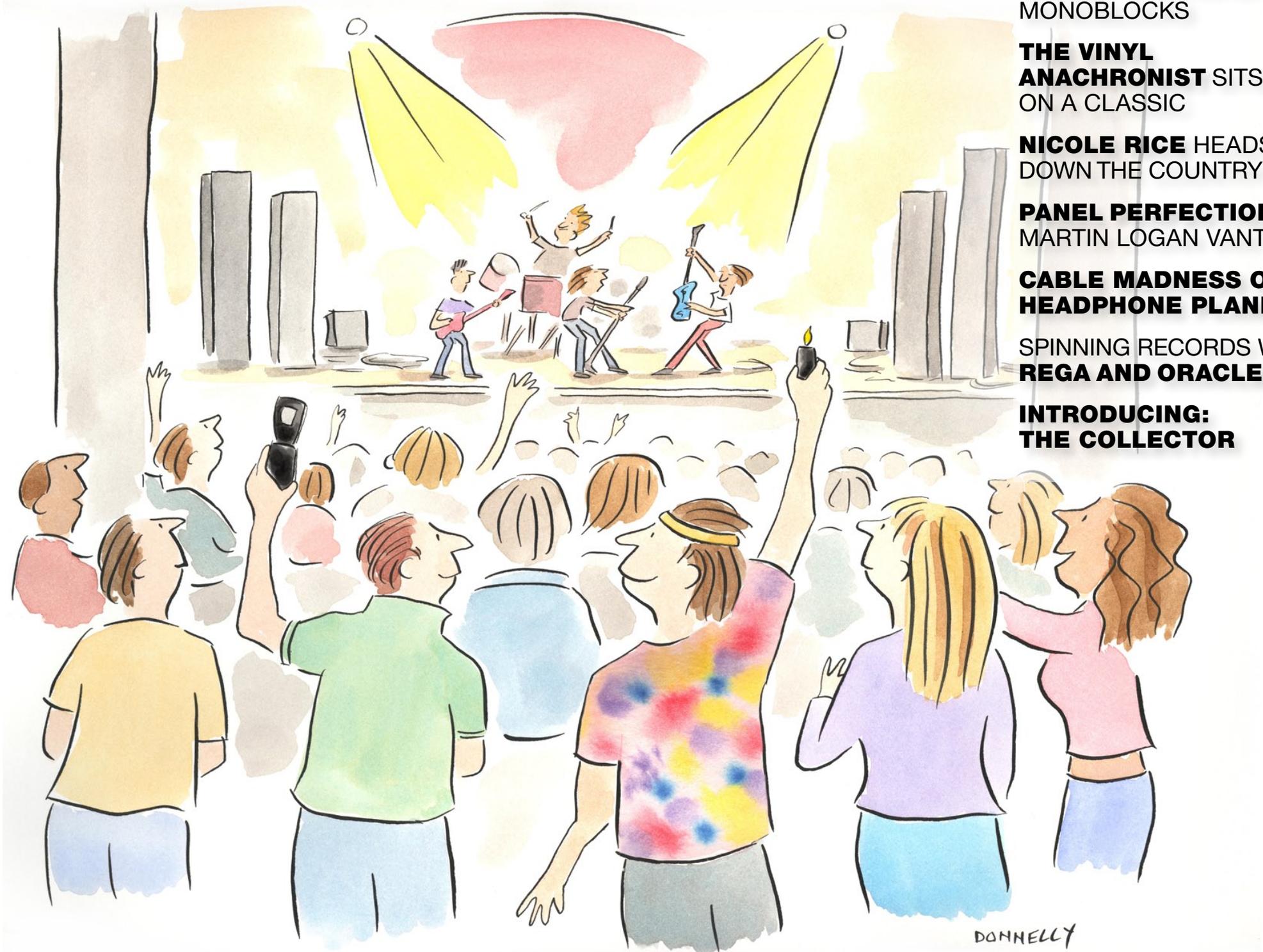


TONEAudio.

The e-journal of analog
and digital sound.

no.10

2007



TWO AMPS IN ONE!
MANLEY'S MONSTER
MONOBLOCKS

**THE VINYL
ANACHRONIST** SITS IN
ON A CLASSIC

NICOLE RICE HEADS
DOWN THE COUNTRY TRAIL

PANEL PERFECTION
MARTIN LOGAN VANTAGE

**CABLE MADNESS ON
HEADPHONE PLANET**

SPINNING RECORDS WITH
REGA AND ORACLE

**INTRODUCING:
THE COLLECTOR**

DONNELLY

IF WE DON'T HOLD ONTO THEIR DREAMS,
WHO WILL?

TONEAudio

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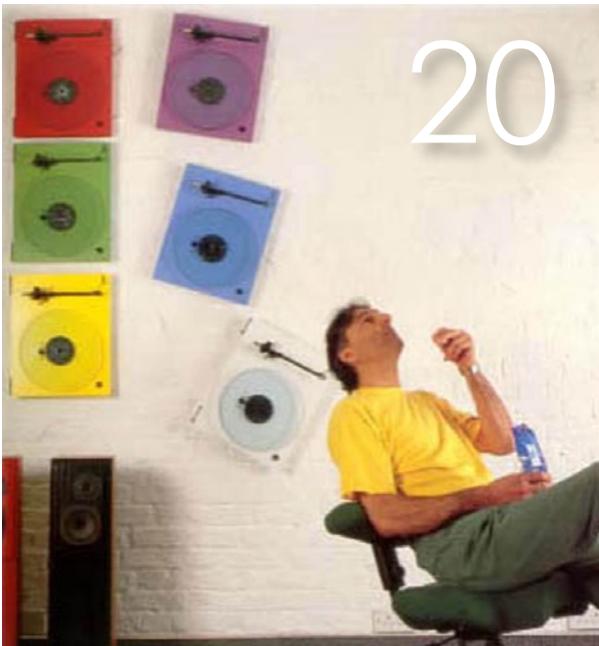


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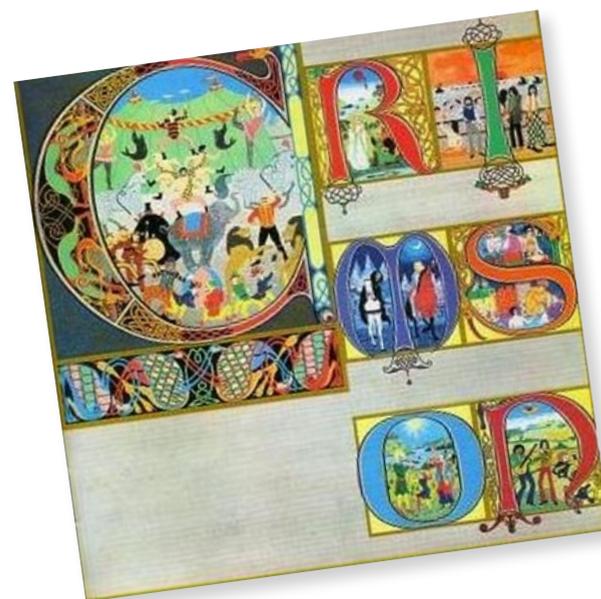
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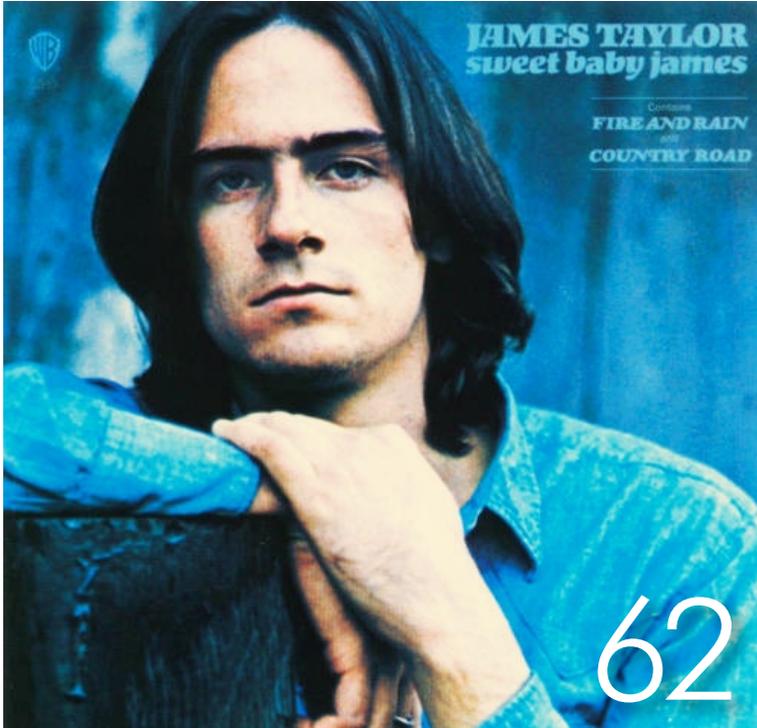


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new in tone this issue

STUART THOMSON

Born and still living in London, UK, Stuart spent some time hanging around with musicians. Yes, he was a drummer (he's heard all the jokes). Nothing ever threatening professionalism, but extremely therapeutic nonetheless. Despite this, he has an abiding love of pop/rock music.

He is still convinced that his lovely wife and two sons are only feigning indifference when he tells them what records he's come home with this time.

He'd dearly love to be able to write like Hunter S. Thompson and PG Wodehouse. Stuart believes in aiming low.

TOM CASELLI

Tom, a Brooklyn native relocated to the suburbs of Atlanta with his wife and two children following the first World Trade Center bombing. In his alter life he is a Project Management software specialist for a large environmental engineering company, which he joined after graduating in 1977.

He has been an avid music collector since the Beatles first touched down at Kennedy airport. He is an admitted obsessive compulsive collector and keeper of dead formats.



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PUBLISHER'S LETTER

What the heck are we trying to accomplish with a review anyway?

With all the recent chatter on the web and in the print magazines lately about the motivations for reviews and the surrounding conspiracy theories, I feel compelled to jump in. Why not get nailed to a cross along with everyone else.

While I can't speak for my colleagues at the other magazines in print and on the web, here's what we are trying to do:

My goal with a review in TONE, is to give you enough information to want to investigate the product for yourself. Hopefully, if all goes well, you will read one of our reviews and decide that the product being reviewed is something you might like to consider for your own system. In a perfect world, you would read our review, seek out the component, listen to it, think it's fantastic, write a check and live happily ever after with it.

As much as we'd like to accuse the manufacturers of behind the scenes monkey business, if you don't enjoy their products, it doesn't serve ANYONE. I can wax poetic about any piece of gear on Earth, but it all falls down when you go to audition it and think it sucks. Granted, you can't all agree with us all the time, because on one level we all hear a bit differently and ten different people have different requirements for what their music system should be. Because of the human factor, you need to make sure said piece of gear is right for you.

In the end our goal is to try and convey enough of our experience with a piece of review gear so that you can decide that it's worth your time. As much as some people want us to say 'so and so makes the BEST CD player... etc. etc.,' it's not that cut and dry around here. I have told all of our writers that they are absolutely forbidden to say the B word, unless they use it in a context of price point or their limited experience. Even then, I make a Marge Simpson like growl under my breath when that word comes up, though I use it myself now and again.

Without opening the objective/subjective can of worms (or Pandoras Box...) too far, we live with a piece of gear for a certain amount of time and we give you our impressions. We tell you what associated components we used and hopefully you will have had a little bit of experience with some of that gear, so you have a little bit of a feel for where we are coming from. We aren't trying to define the best, just relate the experience in a meaningful way that will assist you.

The best hifi system is the one that allows you to enjoy music the way you want to hear it!

It's a lot like buying presents for someone, the best gift is one THEY will enjoy. One of the best things you can do to make your life easier is try to define what you are really looking for after all, and it can be difficult with so many good choices out there these days!

Now that we've been around for almost two years, I'm hoping that you are getting to know us a bit better, so that we can be a good resource for you when searching for new gear. The bad news is that you will still have to do the hard work and go search it out, listen and experiment. But this is a passion worth pursuing! Everyone I've ever met that has a fantastic system has had to work at it! I want you to have the same experience I'm having; when I sit down on my couch and listen to music, I'm thrilled. I'm not thinking about anything but what a great time I'm having listening.

This is a journey, and it's supposed to be fun.

We'll do our best to be helpful tour guides along the way. As always, I hope you enjoy the issue, we had a great time producing it!



BUDGET GEAR:

The Audio Engine 5 Powered Speakers

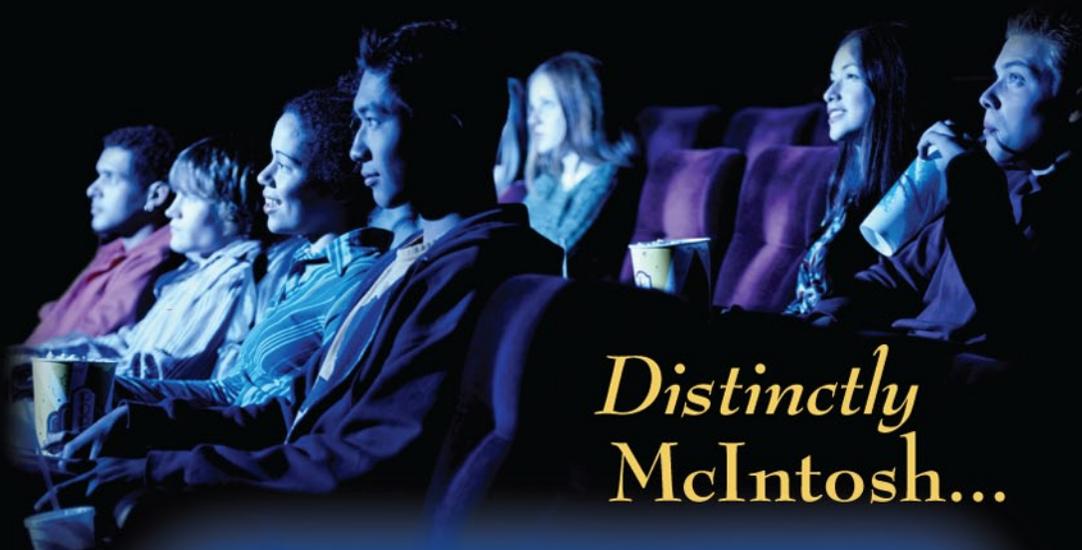
— Jeff Dorgay

Often times people ask us for a good starter system recommendation that is well below a thousand dollars for another room in the house or for one of their kids that is going off to college, followed by a request for extreme compactness as well.

When buying new, this can be a tough price point to hit, but I've been so impressed by the Audio Engine 5, that this is the one I've been suggesting to all my friends. Only 7"x 7"x 10", these little powered speakers have everything you need to run a great mini system anywhere and they make a FANTASTIC pair of powered computer speakers! They are shielded so if you still have a CRT monitor (or TV) it will not be a problem.

At about 14 pounds each, they are very stout indeed, with built in 45-watt amplifiers that are optimized to the 5" Kevlar woofer and 1" dome tweeter. You can read all of the specs on the Audio Engine site (www.audioengineusa.com) but suffice to say, they have covered all of the bases here. And they come in a very cool brushed black finish, or whiny white (to match your white iPod or iMac...)





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I've lived with the AA5s for quite some time now and am still amazed at how much performance they offer for the money. When we first got them out of the box, I have to admit skepticism, but the minute I plugged my iPod in, everyone was grinning. I use all uncompressed music on my iPod and now that I have had my iPod upgraded by Vinnie at Red Wine Audio, this makes a small system that can't be beat!

Very Well Thought Out

The staff at Audio Engine really did their homework with these. While at first glance you might hold it against them for not including an iPod dock, I think it was actually very forward thinking, because who knows when Mr. Jobs and company will upset the apple cart and give the iPod a totally different form factor, making this part of the AA5 irrelevant? They do give you a USB port for charging your favorite personal player, as well as a pair of audio inputs that you can use with an iPod or the Airport Express.

I'd also like to point out that even though the AA5 speakers are a new product from what seems like a new company, these little jewels come with a pedigree. The three principals came from Alesis, Harmon/Kardon, Gibson and Apple. One of them even worked on the iPod team, which probably has more than a little bit to do with how well these speakers integrate with an iPod!

(continued)

A pair of subwoofer out jacks are also very conveniently located on the back, so that you can really make them part of a bigger system, or a budget home theater setup. I used the AA5 with a Tannoy TS8, which offers great performance on a modest budget (\$349). Using this along with the iMod served up incredible sound for a thousand bucks!

The AA5 comes with a length of speaker cable to go from the left to the right, but I made a quick substitute for an 8-foot length of speaker cable from Audio Art with great results; much better mids and a smoother high end! Same thing with input cable; you can use something off the shelf from Radio Shack, but I used one from ALO Audio and again the presentation tightened up quite a bit, so this little system has enough resolution for you to tell the difference!

But It's About The Sound!

Great features aside, the Audio Engine 5 is something that will give you some serious musical pleasure. **I listened to a lot of my favorite tunes all over the map and always had a smile on my face, no matter if I was listening to Ted Nugent or the New York Philharmonic.** The frequency response is claimed to only be down 1.5db at 50hz, and while that seems a trifle optimistic, the low end was not lacking. Having the woofers powered I'm sure contributes to this quite a bit. Again, the Tannoy sub really rounded out the package nicely.

Remember, like any other minimonitor type speaker, if you can put them on good stands you will be rewarded in the bass department and these are no exception to the rule. It's just a bit of overkill to put a \$349 pair of speakers on a \$500 pair of stands, but it worked!

I have to believe that there is a nice compromise out there somewhere for about \$100 a pair that will give you the functionality that your room requires.

If you have to put them on a bookshelf, proceed with caution, as they do have a rear firing port.

Definitely A Winner

No matter what the application, if you need high quality sound in a tight spot, TONE recommends the Audio Engine 5. With its built in amplifiers, subwoofer outputs and USB/iPod functionality, it should be easily integrated wherever you would like another system. If you want a pair of your own, check out the AA website, they have a ton of dealers all over the world and can also be found at most Apple stores.

Should there not be a dealer near you, you can buy them direct from the AA website. They offer free UPS Ground service and a 30 day money back guarantee. It doesn't get any easier than this to have good sound! ●

The Audio Engine 5

MSRP: \$349 in black or white

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A More Than Decent Exposure

EXPOSURE 3010S INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

— Marc Phillips

‘If you like Naim, you’ll love Exposure!’

I used to hear this a lot during my days as a Brit-fi enthusiast and all-around Naim guy. In fact, I know two guys who went the Exposure route. One was an audio salesman from Chicago who begged his boss to start carrying the line, and once he had purchased Exposure’s top-of-the-line amp, preamp and phono stage at wholesale, he proudly exclaimed that ‘it can’t possibly get any better than this!’ Sales hyperbole perhaps, but this guy was a pretty straight shooter, and I took his word for it.

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The second was a friend of mine who was really looking for a nice integrated for around \$1500. I quickly recommended the Naim NAIT 5i, as I often do. I forgot, however, that he had a Rega Planar 3 (that I had also recommended to him), and that the NAIT didn't come with a phono stage like the older NAITs did. By the time we added a Stageline phono stage and the required power supply, we were well over his budget.

So when he asked me about Exposure, I practically slapped my forehead. 'Of course,' I replied, 'the 2010S has everything in one box.'

He wound up auditioning it, and immediately fell in love with it. He's been happy ever since.

When Jeff asked me if I wanted to review an Exposure integrated, I immediately thought he was talking about the 2010S, which I've heard several times at my friend's pad and really like. 'No,' he replied, 'it's the big one... the 3010S!' *(continued)*



Not only did I accept enthusiastically, I drove from LA to Portland to pick it up! (Okay...I also picked up two phono preamps, a pair of speakers, a line conditioner and about a dozen power cords.)

Exposure's 3010S fits in between the budget-priced (but still excellent) 2010S series, and the Classic series, which contains Exposure's statement products. The 3010S line improves over the 2010S gear by offering bigger power supplies, isolation (the casework is all-aluminum to help with resonance and stray electromagnetic fields), and more wattage. I realized somewhat sheepishly that at 110 watts per channel, the 3010S is the most powerful integrated amp I have had in my listening room.

While setting up the Exposure in my system, I was reminded of the Valve Audio Exclame 100 integrated I reviewed in Issue #8. It had the same no-frills silver front panel, around the same power (the Exclame had 100wpc), and same ease in setting up and plugging everything in. They're even about the same size and weight. There is one important difference, however...the Exclame is a hybrid amp, while the Exposure is 100% solid state. For the first time in over two years, my system would be completely tube-free! I felt like I needed a hug when I came to that realization.

I did hit a minor speed bump when I went to hook up my Zu Audio Libtec cables, and found that **the Exposure only accepted banana plugs...my first encounter with those dreaded 'Euronanny' jacks.** Luckily I was able to scrounge up some banana adapters for the spade lugs on the Libtec; I was this close to ordering my third set of Naim NACA5 speaker cables in the last decade. In no time I had everything hooked up and ready to go, and yet I was strangely hesitant. It's been a while since I've heard a solid-state amp, other than the Nagra VSA and the First Watt F3, that didn't make me run for the hills.

I know it sounds like I'm damning the 3010S with faint praise when I say I didn't run for the hills, but I think it's remarkable that after spending the last eighteen months basking in the romance of SET world, I immediately appreciated the Exposure's strengths, and was able to get around whatever reservations I had about its decidedly solid-state sound. This is not one of those British integrations, like the Sugden A21, that will have everyone rhapsodizing about its tube-like sound. Compared to all of the 45, 2A3 and 300B-based SETs I have lying around, the Exposure does sound cool and analytical and even slightly forward through the midrange. *(continued)*

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Even after several weeks of break-in, the Exposure would still occasionally shout at me (kind of like a Naim).

And yet I was completely won over by the Exposure's incredibly low noise floor, its deep bass capability, and the gigantic soundstage I achieved using both my Zu Audio Druid mk. IVs and Jeff's DeVore Fidelity Gibbon Super 8 loudspeakers. For years I've been saying that great imaging and soundstaging, while certainly nice to have, take a back seat to tonal accuracy and a lifelike midrange; you know, the whole PraT thing. Well, the Exposure maintained all those strengths, while giving me the icing on the cake. And when coupled with the Gibbons, the Exposure delivered some of the deepest bass I have ever heard in my home, period.

It's to the Exposure's credit that when I switched back to SET amplification, I felt like everything was a little too soft and indistinct. When I put a McIntosh C220 preamp and a pair of Dignity Audio 300B monoblocks in place of the Exposure, it was definitely a bit more romantic. **I, however, felt that everything had softened and shrunk. I had acclimated to the big Exposure sound, and I missed it.**

Before I had picked up the Exposure from Jeff's house, he had installed the optional MC phono card into the 3010S. When I listened to LPs for the first time, I wondered if Jeff had told Exposure that I had a Koetsu Rosewood cartridge (I did, actually! –ed.) and they had preset all of the loading configurations, or if it was just a one-size-fits all MC card. *(continued)*



I have to admit that it was an utterly perfect fit for my Koetsu, with an extremely low noise floor, and the perfect amount of gain. Compared to the more expensive phono preamps I have on hand, the phono section of the Exposure sounded a little more forward, and it tended to accentuate surface noise slightly.

At \$500, I can't think of another outboard phono preamp I'd choose in its place for the same price. If you're looking for a one-box solution, the 3010S with its MC phono board option is one of the best I've heard. Very versatile, it offers loading at 100, 110, 130, 160, 210, 310, 470 and 1.5k ohms. There are three sensitivity settings at .25mv, .5mv and 1mv, so you should have a pretty easy time matching it up with whatever cartridge you might have in mind. And if you become a vinyl maniac, you can always use the on-board phono stage for a second turntable if you pick up an outboard phono stage!

The Exposure 3010S probably won't make me sell my Yamamoto Sound Craft amplification any time soon (although the 90dB efficient Gibbon Super 8s might!), but it does prove what I've been saying about some audiophiles and their pursuit of One True Sound. I have no problem with listening to something like the 3010S and enjoying its musical presentation, even though it is worlds away from the sound a 2wpc SET provides. But remember, that is a very different sound

and to be fair, it's comparing apples to oranges. Throwing the Exposure in the ring with other solid state integrations I have heard, it more than holds its own.

I have had at least a half-dozen visitors to my home absolutely marvel at the sound the Exposure provided, especially in conjunction with the Devore Fidelity speakers. I even hooked up my old Spendor S20s to the Exposure, and had a nice taste of that classic British sound that got me into High-End audio in the first place!

So I like the Exposure 3010S... a lot. But now I'm wondering if that means I'm going to stay in the solid-state camp? Stay tuned for more adventures! ●

The Exposure 3010 Integrated Amplifier

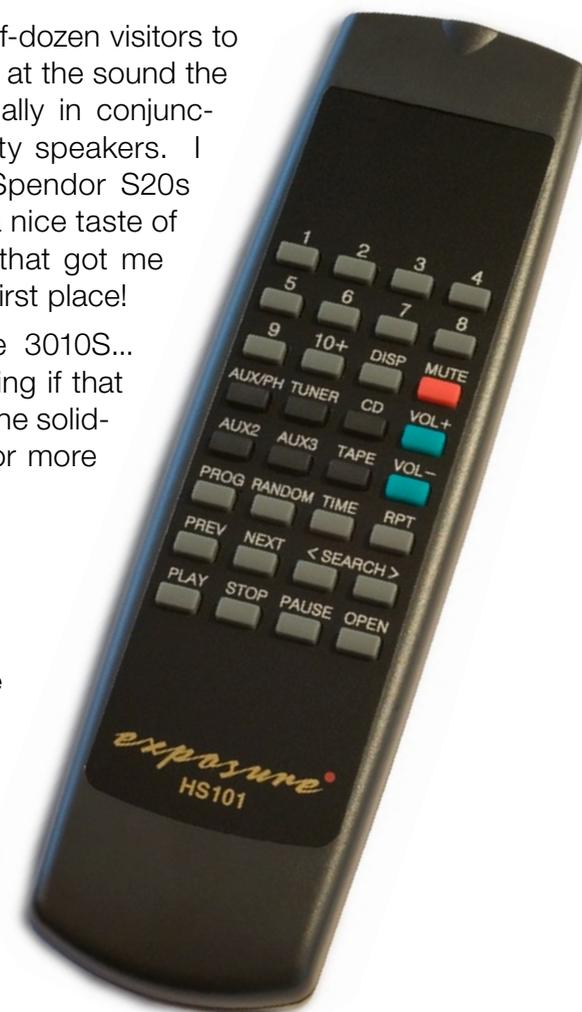
MSRP: \$2200, phono stage additional \$500

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Romantic Robots

The B&W Matrix 801 Series III Loudspeaker

— Kurt Doslu



‘Look at the robots, Dad’ I heard a young boy call from the back room of our store. Having owned a stereo shop for over a decade, I knew exactly what he was talking about. The only question was whether he was turning the ‘heads’ of the robots or pushing them around the room on their useful casters. Luckily a distressed ‘don’t touch anything!’ echoed out from the boy’s warden. It’s funny how quickly most parents will learn to discipline when faced with the possibility of incipient poverty. The six simple words ‘You break it you bought it!’ always terrifies them.

Knowing that the situation was under control, I decided to walk rather than run to the back room and appear completely composed and unflappable. ‘Yes, those are the B&W Matrix 801 series III,’ I said. And then I actually showed them how the midrange and tweeter assembly pivoted to ensure that, as B&W states, the sound remains focused and that the stereo-image is presented with unparalleled three dimensional accuracy.

OLD SCHOOL!

‘There’s quite a history behind those speakers’ I started to say, but noticed that the father’s face was frozen in fear as his 6-year old’s finger was testing the pliability of a Piega P-10 ribbon tweeter.

Rounding him up like two Australian shepherds, we herded the young boy into a sort of low-fi playpen. He was surrounded by sub-\$200 speakers, given a non-working Sony CD player, a powered screwdriver and instructions that the future success of this store depended on his repair abilities. Done.

My newly emancipated customer and I finally walked back over to the B&W Matrix 801 series IIIs. I explained that the original 801 (shown here in our pictures, thanks to the B&W archives) was introduced in 1979 and almost instantly became the reference loudspeaker of the industry. And not just the hi-fi industry; it became the reference speaker in many of the world’s classical recording studios, including EMI Abbey Road, Decca and Deutsche Grammophon just to name a few.

Developed in Worthing, England by John Bowers (of Bowers & Wilkens), B&W has, more than any other company, continued to research, develop and improve upon their loudspeakers. Indisputably clear in the remodeling of the 801. Having researched cabinet making, bracing and bonding materials, B&W constructed an elaborate internal framework and released the Matrix 801 in 1987. The 801 Matrix III was the culmination of B&W’s refinement of the 801, eliminating the environmental EQ on the back of the midrange driver, overload circuit and gaining more bass and better dispersion than any speaker to date. And in case you didn’t notice, moved away from the original acoustic suspension woofer (which required even MORE drive current back then...) to the ported design that continues to this day.

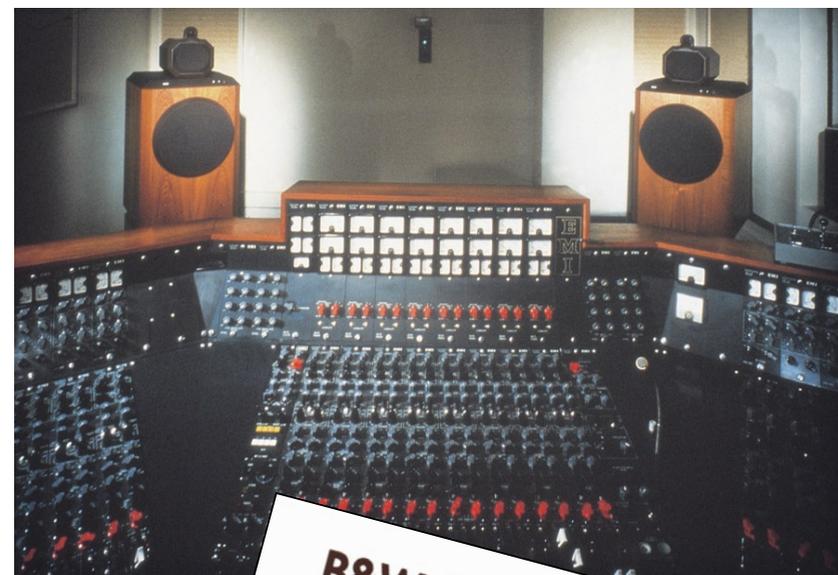
The 801 series III was released in the early 90s and competed for retail floorspace with several formidable adversaries: the Apogee Diva, Thiel CS 3.6, Vandersteen 4a, Merlin Excalibur, Duntech Sovereign and Avalon Eclipse to name a few. Amplifier power was definitely an issue as most of these monsters could eat up 100 watts faster than a Sumo wrestler with a happy meal. At \$5500 a pair, the B&Ws cost a bit more than

the Vandersteens and Thiels, but far less expensive than the others.

‘So let’s have a listen,’ I say. Making sure to have enough power, I choose a classic McIntosh 2205 amplifier. While the series III is more sensitive than its predecessors, it still takes an amplifier with at least 100 watts and a good damping factor to control that titanic 12" woofer. (About 300 per channel was more like it, -ed.)

Neil Young’s **Harvest** is playing. The voice is rich and palatable, as if having undergone some sort of linguistic marination. These are indeed pretty groovy speakers. ‘I like it’ the father says.

Over the years I have found that most listeners assess speakers from an ‘I like it/ I don’t like it’ platform. And the B&W 801 series III will almost always fall into the ‘I like it’ category because of its liquorish midrange, smooth high frequencies and thunderous bass. *(continued)*



series 5

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tones and overall genuineness
will reveal the deeper waters of
engineering that have produced
this musical instrument.

The 801 series III is truly a
musical instrument. **Some
speakers produce a
sound so clinically
accurate that I equate
it to having surgical
theater lights above
your dinner table,
whereas the 801 III
is much more like a
candle-lit chandelier.**

Definitely a more romantic pre-
sentation, but a good one none-
theless. And certainly a very
enjoyable speaker still, after all
these years. ●



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TONEA 19 NO.10 2007

Getting Into Rega with Roy Gandy

What started out as a quick interview with Roy Gandy from Rega ended up being a couple of hours... He had to take his son (a Rugby player) to the hospital to have a cast removed, so we had to cut our talk short!

I managed to catch him after a particularly great day at the office, where he said they had a major breakthrough in electronics design that they had been working on for a few years, so he was in a great mood.

Here's a bit of what we discussed:

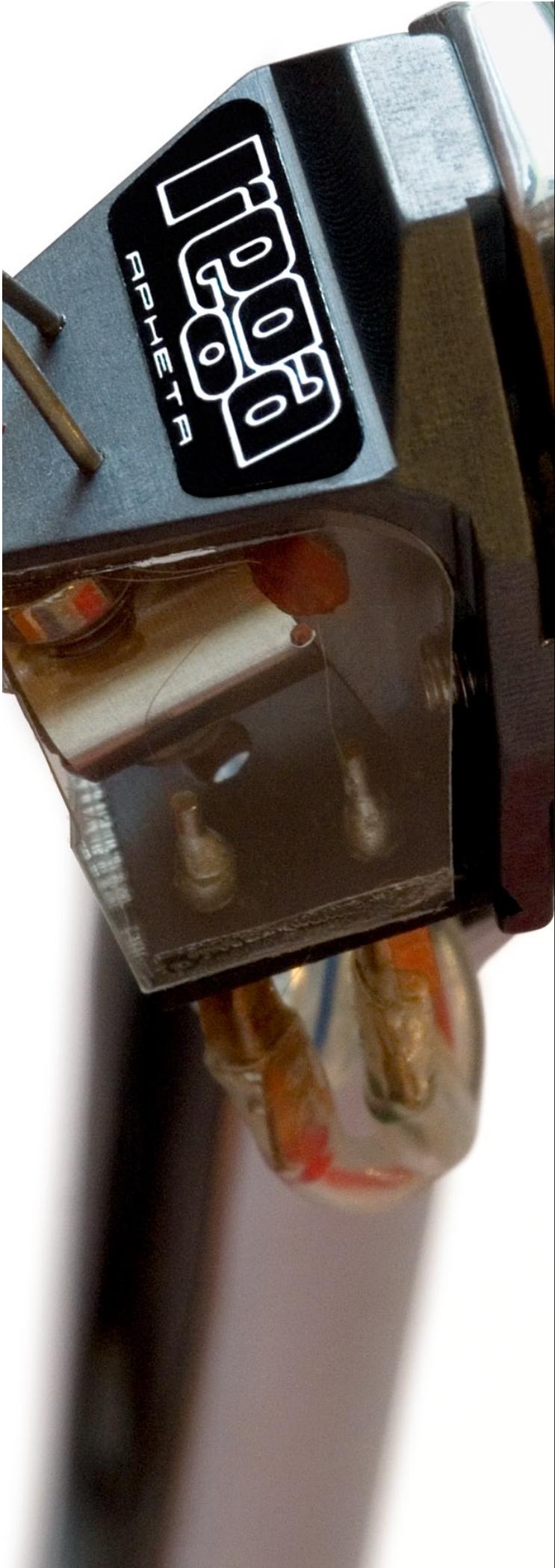
TONE: Rega has had a period of what appears like steady growth, as you constantly introduce and refine your product offerings. Has there ever been a point where you just felt like forgetting about audio and doing something else entirely, or is this still a great day job?

RG: Well, today was quite a good day, with a big breakthrough in circuit design that we have been working on for some time now. Today I'm ecstatic, but a couple of weeks ago, I was not in this good of a mood.

When you've been in business for 34 years, there are always ups and downs. We've had four major periods of restructuring over that time, and it is always about getting the people in the company to move along with the changes. (And people's resistance to change!)

But, we've always strived to make the best products we can, so this is still a very rewarding job indeed.

TONE: I see that you started out as a number of the great designers in this industry, building your own gear. Have you kept any of your first projects in the Rega Museum?



RG: Well there are a few bits up in the loft of the factory, but the unofficial Rega Museum is in Denmark! They have something like 5 million people and more than one percent of the population owns a Rega product, making them the highest per capita Rega owners of anywhere on Earth.

We have a shop there that collects and keeps track of our older products. They even did an event to find the oldest Rega turntable one time. 29 people turned out for the event and one of the gentlemen actually had a table from our first year of production. He didn't want to give it up for a new P3, but eventually they worked it out.

Personally though, I'm not a collector. If I keep things, they are still in use. But various friends of mine have a lot of my earliest creations.

TONE: That in mind, is it pretty cool to look back and see the impact you have made on the audio industry? There are quite a few really happy Rega customers out there!

RG: I'm very happy that there are enough people in the world that recognize good sound quality and that we've been a part of it. But on one level, I don't really see us as a hi-fi company as much as a good engineering firm that happens to make audio components.

TONE: Were your parents involved in music or hi-fi?

RG: Both of my parents were artists and musicians. My Mom was a concert pianist with great technique. What she lacked in music reading skills, she more than made up with in her emotion. She's 94 and still going strong! My Dad was an operatic singer that back in my younger years was on the radio and could imitate the styles of the famous opera singers of the day.

TONE: Sort of like an Elvis impersonator?

RG: Exactly.

TONE: The history section of the Rega website mentions you starting out as a mechanical engineer. When did you start down this path?

RG: At age four, I wanted to ride one of my parents' bicycles, but they both had flat tires. My next-door neighbor showed me how to patch the punctured tubes and I got them going! Next thing, my Mom saw me riding around the neighborhood on her bike. When I was about twelve I used to adjust the tappets on my Dad's car and I moved on to harder tasks, like the clutch!

TONE: I notice your fascination with the bright lime green color! That has always been my favorite color as well and was thrilled back when the original lime green Planar 3's came out. I went to the dealer and traded up right away!! Any plans for bright colors in the rest of the turntable range?

RG: Well, I'm a mischievous sort of person actually. I've always liked that bright green color. As someone who takes a big interest in psychology, I've found that color is very easy to work around, but it is not popular in the West.

The bright green Planar 3 started out as a joke. Whenever we would ship out 50 tables or so, we would include a bright green one in just to see how it would go over. The guys in Denmark loved it, and apparently you as well! Later on, the bright colored range of tables really caught on quite well.

TONE: Can we expect the new P3 in colors?

RG: As soon as we get caught up with the current demand! Every now and then we produce our speakers in a bright color too. Just make a few and then we move on to something else.



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TONE: Let's chat about the new cartridge, the Apheta for a minute. Are you pleased with the result?

RG: Over the moon, actually.

TONE: Is this produced in-house, or is it produced elsewhere?

RG: Like all other Rega products, it is built completely in-house. We started out thinking of sourcing it from another manufacturer, but we couldn't get exactly what we wanted. That's the problem with working that way. When someone else builds your product, you can't always get what you want, but what they want to produce. So we pulled it in house and are very pleased with the results!

We just shipped 150 units to our top distributors and are already backlogged on orders.

TONE: Can we expect an expanded model range of moving coil cartridges?

RG: I think as we study the current cartridge and how it is received, there is a good chance we will come up with another model in a few years.

TONE: After a full day at work, do you go home to music, or are you an "I like peace and quiet" kind of guy at home?

RG: I always enjoy having music on. I don't even watch television, except for the occasional F1 race. My son taped last week's race, (Spanish Grand Prix) but I haven't had time to get to it yet...

TONE: My kind of guy! Who's your favorite for winning the championship this year? *(continued)*



RG: I'm not a betting man, I'm just enjoying the way the field has become so competitive this year. Kimi Raikkonen is a great driver, but has had some mechanical issues, so we'll see.

TONE: Do you have an all Rega system, or do you have a mega expensive system, featuring other people's components?

RG: I listen to my own gear at home, because I'm always analyzing it, thinking of ways to improve it! But to clarify, I am not an equipment person at heart, I love music. That's why Rega products have never been very tweaky. I agree that you can hear a difference in sound by using a different pair of interconnects, or mains cable, but I want people to enjoy their music.

TONE: Do you still play the clarinet? Any other instruments?

RG: I quit the clarinet at 13, but still play guitar in my own band. I could probably still make a sound on the Clarinet though.

TONE: Who was your favorite Beatle?

RG: I love the Beatles, but don't have a favorite.

TONE: What is your favorite type of music to listen to?

RG: I enjoy a wide range of music. I look for artists with something really special in the way they go about it, that's what hooks me. It's the subtleties.

TONE: Do you have a pretty big vinyl collection?

RG: I wouldn't call it huge, probably about 4000 albums, but I've heard them all at least once! I do have the obvious favorites that have been played hundreds of times though.

TONE: Now that Rega has been offering CD players for a while, do you listen to a lot of digital personally, or are you still an analog guy at heart?

RG: Still an analog guy. I only have a couple hundred CDs and most of them are to listen to songs to play for the band. You know, it's a lot easier to repeat something on a CD player when you are trying to learn it!

TONE: What's your prediction for the future of the industry? Bright times ahead or gloom and doom?

RG: Well, a few years ago I might have been a bit more gloom and doom, but lately we are shipping everything we can make and our sales are up about 100%, so no complaints there. What I've seen over the years is that the retailers still doing a good business are the ones who have built a strong clientele and have taken good care of their customers, not necessarily the ones with the biggest ad budgets.

I don't know if you can necessarily drag people into this world. I think a lot of people just naturally gravitate towards it.

TONE: Enough about hifi gear, what do you really enjoy doing that is NOT hifi oriented?

RG: (laughing) Sex, food and wine, not necessarily always in that order! Seriously, I am a big food and wine lover. I also really enjoy spending a lot of time with our good friends.

TONE: And arguing about interconnects?

RG: No.

TONE: Do you do anything death defying, like ride fast motorcycles, race autos, or jump out of airplanes?

RG: I do like things that are a bit on the edge. *(continued)*

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A good friend and I used to run a rally car and we worked our way up to be ranked number 30 in England in our class. I enjoyed the communication between driver and navigator quite a bit.

We did not have the fastest car, but we were consistent and never broke down. That was the key to our success.

TONE: Sort of like Rega turntables....

RG: Exactly!

TONE: Are your children interested in the family business, or have they taken entirely different careers?

RG: My oldest son just started working in procurement two weeks ago. I did not push him in that direction, but he has a knack for it and my employees actually insisted we get him on board. My other son (with the broken bone...) will probably be more the athlete.

TONE: So we can be assured Rega will carry on?

RG: Definitely. I have a fellow at the office who I've been working on. Perhaps in about 10 years, when I'm ready to hang it up, he will be ready to take over!

So, in Roy Gandy, we have a man who enjoys life, music and running Rega. I look forward to chatting with him again and taking him up on the invitation to come over and tour the factory! Stay tuned... ●

The first time Tom came to my studio/ listening room he said,

‘You don’t have any Playtapes, what kind of collector are you?’

Well, haphazard to say the least. But thanks to a lot of the people I have met out on the Steve Hoffman Music Forum, I have really seen just how passionate these folks (and many others I’ve met since) are about collecting music and trying to find that one really great pressing of their favorite music.

Trust me, this guy is one of the most passionate collectors I’ve met. While he has a huge vinyl collection, he also has reel tapes, cassettes, 8-tracks, Mini Disc and yes Playtapes too!

So, I jumped at the chance to have Tom join us here at TONE. He is a music lover first and an audiophile second, though he and his son (an up and coming collector in his own right) have two great systems in their home.

Tom pointed out that back in the 80s some of the audiophile magazines made it more of a point to talk about actually collecting music and evaluating different pressings. Tom will be walking us through some classic rock albums every issue, pointing out the good and the bad, to give you a little more guidance on this path. We are very happy to have him on board!

A Guide To Getting Lucky

— Tom Caselli

PART ONE:

Back then it was a matter of luck, walking into the local used record emporium and scoring a clean original pressing. Today, EBay puts many of these treasures at your fingertips. With a little luck and judiciously studying pictures you just might score a first pressing of one of your favorites for a fraction of its value. The intent with this column is to spotlight several different pressings of the same album, and maybe give you something to add to your want list. Rather than staying with the same old tired workhorses, I’ll try to point out an album or two in an artist’s catalog that are lesser known but equally enjoyable.



King Crimson – Lizard

The 1969 to 1974 era of King Crimson remains the favorite among fans. Nearly thirty-five years latter, **In the Court of the Crimson King** remains an undisputed Progressive Rock masterpiece and later albums like **Red** have derived a following among younger listeners. *(continued)*

Sadly, their third and fourth albums, **Lizard** and **Islands** respectively, are often overlooked. KC's original lineup imploded shortly after the release of their second album, with nearly the entire group being replaced with the exception of founder Robert Fripp. It was this new formation of KC featuring Mel Collins, Gordon Haskell and Andy McCulloch that recorded **Lizard**.

Cirkus was a sideway move for KC, the heavy classical influences were replaced with a more jazz based approach. Free jazz elements are layered with Frippotronics; a term applied to the tape manipulation of Robert Fripp's guitar, along the way a light sprinkling of medieval influences thrown into the mix. Looking at the ornate album cover gives you a hint to the complexity of the music within. I had at my disposal three pressings: an original UK pink rim Island ILPS 9141, a U.S. Broadway Atlantic SD 8278 and the early eighties Editions E.G EGKC 3.

Playing all three versions in a row was an endurance test but what surprised me was the pressing that I ended up preferring.

We'll start with the most obvious choice, the UK Island. Although Island is one of the revered labels by audiophiles, most exhibit some surface noise. If there are any that play silently, they haven't come my way. However, this is by far the most neutral and flat sounding of all the pressings I surveyed. This copy also offered excellent delineation of the instruments. On the opening section of the *Cirkus* suite, the attack of the acoustic guitar is presented clearly allowing each string to ring out. *Waves of Mellotron* provide the background unto which the other instruments are

projected. During the horn flourish on *Indoor Games* each reed instrument comes from a different position within the acoustical space, with height being especially well rendered. The only reservation I have is that the bass is a bit thin never really providing a solid foundation for the music.

Moving on to the U.S. Atlantic, it is obvious from the start that this was cut from a tape at least a generation removed. A boost was added at each end of the spectrum, while the bass boost provides the weight missing from the UK, the treble is often piercing. The equalization applied causes a complete mid-range suck out. The vocals on this pressing are less focused and more recessed than the Island. Both the width and depth of the recording are truncated. If it's a choice between this or the CD buy the CD.

While the Edition E.G. reissues are purported to be half speed mastered, many find these inferior to the original U.S. versions. In my experience this is certainly true for their debut album however **Lizard** may be the lone exception. This version presented the quietest surface of the three reviewed. The much need bass boost was added for this mastering but this time the treble was left untouched. Although not offering the clarity of the UK and a limited center fill, stage width is WIDE but without the depth of the UK original. In my opinion this uses the same tape as the original Atlantic but this time the mastering provides a nice even total balance across the spectrum. The expanded width of the soundstage places the instruments closer to the speakers. If I had to choose between this copy and the UK, I would say this makes for a more pleasant listening experience, especially a less than revealing system.



Frank Zappa & The Mother of Invention – Burnt Weeny Sandwich

After the disbanding of the original Mothers following **Crusin with Ruben and the Jets**, Zappa went on to record **Hot Rats**. Considered by most his masterpiece, it signaled a change of direction for Frank. A mostly instrumental album **Hot Rats** was his first foray into the Jazz idiom. During interviews at the time he talked about releasing a ten album set of unreleased Mothers recordings, which was subsequently nixed by Warner Brothers. Instead he chose to release one of the albums in the set as **Burnt Weeny Sandwich**.

As a historical recording at the time, it mixed early Mothers tracks like WPLJ and Valerie, which would have been right at home on *Crusin'*, with extended instrumental cuts like *Holiday in Berlin* and *The Little House I Used to Live In*. Strong 20th Century classical influences permeate the album especially on the *Igor's Boogie / Holiday in Berlin* combination taking up most of side one of the original LP. *(continued)*

Having Ian Underwood, a classically trained musician, in the group fueled Zappa's compositional skill.

Here we again have three unique pressings available.

First is an early German pressing featuring a two-tone Reprise label (RS6370). By this time Reprise had stopped using the Orange and Tan label in the U.S. When I came across this I had high hopes as it was beautifully

pressed on a thick slab o'vinyl. While it does offer up great low-end bass there is little definition of notes. While lacking the detail of the best pressings it does provide nice snap to the percussion and the Harpsichord on *Igor's Boogie Phase I* is well presented in tonally. The bad news is that the sax interlude it is so badly rendered that it makes it hard to even determine that its a brass instrument. Imaging is wide but not very deep. Although very collectable from a label pressing variation this

can easily be skipped for sound quality.

Next up is the late seventies U.S. tan label Reprise reissue. This one sounds several generations removed from the master tape, with noticeable hiss permeating the album. The overall sound quality is thin and bright with an excessively boosted treble response. WPLJ was either allowed to run 3 seconds longer or the boost in the treble unearthed a bit of dialog at the end of the track. *(continued)*

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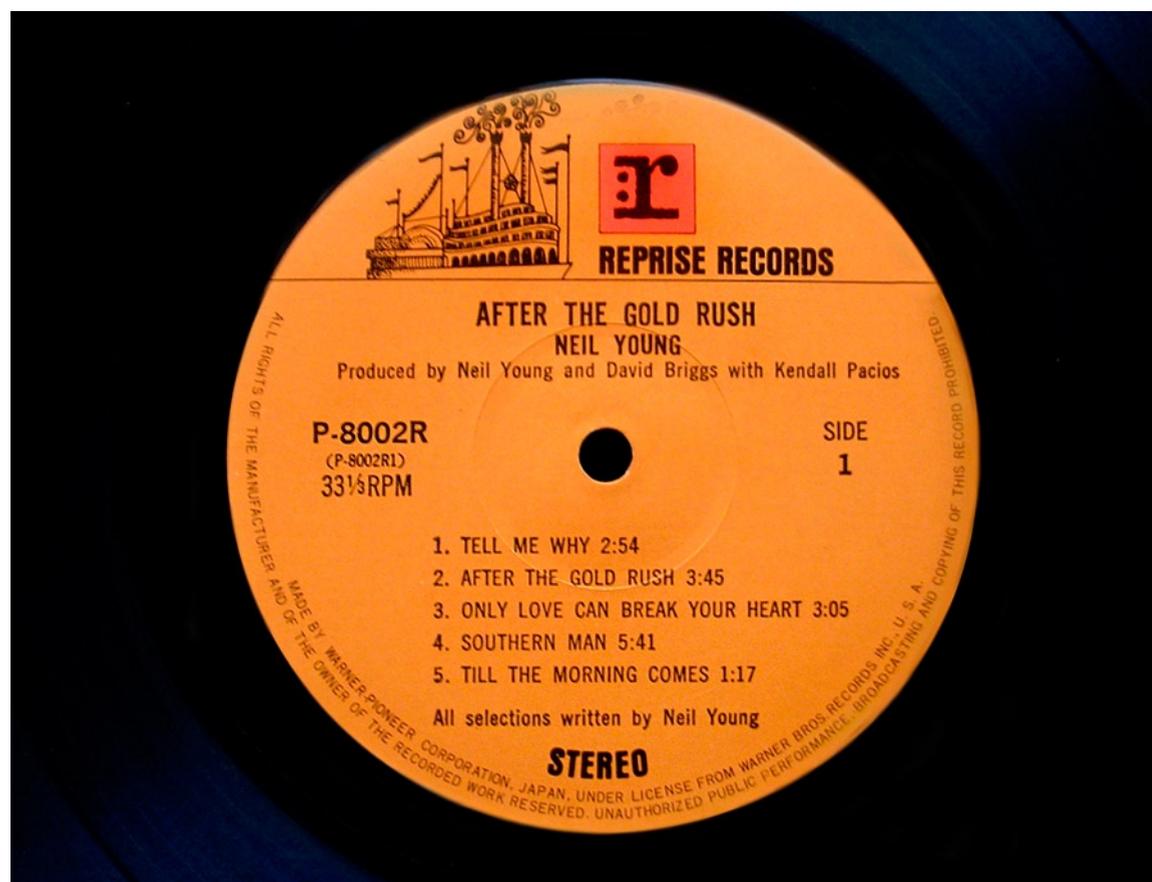
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Some pre echo can be heard at the start of *Holiday in Berlin* (Full Blown), signaling a less than stellar transfer.

Ok, so I've held off the best for last again. I've never met an original Bizarre label pressing that I didn't like and this is no exception. Zappa's Bizarre label, part of his switch from Verve to Warner Brothers, gave him more control over his releases but still not to the level that he desired. One thing is for sure, with Warner Brothers now handling the manufacturing and distribution; the records were well mastered and pressed.

This pressing renders all the instrumentation clearly and with speed lacking in the German version.

Some of the instruments are portrayed less realistically than others, this is especially noticeable on vibes, however this is more a result of the recording than the mastering. Art Tripp, a master percussionist shines on the opening side of the album and his embellishments are given the speed that they deserve. The interplay between bass and bass drum can be clearly made out. A keeper in both sound and music, highly recommended!



Neil Young – After the Gold Rush

There have been volumes written about ol' Neil, a true curmudgeon when it comes to his back catalog. Fans have been waiting decades for long promised archive releases which only now beginning to see the light of day. **After the Gold Rush**, a long time favorite among his following, never achieved the sales of **Harvest**, **Rust Never Sleeps** or even **Harvest Moon**. When it comes to Neil Young it is very hard for me to be objective. I was first introduced to his music as a solo artist when a friend played me **Everybody Knows This is Nowhere** back in my sophomore year of High School and I've been a die-hard fan ever since.

More pressing and cover anomalies exist for this album than any other release. I own or have owned most of them. One of the most desirable featured red lettering as apposed to the usual gold on the

cover. Although some claim it features several alternate mixes I could not detect any differences.

The good news is that the album was very well recorded and all versions serve it well, with one exception. Simply Vinyl, a reissue label from the UK, issued a 180-gram pressing several years back, it used a digital source and was a waste of good vinyl. Avoid this one!

Before we get into the comparisons, it should be noted that the earliest Reprise versions feature the Tan label design and RE-1 in the dead wax. The only difference between RE-1 and the subsequent RE-2 issue was a remix of *When You Dance, I Can Really Love*. Further, no one has yet found any early version without the RE-1. A test pressing did surface in the last several years but if tapes are making the rounds I haven't been privy to one, YET. *(continued)*

Two-Tone Orange and Tan labels have surfaced but these have been attributed to the RCA record club and were an excuse for using up the earlier labels they had on hand.

We'll start this comparison with the earliest 1980s reissue on the Tan label featuring the 'W' Communications logo in the 5 o'clock position. Some of these eighties Reprise pressings sound very good. Although the vinyl is a bit on the thin side, most feature extremely quiet surfaces, however with the abundant number of original copies to be found there is simply no reason to settle.

The Japanese pressing of this album is a joy to behold.

The cover is excellently reproduced, along with the lyric poster and an additional insert with a photo of Neil. Naturally the record is superbly pressed, a trademark of all Japanese albums. Like most Japanese records this one had a number of releases using different catalog numbers. The one I had on hand was P-8002R which I believe is from the mid seventies and distributed by Pioneer.

Neil's guitar on *Tell Me Why* has a nice woody tone but lacks the signature Martin boom. Vocals are spread speaker to speaker but lack the expected depth. Like every pressing, sibilance is a major problem on the title cut *After The Gold Rush*, however it is the least noticeable on this version. Tape hiss is more prevalent than any other copy auditioned, which is a sure sign that the treble got a boost during mastering. On this copy it becomes very noticeable that the French horn was overlaid after the recording was complete, sounding like it came from another place and time.

Now we get to the real treat; the bass is solid and as deep as I've ever heard on *Only Love Can Break Your Heart*. Both drums and vocals are layered in real space. This is the standout track on all the pressings reviewed, a true demo cut for showing off your rig. Overall this is a very pleasant copy but never connects the way the original US copy does.



It's time to say thanks to my parents, coming from an Italian family in New York City you were expected to attend college locally and live at home. This attributed to my record collection never suffering the atrocities that usually occurs from a dormitory existence. Pulling out my original copy it was still in the same condition as it was the day it was purchased. Long live OCD. (Though I lived in Wisconsin, I had the same experience! -ed.)

In this day of mega length albums, **After The Gold Rush** would be considered poor value for the money because of its short length. But at only 37 minutes in length it allowed the record to be cut with plenty of dynamics that is a real value after all. Right from the start of this RE-1 copy you can tell that something is special. *(continued)*

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And wherever I go, my sales reports, my design ideas and my songs go with me. Some might say I have my whole world in the palm of my hand.

Tell Me Why snaps Neil into focus, the depth lacking on the Japanese pressing is here in spades. Whoa, you know it's a Martin guitar this time! Of course with the good comes the bad, sibilance is more pronounced on *Only Love...* and it becomes very irritating at times.

Roll over Lynyrd Skynyrd, because on this pressing Neil is going to put a finish to it on *Southern Man*. The bass drum has kick that can be felt. While on the Japanese copy there is doubt if it is Neil playing his Gretsch or Ol' Black Gibson Les Paul, it's completely cleared up here. The Les Paul is ferocious and his Fender amps are up and humming.

Although only three of the album's tracks are featured on Classic's Greatest Hits 200 gram pressing, I thought it would be interesting to see how they compare.

Classic should have changed their name to Kellogg's for this album. Snap, Crackle and Pop would have been right at home on my copy. Of the three tracks, two are inferior to the US Reprise pressing but the third makes this a mandatory purchase. *Only Love Can Break Your Heart* is presented in 70mm Cinema-scope sound. BIG all over with a panoramic presentation and featuring some of the best bass every recorded. That's what makes this hobby so intriguing, you don't always know where the prizes lurk.

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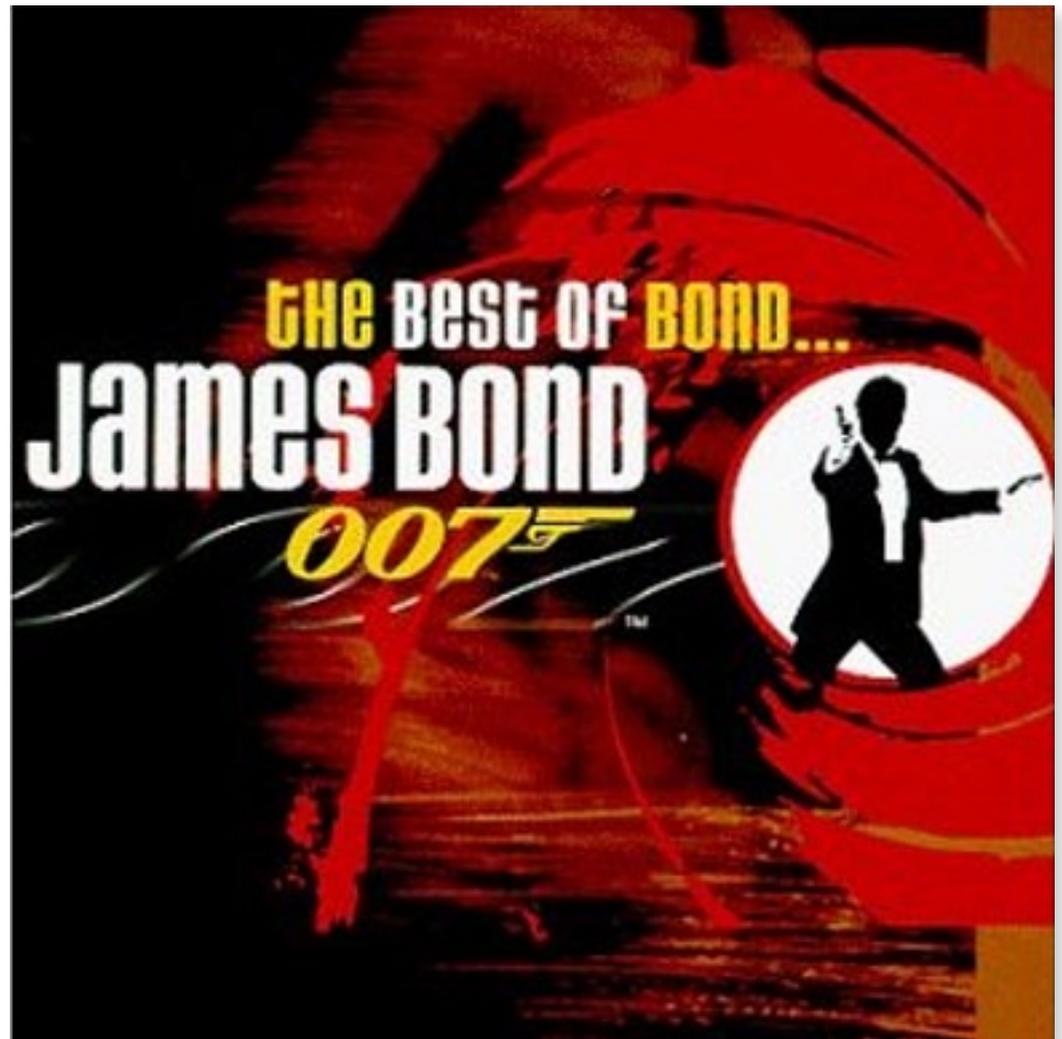
Club Mix

— Scott Tetzlaff

Recently, the new 'Casino Royale' movie was released on DVD. I love a good James Bond film, don't you? Now, I'm not one of those crazy, obsessed movie fans with a distorted sense of reality. But, there are some mornings while I'm getting ready for the day, adjusting my tuxedo and holster, I just drift off into fantasy. I'm thinking to myself: 'Wouldn't it be exciting and glamorous to live that sort of adventurous existence?' I was so preoccupied one morning I almost burned myself on the giant industrial laser that I use to toast my bagels.

Anyhow, there are a lot of fun things about those movies: The cars, outrageous villains, exotic locations, crazy bond-girl-names, and so on. But we're here to talk about music. The soundtrack music is usually very appropriate for the time the film was made, but let's face it: Man can not live on Shirley Bassey and Tom Jones alone. And, at the risk of being called a heretic, there might have been a few dogs in the bunch, too.

So, let's flip through a collection of music – either from the Bond movies, or music that should have been in the movies but got left out somehow. Either way, this is all stuff that would sound really great in your Aston Martin, with the bass turned up a notch or two.



The Best of Bond – Various Artists

This is exactly what you think it would be. The original themes from Dr. No up through GoldenEye. This is what purists want. No tinkering. Just like you heard it in the movie. You can sing along at top karaoke volume with your windows rolled up. No Surprises. This has been re-mastered and sounds pretty darn good. If you're going to buy one James Bond soundtrack album, this would be the one.

Now, if you are an old school purist – you might want to stop reading here and skip to the last paragraph. What follows from here will only make you angry.

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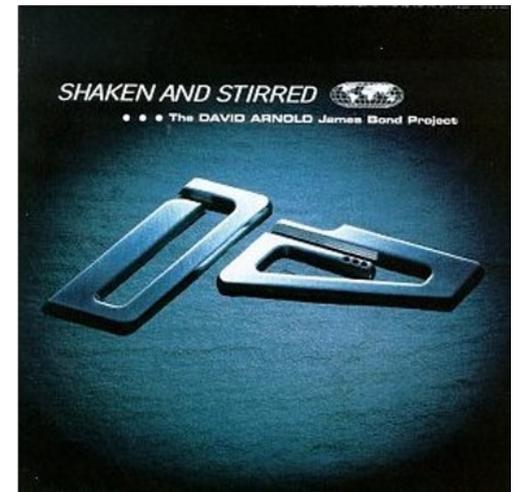
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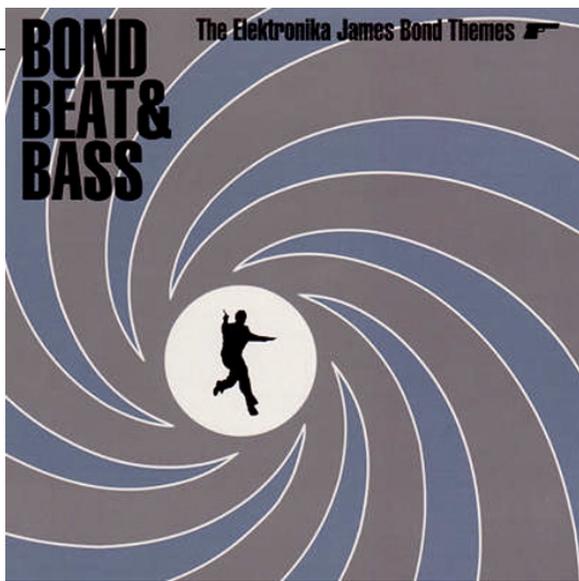
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Shaken and Stirred: The David Arnold James Bond Project – Various Artists

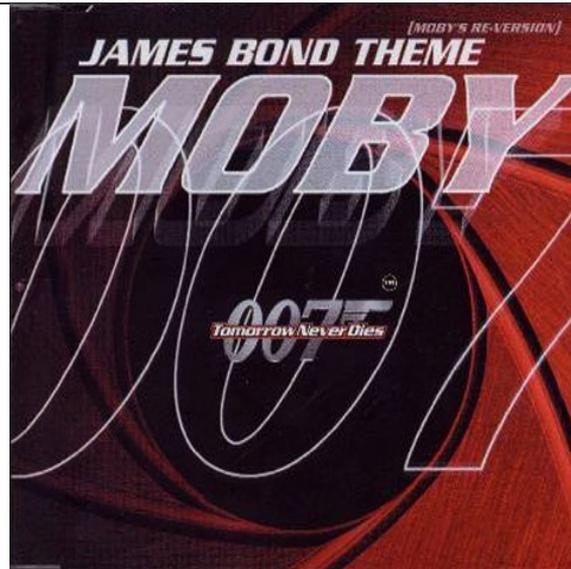
Here's some of that tinkering we were talking about. David Arnold usually composes soundtracks. On this CD he gets a little creative with selected pieces from a few of the Bond films. To me, it's really interesting who he's gathered. There's a great version of *Nobody Does it Better* by Aimee Mann. Two other favorites have to be the Chrissie Hynde (from 'The Pretenders') version of *Live and Let Die* and the closing ballad *We Have All The Time In The World* by Iggy Pop.

I think I would have given them a little extra just to get the Iggy Pop cut, but then I'm a pretty big fan. This clearly isn't for everyone – especially if you're old school, but there's some really good music to be had on this disc. Perhaps just think of it as karaoke for famous people.



Bond, Beat, & Bass: The Elektronika James Bond Themes
– Various Artists

Now we've really crossed a line here. Either you are going to love this, or hate it. This collection is headed very much into the 'techno zone'. No James Bond fan will feel luke warm about this CD. If you like that sort of thing, you are going to love this album. Fast paced – this is a great CD for gaming or red bull fuelled discussions. If you were having a Bond themed party, this is the one you'd put right in the middle as things are heating up.



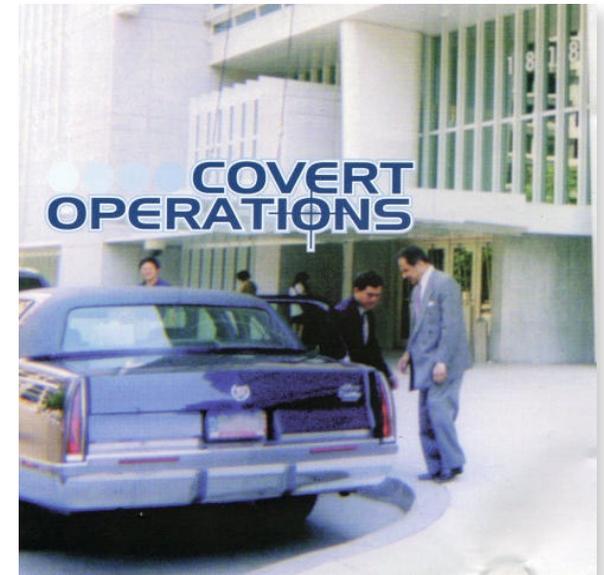
James Bond Theme – Moby

Speaking of, here's something you might add to the mix if you were DJ'ing. It's an EP that's a little difficult to find, but is a fine set of re-mixes of the original James Bond theme. Not something you'd sit and listen to all night – but a great thing for a DJ to own and play with. With six remixes on the EP, you're sure to find one you like. (Kind of like that Depeche Mode CD you made me buy with 10 versions of *Personal Jesus* on it! –ed.)

Now into the grey area...

Decksanddrumsandrolockandroll
– Propellerheads

Here's a classic. In 'big beat' style (similar to The Crystal Method or The Chemical Brothers), the Propellerheads make thickly layered music with tons of detail. The more you listen, the more you hear. This particular CD is a James Bond movie waiting to happen. The track *History Repeating* uses a great Shirley Bassey vocal to create a lounge tune that's fresh and familiar. Another interesting track is *Spybreak* – lots of orchestral fun. The standout track has got to be the amazing remake of *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* – with lush sound clips and double time, this is a perfect adventure tune.



Covert Operations – Various Artists

This could make it onto the list just on the name alone. It's a selection of funky tracks from ESL Music. Like most things from ESL, there are so many influences you feel you should have your passport ready when you listen. The main contributors on this one are Thievery Corporation, Avatars of Dub, and Ursula 1000. This could easily be a soundtrack for a movie that ends up south of the border. It will leave you energized, relaxed, and maybe strangely hungry for South American food.



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High Havoc – Corduroy

Here's one from the 'hard to find' department. An Acid jazz band from the UK made a soundtrack to an imaginary adventure movie a while back. Cheezy good humored fun. Think 'Our Man Flint' after a couple of cocktails, and you are in the neighborhood. If you bump into this one while prowling the used CD shops, pick yourself up a copy. The cover alone makes me chuckle.

Taking the Bond theme a bit further, Scott has started a new blog devoted to living the James Bond lifestyle...

(<http://fullybonded.blogspot.com/>)

I encourage you to check it out often, as there are great gadgets, more music and some good tips that will help you add a little bit more suave style into your life.

From the land of 007, we have a guest contributor. Stuart lives in London and has been a big fan of the Club Mix column. He dropped me a note a while back to tell me about all the mashing that's happening on London radio these days. **'You really should have your guy talk about this!'** he told me.

I suggested that he pen us a guest column, being right there in the midst of things. So we veer off the Bond theme, but give you some more enjoyable tunes from jolly old England.

Mashing About In London

— Stuart Thomson

Cover. Interpretation. Tribute. Re-imagining. Homage. The popular music world seems to have an awful lot of euphemisms for 'copy', and opinions regarding cover versions inhabit an entire spectrum of human attitudes. From zealous preservationists who believe that ANY cover version is a travesty, to liberal dilettantes who believe that anything recorded is fair game for a tribute, irrespective of the quality of the cover.

We can rebut the preservationist theory with just six words 'All Along The Watchtower – Jimi Hendrix.' The liberalist theory only takes five – 'Tomorrow Never Knows – Phil Collins.'

As with most things, the sane response lies somewhere in between the extremes, but even that begs another question:

What constitutes a worthwhile cover/tribute/homage?

What indeed?



Nouvelle Vague – Nouvelle Vague

The French, then. They've never been afraid to do things their own way, and this wilful attitude extends to instrumentalists Marc Collin and Olivier Lipaux, and their revolving cadre of guest chanteuses. This, their debut album, opens to a gently picked acoustic guitar figure in the middle distance. It takes a certain level of commitment and confidence to open an album of covers with Joy Division's brooding, ominous masterpiece *Love Will Tear Us Apart*, especially when they transpose the industrial gloom of Manchester to feather-light break-up despair in a Parisian cafe. See what I mean? Willful.

They clearly love their early 80s post-punk, and have no hesitation to giving the intimate, gallic jazz makeover to such luminary acts as The Clash
(continued)

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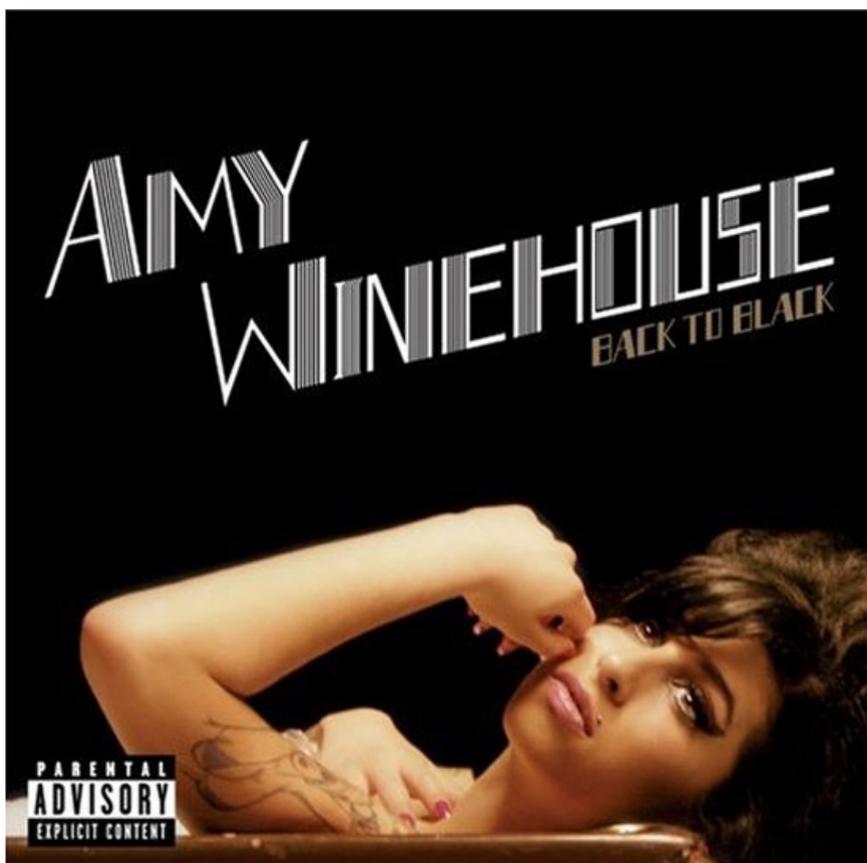
(Guns of Brixton), Public Image Ltd. (This Is Not A Love Song) and The Cure (A Forest). Depeche Mode's *Just Can't Get Enough* is turned into a knock-about romp, and The Undertones' *Teenage Kicks* is given a yearning tone that the original hinted at.

They don't just stick with the bigger songs, though, and their version of Modern English's solitary hit *I Melt With You* is tackled with the same level of respect afforded to the Dead Kennedys' *Too Drunk to F****, although it has to be said there's certainly a greater frisson to hearing a French girl singing the words than I ever experienced from Jello Biafra.

One more thing: *Nouvelle Vague* has a dual meaning: 'bossa nova' and 'new wave'. Never let it be said they didn't give you a clue.

Back to Black – Amy Winehouse

The late Hunter S. Thompson famously created the genre of 'gonzo journalism'; deranged, distorted, but brutally self aware reportage with the author himself at the epicentre of the madness. Londoner Amy Winehouse has now created the 'gonzo break up album' genre. This album deals with a painful break up from a boyfriend. The finger pointing (often at herself), the depression (the 'black' in the album's title), the self destructive coping mechanisms are all grist to the Winehouse mill. Doesn't sound a bundle of laughs so far, does it? *(continued)*



The opening track *Rehab* dispels any doubts within a couple of bars, all Ray Charles organ, Motown drums and Stax brass. **If there is a more uplifting, and more darkly comedic, song about a rehabilitation consultation, I've yet to hear it.** As for Winehouse herself, she certainly has an extraordinary set of pipes, her voice a mix of Karen Carpenter, Janis Joplin and Ronnie Spector, odd as that may sound.

The self incriminatory *You Know I'm No Good* has an Atlantic R&B swing to it, the sort of track that The Wicked Pickett might sing about himself. *Me & Mr Jones* is an irresistible, swaggering stomp, *Tears Dry On Their Own* a deliciously toothsome morsel of bitter, distraught lyrics and sweet melody. Title track *Back to Black* is a prowling, circling thing, a panther that knows it can pick the lock whenever it wants. Not so much 'Where Did Our Love Go?', more 'That's Where Our Love Went.'

The groove is absolutely relentless, and the taste that she and producer Mark Ronson exhibit is flawless. If you can sit still at any point of this album, you need to take your pulse.

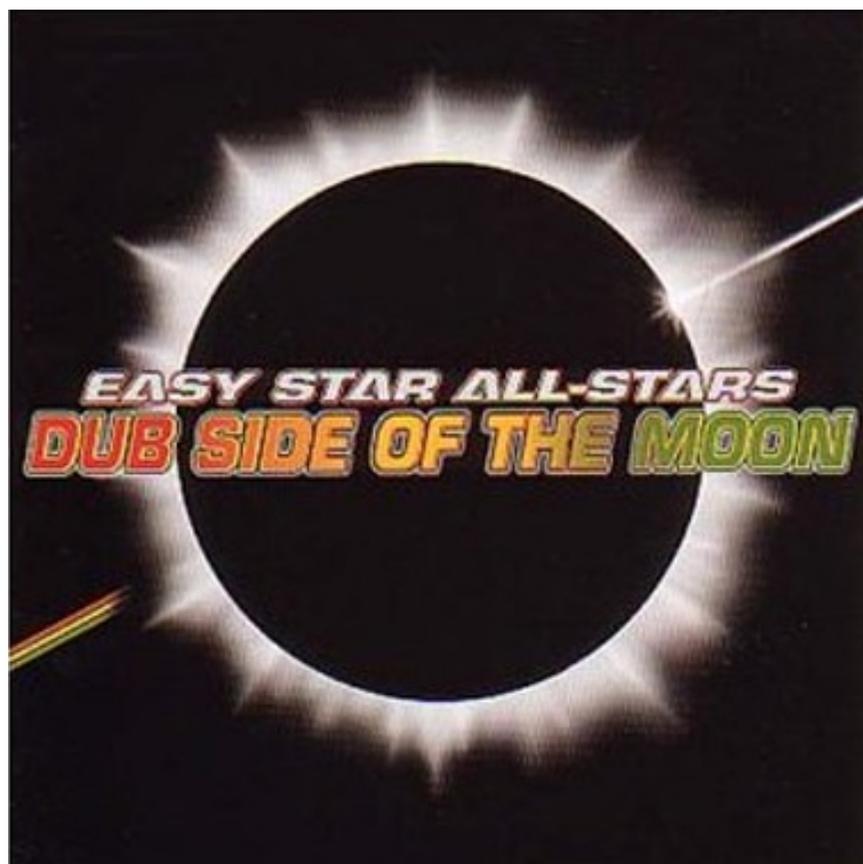
Dub Side Of The Moon – Easy Star All-Stars

Pink Floyd's **Dark Side Of The Moon**. To gain perspective on something so all-encompassing an edifice, just how far back do you have to step?

Easy Star All-Stars instead stepped towards it, and decided to recreate all songs, all transitions and running order of the original, in a reggae style.

After the familiar opening heartbeat, and assorted voices of *Speak To Me* (West Indian accents replacing the London/Irish originals), *Breathe* enters in a lilting, skipping reggae beat. It's entirely familiar, but totally alien at the same time. *On The Run* becomes a frantic drum'n'bass expedition, *Time* is heralded in by alarms and striking clocks, and before you know it, *The Great Gig In The Sky* is signalling that side one is almost complete.

Money is this time delineated not by cash registers, but by striking matches, bubbling bongos and deep inhales, all cut to that awkward 7/8 time signature, which fades into the regal, stately *Us & Them*, the soulful vocals making it possibly even more gut wrenching than the original, the sweetness only emphasising the bile laden words. *(continued)*



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Any Colour You Like is a relaxed dub segue, before the cheeky and bouncy *Brain Damage* leads us home to a resoundingly satisfying *Eclipse*.

'Dub Side...' works so well by presenting familiar songs in a new and fresh way, in fact, it manages to remind you exactly why 'Dark Side...' is so massive in the first place. *Us & Them*, *Breathe*, *Brain Damage* – these are all huge, deathless things. Time shall not wither them.

I find myself agreeing with the last voice you hear on the album - "There is no dark side of the moon really. As a matter of fact, it's all dub."

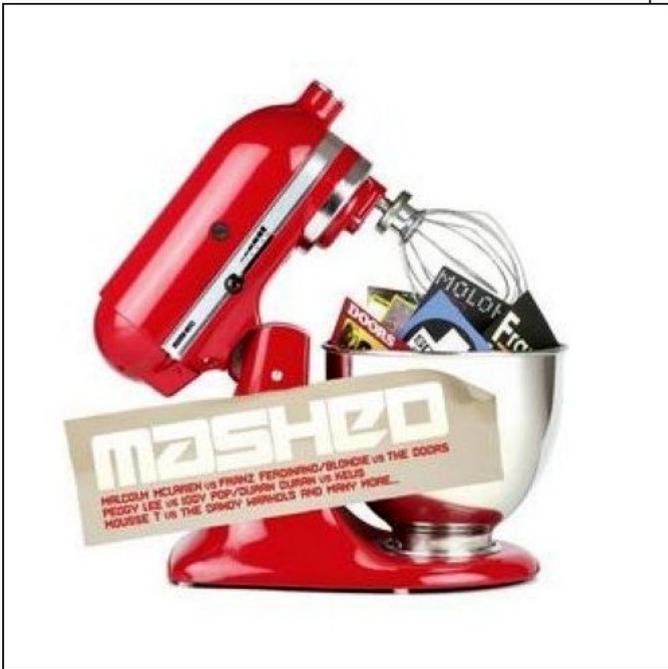
Mashed – Various Artists

I blame Kylie Minogue. For so many things. But specifically for her live performance at the Brit awards in 2002. She sang her *Can't Get You Out Of My Head* over the backing to New Order's seminal *Blue Monday*. The 'mash-up' entered the general public consciousness.

Fast forward 5 years and we have **Mashed**, an album of these mutant hybrids. The majority were created by Mark Vidler at GoHomeProductions, and unlike a lot of the club style mashes, he uses less obvious, not always similar paced, material to create his output.

As a test, get the backing tracking of Blondie's *Rapture* going on in your head. It's a funky, loping sort of groove. Got it? Now, with that in your head start singing the Door's sinister, *Riders On The Storm* over the top. *(continued)*

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It's uncanny isn't it? That's the sort of thing you find on this album. Peggy Lee singing *Fever* over Iggy's *The Passenger*. Malcolm McLaren's stuttery proto-rap *Buffalo Girls* on top of Franz Ferdinand's granite solid *Take Me Out*. Madonna even allowed her *Music* to be laid over A Taste of Honey's *Boogie Oogie Oogie*. **Some songs you'll never hear the same way again, and only you can judge whether that's a good thing or not, but you simply cannot deny that these are tunes you can't sit still for.**

Oh yes, and Kylie's on there too, the unutterable minx.

One of these days, Go Home Productions will clear the other tracks he's created, and he'll be able to release that long lost Christina Aguilera/Velvet Underground track, as I reckon it's the best thing he's ever done.

No, really.

Double Standards – Lea De Laria

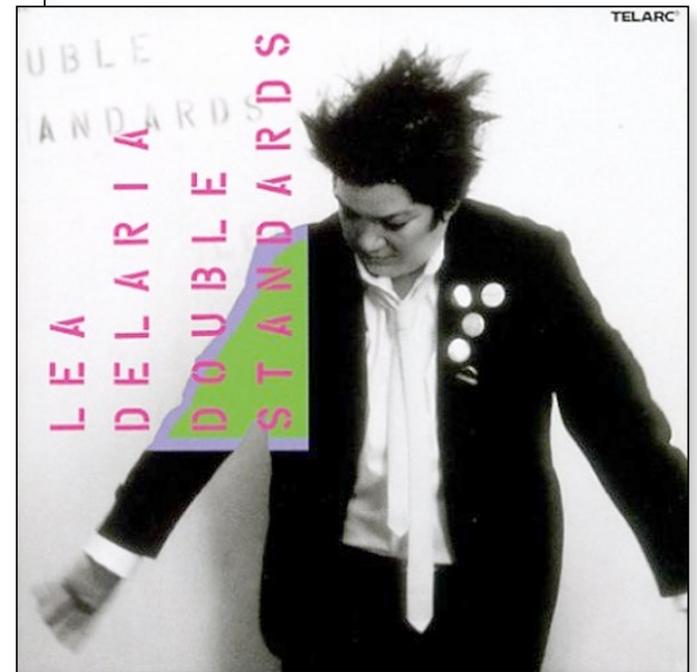
There was an old episode of 'Friends' where Rachel goes to the laundrette/laundromat for the first time, and a nasty woman tries to steal her machine? **Remember the nasty woman? That's Lea De Laria.** Don't hold her sitcom past against her, though. She's been singing for longer than her acting and stand up work. I'm no jazz buff, but to my untrained ear, she's right on the button.

This album is similar to the Nouvelle Vague offering, except instead of a gallic bossa nova style, rock tracks are done in a jazz quartet/quintet style. Patti Smith's *Dancing Barefoot* and Blondie's *Call Me* are probably the most 'traditional' jazz arrangements on the album, and the different, sparser style of playing allows both songs to stretch out and luxuriate in the spaces created. The softer, yet more complex, drums, the resonating double bass, the relaxed piano all let DeLaria intermingle and concentrate on communicating the song.

There are also several quieter, more serene tracks that let her voice really take centre stage. Neil Young's *Philadelphia*, Soundgarden's *Black Hole Sun* and Green Day's *Longview* all benefit from that slowing down process.

The band gets given their head on Jane's Addiction's *Been Caught Stealing*, and really make the most of it, with DeLaria having a whale of a time surfing in on their wave.

Lea DeLaria. Could she BE any more jazzy?



Version – Mark Ronson

Mark Ronson was producer on both Amy Winehouse's and Lily Allen's albums, and also the DJ who did the Cruise/Holmes wedding recently (I won't be using 'TomKat', and if you ever catch me using it, slap me), so he's very much the producer du jour.

This is an album of covers, with original interludes, and it becomes clear very soon that Ronson is a big fan of the Stax/Motown/Atlantic sound, all driving rhythms and stabbing horns. The opener, Coldplay's *God Put A Smile Upon Your Face* transforms into a surging, joyous, car chase of a song, and sets the mood for the rest of the album. Both Lily Allen & Amy Winehouse guest on tracks, Allen tackling Kaiser Chiefs' *Oh My God*, and Winehouse, possibly the standout track, purring her way through The Zutons' *Valerie*. *(continued)*



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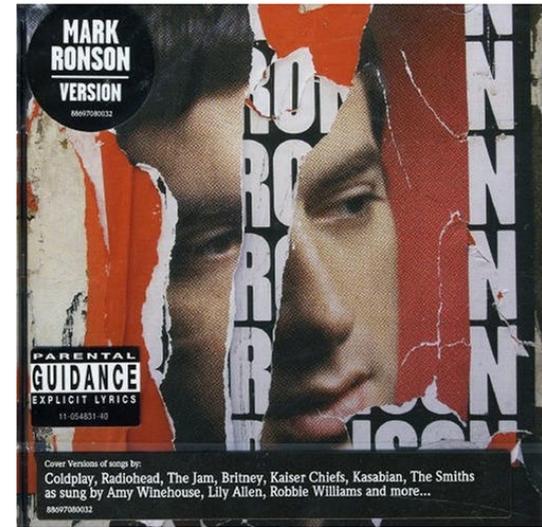
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Most of Ronson's takes seem to up the tempo from the original, but his version of Britney Spears' *Toxic* does the opposite, turning it into a nicely sleazy soul groove.

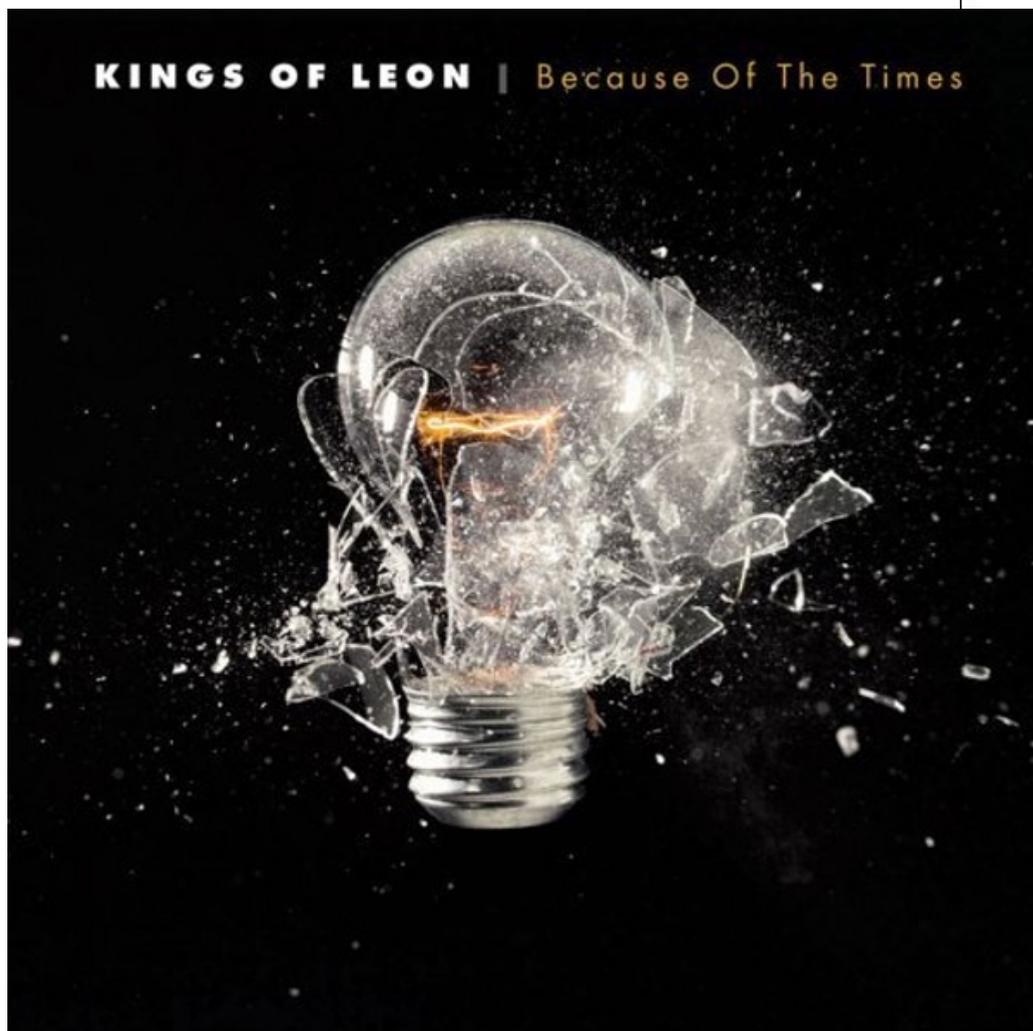
Radiohead's *Just* becomes the offspring of The Jackson 5's *I Want You Back* and Specials' *Rudy, A Message To You*, with its languid, ska tinged trombone.

Oddly, the only jarring note is Kasabian's *LSF*, which is actually a mix rather than a cover. Because the original artists are still on the song, it means that Ronson can change less, take fewer liberties. Don't get me wrong, it's still a great track, but it stands out as oddly incongruous, as if it was the one thing that he couldn't mould to the template.

That's still a very, very small criticism on a deliciously groovy, and brassy, album. ●

Current Pop

— Joe Golfen



Kings of Leon – Because of the Times

The Kings of Leon really shouldn't be complaining. They're massive stars in Europe and Asia. They've toured with Bob Dylan and U2, been name-dropped by Razorlight and even had a photo spread in GQ and an interview in Playboy. **Considering they were raised in the back of a station wagon while their Pentecostal preacher father toured the deep south giving sermons**, this Tennessee band of brothers (and one cousin) have come a long way with their rough and tumble indie rock.

But apparently the Kings are feeling down about their relative obscurity in the US, and they have said that they hope their third album, **Because of the Times**, will get them on the radio and make them as popular in America as they are in the rest of world.

It Won't

Whoever told them that the way into the American mainstream was to be more avant-garde, probably hasn't spent too much time in America. This time around, the Kings ditched their twangy sound, bought some killer effects pedals and made an arty album that might not be a smash radio hit, but one that is difficult to ignore. From the album's dark brooding opener, it is immediately clear that this is a very different animal from their fantastic previous efforts, the frolicking *Youth and Young Manhood* and the playful *Ah Shake Heartbreak*. Because of the Times finds the Kings at their screechiest and most downtrodden, ever. *Knocked Up* is a seven-minute tale of teenage love gone wrong and running scared, and it rumbles along like an old Chevrolet down a dusty highway. *(continued)*

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On *Charmer* lead singer Caleb Followill stretches his peculiar vocal chord into a squawking scream that may eventually grow on you, but for my money the song would be a lot better without it. *On Call*, the album's first single, is another brooding tale punctuated by Followill's finest croon. A great song, though it's very unlikely that it will be in the Top 100 anytime soon.

McFearless is perhaps the biggest departure from the Kings' previous work. With a swirling, churning guitar riff and drums straight out the Bloc Party play-book, the Kings stretch their talents here and nail it head on.

As good as the beginning of the album is, it tends to feel a little forced, losing the laid back ease the Kings are so good at.

The songs are a little too deliberate, taking aim at art scenes and hipster nightclubs everywhere, while losing some of the band's charm and character. The album sags considerably in the middle, meandering into dull arena rock and awkward vocal effects with *Black Fingernail* and *My Party*. By this time in the album, it's hard to tell if anything remains of the Kings Of Leon that used to be.

It's not until the album's seventh track, *True Love Way*, that the Kings offer a glimmer of their former selves, with crunchy Tom Petty guitar solos and mournful vocals. The Kings really saved the best for last on this album, falling back into the kind of Sky-nyrd-meets-the-Strokes rock that made everyone love them in the first place. *(continued)*

The bouncy *Fans* and *Ragoo* prove the band still has its playful side, sporting jumpy guitar lines and lyrics like, 'Either way you caught me whilst a lying/ You caught me with my pants down.'

While the final tracks of **Because of the Times** may lift the somber feel of the music, the lyrics remain firmly planted in the sorrowful dirt that swallows up the opening tracks. *The Runner*, one of the Kings prettiest tunes, finds the

Followill practically penning a pained prayer to God, while closing track *Arizona* is as sweeping, lovely and lonely as the state for which it is named. As the song draws to a close, Followill mutters 'She waves/ Thinking that it's sexy/ She must be plum crazy/ I kind of think I like her,' and given The Kings propensity for risky musical departures and crazy career moves, that's not too hard to believe.

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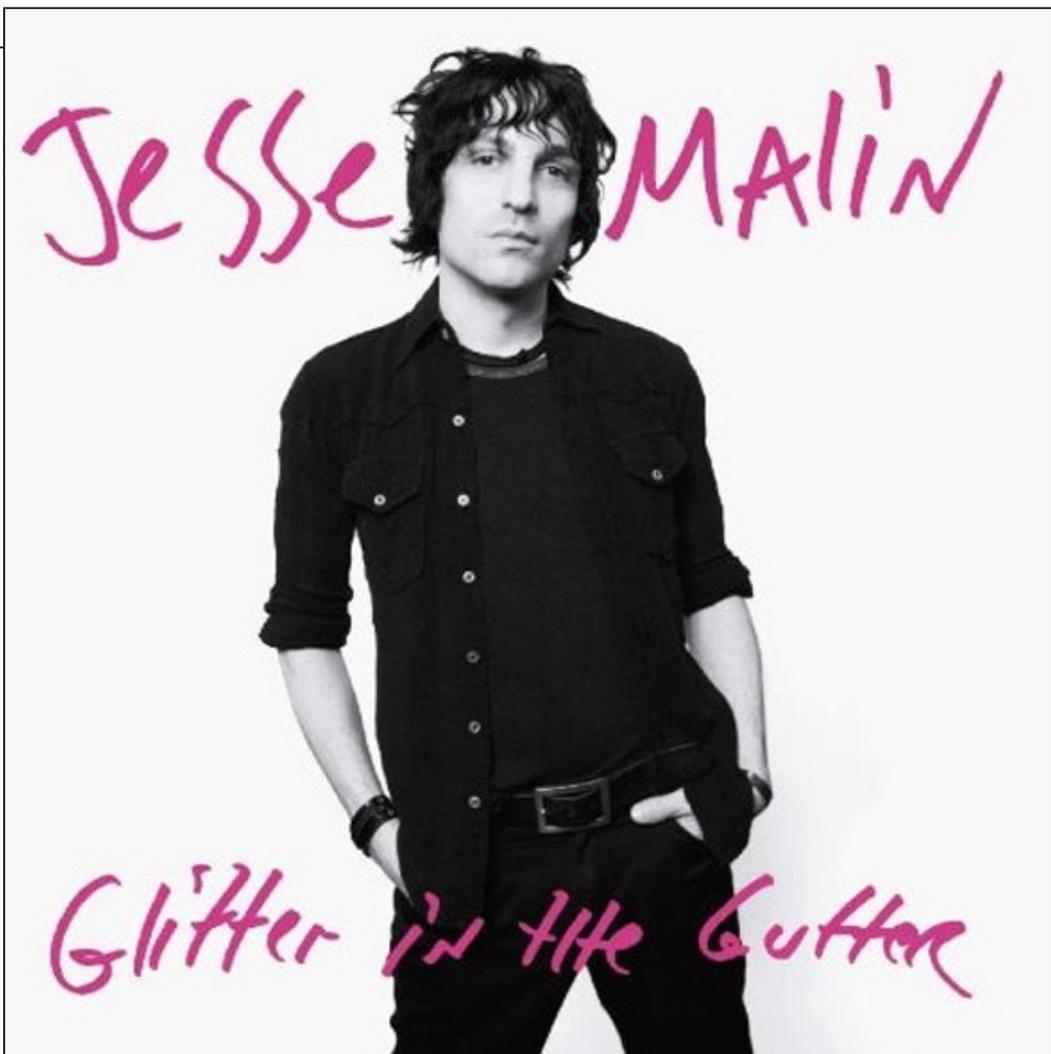


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Jesse Malin – Glitter in the Gutter

Oscar Wilde once wrote, ‘We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars.’ I’m sure Jesse Malin could relate to that. As the former frontman of the gnarly punk band D Generation, Malin probably spent a lot of nights in the New York gutters (possibly seeing stars). But on his third album as a solo artist Malin has cast aside some of his somber singer-songwriter tunes for a little more energy, and he brought in some friends to help him do it.

Besides longtime collaborator Ryan Adams, **Glitter in the Gutter** features guitar work from Josh Hommes (Queens of the Stone Age, Eagles of Death Metal), vocal duties from Jakob Dylan (The Wallflowers) and even a duo with Bruce Springsteen. But even with all of this musical firepower packed into the album, it is still Malin’s sorrowful warble that rises to the top and sings out the loudest.

Gutter seems to find Malin in a better place than his previous work. His marvelous debut, **The Fine Art of Self Destruction**, told stories about growing old in a youth based system, a powerful roots-rock tribute to every aging punk rocker. **The Heat**, Malin’s sophomore effort, was even more mournful than the last, culminating in the beautiful ballad *Basement Home*, a tale of a father trying to relate to his daughter, when he still feels like a kid himself.

Glitter in the Gutter, however, opens with Malin telling everyone it will all be all right. *Don’t Let Them Take You Down* is a jangling breeze of an opening track, decrying the notion that the hard times should drag a person down. Considering that previously Malin’s tunes had had the world’s harsh claws dug deep into them, this up swing is very surprising. *In a Modern World* leaves the grit of New York City for the suburbs, where the propagandist spends her time ranks up friends of MySpace, sleeping with her boyfriend and just being generally bored. All of this bounces over Malin’s catchiest melody since *Wendy*, with a raucous hair metal chorus and a stinging lead guitar, courtesy of Adams.

Hommes adds a staggered guitar riff to *Tomorrow, Tonight* which would have been a great choice for a single, with a catchy chorus and a cool sound. This song also reflects Malin’s growing inner peace, with lines like, ‘When you find the truth/ you won’t care about tomorrow/... I must confess I don’t care about tomorrow tonight.’ But this good mood can’t always cut through the harsh reality. Malin offers a lonely piano ballad with *Broken Radio*, assisted by Springsteen, whose commanding voice dominates but never overpowers Malin’s frail croon. This song of poverty and despair still retains some hopeful lines, and would have fit in on any of Springsteen’s acoustic work. He hammers out power-pop tunes through the middle of the album, which are fun, but lose some of Malin’s poetic lyrics, leaving the songs a little flat. There is also a disappointing use of Jakob Dylan’s raspy vocals on *Black Haired Girl*, with JD buried in the mix on the chorus. *(continued)*

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While Malin has never sounded quite as confident as he does on **Glitter in the Gutter**, a little self-consciousness goes a long way. By losing some of his quieter moments, Malin also loses some of his best songs, ones that reminisce about days gone by, or simply recall memories that aren't as clear as they used to be.

Living in the present, Malin's career has blossomed and he now has enough credibility to feature some major artists on his record, but he still sounds the most at home on the more mellow tracks, like the cover of The Replacements' **Bastards of Youth**.

Perhaps the most telling song on this album comes from the ninth track *Happy Ever After (Since You're in Love 2007)*. This tune originally appeared on **The Heat**, though the new version is much tighter and more listenable. The song is otherwise identical to the original, with the addition on a few lines in the chorus, lines that make all the difference. Here Malin sings, 'Since you're in love/ I hope you're happy ever after/ since you're in love/ hope you get everything you asked for.' By adding the second and fourth line, Malin changed this lonely tune into a declaration of true love and happiness.

This new sense of joy shows Malin to be a changed man. No longer is he wandering the streets alone, too old to go to the punk clubs. Here he finds he no longer needs them. Considering the level of his craft at this point, maybe he's finally got what he's been asking for.

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Fountains of Wayne – Traffic and Weather

The problem with creating your masterpiece is that it can be a tough act to follow. In 2004, Fountains of Wayne released their near flawless third album **Welcome Interstate Managers**, an epic ode to the white collar working class, filled with tunes about drinking at the office, tough days at the rat race and of course, girls. **Traffic and Weather** finds the poppy New Yorkers returning to songs about the minutia of life, things one wouldn't think would be the subjects of songs, but work brilliantly in the hands of these songsmiths.

From their irresistible debut album, Fountains of Wayne have crafted some of the best power-pop songs ever, finally making their make on the mainstream with their omnipresent hit single *Stacy's Mom*. This is a little unfortunate for longtime fans because

Stacy's Mom is a fun songs, but far from the band's best work, and it will likely end up their legacy.

But for those who know better, this foursome of skinny (and by this time aged) rockers have been making songs that dance on the fine line between humorous and heartfelt, never straying too far into either extreme.

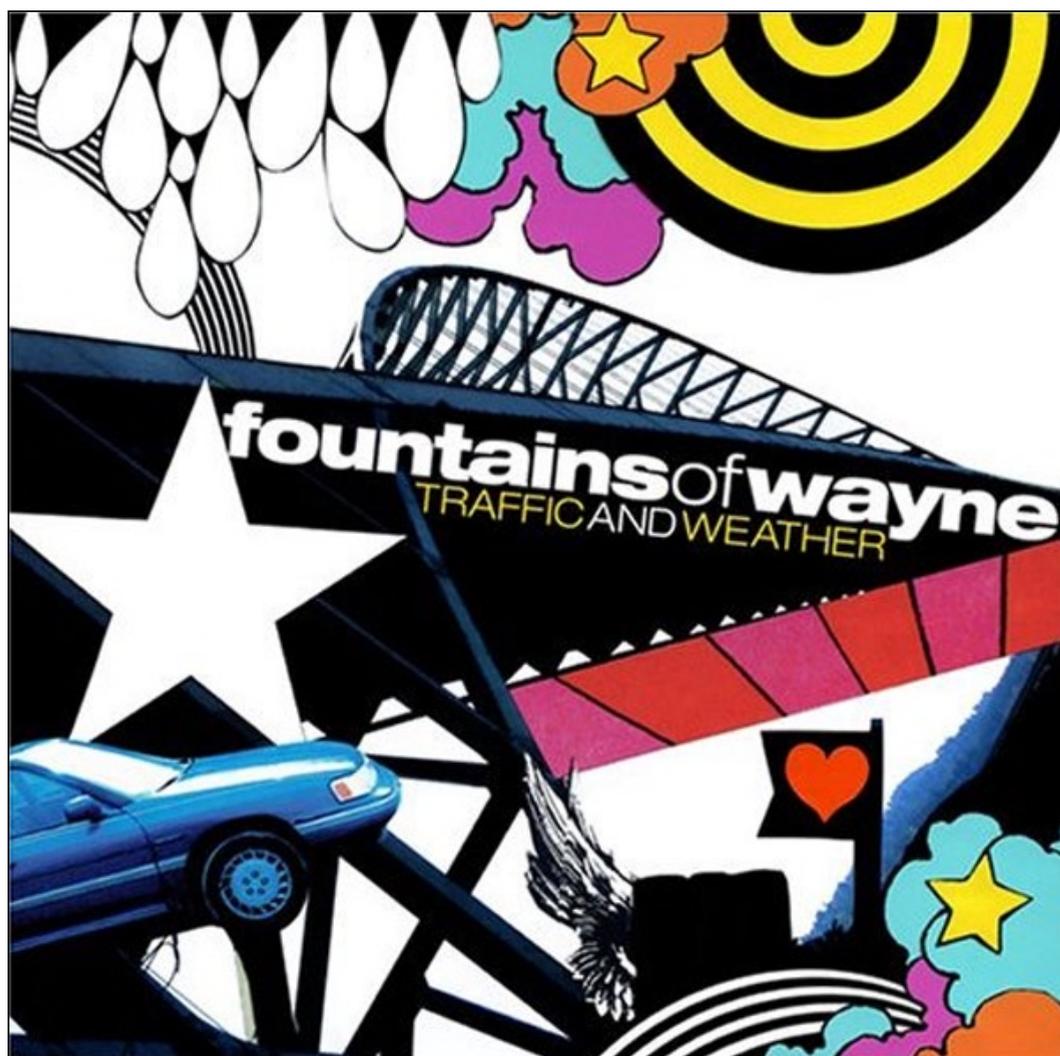
But how long could the formula last? Having finally landed themselves a hit single, a great album and a dubious Grammy award in 2004 (Best New Artist?), it might have seemed like Fountains of Wayne have hit their grand finale.

Traffic and Weather, however, proves the band still has a lot of spark left in them. Album opener and lead single *Someone to Love* is arguably one of the band's greatest tunes. Over crunchy guitars and a disco backbeat, lead singer Chris Collingwood rattles off the daily lives of two young professionals, successful in life but unlucky in love, who could have everything if they weren't so over zealous when hailing a taxi. The colorful characters and comedy mixed with a relatable story and a catchy tune is classic Fountains of Wayne, and *Someone to Love* is absolutely irresistible.

An interesting thing about the band's songwriting duo, Collingwood and bassist Adam Schlesinger, is that they don't write songs about themselves. Very few songs in band's catalog even approach confessional, instead, each one plays out like a three minute Dave Barry column. They pick apart middle-class American life, whether it's fixing up a car that's not that cool to begin with (*92 Subaru*) or having a crush on the lady at the DMV window (*Yolanda Hayes*) all the way to flying coach on your business trip (*Seatbacks and Tray Tables*)

The closest **Traffic and Weather** comes to revealing anything about it's creators is the lonely tune *The Hotel Majestic*, showing a bit of weariness for life on the road, but it could apply to any traveling business man.

Like all of Fountains of Wayne albums, **Traffic and Weather** is pretty long, and there are one or two tracks that should have ended up on the editing room floor. *(continued)*



Michael and Heather at the Baggage Claim is slow and fairly pointless and *Planet of Weed* is just plain bad. Some songs suffer from a too much production, such as the title track and *Strapped for Cash*, making them sounding cheesy.

But these missteps can't tarnish the shine of the other songs the album has to offer. *This Better Be Good* is one of the band's funniest moments and the three lead off tracks are strong enough to make the album worthwhile in and of themselves.

What really makes Traffic and Weather really stand out are the more somber moments.

Like many other playful artist, such as Ben Folds or the Old 97s, it's their serious songs mixed into the bunch that make them a great group. *Fire in the Canyon* is a beautiful folk ballad, while *Seatbacks and Tray Tables* offers a glimpse into the lives of the lonely, surrounded by fellow travelers but feeling utterly alone.

Perhaps the shining star of this album can be found in the tenth track *I-95*, a funny but heartfelt song about a long distance relationship, and all the pain and joy therein. The song tells the familiar road trip tale, complete with fading radio stations and trashy truck stops. The chorus finds Collingwood quietly singing 'It's a nine hour drive/ from me to you/South on I-95/And I'll do it 'til the day that I die if I need to/ Just to be with you.' Capturing the feeling of undying love for someone no matter the cost in three and a half minutes isn't easy, but if anyone can do it, Fountains of Wayne can. ●



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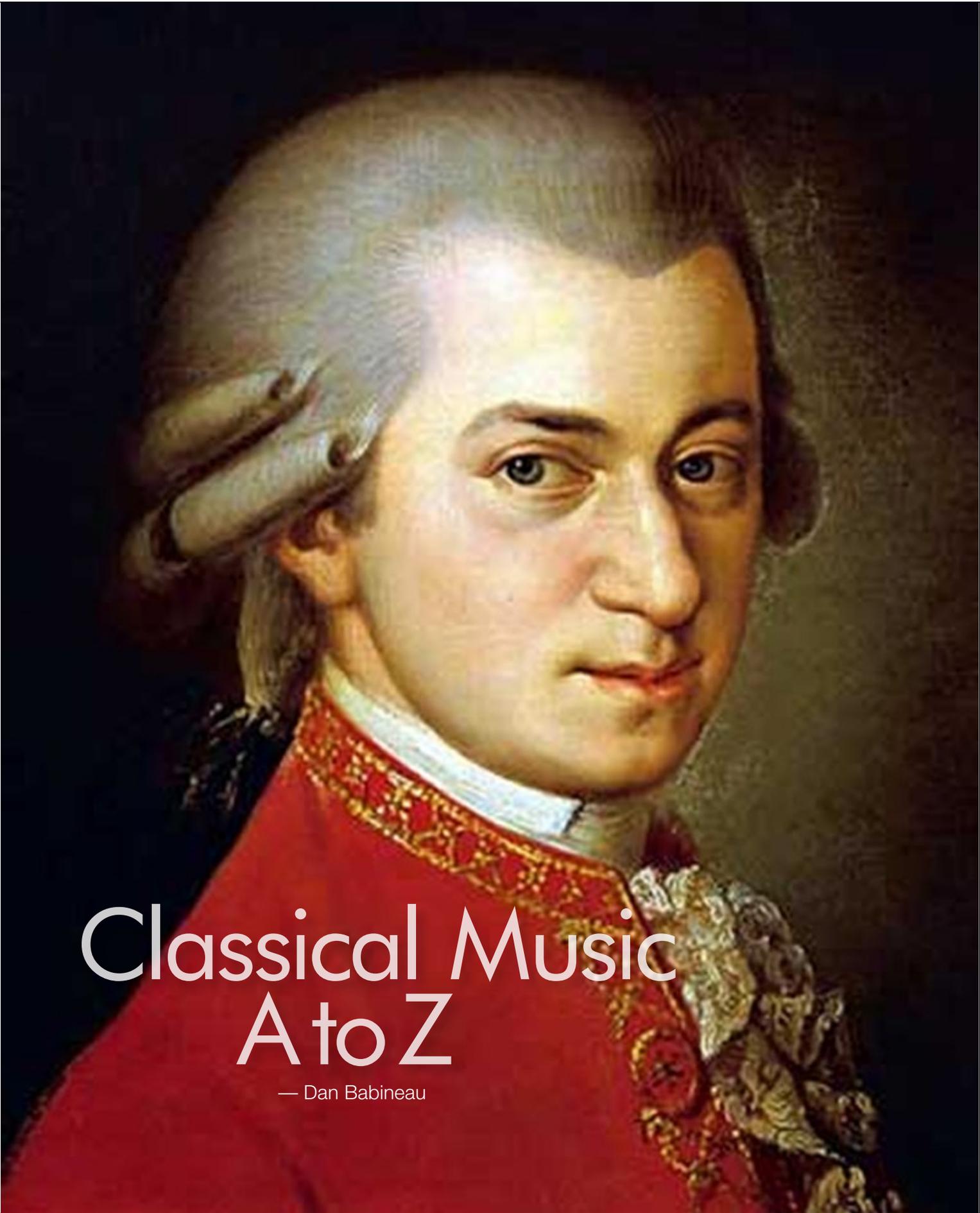
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Mozart Should Have Played The Blues

But he probably would have grown tired of those same 3 chords.

No single composer of any genre of music has had more of any influence on music in general than Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. But very few people realize that life for Mozart was difficult, arduous and certainly not full of the joy and energy reflected in his music.

A detailed oil painting portrait of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, showing him from the chest up. He has a powdered wig and is wearing a red coat with a gold-embroidered collar. The background is dark and indistinct.

Classical Music A to Z

— Dan Babineau

Inherently, there is usually a problem with being a child prodigy and Mozart definitely got the short end of the stick here. His father, Leopold, was more of a promoter than a father and Mozart was never allowed to grow up as a child. From the first glimmer of his musical talent, Mozart was subjected to the rigors of adulthood that included endless practice, rehearsal and performance. But yet, very little if any of this drudgery shows up in his compositions.

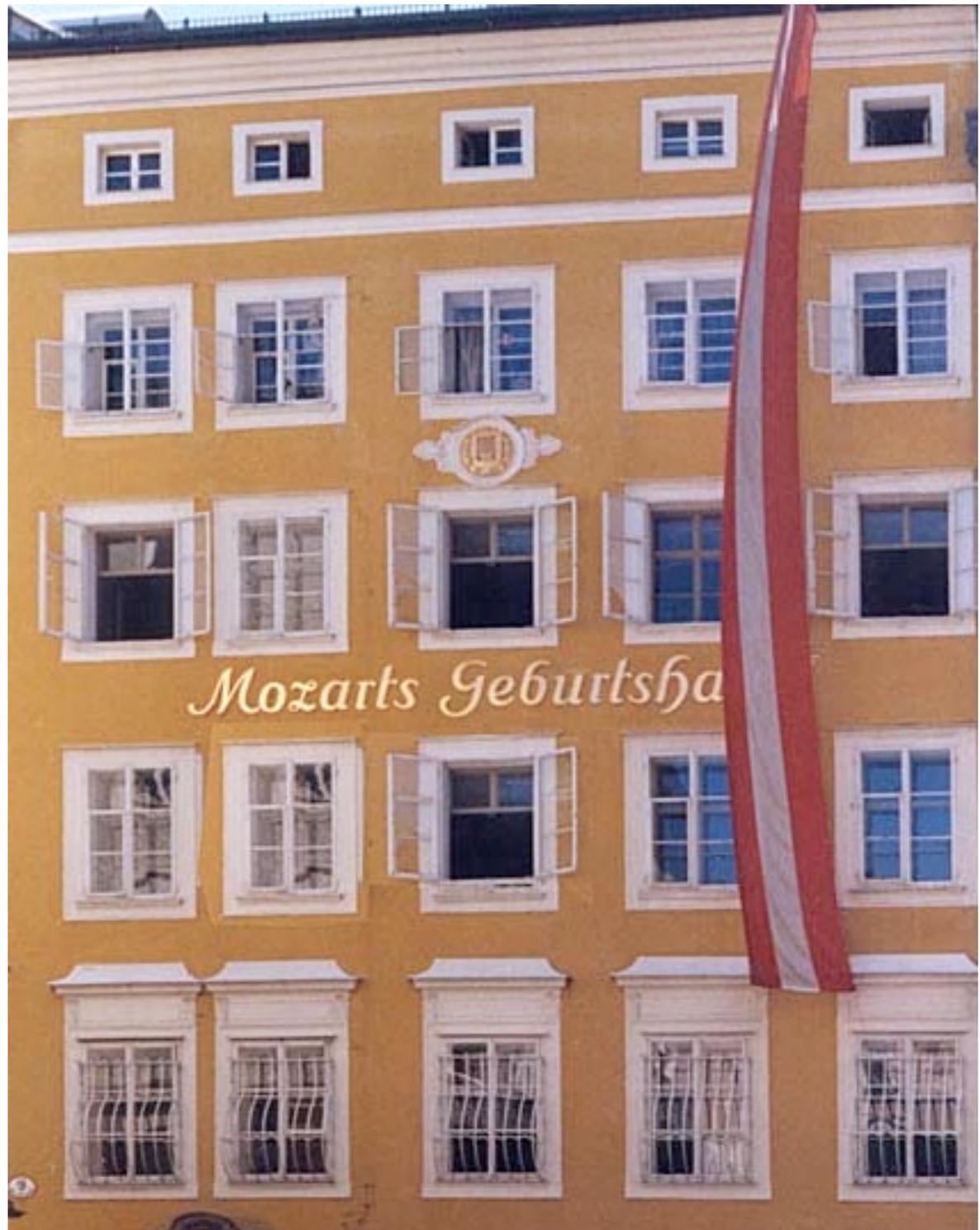
And here is the irony because with rare exception, Mozart was forced to live in a world that demanded perfection from him with little if any reward.

It is much easier to hear the pain and suffering in a great deal of Beethoven's compositions. And in more modern day music, compositions from such composers as Dmitri Shostakovich or better Alan Pettersson clearly call out their unfortunate position in the world. But not Mozart! I believe that music was the only vehicle that kept Mozart sane. Yes, he did enjoy life when he could. You could even call him a weekend warrior of sorts in that he usually spent the majority of his money many times before he received it. But in studying his life – or as much as we can glean from his many letters etc., Mozart would have been there with all of the many great bluesmen: Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters, T-bone Walker, BB King or even Mississippi John Hurt. He should have expressed his sorrow like Schubert, Brahms or even Bach. But Mozart had little time for self pity in his music and that's why I believe we are all so enchanted with this little man from Salzburg.

Usually when I've attempted to get people interested in classical music I'll select a fairly large cross section of music

ranging from the Baroque to contemporary/modern music. Believe it or not this is an enjoyable experience for me because you never quite know what will 'strike someone's fancy'. But without fail, every single time I play Mozart: a sonata, a chamber piece or even something like Symphony

#40, time stops and my newbie friends request more of 'that kind of music'!! There is a distinct quality, lightness, an inner energy in Mozart's music that just hits almost everyone in the right place. It happened in his short life, it happened post mortem and it still happens today. *(continued)*



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Mozart's music is a complete contradiction to both his life and musical composition as a whole. Simple to the unknowing, but extremely complex to play and even more complex to understand. Mozart laid the foundation for all music to come structurally, methodically and spiritually.

The numbers don't lie. People worldwide purchase more Mozart than any other classical composer by a wide margin.

From his early piano music to his last work on earth the **Requiem**, Mozart managed to bury his own predicament in life so deep that it escapes musical recognition. No he didn't dismiss the agony of his life, certainly there are indications of sadness and remorse in some of his operas, but again he was adhering to the theme, the libretto and the history of the opera.

In his short life, Mozart composed a huge assortment of music: sacred and profane, choral, orchestral, chamber music, organ music, marches, dances, concertos, operas serenades, songs, sonatas, solo music and of course symphonies. Mozart cranked out more incredible music in his thirty five years than 100 composers could have completed. I think he was chasing Joseph Haydn, his real life favorite, but Haydn lived to a ripe old age and never had to endure the hardships that Mozart faced throughout his life. In his early symphonies I feel Haydn's influence but then after he left Salzburg things changed and we begin to hear the truly unique voice that was only the beginning for Mozart. *(continued)*

Mozart held no musical boundaries, he looked to the past, the Baroque and maybe even further back. He appreciated his peers, Haydn, Beethoven, Chopin, Schubert, Schumann or even Tchaikovsky. To a point, I think many of his peers were blown away with Mozart's music, the structure, his sequence of modes, cadence, tonality and style. Gallant, rigorous, intentional and almost always fun.

Mozart was never allowed to play as a child but he played in his composition – joked might even be a better word at times!!

It's hard to decide where to begin when discussing the music of Mozart. My first experiences as a musician were his sonatas for piano and then the various wind music. I especially like playing the concertos for bassoon, clarinet and oboe, respectively. Trust me these pieces sound fairly simple but are no walk in the park to play correctly! The solo piano music – especially the sonatas, followed by the serenades will put you in a good mood no matter what your predicament in life. I usually stick on the 1st and 2nd movements of Symphony 40 to introduce someone to my hi-fi system. 'It just sounds right.' – (get it Bill and Lew?).

I dare you to pick up a copy of **Le Nozze Figuro** (the Marriage of Figuro) or **Don Giovanni** or better yet **Così fan Tutti** and not enjoy them. Beautiful arias connected by fun dialog – recitative, if you will. These operas are standard operating procedure in our house every Saturday morning. And the louder you play them the more your neighbors appreciate your existence in the neighborhood!

All of the chamber music is delightful. Mozart could take any dreary occasion and turn it into a party and this is the

case with many of the chamber pieces. Structured but fun to dance to! I like the Sacred Music but I've been fortunate enough to hear them played in some pretty amazing concert halls and they truly are a religious experience no matter who or what you believe in.

Forty six diverse but incredible symphonies in thirty five years is a record that

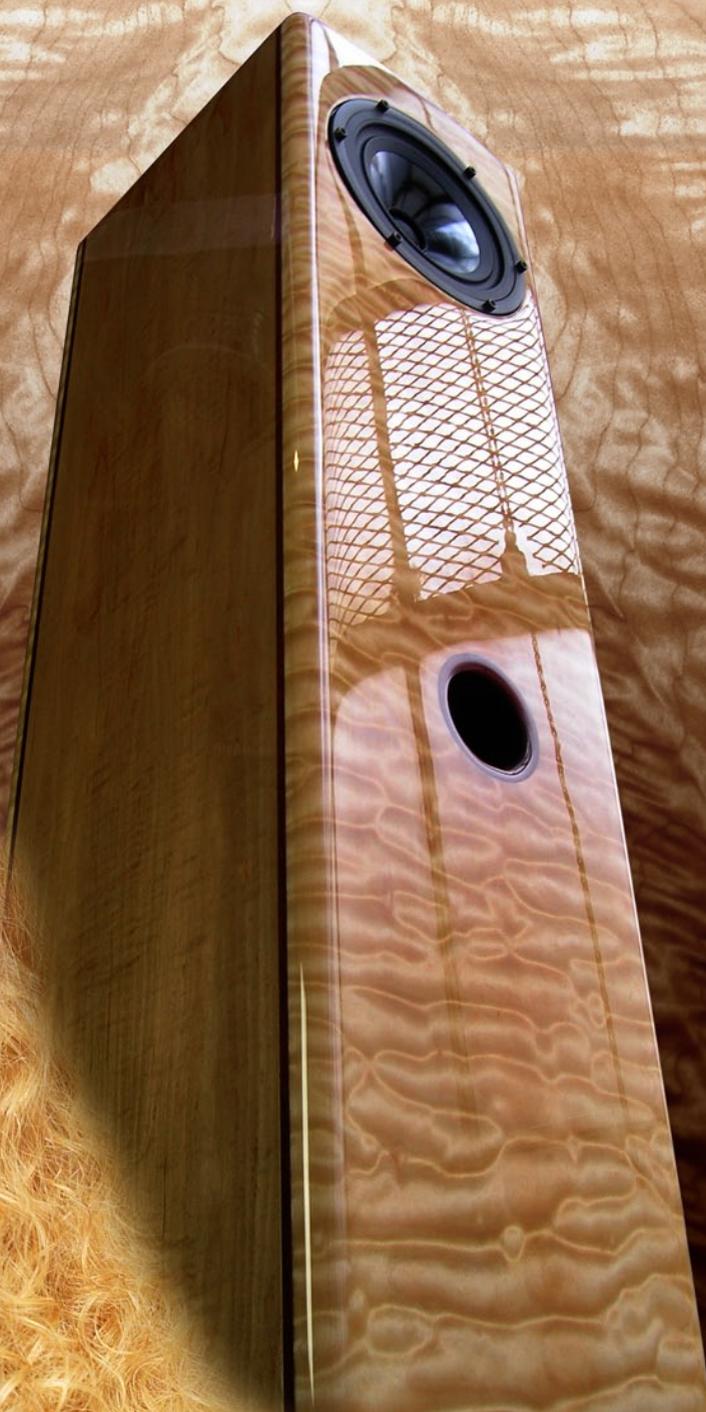
no composer will ever touch. I like them all but then I also like all of Haydn's! Mozart's latter symphonies clearly illustrate the evolution of a musical genius, to put things mildly. But this musical evolution started with the **Paris' symphony #31** and continued to flourish in the **Haffner**, the **Linz** and of course a big favorite the **Prague!**

(continued)





Angelus



Mozart, for all intents and purposes went on tour throughout Europe and his experiences in many of Europe's finer cities had a dramatic effect on his music. Many times, such as in Vienna, he was treated like royalty for a time but then later dismissed by the aristocracy for some 'flavor of the month composer'. The fact that Mozart was buried in an unmarked grave fits perfectly into the complete and utter contradiction of his life. Here, the finest composer to have ever lifted a pen is left penniless and buried as a commoner.

I do believe that Mozart may have known the end was approaching when he began working on his **Requiem**. We know little about his real health issues as many of the writings about him at the time were lost or factually suspect.

There isn't a day that goes by that I don't hear or feel the influence of Mozart in music.

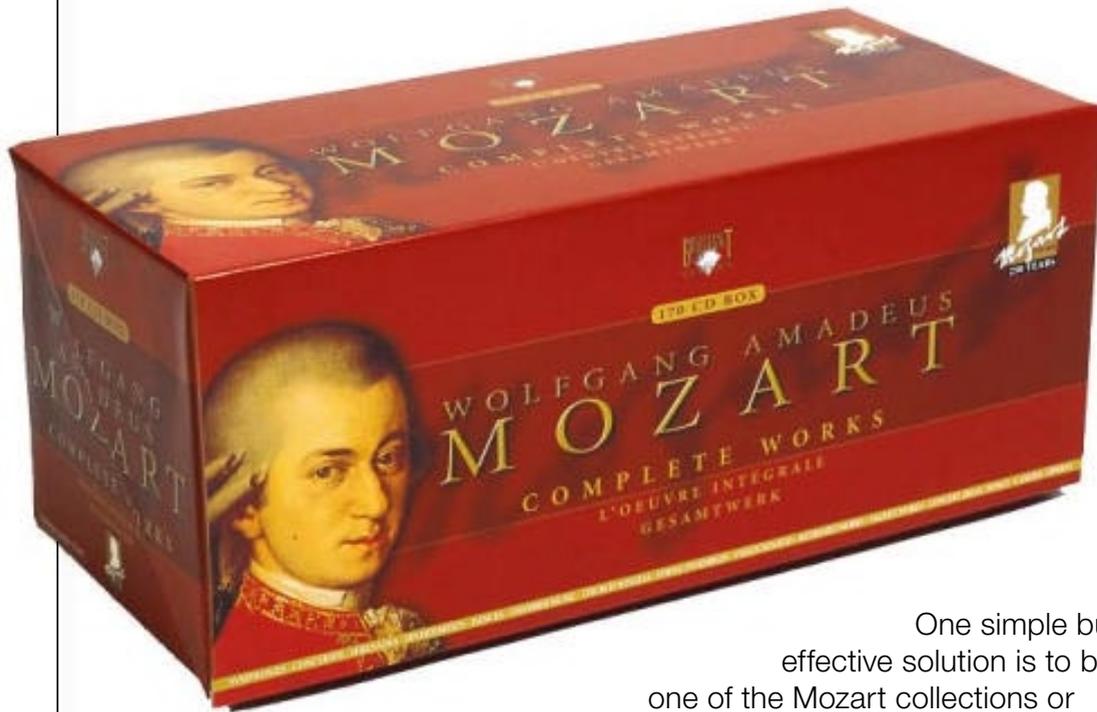
Existentialists love the story of Mozart: 'burn fast, burn clean'. How about a modern version of this philosophy: 'hope I die before I get old'. No one knows what would have taken place if Mozart had lived longer. No one knows what would have taken place if Hendrix, Duane Allman or John Lennon had lived longer. All musical geniuses far ahead of their time with Mozart leading the way!

Dan's Picks:

With the digital domain so accessible and plentiful these days it is quite easy to build up a nice collection of Mozart for a very small sum. I still prefer my original LPs but at this point in time it can get quite expensive to start from scratch and do the analog thing. *(continued)*

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One simple but effective solution is to buy one of the Mozart collections or **Complete Works**. My favorite is on Brilliant Classics Cat. #92540. This 170 CD collection features a large variety of first rate performances of W.A. Mozart's work. Don't worry, I'm going to list a great deal of other recordings as well but if you're a beginner and you want to get into this classical game with both feet then plunk down the \$150 bucks for this set and start the party! (That's just what I did, excellent choice! –ed.)

Again, it's hard to tell you where start with Mozart because all of his compositions offer something truly special.

But if I had to pick a starting point it would be his solo piano music. Play it when you awake and it will brighten your day, play it throughout the day and your day will breeze along and there is no better nightcap. Like Bach's music I find Mozart to be very therapeutic and always helps me to focus on whatever I'm up to. Good choices for the Mozart piano music are many. Try Andras Schiff's performances of the piano sonatas on Decca cat. #443717. There is also Alicia De Larrocha on RCA cat. #60453 and the ever popular Mozart sonatas # 15 and 16 performed exquisitely by Mitsuko Uchida on Philips cat# 412122. There are so many more, but this will at least get you off to a good start!

Being a woodwind player, Mozart is certainly responsible for making me a better player.

All of his music for woodwinds is both a challenge and a privilege for me to play. I started out playing clarinet and here is where I suggest you start your collection of Mozart woodwind music. Jack Brymer, with Sir Thomas Beecham and the Royal Philharmonic is a fantastic start because you also get the Bassoon Concerto in B Flat and the 41st Symphony! These performances are on EMI cat. # 67601.

The deal of the century is on Naxos with killer performances of Mozart's flute concertos, Catalog # 85701. This outstanding recording alone convinces me that the rumors about Mozart not liking the flute is questionable, at best! Another grand slam homerun can be found on Decca #466247 and features Mr. French horn himself – Barry Tuckwell. With a variety of top notch conductors this is a must have CD period! Go buy it, that's an order!! *(continued)*



Merge into the serenades with Willi Boskosky and the Vienna Mozart Ensemble performing the favorites i.e. **Eine Kleine Nachmusik** as well as serenades #6, 7 and 9. You cannot go wrong here. I've always had a soft spot for Karl Bohm and his direction of the Vienna Philharmonic Winds and Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra playing a perfect variety of Mozart wind music permanently reinforces my opinion of this underrated conductor. On DG cat. #000718402.

As far as the Mozart symphonies, the 'world is your oyster'. The performances are generally grouped into his early symphonies 1 through – say . . . 20 something. And the middle to last symphonies usually come bundled together. For this middle area, the people at TelArc, Sir Charles Mackerras and the Prague Chamber Orchestra have made it easy for us. Catalog #80165 first comes to mind for symphonies 25, 28 and 29. They also offer recordings of all of the Mozart symphonies on TelArc cat. #80300 and they are first rate. Yet another collection can be found on Brilliant Classics, catalog number: #92110 with Jaap ter Linden and the Amsterdam Mozart Academy. This 11 disc set is one of my favorite modern recordings of these monumental works.

For the latter symphonies I must apologize, I still prefer my 1950s and 1960s recordings on LP. Mozart systematically increased the size of the orchestra in the latter works and this extra weight really comes through on my analog rig! The problem here is locating these museum pieces. I've seen crazy prices on Decca/London Blue backs, RCAs and even EMIs, God forbid! So for now I'm going to list digital alternatives that at least come close sonically and at least are par for performance!

First and foremost, get off to a grand start with Sir Colin Davis and one amazing orchestra the Dresden Staatskapelle. I've attended several concerts featuring this fine group of players and they always have exceeded my high expectations. The CD of Mozart's symphonies 35,38,39,40 and 41 are recorded on Philips cat. # 470540 and will take you to sonic nirvana. For posterity I like Ansermet and the Swiss Romande which is recorded in mono and can be found on an obscure label: Profil cat. #4048.

This recording may not be as expansive sonically as other fine Mozart recordings but this CD is a showpiece of Mozart's knack for inner detail and thematic development. Another CD that I've grown to love is conducted by Yehudi Menuhin with the Sinfonia Varsovia performing symphonies 35-41 on Virgin Classics, catalog #61676. And last but not least I go back to Karl Bohm and the Berlin Philharmonic performing symphonies 35, 36, 38, 39, 40 and 41. Talk about a warhorse of a CD. The LPs on DG are really good if you can find them as well. CD catalog # 474416.

So as you can see there is an amazing amount of 'software' available when it comes to the Mozart symphonies. And we haven't even touched the choral music or operas!!

There's good news and there's great news here. The good news is there is a wide assortment of Mozart choral & opera music available almost anywhere in the world. The other good news is that this music is usually grouped into collections that allow you to 'drive the car before you buy it'! In other words, many of the incredible arias from Mozart's operas have been highlighted on CD and all you have to do is stick your toe in the water and see if they suit your fancy.

I always start people out with **Don Giovanni** and the EMI Studio recording with Carlo Maria Giulini is phenomenal!! The catalog number is 63078 and this disc features some of the best opera performers that ever sang note. I'm back to my buddy Karl Bohm for the **Marriage of Figaro** with highlights on DG cat. #429822. Bohm holds everyone accountable for their part and the result is way over the top. Did I mention that I can talk about Mozart's operas nonstop for well over a week straight? Might as well pick up the highlights to **Così fan tutte** while you're at it and Daniel Barenboim and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra set the quintessential backdrop for soprano Lella Cuberli, mezzo Cecilia Bartoli and bass John Tomlinson, not to mention Joan Rodgers, Kurt Streit & Ferruccio Furlanetto. Don't worry about what the neighbors think, just sit back and be entertained!!

Catalog #94821 on Erato. If Mozart disliked the flute so much then why did he write the music for an opera about a magic flute: **Die Zauberflöte**?? One of the highlight disc sets that I've really come to enjoy from this opera is on Virgin Classics and features one of the finest living sopranos of the 21 Century – Natalie Dessay. Cat. # 45447. Sir Neville Mariner also excels at conducting highlights from this work along with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields and the Ambrosian Singers on Philips cat. #438459. And the list goes on and on. I'm going to devote an entire installment of my classical column to opera in the very near future and I'll expand more on Mozart's operas at that time.

I would like to close with Mozart's sacred pieces that you absolutely must hear to appreciate. Mozart, for all intents and purposes Mozart was not a religious man, at least not in the traditional sense of his time. I believe that music was primarily the god that Mozart reported to. I'm not saying that he was an atheist or belong to some weird music-worshipping cult. But I do think that Mozart drowned himself in music to survive and to an extent – flourish!

The modern world is much more culturally and religiously diverse and many of us do not attend 'Mass' on a regular basis. Because of this fact, the acceptance or general interest of the music involved in a Mass or other forms of sacred music intimidates or better yet scares away the wrong kind of people. The problem here is that Mozart along with many of his cronies wrote spectacular scores of music for the church and it would be a shame to ignore it. The first recording that comes to mind is on Philips and again has Sir Colin Davis at the helm conducting the London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus in four of the strongest pieces of music ever written! Catalog #412873, I'd first listen to **Ave verum corpus** in D Major and work your way through the disc. The Masonic music contained on London catalog #425722 is enlightening if nothing else. But Mozart never gives up whatever the musical cause and these works demonstrate his amazing depth and or strength. *(continued)*

Finally, the **Requiem** which clearly illustrates Mozart at the pinnacle of his existence as a composer and ironically, the lowest point in all other respects of his time on Earth. We do not know just how sick Mozart really was when he began composing his **Requiem**. His letters to his sister and other correspondents barely give us a clue as to his real condition. As I mentioned earlier in this article, I believe that Mozart knew his end was near because he worked at a frantic pace to attempt to complete the work.

But the Mozart Requiem should be savored like a wine or better yet a gourmet dinner; this is truly the work of a master.

There are a multitude of exemplary recordings of **Requiem** so I'll just touch on my favorites: Bernstein on DG catalog number 000769109 with accompanying DVD video. Leonard Bernstein dedicates Mozart's Requiem to the memory of his late wife and if this performance by the Bavaria Symphony Orchestra and Radio Chorus doesn't touch your heartstrings then climb into the freezer and close the door! It touched my soul so much that I have it in my will to play **Requiem** at my own wake! I also like the mono recording with Benjamin Britten conducting the English Chamber Orchestra and Aldenburgh Festival Chorus, cat. #4119 on Bbc Legends. This recording features Britten favorites Heather Harper, Sir Peter Pears, Alfreda Hodgson and John Shirley-Quirk. A much more current offering can be found on the very cool Classics For Pleasure, catalog #75934 with R. Fruhbeck 'de Burgos and the New Philharmonia Orchestra and Chorus. Pay attention when playing this disc as you may feel your soul ascending-hopefully!

So that takes care of Mozart for now and should keep you music shopping for a little while, enjoy! ●

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— Nicole Rice

So you love Johnny Cash, huh? You listened to Johnny Cash's cover of Nine Inch Nails *Hurt* back in 2003 and now you tell people that you can appreciate country, right? You watched *Walk the Line* and now you have some history under your belt – well I've got news for you. Until you can appreciate the twang in country you are turning your nose up at some of the most unique music in history. And before you turn your nose up at a kid like me telling you what time it is about country music, back off; my Grandpa was a real cowboy, not a Sears cowboy. It's in my DNA.



Here's a quick lesson plan to teach you a little bit about rebel country... We'll start with the basics: Frankie Laine, Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, Loretta Lynn and of course, the man himself, Johnny Cash.

The first stop is purely for my pleasure because I suffered through this album (often) as a child. Now, when I listen to Frankie Laine's **Hell Bent for Leather** I feel like I'm riding on a wagon train for the Old West.... on a Hollywood set that is. Laine is a vocalist by nature and **Hell Bent for Leather** was just an avenue from which to sing from. Laine's music embodies country music by singing classic songs about cattle driving, knife fights and of course, women.

The orchestra is conducted by Johnny Williams with the horns completely enhancing the energy of the mule train and cattle drives; Laine interjects with whip lashes and shouts at the mules. First track is *Wanted Man*, which Laine sings, 'Until I became a wanted man, I never even owned a gun, but now they hunt me like mountain cat and I'm always on the run.' *Rawhide* is the most popularly noted in his repertoire but I am a big fan of *Bowie Knife*, which tells the tale of

gambling gone wrong. 'If my gun won't take your evil life, you can bet my bowie knife will.'

The percussion moves you quickly through most of the songs giving you the sense you are riding in the saddle. His talent is in his ability to fully put himself into the music and believe he is a cowboy.

The energy in his classically trained voice makes this album a joy to listen to if you

appreciate music about the Old West. He was not wildly popular in the States but in my house growing up he WAS the West.

In memoriam, Laine passed away this year on February 6, making it to a ripe old age of 93.

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Willie Nelson's musical career has spanned five decades and in many ways he is the wise old man in this genre. **Red Headed Stranger**, released in May 1975, was Nelson's first commercial success. **The album gives the back porch effect like Jennings but where Waylon might kick some ass Willie would never be in the position to fight.** **Red Headed Stranger** unfolds like a day in the country; the songs play together beautifully like grass, trees and water in the scenery. No song is out of place.

His hit song from the album *Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain* won him a Grammy for best country vocal performance. Most songs on the album are intimately performed; Nelson's demeanor is so quiet and understated that he could be singing on your living room floor. *Can I Sleep in Your Arms Tonight* is a great love song with a beautiful piano enhancing Nelson's delicate voice. What country skeptics might enjoy about this album is the lack of steel guitar and Nelson's ability to deliver what a Denver night just might feel like. *(continued)*

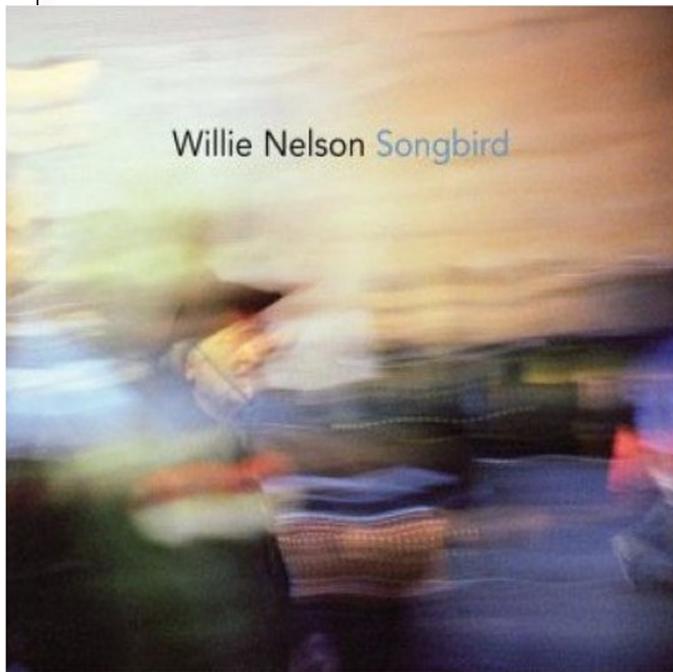


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For a fun contrast, pick up Willie Nelson's **Songbird** from 2006. Willie joins the Cardinals in a Ryan Adams production, which takes Nelson's lone wolf sound into a full alternative country experience. Ryan Adams mixes southern soul, blues, and a dash of twang, which is a pleasure to listen to.

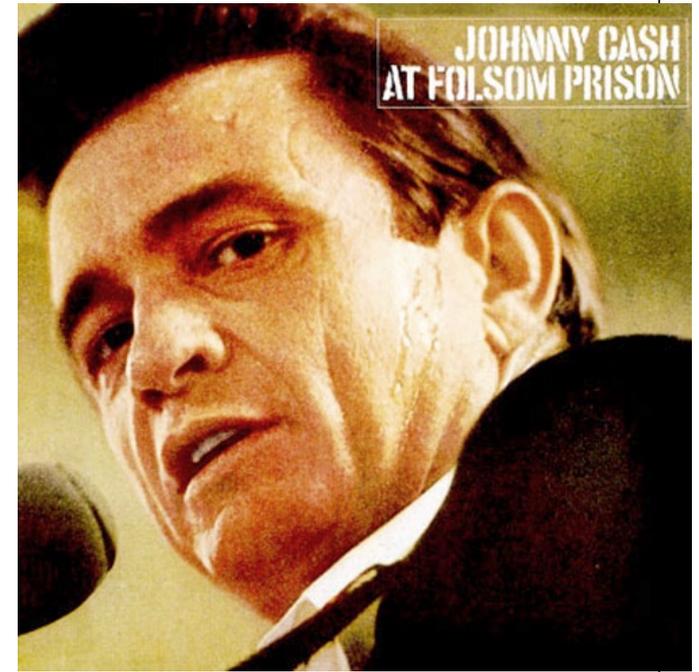
Kudos to Ryan Adams for not over producing someone so well respected in Nashville but giving a different dimension to Nelson's mild natured music. My favorites on the album are *Back to Earth* for its twang and *Sad Songs and Waltzes* for its humor. Nelson also does a cover of *Hallelujah* and *Amazing Grace*, which is worth noting. *Yours Love* is a beautiful love song with twang included; this album doesn't make you bob your head or stomp your foot but on a relaxing evening it will do the trick. His cover of the title track is also quite appropriate.

***Songbird* and *Red Headed Stranger* differ only by music and not by style. They both contain Willie being sweet and telling his tales like a lone wolf tends to do in country music.**



Listening to Loretta Lynn sing *Fist City* leaves me speechless. Grab *Coal Miner's Daughter* and listen to her threaten a woman for bragging about sleeping with her man. Her voice is unique even a little rough, especially when she's laying down threats. And bet your britches there is plenty of twang to go around on this record. *One's on the Way* is the story of the troubles of raising kids and taking care of a husband and house, that is, until she gets the pill. *She's Got You* is a song about losing the one you love and Loretta's distinct phrasing along with the string arrangements adds to its reminiscing sound.

Unlike many other female vocalists at the time, Loretta was the unspoken woman that wasn't taking any crap from anyone. Don't get me wrong, I understand the importance of standing by your man, but Loretta paved a new way for woman in 1970 in country music. She's feisty which always makes for great music in my opinion.



Since I have talked about many of the legends here, it is hard not to mention THE Legend Johnny Cash and his **Live at Folsom Prison** album from 1968. A man that can truly win over a crowd of criminals with his songs of getting caught and going to jail himself is just genius. I would not want to see my tax dollars paying for entertainment for felons but only because Johnny Cash did it does it seem okay. The album is great!

I never knew that country singers had problems with drugs until I listened to the lyrics of *Cocaine Blues*: 'Early one morning while making the rounds, I took a shot of cocaine and I shot my woman down.' The crowd goes wild and I can see the smile on Cash's face. What makes this album so legendary is the way that Johnny Cash plays the songs about jail, loss and despair that inmates can relate to. The audience is so enamored with him and feed him the energy he needs to play the songs. His music sounds like a train going down the tracks; it keeps moving and never stops. He also plays *I Still Miss Someone*, *Give My Love to Rose*, and *Jackson*, which is sung with June Carter. *(continued)*



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I get a laugh out of *Dirty Old Egg Sucking Dog*, which sings about well, a bastard dog after his chickens. Kind of reminds me of my dog, when he goes after my shoes. This album is a wonderful place to start if you have never listened to old Johnny Cash.

Growing up during the rise of hip-hop and metal, it is rare you meet people that truly appreciate the art of twang under the age of 60. I'm no exception; when asked what music I listen to I used to say anything BUT country. Once I spent a lot of time with Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings, I realized there is history in country music and listening to the stories becomes relaxing and almost educational.

For extra credit pick up the **Highway Men** which features Willie, Waylon, Cash and Kris Kristofferson. **Lastly don't run from the sound of a steel guitar; grow up and get over it so you can enjoy the artistry of country music. See you next issue y'all! ●**

Audiophile Pressings

— Jeff Dorgay

Stop the Presses! New Vintage Releases From Warner Brothers

Just a few weeks ago, Warner Brothers announced that they would be hiring Kevin Gray and Steve Hoffman to remaster the classic Warner/Reprise records from 1958 on up. Everything will be pressed and plated at RTI on 180-gram virgin vinyl and released through Warner/Reprise/Rhino. If you would like to sign up for email news flashes surrounding this project, head over to www.becausesoundmatters.com and get on the list.

It's been hard to keep this one under wraps, as I've been privy to the project since Christmas. But now the cat's out of the bag, so I hope you will enjoy these records as much as I have! We appreciate the cooperation with Warner Brothers, Kevin and Steve, so we will let you know more as it unfolds and we are able.

While everyone is being pretty tight lipped about the project in terms of the actual titles being released, we do know about a few: Fleetwood Mac – **Rumours**, The first Rickie Lee Jones album, James Taylor – **Sweet Baby James** and **Mud Slide Slim**, Van Morrison – **Moondance** and **Tres Hombres** and **Fandango** from ZZ Top.

They were kind enough to get me a few test pressings and I can assure you that the quality is outstanding! If you are a big Kevin and Steve fan, you will really enjoy these records! Those of you that would like a bit better pressing, or need to replace worn and damaged ones, get on the list and save your pennies. This looks to be an interesting collection indeed. At this time, WB has not made a definite commitment to just how MANY of these titles will be pressed, so I would advise against hesitating on pushing the buy now button!

Steve said that on many of these records, this will be the first time they have been pressed from the original master tape and that gathering all of the songs was the hardest part of the process! Joni Mitchell's **Blue** has been the first title to be released, with excellent feedback coming in and the next three in line will be ZZ Top – **Tres Hombres**, **Sweet Baby James** and Van Morrison's **Moondance**.

While Steve Hoffman often talks about 'the breath of life' these records really do have a lot of dynamic range. Having sat in with Steve and Kevin on the recent Tom Petty **Lost Highway** session, I know these guys do everything they can to get every last drop of dynamics on the final pressing, so you can rest assured that these records will be as close to the master tapes as is possible!

While I couldn't snag the ZZ Top disc, I did manage to get my hands on **Moondance**, **Sweet Baby James**, **Rumours** and the first Rickie Lee Jones record. One last thing to keep in mind for the collector/purists amongst you, these will not be released with bonus tracks of any kind, just what was on the album, right down to the artwork. Enjoy!

James Taylor – Sweet Baby James

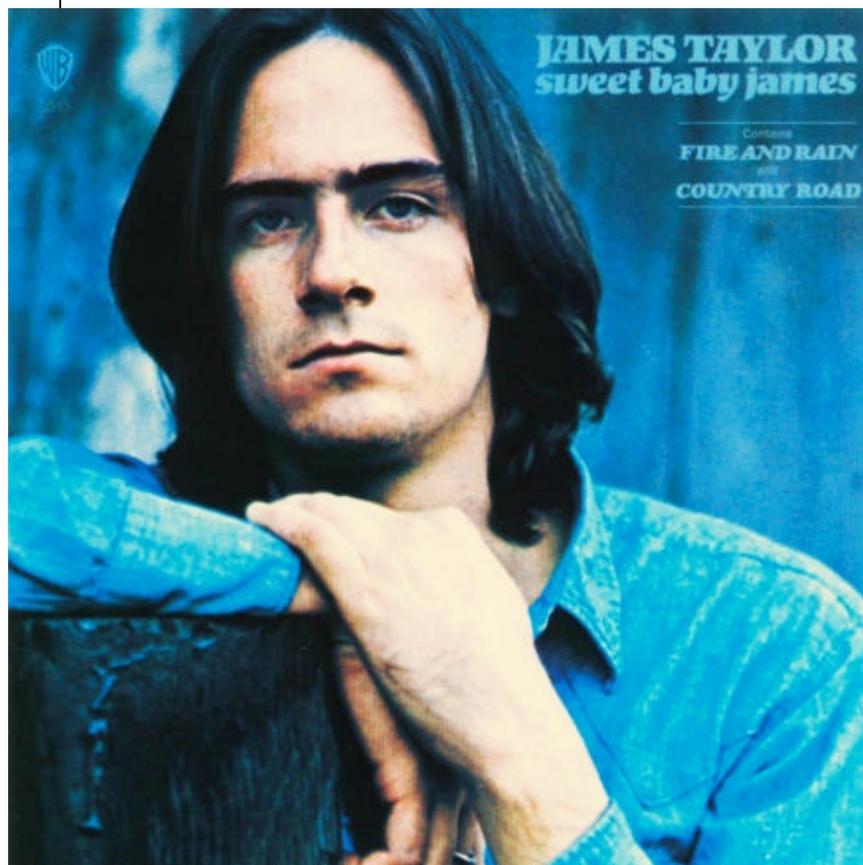
While many people think of **Sweet Baby James** as James Taylor's first album, it's actually his third release (and second album length release), which was responsible for his first Top 10 hit, *Fire and Rain*. Me, I always liked the title track the best, but this whole record is a winner. It's always fun to look back on a piece of musical history like this and it made me dig out my original copy. Being a kid of the '70s, I've got nowhere near an original pressing of this classic, so I can only compare it to the one I own and the CD, (which is really dreadful.)

Where the vocals are pretty closed in on my copy, Taylor's voice is really out in the open here and for that matter there is a LOT more air around the instruments. Right from the beginning, you suspect you are in for a treat, but 27 seconds into **Sweet Baby James** when that steel guitar comes in you know it!

If you have a great system, the vocals on **Oh Susanna** will jump right out at you like you are at a 3-D movie. Heck, the whole record is like this...

I've listened to this one a number of times now and it just reminds me of how much music lurks in those master tapes, and if we had records this good back in the day, records might be with us in a greater capacity than they are today.

These test pressings were dead quiet, but I could hear just a touch of tape hiss between the grooves, which gave it even more of a warm, analog feel. If you liked this one the first time around, you will love it now.



Sweet Baby James

— Marc Phillips

May 30th was a Wednesday morning like most others. I woke up, rolled out of bed, and got a phone call from Editor Jeff to head on down to RTI/AcoustTech Mastering in Camarillo, California, and hang out with a bunch of legendary recording engineers while they remastered one of the great classic albums of all time. Ahhh...Hump Day.

It's not the first time I've been to the AcoustTech mastering studio, but it's definitely the first time I've been lucky enough to see Steve Hoffman and Kevin Gray actually work their magic on a recording that the general public would soon be able to buy.

This time, it was James Taylor's seminal 1970 album, *Sweet Baby James*, which is the latest title in Steve and Kevin's ongoing project to remaster 'cream of the crop' recordings from Warner Brothers/Reprise back catalog for Warner's vinyl division. All of these will be cut, of course, from the original master tapes.

A few other lucky souls were on hand to witness the proceedings. Steve and Kevin invited four members from Steve's online forum (<http://stevhoffman.tv>). In addition, we were joined by a very special guest, Russ Gary, who is well-known for recording many Creedence Clearwater Revival's classic LPs, including **Cosmo's Factory, Willy And The Poor Boys** and **Green River**. Needless to say, many priceless stories and anecdotes were shared in the mastering room that day.

One of the many highlights, of course, was actually hearing those master tapes played over AcoustTech's extraordinary sound system. It's always a treat to hear a recording this way, uncompressed, dynamic, and utterly lifelike. There's no better way, save for sitting in on the original performance, for an audiophile or music lover to calibrate their hearing and truly know what the engineers intended when they laid down the tracks. Watching the actual lacquers being cut was a real treat. A fascinating process. The LP when released, will be pressed right there at Record Tech on 180 gram virgin vinyl and sound as close to the sound of the actual masters as humanly possible. This is what Steve and Kevin are known for; being faithful to the sound of the master tapes.

More information about the release date of **Sweet Baby James**, and other titles in the Warner Brothers project, is available at www.becauseofsoundmatters.com.

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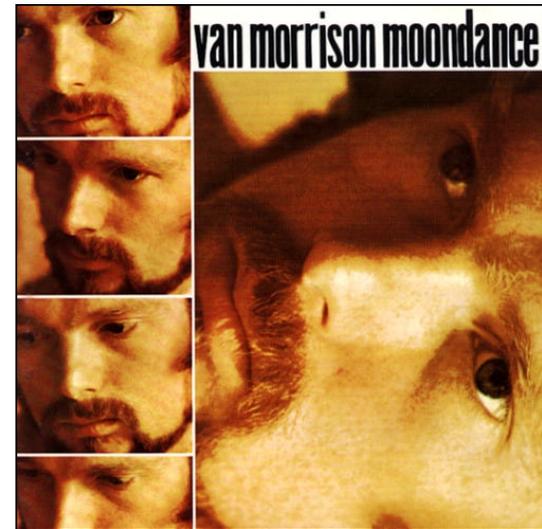
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Van Morrison – Moondance

Van Morrison's second album released in 1970 has a lot more meaning for me now, because over the years I have gotten to know Elliot Landy, the photographer that shot the cover. (He also took the famous shot of Bob Dylan on the cover of **Nashville Skyline**)

I'm still not a huge Van Morrison fan, evident by the fact that after all these years; I still file my Van Morrison albums right after Van Halen! But this record is truly a classic and it sounds so good, if this doesn't make you dig VM, nothing will. Going back to my original pressing and early CD, I was floored at how much more detail is lurking in those grooves!



Fleetwood Mac – Rumors

Another home run out of the park, listening to this disc made me ponder two things; I still really like this record after all these years and I can't believe how the record companies sold so many records that were marginal at best. If only they had paid this kind of attention back in the day, I think we would still have a wider selection of LPs.

Enough ranting though. If you loved this record the first time around you are in for a huge treat. The huge dynamics on this record are apparent the minute you fire up your turntable. I somehow inherited a DVD-a copy of this a while back with my Sound Blaster 24 bit sound card and it was quite good. What I find amazing is that this record is much quieter than the DVD-a! Talk about black backgrounds, wow!

Favorite tracks on this record for me are *The Chain* and *Songbird*. I was always a much bigger fan of Christine McVie than Stevie Nicks and this track has a ton of air in the vocals. If you thought you knew this record inside and out, you are in for a big surprise!!

Rickie Lee Jones – Rickie Lee Jones

Our Club Mix columnist Scott Tetzlaff and I saw Rickie Lee Jones at the Oriental Landmark Theater back in the summer of 1979, right after she made her debut. We both hated *Chuck E's in Love* but we were trying to convince the women we were dating at the time that we were indeed sensitive guys and were interested in more than going to see Rush. So off we went to see Rickie Lee. *(continued)*



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Being that this was Ms. Jones pre-heroin period, the performance was spectacular and we both bought the album the next day. As any of you that became Ricki Lee fans knew, the rest of the record was quite good indeed and had used some of the best session players of the day as her backup.

The original record is not bad at all and even the MoFi release was pretty good, but this one is in another league all together. Go right to *Easy Money* and listen to that upright bass. That is pure analog greatness!! Now if I come over to your house and hear you playing *Chuck E's In Love*, I'm gonna smack you, but the rest of this record is over the top. Excellent job, boys!

If this music holds fond memories for you and you still enjoy it, I encourage you highly to purchase the discs in this series.

I know Steve and Kevin well enough to assure you that every one of the titles that gets released will receive this kind of care, so you can't go wrong.

A few issues ago, classical editor Dan Babineau took a peek at some classic performances on DVD-a from HDTT (high definition tape transfers) that he was very excited about. Here are a few more for you to peruse and on his recommendation, I have purchased the whole set and am very pleased with them! Whether you are a newbie to classical music like me or a long time enthusiast, I think you will enjoy these recordings!



High Definition Tape Transfers

Walk Off With A Masterpiece

— Dan Babineau

Imagine if you could walk into the Louvre, check out some of the paintings and walk out with an original Renoir or Monet? I'm not talking about some grifterheist, I mean if you could legally 'own' a masterpiece! I don't recommend visiting the Louvre for this purpose but I do recommend four DVD-As that I was lucky enough to be able to review recently.

The term legal is key here as the fine people at HDTT (High Definition Tape Transfers) had the keen insight to realize that the copyrights/ royalties etc to a nice group of landmark performance were to expire making these masterpieces available for reproduction. This is the first part of the good news. The second part is equally important as the HDTT people had the wherewithal to take the master tapes from these museum pieces and turn out absolutely astounding DVD-A versions at a wonderful price.

When I first was told that I'd be receiving these classical discs for review I did not know that they were major historic performances, - warhorses, masterpieces, benchmarks, gifts from God, etc. etc. So, imagine my delight in opening the postal box and finding the likes of the London Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Andre Previn performing Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 2*. I love *The Little Russian* and this performance takes this joyful work to the next level. Trust me on this one, I own the LP version of this work and the HDTT transfers are top-drawer for both tone and dynamics. I did not hear the transfers – in other words – tape hiss, wow, flutter or any other micro-dynamic anomalies.

Remember these DVD-As are coming right off of the master tape and HDTT got it right four times in a row!

I received the following four DVD-As: the Tchaikovsky mentioned above with Previn at the baton, *Symphonie Espagnole* composed by Lalo and played magnificently by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under Walter Hendl. Also on this disc hear Kiril Kondrashin and the RCA Victor Symphony Orchestra frolic through Rimsky-Korsakov's *Capriccio Espagnole*. Shifting gears with Beethoven's *Mass in C Major* performed by the Munich Bach Choir & Orchestra and then top it off with the last disc of music composed by a rather obscure composer, Edward Mac Dowell. I was not as familiar with the works as I was the performers or should I say pianists: Carlos Chavez and Mr. Van Cliburn with the CSO.

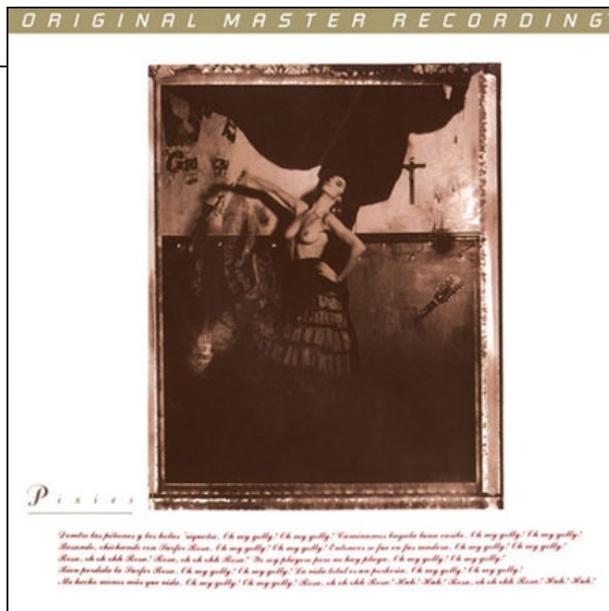
Where I'd normally attempt to dissect each disc I rather just say that you cannot go wrong with these famous performances and exemplary recordings. Again, these were analog recordings transferred to the digital format (24 bit/96khz) by people that took the time to get it right. Much like the people that restore fine art in museums, time must be taken to insure perfection. HDTT has reached this level with these DVD-As. Check out their catalog for more landmark performances in both the CD and DVD-A formats.

The DVD-a versions were reviewed here, but they are also available in CD for the same price of \$25 each. I do suggest though, that if you have a player that is DVD-a compatible to go for the high-resolution format!

A Pair From MoFi

— Jerold O'Brien

We have a couple of jewels here from our friends at Mobile Fidelity as well that are from opposite ends of the spectrum. That's the fun part of promo records, you never really know what they are going to send you, and while our publisher is pretty good at giving me records that rock, he forces me to expand my horizons by always throwing in something that doesn't necessarily rock, but is interesting nonetheless.



The Pixies – *Surfer Rosa*

24kt SACD

I have to be the only headbanger out there that has never been crazy about The Pixies (or Nirvana for that matter), but it's a double-edged sword. I've seen these guys live a few times and they really rock! Somehow their studio sound was always just a bit clean for my taste, but if I had to pick a favorite Pixies album, **Surfer Rosa** would be it. Turns out it was Kurt Cobain's favorite Pixies album too, so I'm not sure what that says about my musical taste.

Kind of a cross between Dick Dale, the Ramones and perhaps the B-52's on Quaaludes, you will either really like this disc or not. But this isn't a review of the music; it's about the MoFi reissue.

If you are a Pixies fan, you are in for a hell of a treat, as they did a killer job remastering this one. The original disc just plain sucks and has all the dynamics squeezed out of it. Next time you are at your favorite hifi emporium, pull this out and ask to demo some SACD players! If this doesn't make those snooty audio insultants run for the hills the minute you put it in, go to track five, Gigantic, and crank it up as far as it will go!

Talk about wall of guitars!! Woo hoo, this is great stuff. Run right out and buy the MoFi disc and give your old copy to your favorite fourteen year old. Who knows what it might inspire?



Coleman Hawkins – *The Hawk Flies High*

180g LP

Being the guy on the staff with the major collection of vintage gear, this record will put you right in the music time machine on a trip back to 1957. Hailed by all as the first great saxophonist of Jazz, this cat is amazing! If you've never heard the Hawk before, go right to the second track and dig the sustain on *Juicy Fruit* – amazing!

This record is mono, but the recording is so good, it has a ton of depth. Something about mono records, they just seem to have that wonderful bass texture that stereo records seem to lack. I've been experimenting with a lot of mono cartridges lately and this has become my new mono demonstration record for friends.

My review copy was so quiet, it blew me away with a stereo cartridge! But if you can go that extra mile and have a mono rig, you will not be disappointed. Kudos to the MoFi crew on this one! If you aren't fortunate enough to own an original pressing (or you don't want to put wear and tear on your original) grab a copy of this record. ●

Goin' Mobile

— Marc Phillips

So what's a vinyl anachronist like myself doing talking about car stereos? Well, it was Jeff's idea. During my last visit up to the TONE mothership, as Jeff likes to call it, he suggested that we hit some of the luxury car dealer ships around the Portland area. We've both been interested in the High End industry's recent ventures into the audio world, such as Mark Levinson making car stereos for Lexus, and B&W hopping on board at Jaguar.

do have to admit that it started to make perfect sense. First of all, Jeff and I are both car guys. He's a BMW man through and through, and likes to terrorize his neighborhood in his two souped-up 3-series Bimmers. I, meanwhile, have been known to peg the speedo on my 'slightly' modded Subaru WRX through the wide open spaces of Utah, Nevada and Colorado. Anyone who knows me in person has already heard the story of my little Subie, two Ferraris, and the stretch of I-15 running southbound toward Las Vegas. **Life is pretty intense at 145 mph, especially when you're staring at the rear end of an Enzo the whole way.**

Secondly, car stereos are as big of a part of my audio upbringing as turntables and '70s receivers. I had the killer car system back in the day. My 1982 Honda Accord had the 'works'... subwoofers, equalizers, all the bells and whistles. I even upgraded all of the cabling to Monster Cable, which was a pretty radical thing to do 25 years ago, even in home audio. Unfortunately, I only went whole-hog on car audio this one time. I grew up in Southern California, car stereo theft capital of the world. And while I was never a victim, many of my friends were. After I traded in the Accord, I never splurged on a decent car stereo again, choosing instead to use whatever stock player came with the car.

Stock players, however, have gotten much better over the years. The stereo in my '05 WRX, for example, sounds pretty good to my ears, with a smooth, full sound, nice deep bass, and even a fair approximation of imaging, something I've always felt was usually a total compromise in an automobile environment. Other than an occasional bit of buzzing in the doors, I'm very happy with the sound I'm getting right now.

But what happens when you spend \$50,000 on a fine luxury automobile? How about \$75,000? \$100,000?

Does the quality of the stereo improve proportionally, too? With names like Mark Levinson and B&W involved, you would think so.

Jeff and I were able to compare the car audio systems in three luxury vehicles, the Lexus LS460L, the Acura MDX, and the BMW 750i. We also went to a Jaguar dealer, but found out that while their new stereo system was designed by B&W, it wouldn't be available until the 2008 models came out. So we'll revisit Jaguar in a future issue.



LEXUS LS460L

First of all, the LS460L costs a whopping \$82,000. When did Lexus get that expensive? I always thought that the point of Japanese luxury marques such as Lexus, Infiniti and Acura was to offer the same level of luxury as the German brands, but for much less money. I'm pretty sure that \$82,000 buys you a really nice Benz or BMW.

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Secondly, Jeff and I were also a bit put off by the attitude of the salesperson, who seemed genuinely put out that we asked for her help, and took her out of her sales rotation for nothing. After that, Jeff and I decided to go straight to the sales managers, and not bother another single salesperson as long as we both live.

That said, I felt that the sound system in the LS460L set the bar very, very high for all of the other systems we would later hear. I brought a few CDs along with me, including TV on the Radio's *Return To Cookie Mountain*, Arcade Fire's *Neon Bible*, and Yo La Tengo's *I Am Not Afraid of You and I Will Beat Your Ass*, and all of them sounded clear and detailed on the Mark Levinson-designed system. Bass was deep, if not quite subterranean.

All in all, the system seemed to be voiced for older, more seasoned ears, the kind that might belong to a person who would buy an \$82,000 Toyota. Everything sounded smooth and pleasing, which is not a bad thing, especially when it comes to listening to music while you're stuck in traffic.

We did run into a glitch when we threw in Jeff's DVD-A copy of The Doors' *L.A. Woman*, however. While the music itself sounded right, the surround system must not have been set-up properly, because Jim Morrison's voice took a nose dive and disappeared deep into the mix. We fiddled and fiddled and couldn't quite get it right. We thought about asking the saleswoman for help, but we thought the better of it. *(continued)*



ACURA MDX

Once we left the Lexus dealer and entered through the large glass doors of the nearby Acura dealer, I sighed in relief. I've owned an Acura once in my life, an Integra, and I knew how fantastic the service and sales staff are. And I was not disappointed. Jeff and I were greeted enthusiastically by a bunch of guys who were excited that two magazine bigwigs would visit their humble dealership. We were given absolute freedom to wander and listen as we pleased.

I headed right toward the RL model, which is Acura's largest luxury sedan. I wanted to keep our comparisons restricted to big four-door luxury boats for obvious reasons. We were told, however, that the system on the brand spankin' new MDX sports-utility vehicle was the latest design, and sounded the best. So much for strict A/B comparisons!

While I thought that listening in an SUV might be an unfair advantage, considering that the increase in interior space might result in better imaging and a bigger soundstage. But with its high seat backs and narrow cabin, I actually found the opposite to be true. While Jeff preferred the sound of the Acura system to the Lexus, mostly because it played the Doors' DVD-A perfectly, I felt that the soundstage was limited to the dashboard in front of me. In the front passenger seat, I literally couldn't hear anything coming out of the back speakers, while Jeff, sitting in the driver's seat, thought everything sounded superb. We played around with the balance and fader controls, but with no real improvement. **This is definitely a sound system that was voiced for the driver alone.**

The Acura system also brought up an important point about today's premium car stereos...they're complicated! We were both amazed at the sheer number of buttons on the faceplate of the head unit. And there were two separate disc transports, one for the audio system, and presumably one for the DVD player. We kept putting CDs into the wrong slot, since they weren't clearly marked. This system is definitely one you have to learn how to use.

BMW 750iL

Ah...BMW. The nicest salespeople, the nicest car, and the nicest audio system. Jeff, being the aforementioned BMW guy, instantly felt at home in this \$85,000 machine. *(continued)*





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Paul Bolin

*“A Lot of Fun!”
(Stereophile, August 2005)*

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While the Lexus and the Acura were very, very nice automobiles, the BMW was clearly at a different level. The interior was by far the most comfortable (Jeff was in heaven in the extraordinarily roomy back seat), and the most beautiful. **I wanted this car! (Actually, I want an M3, and Jeff wants an M6. That’s what we’re putting on our Christmas lists, anyway.)**

Unfortunately, the BMW’s sound system was by far the most complicated. So complicated, in fact, that the salesperson had to accompany us during our audition, since we would have never been able to figure it out our own. Those who are familiar with BMWs know about their somewhat controversial iDrive system, where a huge knob on the center console controls everything in the car, including the GPS system, the climate controls, and the audio system. The knob is sort of like a mouse, and it’s designed to be intuitive. But it takes a lot of practice to get to that point.

The automotive press has been bashing the iDrive system for years, calling it way too complicated and temperamental for ordinary folk.

But I suspect that once you spend some time with iDrive, it does become intuitive, and then it’s a wonderful thing. Our salesman definitely had the hang of it. He was able to adjust volume, change radio stations (by the way, the 750i had the best-sounding FM section of the three cars), and switch between formats without looking. *(continued)*

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And I prefer the iDrive's one-knob approach to the Acura's seventy-button approach any ol' day.

The only downside to the BMW's system was that it wouldn't play DVD-A, much to our surprise. The luxury automakers seem to be rescuing the DVD-A format from oblivion, but BMW demurs, apparently. Still, the sound from the BMW audio system was effortlessly powerful, and superbly detailed, easily the best-sounding of three very good systems. (and BMW is the only automaker to offer HD radio as a factory installed option) The relatively short time we spent in the cabin of the 750i was an oasis, a respite from mediocrity. I may follow in Jeff's footsteps and become a BMW man myself!

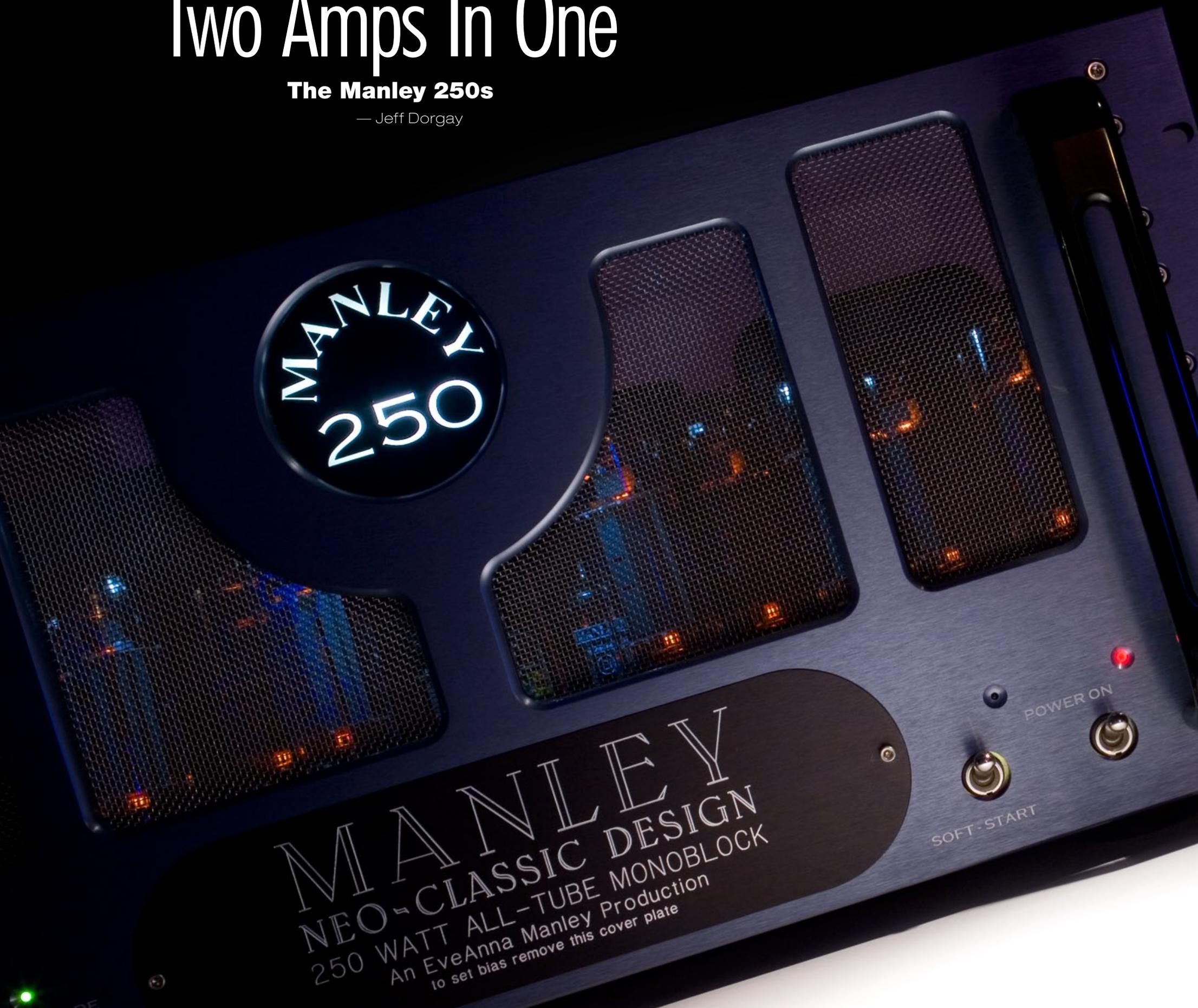
Stay tuned...there's more of the Marc and Jeff Show coming right up!

Next time, we'll investigate that new B&W system from Jaguar. (Did I mention that the new \$100,000 XKR convertible joins the Bentley Continental GT and the Mercedes CL65 AMG as one of the most beautiful cars on the planet?) We'll also take a look at such cars as Mercedes, Infinity (can a Bose system really sounds as good as they say it does?) and whatever dealership will let us sit in one of their cars without kicking us out! ●

Two Amps In One

The Manley 250s

— Jeff Dorgay



I've owned a lot of tube amplifiers over the years and most of them have been of the 30-60 watt per channel variety, either powered by a compliment of EL-34 tubes or the 6550/KT 88 variety. It was always a very pleasing sound, though if someone put a gun to my head and MADE me decide, I would pick the EL-34s because I know I would give up a bit of tightness and control on the bottom for that extra magic in the middle.

But the dilemma is always power. Somewhat like any other controlled substance, power can really be addictive. Over the last year and a half, having a few hundred watts per channel has added a big dimension to my musical enjoyment, but this time with solid state amplification. I have no regrets 98 percent of the time, but what if I could have that tube magic along with all that power? Hmmmm.

Honestly, I did try a few amplifiers (which will remain nameless) with big power, but we were back to my less than favorite 6550 tubes. Again, classical columnist Dan Babineau provided the necessary insight. 'Dude, get a pair of those big Manleys – they use EL34s and they really rock!' And so my quest began.

Big, Blue, Beautiful

When you get your pair of Manley 250s out of the box, just feast your eyes on all of those EL-34s! Ten per channel. I really appreciated getting these right after CES, when it was a bit chilly here in the Northwest.

The front panel is finished in a dark blue anodized finish with a big circular 'Manley 250' logo in the middle. Not understated Euro design by any means. These are robust, American amplifiers and I like them quite a bit. One quick peek at the giant power and output transformers and you know that something pretty major is under the hood.

As good as they look, I suggest tucking those front panels away in a safe place for a day or two. *(continued)*

'Dude, get a pair of those big Manleys – they use EL34s and they really rock!'



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With any tube amplifier, I always suggest keeping a close eye on bias at first. My test samples were on the money right from the factory, but it's always a good idea to double check. Being a little finicky with this will result in better sound and longer tube life; it's kind of like giving your turbo-charged car that extra minute for the turbo to spool down when you pull in the driveway, so the oil can cool down. During my test period, the bias did not change at all. However, I would suggest checking it twice a year just to be safe.

Initial Setup

The Manley 250s went in my main system, replacing the Premier 350, so I was very curious indeed as to how the sound character would change. Though I did use them a lot with my Tetra 506 Customs, I also used them along with a number of speakers we had in for review over the last few months to see how they would perform in a variety of different situations.

The 250s had their own dedicated 20 amp line and a Running Springs Duke power conditioner, so they would not be starved for juice, especially on rare occasion when it was time to really rock!

Remember when you put that can of octane booster in the tank of your muscle car? Same thing.

I did try them on the same circuit as the rest of the system and most of you should be fine under any circumstances. But if you can give them their own power, they will give you just a little more oomph at high volume. *(continued)*



You can use the 250s in single ended mode or balanced, just flip the switch on the rear and use your input of choice. While I did most of my testing with the CJ ACT2/ Series 2, which has only single ended outputs, I did try it with a couple of balanced preamps as well, with great results.

All of the usual suspects in my system were in place, the only change was swapping the 250s in for the Premier 350. Solid State vs. Tubes, here we go! The power up sequence on the 250s takes a minute or two to get used to. You actually turn on the main switch, and then click the standby switch up, once the tube filaments are warm. They can be left in a stand by mode, which is handy if you are going out for a while and don't want to power the amplifiers down all the way, however I suggest (again in the interest of tube life) not leaving them in this mode all the time.

However, I don't recommend leaving any tube component on for long periods of time unattended.

The Sound

So what was the first thing I played with the Manley 250s once all those tubes warmed up? As much as I'd like to say I cranked up Who's **Next** (though I did that later) I just put on some Michael Hedges and listened to some acoustic guitar riffs. Pretty sweet, with a lot of inner detail as well as power, definitely the EL-34 magic here.

This amplifier had a lot of detail as well as power, and that's what is so impressive about the 250s. Often times Manley gear gets compared to muscle cars and Harleys, but honestly I think that is a little unfair

because there is more than a fair amount of finesse here. I guess if I had to compare the 250s to a car, I would compare them to a C5 Corvette that's been tuned by Chuck Mallett. Yep, it's still a Corvette but it goes around a corner as well as a Porsche and it can stop in a hurry too. (And you can still do a huge burnout at the stoplight with all that power!)

Ok, enough being mature and intellectual, now it was time to play Who's **Next** and

This amplifier had a lot of detail as well as power, and that's what is so impressive about the 250s.

crank it up! Honestly, I stayed on that path quite a bit with these amplifiers. No matter what I played from the Yayhoos

to Pink Floyd, the 250s just never ran out of gas. However, even at lower levels, that extra headroom just comes through, giving the sound an ease that you just don't get with a little amplifier. I was hooked! *(continued)*

No matter what kind of music you listen to, I firmly believe that having the extra power on tap that a big amplifier can provide really adds something special to the presentation. The funny thing is you don't really realize it until you go back to that 60 watt per channel amplifier that you thought you were really happy with. It just seems kind of dull, so don't open this door unless you can afford to stay! I guarantee that once you have a taste, nothing else will do!

What really impressed me about these amplifiers was how well controlled the bass was.

I was expecting to just get that standard EL-34 sound kind of scaled up. What I got was that perfect balance of having the control of a 6550 based amplifier without losing the midrange magic of a smaller amplifier with a single pair of output tubes per channel.

Two Amps in One

You can even take this a step further, by clicking the 250s into triode mode! It cuts the power down to about 110 watts per channel, but you do get the additional sweetness that triode mode provides and if you have speakers that are efficient enough, even a touch more midrange warmth to boot! Fortunately my Tetras are 92 db, so it was a perfect match indeed!

I know that there are a few of you out there that are thinking about tube rolling, so I have to admit I didn't bother with this one. With coolio NOS EL-34s going for up to \$500 a PAIR, it was out of the question from an economic point of view. *(continued)*

cardas.com

Besides, they take the time to handpick the tubes at Manley and they voice it around current day stock, so why bother? It sounds great as is, but it does make you wonder if you were filthy rich, what 20 NOS EL-34s would do to the sound...

I tried a number of different inefficient speakers, including my 82db Apogeos and I assure you, nothing was a problem for the 250s. They only have one set of output binding posts and claim to be optimized for a five-ohm load. (Again, my Tetras are six ohm, so this was sheer perfection.) I can't imagine anyone having a compatibility issue here.

Because the tetrode mode is extremely powerful, with a touch less finesse and the triode mode has a ton of detail, warmth and finesse, with a bit less power, it really is like getting two amplifiers for the price of one. That's the best feature of the Manley 250s.

Definitely a Music Lovers Pair of Amplifiers

I have a wide range of musical taste and can listen to anything throughout the course of the day. One minute I'm listening to Boulez and the next minute Run DMC, so I tend to err on the side of

musicality instead of holding out for that last molecule of detail that other listeners might prefer. If you are one of those listeners, these may not be the amplifiers for you.

But, if you value musicality over anything else and you don't mind keeping up with a lot of tubes as well as their ventilation and space requirements,

With all that power on tap, you can pretty much swap speakers to your heart's content.

the Manley 250s could be the last amplifiers you ever need to buy. With all that power on tap, you can pretty much swap speakers to your heart's content and not need to make an amp change. Thanks to the balanced inputs, you can change preamps too.

These amplifiers do so much right, that at a price of \$9000 per pair they earn a TONE Exceptional value award for 2007. I know that \$9000 isn't small potatoes, but considering how much these amplifiers have to offer, I truly feel that they are a value. Plus, taking into account the longevity of the Manley company, you know that these guys will be around to provide service ten years from now, should the need occur. (And by the way, Dan's Manley 240s which are the first generation of these amps are still going strong after 16 years!)

The Manley 250s will be greatly missed around here... ●

Manley 250 Monoblocks
MSRP: \$9000 per pair

MANUFACTURER

Manley Laboratories, Inc.
13880 Magnolia Ave.
Chino (not China) California
91710
909-627-4256
www.manleylabs.com

PERIPHERALS

Preamplifiers: Conrad Johnson ACT2/Series 2, Aesthetix Callisto Signature, Aurum Acoustics CDP

Speakers: Tetra 506 Custom with REL B2 subwoofer, Penaudio Serenades, Martin Logan Vanquish, Apogee Calipers

Analog Sources: SME10 turntable with SME V arm and MoFi 3.5C cartridge, AVID Volvere with SME 309 arm and Shelter 90x cartridge, Aesthetix Rhea phono preamplifier, TEAC 6300.

Digital Sources: Meridian 808, Wadia 581, Aurum CDP

Interconnect: Cardas Neutral Reference, Tetra Artet, Tara The ONE

Speaker Cable: Tetra Artet

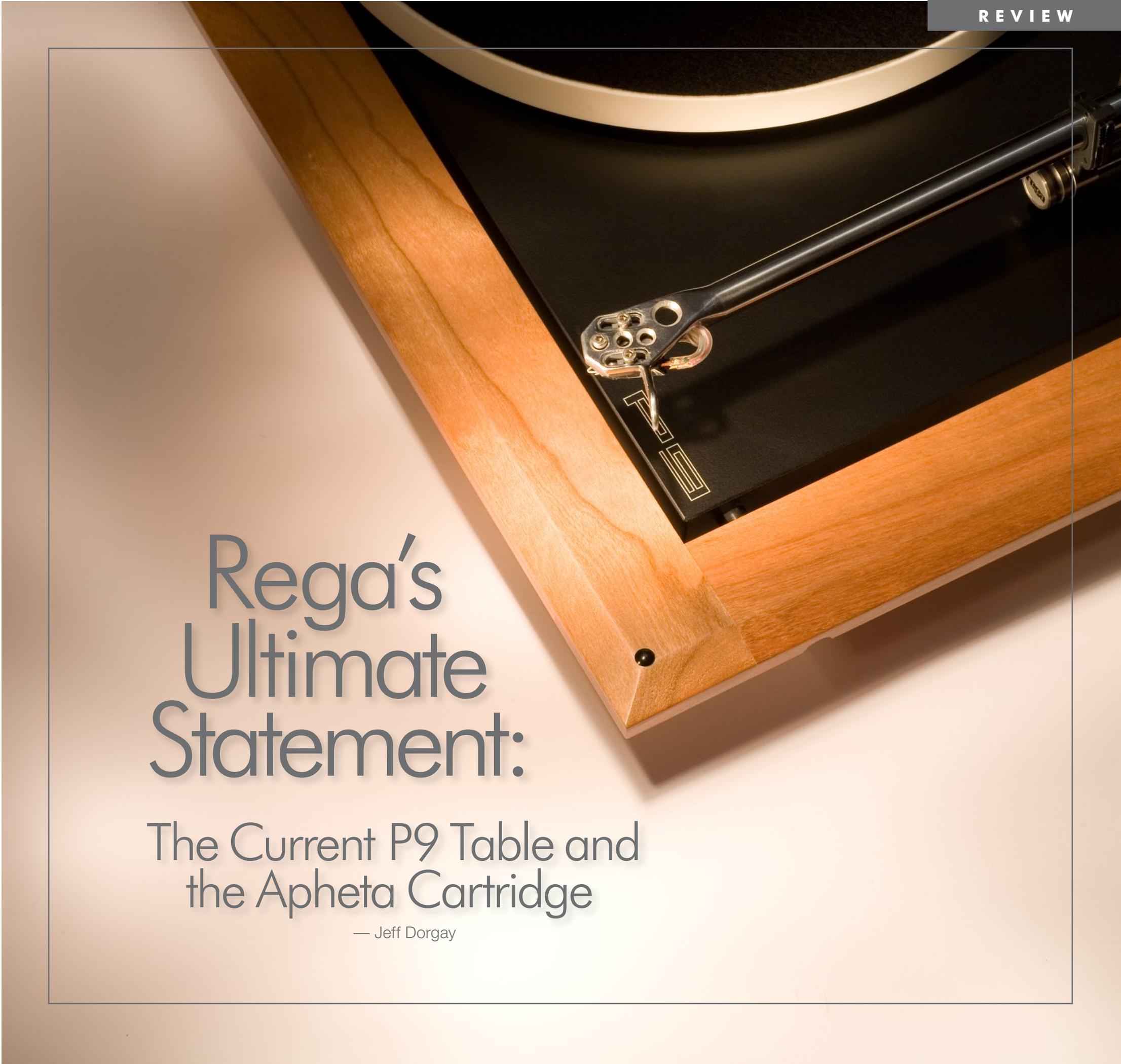
Power Cords: Running Springs Mongoose and Essential Sound Products The Essence Reference

Power Conditioning: Running Springs Jaco and Running Springs Duke

Vibration Control: Finite Elemente Pagode Signature Racks, with Cereballs and Cerepucs

Room Treatment: Gik Bass Traps, Sonex Classic



A close-up photograph of a Rega P9 turntable. The image shows the wooden frame, the black tonearm, and the silver cartridge. The Rega logo is visible on the tonearm. The turntable is set against a light background.

Rega's Ultimate Statement:

The Current P9 Table and
the Apheta Cartridge

— Jeff Dorgay



Usually, we review cartridges and turntables as separate items.

With the Apheta being Rega's first moving coil cartridge after a few years of development, it now takes its place at the top of their cartridge line. The RB1000 arm is also updated, so it made perfect sense to capitalize on the synergy and review these items together as a complete LP playback system.

In case you are not familiar with this turntable and cartridge, the P9 has a suggested retail of \$4495 and the Apheta Moving Coil cartridge is \$1695. The accessory Tungsten counterweight is an additional \$100. This is definitely a serious turntable, folks. Rega has been steadily moving upmarket with their P5 and P7 models, which are great turntables in their own right, but the P9 is the flagship and having spent time with both of them I feel that the P9 is really in a class all its own.

At first glance, the P9 looks like a P25 with a bit larger wood base, but if your analysis stopped there you would be missing the boat entirely.

One of my favorite things about Rega is that their products all have an understated elegance about them. If you want a big, bulky turntable, that screams 'dig me', the P9 is not going to be your cup of tea. But don't let the subtle styling fool you; take a peek under the traditional felt mat and gaze at the high tech ceramic platter. Pop the ceramic platter off and check out the machined sub platter. The plastic part in the P3 and P25 is gone.

Cast your glance over to the RB1000 tonearm. According to Rega, it takes one technician as much time to hand assemble and adjust an RB1000 arm as it does to make 30 RB300s and it shows the first time you pick that tonearm and set it down on a record. Definitely a work of art. *(continued)*

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And the idea that Rega has a moving coil cartridge, is also pretty exciting.

Designed from the ground up, they have eliminated the tie wire and foam damper found in conventional moving coil designs.

The result is indeed, very clean sounding with a tremendous amount of detail on tap. As much as I like the sound, I love the clear body, allowing you a peek inside! Very nice touch!

For a more in-depth technical analysis of the new arm and power supply, head over to the Rega website. (www.rega.co.uk) Thanks to a power supply that is the same size as a Rega integrated amplifier, you no longer have to pop that platter and move the belt on the pulley to get 45rpm playback. Just plug in the umbilical cord, turn it on and choose the speed you want.

I can't imagine that there is anyone out there who hasn't heard of Rega, or even owned one at some point in time. My guess is if you did, it was probably a P2 or P3. Aside from the Linn LP-12, the Rega P3 is probably one of the best selling turntables in history; certainly if we are talking about belt drive tables. (NO surly emails from Technics SL-1200 owners!!)

Like anything that has been around for a long time, there are a number of misconceptions, urban myths and other bits of misinformation floating around. So let's get the BS out of the way and clear the air. Here are the Rega myths exposed and explained once and for all:
(continued)

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TONEA **83** NO.10 2007

1. Rega turntables don't have good speed accuracy, they tend to play a little fast.

Way back in the beginning, some of the Rega tables did play a smidge fast but that has not been an issue for many years now. The engineering staff at Rega has painstakingly worked to rid themselves of this problem and they are so particular, they actually measure speed with a record playing to take the drag from tracking a groove into account.

Even with the P1, this issue is LONG a thing of the past and the P9 had perfect speed accuracy. I had a P25 that was a touch fast, but the minute I changed the belt, it was right on the money, so this would be the first thing I would check if you are having an issue in this department. Most turntable manufacturers suggest changing the belt yearly or at least every other year.

2. Rega turntables don't have deep bass, they sound a little thin.

I guess this one is a matter of personal taste. I have always found the P2, P3 and P25 to have more of a 'fast' sound compared to some other things in the price range, with fantastic detail retrieval and a very nice midrange. One man's fast is another man's thin. Remember, I like minimonitors and panels, so I'm not a big bass freak to begin with. Even on a big system, I've always found these tables to be pretty well balanced and bass has never been an issue. I suspect that those that complained of Rega bass being thin, did not have the VTA set correctly...

3. You can't adjust VTA on a Rega and hence can't use other manufacturers cartridges very easy.

Again, not true. Granted, it's not as easy to adjust the VTA on a Rega table as it is on an SME, but should you decide that you would like a cartridge other than Rega (which have a 14mm stylus to top of the cartridge body distance) there are a few options. You can use one of the aftermarket VTA adjustment devices or if you measure this distance on your cartridge, chances one of Rega's tonearm shims will do the trick. They now have these available for the RB250/300/600 arms as well as the RB700/900/1000 arms and you can just order whatever combination you require from your dealer in 2, 4 or 10mm thicknesses.

4. That felt mat drives me nuts, I've had way better luck with (insert mat of the week here)

Just shut up and use the felt mat. It works just fine, especially when you are spinning a lot of records in a listening session. You can just leave the platter spinning and change records, fantastic! *(continued)*

So let's get back to the job at hand and talk about the P9. Right.





**Loading. That's the secret.
At least 100 ohms, 50-75 if you
can and a touch lower
if you've got it.**

Initial Setup

The P9 came with the new Apheta moving coil cartridge installed, but because it uses Rega's three point mounting system, you can set it up in a jiffy yourself. Attach the wires, insert the screws and you are good to go! No adjustments to make, just tracking force and Anti-skate; not quite as easy as putting a CD in the drawer, but the easiest turntable setup I've ever experienced. Five minutes and you will be playing records! I dare you to accomplish that with any other \$6000 record player.

I spent the initial break-in time (about 150 hours) in my second system and experimented with about eight different phono stages that I have had in for photography before sending them on their way to the various reviewers, so I have found the secret to making the Apheta sing.

Loading. That's the secret. At least 100 ohms, 50-75 if you can and a touch lower if you've got it. If you only have a 1000 ohm setting on your phono stage, there is a high probability that you will find the Apheta bright. Anything higher than that and you will definitely find it bright and possibly way too bright. *(continued)*

The New Sound of the South



We invite you to visit our new facility that offers four unique listening rooms in a relaxed atmosphere, featuring high performance products from the following manufacturers:

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 Exact Power
 ModWright
 Sumiko/Project
 Acoustic Solid

I found that the Modwright 9.0 SWLP on its 50-ohm setting and the BAT VK-10SE with the user definable setting at 33 ohms was just what the doctor ordered. Down here, the cartridge can still breathe and the top end is smoothed out very nicely. All of my serious listening was spent with the ModWright, because I felt that this was a good match financially as well. I felt a \$3k phono stage was probably a more realistic combination for a \$6k turntable than a phono stage that cost just as much! However, the P9/Apheta combination has enough resolution to justify a more expensive phono stage, should you decide to go there.

A Great First Impression

Often times, first impressions really do stick with you and getting the P9 out of the box was quite a surprise.

I was very impressed with the table right away, with the P9 offering a much bigger and more powerful presentations than past Regas I've listened to.

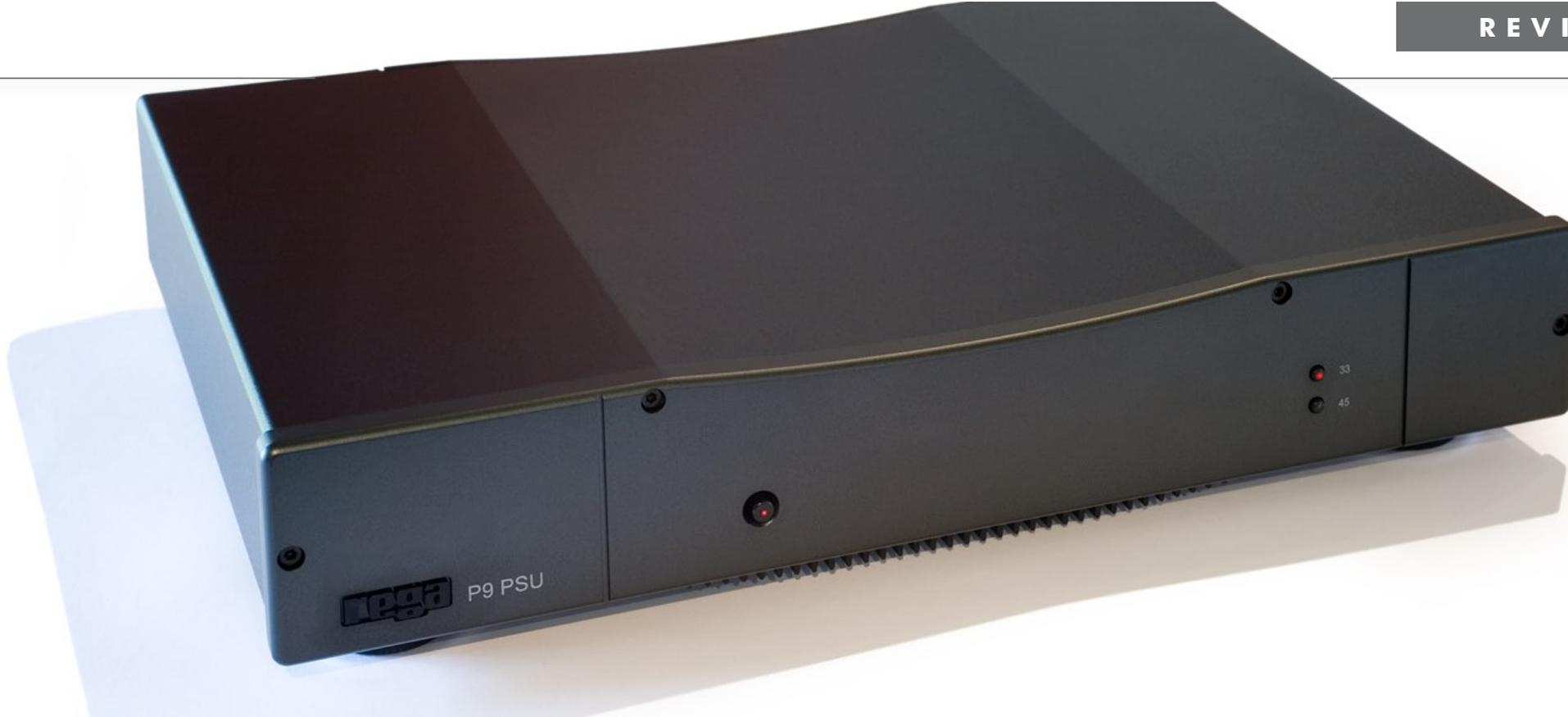
If you were on the bubble and in the 'Rega tables sound a bit thin' camp, you can flush that misconception down the toilet. The P9 has a very authoritative presentation, especially in the lower registers.

The first record I put on that familiar felt mat was Patti Smith's **Trampin'**. The first song on side two, *Cartwheels* has some very deep bass riffs that were reproduced with the usual Rega texture but a lot more weight than I'm used to. *(continued)*

(gateway sound)

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 770 493 1550

www.gatewaysound.net



The next cut, *Ghandi* has a lot of air and some very tasty drum fills over the top of some very strong bass parts too. What the P9/Apheta combination excelled at was keeping everything placed about the soundstage, without losing focus or grip. Some cartridges I have heard in this price range get mushy when the music gets texturally complex, but not the Apheta.

This is when you know that you are listening to first class analog, the sense of air and texture is there along with plenty of detail, yet lacking in grain. The more I listened, the more I was impressed with the Apheta cartridge and marveled at how it had a speed, extension and clarity that I would normally associate with CD, yet with the smoothness I would expect from analog. Quite anomalous behavior from a company that didn't even start making digital products until recently.

And their top of the line digital player has an amazing amount of the positive attributes

of good analog. Very interesting indeed, but you will have to wait until our next issue to read about the Saturn!

It's Getting Better All The Time

I spent a ton of time with this turntable/cartridge combination for a number of reasons. First, the sound quality is fantastic. The P9 has everything I'm looking for in a table at this price range: all the PRAT stuff we audio geeks live for, a healthy dose of weight and a high degree of resolution and nuance.

After becoming very familiar with the Apheta and giving it plenty of time to adequately break in, I moved it out into my main system with the ASR Basis phono stage and my SME 10, so I could bounce back and forth between my reference gear. Again, barely loading down this cartridge at all was the ticket to bliss. The Apheta did a fantastic job with the ASR's ultra low noise floor and offered up a presentation that was CD quiet with pristine records.

This is when you know that you are listening to first class analog, the sense of air and texture is there along with plenty of detail, yet lacking in grain.

This table and cartridge combination is definitely up to the task, even with a phono preamp that costs more than the pair!

Moving through the gamut, I put on the recent Willie Nelson album, **Songbird**, which was produced by Ryan Adams. This is a great album, with a lot of depth and spatial cues. Definitely one of those 'delicate space between the notes' kind of records that really conveys Nelson's vocals in a more soft-spoken manner. Same with the **Johnny Cash American Recording** album; the presentation of *Delia* was RIGHT THERE.

The P9/Apheta had such a good combination of resolution and ease, it made for some very fatigue-free extended listening sessions. Load this baby wrong and you will curse it forever. Get it right and it is a very nice dose of analog bliss.

I also noticed that this cartridge did quite a good job with very dense musical passages, regardless of whether it was ten layers of overdubbed guitars or the violin section in an orchestra. So the heavy metal fan as well as the orchestra lover should be able to find peace here. *(continued)*

Exploring Other Options

Just to be thorough, I did spend some time mounting other cartridges to the P9 to see how well it would perform. Again, it passed with flying colors. My Sumiko Celebration has a 14mm stylus to top measurement, so it did not require any spacer, just a quick HTA adjustment and a rebalance of the tonearm. A bit more on the lush side than the Apheta, this might be a good combination for those needing a bit less detail.

With two of the 2mm spacers at my disposal, I also spent a little time with my trusty Shelter 90x. This cartridge is about a thousand bucks more than the Apheta, but again the P9 did not let me down. Potential P9 owners take note: This table will do well with a modestly priced cartridge (I had great luck with my Grado Platinum as well...) but has enough resolution to support just about any cartridge you would want to put on it.

Tough to Beat

Once you get to this price range in turntables, there is quite a bit to choose from and every table has its own characteristic sound. Right now I have an Oracle and an AVID Volvere here in the studio which are similarly priced and while I don't believe in shootouts, I will say the P9 does hold its own with the others in its class that I have at my disposal.

Where the Rega P9 excels is offering up a nice big dose of analog excellence with NONE of the hassle.

If I could change one thing on the P9, I would love to see it offered with a set of balanced connectors so those of us running a fully balanced phono stage could take advantage of the additional noise reduction this configuration offers. That's my only gripe and it probably only applies to 2% of the people who might buy this table.

Where the Rega P9 excels is offering up a nice big dose of analog excellence with NONE of the hassle. This is as close as you can get to close and play ease of use

with this level of musicality and detail. Yes there are tables (at this price point) that might reveal a little more of this or that, but if there is another table for this kind of money that offers up this much music, yet requires NO setup expertise, I'll eat that felt mat.

An old friend of mine used to say, 'Dude, why do you want a Rega, you can't tweak it!' To which I would reply 'Dude, that's why I want a Rega, I don't want to tweak it, I want to listen to records!'

And I still feel that way 28 years later. This one's a keeper. Highly recommended. ●

The Rega P9 Turntable and Apheta Moving Coil Cartridge:
MSRP: Table – \$4495, Cartridge – \$1695
(tungsten counterweight, \$100)

MANUFACTURER

Rega Research Ltd.
Essex, England
www.rega.co.uk

US DISTRIBUTOR

The Sound Organisation

159 Leslie Street
Dallas, TX 75207
972-234-0182
www.soundorg.com

PERIPHERALS

Preamplifiers: Conrad Johnson ACT2/Series 2, Aurum Acoustics Integris CDP

Phono Stages: Aesthetix Rhea, BAT VK-10 SE, ModWright 9.0SWLP, ASR Basis Exclusive

Additional Phono

Cartridges: Shelter 90x, Sumiko Celebration, Dynavector 17D3

Power Amplifiers: Conrad Johnson Premier 350, Nagra PSA, McIntosh MC275

Speakers: Martin Logan Vantage, Tetra 506 Custom, Penaudio Serenade, ACI Sapphire XL w/REL B2 subwoofer

Interconnects: Tara Labs The One, Cardas Golden Reference

Speaker Cables: Tetra Artet, Cardas Golden Reference

Power Cords: Essential Sound Products The Essence Reference, Running Springs Mongoose

Power Conditioning: Running Springs Jaco, Haley, Duke

Vibration Control: Finite Elemente Pagode Signature, Cereballs, Cerepucs

Room Treatments: Sonex Classic, GIK Panels, GIK Bass Traps



The Emotive Audio Circa:

SIMPLICITY RULES!

— Joe Nino-Hernes



As audiophiles, we often spend a lot of time tweaking our systems so that we can squeeze out all of the performance that we paid for and this is especially true in the world of analog playback. Thankfully, I enjoy doing this stuff. While my buddies hit the bar on a Friday night, I am usually at home playing with my gear. In the world of analog there are just so many variables, all of which can have a dramatic effect upon the sound. Without even touching the electronics, you can endlessly tweak tracking force, anti-skate, VTA, speed etc., etc. However, this is all meaningless without the right electronics in place first.



Because of the low level signal from a phono cartridge, the phono stage is a huge part of your system and can contain many variables to contend with. You could spend a lifetime dialing in the perfect loading for your cartridge. Let's not even talk about VTA!

It is very refreshing when a simple phono stage with excellent performance comes along. The Emotive Audio Circa is just that, a simple high gain solid state moving coil phono stage that sounds great! The Circa is a two box unit, one box for the power supply and one for the actual amplification stage and only one switch, a power switch.

**Setup couldn't be easier,
set it down, plug it in and start
spinning your favorite records.**

The Circa comes from the factory with an input load of 100 ohms, which should work very well with the majority of moving coil cartridges at your disposal. While my Circa came from the factory set at 100 ohms, it can be ordered with any value you choose, or sent back to the factory at a later date to be changed for a nominal charge according to Fred Volz, owner of Emotive Audio.

It feels and looks like a serious piece of equipment. It looks great alongside any linestage with its silver brushed aluminum panels, black case and blue power LED. It has unbalanced RCA inputs and outputs. It comes with a special umbilical cord to connect the power supply to the actual pre-amp. This also allows you to get the power supply somewhat away from the electronics in the preamp itself. I installed the Circa in my main system which consists of a Micro Seiki BL-51 turntable and SME III arm, Benz Micro Glider Cartridge and ModWright SWL 9.0SE linestage. With a retail price of \$2,200, it was right at home in my system.
(continued)

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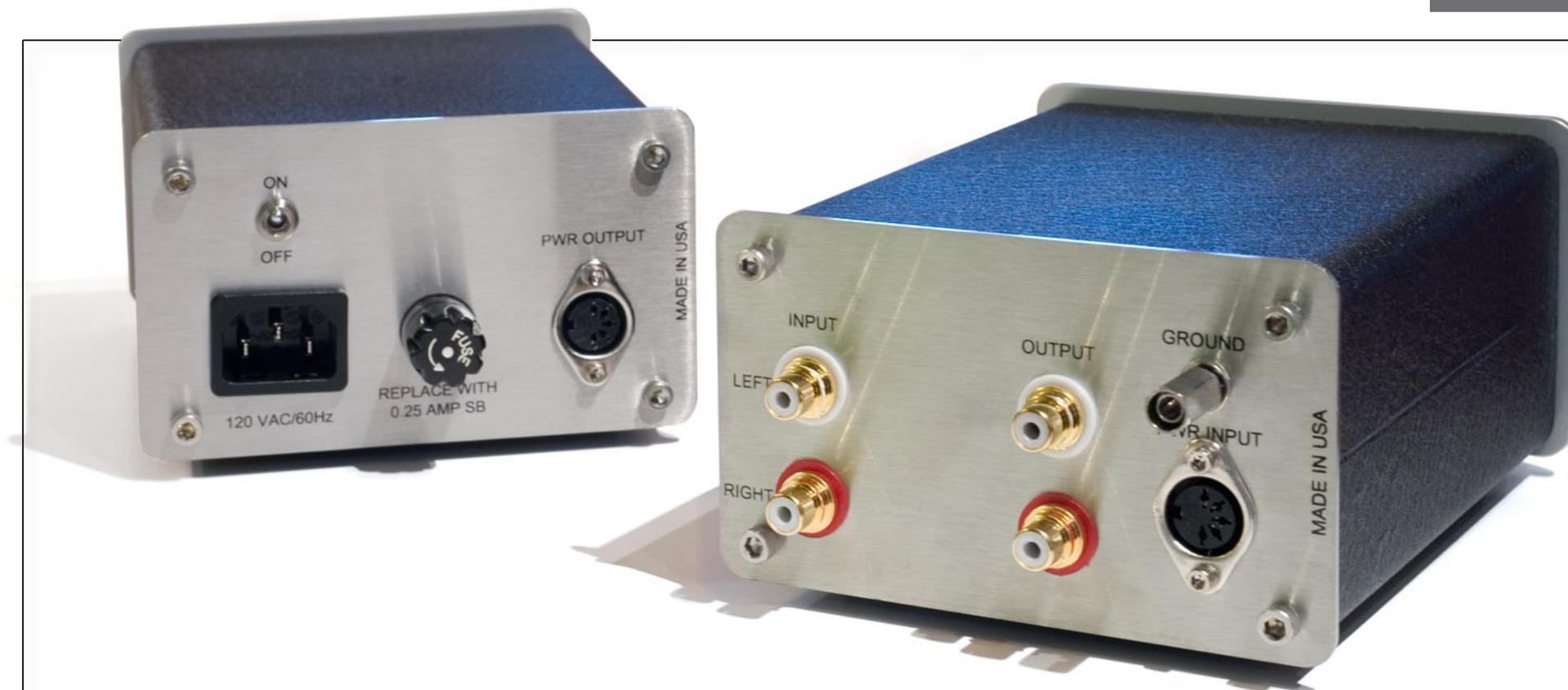
I found the sound very pleasing with my Benz Micro Glider. Since the Circa is solid state, it is very quiet. It uses Teflon film and foil capacitors and high quality carbon resistors. The sound is very musical and involving. I found it to be a little on the warm side, which I like very much. As I received the Circa from our publisher where it spent a fair amount of time for photos and break in, I did not have to wait for the Teflon capacitors to break in!

A Versatile Player Indeed

I put on George Benson – **Big Boss Band** and it sounded full and punchy. George's vocals were warm and free of grain. Because I am the curious type, after a few hours of listening I swapped out the stock power cord for a Clarity Cable White Lightning. This made a big difference.

The soundstage opened up considerably and the sound became more detailed.

I threw on Steve Hoffman's new reissue of Joni Mitchell – **Blue**. Her vocals had a hauntingly realistic sound, like she was in the room with me. If you don't have this record yet, I highly recommend it. If you like Joni Mitchell, you will be in for a real treat! Since I was in the female vocal mood, I decided to break out my brand new Mobile Fidelity 45 RPM copy of Patricia Barber – **Café Blue**. I already had the MOFI CD, and it is excellent but this 45 RPM issue is in another league! The vinyl has incredible dynamic range with deep low frequencies and a very detailed extended top end. The Circa really shined with this recording.
(continued)



Pat's vocals sat right in the center, and were not harsh or grainy. There is nothing I hate more than grainy midrange! The Circa has a smooth mid-range that is not at all cloudy. Piano sounded exceptionally good. The piano is rather difficult to record and reproduce due to its harmonic complexity. The Circa reproduced the piano with exceptional clarity. Good piano recordings never sounded artificial or bright, but rich and full like the instrument that it is. Again, musicality is the key with the Circa.

I dug out my copy of **Ella Fitzgerald Sings the Cole Porter Songbook** (Speakers Corner reissue) lit up a cigarette and let the music carry me away. Her voice is so controlled, with a lot of texture and dynamics. Everything in the recording was well defined, but never bright or over emphasized. During the quiet sections, I could hear tape hiss! That's a good thing, showing how well the Circa reveals every-

After every listening session, I found myself surrounded by stacks of records that I had just played, and stacks that I wanted to hear with the Circa.

thing. This record is mono, but you still feel an incredible sense of space around the musicians. Those engineers really knew what they were doing, and those old recording studios had fantastic acoustics!

The Circa also has excellent low-end response. Bass is powerful and extended yet not out of control. I threw on The Police – **Synchronicity**, and it really rocked! There is a lot going on down low in those 80s rock mixes, and the Circa served it up effortlessly without being muddy. Thanks to the large external power supply the Circa never runs out of gas, allowing the music to flow without restriction.

I enjoy classical music very much, and the Circa really does a nice job of reproducing the full dynamic range of the orchestra. One of my favorite test records for dynamic range is **Dvorak: Symphony No. 5 From The New World** (Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Istvan

Kertesz). Again, I was most impressed with how well the Circa reproduced the softest passages of this recording. Sometimes quiet passages get lost in background noise, or they just lack texture. The Circa allowed me to hear all of the textures and dynamics that were going on in this piece of music, from the softest sound to the loudest. After having the Circa in my system for a couple of weeks, my digital front end began to collect some dust! I played records that I forgot I owned! After every listening session, I found myself surrounded by stacks of records that I had just played, and stacks that I wanted to hear with the Circa. When you find a piece of gear that you really like, you want to hear everything through it. I certainly had a lot of fun with this one!

I'm Still Firmly in the Analog Camp

Even in today's digital world, there is nothing more enjoyable to me than playing records. I think that analog reproduction still has an edge over digital. *(continued)*

audience

...experience the fascination



"The Audience Au24 and powerChord cables share a family resemblance—they balance tonality extremely well, have superb detail (again, in balance; neither too much nor too little of it), and they're smooth. Not colored-smooth, but just-right-smooth."

OnHiFi.com - Wes Phillips - April '04



"The Adept Response made a phenomenal difference in my system. Fundamentally, it improved the clarity of recordings by eliminating a previously undetected lack of definition, without introducing any brightness or most importantly any coloration. That is worth repeating. I did not hear any coloration from the Adept Response or any obscuring of the rhythm of the music. The Adept Response just made every recording I listened to more natural and in turn more musically engaging." **The Absolute Sound - Max Shepherd - June '06**

There is nothing that captures the sense of space and realism like analog. There is also so much music out there on vinyl that can be had for just a few dollars. Also with the abundance of new audiophile reissues, having a good analog front end can be quite rewarding both musically and sonically.

Setting up a good analog playback system can be a challenge, but at the same time, very rewarding. Thanks to its plug and play nature, the Circa makes this a bit easier to enjoy vinyl. You will still have to agonize over VTA though!

I felt the performance was definitely on par with other things I've heard at this price point, but I would like to see adjustable loading and gain for 2200 bucks. It was not a deal breaker for me, but it might be for some of you. For me, the natural, dynamic sound more than made up for the lack of adjustability. I don't flip cartridges much anyway!

If you want a taste of the really good stuff, the Emotive Audio Circa is an excellent place to start.

It serves up great dynamics, musical tonality and ease of use all in one superbly built preamp that couldn't be easier to use. Keep an eye on Emotive Audio for the new Power Two upgrade that will give the Circa a full rechargeable battery powered supply that Fred assured me takes this preamp to the next level, eliminating the issues associated with AC power. As soon we get one in for review, we will give you an update. ●



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PERIPHERALS

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Digital Source Theta Data Universal II Transport, Ultech HDCD-10 DAC

Preamplifier ModWright SWL-9.0SE Linestage, McIntosh C220

Power Amplifier Channel Islands D-200 Monoblocks, Eico HF-89 Power Amp

Speakers Harbeth HL-P3ES-2 Loudspeakers, AR-3 Loudspeakers

Cables AudioQuest Diamondback and King Cobra Interconnects, Kimber Hero Interconnects, Kimber Tonik Interconnects, Kimber 8TC Speaker Cable, Clarity Cable Power Cables

The Canton 807 DC Speakers

— Jeff Dorgay

Canton has been making speakers in Germany since 1972. All through the '80s and early '90s they were very popular in the US. For a while things were quiet on the US front for Canton, but the last few years they are back full steam ahead in our market.



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The speakers you see here, the 807DC, are floorstanding speakers that are 8.7" wide, 12.2" deep and 39" tall. While my test pair came in silver lacquer, they are also available in a high gloss silver, as well as a maple or cherry veneer. As cool and high tech as the silver is, I prefer the wood, but it is very nice that Canton offers a few choices to match your décor. A pair of 807DCs have an MSRP of \$3500.

They come bi-wireable with a set of jumpers in case you do not have speaker cables to support this operation. I chose to bi-wire them for the duration of the review with DH Labs Q-10 speaker cable, which proved to be an excellent match for these speakers.

The 807DC features a pair of 7" aluminum woofers and a 1" aluminum-manganese dome tweeter in a 2 ½ way configuration with a port in front. They have an efficiency rating of 88db (1w/1meter) and have a power rating of 200 watts maximum.

A cool feature to note is that Canton makes all of their own drivers, which allows them to optimize them specifically for whatever application they have in mind.

If you are wanting a more in-depth technical explanation, go to the Canton website where you can find a full white paper on their recent tweeter (and other speaker) designs. *(continued)*

Setup

Once out of the box, these speakers were very easy to position, only being about 50 pounds each. I used them in a few different configurations and found them very easy to set up. The 807DC is not terribly fussy about where you put it in the room, but I ended up about three feet out in my 16 x 24 foot room (short wall placement) and about nine feet apart,

Not only were these speakers very enjoyable, but not what I expected from a speaker system with metal domed tweeters.

with a little bit of toe in. This gave the best overall tonal balance with the smoothest bass response. Depending on your system and taste, you can also put them about six feet out in the room, closer together for more of a 'mini-monitor with bass' voicing.

The 807DCs spent almost all of their time in my main reference system with the ACT2 and Premier 350, so I was sure to have plenty of power on tap. I also briefly substituted the Manley 250s to get a perspective on what they would do with tubes. Once my favorite position was established, the speakers were spiked and no rake angle was applied.

More Than One Surprise

Not only were these speakers very enjoyable, but not what I expected from a speaker system with metal domed tweeters. I mean that in a very good way, as this configuration usually is a bit harsh in the upper registers, but not with the 807s. If anything, these speakers were a touch on the laid back side. I have a bit of an affectation for aluminum woofers, digging the speed and tonality of this type of drivers, but again the 807s were a little bit of a surprise again. While the bass was very nice and taut, with the cleanliness that I'm used to with an aluminum cone, but there was also just a slight bump in the lower mid/upper bass that gave the 807s a slightly warm feel. *(continued)*

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I do this by offering honest, knowledgeable service tuned to your specific needs. Your goals determine our careful recommendations, not the equipment occupying space on the warehouse floor. — Galen Carol

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Jolida, Basis, Sim Audio, Quad,
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Taking a peek at the underside of the speakers revealed the shock absorbing isolation base built into the 807s. There are a group of tiny silicon spheres between the bottom of the base and the speaker. I'm sure this is what helps these speakers achieve the high degree of bass detail that they possess.

Talking to the people at Canton, they mentioned that their recent speakers are much more of an evolutionary change for them, and that the 807 is representative of what you can expect from other speakers in the Canton family. Again, this is one of the main benefits of designing your own drivers!

I am very impressed that Canton is so much of an engineering based company.

Granted, the 807s are not as warm and laid back as say a pair of Vandersteens, but still very musical indeed, all around very pleasant to listen to!! Great full range sound with just a touch of warmth. While my reference Tetras are just a bit forward in their presentation, these offer up the music a few rows back from what I am normally used to. *(continued)*

I didn't have to spend much time at all listening until these speakers settled in and got down to business. I was playing a lot of different things, but for some odd reason I just got in a Beatles groove. Digging out my Parlophone blue box set (I know, it's only stereo and I'm not worthy, blah blah) I listened to most of my favorite Beatles albums and was very impressed at how much bass detail the 807s were able to reveal. Often times at this price point speakers have a fairly extended bass response, but lack tonality and texture.

The Canton 807s definitely are not a one-note bass speaker, another pleasant surprise!

The other big surprise that awaited me as these speakers broke in was how wide of a stereo image they would float between the speakers. The image went way beyond the edges of the speaker cabinets, which was a lot of fun to

I ran the gamut of my music collection and can safely say that there is no genre of music that I would not use the 807s with.

listen to with recordings that were very spacious. Like the self-titled DVD-a from **Toy Matinee**; right away from the first cut, I knew these speakers had a lot of pace that I really enjoyed. Yet another great surprise!

The sound got a bit mellower with the Manleys in place and I also used the VAS Citation monoblocks to put them in more of a system in keeping with their price point. The more time I spent listening, there was still just a touch of that metal dome sound. Granted, it was managed very well, but I would say that if your system is on the dry to bright side of neutral, these might not be your flavor. I really preferred them with tubes as it took that last little bit of edge off the presentation. (As I would with just about every other speaker with a metal dome, no demerits for Canton here.) However, one mans tiny bit bright is that last bit of detail that makes another man jump for joy. Personally, I always tend to err a bit on the side of warmth, so you know where my bias is.

I ran the gamut of my music collection and can safely say that there is no genre of music that I would not use the 807s with. Thanks to their full range abilities, they can play it all with relative ease. *(continued)*



The only nit I have to pick with the 807 is that while they play well at low to moderately loud levels, they tend to compress just a bit if you really crank them up. Again, for most people listening at even a bit beyond reasonable levels you should be fine as long as your amplifier has the headroom. But if you really like it loud, the 807 might not be for you. I'm guessing that for about 95% of the crowd, they will be just fine.

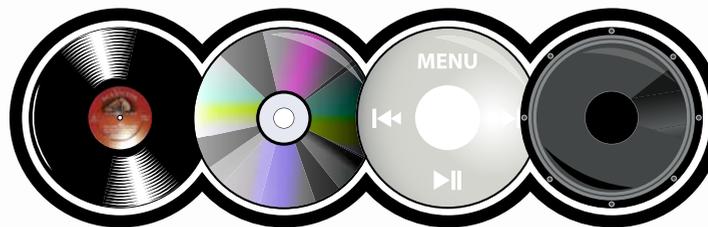
And The Vote Is

Taking everything into consideration, the Canton 807DC is definitely a strong contender in the \$3500 speaker category. Its strengths are many; wide soundstaging, extended frequency response, great tonality and they are very user friendly. Not to mention good looking in an understated, modern way. Its weaknesses are very few; a slight limitation on dynamics and just a slight touch of that metal tweeter sound, which might be right up your alley.

But make no mistake, all speakers require you to compromise and at this price, you are still making a lot of compromises. The Canton 807DGs ask you to make very few. ●



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PERIPHERALS

Analog Source: SME 10 Turntable w/SME V Arm, Sumiko Celebration Cartridge and Aesthetix Rhea Phono Preamp with Great Northern Sound Upgrades.

Digital Sources: Meridian 808, Wadia 581, Rega Jupiter

Power Amplifiers: Conrad-Johnson Premier 350, VAS Citation Monoblocks, Manley 250 Monoblocks

Integrated Amplifier: Valve Audio Predator

Interconnects: Cardas Neutral Reference, Tetra Artet, Tara Labs The One

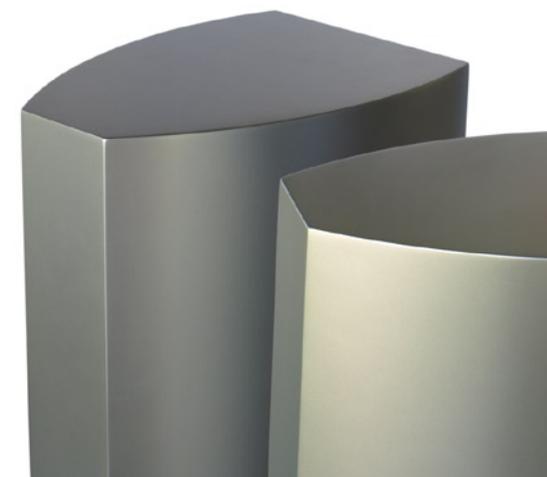
Speaker Cables: DH Labs Q-14, Bi-wired

Power Conditioning: Running Springs Jaco and Duke

Power Cords: Essential Sound Products, The Essence "Reference"

Vibration Control: Finite Element Pagode Signature Racks with Cerepucs and Cereballs

Room Treatments: GIK Panels and Bass Traps





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The MoFi 3.5C

— Jeff Dorgay

These days in just about every form of motorsport you see carbon fiber bits. A casual stroll through the showroom of your local BMW dealer reveals the very sexy M6 with a complete carbon fiber roof! The benefits of carbon fiber are numerous; but mainly it is stronger and lighter than steel and can be molded in to just about any shape you can think of. And it looks really cool too! Somehow just about anything looks much more high performance if it's made out of carbon fiber.



The shape we have here is a phono cartridge and you have to admit that the new 3.5C from Mobile Fidelity is a pretty attractive piece of equipment indeed. Priced at \$3500, it is strongly in the upper range of phono cartridges, but certainly not as spendy as some of the offerings from Koetsu and the like.

But beauty without performance is just a waste of talent and carbon fiber. Letting the cat out of the bag, I can tell you the MoFi 3.5C is neither, matter of fact it's a pretty fantastic cartridge!

The presentation is extremely nice too, and I really enjoyed the exquisite box that it came packaged in. I know there are some that will get grumpy about the box, but the people who make cartridges at this level really consider them works of art (to which I wholeheartedly agree) and like to present them as such.

People who make cartridges at this level really consider them works of art and like to present them as such.

Normally when I read all the hoo hah in the sales literature about how amazing a cartridge is, I just harrumph to myself and wait for another disappointment. I have to admit I was smitten by the carbon fiber body enough to give it a try and knowing that this cartridge was made for MoFi by Mr. Haruo Takeda of Myabi Labs sealed the deal! Just in case you aren't familiar with Myabi, they have made some legendary cartridges that have received very high praise from some of the top people in the industry and a lot of happy music lovers!

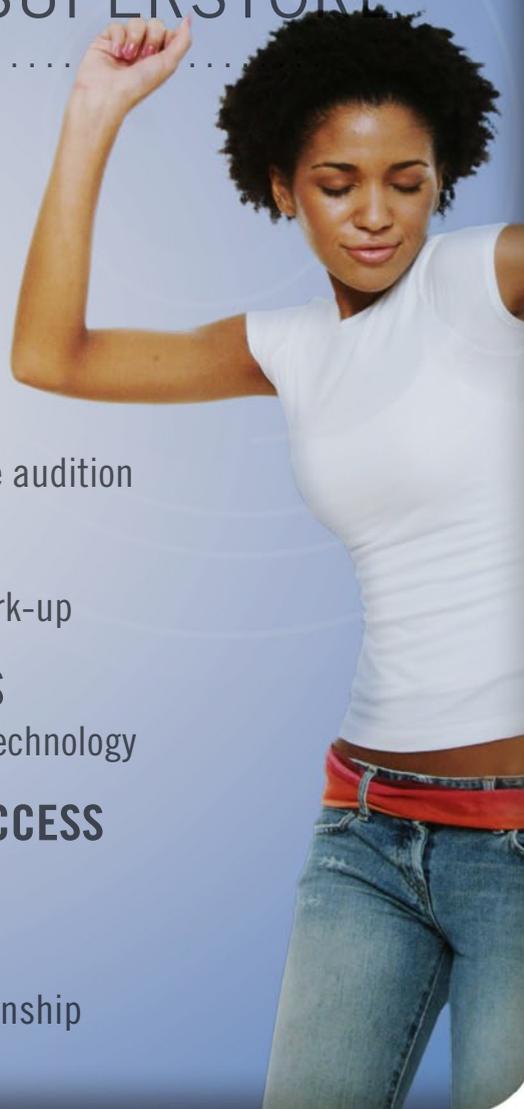
Now that my analog front end was dialed in to my satisfaction, I was ready for the 3.5C. A few of my good friends that are really Jedi Masters of Analog warned me that this cartridge would have to be set up just right to take full advantage of its capabilities. Fortunately, Dan Babineau just happened to be visiting the TONE studio at the beginning of this review, so I put the good doctor to use and had him check my work. *(continued)*

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He harrumphed a bit, made a couple of tiny adjustments and we were sailing!

Right out of the box, this one sounds a little bit stiff, but after a couple hundred hours it comes around rather nicely, with the mids really opening up and a much greater sense of air from top to bottom. A few friends of mine that have had other cartridges by Myabi tell me that they take quite a while to completely break in, so have a little patience with this one, I guarantee it will be worth it! On one level, the 3.5C reminds me of when I first brought home my 2nd Rethm speakers with the Lowther drivers. After about two weeks of continuous listening, they finally opened up and became much more musical. Just hang in there and you will be rewarded.

A Clean Outlook on the Music

If you've ever caught a nasty rock on the freeway and had to have your windshield replaced, do you remember how clear everything looked when the glass guy was done and you got back behind the wheel?

Up until that point, everything seemed fine and you didn't really notice how all the particulates in the air had been slowly sand-blasting your windshield, slightly dulling your view. But the day you got that new glass installed, WOW! Everything just had that reach out and touch it feeling, as if there were no glass at all between you and the outside world. The sheer clarity that this cartridge offers kept me going back to a lot of my old favorite records to see what surprises were in store! *(continued)*

That's what the MoFi 3.5C does, and it does a damn good job at it!

This is definitely a low output moving coil with only .25mv on tap, so if your MC phono stage is not capable of at least 55-60db of gain, you may have some other shopping to do. My ASR Basis Exclusive can easily accommodate this and is so quiet; the match with the 3.5C is very seductive. The music does just come up out of the blackness and fill the room.

Oddly enough, once I had a couple weeks under my belt with the 3.5C and I sat down to listen critically, the first record

I plopped on the platter of my SME 10 was not an amazing audiophile pressing, but the first Cheap Trick album. I could hear the spring in the reverb used on Rick Neilson's

lead guitar clearly in the decay. I've been listening to this record for thirty years and that little bit of nuance has never come through! Moving to a bit more contemporary music, one of

my favorites of the year 2002, was Aimee Mann's **Lost in Space** and the MoFi LP is outstanding. Featuring a lot of very cool little environmental sounds in the mix, when she sings the chorus to *High on Sunday 51*,

This cartridge really delivers the goods with an extraordinary balance of extension AND texture, without sounding overdamped.

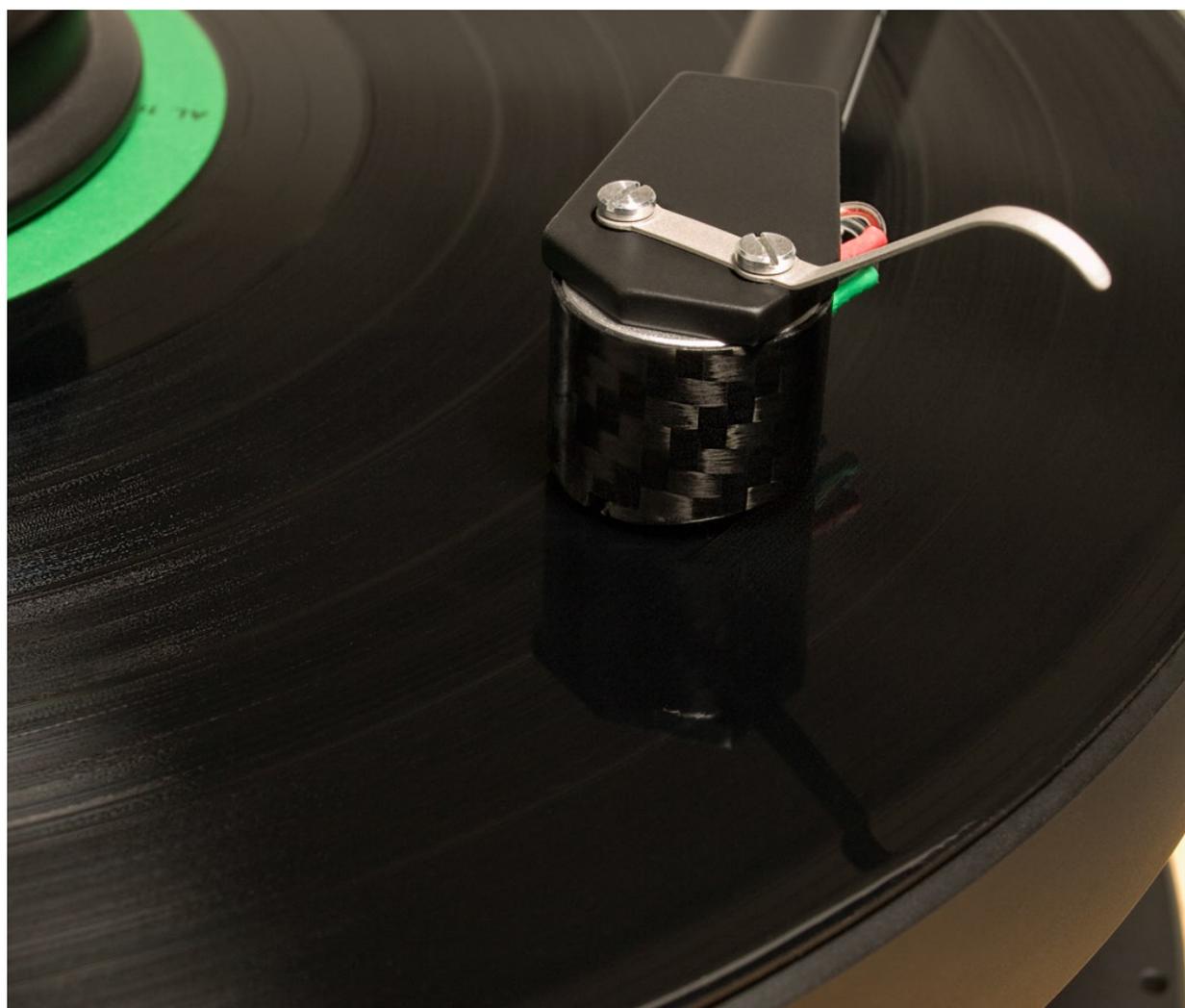
you can clearly hear a male backing vocal just slightly behind her, where in the past (and on CD...) it just sounded like they were fattening up the vocal track.

Here's a wacky one from the obscure bin: **Robert Fripp and the League of Crafty Guitarists, Live!** Talk about layer upon layer of detail and texture! This is one of my favorites because it has quite a few acoustic guitars all playing at once in sort of an a cappella fashion. Which lead me to Todd Rundgren's appropriately titled **A Cappella**. Listen to *Johnee Jingo* and dig all those layers!

In the world of photography, we are always striving to get detail in the extremes of the frequency response curve, just like in audio. If you look closely at the black and white prints of someone new to the craft, everything just seems to go from pretty black right to black and there is usually no highlight detail either. (And trust me, after 35 years of being a professional photographer, I'm still not one of the greats by any means, but I've observed the masters enough that I can recognize greatness when I see it...) Then viewing prints from master photographers, the images just leap off the print and almost appear three-dimensional. There is so much texture in the highlights and shadows that the more you pay attention, you just keep seeing more information there. This is another thing the MoFi 3.5C does a fantastic job at.

But all of this resolution and nuance wouldn't be that much of a big deal if the 3.5C didn't deliver stellar power, weight and control in the lower registers. No matter what kind of music you favor; large scale orchestral, rock, funk or even hip-hop this cartridge really delivers the goods with an extraordinary balance of extension AND texture, without sounding overdamped.

What the 3.5C won't do is romanticize your clunkers. Discs recorded with a lot of compression, or other sonic warts will be revealed. *(continued)*



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Even on my worst records though, I was still getting a big dose of textural information that I didn't hear before. The good news is that fantastic recordings really shine, and for me, that's what this part of the equation is all about.

The MoFi 3.5C is all about detail and nuance, yet it doesn't go too far and become sterile. My guess is if you want the lush performance of a Koetsu (or something else in that vein), this may not be what you are looking for.

A Stellar Performer In The End

While I am not a believer in giant killers, I do want to get as close to the experience offered by the 100 thousand dollar tables and ten thousand dollar cartridges at a more reasonable level.

This is what has had me doing backflips over the 3.5C. I've heard a few of the super duper cartridges and they are quite good. I'm not one of those audiophiles to snipe about stuff I can't afford, telling you that it's really not that great after all, it is. But I highly doubt I'll own a five-figure phono cartridge in this life.

However, in my system I think I can live happily ever after with the MoFi 3.5C. With a good table and first class supporting electronics, this one will give you a huge helping of what the guys at the top of the mountain are enjoying for a more palatable sum. Even though my Meridian 808 offers up some of the best digital playback I've ever heard, once I put a record on the SME with this cartridge, I'm taken to another world entirely. This is the magic of the analog format at its finest!

You will be seeing the MoFi 3.5C on my tonearm for a long time to come! ●

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THE MARTIN LOGAN VANTAGE

High Performance Panels

— Jeff Dorgay



admit it, I love panel speakers. And I've had my share, Magnepans, Acoustats, Quads.

The Eminent Technology speakers – had em. Apogeess – still got a pair.

No matter what it is that you enjoy and perhaps collect, you have all had one of those THING THAT GOT AWAY experiences. For whatever reason, you had this cool car or hunting knife that you decided to get rid of figuring you could always get another one. But you found out later that you couldn't and now you are reduced to telling stories about that legendary thing you no longer have and how everything in today's world is pale in comparison.



Sound familiar? I've got one of those stories (well I have a few of them, but I won't bore you with them here) and it is about the Martin Logan CLS. To make a long story very short, I really loved those speakers. They did everything I wanted a pair of speakers to do and they worked with my system of the day exceptionally well.

But then I sold them to pursue another flavor of the audio cocktail and guess what? They stopped making them! Almost immediately the CLS disappeared from the marketplace and even today it is near impossible to find an exceptional used pair.

The Martin Logan Aerius was another great speaker on my journey, but they never worked well in my room. I sold them to a good friend who had the perfect room and they were awesome at his house! It was like when you bump into your old girlfriend at the grocery store and she tells you that your best friend is a much better guy to hang out with than you ever were. At least the speakers went to a good home.

A Great Way to Start the Day

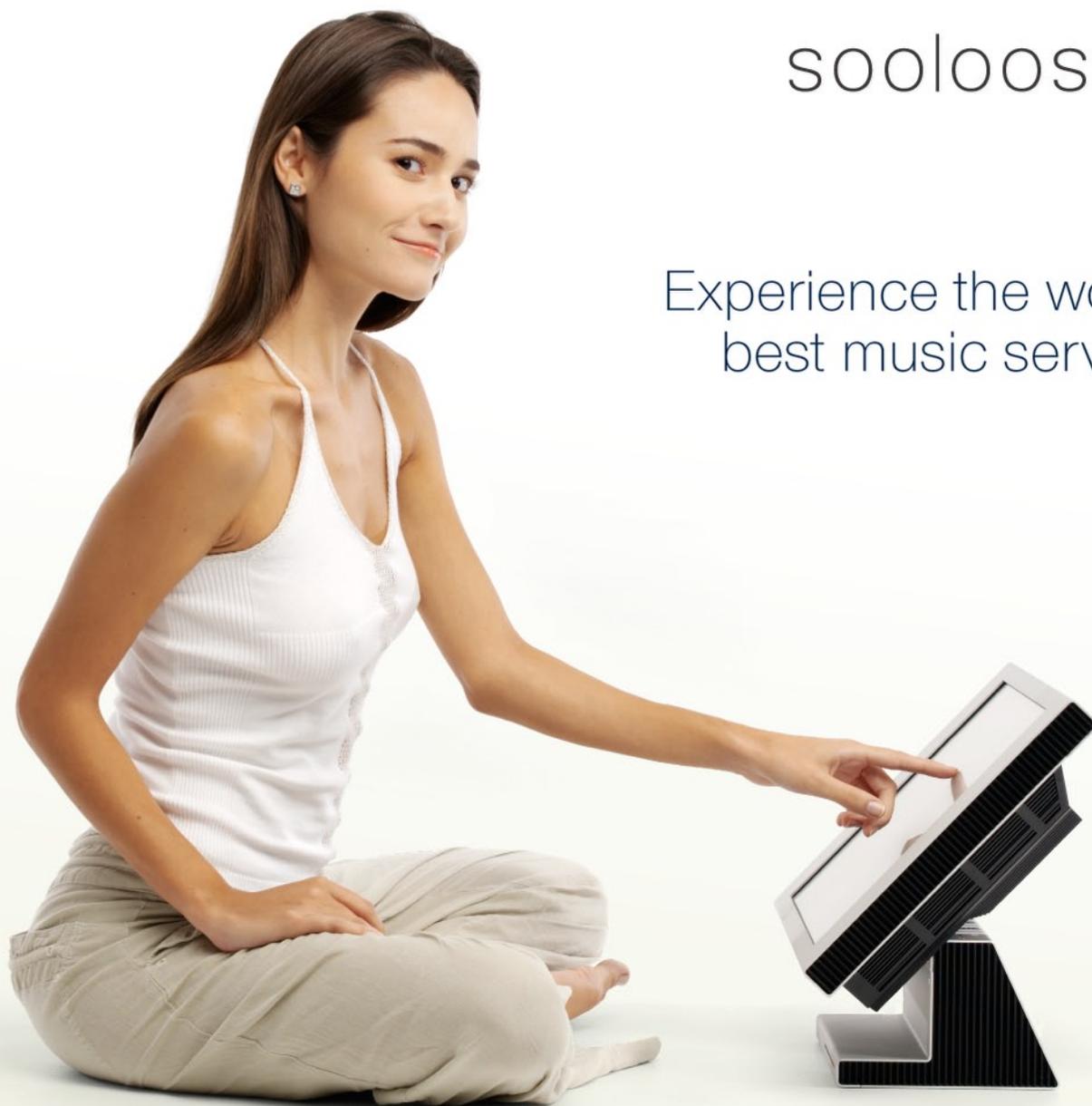
So you can imagine how excited I was when the first phone call of my day was from Martin Logan asking, 'How would you like to review the Vantage?' Hell yeah! Martin Logan has grown a bit since the Aerius days, and their new products are better than ever.

The Vantage takes advantage of M-L's fourth generation of curved electrostatic panel technology. One of the things you really need to understand about Martin Logan is that while they are a company full of music lovers, they are also driven by engineering and design, so they are always subtly improving the product. Much like my favorite automobile, the Porsche 911, the current M-L speakers bear plenty of resemblance to their earlier models, however under close scrutiny you can see the changes.

The ESL panel is still curved, but the frame is much more solid. The panel is perforated to a higher degree so more sound gets out, etc. etc. Just like Porsche; engineering excellence and steady evolution of the breed results in a product that while at first seemed controversial (putting the engine in the rear, using an electrostatic panel to make sound) now is one of the best available. New M-L owners will be intrigued and legacy customers will feel right at home and enjoy the nuances of the latest design. *(continued)*

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The Vantage features an 8" aluminum cone woofer that is internally powered, offering an additional 9hz of bass extension and an extra 2db of sensitivity over the non powered Vista. The 200-watt woofer amplifier also gives you the flexibility of a +/- 10db adjustment at 35hz. A pair of these will set you back \$5000.

Initial Setup

The Vantages went right into my reference system and worked surprisingly well right where my Tetras had been in the room; about 40" out from the back wall and about seven feet from the side walls. However the ultimate spot ended up being another six inches from the back walls and a bit more toe-in than I've been used to.

Harvey Gilbert, the local Martin Logan representative stopped by our place to double check my setup and added that extra bit of toe-in. Not only did it take the presentation to another level, he nailed it on the first go! We went back and forth just a little bit to be sure, but his adjustment couldn't have been more perfect. This underscores the fact that if you spend about 10 minutes extra with the Vantage, will get that last drop of perfection; it's well worth the small effort.

We listened to about eight or nine more selections and he said,

'You've got some magic going on here, let's go get lunch!' My kind of guy.

Another nice touch with the Vantage that you will love or hate are the binding posts. *(continued)*

Not the big he-man binding posts I've seen on some other speakers, but much more user friendly with big plastic knobs that you will not need a socket wrench to tighten down (I'm in the love 'em camp). If you do not have a bi-wired run of speaker cable, you can use the supplied jumpers. For the duration of this review, I used an 8-foot run of bi-wired Tetra Artet speaker cable, which proved to be a perfect match.

Just as M-L advised, these speakers only required about three days (72 hours) of non-stop play, which was a snap. Right out of the box, they will sound a bit rolled off on the high end, so don't be alarmed. As a few days passed, I could easily hear the veil evaporate and get down to some serious listening.

The Sound

Again, I have to remind you that I am biased in favor of the panel sound. I really like the transparent, walk-through feeling of a good panel speaker and the Vantage is by far my favorite flavor of this kind of sound. So, I'll come clean and tell you what these speakers won't do right away. They will not play at the ultimate brain damage level a top shelf cone speaker will. My reference Tetras will play Metallica at ear splitting levels and not break a sweat, so if you are a mega head-banger, the Vantage may not be the speaker for you. However, I do feel that the Vantage would play this kind of music much louder than any previous offering from M-L (or any of the other panels for that matter), so if you can deal with Pantera at slightly less than concert levels, I think you could be very happy indeed.

Because that panel needs to move some air to make sound, the Vantage needs to be turned up a notch or two beyond what you might play a set of cone speakers at low levels. They definitely reach a point (and it is not ultimately that loud) where you can really hear them start to work with the room. At extremely low levels, they sound a little bit flat, but that's the nature of ANY panel speaker.

That's it. The rest is all good, really good.

I listen to a lot of speakers in the course of a year. Photographing everything that appears in the magazine, I make sure to listen to everything before it gets sent off to the other reviewers on the staff. *(continued)*



Thinking outside the box...



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I've had the chance to listen to a lot of very nice things in the last three years and it hasn't made me jaded but it has made me discerning.

First and foremost, when I'm listening to music I'll happily flush everything else down the drain for musicality.

I love detail, resolution, imaging, weight, all of that cool audiophile stuff, but in the end can I drift off while listening to music and just forget about the gear and have a great time?

That's what I want most of all and the Vantage offers up a huge helping of this kind of experience.

Skeptical Roy just happened to drop by once everything was broken in to give his two cents worth. Right away he reminded me that panel speakers can't really rock out. He's a big SRV fan, so I dropped on that audio show favorite, *Tin Pan Alley*. We don't use the phrase jaw dropping at this magazine, but let's just say the boy was somewhat astonished. 'These are pretty amazing speakers for ten grand. I've never heard panels sound this good!'

When I told him that these were just the \$5000 model, he was a bit more surprised. We spent about another two hours listening to his favorite tunes and had so much fun, we forgot about lunch. And for a foodboy like me, that's a big deal indeed. It went through the whole range, from female vocals to some new classical recordings I had just picked up on open reel tape.

Martin-Logan has raised the bar considerably in a number of areas: obviously, much more dynamic range. *(continued)*

Now you can play rock or big orchestral music at a very high level and not be disappointed. My old M-L's did a great job up to that certain point and then they started to compress. That point has been raised so high that now you will probably damage your ears if you have to go there often.

Thanks to the curved surface, the M-L speakers have always done a much better job of throwing a wide soundstage than their flat panel competitors, but the Vantage is exponentially better. When listening to the Mercury box set of the Russian Recordings on Classic Records, the soundstage went all the way to the side walls in my room, which is about seven feet beyond the speaker boundaries. The current speaker also has a bigger sweet spot than past designs, making this a two person on the couch speaker now. I even noticed when friends were over in the good seat; the sound was pretty good off to the sides. But the best seat with the Vantage is still front and center.

Compatibility Is Always An Issue

Early M-L hybrids did a very good job at mating a cone woofer with an ESL panel, but any of you that have tried using subwoofers with your favorite panel of choice have probably had the same experience I have. It's really tough to get that seamless blend where you feel like it's all integrating well enough that you don't notice it. As I said, the earlier M-L hybrids were close, but if you had been fortunate enough to experience the CLS, it wasn't there because they had no woofer and crossover!

The Vantage takes advantage of about 15 more years of M-L development and does a fantastic job with integration. Bass response is powerful, articulate and fast. Whether listening to an acoustic, electric or synthesized bass, it was always easy to hear the texture of the bass as well as the weight. 34hz is a lot lower than most people realize; unless you are playing a ton of hip-hop or electronic music, the Vantage should suffice. *(continued)*



You can always add a M-L subwoofer or step up to the Summits if you need that extra bit... However, it's the midrange magic and high-end transparency that really are the defining characteristic of the Vantage.

In the End, Subtlety Won the Day

But what kept me on the couch for hours on end was really the uncanny ability of these speakers to offer up a lot of nuance without being harsh. Whether listening to vinyl or CD, these speakers had such a natural quality about them, I just didn't want to stop listening. The Vantages always got out of the way and let the music come through, an uncanny feat for a \$5000 pair of speakers.

No matter what I was listening to, I wasn't doing the normal audiophile thing; I just kept thinking about what record I was going to put on next and that's what great gear is supposed to do- make you think about music!

Granted, they had an unfair advantage because they had been playing through a bit better set of electronics than would probably be normal for speakers in this price range, but they were always up to the task.

To get a better idea of how the Vantage would do in a more 'real world' situation, I spent some time with the reference gear out of the way and just used the Valve Audio Predator amplifier and the new Rega Jupiter CD player. While not at the level of my main system, this would be my choice if I were putting a system together for about \$12k. I also gave them a try with tube electronics to make sure that they would work well in that arena. Tube lovers rest assured, these speakers are a fine match with tubed gear and were very dreamy indeed with the Manley 250 monoblocks.

What impressed me about these speakers was that you could make them the cornerstone of a reasonably priced system and be very happy, yet you would have to spend a lot more money before you outgrow them. Right now they are doing a great job in a system worth close to 100k and holding their own quite nicely. I've yet to hear anything else at this price point that can. ●

The Martin Logan Vantage

MSRP: \$4995 per pair

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Analog Sources SME10 Turntable w/SME V tonearm and MoFi 3.5C cartridge, AVID Volvere w/SME iv.Vi tonearm and Shelter 90x Cartridge, Oracle Delphi V w/SME 309 Tonearm and Dynavector 17D3 Cartridge

Digital Sources Meridian 808, Wadia 581, Sooloos Music Server

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TONEA 115 NO.10 2007



Welcome Back Old Friend

THE ORACLE DELPHI V

— Jeff Dorgay

I still remember the day well. It was the summer of 1983 and I got a phone call at work from my local hifi pusher. “It’s like brand new, an Oracle. We just took it in trade and if you can get down here before the end of the day, I’ll let you have it for what we paid for it!”

You can guess who got a sudden case of the flu at lunch. I was out of there and headed off to get my hands on an Oracle of my very own! I cleaned out my checking account, but I finally had a great turntable to go along with

What the Oracle offered was a scientific approach to extracting the information from the groove of a record that up until then had not been taken, at least not to this level.

the rest of my system. (Conrad-Johnson PV-2a, Threshold 4000A and a pair of Acoustat 2s.) Back then, the Oracle had only been out a short while in my neck of the woods and it was at the top of everyone's

list for establishing a new standard in LP playback all over the world.

What the Oracle offered was a scientific approach to extracting the information from the groove of a record that up until then had not been taken, at least not to this level.

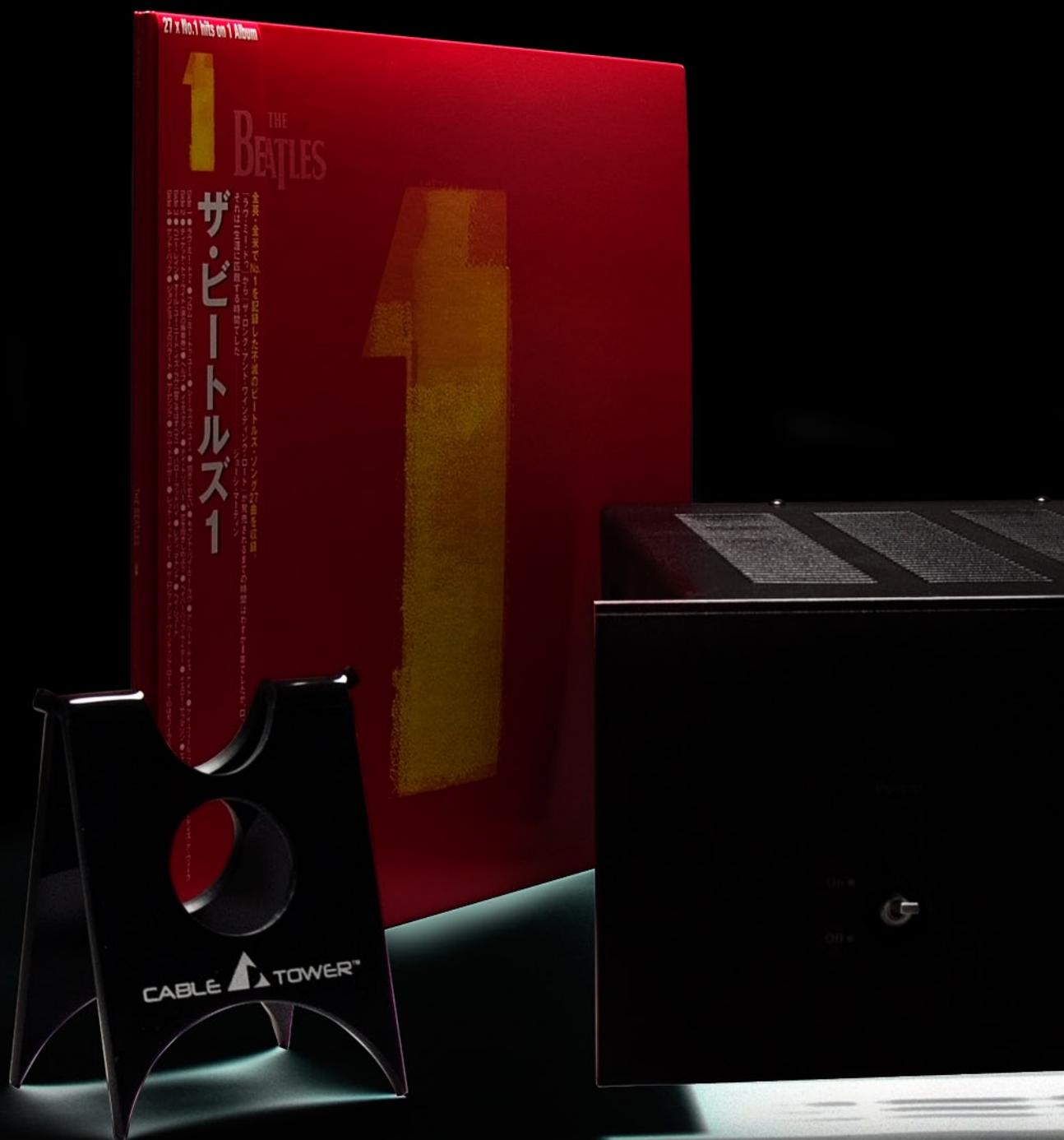
Offering a very different look and operation, they had made a substantial attempt to combat resonance and drive effects and succeeded brilliantly.

Then as now, there were still the lovers of the LP-12, but the Oracle really offered much more in terms of dynamics and resolution. It had a solid tuneful bass, with lightning fast transient response. Mated with an SME tonearm and a Dynavector Ruby Karat cartridge, it was a force to be reckoned with and cemented my love for high performance vinyl playback.

Somewhere around the mid 90s Oracle disappeared from the US market for a while and I went through a non-vinyl phase (that had something to do with an infant in the house), so my Oracle and I parted ways. The motor had given up the ghost and I could not get a replacement. *(continued)*



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Ebay hadn't been invented yet, so there was no way to find extra parts at that time. It was a sad day indeed.

But these days, Oracle is back on top of their game and stronger than ever, so I was very excited to revisit one of my favorite turntables again.

Sometimes you can go home after all. Back then, the original Delphi was about \$1200 without an arm. A decent arm could be had for about five or six hundred dollars and a great cartridge could be purchased for a couple hundred tops. The Dynavector cartridge was outrageously priced at \$350, but was worth every penny! Today, the Delphi V with turbo power supply is still very reasonably priced at \$4500 and the Oracle SME 345 arm (a 309 derivative) is \$2200. The recent version of the Dynavector Ruby Karat, now the 17D3 will set you back \$850.

Missing from past Oracle tables is the backlit Oracle logo on the front of the table. Now there are two wands coming out that are buttons for 33 or 45 r.p.m. operation. Another very nice touch is that the metal surfaces have a nice, thick, protective clearcoat. One of my big complaints with the original Oracle was that the surfaces tarnished a bit after some time, especially the clamp. This Oracle will stay looking good for a long time!

Initial Setup

Back then, my only experience had been with a Technics SL-1200 and my recent purchase, a Rega Planar 3, which I had the dealer set up for me. *(continued)*

Still a newcomer to high performance analog, I had my dealer set up the Oracle as well. (Remember when your dealer set up your table and the sales guy brought it over to your house on his way home from work?)

I took one look at that massive instruction manual and figured it would be way over my head. Fast forward the clock 25 years and it's pretty straightforward. Like every other turntable I've set up, the manual could use a LOT MORE pictures, but that's the way it goes.

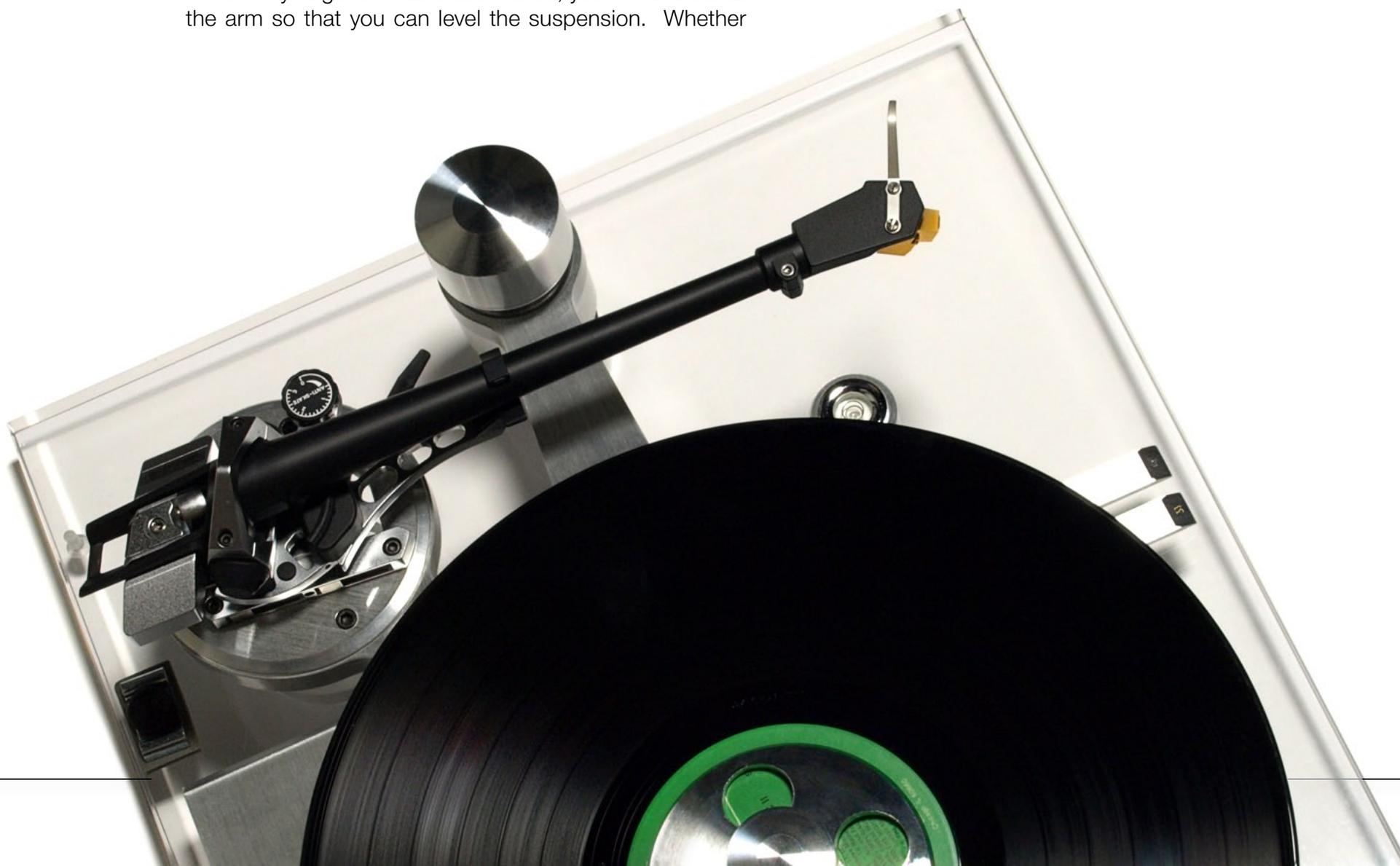
Instead of putting the arm on with a live cartridge at this point, I just taped a pair of pennies to the headshell to make up for the weight of a cartridge.

The main component to setting this table up is getting the spring height of the three suspension towers adjusted so that they are equal. They have a spring in a plastic coupler held into the suspension tower by a squishy elastomer. Oracle supplies a gauge that works on new and old tables, so follow the instructions and use the current settings.

Once you get the table assembled, you need to install the arm so that you can level the suspension. Whether

you are new or skilled to turntable setup, this can be a little tricky because you have a good opportunity to trash the stylus here. Instead of putting the arm on with a live cartridge at this point, I just taped a pair of pennies to the headshell to make up for the weight of a cartridge. That way I could adjust to my hearts content with no fear of stylus damage. FYI: To the best of my knowledge, a penny weighs about three grams, so somewhere between 2-4 pennies should weigh as much as your cartridge.

While a few people hinted that it might be a bit difficult to set up an Oracle, I had no trouble at all. Following our analog expert Dan Babineau's advice, I took everything nice and slow and made VERY SMALL ADJUSTMENTS. This is truly one of the best bits of advice I have ever been given on turntable setup. Be methodical and accurate and I guarantee you can master any turntable and tonearm. It's somewhat like skiing; keep going up in level of difficulty as you get more comfortable with where you started. *(continued)*



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The more patience you have here will greatly affect the outcome. If you are hasty, the Delphi will sound ok, but if you take your time and make incremental adjustments you will be much happier! I recently helped a friend corner balance his Porsche Turbo before a track day, and it's a pretty similar operation.

So, if you can balance a set of Konis, you can set up an Oracle or vice-versa. (Actually the Oracle is easier, because it only has three springs!)

After all of the settings were dialed in nominally, I replaced the head shell with one that had the new Dynavector 17D3 cartridge! For old times sake this seemed like a nice match up to start the review. I had a few others to audition, but this would be a great place to start. I had been using the DV cartridge on my AVID Volv-ere table, so it was well broken in and already mounted on an SME 309 arm. The 345 arm that came with the Oracle is a slightly older version of the 309, so to keep all things equal, I took the whole damn thing off the AVID and replaced it on the Oracle, so I would leave nothing to chance.

Once set up, it's a breeze from there. Screw on the spring tower covers, take a little bit of care routing the phono lead and you should be spinning records shortly!! A quick check of the strobe disc and the speed was perfect! Should you need to adjust ever so slightly, just refer to the owner's manual; all you will need is a very small jewelers screwdriver and the supplied strobe disc. Total time involved: about an hour, perhaps an hour and fifteen. *(continued)*



Now that I've done it with a couple of arms, I could probably do it in one half hour if I was under the gun. Obviously, a few more hours were spent doing final adjustments, but 1 ½-2 hours should get you close enough to enjoy it.

The Sound

Granted, playback gear has gotten much better in the last twenty years, but that only underscores how good the Oracle really is! (And how far ahead of it's time it was back in the 80s...)

With a plethora of turntables around the TONE studio these days, all with different characteristics, it's pretty easy to get a read on the character of the Oracle. I would describe the sound as fast and detailed; yet still having enough weight in the lower registers to round out the picture nicely.

Listening to one of my favorite jazz albums, **The Great Jazz Trio Direct From LA**, I couldn't help but notice what a great job the Oracle/SME/Dynavector combination did with following Ron Carters quick bass lines while offering up a lot of bass texture as well.

Moving along to the MoFi recording of Aimee Mann's **Lost In Space**, I paid particular attention to how well all the little ambient, spacy sounds just floated around the room. Very nice indeed! Listening to her **Batchelor no.2** album (also from MoFi), it was very easy to hear that quality that only analog can bring to the mix.

Somehow, I just stayed in this female vocal groove,

which is way out of the norm for me. Paying tribute to our own Steve Hoffman, I plopped Peggy Lee's **Latin ala Lee** on the platter. (The trumpets drive our art director crazy, but I love it)

I would describe the sound as fast and detailed; yet still having enough weight in the lower registers to round out the picture nicely.

I'm positive that the piano riff on the second cut is where they got the idea for the **Sex And The City** soundtrack, but that's a conspiracy for another day.

Just so you don't think I'm getting soft, I did put the Pretenders first album on next. I must say that I spent a lot of

evenings up way too late listening to the Oracle and what I enjoyed the most was that it had enough weight to go along with the detail. Those of you with a wide range of musical tastes should be just fine with the Oracle.

While I had very good luck with the SME 309/Dynavector combination, I wanted to move up the food chain and see how well the Delphi would do with a better arm and cartridge. Needless to say, I was not disappointed.

Swapping the 309 for an SME V brought a larger dose of airiness and resolution to the mix, even with the reasonably priced Dynavector cartridge. Moving up to the Shelter 90x was even more satisfying and considering what these components cost together now made the Oracle a five-figure analog front end! Granted making this change just doubled the price of the table/arm/cartridge combination but I feel like the Oracle is definitely up to the challenge. If I end up keeping the Delphi V, this would be the way I would go, either with an iv.Vi or the model V. *(continued)*

Conclusion

While there are a lot of great tables in the five figure range these days, and there are certainly a lot of great entry level/budget tables in the \$300-\$1500 range, the \$4-6000 range of turntables is not as densely populated. I feel that this is a very important segment of analog, because the market for the mega tables is a pretty small one, yet there are a lot of people that would like to step up from their Rega P3s and Scouts but not always quite sure where to go.

I wholeheartedly nominate the Oracle for consideration if you fall in this category. It offers solid, musical performance and depending on how far you would like to go with arm and cartridge choices will determine it's ultimate level of performance. This also gives you a very nice upgrade path, should you choose to take it.

The Oracle Delphi was a winner back then and it still is today! ●

The Oracle Maintenance Kit

Should you have an older Oracle that needs a tune-up or you just want to make sure your new one will always be in perfect order, Oracle has everything you need in one handy box for \$199.

The box includes all the necessary bits (except a turntable drive motor) for your Oracle: spare rubber spacers, a fresh belt, bearing oil, springs and more! They even throw in a bottle of plastic polish, cloths and a screwdriver! No Oracle owner should be without one! It works with all versions of the Oracle from the MK. I Delphi to current as well as the Alexandria (had one of those too!) and the Premiere.

Mine is sitting tucked away on the shelf for now, but it is very comforting to know it is there in case I need any goodies!



Oracle Delphi V Turntable

MSRP: Table only, \$4500

Oracle 345 (SME) arm \$2200

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Great Affordable Benchmark:

The Dynavector 17D3

— Jeff Dorgay

Dynavector has had an excellent reputation for many years now. As I mentioned in my review of the Oracle, shortly after I purchased my first Oracle, the Dynavector Karat/Ruby came on the scene. Things were different then; premium unleaded was about 90 cents a gallon, Harry Pearson and I both had more hair and Marc Shifter (now owner of AV 123) was the importer for Dynavector...



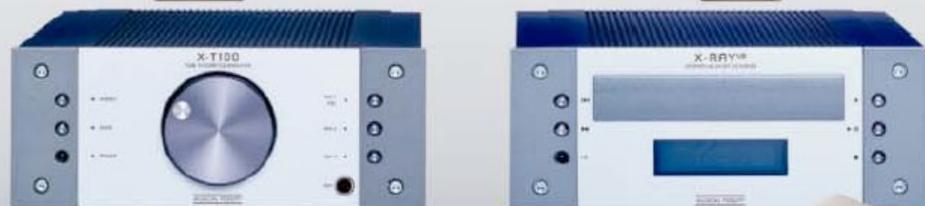
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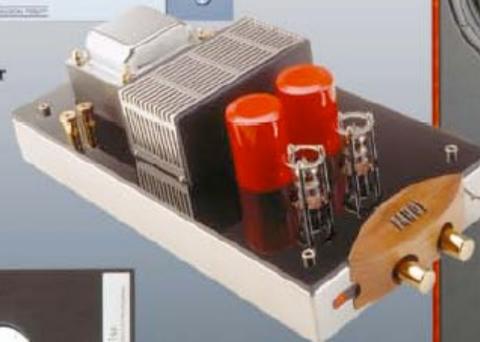
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The Karat/Ruby was a pretty amazing cartridge back then. Except for the super high priced items from Linn and Koetsu, this was still a spendy cartridge at \$350. The audiophile press raved about it because of its super quick transient response and ability to retrieve inner detail. Considering that I was driving a car that was only worth about \$350 back then, all of my friends thought I was NUTS to buy a phono cartridge for that kind of dough. But that's what being an audiophile is all about, right?

So, it just seemed fitting that when the chance to review the current Oracle came up, that I just HAD to put a Dynavector cartridge on it, at least for part of the review. These days, the current version is the 17D3, which has just replaced the D2.

Today, the 17D3 will set you back about \$900, and in the day of ten thousand dollar phono cartridges and hundred thousand dollar turntables, I guess this is now pretty close to being a budget cartridge. Regardless of how you view the pricing of the 17D3, it provides great sound and solid value.

Initial Setup

For the length of the review, I used the 17D3 on the Oracle Delphi V with the SME 309 arm through my reference system, which now has the added bonus of the ASR Basis Exclusive phono stage. The ASR is super quiet, (thanks to its elaborate battery powered supply...) and lightning fast. It also features an extremely wide range of gain and loading options, making it the perfect reviewers tool.

(continued)

The Oracle's tonearm was wired in balanced mode to take advantage of the ASR's balanced inputs. If you have a phono preamplifier that will accept a balanced input, I highly suggest taking advantage of this configuration; it offers up just a bit more quiet in the presentation.

According to the specs, the 17D3 has an output of .3mv so my first guess of setting the ASR to 57db worth of gain proved to be perfect, keeping my ACT 2/Series 2 preamplifier right in the sweet spot of its operating range.

Great detail, separation and speed all in one little gold package...

This is a critical part of analog setup, so that you can maximize dynamics while minimizing noise. For those of you that have variable gain options, resist the urge to use any more gain than you need to get maximum output! Recommended loading was 100 ohms and the manufacturer's suggestion proved to be perfect! Just to be sure, I went a bit up and down the range but 100 ohms it stayed.

Tracking force shook out to be right in the middle of the 1.8 – 2.2 gram range.

Still Great After All These Years

Once the cartridge had about 50 hours of break in time, I sat down and really did some serious listening, but right away I remembered that sound! Great detail, separation and speed all in one little gold package...

Unlike the captain of your high school football team (or captain of the cheerleading squad, depending on your gender and interest of said gender) who probably looks a lot worse now than your memory, the current Dynavector still looks and sounds great. The outer packaging looks almost identical to the old one, but over the past 25 years, the people at Dynavector have been busy refining their designs.

In the last year, I have had the privilege to listen to a number of great phono cartridges that have been around this price point. I've owned the Sumiko Blackbird and spent some time with Grado and Lyra, as well as a few others.

I would describe the sound of the 17D3 very much the way I did the Karat/Ruby; fast, accurate and detailed. You would never call this cartridge thin (unless you had the loading way off) and I think you would be hard pressed to call it warm. Pretty much right down the center.

But thanks to the extremely short cantilever and improvements in the magnet structure, this cartridge is very fast and detailed for this price. If your system has the resolution to showcase it, I think you will be very impressed with what it is capable of.

Because of this cartridge's ability, I found myself playing to its strengths quite a bit. I spun a lot of my old favorites from Frank Zappa, King Crimson, Brand X and others that featured a lot of texture and layering. This was where this cartridge really shined, especially when playing my pristine copy of Zappa's **Just Another Band from L.A.** Yep, all the little coughs and wheezes from *Billy The Mountain* were right where they should be! I also dusted off one of my favorite acoustic guitar records from Michael Hedges, **Aerial Boundaries** to listen to some plucky acoustic guitar. Again, fantastic.

While I have to hand some of the credit to the ASR Basis, this cartridge was very good at throwing a pretty big soundfield into the listening room, with the height dimension represented better than I would have expected for 900 dollars. As I mentioned earlier, I really enjoyed the speed of this cartridge quite a lot, which often made it sound like it was more expensive than it actually is.

Experimenting a little bit, I replaced the SME 309 arm on my Oracle with the iv.Vi model, which costs almost twice as much to see how this might affect the sound. While there was a touch more resolution to be had, I think the 309 is a very nice match for this cartridge indeed. Moving downscale the other way, I substituted the Rega RB 300 arm and while I feel that this is a great budget arm, it doesn't exploit the full potential of this cartridge. (But the P9/RB1000 combination is another story, that match up is quite good!)

Conclusion

If you want that warm, dreamy analog sound, this one's not your baby. But if you would like a cartridge in this price range that offers up a ton of detail, with a very high degree of tonal accuracy, I can't suggest the Dynavector 17D3 highly enough. I would put this one on the short list if you are shopping for a cartridge in the \$1000 range.

Because of the nature of my job, I keep a stable of cartridges on hand for the various turntables I encounter and I was happy enough with the 17D3 to write a check for this one, it's a keeper! ●



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Phono Preamplifier ASR
Basis Exclusive, BAT VK-P10SE,
Aqvox 2ce

Speakers Tetra 506 Custom,
Martin Logan Vantage, Penaudio
Serenade

Turntable Oracle Delphi V, with
Rega RB300 arm, SME 309 arm
and SME iv.Vi arms

Interconnects Cardas Golden
Presence, Golden Reference,
Tetra Artet

Speaker Cable Tetra Artet,
Cardas Golden Presence

Power Cords Running Springs
Mongoose, Essential Sound
Products The Essence Reference

Power Conditioning Running
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Cereballs

Room Treatment GIK Bass
Traps and Diffuser Panels



Holy Earthquake, Batman!

The Minus K BM-8 Isolation Platform

— Jeff Dorgay

Aside from friends that have had too much to drink, vibration is your turntable's biggest enemy. The more you can isolate your table from your environment, the more musical detail your analog rig will be able to resolve.

If you've been in the audio game for sometime now, you know how many different solutions there are available. I've tried a few of them myself, with mixed results. I seem to recall analog maven Michael Fremer reviewing a cool active vibration base that they use for sensitive laboratory instruments and was really excited about it until I saw the price tag-about \$8500 bucks (if memory serves me correctly!)

Ouch! At that point in time I was listening to a Rega P25, so I filed that into the more-expensive- tweak-than-the-gear file and forgot about it, until I stumbled on to the Minus-K website. At \$2795, this is still not a pocket change item, but for those of

you looking to wring the last bit of performance out of your analog rig, this may be just what you are after. At about the price of a pair of mega interconnect cables the BM-8's price tag is palatable.

After living with the Minus K platform for quite a few months now, I am very impressed.

I've toyed with a lot of vibration control bits over the years and have always been able to get a few molecules more sound here and there. Having a 13 inch concrete slab under my listening room probably helps in that respect, but I feel that you can never have too much of a good thing in this department.

The cool thing about the Minus K platform is that it is a passive device, so that means no vacuum pump and none of the extra noise that goes with a pump or the complexity that it brings to the table. After all, the quieter and more resolving your system gets, the last thing you want is a pump in the background chugging away!!

Most of Minus K's customers are scientists. These typically get used in a laboratory underneath scanning microscopes and other precision instruments. The resonant frequency of the platform is .5hz.

Unpack and Adjust

The BM-8 is 18" wide by 20" deep and 4.6" high so make sure that you have enough room on your shelf or rack, as well as the ability to support the 35 pounds of the platform in addition to your turntable. There are three models, to accommodate equipment from 10 -105 pounds. I would suggest to get maximum performance, if you can match the model you need so that your table is in the middle to high end of the weight range. *(continued)*



Setup is a breeze, unpack the BM-8, put your turntable on the platform and unscrew the four red anodized collars. Next, make sure the vertical position indicator is as close to the middle of the range as you can get it. You can adjust this with the crank adjustment that is immediately to the left of the indicator. I found you can be a little off with this, but the closer you can get to the middle, the more effective the BM-8 will be.

Once you have completed this part, nailing the sweet spot for the vertical softness adjustment will take a bit more time, but is somewhat of an adjust to taste setting. This affects the bounciness of the springs in the platform and again after a lot of listening noticed that by going from loose to tight will affect the overall sound. As you might expect, going a bit tighter consequently tightens up the sound, and going a bit more springy gives the overall presentation a bit warmer feel.

Even if you are a bit off the mark, you should notice a good degree of improvement and I felt that the more you listen and make fine adjustments, you will notice a sweet spot where you are getting the maximum isolation without the presentation getting too warm or bouncy. Almost like setting VTA, there is that perfect spot lurking out there!

The Players

To be really fair to the BM-8, I used it with six different turntables: The SME 10, the AVID Volvere, Oracle Delphi V, Rega P9, VPI Scoutmaster and my favorite budget table, the SOTA Comet. I wanted to make sure what I heard initially was happening in a repeatable fashion as well as to see where the threshold for increased resolution would fall off.

The good news is that the BM-8 worked very well on every table I put it under. The bad news is that it's 2800 bucks. However, to put things in perspective, I would spend this amount of money on one of these before I bought an equally expensive pair of interconnects or power cord.

Let's start at the bottom and work our way up.

I noticed two major areas of improvement to the analog presentation with the BM-8 in my system: Tighter, more tuneful bass and better resolution of low-level detail. Just to make sure I wasn't going mad, I picked out a wide range of albums to listen to right in a row and then put the base in and listened again. I used a lot of standards that perhaps are not the audiophile standards, but records that I am infinitely familiar with.

The first record I put on was Donald Fagen's **Morph the Cat**, because the title track has fairly loose, whumpy bass. Another favorite in that department is Thomas Dolby's **Aliens Ate My Buick**. Immediately, I noticed the bass tighten up a bit and it seemed to have a bit more texture. As I spent some time with some records with acoustic bass, I was definitely experiencing more texture.

I also noticed a substantial decrease in woofer movement on my REL subwoofer, I could even leave the dust cover up on my P9, where in the

past that was begging that devil rumble to sneak in at moderate levels.

Though this was great, the biggest improvement was the in the area of low-level detail retrieval. I kind of freaked out from the minute I started listening and the more time I spent with the BM-8, the more I found myself pulled into the music. Listening to all of my Doors albums (the DCC versions) I really enjoyed how much more air was in the presentation; there was so much detail lurking in these already great LP's! Again, this was not that subtle of an improvement. I could really hear my system take a big jump in low level resolution. This was one of those improvements to your system that makes you go right to a lot of your favorite records just to get a quick read on the sound!

Variation on the theme

While vibration is the enemy of all things electronic, I did try the BM-8 with some electronics as well just to conduct a thorough investigation. *(continued)*



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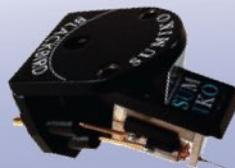
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FEATURED ITEM
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I got the most improvement with tube electronics first, CD players second and power amplifiers last. However, I did not feel that this platform made enough of a difference on any of my electronics to justify a few more of these for my components too. Unless you have a really disproportionate amount of disposable income, I'd just think turntable on this one.

A significant improvement

The BM-8 is not a budget audiophile tweek. But in the world of 1200 dollar coat racks and little blocks of wood with metal cups that cost 800 bucks a throw, this is at least a solid product with some science behind it, that will truly increase the resolution of your system.

I highly recommend the BM-8 with only one reservation; I would make this device the icing on the cake of a very good system. If you have everything else in your system the way you want it (including room treatments) and are just aching for a little more performance, I think you will be pleased with this upgrade. It's not going to turn a budget table into a mega analog rig, but it will allow you to see further in to the presentation on a first rate system. I'm kind of thinking I need one... ●

**The Minus K BM-8
isolation platform**
MSRP: \$2640-2750

MANUFACTURER

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Cables And More Cables!

One of the most popular things you can do to upgrade the sound of your headphone rig is to swap out the cables that they came with. Sometimes in the case of the Sennheiser 580/600/650 series, it's as easy as just unplugging the cable and plugging another one in. With other phones, you have to be more hard-core and rewire them yourself, or find someone who specializes in this kind of thing.

Luckily, I just happen to have someone that specializes in this kind of thing about ten minutes away from the TONE headquarters: Ken Ball of ALO Audio. I have just had him rewire my Grado SR 225s (which have taken up permanent residence at the Vinyl Anachronist's house) and my Grado SR60s with breathtaking results. Ken was also kind enough to let us borrow a pair of his AKG 701s that he has re-wired. Yep, as soon as I can get a pair of these, they are going to be added to my stable of headphones too!

Our resident mastering genius, Steve Hoffman thought we were all nuts carrying on about headphones like this, but then he spent some time at the annual Head-Fi meet in San Jose last month. After listening to quite a few cool-guy headphone rigs with upgraded cables, he also fell victim to the bug and acquiesced that this was indeed the WAY TO GO.

So, we have a few things in store for you.

First Up, The ALO Audio Goodies

If you have a pair of headphones, a portable headphone amplifier and/or an iPod, you need to know about ALO Audio. You can check out their website at www.aloaudio.com

We also have a couple reviews of their cables along with the Red Wine Audio iMod (Ken is the exclusive distributor of the Gen 5 iMod) in the Pod People section of our website in the very near future.

For those of you that have stuck your nose in the air at the prospect of using an iPod as a respectable source, once you hear the iMod with one of ALO's cables, I guarantee that you will change your mind! But more about that later, back to headphones!





Grado Greatness

The ALO modded SR60s will set you back about 325 dollars to be recabled with ALO's silver and cotton-insulated cable. (that is the most expensive version...) While you are at it, spend another \$100 to have the black plastic enclosures replaced with Ken's custom wood ones! These are really the final touch, and look factory! I see ALO being like AMG used to be with Mercedes, the high performance tuning shop down the street that took Mercedes finest even further in looks and performance! This transforms the SR60 from a nice budget phone to a serious contender.

Send in your SR 60 or 225 to have recabled; it costs 300 - 450 depending on which cable and the required length. You also get your choice of wood too!! The new screens look factory.

This was not subtle mod at all. Every aspect of the sound was better. While the highs were smoother, there was an overall ease and lack of grain that made for a much more refined presentation.

I immediately noticed how much bigger the soundstage was when I dropped the first record on the turntable.

I've been using my McIntosh MC275's 16-ohm taps with amazingly good luck as a headphone amplifier lately. Because it has so much midrange detail, it's very easy to hear the difference between phones. That was what I used for almost all of the listening sessions here.

I put on one of my favorite albums from the '70s, The Tubes **Young and Rich**. All of Prairie Prince's drumming came much more into focus and was a lot more natural. The echo off the drumheads was much more realistic. Staying in the '70s groove, I put on that old warhorse, **Dark Side of the Moon**. The heartbeat at the beginning was much more convincing and the separation between all of the different alarm clocks in *Breathe* was very impressive indeed! Hard to believe that I was getting this much performance from a set of phones at this price point.

I was having so much fun with bass and drums, I slipped Mickey Hart's **Drumming at the Edge** in my CD player and was really in for a treat! Big, big soundstage and things really floated around my head quite well. Again, very impressive.

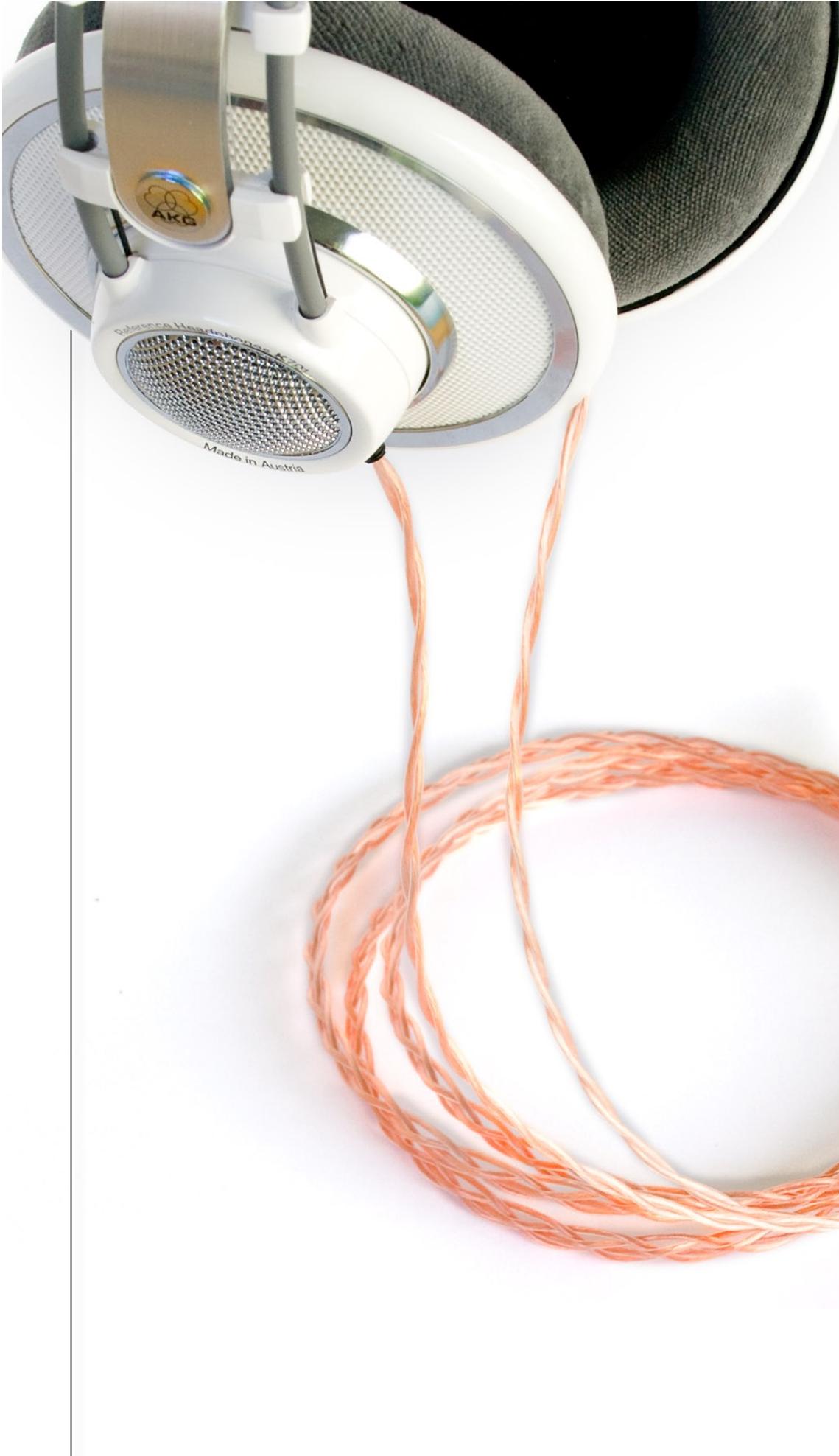
Quantum Leap For The AKG 701

The AKG 701 is another success story. Steve and I really went bonkers over this mod. I was so excited about these when I first heard them here with the Woo Audio 300B amp, I shipped a pair right off to Steve's house. We felt that the original sound of the 701 is a little dark and closed in, but with the ALO mod/recable it goes to a much higher level of performance. Steve has always had issues with his stock 701s, calling them 'lackluster at best' but after some time with the ALO Audio version, he couldn't believe they were even the same phones!

Another happy ALO Audio customer. One of the big bottlenecks in this design is the way they route the wire over the left speaker to the right one. With the ALO mod, the cable goes an equal distance to each driver. The 6 foot cable (copper braided) with a brand new 701s included is 600. Custom lengths are available. If you have a pair of existing 701s it will set you back \$400, but worth every penny! His phones feature the newest Cardas eutectic brass, silver over rhodium plated 1/4" plug everything else is top quality. All of the ALO mods look like they came from the factory, and that is the highest compliment I can pay them.

Depending on what amplifier you use with your 701s, even if you are in the love em' camp, I am confident that once you plug these in you will notice a major change in character for the better. Because I spend so much time listening to speakers in a fairly good sized room, I am a somewhat reluctant headphone listener. So it has to be a very good headphone experience to draw me in and the first gripe on my list of why I don't like listening to headphones is the fatigue factor.

(continued)



TIDAL Audio

Piano



Half Note Audio
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My biggest complaint about the stock 701 is the fatigue factor; after about 45 minutes, I've had enough. With the ALO cable, I've been able to listen to my 701s for hours on end. It's really that devil grain that takes away from the headphone experience and now that I've heard a few different phones with much better cables, I can see that they are all capable of much more performance.

Thanks to that absence of grain, low level details came through a lot better as well. Listening to my favorite headphone freak out track, What's He Building in There? from Tom Waits Mule Variation was very freaky indeed. All those cool little sound effects seemed like they were about 10 feet out from my head!! Moving along to Joes Garage by Frank Zappa was another great experience, which led to about a three hour Zappa session.

I mixed it up and listened to a lot of classical music, which is something I rarely do on headphones. The instant difference I noticed with the ALO 701's was how much more natural violins and pianos sounded, much more realistic. Moving along to the standard list of female vocals was great too. I listened to a lot of Jacqui Naylor and the MoFi LP of Madeline Peyroux all the way through. Female vocals were a lot more fleshed out and like the acoustic instruments, a lot more natural in timbre.

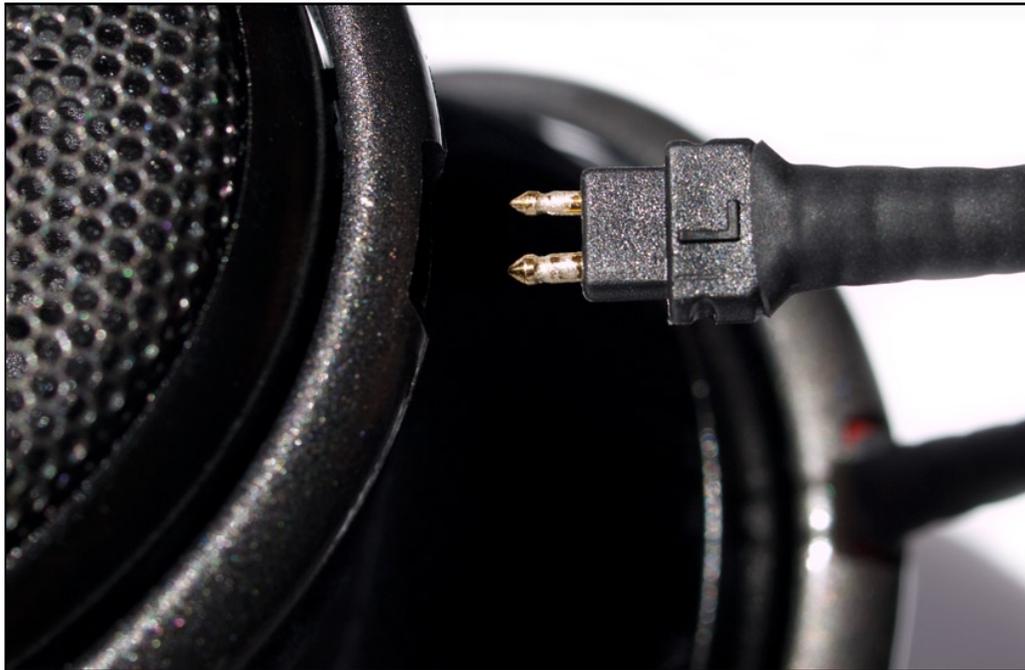
I definitely broke through the 45-minute headphone listening banner! I guess the highest compliment I can pay these phones is that I did have a few moments where it all sounded so good, that I forgot I was listening to headphones!



Stefan Audio Art

Say Goodbye To Grunge!!

I've had my Sennheiser 650s for about a year and now that they are more than adequately broken in, I've been starting to experiment with different cables, thanks to the plug-in architecture of the 580/600/650 phones. The Cardas cable I tried last issue is a nice step up from the stock 650 sound, but if you want to go ALL THE WAY, stop reading this magazine and get over to www.stefanaudioart.com and order a set.



Why should you drop what you are doing to order a pair of these for your Sennheisers? Because these have been so popular, that there is about a 3-month backorder list! I urge you to get on the list now.

My test set came in an 8-foot length. With a mini plug on the end, they are \$255 and with a 1/4-inch plug, they are \$245. Obviously, I would suggest getting the end you use most often and getting an adapter for the other size. You can also get them in shorter lengths as well as up to 20 feet! This is a very nice touch as far as I'm concerned. Fit and finish of this cable is absolutely first rate and the title of 'audio art' is highly appropriate. I always like an aftermarket solution that is so exquisitely built that it looks BETTER than the factory part it replaces.

I haven't been as grumpy about the 650 sound as some of the more hardcore headphiles, but this pair of phones has always sounded a bit closed in, no matter what amplification I've used them with. Not so with the Equinox cable, they don't even sound like the same set of phones any more.

This cable comes very nicely packaged and has very good instructions! For someone new to this, you will have no trouble at all swapping out your stock cable for the Equinox. Just be sure that when you put the cable back in, you keep the indent with the L or R out. (See Above) That way you will keep the drivers in phase. If by some odd chance your freshly recabled phones sound like they have no bass at all, double check the connection and I guarantee this will be the problem.

The folks at SAA suggest 72-96 hours for the cable, so I gave them a quick listen (was initially very impressed) and pushed the repeat button on my living room system. Three days later I brought them back out to the studio and started some serious listening.

With the Mickey Hart CD still on top of the big pile in front of my CD player, I took up back where I started off and immediately went to track 8, Brainstorm. Big, big sound, with that insect like sound flying all around my head!

One of my favorite test tracks is *Gibberish* from Spocks Beard on their **Day For Night** CD. Listening to this on my reference system with Martin Logan Electrostatics, the five part harmonies just float in the air and the overdubs have a very distinct spatial placement. On the stock 650s, this just sounds like one fat vocal, but with the SAA cable, the delineation is back!

Just to make sure I hadn't lost my perspective, I borrowed a pair of stock 650s from a friend, so I could do a quick comparison back and forth. Well, actually it's no comparison; there really is a pretty heavy veil that is lifted from the sound with this cable. No matter what kind of music I listened to, it was just much more open and easier to enjoy. I wouldn't say the actual frequency response was changed, the overall sound was just a lot cleaner. I'd compare it to making about a \$1000 change in interconnects!

Two things have happened with the addition of the SAA Equinox cable to my HD650s; I'm finally convinced that I'm getting every bit of performance that this phone is capable of delivering and I'm now in that 'grumpy with the stock 650' camp. I can't go back anymore after hearing this. If you have a pair of Sennheiser 650s, this is hands down the best upgrade you can make to your headphone rig for around \$300.





The New Headphone Amp From Channel Islands

A few issues ago, we reviewed the VHP-1 from Channel Islands. If you aren't familiar with Channel Islands and its owner/chief designer Dusty Vawter, he makes great gear that offers a lot of performance for the dollar. His new version, the VHP-2 looks identical to the VHP-1, except the model number has changed. According to Dusty, the volume control has been upgraded to a better ALPS pot, a new gold plated circuit board 'And a few other things...'

In Channel Islands tradition, the price has stayed the same at \$349 – that's value!

Listening at Steve Hoffman's house, side by side with the VHP-1, the new model is definitely a step up. The thing we both noticed right away was the improved soundstaging of the new unit. Steve said 'What a difference! More dynamics, better soundstaging and an even quieter background make this one a real treat for serious headphone users. Make sure you get the matching power supply, it's cute!'

Don't know if Dusty will appreciate us calling his power supply cute, but it's better than a poke in the eye with a stick, right?

Seriously though, whether you have the VHP-1 or 2, I feel the power supply is essential. It really takes this amp to a much higher level. Transient slam is better, and the bass is definitely a lot punchier. What I really enjoy about adding the power supply is that it is a big jump in performance the minute you plug it in, you won't be struggling to hear what you spent another \$160 on. It's like dropping that Dinan chip in your BMW. The minute you floor it, you can feel it!

If you want to be a little more of a fanatic, try a better power cord on the supply. I used the DH Labs Power Plus (\$180) and it offered up a slightly less grainy presentation. This one is a bit subtler but it's that last push over the cliff if you just have to have more performance.

www.ciaudio.com

There you go loyal readers. That's what we've been having fun with this issue. More headphone madness to come next time! ●



All those MP3s and nowhere to put them?

The HP Media Vault Pro

If you've jumped on the digital music bandwagon and have a fairly substantial collection of CDs, you've probably run into two bottlenecks already; where to put all these MP3 files and how to back them up. Right?

The good news is that digital storage keeps getting better, faster and cheaper every week.

Even though I'm primarily a Mac guy, I've had fantastic luck with HP products over the years and their new Media Vault Pro is no exception. Mainly setup for PC use, even you Mac users can put this baby on your network, assign it an IP address and blast your music files over the network to the MVP.

You should be able to have this thing up and running within about 15 minutes and it offers a terabyte (1000GB) of storage. If my math is correct, that should translate into a few thousand CD's at the equivalent of 320kb/sec and a backup copy. The Media Vault Pro can be used as a RAID 1 (mirrored) 500 GB drive, or as a 1TB backup, which was how I used it for my test.

As I already have about a TB worth of music files on my computer, I was interested in using it strictly as a backup device, so on one level this is a pretty uneventful review because I didn't experience any data loss.

Setup was a snap and I had the whole thing integrated into my network straight away.

The MVP has a very unobtrusive form factor and is very quiet, which is a bonus to us audiophile types.... Just plug it in to your router with the supplied Ethernet cable and follow the directions! It has a convenient USB port so that you can attach a couple of networked printers too, which adds to its usefulness.

The biggest use of time with the MVP is getting a TB of data over your network to populate it! But once you get over that hump, you can rest assured that your music collection is safe and sound. Don't have a TB worth of music files? It will store any of your other digital data as well and works seamlessly.
(continued)





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I also used the Media Vault Pro as a way to distribute MP3s through my Squeezebox and it worked quite well at this task, though somewhat overkill, because of the cost. At \$749, you have to realize that you are actually getting a mini-server without a computer attached. If you are using the MVP strictly as a backup device, you can set it to do automated backups and the like, which is very cool.

Last but not least, I can tell you first hand that HP's customer support and service is first rate. I'm a Mac guy, so tiptoeing into Windows world always makes me shiver. Just to give their tech people a shakedown, I got on the phone at 10pm on a Saturday night and started asking a ton of stupid questions. The very courteous person on the other end of the phone (sounded like India to me...) got me up and running in about five minutes. Very impressive!

You can buy one of these at an HP reseller near you, or you can just buy it direct from HP at their website, www.hp.com. If you are feeling really flush with cash, step up to their LP3065 30" monitor for your computer. Flipping through your MP3 collection on that big monitor is a fantastic experience! (watch for a review of this jewel in TONE Photo soon...) If you don't need a TB worth of backup, they offer the standard Media Vault, which is only 500GB and sells for \$399.

Trust me if THAT FATEFUL DAY comes that your MP3 collection has taken a huge dump, you will be really glad you have one of these out there on your network. ●

HP Media Vault Pro

MSRP: \$749

Slummin'

— Jeff Dorgay



This issue, it's all about tape! Our new contributor Tom Caselli called the other day and asked me if I liked classical music...“Give me your FedEx number and I'll have a surprise for you!”

A week later a giant box came to the door with about 40 great classical reel-to-reel tapes inside, some of them still in the SHRINK WRAP!! This was a pretty nice surprise indeed, because I've been buying a few classical reels lately with excellent results. And you can't beat free! Any of you out there in the audience that would like to unload your reel-to-reel tapes, send me an email!

Interestingly enough, some of the Deutsche Grammophon tapes were recorded at 7 1/2 i.p.s (4 track) with Dolby, so you know what that meant – Ebay!! The light bulb went off; I knew TEAC used to make an outboard Dolby unit and I had a hunch that someone somewhere would want to dump one.



Which leads us to our second item...

Sure enough, the minute I logged on to EBay, there is was, a mint AN-60 outboard Dolby unit with a starting bid of \$9.99, so I was in the game! As the final minutes ticked away on the clock, it was bid up to \$21, but this was still a major score. A few days later, I pulled a pristine AN-60 out of the box with the original manual!!

Threading up Shostakovich one was a very pleasant experience indeed and took the performance of my NOS TEAC A-4300S to another level. Best \$21 I've spent lately!!

I'll be watching for more Dolby encoded tapes in the future!

Where to find what you have seen in **TONE**Audio.

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