

RAISING the bar:

conrad-johnson's ART 88

The latest in a long line of top preamplifiers from C-J, and we revisit the ACT 2 and the last generation GAT 2

Focal's compact Vestia no.1

Bel Canto's EX Black integrated

Massive Monoblocks from PS Audio

Jim Macnie on Jazz

Killer Playlists

And more!



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of the issue.

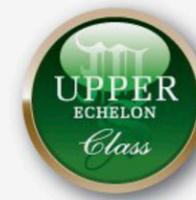


Starting this issue hard, with the volume cranked up! And you thought only Saabs and Volvos came from Sweden... The Hellcopters first record is awesome, and you can't stream it. Hooray physical media!

TONE.118.003



— Formula xHD rev. 2 —



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“It’s simply magnificent. It is revealing without being trying, lush but not bloomy, and above all capable of captivating musical sound.”

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T O N E

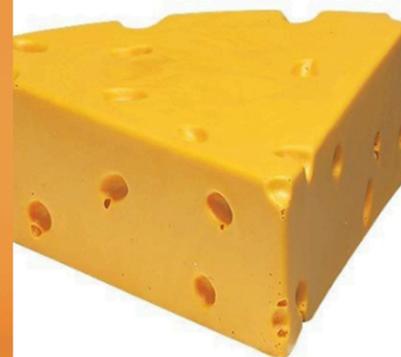
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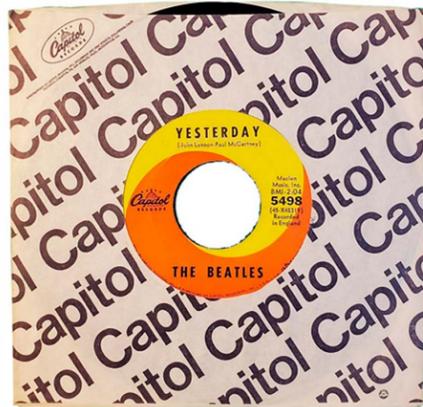
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-By jeff dorgay



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It's nap time with the pup.



visit our websites: tonepublications.com cartridgedude.com

You are there.

"The new statement wire from Audience proved worthy of its name. Led by a full-throated midrange, highly focused imaging, and a 'you are there' transparency, frontRow summoned up the electric excitement of the live concert experience like few cables Neil Gader has experienced. Dimensionality, always a strength with Audience cabling, was even more well defined. Audience's top-notch wire, although not inexpensive, seemed boundless in its responsiveness, speed, and musicality. Highly recommended for systems of superior resolution."

Neil Gader
The Absolute Sound Magazine, Issue 325
reviewing the **Audience frontRow cables**.



audience

audience-av.com

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Perreaux 200ix

The perfect solution for having it all in a compact environment.

Headphone Arts

Next issue we'll have two great phones from Audeze and Focal!



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Jeff Dorgay *Tone Audio* on the C7 XD



"...Alan Shaw's Masterpiece"

Tone Audio
on the 40.3 XD



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30

Cartridge Dude

PrimaLuna has finally produced a phono stage, and it is more than worthy of the lineage they've developed in 20 years.

Jeff and Chris both take it for a spin.



TONE118.009

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Fire V2



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NEW Arrivals

Lorie Ransom joins us to resurrect the TONE Toon. It's been gone way too long, and we're happy to have it back. Lorie owns Tiny Whale Creative, a design firm in Seattle (so we're equally excited to bring another Pacific Northwesterner on board!) and you can view the rest of their work at tinywhalecreative.com.



TONE118.011



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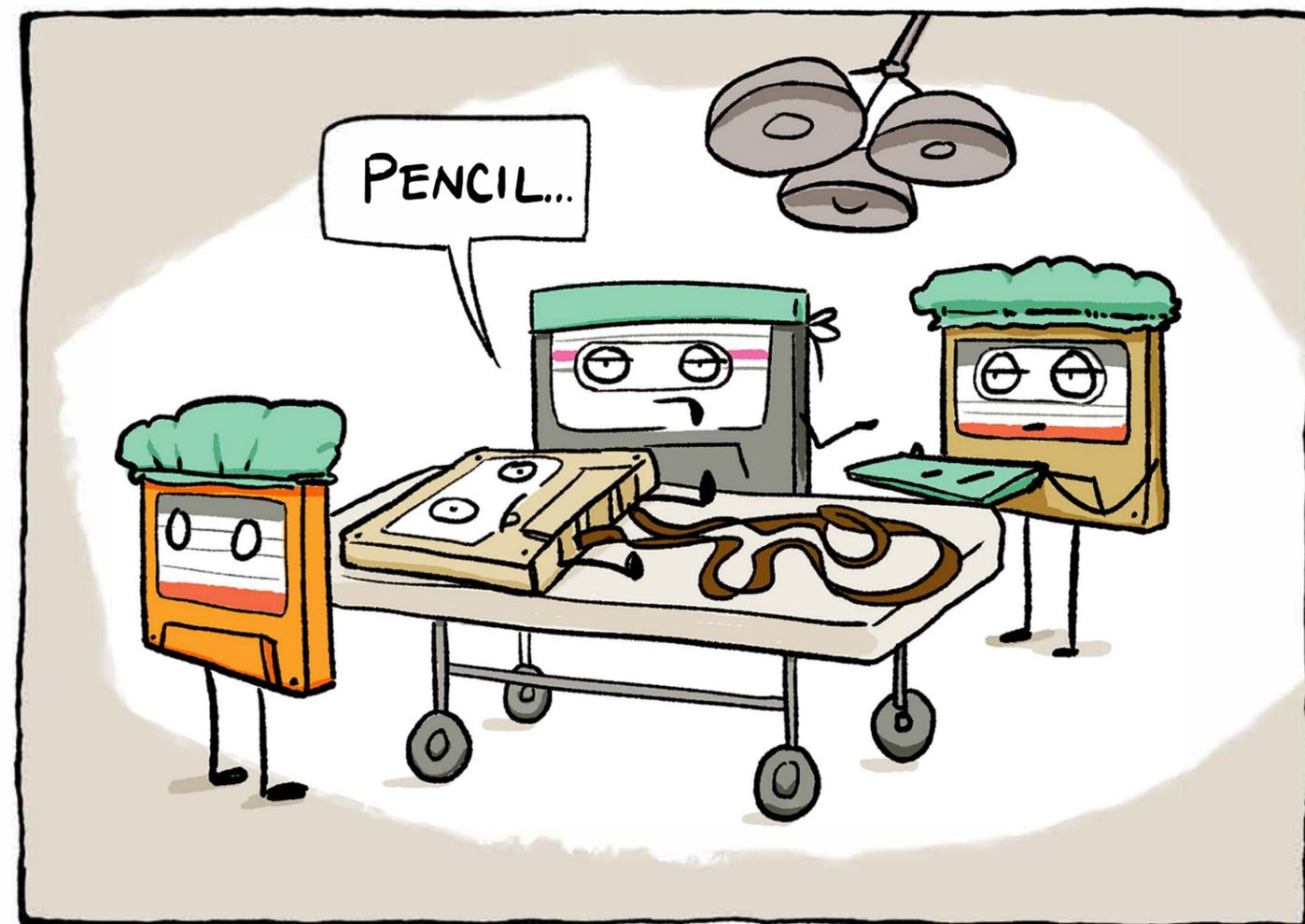
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and the other advantages of Acora Acoustics
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TONEToon

The toon is back after a long hiatus. We've enlisted the talent of Lorie Ransom, an illustrator and designer from Seattle to carry it forward. You can find more of her work at thedailydrawing.com and gocomics.com/the-daily-drawing.

Considering my love for the cassette, this one is especially fun.





Cover Shot:

Two classics - one past, one soon to be. The Conrad-Johnson GAT2 preamplifier and the new ART88.

Shot with Nikon D800 and 55mm f1.2 lens - 8 sec @f5.6

Going for the golden glow.



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no.118

P u b l i s h e r ' s L e t t e r

S

teve Martin once said, “you all look pretty happy for a bunch of people that are all going to be dead someday.” For the first time in a long time, no family members, friends, or industry associates have died during the production of this issue. I hope that continues.

As *TONE's* 18th birthday looms on the horizon, it's been a good journey. While nearly everyone else publishing hifi related content continues to blather about their awesomeness and superiority, I'm just enjoying the ride. My hope is that if you love hifi as much as I do, that you read everything you can get your hands on. Why would you not? With so many manufacturers vying for your attention, it's a lot to sort through. As many continue to raise the performance bar, it's easy to get lost along the way. Trust me, measurements aren't going to help you. Just as my favorite car magazines publish data about 0-60 times, 60-0 stopping distances and lateral cornering force, they don't tell me how a car really drives and feels. Sound familiar?

18 years may seem like a long time (it certainly does to me) but the magazine that really got things going, *The Absolute Sound*, celebrates their 50th birthday this month. Wow. I can't believe it's been 50 years since I picked up the first issue of *TAS*. I must admit at 13 years old, it was way over my head, but a few years later I was firmly in the groove of audiophile madness, and couldn't wait for the day I'd have an Audio Research amplifier and a pair of Magnepans.

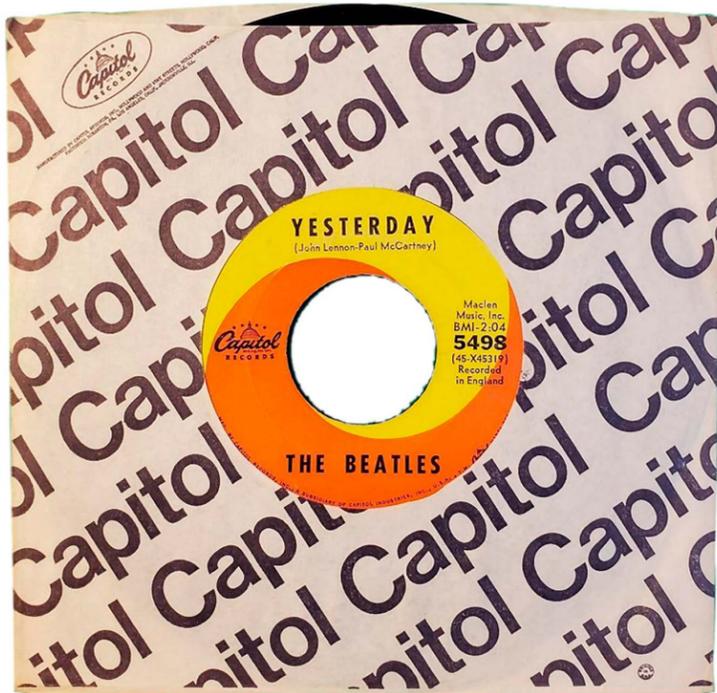
Today, many sets of Magnepans have come and gone, and I've written a check for 19 ARC components over the years. It's been a long journey. However, my commitment to helping you make informed audio purchases remains as strong as ever. To quote the late, great, HP:

“Our chief function is to inform. Second, we may comment on technical innovations. Third and perhaps most important, we attempt to describe as objectively as possible the peculiar sound characteristics of the equipment under consideration.”

I couldn't agree more. I always enjoyed talking to HP on the phone back in the early 2000s and he offered a lot of constructive criticism and praise when *TONE* first started. Who could ask for more? It was an honor to write for *TAS* for a little over a year and be a miniscule part of audio history. Who knows, maybe someone will continue *TONE's* path and produce a 50th anniversary issue? By then, hopefully I'll be in audio heaven, where all turntables have perfect VTA, having a drink with Harry.



Sometimes, it's interesting to investigate a song's roots, and see what other artists have interpreted. Here's a tune you might think you know well. And perhaps, it goes back further than you think. In the case of the Beatle's "Yesterday," it's been said that over 2200 cover versions have been done. Crazy.



Beatles Version - 1965 (orig.)

The Band of Irish Guards Version - 1966

Ray Charles Version - 1967

Frank Sinatra Version - 1969

Elvis Presley Version - 1970

Shirley Bassey Version - 1991

Boys 2 Men Version - 1994

Hemp! (reggae tribute) Version - 2013

MadDriven Version - 2013

Erik Soderlind Version - 2019

Al DiMeola Version - 2020

Herb Alpert Version - 2021

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Audio Research CA50

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\$1,500 - \$4,000

Back in 1997, when the CA50 was introduced, most audiophiles weren't thinking of "downsizing;" McMansions were going up everywhere, and some builders were even letting you write the cost of a sound system into your mortgage. Crazy.

ARC was way ahead of their time building a premium integrated amplifier back then, and because so much emphasis was on more power, this 50-Watt per channel amplifier that could take a backseat to the big boxes.

Ken Kessler summed it up perfectly, "great sounding little amp that didn't have enough power." Yet, if you don't need to really blast your music at earsplitting levels or happen to have a pair of high-efficiency speakers, this jewel from the past provides enticing performance.





What we have with the CA50, is an under the radar jewel. Sharing some core engineering with the Classic 120 and Classic 150, this amp features dual mono construction and the same level of components and build quality that made ARC famous.

The super clean example you see here came from our friends at Echo Audio, in Portland, OR. Proprietor Kurt Doslu always seems to have a knack for reading my mind and finding exactly the component I'm looking for.

As a bonus, this one had just been sent back to ARC for a complete going over in their service department (before the change of ownership) and a fresh set of tubes.

Unfortunately, it was not meant to be. This piece was on consignment, and just as I was ready to write the check, the owner decided he wanted twice the original asking price.

However, to prove my point, even at the new price, it was sold immediately. Alas, they are like Pokemon, you can't catch them all.

There are only a few caveats with a CA50.

First, if aesthetics matter to you at all, buy the best looking one you can afford - ARC no longer has sheet metal in parts inventory. Second, if you do decide to retube, especially the output tubes, get a pair of matched pairs. Like other ARC amplifiers of this time period, there is only one bias control to handle each pair of output tubes. Remember, back in 97', tubes were inexpensive and much more plentiful than they are today.

Make sure the owner has the remote control, and if they do not, be a stickler on price. Again, these are unobtainium

Enjoy the Experience



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Thanks to four 6922's under the perforated cover, the CA50 has more of a vintage ARC sound - perhaps a welcome thing for those that don't dig the voice of the current ARC integrated.

You can tube roll this one to your heart's content to fine tune it, and either swap the 6550 output tubes for KT88s (re-bias necessary) to get a slightly punchier sound, or if you're feeling wacky with your credit card, grab a set of EAT tubes, or even some NOS GE 6550s.

Yet, considering what some components cost today, paying top dollar for a mint CA50 is still going to be a bargain for a certain customer who wants an engaging tube system with a minimal box count.

It's worth mentioning that ARC's PH3SE phono, from about the same time period makes a fantastic mate to this amplifier.

Used within its operating parameters, there's a lot more D-79 DNA in this one than i50. And for me, that's a good thing.

This one got away this time, but next time, i will have success. Happy hunting!



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Great sound around a G...
By Jeff Dorgay

TEAC TN-4D-SE Turntable

Superb in every way.

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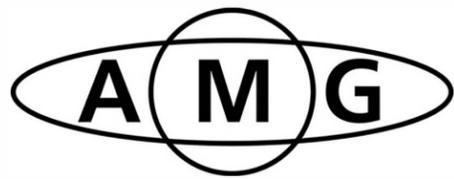
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Listening to some early Led Zeppelin records, via a pair of vintage ESS AMT-1b speakers and Sansui 717 integrated amplifier, with a TEAC 3300 reel to reel tape deck in the background, you might think it was 1977 again, and we were in my college flat. Yet something is from the here and now - the new TEAC TN-4D-SE direct drive turntable. You wouldn't know from first glance, with its S-shaped tonearm and walnut plinth. It's a beauty to be sure, and it also comes in black.

While the TD-4D-SE has a semi-retro look, it's definitely 21st century all the way. For those of you not familiar, this is the same company that has been making broadcast/studio quality reel to reel decks (Tascam) and some of the world's finest high end audio components under the Estoteric moiker. So there is a tremendous amount of manufacturing expertise behind this modestly priced turntable, featuring a Sumiko Oyster MM cartridge and built-in phono stage. You can bypass it if neccessary.

That same level of manufacturing excellence delivers a much higher performance table than you would expect for well under the 1095- dollar price point that this column demands.

DIRECT DRIVE TURNTABLE



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Hand made in Germany by master machinist Julian Lorenzi, the Forte Turbo is AMG's reference-level flagship turntable. The Forte is machined from a solid aluminum billet and incorporates AMG's celebrated oil-damped bearing, decoupled spindle, 24v DC brushless motor, upgraded linear power supply, and reflex clamp.



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1095

Unboxing and Setup

As the cartridge comes pre-mounted, and there's no belt to adjust, you merely unpack the table, mount the headshell and set tracking (and anti-skate) force. You'll be playing records in five minutes. Don't lose the external power supply while unpacking! The rest is a breeze.

Should you be plugging your TN-4D-SE into an amplifier or pair of powered speakers without a phono input, the onboard phono stage will come in handy. On the rear face of the TN-4D-SE, rests a small switch marked "Phono EQ – in/out." That's all you need to set – in if you do not have existing phono capability, out if you do. Then attach the supplied phono cable and ground wire.

Again, while unpacking the TN-4D-SE, the level of execution on this table is stunning for the price. There are a few similarly priced products that look like woodshop projects by comparison. The TN-4D-SE does not feel like an entry level turntable. Bonus style points for those of you of a certain age. You'll recognize the font used on the packaging is the same as TEAC reel to reel decks from back in the day. It's a nice feeling.

Performance

Discussing the virtues of direct drive versus belt drive is nearly as old as the digital versus analog question. Another feather in the cap of TEAC. Like the Panasonic Technics SL-1200s, companies with this level of virtual manufacturing can build a great direct drive motor in the context of a turntable at this price. Witness the boutique tables from Grand Prix, Brinkmann and even VPI. They all feature direct drive and have five figure price tags.



TONE118.020-1095

My experience with direct drive has always been a solidity to the lower register that similarly priced belt drives lack. Comparing the TN-4D-SE to a Rega P3, a vintage Technics SL-1200, and the current SL-1200GR (about \$1,800) is telling. The TEAC performs well beyond what I'd expect from an \$800 turntable in terms of bass extension, overall detail retrieval and isolation from background noise and interference.

Judged solely on its sonic performance with the built in MM phono stage and \$79 Sumiko cartridge, the TN-4D-SE gets a solid C+, but that's only part of the story. Removing that cartridge and mounting it to the other three reveals the same sonic limitations. While we don't measure, putting a turntable on top of a REL Carbon Special subwoofer and playing bass heavy music gives a relative idea of how much isolation a turntable system can offer.

The low bass in Kruder & Dorfmeister's "Bug Powder Dust" makes it easy to see how far the volume control could be turned up before acoustic feedback takes over, and the TN-4D-SE was the clear winner here. Swapping a slightly warped disc in place and observing woofer cone motion again reveals the TEAC to dampen more than the immediate rivals on hand.

The belt drive Rega table is slightly more spacious, listening to vocal tracks, and electronica with a lot of tinkly, atmospheric bits floating about, but the TEAC still offers more top to bottom sound and more dynamics – thanks in part to the direct drive system.

Changing the game

This is only part of the story, when swapping the supplied Sumiko cartridge for the increased performance of the Sumiko Moonstone MM cartridge (\$299) further reveals the capabilities of the TN-4D-SE's tonearm. Supplied by SAEC with a knife edge pivot bearing, this table can really pull minute detail from your favorite records. Swapping the Moonstone in not only raises overall performance dramatically (and you can go all the way up to the top range Oyster cartridge by merely changing stylus assemblies at this point) it raises the sonic quality to an A+. This is exciting performance for a \$750 turntable.



Tracking through records with densely packed, layered vocals, and highly dynamic passages is the strong suit here, and this is all part of what makes vinyl come alive. As there is no adjustment for VTA with the TN-4D-SE, I stuck with the Moonstone, as this has an identical stylus tip to cartridge body top measurement, not requiring a VTA adjustment. This is where the considerably more expensive Technics takes the edge, because it allows for a wider range of cartridges to be used. This is not a completely fair comparison, but the flagship TEAC TN-5BB at \$1,799 does offer this option. Hopefully, we will be getting one of these in for a further report.

Finally, for those craving a bit more performance, the RCA outputs on the rear also allow using a better quality cable going from turntable to phono input should you be going that route. All of these things are not mentioned to suggest the TN-4D-SE is not fantastic as it is, but to underline how much more performance lurks inside this turntable.

Should you be an analog lover wanting more performance at some point, the TN-4D-SE will allow you to take your setup further, and this makes it an even better value. Even substituting the on-board phono amplifier for the recently reviewed Parasound ZPhono (\$495) makes for a formidable analog setup.

Everything you need

The TEAC TN-4D-SE delivers a fantastic way to take a step up from a strictly entry level turntable, it offers top shelf build quality, great sound, and a way to extract a bit more performance should you so desire. That's as good as it gets. We are happy to give the TN-4D-SE one of our Exceptional Value Awards for 2023. Highly recommended.

Focal Vestia no.1 Speakers

Engineering makes the difference.

\$1,198/pair
Focal.com

After spending an afternoon with staffer Earle's Focal Sopra 3s, just before firing up their new Vestia no.1 at my place, the level of sonic excellence Focal brings to a \$1,198 pair of speakers seems amazing. Listening to the same handful of tracks that I shuffled through at Earle's house, not much sonic memory was lost in the 25-minute drive on the I-5 back to my place.

Playing the Vestia no.1s through the main reference system truly shows off what they can do, but it's not really a fair comparison, so my Naim Uniti Atom (\$3,599 and available from your Naim/Focal dealer) makes for a perfect match. However, like all the other Focal speakers we've used, they are just as easy to drive with your favorite tube amplifier as well. Swapping the Uniti Atom for the PrimaLuna ProLogue One and the Naim CD5is in for review is equally enticing.

Queuing up a MoFi copy of Santana's Caravanserai is lovely and room filling. Placed on 24" Sound Anchor stands about 10 feet apart on the 24-foot wall in my listening room (couch about 10 feet back) the small Focals produce a large soundstage, but in a large room, their horizontal dispersion, especially from the top is slightly limited. The cure for this is stands that allow the tweeters to be close to ear height as possible, or the ability to tip them back slightly. The more stylish dedicated stands from Focal do just this, and are reasonably priced, at \$249 a pair. Thanks to their front ports, you can achieve nearly the same effect on a bookshelf. The Vestia no. 1 is definitely user friendly.



All in the family

The Vestias take advantage of some new and existing Focal technology. You can read the full story on the Focal website here; suffice to say Focal puts a lot of expertise into their entry level speakers. The only thing that is really compromised between the Vestias and the higher range Focals, is the simplicity of the cabinets. The finish and shape is a more simple box shape, lacking the complex finish of Sopras and Kantas. Yet what is delivered is of top quality. Compare the Vestias to some of the competitors made in China, and you can see the Focal difference. A quick rap on the cabinet reveals solid construction and lack of resonance. Impressive for this price point.

A 2-way design, the compact cabinet only measures 8 5/8 x10 1/4x15 1/4" (21.9x26x38.7cm) and weighs only 15.4 pounds, so they are easy to unbox and install. They utilize a 1-inch inverted dome tweeter with Focal's TAM material. (aluminum and magnesium composite) The 6 1/2- inch woofer is made from recycled carbon fiber, allowing added stiffness at a lower cost than standard, woven carbon fiber – a very unique approach. The Vestias are available in light wood like our review samples, dark wood and a black high gloss finish. All feature a "leather effect" front panel.

Further listening

Moving on to Lloyd Cole's new album, *On Pain* (as well as a few LC classic tracks) reveals the clean, natural midrange the Vestias deliver, which ironically hits me near the middle of the 3rd track, "I Can Hear Everything." Sometimes the soundtrack of your life is synergistic.

Going through the gamut of favorite vocal tracks confirms the initial excitement. The Undertones' "More Songs About Chocolate and Girls" demonstrates the Vestias ability to extract detail from dense, compressed recordings. This is a terrible sounding (but fun) track, showing you can have high end speakers that play everything with ease.



New, Used, or?



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When starting to build a system, every bit of performance you can get for the dollar is key and this makes the Vestias such a great value. If you could see what goes on every day at the Focal factory in France, it's easy to see how they do it. Focal performs every aspect of manufacturing and design in-house; cabinets, drivers, and crossovers. The sheer amount of engineering talent is incredible, equally so with execution. Focal definitely takes the high road on the Vestia no.1 in terms of overall balance. Many speakers in this price range hinge their reputation on a single feature, where the Vestias sacrifice an over exaggerated frequency response to deliver smooth and resolving sound.

Changing program material to bass heavy tracks from Thievery Corp., Massive Attack, and Tosca reveal the Vestias' ability to go down fairly low, and the bass delivered is of high tonal quality. Moving them back into a more appropriate sized room (12 x 18 feet, and 10 x 12 feet respectively) and taking care to place them so they can take advantage of a bit of room gain provides tremendous sonic rewards. It's easy to hear the lineage all the way up to the Utopia series.

Differnt partners

Swapping the Naim Atom for the T+A Caruso R, and PrimaLuna amplifier is fun, and again proves that these little speakers have more than enough resolution to discern distinct differences between amplification and program sources. The no.1s are a great way to start building a system, and like some of the other Focal speakers, they offer a full range of floorstanding speakers, and a center channel option so you can build a multichannel system having the same voice.

Focal claims a sensitivity of 89dB/1-Watt, and they proved easy to drive even with our 12 Watt per channel Lab 12 Mighty (vacuum tubes) amplifier, so they should work well with whatever you have on hand. Around back is a single pair of 5-way binding posts to make connection to your speaker cables equally easy.

At present, Focal doesn't offer a subwoofer in the Vestia lineup, but they do suggest their SUB600P. To get a better chance of what they can do in a 2.1 system, they were mated to an SVS 3000 Micro (\$899) subwoofer and alternately with a REL T5/x (\$699). Thanks to the solid bass foundation that the Vestias deliver, adding a sub makes for a great full range system should you so desire to take this direction.

Constant innovation, tremendous value

While some of the names might be a little confusing at times, Focal continues to innovate and apply new technologies and construction techniques on every speaker in their range. That their commitment to excellence is just as serious with the Vestias as it is with their top range Utopia speakers is great news for the beginning audiophile. We are happy to give these one of our Exceptional Value Awards for 2023. This is a great pair of speakers to build a system with.



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Late Night Garage Playlist
-Jeff Dorgay

Now that a pair of Heretic speakers are installed in the garage system, it's ability to really rock has increased substantially. Nothing like tubes, some high efficiency speakers, and the classics - rock, that is.



David Lee Roth - "Ladies Night in Buffalo"

Van Halen - "Atomic Punk"

Ratt - "Dangerous but Worth The Risk"

AC/DC - "Down Payment Blues"

Pat Travers - "Boom, Boom(out go the lights)"

Dokken - "It's Not Love"

Scorpions - "Lovedrive"

UFO - "Too Hot to Handle"

Deep Purple - "Highway Star"

Kiss - "Black Diamond"

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It's always fun to decide what the first track to play on a new piece of gear will be. A timeworn track, an audiophile classic, or something off the radar? Feeling in a totally 80s mood, Fun Fun's "Tell Me" is the choice with some major synth bass to get the Peak Consult Sinfonias going right away. Right about this time, Chris drops me a text telling me to investigate the bass line in Portico's "Living Fields," from the album of the same name. In my best Keanu Reeves' (i.e. Ted) voice – "whoooooa." The Bel Canto Black EX Integrated amplifier kicks major ass. With Roon in random play mode, the next track up is The Acid's "Animal," and the windows in my studio are rattling. It's gonna be a bass heavy morning indeed.

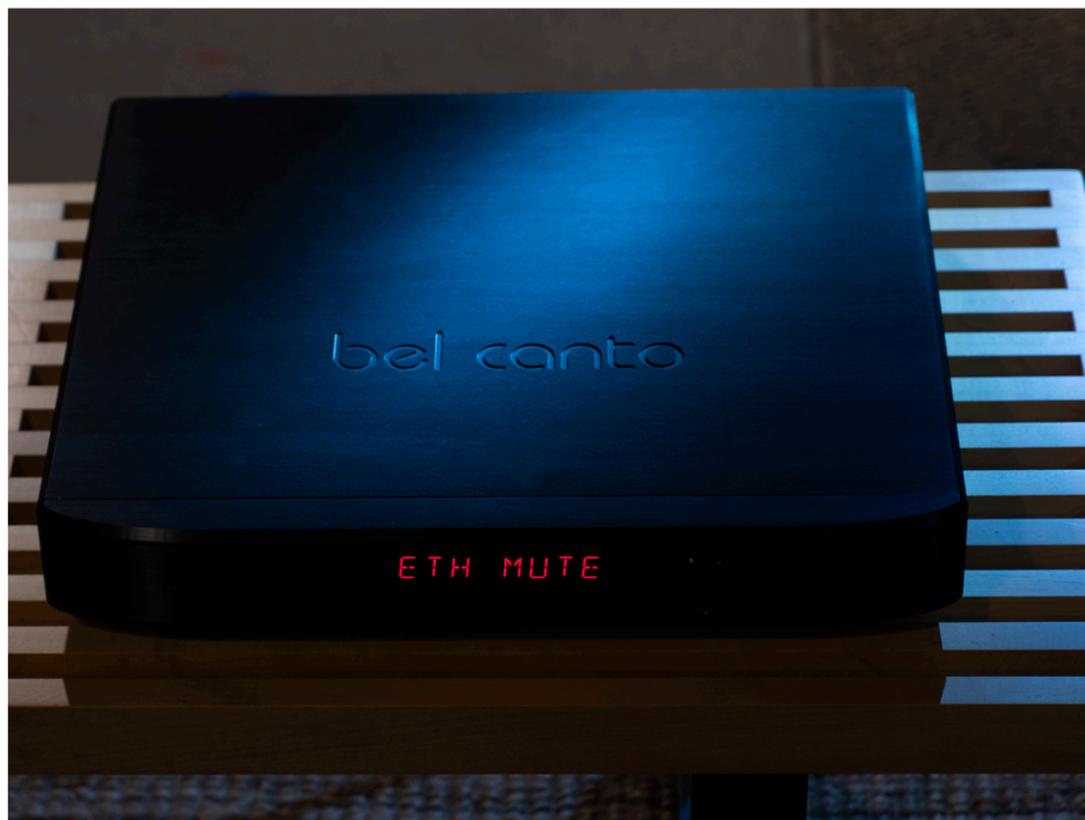
At the risk of annoying nearly everyone, adding the Black EX Integrated to a short list of amplifiers employing a Class D output stages that sounds damn good, it's like the adjustment we all had to make to our thinking when digital started sounding really good. Here's where you'll all want to tie me up and light a fire under me – I don't prefer analog over digital or vice versa. I like the presentation of each, and think they suit certain types of music better. Wanna play some Blue Note Tone Poet tracks? Give me a turntable, an all-analog system and even some tubes (or at least Class A solid-state) and I'm grooving for days. But it's tough to beat Deadmau5 on high-res digital. It's the same with cameras, but we can argue about that forever too.



Keep in mind that the EX features a digital power amplification stage, and there is an analog stage in the preamplifier. All incoming analog signals are digitized and modified (should you take advantage of this functionality) before being decoded back to analog for the Class D power output stage. For a more detailed explanation of the process, please click here to go to the Bel Canto website: <https://belcantodesign.com/home/black-ex/ex-integrated/>

During a chat with John Stronczer, the designer behind the Black EX he makes it a point to emphasize “They optimize analog and digital aspects of the system architecture to get the advantages of both. It allows the integration of DSP based tilt, bass EQ, and bass management functions without compromised, delivering a finely tuned result.”

It's tough to ignore how incredible a well-executed Class D amplifier sounds listening to hip-hop, techno/electronica, and heavy rock music. By this time, Roon is serving up The Cinematic Orchestra's “A Caged Bird/Imitations of Life,” and things are pounding again. This amplifier is so fast and clean, it's a revelation. A couple of solid days were spent in this groove, because in addition to the big, big bass a lot of these tracks provide, even though there are no real instruments to refer to, there's a spaciousness that can't be achieved with a slow amplifier. The enormous sound field in all three dimensions that the Black EX Integrated renders is impossible to ignore. Remember – volume is the fourth dimension. You just can't play Massive Attack on a pair of LS3/5a's with a small tube amp. I also asked Stronczer about their output stage, and why they are not using the latest GaN devices. He feels that their N-MOSFET design (with discrete modulator and power output stages) deliver better transparency and dynamics. The proof is definitely in the listening.



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Music lovers wanting a high performance, yet minimal box compliment system, a premium integrated amplifier is the way to go. Bel Canto's Black EX is one step down from their top, (\$30,000) Black ACI600 at \$15,500. Anyone getting jumpy about a \$15k integrated, remember, you're getting an amplifier, preamplifier, DAC, headphone amplifier and MM/MC phono stage all on one chassis. Even five power cords and four pairs of modest interconnects will set you back at least \$4-6k.

However, this is no recent trend – Bel Canto has always made great gear in compact enclosures. Midwestern people don't do trendy – I know I grew up there. Bel Canto has slowly refined their products over the last two decades and were at the forefront of Class-D amplification when it was first introduced. They actually started as a tube amplifier company, a long time ago.

The Black EX merely requires an Ethernet cable to stream ROON, or whatever you prefer) a turntable if you're into vinyl and your favorite pair of speakers. With 250 Watts of power available into 8-ohms and double that for 4-ohm speakers, the Black EX will not limit your choice of speakers. Even power absorbing Magneplans are driven with ease. Ironically, Bel Canto is also from Minnesota, home of Magneplanar.

An interesting tilt on things

The Black EX features a "tilt" control, processed in the digital domain. This was the toughest feature to wrap my brain around, especially considering how well the Bass EQ function works. Giving a slightbump in the lower region, starting at about 250Hz, with maximum boost or cut of +/- 3dB at 20 Hz, this is a fantastic way to fine tune speakers to your room, or just add some oomph to an otherwise flat recording. The tilt control has a center frequency of 750 Hz, but as it increases low frequencies, it slightly decreases high frequencies. While I'd rather a working bass and treble control, this does help to balance out a slightly dead or lively room. Use this one delicately.

However, Bel Canto's Main HP (High Pass) filter is one of the most helpful features I've ever seen in an amplifier, and this is one of those things that is helps tremendously when done in the digital domain. By rolling off the low bass output to your speakers, it allows anyone using smaller monitors, or panel speakers with limited low frequency excursion, to pair with a subwoofer (via the analog outs) and really rock.



ACCURACY IS ESSENTIAL TO BEAUTY

– Ralph Waldo Emerson



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Used in conjunction with a pair of XSA Vanguards, a pair of Falcon LS3/5as, the Dynaudio Confidence 20s and even the Peak Consult Sinfonias, the internal crossover allows integrating a REL Carbon Special subwoofer into the system with ease. By tuning the Bel Canto and the REL to work together, additional dynamic output is easier to accomplish.

This is a real blessing for anyone using a pair of Magnepans, Quads, or other vintage ESL speakers too. Switching the system up to a pair of vintage Acoustats, which will generate some major panel slam on anything from Electronica to Pink Floyd, having the ability to have the mains start to roll off around 50 Hz is fantastic. I dare say, the Black EX provided the most full-range experience I've ever heard from these old ESLs! If only I'd had one of these in the 80s!

Connection

Other than a powered subwoofer output, there are only two analog inputs. With five digital inputs (Ethernet – and ROON Ready) USB, toslink, SPDIF, and AES/EBU, what else would you need? Other than a turntable, I can't imagine what else you'd connect to the Black EX.

The Black EX will decode any kind of digital data you send to it; however, I was only able to test it with a vintage Proceed PDT via SPDIF, and a Dell desktop via USB. The remaining digital listening was done with Roon. It's worth mentioning that this was one of the easiest Roon endpoints to use – plug in the network, open the app, select the Bel Canto and roll.

The phono section is a slightly different story. You can adjust MC loading from 50, 100, 500 and 1000 ohms, with MM fixed at 47k. Bel Canto suggests carts from .25 to .5mV, but a gain spec is not listed. While they only specify a 70dB signal to noise ratio, it feels quieter than this.

Like the other amplifiers that digitize their phono inputs, the most devoted analog enthusiasts will be skeptical. However, the result is excellent. While you might argue that the phono stage in the Bel Canto is not the pinnacle of analog, the only person that's really going to notice it is someone with an analog front end costing 2 – 4 times as much as the EX, so it's a moot point.

If you think of the Black EX Integrated as a system, you're probably looking at a \$6,000 amp, \$4,000 preamp, \$3,000 DAC, \$3,000 phono stage and \$1,500 headphone amplifier (plus a rack and all those cables) all in one stylish, compact box, that will take you longer to unpack than to set up and start playing music.

Utilizing a number of cartridges from about \$500 - \$2,500 on the Technics 1200GR and a Linn LP-12 Basik with Adikt MM cart, on a wide range of material is very impressive. Comparing the onboard phono to a couple of externals was somewhat misleading because the analog inputs are converted to high res digital. Violating the Prime Directive, I say stick with the internal option and live happily ever after.



Same for the DAC. Not only is its performance excellent, as with the phono, you'd have to spend close to \$10k to really get a major upgrade, and then you'd still be going from your outboard DAC's analog outputs to be re-digitized inside the Black EX. Keep it simple. Buy this one for what it is, get a great pair of speakers and just forget about audiophilia.

The Black EX integrated is like going on vacation every time you use it – just sit back, relax and enjoy.

Why you should buy one

This amplifier is so musical, combining a high level of performance and functionality in a compact and stylish package, you'd have to spend a lot more money on separates to exceed what it can accomplish. Whether you are a music lover wanting a killer system with a small footprint, a long-term audiophile looking to downsize or build an additional system, I can't suggest this one highly enough. The Bel Canto Black EX Integrated is the perfect way to cure your urges to upgrade. Merely add a great pair of speakers and call it a day.

Just as digital, and integrated amplifier, are no longer dirty words, neither is digital power amplification.



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PrimaLuna EVO 100 Phono Preamp

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Listening to PrimaLuna's new phonostage begins with an audiophile cut for a change. If you haven't had a chance to hear Earth & Wood on Yarlung Records, this is an incredible piece of music exquisitely captured. The tone and dynamics are out of this world good. Seeing the EVO 100 Phono has a 50-ohm setting for MC loading, Rega's Apheta 2 mounted to a Rega P9 is the toughest cartridge to drive on hand. Apheta cartridges often get a bad rap at being thin and strident sounding, but nearly all the time they are loaded at too high of an impedance setting. 25-50 ohms is the key to unlocking the speed and transparency that this cartridge offers, and the EVO is a perfect match.

Next up, the SME 20 with a Lyra Helikon reworked by Ana Mighty Sound delivers a completely different voice. Not quite as contrasty from top to bottom, the Lyra has considerably more inner detail and front to back depth. Tracking through a handful of Blue Note remasters delivers a luxurious, texture filled presentation, that brings these classics to life.

Going off on a different tangent, the Technics 1200GR with Luxman LMC-5 is the last choice, again, we're talking about different and subtlety, rather than hit you over the head differences, but you should know that the EVO 100 possesses more than enough resolution to let all of these different cartridges shine.



A long time in the making

PrimaLuna fans have been asking Mr. van den Dungen at PrimaLuna when they would make a killer phono stage offering a level of performance and value to match their award winning amplification products for some time now. They've produced a CD player and recently a DAC – both upholding the PrimaLuna traditions of value, performance, and execution. (Staffer Sean Zloch owns the DAC and loves it, btw.) You have to hand it to Herman van den Dungen for keeping a poker face, he's never even hinted that they were actually doing this project.

Well, it's here and it's fantastic. Though it's commonplace today to spout superlatives at every turn in the audio reviewing world, the EVO 100 Phono gets highest praise, as we own a handful of great \$10k-ish phonostages from ARC, Backert Labs, BAT, Pass Labs, and VAC. The 20k-ish Nagra Classic Phono is also here for listening, so when I say that the EVO is one of the best deals going in a \$3,700 phono and delivers performance you'd expect to pay more for, it's not empty praise. It's been compared to several great phono stages, with a wide variety of cartridges.

PrimaLuna has been around for 20 years now, and their components stand the test of time. Check your favorite internet forum, EBay, or Audiogon. There's rarely many used PrimaLuna components for sale. People tend to keep em. For those of you that haven't heard me say this often, I still have my ProLogue One integrated that I reviewed for The Absolute Sound 20 years ago. Just over 2,500 components have come through the door as TONE approaches its 19th birthday, and this one's still delivering the goods. So, this is a product you can buy with total confidence.

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Break it down again

The EVO 100 Phono uses a half-sized chassis, like the original PrimaLuna integrated amplifiers, the current EVO DAC and the EVO 100 series products. The physical design and styling match all PrimaLuna products, with the familiar dark blue metallic chassis, black or silver matte front panel, and the Coney Island Hot Dog warmer tube cage. It also comes triple boxed to make sure it is not damaged in transit, and a pair of gloves so you don't smudge it when installing. If this is your first go around with PrimaLuna, you'll be impressed with how well their products are packaged.

Though the EVO 100 Phono offers MM and MC capability, there is only one phono input on the rear panel. This is the only real complaint and it's unfortunate that they couldn't have at least gone the route of having a separate MM and MC input, allowing you to use two turntables, or even using an external step-up transformer with the MM input. A single pair of RCA outputs are also supplied for output to your preamplifier or integrated of choice. With a pair of 6922 tubes for the MC stage, the main gain and MM stage each use a pair of 12AX7 tubes.

Space the final frontier

Even though people still argue about analog versus digital, the spaciousness that analog brings to the listening experience is always exciting. Side one of Earth & Wood features Lou Harrison's 1940s "Canticle No. 3." Performed by the Smoke and Mirrors percussion ensemble, this track features a steel guitar and a number of vintage percussion instruments. The closest comparison would be to some of the Mickey Hart Drumming at the Edge work. The spaciousness of this recording through the recently installed Peak Consult Sinfonia speakers is massive.

Moving back to more familiar territory, Paul Weller's first solo album proves equally engaging. Though this record feels digitally mastered, that feeling of a nearly endless soundstage is incredibly cool, revealing fine details not as easily discernable in the Japanese CD version. Isn't that what vinyl is all about? Uh huh, oh yeah.

The vinyl version of Kruder & Dorfmeister's *The K&D Sessions* is perfectly suited to this turntable/cartridge setup, and the tonal saturation that the PrimaLuna adds to the Rega makes for a Technicolor/Superscope presentation. The bass hits hard, and the tinkly bits float around the room. This all-tube design is a master of rendering three dimensional space, precisely the thing to gravitate towards tubes for.

MM and MC

While Chris did not achieve incredible synergy with the EVO 100 and the MM cartridges he had on hand, the Technics 1200G and Concorde Silver (basically a higher performance Ortofon OM40 in a Concorde body) used here was perfection, as well as our other MM reference, Clearaudio's Virtuoso Wood. Both delivered the dynamics associated with taking the MM path. My least favorite matchup with the EVO 100 on the MM side, was the Linn LP-12 Basik, sporting their Adikt II cartridge. Sometimes it's just how the planets line up, but this combination is already somewhat on the romantic side, so this might just be a bit too much of a good thing. And remember, I'm the guy on the staff that leans to the warmer side of things.

An interesting aspect of the EVO 100 Phono is the all-tube design – no step up transformers, Op amps, or solid-state gain stage anywhere. A pair of hand-picked 6922s are hidden around back, in a sub enclosure (behind a little door) with the circuit board suspended from the main chassis. You simply remove a small pair of posts to remove the door for tube access. This only delivers 60dB of maximum MC gain, but also adds a level of circuit purity and tonal saturation that others do not. The medium and low gain settings are 56dB and 52dB, handy if you have a high(er) output MC that ranges from .9mV to 2.5mV.

It's slightly on the low side for something in the .25 - .30mV range, like a Denon 103 if you have a preamplifier/linestage with low to moderate gain. However, when feeding the Pass XS Pre and the conrad-johnson ART88 (in for review) we had no problems with lower output cartridges. And it's a perfect match for an all PrimaLuna system. If you have a MC cartridge in the .4mV - .6mV range, you will be fine regardless. The EVO offers loading at 50, 100, 200, 500, and 1000 ohms for MC and two capacitance settings of 47pF, and 100pF for MM.



Many different system configurations were tried, however most listening was done with the Pass gear and Peak Consult speakers. While the EVO 100 lacks the ultimate level of resolution of the \$10-\$20k phonostages on hand here, (as it should) to coin an old audiophile cliché, they are only sins of omission. Yet dynamically, the EVO leaves precious little on the table compared to some of the industry's finest thanks to the enormous power supply with tube rectification handled by a pair of 5AR4s and regulation from a pair of EL34s. It's like getting out of a Carrera GTS and getting into a standard model 911. After about half an hour, you don't really miss that extra 50 horsepower.

I'm not much of a tube roller, but considering the good luck I have had with PrimaLuna pre and power amplifiers, I'm guessing those of you that want to invest in some premium NOS tubes for this phonostage can probably wring even more performance from it. This is not to say it is necessary to enjoy the EVO 100, but the most fanatic among you can probably take it a click or two further, should you choose to experiment.

There was a time that almost four grand was crazy money for a phonostage. Today not so much, but for many analog enthusiasts this is still a major commitment of resources. To that effect, the EVO Phono is more than worthy of an Exceptional Value Award for 2023. I know I could live with one of these forever – and with shopping season around the corner, I still may purchase one. Highly recommended.

To get a better handle on how it stacks up to something much more in the same price neighborhood, I sent it over to Chris' house for a while as he has been listening to the Modwright 9.0 SE (now with X mods) for some time. Here's his take on the two.

Additional listening; Chris Harr

For several months, I've been thoroughly enjoying ModWright's PH 9.0 phonostage (\$3,500). So much so, I recently returned the unit to ModWright for the "X" upgrades (+\$1,250). While the "X" mods are entirely positive, they don't transform the PH 9.0 into an entirely different phonostage. For that reason, it seemed obvious to compare it to the \$3,695 PrimaLuna Evo 100 Tube Phonostage.

For initial listening, the PrimaLuna Evo 100 Phonostage is paired with the Avid Volvere SP and a Kuzma 4 Point 9 tonearm, utilizing an Ortofon Cadenza Bronze modified by Andy Kim at the Needle Clinic with a boron cantilever and micro ridge stylus. Listening to the Evo 100 phono stage, I'm quickly struck by a smooth, liquid and well-layered midrange while listening to Clementine on Halsey's (Ashley Nicollet Fragipane) *Manic* album. Make no mistake, Halsey is a pop singer/songwriter of a special quality. Her voice carries a textured emotional depth and the PrimaLuna allows that nuance to be clearly heard. Contrasting overdubbed vocals emerge from a space behind the main vocal rather than blending with the primary vocal. The effect is haunting, in a good way, as though we're hearing raw desperation.



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Later, listening to “Little Death” from The Beths’ debut album *Future Me Hates Me*, I’m greeted with the expected crystalline triangle-type sound at the beginning of the track followed by a rapid, light cymbal tap before the song transitions into wall of electric guitars over the top of galloping drums. The Evo 100 keeps the dense instrumentation well-separated and clearly placed in the soundstage.

Next, a ProJect X8 with a Nagaoka MP-200 cartridge (4mV MM) and Cardas Cygnus phono cable is plugged in to assess the PrimaLuna’s MM input. I found the overall combination to be excessively weighted toward the bottom octaves and relatively dark sounding overall. This same configuration is warm through the ModWright also, but very satisfying especially with recordings which tend toward being “hot” in the upper midrange and treble.

Finally, a Rega RP6 with a Dynavector 20x2H (2.8mV HOMC) is substituted. The sound is clear and well balanced, if not as intense as I was accustomed to through the PH 9.0. Overall, I am left with the impression that the Evo 100’s MM stage is best paired with livelier, brighter sounding MM cartridges. I’m sure some of this could be changed by a little tube rolling in the MM section. My evening concludes switching back to the Avid and listening to Phantogram’s *Eyelid Movies*. Phantogram recordings fall into a special category of electronic rock/dream pop with sequenced beats. They’re intense, fun albums but are far from being “audiophile” quality recordings. Despite the average recording quality, I’m again struck by the smooth, textured clarity of vocals through the Evo 100.

While the majority of Phantogram’s songs are sung by Sarah Barthel, guitarist and producer Josh Carter takes an occasional turn at the mic. His voice often falls back into the mix, lacking nuance. Through the PrimaLuna, he emerges in a convincing, textured manner not experienced before. Very impressive.

A major difference between these two, is how differently they present dynamics. The Evo 100 builds from the bottom-up, whereas the ModWright builds top-down from a higher average intensity level. High frequency dynamic details emerge from the PrimaLuna, as though someone were turning up a dimmer switch in a darkened room. From the ModWright, the ambient light level is higher, and the color temperature changes instead. The ModWright PH 9.0X presents dense rock and pop recordings in a stable, lively manner with tighter, punchier bass and equally extended low frequencies. Paired with the Focal Scala Utopia Evo’s powered by a Parasound JC5, The lower octaves and overall tonal balance are more satisfying through the ModWright with rock, pop and electronic recordings, the types of music I listen to most often.

To my ear, The PrimaLuna Evo 100 Phonostage comes across warmer and more organic sounding, excelling at presenting a more layered midband, remaining unflustered when complex passages occur and remaining sweet in the top octaves.

An audition of the PrimaLuna would be easy to recommend, especially to vinyl enthusiasts who gravitate toward acoustic and vocal based recordings.

Axpona 2023 Chicago, USA

Good to be back!

axpona.com

It was great to be back in Chicago for Axpona this year. With the pandemic in the rearview mirror and warm sunny skies, everyone here is glad to be back in full swing and looking towards the future. There is a vibe at this year's Axpona that pictures can't capture. It's thousands of likeminded people sharing their passion for music and gear. Of course, there are systems that give the average enthusiasts some aspirational moments, but there is also a feeling of community in the elevators, halls and rooms. Strangers sit beside each other in listening spaces, nod their heads to the music approvingly and make requests. Here, you can listen to that turntable of your dreams, try out those headphones that are within your budget, and meet some incredible people along the way. I had some great experiences this year, and definitely had some moments in which the connection to the music was right there.

There is a lot to see and hear at Axpona, so it's smart to organize using the nicely laid out handbook and app. I notice that there is more swag for participants this year and come home with a few tote bags, t-shirts, hats, and water bottles. With 200 listening rooms and representatives from 17 countries, there is something for everyone. From The Ear Gear to The Expo Hall on the main floor, to the 12 floors of listening rooms, ballrooms and hallway exhibits, the steady stream of participants varies. The demographic is mainly men, but there are families with young children, twentysomething YouTubers and even a few passionate lady audiophiles who have an opportunity for hands-on demonstrations, meet and greets, record sales and picking up pieces for the home audio system.



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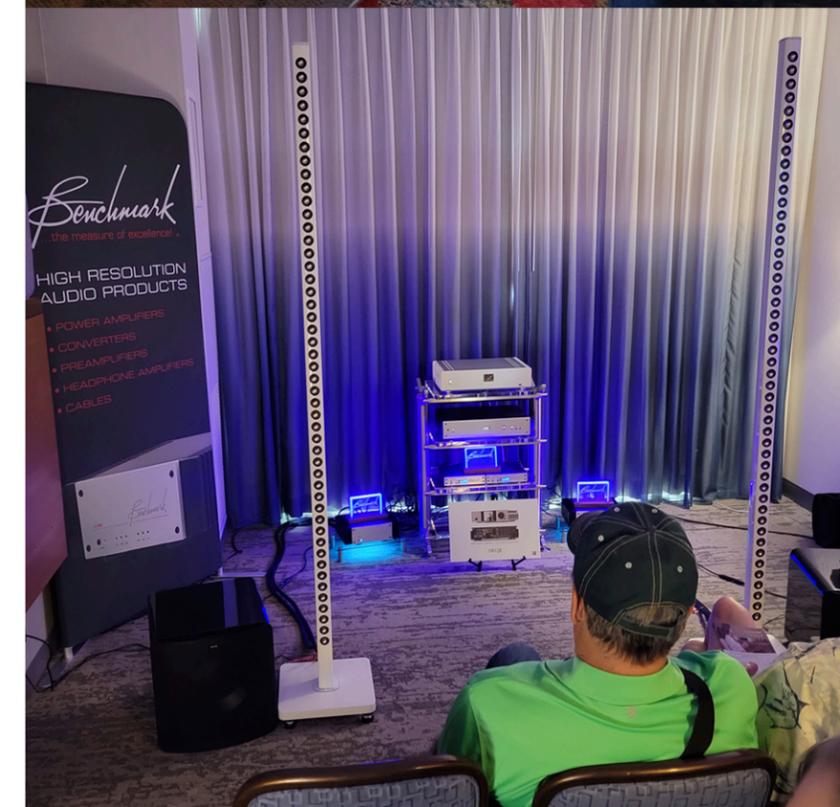
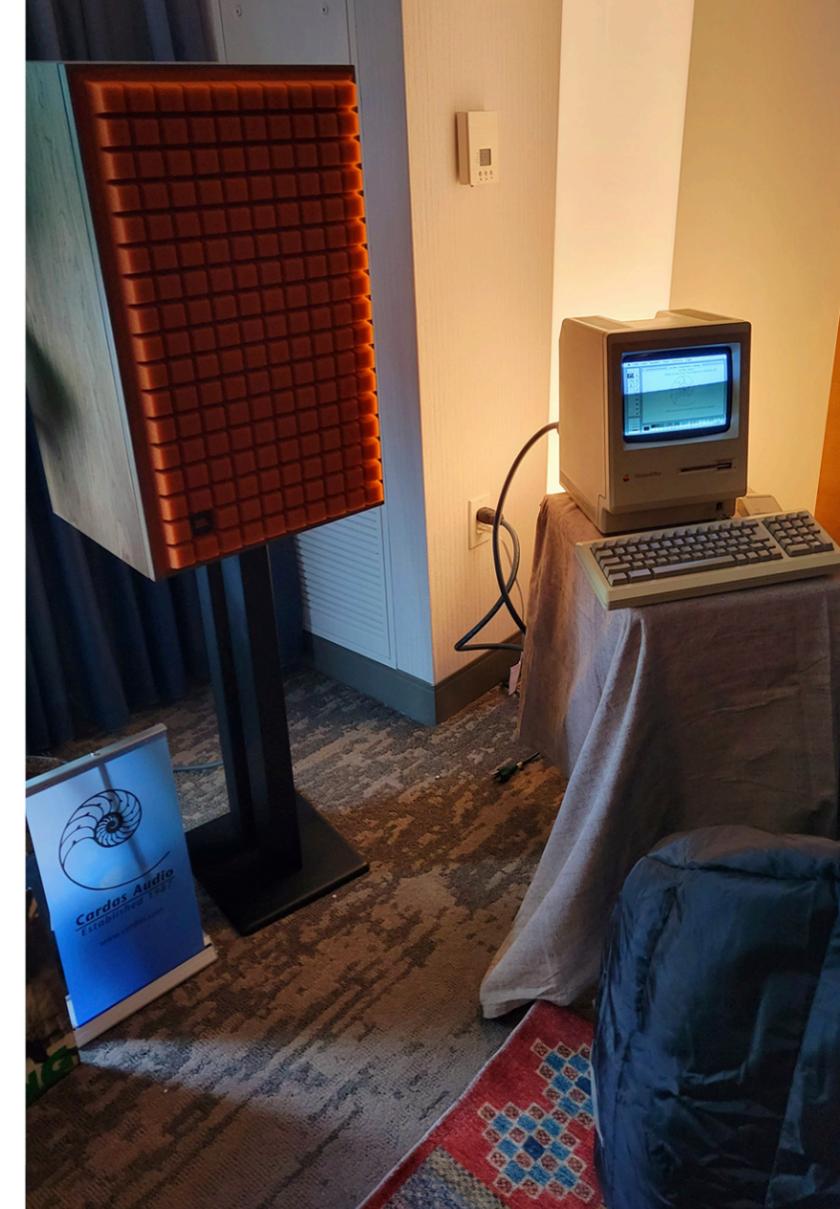
Being a woman at Axpona as part of the media is a unique experience.

There are rooms in which I feel invisible, while my non-audiophile male companion is greeted with a handshake and smile. Thankfully, there are enough rooms in which I am warmly greeted, given a great run down of the gear, and offered the best listening seat. Although the female audio community may be small by comparison, not all the women attendees are non-audiophiles. I see younger women stepping forward and setting the bar high. I see experienced women shoulder to shoulder with men holding their own, but in high heels. My personal favorite balanced sound, both digital and vinyl, is in the Upscale Audio room. All the credit goes to Kat Ourlian for her fierce skills tweaking some lovely Tannoy Prestige speakers and Dr. Feickert turntable with laser precision. Awesome!

"I talk to many other participants, some first timers, others returnees, and they all say the same thing:

They are having a great time."

Everyone has a favorite room or sound, and they always ask about mine! I have a few stand outs, but let's talk about that later. Sure, there are rooms in which horns, female jazz vocalists and even avant garde music is predominantly played, but the music choices are more varied this year. Perhaps it's because Qobuz has such a terrific catalog of Hi-Res, perhaps it is because the vinyl available in those rooms is more diverse.



Instead of just the regular audiophile standards, I hear more music like Santana, Elvis, the Eagles, Buena Vista Social Club, Yosi Horitawa and yes, I even hear the Clash. And of course it's in the super fun Cardas room, decked out with incredible memorabilia (including Farrah Fawcett's famous red one-piece and velvet Kiss posters), a working MacIntosh Plus computer circa 1986, and a pair of JBL L-100 classic speakers as Josh Meredith opens a brand-new copy of *London Calling*. I appreciate how Angela Cardas and Josh make their room a family affair with a guitar solo or two, comfy bean bags, with their son Luke and his buddy helping out.

When it comes to sound, I feel that all important emotional connection while listening to a gorgeous Clearaudio equipped with a Hana Umami Blue, Audio Research rack and Wilson Alexia speakers from Quintessence Audio. I go back to that set up a few times and notice no matter what piece of music, the emotional association is unmistakable. Bill Peugh from Wilson Audio gives a convincing argument for meticulous set up. On the digital side of things, a chance encounter leads me to a front row seat with some moderately priced Benchmark gear and unusual Laufner Teknik Note speakers. This combination has such an unexpectedly life-like and dynamic sound that it hit me right in the heels.

It's a pleasure to be part of the appreciative crowd during David Solomon's flash DJ session with some well thought out Qobuz Hi-Res tracks as he pushes the weight of the Wilson Alexx speakers and a full dCS rack. Some of the friendliest folks were from Acora Audio, Luxman, Cambridge Audio and Black Ice. At Acora, I am invited to dig through their crates of vinyl and find a 40th anniversary box set of Moving Pictures. Valerio Cora, a fellow Canadian and Rush fan, drops the stylus from an Oracle turntable onto *Witch Hunt* and we both sit back with a smile. Neil Peart was in the house when those huge granite speakers are cranked up. Luxman has a fantastic set up and even though the president of Luxman, Tatsuya Sueyoshi is visiting from Japan, there is never an air of pretention. I also get to hear some tracks from the soon to be released one-step of the classic *Getz/Gilberto* album on Luxman's new PD-191A turntable through Magico speakers. Stan Getz's son Nick Getz introduced this album. He and Abby Fonn from Impex Records discuss the making of it back in 1964 and how Impex collaborated with the family to bring the original master tapes back to life. There is an aha moment about halfway through "Girl From Ipanema" that resonates throughout the room



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The kind guys from Cambridge Audio hand us a beverage upon entering, taking the time to talk about their new gear which is versatile and user friendly. At the Black Ice booth in the Ear Gear Expo, I have the opportunity to spend some time with their new headphone amp, a prototype upgrade, and tubed amp that really don't break the bank but offer clean separation and layered sound. For someone just starting out, there are options that not only fit a tight budget but creatively make getting into audio not so daunting. Encouraging younger people to get into audio is a common premise at the show, sparking interest with smart technology, convenient and stylish gear.

Axpona has several education and information sessions open to all, and options this year hit a wider variety of audio enthusiasts. Sessions offering info about how to start out in audio on a budget, cleaning vinyl, making streaming user friendly, and setting up a turntable appeal to a broad audience. Sure, audio manufacturers bring the best of their best to Axpona, with gear that may seem intimidating or unattainable, but with the numbers of younger folks I see, staying progressive ensures continued enthusiasm for audio. Keeping that in mind, there are lower priced, moderately priced, and higher end components to interest an extensive variety of music listeners. The introduction of new gear or allowing participants to experience prototypes engages hope for the future.

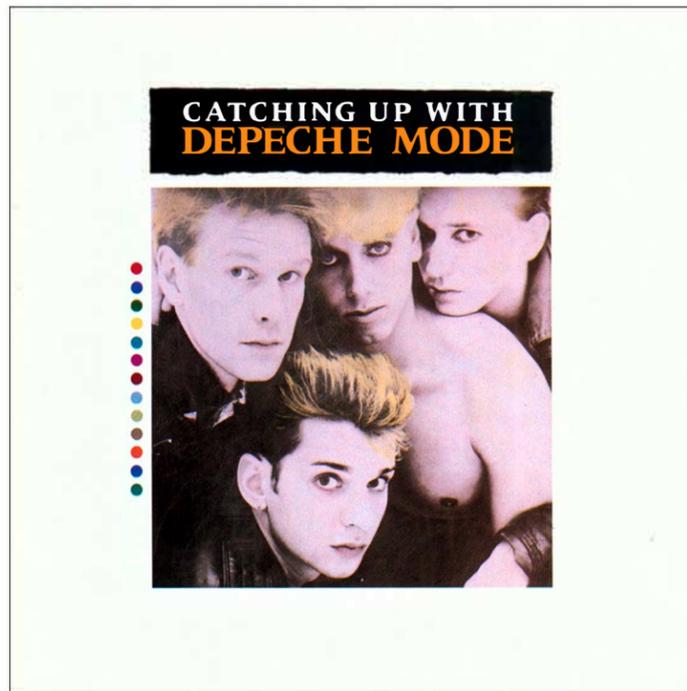
If you have ever thought about attending an audio show, Axpona is one to consider if you can't make the pilgrimage to Munich High End. Once you feel what it is like to sit in front of a million-dollar set up, meet up with audio experts, or just connect in person with one of your online audio group buddies for buffet breakfast in the handy on-site restaurant, it all makes sense why you want to go back again next year.

See you in Chicago for Axpona 2024!



A Lost Playlist -John Bates

Our readers are always sending playlist ideas, and cleaning out my email box, I stumbled on this one from friend John Bates. Considering it's never a bad time for some more Depeche Mode, it's better late than never. Enjoy!



“Leave in Silence” - *A Broken Frame*

“Fly on the Windscreen” - *Black Celebration*

“Shake the Disease” - *Catching up With Depeche Mode*

“Everything Counts” - *Construction Time Again*

“Never Let Me Down Again” - *Music for The Masses*

“Strangelove” - *Music for The Masses*

“Blasphemous Rumours” - *Some Great Reward*

“Walking in my Shoes” - *Songs of Faith and Devotion*

“Personal Jesus” - *Violator*

“World in my Eyes” - *Violator*

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Rolling Stones "Exile on Main St."



Andrey Medina is from El Paso, Texas. I've been following him on Facebook for years now, and in addition to his incredibly good taste in music, animation, and Mexican cuisine, he has the best rock T-shirt collection I've ever seen. One day I asked him if he would share some of his collection with us and bam.

This time he's got a rare Japanese pressing of the CD (I've got this as well) and of course the matching T. Very cool.

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Tellurium Q Statement II - Digital

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At the upper end of digital sound reproduction, many of the world's finest DACs offer the option of an external word clock to keep the bitstream locked down and in perfect order. This has been a very worthwhile upgrade on every DAC I have auditioned offering this functionality. The better digital gets, the less digital it sounds, and some of the world's finest from Estoteric, dCS and a few others are now resolving enough, I could live without a turntable. Before you get ready to tie me up to a stake and make me pay for my sins, I still have three turntables, so I'm not abandoning you. However, if I had to start from zero again, I'd be awfully tempted to just go digital.

If you are of the mind that everything in a digital system makes a difference, the newest cables from Tellurium Q will be a welcome update to an already great digital system. When I had the four box dCS Vivaldi system, upgrading from the standard digital cables to some Nordost Heimhall cables made a significant change in the stack's overall sound, pushing things again in the same direction that adding the external word clock did, so I approached this with a very open mind.

I've been using various Tellurium Q cables in one of my two reference system for some time now, with excellent result. Principal Geoff Merrigan makes great products that does what he claims - eliminate timing and phase errors that lead to distortion. Every TQ cable we've used from their least expensive to most have proved an excellent upgrade and well worth the price asked.

A quick trip to the TQ site will show you the rest of the TQ range, but a big part of their success is paying careful attention to every aspect of cable construction, rather than just concentrating on ultra-pure (and mega expensive) raw conductors. By optimizing the materials of the dielectrics used, the connector materials/coatings and even the solder used, they create cables that are as free of signal distortion as possible.

While these are available in varying lengths, the Statement IIs are somewhat stiff, so I followed Mr. Merrigan's advice and got a pair of the one meter cables to run between the clock and DAC on my dCS Lina headphone stack.

The experience is as I've had in the past when upgrading this aspect of my digital playback system in the two-channel realm. Everything is cleaner, and less electronic sounding. Listening to very fine acoustic details reveals more information, and of a higher quality. Spatial relationships are more defined too. The three-dimensional space created between my ears feels larger as well. Tonal balance is not affected at all, these cables merely offer a cleaner, less grainy look into your music. Honestly, I prefer that approach, and again, that has been my experience with all of the other TQ cables I use. I was definitely expecting some improvement but was excited by how much more natural everything sounded with these cables.

Listening to the "Fly Mix Edit" of Curtis Mayfield and Ice-T doing the *Superfly 1990* theme song is illuminating where you might not expect. The synth bass line and drums are much more locked down, with ICE-T and Mayfield's voices now having a lot more separation between them, each having more of an individual space. Whether listening to this, Hall & Oates Abandoned Luncheonette, or some hard bop Blue Notes, everything has a better sense of pace and timing with the TQ cables in place. And when listening to solo vocal records, voices are more detailed yet more natural at the same time. Going back to the stock cables sucks, because once you hear it...

So, these are going to have to become part of the permanent headphone reference system, and count on seeing them again in our October awards issue. Just like a pair of relatively expensive interconnects or speaker cables, talking price is always argument fodder. My criteria for cable is pretty simple: can I hear a significant difference? (that reveals more music, not just a tone control) Can a non-audiophile hear a significant difference? (so I'm not psyching myself out) and, what does cable cost as a percentage of total system cost work out to be?

Yes, yes, and yes. Considering the Lina Stack and Focal Utopia 2020s are pushing \$40k as a set, about 15% of retail for cables that deliver more than a 15% improvement in sound works for me. But like any good component, you have to be able to hear (and justify) it. However, if you have a top-notch digital setup, I highly suggest taking the TQ digital cables for a test drive.

Also, please keep in mind that this is TQ's TOP digital cable. It has also been my experience that they try very hard to incorporate as much of their flagship tech in their other range of cables, so you don't *have* to spend this much on a digital cable to get a performance bump. I wanted to try this one with the dCS stack.

Please note: "Tone Imports" belongs to Jonathan Halpern in Palm Springs, CA. They have nothing to do with TONEAudio magazine, other than being an advertiser.



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The gentle clicking of a conrad-johnson preamplifier's attenuator (and the gold face plate – shut up, I still love it) that always feels good in the way the click of a Leica shutter or the sound of an 80s Porsche 911 door closing does. It's solid, resolute, familiar and confidence inspiring. You know what to expect, and you know it will always be this welcoming for years to come. Call me sentimental. The click is slightly subdued in the new ART88, but it's still there and still good. Like all past C-J preamplifiers with numeric volume indicators, turning the ART88 on is a slow start process that automatically sets the volume level at 20, with "CD" illuminated and the mute engaged. As it's been for at least 20 years now.

Instead of the usual Aimee Mann tracks I always begin with, this time it's Kenny Dorham's *Afro Cuban*. Since the beginning, the C-J slogan has been "it just sounds right." In the case of the ART88, truer words have never been spoken. Conrad-Johnson gear always has a sense of musical flow that is instantly engaging, and the ART88 is the best of the breed. Dorham's horn permeates the listening room, nearly convincing me there is a live jazz group here when I close my eyes. Great as the tonality is, the spatial cues and sense of everything being in correct proportion takes the sound over the top. What's a measurement for that? While some of their gear in the 80s and 90s was slightly on the mellow side, it was always so sonically involving, no one cared.



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In the early 2000s, C-J stepped up to their own own CJD Teflon capacitors, replacing the electrolytics in their power supplies with film capacitors as well. This took their sound to an entirely new level, keeping the tonal saturation that made them famous, but added a level of dynamics and resolution that few competitors could match.

Rather than make you wait until the end of the review, if you are in the market for a final destination linestage/preamplifier, and do not need balanced inputs and outputs, call your C-J dealer now, as there will only be 250 of these made. Don't laugh, every GAT, GAT 2, ART and ACT 2 preamplifier sold out. If you like to be the one to unbox it for the first time, just do it.

Some audio purists claim that adding a line stage or preamplifier to the signal path merely colors things, yet nearly every time the preamplifier is eliminated to go direct, the sound the sound lacks body. On rare occasions, magic is achieved, but it's still tough to use more than one source. Whatever it is, the new ART88 from conrad-johnson is appropriately named, as the world's finest components are a combination of art, science, and technology.

For about the last 20 years, C-J's flagship preamplifiers (the ACT 2, the ART, and the GAT) have all been considered by many to be one of the world's finest preamplifiers. I've owned both versions of the ACT 2, used the ART 3, and owned the GAT 2 as well, so I feel comfortable talking about the new ART88.

Not being one to let memory cloud my judgement, I rustled up the GAT from staffer Earle Blanton while he's on summer holiday, and my ACT 2 series 2 from a friend that still owns it. This way, a legitimate comparison can be made, rather than just spout superlatives.

Blast from the past

In the case of conrad-johnson, it hasn't been a long, strange trip, it's been a long, interesting one. And it started 40-plus years ago with their PV-1, a pair of Acoustat 2+2s and a Threshold 400A power amplifier. (Nelson Pass' first amplifier company for those not familiar.) Three semesters of student loan money went to buy that system, but it was worth every penny.

As I still own a pair of 2+2s in excellent shape, and I'm using Mr. Pass' latest creations, the XA200.8 monoblocks, why not start this review with a semi time warp visit?



It's still amazing how those old, full range ESLs come alive with this preamplifier in the system, creating an enveloping soundstage, and a coherence that is tough to beat, even today. Fun as this is, my old speakers do not have enough resolution to let the ART88 express its full potential.

Getting down to serious comparisons between the last two generations of C-J preamplifiers, they both still stand up, yet offer different sonic palettes. The ACT 2 was built around 4 6H30 triodes (This tube was fairly new at the time, brought to the audio world first by Balanced Audio Technology), while the ART 3 served up 5 6922s per channel, and the GAT preamplifiers a single 6922 per channel with MOSFET buffers. The current ART88 uses a pair of NOS Philips PCC88s per channel. (this tube is a lot like a 6DJ8 or 6922, but with a 7-Volt filament)

The rest of the tech bits can be found here at the conrad-johnson site:

<https://conradjohnson.com/art88-triode-preamplifier/>

Having all three at my disposal confirms my suspicions (I must rely, however on memory for the ART 3.) All were played with the dCS Vivaldi as a source, with the Pass XS200.8 monoblock power amplifiers and the Peak Consult Sinfonia speakers via a mixture of Cardas Clear and Tellurium Q black diamond cables and power cords.

The ACT 2 has a slightly punchier sound, with less midrange resolution, and a bit more tonal contrast, where the GAT 2 is more similar in sonic signature to the ART88, but not as delicate or resolving. Even though the GAT does feature a solid-state buffer, the ART88 still achieves a lower noise floor. When playing Elvis Costello's *Painted From Memory*, the ART88 brings his voice closer, yet clearer, with more emphasis on his vibrato rising and falling.

Where the ACT 2 is a completely different movie, the ART88 is like pressing the sport button on the GAT 2 (if it had one) everything comes into tighter focus, revealing even more music with no downside. Many audiophiles love to make the comparison of a "cleaner window into the sound." If you've ever been in a frame store and have seen the difference between multicoated museum glass and standard glass, it's like that.

The rest of the journey

Music lovers can't live on midrange alone, otherwise we'd all still have our PV-2s. Listening to the opening verse of XTC's "Dear God" takes on an entirely new dimension for a track that I've heard thousands of times before. The eight-year-old girl recruited by Todd Rundgren during the recording of the track, sounds much more like a young person singing the lines than before, if that makes sense.

Revisiting countless other favorites, more information is presented as well. The ART88 is the true master of fine detail retrieval, in a way that only the finest tube preamplifiers can. The past versions are excellent, but going back to Elvis Costello, this time listening to "After the Fall," from his Like a Rose album, and then Beck's "The Golden Age" is magnificent. The way the ART88 floats the music in the listening space is almost unbelievable.

All this ethereal stuff is great, but make no mistake, you can play the heaviest metal with the ART88 or the most complex techno. The ART88 is incredibly dynamic, with a weightiness to its presentation that will take your breath away. Much as I am not a Paul Simon fan, the opening bass line of "Wristband" has so much texture and depth, again it feels like there's someone playing a big, stand-up bass in the room. It's more than three-dimensional, it's like when they do those 360-degree, slow motion shots in a movie – it feels like you can hear around the instruments and go inside them. Crazy I know.



As mentioned at the beginning of the review, the ART88 is a single-ended design; something that C-J has always believed in, in terms of sheer circuit simplicity. So, if you do need to have a system based around balanced components, you're out of the luck. (Though different, the BAT REX is similarly priced and equally enticing in terms of sheer musicality, however it possesses way more tubes.) And even though Pass Labs caved in to providing black faceplates after nearly 40 years, no dice with conrad-johnson. So just buy a C-J amp if you don't have one – we suggest one of the ART amplifiers, and keep it matchy-matchy. You won't regret it. There is definitely a special synergy with a Conrad-Johnson amplifier and pre combination.

That said, the ART88 provided excellent results with the Pass, PS Audio, and PrimaLuna amplifiers on hand here, particularly the PS Audio 600BHK Signature Monos. The grunt of the PS 600s and the delicacy of the ART88 is one of the most exciting combinations I've had the pleasure to spend time with.

In the end, there will be 250 very lucky music lovers

I've said it before. Refinement costs money, because refinement takes time. Knowing the folks at C-J as long as I have, I know that current designer (and owner) Jeff Fischel follows in Lew and Bill's process from the sense that every component is agonized over mercilessly for sound quality. Expensive, boutique parts are not used as a matter of course, unless they make a positive contribution. Nothing in the design and execution is left unexamined.

Considering the already stratospheric performance of the GAT, the ART88 still takes a fairly big leap. So the toughest question is if you have a GAT or GAT2, should you make the step up? If it makes financial sense, absolutely. There is enough of a jump with the ART88, I do not think you will come away feeling the ART88 is a minute improvement. But, logistics are what they are. Don't take too long to decide – supplies are limited. When you consider that certain pairs of sneakers, or Swatch watches go up 10-20x after they sell out in a day, the ART88 is a steal.

In the end it sounds right. I may have to eat these words in five years, but I truly don't know how this preamplifier can be improved to the point where it reveals more music than it does now. We shall see. Very enthusiastically recommended.



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The picture you see on the right is interesting because about 15 years ago we reviewed the Peak Consult Princess speakers and loved their compact and engaging floor standing design. At the time, they had an MSRP of about \$15,000/pair and worth every penny. If you've ever seen a pair of Peak Consult speakers, you know that the build quality is incredible and even the small Princesses weighed over 100 pounds each. To say that these artisan built cabinets are inert is an understatement.

In my forgetful way, I neglected to send the accessory package back, containing a cleaning cloth, some cleaner for the leather surfaces, and a bottle of oil for the wood surfaces. When I called the late Chris Sommovigo, who at that time was the Peak importer, he said, "Just keep it, we'll be sending you another pair for review shortly." As fate would have it, that did not happen until now, and the Sinfonias were a welcome site, their large crates arriving practically the day I decided to tear all the walls down in my listening room. So, they stayed hidden in the garage, with my Mini pushed back to within a few millimeters of the crates for safe keeping.

Fortunately, all went smoothly, the walls came down, and the Sinfonias now strut their stuff in a 24 x 36 foot room. Initial setup attempts where past speakers sounded good yielded a slight upper bass bump, so after a number of different placements, they worked magnificently about three more feet into the room than before (which would not have been possible in the old room) and also on the long wall, with nearly 12 feet on each side of the speakers. While I realize not everyone will have this option, it is glorious to be so free of side wall reflections.





Taking care of business

Because the Sinfonias have major low bass output, these are not speakers that can be casually placed in the room, and because they also deliver high resolution, it is to your advantage to take the time to carefully place them. First set up for proper bass coupling and optimization to the room is key. Then, experiment with rake and toe-in to get just the right amount of high-end sparkle takes them the rest of the way. These 72-pound (each) speakers are remarkably easy to remove from their shipping crates and thanks to some Teflon pucks on hand, easy to move into place singlehandedly.

Peak's soft dome tweeter is smooth, and resolving (I admit a bias for the sound of soft dome tweeters, so take that for what it's worth) and the level of coherence provided is definitely reminiscent of a full range design. This is a true testament to the meticulous crossover network inside, which crosses to the midrange driver at 3,100 Hz and then again to the woofer at 450 Hz. The rear ported design claims to be 3dB down at 25 Hz on the bottom and 30 kHz up on top. While we don't do specific measurements, playing a series of test tones reveals only slightly diminished output going from 30 to 25 Hz, then dropping substantially from 25 to 20 Hz.

But that's what REL six packs are for...

Even the most dedicated bassheads will be more than happy with the low-frequency performance of the Sinfonia. The biggest difference between these and my last reference speakers, the Sonus faber Stradivari's' is the quality of the LF output and an equally natural, yet more resolving midband. Listening to a wide range of tracks with serious energy in the lowest part of the frequency spectrum is very rewarding.

The opening track of Joni Mitchell's *Don Juan's Restless Daughter* features some incredibly low bass notes played by Jaco Pastorius, that are tough to capture on vinyl, but absolutely growl when played back from a 24/192 digital file. It starts at 1:45 in, and these riffs punctuate the track. While the single woofers in each Sinfonia cabinet can not produce the sheer output of my six pack of REL no.25 subwoofers, what's most important is that the definition and quality provided is incredibly close. Precious few speakers at any price can deliver this.

It's about the cabinet

So much has been carefully optimized in terms of driver and crossover design, yet the cabinet is a huge part of the equation. Chatting with Wilfried Ehrenholz, the principal at Peak Consult, he makes it a point to discuss the complexity of the Sinfonia's enclosure, which features a 45mm thick (almost 2-inches) front baffle and a cabinet made up of multiple materials, bound together with a special flexible adhesive. These layers work together to absorb the unwanted resonant energy instead of clouding the sonic presentation. "Like in two different restaurants, using the same ingredients, one meal is fantastic, and one is average. The design team on the Sinfonia has a combined experience of nearly 80 years in the speaker business – that makes the difference."

He goes on further about the cabinets to emphasize that they are made entirely in-house. "You can not go to a cabinet supplier to get all the crazy custom work we have done to these cabinets. It must be done in-house."

For those of you not familiar, Ehrenholz is the former CEO of Dynaudio, recently out of retirement to work with Peak Consult. Karl-Heinz Fink (of Fink Team) has been enlisted to work on the crossover design and perform all the measurements. Ehrenholz goes on to comment, "we are very efficient in our design process. Karl-Heinz has very sophisticated measuring equipment and knows exactly what he's doing, so before we start, he's measuring drivers. By the time we start listening, we're already about 70% of the way there."

“You can not go to a cabinet supplier to get all the crazy custom work we have done to these cabinets. It must be done in-house.”

In addition to the cabinet, the Sinfonias (like all PC speakers are coupled to the floor by “Serenity bars.” These stainless steel footers at the bottom of the enclosure have screw in steel pods with high quality ceramic balls, supporting the entire weight of the speaker, with less than 1 square millimeter actually coming between the floor and the speaker, decoupling the speaker, and eliminating the need for potentially damaging spikes. Precise, beautiful, and unique.

This is only part of the story. Quality mavens will be excited over every inch of the Sinfonias, from their gorgeous wood cabinets to the lovely leather front and rear faces. The quality of execution is every bit as good if not better as what comes from Sonus faber in Italy. These are speakers you will be excited to have in your environment. These are speakers you will fall in love with.

A quiet calm

If you bought a Bentley Continental as your first luxury car, you wouldn't appreciate just how special it is, and so it goes with speakers. I gently suggest that the more you've heard, the more you will appreciate these speakers. Their lack of tonal coloration makes every kind of music welcome, and their high level of resolution will bring numerous “a-ha” moments during the time spent in front of them.

Like the Bentley they do everything at such a high level of quality, you almost forget how much work went in behind the scenes to make it all seem so easy. Swapping components in and out instantly reveals the changes made, so while being incredibly musical the Sinfonias are incredibly useful as a reference speaker as well. Whether you are a music lover, gear geek, or any combination thereof, you'll be equally enthralled with the Sinfonias.

Specs aren't the whole picture

One more aspect of the Sinfonia's design that Ehrenholz is particularly proud of is the crossover design. Thanks to their Peak linear



impedance control (PLIC), they claim the impedance only varies +/- 1 ohm with a nominal impedance of 5 ohms. The Sinfonias also have a claimed sensitivity of 89dB/1 Watt. In addition to the seamless blend of the drivers, the PLIC is a low-loss crossover network. Not all speakers with the same sensitivity measurements are equally easy to drive. Even driving the Peak's with the 15-watt per channel amps and sound tube monoblocks is a success. Some crossover designs that are more complex tend to lose the first few watts in the network – no big deal if you have 200-Watt monoblocks. To make a long story short, the Peaks are incredibly tube friendly.

All things considered, anything above about 40 Watts per channel will drive the Sinfonias, but how loud you need to go will determine how much more power you'll need. Much as I love my reference Pass XA200.8/Pass XS Pre combo, the synergistic combination turns out to be the new PS Audio BHK 600 Monos, driven by the incredible ART88 preamplifier from Conrad-Johnson.

The PS amps deliver slightly better bass control at higher levels, and the CJ preamplifier images like nothing I've ever experienced – again proving how resolving the Peak speakers are. Every change, no matter how minute is easily discerned. This will allow you to fine tune the result exactly to your liking with ease. That being said, there wasn't a combination I didn't like.

More listening

Because the Sinfonias are so engaging, I listened to even more music than normal, both in dedicated listening, and just for background music while doing other things. No matter what

music was playing, it was all enjoyable. Nothing caught me off guard, whether listening to solo piano or guitar, to larger scale orchestral works, or the heaviest rock music. Having heard the last version of their top-of-the-line Dragon at contributor Richard Mak's house, the only thing the Sinfonia does not deliver, is that last half octave of low bass, and the ability to play louder. But I don't listen as loud as Mr. Mak does, so for me the Sinfonias are just fine. All of the Peak Consult speakers share a similar voice, which again speaks to the excellence of the design team.

In closing I ask Ehrenholz when he and his team know when to stop the design process and go forward with the final build. “When I have no further ideas on how to improve, then we stop.” The proof is in the listening. While I am no speaker engineer, I have certainly listened to a lot of them over the past 40 years, and I must agree, there is nothing I would ask the Peak Consult team to improve in the Sinfonia. These are by far one of the most musically satisfying speakers I've had the pleasure to spend time with. I feel they have certainly met their goals. In my room with my system, they are absolutely heavenly.



PS Audio BHK Mono 600's

Mega power

\$32,498/pair
psaudio.com

Cranking up the title track on *The Afghan Whigs *Gentlemen** is a major “Oh Shit” moment. I’m still getting used to the Peak Consult Sinfonias as the new reference speaker here, and they are a good, but slightly warm fit for the Pass Labs XA200.8s and Cardas Clear speaker cable that is my go to reference.

As the BHK 600s deliver 1200 Watts each into a four-ohm load and the Sinfonias are 5.3, let’s just assume there’s about 1000 Watts per at our disposal. Even though the BHKs have 15A IEC sockets, each amplifier is plugged into a dedicated 20A circuit, so they don’t run out of juice. If you don’t plan on using these massive amplifiers at anywhere close to their limits, you can skate by with a single 15A circuit. As the volume goes up, you’ll hear the soundstage compress slightly, then collapse, right before you blow the breaker. If you have inefficient speakers, or just like to blast the music, consider the cost of a couple dedicated circuits in your listening room if you don’t already have them.

Amplification is a very personal thing, and while simple low power amplifiers have a delicacy that huge power amplifiers lack, the big amplifiers deliver dynamics in such an effortless way that the small ones lack. Remember, dynamics are the fourth dimension. The BHK 600s will send you to hyperspace. For such high-powered amplifiers, they are amazingly nuanced at low volume levels – this is tough to pull off.



The BHK

If you aren't aware of the late Mr. Bascom H. King, in addition to being one of the audio world's most famous reviewers at Audio magazine, he was a legendary audio designer as well. PS Audio's Paul McGowan mentions "at one time or another, he designed for just about everyone." King was Infinity's chief engineer when their IRS speaker was one of the finest speakers available to audio and worked with a number of major brands as a consultant or designing circuits for hire outright. The Mono 600s are his final design, and it's safe to say his most ambitious project realized.

Click here to go to the PS Audio site and read the full specs, a comprehensive overview, and a cool video about the circuit design.

The most fascinating aspect of the BHK 600s is the hybrid design and how it's been implemented. It starts with a huge power supply, built around a 1.6kV power transformer and 330,000 uF of capacitance. The twist on the hybrid design here, features a tube input stage (with a pair of matched, current production Gold Lion E88CC/6922s) and a NOS 6CA4/EZ81 rectifier. Using the tube rectifier for the input stage accomplishes several things, but most importantly, lower noise than a solid-state rectifier. This contributes heavily to the incredibly low noise floor (and resulting dynamics) that the BHK 600s have.

This approach in the input stage means way less grunge carried through the rest of the signal path. Think of an amplifier that can produce nearly 2,000 Watts of power per channel into a 2-ohm load as an enormous magnifying glass. Noise that might not be terribly bothersome at the 25-Watt level becomes excruciating when pumping out 1,000 Watts per channel. Mr. King's design is also unique in the sense that it combines a number of topologies, to give each section of the amplifier the one most optimum for the task at hand. It is a fully balanced amplifier from start to finish, and if you happen to have a REL subwoofer (or subwoofers) that utilize high-level outputs, they even provide individual grounding lugs on each chassis.



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3 DRIVERS, 3 AMPS

POWER
1050 W RMS / 2100 W PEAK

DIMENSIONS / WEIGHT
8.7" DIAMETER / 18 LBS EACH



Do NOT hook your REL to the negative speaker terminals, this will damage the amplifier, and probably your RELs too. This will make the people at both companies cranky and they probably won't fix your gear under warranty – you've been warned.

Read the manual, it's excellent. In addition to be well written and truly enjoyable to read, the front section gets you up and running right now, explaining the functionality, and the back half has all the advanced stuff you will eventually need to know. Once the amplifiers are in position, you're only two button pushes from bliss. Like all PS Audio products, there is a master switch on the rear panel, that will keep the amplifier in standby mode. Depressing the backlit PS Audio logo, starts the slow, deliberate warm up process. The logo blinks until full power, when it turns steady blue. And, PS Audio has been considerate enough to put substantial handles on the front and rear panels of the BHK 600s.

Nothing left to chance

Another one of the coolest things about this amplifier is its level of user friendliness. Mr. King thought of everything. With two gain settings, 30dB and 26dB, you can keep your preamplifier in its sweet spot, assuring plenty of volume control range in the process. With the C-J ART88 in for review with a high level of gain (25dB) and single ended outputs, it's easy to keep the C-J running with the level up, where it is the most dynamic. My reference Pass Labs is a fully balanced preamplifier with only 9.5dB of gain in balanced mode, so the higher setting becomes the perfect fit here, to achieve the same results. The switch on the rear panel lets you choose gain level and whether you want to use the BHK 600s XLR or RCA inputs – no pesky jumpers to lose. (And by the way, I'm the worst at this) Two pairs of high-quality binding posts are on the back panel, should you choose to bi-wire your speakers, along with the input jacks a pair of power supply fuses, a 15A IEC connector and a USB socket for future firmware updates. 12v trigger sockets and a PS link is also available should your system be able to take advantage of that functionality. There is also a removable plate to access the tubes



without taking the amplifier apart. A very nice touch. This relatively compact 17.1 x 11.2 x 14 inch deep enclosure features massive heat sinks on each side, and is heavy. 108 pounds heavy. Get help when you move them into their final resting place and don't hurt your back. However, the really nice bit of human engineering with the BHK 600s is the way they are packaged. The double boxes have embedded wheels and pull up handles like a piece of luggage. This is an awesome touch that I wish everyone making components weighing more than about 60 pounds would implement.

To make my back's life easier, I had my pal Al Moccia at High Altitude Engineering (another Colorado craftsman) build a special three shelf, wheeled rack with castors good for 1000 pounds each. I'm sure an enormous and complex (and expensive) vibration controlled contraption would allow the BHK 600s to deliver a few more molecules of sound, but my days of lugging 100 plus pound amplifiers back and forth between three reference systems is over. Should you buy a pair of these, I highly suggest giving Al a call.



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Further listening

The BHK 600s really don't have a single outstanding characteristic, which is good. Yet their incredible dynamic range and resolution make them almost chameleon like with whatever you might pair them with. I'll stick my neck out and call them the slightest bit on the warm/tonally saturated side of dead neutral, with Boulder and CH Precision being right in the center, and my reference Pass monos one more click on the warm side of the BHKs, with Luxman right inbetween the Pass and the PS in terms of overall tonality.

That tube input stage adds that friendliness that keeps you listening all night, and helps to create a huge soundstage in all three directions. Those wanting to tube roll to personalize the amplifier to the rest of your gear and speakers can easily do so. Chris Harr had great luck tube rolling to suit his big Focals more to his liking, but I'm just not a tube roller!

“no matter what you listen to, the BHK 600s tick all the boxes...”



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No matter what you listen to, the BHK 600s tick all the boxes. With a damping factor of 700, they can easily control the woofers of any speaker, creating a low frequency experience that you will feel as much as hear. Running through a long list of Rock, Hip Hop, and Electronica tracks from Pink Floyd to Massive Attack, the bottom end is powerful. With this much power on tap, be careful to watch your speakers for cone bottoming.

The top end is equally refined. Whether listening to solo vocalists, string quartets, or solo piano recordings, the smooth yet fine detailed response is impressive. As I like to mention – try your favorite violin and piano records to listen for the lack of graininess these monster amps can provide, as well as the extended decay.



Perhaps the toughest job for any amplifier though, is a meaningful, convincing midrange. Again, the BHK 600 triumphs. It's not quite as delicate as say, a 300B SET amplifier, but it's way close enough to make even the fussiest midrange tonality biased audiophiles to sit up and take notice. Mr. King threw it all at this amplifier and his passion permeates the design. Acoustic instruments sound lively, tonally correct, and of the proper scale. Seriously, the highest compliment I can pay these amplifiers is that they do nothing wrong: how many audio components can you truly say that about?

As mentioned earlier the BHK 600 sounds equally great with the RCA inputs as it does with the XLRs. Giving it a try with ARC, BAT, C-J, Nagra, and Pass Preamplifiers all yielded excellent results and the BHK 600s have more than enough fine detail in their presentation, that the individual character of each preamplifier shines through.

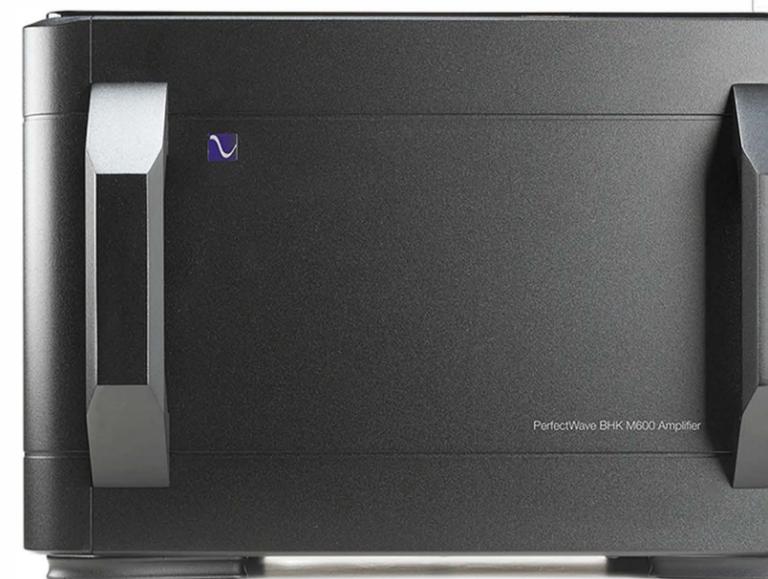
In the end

The combination of the BHK 600s inexhaustible power reserves, sonic bliss and industry leading user friendliness certainly leaves me wondering why you'd want another pair of amps after these. (Save the boxes anyway) At their asking price, they aren't cheap, but considering the sound and the build quality, you can pay three times more for amps from a few other manufacturers, but that's just for bragging rights at this point.

Not that there's anything wrong with that, but if you want some tastefully designed power amplifiers that you'll enjoy looking at as much as you enjoy listening to, your quest for the last pair of monoblocks can stop here. PS Audio has been around forever, and they have always delivered world class performance at much more reasonable prices, all the way back to their 200cx power amplifiers back in the 80s.

That's where my PS Audio journey began, with a 200cx, a PS 4.6 preamplifier, and later with their first Digital Link DAC, which I still own. In 1985, Stereophile's J. Gordon Holt said of the 200C: "While it's not cheap, it's a lot less than many people have been paying for amplifiers that are not nearly as good." I don't think I can improve on that sentiment with the BHK 600 Monos.

I only wish I could thank Mr. King personally.



Perreaux 200ix

A colorful performer.

\$7,500
perreaux.com

As integrated amplifiers continue to be more popular with listeners demanding high performance sound, and a diverse feature set, without needing an entire stack of gear, it's amazing how so many manufacturers have upped their offerings. With so much excitement surrounding six-figure components, I continue to be excited about how much tech makes it into \$5k-\$15k components these days.

Not only is the Perreaux 200iX integrated a perfect example of this, but its coolness factor is off the charts. Our review sample is not actually a production model, only in the sense that it is painted with a rainbow-colored front faceplate. This is not a political statement in any way. It's actually marketing director Paul Sammes personal unit from his home. As Perreaux is offering a wide range of exciting colors for their new products, he had the paint department produce a one off for Sammes to show off all the colors they could produce and it's pretty darn fun. You can check out the full range of colors at the Perreaux site, [here](#). Of course you can get black, but why would you? And, they don't even make them in silver. Bravo!

While integrated amplifiers aren't everything for everyone, they are the perfect choice for many. It's easy to forget that not everyone that wants a good music system wants a rack full of gear and cables. The 200iX includes a 200 Watt-per-channel class-AB MOSFET power amplifier, full control preamplifier, high resolution DAC (that will stream via Bluetooth) an MM/MC phonostage, and a class-A headphone amplifier. Not bad for \$7,500.



An excellent, balanced performer

Perhaps the best thing about the 200iX is how well it accomplishes all the tasks that it's asked to perform. The DAC section uses current SABRE technology and will decode everything. The only thing it does not do, is render streaming content via Ethernet. But it will via Bluetooth. Not a big deal, especially considering how many great, inexpensive streamers are out there. Listening with the Pro-Ject StreamBox 2 and a Dell touch screen desktop via it's USB output, so both could be used as ROON endpoints made it easy to stream a wide range of 16/44, 24/96 and 24/192 content.



There is a single phono input that can be configured as MM or MC, and the MC is set up for 60dB of gain and 100-ohm impedance, which makes it compatible with a wide range of cartridges. Picky audiophiles might need more choices, but again the 200iX is spot on for its target audience. Or, if you need extra tables and a wider range of gain/loading choices, you can opt for the excellent Perreaux phono stage. (we're hoping to get a peek at this in the near future, so stay tuned)

However, keeping in context with the person who will more than likely use the 200iX, we felt a Technics 1200GR (\$1,800 and an Ortofon Quintet Blue MC (\$579) made a great match for this setup, mated to a pair of Eggleston Nico speakers (\$5,995/pair) tied together with some Tellurium Q Black II interconnects and Ultra Black II speaker cables. (\$379, and \$1,799/pair) Total system cost about \$15k, about the cost of a nice used Ducati.

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Finally, a built-in class A headphone amplifier is included, so personal listening fans have a great starter headphone amp ready to go. The 200iX delivers excellent results with the Audeze, Grado and Focal phones on hand. Mega headphone enthusiasts, will probably already have an outboard amp, but the 200iX is no slouch for moderate listening.

The sound

Like the functionality, the overall sound and tonality of the 200iX is very neutral and balanced. A few years back, we revisited some older, vintage Perreaux gear, and like the MOSFETs of that era, it was a little on the dark side. Not anymore. This amplifier neither embellishes as some class A designs do, nor is it tipped up on the top end.

While the majority of the listening was done with the Eggleston speakers, the MartinLogan ESL 9s, TeamFink Kims, and Dynaudio Contour 20s were all brought in to give it a try with speakers having different strengths.

The 200iX passes the test easily, and handles them all. The MLs are not always the easiest speakers to drive, but they come alive with the Perreaux amplifier, and at a similar \$7,799 per pair, are a speaker we wouldn't hesitate in the least to suggest. Truly, all three of these speakers from \$7,799/pair to \$14,000/pair turn in fantastic performances, so this is an amplifier you can grow your system with, should the urge hit you.

The specifications list rated power at 200 Watts per channel into 8-ohms and 300 into 4-ohms. For those freaking out because the 200iX doesn't double its power into 4-ohms (remember, this is a somewhat compact amplifier) rest assured, we never ran out of power, even at incredibly high levels. Ok, maybe if you have a pair of Magnepans, or old B&Ws, you might need a little more power to play really loud, but otherwise you'll be fine.

Because the 200iX has such a natural tonal balance, there aren't as many flowery adjectives to apply. It goes about playing music in a very pleasing manner that does not call attention to itself. It is very dynamic and very quiet. Listening to classical and acoustic tracks with a lot of quiet spots never disappoints, and this amplifier does not have any sense of electronic harshness,

possessing a level of electronic refinement not always present at this price point, especially considering how much else is packed into the chassis. Regardless of speakers used, the 200iX goes deep, offering bass with texture and control.

Understated excellence (well, the black one...)

The Perreaux 200iX is a flawless component, delivering balanced performance on all levels. So many of us get carried away with hifi as a sport. I say this from an "it takes one to know one" perspective, not passing judgement. It's easy to lose sight of the many people out there that desire something considerably better than a mass market system or soundbar, but still don't want to enter the audiophile world of regular upgrades. The 200iX is the perfect component for that end user. It offers true audiophile performance from a company with a long pedigree for excellence. It features a broad enough feature set that you need only add a turntable and speakers to have a great music system you can enjoy for years. Just be sure to pick a color you want to live with for a long time!

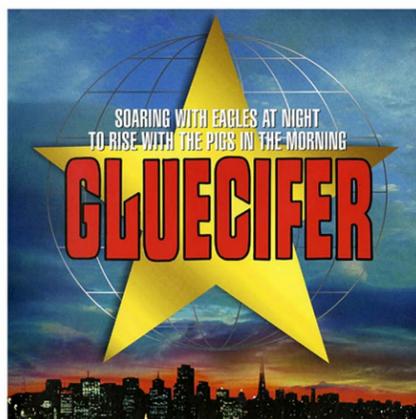
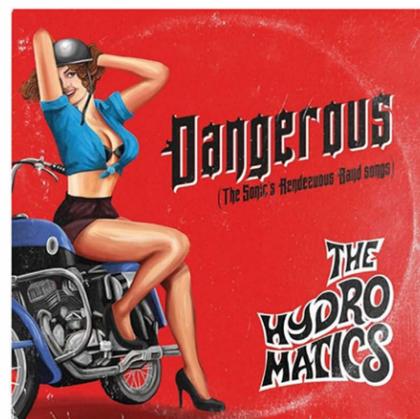
An Exceptional Value Award winner to be sure!

Around the turn of the century, a newly evolved and wholly unpredicted branch broke off of the rock tree in Scandinavia, of all places,

Fusing the street guitar muscle of 70s Detroit rock (think MC5, The Stooges, pre-political Ted Nugent and the entirely obscure Sonic's Rendezvous Band, who had only released a single, amazing 45 in their lifespan) with the energy of 80s punk and more than a couple shots of Motorhead and Kiss, this new breed took the sub-Arctic music charts by storm.

In the process, the term "Action Rock" was coined to describe this genre, many of whom were veterans of punk and metal bands, but now dressed in flared jeans, boots and sideburns. While the worldwide commercial excitement has ebbed, the energy of the raw, guitar-driven sound endured and bands like The Hellcopters and Turbonegro still headline European summer music festivals.

So pour one out and turn up the volume...



Sonic's Rendezvous Band (Detroit) – City Slang, Electrophonic Tonic

Gluecifer (Norway) – Year Of Manly Living, Get The Horn

The Hellcopters (Sweden) – Devil Stole The Beat From The Lord,
Like No Other Man, Crimson Ballroom, City Slang

Backyard Babies (Sweden) – UFO Romeo, Let's Go To Hell

Turbonegro (Norway) – The Age Of Pamparius, Prince Of The Rodeo

The Gaza Strippers (Chicago, IL) – Missile Command

Electric Frankenstein (New York) – Already Dead, Fistful Of Rock

The Hydromatics (members of The Hellcopters and Scott Morgan of Sonic's Rendezvous Band) - Earthy, RIP R'N'R

THEY EVEN Paint 'em to Match Your Car...



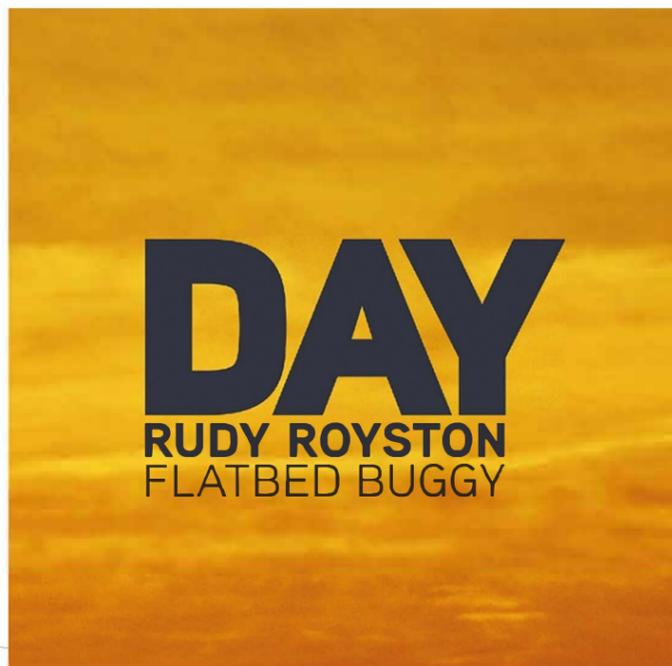
JAZZ

By Jim Macnie

Rudy Royston's Flatbed Buggy DAY

It's one thing to be a master drummer, bringing a variety of percussion ploys to the era's most respected ensembles. It's another to lead a uniquely designed group and write a book of odd but inviting tunes for it. Royston does both, and it's been fun to watch his talents unfold through the last decade. His work with JD Allen, Bill Frisell, and Dave Douglas is that of a powerhouse sideman, energizing any ensemble gambits. But where his artistic persona truly blossomed was the arrival of Flatbed Buggy, an instantly compelling outfit with the curious front line of accordion and bass clarinet. Their 2018 debut was received warmly by critics and fans. "By stressing variety and dodging routine jazz tacks, the middle-aged whirlwind signals that he's a risk-taker who's ready to follow his muse down uncommon roads," said DownBeat. Brimming with ideas, the sunny program of Royston's first album was inspired by childhood visits to rural Texas. DAY is a pandemic meditation, a glance at the psychological subdivisions of a 24-hour clock ticking while you're stuck in one place.

The blend of John Ellis' bass clarinet and Gary Versace's accordion is novel enough to demand attention, but it's Team Royston's catchy tunes that grab you first. Frolic sets the overall tone; the melodies of "Morning" and "Five-Thirty Strut" bounce with a gleeful spirit. Their buoyancy has to do with the well-gauged locomotion of the rhythm section. Bassist Joe Martin and cellist Hank Roberts provide their boss with the kind of nudging that gives the pieces extra juice. If the scores weren't as clear as they are, this double-stringed approach might crumble into clutter. But on "Keep It Moving," and "The Mokes" there's a sweet sense of duty in play - each improviser gives the drummer discrete materials to work with. The ballads are even more fetching. "Look To The Hills" inches along, assured of its own allure. Like some of Frisell's more elaborate miniatures (see "The Gallows," "Stringbean" or "Gather Good Things") Royston's pieces seem sketchy yet thorough - chamber swing that shrugs off requests to scrape the mud from its shoes before it sits down in the parlor.



What does Marshall Wood, bassist for Tony Bennett, think of his Backert Labs?

"With the Rhumba Extreme preamp, my listening experience immediately became much more satisfying."



Photo courtesy of Provincetown Jazz Festival



"This was a very big step forward in listening enjoyment, feeling more like what I experience when I'm playing bass in a group. It's like I'm right there in the room, hearing every detail of the instruments. The rhythm and pace are delivered with greater palpability than I have ever heard, and the result for me is pure nirvana." – Marshall Wood

BACKERT LABS

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Bass player for Tony Bennett beginning in 2009, Mr. Wood has also played with Monty Alexander, Randy Brecker, Dizzy Gillespie, Scott Hamilton, Anita O'Day, Marian McPartland, Joe Pass, Nelson Riddle, Clark Terry, Phil Woods and many other jazz greats. He is featured on Bennett's double-platinum Grammy award-winning album Duets II, Tony Bennett at 90, and in concert appearances around the world. There was no expectation of an endorsement in this purchase and Mr. Wood paid for his Rhumba Extreme in full.

JAZZ

By Jim Macnie

Artemis In Real Time

First I fell for “Timber.” Trumpeter Ingrid Jensen’s portrait of a forest’s beauty and the lumber industry’s eradication of it is instantly appealing. The sextet’s horns unite in a graceful glide, inching up on you and whisking you away. By the time the pointillistic notes of the opening section melt into longer tones and pick up some thrust, they - the horns themselves and the entire band - have snared you. That happens several times during Artemis’s second album. The group employs a somewhat standard set-up for a mainstream jazz ensemble, yet the improvisers - Jensen, pianist Renee Rosnes, drummer Allison Miller, bassist Noriko Ueda, saxophonists Nicole Glover and Alexa Tarantino - manage to tweak the norms to come away with something that’s often coloring just outside the lines.

The music’s pleasures come from a steady flow of nuances. Rosnes’ precise touch on “Balance of Time” amplifies its shadowy romance. The full-band shift into the punctuated outro of “Slink” is a marvel of accord. The thrust that Ueda brings to “Lights Away From Home” launches a couple of reed solos even higher. And the elliptical tenor phrases that move from keening to circumspect on Wayne Shorter’s “Penelope” impress with their subtleties. *In Real Time* is a program that needs to be focused on to enjoy completely.

That said, feisty extended passages are exciting as well. Jensen’s “Bow and Arrow” solo is a two-minute excursion that sails through the chord changes with shifting rhythm and textural motifs. And Glover and Miller follow with equally canny romps that deliver caliente licks and fierce wallops - the performance is an exemplar of graceful hubbub. Throughout, it’s obvious that the group (which has shifted personnel) has cohered since their 2020 debut. What initially came off as a well-planned project now stands tall as an enviable band.



Michael Blake *Dance of the Mystic Bliss*

The ability to take listeners through a series of emotional climates during a musical program is always a valuable asset. Dodging stylistic stasis requires versatility, of course - or maybe fluency is a better word. Through 25 years of making albums, Michael Blake has relied on such breadth. The saxophonist’s interests stretch from funk to swing to Africa to post-bop to skronk - for this guy, running the gamut is simply getting the job done.

Leading his new Chroma Nova ensemble, Blake absorbs elements of Brazilian forro into his own well established sensibility. The strings and percussion octet is superb at propulsion, a Blake priority ever since his exclamatory days with the most powerful edition of the Lounge Lizards. Well-versed in the attractions of Middle Eastern patterns and Caribbean motifs, he applies a bit of each to the lithe melodies that dominate the record. From the opening “Merle The Pearl” (dedicated, as are several tunes, to his late mother), to “Love Finally Arrives,” the nimble use of counterpoint makes everything percolate. Clarity has never been a problem for the composer - he wants his music to connect quickly.



Because the tunes are so catchy this time ‘round, it feels like the band is always moving through a variety of dispositions.

Cellist Christopher Hoffman waxes forlorn during a section of “Le Coeur Du Jardin.” The leader delivers a great call-and-response vibe on “Little Demons,” which also finds him blowing over a roiling percussion foray (Blake loves him some Eddie Harris, and there are moments when the churning grooves of “Compared To What” come to mind). “Prune Pluck Pangloss” is a light-hearted lark, brimming with optimism. “Topanga Burns” is a sound experiment, eerie and cinematic. “Love Finally Arrives” swirls towards the heavens, a romantic revelation.

Ultimately, *Dance Of The Mystic Bliss* creates its substantial aura by exuding the catholic interests of its creators. When violinist Sky Steele drops into hoe-down mode while riding Michael Bates’ jubilant bass line on “Sagra,” it doesn’t matter if it’s a nod to Brazil or Kentucky, the pleasures of revelry speak for themselves.

Sexmob *The Hard Way*

Ya gotta change shit up, right? The NYC quartet has always had a fierce sound - its blend of slide trumpet, saxophone, bass, and drums is built on a sassy oomph that never blinks. Sure, they appreciate nuances as much as any improvising quartet should, but they’re always ready to put some punch into a flourish and kick some ass with an anthem (grab some headphones and check their operatic spin on “Ruby Tuesday”). Their 10th album is about transition, however; it finds ‘em moving from their tried-and-true acoustic approach to cagey digi-matic maneuvers that are tweaked to form a rambunctious terrain. The vibe is 2025 if not 2029: there’s something cranky, cool, and cosmopolitan about the whole thing, like the soundtrack to a long stroll down the Champs-Élysées if it felt like 14th Street and smelled like the Bowery.

The Hard Way is produced by Scott Harding, a longstanding band ally who’s crucial enough to this record’s personality to be deemed a fifth mobster. In his hands, Kenny Wollesen’s drums get a robotics lesson, the horns of Briggan Krauss and Steven Bernstein are plied with fuzzy filters, and that groove machine wielded by bassist Tony Scherr comes off like Aphex Twin put James Jamerson on his payroll - psychedelic with a futuristic flava. From the chopped and screwed hijinks of “Fletcher Henderson,” to the dubby prayer of “Dominion,” the band finds several ways to connect the dots between abstraction and melody, earnestness and nonchalance, spontaneity and design.

A couple guests drop by. Vijay Iyer adds spooky keys to “You Can Take a Myth” and John Medeski’s B-3 gets ultra saucy on “Banacek” (which cues of George Peppard’s dapper turtleneck). But added instruments don’t really matter; Bernstein’s brass and Krauss’ alto are at the center of the action, and Harding’s finger is always on the climate control knob. Because the band has heart to spare, his mildly aggro atmosphere seldom sounds harsh. And just because they’re messing with beats, don’t think Sexmob has abandoned the tradition they’ve been gleefully giving a hot foot since their late ‘90s romps at NYC’s Knitting Factory. The final snatch of melody heard as the record fades away is “Sunny Side of the Street.”

JAZZ

By Jim Macnie

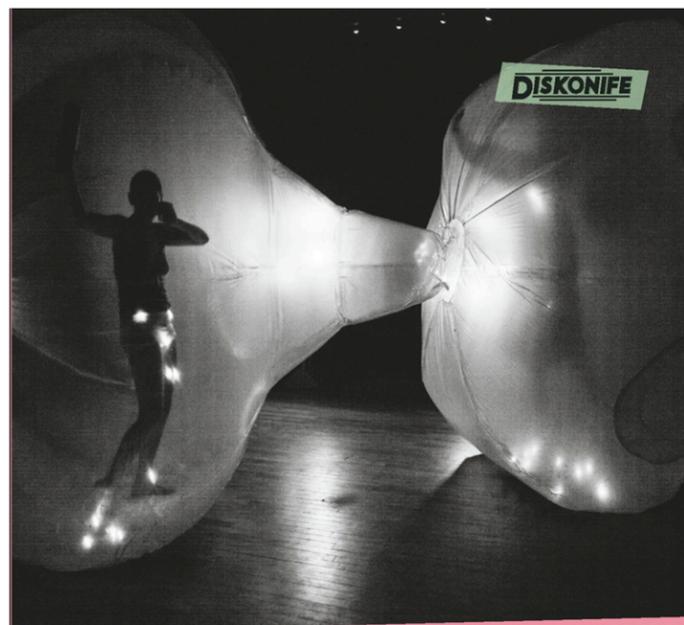


Matt Moran/Sarah Elizabeth Charles/ Curtis Hasselbring *Audible Spirits*

How can the past inform the present? What kind of tomorrow exists if we discount yesterday? In which ways can bedrock music lessons be best utilized by experimental improvisers? Matt Moran (vibraphone), Sarah Elizabeth Charles (vocals, digital effects) and Curtis Hasselbring (trombone and Jamey Aebersold Play-A-Long recordings) take a stab at answering such questions with their Audible Spirits ensemble. The group members are known for advancing their own progressive music, which has earned critical applause and taken their work around the world. Here they unite to bring a present-tense perspective to historic jazz gems. A tongue-in-cheek attitude sashays through “Misty,” “Satin Doll,” and other dusty but delightful nuggets. But only a tad in cheek; appreciation is part of the menu as well. As the trio guides these tunes through unconventional arrangements, an acknowledgement of their stature arises.

These designs are not only atypical, but well balanced. Oliver Nelson’s “Stolen Moments” opens with Hasselbring’s moody brass pronouncement, which overlaps into Charles’ noirish glide through the lyric, and then makes way for Moran’s thoughtful interaction with a mesh of samples and sounds that act as his rhythm section. Each turn is engaging, but the outro is best: a 6-bit plink-plonk melange of beats that somehow parallels Nelson’s classic melody. The band calls this performance a “fulcrum” between past and future. An album high point is their deconstruction of Coltrane’s “Moments Notice,” which starts with a ‘Juliet of the Spirits’ intro from Charles before bouncing into real-time improv of Hasselbring feeding Moran sliced and diced bits of Aebersold’s version of the track.

It prompts a hard-swinging flight of fancy from the vibes player before dissipating into a hazy farewell. No episode lasts too long on *Audible Spirits*; pith is a valuable partner. Ultimately the trio delivers a surrealism that lives in the shadows, bolstering its music with subtexts on jazz education, group improvisation, and the challenges of positioning yourself in an ever-morphing continuum. “I hope it sounds exquisitely beautiful and totally heretical at the same time,” Moran has said. Take a bow, sir. Job well done.



AUDIBLE SPIRITS



TIM BERNE HANK ROBERTS AURORA NEALAND

Tim Berne/Hank Roberts/Aurora Nealand *Oceans And*

It’s refreshing when artists tweak their established approach; when it happens, all sorts of micro revelations tend to appear, broadening an audience’s view on the subject at hand. Might be best to use a cap-lock on the word “established” when referencing saxophonist Tim Berne; after several decades of work and well over 50 albums released, his position as a shrewd improviser, daring composer, and recombinant bandleader couldn’t be more solid. The language he’s fashioned during all these achievements is instantly recognizable, a clever take on thematic development that snoops around a tune’s most intriguing corners before delivering an intricate melodic fanfare that often seems to be at its boiling point. When his music is truly successful, a performance can be as exhaustive as it is exciting.

Not so on this novel entry into the Berne canon, where momentum is stretched out, and drones, not jitters, are the most valuable currency. Some of these changes are due to esthetic choice (these pieces are fully improvised), and some are ushered along by *Ocean And’s* instrumentation. Hank Roberts’ cello and Aurora Nealand’s accordion are ideal for protraction, with bows and bellows able to float notes for extended periods. The saxophonist has been honing his use of long tones during the past two years as well. Recent shows have revealed him masterfully keening on one note for moments at a time, effecting a siren of sorts. That happens here; the maneuver is more languid than ever before.

“The Latter” opens the program with a harmonized murmur that conjures a tug boat inching through the fog (the group recorded the session mere yards from the NYC harbor). Each musician shapes the whole towards a steady denouement that feels like a spectral exhale. On “Frosted,” Roberts’ arco swoops feed into huffy accordion breaths, and Berne lights a slow-building fire on top of it. Even when the tempos and interplay pick up, there’s a gentility to the action. “Clustard” finds the trio moving at pace while still dodging frenzy. Nealand is also a clarinet whiz (don’t hit New Orleans without seeing if she’s gigging somewhere), and when the squeezebox is down, the straight horn comes up. She’s worked with Berne long enough to determine wise ways of gliding with him, and on “Mortal and Pestered,” she also provides some wordless cooing that keeps everything fluid. One sharp critic has called *Oceans And* “high caliber chamber music unmoored from any single stylistic foundation.” The work Berne and Roberts did with the group *Miniature* hinted at this, and Berne and Nealand’s newfound mojo helps secure it as a brilliant anomaly - an ethereal exercise that fashions a dream world where walking with slippers on winds up delivering a wealth of atmospheric impact.

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TONE118.065

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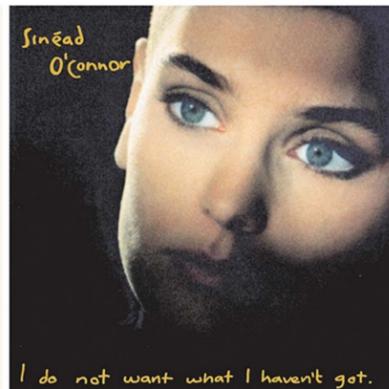
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TONE118.071

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The reviews are in.



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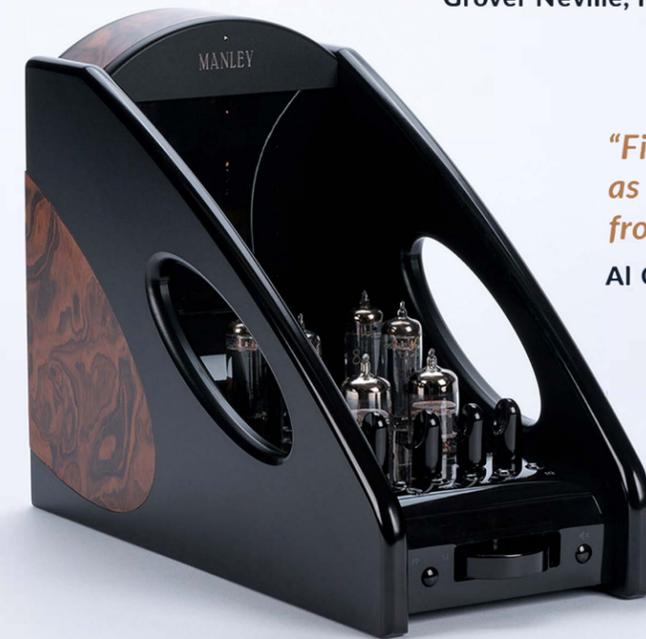
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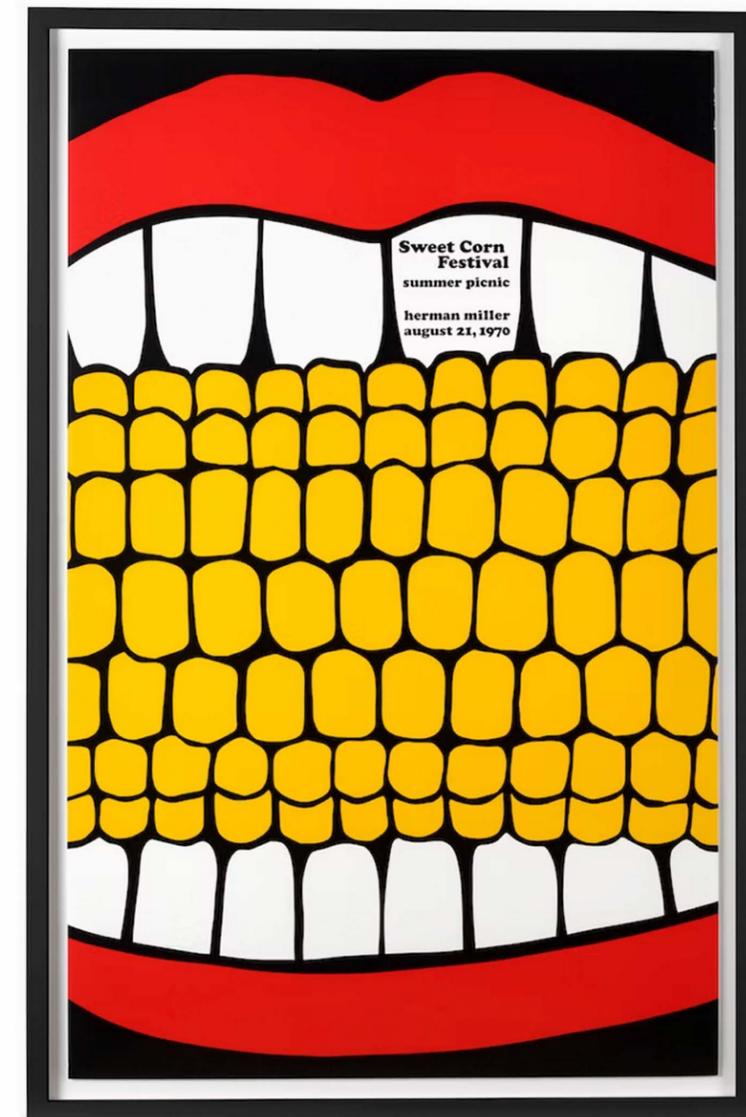
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Dealers That Mean Business

We've had this section at the back of TONE for some time now, and actually before we got hit with COVID, and it was easier to just pop in your favorite hifi store for a cursory visit, I was planning on an extended road trip to seek out great audio salons. I'm sorry to say that quest has been on hold for a while.

A few years later, times have changed, the landscape has changed somewhat, but the best dealers have adapted and are still thriving. Innovate or perish, as the saying goes. Most have gone to an appointments only model, which hasn't been all that much of a stretch, because many hifi shops had adopted this model, or at least a semi-appointment model before the current situation. Of course, stricter anti-cooties protocols have been engaged, and for the most part, customers have stayed in the retail game.

We've swapped a few people out here, but most of the dealers we were featuring are still doing well – we are truly glad for this. As it becomes easier and easier to travel again, I'll be back on the road seeking out more great dealers and attending events.

In the issues to come, we're also going to be featuring commentary from these dealers, telling their stories on how they've adjusted, and what, if anything they've learned and changed.

As we move into the year 2022 (which still feels weird saying) I still firmly believe the support from a great hifi dealer is essential to help you wade through the ever increasing complexity of audio, whether it be two channel, theater, or something in-between.

To recap what I've said here before: Nearly every audio system that has failed to achieve the greatness expected of it can be traced back to poor component choice and setup. I've heard a lot of systems all over the world, and it always falls back to these two factors.

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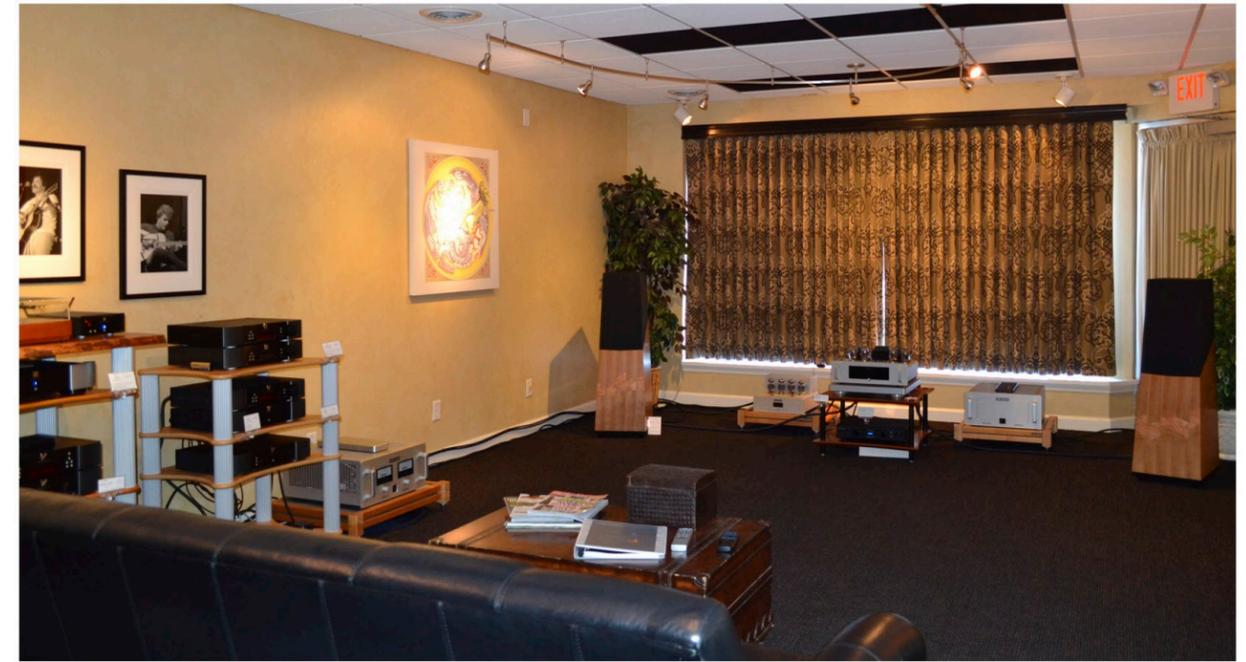
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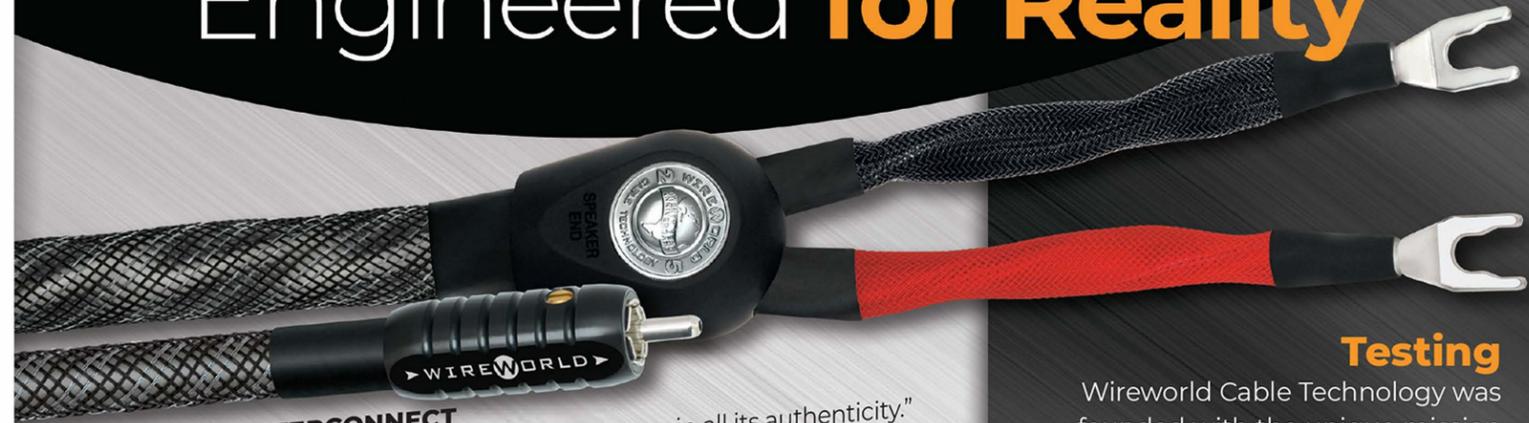
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5701 W. Dempster Street
Morton Grove, Illinois 60053 **847.966.4434**



Scottsdale, Arizona - LMC Home Entertainment
lmche.com
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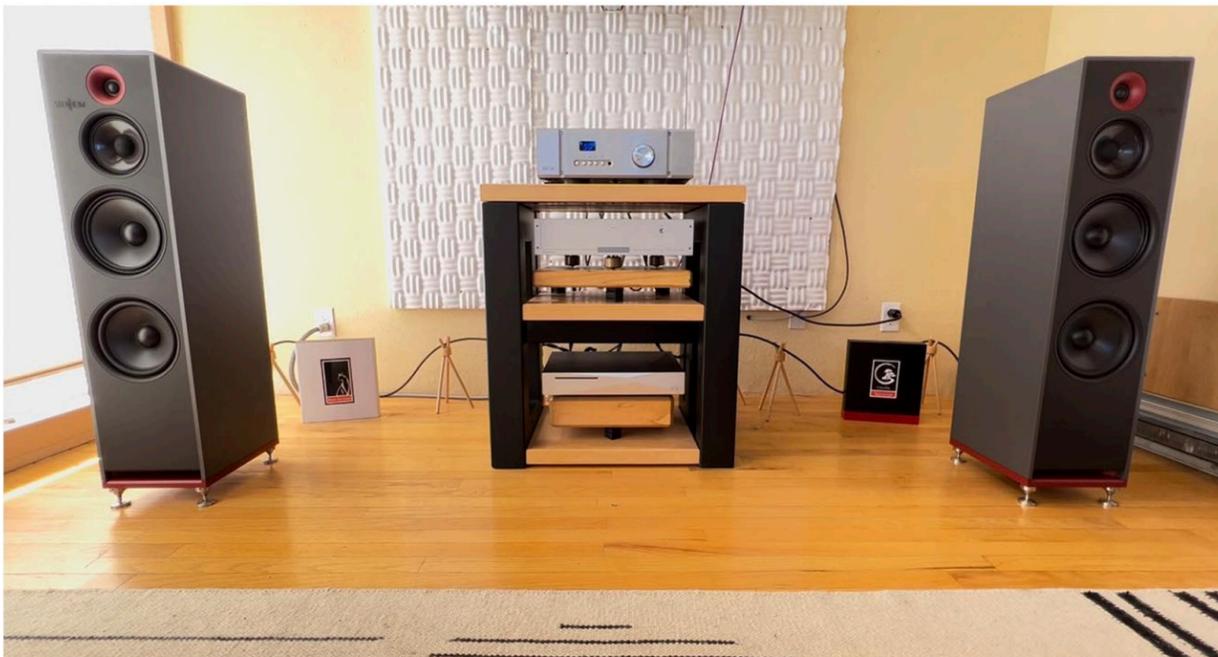


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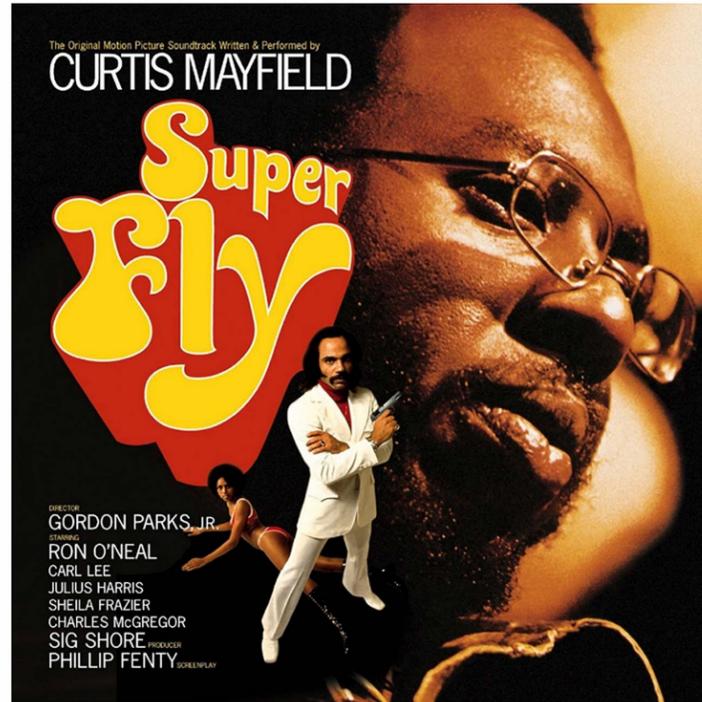


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Club Mix compilation expert, Scott Tetzlaff's theme for this playlist is "R&B and Friends" A soundtrack for hanging out on the front porch and watching the world go by. Kind of seasonal too... Feels a little summertime.



Jamie lidell - Multiply

Cymande - The Message

Curtis Mayfield - Move on Up

El Michels Affair - Snakes

Leon Bridges - Coming Home

Curtis Mayfield - Pusherman

Sharon Jones & The Dap Kings - How Long Do I Have to Wait For You

Galt MacDermot - Cold Coffee

Sly & The Family Stone - Family Affair

The Brothers Johnson - Strawberry Letter 23

Tim Maia - Rational Culture

Nina Simone - Baltimore

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— Angela Cardas Meredith, Cardas Audio

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- Kevin Hayes, VAC

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- Jeremy Bryan, MBL North America



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sme
sonos
soundsmith
stillpoints
technics
vinnie rossi
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Get The Gear: Where to find what you've seen in this issue.

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AMG/Benz Micro	sierrasound.com	dCS	desaudio.com
AmpsandSound	ampsandsound.com	Dynaudio	dynaudio.com
Ana Mighty Sound	anamightysound.com	Echo Audio	echohifi.com
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Aqua Audio	aquahifi.com	EPOS	epos-loudspeakers.com
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AudioVision SF	audiovisionsf.com	Heretic Loudspeakers	thehereticspeaker.com
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Bob Carver	bobcarvercorp.com	Java Hifi	javahifi.com
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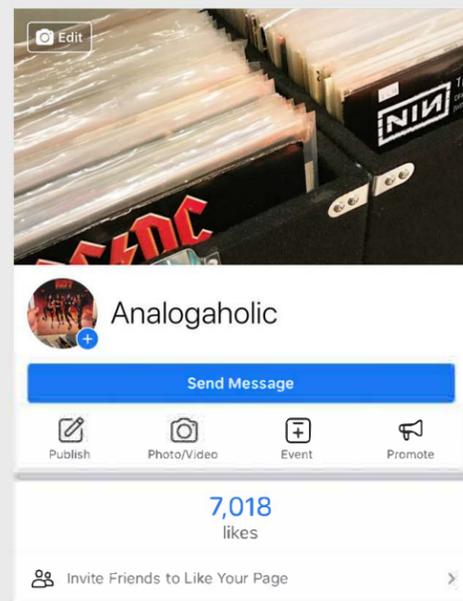
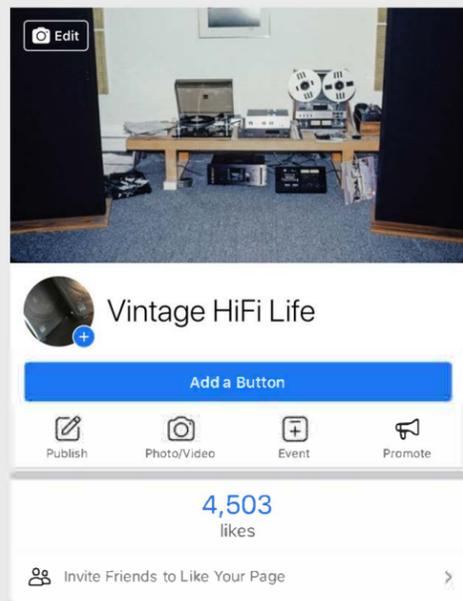
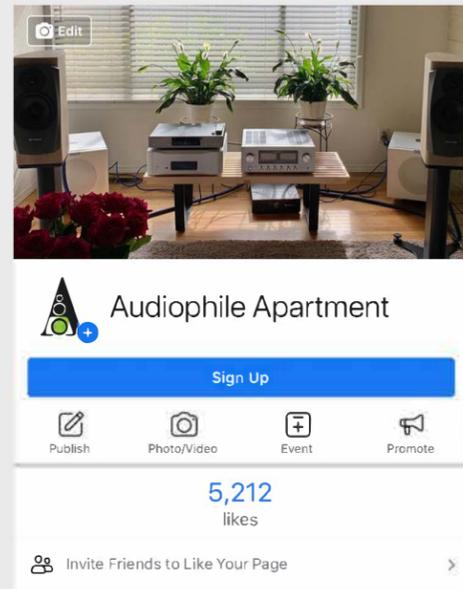
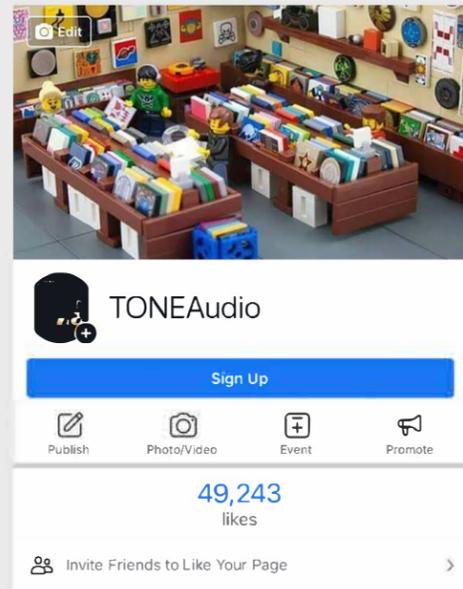
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MoFi Distribution	mofidistribution.com
Mytek	mytekdigital.com
Nagra	nagraaudio.com
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Octave	octave.de
Ortofon	ortofon.com
Paradigm	paradigm.com
Parasound	parasound.com
Pass Labs	passlabs.com
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REL	rel.net
Rega	soundorg.com
Sierra Sound	sierrasound.com
Suncoast Audio	suncoastaudio.com
SVS	svsound.com
T+A	ta-hifi.de
Tannoy	upscaledistribution.com
Tellurium Q	telluriumq.com
TONE Imports	toneimports.com
Totem	totemacoustic.com
Upscale Audio	upscaleaudio.com
Vanguard Speakers	xsa-labs.com
Vera-fi	verafiaudiolle.com
Wireworld	wireworldcable.com
YG Acoustics	yg-acoustics.com



We've tried to make it pretty easy for you to find us out on Facebook, and have divided up our pages to be a bit more subject specific.

Here they are with links. Just click on the page that interests you most. We look forward to hearing from you when you have a spare moment.



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Noise Floor:

Output Noise with Inputs
shorted: < 650uV rms A-weighted.

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-3dB at 18Hz and 100WPC
-3dB at 11Hz and 40WPC

Sensitivity:

100W at 1.27Vrms, for both 8ohm
and 4ohm loads.

Next issue, **119:**

Next issue...more gear and our cover feature will be the Tambaqui DAC along with the Lupe phonostage from Mola Mola! Sorry we had to push this out an issue, but we hope you’ll agree it was worth the wait. We’re excited to make the comparison.

And a few of our favorite features, missing this issue due to time constraints will return as well.

A little bit about what we’re trying to accomplish on YouTube as well. We hope you’ll tune in - we’ll keep it short and to the point.

As always, drop on by our Facebook and Instagram pages and let us know how you are...



T O N E