

21ST CENTURY SOUND:
FULLY ACTIVE SYSTEMS
FROM SONICWELD AND
SALAGAR

**SECOND ANNUAL
EXCEPTIONAL VALUE
AWARDS**

BEN FONG-TORRES
TALKS TO THE REVEREND
AL GREEN

**HENRY ROLLINS:
PROVOKED**

HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

DAN BABINEAU GETS
THE SCOOP ON **BLUE
NOTE REISSUES**

EXPLORING THE
AUDIOPHILE MIND

Blues Invasion!

THE BLUES MASTERS FESTIVAL



PUBLISHER Jeff Dorgay
EDITOR Toni McQuilken
ART DIRECTOR Jean Dorgay
MUSIC EDITOR Ben Fong-Torres
ASSISTANT MUSIC EDITOR Desi Day
MUSIC VISIONARIES Terry Currier
Norwood Brown
TECHNICAL EDITOR Dan Babineau
COPY EDITOR Marc Phillips
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS Tom Caselli
Kurt Doslu
Joe Golfen
Irv Gross
Ken Kessler
Christina Kratzman
Joe Nino-Hernes
Jerold O'Brien
Todd Sageser
Richard Simmons
Scott Tetzlaff
Randy Wells

UBER CARTOONIST Liza Donnelly

ADVERTISING Jeff Dorgay

SERVER SUPREMO Nate Silva

MR DREAMWEAVER Eddie Kaddi



tonepublications.com

Editor Questions and
Comments:
tonepub@yahoo.com

800.432.4569

© 2007 TONE MAGAZINE, LLC
All rights reserved.

TONEA2 NO.13 2007



© 2005, MartinLogan Ltd. Lawrence, KS 66046 USA 785.749.0133



www.martinlogan.com

Summit

NOTHING BUT PERFORMANCE

Audiophiles have long accepted as an infallible truth that quality bass reproduction requires large speakers with massive bass enclosures. Not any more.

MartinLogan's new ESL Series not only improves bass precision and presses dynamic output to mind boggling levels, it accomplishes this from an enclosure slightly larger than a case of wine.

Summit integrates new Xstat™ electrostatic technology seamlessly revealing a detailed sound field with realism and power—an unforgettable listening experience.

Experience Summit and discover what a high-performance speaker can and should be. For a closer look and to locate your authorized MartinLogan ESL Series dealer, visit www.martinlogan.com.

CONTENTS

features

10 Old School: **Marc Relives His Sansui 8080 Days**

12 Last Minute Gift Guide:
It's Never Too Late To Surprise An Audiophile

24 The Collector: **Tom Casseli Returns With Some Island Hopping Advice**

40 The Vinyl Anachronist: **Face to Face with Tonearm Manufacturer Frank Schroder**

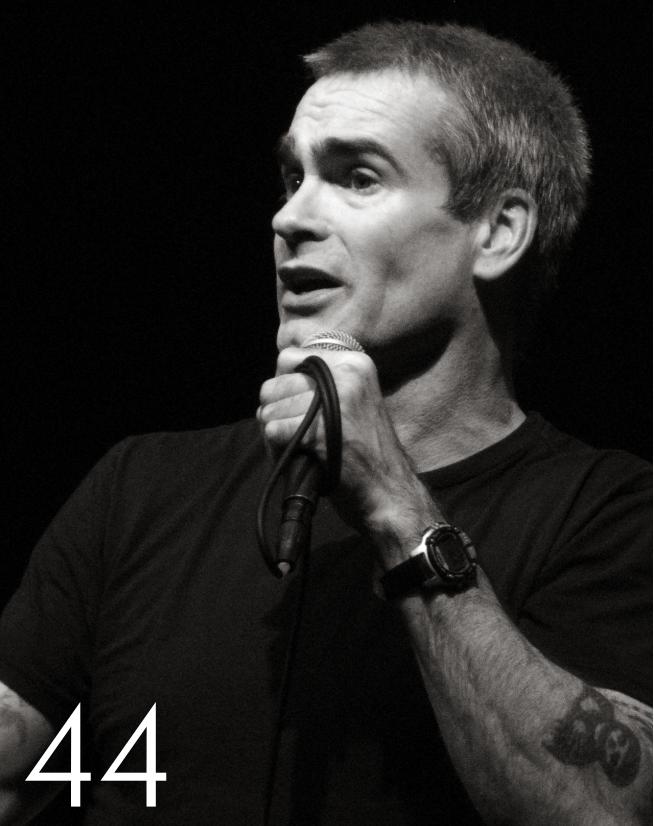
44 Henry Rollins **Does Not Disappoint Portland**

47 Blue Note Reissues **Dan Babineau Gets the Scoop on Upcoming Remasters for Acoustic Sounds**

69 Now and Then With the Reverend Al Green
by Ben Fong-Torres

- 7.** NEW CONTRIBUTORS
- 8.** PUBLISHER'S LETTER
- 9.** TONE TOON
By Liza Donnelly

12



69





86

132

95



CONTENTS

features

- 86 Anti-Tone Ken Kessler Opens Up His Wine Cellar with Four Great Italians
- 95 The ToneAudio Exceptional Value Awards and Our Product of the Year
- 128 Becoming An Audiophile Part One Kieren Downes offers some insight to getting hooked on hifi.
- 132 21st Century Sound Active Loudspeakers from Salagar and Sonicweld



CONTENTS

music/media

- 31. Blues at the Crossroads:**
Get a Taste of the Blues Masters Festival in Salina, Kansas

- 50. On The New Music Front:**
Fresh Releases in Pop/Rock World
By Jeff Dorgay, Marc Phillips and Terry Currier

- 62. Club Mix:** A Musical Journey to Vagoose *By Scott Tetzlaff*

- 76. Audiophile Recordings:** Japanese Recordings for MCA/Universal available at Acoustic Sounds
By Jeff Dorgay

- 79. Classical Music A to Z**
Rachmaninoff the Romantic and Ravel the Neo-classicist
By Dan Babineau

- 92. Blues You Can Use:** New Music from Tinsley Ellis, Joan Armatrading, Debbie Davies and Gary Moore
By Irv Gross

108

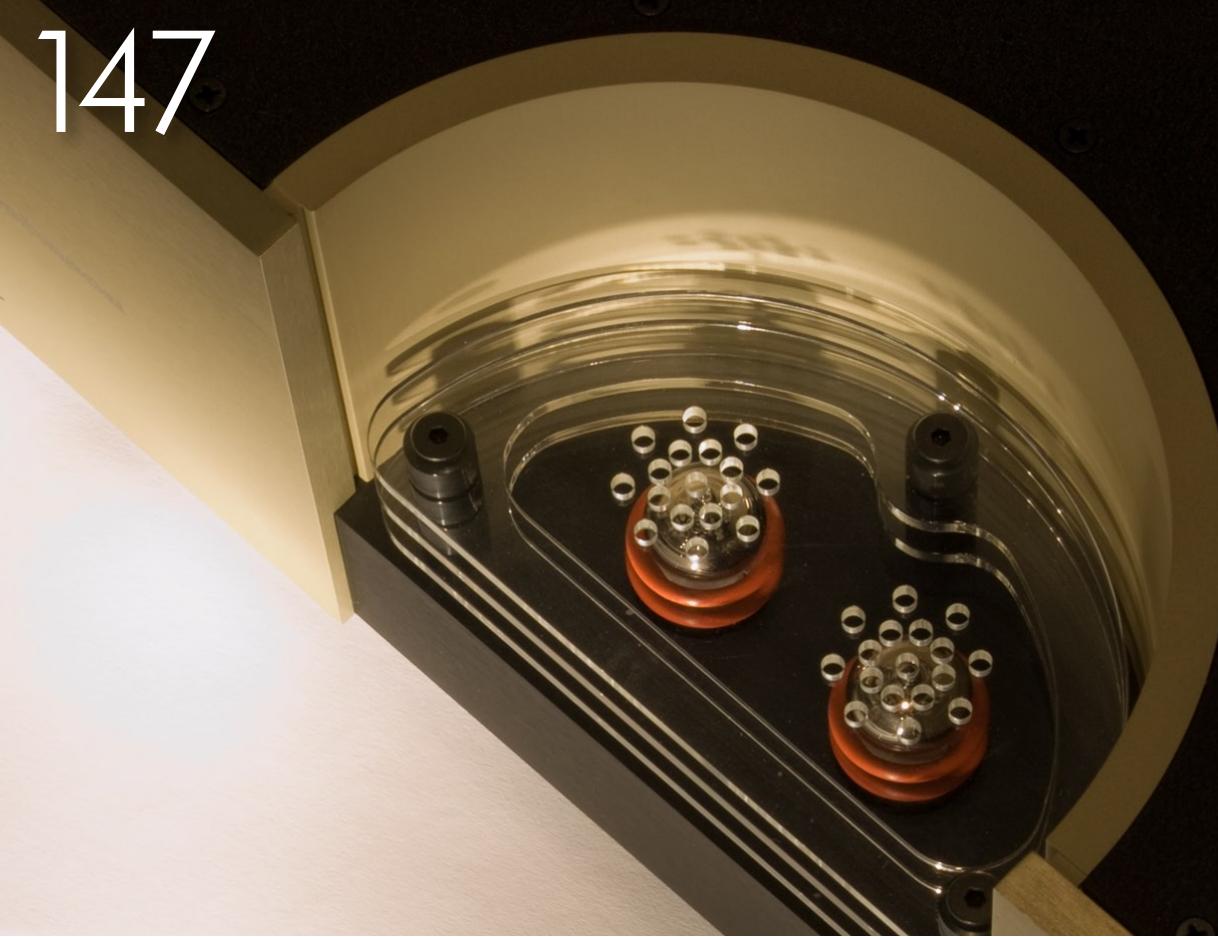


running springs audio

153



147



CONTENTS

reviews

- 108. What's On Tap?** Running Springs Audio Haley and Duke Power Conditioners
- 114. MartinLogan Summit**
The Panel That Takes No Prisoners
- 122. ModWright-On!** The Tone Staff Reviews The ModWright SWP 9.0 SE
- 147. Conrad-Johnson's ET250**
A Different Kind of Fun
- 153. Sonics by Joachim Gerhard**
Argenta Loudspeakers
- 159. Musical Surroundings Supernova**
Multiple Turntable Owners Rejoice
- 164. SLUMMIN'** Audio on the Cheap!
- 166. Where to Find What You've**
Seen In **TONE**

CONTRIBUTORS

new in tone this issue

SCOTT M. BOCK

Scott has been chasing the blues since he was a kid. It started with stealing John Lee Hooker 45s from the cut-out bins in Woolworth's, and got worse when he began shooting pictures at shows for a regional music magazine about 15 years ago. Once he started doing interviews, he was hooked.

In just over ten years, he has published more than one hundred features on blues, gospel, and soul artists for magazines in the U.S., England, and France. He now lives in the Boston area with his wife, Laura, and their black cat. He's still spending time in musicians' homes and travels with them to gigs, whenever he can.

KIERAN DOWNES

Originally from just south of TONE headquarters, Kieran is pursuing his Ph.D. at MIT in the history and sociology of technology. He's been an avid music lover and amateur musician since childhood, and, thanks to his brother and some Linn electronics, a high-end enthusiast for about a decade.

With high-end audio as the focus of his research, he is basically the luckiest graduate student ever. His dissertation explores the history of high-end technology from the 1970s to the present, and the people who have helped bring it to life.

MICHAEL MASLIN

We are proud to introduce the talents of another New Yorker cartoonist to our readers. Michael has been cartooning since high school days and working for the New Yorker since 1977. Michael illustrated Kieran's feature on "Becoming An Audiophile-Part One" and we look forward to him adding more of his illustrations in future issues.

You can find out more about Michael and his work at www.michaelmaslin.com



PUBLISHER'S LETTER



It's almost holiday time again (and CES, but who's counting...) and that means it's time to buy your favorite audiophile and/or music lover something that they will enjoy. Maybe you aren't thinking of things audio at all, perhaps a gift from Victoria's Secret or a trip to the car dealer might eliminate some of the often self imposed stress of audiophilia, but that's a different article! Moving right back to hifi and music, we have a number of fun suggestions for the music lover in your life at all different price points. If all else fails, just buy the music lover in the family a gift certificate from Acoustic Sounds, Todd the Vinyl Junkie or Music Giants and let them give it a go.

If you want to get on my good side and can't afford to buy me that Boxster S or a pair of Avalon Sentinels for Christmas, here's how you get off cheaply: I just want a little bit of peace and quiet before the CES frenzy sets in, so a big bottle of Hello Kitty bubble bath (or GI Joe bubble bath if you need something more macho) will do the trick.

If you want to hear the limit of what is possible with recorded music, I suggest making a pilgrimage to Acoustic Sounds in Salina, Kansas to hear the Sentinels in their main sound room. Even if they are not close to what you can afford (don't feel bad, at \$125k, I can't afford em either), make the trip to buy some records and just spend 15 minutes in front of that system so that you can have the experience. I guarantee you will be transformed; whether you will be transformed into someone who has had the ultimate experience or into a criminal who starts robbing convenience stores so you can have a pair of Sentinels for yourself, that's up to you.

So, sit back and enjoy the issue. We have some great coverage of the Blues Masters Festival, photographed by yours truly and with some insightful copy by Scott Bock, blues writer extraordinaire, along with our usual music columnists and some great gear reviews. We have an intriguing article by PhD candidate Kieran Downs, who is researching the audiophile mind set at M.I.T. no less. His thoughts might give you some insight into our madness, or at least a few laughs.

Thanks to classical columnist Dan Babineau for dropping everything at a moments notice to get the news on the new Blue Note vinyl that is about to be released; he braved the LA freeway for you!

Music editor Ben Fong-Torres has a great article on the Reverend Al Green and as always, keeps us on our toes.

Last but not least, it's award time. Our Exceptional Value Award list has grown to 12 pieces of gear this year, due to us listening to more equipment than last year and we have added a new category for "Product of the Year". You will have read through the issue to see the results; I'm not giving it away here!

Here's to a good holiday season for you and yours. May all your LP's be clean ones.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "JOE BOYD". The signature is fluid and cursive, with varying line thicknesses.





"Quick, pitch those monoblocks!"



The Sansui 8080 Receiver

By Marc Phillips

I can still remember my father getting angry at me for selling my Sansui 8080 receiver. I was probably sixteen or seventeen at the time, and thanks to a friendship I had forged with a salesman at a local Pacific Stereo, I had quickly traded from a Kenwood KR-9600 to a Sansui 8080 to a Concept 5.5 receiver in a matter of 18 months.

"What kind of brand is 'Concept'?" he asked testily, referring to the house brand of Pacific Stereo that actually wound up very desirable among collectors some years later. **"I think you're getting ripped off by that salesman friend of yours."** My father was in the aerospace industry, and went on to tell me how all of his engineer friends at work were impressed that he had a teenage son with an 8080. Now he was going to have to lose face with those buddies. Never mind the fact that he was still listening to Floyd Kramer and Burt Bacharach on a Zenith 8-track player in the living room.



So every time I hear about a Sansui 8080, I wince a little. Sure, my father's words still sting a bit, but at the same time, I realize that I let go of a real honey of a receiver. And now, thirty years later, I have a nearly mint 8080 sitting in *my* living room, and I can't believe how good it sounds. Compared with my reference gear, the 8080 is fairly grainy and dry through the treble, and the lower bass is more than a little fuzzy. But imaging and soundstaging is spot on, as good as any of the so-called modern amps I've listened to over the last few years. And, best of all, the 80wpc 8080 is very dynamic, and plays loud very well. Strap this baby to a pair of Dahlquist DQ-10s (or any other of your favorite vintage speakers), and invite all of your friends over for the bash of the year.

The 8080 may have been eclipsed slightly by the introduction of the 8080DB, which offered Dolby noise reduction and 5 more watts per channel, but many Sansui aficionados feel that there is little sonic difference between the 8080 and the 8080DB, or even the larger 9090DB for that matter. Because of this, you can find a really nice 8080 on e-Bay for \$100 or so (Mine was \$399 new). That's not bad when you consider that many of the 8080's contemporaries, such as the bigger Kenwood KR series and the Pioneer SX series receivers, can fetch twice that. Even the little 15wpc Advent 300s are now running close to \$200 in good condition.

With tons of features, including a respectable headphone section, a decent tuner and provisions for three sets of speakers (not to mention two tape decks), the Sansui 8080 receiver is still a very substantial piece of gear. In fact, I may just wrap this one up and give it to my father for Christmas! ●

Thirty years later, I have a nearly mint 8080 sitting in *my* living room, and I can't believe how good it sounds.



TONEAUDIO'S
**Last Minute
Gift Guide**
2007

Who better to be on the opening page of our gift guide than industry ambassador EveAnna Manley? She was kind enough to put on the Santa hat and pose for us with the Stingray, which you can put in a *big* stocking for a mere \$2250. It boasts 40 watts per channel in UL mode and 20 in triode mode. Remember, this baby is an integrated, with four inputs, so add your favorite source, speakers and go! www.manleylabs.com

**TINY GIANT**

The Red Wine Audio 30.2 Signature

For those of you wanting the ultimate minimalist system, look no further. The 30.2 Signature offers 30 watts per channel with battery power giving you two a level of quiet, grain free that's hard to duplicate being plugged into the power grid. And with that thousand bucks you save on a boutique power cord, you can buy your significant other something really cool!

www.redwineaudio.com

**MAKE YOUR IPOD ALL IT CAN BE**

The ALO Audio Fidelity Docking Station

Plug that new iPod you're getting for Christmas into this stylish wood dock from ALO and you will be amazed at how great it can really sound! Cut from a solid block of hardwood with a CNC milling machine, the ALO dock is functional as well as beautiful. With an upgraded "linear power supply" you can keep your iPod charged all the time while you are sporting upgraded sound. Pick up one of ALO's matching interconnects while you are at it to finish off the package.

www.aloaudio.com



Distinctly
McIntosh...



The MC207 features Dynamic Power Manager,TM a new technology developed by McIntosh. DPMTM senses whether your speakers are 4 or 8 ohms and automatically optimizes the MC207 to deliver full power. Get all the power you've paid for with a McIntosh.

MC207 Power Amplifier

- Power a 7.1 home theater or a 5.1 home theater with 2 channels available to power a second zone
- 200 watts x 7 with either 4-ohm or 8-ohm speakers
 - Power Guard[®] amplifier clipping protection
 - Ultra-low distortion (less than 0.005%)
 - Silent (no fans) convection cooling
 - Balanced & unbalanced inputs

By design. There is nothing like a **McIntosh**
www.mcintoshlabs.com
 800.538.6576



WINE TO YOUR DOOR

Too busy spinning records to buy wine? Just stay in front of your computer, go to wine.com and have it brought right to your doorstep. The biggest collection in the US, and fantastic customer service assures a great wine-buying experience. You will have to get out of the listening chair though; all of their packages require a signature.

www.wine.com



BEND IT BABY!*The Lensbaby 3-D*

Camera buffs in the audience, check out the Lensbaby 3-D. The original Lensbaby is one of the coolest gadgets ever made and allows you to get those hip, selective focus images that you see in all the fashion and travel magazines. The best thing about the Lensbaby 3-D is that you can put your camera on a tripod and fine-tune the amount of soft focus with its adjustment screws.

www.lensbaby.com

**FERRARI PERFORMANCE ON YOUR DESKTOP***The Meridian F80*

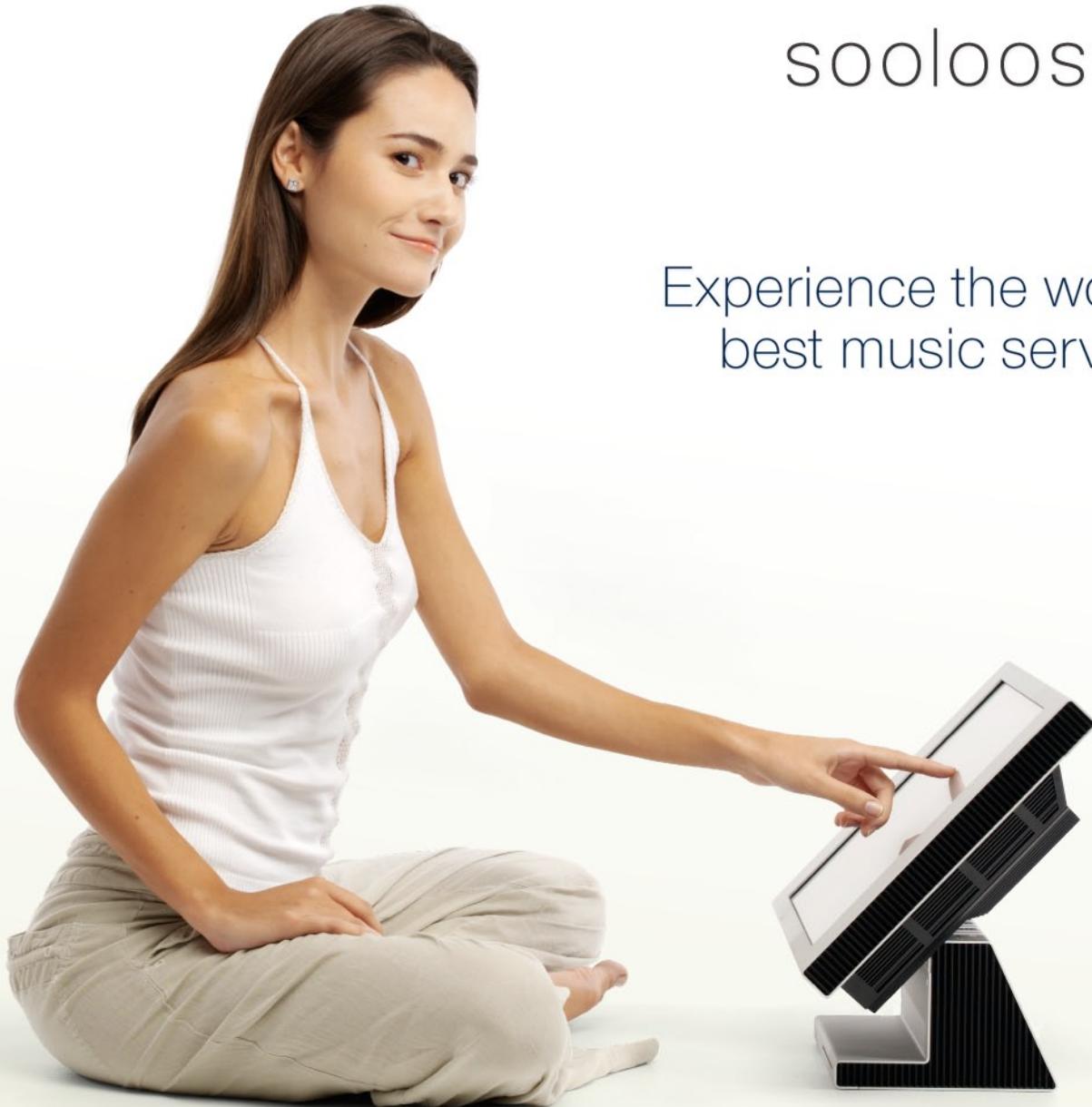
Watch your favorite Ferrari fan smile ear to ear with one of these! A co branded product between Meridian and Ferrari, it combines the expertise of both to provide you with a tabletop sound experience like no other. Our publisher and technical editor found the F80 irresistible and you will too.

www.thef80.com



sooloos

Experience the world's
best music server.



sooloos • www.sooloos.com • 866.606.0333



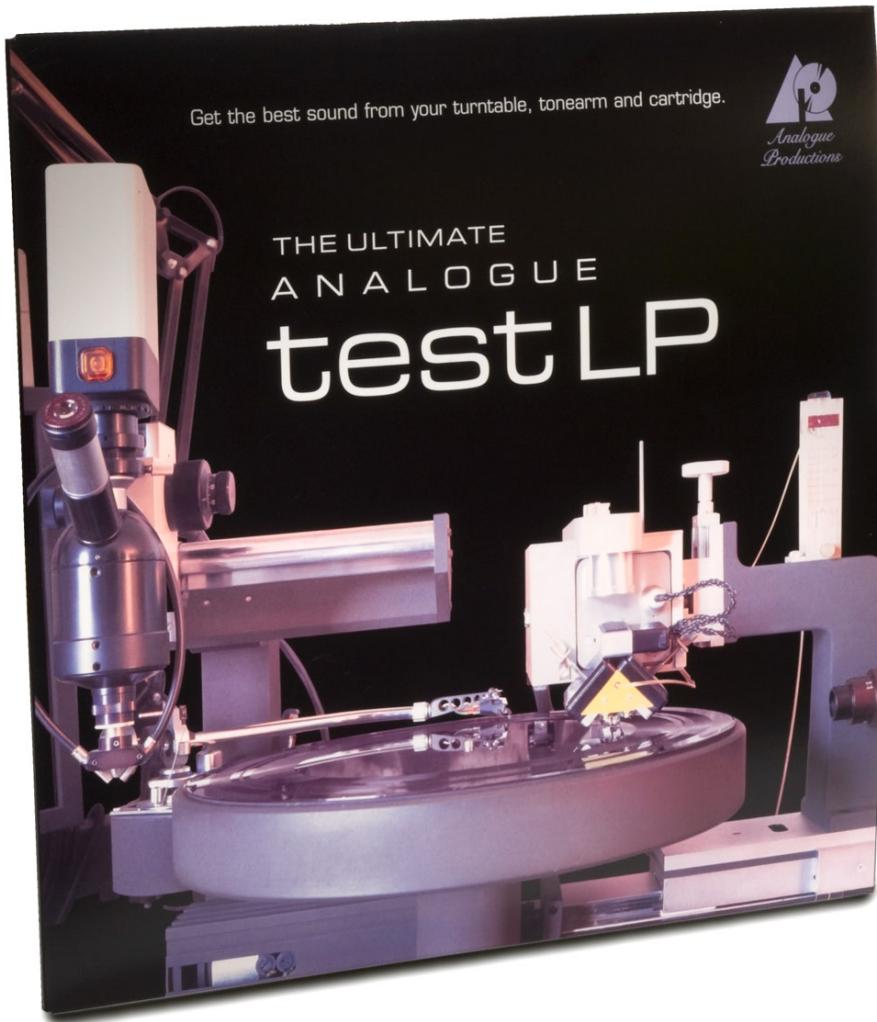
LASER GUIDED PRECISION

The Leica Disto A2

No more guessing or fumbling with the tape measure (and potentially doing damage in the process!) to get those speakers just where they belong. The Leica Disto A2 will tell you to the 1/16th of an inch where your speakers are placed in the room. They will do other fun things, like calculate room volume too! A setup nerd's must-have!

www.leica-geosystems.com



**ANOTHER GREAT TOOL**

The Acoustic Sounds Test Record

While we are on the subject of setup, how about the world's greatest setup record? Our technical editor Dan Babineau calls the Acoustic Sounds Test Record a "double diamond run". If you want to get serious about setting up your turntable, this is the one you want. And now that your turntable will be that much better sounding, treat yourself to a pile of new LP's while at the Acoustic Sounds website!

www.acousticsounds.com

**CURVY, SEDUCTIVE SOUND**

The Salagar Symphony S210

The Symphony S210 has been out a few short months and already it's racking up the "best of" awards. (Here, too!) An active powered set of DSP speakers; the S210's have the sound quality to match their stunning good looks. Add the source of your choice and some interconnects and you are ready to go!

www.salagar.com





TUBE WARMTH FOR YOUR IPOD

The Fatman iTube

Take the edge off of those MP3 files, or get analog bliss from your uncompressed files. Either way, match the iTube up with your favorite pair of speakers and this is a recipe for great sound that doesn't take up much space. I'm sure you know a young audiophile who would go nuts with one of these under the tree. Pick up a second one for yourself while you are at it!

www.fat-man.co.uk

NEW FROM PENAUDIO

The Penaudio Rogue 4

Introduced at CES this year, the new ambient series of speakers from Penaudio is a bit smaller than their classic series (Charisma and Serenade) and are available in a number of cool painted finishes as well as five wood surfaces. Those of you that prefer your Finnish beauty in the standard Penaudio finish that is available too. And these little jewels sound as good as they look!

www.penaudio.fi



The Connection Between Art and Science



haley

The Haley is an unsurpassed value. It is built to the same exacting standards as the "top of the line" RSA units. Designed for high-current amplifiers, front-end components, and smaller home theaters. The Haley gives you a noise-free background, huge dynamics, and protection for your audio/video investment.

- 15-amp
- 1800 watts of continuous uncompressed, uncolored power
- Three isolated RSA modified duplexes (6 outlets)
- RSA Mongoose 15-amp Power Cord optional



POWER UP

Power Line Conditioners Hand Made In California . Tel: 949.582.8072 . www.runningspringsaudio.com



running springs audio

THE ALTERNATIVE TO THE iPod?

The Microsoft Zune

The new Zune from Microsoft is pretty cool and they are betting the farm on its success. Like its buddy from Apple, the Zune comes in pretty colors (actually a little prettier than the iPod) and in chip memory or disc drive versions. Everywhere we went to find one, they were off the shelf, so this might be the little MP3 player that could. If you are one of those people that just can't get iTunes to work on your Dell PC, here's your ticket home.

www.zune.net



**TRICK OUT YOUR TRANSPORTER**

The ModWright Transporter

If you've been enjoying the music server game but long for more performance, send your Transporter off to Dan Wright and have him transform your Transporter into a world-class source component.

This upgrade to your Transporter is \$2000 and if you don't have one yet, ModWright can sell you a brand new one all done up right. Those cool glowing tubes sticking out of the top hint at the analog goodness inside!

www.modwright.com

XM IN STYLE

The Magnum Dynalab XT-606

We just reviewed this tuner's big brother, the 609 and it was fantastic. This model is a bit more affordable and will give you out of this world XM Radio performance. A tube output stage and a phenomenal DAC section take the nasties out of the presentation. Available in black or silver, there is no finer way to enjoy all of these channels!

www.magnumdynalab.com



**LET EVERYONE ENJOY YOUR IPOD***The Chestnut Hill Sound "George"*

It's an alarm clock with an AUX input and an iPod dock. How great is that? The George has built in power, speakers and a set of adapter plates so that you can use any generation of iPod with it. They sound great and come in a variety of different colors and finishes.

www.chillsound.com

MORE TUBEY GOODNESS*The Prima Luna ProLogue Eight*

Building on the success of their ProLogue line, Prima Luna introduces their new all vacuum tube CD player and it's a honey. If you have other Prima Luna components, you know what a great value this gear provides along with good sound and tasteful good looks.

The ProLogue Eight is available in black or silver.

www.upscaleaudio.com



Nik Software Professional Suite

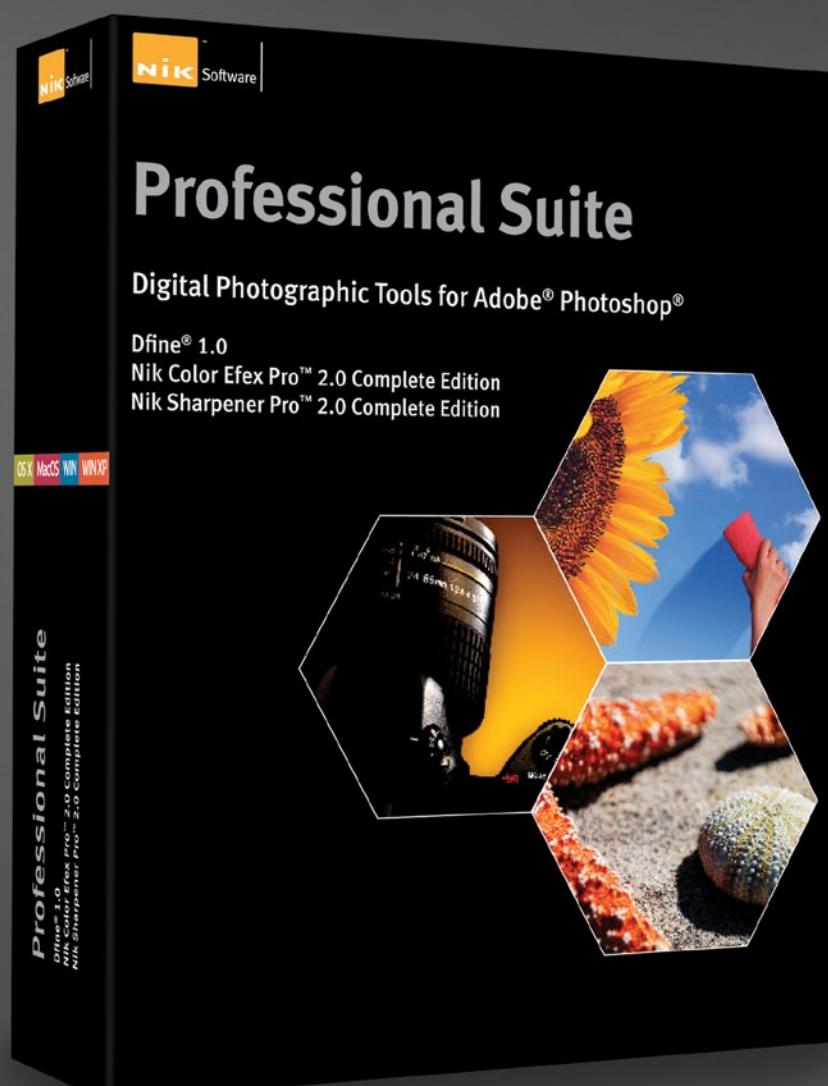
**Nik Software's Award-Winning Products
Now Available Together For The First Time**

Nik Software Professional Suite (MSRP \$449.95)

Dfine® 1.0

Nik Color Efex Pro™ 2.0 Complete Edition

Nik Sharpener Pro™ 2.0 Complete Edition



Now available at www.niksoftware.com or from any of our participating retailers.

www.niksoftware.com
888.284.4085

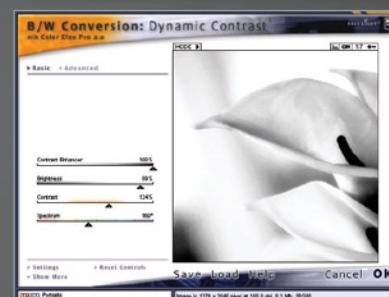


ANYTHING BUT COMPACT

*The Sonics by
Joachim Gerhard
Argenta*

Don't let the small size and understated looks fool you, these are great speakers. Whether the foundation for a great starter audiophile system or an awesome second system, a pair of Argentas will make you tap your toes. Available in a few different finishes, the compact size and front port makes them a great choice for someone who actually has to put their "bookshelf" speaker on a bookshelf.

www.immediasound.com



THE PERFECT GO-ANYWHERE CAMERA*The Canon G9 Compact*

With a 12 megapixel sensor and RAW capture capabilities, the new Canon G9 offers the kind of performance that you could only get in a DSLR not too long ago. Tiny enough to fit in your pocket, you can take it backpacking or to your favorite concert, where they don't allow "professional cameras" in the door. The joke is on them, you could shoot a spread for any major magazine with this one!

www.canonusa.com

**SHUT YOUR HIFI OFF AND GET SOME FRESH AIR**

Auto care products from Griot's Garage

Car lovers in the crowd will enjoy the wide range of cool stuff available at Griot's Garage. Whether you need a bottle of wax or a garage full of goodies, Griot's Garage gets my recommendation every time! They have a staff of trained experts that can help you select the products you need to keep your vehicle of choice in concours condition.

www.griotsgarage.com

Island Hopping

By Tom Caselli

My wife is a native of Long Island, and our daughter is a rapid hockey fan—especially of the Islanders. But my own favorite Island is a record label.

I first encountered an Island record in 1971 during a European trip when I came across Free's Live album in a Swiss record store. My interest was piqued by the label and its unique packaging, which made the album seem exotic. Island records did not exist in the United States until the early 70s. Until then, their artists were distributed by U.S. labels like A&M and United Artists. When Island did appear, starting in late 1971, it was distributed by Capitol.

It was Chris Blackwell's vision that created Island as an independent record company. Born in England, he grew up in Jamaica and created Island in 1959 as an outlet for local artists. Initially most of his artists were signed to Island but the recordings were licensed to other labels for distribution. His first major international success was with "My Boy Lollipop" by Millie Small. By the mid 60s he had returned to London and took advantage of the burgeoning music scene there. With Island now operating as a full fledged label, Blackwell signed many of the most innovative artists in the UK scene.

Because of my love of progressive rock, Island's peak years for me will always span 1968 to 1972.





n-Vious ?



world class sound... with vision

NaimUSA • 5657 West Howard Street • Niles, Illinois USA • 60714-4011 • Telephone: (847) 647-2293 • Facsimile: (847) 647-2461
<http://www.naimusa.com>

DAB / FM
tuner / clock
module now
available!



n-Vi DVD and CD player

Stunning one-box home
entertainment solution
for music and movie fans
who demand the best.

With the release of classic albums by King Crimson, Traffic, Jethro Tull, Emerson, Lake and Palmer as well as the softer sounds of Cat Stevens and Fairport Convention, the label's glory lasted well into the early 80's. Beyond rock, the label's greatest success on an international level was Bob Marley, who brought reggae to the masses.

Early Island pressings are referred to as "Pink Islands," for their solid pink color with stylized Island logos.

These are especially sought after by collectors. They not only featured the crown princes of the British underground, but also offered great sonics. Mint condition titles by Cat Stevens, Traffic and King Crimson continue to escalate in value and can command prices in the hundreds of dollars. However, the second issue label, commonly called "Pink Rims," featured a palm tree label with a pink rim (surprised, aren't you?) and can be had for a fraction of the cost.

Many titles were reissued on the Pink Rim using the same stampers as their more expensive relatives. A host of performers and titles never even saw a Pink Label (DOES HE MEAN PINK ISLANDS?) release, and artists like Marley, Roxy Music, and Robert Palmer only came to prominence with the second-generation label.

The Island catalog was sold to PolyGram and is now part of the Universal Music Group. Many of the acts have long since broken their ties to Island, and their catalogs are no longer under Universal's control. For many of the ones that remain, the CD age has not been kind. Although the initial CD releases of Island material sounded good, many of the later remasters had excessive noise reduction, which robbed the music of much of its life.
(continued)

This issue, we will concentrate on a couple of releases that can be found more easily and that offer great sound at a reasonable price.

Free – Tons of Sobs

Though original Pink Island copies often cross into the \$200 territory, I recently came across a mint pink rim at Rockaway Records in Los Angeles. Rockaway Records usually sports the cream of collectible pressings—with prices to match. However, they usually are very reasonable on second issues. This makes it a mandatory stop when in the downtown Los Angeles area.

Free are best known for the riff-laden FM staple “All Right Now.” Although it contains one of the classic rock guitar signatures, it is probably one of their worst songs. Discovered by Britain’s godfather of blues Alex Korner and given support by legendary BBC DJ John Peel, *Tons of Sobs* was their debut entry into the exploding UK blues scene.

The UK cover features a disturbing photo of what appears to be a glass coffin-like enclosure, with a teddy bear displayed among churchyard like surroundings. The interpretation of “Tons of Sobs” is up to you. In a tasteful move, the UK cover was replaced with the inside photo spread for the U.S. market.

This pink rimmed copy sports the stamper numbers “3u” on both sides with the Porky / Pecko name. This designated a mastering by George Peckham, a mastering engineer responsible for many great sounding British albums. The album was produced by Guy



Stevens and engineered by Andy Johns, a team that accounted for some of the best albums issued by Island during its independent run.

“I’m a Mover” leads things off. It’s a stone cold classic in Free’s canon of great songs, and it features not only the superb vocals of Paul Rodgers but also one of the early originators of the Les Paul / Marshall combination, Paul Kossoff. And this track has Koss’s guitar up front where it should be. The drums have a nice amount of air around them, giving the impression of playing in real space.

Next up is the Booker T. & The MG’s classic, “The Hunter,” which has been covered by every hard rock and bar band and done to death. If only one version needs to exist, this is it. Free took the song and made it their own, keeping it in their repertoire to the end. They charge into it balls to the wall and my only complaint is that the guitar is a bit recessed in the mix compared with some other tracks on the album. (*continued*)

Keeping in line with the album title is the song "Moonshine," which has nothing to do with the grain alcohol elixir or paint thinner, depending on which side of the Mason Dixon line you reside. It's an ominous tune about sitting in the graveyard under the cloak of darkness, lamenting on a past lover. Paul Rodgers is placed to the left with just the right amount of echo added to give a haunting feel to the landscape.

A favorite song of mine is "Sweet Tooth," a classic 12-bar blues with Rodgers and Kossoff anchoring each side of the stage. Piano is added into the mix on this track, a welcome addition to the sound that gives added texture.

"Walking in My Shadow" closes out the album, a classic cockrock shouter that could probably have fitted in nicely on any Bad Company album.

Squeeze the music from your CDs... right to the last note!

Thirty years of research towards the advancement of musical sound quality has enabled Rega to produce two CD players that incorporate a radical new technology.

The **Apollo** and **Saturn CD players** use a proprietary system which analyses each disc and optimizes the player's setup accordingly. Rega's new technology squeezes the musical essence out of the CD just as it was interpreted and recorded, right to the last note. Take a test squeeze for yourself, contact The Sound Organisation today for a qualified Rega retailer.



Rega Apollo CD Player



Rega Saturn CD Player



THE COLLECTOR:



Emerson, Lake and Palmer

– *Emerson, Lake and Palmer*

The first ELP album was recorded before their overblown egos and pretentious ideas permeated the band's mentality. I've owned many variations on this album; UK and German Pink Island originals, U.S. promos and Manitcore reissues. While this copy has the pink rim label it uses stamper numbers 1u and 2u as my original Pink Island copy.

The album is engineered by Eddie Offord, who was responsible for all of ELP's early albums. The band even named a song for him on their second album, Tarkus. It's called "Are You Ready Eddie."

The opening track, "The Barbarian," gave a good indication of what to expect from this heavy keyboard trio. Piano, drums and bass anchor

the stage while the Moog paints broad strokes over the soundscape. The overall sound is well balanced, and if any fault can be found, it is that the bass drum is more pronounced than the rest of the kit.

I'm going to skip "Take a Pebble," a song that if I never hear it again will be too soon, and go straight to "Knife-Edge." The acoustic guitar is beautifully rendered with plenty of space allocated to the hand clap accompaniment that highlights the micro dynamics of the song.

What would any prog-rock album be without a pipe organ? Restrained and tasteful? No chance of that happening with ELP. Sure enough, the Royal Festival Hall's massive pipe organ makes its entry on the "Clotho" movement of "The Three Fates." As you would expect, the low end is a sub-woofer demonstration, but the hall's ambiance, width and depth are nicely reproduced.

The next movement, "Lachesis," features some solo piano work from Mr. Emerson that has wonderful weight often missing on other rock recordings of this instrument. However, the piano size is so outlandishly large that the Jolly Green Giant would have difficulty playing it.

Skipping the last movement and heading directly into "Tank," it's clear that this track exists to highlight Carl Palmer's skills. Unfortunately, the drums are miked so closely that any air is prevented from sneaking in. It's only after Emerson and Lake enter that the sound opens up. The album closes with "Lucky Man," the FM radio staple. Although this was one of their more restrained songs, the wonderful Island pressing does a great job reproducing the layered vocals.

While some of the U.S. Cotillion pressings can be very good, even the best don't begin to compare to the Island pressings. Later UK Manticore issues should be avoided; they are thin-sounding and offer none of the sonics found on the Island, or even the best U.S. pressings.

Mott The Hoople – Wildlife

For most on this side of the Atlantic, Mott was associated with the start of the glam rock movement and their anthem “All the Young Dudes,” penned by admirer David Bowie. However, by that time, they had issued four albums with a much more diversified sound. While their first two, the eponymous Mott the Hoople and Mad Shadows, featured a harder edge and appeared on the pink Island label, their third took a more laid-back approach.

Wildlife made its appearance on the pink rimmed Island label. The album is the handy work of three engineers, Andy John among them, but this makes for a rather uneven sound between tracks.

The LP opens with “Angel of Eighth Avenue,” a country tinged ballad that wouldn’t be out of place on an Eagles album. The band is augmented with both pedal steel and fiddle, while an acoustic guitar drives the song along. It has a nice open soundstage that gives it a lazy Sunday morning feel. The band must have spent a lot of time in New York City, because they captured the mood of Manhattan’s seedy Eighth Avenue perfectly.

“Wrong Side of the River” follows, and Mick Ralph, the band’s guitarist takes over lead vocals from Ian Hunter. It has the acoustic piano playing off Verden Allen’s organ, a combination that served Procol Harum well. The recording allows the double-tracked acoustic guitar to be clearly distinguished.

“Waterlow” is a truly melancholy song. It sounds like a bad orchestra tape was played as the band recorded the song. Although Ian Hunter’s vocals are very distinctive on this song, his vocal is much more subdued, giving it a homogenized sound. Melanie’s classic “Lay Down (Candles in the Rain)” is covered very well and gives hint to the sound that Mott would adopt on their later, pop-oriented albums. The chorus takes on the character of a sing-a-long more likely to be heard at a sporting event than the kaftan infused Melanie original.

The album closes with an absolute rave-up on Little Richard’s “Keepin’ a Kockin’.” It’s raw, crude and over the top. Worth the price of admission alone.

Spooky Tooth – Spooky Two

I’ve saved the best for last. I was introduced to this band while a sophomore in high school. A friend said,



“You need to hear this band.” It was love at first listen. Although a British band, they were led by expatriate American Gary Wright of “Dream Weaver” fame, which I won’t hold against him. Spooky Tooth featured a heavy albeit soulful sound courtesy of lead vocalist Mike Harrison. A comparison to Humble Pie would not be far off base, considering Spooky Tooth bassist Greg Ridley jumped ship after this album to join them.

This, their second album, was a departure from the more psychedelic sound of their first, *It’s All About a Roundabout*, an album many consider a classic slice of British pop.

Most of the tracks were authored by Wright, except for the one cover, “Evil Woman,” a song covered by many, but none better than this. I’ve never been able to get a hold of a clean pink label copy, but this pink rim has the stamper numbers +A and +B. This is different from most Island albums, which use the designation A1, A2 or 1u, 2u etc. So, I’m not sure how close this is to an original. I will say that the sound is miles ahead of any U.S. copies I’ve owned.

While Andy Johns occupied the engineer’s chair, the album was produced by Jimmy Miller, who was on a hot streak at the time, responsible for many of the best albums emulating from the UK. (*continued*)

Opening with "Waiting for the Wind," it has Mike Harrison sounding very much like early Rod Stewart. Gary Wright's Hammond swirls around the song. Unfortunately the chorus on this and most cuts on the LP sounds compressed.

The following track, "Feelin' Bad," has a nicely extended bass. A bit of echo added to the vocals gives the recording great depth with lots of space around the drums.

This next song makes the album a required purchase for audiophiles. "I've Got Heartache"

is a gospel influenced number with the vocal "choir" of the band placed well beyond the outsides of the speakers. The accompanying piano is clearly heard in the right rear corner of the room.

Finally, we have the album's show stopper, "Evil Woman." This has everything that made late 60s rock great. An extended nine-minute track that is loaded with fat sounding guitar riffs, awesome organ interplay and classic raspy vocals; it doesn't get better than this. Turn on

the black light and get the bong from under the bed. You'll be 16 again.

As you might expect, the organ is placed front and center throughout the album and shares the stage with equally well-recorded drums. Spooky Tooth went on to record another five albums. All have their merits, especially their rendition of "I Am the Walrus" on *The Last Puff*. But *Ceremony* should be avoided at all costs. It was a failed attempt at merging them with the electronic noodlings of French composer Pierre Henry. ●

Simplify your system... and get more from your music!



AURUM
ACOUSTICS

aurumacoustics.com :: Tel: 709 834 8244
MADE IN CANADA

"...a complete success..."
— *Audio Ideas Guide*, 2007

"...dangerously seductive..."
— *magazine-audio*, 2007

"...among the very standalone CD players and preamps..."
— *SoundStage!*, 2006

"... without question the best CD playback I've heard."
— *Ultra Audio*, 2005



Stereo Times Most Wanted Components, 2007 :: SoundStage! Reviewers' Choice Award, 2006
SoundStage! Edge of the Art Award, 2006 :: Ultra Audio Select Component Award, 2005

Because Less is More!

ONE COMPONENT — ONE REMOTE — MINIMAL CABLE REQUIREMENTS
MORE TECHNOLOGY — SUPERIOR SOUND

The pinnacle of the "less is more" concept is the **Integris CDP**. As an integrated CD player and preamp you'll hear digital at its absolute finest — the is your one-piece solution for performance, convenience and simplicity. You will also appreciate your other sources with excellent fidelity, extensive flexibility, a great feature set and reference caliber engineering, as every preamp should offer (but few do).

state-of-the art DSP-enhanced CD playback with premium top-loading transport :: multiple PCM digital inputs supported
neutral transparent linestage preamp with 5 inputs :: high performance MC/MM phono stage — new option!
dedicated headphone amplifier circuit — new option!

Blues Masters at the Crossroads-Salina, Kansas

By Scott M. Bock

Photography By Jeff Dorgay

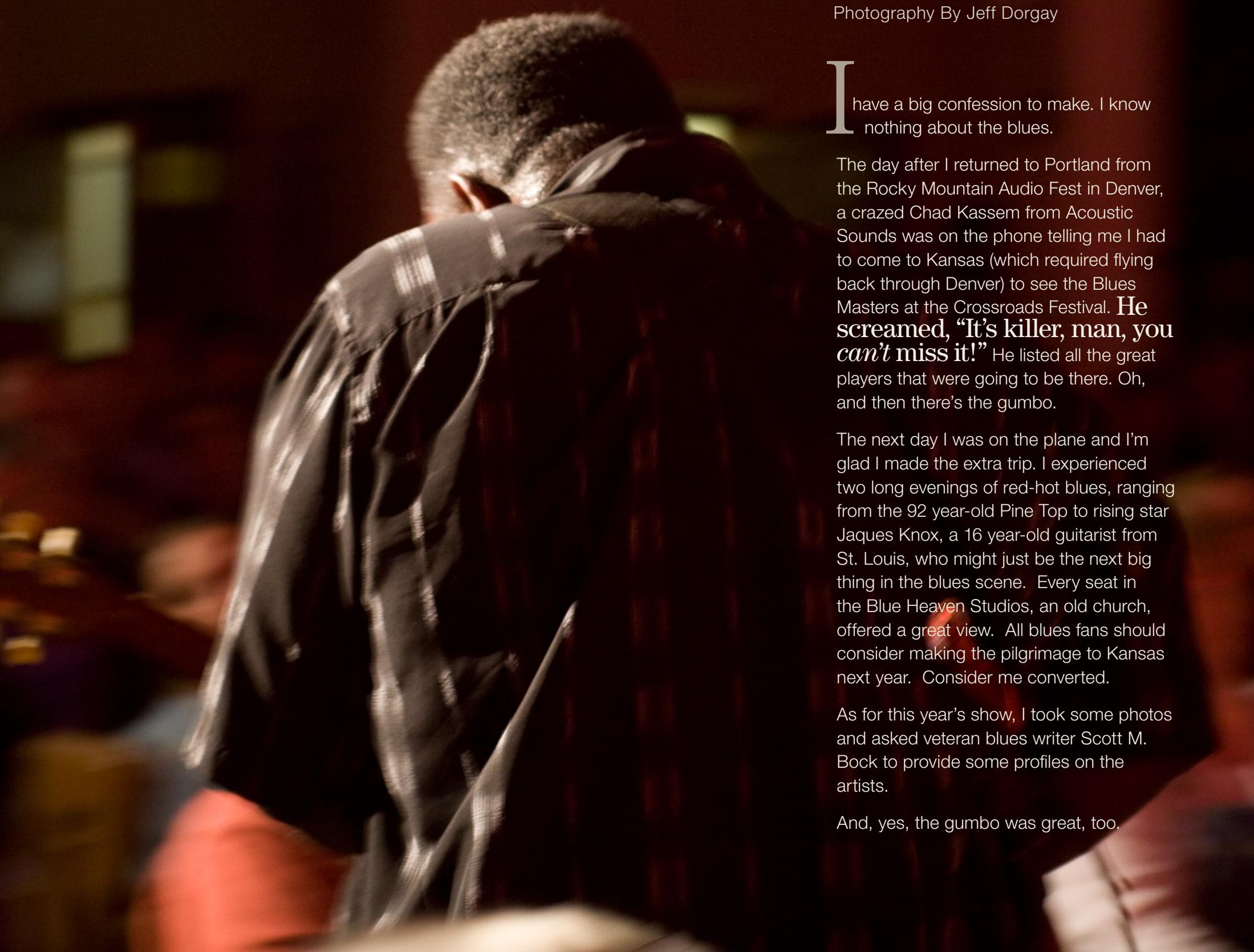
I have a big confession to make. I know nothing about the blues.

The day after I returned to Portland from the Rocky Mountain Audio Fest in Denver, a crazed Chad Kassem from Acoustic Sounds was on the phone telling me I had to come to Kansas (which required flying back through Denver) to see the Blues Masters at the Crossroads Festival. **He screamed, “It’s killer, man, you can’t miss it!”** He listed all the great players that were going to be there. Oh, and then there’s the gumbo.

The next day I was on the plane and I’m glad I made the extra trip. I experienced two long evenings of red-hot blues, ranging from the 92 year-old Pine Top to rising star Jaques Knox, a 16 year-old guitarist from St. Louis, who might just be the next big thing in the blues scene. Every seat in the Blue Heaven Studios, an old church, offered a great view. All blues fans should consider making the pilgrimage to Kansas next year. Consider me converted.

As for this year’s show, I took some photos and asked veteran blues writer Scott M. Bock to provide some profiles on the artists.

And, yes, the gumbo was great, too.



Michael Burks

Michael Burks grew up with music. There was a family band, and for a time, a crowded nightclub. His dad even played with the iconic Sonny Boy Williamson II. Michael, in fact, started woodshedding on his guitar at two years old! You can hear his command of the instrument as soon as he hits his first few notes. There are echoes of Albert King, but Michael's powerhouse playing has evolved, as he fuses his Arkansas-rooted blues with a rockier, more modern sound.

This bluesman is riding the blues highway from gig to gig and recording regularly, with a new CD on the way. He clearly enjoyed the chance to hang out with other artists backstage in Salina and to spend time with some of his fans. Michael closed the first night with a tasteful blues fireworks show. The next morning, he was up and gone early, on his way to yet another gig.



Thornetta Davis

Thornetta Davis was an inspired addition to the lineup in Salina. She's a deep, soulful blues singer, and she's also an unapologetic, eclectic artist. She's toured with the funk-metal band, Big Chief, and knows a mosh pit when she sees one. Not too long ago, one of her songs was even featured on an episode of *The Sopranos*.

This native of East Detroit has an incredibly powerful voice, and, in the Blue Heaven Studio, she handled blues standards and her own material with equal ease, and kept it all bluesy for this crowd. Thornetta is busy in Detroit these days, but with a growing number of recordings and festival gigs, she has become a national artist.



Buckwheat Zydeco

Stanley Dural is “The Man” in today’s zydeco music scene. He’s popular in venues that don’t typically offer his brand of Louisiana pop, and he’s recording on major labels. In fact, Buckwheat – and, yes, he’s been called that since he was a kid (after the Little Rascals character) – has been traveling in elite circles, kicking off shows for U2, Eric Clapton, and a host of others.

Buckwheat was in Salina to back some great musicians. He arrived with an all-star band, including guitar great Lil’ Buck Sinegal, Buckwheat’s son, Sir Reginald Dural, and accordion monster Major Handy. Sitting behind the B-3 for much of Major Handy’s set, Buckwheat created a funky pulse that had everyone moving. He eventually stepped out in front, laying down some funky accordion licks to get everyone up and moving.





Marquise Knox

Never heard of Marquise Knox? No one else outside of St. Louis had, either. He's 16 going on 50. Think Howlin' Wolf reincarnated. He's cocky, tough, and his voice has that grit that comes from years of singing.

Despite his young age, Marquise has already played with a truck-load of established bluesmen, and he's proven that he's no novelty act. After his set the first evening, he raced to the hotel to set up for the all night jam that takes place every year after the Blue Heaven gig. Marquise just put out his first CD, and surely will be showing up on the festival circuit this year.



James Cotton

Cotton is one of the elder statesman of the blues. He's done it all, from backing Muddy Waters to running his own band all over the world and performing in rock venues like the fabled Fillmore West and at the Newport Jazz Festival. He's also mentored dozens of younger players. Having gone through throat surgery, Cotton no longer sings, but his harmonica playing continues to give him a potent voice that instantly commands attention.

At Blues Masters, Cotton worked with Muddy's band. And though he lives in Texas these days and generally uses a stool on stage, his Mississippi-gone-to-Chicago harp licks remain as deep and powerful as those of any bluesman in history.



Big George Brock

Big George Brock has been playing the harmonica and singing for 60 years. He's old school - inspired by a harmonica player he heard on the radio when he'd come out of the Mississippi fields, and by the 78 rpm records his mother played, by Sonny Boy, II.

But, music wasn't how he started out making a living. He boxed for a time, and once beat a bear in a fight! He left for St. Louis where he loaded trucks, worked in a restaurant, and had a ton of kids.

He finally ran a nightclub where he played harp and booked everyone who came through town, including Ike and Tina, and childhood neighbor, Muddy Waters. Even Albert King played guitar for him.

Now, Big George is making up for lost time. He's recording and touring every chance he gets. Don't be fooled by his clean, pressed, red suit, the cane, and coke-bottle glasses. George blew the reeds out of his harp, got down, and rolled around on the floor during his set.

Chicago Bob Nelson

Harp player Chicago Bob Nelson actually comes from Bogalusa, Louisiana. His nickname came from Muddy Waters, who would always find Bob at the front of the stage, at his gigs, in the Windy City. Bob learned from Muddy, as well as from Louisiana legends Slim Harpo and Lightning Slim. Before leading his own band, he also toured for a time with John Lee Hooker.

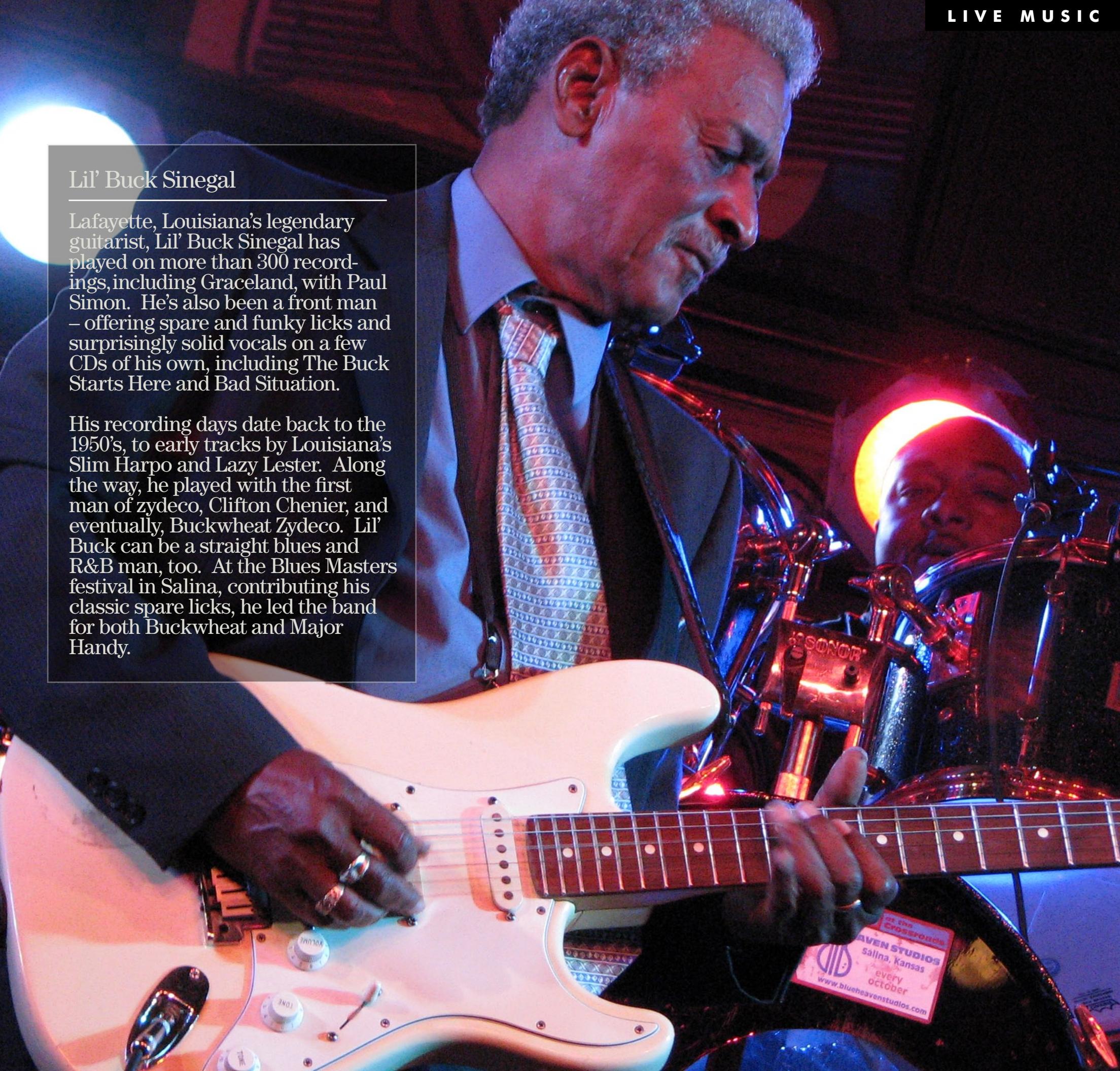
This gig was a blast for Bob, who now lives in Boston. He had the chance to play with Muddy's band, offering up deep 50's Chicago blues with his unique, laid back vocals. He also played with one of his childhood friends, Lazy Lester, who put down his own harp and backed Bob on guitar.



Lil' Buck Sinegal

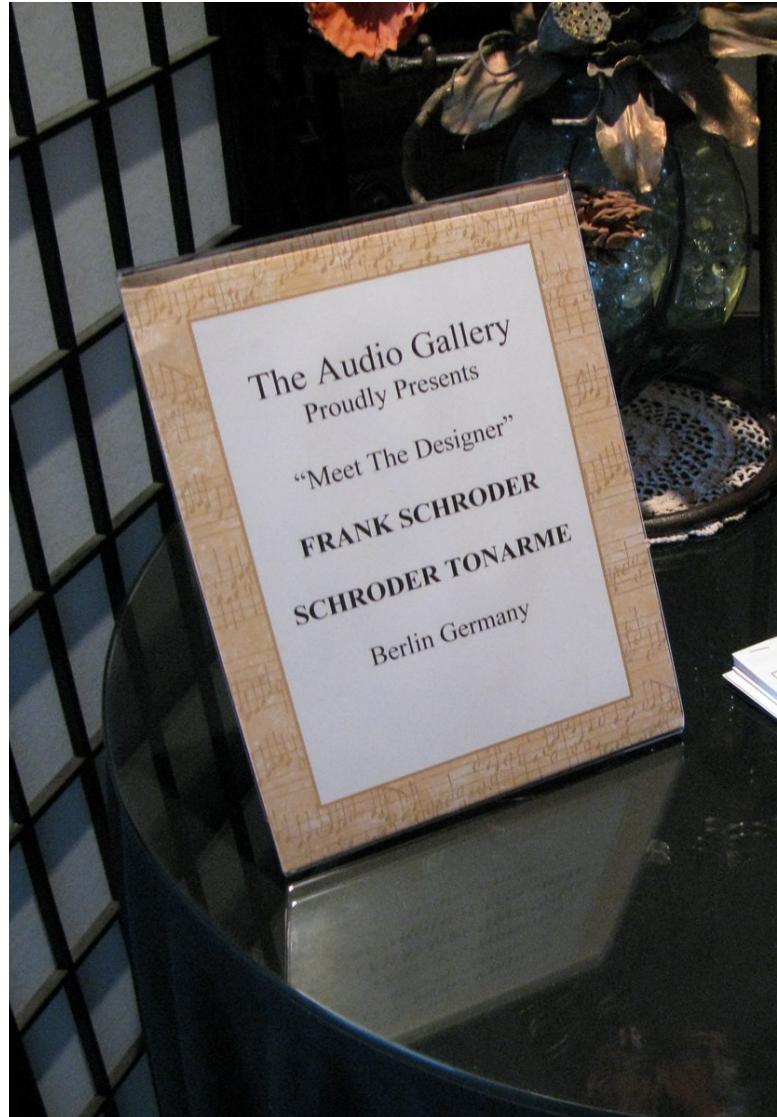
Lafayette, Louisiana's legendary guitarist, Lil' Buck Sinegal has played on more than 300 recordings, including Graceland, with Paul Simon. He's also been a front man – offering spare and funky licks and surprisingly solid vocals on a few CDs of his own, including *The Buck Starts Here* and *Bad Situation*.

His recording days date back to the 1950's, to early tracks by Louisiana's Slim Harpo and Lazy Lester. Along the way, he played with the first man of zydeco, Clifton Chenier, and eventually, Buckwheat Zydeco. Lil' Buck can be a straight blues and R&B man, too. At the Blues Masters festival in Salina, contributing his classic spare licks, he led the band for both Buckwheat and Major Handy.



The Way Things Are Supposed To Be

By Marc Phillips



It could have been 1986. Or even 1976.

Here I was, spending a Saturday afternoon in a high-end audio store, chatting with the owner and a few customers about audio, and listening to a genuinely gifted manufacturer talk about his latest tonearm. Turntables outnumbered CD players. Each listening room was set up with one system, not ten. Audiophile LPs were being sold near the cash register. And, most importantly, there was absolutely no home theatre or multi-channel setups to be seen anywhere. SACD? DVD-a? Beats me. I didn't notice. It was a rare glimpse of heaven.

I kept saying to myself, "I feel at home." This is how I got started in this hobby, after all, as a teenager hanging out in hi-fi stores, putting audio salesmen through the paces. Sure, I had to gain their trust, since it's hard to take a 15-year-old with long hair and an OP shirt seriously when it comes to buying high-end stereo gear. But I'd always freak them out by actually buying that Kenwood KR-9600 receiver, or that Dual 510 with the Shure V-15 Type III, or that pair of AR 11 bookshelf speakers. And when I told them I'd be back for those Dahlquist DQ-10s, or those Phase Linear separates, they'd believe me.

These days I'm usually taken seriously when I wander into a high-end store, since I'm no longer that long-haired kid in torn Levi's. (Now I'm just a middle-aged man in torn Levi's.) But the magic is gone. The Internet, home theater and music downloading have changed the audio landscape, and the once ubiquitous hi-fi store is as rare as, well, the ubiquitous record store. Usually when you schmooze with audio salesmen these days, they're pessimistic and pragmatic, the very essence of what's called a dying breed. It's just not as fun as it used to be.

It Takes a Village to Raise an Audiophile

Audio Gallery, in Lake Oswego, Oregon, has retained some of that old magic. I was invited to stop by on October 20 to listen to Frank Schroder, designer of the world-class Schroder tonearm line, talk about his latest version of his flagship Reference SQ arm, which is designed to be used with higher-mass turntables. When I walked in, however, my vision started to swim and waver as I headed into flashback mode, and started thinking about every warm and inviting hi-fi salon I've ever visited; I had to sit down. I plunked down in a comfy leather sofa until I regained my senses.

I've met Mr. Schroder, who is a proud resident of Berlin, on a few occasions. (I'd make a quick "I'm a jelly donut" reference, but I'll refrain.) I was sure that he wouldn't remember, since these brief handshakes occurred at audio shows, where he was dodging from room to room, making sure his plethora of tonearms were performing at their best. But I'm sure he'll remember me now, since I monopolized his time for at least an hour, asking endless questions about his beautiful yet functional works of art.

C'mon, Professor...Just Roll the Film

I finally shut up when the time came to hear the new Schroder Reference SQ arm in action. Gary Kerr, one of the proprietors of Audio Gallery, had mounted the SQ on TW Acustics' massive AC Raven turntable, along with a rare Lyra Olympos SL cartridge. All amplification was from the Japanese company Air-Tight, who makes some of the most



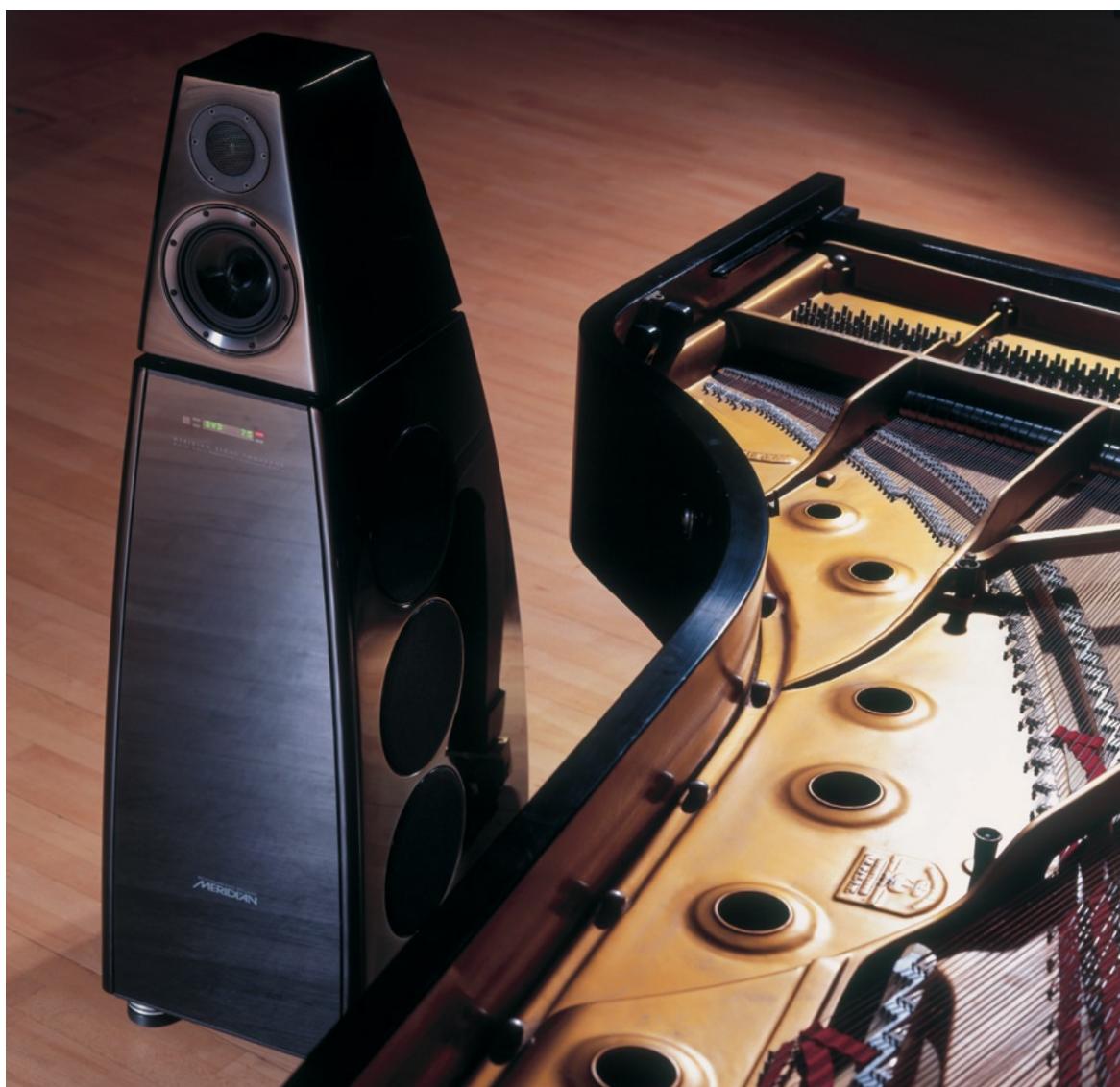
reliable, capable and exquisite single-ended triode amps in the world. And Gary chose the Quad 2805 ESLs to complete this particular system which, if you haven't already figured it out, lacks any type of digital source. My kind of system, I thought.

The sound, of course, was extraordinary. Even though Frank Schroder and Gary Kerr insisted that the SQ tonearm had relatively few hours on it and would eventually open up even more, I was more than impressed. The whole system had a lovely, understated feel about it that drew you in, as opposed to pinning your ears back. (*continued*)

**The sound,
of course,
was
extraordinary.**

True piano sound

Meridian Audio systems



Meridian engineers know that the sound of a Concert Grand Piano is the most difficult of any instrument to reproduce accurately.

Meridian DSP8000 digital loudspeakers, driven by the Signature Reference 808 CD player, comprise one of the very few audio systems in the world to achieve this goal from a CD source. Listen for yourself.

BOOTHROYD STUART
MERIDIAN[®]

Meridian America Inc., 8055 Troon Circle, Suite C,
Austell, GA 30168-7849
+1 404 344 7111
www.meridian-audio.com
In Canada, contact Aralex Acoustics:
+1 800 663 6732
www.aralex.com

At first I thought the overall system sounded a bit subdued, especially in terms of dynamics. And after spending the better part of the last year with a loudspeaker (the Devore Gibbon Super 8s) that utterly disappear into a room, I felt that the majority of the sound came directly out of the two Quad ESL panels. (I might not be a panel guy after all!)

But by the end of the afternoon, I kept returning to that room, which was decorated in unusually warm and comforting tones, to listen a bit more.

I realized that this was a quiet man's system, designed for the audiophile who wants to hear more closely.

And I realized that I'm that kind of guy most of the time. As I grow older, I rock out less, and I tend to keep the volume control about an hour sooner than I did just a few years ago. This is the type of system I'll buy when I'm ready to ride off into the sunset and forget about this crazy hobby once and for all.

Talking with Mr. Schroder underlined a few more instincts I've had about the hobby as well. I've been meeting more and more audiophiles, especially novices, who are trying to use the Internet to learn how to be an audiophile. They're getting too much of their information from online discussion forums, where on a regular you can hear such misinformation as Rega turntables being unreliable (when they're probably the most reliable products in the entire audio industry), or that you can feel a micron or two of play in a tonearm, or that by measuring VTA down to one ten-thousandth of a millimeter, you can make a mass-market direct-drive turntable sound better than an expensive belt-drive design.

(continued)

THE VINYL ANARCHONIST



I mentioned that last online forum gem (yes, it was an actual comment) to Mr. Schroder, and he stared at me in disbelief before laughing graciously. The manufacturer of one of the finest tonearms in the world feels that fiddling with VTA is overemphasized among analog purists, and that you should just set it to accommodate 80% of your records, and forget about it. In addition, constantly resetting VTA affects the tracking force of your cartridge, and may cause your stylus to operate out of its comfort zone, which will mess up the sound even more profoundly than incorrect VTA. This is the type of information you just don't find floating freely from the keyboards of the self-professed vinyl gurus on the Internet.

How about that SQ review, V.A.?

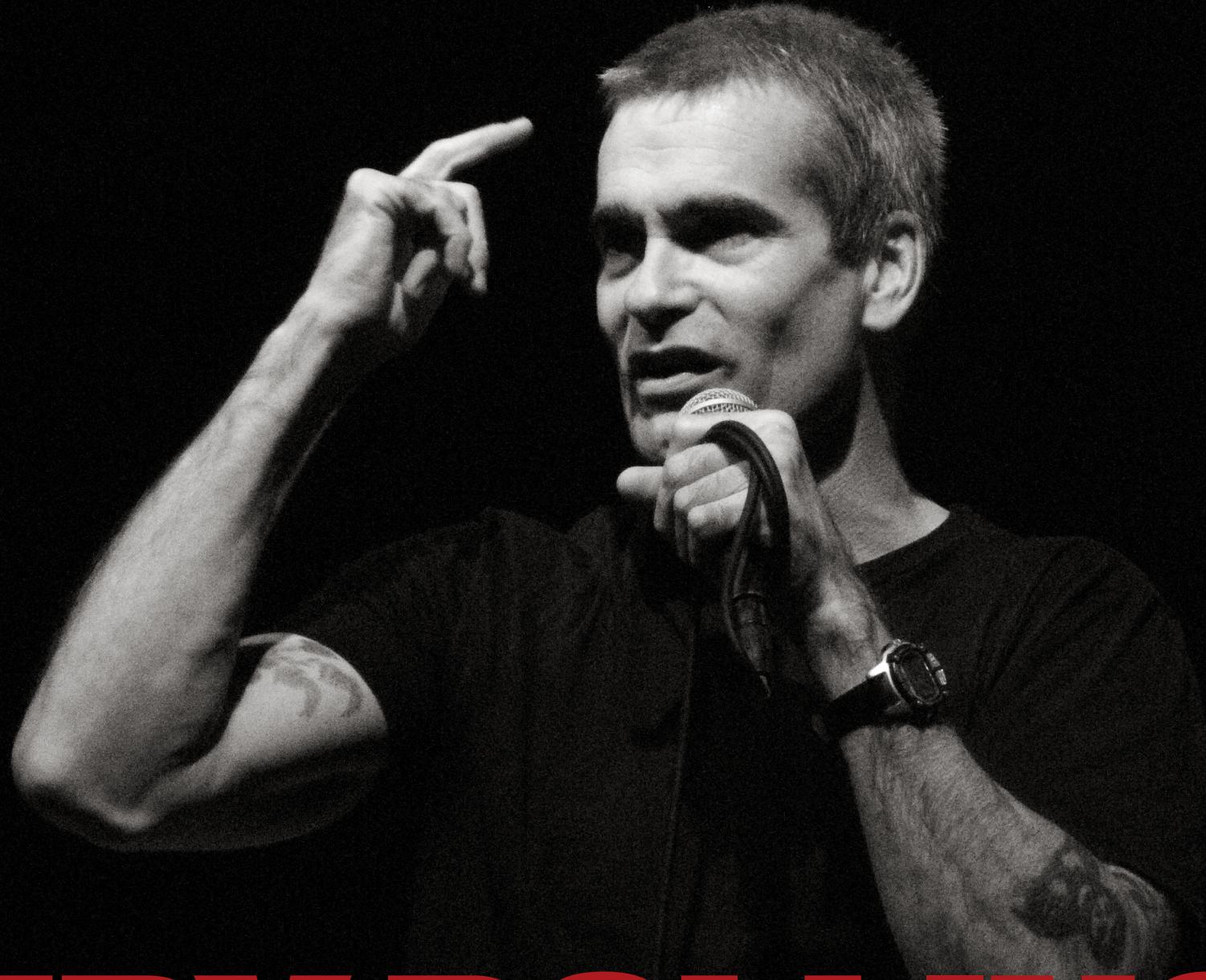
Unfortunately, I won't be getting a Schroder arm in for review any time soon, although God knows I tried. As with all of the finer things in life, there is a considerable wait for a Schroder

tonearm. Frank Schroder makes each one by hand, and he can't whip one out in a day or two. "Usually at this time of year, I have eight or so to make before Christmas," he told us. His current waiting list, however, is many times that this year. But he isn't about to rush anything. "They'll get it when it's done," he said, with a knowing look that said that most of his clients understand completely.

Of course, this may prompt more than one individual to wonder why Mr. Schroder was in Oregon at all. I can almost hear those eager souls bellowing, "Get back to Berlin and finish my tonearm!" But Mr. Schroder wanted to come out and meet those who are interested in his work. He wanted to hear his own creation in the context of a specific system (and a fine one at that!). And he wanted to talk about audio... not on an online audio forum, and not through countless e-mails.

It has to be done face to face. That's how we used to learn about this stuff. We still can. ●

The manufacturer of one of the finest tonearms in the world feels that fiddling with VTA is overemphasized...



HENRY ROLLINS PROVOKED

Nov. 1, 2007

Aladdin Theatre, Portland OR

Story and Photos By Jeff Dorgay

Perusing the audience before Henry Rollins took the stage, I counted 19 women with Bettie Page hairdos and only one guy (besides me) wearing a GAP hoodie. I noticed a lot of black clothing and tattoos. No one was wearing Hello Kitty anything in this crowd.

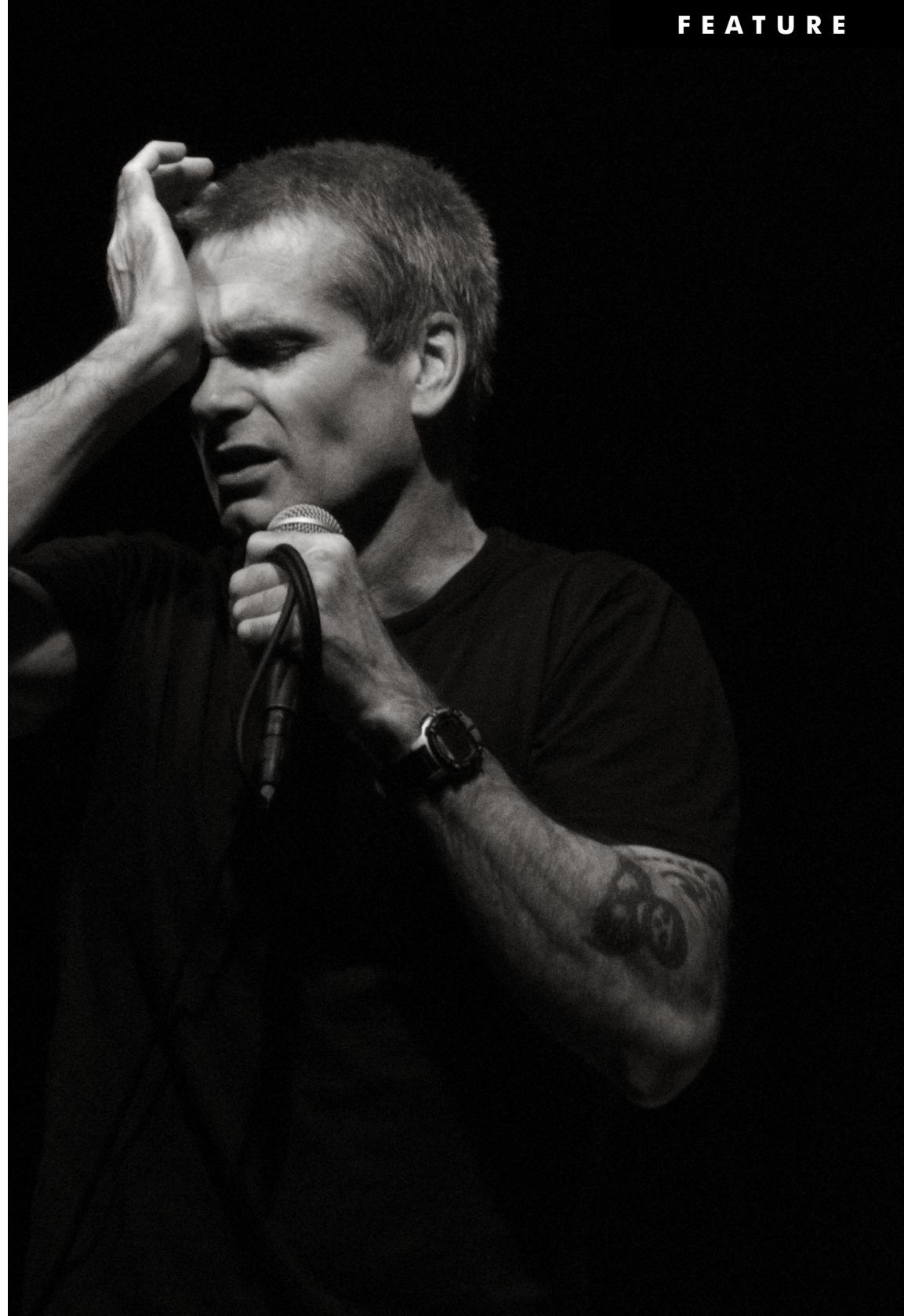
While waiting for the doors to open before the show, one of his security staff informed us that no photography with a “professional camera” would be allowed and that we were *not to approach the stage for any reason*. Doing so would result in expulsion from the show, immediately. The couple sitting behind us confirmed that when a fan tried to approach the stage last year, Henry became very unnerved by this move and had this guest removed by security.

At his prior performance here it had been a bit over a year since Pantera’s lead guitarist Dimebag Darrell had died at the hands of a crazed audience member and Henry was still a bit jumpy about anyone approaching the stage abruptly. True to form, Henry commented that perhaps he was “a little more pissed off than normal” the last time he was in Portland. However, he stressed once again that we should all remain seated calmly.

Many of you know Henry from his days as the front man for Black Flag and later the Rollins Band. These days, one of his many gigs is hosting *The Henry Rollins Show* on the Independent Film Channel. This show was going to be one of his legendary spoken word performances. Some of you don’t know who he is at all, but you should.

Why?

Because Henry Rollins is one intense motherfucker, that’s why.



He started the evening by telling us that it's not that he's controversial; he just refuses to stop thinking.

Love him or hate him, Henry Rollins is one of the most literate people I've ever run across; he's a well-oiled machine with a big appetite for knowledge and hands-on experience. He started the evening by telling us that he's not controversial; he just refuses to stop thinking. I don't believe he ever stops thinking.

Rollins in person, stalking the stage and talking for three hours, occasionally smacking the microphone around, is quite an experience, because you never know where he's going to go next. He does a damn good job of imitating President Bush (and Christopher Walken), yet he didn't waste too much time bashing our president this evening. He talked about the surreal experience of working with the "handlers" at the Fox network prior to his interview and leaving a personal message for Bill O'Reilly that was given a standing ovation.

Next stop, Walter Reed medical facility. Not only does Henry spend a fair amount of time entertaining our troops, he makes it a point to spend time at the VA hospitals whenever he is in Washington DC. These are not choreographed grip and grin experiences, Henry makes it a point to talk to the troops that have been hit the hardest. One soldier that he asked how things were going responded with **"How the fuck do you think I'm doing, I only have one arm left!"**

He told rock-warrior stories, recounting seeing Van Halen open for Ted Nugent on their first tour and later meeting David Lee Roth in an art gallery. And he went into great details about his benefit show for the Ruts guitarist, Paul Fox (who passed away October 21 of this year from terminal lung cancer). Tough guy that he is, he confessed that he still gets nervous talking to Iggy Pop and other musicians that he respects.

It wouldn't be a Henry Rollins performance without his comments on dating. When it comes to approaching the opposite sex, Henry freely admits he fears getting too close to anyone and is somewhat shy when having to make the cold calls necessary at the beginning of a relationship.

I think the most intriguing thing about Rollins is that, as well-traveled as he is, he still possesses an extremely high level of awe, intrigue and inquisitiveness. He left us with one strong message. Wherever he goes, he finds that people have the same goals; they want a safe place to raise their kids, and they think that the US government should keep their nose out of everyone else's business.

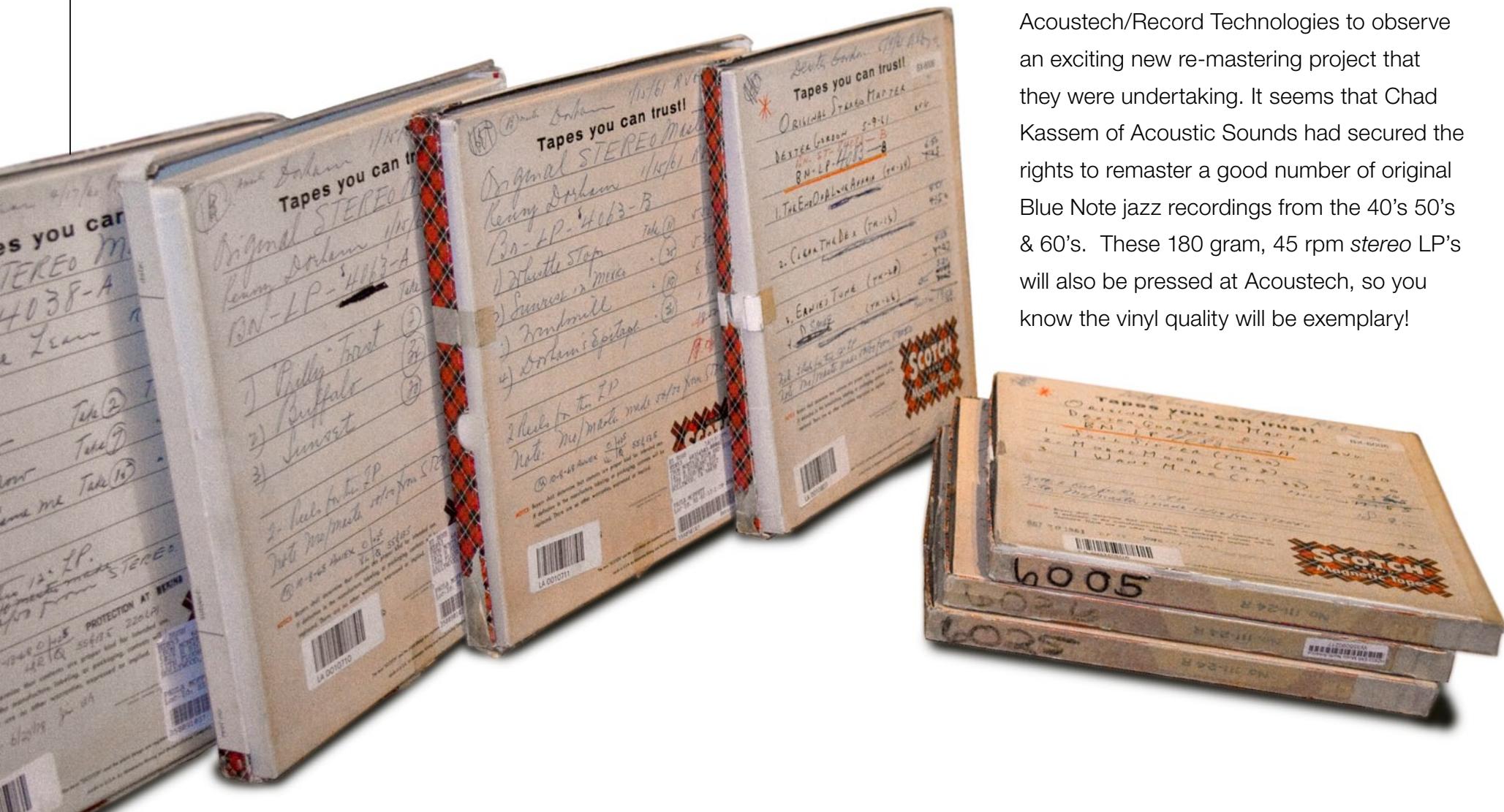
Should you choose to accept the mission and catch Henry Rollins live, you will not be disappointed. Just remember, don't approach the stage. ●



Rollins in person is quite an experience because you never know where he's going to go next.

Blue Note Reissues, Gems and the Art of Jazz

By Dan Babineau



Every now and then life throws a real gem your way. That was the case when I was recently invited to visit the fine people at Acoustech/Record Technologies to observe an exciting new re-mastering project that they were undertaking. It seems that Chad Kassem of Acoustic Sounds had secured the rights to remaster a good number of original Blue Note jazz recordings from the 40's 50's & 60's. These 180 gram, 45 rpm stereo LP's will also be pressed at Acoustech, so you know the vinyl quality will be exemplary!

Get More Ben



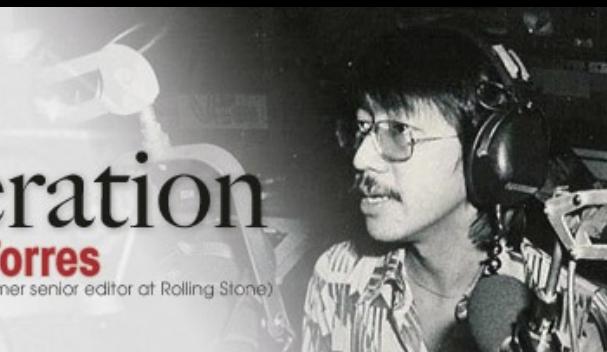
Like a Rolling Stone

Music of the TV Generation

by Ben Fong-Torres

(former senior editor at Rolling Stone)

www.tvland.com



Many of you know me as a classical music fanatic, but if the truth be known, I was weaned on jazz. My father is still a huge collector of jazz recordings and many of his personal favorites just happened to be Blue Notes: Cannonball Adderley, Jackie McLean, Art Blakey, Horace Silver, Coltrane, Miles, Sonny Rollins, and of course Dexter Gordon. Yep, my dad had a thing for Dexter and I can easily recite every note that Mr. Gordon laid down for Blue Note. So imagine my delight as I stepped into the Acoustech mastering studio only to find the original master tape of "Dexter's Calling", pristine and ready to be remastered by two of the finest mastering engineers on the Earth!

Kevin Gray and Steve Hoffman were genuinely enthusiastic about the Blue Note project.

Steve explained that these truly were the original master tapes simply because Blue Note was a small company and didn't feel the need to make auxiliary back-up to these jazz masterpieces. I asked how many of the recordings were in mono and Steve went on to explain that they were all recorded in stereo and that they will be re-released in stereo as well!! He also explained that in the 40's 50's and 60's most people had mono hi-fi rigs and Blue Note released these LP's in mono to appeal to this first generation of audio-philes. And it was written right on the inside sleeve of each one of the six master tapes that I had the pleasure of foundling with my own two hands: "stereo".

I get a real charge out of holding an original piece of art in my hands. It's a time warp imagining how it must have been during these legendary recording sessions.

(continued)

Listening to these tapes brings you even closer to a musical era that still speaks clearly to our hearts and souls.

When I walked into the room, Kevin and Steve were working on "Jackie's Bag" by Jackie McLean. Smooth straight-ahead jazz, it makes you want to sink down in your chair and forget about the world. Along with another Jackie McLean recording, were master tapes for Kenny Dorham's "Whistle Stop", Fred Jackson's boppy "Hootin' N Tootin'" and of course, the Dexter Gordon tapes. Rudy Van Gelder's initials graced the center of some of the master tape reels and each tape box contained the original recording notes for these solid works of art.

Kevin and Steve both agreed that the quality of the original recordings were quite good and felt that their role in this project was preserving these musical gems for generations to come, rather than making any radical changes. Once they went about their business of flicking switches and twisting the knobs of the control console, I noticed more clarity and weight to the Jackie McLean recording. Subtle changes to be sure, but the final result was more organic sounding. Definitely worth the wait on the LA freeway!

Remember, these recordings feature non-amplified instrumentation and when the tone is wrong you notice it immediately. But when it's right it can't be beat. Between the two of them, Kevin and Steve have over 50 years of record mastering experience. They make it look easy, but trust me nothing is further from the truth; they are performing an art that few engineers ever get close to. And the results of their efforts will be worth every penny as they begin releasing these Blue Notes in 2008. There will be about twenty five offerings in all and we are all in for an amazing treat as every one of these releases is clearly a monument to the art of jazz. Mr. Kassem definitely picked a set of winners here! I must get the Dexter Gordon recordings for my dad, I'll also have to make sure his turntable is up to speed – 45rpm that is. ●



Current Releases

By Jeff Dorgay, Marc Phillips
and Terry Currier

Bruce Springsteen — Magic

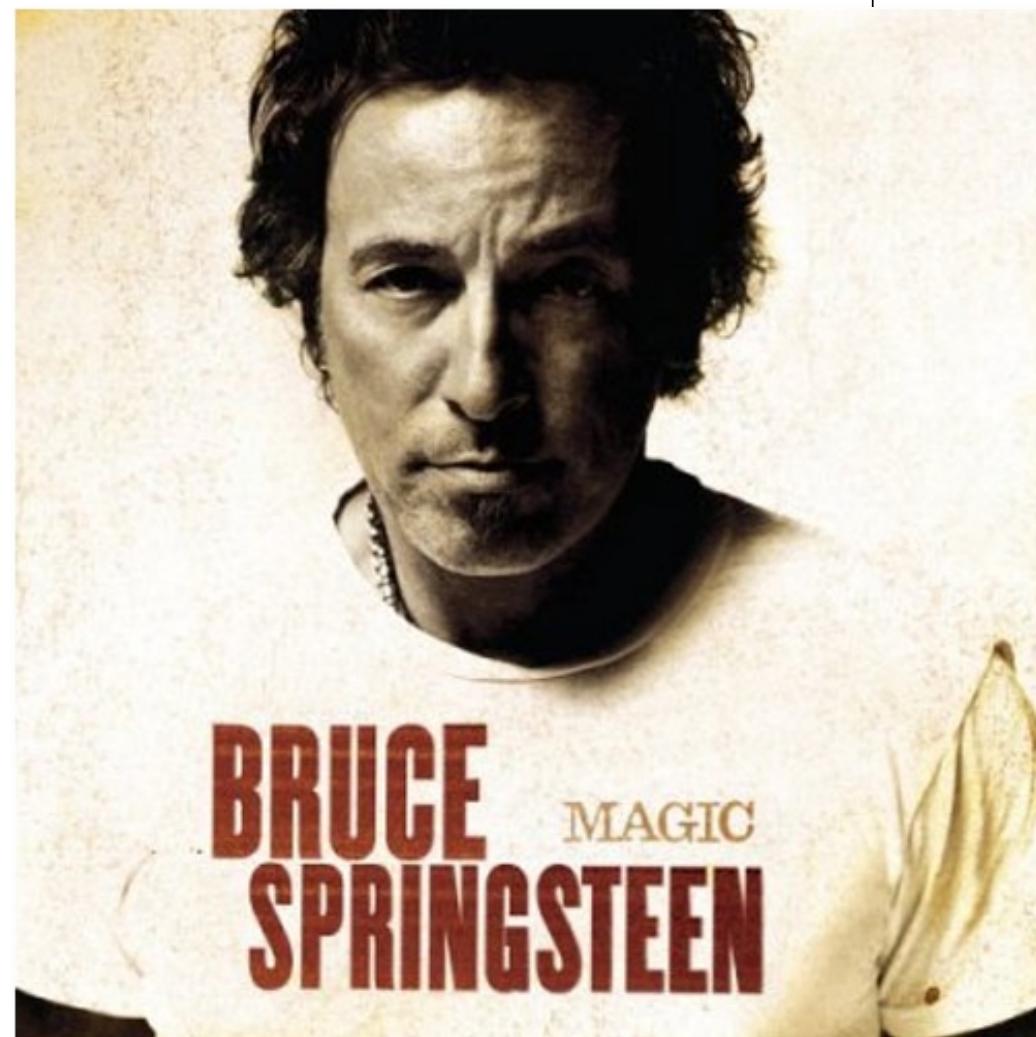
Columbia, CD By Jeff Dorgay

When classics get reinvented, they usually miss the mark. Look no further than the New Beetle and the Thunderbird reissues and you know what I'm talking about. But Bruce Springsteen has hit the nail on the head, dead on, with his latest, *Magic*.

I've had an on-again, off-again relationship with Bruce Springsteen's music. Don't get me wrong, I think he's incredibly talented; I just didn't always dig what he produced. For a while he got way too commercial for my tastes, yet he was always fantastic in concert. There is no better value in live rock entertainment than Bruce Springsteen; No one I know has ever seen him put on a mediocre show.

But I want the old Bruce back, the guy who wrote *Greetings From Asbury Park*, *The Wild*, *The Innocent* and *The E-Street Shuffle* and *Born to Run*. If this is your favorite flavor of Bruce, then you are in for a treat indeed. *Magic* is a great title, because it takes that raw street sound that put Springsteen on the map, adds some of the wisdom that comes with age and the experience that comes from touring for more than 30 years to create a record that is instantly recognizable, yet more musically complex than *Greetings...* was.

Springsteen's songs, as always, amount to short stories about gritty characters who hang out in diners, take long rides in cars and fall in and out of love with each other. The beauty of this record is that the songs have that same timeless quality that his first work possessed.



This is always the mark of pure genius; will you still listen to *Magic* 20 years from now? I bet you will and it will probably be in your music server along with *Greetings From Asbury Park*.

Back in the early seventies Bruce was hanging out on the boardwalk with his buddies. After a number of years outside the Hollywood hills, he returns to New Jersey once again to produce what critics are calling one of his best records ever. Bruce said in a recent *Rolling Stone* interview that the band is in the best shape they have ever been in, so I know I'll be there to check him out when he rolls into town.

My only complaint is that for audiophiles, this one's got a lot of compression to punch the levels up, so it will probably sound better in your car than on your mega hi-fi system. I'm hoping that this one gets released on vinyl.

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



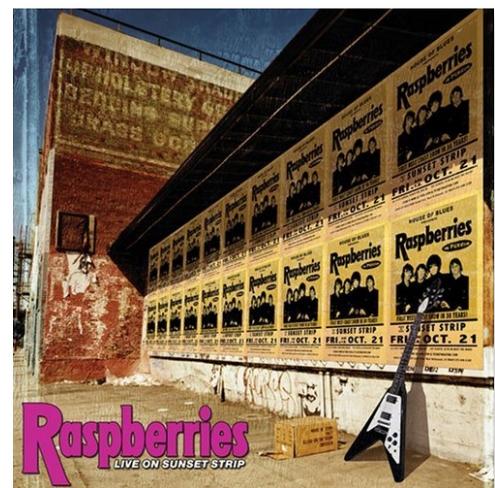
©2005 Viacom International Inc. All Rights Reserved.



VH1 SAVE THE MUSIC FOUNDATION

HAS DONATED \$30 MILLION WORTH OF NEW MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS TO NEARLY
1,200 SCHOOLS IN 80 CITIES, BUT WE'RE NOWHERE NEAR DONE.

TO LEARN WHAT YOU CAN DO TO SUPPORT THE FOUNDATION,
PLEASE VISIT US AT VH1SAVETHEMUSIC.COM.



The Raspberries — *Live On Sunset Strip*
Ryko, CD By Jeff Dorgay

The Raspberries were one of the original power pop groups that inspired Cheap Trick, The Knack, and others. Their career lasted about five years, ending in the middle of 1975, with band members going off to pursue other projects. Lead singer Eric Carmen popped up throughout the '80s with singles, including "All by Myself," "Hungry Eyes," and "Make Me Lose Control."

In November 2004, the four original Raspberries members reunited for the opening of the Cleveland House of Blues and performed to a sellout audience. Following a VH-1 Classic special, they went on a short tour, ending in the performance we have here, recorded at the House of Blues in Los Angeles. According to their web site, Paul Stanley and Rick Springfield were among the musicians in the audience.

In addition to two CD's, a bonus DVD from the evenings performance is included and features "I Wanna Be With You," "Tonight," "Overnight Sensation (Hit Record)," "Ecstasy," and "Go All The Way".

While it can sometimes be difficult listening to guys in their fifties singing pop songs about making out, The Raspberries step up to the plate and give a flawless performance. The chemistry is there as well as the musical ability, so if you loved The Raspberries then, this three-disc set is for you.

Another bonus is that the sound quality is excellent. *Live On Sunset Strip* is well recorded and does a great job at capturing this show. Close your eyes and you're back in 1973!

ROBERT PLANT | ALISON KRAUSS

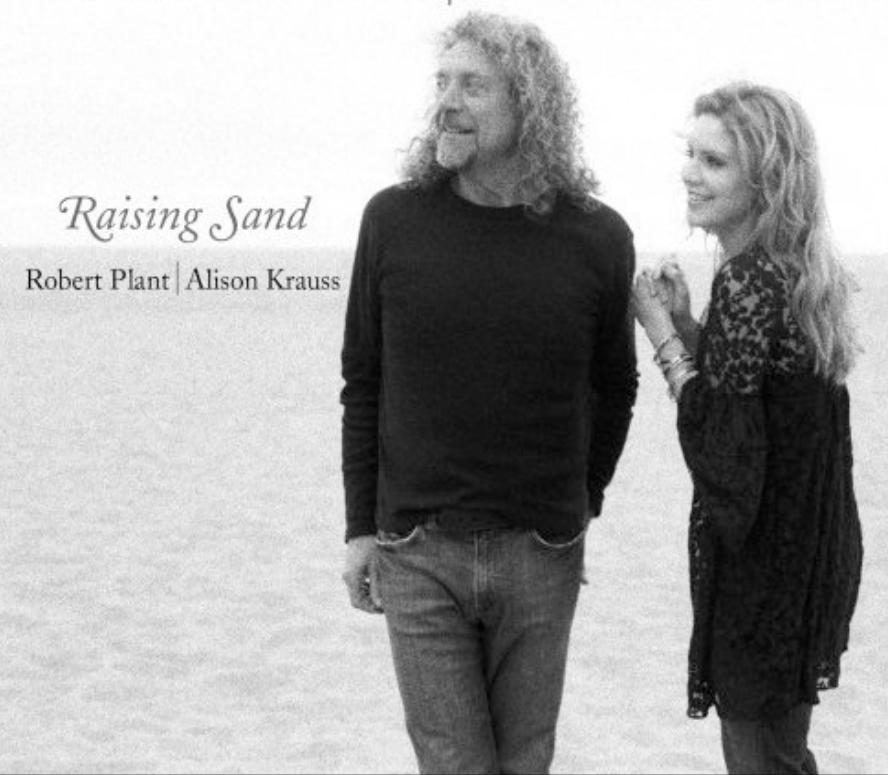
Robert Plant/Alison Krauss

— *Raising Sand*

Rounder, CD By Marc Phillips

A lot has already been said about the serendipitous pairing of Robert Plant and Alison Krauss for what may be this year's most intriguing album, *Raising Sand*. While many listeners are surprised at how quiet and sedate Plant's vocals have become, most are downright astonished at how well his voice matches up with the sweet, clear and endearing tones of Krauss. And while those who are expecting a cross between Led Zeppelin and Union Station will be flatly disappointed by this stark yet lovely album, this particular hardcore Zep fan thinks *Raising Sand* is one of the most compelling CDs of the year.

Producer T-Bone Burnett deserves much of the credit. His spare yet always challenging arrangements remind me of his best work with his wife, Sam Phillips, as well as what I feel is Elvis Costello's last truly inspired work, *King of America*. *Raising Sand* is a collection of standards, from Mel Tillis' "Stick With Me Baby" to Townes Van Zandt's "Nothin'," to Tom Waits' "Trampled Rose." Yet, Burnett makes each song sound like it's being sung by Plant and Krauss for the very first time anywhere. It also helps that Burnett has hired some of the most accomplished session musicians around, such as Marc Ribot, Riley Baugus, Dennis Crouch, Norman Blake, and Jay Bellerose. And T-Bone jumps in with his electric guitar on nearly every song.



But while it's certainly exciting to hear Plant and Krauss croon together in quite, almost hushed tones, I feel that the tracks where the singers perform solo supply the album's best moments. Take Krauss' turn on "Trampled Rose," on which her haunting, soaring voice drives a wrought iron spire through Burnett's Gothic Appalachian arrangement. And listen closely for a touch of "Tangerine" and "Down by the Seaside" in Plant's approach to "Nothin'," or even a stray bit of "Hot Dog" in "Fortune Teller." Do yourself a favor and listen to this album more than once before you decide whether you like it or not. It's one of those albums that congeals into a warm, embracing whole after repeated listenings.

Acoustic Sounds...

The exclusive mail-order source for
KOETSU CARTRIDGES

*One of a kind
cartridges,
each a
pampered
piece of
perfection.*



BLOODSTONE PLATINUM \$8,500

ONYX PLATINUM \$8,000

JADE PLATINUM \$8,000

**NEW!** CORAL PLATINUM
\$15,000
(IN STEREO OR MONO)ROSE SIGNATURE
PLATINUM \$5,900
(IN STEREO OR MONO)URUSHI TSUGARU
\$4,300WAJIMA
\$4,300**NEW!** URUSHI
SKY BLUE \$4,300URUSHI VERMILLION
\$4,300ROSE SIGNATURE
\$3,700BLACK
\$1,600

Call 800-716-3553, or visit us online at www.acousticsounds.com 

The World's Largest Selection of Audiophile Recordings

2CHANNELDISTRIBUTION

Exclusive USA distributor for

THORENS



TD 350

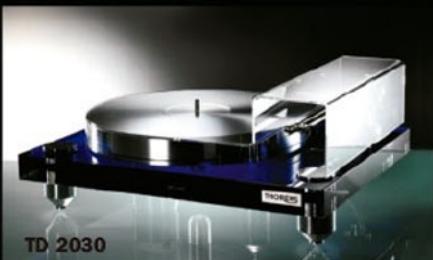
Thorens turntables combine more than 100 years of tradition in excellence with innovative high-end analogue technology to create a captivating sound experience.



TD 170-EV



TD 850



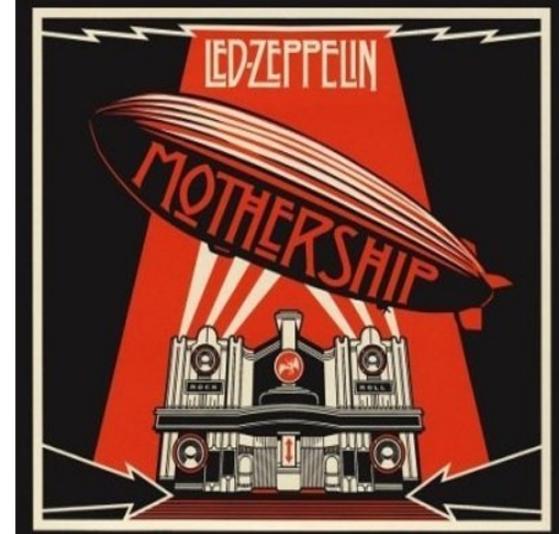
TD 2030

Dealer inquiries welcome



1.888.526.2564
2channeldistribution.com

YOUR COMPREHENSIVE WHOLESALE SOURCE FOR THE BEST QUALITY TWO-CHANNEL GEAR
Thorens • Sutherland • Dr. Feickert • The Funk Firm • AcousTech • Art Vinyl
Go to www.2channeldistribution.com for your local dealer.



Led Zeppelin — Mothership

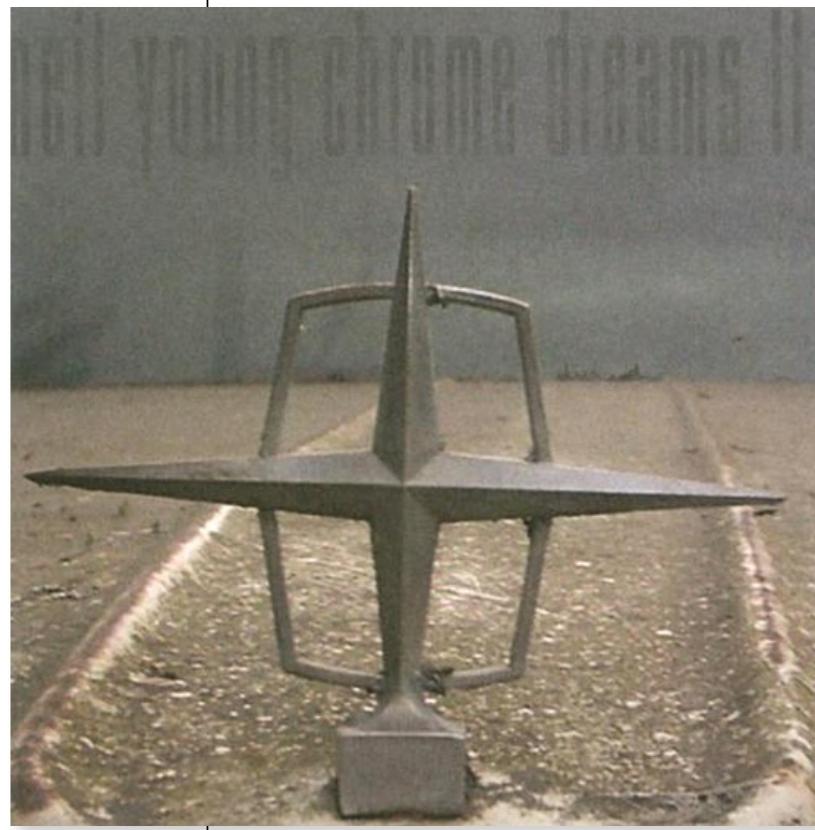
Atlantic, 2CD/DVD

By Jeff Dorgay

And now for a little classic Robert Plant and company. I'm sure this was released with their reunion in mind, but honestly, even as a huge Led Zeppelin fan, I might be predisposed to think, "What's the point?" with this one, but here's where it fits in the scheme of things – every 14 year old kid should be issued a copy of this along with their school supplies. All of us who are 40 and older have seen and heard it, but this is a great Zep-In-a-Box primer for kids who want to see the way it was done, by one of the best heavy rock bands ever to walk the stage.

If you are a die hard fan and have everything else these guys have put out, pass on this one. The recording quality is better than average, but not top shelf and you have probably seen the performances on the DVD elsewhere. (Or maybe you even were there.)

But anyone, young or old, who doesn't have any Zeppelin in their CD cabinet should grab a copy of *Mothership*.



Neil Young — *Chrome Dreams II*
Reprise, CD By Marc Phillips

The last few Neil Young albums have had themes, more or less, such as the anti-Bush sentiments of last year's *Living With War*, the ambitious, sprawling saga of *Greendale*, and the front porch ruminations of *Silver and Gold*. Young's latest, *Chrome Dreams II* (which takes its title from his unreleased 1977 album), starts off in that same mode, opening with two gentle country-tinged tracks that might suggest that we're in for something along the lines of *Old Ways* or *Harvest Moon*. "Beautiful Bluebird," for example, opens with the lines, "One morning when I was ridin' in my old pickup truck / A beautiful bluebird came flyin' down..." Well, if you know Neil Young, you can almost tell what that song sounds like from that line alone. And the same can be done with the next track by hearing the title alone... "Boxcar."

Young then abruptly changes gears, however, with the 18-minute-plus epic "Ordinary People." With a blaring horn section, a couple of saxophone solos, a rumbling piano and some tinkly synthesizer

flourishes, it almost sounds like he's being backed up by the E Street Band. Instead of Bruce's growling, grumbling vocals, however, we have Neil's growling buzzsaw guitar. From there, it becomes obvious Young doesn't have a plan or an agenda. He's just out to have a good time, to summarize the last decade or so of his career. In fact, *Chrome Dreams II* has the feel of a B-side compilation album, with each song feeling different from the other, without seeming quite that disjointed.

My personal favorite is "Dirty Old Man," which is short, sleazy and whimsical. The protagonist in this song is quite different from the "Old Man" in *Harvest*, which may or may not be the result of Neil having his 61st birthday earlier this year. Lines like "I like to get hammered on Friday night/ Sometimes I can't wait so Monday's all-right" may cause you to hesitate before uttering "I'm a lot like you were." Or not.

Dion — *Son of Skip James*
Verve Forecast, CD By Marc Phillips

It might seem strange for the singer of such classics as "Teenager in Love" and "The Wanderer" to attempt a tribute album to one of the most enigmatic and feral of blues singers, Skip James. But Dion, formerly of Dion and the Belmonts, had a kinship with James, borne out of a true and lifelong love of the blues. DiMucci met Skip James in 1964, and wrote: "He was one beautiful, shy, mysterious dude, who sang like he was from outer space."

Son of Skip James certainly isn't Dion's first foray into the world of the blues. Last year he released *Bronx in Blue*, which featured mostly blues and country standards. But SOSJ is such a confident, clear-headed approach to the low-lying country blues that defined James as an artist, you'd think DiMucci had watched that epic battle between Ol' Scratch and Mr. Johnson in person. (*continued*)

PENAUDIO®

Voiced on real music.
Faithful to live music.™

CHARISMA

The Essence of Finnish Design

Simple. Elegant. Natural.

PENAUDIO USA
46 SOUTHFIELD AVENUE
THREE STAMFORD LANDING
SUITE 250
STAMFORD, CT 06902

TEL: 203-357-9922 EXT 204
FAX: 203-357-9955

auditional wellbeing™



While Dion's singing and picking and blowing (on harmonica) doesn't quite capture the weariness and desperation of the best blues ("The Thunderer," in particular, could be worked into the playlist of a few alternative rock stations), he's not far off. Backed up by Rick Krive on piano, and Bob Guertin on percussion and organ, DiMucci brings a new clarity and energy that stands in marked contrast to the Delta Blues style, whether he's singing songs by Dylan ("Baby I'm in the Mood For You"), Junior Wells ("Hoodoo Man Blues") or even one of his own (such as the title track). But when he finally takes on one of James's songs, the inimitable "Devil Got My Woman," he slows down and liquors up...and succeeds admirably. While Dion may not have lain in the same gutters as Skip James, he's certainly walked by that same spot, looked down, and let out a deep sigh of regret and recognition.

SHUNYATA RESEARCH INC.

NEW FROM SHUNYATA RESEARCH THE GUARDIAN A/V POWER CONDITIONER



Massive Current Capabilities

Trident Defense System:
3 Stage Power Protection

Venom Noise Filter:
Proprietary Capacitive Array

All Metal Chassis

Ideal For Custom Installers,
Professional Use,
Home Theater, & Audio

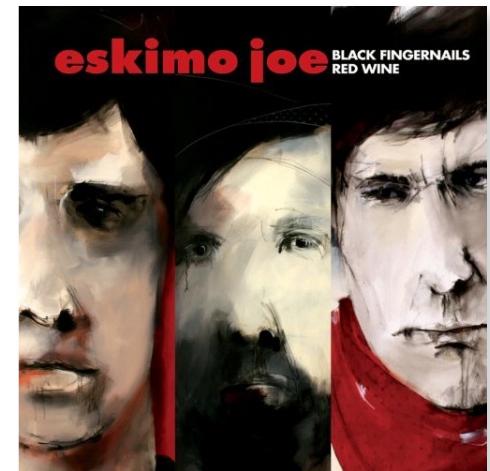
<< HYDRA PERFORMANCE
& TECHNOLOGY AT
HALF THE PRICE!

Gold Plated Contacts
100% Coverage Shielding
RFI/EMI Immunity
Massive 12AWG
Oxygen-Free Pure Copper
Proprietary
Molded Connectors
Ideal For Custom Installers,
Professional Use,
Home Theater, & Audio
**EXTRAORDINARY
PERFORMANCE –
UNPRECEDENTED VALUE! >>**

**POWERSNAKE PERFORMANCE
...AT LESS THAN \$100!**

www.shunyata.com

Shunyata Research :: Poulsbo, WA 98370 :: 360 297 8960



Eskimo Joe

— *Black Fingernails and Red Wine*
Ryko, CD By Jeff Dorgay

Another great talent from Australia, Eskimo Joe opens this disc with a track that has a U2-esque groove to it, but that's where the similarities to other current bands end.

The rest of the record has a pop feel, perhaps with just the slightest pinch of emo thrown in ("I had a lot to drink last night, now I'm feeling old"), but the songs are very well crafted and arranged. Eskimo Joe hails from Australia and is made up of Kaven Temperly (voice/bass), Stuart MacLeod (guitar/backing vocals), and Joel Quartermain (drums, keyboards, backing vocals).

The highest compliment I can pay these guys is that I keep trying to put my finger on who they sound like, and keep drawing a blank. I hear little bits and influences here and there, but Eskimo Joe really has their own pop sound. OK, maybe they do sound a little bit like Matchbox 20... It is very full texturally, with multiple layers of keyboards and guitars to the mix, complementing Temperly's vocals all the way.

Ted Jensen from Sterling Sound has the mastering credit and did a very nice job of retaining dynamics in the disc. It's always refreshing when the sound matches the performance.

This is Eskimo Joe's first US release, but their third CD. Their first two discs, *Girl* and *A Song is a City* are available as imports, but are pretty pricey. After listening to this disc, I think I'll take the plunge.

Levon Helm — *Dirt Farmer*
 Vanguard, CD By Marc Phillips

What do Phil Collins, Don Henley and Levon Helm have in common? I'm often surprised that only about half of the people I ask give me the complete answer to that question, and more often than not I'm troubled by the blank stare I get after I mention that last singing drummer on the list. As far as I'm concerned, Helm is the only one of the trio to still be recording truly vital music, and the only one who's still worth a damn in the big scheme of things.

It almost wasn't so. Levon Helm was diagnosed with throat cancer and had surgery back in 1998, and he mentioned that it took 28 radiation treatments and three to four years of steady prayer to get to the point where he felt he could sing again. His new CD, *Dirt Farmer*, is a celebration of that success. Primarily a cross between Appalachian music, gospel and the blues, *Dirt Farmer* is a Thanksgiving of sorts, with Levon paying musical tribute to everyone from his parents, Nell and Diamond, to fellow musicians such as Steve Earle, Emmylou Harris, Paul Kennerley and the Stanley Brothers.

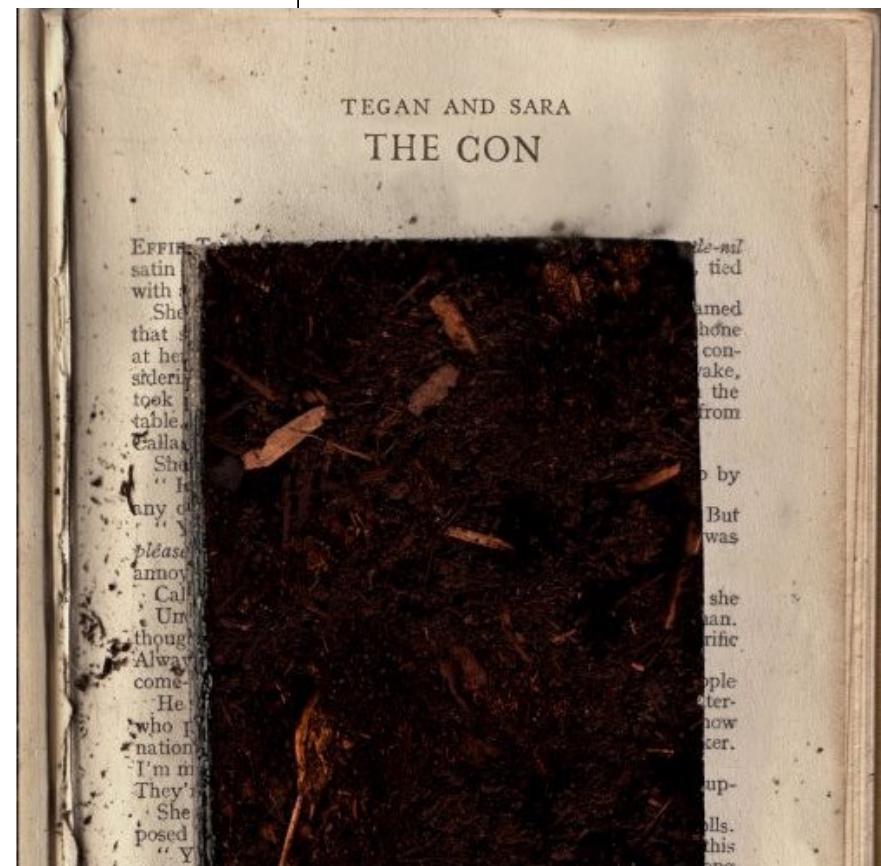
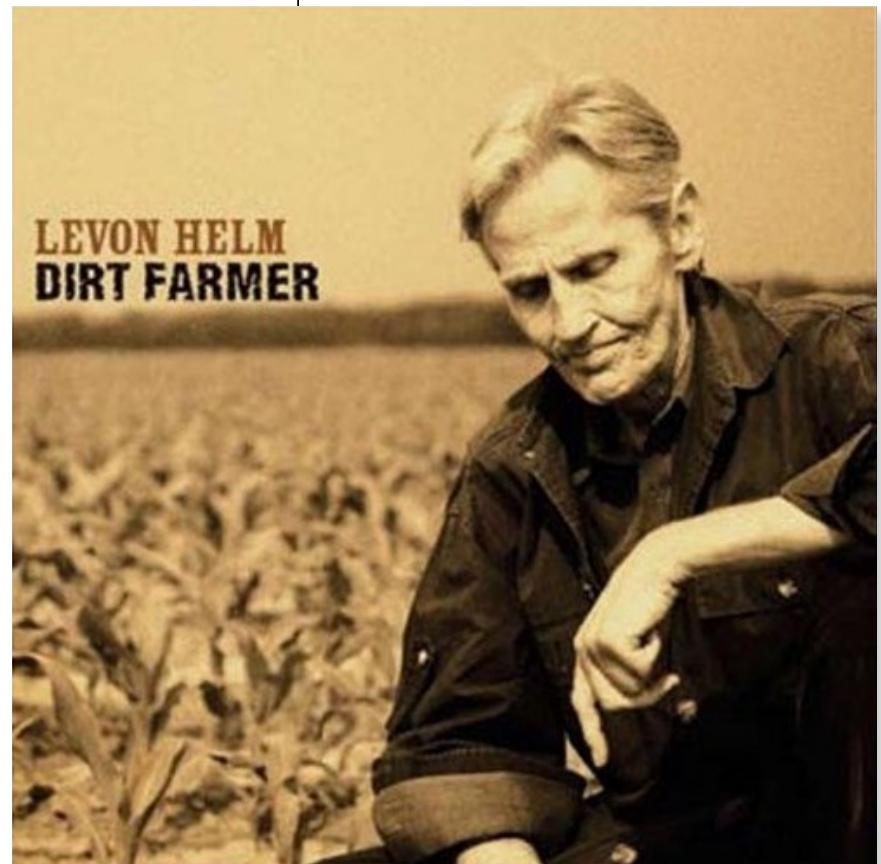
Some of the cuts are based on traditional songs from Levon's childhood, such as "False Hearted Lover Blues," "Poor Old Dirt Farmer" and "The Girl I Left Behind." And while many of the songs are sad and dispirited when left to their own devices, Levon infuses these tracks with sheer joy, mated with a polite, plaintive "it's good to be back" vibe. Supported by daughter Amy and former Dylan sideman Larry Campbell among many others, Levon is able to recreate the fun and spontaneity of his Midnight Ramble shows. And while his voice may be slightly compromised by his personal battle, his drumming is as solid and distinctive as ever. Welcome back, Levon.

Tegan and Sara — *The Con*
 Sire, CD By Jeff Dorgay

The twins from Calgary are back with their latest, and it's pretty similar to their last disc, *So Jealous*. The general sound and feel are so similar, that I think if you accidentally put one disc in the other box, you might not know right away. Perhaps I just don't get Tegan and Sara, but I liked them quite a lot on *This Business of Art*, which had an edgier, Patti Smith kind of sound to it.

The Con is very well recorded and very slickly packaged, so perhaps the title is appropriate. I know these two have toured with a number of big names in the music world (Neil Young, Rufus Wainwright, The Pretenders, Ryan Adams) and have played the Lilith Fair.

All of the songs are pretty juvenile and they sound like troubled chicks with relationship problems. On "Knife Going In" they sing, "I swear I'll sleep outside your window. I feel the knife going in, I'm feeling anxious. Not enough to kill me." So as much as I wanted to like this one after seeing a couple of their recent videos, I guess I'm just too old to dig *The Con*.



Prince — *F.U.N.K.*

Single, iTunes Store exclusive download By Jeff Dorgay

What the heck will Prince come up with next? When this popped up on the iTunes Store, I had to bite. I guarantee you will love this or really hate it. It's definitely funky and has some burning guitar riffs, but the vocals are trippy! Prince is definitely channeling the alien from Jimi Hendrix's song "EXP" on *Axis: Bold as Love* here, sounding like he inhaled a giant canister of helium.

For 99 cents, I dare you.

**Various Artists**

— *Home Schooled: The ABC's of Kid Soul*
Numero, CD By Jeff Dorgay

Here's a wacky CD for you. It's a group of singles by kid groups that *didn't* make it. Back in the '70s every group of kids who could sing, even a little bit, dreamed of being the next Jackson 5, Osmonds or (heaven forbid) The Partridge Family. It starts with the semi-rap tune "Trust You Child" by Patrizia & Jimmy and moves right along to the last, "Step by Step" from Time After Time. My favorite is "Jersey Slide Pt. 1" by the 3 Stars, which has kind of a smarmy, Jackson 5 feel.

More of a novelty, this one should be a hit at your next party or on an upcoming road trip.

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a grey t-shirt over a red long-sleeved shirt, stands against a solid blue background. She is holding a light blue Fender Jaguar electric guitar. A small silver Maxtor OneTouch III Mini Edition portable hard drive is attached to the guitar's body. She is also holding a white strap. The guitar has the name "Johnny" written on its body.

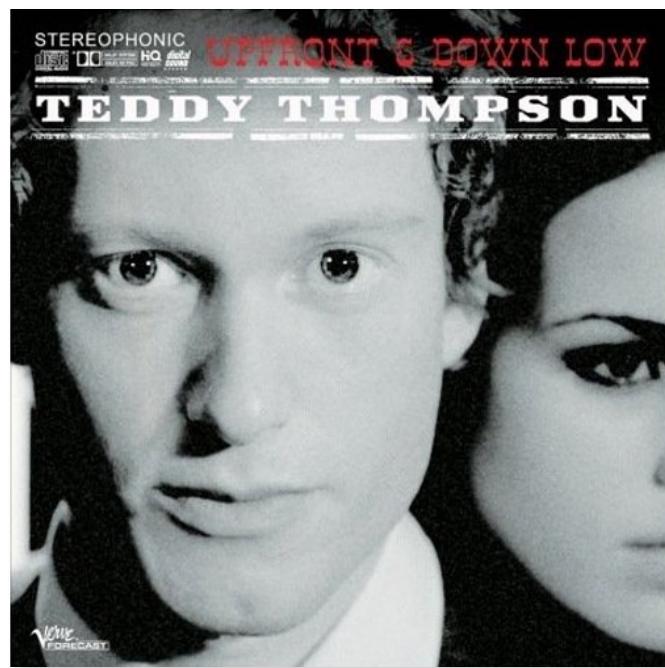
MAXTOR ONE TOUCH™ III MINI EDITION

Introducing up to 100GB of portable storage and automated backup that lets you take your digital life on the road, sync data between two or more computers, and keep your files secure with Maxtor DriveLock™ and Encryption.



That's a lot of Good Thinking in a mini package.
Learn more at Maxtor.com/mini

Maxtor
GOOD THINKING.™



Teddy Thompson — *Up Front and Down Low*
Verve Forecast, CD By Jeff Dorgay

The son of Richard and Linda Thompson has put out a few albums that were more on the country side of things, but this one, a series of classic covers, is quite amazing. If I told my redneck friends that this was a young British guy singing these tunes, they'd drag me behind a tractor. But if you listen really closely, you can hear just a tiny bit of father Richard Thompson's vocal inflections sneaking in.

Teddy says that he grew up with this music, but it's more than that. His parents must have marinated him in this music for him to be this true to the genre. Doing tunes by the Everly Brothers, Dolly Parton, Ernest Tubb and even Elvis, Thompson smacks a home run with this one. Even if you aren't a country fan (and I'm not), *Up Front and Down Low* is a record you can relax with.

The one song written by Thompson, "Down Low" fits in perfectly with the rest of the album. When he sings "You'd be better off dead, with a bullet in your head, than to come back to me" and Jenni Muldaur (daughter of Maria) backs him up, sounding an awful lot like Emmylou Harris, it's almost spooky.

To top it off, the recording is fantastic and definitely the equivalent of the performance. This whole disc has a very open, airy, sparse feel to it. Greg Calbi at Sterling Sound did an awesome job on the mastering; on a good system this one will transport you to another place entirely. I know I'm putting this disc in a few stockings this Christmas!

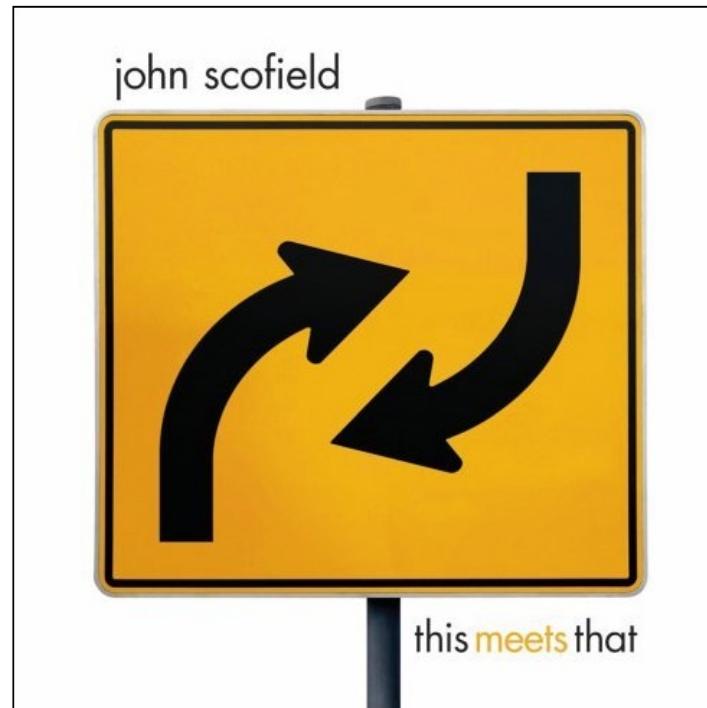
John Scofield — *This Meets That*

Emarcy, CD By Marc Phillips

Virtuoso guitarist John Scofield is one of those musicians who lives between the cracks of musical genres, making it impossible to apply such labels as jazz-rock or fusion-blues. With bassist Steve Swallow and drummer Bill Stewart, Scofield continues to straddle the line in *This Meets That*, his first release for the Emarcy label. Alternating between a plaintive, almost retro feel, and an explosive, horn-driven momentum in the CD's opening track, "The Low Road," Scofield brings to mind a mixture of Pat Metheny and Bill Frisell after a quad-shot latte. (It should be no surprise that Bill Frisell actually shows up to play tremolo guitar on "House of the Rising Sun.")

Scofield specializes in thick, heavy slices of electric Americana that is reminiscent of Frisell's memorable *Gone, Just Like a Train*. Nervous, angular tracks such as "Memorette" and "Pretty Out" bristle with the same tension, while more optimistic tracks such as "Shoe Dog" and "Down D" still have that Midwestern bleakness that Metheny used to nail so consistently 20 years ago. I would guess that while Scofield admires both Metheny and Frisell without emulating them, there's a big train and a wheat field near wherever Scofield plays.

The fun of the album is contained in three cover tunes. Besides "House of the Rising Sun," Scofield transforms country into jazz by trying out Charlie Rich's "Behind Closed Doors," and closes the album with a surprisingly fresh and complementary version of "I Can't Get No Satisfaction." While *This Meets That* is far from easy listening, and may make beads of sweat appear at your temples as you suspiciously eye the horizon, Scofield still manages to be a driving force in his musical genre...whatever that genre happens to be.





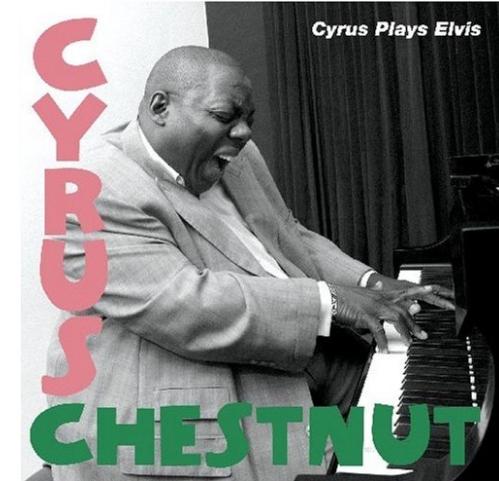
Elegance. Simplicity. Truth.



ModWright
Instruments

modwright.com
360.247.6688

21919 NE 399th Street
Amboy, WA 98601



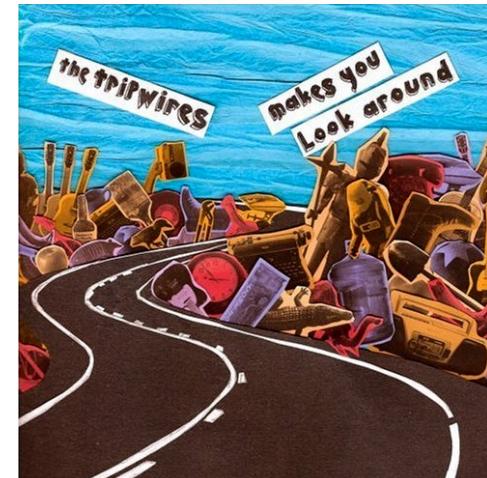
Cyrus Chestnut

— *Cyrus Plays Elvis*
Koch, CD By Jeff Dorgay

Here's one that slipped under the radar. Cyrus Chestnut has played with a lot of major jazz greats (Branford Marsalis, Freddie Hubbard and Chick Corea, to name a few) and has released quite a few CDs of his own on the Japanese Alfa label as well as Atlantic before this release on Koch records.

This is an interesting disc, because it sounds like the Vince Guaraldi Trio playing Elvis songs on an unreleased Charlie Brown film. In fact, a quick glance at the Cyrus Chestnut web site reveals that he released *A Charlie Brown Christmas* back in 2001.

This is definitely a very pleasant, easy listening disc that will be a big hit at whatever Christmas party you bring it to, but I don't think you will convince any Elvis fans. And I just can't stop seeing Schroeder playing the piano whenever I put *Cyrus Plays Elvis* in the CD player!



The Tripwires

— *Makes You Look Around*
Paisley Pop, CD
By Jeff Dorgay

The Seattle PowerPop blog says that the Tripwires debut album is something that “both the power pop set and the alt-country folks should be able to hang their hats on,” and I think that sums it up perfectly. If you like twangy guitars with your pop, this band is for you; it definitely has that “horsey beat” sound, reminiscent of early Nick Lowe.

If it ended there, this record would still be a success, but The Tripwires are pretty clever songwriters. All of the songs are perky and up-tempo, reminding me somewhat of the twangier songs that Squeeze used to do. They even cover Chuck Berry’s “Tulane” and do this classic justice. The last song on the disc is “Sold Yer Guitar Blues” and it wraps up a great set of tunes. This disc is fun, start to finish, and if it doesn’t put a smile on your face, nothing will.

I predict a road trip to Seattle to catch these guys live very soon. ●

Club Mix

By Scott Tetzlaff



Vegoose On The Loose

Las Vegas, Halloween and an eclectic mix of hip-hop, indie rock and superstars. That's a potent brew, and it's called Vegoose. The third annual music festival took place at the end of October, and its two-night blend of diverse and energetic artists, along with crazed, costumed audiences, drew attention from *USA Today* and *Rolling Stone*, marveling at the variety of sights and sounds reverberating all around town, as many of the bands played gigs at smaller venues the week before and after the festival.

Vegas, after all, is known for Wayne Newton and Celine Dion working glitzy showrooms; for audiences made up of high-rollers and tourists. Vegoose takes place in an open field; artists this year included Iggy Pop & the Stooges; Rage Against the Machine; Daft Punk, Public Enemy, Cypress Hill, Thievery Corporation, M.I.A., and the Shins.

Danke Schoen, indeed.

DH LABS

SILVER SONIC™

HIGH PERFORMANCE AUDIO CABLES

D.H. LABS, INC.
612 N. ORANGE AVE. SUITE A-2
JUPITER, FL 33458

SILVERSONIC.COM
561-745-6406



Vegoose can only grow, so, if you'd like to attend, here are a few tips:

Check www.vegoose.com and mark your calendar for next year. Check the site on a regular basis for lineup information. This will also lead you to shows that are not included with the two-day music pass.

Be sure to stay at one of the major hotels that include music passes with their room packages.

Dressing like Hunter S. Thompson is always appropriate in Las Vegas.

This year, many of the artists from The Eighteenth Street Lounge recording label (and their friends) invaded the Mandalay Bay hotel for most of the weekend. Here's a quick guide to various spots at the hotel, where the action was:

Moorea is the private "European Style" pool area embedded in the massive pool complex. "European Style" is the hotel's code for "topless is OK with us." This screened-off area is adults only, with Jacuzzis, a DJ booth, some shady nooks, and of course, cocktail bars. While drinks are being served, sun-baked bathing beauties cavort on big puffy lounge chairs, and all is well.

The House of Blues is nestled deep inside the casino and has its own performance space. This is the more technical set up area with all the bells and whistles you'd want in a nice sized package – not too big, not too small. It manages to seat quite a few while still keeping an intimate feeling. The area in front of the stage is often left open for dancing or general horsing around.

The new EyeCandy Lounge is located in the center of the casino and was launched during the Vegoose weekend. *(continued)*



At various times, beautiful women dressed in evening gowns wander the crowds, while other women are suspended in padded pods or hang in hoops above the touch sensitive dance floor. I wouldn't make that up.

The Mix is a restaurant and nightclub located on the 64th floor. This elegant space has 18-foot floor to ceiling windows, offering an amazing view of the Strip at night; a perfect backdrop for listening to the groovy ESL sounds. I guarantee you will feel like you have just wandered onto a movie set.

Now, if you haven't been following my column, here's a quick overview of the players:

Thievery Corporation: The ring leaders of the ESL label. Known for their smooth and varied international sounds.

Federico Aubele: Argentine born singer/songwriter who combines ambient, hip-hop, bolero and reggae to create a unique Latin fusion sound.

Ursula1000 (a/k/a Alex Gimeno): Serves up a wild blend of exotic musical influences including world music, bossa nova, glam rock, and breakbeat.

Thunderball: The trio of Sid Barcelona, Steve Raskin, and Rob Meyers. They have a very identifiable sound that mixes breakbeat with drum & bass and downtempo. Their sounds are often featured on movie and TV soundtracks.

Tom B. (a/k/a Thomas Blondet): Spins grooves with liberal doses of Latin and Caribbean influences.

DJ Shoe: Local resident DJ in Las Vegas, known for his smooth mixing style and vocal integration.

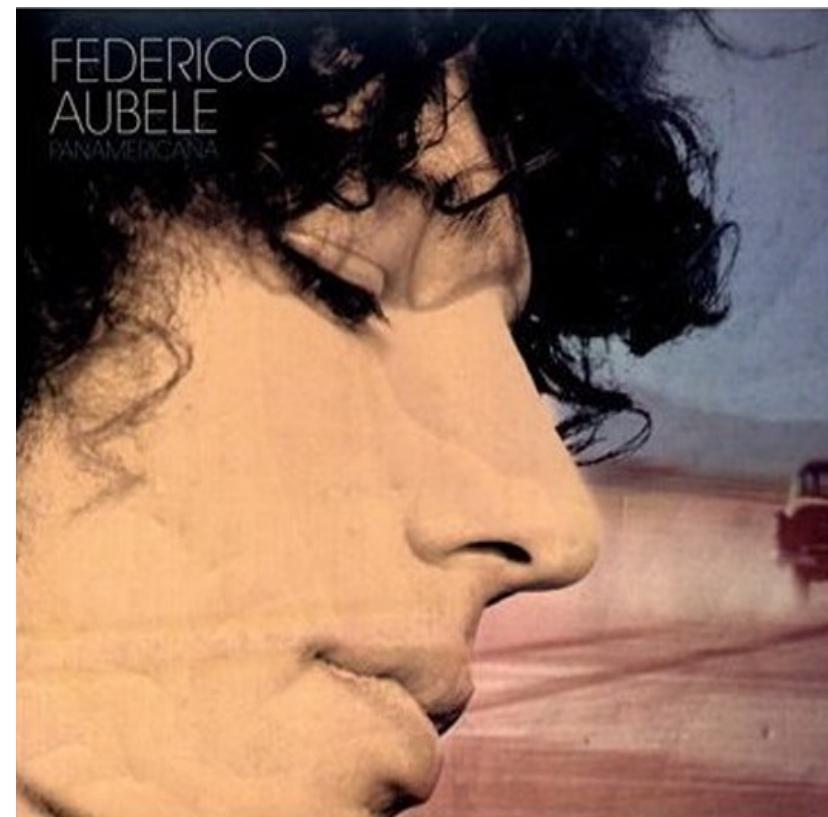
As you might imagine, three days of rotation between the groups and venues was a bit overwhelming, but that's what Vegas is all about. Here's a typical slice of the action:

On Saturday evening, three factors converged. The grand opening of the EyeCandy lounge, Tom B. spinning, and a party for 944 Magazine. A small herd of B-Boyz were busting moves on the glowing hi-tech dance floor. A group of older tourists were overwhelmed with the urge to dance, and joined them. Femme fatales suspended from the ceiling and lurking hipsters gazed on approvingly. All the while, a burlesque queen sat in a glass box to offer prizes to those party people who could crack the code to her temporary prison. Somehow it all blended nicely. This is the kind of surrealist fun that happens in few places outside of Sin City. *(continued)*

In the spirit of the ESL invasion, this month's music offerings are all related to the record label (and its extended family).

Thievery Corporation — Versions

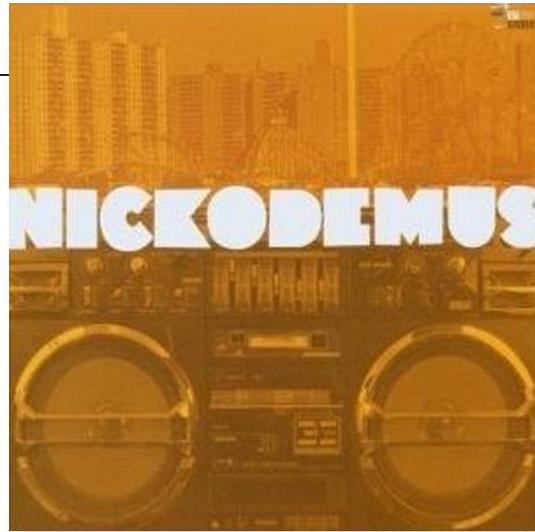
This is remixing at its best, a collection of 18 songs from a dizzyingly wide spectrum of musical sources combined to build a smooth downtempo blend. Nouvelle Vague, Astrud Gilberto, The Doors, Herb Alpert, and Sarah McLachlan all get thrown into the mix, and come out sounding like the Thievery Corporation. That's a very good thing. This is a must-have for anyone who loves Eastern flavored lounge music. Standout tracks are "Strange Days," originally by the Doors, and the Wax Poetic track "Angels" with great vocals by Norah Jones. The rework of the Herb Alpert classic "Lemon Tree" is brilliant on all levels.



Federico Aubele — Panamericana

This is the second CD from this Argentinean artist and if you worried about a sophomore slump, I can assure you it's not happening on this release. Aubele mixes beautiful, languid guitar riffs with vocals and just the perfect amount of electronic enhancements. This could almost be considered a continuation of his first CD, *Gran Hotel Buenos Aires*.

At first, you might just take this as an acoustic CD – but as you listen closer, you'll hear all kinds of influences bubbling beneath the surface: acid jazz, trip hop, and dub, with many of the female vocals done by Natalia Clavier. Fans of Ms. Clavier take note; she's working on a solo CD right now. My favorite tracks tend towards the peppier side: "La Orilla," "Corazon," and "Lluvia." You'll enjoy this CD no matter what language you speak.


Nickodemus — *Endangered Species*

You might be familiar with some of Nickodemus's work from the “Turntables on the Hudson” series. On this solo effort, there's plenty of the New York sound you might expect – funky breaks, soulful saxophones and such – but there's another set of world influences as well. These tracks have Mediterranean, North African, Afro-Cuban and South American influences woven into them, with a great sense of style and funk. If you dig a little deeper, you'll notice he had a little help from Quantic and Nappy G.

Standout tracks include the aptly named “Cleopatra in New York” mix and the instrumental “The Global Village.” All the tracks are solid; no filler!

RIENZI

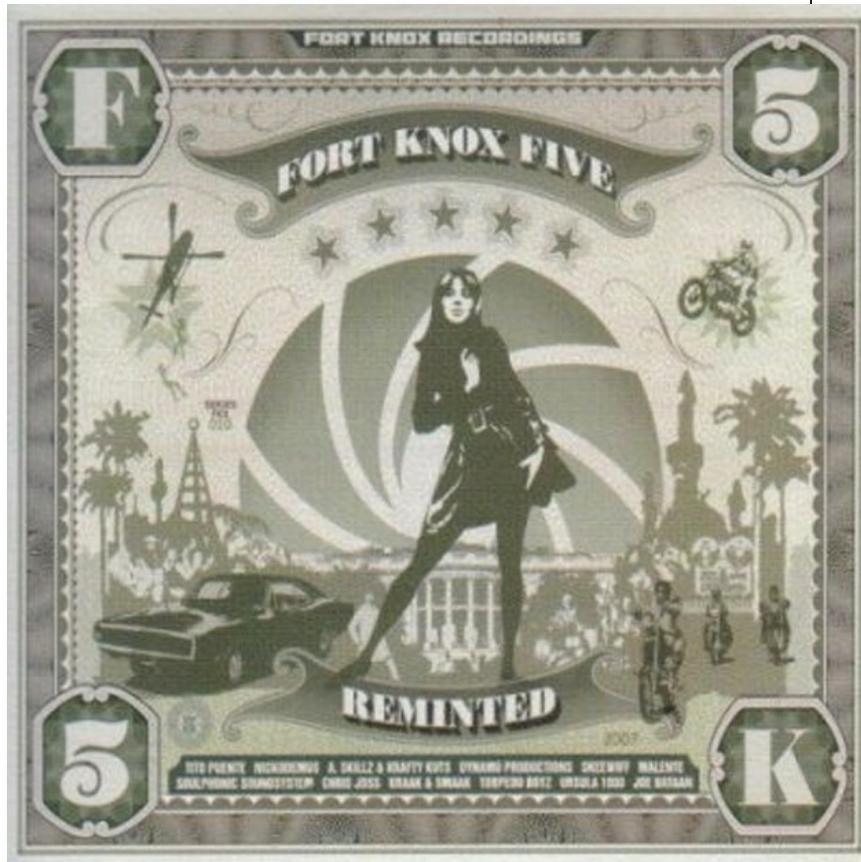
THE ESSENCE OF EXCELLENCE

Verity Audio has earned a deserved reputation for producing some of the very finest loudspeakers available at any price. Through a careful distillation of core design sensibilities, the new Rienzi brings the vision and design philosophy of Verity Audio to a wider audience of music lovers.

Modeled after the highly acclaimed Parsifal Ovation, the Rienzi preserves what matters most, faithfully revealing the full grandeur of music. It is a superb overall performer, combining unfailing coherence with exemplary musicality - a true Verity Audio product in every respect.

All Verity Audio designs are crafted with a balance of science and art. It is only through this tradition that the spirit of knowledge and craftsmanship come alive.



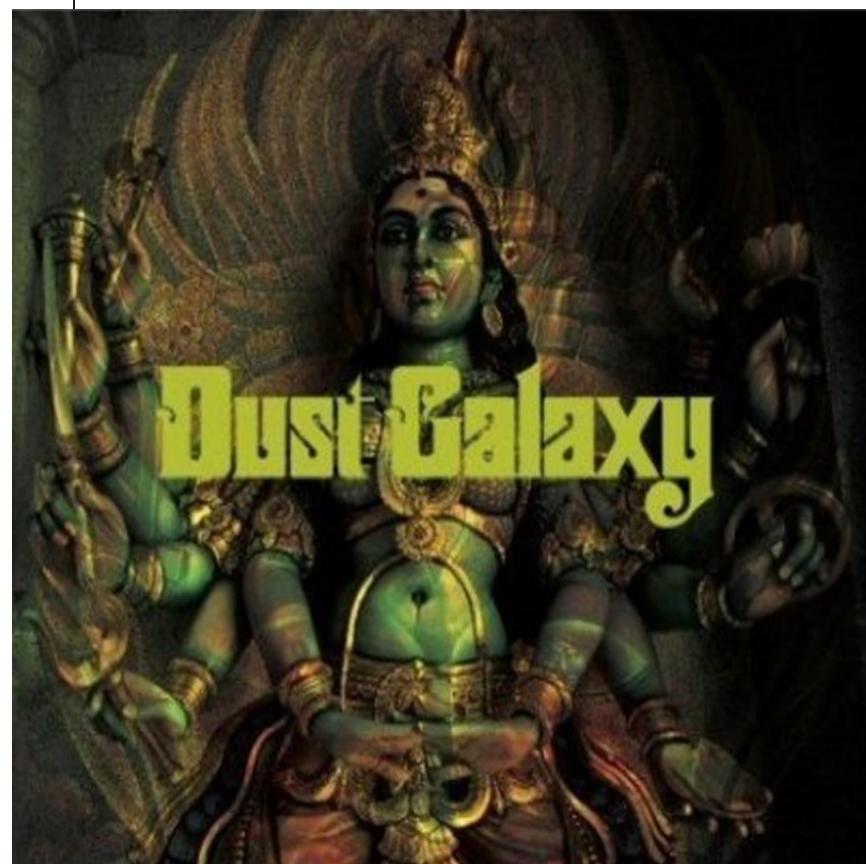


Fort Knox Five — *Reminted*

When you remix the group Thunderball you end up with their alter ego, The Fort Knox Five. *Reminted* comes out of the chute strong, and it's relentlessly fun. Bring on the funkiness; it starts with a Tito Puente remix and goes crazy from there. There are cuts from Chris Joss, Nickodemus, Kraak n' Smaak, and Skeewif. If you are looking for a solid, high-energy disk to slip on during a party, this is one you need to have in your crate. This is serious booty-shaking stuff. Featured cuts include the FK5 mix of "Electrik Boogie" by Ursula 1000 and Soulphonic Soundsystem's "Catalina Sunset."

Rob Garza — *Dust Galaxy*

Dust Galaxy is a side project by Rob Garza (half of Thievery Corporation). This CD may be a little more rock 'n' roll than you might expect. Sure, there are some of the elements you've come to expect from the Thievery Corp., but there're a lot of harder edged guitars with power chords in the mix. Rob does his own vocals on most of the tracks; his voice is a little ragged and adds a grittier feel to the tracks. It works for me. As for you—well, you can check out some samples online. Be sure to try these three: "Sun in your Head," "Mother of Illusion," and "River of Ever Changing Forms."



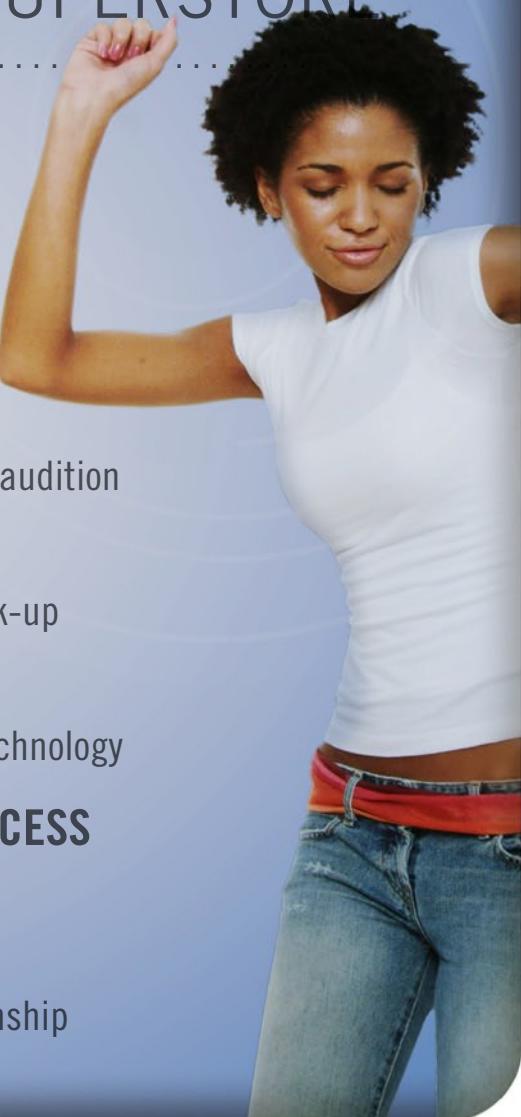
THUNDERBALL

FIVE REASONS TO *choose us* OVER THAT ELECTRONICS SUPERSTORE

(AS IF YOU NEEDED
MORE THAN ONE)



1. **FREE SHIPPING BOTH WAYS**
with our risk-free in-home audition
2. **NO MIDDLEMAN**
means no middleman mark-up
3. **KICK-ASS ACOUSTICS**
with patented crossover technology
4. **UNLIMITED (FREE) ACCESS**
to our audio gurus
5. **AWARD-WINNING**
engineering and craftsmanship



“If you’re shopping in this price range—or even if your budget is two or three times higher—I highly recommend checking them out.”

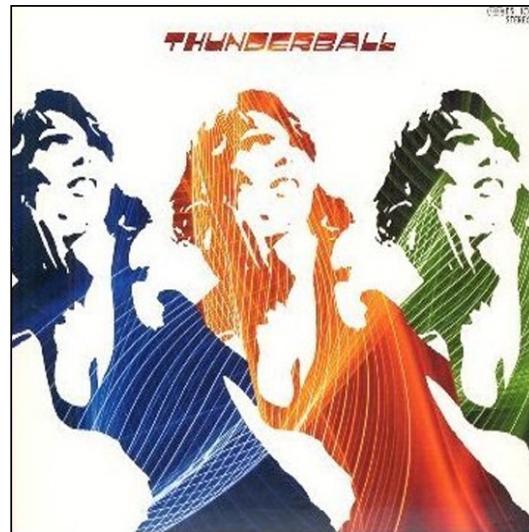
—Thomas J. Norton, Ultimate AV



aperionaudio.com®

Visit us on the web:
www.aperionaudio.com

Or give us a ring:
1 888 880-8992



Thunderball — Cinescope

Thunderball tends to do things big, and this is no exception. Cinescope is lush, exotic, and soundtrack-like, as the name might imply. From the dramatic sitar-laced opening track “The Road to Benares” to the orchestral closing song “The Last Flight Out,” this could be a great accompaniment to chasing bad guys or disarming bombs. Groovy tracks to check out are “Electric Shaka” featuring Afrika Bambaataa and “Return of the Panther” with Mustafa Akbar. If you enjoyed the dancehall cut “Strictly Rude Boy,” check out the other EPs on eslmusic.com, where there are multiple remixes available.

DJ Tom B. — Echo Chamber

DJ Tom B. (Thomas Blondet) can often be found at the Eighteenth Street Lounge in Washington D.C. His new EP, *Echo Chamber*, features his excellent use of Latin and Caribbean influenced beats, with a very nice blend of classic house and chillout styles. If you’re a DJ, here’s some great material for you to add to your crate. You can check out his full collection of EPs at the record label Rhythm and Culture Recordings. ●



Al Green Is Still In Love With You

By Ben Fong-Torres

When the Reverend Al Green decided to return to singing love songs, he did more than revive his pop music career. He may have saved the life of one of the most important men in his own life: his record producer.



ENCORE PERFORMANCE CT5 COMPOSITE TRIODE PREAMPLIFIER

With the stunning ACT2 composite triode preamplifier conrad-johnson has again dramatically raised the bar for line-stage performance and again that leap in performance has been transferred to a more affordable model. Introducing the CT5 line-stage preamplifier featuring the same zero-feedback composite triode circuit, 6N30P triodes, and CJD teflon capacitors that elevate the ACT2 above the competition. Visit your conrad-johnson dealer soon to hear just how life-like recorded music can sound.

conrad-johnson It just sounds right.

2733 Merrilee Dr • Fairfax, VA 22031 • phone: 703-698-8581, fax: 703-560-5360 • www.conradjohnson.com

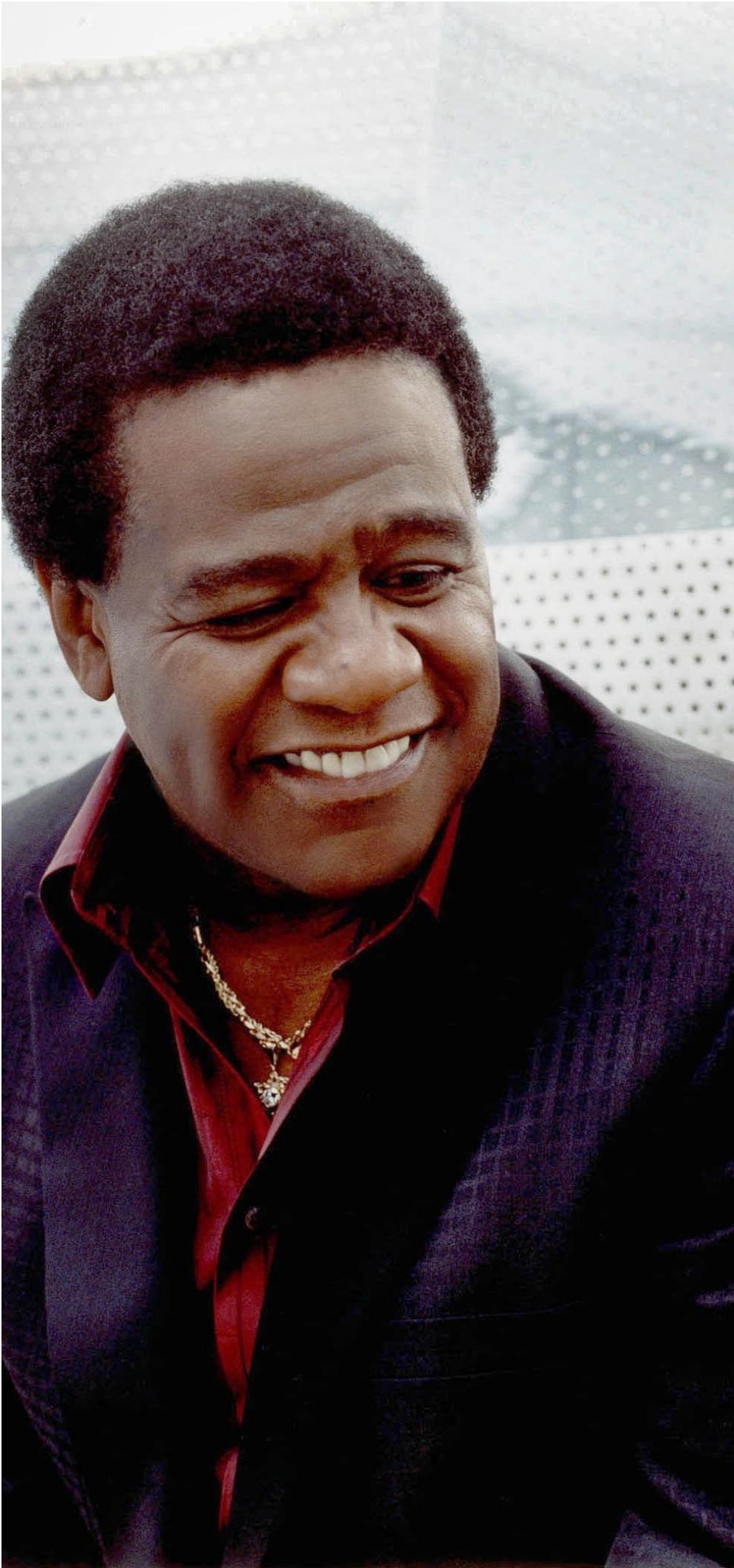
Green had enjoyed a string of hits in the early Seventies with smooth, sensuous songs like "Let's Stay Together," "I'm Still in Love with You," "Look What You Done For Me," and "You Ought to Be with Me." But by mid-decade, he'd been born again, switched to gospel music, become an ordained minister and opened his own church in Memphis.

Then, early in 2003, he heard that Willie Mitchell, the veteran Memphis musician and producer who'd recorded and, in some cases, co-written many of Green's biggest hits, was in the hospital with diabetes.

"Willie was in bad shape," says Green, in his office behind his Full Gospel Tabernacle church, where, almost every Sunday, a devoted congregation and out-of-town visitors gather to hear him preach and sing.

On this wintry afternoon in Memphis, in January of 2005, he's not in such great shape himself. He's nursing a cold, but looks dapper, in a crisp black suit over a black, V-necked shirt and vest. He wears shades and just a bit of bling—a gold chain, a gold watch and a couple of bracelets.

Mitchell, he recounts, had been in the hospital for a week. **"He was drinking – which is not good for his sugar diabetes – and not caring. Earlier this last year he'd lost his wife, and then his brother."** *(continued)*



Green visited his musical mentor. "I said, the first thing we should do is give him something to do, something that knocks his socks off. And what has he wanted to do all this time but cut an album with Al Green?" He flashes a broad smile. **"That's it! Oh, man. He sits up. He said, 'When we gonna get started?' Well, that type of thing gives you the energio, the energy to perk up."**

"It was a nice boost," says Mitchell, still dapper at 77. He is in the control room of his funky Royal Recording Studios, a former movie house in a residential neighborhood. "I was really sick, and everybody said you can't even go into the studio. But we started cutting the album, and it brought some kind of life to me."

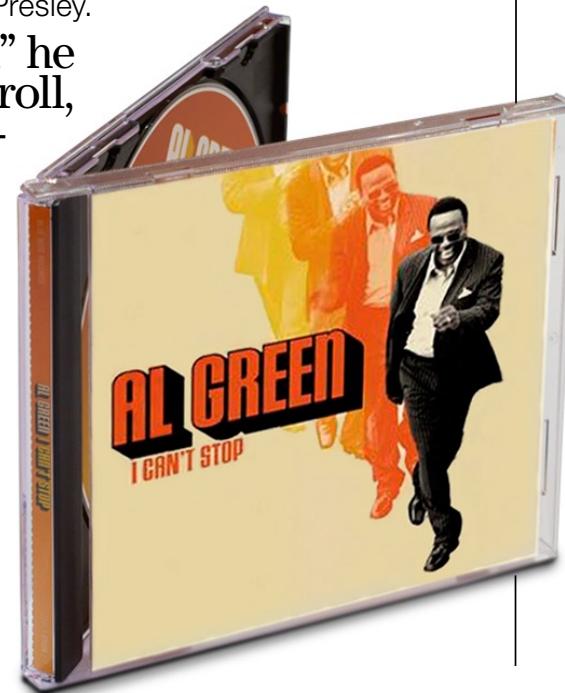
The result was *I Can't Stop*, which earned critical praise and a Grammy nomination. In May, 2005, Green's label, Blue Note Records, would issue another co-production with Mitchell, *Everything's OK*.

In his memoirs, "Take Me to the River," Green, who is 59, refers to Mitchell as a father figure. It was a role, he wrote, that was "vacant since that day I had marched out of the apartment and turned my back on my daddy's plans for my life."

That apartment was in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where Al, the sixth of ten children, and his parents, had moved, looking for a better life than they'd had in Forrest City, Arkansas. There, Robert Greene (his son later changed his surname) was a sharecropper, and he'd formed a family gospel group. But Al also loved the music of Sam Cooke, Jackie Wilson, James Brown, and Elvis Presley.

Elvis? "I loved the music," he says, "the shake, rattle and roll, hip-swinging, hair-down-in-your face – that was one of my little fantasies, and this guy filled it really well."

Al would sneak records into the apartment, and one day, his father, who'd forbidden the playing of secular music, caught him dancing to a Jackie Wilson record. Al, only 14, moved out, and moved in with a friend who lived nearby. *(continued)*





Exquisitely engineered, self-amplified, speaker systems.

SALAGAR™
S P E A K E R S
Drop Dead Sound.

salagar.com

He soon formed a singing group with some buddies. But, he says, he made certain to finish school. "I wanted to prove something to my Dad. When someone tells you you're not gonna do something, then I made up my mind I was going to do it."

Green was a struggling young singer with one modest hit record, "Back Up Train," under his belt when he met Mitchell, a saxophone player and bandleader as well as a record producer, at a nightclub in Midland, Texas in 1969, where they both had been booked. Mitchell liked Green's voice, and they were soon working together at Mitchell's studios. After a couple of duds, they clicked with a song Green wrote, "Tired of Being Alone," in fall of 1971. And when "Let's Stay Together" hit Number One the next year, Green became a star—and a sex symbol, delivering his gospel-tinged love songs in a voice that gritty to pretty, soaring into a yearning falsetto that set hearts fluttering and got critics raving. In 1972 and 1973, he sold some 20 million records.

"It was a party every night," Green says about life on tour. **"It's just a whirlwind, and if you're not careful, you'll get into a whirlwind of liquor, a whirlwind of lines of cocaine, a whirlwind of women."**

But Green soon began to feel a spiritual tug. In 1972, he wrote and recorded a song called "Jesus is Waiting." He turned out to be prescient. In summer of that year, Green was staying one night at a hotel near Disneyland when he was awakened by the sound of shouting, only to realize that the voice was his own. *(continued)*

"I was praising God...and lifting my voice to heaven. The Holy Spirit is a witness to what I'm saying—I've never felt like that before."

And, he tells me, he didn't limit his shouting to the heavens. "I went around knocking on people's doors telling them, 'Hey, I've been saved.' I couldn't keep it to myself—and this guy looked at me and said, 'Yeah, sure you have. Weirdo.'"

Green began to incorporate gospel music and short sermons into his concerts. Although reviews were mixed, and his record sales began to slip, he was determined that he was on the right road—especially after an incident in 1974 when a woman came to his home, proposed marriage, and after Green turned her down, attacked him with a pan of boiled Cream of Wheat cereal, causing second-degree burns. While Green cleaned himself, the woman shot herself to death.

I spoke with Green shortly after the incident for *Rolling Stone*. "It was terrifying," he said, "to know someone would actually go to that extent to get a message to you."

Looking back, he says that it wasn't success or women that posed problems. **"Life itself causes problems. Its got its own weights. That's why it's like it is; it's written like that in the Bible so you know what to expect out of life. It can be quite choppy, but you have to know that, and go on."**

Green became an ordained minister and opened his church in 1976. Besides singing and preaching, he does a little teaching, offering counsel to whoever needs some.

One Memphis citizen who never came by was his old mentor, Willie Mitchell. The producer never understood why Green would give up secular music entirely.

Mitchell, who told me that he considers Green the greatest singer he's ever heard, told him that he needed to defend the turf he'd claimed back in the Seventies.

"He said, 'You take a stand on that land and claim it and defend it,'" says Green. "'You can have the whole world if you want it, you just have to want it. And if you want it, take it. If you don't take it, somebody else will walk away with it.'"

"You just stopped," Green says Mitchell told him, "because of religion and because you don't understand who you are and what you're doing and what God is doing for you!"

"And I didn't!" Green says. When he began contemplating a return to love songs, he says he had a consultation with God. "And God said, 'Al, I gave you the songs, they are wonderful songs, they are beautiful songs.' 'Call Me,' 'Sha-La-La (Make Me Happy),' 'Living for You.' 'I'm Still In Love With You,' 'Let's Stay Together.' *(continued)*



© 2006 Olympus Imaging America Inc.

Not responsible for damaged rocks.



The irresistible Stylus.
Shock proof. Waterproof. You-name-it-proof.
Stylus 720 SW. **Designed to Do More.**



OLYMPUS
getolympus.com



"Nobody's shooting or killing or anything in here, these are what you call life songs, life experience songs."

In 2003, he and Mitchell reunited to produce *I Can't Stop*, which was a critical and commercial hit. When he was questioned about singing love songs, he had a ready response: "God didn't only make Sunday," he reasons. "He made Monday and Tuesday, too. God has people in love."

After issuing *Everything's O.K.* in 2005, Blue Note also made a four-track EP of live performances, called *The Reverend Al Green – Sessions@AOL*, available via iTunes.

Taking occasional weekends off from his church, the Green continues to perform concerts, where he sings it all: gospel favorites, his Seventies hits – some of his other Top Ten songs include "Sha-La-La (Make Me Happy)," "Here I Am (Come and Take Me)," and "Call Me (Come Back Home)," and his more recent tunes. He clearly favors, and savors, the early hits. *(continued)*

EXCEPTIONAL AUDIO COMPONENTS



EMOTIVE AUDIO

Emotive Audio components have won high praise from listeners and reviewers around the world. We invite you to audition our products and see the craftsmanship and artistry that makes Emotive Audio unique. The highest quality components assembled by hand combined with our exotic wood bases, make a visual and sonic statement in your listening room!

"It will be the centerpiece of your stereo system for life!"

— Steve Hoffman, TONEAudio

Emotive Audio Designs
236 E. Bishop Street
Bellefonte, PA 16823
814-355-0881

www.emotiveaudio.com



In fact, in his office in Memphis, he interrupts our interview to go his desk, where he finds a recording of "I'm Still in Love With You" to play for me. It's not a remake, an alternate take, or a live version of that 1972 hit. He just wants to hear it.

"I'm talking about how fresh it is, with today's music," he says. "It still sounds new. I was listening to it the other day, and Willie started laughing with me!"

He plays it full blast. Soon, he is exulting in his own voice, punctuating his lines with whoops and shouts of **"Right!"** and **"Yeah!"** He scats, he dances a bit, and he laughs, out of sheer joy.

"Woo!" he shouts. He may have a cold, and tomorrow, a Sunday, he may not be able to preach to his flock. But right now, to the sound of his own, timeless music, the Reverend is testifying. ●



Ben Fong-Torres is a freelance writer and broadcaster in San Francisco. He is the author of seven books, including *Becoming Almost Famous*, in which this article appeared. It has been edited and updated for TONEAudio.

Audiophile Recordings

Presented By Acoustic Sounds

Electronic Warriors

By Jeff Dorgay

This issue we have some classic reissues from MCA/Universal Japan, available from our friends at Acoustic Sounds. There are 72 in all, ranging from Steely Dan to Nirvana, with a bit of classical and jazz thrown in. The artwork and printing is some of the best I have ever seen, and the titles are all pressed on 200 gram vinyl.

I was very impressed by the awesome presentation and overall quality of these discs. The ultimate collectors in our audience may pass on these because they are not first edition pressings, but if you are like me and want a fresh copy of some classic rock records that you still love (or destroyed in college) here's your chance to get in the time machine and go shopping.

If you are interested in purchasing any of these LPs, just click on the record cover and you will open a new browser window to the Acoustic Sounds website.



Free – *Fire and Water*

The third album from Free would be their biggest, featuring their big hit "All Right Now," with the single making it all the way to number 4 on the Billboard Top 100 chart in 1970. Free would eventually disband for good in 1973, but Paul Rodgers would find a comfy spot in Bad Company for years to come.

Whether you are a Free fan, or want to dig further into the roots of Bad Company, this album stands up, although it's definitely a lot mellow than what would make up the self titled Bad Company debut. In terms of recording quality, this one is a winner, with extremely quiet surfaces, a nice wide open soundstage and warm tonality that one doesn't always get with Japanese pressings, reissues or not.

Marvin Gaye – What's Going On

Released in 1971, *What's Going On* was one of Marvin Gaye's biggest albums. This record has much more of a jazz groove than the funk that would permeate *Let's Get It On* two years later. Lyrically, *What's Going On* is a much heavier album, dealing with spirituality, the safety of our children and the environment. The title track and "Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology)" were top ten singles as well as "Inner City Blues (Make Me Wanna Holler)."

Every early Motown record I've ever owned has had dreadful sonics, with rolled off treble, weak bass and a ton of compression. This Japanese copy of *What's Going On* still does not possess pristine sonic qualities, but it is much better than what you probably have left in your collection. I hope the other Motown remasters available in the Acoustic Sounds catalog are this good!



Jimi Hendrix – Axis: Bold as Love

Not quite as heavy as *Are You Experienced* before it or *Electric Ladyland* after, *Axis: Bold as Love* is still nothing short of genius.

Though this record has been remastered to death by a number of audiophile labels, this Japanese version is quite good. A touch of cloudiness in the mids still remains, but the highs are fairly smooth and there is not a lot of compression. Jimi's guitar blasts through on "If 6 Was 9," and the opening track, "EXP" has a huge feel. Definitely a great album for headphone listening.

Our collector, Tom Caselli, has a few suggestions for you if you have a few hundred dollars to spend on a copy of this record, but if you don't have to have the ultimate collector's copy, I say run, don't walk, to pick up one of these before they are gone.



KISS – Destroyer

You know I couldn't leave this one out.

Released just three months before I graduated from high school, *Destroyer* was the first KISS studio album to follow up on their mega success, *KISS Alive!* Though *Destroyer* spawned the ultimate wuss KISS single, "Beth," it was still full of jewels like "Detroit Rock City," "Do You Love Me," and concert staple "Shout it Out Loud." Some of you may remember that this record sounded dreadful on anything but an AM radio and had a ton of compression, along with a very limited frequency response. The midrange was completely squashed in the mix.

The KISS fans in our audience can rejoice, somewhat. The minute you hear the car door slam on "Detroit Rock City," you'll know that this record is much better than the one you owned back in 1976. Though still somewhat compressed, there is more information on both ends of the scale and the mids have been boosted up so the vocals (and guitar overdubs) come through loud and clear. If you want the best pressing of *Destroyer*, it's within reach.

T. Rex – Electric Warrior

Being the punk kid who lived across the street from a radio engineer had its benefits back in the early '70s. While all the other kids were playing with Hot Wheels, I was dodging smoke of a suspicious origin and listening to T. Rex. When I saw the promo of *Electric Warrior* come out of the shrink wrap, I wanted to be that guy in front of that amplifier stack.

Other guys have five copies of *Dark Side of the Moon*; I have five copies of *Electric Warrior*. What can I say? This Japanese pressing is my favorite. It strikes the best balance of tonality with the least amount of compression. Low level detail is quite good, too. I can now hear another layer of background vocals and guitar overdubs that was getting lost in the noise floor before. Highly recommended. ●



Classical Music A to Z

By Dan Babineau



**RACHMANINOFF, THE ROMANTIC
& RAVEL, THE NEO-CLASSICIST
(Thank God for Hypnosis!)**

As a pure scientist, working my way through graduate school, I didn't put a lot of credence in the study of hypnosis. It always seemed like a carnival act as these so called "masters of human consciousness" made supposedly intelligent men or women chirp like birds or worse, behave like monkeys. But then one of my psychology professors began discussing Sergei Rachmaninoff and my negative opinion of hypnosis changed – forever.

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943):

The story goes like this: Sergei Rachmaninoff, a child prodigy comes of age and composes his first symphony after many successful smaller pieces. The premier performance of his first symphony is blasted by the critics largely due to a shoddy performance, conducted by a drunken Alexander Glazunov. Next, Rachmaninoff meets with Russian author Leo Tolstoy who strips him of all his dignity, claiming that there is no real purpose to his music. These biting words sent him into a deep depression because he greatly respected this famous author; it shut down his creative powers. And to make matters still worse, his church, the Eastern Orthodox, objected to his intent to marry his cousin, Natalie Satina. Rachmaninoff then went into a self-imposed exile and the music stopped for years!

Enter psychologist Nicholai Dahl, a master of a type of hypnosis called "autosuggestive therapy". And as the cliché goes, "the rest is history". Rachmaninoff practiced this new form of self hypnosis and recovered completely from his bout with depression. The church lifted their denial of his marriage to Natalie Satina and they were married in 1902. Rachmaninoff dedicated his 2nd piano concerto to Dr. Dahl and this concerto put him back on the musical map forever!

Rachmaninoff's music is very Russian; deep and tonally warm, it is enchanting, melodic and full of color. I think Stravinsky got it right when he wrote that: *Rachmaninoff started off as a youthful watercolorist, who eventually turned to oils.*

My point is that though Rachmaninoff's music got darker as he passed through his thirties, it stayed full of raw human emotion without getting hard.

Play Rachmaninoff if you are in love. It's no secret that Rachmaninoff absolutely worshipped his wife, and drew a great deal of his emotion to compose from this undying love. Some of his music can seem sappy at times, because of the huge melodramatic passages, but in the end I always come away satisfied with his exceptional musical understanding of the human psyche! The first two piano concertos and his 2nd symphony are perfect examples of this abundance of melodrama.

Rachmaninoff was an amazing pianist, traveling extensively to perform his many compositions with incredible power and lucidity. Well over six feet tall, he had extremely long fingers which allowed him to attack the keys with a dexterity and virtuosity that literally stopped audiences' cold! The term "jaw dropping" began at Rachmaninoff performances and America could not get enough of this gentle giant. He composed a wide assortment of music ranging from a huge catalog of solo piano music to several large-

scale orchestral works like his "Symphonic Dances". Rachmaninoff was a musical innovator and even featured the seldom heard - saxophone in "Dances".

He relied heavily on his Russian heritage for melody and style. Rachmaninoff even went as far as to borrow a theme from another virtuoso, Paganini in his Opus #43 "Rhapsody on a theme of Paganini". He also borrowed themes from the likes of Chopin and Correli, putting his magical touch on these already well-established musical foundations. Rachmaninoff's brilliant understanding of musical composition allowed him to paint musical pictures capable of transporting you to strange places like the "Isle of the Dead": a short piece

that he composed after viewing a Swiss painting depicting a rather gory destination. In his latter works, this ability to paint musical pictures evolved into creating musical atmospheres as in Opus 35, "The Bells" or Opus 37, the all night vigil sometimes called "Vespers". He made enormous amends to his Eastern Orthodox Church with these works and their raw sacred beauty will put you at peace no matter what kind of day you've endured!

Sergei Rachmaninoff was one of the cornerstones of the Romantic era of classical music. He broke many of the rules of the previous Classical era to be able to create these dramatic musical atmospheres that could exemplify raw emotion. From his first work for piano to his last Opus 45 "Symphonic Dances" we glimpse into the human soul, innocent and volatile. He composed three symphonies, four piano concertos, three variations on a theme, a couple cello works, two operas, music for voice and piano not to mention an enormous assortment of challenging piano music. And after reviewing his life's work it's easy to understand how Rachmaninoff's music continues to reach our deepest passions!

Rachmaninoff's brilliant understanding of musical composition allowed him to paint musical pictures capable of transporting you to strange places like the "Isle of the Dead"

DAN'S PICKS:

Decca cat. #467453: **Piano Concertos #2 & 4**

– Ashkenazy, Previn & the London Symphony Orchestra

RCA cat. #59511: **Piano Concerto #3**

– Horowitz, Ormandy & the New York Philharmonic

RCA cat. #63612: **My Favorite Rachmaninoff**

– Van Cliburn (assorted piano music)

RCA cat. #68886: **Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini**

– Rubinstein, Reiner & the Chicago Symphony Orchestra

RCA cat. #61250: **Isle of the Dead and other gems**

– Reiner & the Chicago Symphony Orchestra

EMI cat. #66997: **Symphony #3 & Symphonic Dances**

– Jansons & the St. Petersburg Orchestra

EMI cat. #64530: **Symphonies 1-3, Isle, Symphonic Dances & Songs** – Previn & the London Symphony Orchestra

RCA cat. #61658: **Four Piano Concertos**

– Rachmaninoff, Ormandy, Stokowski & the Philadelphia Orchestra (great historic mono recording)

LPs: (Fun if you can find them)

EMI cat. #3259: **Isle of the Dead & Symphonic Dances**

– Previn & the London Symphony Orchestra

EMI cat. #3197: **Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini**

– Christina Ortiz, Koizumi & the New Philharmonic

Columbia cat. #6205: **Symphonic Dances**

– Ormandy & the Philadelphia Orchestra

Decca cat. #SXL6996: **Piano Sonata #2, Etudes**

– Ashkenazy

EMI cat. #ASD2889: **Symphony #2**

– Previn & the London Symphony Orchestra

RCA cat. #LSC #2185: **Symphony #3**

– Boult & the London Philharmonic (Classic Record release)

Mercury cat. #SR90283: **Piano Concerto #3**

– Janis, Dorati & the London Symphony (Speakers Corner release)

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937):

On my many trips to Switzerland I have always been amazed by the trains. The fact that they are almost always within a minute of their scheduled time absolutely astounds me; especially if you think of all of the variables that could effect arrivals and departures. And it is with this precision that Maurice Ravel composed his many splendid works. Ravel didn't just sit down at the piano and write a score, he laid out the foundation, hammered it into shape, chiseled off the edges and probably spent more time re-writing his music than any other classical composer. But his perfectionism paid off and we are left with some of the most technically balanced, uniquely musical works ever composed!

Ravel's father was a Swiss inventor and I'm quite sure that his meticulous nature rubbed off on Maurice early in his life. His mother was from the Basque region of Spain and this also had a dramatic effect on Ravel as his music beautifully captures the energy and mystique of this hearty region. It is easy to see in his early works how his teacher, Gabriel Faure influenced him, but then he evolved and found his own voice.

Neither Debussy nor Ravel admitted in their lifetime that they were part of the impressionistic movement illustrated in the paintings of Monet or Renoir. Instead, both of these French composers were *classicists* by trade and didn't embrace the Romantic era the way that Liszt or Rachmaninoff did. Using hardcore classical theory Debussy and Ravel re-invented a past era and then modernized it to fit their needs. Ravel absorbed his surroundings and then went home and made sense

of it through his music. Bolero is a perfect example of Ravel the pragmatist at work taking a central theme to the fullest and then blowing the top off with every single piece of the orchestra working on overdrive! He was greatly influenced by the music of Mozart and of course Francois Couperin. And remember, it was Ravel who orchestrated Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition", taking a rambunctious piano work and turning it into a musical monster!

Bolero is a perfect example of Ravel the pragmatist at work taking a central theme to the fullest and then blowing the top off with every single piece of the orchestra working on overdrive!

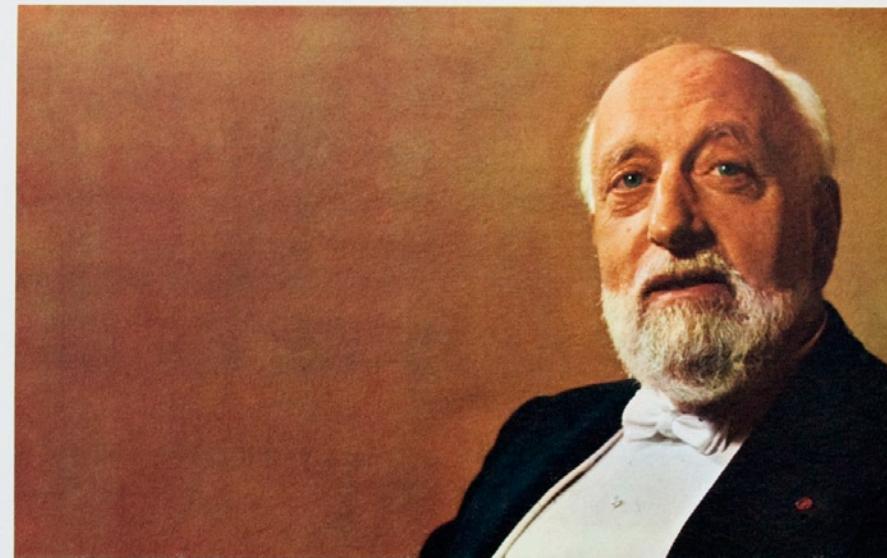
Ravel never married and spent the majority of his life in a small house in the French countryside that he shared with a large number of house cats. His rather poor health excluded him from frontline military service and he found himself driving a supply truck for a good part of the

First World War. This infuriated Ravel as he could not participate in the fight to protect his beloved France, but he did compose a great deal of his finest work during these horrid times; in-

haling the atmosphere of his surroundings. Then with structure, and a keen sense of modal tonality and counterpoint Ravel honed his musical craft to sound like no other composer. Yes, he embraced the same basic techniques of composition that Debussy employed but it was Ravel who went several steps forward and created a new musical world. The "images" that Debussy brings forth in his composition get even more three dimensional in Ravel's compositions. (*continued*)

RAVEL

DAPHNIS ET CHLOE ALBORADA DEL GRACIOSO
LE TOMBEAU DE COUPERIN
VALSES NOBLES ET SENTIMENTALES



L'ORCHESTRE DE LA SUISSE ROMANDE

ANSERMET

LONDON
STEREO

CS 6210

The Badge Tells You What's Inside.



At Great Northern Sound we offer upgrades on some of the finest names in audio, taking great gear to an even higher level of performance.

We also carry select lines of new gear that we strongly believe will offer you great value and performance.

This badge lets you know that there is something special inside.

Great Northern Sound Co.

217 North 2nd Street
Stillwater, MN 55082
651-351-5355
www.greatnorthernsound.com

One of the classic examples of Ravel's abundant imagery can be found in his *Rhapsodie Espagnole* or *Spanish rhapsodie*. Ravel did not compose symphonies; he collected musical patchworks and neatly assembled them to paint magnificent portraits of a place in time. In this case it was his mother's home in Basque country filled with mysticism, joyful dance and wild celebration! There are even more examples of this patchwork imagery in pieces like "Alborada del Gracioso" (Dawn song of the jester) or "Une barque sur l'ocean" (Boat on the ocean) where you can feel the sea splash up in your face as the boat crashes through the surf in one gigantic roar!

On a more serious side, Ravel's piano works are incredibly complex little balls of energy; technically challenging to play and absolutely wonderful to take in as a live performance.

"Gaspard del la nuit" (Demons in the night) always sends me off to another world – dark but intriguing all at the same time. When asked why it took so long to complete *Gaspard*, Ravel responded by saying "It takes a long time to please the devil". And then there is the delicate "Sonatina" or even the piano version of "Ma Mere l'Oye", the piano duet that Ravel eventually turned into a full blown ballet – "The Mother Goose". Ravel's other complete ballet; "Daphnis et Chloe" is his longest work and definitely one of his best. This score was composed late in Ravel's life when his musical craftsmanship had been sharpened to the highest degree. (*continued*)

Some clear-cut examples of Ravel's work slant toward classicism, or should I say *neo-classicism* that can be found in his "Menuet antique" a delightful piano piece that he eventually scored for orchestra. "Le Tombeau de Couperin" is a tribute to Francois Couperin as Ravel takes Couperin's classic style and again re-invents the past. I don't think I'd like to be on the dance floor when Ravel's "LaValse" is performed. This "waltz" starts out in a normal tempo and by the close of the piece Ravel's change in tempo blows the doors off the dancehall. Ravel's music is playful, like Mozart's music, with little jokes and jabs mixed in to make sure we are all paying attention. "Jeux d'eau" or "games" perfectly illustrates this ability to bring fun into the music. Perhaps Ravel used the antics of his many cats for material?

Proving his genius of composition, Ravel's only string quartet, the "F Major" is a complete masterpiece. From the first movement in classic sonata allegro form to the dynamic pizzicato scherzo of the second movement, slowing down again in the third to reflect and then ripping the cover off of the ball in the finale Ravel once again demonstrates his innate talent for imagery, all brilliantly constructed like a fine Swiss watch!

He chose the title, "Pavane une infante défunte" (pavane for a dead princess) simply because he liked the way the words sounded together.

He wrote two ballets, two operas, a violin sonata, a cello sonata, assorted chamber music, the song cycle "Sheherazade", a delicately wonderful "Introduction & allegro" for harp, flute, clarinet & string quartet, several pieces for voice & piano and his version of an introduction to the orchestra: "Bolero". I remember playing *Bolero* and thinking that only Ravel could come up with a theme strong enough to endure the consensus of the entire orchestra.

Don't forget two other gems the two piano concertos: "Piano Concerto for the Left Hand" or "Piano Concerto in G major". The first piano concerto was written for pianist Paul Wittgenstein, who lost his right arm during World War I.

Ravel's music is playful, like Mozart's music, with little jokes and jabs mixed in to make sure we are all paying attention.



Before this piece was composed Ravel had visited America and had been privy to the new jazz scene that was erupting there. This concerto is loaded with expanded jazz riffs and rhythms as Ravel steps out of his usual classic form. In the "G major" he returns to his classicist root with

three movements: Allegramente (Fast), Adagio (Slow) & Presto (Very fast!). The 2nd movement – Adagio, is guaranteed to take you to dreamland and then get ready for a wild awakening in the rather brief, last movement.

Unfortunately, Ravel was involved in terrible car accident. Apparently, the taxi that he had hired overturned and Ravel suffered major trauma to his head. The effects of this accident continued to worsen and eventually he could no longer remember enough to compose. As a last resort they decided to operate to lessen the fluid around his brain but the operation was a dismal failure and Ravel died due to complications from this extreme surgery. I only wish they had tried hypnosis! ●

Red Wine Audio

Signature 30.2



The Signature 30.2 stereo amplifier was created for music connoisseurs seeking a sublime listening experience, dependability, and value.

Carefully designed to deliver a well-balanced musical presentation and long-term listening pleasure, the Signature 30.2 stereo amplifier combines the finest sonic attributes of classic tube amplification and solid-state amplification to enhance the listener's emotional involvement with the music.

On the inside is a unique circuit design that demonstrates our beliefs in using premium parts, shorter signal paths, and high-current sealed lead-acid (SLA) battery power to allow all the nuances of the music to emerge with remarkable coherence and integrity.



- Red Wine Audio SMART module equipped
- Premium Goldpoint stepped attenuator volume control with remote (optional)
- Select Danish Paper-in-Oil input capacitors
- Custom-designed output stage
- Vampire input and output jacks
- Proudly hand-made in the USA

battery-powered purist hi-fi

"Minimalist to the core, with top-notch parts and a deeply tweaked circuit, this amplifier has already sidelined \$45,000/pr battery-powered monos, given \$10,000/pr muscle amps the fly-by finger and butted heads with first-rate tube amps. I'll tip my hand and reveal prior to the full review conclusion that the 30.2 will walk away with a Lunar Eclipse Award in the new year, only the fourth one to be given out in our 5 years of operation." Srajan Ebaen, 6moons

DAN'S PICKS:

Decca cat. #458605:

Daphnis & Chloe, La Valse, Pavane

– Dutoit & the Montreal Symphony & Chorus

Universal cat. #000044102:

Bolero, Alborada, Rhapsodie

– Haitink & the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra

RCA cat. #61250:

The Reiner Sound

– Reiner & the Chicago Symphony Orchestra

RCA cat. #63683:

Rhapsodie, Ma mere, Introduction, Daphnis

– Martinon & the Chicago Symphony Orchestra

DG cat. 447438:

Piano Concertos 1 &2

– Argerich, Abbado & the Berlin Philharmonic

Vox cat. #5012:

Ravel, Complete Piano Music

– Abbey Simon

EMI cat. #67258:

Piano Concerto in G Major

– Michelangeli, Ettore & the Philharmonic

Decca cat. #460214:

Bolero, and all the favorites

– Dutoit & the Montreal Symphony

Naxos cat. #554722:

String Quartets, Ravel & Faure

– Ensemble Ad Libitum

EMI cat. #76978:

Introduction & Allegro

– Nancy Allen & the Tokyo String Quartet

(continued)

**GERMAN
PHYSIKS**
HIGH END TECHNOLOGY

There is Only ONE

The German Physiks DDD omnidirectional driver is the *only* precision full-range, point-source, bending-wave omni driver in the world. The DDD projects a perfectly coherent spherical wavefront from fundamentals through to ultrasonics, avoiding the music-masking penalties of multi-element designs.

The unmistakable result: The *most revealing* presentation of music you will ever hear. 3-Dimensional musical images that breathe with life, vast soundstages that evaporate the walls, transparency unfolding with effortless beauty, dynamics that will rock your soul ...

For the connoisseur in search of only the *most authentic* musical experience, the choice is only ONE:

GERMAN PHYSIKS


Signals
SUPER-FI
DISTRIBUTORS OF FINE AUDIO INSTRUMENTS

 828 RALPH MCGILL BLVD
STUDIO W3
ATLANTA, GA 30306
6 7 8 . 5 2 8 . 8 0 7 7

WWW.SIGNALS-SUPERFI.COM

Calliope cat. #3822:

Ravel, Chamber music

– Large cast of players with the Hanover String Duo & Talich String Quartet

Kontrapunkt cat. #32158:

Piano Trios – Copenhagen Trio

Dg cat. #449769:

L'heure espagnole & L'enfante

– French National Radio Orchestra

LPs: (*Some of these are very possible to locate, some not*)

Connoisseur Society cat. #CS2103:

String Quartet in G Major

– Parrenin Quartet

Valois cat. #MB792:

Piano Music – Noel Lee

Philips cat. #835-258LY:

Bolero, La valse

– Monteux & the London Symphony Orchestra

London cat. #CS6023:

Ma Mere L'oye

– Ansermet & the Swiss Romande

Angel cat. #35567:

Piano Concerto in G Major

– Michelangeli & the Philharmonic

APC cat. #007:

Works for Orchestra

– Skrowaczewski & the Minnesota Orchestra

Decca cat. #SDDSF 337-9:

Ansermet Conducts Ravel

– Orchstra of the Swiss Romande



This starts a new column in TONE, that while sporadic in nature, is very important. Being obsessed with music and hifi gear one can at times forget to have fun, shut the system off and pursue something else for a while! If nothing else, absence will make the heart grow fonder.

We all decided who better to kick off our new column than world traveler Ken Kessler? While well known as one of audio journalism's finest, Ken has a wide range of interests including fine automobiles, watches and liquor. Our kind of guy! I hope you enjoy this column where I asked Ken to give us four good Italian wines under \$100 a bottle. He gave us a few reasonably priced examples and one towards the upper end of the range. I can vouch for his taste, all were very enjoyable!

Red Wine Only

By Ken Kessler

When our editor asked me to come up with a quartet of favorite, affordable wines, I had to admit I'm no expert. However, for the past few years I've been knocking back wines I can't afford – one of the perks of being a journalist in the luxury field.

Like those who dismiss art with an "I don't know what it means, but I know what I like," I, too, have the benefit of being the village idiot. Thus, I am immune to the bleatings of critics, while respecting sommeliers in restaurants with good reputations. Most important of all, I have a "wine rabbi" in Italy who prepared a list of wines I must drink before I die. Hence, I can go to decent restaurants and order a bottle without having the staff wet themselves laughing.

It's like this: I touched *absolutely no alcohol* for 25 years. A recurring nightmare about a drink/driving arrest inspired that stupidity. Masochistic? Yup. Then, five years ago in Florence, my Italian hosts got fed up with me toasting with a glass of water. "Nefasto!!" They forced a "Super Tuscan" down my throat. The proverbial light-bulb flashed: "What the f*** have I been denying myself??!?" So I decided to make up for my "lost years." *(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:

- Acoustic Zen
- Vienna Acoustics
- VMPS
- Coincident
- mbl
- Usher
- NuForce
- Wadia
- REL
- DeHavilland
- Manley
- ReQuest
- Musical Fidelity
- Cayin
- Genesis
- Primare
- Exact Power
- ModWright
- Sumiko/Project
- Acoustic Solid

(**gateway sound**)

125 Royal Woods Court
Suite 160
Tucker, Georgia
770 493 1550
www.gatewaysound.net

First, I only drink reds. Why? Because I detest white wine, champagne, and fizzy stuff (though I've been told not to ignore Lambruscos). Second, I only drink Italian reds because I love all things Italian, I don't have enough years left to explore wines randomly, and my opinion of the French would land me in jail if published. Which is not to say that I'm still a masochist: in the last two years, I've savored a 1996 Haut Medoc, a 1976 Mouton-Rothschild, a 1999 Romanée Conti, and others that almost force me to forgive the French for the Dreyfus affair and Sangatte.

Thus what follows is a quite narrow selection, for the above reasons. Even with the weak dollar, all are available at sane prices on-line for US delivery. Jeff asked for four between \$25-\$75, but I've been drinking a pair that are so cheap it's a crime not to recommend them ... before the prices creep up. And the reason I know about them? My Italian wine rabbi is, above all, not a snob.

One other thing. Although two of these wines cost around the price of a six-pack of Heineken, proving that I love affordable stuff, I have come to one realization: I would rather have one \$50 wine than five \$10 wines. Having learned that great wine is not a scam like, say, high-end cables, I have no problem justifying the \$100 I spent on a nice Amarone.



NERO D'AVOLA (below \$10)

Nero d'Avola is a Sicilian grape, not a wine type per se, and there are dozens of wines using it. I've been drinking them indiscriminately because they cost bupkес, even in "Treasure Island" (a.k.a. the UK). In fact, it's so inexpensive that I pour whole bottles into stews, pasta sauces, over roasts. It's one of those industrial-strength wines that cuts through chili con carne, curries, Thai food. Serve it with an arrabiata pasta dish, or a fully-loaded pizza, and you'll experience budget nirvana.

Although Nero D'Avola is cultivated all over Sicily, the island's most popular grape, my Italian friends treat it like a well-kept secret, laughing at non-Italians who ignore it. But word is leaking out, and fans of Italian wine the world over are discovering it in droves. Trust me: we will see "high end" Nero D'Avolas with scary price tags in the coming years.

But, no, it's not an exercise in subtlety, if that's your priority. This is rugged stuff, strong and rich and fruity, a bit Syrah-like, and certainly better with food than for savoring on its own. Let's not be precious about this: buy whichever you find, even if you choose it just because the label is pretty. I buy Cusumano, simply because that's the same name as Tony Soprano's neighbors. This does not require the blessings of Robert Parker. Nero D'Avola only requires a glass.



CANNONAU (under \$20)

Cannonau is Sardinia's answer to Nero D'Avola, and by all accounts, it's climbing up the prestige scale with greater rapidity. The day my wine rabbi told me about it, I saw it on a menu that night: destiny. Hell, even in Geneva, it sold for under \$15 in a restaurant! Love at first sip.

I like Sella & Mosca's Cannonau di Sardegna Riserva 2004, which I've seen on-line for as little as \$8.99 a bottle. Like Nero D'Avola, this will cut through heavily-seasoned foods and cheeses, but it's more sophisticated, still very fruity, and quite distinctive. The usual coven of critics attribute "violets" to it, but never having eaten, drunk, or mated with violets, I can't confirm it.

A glass on its own will show more layers than the Nero D'Avola, and it lingers thanks to finesse rather than through a show of sheer strength. I had a bottle with my favorite dish – stracotto, Tuscan braised beef that you will adore if you love brisket – and the marriage was heavenly. Especially if you don't want to spring for one of the next pair.

LE SERRE NUOVE (\$40-\$70)

This one found me by accident: while crossing wines off my “must drink” list, I reached Ornellaia – one of the very finest Super Tuscans (“ST”). In a wine store in Florence, I was offered a 2001 Ornellaia with its matching Serre Nuove at a ridiculously low price.

Ornellaia is a sexy blend of two Cabernets and Merlot that’s been around since 1985. In 1997, it was joined by its “second wine”, Le Serre Nuove, which is, I gather, made from fruit rejected for the primary wine, younger vines, etc. Poor relative it may be, but I can tell you that the wine mavens who shared a bottle of Le Serre Nuove with me were so dazzled that they even rated it above a top-level,

full-price Super Tuscan.

It’s just gorgeous: delicate enough to savor on its own, but it worked a treat for me with roast veal. Fruity, smoky and herby rather than spicy, it’s almost as complex and mysterious as its dearer sibling. Thus, it’s worth every penny, especially if you’ve been dreaming about Super Tuscans but can’t quite accommodate the prices.

(By the way, the Ornellaia’s super-duper, costlier cousin is Masseto, and there’s another less-pricey relative called Le Volte. I have a bottle of the former awaiting a special occasion, and drank a Le Volte in Geneva this month that was sensational.)

Compact Disc Concept CDC So authentically Nagra



Compact design, proven Nagra ergonomics, digital technology from Nagra's state-of-the-art professional recorders, Swiss mechanical engineering based on military specifications: the new Nagra CDC player has all the ingredients that have made Nagra the ultimate reference for music lovers and sound professionals.

The new Nagra CDC family of products is the finest solution to reproduce, at home, the original quality of a live or studio recording - often made with a Nagra recorder. Nagra CD player range: Nagra CDC (with analog volume and balance control), Nagra CDP (player with fixed analog output), Nagra CDT (CD transport).

Nagra USA, 30 years at your service. Tel 800 813-1663.

NAGRA
Swiss made
www.nagraaudio.com



TIGNANELLO 2004

My first-ever taste of a Super Tuscan was a 1995 Sassicaia, and I was overjoyed to find that this most famous of STs surpassed the hype. But I've been most happy with a far more common, less expensive ST, and therefore have enjoyed a half-dozen different vintages of Tignanello in 2007 alone.

So you can imagine my shock upon finding that the youngest I've tried – 2004 – has been one of the very best. Two completely unrelated sommeliers assured me it wasn't too young to drink. Made up of 85% Sangiovese (my all-time favorite grape), 10% Cabernet Sauvignon and 5% Cabernet Franc, it was – as expected – friskier than the older ones I've enjoyed, but it was no less complex and even more seductive. The mélange of flavors include strong fruit, raisins in particular, while the subtle spiciness is beguiling enough to distract you from whatever food you may be enjoying at the time.

This particular Tignanello is a wine I find myself relishing as much for a nose full of its aroma as I do for its effect on one's tongue. No kidding: I've laid up two bottles. But I doubt I'll hang on until 2010...●

KK's hot tip - one to look out for:

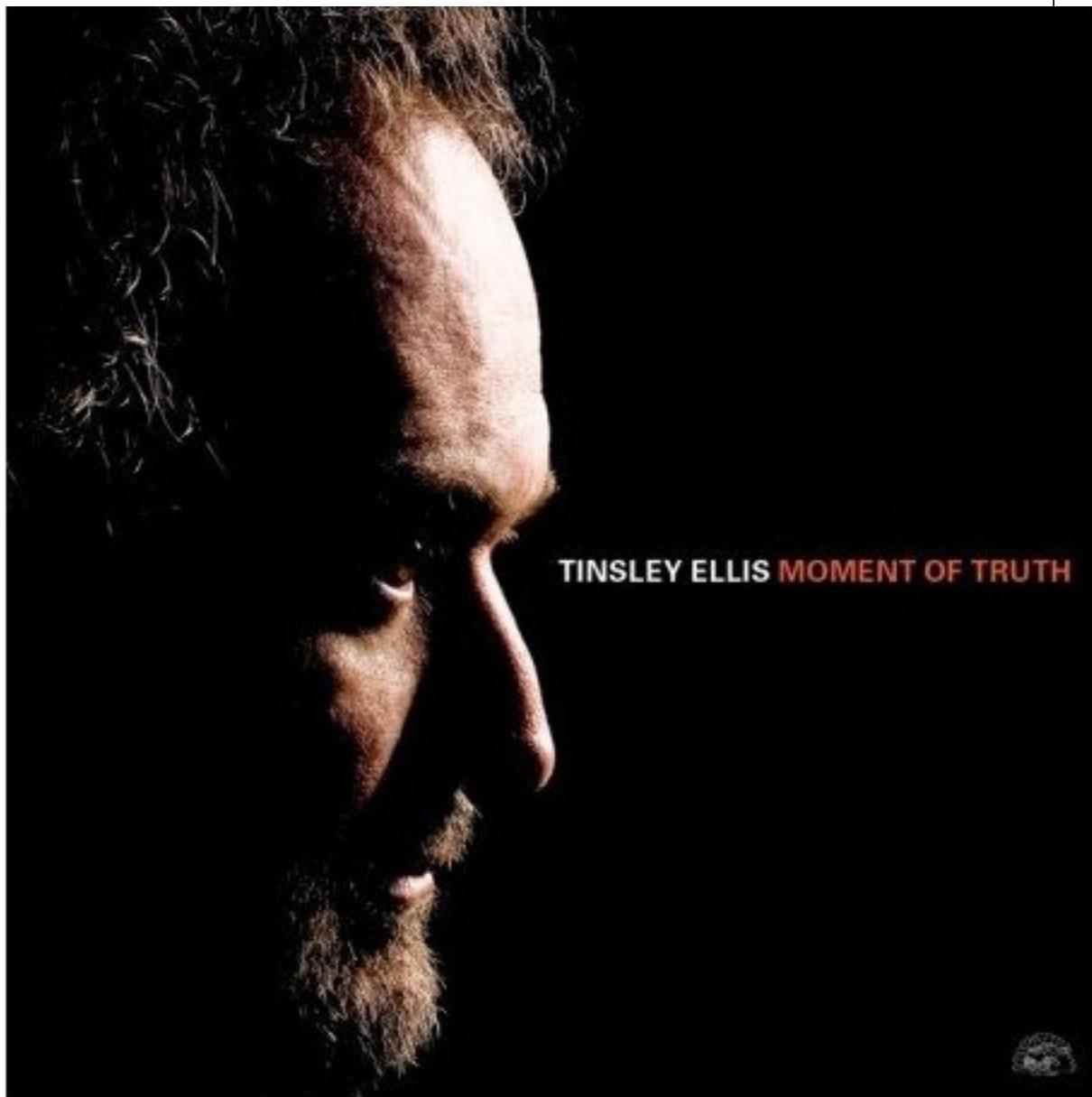
Castello Sonnino Cantinino (Sangiovese Blend) 2001

Expect to pay under \$30. And don't miss it if, like me, you think the Sangiovese grape is the greatest of them all.

Editor's Note: Photo for illustration only

Blues You Can Use

By Irv Gross



Tinsley Ellis

— *Moment Of Truth*
Alligator Records, CD

Tinsley Ellis is a veteran blues guitarist whose previous releases somehow have escaped me. It's been my loss, but I am now up to speed, and his latest release, *Moment of Truth*, is a gem. From the first electric chord to the last acoustic note, this is guitar-based blues at its best. What I like most about the disc is that it can't be pigeonholed; it's just blues. While his roots are obviously in rock and roll of the southern variety, Ellis' versatility transcends any one genre.

Make no mistake, this is a guitar-based band. On "Say Too Much," the opening drums and bass riff followed by the lead guitar hooked me instantly and reminded me of Cream's "Sunshine of Your Love." The star of the disc is "You're Gonna Thank Me," with its B.B. King feel. A tasteful use of the Hammond B-3 sets the tone and the stage for a long guitar solo in mid-track.

The second half of the disc continues to showcase the band's tight ensemble playing. On "Freeway Soul" the walking bass opening is followed by Ellis's guitar artistry as well as his vocal abilities. "Sleep On It" again demonstrates the band's tightness, with organ setting the stage for the soaring guitar, this time with the percussion driving the music forward. The final cut, "Shadow of Doubt," has Ellis playing solo acoustic guitar, his voice nicely centered between the speakers with a good balance of voice and guitar. The recording is at the same high level of the other Alligator discs in my collection.

Ellis wrote eleven of the twelve tracks on this disc. Lyrics, however, are not included in the CD packaging. Also absent is a list of acknowledgements or endorsements. *Moment of Truth* is about a solid bluesman doing what he does best, playing the blues. To these ears, the album is a must-have.


Joan Armatrading

— *Into The Blues*
429 Records, CD

While the Ellis disc is a blues album recorded by a working bluesman, this disc takes us on a journey down the blues path by an artist who doesn't live there, yet does an excellent job as tour guide. Armatrading plays all of the instruments on the album, save percussion and mandolin, and she does so very well. A very personal album, *Into the Blues* explores the journey of a woman who has been in and out of love, and hurt by the process. These eternal blues themes are woven throughout the 13 tracks, all written by Armatrading.

Her deep and powerful voice guides us through her journey. Her lyrical guitar playing illuminates the path, but doesn't blaze the trail as Ellis' does. Her playing is smooth and seductive as she invites the listener into her world. The words and music of "Empty Highway" remind me of "A Rainy Night in Georgia." As the rain merges with her tears, you feel her pain. The level of depth and intelligence in the lyrics is refreshing.

Yet this pain is not rehashed and vented through clichés. I would call this a disc of "graceful blues." Whether you are a long time fan of Joan Armatrading, or new to her work, this is one I can recommend with confidence.

Debbie Davies — *Blues Blast*

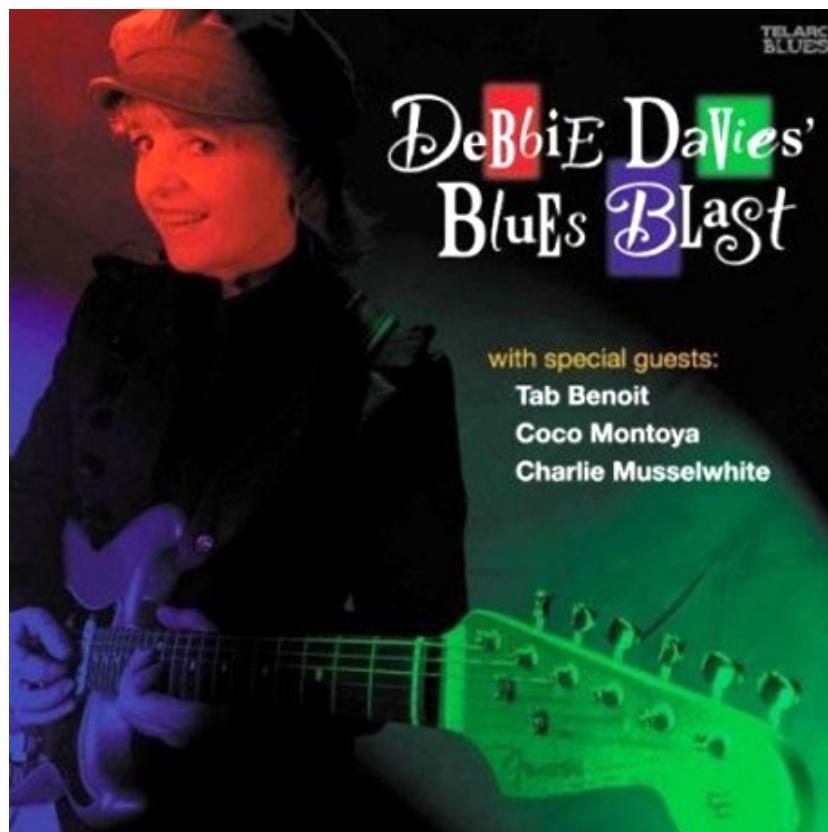
Telarc, CD

In her latest release on Telarc, Davies is leading an all-star lineup that includes Bruce Katz on the B-3 organ and harpist Charlie Musselwhite, along with guitarists Tab Benoit and Coco Montoya. She mixes in a good helping of standard blues with plenty of her own style.

Davies' playing reminds me a bit of Koko Taylor, but with a younger timbre and—at least not yet—with his power. There is good reason for her guitar chops reminding of Albert Collins as well: she was the featured guitarist with Albert Collins and the Icebreakers in the late 1980's. She also honed her skills working with two separate John Mayall bands, playing in Mayall's *A Sense of Place* and serving as lead guitarist in his wife's all female R&B band, Maggie Mayall and the Cadillacs. She has definitely paid her dues, and on this album we hear the rewards.

My only real criticism is that the tempo seems to languish in the middle of the album. Tab Benoit is one of my favorite musicians, but his swampy guitar playing and vocals tend to drag the pace down a bit.

There are great instrumentals at the beginning and end of this disc, but the final cut, "Sonoma Sunset," has the ensemble at its best. The song starts slowly, giving each musician time to step into the spotlight. Musselwhite's harp begins, followed by Montoya, finally giving way to a wonderful interplay between Davies and Benoit. The musicians are obviously having fun and enjoying playing with each other. The song is a treat and a great way to end the album; it leaves you wanting more. Production is up to Telarc's usual high standards, and the well-written liner notes are a bonus.



Once Is Not Enough

I really am not interested in making the quick, one-time sale. Rather, I want you as a long-time repeat customer. Earning your confidence is the key to this philosophy.

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

Jeff Rowland Design, Shunyata, Audio Physic, Musical Fidelity, Quicksilver, MBL, Jolida, Basis, Sim Audio, Quad, Spendor, Rega, Creek, WAVAC, NuForce, VPI, Convergent Audio, Pass Labs, Michell, Gamut, Plinius, Shanling, Audible Illusions, Art Audio, Graham, Spectron, Esoteric
...and many more!

We carry virtually all cable, cartridge and accessory lines.

GALEN CAROL
A • U • D • I • O

www.gcaudio.com
email: galen@gcaudio.com

San Antonio, Texas
210.805.9927



ModWright makes some astounding preamplifiers! Call me right now, order one and you can be in heaven, it's as simple as that. But which one to choose, that's the question?

The SWL-9.0 SE has been around for a couple of years now and has won awards and acclaim from many reviewers around the world, including TONE Audio, 6 Moons, Positive Feedback and Blue Note.

The Standard SWL-9.0SE

With Solid State Power Supply is \$2495

The SWL-9.0SE

With a Tube Rectified Power Supply is \$2995

The SWLP-9.0SE

With an Internal Phono Stage and Outboard Tube Rectified Power Supply is \$3995

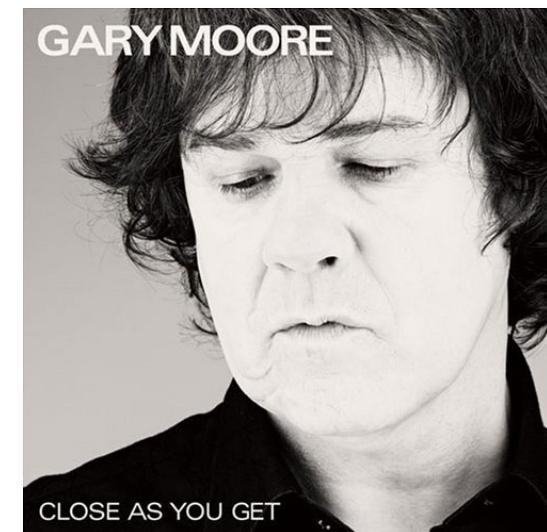


Don't miss the brand new LS 36.5. It is Dan's newest design and builds on the strengths of the 9.0 series. Offering even greater musicality along with balanced inputs and outputs, the 36.5 competes with some of the best available.

The LS-36.5

With a Tube Rectified Power Supply is \$4995

GARY MOORE



CLOSE AS YOU GET

Gary Moore — Close As You Get
Eagle Records, CD

If you're not familiar with this veteran blues guitarist, who's probably best known for his work with Thin Lizzy, there is no better time than now to tune in.

One of the best qualities of this disc is its pacing. It begins with one of Moore's own tunes, "If the Devil Made Whiskey," and goes into covers of Chuck Berry's "30 Days," Sonny Boy Williamson's classic "Eyesight to the Blind," and John Mayall's "Have you Heard," capturing the blues with rock and soul sensibilities. His guitar work shines the brightest on the ballads, specifically on "I Had a Dream," on which the keyboards are tastefully mixed in. If you want guitar pyrotechnics, look elsewhere, but if you are looking for a fine blues guitarist, Moore has the chops.

Like Tinsley Ellis, this is a band with the guitar and Moore's vocals right up front. The rhythm section drives the up-tempo numbers while the keyboards set the pace on the ballads. If you like your blues flavored with the likes of Peter Green, Jimi Hendrix, and Cream, this disc is for you. ●

The TONEAudio Exceptional Value Awards



It's been a great year and we've had a lot of truly great gear to evaluate. Choosing from such a big selection was a difficult task; picking out those few things that we felt offered a little something extra in terms of value and style. While we've bumped the awards from nine to twelve this year and have added a new category – Product of the Year, it's still a pretty short list.

Not only do the products being awarded offer up great value for the price tag, we feel that they are great performers that you might want to keep in your system for a very long time. I hope you agree with our choices. We'll start out with least expensive component and work our way up the scale, ending with our choice for Product of the Year.

The Dynavector 17D3

\$895 Reviewed in issue 10

This moving coil cartridge has a lineage all the way back to the original Ruby Karat, which was a legend in its time for trackability, neutrality and exceptional dynamics. The current 17D3 is a worthy successor, offering plenty of the same characteristics. The 17D2 definitely qualifies as a low output moving coil, with only .23mv on tap, so make sure your phono stage has enough gain. If it is up to the task, you will be rewarded with great sound with a very reasonable price tag!



Rega P3-24 with TT PSU Power Supply

\$1245 www.rega.co.uk **Reviewed in issue 12**

Rega has always been synonymous with value. Many of us grew up with the P3 and many still have one, but the newest version is full of subtle upgrades; all of them contributing to a table that has a bigger, more musical sound than its predecessors. As great as this table is, the outboard supply takes it to the next level, offering a quieter background and smoother highs. Not to mention, if you get the TT PSU your days of removing the platter and moving the belt on the pulley are over! Now 45-rpm operation is just a button push away. A favorite for many years.

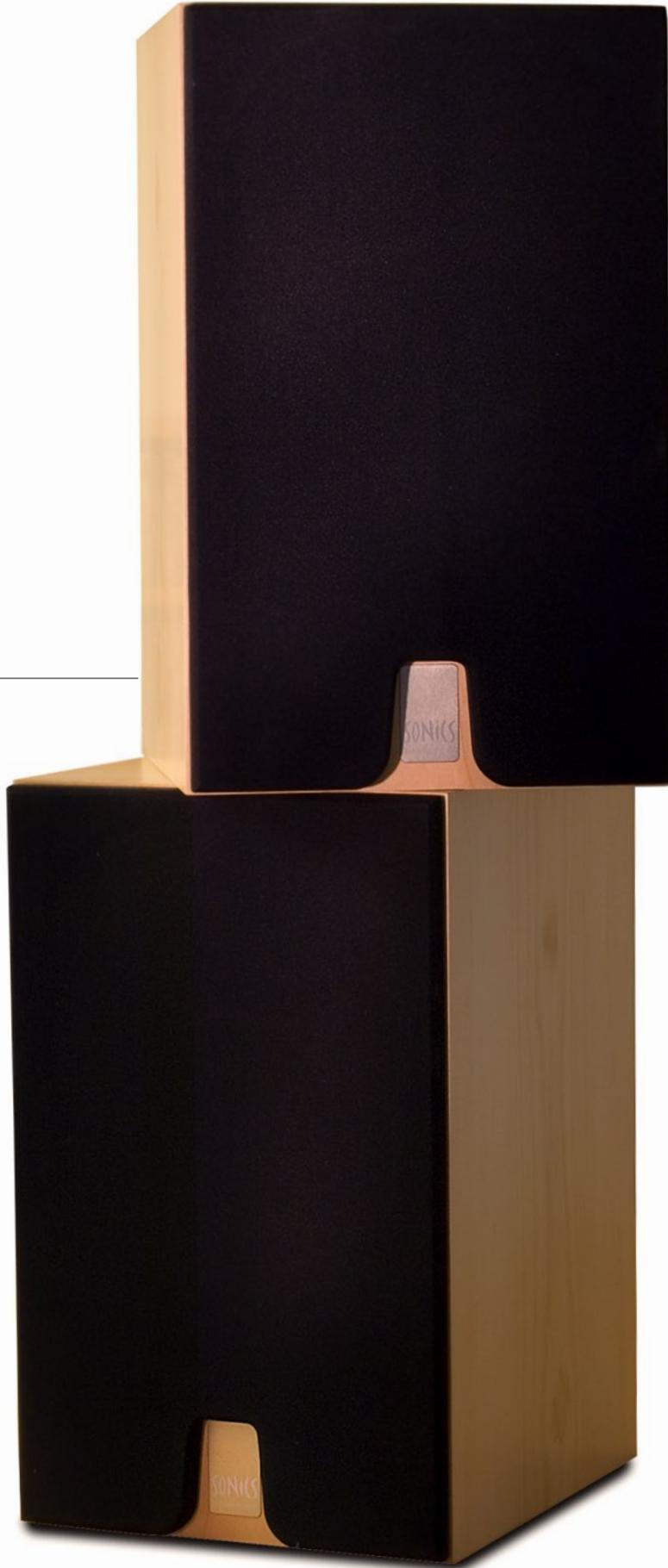


The Sonics Argentas Speakers

\$1600 per pair www.immediasound.com

Reviewed in issue 13

With their grilles off, you might mistake these gorgeous yet understated speakers for a pair of ProAcs, but they come from Germany, not Britain. A modest two way, these speakers offer a much bigger sound than their small size might suggest, with solid bass response down to 40hz. The front port makes these very versatile, so you can actually place them on a bookshelf if you have to. Otherwise a nice pair of stands will do just fine. These speakers were very easy to drive and worked just as well with tubes or solid-state electronics. With a 4-ohm impedance and a sensitivity of 87 db, we had great luck with a wide range of integrated amplifiers.



Avalon NP Evolution 2.0 Series Speakers

\$2000 per pair www.avalonacoustics.com
Review in process

I know this review is not finished yet, but I didn't want to wait another whole year before handing out an award to these guys. While many of you think five-figure price tag when the word Avalon comes up in conversation, you couldn't be more wrong with the NP 2.0's. Packaged in a very simple, yet high quality box, the NP 2.0 is a floor standing system that uses a pair of Avalon's 5 1/4" Kevlar woofers and one of their newest composite tweeters.

With a 4-ohm impedance and an efficiency of 90db, you can rock the house with 30-50 watts per channel. I've been listening to these for about a month now and still can't believe that you can get this much speaker, with proprietary drivers and phenomenal craftsmanship that is made in the USA for two grand. This is a true testament to the engineering prowess at Avalon. Thought you couldn't afford a pair of Avalons? Think again!



JLTi Phono Stage

\$1600, upgraded power supply \$950 additional

www.audiorevelation.com

Reviewed in issue 11



This is one of my two favorite moderately priced phono stages. Small, solid-state and dead quiet, the JLTI will blow you away with its performance, especially if you pony up for the upgraded power supply. The nice thing about their approach is that you can buy in for \$1600 and then add the upgraded supply later. I always appreciate products with an upgrade path.

The sound is tight, dynamic and resolving. We were all very impressed at how powerful the bass response was and how grain free the upper registers were. Don't let the small size fool you! Sole importer Jay Kaufman is an analog fanatic and is a great resource if you need a cartridge (or another turntable!) to go along with your JLTI.

ModWright SWP 9.0 SE Phono Stage

\$3000 www.modwright.com **Reviewed in issue 13**

Here's my other favorite phono stage at this price point. This one is housed in a more conventionally sized box, but one look under the hood reveals all top-notch components, with the new ModWright Teflon capacitors and a big beefy power supply.

Definitely tubey, but not overly so the 9.0 SWP SE offers a different presentation than the JLTI, but equally exciting. If you want your analog presentation just one click to the right of center with that pinch of romance that you can only get from tubes, this one is your baby. Also very good news for the analog lover, there is a wide range of gain and loading adjustments on the back, with a MM/MC switch on the front as well as a mono switch. As far as tube phono preamplifiers go, this one is one of the quietest, period.

Well thought out from start to finish, the 9.0 SWP SE should be on your short list, too.



Ayre CX-7e Player

\$3000 www.ayre.com **Reviewed in issue 12**

If you are looking for a superb redbook only player, this one does it all. The competition in this price category is feverish, but the CX-7e was the one that I really got excited about. Made at the Ayre factory in Boulder, Colorado, the attention to detail and assembly is fantastic; this thing is built like a tank!

Sound quality is very dynamic and extended without sounding the least bit harsh. The CX-7e had a very neutral, fatigue free presentation that made it easy to listen to for hours on end. As I said in the review, if I were buying a player at this price point, this would be the one I'd spend my hard earned cash on.



McIntosh MC 275 Power Amplifier



\$4000

www.mcintoshlabs.com

Reviewed in issue 9

No list of high value components would be complete without the McIntosh MC275. It has it all, good sound, tank-like build quality and those classic McIntosh good looks. I've only owned my 275 for the better part of the year now, but I know it will get handed down to my daughter.

With a very conservatively rated 75 watts per channel, the MC275 can drive a very wide range of speakers to near ear-splitting levels without a problem, but the true magic in this amplifier is its warmth and detail at realistic levels. Some of the vintage McIntosh amplifiers look very similar to the 275 on the outside, but that's where it ends. This is truly a modern tube amplifier with good high end extension and solid bass response that doesn't come at the expense of a glorious midrange that's hard to get without the glowing bottles. It also features RCA and XLR inputs as well as the ability to turn it into a 150 watt monoblock at the flip of a switch.



Salagar Symphony S210 Active Speakers

\$7995 per pair

www.salagar.com

Reviewed in issue 13

Beautiful to look at and a breeze to set up. Good sound doesn't get any easier than this. The Salagar S210's were a ton of fun to have around the studio and they got more attention than just about any other speaker that we've had here in some time.

Thanks to internal amplification, DSP crossovers and processing, you can use the four built in presets, or can upload a custom program if you have the tools. We had great luck with the factory presets, so in about 15 minutes, we had great sound. Connect your favorite source to the XLR outputs and go!

Stunning good looks and fantastic sound.
Highly recommended.

Manley Neo-Classic 250 Monoblocks

\$9000 per pair www.manleylabs.com **Reviewed in issue 10**

Yep, these would be the ones that Santa would be throwing off the sleigh because they were causing him to lose altitude. These amplifiers are big and beefy, offering up tons of power, thanks to a bank of ten EL-34's per channel. Not for the weak of heart or bicep, the Classic 250's will rock your world no matter what kind of music you enjoy.

A very versatile amplifier, you can use them in triode mode (125 wpc) or tetrode (250 wpc) mode. While we had them here there wasn't a speaker they wouldn't drive with ease including some panel speakers that are typically a somewhat complex load. One listen and you know that they are a tube amplifier, but still possess the dynamics and musicality that make them a joy to listen to.

So get a pair of 250's and settle in for tubey goodness at it's best.



Classé CP-500 Preamplifier CA-22100 Amplifier CDP-102 Disc Player

\$10,500 for the stack www.classeaudio.com
CA-2100 reviewed in issue 11
(other two forthcoming)

Should you be looking for a stack of components that gives you industrial design worthy of a museum, great sound and outstanding functionality, this trio of Classé gear is just what the doctor ordered. The CA-2100 offers 100 watts per channel and a very neutral sound to boot. The matching preamplifier and disc player have a similar sonic signature and couldn't be easier to set up and operate.

If you can plug an Ethernet cable in, you can cable all three of these components together so that they all turn on at once, eliminating the need to remember a specific turn-on sequence. It's awesome to hit the remote from across the room and see everything come to life with one click!

This group of components truly defines the phrase *form fits function*; Great sound and great looks all at a very reasonable price.



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR 2007

The MartinLogan Summit Speakers

\$11,000 per pair www.martinlogan.com **Reviewed in issue 13**

The reason these speakers get our first Product of the Year award, is that they truly do it all and offer a significant slice of what the best cost no object speakers do for this price. Granted, \$11k is not pocket change by any stretch of the imagination, but taking into account how much performance the Summits offer for this kind of money is truly amazing.

All of the limitations in panel speakers and especially panel/dynamic hybrid speakers in the past have been overcome with the Summit. Integration is fantastic, and the tonality offered by having a crossover way down at 240 hz is wonderful, along with a coherence you will only get from single driver speakers.

Best of all the Summit offers major dynamic range, always the shortcoming of past electrostatic designs. This is the panel for all music, no matter what your listening preference. With solid bass response down to about 25hz, you don't need subwoofers with the Summits unless you are really maniacal. But that's another review for next year, so stay tuned.

Thanks to a 92 db efficiency, 100 watts per channel should offer up enough volume for most people, though if you have the extra juice on tap, the Summit will rise to the occasion.

For many of you, this could well be the last speaker you ever need to buy. The Summit also has the resolution to be paired with the most expensive gear money can buy and make a great showing. That's what makes it the Product of the Year in my book. And don't forget the sylish good looks!

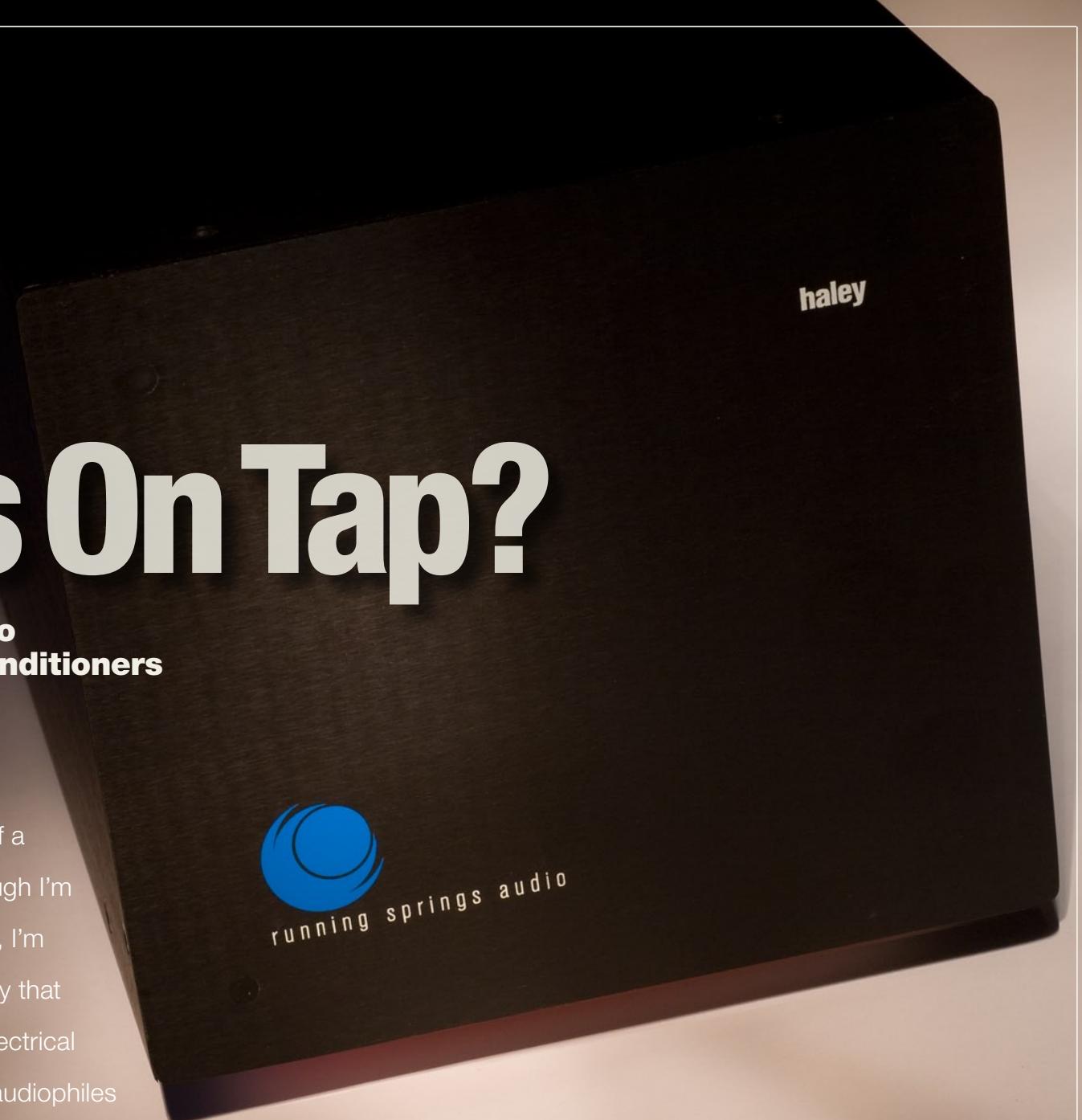


What's On Tap?

**The Running Springs Audio
Haley and Duke Power Conditioners**

By Randy Wells

Surprisingly, I've never been much of a believer in power conditioning. Although I'm always tweaking my system it seems, I'm lucky in that I live in a rural community that has few apparent power surges or electrical contamination issues. Like so many audiophiles I've talked with, I figured if I had a 20 amp dedicated line running to my stereo system I was good to go. Turns out, even though I had two of these lines installed, I was still lacking something.





“Dude, power doesn’t come from your amp, it comes from the wall. All you’re getting now is dirty dedicated power.” According to my friend’s advice, power needs to be conditioned first or you won’t be hearing all that your system is capable of. Since I’m from Missouri (well my grandfather was anyway), I needed to prove this for myself.

Here’s what I found: electric power to your audio system is like the water you feed your body. Battery power is best (like bottled water), and filtered power (or water) is better than what’s coming straight out of the tap. I know this is simplistic, but it is as good a non-technical illustration as I can draw. To make a long story short, after a month with superb power conditioners in the line, you can count me as one of the newly converted believers in clean power.

Power line conditioners (PLCs) have been around for a long time. In the mid-90s I tried one of the big name models. It promised a lot and delivered a lot less – squashing dynamics and pace along the way. But at least I was protecting my equipment against power surges. Or was I? I never found out because I could never listen for very long without feeling deprived of the really good sound I had when my gear was plugged directly into the wall. My system included a 75WPC amp at the time, so I knew I was not reaching for too much. But even when I plugged just my CD player into the conditioner, the results were pretty much the same – lackluster and boring.

Fast forward ten years, and we have several sophisticated power conditioners available that more than live up to the hype. One such brand is Running Springs Audio of California. This relatively new company sells conditioners designed by TONEAudio technical editor, Dan Babineau. Dan is also an accomplished musician, audiophile and electrical engineer with a PhD in Physics. (*continued*)

See in a new way.



© Craig Tanner

Lensbaby 3G™



Lensbaby 3G—the newest member of our family—lets you lock your lens in a bent position, then fine focus. Explore the possibilities of our latest selective focus SLR lens at lensbabies.com.

bend • lock • fine focus

another simple idea from
Lensbabies™

Now, before you start yelling “favoritism!” I’ll tell you that I honestly did not allow him or his product any quarter. I promised our publisher that Dan’s power conditioners were going to have to wow me, or my review would never be written. Well, I obviously wrote it, so I suppose you could stop reading right here, but there’s much more to tell.

Inspiration often comes frustration, and that’s what happened a few years ago when Dan experienced poor quality power coming into his listening room.

As a consultant for many high-end audio brands and a firm that specializes in capacitor design/manufacture, he felt up to the task of fixing this problem. His first PLC was built, and before you can say Evian all his friends were clamoring for more. Soon he was hiring employees and occupying a new building to keep up with demand. The rest, as they say, is history. For more on Dan, his products and his manufacturing plant, see TONEAudio no.2.

The 3-duplex/6-outlet Haley (named after Dan’s daughter) and the 1-duplex/2-outlet Duke (named after you know who) are two of the power line conditioners Running Springs Audio makes. Like all RSA PLCs, these products are reasonably small aluminum encased black boxes with no sound-degrading on/off switches, meters or LEDs. Since these unassuming units will likely be hidden behind other equipment, Running Springs eschews bells and whistles for the stuff that matters most, like proprietary passive filters, inductors and capacitors. *(continued)*

In fact, the only parts they do not make are the outlets, IEC, and the sonically invisible circuit breaker. This is pretty unusual stuff for a power conditioner manufacturer, believe it or not, and speaks volumes for the quality that goes into their products, as does a 5-year warranty. It's also important to note that the RSA Mongoose power cord they use is not (as some have claimed) simply a Cardas Golden Reference PC. It is a Running Springs Audio design. The price of the Haley and Duke PLC with a 5-foot Mongoose power cord is \$1,899 each.

These units perform voltage stabilization to 123V within 4ms from power-on and act as power regulators during short-term voltage sags or spikes. The Haley is rated at 1800 watts RMS Power @ 15 amps, and the Duke is 2400W @ 20A. Reportedly, each unit provides clear and precise voltage stabilization, noise reduction, voltage purification and protection, without the need for feedback or power regeneration. These conditioners cleanse your inbound current of RFI, EMI and other voltage anomalies via a series of proprietary inductors. Spike protection is offered by a proprietary RSV and audiophile circuit breaker. They can be used on all equipment from source to amplifiers without cross talk or current limitation and do not restrict high power amplifiers when using a 20 amp A/C line.

I plugged the Running Springs power conditioners into my system with the Duke on one 20 amp dedicated line running to my big VTL monoblocks and the Haley on another dedicated line running to everything else. I used the supplied RSA power cords between the PLCs and the wall. After breaking the units in for the recommended 20 hours, I put Paul Simon's *Graceland* into my CD player and spun "Homeless". What I heard was a more integrated sound with greater acoustic space around each voice and instrument portrayed. After further listening I was convinced there was more liquidity to the sound, especially in the mid range.

(continued)

What I heard was a more integrated sound with greater acoustic space around each voice and instrument portrayed.



DeVORE FIDELITY



gibbon **SUPER 8**

five out of five reviewers bought em

come visit our website for information on the rest of our award-winning
line of speakers, from the little gibbon 3 to the mighty Silverback Reference.

www.devorefidelity.com

2006 Awards for the **SUPER 8**

Positive Feedback Writer's Choice

Best of 2006, 6moons

Best of 2006, Enjoy the Music

Best Speaker 2006 Home Theater Israel

The mid bass was fuller, highs were smoother, and tonality was rendered more convincingly all around. The result was that music sounded "more real", like actual individual performers were singing in my listening room. Next up was "Falling From Above" off Neil Young's Greendale album. This is an unusual rock and roll cut because it is both complex and well recorded enough to allow for discerning differences among audio equipment.

What impressed me most was that I could listen to this song at significantly louder volumes and for longer periods of time than ever before.

In fact, I never experienced listening fatigue in all the time I spent with these conditioners in my system. It would be easy to surmise that what I was hearing was a slight rolling off of the frequency extremes, but every sound I heard through the Haley and Duke was more distinct without any blunting of attack. In particular, backgrounds seemed blacker. It was as if the performers were mountains, and the backgrounds were valleys. The lower the valley (noise floor) became, the more fully resolved were the mountains (performers).

Transparency and soundstage depth were improved as well. The result was a more life-like presentation with greater dimensionality. When I played classical music like Vaughn Williams' *Fantasia on a Theme* by Thomas Tallis (on Telarc CD-80059 with Leonard Slatkin conducting), the same effect occurred, and there was no loss of dynamic shading or change in musical pace and rhythm.

(continued)

Conclusion: less grain equals more music! Now before you say to yourself "this guy is just fooling himself", let me tell you that I pulled the RSA units out of my system and reinstated them on three separate occasions, and the results were always the same. These PLCs made my system sound significantly better. End result: I bought the review samples.

I also pulled one PLC at a time out of my system, and discovered that the result of adding two PLCs was cumulative compared to just using one. While adding the Duke PLC to my amps resulted in maybe a 5-10% improvement in sound, adding the Haley to everything else improved the sound by an additional 10% easily. Obviously, system resolving power has a lot to do with how much difference you will hear, but when I plugged the Duke into my small system, I could still discern a noticeable improvement.

After what turned out to be a bunch of listening with and without the PLCs in place, I ended up asking myself only one question, "Is the somewhat chunky character I'm hearing with the PLCs removed

an indication of greater perceived dynamics or just one of more noise?" After a few weeks, I concluded it was the latter. With less "grunge" overlaying the musical signal, power conditioning allowed me to sink deeper into the music. It was easier to envision each individual instrument and voice within its own space. Essentially I could now more easily follow each layer of music independent from one another.

The result was a much better connection with the artist, and ultimately the blissful experience which high-end audio allows.

So, what is clean power, how important is it, and how do we achieve it? Turns out, it's hard not to hear the difference clean power can make, harder than you might think to live without it, and not so hard to find it. Running Springs Audio is a company that can get you there without breaking the bank. I assure you that once you experience your system with a Haley and/or Duke in place, you will never go back to an unfiltered tap again. ●



MANUFACTURER

Running Springs Audio

1800 E Via Burton St.

Anaheim, CA 92806

949-582-8072

www.runningspringsaudio.com

PERIPHERALS

Preamplifier: Vacuum Tube Logic TL-5.5 line stage

Power Amplifiers: Vacuum Tube Logic Signature Triode MB-250 monoblocks, Creek 4140 integrated

Speakers: Magnepan MG 3.6, Rogers LS3/5a

Analog Source: Rega P9 with RB1000 arm and Koetsu Rosewood Cartridge, Cary PH302 phono stage

Other Digital Source: Linn Unidisk 1.1, Linn Ikemi

Interconnects: Harmonic Technology Magic Link One and Pro-Silway Mk III, Grover S and SC, Audience Au24

Speaker Cables: Transparent Audio Musicwave Ultra MM

Power Cords: Running Springs Audio Mongoose, Black Sand Chromium, Violet and Reference

Vibration Control: Fim rollerblocks, Mapleshade platforms and Isoblocks, DIY air suspension, Target wall stands



A Panel That Takes No Prisoners

THE MARTINLOGAN SUMMIT

By Jeff Dorgay

After 25 years of being a loyal electrostatic panel fan, I finally have panel speakers that rock! Though I'm getting a bit old to play Metallica loud, I can finally do it to my satisfaction with the MartinLogan Summit. As much as I've loved the transparent sound of panel speakers, they have always had a few limitations, mainly in the dynamic range and bass response departments. MartinLogan started down a new path back in 1983 with their original Monolith, mating their signature curved electrostatic panel with a high performance cone woofer to handle the lowest bass frequencies. A revolution had begun. Naysayers have always sniped that the woofers were never quite fast enough for the panel, but no more, the Vantage that we reviewed back in issue 11 was quite amazing and the Summit is over the top.

(Hence the name)



The Cardas Conductor



Patented, Golden Section strand sizing,
Constant Q strand lay up,
perfectly neutral, pure Copper,
Litz coated technology.

cardas.com

The Summit is the current flagship of the MartinLogan line and costs 11,000 dollars per pair. You can also order them in custom finishes, picking cabinet and frame options (and change the light color of the backlit ML logo as well) at <http://configurator.martinlogan.com>. This will give the design conscious almost 400,000 different options for the final look and feel of their Summits, albeit at a slightly higher price. I stuck with basic black and maple, because I'm a classic kind of guy, but those desiring more bling for their Summits will have a field day. Praise to ML for making the configurator work on Macintosh computers as well as PC's.

I had a fantastic experience with the Vantage speakers at the beginning of the year. They are a couple of inches smaller in all dimensions from the Summit and use a single 8-inch powered woofer that crosses over to the XStat panel at 400hz.

The Summit steps up the game considerably, with a pair of powered 10-inchwoofers.

One fires forward and one fires down towards the floor. To the untrained eye, they don't look all that much different, until you turn them on for the first time! Note to Vantage owners that want to trade up: Make this switch while your housemate is out of town for a couple of days and they might not even notice if you choose the same finish. How you hide the credit card receipt is up to you.

The Summit crosses over to its XStat panel a bit lower, at 270hz and has a pair of bass controls at 25hz and 50hz, where the Vantage only had one at 35hz.

(continued)

This makes it even easier to tailor the Summit to your room and makes subwoofer integration that much easier too, should you decide to go for broke and add a subwoofer. If you would like the full tech rundown on the Summit, click here: <http://www.us.martinlogan.com/specs/summit.html>. A good test tone disc along with a Radio Shack SPL meter will help you find the peaks and dips in the bass response in your room. A few adjustments of the bass controls, along with a little bit of speaker positioning will offer considerable rewards.

Initial Setup

With the Vantages still here, I had a great starting point for the Summits. A little experimentation put the final spot a couple of inches further out than I had the Vantages and about an inch back. If you are starting from scratch, use the flat footers on the bottom until you get the best bass response you can and then flip them over to spike the Summits. I felt that this was another nice touch, as you don't need to worry about losing the spikes! Depending on how you like your bass response and what your floor situation is, you may prefer the footers on a tile or hardwood floor. Versatility is always a plus and I appreciate the fanatical attention to detail by MartinLogan.

This is a good time to point out that the Summit instruction manual is excellent. It is very well written and will be able to help even the rank beginner get their speakers set up properly in no time.

The final setup consisted of the speakers being about 8 feet apart, 9 feet from my couch and about 40 inches from the back wall with a fair amount of toe in. Our local ML rep Harvey Gilbert stopped by to check my setup and commented "You are getting better at this, last time it took half an hour, this time, only five minutes!" The Summits were powered by my CJ combination of the ACT2/Series 2 preamplifier and the Premier 350 power amplifier, which produces 350 watts per channel into 8 ohms and will operate into loads down to 1 ohm without issue.



Cardas Golden Reference cables took care of interconnect and speaker duties.

Right out of the box, the lower bass on a fresh pair of Summits is a touch whumpy and a bit slower than the panel, but don't panic. Once these have about 100 hours on the clock they are about 75% of the way home and after about 300 hours, is a totally different speaker. The sooner you can play them at a somewhat loud level for hours at a time using music with very punchy bass, the quicker the process will go, but it's worth it! I would suggest not worrying about ultimate placement and adjustment of the 25 and 50 hz controls until the speakers are fully broken in. (*continued*)

Versatility is always a plus and I appreciate the fanatical attention to detail by MartinLogan.

Great Sound. Great Price.



Onix from AV 123

Onix Electronics offers a full line of amplifiers and CD players for 2-channel enthusiasts.

All of our gear is designed and manufactured by us to bring you equipment that looks and sounds like higher priced gear! The experts agree.

"Even dyed-in-the-wool 'philes should put this rig on the menu..."

Srajan Ebaen
6moons.com

"The result, great sound!"

Jeff Dorgay
ToneAudio



Purchase from us directly at
www.av123.com
877-543-7500

For the first half of the test, I used the supplied power cords, but later switched to the Essential Sound Products The Essence "Reference" cords. Tweekophiles note; the Summits have a pair of 200 watt amplifiers tucked inside each cabinet, so just like any good power amplifier, I did feel that there was a little bit tighter bass on tap with upgraded power cords, but if you are contemplating a pair of Summits, don't panic that they won't sound good in the stock format. Remember, I'm obsessed.

Space, The Final Frontier

One of the biggest lessons I've learned from the years spent with panel speakers is that a larger room really lets them show off what they can do better than a smaller room. I set the Summits up in my somewhat small living room that is about 11 x 16 and some of the magic that this speaker produces gets lost in the shuffle. If you have to work around a small room, consider the Vantage and spend the extra five thousand on some room treatments and better electronics. (Perhaps more music software!)

Should you push on and put the Summits in a small room, I stress the need for room treatments, especially right behind the speakers and off to the sides on the walls about a foot or two in front of them to catch that first reflection. I've been using GIK 242 panels with excellent results. If you can't work room treatment into your décor, again the ML engineers have made this the most user friendly panel speaker I've ever listened to, so they will offer great sound in an untreated room, but if you want to take it all the way, a little room treatment makes for big increase in clarity and focus.

(continued)



Big, Big Sound

In the past, panel speakers and electrostats in particular have been accused of a “head in the vise” sweet spot that is only about six inches wide. Having owned a wide variety of them over the years, I think this is a little bit exaggerated, but still electrostats are not a speaker that sounds as good walking around the room as it does in the zone. The development of the curved electrostatic panel by MartinLogan has gone a long way at curing this problem and again, the Summit does a better job of having a wide sweet spot than any of their competitors in the panel arena.

Think of the Summit as a two and a half person speaker. Like any high performance speaker, the best listening spot is always going to be right in the sweet spot, but these do allow having one or two people on the couch to have a very good listening experience. While this may be a limitation for some, it is not for me.

Tonally, these speakers are fantastic and thanks to not having a crossover in the critical midrange area, the presentation is very seamless from top to bottom.

Back when I went through the SET/single driver phase of my audiophile existence, I got really hooked on the coherency this setup would provide, but the lack of response at the frequency extremes sent me back to panels again. I wanted the coherency of a single driver speaker, the big, transparent sound of a panel and the oomph of a good cone speaker. Not too much to ask, eh? No worries, the Summits have plenty of oomph. *(continued)*

Thinking outside the box...



Coffin & Trout
Fine Jewellers

WWW.COFFINANDTROUT.COM

IMAGINATIVE - ARTISTIC - JEWELRY | 480.763.1300 800.684.8984 CHANDLER, ARIZONA

It was hard to actually sit down and write this review because I was having so much fun listening to the Summits. What I enjoy the most about them is that in my room they do a fantastic job of disappearing for a big speaker and offer up a *huge*, three dimensional soundstage, extending way beyond the width of the speakers all the way to the edges of my listening room, with tons of depth to boot.

The biggest compliment I can pay these speakers is that on first listen, everyone that auditioned the Summits asked me where I hid the surround speakers!

With top quality electronics, the Summits offer up such an immersive experience, I can't imagine needing 5.1. This is truly "walk through" sound.

Thanks to those powered 10" woofers in each cabinet; these speakers offer the necessary weight to play any kind of music at any level. With the past ML's I've owned, they always got to a certain point with rock music where they started to compress. This is not an issue *at all* with the Summits; if you enjoy heavy rock music or full-scale orchestral music you will not be disappointed.

The bass is powerful, tight and articulate. Most of all it integrates with the panel exquisitely. TONE contributor Ken Kessler said in Hi Fi News that the Summit "provided the most seamless hybrid marriage he'd ever heard" and I couldn't agree more.

Amplifier Choices

There are a number of different thoughts on how electrostatic speakers need to be powered, and a quick glance at a few of the more popular internet forums will show that this can be a very heated topic at times. *(continued)*

I made it a point to try the Summits with about ten amplifiers, from low to high power, both tubed and solid state to get a good handle on what these speakers work best with.

Keep in mind that the Summit is a speaker that has an amazing amount of resolution, so it will reflect accordingly on whatever is upstream from it. If you hook it up to basic electronics, it will only give you so much music and if you pair it with world class electronics you will hear a much larger, more full presentation. As a tool in my reference system, they have made it very easy to observe the difference in character from one component (or cable) to my reference components.

The Summit is remarkably versatile and will perform well with tube or solid-state amplifiers. However, if you are going the tube route, I would highly suggest auditioning the amplifier in question before spending the money. Some of the tube amplifiers I tried just ran out of gas driving these speakers, or rolled off the high end more than I would have liked. I had excellent results with the Manley 250 monoblocks, as well as with a borrowed pair of Audio Research Classic 150's. My trusty McIntosh MC275 did not fare as well, offering a much more romantic sound, but not as resolving. My reference Premier 350 still offered up the best of all worlds with these speakers.

The Honeymoon Continues

Though I have always been biased in favor of the electrostat sound, I have always had to ultimately forgo it because I listen to such a wide range of very dynamic music that the frustration of giving up the dynamics for the midrange magic and transparency was too much to bear. Not any more. The MartinLogan Summit delivers the goods and should make any music lover very happy. It breaks down the barriers for the cone vs. panel argument quite decisively.

With the right room and first class electronics, this speaker will give just about anything a run for the money, regardless of cost. I consider the 11 thousand dollar price tag a real bargain and am happy to award the MartinLogan Summit our Product of the Year award for 2007. ●

The MartinLogan Summit

MSRP: \$11,000 per pair, standard finish

MANUFACTURER

MartinLogan

2101 Delaware
Lawrence, KS 66046
785-749-0133

www.martinlogan.com

PERIPHERALS

Preamplifier: Conrad Johnson ACT2/Series 2, Aesthetix Callisto Signature

Phono Preamplifier: ASR Basis Exclusive, ModWright 9.0 SWP

Power Amplifiers: Audio Research Classic 150 monoblocks, Classe CA-2100, Clayton Audio Stereo 50, Conrad Johnson Premier 350SA, Conrad Johnson ET 250, Conrad Johnson MV-60, Manley 250 monoblocks, McIntosh MC275, Moon I-7, Nagra PSA, Prima Luna Prologue 1

Analog Sources: SME10 turntable w/SME V tonearm and MoFi 3.5C cartridge, Oracle Delphi V w/SME 309 tonearm and Dynavector 17D3 cartridge, Rega P9 w/RB1000 tonearm and Grado Statement cartridge

Digital Sources: Meridian 808, Naim CD555

Interconnects: Cardas Golden Reference

Speaker Cable: Cardas Golden Reference

Power Conditioning: Running Springs Jaco and Duke, Running Springs Mongoose power cords, Essential Sound Products The Essence "Reference" power cords

Vibration Control: (3) Finite Elemente Pagode Signature racks and Pagode amp stand w/Cereballs and Cerepucs

Room Treatment: GIK Tri-Trap Bass traps, 242 panels and Sonex Classic





ModWright-On! The ModWright SWP 9.0

The TONEAudio Staff

As many of you know, it's really hard to get music and gear lovers to agree on anything. Just take a peek on any popular internet hifi forum and you can read the major arguments over just about everything from soup to nuts. And that's the nature of the beast; it keeps things interesting – sometimes.

Q

Once in a while a product comes along that is enough of a cut above that we all just shut up and dig the music. The ModWright SWP 9.0 is one of those rare products. I've owned a couple of ModWright products over the years and have been very happy with them, yet that has made me a little bit biased in favor of our local success story Dan Wright.

To keep things objective, I made three of the other analog nuts on the staff spend a lot of time with the SWP to make sure I was on track. This time, we are all of one mind that this phono stage is a big hit. When I asked technical editor Dan Babineau if he was comfortable giving the SWP one of our Exceptional Value Awards, he said "I'd give it the award if it cost \$5000!" High praise indeed for a man that has an analog front end worth more than most people's systems. Marc Phillips lived with the SWP for a couple of months and said it offered "A perfect tonal balance".

Another tough nut to crack is our Collector, Tom Caselli. He also felt that you would have to easily spend twice the asking price of the SWP to get any more performance. His Audio Research phono stage went for sale to a friend, as he purchased the one that I sent him to listen to, (Which meant I had to go through the break-in process again...) saying "this is one of the most gorgeous phono stages I've ever heard; naturally recorded instruments are portrayed with a tone and body that is simply superb!" *(continued)*



TIDAL Audio

Piano



Half Note Audio
Importer/Distributor of World Class Audio Components
www.halfnoteaudio.com

The Importance Of a Good Phono Stage

Because of the sensitive nature of the tiny signal that comes out of a phono cartridge, I think a phono preamplifier is one of the hardest components to buy. If you are going to have problems anywhere, it's probably going to be in the phono stage and with so many to choose from these days, it can be a daunting task. With vinyl in the middle of a renaissance that we will probably never see again, this is the time for dyed in the wool vinyl junkies or newcomers to get the phono stage of their dreams.

I view the phono stage as being as important as your turn-table/arm/cartridge combination, and this is where system synergy is particularly critical, as well as the ability to tailor said phono stage to as wide a range of cartridges as possible. The SWP has two gain settings, switchable on the front panel, with an MM/MC switch. The MM setting offers 50db of gain, while the MC setting has 68db. There is also a conveniently placed mono switch on the front panel. With the resurgence of mono pressings in the audiophile world, this is a really nice touch at this price point.

Initial Setup and Break In

The only area that the SWP will require some patience is with break in. Popping the top reveals quite a few of the new MWI Teflon capacitors and if you aren't familiar with that story, they require a *long* time to sound their best. My C-J Act 2 (as well as a number of other pieces of gear we've reviewed lately) has quite a few of these under the hood and it wasn't sounding its best until 300-500 hours were on the clock. (*continued*)

For many of you that only have time to listen to music here and there, this might seem like an eternity, so I suggest using the Granite Audio Phono Burn-In & RIAA Test CD. (<http://www.graniteaudio.com/phono/page6.html>)

Here's the short cut: buy the cheapest CD player you can find at a garage sale and keep it up on a shelf for breaking gear in. Plug said CD player into the SWP and leave track 33 on repeat for about ten days.

Should you not be a believer in component break in, listen to your SWP the minute you take it out of the box and then at 75 hour intervals with the same track as it's burning in, I guarantee you will see the fruits of your labor! Then you can get down to serious listening.

I used the SWP in both of my systems, but it has found a permanent home in my reference system, with my Rega P9 and the Grado Statement. This has proven to be a sublime match. The stock power cord was tossed back in the box in favor of an Essential Sound Products Essence "Reference" cord and a one-meter length of Cardas Golden Reference cable carried the signal from the SWP to my ACT2/Series 2.

The SWP Plays Very Well With Others

If you are an analog nut, there's a good chance that you will probably swap cartridges out more than most normal human beings. The first thing that you will notice about the SWP is how quiet it is. I have had quite a few high zoot tube phono stages in my listening room over the last couple of years and the ModWright gets the nod here. It's the quietest tube phono stage I've yet to use at any price.

This makes it very easy to use a MC cartridge that's on the lower output side with ease. Dan's Koetsu Rosewood Signature Platinum only offers up .2mv and my MoFi 3.5C comes in at .23mv, with my favorite budget cartridge, the Dynavector 17D3 is still only .3mv, so a low noise floor is very important, as is having enough gain. The SWP passed this test with flying colors, so if you have a cartridge in this range you can rest assured that this preamp will work just fine.

The other cartridges we used very successfully with the SWP included are listed at the end of the review in the peripherals section, so take a peek. There wasn't a stinker in the lot; regardless of your cartridge choice present and future, I think you will be very pleased with this preamp. Loading is variable, via the rear DIP switches at 50, 100, 500, 1000 and 47k ohms. This should cover most cartridges at your disposal. I really appreciated the 50 ohm setting, as my Rega Apheta gives its all at this setting. *(continued)*

The ModWright gets the nod here. It's the quietest tube phono stage I've yet to use at any price.





"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**



The Sound, or Lack of It

While there are quite a few variations on the theme, phono preamps fall into a couple major food groups, solid state or tubes and AC powered or battery powered. Each type has its advantage and disadvantages, while some of it falls down to personal preference.

Hi-fi components are a lot like girlfriends (work with me here for a second...) in the sense that the first impression is everything.

Call me cheap and shallow, but once a component has had a couple hundred hours on the burn in rack and I sit down to listen, if something grabs me right away, it usually holds my attention for the duration.

The SWP was no exception. Right from the first record (again, after 300 hours with the burn in CD...) I really liked the weight and space to the presentation. My reference system has a pretty big sound, so if I put something in that does not offer big dynamics and air right away, the whole thing just starts to shrink and I lose interest. Tom mentioned that one of his favorite test records for this preamp was the Nautilus direct to disc pressing of John Klemmer's *Straight From the Heart*. He said, "When I heard that first low, sustained sax note, I knew the SWP was a keeper!" I had the same experience here.

Again, a wide range of music was played during the evaluation period and what I kept noticing was how well the SWP did with timbre. *(continued)*



Pianos and violins sounded correct and when listening to pieces with acoustic guitar and bass, plucked strings had the necessary amount of attack and decay, but no more. This is not a preamp that possesses an "audiophile" sound, it is true to the music.

A few hundred records later, my initial excitement had not waned; this is a killer phono preamp! I would say that regardless of what your system sounds like, the ModWright is so neutral tonally that it should be a great fit. It has just that hint of air and "tubeyness" that it doesn't sound like a solid-state preamp, but it is never overly warm either. Right in the middle, where I like it.

The Great Divide

There are a lot of competent phono stages in the thousand-dollar range, and we've listened to quite a few of them over the last two years. We've also had the privilege to spend a good amount of time with some of the big bucks stuff in the 5-15 thousand dollar range as well. If you have the turntable combination and the system to take advantage of the top dogs, there is a lot more refinement and detail to be had if you have the budget.

This is what puts the SWP in the big boy camp rather than the step above budget camp; the amount of detail, resolution and control that it offers. Bass is very tight and tuneful, which can be difficult for a tube design. I was listening to a German pressing of Peter Gabriel's *Security* album and the bass lines on the opening track were just as tight as they are on the original CD. I followed Tom's lead and pulled out the CBS Mastersound copy of Pink Floyd's *Wish You Were Here* to listen to the engine start up on

A few hundred records later, my initial excitement had not waned; this is a killer phono preamp!

"Welcome to the Machine". Since I've added a MartinLogan Descent i subwoofer to my system, I'm particularly critical of lower bass detail and the SWP did not disappoint at all.

While I appreciate tonality and weight in music playback, resolution is equally important. One of the true pleasures of a good high end system is the ability to hear all the nuances in the recording. The SWP offers up a major helping of detail that I've grown accustomed

to in more expensive phono preamplifiers, again accentuated by the low noise floor in this design. If you are stepping up from a lesser unit, the SWP will definitely give you the "I didn't hear that on the record before" experience.

As I mentioned at the beginning of the review, we used the SWP with a very wide variety of cartridges, some costing as much (some costing almost twice as much) as the preamplifier and it never failed to deliver excellent sound.

The only thing that further enhanced my enjoyment of the SWP was to put a set of Finite Element Ceraballs underneath it. Every tube preamplifier I've ever put these under has benefited a bit from the tweak. Those little filaments are pretty sensitive to any kind of vibration, so this will open up your soundstage a touch. Not a jaw dropping move, but enough that you can hear and enjoy it.

Definitely an Award Winner!

We are very happy to give the ModWright SWP 9.0 one of our Exceptional Value Awards for 2007. This is one of the best values in analog today and a product I can happily recommend to anyone looking for a phono preamp in the 3-6000 dollar range. ●

MANUFACTURER

ModWright Instruments, Inc.

21919 NE 399th St.
Amboy, WA 98601
360-247-6688
www.modwright.com
MSRP: \$3000

ASSOCIATED COMPONENTS

Due to the fact that this preamp spent plenty of time in six different systems, it would add two more pages to the review to list all of our associated components here, so we are just listing the turntables and other cartridges used.

Turntables: Technics SL1200, Rega P3-24/RB 301, Linn LP-12, Rega P9, SOTA Comet/RB300, SOTA NOVA/SME 309 and Origin Live arms, Oracle Delphi V/SME iv.Vi, SME 10/SME V, SME 20/SME iv.VI, Michell Orbe/SME V.

Cartridges: Shure M97xe, Grado Master, GradoStatement, Rega Apheta, Dynavector 17D3, Koetsu Rosewood, Koetsu Rosewood Signature Platinum, Lyra Skala, Lyra Argo I, MoFi 3.5C, Sumiko Blackbird, Sumiko Celebration

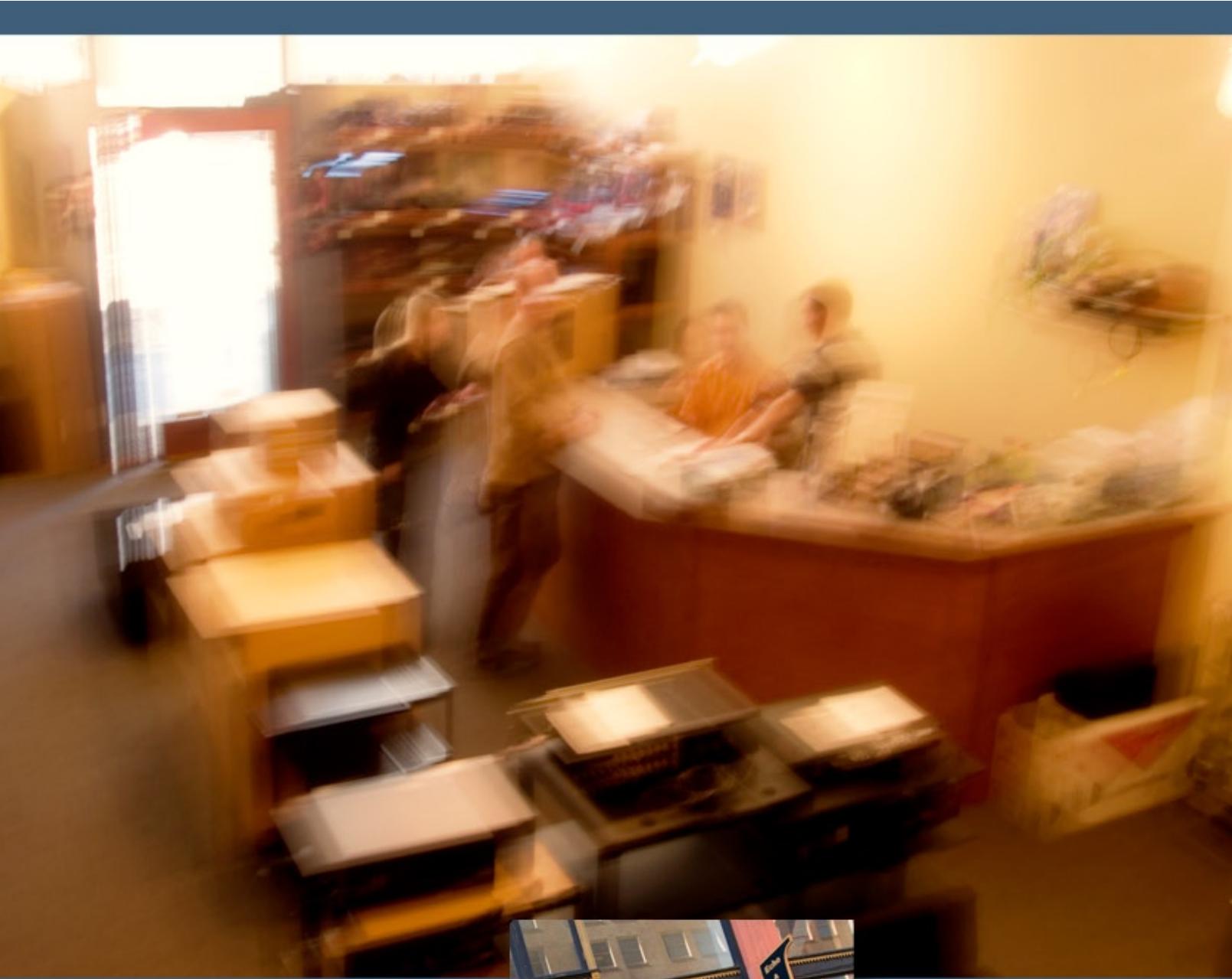
Becoming An Audiophile

-Part One

By Kieren Downes
Illustrations by Michael Maslin



Until I was about 25, I'd never heard of "high-end" audio. But I had been a music lover and amateur musician since I was a kid, and thanks to my Dad, we always had a good stereo in the house. Although his system was modest in comparison to today's top notch gear, he was serious about music, and he passed that seriousness along to me and my siblings. My exposure to high-end audio came through my brother, who'd been introduced to it by a downstairs neighbor. I was stunned by the sound of music through his Linn system, and even more so by the Lamm electronics and Thiel loudspeakers he acquired a couple of years later. With his guidance, I eventually bought my own system, and soon enough found myself introducing my friends to high-end audio much as he had done for me. Fast forward to 2007, and high-end audio has become the subject of my dissertation research in the history and sociology of technology at MIT.



When you want to hear the truth...



echo ||
audio

Fine Home Audio
Bought - Sold

425 SW 10th Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97205

888.248.echo
503.223.2292

echohifi.com
echoaudio@hotmail.com

m-f 11-6
sat 12-5

A professor of mine once told me that **“culture is what people know without articulating it.”** We are surrounded by activities and artifacts that may seem perfectly normal to us, and require little or no explanation. But to others who don’t share our culture, these things look. . . well, weird. This contrast is evident in terms of large-scale culture, and in smaller-scale groupings and communities within cultures, sometimes referred to as “subcultures.” High-end audio enthusiasts are largely accustomed to being thought of as a “tweaky cult,” as one audiophile put it to me, in the popular press and elsewhere outside of the audiophile community. But, unique as the high-end audio hobby is, audiophiles have more in common with other enthusiast communities than some might think. One way these similarities can be revealed is by considering how people become audiophiles in the first place.

Sociologists sometimes refer to the ways individuals are initiated into subcultures as becoming “deviant.” “Deviant,” in this case, doesn’t have to mean pathological or antisocial, but instead can refer to any group with unique characteristics, behaviors, and artifacts, common among its members, which are not necessarily shared with (or sanctioned by) the larger social world. *(continued)*



By artifacts I mean the material objects that help define a subculture, like the leathers of a Harley-Davidson rider, the effects pedals and instruments of an electric guitar player, or the specialty cabling of an audiophile. Among the pioneers of this type of research is the sociologist Howard Becker, who has written about communities of musicians, artists, and, perhaps most famously, marijuana users. Becker's research on marijuana users shows that becoming a marijuana user involves the guidance of an expert user, an individual with experience and a willingness to share their expertise with a novice.

Does that mean audiophiles are just like potheads? Ehh, no. The value of Becker's argument comes from his abstraction of the experience, and how we can look at that abstraction and apply it to other subcultures to see what fits and what is different. Becker's observations provide a springboard for making arguments about the behaviors of other subcultures that might involve similar processes of mentoring, raising the possibility that, while different, they have things in common that can give us insight not only into the particular subculture we're studying, but also

how the larger social world works.

So what does the process of becoming an audiophile look like? Since last winter, I've been talking with audiophiles from across the high-end audio spectrum – including reviewers and publishers, retailers, engineers, and others – about their personal histories and experiences with music and audio. I've found that while we cannot, of course, say that all audiophiles have the same experience of taking up the hobby, certain common experiences stand out. Although my research is still under way, I'd like to describe what I've found so far, how I think the process works, and why I believe understanding this process can be helpful for understanding both the high-end audio community and other enthusiast communities as well.

Before becoming audiophiles, potential audiophiles often share some common traits. First, many have had exposure and access to music from a young age, including live, recorded, or some mixture. Second, they have a curiosity about the technologies of audio reproduction. Some audiophiles I've interviewed were tinkerers as young people, experimenting with electronics or kit-building, while others were interested in a less hands-on way.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, they have a passion for music. This passion is created and nurtured through interactions with family members, friends, and others who act as "mentors" to young music enthusiasts, introducing them to different types of music, to new music, and helping to create an atmosphere where music is considered important. If each of these traits are present, the person is, at this stage, a music lover, but not necessarily an audiophile.

To become an audiophile, the music lover often experiences a sequence of events:

1. A demonstration of a high-end audio system by an existing audiophile
2. A "conversion experience" where the music lover becomes convinced of the benefits of high-end audio reproduction
3. The acquisition of their own high-end audio system
4. The adoption of a mentorship role for other music lovers, some of whom then become audiophiles themselves

The last item is not meant to suggest that audiophiles become amateur salespeople, representatives for particular manufacturers, or "evangelists," though some certainly do. (*continued*)



Rather, the passion for music, coupled with a belief in the power of high-end music reproduction, inspires audiophiles to share their hobby with others whom they believe are curious and receptive, repeating the cycle they themselves went through. This process is a vital part of how the high-end audio community regenerates itself.

Some of you might be thinking, **"Well, Duh. Of course this is how it works!"**

But what may seem like stating the obvious does have value. By trying to describe this social process, we can begin to see where the common links are with other enthusiast communities, and how people's choices and priorities in other contexts might be similar to those of audiophiles. These other contexts may be easier for music lovers to relate to at first, and help them understand how they, too, could be involved with high-end audio.

This becomes particularly important when audiophiles confront what is perhaps the most common point of misunderstanding among non-audiophiles and potential audiophiles alike: the prices of high-end equipment. One audiophile described to me how, in conversation with a friend who balked at the high

prices of a certain brand of electronics, he tried to find something she could relate to. This turned out to be fine wine. When he asked if she'd be willing to spend \$500 on a rare bottle of wine from a famous vintner, she said, "of course!" It then became much easier for him to convince her that spending significant amounts of money on high-end electronics made as much sense for audiophiles as spending significant amounts on wine did for her.

Another important and related lesson learned during the process of becoming an audiophile is that **a high-end sound is attainable without breaking the bank.** Many of my conversations have also included stories of discovering the variety of high-end audio equipment, and attendant variety of price-points, through reading audio enthusiast magazines, and by walking in to hi-fi shops to have a look around. In these areas, the mentoring role falls additionally to reviewers and salespeople, who directly and indirectly influence a budding audiophile's interest in the hobby.

At the beginning of this article, I mentioned that I was once in the position of loving music but not knowing about high-end audio.

Many of the people I've talked with have observed that most of the world falls into this category, and that often those who may have limited knowledge assume high-end audio is the exclusive domain of the fantastically rich and fantastically tweaky. These assumptions are part of what gets dispelled in the process of becoming an audiophile. By examining this process, we can begin to see how those in the high-end audio community introduce new people to the hobby, and how audiophiles can find ways to reach more of those music lovers who might enjoy high-end sound in their homes.

I'm sure some of you are also thinking, **"it isn't just music lovers who get involved in high-end audio. What about the gearheads?"**

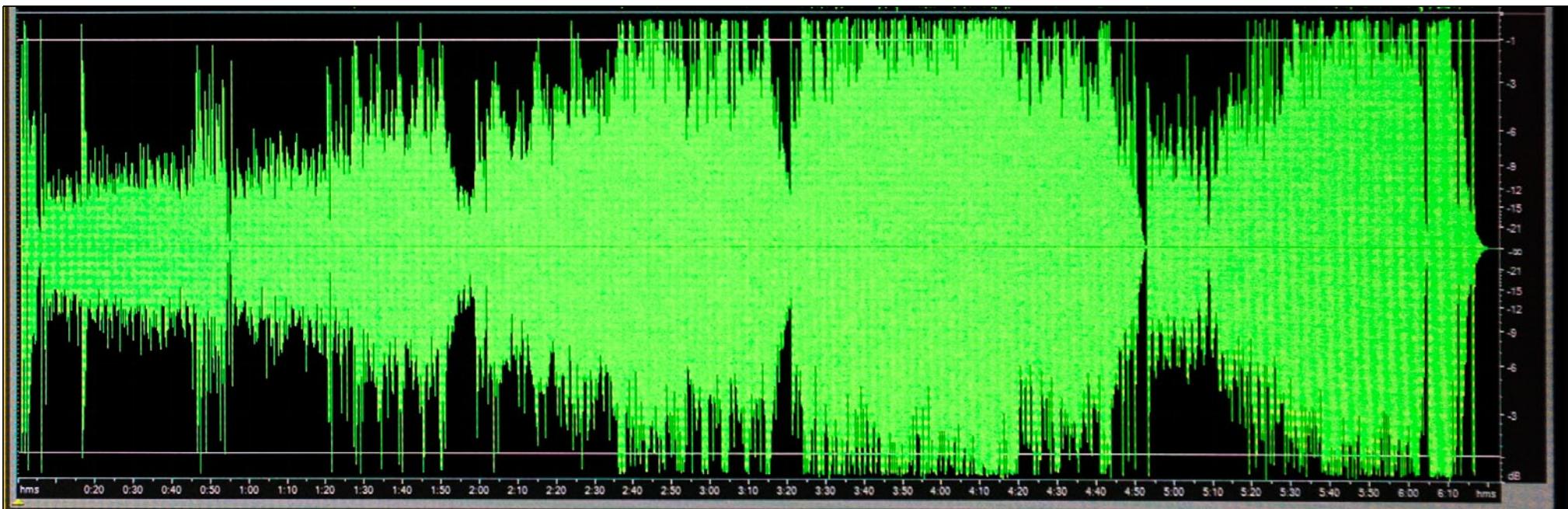
How audiophiles relate to the technologies of high-end – and how these relationships illustrate commonalities with other enthusiast communities – is also a part of my research, and I'll share what I've found in that regard in my next article! ●

Recommended Reading:

Becker, Howard. *Outsiders*. New York: The Free Press, 1963/1997.

Becker, Howard. *Art Worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.





21ST CENTURY SOUND:

Active Loudspeakers

By Jeff Dorgay

Active loudspeakers have been around for some time now, so they aren't necessarily a "new development" for the 21st century, but I do feel that the powered speaker concept is really starting to come into its own for a number of reasons. First and foremost, that dreaded word "Lifestyle" keeps creeping back into the picture. As much as we'd like to associate that word with mass market audio, there are a lot of people out there that love music, appreciate good sound and have enough disposable income to buy a rack full of awesome gear, except for one thing:

They don't want a big rack of gear in their house.

At this years CEDIA show, Bob Stuart of Meridian Audio said: "I don't understand it, active speakers are quite popular in Europe, but they just haven't caught on in the US!" Personally, I think that's about to change and I've had the pleasure of listening to two great examples of this concept, at opposite ends of the price scale with

somewhat different implementation, but delivering great results in both cases.

The Sonicweld system is \$110,000 and is a full scale assault on the active speaker concept, offering a full DSP crossover, equalizer and room correction package to go along with their pair of powered speakers and powered subs. I'll stick my neck out and say that this is the most impressive active system I've heard so far.

On the much more affordable end of the spectrum, we have the Salagar S210. This is a basic 2 way system that tips the scale at about \$8000, (finish choices will swing the price about \$500) and is a pair of stand mounted speakers.

Both systems look like they could be completely at home in an art gallery, which adds to their allure. Those of you going for the "mancave" approach, may not find either of these to your liking, but if your living room looks more like an ad from Dwell magazine, read on.



The Salagar Symphony S210

STYLE AND PERFORMANCE

By Jeff Dorgay

I can't tell you how many times I get the phone call from a new speaker manufacturer that starts out with "We have something really amazing here..." or "We have a revolutionary new design that no one else has thought of..." Right. One does need to keep an open mind though, and when I was about five minutes into the conversation with Gary DiChiara at SALAGAR, I was definitely intrigued. When he mentioned that both he and his partner M. Salahuddin Khan were not only music lovers but also that Khan was a retired aerospace engineer (and it didn't hurt that Gary loved the sound of his Harbeth Monitor 40s either) I thought these guys just might be on to something good, indeed.



An Initial Listen at the RMAF Confirmed It

The SALAGAR Symphony S210 is a two way, active loudspeaker that retails for \$7999, in either traditional wood finish, with a \$500 upcharge for a high gloss automotive paint finish. I saw both at RMAF and the quality was what you would expect from a top-shelf company like Wilson or Avalon. The S210s are somewhat pear-shaped, about 25 inches high, 16 inches wide, and 12 inches deep, weighing a little over 40 pounds. They are just big enough that I suggest having a friend help you unpack them; you wouldn't want to scratch that gorgeous finish!

The cabinet has a curved shape, with multiple bracing to break up internal resonances. You can see from the illustration, the care that was taken on the design. It never ceases to amaze me at how far modern cabinet design has come in the last ten years.

Inside that cabinet resides a 10-inch woofer and 1-inch soft dome tweeter that each have their own 200 watt ICEpower module powering them, along with SALAGAR's own digital crossover with integrated digital EQ. The S210 has a single, balanced XLR connection for your preamp or digital source that has a volume control. Should your source only have a preamplifier with RCA outputs, they sell a high quality RCA to XLR bridge for \$149.95. They even had one of these at RMAF, with the S210s hooked up to an iPod with uncompressed music playing and it was very impressive! *(continued)*

series 5

581 CD Player

581i CD Player



LIVING THE DREAM



Innovation is our nature – it is what we do.

At Wadia we never rest at "good enough". We are driven by our passion for music. We are continuously searching for what is possible. After almost two decades of inventing the future of digital audio, we are just getting started.

The Wadia 581 and 581i CD players feature no less than 6 all new circuit topologies and introduce SACD playback capability to the Wadia line. Building on the Wadia legacy, proven and new technologies are combined in a way that can only be described as innovative.

Consider the new Wadia DSD processing engine – few companies would contemplate format conversion. However at Wadia we innovate – it is what we do. The Wadia 581 introduces a newly developed proprietary software DSD Processing Algorithm that generates phase perfect and bit accurate SACD playback.

Here the results for yourself!

www.wadia.com



Once Unboxed the Fun Begins

The speakers can be purchased with cosmetically matched 24 inch high stands that have a curved top plate that contacts the speakers, so that their round shape will stay in place. The instruction manual states that you can have the tweeters facing in or out. To put the speakers through their paces, I used them primarily in my main listening room (16 x 24 feet, speakers placed on the long wall) and in my living room (11 x 16 feet, speakers on short wall) to put the digital EQ to the test.

Looking behind the speaker, you can see a pair of switches, marked A and B. This offers up four different combinations, with three actual different settings. Position one has a normal response curve with a slight notch in the bass response to compensate for the speakers being placed close to walls. This worked extremely well in my living room, which requires the speakers to be closer to the wall than might normally be optimum. Position two has the same EQ setting, but with 6db more gain, which can be helpful with some preamplifiers and the iPod.

(continued)

Wadia

Setting three gives a slight bit of a bump to the lower bass, which might work well in an extremely big room or if you need to have the speakers well out into your room. I ended up using setting four, which was the flat setting.

Final placement of the speakers was about four feet from the back wall and seven feet from the side walls, with just a few degrees of toe-in. My listening spot ended up being about nine feet back from the speakers.

I used a few different sources, but settled on my Meridian 808 because it has variable level on its XLR outputs, eliminating anything else from the chain. To investigate a bit more of a budget oriented system, I also used the Classe CA-210 preamplifier and the matching disc player, which was also balanced, with excellent results.

Cardas Golden Reference XLR cables were used between source and the S210s along with a pair of Essential Sound Products Essence "Reference" power cords for each speaker. The whole system was powered by a dedicated 20-amp line through a Running Springs Jaco power conditioner.

I Wish Great Sound Was Always This Easy

While I preferred the tweeters in with the speakers a bit further apart, the S210's were very room friendly and after about 15 minutes worth of experimenting with the three other EQ curves were ready to rock. Even in my small living room with completely different settings, it was a piece of cake to get setup out of the way.

We all know how tough it is to get decent sound at a hifi show, so when I hear something sounding this good at a show, it's a pretty safe bet it will sound even better in more controlled conditions and the S210's did not disappoint me at all.

When I first saw the S210, I was a bit nervous about the 10" woofer being matched to a 1" tweeter, but five minutes into the first listening session, I let go of that reviewer bias. The midrange of these speakers is exceptionally clean and transparent. Female vocal lovers in the crowd should be very happy with these. Switching to solo acoustic instruments was equally enjoyable. The new John Jorgenson CD, *Ultraspontane*, which has a guest appearance of the Nashville string quartet, will give any system a workout.

This system did a very nice job of differentiating all of the violins, yet managed to maintain a good amount of air in the mix. Going way back to a few of my favorite old Windham Hill discs, I pulled out the '88 Sampler disc and listened to the guitar tracks by Michael Hedges and William Ackerman; again great tonality, attack and decay.
(continued)





Very Engaging Sound

If your tastes in music are on the heavier side, you too will feel right at home with the S210's, they have plenty of giddyup. These speakers are very dynamic and did a fantastic job playing rock music at near ear splitting levels. When working on the new music reviews, I used the S210's for all of the discs we had here for audition, so they of course got put to the test on the new Led Zeppelin box set. As we have a "no Stairway" rule, we blasted "No Quarter" on disc two with no problems. You will have to push these speakers way beyond reasonable limits to get them to run out of gas.

Whether in my main listening room or small living room, these speakers did a fantastic job at throwing a very big, wide soundstage, with excellent imaging. It's almost as if the active speaker concept helps to make the S210 have bass and dynamics like a big speaker, yet offer up the imaging and delicacy you might only expect from a small mini-monitor.

Award Winning Performance

Thanks to the holiday season being upon us, I had a lot of guests over during the course of this review, so I was able to do a lot of impromptu market research. You don't get dinner and drinks at my house without being a guinea pig! While everyone polled responded favorably, I was not surprised at how well the S210's did with our female guests. If we gave an award for best wife acceptance factor, these would win hands down. All of our female guests liked the shape and the fact that they only required one additional box and set of cables to make great music. Other manufacturers take note.

I spent a lot of time with the S210's, listening to everything from Beethoven to Tegan and Sara and no matter what the source, I came away very impressed. You need to keep in mind that what you are getting for 8000 dollars is a pair of speakers and a pair of power amplifiers. Back out a pair of your favorite 1000-2000 dollar speaker cables from the price and you have a tremendous value indeed. Which is why we have awarded the SALAGAR Symphony S210 speakers one of our Exceptional Value Awards for 2007. *(continued)*

For the person who wants great sound in an attractive package without a big stack of gear in their living space, the S210 is the ultimate solution.

The SALAGAR Symphony S210 Loudspeaker

MSRP: \$7999 (in wood finish or standard paint, special order finish \$500 extra, additional custom finishes – quoted on request)

MANUFACTURER

SALAGAR Sonics, Inc.
1008 S. Northpoint Blvd.
Waukegan, IL 60085
847-688-0227

www.salagar.com



IMMEDIA

Sound Refinement

www.immediasound.com 510.559.2050

Full Assault Active System By Sonicweld

By Jeff Dorgay

A close-up photograph of a curved, metallic pulserod. The word "PULSEROD" is printed in a stylized, lowercase font along the curve. There are two small, glowing blue circles, one near the top and one near the bottom, which appear to be sensors or markers. The background is dark and out of focus.

PULSEROD



The Sonicweld Pulserod System

Cost: \$110,000

At the other end of the spectrum from the Salagar, we have the Sonicweld Pulserod system. Josh Heiner, the owner and designer of the Sonicweld products and I met when TONEAudio was about two hours old at RMAF 2005. I enjoyed the system, but didn't even think of asking a manufacturer for something this expensive to review the day I launched the magazine! But we kept bumping into each other at all the hifi shows and every time I was in the Sonicweld room I loved the sound.

This year at RMAF 2007, he approached me, saying that a system could be sent my way right after the show, so plans were made. Shortly thereafter Josh and his lovely wife Camille arrived at our studio to set the system up!

The Sonicweld system consists of two slim tower speakers, two powered subwoofers and a DEQX preamp/controller, with remote control. The system tested here came with all the necessary power cords and interconnects, custom designed and built for this application by Locus Design. Everything you see in the picture has a retail of \$110k and needs nothing but a day or two to set it all up, which is included in the purchase price. *(continued)*



500 SERIES

Serious sound from serious retailers...



...experience the
500 series for yourself

THE RETAILERS

PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Hawthorne Stereo
206-522-9609

CALIFORNIA
Audio Vision
San Francisco
415-614-1118
Gene Rubin Audio
805-658-8311
Music by Design
415-847-8939

ROCKY MOUNTAINS

Audio Alternative
970-221-1496

MIDWEST
ProMusica
773-883-9500

FLORIDA

Wellington Audio
561-798-1059

MIDDLE ATLANTIC
Boulevard Audio
703-329-6343
Serious Hi-Fi
919-870-5522

NORTHEAST

Accent on Music
914-242-0747
Ears Nova
212-288-2855

Fidelis AV
603-437-4769
Fidelis Boston
617-851-9417
Innovative Audio
212-634-4444

The system is available without all the cabling for a cool \$99k, but why bother when Josh has done all the homework? My guess is that if you have this kind of dough to spend on a system, you don't want to be bothered agonizing over cables. You probably have more important things to do.

What I found fascinating about this system is that it violates quite a few of my built in misconceptions:

- I'm not terribly fond of class D amplification
- I don't like digital crossovers or EQ
- I don't like 15" subwoofers, and I certainly don't like subs crossed over above 40hz.
- I've only heard one line source speaker that I've liked so far.
- I've never heard a speaker with a metal enclosure that I like.

The Sonicweld system uses three 200-watt ICE power modules in each one of the towers and an 1100-watt module in each one of the subwoofers. It is a four-way system, with active crossovers and digital EQ and room correction and to top it off the subwoofers are 15" units, crossed over to the towers at 90hz.

Can't possibly sound great, right?

You Couldn't Be More Wrong

There are a few qualifying questions you need to ponder first. Are you a journey person or a destination person? If you are one that will enjoy the journey of hand picking a hundred thousand dollar system and going through a few wrong turns, trying countless different gear, cable and setup choices with a myriad of tweeks to get the sound just right, then this might all be too easy for you.

However, if you want to play with the system *after* it is set up, that's another journey altogether. (*continued*)



The system I was left with had a few different programs loaded into it, though I found Josh's hard work to get the system as flat as possible was the most enjoyable for me. With three preset EQ curves on tap, you can make up somewhat for poorly recorded CDs, records or even old 78's if that's what you have in your collection. You can still retain your initial room corrections, but apply a full digital parametric EQ (with 100 available three band presets) on top of that.

If you would like to investigate the complexity of this further, just go to: <http://www.deqx.com/DEQX-media-correction.html> and you can get a full explanation of the system's operation.

Should you want to experiment with different room treatments and speaker placements, you can measure and correct to your heart's content, so on one level you can consider this one of the most adjustable systems available. Switching the couch from fabric to leather? Get out the test gear and re-EQ the system! It will either be tons of fun or drive you to madness.

The next question is not whether this system is worth the money asked of it. It is meticulously built to the highest quality standards and uses top shelf materials.

The question is; how does it stack up to other systems that I've heard in this price range? Considering that three of us on the TONE staff have six figure reference systems and I have a few more friends at this level, I'd say I spend a pretty good amount of time eating the caviar, so I feel comfortable taking on a project of this magnitude.

Again, the Sonicweld system passes with flying colors.

As you can see from the pictures, each one of the four components that hold the drivers in the system are CNC machined from billet 6061 T-651 aluminum. The damper plates that are used throughout the system are machined from 301 stainless. I've spent enough time under the hoods of the best Porsche and Ferrari have to offer and I don't know why Sonicweld doesn't relocate to England and start a shop building parts for a Formula 1 team. It works for SME!

Ok, the build quality is fantastic and the attention to detail in assembly is maniacal. For 100 grand it should be. *(continued)*

INTRODUCING



The DiaLogue Series from  **PrimaLuna®**

From the makers of the hugely-popular, critically-acclaimed ProLogue Series comes this dazzling new offering . . .

DiaLogue One and Two

How did we improve on excellence? DiaLogue integrated amps satisfy the audiophile's most stringent demands with increased bandwidth and headroom originating from some of the best power and output transformers in the industry.

What's more, they assimilate into home theater systems so easily anyone can do it. With the simple push of a button on the exquisite, full function remote, you can engage DiaLogue's home theater pass-thru circuitry as well as switch operation from the warmth of triode to the snap of ultralinear.

PrimaLuna Has Once Again Raised the Bar

Brilliantly conceived. Impeccably engineered. Bundled into a stunning, high-gloss chassis with PrimaLuna's standard-setting build quality and unparalleled reliability.

\$2199 and \$2499

For more information on all PrimaLuna Products, please visit primaluna-usa.com or upscaleaudio.com

Our PrimaLuna Partner Stores: **Audio Concepts** – Dallas, TX • **Audio Excellence** – Ontario, Canada • **Audio Systems Inc.** – Austin, TX
Audio Nexus – Summit, NJ • **Primus Audio** – Kansas City, MO


UPSCALE
AUDIO
HIGHEST FIDELITY • MUSIC SYSTEMS

www.upscaleaudio.com

2504 Spring Terrace • Upland, CA 91784
 [909] 931-9686 FAX: [909] 985-6968

Setup and Installation

As I mentioned, the purchase price of the Sonicweld system includes Josh delivering the system to your house and setting it up. Fortunately when we measured my room, there weren't any big glitches in the room response that required much more than a bit of moving speakers around and recalibrating the EQ.

The initial setup was done in about three hours and Josh spent the rest of the day listening and tweaking the crossovers until he was convinced it was just perfect.

The towers are about 48" high, 5" wide and 5" deep, weighing 58 lbs. each with four machined feet on the bottom, complete with spikes. These go from 65hz to beyond infinity as a line source, using three 4" woofers on the lower front and three on the lower rear of the enclosure, with six midrange domes that crossover to a single dome tweeter at about 5500 hz. The 15" powered sub crosses over to the towers at 90hz and again I have to stress that I was pretty skeptical about this, but I will go on record to say that the Sonicweld system has the most seamless subwoofer integration I have ever heard at any price.

If you want a system with deep, powerful bass with ultrafast attack, no overhang and flawless integration, this is the Holy Grail.

I dare anyone to be able to hear even the slightest hint of where the subs are when this system is properly set up.
(continued)



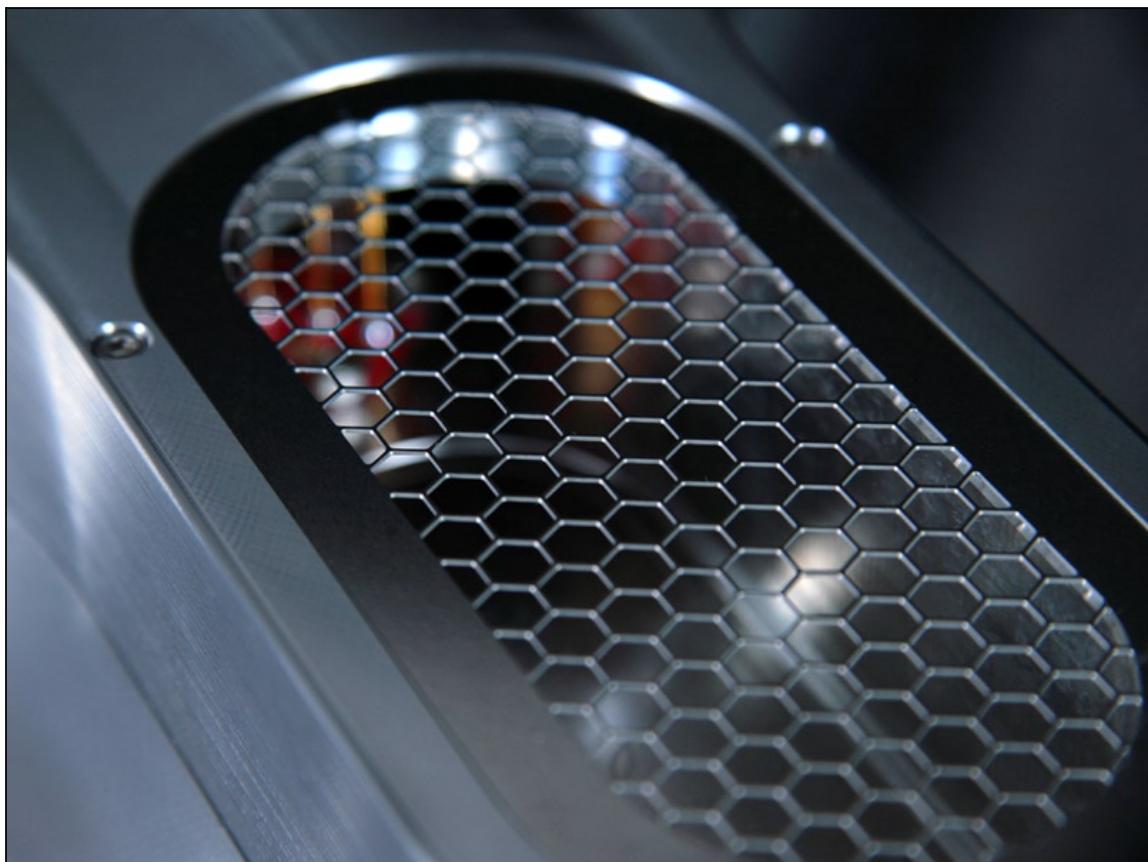
The rest of the setup consisted of running a set of XLRs from the DEQX box to the speakers, plugging everything in and then running a CD transport to the DEQX and letting it handle the DAC functions as well. Should you have a CD player that only has analog outputs or want to add another source, there are two RCA inputs and two XLR inputs on the back of the box. I tried about five different CD players but ultimately settled on my Meridian 808, going digital out to the DEQX. I felt there was no point using the Naim CD555 here, going from digital to analog back to digital again. To get a bit of analog flavor, I also used the Rega P9 with the Grado Statement cartridge through the ModWright 9.0SWP tube phono preamp.

It needs to be mentioned that the DEQX controller in the Sonicweld system is highly modified at the factory, with upgraded wiring, capacitors, power supply and a few other tricks that Josh has up his sleeve. Same thing with the implementation of the ICE modules inside the speaker enclosures, every bit of this system has been tweaked to the max.

The Sound

To answer the 110 thousand dollar question, the Sonicweld system is fantastic and does a number of things quite well, some better than I've heard anywhere else. I can honestly say I only have a tiny nit or two to pick, but I don't think it's a big deal. Remember, even at a 100k, you still have to make some small compromises.

First off, let's play to the strengths of the system. It is incredibly dynamic, with about three thousand watts on tap, you can rest assured that this system does not run out of juice. It was very refreshing to see that a guy that is this much of a high tech craftsman was also a real music lover. Having played the violin since age 5 shows here, the tonality of the Sonicweld system is exceptional. Violins, pianos and any other acoustic instrument sounds correct, with the right amount of attack and decay to make the speakers disappear in the room easily. And it does this equally well at low or high sound pressure levels. *(continued)*



As I mentioned earlier, the bass response of this system is breathtaking and will spoil you after a very short period of listening. I dragged out all of my favorite records with a lot of low frequency energy. Classical, rock, I even made Josh listen to Snoop Dogg for a few minutes and no matter what we played on this system,

it was up to the challenge. Bass not only had power and slam, but it was very detailed with tons of texture as well. Once you hear this done properly, it's hard to go back.

My MartinLogan Summits offer up a pretty big, airy presentation, but you are stuck on the couch to enjoy it. If you get up and walk around the room, the magic is gone. The Sonicweld system still sounds best on the middle of the couch, but it doesn't fall off much as you move around. It doesn't disintegrate when you stand up either and as you know, this last trick is a tough one to pull off.

Initially I was worried that I might easily tire of an all digital system, but after spending a number of 10-hour days in front of the Sonicweld system, there was no listener fatigue at all. It does not create beauty where none exists; if you have awful recordings, they will still sound awful, but your best recordings will really shine here.

No matter what we played on this system, it was up to the challenge.

I do believe some of the magic in the Sonicweld system though is the digital room correction. Fortunately after spending some time measuring my room, Josh commented that it was pretty free of any big anomalies. (So my room construction and treatments were working!) We had a little bit of a suckout at about 75hz and with a little bit of speaker movement and some digital EQ, the final measurements were awfully flat from 16hz all the way up to where dogs can hear.

But Is It Your Cup Of Tea?

The only comparison I can make with the Sonicweld system is to that of an extremely high-end digital camera system. When you see colors perfectly reproduced that are noise free for the first time, it's a bit shocking, perhaps too perfect. Especially when you were raised on Kodachrome.

The Sonicweld system, properly dialed in does not add or subtract from the sound. Certainly a lot less than most other things. Many of us are married to our favorite flavor of coloration and while there is nothing wrong with that, (and I'm just as guilty as anyone here) I suspect that you will be pretty polarized on whether this Bud's for you or not.

Which leads me to the only complaint about this system. When I plugged my turntable in to the other input, with the warmest cartridge I had, there wasn't much of a difference between it and CD. That last little bit of analog warmth isn't as relevant, because it goes through a set of A/D converters before going to the speakers. For some, this won't be an issue, for others it might be a deal breaker. The other small issue I noticed for those of you that choose to go here with a vinyl setup will notice that records that are somewhat worn, dirty or damaged sound a lot worse. (And I had the same issue with the Salagar system, so this is not specific to the Sonicweld system) Somehow, when those clicks and pops go through the A/D converters they get more pronounced.

Interestingly enough, analog tape sounded quite dreamy through this system.

I never felt that the Sonicweld system was harsh, or overly digital sounding, but it gives you the facts; nothing more, nothing less. It did not embellish or color the presentation. *(continued)*

UNMASK YOUR AUDIO

"I actually heard musical detail (i.e. actual notes!) that I had not heard before on CD's which I have played hundreds of times..."

Mike Kontor, NotePerfect Loudspeakers

"I am hearing things on ALL my CD's that I never heard before. It is almost scary!"

Thomas W. Bethel, Managing Director
Acoustik Musik, Ltd.

The distortion-free output from the **DAC1 USB** is so pristine you can hear detail that was previously masked by jitter-induced artifacts and distortion.

Unmask your Audio with the **DAC1 USB**.
Hear what you've been missing.



Call us today: 800-262-4675
or visit our website:
www.benchmarkmedia.com/tone

Benchmark
...the measure of excellence!™

So Who Should Buy This Setup?

No offense to our readers, but I don't want to get any whiny emails with you telling me that "no system is worth this kind of money, etc. etc." and that you can think of much better ways to spend this kind of cash. That's irrelevant. I'm writing this review for the handful of people that have this level of income.

If you have the cash, the room and the appropriate décor, this system is definitely worth investigating.

If you want a system that will make a dramatic statement sonically AND visually, look no further than the Sonicweld setup. Also, if you want great sound and do not want to be bothered in the least with agonizing over component choices, put this system at the top of your list. If you are a total romantic and want that last drop of analog warmth, then this one's not your baby.

The Sonicweld Pulserod system is definitely a contender in the arena of the best sound systems available today. It was a pleasure and a privilege to get to live with it for a month. ●

The Sonicweld Pulserod Speaker System

MSRP: \$110,000 as tested: Two Pulserod active speaker systems, Two Subpulse active subwoofers, DEQX controller, software, power and XLR cables.

MANUFACTURER **Sonicweld**

1188 South 1680 West
Orem, UT 84058
801-226-3614

www.sonicweld.com

A Different Kind of Fun

THE CONRAD JOHNSON ET250

By Jeff Dorgay



ET250S
enhanced-triode amplifier



Conrad Johnson offers two distinct lines of power amplifiers; their all vacuum-tube LP series and the solid state Premier 350SA, each catering to a specific group of fans and offering their own distinct sound qualities. I've been using the Premier 350SA as my reference for the past two years now, so you know what side of the fence I'm on.

Back in the '90s, one of my favorite amplifiers was the CJ Evolution 2000. It was a hybrid design that produced 200 watts per channel with a quartet of 5751 triodes in the input stage and power MOSFET output transistors. Needless to say I was very intrigued when the opportunity to audition the ET250, which is the first hybrid design since the Evolution 2000.

When I chatted with Lew Johnson at CES this year, he told me that the ET250 had "four fifths of the output stage of your Premier 350, with an all new triode input stage". Of course it's not that simple, but I can't blame the master for revealing all the secrets. Note that the ET250 is *not* a repackaged Evolution 2000; instead of using four tubes in the input stage, it just has a pair of 6922/6DJ8's that are common to the other tube amplifiers in the CJ line as well as the ART 3 Reference Preamplifier. The output stage utilizes bi-polar output devices instead of the MOSFETs used in the earlier amplifier.

"The ET250 has four fifths of the output stage of your Premier 350, with an all new triode input stage"



THE VACUUM STATE OF THE ART CONFERENCE RETURNS!

VSAC 2008
May 24-26, 2008
Vancouver, Washington USA
Details Coming Soon At
www.vsac2008.com

Conrad-Johnson supplies the ET250 with Sovtek tubes as standard issue because they are inexpensive, easy to get and fairly consistent. The ET250 is still fantastic, even if you do not venture beyond the standard issue tubes. For those of you that like to roll tubes, you know that the 6DJ9/6922 is a plentiful tube that is still not ridiculously expensive. The great news is that there are only two, so even if you want a pair of ultra rare tubes, it won't break the bank. I suggest that if you find a brand you really love, buy a few sets!

The ET 250 features the same case work as the LP series amplifiers, but has heat sinks running along both sides so that is the easiest way to tell them apart. Retail price for the ET250 is \$7995.

Initial Setup

The ET250 weighs a bit less than my Premier 350 at 65 pounds, so if you have a little bit of muscle tone, you should be able to unbox and move this one yourself. I plopped our test unit right next to my Premier 350, so I could easily compare the two and for the majority of the review period that was the only change I made. Once I had drawn my conclusions on the sound, I tried a few other linestages to explore some system synergy issues and there were none – The ET250 was a great match for all of the other preamplifiers I tried, so I think this one would be at home just about anywhere. Obviously, it was a stellar match with my reference, the CJ ACT2/Series 2. Technical editor Dan Babineau had excellent results mating the ET250 with CJ's ART 3 in his system.

(continued)



Peeking under the hood of the ET250 revealed the usual robust CJ build quality; a massive power transformer and quite a few of their now ubiquitous CJD Teflon capacitors. As has been my experience with other gear that relies on Teflon capacitors, the ET250 took a couple hundred hours to open up all the way, so be prepared to spend a little time with this one before you get the full experience.

I ran the ET250 through its paces with a very wide range of speakers in addition to my MartinLogan Summits. They present a somewhat difficult load, going down to .7 ohms at 20k, so an amplifier without substantial current drive will fall flat. To keep the torture test up, I also wheeled out my Apogee Calipers that are no picnic to drive either because of their low impedance and low 82db efficiency. Passing this test with ease, I knew anything else I threw at the ET250 would be no problem, so I moved on to a few other offerings from Penaudio, Harbeth, Avalon, KEF and Verity Audio. This group of speakers had an efficiency of 86-92 db and presented no challenge to the ET250 whatsoever.

What's Your Favorite Flavor?

Every amplifier on the market has it's own voice, or way of altering the signal it's fed, even if only slightly and the ET250 is no exception to that rule. I've gotten very spoiled with the effortless dynamics and tonal accuracy with my Premier 350.

After two years still enjoy tremendous synergy with my reference speakers as well as every other speaker that I've used with it.

However, some of you might want just a touch more warmth, or that tube romance with your sound without going all the way to a fully tubed amplifier. Perhaps you like to change speakers on a regular basis, or just enjoy fiddling with the sound when the mood strikes. If you fall into one of these categories, the ET250 is right up your alley.

Having listened to the ET250 for quite a while now, I would describe the sound as very similar to the Premier 350, with a touch less ultimate dynamics and a touch bit more midrange palpability. Where the 350 never seems to run out of gas, the 250 can play extremely loud but does have a limit. Remember, that's what you are paying the extra \$2000 for with a Premier 350. If you are listening at anything less than brain damage levels, both amplifiers are more than adequate.

Let's Judge Junior On His Own Merits, Shall We?

The ET250 is a spectacular power amplifier and one that should be very easy to integrate into your system, no matter what you are using for a front end. Once the necessary amount of break in hours were logged and I got down to serious listening, I was very impressed with this amplifier. *(continued)*

The ET250 is a spectacular power amplifier and one that should be very easy to integrate into your system.



As in the rest of the current CJ lineup, the ET250 has an open sound, possessing a lot of detail and weight.

What makes this amplifier so special is that last little bit of romance added by the tubes. The midrange is wonderful; listening to Teddy Thompson's new album, *Up Front and Down Low*, the vocals just hung in the air, with that last bit of three dimensionality that vacuum tubes are famous for. Same thing with the prerequisite female vocal tracks, the music had just the right amount of body, air and decay, with out ever feeling, soggy or rolled off. That pair of tubes gives the ET250 a very pleasing, organic quality.

But those are parlor tricks that any decent amplifier can pull off. Reproducing dynamics without losing composure is what I look for when auditioning a high-powered amplifier. Can it play good and loud, yet loud and good; that's the best. Celebrating our coverage of Rachmaninoff this issue, I played my share of his music, but then jumped over to my favorites, Shostakovich and Bax. This is where the ET250 shines; it can produce the big dynamic swings that this kind of music demands, while retaining the subtlety and texture that makes acoustic music sound very close to real in your listening room.

Lovers of rock music have nothing to fear with

the ET250 either. Playing a recent Japanese pressing of *London Calling* at very unreasonable levels brought through the weight that makes you want to keep turning it up! That's always the measure of a great amplifier (for that matter a great system), when the presentation is this free of fatigue, you can get carried away with the volume control.

A Unique Voice

The Conrad Johnson ET250 is a very interesting creation. If you want the punch, power and control that solid state offers, yet just a bit more warmth than an all solid-state amplifier can provide, I'd put this one at the top of my list. This is an amplifier that you can easily build the rest of your system around and my guess is you might have to upgrade everything else in your system to pretty obscene levels before you'd even think of getting rid of your ET250.

As always, a trip to your local CJ dealer will help you make the decision. Some of you might end up going fully solid state with the Premier 350, while others might go the other way and purchase one of their all tube amplifiers. It will depend on your budget and patience with glowing bottles.

Personally, I think most of you could live happily ever after right in the middle with the ET250, I know I could. ●

If you want the punch, power and control that solid state offers, yet just a bit more warmth than an all solid-state amplifier can provide, I'd put this one at the top of my list.

Dude, it's music, not rocket science.

See if you can find the secret
message hidden in the formula!

\$999.95



Vincent™ SP-331 Stereo Power Amplifier

"Let me not mince words. The SP-331 is the best-sounding sub-\$1000 amplifier I've yet heard, and I therefore regard it as one of the sweetest deals in high-end audio today."

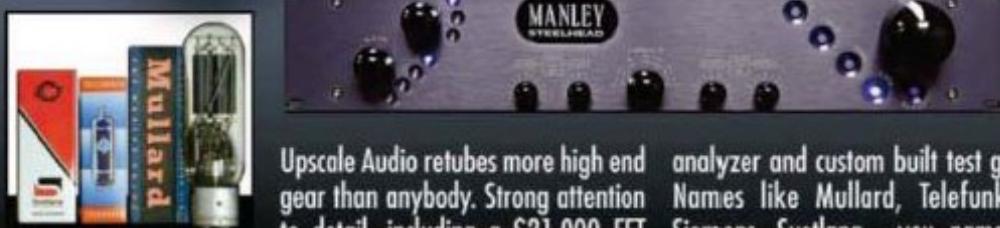
— Chris Martens, *The Absolute Sound*, August 2007

Here's the Magic!

CARY
CAD 120S Amplifier



PATHOS
Classic One MK III



MANLEY
Steelhead Phono Preamplifier

Upscale Audio retubes more high end gear than anybody. Strong attention to detail, including a \$21,000 FFT

analyzer and custom built test gear. Names like Mullard, Telefunken, Siemens, Svetlana... you name it. See pictures on our website! And remember... we DO NOT use your amp as a tube tester.

IN STOCK NOW: ACOUSTIC ZEN, AESTHETIX, AH! TJOEB, ANTHEM, ARCAM, ATMA-SPHERE, AUDIO ELECTRONIC SUPPLY, AVANTGARDE, B&K, BALANCED AUDIO TECHNOLOGY, BENZ MICRO, CARY, CHANG LIGHTSPEED, CLEARAUDIO, COINCIDENT, DH LABS, DYNAVECTOR, ERA, EQUI-TECH, EXACTPOWER, GALLO, GRAHAM, KIMBER KABLE, LYRA, MAGNUM DYNALAB, MANLEY, MUSIC HALL, NITTY GRITTY, NORDOST, NOTTINGHAM, OPERA, PATHOS, PRIMALUNA, PRIMARE, PS AUDIO, PSB, REGA, REL, SME, SONUS FABER, TRIANGLE, TRI-PLANAR, UNISON, VPI, VIENNA ACOUSTICS

The Conrad-Johnson
ET250 power amplifier
MSRP: \$7995

MANUFACTURER

Conrad-Johnson Design Inc.

2733 Merrilee Drive
Fairfax, VA 22031
703-698-8581
www.conradjohnson.com

PERIPHERALS

Preamplifier: Conrad Johnson ACT2/Series 2, Aesthetix Callisto Signature, Nagra PL-L, McIntosh MC2300

Power Amplifier: Conrad-Johnson Premier 350SA

Phono Preamplifier: ASR Basis Exclusive

Speakers: MartinLogan Summit, Tetra 506 Custom, Verity Audio Rienzi, Pennaudio Serenade, Apogee Caliper, Avalon Ascendant, Harbeth Compact 7/version III

Digital Sources: Naim CD555, Wadia 581i, Meridian 808

Analog Sources: Oracle Delphi V w/SME iv.VI arm/MoFi 3.5C cartridge, Rega P9 w/RB1000 arm/Shelter 9000 cartridge

Interconnect and Speaker Cable

Cable: Cardas Golden Reference

Power Conditioning: Running Springs Danielle and Jaco, RSA Mongoose power cords

Vibration Control: Finite Elemente Pagode Signature racks and amplifier stand, Finite Ceraballs and Cerapucs

Room Treatment: GIK Bass traps and 242 panels, Sonex classic

Sonics

**BY JOACHIM GERHARD
ARGENTA LOUDSPEAKERS**

By Marc Phillips



I cut my audiophile teeth on small 2-way bookshelf monitors. Matter of fact, I think I was well into my thirties before I owned a speaker system possessing a midrange driver! By that time, I was a homeowner, and could rock out whenever I felt like (well, as long as the wife and kids weren't around). But back in my apartment dwelling days, stand mounted monitors were the best way to achieve good sound without drawing the ire of my neighbors and elderly landlords.

I am still inexplicably drawn toward the little guys, especially if the cabinets are well finished in a gorgeous wood veneer. Put me in a room with a dozen different speakers, and I'll instantly gravitate toward the stand-mounted monitors. I think that's why I wound up evaluating the new Sonics Argenta. Each time I'd visit the Tone mothership, I'd walk past the huge electrostatic panels and tower speakers and stand in front of the Argentas, asking **"How are these? Have you listened to them yet? What are they like? Can I try them for a few days? Huh? Can I? Can I?"**

Persistence paid off and I finally rushed home with the Argentas in the back of my station wagon. An hour later I found myself sitting on my sofa, a goofy smile on my face, marveling at the fact that after years of fairly large floorstanding speakers, I finally had a pair of small monitors back in my system. You know, memories of the way I used to be, and all that.



Misty, Water-Colored Speakers

The Sonics Argentas really aren't that small. At roughly 10" by 11" by 16", they're not what I would call mini-monitors. I do have to admit that it was a delight to toy incessantly with speaker placement without having to dance the tango with a cumbersome tower. The Argentas are surprisingly light, yet still substantial; a quick knuckle wrap confirms this. Their appearance is simple, yet tasteful. And the quality of the maple veneer far exceeds what you would expect for a \$1500 pair of bookshelf speakers. *(continued)*



CONNECTING YOU WITH THE MUSIC



"Editor's Choice Award, 2006"
STEREOTIMES.COM

"Writer's Choice Award, 2006"
POSITIVE FEEDBACK ONLINE

"Exceptional Value Award, 2006"
TONE AUDIO

SAN DIEGO, CA
AUDIOARTCABLE.COM
619-255-6451



At first glance, the Argentas seems fairly conventional. It uses a silk dome tweeter and a 7" paper-cone woofer. It's ported in the front, which makes it fairly easy to place in a small room. And with its 87dB sensitivity and 8-ohm impedance, it will work well with a variety of amplification. I paired the Argentas with Clayton Audio's spectacular Stereo 40 amplifier (pure Class A with 50wpc), the Nagra PSA (100wpc), and the Si-mAudio I-7 integrated (150 wpc), and achieved splendid results with each amp. I did most of my listening with the Clayton, however, which produced an earthier, more relaxing presentation with the Argentas.

The Argentas, however, are not conventional in terms of their performance.

You see, the Sonics company is actually called Sonics by Joachim Gerhard. That's right, we're talking about *that* Joachim Gerhard, the German fellow who founded Audio Physic and gave the world side-firing woofers. While these loudspeakers that were designed to be brought out well into the room and pushed out to the sides in order to create some of the largest, most astonishing soundstages ever, the Argentas are a bit more traditional in their approach. They did confound my expectations, offering up sound that had me muttering "Are these speakers really this good?" over and over. The answer to this question is a definite yes. *(continued)*

I was confounded at first listen. The Argentas provided a very relaxed, presentation with a fairly deep soundstage and full, well-developed bass.

Like the Corners of My Listening Room

I placed the Argentas on a pair of 24" Sound Anchor stands that I originally thought might have been too tall. Personally, I would recommend stands that are around 20" tall, but I was able to listen in a chair that elevated my ears to the level of the tweeters, however, and it didn't make a huge difference. I found that Argentas were very flexible in terms of room placement, and I eventually wound up placing them in roughly the same spot as my reference Devore Fidelity Gibbon Super 8s, in a 7' equilateral triangle with my sitting position. I even tried to experiment with the notorious Audio Physic

arrangement, where the speakers are brought out well into the room, and close to the side walls. This created a decidedly different presentation, with better imaging and an incredibly wide soundstage, but with a slight reduction in low bass information. All in all, the Argentas seem to be happy almost anywhere; this is an easy speaker to set up in your room.

Like I said, I was confounded at first listen. The Argentas provided a very relaxed, presentation with a fairly deep soundstage and full, well-developed bass (the Argenta's specs say they go down to 38 Hz, same as the floorstanding Gibbons). For those who are familiar with my tastes in equipment, you'll know that a relaxed and laid-back presentation is a very good thing, and is synonymous with organic, natural and realistic. For instance, my current litmus test and sonic touchstone is Joanna Newsom's *The Milk-Eyed Mender*, which offers a clear and often stunning portrayal of her harp, which is often in direct contrast with her Lisa Simpson-esque vocal style, which can be aggressive and harsh at times. The Argentas excelled and bringing the two contrasts together seamlessly, without the feeling that the vocals and the harp were recorded separately, as is the case with lesser loudspeakers.

No, the Argentas didn't fully recreate the illusion of a full symphony orchestra, nor are they necessarily the right speaker to play *Axis: Bold as Love* or "Lateralus" at concert levels. But I did enjoy the way they added a little more air and detail to my German ARS LP pressing of Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours*. And the Argentas did an excellent job of dressing up every electronic effect in my Sundazed LP of Wilco's *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*. *(continued)*





Can it be That Speakers Were so Simple Then?

While listening to the Argentas, I had the somewhat deluded instinct that I was hearing an almost BBC-like sound. Again, my audiophile infancy was nurtured by the likes of Spendor, Rogers and KEF. So I pulled out my aging Spendor S20 mini-monitors, which I purchased more than 15 years ago, and compared them to the Argentas. I felt that smooth, refined and neutral sound offered by the Sonics monitors would be in the same ballpark. Boy, was I wrong.

The S20s sounded absolutely tiny next to the Argentas. What was polite and refined in 1992 was now timid and pensive. The little Spendors sounded boxed in and dark. The Argenta, however, was endlessly expansive and dynamic and clear. It could be that my

The Argentas are proof that great sound can come in a relatively modest package.

tastes in loudspeakers have changed dramatically over the years, or that the Spendors really aren't happy about being left in a box in the closet for years on end, only to be trotted out whenever I wax nostalgic.

Or maybe it's because loudspeaker design really has advanced in the last few years, and that the Argentas are proof that great sound can come in a relatively modest package.

Whatever the reason, at \$1500 per pair, the Sonics Argentas are very accomplished loudspeakers, especially when you consider that even the tiniest BBC monitors are pushing \$2K a pair these days. The next time I talk to someone who can't afford the latest British speaker due to the weakening dollar, these will get my recommendation.

Second Opinion – Jeff Dorgay

I have really enjoyed the presentation of the other speakers in the Sonics line that I have heard over the last year and we reviewed their Allegras back in issue 8, so I was very curious to hear how much of that performance could be squeezed into a small box. I was very impressed with the Argentas, so much that we are giving them one of our Exceptional Value Awards for 2007. These speakers have it all, aesthetic and sonic excellence at a very reasonable price. All but those on the tightest budgets should be able to fit these on their shopping list. Add your favorite thousand-dollar CD player and a decent integrated for a thousand or two and you've got the recipe for high quality, reasonably priced sound.

I put quite a few hours on the speakers before handing them off to Marc and tried them in my small living room and much larger dedicated room. Even in the big room, they were able to do a great job with great bass extension and detail.

I listened a bit with the Moon I-7, but also had some very happy listening sessions with my McIntosh MC275 tube power amplifier. Its 75 watts per channel was more than enough to provide plenty of dynamic range with the Argentas. I had a good experience with tube and solid-state gear, but these speakers were incredibly synergistic with the MC275. *(continued)*

**"At last a power cord
that can properly be termed
a component."**

Mark Bucksath, *The Absolute Sound*, Issue 109

**"...this is not a
matter of preference.
Once I heard my system
with the ESP products in place
it simply sounds 'wrong' without them,
not less good, wrong"**

Rick Gardner, *Positive Feedback*, Vol. 8 #3

**"...performance without obvious limitations --
completeness."**

Marc Mickelson, *SoundStage!*, November 2005

The Essence
REFERENCE
MADE IN USA



**"No single accessory
has had a more profound effect..."**

Greg Petan, *Ultimate Audio, Recommended Components*

Need we say more?

**"IN TODAY'S ULTRA-HIGH PRICED WORLD, ESP'S
THE ESSENCE REFERENCE POWER CORD'S
PRICE AND PERFORMANCE SHOCKED ME"**

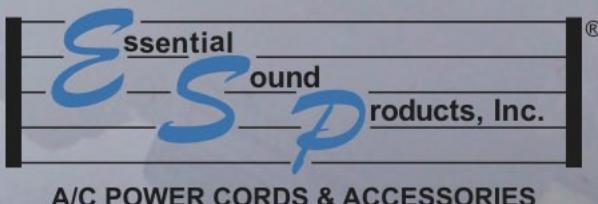
Myles Astor, *The Inner Ear*, Vol. 17, # 4 / 2007

**"The phase correct ESP's allow for a fluidity of movement,
a continuity of change, if you will,
that no longer wakes the mind from its trance of enjoyment."**

Michael Gindi, *Fi*, Volume 1, Issue 3

**"Its sound, if "its sound" does exist,
has the character of flowing water:
clarity with no dominating flavor..."**

Marc Mickelson, *SoundStage!*, May, 2007



One listen, and nothing else will do.

web: www.essentialsound.com / email: info@essentialsound.com

Back in the mid '70s when the Vandersteen 2's hit the scene, you couldn't get a speaker that looked AND sounded great for this kind of money. Fast forward the clock to the 21st century and you can have your cake and eat it too. I can't imagine anyone's roommate objecting to a pair of these in their habitat.

Those of you that actually need to place your bookshelf speakers on a bookshelf will appreciate the front port of the Argentas. A rear firing port can be very problematic when you need to place your speakers close to the wall; problem solved here.

The \$1500 price point is very competitive, with some very good examples of just how much of the audiophile pie you can get for workingman's' prices. After spending quite a few months with the Argentas, I'd put them at the top of my list. ●

**The Sonics Argentas
MSRP: \$1600 per pair**

MANUFACTURER

Sonics Speakers

US Importer:
Immedia Products
1101 8th Street
Suite 210
Berkeley, CA 94710
510-559-2050

www.immediasound.com



Multiple Turntable Owners Rejoice!

THE MUSICAL SURROUNDINGS SUPERNOVA PHONO PREAMPLIFIER

By Marc Phillips

I keep hearing Liz Phair's plaintive, sexy voice whenever I say the words SuperNova phono amplifier to people. In fact, I couldn't resist playing my copy of Liz's **whitechocolatespaceegg** as the inaugural LP once I had the Musical Surroundings SuperNova phono preamplifier plugged into my system.

Like Ms. Phair's first three albums, the SuperNova is anything but ordinary. It's actually three phono preamps in one chassis (or two chassis, if you count the outboard power supply). Based on the circuitry of Musical Surroundings' popular Nova Phenomena phono stage, the SuperNova is the ideal phono preamp for analog hobbyists who have more than one turntable or cartridge at their disposal. If you're one of those audiophiles who drool at the sight of a turntable with two tonearms, and completely understand the reason for owning such a beast, then the SuperNova is your kind of phono preamp.



The SuperNova offers three separate pair of input jacks for three different turntable/cartridge combinations. You can set gain (40, 44, 46, 50, 56 and 60dB) and loading (eight different settings from 59 ohms to 100K ohms,) using the dip switches located next to each set of input jacks. You just plug in your three 'tables into each pair of jacks, choose your settings, and flip back and forth between the 'tables using one of two big selector knobs on the front panel. IT'S JUST THAT EASY!

Obviously, the SuperNova is an effective tool for equipment reviewers. I was able to freely switch between my J.A. Michell Orbe SE/SME V/Koetsu Rosewood and the Technics SL1200/Ortofon OM-10 combination I'm currently playing with and modifying, while still having room to plug one more table into my system (you see where I'm going here...). But the SuperNova is also the

Unless you can swap and properly align a cartridge in a couple of minutes...the SuperNova is the perfect solution.

to boot), or have a strong belief that certain cartridges are better suited to certain types of music. Crazy as this might sound, I keep meeting more of this type of music lover all the time! Unless you can swap and properly align a cartridge in a couple of minutes—and I certainly can't—the SuperNova is the perfect solution.

Major Flexibility

When I mentioned that the circuitry is very similar to the layout of the much less expensive Nova Phenomena that might not be entirely fair to the SuperNova. It has a couple of tricks up its sleeve that separates it from its little brother.

The first difference, obviously, is the outboard power supply. It's battery-powered,

perfect phono stage for those audiophiles who are in love with two utterly different-sounding cartridges (and maybe a mono rig

using four NiMH packs, as opposed to the two used inside the Nova's internal power supply. This allows the SuperNova, once it has been properly charged, to run independently from an electrical source for around three hours. With a phono stage, battery option is the ultimate option for low noise, and it eliminates the need for an exotic power cord as well! Leave the power supply plugged into the wall, so the batteries always remain charged and the Super Nova is always ready to go.

Two red LEDs on the front panel of the main unit (marked status, with each light assigned to its corresponding channel, since the SuperNova is a true dual-mono design) flash while the power supply is charging. When the two red LEDs glow steadily, you hit the mode button on the power supply, and they change to green, which means you're running on pure battery power. Should you find yourself up until the wee hours spinning records and deplete the batteries, it will switch back into AC operation. *(continued)*

HAGERMAN

Is this what is meant by “intelligent design”?

- World's best vacuum tube phonostage under \$1000 (Cornet MC, \$999)
- World's best vacuum tube DAC under \$2000* (Chime, \$1799)
- World's best vacuum tube tester (VacuTrace, \$1249)
- World's best moving coil headamp under \$1000 (Piccolo, \$299)
- World's best phonostage under \$200 (Bugle, \$129)
- World's best digitizing phonostage under \$500 (The Ripper, \$399)
- World's best cable burn-in device under \$500 (FryBaby, \$249)
- World's best CD reference clock under \$200 (HagClock, \$99)
- World's best variable equalization phonostage under \$2000 (Archiver, \$1249)
- World's best turntable strobeclamp (UFO, \$399)

Compare our products to anything else available. Hagerman Technology provides an unbeatable combination of performance, features, and price. Feel free to question any of these audacious claims via email. jim@hagtech.com

* with USB input and volume control

www.hagtech.com

The SuperNova has two pairs of output jacks on its back panel; one marked fixed and one marked variable. When using the variable output jacks, you can plug in a pair of interconnects directly into your power amplifier, enabling the SuperNova to perform as an active line stage. The second large knob on the front panel is the output attenuator, so you can adjust output level in this mode.

Remember when digital volume controls were the hot item a few years ago?

Well, here's a purely analog volume control. For those of you who have a vinyl-only rig (and I know at least a couple of you who do), this is a great way to streamline your signal path and save a few bucks by not having to buy a separate preamplifier.

The other way that you can use the variable attenuator on the front panel is to fine tune the gain structure of the phono stage to your preamp so you have just enough gain to achieve maximum output, while keeping it in its own optimum zone. This allows you to keep noise at a minimum and dynamics at a maximum.

Getting Down To Business

With some break-in time out of the way, I settled in for some critical listening. And at first, I was quite surprised by how different the overall presentation of the SuperNova was compared to other phono stages I'd been using. In conjunction with my reference Michell table, the Exposure 3010S integrated amplifier and the Devore Fidelity Gibbon Super 8 loudspeakers; the SuperNova delivered an incredibly wide soundstage. *(continued)*



It reached an almost 180 degree arc, something I haven't heard in a long time. It definitely pushed the spatial boundaries of what I thought was possible in my listening room.

During Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* on the sixth LP of the Classic 45 rpm reissue of The Royal Ballet Gala Performances, the harp appeared so far back and to the right that it appeared to be coming from the middle of my backyard. Again, this was not hyper-realistic, but just big and extended, more so than any other phono preamp I've used recently in this price range. I also noticed a similar sense of wide-open frontier-like spaces with my Three Blind Mice pressing of Tsuyoshi Yamamoto's *Midnight Sugar*, with the jazz trio playing even further apart from each other than ever before. If exceptional imaging and soundstaging is a priority for you, the SuperNova will deliver and then some.

As the Exposure's presentation is a bit etched (remember, I'm a tube lover after all) moving back to the combination of the ModWright 36.5 and McIntosh MC275 possessed a warmer, more fleshed out presentation, offering up a bit more natural feel to

that breathtaking soundstage. Even more curious, I took the 36.5 out of the system and went direct to observe the changes. Ultimately, I still preferred having a good linestage in the system in terms of overall sonics, but those of you wanting the minimalist approach will giggle like a schoolgirl over how great the SuperNova can sound jacked directly into your power amplifier.

As far as the battery supply goes, there is a not-so-subtle shift in the overall musical presentation when you are running free and clear from your AC outlets, even if you use a superb line conditioner.

When you're on battery power, the sound tends to smooth out and move back significantly. The noise floor disappears into oblivion. When the power supply of the SuperNova needs to recharge, and the current from your outlet stampedes back in, everything leaps back out at you, and one of those slight but noticeable sonic veils appear. If you're thinking about a very intensive listening session, it's best to plan ahead so that the batteries don't run out of juice at the wrong moment. *(continued)*



Keeping Things In Perspective

The SuperNova offers the flexibility of three separate phono preamplifiers on one chassis. Especially, when you factor in extra power cords, interconnects and for that matter, inputs on your preamp!

The SuperNova circuit design was in development for over two years before coming to market. The new, lower priced, single input NOVA has its circuit derived from it, albeit with a smaller battery powered supply. The more substantial battery supply in the Super Nova is what gives it the extra weight, dynamics and soundstage

size. Considering what three separate phono stages, their associated power cords and interconnects would cost, (and rack space!) the SuperNova is worth way more than the sum of its parts.

Also quite impressive is the top notch industrial design. Looking closely at the large machined knobs and the legs on the side, you can tell a lot of thought went into the visual design as well as the electronics inside. This one will look just as good on your rack as it sounds! And I bet this nifty phono stage will wind up in the systems of more than one audio reviewer, too. ●

The Musical Surroundings SuperNova Phono Preamplifier MSRP: \$2800

MANUFACTURER

Musical Surroundings

Attn: Garth Leerer
5662 Shattuck Ave.
Oakland, CA 94609
510-547-5006
www.musicalsurroundings.com

PERIPHERALS

Analog Sources: J.A. Michell
Orbe SE w/SME V/Koetsu
Rosewood, Technics SL1200/
Ortofon OM-10

Digital Source: Naim CDX2

Preamplifier: ModWright 36.5,
Yamamoto CA-03L

Power Amplifier: McIntosh
MC275, Nagra PSA

Speakers: DeVore Fidelity
Gibbon Super 8s, Zu Druids

Interconnects: Chord Cobra
2, DH Labs Relelation, Cardas
Golden Reference

Speaker Cable: Zu Libtec,
Wireworld Equinox III +

Power Cords: Shunyata Taipan
Helix, Diamondback, Copperhead,
Venom

Power Conditioning: Shunyata
Guardian 8, Running Springs
Jaco

Slummin'

By Jeff Dorgay

This issue, it's waaaaay back to the 70's. Some guys collect expensive sports cars; I collect hifi gear from my youth. It's quite a bit less expensive, but it does start to take up space! Sniffing around E Bay and my local garage sales have turned up a few treasures...

The Harman Kardon 330 C

E Bay — \$32

I sold a ton of these in the late 70's, usually with a pair of Advents or EPI 100's to go with, and FREE speaker wire thrown in! Boy, those were the days indeed. Only 20 watts per channel, this one had dual mono power supplies and was amazingly good sounding for the money. The HK 330 had three different facelifts, starting off as the 330A and the last of the line was by far the best one in terms of sound quality. H/K had taken a bit of what they learned with the legendary Citation series and incorporated it into their line of receivers.

Unfortunately, H/K receivers would soon become a mass market item, just like Pioneer, Marantz and others from this era. But you can re-live the glory days now for about 50 bucks. A great second system receiver, to be sure. I've got this one playing with a pair of vintage AR's right now! Much like the Advent 300, this one's a real sleeper.



**Teac 2300**

Garage Sale — \$50

This one took about a hundred bucks worth of bench time at Echo Audio to make right again, but for \$150, it's still a great machine. Kurt told us that the heads were like new and so we can expect to have a lot of playing time with this little jewel.

In the early 70's TEAC and AKAI tape machines were all the rage. There were some cool machines from Revox, Tandberg and Ampex, but the TEAC 2300 was pretty much the workingman's reel to reel. They were about \$400 new, which was still a lot of money back in 1975, but their durability is a testament to the quality that went in to their construction. You can still get many of the replacement parts and heads from TEAC today, so maintenance is still highly possible. You can buy the complete owners and service manual online, but the much coveted dust cover is another issue entirely. ●

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



Acoustic Sounds: www.acousticsounds.com
 Aperion: www.aperionaudio.com
 Audience: www.audience-av.com
 Audio Art Cables: www.audioartcable.com
 Audio Physik: www.signals-superfi.com
 Aurum Acoustics: www.signals-superfi.com
 AV123: www.av123.com
 Benchmark: www.benchmarkmedia.com
 Cardas Audio: www.cardas.com
 Coffin and Trout: www.coffinandtrout.com
 Conrad Johnson: www.conradjohnson.com
 DH labs: www.silversonic.com
 DeVore Fidelity: www.devorefidelity.com
 Echo Audio: www.echohifi.com
 Emotive Audio: www.emotiveaudio.com
 Essential Sound Products: www.essentialsound.com
 Galen Carol Audio: www.gcaudio.com
 Gateway Sound: www.gatewaysound.net
 Great Northern Sound: www.greatnorternsound.com
 Hagerman Technology: www.hagtech.com
 Half Note Audio: www.halfnoteaudio.com
 Immedia Sound: www.immediasound.com
 Lensbabies: www.lensbabies.com
 Martin-Logan: www.martinlogan.com
 Maxtor: www.maxtor.com

McIntosh: www.mcintoshlabs.com
 Meridian: www.meridian-audio.com
 ModWright Instruments: www.modwright.com
 Nagra: www.nagraaudio.com
 Naim: www.naimusa.com
 Nik Software: www.niksoftware.com
 Olympus: www.olympusamerica.com
 Penaudio: www.penaudio.fi
 Red Wine Audio: www.redwineaudio.com
 Rega: www.soundorg.com
 Running Springs Audio: www.runningspringsaudio.com
 Salagar Speakers: www.salagar.com
 Save the Music: www.vh1.com
 Shunyata: www.shunyata.com
 Sooloos: www.sooloos.com
 Tidal Speakers: www.halfnoteaudio.com
 Todd The Vinyl Junkie: www.ttvj.com
 Upscale Audio: www.upscaleaudio.com
 Verity Audio: www.verityaudio.com
 Wadia: www.wadia.com