undeniable aesthetic panache.

The Coherence preamplifier and companion Cadence phono stage are the crown jewels of Rowland's current lineup. The massive, two-piece, line-level Coherence and the equally solid Cadence combine brute-force design solutions, cutting-edge fineness, and venerable techniques of old newly revamped, all in a highly modular and flexible layout.

I bought Rowland's original flagship Coherence battery-powered preamp for my reference system not long after its introduction almost four years ago. Had it not been for the distractions of my house-building project, I'd have had this report to you long ago. The silver lining from this delay is that the companion Cadence moving-coil phono stage appeared in the interim, and the Coherence itself underwent refinement, to Series 2 status.

**Mechanical design**

The Coherence and Cadence are housed in three separate enclosures machined from solid billets of 6061 T-6 aluminum. The line-stage chassis are the same height and width as the Cadence phono stage, but the latter is 5” shallower. As a result, the two Coherence main chassis weigh an incredible 88 lbs, while the Cadence is a still hefty 35 lbs. These breathtakingly beautiful enclosures could probably survive a nearfield nuclear explosion.

The Cadence's rear panel is more than 1” thick and provides access to a pair of internal cylindrical step-up transformers nestled within holes routed out of the main body's rear panel. These transformers straddle a small circuit board that rests within its own milled-out socket and contains the active components. The rear panel also features two pairs of input and output XLRs, a 5-pin XLR power-supply connector, and a grounding stud. A single central button and minuscule green LEDs on the front panel select and signal four levels of cartridge loading and configuration of the unit's moving-coil step-up transformers.

The Coherence's main faceplate features a removable center section sporting a removable knob and very high-quality selection buttons and rocker switches. It can either be left in place or used as a standalone, full-function, wired remote control—perhaps mounted on a tripod beside your listening chair.

### Measurements

**Coherence**

Although the Coherence can be used with single-ended-to-balanced adapters, it is a true balanced design, so all the measurements were done in balanced mode. The Coherence inverted signal polarity, as Jeff Rowland adheres to the older US convention of wiring pin 3 of the XLR to be “hot” rather than pin 2, as the AES now recommends. The input impedance was 11k ohms in the normal setting, 690 ohms in “terminated” mode; the output impedance was a low 55 ohms across the audio band.

The volume control operated in accurate 0.5dB steps up to an indicated maximum setting of “63.5.” As supplied, the voltage gain was unity, but up to 20dB can be dialed-in for each input. This was an accurate 20dB, meaning that an indicated “43.5” was the unity-gain volume-control setting when the gain was as high as it would go. The noise floor with the inputs shortsed was low in level, but did vary with the volume-control and gain settings. With maximum gain but the volume control set to minimum, the S/N ratios were 87dB (wideband), 99.8dB (22Hz-22kHz), and 102dB (A-weighted), all ref. 1V output. Keeping the conditions the same but setting the control to its maximum worsened all the above figures by around 19dB.

The Coherence's frequency response (fig.1) was perfectly flat up to 20kHz, with a gentle rolloff to -1dB at 100kHz after. The channel separation was superb, at better than 110dB below 1kHz, with only a slight decrease above the audioband.

The preamplifier was also very linear. Fig.2 shows the spectrum of a 50Hz sinewave reproduced at a very high level into 100k ohms. Both the second and third harmonics (100Hz and 150Hz, respectively) are around -83dB (0.007%) — ie, very low. In addition, the distortion level didn't increase when the load was reduced to a much more demanding 600 ohms. However, if the THD+noise is plotted against frequency at this high output level — 5V is more than twice as high as the preamplifier will be asked to deliver in practice — the distortion increased dramatically in the low bass (fig.3, top trace below 30Hz). This is due to an increase in odd-order harmonics at these low frequencies, presumably due to the input transformer starting to saturate. If the output level is reduced to a more typical 1V (fig.3, bottom trace below 30Hz), the increase in distortion in the low bass is benign. (The higher level of distortion

---

*Stereophile, September 1999*
the main chassis are six separate “corals” — three per channel — nulled out from the top to house separate machined aluminum modules containing the I/O transformers and active circuitry.

A connector for the external power supply and seven pairs of high-quality XLR inputs populate the rear panel, along with two pairs of record outputs and two pairs of main outputs — the latter to facilitate system biamping.

The degradation in performance that can occur when connecting single-ended products to (typically) actively balanced gear is not an issue with the Coherence. This is true not only because of the use of transformer coupling and Rowland's high-quality RCA-to-XLR adapters, but because the all-too-common “Pin 1 Problem” has been eliminat-ed: pin 1 of the XLR inputs, which carries the shield current, connects directly to the chassis instead of allowing this unwanted source of noise to penetrate the enclosure and mingle with the audio signal's ground paths — a source of countless headaches and sonic compromises in both the pro and consumer audio worlds. As a result, the chassis acts as an extension of the interconnect shield, as it should. Prospective owners who plan on keeping other components that lack XLR connections, yet who are averse to adapters, can simply have their cables re-terminated with XLRs on one end and RCAs on the other. When having new cables made, just follow Rowland's XLR I/O convention: pin 3 non-inverting, pin 2 inverting, which is the opposite of the AES standard.

at higher frequencies in this graph is actually due to the apparent rise in the noise floor at the lower output level and should be ignored)

At 1kHz, the Coherence could output around 15V before clipping (fig.4, bottom trace), even into 600 ohms. But at 20Hz (fig.4, top trace) the maximum output was about 8V, as expected from fig.3. Again, this difference will be irrelevant in practice.

Finally, Shannon Dickson made much of the Rowland's rejection of common-mode noise on its balanced inputs. I therefore ran a sweep, examining the Coherence's rejection of a very high common-mode signal, 1V present on both pin 2 and pin 3 of the input XLR. The results with the volume control set to its maximum and the gain set to 20dB are shown in fig.5 (bottom traces). Below 10kHz, the leakage is below the preamplifier's noise floor. Above that frequency there is a gradual drop in the rejection ratio, somewhat different in the two channels, to 53dB at 20kHz, which is still excellent. This is the first preamplifier whose common-mode rejection ratio (CMRR) I have measured, so I repeated the test under identical conditions for the only other fully balanced preamplifier I had to hand—the Mark Levinson No.380S sample that I purchased in 1998. The CMRR for this all-active balanced circuit is better than the noise floor below 3kHz, with then a 6dB/octave decrease to 48dB at 200kHz. The Rowland is slightly better than the Levinson at ultrasonic common-mode rejection, but I'm not sure what influence, if any, this has on sound quality.

The Coherence not only features looks to die for, but its measured performance is also superb.

**Cadence**

I measured the Cadence only in the mode in which it will most likely be used: the “Lo-Gain Amp/HI-Load" setting suitable for use with typical MC cartridges. The voltage gain in this mode was 62.4dB, the output impedance a low 79 ohms. Despite the high gain, noise levels were very low. The unweighted signal/noise ratios ref. 1V output were 70dB (10Hz–50kHz) and 71.7dB (22Hz–22kHz), these improving to 78dB when A-weighted.

The Cadence's RIAA error is shown in fig.6. A slight channel imbalance (0.09dB) can be seen, as can a slight rolloff (-0.6dB) at 20kHz. The distortion levels are very low, as is seen in the output spectrum with the Cadence reproducing 50Hz at a very high level of 6.7V (fig.7). Referenced to a standard MC output level of 500μV at 1kHz, the measured overload margin was around 20dB across the audio band — which is good.

—John Atkinson

**Inside the Coherence**

All I/O connectors in the Coherence are soldered directly to a narrow PC board spanning the inside rear panel. This board also contains high-quality switching relays that allow independent listen and record functions on each input. In addition, since the relays route a given signal to a single pair of Jensen input transformers per channel, only the selected input is connected at any one time. All other inputs might as well not exist electrically, greatly reducing the opportunity for cross-contamination during playback of the selected source.

This rear board also contains one of three Microchip PIC microprocessors used in the Coherence; the other two reside within the power-supply chassis and the front faceplate. Communication...
Transformers and the Audio Interface: A Question of Balance

The majority of Jeff Rowland's new products are equipped with line-level input transformers. In the early days of stereo, the use of transformer-coupling components in the recording studio was the norm. Nearly all of the most prized recordings of the late 1950s and '60s were captured through a whole chain of these passive devices. Because at that time construction of good line-level transformers was more of an art than a science, quality was understandably variable. In addition, limitations in material quality, knowledge, and precision equipment led to products that were good at isolating one component from another and preventing unwanted hum, but often suffered from limited bandwidth, core saturation, audible hysteresis, and excess phase-distortion anomalies. Combined with high cost, these flaws led to a rapid reduction in the use of line-level transformers after the appearance of cheap silicon differential amplifiers, claimed to be "electronic transformers."

Unfortunately, the majority of these active-differential input topologies fell short of meeting the essential transformer requirement of rejecting unwanted in-band (and some out-of-band) spurious signals. Meanwhile, tremendous progress has been made in the past 25 years in transformer design, quality of core materials, and precise winding technologies. To be sure, many poor-quality audio transformers are still sold, but the few commercial reference-grade devices—such as those made by Jensen Transformers—are extremely consistent, and have largely addressed the performance drawbacks of the old days while enhancing the beneficial qualities inherent to these devices. But they're still very expensive.

The Jensen JT-10-KBD, used in the Coherence, sports a reported bandwidth of 0.3Hz-160kHz, and a deviation from linear phase (DLP) of less than 1° across the audible band. (DLP is a true measure of phase distortion.) This is accomplished by taking what used to be a disadvantage of transformers—a degree of intrinsic leakage inductance and capacitive coupling between the primary and secondary windings—and shaping those reactances through specific winding techniques to form a second-order Bessel low-pass filter when the DC resistance of the device is taken into consideration. As a result, ultrasonic transformer resonances that can intermodulate with subsequent, poorly filtered amplifying stages are eliminated. Another key benefit of this inherent low-pass filter is good RFI/EMI rejection up to a claimed 30MHz.

Jensen states that their large, high-quality nickel-alloy cores make saturation a nonissue, even at inputs as high as +22dBu—far above any home-playback SPL. As a result, transformer-generated distortion is effectively quelled at any realistic signal level. If all of this wasn't enough benefit from a simple passive device that requires no trimming and lasts a lifetime, the primary benefit of an input transformer is its outstanding common-mode rejection ratio (CMRR).

Transformers vs diff-amps

A fundamental limitation of most actively balanced input circuits compared to a good input transformer is revealed by examining a basic misconception of what constitutes a balanced interface. Semantics is part of the problem—balanced operation implies a circuit capable of robust common-mode rejection (CMR), regardless of its signal symmetry. Signal symmetry is achieved at any point along the signal path when the positive and negative legs of a normal-mode signal are of equal amplitude but opposite polarity with respect to ground reference. It's also important to distinguish between balanced topology within a component, where symmetry can play a key role, and the limited value of symmetry through the analog interface. If perfect-differential signal symmetry is maintained throughout a component—no small feat—benefits such as improved power-supply rejection and reduction of even-order distortion can occur.

Unfortunately, many active or discrete interface designs were built based on the erroneous assumption that signal symmetry alone ensured good balanced operation, and thus a high CMRR. In reality, common-mode rejection is not an inherent advantage of signal symmetry. Hence, a purely symmetrical interface is not inherently balanced. On the other
event, it's easy to accidentally hit a Balance button instead of Volume on the remote; double-check the tiny front-panel indicator lights occasionally.

**Modular design**
The six aluminum modules that form the heart of the Coherence are mounted to the chassis floor with elastomeric grommets for maximum isolation and rigidity. Indeed, this preamp showed the least sensitivity to external vibration of any electronic component I've had in my system. All modules are connected to each other, and to the I/O board on the back panel, with fine-gauge, tightly twisted Cardas hookup wire. Rowland feels that combining a small, tight loop area for the active circuitry, with twisted round wire to connect it all together, maximizes effective speed while minimizing RFI and magnetic coupling to the circuitry.

Where a single input transformer for each channel would have been adequate, Rowland went all out and used two Jensen JT-10-KBD transformers per channel, these contained within the far left and right modules. With a pair of these devices per side, the output of each forms an extra pair of cross-coupled, opposite-polarity signals to ensure a differential signal path all the way through the preamp, while also providing the vital mode conversion and resulting common-mode rejection (CMR) just before each channel feeds separate stereo attenuators. These transformers also provide isolation and compensation for the key amplifier circuitry, located on the same small circuit board as the attenuator within the second set of sealed modules.

A large Jensen JT-11-DM line-level output transformer, complete with 15MHz bandwidth and ultra-low phase distortion, is found in each of the two innermost modules. This is a very different animal from an input transformer, or the type of output transformer typically used to couple the output of a tube amplifier to a reactive loudspeaker. While they're sonically less important than at the inputs, Rowland insists that these output transformers ensure the best possible balance of the signal feeding the downstream component, while also reducing “backdoor” contamination. (See sidebar, “Transformers and the Audio Interface.”)

**Synergistic serendipity**
Unlike the MDAC often recruited for use as a volume control in other remote-controlled preamps, the Coherence employs Crystal Semiconductor CS-3310 digitally controlled stereo analog attenuators. The CS-3310 is specifically designed for superior sonic performance, yet without the inherent disadvantages of a DAC used for volume control: routing the music signal through a series of poor-quality polysilicon resistors and CMOS switches, excess “zipper noise,” and coarse steps of attenuation. In addition, Rowland claims that a special synergy occurs between the input transformers and these attenuators in the Coherence.

In spite of the many advantages of the CS-3310, one of the chip's few limitations is that it can handle only a moderate input voltage (around 8V peak-to-peak) without overloading. However, since the two attenuators are preceded by transformers with a 12dB step-down, they won't be overdriven.

The Coherence's active circuitry employs an ultra-high-speed current-feedback amplifier block built around the excellent AD-815 chip from Analog Devices. This amplifier's transimpedance topology essentially comprises an input buffer followed by a current mirror, then an output buffer. An AD-815 has a large open-loop bandwidth, a slew rate of nearly 1000V/µs, and robust stability while driving reactive loads. It also offers unusually high output capability — up to a whopping 500mA — and can sustain linear current drive into widely varying...
loads—even down to around 8 ohms!

Furthermore, the AD-815 is not slew-rate-limited, as a voltage-feedback design can be: as the signal voltage varies, the slew rate remains stable. This leads to improved settling time and reduced energy storage, with their associated smearing effects. The Jensen input transformers inherently form a Bessel low-pass filter as well, providing the necessary bandwidth-limiting function for the signal and obviating the need for any additional signal-filtering components to protect the amplifier. Rowland claims that this feature, combined with careful compensation and bypass of the amplifier’s power-supply pins, helped achieve his design goal of a blazingly fast, highly stable, and linear preamp with robust immunity from spurious high-frequency artifacts and EMI—all key parameters for superior sound quality under real-world conditions.

Clean power

Any amplifier or preamp is essentially a DC power supply modulated by the AC signal. This makes the quality of the power supply a vital issue. You often hear sophisticated, well-designed AC supplies described as being “almost as good as a pure battery,” and the best of these designs indeed come very close. Rowland uses the real McCoy.

Inside the chassis of the power supply, which handles both the Coherence and Cadence, a large potted toroidal transformer is mounted in a deep central well and flanked by a pair of Panasonic 12V, 72 amp-hour, rechargeable lead-acid batteries in their own machined corrals. These form a full-function, high-quality AC power supply that also acts as a sophisticated, microprocessor-controlled battery charger. The main technical advantage derived from a battery-powered preamp stems from its inherently low noise and very low source impedance, maintained over a wide frequency range. In addition, pure DC operation avoids the conducted and radiated noise typically produced by rectifiers and regulators.

In this design, the preamp and phono stage always use battery power. Even when in AC mode, the power supply is simply float-charging the batteries while both, in parallel, supply juice to the circuitry. As a result, even while recharging the batteries, you’ll still achieve almost all the sonic benefits of battery power. Lead-acid batteries lack the “memory” effect of nicads, but good design practice and battery longevity dictate that you not deep-cycle them. Rowland designed the system to prevent discharging below 50% of full charge. Once you’ve gone that far—which takes between 14 and 18 hours of pure DC operation—the charger automatically kicks in, and you’re back in float mode without having skipped a beat. I found that if you run the Cadence and Coherence simultaneously, you should manually return the power supply to AC mode before going to bed to prevent automatic cycling. Otherwise, you may lose your memory settings after the charger reboots.

In this design, the preamp and phono stage always use battery power.

As a result, even while recharging the batteries, you’ll still achieve almost all the sonic benefits of battery power.

Step-up with Cadence

The circuit design and parts selection of the Cadence moving-coil phono stage match the Coherence in quality, sophistication, and simplicity.

The prime criterion for superb moving-coil amplification is the ability to extract and preserve the dynamic integrity of a minute, sub-milliampere signal while precisely mapping the RIAA curve. This is no trivial task, but one ideally suited for a step-up transformer—provided it’s carefully designed and matched to the range of cartridge parameters it’s likely to see, as well as to the following amplification stage. A moving-coil cartridge is an inherently balanced device. Rowland took advantage of this by encouraging Jensen to design a special MC step-up transformer optimized for a circuit of low impedance and very low noise. This is unlike most step-up devices, which are followed by a high-impedance amplification stage.

The resulting Jensen JT-346-AX step-up transformers sport a very wide bandwidth of over 200kHz, “almost inescapable” phase distortion, and an extremely high Common-Mode Rejection Ratio (CMRR): from 145dB at 60Hz to 106dB at 3kHz! High CMRR can be particularly important in a phono stage due to the considerable amount of common-mode noise that often contaminates the low-level signals in tonearm leads.

The two transformers are completely encased in their own triple-mu-metal, double-copper-plated nested shields and are not ground-referenced, in order to prevent ground-current leakage from contaminating such fragile signals. The transformers can also be optimized to essentially any MC cartridge on the market by choosing one of four ranges via the Cadence’s front-panel button. The low-gain setting has two impedance ranges: 250 and 400 ohms, ideal for cartridges whose DC resistance ranges from 5 to 25 ohms; and from 25 to 60 ohms and above. The high-gain setting also has two levels: for cartridge resistances of 3 ohms and below, and those between 3 and 5 ohms.

The transformers are followed by an AD-797 op-amp chip, used to shape the bottom half of the RIAA frequency curve (50Hz–2.12kHz). Above this frequency, the RIAA shaping is done with a purely passive topology using top-quality components. Unlike typical, series-feedback active equalization, which tends to cause a rising response above 20kHz, passive handling at the top end of the RIAA slope allows the ultrasonic response to continue to drop off at 6dB/octave.

Following the RIAA stage, a very robust INA-103 instrumentation amplifier buffers the unit’s output and allows the Cadence to drive long lines and capacitive loads with relative ease. The Cadence can be powered by the second output on the Coherence’s battery power supply, or can be bought as a standalone unit with either its own battery or an AC-only supply.

A sonic reference

The credo to which any top-drawer preamplifier must aspire is also of paramount importance to me as a reviewer and music lover: First, do no harm. While no preamp I’ve evaluated is truly transparent, a few at the upper end of the quality scale come close—and not all of them cost a small fortune. Without a doubt, though, the Coherence and Cadence are solid members of this elite class.

Sonic differences can be heard even among the best preamps, yet it’s all too easy to exaggerate such differences when describing what often amounts to subtle shifts of timber, dynamic shading, transparency, and image perspective between otherwise top-tier products. When evaluating products that strive for genuine neutrality and are solidly engineered—such as the Coherence and Cadence—it’s also easy to attribute
qualities to the preamp that properly belong to other components or variables in the record/playback chain. Ironically, there's often more to say about the sound of those models — some of them very costly — that use subtle colorations for euphonic appeal, and about second-class products in which budget restrictions place an audible cap on performance.

My impressions of the Coherence apply in full to the Cadence as well. However, the Cadence made its own mark as easily the quietest and most dynamic phono stage I've heard. Indeed, with my car to the tweeter and no material being played, it was as quiet as my digital processor! This fact is all the more impressive because much of Honolulu, where I live, is notorious for strong RFI/EMI fields. In my experience, the Coherence/Cadence rig took the brass ring as the most consistent performers in their class, particularly in such tough environments.

Good bypass tests can ferret out and confirm subtle variations between competing products, while adding a critical measure of proportion that helps tether one's perspective to terra firma. In this case, I achieved a healthy 86dB SPL at my listening chair by directly connecting the 2V output of a Muse Model 296 24-bit/96kHz processor to the active crossover of my Audio Artistry Beethoven Grand speakers. After repeated listening to familiar tracks, the preamps under test were reinserted and precisely matched to the direct digital source, with only a short interconnect as a second variable. This technique eliminates the attenuator and/or impedance variations possible when using a passive line controller, or a CD player with built-in volume control, as a "bypass" setup.

Under such scrutiny most preamps quickly reveal a loss in transparency, shifts in image perspective and/or focus, and masking of low-level harmonic decay. Poorer models even show evident timbral colorations and a blunting of the leading edges of transients. That said, it's surprising just how small in scale these anomalies are among the better preamps I've auditioned.

There was a very faint loss in transparency when the Cadence was added to the chain during these tests, and though I easily heard extremely fine levels of decay detail through the preamp, the direct bypass mode made subtle decay characteristics slightly more immediate. However, it took multiple attempts to sort out these variations with certainty, and resolution of the leading edges of transients and harmonic timbres remained remarkably consistent with that of the direct sound, varying only with a small increase in smoothness and the richness of broadband timbre with the Cadence in the system. However, the big surprise — and a first for me — was that the Coherence actually sounded better to my ears than the direct digital source in two key areas: a greater sense of envelopment by the music; and a greater solidity, or "body," to sonic images. Perhaps these subtle improvements over the direct source were due to the reduction of high-frequency artifacts from the processor's output by the low-pass filtering and CMR qualities of the preamp's input transistors. While I'm speculating here, that's one plausible explanation. Your mileage may vary, depending on your source components and electrical environment. Nevertheless, the Coherence was the overall winner in these revealing bypass tests — one reason it's still my reference preamp.

But as illuminating as A/B tests are, they don't fully convey the musical impact of a given preamp in a given system. Only extensive listening to a wide variety of familiar material can do that. And it was over the long haul that the Coherence and Cadence really shone.

Enduring sonic characteristics of the Rowland rig included crystal-clear boundary definition of the soundstage combined with an uncannily seamless resolution of acoustic space within those borders. This gear conveyed such a high degree of transparency and transient dexterity that I could easily identify faint recording nuances and the finest imprints of source components. Delicate harmonic textures were vividly preserved during their journey through the preamp, and both the leading edges and decay tails of transients were cleanly delineated with seductive effortlessness, yet without suppressing the rhythmic drive of music or making it sound overly recessed. Indeed, the Coherence portrayed outstanding broadband dynamic contrast.

But perhaps most striking was a unique combination of two of the attributes mentioned above. When I listened to good recordings through the Coherence, I heard a deep, expansive soundscape anchored by superb low-frequency grip and extension, along with a powerful sense of being enveloped by both the music and the recording venue. In my experience of components that convey good depth, the soundstage usually starts a fair distance behind the speakers and extends back from there, lending the sound an overall laid-back perspective. Through the Coherence, the soundstage and instrumental images were spread across the breadth and depth of the room behind the speakers, while a subtle yet tangible sense of the venue's acoustic

---

**Associated Equipment**

**Analog source:** Imedia RPM-2 turntable and unipivot tonearm,
Lyra Da Capo and Sounds of Silence Crown Jewel cartridges.

**Digital sources:** Transports: Muse Model Eight (DVD/CD), Resolution Audio VT-960 (CD), Sonic Frontiers Transport-3 (CD), Pioneer DV-500 (DVD/CD). Processors: Muse 296 (DVD/CD), Sonic Frontiers Processor-3 (CD), Muse Model Two-Plus (CD), Resolution Audio D-92 (DVD/CD).

**Preamplification:** Z-Systems RDP-1 digital preamp, BAT VK-40, BAT VK-3i, Muse Model 3 Plus, Audio Research LS22, Sonic Frontiers SFL-2, Jeff Rowland Design Group Consummate.

**Power amplifiers:** Jeff Rowland Design Group Model MC-6 six-channel amplifier, battery-powered Model 6 monoblocks, two ATI AT-1504 four-channel amps, two prototype LFD four-channel amps.

**Loudspeakers:** Audio Artistry Beethoven Grand, quad-amplified system.


**Accessories:** Arcici Suspense isolation stand, Symposium Ultra and Super Platforms and Rollerblocks, Audio Power Ultra Wedges, Vibra-plane pneumatic isolation platforms, Townshend Seismic Sinks, Signal Guard platform, Acoustics' First Ceiling Cloud and custom Bermuda Corner Traps. — Shannon Dickson
extended beyond the front of the speakers, embracing me with a powerful sensation of presence. Obviously, the speakers and the rest of the system must be up to the task, but this appealing amalgam of sonic illusions really stood out with the Coherence at the helm.

Wrap-up

Regardless of the actual cause-and-effect relationships that led to the stellar performance of the Coherence/Cadence, there’s no denying that the system constitutes a tour de force of preamplifier design. However, though this combo’s sound quality has not been surpassed or equaled in my living room, at least two other line-level models pending review have come close enough—and for considerably less than $17,800—that I can’t make a blanket recommendation if sound quality is your only criterion.

I do, however, strongly endorse this dynamic duo to anyone who insists on the very best across the board, including a bulletproof interface to the outside world.

I strongly endorse this dynamic duo to anyone who insists on the very best across the board, including a bulletproof interface to the outside world.
Victor Tiscareno and Byron Collett of AudioPrism are known in audiophile circles for their complete line of power-conditioning products. (See Barry Willis’ omnibus review in the December 1998 Stereophile.) Their intimate knowledge of the ever-capricious electrical supply has resulted in a series of front-end components bearing the company’s logo. The flagship Mana Reference monoblocks, under consideration here, represent AudioPrism’s collected wisdom and engineering savvy taken to its logical extreme.

The Mana is a fine blend of good looks and contemporary circuit design, even though it sports a classic, if somewhat quirky, 6L6/5881 tube array. (The 6L6 is most often associated with guitar amplifiers and is said to be good for about 10,000 hours.) When I mentioned this to Victor at HIFI ‘99, he screwed on his best whatever-do-you-mean-if-anew-we-do-it-that-way look. And when he explained the what and why of it, I have to admit, it all made a lot of sense.

The 20/20
As you’ll see from the photo, the Mana Reference is good-looking, almost architectural. All decked out in burnished golden hues, the monoblock pair makes a strong fashion statement. Despite all the brightwork, the amplifier looks anything but vulgar. There’s a gratifying, unified wholeness to its design that I found very appealing.

Atop the broad expanse of the upper deck, in front of the slotted transformer covers, the tiny phase-splitter tube sits in its own beveled well at the back of a curved, raised console set between the tube arrays. (Cages to protect the tubes, not to mention little fingers and curious pets, are available.) Below the phase-splitter tube is the biasing meter, set into a gracefully raised oval with a rotary control below it to select the tube to be biased. The front panel’s nicely weighted Operate knob is set into a beveled stroke with a subtle LED showing operating status.

Around back, Cardas speaker terminals sit in a convenient vertical array behind the output transformer. Speaker impedance can best be matched to 2, 4, 6, and 8 ohm taps, a neutral tap between each making wiring chores a snap. The neutral taps also facilitate biwiring; all taps are driven, so the user can tailor the output impedance for the associated driver. This is not so remarkable in itself, but it’s one of the Mana’s many thoughtful and well-implemented design elements.

Input is available on single-ended RCAs or balanced XLRs (pin 2 hot), selected via a toggle; another switch tips the amps from ultralinear into triode mode. The switch next to that is for toggling between grounding options: Float disconnects the audio circuit from the chassis ground, Ground reconnects them. One setting should prove quieter than the other.

An IEC power-cord receptacle is tapped into the center of the rear panel.

**Description:** Monoblock tube power amplifier with switchable ultralinear or triode output stage. Tube complement: eight 5881/6L6, four 6SN7, one Raytheon or WE 5842/417A. Bias: class-A/B1 fixed bias with individual adjustment, 6dB global differential feedback (first stage not in feedback loop). Specified output power: 100Wpc into 8, 6, 4, or 2 ohms (20dBW), 115–150W at visible clipping (ultralinear); 55Wpc into 8, 6, 4, or 2 ohms (17.4dBW) (triode). Input impedance: 110k ohms single-ended, 200k ohms balanced. Voltage Gain: 26.5dB. Distortion: 1% THD at full rated power, 20Hz–20kHz. Power consumption: 400W average, 600W full power, 125W auto-bias standby, 75W standby.

**Dimensions:** 15” W by 8.5” H by 25” D. Net weight: 68 lbs each.

**Serial numbers of units reviewed:** 98103001, 98103002.

**Price:** $15,000/pair. Approximate number of dealers: 15.

**Manufacturer:** AudioPrism, 2729 152nd Avenue NE, Redmond, WA 98052. Tel: (425) 869-8482. Fax: (425) 869-1873.

Stereophile, September 1999
It's a chunky number meant for Hubbell 20A IEC-320 connectors rather than the 10A fittings found on most high-end gear. AudioPrism's own AC/RF filtering modules were supplied; I made good use of them running Poor Man's Balanced Power, as described in the May "Fine Tunes."

**Tiscareno's way**

We begin at the power supply, where it's said the quality of any gain stage is ultimately defined. AudioPrism uses 14 precision regulated supplies to energize all circuits, including the high-voltage and high-current output stages. There are two separate regulated DC supplies for the tube filaments, and the input stage gets its own filament supply.

Next, for those of you coming in single-ended, the signal is split into an opposite-polarity pair with zero gain. The Mana's splitter is based on a Raytheon 5842 single triode tube, with the Western Electric 5842/417A a $250 option (when available) for each amplifier ($500/pair). The phase splitter sits right at the input but significantly outside the 6dB global differential negative feedback loop. Tiscareno explains that this reduces noise and improves signal integrity and linearity. Once the signal is split into two phases for push-pull operation, each phase is fed to two gain stages using the highly regarded 6SN7 dual-triode octal-based tube. A push-pull driver couples to the low-impedance grid circuit of the eight 6L6 power tubes. The 6SN7s supplied were Philips JAN (Joint Army Navy) WG7As, the power tubes Sovtek 6L6WXTs.

Balanced input signals bypass the phase-splitter completely; that's one fewer tube and a more direct signal path — what could be wrong with that? Exactly nothing, and that's how I used the Manas for most of the evalu-

---

**Measurements**

Because of the Mana Reference's wide variety of configurations — four output transformer taps, unbalanced or triode output tube transformer operation, balanced and unbalanced inputs — I carried out a complete set of measurements on the amplifier only with balanced input and unbalanced output. I did check some of the performance parameters in the other modes, however. But if no input or output modes are mentioned, assume it's balanced and unbalanced, respectively.

Before I did anything, I warmed up the amplifier at one-third power into 8 ohms for 60 minutes, after which I checked that the bias current for the output tube was correctly set to 45mA each in unilinlear mode. The input impedance measured 95k ohms single-ended and around 400k balanced (the exact figure is hard to specify, as the voltage-drop method I use gave a change of only a couple of millivolts with this high an impedance). The A-weighted noise level was low, the S/N ratio (ref. 1W into 8 ohms) measuring 72dB. However, unweighted with a wide, 10Hz-500kHz bandwidth, the S/N worsened to 54dB due to out-of-band noise. Voltage gain into 8 ohms with balanced drive was 23.7dB (ultralinear) and 22.4dB (triode). With an unbalanced input signal, the gain increased by around 5.5dB, presumably due to the phase-splitter action. (While each output half of the splitter is the same level as the input, the two halves produce two signals in opposite phase, giving a theoretical gain of 6dB.)

The output impedance from the 8 ohm tap was very high, at 3.3 ohms (triode) and 3.7 ohms (ultralinear) over most of the band, rising to 4.75 ohms and 5.5 ohms (respectively) at 20kHz. Using the 4 and 2 ohm taps, the output impedance dropped to 1.7/0.9 ohms (TI) and 1.9/1.1 ohms (U) at 1kHz, but these are all high enough figures to give significant frequency-response modification with real loudspeaker loads.

This can be seen in fig.1, which shows the response into 8 ohms, 4 ohms, and Stereophile's simulated speaker load from the 8 ohm tap. Into pure resistances, there is some extra HF rolloff into the lower loads, with the response 1dB down at 20kHz. But note the large variations into the simulated speaker — these will be audible. Note also the vestigial peak at 55kHz. Even from the 2 ohm tap (fig.2), the response variation will still be audibly significant. But from this tap some peaking...
The Mana operates in ultralinear "partial triode," conservatively rated 100W, and switches easily to all-triode operation.

The transformers aren't huge, but you can bet they're anything but run-of-the-mill. They feature proprietary dual ultralinear primary windings, a standard-configuration secondary, and a "special" tertiary winding. This last supplies a differential feedback circuit that, Tiscareno

The output transformer was matched to the load, with about 115W available at 1% THD+noise in ultralinear mode (20.6dBW), 70W in triode (18.5dBW). I explored the Mana's clipping behavior in some detail using the Miller Audio Research Amplifier Profiler, which drives the amplifier with a low-duty-cycle toneburst that more closely resembles the dynamic demands of a real music signal. Fig.12 shows how the amplifier's distortion changes as the output voltage increases into 8, 4, 2, and 1 ohm (2 ohm tap, triode mode). The same pattern can be seen into each load: a linear
SHOULDN'T THIS BE YOUR NexStep?

Multi-channel DVD software is here and so is your NexStep™ processor from Legacy Audio.

Imagine an all-digital, multi-channel processor that provides the sonic purity of the best stereo preamps while decoding the new Dolby Digital® and DTS™ formats. Envision backward compatibility with your existing Dolby Pro Logic® soundtracks. Add full video switching capabilities controlled by a remote that won't leave you in the dark. And setup — that's as easy as the touch of a button.

Home Theater Easy As... 1 2 3

Legacy Audio

3023 E. Sangamon Ave. • Springfield, IL 62702
Fax: 217-544-1483

1-800-283-4644

Come visit us on the web @ www.legacy-audio.com

Come experience your dream Home Theater this fall and winter in the following cities:

Boston, Washington DC-Baltimore, Dallas, Houston, Miami, Orlando, Oakland, Chicago, Cincinnati, Minneapolis, Denver, Phoenix, Los Angeles, Pasadena, New York City, and Long Island.

Call the factory or visit us on the web for dates and times of these shows

Dolby Digital and Dolby Pro Logic are trademarks of Dolby Laboratories Licensing Corporation
DTS is a registered trademark of Digital Theater Systems, LLC
NexStep is a trademark of Legacy Audio.
before the final biasing operation. All tubes are matched and set for lowest distortion in each amplifier, then marked for placement in the corresponding sockets on the top deck. The clearly marked tube positions and bias-adjustment legends blend into the overall design that you don’t notice them until you need them—and suddenly, there they are before you. Setting the bias, if required, is a snap, even for those as heavily klutzed as I. The 6L6 proved a robust performer that held its 45mA bias with little or no drift.

Four operating modes can be selected with the front-mounted control knob: Off simply means B'bye, and Standby puts the amplifier into quiescent mode with the tubes in bias cutoff and the output muted. If you continue rotating the knob to the Operate position, a one-minute timer holds the amp in Standby to avoid unseemly tube-related thumpage. When the amps come up from Standby they make a low-level electronic burp of sorts. Tiscareno explains that this frisson of sound is a not a flaw but a feature. Hey, think positive. But the amps have impeccable manners; the relays, for example, are quiet and silky-smooth in operation.

The final Operate position, Auto-Mute, is interesting and convenient in that it mutes the audio and switches the bias on the output tubes into cutoff after one hour of no signal. The amps disengage the mute within three seconds of signal reappearing. The result is less heat and power consumption, and so longer tube life. As all other voltages remain up while quiescent, the amp is quickly ready to give of its sonic best.

I’m impressed—it’s all well thought out and neatly implemented.

**Sorcerer, thy name is Mana**

Considering its overall character, the Mana Reference impressed me right...
away as the spiritual heir to the Jadis JA-200, which I once owned and used as my reference. This was especially so in ultralinear mode (the Jadis, too, is an ultralinear design). While the JA-200 uses massive hand-wound transformers and point-to-point wiring to scale the audiophile heights, the Mana does it with the intelligent fusion of traditional tube values and innovative circuit design and support systems.

Aside from triode operation's sweet highs, huge draughts of tonal color, bags of air and harmonious lushness — as if all that weren't enough — the bass proved unusually fine for something on the order of 50W or so. It was pretty stunning as long as the volume control wasn't cranked too far into the red — where K-10 likes to peg it! One memorable evening she bathed the woofers with "Looking Down on London" from Komputer: The World of Tomorrow (Mute 9047-2), a tribute to Kraftwerk that's more enjoyable than you'd imagine. The peppyy, thonky bass line kept the whole sonic construct up on its toes, moving it forward with heft, power, and oomph. The midrange was delightful, full of air, detail, and smoothness, with a complete lack of grain. The highs were sweet and engaging without ever sounding rolled or euphonic. Vee will dance now!

Triode also offered up more air and stunning palpability than I knew what to do with. The bloom, in every good sense of the word, was totally remarkable yet never overdone. Try Fascinoma (Water Lily Acoustics WLA-CS-70 CD), Jon Hassel's striking new release, engineered by Kvi Alexander and featuring Ry Cooder, Jacky Terrason, and Ronu Majumdar. "Secretly Happy" left me ... well, secretly happy deep inside of max headroom made itself known primarily in the bass, which became fat, congested, and way overripe. Switching to ultralinear kept the big, lightweight soundwich technology woofers of the JMlab Uтопias under much better control right out to and beyond the legal posted limit. Okay, not like the giant VTL Wotans or practically any of the hulking, high-power, solid-state giants we've auditioned lately — but still low frequencies of an admirable quality.

When spinning such overdrive bass masters as Leftfield's Leftism (Hard Hands/Columbia CK 67231), I didn't even bother with triode mode. Some recordings are made to be played loud, and this baby is one of them. You might say it's a combination of Ladyship Black Manbazo and Art of Noise, with hefty handfuls of trip-hop and ska thrown in — high-voltage world music, if you need a label. The bass was big, chunky, and moved a lot of colorful, vibrantly charged air. The leading-edge transient information, even down below, was beautifully rendered in the way tubes do so well. It seamlessly blossomed into a harmonically rich and fully pitch-differentiated lobe of acoustic energy, dying back into the noise floor's dusky embers. Not as deep and tight as the aforementioned hugely muscular power plants, but still entertaining, evocative, and extremely palpable.

Let's turn to Alterna (M'A Recordings/Series Momentum M3), composed, performed, and recorded by Stereophile's very own webmaster, Jon Iverson. It's spiritual, ethereal music with dollops of Loop Guru and world-music influence. Running in ultralinear on the 4 ohm taps controlled the deep and abiding bass produced by some of Iverson's massive collection of Balinese instruments.

And the midrange? Don't ask. Last year, while visiting JI and his (fair) better half, Corinna, on the Left Coast, Kathleen and I wriggled in pleasure to the sweet, vibrant tones produced by the beautiful Balinese instruments in the music room. Oh, 10, that bell-like, captivatingly harmonic acoustic developed in practically the same way. Especially in triode, the decay into the noise floor was jaw-dropping. Damn, these AudioPrism amps sounded good.

Female vocals were a sensual delight in either mode, though triode was a good deal more seductive and sexy. Listening to the recent Cassandra Wilson CD, Traveling Miles (Blue Note 8 54123 2), or Sara K.'s fab new No Cover (Chesky JD185), proved revealing and viscerally enjoyable. I noted that while ultralinear sacrificed a certain bloom and ambient decay and sounded slightly drier than triode, the additional power was just what the JMlab Utopias needed to fully develop the soundstage, and especially the acoustic bass. There was a certain precision evident in ultralinear that served to improve the focus quite noticeably. I didn't miss it when enjoying the rounder, less sharp-edged imaging and tonal plunghness of triode mode, but I appreciated it when I switched back. Strangely, while more focused, ultralinear was somehow less palpable than triode! But either mode delivered a huge, well-populated soundstage.

How about the boys? Try Mighty Sam McClain belting it out on Soul Survivor (AudioQuest Music CD 1053). The album was produced by Joe Harley, of course, recorded in analog at 30ips direct

The Mana uses the intelligent fusion of traditional tube values and innovative circuit design to scale the audiophile heights.

Associated Equipment

**Analog source:** Judith Spothemn La Luce turntable/Spi tonearm, Koetsu Rosewood Signature Platinum phono cartridge.

**Digital source:** Forsell Air Bearing CD transport, Burmester 989 CD transport, dCS 972 Sample Rate Converter and dCS Elgar converter at 24/192, direct output to the amps or into the preamp.

**Preamplifiers:** Classé Omega, BAT VK-505E, Burmester 808 Mk.V, YBA Signature 6 Chassis.

**Loudspeakers:** JMlab Utopia.

**Cables:** Synergistic Research De-

**Accessories:** API Power Wedge Ultra and Enhancers, Accuphase PS-1200 Clean Power Supply, ASC Studio Traps, Argent RoomLenses, Polycrystal equipment racks, cones, and cable towers, Signal Guard platforms, Black Diamond Racing shelves and cones, AudioPrism Iso-Bearings, Bright Star Air Mass/Big Rock combo.

— Jonathan Scull

Stereophile, September 1999
to two-track, then mastered by Bernie Grundman in Sony's Direct Stream Digital process, everything wired up with AudioQuest cables. The result is, simply put, magnificent. Mighty Sam does me righteous with "When the Hurt is Over." You just have to experience the way he warbles "Baby you hoit me." My notes: "His intonation is amazing, the deep feeling in his voice, the pain and the hurt, the longing echoed by the deli-

I recommend the AudioPrism Mana Reference most vociferously to all tube-friendly audiophiles.

cate, low-key guitar work. Unbelievably 3-D and palpable, the air and smoothness are remarkable. There's some quality of acoustic seamlessness that DSD gets right that goes down to what seems like the molecular level." And this nugget from Joe Harley's liner note: "Performing for Sam is not about 'showtime,' it's about reaching deep within and giving a piece of himself every time." Well, you can hear it; this is one damn fine recording. And this is one damn fine amplifier system through which to experience the richness and meaning contained therein.

Mana from heaven

Overall, the AudioPrism Mana Reference proved less powerful and transparent than the tour de force that is the (similarly priced) 845-powered Nagra VPA. On the other hand, the Mana Reference is certainly more romantic and colorful than the Swiss amplifier, with more roundness and body to the imaging and more texture and velvet throughout. My sample pair always proved perfectly engaging, and a joy to experience music through. They deployed a lush midrange, a powerful and fulsome bottom end, and a sweeter natured, airy treble that seduced eye and ear alike. Best into a fairly efficient speaker (88dB sensitivity and up, I'd guess), they're sure to bring musical delight to any lucky owner's system.

I recommend the AudioPrism Mana Reference most vociferously to all tube-friendly audiophiles. And, given its easy-to-live-with nature, I recommend it as well to all of you who haven't so far considered tubed amplification. It was a bummer sending them off to Santa Fe for measurements.

Top Five

Best Sound

At HiFi '97, our RM22si became the only $2299 speakers to ever crack the "Top Ten" Best Sound List.

Now the HiFi '98 votes are in, and we've broken yet another price/performance barrier.

Our RM25si is the first $3299 speaker to crack the Top Five! (That's less than the sales tax on the average cost of the other top five!)

At last, a Top Five Best Sound winner you can actually afford to call your own!

The new RM25si - The first $3299 speakers to ever crack the Top Five!

JosephAudio

Effortless Musicality • Exclusive Technology

(800) 474-HIFI (4434)

www.josephaudio.com

Fax (212) 724-2509

Associate Member - PARA

Produced under license from Modafini Acoustical Labs

US Patent #4771466

SEE THE TRANSPARENT CES 99 REPORT

with manufacturer links in the "What's New?" section of our website. Get the complete story about who used Transparent at CES 99 and the exciting new products at these world class exhibits.

Transparent Cables are designed and manufactured by Transparent Audio, Inc.

47 Industrial Park Road

Saco ME 04072 USA

(207) 284-1100

Fax (207) 284-1101

E-mail transparent@transparentcable.com

http://www.transparentcable.com

Stereophile, September 1999
BEST PRODUCTS! BEST PRICE! BEST SERVICE! GUARANTEED!

HARDWARE & ACCESSORIES SALE!!!

BENZ-MICRO MC CARTRIDGES
RUBY II 0.3 or 0.6mV SCALL W/Track$199.99
RECORD 0.4mV SCALL W/Track$199.99
MC H/OC, MOB. LO. 4mV SCALL W/Track$110.99
MC GOLD 60.4mV SCALL W/Track$135.00
MC SILVER 2.4mV SCALL W/Track$350.00
MC 320.2mV SCALL W/Track$350.00
LUGASCHKAP 1 PHONO STAGE Benz & Neubauer Cartridge Magazine

$750 Or More

SLEEVES 4/$24.99

BASIS Turntables & Accessories
Models 1400, 2000 thru 2800 and Debut.
Available with Rega RB250, 300, 900 and
Graham 2.0 Tonearms. Package prices are
available for all models! SCALL

CABLES

- Of course, an Audiophile
- And also a Shopper

1022 ROLLING BARREL RD.
PONDLETON, NJ 07854

- Michael Ruben

- SCALL

- 1022 ROLLING BARREL RD.
PONDLETON, NJ 07854

- Michael Ruben

- SCALL
Mark Levinson No.334 power amplifier

My father couldn’t resist buying electronic and photographic gear. As soon as he heard about a new Polaroid camera, or weather radio, tape recorder, or television, he’d go shopping. He was even more eager to buy an updated version of what he already had. He’d buy one for himself, and sometimes he’d give me and my three brothers one as a birthday or Christmas gift. (I often thought he took more pleasure from giving to us than he did from getting his own.)

Dad would have loved the new Mark Levinson No.334 amplifier.

The 125Wpc No.334 is the second generation—introduced four years after its predecessor, the 100Wpc No.331—of the company’s smallest 300-series dual-monoaural amplifier. Even if he had been a No.331 owner, Dad would have wasted no time in purchasing the 25% more expensive No.334. He’d have pointed to the No.331’s and No.333’s positive reviews in this magazine (Vol.19 Nos.1 and 12, respectively) and their Class A standings in “Recommended Components.” He’d mention that the No.334 uses components and technologies derived from the $19,950/pair Mark Levinson No.33H monoblock (reviewed in Vol.21 No.1), which won Stereophile’s 1998 Joint Amplification Component of the Year Award. And he’d itemize the Madrigal accessories: the rugged white handling gloves, the optional Madrigal Balanced Bridging Adapter Kit ($375), and the No.331.5 cyanate-ester voltage-board update ($1950) for No.331 owners.

Opening the carton

Even at 112 lbs shipping weight, the hefty Mark Levinson No.334 power amplifier is the baby in Levinson’s 33-series dual-mono solid-state amplifier family. Its bigger brothers are the 250Wpc No.335 (155 lbs, $7900) and the 350Wpc No.336 (165 lbs, $9500).

Stacking the No.334 atop the No.331 was the only way I could tell them apart. The newer amplifier’s subtle external cosmetic changes include rounded edges on the heatsink fins and curved silver faceplate, and a perforated grille in the top cover plate. All units are certified for sale in Europe, and therefore come with an AC mains switch, which can be used to disconnect the control circuit power supply from the AC mains without having to unplug the amp itself. My father would have delighted in the three control ports set just below this switch: the remote turn-on trigger jacks; the Mark Levinson Communication Link Ports, which allow the amplifier to be controlled by a 30/300-series Levinson pre-amplifier; and two PHAST™-compatible ports for two-way communication with a home automation controller.

Inputs to the amplifier can be managed via single-ended RCA or balanced XLR connectors—U-shaped shorting plugs connect pin 1 (signal ground) to pin 3 (signal, inverting) in each rear-panel XLR input to reduce noise pickup during single-ended operation. (These must be removed for balanced operation.) The Madrigal bridging input adapter uses the XLR inputs and short lengths of CZ-Gel cable to reconfigure the two channels of the 334 into a single, more powerful amplifier rated at 500W RMS into 8 ohms.

The No.334’s output stage carries a 25% greater continuous power output rating per channel than the 331’s. Its bipolar output power transistors are packaged in small plastic cases instead of the No.331’s more microphonic metal TO3 cans, and are clamped to the heatsinks with an aluminum bar. The result is an output stage with lower noise, lower THD and IMD, and better squarewave performance.1 The protection circuit has been upgraded to prevent damage to the output stage if the amplifier is switched from standby to full operation when there is a short

---

1 Because the No.331 was designed for the widest open-loop bandwidth, Madrigal’s engineers selected an under-damped system, Stenheim’s test bench confirmed this via a rise in ultrasonic response, with a 1.5dB peak at 100kHz. There was some initial overshoot and a single cycle of ringing on the 10kHz squarewave response. Madrigal didn’t feel that this related to the amplifier’s sonic performance, but in theTunes of the No.334’s output stage, they applied compensation to critically damp the amplifier’s ultrasonic response.

*Description:* Solid-state dual-mono power amplifier. Frequency response: 20Hz–20kHz, ±0.1dB. THD: ≤0.5% (FTC). Power output: 125Wpc into 8 ohms (21dBW), 250Wpc minimum continuous into 4 ohms (24dBW), 500Wpc minimum continuous into 2 ohms (27dBW), 500Wpc into 8 ohms bridged (27dBW). Input impedance: 100k ohms balanced, 50k ohms single-ended. Voltage gain: 26.8dB. Input sensitivity: 130mV for 2.83V output, 1.44V for full output. Output impedance: ±0.05 ohms, 20Hz–20kHz. Damping factor: >800, 20Hz–20kHz into 8 ohms. S/N: >80dB (ref. 1W). Power consumption: typically 260W at idle, 110W in standby.

*Dimensions:* 17.56" (446mm) W by 9.3" (237mm) H by 18.85" (479mm). D. Shipping weight: 112 lbs (50.9kg).

*Serial numbers of units reviewed:* 1194, 1252.

*Price:* $5900. Approximate number of dealers: 70.

*Manufacturer:* Madrigal Audio Laboratories, P.O. Box 781, Middletown, CT 06457. Tel: (860) 346-0896. Fax: (860) 346-1540. Web: www.madrigal.com.
As virtually normal values. 20kHz.) The frequency 0.014 speaker weighted was 22Hz-22kHz only. The is anced was into the circuit includes two triple-bypassed, 44,000μF, low-ESR electrolytic filter capacitors per channel; a soft-clipping circuit to reduce the audible effects of amplifier clipping or overloading; adaptively biased output stages that are intended to provide much of the benefits of class-A operation without generating huge amounts of heat; and independent regulation of all voltage gain stages.

The No.334 includes the exotic “S” series printed circuit board material—a cyanate-ester composite—used in Madrigal’s Reference No.33 and No.33H amplifiers. These PCBs have a lower and more stable dielectric constant, resulting in better electrical isolation of circuit stages and improved sound. Madrigal's David Nauber explained that if the dielectric constant is too high—as it is with fiberglass—the PCB signal traces, separated by dielectric configuration, can store energy like a capacitor and cause the circuit board “to sing along with the music.” The two avocado-green cyanate-ester voltage-gain (VG) PCBs that lie just under the 334’s top cover cost Madrigal 10 times more than the No.331’s original dark-green fiberglass VG boards. Because Madrigal attributes much of the No.334’s sonic improvements to the new boards, they are available as a dealer-

**Measurements**

A complete set of measurements of the Mark Levinson No.334 was made in the balanced configuration. Selected readings were also performed in unbalanced mode. Unless otherwise noted, the results here refer to balanced operation.

Following its one-hour pre-conditioning test, the Mark Levinson’s heat sinks were hot, but still could be touched without discomfort. The amplifier’s voltage gain into 8 ohms measured 28dB, balanced or unbalanced. The input impedance measured 98k ohms balanced, 50.7k ohms unbalanced. The DC offset was a very low 15mV in both channels. The No.334 is noninverting at its unbalanced input; pin 2 of the balanced input is positive. The unweighted S/N ratio at 1W into 8 ohms measured 79.2dB over a 22Hz–22kHz bandwidth, 58.1dB balanced from 10Hz to 500kHz, and 81.6dB A-weighted. The broadband, unweighted result is unusually high for a high-performance amplifier. All possible grounding schemes were tried, with little change. The unbalanced S/N measured only a small fraction of a dB higher. Most of the noise is above 80kHz, it is unlikely that it will be audible.

The No.334’s crosstalk was so low as to be irrelevant. The measured output impedance of the No.334 varied from 0.014 to 0.022 ohms—inconsequential values. (The highest reading was at 20kHz.) This amplifier’s frequency response should not vary with the loudspeaker load. Fig.1 shows the No.334’s frequency response. It is so flat to our normal measurement limit of 50kHz that I continued the curve to 200kHz. As you can see, it remained essentially flat to 100kHz with all of our test loads. The unbalanced result (not shown) was virtually identical. Fig.2 shows the amplifier’s 10kHz squarewave response.

The slight overshoot visible on the leading edge is quickly damped, and risetime is excellent. The 1kHz squarewave (not shown) is similar, with the overshoot also visible (but only just).

Fig.3 plots the small-signal THD+noise percentage against frequency. This result is typical of well-designed solid-state amplifiers. The 1kHz, THD+noise waveform at an output of 40W into 4 ohms is shown in fig.4. (The distortion is largely obscured by noise at the lower power readings we usually use for this measurement.) The second harmonic dominates, but the waveform's slight triangularity indicates the presence of higher-order harmonics. This is more pronounced into a 2 ohm load, less so into 8 ohms. (Neither of the latter is shown.)

The distortion spectrum resulting

---

**Fig.1** Mark Levinson No.334, frequency response at (from top to bottom): 1W into 8 ohms, and 2.82V into simulated loudspeaker load (0.5dB/vertical div, right channel dashed).

**Fig.2** Mark Levinson No.334, small-signal 10kHz squarewave into 8 ohms.

**Fig.3** Mark Levinson No.334, THD+noise (%) vs frequency at (from top to bottom at 10kHz): 4W into 2 ohms, 2W into 4 ohms, 1W into 8 ohms, and 2.83V into simulated loudspeaker load (right channel dashed).

**Fig.4** Mark Levinson No.334, 1kHz waveform at 40W into 4 ohms (top), distortion and noise waveform with fundamental notched out (bottom, not to scale).

**Fig.5** Mark Levinson No.334, spectrum of 50Hz sinewave, DC–1kHz, at 167.5W into 4 ohms (linear frequency scale).
installed upgrade kit to No.331-333 owners for $1950 (see sidebar).

Setup
I began listening the day the first No.334, a pre-production model (serial no.1194), arrived. Two weeks later, Madrigal shipped me a full production model (serial no.1252) that differed only in the addition of two diodes to its soft-clipping circuit. Because one can never have too many amplifiers, I expanded my listening tests to include both amplifiers, used in bridged or biamped mode.

Setting up most two-channel stereo amplifiers doesn't require reading a manual. Not so with the No.334. If you don't read p.6 of the 38-page manual — and you should before unpacking this amplifier — you won't know that Madrigal strongly advises a minimum of two people remove the No.334 from its shipping carton.

from a 50Hz input at 167.5W into 4 ohms is shown in fig.5. All artifacts are below ~80dB (0.01%), an excellent result. Fig.6 shows the 19+20kHz intermodulation spectrum at 67.7W into 8 ohms (linear frequency scale).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Load (ohms)</th>
<th>Both Channels Driven W (dBW)</th>
<th>One Channel Driven W (dBW)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>139.9 (21.46) 139 (21.43) 140 (21.56)</td>
<td>113V 114V 114V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(line)</td>
<td>113V 114V 114V</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>243.4 (20.86) 239.5 (20.79) 260.8 (21.16)</td>
<td>112V 112V 114V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(line)</td>
<td>112V 112V 114V</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>430 (20.33)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(line)</td>
<td>112V</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>486 (26.87)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bridged)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(line)</td>
<td>112V</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig.6 Mark Levinson No.334, HF intermodulation spectrum, DC-22kHz, 19+20kHz at 67.7W into 8 ohms (linear frequency scale).

Fig.7 Mark Levinson No.334, distortion (%) vs continuous output power into (from bottom to top): 8 ohms, 4 ohms.

Madrigal strongly advises a minimum of two people remove the No.334 from its shipping carton.

Though the amplifier did meet its specification into 4 ohms with this signal and one channel driven, there was a very slight shortfall into the demanding 2 ohm and 1 ohm loads. Into these impedances, 492W and 829W were available, these powers equivalent to output currents of 15.7A and 2B.AA, respectively. Note the very low levels of distortion in this graph, particularly into 8 and 4 ohms, up to the point where the amplifier starts to clip. There is then a relatively gradual rise to the 1% (~40dB) clipping point due to the No.334's soft-clipping circuit.

With the exception of the unweighted noise floor, which should be inaudible, this is a solid set of measurements.

— Thomas J. Norton

Stereophile, September 1999
Having heard the No.334's strong bass response and dynamic contrasts, I couldn't wait to try Madrigal's MLC780 VG No.331.5 Update Kit on my own No.331 dual-mono amplifier. At $1950 it is an expensive modification, especially when you consider that the difference in retail cost between the No.334 and the discontinued No.331 is only $1000. Madrigal claims that the two cyanate-ester voltage-gain boards account for most of this cost. Besides these PCBs, the kit supplies a new black-anodized "No.331.5" nameplate for insertion into the front panel; a new rear-panel stick-on label stating "No.331.5, Factory Authorized Update," with the serial number; a Whia slotted 2.0x40 precision electronic tool for unlocking the XLR connectors; and instruction sheets with color photographs. Similar upgrades are available for the No.332 and No.333 amplifiers.

Madrigal's David Nauber explained that the update kit was designed for dealer installation, a polite hint that I ignored as I requested a kit. (Installation by an authorized Madrigal dealer is mandatory, or the warranty will be voided.) After four hours of work, three phone calls, and one trip to the hardware store, I had a functioning No.331.5. Swapping VG boards and front-panel nameplates was easy, but unscrewing and then re-screwing the 62 Allen-head bolts securing the top plate, output device covers, heatsink dress bars, VG boards, bottom plate, and front panel to install the replacement parts was demanding, risky, occasionally frustrating, and eventually rewarding.

Demanding? The job required a clean surface, excellent lighting, keen eyesight to seat the four sizes of Allen wrenches required, strong muscles to rotate the amplifier during the job, a Philips screwdriver, a ¾" nut driver, and a power drill with a reinforced cutoff wheel and mandrel to notch a stripped bolt holding the powder-finished bottom plate to the chassis. The instruction booklet's photographs were excellent, and Madrigal's service staff was very helpful and most responsive by telephone.

Risky? The No.331's blue electrolytic filter capacitors held a sizable charge, even after the amplifier had been unplugged from the AC mains for two weeks. Working inside a metal chassis, using metal wrenches to unscrew metal bolts less than an inch from an electrolytic capacitor's positive terminal, and rescuing metal washers when they fell into the chassis provided lots of tension and drama. For safety, I covered the electrolytics with a rubber mat while working inside the chassis.

Frustrating? The screwposts of the new No.331.5 nameplate turned out to be too short to hold down my amplifier's on/off circuit mounting block — a standoff to keep the turn-on circuit away from the metal nameplate — so I had to reinstall the original (No.331) nameplate. Investigations back at Madrigal discovered that early-production No.331s (my unit's serial no.: 1114) used the No.33's thicker mounting block. The service department express-mailed me a thinner piece the next day, and the problem was solved.

Rewarding? For me, the cyanate-ester VG board's sonic improvements were worth all the effort. The added bass heft was heard right away when playing Massive Attack's Unfinished Symphony (Circa WBX2). The soundtrack from My Cousin Vinny (Varèse Sarabande VSD 5364) had much more slam, punch, and drive, like Popeye after a fresh can of spinach. More transparent mids and highs, grain-free and open, were also present. All told, the update brought my old No.331 amplifier more than halfway up to the No.334's level.

However, the 331.5 kit did not transform my amplifier into a full-blown No.334. While certainly improved, deep synthesizer notes did not growl, shock, or surprise as they did when played over a gain-matched No.334 — which produced a wider, deeper soundstage, greater dynamic contrasts, more headroom, and more transparent midranges than did the No.331.5. Owners who like the sonic performance of their No.331 but would like improved bass response will benefit most from this upgrade.

— Larry Greenhill

terrific gripping power while protecting hands from being cut by the heatsinks.

Turning on the amplifier properly also requires a study of the manual, which explains on p.15 that the No.334 needs a minimum of 10 seconds — about four cycles of the slowly blinking front-panel indicator light — before its power supply is fully charged and its circuits are stabilized. The No.334 ignores those who repeatedly push its front-panel standby button — like my 21-year-old son, who tried to play his didgeridoo album while I was at work.2 Turning off the amp by its rear-panel AC mains switch instead of using the standby button generated a spray of static in the speaker from the pre-production No.334, but not in the production model.

The 100A-rated, insulated loudspeaker terminals didn't accept my Qudos QED speaker cables, which terminate in banana plugs.3 As a result, I had to use spade-lug—tipped PSC Pristine R50 biwired speaker cables. The amplifier was driven in single-ended mode from a Mark Levinson ML-7A preamplifier using Levinson interconnects via RCA inputs, and in balanced mode from a Krell KBL preamplifier using balanced PSC Pristine R30 Silver Alloy interconnects via XLR inputs.

Listening

The good news is that the No.334 played with clarity, liquid mids and highs, stunning transparency, and an ability to render dynamic contrasts not evident in listening to the No.331. Whether driving the Dynaudio Contour 3.0, Quad ESL-63, B&W 805 Nautilus, or Revel Salon speakers, both Mark Levinson No.334s did a superb job — I heard no differences between the pilot and production units. The No.334 was ultra-clear, transparent, and in complete control. MIDBASS, midrange, and highs were very, very smooth. Slightly brighter with the Quads than comparison amplifiers, the No.334 was second to none in infusing them with dynamic impact, transparency, and low-frequency solidity.

2 According to the manual: Switch on rear-panel AC mains; push the front-panel Standby button to bring the amplifier from Off to Standby; wait 10 seconds as the indicator light slowly flashes; then push the Standby button a second time. If this procedure has been followed, the internal relays will make a number of soft clacks, after which music can be played.

3 "CE-certified" products are designed so that speaker terminals will not accept dual banana plugs. The AC mains cables some European countries use resemble dual bananas, which means that they can be accidentally — and disastrously — plugged into amplifier speaker terminals.
The biggest improvement the No.334 wrought in dynamic loudspeaker systems was in bass impact. Up till then, along with the discontinued Krell KSA-250, the Bryston 4B-ST stereo amplifier had been my bassmaster, coaxing slam and bass heft from just about any dynamic loudspeaker. All of a sudden, I knew there was a new kid on the block. Power-

**Powered by the No.334,**
even the diminutive B&W 805 Nautilus two-way bookshelf speaker tracked the deepest synthesizer notes, producing powerful, subterranean bass.

cered by the No.334, even the diminutive B&W 805 Nautilus two-way bookshelf speaker tracked the deepest synthesizer notes, producing powerful, subterranean bass from I Ching's "Silk Road," from *Of the Marsh and the Moon* (Chesky WO144).

Its bass slam and definition enabled the No.334 to convey jaw-dropping dynamic contrasts. This effect was much more than just extra headroom. Through the Revel Salons, the No.334 resolved what seemed to be the most subtle dynamic differences, whether the speakers were driven to lease-breaking levels or played softly. When I listened to "The Hand-Off," from the *Sweakers* soundtrack CD (Columbia CK 53146), explosive piano scales jumped out of dead-black silence to send chills up my spine.

Don Dorsey's use of synthesizer chords in "Ascent," from *Time Warp* (Telarc CDJ-80106), thrilled me again. Although I'm familiar with this piece, I had not anticipated how the much the Salon/No.334 combination would intensify my emotional reaction to the music. The sledgehammer bass and transparent highs sent me on an emotional roller coaster, as Dorsey's synthesizer erupted out of total black silence with a run of bells, pulses, whooshes, and high-pitched tones like those produced by running your finger over the rim of a glass—all sweeping back and forth across the soundstage at what seemed an infinite number of different loudness levels. The end—a whip-cracking shot followed by a deep, subterranean rumble—was eerie, tortured, and unnerving. On live concert vocals,
the Salon/No.334 combination developed such powerful rhythmic drive and pace that I jumped out of my seat and began dancing when, on Spyboy (Eminent EM 25001-2), Emmylou Harris broke into a chorus from "Born to Run."

As a result of such dynamic contrasts, the No.334 was able to develop extraordinary instrumental timbre and resolution of fine detail. I heard this while listening to "The Mooche," from Jerome Harris' Rendezvous: Jerome Harris Quintet Plays Jazz (Stereophile STPH013-2). I've used this track to review four different loudspeakers; past notes describe Duke Ellington's composition as "a somber, recessed, dark, blurred, and distant tune, like a train passing in the night." Putting the No.334 in the audio chain brought forth the most dramatic, focused, and stunningly transparent presentation I'd heard. The amplifier best captured and reproduced the opening cymbal work—a shimmering, metallic sound rather than something that lesser amplifiers turn into soft, hissing static. Switching from gain-matched comparison amplifiers to the No.334 widened the soundstage and revealed the different tensions of the tom-tom heads in Billy Drummond's drumkit. The kick drum, previously a faint shadow, took on an oppressive, solid heft. Trumpet and trombone solos blossomed into the full, biting, "brassy bluntness" that J. Gordon Holt claims can be heard only on the finest high-fidelity systems.

Although I reached very positive conclusions about the No.334, in one area it left me unfulfilled: power. The Revel Salon loudspeakers sounded best when I ginned the volume control. Only the biggest monoblock amplifier I had to hand—the Bryston 7B-ST, rated at 965W in 4 ohms—could play full-volume percussion music into my large listening room without compression. At the volume levels I like, a single No.334 delivered enough power to play percussion? Yes—by using two No.334s in a vertically biamped system. This involved using a Y-connector to feed both inputs of a No.334 from a single channel's interconnect. The left and right pairs of speaker cables from each No.334 were configured to drive different parts of a single Salon.

Listened to in this biamped configuration, the percussion opening of "Tito" remained uncompressed and free of glare at much higher volume—enough so that I was startled and electrified by exploding timbale rimshots and staccato brass notes erupting out of a black background, and could easily hear the building crescendo in the opening drum solo. Headroom seemed endless, and the soundstage was very deep, wide, and rich. All the soundstaging space, transparency, grain-free midrange, and well-defined bass heard in the stereo configuration were present, with added headroom and enhanced dynamic contrasts. The performance of these amplifiers was awesome!

Summing up

The No.334’s minor physical changes gave me no hint of its major sonic improvements over the No.33, but the more powerful No.334 turned out to be far superior in bass slam, dynamics, and definition. It accurately conveyed instrumental timbre, provided resolution of fine musical detail, and created a "lush, opulent, billowing soundstage."

Its bass response is the best I’ve heard from a Mark Levinson stereo amplifier. It will be a sad day here when the No.334 amplifiers leave.

Unashamedly expensive at $5990, the No.334 proved its worth in coaxing the very best performance from different loudspeakers in my listening room. My enthusiasm was not diminished when a single No.334 ran out of steam playing percussion music on a pair of Revel Salons. For large loudspeakers in demanding listening rooms like mine, one could purchase two No.334 amplifiers for bi amplification, or choose the more powerful, 350Wpc No.336. But for most music, a single No.334 in stereo had more than enough bass slam.

The No.334’s higher power rating, increased ability to render dynamic musical contrasts, and outstanding build quality have earned it a strong Class A rating from me. I’m certain that it would have made my father smile.

---

**The No.334’s bass response is the best I’ve heard from a Mark Levinson stereo amplifier.**

---

**Associated Equipment**

**Analog sources:** Linn Sondek LP12 turntable with Lingo power supply, Itok tonearm, Spectral moving-coil cartridge.

**Digital source:** Krell MD-1 CD transport, Adcom GDA-700 processor. **Tuners:** Day-Sequerra FM Reference Classic, Rotel RH-10, Fanfare FM-1, Magnum Dynalab MD-108/Model 205 Sleuth RF amplifier, Myrrad T-100.

**Preamplifiers:** Krell KBL, Mark Levinson ML-7A with 1-2 phono section, Duntech MX-10 head amplifier.

**Power amplifiers:** Mark Levinson No.331, No.334s (2), Bryston 4B-ST (stereo), Bryston 7B-ST (monoblocks).

**Loudspeakers:** Snell Type A Reference, Dynaudio Contour 3.0, Quad ESL-63, B&W 805 Nautilus. Subwoofers: Velodyne FSR-18, Paradigm Reference Servo 15, Snell SUB-1800 (2).

**Cables:** Interconnects: Bryston Balanced, Krell CogelecoYellow balanced, PSC Pristine R30 silver-alloy balanced, Randall Research single-ended, Mark Levinson HFC (with Canac connectors) single-ended, 75 ohm Silver Starlight digital coax. Speaker cables: Levinson HFC-10, PSC Pristine R-50 biwired double ribbons.

**Accessories:** Madrigal CZ Gel-1 Balanced Y-Adapter Bridging Kit; Madrigal single-ended Y-adapters (for bi amplification); Arci, Sumiko Franklin & Lowell stands.

—Larry Greenhill

---

4 From JA’s description of the sound of the Wadia 27tx/270 C1 player in Stereophile, April 1999, p.165.
I've heard my share of Krells, Leavinsons, Rowlands, and the like in other people's systems—expensive solid-state amplifiers are not my usual beat. With the exception of an inexpensive Adcom a few years back, for more than a decade I've owned and reviewed only tube amps. In fact, until the $7500 Ayre Acoustics V-1 showed up, I'd not had one in my system. Similarly, I'd had only tube preamps until I reviewed the Ayre K-3, which so impressed me that I asked to hear the more expensive K-1—and ended up buying it.

So Ayre's Charlie Hansen was quite comfortable having me review his big baby, the V-1. Or as comfortable as a compulsive can be. Hansen, who has a degree in physics and who designed Avalon's well-regarded Eclipse loudspeaker, is definitely compulsive about his designs, the parts used in them, what cables they should be hooked up with—even about what his amp sits on.

For instance, I needed a set of 15' balanced interconnects. While Hansen was sure I should use Cardas, since that's what he's used inside the V-1, he obsessed over whether Neutral Reference or Golden Reference would be best in my system. I ended up with both, and finally decided on the Golden. Hansen sent along a set of wooden Jenga blocks (child's toys), which he suggested I put under the V-1's heatsinks to support the 100-lb amp. I tried that, but ended up using three large Walker Audio Valid Points embedded in three Walker lead/resin discs. I added a pair of discs on top to damp the chassis.

Design

The V-1 is a fully balanced zero-feedback design. Among the reasons Hansen avoids negative feedback is his belief that, when you route the signal at the output back to the input, the speaker cable ("a large antenna," he calls it) induces a healthy dollop of RF. Throw RF back to the input and, depending on the amplifier's intrinsic response, you will amplify it.

In order to make that interesting combination of fully balanced and zero negative feedback work as planned, every transistor in the circuit must be individually tested and matched in sets. That must add at least $5 to the final price of the amp—there are 64 output MOSFETs alone!

Rated at 200Wpc continuous power into 8 ohms and twice that into 4, the V-1 should have no trouble driving most loudspeakers. The power supply features a two-stage choke input filter that includes a huge toroidal transformer and two pairs of chokes (one each for the input- and output-stage power supplies), plus a bank of filter caps. The choke/filter-cap combo filters RF from the AC line, and the chokes also store energy in their magnetic fields, so there's a more continuous source of power supply current, according to Hansen. A conventional chokeless power supply charges the reservoir caps with quick pulses, which can act as an internally generated source of RF.

The power supply also features discrete rectifiers instead of a rectifier bridge in order to use the fastest devices available.

The input stage is a cascaded complementary-differential circuit that directly drives the complementary source-follower output stage. Very basic. This same circuit is used in the K-1 and K-3 preamps, with different-value parts and, of course, different voltages: ±15V vs the V-1's ±60V. The input connectors (a pair each of XLR and RCA jacks) are directly soldered to the input board, which is attached to the inside of the rear chassis wall. The boards are the same high-speed ones used in the K-1.

Two pairs of Cardas speaker terminals (for biwiring) are connected via short runs of Cardas wire to the output circuit board. The terminals are not in parallel, as they are in most amplifiers. Instead, separate pairs of wires run from the output board to the terminals.

There is no servo in the circuit to remove DC. DC offset is minimized at the factory via tiny holes in the back of the chassis—these allow adjustments to be made with the top on, so the

**Ayre V-1 power amplifier**

---

**Description:** Solid-state, stereo power amplifier. Output power: 200Wpc into 8 ohms (23dBW), 400Wpc into 4 ohms (23dBW). Voltage gain: 26dB. Input impedance: 10k ohms per signal phase (10k ohms unbalanced, 20k ohms balanced). Frequency response: not specified. THD: not specified. Power consumption: 30W in standby mode, 300W in operating mode, no signal.

**Dimensions:** 18" W by 7" H by 18" D. Weight: 95 lbs.

**Serial number of unit reviewed:** 4E001F.

**Price:** $7500. Approximate number of dealers: 30. Warranty: 5 years parts & labor, transferable.

**Manufacturer:** Ayre Acoustics, Inc., 2500-B Central Avenue, Boulder, CO 80301. Tel: (303) 442-7300. Fax: (303) 442-7301. Web: www.ayre.com.
amplifier is at normal operating temperature. According to Hansen, the V-1 is a "true DC amplifier": 1V of DC into the circuit will yield 20V DC out. Of course, when the amplifier "sees" DC, power is removed from the output stage and the V-1 reverts to warm-up mode. There is no microprocessor in the protection circuitry.

Parts and build qualities appear to be extremely high, though the fins on the heatsinks will Vev-A-Matic your hands if you’re not careful.

The sound of tubes?
If you do not currently have or are not planning on buying a balanced preamplifier, I would suggest looking elsewhere for a power amplifier. For one thing, you'd be paying for circuitry you won't use. For another, the V-1 sounded listless with single-ended drive—it just didn't get up and go. When I questioned Charlie Hansen about this, he admitted that he'd never listened to the V-1 in unbalanced mode.

Not a big problem—I don't believe many audiophiles buy balanced products to use unbalanced. Sure enough, running those Cardas cables from the K-1's balanced output to the V-1 brought the amplifier to life. For the V-1, "life" did not mean the speedy, crystalline highs and faster-than-live transients some listeners associate with solid-state amplifiers. Nor did it mean ironfist bass. At least not in my room and system.

Nor were the V-1's frequency extremes "tubelike"—not that tube amps

Measurements
A complete set of measurements was performed on the Ayre V-1 in the balanced mode, with selected readings repeated in the unbalanced (single-ended) configuration. Except where noted otherwise, the following results refer to balanced operation.

Following its one-hour preconditioning test, the Ayre's heatsinks were quite hot, but could be touched for several seconds with no discomfort. The DC offset was 8.2mV in the left channel, 9.0mV in the right. The V-1 is noninverting at its unbalanced input, pin 2 of the balanced input is wired as positive. The S/N ratio (at 1W into 8 ohms) measured 89.6dB over a 22Hz–22kHz bandwidth and 88.4dB from 10Hz to 50kHz, both unweighted, and 93.3dB A-weighted. The unbalanced S/N measurements were, in each case, less than 1dB higher than the balanced figures. The voltage gain into 8 ohms measured 25.8dB, balanced or unbalanced.

The Ayre's input impedance measured 20.9k ohms balanced and 10k ohms unbalanced. Its measured output impedance varied from 0.32 to 0.47 ohms, the higher figure at 20kHz into a 4 ohm load. These are higher figures than we normally see in solid-state amplifiers (though far lower than in most tube amps), and will have a small effect on the V-1's frequency response into real-world loudspeaker loads. This can be seen in fig.1, which shows the modification of the response with our simulated speaker load, along with the amplifier's response into fixed resistances of 8 and 4 ohms.

Fig.2 shows the V-1's 10kHz squarewave response: There is a slight rounding of the leading edge (very common) and a short risetime. The 1kHz squarewave (not shown) is nearly textbook-perfect. The V-1's crosstalk (not shown), was very low, at better than 100dB over most of the band. The channel separation decreased above 3kHz, reaching a still-excellent 72dB at 50kHz, due to capacitive coupling between the channels.

Fig.3 plots the small-signal THD+noise percentage against frequency, a respectable but not unusual result for a good solid-state amplifier. With unbalanced drive, the THD+noise figure was slightly higher. Balanced inputs do not invariably have lower distortion than unbalanced ones. In fact, the opposite is often the case, though the differences in linearity are usually small. The 1kHz THD+noise waveform at 2W into 4 ohms is shown in fig.4. The distortion is heavily third-harmonic, plus noise. The third harmonic also predominates into 8 and 2 ohms (results not shown).

The distortion spectrum resulting from a 50Hz input at 268W into 4 ohms is shown in fig.5. Note the dominance of odd-order distortion products. At 150Hz (third harmonic) the distortion is 50.9dB, or about 0.3%; at 250Hz (fifth harmonic) it is -73.3dB, or just under 0.025%. The

---

Fig.1 Ayre V-1, frequency response at (from top to bottom): 1W into 8 ohms, and 2.628V into simulated loudspeaker load (0.5dB/vertical div., right channel dashed).

Fig.2 Ayre V-1, small-signal 10kHz squarewave into 8 ohms.

Fig.3 Ayre V-1, THD+noise (%) vs frequency at (from top to bottom at 2kHz): 4W into 2 ohms, 2W into 4 ohms, 1W into 8 ohms, and 2.83V into simulated loudspeaker load (right channel dashed).

Fig.4 Ayre V-1, 1kHz waveform at 2W into 4 ohms (top), distortion and noise waveform with fundamental notched out (bottom, not to scale).

Fig.5 Ayre V-1, spectrum of 50Hz sinewave, DC–1kHz, at 268W into 4 ohms (linear frequency scale).

Stereophile, September 1999
these days have to sound “tubelike” either. While some listeners might find the V-1’s top end to be somewhat retentive, I didn’t. Rather, it was essentially etch-free and smooth, clear of grain and hash, but not in the sense that good tube sound is — it wasn’t that kind of sweetness or purity. Transients and sibilants didn’t “come to rounded points” and melt away as they do with good tubes, nor did they come to impossibly spiky and clean points as they do with some solid-state amps. Rather, they hit a mid-point between the two.

Deep bass response was outstanding, as you’d expect from a formidable powered solid-state amplifier, but it wasn’t the kind of tightly-controlled control some solid-state fans expect and demand. Though not particularly well controlled compared to some other amps I’ve heard, the V-1’s bass was rich and fully fleshed-out — though, again, not tubelike. And it was somewhat on the lethargic side, and not as well focused as I’d like.

Where the V-1 exceeded my highest expectations was in its midrange, which was airy, sweet, and delicate, and projected an involving, tubelike sense of space. During the review period I received some of Classic Records’ new 45rpm reissues, including old standbys like Bela-

19±20kHz intermodulation spectrum at 243.5W into 4 ohms is shown in fig.6. (Visible signs of clipping begin to appear with this signal at higher power readings.) The highest-level IM artifact is −39.9dB (just above 1%) at 18kHz. At 125.5W into 4 ohms (not shown) the IM distortion is lower: a maximum of −42.7% (about 0.75%) at 18kHz.

The V-1’s THD+noise percentage vs continuous output power curves are shown in fig.7, with the discrete clipping levels shown in Table 1. While the amplifier easily meets its specified power into 8 ohms, it doesn’t do so into 4 ohms, though the line voltage during the test was slightly lower than normal. (Such doubling capability is rare among power amplifiers.) In order to test the amplifier using continuous test signals into 2 ohm loads, we had to replace — at Ayre’s recommendation — the V-1’s internal 10-amp resistor-fuses with 15A versions. The 10A fuses would blow at high power into 2 ohms with sinewaves, though I would not expect this to be a problem with normal program material, which can be seen in fig.8, the amplifier’s clipping performance with just one channel driven but now driven with a low-duty-cycle 1kHz toneburst (10 cycles on, 40 cycles off).

Strange, less power was available with this signal than a continuous sinewave — 161W vs 233.6W at 1% THD+N — though now it did double every time the load impedance was halved, with 1020W (equivalent to a maximum current of 31.9A) available into 1 ohm. Other than with the punishing 1 ohm load (green curve), the clipping was gentle, reminiscent of tube amplifier overload. (The magenta line in fig.8 shows the usual 1% THD+N (40dB) limit we define as the clipping point.)

The slightly high distortion levels and high output impedance of the V-1 relative to many comparable solid-state amps are typical of low-feedback designs. It’s something of an audiophile mantra, if a controversial one, that very low negative feedback grants sonic benefits — but it rarely makes for wowie-zowie measurements. Despite this, the Ayre’s test-bench results are good.

— Thomas J. Norton

---

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ayre V-1 Clipping</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(%) THD+noise at 1kHz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Channels</td>
<td>One Channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driven</td>
<td>Driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Load (ohms)</td>
<td>W (dBW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>233.6 (23.68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(line)</td>
<td>112V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>350.9 (22.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(line)</td>
<td>109V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>555.5 (21.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(line)</td>
<td>109V</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The V-1 impressed on these classics. Paul Desmond's alto sax on “Take Five” sounded rich, round, and well focused, but had the breathy, almost raspy quality a reed instrument must have to sound real—the V-1 didn't gloss over the horn’s important harmonic and textural qualities. Joe Morello's bass drum was fat and springy, not at all overdamped or brittle, and Brubeck's piano struck a fine balance between the instrument's percussive and reverberant qualities: the felt hammers hitting metal strings, the sounding board reacting. Not too dry, not too effusive. With the V-1, I found I could forget what amplification technology I was listening to and just enjoy the music.

Yet whatever I played, LP or CD, I felt the amp sounded a bit sluggish, a bit too warmed-over, as if Hansen had tried to emulate a tube amplifier with solid-state parts. I liked the V-1— I liked many of its qualities, enjoyed listening to it, never felt its seams were showing, never lost interest in what I was listening to—but it didn't excite me. It lacked solid-state's usual vibrance and tube's usual lishness. That middle ground can lead to ambivalence. Ambivalent is how I felt.

ESP image, and a dirty little secret
Maybe I was sending out ambivalent vibes, because just about then Charlie Hansen called to ask if he could visit. He showed up a few days later, listened for a while, and what he then said was what I'd been thinking. He had two requests: that he might up the V-1's output stage bias from 30mV to 35mV; and that I try to get a competing amplifier from one of the "prestigious" solid-state names, like Krell or Mark Levinson. Then I, a tube enthusiast, could compare his work with theirs, instead of to my tube references.

As for the bias request, I said "Go ahead." After making the adjustment, the V-1 ran somewhat hotter and lost its lethargic quality without becoming hyper. The change was immediately obvious: more punch but not more edge.

"So why'd you set the bias where it was to begin with?" I axed.

Well, some manufacturers have to alter their products for different markets and different tastes. While the V-1 is a zero-electrical-feedback design, the customer feedback from overseas does get in the circuit. Based on overseas reactions, Hansen had been setting the bias a bit on the low side, which emphasized smoothness at the expense of rhythm, pacing, and focus. But he'd also been listening, experimenting, and fine-tuning, and had decided to up the bias in future production. What I now had, with bias tweaked to 35mV, was the V-1 as it would be delivered—at least in America.

The issue of finding a competing solid-state product was a bit more complicated. Hansen allowed that he was frustrated when competing head to head with some of the bigger brands; his dealers tell him that some consumers buy by the label instead of judging the products on their merits. We then got into a big discussion about marketing and image—something I'm familiar with, having spent over a decade in advertising.

Though we audiophiles think of ourselves as purists, snob appeal does come into play; some people buy names. Ayre doesn't have the advertising or marketing budget at this point to indulge in the kind of heavy-duty image-making needed to play on the same level as Krell or Levinson. The money goes into the R&D and build quality, where I think Ayre does play on the same field as the others, even if Ayre's industrial design is more pedestrian (while still being attractive).

I told Hansen I'd get hold of one of those "badge" products, do the comparison he sought, and let the sonic chips fall where they might. I managed to borrow a Mark Levinson No.335, which is a close match to the Ayre V-1 in terms of price ($7495) and power (250Wpc), and a larger version of the No.334 reviewed elsewhere in this issue by Larry Greenhill. Carrying the 155-lb Levinson down a flight of narrow stairs was such fun.

Ayre vs Levinson
After allowing the Mark Levinson No.335 to warm up sufficiently (with music), I began the head-to-head. I used DCC's reissue of Nat Cole’s Love is the Thing, MoFi’s Getz/Gilberto, Classic’s 45rpm editions of Pictures at an Exhibition and Time Out, the late Mel Tormé’s Mel Tormé and Friends Live at Marty’s, and the Rolling Stones’ Tattoo You—all on vinyl. I also auditioned the incredibly fine-sounding HDCD gold CD reissue of Patricia Barber’s Café Blue.

First up was the Barber CD through the Levinson. I've never heard an amplifier control the bass on my Audio Physic Virgo speakers as the Levinson did. On “Ode to Billy Joe,” the bass focus and intonation were astounding. The fingersnaps projected well in front of the speakers, with a nice sense of flesh. Barber's voice was also extremely well focused, though a bit cool, and the 335's ability to control her sibilants was unparalleled in my experience: cleanly delivered, without etch. The midrange was somewhat laid-back but nicely balanced. Overall, the 335's physical and timbral presentation was on the cool, restrained side, but organizationally it

Associated Equipment

| Preamplification: | Ayre K-1 full-function preamplifier; Audio Research Reference, Musical Fidelity X-1P phono sections. |
| Loudspeakers: | Audio Physic Virgo, Sonus Faber Amati Homage. |
| Cables: | Yamamura Millennium 6000, Cardas Golden Reference, Electraglide interconnects; Yamamura Millennium 6000 speaker cables; Yamamura Quantum, Electraglide AC cords. |

was sensational — ironfisted. The picture, while somewhat compressed from front to back, was locked in place. In fact, what I realized after that very first cut was that the Levinson made my Vir-"gos sound like Revels! Or perhaps I should say that the qualities I was hearing I’d heard before — at Revel demos, which use Levinson amps exclusively.

When I switched to the Ayre V-1, the presentation was totally different. The standup bass was not nearly as physically focused in space or as rhythmically taut, but it had timbral and textural qualities that were lacking through the Levinson. The finger-snaps were not as tightly focused, but had a bit more flesh on them. The overall midrange presentation was more liquid and upfront, which put Barber’s voice more in my face, but the transient delivery on her sibilants was clearly sloppier. In fact, the overall presentation was not nearly as well organized, but it had an organic vitality the Levinson did not match. I could easily hear where some listeners would prefer one over the other. There was no clear winner.

When I switched to Classic’s simply awesome-sounding 45 of Mussorgsky’s Pictures at an Exhibition, the results were basically the same. The Levinson was cooler in the midrange, which resulted in less reverberant glow around the trumpet but better focus. There was less “grip” and texture to the strings, but phenomenal resolution of detail. During the explosive orchestral crescendos the Levinson’s ability to portray the wide dynamic swings was awesome, but slightly steely in character at the peaks. The Ayre’s renderings of the same crescendos were somewhat more restrained but more liquid, and more timbrally consistent with the less taxing parts of the music.

From disc to disc, so it went: The Levinson excelled at controlling the presentation, focusing the picture, and achieving a sense of seamless sonic stability, though in a somewhat cool and reserved way. The Ayre scored points with a rich, palpable, three-dimensional midrange that seemed to reach out to, grab, and draw me into the emotional center of the music. The Levinson went for the head, the Ayre for the heart. Despite its name, the Levinson was the WASPier-sounding amp, the Ayre more the hand-gesturing Jewish- or Italian-sounding amp.

Two great products. Two different sounds. One offensive analogy.

Conclusion
Charlie Hansen’s purist approach to designing a solid-state amplifier — zero feedback, simple circuit topology, high-quality parts, hand-matched transistor pairs — has resulted in a solid-state amplifier with impressive midrange liquidity, ease, and listenability. The V-1’s overall sound is as relaxed and fluid as I’ve heard from a solid-state amplifier. The plush, nonmechanical-sounding midrange drew me in while helping to create an airy, three-dimensional soundstage of enormous depth.

It’s at the frequency extremes where opinions will diverge. No one will fault the V-1’s bottom-end extension, but some will be disappointed with its somewhat diffuse bass focus and lack of slam compared to other solid-state amps. On top, some will appreciate the V-1’s smooth, natural, etch-free high-frequency performance (though siblants aren’t always tamed), while others will yearn for a more crystalline presence. But no one auditioning the V-1 should be less than thrilled by its exceptionally rich, liquid midrange.

What’s most important is that the overall sonic picture, from top to bottom, is cut from whole cloth. In other words, the V-1 paints a complete, involving musical picture, not a series of disjointed musical parts. Overall, the V-1 is a solid-state amplifier that should grab even the most hardened tube devotee and give him or her an impressive musical ride.

What’s dangerous for the manufacturer of such a product is that tube devotees might like what they hear but be unwilling to switch, while solid-states, used to hearing a more crystalline top and tauter bottom, will be unimpressed in a quick listen.

The V-1 demands some long-term attention. If you have an opportunity to hear it, leave your preconceptions at the door, sit a spell, and listen. This amp breaks barriers.
Experience your CDs in a whole new light. Don’t just play them, X-Ray them with Musical Fidelity’s new 24-bit X-Ray CD player. This aptly named innovation is incredibly transparent, revealing every last angstrom of musical detail.

**What Hi-Fi?’s “Supertest” Verdict**

Once each year editors of England’s *What Hi-Fi?* magazine put their brains (and ears) together to decide which CD player is the overall best value. This year’s winner? Musical Fidelity’s exceptional X-Ray.

**Outstanding X-RAY**

The X-Ray stood out—both visually and sonically—from the rest. “There’s no restraint or softness in the way the X-Ray plays music—instead you get the kind of insight that ensures the machine lives up to its name—but at the same time there’s never that apprehension that it’s all about to go horribly wrong. The music pours forth in a highly addictive manner,” reported *What Hi-Fi?’s* editors in February 1999.

“What the X-Ray has, in keeping with its oh-so-apt name, are fabulously naked, Zeiss-inspired transparency, the sort of detail retrieval which would make a Hornsby collector swoon, and top-to-bottom consistency which means I’m making the X-Ray my sub-$1,700 reference,” adds the bowled-over Ken Kessler in *Hi-Fi News & Record Review*, October 1998.

Inside the gracefully styled cylindrical metal chassis, the X-Ray boasts an advanced Sony laser transport and a state-of-the-art Burr-Brown PCM1716 24-bit processor. The internal circuit offers remarkable 0.0025% total harmonic distortion and unbelievable 140 dB dynamic range. Both coaxial and Toslink digital outputs are included along with a full-featured remote.

**Summary: Don’t Let The Money Burn**

“This is a player that does music—it’s as simple as that — and does it across a huge range of genres and in a wide variety of systems,” raves *What Hi-Fi?* “It’s also superbly built and we love the looks: if we had ($1,300) burning a whole in the corporate pocket, this is the player with which we’d be going home.”

**Order X-Ray With No Risk!**

You won’t find the X-Ray in any store in the US, but it’s very easy to get one. Call toll-free (800) 942-0220 and tell us you want to “x-ray” your CDs. We’ll send you the amazing X-Ray for only $1,295 plus $19.95 shipping in the US.

If you’re not thrilled by the ultra-revealing sound of the X-Ray, let us know within 30 days and you can return the X-Ray for a full refund of the purchase price.
Soliloquy 5.3 loudspeaker

"Gotta get my hands on these!"

Before the 1999 CES, I had never heard of the Soliloquy 5.3, but "this slim, 38"-high obelisk was among the most open- and transparent-sounding speakers at the show," as I said in my April '99 CES report. As I slugged from room to room, never able to spend enough time with things (and people) that entertain and inform, and rarely able to avoid exhibits of even minimal interest, it was absolutely wonderful to stumble on something both novel and satisfying.

Skimming Soliloquy's website, I learned that Dennis Had of Cary Audio Design put about four years into the development of the original Soliloquy as a labor of love, and in an effort to allow his electronics to fully express their talents. Not wishing to divert focus from his electronics business, Had sold his interest in the design to Bernie Byers, who then established the Soliloquy High Fidelity Loudspeaker Company.

I don't know how much of a hand Had had in the 5.3, but its family resemblance to its forebears is clear. Other models I saw on the website included the 5.2 (stand-mounted, 5" low-mid, 1" silk-dome HF) and 8.2 (floorstander, 8" low-mid, the same HF dome). The 5.3—a floorstander with two 5" midrange/woofers and the 1" dome—seems to be their offspring. All Soliloquies have narrow faces, that silk HF dome, and rearported enclosures. Moreover, I'm told that all have been developed via an arduous, reiterative process of "design-produce-listen-redesign... repetitions."

Setup and break-in

The 5.3s arrived double boxed. Unpacking and maneuvering was easy—the tall, slim cabinet can be slid or walked on its steel base plate. The cabinet itself is pretty solid, its rosewood finish is beautifully matched on all visible surfaces, and, with or without the grilles, the 5.3 slips graciously into domesticity. Fit and finish are above reproach.

Once the speakers were in place, I screwed down their massive, beautifully machined spikes through the base plate


Dimensions: 38" H by 7.5" W by 11" D. Weight: 80 lbs each.

Finishes: Curly maple, cherry, rosewood.

Serial numbers of units reviewed: S530030LR/RR.


Manufacturer: Soliloquy High Fidelity Loudspeaker Company, 2613 Discovery Drive, Building A, Raleigh, NC 27616. Tel: (919) 876-7554. Fax: (919) 876-2590. Web: www.solspeak.com. E-mail: info@solspeak.com
VMPS Ribbons

The new line of VMPS Ribbon speakers are now available. From the "Ribbon Monitors" to the "Special Ribbon Edition" models they represent tremendous value in modern loudspeaker technology. For example, their $16,000 ST-III/SRE uses the same 72" ribbon as a popular $40,000 model from their nearest competitor. The FF3/SRE for under $7000 uses a 52" version of the same Ribbon! Woofers are Phase-Plugged Woven Carbon Fiber. They also are very serious about box construction with baffles as thick as 3" on some models! The crossovers are hand made using capacitors from Wondercap and Solen, and wired with quality silver plated cable. Bottom line: For the ten years we’ve been carrying VMPS they have been a favorite, always representing great value. With their new Ribbon Series they’ve taken it to a new level... They’ve combined value with State-Of-The-Art sound and technology. A task that we feel is truly remarkable!

VMPS Ribbon Series
Start at under $1500 pair

ONIX Electronics Closeout

A-60 Integrated Amplifier 40/40 watts $299.95 (List $500)
A-120 Integrated Amplifier 120/120 watts $419.95 (List $700)
A-2150 Power Amplifier 150/150 watts $349.95 (List $700)
P-3000 Remote Control Pre-Amplifier $299.95 (List $500)
A-2150/P-3000 Amp/Preamp Package $599.95 (List $1200)

Platinum Closeout

Closeout on Target Stands
GR5 32" Tall 5-Shelf $197.50 (List $395)
TT5/II 37" 5-Shelf $239.50 (List $395)
TT5/II 29" 5-Shelf $175.00 (List $350)
TT3/II 29" 3-Shelf $129.50 (List $260)
B5A/G 33" 5-Shelf $279.50 (List $455)
B5/G 33" 5-Shelf $279.50 (List $455)
B6/G 40" 6-Shelf $399.50 (List $500)
LRXT5G 42" 5-Shelf $319.50 (List $465)

Creek Headphone Amplifier
Buy the Creek OBH-11 for $199 and get upgraded to the OBH-2 Power Supply plus a FREE Mogami headphone extension cable.

Audio Technica Phono Cartridge
$199
$169 audio.technica.

Arcici • Audio Magic • API • AudioQuest • Audio Technica • Bag End • Blue Point • Chang • Creek • Flatile • Grado • Hafler • Lightspeed • Mogami • Musical Concepts • Musical Design • Music Hall • Music Metre • Nordost • Onix • Platinum • Pro-Ject • Sumiko • Target • Tice • VMPS • WBT

Get the rest of the deals on the web at: www.hcmaudio.com
800-222-3465 • 530-345-1341 • Fax 530-345-7269
2725 Hwy 32 West, Suite C, Chico, CA 95973
e-mail: sales@hcmaudio.com

Stereophile, September 1999
to ensure a solid, level footing. Even with the spikes in place, I could still move a 5.3 by carefully tilting it onto one spike at a time and walking it about.

The 1" silk-dome tweeter is near the top of the front panel, the two 5" drivers directly below. The internal crossover is third-order (18dB/octave) at 2.4kHz. Interestingly, the 5.3 is said to have an electrical phase response within ±45° over the entire audible bandwidth. The large-diameter port on the enclosure’s rear extends to within 2" of the front panel, which, in the visible area near the port, appears undamped. This close proximity of the front panel and the input of the port suggests high-pressure loading of the port. Polyester stuffing is just visible above and below the port. A nicely inset identification and connection port toward the bottom of the rear panel bears four heavy-duty, gold-plated five-way binding posts. Gold-plated jumpers are provided for use when not biwiring.

By the time the 5.3s arrived, I had forgotten almost everything about them except that it was I who’d written so favorably about them in my CES report.

The instruction manual does say that 500 hours of break-in are needed. After that break-in period, the Soliloquy 5.3 was an absolute delight.

Whether I hooked them up to the hot-rodded McCormack DNA-1 or the Sonic Frontiers Power-2 via a pair of Straight Wire Maestro II cables, the 5.3s sounded bright and boomy. There certainly was evidence of clarity and resolution, but the highs seemed excessive. At the other end, the bass was overripe, and the lower mids tended to bark when driven at anything approaching useful levels. Radio announcers were more difficult to tolerate than usual. Clearly, I had made an error of judgment at the show, the guys at Soliloquy had somehow screwed up, or—just mebbe—these babies were too new to be housebroken.

The instruction manual does say that 500 hours of break-in are needed. While you might not be able to put off listening to your new acquisitions that long, please reserve judgment for a few hundred hours.

Over the course of the next few weeks I moved the 5.3s closer together, then farther apart, all the while experimenting with their distance from the listening seat. I tried to reduce the bass bark by stuffing their rear ports with polyester batting. Nah—that only muffled the bass. Besides, the Soliloquies demonstrated their disdain by blowing the batting out with an emphatic PFOOOT! Finally, thinking that

**Measurements**

The Soliloquy 5.3 was fractionally less sensitive than specified, my B-weighted estimate coming out at 88dB/2.83V/m, but the speaker is still a little above average in this respect. It is also relatively easy to drive, its plot of impedance (fig.1) indicating a generally mild electrical phase angle, and a magnitude that remains above 8 ohms for most of the midrange and treble and drops below 6 ohms only in the midbass and lower midrange. Relatively low-powered tube amplifiers should work well with this speaker, though if they have a high output impedance, the large changes in impedance magnitude might result in a too-forward upper-midrange balance.

The saddle in the impedance curve at 40Hz indicates the tuning of the port, and implies moderate LF extension. The very slight kink in the curves around 150Hz might be associated with a cabinet resonance, but the Soliloquy’s enclosure was actually well braced. The only mode I could find was around 350Hz (fig.2), which is probably too high in frequency to be subjectively irksome.

Fig.3 shows the individual outputs of the drive-units and port. The port’s output is the bandpass curve centered on the tuning frequency of 40Hz, and while there is a severe notch between 200Hz and 300Hz, this is inconsequential. The woofers’ output peaks a little in the upper bass, but is otherwise flat in the midrange. The crossover to the tweeter features steep roll-off slopes and appears to be set a little lower than specified at 19kHz. Residual cone-breakup modes in the woofer’s output are well suppressed by the crossover, but the tweeter’s output appears to be somewhat boosted on-axis.

This can also be seen in the Soliloquy’s overall response, averaged across a
the drivers might be wired out of phase, I removed the jumpers from the binding posts and wired the 5.3s for easy phase reversal. This only made things worse.

Not knowing how to live without music, I left the 5.3s biwired to the Power-2, but with the recommended phasing. At this point the 5.3s stood more than 9° apart and less than 3° from the front wall—significantly farther from each other and the listener than is usual for speakers in my listening room. Toe-in was minimal, at about 5°. Other large reflecting or absorbing objects were kept well away.

Weeks passed. Gradually, it dawned on me that WQXR's announcers no longer seemed to be swallowing their mikes, and surface noise from my thrift-shop LPs seemed smoother and less obtrusive. After seven weeks, the 5.3s had matured enough for me to remember why they'd so impressed me in Las Vegas.

**Listening**

After that break-in period, the Soliloquy 5.3 was an absolute delight. The immediate impression I got was of great transparency and space. With the spatial trickery of the Willow soundtrack (Virgin 90939-2), the 5.3s put the pan flute front and center, spread the strings widely across the room, hurled the percussion from various directions, and summoned up the chorus from somewhere back in the Meadowlands of New Jersey. (When listening, I face west!) Imaging was stable and natural, but not "pinpoint."

James Horner's less varied score for Glory (Virgin/Classic DAD 1008) has benefited from full 24/96 treatment, its rolling drums and ethereal chorus seeming entirely liberated from the equipment. There was no "sweet spot"—I could get up, walk around the room, stand up, or sit down, and transparency and tonal balance remained constant. Bass was not Stygian, but adequately extended.

The magic was not restricted to contrived recordings, but was lavished equally on voices and instrumental ensembles. I tried all my standard voice tests, from Diana Krall and Holly Cole to Jerry Hadley and Thomas Hampson, and the 5.3 presented them as purely and naturally as any speaker yet to visit my listening room. Latin flavors, from The Buena Vista Social Club to Los Lobos' Kika, were pungent and intense. Jazz ensembles were particularly well served by the 5.3s' generous stage presence and lack of coloration.

Dick Cary's Tuesday Night Friends' Catching Up (Klavier KJ-77024) seems to have taken up permanent residence in

---

**Measurements**

30° angle on the tweeter axis (fig.4). In fact, the response has a distinct double hump, the on-axis boost in the top two octaves being balanced by a similar energy excess in the bass. When well handled by the designer, the result can sound musically balanced—witness the classic BHC LS3/5A. When carried to excess, the result is as KIR describes on first hearing the Soliloquy 5.3 in his listening room. That the speaker sounded more acceptably neutral after its long break-in means that it must have been even more peaky out of the box. Note that about 3dB of the apparent boost in the bass will be due to the nearfield measurement technique, but that, even taking that into account, the speaker will easily sound boomy if care is not taken with room placement.

Fig.5 shows how the 5.3's balance changes to its sides. In a normal, not-too-lively room, the slight flare in the presence region (due to the tweeter's wide dispersion at the bottom of its passband) will compromise for a slight lack of on-

---

**Fig.4** Soliloquy 5.3, anechoic response on tweeter axis at 50°, averaged across 30° horizontal window and corrected for microphone response, with the complex sum of the nearfield woofer and port responses plotted below 300Hz.

**Fig.5** Soliloquy 5.3, lateral response family at 50°, normalized to response on tweeter axis, from back to front: differences in response 90°-5° off-axis, reference response, differences in response 5°-90° off-axis.

**Fig.6** Soliloquy 5.3, vertical response family at 50°, from back to front: differences in response 15°-5° above HF axis, reference response, differences in response 5°-10° below HF axis.
one of my CD transports — I can’t resist playing it almost daily. This disc is a model of how to record a jazz band with the rich, warm brass retaining the bite. On my favorite cut, “Recado,” the 5.3 deliciously delineated all the brass and woodwind counterpoint while maintaining ensemble cohesion. The interplay of keyboard, bass, and percussion was clearly revealed, as the bass performance of the 5.3 extended down to near 40Hz. And George Faber’s “Count the Tears,” from Sure Beats Workin’ (Popemusic PMG 2032-2), had all the requisite slam.

The two cone drivers handle everything up through the midrange, so there were none of the discontinuities that plagued the Coincident Super Conquest Series II (Stereophile, June 1999). Thus, although the Super Conquest had more extension and power in the lowest bass, the 5.3 had more useful impact and kick in the range just above — especially notable on piano recordings. Throughout the rest of the range, it was no contest — the 5.3’s transparency made it super seductive.

It was harder to compare the 5.3 with the newly arrived PSB Stratus Goldi. The PSB has a richness and a soliity, without boom, that the much smaller 5.3 could not approach. On the other hand, I was more conscious of the presence of the PSB, from both visual and auditory cues, than I ever was of the Soliloquy, which seemed to disappear into the music. But take that last comment with a big grain of salt — I’m only beginning to become familiar with the PSB.

The use of small drivers in a small enclosure means that the Soliloquy is limited in how much air it can move. It couldn’t blow me away with huge symphonic and choral monsters, as can the Stratus Goldi. In fact, my Paradigm Reference Esprit/BP, with a pair of 165mm drivers but with a 60% larger enclosure, is more capable of shaking the timbers than is the 5.3. But when listening to Mahler, as is my habit, I found the Soliloquy ever-so-nearly excellent. It handled everything in Symphony 4 (Salonen/LAPO, Sony Classical SK 48380) with aplomb, and did just fine with Symphony 3 (Horenstein/LSO, Unicorn-Kanchana UKCD 2006/7), because the scoring is pretty open. The denser, deeper Symphony 2 (Rattle/CBSO, EMI 47962) and 6 (Zander/Boston Philharmonic, IMP DMCI93), however, simply demand more weight than the Soliloquy could load into my room.

The 5.3/Power-2 combination was quite refined in its depiction of detail, harmonics, and microdynamics, but macro-dynamics were merely okay. It wasn’t just a matter of SPLs — switching to the hot-rodded DNA-1 afforded more volume and punch, but no more heft. Besides, the 5.3s were simply succulent with the Power-2. In fact, the 5.3s were so good and so coherent that I’d hesitate before gambling on a subwoofer. (Soliloquy does offer one, along with a center-channel speaker, to fill out a home-theater setup.)

The Soliloquy had only minor failings. Because my listening room is fairly warm, the 5.3’s slight prominence in the lower treble (approximately 6kHz) troubled me but little — placed at the live end, the speakers effectively balanced that warmth. (If your room is a bit hard overall, you should audition the 5.3 at home before purchase.) Bass-rich sources can still evoke a bit of a bark from the 5.3. For example, when listening to music at healthy levels on well-miked FM broadcasts, I often had to turn up and quench the volume when the close-miked announcer came on. Both of these characteristics seemed to fade with continued use, but I wonder if the low-end characteristic could be caused by turbulence in the duct system. Finally, the 5.3s needed a breathing room. Their bass became thumpy, and their image depth compromised, when I moved the Stratus Goldi’s down to the same end of the room.

A truly lovely recording is Flamenca Mysterio (FIM GSCD 016), featuring Gino D’Auri on guitar, accompanied by percussion (tablal), strings, and assorted keyboards. It’s far from traditional flamenco, but nonetheless exudes style and spirit. Recorded by Stephen Hill and remastered by Doug Sax, the recording presents D’Auri’s instrument with lifelike presence, precise transients, and warm resonance. Over the Soliloquies, D’Auri

---

**Fig. 7** Soliloquy 5.3, step response on tweeter axis at 50° (5ms time window, 30kHz bandwidth).

**Fig. 8** Soliloquy 5.3, cumulative spectral-decay plot at 50° (0.15ms risetime).
The Cable Company offers the only "Library" of broken-in samples of nearly every cable for you to try at home. We also do this for dozens of powerline filters, and many, many components. This service for our customers is cost-free and guilt-free (5-10% deposit required – call for details).

RACKS
Arcici
Atlantis
PolyCrystal
RoomTune
Salamander/Synergy
SolidSteel
Sound Anchors
Target
Townshend

ROOM ACOUSTICS
ASC/Acoustic Sciences
Argent RoomLens
Combak Harmonix
Echobusters
RoomTune
Shun Mook

RESONANCE CONTROL
AudioPoints • DH Labs • Harmonix • Marigo • PolyCrystal
Shun Mook • Signal Guard • Townshend • Vibraplane

POWER LINE FILTRATION
Audio Power Wedge • Audioprism • Bybee • Chang
Lightspeed • PAC IDOS • Quantum • Tice
sat across the room from me, the sounds of his fingers on strings and fingerboard just audible under the rich tones emanating from the gut and wood. I got up and walked over to him. Remarkably, the balance between the sounds produced by the instrument and those directly on it shifted as I sat down directly in front of him. Although I moved, he was still in the same relationship to the supporting instruments in the nicely reverberant soundstage. This rare experience was made possible by the Soliloquy 5.3s—speakers with little if any grain, and with extremely fine resolution.

**Conclusions**

I have avoided discussion of price, since the remarkable Soliloquy 5.3 deserves to be judged solely on the basis of its superb performance and construction, and on its suitability for your room. Its spatial presentation is excellent, and voice and instrumental balances are natural and satisfying. Mated with a sympathetic amplifier and decent source material, the 5.3s can be an open window into the recording venue. Their dynamic limitations are a bit restricting with post-Romantic blockbusters, but that is merely concomitant with their size.

So it isn't perfect, but neither is any other small speaker in that regard. Otherwise, it's as good (and as good-looking) as you can get for the price, not to mention a fair bit more.

"Gotta get my hands on these!" I'm very glad I did.

**Associated Equipment**

**Analog source:** Heybrook TT2 turntable, Rega RB300 tonearm, Koetsu Black/Gold cartridge.

**Digital sources:** Burmester 970/969 CD transport/DAC, California Audio Labs CL-20 DVD/CD player, Mark Levinson No.360 DAC, Theta Miles CD player.

**Preamplifiers:** Klyne 6L33P, Z-Systems tpd-1.

**Power amplifiers:** McCormack DNA-1 (with Rev. A mod), Sonic Frontiers Power-2.

**Loudspeakers:** Coincident Super Conquest Series II, Paradigm Reference Esprit/BP, PSB Stratus Gold.

**Cables:** Cardas Cross and Golden Cross interconnects, Straight Wire Maestro II speaker cables.

—Kalman Rubinson

---

**Get This Catalog Before You Make Your Next High-End Audio Purchase!**

Huge Selection At Low Prices. Hundreds of high-end audio products including hard-to-find accessories, speakers, analog and digital audio, audio cables, power conditioners, acoustic treatments, equipment racks, and more!

Learn What You Need to Know Before You Buy. Get complete information—product descriptions specifications, buying tips, colorful images, detailed comparison charts, revealing cut-away illustrations, profiles of the manufacturer and designer, and more!

How to Get Your FREE copy Of The Catalog. Call toll-free, 1-800-451-5445, and give us your name and address. The call is free, and so is the catalog. This catalog request hot-line is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

**Call Now!**

1-800-451-5445

Source Code: SP98T
Monocle Loudspeaker Cables
The most intimate union of amplifier & loudspeaker.

Twenty years of avant-garde manufacturing and engineering enable Kimber Kable to offer the most significant sensible loudspeaker cables in High End audio.

This collection of loudspeaker cables features many technologies developed during the Black Pearl™ project. Now, we unite the performance and ideals uncovered in that project with cost effective materials and procedures without sacrificing quality. The new cables are a statement of our relentless pursuit of performance, quality and value.

Monocle Series—designed specifically for standard loudspeakers. Technology, performance, sensibility. These words accurately describe the new Monocle Series. Monocle brings an unprecedented price to performance ratio to the audio cable world. The level of engineering, technology and beauty this cable provides are without equal, especially considering its price. Monocle offers increased dynamic range with greater speed and acceleration. Timbre, space, detail, intimacy; the Monocle delivers the musical nuances and color with emotion, truth and realism.

We are proud to feature German made WBT connectors as standard equipment. WBT incorporates uniquely functional designs and superior materials to produce the finest connectors the world has to offer.

WBT's new spade lug incorporates an elastomer type damper for excellent contact and dramatic reduction of vibration. The bimetal spade is fully insulated and CE compliant. Sandwich spades offer the highest fidelity and are strongly recommended.

---

**VIBRAPOD™**

Opal ........ $195 1 meter pair
Extremely pure solid FPC-6 copper (99.999%). RCA plugs are welded on using 8,000 amperes of current commingling the molecules.

Ruby ........ $125 1 meter pair
Extremely pure solid FPC copper (99.997%). RCA plugs are welded on using 8,000 amperes of current commingling the molecules.

Topaz ........ $79 1 meter pair

Turquoise ........ $45 1 meter pair

Jade ........ $29 1 meter pair

---

**KIMBER KABLE**

Monocle XL $880 8 foot pair
Monocle XL $855 5 foot pair
Monocle X $660 8 foot pair
Monocle X $585 5 foot pair

---

**VIBRAPHONE**

"A KR favorite...Vibrapods isolate and enhance performance. I keep a box of them around so that no component goes without".

-Stereophile Rec. Comp. 4/99

---

**Audioquest**

---

**Rega**

---

**One of A Kind Items!**

Rega Brio S35 integrated amp $399
Denon DCD 1650 CD player $699
Audio Prism Foundation II $399
Vanesvaro Model 11 Digital $220
AMC CD-6 CD player $199
AQ Diamond .5 meter pair $399
AQ QuartZ 1.5 meter pair $109
AQ QuarTz 2 meter pair $124
AQ Ruby 3 meter pair $99
AQ Turquoise 4 meter pair $39
AQ Turquoise 5 meter pair $49
AQ Type 6 Spk. Cable 4 pair $49
Monster M1.5 Spk. Cables 6' pr. $169
Monster M7 Spk. Cables 8' pr. $39
Goertz Sapphire 2m pr. $299
Goertz Triode Quartz 3m pr. $299
Goertz Tourmaline 1.5m pr. $299
XLO Type 4 Digital Cable $69
Kimber Kable PBJ 1.5m Pair $49
Kimber Kable 2.5m Pair $59
Vampire Dual Banana Pair $14

---

Prices subject to change without notice. Some pictures are representations of products.
We are the world’s largest supplier of audiophile LPs & CDs

Call 1-800-716-3553 for your FREE full-color catalog with covers and descriptions of more than 2,500 items.

Visit us at www.acousticsounds.com we’re always open.

Acoustic Sounds, Inc. • 1000 West Elm, Salina, KS 67401 • Phone 785-825-8609 • Fax 785-825-0156
At most world-music festivals in this post-Graceland, globally economized world, the name of the game is now cross-cultural collaboration. Hang around long enough and you’re sure to see American guitarist Ry Cooder, the one-man Mt. Olympus of planetary musicality, mixing it up with an African griot or an octogenarian conguero.

The more diverse the flavors, it seems, the better: Madagascar meets Indonesia; Delta blues on National steel guitar mixed with song-stories plucked out on the gourd-and-gut-string kora from West Africa; ballads and dance tunes all mashed into the same jam. Best of all are the stage announcements in at least three languages.

Although Cooder, notoriously shy (and, according to breathless festival gossip, notoriously difficult), wasn’t there, I saw and heard any number of “We Are the World” meetings during the weekend I spent at the 32nd edition of one of this hemisphere’s premier world-music festivals, the Festival D’Été de Québec, held in Quebec City two weeks of every July.

The festival, which has hosted the North American debuts of artists ranging from Italian soprano Cecilia Bartoli to African singer Ismael Lo, is still a secret worth getting in on. Unlike most summer music festivals, which are crowded and increasingly pricey, Quebec remains an appealing, low-cost mix, with a gorgeous European-style setting, manageable crowds, and local hospitality galore.

After five days of mostly African and Quebeccois music—as well as a number of one-world musical pairings played in a French-speaking city in an English-speaking country just north of an egocentric colonus obsessed at that moment with the disappearance of a Kennedy—my patois-babbling brain was set a-whirl. While I’m all for world peace, not to mention ART, there’s something pretentious and offputting about the quickening pace of cross-cultural, multi-continental “world music” projects.

First, there’s that record-store label, “world music.” This condescending Americanism has become a universally accepted tag in North America and Europe for any music that comes from anywhere else—the frontier, it seems to say, beyond the reach of civilization. Of course, you do have to wonder: If they’re the world, what are we?

During my weekend at the festival, I decided to turn the “world” music tables and ask several participants, many from the Francophone countries of Africa, what they called music from America.

“Rock’n’roll” and “jazz” were the most common responses, followed by “pop,” “bad,” and “From where?” So much for that vaunted (and/or condemned) Yankee cultural superiority.

While cross-cultural experiments can be beautiful when they work—the superb series from Water Lily Acoustics (see “Record Reviews,” p.162) and the Grammy-winning Buena Vista Social Club (with Ry Cooder) are obvious examples—most of these situations where an American/European musician tries to add something, anything, to a foreign (for them) musical form, fail to achieve much musical validity beyond being a curiosity or an ethnomusicological experience. Such efforts may revitalize a career in need of inspiration (ie Paul Simon), yet they inevitably feel like side projects.

In Quebec this year, most of the planned East-meets-West happenings involved guitars, and most revolved around American slide guitarist Bob Brosman. Brosman has written a book on National steel guitars, was once signed to Rounder Records, and currently couldn’t get arrested in his homeland (though that may soon change). As the festival’s unofficial Artist-in-Residence, Brosman was very prominent—at times too much so. The weekend I was there he collaborated onstage with Okinawan guitarist Takashi Hirayasu; the great René Lacaille, a guitarist/accordion player from Réunion Island in the Indian Ocean (who played in an odd 6/8 time); and Jali Musa Jawara, a singer from Guinea who’s also mastered the kora, the harp/lute instrument mentioned earlier.

After witnessing several of Brosman’s impromptu jams, I came away impressed and nonplused—which might be the point. No matter how intellectually intriguing or musically combustible such global music summits might look on paper, or how right the initial impulses to do them, many of these sessions simply did not jell. The talent was certainly there, but the lack of any coherent material that all players could relate to was a problem. I suspect lack of rehearsal time was another. On top of that, many forms of folk music just do not blend well with others—they’re almost too pure to work in any context but their own.

That said, there were several breath-taking sessions involving Brosman and Lacaille in which both players fell into a conversation that produced fascinating sound combinations and inventive solo trading. Brosman later remarked that his playing was forever changed by the experience, which in itself is reason enough for these combinations.

In the end, I came away with my cynicism much reduced, realizing that the inherent nature of today’s ubiquitous Cuba-meets-Clarksdale experiments, certainly for the listening audience, is hit or miss: high highs and low lows, with almost no gray area between rare triumph and flat dud. The key I’ve learned: Patience.

Or, as the Festival D’Été de Québec’s programming director, Jean Beaucehes, replied when he was asked about the festival’s future collaborations: “I’m listening.”
VISIT US ON-LINE FOR THE MOST EXTENSIVE
SELECTION OF CABLES FROM AUDIOQUEST, XLO, AND
TRIBUTURIES CABLES AVAILABLE ON THE INTERNET!

We’ve got the selection: A/V Racks...No one has a better selection! We carry the best brands such as, Atlantis, Bella’Getti, Lovan Sanus, Salamander, Alphason, Studio Tech, Altra, Tivoli Design, BDY and More! To see the full line of product from manufacturer, visit us on the web @ www.soundcity.com

Call us with any model number you are looking for at
1-800-432-0007

CINEPRO

Cinepro has been supplying home theater enthusiasts with amplifiers products since 1985, and is now recognized as a leader in home multi-channel amplification. Cinepro has quickly become a leader in performance audio components for a number of reasons. Our customers demand quality and, to exceed their expectations, our team of dedicated professionals has established certain business practices, with an emphasis on offering superior quality at an affordable price.

Chase Technologies RLC-1
Remote Line Controller
- Auto-tuning control & equalizer. Automatic subwoofer cut-off frequencies
- 8-bit digital output. LED display. - FI 28kHz. 15kHz - Switched
- AC power input. Switched. Dual VU meters (southern hemisphere).
- Individually switchable incline, decline or horizontal control.
- Individually switchable up, down, line, nature, volume, balance.
- Individually switchable for 4 line-level sources.
- By Barry White

$59

The Best Selection of DVD

Sony DVD Players
models include: DVD-ES500, DVD-5050, DVD-500, DVD-5050U, DVD-5500, DVD-5500U, DVD-5700U, DVD-5050U

Panasonic DVD Players
models include: DVD-ES500, DVD-5050, DVD-500, DVD-5050U

JVC DVD Players
models include: DVD-E50, DVD-E700

Pioneer DVD Players
models include: DV-500, DV-5050, DV-5700U

Parasound SCAMP Signal Controlled Amp Power
- Total AC control. Can be activated with audio in DC, voltage
- 1.2.4Ö (4) remote relays
- May be videoDMPS $59

Authorized Retailer Dealer For:


Sony DVDSS5000
Virtual Dolby
Digital Headphones

Authorized Internet Dealer For:

To Order Call 1-800-432-0007

FULL LINE AVAILABLE

CALL

CALL

CALL

CALL

CALL

CALL

CALL

FULL LINE AVAILABLE

CALL

CALL

CALL

CALL

CALL

CALL

CALL
Selection, Price & Expert Advice

Sound City is proud to carry TICE A.C. Power Conditioners, the only product that can dramatically improve the performance of every component in your Audio/Video system! TICE Audio, well known for pioneering breakthrough technologies in A.C. fine line filtering, has consistently pushed the envelope when it comes to innovative, cost effective line conditioners. All models exemplify "aero-space build quality" and truly exhibit what can be achieved through handcrafted performance.

"With the Elite and Infinite Speed together, my system went beyond what I considered its limits, with a speed and effortlessness that let the music breathe...Go ahead - maximize your system's potential. Get TICE!"

Play Magazine, Spring 1997

The Elite dramatically improves sound and picture quality while providing the ultimate in surge and spike protection.

- 6 outlets - 1975VA capacity
- IP technology for increased soundstage and video color accuracy
- 3 individually filtered circuits
- Additional filter circuit for dual-mono amplifiers (Elite-4)
- Front panel system control
- High accuracy dual spike A.C. filter
- Superior layout for digital, analog, video and power amplifiers
- Lifetime warranty!
- Dimension: 5 1/4 x 9 1/8 x 8"

"The most awesome thing the Elite offered was improved low-level resolution...bass reproduction was better controlled...even in a very good system, improvement can be significant."

Play Magazine, Spring 1997

The Power Block II C is two transformerless power conditioners in one common chassis.

* THE POWER BLOCK II C WILL NOT LIMIT CURRENT WHEN USED WITH HIGH POWER AMPLIFIERS

- 3 Outlets - 1975VA capacity
- Front & Rear isolated power cables
- Independent volume memory circuits
- 4 Point, rising & falling protection
- 3 independent circuits for power components totaling 8000VA
- 40amp 50 amp circuit breaker protection
- Dimension: 5 1/4 x 6 1/2 x 9 1/2"

"...the Power Block II C must be recognized as the final component of the finest audio systems...Gorgeous construction and build quality...the Tice Power Block II C stands alone in defining the state of art."

Audio Observatory, Volume 3, No. 9

Solo A/V- CALL Solo HC- CALL

Solo Power Line Enhancer- CALL

The Solo Power Line Enhancer provides parallel AC line enhancement to improve video quality as well as soundstaging width & depth.

- No AC line enhancement totally absent that is plugged into
- 10 outlets - 2300VA capacity
- IP technology for increased soundstage and video color accuracy
- Provision for enhanced video if components that are not plugged into
- Dimension: 5 3/4 x 8 x 9 1/4"

The Solo Power Line Enhancer dramatically improves sound and picture quality while providing the ultimate in surge and spike protection.

- 10 outlets - 2300VA capacity
- IP technology for increased soundstage and video color accuracy
- Provision for enhanced video if components that are not plugged into
- Dimension: 5 3/4 x 8 x 9 1/4"

Help your equipment reach its full potential with the value priced PC-3 AC Power Cable

- 6 outlets - 1975VA capacity
- Provision for enhanced video if components that are not plugged into
- Dimension: 5 3/4 x 8 x 9 1/4"

Power Block III- CALL

Powerblock III- CALL

Powerblock III- CALL

The Elite dramatically improves sound and picture quality while providing the ultimate in surge and spike protection.

- 6 outlets - 1975VA capacity
- IP technology for increased soundstage and video color accuracy
- Provision for enhanced video if components that are not plugged into
- Dimension: 5 3/4 x 8 x 9 1/4"

Help your equipment reach its full potential with the value priced PC-3 AC Power Cable

- 6 outlets - 1975VA capacity
- Provision for enhanced video if components that are not plugged into
- Dimension: 5 3/4 x 8 x 9 1/4"

"In my system, it improved amplifier performance the most...improved both the definition and the depth of the soundstage."

Play Magazine, Spring 1997

Tice Offers a Lifetime Warranty On All Products. Tice line conditioners and power cords offer a unique window into the world of high end audio and video. By dramatically reducing the noise and distortion found in all AC lines, these conditioners allow fine A/V components to reach their full performance potential.

FREE SHIPPING On All Tice Purchases through October 31, 1999.

Sound City specializes in products that provide an outstanding price/performance ratio, and TICE Audio proudly continues that tradition. From an entry level home theater system to a state-of-the-art audiophile music system, TICE has a high performance line conditioner or A.C. power cable starting at $159.

WE DELIVER
The following domestic and import CDs are just a sampling of what we carry.

(Holly Cole Canadian Press) $18.99 ea
Dear Dark Heart
Treasure (Limited)
It Happened One Night
Don’t Smoke In Bed
Temptation
Girl Talk
Arie Moreno Killer B’s (British) $21.99
Dead Can Dance (British) $21.99
Into The Labyrinth
Toward The Within
Charlie Haden/Chris Anderson None But
The Lonely Heart (Naim) $17.99
Audionet $17.99
Crave Records $13.99
Dion Recording $14.99
Classic Records Gold CD Sale $12.99
DCC Gold CDs $22.99
Donini xCDs $13.99
JVC XRCDs $25.99
Mobile Fidelity Gold CDs $22.99
Reference Recordings $13.49

Audio Prism Waveguide
This incredible sonic advance from Audio Prism eliminates cross-channel noise on power cords, interconnects and speaker cables down to DC frequencies. The Waveguide is first-class ahead of ferrite-based noise eliminators. $99.99

SCE Harmonic Recovery System $499.99
Sennheiser HD600 headphones $349.99
Sennheiser HD580 headphones $199.99
Shaklki Stone $199.99
Shaklki Dr.-Lines $99.99/pair
Signet Cleaning Tools (plug of 4) $119.99
TDS Passive Audioisolation Processor $399.99
Tektronics C-T Vibration Absorber $99.99
Vans Evers Pandora power cord $299.99
XLD TCP wipes (plug of 10) $8.99
3M Vacuum Tube Dampers $3.49 ea
3M Damping Sheets $4.99 ea

High-end accessories

Audio Prism Quintet Filters $24.99
Audio Prism Power Foundation 3 $99.99
Audio Prism CD Stoplight $18.99
Black Diamond Racing cones (3) $59.99
Custom Power Cord Co. Model 11 $299.99
An incredible power cord value
Ensemble tubewax $164.99/pair
Highwire Powerwrap $49.99
Lightspeed 480 line conditioner $299.99
McCormack Micro Headphone drive $794.99
back in production
MSB Technologies Link DAC $349.99
Nordost Electrostatic anti-static spray $39.99
Rega Planet CD Player $299.99
Rightway Audio Suppressors (each) $29.99

Ultimate Field Optimizer
This is the one audio tweak you cannot do without! The UFO dissipated the magnetic electrostatic ghosts that inhabit all audio equipment and cabling. One treatment restores your system's high frequency extension, dynamics and transparent response. Music Direct's most highly recommended accessory. UFO $299.99

Grado The Statement phonograph cartridge
John Grado introduces the finest federal gothophone cartridge in the world! (and maybe the finest cartridge of any design) This low output (75mV) cartridge delivers a lush, warm tonal balance that is exceedingly natural without being bloated. Its high frequency extension is the equal of any moving coil. Best of all, you can tryout The Statement with Music Direct's unique cartridge demo program. $2495.99

Aesthetic Cartridge Demagnetizer $179.99
Alltop DeTrac 2 $349.99

analogue accessories

Music Direct carries the best in analogue accessories. Call for products not listed

The fine print

We’re open Monday to Friday, 9 to 6 central time, Saturday, 10 to 3. For a catalog, leave your name and address on our voice mail. There is a $5 charge for catalogs mailed outside North America, refundable on your first order.

In addition to items featured here, we carry a one of the country's largest inventories of domestic and import vinyl, CDs, and other products from: Acoustic Disc, Analogue Productions, Alto Edition, Audioquest, Chesky, Clarity, Classic Records, DCC, Decca, Debut, DMP, Dorian, First Impressions Music, GNP Harmonia Mundi, Maple Shade, John Marks Records, JVC XRCD, MCA Heavy Vinyl, Mercury, Mobile Fidelity, Naim, DUC, Reference Recordings, Sheffield Lab, Sony Legacy, Telarc, Water Lily.

Music Direct also features accessories and hardware from: Arctis, Ap, Audio Prism, Audioquest, Bedini, Benz Micro, Black Diamond Racing, Bright Star Audio, Creek, Echo Busters, Grado, Last, Lightspeed, Magico, Monster Cable, MSB Technology, Nitty Grity, Perfectionist Audio, Rega, RingMat, Roomtone, Sennheiser, Shaklki, Shure, Solidsteel, Sovtek, Sumiko, Svelta, Synergistic, Target, Vans Evers, Versalab, VPI.

Benz Glider cartridge $21.99
Disc Doctor record brushes $34.99/pair
Disc Dr. Miracle Record Cleaning Fluid $19.99/pct
Grado Reference Platinum cartridge $29.99
Groove Glide II $21.99
Hifi News Test LP $24.99
Hunt Brush $19.99
KAB Speedster $69.99
KAB Record Grip $29.99
LAST record preservative $29.99
Lehmann Black cube phono stage $694.99
Milly Zero stat $59.99
Music Hall MMF-2 turntable $219.99
Record Research Lab’s LP-9 $24.99
Ringmatt 330XLR $79.99
Shure VSVM $59.99
Shure Stylus Force Gauge $16.99
Sumiko Blue Point Special $29.99
Sumiko HS-12 Headshell $29.99
VPI 16.5 Record Cleaning Machine $429.99

check out our catalog online at http://www.amusicdirect.com
Tom Waits

In a parallel universe, the words "acquired taste" or "cult artist" might signify Tom Waits. He and his music aren't for everyone, particularly in the past decade, when his records have grown progressively uproarious and noisy.

But for those who've stayed abreast of this inimitable singer/songwriter/pianist/actor/provocateur's varied career, and have been converted to his cancerous tinshle, his rushing, whispered beatnik poetics, and, over the past five years, his increasingly assaultive, self-indulgent approach to whipping up a musical din, Waits remains a revelation — one of the few musicians alive who entirely defines the creative universe in which he lives and works.

At the core, Waits and his music are a sly, crooked combination of maudlin sentimentality and shaggy, perverse anarchy. Rolling drunk in the gutter and wowing the longhairs at Carnegie Hall with his intellectually tortured monologues are equally important to this fry cook in minstrel's clothing. On stage and on record, he's as interested in your tears as in your belly laughs.

No one since Fats Waller and the great Harlem rent-party pianists of the early 1930s and '40s has carved out a more distinctive identity, using just a piano and a bristly singing voice as primary weapons. Waits' endless stream of risky artistic ideas could only have come from him. Beyond that, few musicians are capable of the kind of mid-career artistic transformation that Waits sprung on the world in the early 1980s.

Born in the San Diego suburb of National City — in, he claims, a moving taxi — Waits was influenced as a child by the music of George Gershwin, Stephen Foster, and Bing Crosby. To that he later added a love of bebop and the works of beat writers like Jack Kerouac and Charles Bukowski. Once he began to write melodies and lyrics, Randy Newman was a huge influence, as was '50s jazz talker Babs Gonzales. In the late '60s, the teenaged pizza-parlor employee (a job later immortalized in song) moved to L.A., where he began playing the Troubadour, among other venues, and living in the famed rock-star haunt of the Tropicana Hotel.

Under the direction of his then-new manager Herb Cohen, Waits recorded his first demos in L.A. in 1971, for Frank Zappa's Bizarre/Straight label. (Cohen also managed Zappa.) Although mercilessly pummeled by the same critics who can't fawn fast enough over his later, quirkier work, the two volumes of Tom Waits: The Early Years (Bizarre/Straight/Rhino R2 70557 and Bizarre/Straight/Manifesto PT3 40602) are oddly, amusingly charming, if for no other reason than the innocence and earnestness that the 22-year-old aspiring singer/songwriter so tentatively displays. Waits' singing voice is nasal, and his falsettos (at the close of "Poncho's lament") are hilariously wobbly hound-dog cries. Those who've heard only his later work won't recognize these warblings: these demos aren't anywhere near his best work. But there's nothing quite so precious as the debut recordings of a singer/songwriter: one guitar (and, in this case, one piano), one voice, and a batch of shiny songs vs. the world.

Best of all (or worst, if you must be serious) are his embryonic lyrics. Volume One is a treasure trove of stubbed lyrical toes. In "Had Me a Girl," after the gem of "I had me a girl from Mississippi / Boy, she was kippy," he rhymes his way out of a poetic corner with "I had me a girl from Toledo / Boy, she sure was neat." In the ridiculously love-sick "Little Trip to Heaven" (which sounds like a castoff from a nauseatingly sappy Broadway musical), these couplets — "I don't need to take no trip to outer space / All I have to do is look at your face / Before I know it I'm in orbit around you / I thank my lucky stars I found you" — are followed by out-of-tune whistling!

Finally, in "Frank's Song," Waits sings, "I had a friend, his name was Frank / He walked on the water now, lord he sank / We used to go stag / But now he's got a bag / It looks like Frank's got a brand new bag." Ouch.

Had Waits never progressed from this point, such gaffes wouldn't be so funny.

With his eye on the prize, a young Tom Waits wonders how long it will be until fate smiles upon him.

Stereophile, September 1999
The PROCEED Modular DVD Transport... designed & built by Madrigal...

UNIQUE DESIGN...better performance...better user interface...flexible platform to avoid premature obsolescence...HIGH PERFORMANCE...audiophile quality CD playback & videophile quality DVD...four separate power supplies...BROADCAST QUALITY VIDEO...delivering precisely what's on the DVD without degradation...MODULAR DESIGN...Software & hardware modularity allow for compatibility with new formats & data...Software readily updatable via download by your Proceed dealer...DESIGNED FOR FLEXIBILITY...a long-term optical disc platform, benefiting from software & hardware modularity, allows the PMDT to change with the times...CUSTOM INSTALLATION FEATURES...communications link to other Proceed products...RS-232 control capability for AMX & PHASTLink™ communications...IR input jack...ELEGANT TO LOOK AT...EASY TO USE...

...call or visit SOUNDex to arrange for your private demo of the new PMDT & all the other exceptional products from PROCEED...MARK LEVINSON...& MADRIGAL...

Come visit the world's most luxurious HIGH-END showroom & play in our 22 comfortable & furnished model soundrooms & home theaters set-up for your private listening & viewing pleasure!

Madrigal
A Harman International Company

A High Performance Modular DVD Transport...
But considering the subsequent arc of his career, it's nice to hear that even this consummate musician had to learn the hard way. It's also worth noting that many of these songs—"Virginia Avenue," "Ol' 55," "Old Shoes," "Grapefruit Moon"—ended up, in better-played and -arranged versions, on Waits' first album.

Waits signed with Elektra in 1973, and *Closing Time* (Elektra 5061-2) was the first blossoms of what would become a very fruitful relationship. It set the pattern for the half-dozen albums to come: three or four yearning, lovable loser ballads sprinkled among the more upbeat styles of blues-piano growlers, jazzy, out-on-the-town whisperers, and, beginning with the later Elektra albums, a fearless, imaginative obsessiveness with feathering his increasingly experimental vision with all kinds of sounds, no matter how abrasive or tangentially musical.

But *Closing Time* was still tentative, if not as much so as the *Early Years* demos. It was also Waits' only attempt to cut a straight folk album, and established right from the opening track—"Ol' 55," still one of his most accessible and appealing melodies—that a new and very gifted songwriter had arrived.

"Ol' 55" also established another pattern that haunts Waits to this day: his most famous tunes have become so via cover versions by the likes of Bruce Springsteen, Rod Stewart, Marianne Faithfull, and, in the case of "Ol' 55," The Eagles, who included it on their 1974 album, *On the Border.*

Gazed at through the clear lens of hindsight and Waits' established career, *Closing Time,* produced by Jerry Yester (who joined Lovin' Spoonful after their early hits), remains a solid songwriting effort. The woozy, buzzy "Virginia Avenue" and Waits' second stab at the Tin Pan Alley-esque "Little Trip to Heaven" (complete with a Miles-esque muted trumpet accompaniment), are two of his more successful ventures into a jazzier mode. The swingin', R&B-inflected "Ice Cream Man," which pre-dates the current swing boom by more than 20 years, still holds its own. "Martha" is proof of Waits' prodigious melodic gifts. And "I Hope That I Don't Fall in Love with You" is the first in a long line of heart-rending ballads that have, over the years, become the deepest, most fertile channel in Waits' songwriting stream. The album's sparse production style—in most cases just Waits, singing and playing piano—is occasionally and tastefully augmented by modest string sections that add sweep and body, particularly to his yearning ballads.

"Ol' 55" established a pattern that haunts Waits to this day: his most famous tunes have become so via cover versions.

*Closing Time* is also distinguished by being perhaps the one time when Waits actually sang throughout an entire record. No growls. No gutturals. No gutural hollers.

That serious singing trend continues unabated on the Bones Howe--produced *The Heart of Saturday Night* (1974, Elektra/Asylum 1015-2). Song by song, you can practically hear Waits gaining confidence as a hipster rapper/singer as he honed his persona of smoke-ringed bar-room philosopher. The smoky, laid-back "Semi Suite" may be the best example ever of his overtly jazzy side. With its hot jazz clarinet accents and solo, "Fumblin' with the Blues" is his best piano/vocal blues to that point. And the title track remains a Waits favorite, having been resurrected most recently (and very effectively) by Shawn Colvin.

But *Saturday Night* is most notable for the increasing proportion of purplish, stream-of-consciousness lyrics, such as "The clouds are like headlines / on a new front page sky / my tears are salt water / and the moon's full and high," from "Shiver Me Timbers"; the first appearance of spoken-word numbers, in this case "Diamonds on My Windshield" and "The Ghosts of Saturday Night"; and finally, the deliberate creation of Waits as a greasy, disheveled, piano-noodling metaphysician—cigarette perpetually lit, hiply epigrammatic flummery pouring out, fedora or newsboy cap pulled conspiratorially low. This image, reinforced by his rakish live performances, endured until his final Elektra album, 1980's *Heartattack and Vine.*

Waits' next collection—*Nighthawks at the Diner* (Elektra/Asylum 2008-2), released in 1975, the year of Springsteen's *Born to Run*—was a classic ill-fated attempt to break Waits out to a larger record-buying audience via a live album full of those rambling, often convivial club performances. Recorded in a studio with an audience present, this long set (originally released as a double LP) is either overblown and self-conscious as hell or, if you suspend your disbelief, a revealing slice of Waits' Bukowski-esque rantings, egged on by the captive crowd's laughter and applause.

After a faux intro to this gig at "Rafael's Silver Cloud Lounge," Waits launches lustily into such babble as "Hubba-hubba, ding, ding, ding / I said, baby, you got everything" ("Emotional Weather Report"). For the first time on Elektra's current set of cheaply packaged midline CD reissues, the lyrics and list of musicians are printed in the booklet. If there were ever a candidate for a first-class remastering and

*Stereophile,* September 1999

"Ol' 55" established a pattern that haunts Waits to this day: his most famous tunes have become so via cover versions.

Waits on home ice — a piano, a cigarette, and an empty bar near closing time.

127
Basis Model 1400 ($1,200, pictured top)
"How inexpensive...the entry into Basis ownership...not a Basis wannabee." Ken Kessler, HiFi News, 2/99

Graham Nightingale ($3,800, lower inset)
Integral cartridge/armwand, a collaboration with Immutable Music, manufacturer of the Transfiguration Temper Supreme, Spirit and Esprit cartridges.

Basis Debut Vacuum Mk V
($10,600, pictured bottom)

Graham 2.0 Pickup Arm
($3,000, pictured bottom)
Editor's Choice ★★★
The Absolute Sound, Issue 116

Audio Unlimited
"Best stereo store, cooler than cool selection of high end from around the world." Unlimited Magazine, 2/99

Accuphase, Aesthetix, Airtight, Audio Artistry, Avalon Acoustics, Cabasse, Cary, Graaf, Joseph Audio, Koetsu, Muse, Nagra, Pathos, Spendor, Tannoy, Transfiguration, YBA, XLO and more...

Now Featuring Conrad-Johnson

Call John Barnes 303.691.3407
reissue job—not to mention a boxed set—it’s Tom Waits.

The band, led by tenor saxman Pete Christlieb, meanders behind Waits’ Beat
poet raps and piano accompaniment. If wordplay makes you smile, then this is the
Waits disc for you, and in small doses it’s genuinely funny. In “Eggs and
Sausage,” the self-proclaimed “pioneer of the palate” riff on cheap late-night eats
in L.A.—“the veal cutlet came down and tried to beat the shit out of my cup of
coffee and my coffee wasn’t strong enough to defend itself.” And in “Better
Off Without a Wife,” Waits comes home after a date with himself and by
2:30am has “taken advantage” of himself by “makin’ the scene with a magazine.”
And in the intro to “Foggy Night,” he seems up the album’s overall aim: an
“improvisational adventure through the bowels of the metropolitan region.”

By 1976’s Small Change (Elektra/Asylum 1078-2), Waits had cranked out
an album a year for four years, in the process working hard to enrich and
expand the by-now familiar songwriting modes that had become integral parts of
his mad poet/nighttime denizen personality. “Step Right Up” is a rapid-fire
stream of Madison Avenue TV-commercial catchlines, peppered with pecu-
liar Waitsisms like “Change into a nine-
year-old I lindu boy and get rid of your
wife.” His long-simmering Randy
Newman influences burst into the open with
“I Wish I Was in New Orleans,” and
another Big Easy musical model, Louis
Armstrong, begins to be discerned in
Waits’ mugging stage presence and
rounded, emphatic vocals. His spoken-
word groove reaches a new height in
“Pasties and a G-String,” where “I smell
like a brewery, look like a tramp / ain’t
got a quarter, got a postage stamp,” and
where, watching a strip show, he gets
“harder than Chinese algebra.”

Finally, his lonely-guy, drink-himself-
under-the-table aesthetic finds its finest
expression in a pair of tunes that push
Small Change over the top as Waits’ best
recorded effort of the ’70s: the slow,
repetitive “The Piano Has Been Drinking
(Not Me),” and “Bad Liver and a
Broken Heart,” at the beginning and
end of which he briefly quotes “As
Time Goes By” on the piano and sings
“I don’t have a drinking problem / ex-
cept when I can’t get a drink.”

After that high point, Foreign Affairs
(1977, Elektra 1117-2) was a step back,
and the first sign that Waits had begun
to repeat himself. The singles-bar chit-
chat duet with Betty Midler, “I Never
Talk to Strangers” (which presaged his
duets with Crystal Gayle on the One
from the Heart soundtrack), is the high-
light of side 1 of the original LP. But
side 2, with the spidery spoken-word
“Potter’s Field” and the sparse, dreamy
“Burnin Shave,” is what makes this disc
worth having.

Perhaps sensing that he needed a
change, Waits made several course cor-
rections on his next annual installment,
1978’s Blue Valentine. The piano is de-
emphasized in favor of Waits just singing to minimal accom-
paniment, or electric guitar played by Waits, Roland
Bautista, or I Harold Bartiste.

The song-story of “Christmas Card from a Hooker in
Minneapolis” and the kool, loungey, hipsterese of “Ro-
meo is Bleeding” are this album’s two best-known
cuts. A trio of blue tunes —
“$29.00,” “Wrong Side of the
Road,” and “Whistlin’ Past the Graveyard”—show
that Waits still featured that
semital genre prominently
on record. The singer’s graceful, inex-
orable heavy-heartedness returns in
the gorgeous ballad of “Kentucky
Avenue,” on which Bones Howe em-
ploys a tasteful flight of strings. And
the very next song, “Sweet Little Bullet
from a Pretty Blue Gun,” is the first
fragile sprig of the noisy Waits thicket to
come.

After a two-year break—
during which he appeared
in his first film, Sly Stal-
lone’s Paradise Alley—in
1980 Waits released Heart-
attack and Vine (Elektra 295-
2), which became a mile-
stone in his career for a
number of reasons. It was
the last of seven albums he
recorded for Elektra/Asy-
lum. (He signed with Island
Records in 1982.) It was also
the last album for which he
had an outside producer,
Bones Howe. After Heart-
attack, Waits split from longtime man-
ger Herb Cohen. And this album was
the end of Waits’ lounge piano-player
persona.

As farewells go, though, this one was
sweet. The orchestra- and piano-filled,
Randy Newman–influenced “Saving
All My Love for You” is one of his finest
ballads. The organ-led “Downtown” is
as close as he’s ever come to having a
radio hit. And of all his hundreds of
original songs, “Jersey Girl,” which

Stereophile, September 1999

Building a Library
STEREO EXCHANGE

HOME THEATER specialists
Audio and Video: a single component to a matched system
Custom design & installation...
We work with architects and designers
Multi-room installation
Surround Sound: Dolby Digital, DTS
Consulting, Troubleshooting
Authorized factory repairs
Used equipment specialists: BUY-SELL TRADE by PHONE

AUTHORIZED DEALERSHIPS:
- Audio Research
- Acurus
- Adcom
- Aerial
- Alpha Care
- Aragon
- Arcam
- Arcici
- Audio Access
- Audio Prism
- Bellogetti
- B&W
- B&W Nautilus
- C.A.L.
- Chang Light Speed
- CRT Projection
- Definitive Technology
- E.A.R.
- Elan
- Entech
- Fanfare
- Faroudja
- Gallo
- Golden Tube
- Grado
- Graham
- Hovland
- Infinity
- Kimber Kable
- Kimber Select
- Loewe TV
- Magnuim Dynalab
- Martin Logan
- Marantz
- McCormack
- McIntosh
- Meridian
- MIT
- Monster
- Nakamichi
- Niles
- Oracle
- Ortofon
- Pass
- Pioneer Elite
- ProAc
- Proscan TV
- Proton
- Rega
- Rel
- Rock Solid
- Rotel
- Runco
- Salamander
- Satellite TV
- Sennheiser
- Sharpvision
- LCD & H.D.T.V.
- SME
- Straight Wire
- Sumiko
- Sunfire
- Tact
- Target
- Unity Motion H.D.T.V.
- VAC
- Van Den Hul
- Vidikron
- VPI
- Wadia
- Well Tempered
- Yamaha...
and more...MUCH more

We do not mail-order NEW products outside our market area.

627 Broadway, Greenwich Village, New York 10012 • 212-505-1111 • Fax: 212-995-5524 (Outside NYC • 1-800-833-0071)
Open 7 days... Mon.-Fri. 11-7:30 pm • Sat. 10:30-7 pm • Sun.12-7pm www.stereoexchange.com • 9/4/89

See ad in Bell Atlantic yellow pages
Springsteen later made into an anthem, is perhaps Waits’ best-known tune—the single song that sums up all he’d had tried to accomplish, musically and lyrically, in the preceding decade. After *Small Change*, this is the other essential album from the Elektra years.

The last and, paradoxically, most mainstream gash of Waits’ lounge-singer persona and Tin Pan Alley songwriting homages came with his Grammy-nominated score for Francis Ford Coppola’s ill-fated musical, *One from the Heart* (Columbia KC 37703). In a series of straightforward duets with Crystal Gayle (Bette Midler, Waits’ first choice, was unavailable), Waits vamps through jazzy ditties (“Little Boy Blue”), spoken-word bits (“You Can’t Unring a Bell”), and utterly saccharine numbers like “I Beg Your Pardon.” It’s a fitting irony that he made the most mainstream record of his career just as he was poised to swing in the exact opposite artistic direction.

From the plinking/plunking opening bars of “Underground,” the first cut on 1983’s *Swordfishtrombones* (Island 422-842 469-2), it’s clear that Waits had become the ringmaster of a new musical world. Since the release of *One from the Heart*, he’d married playwright Kathleen Brennan and moved to New York, where he wrote songs with the leader of the Lounge Lizards, John Lurie, with whom he was to star in Jim Jarmusch’s 1986 film, *Down by Law*.

The sound of *Swordfishtrombones* was so different that it made the Elektra albums sound as if they’d been recorded by someone else. Elektra in fact had been offered the disc first, and their refusal ended Waits’ tenure on the label. Odd time signatures, close-nicked percussion of every imaginable sort, and shouted, Howlin’ Wolf-like vocals replaced the strings and lounge jazz-cat mannerisms. There were plenty of exotic instruments—bagpipes, glass harmonica, and Balinese percussion. Chief influence Randy Newman had now been supplanted by Kurt Weill, Captain Beefheart, Charles Ives, and Harry Partch. In every way, this disc was a huge artistic leap forward.

In a recent interview in *Mojo* (April ’99), Waits described the changes: “I was trying to find music that felt more like the people that were in the songs, rather than everybody being kind of dressed up in the same outfit. The people in my earlier songs might have had unique things to say and have come from diverse backgrounds, but they all looked the same.”

The reception among fans and fellow musicians was surprise, followed—once they got used to the volcanic changes—by awe and cultish adoration. In Patrick Humphries’ biography of Waits, *Small Change* (1989, Omnibus Press), Elvis Costello says: “I was envious, not so much of the music, but his ability to rewrite himself out of the corner he’d appeared to have backed himself into. It was an audacious thing to do, and I think that anyone who can’t recognize the quality of that music really doesn’t have their ears on the right wave ‘round!”

The one familiar element on Waits’ Island debut were the ballads, at which he continued to excel, and best represented here by the short, gorgeous “Johnsburg, Illinois.” The very next cut, however—the aggressively howled “I6 Shells from a Thirty-Ought Six”—was the new Waits in purest form. In the half-spoken, half-sung “Shore Leave” there’s a sailor in port on a two-day pass who “shot billiards with a midget until his rain stopped” in a new hybrid between the monologues of the past and Waits’ prickly new musical vision. A brass band, complete with glockenspiel, backs Waits on the deliciously sweet (music) and sour (lyrics), “In the Neighborhood.” Three instrumentalists, headed by “Just Another Sucker on the Vine,” break things up in a beneficial way. “Down, Down, Down” is frantic funk, and in “Frank’s Wild Years,” Frank Leroux, who would later become the subject of an entire album, makes his first appearance, driven crazy by Carlos, a blind Chihuahua with a skin disease.

All in all, *Swordfishtrombones* is the kind of fresh, oblique album that routinely inspires critics to pant and gush about “embarrassments of riches.” Prismatic in the extreme, it gets better—or at least different—with each listen. Elektra followed the success of this album with the *Anthology* (Elektra 60416) compilation, which collects many of the best tracks from Waits’ years on that label. *Rain Dogs* (1985, Island 90299-2) continued the experimentalism of *Swordfishtrombones*. Cacophony had now become the end, not the means. The Weillisms increased, as did the jarring rhythms and

It’s a fitting irony that Waits made the most mainstream record of his career just as he was poised to swing in the exact opposite artistic direction.
Classé
SSP-25
• Newest Processor from Classé
• Includes DTS, AC3
• Simple User Interface
• Silver or Black Faceplate

ROKSAN
XERXES.X
• Outboard DC Power Supply
• Ultra Quiet Swiss DC Motor
• Outboard Speed Selector (No Belt Changing)
• Rosewood or Black Finish
• New Lower Price Makes it a Bargain

Convergent Audio Technology

New! SL-1 Ultimate
Improves on the SL-1 MKIII in the Following Ways:
• More Powerful Bass with Greater Authority
• Reduced Grain, Less Mechanical Sound
• Liquid Free Flowing with Huge Crescendos
• Makes All Other Pre-Amps Sound Coarse and Mechanical by Comparison

New! JL-1 Signature
From the design genius of Ken Stevens comes his latest master stroke. CAT now uses improved wire, better capacitors and new transformers. This is without question the world’s finest amplifier.
$29,995.00/pair

Master Control Center
• Active Shielding Now Available
• Actively Reduces System Noise Floor by 12 db for Breathtaking Inner Detail
• One Master Control Center can power up to Six Pairs of Interconnects
• Doubles Sound Stage Size for Both Audio and Home Theater Systems

AVALON
ACOUSTICS
Arcus
• New Generation Loudspeaker from Avalon
• Breathtaking Clarity and Soundstaging
• Stunning Cosmetics, Available in Seven Finishes
• rave Reviews from Press and Consumers

Designed by Neil Patel
for Avalon Acoustics

PRODUCTS AVAILABLE
• ATLANTIS • AUDIBLE ILLUSIONS • AUDIO MAGIC • AUDIO PHYSICS • AUDIO TECHNICA • AUDIO ECO • AUDIOPHILE • AVALON ACOUSTICS • AYRE
• BALANCED AT10 TECHNOLOGY • BANS • BENZ MICRO • BRIGHTSTAR • CHANG LIGHTSPEED • CLASSÉ • CLEAR AUDIO PHONO PRODUCTS • CYDA • CONRAD-JOHNSON • CONVERGENT AUDIO TECHNOLOGY • DISCOVERY CABLE • DUNLAP LOUDSPEAKERS AND CABLIS • FAD • FAD • ESSENTIAL SOUND PRODUCTS
• FANFARE • GENESIS • GRAFET • GRAHAM TONEARMS • IRMINA • KIMBER KABLE • KLZA • LITA • MAGNUM DYNAUDIO • MARANTZ CLASSIC • MILLS
• MORA • MICROMEGA • MORDAUNT-SHORT • MUNE • MUSIC METRE • MUSIC REFERENCE • NAGRA
• MORDANT-CARLES • PHINIS • REFLECTION AUDIO • REGA • REL ACOUSTICS • ROGUE AUDIO
• ROKAN • RPM • METCH • STE • SOLIDSTEEL • SON’S FADER • SUMIKO • SYNERGISTIC RESEARCH
• TARA LABS • TARA LABS DECADE • TDC • TOWNSHEND • TRANSGRESSION • VON SCHWEIKERT RESEARCH • VPI • WADE DIGITAL • WEATON TRI-PLANAR • WILSON BENSH • YBA • ZOETHESIS

PHONE: 716 • 742 • 2860
FAX: 716 • 742 • 2859
E-Mail: analogshop@aol.com

Stereophile, September 1999
bizarre juxtapositions of instruments. The marimba-led "Diamonds & Gold" quotes "Chim Chim Cher-ee." Waits bangs away at the banjo in "Gun Street Girl." The title tune opens with Phantom-of-the-Opera organ lines played on accordion. Guitarist Marc Ribot, a new and quickly essential addition to the chaotic Waitsian world, adds amplified noise and intricate guitar figures to "Jockey Full of Bourbon" and other tracks. Guitars, in fact, are predominant again, with high-profile guest Keith Richards adding accents to the Stones-like sax-led honk of "Union Square," the cracked country twangin' of "Blind Love," and "Big Black Mariah."

Although more expansive and necessarily less surprising than its predecessor, Rain Dogs is still tethered to earth (although the strings were loosening) by conventional rock 'n' pop song structures and melodies and verse-chorus-verse structures—songs like "Hang Down Your Head" and the absolutely superb "Downtown Train," arguably Waits' last intelligible pop song. This record and its predecessor, added to the earlier Small Change and Heartattack and Vine, form the quartet of essential Waits discs.

From this point on, the plentiful eccentricities of this increasingly eccentric artist began to take over, making his more recent Island albums a challenging listen.

Franks Wild Years (1987, Island 422-842 357-2)—also the title of a song on Swordfish Trombones and of a stage play Waits wrote with his wife— is a moody exploration of sound and texture that continues his tribute to German cabaret while moving further away from conventional song structures and any notion of "accessibility." Waits himself described it as "a cross between Jacqueline Susann's The Love Machine and the New Testament." Waits' vocals are often run through a processor, and musical instruments are picked at or bashed on. Whiffs of the old reverence for Randy Newman appear only on "Train Song." Even the tender "Innocent When You Dream (Barroom)," reprised as the final cut with a vocal processor, is marred (or, depending on your taste, brilliantly distorted) by an odd, wobbly arrangement.

Many singularly inventive moments of previously unheard experimentalism are woven in—the horns of "Way Down in the Hole," the skating-rink pump organ of "I'll Take New York," and the doo-wop/accordion combination of "Cold Cold Ground"—but overall, Waits has here moved from being an artist who grabs you in the gut to one who tries the patience of the uninstructed while aiming squarely for the intellectual respect of his long-time fans.

The amount of difficulty in Waits' music directly corresponds to the rise of his career as a film actor. Since 1982 he's appeared in a number of Coppola projects—Rumble Fish, The Cotton Club, The Outsiders, and Bram Stoker's Dracula (as Renfield)—as well as Down By Law, Ironweed, and Short Cuts. Is he now spending less time on music and more on the silver screen?

From this point on, the plentiful eccentricities of this increasingly eccentric artist began to take over, making his more recent Island albums a challenging listen.

A film was the inspiration for his next album, the live Big Time (1988, Island 422-842 470-2), which serves as a greatest-hits-so-far sampling of his Island records. Not particularly exciting or even well recorded, Big Time was the soundtrack album for the sold-out concert film of the same name. Another minor work—although any Waits album is still leagues above what most musicians dream of, let alone are capable of—is his soundtrack music for Jim Jarmusch's 1992 saga of taxi divers the world over, Night on Earth (Island 314-510 725-2).

It's fitting that Waits' monument to outright noise, 1992's Bone Machine (Island 314-512 580-2), also won him his only Grammy Award for a solo album. Of all his records, this is the one to play for novices. For one thing, as in his late-'70s work, Waits here begins to repeat himself. Experimentalism and laziness mix seamlessly. Shril, damorous soundscapes like "Such a Scream" and its follow-up, "All Stripped Down," are more self-indulgent jabber than anything musical. Most foureads are quieter than "In the Colosseum" or "Goin' Out West," and even ballads like "Who Are You" or "Whistle Down the Wind," normally his saving grace, sound bloodless. Only in the falsetto wailing of "Jesus Gonna Be Here" and the snusulously menacing "Murder in the Red Barn" does Waits hit the mark in the crazier material. Any way you slice it, Bone Machine is Waits' most difficult record; it makes Small Change sound like The Sound of Music.

All the annoying tendencies of Bone Machine—and a few new ones he obviously thought up on the spot—came to fruition on 1993's Black Rider (Island 314-518 559-2), which is as close to a genuinely bad record as Waits has made. The score for his successful theatrical collaboration of the same name with Robert Wilson (Einstein on the Beach) and writer William Burroughs, this hopefully was Waits' final catharsis of Weil-like Germanic cabaret song obsession. While there are enough touches to hook his true fans—the theremin that opens "November," Burroughs' spoken asides—much of this incredibly self-indulgent disc of music and spoken word suffers mightily from the lack of the accompanying visuals, and is simply not worth listening to. Minor, very art Waits in the extreme.

Fortunately, the story doesn't end there. After another compilation, Beautiful Maladies: The Island Years (Island 314-524 519-2), Waits again switched labels, from Island to metal/rap indie Epiphant, and again was reinvigorated. His first Epiphant disc, 1999's Mule Variations (Epiphant 86547-2), is a return—almost—to the quality of inspiration shown on his first stellar pair of Island albums. In other words, noisy percussion, processed vocals, and experimentalism predominate. But this time out—seven years after Bone Machine—first-class tunes like "Hold On," whose melody and simple but effective approach echoes "Downtown," and a pair of knockout ballads ("House Where Nobody Loves" and "Georgia Lee") make the album a success. "What's He Building?" is a hilarious spoken-word monologue. And even some of the clangorous numbers are fun: "Eyeball Kid" and "Filipino Box Spring Hog" (with Charlie Musselwhite on harmonica).

If there's a problem with Mule Variations, it could be that Waits, who once before almost completely reinvented himself musically, seems in need of repeating that nearly impossible feat. Can he do it?

Don't bet against it. As he said in Mojo when asked if he and his old stage persona were the same: "You mean am I Frank Sinatra or am I Jimi Hendrix? Or am I Jimi Sinatra? It's a ventriloquist act, everybody does one."
Frank Sinatra: '57 - In Concert

This NEVER BEFORE RELEASED Frank Sinatra CONCERT captures a 41-year-old Sinatra at his very best backed by the Nelson Riddle orchestra! Features many of Sinatra's GREATEST HITS including "You Make Me Feel So Young," "I Got A Kick Out Of You," "The Lady Is A Tramp," "I Won't Dance," and many others. Includes a VERY SPECIAL 36 PAGE BOOKLET with ALL NEW ARTWORK, RARE PHOTOS and LINER NOTES written by Kelsey Grammer, star of "Frasier" and "Will Friedwald," author of "SINATRA! THE SONG IS YOU" and "THE GOOD LIFE."

Joni Mitchell: Blue

Joni Mitchell's RIAA certified Platinum 1971 album "BLUE" captures this folk legend at her absolute peak in form and creativity. NOW AVAILABLE FOR THE FIRST TIME ON 24 KARAT GOLD CD. "BLUE" features the Joni gem, "California" and the title track "Blue."

Joni Mitchell: Ladies Of The Canyon

This beautiful RIAA-certified Platinum album from 1970 marked the beginning of a run of 8 Platinum or Gold albums in a row from this amazing artist. NOW AVAILABLE FOR THE FIRST TIME ON 24 KARAT GOLD CD. LADIES OF THE CANYON includes Joni's first hit single "Big Yellow Taxi," plus the folk masterpieces, "Woodstock" and the title track, "Ladies Of The Canyon."

DCC Compact Classics

9301 Jordan Ave.
Suite 105, Chatsworth, CA 91311
dccompactclassics.com
Analogical Productions

HONEYBOY EDWARDS: Shake ‘em on Down
EOMOT RASUN: Three Days Walkin’

hat would it be worth to spend an hour with a man who learned the blues from Charlie Patton? Who hung out with Robert Johnson — was there the night he was poisoned? Who recorded for Alan Lomax during his epic search for the real bluesmen in the ‘40s, recorded for Sam Phillips at Sun Studios in the ’50s, was working for the Chess brothers in Chicago when Muddy Waters came up from Stovall’s Plantation, toured with Joe Williams, and played with Sunnyland Slim and Sonny Boy Williamson?

To a blues fan like me, that would be like hanging out with the guy who kept Homer’s wineglass filled while he recited his great epics. It would be beyond price. That’s what the Honeyboy Edwards DVD is. In addition to the music tracks, which are also available on CD, the DVD includes generous footage of Edwards reminiscing about his life in the blues. And what a life it’s been — like the blues, Edwards was born on the Delta, and he learned the form at the feet of his first acknowledged masters. And with this DVD, he has been recorded on nearly every commercial recording format, from 78s on down.
The 84-year-old still has it, too. The 13 tracks featured here are the real thing — raw and not at all slick, but filled with power and bite. The 24-bit/96kHz recording captures Honeyboy’s vocal quaver and the bright tang of his Delta slide work. He’s accompanied by Madison Slim on harmonica and, on some tracks, by co-producer Jimmy D. Lane, who also prompts his reminiscences during the long video interview as only an old family friend and musical companion could do.

The video portion of the disc isn’t fancy. What you see is Honeyboy seated in Blue Heaven Studios — recording the music, holding a guitar as engineers adjust microphones, or just responding to Lane’s questions. But it doesn’t need to be fancy. It’s real.

Eomot RaSun is a harmonica player who plays a contemporary, hard-rocking version of the blues. He’s joined on Three days Walkin’ by Jimmy D. Lane on electric guitar, Bob Stroger on bass, and Sam Lay on drums — that’s a band that knows how to flat-out romp. Which they do on this disc.

Sam Lay’s nifty drumming is the backbone here, laying down a beat with Stroger that allows Eomot to simply fly into fusillades and fandangos on harp. Lane’s interplay with ‘Mot is great stuff — hard-driving but intensely melodic at the same time.

The sound is incredible. It’s loud and complex, but engineer David Baker succeeded in keeping all the elements under control. Lay’s drums have tons of heft, as well as an airy cleanliness that suits his tasteful, melodic style. RaSun’s harp is, quite simply, the best harmonica sound I’ve ever heard on record. He produces loads of tonal color, all of which is used to great effect in this recording.

This one’s a stone killer.

Classic Records

RY COODER/IBRAHIM FERRER/RUBEN GONZALEZ/LIDADES OCHOA/COMPA SEGUNDO: Buena Vista Social Club

MILES DAVIS: Sketches of Spain
Miles Davis, trumpet, flugelhorn; Al Block, Eddie Caine, flue, Romeorenzie, harp; Harold Feldman, clarinet, oboe; Danny Bank, bass clarinet; Jack Knitzer, bassoon; Ernie Royal, Bernie Glow, Louis Mucci, Tall Jordan, trumpet; Jimmy Buffington, John Barrow, Earl Chapin, Tony Miranda, french horn; Dick Hixon, Frank Rehak, trombone; Bill Barber, Jimmy McAllister, tuba; Janet Putnam, harp; Paul Chambers, bass; Jimmy Cobb, drums; Elvin Jones, Jose Manguel, percussion; arranged, conducted by Gil Evans.

BOB DYLAN: Live 1966: The “Royal Albert Hall” Concert

BILLIE HOLIDAY: Lady in Satin

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Born to Run

MENDELSSOHN: Violin Concerto in e, Op. 64
Nathan Milstein, violin; Bruno Walter, Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra; Columbia Masterworks/Classic ML 4001 (mono LP). 1948/1959. No prod./eng. credited. AAA. TT: 24:25

TAIKOYEVSKY: Violin Concerto

woua Vista Social Club was one of those CDs that even the hardiest-core analog-only devotees had to like. It featured superlatively natural sound (it was Stereophile’s “Recording of the Month” for January 1998), and boasted some of the most joyfully relaxed, not to mention addictive, music-making of the last decade.

Recorded in analog at Egrem Studios in Havana, Social Club was a natural for Classic Records to give the full treatment — except that it seemed like too much to hope for. But the Nonesuch guy in charge of disappointing hopeful record-lovers must have been on vacation — BF/SC is now available as a two-LP set.

Everything that made the CD great has survived to the LP transfer, but try as I might, I can’t hear substantial differences between the two. This is not a slam at the record — the CD was one of the best I’ve heard, and is awfully hard

Stereophile, September 1999
Audiolab • Tice • Magnum • Melos • Artemis • Noisetrapper • Sunfire • Beyerdynamics • Bybee • Jolida • Creek • Melos • Plinius • APS • Michael • BEL AUDIO • Powerwedge • Audio • • .71111.ionta_time • Cary • SHA • Audio • • • • • • Nakamichi • • • • • • Klyne • Mesa • • • • • • Densen • Yee • FM • Chang • • • • • • Dynalab • Dynalab • Powerwedge • Audio • • • • • • Dynalab • Dynalab • Day • Sequerra • Fanfare FM • Magnus Dynalab • APS • Audio • • • • • • CM • • • • • • Magnum Dynalab

DIGITAL

ACURUS • ALTIS • AUDIOLAB • CARY • Audio Logic • Aragon • Audiolab • Cary • C.E.C. • Copland • Encore • Genesis • Levinson • Metronome • Monarchy • Muse • Parasound • Panasonic • Rega • Ultech • YBA

ANALOG

Basis Engineering • Benz-Micro • Clearaudio • Crown • Jewel • Graham • Grado • E.T. • Immedia • Koetsu • Kuzma • Lyra • Project Series • Rega • SME • Sota • Sumiko • Townshend • van den hul • Win

ELECTRONICS

ACURUS • ARAGON • AESTHETIX • AUDIOLAB • Audio Matiere • BEL • Cary • Celeste • Conrad-Johnson • Copland • Creek • Densen • EAR • Golden Tube • Joule Electra • Jolida • Klyne • LAMM • Mark Levinson • Melos • Mesa Engineering • Michael Yee Audio • Muse • Nakamichi • OCM/Belles • Plinius • PSE • Sunfire • YBA • Z-Systems

SPEAKERS

Avalon Acoustics — Come hear the amazing Edelon!!

Artemis • Audio Artistry • Audio Physic • Avalon Acoustics • Dynaudio • Epos • Martin-Logan • N.E.A.R. • Paradigm • Paradigm Reference • ProAc • Totem • Verity Audio • Wilson Audio

SUBWOOFERS

Artemis • Audio Physic • Muse • Paradigm • Sunfire

POWER CONDITIONERS

API Powerwedge • AudioPrism • Bybee • Chang Lightspeed • Noisetrapper • Seakay • Tice Audio • Versalabs

HEADPHONES

Beyerdynamics • Grado • Melos SHA 1 headphone amplifier • Sennheiser

TUNERS

Audiolab • Day • Sequerra • Fanfare FM • Magnus Dynalab

ANTENNAS

APS • Audio Prism • CM • Magnus Dynalab

VACUUM TUBES

Golden Dragon • EL • Sovtek • Svetlana • Tesla • Teslovak • Western Electric

HOME THEATER

Acúrus • Aragon • Angstrom • Citation • Paradigm • Proceed

RACKS, STANDS & PLATFORMS

Arcici • Atlantis • Black Diamond Racing • Design Progression • Encase • Lovan • Magro • Roomtune • Salamander • Signal Guard • Solidsteel • Sound Anchor • Standesign • Symposium • Target • Vibrapl.

GROUND LOOP ELIMINATOR

M.A.G.I.C. Box / Splitter by Mondial Designs

CABLES

Aural Symphonics • BEL “The Wire” • Cardas • Discovery • Goertz Alpha Core • Harmonic Technology • Hovland • Illuminati • Kimber Kable • Kimber Select • Magnan • Nordost-Flatline • OCC • Prisma • Purist Audio Design • Siltech • Straightwire • van den Hul • XLO Electric • All Series • Yamamura Systems

CATALOG - Dedicated to “High-End”

The Audio Outlet

To get your copy of Audio Outlet’s Reference Guide and a $10.00 discount coupon good on your first purchase of $50.00 or more, send $4.00 along with your mailing address or call with your credit card information.

69 S. Moger Avenue
Mount Kisco, NY 10549
Tel. 914-666-0550
Fax 914-666-0544
audoutlet@aol.com
http://www.audiooutlet.com
Hours:
Mon. - Fri. 10am-7pm ET
Thurs. 10am-8pm ET
Sat. 10am-5pm ET

Audiophiles Since 1985
All Major Credit Cards Are Welcome
No Money Down Financing Available

Mark Levinson No. 39
On Display

Warren A. S. Grigoroff
to improve on. I like having the package in 12" format, and I'd buy it for that alone. You might feel differently, and the price difference certainly favors the CD. But if you've got a good turntable, it's mighty nice having something as good as BVSC to play on it.

It took me a while to understand Sketches of Spain—I kept confusing it with its source material, Rodrigo's slight Concierto de Aranjuez. But then, I'm not a great artist and improviser, as Miles Davis was. Where I heard a classical work as ephemeral as a pop song, he heard moments of sustained beauty and mystery. Now I hear them too.

This LP suggests that Classic is going to be able to get access to some of the true treasures in Columbia's vaults, and that alone would be great news. But Sketches is also a substantial improvement on the LP version that's been available at least since the '70s—and perhaps even back to the late '50s. I don't have an original pressing, but critics have never rated the record as one of Miles' best-sounding. The Sony CD sounded dry and flat, although the version in Sony's boxed set of Miles Davis and Gil Evans' The Complete Columbia Studio Recordings has extremely good sound.

Classic's remastering is filled with detail and space, and has a phenomenal sense of depth. The bass and brass have bodies that are almost corporeal, and there's more detail and HF openness—compared to my "six-eye" copy, at least. That detail and HF sparkle come without the relatively high degree of tape hiss present on my older copy as well.

The release last year of The Bootleg Series, Vol.4: Live 1966, The "Royal Albert Hall" Concert was one of the high points of this Dylan fan's year. It made available the most widely bootlegged of all Dylan performances (known as "The Royal Albert Hall Concert" despite its having taken place in Manchester) — one where he was booted and heckled for going electric—packaged with the same concert's acoustic first half, also (officially) previously unreleased. As much as I'd always wanted a copy of the famous electric half (with The Band, no less), it turns out that Dylan's solo acoustic set is the real star here. It's some of the best live Dylan ever recorded — warm and conversational, and thankfully free of his later, mannered reworkings of these classic songs. (Of course, back in 1966 he hadn't yet been playing them for 30 years.)

None of that prepared me for Live 1966's appearance as a two-LP box from Classic. Just as an object, it's remarkable. I'd barely noticed the CD's booklet, although it has some wonderful photographs I'd never seen before. But when it's blown up to 12" by 12", you can't ignore it! I'd spend the $60 price of the set just to get a copy of the booklet in this format. If you love the sumptuous feel of albums and the album art from the golden age of the LP, this one will make you drool.

The master for the set was a three-track safety that was assembled for the digital transfer to CD, but I hear only the slightest difference between the LP and CD versions. If pressed, I'd say that the LP surrounds Dylan's voice with slightly less murk on the electric sides. This is not audiophile sound, but a remarkable document of a time when Dylan was stretching as an artist and discovering his true voice, which is more than enough for me.

Lady in Satin is hard listening. Ray Ellis' arrangements are in the easy-listening mode, and I've heard that Billie Holiday said it was her favorite recording—but it was her last record, and, at 43, she sounded tired and used up. Her voice was a croak drenched in despair and loss, and the material fits the mood—"Glad to Be Unhappy," "You Don't Know What Love Is," "I Get Along Without You Very Well." I've always found this record creepy, almost cruel.

Some people think it's her masterpiece—an artist's victory over adversity. They also find the disparity between Ellis' swooping strings and wordless female choruses and Lady Day's ruined husk of a voice a brilliant artistic statement that simply deepens the mood of disillusionment. I don't think it's a mood—I think the disillusionment is real, and I find it painful to contemplate.

But I can't deny that the sound of this record is impressive. Holiday is very closely miked, but the instrumental sound is lush and extremely natural, featuring surprisingly deep bass. The soundstage, too, is vast.

If you're looking for a copy of Lady in Satin, this reissue is a remarkable achievement—it sounds better than any copy of the disc I've ever heard before. That's what Classic's job is, and they've done it well. But what a depressing record.

I imagine that Columbia thought they were being incredibly generous when they told Classic they could reissue Born To Run. It was Springsteen's breakthrough album and it sold a ton of copies, but for all that it remains a sonic mess. Besides, it's not exactly hard to find used—although finding a mint copy is admittedly a lot harder with a popular record like BTR.

I've always assumed Jimmy Iovine had a control on his mastering console labeled "Murm," and he just pegged it for BTR. I'd much rather have had a new pressing of The Wild, the Innocent and the E Street Shuffle, but that wasn't my call.

It probably wasn't Classic's either. They've done what they could with what they were given, and it does sound better than the original Columbia pressing (and a lot better than the half-speed-mastered "audiophile" pressing CBS released on their "Master Sound" label in 1980, which actually sounded worse) — deeper bass, better highs, and a better perspective, but still not exactly a clean window onto a great moment in rock'n'roll.
Chateau d' HeadRoom Vintage Line
Enter Our Cellar for Intoxicatingly Fine Sound.

The Max
Wet your musical palate with the finesse of the Max. Marvelous detail, excellent articulation, tight bass, good resolution, and a deep blackness between the notes make the Max outstanding in every area. Gold labeled and at the top of the line, the Max is sure to please any fine music connoisseur.

The Maxed Home
The Maxed Out Home sounds so good you can taste it. Holding our silver label, the Maxed Out Home emanates a bouquet of sound that is very refined. The Maxed Out Home leaves you savoring the finish, knowing a true sense of what integrated components can do.

The Home
Close your eyes and enjoy the round sound of the Home. A fine audiophile amp, the Home presents a warm sound that still delivers detail and tight bass. The Home presents any fine listener with high-quality sound at a reasonable price.

The Cosmic
Quench your musical appetite anywhere with the sparkling sound of the Cosmic. The Cosmic delivers highly detailed, articulate sound in a portable form. Small and durable, the Cosmic will keep the music connoisseur in fine sound on the road or at home.

Stock Your Cellar at www.headphone.com
Sold individually or by the case!
July

Robert

The

plummy,

Concerto

(Note

happen

all

from

this

12" 333/4rpm recording. the (monophonic,

need I mention?) Milstein/Walker

of the Mendelssohn Violin

Concerto in e that was released around

July 1, 1948. It’s a delightful performance,

filled with charm and astounding playing.

The orchestral sound is somewhat

plummy, which certainly lends a period

charm, but the violin tone is vivid.

Classic has also released the

Heifetz/Reiner Tchaikovsky Violin

Concerto—one of the most revered of

all RCA Living Stereo recordings. The

musicianship has been praised so fre-

quently that there’s not much I can add.

The sound is simply glorious.

This may be the single best-sounding

reissue that Classic has ever done. It

has all the space, all the power, all the color,

and all the dynamic subtleties of the original

—and, compared to my pressing, manages to

extract even more of each from the tape. If you buy only one LP this

year, it should be this one. ’Nuff said.

M&A Recordings/

Series Momentum

JON IVERSON: Altermesia


You, this is a recording by Stereophile’s webmaster.

Altermesia is rooted in Jon’s love of Balinese Gamelan. With the exception of a small amount of sampled bass “in just a couple of tiny spots,” some flute (played by Robert Rich, who mastered the recording), and a smidgen of direct-injected bass guitar, all of the sounds here are percussion—drums and idiosyncatic—recorded directly to 2” analog tape on a modified MCI JH100

g 16-track deck.

The disc opens with a subtly swelling wash of gong overtones as fat as pillows, before embarking on a pulsing, relentless march through different percussive landscapes—think of Steve Reich’s

Drumming without the phased decay element and you’ll be in the very general neighborhood, although Jon hearkens as much to Brian Eno’s sonic explorations as to the rules of third world or classical music.

The sound is massive—that sampled bass is “small” only in terms of duration. In terms of sheer output, it’ll get you out of any leases you’ll ever need to break. Think rolling thunder. The delicate decays of the various chimes and gongs are rendered with extraordinary detail, however, so Altermesia is no one-trick sonic pony. However, since it was constructed one track at a time, it does lack the clangor between and abrupt collisions of overtones that result when playing untamed instruments simultaneously in the same acoustic. This might even be considered a plus, since such discords produce adverse physical reactions in some listeners; I find ’em thrilling, myself. Would I like Altermesia better if it included them? I doubt it. That would have created a different sonic world, one that obeyed the physical laws of this one and, therefore, was ever so slightly less exotic.

I like traveling to Jon’s world. I go there often, and look forward to taking many more trips with him.

Review System

The recordings reviewed in this installment of “Quarter Notes” were auditioned on the following system:

**Analog source:** Linn LP12/ Lingo/Cirkus/Ekos/Arkiv

**Digital sources:** Meridian 508.24 CD player, Denon DVD-3000 DVD player

**Preamplifier:** Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista

**Power amplifier:** Musical Fidelity XA-200 monoblocks

**Loudspeakers:** B&W Silver Signature, Dynaudio Contour 1.1

**Cables:** AudioTruth Lapis x3 interconnect, AudioQuest Dragon speaker cable

**Accessories:** OSAR Selway Audio Racks, Audio Power Industries Power Wedge Ultra 116 AC line conditioner

**Room treatment:** ASC Tube Traps, Slim Jims, Bass Traps, latubulinosus cat.

— Wes Phillips

Stereophile, September 1999 139
We are serious about music.

At David Lewis Audio

We specialize in state-of-the-art 2-channel music systems including analog and vacuum tubes (single ended & triode types)

The Montana KAS
Frequency Range: 20-22,000Hz
Impedance: Nominal 4 ohms (3-1/2"
Sensitivity: 93.5 dB/2.83V/1 meter
Power Handling: 800W Continuous (2Kw peak)
X-Over Points: 80Hz/500Hz/4000Hz
Size HxWxD: 68" x 19" x 22"
Weight: 400 lbs. (ship wt. 666 lbs/Pair)
MSRP: $27,500/pair

The Montana EPS
Frequency Range: 20-22,000Hz
Impedance: Nominal 4 ohms (3-1/2"
Sensitivity: 92 dB/2.83V/1 meter
Power Handling: 250W Continuous (700W peak)
X-Over Points: 300Hz/3000Hz
Size HxWxD: 54” x 14” x 15”
Weight: 154 lbs. (ship wt. 380 lbs/Pair)
MSRP: $7,995/pair

6 models from $2000 to $55,000.
We have them all!

Now on display at David Lewis Audio

Accuphase • Acoustic Energy • Air Tight • Altis • Audible Illusions • Audiolab • Basis • Bel Canto • Benz-Micro • Cary • Dynavector • FanFare FM • Graaf • Grado • Graham • Jadis • JM Lab • Kimber Kable • Kimber Select • Klyne • Koetsu • Magnum Audio • Magnum Dynalab • Michell • Monitor Audio • Montana • Morch • Mordaunt Short • Muse • NAD • Nitty Gritty • Nordost • Pass Labs • Platinum • Plinius • Promethean • Rega Research • Rogers • Sierra Audio • Siltech • Spendor • Stax • Synergistic • Transfiguration • VAC • Van Den Hul • VPI • Wadia Digital • Xylonite • YBA

We are the Philadelphia Audiophiles Choice

David Lewis Audio LTD
8010 Bustleton Avenue • Philadelphia, PA 19152-2802
(215) 725-4080 • Fax: (215) 725-4495
Speaker's Corner

MILES DAVIS: Ascenseur pour l'Échafaud (Lift to the Scaffold): The Complete Original Recordings

Miles Davis, trumpet; Barney Wilen, tenor sax; René Urethane, piano; Pierre Michelot, bass; Kenny Clarke, drums
Fontana/Spencer's Corner 0662013 (mono LP). 1957/1999. No original prod. eng. credited. AAA.
TT: 46:00
Ella Fitzgerald/Louis Armstrong: Ella and Louis
Ella Fitzgerald, vocals; Louis Armstrong, vocals, trump.; Oscar Peterson, piano; Herb Ellis, guitar; Ray Brown, bass; Buddy Rich, drums
STAN GETZ/JOÃO GILBERTO: Getz/Gilberto
Stan Getz, tenor sax; João Gilberto, guitar, vocals.
OSCAR PETERSON TRIO: Night Train
Oscar Peterson, piano; Ray Brown, bass; Ed Thigpen, drums
BEN WEBSTER: Southside
Benn Webster, tenor sax; Oscar Peterson, piano; Herb Ellis, guitar; Ray Brown, bass; Stan Levey, drums
BACH: A Musical Offering
Karl Münchinger Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra
ELGAR: Cello Concerto, Sea Pictures
Jacqueline du Pré, cello; Janet Baker, soprano; London Symphony Orchestra, Sir John Barbirolli

AAscenseur pour l'Échafaud (released in the US as Lift to the Scaffold) was a Louis Malle movie that probably wouldn't be remembered much these days had Miles Davis not provided the score. Film critics have praised the soundtrack lavishly, some going so far as to claim that Miles' introspective music gave the film a much deeper emotional subtext than it would have otherwise had.

However, I've always thought the pieces sounded fragmented, and lacked the linear logic of Miles' work before and after this recording. To put things in perspective, Miles recorded Miles Ahead in May 1957, Ascenseur in December, and had formed his extraordinary sextet and recorded Milestones by April 1958. Sandwiched between his first collaboration with Gil Evans and the first incarnation of the band that produced Kind of Blue, this soundtrack just isn't all that compelling.

Speaker's Corner has reissued The Complete Original Recordings rather than the original Fontana soundtrack, which presented only the 10 cues that appear on the film soundtrack. This version includes more than 19 additional min-utes of music in six alternate takes, most of which end abruptly. This extra music does demonstrate the highly improvisational nature of the sound track, however, as each take is quite different from its mate.

The sound is good mono. The bass has startling solidity and heft, while Miles' trumpet rings clear and bright. He uses the Harmon mute, which overlays a distant, edgy quality to his tone—an effect that adds to the atmospheric quality of the pieces. Kenny Clarke's drums are crisply recorded, allowing his dynamic expressiveness to shine through nicely. This disc sounds substantially better than the mid-80s Japanese reissue of the soundtrack LP I compared it to, which sounded flatter and compressed, and had much noisier surfaces.

Ella and Louis was the first of many Fitzgerald/Armstrong pairings, and while none of them ever demonstrated the sort of raucous interplay that you just know the two were capable of, this one comes closest. Hearing Ella mimic Pops in the closing bars of "Tenderly" is a hoot, and "Stars Fell on Alabama" is alone worth the price of admission.

This is another mono recording, although one with a very vibrant sound—perhaps too vibrant in places. Armstrong tended to get really close to the mike when he sang, and you can hear him smacking his chops here. And his voice is astoundingly sibilant—in "Tenderly," when he responds to Ella's mimicry, it comes out "You took my chopssss away from Poppssss.

Maybe this is one of those cases of the right hand giving while the left hand tooketh away. While original pressings had only a touch of Louis' vocal sibilance, mine, at least, also lacks much of the high-frequency sparkle that makes his horn playing sound so alive. Armstrong's solos here are gems of concision and control—his tone is bright and brassy.

The record also proves that you don't need fast tempos to swing—not a song here is played faster than midtempo, but it's one of the hardest rockin' records you can imagine. It's a joyful occasion, one that my minor sonic cavils won't keep me from playing it.

Getz/Gilberto was Verve's best-selling jazz record ever—proof, some critics claimed, that quality could sell—and it has been reissued several times, most recently by Mobile Fidelity. You've never heard it like this, though.

After years of hearing Milton Banana on the left and Jobim on the right, I nearly fell down when I cued up the Speaker's Corner LP and heard exactly the opposite! I checked my MoFi LP (MFSL 1-208) and CD (UDCD 607), as well as The Bossa Now Years (Verve 823 611), and they all matched: Banana left, Jobim right. I called Chad Kassem, Speaker's Corner's distributor, who put me in touch with Kevin Gray, who mastered the disc.

Gray says that he mastered according to the channel directions on the master tape's box. He said that he, too, had noticed that all the other versions positioned the channels differently, but he decided that the original session producer and engineer knew how it was supposed to sound. He also said, "Steve Hoffman told me that he'd looked into it and was told that they reversed the channels on the original pressing and that by the time they noticed it, they'd pressed too many records to do it over. Since then, everybody's just followed the original release, figuring it had to be right.

Which way's right? Beats me—I'm used to it the old way, but it's not like there's a correct way to arrange a jazz group, the way there is for an orchestra. (Yes, I know—there are several "correct" ways.)

The Speaker's Corner reissue has a lot more HF information than the old Verve or MoFi, though. This makes it sound brighter than I'm used to—and it puts Banana's cymbal work much higher in the mix. It can be argued that I'm just reacting to how much better the recording chain is in this new one (that's exactly what Chad Kassem claims), but I find it unnerving.

But that doesn't mean I'm right, any more than the people disturbed by the bright colors in the recently cleaned Sistine Chapel are correct that the frescoes looked better dirty. Once you get used to something, it can be hard to see

1 This music was also reissued on a variorum 1988 Fontana CD, including all of the alternate takes, plus all of the cues that appear in the movie, both with and without the huge amounts of reverb used on the soundtrack. —RL

Stereophile, September 1999
Ok, let us explain. At Goodwin's High End we try very hard to provide the information, environment, and resources for you to properly evaluate music systems. You can use our six custom-designed, meticulously-constructed, and acoustically-treated listening rooms to accurately evaluate and compare today's top high-end components.

We believe in long-term relationships with our clients, many of whom we've known for 20 years or more. These relationships are based upon mutual trust and respect. Obviously, trust must be earned, and so we give only our most sage advice. We honor our clients' needs because we know that self-serving advice would, in the long run, ruin the relationship.

As for the Spectral DMA-360 Monaural Reference, now you know why we won't sell it to you. We would, of course, be glad to demonstrate it for you, perhaps with the Martin-Logan Statement, the Avalon Eidolon, or the Dunlavy SC-V reference speakers. We'd be happy to talk about the truly incredible resolution, speed, and neutrality of the DMA-360. We'd point out how these Spectral amplifiers control the speaker better than any other amplifier we've ever heard.

We would tell you about the multi-megahertz bandwidth of Spectral electronics, and how this relates to their remarkable transparency and holography. We'd play these amplifiers in our dual-purpose listening room/recording studio. We'd play CD's with the incredible Spectral digital front end, or perhaps play records on our Basis Debut Gold Standard turntable.

We'd leave you alone to listen, or if you'd rather, we would stay with you to guide your evaluation. No, we won't sell you these Spectral amplifiers, but we'd be pleased if you choose to buy them from us. It's your choice — no hurry, no pressure.

Goodwin's High End 781-893-9000

www.goodwinshighend.com · 899 Main Street · Waltham, MA 02451 · Fax 781-893-9200 · info@goodwinshighend.com

Hours: Tuesday through Thursday from noon until 7 p.m. · Friday and Saturday from noon until 6 p.m. or by appointment
It's tempting to look back at the 1950s and '60s as the golden age of the art of classical orchestral recording. Yet these two CDs—both recorded this past February by two masters of microphone placement, Keith Johnson of Reference Recordings and Kavi Alexander of Water Lily—rank with the best recordings produced 30-40 years ago by Decca and EMI in England, and Mercury and RCA in the US. But when you consider that musical honesty is the primary goal of both Alexander and Johnson, it's strange that these discs sound as different as it is possible to sound.

Kavi Alexander has come a long way since he engineered the first two Stereophile classical recordings. His recording of the 1993 Ry Cooder/V.M. Bhatt collaboration, *A Meeting by the River* (Water Lily WLA-CS 29-CD), not only achieved commercial success, but was also featured in the soundtrack of *Dead Man Walking.* Surprisingly enough, this Philadelphia disc is his first full-scale orchestral recording, and was made possible only by the fact that, for the first time, the Philadelphia Orchestra is without a recording contract.

Using a single-point MS (Middle-Side) mike technique, with all-tube electronics and a 1" two-track tape machine from Tim de Paravicini, Kavi has captured with breathtaking clarity the sound of the orchestra in its regular concert venue, Philadelphia's Academy of Music. From the opening 30dB string passage of *Les Préludes* to the peaks of the beautifully defined timpani, the dynamics are stunningly wide, meaning that you'll have to turn up your volume control more than you're used to. (I grow weary of audiophiles who complain that a quiet-sounding recording has "restricted dynamics"; the opposite is the case.)

But this clarity also reveals that the Academy of Music's ambience is not as supportive of the orchestral sound as that of the venue where they used to record with Ormandy and Muti. When the acoustic is lit up by the horn call around 11 minutes into the Liszt, or the triangle and tambourine in the Dvorák overtures, you can clearly hear the Academy's walls, but you can also hear that the hall's sound is unsuitably dry. In fact, as the excellent booklet text points out, the Academy's acoustics were intended for productions of opera; the necessity for clarity and articulation defined the architects to design in the longer reverberation times that are optimal for performances of the standard orchestral repertoire. As in Sheffield Lab's 1986 recording of Stravinsky's The Firebird, the hall is just not up to the high level of the performance, or the verisimilitude of the engineering.

But this is still a CD to be purchased and enjoyed. For what it's worth, the Super Audio CD transfer that I heard at Hi-Fi '99 sounded more vividly real, with even more precisely defined soundstaging.

The Reference Recordings CD—the seventh the company has produced of the Minnesota Orchestra under Eiji Oue—has the same stable, wide, deep soundstage as the Water Lily disc, with solo instruments pinpointed as they would be in real life (horns excepted, as these are never well localized in concert, due to the fact that their bells are aimed at the rear of the stage). But Orchestra Hall in Minneapolis is much more supportive of the orchestra than the Academy of Music; in fact, it is this disc that continues the tradition of lush balances that were the trademark of the Philadelphia ensemble's recordings.

Assuming the HDCD-encoded Minnesota recording is correctly decoded on playback, the discs have similarly wide dynamic ranges. But while the analog-mastered Water Lily trades off bloom for articulation, the all-digital Reference preserves the clarity and adds a rich, enveloping ambience. The balance is not that "wet," but the lower strings in particular sound rich and powerful. And on the few occasions that the score calls for a bass-drum whack, the Minnesota sound may not start and stop quite as quickly as on the Philadelphia recording, but it nicely substitutes majesty for speed.

Quite simply, I think this is the best orchestral recording yet to come from Keith Johnson.

*System: Mark Levinson No.315 CD transport, No.306 processor, No.32 Reference preamplifier, No.33H monoblock power amplifiers, Wadia 27ixs processor, Z-Systems RDF-1 digital control unit, B&W Silver Signature and Mirage MRM-1 loudspeakers, AudioQuest Sterling loudspeaker cable, AudioQuest Lapis x3 and Madrigal CZ-Gel balanced interconnects.*

—John Atkinson

---

**The Art of Classical Orchestral Recording**

**LISTZ: Les Préludes**

**DVORÁK: In Nature's Realm, Carnival, Othello**

Wolfgang Sawallisch, Philadelphia Orchestra


**BERNSTEIN: Orchestral Music**

Overture & Suite from Candide, Three Meditations from Mass, Five Songs, Divertimento for Orchestra

Eiji Oue, Minnesota Orchestra


**Notes**

**Stereophile, September 1999**

143
“Man, there’s no boundary line to art.”

– Charlie Parker

The passion for perfection has earned Progressive Audio acclaim as the best in the business. We’ve befriended top-shelf manufacturers, the technological pioneers, and most importantly, our customers who are comfortable approaching us from the first “just looking” handshake to the phone call made years after the sale.

Visit our inviting 15 room store - in reality, one of the biggest specialty electronics facilities on the U.S. Bring your favorite CD or DVD and see if we don’t make you a lover of perfection too.
closes the album with a luminous performance and the suggestion that the past is, we all hope, only a prelude to better things to come.

The playing on this disc is first-rate. Thigpen, Brown, and Peterson give one another all the room a soloist could need—an invitation Peterson seldom, if ever, declines. The sound lives up to the playing: Brown’s bass is prominent in the mix, ringing forth meatily and mightily; Thigpen’s drums are crisp and well placed, and the recording emphasizes his finely tuned sense of dynamic flow; and OP’s piano is solidly out front (but not too far), with lots of rumbling low notes and zingy highs—not to mention everything in between. (It’s inevitable, that if you have a good recording of Peterson’s piano, you also have a good recording of him grunting and moaning as he plays. If this bothers you, any OP record will be a trial.) Night Train may not be the best OP record, but it’s in the running, and Speaker’s Corner has given us a reissue that does it justice.

Souville is a wonderful recording that showcases Webster in a most congenial setting—Peterson on piano, Ray Brown on bass, Herb Ellis on guitar, and Stan Levey on drums. The performances smolder with restrained passion. Actually, by 1957, “restraint” was Ben Webster’s watchword. After the late ’40s he rarely recorded at anything faster than a lope, but then again, he didn’t need to—he rocked harder slow than most young players can full out. And Souville does rock hard, in a 3am-Sunday-morning kind of groove. Everyone seems to be having such a great time that it’s hard not to wish you were there for these performances.

The recording gets you awfully close, though. Webster’s sound is huge—which it was—and made a little more so by the close miking, which lets you hear a lot of air spilling from his embouchure. His tenor is sweetened by a subtle reverb, but not to the extent that it bothered me. Peterson’s piano sounds crisply articulate and, as is OP’s wont, he grunts away while soloing, obviously compensating another melodic line in his head. Ellis’ tone is a shredded wonder, filled with overtones and some of the most finely judged distortion you’ll ever hear. (When people think “jazz guitar,” Ellis’ sound on this recording is the Platonic ideal they envision.) Brown’s bass sounds huge yet agile, and Levey’s drums are dynamic and incisive.

I don’t have an original to compare with this reissue, but I do have the old Verve CD (Verve 833 551-2), and it’s a pale shadow, sounding dynamically compressed and noisy. Verve’s recent Master Editions reissues prove that they can extract a lot more fidelity from their tapes than their early CDs indicated—Souville hasn’t been re-released yet, but it’s bound to be eventually, so don’t give up if CD is your preferred medium. If your taste runs to LPs, however, Speaker’s Corner’s Souville is a solid winner.

So too, is Karl Münchinger’s performance of Bach’s A Musical Offering, which uses modern instruments but employs a harpsichord as keyboard. This does sound strange compared to prevailing performance practices, but the reading is stylish, intelligent, and full of life. The recording is bright and detailed, with lots of air surrounding the individual instruments. The instruments themselves are supported by a slightly reverberant, quite lively acoustic. This is a sunny-sounding record, in keeping with the music’s playful, punning nature.

This reissue sounds far better than my late-’70s London LP (CS 7045, “Record Imported from England”). It has more detail and a brighter, more colorful tonal palette, and the surfaces are, overall, quieter. However, the groove noise on the Speaker’s Corner LP has more hiss content than that of the London. It’s not very noisy, but it’s not silent either. Others may be more bothered by this than I, but I think the gains are worth the tradeoff; I’ll listen to the SC reissue when I want to hear this music.

If you don’t know the Elgar Cello Concerto, you’re missing one of the most beautiful and passionate musical works of this century. Just go out and buy it—you’ll thank me for it. But don’t buy just any recording (although, come to think of it, I haven’t actually heard a bad one). Buy this one.

This performance established Jacqueline du Pré’s reputation as a great artist, and not as merely a talented instrumentalist. Her intensely emotional response perfectly matched this music’s poignant disillusionment, and her spontaneity and delicate touch made the most of the simple lyrical forms comprising the work. Her talent was not so much in just being able to extract the most from each phrase, but in making each phrase a part of a much longer line of thought. Great musicianship in the service of great music.

The B-side, featuring Janet Baker’s performance of Elgar’s Sea Nymphs, is also first-rate, although the piece lacks the emotional depth of the Concerto.

And it all sounds fantastic. EMI gave the orchestra wonderfully atmospheric sound. The stage is immense—both wide and deep—and the orchestra is in perfect proportion to du Pré, which happens a lot less frequently in concerto recordings than it should. The cello sound marvelous rich, with deep, ringing overtones and just the right amount of bite. Dame Janet was also extremely well recorded.

The surfaces are exactly the match of my original pressing, and the tonal match is very close. The reissue sounds ever so slightly brighter when compared directly, although I’d have never noticed without A/B-ing them.

Stereophile, September 1999
Available at these fine dealers:

Ambrosia Audio
Los Angeles, CA
(310) 477-7380

Audio Consultants
Huntington, IL
(708) 525-3000

Cosmophonic Sound
New York, NY
(212) 734-0199

Goodwin's Audio
Shrewsbury, MA
(508) 791-8200

Audioshop
Montreal, QC
(514) 871-0901

Executive Stereo
Toronto, ON
(416) 597-1400

National Audio Video
Edmonton, AB
(780) 455-6255

ASL Systems
San Jose, CA
(408) 291-1007

Audio Consultants
Derryville, IL
(503) 362-5564

Digital Sound
Virginia Beach, VA
(757) 424-5550

Hoffman's
Cleveland, OH
(216) 481-3707

Audio Two
Windsor, ON
(519) 978-7101

Globus Sound Studio
Durham, NY
(516) 434-5511

Sound Advice (S. Fla.)
Vero Beach, FL
(772) 374-2225

K&W Audio
Edgerton, AB
(403) 244-5111

Sound Advice (Yates)
Victoria, BC
(250) 388-5779

Audio Consultants
Chicago, IL
(312) 475-4564

Butternut Audio
Essex Junction, VT
(802) 876-3398

Digital Visions
Pittsburgh, PA
(412) 561-1115

Northampton Audio
Northampton, MA
(413) 584-9547

KAS Audio
Calgary, AB
(403) 244-8111

Main & Matrix
Toronto, ON
(416) 878-6232

Trutone Electronics
Mississauga, ON
(905) 270-3440

Catalina Sound
Santa Rosa, CA
(707) 526-7555

Goodwin's Audio
Boston, MA
(617) 734-8888

Top Audio
Westminster, CA
(714) 591-5944

Dynamic Audio
Regina, SK
(306) 517-5228

Main & Matrix
Worcester, MA
(508) 878-6232

The Philadelphia Orchestra
Wolfgang Sawallisch, Conductor

The First Analogue All-Tube Coincident Miked Orchestral Recording in 20 Years!

ON SALE NOW!

Gold Alley Compact Disc (16bit / 44.1 KHz PCM) $14.95
24 Karat Gold Compact Disk (16bit / 44.1 KHz DSD) $19.95
DVD Video Standard Audio Only Disk (16bit / 44.1 KHz PCM) $29.95

PLUS

THE ALL NEW SONY Direct Stream Digital Hybrid Stereo Audio Compact Disc (1bit / 2.8 Mhz Delta-Style) $35.00

Please include a $2.50 postage and handling fee per item ordered. Residents of PA add 6% sales tax.

This exclusive recording is available on the web at www.philorch.org.

The new standard for realism in orchestral recording!

One of the greatest orchestras in the world has been recorded with a naturalness and purity of timbre that is seldom heard today.

C all 1.800.457.8354
The Philadelphia Orchestra Media Institute, 1420 Locust Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102
Recording of the Month

GEORGE JONES: Cold Hard Truth
Performance ****1/2
Sonics ****1/2

B ojay's career ended with The Harder They Fall. Marilyn Monroe's final film was The Misfits. Marlene Dietrich finished with just a Gig. An artist's final work often has a way of cutting to the heart of his or her talent.

Cold Hard Truth—something George Jones avoided during much of his tumultuous life—was almost the singer's epitaph. The disc was completed days before his near-fatal auto accident; the urge to discern a deeper meaning in every line is all too tempting.

Still, compared to Jones' work for MCA/Nashville over the past decade, Cold Hard Truth does dig deeper, both in terms of pointed, self-referential lyrics and stunning vocal performances. According to the liner notes by Asylum Records president Evelyn Shriver, Jones was given carte blanche to do "the record he would have done 20 years ago if he had been sober." The result: Excepting greatest-hits discs and compilations like Cap of Lincoln: The Memory Years (PolyGram 522 279-2), Cold Hard Truth is Jones' best record since 1980's I Am What I Am (Columbia CK 36586).

Although Jones and producer Keith Stegall have assembled a class group of songs by an all-star list of songwriters, Jones has in many ways been making the same album ever since he cut his first single for Pappy Daily and Starday Records back in 1954: a couple of upbeat, boot-scuffling dance numbers, an ill-chosen novelty tune or two, and then the knockout blow of a handful of elegantly rendered ballads.

Cold Hard Truth is no exception. It gets off to a portentous start with its first single, the gorgeously paced, fiddle-led "Choices." Here Jones fesses up to his sins (a characteristic ploy), ticking off specifics and repeating the chorus kick: "Living and dying with the choices I've made," a line made that much more poignant given his subsequent brush with the grim reaper.

As the disc that he would have made 20 years ago had he been able, this collection of tunes, not surprisingly, echoes many of the highlights from Jones' 40 years in music. The title track, for example, has more than a few moments—particularly in the way the verses unfold—that recall his biggest hit, "He Stopped Loving Her Today."

Jones revisits his honky-tonk roots with the upbeat "Saints and Sinners" and the delightful Mark Collie/Dean Miller romp of "Ain't Love a Lot Like That," which, while still a novelty song—he's got a weakness for 'em—is on a par with "White Lightning" and some of the other, better silly songs he's turned into hits.

The ballad "Our Bed of Roses" returns to a flower that Jones has often sung about, most affecting in his mid-'70s hit "A Good Year for the Roses." Best of all, though, is another ballad, Max D. Barnes' "Day After Forever." In it, Jones plows the fertile I'm-out-the-door-(and-damned-sad-about-it) ground he's made a career of.

Through it all, of course, is "The Voice"—one of the most distinctive instruments in the history of the music—the male equal of Patsy Cline's. Although huskier than when he was young, it still has astounding punch and nuance. In "Real Deal," Jones takes his still considerable upper range for a smooth, unbroken ride, and near the end throws in one of his trademark real low-spoken asides, à la the title line in "White Lightning."

While Truth features the usual A-list slate of CMA "Instrumentalist of the Year" nominees—guitarist Brent Mason, pianist Hargus M. "Pig" Robbins, fiddler Stuart Duncan, pedal-steel player Paul Franklin—they actually manage to enote more than usual, and often find a higher gear during solos and ensemble parts.

When Stereophile editor John Atkinson and I sat down to review the candidates for September's "Recording of the Month," his comment on this disc was that it was "the essence of country music." I agree. From the very first track, it's clear that Stegall was determined to keep that essence intact, both in terms of not candy-coating the overall production—the Achilles' heel of many past Jones albums—and in keeping the singer's spot-on, emotionally engaged vocals front and center. In other words, Stegall had the sense not to shave off the sessions' rough edges and turn this record into yet another overmanicured Nashville studio creation. Sonically, this disc is an example of how far Nashville has come as a recording center—it's alive and warm, with excellent depth of imaging.

The one-two shock of this album's release and the artist's near-fatal accident have snapped into sharp focus the question Jones once asked, very memorably, in song—"Who's gonna fill their shoes?" Despite his past decade of less than stellar albums, this one tells you that, when it comes to George Jones, the cold hard truth is: No one. —Robert Baird
A Sampling of the Latest & Greatest LP’s, CD’s & DVD’s For Fall 99!

**Vivante Productions 1980 Import LP’s**

VPL/003 Muddy Waters / Folk Singer

The Legend is back! Best Blues LP ever! Don’t miss this classic reissue!

VPL/002 J.J. Cale / Naturally


VPL/001 Al DiMeola, John McLaughlin & Paco DeLucia / Friday Night In San Francisco Live! Best Guitar LP ever!!!

**MFSL Out-Of-Print Gold CD Sale!!!**

$29.99

**Classic Records Audio DVDs Only**

$29.99+$4.99

**MFSL Out-Of-Print 2000 DVD Sale!!!**

$39.99

**MFSL Out-Of-Print 2000 DVD Sale!!!**

$39.99

**PREMIUM PRESENTATION RECORDS - CDs: $14.99 / LPs: $27.99**

**PREM-1999**

Patricia Barber: Split (CD & 180g LP) (1ST ALBUM)

**PREM-737**

Patricia Barber: Cafe Blue (CD & 180g LP) STEPHENIE R2D4

**PREM-741**

Patricia Barber: Modern Cool (CD & 180g LP) NEW!!!

**[For Audioquest New Zealand/Music Lps at $17.99]**

**[LPs only available up to 10]**

**[Cheesecake Records]**

24/96 DVDs: $52.99

CDs: $12.99

**ORDER TOLL FREE:**

1-800-782-3472

ORDER BY FAX (765) 778-2669

E-MAIL: ElusDisc@aol.com

WEB: www.elusivedisc.com

FOR INFO: (765) 778-2715

*All In-Stock orders shipped in 24 hrs!*

150+ page! **3rd U.S. / 5th INTL. CATALOG / FREE WITH ORDER!!**

**DOMESTIC SHIPPING:**

UPS Ground/Priority Mail - 1-4 items: $5 (std. $50 ec.) - 3 Day/next day: 1-3 items $7 (std. $51 ec.) - 2nd Day Air: 1-3 items: $9 (std. $91 ec.)

**INTERNATIONAL SHIPPING:** CALL OR FAX

CANADA: 1st item: $7.00 (std. $71 ec.)
Sonics

Symphony 9
Ruth Ziesak, soprano; Birgit Remmert, alto; Steve Davislim, tenor; Detlef Roth, bass; Schweizer Kammerchor, Zürich Tonhalle Orchestra, David Zinman
Performance ****
Sonics ****1/2

Symphony 9
Melanie Diener, soprano; Petra Lang, alto; Endrik Wotlitch, tenor; Dietrich Henschel, bass; La Chapelle Royale, Collegium Vocale, Orchestre des Champs Elysees, Philippe Herreweghe
Performance ****1/2
Sonics ****

Symphony 9, Missa Solemnis
Eileen Farrell, soprano; Nan Merriman, alto; Jan Peerce, tenor; Norman Scott, bass; Robert Shaw Chorale, NBC Symphony, Arturo Toscaini
Performance ****
Sonics **

The frontunner in the Beethoven sweepstakes? David Zinman makes a convincing case for his ascendancy.

Strange as it may seem, there are people who never liked Beethoven’s Symphony 9 until the early-music movement came along. Such individuals—mostly academics—specifically had problems with the joyous final movement, finding it so discursive and overblown as to be annoying. This sounds crazy to those who find irresistible its joyful message of universal brotherhood and daredevil quantum leaps in symphonic form. But as historically informed conductors work with the piece, the more this and the other movements knit together and make sense in ways that longtime admirers never expected but can nonetheless enjoy.

American conductor David Zinman—who works well outside the British and Dutch early-music axis—would hardly seem a promising candidate for delivering new revelations in a Beethoven performance, but anyone who followed his work with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra in the early 1990s knows otherwise: He could have made a great Beethoven cycle with that orchestra. Luckily, it’s finally happening, though with the Zürich Tonhalle Orchestra, and the recordings are the pride and joy of RCA/BMG’s Arte Nova label. Besides sounding vital and distinctive, these recordings signal important breakthroughs in Beethoven performance that can’t help but put Zinman’s predecessors in the shade.

Historically informed performances tend to be highly disposable—recordings that once astonished now seem badly played or strangely mannered. Even John Eliot Gardiner’s Beethoven symphonies on DG Archiv (439 900-2)—which I’d always admired for their daring and virtuosity but never much enjoyed—are less satisfying when revisited. However, conductors attempting Beethoven’s dramatic, prescribed acceleration have, at best, given the impression of a train running away without them. With Zinman, it’s like a sports car going into overdrive, the shift facilitated by his lean sound.

In the final movement, the unusually fast Turkish-hand section not only has a delightfully wacky humor, but glides effortlessly into the rest of the movement. Throughout, Zinman does far more than merely execute Beethoven’s long-ignored instructions. I particularly love his double-bass recitative at the beginning of the fourth movement: Treated here with a lighter touch, it has never spoken with such witty persuasion. The soloists aren’t first-class, but are far more than adequate.

One element of the Ninth that historically informed performances have never quite conveyed is the sublime spirituality of its third movement, and this is the one disappointment of Zinman’s performance. Happily, it’s the hallmark of Philippe Herreweghe’s, which overall is a far more conventional performance. But if there’s a happy medium to be found between historic authenticity and the possibly spurious 20th-century tradition of Beethoven performance, this is it. Minding the letter of Beethoven’s score often seems to have distracted musicians from the more poetic elements of performance, but few wind players have phrased their solos in the third movement as gracefully as in Herreweghe’s recording, and with such a lovely bedrock of vibrato-free string sound.

Elsewhere, the performance is typical Herreweghe, full of unfussy thought and care as to what every phrase means without compromising the music’s flow. Tempos are still brisk—he first movement is almost as fast as Zinman’s. Others clock in at two to three minutes slower, which, given Herreweghe’s bigger sound, makes sense. The final movement is more episodic than Zinman, but the choruses and soloists are so good that nonacademic listeners will hardly notice.

A fascinating counterpart to these two recordings is a new reissue of a performance by Arturo Toscanini, who was among the first modern conductors to consider Beethoven’s metronome markings, perhaps because they sat well with the increasingly speedy tendencies of his old age. As one who often finds Toscanini brusque, I didn’t fall to my knees on hearing this remastered 1952 record.
New Releases from Chesky Records

Be swept away...

Haunting melodies spun with the poetry of Yeats and others. Recorded in natural surround sound.

Carla Lother
Emphera • JD183

“Ms. Lother’s success is assured...”
- RPM Weekly

“A comfortable-exciting fusion of new-age, pop, folk and classical”
- New Age Voice

Raw portraits of life and love...

The live concert recording from a master singer-songwriter. Features “Ball ’n Joint” & “Horse I Used To Ride.” Also available on DVD with full motion video.

Sara K.
No Cover
JD185 • CODVD195

Available now at all fine record stores.
To order call: (800) 331-1437 www.chesky.com
P.O. Box 1268 Radio City Station, New York, NY 10101

Chesky Records
ing, taped live at Carnegie Hall. That said, this performance has a thrillingly strong pulse, a firm singing line, an elemental sense of power, and a great sense of tension and release, particularly in the first movement. The final movement’s philosophical content was obviously close to the maestro’s heart, and it shows in the performance’s evangelistic fervor. The soloists are excellent and operatic; in fact, were it not for everyone’s robust sound and big vibratos, this might pass for a modern performance, though the 1952 sound, still improved greatly over past issues, would give it away.

The 1953 *Missa Selenus* that fills out the disc is, unfortunately, the kind of performance that gives late Toscanni recordings a bad name. Though cleanly deployed, it simply sounds rushed, a reminder that finding the right tempo does not necessarily mean articulate performance.

—David Patrick Stearns

**CHOPIN**

**Piano Music**

Sergio Fiorentino, piano  
Performance ******  
Sonic ****

Sergio Fiorentino should have been one of the best-known pianists of the 20th century — he was headed in that direction in the late 1940s and early ‘50s. After he won first prize at a competition in Monza, the president of the jury, Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli, said of Fiorentino, “There is only him and me.” He played in most of Europe, and made a successful debut at Carnegie Hall in 1953.

The following year, Fiorentino was severely injured in a plane crash in South America. By the time he recovered, his career had evaporated. Forgotten by music management, Fiorentino settled into a quiet career teaching at San Pietro a Majella, the school in Naples where he had been a student.

Fiorentino played few concerts during these years but made a lengthy series of LPs for various obscure, mostly bargain labels in England. One of these, a Beethoven “Appassionata” Sonata, was so shoddily produced that the finished LP went on sale with a false start at the beginning of the music. A few of these records were reissued by other discount labels in the US. Some collectors were hip to this great pianist, and one of them turned me on to his playing early enough so that I managed to collect more than a dozen of his LPs.

Eventually Fiorentino retired from San Pietro and began to play more concerts. A German fan, Ernst Lumpe, arranged for a small tour of Germany in 1993, and made amateur recordings of the performances. The Appian label issued a selection of these concert recordings (APR 7036), and that disc alone should be enough to convince the listener that Fiorentino was one of the greatest pianists of the entire recording era — the passion, poetry, and one-take near-perfection of his Schumann Fantasia are truly astonishing.

Mark B. Malkovich III, a first-rate piano scout, brought Fiorentino to play at the 1996 Newport Music Festival, then presented him in concert at Alice Tully Hall in New York in 1997. The Tully Hall concert was poorly attended, but those of us who went heard a memorable evening. Fiorentino returned to Tully Hall and to Newport in 1998, and died suddenly in August of that year at the age of 70.

This disc presents a midnight Chopin recital recorded at Newport on July 13, 1997. Every performance is Chopin played on the highest level: superlative interpretations, impeccable technique, and extremely beautiful piano tone. In the famous Waltz, Op.18, Fiorentino brings back the spirit of Sergei Rachmaninoff’s magnificent recording, with the same kind of poise, brio, and effortless execution. During two Nocturnes, the music almost seems to bring time to a halt, so intensely does Fiorentino evoke the calm of Chopin’s lyrical inspiration. And the drama he brings out of the A-flat Major Ballade, Op.47, is almost nerve-wracking. You can’t live on that level of intensity for long.

This is truly indispensable Chopin. Fortunately, it was also recorded realistically, with a vivid sense of presence that captures the piano, the space around it, and the nearly silent audience.

—Leslie Gerber

**DONIZETTI**

Mary Stuart

Dame Janet Baker, Mary Stuart; Rosalind Plowright, Queen Elizabeth I; David Randell, Leicester; Alan Opie, Cecil; others; English Opera Orchestra & Chorus; Sir Charles Mackerras

Chandos 3017(2) (2 CDs). 1982/1999. John Fraser, prod.; Stuart Eltham, Michael Sheady, engs. DDD. TT: 2:16:06  
Performance ******1/2  
Sonic ****

Donizetti’s *Mary Stuart* was buried as deeply as his *Roberto Devereux* and *Anna Bolena* until more than halfway through this century. Callas brought *Bolena* back in 1957, but *Stuarda* — though a Callas performance followed in 1958 — had to wait until the late ‘60s, when soprano Montserrat Caballé sang it in New York. Caballé was followed by Leyla Gencer, Beverly Sills, and others. Recordings — so-called “pirates” — exist of Caballé, Joan Sutherland, Sills, and Edita Gruberova in the title role; all of these sopranos are exciting and worth hearing.

But it is this recording, taken from four live performances in London in 1982, in which Janet Baker sings the title role in a mezzo version (often her vocal line is exchanged for Elizabeth’s, which sits lower and is normally cast with a mezzo), that carries the biggest wallop, for the sonics, so long as you like sitting in the front row. The soloists are very prominent, the orchestra a little distant.

The Double Concerto, Brahms’ last orchestral work, evokes an autumn mood and hides its virtuosity. Szell is fabulous in the gritty sections of the opening movement, and urges all-out playing from soloists and orchestra alike. I would have liked more serenity in the slow movement and a lighter touch in the finale, but the legendary fame of this recording is certainly well deserved. Again the soloists are too close, so they sometimes overshadow Brahms’ substantial accompaniment. Overall, though, the sound is very fine, and compares quite favorably with the LP.

—Paul L. Althouse

**REISSUE OF THE MONTH**

**BEETHOVEN & BRAHMS**

**Triple & Double Concertos**

David Oistrakh, violin; Mstislav Rostropovich, cello; Sviatoslav Richter, piano; Herbert von Karajan, Berlin Philharmonic (Beethoven); George Szell, Cleveland Orchestra (Brahms)

EMI 5 66954 2 (CD). 1969/1999. Peter Andry, prod.; Allen Stagg (Beethoven), Carson Taylor (Brahms), engs. DDD. TT: 70:08  
Performance ******  
Sonic ****

The Triple Concerto is not considered major Beethoven, but it nearly makes the grade when played by Karajan’s Berlin Philharmonic and three of the leading Russian artists of the century. The playing is wonderfully alive and convincing, all three showing the assurance and technical expertise that characterize the finest Russian instrumentalists. No apology need be made

—Stereophile, September 1999
We have built or designed 550 motion picture theaters, installed over 1,000 night club systems, 54 recording studios, 23 churches, 2 theme parks, 9 symphony orchestras, 1500 dedicated listening rooms, and 2000 home theaters.

After all of that, we chose one brand to connect it all...

AudioForest
6900 Peachtree Industrial Blvd.
Atlanta, GA 30360-2339
770.729.0550 / 800.488.9672
e-mail: straight@audioforest.com
www.audioforest.com

STEREOPHILE RECOMMENDED COMPONENT
Oct. ’98, Vol. 21, No. 10

GIVE LIFE TO THE MUSIC

VIBRAPOD™ ISOLATORS IMPROVE
BASS DEFINITION AND DEPTH
DYNAMICS, DETAIL RESOLUTION
AMBIENCE, CLARITY
SOUNDSTAGING
VIDEO IMAGES

Patent Pending
THE VIBRAPOD COMPANY
www.vibrapod.com

2 ½” DIAMETER BY ¾” HIGH
5 MODELS AVAILABLE
AT $6.00 EACH AND A 30 DAY
MONEY BACK GUARANTEE...
YOU CAN’T GO WRONG!

ORDERS
(800) 782-3472
(765) 778-2715
FAX (765) 778-2669
Email: ElusDisc@aol.com
WEB: www.elusivedisc.com

1022 Rolling Barrell Road
Pendelton, IN 46064
despite what I see as a drawback.

That drawback is that the opera is sung in English translation. At the risk of sounding provincial, I've gotta tell you that the bel canto composers, perhaps more than any others, require the mellifluousness of the Italian language to be effective. And I don't feel that this is true only in the cantilenas; even in the spectacularly brutal confrontation scene in Act II, wherein Elizabeth insults Mary and the latter calls her a "vil bastard," the Italian endings are an integral part of the sound, and they are sacrificed here. Add to that the fact that only every third word is intelligible, and what one winds up doing is working too hard to understand.

Off my soapbox, however, I must acknowledge how much I've always liked this performance, and how re-hearing it has underscored all that is good about it. Baker is a superb Mary — but injured, enraged and indignant, pious and noble. Her handsome mezzo and native musicality are impeccable, and one is left with a towering reading that smacks little of the prima donna. Rosalind Plowright, with a voice as acidic and wild as Baker's is not, is a cruel Elizabeth, implacable and jealous — and, indeed, their showdown is a beauty. David Rendall's English is understandable, but just that quality is a drawback — he sounds prissy at times, and is no match for Pavarotti (with Sutherland on London). Granted, the role of Leicester, the servant of two difficult mistresses, is a tough one to make an effect in, but that unfortunate impression remains. Alan Opie is wonderful as Cecil.

Mackerras is a superb leader, and the orchestra and chorus are at their best for him: The fact that these were live performances adds to the passion for all concerned. The sound is dazzlingly good, with fine balance among all parts, vocal and instrumental.

I wouldn't want to be without this performance, but it still sounds stilted for me: In the best of worlds, it would have been sung in Italian, and just as thrillingly.

— Robert Levine

**Record Reviews**

**VIVALDI/CHÉDEVILLE**

Les Saisons Amusantes

Palissian Ensemble


Performance *****

Sonom ****

So, let's see, what have we got in our review pile this week? Oh look, The Four Seasons on bagpipe and hurdy-gurdy with continuo!

Just what we needed! But wait, this one is authentic. No, no, I don't mean that Vivaldi scored it this way. The French did it…

Okay, start from the beginning. In the 18th century, when Vivaldi was writing, the French were off on this big rustic thing. It sort of reached its peak later on, with Marie Antoinette tripping around the Petite Trianon dressed as a shepherdess. (Of course, unlike Little Bo Peep, if Marie's sheep happened to stray she could issue lettres de cachet and have them committed to the Bastille.) Naturally, if you were going to play at being peasants, you needed some quaint music, which is where M. Nicolas Chédeville (1705–82) came in. His favorite instrument appears to have been the musette (aka cornemuse), the peasant smallpipes common throughout Europe. He had prominent instrument-makers whip up appropriately Baroque versions (chromatics and all that), and set himself to creating suitable repertoire. Naturally, he hit upon The Four Seasons.

Now before both of you stop reading entirely, I have to point the this: is absolutely wonderful. When this CD arrived at my house, it had the usualaudit in the mighty Kitchen System. (In addition to its thundering Amplified Subwoofer, it also has a built-in clock radio and 40W counter light.) The review then had to wait until I could pry the disc out of my spouse's clutches. This took some time. The combination of Vivaldi's great chestnut, a fine Baroque ensemble, and Chédeville's inspiredly silly orchestration is a sheer delight. Not only do we have the bagpipes (and the Palladian Ensemble's brilliant addition of the hurdy-gurdy), but there is also the fact that Chédeville happily mixed up or left out whole movements. This is The Seasons as you've never heard them before, and certainly never will again.

The Palladian Ensemble consists of one tonsorially challenged gentleman (Wil-

liam Carter) and three not-unattractive ladies (Rachel Podger, Pamela Thorby, and Susanne Heinrich), who once issued an album entitled An Excess of Pleasure. Obviously, they are well suited to this music. Having no resident hurdy-gurdyist (or whatever one calls them), they have brought in Nigel Eaton, along with Jean-Pierre Basle on musette and Richard Egarr on harpsichord. Everyone plays to a fare-thee-well, and leaves us to mourn the unfortunate fate of Chédeville, who, like the English composer Tobias Hume, apparently died in great poverty and want. He deserved far better.

Linn's sound is splendid, if you can call any reproduction of the hurdy-gurdy "splendid." Listening to this disc after many a commercial release from pop (or pop classical) musicians will remind you of why you are an audiophile and they are not. Enjoy!

— Les Berkley

**JACK LOGAN**

**Buzz Me In**


Performance ****

Sonom ***1/2

Only a man who has spent the days of his life repairing motors and who has saved his true passion for his nighttime obsession with rock'n'roll could write a verse like the one Jack Logan uses to open "Hit or Miss": "The bearing in the ceiling fan is drying up / I let it shriek 'cause it's too hot to turn off / Sounds like music if you listen long enough."

Logan's day job — which he's finally left to become a full-time rocker — is worth mentioning, since few artists are as astute as he is at opening up a rock song to wind its armatures and replace its bearings. Logan has a knack for knowing which words fit precisely and still tell a story, while keeping the rotor whirring at a varied pace, powered in turn by weeping country, bluesy folk, and full-tilt rock'n'roll.

To an outsider, it might seem that Logan is more concerned with quantity than quality. After all, his debut album, Bully, was an unheard-of double-disc set, a 42-song selection plucked from the hundreds of demos Logan has amassed over the years. (His current song count is in the 900s.) He's released several more albums, eventually resorting to his...
Discerning audiophiles demand the best. Wise audiophiles don’t mind paying less.

The easiest way to buy vacuum tubes. Just point and click at our secure online store.

Clear, honest pricing and shipped at your speed

We stock a wide range of products including Ei, Tesla/JJ, Svetlana, Sovtek, Sino, and JAN Military Surplus

Check out the selection at http://thetubestore.com or call toll-free 1-877-570-0979

Dig Tubes? Read this...

Of course we sell the best in solid state and home theater. But in Tubeland we do what no other dealer in North America does. We don’t do tube gear as an afterthought in the corner. We sell the finest brands and through great relationships with manufacturers we seek out special buys and pass these savings on to you.

AUTHORIZED DEALER: Audible Illusions, Balanced Audio Technology, Rega, B&K, Manley, Sunfire, Sonic Frontiers, Anthem, Golden Tube, Golden Theater, Basis, Benz, Von Schweikert, Tannoy, Meadowlark, Nordost Flatline, Kimber, Speckercraft, PSB, Presence, and others by order. We stock and show most every model!

Can changing tubes to a premium NOS (New Old Stock) make an improvement equal to a component change? Yes. We have by far the largest inventory in the U.S. of premium tubes from lost inventories made long ago by companies like Telefunken, Mullard, and Amperex to name a few. Test gear including a $21,000 Spectral Dynamics FFT Analyzer, Tek 570 curve tracer, and our custom built TM-100 Lab Precision Tube Matcher. Done one at a time with headphones. Time consuming? Yes. Obsessive? Maybe. Worth it? Absolutely.

We re-tube more BAT’s, CAT’s, ARC’s, SF’s, & C-J’s than anybody. That is why new and seasoned audiophiles as well as the best recording engineers and world-famous musicians come to Upscale Audio. Want to learn more? Go to our web site.

“My other tube discovery showed, yet again, how much those of us in Tubeland rely on good, no make that great dealers. I’ve mentioned Kevin Deal of Upscale Audio before in this column, and here he’s come through again.”

— Tom Davis, Positive Feedback Magazine

2504 Spring Terrace • Upland, CA 91784 • Voice [909] 931-9686
Fax [909] 985-6968 • www.upscaleaudio.com
own Internet-only label, Backburner, to get his songs and side-projects before the public. Capricorn rescued *Buzz Me In*, which sat in limbo for two years after Logan's former label, Restless, refused to release it.

*Buzz Me In*, as it turns out, is anything but lo-fi. Fleshed out with background vocalists and an array of keyboards, horns, even strings, this is the first Logan album that sounds as good as his songs deserve. The choogling driving song that opens the album, "I Brake for God," seems like a simple reverie of the open road, but screreches to a halt in the final verse when Logan reveals that the devil is riding beside him in the passenger seat. "All Grown Up" is a furious Stones-like rocker driven by raging guitars and a honking sax. "Hit or Miss," meanwhile, is elegantly backed by a piano and string quartet. Elsewhere on the album are country-style plaints ("Melancholy Girl," "Anytime"), lush pop ("The Possibilities"), Appalachian-style folk ("Pearl of them All"), and hard-hitting rock ("Weren't Gone Long").

The wisdom that Logan more often than not squeezes into a three-and-a-half-minute sermon is sometimes astounding: "Worldly Possessions" is a dramatic, meditative tune about a man who trades his friends for material gain, while "Diving Deeper" is about taking chances in life. On "Glorious World" Logan encourages listeners to find life's pearls amid a mountain of oyster shells, andcuts loose with a heretofore hidden sense of humor: "Your neck smells like peppermint / Come on baby, let me pay your rent." And later: "Pay no mind to the city stench / people here are ruder than the French."

*Buzz Me In*'s few funny lines go down well; most of the songs are populated by lonesome losers, procrastinators, and dreamers. To some, that may seem like the m.o. for Logan himself, who didn't get around to chasing his rock'n'roll dreams until after he turned 40. In fact, he's among the most prolific of American songwriters, a published cartoonist who draws for *Flagpole* (an Athens, Georgia weekly), and did his own animation for the video of "Tombstone." Besides, if Logan's in your town and the motor on your swimming-pool pump suddenly dies, who you gonna call?

— Daniel Durchholz

### THE NEVILLE BROTHERS

**Valence Street**


Some things were just never meant to be, apparently: the Cubs winning a World Series, taxes going down, and the Neville Brothers making a truly great album.

The Nevilles have come close a few times—most notably with 1981's *Fipy on the Bayou*, and *Yellow Moon* in '89—but they've never hit the mark, usually missing because of lapses in judgment in choice of material and/or lousy production. (Think of their cover of the insipid "Fly Like an Eagle" and the dead sound of the live *Neville-ization.* ) Aside from Aaron's few solo hits and his collaborations with Linda Ronstadt, in 40-some years in the music business the Nevilles haven't sold tons of records. But if you ask New Orleans musicians who they went to see and who they listened to while growing up, invariably the name of the Neville Brothers comes up.

Because the Nevilles grew up on Valence Street in uptown New Orleans, the title of this first album on Columbia lights up hope that they're digging in their roots again. Unfortunately, on *Valence Street*, Aaron, Art, Charles, and Cyril sound as though they're trying to find a home in adult contemporary radio, and are mostly uninterested in further exploration of their roots. Maybe they're tired of being critics' darlings while remaining strangers to most people. Speculation is easy: Are they trying to please the new label by being safe for mass consumption? Do they need a strong producer, as they had in Daniel Lanois for *Yellow Moon?* Could it be that they're simply bored with the business of making music? There are no simple answers.

But there is easy listening, and at times *Valence Street* comes very close to giving it to us. "Utterly Beloved" is startlingly typical: a soft bubbling of musical and lyrical cliches that succeeds only in being a song in which no chances are taken. In theory, it's safely "soulful" to those with fond memories of Motown, and it's cautionary "romance" for folks who miss Harold Melvin and the Blue-notes. In reality, it feeds on memories while being unable to create any of its own, and winds up offending precisely because it's so deliberately inoffensive. The same tone, or lack of it, infiltrates Charles' ballad, "Until We Meet Again," Aaron's "Little Piece of Heaven," and Art's "The Dealer"—all made with good intentions, no doubt, to be soulful, romantic, even funky, and all waylaid by a lack of musical conviction.

While *Valence Street* is overly safe, it isn't a complete bust. "Tears" is reminiscent of the lush voodoo-funk of *Yellow Moon*, and if you enjoy Aaron's shimmering ballads, there's a feast of falsetto in the aching balladry of "Give Me a Reason." The best of the lot just might be the cover of Richard Thompson's "Dimming of the Day." But this gospel-inspired wenching of the heart is a cover of a cover—the Five Blind Boys' nearly identical treatment of the song on the Thompson tribute album preceded this version by a few years. It's hard to believe that even the most moving song on a Neville Brothers album is tainted by a lack of vision, but it's true.

The questions and doubts raised by *Valence Street* will be answered and, hopefully, laid to rest by the disc that follows it. After all, it's just possible that the Cubs and the Nevilles will both win the big one next year.

— Michael Metzger

### OLD 97'S

**Fight Songs**


The news just keeps getting better and better when it comes to the Old 97's. With each new album everything improves: the playing's tighter, the vocals are richer, the melodies are more winning, and the arrangements pack in more and more hooks.

All this progress adds up to a band that's outgrowing its roots. While they still spice in the countrified influences
that have made them one of the most promising acts to come out of the alternative country/No Depression ranks, these Texas boys are now a pop band, sure and simple. Get out the guitars, turn up the drum mikes, and let's sing about girls, girls, and... oh yeah—girls.

Actually, that's not quite true. This versatile quartet makes pop for adults, as opposed to the white-punks-on-soul adolescent variety peddled by any number of lowest common denominators. To emphasize that, *Fight Songs* opens with "Jagged," the kind of bow-to-oil-Neil sludge-guitar fest that has become a rite of passage for all American guitar bands with any country leanings at all.

From there the album goes on a tear, piling up strong tunes in a breathless rush. Having obviously gained confidence in their songwriting, the group's now pushing the envelope, varying styles and tempos, stretching and searching for new ways to spell "pop."

A country honk for the '90s par excellence, "Indefinitely" has a bouncy guitar line and the kind of chorus that defines that overused but indispensable adjective, "infectious": "I don't mean no / I don't mean maybe / I'm indefinitely / I'm in indefinitely." Close behind is another polished bauble, "Busted Afternoon." And then there's "Oppenheimer," a galloping road song about "me and this girl" that turns grandiose and Springsteen-esque thanks to dramatic, slashing choruses that use chimes for emphasis.

Perhaps the most impressive piece of songwriting here is the tightrope act that is "Crash on the Barrelhead." Rising off the Louvin Brothers' classic "Cash on the Barrelhead"—a tune that later became a holy relic because St. Gram Parson included it on *GP*, one of his two revered solo albums—this cheeky lads of Old 97's both spoof and pay tribute to the man who started country rock in a very deft piece of artistry.

Better with repeated hearings and brimming with singles, *Fight Songs* is the kind of album that could drag the still-fringe alternative country movement out into the mainstream light. —Robert Baird

**SHAVER**

*Electric Shaver*


Performance ★★★ 1/2

Sonic ★★★ 1/2

Listening to Shaver (the band) in action puts one in mind of a grizzled stroller being dragged through a park by a particularly rambunctious pup. Billy Joe Shaver, erstwhile country outlaw and country songwriter par excellence, is the guy with the leash. His boy, Eddie, is the supercharged whelp.

The aptly titled *Electric Shaver* finds the 60-year-old father and his twenty-something offspring plugging in again after the acoustic respite that was 1998's reflective country-gospel outing, *Victory.* This time out, Billy Joe turns his proge- ny loose on electric guitar, with to-be-expected rewarding results.

While not quite as stunning as *Victory* (one of the best country albums of 1998) or the earlier electrified *Tamp on Your Street,* *Electric Shaver* nevertheless reflects a collaboration that's consistently well above par. Billy Joe's ragged-but-right vocals can still stand up to the din created by Eddie and company. Meanwhile, the man who's penned tunes for the likes of Elvis Presley, Waylon Jennings, and Johnny Cash remains nearly as irascible as ever, and certainly hasn't lost his way with words.

"Thunderbird" kicks things off in high gear, with the elder Shaver musing about the good old days of cheap wine and true love. "You Wouldn't Know Love (If You Fell In It)" is a kiss-off with just enough hurt counterbalancing the humor to ring true. "People and Their Problems" finds Eddie sounding more neo-metal than country as the old man rails impatiently against needy acquaintances. Elsewhere, the duo explore more pensive terrain, but it's the rowdy rockers that rule the day.

*Electric Shaver* is less a testament to perfectionist record-making than a statement of what a father and son can accomplish by finding a common group—and making their differences work for them.

—Steven Soder

**TEXAS**

The Hush


Performance ★★★★★

Sonic ★★★★★

Along with hope and tenacity, some deep connection to funk obviously springs eternal in Scotland, as evidenced most these days by the band Texas. Back in the late '80s, this gaggle of Scots, led by winsome Sharleen Spiteri, decided to commit the cool-in-the-UK-but-inexplicable-in-the-States move of naming themselves after America's "whole other country." They then embarked on a stylistic journey that wound through folkly country rock, rock-guitar rock, and finally, in the closing days of the decade, a retro form of slick funk-lite.

Now, building on 1997's breakthrough album, *White On Blonde,* Texas takes their new pop/soul identity for a very satisfying flight. Forget the guitars—the object now is smooth, sure, very commercial pop, often with the phrase "get up and dance" pounding subconsciously beneath every line. Keyboards and drums (both human and hard-driven) predominate. Layered, filled, and icid like the "pasties" no sane person can resist when north of Hadrian's Wall, this music is to be *enjoyed*—if not for its irresistible, rolling merriment of...
hooks, then for the sheer pleasure of gobbling down such fluffy cake and reveling in the halo of crumbs and stickiness ringing your blissful smile.

The lush opener, “In Our Lifetime,” adds a Chinese melodic accent to its sinuous, breathy, multitracked choruses, and is the first hit on an album full of monster singles. Close your eyes and you can hear any of them on the radio or the dance floor.

The first of many Prince influences crops up via Spiteri’s falsetto vocals on track 2, “Tell Me the Answer.” And by the time the chimes and huge house beat of “Summer Son” sweep across your speakers, it’s time to surrender: This is beach music, the soundtrack to endorphin-charged nights, an anthem to youthful confidencelost, wasted, or long gone.

Four tracks into this aural elixir you encounter the smoky, slow “Sunday Afternoon,” which is Spandau Ballet mixed with George Michael’s “Father Figure.” Again, no way to resist this kind of pillowy vocal and keyboard lusciousness.

To show they’ve done their homework—and presumably to attract a few less youthful codgers like themselves—Texas includes a killer tribute to the old Berry Gordy formula for sweet soul success: “When We Are Together.” (Is that a Motown title or what?) Sounding every bit like a young Diana Ross, Spiteri stretches out and makes Motown her home. The very next track, “Day After Day,” is the kind of tune Al Green was born to sing. Returning to the current day, the title song adds enough vocal phasing and dub-beat backing to suggest that the conventions of electronics are not Greek to these Scots.

Like most dance/pop discs, this one sounds a little bright. But in general, it’s a speakerful even at half volume. Turn it up and it spreads so fast that you’ll feel like you’re living in a closet. —Robert Baird
A Tribute to Neil Young

Innerstate Records, P.O. Box 411241, San Francisco, CA 94141. Web: www.innerstate.com. Performance ****
Sonics ***

O
nce upon a time, tribute albums actually meant something. A serving cult artist such as Captain Beefheart was put in the spotlight, established heroes like the Stones or Kinks were given idiosyncratic treatments in order to bring out heretofore unexamined stylistic nuances, or an uncatagorizable icon was simply paid due tribute. (Stand up and be counted if you remember the left-field 1977 Phil Spec-tor tribute album, *Binnie Gold*)

Nowadays, tribute albums are pathetic displays of musicians' egos and managerial muscle-flexing. Hard to say what's worse—listening to a bunch of Steve Vai clones readjusting the sockets stuffed down the front of their trousers on the umpteenth Hendrix trib, or having to endure the tortured bleedings of aspiring one-hit altera-wonders who couldn't land one of those lucrative film-soundtrack slots.

Which is to say, it's always nice to hear the occasional exception that hews to the imperatives put forth in Paragraph 1 in order to prove Paragraph 2's rule.

Technically, *This Note's For You Too!* is the fourth Neil Young tribute album. The other three are last year's *Pickin' On Neil Young*, bluegrass interpretations; *Borrowed Times*, a 1994 double-disc collection of Canadian artists; and *The Bridge*, from '89, which included the likes of Sonic Youth and the Pixies and, to date, is the only one given the official seal of approval from the Neil Young camp—it was a benefit for Young's official charity, the Bridge School for severely disabled kids. The compilers of *This Note's For You Too!* are also donating artists' royalties and record-company profits to the Bridge School, but for unexplained reasons were prevented by Young's management from using the charity's name. In addition, the Young camp tried to block the tribute's title—no small irony there, considering it's derived from Young's classic anti-commercial tune "This Note's for You." But, as Innerstate Records head honcho Pat Thomas observes, "You can't copyright an album or song title."

Thankfully, the combined forces of the Innerstate (US) and Inbetweens (Nether-
lands) record companies persevered, as this collection really gets at the heart of Young's artistry. It's not perfect, as one might expect of a sprawling, two-disc, 37-artist assemblage. It should also be noted that you'll encounter the entire spectrum of medium- and hi-fi source materials here, from demo-ish bedroom recordings to live takes to products of 48-track studios. To the compilers' credit, a fair consisten-
ty of sound has been achieved, suggesting that great care was taken in the mastering stages. And the tribute has sparked and spirit to spare, charting all of Young's myriad moods (and adding a few mood swings along the way).

This Note's For You Too!

This Note's For You Too! begins with a version of the earliest known extant Young recording, "Aurora"—one side of a 1963 single released in Canada by the Squires, Young's teenage garage combo. It's performed here by Holland's Treble Spankers, fittingly as a kind of surf/jungle instrumental remi-
niscient of Young's early guitar hero, Hank Marvin. The tribute closes with Texas roots loonies Slobberbone lurching and crunching through a rousing take of "Piece of Crap," originally found on the Young/Crazy Horse '74 epic *Sleeps With Angels*. In fact, one of this compilation's subtle touches of genius is its sequence of tunes, which appear in chronolog-ical order: you move from the Squires, to Buffalo Springfield, to Young's eponymous debut album, and onward through his multifaceted, three-decades-and-counting solo career.

Sonya Hunter's "Expecting to Fly" is dreamily incandescent, her trembly warble unexpectedly bringing a tragic edge to what was one of the more surreal, drugy Springfield songs. Likewise, Tom Rapp, late of Pearls Before Swine, offers a moving, slightly baroque "After the Gold Rush"; it's a vocal duet with Naomi Yang (of indie folk-psychsters Damom & Naomi). Rich Hopkins &

Luminaries revisit "Like a Hurricane," not along the expected anthemic lines but as a sepulchral study in contrasting electric-acoustic moods. And unknowns the Golden Watusis, by substituting a harmonica (treated to sound like a Mel-
odica) for a well-known guitar riff, grimly cast "Hey Hey, My My" as rock's rotting corpse: once you're gone, you definitely ain't coming back. Except in a boxed set.

A number of the artists aim for the jugular and draw blood, including Eric Ambel in a rambunctious "Revolution Blues," the Walkabouts' desolate "Albu-querque," Bevis Frond's wall-of-sound "I've Been Waiting for You," the Con-
tinental Drifters' grandly anemic "When You Dance I Can Really Love," and Shane (Cheepskates) Faubert's or-nate piano on the ballad "Running Dry."

It's interesting, too, that some of the best tracks are from alumni of Paisley Underground, a loose '80s aggregation of American psych/roots combos, many of which acknowledged their indebtedness to Young from the outset. Present are contributions from True West's Russ Tolman and Richard McGrath, Rain Parade's Matt Piuchi and Steven Roback, Dream Syndicate's Steve Wynn, Long Ryders Tom Stevens and Sid Griffin, and Naked Prey's Van Christian. Significantly, it's a Paisley alumnus who delivers the best tribute. Chris Cacavas (late of Green On Red), playing all the instruments, singing in a creepy-creepy quavery voice and joined by a female backing singer for "Tonight's the Night," cap-
tures the tune in all its blood-splattered, stringy-strewn ghastliness, part public service announcement and part chemically induced dementia. Kids, please don't try this tribute thing at home—but if you must, first listen to *This Note's For You Too!*

—Fred Mills

RAY DRUMMOND

RAY DRUMMOND 1–2–3–4
Ray Drummond, acoustic bass; Craig Handy, tenor & soprano sax; Stephen Scott, piano; Billy Hart, drums
Sonics *****1/2

Many postmodern jazz bassists love to chimp, skip, and whir in their upper registers. Not Ray Drummond. 1–2–3–4 is a celebra-
**Audiophile Electron Tubes**

**MATCHED POWER TUBES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PIN</th>
<th>EACH</th>
<th>PAIRS QUARTET</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2A3, CHINA</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6B6S/EL84, Philp/Syl</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>30.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6B6/EL84, U&amp;S/E</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>22.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6CA7/EL34, Ugo/E</td>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>36.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6L6, EL34, Philips/Syl</td>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>36.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6L6G/BPhilp/Syl USA</td>
<td>19.00</td>
<td>38.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mil-Spec E34L</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>28.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EL34, TESLA</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KT88</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5811/BPhilp/Syl USA</td>
<td>19.00</td>
<td>38.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mil-Spec</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>24.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EL34</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>28.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GE 6550A</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EI 6CA7</td>
<td>39.00</td>
<td>78.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PRE-AMP TUBES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PIN</th>
<th>EACH</th>
<th>PAIRS QUARTET</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5AR4 CHINA</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>12.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54GB USA</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>8.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6A8B</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>8.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6A9A</td>
<td>6.50</td>
<td>8.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6C4</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>8.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6C6W RCA</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>8.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6CJ8 E1</td>
<td>8.50</td>
<td>8.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6D7 USA</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>8.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6F62/RG8G</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>8.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6H27OT/6L6OT</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>8.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6N7GT USA</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6N7 GT</td>
<td>8.50</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6N7GT E1</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7199 USSR</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>USSR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**BEST QUALITY AVAILABLE**

**LAB TESTED**

**TESLA**

**GE**

**EI**

**ARS ELECTRONICS**

**ELECTRONIC TUBE SPECIALISTS**

7110 DeCote Place • P.O. Box 723
Van Nuys, California 91405

(818) 997-6279
Fax: (818) 997-6158

**Audio Connection**

“AUDIO CONNECTION” FOR UNDER $50,000 • HI-FI ’96

**Audio Connection**

“BEST SOUND AT SHOW” FOR UNDER $50,000 • HI-FI ’96

Audible Illusions • ProAc • Cardas

Vandersteen • Wadia • PSE

**SPEAKERS**

Asaro • Arcam • Audible Illusions

Audiolab • Audioquest • Ayre

B&W • Kimber Kable

**SELECT**

Basis • Belles • Benz-Micro

Bryston • Cardas • Cary

Chang Light Speed • Magnepan

**TUBES**

Magneplan • National Dynalab

Morch • Mordaunt-Short

Music Reference • Nordost

ProAc • PSE

QuickSilver • Rega

Rogue • Rotel

Sonic Frontiers • Tannoy

Tartr • Vandersteen

VI • Wadia

XLO • YBA

© 1999 Audioconnection.com
ton of what the bass does best: make thunder and deep primal whispers, to touch the soul where upper frequencies can’t reach.

The few bassists who choose to be bandleaders are in a good position to understand group form. They know the shifting relationships between accompanists and soloists, between foreground and background. Ray Drummond’s concept for his eighth album as a leader is implied by the title. He creates a space in which four musicians explore limitless possibilities by aligning and realigning themselves in configurations of from one to four players.

It works because Drummond’s ensemble contains only musicians who have been leaders themselves. Craig Handy doesn’t get as much press as other reed players of his generation, like Joshua Redman or James Carter, but he’s just as important, if not quite as flashy. On soprano (Wayne Shorter’s “Ana Maria” and Drummond’s “Driffin”), Handy is capable of finely spun melodicism; and on tenor (“Neferiti”), his complex solos start from lines of compelling clarity. But the intensity of inner necessity always overwhelms his designs, and he rasps and breaks. On “Goin’ Home,” his ideas narrow to a single note, and he lays on it so long he risks everything.

Stephen Scott is an impeccable pianist, always coming in on the microsecond. In the trio pieces (“Willow Weep for Me,” “Little Waltz”), his first assignment is to support the lead voice of Ray Drummond. But when Scott solos, his natural, clean percussiveness flows into lush lyricism. Billy Hart, one of the great living drummers, is put to excellent use. On John Coltrane’s “Mr. P.C.,” an epic bass/percussion duet, Drummond hammers the theme like a mantra as Hart works his skittering magic with time.

Drummond is the energy source and the checkpoint throughout, and most arrangements quickly clear a space for his rapt solos. One piece, “Prelude to a Kiss,” is Drummond alone, and it is complete. That dark voice, ponderous yet strangely articulate, tells stories with a dignity and poignance no horn can touch.

James Farber’s exceptional digital recording gets the texture of Drummond’s bass right through to the bottom octave. 1–2–3–4 will tell you in a hurry how low your speakers will go.

— Thomas Conrad

**Record Reviews**

**George Freeman**

**GEORGE FREEMAN**

**George Burns!**

George Freeman, guitar; Von Freeman, tenor sax; Lou Gregory, Bradley Parker-Sparrow, piano; ElDee Young, bass; Phil Thomas, drums; Ron Cooper, Joanne Pallatto, vocals.


Performance *****/2 Sonics ***1/2

George Freeman, the 71-year-old guitarist who is brother and unde, respectively, to saxophonists Von and Chico Freeman, is one of many Rodney Dangerfields in jazz: a talented fellow who gets no respect. Though the Chicagoan once recorded with Charlie Parker and was a longtime sidestick of tenor giant Gene Ammons, he’s made hardly any noise outside of the Windy City, “Tain’t right.

George Burns! has the good-time feel of a relaxed set at a Chicago jazz club like the Green Mill. There’s no audience applause, but you can almost sense the folks there in the studio, so convivially and warmly do Freeman and colleagues butt their stuff.

With the exception of the free-for-all “Tee-Hee,” there’s nothing about the music that’s especially complex — or modern, for that matter. It’s just straightforward, meat-and-potatoes jazz: sincere, unpretentious, swinging, with a deep blues core. Within that framework, there’s plenty of variety to maintain interest, as well as cameos by brother Von and singers Ron Cooper and Joanne Pallatto.

George Freeman has a round, ringing sound in the Wes Montgomery vein, and cooks handily on the medium-fast title track, one of four blues here. His rhythm is assured, and his good note choices land where they should. He tells a heartfelt story on the slow blues, “Hot Box,” as does journeyman pianist Lou Gregory, while bassist ElDee Young scores on the equally soulful “Messy.” “It’s Cha Time!” has a bright Latin feel, and “Once in a While,” often done as a ballad, here has a persuasive medium bounce.

Of the vocals, “Here’s Bruz,” dedicated to Freeman’s other brother, the drummer, is a spirited winner. “And She Left Me” isn’t bad either.

Detailed information is included as to the recording process; eg, vintage Neumann and AKG tube mikes, reverb from an EMT 140-S plate with a Lexicon PCM-41 as pre-delay, etc. Occasionally there’s a solid soundstage with good depth and focus, a good midrange, and appealingly live presence. But there are also many moments where the players are relegated to the speakers, the sound unnaturally separated. And Freeman’s guitar is recorded inconsistently, with the volume shifting slightly, even dramatically, between tracks.

— Zan Stewart

**Benny Green**

**These Are Soulful Days**

Benny Green, piano; Russell Malone, guitar; Christian McBride, bass.


Performance *****/2 Sonics ****

While it would be a misnomer to bill These Are Soulful Days as a “super session,” the lineup on Benny Green’s latest Blue Note recording qualifies as an all-star jazz trio, as it includes guitarist Russell Malone and bassist Christian McBride — two of jazz’s finest session men, and young leaders in their own right. Their aim? To mark Green’s 10-year stint on the label by covering several tunes the pianist chose from the catalog of Blue Note, which is celebrating its 60th anniversary.

Blue Note president Bruce Lundvall came up with this album’s concept, just as a few years back he conceived “Coverers,” a series in which Blue Note artists rendered jazz interpretations of classic rock/pop albums. (The series was only partially successful.) Green’s last album, Kaleidoscope, was born of the leader’s desire to explore adventurous

_Stereophile, September 1999_
ensemble improvisations of his own compositions, and was one of his best.

So how does Green fare in manifesting Lundvall's vision? While Green makes no staggering statements in covering tunes by Horace Silver, Joe Henderson, Dexter Gordon, and Lee Morgan, he does embrace them as his own and, with the help of his colleagues, succeeds in delivering a tasty mainstream set. The overall feel is one of old friends hanging out and having fun with the music. (McBride and Malone have gigged with Green in the past.)

Two Silver tunes bookend the eight-song collection, which opens with a jaunty take on “Virgo” and closes with “Come On Home,” here treated to a relaxed groove. In addition to mid-tempo numbers, the trio scores on the slow songs, especially Bobby Hutcherson’s “Summer Nights,” which is given a wistful, heartfelt reading. Green shows his speed with tasteful tumbles of notes on such tunes as the title track and Henderson’s “Punjab,” yet balances his keyboard blitz with easy-flowing swing sections. Likewise, Malone sprints and eases, and sounds especially strong in his blues-tinged guitar excursion on Morgan’s “Focus—Focus.” Perhaps because he was content to stabilize the rhythm in this drummerless trio, McBride doesn’t play as adventurously on the acoustic bass as he does on his own albums. But that’s a trifling criticism for what is overall an impressive and—as its title denotes—soulful recording of Green’s favorite Blue Note tunes. —Dan Ouellette

**Record Reviews**

**TWO WATER LILIES**

**KADRI GOPALNATH/JAMES NEWTON/P. SRINIVASAN: Southern Brothers**

Kadri Gopalnath, alto sax; James Newton, flute; P. Srinivasan, mrdangam


Kavichandran Alexander, prod., eng. AAD. TT: 47/45

Performance ****

Sonic ****

**L. SUBRAMANIAM/LARRY CORYELL: From the Ashes**

L. Subramaniam, violin; Larry Coryell, guitar


Kavichandran Alexander, prod., eng. AAD. TT: 45/49

Performance ****

Sonic ****

In the fall of 1961, sitar master Ravi Shankar penned a composition, “Fire Night,” for one track on a World Pacific session featuring jazzmen Bud Shank, Dennis Budimir, Gary Peacock, and Louis Hayes. Today, given the efforts of Shankar, Yehudi Menuhin, John Handy, Ali Akbar Khan, Zakir Hussain, John McLaughlin, and the brothers L. Subramaniam and L. Shankar, it’s rather quaint to revisit these tentative but earnest early efforts at an east-west accommodation, if only because the spirit of improvisation and of cultural rapprochement has since become, if anything, second nature to many musicians and listeners.

In his unparalleled devotion to Carnatic and analog traditions, producer/recording engineer Kavichandran Alexander has fashioned an adventurous catalog of post-modern musical encounters for his Water Lily Acoustics label—one that stands in stark contrast to the conservative repertoire of some audiophile imprints. Employing a wide array of vacuum-tube mikes and triode electronics (including a custom-built 1", two-track tube tape recorder courtesy of Esoteric Audio Research’s Tim de Paravicini), Water Lily recordings are notable for their extraordinary harmonic detail, dynamic range, and expressive ambience. Alexander’s recordings of mohan vina player V.M. Bhat’s collaborations with guitarist By Cooder and banjo master Bela Fleck garnered a Grammy and a Grammy nomination, respectively; these latest releases achieve an even more organic sense of spiritual unity and musical purpose.

*Southern Brothers* is an epic series of chanting exchanges between two master wind players, depicted against a luminous cathedral backdrop of infinite space. Alto saxophonist Kadri Gopalnath is a remarkable musician; it’s surprising to hear an instrument we associate so strongly with western jazz sound so right in the context of the Indian vocal tradition. Gopalnath navigates the vocalized scales of the raga and the incantatory rounds of Indian rhythmic cycles with a sweet, steady articulation that is dead on in pitch and timbre. But in a classic case of role reversal, it is flutist Janies Newton who makes the most extensive use of microtonal ornaments. This linebacker-sized virtuoso varies his articulation to reflect the instrument’s classical dimension and avian possibilities, then suddenly swoops out of the sky with shrieking Hindustian holgers, Dolphy-esque percussive effects, and hollow, breathy screams that recall Roland Kirk and Mongolian throat singers. Together, he and Gopalnath create a spiraling melodic light show, whether floating in free space or growing over mrdangam player P. Srinivasan’s understated backbeat. From the Ashes features violinist L. Subramaniam and guitar virtuoso Larry Coryell in a slightly more devotional vein, plumbing the depths of the drone in search of deeper and deeper melodic insights. Subramaniam’s melodic lines have a lyric, cosmopolitan air; and he has an ease of execution worthy of Stéphane Grappelli. His range of articulation is astounding—from an earthy purr to aqueous glissandos, from recly cries to whistling overtones—and the tube gear employed throughout the signal chain captures the microdynamic complexity of his bowing with breathtaking transparency. On “Alone by the Ganges,” Coryell answers Subramaniam’s fervent cries with fluttering hummingbird filigrees of chord and swiftly picked melodic retorts. One feels as though the entire dynamic range of his guitar playing has been captured with stunning immediacy, from Djangoish rhythmic frailing to jangling guitar-strings harmonics. On “Beyond the Flames,” Coryell employs a nylon-string guitar to great effect, and Subramaniam responds with some of his most haunting lyric effects, eschewing the use of the drone (presumably a little electric box that simulates the four strings of the tambura). The instrumental presence on this track is especially vivid.

These two recordings are not merely state-of-the-art aural dog-yummies for high-end rigs, but illustrate the commonality of purpose between improving pilgrims, whether their spirits live on the banks of the Ganges or in the Mississippi Delta. Such musical encounters point toward the type of cultural and stylistic accommodations that will distinguish the evolving musical forms of the 21st century, as we abandon parochial niches in favor of a bold new synthesis of ideas. Everyone into the pool! —Chip Stern

Stereophile, September 1999
We are authorized dealers for:

**Audiotruth**

**Convergent Audio Technology**

**Music Hall Goldring/Creek**

**New SL1 Ultimate and JL1 Deluxe Edition Now Available. Call for info.**

**Single Crystal Cables**

Pre-owned & New Hi-End

- Paradigm DAC 1000 $2,950
- Sone Front SFD | TDA $850
- T-3P-3 Combo SC $1,000
- Theta Cobalt $1,950
- Wapo X-64 $7,195
- JTR $2,950
- Basik w/arm/K5 $649
- Marantz ST-400 $950
- McIntosh MR-71 $1,199
- Mr-665 R MPX $695
- Naim 02 $1,295
- Nakamichi BX-300 $3,950
- Onkyo T-4100 $595
- Teac A-4300 $3,950
- Triplaner V Dermo $1,695
- Waver Procinium $1,000
- Fosgate 4 $3,950
- 3A $895
- Lexus CP-2 $2,895
- CP I Plus $955
- Onkyo ASV 620 $2,650
- V Mueller TQS-200 $3,495
- Zephyr Advent Pearl $2,895
- AKG K240 DF $495
- Daugtast DQM-9 $975
- Dunlavy SM-1 $1,395
- Eggleson Andra $8995
- Grado SR-125 $1295
- Klipsch Heresy $375
- Magnepan MG-20S $4,595
- Martin-Logan
- CMS $1395
- Lexicon CPX-2 $1,295
- Mehdowsound $1,599
- Merlot-Excellor $1,295
- Mission 704 $4,495
- Paradigm Studio 80 $7,950
- Platinum Ref. 1 $1,295
- Polk Monitor 7C $2,225
- Shure SR444 $1,959
- Thiel 3.5 $3,195
- Vandersteen 2CD $7,995
- All models available - call

**Cables-n-things**

- Digital: Goldring Classic!
- Digital Link 1m XLR $349
- Cardas 24K Fm XLR $2,995
- Kimber 1/031 S micro $1,095
- MIT Variety $1,295
- Z Center hi-fi $1,115
- Mod Squad Dgit 1m XLR $39
- Music Metre Calibre $89
- Signature $1,295
- Omega Master 5lm $3,995
- Omega-Micro's $1,295
- Siltech 4/56 MK II $2,295
- MW Staalvol 4m XLR $4,295
- Virtuoso Gold $1,295
- Sympo 8' Spkr $2,495
- Tara Res RSC Ref. 2m XLR $999
- Transparent Cable $995
- Digital Link 1m XLR $595
- Digital Link 1m $2,995
- Ref 1.5m RCA $1,195
- Ref 2m XLR $2,195
- Super Pwr Cdr $1,695
- Ultra 8' Spkr $1,195
- Ultra 1m RCA $495
- HUCR Teleg et al $1,295
- Valid Points Kit $349
- Worldwide Plls 3.5m RCA $2,995
- XLO Sig 10' Spkr $1,495

**All models available - call for price and descriptions**

**Single CD**

- Single CD $26.95
- 4 or more $25.95
- LP $23.95
- CD $22.95

**Philips**

- **NEW CD1**

**Hi-Fi Farm**

New & Used Audio Since 1978

- 800-752-4018 or 540-721-4434 www.hififarm.com

Stereophile, September 1999

163
THE PARTS CONNECTION - The Audio Hobbyist's Definitive Parts Source

Assemblage DAC 2.5 Digital Processor
24 bit / 96kHz Ready! Now Available!

 **DESIGN FEATURES:**
- 4 inputs: 110 ohm AES/EBU (XLR), S/PDIF (RCA/BNC Coax, Toslink Optical) - transformer isolated
- Potted and encapsulated toroidal transformer, low ESR/ESL filter capacitors, ultra-fast, soft-recovery diodes, 11 regulated power supply stages (4 adjustable/7 fixed)
- Crystal 24 bit/96kHz CS8414 input receiver, "socketed" PNO-100 HCCD Digital Filter/Decoder (optional "plug-in" Burr-Brown DF1704
- 96kHz digital filter - $50 USD extra; top-of-the-line Burr-Brown 24 bit PCM1704 (not Delta-Sigma) DAC chips
- Reference quality Analog Devices (AD844, AD811) and Burr-Brown (OPA134, OPA627) op amps
- Tattle "touch" switching for input and phase selection
- Hall-of-Fame parts quality - Panasonic HFQ, Wima, Hocho, Kimber, Caddock, Sonyo OS-CON, MultiCap, EAR, Soundcoat, Linear Technology, Scientific Conversions, TELSTRA, Neutrik, etc...

Starting at $699 (kit); $749 (assembled) USD
+ Signature Parts Upgrade Kit available ($159 kit, $209 installed)

Toll Free Order Line 1-800-769-0747
(U.S. & Canada Only)

2730 Brighton Road, Oakville, Ontario, Canada L6H 5T4

(905) 829-5858
(905) 829-5388

TPC@sonicfrontiers.com
www.sonicfrontiers.com/TPC

FRONT ROW CENTER THEATER & SOUND

We DO THEATER RIGHT!
Come See What's New for Home Theater 99

REVEL
NEW STUDIO AND POWERED SUBWOOFER

KRELL
HOME THEATER STANDARD PROCESSOR

CLASSÉ
OMEGA MONO BLOCKS
SSP-25 AND CAV-500

We Went to The Show and Brought Back the Goods

5435 N. Federal Highway (One Block North of Commercial Blvd.), Fort Lauderdale, FL 33308
Telephone 954/351-8985 • Fax 954/351-8986 • www.frontrowtheater.com

Stereophile, September 1999
Manufacturers' Comments

Paradigm Reference Servo-15
Editor:
Our sincerest thanks to Stereophile and Larry Greenhill for reviewing the Paradigm Reference Servo-15 subwoofer. Larry's comments about the Servo-15 delivering "low distortion, ultra-clean deep-bass output, and outstanding tonal accuracy" highlight the advanced engineering that the Paradigm Reference design team put into the Servo-15!

We especially appreciate Larry's comments outlining the match-up of the Servo-15 with forward-radiating speakers — we designed it for use with our own high-end Studio Series models. As such, the Servo-15/Studio combination does indeed deliver the "great timbre" and "precise pitch definition and articulation" that Larry reported.

Larry's concern over slam in large listening rooms can also be easily addressed by using two Servo-15s. This costs only a few hundred dollars more than the 18" model he reviewed, and will deliver far greater output, along with the additional benefit of breaking up room bass modes. By breaking up these standing waves, pitch definition and bass resolution will also be further and quite dramatically improved. We are certain this will provide a seamless blend with Larry's electrostatic dipoles. Perhaps he would like to try this in a Follow-Up . . .

Thanks again for a fantastic review.

W.A. VanderMaeil
Director, Sales & Marketing
Paradigm/AudioStream

Audio Electronic Supply SE-1 2A3
Editor:
Sam Tellig, you have captivated me again with your exactness: "Better five great watts than 100 crappy ones!" I love it! Many audiophiles simply do not have a clue as to how many amplifier watts, and of what quality, are truly necessary to convey the emotional impact of recorded music in the home. If one were interested only in re-creating the exact sound pressure of musical performances in their home, if the truth be known, an amplifier of about 2000W would be necessary. Believe me, those 2000W would be "crappy." How many prospective audiophiles have been turned off by the loud, brash, ear-bleeding sounds of "crappy" watts? In my opinion, untold numbers — especially wives. How many of our wives have come to depreciate our music hobby because of those crappy, high-SPL watts? Imagine standing on the bank at Niagara Falls and taking a picture. The impact and power are overwhelming. You have used the finest camera ever designed. Photo finishing is performed, and you have a memory of the emotional experience. No matter how large you have the picture blown up and framed for display in your home, will you re-create Niagara Falls in your home? Hopefully, what you have created is the emotional impact of the original experience.

The same is true with music. The emotional impact of the music is the key. Forget attempting to re-create the original performance. It simply isn't possible. Sam, I am with you . . . may all our watts be great!!!

Dennis J. Had
President, Cary Audio Design

VPI SDS
Editor:
Michael, thank you for again mentioning the SDS in your column. There are a few things that need to be cleared up so your readers will understand the true value of the SDS. The SDS was designed to work with synchronous-motor turntables of less than 25W. VPI has been producing synchronous-motor turntables since 1981. There are well over 20,000 VPI turntables in existence; thus it seemed logical to make the SDS work perfectly with our designs. VPI believes a turntable motor should be large enough to start the platter in a consistent and timely fashion. Some turntables do not live up to these criteria and will cause the SDS to balk at its being used with them.

The reason MF enjoyed the liquidity of the SDS is the supreme stability of the frequency and waveform driving the motor. Liquidity and sweetness are a function of smooth motor rotation. Dynamics is a function of energy transfer from the motor to the platter when the stylus is tracking hard transients. At 96V, more power was smoothly delivered, giving the feeling of greater apparent dynamics.

With almost 400 SDSes shipped, a pattern is developing in regard to which turntables work well with this unit. So far, the only problems seem to occur when listening to the Simon Yorke and Well Tempere Reference. Both of these turntables are not what you would consider standard loads. The SDS doesn't have any problem driving my DVD or CD players. Both of these sound significantly better, and the DVD player produces a better picture.

Harry Weisfeld
VPI Industries

Walker Audio Precision Isolated Power Motor Drive
Editor:
Mr. Fremer is absolutely correct in his assessment of the sound he heard. In our haste to prepare for the Stereophile show in Chicago, we built three units for testing purposes, using different capacitors in the power supply. Two values of the new capacitors were marked incorrectly and mistakenly installed in Mr. Fremer's review sample.

We did not discover the mistake until after the show, when the units were tested and we realized that Mr. Fremer had received a unit with the wrong capacitors installed. In tests, we, too, found the sound to be grainy.

Unfortunately, we were unable to get in touch with Mr. Fremer in time to let him know what had happened before his review was completed. We apologize to Mr. Fremer for the mix-up, and would very much like the opportunity to replace the incorrect capacitors and resubmit the unit to Mr. Fremer for his review.

Lloyd Walker
President, Walker Audio

Jeff Rowland Design Group
Coherence & Cadence
Editor:
I would like to take this opportunity to thank Stereophile and Shannon Dickson for the insightful and thorough review of the Coherence preamplifier and Cadence phono-stage combo. Shannon's in-depth technical discussions and explanations of lesser known or understood design concepts demonstrate his commitment to informing and educating the audio world at large. His ability to explain complex or abstract technical concepts in a form understandable to the layman is quite commendable and should be encouraged.

A great amount of effort was expended in the development phase of the Coherence, for we do indeed live in a thick "soup" of RF and EMI energy in this post-industrial information age. Only by paying serious attention to RF immunity in the design of all audio products can we hope to preserve the spirit of music in "real world" environments. Your "new"
Simaudio deserves recognition as a solid state brand of first rank, alongside well known mummies such as Jeff Rowland, Krell and Levinson. The bottom line is that the SimAudio flagship electronics can hold their own against competing flagship electronics costing 6 times more, even surpassing these competing units in some sonic respects. 

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

"I found the smoothness, coherency, holography and overall tonal balance to be remarkable. PS/WS-5 Les Turoczi - Audiophile Voice vol. 4 no.6 1998.

Available at these fine dealers:

- Home Theatre
- Primus Audio/Video
- Audio Nexus

New Location!
Music Systems & Home Theatre
MERIDIAN

New!
Meridian 561 Surround Processor
#1 Rated by Stereophile

"Finest in its class." — SGTH, June '99
508.24 508.24

Visa
Benz

N°336,
Sony

Jeff

On

featuring
Music
Stewart

Niles
Classé
N°33
N°380S

REI.
Meridian

Meridian

Micro
Rowland

Display:
Select

Bal

Bethesda,

Meridian

e-mail:

Multiscan

301.656.7020

CD

New

One

pre-owned
year

equipment
trade-in's
available.

20814

Saint

Maryland

Avenue

24/96

processor/transport

-24/96 DAC DSP-6000's,
DSP-5500's and DSP-5000c

Sonus faber

On Display: Amati Homage

mark

Evinson

MDRICAL AUDIO LABORATORIES

New on display!
N°360S Digital Processor
N°39 CD Processor/Transport
N°380S Remote Control Preamplifier
N°33 Reference Monoaural Amplifiers
N°336, 335, 334 Dual Monoaural Amplifier

THIEL
New MCS-1
On Display

REL

Bryston

Subwoofers Glass Audio

www.jsaudio.com

Annie Hilburn • AD's
Balanced Audio Technology • Russ
Benz Micro • Brightstar • Bryston • Billy Sara
Cayin Audio • Cardas • Dynaudio • SAAR
Jeff Rowland Design • Grain • Graham Eng
Illuminati • Kef • Kimber Select
Mark Levinson • Meridian • Meridian Digital
Meridian Reference • Monster Cable
Niles • Powerwedge • PSB • Pioneer Elite
REL • Rock Solid • Sonus Faber • SME
Sony XBR • Sony DVD
Sony Multiscan Projectors & Plasma Monitor
Stewart Filmscreens • Thiel • Target • VPI

One year 100% trade up policy
Select pre-owned products available
Equipment trade-ins accepted

JS

AUDIO

4919 Saint Elmo Avenue
Bethesda, Maryland 20814
301.656.7020
fax: 301.656.7741
e-mail: jsaudio@jsaudio.com
Visa Mastercard American Express
WOW! I Can’t Believe You Have That CD!

EveryCD is a wholesale music club offering members an 850-page catalog containing virtually every CD in print.

We have the CD's you've been looking for but could never find. We also have the last CD you bought - for a lot less!

All CD's are available at wholesale prices. We never send unsolicited CD's and there is never any minimum to order.

Please call 1-800-Every-CD or visit our web site at www.everycd.com to begin your free trial membership.

NEW! Complete DVD and VHS movie library now available.

©1998 EveryCD
CMRR test should be added to your battery of technical measurements on all applicable equipment tests in the future.

Dramatically different results will be obtained when "real-world" differential impedance imbalances of a few ohms are inserted into the testing procedure, as mentioned in the main body of the review. Thank you for adding this test parameter to your technical measurements.

On behalf of everyone involved in the design, manufacture, and marketing of the Coherence preamplifier, I would like to express my gratitude to Stereophile for reviewing this product and publishing this review.

Jeff Rowland
President, Jeff Rowland Design Group

AudioPrism Mana

Editor:
We at AudioPrism want to thank Jonathan Scull and John Atkinson for their thorough evaluation and review of the Mana monoblock amplifiers.

Although AudioPrism is well known for its audio accessories and powerline filters, we have been manufacturing vacuum-tube preamplifiers and power amplifiers since 1994. We have the two 20 years' experience gained in RF and power-quality engineering to maximize the performance of the circuit configuration used in the Mana amplifier. We believe that carefully regulating each tube, stage, and phase is a large contributor to the sonic qualities found during the review.

We are pleased that Jonathan found our Mana amplifiers musically fulfilling, and that he recommends other audiofiles consider it for their own systems.

Thanks again for the opportunity to comment here.

Byron Collet
Director of Marketing
AudioPrism

Vic Tomareno
Director of Engineering
AudioPrism

Ayre V-1

Editor:
Ever the optimists, we at Ayre were hoping to convert confessed longtime tubeophile Michael Fremer with our power amplifier, as we did with our preamplifier. While I'm not sure we have completely succeeded with Michael, at least yet (it took him several months to spring for our K-1 preamplifier!), we appreciate that he discovered that "this amp breaks barriers."

For the past six years we have exclusively been building zero-feedback amplifiers for an exceptionally important reason: the achieved degree of absolute neutrality allows for all types of music (as well as all quality levels of recordings) to "draw one into the emotional center of the music." In Martin Colloms' "A Future Without Feedback" (Stereophile, January 1998), he finds the musical benefits of zero feedback to be so compelling that "engineers need to rethink how audio systems should be designed."

Just as a circuit's measured performance can be dominated by the application of feedback, so can its sonic performance. Michael heard this effect in a competing product that "made my Virgos sound like Revels." In other words, the sonic signature of that amplifier was strong enough to make different brands of loudspeakers sound alike. This is precisely why we at Ayre have instead chosen the less-traveled path of zero feedback rather than merely "low" feedback.

The resultant transparency level of the Ayre V-1 allows one to immediately identify the sonic attributes of the other components in one system, in addition to revealing expressive musical details inherent in each recording. One example of this effect is the difference that Michael encountered between unbalanced and balanced operation. Our experience indicates that these variations were largely due to sonic dissimilarities in the different brands of cables he used for each mode, rather than meaningful differences in the amplifier's performance.

As Michael points out, "the V-1 demands some long-term attention." It is not aimed at the casual listener or first-time buyer of separates looking for a quick thrill. Instead, it is intended for the serious music lover buying a second (or perhaps ninth) amplifier. The ability of the Ayre V-1 to paint "a complete, involving musical picture," coupled with its capacity to drive virtually any loudspeaker to realistic listening levels with complete reliability, is unparalleled.

Many thanks to Michael Fremer for his insightful review, and especially for going the extra mile in schlepping multiple behemoth amplifiers up and down his flight of narrow stairs. We at Ayre urge everyone to go the extra mile and also dare to compare.

Charles Hansen
Research Director, Ayre Acoustics

Soliqouy Model 5.3

Editor:
When Kalman Rubinson requested a pair of our Model 5.3s for review after the 1999 CES, we were delighted and offered him the actual pair that had caused his "gotta get my hands on these" feelings. To Kal's credit, he requested a factory-new pair in order to experience the entire break-in process, just like a Soliqouy consumer. His accurate descriptions of the break-in changes, quite common with high-quality drivers, echo our own experience. Our customers report a rapid improvement over the first two days of continuous play, and increasing enjoyment over the next 200 hours of play. I am pleased that Kal persisted in believing his original impression of the Model 5.3 from the CES to be true, and that he found the "mature" Model 5.3 "remarkable."

Judging a speaker purely on its sonic merits without reference to price becomes a wonderful compliment. Kal's description of his "rare experience" with the Model 5.3 and the D'Auri recording is very rewarding because it is this "you are there" experience that we feel all Soliqouy loudspeakers can deliver to music lovers of all types.

When Kal visited our website earlier this year, we were selling the two models originally purchased from Cary Audio, the Model 5.2 and Model 8.2. In April of this year the decision was made to suspend production of both models. Our website now features five models developed by Soliqouy since we became our own company in 1997. Kal is correct, however: The new models, like the 5.3, do reflect many of the same qualities of those original Soliqouy designs.

Kal's conclusion about the Model 5.3 accurately mirrors our design and business priorities: 1) "Superb performance and construction," 2) "Open window into the recording venue," 3) "As good (and as good-looking) as you can get for the price, not to mention a fair bit more."

Our sincere thanks to Kal Rubinson and Stereophile for taking an interest in Soliqouy and reviewing our Model 5.3.

Bernie Byers
President, Soliqouy Loudspeaker Company

Acarian responds

Editor:
Richard Hardesty ("Letters," July 1999, p.10) raises many disturbing questions regarding the Alon Circe, the Genesis 500, and the Wilson MAXX, in addition to questioning the subjective reviewing process, Stereophile's methods, and the quality/competence of Stereophile's reviewers. He also questions the integrity of Acarian Systems in its motives for producing the Circe and its pricing policies. He then somewhat tries to tie up all his complaints, then plants them on our shoulders as proof that we are the cause of the current malaise of high-end audio! Wow! This is amazing! While I cannot speak for the other two target companies, I will respond on behalf of our company.

First of all, let's get some of the measurement issues he raises out of the way. Hardesty places great faith in the "measured frequency response" as an indication of accuracy. This is fine as far as it goes. Unlike amplifiers, preamplifiers, and CD players, etc., loudspeakers do not have a set of output terminals from which to measure the response. John Atkinson has measured more loudspeakers than anyone I know. He tends to measure loudspeakers on the tweeter axis. However, the design axis for the Circe is lower — between the midrange and tweeter — as the tweeter is relatively low. On this axis the response will measure flatter than Stereophile's curve because we do not use sharp-slope...
THE SUPER ANALOGUE LIMITED EDITION

• The First Name In 180 Gram Vinyl.
• Vacuum Tube Mastering From The Very Beginning.
• Incomparable Performances.
• The Largest Selection of 180 Gram Classical Titles Available.

Over 100 Titles To Choose From

KJC 9225 Tchaikovsky: Piano Concerto No. 1
Vladimir Ashkenazy, Pianist
Lorin Maazel Conducting
The London Symphony Orchestra

KJC 9226 Mozart: Eine Kleine Nachtmusik, K. 525
A Musical Joke, K. 522
Willi Boskovsky Conducting
The Vienna Mozart Ensemble

800.947.4434
so. col. 310.517.1700
fax 310.517.1732
www.reference-av.com

Authorized dealer for the finest audio & video brands:
ADA
ATI
Audible Illusions
Audio Control
Audio Power
Audiodraft
Bag End
Balanced Audio
Bryston
Cal Audio Labs
Carver
Cary
Cobalt
Citation
Creek
Crestron
Denon
Denon
Elysian
Fantare
Grado
Harker
Hallmark
Hale Design Group
Harman Kardon
Infinity
JBL
JBL Synthesis
KEF
Kimber Kable
Magnum Dynalab

Competitive Prices
Courteous Service
Expert Advice

18214 Dalton Ave., Dept. SP, Gardena, CA 90248
e-mail: rava20000aol.com

www.AUDIOGON.com
Introducing Audiogon. A place where audio enthusiasts can spend on eternity. There's a vast showcase with photos, so you can shop to your heart's content. Live, ongoing auctions. A vast classified section. And a personalized homepage, so you can keep track of your own activities. Audiogon. Going once, going twice. Go.
much more costly to produce than a box speaker. I defy anyone to produce a Circe for $4000/pair retail!

Hardesty then proceeds to attack Wes Phillips for his description of the Circe's mid/high-frequency purity as being "magical." Clearly, Wes was responding to the perceived quality of the sound. Isn't this what it's supposed to be about? Or should it be about Hardesty feeling satisfied with a computer printout? Quality can be judged only by listening. I thought this was pretty basic. Wes heard the Circe in four or five different rooms and with at least six or seven amplifiers before drawing his conclusions. Did Hardesty? I doubt it. At HI-FI '98, John Atkinson's comment was that it was "among the very, very best." Why doesn't Hardesty attack John Atkinson? Thousands of regular folks also heard the Circe at HI-FI '98 and HI-FI '99, plus hi-fi shows in Greece and Switzerland — all with great approval!

Note also a few of the industry people now using the Circe for reference: Art Pfeffer (TAS), Harry Weisfeld (VPI), Keith Herron (Herron Audio), Fred Cox (music reviewer), David Elrod (Electrogide), Dennis Had (Cary Audio), and Robert Reina (Sterephile). If I am capable of fooling all these people, then Houdini has indeed been reborn!

**Coral Marchiottos**

**Atarian Systems**

nyNOISE

**Editor:**

I would like to thank Stereophile and Jonathan Scull for attending, covering, and above all appreciating our little underground shindig, the nyNOISE Audio Design Exhibition [Stereophile, June 1999, p.23]. Being recognized in the "Big Audio Press" has added to the excitement. J.C. Morrison and I feel for music, audio, technology, ideas, building, making the scene, livin' large, havin' fun, designing, expressing ourselves, eatin' bagels, arguing, entertaining each other, getting high-voltage electric shocks — you know, LIFE. Thanks, guys!

Time constraints and general stress kept me from making an important point about the show in my presentation. The guiding concept of nyNOISE was simply this:

**No Boundaries.** No artificial distinctions between professional and amateur builder. No preconceptions about what is appropriate in an audio show and what isn't. As few rules as possible. If you build it, you can show it. Let's see it! Hear it! Tell us about it! What were you trying to do? Did you achieve your original goal, find a more important one in the process, crap out totally? Cool! Did you want to have fun, make dough, amaze people, amaze yourself? No judgment regarding motives. Lo and behold, the participants/attendees of nyNOISE amazed me. People showed from all over, brought stuff with 'em, made the event a killer. Jonathan Scull in the front row, rowdy and rockin', throwing gasoline on the creative fires. Voices from the Internet, *mono a mono* for the first time. Pro super high-end designers like Morrison, Komuro, Berger, Fuchs, and myself, cheek by jowl with first-time builders like Epstein playing their favorite music for the audio patrons and press on a machine lovingly constructed and tweaked. NYC scene-makers like Fran Blanche and Mayuko rubbing elbows with the cream of the Left-Coast DIY designers and kit-makers — Bottlehead, LeFevre, Smootherplate Tucker, Mad, inspired experimenters like Slagle, Danilakov, and Larry Dean Moore making musical magic. And the music! Petula Clark, Duke, The Ventures! The envelope was pushed...and we all had fun.

And what did I walk away with? The realization that, the more I listen and the less I judge, the more fun I have and the less I miss.

Oh yeah, and a bill for 200 bagels. [Yiddish acronym] Such a deal!

**Blakie Pogono**

blackie@tubesville.com

www.tubesville.com

**Harmonic Recovery System**

The indispensable component for your audio system. "It adds a level of vibrancy and substance to the music that is intoxicating," Sound Stage 06/98. Experience the HRS for yourself with a 30 day money-back guarantee. More info, including Sam Tellig's comments in Stereophile? Call or write.

**What's new?**

Introducing the world's first do-it-yourself affordable high end turntable kit!

- all acrylic base — string drive
- world's finest bearing — mount any arm
- matte acrylic platter — outboard motor
- optional battery supply — stunning design

Tonearms: MORCH, BELCANTO, SME 3012

Cartridges: ALLAERTS, BENZ SE-7, DENON

**AUDI0 ADVANCEMENTS LLC**

PO Box 2090 • Branchville NJ 07826 • USA
973 875 8705 • Fax 973 875 8735
Email audadv@earthlink.net

www.audi0advancements.com
### Where to Buy Stereophile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Cities</th>
<th>Phone Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALABAMA</td>
<td>Birmingham</td>
<td>(205) 945-5200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Huntsville</td>
<td>(256) 533-1711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALASKA</td>
<td>Anchorage</td>
<td>(907) 272-9111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shelmiks Audio</td>
<td>(907) 276-2525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARIZONA</td>
<td>Phoenix</td>
<td>(602) 272-6696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scottsdale</td>
<td>(602) 946-8128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tucson</td>
<td>(602) 336-4662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALIFORNIA</td>
<td>Agoura Hills</td>
<td>(818) 879-1332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bel Air</td>
<td>(310) 440-5402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Berkeley</td>
<td>(310) 588-1080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Simi Valley</td>
<td>(805) 582-1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sonora</td>
<td>(310) 486-2454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>San Francisco/Steam</td>
<td>(310) 486-1044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Burlingame</td>
<td>(905) 342-1476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carmichael</td>
<td>(916) 534-7000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Costa Mesa</td>
<td>(714) 646-8895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Calver City</td>
<td>(213) 937-7674</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Audio Video City #2</td>
<td>(310) 838-8889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encino</td>
<td>(818) 501-3548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fremont</td>
<td>(818) 656-1241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Garden City</td>
<td>(213) 317-0700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Glendale</td>
<td>(310) 517-1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Newstand Company</td>
<td>(310) 247-9095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Goleta</td>
<td>(619) 203-4572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hollywood</td>
<td>(213) 683-2162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>World Book and News</td>
<td>(310) 667-4522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>(310) 393-1200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bentleywood Communications</td>
<td>(310) 476-5635</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Dealers interested in selling Stereophile please call (800) 446-3563.


PREMIUM-GRADE PARTS! Absolutely the best se lect of audiophile-grade parts at fair prices! InfiniCaps, Holvand, MIT MultiCaps, SCR, Black Gate, Elna, Nichicon, Vishay, Caddock, Heleno, Mills, Kowlon, etc., capacitors, resistors. All types of connectors, chassis wires, cabling, Alp, Noble, TK1, Hexed diodes, copper-foil inductors, tubes, vibration damping sheets, isolators, Deflex Panels, hospital-grade AC connectors, tools, acces sories, free catalogs. Michael Levy, Box 326, Inman, SC 29349. (415) 669-7581, fax: 415-669-7558, e-mail: Microsere@msn.com.

HI-FI EXCHANGE! — large selection of quality used high-end components at huge discounts. We buy, sell, and trade. Call for inventory list. (718) 423-0400, or visit our showroom at 2351-11 Northern Blvd, Little Neck, NY 11363.


WILSON GRAND SLAMMS Series 2, 6 months old, $5,500; Levinson No.33 pair, $22,000. (404) 256-9700.


CONRAD-JOHNSON PV10IAL. Thiel CS15, Chiro CR200, Parsau6ion. (323) 254-1157, thi1on@comcast.net.

VMPs AUDIOPHILE SPEAKER. Jdealer for entire speaker line, including the FFL, FF3, and special ribbon editions, I have the FF1s on hand for audition on Long Island, New York. My prices are absolutely the lowest available. Please call for prices and/or information. Bill. (516) 826-3791, fax (516) 826-5870.

AVALON ASCENT Mk.II speakers in quilted cherry finish, $6000 OBO; VTL Ichiban 600 amps, upgraded to VTL 750 equivalent with Signature transformer and Mt caps, $7500 OBO. Outstanding sound quality, all mint, original owner. (718) 985-4936.

MERIDIAN 500 CD transport, current software, original box, ($2000) $750 firs, price includes insured shipping anywhere. Jason, (503) 205-5088, 24 hours a day.

URGENT! MUST SELL two complete bi-ampl f systems! Speakers: 3A Reference 2000, $9000 pair; Gershman Acoustics Avant-Garde, $3500/pair. CI3 drives: Rolsan Rock PDI, $2500, FS; Audio Lambda, $2500. D/A: EAD DSD29000 Pro II, $4500. Wireworld Eclipse cables: speaker, 2 pairs, $1400; ICA, 6 pairs, $3, $1500; digital Gold Eclipse, 2 pairs, $3, $1000. Amplifiers: Simaudio Moon WS, $4250; Celeste W4070SE (2 units), $1600 each. Preamps: Simaudio Cevitas 14002, $1600, $3500. All items in great condition with original man uals and boxes. Prices are negotiable. For additional infor mation and pictures, look at my personal website. Allen, (514) 761-3693 home, (514) 574-3695 cellular. E-mail: mailto:allen@silencedia.com. Web: pages.infinitas.net/alan/.

COUNTERPOINT UPGRADES — Covet SA12/ 100-200/220 into completely new amp! Monoblocks, balanced inputs, rugged, reliable, tremendous power, fantastic sound! Custom shop. Used equipment marketplace! Counterpoint's designer Michael Elliott repairs, upgrades Counterpoint components. (760) 945-0356. See www.covettoneaudio.com for details!
BAY VK-SI preamp with remote, ($4500) $2250; Sonic Frontiers SF-2 Mk.II DAC, ($5520) $2350; Sony XM-7ES CD player, ($3000) $1500; TARA The One interconnect, 1m, XLR with Isolation Station, ($2490) $1245; extra Isolation Station, ($395) $295; Kimber KCTG, 6-strand, 1m, XLR, ($695) $345; Wilson Puppy Tails v5.1 (can also be used for monoblocks), transport, ($695) $345; Discovery Signature, 5m, XLR, ($1010) $500; 1m, XLR, ($450) $225; HiWire 1100 LSI speaker cable, 2.5m, spades, ($1274) $625. All items plus shipping. freds@pixelphonelab.com or (631) 438-5570, 24/7.


WHOLESALE PRICES—EXOR's new interconnect and speaker cables. Also, a fantastic preamp with superb phono (see Bound for Sound, 11/96, for glowing review). Contact physicist/designer Paul Bon@ EXOR Industries, (913) 384-0731, or e-mail couriod@nelson.com for details. Money-back guarantee.

MUSE MODEL 2 DAC, $900; Model 3 preamp with display, $1650; Model 30 mono amps, $2600. Boxes and warranties. Call about 24/66 processor and transport. (888) 415-3081.

KRELL AUDIO STANDARD monoblock amplifiers, Sonalert Amplification Component of 1996, ($35,000/pair) $15,000; Enlightened Audio Design DSP-9000 Pro III D/A converter with remote control, ($8800) $2600 OBO. Both excellent condition, like new, original boxes. NBS Pro interconnect, 4', balanced, $1300; NBS AES/EBU, 1m, $900; NBS Pro speaker cable, 4', 2 sets, $1500/set. Francis, (312) 225-2828, 10am-6pm CST.

NBS CABLES AND CORDS! Statement power cords, all 6', 4 used, ($3000) $1825 each; 4 new, ($3000) $2250 each; interconnects, 4', RCA, 1 pair new, ($6000) $4500; 1 pair used, ($6000) $3400; digital interconnect, ($3000) $1825; speaker cable, 4', biwire, 8' pair, best offer. NBS Signature cables and cords: power cord, 6', 2 used, ($6000) $30 each; 1 new, ($6000) $4000; interconnect, 4', RCA, best offer; speaker cable, 8', best offer. Tel: 0011-61-246625866 or 0011-61-41307054, Australia.

REFERENCE LINE PREEMINENCE 15 passive preamp, like new, $6500; Theta Data Basic II CD transport, like new, $750. (310) 372-4177 evenings PST.

MARK LEVINSON No 36 CD processor, mint, $2595; Levinson No.315 Reference transport, new, $695; VPI TNT 3 with 12 JMW arm, new, $4495; with Ruby 2 cartridge, $6995. (760) 638-0577.

FALL DEMO/OVERSEAS SALE! Billy Hage, Black Diamond Racing, Byphen Technologies, Electraglide, ESP, Merlin Speakers, Metronome Technologie, pA/TKular Contemporary Design (A/V furniture), Plinus, PolyFusion Audio, Sibloc, Synergistic Research, Lasers (Checkpoint), Totem Acoustics. Quantum Leap AUDIO Video, East Lansing, Ml. (517) 337-8362, EST.

JYNACO PAS 4-tube preamp with phono, Multi-Cap/Caddock/Holco-upgraded, ($1000) $600. (785) 838-3791; e-mail jynaco@yahoo.com.


WARNING !!!

Be careful with mail-order dealers who insist on cash/personal checks, or who offer a large discount on the same basis. Be secure—pay by credit card.


B&W 805s, SOUND ANCHOR stands; Velodyne, latest FSR18, mint, boxes, manuals; Chario Academy 3 Jr, $800 new, any offer over $2500; Counterpoint SA20, very good condition; Z-MAN signal enhancer. (904) 725-1008, EST.


GENESIS 350 SPECIAL EDITION speaker system, made for owner Mark Schifer, only four made, BO. Levinson No.332 amplifier, best offer. (415) 567-9157.

CAT SIGNATURE Mk.II preamp, $2475; Crown Jewel SE cartridge, $950; RoomTime Bastraps, $100. (606) 581-3765.

B&W MATRIX 805, black ash, crystalline sound, pumped speakers, ($1600) $650; Epøi E51, mahogany, gorgeous finish, absolutely flawless, with stands, ($1350) $550. Negotiable, (909) 883-3404.

SONIC FRONTIERS Line 3 preamp, mint condition, $3000, Bob, (760) 788-9931.
SNELL CV SPEAKERS, Digital Phase speakers, Parasound PLD-1500 preamp, Yamaha and JBL shelf speakers. (619) 672-5753.

WILSON WATT/PUPPY 5.0, purchased 1996, perfect, best offer. 670-391-4400 days. (619) 634-6619 evenings EST.

LINN LKZ40, 125W mono amplifier (20W into 4 ohms), mint, current model. ($1400) $495. (858) 488-2425. EST.

PROAC RESPONSE 2.5, exotic yew wood, excellent condition. Stereophile Class B Recommended Component, (April 1999), ($5050) $3200 OBO. Mark. (312) 347-1618, leave message.


INFINITY MODULUS speaker system, piano-black finish, dedicated stands, and serve 12" subwoofer with electronic crossover; JA ranked system as Class B (Stereophile, November 1990), ($3300) $1300. Sony SSMB speakers, Class B Recommended Component (Stereophile, April 1999), three months old, black ash, 150 lbs. each, ($4000) $2500. B&K Sonatas M200 monoblocks, $1000/pair firm; B&K PROMC10 preamplifier with separate power supply, $400 firm. Adcom GCD-700 D/A converter, mint, ($1000) $500 firm; Adcom CD-575 classic budget CD player, $500 firm. Rega 2 turntable with Linn Baak arm and Sumiko Blue Point Special, $400 firm. Please call Paul. (954) 424-9429 after 6pm EST.

CELLO PALETTE, $4300; Duet 350, $4900; Conrad-Johnson: Primeur 14, remote, ($4400) $2200; PV-11 with phono, $780. Krell: KAS amps, ($35,000) $15,500; KAS 11, $9500; KRC, $2700; C.C.: TL 0, $7500; TL-2X, new, $11500. Genesis: 300, $14,500; V, $6500; APM4-1, $5600. NBS Starrett pro power cord, $1900; Chario Academy 3 Jr, ($10,500) $4500. (909) 672-3869.

SAVE BIG: Krell KAV-300v of CD player, new in box, ($4200) $2700; MIT 350 P25 pull-pull-technology balanced cable, ($2675) $1200; MIT 750 P198 push-pull 8' speaker cable, ($4000) $1800; MIT 750 BW25 25' biwire speaker cable, new in box, ($1650) $850; MIT PHR 1 Reference phono cable, ($2500) $1300. All in new condition. Buyer pays shipping and handling. (504) 887-4832 between 11am and 9pm CST; bobby73@citicom.com.

NO REVIEWS, NO EDITORIALS, just lots of used equipment! For over 8 years, thousands of audiophiles have used our publication to buy and sell used audio gear nationwide. Call today for your free brochure and sample issue. Audio Technology (June) 1999, (715) 479-7103.


TRANSPARENT AUDIO Reference XL balanced interconnect, 1m, mint, ($8000) $4100; Transparent Audio Reference balanced digital interconnect, 0.5m, mint, ($900) $450. Frank, (954) 922-0505. 9am-5pm; (954) 456-9180 evenings.
Audio Mart Order Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audio Mart Order Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RATES:</strong> Private, $1.25 per word; Commercial, $4.15 per word; $166 minimum on all commercial ads. A word is defined as one or more characters with a space, dash, or slash on either side. (Telephone and fax numbers, e-mail and WWW addresses count as one word.) <strong>PAYMENT:</strong> All ads must be prepaid with order. Visa/MC or checks are accepted. MAIL TO: Stereophile, Classified Ad Department, P.O. Box 5529, Santa Fe, NM 87502-5529, or FAX (505) 983-6322, or SUBMIT ONLINE: <a href="mailto:classified@stereophile.com">classified@stereophile.com</a> (Faxed and e-mailed ads are credit-card only) <strong>DEADLINE:</strong> Ads are due on the first working day of the month, two months in advance of publication in which your ad will appear. For example, if you want your ad to run in the November 1999 Stereophile, you must submit it with payment by September 1, 1999. Ad material that reaches us after deadline will appear in the next available issue. No refunds. If you have questions, call (505) 982-1411.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Enclosed is payment in the amount of $ ____ for ____ words. |
| I prefer to pay by check, made payable to Stereophile. |
| I prefer to pay by [ ] Visa [ ] MasterCard |
| My card # is ___________________________ Exp. date _______ |
| Signature _____________________________ |

Please run my ad in the following months:

| Category heading: [ ] General [ ] CDs/LPs/Tapes [ ] Wanted [ ] Employment |
| Copy (Please type or print; attach separate sheet if necessary): |
| Name _____________________________ |
| Street _____________________________ |
| City _____________________________ |
| Zip _____________________________ |
| Tel. _____________________________ |
| Fax _____________________________ |

---

BRUCE MOORE AUDIO, "Best Tube Gear Today." Offering a line of tube preamps and power amps. R.B. Electronics, 5492 Linden Street, Suite D, CA 94568. Tel. or fax: (925) 875-1055. Dealers and distributors welcome.


SOLID SILVER CABLES FOR UNDER $100! Interconnects starting at $95. Speaker cables at $225. Pure-silver ribbon conductors, air dielectric, silver terminations, and superior build quality delivering outstanding performance. Full range of cables and equipment isolation accessories, reasonably priced. Stage III Concepts Inc. (212) 627-5628.

SONIC FRONTIERS Power 3 monoblocks, excellent condition, original packaging, ($10,000) $4800. Robert, (805) 485-9461.

JOLIDA $200 integrated amp, new tubes, $395. (949) 454-0312.

NAKAMICHI 1000 ZLX Limited cassette recorder, original owner, mint; Conrad-Johnson ART preamplifier, Panasonic 3800 VHS cassette recorder. (973) 746-2794.


GUARANTEED CONDITION pre-owned audio equipment. Amplifiers, preamplifiers, processors, transporters, players, analog, home theater, speakers, and cables. VPI HW19 Jr., Well Tempered Classic, Apogee Caliper Signature, B&W Matrix 801, Genesis III, Spectral SPD-100. Please contact Trevor for questions and inventory list. Toll-free (877) 274-9583, sales@vietones.com.

ROWLAND BPS-2, silver face, 4 months old, low hours, as-new condition, with crate. $1495 plus shipping. (860) 535-9147.

McINTOSH CZ2 preamplifier reissue with walnut cabinet, flawless, ($2600) $1800. (212) 319-7233. 10am-6pm EST.


HIGHEST PRICES PAID for classical LPs and CDs. Will travel. Only collections of 1000+. Call Lawrence O’Tiole, PO. Box 138, Bearsville, NY 12419. Tel./Fax: (914) 679-1054.


AUDIOPHILEUSA.COM — Addictive website for LP and CD fans. We e-mail superb monthly lists of new and used jazz, rock, audiophile, and much more. Many enjoyable staff, great service. We buy choice record collections. Free monthly catalogs. Toll-free orders, (877) SPIN-LPS.

Wanted

TUBE HI-FI AND SPEAKERS, tube theater amps, corner speakers, born drivers, coaxial/tri-axial speakers, crossovers, tubes. Altec, ElectroVoice, JBL, Jensen, Mcintosh, Quad, Dynaco, Scott, Lowther, Fisher, Heath, Eico, RCA, Tonnoy, Leak, Marantz, Western Electric, etc. Also high-end ARC, Conrad-Johnson, Linn speakers, etc. Also old guitars and guitar amplifiers. Sonny Golden, 1413 Magnolia Lane, Midwest City, OK 73110 (405) 737-3312, fax (405) 737-3355.


220 VOLTS/60HZ KRELL KPS-25, $15,500; KAV Standard, $7500; KAV-HR, $4000; KRC, $2600; KAV-250a, $1900; KAV-250p, $1400; KAV-300, $1600; KAV-500XS, $3000; KSA-250, $1300; KSA-300s, $4500; PF-350MC, $9400; KAS, $1600; KAS IL $9500. (718) 494-7765.

CARY 300SEILX20, $4150; 300SEILX20, $2850; 805C, latest, $9500; 300SE Signature, Western tubes, $3200; 2A3 Signature, latest, $2700. Pass demons: Aleph 12, Aleph P with remote, Aleph 5. Komoro 8545SE, $3900. Nordost and Goertz Alpha-Core demo cables; Spectron amp, 300Wpc, $1700. (805) 206-1018.

ROCKPORT SIRIUS 2.2 turntable, black granite, mint, ($36000) $19000. Mike, (925) 327-1204, 9am-9pm PST.

GENESIS 9000 subwoofer (SGHT 11), ($25000) $2000; Pinnacle Digital Sub350 subwoofer, (SGHT 17), ($12000) $600; Audeo C221 center-channel speaker, ($700) $350; Transparent Digital Link, 1m, RCA, ($300) $125. All prices plus shipping. (973) 713-9493.

CDs, LPs, Tapes
This September, and "Recommended Components" is nigh upon us. The season that brings audiophiles to dealers' showrooms, folded-open issues of the October Stereophile clutched tightly in hand, is nearly here.

Some recent statistics published by the Consumer Electronics Manufacturers Association (CEMA) showed that the hi-fi business typically picks up sharply in September, with increased/higher sales continuing through mid-January. I was surprised — you don't begin to hear about increasing sales from retailers until October or November.

Could it be that these sales are stimulated by our October issue? I doubt it. CEMA's figures look at the business as a whole, which is little influenced by Stereophile. In fact, even high-end manufacturers report that less than a majority of their buyers read any magazine about sound reproduction, even the widely circulated Stereo Review (now Sound & Vision).

Still, RC has a mighty effect, manufacturers tell us — particularly when one of their products is omitted. It strikes me as strange: even though Stereophile's April and October issues enjoy newstand circulations typically about 25% higher than those of other months, the knock-on effect of RC is much greater than that. But "Recommended Components" consists almost entirely of things we've already said in previous issues of Stereophile. It's old news.

This anomaly is certainly the result of condensation. Presenting the same material in a short, focused format makes the decision-making easier, thus increasing the potential commercial impact of what is said. But easy buying decisions do not a great-sounding system make. The map is not the territory.

Our most recent issue of "Recommended Components" stirred up a hornet's nest on rec.audio.opinion. We were criticized for recommending far too many products, and the wrong ones to boot. Our writers, who work hard and are paid little, were accused of sloth, ignorance, favoritism, and technical laxity.

I agree with none of these criticisms. Our writers hear a very large amount of hi-fi equipment, have no axes to grind, work hard to get a good sound out of the products they're sent, can hear well — and have their subjective observations subjected to comparison to the most rigorous technical measurements in the business. I seriously concur, however, that "Recommended Components" — or any such rating system — needs to be treated with the greatest skepticism by you, the reader, RC, and reviewing in general, is just an assessment tool, a kind of abstract measurement. You can't listen to everything in the comfort and relaxation of your home, so you rely on someone else to listen for you.

But a tool is only as good as its calibration, a point driven painfully home to me back in the 1970s, when I was an auto mechanic. Pretty much alone in the community, my garage did its own wheel alignment. We were expecting when it came to safety checkups, and two of the most frequent faults in older cars are front-end and steering problems.

Every replaced part requires a front-end realignment, and we went to considerable expense to outfit ourselves with the necessary gadgetry to ensure that our customers were pointed straight ahead and up-and-down (actually, a little pigeon-toed and tilted in at the top, according to the specs). Other shops firmed out their wheel alignments, with middling and sometimes unpredictable results.

But our commitment to excellence was not without its pitfalls. Early on in my wheel-alignement career, I had problems — customers would return with complaints that the car pulled to one side or another. I would recheck the alignment and make sure it was absolutely precise. The problems remained.

Finally, after a few months, one customer returned with serious tire wear, which made me realize that something was wrong. After much checking and rechecking, I discovered that the calibration tool we used with our alignment rig was itself at fault. The calibrator was in need of calibrating. We corrected the problem and our problems subsided — but we had at least one customer for whom we had to purchase a new set of tires.

With cars there are absolute standards: The wheels are toed-in a fixed amount, within narrow limits. The camber is plus or minus a few seconds of a minute of a degree, the caster likewise. You can push these specs a little this way or that to accommodate different road conditions and tire types, but not much. Taste does not enter in.

That's where Stereophile's — or anybody's — reviews are different from front-end alignments. Our descriptions and measurements are objective, but our judgments are subjective. Tom Norton likes speakers with "healthy" bass and I like them with lean bass, so the heartiness of our recommendations of a particular product will differ. Sam Tellig loves the sound of single-ended triodes and I find them a bit colored, if still magical-sounding in some systems. Our judgments vary.

Longtime readers will know that I'm an oenophile — a lover of wine. The wine world has been bedeviled the last several years by wealthy, unhinging wine-buyers who see a rating of 95+ in one of the wine magazines, and rush off to corner the market. But these people just collect — they don't drink. The world is thus triply hurt: prices soar; good wines, through no fault of their makers, become unavailable; and, worst of all, no one derives pleasure from the product. The collectors don't know what they own, or whether they even like the wine they've spent so much to obtain — the wines are too valuable to drink.

Stereophile readers need to calibrate their source of recommendations. Choose a product that is available near you, at a friend's or at a store. Get to know it. See if you can understand what the review criticized, and what it praised. Go through this process again. Do it for any writer on the basis of whose opinion you're thinking of making a purchase.

Calibrate your tool — and don't get stuck with 95-point products to which you never listen.
Masters of Space and Time

Our mastery of time-based effects earned us an Emmy; our mastery of acoustical space has won us 8 TEC awards, 10 Hi-Fi Grand Prix awards and countless other accolades throughout the audio industry. In our home, our processors provide the best possible playback of any source, from analog mono to 8-channel digital surround.

Lexicon’s MC-1 Digital Controller is unique in its ability to deliver the spatial realism and 3-dimensional envelopment essential to experiencing the full emotional impact of film soundtracks and musical performances. Fully-equipped to deliver the highest quality decoding, and loaded with down-to-earth features, it will bring your audio/video system into the next millennium.

Transcend time and space. Contact your Lexicon dealer.

www.lexicon.com

Enhanced Dual-Bit Delta-Sigma 24-Bit A/D and D/A Conversion • Frequency Response: 10Hz to 20kHz ±0.3dB • THD+N/Noise: Less than 0.005% • Dynamic Range: 105dB minimum. 110dB typical

Lexicon, Inc. • 3 Oak Park, Bedford, MA 01730-1441 • Tel: 781/280-0300 • Fax: 781/280-0490 • Email: info@lexicon.com
Was the challenge to make cables that live up to the names of the greatest mountain and river on earth... or to come up with names for the greatest speaker cable and interconnect on earth?