

TONEAudio



Music.Gear.Style.

No.37 May 2011

Beyond Sound and Vision

**Roadburn Festival 2011
Blows Minds**

■ **In-Depth Reviews of New Records** from Fleet Foxes, Okkervil River, Neil Young, Ty Segall, Beastie Boys, Branford Marsalis, and More

■ **Finest Wine You Could Hope to Drink** ■ **Martin Logan's Legacy and Latest**
■ **Two Great Integrated Amplifiers from Simaudio Compared** ■ **Apple iPad 2**



Stereotypes
Daytona Beach, FL 32114
386-253-7093

Sound Components
Coral Gables, FL 33146
305-665-4299

Audio Advisors
West Palm Beach, FL 33409
561-478-3100

Independence Audio
Independence, MO 64055
816-252-9782

Definitive Audio
Bellevue, WA 98005
425-746-3188

Audio Design
Fairfield, CT 06825
203-336-4401

Sound City
Denville, NJ 07834
973-627-0083

The Sound Concept
Bedford Hills, NY 10507
914-244-0900

**Sound Image Audio and
Video Design Group**
Carrollton, TX 75006
972-503-4434

**Advanced Home
Theater Systems**
Plano, TX 75075
972-516-1849

Speaker Shop
Amherst, NY 14226
716-837-1557

Audio Classics
Vestal, NY 13850
607-766-3501

Home Theater Concepts
Morton, IL 61550
309-266-6640

Global Sight & Sound
Sussex, WI 53089
262-820-0600

Freeman's Stereo
Charlotte, NC 28216
704-398-1822

Hi Fi Buys
Nashville, TN 37211
615-832-3121

**Electronic System
Consultants**
Aspen, CO 81611
970-925-1700

**Shelley's Stereo
Hi Fi Center**
Woodland Hills, CA 91367
818-716-8500

**DSS- Dynamic
Sound Systems**
Carlsbad, CA 92088
760-723-2535

L & M Home Entertainment
Tempe, AZ 85285
480-403-0011

Joseph Cali Systems Design
Santa Monica, CA 90404
310-453-3297

Systems Design Group
Redondo Beach, CA 90278
310-370-8575

Sunny Components
Covina, CA 91724
626-966-6259

Audio Vision S F
San Francisco, CA 94109
415-641-1118

Audio FX
Sacramento, CA 95825
916-929-2100

Media Enviroments
San Rafael, CA 94901
415-456-1681

Pro Home Systems
Oakland, CA 94609
510-653-4300

Overture
Winnington, DE 19803
302-478-6050



**3800 Watts.
360 lbs.
Devastating Bass.**

© 2007 JL AUDIO, Inc. For more information on our complete line of subwoofers, please visit your local authorized dealer or www.jlaudio.com. Subwoofers pictured with grilles removed. In Canada contact GemSen Distribution at www.gemsen.com. U.S. PATENTS: #5,734,734 #5,949,898 #6,118,884 #6,229,902 #6,243,479 #6,294,959 #6,501,844 #6,496,590 #6,441,685 #5,687,247 #6,219,431 #6,625,292 #6,744,902 #D472,891 #D480,709 Other U.S. & Foreign patents pending.

CONTENTS



66

- 11. PUBLISHER'S LETTER
- 13. NEW CONTRIBUTORS
- 14. TONE TOON
By Liza Donnelly

features

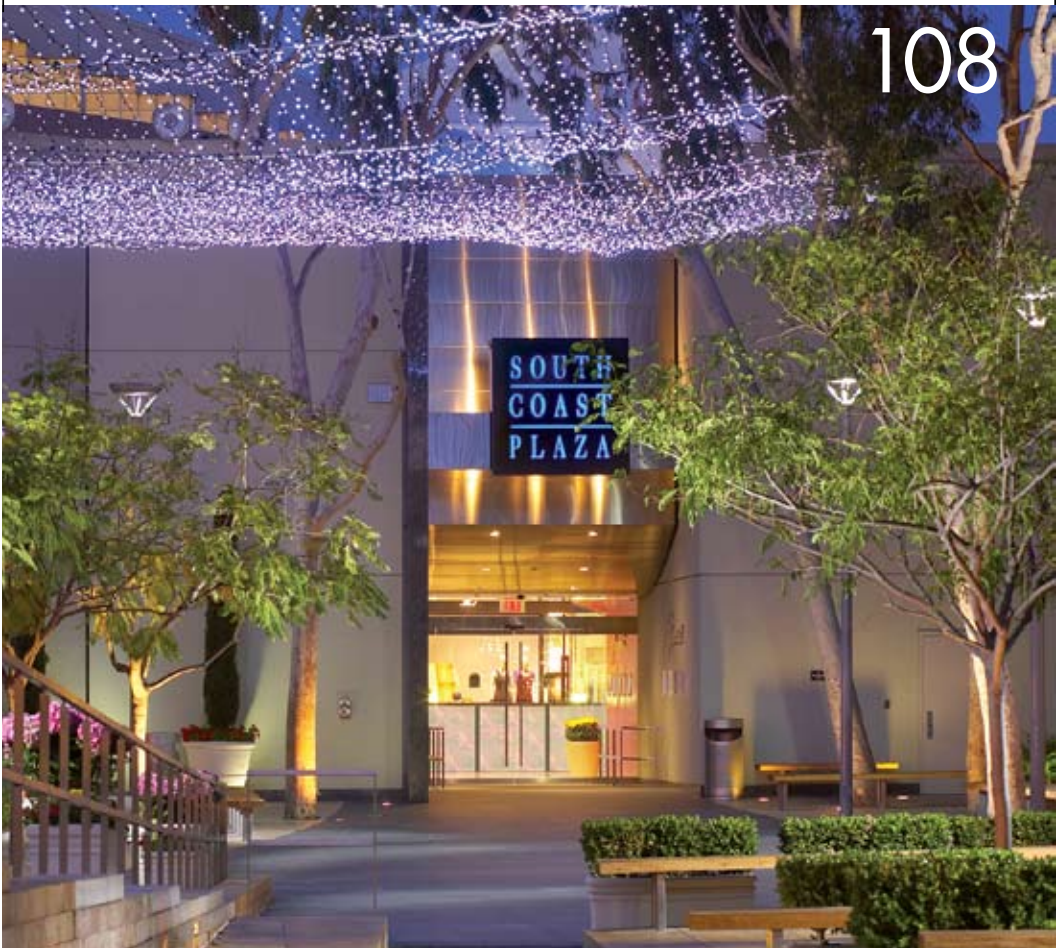
- 66 Old School
The MartinLogan Aerius i Loudspeakers: Welcome Back!
By Jeff Dorgay
- 88 Budget Gear
A Mini Phono Preamp With a Twist: NAD PP 3i
By Jeff Dorgay
- 102 Journeyman Audiophile
Running Springs Elgar: Clean Power for the Regular Guy
By Jerold O'Brien



CONTENTS



127



108



tone style

133

- 108 T.H.E. Show
June 3-5, 2011
How To Do Newport Beach
By Scott Tetzlaff and Jeff Dorgay
- 125 Apple iPad 2
Not So Much
- 126 NeatWorks
Clean Up and File
- 127 The Rolling Stones
The Complete Singles (1971-2006) Box Set
- 128 The LP Qube
Precious Vinyl Storage
- 131 Bottle Screws
Make Drinking Fun
- 132 Mark Lanegan
Bobblehead Bad Boy
By Bob Gendron
- 133 Sassicaia Session
By Ken Kessler

CONTENTS

music

14. LIVE MUSIC: Bob Gendron covers Neil Young and Femi Kuti with Positive Force. Louise Brown covers the Roadburn Festival.

40. CURRENT RELEASES:

Fresh Releases in the Pop/Rock World
By the TONE Staff

72. AUDIOPHILE PRESSINGS:

XTC, Japan, The Clash, Billy Joel, Etta James, Supertramp, Fleetwood Mac, and More
By the TONE Staff

94. JAZZ & BLUES:

New Releases from Adam Kolker, Darius Jones & Matthew Shipp, Branford Marsalis & Joey Calderazzo, and More
By Jim Macnie



99. Konitz/Mehldau/Haden/Motian
Live at Birdland



©Photo by Christian Westgeest

CONTENTS

previews

148. Gemme Tonic 5 Loudspeaker

149. Lyra Kleos Phono Cartridge

150. Burmester 089 CD Player

reviews

140. Headphone Planet
Marshall Major and WESC
Banjo Headphones

By Kevin Gallucci

152. A Result of Refinement
The ARC PH 6 Phono Preamplifier

By Jeff Dorgay

161. MartinLogan ElectroMotion
ESL Speaker: Cost-Defying Classic

By Jeff Dorgay

168. Fully Charged
Red Wine Audio's Ginevra LFP-V
Edition Phono Preamplifier

By Steve Guttenberg

176. Red Wine Audio
A Brief History and Factory Visit

By Steve Guttenberg

184. Scalable Performance
Octave MRE 130 Monoblocks

By Jeff Dorgay

196. Conquering the Final Frontier
Silent Running Audio's Equipment Platform

By Jeff Dorgay

204. Comparison Test
Simaudio Moon 600i and
Moon 700i Amplifiers

By Jeff Dorgay



web reviews

220. Meridian Media Source 600

223. Parasound JC 3 Phono
Preamplifier

224. SLUMMIN' Classics on the cheap

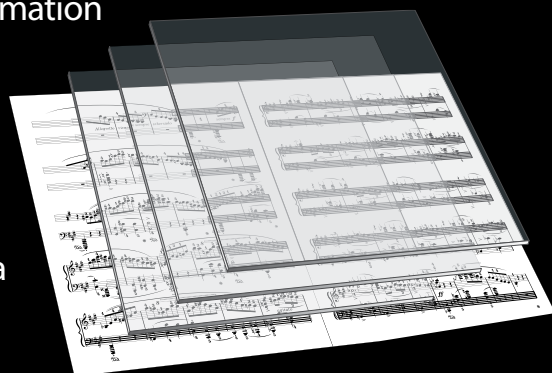
227. Manufacturers Info.

Do No HARM!

Great sound and great pictures, music that consumes you, movies that transport you around the universe ... comes from honoring the original signal.

An unavoidable fact-of-life: Every component and cable in a system causes some amount of distortion. These aberrations add up, like layers of foggy glass between you and the image. The goal of high quality components and cables is to be like clean clear panes of glass, altering and distorting the information as little as possible.

Some of the most fundamental distortion mechanisms are honored and addressed by AudioQuest's **4-Elements**. Any improvement in these areas of design and materials results in less damage and a more effective immersive experience.



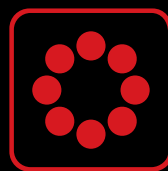
Solid Conductors

Electrical and magnetic interaction between strands is one of the greatest sources of distortion in normal cables. Separate solid conductors prevent interaction between strands.



Insulation

In addition to insulating, all conductor coatings are also a "dielectric." Signal flow is slowed down and distorted by a dielectric, making the choice of material, and AQ's Dielectric-Bias System, very important.



Geometry

The relationship between conductors, whether of the same polarity (+ & +) or opposite polarity (+ & -) affects many electrical and mechanical parameters, including capacitance, inductance, RF Interference, etc.



Metal Quality

Conductor material quality has a pronounced effect on the signal passing through. Different materials have more or less impurities, grain-boundaries, surface irregularities, etc.

PUBLISHER'S LETTER



TONE Continues to Go International

The best music, gear, beverages, food, destinations, and style aren't confined to the US. So why should we limit ourselves and shortchange you,

our readers? Indeed, those that have flipped through the pages of *TONEAudio* over the last few months likely noticed the names of several new writers and photographers. I'd like to warmly welcome our latest contributors from the UK, the Netherlands, and, yes, the US, all of whom are helping us expand our efforts to make *TONEAudio* a truly international magazine.

Paul Rigby joins us from *HiFi News* and *Record Collector*, where he covers an equal share of music and hi-fi gear—a perfect blend of what we're all about. Kevin Gallucci recently did a two-year stint in London as one of the guys responsible for taking measurements at *HiFi Choice*. Don't panic, though: You won't see any charts or graphs populating our pages anytime soon. However, Kevin will be assisting us in becoming more active in the computer audio field and, along with Steve Guttenberg, add to our headphone coverage.

Carey Borth currently lives in my hometown of Milwaukee, Wisconsin but spent quite a bit of time in Hollywood as part of the film industry and possesses encyclopedic movie knowledge. Her first article for us, an interview with Roy Orbison's son, appeared in Issue 36. She'll be writing an ongoing column on film soundtracks.

I'd also like to extend special thanks to UK-based Louise Brown, editor of *Terrorizer Magazine*, for providing timely coverage of the Roadburn Festival in the Netherlands.

She filled in at the last minute for our editor, Bob Gendron, who met with an untimely accident less than 20 hours before he was slated to board a plane and head to the Netherlands music gathering.

While there is arguably nothing more metal than broken bones, surgery, and metal plates, wires, and screws—and perhaps nothing more Spinal Tap than Murphy's Law mishaps—

Bob was extremely frustrated to miss out on Roadburn's inimitable offerings and atmosphere. Currently on the mend, he will join me in traveling to Montreal in late June for the city's 32nd Annual Jazz Festival. Hopefully, this time, I won't come home six pounds heavier as a result of hanging out with the bottomless Chicagoan at Montreal's scrumptious cafes, charming bars, myriad Tim Horton's outposts, and French-style restaurants.

As we continue to scour the globe in search of interesting music and gear, we encourage you to do the same. Just keep the broken limbs to a minimum.



X-ray of Bob's fractured ankle. Brutal.

32nd EDITION
JUNE 25 TO JULY 4



présente le
**FESTIVAL
INTERNATIONAL
DE JAZZ
DE MONTREAL**

en collaboration avec

RioTinto Alcan

3000 ARTISTS
10 DAYS OF GREAT MUSIC
30 COUNTRIES
180 INDOOR CONCERTS
350 FREE OUTDOOR SHOWS

**JOIN US FOR THE BIGGEST PARTY
IN THE COOL DOWNTOWN MONTREAL!**

SOME OF THIS YEAR'S HIGHLIGHTS:



**YOUSSEU
N'DOUR**

FRIDAY JUNE 27
MÉTROPOLIS



**TONY
BENNETT**

FRIDAY JULY 1
SALLE WILFRID-PELLETIER, PDA



**NIKKI
YANOFSKY**
and l'orchestre
Métropolitain

SATURDAY JULY 2
SALLE WILFRID-PELLETIER, PDA



DON MCLEAN & AMERICA

SUNDAY JULY 3
SALLE WILFRID-PELLETIER, PDA



**DANIEL
LANOIS**

Black Dub
Opening Act: Leif Vollebakk

MONDAY JULY 4
SALLE WILFRID-PELLETIER, PDA



**MARIANNE
FAITHFULL**

MONDAY JULY 4
THÉÂTRE MAISONNEUVE, PDA

JAZZ ACCOMODATION PACKAGES

More than 20 lodging establishments (from youth hostels to five-star hotels) have enlisted establishments, please visit montrealjazzfest.com/packages



JULY 1 to 3, 2011
Hundreds of handmade guitars for sale
by some of the best luthiers in the world!
montrealguitarshow.com

The most
amazing
guitar boutique ever!

Tickets, informations, newsletters and much more

MONTREALJAZZFEST.COM

infoBell
514 871-1881
1 855 jazzfest
montrealjazzfest.com



NEW CONTRIBUTORS

Carey Borth

Other than win the Indy 500, there isn't much that Carey Borth hasn't done. An intellectual property lawyer that's worked on both sides of the camera, her passion for music and cinema drew the Milwaukee resident to *TONEAudio*, where she brings expert insight into the world of soundtracks. She wrote the column on Roy Orbison in Issue 36 and makes it a point to watch a movie every night.

Louise Brown

Louise Brown is the editor of UK-based tome of extremity, *Terrorizer Magazine*, which each month celebrates the most underground and cult heavy metal. Brown happens to blag her knowledge of black metal rather well, and has therefore kept up the illusion of being an authority on all things grim and true. She actually loves musicals and Fleetwood Mac. But don't tell anyone.

Kevin Gallucci

Kevin Gallucci is a freelance hi-fi writer who, in search of better food, recently returned home to New England after living in London for the past two years. If a new electronic gadget is out there, he has it or is in the process of acquiring it—much to his girlfriend's frustration. He has written for various hi-fi and home-theater publications, including *Hi-fi Choice*, *Sound-Stage*, *HiFi News*, and *Home Cinema Choice*. When he is not glued to his computer researching and writing about gear, he can be found cliff jumping, hiking, working on his car, watching the Ohio State Buckeyes, or planning his next trip.

Paul Rigby

With a name like Rigby you won't be surprised to hear that Paul Rigby went to the same school as Paul McCartney and George Harrison. Which makes McCartney's continued refusal to invite Mr. Rigby around for tea a source of constant confusion and disappointment. In the meantime, he writes regular columns for the UK-based *Record Collector* and tackles hardware and music for *HiFi World*. A passionate analog fan, he likes technology but has Luddite tendencies: planes should have propellers, the best movies are in black & white, words should be read between two covers, beer should be in a bottle, and portable music should be on cassette.

Christiaan Westgeest

We are honored to have Christiaan Westgeest cover the world-renowned Roadburn music festival for us in his home country of the Netherlands. He prefers that his actions do the talking but the curious-minded are welcome to explore his as his website at www.westgeestphotography.nl.



Beavis and Butt-Head Bobbleheads

©2005 MTVN All rights reserved
www.necaonline.com



"But Sir, that Rolling Stones box set I told you to buy is off the chart."

PUBLISHER Jeff Dorgay

EDITOR Bob Gendron

ART DIRECTOR Jean Dorgay

MUSIC VISIONARIES Terry Currier
Tom Caselli

STYLE EDITOR Scott Tetzlaff

SENIOR CONTRIBUTOR Ben Fong-Torres

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS Bailey S. Barnard
Lawrence Devoe
Andy Downing
Anne Farnsworth
Kevin Gallucci
Steve Guttenberg
Jacob Heilbrunn
Ken Kessler
Jim Macnie
Mark Marcantonio
Ken Mercereau
Jerold O'Brien
Paul Rigby
Michele Rundgren
Todd Sageser
Jaan Uhelszki

UBER CARTOONIST Liza Donnelly

ADVERTISING Jeff Dorgay

WEBSITE bloodymonster.com

ON THE COVER:

Godflesh at Roadburn
Photo by Christiaan Westgeest

tonepublications.com

Editor Questions and
Comments:

tonepub@yahoo.com
800.432.4569

© 2011 TONE MAGAZINE, LLC
All rights reserved.



Neil Young

Chicago Theatre
Chicago, Illinois
May 6, 2011
By Bob Gendron

Floors vibrated, metal chairs rattled, and structural beams shook at the first of a two-night stand by Neil Young at the intimate Chicago Theatre in early May. Such was the level of tonal resonance, low-frequency extension, and decibel-emboldened tenacity summoned by the iconic artist on just a handful of guitars—two very familiar to longtime fans. Unaccompanied, Young seemed intent not to journey through the past but rearrange it—as well as confront the present via recent material that stands among his most vital.

Several years removed from a near-fatal brain aneurysm, Young has witnessed several close friends and associates pass away over the last two years, chief among them film producer/collaborator L.A. Johnson and close musical companion Ben Keith. Young is quoted as saying that, without Keith, he is no longer able to play 70% of his repertoire with a band. Perhaps that explains his decision to go it alone on 2010's superb *Le Noise* and on several recent outings. Yet the reasons probably also relate to Young's way of coming to terms with the personal losses and surrounding world. The Canadian native channeled frustration, mourning, and conflict through sound and verse

throughout the hyper-focused 110-minute set, during which Young, in typical fashion, rarely spoke to the near-capacity crowd.

Roaming around a dimly lit stage in a white sports coat, jeans, and Panama-style hat, Young remains an introverted figure. He surveyed available instruments with cautious consideration, rubbing his fingers along the body of a grand piano before taking a seat and spying his pump organ as if it were a deity before climbing up a short row of stairs and launching into a meditative "After the Gold the Rush." Young's pensive motions made for understated drama. Yet they also came across as slightly exaggerated. The show's meticulous nature and serious mood were never in doubt. Young needn't have slowly wandered about like a pensive drifter to drive the points across.

Still, if further slowing the pace and engaging in spiritual communion with a cigar store Indian perched onstage served the enigmatic artist—upon entering the venue, at Young's request, patrons were informed to refrain from shooting photos even with cell phones—the introspective moments never derailed momentum. While no stranger to raucous fun and celebratory irony, on this evening, Young held fast to a severe presentation that underlined the sober themes in his songs. Tonight was no place for "Welfare Mothers," "Sedan Delivery," "Roll Another Number," or, thankfully, any of his well-meaning tunes about hybrid automobiles.

At the onset, the 65-year-old stamped standbys such as

"My My, Hey Hey (Out of the Blue)" and the country-tinged "Tell Me Why" with a more pronounced hesitation and susceptibility. He carefully balanced forlorn harmonica fills with restrained acoustic guitar passages, his lanky body a loose Jell-O mold of wobbling knees, swaying legs, and bobbling torso. For "Helpless," Young painted rural pictures with bucolic poetry and mellow chords. As blue-hued lighting glowed behind him, the gorgeous imagery both corresponded to the "blue, blue windows behind the stars" lyric and invoked Marc Chagall's "America Windows"—a masterpiece located less than a mile away at the Art Institute of Chicago. Young also performed the unreleased "You Never Call" unplugged, and in spite of a narrative that mentioned the Detroit Red Wings and In-N-Out Burger by name, steel-tinted textures and apparent allusions to Johnson and Keith lent comparable gravitas.

Weight—in the emotional, voluminous, and responsible senses of the term—guided Young's progression. The most spectacular moments arrived via electric guitar, his tool of choice. Akin to the treatments employed on *Le Noise*, his Old Black (Les Paul) and White Falcon (Gretsch) guitars were filtered through distortion effects and related pedals, yielding huge soundscapes that seemed to infinitely extend and seldom decay. Rhythms stacked upon one another, each swipe of Young's hand to the strings unleashing torrents of crackling thunder, rolling feedback, and booming resonance.

Heard amidst such sonic constructs, "Down By the River" wore an even deadlier mask, "Rumblin'" proved true to its name, "Ohio" recoiled with bitter disgust, and "Peaceful Valley Boulevard" flowed with a menacing fervor targeted at unforgivable ignorance. Similarly, despite its lively Spanish-flavored intro, "Love and War" conveyed foreboding feelings, the song's piercing truisms and horrors ringing out alongside guitar notes that hummed, moaned, and exploded. Young abruptly stopped and shifted tempos, adding to the material's edginess and upping dynamic contrast. In fine form, his hallmark soulfully quivering tenor voice warmly complemented several paeans to love ("Sign of Love," "I Believe In You") but refused to shy away from irritation at everything from environmental ruin to corrupt politics to distorted history to himself.

On the autobiographical "Hitchhiker," Young turned his never-sleeping rust loose, the subterranean guitar riffs corroded with terrifying noise, the tune marching on even as the singer injected percussive breaks into the violent arrangement. By the time Young concluded with the persuasive "Walk With Me," the dark clouds began to clear, and the frontman, as if finally purged if not entirely content, sought solace in friendship and faith.

Femi Kuti and Positive Force

Metro

Chicago, Illinois

April 30, 2011

By Bob Gendron

Photo by Simon Phipps

Femi Kuti's professional fate seemed determined the day he was born. The eldest son of legendary Afrobeat musician and revolutionary activist Fela Kuti—a cultural giant whose unparalleled career and wild life are the subjects of the smash Broadway play “Fela!” and whose enormous, largely indispensable output is currently being reissued on vinyl—Femi joined his father's sprawling band as a teenager, although not entirely willingly. The chosen descendent initially eyed college and verbally sparred with his notoriously egotistical patriarch before finally settling in and, akin to Fela, developing a demanding work ethic and perfectionist mentality that helped the 48-year-old Nigerian native emerge as one of the leading world-music artists of his or any other generation.

During an appearance at Chicago's Metro in late April, Femi both honored and extended his father's legacy with an invigorating, defiant, and uplifting 135-minute concert that acknowledged the past while fixating its proverbial eye on the future. Backed by Positive Force—a colorful and spirited 13-piece band that included a sizzling brass section, syncopated percussion, and resounding vocal support—the vocalist treated feverish songs as righteous, spirit-buoying celebrations. Maximizing group interplay and keeping close tabs on one another during abrupt tempo changes, the ensemble ignored conventional lengths, expanding grooves and bringing rhythms to a boil before allowing them to simmer over as if spicy soups being heated over a flame.

While he dabbled on saxophone and keyboards, Femi primarily functioned as singer and bandleader, his animated motions and incessant energy provoking the instrumentalists to stack layer after layer of beats, notes, and fills on top of trance-inducing foundations. Akin to his father's art, Femi's creations came with a strong message—many, actually, which took the forms of chants, declarations, challenges, calls to arms, and protests. Widely diverging from Westernized culture's sanitized conventions of remaining politically correct and/or humbly quiet, the frontman opted for an outspoken approach that witnessed him name names, consequences be damned. Like fat pigs on a spit, government leaders and corporate honchos got roasted, Femi taking aim at issues of corruption, poverty, greed, and empty promises that corrode his homeland and plague many other nations.

Heavily drawing from the excellent, recent *Africa for Africa*—Femi's fiercest, rawest album in years—the provocateur rang the alarm bell of change via soulful tunes such as “Make We Remember,” on which goals of solidarity, dignity, equality, and unity were shouted out as if they were the firm demands of a striking teamster's union. “Bad Government” bubbled like an automatic coffee maker brewing caffeine fixes in the early morning hours, the warm organs and marching horn passages spiking the presentation with a call-and-response enthusiasm and affording the song a greater degree of persuasion than that on record. Similarly, Femi and Positive Force regularly blew through constraints they obey in the studio, often stretching arrangements well beyond the 10-minute mark while slaving to the groove.

Indeed, with a trio of joyous dancers dressed in traditional African garb and a battery of bold horn refrains, pop-centric hooks, and blues-rock shuffles at his disposal, Femi's music never lost sight of its optimistic purpose and loose-limbed dance structures. His words often addressed despair, tyranny, lies, and fraud, yet he and his band's collective amalgamation of funk, traditional African music, jazz, and rock conveyed resistance, triumph, and hope—all serving as reminders of music's universal language and communicative power. And that's precisely what made Femi so potent onstage. With much of the planet impacted by natural disasters and oppressive rule, Femi's sociopolitical missives and feet-scurrying rhythms transcended geographical borders and language boundaries, the net effect a jamboree that no authority could ever dream of putting down.

LIVE MUSIC

2011 Roadburn FESTIVAL

Tilburg, Holland April 14-16, 2011

Benchmark



DAC1 HDR

Stereo Pre-Amp with Remote Control
DAC / Headphone Amp / USB

“...a great all around piece.”
Tone Audio

“Damn close to a perfect piece of equipment.”
The Audio Critic

800-262-4675
BenchmarkMedia.com

Made in
Syracuse, NY, U.S.A.

LIVE MUSIC

Beyond Sight and Sound

By Louise Brown

Photography by
Christiaan Westgeest

Located in Noord-Brabant, a Southern province of the Netherlands, Tilburg is a cultural hive of Europe. Home to the jazz festival Stranger Than Paranoia, the world-music celebration Festival Mundial, and the renowned avant-garde arts expo Incubate, the city—with its myriad of street cafes and bars—is also home to the 013 Popcentre, and every April, the Roadburn Festival.

Walk down the pedestrian sidewalk, through the city center, and you'll find 013, an inviting albeit ominous venue, its black rubber-clad architecture complete with actual CDs worked into the façade, an outward sign of its dedication to music. The space has hosted artists from Nick Cave to Ice Cube, and invites 230,000 patrons through its doors every year. But in spring, there is a sonic awakening over a weekend, a blossoming of structured riff passages and discordant audio experimentation to which 3000 fans of doom, blues rock, and heavy metal flock.

LIVE MUSIC

Hailed as a pilgrimage for lovers of the riff, Roadburn Festival, which was set up in 1999 and boasted Cathedral and Orange Goblin among its initial lineup, has 13 years on become a Mecca for music lovers. Roadburn has since invited some of the world's most respected artists to perform across its four stages, whether it's the stoner rock of Monster Magnet, neofolk of 2008 curator Current 93, Norwegian black metal of Enslaved, occult death metal of Britain's Grave Miasma, traditional Scandinavian folk of Wardruna, or droning doom metal of this year's curators Sunn O))),. The acts might be vastly different, but there is one common goal at Roadburn: a passion for music that transcends genres and boundaries.

The festival also breaks down the boundaries between fan and artist. Stroll the main streets and you might see Japanese noise master Keiji Haino talking to friends, or Scott Kelly of post-hardcore duo Neurosis enjoying a glass of Belgian beer. Or, you could stumble across members of Canadian prog troupe Blood Ceremony as they watch Sabbath Assembly from the crowd and join English doom brigade Ramesses as they take advantage of the Netherlands' cannabis laws. There is no VIP bar; no "us and them" division.

(continued)



Just a joint purpose to soak up every riff, every drum roll, every prolonged chord, and every soaring vocal.

Each year, the Roadburn billing becomes more and more beguiling, with bands tripping over themselves to get a sought-after slot. In 2001, eighty bands tread the boards over four stages. There's the gargantuan main stage at the 013, with its shimmering acoustics and enviable capacity for a heady light show, the latter a common sight during the weekend's artistically minded festivities.

The smaller Green Room usually sees desperate fans spilling out to into the corridors that host a bar filled with Belgian brews and some of the friendliest staff you'll ever encounter at a music fest. Meanwhile, the Bat Cave is a no-go unless you've prepared an hour in advance to get inside. Cave by name, cave by nature: If your must-see band is playing there, be forewarned that if 100 other fans share your thoughts, you might be out of luck. But if you find yourself amongst the throng, you'll be treated to intimate and intense performances that often become the stuff of legend. In 2008, Boris played to a packed room here, and three years later, it's one of those historic moments that 1000 people claim to have witnessed. *(continued)*



INTRODUCING THE NEW TOTEM ELEMENT SERIES

The Totem Element Series is in perfect balance between art and science. Streamlined for all musical genre, it conveys conviction and honesty, while offering enormous scale and presence. Revolutionary in its conception, the Totem Element Series is a true evolutionary step in sound design.

Discover yours at totemacoustic.com

TOTEM  METAL
ELEMENT SERIES

LIVE MUSIC

In 2011, sets by In Solitude, Imaad Wasif, and Wolf People are destined to go down in the same annals of infamy.

Since 2010, Roadburn has also taken over the modern surroundings of the Midi Theatre, normally home to passing theatre troupes and stand-up comedy. Its lush sound is a perfect home for the subtle acoustics of drone lords Earth, Finnish experimentalists Circle, and stunning closers Uf-fomammut. No wonder this festival sells out in 15 minutes.

As 2011's event begins, it's the Midi that causes crowds to buzz. Rumours abound that you won't be able to get into the space unless you queue two hours prior. The calm panic arrives amidst myriad whispering, as fans are asking, 'Who are they?' Such excitement proves that the hype band of the festival, and year, is the mysterious ensemble Ghost. They're Swedish. Maybe Italian. No one is quite sure and hearsay claims that, beneath the macabre black robes, the musicians are all members of underground death metal bands. One thing is certain: Whoever they are, they are dabbling in the dark arts. With a menacing manifesto that claims to use pop music to entice the naïve to the dark, the band takes the template of Fleetwood Mac and Blue Oyster Cult, gives it a hard rock makeover a la Black Sabbath, and 10,000 record sales later, the group is worryingly close to its goal. It's true. The devil does have all the best tunes. *(continued)*





All Tomorrows Parties events made it their trademark feature, but now, bands playing classic albums in their entirety are a festival staple. Roadburn is no different, and many of the acts on the weekend's bill give fans exactly what they want, song for song. But it's the industrial marvel of Godflesh that stops lovers of discord in their tracks. Long hailed as a masterpiece, and taking its rightful place alongside Sabbath, Judas Priest, and Led Zeppelin as yet another groundbreaking work of art that gives its composers a glimmer of hope in the desperate desolation of Birmingham, UK, *Streetcleaner* is performed in the same order as it was originally heard on first-press scratchy vinyl in 1989. From the somewhat shaky start of "Like Rats" to the knee-buckling "Suction," this is a knockout event for fans of all the sub-genres of extreme music that Godflesh main architect Justin Broadrick helped birth—whether the style is deemed to be industrial, grind-core, post-rock, or anything in between.

With a painstaking devotion, the line-up for Roadburn is a bubbling cauldron of wonder, each band on the bill adding another layer to the sonic magic. And by inviting a curator every year since 2008 to bring their offering to the altar, the festival will forever stay fresh and exciting. *(continued)*



This year sees Seattle's amplified monks, Sunn O))), cast their wizard's spell over Tilburg and bring some lead weight to the lighter fare with a thunderous mix of deafening doom, monumental bass, and of course, their own brand of droning druidry. By resurrecting the dead in Winter, the lauded doom tyrants from New York, whose sole album *Into Darkness* changed the face of extremity in 1990, Sunn O))) scores a goal for the field of crust-ridden, bile-spitting metal. But the curators also add sugar to the spice with the sweet country blues of Jesse Sykes, going great lengths to keep Roadburn's eclecticism in check.

Another reunited band at the beck and call of Stephen O'Malley and Greg Anderson—Sunn O)))'s leaders and the robed masters of ceremony—is Corrosion Of Conformity, the North Carolina trio that, like many alternative acts of the period, surprisingly found itself on a major label in the 90s. Pared down to core members Reed Mullins, Woody Weatherman, and Mike Dean, the group delights in going back to punkish basics, churning out classics from its 1985 sophomore album *Animosity* while the collective enthusiasm rubs off on a crowd desperate for simple chord progressions on a day that is all about the avant-garde.

(continued)

music millennium

a place where the music & people still matter




#9 on the List of Best Record Stores in the Country



One of America's Best Record Stores

www.musicmillennium.com

3158 E. Burnside
Portland, Oregon 97214
Phone: (503) 231-8926



With a 20-minute dirge heralding Sunn O)))'s arrival, many waiting to watch this main event get bored, or tinnitus, or whatever comes first. They set off to watch the likes of textural tinker Caspar Brotzmann or Canadian future thrashers Voivod. But eventually, Sunn O))) resonates something other than guitar feedback, and the result is the elixir between noise and nuance. Sunn O))) gets caught up in smoke, literally, with dry ice filling the room to the same degree as its riffs. Those not wearing ear protection, beware. But it's not all decibel-shattering devastation. When the band brings it down a notch, it happens upon a bewitching mix of drama and exhilaration, especially when long-time collaborator Attila Csihar and Japanese noise icon Keiji Haino join together for a bizarre, electrifying duet.

Death metal, drone, doom, psychedelic, rock, blues: If a genre exists, it's welcome under the Roadburn banner, and even genres that don't even yet have names seem to crystallize in Tilburg. Chicago-based indie imprint Thrill Jockey took a risk when signing indefinable four-piece Liturgy, but word of mouth leads to a gathering crowd to spy the New Yorkers open up the Bat Cave on Sunday afternoon. *(continued)*

Liturgy

LIVE MUSIC


Deconstructing black metal from its caustic Norse roots and putting it through a filter where words like “burst-beats,” “hypnotic abstraction,” and “polyvalent alchemy” are bandied about seem to make so much sense when describing the group’s experimental take on a genre that was never meant to be dissected by music students or played by people named Tyler or Hunter. Nonetheless, 20 years later almost to the day that a man called Dead from a band called Mayhem took his life and, in the process shone a glaring torch on an underground musical movement, black metal is cast once again into the spotlight. And although Liturgy splits opinions, it begs the question about the next evolution of such a fascinating form of aural anarchy.

With the festival drawing to a sorry close, highs (fighting through the crowd to get into the Green Room for jazz weirdos Yazuka) and lows (a disappointing and long-awaited Shrinebuilder set, the only bad sound mix of the weekend) abound as the last day crawls to its zenith. Finally, Michael Gira—flanked by *(continued)*



Bowers & Wilkins

The origin of true sound



One material sums up our uncompromising quest for perfection in sound reproduction more than any other. Diamond. A unique combination of lightness and rigidity, it's the ultimate tweeter dome material. So when we were designing our flagship 800 Series Diamond reference speakers, we knew

that nothing else would do. Now, for the first time ever, you can experience the unparalleled clarity of diamond in every speaker in the range. True sound. Made for recording studios. And now available everywhere else.

www.bowers-wilkins.com



LIVE MUSIC

musical minions that gather in a semi-circle around him like worshippers of a bizarre sect—strums his first chord and immediately, contrasting feelings of sadness (that the festival is almost done) and relief (taking a breath after anticipating such a legendary band) collide.

As Gira screams for Jesus Christ to “come down” he, himself, is messianic in his demeanour. No disharmonious noise-for-noise's sake, no experimental rambling, just an ebb and flow of melody and transcendental melancholy. Take the best of Roadburn—the width and breadth of bands who played, the fans, the hangouts, the good beer, the even better weed, the art exhibitions, the film screenings, the conversations with strangers that shared your most obscure musical obsession, the friendly staff, the dedicated crew that made all this happen. Swans condense it all into a musical whole that makes the ensemble worthy of the headline slot, and forces everyone to start to countdown the days until April 2012, when they can do it all again. ●

Current Releases

By the TONE Staff

Damian Abraham's intense, throaty voice has emerged as one of the most riveting instruments in music. His robust pipes are a human bullhorn, his volatile chords bulging on steroids—each blustery syllable emanating from the stout frontman's mouth coming across like the barked orders of an iron-lunged drill sergeant. Of course, Abraham doesn't sing in the traditional manner. He growls, yowls, huffs, rants, and bellows, the gruff timbre an inherent charm, the violent outpouring sonic flares that indicate his band isn't putting on any pretense.

And so it is with *David Comes to Life*, Fucked Up's latest and most ambitious rule-violating statement to date. A rock opera, the 78-minute-plus set is at once sweeping, grand, determined, confusing, heady, brawling, sprawling, confounding, and often brilliant. Experienced start-to-finish, it leaves bruises and threatens to wear out the listener with a panoply of characters, plots, changes, and breathless urgency. The Toronto collective's triple-guitar attack allows the band to whip songs into frenzies, drop clusters of counterpoint fills and leads, and slam tempos against the wall, building up heads of steam that charge ahead with reckless abandon. Riffs alternately slash and burn ("Serve Me Right"), race into the stratosphere ("Queen of Hearts"), hit with balled-fist force ("Inside A Frame"), and buck akin to an untamed bull busting out of the gate at a rodeo ("Remember My Name").

Such controlled variation and tonal differentiation underscore the foundation of an album bent on upending expectations and shattering preconceived notions. Fucked Up has operated outside boundaries for its entire ten-year existence; take a look at the group's name, which isn't for showy effect.

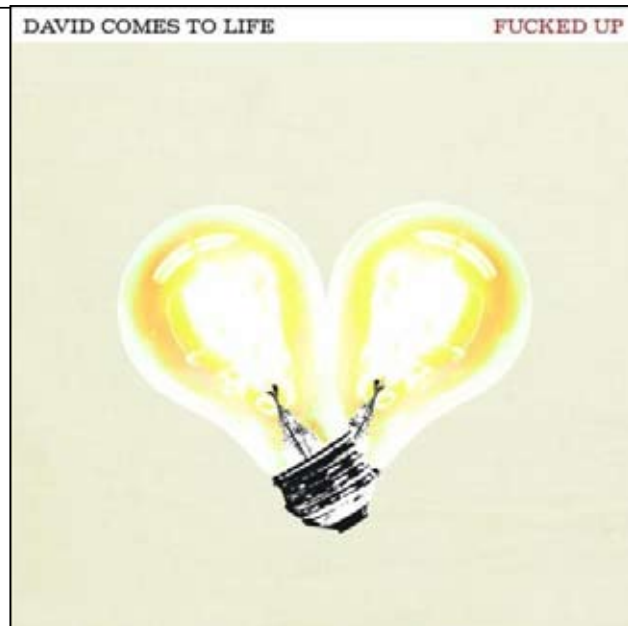


© Photo by Daniel Boud

Ostensibly a hardcore band, the sextet long ago blew away the limiting stylistic trappings associated with the genre, imbibing in everything from extremely lengthy jams to flute-driven passages on EPs, seven-inch singles, and two prior LPs that provoke both musically and lyrically. *David Comes to Life* is certain to invite the typical blow-back associated with taking risks, the empty sort that accuses a group of selling out and betraying the sensibility of true punk. The quantity and quality of the melodies, catchiness of the anthemic hooks, tuneful stomps, and highly professional multi-tracked production veritably invite it. Underground credibility and coolness aside, few bands are currently making more meaningful, cerebral, or invigorating noise.

Like most concept efforts, *David Comes to*

Life revels in complexity. The four-act narrative's principal characters include David, a lightbulb-factory worker; Veronica, his love; Vivian, the proverbial "lady in the lake"; and Octavio, the story's appointed narrator who also figures into the plot. The latter, which involves myriad twists and turns—and demands a close reading of the lyrics—unfolds as a tale about loneliness, love, fleeting happiness, despair, defeat, and, ultimately, redemption and hope. Abraham handles the male protagonists and gets assistance from the Cults' Madeline Follin and several other participants to play the female roles. While intermittent, these softer, gentler, calming voices offer a welcome contrast to Abraham's masculine roar, lending a floating atmospheric element to a record that has just about everything. *(continued)*



Fucked Up

David Comes to Life
Matador, CD or 2LP

Indeed, the 18-track double-album occasionally tries to do too much. Yet for all its flaws, most minor, Fucked Up's colossal album consistently engages with aggregate arrangements, bigger-than-life personality, piercing one-liners, and ferocious energy. "When he raises the trumpet to his mouth," Abraham thunders on "A Slanted Tone," before proclaiming "he tells the choir when to sing," the paint-peeling song's centrifugal spin fueling its bull-in-a-china-shop aggression. Similarly, "Under My Nose" refuses to let up, glimmering as the group's momentum somersaults forward. Not all is rip and tear.

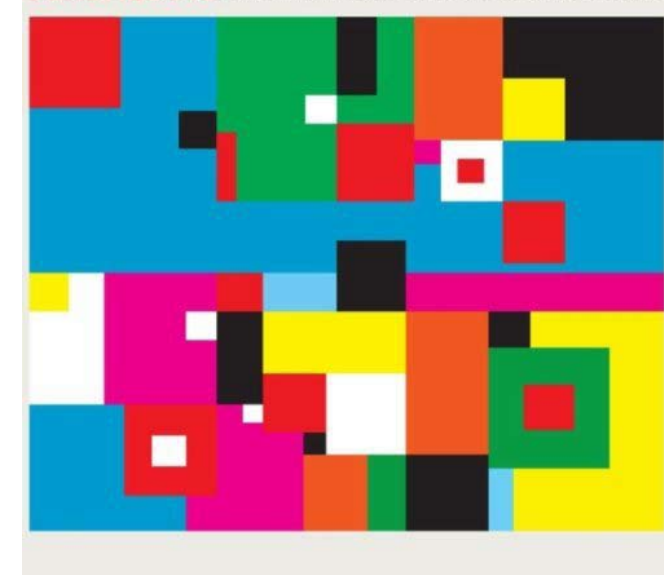
Structured choral maneuvers trigger an avalanche of drama on "Turn the Season." Abraham's impassioned tones—his theatrical performances convey fluctuating emotions in the same manner an actor's diction expresses a character's physiological state—project pained conditions on the crunchy "Truth I Know," abetted with glossy pop refrains and ringing treble guitar notes that conjure sympathy. High-voltage blues provides a platform for rhymed couplets and metaphorical pronouncements on the boogie-based "Ship of Fools," while psychedelic effects send "I Was There" spiraling into the cosmos. Aptly, the song opens the Fourth Act, at which point the protagonist begins to find enlightenment.

Concluding their chronological progression and emotional journey with "Lights Go Up," Abraham and company exit with upbeat swagger, dancing not to the end of days but to the rebirth of love and life. —**Bob Gendron**



© Photo by Phil Andelman

BEASTIEBOYS HOTSAUCECOMMITTEEPARTTWO



Beastie Boys

Hot Sauce Committee Part Two
Capitol, CD or 2LP

Despite sitting comfortably in middle age—the hip-hop trio's youngest member, Adam "Ad-Roc" Horowitz, is now 44—the Beastie Boys rip into their first album in seven years as if only a few short months have passed since the crew released the now-classic */// Communication*, which turns 20 in just three short years.

Delayed nearly 18 months while the now-fully-recovered Adam "MCA" Yauch underwent treatment for salivary-gland cancer ("How you feeling MCA? Well I feel alright" he rhymes on the robotic "Nonstop Disco Powerpack"), the record finds the longtime

mates still embracing their hip-hop "Three Stooges" personas—from the increasingly gruff MCA (Moe) to the goofball rhymes of class clown Michael "Mike D" Diamond (Curly), who playfully compares himself to a Jewish Brad Pitt on "Long Burn the Fire."

But even though some of the Beasties' lyrical references sound like mid-90s holdovers ("Be kind, rewind"; "Like a Big Mac attack on your gut"; "I'll make you sick like a Kenny Rogers Roaster"), the music consistently points forward. The MCs rhyme atop punk-ish, Ramones-via-Run-DMC backdrops ("Lee Majors Come Again"), steel drum-flecked Caribbean grooves (the Santigold-guesting "Don't Play No Game That I Can't Win"), and rumbling digital passages that sound something like Transformers breakdancing (album standout "Too Many Rappers," which finds guest rapper Nas dropping his best

verse in years). "Nonstop Disco Powerpack," a song whose title sounds like it was translated from Japanese ("Happy America Disco Baseball!"), flashes even further into the future, the rappers' voices breaking and digitizing like humanoids reverting back to robot form.

As one might expect, the Beastie Boys have greatly matured since breaking through with "(You Gotta) Fight for Your Right (To Party!)" back in the mid-80s. Offstage, the trio is known for trumpeting political causes—countless urban hippies adorn their Prius bumpers with "Free Tibet" stickers due to the Beasties' persistence. And in recent years, the group has tried to put some distance between it and some of its more hooligan-ish early tunes. No longer does anyone get lyrically sodomized with a Wiffle Ball bat in live performances of "Paul Revere."

Fortunately, *Hot Sauce Committee Part Two* doesn't fall prey to any middle-aged tisk-tisking. Instead, the three pass the mic like old-school MCs, trading playful boasts (on competing rappers: "I put 'em through a strainer like macaroni, 'cause the shit sounds cheesy!") and weaving together an increasingly dense web of pop-culture references (Wolf Blitzer holograms, Operation, Crocs, Bob Dylan's "Subterranean Homesick Blues"). Besides, how deep can things really get on an album with song titles like "Funky Donkey" and "Crazy Ass Shit?" Thankfully, when it comes to the music, the Beasties are still more about getting bodies moving than trying to expand minds.

—**Andy Downing**



The most extraordinary museum you'll ever hear.

Enter MIM and discover an incomparable new experience that will delight your senses. With more than 3,000 instruments and cultural treasures on display, you'll enjoy music from every country in the world using the latest audio and visual technology. See people playing their native instruments. Attend a live performance in the state-of-the-art MIM Music Theater. Even make a little music of your own.

It's a fun, new way to discover the powerful and unifying force of the world's music.

MIM
MUSICAL INSTRUMENT MUSEUM

www.theMIM.org | 480.478.6000

4725 East Mayo Blvd., Phoenix, AZ 85050

Corner of Tatum & Mayo Blvds., just south of the 101 in Phoenix

HOURS: Mon., Tue., Wed., Sat. 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Thu., Fri. 9 a.m. – 9 p.m. | Sun. 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.

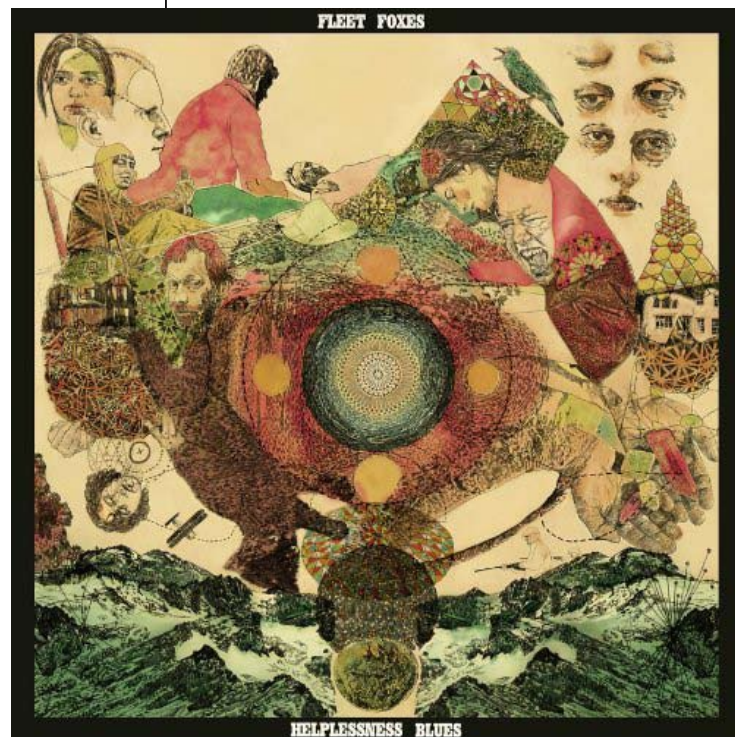
MUSIC



© Photo by Sean Pecknold

“So now I’m older,” confesses Fleet Foxes leader Robin Pecknold on “Montezuma,” opening the band’s anticipated sophomore record with a sentiment that largely informs the intelligently crafted, complexly arranged, and gorgeously executed album. Indeed, feelings and realities of being older seemingly consume the sweet-timbered singer-songwriter, who uses *Helplessness Blues* as a platform for soul-searching, questioning personal identity, reflecting on life purposes, and contemplating existence.

Artists have long ruminated on these weighty matters, but one of the myriad reasons that make Fleet Foxes unique is that at no point does the group invoke self-pity, resort to cloying earnestness, or complain about fame as it raises deep questions that often yield no resolute answers.



Fleet Foxes

Helplessness Blues
Sub Pop, CD and 2LP

If the Seattle sextet had any detractors after releasing a 2008 full-length debut that landed on most critics' Top Ten lists and staging shows that proved its natural harmonizing absolutely ethereal in scope, its latest creation should elevate the band to household-name status. Such is the spectral beauty, cohesive chemistry, and golden-hued ambition contained within.

Whether referred to as roots-rock, folk-rock, or the hipster-coined beardo-rock, the last several years have witnessed an inundation of bucolic music performed by bands that yearn for passed times and bygone environments. Mumford and Sons, Dawes, The Head and the Heart, and Blitzen Trapper are among the acts whose rustic fare evokes simpler times and pastoral pleasures while offering needed relief from a technology-dominant culture that's far removed from the tranquil, down-home rootsiness conjured by acoustic instruments and easygoing singing. Fleet Foxes stand apart from their contemporaries and followers due to a

basic fact: As demonstrated on this filler-free 12-song set, they are plainly superior, deeper, and more soulful than their peers. It's a truth borne out every year in professional sports. Championship-winning teams claim immense talent and advanced skill sets. For all its romanticism, sheer will takes you so far.

Whereas the band's influences shone brightly on its debut, they recede further into the background on *Helplessness Blues*. Shades of Simon & Garfunkel, Crosby, Stills & Nash, and the Incredible String Band give way to a mix that's more original, involved, and modern. Fleet Foxes occupy an indefinable territory that both bridges and honors the Laurel Canyon past while taking the former period's earthy, intricate, and natural elements into a present that delves further into go-for-broke blends of gospel, baroque, Americana, rock, psychedelic, and, on "The Shrine/An Argument," even avant-garde jazz strains. The amount of time and care the group invested in its craft will be immediately evident to even the most casual listener; more than a year in the making, and captured at multiple studios, *Helplessness Blues* comes on like record on which every note is carefully considered but never overly polished or overwrought. It's a difficult line to navigate, and yet, Fleet Foxes and co-producer Phil Ek convert their Swiss-wristwatch-precise obsessiveness into transcendent art.

"So, guess I got old," vocally shrugs Pecknold on "Lorelai," continuing to explore a topic that occupies him from the start and stays with him until the concluding "Grown Ocean," a stomping upbeat tune that reveals glimpses of unvarnished optimism and finds him declaring "I'm as old as the mountains." Amidst the group's

arching heaven-bound harmonies, delicate fingerpicking, booming drums, and majestic melodies, Pecknold engages in blunt self-evaluation, his confessional meditations on uncertainty, withdrawal, and responsibility contributing to an ebb-and-flow of swelling choral tides and three-dimensional textures. Songs pour into diverse structural molds, ranging from suites ("The Plains/Bitter Dancer," which commences with layered vocals that sound plucked from the heights of an European cathedral ceiling and unexpectedly transitions, via flute passages, into an uptempo romp) to concise, close-up, solitary hymnals ("Blue Spotted Tail").

Purity maintains as important a role as needle-pointed guitar motifs and immediate, wide-open production. Slight pauses, reverb baths, and ornate flourishes don't decorate as much as flavor and reinforce existing patterns. Such detailing enhances the woody percussion and gypsy sway on "Bedouin Dress," underscores the dips and dives in Pecknold's vocals during "Someone You'd Admire," and allows "Sim Sala Bim" to emerge with equal parts orchestral flair and private abandon. And it's the latter—as experienced through Pecknold and Co.'s aspirations, hallucinations, desires, and innermost thoughts—that spikes *Helplessness Blues* with the mystical intensity and engaging hypnotism of a fever dream.

"All these voices I'll someday have turned off then/And I will see you when I've woken/I'll be so happy just to have spoken/I'll have so much to tell you about it then," Pecknold tenders towards the conclusion of "Grown Ocean," singing like a drifter in no rush to awaken from his sleep. —**Bob Gendron**



Okkervil River

I Am Very Far
Jagjaguwar, CD or LP

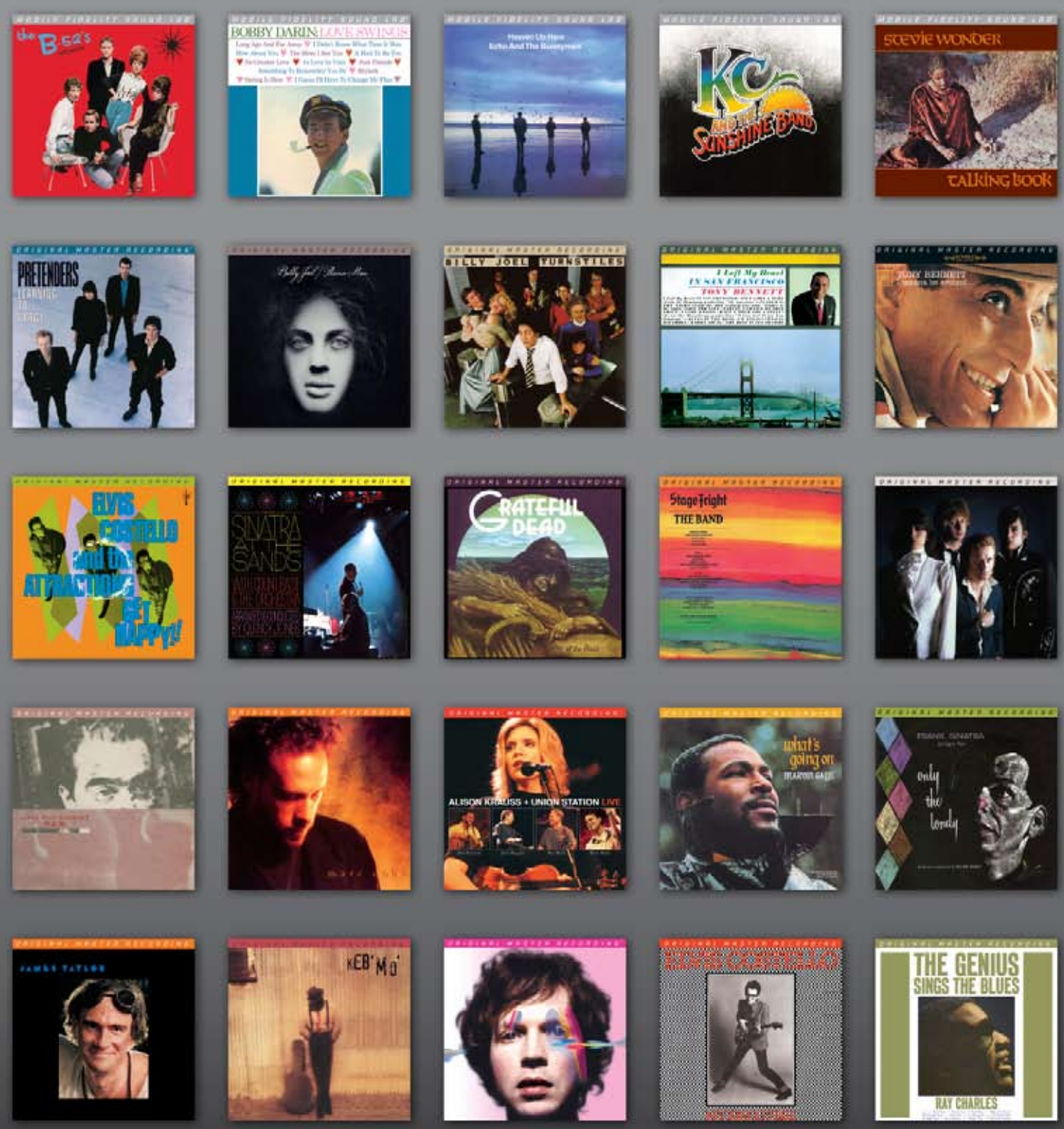
Okkervil River and its lit-prof-looking frontman Will Sheff have never lacked for ambition. So while contemporaries like the Decemberists have started to reign things in, the Austin-based crew drifts even further from its NPR-approved roots on its sixth full-length, *I Am Very Far*, a weary, ambiguous, dense, refined, and fragmented epic of an album.

At times during recording, Sheff amassed a small army of musicians in the studio, gathering two drummers, two pianists, two bassists, and seven guitarists. The immersive effect can be heard on sprawling cuts like "Wake and Be Fine," which gradually builds to an orchestral swell even as it threatens to come apart at the seams. (*continued*)



The Original Audiophile Record Label.
Still Producing the World's Finest
LPs, SACDs and 24K Gold CDs.

www.mofi.com



MUSIC



© Photo by Alexandra Valenti

Musically, the album finds Okkervil River marrying a range of pretty sounds (sweeping string sections, glassine piano, deep-breathing tuba) to more rustic, potentially ugly flourishes. The drums on “The Valley,” for one, rumble in like a cavalcade of beefy men keeping a beat on thick oak tables in some ancient beer hall. Equally jarring is a squealing, fractured solo that interrupts “Pirates,” a spindly sound the band created by re-winding and fast-forwarding a boombox. On “White Shadow Waltz,” all such aspects surface at once, a string section sweeping through in a graceful waltz as drums stutter and trip, clipping toes as they fumble their way through the dancehall.

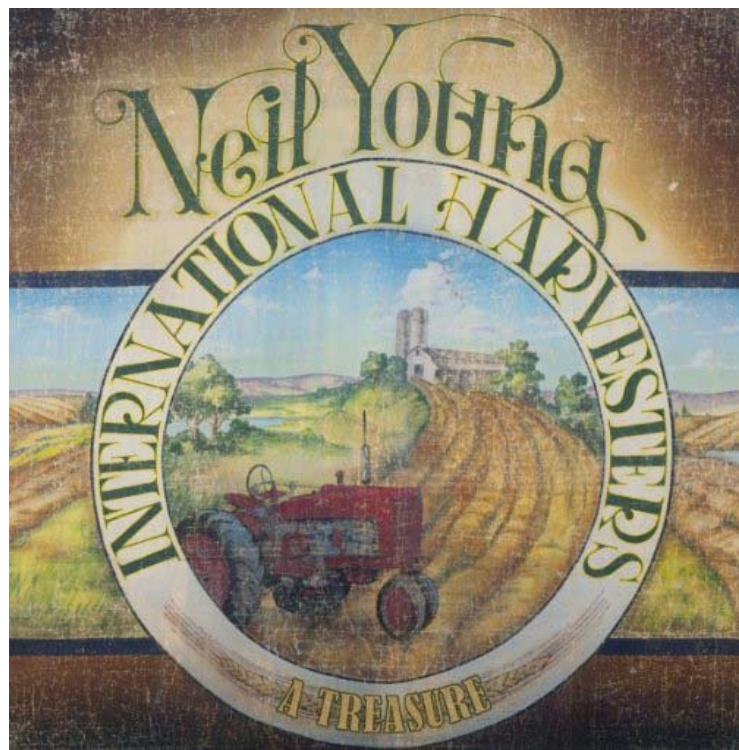
In the past, Sheff specialized in plot-driven tunes, turning out eulogies to deceased porn stars (“Savannah Smiles,” written for Shannon “Savannah” Wilsey) and spinning detail-rich, noir-ish tales that unfolded like would-be film scenes (“Our Life Is Not A Movie Or Maybe”). This time around, things are far more obscure. Rather than being built into a coherent narrative, Sheff’s elusive lyrics flash by like images from a horrific slideshow: blue skies the shade of “a dead bachelor’s tongue,” a child’s toy as red as “flayed pigs,” bloody black gunshot wounds.

Perhaps working with psych-rock pioneer Roky Erickson—Sheff produced Erickson’s

excellent comeback album *True Love Cast Out All Evil*—ferreted out the once-linear singer’s inner Dali. But even amidst the surreal nightmarish flood, unexpectedly refined bits of wisdom rise from the murk. “We’re cut adrift,” Sheff announces in his unsteady, love-it-or-hate-it bray on “We Need A Myth.” “We need a mass uplift.” Set alongside the singer’s most cryptic utterings (“It’s just nine hands wiping a white shadow off of the walls,” he exhales on the dark fairy tale “White Shadow Waltz”), the lyrical couplet stands out like a torch on the midnight horizon—a prescient assessment of our disconnected, doldrums-driven modern age.

—Andy Downing

The newest volume in Young's ongoing Archive Performance Series, and a truly inspired choice, *A Treasure* finally brings to light a dozen sparkling performances from the ensemble's 1984-85 trek, including five often-bootlegged albeit previously unreleased songs.



Neil Young

A Treasure

Reprise/Warner Bros., 180g 2LP, CD, or Blu-ray/CD

Neil Young initially asked “Are you ready for the country?” on 1972’s legendary *Harvest*. But the idiosyncratic singer didn’t fully put his money where his mouth was until more than a decade later when he hit the road with the International Harvesters, a crack band comprised of country music pros.

At the time, Young achieved infamy for becoming the first artist to be sued by his record company, an action that served only to spur more of his stubbornness and eclecticism. Young ultimately conquered over Geffen’s commercial will, and in 1985, issued *Old Ways*, a roots-flavored set featuring Waylon Jennings, cowboy tunes, and an intentional down-home feel. Despite the presence of a few minor classics, the album hasn’t aged well and feels sterile. It comes nowhere close to capturing the loose vibe, go-for-broke cohesion, and contagious energy that Young attained with his International Harvester pals on the preceding tour.

The newest volume in Young’s ongoing Archive Performance Series, and a truly inspired choice, *A Treasure* finally brings to light a dozen sparkling performances from the ensemble’s 1984-85 trek, including five often-bootlegged albeit previously unreleased songs. The tour also benefited from excellent behind-the-stage help, as Larry Cragg took charge of instruments and Tim Foster ran operations. As a result, the sound quality of the dozen tracks—recorded at eight different locales, presented in chronological order, and mixed and mastered by Tim Mulligan—is among the finest of Young’s archival releases. Despite the wide-open, airy, transparent, and lively sonics, the music is even better.

Named after recently departed co-producer and long-time Young foil Ben Keith’s statement upon hearing the material, *A Treasure* is the first Young album on which the leader is at times clearly overshadowed by his band. Young doesn’t ever seem ruffled by the prospect. With Keith manning pedal-steel and slide guitars, Rufus Thibodeaux scarping the fiddle, Spooner Oldham and Hargus “Pig” Robbins tickling the piano, Tim Drummond and Joe Allen plucking bass, and Karl Himmel manning the drums, along with various other contributors, Young is free to dig deep into traditional country

elements and their accompanying hayride tones. The manners in which the collective communicate with and complement one another with fills, chords, and solos recall the Grand Ole Opry’s heyday. Nothing is overplayed or overdone. There’s no star-making or showy competition; everyone does what’s best for the material.

Far from taking a passing interest, or trotting out a novelty, Young fully immerses himself in the barn-dance moods and atmospheres, giving his nasal timbre more drawl than usual and remaining relaxed throughout. He and the Harvesters have fun with slippery, greasy jamborees (“Are You Ready for the Country?”), interstate fare (“Bound for Glory”), square-dancing shuffles (“Let Your Fingers Do the Walking”), melancholic laments (“It Might Have Been”), and punk-fueled bluegrass rejoinders (“Get Back to the Country”). Thematically, verses that speak of the days of covered wagons, cruising down the Trans-Canada Highway, and broken hearts seeking good times perfectly meld with the swirling, rustic arrangements.

While the entire record is a harbinger of Young’s lifelong involvement with Farm Aid, the gospel-fused “Nothing Is Perfect” closely mirrors its era, with a patriotic sweep and enduring optimism that echoes Reaganism’s messages. Similarly, “Motor City”—a great, largely

forgotten cut from 1981’s *Re-ac-tor*—conjures the 80s with references to the decline of the American auto industry and emergence of Japanese imports. Here, Young’s sarcastic humor, hayseed accent, and biting take over, with his support band equally game for a spunky, spirited romp. Not to be outdone, “Southern Pacific,” Young’s hallmark railroad song, allows him to play the role of conductor, the guitars doubling as the blaring horns of a diesel engine and the song’s progression advancing like a smoke-billowing train coming around a mountain bend.

Longtime Young fans also get a wish granted. Finally, the epic “Grey Riders,” one of the Ontario native’s prized unreleased songs, gets its due in the form of a dramatic, hoof-pounding, wind-howling version that finds Young ripping electric shards from his guitar and his colleagues’ notes approximating the sound of pelting hail. It’s a fitting climax to a flawless archival release. —**Bob Gendron**

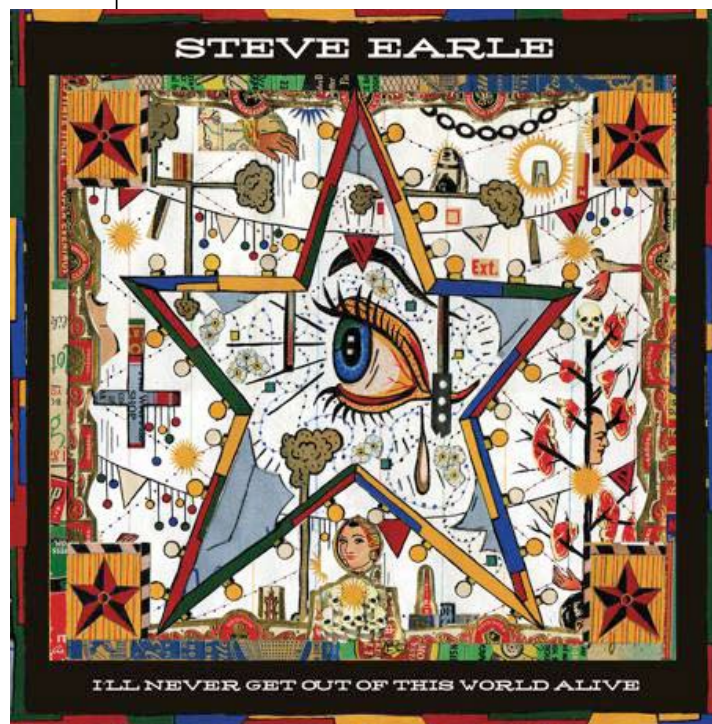


 **MICS**

MONACO INTERNATIONAL CLUBBING SHOW

9 • 10 & 11 NOVEMBER 2011

Steve Earle has spent the past few years engaged in various activities such as writing and acting, first appearing on HBO's incredible "The Wire" and most recently inhabiting the role of a street musician in "Treme." Earle's own "This City," which appears as the final track on *I'll Never Get Out of This World Alive*, plays over the final credits in the series' first season. Featuring horn arrangements by New Orleans legend Allen Toussaint and a defiant progression, it's the most distinctive and impassioned song on the outlaw singer's latest record.



Steve Earle

I'll Never Get Out of This World Alive
New West, CD or LP

Named after the Hank Williams tune of the same name, Earle's first new studio work of original material in four years—the longest-ever cycle in the activist/roots artist's career—intentionally harkens back to his country-based origins and comes flavored with dusty stomps, phlanged and pedal-steel guitars, and a more pronounced vocal drawl. It's also produced by current it-man T-Bone Burnett, and claims the spiritually bent "God Is God" and "I Am A Wanderer," two cuts Earle penned in 2008 for Joan Baez. The star-studded resume checks out fine. But there's something ultimately lacking.

Specifically, basic efforts such as the Irish-themed "Gulf of Mexico," traditional bluegrass ballad "Molly-O," and spare acoustic folk "Lonely Are the Free" sound like mimeographs of Earle's best work—copies you'd imagine lesser artists presenting as originals.

Vivid details, compelling narratives, and the bold sense to skirt conventional devices have always comprised the 56-year-old Virginia native's hallmark strengths. Yet he seems to lose sight of them during multiple weak moments here, which include a very plain duet with wife Allison Moorer on "Heaven or Hell"—as generic as the title indicates. By comparison, at least the jumpy "Waitin' on the

Sky" pulses with a restless energy. Earle's also not done skewering George W. Bush. The hoedown "Little Emperor" takes aim at the former president, shot through with a trusted combination of leftist politics and cunning wit.

Still, given the gestation period, *I'll Never Get Out of This World Alive* lacks the spark, promise, and focus implied by its Williams-inspired inscription. Odds are Earle's

other pursuits—he's releasing his debut novel in May—are consuming his attention. Nothing wrong with branching out, and Earle has definitely earned the right to do so, but it's a shame that the expansion is coming at the expense of his music. —**Bob Gendron**

© Photo by Ted Barron



gr...ve
thysel



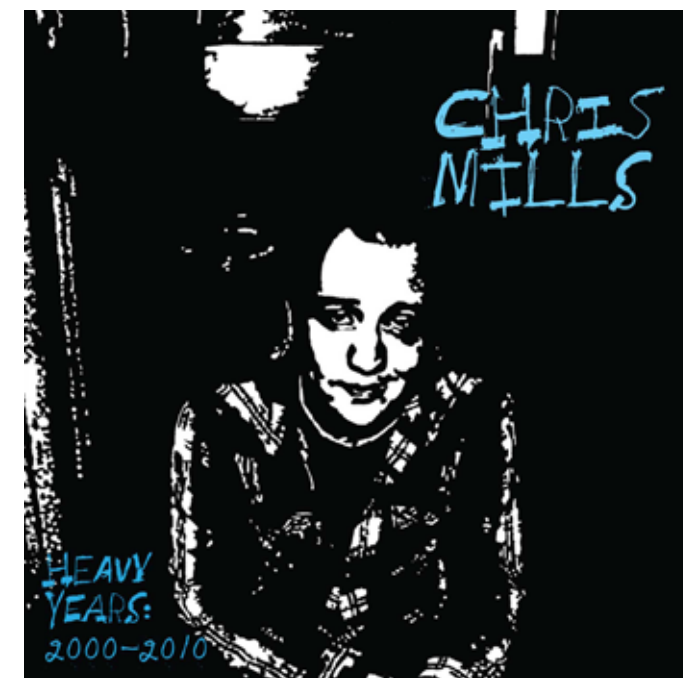
You listen, you look, you're there...

MUSIC MATTERS
presents **BLUE NOTE** LIMITED EDITION
2500 BLUE NOTE

musicmattersjazz.com

MUSIC

Chris Mills is at his best when he's at his most vulnerable. On *Heavy Years: 2000-2010*, a 14-track decade-spanning compilation that serves as a perfect introduction to the singer-songwriter for the uninitiated, Mills alternately finds himself bloodied and bruised by love ("A Farewell to Arms"), drinking himself into oblivion ("Signal/Noise"), and struggling to find the beauty in a relationship gone sour ("Diamond").



Chris Mills

Heavy Years: 2000-2010
Ernest Jennings Record Co., CD

Growing up in a military family, Mills moved frequently, spending time in Germany before settling in Southern Illinois as a teenager. He spent his formative years in Chicago, coming up alongside the likes of Kelly Hogan (whose haunting vocals grace this album's "Suicide Note"), Califone, Waco Brothers and Neko Case. Normally lumped in with the then-booming alt-country scene, this collection suggests that Mills, who currently makes his home in Brooklyn, never really took to the role.

Too much of a romantic to revel in the genre's all-encompassing despair, even Mills' most pained confessionals sound somewhat optimistic. Witness "Suicide Note," a shuffling back-porch lament on which Mills sings about trying to find a tune that can finally mute the pain inside, his earnest voice cracked—yet-hopeful. "A Farewell to Arms" describes a broken relationship in terms normally reserved for the battlefield ("Love lay your weapons down"; "There is no common ground left for to fight") even as the swooning, horn-fueled musical backdrop calls to mind a tender, moonlit waltz. (*continued*)



At times, Mills' heart swells with so much emotion that he can't even find the words to describe how he feels. "You burn like something that burns/And you sing like something that sings," he croons atop a lush musical prairie of pedal steel, piano, and violin on the starry-eyed "Such a Beautiful Thing."

While missteps are rare, the more upbeat tunes don't hit with the same impact, often-times morphing into by-the-numbers pub rock (the sneering "All You Ever Do") or coming across like watered-down takes on artists that influenced him along the way (spot the B-rate Jayhawks impression on the jangly "Sleeptalking"). Better are the piano-flecked "All Our Days and Nights," where the singer explores what happens to love once romantic high fades, and

"You Are My Favorite Song," a catchy jukebox ode built around barrelhouse piano and woozy brass. Here, Mills compares a lover to a favorite tune, singing, "Were you born on a barroom napkin?/Or in the hear of some seasick captain/ Longing for the shore?"

Then there's the seven-minute-plus "Signal/ Noise," a delicate lullaby that sounds like a corroded take on Phil Spector's wall of noise. The song opens simply, Mills singing atop a fragile, music-box patter before things start degrading near the midpoint, as if the track were recorded to crumbling tape. "And I love you more as...your voice goes static," Mills sings, his own voice slowly giving way to the encroaching white-noise roar of some distant surf.

—**Andy Downing**



This beauty is a beast

Reintroducing big speaker sound without the big speaker®: the new Blackstone® TL series compact speakers

The same components used in our award-winning full size speakers optimized for superior response in compact enclosures, for big, dynamic, realistic sound. The only thing that's small is the speaker cabinet.

The new Blackstone® TL speakers offer the perfect solution for those who want high performance without big bulky speakers.

Deeper bass extension than any other compact speaker, with wider dynamic range and better system blending, for a more enveloping surround sound environment in practically any room.

Connects easily, goes anywhere, multiple mounting options for completely unobtrusive home theater or gaming excitement.



Click Here to find out more about the Blackstone TL and where you can go to hear it

Available in 5 pack and 6 piece systems, including a subwoofer, and individually, to build the multi channel home theater system of your dreams.

Ty Segall

Goodbye Bread
Drag City, LP and CD

Ty Segall is just 23, but the San Francisco-based multi-instrumentalist has already emerged as an indie-rock cult figure that's presently on the verge of making mainstream noise. Five years ago, Segall left high school and headed to the Bay Area to play in various bands. He didn't waste much time. A present or former member of garage-rock acts the Coachwhips, Traditional Fools, Epsilons, Sic Alps, and Party Fowl, he resembles prolific Guided By Voices leader Robert Pollard in the manner in which he seems to release a new seven-inch or spilt EP every month.

Of course, Segall isn't alone in cranking out copious amounts of music, much of it crudely recorded in bedrooms or on four-tracks. One downfall of affordable technology is the resultant glut of mediocre fare that's flooded market and made it more difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff. But Segall is different. A majority of his releases transcend such disposable and amateurish traits, and while he hasn't hit a home run with every release, in particular, his recent solo full-lengths—including 2010's

Meltd—capture an artist clearly in the midst of bloom.

Segall also deviates from the norm in terms of public persona. In an age when most performers seize all available social media tools and seek maximum exposure, the singer/guitarist keeps a low profile. There's precious little information in his official biography. He forgoes having an official Web site. And he doesn't seem as if he's in any hurry to lift the veil on his guarded identity, instead preferring to let the music do the talking. Does it ever.

Goodbye Bread checks in as Segall's most visible effort yet. The compact 10-song set comes via venerable indie label Drag City and furthers the strengths Segall has demonstrated both as a one-man band and bandleader. Songs arrive as if they could've been made in the mid- and late 1960s and deserve retro inclusion on the famous *Nuggets* compilation. Such is Segall's knack for classic garage-rock grit, hungover psychedelia, and unavoidably catchy devices. Evoking the primitive fuzz-out tones of local 60s legends ranging from the Sonics to the Nazz, as well as the choral properties of early sides by the Kinks, Move, and the Who, Segall brings a modernity and originality to *Goodbye Bread* that tags him as an artist that's well beyond mere nostalgic revivalism.



© Photo by Denee Petracek

Not to say that the slow, jangling tones and chiming chords on the excellent title track don't evoke British Invasion muses. Yet Segall's lilting warm falsetto, slightly frayed deliveries, and delightfully shredded guitar notes (which briefly stir the calm) stamp the tune with its own identity. Indeed, the frontman's reverb-soaked bloodshot vocals and stoned-out atmospheres coexist alongside his inarguable gift for constructing great hooks. Deceptively simple, he appears intent on channeling the sound of what it feels like to be caught between reality and hallucination. Bass-spurred rhythms bubble underneath "You Make the Sun Fry," taser-gun distortion infuses the crunchy "Where Your Head

Goes," and rough-and-tumble grit drives "Comfortable Home," each splitting the line between mess and melody, each revealing obvious allegiances to pop elements.

"I'm sick of you/I'm sick of me" Segall gushes with humorous disgust on "I Am With You," one of the handful of tracks on which he pushes the limits of his earlier compact structures into four-minute-plus lengths. He's still best when keeping arrangements tight and short, but as the crashing-through-your-consciousness bridge to the aptly titled and more involved "My Head Explodes" attests, the garage-pop tunesmith claims a wealth of surprises that refuse to be contained in the space of two minutes. —**Bob Gendron**

Deceptively simple, Segall appears intent on channeling the sound of what it feels like to be caught between reality and hallucination.



Hear More Music.

Meridian Sooloos' powerful media server system makes any digital music collection a joy to explore. Not only do you have instant access to your entire library with an intuitive touch-screen interface: you'll also rediscover forgotten albums as the system finds music for you based on what you want to hear. Meridian's DSP Active Loudspeakers combine 30 years of high performance digital loudspeaker excellence in a simple, elegant design. Bring them together, and you have an astonishing listening experience.

The Meridian Sooloos Control 10 connects quickly and easily to your Meridian DSP Active Loudspeakers to form a complete digital audio system in a single room – or throughout your entire home.

It's the ultimate music system for simplicity and elegance, power and performance, enjoyment and discovery.

Call 404-344-7111 to arrange for a personal demonstration of Meridian's distributed audio, home theatre and music server systems, or visit www.meridian-audio.com to learn more about Meridian products.

"A complete reinvention of how we relate to music" —ESQUIRE

"Arguably the most intuitive and rewarding piece of audio technology ever conceived" —WHAT HI FI

"The Sooloos system gave us a musical epiphany... it's sheer genius" —STEREOPHILE

"Sooloos' ability to instantly sort through your library and present to you exactly the music you might want to hear at any particular moment borders on the magical..."

—THE ABSOLUTE SOUND

MERIDIAN sooloos



White Hills

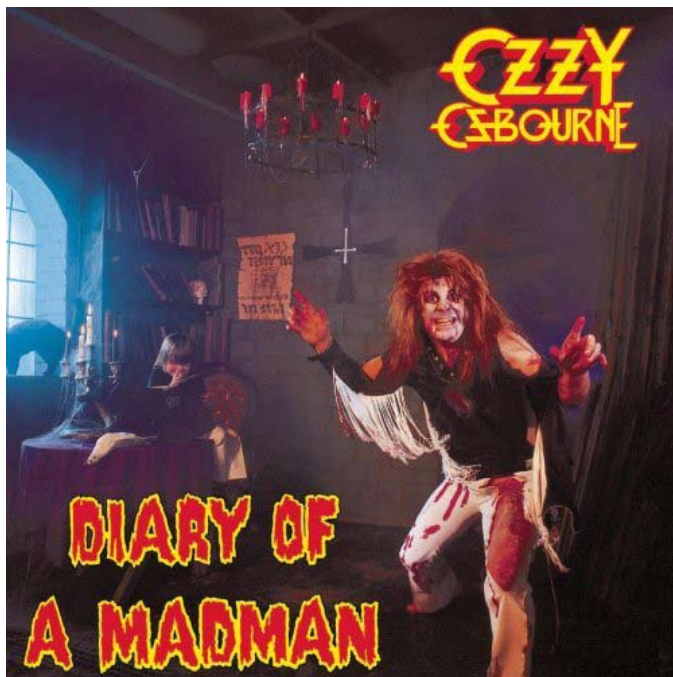
H-p1

Thrill Jockey, CD or 2LP

On its second album for Thrill Jockey, enigmatic psych-rockers White Hills deliver another monstrous slab of deep space riffage. Epic in both size (the record clocks in at over 70 minutes) and scope (an accompanying press release describes it as "a concept album telling the story of a corrupt government that is run like and owned by corporations"), *H-p1* finds the trio splitting its time between metallic guitar outbursts and moodier, more spacious passages.

The opening "The Condition of Nothing" establishes the template, piling on zombified vocals ("I speak to you" the mates intone, like freshly reanimated corpses), intricate drum tentacles, and dark swirls of fuzzed-out guitar that move like ocean currents. From there, the group travels through underground sewer systems (the dense, echo-laden "Movement") and abandoned factories—guitars buzz and chime like heavy machinery on "Paradise," which gradually dissipates into a white noise that evokes millions of mosquitoes buzzing overhead—before rocketing into the cosmos on "Hand In Hand." The latter is a massive tune that sounds like a space station slowly circling its way into the yawning cavern of a black hole, blips and beeps gradually giving way to all-encompassing nothingness.

Despite its heady concept, the album remains largely instrumental. Indeed, the lyrics on the few cuts that actually contain words are as primal and rudimentary as ancient cave paintings. "No truth, no freedom," singer/guitarist Dave W. chants on the 17-minute title track. Or is that "Know truth, know freedom?" The anger and frustration that drive the anti-corporate concept are instead embedded in the music's DNA, from the beastly swagger of "Upon Arrival," which breaks into an explosion of drums that come on like a herd of hooved creatures thundering over a plain, to the hazy "Monument," which sounds like a final transmission to escape a crumbling empire, seconds before its fall. —**Andy Downing**



Ozzy Osbourne

Blizzard of Ozz/Diary of a Madman 30th Anniversary Collector's Edition

Epic/Legacy, 3CD + DVD box set; also available as individual CDs or LPs

Long before Ozzy Osbourne devolved into a caricature—a role he's sadly played for the better part of the past two decades—the singer recorded two of the most influential, complete, and ageless hard-rock albums in history. Made within a year's time, 1980's *Blizzard of Ozz* and 1981's *Diary of a Madman* explode with the kind of passion and creativity that the legendary frontman has been able to only briefly recapture (1988's *No Rest for the Wicked*, 1991's *No More Tears*) since becoming a solo artist following his dismissal from Black Sabbath. Anyone familiar with the two early 80s efforts and Osbourne's history understands why the material remains mammoth: guitarist Randy Rhoads.

In honor of the albums' 30th anniversary, Sony Legacy has reissued them in several remastered configurations: 180g LP, picture-disc LP, separate CDs, and, for the faithful, a fancy \$150 multi-disc box set in which a DVD, 100-page coffee table book, poster, and replica of Osbourne's cross are exclusive. The latter arrives in an attractive package, yet apart from its inherent appeal to collectors, the only real reason to make such an investment is the *Thirty Years After the Blizzard* documentary that contains more than 30 minutes of never-bootlegged footage from a May 1981 Palladium concert.

The short film itself covers usual territory. Namely, the story of Osbourne's ascent from booze-inundated exile, his meeting and partnering with the incredible Rhoads, his infamous encounters with a live bat and live dove, his memories of the dearly departed virtuosic guitarist. At best, the documentary functions as a loving tribute to Rhoads; at worst, it's another opportunity for Osbourne's meddling wife Sharon to put a laughable spin on things.

Given her track record of trotting Osbourne out like a court jester in front of the media, her blaming the press for fanning controversial flames is audacious. Too bad the moments showing her gabbing aren't replaced with raw clips of Rhoads.

Indeed, Rhoads and Osbourne's music and chemistry drive these reissues. Aside from Eddie Van Halen's period material, no guitarist rivaled the inventive, contagious, soulful, and heavy passages Rhoads laid down on *Blizzard of Ozz* and *Diary of a Madman*. Osbourne is in fine voice throughout, singing as if his future depended on his performance. It did. Songs such as "I Don't Know," "Crazy Train," "Suicide Solution," and "No Bone Movies" (from the debut) and "Over the Mountain," "Flying High Again," "Believer," and "Tonight" from the 1981 follow-up serve as prime examples of the increasingly melodic, diverse, and accessible direction heavy metal took before limp keyboards and saccharine pop crept into the mix.

Blending gorgeous classical strains with flashy dalliance and elegant moodiness, Rhoads proved the perfect foil for Osbourne's interest in both expanding his sound and pursuing his preoccupation with intelligent, dark lyrical themes. Former Osbourne guitarist Zakk Wylde cogently observed that Rhoads' arrangements were songs within songs; listen to the soloing and fills on "Revelation (Mother Earth)" and try not to arrive at the same conclusion. If only Rhoads' disciples employed their hero's discipline and tastefulness.

On disc, *Diary of a Madman* is expanded into a double-CD set, with the extra disc comprising 11 live songs from the 1981 tour. It's scorching, unencumbered, and absolutely essential. Of course, so are each records' iconic cover artwork, which



© Getty Photo by Fin Castello-Redferns

makes the analog editions that much more appealing. Anyone born between 1965 and 1980 is lying if they say their heads weren't turned when encountering the albums—especially for the first time—in record store bins. Like the music within the grooves, the thematic images of a caped, cross-clutching Ozzy and demonic, castle-dwelling Osbourne, respectively, are timeless.

—**Bob Gendron**



The MartinLogan Aeries i Loudspeaker

Welcome Back!

By Jeff Dorgay

MartinLogan's full-range CLS is the speaker often cited for gaining the company a legion of fans, but if you dig a bit deeper, you'll find another speaker with similar loyalty—the Aeries, which later became the Aeries i. Speaking as someone who's had prolonged experience with both models, the CLS' larger-than-life soundstage and breathtaking transparency was tough to beat, especially as vinyl headed for its sunset and many made the move to compact disc. Indeed, the CLS possessed so much resolution that it took only about 30 seconds to convince the uninitiated that the CD was no match for the LP.

When I moved to a smaller living space in the late 80s, the CLS had to go, and I temporarily ended up in the Acoustat camp. While the 1+1s were pleasant, they lacked the detail that made the MartinLogan speakers intoxicating. But then, in 1992, MartinLogan introduced the Aeries, which mated an 8-inch dynamic woofer to an electrostatic panel that was about 30% smaller than the one fitted to its larger Sequel. The Aeries was less expensive as well, costing just \$1,995. The audiophile press raved; *Stereophile's* John Atkinson claimed the woofer/panel integration to be "virtually flawless."

Building on the success of the Aerius, the Aerius i came out in 1996 and remained in production until 2000. The i featured an improved crossover network, which lowered the critical crossover frequency from 500hz to 450hz and allowed the ESL panel handle more of the critical midrange frequencies. The new model was an improvement in every way, but did feature a lower minimum impedance (2 ohms with the Aerius; 1.7 ohms with the Aerius i) that made them tougher to drive with low-powered tube amplifiers.

Just As I Remembered

The pair of Aerius i speakers featured here were supplied by MartinLogan for a comparison with its new ElectroMotion speaker that's featured on page 161 of this issue. After allowing the panels to charge for a full day, the Aerius i sounded just as I remembered, featuring a smooth upper register, excellent integration between

woofer and the ESL panel, and solid bass performance. While it's been close to 20 years since these speakers were in my system, I'm as astonished by their performance now as I was the day I first uncrated them. I felt they were an amazing value for \$2,000 then; considering a clean used pair fetches only \$700-\$900, the i makes for an excellent building block for a high-performance albeit moderately priced system.

MartinLogan's ESL panels have a finite lifespan of about 15 years, so if you plan on hanging on to the Aerius for any length of time, budget for a panel replacement. This requires both DIY skills and between \$500 and \$700 for raw materials. The panels are still available from MartinLogan and are produced at its Kansas facility. Unless the previously owned speakers you purchase are flawless, plan on exchanging the panels in the near future. Negotiate the price accordingly.

Performance from the modestly powered tube amplifiers at my disposal was mixed. The CJ MV-50 and PrimaLuna Dialog 4 with EL34 output tubes (and about 35-45 watts per channel) had no problem driving the Aerius i, yet the vintage Dynaco Stereo 70 struggled, offering boomy and uncontrolled bass as well as a rolled-off high end. Note to tube aficionados: Make certain you can audition the speakers with your amplifier; the more power, the better, and if your amplifier offers a 2-ohm tap, that will help.

While these speakers work well with most tube amplification, I've always achieved the best balance of musicality, HF extension, and bass control with a vacuum-tube preamplifier and high-current solid-state power amplifier. Should you be assembling a vintage/budget system, there's a plethora of great amplifiers from which to choose in the \$1,000-\$2,000 range. But remember, these speakers are very revealing and will benefit from quality over quantity when it comes to power. *(continued)*





e.One C5i DAC Integrated Amplifier

Why choose different components for your music downloads, computer, CD player, turntable, cable/satellite box or game consoles? Keep it simple with Bel Canto's compact, powerful **e.One C5i DAC Integrated Amplifier** that powers it all!

The C5i features **2 SPDIF** and **2 TOSLINK inputs** at 24/192, a **USB input** at 24/96, plus **analog MM Phono** and **line level inputs on RCAs**. Outputs include speaker binding posts, line level outputs on RCAs, and a front panel headphone jack. It's a powerful, energy efficient multimedia analog and digital media center. Just add speakers and the C5i's **versatility, performance and dynamic sound** puts you in total system control.

For More Information Call (612) 317-4550 (9 AM to 5 PM CST M-F). © 2011 Bel Canto Design, Ltd.

FEATURE

Early ESL Magic

The Aeries i had no trouble capturing the delicacy in Loudness' "In My Dreams" from the Japanese rock legends' *Unleashed in the East* album. The song features layers of phased and flanged guitars, which prove a treat for anyone that appreciates pinpoint imaging. An equally intriguing effect came courtesy of Lou Reed's live Metal Machine Trio album, *Creation of the Universe*. The record's atmospheric, edgy quality burst to life on these vintage speakers. Of course, if solo vocalists and acoustic guitarists are your bag, you will be thrilled—that's the kind of music for which ESL panels were designed.

In fact, harder-edged rock was the only area in which the Aeries fell short. Even swapping the tube amplifiers for the formidable solid-state Burmester 911 mk. 3 failed to deliver the goods. Cranking up Triumph's *Rock and Roll Machine* proved fruitless. As the volume levels approached realistic levels, the experience brought my Aeries journey full circle. I remembered why I had to ultimately move on from the pair of speakers that had been my staple for so many years. Joni Mitchell, yes; Jimi Hendrix, no.

Defying Convention

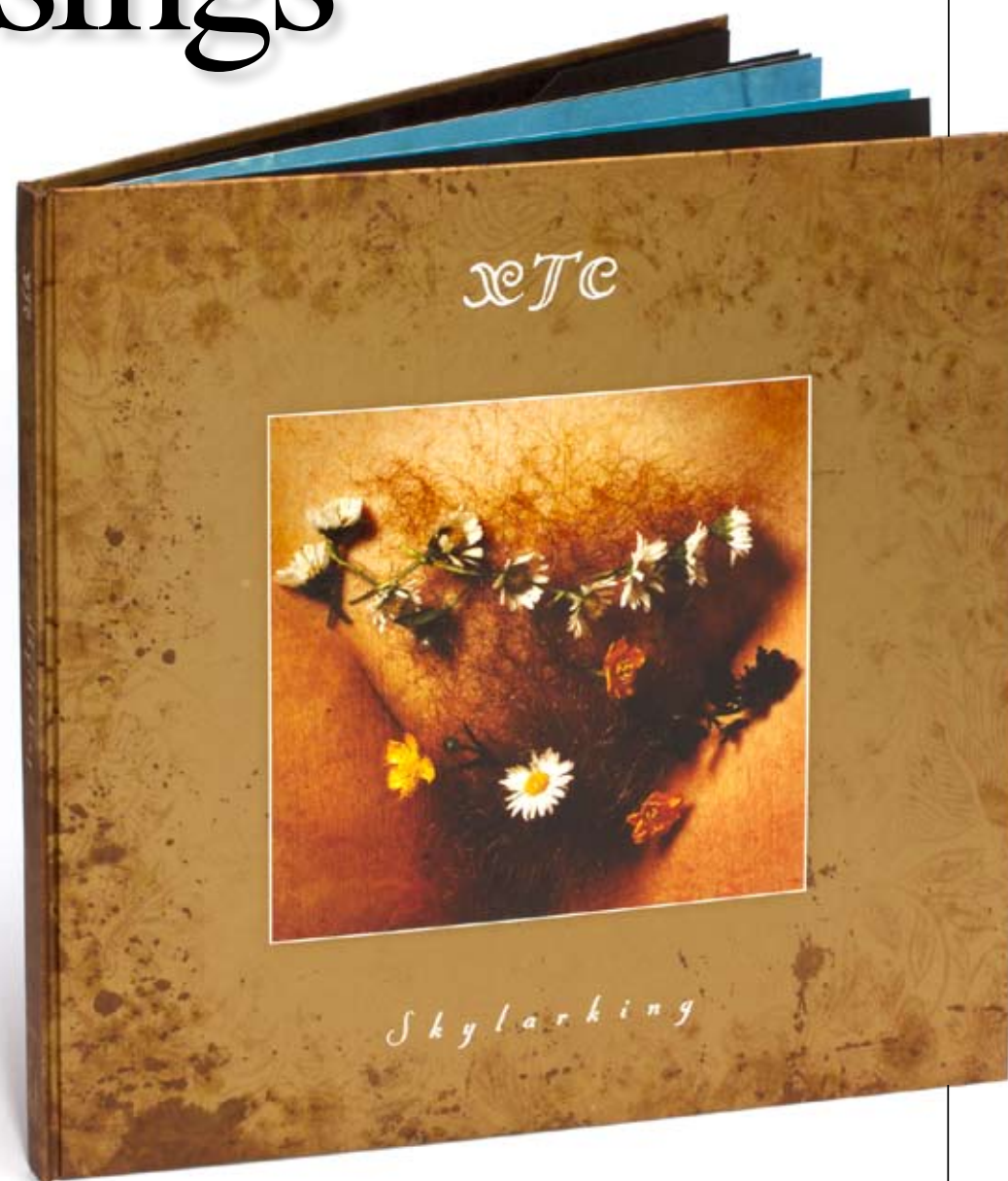
Critics told MartinLogan that a speaker incorporating a dynamic woofer and electrostatic panel couldn't be done. Yet MartinLogan has continued to refine its hybrid ESL/dynamic woofer concept to the point where on the company's current speakers, you can play Metallica at realistic levels, increasing the dynamic range and improving the blend between the disparate drivers. Each new model performs better than its predecessor.

But the Aeries and Aeries i marked a turning point. They nailed the recipe, winning major accolades and loyal fans in the process. Revisiting these speakers only reinforces their excellence. Need a great anchor for a burgeoning high-end system? Look no further. ●



Audiophile Pressings

By the Tone Staff
Click on album art
to purchase from
Music Direct



XTC
Skylarking
Virtual 180 Records, 2 45RPM LPs

The feud between producer Todd Rundgren and XTC, which transpired during the recording of *Skylarking*, has been exhaustively covered in myriad articles and in several books over the past two-plus decades. Yet, buried in each band member's liner-notes prose on this deluxe edition of their 1986 epic is that, in retrospect, Rundgren was actually much more of a genius than they realized at the time. Not that some bad feelings don't remain. In closing his essay, vocalist/guitarist Andy Partridge can't resist taking one last parting passive-aggressive shot at Rundgren: "Thanks Todd, time wounds all heels."

On a more pragmatic level, Partridge mentions that while neither XTC nor Rundgren know what became of the master tape, they found some alternates that were used instead; Partridge refers to it as a "sales tape." Moreover, he claims that the original as well as all subsequent remasters (Mobile Fidelity's mid-90s

CD release included) were all produced out of phase, and that this new version is finally correct and features the tracks in their original intended order, with the missing "Mermaid Smiled" in the 11th position.

While the additional groove width and velocity certainly give this set some much-needed dynamic range, it still sounds slightly mechanical—as if it's produced from a high-res digital copy. Partridge also notes that this version is "approximately 30% better than the MoFi." But a quick comparison reveals that the audiophile imprint's 16/44.1 disc was handled with extreme care, and claims a naturalness to the midrange that even this analog pressing can't quite match.

However, when comparing the 45RPM set to average vinyl pressings that fetch between \$5 and \$15, the new version boasts improvement in all aspects. It has considerably more punch and more depth; the three originals in my collection are fairly compressed.

Surface noise is greatly reduced in this version, too, and since this record hails from the early Geffen years, you know what that means.

So, \$45 bucks gets you a competent mastering job (no mastering credit is given), quiet surfaces, and the original banned artwork—a girl part on the front cover and a boy part on the back cover—along with photos and commentary that will likely amuse and entertain loyal fans. —**Jeff Dorgay**

"In Admiration of Music is the very foundation on which we develop and produce speakers."

- Lars Worre, CEO, DALI A/S

It starts with a vision.

Ours is a relection of life: that what's on the inside is more important than what you see on the outside. Music engages every sense, it makes us laugh and cry, tap our toes, and ignites a fire in our hearts.

Music is our reality.



IN ADMIRATION OF MUSIC



Helicon 600 MK2



Japan

Quiet Life

Music On Vinyl, 180g 3LP

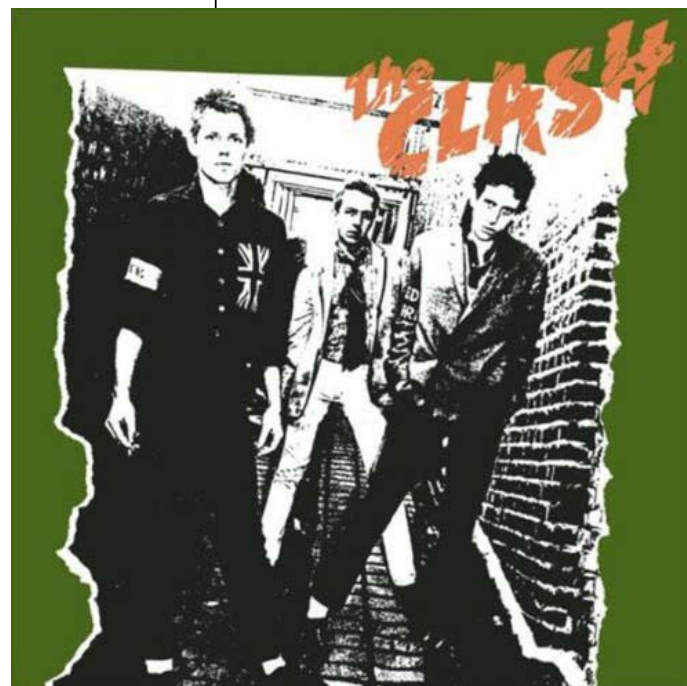
his new reissue is aptly timed: Music On Vinyl created a back-cover tribute to Japan bassist Mick Karn, who passed away this past January. It is here, too, that you realize that this is no ordinary reissue as the track listing reveals that the original single-disc LP has grown into a 3LP package on limited red vinyl.

Unravelling the bonus tracks breaks down to this: Out of the four extra sides, there's the UK 7" version of "Quiet Life" and a special remix of "Life In Toyko" from *The Very Best Of Japan*; a remix of "Life In Tokyo" from the album collection *Assemblage* and a 12" extended remix of "Quiet Life"; a 12" version of "I Second That Emotion," three further versions of "Life In Tokyo"; "A Foreign Place" (the B-Side of the "Quiet Life" 7" single); a 12" version of "Fall In Love With Me"; and three Steve Nye remixes of "All Tomorrow's Parties," "I Second That Emotion," and "European Son," all found on the rare *Singles Compilation* previously issued in Japan (the country, that is). You also get the Japanese lyric insert found in the original LP issue.

Holland-based Music On Vinyl has the benefit of owning and running its own pressing plant. There are definite advantages, and two positives stood out after just a few seconds. First, the pressing is dead-quiet, ranking up there with Mobile Fidelity's standards. The presentation offered tremendous clarity; Karn's bass and David Sylvian's voice emerge from an inky blackness. Second, the recording yields impressively deep bass that helps drive the music forward. Low-frequency output can be a real diaphragm-mover given the right hi-fi rig. The album's cohesive nature has also been measurably improved because the instruments occupying the broad soundstage now have more room to maneuver, providing a sense of calm and ease. Even if you have the original issue, you'd be wise to consider this upgrade. **—Paul Rigby**

The Clash

The Clash
Music On Vinyl, 180g LP



The Clash's 1977 debut has always been a source of confusion given the presence of conflicting UK and US versions. This reissue focuses on the US edition, with the logo on the top right-hand side of the sleeve as opposed to the UK copy, which places it on the bottom right. As some may remember, the US version came out nearly two years after the British edition. Industry observers believed the Clash too severe for American audiences, a misbegotten opinion that led to the UK LP becoming the highest-selling import record in US history.

Not happy with only delaying the American release, Epic Records also decided to alter the track listing. "Deny," "Cheat," "Protex Blue," "48 Hours," and the original version of "White Riot" were removed in favor of "Clash City Rockers" (a 1978 A-side), "Complete Control" (a 1977 single), a re-recorded "White Riot," "(White

Man) In Hammersmith Palais" (another 1978 UK single), "I Fought the Law" (a 1979 UK EP cut), and "Jail Guitar Doors" (a '78 UK B-side). The replacements gave the US version an intentional "best-of Clash" feel.

Close listening reveals that the LP's mastering has stood the test of time. There's energy, rage, and power by the bundle, plus an under-produced claustrophobia, especially on the guitars, which sound like they want to burst out into extended upper-midrange splendour but never do, thus enhancing the overall tension. This pressing is also nicely executed, with a quiet background that yields a great sense of clarity—well, as much clarity as is possible with a bunch of blokes exploding all over the soundstage. A bonus 7" with "Groovy Times" and "Gates of the West" is included with the package. Essential. —**Paul Rigby**

MUSICAL FIDELITY

Introducing the all new **M6500i**: the latest in a rich history of ground-breaking Musical Fidelity integrated amplifiers



Exclusive North American Importer

Tempo Distriburion LLC

(617) 314-9296 tel ○ info@tempohighfidelity.com

www.musicalfidelity.com

www.tempohighfidelity.com

Listen. Don't just hear.

You've collected hundreds — even thousands — of songs on your computer and iPod. But, you haven't really experienced the music until you play it through Wadia's proven iTransports and PowerDAC integrated amplifier.

The first truly superior way to listen to your music.



Wadia series 1 171iTransport and 151PowerDAC mini www.wadia.com

Canned Heat

Boogie With Canned Heat
Pure Pleasure, LP

Complete with groovy 60s psychedelic album art, Canned Heat's second album is anything but. It's pure blues, containing perhaps the band's most memorable tune, "On the Road Again," featuring great guitar and harp work that comes through loud and clear on this reissue. The rest of the record, consisting primarily of Canned Heat originals, is equally as much fun, especially the group's intro to "Whiskey Headed Woman."



While this pressing sounds ever so slightly crunchy on the high end, Tony Hickmott, the head of Pure Pleasure Records, said that he used the UK analog master tape and did the work at Abbey Road, "figuring the UK tape probably had less wear than the US version." The end result is remarkable given that the album is more than 40 years old.

The record boasts the trademark kind of spacious separation that graced records from its era, but vocals are clean and the electric guitar claims plenty of bite. I did not have a mint original for comparison, but my Columbia House copy—purchased in the late 70s—sounds terrible, overly compressed and somewhat rolled-off. Most re-pressings from late 70s sound similar and sell for \$10 or less.

The Pure Pleasure reissue maintains the label's high standards. The LP is flat, very quiet, and the artwork faithfully reproduced without having any of the heavy contrast buildup so often introduced by other reissue labels. With mint copies of the Liberty label original inching towards \$100, this Pure Pleasure version is a safe bet and good deal at \$35. —**Jeff Dorgay**



Lard Free

///

Wah Wah, LP

In technical terms, Lard Free was a French prog-rock group. However, such a description is slightly oxymoronic given that the band boiled down to one man—drummer and synth specialist, Gilbert Artman—accompanied by a host of additional artists that populated the collective's three excellent albums on a rotating basis.

And while the music may be prog, it's only so in the loosest sense. 1977's *III*, the band's best record, is centred around a synthesizer core and owes much to the Krautrock sensibilities of Tangerine Dream and early Pink Floyd. Shades of the latter surface in spades: Plenty of organic instruments such as guitar, drums, and clarinet betray the band's earlier jazz inflections. Add a sprinkling of Can's harder-edged style, and you've got a fair summation of the outfit's capabilities.

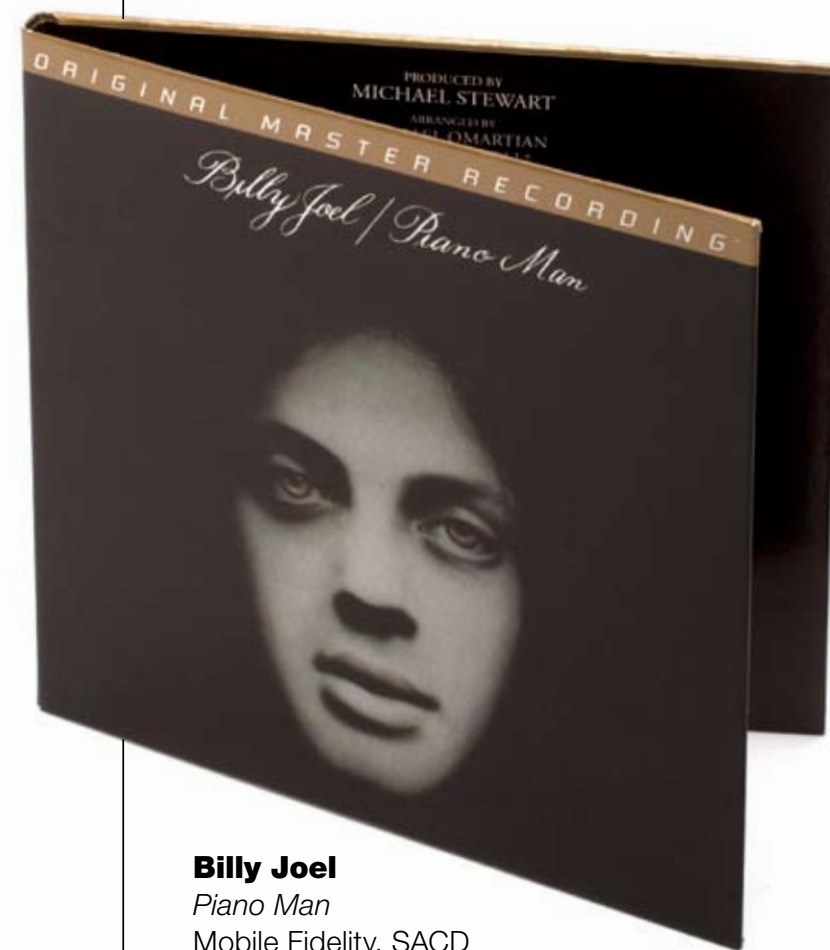
The new edition of *III* contains a 24" x 12" poster that includes (on the flip side) two sets of notes (in English and French) detailing the band's history as well as a selection of rare photos and art. During playback, the 70s vintage sound is very audible. Caveat: The mastering lacks the dynamic clarity that characterizes modern-day audiophile pressings; there is no dramatic instrumentation that hits you in the face. What you have instead is a warm, friendly remaster with rolled-off upper frequencies that provide a unique sense of time and place, and add to the character. One could easily describe the master as "authentic." And yes, this also means that the original mastering engineer had a fine old time panning the stereo image from the left to the right with gay abandon.

Drenched with a psychedelic fugue, hypnotic looped synth sections, and deep, dark percussive effects, *III* demands to be played whilst wearing flares, staring into your lava lamp, and eating questionable biscuits. Fire it up. —**Paul Rigby**

For most fans, Billy Joel's second album is where their journey with the artist began— primarily with Joel's big radio hit "Piano Man." While many AM radio stations played the heck out of the aforementioned tune, AOR FM stations made a favorite out of "Captain Jack." Admittedly influenced by Elton John's *Tumbleweed Connection*, *Piano Man* went on to four-times platinum status.

Rob LoVerde has done an excellent job capturing the soul on this 1970s classic. The CD layer sounds great, but the SACD takes advantage of the additional dynamic range and allows for a slightly more open sound. Turning up the volume reveals a smidge of tape hiss, but that's what analog is all about. Compared to those on the original US CD, Joel's vocals have more space. His piano also sounds larger, with better overall tonality. Akin to other MoFi reissues of 70s classics with which I'm very familiar, a layer or two of grunge is removed from the mix, permitting listeners to hear further into the tracks.

Note to collectors: If you have an early US copy, or the semi rare "target" Japanese copy that fetches upwards of \$100 on eBay, the increase in sound quality here may not be worth it if you do not have SACD capability. Considering what MoFi accomplished, the upcoming LP might be the edition to grab, especially if you prefer analog. However, if you are a digital fan and don't have a CD made from the early US mastering, this one, as Wayne and Garth would note, is worthy. SACD listeners are in for a treat. —**Jeff Dorgay**

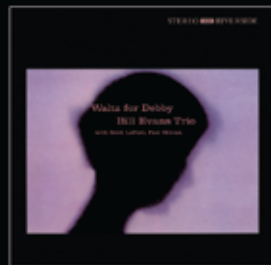


Billy Joel

Piano Man

Mobile Fidelity, SACD

Experience the worlds greatest labels and artists
in stunning 96/24 sound, with full liner notes!



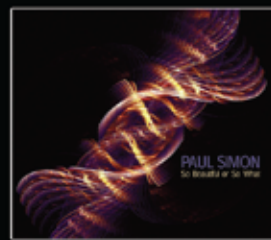
Bill Evans Trio
Waltz For Debby



The Rolling Stones
Beggars Banquet



Eric Clapton
461 Ocean Boulevard



Paul Simon
So Beautiful or So What



Elton John
Madman Across the Water



The Who
Tommy



David Chesky
Urbanicity/Concerto for Electric Guitar
and Orchestra



The Rolling Stones
Let It Bleed



Wiener Philharmoniker/Carlos Kleiber
Beethoven Symphonies Nos. 5 & 7



Sonny Rollins
Saxophone Colossus



Diana Krall
The Look of Love

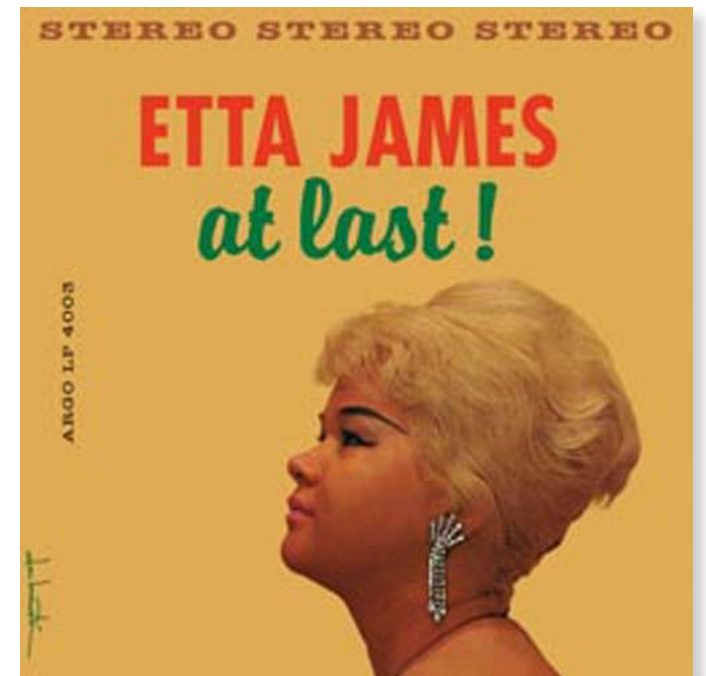


Keith Jarrett
The Köln Concert

Before you drop the needle on the groove, look at the sleeve. It is a perfect duplicate. No modern ephemera, no barcodes, no modern label logos, no modern dates. Aesthetically, this is a “perfect” reissue. And listening to the recording proves equally fascinating as you can hear a real tussle going on with the remastering.

Speakers Corner obviously wanted to retain as much of the atmosphere and flavor of the original recording as possible, keeping James’ signature strength, power, and “bad girl” delivery. You can effortlessly hear James’ rasping, guttural power on the remaster. At the same time, however, you can also hear the German imprint wishing to push the technical boundaries as much as possible. And the label accomplishes this goal with a vastly improved soundstage as well as a richer, broader vocal. James really flowers here, her emotional texture conveying a deep understanding of the lyrics and a close relationship to the song itself.

But the real magic happens when the audiophile imprint’s two aims clash. Sparks fly; you can clearly hear James play with the microphone. She moves around it like Cassius Clay dancing around his opponent in his prime.



Etta James

At Last!

Speakers Corner, 180g LP

Listen to her stand away from the mic, giving some distance as she strikes a high note before moving back in to tackle a softer line. Then, she surprises you. She darts in and hits you with a massive, volcanic eruption—a primeval shout that literally whacks the needle into the red and slams the signal to the ceiling. Even the Speakers Corner remaster can’t cope, and this is the point where the mastering engineer must think, “OK, that’s it. This is the line. This is where we stop.” Because, to process and develop the signal any further would take away James’ passion.

And that’s what we have here: Pure, unadulterated passion. There’s no covering, no skin, no protection. It’s bare, vulnerable. It could shrivel up in front of you or blast you in a moment’s notice. Etta unleashed. – **Paul Rigby**

Order now and receive 10% off! Use coupon code **TONEAudio** ... Good through **6/12/11**
Still not a believer? Try a **free 96/24 download** at www.hdtracks.com



Supertramp

Breakfast In America

A&M, 180g LP + 2CD + DVD Box Set

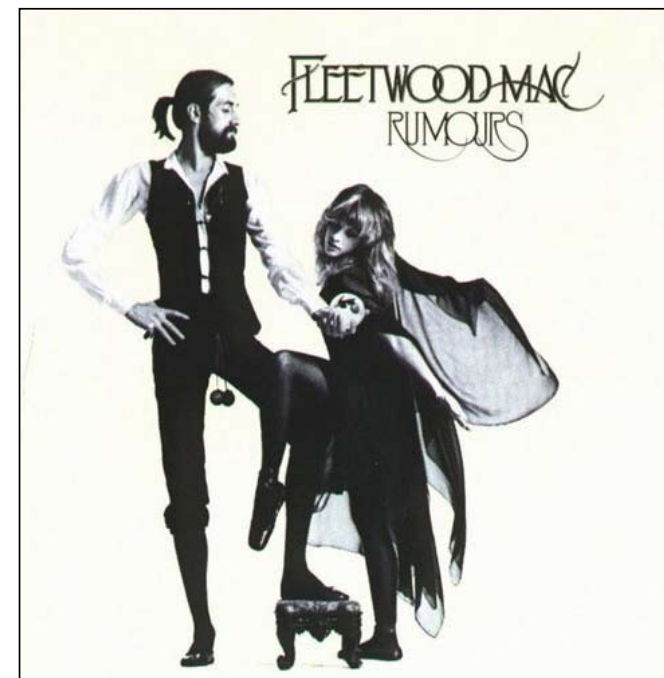
Universal has finally given *Breakfast In America* the special treatment it deserves via a deluxe version that contains analog and digital remasters of the original album plus a slipcase of goodies, to boot. You get the album on 180g vinyl plus CD; a second CD that features live tracks from 1979 and which are presented in an intimate, splendidly raw manner; and a DVD that features videos of singles from the album and rare footage broadcast on the classic, late-night UK cult-music show *The Old Grey Whistle Test*. Finally, there's a 60-page hardback book replete with interviews, photographs, lyrics, poster, replica concert ticket, patch, and program.

The whole lot is stuffed within a hard slipcase cover; what's more, the vinyl and CDs are contained in a separate, heavy-gauge gatefold cover. Compared to the original pressing, the cover art is vastly improved with a clearer, more vivid series of colors and slightly more space afforded to the band's name at the top. The photo of the band on the back cover is also brought into better focus.

I compared the new remaster to the 1979 original. From the first few seconds of the opening track, "Gone Hollywood," the remaster revealed a more sumptuous presentation. Universal's reissue is much more relaxed, and sounds suitably matured. Framed by an absolutely enormous soundstage, every instrument and vocal is surrounded by so much air that you might be prompted to reach for a coat and scarf. Bass has been lifted and fattened, while previously over-sibilant passages are eradicated with a midrange and treble blend that's now appreciably extended. The latter effect is ably shown off during the first minute of "Take The Long Way Home," on which the lower-frequency range of the featured piano exhibits real power and the accompanying harp displays startling dynamics.

The digital version also wows. In this era of overly compressed and/or excessively peak-limited CDs, it was a joy to hear a quieter mix that allows natural volume levels to reveal new details. Nothing less than a party in a box.

—Paul Rigby



Fleetwood Mac

Rumours

Warner Bros., 180g 45RPM 2LP or 33RPM LP

After years of delay, Fleetwood Mac's 1977 blockbuster *Rumours* finally made its way to the pressing plant—the Pallas plant in Germany, to be exact. True to its past performances, Pallas has done an exquisite job on these four vinyl surfaces. Though the cover printing has picked up a bit of contrast from the original, it's printed on heavy stock, and there's evidence of spot varnish having been applied. Very nice touch. Steve Hoffman and Kevin Gray have performed the remastering duties, and Hoffman has chosen to include a different intro to "Gold Dust Woman." Fittingly, then, the record retains some of its original relationship-related controversy.

Those who have been waiting for this reissue since 2006, the year a few test pressings slipped onto the market, will be rewarded the second they drop the tonearm on the opening track. It sounds scrumptious. Thanks to the almost CD-

quiet backgrounds, you hear much more of Mick Fleetwood's percussion. On "Dreams," Lindsey Buckingham's backing vocals have considerably more space than they do on early pressings. A smidge of tape hiss creeps into "Songbird" at the end of the second side, but that's not a bad thing. It actually reinforces the material's analog greatness. Moreover, Christine McVie's voice never sounded better and, thanks to the extra grooves made possible by the 45RPM extension, possesses more delicacy than the original pressings. "Songbird" is the best example of low-level detail; the following track, and beginning of the third side, "The Chain," offers up the best example of dynamic punch. "I Don't Want To Know" comes a close second.

The best news? Warner Bros.' pressing is flawless from beginning to end. This is definitely the super-sized version of *Rumours*: It goes beyond big sound. You can just feel this record breathe, in and out, while listening to tracks that you thought you knew like the back of your hand. Wait until you experience the new information that's available. And the soundstage is massive. If the music doesn't float well past your speakers' boundaries, it's time to go shopping for a new stereo.

So, take a trip back to 1977 when Stevie Nicks had small breasts and Buckingham sported big hair. If you've got a rare, early first-stamper pressing, you may not need to add this one to your collection unless you are really obsessive compulsive. But if you love *Rumours* (and almost everyone does) and you don't have a flawless copy, this edition is worth every penny. A 180g 33-1/3RPM version is also available for around \$25. But fairly priced at \$45 for four sides, the deluxe audiophile edition is the way to go.

—Jeff Dorgay



C50 Stereo Control Center:

- For the first time 4 assignable digital and one dedicated USB input are offered
- New eight band tone controls are programmable by input selection
- Two dedicated phono sections, one moving magnet and one moving coil are supported
- Multiple amplifiers, headphones or signal processors are all controlled

PERFECT PAIR

MC452 Stereo Power Amplifier:

- The most powerful McIntosh stereo amplifier, MC452 is the master of the most delicate or demanding musical passages
- The latest advancements in transistor technology and circuit design result in cooler operation and longer life
- Larger, easier to read power meters monitor the power delivered while protecting one's speaker investment
- New McIntosh designed output binding posts guarantee the best connection with all speaker cable types



McIntosh
LEGENDARY PERFORMANCE™

www.mcintoshlabs.com

Handcrafted in America since 1949, McIntosh's unwavering commitment to performance, innovation and quality brings an elevated music and film experience.



Abba

The Vinyl Collection
Universal, 9LP Box Set

Pop fans, this one's for you: All eight ABBA studio records plus a ninth LP containing extra tracks. The latter record, *ABBA Tracks*, features the five A-side singles not included on the original studio albums, a selection of B-sides, plus a rare track, "Put On Your White Sombrero," that first saw the light of day in the late 90s. A 50+-page booklet delves into the band and albums.

The Vinyl Collection is notable in that all of the albums are exact replicas of the original Swedish editions. Hence, three of the earlier LPs contain inner sleeves featuring Swedish advertisements. Of course, in listening, it quickly becomes evident that this is not an audiophile box set.

Then again, ABBA was never an audiophile band—the group was recorded and mixed for radios, cheap record players, and the mass market. So the sound is a little lacking in dynamics, which boast something along the lines of a "wall of sound" approach. On the plus side, the records here are sourced from the original analog masters. The sonics won't blow your socks off, but the bass is a mite fuller and the mids a touch more detailed than the original issues. The pressings are appreciably quiet.

Yet what matters most is that this box set is a testament to the purity of pop and my assertion that "Dancing Queen" is the best pop single the world has ever seen. Go ahead—have the time of your life.

—Paul Rigby

A Mini Phono Preamp With A Twist

NAD PP 3i

By Jeff Dorgay

N

ow that it costs about \$75

to gas up your car, a \$199 phono preamplifier is a real bargain, especially one that digitizes your vinyl collection via the onboard USB connection. If that isn't enough, the NAD PP 3i even has a line input so that you can digitize your cassette collection (and 8-tracks). The PP 3i comes with Mac/PC compatible AlpineSoft's *VinylStudio Lite* software or it can be downloaded with a quick visit to the NAD website, allowing you to save WAV files of your favorite albums; that's another review for another day.



The PP 3i is powered by an included 24-volt wall wart and is always on. It only draws a couple of watts from the power line, so those worried about being green can sleep easily, knowing that leaving the PP 3i on 24/7 won't cause glacial meltdown. Setup is straightforward, with no switches or added ephemera. You just power it up, plug in your turntable, and roll.

Begin Your Vinyl Journey

If you are just dipping your toe into the waters of analog, the PP 3i is a great place to begin building your budget analog front end. The PP 3i has inputs for MM and MC cartridges, surprising given this price. While there are only a handful of budget MC cartridges on the market, the NAD's match with Denon's DL-110 (\$139) proved amazingly good.

Three budget turntable/cartridge combinations put the PP 3i through its paces: The AudioTechnica AT-LP120 (now discontinued for a new model with a phono preamp/USB link built-in) with Denon DL-110 MC cartridge; the new Rega RP1 turntable with stock Ortofon OM5e MM cartridge; and a freshly refurbished Dual 1219 from Fix My Dual, fitted with a brand-new Grado Red cartridge. A pair of Audio Art IC-3 interconnects (\$110) transferred the signal to the Croft pre and power amplifier combination, both played through the latest Klipsch Heresy III loudspeakers. *(continued)*

FEATURE



What Does \$199 Get You?

Amazingly, a lot more than I expected. While we won't be having a detailed discussion about finesse, air, and extension, this little box did a very respectable job at getting the analog essence to the speakers. The onboard phonostage in the Croft preamp was still miles better than the little NAD, so I did what any self-respecting slacker would, and lowered my standards.

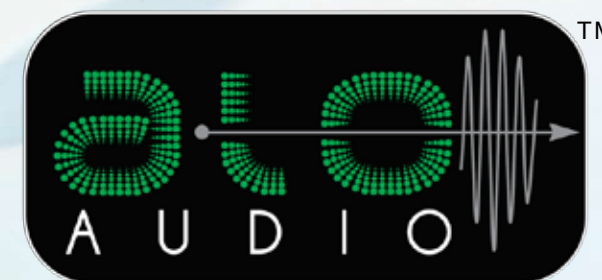
Swapping the Croft amp and preamp for a few vintage 70s receivers revealed that the NAD outperformed a couple (the Pioneer SX -424 and 535), was on par with another (Harmon Kardon 330), and fell a bit short of what was on board with the Marantz 2230.

Honestly, in the day where four- and even five-figure cartridges are more commonplace than one might think, just the fact that this thing even plays music for \$199 is pretty impressive.

Excels With Digital Transfers

While you might get a little bit more soundstage depth with something like the Bellari VP130, it costs more, is a lot noisier, and it won't digitize your vinyl. Even if you don't use the PP 3i to play music in the context of a budget hi-fi system, which it does well, its real strength is its ability to capture some of your favorite LPs for enjoyment in your car or on your iPod. So shell out another 30 bucks (or half a tank of gas) for the full version of *VinylStudio* and get to work. *(continued)*

Don't let your interconnects be your weakest link.



Tel. 503-232-9184
Web. ALOaudio.com

FEATURE



And this is the real strength of the PP 3i, folks. If you are a true vinyl enthusiast, you will obviously end up going for much more, but ripping a stack of your favorite LPs to your iTunes library couldn't be easier. *VinylStudio* makes it painless to chop your tracks up into album format and add metadata. Surprisingly, less-than-audiophile-quality records transferred to iTunes in the Apple Lossless format sounded as good if not a little better than ripping their CD counterparts, at least on a budget system.

The fun didn't stop there. Digitizing some of my favorite hip-hop treasures from cassette yielded results that were as equally as good as the vinyl rips. Not only is Cash Money's *Where's the Party At?* now available in my iTunes library, I'm revisiting K-Tel's *Super Hits of 75* from my 8-track collection, too. Plug your 8-track deck into the high-level input and connect the PP 3i to your laptop via USB, and you are in business.

You Need It

No matter the degree of your vinyl obsession, I suggest buying the NAD PP 3i. It's a perfect entry-level phonostage with benefits for the neophyte, and it works well to digitize some of your analog rarities. Plus, it comes in handy should your mega-bucks phonostage have to make a return to the factory for repairs. Some music is always better than none. ●

www.nadelectronics.com

A REVOLUTION IN AMERICAN HI-FI



The New OMEN DEF 3.0

package pricing starting at \$3,400

U.S. price only - Call for International pricing

PROUDLY BUILT IN THE U.S.A.

www.ZUAUDIO.com



Jazz&Blues

By Jim Macnie

Seems like piano/sax duets offer lots of elbowroom. In the large, each participant has leeway when it comes to bending a melody or messing with a tempo. Indeed, it was an extended *pas de deux* from Cecil Taylor and Jimmy Lyons that helped cement my love of jazz decades ago, and from the Steve Lacy/Mal Waldron exchanges to the Archie Shepp/Horace Parlan outings, I've been a fan of the keys and reeds setting ever since. Two new titles present their participants in a similar environment.



Darius Jones & Matthew Shipp

Cosmic Lieder
AUM Fidelity, CD



Branford Marsalis & Joey Calderazzo

Songs of Mirth & Melancholy
Marsalis Music, CD





GamuT S7

Main Office:
GamuT International A/S
gamutaudio.com

U.S. Distributor:
KT Audio Imports
ktaudioimports.com

Experience the “El Superiores” Speakers

MUSIC

On *Cosmic Lieder*, Darius Jones and Matthew Shipp are responsible for an ominous beauty. The session slithers through mysterious waters and always leads somewhere powerful. Saxophonist Jones has a sweet ‘n’ sour tone that bends in surprising ways. A sense of foreboding marks “Zillo Valla,” but the horn player’s pliant pitch—on eerie long tones and jagged roars—is a siren song that can’t be rebuffed. Shipp’s dark lyricism, especially potent here, fits nicely into such forays. On “Overvoid” he makes a string of choppy passages seem like one continuous thought.

Branford Marsalis and Joey Calderazzo have no trouble with rapport, either. The pianist has been part of his pal’s quartet for years, and their hook-up is deep. The title of this fresh outing describes the program’s duality of moods, and compared to the Jones/Shipp date, it arrives with smile on its face. But a sober atmosphere wafts through the music as well.

Marsalis has been shedding on classical music for decades now, and the poise and grandeur associated with that realm shows up here. “The Bard Lachrymose” is a curiously intimate lament—oversized emotions wisely played small. “Bri’s Dance” bounces gracefully, full of animation albeit guided by the responsibilities of partnership. Calderazzo’s left hand is a fistful of forward motion and drives the romp with that key element of such duets: daring.

—**Jim Macnie**





Charlie Haden, Lee Konitz, Brad Mehldau and Paul Motian (L to R)

© John Rogers/ECM Records



Konitz/Mehldau/Haden/Motian

Live at Birdland

ECM, CD

Sometimes the measured approach is the exciting approach. When jazz elders Lee Konitz, Charlie Haden, and Paul Motian connected with 40-year-old pianist Brad Mehldau for several sets of clever improv at Manhattan's Birdland in the winter of 2009, no exclamation came from the bandstand. Rather, the collective's ardor was closer in temperament to the kind you'd find in a chess game. Like the Modern Jazz Quartet, the group's actions were refined, but its art gripping.

At least that's how it sounds on this new disc, which finds the quartet steadily mulling over its options before making deliberate moves that weave in and out of each member's spheres. A spray of cymbal taps by Motian triggers a rumble from the bottom of Mehldau's piano. The pulsed thumping of Haden's bass spurs a flurry of sideways notes from Konitz's horn. Thematic chestnuts like "Solar" and "Oleo" become secondary to the extrapolations that the unit steers collectively. On "Lullaby of Birdland," the melody barely gets a mention; the masters harvest its DNA for alternate purposes.

Indeed, a few moments prompt a head-scratch or two, with the listener asking: "I thought I knew what tune this is, but now I'm not so sure." For the most part, that's a good thing. The music is perpetually morphing, and its creators calmly in control of its destination. —**Jim Macnie**

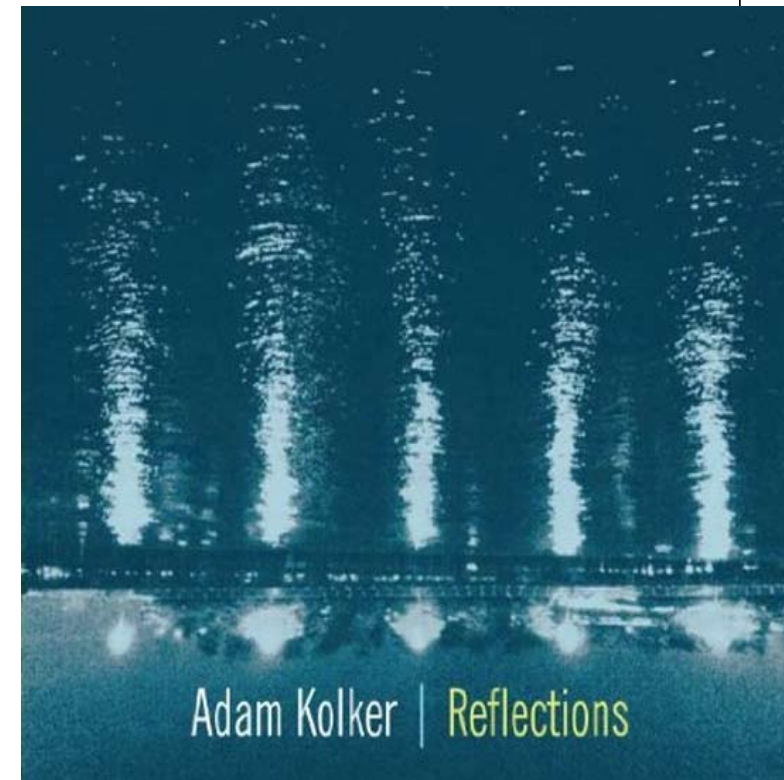


From spinning vinyl...
to streaming a library
of thousands of albums.

The medium may change...but some songs
will always remain the same.



Creators of high-quality audio equipment for the enjoyment of music.
Designed, tested, and hand-built in Salisbury, UK since 1974.



Adam Kolker
Reflections
Sunnyside, CD

The field is thick, so it's not hard for strong players to be overlooked on the New York City jazz scene. But it's a crime when a terrific saxophonist like Adam Kolker doesn't get more dap than he does.

Three years ago, the 50-something woodwind player dropped the radiant *Flag Day*, which not only illustrates his deep ballad playing, but his wide scope. Neil Young's "Don't Let It Bring You Down" is contoured to fit within a set of cozy chestnuts and lithe originals. The program's arc—which accounted for tempos, eras, genres, textures, etc.—is designed to keep the listener actively engaged. Kolker becomes more than a sharp improviser; he's a thoughtful host as well.

Reflections assures that *Flag Day*'s inspired architecture is no fluke. It's a suite of sorts, with each track snuggling next to another with an implied connection. A multi-tracked flute salutation bleeds into a cozy duet with guitarist John Abercrombie. Thelonious Monk's "Let's Call This" is given a nuanced rumba feel. Judi Silvano scats athletically while the band feeds her all sorts of nourishing licks. The territory opens up for rumination between Kolker and bassist John Hebert, and a quick-paced free-bop tune gives way to a flute/voice rendering of "Nature Boy." A killer blues—ultra lyrical, ultra tight—serves as the formidable bookend. You can almost feel the logic of the continuity, and there's not a whiff of "same old thing" anywhere.

Along the way, Kolker reveals a lot about his take on the way modern jazz language works. There's passion, but no roars. There's refinement, but plenty of tension and release. It's all about subtlety, timing, and thinking your way through a thicket of sound. Gorgeous stuff. —**Jim Macnie**

At Last: Clean Power for the Regular Guy

By Jerold O'Brien

Want to start a quick brawl on your favorite Internet forum? Start a discussion about power line conditioners. Every know-it-all in the place will crawl out of the woodwork to tell you why power conditioning won't or can't work. The cruel irony of these discussions is that most of the participants haven't even tried a power conditioner. On one level, it's understandable, because a great power line conditioner costs money, no matter which brand you purchase. And there is a healthy segment of the audiophile community that just doesn't like to spend money.



UNLIMITED ENJOYMENT. LIMITED PRODUCTION.

The ART amplifier

with its seemingly

unbounded power

reserves places

no limits on your

enjoyment of

recorded music.

But only 250 units

(125 pairs) will be

available to

audiophiles

world-wide.

conrad-johnson

conrad-johnson It just sounds right.

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



I've been using a Running Springs Jaco for more than a year, and my system has never sounded better: Increased dynamics, decreased noise, and no adverse effects on tonality. In a word, it's perfect. However, at about \$3,500 with power cord, it's out of reach for the average audiophile that has five or ten grand invested in their system, or perhaps someone with an SET amplifier or even a headphone system that just doesn't have the requirements dictated by a large power amplifier. If you fall into these latter categories, Running Springs has your answer with its newest product, the Elgar. A cool \$995 gets you the box and a great entry-level power cord with 15-amp capacity and six outlets.

Built in Running Springs' ISO 9001 facility in Anaheim, California, the Elgar almost didn't make it to market. When *TONE* publisher Jeff Dorgay talked to owner Dan Babineau about the Elgar at last year's Rocky Mountain Audiofest, Babineau told him that it was almost impossible to produce the Elgar at its price point without involving offshore manufacturing—a choice that he found unacceptable. But Babineau remained committed to producing a high-quality line conditioner made in the US that cost just under \$1,000. He explains: "Utilizing the enclosure from the Haley, with a slightly simpler faceplate helped us to hit the price target. Casework is expensive, no matter how you slice it, so not having to redesign the Elgar's box was the perfect solution." *(continued)*

“Utilizing the enclosure from the Haley, with a slightly simpler faceplate helped us to hit the price target...”

FEATURE

Lifts the Veil

Ironically, budget gear responds to cleaning up power line anomalies even better than some of the world's most expensive products that already have massive power supplies on board. But large power reserves aren't everything. No matter how chock full of expensive filter capacitors your favorite audio component might be, there is still a fair amount of distortion in your power line. And that's what your system amplifies and, left unchecked, leads to fatigue. This is precisely what the Elgar alleviates.

While I've moved somewhat up-scale with my main system, my second system is still comprised of my favorite vintage budget and DIY components. Like the Jaco, the Elgar seems to work more magic on tube gear. My test system consisted of a recently rebuilt Audio Research SP-9, pair of Vandersteen 1C speakers, and a pair of amplifiers—an Audio Research D-76 and Dorgay's Conrad-Johnson MV-50. Analog was provided by a Rega P3-24 'table with Clearaudio Maestro Wood cartridge, and digital via the Neko Audio DAC. Total system cost, sans cable, came to around \$4,500, so we are not talking fiscal irresponsibility.

When Dorgay reviewed the Jaco nearly five years ago, Babineau gave him great advice that still rings true today: "Play the worst-sounding CDs in your collection." I did just that, starting with Metallica's *Death Magnetic*, the Tubes' *Love Bomb*, and a few mid-90s Blue Note discs. Unfortunately, even the Elgar couldn't tame all the harshness in the Metallica disc, but the others showed marked improvement.



The digital component of the music became much more tolerable, with some harsh edges removed. I was instantly impressed, but the best was yet to come.

Switching to better-quality recordings, analog and digital, offered an even bigger performance gain that was similar to the effect of plugging my reference system into the Jaco. Backgrounds became much quieter, with substantial decreases in tube noise, yet not at the cost of smearing leading- or trailing-edge transients. The overall performance became more organic in the sense that the music possessed a better flow, and I was much happier listening to digital with the Elgar in the system. When playing "Continuum" from Jaco Pastorius' self-titled album, I immediately noted how much more air danced around the cymbals, not to mention the additional textures emitted by Pastorius' signature bass. Again, the CD came a step closer to the LP.

A Quick Comparison

In terms of ultimate performance, my \$3,900 Jaco lifts even more crud from my system's presentation, but it costs four times as much. To put both conditioners in perspective, think of a photograph with four sheets of tracing paper laid on top of it. The Jaco removes all four; the Elgar takes away two. Still, the latter represents an outstanding value for \$995. Indeed, it's an ideal solution for the intended customer. So whether you are the audiophile with modest power requirements, or just entering the world of power conditioning, this is the one you want. ●

www.runningspringsaudio.com

ON THE RADAR

T.H.E. Show

Newport Beach, June 3-5, 2011

By Jeff Dorgay and Scott Tetzlaff

While the song goes “nobody walks in LA,” you can easily walk to T.H.E. Show’s Newport Beach Audio Show. Of course, with so many regional shows popping up, the idea of yet another hotel filled with rooms full of hi-fi gear doesn’t sound terribly enticing. Yet promoter Richard Beers has taken a different approach with this event—targeting the much larger luxury goods market rather than the ever-shrinking hardcore audiophile segment.

It’s debatable as to whether more people are buying high-end gear than before, but there’s no doubt that even in these odd economic times, there are plenty of households with disposable income that would love to have a high-performance music system—if only they knew where to find one.

THE LUXURY TV *of Style and Substance*



NuVision, the luxury American brand, creates beautifully hand crafted TVs which deliver a breathtaking 3D visual experience thanks to outstanding engineering and high performance technology.

From the sleek and aesthetically pleasing design to the environmentally conscious build quality, NuVision is the de facto choice for the most discerning home owners.

Add the option to customize the bezel color and incorporate a mirror* and your TV can be individually hand-made to suit the interior design and personality of your room.

Contact us to discover the beauty and technical excellence of NuVision by booking a technology test drive.

Kim Tesori, 480.970.9120, kim.tesori@nuvision.com or visit www.nuvision.com.

* Only available on 55" FX10 LS

NUVISION®
THE FLATSCREEN CONNOISSEUR

TONE STYLE

Beers has been putting on The Home Entertainment Show for ten years, and while he doesn't claim to be an audiophile, he's become part of our tribe. He notes that, "Everyone I know in this industry seems to have the same interests: automobiles, cigars, fine wine, etc. I felt it was time to put it all together with this event."

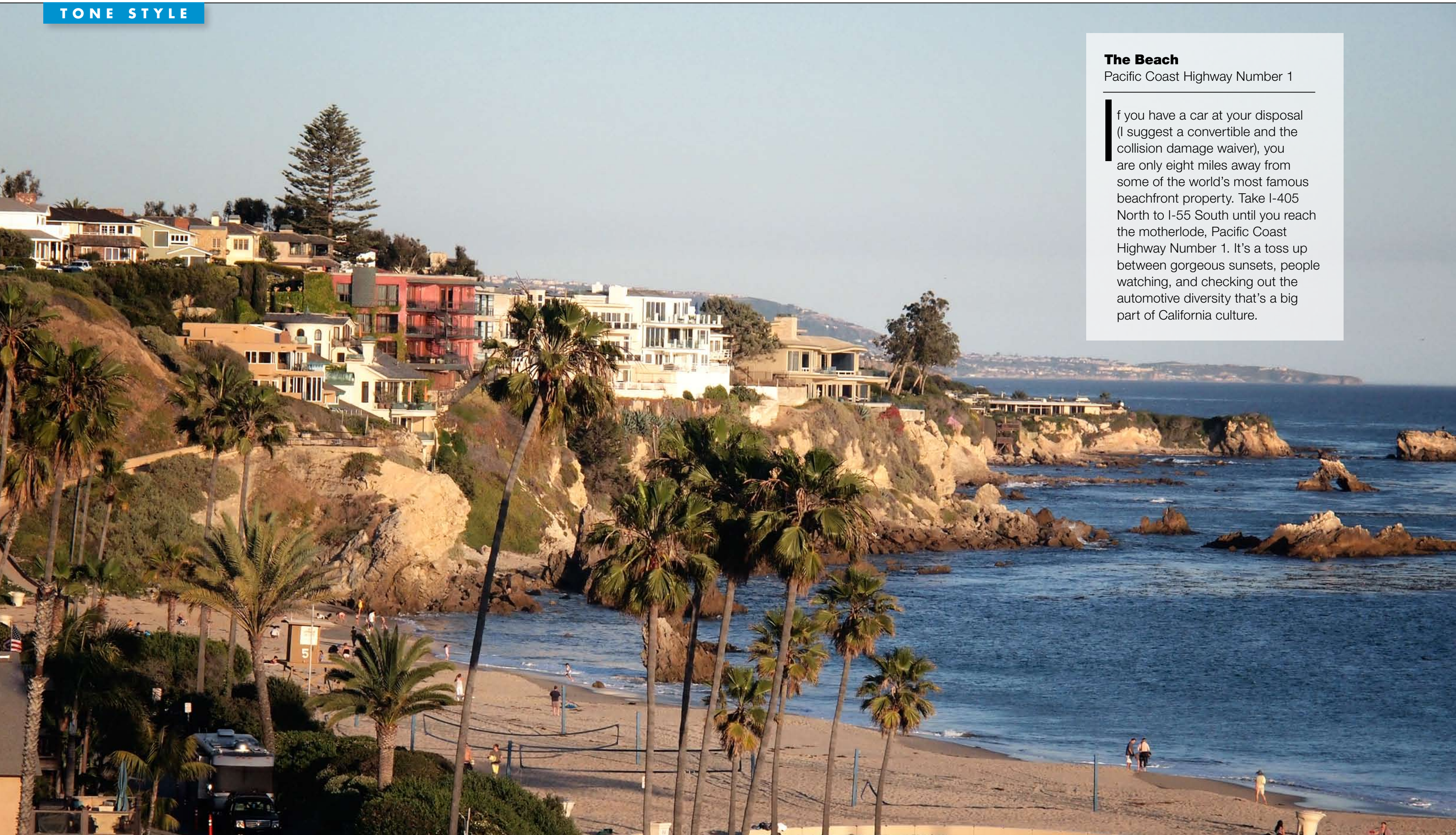
And put it all together he has. With sponsors including local wine vendors and a nearby BMW dealer, his show promises to be something to see. Live music, a classic car event, and wine tasting will all be part of the early June festivities.

Continuing a tradition started with *TONE's* recent article on Montreal Salon Son and Image, rather than produce a stale "show report," we'd rather help you enjoy your trip to Newport Beach. For those of you that aren't locals, here are a few nearby spots to eat, drink, and shop. And should you happen to be working one of the rooms and need extra supplies, Staples is right across the street.

Speaking of proximity, the show is being held at the Hilton Irvine/Orange County Airport. As Beers points out, "You can walk right across the street, provided you don't have too much luggage to carry." Expect the weather to be sunny and in the upper 80s during the day and mid 70s at night, so dress accordingly and leave the tie at home— it's Southern California. Here's to Mr. Beers' success.

**"Everyone I know
in this industry
seems to have the
same interests:
automobiles, cigars,
fine wine, etc.
I felt it was time to
put it all together
with this event."**



**The Beach**

Pacific Coast Highway Number 1

If you have a car at your disposal (I suggest a convertible and the collision damage waiver), you are only eight miles away from some of the world's most famous beachfront property. Take I-405 North to I-55 South until you reach the motherlode, Pacific Coast Highway Number 1. It's a toss up between gorgeous sunsets, people watching, and checking out the automotive diversity that's a big part of California culture.

TONE STYLE

South Coast Plaza

3333 Bristol Street
Costa Mesa
www.southcoastplaza.com

In Southern California, shopping is always on equal footing with beach going, and there's no better place to find everything under the sun than South Coast Plaza. Home to Armani, Barney's, and Gucci (just to name a few), SCP is sure to accommodate you or your better half's needs. Whether you want a new pair of loafers or a complete makeover, here's your destination.



POWER TRIO

The latest additions to Burmester's Top Line offer award winning fidelity and tremendous versatility. The 088 preamplifier features X-Amp 2 modules and can be configured with an on-board phono stage or DAC. The 089 CD player uses an advanced Belt Drive system to keep digital jitter to a minimum, while also featuring a preamplifier stage with volume control and a pair of analog inputs. The 100 phono preamplifier combines two phono inputs and an optional 24-bit/192kHz analog to digital converter, so that you can capture your favorite vinyl treasures at the highest quality possible.

Burmester
ART FOR THE EAR

Top Line
HANDMADE IN GERMANY

Marche Moderne

The Penthouse,
South Coast Plaza
714-434-7900
www.marchemoderne.net

Florent and Amelia Marneau tucked this modern French bistro quietly away on the top floor of South Coast Plaza. Its quiet, tasteful elegance adds to delicious fare. While the offerings are diverse, we suggest the three-course prix fixe “Spontanée” menu. For \$20, you’ll get a fresh salad, the choice of one of two main courses, and an outstanding dessert—all of which can be viewed on the restaurant’s Web site.

After 30-plus years living in Newport Beach, *TONE* style maven Scott Tetzlaff is practically a native. His take: “Most of the locals don’t even know that there’s a third floor to South Coast Plaza, but this is the best restaurant in the city.”



Kean's Coffee

2043 Westcliff Drive
Newport Beach
949-642-5326
www.keancoffee.com

Started by Martin and Karin Diedrich of the Diedrich Coffee chain, and winners of myriad barista contests, Kean's features artisan coffee in a decidedly old-school coffeehouse setting. On the day we visited, a patron described Kean's coffee as “too beautiful to drink.”

In addition to a diverse range of coffee, recently ground and neatly bagged to go, the café sports a full selection of freshly baked snacks and TAO teas. Gluten-free and vegan options are also available.





MOON ... The finest manner for indulging in recorded music

www.simaudio.com



30 Years of Excellence



Haute Cakes Caffe

1807 Westcliff Drive
Newport Beach
949-642-4114

Quaint and quiet, with wonderful courtyard seating, Haute Cakes Caffe gives off a breakfast vibe that's part Euro and part Laurel Canyon. The place is a big hit with the cycling crowd on weekends.

A Newport Beach staple since 1990, the eatery is known for a variety of egg specialties as well as roasting its own coffee and freshly baking all pastries. While the omelets are exquisite, "Bill's Breakfast" is highly recommended if you require a major caloric intake first thing in the morning. The plate features two eggs to taste, bacon, bread, and freshly sliced pineapple and mango. Sound seductive? Stop by Haute Cakes' Facebook page and download the mobile menu.

TONE STYLE

A Restaurant

3334 Pacific Coast Highway
Newport Beach
949-650-6505
www.arestaurantnb.com

Beginning as The Arches in 1926, A Restaurant remains a landmark that harkens back to the days of Bogart and Bacall (who, among other Hollywood stars, were regulars). Save for a plasma screen located behind the bar, the red lighting and leather décor is true to the early vision of this great steak and seafood establishment.

While you are sipping a Manhattan and waiting for your dinner, check out the restaurant's photographic gallery displaying the work of George Seitz, who chronicled Newport Beach between 1994 and 1998. Or take advantage of one of the 72 wine lockers, \$1,000 from the sale of each is donated to the John Wayne Cancer Foundation.



The new gateway for Audiophiles

After the first drum hit, you'll be hooked. But don't worry, at these prices, Junior's college fund is safe...for now.

Never Settle. That's the driving philosophy behind every product our distinguished in-house design and engineering team creates, and the Motion Series is no exception. Voice matched with MartinLogan's ultra-high-end electrostatic speakers, Motion speakers features exotic Folded Motion tweeters that will have your ears lusting for more alone time with your music collection.

Meet the family

Starting at only
\$199.95* each.

*Suggested US retail



Motion™
MARTIN LOGAN

The Great American Speaker Company

www.martinlogan.com/motion

Hi Time Wine Cellar

250 Ogle Street
Costa Mesa
800-331-3005
www.hitimewine.net

Nothing goes better with your favorite tunes than a preferred adult beverage. Don't let the cheesy Web site fool you; this is a Mecca for vinophiles. Rated by many luxury lifestyle magazines as "the best wine cellar in Southern California," Hi Time has an equally impressive collection of spirits and a humungous humidor, as well.

Featuring weekly tasting events, the cellar's convenient bar hosts a dozen recent favorites on tap. A taste portion, half-full pour, or full glass is only a credit-card click away. Imagine a vending machine for great wine, and you get the picture.

The helpful staff is even better. No matter what level of appreciation you have for the fermented grape, Hi Time's experts will be able to guide you to the proper choices.

Mesa

725 Baker Street
Costa Mesa
714-557-6700
www.mesacostamesa.com

Depending on the time of evening, Mesa changes its character. Sometimes it's a chill-out lounge, and other times it is a swank club, with dark booths, fireplaces, and intimate seating. For the NBA Semi-Finals, it was transformed into a 21st century sports bar, with plasma screens in every booth and cheering fans in anguish while Kobe Bryant missed the opportunity to win the game with three seconds on the clock.

Regardless of the mood, Mesa features an all-star service staff and eclectic mix of small plate, fusion cuisine, and a three-course flatbread menu featuring carefully selected local cheeses and berries from local markets. And don't miss the surprises that await you in the restrooms.

Ruby's

Multiple Locations
www.rubys.com

Although it pays homage to 50s diners, Ruby's began life in 1982 at the end of the Balboa pier. And even now that the company is almost 40 locations strong, it's still worth taking a walk down the pier to eat at the first location.

While burger snobs may snipe that better examples exist, the food is consistently good, and the shakes are some of the best on the coastline. But the greatest part of Ruby's is the atmosphere, especially if you manage to grab a window seat at sunset. ●

"The Truth, nothing more, nothing less..."

"Ridiculously good in every aspect of vinyl playback" - Michael Fremer, *Stereophile*



 **AVIDHIFI**

The Diva II SP edition reveals a genuine insight into the performance standards of high-end audio.

Precision control of turntable speed is achieved with our DSP engine. Variations in the mains supplies are ironed out to create a pure supply of power to the motor. This can be calibrated to achieve perfect platter speeds.

Motor noise, vibration and control are class-leading with a 'twin belt' drive controlling platter dynamics and stability under load. The result? A smooth, yet dynamic sound quality, improved bass and treble definition.

www.avidhifi.co.uk

AVID HIFI LIMITED, Bicton Industrial Park, Kimbolton, Huntingdon, Cambs, PE28 0LW
Tel: +44(0)1480 869 900 Fax: +44(0)1480 869 909
Website: www.avidhifi.co.uk, Email: info@avidhifi.co.uk

"It revealed an incredible wealth of genuine low-level detail... If times got tough and I had to sell my big rig, I could listen happily ever after to the Diva II SP. That's how well balanced and robust its overall sound was."

- Michael Fremer, *Stereophile* (January 2011)



Pulsar Phono Stage

TONE STYLE

Apple iPad 2

\$599 - \$899

www.apple.com

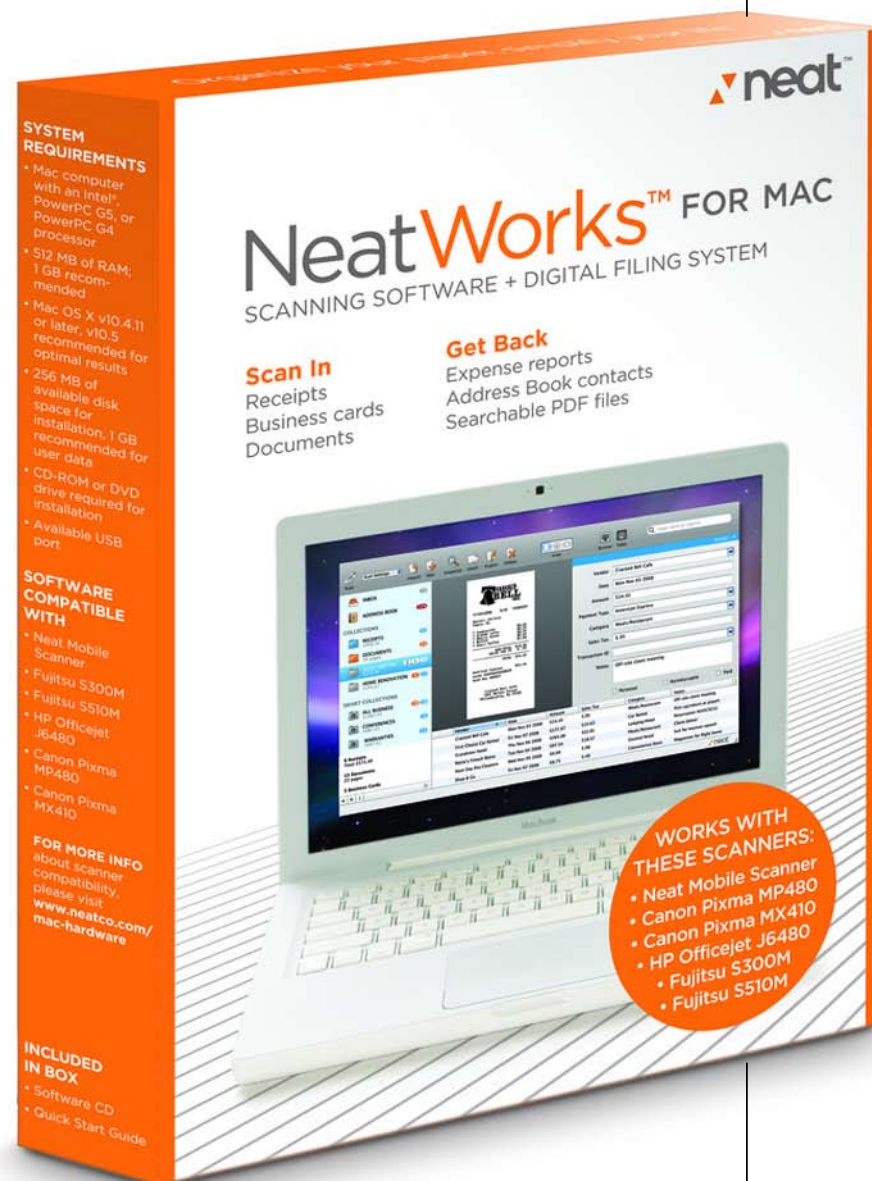
Now that the dust has settled and you can walk into a local Apple store and grab an iPad 2, the question becomes: Do you really need one? Not really. Unless you are a gadget fanatic that just has to have the latest greatest, wait for v.3. Here's why.

At the end of the day, the "33 percent thinner" iPad 2 only translates into .15 inches, and "up to 15% lighter" actually means about 3 fewer ounces. An informal poll of iPad 2 users has yielded mixed responses, with some respondents claiming that the device is "dramatically lighter" while others—myself included—can't tell the difference.

However, most will notice that the front bezel is somewhat cleaner looking, with less metal frame surrounding the screen. A new, magnetically attached integrated case that doubles as a stand increases the hip factor but does not protect the back. In other words, on-the-go owners may find that an accidental drop onto a surface such as a tile floor results in a big dent. And while pundits rave about the iPad 2's front and rear cameras, these, too, represent a proverbial double-edged sword: Now there is something else to break and disable the tablet, and who really uses FaceTime anyway? As an active photographer, I wish Apple would've included the iMac's SD card reader instead.

The positives? The iPad 2 sports a faster, dual-core A5 processor and a nine-times boost in video performance, which gamers will love. Still, those not addicted to Angry Birds and the like will probably not notice much of a difference unless they regularly download movies in HD from iTunes. Fortunately, Apple did not mess with what is arguably the best feature: 10-plus-hour battery life. You'll get about ten hours of performance on a full charge, even when using Wi-Fi and the new camera. And, as with the original, you'll get nearly 12 hours with 3G and Wi-Fi disabled.





NeatWorks

\$79.95 (Mac or PC)
www.neatco.com

Here's one of the few "as seen on TV" products that really works, and impressively so. If you have a mountain of receipts, business cards, and the like, installing NeatWorks gets you organized with just a few quick mouse clicks.

While the ads try to sell you one with a proprietary scanner in a bundle for which you pay in four installments, the software is available separately and works with any number of common scanners from Canon, Fujitsu, and others. NeatWorks effortlessly operated with my Fujitsu SnapScan 300 (now on the secondary market for less than \$50).

Once the software is installed, it's easy to scan business cards, receipts, and documents. NeatWorks provides a digital in-box for everything you've scanned, so you can sort in any number of ways. If you are in a hurry and need something pronto, Mac users can take advantage of the Spotlight functionality. Best of all, NeatWorks information can be exported to Excel, Quicken, and TurboTax. Your accountant will love you, and you'll be able to spend all the time you've saved record shopping.

The Rolling Stones

The Complete Singles (1971-2006)
45CD Box Set
www.amazon.com

The Stones' latest box set is a paradox on several levels. It doesn't cover any of the band's output from the 1964-1969 London/Decca period, so the title is somewhat of a misnomer. And completists will be appalled that not all of the artwork is actually as it should be, but everyone else should enjoy it just fine.

Including a small booklet, with copy courtesy of Paul Sexton, as well as a full track listing, this collection isn't for everybody. Maniacal collectors probably already have all this material in at least a few other formats. Handled by Metropolis Studios in London, sonics are decent, and the formatting tons of fun. If nothing else, the 45-disc



The Complete Singles (1971-2006) makes for a great coffee-table conversation piece. Think of it as the Rolling Stones version of Trivial Pursuit.

Of course, the \$200 price tag may prove prohibitive for some. But what would have really sealed the deal would have been to press these selections on vinyl: 45 45RPM records with replica sleeves would prove incredibly cool.

The LP Qube

\$189 each, multiple finish options
www.quadraspire.co.uk

Maintaining the classic shape of Quadraspire equipment racks, the LP Qube presents a stylish and solid way to store LPs. Each Qube can hold up to 150 LPs, and thanks to the modular design, can be scaled up to almost limitless proportions. While the units can easily sit on the floor, they look very snappy when wall-mounted (just make sure you attach securely to wall studs) and can be accessorized with optional clear or bead-blasted glass doors. So, give your precious vinyl the respect it deserves by properly storing your collection.



CD 303T SACD PRO DISC PLAYER
 CAD 211FE POWER AMPLIFIER
 SLP 05 PREAMPLIFIER

THE FINE ART OF *technology*



Uncompromising design.
 Quality beyond comparison.

Experience
 hi-fidelity
 today.

Visit your local Cary Audio
 Dealer for a demo.

CARY
 Audio Design



The benchmark has now been established - 6moon
Transparent balanced & very realistic - PlayBack
The most effortless, immediate presentation of sound - Positive Feedback

WA22 Fully Balanced Headphone Amplifier
WOO AUDIO
 Finely Crafted in New York

Bottle Screws

\$11.95, set of three
<http://tinyurl.com/3ugmwxj> (Amazon)

Wine purists may wretch, but if you aren't slurping the good stuff and need to break up a drinking session, these bottle screws work much better than trying to stuff a cork back into a bottle. Available in fun colors and easy to use.





Mark Lanegan Bobblehead

\$25.00

www.gomerch.com/shop

They remain the most popular and valuable giveaways at sporting events—search eBay for figurines of past and present Chicago Blackhawks such as Tony Esposito, Jonathan Toews, and Patrick Kane and prepare for sticker shock at what were presented free to ticketholders—so why shouldn't musicians get their due in the form of lively bobbleheads? That said, even the most devoted Mark Lanegan fans must be somewhat shocked to see his likeness in plastic, but the former Screaming Tree vocalist and nicotine-throated solo sensation is definitely deserving of the honor. Dressed in a black suit, sporting finger tattoos and the requisite cigarette, and standing on a pedestal labeled “The Night Porter,” make sure you have it around next time you spin Lanegan’s haunting *Whiskey for the Holy Ghost* and the Gutter Twins’ inimitable *Saturnalia*.



Shown: LTX 500 Projector



AVM 50v audio/video processor

+



Anthem Room Correction (ARC™)

+



LTX 500 LCOS Projector

= Home Theater Bliss

... that's what you get when Anthem, the #1 Electronics Brand Overall, offers a complete audio/video solution. You get high-end home theater that doesn't get any better ... or any more affordable! Visit your nearest Anthem Dealer today for an amazing demonstration of a complete Anthem Home Theater.

A N T H E M
THE KEY TO HIGH END AUDIO-VIDEO™

#1 Brand Overall, Inside Track Annual Dealer Survey 2007, 2008, 2009.
An annual independent nationwide survey of consumer electronics specialist retailers and custom installers.

Sassicaia Session

By Ken Kessler

Think of all the things you'd love to do, savor, and experience that are just beyond your reach. Perhaps you wish to dine at El Bulli, regarded as the world's finest restaurant and rumored to soon close. Or maybe you want to drive a Bugatti Veyron before spending a few uninterrupted hours in front of your dream sound system. For me, one of my dreams has been recently realized: Getting tipsy on Sassicaia.

Not that it's such a stretch as borrowing a Veyron. All it requires is requisite cash. But even then, there are "incidentals," like the correct venue, right food, and presence of a Tenuta San Guido executive to add the necessary authenticity and gravitas. But first, the why and the wine.

Sassicaia is an Italian red wine produced by Tenuta San Guido in the DOC Bolgheri in Toscana. It's debatable as to whether or not it is the first of what are now deemed "Super Tuscan" wines; some might credit Tignanello. But one thing is indisputable: Sassicaia is the Italian wine that singlehandedly made the world forget about tongue-torturing, rat-pee Chianti that's good only for bottles covered with basket weave and suited for holding candles.

Tenuta San Guido was established by Mario Incisa della Rochetta of the Antinori family, a name familiar to all Italian wine lovers for its vast range of superior wines. Sassicaia—which comes from the Italian word for stone, the name suggesting a stony field—was first produced solely for the family's use as far back as 1948. It turned out to be not just a magnificent wine but also a wonderful means of explaining the importance of *terroir*—the geography and climate of where the grapes are grown, and an obsession with wine cognoscenti. Incisa della Rochetta used Cabernet Sauvignon vines reputedly sourced from Château Lafite-Rothschild. In theory, then, the only difference between Sassicaia and the French icon comes down to the very soil that supported and fed the vines. Concurrently, changes were afoot in Italy pertaining to the way wine was grown, sold, accredited. Italian wine growers looked at the French's more sophisticated approach and both the respect and income generated by their superior wines.

Around 1968, the family employed highly regarded consultants to improve production, yet the wine wasn't offered commercially until the 1970s. What happened in the midterm should amuse those who "punched the air" when Californian wines humiliated French snobs in 1976. At a 1978 tasting of "great clarets"—what the British insist on calling Bordeaux—a panel of wine experts that included the legendary Hugh Johnson declared the 1972 Sassicaia the victor over 33 wines from 11 countries.





Burmester 100 Phono Preamp

Auravis Systems is pleased to announce the arrival of Burmester's state of the art 100 Phono Preamp in Salt Lake City. As avid fans of analog music reproduction, ground breaking engineering, and world class craftsman, we could not be more excited about Burmester's introduction of this work of art.

The 100 Phono Preamp may be the world's most advanced phono stage amplifier. At its core, the 100 is built with the finest, hand selected and proprietary components. The design is executed with Burmester's zero compromise "Reference Line" technology. The Result? Possibly the quietest, most accurate and spectacularly dynamic and natural, three dimensional presentation ever yielded by a phono stage amplifier.

The 100 features up to two independent MM/MC phono inputs with on the fly cartridge load/gain setting switching. An optional A to D conversion module allows for reference level digital output of your vinyl collection to a hard drive or CD burner. Additional features include an auto-adjust function for cartridge channel output balance, variable volume direct to amplifier capability, and phase switching.

Burmester
ART FOR THE EAR

Audio Acoustics . Brinkman . Burmester . Cardas . Chord Cable
Dali . Dynavector . Feikert . FIM . Furutech . Joseph Audio
Hannl . Harmonix . HRS . Manley Labs . Lindemann . Millenium
Mobile Fidelity . Naim . Nottingham . Oppo . Quadraspire
Rega . Reimyo . Running Springs Audio . Shakti . Shure
Stage III Concepts . Synergistic Research . Target Audio . Torus
VPI . Wadia . Weizhi . Well Tempered

For more information about this phenomenal
Burmester product or to arrange a demo call:

801.558.1625



The upset was all it took to position Sassicaia, and by extension, other Italian wines among the world's greats. While I'm loathe to popularize them—most people still use French wines as the default purchase, causing them to be extortionately priced and, by extension, leaving Italian luxury wines with relatively sane tariffs—the number of stunning Tuscan wines is in the hundreds. Sassicaia is arguably the best, although oenophiles might prefer Masseto, Solaia, or Ornellaia. What's not in question is that Sassicaia is now the most famous among connoisseurs.

As for the dry facts, Tenuta San Guido's wines are grown in Bolgheri on plots of around 75 hectares (190 acres), with Sassicaia's grape complement consisting of 85% Cabernet Sauvignon and 15% Cabernet

Franc. For such a coveted wine, production is not painfully low, as with, say, Romanee-Conti. Annual production amounts to approximately 180,000 bottles.

Even so, Sassicaia is never exactly cheap. Most satisfy their beyond-reach cravings with the second wine, the delightful Guidalberto, introduced in 2000 and comprised of 45% Cabernet Sauvignon, 45% Merlot, and 10% Sangiovese. Or the newer wine, Le Difese, made of 70% Cabernet Sauvignon and 30% Sangiovese. If you want to try the real thing, the least expensive bottle wine-searcher.com turned up in the USA is a half-bottle of the 1996 for \$95. At the other end of the scale is the legendary 1985, at around \$1800. One can only wonder what restaurants charge. But price did not concern me on my "dream night."

(continued)



The phone rings. The voice on the other line says, “Ken, I have two tickets for dinner in London. At Harry’s Bar.” Hmm. Quick recall: private dining club, sublime food. Interest piqued. “All of the wines will be Sassicaia. Are you free?” Restraint, Ken, restraint. The time trickled by. Finally, the date arrived.

The scene: About 70 diners, all looking like they knew their 87s from their 88s. The staff? All-Italian. The guest of honor? Dott. Sebastiano Rosa, Direttore Commerciale of Tenuta San Guido, parent of Sassicaia, one of Italy’s most noble wines. A corner table, romantic atmosphere.

While I am not a stickler for *abbinamento*, the matching of wine with food—especially as I despise white or bubbly and will drink red with fish or anything else on my plate—you might think it was pearls before swine. Trust me; I appreciated the effort. We commenced with a melt-in-the-mouth Tuscan rejoinder to foie

gras, paté di fegatini, supported by fresh, raw porcini. The first wine arrived: a 2008 Guidalberto, Sassicaia’s aforementioned “second wine.” Fresh and young it may have been, but there was no mistaking its provenance. I’d had it at least a dozen times before, and even one this young possessed the spirit and finesse of its paterfamilias.

Soon after, an exquisite dish of tagliatelle with a sauce of boar emerged, complementing a 2007 Sassicaia. Despite its youth, the wine belied or even contradicted any need to wait, as if justifying the impatience of the modern age. Seasoned pros insist that its best years are ahead of it, yet one can delight in its pre-pubescent state. A main dish fit for a king provided the platform for the next two wines. Chianina beef marinated in, yes, Sassicaia. We started with a 98, a wine not to be forgotten. Greater depth, interwoven tastes and aromas, never overpowering, and always enticing.

Back to the course: A most tender cut of beef, fried zucchini, the creamiest of potatoes. And then the 1982 Sassicaia arrived. They saved a legend for last. Any Sassicaia from the 1980s is wine to savor with respect, control, deliberation. I could have spent the evening inhaling its perfume. On the tongue? The realization that this breed of wine from Italy’s Western coast, commercially available for less than 40 years, has a permanent place among the global greats. And that the hype just isn’t. It’s all for real.

My “bucket list” had grown shorter. The Veyron? Perhaps never. A 1950s Breguet Type XX on my wrist? If I get lucky. But a Sassicaia evening? One for the memory bank.

PUBLISHER’S NOTE: In case you aren’t prepared to drop six grand on a bottle of wine (most people aren’t) but would like to have the experience someday, buy a semi current bottle now. That’s the advice I received from the staff at Hi Time Wine Cellar in Costa Mesa, California. During a recent visit, the ‘82 Sassicaia came up as I discussed jumping off the cliff for the \$200 bottle of the 2007 vintage you see at the beginning of this article. “Buy a few more bottles and put them in your wine cellar for 10 -15 years,” said owner Fritz Hanson. “They may not appreciate quite as much as the ‘82, but the experience will be the same. You just have to be patient.” So, for the cost of a Rolling Stones box set, you can have a premier wine experience in the year 2020. ●



extraordinary
+
synergy

Red Wine Audio is proud to be the exclusive
North American Distributor for **WLM Loudspeakers**

Red Wine Audio
battery-powered purist hi-fi



WLM
Loudspeakers

www.redwineaudio.com

Marshall Major

\$99 www.marshallheadphones.com



Go to just about any rock concert and you're bound to see a stack of Marshall amplifiers onstage. Due to their sound and reliability, countless musicians have relied on them for nearly 50 years. And while Marshall continues to comfortably dominate the guitar amp world, the company recently set its sights on shaking up in the mainstream headphone market. The legendary brand's latest creation is the Major headphones, which redefine what most listeners will expect from \$99 headphones.

With the Major, Marshall designed a stylish albeit rugged headphone that consumers will instantly associate with its legendary amplifiers. It all starts with the square earpieces, which replicate the physical shape of Marshall's amplifiers. The vinyl is the same that's used in the amplifiers, and the manufacturer went as far as to put the same texture on the earpieces. Fit and finish are exceptional. To ensure comfort, Marshall utilizes a soft faux-leather on the earpieces and on the inner side of the headband. The cord sports one of the best-designed plugs you'll encounter in this price range. A gold-plated plug is over-designed to ensure longevity, and includes a spring to ease tension so that the cord doesn't prematurely wear out. Marshall also includes a 6.3mm adapter so that users can hook the Major up to a traditional headphone amplifier. The Major collapses for easy and safe storage.

Packing a solid punch, the Major sounded very natural with every type of music I played. Much like Marshall amplifiers, its overall sound character leans a bit towards the warm side, yet the latter characteristic doesn't subtract from the sound. In fact, it helped create an overall smoothness that allowed long listening sessions to be non-fatiguing. And these headphones are faithful to the source.





They let you hear everything on a recording, but do it in a way that isn't clinical. We all know that there's nothing worse than a hi-fi product that sounds like it is mining for information.

For example, on Oasis's "The Masterplan," off *Stop the Clocks*, Liam Gallagher's vocals sounded exceptional. An enhanced sense of body brought the vocals to life and made them sound extremely realistic. There's a lot happening in the song, but the Major never hid anything. I distinctly heard all the instruments and their associated subtle nuances, aspects that both added to the performance and drew me in. Changing gears, I turned to the Scorpions' "No One Like You" from *Blackout*. The killer guitar work on the song proved that the Major possessed a clear and extended treble—never harsh or shrill, never rolled off. No, it wasn't the most airy and sweet sounding, but still very good. I found myself listening to a wide variety of music with these headphones, and they handled every genre with ease. When I played White Lies' "Death" from the band's *To Lose a Life* album, I couldn't help but be impressed by the bass. This song is driven by a bass rhythm, and all the notes claimed solid weight and impact.

If you have low-resolution MP3 files, don't worry, as they'll sound very good via the Major. I had no problem listening to some of my lower-quality music files;

I just lost a level of realism when I did. When I hooked the Major up to my Peachtree Audio headphone amplifier, the sound quality jumped in every conceivable area. Still, you can get legitimate hi-fi sound from the headphones even if only using a standard iPod.

Of course, the Major isn't perfect. I really enjoyed the headphones' sound quality, but noticed that the midrange sounded like it was tuned 1dB lower than the bass and treble, and didn't have as much presence. In addition, while I liked the style of the square-shaped earpieces, the design didn't prove to be comfortable for long-term listening. Marshall is trying to draw comparisons to its amplifiers, but a square design isn't the best shape for ears.

That said, Marshall exceeds expectations with the Major. The level of refinement is exceptional, and the sound is smooth and clear, with extended highs and deep bass. Moreover, the model is built to a standard rarely seen at this price. At \$99, the Major constitutes bargain. If you are looking for a huge upgrade at an affordable price, these headphones should be on your short list.

—Kevin Gallucci

WESC Banjo Headphones

\$54 www.wesc.com

What happens when trendy street fashion gets crossed with headphone design? Nothing less than WESC (WeAretheSuperlativeConspiracy) Banjo headphones. WESC is a Swedish clothing company that sets itself apart by creating its own design trends. Extending its reach to the burgeoning headphone market, the firm recently launched a range of headphones for consumers that want to listen to their tunes in style. Banjo 'phones represent a modern twist on traditional designs and are unlike most models you see on the street.

The Banjo clearly embodies simplicity, as the headphones are very minimalist and available in a variety of bold colors. My review sample came in Hot Orange, which appropriately describes the 80s throwback color. These are headphones that definitely scream, "LOOK AT ME!" Build quality, however, is average. The earpieces are an on-ear design and modestly comfortable, but the cushions could be softer and plastic coating a bit thicker. The materials feel budget, but for \$54, you are not going to get Rolex quality. Intuitively, the headphone cord comes in two pieces and can be shortened so listeners don't have to deal with any excess cord. Also, WESC included a pause button on the cord, so users can turn off their music without digging out their iPod player—a nice feature given the growing size of handbags and backpacks.

Sound quality is what you might expect for the price. The Banjo uses 40mm power drivers in a closed-back design. Sonics don't fall in the hi-fi category, but they aren't of stock Apple earbud variety, either. Listening to "Doll Parts" on Hole's *Live Through This* yielded a presentation that fell somewhat short of natural-sounding. The headphones are far from grainy or harsh, but their overall sound is slightly processed. Courtney Love's vocals lacked the realism afforded by hi-fi headphones. *(continued)*



However, I was impressed with the transparency, and clearly heard all the instruments. It helped compensate for the uneven natural sound character, seemingly a result of degradation most likely caused by poor crossover design or budget-made drivers.

Changing pace, I tossed on Michael Jackson's "Beat It" from *Thriller* and was taken with the treble. The guitar solo possessed satisfying detail, and the highs sounded crisp. Ditto for Jackson's upper register, which sounded extended and smooth. Unfortunately, this track suffered from the same problems encountered with Hole, the presentation just slightly off and unnatural. Keeping with the Jackson theme, I listened to OutKast's "Ms. Jackson" from the group's breakout *Stankonia* and came away very satisfied with the headphones' ample bass. My nitpick is that it wasn't very tight and controlled, and thus, verged on boomy. The opening drums also lacked definition, showing again that the bass was sufficient but lacked desired control.

I wasn't blown away by the Banjo, but for the budget consumer looking to upgrade from their flimsy iPod ear buds, the WESC represents a fine option. The Banjo has several pluses—as well as definite minuses. Capable of smooth, extended highs and decent transparency, the headphones lack the natural sound that's a must for realistic sound reproduction. A middle-of-the-road model, the Banjo is better sounding than stock earpieces but doesn't have the chops to compete with genuine hi-fi headphones. If you can spare a little more money, for around \$100, you can find substantially better headphones—even if they don't come with the stylish "wow" factor the Banjo delivers. —**Kevin Gallucci**



verityaudio.com

Gemme Tonic 5 Loudspeaker

\$1,395/pair
www.gemmeaudio.com

Gemme's past efforts (the Tanto, Katana, and Vivace) combined great sound with fashion-forward aesthetics, the approach yielding highly desirable speakers that easily integrate into your home and system. The company's new Tonic line is somewhat more straightforward in appearance but incorporates everything the Gemme team learned in cabinet and crossover design. The net result? An attractive pair of modestly sized—and priced—floorstanders. Review in process.



Lyra Kleos Phono Cartridge

\$2,995
www.immedia.com

The second cartridge from Lyra's "third generation" of products, and priced slightly below the Skala, the Kleos possesses the analog firm's renowned line-contact stylus profile and "new angle" coil system. Several other technical advances augment the Kleos, but the real proof is in the listening.

Advancing beyond the sound of the award-winning Skala, the Kleos boasts a sound profile that's ever so slightly warmer. And still, it doesn't sacrifice any of the speed and resolution for which Lyra is famous. A full review will appear in Issue 39.

Photo courtesy of Music Direct

Burmester 089 CD Player

\$28,995
www.burmester.de

A relentless innovator, Dieter Burmester revolutionized digital playback by applying the belt-drive concept to his namesake company's line of CD players. Isolating the drive motor from the spindle that actually spins the CD makes for a much smoother rotation, just as it does in a turntable. While the belt-drive system cuts down on wow and flutter in a turntable, it makes for lower jitter in a CD player, which results in a more natural sound. Featuring such traits, the 089 can also be used as a DAC that's capable of resolution up to 24bit/192k sampling. An optional Bluetooth adapter allows for wireless streaming, too.

Sure, new Burmester transports are always exciting, yet the 089 takes things a step further. It offers an analog input, meaning that those wanting a compact albeit ultra high-performance system can use the 089 as a control center. Moreover, in the output stage, it features a pair of X-Amp2 modules, previously only used in Burmester's Reference Line components. To make the 089 the center of your system, simply plug in your favorite phono preamplifier and music server. Review in progress.



All the coughing there is. Beethoven's 6th, 1st movement, on the new Focus 260.



The new Focus 260. A perfect symbiosis. Now.

Cohesively balanced like a compact monitor. Exhibiting the substance and power of a floor-standing loudspeaker. The Focus 260 features the legendary Dynaudio soft dome tweeter, now with new Precision Coating. A dual mid/bass driver complement featuring the advanced new Black Kapton® voice coil formers. And our famous die-cast aluminum driver baskets, in a relatively large cabinet volume. The Focus 260 brings you homogenous balance, excellent speed and incredibly natural musicality with added low-bass dynamics and presence. Soon at your Dynaudio dealer. Read more at www.dynaudio.com/new_focus

A Result of Refinement

THE ARC PH6 PHONO PREAMPLIFIER

By Jeff Dorgay

As you might guess, a company like Audio Research doesn't stay at the top of the heap by making willy-nilly model changes just for the sake of cranking out a new box. Upgrades have to be demonstrable. I've had my hands on almost every phono preamplifier in the Audio Research lineup for the past 25 years, including the phonostage in the legendary SP 10 preamplifier. It's always exciting when something new is under the hood.

The \$3,495 PH 6, along with the PH 8, which will be reviewed later this year, is the latest addition to ARC's award-winning phono preamplifier line. Its price represents a \$1,000 increase from the previous PH 5, but considering the improvements in power supply and different topology, offers a completely new design.

While the LP was in serious decline during the late 80s, ARC still included a top-quality phonostage in its preamplifiers. Until then, included phonostages consisted solely of vacuum tubes. In the early 90s, when the LS (linestage) series began production, ARC's outboard phonostages, beginning with the PH 1 and PH 2, were solid state, but the PH 3 (and later PH 3SE) started down the current path of hybrid design by utilizing low-noise FET transistors for the input stage, coupled to a tube output stage. The benefits of such a design make for a quieter phonostage than one that is all tubes; it also cuts down the tube complement, boosting long-term reliability.

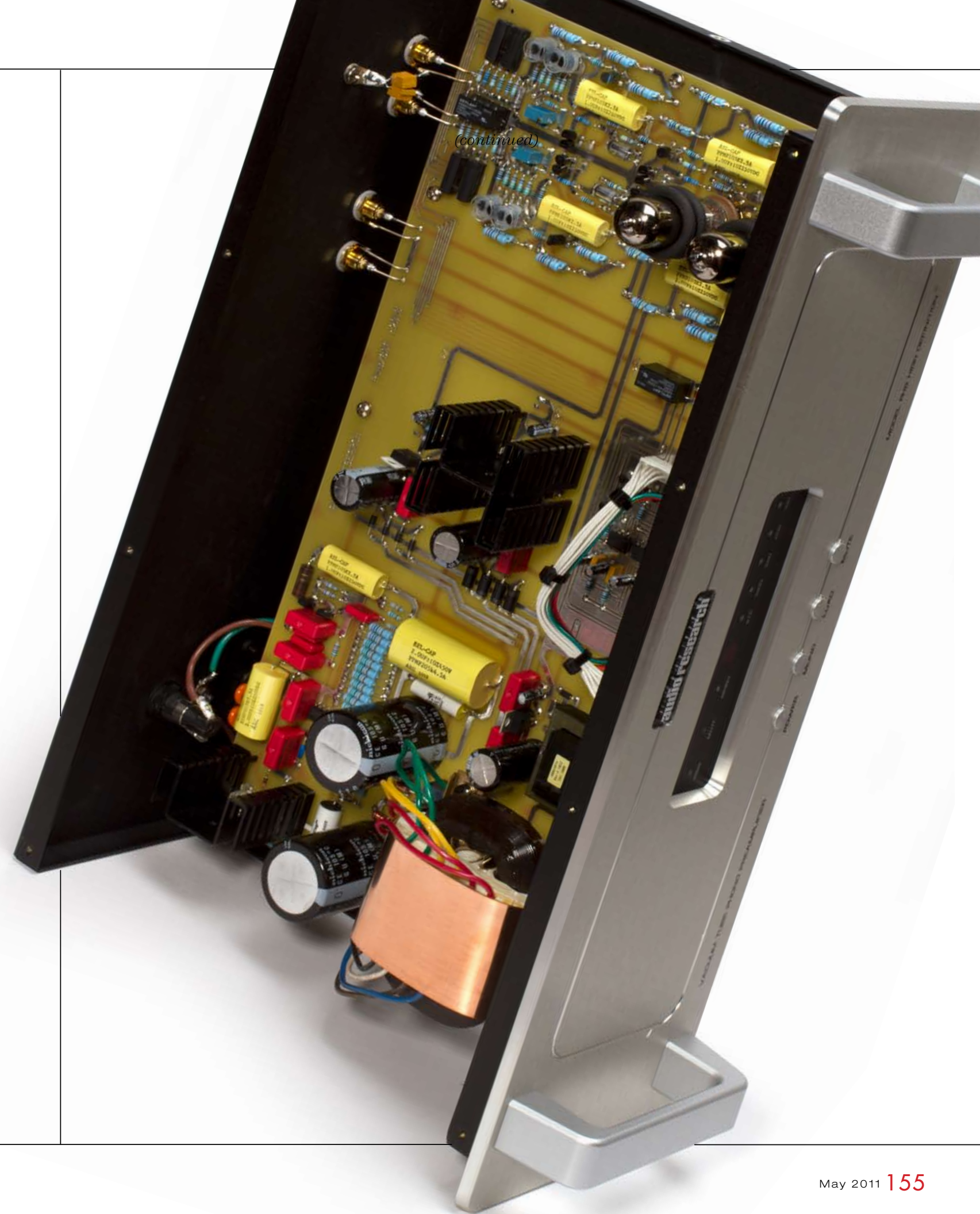
Tech Basics

Having replaced the PH 5, the PH 6 has a number of significant changes, the most visible being the switch from a tube complement of four 6922 tubes to a pair of 6H30 tubes—also used in ARC's REF Phono 2, my current reference phono preamplifier. Though ARC is not making any claims, my experience with the 6H30 in other preampli-

fiers is that this tube tends to be very robust, so tube life should be fairly long. And since there aren't a lot of variations on the 6H30 theme, I suggest sticking with the factory-approved tubes. When replacement time does come (probably around 5,000 hours), a new pair from ARC will only set you back around \$100. Consequently, *no* tube rolling was done during the course of this review.

The rear panel is straightforward, with RCA jacks for input and output; this is a single-ended design, and unlike ARC's higher-end products that feature fully balanced design. The PH 6 has only one input and output, and a fixed gain of 58db, but loading is configurable in steps of 100, 200, 500, 1000, and 47k ohms from either the front panel or handy remote control. A mono switch is also included for those that boast mono record collections yet lack a mono switch on their linestage. Cosmetics are classic ARC, with the option of a natural or black anodized front panel flanked with massive rack handles and a series of lime green LEDs that indicate function and loading.

(continued)





CM-IW2000

The iPad has become the face of the modern home, with Apps for anything and everything. So doesn't it make sense to have a central location to check emails, post notes, update social networks, or even work out what to wear and which route to take to work.

With iPort, the iPad is neatly installed into the wall, fully charged, and always ready to use.



Past and Present

ARC's Dave Gordon recently told me that "while our customers are very loyal, many of them wait two models to upgrade." After rustling up my PH 3SE from staff member Jerold O'Brien and a PH 5 from a friend, a long weekend listening session revealed the steady upgrades that led to this current model. So, in case you are wondering if it's time to trade up, here's the scoop.

The PH 3/PH 3 SE models definitely have more of a vintage sound quality, with a warmer overall tonality, not necessarily a bad thing. One of my favorite MC cartridges happens to be the high output (2.5mv) Blackbird from Sumiko. At \$1,099 it offers great dynamic range and high resolution for the price point, but when paired with most solid-state phono preamplifiers, it is too forward for my tastes. I've never had better phono preamp/cartridge synergy than mating the Blackbird with the PH 3 SE, and the preamplifier's overall musicality still makes it a great used value.

The PH 5 has a more "modern" sound, with more transparency and dynamic slam, but constitutes a better overall match with cartridges possessing a more neutral to even slightly warm tonal balance. The ARC

was amazing with the Grado Master 1 and Shelter 501 II cartridges, and thanks to the loading controls on the front panel, made it easier to experiment with a wider range of cartridges than the PH 3 SE, which requires you to solder different loading resistors in place. Remember, 20 years ago we did not have the plethora of cartridges we do today. Who knew?

If you are familiar with either or both of these great phonostages, you might consider the PH 6 the "Goldilocks" of the bunch—it's just right. Well, it was for me anyway. I really enjoyed the balance it served up, as it possesses even more resolution than the PH 5. Yet it claims a dose of tonal richness that the PH 5 doesn't have. On many levels, it reminds me of the excellent PH 7 that we reviewed about a year ago, but for a lower price.

Of course, every vacuum tube has somewhat of a "signature sound," with the 12AX7-based preamplifiers perhaps the most lush, the 6922 somewhat less but still unmistakably "tubey" sounding, and the 6H30 more dynamic and forceful. However, ARC has done a fantastic job at creating a circuit that is tonally gratifying and yet, never sacrifices musicality. *(continued)*



Sound vs. Value

With so many excellent phono preamplifiers in the \$1,000-\$1,500 range, stepping up to this price range, and the PH 6 in particular, offers significant advantages, the main being resolution and clarity. When listening to live acoustic music in a decent environment, it allows nothing to stand between you and the music. Think of the layers of electronics, wire, and listening room anomalies—all adding their own cloudiness and distortions to the presentation you hear in your listening chair—as if they were thin sheets of semi-transparent fabric. A significant upgrade to your system will sound as if you've removed a few sheets of fabric between you and the musical presentation at hand. When comparing the PH 6 to some of my favorite phonostage examples in the \$1,500 range, this experience clearly became the case: the music was that much more believable when played through the PH 6.

This effect wasn't limited to acoustic music. While the PH 6 did a tremendous job with the nuances of

Keith Jarrett's acoustic piano work, listening to Herbie Hancock's *Head Hunters* felt livelier as well. And although many dedicated audiophiles raise an eyebrow at heavier rock music, it represents another torture test that separates mediocre components from the excellent. A wall of Marshall amplifiers is just as tough to capture as the scale of a symphony orchestra. Both require a level of dynamics and weight, allowing the listener to forget about the system and delve into the music. I found the PH 6 to be as adept at capturing the nuance in the layered guitars of the recent High on Fire album as I did during the loudest bits of Mahler's F.

Further Listening

After a couple hundred hours of run-in time and experimenting with various cartridges, most of the final listening was done with the Rega P9/RB1000 and the Lyra Dorian, Sumiko Blackbird, and Shelter 501 II. The latter are all about the same price and in line with what I expect someone to pair with a phonostage of this quality. However, the PH 6 has such a high

enough level of performance that cartridges costing twice as much will deliver sheer excellence, so you have room to expand your analog capabilities with this preamp should you need to do so.

Much like the REF Phono 2, I found the hybrid FET/vacuum tube combination without fault, producing a very quiet backdrop for my favorite analog recordings. You'll have to put your ear right up to the tweeter and crank up the volume way past normal listening levels to hear the most faint sound coming from the PH 6. I guarantee that it's quieter than the background of any LP you own. Combined with the punchy, dynamic sound of the 6H30 tubes, the music reproduced by the PH 6 features a good level of dynamic contrast and weight. On pristine recordings, you might mistake the PH 6's sound to be CD quiet. Yet it still has enough analog magic to let you know that you aren't listening to digital.

A Worthy Successor

The PH 6 is an excellent phono preamplifier, offering excellent sonic

performance, build quality, and value. In comparison to other phono preamplifiers, both models costing considerably more and less, its price is spot on. The PH 6 also stood up well when compared to ARC's top-of-the-line REF Phono 2; the lineage is immediately evident. The only potential limitation of the PH 6 may be related to the 58db gain figure when combined with a handful of very low-output cartridges below .4mv. However, considering the range of excellent cartridges above that figure, finding something you like should not prove difficult.

When going from regular, to large, to super size (PH 6, PH7, REF Phono 2), the listener will find the tonal qualities to be very similar, each increasing model offering more dynamic range, and more low level detail and increased resolution, along with increased functionality. Taking these points into consideration, it's easy to see why ARC continues to enjoy such a loyal customer base. So whether you are a new customer or legacy customer waiting to trade up, you will enjoy the PH 6. ●

Audio Research PH 6 Phono Preamplifier MSRP: \$3,495

MANUFACTURER

www.audioresearch.com

PERIPHERALS

Analog Sources AVID Volvere SP w/Triplanar arm and Zu Denon 103 cartridge, Rega P9 w/RB1000 arm, Lyra Dorian, Sumiko Blackbird and Shelter 501 II cartridges

Preamplifiers Conrad Johnson ACT 2/Series 2, Burmester 011

Power Amplifiers Burmester 011, Octave MRE 130 monoblocks

Speakers GamuT S9, B&W 805D, Magnepan 1.6

Cable Shunyata Aurora I/C, Stratos SP

Power Running Springs Dmitri and Maxim line conditioners

Accessories Furutech DeMag, Loricraft PRC 2 record cleaner, MoFi fluids

The MartinLogan ElectroMotion ESL Speaker

A Cost-Defying Classic

By Jeff Dorgay

If you happen to be a music lover who adores electrostatic speakers, you no doubt have your favorites. And if MartinLogan is on your radar, its Aeries is definitely at the top of your list. Considering what an amazing value the Aeries offered back in 1992 for about \$2000, the fact that MartinLogan has hit the same price with its ElectroMotion is nothing less than a major miracle in 2011.

When discussions about the ElectroMotion ESL began last fall, MartinLogan's product manager Devin Zell couldn't have been more enthusiastic. When he started telling me about the driver complement and fact that the company was trying to bring the speaker to market right at \$2,000, I immediately thought of the Aeries. Zell, pleased that I picked up on the strategy, commented, "Exactly. We've had a number of product focus meetings and we've never quite been able to create a speaker like the Aeries for \$2,000. Until now."

REVIEW

Of course that's what marketing guys are supposed to say, but Zell put his money where his mouth is. "To prove just how amazing these speakers are, I'm going to send you a pair of Aeries i's so you can compare them side by side." Nothing like a man who walks it like he talks it.

Speaker Basics

The \$1,995 ElectroMotion utilizes an 8-inch unamplified woofer and an ESL panel that uses the same "XStat MicroPerf" technology that is featured in MartinLogan's top-of-the-line speakers. Thanks to such a design, the EM-ESL has about 40% more panel area than the Aeries, yet has a smaller footprint. The crossover uses ML's latest technology, all trickled down from its flagship CLX speakers and a downward firing port.

The EM-ESL has a rated sensitivity of 91db and nominal impedance of 6 ohms, which dips to 1.6 ohms at 20khz, making the EM-ESL fairly tube-amplifier friendly. Switching from the Aeries i to the EM-ESL speakers with the PrimaLuna Dialog 4 power amplifier (EL34 output tubes, 40wpc), there wasn't much perceived increase in output level even though the EM-ESL's are allegedly 3db more sensitive. The additional bass control and HF extension became immediately apparent. Swapping back and forth between the two revealed the Aeries i to have a warmer, darker (richer to some) sound.

Save for binding posts, build quality is top-notch and worthy of a decent set of speaker cables. But those posts. Sourced from MartinLogan's Motion 4 speakers, the only option is bare wire and banana plugs. Sure, MartinLogan had to sharpen the pencil to hit its price target, but most would happily pay an extra \$100 to get proper binding posts. *(continued)*



DEVIALET



“Once in a generation a company will emerge with a concept so original and innovative that it has the capacity to re-define the expectations of a product genre. That company is Devialet. ”

Paul Miller
Hi-Fi News

“Forget everything you know about high-end audio (...) The D-Premier is more than the sum of its parts in concept, performance and value. ”

Jeff Dorgay
Tone Audio

For those who still believe in progress
D-Premier, The Audiophile Hub

NEW HYBRID AMPLIFICATION TECHNOLOGY - PATENTED ADH® CORE
REVOLUTIONARY 24/192 DAC - PATENTED ZERO PROCESSING I/V CONVERSION
EXCLUSIVE PFC PLANAR POWER SUPPLY
FULLY CONFIGURABLE AND UPGRADABLE PLATFORM

Devialet is distributed by:
USA - Audio Plus Services - www.audioplusservices.com - 800 663 9352 / Canada - Plurison - www.plurison.com - 866 271 5869

www.devialet.com

Setup

Thanks to the smaller size and lighter weight (I've been using MartinLogan's CLXs for some time, and they are much larger) the EM-ESL is easy to set up and can be easily accomplished with one person. They work well in a small-to-medium-sized room, but did an amazingly good job filling up my main 16 x 24 feet listening room. As with any panel speaker, the further you can keep them away from the sidewalls, the better, as doing so results in a wider stereo image. Fortunately, the EM-ESL's small footprint allowed them to seamlessly integrate into my room better than any other panels I've tried since the MartinLogan Vantage.

Final placement ended up being about seven feet apart, slightly toed in with the ESL panels about 50 inches from the rear wall. While I spent a fair amount of time listening through PrimaLuna, CJ, and Octave power amplifiers I had on hand, the speakers' limits were explored via the Burmester 011 preamplifier/911 mk. 3 power amplifier—the same combination through which I've auditioned MartinLogan's CLX, Summit, and Summit X for nearly a year.

No, the average EM-ESL owner isn't going to hook them up to a \$60k power amplifier/preamplifier setup. But rest assured that these speakers weren't embarrassed in the company of the Burmester gear, and yielded stellar performance. Finally, the EM-ESL's spent the bulk of the review paired with Simaudio's new 600i integrated amplifier. Yes, the tubes were great fun, and while the romance of the vacuum tubes appeal to some, a high-current solid-state amplifier coaxes maximum performance.

Comparing Old and New

I began comparison between the Aeries i and EM-ESL by playing "The Breeze," from Lynyrd Skynyrd's *Second Helping*. (continued)



Hardcore audiophiles might scoff, yet Skynyrd albums actually reveal tons of information due to the band's triple lead-guitar format. Not only did they impress with excellent imaging of each of the three guitarists, the speakers also dynamically portrayed the grungy guitar intro to "Sugar Buzz" off kd lang's new *Sing it Loud*. While Lang's is a fairly dense recording, the ElectroMotions had no difficulty keeping the singer front and center without ever losing the bite of the instruments.

Switching between the Aeries i's and EM-ESLs repeatedly revealed the latter's tremendous refinement. Regardless of musical choice, the current model possessed an increased level of resolution that its predecessor couldn't touch. When listening to primarily acoustic fare, the EM-ESLs presented instruments with a more lifelike timbre and provided extra low-level detail. Craving exquisite? Experience the cymbal decay on the title track of Kenny Burrell's *Midnight Blue* via these cost-defying loudspeakers. I constantly had the illusion that I was listening to significantly more expensive speakers.

What's more, the EM-ESL really pulls ahead of its predecessor when playing rock. Where the Aeries always struggled, running out of dynamic punch at higher levels, the MicroPerf panel in the ElectroMotion plays much louder without hitting its limit. I first noticed this ability in MartinLogan's Summit (the original as well as the Summit X); I could actually play Metallica at a level loud enough to qualify as immersive. While the EM-ESL can't play as loud as the Summit, all but the most crazed metalheads should find satisfaction. I was never disappointed when going through a fair share of classic Led Zeppelin or

prog-minded Tool.

ESLs aren't famous for having a huge sweet spot, yet that of the EM-ESL is on par with ML's much more expensive Vantage. Amazing. The other surprise? Bass performance. The EM-ESLs go down solidly to the mid-40hz range and still have useable output below 40hz, although, it should be noted, they are rolling off at this point.

Exceeds Expectations

The Aeries was an amazing speaker in its day and still holds up well, but the MartinLogan team has learned a lot in the last 15 years. I'm still stunned that a company can manufacture a speaker *this good* for \$1,995 in 2011. Granted, an ESL is slightly more finicky than your average pair of cone speakers, but if there's a more exciting loudspeaker out there at this price, I certainly haven't heard it. While the year isn't yet half over, the EM-ESLs are on our short list for a Product of the Year award. ●

MartinLogan EM-ESL Speakers
MSRP: \$1,995

MANUFACTURER
www.martinlogan.com

PERIPHERALS

Amplifier Simaudio 600i

Digital Source Simaudio 750D

Analog Source Rega P9 w/RB1000 arm and Denon DL-103 cartridge, Parasound JC- phono preamp

Cable ED 411 ICs and 432 speaker cable

Power Running Springs Elgar

Fully Charged

Red Wine Audio Ginevra LFP-V Edition Phono Preamplifier

By Steve Guttenberg

When “Perfect Sound Forever” debuted in 1983 in the form of the CD, I doubt that anyone seriously imagined the LP would still be with us in 2011. The compact disc immediately ignited an analog/digital debate among hardcore audiophiles, and while true believers on each side are still holding tight, it’s the CD, not the LP, whose future remains uncertain. No wonder many analog loving audiophiles continue to upgrade their turntables, tonearms, cartridges, and phono preamplifiers.

If you happen to be in that group, Red Wine Audio’s luscious new Ginevra LFP-V Edition Phono Preamplifier should be on your short list. It’s a fully discrete Class-A FET gain stage/buffered tube output, passive RIAA equalization network, and battery-powered design. And that makes the Ginevra the first tube design I’ve seen that doesn’t work off AC power. That said, it’s not all that tubey, and there’s no overt electronic signature. Indeed, the Ginevra’s sound is totally organic. It has substance and weight, so it sounds like live music.



Red Wine Audio

Ginevra



Intriguing Design and Construction

Red Wine founder Vinnie Rossi favors the 6922 (E88CC) dual-triode vacuum tube, and uses it in most of his designs. If you like to experiment with “tube rolling,” feel free to try some 6DJ8/ECC88, 7308/E188CC, 7DJ8/PCC88, 6N23, 6H23, 6N11 or 6GM8 tubes. Since the Ginevra uses just one tube, it won’t break the bank to keep a few tubes on hand, allowing you to change the sonic flavor when the mood strikes.

Moving-magnet cartridge gain is spec’d at 40dB and loaded with 47k ohms. Moving coil gain, at 60dB, is moderate, so owners of really low-output coils may not have enough juice; Rossi recommends using a step-up transformer if you need more gain. Moving-coil loading options are 75, 82, 90, 100, 350, 500, 1k, and 10k ohms, settable via internal DIP switches, and load sockets for individual resistors are provided for owners that prefer custom loads. While separate connectors for moving magnet and moving coil cartridges are provided, the owner’s manual cautions against connecting both types of cartridges at the same time.

It should be noted that Red Wine doesn’t just pack the Ginevra with a bunch of “D” cells and call it a day. No, the preamp boasts state-of-the-art 25.6-volt “Lithium Iron Phosphate”

(LFP) battery technology. These low-impedance battery packs are exclusively manufactured for Red Wine Audio and designed for long life. The battery pack includes a built-in, custom-designed cell management board that balances individual battery cells, both optimizing reliability and battery pack performance. The pack is also user-replaceable, and doesn’t require any soldering to install.

Best of all, the Ginevra completely operates “off-the-grid,” meaning the preamp is electrically decoupled when it runs off the battery supply. A full charge lasts approximately eight hours, but for all-night parties or background music, you can run the Ginevra off the AC power supply. The battery charges whenever you play the preamp with AC power and when you switch off the Ginevra.

The Ginevra’s nicely machined, anodized black front panel is the preamp’s most interesting design feature—it’s a very plain-looking black box. The unit measures a scant 12" wide, 9" deep, and 3.5" high. Sans the separate battery charger, it weighs 8 pounds. Giving a determined nudge to the power button triggers an internal relay that disconnects the charger’s negative and positive AC feeds to the preamp. And the “piezo” switch, with a rated cycle life in the millions, is made in Israel with aircraft-grade aluminum. *(continued)*

Rossi's battery pack delivers pure DC current just perfectly, which is crucially important when amplifying miniscule voltages generated by phono cartridges.



Let the Listening Commence

I listened to the Ginevra with a few tubes: the standard JJ Electronic Russian 6922, which possess a sweet demeanor; a similar-sounding Holland-made Amperex 6DJ8; and a significantly more aggressive Sovtek 6922. A \$225 EAT ECC88 tube that comes with an attached red anodized heat sink upped the resolution a notch or two over the others, but Rossi's stock tube is very listenable.

With my VPI Classic turntable and van den Hul Frog low-output moving-coil cartridge at the ready, the Ginevra's gain definitely proved lower than that of my Whet TWO phono preamp. Still, I never felt like I needed more gain. The Whet is no slouch, but it's distinctly

cooler-sounding and leaves a lot of music on the floor. The Ginevra is grainless, sweet, and beguiling—this preamp is not the sort that dazzles with displays of audiophile “speed,” “detail,” or “resolution.” It's much more musically honest. Treble is purer, better, and more natural than I've heard from most SACD and DVD-A discs. Moreover, the Ginevra is very quiet in battery mode; switching over to AC raises the noise level. Hence, I ran with battery juice most of the time.

The importance of power supply design in phono preamps also can't be overstated. Rossi's battery pack delivers pure DC current just perfectly, which is crucially important when amplifying miniscule voltages generated by phono

cartridges. Since the preamp automatically decouples from the AC line when operating on battery power, Ginevra owners will never be tempted to buy pricey power cables or power-line conditioners.

With the Ginevra, record surface noise, clicks, and pops are not necessarily lower in level, but they recede into the background more than they did with my Whet. And the Ginevra's deft portrayals of the quieter parts in music are remarkable in their own right; dynamic shadings and expressive nuance really shine through. In short, music sounds more natural and less like hi-fi. Always a good thing.

I also love the way the Ginevra allowed the sound of Egberto Gismonti's guitar on his *Duas Vozes* to

radiate in three dimensions. Each pluck and every strum fill the studio space to holographic effect. In addition, Nana Vasconcelos' evocative vocalizations and palpable percussion accents populated a broad and deep soundstage.

In listening to the Persuasions' *We Came to Play*, the Ginevra absolutely nailed the ensemble's a *capella* sound. I hung around these guys at a few Chesky recording sessions, so I have a good fix on their individual voices and group vibe. I closed my eyes and the Persuasions simply appeared—voices, foot shuffles, thigh slaps, finger snaps, the entire package. This session record led me to *The Intimate Ellington*, which starts off with Duke talk/singing “Moon Maiden”

and gently playing a celeste keyboard. I've spun this LP countless times, and this much I know for sure: Hi-fis rarely get this close to sounding so expressive and downright human.

Making a Tangible Musical Connection

Moving on to more contemporary recordings, like Tom Jones' all-analog, live-in-the-studio *Praise & Blame*, put a big smile on my face. Jones is no youngster, but his pipes are in great shape, the bluesy, gospel-infused record is loaded with great tunes. By comparison, the Cowboy Junkies' *Trinity Revisited* sounded cooler, brighter and, well, more modern. *(continued)*



Its more upfront nature, sparkly treble, and tighter, more direct-sounding bass stood in sharp contrast to the older, all-analog LPs in my collection. Don't get me wrong. The Junkies' record is nice, but the Ginevra's sweet temperament didn't smooth over the differences.

Paul Simon's brand-new *So Beautiful or So What* is likely a digital recording (the LP comes with a free 96/24 download), but it's a delight nonetheless. The material is wonderful, and the sound clear and clean, with the musical connection on LP is a wee bit stronger than what I gleaned from the high-resolution file. The Ginevra also lit up the English Beat's stellar *I Just Can't Stop It* LP. The ska revivalists' beats are as nimble as they come, and the band's tunes are tops. Bass definition was excellent, tuneful, and rich.

I couldn't stop putting LPs on the platter. Giorgio Moroder's dense synthesizer tapestries drifting through the *Cat People* soundtrack kept me up late at night. The record's high-frequency shrieks and sputtery flourishes floated high above the rest of the soundstage, and I couldn't get enough of the throbbing beats and eerie whooshes. All so 1982! Those were the days, before the CD came onto the scene.

Satisfaction Guaranteed

If you're in the market for a phono preamp that'll get you closer to the by-the-number sound of the better solid-state alternatives, the Ginevra probably ain't it. But if you're like me, you might be in love at first listen. And while the LFP-V is sold factory-direct with a 30-day satisfaction guarantee, I can't imagine many customers ever sending their units back. ●

Red Wine Audio Ginevra LFP-V Edition Phono Preamplifier
MSRP: \$3,000
www.redwineaudio.com

PERIPHERALS

Analog Source VPI Classic turntable with a van den Hul Frog cartridge

Digital Sources PS Audio PerfectWave DAC & Transport, MSB Technology Platinum DAC & Data CD Transport, Oppo BDP-83 Special Edition

Electronics Parasound JC 2 and Pass Labs XP-20 preamps, Whesh TWO phono preamp; Pass Labs XA100.5 and First Watt J2 power amps

Speakers Dynaudio C-1, Mangepan 3.6, Mangepan 3.7

Cable XLO Signature 3 interconnects and speaker wire; Zu Mission interconnects, speaker cable; Audioquest Sky interconnects

estelon ()
from Alfred & Partners



Model **XA**

Pushing the boundaries of style and engineering – an amorphous shape resulting from the latest manufacturing technologies with a healthy dose of handmade craftsmanship.

estelon.com



Red Wine Audio

A Brief History and Factory Visit

By Steve Guttenberg

While I've worked in the high-end audio business for more than 30 years, I haven't visited many factories. I'm always fascinated by audio designers, and have interviewed hundreds of engineers, but most of my chats were done over the phone. Which made my visit to Red Wine's 2,400-square-foot factory in Durham, Connecticut that much sweeter.

I met Red Wine Audio founder Vinnie Rossi at the 2010 Rocky Mountain Audio Fest and was immediately impressed by the sound of his designs. He's definitely an audiophile, and that's not always the case with audio engineers. He's also young, just 31 years old—interesting given that nowadays, under-40 audiophile entrepreneurs are pretty rare.

Rossi started Red Wine in 2005 in the basement of his home, initially building battery power supplies for Tripath Class T power amplifiers, and modding Squeezeboxes and Toshiba DVD players. He also designed high-speed laser transmitters and receivers for fiber optics systems before going off on his own. He holds an Electrical Engineering degree from the State University of New York, and designed software for Lucent Technology and Bell Labs.



Rossi demonstrating a prototype of his new “off-the-grid” CD player.

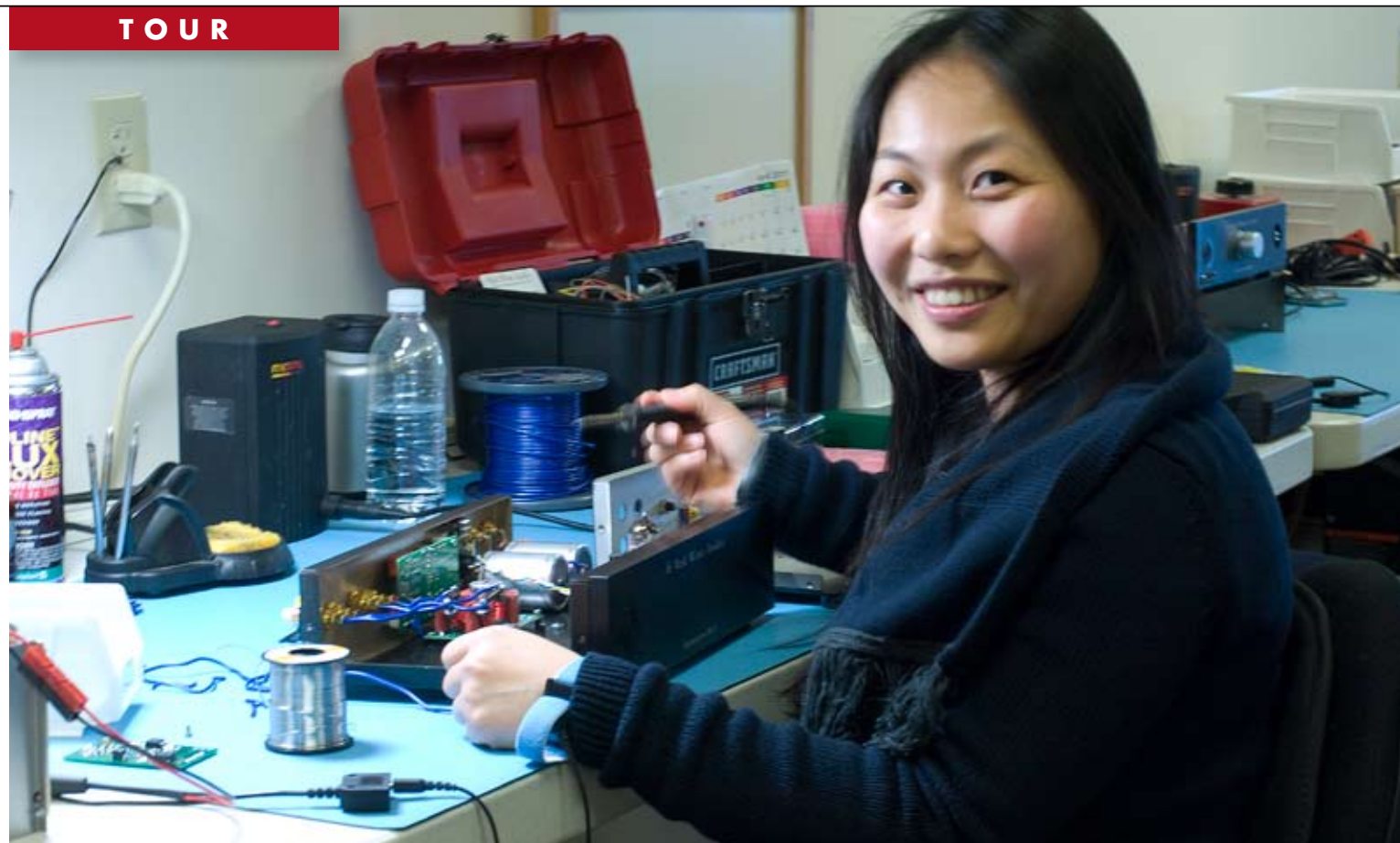
Functional Sophistication

Red Wine components' elegant functionality belies their technical sophistication. Rossi's creations are all battery-powered, and he favors high-current, low-output impedance Lithium Iron Phosphate (LFP) batteries that use organic materials. He feels that his latest 25.6 volt LFP battery pack provides the ideal combination of performance, safety, reliability, and environmental friendliness—more than any other rechargeable battery technology.

Rossi doesn't just love batteries because they're quieter than conventional AC powered gear; he claims properly implemented battery power supplies can deliver substantially higher instantaneous current than AC power supplies. And Rossi's battery pack packs a wallop.

Even when plugged into an AC power outlet, Red Wine components are completely decoupled from the AC power grid and the noise associated with computers, air conditioners, and motors. So there's no need to use power conditioners with Red Wine products; they already have the purest available source for DC power. Moreover, Rossi's customers definitely don't need to buy pricey power cords, especially those that sell for more than Red Wine components.

Rossi is a big proponent of 16-bit, non-oversampling digital-to-analog converters. Sure, the newest 192-kHz/24-bit DACs specifications look more impressive on paper, but Rossi thinks most sound "quite sterile and artificial." Red Wine's 16-bit DAC works with sample rates up to 192 kHz, but it will only playback with 16-bit resolution. Rossi will soon offer a 192-kHz/24-bit DAC as an option, but all Red Wine components with DACs will still have the 16-bit, non-oversampling converter on board. *(continued)*



Alexis Chen assists on all the Red Wine products.

That way, users can toggle between the two DACs. Despite being a trained engineer, Rossi's strong feelings transcend technical precision. "Accuracy isn't my first priority, I just want my components to sound good," he says.

Born In the USA

Always looking to improve his designs, Rossi offers performance-enhancing modifications for older Red Wine products for modest fees. Red Wine isn't the only high-end company to offer such services, but when the upgrade costs are significant, the firm offers existing owners a 100% trade-in value when they move up to a more expensive Red Wine component. Traded-in products are fully reconditioned, tested, given new batteries, outfitted a new tube, and

backed by a full five-year warranty before being sold at a discount on the company's Web site.

Unfortunately, many American high-end companies have moved production "off-shore"—exactly where Rossi could have built Red Wine products for a fraction of what it costs in Durham. But that's not why he got into the business. He needs to oversee every detail of his products. Red Wine circuit boards are fabricated by hand, a process that allows Rossi to build custom versions of components. He also enjoys talking with his customers and doesn't want Red Wine to ever grow to the point he can't maintain that connection. Rossi personally answers questions or troubleshoots any problem.

Due to increasing demand, Rossi moved Red Wine into its

current space in early 2010. It's bright and clean, and thanks in large part to the presence of Alexis Chen, has a great vibe. She assists Rossi with the building of all Red Wine products. The chassis is the only part not built in the Red Wine factory. A New Jersey company supplies the metalwork. Rossi selected the contractor because the manufacturer handles everything—folding the sheet metal, painting, anodizing, CNC machining the faceplate, and laser etching—under one roof.

Reason to Visit

During my factory visit, Rossi demonstrated a prototype of his new CD player. It's battery powered, uses the 16-bit, non-over-sampling DAC, and tube output stage. While rare, the player's DAC will have a USB digital input for easy hookup to a computer. *(continued)*

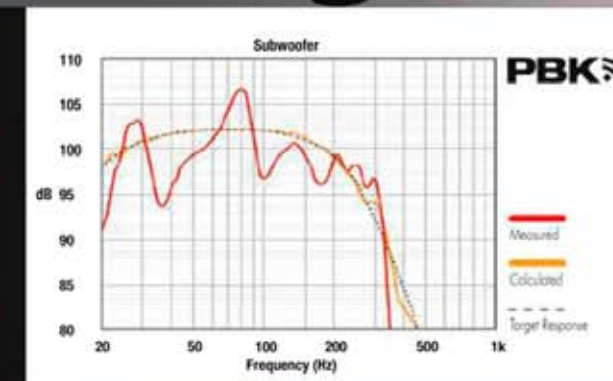
SUB 2: THE WORLD'S MOST POWERFUL SUBWOOFER*

From Paradigm, the #1 Speaker Brand†



PARADIGM REFERENCE

Signature Series



"Audibly better bass through science"

— Chris Martens, AV Guide

Room dimensions, dead spots, archways, furniture placement have a negative effect on bass performance. Until now. In a process that takes just a few minutes, Paradigm's **Perfect Bass Kit** puts the sub through a frequency sweep to highlight problem areas, determines necessary adjustments and saves configurations to your connected PC. Optimized solutions are uploaded to the sub. A scientific approach to perfect bass.

*Connected to a 240-volt line

Physics trumps mechanics, with help from Paradigm

Signature SUB 2 is a mover not a shaker. Massive air movement, massive output, vibration free. Six identical, perfectly balanced state-of-the-art drivers radially aligned (two on each side) inside the cabinet in a **Vibration Canceling Design Architecture**. As powerful opposing forces of equal magnitude, the vibration-reaction forces effectively cancel each other out. Barely a ripple disturbs the contents of the glass placed on top of the cabinet, such is the degree to which unwanted, distortion-inducing vibrations are reduced.

10" drivers handle the amazing 9,000 watts Peak Power and 4,500 watts Continuous Power the amp delivers through its unique Power Factor Correction feature.



www.paradigm.com



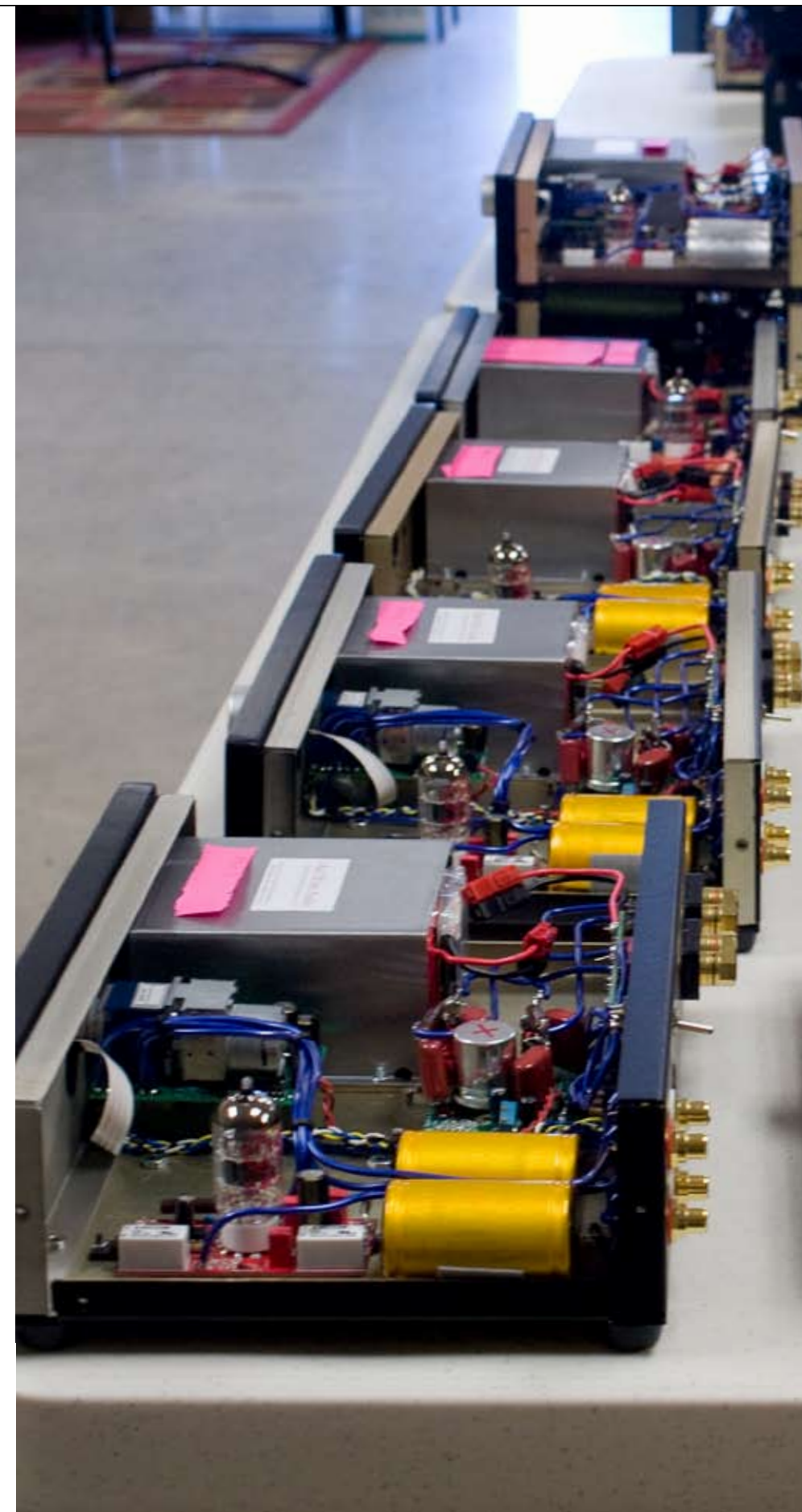
CLEAR Light
cardas.com

When used in such a manner, you can actually turn off the CD transport part of the player. Rossi calls it “an off-the-grid CD player,” and he’s hoping it will be in full production later this year. A bigger power amp is also in the works.

I’ve been disappointed by the sound of many a manufacturer’s listening room, but Rossi’s is amazing. I put on a great-sounding CD, *Preservation Hall Hot 4 With Duke Dejan*, and quickly nailed Red Wine’s sound: no edge, grain, or glare, but the detail is just there, as it is in real life. The entire system, including Rossi’s prototype CD player, is battery powered, so it’s super-quiet, and the dynamics effortless. Dejan’s vocals were perfect, and the Red Wine’s midrange was spot-on. But when you’re listening to a system this good, you can’t break down the sound into bass, midrange, and treble. Rather, it has a more organic, complete quality, and the imaging, with great recordings, possesses a solidity that goes beyond hi-fi.

Rossi’s digital playback has a very analog sound, but his Scheu Analog Premier mkII turntable with a Scheu Classic mkII tonearm and Dynavector 20XL cartridge sound was even better. We jumped from Louis Armstrong to the Fleet Foxes to Thom Yorke. The Red Wine sound was even more present and full of life. A keen listener, Rossi opts for musicality over hi-fi “detail” and “resolution.” Judging by the results, I’d say he’s definitely on the right track.

Best of all, Rossi’s sound room is open everyone. He just asks that interested parties to call in advance to set up an appointment. You can listen to any component, and Rossi encourages prospective customers to bring in any piece of gear and compare it to Red Wine components. And you’ll have to supply your own wine, of course. ●



REVIEW

Scalable Performance

Octave MRE 130 Monoblocks

By Jeff Dorgay

OCTAVE
MRE 130





Merely mentioning that you still listen to vinyl records in casual conversation amongst non-audiophiles almost always invokes a raised eyebrow. And if you try to explain the thrill of vacuum tubes, people that don't give you a dog-like stare will surely move you to the penalty box. But as vacuum tube fans know, current designs continue to advance like the Energizer bunny, with the best examples light years ahead of the humble beginning of the Williamson circuit from the 1940s. In 1955, the Heathkit version of the original circuit claimed to have "performance far beyond the finest speaker systems available." Much has improved since then.

Hailing from Germany, the Octave MRE 130 monoblocks look straightforward in terms of aesthetics. But they've also combined a few unique features, along with meticulous attention to detail, to create a pair of power amplifiers that sit at the top of their class. The standard MRE 130 monos run \$16,000 per pair, and thanks to external power supply modules (\$7,500 additional per pair), allow for the option of taking their stunning performance even further.

The most distinctive aspect of these amplifiers is the substantial redesign of the classic pentode amplifier circuit. The first part of the Octave approach is its power management system, which not only provides a soft start for the tubes, but also furnishes a separate supply that is optimized for the input stage—as well as another for the

output stage and a third section that takes care of the additional current requirements of the pentode circuit. In addition, an electronic protection circuit protects the amplifier from damage, should tube failure occur while remaining audibly transparent.

While Octave has only been distributed in the United States for a few years, the company began in 1968 when founder Andreas Hoffman's father began a transformer-winding factory in Germany. Hoffman started building solid-state amplifiers in 1975 and turned his attention to tubes in 1977. In the years that followed, his products won numerous awards in Europe and Asia.

The MRE 130 amplifiers are rated at 100 watts per channel into an 8-ohm load and 130 per channel into 4 ohms. Available in silver or black, the MRE 130s are substantial at 46

pounds (22.7kg) each, but not so heavy that they need more than one person to lift.

Setup

Removing the tube cage reveals a complement of two 12AU7s (ECC82C) and a 6C5 as driver tubes, with a quartet of 6550s for the output stage. They can also be configured with KT88s. The review pair came with KT88s installed, and Octave was thoughtful by including two spare power tubes. The company should also be praised for producing one of the most comprehensive and well-written manuals in the industry. It offers background on the design, a thorough explanation of how to properly bias the tubes, and finally, for the technically inclined, measurements. *(continued)*

Nagra MSA amplifiers

Power is nothing without refinement!



- The finest engineering focused on truthful musicality
- Advanced Nagra PFC power supply for unwavering performance under all conditions
- Highly configurable 60 wpc stereo, 60 wpc mono bi-amp or 120 wpc parallel-bridged mono
- Compact chassis with integral heatsink milled from a solid block of aluminum

NAGRA

swiss made
www.nagraaudio.com

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

REVIEW



Hoffman has indicated that future versions of the MRE 130 have been slightly modified to ship with a 6SN7 in the place of the 6C5, to make it easier to find replacements, but assured me that there is no change in sound.

Once the tubes are installed in their respective sockets, the output tubes need to have proper bias set. Five LEDs indicate bias status. A middle green LED indicates correct bias, while a yellow one to the left of center glows with an underbias situation and a yellow one to the right indicates overbias. An orange LED all the way on the far left is used when installing a fresh set of tubes. Finally, a red LED on the maximum far right position only lights when a tube is defective.

The remainder of the setup is straightforward, with two pairs of easily accessible speaker binding posts and a pair of RCA and XLR input sockets. Input type is selected via a switch, and the inputs can be shorted as well, so you can change cables without causing amplifier or speaker damage. XLR connectors are offered, but the amplifier is not fully balanced, as Hoffman doesn't feel that it's a superior way to design a tube amplifier.

Although the manual states that output tubes can take "up to 300 hours to sound their best," my review samples had just come from the Rocky Mountain Audio Fest, where they had about a week on the clock. I did not hear a change in amplifiers' sound character during the test period, other than that of initial warm-up. The MRE 130s require about 45 minutes to sound their best. *(continued)*



It's also worth mentioning that an output tube failed during the course of this review, and while such an episode may have caused drama with other amplifiers, the MRE 130 simply went quiet. The corresponding red LED lit up to indicate the defective tube. Once the latter was replaced, the MRE 130 went back to performing flawlessly.

Listening Impressions

Beginning with a handful of audiophile classics, I was instantly struck by the soundstage depth and fine detail offered by the MR130s. The LP of the Fleet Foxes' debut encapsulated such characteristics, keeping the band members' harmonies wonderfully separated. And the title track from the new Fleet Foxes record, *Helplessness Blues* (reviewed this issue), proved quite a treat as well. The heavily layered vocals were easy to pluck from the main musical line, as they floated above and in front of the big bass drum in the background.

John Fogerty's version of "I Put a Spell on You" from Creedence Clearwater Revival's self-titled album (45RPM Analogue Productions version) proved equally captivating. Shortly thereafter, the band's "Suzie Q" equated to retro treat, with the lead guitar distinctly defined in the far left channel, full of glorious distortion as Fogerty chimed in and out of the right channel. Yet the bass guitar sounded diffused, hanging back behind the performers. It was as if bassist Stu Cook was off playing in another room.

While most tube amplifiers impart a glorious sense of pace and a generous measure of air, they usually falter in the area of bass control. But the MRE 130s did not fall victim to the common problem that plagues all but the world's best tube amplifiers— proof that Hoffman's power-supply design is highly successful. The funky bass lines in George Michael's "Hard Day" from *Faith* arrived with just the right amount of weight and grip, and without losing control. Keep in mind that this song usually overwhelms most tube amplifiers and ends up boomy.

I was equally impressed with the deep bass performance of the MRE 130s when grooving to George Clinton's "Why Should I Dog You Out?" from *The Cinderella Theory*. If you have speakers capable of delivering major low-frequency extension, the MRE 130s will step up to the plate. Depth and dimension were definite specialties of the MRE 130s even if they weren't the equivalent of my Burmester 911 mk.3s. But the Octaves were about to make some big performance gains.

Increasing Performance: Step One

Users not interested in experimenting with different tube configurations will enjoy the MRE 130s as outfitted at the factory. However, if you are a maniacal tube enthusiast that always searches for more performance, rest assured that more is on tap. Towards the end of the review period, the new KT120 power tubes were released. And while this model isn't a plug-in replacement for every amplifier that utilizes 6550 or KT88 tubes, Hoffman assured me that the MRE 130s' power supply was up to the task of this particular tube's increased current demands.

Hoffman also claims that, without redesigning the amplifier, it really won't produce much more power than with the stock KT88 tubes. Yet, with the KT120s installed, the sound quality tremendously improved on both ends of the frequency spectrum. Bass became deeper and tighter, with even better control than before. The MRE 130s already exhibited some of the most controlled bass I've ever heard from a tube amplifier, and with the KT120s, they offer even more grunt.

At the other end of the spectrum, more air circulated around cymbals than before. Heading back to the CCR catalog, the high hat cymbals seemed to float better while the overall sound achieved a heightened level of refinement. Acoustic instruments became fleshed out with more body; the more complex sounds of the violin and piano took another step towards reality. *(continued)*

“Cash for Clunkers?”

Not exactly, but here's how to turn your old CD player into an industry-acclaimed Rega CD player... and enjoy substantial savings.

“ The Apollo is a **surprising step forward** in a field that I'd thought was empty of same, and a hell of a bargain. ”

—Art Dudley, Stereophile

“ Rega has given us a digital player that offers **breakthrough performance** at a bargain price. ”

—Chris Martens, The Absolute Sound

“ There seems to be unanimity among critics about this: the Rega Apollo is a \$1000 **category-killer**. ”

—Sam Tellig, Stereophile

“ The Saturn **surpassed just about every digital playback system I've heard before**...on a purely musical level it would be hard to beat this machine. ”


—Mike Quinn, Jazz Times

It's easy. Whatever its age, make or condition, bring in your old CD Player and we'll surprise you with an eye-popping, trade-in allowance on a new Rega Apollo or Saturn CD player. What was always affordable is now simply unbeatable. Discover that what is music to your ears you were able to get for a song.



To find out the details of this plan and your closest participating Rega dealer, call or email:

THE SOUND ORGANISATION
MORE THAN MUSIC

 In USA: 972.234.0182 —Steve
steve@soundorg.com
www.soundorg.com

REVIEW

Originally recorded to two-track 30 i.p.s. tape, Liz Story's Steinway on her *Solid Colors* LP suspiciously sounded like the one in my living room. The amplifiers did an excellent job of letting me just forget about the gear and get lost in the musical presentation.

While the MRE 130s came with a pair of JJ ECC82s (12AU7) installed in each unit, swapping them out for the new Pdvane 12AU7s from Shunuang yielded more delicacy. Substituting your favorite NOS tube may change the tonal character of the amplifier, but the new Pdvane tubes did not alter tonality. They simply dropped the noise floor of an already very quiet tube amplifier even further, and peeled off a layer of grain that I didn't previously know existed. If you do nothing else to your MRE 130s, I highly suggest making this small change.

Step Two: Adding the Big Black Boxes

After becoming thoroughly familiar with the MRE 130s in their stock form and then again with upgraded tubes, another big performance jump came via the Super Black Box, which incidentally, is silver. While a pair of Super Black Boxes add \$7,500 to the MRE 130s' price tag, the improvement is major—and well worth it. As you might suspect from such a substantial upgrade, the soundstage immediately became larger in all three directions, the upper register had more clarity, and the bass possessed even more heft and control.



Whereas Naim gives you the opportunity to add a completely different power supply, the Octave Super Black Box is a giant capacitor bank tethered to each amplifier by a massive power cord and connector. Once powered up, the Super Black Box has a blue status indicator—just like the power amplifier. Should you feel the need to disconnect them, a yellow LED glows for approximately two seconds, indicating the discharge. Hence, you will not be exposed to any harmful voltage when unplugging them.

Digging through deep tracks to locate old-school synthesized bass, I dusted off Edgar Winter's *Jasmine*

Nightdreams. The second cut, "Little Brother," has a fairly loose and whumpy albeit powerful bass line that was much more agreeable with the Super Black Boxes in place. The song lost some looseness but not the character of the bass. I discovered the same effect when playing "Word Up!" from Korn's *Greatest Hits, Vol. 1*. The driving bass line attained more authority and punch than before, an experience that led me to revisit most of the initial tracks I used to determine the MRE 130s' character. A definite transformation.

Still, the improvements afforded by the Super Black Box went beyond bass performance. The three-

dimensional aspect of the presentation increased to the point that I felt as if I were listening to surround sound. Kraftwerk's *Tour de France* took on an uncanny sense of depth that normally requires an analog source to achieve. I found myself listening start-to-finish to several albums in the digital format that I normally experience one or two tracks at a time before moving on. The MRE 130s' resolution healthily expanded, as did the jump in dynamic range.

Hoffman also told me that one of the side benefits of additional power-supply capacity lowered the amplifier's output impedance, which accounts for its spectacular

bass performance. Such extra capacity also gives the MRE 130s' the ability to more easily drive difficult loads. I had no problem driving my MartinLogan CLX speakers or the Magnepan 1.6s, each notoriously tough to drive with tubes. Without the Super Black Boxes in place, the MRE 130s ran out of juice with the Magnepans and rolled off the highs with the CLXs. This upgrade is a must if you plan on using these amplifiers with either speaker.

Before adding the upgraded tubes and Super Black Box, the MRE 130s took a back seat to my Burmester 911 Mk. 3 monoblocks in terms of imaging and delicacy. But, after I made the changes,

the Octave units held their own in these areas when played within their limits—very impressive for a pair of amplifiers that cost one-third as much as the Burmester gear.

Conclusion

While I can't imagine using the Octave MRE 130s without the Super Black Boxes now that I've had the experience, they are fantastic amplifiers without the add-ons, and Octave is to be commended for giving the end user the opportunity to work their way up to a statement product.

The Octave MRE 130 monoblocks should satisfy all but the most power-hungry systems. If 130 watts per channel is not enough, Octave also produces floor-standing Jubilee monoblocks, which we will audition in the near future. If you've always wanted the benefits of tube amplification without any of the drawbacks, these amplifiers are for you. ●

Octave MRE 130 Monoblock Amplifiers

MSRP: \$16,000/pair;
Super Black Box: \$3,500/each

MANUFACTURER

www.octave.de

PERIPHERALS

Analog Source AVID Acutus Reference SP w/SME V and Koetsu Urushi Blue

Digital Source dCS Paganini (4 box stack), Sooloos Control 15

Phono Preamplifier ARC REF Phono 2, Octave Phono Module

Preamplifier Burmester 011, McIntosh C500

Speakers GamuT S9, MartinLogan CLX, Magnepan 1.6, B&W 805D

Cable Cardas Clear

Power Running Springs Maxim and Dmitri power conditioners, RSA and Shunyata power cords

Accessories Furutech DeMag, SRA Ohio Class XL+² equipment platforms, Loricraft PRC -2 record cleaner



Conquering the Final Frontier

Silent Running Audio's Ohio Class XL+² Equipment Platforms

By Jeff Dorgay

If you haven't fully addressed vibration control in your audio system, that means you still have a final frontier to conquer. And the SRA Ohio Class XL+² platform is a great place to start your quest. I've seen my fair share of DIY attempts: granite slabs, maple boards, sand boxes, and inner tubes to name a few, many piled up like Dr. Seuss contraptions. While any of these alleged solutions will change the sound of your system, I've yet to hear one that consistently reveals more music throughout the frequency range.

Until now. And trust me, I was highly skeptical until the very end. The cable world is renowned for its empty promises, and the field of vibration control is no different. Most of it is hit-and-miss. If you peel back the curtain, precious few anti-vibration vendors have any real credentials to back up their products.

Kevin Tellekamp, the brains behind SRA, is a music lover and audiophile, but he also has an extensive background in math, physics, and acoustics. Oh, and he holds more than 50 worldwide patents on vibration control. His "day job" involves solving vibration-related issues for NASA and the US military (hence, the ship-related product names) along with other very high-profile customers. At the time of this review, Tellekamp was working with a NYC hospital to isolate its CT scanner from intruding vibrations in order to increase its resolution.



SRA's Ohio Class XL+2 equipment platforms are made to order. The company takes a component's weight, profile, and a host of other factors into account when performing the necessary calculations to optimize a platform for a given piece of equipment.

Component Couture

SRA's Ohio Class XL+2 equipment platforms are made to order. The company takes a component's weight, profile, and a host of other factors into account when performing the necessary calculations to optimize a platform for a given piece of equipment. The result is perfectly suited to your gear and according to SRA, "future proof."

Each Ohio Class XL+2 is also designed and manufactured with a specific component in mind. But should you change or upgrade, as audiophiles have a habit to do, the platform can be recalibrated for the new item for no additional cost to the original owner. In the rare case that this is not possible, an aggressive trade-in allowance will be made provided your platform is still in excellent condition.

SRA currently maintains a database with thousands of different pieces of gear on file. Still, as Tellekamp points out, "If it's not in our database, we'll get the measurements." The company deems this approach Component Specific Design, and even takes into account the exact type of footer used by every equipment manufacturer. Because of SRA's meticulousness, additional cones, balls, and mass loading aren't recommended—such extras will diminish the SRA isolation unit's component-specific design. Applying his physics knowledge, Tellekamp notes that the Earth vibrates somewhere near 3hz, and asks: "What on Earth, weighs more than the Earth? Mass loading is simply not effective."

Another critical aspect of SRA designs involves the fact that they don't employ any material whose performance decreases over time. As anyone who has used Sorbothane-based solutions knows, the material compresses relatively quickly and loses its ability to dampen.

Each Ohio Class XL+2 is hand-built, and because of the different parameters involved, can range in price from about \$1,000 each to as much as \$8,000 each. Total time from order to delivery is usually about a month. Keep in mind that Tellekamp and his team consider every part of the design, including the room, and how SRA's products interface with their surroundings. Be it a rack-based or floor-based application, SRA first concentrates on three main problem areas: air-born energy, floor-based energy, and equipment-born energy. The latter is largely dependent on the first two areas, but also involves residual internal vibrations from power transformers.

The pair of platforms I received for my Burmester 911 mk.3 amplifiers cost \$3,000 each and arrived in massive wood crates. Packaged more carefully than the \$30k Burmester amplifiers they would be supporting, the SRA units' construction quality immediately became evident; workmanship and finish are flawless. My review samples came in high-gloss black, but eight standard colors are available, and the platforms can be finished in custom colors for an additional cost.

A Vexing Moment

Even after setup, I remained highly skeptical. With a 12-inch thick concrete floor and a solid-state amplifier, how could I be subject to vibration issues? Tellekamp was quick to correct my presumptions: "Vibration will travel quickly through this floor. Stand at one end in your bare feet and have someone bounce a golf ball at the other end. You will feel it unless there are deep voids or saw cuts separating the solid mass."

Not wanting to risk the sound changing even in the slightest as a result of powering the amplifier on and off, I had a friend slide the SRA platform into place under one of the 911s, already powered on. Now, listening could begin in earnest. Then, in the midst of listening to recent Blue Note remasters, I immediately heard a darker background, with instrument decay having a wider degree of contrast. *(continued)*

Of course, this is where even the most seasoned listener may suspect the mind playing tricks—that new upgrade has to sound better. Moving on to a number of favorite tracks, the change with the SRA platform became almost spooky. Everything I played possessed a more organic, relaxed feel, and didn't come at the expense of any of the dynamic punch my system offers.

Over the next few days, these effects increased, and I felt psyched out by the whole experience. Every time I played something that I've heard many times before, more music came to the fore. It was time to make the switch to the 911 that wasn't supported by the SRA. What a difference. The sound-stage collapsed somewhat and there was a level of cloudiness to the presentation that I hadn't noticed before. Everything sounded slightly more electronic and less natural. The effect was akin to unplugging the amplifiers from the RSA Maxim power conditioner and plugging straight into the wall. Think about the impact being similar to the effect of making a substantial upgrade to a component. For example, when listening to the same phono cartridge on my Rega P3 and P9, the tonality is similar. But the P9 retrieves more detail and offers more dynamic contrast.

With a pair of identical amplifiers at my disposal, it was incredibly easy to go back and forth for comparison rather than to have to rely on aural memory. Because at this stage of the game, you want to believe that the shiny new thing makes a difference. And fortunately, the difference is not understated—the SRA platform offers a marked improvement in every way and takes nothing away from the musical performance when in place. *(continued)*



WHEN THE WORLD STOPS

AND THERE IS...

ONLY THE MUSIC

Scarlatti. The Ultimate Digital Playback System.



"The dCS Scarlatti is the best sounding, most satisfying digital playback system I've heard." **Stereophile**



Our design philosophy in building **Scarlatti** was to use our 21 years of experience to deliver the best digital playback system in the business. For people who are serious about their music, Scarlatti sets new standards in both measured performance and musicality. CD or Computer Audio, Scarlatti delivers a life enhancing performance every time.

Imported by dCS North America

www.dcsltd.co.uk | info@dcsltd.co.uk | +1 617 314 9296



dmitri

The new RSA Dmitri is the ultimate evolution of our work in power line conditioning technology. Utilizing our new RSA platinum series capacitors and proprietary inductors, the Dmitri takes power line conditioning to the next level and beyond.

- All components are designed and manufactured in our ISO 9001:2000 approved facility in Anaheim, California – USA
- Tolerances on capacitors and inductors meet or exceed 1%
- 100% passive, non-current limiting topography
- New carbon fiber resonance vibration control
- Significantly lower noise floor and improved dynamics

With meticulous attention to detail, coupled with raw science, the Dmitri allows your components the opportunity to deliver all of the performance that your system has to offer.

The Dmitri can be ordered as a stand alone unit, (without 20A power cord), with our world famous Mongoose power cord or with our new flagship PC, the HZ Crown Jewel, for ultimate performance. Stop by your Running Springs Audio dealer and audition the future of power line conditioning.



"...my new reference in AC conditioners."

– Robert Harley,
The Absolute Sound,
Issue 193



Product of the Year
Award

"The Dmitri represents the state of the art in power line conditioning."

– Jeff Dorgay,
TONEAudio
Magazine,
Issue 18



running springs audio

CLEANPOWERPURESOUND
Power Line Conditioners Hand Made in California . Tel: 714.765.8246 . www.runningsspringsaudio.com

What's in the Box, Doc?

While I've seen some hints and glimmers at what lurks inside the SRA platform, I still don't know exactly what's there. But whether it's some kind of unobtainable goo from Area 51 or a gigantic wad of Hubba Bubba, it works even better than claimed, and like the monolith in *2001*, it's well camouflaged.

After spending considerable time with the SRA platforms, I consider them essential to my system's performance and put the enhancement on par with what I've achieved with careful attention to power line conditioning. If you have a system that's capable of great resolution and dynamic swing, you will notice about 50% of the SRA's improved effect right away and the remainder in about 48 hours. This is not a subtle upgrade.

While I highly endorse placing the Ohio Class XL+² underneath your amplifier(s), I also suggest first optimizing the rest of your system so that you can take full advantage of what the SRA platform offers. If you have major room and/or set-up issues, the added benefit will not be as evident. Still have a big plasma screen between your speakers or a large area of bare floor? These are bigger bang-for-the-buck improvements that need to be addressed first.

SRA will be sending us one of its GRAZ racks in the near future for evaluation, and we're very anxious to observe the improvement it makes to the rest of the reference system. For now, I give the SRA Ohio Class XL+² platforms my highest recommendation. If you own a high-performance audio system, I guarantee it will offer a level of performance you didn't know existed. ●



The SRA Ohio Class XL+² Equipment Platform
MSRP: Equipment dependent

MANUFACTURER

www.silentrunningaudio.com

PERIPHERALS

Analog Source AVID Acutus Reference SP w/SME V and Koetsu Urushi

Digital Source dCS Paganini, 4 box stack w/Sooloos Control 15

Preamplifier Burmester 011

Power Amplifier Burmester 911 mk. 3

Speakers GamuT S9

Power Running Springs Dmitri and Maxim, RSA power cords

Cable Shunyata Aurora

Comparison Test:

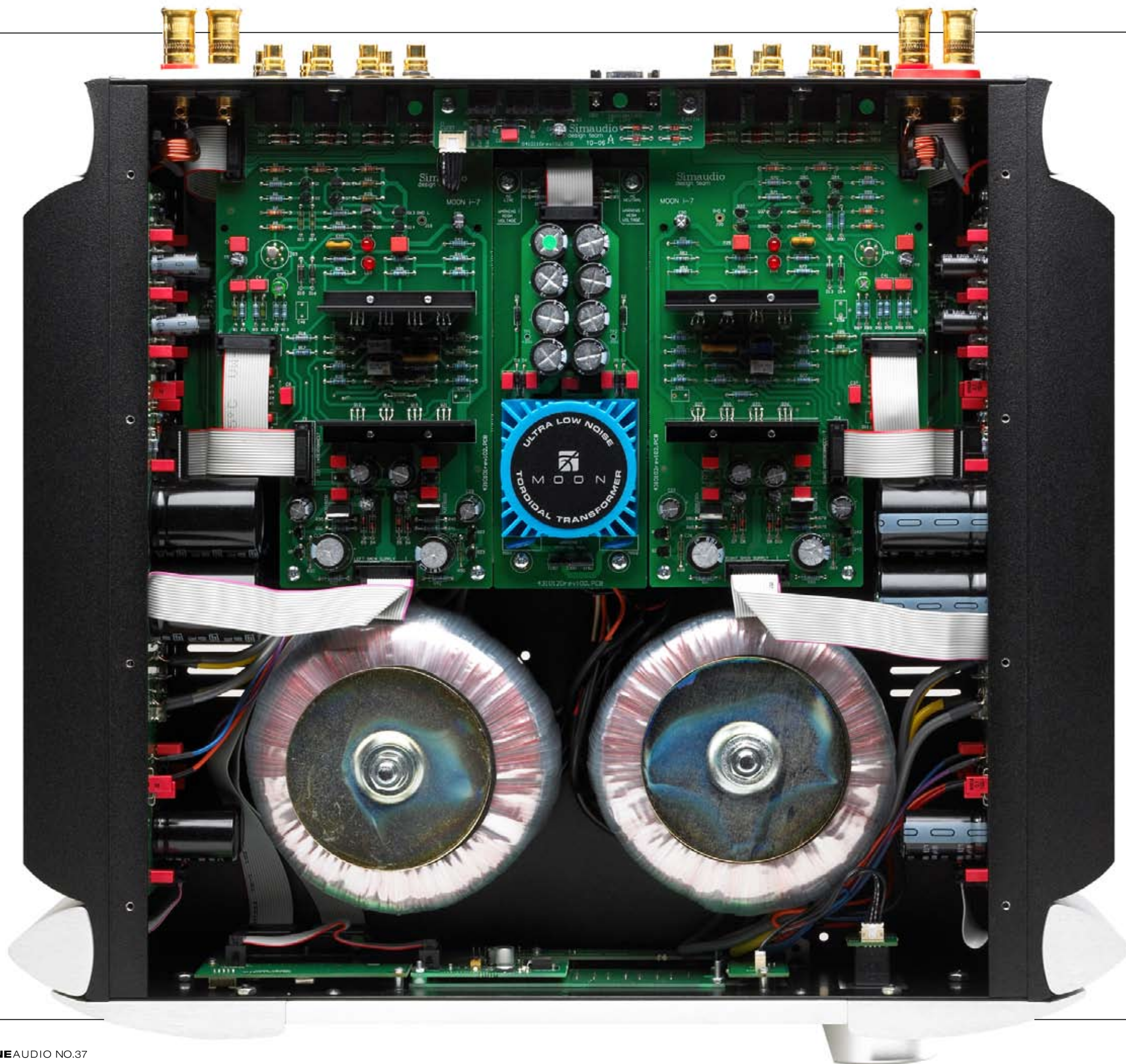
Simaudio Moon 600i and Moon 700i Amplifiers

By Jeff Dorgay

Following up a highly successful product always presents audio manufacturers with problems. No matter how long a product's life happens to be, when a change occurs, someone is going to be crabby because they just bought the "old" box and now there is a "new" box on the dealer's shelf. Somehow, with a certain segment of the audiophile population, all reason goes out the window. For those of you that own a Simaudio Moon i-7 integrated amplifier, take a deep breath and relax. Your amplifier is just as good as it was the day you bought it.

Now that we've cleared the air, let's move on. Having just finished work on its Moon 850P Reference two-channel preamplifier and highly regarded Moon 880M monoblocks, Simaudio engineers added more to their knowledge base and redesigned the top end of the company's integrated amplifier range. Where the 150 watts-per-channel i-7 once represented Simaudio's peak integrated, the manufacturer now offers the 600i and 700i, with 125 watts per channel and 175 watts per channel, respectively. Priced at \$8,000 and \$12,000, both models are also pricier than the former i-7.





A Solid Case for Integrated

Mimicking the example set by the i-7, the 600i and 700i are dual mono designs, with gigantic toroidal power transformers under the hood. And both amplifiers have an elegant, understated look and feel. But the second you pick up either of them, the message is clear: these are serious amplifiers.

While some hardcore audiophiles always look down on the integrated amplifier concept, these days, it's nothing to sneeze at. The Simaudio amplifiers offer the flexibility and performance of comparably priced separates, and best some of the latter in their respective price class. For the music lover that doesn't necessarily want a gigantic rack full of gear and cables yet still craves high performance, an integrated is the way to go. Since Simaudio has its own in-house 5-axis CNC machining center, these amplifiers have the visual appeal of the world's finest and most expensive components. They will look right at home in a design-conscious environment and are available with silver, black, or a combination of black and silver anodizing.

In the end, however, it's about performance. Having both the amplifier and preamplifier on the same chassis eliminates not only at least one set of interconnects and one power cord, it presents the ultimate in system synergy. With an integrated, you'll never again agonize over whether you picked the perfect cable to go between your amp and preamp.
(continued)

Ins and Outs

Because of the dual mono design, both amplifiers feature mirror images of the inputs and outputs on the respective side of the chassis rather than having them grouped together. It's a different approach than that taken by many other manufacturers, but once you get used to it, everything works fine. Both amplifiers have four sets of RCA line level inputs and a single balanced input; the 700i has tape monitor inputs and outputs. And, in what makes for a nice touch, both offer a variable level output (RCA only) to drive an additional amplifier or powered subwoofer.

The heavy-duty WBT binding posts will handle even the most massive speaker cables, but those utilizing really monstrous cable will have to work to get the posts to the level snugness they might desire. An RS-232 port, IR port, and 12V trigger (SimLink) ports also reside on the rear panel, so either amplifier can easily be put to use in a home automation system. Overall, along with great ergonomics, the rear panel features an adequate amount of inputs and outputs.

Since it's a fully balanced differential amplifier, my only complaint of the i-7 relates to the absence of two or three balanced inputs on the rear panel. As Simaudio makes fully balanced phono preamplifiers and CD players, it makes no sense to not take advantage of connecting to the amplifier in balanced mode.

Like the other Simaudio products we've reviewed, the 600i and 700i require at least a few hundred hours on the clock before sounding their best. Out of the box, they definitely sound stiff. These amplifiers get approximately 60% of the way to their ultimate sound quality within the first 48 hours of play, and the rest takes time—a situation that mirrors that associated with many high-powered solid-state amplifiers. While not a green solution, I suggest running your 600i or 700i 24 hours a day (with signal passing through) for the first few weeks of ownership. During the course of our tests, we left them on non-stop. *(continued)*





I placed the 600i and 700i on a Finite Elemente Pagode Signature rack, and used Simaudio's 750D DAC/CD player as a primary source component. The AVID Acutus SP Reference with SME V tonearm and Koetsu Urushi Blue cartridge via the Audio Research REF Phono 2 served as my primary analog source. The whole system was cabled with Cardas Clear interconnects and speaker cables. To ensure that neither of the amplifiers' performance would be compromised, I employed my \$150,000 GamuT S9 speakers—the anchor of my reference system, normally powered by \$100k of Burmester electronics—to compare all three Simaudio amplifiers.

600i vs. 700i

Each new Simaudio unit is a stellar example of an integrated amplifier providing a worthy alternative to

separates. They both have lightning-fast transient response along with a healthy amount of control, whether reproducing the higher-frequency transients of a cymbal strike or controlling the thwack of a bass drum. While some solid-state amplifiers offer too much detail, the 600i and 700i achieve the balance of high detail without being harsh or fatiguing—a minor miracle on its own.

On paper, there are a few main differences between the 600i and the 700i. The 700i has its own dedicated power supply for the preamplifier, while the 600i shares its power supply with both sections. The 700i also features a considerably larger power transformer with greater reserve capacity. While both amplifiers offer a “no overall feedback” design, the 700i takes it a step further, incorporating Simaudio's LYNX design. *(continued)*



“If I had to live with just one cartridge,
I would choose the Paua ...”

– Jeff Dorgay, *TONEAudio*
No.36, April 2011

Derived from our acclaimed Sussurro cartridge, “Paua” (*pronounced POWah*) delivers a level of performance that rivals the world's most celebrated moving-coil cartridges for a mere fraction of their prices.

Now, SoundSmith is making it even more tempting to choose the Paua: from June 1st through August 31st, 2011 SoundSmith is offering **\$500 off the retail price of Paua**.

If you've ever wondered what it's like to play records with a world-class supercartridge, your time has come!

SoundSmith

visit www.sound-smith.com
to find your nearest retailer



This utilizes a four layer gain board design, that puts the gain and output sections in closer proximity than they would be otherwise, making a significant improvement in the 700i's utter transparency.

Listening tests back up claims made in Simaudio's white papers. DCC's remaster of 10cc's *The Original Soundtrack*, with that radio classic you've heard a million times, "I'm Not In Love," sounded wonderful via the 600i. It kept the vocal track well in front of the heavily layered mellotron intro, and the hints of acoustic guitar well in the lower

back of the sound field. Quickly switching to the 700i and playing the track again became a stunning experience, especially after the first chorus, when the female vocalist whispers, "big boys don't cry." On the larger amplifier, her voice almost leapt into my lap, possessing more dimension, space, and realism.

Along with a neutral, clean tonality, both amplifiers have considerable dynamic punch and headroom that go beyond their power ratings. While the GamuT S9 and B&W 805Ds are very easy to drive, the Magnepan 1.6s are

another story. The latter usually require *hundreds* of watts to really rock. The 600i had no problem handling big bass drum that opens the title track of the Drive-By Truckers' recent *Go-Go Boots*, complete with sufficient weight and texture. And the 700i, well, it went one louder. Highly impressive showings from both models.

The key word here? Refinement. Such welcome polish makes it easy to believe you are listening to separate components. But do you want a 330i or an M3 Sport? That's a question only your checkbook

can answer. The tonality of both amplifiers is identical, but the extra oomph offered by the 700i is hard to forget once you've experienced it. Horsepower is always intoxicating.

Living In the Past

My impressions of the new amplifiers were extremely positive, but I was also very curious to compare them to the i-7. Reviewed in Issue 16, the latter received high marks for transparency, tonality and dynamic punch; a pretty awesome package for \$6,000. We purchased the review sample, and it has been

staff writer Mark Marcantonio's reference for the last two years. He and I were more than a little jumpy when we sat down on a weekend to compare the two newcomers to the faithful standby.

If you find one used, the i-7 still sells on the secondary market for about \$5,000. With many components being blown out the door for half of their list price only months after purchase, such residual value speaks volumes the i-7. So, should you ditch your i-7 and trade up? It depends. *(continued)*

REVIEW



Starting our comparison by listening to Adele's recent *21* left us thinking that the older model was the way to roll, as it claimed a warmer overall tonality than that of the new models. *21* is somewhat compressed, with a slightly bright tonal balance. So, we brought out a few new Audio Wave Blue Notes and Sheffield Labs favorites to get a better feel for acoustic performances. That's when the tables turned in favor of the current crop.

Once the program material featured more dynamic range, the additional bass grip delivered by the new amplifiers made such sonic elements more decisively known, and the higher level of resolution provided a more natural musical experience. Whether we listened to Black Sabbath stomp through "Iron Man" or Dexter Gordon blast out "Tom Cat," these amplifiers had a natural ease along with a lightning-fast attack and equally

quick and clean decay that allowed for long listening sessions without any trace of fatigue.

Spinning vinyl further widened the gap, with the differences between analog and digital being much greater through both new amplifiers than they had been with the i-7. Listening to the new remaster of *Boogie With Canned Heat* proved trippy, staying true to the original psychedelic vibe with an incredibly big sound. The extra resolution and three dimensionality allowed the analog pressings to breathe in a way they didn't when played through the i-7, which, via comparison, sounded warmer and slightly slower. However, in all fairness, if your music collection is primarily comprised of digital and/or newer, more compressed recordings, you might favor the older i-7. Such extra warmth goes a long way to tame digititus. *(continued)*

AudioVision
san francisco

sound choices

"KEEPING IT FUN"

Wayne Garcia, *THE ABSOLUTE SOUND*

"2010 ASL Product of the Year"

Nola Boxer Loudspeakers



and yes \$1499 per pair

1603 pine street san francisco ca. 94109

ph:415-614-1118

www.audiovisionsf.com

dali
dynaudio
gallo
jl audio
kef
nola
psb
quad
raidho
rel acoustics
rockport technology
thiel
triangle
ultrasone
wilson benesch
arcam
audio research
audioquest
bat
bel canto
benz
cardas
cary audio
chord
clearaudio
composite products
finite elemente
harmonic resolution systems
harmonic tech
integra
lyngdorf audio
lyra
marantz
micromega
naim audio
nordost
nuforce
primaluna
pro-ject
ps audio
quadraspire
rega
richard gray
runco
shunyata research
sim 2
simaudio moon
sonos
soundsmith
vpi



Spending Other People's Cash

It's always easier to spend other people's money, so rush right down to your Simaudio dealer and buy the 700i. According to the gloom-and-doom messages we seemingly encounter on a daily basis, the world's economy is going to collapse sooner rather than later, so you might as well have an awesome stereo before the world ends.

All kidding aside, these are both great amplifiers and easily the equal—if not the better—of any comparably priced separates I've heard. The 700i possesses even more refinement than the 600i, and its extra power will drive more speakers. However, you can almost put your hands on the 600i and its companion CD player/DAC, the 650D, for the price of the 700i.

After side-by-side listening, the progression between the two amplifiers is fairly linear.

It's not as if you get 85% of the goods with the smaller amplifier and pay a premium for the bigger one. Your room and speaker choices will be determining factors. The more volume you crave, the more you will probably be pushed towards the higher-powered 700i. And, it's worth noting that even at modest volume levels, the 700i reveals more musical information and offers a larger presentation in all three dimensions.

If nothing else, the decision to buy the 700i over the 600i may be determined by your system expansion plans. The 600i is certainly no slouch, but might leave you craving down the road, where the 700i likely has a higher chance of staying in your rack for a longer period. Me, I'd eat mashed-potato sandwiches for a few months and buy the bigger amp. ●

REVIEW



Simaudio 600i and 700i Integrated Amplifiers
MSRP: \$8,000 and \$12,000, respectively

MANUFACTURER

www.simaudio.com

PERIPHERALS

Digital Source Simaudio 750D CD player/DAC w/Sooloos Control 15

Analog Source AVID Acutus SP Reference w/ SME V and Koetsu Urushi Blue, through Audio Research REF Phono 2

Speakers GamuT S9, B&W 805D, Magnepan 1.6

Cable Cardas Clear I/C and Speaker

Power Running Springs Maxim, Mongoose and HZ power cords

the absolute sound
**2010
PRODUCT
OF THE YEAR
AWARD**

Now in stock!

The Absolute Sound's
2010 Product of the Year
Award Winner
The **ca21 Preamplifier**

\$2295



"Of all the integrated amps I've reviewed in the last year...the Mystère ia21 is my favorite, the least expensive, and drew the least attention to itself, allowing me to focus on the music." —Erick Lichte **Stereophile** March 2011

The Mystère ia21 Integrated amplifier **\$2995**

For more information

USA: Mystère USA at 909.931.0219 www.mystere-usa.com • Canada: Audioscape Canada Inc. at 905.833.0010

Anyone can change a product... improving it is the real challenge.

The new – and improved – **ProLogue Premium Integrated Amplifier. \$2299**
More features and better built than any product in its class.



And the sound?

"Truly stunning... PrimaLuna's latest effort goes to the heart of what the high end represents..."

—Neil Gader, *The Absolute Sound* April 2011

PrimaLuna®

909.931.0219 ■ info@primaluna-usa.com ■ primaluna-usa.com

From The Website

In case you haven't been perusing the *TONEAudio* website on a regular basis, we are constantly adding gear reviews between issues. The following are links to the two most recent reviews.



Meridian Media Source 600

\$3,995

www.meridian-audio.com/sooloos

For those wanting to expand their Sooloos system to more than one zone, the Media Source 600 represents the ideal solution, offering XLR and RCA analog outputs along with an additional SPDIF (RCA) digital output. A set of Meridian SpeakerLink outputs are also available, and can connect directly to a pair of Meridian DSP loudspeakers to comprise a compact, high-performance system.

Music choices can be made via a Sooloos Control 10 or 15 (with full touch-screen interface) or locally via an iPad, iPod, or iPhone over your network. A 12v trigger output and Meridian G12 IR controller are also provided, meaning

that one of those massive Meridian remotes from elsewhere in your system can control basic system parameters, including volume.

On the tech side, both in appearances and electronics, the Media Source 600 shares much in common with Meridian's G series digital players. It features Meridian's recent crop of audio-enhancement technologies—including a high-quality clock and its Apodising Upsampling to ensure maximum digital signal integrity.

[Read the full review here.](#)

Where Have all the Good Stereos Gone?



We know. Sorting through the jungle that is pre-owned hi-fi gear can be tough. Myriad Internet forums and online shopping sites just don't offer the expertise required to make sound decisions.

That's where Echo Audio comes in. We have more than 20 years of retail experience in selling hi-fi equipment the way it should be sold: In a brick-and-mortar environment that provides you with personalized attention.

While we will certainly ship any of our gently used classics directly to your door, we invite you to stop by our shop in beautiful downtown Portland, Oregon to browse our inventory in person. Thanks to an in-house service department, we not only service everything we sell, but every piece of used gear is thoroughly checked before being put on display. Consider our white-gloves treatment your guarantee against potential problems.

So, when you are looking for high-quality, lightly used hi-fi gear, look no further than Echo Audio. Be sure to check out our Web site for current products and new arrivals.

echo)))
audio

www.echohifi.com 888.248.echo

It's Power Conditioning Month at Music Direct!

Electricity. It's AC that drives your entire music system. Take a moment and think about that. Every subtle syllable from the world's finest voices. Every guitar lick from the best pickers. Every thwack of a drum skin, or breath through a reed. Every pluck of the bass or tinkle of the keys. Without the proper AC foundation, these sounds can not be reproduced faithfully in your

listening room. And you know you want more than the minimum when it comes to the realism of your music system. You demand the best, that's why you are reading this magazine. A world-class power conditioner will be the biggest upgrade to your system you have ever heard. Guaranteed. And no one understands power conditioning products better than Music Direct.

Shunyata's Best: Award-Winning Hydras Get Upgraded

Introducing the brand-new Shunyata Hydra Talos and Triton power conditioners, each contain a decade of Shunyata research and development. The Talos and Triton eliminate noise with a level of precision and control superior to any previous design. Gone are the massive buss bars and banks of capacitors, replaced with new patented and proprietary core technologies. You'll hear so many different improvements we can't even begin to list them all here. These new conditioners represent the absolute state-of-the-art in high-performance, high-current power delivery.



Triton \$4,995 (Eight Outlets)



Talos \$2,995 (Six Outlets)

PS Audio P5 & P10 Power Plants—Create Your Own Clean Power



P10 Power Plant \$4,495 (Ten Outlets)



P5 Power Plant \$2,995 (Eight Outlets)

PS Audio introduced its first Power Plant fourteen years ago. For the first time, the quality of the power coming from your outlet was taken out the equation. Finally, you could create your own AC with a mini power plant in your listening room. But PS Audio engineers have busy with their new P5 and P10 PerfectWave Power Plants, which exceeded our expectations. Now fully designed and built in PS Audio's Boulder, Colorado factory, the P5 and P10 are huge improvements over older designs. Plug one in and you won't believe you're listening to the same system.

Trade In Your Old Power Conditioner

We have generous trade-up programs in effect this month. Call us and we'll help you get a big upgrade in performance.

Parasound JC 3 Phono Preamplifier

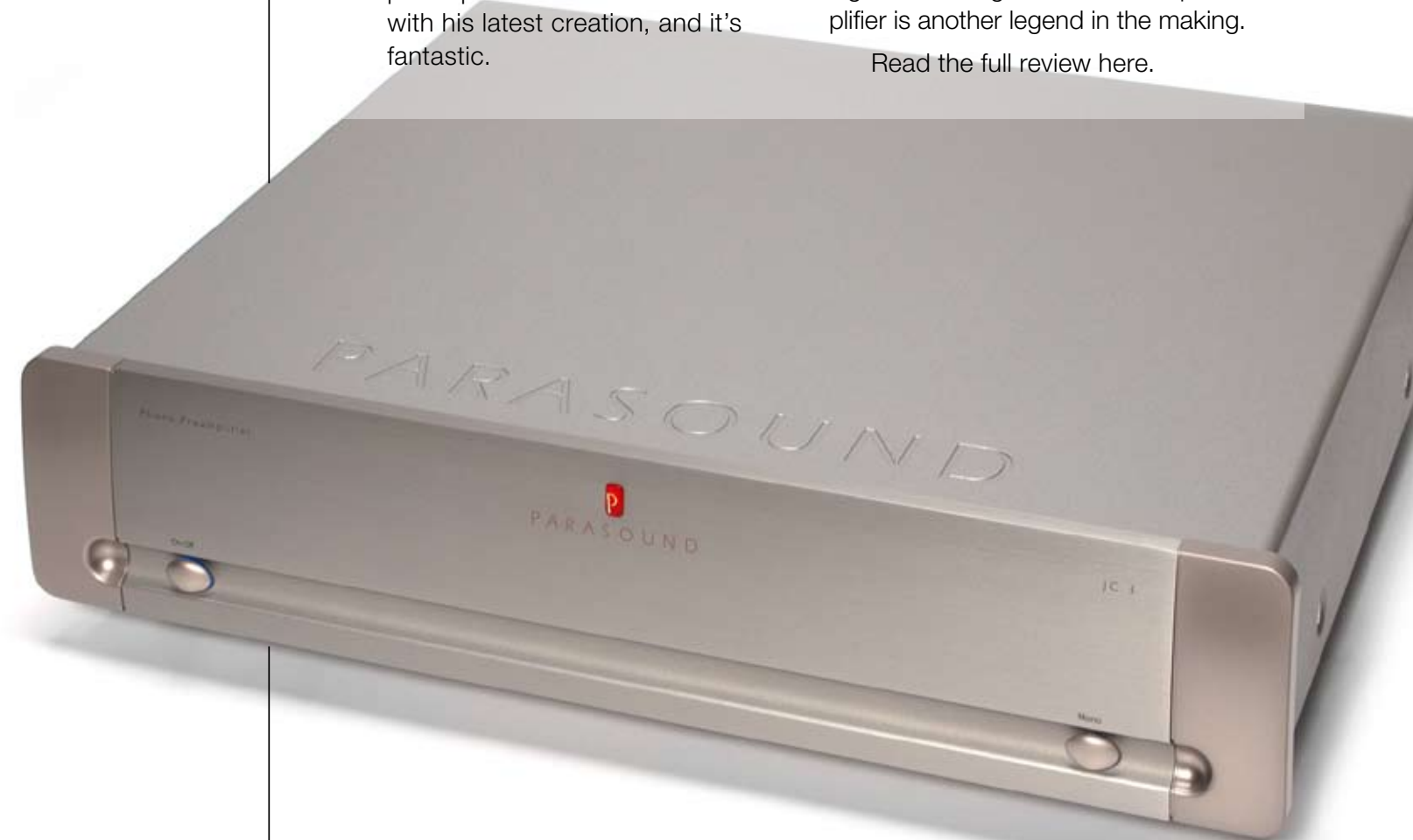
\$2,350

www.parasound.com/halo

For those too young to remember, the two initials in the name of this phono preamplifier stand for a legend—John Curl. Yes, the man who produced the initial Mark Levinson designs as well as the famous Vendetta Research preamplifier in the mid 80s is back with his latest creation, and it's fantastic.

Utilizing premium parts throughout, and sporting a dual mono design, the JC3 forfeits many features, instead concentrating on delivering high performance for a relatively bargain price. The MM and MC inputs are joined by a 47k MC input, perfect for demanding moving-iron cartridges. Indeed, this preamplifier is another legend in the making.

[Read the full review here.](#)



Slummin'

By jeff Dorgay

Nakamichi Watch

\$12, EBay

While others are out collecting Patek Phillippe, I brought my quest down to Earth and started my collection of audio swag with watches—like the lovely Nakamichi model you see here. Quartz movement and in perfect shape, it keeps time as well as many of the world's most expensive watches and already garnered kudos at a recent audio event I've attended. Watch (pun intended) for more of these little jewels in the future.



Judas Priest

Metalogy 4CD Box Set
\$20, Second Spin Records

I can't go in a used record store and not buy something. Still, the pickings were looking thin at one of the last remaining used music retailers in Newport Beach, CA. That is, until I began to peruse the used box sets. While the outer cover is slightly knackered—only making it that much more metal—the discs inside are in great shape, and allow every bit of Priest to come through loud and clear. And, as a bonus, the booklet is present and accounted for.

Look, everyone knows I'm a solid state kinda guy. But lately I've been fantasizing... about tubes.

Well, maybe you're "Tube Curious." Just go with it.

PRECISION SELECTED Upscale Audio SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CRYOGENICALLY TREATED

MARTIN LOGAN ElectroMotion EM-ESL \$1999

SUTHERLAND 20/20 Phono Stage \$2200

PRIMALUNA Prologue Premium Integrated Amp \$2299

PEACHTREE AUDIO iDac \$995

NOLA Boxer \$1500

MYSTÈRE CA-21 Preamp \$2295

the absolute sound 2010 PRODUCT OF THE YEAR AWARD

the absolute sound 2010 PRODUCT OF THE YEAR AWARD

the absolute sound 2010 PRODUCT OF THE YEAR AWARD

Tube upgrades! Huge stocks of cryogenically treated, current production and vintage new old stock (N.O.S.) tubes. See how we do it at [upscaleaudio.com](http://www.upscaleaudio.com)

IN STOCK: ACOUSTIC ZEN, AESTHETIX, AHI TJOEB, ANTHEM, ARCAM, ATMA-SPHERE, AUDIO ELECTRONIC SUPPLY, B&K, BENZ MICRO, CARY, CHANG LIGHTSPEED, CLEARAUDIO, COINCIDENT, DH LABS, DYNVECTOR, ERA, EQUI-TECH, EXACTPOWER, GALLO, GRAHAM, JL AUDIO, KIMBER KABLE, LYRA, MAGNUM DYNALAB, MANLEY, MARTIN LOGAN, MUSIC HALL, MYSTÈRE, NITTY GRITTY, NOLA, NORDOST, NOTTINGHAM, OPERA, PATHOS, PEACHTREE, PRIMALUNA, PRIMARE, PS AUDIO, QUAD, REGA, REL, SME, SOOLOOS, SONUS FABER, SUTHERLAND, TRI-PLANAR, VPI, VINCENT, VIENNA ACOUSTICS

UPSACLE AUDIO
HIGH FIDELITY • MUSICAL SYSTEMS

www.upscaleaudio.com

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

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

ALO Audio: www.aloaudio.co

Anthem: www.anthemav.com

AudioVision SF: www.audiovisionsf.com

Auravis Systems: www.auravissystems.com

AudioQuest: www.audioquest.com

AVID: www.avidhifi.co.uk

B&W Music Club: www.bowersandwilkins.com

B&W Loudspeakers: www.bowersandwilkins.com

BelCanto: www.belcantodesign.com

Benchmark: www.benchmarkmedia.com

Burmester: www.burmester.de

Cardas: www.cardas.com

Conrad Johnson: www.conradjohnson.com

dCS: www.dcsLtd.co.uk

Dali: www.soundorg.com

Devialet: www.audioplusservices.com

Echo Audio: www.echohifi.com

Dynaudio: www.dynaudio.com

Estelon: www.estelon.com

GamuT: www.gamutaudio.com

HDTracks.com: www.hdtracks.com

iPort: www.iportmusic.com

JM Labs/Focal: www.audioplusservices.com

JL Audio: www.jlaudio.com

MartinLogan: www.martinlogan.com

McIntosh: www.mcintoshlabs.com

Meridian: www.meridian-audio.com

MICS: www.mics.mc

Mobile Fidelity: www.mofi.com

Mystere: www.mystere-usa.com

Music Direct: www.musicdirect.com

Music Instrument Museum: www.themim.org

Music Matters: www.musicmattersjazz.com

Music Millennium: www.musicmillennium.com

Musical Fidelity: www.musicalfidelity.com

Nagra: www.nagraaudio.com

Naim: www.soundorg.com

NuVision: www.nuvision.com

Paradigm: www.paradigm.com

Polk Audio: www.polkaudio.com

Primare: www.soundorg.com

Red Wine Audio: www.redwineaudio.com

Rega: www.soundorg.com

Running Springs Audio: www.runningspringsaudio.com

Save the Music: www.vh1.com

Simaudio: www.simaudio.com

Totem: www.totemacoustic.com

Upscale Audio: www.upscaleaudio.com

Verity Audio: www.verityaudio.com

Wadia: www.wadia.com

Woo Audio: www.wooaudio.com

Zu Audio: www.zuaudio.com