

TONEAudio.

The e-journal of analog
and digital sound.

no.3

2006

DAY TRIPPIN'
TAKING IN MUSIC
FROM THE 80S

MUSIC
REEL-TO-REEL

Steve Hoffman On
The deHavilland
Aries 845-G

OLD SCHOOL:
Life With The
Quad 57's
from Chris Beeching

REGA Accessories
And Clean Vinyl

REVIEWS, MUSIC AND
SO MUCH MORE.



CONTENTS

4. STAFF

5. CONTRIBUTORS

6. PUBLISHER'S LETTER

7. TONE TOON

— *Liza Donnelly*

● FEATURES

9. **THE BUDGET SYSTEM**

Definitive Technologies
Speakers

— *Jeff Dorgay*

12. **THE MONOGAMOUS**

AUDIOPHILE:
The Proceed PDT

13. **OLD SCHOOL:**

Quad 57s
— *Chris Beecher*

● SHOW REPORT

19. 2006 Consumer Electronics Show

● CAR SOUNDS

21. Can You Achieve Hi End Sound In A Car?

● PRODUCT REVIEWS

24. Balanced Audio Technologies Entry Level BK-P5 Phono Stage

29. The Magnificent DeHavilland Aries 845-G

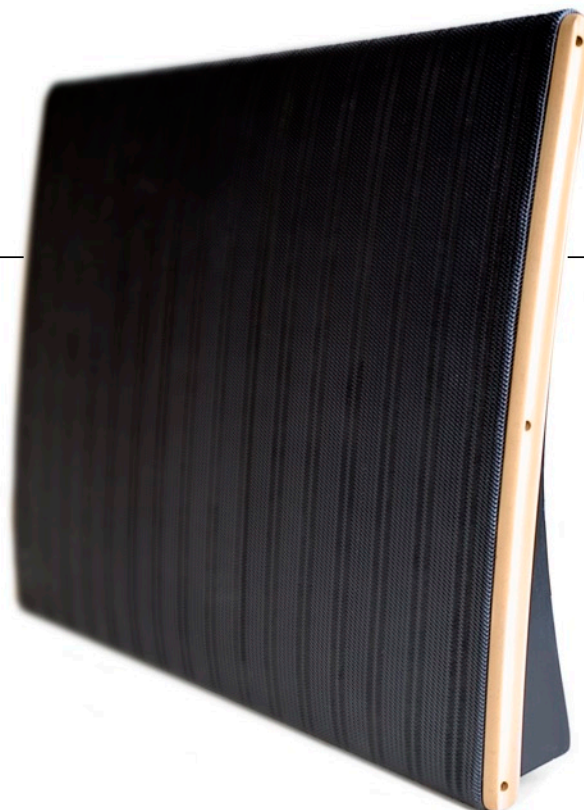
33. Aperion's 633-T Speakers

38. Big And Mighty: The McCormack DNA-500

44. Small But Mighty: The Benchmark DAC-1

48. Beautiful Roan Audio Model 5 Speakers from the Pacific Northwest

52. Prima Luna does it again with the Prologue 7 Monoblocks



CONTENTS

● HEADPHONE PLANET

56. The AKG 701s
— *Aaron Kovics*

● I.P.S.

60. Revisiting Reel to Reel
— *Jeff Dorgay*



● SHORT TAKES

62. Further Upgrades for your Rega from Groovetracer

65. Keeping Your Vinyl Clean With the VPI 16.5

● MUSIC

TRIBUTE TO THE 80s

67. Music of the 80s
- Jeff Dorgay

71. Just Rock
- Jerold O'Brien

73. Back to the 80s
- Nicole Wilson

75. 80s Weren't All Bad
- Joe Golfen

78. A Record Man Reflects
- Norwood Brown

81. BLUES YOU CAN USE
Roomful Revisited
— *Jeff Neumann*

84. ART OF BUYING OBSCURE RECORDS
— *Jeff Dorgay*

88. MUSIC FOR THE HEAD... PHONE
— *Aaron Kovics*



● SLUMMIN'

91. Audio on the Cheap!

● MANUFACTURES INFO



STAFF

JEFF DORGAY

A Wisconsin native, Jeff built his first amplifier from a schematic in the RCA tube manual. A brief career selling mid-fi gear ended in 1981, when he told a customer to take his big check up the street to the local Levinson dealer for some really cool equipment.

Having spent the last seven years writing about photography and digital imaging for a number of publications, he also had a brief career at another popular high end audio magazine before starting TONE.

TONI MCQUILKEN

Toni McQuilken steps up to the big chair at TONE after being assistant editor at Digital Output for three years. A confessed technology junkie, she has a Communications Degree from Flagler College in St. Augustine, Florida, and recently finished her MBA from the University of Phoenix Online.

She lives in New York with her two spoiled-rotten cats, loves most types of music, and chews Cinnamint Orbit gum.

JEAN DORGAY

With a wealth of advertising experience, Jean brings 25 years as an art director to TONE. Her early studies of fine art and marketing were spent at the University of Southern Oregon. She later moved to the Southwest to work on her tan and finish a degree in design at the University of Arizona.

When she's not digitally designing, you can find Jean at the local gardening shops looking for cool things to add to the yard and dreaming about living in Tuscany.

STEVE HOFFMAN

Known to many in the music business as one of the world's most talented mastering engineers, Steve is a passionate Leica collector and known to take some pretty good pictures when the mood strikes. He's not a bad drummer, either.

Steve resides in Los Angeles to stay close to the music business with his wife Karla and two year old son, Mikey who would very much like to get his hands on Dad's Leica collection, or better yet some of those antique 300Bs in the nice wooden boxes.

NORWOOD BROWN

Our music editor, Norwood Brown has an interesting past. Playing drums professionally since age 12, Norwood is a music industry veteran, having spent many years behind the scenes in the record company and recording studio worlds. Now living in the Pacific Northwest, he is a certified living legend and walking encyclopedia of all things musical.

In addition to a wealth of information, Norwood also brings his outrageous sense of humor to the TONE staff on a regular basis.

NICOLE WILSON

A graduate of the University of Washington, Nicole spent her early years listening to classic pop/rock and later developed a taste for goth and hip hop. A time spent on the London music scene broadened Nicole's music collection as well as her hair colors.

When she's not catering to the coffee connoisseurs, Nicole can be seen toting a Dachs-hund named D.C. and enjoying double short cinnamon non-fat lattes with a bit 'o whip on top.

CHRIS BEECHING

Better known across the pond in the UK, Chris joins us to help review gear that doesn't make it to our shores and will be concentrating on the European hi-fi scene.

Another music industry veteran, Chris graduated with honors in music before going on to work for EMI/London in the classical promotions department.

An avid musician and music collector, CB has a number of hifi systems in his house and plays a mean game of squash in his spare time.

JOE GOLFEN

Joe comes to us from Phoenix, where he has been a long-time friend of the family. Now as he is about to graduate from Arizona State University, he is following in his father's footsteps at the Arizona Republic, where he regularly writes about music.

With a depth of music knowledge beyond his years, Joe also plays guitar whenever he has the time. Keep an eye on this one!

JEROLD O'BRIEN

JD can't remember if he first met Jerold at a Badger game at the University of Wisconsin or standing in line waiting to see the Rocky Horror Picture Show on Milwaukee's East Side.

The staff hermit, JO now also resides in the Pacific Northwest where he listens to a lot of 60s and 70s rock music, restores old BMWs and vintage tube amplifiers. He is the only member of the staff that does not own a TIVO.

CONTRIBUTORS

LIZA DONNELLY

Liza Donnelly comes to **TONE** from the *New Yorker*, where she has been a staff cartoonist since 1982. She has also worked for quite a few other publications including *American Photographer*, *National Lampoon*, *Cosmopolitan* and *The New York Times*.

She has written a number of children's books and has shown her work in numerous exhibitions around the country. Her latest book, *Funny Ladies The New Yorkers Greatest Women Cartoonists And Their Cartoons* is currently on sale at a bookstore near you. She lives in New York with her husband and two daughters. More information about Liza, her work and appearances can be found at: www.lizadonnelly.com

KURT DOSLU

Another Pacific Northwest resident, Kurt owns Echo Audio just outside of the chi-chi Pearl District in Portland, Oregon. He has been in the audio world most of his life and in addition to being one of the friendliest audio salesmen you will ever meet, knows more about Nakamichi tape decks than just about anyone on Earth.

If that isn't enough, Kurt is an outstanding chef as well. If you need to find a great piece of used gear, check out Kurt's site at: www.echohifi.com

AARON KOVICS

Born and configured in Long Island, New York, Aaron brings his advice and expertise from being a reviewer and moderator at the dedicated headphone forum, Head Fi. He has a degree in computer/electrical engineering and when he's not enveloped in his music, he is also passionate about scuba diving, mountain biking, and writing. His motto is: "Music is my recreational drug, I need a dose of it, everyday". Aaron also loves motorcycles. You can find Aaron on the forum at: www.head-fi.org/forums.

JEFFERY NEUMANN

I have no idea where Hillsdale, New York is, but that is where you can find our blues columnist, Jeffrey Neumann. A lifelong blues vocalist, Jeffrey has finally escaped corporate cube world to pursue his career as a fine artist full time. He has been written up in a number of fine art magazines, including a recent piece in *Art Business News* and is currently showing at a number of galleries around the country. You can view his visual skills at:

www.neumannfineart.com



THE CARTOON BEATLES ©2005 MCFARLANE TOYS

PUBLISHER'S LETTER

A MID COURSE CORRECTION

As any proud parent, I have to apologize to all of you for getting a bit overzealous in my initial estimates with TONE-Audio in regards to getting 10 issues a year produced. But the good news is that we are totally committed to keeping the level of written and visual content at the high level we have achieved so far and all of us at TONE-Audio agree that this is our top priority. We would rather put out six great issues than six good ones and four issues that are so-so. It's not fair to our readers who have supported us thus far.

When asked if the glass was half full or half empty, Jay Leno once remarked, "perhaps the glass is just the wrong size!" That has always stuck with me and has never been more appropriate than now. The magazine is rapidly approaching 100 pages and we are going to be adding some additional bonus web content in the months to come, so there will still be more material for you to read than we originally planned. We will be posting the additional content on the web as often as we can, to give you more to read between issues.

Going to a six-issue schedule for now allows us the luxury of giving a piece of gear the time we all feel that it really needs to be adequately reviewed. We are also adding a couple more music columns over the next few issues to get closer to our initial goal of TONE-Audio being as much about music as it is about gear.

Speaking of music, this issue we have decided to take a look at that wacky decade of the 80's in retrospect. It all meant something different to us and even though our two youngest writers were in diapers then, they were still profoundly affected by this music. The DEVO hat on the cover was actually a gift to me from the band and arrived in the mail one day as a set of four in a box along with an autographed copy of DEVO's *Duty Now For The Future* album.

Curious as to why I got this package, my then girlfriend announced, "oh yeah, my sister is their executive secretary." While I would like to tell you this led to a long friendship between the spudboys and myself, it did not. However, those red DEVO hats really came in handy as a college student who didn't always have enough clean cereal bowls in the cupboard. I ate a lot of Frosted Flakes out of those hats over the years!

To make things a bit more interesting, some people from the industry told me what their systems consisted of back in the 80's. I was both surprised and amused to see what everyone was listening to. It also brought back a lot of good memories.

Again, I thank you for your enthusiasm and support for TONE-Audio. We hope you enjoy this month's issue. Now here's the cartoon.





"I just bought these for Richard. They're organic!"

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

TONEAudio

PUBLISHER Jeff Dorgay

EDITOR Toni McQuilken

ART DIRECTOR Jean Dorgay

MUSIC EDITOR Norwood Brown

UK BUREAU CHIEF Chirs Beeching

CONTRIBUTING
WRITERS Joe Golfen
Steve Hoffman
Aaron Kovics
Jeff Neumann
Jerold O'Brien
Nicole Wilson

UBER CARTOONIST Liza Donnelly

ADVERTISING Jeff Dorgay

SERVER SUPREMO Nate Silva

MR DREAMWEAVER Eddie Kaddi



tonepublications.com

800.432.4569

Editor Questions and
Comments:

tonepub@yahoo.com

© 2006 TONE MAGAZINE, LLC
All rights reserved.



VH1 SAVE THE MUSIC FOUNDATION

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

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



Definitive Technologies Power Monitor 700

Jeff Dorgay

More often than not, an entry level system does not have a ton of power to spare, which makes speaker choices that much more limited. Space can often be an issue when starting out in this wacky hobby of ours and one might not be ready to sign up for subwoofers and the added system complexity that comes along with all this hardware.

We have just recently had the pleasure to live with the Definitive Technologies Power Monitor 700s for a while and they solve a number of problems for beginning and seasoned audiophiles alike. They are small, so you can place them just about anywhere, taking up a tiny (7"W x 14"D x 17"H) footprint, with the optional \$150 stands. Second, they have built-in 8" powered subwoofers with 250-watt amplifiers. Third, they sport 92db efficiency, so you can use them with even a small SET amplifier and still rock out.

The 700s feature a 5 1/4" woofer and a 1" aluminum dome tweeter. There is no spec for the crossover point or slope.

Last but not least, they are very attractive in an understatedly elegant way, so they should be able to mesh with your décor, no problem. Fully shielded, they will work just fine in home theatre applications as well. The PM 700s retail for \$599 each, without stands.

Initial Set Up – Be Prepared!

After working with a number of large speakers, it was very nice to lift speakers that only weigh 35 pounds each!! Everything arrived well packaged and the stands require about 5

minutes of assembly. The back of the speakers feature a large LF level control, speaker level inputs and an additional LF line level input, making connection very easy.

Beware the woofer ports on the rear, when you first plug the speakers in to the wall, they will let out a big fart noise that will startle you if unprepared, followed by a little outer-space type of noise before you are ready to go. This large turn-on thump is present whether the level control is set to minimum or maximum level. Should you ever unplug them, get ready for a really large whump! on power down.

I did all of my testing with low powered amplifiers, as even our 36 wpc Prima Luna amplifier was way more than I needed to get adequate volume levels. My personal favorites for the test were the 9wpc Pacific Creek SET from issue one and the new Sophia "Baby" amplifier that will be in the next issue. The Sophia amplifier is tiny and uses pair of 6P1T tubes in push pull configuration for about 12 watts per channel, which was more than enough for this operation.

The 700s have dedicated power cords, so no chance to tweak here. The Sophia was connected to the speakers with DH Labs T-14 cable and we used DH Air Matrix interconnects and stock power cords to keep this as a budget rig. Digital source was the soon to be reviewed Onyx xcd-99 CD player. Yes, you can get a bit more from these speakers by using a bit spendier setup, but this was a reasonable fit.

(continued)

How much fun can you have with 12 watts per channel?

Answer: a lot! As I mentioned earlier, you can have a ton of fun with 9 watts per channel with the 700s. To keep things fair, I gave the Naim Nait a try with them and they will perform really well with a solid state amplifier, so those of you in the mid-priced transistor integrated camp won't go wrong with a pair of these either.

But, the magic was really with a small tube amplifier. Relieved of low bass duties, the PM 700s are very easy to place in the room because you can adjust the subwoofer output no matter where you have to put them. Need to have your speakers out of the way and up close to the wall, just turn it down a bit. If you have the extra space and can put them four or five feet out in the room, just crank up the LFE control. This makes for a very versatile speaker indeed.

Speaking of versatility, this speaker was very friendly to all of the different tube amplifiers I tried it with, so this suggests a pretty smooth impedance curve. Some speakers, even though they have a fairly high efficiency rating on paper, really choke an SET amplifier due to dips in the impedance curve or other crossover related issues. Not a problem with the 700's, I tried a few different SET amps with great results and modest power tube amplifiers were a great match as well.

In a future issue, you will be hearing about my fascination with reel to reel tape, but I can tell you that using my TEAC A-4300 (thanks to SH, for finding me a primo NOS one!!) is a blast listening to some groovy old tunes with 12 watts of tube power and the bass weight afforded by the built in subs. Hearing a 25 year old Tony Bennett on *I Left My Heart in San Francisco* (Columbia 4 track) through the TEAC makes you feel just like you were back in the 60's hanging out with Hugh Hefner!

Switching to LP took advantage of a bit smoother presentation than digital, and some of my favorite Miles Davis and John Coltrane records sounded great. Having had a number of great minimonitors over the past 12 months that didn't have a built-in subwoofer, makes the PM700s pretty addictive, especially in a medium to small space.

Regardless of source, I was very pleased with the overall sound of the 700s. Midrange tonality was very good for a speaker in this price range and they tended to throw a soundfield that was more wide than deep. While I think home theater enthusiasts will freak out over these speakers, I think they have enough of a pedigree to keep entry-level audiophiles happy.

Thanks to those subs, these small speakers really have a lot of punch!

For Those About to Rock

If you really want to crank it up, the 700s won't disappoint you. Just as this review was finishing up, the Prima Luna 70 watt monoblocks appeared at the studio, and this was a great match for these speakers, achieving much louder sound pressure levels than are prudent.

Thanks to those subs, these small speakers really have a lot of punch! What they lack in refinement, they make up for with enthusiasm. If you have a party going on and need some speakers to rock the house, these do the job rather nicely. You can play anything from classical to hip-hop with the 700s at a fairly high level without fatigue. Again, the subwoofer controls offer a lot of flexibility, allowing you to custom tailor the sound to your liking.

Mr. O'Brien and I fell into another one of our black holes full of classic rock again, and all the old records came out. Going through our favorite Springsteen, Steely Dan and Rush albums with the Prima Luna monoblocks was a ton of fun. It's really cool to have such a small speaker produce that much bass! Like the nerds we are; we got out the tone generator and can attest that the PM700s will go down to 30hz with no problem.

Sadly enough, these speakers are sold in a lot of mass market stores, so they will usually be paired up with relatively inexpensive solid state amplification, alas not revealing their full character. If you are planning on making these speakers part of your system, think long and hard about putting some tubes somewhere in the signal path for the ultimate in smoothness. A little careful system matching is required to get the most out of the PM700s.

(continued)



931 Digital Controller 921 mono Decoding Computer



At Wadia we do not build ordinary products. There are enough of those. We do build audio components that inspire. We build with beauty and fanatical attention to detail. We are constructing much more than a stereo. We create moments of exhilaration, freedom, and joy. We provide our customers with the ability to hear and understand the universal language of music.

In designing the series 9 Decoding Computer system our objective was clear – *to create the new standard.*

The 921 mono Decoding Computers and the 931 Digital Controller (series 9 Decoding Computer system) present a unique three box architecture of unmatched digital and analog technology. Each 921 provides a single channel of D>A conversion and the 931 functions as a digital preamplifier. Combined with the execution you expect from reference Wadia, the series 9 Decoding Computer system is proof positive that Wadia means – *the best in digital audio reproduction.*



THE VERDICT

The Definitive Technologies PM700s are very reasonably priced with tremendous versatility. They are very small and unobtrusive and will work well with just about any source, thanks to the built-in amplified subwoofers and their high efficiency. Well made and tastefully finished, they should also blend unobtrusively into just about any décor. ●

MANUFACTURER

Definitive Technology
11433 Cronridge Drive
Owings Mills, MD 21117
410-363-7148
www.definitivetech.com

PERIPHERALS

Amplification

Naim Nait 5i, Pacific Creek SE300i, Sophia SET Baby

Digital Source

Onix XCD-99 CD player, with and without Benchmark DAC-1

Analog Source

Rega P25/Sumiko Blackbird/Whest .20 Phono
Teac A-4300 Open reel deck

Cables

DH Labs Power Plus AC Cords, DH Labs Revelation interconnects

Vibration Control

Symposium Svelte Shelves and Rollerblock Jr.

FAVORITE TEST TUNES

Tony Bennett I Left My Heart In San Francisco, 4-Track tape (Columbia)

Dionne Warwick Valley of the Dolls, 4-Track tape (Scepter)

Emerson, Lake & Palmer Tarkus, LP (Cotillion)

Miles Davis Cookin' With The Miles Davis Quintet (DCC)

CCR Cosmos Factory, CD (DCC)

John Coltrane Lush Life, CD (DCC)

THE MONOGAMOUS AUDIOPHILE:

When I saw the email, I knew this guy was in. I too, had a Proceed

PDT for a long time and it still

lives a happy and productive life

out at Skeptical Roy's house.

Here's Albert Bryant's story from

Palm Beach, Florida.

THE PROCEED PDT

Buying the Proceed PDT 2 was actually a result of my local dealers misfortune. They had been a Levinson dealer for some time, but like many high end retailers in the early 90s, had to restructure to accommodate the coming home-theater craze. I had actually been looking at a complete Proceed system (they also made amplifiers and preamplifiers then, too.) but got a call from my salesperson saying they were clearing all the Levinson stuff out and I could get an outstanding deal on the PDT.

He wasn't kidding. Back then, the PDT 2 was selling for about \$2500 and I got this one for \$1395, but I had to move THAT

DAY. Told the boss I was taking a long lunch hour and went to pick up the PDT. I was eating ramen noodles for the next couple of weeks, but so what! I had my first piece of major high-end gear in hand. Now it was time to upgrade all of that Adcom stuff, but that's another story.

The PDT 2 has worked flawlessly except for one trip back to the mothership when it was fixed under warranty. It has been used with a number of different DAC's and is currently is partnered with a Benchmark DAC 1, in balanced mode. The sound is still great and this thing is built like a tank. Only one other problem has cropped up, the LCD display was starting to get a bit faded. The friendly folks at Madrigal told me the minimum charge for this repair would be \$800, ouch!

It was a quandary, to get it fixed or not and as fate would have it, I got off the hook. When I borrowed a friend's transport for a few days, I moved the PDT off to the side and placed it on a shelf upside down. When I flipped the PDT back over, the display worked fine and it has ever since!

So there you have it, a great transport that has served me well for about 15 years. I'll use it until it croaks. ●

Got a piece of gear you've had forever? Send us your story (and a high res digital photo if you can). If we publish it, we'll send you a \$100 gift certificate to Music Direct to enjoy.



OLD SCHOOL:



Old Friends

Chris Beeching

Old friends should be treasured. I'm always disappointed when, particularly on the silver screen, someone gets into trouble, and then imposes on the friendship of a long-lost or close friend to take a risk and get them out of a fix, usually of their own making. The guy in trouble seems to have no understanding that what he's asking his friend to do cuts across scruples, values and the conscience.

**"What on earth,"
I hear you ask, "does this have
to do with hi-fi?"**

It's very easy to get lulled into a sense of disappointment or dissatisfaction by the messages sent out by advertising, by demonstrations at shows, by the feeling that you're missing out because you don't have the latest opto-bionic-poly-basmatric gizmo.

My response to that is: So what? Did you miss it before it was invented? Probably not. Do you miss it now? Unlikely. And there's the ages-old adage about "if it isn't broke, don't fix it."

But, like friendships, audio gear does need servicing, and a little TLC every now and again. This is especially true of the venerable Quad ESL57. *(continued)*

The Start of a Beautiful Relationship

The 57's rebuild and refurbishment potential has been covered in many august journals ever since their true value and worth as recognized.

I first made their acquaintance in 1963, at a music shop in Tunbridge Wells, Kent, England. The shop is no longer there, but its spirit still lives on in some of its former employees, who I bump into on the very odd occasion. The shop itself was comprised a bookshop, a record shop, and a general stationer's. I believe the bookshop part was owned by one partner, the record shop by the other partner, and the stationer's shared between them to cover any lean times.

Behind the record shop façade there lurked a dark den of hi-fi magic. To gain access, you had to prove your worth by showing a certain discernment in your record-buying habits. Only then were you transported to the hallowed and heady heights of the second floor to savor the delights of products from the Leak, Wharfedale, Quad, SME and Garrard stables (among others).

I was too young to be a serious music-buyer, but my father was an avid chamber-music collector, and we were often whisked from the shop floor to the listening rooms to audition the latest vinyl releases prior to purchase.

It was in these lofty rooms I first heard 57s. Although my father's home system was high quality, the 57s weaved a beguiling sense of rightness many other systems have tried in vain to match.

I succumbed, eventually buying a new pair of 57s in 1975. They still give sterling service, have been regularly cleaned out and checked, and have never had anything larger than a 303 through them. They are unclamped, and apart from replacing the EHT blocks with new boards and separate diode packs and removing the rear felt, are unmodified.

I also have a stacked pair, two Avant-Garde horns, some Impulse horns, Linn Isobariks and various mini-monitors dotted round the family home.

Those of you who have suffered my writings in other journals will know of my praise for the AvantGardes as well as my various rebuild articles on 57s. We will cover none of that ground here. This piece is about living with 57s; the relationship between music, speaker and listener which develops over time and, unlike the guy at the top of this piece, has an integrity which should not be tested.

A Place for Everything

For someone coming to 57s for the first time, it's not unusual to hear comments like, "sound like a soft pair of headphones," "where's the bass" and "don't go high, do they?" But these need to be put into context. The majority of people have conventional box speakers, which is not surprising when you

consider that the majority of the marketplace is dominated by them, and, to a large extent, they are inefficient bookshelf speakers of relatively low price.

But what most of them don't realize is that in order to produce a wide bandwidth, the box needs to have resonances at certain frequencies to augment the falling response of a small bass driver, and the tweeter has to be very aggressive to give some impact. 57s aren't like that, and the culture shock can initially put a number of prospective converts off for good.

Another aspect which can be off-putting is their physical presence. In the days of mono, when only one speaker was required, it was not beyond the bounds of possibility for a family lounge to accommodate a large cabinet or a 57. Because, to a large degree, placement was not as critical as for stereo, it was even possible for the speaker to be placed somewhere convenient for everyday



living, only bringing it into position for listening.

Conventional speakers were often housed in corner-cabinets of large proportions, but being in corners did not intrude. This is what my father proudly owned, sporting a Wharfedale Super 12 CS/AL and Wharfedale Super 3 tweeter in a sand-filled corner baffle. For all the simplicity of the design, the sound quality was unbelievable. The only comparisons which could be made then were either with live music, or the relatively poor radio and TV sound.

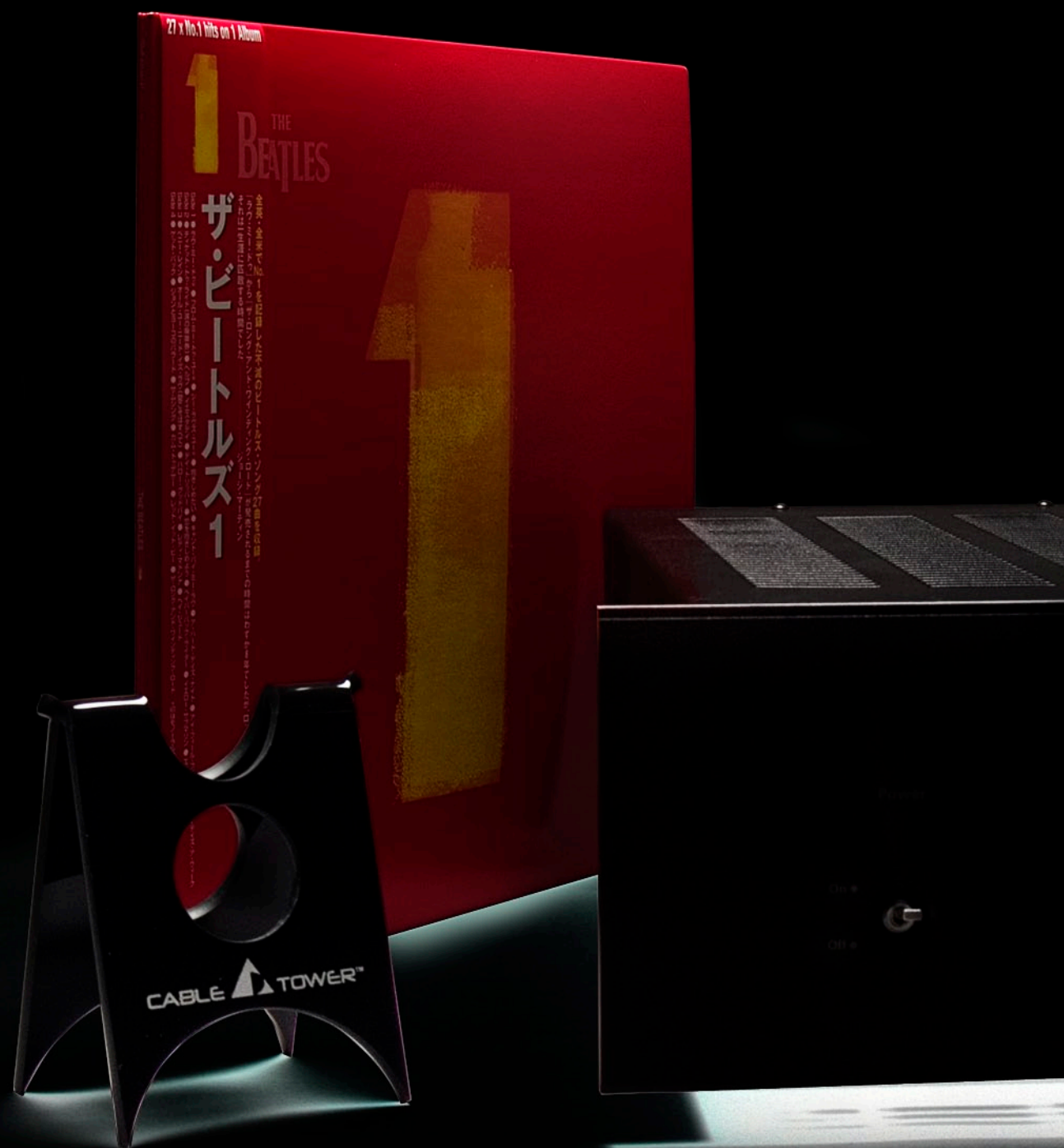
Having said that, a properly set-up corner baffle is capable of truly amazing sound reproduction with good electronics behind it, so don't knock old simply because it's old!

As far as I can tell, when the 57 was launched having a proper hi-fi system was still something many aspired to (rather than it being just another commodity on the list), and it found relatively high acceptance from the female fraternity.

Having quizzed my mother about 57s (she knows of my long-time affair) she did once admit that had my Father returned home with one (note; one, not two) at that time, she would have been quite happy for it to live in the lounge. The only reason I think

(continued)

Hardware. Software. Accessories.



my Father never ended up with one was because he'd put a lot of himself into building a proper craftsman's cabinet to house the Wharfedales, and letting that go would have been too personal a loss. And to qualify the quality of his woodworking skills, he makes violins and violas by hand, starting with a chunk of wood, hand-carving the scroll neck, shaping the backs and bellies and fitting the purfling.



An Addiction

So what is it about 57s that make them so addictive?

Listening in mono is something of a revelation, but stereo really brings the 57's strengths to the fore. While the visual presence really doesn't diminish, it really is the way in which they convey and present music which makes them such a present-day audiophile bargain.

They have a total ease with any signal you feed them, provided it doesn't overdrive the speaker falls within its bandwidth. The 57's technical specifications are legendary, and don't need reiterating here, but the reality is that this is a

(continued)



BALANCED AUDIO TECHNOLOGY • CARDAS • RUNNING SPRINGS AUDIO
SHELTER • USHER • TRANSROTOR TURNTABLES • VPI AND MUCH MORE

WWW.DEDICATEDAUDIO.COM 602.439.0414

loudspeaker which really does what it says on the box. And it also carries its designer's humility; "oh no, we think our speaker is very poor."

It is this very unassuming nature that makes them such a good conduit between the program source (CD/tape/LP or whatever), amplifier and listener.

Many loudspeakers have been criticized for being ruthless. The 57 is not. Nor is it aggressive, laid back, or forgiving. It simply reproduces with unerring and disarming honesty whatever you feed into it.

It's well-known that music listeners have a "picture in their head" of how they want things to sound. This, I believe, is conditioned by a number of factors, but includes their early exposure to home audio, live music and possibly the type of music they prefer. So, not surprisingly, people like their music "up front," or "with a lot of bass" or "loud." The list is endless. The 57 will stand or fall depending on those preferences.

Free and Clear

The 57 is often criticized for being lean in the low bass area. To a certain extent this is

true, as the small diaphragm excursions do limit the available output level at low frequencies before the diaphragm contacts the stator and large electric storms ensue. But the bass reproduction at those lower frequencies is very clean, and I, for one, still use 57s for recordings of cathedral organ music so I can identify which ranks of pedals are being used. This helps me register a new piece for when I perform it (I am a music graduate with organ as my main instrument.)

Many loudspeakers have been criticized for being ruthless. The 57 is not.

This is not lean, but clean, free from resonances, overhang, bloom, box coloration and so on. Once you've gotten used to it, box loudspeakers can sound very colored indeed. 57 bass is also fast. Compare, if you will, the weight of the cling-filmesque weight of a bass diaphragm and contrast this with the weight of a bass driver cone and coil assembly. Which would you prefer to keep stopping and starting?

But this bass response also limits the 57's potential listener audience, particularly if the preferred music is heavy rock at high levels. No, the 57 won't cope, and there's no point in trying to argue otherwise. But rock with a deep bass element at "domestically acceptable" levels it will handle very well, and the use of a heavy high-mass stand of about 14 inches or so will really let you hear how good the 57's bass actually is. To hear a bass player really make his instrument talk is a revelation on a pair of 57s.

A Perfect Image

The other area where the 57s excel is imaging. Now I know that many have waxed lyrical (and sometimes bemoaned) the precision of the 57, and said that you

need to be almost exactly in this position or that. I have never felt that about them. My single pair sit about 4 feet from the rear wall, with about 5 feet between them, and 8 feet from where the sofa is. They are fairly flat-on, rather than being heavily toed-in, and give a very palpable and credible representation of an ensemble. They struggle with squeezing in the scale of a full symphony orchestra, but then, the psychology of mentally trying to credibly perform that feat in my listening room is beyond me anyway!

When you listen to live music, whether it be at a formal concert or a gig at a local pub, there is no pinpoint image to latch on to. Pinpoint image production in a listening room is only appropriate if you're trying to reproduce a pinpoint sound source. The nearest I can come to that is a triangle being struck, or a pair of spoons being played. Ask a double-bass player which part of his instrument makes a sound and he'll shake his head in utter disbelief.

The 57 can and does produce a soundstage which can be accessed from more than just one position, almost giving a 3D impression, and when I've hosted music evenings for the local Recorded Music Society they have all commented on how natural the sound is, both in its presentation and its feeling. I still take the view that, just as there's no one ideal spot at which to listen to live music at a concert, why should there be one at home?

The 57's sound is also seamless. There's no obvious transition or join between the bass and treble panel output. There's no obvious source of high and low frequencies. In fact, in an aural sense, the speaker does a very good job of disappearing.

As far as the top-end output is concerned, maybe it is a little soft compared with some more modern loudspeaker systems, which boast super-tweeters whose frequency response keeps bats awake at night, but the reality is that for the majority of us, our hear-

(continued)



DH LABS

SILVER SONIC™

HIGH PERFORMANCE AUDIO CABLES

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

SILVERSONIC.COM
561-745-6406



*"A reference
for just how good
an inexpensive
cable can be."*

-Dave Clark
Positive Feedback

ing doesn't go that high anyway. And from another point of view, although our hearing is limited in frequency response, we are still able to perceive the differences attributable to much higher frequencies. For example, the main difference in sound between a clarinet and a saxophone lies in the harmonic series, or the higher-frequency sounds that the two instruments make. We can't hear them, but their interference patterns "color" the sounds lower in the aural spectrum and give each instrument its individuality. So the reality is that the 57's output at the top end is certainly more than adequate for most listeners.

Speaking Volumes

Just for fun, this last summer I put my pair on their MAF stands on the decking in the garden, coupled them up to a 33/303 and a decent CD player, and played some music in the garden. It wasn't played particularly loud. Fortunately our garden's not that overlooked, so it was with some surprise that a

(continued)



neighbor later commented that they liked the Dixieland jazz band that came and played the other day, and when were they coming again?

Somehow the 57 doesn't need to go that loud to make an impact. In the garden they seemed to maintain their volume over quite a distance, which was something the other speakers I took out (a pair of PMS Isobariks) didn't equal. They also seemed to revel in the space, which came as something of a surprise as they were never designed to be an outside speaker. Perhaps there's a missed opportunity there!

Visually, the stacked pair image very well too. Bass response seems more extended, but in reality this is a minor illusion caused by there simply being more sound, rather than it being actually deeper or louder. You have twice the amount of air being moved, a prerequisite for good bass response, and as the 57's bass panels are quite large when compared with conventional bass drivers, you get the benefit of increased scale; on this occasion, size matters!

The imaging is also about the same, because essentially the 57s' tweeter panels form a line source, but certainly the ability to recreate a rock group on stage or a full symphony orchestra is hugely enhanced, and, as long as your room is large enough, a credible aural representation is achievable.

Also enhanced is the apparent dynamic range. This occurs because twice as much air is being moved, which has the effect of potentially hitting you in the chest harder, and not as a result of any efficiency increase.

Downsides?

Well, I've lived with 57s for 30 years.

For me and my family, they have strengths without which I would feel musically short-changed. Over an extended listening period they are unfatiguing, and are essentially a music-lover's best friend. Their shortcomings are limited to the marriage of a person's mental picture and what can be achieved in the listening room. They don't meet or serve all tastes, in the visual aesthetic or the aural one, and, for some, the way they do things will be a totally alien experience. But for those who have open ears, and who have a handle on what live music sounds like, and who are searching for that natural presentation at home, they are possibly the only contender.

They don't do absolutely everything, but they do so many of the important things so well that they are, possibly, the most complete loudspeaker available.

They can take some getting used to, but that they are relatively portable and can be stored against a wall when not in use gives them more of a chance than if they were hummingous and imposing. They're unassuming, really, demanding nothing more than a good clean signal.

Living with 57s is like having a relationship with an old friend. Sometimes I stray, and it is often refreshing to listen to other loudspeakers from time to time; for a host of very different reasons I love the other speakers I have. But when I come back to the 57s, it's almost like I've betrayed them, gone off and had an illicit affair. They don't do absolutely everything, but they do so many of the important things so well that they are, possibly, the most complete loudspeaker available.

If you have trouble with that concept, ask yourself if there is any other speaker which, unaltered, has earned so much respect and widespread acceptance across a very wide range of the music-loving public, and which can still hold its head up after nearly 50 years since its introduction. ●



A SIDE NOTE: Yet another man's passion for the Quad 57s

As we hired Chris for his insightful writing, not his photographic skills, I decided to photograph the Quads for his story over here (or, across the pond, as Chris likes to say). KD told me he had a number of customers with 57s so it would be no problem. As deadline time approached, everyone else was out of town or otherwise unavailable, but Michael Heifitz came to our rescue. Jean tagged along to art direct and we had a wonderful drive out in the country to his home.

Michael has a few systems in his house, but being a violinist himself, loves the honesty of the Quads as well, powering his with a new pair of Quad amplifiers featuring the NOS tubes from his former Quad amplifiers! He has had his since college. "Actually, I bought one and listened to mono for a few years before I could buy the other one. The dealer was kind enough to hold onto the other one until I could afford it!"

Once the photos were done, Michael treated us to a little bit of time with his mint pair of 57s and it was like running back into an old friend that you have lost touch with for a long time. Our daughter is off to college in a few years, and I know what's going in that empty room!



Praise God, this year the weather was gorgeous in Las Vegas for CES! While the rain seemed like a modest inconvenience last year, after a solid month of rain in the Northwest, I was on my knees in a major way hoping for sunshine this year.

The 2006 Consumer Electronics Show

I'm not sure if the choices make it easier or harder, but there's no excuse for not being able to put a good system together, no matter what your budget. We'll do our best to help!

As good fortune would have it, everything went without a hitch from the minute we got off the plane. An inexpensive shuttle was found immediately, while everyone else was waiting for a cab and there was no monkey business upon registration. Last year, I must have dealt with the world's oldest living trade show help desk person and it took forever. This year, it was smooth as the top end on a Dynaco Stereo 70.

It was great to get back in touch with all the friendly faces from the industry and meet some new folks as well. Again, my hats off to all of our readers, the feedback was great and it was very nice to meet some of you! I said it before and I'll say it again, no Best of Show awards from TONE at CES (or any other audio show, for that matter), because everyone is up against too much to be put to the sword for not having the optimum setup.

The whole point of going to CES is to touch base with people, check out

what's on the horizon and buy records! At least that's my agenda. To underscore this, I was in a number of rooms that had great sound last year and did not have the same level of good sound this year, much as they tried. A few people that had crappy sound last year had outstanding sound this year, and that's just how the trade show magic 8-ball works. If you saw something even remotely interesting, get your butt down to a dealer and give it a serious listen.

MORE NEW ARRIVALS

Maybe it was just my imagination (no obvious pun here), but it seemed like there were a lot more new products this year, so it should as exciting for you as it will be for us checking out all the new gear over the next year. I'm not sure if the choices make it easier or harder, but there's no excuse for not being able to put a good system together, no matter what your budget. We'll do our best to help! *(continued)*

The one trend I saw continuing from last year's CES was the proliferation of integrated amplifiers. I just read an article recently on CNN.com stating that the new trend in housing is larger condominiums, as people don't want the maintenance issues of a large house anymore. On one level, the luxury integrated amplifier is the same thing, one power cord and no amp to preamp interconnect leaves you that much more money for the rest of your system. We will be reviewing quite a few of these in the months to come.

My esteemed ex-colleague, Mr. Harry Pearson mentioned in this month's TAS that he is excited about the level of development in audio recently thanks to the improvements in technology and parts quality, etc. While I am also excited about this as far as the bleeding edge goes, I saw a lot of advancement in reasonably priced gear as well, thanks to the trickle-down effects.

SO, HERE ARE MY AWARDS FOR THE SHOW:

The James Brown Award

We have decided that the James Brown award goes to Dan Harmon from Dedicated Audio for being the hardest working man in show business. Seems like every time that I saw him, he was running somewhere with both arms full. I don't think Dan spent much time relaxing at the show this year!

Snappiest Dresser at the Show

This one was easy. Jaime Munroy from Musical Surroundings was impeccably dressed every day when I stopped by the Musical Surroundings room. Not to mention all that sexy Italian gear from Pathos. Pure style at its best! Look for a review soon.

Coollest Shoes at the Show

I'm crazy about electrostatic speakers and the new model 1000 from Final looked and sounded fantastic. However Ellen Walravens shoes stole the thunder from those statuesque beauties. Carrie from Sex And The City has nothing on her!

Best Props at the Show

Trying to get off campus a bit for some non trade show food, I found myself frequenting the Hard Rock Café across the street pretty often. In the lobby, they had a set of costumes from one of the KISS tours in the main display case. Being a diehard KISS fan, I found this totally amusing.

The James Bond Award

Part of being a successful undercover kind of guy means mastering the art of not being seen. This year I nominate Mark Shifter from AV 123, as he had the stealthiest presence there, hanging out way on the periphery of the Alexis Park goings on.

Best Tunes

The folks at Zu had the best and widest variety of music this year, at least whenever I was passing by. They had a pair of tables, a big mixer and crates of vinyl on tap. I hope a lot more people will follow this example in years to come, because it's all about music for us!

IN THE END

We're all dead. Just kidding. But seriously folks, I felt that this year's CES had a bit more relaxed vibe than last year. A good share of new gear and way less Patricia Barber than I heard last year. Right on! ●

Can You Achieve High End Sound In A Car?



Mention car audio to just about any group of audiophiles and they will usually go into freak-out mode. I'm not talking about big woofers and boom-boom; I'm interested in finding some decent quality sound when I'm driving my car. Now that I have a couple of pretty good systems at home, I really hate the way my car stereo sounds!

I've been chatting with a number of folks in the audio industry informally and their responses have been very positive, so I'm going to put my head on the chopping block and try to create the equivalent of some decent mini-monitors in my car.

Where to Start

To make this project reasonable, I am going to try and stay within a budget of \$5000. Most crazed autosound enthusiasts I know have spent 2-5 times this, with thousands of watts of power and enough woofer square footage to power the Portland Rose Garden. I'm talking about refinement here.

Here is a brief overview of where we plan on taking this project. In the months to come, we will move coverage of our project car to a new section of the TONE-Audio website called **THE LAB**. That way, we can post new developments as they occur and not take up space in the magazine for those offended by the thought of this idea.

The car chosen for the project is my 87 BMW 325i four-door sedan. It's been a great car and has recently had it's drive-train rebuilt by my good friend George, who works for the local BMW dealer in Portland and moonlights on the weekend. Now that I've got a fresh motor, exhaust, chip and Bilstein/Eibach suspension, might as well get some great tunes! *(continued)*



PENAUDIO[®]

auditional wellbeing[™]

Voiced on real music.
Faithful to live music.[™]

SERENADE

The Essence of Finnish Design

Simple. Elegant. Natural.

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

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

A number of people have suggested that most of the interior needs to be torn up and some sound deadening added to make the car a bit quieter. No problem here, I was going to replace the carpeting and dash anyway. A number of years in the scorching Phoenix heat took its toll on the interior. (And my mental health, but that's another story)

One of the enemies of performance is weight and unfortunately one of the enemies of good sound is background noise.

A quick peek at the scale after the Denver hifi show revealed that I am no where near the fighting weight of my college days, so my goal is to lose 35 pounds by the time the project is done. So, a diet and serious fitness program has been implemented to keep my horsepower to weight ratio intact. Progress since Denver, 12 pounds, so I'm on my way and my racquetball game is improving substantially. Anybody out there want to go a few rounds on the court? Bring it on!

The Gear

We haven't decided on a head unit and speakers yet, but the folks at Cardas have agreed to lend a hand in the cable department and I have an amplifier. It's a BEAUTY. In case you haven't heard of the people at Milbert Amplifiers (www.milbert.com) they make the best sounding car amplifier on the face of the Earth.

(continued)

No thousand watt per channel behemoth here, just 35 pure tube watts per channel. I have heard that Eric Clapton has a couple of these, so there you have it. I had the privilege of writing about this baby for The Robb Report last year and even with my standard CD player and ADS separates, it sounded so good, I HAD to have it.

The Milbert BaM-235ab will set you back \$2649 and it is worth every cent. Just for laughs, I brought it in the office with a car battery to insert in one of the systems here and it held it's own rather nicely. Build quality is what you would expect from a tube amplifier from BAT or CJ, with Kimber Cable inside and a lot of familiar audiophile-grade parts. Milbert claims that this thing is vibration proof and also a ten year lifespan for the tubes. Ill keep you posted on that in the next few years!!

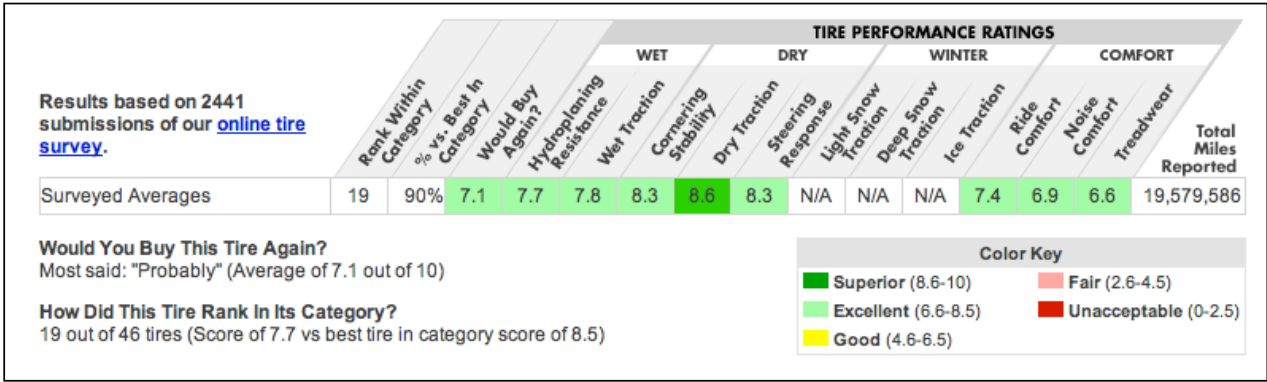
Speakers will be chosen for the front compartment only. I'm not a fan of surround sound in the home, OR the car, so we will set this up as a 2.1 system, with a pair of woofers and tweeters in the front and a small woofer in the trunk or mounted securely in the back deck. This should also be pretty easy to integrate with a head unit, the Milbert and a reasonable bass amplifier.

Think Like a Speaker Box

That's the goal here. My doors and trunk need to be turned into speaker enclosures without giving up too much of the car. In the months to come, we will go into extreme detail how you can achieve our results, so that you can enjoy some great in-car sound. First, we decided to take some noise readings to establish a baseline:

- Car Off: Under 50db
- Idle: 58db
- 35 mph: 70db
- 65 mph: 74db
- Full Throttle: 82db
- 100 mph: Hey, you should shut the stereo off and pay attention to your driving!

We found that on average, driving over rough pavement, which we have no shortage of in the Pacific Northwest increased the sound levels by about 4 db, so if you are thinking about your next set of tires, consider how quiet they are in terms of your car audio aspirations. If you go to the Tire Rack's website, (www.tirerack.com) you can find out just how noisy or quiet your tires or potential tires are. Here is an example:



Entry Level Phono Bliss The Balanced Audio VK-P5

— JEFF DORGAY





I like the way the guys at BAT do things. Perhaps it's my Russian heritage, but I think it's more my appreciation for a job well done. As a confessed build-quality freak, the VK-P5 is so substantial it feels like a power amplifier when you take it out of the box. In addition to the preamp, you get a Torx tool to get the cover off (and get at the cartridge-loading settings), an extra tube and 5 extra screws. That's what I call attention to detail! All this would be worthless without great sound, and the VK-P5 does not disappoint, but I'm letting the cat out of the bag early.

The VK-P5 has a set of RCA inputs and balanced outputs. (They are called Balanced Audio Technology, after all.) I was able to pick up a set of BAT adapters to allow me to use RCA cables for the first part of my tests, as their new VK-42SE solid-state preamplifier is not here yet.

Initial Set-Up

Right out of the box, to get some hours on the VK-P5, it went into my second system for break-in. This consists of my Modwright 9.0 SWL linestage, Pass Aleph 3 amplifier and (at least for the last few months) the ACL Sapphire XL speakers, along with my modded Rega P25 and Shelter 501II. Considering the P5's retail price of \$1,995, I felt using it in to a \$7-10k system would be a likely home for a piece like this, and a good upgrade for someone with a modest, but good table/arm/cartridge combo that would like some room to grow.

The instruction manual for the VK-P5 is very thorough and walks you through the cartridge-loading DIP switches and gain settings. Should you have a cartridge with slightly uneven channel balance, you can even adjust that. Just knowing I had this adjustment made me curious to check it, so I recorded a few test tones from the Cardas Set-Up disc and found my Shelter was spot on, but my V15 was a touch off. Again, nice attention to detail.

With the cover off, you get a better look at all of those glorious tubes.

With the cover off, you get a better look at all of those glorious tubes. There are a total of ten: eight 6922's and a pair of 6SN7's. BAT claims a life of 5,000 hours for the tubes, so if you only listen a few hours a day, you should easily get a few years out of a set. The VK-P5 features a slow-start circuit to contribute to tube life. The generic replacements will only run about \$15-20 each, and depending on how crazed you are, you can buy NOS tubes in the \$50-100 range. If you fear going down the path of a tube phono stage, the VK-P5 is as painless as it gets, so jump in.

Because I knew I would be using the VK-P5 with a few different turntable/cartridge combinations, I ignored the instruction manual and left the cover off so I could easily adjust cartridge loading. Keep in mind I have no one around to get fingers or noses inside, so you should follow the directions and put the top back on as soon as you are done with setup! As the loading will affect the high-frequency response, I would suggest waiting until the VK-P5 is broken in before performing a fine adjustment, or you may find yourself taking the top off again. Make sure your cartridge is sufficiently broken in as well, because that will change a bit with time too!

After I was very comfy with the sound, I moved it to my reference system, which

(continued)

Coffin & Trout
Fine Jewellers



*Interlude - Lady's Blue Sapphire ring accented
with Diamonds, set in Platinum.*

WWW.COFFINANDTROUT.COM

IMAGINATIVE • ARTISTIC • JEWELRY | 480.763.1300 800.684.8984 CHANDLER, ARIZONA

consists of a Conrad Johnson ACT2 preamplifier and Premier 350 power amplifier, Penaudio Serenades and the Ray Samuels XR-10B phono stage. My LP-12 with all the tweaks and a Graham 2.2/Sumiko Blackbird performs analog playback in this system. All cables were Cardas Golden Presence, and of course the Running Springs Jaco power conditioner.

After enough break-in time had passed, I substituted my two favorite power cords (the DH Labs Power Plus and the Essential Sound Products "The Reference") to listen for any improvement. Switching to the DH cord gave me a few percent more sound and the ESP a click beyond that, but considering this is a reasonably priced phono preamplifier, I could easily live with the DH cable. I get the feeling that the \$800 SIX-PAX upgrade would be more cost-effective than a \$700 power cord as this upgrades the power supply significantly.

For the duration of the review period, I kept all the stock tubes in the VK-P5. At a later date, I am going to send it back to BAT for the SIX-PAK upgrade which beefs up the power supply and adds paper-in oil capacitors to the interstage and output stages. Once that is broken in, we will push the envelope with NOS tubes. Look for a future report later in the year on this.

The Sound

When I am listening to music for fun, I don't mind a bit of romance creeping in, but when I put the reviewer hat on, I am always on the quest for tonal accuracy and as much resolution as I can get. In the case of a phono preamplifier, I specifically want a quiet background, ease of adjustability

(continued)



and if possible, a box that is aesthetically pleasing, though this is not a deal-breaker for me. For the record, I do like the design aesthetic of BAT gear, especially in all black.

The amount I like any vinyl-playback component is directly proportional to how big the stack of records gets in front of the equipment rack. The larger the stack, the more fun I'm having, because I just keep getting more records out of the closet to listen to. After a short period of time with the VK-P5, I had a BIG stack of LP's piling up!

Once broken in, the first disc I listened to was Michael Hedges *Aerial Boundaries* on Windham Hill. This has a lot of acoustic guitar played in a very plucky kind of style, which does a great job at revealing transient attack and space around the strings. Another favorite is Tom Waits *Mule Variations* (Epitaph), along with Aimee Mann's *Lost in Space* (MoFi). All three of these are very good for listening to spatial details. You can argue whether these are the perfect recordings, but I listen to them a lot because I know where all the little details are. Another good one for this test is Jean-Michael Jarre's *Zoolook*. There are a couple of tracks that sound like running water with backtracked voices and little soundbites. Again, not the ultimate fidelity test, but as the level of resolution goes down, the soundfield becomes increasingly 2D. None of this was a problem with the VK-P5.

To get a break, I cued up Metallica's *Black Album*. Why? Because I'm the boss and I like Metallica! Seriously, if I had to sum up the BAT sound in one word it would be dynamics, and cranking up Metallica really shows how well this

preamp can do with a lot of dynamics, as well as a lot of musical density. Lesser vinyl playback systems just don't reveal all the delicate nuances of this recording. Another favorite, though perhaps overused, is MoFi's version of Genesis' *Trick of the Tail*. You can make fun of me all you want, but I've heard *Squonk* a billion times and I never get tired of it. That low synth bass is hard to get right and still have some texture to it, without sounding loose or boomy. Explosive, yet controlled, powerful bass response is another trademark of BAT gear that I really enjoy.

I'll cut to the chase: the VK-P5 sets the bar for excellence in the \$2,000 phono preamplifier category for me. It really made me take notice from the minute I plugged it in to my P3/RB300/Shure V15 combo on the stock (47k/no cap. loading) settings. The VK-P5 had an open sound with a lot of punch. Everything had more impact than before, but this isn't a terribly high-resolution rig, so I moved my P25 back in the system. Even with the .4mv output of the Shelter 501, the VK-P5 still had more than enough gain to power any of my preamplifiers. Those of you with really low output moving coil cartridges may need to step up to the flagship VK-P10. (But this will set you back another \$2,500.)

Geoff Poor from BAT told me they felt this preamp offered tremendous value and about 80 percent of the performance of the P10 for a lot less money. While I haven't had the pleasure of listening to the P10 yet, I have a few friends that do, and they were impressed when they dropped by to give it a listen. I guess it's a testament to BAT gear that no one would part with their P10 so I

After a short period of time with the VK-P5, I had a BIG stack of LPs piling up!

could do a direct comparison!

It did, however, hold its own compared to my \$4,500 reference phono preamplifier, the Ray Samuels XR-10B. Obviously, there is a bit of difference in character between solid state and tube electronics. The XR-10B is a bit quieter and does possess a bit more ultimate resolution, but it does cost quite a bit more. For a reviewer, the three inputs of the XR-10B is hard to beat, but if you don't have two or three cartridges and you live blissfully with one turntable/tone arm, the VK-P5 is worthy of consideration, even in a very high-quality system. After a couple of months in my reference system, I am even more curious to investigate the SIX-PAK upgrade.

Last but not least, I was having so much fun listening to music that I forgot to compare balanced vs. RCA output at first! Typically, balanced operation offers a lower noise floor than single ended operation, but I borrowed a BAT 31SE from a friend to listen for the difference. Because the VK-P5 is so quiet, even in single-ended mode, I couldn't hear a huge difference when used in full-balanced mode. Backgrounds are just a bit more black, but we are splitting hairs here. Rest assured, it sounds great either way.

THE VERDICT

The BAT VK-P5 was a joy to listen to, possessing phenomenal resolution for a \$2,000 phono preamp. I love this thing!

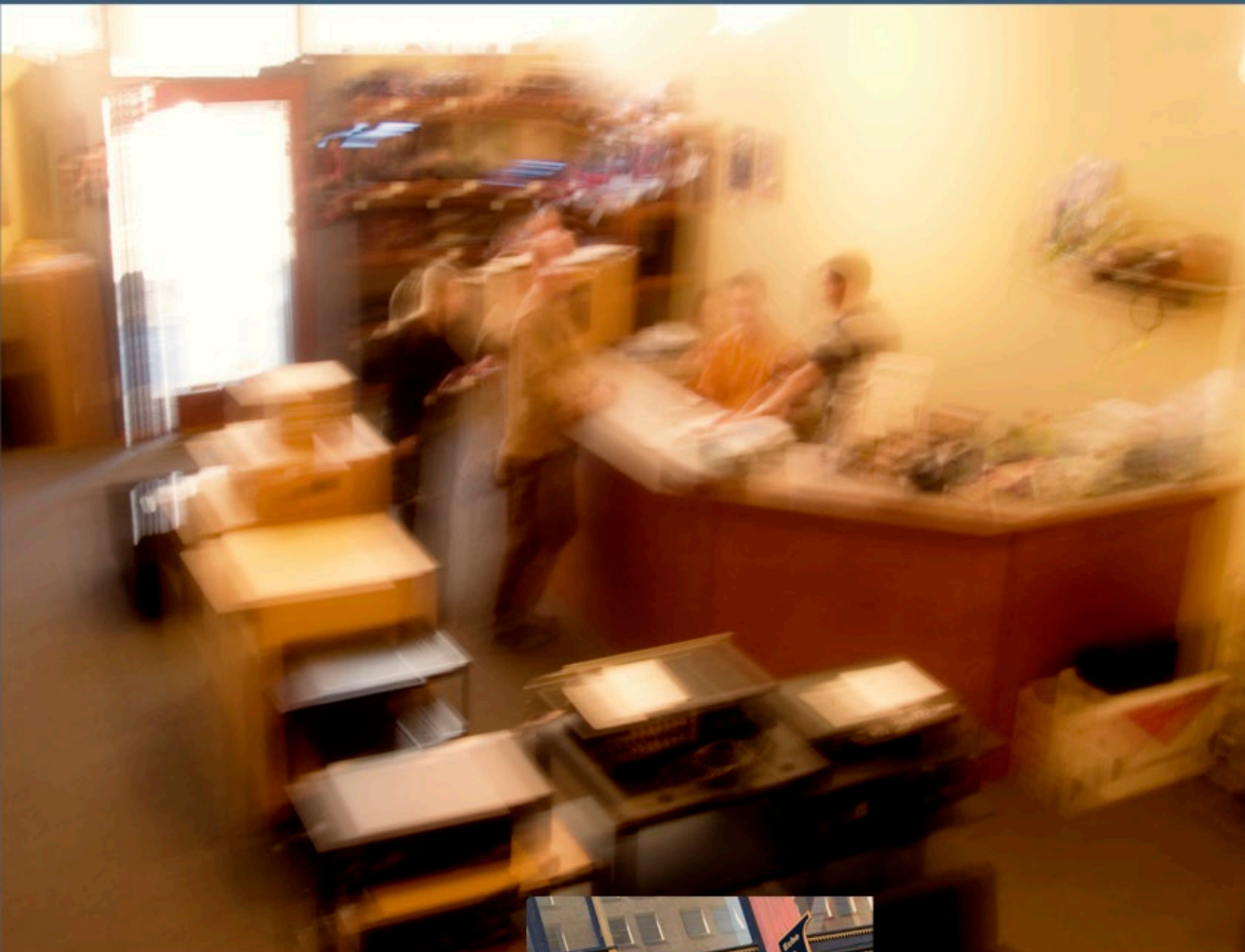
Tonally, it is very neutral and possesses enough resolution to keep all but most fanatical vinyl fan happy. Whether you have a \$5,000 system or a \$30,000 system, you could be very happy with the VK-P5. You will have to upgrade pretty substantially to outgrow this one.

We will keep you posted in a future issue when the SIX-PAK has been installed and evaluated, but for now, we give the VK-P5 our highest recommendation. ●

MANUFACTURER

Balanced Audio Technologies

1300 First State Blvd. Suite A
Wilmington, DE 19804
(302) 999-8855
www.balanced.com



When you want to hear the truth...



echo
audio

Fine Home Audio
Bought - Sold

425 SW 10th Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97205

888.248.echo
503.223.2292

echohifi.com
echoaudio@hotmail.com

m-f 11-6
sat 12-5

PERIPHERALS

Tables: Modded Rega P25/
RB600 w/Shelter 501 II, Linn LP-12,
Lingo/Cirkus/Trampolin w/Sumiko
Blackbird

Electronics: Modwright 9.0 SWL
linestage, Conrad-Johnson ACT
2 linestage, Pass Aleph 3 power
amp, Conrad-Johnson Premier 350
power amp.

Interconnects: DH Labs
Revelation, Cardas Golden
Presence, Acrolink 7N-A2070(from
turntable to phono pre)

Speaker Cables: DH Labs Q-14,
Cardas Golden Presence

Power Cords: DH Labs Power
Plus, Essential Sound Products,
"The Essence Reference"

Power Conditioning: Running
Springs Audio Jaco

Vibration Control: Symposium
Ultra platforms underneath Disc
player, preamp, power amp and
power supply for Disc player.

FAVORITE TEST TUNES

Genesis Trick of the Tail LP
(MoFi)

Michael Hedges Aerial
Boundaries LP (Windham Hill)

Jean-Michael Jarre Zoolook
LP (Dreyfus)

Tom Waits Mule Variation LP

Metallica Black Album LP

John Klemmer Straight From
The Heart LP (nautilus)

Johnny Winter Second Winter
LP (Columbia)

The deHavilland Aries 845-G

— STEVE HOFFMAN



The deHavilland Aries 845-G

The deHavilland Electric Amplifier Co. updated their flagship SET monoblock with wonderful results. This single-ended, directly heated triode amplifier puts out a whopping 30 watts per channel into an 8 ohm load, enough to drive most speakers to acceptable listening levels. This class-A, zero-feedback design uses the 845 tube developed by RCA/Cunningham with no negative feedback and just three tubes per channel. The sound is pure, lifelike and (unlike some 300B type SET amps), quite rich and meaty.

The big 845 tubes work well in audio applications, and are wonderful in the Aries. Amazing soundstage, a harmonic “rightness” and wonderful dynamics are all hallmarks of the Aries 845-G. Don’t let the 30 watts per channel fool you or dismay you, these are single ended watts, and each one counts. A powerful sound comes out of these amps, enough to drive my medium-efficiency Tetra 506 custom LTD speakers just fine.

The deHavilland company is located in California, and designer Kara Chaffee believes SET amplifiers are the way to go. There is nothing like the sound of a good SET amplifier; no push, no pull, just one tube doing everything for a cohesive sound. Sales and marketing director George Kielczynski agrees, and they make quite a team. The deHavilland gear stands out in a crowd, with a distinctive look that is almost retro. The best thing is that the \$7,999 price tag won’t kill you either!

For the nerds in the audience, there are plenty of goodies under the hood. The Aries features point-to-point wiring, Electra-Print transformers and premium capacitors from Auricap and Hovland. I noticed Cardas and Kimber wire snaking around, and was told the whole thing is held together with Wonder Solder. Now put your favorite record on and forget about this stuff!

Don’t let the 30 watts per channel fool you or dismay you, these are single ended watts, and each one counts.

My demo pair of Aries 845-G arrived with the current Chinese 845 output tubes in a matched pair (the nice sounding SuperTNT 845B), along with a vintage 6AU5 driver and 6SN7 voltage amp tube. The 6AU5 is an
(continued)





ENCORE PERFORMANCE

CT5 COMPOSITE TRIODE PREAMPLIFIER

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

conrad-johnson It just sounds right.

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

ancient television sweep tube, rescued from oblivion. It kicks in a bunch of midrange magic to the equation and, along with the 6SN7 (which you can “roll” to flavor at will), makes the 845 tube in this circuit almost as harmonically complex as my favorite SET—the Western Electric 300B. The monoblocks feature solid-state rectification with hexfred diodes, which helps the tight, extended bass response.

The single-ended sound is so lifelike with these amps that you can hear the breath of life I try to bring out in my masterings.

I plugged them in, waited for the automatic tube-saving time delay to kick in, and warmed everything up for an hour. I set the output tube bias using the nifty on-board bias meter, and let them RIP. First thing I played was *Can't Get Enough (Of Your Love)* by Bad Company, a version I was mastering for the Audio Fidelity 24 karat Gold CD version of their self-titled album. They sounded great, with no hint of fatigue, nice dynamic drive and wonderful tonality, right out of the box. This makes my work as a mastering engineer so much more fun. I love to watch the tubes glow and the single-ended sound is so lifelike with these amps that you can hear the breath of life I try to bring out in my masterings.

When I review a new piece of gear, I always use music I am working on at the moment. The reason I do this is that I am

(continued)

familiar with it from listening on a variety of systems in studios, homes and project rooms. It's easy for me to hear sonic differences on a new component because I have spent so much time listening to that particular music.

An SET is an SET, But...

The main difference between the Aries and the crop of 300B SET amplifiers is the meat portion. The lower spectrum of music has a lot of power and definition. My WAVAC EC-300B is all sweetness and light; delicate and moving. However nine watts just won't rock your world unless you are using a horn-loaded loudspeaker. Ms. Chaffee wanted a real-world SET amplifier that moves air. Yes, it sacrifices some of that sweetness when you listen to a recorded piano recital, but if you are an all around music person, rock one day, string quartets the next, these monoblocks are for you. Of course, if your speakers are horn-loaded you don't really need 30 watts; that is inglorious overkill, but in the real world with less efficient speakers, it makes it possible for one to experience the SET sound while still keeping the dynamic drive and excitement of a higher-power amplification system intact.

The Aries 845-G monoblocks are pure-sounding in their own right. I tried several different line stages with these amps and could detect the sonic signature of each with no problem. The \$17,000 Emotive Audio Epifania line stage made these amps sing, but deHavilland's own Mercury 2 line stage was no slouch.

If you've been avoiding buying a single-ended triode amplifier for fear of wimpy sound, fear no longer; the Aries 845-G will drive your speakers to a

respectable level and give you amazing single ended sound in the process.

A Final Word on the 845 Tube

Before the Japanese discovered these tubes would work in high-end audio 10 or 20 years ago, you could buy a new old-stock RCA or GE pair from the 1930s or 40s for \$20 a pair. Now, they are thousands. So, for all intents and purposes, we are stuck with the current production. I find these tubes work well in Ms. Chaffee's design; after all, she voiced the amps with them in place.

I think using vintage RCA 845s in this circuit is just a waste of money. If you're rich and want to do it, I can't stop you, but I can tell you that my experience has been to go with the tube brand the gear was voiced with originally. I don't think the Aries drives any of their tubes particularly hard, so these 845s should last a good long time without any meltdowns. You can buy a matched set between about \$150 and \$550, depending on where you choose to source them.



THE VERDICT

The Aries 845-G could very well be the perfect compromise for someone wanting the delicacy of a single-ended amplifier, yet needs more power. 30 watts per channel opens the door to a much wider range of speakers than the 300B based amplifiers. Whether you are new to the world of single ended amplification, or have listened to many, the 845-G is one you will enjoy! ●

MANUFACTURER

deHavilland Electric Amplifier Company

108 Wallace Lane
Cloverdale, CA 95425
707-894-0176
www.dehavillandhifi.com

PERIPHERALS

Line Stage

Emotive Audio Epifania
deHavilland Mercury 2

Digital Source

Various DAT machines
YBA/Audio Refinement CD Complete

Speakers

Tetra 506 LTD custom

Cables

Kubala-Sosna interconnects, bi-wired speaker cables and power cords

Vibration Control

Symposium Ultra platforms, Rollerblocks and ISIS rack

FAVORITE TEST TUNES

Bad Co. Bad Co. (CD) Audio Fidelity

Vince Guaraldi Trio A Charlie Brown Christmas (LP) Classic Productions

Nat King Cole After Midnight (LP) Pure Pleasure

Eva Cassidy Time After Time (LP)

The Aperion 633-T Speakers

— JEFF DORGAY



The Aperion 633-T Speakers

If you read the first issue of TONE-Audio, you know that I really liked the Aperion 632-LR bookshelf speaker. This little 6 ½ two-way was impeccably built and offered a good look into high-end sound at an entry-level price. For those of you with a bit more room, a bit stronger back and a few more bucks in your checking account, the 633-T is a great step up. At \$1000 for the pair, they also offer tremendous value.

Building on the 632, the 633 is in a much larger cabinet, measuring 41.5" tall, a hair over 10" wide and 18" deep. For those of you that didn't read issue one, Aperion speakers are designed here in the Pacific Northwest and assembled in China. The build quality is good for a \$5000 set of speakers, but wait, these are only a \$1000 set of speakers! Like the much smaller 632s, these also come packaged in the giant Crown Royal bags, so the finish won't be scratched in transit. The test pair came in lovely piano black, but you can also order them in cherry as well. (same price for either finish) The 633s have only a single pair of binding posts, so they cannot be bi-wired.

Aperion speakers are only available direct from aperionaudio.com; so don't expect to do a shootout at your local dealer.

Aperion speakers are only available direct from aperionaudio.com; so don't expect to do a shootout at your local dealer. Should you decide that they are not your cup of tea, they will pay for return shipping, as long as they return unmolested, so keep the boxes and the bags handy. If you are considering a speaker in this price range, you can't go wrong with this arrangement.

Initial Set Up

Once unboxed, set-up is a breeze with these speakers. I started about three feet out in the room, with the speakers about 7 feet apart. 20 minutes later, the best balance was with the speakers 39 inches out, 78 inches apart with 3 degrees of toe-in. I have a fairly good-sized room (24 x 36) and had them on the long wall facing my workstation. If you have a smaller room, you will probably want to start just a bit further out in the room.

One thing that really impressed me with the Aperions, was how fast they were ready to play serious music. A little tubby right out of the box, by day two (continuous play) the woofers were just right. I did all of my listening tests with that sexy Naim Nait 5i from last issue and my Prima Luna Prologue 2 integrated amplifier, so that I could get both perspectives on the sound. I also felt

that these two amplifiers would be something that one might purchase along with a pair of speakers priced in this range. The Ah! Tjoeb 4000 CD player with all the Upscale Audio

tweaks was my primary source component along with DH Labs Revelation interconnects and their Q-10 speaker cables. I started with budget basement Home Depot 12 gauge speaker wire, but these speakers definitely have enough resolution to benefit from a good pair of cables. *(continued)*



Elegance. Simplicity. Truth.



ModWright
Instruments

modwright.com

360.247.6688

21919 NE 399th Street
Amboy, WA 98601

The Sound

Because these speakers share the same drivers and crossover as the 632, the voicing is identical, but thanks to the additional woofer and larger cabinet, go quite a bit lower. A quick check of the Aperion website claims a low point of 38hz, but these seemed to be going deeper, so out with the tone generator. Sure enough, the 633s have very solid bass down to 30hz, so those of you that like music with a lot of low frequency information will not be disappointed. The 632 is a great speaker, but if you are a two channel person, I would highly suggest stepping up to the 633, because by the time you buy a decent pair of stands, you will be pretty close to the cost of 632s and get more LF extension with a similar footprint. (Plus kids and pets will have a harder time knocking these over...)

Once I had the first two days out of the way, I listened to a lot of different music from hip-hop to classical and I was pleasantly surprised with everything I heard. Buying a thousand dollar pair of speakers can be a real crapshoot. The competition is fierce and there are a number of good products, but I nominate the 633s for the top of the heap award, as these are one of the best sounding speakers I have heard in this price range.

Boo Berry, Count Chocula, or Frankenberry

Which sound do you prefer? Not as detailed as a pair of Pro-Ac Tablette signatures, nor as laid back as a pair of Vandersteen 2ces (both costing about 50% more), the Aperion 633s had a very neutral tonal balance. If you like your
(continued)

sound a bit more on the warm side, consider tube amplification for a bit more romance. Mr. O'Brien was kind enough to let me borrow his old Dynaco SCA-35 integrated amplifier that has 15 watts of lush EL-84 power per channel and it was a ton of fun. The Prima Luna was more of a modern tube sound and the Naim Nait 5i was very fast and detailed. Each provided a great experience, though I was very impressed with the Naim set-up because of the more powerful bass presentation.

Just to see how well they did upstream, I did substitute my ModWright 9.0 SE linestage and Pass Aleph 3, which is the core of my second reference system. The Aperions definitely let more music come through and could be used in a pinch in a higher end system.

The bass response of the 633s was taut without being boomy. One of my favorite bass riffs is *The Journey* on Boston's **Don't Look Back**. I know, it's really a bright, compressed recording, but I'm talking about bass here. Click to track two and you will see what I mean. Many inexpensive speakers just won't go down this low in a convincing manner. Another favorite is *Just Chillin* on the Crash Test Dummies **Give Yourself a Hand**. And yes, Audioslave really kicks ass on these speakers too.

Treble is smooth without being harsh and again, the better your source component, the happier you will be. Even though I am a tube guy at heart, the Aperions with the Naim Nait made for some of the best budget sound I have ever heard. Add a

decent CD player, some reasonable cables and you can have a great entry level system for about \$3000.



What they really got right at Aperion though, is the midrange. These speakers have a generous helping of midrange clarity that makes them very easy to listen to for a long period of time. This was what I enjoyed about them the most. Again, comparing them to the ProAc and Vandersteens, the 633s were about row 8, the 2Ces were about row 15 and the Tablettes about row 3. Running through the gamut of male and female vocal records were all very pleasant, with things sounding as they should. Regard-

less of your musical tastes, you should be able to enjoy the 633s. One of the other bonuses about going to the 633 is that you pick up 4db of efficiency (86 db vs. 90 db) over the 632s. Bottom line - the 50 clean watts per channel will get you evicted. There is a fair amount of techie stuff that goes into detail about the new HD-X3 crossover on the Aperion website. Mumbo jumbo aside, what I noticed about these speakers was

that they worked very well with a tube or solid-state amplifier, which suggests good crossover design.

In addition to good tone, the 633s provide a very good level of detail all the way from low volume up to brain-damage level. With a maximum power handling capability of 300 watts, you don't need to knock pictures off the walls to hear detail.

The only real weakness of these speakers is that they do not throw a very deep three-dimensional picture of the music. Horizontal imaging is good, but I am assuming that Aperion aims their product more at the home theater market, where you

would have surround channels take care of this information, they concentrated more on tonality and balance.

THE VERDICT

Back when I had a real job, my boss used to say, "good, fast, cheap; pick two." With inexpensive speakers I say "imaging, dynamic range, tonal accuracy; pick two, get one if you are lucky." With this criterion in mind, I think the Aperion 633-T gives you about two and a quarter of these three, which is excellent for a thousand bucks. We like these enough that they are headed to a permanent home at NW's house for her system.

The 633-Ts can be the cornerstone of a great two channel system or a home theater system. They sound great, are easy to setup and very well built. The folks at Aperion make it so easy for you to purchase their speakers you can't go wrong. Tell them I sent you. ●

Bottom line - the 50 clean watts per channel will get you evicted.

PACIFIC CREEK

MANUFACTURER

Aperion Audio

18151 SW Boones Ferry Rd
Portland, OR 97224
1-866-APERION
www.aperionaudio.com

PERIPHERALS

Line Stage

Modwright Instruments 9.0
SWL(with Bybee upgrade),
PrimaLuna ProLogue 3 Preamplifier

Power Amplifier

Pass Aleph 3, Naim Nait 5i
(as integrated), Dynaco SCA-35
(as integrated)

Digital Source

Ah! Tjoeb 4000 CD Player with
and without Benchmark DAC-1

Analog Source

Rega P3/Shure V15/BAT VK-P5

Cables

DH Labs Power Plus AC cords,
DH Labs Revelation Interconnects,
DH Labs Q-14 Speaker Cables

Power Conditioning

Running Springs Audio Haley

FAVORITE TEST TUNES

Crash Test Dummies Give
Yourself a Hand, CD (Arista)

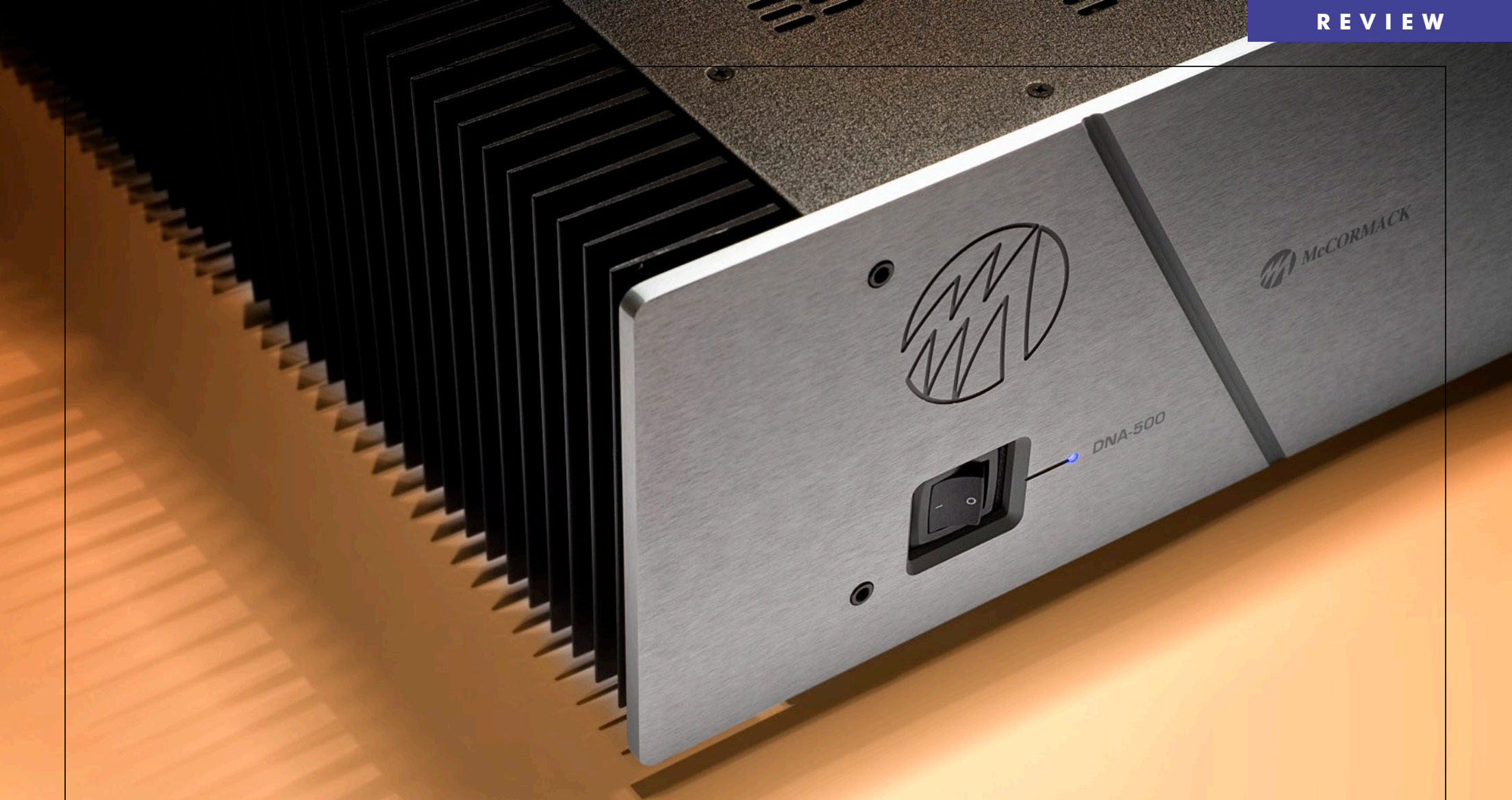
Boston Don't Look Back,
LP (Epic)

Dave Grusin Discovered Again!,
LP (Sheffield)

Stevie Ray Vaughn Couldn't
Stand the Weather, CD (Epic)

Brand X Livestock, LP (Passport)

Pacific Creek, Inc.
P.O.Box 992
Issaquah, WA 98029
Tel: 425-961-0136
www.pacificcreek.com



The McCormack DNA-500

— JEFF DORGAY

Big And Mighty: The McCormack DNA-500



As someone who used to own various amplifiers from major players, I'm amazed by a 500-watt per channel amplifier I can pick up without busting a gut. Fortunately, the excitement doesn't end there. Steve McCormack has always had a reputation in the industry for building solid gear at reasonable prices, and the McCormack DNA-500 upholds that tradition. After a few months of listening to them on a daily basis, this is an amplifier all but those with the fattest wallets could live with happily ever after (i.e. about 95 percent of us).

BUT DO I REALLY NEED 500 WATTS PER CHANNEL?

This is the question everyone asked. While you may not really need to have a thousand watts on tap, especially if you have relatively efficient speakers, it doesn't hurt. If you enjoy a bit higher SPL, or listen to music from either side of the fence that has a lot of dynamic range, it is wonderful to have the extra juice. Just as many people who are quite content with a pair of small speakers that sound fantastic, once you hear a good, full-range system that goes all the way down to 20hz or so, you see what you're missing.

Where the DNA-500 really shines, though, is dynamics. With all the talk about sound-staging, imaging and the like, we often forget that another important aspect of music reproduction is dynamics. After a lot of listening, even at modest levels, I noticed a greater lack of fatigue with the DNA-500, because I was never pushing this amplifier close to its limits.

INITIAL SET UP

Upon arrival, the DNA-500 was integrated into my current system, which had

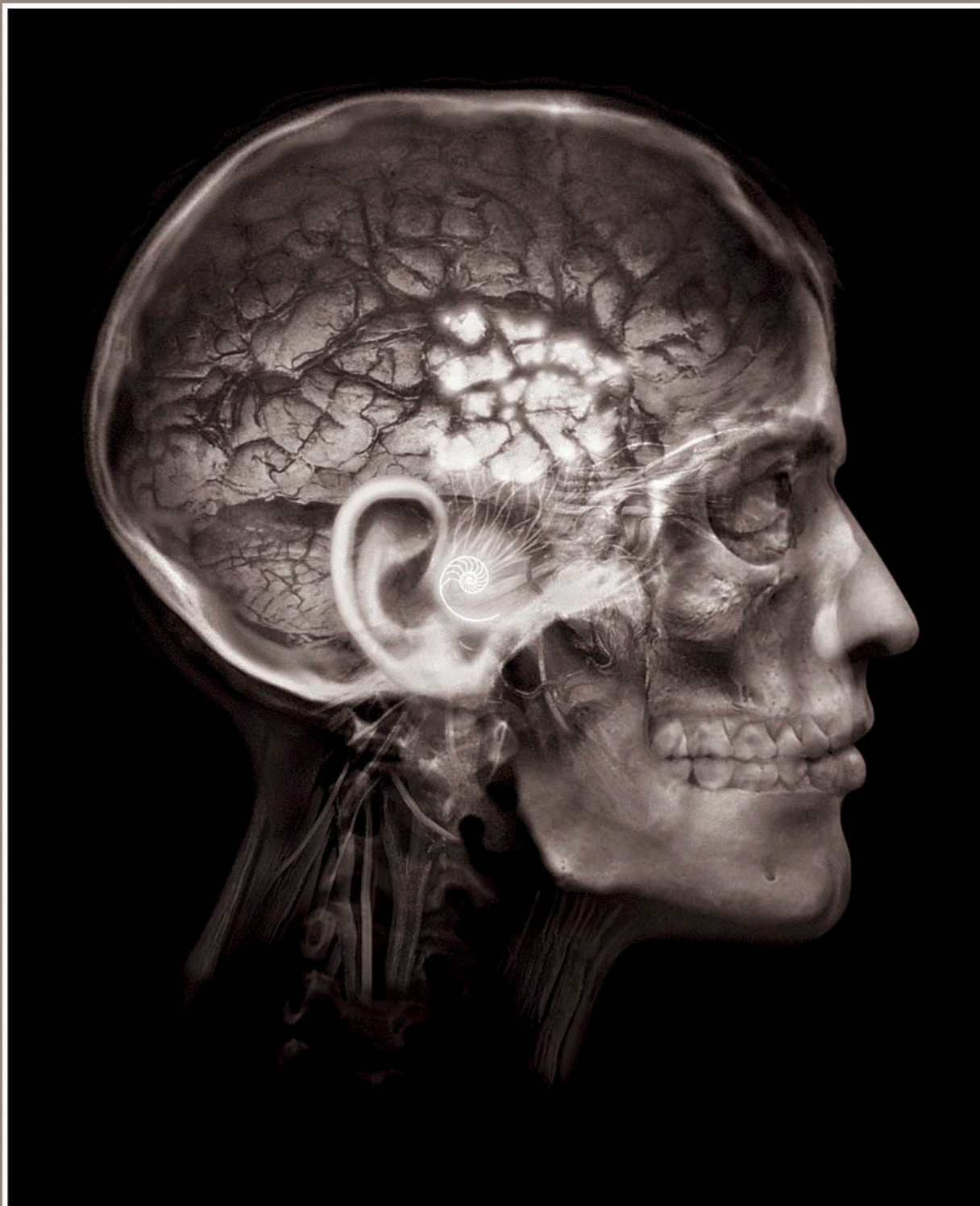
consisted of the Emotive Audio Poeta Linestage, Pass Aleph 5 and the Penaudio Serenades, that I had been listening to with my digital and analog sources for quite some time. While the Pass amplifier has a ton of detail and control, I could not play the 86 db Serenades as loud as I would have liked at times, so I was anxious to see just how the McCormack would crank.

The DNA-500 has squishy rubber feet on the bottom and comes thoughtfully packaged with cork coasters in case you are putting it on a surface you would like to protect. As I was moving the

Penaudios a bit, looking for the optimum spot, I kept the amp on my trusty piano dolly for a week. (See the gadgets column this month.) Yes, the wooden piano dolly did cloud the sound a touch, but it let me easily position everything right where I wanted it. After that, the DNA-500 had a home on top of a Symposium Ultra platform, which tightened everything up nicely. Interconnects used were Tara Labs The One, power cords were the Essential Sound Products The Reference I mentioned last issue (however the DNA-500 requires a 20-amp plug) and

(continued)

**Where the DNA-500
really shines, though,
is dynamics.**



Let sound be your guide.

cardas.com

power conditioning was handled by Running Springs. After I had spent considerable time with this system, I swapped out the Poeta and the Tara Cables for my trusty Modwright 9.0 SWL and much less expensive cabling from DH Labs.

NUTS AND BOLTS

The main reason the DNA-500 is remarkably svelte for its power range is Steve McCormack's distributed node topology. This keeps most of the power supply capacitors as close as possible to the output stages, and allows a lower output impedance. Part of this approach is using multiple, smaller capacitors rather than a couple of very large ones. I am convinced this is what contributes significantly to the outstanding speed of this amplifier.

The main reason the DNA-500 is remarkably svelte is Steve McCormack's distributed node topology.

The DNA-500 is a fully balanced amplifier from input to output, and which opens up a lot of choices for a potential linestage. The amplifier is essentially a pair of bridged, lower-powered amplifiers per channel, that because of the massive power supply and careful design, can deliver over 500 watts per channel into 8 ohms, and close to 1,000 watts per channel into 4 ohms. Keep in mind that the DNA-500 will produce its full rated power from a 15-amp line, but if you have the luxury of feeding it with a dedicated 20-amp circuit, it will actually exceed its rated power by about 15 percent! I would highly suggest a good aftermarket power cord as well, to keep the juice flowing to this one. *(continued)*



One small technical detail worth noting: the DNA-500 requires 2.2 volts to drive to maximum output, and has an input impedance of only 10,000 ohms. While this may be a concern for some older preamps, we had no problem driving it with a number of them here. Even the Joule Electra LA-150 we tested last issue had an available higher-gain setting that allowed it to drive the DNA-500 with no problem.

A combination of FETs in the input and driver stages, along with bipolar output transistors, gives the DNA-500 its signature sound of extreme musicality along with the tremendous power and control. Popping the top revealed meticulous build quality and a plethora of good components, probably better than you might expect at this price point.

If you are interested in a major explanation of the inner workings of the DNA-500, Chip Stern at 6moons did such an extensive technical overview, anything I would be saying here might be viewed as plagiarism, so I suggest keeping your inner nerd happy with a visit to their site.

THE SOUND

For those of you who aren't as concerned about the techie stuff, I can assure you the DNA-500 sounds great, and this is coming straight from the mouth of a bonafide tube guy. Many of us have probably offended more than one person over the years arguing about whether solid state or tube electronics sound "better". We all know a well-crafted tube circuit can provide a bit more of that "reach out and touch it-ness" that solid state seems to lack. But thanks to much better components and more years of design expertise, the solid-state side of the fence is looking better all the time.

Am I mellowing out in my old age? Perhaps I am, but not as much as you might think. The DNA-500 provided me with a tremendous amount of musical enjoyment, so much that I didn't even peruse these questions while I was listening. And that's the point, at least part of it. This amplifier sounded pretty darn good right out of the

box, but after about 100 hours was where it stopped improving dramatically. I

have four separate 20-amp circuits in my studio where the hi-fi goes, so I got to take advantage of everything the DNA-500 was capable of delivering.

Even from the first minute I plugged in this amplifier, I noticed a lot of control and authority in the lower registers, reminiscent of when I used to own Krell gear. Call me a sentimental oaf, but **Dark Side of The Moon** never sounded better than this! Mid-range clarity was excellent, and as a tube lover, this is the ultimate test for me. Listening to a fair amount of acoustic music revealed

accurate tonality without being overly bright or forward like some solid state amplifiers. I got the same results with the high end: very smooth and natural, never grainy.

I really enjoyed listening to familiar records with a lot of texture and spatial detail as well. The song *What's He Building?* from the Tom Waits **Mule Variation** album took on a decidedly eerie feel, as did the

(continued)

Call me a sentimental oaf, but "Dark Side of The Moon" never sounded better than this!



"It's kinda heavy, but when I couldn't find my Walkman . . ."

NEW at Upscale Audio

CARY SLI-80 Portable Stereo

Only 42 Pounds!



AESTHETIX CALYPSO



MUSICAL FIDELITY
kW 500 Integrated Amp
and X-10^{V3}



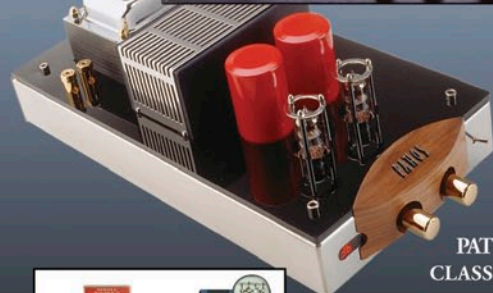
BAT VK-55



ATMA-SPHERE
S-30



MANLEY
STEELHEAD



PATHOS
CLASSIC ONE

CARY 805C
ANNIVERSARY



TRIANGLE
ALTEA Es



Central Scrutinizer in **Joe's Garage**. This amplifier possesses a lot of air and has a BIG sound. That sound, along with limitless dynamic capability, is where the DNA-500 gets addictive in a hurry. Whether it was my neighbor listening to large-scale orchestral music or me rocking out, this amplifier never ran out of gas. If you have never listened to a truly high-powered amplifier, this is another realm of musical realism that will make it hard to return to the 100 watt-per-channel world. Laugh now, but one listen and you, too, will be convinced.

But the acid test for me was getting out the Apogeos. I know this is not a currently produced speaker, but it is a flavor I really enjoy. Until now, it has been a flavor I have been able to enjoy on a

While I can just about fry eggs on my Aleph, the DNA-500 stays comfortably cool.

very limited basis because these are 82db speakers. My Calipers were just sitting there in the corner, begging to be hooked up, so I put Skeptical Roy to work, and it was amazing. With 1,000 watts of power per channel on tap (the Calipers are about 3 ohms), this was fantastic! Those of you out there that still have a pair of these speakers will be able to enjoy them to their fullest with a DNA-500. Anyone with similarly inefficient speakers will enjoy the same bliss; this amplifier is almost impossible to push to clipping.

While I can just about fry eggs on my Aleph, the DNA-500 stays comfortably cool even after hours of high-volume listening.

(continued)



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

analyzer and custom built test gear. Names like Mullard, Telefunken, Siemens, Svetlana... you name it.

See pictures on our website! And remember... we **DO NOT** use your amp as a tube tester.

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

UPSCALE
AUDIO
HIGH FIDELITY • MUSICAL SYSTEMS

www.upscaleaudio.com

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

On that subject, if you do not have one of those nifty SPL meters from Radio Shack, I highly suggest purchasing one. Because the DNA-500 is so effortless in its presentation, you just might find yourself listening a lot louder than you used to, just because you can. Out of respect to your ears, take a peek at the OSHA website to see how long they suggest you listen to varying sound pressure levels. Considering how loud this amplifier will play, it is a good precaution.

I found the overall sound to be very neutral, so depending on your tastes, choose a linestage accordingly. Personally, I enjoyed this amplifier with a tube linestage to retain a bit of that "tubeyness," with the control and oomph that a solid-state amplifier offers. The Poeta is just a click or two on the romantic side, but the Modwright 9.0 SWL is more neutral and made for an exceptional match. At \$2,200, it makes a great combination with the DNA-500 and could be the cornerstone of a very musically satisfying system for about \$20,000.

THE VERDICT

The McCormack DNA-500 is one of the best-sounding solid-state amplifiers I have heard at any price, offering a level of refinement that makes it a bargain at the \$7,000 price point. Thanks to its flexibility of having balanced and single ended inputs, this is an amplifier you could live with for a very long time. I think you could spend a lot more money upgrading everything else in your system before you grew tired of this one.

Just when you thought you would make it to the end of the review without me making a reference to the automotive world, here it comes. The best way I can compare the tremendous power of the DNA-500 is to my good friend Dave's RUF Porsche. We were out in the Napa Valley one afternoon cruising at about three times the posted speed limit when I

pulled the shifter back from 6th to 5th gear and floored it. We sunk back in the seats and just kept accelerating! That's what you get with the DNA-500: tons of power.

I even suggest this one to you tube lovers out there. If you have grown tired of the rituals your power amplifier requires, this might be what you are seeking. You can still roll NOS tubes in your preamp until the cows come home, but no more power tubes every other year. Ignore this one at your own peril. ●

MANUFACTURER

McCormack Audio of Virginia

2733 Merilee Drive
Fairfax, VA 22031
703-573-9665
www.mccormackaudio.com

PERIPHERALS

Line Stage

Modwright Instruments 9.0 SWL(with Bybee upgrade), Emotive Audio Poeta

Digital Sources

Denon 3910 universal player with Modwright Modifications

Analog Sources

Rega P25/Sumiko Blackbird/Ray Samuels Audio XR-10B

Speakers

ESP Bodhrans, Apogee Caliper, Penaudio Serenades

Cables

Essential Sound Products "The Essence Reference", Running Springs Audio Mongoose

Power Conditioning

Running Springs Audio Jaco

Vibration Control

Symposium Ultra Platforms on Linestage, Amplifier and Disc Player



FAVORITE TEST TUNES

Frank Zappa Joe's Garage LP (Bizarre)

Pink Floyd Dark Side of the Moon LP (MoFi)

Tom Waits Mule Variation LP (Epitaph)

Transatlantic Bridge Across Forever CD (Radiant)

The Doors The Doors CD (DCC)

Elvis The 24kt Hits CD (DCC)

The Benchmark DAC-1

— JEFF DORGAY

SMALL BUT MIGHTY

This is definite proof that great things do come in small packages. If you have an older CD player with a digital out, or even a modestly priced current player that you would like a serious upgrade for, the DAC-1 from Benchmark is the way to go. Known a lot better for their pro gear, Benchmark supplies a lot of recording studios with their products and has a tremendous amount of digital expertise.

The DAC-1 is beyond small, it's tiny, only measuring 9.33 x 9.5 x 1.7 in., weighing a few pounds and is dwarfed by a big aftermarket power cord! The box has balanced inputs and outputs along with an optical and coaxial (with RCA adapter) inputs, so you should be able to make it work with whatever hardware configuration you have.

(continued)





Very Versatile Indeed

There are also three configurations for the output level on the DAC-1. You can switch it between fixed level outputs, calibrated outputs (which have 10-turn pots on the back to fine tune) and a variable output, controlled by the level control on the front panel. This alone would be enough to justify the DAC-1. How many times have you had a system problem that required tracing and you just didn't have another linestage lying around? Some of you might laugh at the thought of this, but if you have been there, it's NOT funny. Should you ever need to troubleshoot a system glitch, just plug the Benchmark in and use it as a preamp.

If that wasn't enough, they even throw in a headphone jack on the front panel that does a more than adequate job with good phones. While shooting some AKGs for AK's column, I gave this a whirl with great results. The DAC-1 is very versatile indeed.

Thanks to their jitter free UltraLock™ circuitry, Benchmark claims that you can run a very long cable from your digital output to their processor with no problems and that cable quality is not a major issue. I was using a Cardas Golden Reference digital cable with my past DAC and was very happy with it, but this just sounded like too

much of a challenge to pass up. Substituting a \$30 Radio Shack digital cable that was about 15 feet long really didn't seem to make a lot of difference with this processor. I must say that I was amazed at this!

Set Up and Initial Observations

I tried the DAC-1 with about seven different CD transports from my ultra-cheapo Pioneer 563 (that you can find on EBay for \$50) all the way up to my Modwright modded Denon 3910, just to see where the

cutoff point for performance was. Again, thanks to the circuitry in the Benchmark, I got amazingly good results from paring it up with the inexpensive Pioneer. I got

the best results with the transport section of my Jolida JD100A player, with the Phillips transport offering a touch more transparency than the Pioneer, though hardly enough to justify the \$900 difference.

All of my initial tests were done with the stock power cord and again, even the difference offered with the \$650 ESP power cord was not enough to justify using it with a thousand dollar DAC. (However, when I used the DAC-1 on my reference system, stepping up to the better power cord did make enough of a difference to justify) I did the rest of my listening with the DH Labs Power Plus just to build up some audio karma, but had a hard

time telling if it made a difference. I spent 90% of my listening time with the DAC-1 on my second system, which consisted of the outstanding ACI Sapphire XLs, Modwright 9.0 SWL Linestage and Pass Aleph 3 power amplifier.

One area I did notice some difference, was in swapping interconnects. My favorite interconnect for the DAC-1 was the Cardas Golden Presence cable that I am using in my reference system worked like a charm here because it has proved to be very neutral in every system I have used it with.

The Sound

The sound of the DAC-1 is extremely neutral. If you want to inject romance in your system, you will have to search elsewhere, this one tells it like it is, nothing more nothing less. The Benchmark site has a ton of specs for this processor, but the bottom line; it sounds great and is DEAD QUIET.

Compared to the handful of \$1000-1500 CD players that were taking up residence, the Benchmark with the Pioneer 563 beat them all in every aspect, there's a lot of musical performance in this tiny box! Even in my reference system the DAC-1 held its own. I still prefer the presentation of my Modwright Denon at this level, because it has a bit more air, texture and dimensionality. But remember, I'm a tube guy and I like that kind of sound.

(continued)

Some of you might laugh at the thought of this, but if you have been there, it's NOT funny.

An exceptional hi-fi system is **not** a luxury.

For over thirty years, **Naim Audio** has designed and hand-built music playback systems that are musically outstanding and easy to use.

Please visit one of our retailers to listen for yourself.



Pictured at left: Naim **NAIT 05** FM Tuner, **CD5i** Compact Disc Player, **NAIT 5i** Integrated Amplifier, and **Ariva** Loudspeakers.

It's a pleasure!

naim
WORLD CLASS HI FI

Naim Audio North America
5657 West Howard Street
Niles, Illinois 60714 USA

Telephone: (847) 647-2293
Facsimile: (847) 647-2461
<http://www.naimusa.com>

During the review period, I was able to put the Benchmark in about five different systems and was pleased everywhere it went. I even lent it out to a few friends that have been thinking of upgrading their digital gear a bit and they all gave the DAC-1 a serious thumbs up. To my knowledge, two of them bought the processor.

As I was working on a piece about music from the 80s during this review, I got to revisit a lot of my old favorite music through this player. I bought a lot of those CDs back in the 80s and you all know what digital was like in those days! One of my favorite test tracks is *Workin on My Tan* by Tim Curry. About a third of the way through the tune he sings "take a bus, take a truck" they did a great job of capturing the sound of a city bus going by and on many other digital playback systems, this sounds very fake. Through the DAC-1 it was phenomenal.

Ok, so you don't care about bus sounds, how about music?

Rest assured it was fantastic everywhere else too. Running through the standard female vocal tracks was even better than expected, but another area that this processor really shined was listening to solo piano. Going back to some earlier Windham Hill, I was listening to Liz Story and really enjoyed how well this processor captured the Steinway sound; full bodied, plenty of resonance and not thin. And we just happen to have a Steinway in the house for a reference. *(continued)*



THE VERDICT

The Benchmark DAC-1 makes a great reference component and is definitely not going back to the manufacturer. Unless you have quite a few thousand dollars to spend on a digital front end, I doubt you will find more sound for the money anywhere.

For those of you with anything less than the most expensive components, this may be all you need for CD playback. Considering how inexpensive three-year-old CD transports are, you could have an outstanding combination for very little money.

This one is going to find a permanent home in the TONE office and I nominate the DAC-1 for our first Exceptional Value Award. ●

MANUFACTURER

Benchmark Media Systems

5925 Court Street Rd
Syracuse, NY 13206
1-800-BNCHMRK
www.benchmarkmedia.com

PERIPHERALS

Line Stage

Modwright Instruments 9.0 SWL (with Bybee upgrade), Conrad Johnson ACT 2

Power Amplifier

Pass Aleph 3, Conrad Johnson Premier 350

Digital Source

Pioneer 563 (as Transport) Jolida CD 100A (as Transport) Modwright Denon 3910

Speakers

Penaudio Serenede, ACI Sapphire XL

Cables

Radio Shack budget digital cable, DH Labs Power Plus AC cords, DH Labs Revelation Interconnects, DH Labs Q-14 Speaker Cables Cardas Golden Preference Interconnects and Speaker cables, Essential Sound Products "The Essence Reference" power cords

Power Conditioning

Running Springs Audio Jaco

Vibration Control

Symposium Ultra Platforms, Svelte Shelf and Fat Padz

FAVORITE TEST TUNES

Tim Curry Greatest Hits, CD (A&M)

California Guitar Trio Pathways, CD (DGM)

Neil Young Prairie Wind, CD (Reprise)

Liz Story Solid Colors, CD (Windham Hill)

Pat Metheny Watercolors, CD (ECM)

Rollins Band Liar, CD (Imago)

The Roan Audio Model 5s

— JEROLD O'BRIEN

I have managed to get a reputation around here for being a collector of all things Dynaco and that might be true, but I have more depth than that, I collect mini-monitors too! Because I have always lived in relatively small spaces before moving to the Pacific Northwest, small speakers were usually all my domestic situation would allow. I used to laugh at JD in the old days, moosing around whatever giant panel speaker struck his fancy, while I came home to my LS3/5as feeling mighty smug. *(continued)*

Old habits die hard and one gets comfy with a certain kind of sound. When you get used to the presentation of a good set of small speakers, it is sometimes difficult to go back to something larger. Granted, the floor standers always have more bass, but that pinpoint-imaging thing is something that really turns me on. Lately, I have been listening to a lot of fun speakers in this category and though they all look pretty similar, they all have unique personalities.

My standby speakers are the LS3/5as, an original pair of ProAc Tablettes, a current pair of ProAc Tablette Signatures and the Quad 12Ls. Just for good measure, I rounded up JD's pair of Aperion 632s to round out the field.

Though my trusty modded Dynacos are what I listen to for my

own enjoyment, they have become Frankenamplifiers, and not really anything you could consider a reference that anyone has access to.

The Roan Audio speakers are made here in the Pacific Northwest, in Beaverton, Oregon to be exact. The model 5s are a bit bigger than the ProAc's, but smaller than the Aperions and made here in the US. They feature a 5 1/4" woofer and a 1" soft dome tweeter. The review pair came in cherry and they are available in a few other colors including black. The cabinets are SOLID and passed the knuckle test with flying colors; these speakers have a very understated elegance about them. One of the benefits of no wife/girlfriend/kids/cats/dogs is that I get to leave the speaker grilles off, with

The cabinets are SOLID and passed the knuckle test with flying colors.



no fear. Should you prefer that look, you will really appreciate the grilles on the Roan 5s, because they have a magnet in them and this means no holes in the fronts.

Initial Set Up

My review amplifier and preamp consist of the Modwright SWL 9.0 SE along with the PrimaLuna Prologue 5 power amplifier, which I just upgraded to the PL 7 monoblocks for some extra power. To explore the solid-state side of the equation, I also use the Monarchy SM-70 Pro monoblocks. This is all gear that you might expect to hook a \$1300 pair of speakers to. A few days of non-stop pink noise and the Model 5s were pretty good to go, however after a few weeks they still opened up a bit more.

You can adjust to taste for the bass/midrange balance, but my compromise was about 30 inches from the back wall. According to the spec sheet, the Model 5s are supposed to go down to 55hz. Zipping through the test tracks on my Stereophile test CD revealed almost no drop in output on the 50hz test tone and while down at 40hz, there was definitely useable output. This will vary a bit depending on your room placement.

I had initially used DH Labs Revelation interconnects, but they were just a touch too bright for these speakers that are already a bit forward. Switching to DH Labs Air Matrix was just what the doctor ordered. Power and speaker cables were also from DH, with a Running Springs Danielle taking care of power conditioning duties. JD recently availed me to the Running Springs power conditioner and I am a convert! Adding the Haley to my system reveals a lot more, even at my level.

(continued)

TONEPhoto.



The e-journal of analog and
digital photography.

www.tonepublications.com

subscribe now. (it's free)

The Sound

So lets spin some discs, dammit! I have to warn you right now that even though these speakers have a soft dome tweeter, the high frequency response is just a touch crunchy. Call me crazy, but these speakers remind me a lot of my old Spica TC-50s. Fortunately, they are a lot more robustly built than my TC-50s. While very neutral, they would NOT rock. I lost a few tweeters with those speakers and gave up when the company went under and tweeters became impossible to source.

**I did punish the Model 5s
with a fair amount of Ted
Nugent and the like when
I was breaking them in.**

Like my old Irish mechanic back in Milwaukee used to say "If you want em' to run hard, break em' in hard!" So, after a few weeks of abuse, I settled down for some serious listening. Even now after months of listening, that tweeter is just a touch harsh.

Here's the agony with the Model 5s; they really image wide with the solid state amps but have more depth and romance with the tube amps. The good news is that the tweeter is easily tamed with a slightly romantic tube amplifier. After a lot of listening, I would still go the tube route, but if you are an ultimate detail fanatic, you might just prefer solid state. Should you be really romantic, they sound killer with an old Stereo 70 or CJ MV-50.

(continued)

Even though I bag on the 80s later in the issue, I did really like Thomas Dolby and listening to *I Scare Myself* on **The Flat Earth** showed just how low these little speakers would go. Resisting the urge to drag out some prog music to listen to more bass, I sidestepped over to The Art of Noise's **In Visible Silence** to listen to *Paranormia*. Again, these little speakers did very well with the lower registers, but were punchier with a solid-state power amplifier. Where my Quad's are a bit reserved, the Model 5s are more like the Tablettes, with a bit more forward upper mid-range balance.

Where these speakers really do excel is throwing a huge soundfield and they image like crazy!! The secret to the best sound with these is to avoid toeing them in at all, and get out the tape measure and get the cabinets as close to the same distance from the back wall as you have patience for. A 2" inch difference will make them sound ok, but no big deal. Take the time to get the back wall distance within an eighth of an inch between both speakers and it's a whole different ball-game. A good test for this is to listen to the beginning of the title track on Bowie's **Aladdin Sane**. If that piano floats in mid air, you've got it!

As with just about any smaller speaker, these do better in a smaller room. My minimonitor listening room is only 11 x 14 feet with minimal room treatment. Combine the Roan 5s with a PrimaLuna integrated and you can be in pig heaven for a long time!

THE VERDICT

The Roan Audio 5s are a very well built speaker and are definitely a competitor in the "just above a thousand dollar" category. The tonal balance is just a bit on the hot side of neutral, but they work very well with tube or solid-state amplifiers, so you can easily tune the rest of your system to accommodate them, depending on how you like your presentation.

For those of you that need a high WAF rating, they pass with flying colors. These small, inoffensive boxes are beautifully made and with the right stands should fit into anyone's environment without a problem. ●

MANUFACTURER

Roan Audio LLC.
14485 SW Arabian Drive
Beaverton, OR 97008
1-503-504-2413
www.roanaudio.com

PERIPHERALS

Line Stage Modwright Instruments 9.0 SWL, Highly modified Dynaco PAS-3

Power Amplifier PrimaLuna Prologue 7s, Monarchy SM-70 Pro

Digital Source Ah! Tjoebe 4000 CD player

Analog Source Rega P3/Sumiko Blue Point Special, Bottlehead Seduction, Nakamichi Dragon

Cables DH Labs Power Plus AC cords, DH Labs Air Matrix Interconnects, DH Labs Q-14 Speaker Cables

Power Conditioning Running Springs Audio Haley

Vibration Control Symposium Svelte Shelf and Fat Padz

FAVORITE TEST TUNES

David Bowie Aladdin Sane, LP (RCA)

Art Of Noise In Visible Silence, LP (Island)

Thomas Dolby The Flat Earth, CD (EMI)

Zombies Best Of, CD (DCC)

Yes Close to the Edge, LP (MoFi)

Ted Nugent Cat Scratch Fever, LP (Epic)



Encore Presentation: The PrimaLuna Prologue 7 Monoblocks — JEFF DORGAY

The PrimaLuna Prologue 7 Monoblocks

Here at TONE-Audio, (along with almost everyone else in the audio world) we like PrimaLuna products for a number of reasons; they offer great value, are stylishly understated, extremely well built and sound great. There has only been one collective request from reviewers and owners alike – more power!!



As we just recently reviewed the ProLogue 5 power amplifier in issue one, this will be a fairly short review, because that's what the folks at PrimaLuna did, serve up more power.

The basic sound and character is intact here, albeit a bit more refined. If you enjoyed the other products from PrimaLuna, but shied away because 35 watts per channel just wasn't enough, your answer is here. I first saw them in the Upscale Audio room in January at the CES show and was amazed to see that they had these amps (and the PL preamp) hooked up to a pair of 28 thousand dollar Sonus Faber speakers.

Ambitious for sure, and while the little PrimaLuna amplifiers did not possess the control and resolution as some five figure electronics I heard elsewhere, it had a very musical sound that was fundamentally correct and a lot more fun than some of the other systems I heard that cost more.

Family Resemblance

As you know from reading my last review of the PL preamp and power amp, I really

enjoyed them and thought the PL preamp, with its dual mono power supply and tube rectification was the real jewel of the pair, but the amplifier needed a bit more juice. The Prologue 7 answers that issue, with 70 watts per channel, using four KT88s per channel instead of the two in the Prologue 5, which uses one chassis. Spreading this out to two chassis with separate power supplies really gives you the Prima Luna sound with more authority. Now you have to buy another fancy power cord, but hey, that's what being an audiophile is all about, buying stuff.

Success has not gone to their heads at PL. Everything is still triple boxed and the white gloves are of higher quality than the ones that came with our ProLogue 1 two years ago. Call me wacky, but I really like the smell of new PL gear in the box. It just has a unique, very electronic smell to it. You can smell the resistors and the transformers. I can see it now; "Ralph Lauren introduces Electron for the nerd in you!" Well, maybe I better keep my day job for now.

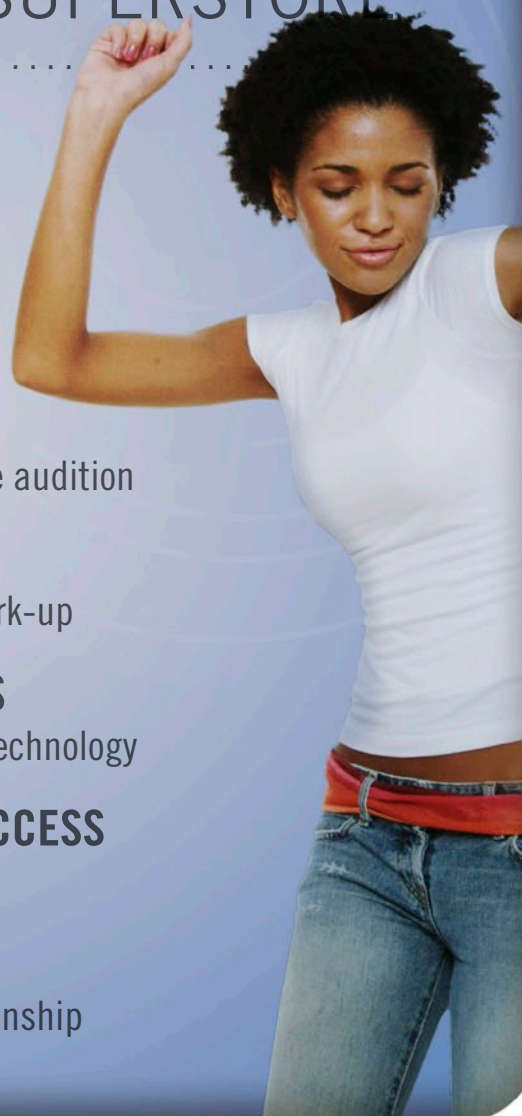
(continued)

I can see it now; "Ralph Lauren introduces *Electron* - For the Nerd in You!" Well, maybe I better keep my day job for now.

FIVE REASONS TO *choose us* OVER THAT ELECTRONICS SUPERSTORE

(AS IF YOU NEEDED
MORE THAN ONE)

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



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

—Thomas J. Norton, *Ultimate AV*

 **aperionaudio.com®**

➤ Visit us on the web:
www.aperionaudio.com

➤ Or give us a ring:
1 888 880-8992

The PL sevens use the same chassis as all past PL products, which no doubt keeps production easier and costs reasonable. A pair of Prologue 7s will set you back \$2699 and there are now some affiliate dealers around the country, so it might be a bit easier to find them in your hood. You can spend the 100 bucks you would have used on shipping to buy some more records! Pricing is the same at Upscale or an affiliate dealer.

Set Up and Burn In

The ProLogue 7s popped right out of the box and only required a few days of break-in to sound their best. 50 hours max. and they will be at their full potential, though they will sound pretty good after an hour. The initial break-in was done with stock power cords and tubes before we started tweaking a bit.

Most of my test listening was done with digital as a source, split between the Ah! Tjoeb 4000 player on its own and the rest using the AT4000 as a transport and the outstanding Benchmark DAC-1. (Also in this issue) I also spun some LPs with my Rega P25/Shelter 501/BAT VK-P5 combination with excellent results. All system interconnects were DH Labs Air Matrix, along with the DH Power Plus AC cords on all three boxes. I felt that this was keeping in with the cost of this system, yet still provided better sound than the stock cords. I also borrowed a Running Springs Haley from my local dealer, which also made a dramatic improvement in the system in terms of noise reduction and improved transient attack.

Power, Power, Power

Just like the difference between the stereo PL power amplifiers, the KT-88 equipped model has a bit beefier power supply and some upgraded

(continued)



capacitors. Thanks to Prima Luna's Adaptive Auto Bias, you don't need to match output tubes, which makes operation reasonably priced and allows you to try a couple of other flavors of output tubes, to have the option of tuning the sound to your taste a bit.

In addition to the adaptive auto bias, the tubes also have a soft start feature, which should contribute to long output tube life. Our ProLogue 1 has two years on it now, with almost continuous use at music editor NB's house with not as much as a burp.

When you use a moderate efficiency pair of speakers, the monoblocks really sing. If you have a pair of Vandersteens or something else with about an 86db sensitivity, you will really love this pair of amplifiers. I also heard the monoblocks at CES along with the outstanding ACI Sapphire speakers which feature an 85db efficiency. Once I got a pair for review, the monos weren't here yet and I started the review with the PL 5 amplifier. While this was fine for Miles Davis, I just couldn't crank the Sapphires with 35 watts as much as I would have liked.

Once the monoblocks got here though, it was a different story. Now when I wanted to wind out Deep Purple's *Made In Japan*, I was in business! Ritchie Blackmore's lead solos had some guts and were well separated from the keyboards. Everything had that last bit of dimension that only comes with power. Everything that sounded good with

the stereo amplifier, sounded GREAT with the monoblocks.

Keep in mind that these are not just the stereo amplifiers with another pair of output tubes added in parallel. The input circuit has been modified somewhat (see the Upscale Audio website for a full description) and the power supply beefed up as well. If you look close, you will also notice a 2-ohm tap on the speaker outputs.

Kevin Deal mentioned that he was surprised checking out some of the audio forums and seeing what people were connecting these amplifiers up to; Martin Logans, Magnepons, etc., so I had to give them the ultimate test, my Apogee Calipers. These have to be one of the most difficult speakers to drive and has the potential of turning your amplifier to a puddle of goo in a hurry. I made Jean get the fire extinguisher ready and hooked them up, but there was no drama, just good music.

For what it's worth, the ProLogue 7s played just as loud as my McIntosh solid state amplifier that is rated at 200wpc. This is a VERY impressive little pair of amplifiers.

A Small Detour

As I mentioned earlier in this and my other PL review, thanks to the Adaptive Auto Bias, you can change the output tubes for different effect and system tuning. If you want dreamy midrange, switch to a set of EL-34s. (Might be really nice for driving a pair of Quads) The stock KT-88s are very good and a good all around compromise, but my favorite tube in this amplifier is the 6L6GC. It gives these amplifiers a bit warmer, more vintage character, almost like a pair of modern MAC 30s. (That won't ever require service) While I found this combination dreamy with most speakers, it will really help tame a set of overly bright tweeters. I don't measure gear for output yet, but it did seem like the 6L6s had just a touch less power than the stock KT88 tubes.

THE VERDICT

The ultimate question, is twice the power and a bit more refinement worth an extra \$1300? No question about it! If you can only afford the stereo amplifier, I won't call you a bad Smurf, but if you can scrape up the extra cash, go for the monoblocks, you'll be glad you did. ●

IMPORTER

Upscale Audio

2504 Spring Terrace
Upland, CA 91784
909-931-9686
www.upscaleaudio.com

PERIPHERALS

Line Stage PrimaLuna ProLogue 3, Modwright Instruments 9.0 SWL

Digital Source Ah! Tjoebe 4000 CD player and Benchmark DAC-1

Analog Source Rega P25/Shelter 501, BAT VK-P5, Teac A-4300

Speakers ACI Sapphire XL, Vandersteen 2Ce Signature, Apogee Caliper

Cables DH Labs Power Plus AC cords, DH Revelation interconnects, DH Labs Q-14 Speaker Cables, Cardas Golden Presence Digital interconnect

Power Conditioning
Running Springs Audio Haley

FAVORITE TEST TUNES

Deep Purple Made in Japan, LP (Warner Bros)

Richard Thompson From Parlour Ballads, LP (Diverse)

Cat Power The Greatest, LP (Matador)

Death Cab for Cutie Plans, CD (Barsuk)

Al DiMeola Land of the Midnight Sun, LP (Columbia)

Van Halen Van Halen, CD (DCC)



Headphone Planet

— Aaron Kovics

AKG 701 HEADPHONES

In the middle of 2005, rumors were running through the internet audio forums that AKG Acoustics, was going to introduce two new entry-level audiophile headphones, the 601 and 701 respectively. There was immediate buzz and the big question was “Would they knock Sennheiser and Beyer Dynamic off the top of the hill?” Everyone that wanted a new toy was very interested in these.

I organized a meet for the Head-Fi forum in November of 2005 (for those of you just tuning in to my column, I am a moderator on this board) at a local hotel for about 50 of our members and it was a blast! Members from Maine to Maryland joined the local NYC members with their gear in tow. There were CD players, turntables, laptops, headphone amplifiers of all kinds and of course – headphones!! One of our members’ (Jeff Wong) day job is wielding a camera and he was kind enough to come along and take pictures. Wes Phillips from Stereophile attended as well, and you can read his account of our meet at:

<http://stereophile.com/news/11405headfi/>

One of our other members who works in sales for Siltech managed to get the first pair of 701s on Earth from AKG during the week on his way to the meet, so they only had a few days of break-in. Being the ever-dedicated headphone enthusiast, he drove down from Boston with a portable set-up in the car, so they could get another 5 hours of playtime. How’s that for enthusiasm?

People in the ugly camp claimed they were too iPod white and the looks took away from the construction. Me, I thought they looked nice, so I got in line for a dance with the new girl.

Everyone was eager to hear the new kid on the block and the crowd was divided on the aesthetics right away, ranging from “the most beautiful headphones ever” to “holy moley, these are UGLY!” People in the ugly camp claimed they were too iPod white and the looks took away from the construction. Me, I thought they looked nice, so I got in line for a dance with the new girl. Fortunately, we all had a turn, but most attendees agreed that this one had potential but they were still too new to tell. The initial reaction was that they were a bit congested and the bass was still a bit wobbly.

(continued)



One listen, and nothing else will do.™

**“No single accessory has had
a more profound effect”**

Greg Petan, *Ultimate Audio Magazine*

New!
Reference
version

The Essence
A/C Power Cord & POWER DISTRIBUTOR



visit our website at:
www.essentialsound.com

Two weeks later at the Head-Fi meet in Tampa (can you tell I'm just a little crazy about headphones?) a member going by the name "Flecom" had a pair with about 250 hours of break-in, so I lined up for another dance. While a meet is a lot of fun because there is so much to experience, it is sometimes difficult as the room noise starts to increase. However, I found that I was really starting to like the 701s. Using an Eastsound E-5 CD player and a Ray Samuels Audio Raptor tubed headphone amplifier (that cost 50% more than the player) I enjoyed what I heard enough to pursue listening in my home and a full review.

Sales have been so brisk, that I had to depend on my buddy Canman who sacrificed his pair for the benefit of all mankind, at least the part of mankind that needs a new pair of headphones.

**I found the headband
rather uncomfortable but
I have a big head. (more
room for brains)**

The 701s have a rated impedance of 62 ohms but they are extremely power hungry. The claimed bandwidth is 10-39,800 hz that initially seemed a bit optimistic. They use a bi-wire 99.99% oxygen-free cable with a nice looking leather headband. I found the headband rather uncomfortable but I have a big head. (more room for brains) while I maxed out the adjustable band, no one else that I have spoken to has found them uncomfortable, so please don't be put off by my experience. (however, if you have a big head, proceed with caution)

(continued)



I was very impressed with the way the input cable comes in on the left channel only and the headband is used in a very ingenious way to hide the wiring to the right channel. Nice touch.

Impressions After Break-in

At first listen I decided right away that I didn't like them. They had a very dark presentation lacking extension at the extreme upper and lower end of the scale. Even though the treble was there, it was missing the sparkle. The cymbals would sound out, but decayed quickly. They also felt a bit recessed. The bass dropped off at the lower frequencies on my reference recordings that I know as well as my six-pack abdomen (no wait...like I used to know) in the mirror. I listened to three other headphones in the same price range from Sennheiser, Beyer Dynamic and Grado. They all had the upper and lower ranges present to a more satisfying degree.

Just to make sure I wasn't losing my way after listening to four different headphones, I went back to the King of Headphones, my Sony R-10s. Granted, the Sonys are much more expensive, but they are as neutral as it gets in my world. Sometimes you become fooled when

on LP, the first classic cut *Black Cow* has a keyboard solo halfway into the song that is meaty and lies heavily across my left eyebrow. In the last minute and a half of the song the keyboard has a gritty grumbling groaning sound in both channels that is situated dead center in both ears about four inches away from my ear canal. My comparison phones had less of a growl and were much closer to the ear. Between my ear and that four inches were many other layered sounds. I felt as if I could peel back each layer of the onion, finding new things before I eventually got to the ivories (or maybe Fender Rhodes type plastic). That's detail!

I then listened to Jimmy Smith and Wes Montgomery's **The Dynamic Duo** cut number four, which has a great sleigh bell in the background and again there isn't a ton of sustain in the notes given off by the bells, but they have depth. Is it a worthy tradeoff to lose some of the top and bottom of the Oreo Cookies to get more of the filling? Some people might think so. They break off the cookies and go right to the crème filling and maybe enjoy one of the choco-

listening to a component without switching back to your reference and indeed the 701s are a bit rolled off at both ends.

However, after many more hours of listening to a lot of different music, what I feel the 701s do offer over similarly priced competitors is a greater amount of detail. While listening to Steely Dan's **Aja**

late parts afterwards. Different strokes for different folks. I personally prefer to have it all, but at this price point I've yet to be able to "have my Oreo and eat it too"!

It's About the Midrange, Baby

The AKG 701s are a midrange headphone. They excel in that category. They fill the air in your ears with a lot of information that the recording has to offer that other headphones fail to reproduce. The soundstage is huge. It goes from two inches behind your ears all the way to the sides (but not tip) of your nose. On jazz, classical, and acoustic recordings the notes also find a way of traveling almost all the way to the top of your head. That is a very satiating sensation leaving the listener feeling full after a pleasant listening session.

However, I did not find this to be the case on most "harder rock" pressings. On recordings with double bass drums and riffin' bass tracks, the 701s suffered due to lack of extension. The bottom just isn't all there. On recordings that suffer from "drumitis" where there is a lot of overlap from the drums, cymbals and percussion, the 701s lose a few more opportunities for a clear presentation.

When I gave Rush's **Power Windows** a spin (Now you know why I like this guy! –JD) you can tell where the top and bottom are lacking but there is plenty of guitar and keyboard frosting in the middle. You can hear Geddy Lee's playing but the crowd is crying for deeper bass! Same thing with Dream Theater's **Train of Thought**. Bass drums and cymbals seem a bit veiled, the 701s just don't do as well with this kind of music as a pair of Grados, which I feel are a match made in heaven for rock music.

Watch for a Grado review as soon as I can get my hands on a pair!

(continued)



Experience Running Springs Audio.



HARDWARE SOFTWARE ACCESSORIES

BALANCED AUDIO TECHNOLOGY • CARDAS • RUNNING SPRINGS AUDIO
SHELTER • USHER • TRANSROTOR TURNTABLES • VPI AND MUCH MORE

WWW.DEDICATEDAUDIO.COM 602.439.0414

THE VERDICT

The AKG 701s are a beautifully crafted pair of headphones that excel in midrange presentation and detail, but suffer at the extremes. A good mate for jazz and classical music, but not my first choice if you like to rock. They would make a good addition to someone's collection and are definitely worth the asking price, but if they are going to be your only 'phone, I would consider further shopping. ●

MANUFACTURER

AKG Acoustics

914 Airpark Center Drive
Nashville, TN 37217
1-615-620-3800
akgusales@harman.com

PERIPHERALS

Headphones AKG Acoustics
model 701

Amplifiers Ray Samuels Audio
Raptor and HR-2
Rudistor RP-33 Headroom
Desktop

Sources Original Audio Leonardo
9.3 CD player
VPI Aries 2 Turntable w/ JMW
10.5 tonearm and Benz Ruby 3
cartridge

Interconnects Nordost Red
Dawns Audience AU24

Power Cables Cardas Golden
Reference Cardas Reference

TEST TUNES

**Jimmy Smith and Wes
Montgomery** – The Dynamic Duo
(CD) – Verve Master Edition

Dream Theater – Train of Thought
(CD) – Electra Entertainment Group

Rush – Power Windows (LP)
– Mercury Records

Steely Dan – Aja (LP) – abc
Records

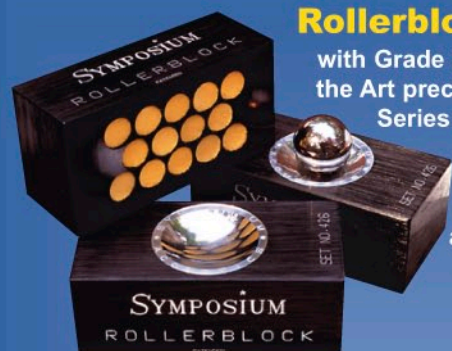


Revisiting Reel-To-Reel

You have all heard me sneaking it in there now and again; I'm listening to open reel tape again. For the newcomers to the audiophile world under 30 years old, this probably seems even more bizarre than listening to vinyl, but it has been a ton of fun.

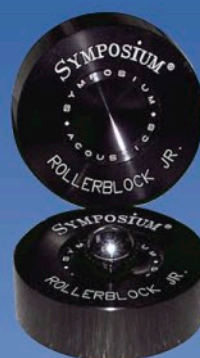
Where did I get this crazy idea? Steve Hoffman, it's his fault. One day when I was over at his house, the dining room table and the dining room was full of boxes of old ¼ track tapes from the 60s and 70s that he was sorting for a radio show he was doing for someone over in Europe. After playing with all these tapes for the better part of a Sunday, I was back in the game!

(continued)



Rollerblock Series 2+G3

with Grade 3 Superball. True State of the Art precision makes the patented Series 2 Rollerblock the world's finest bearing isolation device for audio and video components... and a must for state-of-the-art performance with digital playback components!



Rollerblock Jr.

Our introductory Rollerblock system offers Symposium quality at a lower price. Available with standard chromium balls or optional Grade 10 Tungsten Carbide, "Jr." improves sound quality with all components from budget turntables to large subwoofers.

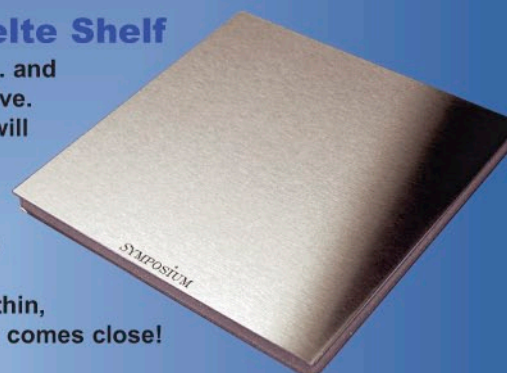


Ultra Platform

First introduced in 1994, our exclusive, varying density constrained-layer design has made the Ultra a classic which defies obsolescence. Whether used with standard Precision Couplers or optional Rollerblocks, the Ultra delivers unexcelled performance in its price class.

Svelte Shelf

Elegantly simple... and shockingly effective. The Svelte Shelf will coax superior bass, transients, and musicality from components and speakers. At only 5/8" inch thin, nothing else even comes close!

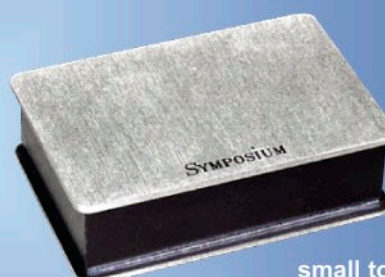


Isis Rack



Employing multiple state of the art vibration control and EMI/RFI suppression technologies in one elegant, modular package, the Isis will shift the performance of your music or home theater system into top gear. The Isis boasts unmatched parts quality, patented Compound Rollerblock Isolation™, Svelte technology, expandable, modular design - and two US Patents. Available in several finishes.

Never "tweaks," Symposium products are indispensable components in a well-balanced music or video system. True state-of-the-art performance requires multiple system management disciplines. Only Symposium products employ interrelated vibration control techniques to achieve great performance without adding new resonances and distortions.



Fat Padz

2" x 3" Fat Padz improve neutrality, dynamics, and musical authority - at a very affordable price. Great with CD players, turntables, Amps, Preamps and small to medium sized speakers.

Precision Rack

With virtually no weight limits, the Precision Rack is the choice of uncompromising perfectionists who demand a beautiful, powerful, and rock solid audio/video foundation. Exhaustive hand finishing, precision machining and our famous Ultra, Super Plus or Svelte shelves makes the Precision Rack truly special.



Thanks again to Steve, I got my hands on the mint Teac A-4300 you see here. Back in the day, these things cost a fortune and I actually owned an A-3300 and a couple of 2300s, so this thing brings back great memories.

Collecting the older, prerecorded tapes is a blast. Most of what you see on EBay is not too expensive if you aren't trying to buy the Beatles, Rolling Stones or the Doors. I have been building a fun collection of tapes for about 5-8 bucks each. It is however, a mixed bag of treats. Some of these sound a bit rolled off and others a little thin.

But some of them sound quite good and that's the most fun part, it's like being on a treasure hunt.

Most of these tapes were recorded at 3 3/4 i.p.s., but some have been done at 7 1/2. Some of these tapes were even half-track, but they are pretty rare.

Deck Shopping

Like buying a classic car, find the best one you can afford, rather than trying to get a "bargain" machine repaired. You will quickly spend more than the unit's value at this rate.

Even though these decks only had a signal to noise ratio in the vicinity of 55-60db, the tapes you make from your LPs sound fantastic. This leads us to the main problem of owning one of these monsters, tape is scarce, but there is a lot of stuff for sale used. We will be adding a column to our website called **i.p.s.** If this sounds like your cup of tea, stay tuned, we'll try to guide you down the path! ●

Don't limit your components - Unleash their true potential!

SYMPOSIUM

A C O U S T I C S

973 616 4787 • www.symposiumusa.com

We have three more Rega tweaks this month. Though I have crossed over to the other side and am probably the last audiophile on Earth to buy an LP-12, I still have my trusty P25 in my second system and will be committed to wringing the most performance that this classic deck is capable of. This group of upgrades from Groovetracer are not quite as plug and play as what we offered last issue, but if you can follow a couple of simple instructions, you will be rewarded with much better sound.

We also revisit the classic VPI record cleaning machine. Enjoy!

Groovetracer[™] Acrylic Platter, Subplatter and Counterweight For All Rega Turntables

www.groovetracer.com 408-727-2610

Counterweight — \$130

Standard Subplatter — \$189

Deluxe Subplatter — \$225

Acrylic Platter — \$160

There is a 10% discount on the Platter and Subplatter if you buy them together.

I met Frank Smillie on Steve Hoffman's forum discussing Rega upgrades. A few phone calls later and I discovered that he runs an aerospace machine shop in the Bay area and is a huge Rega fan, matter of fact when I called, he was working on modding a P3 for his son.

If you have a Rega table, you know that it is a good basic table, but especially the lower end models have had a few corners cut in build quality. Not to blame Rega here, because if these issues were addressed, they would cost twice as much! However, there is some room for improvement and if you already have a P2, P3 or P25 you can upgrade them quite a bit and achieve performance far beyond the original design. *(continued)*



There are a few places that offer upgraded platters, subplatters and counterweights for the Rega, but nothing comes close to the quality of the parts Frank sent me. This stuff looks like it would be at home in the Ferrari F1 garage, not on a budget turntable, and I know the difference, I've been in the Ferrari F1 garage!

First, The Counterweight

Let's start with the counterweight first, but I highly suggest that you budget for all three of these products, they will raise the performance of your table significantly, especially if you have a P25, with the better RB600 arm. The counterweights are available in 130 gram and 150 gram weights, for cartridges over and under 8 grams, respectively. They are CNC machined from 6061-T6 aluminum and stainless steel. Tungsten and Brass are also available if you need more mass.

These will also work with other tonearms having a ½" (12.7mm) end stub, though I only tried mine on a Rega P3 and P25. The counterweight is decoupled from the arm with a precision Delrin bushing and set screw. An allen wrench is thoughtfully included.



Replacing the counterweight with the Groovetracer allowed my Shelter 501 mk. II to track difficult passages a bit better with less distortion than before. Just to check this, I pulled out the trusty Shure Audio Obstacle course and I could track one more band than before installing it!

Next, A Better Platter

I must stress again, that these pieces are truly a work of art, but functional art!! While the acrylic platter will work with your stock subplatter (which is also plastic), it will work a lot better with the Groovetracer acrylic platter. Here's what makes the Groovetracer products the best: attention to detail and precision tolerances. The further out of round your platter and subplatter are, the more speed variation there will be along with increased wow and flutter.

The Groovetracer™ acrylic platter is 24mm thick and no longer needs the felt mat thanks to the precision recess cut in the center of the platter where the record label is. (I told you this guy should work for Ferrari!) The underside of the platter is machined to maintain the standard platter height, hence you will not have to fool around with VTA spacers. The Groovetracer platter works extremely well with the Basic Clamp we tested last issue. As you can see from the photo, this platter really makes the basic Rega table look a lot better too!

My observation from going to the Acrylic platter and eliminating the felt mat was a substantial increase in high frequency extension, without being harsh. I tried this on my P3 with a Shure V15 and a P25 with a Shelter 501 II. There was definitely a lot more midrange resolution as well, on any kind of music. Thanks to this extra resolution, now is a good time to check your cartridge alignment, there might be a few more percent lurking there as well.

(continued)

Finally The Subplatter

Frank might argue with me, but I feel if you can only afford one of these three outstanding products, go for the subplatter. I feel that this is the weakest link in the Rega table, because it is made out of plastic and subject to the most manufacturing inaccuracy.

The Groovetracer™ subplatter is also machined from 6061-T6 aluminum and has three raised surfaces machined into the top so that it helps decouple the platter better while at the same time providing a positive interface between the 3 contact points. They also supply a new Ruby bearing and some oil to replace the standard bearing in your table.

Thanks to a well written instruction sheet, you should be able to do this in about 5 minutes if you are careful and the difference is not subtle. Because the Groovetracer subplatter is machined to a .001 inch concentricity tolerance, pitch control is significantly improved. Granted, your Rega, like mine will probably run a spot fast, (but we will address that too...) but it will be consistent. Frank mentioned that the new P5 also comes with a plastic subplatter so the upgrade really makes sense for anyone owning that model.

My suggestion is to play something acoustic before you do the subplatter swap, that will help you really hear how much more the image locks into place and the soundfield gets bigger. The new bearing also helps lower the noise floor significantly too.

The Combination

I installed these parts on my P3 one at a time, so I could be a bit more scientific in my evaluation, but on the P25, I just went from stock to all three and it was amazing! My P25 did not even sound like the same table anymore, but a couple orders of magnitude better. Considering that I bought my P25 used for \$600, adding \$500 worth of goodies gives it a level of performance significantly better than what you can buy off the shelf for that kind of money.

If you have one of these turntables, I give the Groovetracer products the highest recommendation. You will be blown away by how much more sound is lurking in that turntable! The Groovetracer™ website will be up soon, but for now you can give Frank a call direct. He's a great guy and will do his best to help you out. Tell him I sent you.

Next time, we will tackle the speed issue.



The VPI 16.5 Record Cleaning System

www.vpiindustries.com \$525.00



While many of you already know about VPI and their record cleaning devices, but we are trying to reach the new people entering our world, so we felt that the trusty 16.5 is worth mentioning. I have used an entry level Nitty Gritty for years now and just made the step up myself recently.

Record cleaning is another subject that will polarize a number of audiophiles and the Linn folks swear up and down that you should NOT clean your records, but as a Linn owner AND a devout record cleaner, I am in the “cleaning your records is a good thing” camp. In a future issue, we will provide you with everything you need to know about adequately cleaning your records, and scientific proof WHY it is a good thing to do so, but for now, I just want to expose you to the 16.5.

The 16.5 is built like a tank and comes with great instructions, so you should be up and running in a few minutes. Once going, it offers a motor to spin the record while you scrub and then when you turn on the vacuum, two spins of the record with suction on and your record will be nice and clean.

The only drawback to the VPI 16.5 is the motor. A number of owners have told me that the 16.5 will only clean about 10-15 records per hour and if you try to clean more than that, you risk overheating and possible damage. If you are wanting to perform marathon record cleaning sessions, you should consider their top of the line machine, the model 17. *(continued)*



I'm just not that ambitious, so the 16.5 should serve me well for a long time. I typically don't clean more than a few records per hour, but keep this limitation in mind before you purchase.

If you are a bargain record shopper like me, here's a handy trick with the 16.5; pick up an additional cleaning tube for really gnarly records.

Keep the other one for cleaning your brand new records, so you don't risk any grime from the garage sale ones getting on your brand new pressings (which need cleaning as well). Thanks to the folks at Music Direct for pointing this out! An extra tube will only set you back \$25 and is a worthwhile addition to your

cleaning arsenal. Keep them in a ziplock bag to keep the cooties out.

If you maintain that a record cleaner is evil, I can't change your mind, but if you think I'm on to something here, the VPI 16.5 is an excellent product that is a modern classic. Highly recommended. ●

experience the music.....



www.whestaudio.co.uk
t: +44 (0) 20 8965 4535

Music of the 80s

— Jeff Dorgay

While many people despised the 80s, it was a time of great exploration for me. I left the 70s being somewhat of a headbanger on the tail of the punk scene, but I was starting to listen to a lot of different things. My record collection grew tremendously during this decade and I did not buy ANY Flock of Seagulls records. This was also the decade of the compact disc, which would change the high end forever. I remember bringing that first Denon CD player and disc home from the hifi store thinking “this sounds pretty crappy!” but look at the progress we have made! Not necessarily “perfect sound forever”, but it’s become pretty good. Now we have MP3s to complain about. Who knew?

A few of us from the TONE staff have looked back and shared their favorite music of that time period. I’ll go first.



David Bowie – **SCARY MONSTERS** (1980)

This was David Bowie at the top of his game. Taking what he had learned from the Ziggy Phase and the Aladdin Sane periods, Bowie once again morphed into the most hip guy on the face of the Earth. *Scary Monsters* was the coolest tune on this record, but there weren’t any stinkers here. If you had the good fortune to buy this on Japanese import LP, you have a real treasure, as the remasters (especially the current DVD-A) are way too bright.

Hardcore Bowie fans would have to wait until the 1993 release of **Black Tie/White Noise** for him to get back on track creatively, but **SCARY MONSTERS** was one of those records that you had to have in the early 80s if you wanted anyone to take your music collection seriously.

Tim Curry – **SIMPLICITY** (1981)

Most of you either don’t know who Tim Curry is, or you saw him in Muppet Treasure Island. But the guy who was perhaps best known as Dr. Frank-N-Furter in the infamous Rocky Horror Picture Show was a very multifaceted man indeed. He made three great albums starting in the late 70s that were more pop-like, but really found his voice on his final record, **SIMPLICITY**.

(continued)



LOVE YOUR
iPOD EVEN
LONGER™

Play More. Listen Anywhere.
Charge — Wherever.

Boost your iPod's playtime with a Sonnet iPod battery — everything is included, from the proper tools to easy-to-follow video instructions.

Listen to your tunes anywhere you go with a Podfrēq™ or Podfrēq mini. Charge your iPod® while on the go with our USB Power Adapter. Sonnet iPod accessories let you love your iPod even longer!

www.sonnettech.com/ipod

January 2006 Expo
Booth 2528, South Hall

Macworld
Conference & Expo



iPod Battery
with tools + video instructions



Podfrēq & Podfrēq mini
Play your tunes with any FM radio!



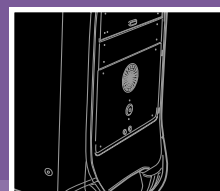
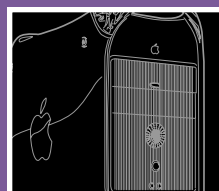
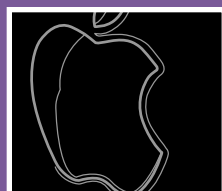
iPod USB Power Adapter
Charge your iPod anywhere



Sidekick
The USB 2.0 adapter that bends and rotates



New!
1.7 DUAL GHz



Wow. That's Fast.

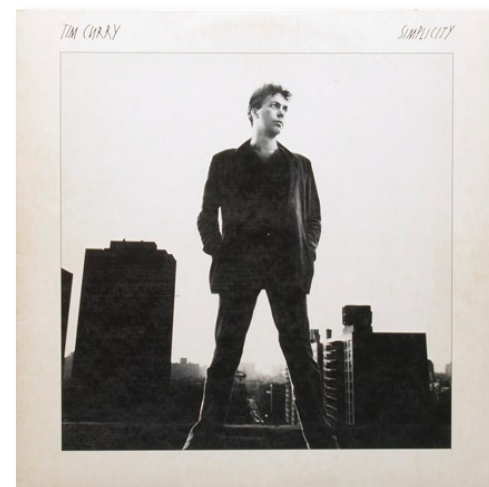
Top-End Dual Processor Upgrade for
Power Mac G4

Can your Power Mac® keep up with Mac OS® X and the latest photo editing applications? Give it a double-shot speed boost when you install a Sonnet Encore/ST G4 Duet dual processor upgrade card!

www.sonnettech.com

SONNET
SIMPLY FAST™

ENCORE/ST G4 DUET



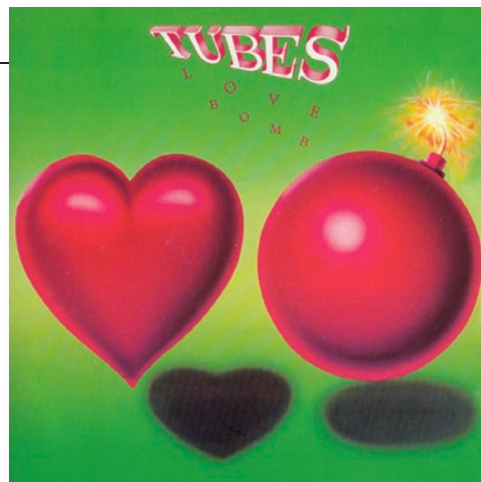
A quick look at the credits reveals some pretty heavy hitters. Produced by Michael Kamen (who also played keyboards), Earl Slick is on guitar along with David Sanborn on saxophone to round out the band.

SIMPLICITY features about half cover material, with the rest written by TC. Though it is 25 years old, it is still one of my favorite discs and impeccably recorded. Forget the **Best Of Tim Curry Compilation**, it sounds awful. He's obscure enough that you should be able to find this one in good shape at your local used record store for a few bucks.

The Tubes – LOVE BOMB
(1985)

With more complex theatrics than just about anyone before or since, The Tubes were a band to experience live. But these Bay-area madmen could play incredibly well and would often put on a multi-hour show, featuring two drummers, three guitarists and two keyboard players that was never boring.

(continued)



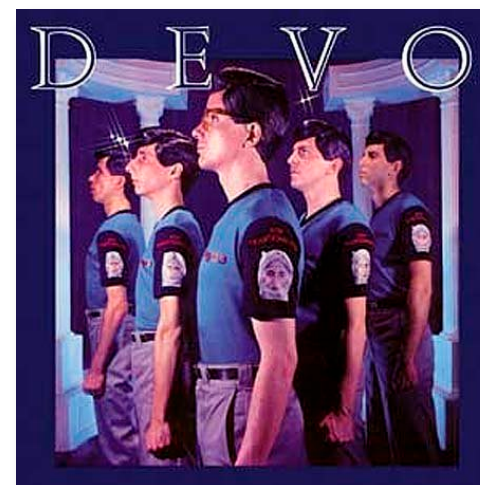
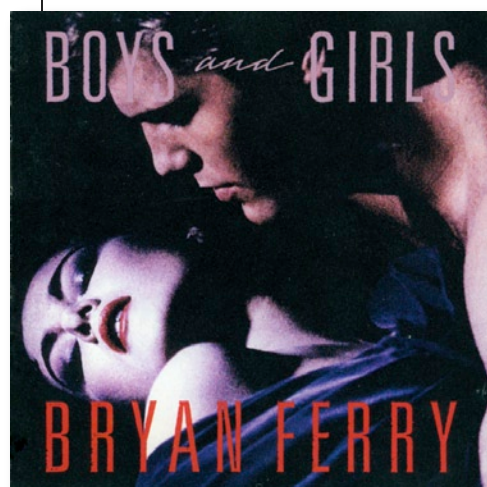
Having tons of critical acclaim, but never really achieving mainstream success, **LOVE BOMB** was their final attempt at getting on the radio after their hit *She's a Beauty* from the previous Tubes album **Outside Inside**. Even recruiting producer Todd Rundgren could not get The Tubes the commercial success they deserved, and they faded off into relative obscurity after this record, making one last tour with Todd Rundgren as the opening act.

Though this one is a touch more conservative than past Tubes albums, it is full of catchy, clever tunes that like all other Tubes records were very well recorded. *For a Song* sounded particularly good on those big Acoustats I had back in the day. Again, if this sounds interesting, buy 'em on LP, forget the CDs.

Bryan Ferry – **BOYS AND GIRLS** (1985)

I guess you could argue who had more personal style back in the mid 80s; David Bowie or Bryan Ferry. While perhaps Bowie was a bit more edgy, Bryan Ferry was smooth. Bouncing in and out of Roxy Music, Bryan Ferry put out a string of solo records from the early 70s until 2002. **BOYS AND GIRLS** had a similar groove to the RM album **Avalon**, but **BOYS AND GIRLS** was his first solo record after Roxy disbanded.

Slave to Love is probably the most memorable track, because it was used on the soundtrack for the love-it-or-hate-it movie *9 ½ Weeks*, but the entire record is outstanding.



DEVO – **NEW TRADITIONALISTS** (1988)

The end of the 80s also marked the beginning of the end of one of my favorite bands of all time, DEVO. It only seems like ten years ago that I saw these guys burst on the stage of Saturday Night Live in their yellow suits and swim goggles and got to watch my parents freak out. I probably saw DEVO in concert five or six times. Their live shows were great episodes of performance art, even before the great Laurie Anderson, but on this tour, they were starting to show their age.

Fortunately the New Traditionalists album still had some great songs and featured the hits *Through Being Cool* (later picked up in the soundtrack of the animated *Heavy Metal*), *Jerkin' Back N' Forth* and *Beautiful World*. But perky, pop tunes with a lot of synthesizers were on their way out and even though DEVO made a couple more records, they were downhill after this one.

As luck would have it, Mark Mothersbaugh and a couple of the spudboys would find a new lease on life working for Klasky-Csupo animation doing the theme song and other music for the cartoon franchise, *The Rugrats*.
(continued)



WELCOME HOME



**Tears For Fears –
THE SEEDS OF LOVE (1989)**

At the end of the 80's, just before popular music would make the move to embrace grunge, I bought this CD on a warm fall evening in Phoenix, popped it into the CD player in my Alfa Spider and kept driving until the disc was over. It was a groovy disc then and it still holds up as one of my favorite discs today.

The title track was the big hit, but the whole record was full of great songs and amazing craftsmanship, with a sound that has been called somewhat Beatlesque. Even the two guys that made up Tears For Fears, Roland Orzabal and Curt Smith said that they were listening to a lot of Beatles when they made it.

The CD sounds great (I'd love to hear SH remaster this one) but I had the good fortune to get an LP copy when passing through Chicago on a layover for a few hours and it is fantastic. ●



iCub : Hi-fi for the iGeneration

iCub is a "amplifier-subwoofer" with no less than three BASH amplifiers: two 100 W amplifiers to drive a pair of loudspeakers and one 200 W amplifier to drive the subwoofer. It is a very simple solution that brings a "big" sound for your new digital sources. Connect an iCub to your Sib & Co speakers.... Connect your iPod or Wi-Fi hub... Raise the volume.... Listen....

US - Audio Plus Services - Tel. 800 663 9352 - www.audiopluservices.com
Canada - Plurison - Tel. 450 585 0098 - www.plurison.com

*Airport Express® and iPod® are registered trademarks of Apple Computer. Focal® is a registered trademark of Focal-JMlab®.



FOCAL
the Spirit of Sound

Just Rock

— Jerold O'Brien

While all the sissies were listening to new wave; I held my ground and kept banging my head. None of those British synthesizer bands appealed to my Midwestern sensibilities **AT ALL**. Nope, you didn't see me in clubs with eye shadow on, I kept the faith. Ok, I did like Thomas Dolby, but that's it.

The bad news was that traditional hard rock had really been displaced by the beginning of the 80s and even a loyal fan like myself was getting a bit bored with dinosaur rock. KISS was having an identity crisis, and Ted Nugent looked a bit silly (but he still rocked) so what to do? Here are my five picks from that era that stayed true to my roots.



Pat Travers – **CRASH AND BURN** (1980)

Pat Travers came on the scene in a major way in the mid 70s with a mix of blues and heavy rock that was very innovative, along with some cool album covers. Building on the momentum of Putting it Straight and Heat in the Street, using the same lineup with Pat Thrall playing the other guitar. When I bought this record I thought, “this new wave stuff will NEVER catch on, right?”

A true thinking man's brain damage album, **Crash and Burn** was recorded at 30 i.p.s. with no Dolby, so crank this one up loud! The single *Snortin' Whiskey* gave PT his 15 minutes of fame with a ton of airplay, which would then see him fade into relative obscurity. Good bands that didn't sell millions of albums went by the wayside in the 80s and that's the way it went.

TWISTED SISTER – **Stay Hungry** (1984)

Back in the early days of MTV, long before we had Ratt, Warrant or Poison (which all sucked by the way) Twisted Sister brought big hair and big makeup to heavy metal. Watching that kid get yelled at in his desk by the teacher, replying to the ultimate question of “what are you gonna do with your life?” with the only logical answer “I wanna rock!” used to really annoy our parents. JD's parents always used to ask us why we liked that Twisted Brother band and we just shook our heads.

Believe it or not, going back to my record racks to revisit this classic, I noticed that my copy of this record is GONE. Someone is going to pay dearly.

Sammy Hagar – **VOA** (1984)

Sammy Hagar always put on a great show back in the day, whether he was the lead singer for Mon-trose, or as a solo artist, but the planets really lined up in 1984, with the **VOA** album getting major airplay as well as the classic *I Can't Drive 55* in heavy rotation on MTV. While this was never music as intellectually heavy as Rush, it still was great party music and remains a favorite to this day.

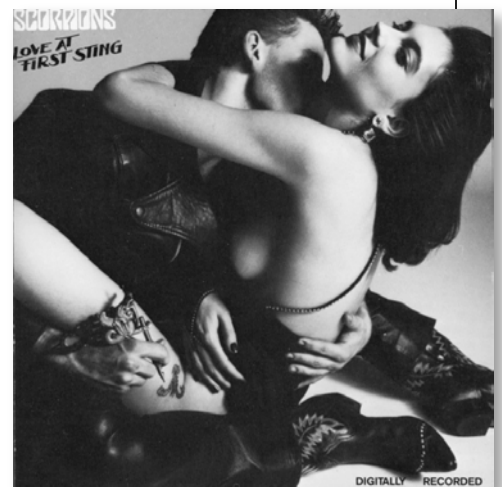
All that MTV exposure would eventually land Sammy in Van Halen, which left his bandmates holding pinkslips.



Scorpions – **LOVE AT FIRST STING** (1985)

One of the reasons this record is so cool is that it has a Helmut Newton photo on the cover. The other reason is that it was probably the most kick ass rock album of 1985. (If not of all time.)

Thanks to super-slick production and two blazing lead guitarists, this record produced four hits and was one of the few heavy metal bands that got a lot of MTV airplay. The Scorpions were also one of the few bands to give Judas Priest a run for their money on the stage. You might tell me you listen to Patricia Barber, but I know you have a copy of this CD and I know you play air guitar with *Rock You Like a Hurricane* when no one else is home. Busted. (continued)



The Connection Between Art and Science



duke

The Duke, designed for high-current, high-power amplifiers and subwoofer systems, enables your amp to get the same benefits that only your front-end has enjoyed up until now; a lower noise floor, increased dynamics, and protection, without current limitation or sonic degradation.

- 20-amp
- 2400 watts of continuous uncompressed, uncolored power
- Single isolated RSA modified BMF1 duplex (2 outlets)
- RSA Mongoose 20-amp Power Cord included

POWER UP



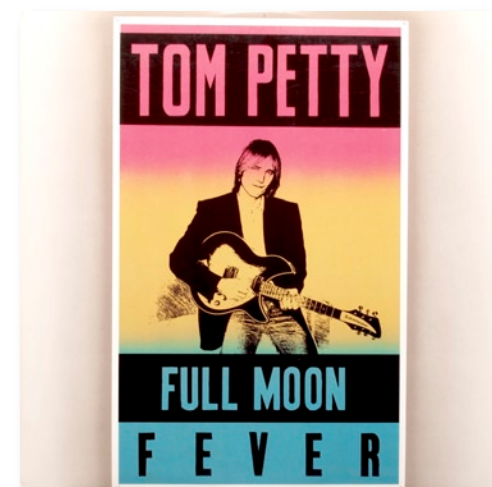
Power Line Conditioners Hand Made In California . Tel: 949.582.8072 . www.runningspringsaudio.com

running springs audio

Tom Petty – FULL MOON FEVER (1989)

I had to wait until the end of the 80s for this one, but it was worth it. Thanks to its stellar production, it appeals to audiophiles as well. I have it on CD and Mofi Gold CD, but the real gem was the LP that you could buy off the rack when it first came out. Building on Petty's growth as a musician and his influences by fellow Wilbury's, this record stands the test of time today.

A great mix of songs that are definitely more complex than your average group of pop tunes; Petty hit one out of the park here. In case you aren't familiar with this one, all versions sound pretty darn good, but I'm partial to the LP. Just as I was starting to mellow out, I had no idea that we were just about to discover Pearl Jam and Soundgarden. But that's another story.



Back to the 80s!

— Nicole Wilson

The eighties are a bit foggy for me. I have to admit, the first tape I bought in the eighties was New Kids on the Block in 1989; I was in the second grade and I purchased the album with my allowance money. Another factor in missing out was my mother, who determined that Married with Children was the worst show ever, MTV would corrupt me, and the Simpsons was an example of bad parenting. Mom's ever-watchful eye kept bands like Guns n' Roses and Prince out of the house, so I grew up with Phil Collins and Genesis, which I still defend to this day. I never met a kid who was raised listening to Tom Waits or Joy Division, but I bet they had a better leg up on me somehow. I recently took these artists' albums out and reminisced about when I heard them for the first time.

All Hail the Prince

At fourteen years of age I found Prince's **PURPLE RAIN** in the bottom of the bargain bin for a couple bucks. I played that tape until it wouldn't play anymore, which led to my first vinyl purchase years later. Prince is a musical genius and I don't care how short he is or how freaky those pants he wore to The MTV Music Awards are – the man has more sex appeal and energy in his music than most artists in his genre.

PURPLE RAIN remains in my collection because it showcases some of the finest songs performed with passion and energy. *I Would Die For You* and *Let's Go Crazy* have that upbeat zing that make you want to belt out the lyrics. I crank up *When Doves Cry*; that song exudes passionate imagery and the percussion, keyboard and Prince's guitar make this song addicting. *Darling Nikki* was remade by Foo Fighters not too long ago, and Mariah Carey remade *The Beautiful Ones* much earlier, but they pale in comparison due to a lack of urgency and drive only Prince can bring.

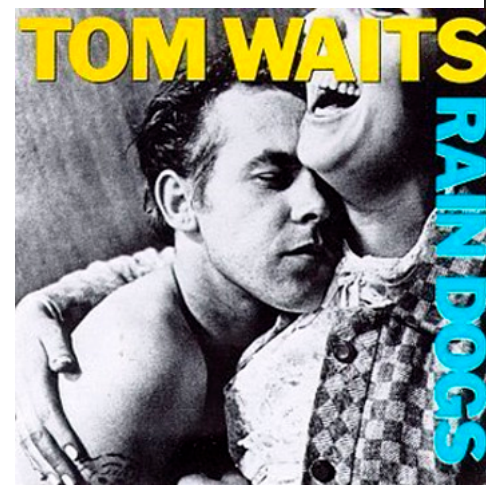


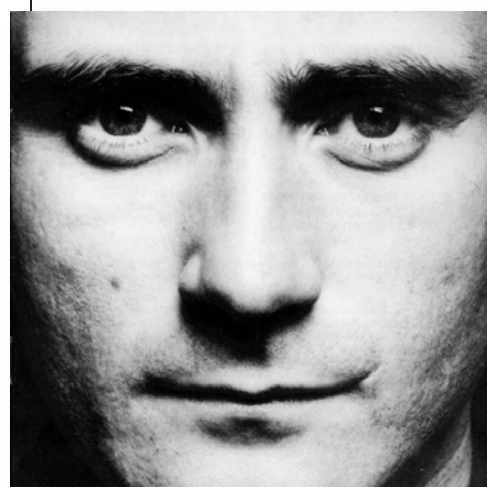
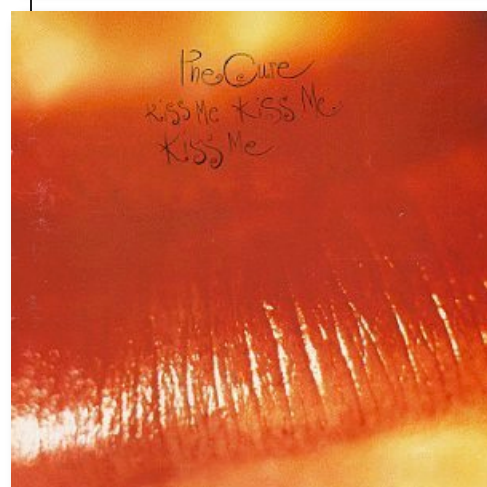
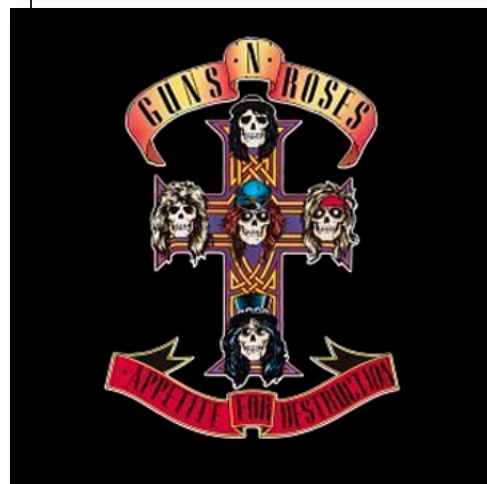
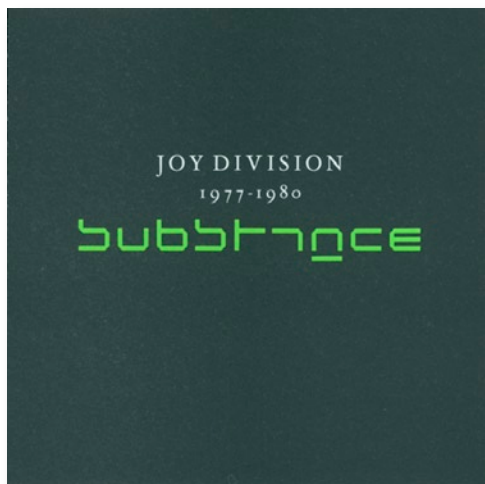
A Second Chance

Tom Waits has recorded a lot of albums over the years, but I felt the transition from Asylum Records to Island Records brought new life to his music. **HEART ATTACK AND VINE** came out in 1980, and was his last production on Asylum; although it sounds mainstream music-wise, Waits produces his signature ballads and blues filled tunes. *Jersey Girl* is a simple love song backed up with strings and lots of "sha la la las." *On the Nickel* is a serious tear jerker about orphaned boys and innocence. Between Waits on the piano and the strings in the background, it sounds like a six-minute chick-flick. You hear some Randy Newman influence, and occasionally Waits reminds me of Jimmy Durante, but **Heart Attack and Vine** was just the end of the first act for Mr. Waits' career.



RAIN DOGS was his sophomore album on Island Records, which came out in 1985 and impresses me each time I listen to it. He made music that defied the signature eighties sound; he brings a depth and innovation in music that satisfies the senses. *Cemetery Polka* is quirky, and the family can be visualized as if in the same painting, each one trying to scam the other. *Tango Till They're Sore* is one of my favorites. The music brings you to the South via piano and trombone, with lyrics that are about something to come, as opposed to the past. To my surprise, *Downtown Train* was not performed by Rod Stewart first; I hate when you here remakes before the original because I feel like the experience is tainted. The great thing about any of Tom Waits' music is that none of it sounds dated, and his sound influenced so many artists to follow. (continued)





Missing Link

There is a great bar in the Seattle area called the Tin Hat that served up the best Makers Mark Manhattans and a jukebox with my first encounter with the British band Joy Division. Joy Division's music is significant because they produced that familiar 70s garage punk refined with synthesizers and BAM! you have early eighties music in a nutshell. They are the missing link between punk and eighties new wave; the lyrics are not bursting with rage like the Sex Pistols, but they create the melancholy moods you see later in bands like the Cure. Substance came out in 1988, and is a compilation of Joy Division's music. Lead vocalist Ian Curtis hung himself in 1980 just before the band was going to hit it big; the other members went on to form New Order. **SUBSTANCE** contains the early songs like *Warsaw*, and through each track you can hear their sound becoming more defined. *Love Will Tear Us Apart* is their biggest commercial hit, which carries the same dread as many of their songs, but with a cheerier tune. Curtis was troubled with epilepsy and depression, which comes through in most of the lyrics. **SUBSTANCE** covers the hits, with some lesser known songs thrown in for good measure.

Quintessential 80s

APPETITE FOR DESTRUCTION is one of the best albums from the 80s because it's bad-ass rock-n-roll that bridged the gap between nameless hair bands and heavy metal. Axl Rose can rail his voice like no one else, with obscenities that I had never before heard in a song. *Welcome to the Jungle* is a foreshadowing of the rest of the album's stories about urban life and addiction. *Nightrain* and *Mr. Brownstone* are very matter of fact ABC's of addiction to alcohol and heroin, and *Paradise City* is on every jukebox in America because it just rocks. This album made more sense to me once I met my small town – bad boy with a beat-up truck that thought the world of Guns 'n Roses. **APPETITE FOR DESTRUCTION** has texture with raw, worn-through music that brought a whole new sound to rock n roll in the eighties.

The Cure

You cannot discuss eighties music and not talk about The Cure. You are either in love with Robert Smith's British voice, or it grates on your nerves; luckily I think that his vocal range and emotional lyrics make for some of the best music. **KISS ME KISS ME KISS ME** is the album most kids listened to due to its large list of songs and diversified sound. I cannot tell a lie however, I love this album primarily for the song *Just Like Heaven*, which has become a classic hit. The music is crisp and flighty, and the keyboard adds the sentiment. *Catch* is thoughtful, and there are other great hits like *Hot Hot Hot!* and *All I Want*. Even if Smith's voice drives you crazy and the lyrics seem a bit desperate, you cannot deny The Cure is a talented, fruitful band that produced a distinct sound still influential to this day.

The Best Music No One Likes

It is totally appropriate to love Peter Dinklage, but you must have been dropped on your head as a baby if you love Phil Collins; can someone tell me how such a creative and intelligent artist completely turned off a whole generation? He's British, capable of orchestrating touching music with compositions that rock... and I have no taste? His debut solo album, **FACE VALUE**, gets off to a great start with *In the Air Tonight* which is one of the best songs ever written. As songs about sour marriages go, this one seems particularly fresh, like the break-up happened five minutes before the song was written. The story begins slow and painfully drawn out, and suddenly explodes with anger; it gives me chills. The rest of the album is more friendly, with songs like *This Must Be Love* and *I Missed Again*. It makes for good dinner-making music with its upbeat tempo and lively horn section. Phil Collins writes mature music that usually fits the bill, and never disappoints.

Generation X, or the MTV generation, or whatever generation I belong to missed out on some great music (especially kids like me with very protective mothers) but these albums have songs I love, and artists who created some of the greatest music ever recorded. Don't be afraid to pull out your eighties vinyl and rock it like it was 1989.

The 80s Weren't All Bad

— Joe Golfen

People don't really remember the 1980s. I was only six years old when they ended, so I have a valid excuse, but whenever I hear people talk about this particular decade, it seems as though it was a magical time of bright colors, big hair and bubble gum-flavored optimism. Tune into VH1 at any given hour, and you will find a celebrity you never heard of going on about how cool Swatch watches were, or how much they loved their first bubble jacket.

Maybe I'm wrong, but I have a feeling these 10 years have become more romanticized than they have any right to be. Take the music, for example. Nowadays, when people hear The Killers or Interpol on the radio, they seem almost obligated to say, "Wow, they sound so 80s," followed by a smug grin. But is that statement really accurate? **From what I can tell, a lot of the 80s were dominated by sweaty hair bands and Lionel Ritchie. People seemed to want to sing about having sugar poured on them and dancing on ceilings,** neither of which hold any particular interest for me.

Of course, it wasn't all like this. A great number of fantastic bands made their debut in the eighties, and old genres were stretched and molded into entirely new ones. So there were great things coming out, but I think people overstate the popularity of these bands. I bet that, just like today, some people were cool and into the good music, but most were pretty damn lame. Just so we're clear.

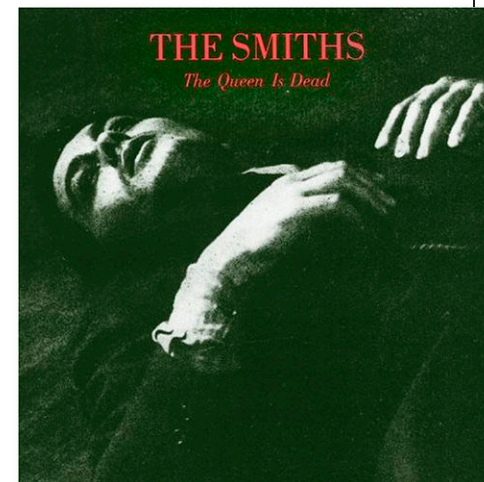
But enough with the negativity. This decade brought about some of the greatest musicians in rock music, and it was difficult to pick out the best albums from this decade, so I'll just tell you my favorites. These are the albums that are both my favorites from the decade, and were truly influential to pretty much everything I listen to today.

The Smiths – **THE QUEEN IS DEAD** (1986)

Only The Smiths could make sounding so miserable feel so joyful. *The Queen Is Dead* captures the interplay between Morrissey's soul-barring lyrics and Johnny Marr's intricate guitar work, making for an album that is bouncy and catchy, but also dark and destitute.

The Smiths are sometimes referred to as the most influential band no one has heard of, and while that may be an exaggeration, it certainly reflects how this little band from Manchester, England helped shape modern rock. Songs like *Bigmouth Strikes Again*, and *There is a Light That Never Goes Out* are evidence of the band's originality. Marr's elaborate, over-dubbed guitar lines are often duplicated, and traces of Morrissey's irreverently violent and sexual lyrics can be heard in any number of sad songs. The whole genre of "emo" can trace its roots to Morrissey's mournful pen.

THE QUEEN IS DEAD captures this band in its state of perfection, and despite its many imitators, remains as sad, fresh and truly unique as it did twenty years ago.



U2 – **THE JOSHUA TREE** (1987)

This album officially announced U2's arrival as one of the world's biggest bands. The first three tracks were huge hits for the band, songs that are now so epic it seems strange that someone actually sat down and wrote them. **THE JOSHUA TREE** was U2 moving away from their post-punk roots and into a slicker, more unique sound, crafted in part by

producer Brian Eno, who began working with the band on their previous record, *The Unforgettable Fire*.

Some might consider **THE JOSHUA TREE** to be U2's "selling out" record, and while the album made them a household name, what makes

(continued)

EXCEPTIONAL AUDIO COMPONENTS



EMOTIVE AUDIO

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

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

—Steve Hoffman, TONE-Audio

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

www.emotiveaudio.com



it so compelling was its subtlety. Despite Bono's powerful croon, these songs are mostly quiet and brooding. The Edge's now infamous guitar work is airy and light, chiming in and building upon itself rather than forcing any heavy riffs into the songs. Even the themes of the songs are deeper and more complex than on previous albums. Songs like *With or Without You* and *Running to Stand Still* are as potent and powerful as previous efforts such as *Pride (In The Name Of Love)*, but come off as less direct and bombastic, and are the better for it.



R.E.M – MURMUR (1983)

R.E.M couldn't have picked a better name for their debut album, because this quiet, mumbled record may have just sounded like a murmur, but its jangly, alternative rock created what we now call, well, alternative rock. This album announced the arrival of R.E.M, a band whose constant touring and college radio sound would be emulated by countless others in the years to come. Peter Bucks' glistening, poppy guitar work, and Michael Stipes' high, unintelligible vocals are already perfectly formed on this first album, and only improve with time. Like every R.E.M

(continued)

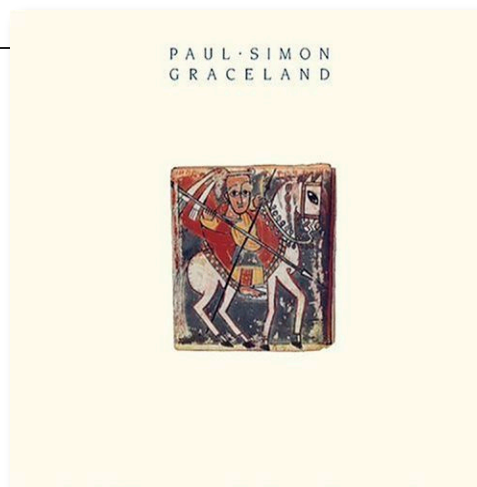
album, **MURMUR** is a bit uneven, but songs like *Radio Free Europe* and *Laughing* are great musical moments. Stipes is as strangely wordy as he is on following albums, and the band's sound was fresh at the time. Surely other bands were playing this type of music, but R.E.M brought it into the collective consciousness, and for that they deserve a lot of credit.



The Police – **GHOST IN THE MACHINE** (1981)

This album illustrates what made The Police great. Sting's unique mix of punk, reggae and new wave added richness and texture to these incredibly catchy songs. **GHOST IN THE MACHINE** is The Police at their darkest, but also at the height of their power. Although many point to *Synchronicity* as the band's finest moment, and indeed it is a great album, *Ghost* is free of some of the mushy, overproduced sound that bogged down other releases. The choruses are bright, but not too bright, and the sense of darkness and dread always present in Sting's music comes to fruition here.

Invisible Sun and *Spirits in a Material World* were both big hits, but even these are steeped in dark paranoia. Other great songs, like *Demolition Man* and *Darkness*, despite their up-beat exteriors, are some of the darkest material The Police ever made, as well as some of the best. Even the bouncy *Everything She Does is Magic* has a haunting, desperate quality. This carefully crafted and well-written album is a great example of 80s pop.



Paul Simon – **GRACELAND** (1986)

Paul Simon reinvents himself on this pop gem, and in the process manages to fuse big-budget rock songs with South African rhythms and vocals. He abandons the folksy guitar and confessional lyrics that had made him a star, and instead lets loose a series of complex songs full of abstract and poetic themes.

This is the album where Simon really starts to expand his song-writing styles, jumping from the folksy title track, to the completely a cappella track *Homeless*, or the Cajun *That Was Your Mother*. Some of the production on this album may be a little corny, with the electric drums and keyboard slides, but it was contemporary at the time, and still doesn't detract from the compelling tunes.

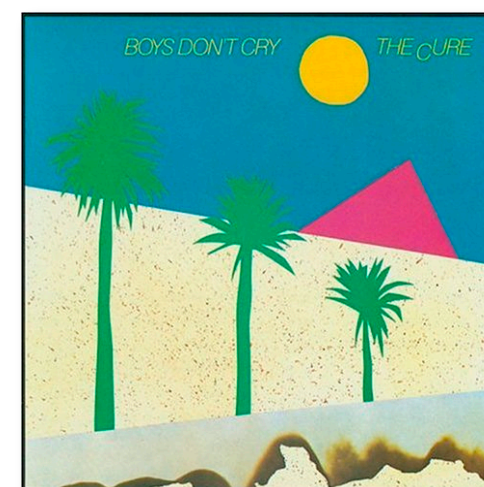
The album did, however, generate a lot of controversy, as did his 1990 album *Rhythm of the Saints*, because critics felt he was trying to exploit the troubled situation in South Africa at the time to drum up publicity. But when you listen to **GRACELAND**, as well as his other albums done with South African performers, it's clear that he respected and revered them. And although he would eventually go a little overboard with the African style, he gets the formula right on **GRACELAND**. Combined with Simon's already great songs, this album stands as a crowning achievement of artistic daring, and a testament to a truly talented musician.

The Cure – **BOYS DON'T CRY** (1980)

This was The Cure's first American release, but it was really a collection of the best songs off their 1979 UK release *Three Imaginary Boys*. The Cure are, of course, one of the great groundbreakers in punk and modern rock, and although their albums kept getting stronger, their debut has such a sense of sorrow and originality that it remains my favorite. What is so fun and interesting about this album is that it was written by Robert Smith, who is now known around the world but at the time was just a weird English kid. This record has a greater sense of loneliness and isolation because Smith hadn't experienced his future success, and has less confidence on this album than on the later ones. And it works well.

This record covers the full range of everything The Cure would come to represent, from the lonely, mascara anthems *Boys Don't Cry* and *10:15 Saturday Night*, to the dark literary *Killing an Arab*, a reference to Albert Camus' *L'Etranger* (The Outsider). These early gems established Smith's sense of awkward isolation and, along with this album's great post-punk sound, encouraged a legion of sad boys and girls to find their heroes in The Cure.

So there you go, my take on the 80s and what I thought was cool. I wasn't there, per se, but I still enjoy a lot of the music from that generation.

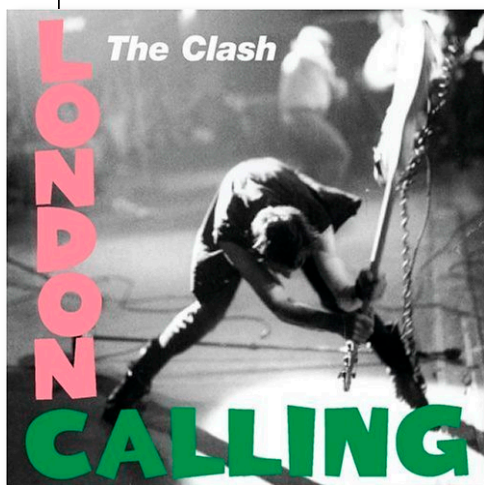


A Record Man Reflects

— Norwood Brown

Back in the mid 80s I was still working for a major record company and I had access to just about everything. This was a time when a lot of interesting music was being released all the time. Though you might think we were jaded, there was a hardcore group of us that couldn't get enough and we used to go over to Tower Records on our lunch break and buy more records!

Here's some of the stuff we shelled out our own money for:



The Clash – **LONDON CALLING** (1980)

Great music seems to come out of the angriest places and **LONDON CALLING** is a perfect example. The economic situation in the UK in the early Thatcher administration was extremely tough on the lower and middle class with calls for change and reform with daily protests. The Clash were just an angry bunch of young

men in the wrong place at the right time.

The Clash had a lean, hard R&B/Ska edge that appealed to my surfer sensibilities. They were irreverent enough to sound great. Most of the work was done in the late 70s but the final release was in 1980. These guys had something to prove with this album, the music industry saw them as a single/EP band, and word on the street was this was their make it or break it album. Conceived above an automotive garage in blistering day and night sessions, **LONDON CALLING** produced several key songs, still considered anthems today, the title track in particular.

Rolling Stone proclaimed **LONDON CALLING** the most important album of the 80s.



Elvis Costello – **IMPERIAL BEDROOM** (1982)

This was where EC really caught his stride and found his voice. He could have stayed on the two minute pop song track, but didn't and stretched out to produce a group of haunting ballads that were markedly different from his previous work.

To many of us, this was EC's launchpad record. Production was beautiful, with Geoff Emerick as engineer and a cover that had a very pop art feel.

It's what we used to call an "other" in the music business, a record that was different enough to shake things up. We waited and it did. Even though his previous album, *Armed Forces* was very successful (with its Jackson Pollack style cover) **IMPERIAL BEDROOM** would start the trend of EC trying something different, often, much like David Bowie.

While I loved the whole album and wore my first one out, the definite favorites were *Man Out of Time*, *Boy With a Problem* and *Town Cryer*.

Bob Marley – **LEGEND** (1980)

This was the biggest selling reggae album of all time. It superheated the market for this style of music and broke ground for all of the reggae artists after that. It was released three years after his death, but through clever song selections and wide marketing (after all that's what us clever record people did) this album outsold even *Frampton Comes Alive!* and like *Dark Side of the Moon*, keeps on going like an Energizer Bunny.

Unfortunately, like many other great artists, this tremendous success was posthumous. By now, almost everyone had a few reggae albums, so they all bought this one. Many bands instantly took up the standard (or the spear for you purists), ran into the studio and started churning out Ska influenced records. Many anthems of love and hate with a reggae beat ensued. The good news is that now everyone knew about reggae. The bad news was UB 40 got a record deal. Death to anyone that admits they like *Red, Red, Wine*. (art director Jean chimes in from the other room, "Oh man, that song is just BAD!")



Take Your HiFi On The Road.



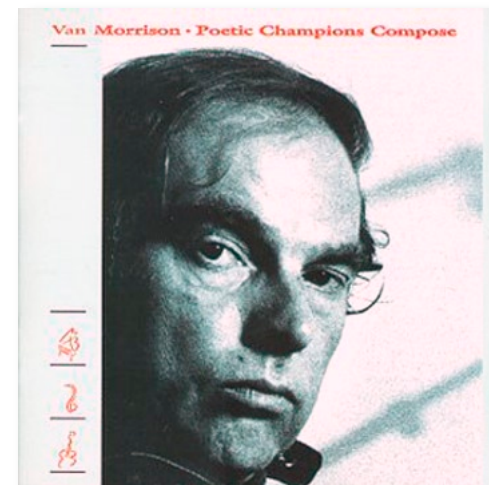
Now you can have audiophile sound in your drivers seat. The Milbert Bam-235ab is built to withstand the rigors of the automotive environment, yet offers the delicacy of an amplifier that would be right at home in our living room with the finest components.

- Hand Built in the USA
- 10+ Year Tube Life
- Impervious to Vibration
- Will Drive ½ ohm Loads
- Audiophile Grade Parts Throughout



MILBERT AMPLIFIERS
Vacuum Tube Car Audio Equipment
Since 1986

PO Box 1027
Germantown, Maryland 20875
www.milbert.com
301-963-9355



Van Morrison – **POETIC CHAMPIONS COMPOSE** (1987)

First of all you need to know that I am a HUGE Van Morrison fan and have always followed the music from this scene closely. (but I do HATE Brown Eyed Girl) I first heard this one in the Leo Castelli Gallery that had just opened up in Los Angeles, attending a Frank Stella Show. When *Spanish Steps* came on, a number of the guests went silent and a few mumbled “who is that, it sounds like Van Morrison?” I spent the rest of that night sitting by the gallery desk so I could hear the speakers and resolved to buy this record TOMORROW. I still remember this like it was yesterday.

This particular VM release made it into heavy rotation at most of the tres hip art galleries and coffee shops in the Los Angeles area almost immediately, but I was there first. You gotta love an album that has Alan Watts Blues, *I Forgot That Love Existed* and a song called *Keltic Excavation*. Not to mention VM does a killer rendition of *Motherless Child* as well. If you had only ten CDs during this time period, this was one of them.

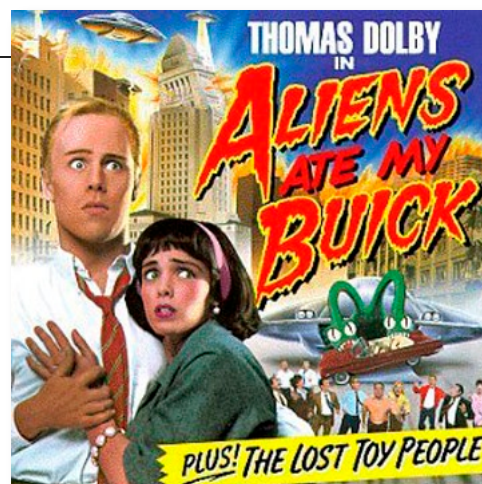
Joe Jackson – NIGHT AND DAY (1989)

While many used Boys and Girls as their mating record of choice, this was my favorite. My JBL studio monitors never sounded better than when this record was on the stereo. Joe Jackson was on fire when he did this record.



Unlike today, where you are lucky if you buy a CD with two good songs on it, every cut on this record is great. With it's Day side and Night side, you could have built a film around both sides of this classic album. *Breaking Us In Two* got all the airplay, but I dug all of this album and it made for a rebirth of the Lava Lamp in my apartment.

Co-produced by Joe Jackson, this was a departure from his previous efforts that had much more of a new wave feel to them. This was a much more sophisticated record in terms of songwriting and musicianship. The inner album photo, shows Jackson and crew in a very densely packed basement-style studio, only hinting at the complexity that was contained within.



Thomas Dolby – ALIENS ATE MY BUICK (1988)

Most of you remember Thomas Dolby for *Blinded Me With Science* but **ALIENS ATE MY BUICK** brought about a whole new standard for production values that came on with a vengeance in the 90s. This was Thomas Dolby's Sargent Pepper and everything that could go right on this record did. Everyone involved in this came away amazed and changed. This release made everyone's stereo sound great. For those of you with really good systems, check out *Ability to Swing* and *Pulp Culture*; there is a lot of great spatial things going on along with a great bass line.

It even includes voiceover talent from Robin Leach and Edward Asner, you have to love it! This was and still is great martini bar music, it jumps off the vinyl and is alive in the room. Great art and innovation never dies. This one sounds as good today as when I first bought it. Forget the CD, go out and find a clean vinyl copy of this one.

The Replacements – LET IT BE (1984)

Ok, let's have some real fun. Put this in, go right to track 9 and crank it up! No, it's not T.Rex or Motorhead, but that loveable bunch from Minnesota, the Replacements, singing *Garys Got a Boner*. Don't let that song leave you scratching your head because any band that dares to label their album **LET IT BE**, while calling themselves the Replacements, deserves a serious listen.

I was concerned that working for a big label, we got to hear too much stuff from only the coasts, but our production guys turned me on to the Replacements. They were definitely a band that had everything to gain and nothing to lose. Thankfully, they stayed together long enough to make a serious dent in the 80s scene. While they didn't get much mainstream radio airplay, they were very popular with the college crowd and big with other musicians and aspiring songwriters. These guys opened the door for a lot of the alternative bands to arrive in the early 90s.



After the seemingly overnight success of their third album, *Hootenanny*, **LET IT BE** was ambitious from the start and on the radar screen of those in the know. On Twin Tone records, they were largely self produced and set the model for "indie pop". Their next record, *the Shit Hits the Fans* would be their final, though lead singer Paul Weterberg would go on to a critically acclaimed solo career.

If I could sum up the 80s on one note, it would be diversity. While there was a lot of dreadful mainstream music, everything was still up for grabs. Many musicians were still able to create interesting music without the pressure of selling 8 million units, but that would soon change in the 90s..... ●

Blues You Can Use — Jeff Neumann

ROOMFUL REVISITED

I can't remember where I first heard Roomful of Blues. It was in the 1970s, where memories from countless nights in smoky bars are a blur.

Residing in Western Massachusetts, the favorite trip to the beach for my friends and I was to the Rhode Island shore. "Let's go see Roomful" was the nighttime party rally for beach clubs like The Blue Sands, The Wreck, The Red Parrot and up the road in Providence, the legendary Lupo's Heartbreak Hotel. As New Englanders of a certain ilk, Roomful of Blues was "our band." It's gratifying to know the band is now loved all over the world. So many things have changed since I was first knocked-out by Mr. Robillard and his muscular horn section, but one thing has not — a night out with Roomful of Blues is a guaranteed good time.

*Photos by Jeff Neumann
taken at Club Helsinki in
Great Barrington.*

I had not seen the band in the five years since their last major personnel change. Naturally, I jumped at the chance catch them at Club Helsinki, an intimate club in Great Barrington, Mass., close to my current home in Hillsdale, N.Y. Curious to hear the latest version, I was not disappointed.

Roomful of Blues is not just a band, they are an institution. Founded in 1968 by blues guitar champ Duke Robillard, and surviving the vicissitudes of popular taste in multiple incarnations, Roomful has been a swinging powerhouse of American music for 38 years. Over 50 different musicians have lent their talents to the band's signature sound.

(continued)



With so many outstanding musicians and so much great music, it would be impossible to say which album is their best. But Standing Room Only has to be a contender. The eight-piece group is in top form on this latest release.

If the financial, psychological and sheer logistical challenges of keeping a seven to 10 piece band constantly touring, recording and “keepin’ ‘em dancin’” for almost 40 years were not impressive enough, you have to respect the fact that Roomful of Blues has consistently added great new tunes to the lexicon of swing jazz, rock-and-roll, R&B and blues music. Seven of the 14 tracks on Standing Room Only, their 18th album, are originals. The band has remained faithful to its postwar jump blues, R&B and rock-and-roll roots, while creating new original material that instantly sounds classic.

A Solid Line-Up

Guitarist Chris Vachon joined the band in 1990, and has produced their last five

albums. Aside from being a monster guitar player, Mr. Vachon is a damn good songwriter. Four of the originals on this album are his: “Boomerang” is a straight up rock-and-roll burner; “The Love You Lost on the Way” serious get-down blues; “Keep on Rockin’” is a melodic jump swing that dancers will love; and “Nobody Knows” is a wistful old-time jazz number. Mr. Vachon’s Louis Armstrong-style vocal is perfect for this one, which shows the diversity of his talent. You’ll be whistling along.

The singer in the band is Mark DuFresne. The man is a Singer with a capital S. Wisely, Roomful of Blues has always kept its identity as a band. Even though there have been some great singers in the band, top billing goes to the unit. That said, it’s the man up front singing who delivers the songs, and man can this guy put across a song! With clear-as-a-bell tone and strong vibrato, Mr. DuFresne’s supple tenor is rich with natural soul. His impeccable timing and evocative phrasing add punch and meaning to every

song. A real showcase for his vocal talent and one of my favorite tunes on this record is the wonderful ballad “Sufferin’ with the Blues.” Little Willie John couldn’t have sung it better.

Mr. DuFresne’s songwriting contribution to the album is “Two for the Price of Ten” a cautionary tale told with self-deprecating wit. It features his harmonica in a concise solo. Being a harp player myself, I would like to hear more, but I also understand that in a band with three great horn players, the harp is certainly unnecessary and probably best used sparingly.

Singing with Roomful for five years now, Mark DuFresne sounds as though he’s been with the band forever. Originally from Kansas City and residing in Seattle, Mr. DuFresne, 52, is the only non-New Englander in the band. Talking with him about the rigors of touring, I asked, “so you pay the most dues?” He said, “No, my wife does.”

Keyboard man Travis Colby authored the eight-to-the-bar romp “Jona Lee.” If you see the band live, you may get the treat of hearing him pummel the 88s on this one for a jaw-dropping solo like the one he took that night at Club Helsinki.

Alto and tenor sax player Rich Lataille is the band’s senior veteran, with Roomful for an amazing 36 years. His hard bop instrumental “Straight Jacquet,” a tribute to the great bandleader and saxophonist Illinois Jacquet, is a testament to the fact that this band can be great listening as a straight ahead jazz if they so choose.

If there was to be a single from the album, “Flip Flap Jack,” short but sweet at just 2 minutes 50 seconds, may be the most likely candidate. The infectious bounce was penned by baritone sax player Mark Early, and he offers up a great solo. It’s probably the breeziest break-up song you’ll ever hear. The melody and lyrics sung with such aplomb by Mr. DuFresne are such a hook

(continued)





ruby star records

194 GOUGH STREET SAN FRANCISCO CALIFORNIA 94102

TEL 415.621.8237 FAX 415.255.8237 EMAIL info@rubystarrecords.com

Please visit [Jacqui Naylor's website](#) for information on her albums and upcoming shows.



that this is one of those tunes you sing to yourself for days: "Flip flap Jack, I ain't comin' back - Feetie fighty foe, it's time to go."

If you have never heard this band live, you owe it to yourself to get out your dancing shoes and get off the couch. With their extensive touring schedule, it's very likely they are coming soon to a city near you. Check out their web site www.roomful.com for the schedule. Second best would be to buy this CD, have a party and tear up the living room. This is a distant second best though, since the power of an eight-piece band with horns has to be experienced live to be truly appreciated. Wherever you find them playing, it is sure to be Standing Room Only. ●

The Art of Buying Obscure Records

— Jeff Dorgay

I know it sounds wacky, but being an artist I have often times purchased records or CDs because I thought the album art looked cool, or because I thought the band's name was intriguing. This has bit me in the behind a few times, but all in all, it has turned up some fun music I probably wouldn't have otherwise bought. This used to be a lot easier in the old days, when most music came in a 12-inch square package, but the CD has brought along the box set, and on occasion some pretty elaborate information in book form along with the little silver disc, so it's still a good time searching for new music.

On any record purchasing expedition, it's always the same story: I begin by looking for something mundane, and there it is, something totally obscure that hints at the possibility of fun inside. Here are a few of my purchases from off the beaten path over the years. It's been tons of fun, and has led me to multiple purchases by those same artists. The next time you are at your favorite music emporium, try something kooky. After all, how many Doug and The Slugs albums do you own?



Bliss Band – RIO

Here's one I got from a friend who used to work at a radio station. Then, as now, free music is almost always cool, so I flipped it on the turntable and had a great time with its pop sensibility. At first listen, it had a Doobie Brothers kind of sound, and further reading of the album notes revealed that it was produced by Jeff Baxter and featured Michael McDonald singing backup on a couple of tracks.

This one came out in 1978, and there was another Bliss Band album (that I have never heard) called Neon Smiles, released in 1979. Mr. Bliss then fell out of the record bins until 1997, when he released his only solo album. In the middle of all this, he got picked up as the other keyboardist for The Moody Blues, which, as far as I can tell, is still his day job.

Rio was fairly well recorded, so every now and then, I pull it out of the stack and play a few cuts. It always brings back great memories.

Favorite tracks: *Rio*, *Slipaway*, *Don't Do Me Any Favours*

(continued)



Doug and The Slugs – COGNAC AND BOLOGNA

I heard about this Canadian band flipping through the pages of Rolling Stone one afternoon. Their album only got a paragraph (but a positive review, nonetheless) and I said to a friend, “I have to find this record. Anyone with a band title like that has to be interesting.” It took a while, but upon opening it I discovered that the record sleeve had a pattern you could cut out to make “slug sound enhancers” to place on your ears and get more midrange.

At the time, I had a pair of AR 2axs that had a bit of midrange suck-out, so it was a pretty fun concept after a couple of beers one evening.

A Google search on Doug and The Slugs revealed, www.dougandtheslugs.com! Duh, why didn't I think of that! A quick perusal of the site revealed that the original lineup on Cognac and Bologna (which went on to a gold record, along with their next three albums) stayed together from 1978 until 1988. The Web site described them as the ultimate party band, but I think that's selling Doug and The Slugs a bit short; listening to Cognac and Bologna again reveals a lot of tasty licks as well as a cool, new-wave sound. I bet if you tied Huey Lewis to a chair and gave him a shot of truth serum, you would find he spent some time listening to these guys before doing his thing.

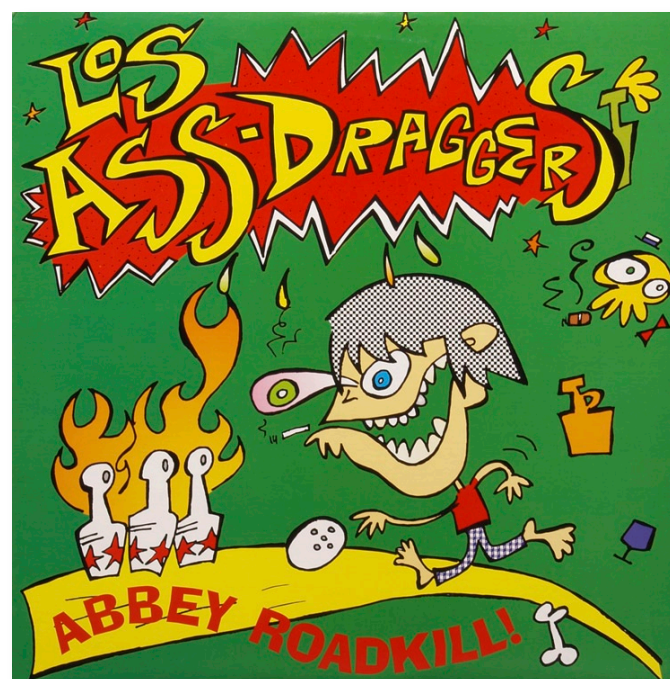
The band stayed together under different incarnations until October 2004, when Doug passed away from what was described as a lengthy but undisclosed illness. He was 52.

Favorite tracks: *Soldier of Fortune, Too Bad, Chinatown Calculation.*

Los Ass Draggers – ABBEY ROADKILL

How can you not buy this record, with a title like that? The artwork suggests punk music inside, and punk it is. One website describes them as Spanish Fury Punk and I couldn't agree more.

If you are still mourning the passing of the Ramones, pick this one up, you will enjoy it. In typical Ramones fashion, there are about 17 tracks on



each side, with none longer than 1:48 minutes, but they all rock! This is just plain fun. Break this out when your 15-year-old has friends over and they will all think you are insane. And that, of course, is the point!

Favorite tracks: *Makin Shit Like a Bear, What About the Fucking Martians?* (continued)



HIDDEN MESSAGES

WHEN YOU CAN'T PLAY  CDs BACKWARDS?

1. TODDTHEVINYLJUNKIE.COM

Toll-free 866-444-3910

Turntables, Cartridges and
Complete Systems



Graham Parker
– **STICK TO ME**

I have to admit, back in my first year of college (1977) I didn't even know who Graham Parker was. But one day, looking through the 99-cent cut-out bin, I came across *Stick to Me* and thought the cover was really cool with all the filmstrips on it, so I brought it home.

Not only did I become a Graham Parker fan, this is still one of my favorite records of all time. *Stick to Me* is straight ahead rock and roll at its finest, and is one of those rare records that doesn't have a weak track. GP was still fairly unknown in the United States back then, and while almost all of his records got a lot of critical praise, he never made it to big rock stardom like many of his contemporaries. To this day, I can't understand why he wasn't the next Elvis Costello.

Favorite tracks: *Stick to Me*, *I'm Gonna Tear Your Playhouse Down*, *Watch the Moon Come Down*

(continued)



DEATH FROM ABOVE 1979 – Romance Bloody Romance, Remixes and B-Sides

Here is another cool band from Canada (remember, I didn't plan this, I was buying records because I thought the album covers were intriguing) I stumbled upon completely by accident. This cover has a Warhol-like posterized image of two guys that look like Dave Grohl with elephant trunks! Definitely a must-buy; my frequent record buying partner, NB, just shook his head and said "man, I never have any luck buying stuff like that!"

But score I did. Romance Bloody Romance is full of great tunes, and it's pretty well recorded. It is a touch crunchy on top, but has a lot of punch and some great audio textures. What is most amazing is that this band consists of two guys (that do look a lot like Dave Grohl) that play bass and drums. The Canadian magazine Rip and Burn calls them a "funky punk band with a singing drummer that doesn't sound like Phil Collins!"

This has definitely gone into my iPod for the morning time on the treadmill. If this doesn't get you up and moving, nothing will. If you liked Rage Against The Machine, I think you will like Death From Above 1979. This CD features a number of their songs from their earlier release *You're a Woman, I'm a Machine* that have been redone a number of different ways for your listening pleasure, from disco to punk style.

While this disc doesn't speak to me as much at my current age, when I was in college I would have played it every day. Here's another disc that will keep your younger acquaintances guessing.

Favorite Tracks: *Romantic Rights, You're Lovely (But You've Got Problems)*

PEPE & THE BOTTLE BLONDES – Pambrosia

The most recent addition to my CD collection, Pepe & The Bottle Blondes, are a local band from the Portland area. I didn't know this when I bought the disc, I just liked all the yellow on the cover. Building on the success of their last CD, *Latenight Betty*, Pepe and company were described on www.cdbaby.com as "A little Dezi Arnaz and a little Andy Kaufman." Damn, everyone has taken the good lines.

This is a great swinging disc that will be a hit at any dinner party, and has a great Latin groove. I found it reminding me of Kid Creole and the Coconuts, and a ton of fun. The artwork inside is great, and its discs like this that really make me long for vinyl releases.

While I am someone that does not choose dance as a medium for expression, those of you predisposed to this kind of entertainment will be bouncing all over the place.

Favorite Tracks: *Outta This World, Unnamed* ●



Music for the Head...phone

— Aaron Kovics

I use music for many different reasons. Sometimes it fills a void in my life, while others it is a background activity. One type of music calms my nerves while another motivates me. For audiophiles though, some music really needs to be heard without life's daily distractions. The favorite kinds of music for me that satisfy this need are technically strong and sonically masterful. Green Day just doesn't do it for me when I'm in this kind of mood. I enjoy a lot of things that I will be sharing with you in the issues to come, but I still find myself enjoying some of the "head" music from the 60s and 70s as well as many contemporary artists.

Now that I'm older with a wife and two kids that all have their own agendas (that usually require them making noise of some kind, which sidetracks my musical journey) I find a lot of solace in my head-phone system. When the need for the music fix hits, it needs to be taken care of, right now! I know that listening through speakers offers a level of visceral impact that is not possible, but the speakers can fall prey to some unwanted effects too.

I really enjoy the intimacy of my headphone system because it allows me to pick up on some minute details that I miss when listening to speakers. Here's a few of my favorites that I prefer through the headphones that are also a few of my reference recordings:



MISTY – Yamamoto, Tsuyoshi Trio (TBM)

This is one of the best sounding LPs that has ever graced my turntable. The version that I own is a Limited 25th Anniversary Edition that is a premium HQ-180 gram "super vinyl" remastered recording on a label called "Three Blind Mice" from Yokohama, Japan. It features Tsuyoshi Yamamoto on piano, Isoo Fukui on bass, and Tetsujiro Obara on drums. It was originally recorded in Tokyo on August 7, 1974. It was re-cut at the JVC Mastering Center in July 3, 1995. This jazz masterpiece features standards such as "Misty", "Honey Suckle Rose", and "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" and was recorded using a 16 channel 3M tape Master recorder at a speed of 76cm/second, and a 2-channel Phillips recorder at 38 cm/second.

This recording has a level of quality that will appeal to every audiophile. There is no distortion and his keystrokes do not get lost while co-existing with the rest of sounds being created by his bandmates. The beginning and end of each stroke has a personality of it's own, while working together to form a happy alliance with bass that goes deep down into your soul, and drums that make the entire album a perfect package. You can hear the piano pedals as they are being pressed and released, and brushes as they travel across the entire span of the snare. The performance is outstanding and sound quality is top notch as well.

(continued)

Reference setting audio designs!

Metronome-Technologie

- State-of the-art digital playback
- Modified metal Pro transports for highest accuracy
- Upsampling 24-bit/192khz
- Pure, transparent analog sound
- Advanced & robust Power Supply—most models have PS in a separate chassis
- CD Players from \$10,800



New Audio Frontiers

- Extraordinary Single-Ended Triode "845" amplifiers
- Breathtaking & Musical "Ongaku" sound
- Optional silver/copper litz transformers
- Advance design & robust Power Supplies
- Power Output: 20-50 w/ch
- Models from \$13,000 – Stereo, Integrated and Mono
- 110 lbs each chassis



Argento Audio

- Reference Silver cables
- Elliptical silver conductors, polished and cryo treated
- Non-shielded for most open, pure, detailed sound
- VDM – Vibration Damping Material
- Copper AC cords



UNITED ARTISTS OF MESSIDOR (Messidor)

This 150 gram double LP is a collaboration of contemporary Latin music on the Messidor label. It features such artists as Astor Piazzolla, Paquito D'Rivera, Arturo Sandoval, and Mario Bauza that also features some traditional styles. I find that this record has so many different instruments from the percussion family, sitting down with my eyes closed, and a pair of my favorite cans on my ears, it is easier to differentiate each of the instruments, and the place they have in the soundstage of the recording. They tend to have more "air" around them, while trying not to step on their neighbors.

I also love this album at high volumes through my speaker set-up. Congas and timbales travel through your listening area, in a way that only good quality speakers can bring out, but I always save one side for an intimate headphone listening session. It does have a bit more surface noise than I am used to, but the performance more than makes up for it! This one only set me back ten bucks, but is really hard to find now!

(continued)

Distributed by: tmh audio

Dayton, OH | 937-439-2667 | info@tmhaudio.com | www.@tmhaudio.com

A FORTNIGHT IN FRANCE – Patricia Barber (Blue Note)

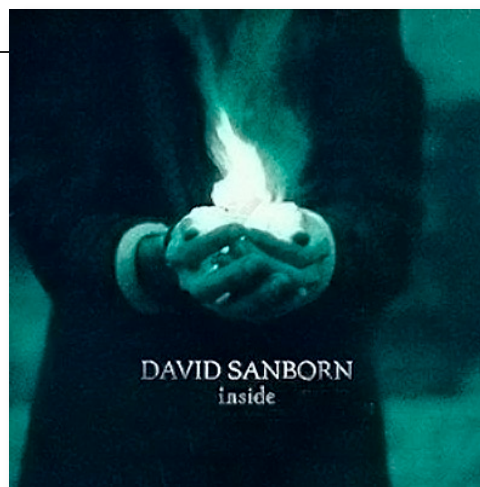
Usually, I dislike listening to live recordings with headphones as I am usually in search of the highest resolution possible. The sounds of coughing or glasses clinking and especially applause, detracts from the experience, especially so close to my ears. But this one is an exception, done in three different clubs in France between March and April of 2004.

It is a perfect mix of Patricia's own songs and three standards which consist of *Witchcraft*, *Call Me* and an awesome interpretation of the Lennon-McCartney song *Norwegian Wood*. She has an entirely different idea of how music should sound than most other musicians do. That and the fact that she found three other band-mates that understand exactly what she is trying to express, makes for some intense listening pleasure. The talent of these four artists is exactly

what tickles my fancy when putting time aside for a listening session.

Even though the recording is live, it is one of the cleanest and complete albums that I have

ever heard. It is in my top 5 for 2005. Most of the songs start out with the four of them playing separately and yet sounding as one. Then as the songs progress everyone gets to show some of their individual talents in a solo with the others playing quietly in the background. Everyone gets to "strut their stuff", and they strut with such talent that the listener is left in awe. In a world where popular music is divided into the current top 40 hits of the week, "A Fortnight in France" is the antithesis. Again, sound quality and performance are top shelf.



INSIDE – David Sanborn (Elektra)

David Sanborn has always shown care about the quality of his recordings. My inner geek appreciates that he often lists which mikes and cables were used while laying down his tracks. Marcus Miller produced this CD and joins in on bass and electric piano on some cuts. Also joining are Michael Brecker, Dr. John, Cassandra Wilson, Bill Frisell, and Sting. I have spent many late hours, in my comfy chair, wearing one of my favorite headphones (yes, I have many different kinds), groovin' to the tunes on this CD.

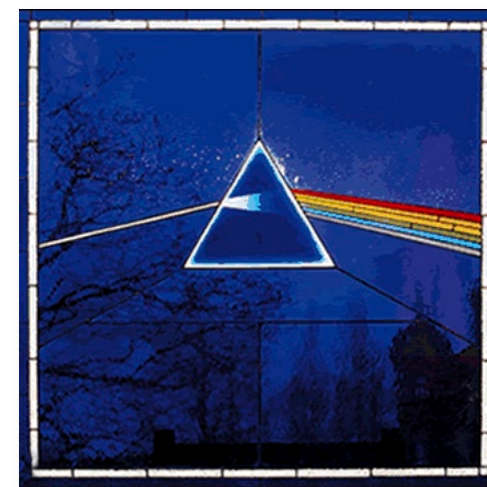
I know every nook and cranny of this CD and it is one of the ones I often use when first listening to a new piece of gear. Another "headphone-only" special sound to listen to on this disc is track 6, *When I'm with You*. At precisely 14 and 17 seconds (as well as a few other spots) into the disc there is a sound that appears to be coming from over your left shoulder that sounds like little pieces of sheetrock falling behind the wall when you nail it down.

You might think I'm crazy getting excited about hearing these extra sounds, but if you really think hard about it, somewhere, there was a recording engineer during the mixing of this record, that decided it was important to have that sound in there. Many people will listen to this song for a certain amount of times, and never know it was there, but once you hear it, there you go!

The other reason that I prefer enjoying this particular recording with headphones is because of the percussion used, for the same reasons given above in the Messidor recordings. This one should be part of every jazz lover's collection. This is not "smooth jazz". The performance and recording quality are fantastic!

DARK SIDE OF THE MOON – Pink Floyd (Capitol)

For me, the 30th Anniversary SACD remaster of this classic is still the reference of all references, released in 2003 on Capitol. Both the CD and SACD layers are remastered and it is a direct path down the road to headphone (or surround sound) Nirvana. Money and Time are classics that appeal to everyone from the boomers to today's kids.



While I enjoy the 5.1 layer on my multichannel rig, I really enjoy the 2 channel SACD layer for headphone listening. If your environment is really quiet, check out the last 20 seconds of *Eclipse*, there is an orchestral piece playing in the background that sounds like part of a Blood, Sweat and Tears song or something from Sgt. Pepper. It's very faint, but once you find it, it's a good test for ultimate resolution. There's only so much remastering can do for a 70s master, but the performance is stellar. ●

Slummin'

— Jeff Dorgay

This issue we have even more budget goodies and audio oddities for you all in the name of having some fun. If it's related to audio and really cheap, count me in! So far the feedback on this column has been great, so hopefully you will have a few laughs and come to the big TONE garage sale one of these days!



Beavis & Butthead Remote Control — Free

Now that I'm finally going through the last of the boxes from when we moved to the Northwest, I found this little jewel. A quick check on EBay revealed that you could purchase this along with its original book titled "This Sucks, Change It!" for a few dollars. If you just happen to have more than one remote, it's perfect to have on the coffee table when company comes over. Having twelve pre-programmed sayings like "I Am Cornholio" and "Don't Make Me Kick Your Ass" is incredibly handy.

(continued)



musicdirect®
it's the music that matters™

Stay informed!

Log on to **musicdirect.com** to sign up for our weekly newsletter. It's packed with new release information and special hardware and accessory features!

musicdirect
soundbytes

B A R G A I N S



Musical Fidelity The Ultimate CD Upgrade!

Turns any CD player into a World Class performer!

Regular price \$1800...for a limited time GET ALL THREE for only \$1199!

Special Offer from Musical Fidelity:

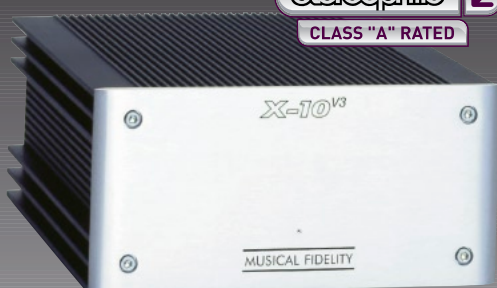
Buy the \$1000 X-DACv3, the \$400 X-10v3, and the \$400 X-PSUv3 and SAVE \$600!

As great as the X-DACv3 and X-10v3 sound separately, something truly magical happens when these pieces come together with the X-PSU Power Supply. You get all the incredible extended resolution from the X-DACv3 combined with the warmth and added musicality of the X-10v3 and the lower noise floor, increased dynamics and extended bass weight of the X-PSUv3. This "triple-threat" CD Upgrade from our friends at Musical Fidelity is far greater than the sum of its parts! You would need to spend \$6000 and up on a new digital front end to get close to this level of CD resolution and musicality!

MUSICAL FIDELITY



RECOMMENDED



stereophile
CLASS "A" RATED

Musical Fidelity X-10v3 Tube Buffer Stage

Add the warmth and musicality of Musical Fidelity's exclusive Mu-Vista tubes to any system with the Stereophile "Class A" Rated, Limited-Edition X-10v3 Tube Buffer Stage! Only \$399!

Stereophile "Class A" Rated! The most affordable "Class A" Rated component is a tremendous upgrade to any serious system. Place the X-10v3 between your amp and preamp, behind any digital player or phono preamp, or to connect an iPod or other portable device to your system to add the warmth of tubes to your system! Built around the Musical Fidelity exclusive Mu-Vista tube, the X-10v3 allows you to add the magic of tubes to any system without adding any noise or distortion. All you add is better dynamics, better soundstaging, more natural tonality and a more natural sense of musicality! Our Highest Recommendation!

EDGE Amplification

Designed and Built in the USA!

From the Edge G-4 at only \$3250 to the incredible performance of the \$10,000/pair G-8+ Mono Blocks, EDGE has the perfect amp for your needs! Every Edge amp, preamp, integrated amp and now the NEW Edge CD Player is among the world's finest sounding available. Call us to learn more about these amazing products!



Zerodust Stylus Cleaner The Best Stylus Cleaner! \$69.95

No need for harsh cleaning chemicals or stiff bristled brushes. This stylus cleaner will last forever!

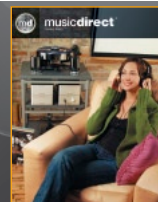


Call us Mon-Fri 9am-6pm, Sat 10am-3pm Central Time
318 N. Laflin St., Chicago IL 60607 :: (312)433-0200

800-449-8333 » musicdirect.com

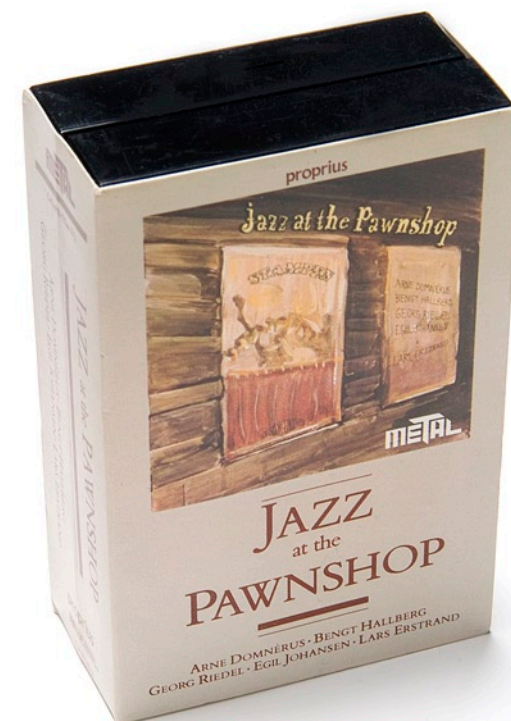


We couldn't call ourselves **musicdirect** if we didn't carry the most diverse selection of the world's finest recordings! We also stock every single title reviewed in here in TONE-AUDIO. Call us or check our web-site for our recommendations.



**Call for a
copy of our
FREE 164 page
catalog.**

It's really nice!



Jazz at the Pawnshop — Free

It's really been a good month for this kind of thing. My colleague John Sunier at Audiophile Audition read the column last issue and liked the little bit about the Nak 600, so he sent me this pre-recorded copy of Jazz at the Pawnshop on the original metal cassettes. I popped it right in and it sounded fantastic!! A definite keeper.
(continued)



Pile of Classical CDs — \$10

When you really want to go slummin' around you head for the pawnshop. Laugh all you want, but I have picked up a lot of great CDs at the pawnshop for next to NO money. As I am just starting to listen to classical music, I'm not nearly as fussy as the aficionados in the group. While Bon Jovi CDs were still fetching \$5 each, there was a pile of classical CDs with a \$2 each label on them. I asked the smarmy guy behind the counter "How much for all 10?" to which he replied, "Give me \$10 and they're yours, dude, nobody wants that crap!" Hey, it was worth it just for the copy of **Bolero**.



NAD 1020A Preamp — Free

A couple of months ago, I read an article that Michael Fremer had written where he mentioned that he collects old receivers and gives them to friends as gifts. Well, he's not the only one collecting receivers. I took his lead and sent one to a friend of mine for his daughter and the kindness was repaid, he sent me an old NAD preamp the next week. The kicker is it even works! (and it has a mm/mc switch along with cartridge loading!!) Definitely going into the garage system with some old AR-2ax speakers I found.

Case of Maxell UDXL-II — \$7

I'm not telling anyone where I bought these, as I want to go back and get more! But when I saw brand new, fresh Maxell cassettes this cheap, I bought about 5 boxes. Now if I could only find some reel-to-reel tape in a few boxes like this! Watch for our new column on the web called **i.p.s.** It should be a lot of fun for you tape lovers.



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

Aperion: www.aperionaudio.com

APPLE: www.apple.com

Coffin and Trout: www.coffinandtrout.com

CARDAS AUDIO: www.cardas.com

Conrad Johnson: www.conradjohnson.com

DH LABS: www.silversonic.com

Dedicated Audio: www.dedicatedaudio.com

ECHO AUDIO: www.echohifi.com

Emotive Audio: www.emotiveaudio.com

ESSENTIAL SOUND LABS: www.essentialsound.com

JM Labs/Focal: www.audioplusservices.com

Milbert Amplifiers: www.milbert.com

MODWRIGHT INSTRUMENTS: www.modwright.com

Music Direct: www.amusicdirect.com

NAIM: www.naimusa.com

Pacific Creek: www.pacificcreek.com

PRIMA LUNA: www.upscaleaudio.com

Penaudio: www.penaudio.fi

UPSCALE AUDIO: www.upscaleaudio.com

Ruby Star Records: www.rubystarrecords.com

Running Springs Audio: www.runningspringsaudio.com

SYMPOSIUM USA: www.symposiumusa.com

Sonnett Technologies: www.sonnettech.com

SOPHIA ELECTRIC: www.sophiaelectric.com

TMH AUDIO: www.tmhaudio.com

Todd The Vinyl Junkie: www.toddthevinyljunkie.com

VH-1: www.vh1savethemusic.com

WADIA: www.wadia.com

Whest Audio: www.whestaudio.co.uk

