

toneAudio.

The e-journal of analog
and digital sound.

no.5

2006

What Are You Listening On?

**CANADIAN
IMPORTS**
THE TETRA 506s

**FUN FUN WITH
MANLEY'S
MAHI MAHI**

**CROSS
POLLINATION**
Two Generations
Reflect Musically

**BE A STAR
WITH
GUITAR HERO**

**New Digital From
ModWright**

REVIEWS, MUSIC &
SO MUCH MORE

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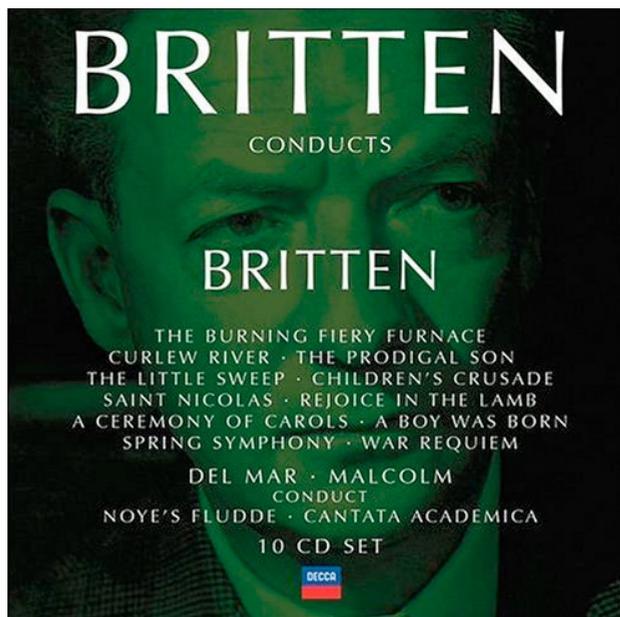
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STAFF

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.

DAN BABINEAU

Dan joins TONE as our classical music authority. Much more than just another opinionated audiophile, he brings a wealth of knowledge playing classical music (oboe and bassoon) for a number of well known orchestras and has more equity in his record collection than most people have in their homes. A certified analog enthusiast, watch for DB contributing an occasional review concerning the stratosphere of LP playback.

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.

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 Dachshund named D.C. and enjoying double short cinnamon non-fat lattes with a bit 'o whip on top.

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!

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.

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.

SCOTT TETZLAFF

Scott keeps the computers running for the world's largest advertising agency by day, but is a big music enthusiast, with almost a full terabyte of music on his hard disc. Because his job takes him all over the world, his buddies keep him on top of the coolest new music in all of the clubs in Europe and elsewhere. Incidentally, he and JD met working in Milwaukee's infamous Safe House spinning records many years ago.

CONTRIBUTORS

NEW IN TONE THIS ISSUE



Photo by Paul Golfen

Ken Kessler is a world famous audio journalist that also writes about automobiles and watches for a number of magazines, including *Hifi Plus*, *Stereophile* and *The Robb Report*, just to name a few. As you can see from his **Get Off The Couch** segment this month, he keeps very busy outside of the audiophile world. Mr. Kessler will soon be releasing his new book on the McIntosh company and their history. If it's even half as good as his book on the Quad company, it will be a must read.

Bob Golfen is the father of staff writer, Joseph Golfen and a longtime music enthusiast. For his day job, Bob works on the city desk of the *Arizona Republic*, covering automobiles and some of the goings on in Scottsdale, Arizona. He lives in the stylish Central Corridor of Phoenix and has a couple of very cool vintage MG sportscars.



PUBLISHER'S LETTER

Continuing our quest to bring you more fun, we are starting a new column this issue, called appropriately **Get Off The Couch!** As much as we all like to be mole-people, in the dark with our tubes glowing, we need variety in our lives. We will be talking to people in the industry, and giving you a little bit of a glimpse of what they do to get 180 degrees out of phase from the audio and music business. Not to say that this isn't a great time, listening to music and gear, but change is good now and then. The distinguished Ken Kessler, an avid *TONEAudio* reader, offered to go first and tell us about the things he likes to do when not setting VTA. Hopefully, this column will inspire you to check out a new interest OUTSIDE of hi-fi as well.

Getting back on the couch (or the chair, to be exact), I have always been a bit of a furniture snob. I used to spend a lot of time with a Herman Miller employee many years ago who got me hooked on great furniture and classic designers. Just like high-end audio, once you get used to the good stuff, it's hard to go back. Considering all the money many of us spend on power cords and such, a few thousand bucks for an outstanding chair isn't that bad.

Besides, the more relaxed you are when listening, the more acute your sense of hearing will be.

How's that for a rationalization? On our cover is the classic Eames Lounge chair, which can be yours (with ottoman) for \$3200 in standard finish or Rosewood as the anniversary model for \$3995. Inside, we have profiled five chairs that combine functionality, stylish good looks and excellent build quality. A good place to start is **Design Within Reach** (www.dwr.com), where they have a number of showrooms in the West as well as a healthy mail order business. All of the designs they carry are the real thing from Herman Miller, Knoll and the like. Just like with audio, beware the knockoffs!

Continuing the trend we started last issue, there is a bit more music this issue and there will be even more next issue when we add Mike Metheny (Yes, Pat's Brother) to the staff and explore Jazz in more depth. We also have a few more surprises that we can't share with you just yet!

I hope you enjoy the issue and would like to thank all of our readers for staying tuned. We really appreciate all of the great comments you have been sending us! If you are attending the **Rocky Mountain Audio Fest** in Denver (October 20-22), please stop by the 10th floor and say hello in person.



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

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"I believe the violins need to be toed in a bit"



The Pioneer DV-588A-S

Jerold O'Brien

If you want a great entry-level disc player for less money than even a mediocre power cord, the DV-588A-S from Pioneer is the one for you. For \$129, it offers way better CD playback than you would expect and you can play SACDs, DVD-A discs and DVD video discs! Whether you are a beginning audiophile buying your first disc player, want a spare DVD player for the living room, or in my case, the garage A/V system, you will be very impressed with this player.

How do they stuff this much into a box this cheap?

Granted, I'm not going to tell you this thing sounds better than your 3-10 thousand dollar digital rig, but it sounds great in my garage with an NAD amplifier and a pair of Aperion 633s. One feature that is really cool is the 588's ability to play DVDs that you fill up with MP3s yourself. This is a blast, you can put about 40 hours worth of music on a 4.7 GB DVD writeable disc, so you can rock to your hearts content when not getting up to change the disc is more important than ultimate fidelity.

While the 588 sounded fantastic on the garage system, it did a pretty good job in the house on my small system that consists of some vintage Dynaco gear and a pair of Vandersteen 1Cs. The presentation was slightly two dimensional, but hi-res playback was pretty darn good, especially at this price point. Listening to my favorite Neil Young DVD-A, **Harvest**, revealed a fairly well fleshed out midrange and fairly solid bass response. Switching to the John Mayer Dual Disc, **Heavier Things**, there was a substantial difference between the DVD-A layer and the CD layer, with the former having a much punchier sound. *(continued)*



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There are no primo parts inside this thing, so two days of constant play and it's broken in. You won't need to spend a ton of money on cables at this level. Just because I couldn't resist the urge to tweak, I did try a very modestly priced Audioquest power cord (or use the ICE Cube from last issue with a standard IEC cord) and a pair of \$75 interconnects from my ever-growing cable ball in the spare bedroom. Definitely, a little more sound gets through, but here's the ultimate tweak for this budget player; A used Musical Fidelity X-10 tube buffer stage. JD bought one a while back for a song, so I borrowed it for this test and the results were amazing! You can probably find one on EBay for under 100 bucks and it transforms this player, making the presentation much more liquid.

If you really want to get mental, you can use the digital output of this player with the outstanding Benchmark DAC-1. This combination will offer up some serious digital playback and still give you the option of SACD and DVD-A. Using the DAC-1 for RedBook reproduction and the X-10 for SACD and DVD-A should give the beginning audiophile a great upgrade path for this player as well. If it breaks, throw it out and get another one! There I go, getting way off the path again.

All tweaking aside, if you just want a very respectable disc player that can handle any format you throw at it, the Pioneer DV-588A-S is the way to go. It even does a great job with movies and has 5.1 capabilities as well as a pair of two channel outputs. ●

GET OFF THE COUCH:

This month, we feature a new column where we talk to other folks in the industry to see what they do for fun and relaxation that takes them AWAY from music and hi-fi for a little while. If you are new to our group, it's important that you know we are not all totally obsessed with this stuff and do, in fact, have lives. It's probably good for the significant other people in your life to have this info and that they know this will not become the *Hobby That Ate Your Brain*. (So if it DOES, it's not our fault...)

Ken Kessler is known to many of us in the industry as a seasoned veteran. He has also written on a number of other subjects, including cars and watches for a number of different publications. If you are a *TONEPhoto* reader, watch for more from Ken there, we will be featuring his writing very soon.

Here is a little vignette in to his world and some of the other things that pique his interest. Enjoy! *(continued)*

HOW I SPENT MY SUMMER

KEN KESSLER

GET OFF THE COUCH:



Stick two or more hi-fi scribes in a room, lock the door, eavesdrop, and count the mere minutes until the conversation veers away from audio onto something you'd never anticipate.

Why? We work with the stuff all the time. When we're not listening or writing, most of us would rather do something else than talk about it.

How many of you know that Michael Fremer loves dogs, cooking, and good wines, or that Art Dudley has a weakness for Italian cars? That John Marks is a scholar of theology, and Steven Stone is both a serious photographer and a guitar maven? Hate to break it to you, but some of us have lives.

It amuses us no end that our readers think we're monomaniacal, one-dimensional obsessive who eat, drink, and sleep hi-fi. Some may be that way, but count me out. My biggest *kvetch* is that life is too short for me to indulge in all of my other pursuits, which have nothing whatsoever to do with hi-fi, and which touch my soul just as deeply. Sorry if this suddenly makes me seem like a blasphemer.

(continued)

Unfortunately, I lack the discipline of an audiophile I met some 15 years ago in Italy. Wealthy beyond comprehension, he owned a converted medieval slaughterhouse, which he converted into a simply astonishing villa. In it were four or five of the most remarkable systems of the day, including the top five loudspeakers on the market, a Goldmund turntable, ad infinitum. But that wasn't what surprised me. Elsewhere in the villa were rooms dedicated to scotch, cameras (Hasselblads and Contaxes, I seem to recall), seriously rare shotguns, and maybe one or two other pursuits.

Seeing a kindred spirit, I asked him how he dealt with so many passions. "Simple," he said. "I devote one night each week to each hobby." I never asked if that meant he only drank the finer scotches one a week.

What a solution! What a master of self-control! But my mind doesn't work that way. I simply get into moods. And there's plenty besides hi-fi and the related obsessions of rock music, soul, blues, and 1950s crooners, record collecting, as well as my passion for movies and therefore home cinema and DVDs. (Film noir, Italian films of the 1950s and 1960s, and Kurosawa, in case you were wondering about the main genres.)

What the readers don't know is that I have, for my entire adult life and part of my childhood, been a fanatic about hard-boiled detective fiction, SF and fantasy, and my library – including thousands of non-fiction titles – contains some 8-10,000 books. Then there are Judaica, automobiles (especially Bugatti and Pegaso), model cars, cameras (I'm an Alpa-phile), wristwatches and everything related to them, fountain pens, and cooking. And books on every one of those subjects, of course.

On top of that, I'm consumed by anything Italian and have forced myself to learn a bit of the language. A recent by-product of that is a deep love for Super Tuscans – I have four bottles of Sassicaia and a 1998 Brunello

Riserva awaiting special occasions – and I actually dream at night about olive all'ascolane, stinco, and osso bucco. I had the eerie pleasure of watching Italy beat Germany in this year's world cup ... while in a bar in Germany. I managed to stifle a "YESSSS!!!"

Believe me, I know that I'm blessed, aware that my work allows me to indulge in my passions in foreign lands, when I have free time after the work is done. In 2005-2006, I visited the USA seven times, Italy three times, Germany twice, Switzerland at least eight times, once to Monaco, two trips to Tokyo. In the last-named city, I realized the dream of eating fugu, or blowfish, as well as a couple of kobe beef dinners. And I have dear friends in all of those countries and cities, which matters more than anything else.

Is there anything cooler on this earth than being able to call someone up in LA or New York or Milano or Hong Kong, or Portland, Maine, for that matter, to join you at short notice for some good food and great conversation?

It's the privilege of combining work with pleasure that allows me not to have to think in terms of what I would do with free time. Take, for example, my lust for cars. *(continued)*

...I have dear friends in all of those countries and cities, which matters more than anything else.



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FEATURE

Now I haven't been primarily an automotive journalist for over 25 years, yet freelance opportunities in 2005-6 found me driving Ferraris at Monza and Fiorano, renting a Shelby Mustang from Hertz, driving a friend's Maserati, and bouts with a Bentley Flying Spur, a Range Rover, a Mercedes-Benz S-Class, an Audi A8, and other fine vehicles ... to review their sound systems! How lucky is that! So I don't worry about satisfying my automotive jones; my career takes care of that.

Because I write about nearly all of my passions, I'm unable to separate them from work.

What provides joy in my life are my son deciding to teach himself guitar after seven years of formal training on sax, or him knowing the words to an old blues song just because Nirvana covered it. I chill out by taking him to movies and embarrassing him, as dads are supposed to do to their 16-year-old sons. I love cooking for my wife. And I get almost as much pleasure out of seeing my cat warm his ass on my Lexicon MC-1 A/V processor as I do listening to it.

Given a surfeit of free time, though, I'd read more. I can't remember ever leaving the house without a book or magazine. Which is why I am never, ever bored. And that's what hobbies and passions are all about, I suppose. And if I have my way, I'll die in my listening room with a glass of Tignanello, with Dino on the system, while I peruse the biography of George Daniels. Now that would be a blessing. ●



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TONE **14** No.5 2006



A Familiar Package

THE CONRAD JOHNSON PV-1

Jeff Dorgay

The audio world is sometimes wacky indeed. In the first issue of TONE-Audio, this column featured the first real high-end preamplifier I ever purchased, the Hafler DH-101. Always the packrat, I recently found a box with a bunch of old receipts, for you guessed it, hi-fi gear. As it turns out, before I got my hands on a PV-2, I actually owned a PV-1, Conrad-Johnson's first preamplifier. If we are being historically correct, this preamplifier was first introduced as the Conrad Johnson Preamplifier in 1977 and then a bit later renamed the PV-1.

I bought mine in the fall of 1978, along with my neighbor Tony and our mutual friend Jon, who at the time was working for the local CJ dealer. So what are the chances of three guys all living within two blocks of each other all having a PV-1? Actually Jon had bought his a bit earlier, but that convinced Tony and I that we needed one too. Already, the upgrade bug had bit! I ended up having the PV-1 for about a year before trading up to the new PV-2, but Tony hung on to his for a long time...

(continued)

Working on my review for the flagship CJ preamp, the ACT2 (soon to be the ACT2/series2), I thought, why not revisit the beginning of the gene pool? A quick check on EBay revealed that PV-1s were going for about \$400.

I put a call in to Jon to see if he had a customer that by some weird chance traded in a PV-1 recently. "Wow, you are in luck; Tony STILL has his and he finally wants to trade up. I'll box it up and send it your way!" Though I have lost touch with Tony, I'll just bet he has more cash in the bank than I do.



I had lent Tony my box to ship his PV-1 back to CJ for repairs and by the time I thought of it, I already had a PV-2. Back then; we weren't so mental about OBM.

The PV-1 arrived on my doorstep a few days later, and everything was in good order. I immediately put it in a system and fired it up! A few minutes later, I was listening to great, vintage CJ sound. It was definitely a much warmer sound than my ACT2, but good nonetheless. I think it is a solid testament to Lew and Bill, that this PV-1 is still around and working well, not to mention they are selling on Ebay for about 100 bucks less than I paid for it almost 30 years ago!!

When it arrived, it was not only in the original packaging, it was in MY original packaging!

A quick call to CJ revealed that they still have parts for the PV-1, so if you have one in a closet somewhere that no longer works, they can probably get it going again for you. It might make for a great second system, or the perfect thing to get one of your kids involved in the world of high-end audio! ●



Now you might think it somewhat strange that I actually managed to buy a one-owner PV-1, from a guy that lived a block away from me when I bought my PV-1 almost 30 years ago, but it gets better. When it arrived, it was not only in the original packaging, it was in MY original packaging!

The Tetra 506 Custom

— JEFF DORGAY



My first experience with the Tetra 506s was at Steve Hoffman's house. He has been using them for some time now in his mastering work, and I liked them the first time I heard them, but you know how it goes. "It's not my amp, pre-amp, blah-blah..." Steve put a call into Adrian Butts, head man at Tetra, and I soon had a pair for review.

You can get the 506s in a wide range of finishes. Basic black will set you back about \$9,800, while my test pair came in a really cool custom cherry finish that runs around \$14,000. They are also available in all gloss black for \$10,450 and feature a three step process with each layer hand rubbed for smoothness. While I have to admit I am really fond of the reddish color and the finish is impeccable, for my money, I'd spend the extra \$4,000 on records! But if you have the dough and the room aesthetics to compliment a custom pair, you won't be disappointed. The folks at Tetra are craftsmen, indeed.

As you can see from the pictures, these are definitely funky looking speakers. Just like a Formula 1 car, form follows function. The tetrahedron shape minimized the front panel diffraction effects and helps to cut down the standing waves in the cabinet. Visitors were polarized by the design; no one said, "Those are nice speakers". They either said, "Wow, those are really cool, who makes em?" or they said, "Wow, those are really weird, I'd never let those in my house!"

(continued)





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But I'm in the group that digs them. I always appreciate when speaker designers can add art to the presentation. However, if you want a similar sound in a more familiar shape, the Tetra 505 shares the same drivers and crossovers in a bit boxier shape. Though I haven't heard these in person, Adrian assures me that they "are almost as good as the 506, but not able to capitalize on the advantages offered by that enclosure shape."

Initial Set-up and Listening

I gave these speakers a lot of listening time before sitting down to the keyboard. I used a number of different combinations to see how they would work in a medium room and larger room, and I experimented with about four different types of electronics.

Often times a speaker's cross-over design will dictate that it works better with tubes or solid state. I can say with confidence, you can use either with the Tetras, but though I had great luck with everything from 9 watt SET amps all the way up to my CJ Premier 350, they provide a completely different presentation. While fairly efficient, they have a lot of dynamic range, and will play loud effortlessly with a powerful amplifier.

If you have a 30-60 watt-per-channel amplifier, you can still fall in love with the Tetras. Unlike some speakers that need to get a certain amount of power flowing through them before they open up, the DeHavilland Aries amplifiers (30 watts per channel, SET) was more than enough for adequate listening levels. I even used them with the ONIX SP3 amplifier from last issue with great luck.

(continued)

But you won't hear everything these speakers are capable of until you can get them in a moderate to big room, where you can get about 10-12 feet back and really crank them up! My favorite position was to have the tweeters about 48 inches from the back wall, with the speakers about 3 feet from the side wall, with just a couple degrees of toe-in. I enjoyed the fact that this was not a terribly fussy speaker to set up. If you just plop them in the room, they will sound pretty good, but if you can spend about 20 minutes with a tape measure, you will be able to get a bit more sound.

The woofer and tweeter are already set back on an angle, so rake is preset from the factory, and thanks to three large spikes on the bottom, you won't have to worry about leveling. They are fairly heavy, (95 lbs. each) so it's up to you if you are enough of a manly man to move them around by yourself.

The Good, The Bad, and The Funky

The 506 is a two-way speaker with a rather large rear-firing ported enclosure. The triangular-shaped top eliminates a number of resonances. One of the biggest benefits of a two-way design is the simplicity. In my book, fewer components means less between you and the sound.

The 506 uses an 8-inch woofer and a 1-inch treated fabric tweeter from Morel (both built to Tetras specs), with a 12 db-per-octave crossover. Adrian claims the parts-count is very low in the crossover, and Cardas wire is used to connect everything internally. The speakers have separate connections for low and high frequencies.

The only real limitations with a two-way design can be ultimate bass extension and dynamic range, because two drivers can only play so loud. Tetra claims a measured response down to 29 hz, which I was able to confirm. They played the 31.5 hz band on my Stereophile test disc easily, with decent output on the 25 hz band, so I think we could safely call it a day at 29 hz.

Tetra also claims a 91db efficiency for the 506s, but that's not the whole story. I have had a number of 90-95 db speakers in the studio that won't necessarily play well with a low powered



SET amplifier. This is a test that the 506 not only passes with flying colors, it gives these speakers a completely different flavor. If you have a smaller room and are really an inner detail nut, this might be your cup of tea. The crossover design is compatible with tubes in general, but is very friendly to an SET, which is an added bonus. Hoffman uses his Tetras with the outstanding WAVAC EC-300B, and they reveal a ton of detail in that setting.

The Sound

The Tetra 506 has a very open, dynamic sound. I would say these are much more of a row five speaker, with a pretty up-front presentation, however I did not find them grainy or bright, provided you match them with the right cables. When I was getting used to them, the DH Labs Revelation cable that is silver coated was too bright for my taste. Switching to my favorite, the Cardas Neutral Reference cable was just a bit laid back.

A quick call to Adrian revealed that he had just finished work on his own cables, called Artet. He included his interconnects to get the full presentation. The interconnects did not make as much of a difference, but the speaker cables took the Tetra presentation to a whole new level. As you may recall, I had a similar situation with the Zu Druids last issue, so I once again suggest going to the Artet speaker cables if you are considering a pair of Tetras, it will really take them as far as they can go.

This is a trend I have been seeing lately and fully agree with. Who would know better what cable would be the best match for their speaker than the folks who made it in the first place? It also saves another big chunk of your time auditioning cable. As always, before you spend another \$3000 on cables (when you could be buying more records...) give them a try with your current cables, you might be perfectly happy right where you are. If you are a nerdo supreme and insist on auditioning thirty different speaker cables, carry on. Otherwise, just buy the Artet cables and start enjoying the music. We will be doing a follow up on the Artet cables in a future issue. *(continued)*

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Another great attribute of these speakers is their ability to reveal inner detail and nuance without fatigue. I can see why a lot of engineers like these speakers, because a ton of detail is great, but if you are fatigued from the speakers hitting you over the head all day, what good are they? I would say this is the biggest strength of the 506s: they offer enough detail that you feel right with your conscience for dropping \$10,000, but they are very musical, so you still love them in the morning.

Listening to **The Best of Paulo Conte** was a blast, as was Tom Waits' **Mule Variation**. Both of these discs have a ton of small details spread through the mix that are very soft and subtle, which the Tetras excel at revealing. This is definitely a speaker that if you have equally good electronics will put you in that "Wow, I didn't hear that before!" groove. Put *What's He Building on in There?* on your turntable, and I guarantee you will freak out. Those of you that are female vocal lovers will also really enjoy these speakers.

But Can They Rock?

The short answer is *Hell Yeah!* The Tetra 506 LTDs are somewhat of a chameleon. Put them in a smaller room with a modest tube amp or, better yet, a good SET amp, throw any good vocal or jazz disc on, and you will be happy as a clam.

But, if you have a bigger space that will allow you the liberty of getting them out in the room, as well as putting your couch about 9-12 feet back, you will be in for a real treat if you have a lot of clean power.

(continued)

These speakers have a ton of dynamic range even though they are fairly efficient. If you have ever heard the Wilson speakers and thought to yourself how well they reproduce dynamics, but never quite warmed up to the sound, the 506 is perfect for you. These are dynamic AND musical.

Granted one eight inch bass/mid driver can only play so loud, but these speakers get louder than I ever need to play music. For those of you that are listening to a lot of music that has major sub bass content, I paired the Tetras up with the outstanding REL B2. This gave me enough bass to really tear it up.

Moving the speakers to the main listening area, with the CJ ACT2 and Premier 350, made revisiting my favorite rock LPs a lot of fun. Combining efficient speakers with a powerful amplifier really makes for a great recipe for listening to Audioslave at lease-busting levels. (Not that we at TONE-Audio condone this practice.) Dropping the Classic Records reissue of **Led Zeppelin 1** on the turntable was a real treat, especially listening to *Dazed and Confused*; this is the kind of dynamic range and clarity that takes this music to a whole new level of enjoyment. Call me sentimental, but I had to put on **Dark Side of The Moon**. This was very cool, listening to the guy walk back and forth across the soundstage, right before the alarm clocks go off!

Granted, the Tetras do a fantastic job with any kind of music, but those of you that are heavy-duty rock and rollers are really in for a treat.

The Big Dilemma

The hardest part of the Tetra test was deciding on the ultimate environment to use them. High power and a larger room was a ton of fun, but a bit closer up with a low power SET was really cool too. I had to pick a point and stop there, so I could get on with it. For my eclectic taste, the best balance for me was the DeHavilland Aries we tested

last issue. 30 watts of SET power was an outstanding match for this speaker, offering great bass extension and almost as much rich, inner detail of the glorious 300B with the extra slam those additional 20 watts provide.

Either way, you have a lot of options with the Tetras, so I think these speakers will have a big audience.

THE VERDICT

Do you think I had a great time listening to these speakers or what? This is a speaker I could live happily ever after with, because it works well with a very wide range of music and was compatible with a wide range of electronics. The Tetra 506s are smart, attractive, and they can dance. For those of you who have this kind of girlfriend, you know what I'm talking about. ●

MANUFACTURER:

Tetra Speakers Inc.

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www.tetraspeakers.com

PERIPHERALS:

Linestage BAT VK-42SE, Conrad-Johnson ACT2

Power Amplifier Pass Aleph 3, Manley Mahis, DeHavilland Aries, Conrad-Johnson Premier 350

Analog Source Linn LP-12 (lingo/cirkus/trampoline) with Shelter 90x

Phono Preamplifier Asthetix Rhea

Digital Source ModWright Denon 3910

Interconnect Tetra Artet

Speaker Cable Tetra Artet

Power Cords Running Springs Mongoose

Power Conditioner Running Springs Jaco

Vibration Control Symposium Ultra Platforms, Rollerblock Jr.s

FAVORITE TEST TUNES:

Paulo Conte – Best of Paulo Conte (CD)

Tom Waits – Mule Variation (LP)

Cream – Cream at Royal Albert Hall (LP)

Led Zeppelin – Led Zeppelin (LP)
Classic Records

Pink Floyd – Dark Side of the Moon (LP)
MoFi

Pat Travers – Pat Travers (LP)



The Ray Samuels XR-10B Phono Stage

— JEFF DORGAY

I have really had the pleasure to listen to quite a few good phono stages over the past year or so, but one that really stands out is the XR-10B from Ray Samuels. While the Manley Steelhead has become quite popular with reviewers, because of its multiple inputs and front panel loading adjustments, one downfall (or benefit, depending on how you look at it) is all those tubes inside. With a solid-state preamplifier, everything stays consistent and cool. *(continued)*



Phono preamplifiers really battle noise more than any other component because they are dealing with such low level signals. If you do have a tube phono preamplifier (I currently own three...), you are always on the lookout for tubes with low noise and then in matched pairs, to assure the best sound you can get. But the XR-10B is solid state, so those worries are gone. All you need to do is unpack the XR-10B, turn it on and forget about the sound ever changing and because it draws so little current, you can just leave it on forever.

The XR-10B is a two-box design; one holds the preamplifier circuitry and the other the power supply. Both boxes are identical in size with a 5-foot umbilical cord between them. Ray suggests that you keep the boxes as far apart as possible and I concur. While the

XR-10B came with a fairly heavy power cord, I substituted my favorite, the Running Springs Mongoose, with excellent results. Some say you can never be too thin or too rich, but I say you can never have too little background noise in your phono stage, so a good power cord will definitely help.

This is what makes the XR-10B an analog addict's dream.

10B, it too has three inputs, switchable from the front panel, along with adjustable gain settings (from 40 to 70db), adjustable input loading (from 30 ohms to the standard 47K) and adjustable input capacitance (from 50pf to 330pf). This is what makes the XR-10B an analog addict's dream. At first, I thought, what do I need three phono inputs for? But guess who has three turntables now? These

Thanks to the small size, this preamp should fit just about anywhere. In case you haven't heard anything about the XR-

days, I'm using my trusty LP-12, the Rega P25, and will soon be adding an SME 10 to the mix as my ultimate reference, and thanks to the removable headshells, it will be a breeze to compare cartridges to my reference Shelter 90x.

It wouldn't be this easy without all that adjustability. Even if you aren't a reviewer, you might want to have a budget table for those questionable records you bring home from the used record stores and maybe an extra turntable for 78s or perhaps another table with a mono cartridge if you have a large collection of those records.

See how easy it is to come up with a reason for three turntables?

The Ray Samuels XR-10B, with all of these adjustments helps to bring out your inner vinyl addict, but this fix doesn't come cheap at \$4500. *(continued)*



Considering you won't be buying NOS tubes at 50-100 bucks a pop though, it's still not that bad.

Initial set up

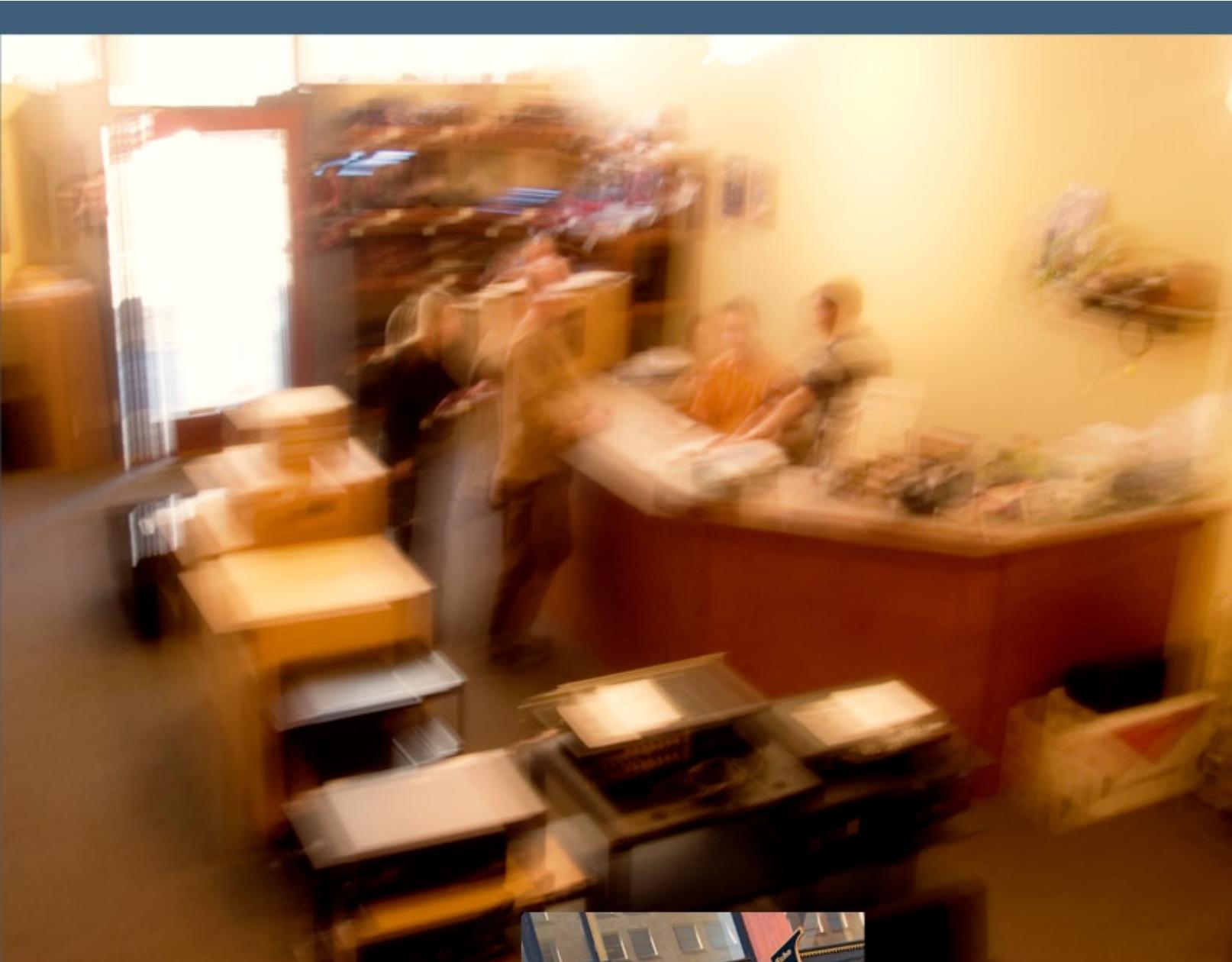
The unit I received for this review had already had some hours on it, so Ray assured me that it would not need much break-in to fully take advantage of the XR-10B's sound.

When I started on this review, I still had a Shure V15 on my Rega P25 and I was immediately impressed with the powerful sound of this preamp. The first record I put on was Little Feat's *The Last Record Album*. My favorite cut on the disc, Romance Dance has a deep, semi-whumpy bass line, but it was tight, controlled and deep with the XR-10B. After leaving it on all week (I've never shut it off since it's been here) and a few 12-14 hour days of spinning records nonstop, it completely settled in to its own sound pretty quickly.

I experimented a bit with some vibration control, but it did not seem to make a big difference here, the XR-10B is very stoutly built! Just to build up some good audio karma, I did put a Symposium Fat Pad on top of each box though. Ray Samuels used to work in the defense industry and you can tell when you lift the cover. The workmanship is first rate, with very thick circuit boards, excellent parts quality and a lot of attention to detail. Everything is neat and tidy and that's what you want with low-level signals.

Once I spent a week getting used to the XR-10B, it moved on to my reference system, which consists of the C-J ACT2 pre-amplifier and Premier 350 power amplifier along with the Empirium Acoustics Nicole speakers.

(continued)



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(Later joined by the REL B2 subwoofer) This system features Cardas Neutral Reference interconnects and speaker cables, a mixture of Essential Sound Products (the Essence Reference) and Running Springs (Mongoose) power cords with power conditioning also from Running Springs. Analog was courtesy of the Linn LP-12 (Lingo, Cirkus, Trampolin) using the Graham 2.2 arm and the Shelter 90x phono cartridge.

The Sound

I know I'm letting the cat out of the bag here, but once I got the XR-10B in my reference system, I started listening to digital less and less. Even if you never plan on having more than one turntable (but once you have the option it WILL beckon, I warn you...), the XR-10B is worth it just to get the variable loading and gain options on the front panel. It's a lot like having a preamplifier with a remote. Once you get used to this functionality, you won't want to go back to not having it.

One of the keys to the XR-10B is resolution. This phono preamplifier reveals a lot of detail and will show the difference between cartridges very easily. The better your cartridge and table, the more music you will get, it's that easy. The other key is being able to adjust the loading and gain. Some cartridges that claimed to require 47k loading actually worked better at 1000 ohms and vice versa. My Sumiko Blackbird (also rated

47k) is the perfect example of this, delivering the smoothest response at the 100 ohm setting.

You can change loading and capacitance during playback, but should you require changing the gain, mute your preamplifier, or you will hear a (potentially damaging) thump coming through. Being able to dial these settings in really allows you to completely fine tune your system. Again, resist the urge for analysis paralysis; used sparingly (or P.R.N. as my medical

friends say) it can take your system from good to great!

Normally, I always listen to one or two Beatles albums when

I review anything phono related, but I spent one day listening to all thirteen albums in The Beatles Collection box set, stopping along the way to compare some cuts to the MoFi albums! It was always very easy to pick out the individual vocals, especially on the earlier albums, where George, Paul and John sometimes blend together a bit too much for my liking.

Another key word with the XR-10B is quiet, this one is dead quiet, so you classical music lovers will really enjoy the silent backdrop your favorites will now have. One of my favorite pieces is the Netherlands Wind Ensemble's *Beethoven Wind Music*. Through the XR-10B, these delicate instruments all had their own individual space in a way that I had not previously experienced on my system.

Once I got the XR-10B in my reference system, I started listening to digital less and less.

Looking for some music with a bit more weight, I switched back to popular music and spinned some Peter Gabriel discs, courtesy of Classic Records. One of my favorites, *Security*, has some very powerful deep bass lines and this revealed another strength of the XR-10B. No matter what I listened to, bass tracks were always solid and well defined with a lot of texture. Everything I listened to had the weight that I associate with high quality sound reproduction. Again, the super quiet background made it very easy to hear small, spatial things in the recording that require a bit more effort on other phono stages.

The XR-10B can even go a bit further down the quiet path if you have a preamp with balanced inputs. My ACT 2 only has RCA inputs, but it was still way more than adequate. When using it with the BAT VK-42SE, (which is solid state) it was just a touch more silent.

A 9.8 But Not A Ten

I felt that no matter what kind of music I listened to, the XR-10B presented a very neutral and accurate rendition, however I only have one minor issue with this preamp. I wish it had a bit more depth. I can't fault Ray Samuels for this, I have yet to hear a solid-state phono preamplifier that has that last bit of depth that I can get with the best tube units. Because my ACT 2 has a TON of depth, this was not as much of a shortcoming as it would be with a lesser preamplifier. However, there are no complaints in the reproduction of width or height, the XR-10B really has a wide soundstage.

Thanks to the big power supply, the XR-10B does an excellent job with dynamics and attack too. I pulled out a number of direct to disc jazz recordings, including my old favorite, Dave Grusin's **Discovered Again!** Listening to *Keep Your Eye On The Sparrow* was great, with all of that records attack preserved perfectly.

If you are an anti-tube person, this may be the perfect bit of vinyl heaven you have been searching for. Even if you are more on the tube side of the fence, it still may be for you because it does so much right and you don't have to buy a pile of tubes every couple of years. *(continued)*



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inside

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

THE VERDICT

This is always the hard part, because even though I have heard a lot of phono preamplifiers in my day, I haven't heard them all. Then my personal bias creeps in and tugs at my emotions. The bottom line at the end of the day that I have to ask myself is, would I write the \$4500 check for this preamplifier, and most of all would I tell a friend to buy one?

The answer to that my friends is yes. The Ray Samuels XR-10B has a lot to offer, no matter how many turntables you own. It is a high quality phono preamplifier with a highly refined sound, and on one level a bargain, considering you will never have to change tubes! ●

MANUFACTURER:

Ray Samuels Audio

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PERIPHERALS:

Preamplifier Conrad-Johnson ACT2

Power Amplifier Conrad-Johnson Premier 350
Analog Source: Linn LP-12 (lingo/cirkus/trampolin) Graham 2.2 arm with Shelter 90x, Modded Rega P25 with Sumiko Blackbird

Digital Source ModWright Denon 3910

Speakers Emperium Acoustics Nicole with REL B2 subwoofer

Interconnect Cardas Neutral Reference

Speaker Cable Cardas Neutral Reference

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

Power Conditioner Running Springs Jaco

Vibration Control Symposium Ultra Platforms, Rollerblock Jr.s

FAVORITE TEST TUNES:

The Beatles Collection (all stereo) (LP) Parlophone/EMI

Peter Gabriel Security (LP) Classic Records

Netherlands Wind Ensemble Beethoven Wind Music (LP) Philips

Joni Mitchell Wild Things Run Fast (LP) Geffen

John Mayer Trio Trio (LP) Columbia

The Great Jazz Trio Direct From LA (LP) East Wind

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The Manley Mahis

— JEFF DORGAY

Often, good sound in the audiophile world means big: big amplifiers, lots of big tubes, big heatsinks with a lot of power transistors. And of course, we need a big power supply too. That is the conventional wisdom, and it works pretty well for the most part, but every now and then you get surprised.



MANLEY
MAHIS

A 9-pin tube, the EL-84 looks a lot like a preamp tube at first glance, but I assure you it delivers the goods!



The Mahis are one of those surprises.

When I first saw the Mahis, I really wanted to get my hands on them, just because they looked so cool. I've always been a big fan of Manley stuff from an industrial design point of view, however I had never really heard any of their gear, outside of a show or dealer environment. So, the call was placed and we got a set delivered to the TONE office.

Only about 10x11x5-inches, the Mahis are small but substantial, weighing 18 pounds each. The chassis are black, but the front panel and spiked feet are a dark, metallic blue, and the front panels have the Manley

Mahi logo on them that light up from behind when you turn the power on!

Even though these amplifiers are compact, the details are beefy. There is an IEC socket on the back, so you can use the power cord of your choice. (I had great luck upgrading to the DH Labs Power Plus cord)

Your speakers connect via a pair of WBT binding posts, though there are no options for different impedance. I tried the Mahis with a number of different speakers, and did not feel this was a problem.

Unlike a lot of tube amplifiers in this price range, the Mahis use a pair of EL-84 output

tubes per channel, instead of the more common EL-34. This amplifier began its life about 15 years ago as VTL's "Tiny Triode" amplifier and made quite a name for itself. It then became their 35 watt monoblock, and later morphed into their 50 watt monoblock amplifier. A 9-pin tube, the EL-84 looks a lot like a preamp tube at first glance, but I assure you it delivers the goods! Guitar geeks in the audience will recognize this tube as the one that contributes to the sweet sound of the old VOX amplifiers the Beatles (and the Knaack) used.

A pair of Mahis will only set you back \$2,500, and they are stoutly built at the Manley facility in Chino, California. These are monoblock versions of the popular Stingray, without input switching and volume controls, so they are perfect for those of you who already have a linestage you are fond of. I have a couple, so I was looking forward to giving these a test drive!

Initial Set-up

For the first part of the test and break in, I used the Mahis in a system consisting of the ACI Sapphire XLs (See page 50 for a review) along with the ModWright 9.0 SWL SE linestage. Digital came from an Ah! Tjoeb 4000, partnered with the Benchmark DAC-1. Vinyl playback was provided by my hotrod-ded Rega P25 with a Sumiko Blackbird and the Hagerman Trumpet phono stage, so I felt we had these amplifiers in a system that was fairly representative of like-priced gear. Those of you wanting to stay all Manley would do well to consider their Shrimp preamplifier. (\$1,800)

These amplifiers broke in very quickly, and after about 50 hours were doing just fine. They were better than fine, so I decided to get wacky and put them into a much bigger system to really rock out. Normally, most people wouldn't put a pair of Mahi's into a \$40,000 system, but that's what I did and the results were impressive. *(continued)*

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Ad design courtesy of JackTracy, LLC.

For the duration of my listening with the Mahis, I used them with the Tetra 506s, along with my BAT VK-42SE linestage and VK-P5 phono preamplifier. My ModWright Denon 3910 was used for digital playback and the LP-12 with Shelter 90x provided LP playback. This resulted in some very satisfying sound with a few variations on the theme.

Because the Tetra 506s are pretty efficient (91 db), they proved to be a great match. The Mahis produce just over 40 watts in ultralinear mode, so this was more than enough juice to make plenty of noise. Triode lovers only get 20 watts per channel, but it's a bit warmer sound.

Adjustability Equals Fun

The Mahis give you two different ways to tailor the sound to your liking. Not only can you switch between ultralinear and triode mode, there are three settings for feedback as well. The standard setting (middle position) offers about 6 db of feedback, with the low setting has 3 db and the high setting, 10 db. You may question all of this, but it really comes in handy to dial in the sound you want. In a perfect world, if all records were perfectly mastered, you wouldn't need this, but we all know that's not the case.

(continued)



If you are new to the tube scene, the standard ultralinear mode is more powerful and offers a touch more control over the lower frequencies, while being just a bit more extended on the high end. Using those little EL-84s in triode mode will cost you a bit of extension and control, but the midrange is more liquid. Quad 57 owners, this may be an amplifier for you. I didn't have a pair of Quads around, but I did use these for a while with the 100db Zu Druids from our last issue with great results in triode mode.

While many of you might just leave everything in the center position and forget it, I found this feature to be really handy as a tone control.

Got a CD with way too much sizzle? Crank up the feedback. Granted, you will lose a little bit of ultimate detail and resolution, but the smooth sound will be a lot easier on your ears. Listening to female vocals late at night over a glass of wine or two, crank up the feedback and go to triode mode as well. This combination is as romantic as it gets.

If you are playing Led Zeppelin and need that extra push over the cliff, switch back to ultralinear mode and turn the feedback all the way down.

For some of you, this will be too much to handle, so if you are like a friend of mine

that keeps VTA settings for all of his favorite records on an Excel file, forget about the Mahis, they will probably drive you nuts. You need a power amplifier with a power switch and that's it. However, if having a few options sounds like a good time, grab a pair of Mahis and live it up!

A Different Kind of Fun

If you have never experienced an amplifier that uses EL-84 tubes, you are definitely in for a treat. Though the 6550 and KT-88 tubes are probably more common because of their higher power capacity, this configuration is very interesting. Conventional wisdom states that the EL-34 tubes have a more romantic sound, while the 6550s have more extension and punch.

However, the EL-84 in many ways is the best of both worlds, having great bass, top end extension, yet a liquid midrange. The only drawback is that these little tubes are only good for about 40 watts per channel, so in order to take advantage of the magic these amplifiers have to offer, you need a small room, efficient speakers, or both.

The more time I spent listening to the Mahis, the clearer picture I got of their character. If you've ever spent much time on two wheels riding sportbikes, the Mahis are like riding a 600cc bike instead of a 1000cc bike. If you keep it under 120 and zoom around a lot of tight turns, the smaller bike will actually

outperform the big one because it is more nimble. That's the key to the Mahi sound, very nimble.

They also had a very good dose of control in the lower registers. I tried a number of my favorite bass records by Kruder & Dorfmeister, Mickey Hart, and even dusted off my oldest Run DMC LPs. I was more than satisfied with the bass response of the Mahis on all occasions. Granted, there are a few tube amplifiers in this price range that have more power, but the Mahis had more finesse, so if that's your hot button, you will dig these amplifiers.

Again, the key is system matching. Get a pair of 92-96 db speakers and you may not ever need a bigger amplifier, because the quality of the sound you get out of these is very enjoyable. Hook 'em up to a pair of 86 db speakers and you might not get the same picture I got unless you are in a small room. Thanks to the great tonality of these amplifiers, you female vocal fans will really enjoy the Mahi sound.

It's all about detail with the Mahis. You can't beat the laws of physics with any pair of 40 watt amplifiers, but the Mahis do such a great job with detail, you may not find yourself wanting to turn it up quite so loud. One little detail I need to mention: the Mahis are very sensitive and only require about 300 mv to produce full power. If you take a pair for a test drive, turn your preamp way down before starting to listen. *(continued)*

If having a few options sounds like a good time, grab a pair of Mahis and live it up!



THE VERDICT

Remember, this is a 600cc bike. Don't tell me you put a pair of Mahis in a big room with inefficient speakers and didn't get the magic—I'll punch you. If you pay attention to what you mate the Mahis with, there is a ton of musical enjoyment to be had. They look cool, sound great, and won't break the bank. The ability to adjust the feedback and switch into triode mode is icing on the cake. What more could you ask out of a \$2,500 pair of tube amplifiers? Highly recommended. ●

MANUFACTURER:**Manley Labs**

13880 Magnolia Avenue
Chino, CA 91710
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PERIPHERALS:

Preamplifier BAT VK-42SE

Phono Preamplifier BAT VK-P5

Analog Source Linn LP-12 (lingo/circus/trampolin) with Shelter 90x

Digital Source ModWright Denon 3910

Speakers Tetra 506 Custom

Cables Tetra Artet

Power Cords DH Labs Power Plus (Mahis), Running Springs Mongoose (everything else)

Power Conditioner Running Springs Haley

Vibration Control Symposium Ultra Platforms, Rollerblock Jr.s

FAVORITE TEST TUNES:**Kruder & Dorfmeister**

The K&D Sessions (CD)

Run DMC Kings of Rock (LP)

Jacqui Naylor Plush Room (CD)

Led Zeppelin Led Zeppelin II (LP)

Transatlantic Bridge Across Forever (CD)

Al DiMeola – Land of the Midnight Sun (LP)

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The Tube Lover's Solid State Integrated: Sugden A21SE

— JEFF DORGAY

The Sugden A21SE

If you have been reading this magazine since day one, you know I'm a tube lover. Honestly, I'm a tube lover that falls to the romantic side of the sound spectrum if the truth be told. I have all the respect in the world for extension, dynamics, and musical accuracy, but at the end of many days, I just want to sit on the couch and relax. At that point, I don't want to think about any of this stuff, I just want to put a record or CD on and take it easy.

While I have heard a number of great solid-state integrated amplifiers over the past few years, they just haven't grabbed me in a way I would ever consider giving up the glowing bottles. Until now, that is.

For two years in a row, I have walked out of the Stanalog room at CES smitten after listening to the Sugden A21SE. For those of you not familiar with Sugden, they are a small company in the UK that has been making hi-fi gear for a long time. Though they make an intriguing set of Class-A monoblocks, they also make a few low-powered integrated amplifiers, with the A21SE being the top of that line. George Stanwick is probably one of the nicest guys in the world of high-end audio, and when he said, "when are you going to review some of our stuff?" I immediately said "Please, send me an A21SE!"

Many of you might stick your nose right up in the air when I mention the word integrated, but this one is the shizzle. The A21SE is worthy of replacing separate components, and can be mated with good source components and speakers to provide a high qual-



ity, albeit lower powered, system. Remember, they don't have McMansions in London, and in general the rooms are smaller, so quality is what matters, not size.

If you have any combination of a medium to small room, efficient speakers, or just don't listen that loud, the A21SE is as good as it gets. And you can take this baby home for \$3,495.

While all of Sugden's stuff is good, you want the SE model, because it has a much bigger power supply and 30 watts of pure class-A power (vs. 25 watts per channel in the A21). Taking the top off reveals the power supply and a dual-mono type design, relay-switched inputs, and a very tidy design throughout. It takes about an hour to really rock, and while it doesn't get warm enough to fry an egg on top, it will get warm enough to melt a CD cover. (No, I did not find out first hand...)

Understated is the name of the game with the A21SE. You can get it in silver or titanium finish, and it features a blue LED power light, power switch, and a big volume control, along

with an input selector that gives five inputs to choose from. The front panel and heatsinks on the side are substantial, with high quality RCA jacks on the rear panel.

Initial Set-up

Because this amplifier has a huge current capability, I tried it with a few speakers that were not necessarily the most efficient at first, just to see how it would perform. My first choice was the Penaudio Serenedes in my second system, featuring the BAT VK-42SE preamplifier and Pass Aleph 3 amplifier. The Aleph is a single ended class-A, with only 30 watts of power, and the BAT preamp is an exquisite solid-state unit, possessing a ton of detail without being harsh. However, this combination will never be mistaken for an overly romantic sound. Driving the 85db Serenades to a reasonable level was no problem, and neither were the Eminent Technology LFT-16 planar speakers. (Also 85db)

The two magic combinations for the Sugden was the 91db pair of Tetra 506s, and they had headroom to spare on my 101db 2nd Rethms. Thanks to the variable preamp output, I was able to use them with my Tannoy

(continued)

Many of you might stick your nose right up in the air when I mention the word integrated, but this one is the shizzle.

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TS-10 subwoofer that is part of the Rethm system. This is an excellent touch, as some integrated amplifiers do not have this feature, which is essential if you want to add a sub to your system.

Good as all of this is, I only have one minor complaint with the A21SE: The speaker binding posts, while substantial, are positioned in a way that it is extremely difficult to get spade lugs in. Should you have speaker cables with thin posts on one end, you can slide them right in, but banana plugs will not work.

I used an ONIX CD player as a transport, along with the Benchmark DAC-1 for digital playback, and the trusty Rega P25 with some new mods along with the Hagerman Trumpet phono stage that has now joined my ever-growing collection of phono stages.

All interconnects and speaker cables were the new Artet line by Tetra, and power cords were the DH Labs Power Plus. A Running Springs Haley provided clean power. When using the 2nd Rethms, I substituted the Audience AU24 speaker cables for the Tetra speaker cables because these speakers did not require bi-wiring. *(continued)*



The Sound

Because this amplifier had some hours already on it, extensive break-in was not required. By the second twelve-hour listening session, the A21SE was in its groove. Should you be predisposed to keeping solid-state electronics on all the time, I advise you not to follow this practice with the A21SE: It gets extremely warm. Even at the end of a full day of constant listening and typing, the A21SE is very warm, almost hot to the touch. You must have adequate ventilation for this amplifier, or you run the risk of damaging it.

All that heat leaves no question in my mind that this one is biased completely class-A all the time. I am always suspect of amplifiers that claim to be class-A, yet don't get terribly warm to the touch. I have owned a number of class-A amplifiers over the years, and they have always been my favorites. The Sugden is no exception. Compared to my BAT/Pass reference, the Sugden is a bit on the warm side, but again, I think most of you will enjoy this amplifier.

The highest compliment I can pay to this amplifier is that I spent a lot of hours listening to it without fatigue, and without thinking "I need more bass, or I need more of this, that and the other thing." Coupled with the Tetras, I could play music at realistic levels without clipping. Now that DB has me on a constant

diet of classical music, I am starting to share his appreciation for Shostakovich.

Not even pretending to know what I'm talking about when it comes to classical music, the one thing I do notice the more I listen is that in order to enjoy this music, when played back, it needs to possess a certain amount of weight to feel right to me. This is one detail not all small amplifiers get right, but the Sugden does an exceptional job. The A21SE always appears to have a lot more power (and headroom) than its modest power rating would suggest.

This is where the A21SE really shines, keeping things together during complex musical passages.

I don't know much about Shostakovich, but I do know a lot about Motorhead. JO is reviewing the complete, remastered Motorhead catalog, so I got a chance to borrow those LPs for an evening. My all-time favorite Motorhead song is *Eat the Rich*, and while you might pooh-pooh this selection (especially after listening to Shostakovich), most Motorhead songs are extremely dense texturally. This is where the A21SE really shines, keeping things together during complex musical passages.

Another good variation on the Shostakovich theme (should orchestra or heavy metal not be your bag) is Keith Jarrett's *Shostakovich: 24 Preludes & Fugues op.87* on ECM. For

those of you who have only listened to the Jazz side of Jarrett's career, you might have a lot of fun with this one. Remember, this is Shostakovich, so don't let the opening track with soft piano music fool you; you are in for some spirited playing here.

Careful listening to this disc, along with a few of my other favorite piano recordings, revealed two more things about the A21SE: it almost sounds tubey, at least as tubey as solid-state can sound, but still has a nice amount of control in the lower registers. However, it does not have that last bit of extension and transient attack you might expect from a transistor amplifier. I would characterize this as musical, perhaps even a bit relaxed.

Spinning LPs through the Sugden was also nice. As I mentioned earlier, what I enjoyed most about this amplifier is that it is easy to listen to for long periods of time. The A21SE is almost an anti-audiophile piece of gear. Much like the CJ CA 200 I reviewed last issue, this is an amplifier you buy to enjoy music with.

THE VERDICT

The Sugden A21SE is the pinnacle of audio simplicity. It is easy to use, and it is wonderful to listen to. I would happily buy this one if I had room for one more system in my home or office. For those of you who are music lovers first, and don't want to change your gear often, I give it my highest recommendation. ●

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Phono Preamplifier Hagerman
Trumpet

Analog Source Modded Rega
P25 with Sumiko Blackbird, Sota
Comet with Shelter 501 mk.II

Digital Source Onyx XCD-99
disc player with Benchmark DAC-1

Speakers Penaudio Serenade,
Tetra 506, Rethm 2nd Rethm

Interconnect Tetra Artet

Speaker Cable Tetra Artet

Power Cords DH Labs Power
Plus

Power Conditioner Running
Springs Haley

Vibration Control Symposium
Ultra Platforms, Rollerblock Jr.s

FAVORITE TEST TUNES:

Keith Jarrett – Shostakovich:
24 Preludes & Fugues op.87 (CD)
ECM

Motorhead – Rock & Roll (LP)
Earmark

Fleetwood Mac – Fleetwood
Mac (LP) MoFi

The Shins – Chutes Too Narrow
(LP) Sub Pop

Johnny Cash – At Folsom
Prison (LP) Columbia

Aimee Mann – Batchelor no. 2
(LP) MoFi

The Hagerman Technology Trumpet Phono Stage

— JERALD O'BRIEN

This one was right up my alley: a nice tube phono stage with 12AX7s and 12AU7s. Tubes I grew up with, and consequently always have a few variations on the theme lying around. At first glance, the Trumpet looks like one of the Red Rock Renaissance amplifiers JD is currently reviewing, put in a shrink machine. But this unconventional approach makes a lot of sense: it's not just being different for the heck of it. The power supply is down below and the tubes are up top, suspended to be immune from vibration. *(continued)*



**This one is really no fuss,
no muss. Plug the tubes in,
put the tube dampers on,
and turn it on!**



You will notice a couple of cool touches right away. You can turn the tube heaters on separately from the high voltage supply, which in theory should make the tubes last longer. Jim Hagerman uses Russian tubes he has matched for use in the Trumpet. Because this is a balanced circuit, if you purchase NOS tubes, make sure you can buy them in matched pairs to get the most out of the Trumpet. The four in the rear are 12AX7s, the four in the front are 12AU7s.

If you would like a bit more explanation on the design choices in the Trumpet, visit the Hagerman Technology website at www.hagtech.com. You can also download the owner's manual here to find out a bit more about this little box. A Gold Trumpet of your very own will set you back \$2500 and will work just fine with most cartridges. It is listed as a moving magnet phono stage, but JD had no trouble using it with his .6mv Shelter 501 II.

You can purchase a high quality step-up transformer for about \$1000. I will do a follow up as soon as I get my hands on a very low output moving coil cartridge and the new "Gold" version of the Trumpet that has a few upgraded components internally with cool gold anodized front and rear panels.

The ability to mute and change polarity on the front panel is also a handy feature. Considering how few linestages do this today, it is a welcome option. The Trumpet features a balanced circuit, and is available with XLR outputs or RCA jacks. Our test unit came with RCA jacks, which worked well for me. The new Gold version will be RCA-only, so take note.

Initial Set-Up and Listening

This one is really no fuss, no muss. Plug the tubes in, put the tube dampers on, and turn it on! I used the stock power cord for the first couple hundred hours to get a handle on the sound, then upgraded to the Audience Power Chord (review next issue). Whatever cord you choose, I feel anything that will help with lowering noise in a phono stage is a good idea. Because of the high gain involved, relative to a pre or power amplifier, you will probably notice more difference from a power cord or interconnect swap than you would on just an amplifier.

Once up and going, it took about two weeks of almost continuous listening to get the Trumpet broken in.

Enter the realm of head-fi.



www.head-fi.org

All of my test listening was done with a Rega P3 with the Promach mods: platter, subplatter, and counterweight; and a Sumiko Blackbird. The Modwright 9.0SWL linestage, the Prima Luna Prologue 5 Monoblocks, and my Vandersteen 2Ce Signature speakers comprised the rest of the system.

Some listening was also done with the Eminent Technology LFT-16s that I am reviewing for issue #6. DH Labs Air Matrix interconnects and Power Plus Power cords were used in the rest of my system, along with a Running Springs Haley power conditioner.

The Sound

For me, the Trumpet was a revelation, because until now, I was using a Bottlehead phono preamp I purchased about a year ago from JD and have now significantly upgraded the internals. While this offered good budget sound on par with a number of \$700-\$1,000 phono preamps the Trumpet was in another class; it took my system to the next level.

Though I have a somewhat mellow system, the Trumpet had a lot of detail and a very open sound. One thing I was pleased with was how quiet it was for a tube phono preamp. It sounds good after 20 minutes, but it really takes about 45 minutes to unfold all the way.

More Cowbell! The first record I put on was the first Bachman Turner Overdrive album to listen to Blue Collar. Groovy guitar licks and nicely miked percussion; this is always one of my favorite heavy tracks with a very open sound. The Trumpet had huge front to back depth on this record.

(continued)

Next, it was on to Motorhead. One of my new projects is to evaluate all the remastered discs in the Motorhead catalog, and again the ability of the Trumpet to pick out layers of screaming guitars while keeping a good lock on the bass line was outstanding. *Eat the Rich* has never sounded better on my system.

Ok, ok, what about giving this thing a whirl on music YOU might like? Well, now that I have a steady girlfriend again, I am listening to the occasional female vocal record now and then (but still NO Patricia Barber, that's where this sensitive guy stuff stops). Said girlfriend really digs Billie Holliday, so I picked up the Madeline Peroux disc on MoFi and spent a little time with this.

Rest assured, female vocal lovers, if this kind of thing is your cup of tea, you will really enjoy the Trumpet.

It has just a touch of warmth to the sound that really makes well recorded music come alive, yet doesn't expose every last bit of crud on a poorly recorded record. Last but not least, I threw on my favorite Pat Metheny album, *Offramp* and was in for a real treat. From the minute I put the stylus down on the record, the sound was fantastic. All of the percussion on the first cut, *Baccarole*, just floated in the air. Thanks to the tubes, this was a very airy presentation.

And because I can never stand to leave well enough alone, I had to try some vintage tubes. Substituting the stock tubes for NOS Tung Sols I had laying around gave the sound an even more three-dimensional quality. These tubes can be had for about \$30-\$40 each, so a set of eight won't break the bank. If any of you have a stash of Mullards, or the like, it might take the Trumpet to even a higher level of musicality. Remember though, if you get really crazy with this, you could spend the cost of the pre-amp again, just on rare tubes.

THE VERDICT

I want one of these under the Christmas tree. With a few parts upgrades, the Gold version should sound even better, though it will be \$2,500 instead of \$2,000 the Woody model you see here costs. Mr. Hagerman says there are still a few Woodies left, so if you are on a tighter budget, order one fast. If you want the true opposite of digital, and have at least a decent turntable, you will be thrilled with the Trumpet.

The Trumpet is really all about tone. This preamp has a great tonal quality, real instruments sound good, and vocals sound great. I've spent so much quality time with this one I may just put my CD player on eBay and forget about digital all together. ●



A Second Opinion

— Jeff Dorgay

My man Jerold was so crazy about the Trumpet, I had to investigate further. Being that I have a plethora of phono stages around the studio, it was a fun piece of gear to listen to. I put the Trumpet in my second system, which these days consists of my BAT VK42-SE, a Conrad Johnson MV-60 (or a Pass Aleph 3, depending on the speaker and my mood) and the Tetra 506s (see page 17 for a review). I use a highly modified Rega P25 that has incorporated all the upgrades we've been discussing in the magazine, along with a Shelter 501 II. To make things as fair as possible, I put my Blackbird back on the RB600 arm.

The obvious comparison was with the BAT VK-P5, as they are both the same price, \$2,000. I didn't come away with a better or worse, just different flavors. The BAT is a touch quieter, possessing more of a punchy, visceral sound quality. The Trumpet was a bit more relaxed and organic, so that's where I would draw the line. If you want the last word in ultimate detail, the Trumpet is not for you. However, if you would like an extremely musical presentation or have a system (or cartridge) that is just a bit too forward, this could be your cup of tea.

I only have one very minor complaint about the Trumpet: I could not find a way to adjust the loading. As there are a lot of cartridges that will work just fine with a 47k input, this is by no means a deal breaker, and if you use the step up transformer, it will work just fine with a low output moving coil cartridge.

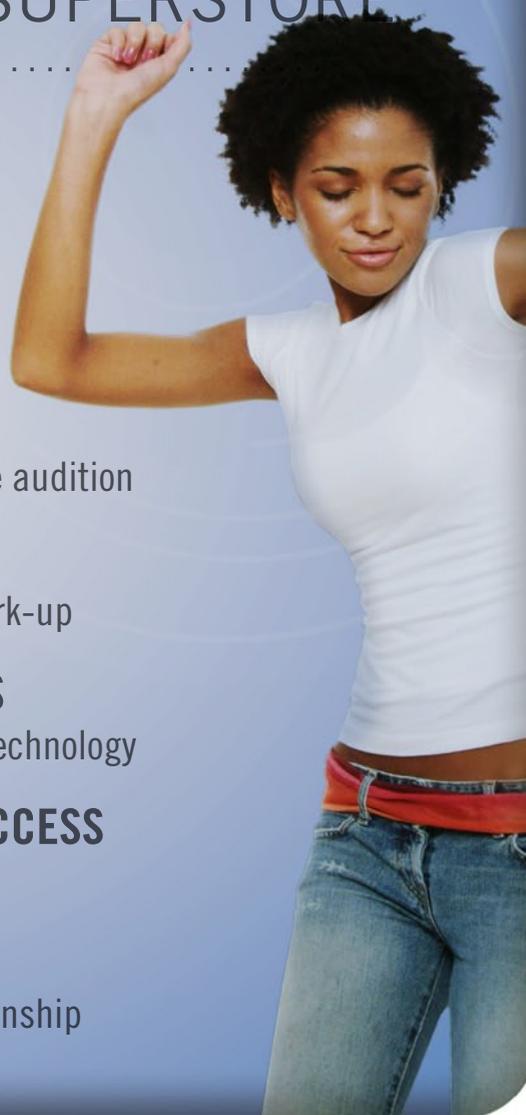
Bottom line, the Hagerman Trumpet is a great phono stage, and if this one fits in your budget I suggest you give it a good listen when it comes time to spend your hard-earned money. *(continued)*

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FAVORITE TEST TUNES:

Motorhead – Orgazmatron (LP)
Earmark

Bachman Turner Overdrive
– Bachman Turner Overdrive
(LP)

Madeline Peroux – Careless
Love (LP) MoFi

Pat Metheny – Offramp (LP)

Yes – Close to the Edge (LP)
MoFi

Neil Young – Harvest (LP)

ModWright Sony 9100ES CD Player

— STEVE HOFFMAN

Take the new Sony 9100ES CD/DVD/SACD player, add Dan Wright's expertise to the equation and you get THE GOOD STUFF!

The Sony 9100ES is the replacement for the old Sony 999ES which was a nice machine, but the new one is better, stock. It has many features that make it a best buy machine at a grand. Add \$2,500.00 worth of serious modifications by Dan Wright and you have the ModWright Signature Truth/Sony 9100ES player. Optimized for digital compact disc playback, it's a true winner. *(continued)*





Dan's mod for this player focuses on TWO CHANNEL CD playback. Even though the machine can play 5:1 and DVDs, etc., it's just the two-channel sound that Dan is concerned with. Dan says that his modifications are intended to transform the Sony 9100ES into a Reference 2CH player for CD, SACD and DVD (not DVD-A). For my review I played two-channel compact discs.

First, my system. I'm using the VENTURE Excellence III speakers from Belgium and Masataka Tsuda's Concert Fidelity CF-040 tubed line stage and 6B4G Fusion Monoblock Power Amplifiers from Japan. The power cables, interconnects and bi-wire speaker wire are Kubala-Sosna Emotion. Everything is plugged into a Running Springs Jaco power conditioner. All components are resting Symposium Ultra Platforms. All in all, this is a system worth over \$100,000.00. I tell you this because I want you to know that I plugged the Modwright/Sony into one of the top systems I've ever heard and I am much used to the sound quality with other CD players. Nothing prepared me for this palpable sound experience though.....

Nothing prepared me for this palpable sound experience.

Revisiting ModWright

My last player from Dan Wright was a Denon 3910 with his mods and I felt it was a tad on the warm side for my liking, however JD likes his. This new player is neither warm nor cold; it just SPEAKS THE TRUTH. The sound is realistic, immediate and wonderfully full and rich at the same time. You can reach out and touch Billie Holliday or Bill Evans; that's the sound I like! The "breath of life" comes out of this machine and one is never prepared for the wonder of resurrecting the dead like this. It's spooky exciting and moving; it begs you to listen and listen. This is what makes high-end audio fulfilling and fun for me.

Before you play anything you must turn off all digital outs/video display/multi-channel outs, etc. The instruction manual will walk you through this part of the setup procedure. The ModWright version of the Sony player comes in two parts; the actual machine (A stylish silver Sony beauty) and the ModWright PS 9.0 outboard power supply. You'll notice two little thingies sticking up towards the back of the Sony player. What are those little bumps? Heh, they are TUBES, friend. Something Sony didn't design (or even think of in their wildest

dreams). The tubes can be inserted into the top of the machine with ease, making it very simple to change out tubes for tube rolling, etc. However, we need TWO power cords, one for the machine and one for the power supply. The Sony is connected to the power supply via a proprietary umbilical cord.

Fire it up and PLEASE, my friends, let it burn in for a few days. I know that you are eager but this is crucial. Do some non-critical listening if you want; play some Fleetwood Mac CDs or something. (I resent that! -JD.) Enjoy the music but don't sit in the sweet spot. GIVE IT A FEW DAYS. After that, bingo!!!!

This player uses two 5687 tubes. It came with new old stock Raytheon "Joint Army/Navy" 5687s made by the old Tung-Sol company. This is a tube type that is readily available so you can try RCA's or GE's, etc. I stuck with the stock tubes that came with the machine. After this baby burned in I didn't feel the need to muck around with tube rolling (a compliment to Dan Wright). Rumor has it that swapping the existing tubes for a pair of Bendix NOS 6900s will bring you even closer to audio perfection, but I can't vouch for this in person. *(continued)*

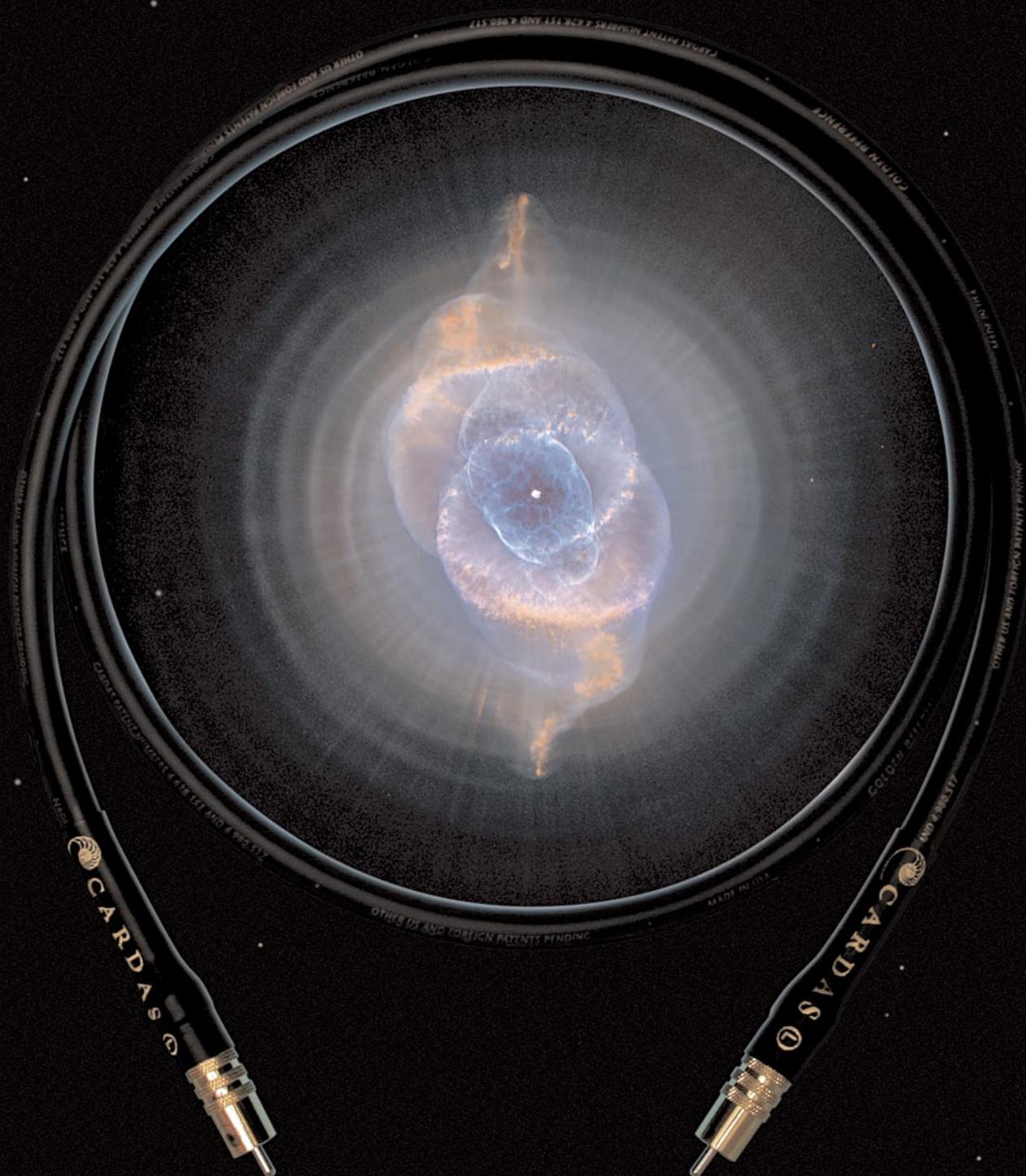
The Usual Suspects

The music I played for this review is pretty much the same pieces of music that I use when I give lectures on mastering at the Stereophile Home Entertainment Show and the Consumer Electronics Show. I like to play some magnificent recordings from the golden age, Ray Charles, Art Pepper, Getz/Gilberto, Nat “King” Cole, Bill Evans Trio, Peggy Lee and then into the rock era: James Taylor, Beach Boys, Van Morrison, Everly Bros., Beatles and a bunch more. You know, the good stuff. On the classical side I played a wide range of material, Telarc, “Living Stereo”, “Living Presence”, DG, Phillips, Decca, etc. CDs from the 1980s and up.

Finally, I played many of the projects that I am working on right now; can’t tell you what they are though, top secret for now! Famous good stuff though. Everything I played, even the lackluster stuff revealed a special magic when played with this player. The ModWright Sony player added a level of realism and natural sound that was at once engrossing and exciting; never did I feel like turning the system off. I only did that when my wife called me to dinner; believe me I went reluctantly.

So, what does this ModWright “MOD” do to the sound of the stock Sony player?

First, let’s talk about spatial cues: perfect! No phase distortion. No coloration. Amazing low-level definition. It gives you back what you put into it; in other words, a great sounding disc will sound great. *(continued)*



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A bad sounding disc won't sound great but it will be darn listenable! The midrange is magic, the bass is tight and accurate and the top end is delicate but authoritative. All in all, this is a groovy creation from the folks at ModWright, well worth the money.

Dan Wright says (and I agree) that Sony has improved the build and design quality of the new 9100 vs. the old 999ES player. The chassis is thicker and resonance free for the most part. The look of the new unit is very nice, reminiscent of most expensive Sony units.

Another crucial difference between this new 9100ES and the older unit is that this new design utilizes three separate power supplies. Two transformer-based, regulated supplies are provided for discrete analog and digital circuits and one switched-mode supply for video and control functions. The 999ES just had a single transformer-based, regulated supply for the analog circuitry and a switched-mode supply for digital, video and control circuits.

The DACs in the 9100ES are Burr-Browns best new SACD DACs, also found in the Denon 3910. Stock analog power supply regulation is discrete and well done.

ModWright upgrades to the Sony 9100ES include an updated tube circuit that borrows

All in all, this is a groovy creation from the folks at ModWright, well worth the money.

technology from the ModWright Instruments SWL 9.0SE tube line stage preamplifier and a new Copper Reference tube supply umbilical, designed exclusively for ModWright by Robert Lee of Acoustic Zen. The Acoustic Zen umbilical is made from all 6N Zero Crystal Copper

conductors. The ModWright PS 9.0 external power supply is included (same supply as used in the 9.0SE linestage). The fit and finish is classic ModWright, with exposed tubes and an engraved finish plate.

The Nuts and Bolts of Things

The ModWright Signature/Truth modification package includes upgrades to Sony's stock power supply, damping of the transport mechanism along with upgrades to digital and analog power supply regulation. It is finished off with a complete replacement of the stock analog stage with ModWright's Class A tube output stage that is powered by the PS 9.0 power supply. This is a very beefy, choke regulated supply that weighs about 25 pounds all by itself! The master clock circuit is also upgraded by MW.

You can buy the player from ModWright as a finished package for \$3500. If you already have a 9100ES that you would like

modded, it will cost \$2500 plus shipping both ways. Expect to wait about three weeks for your completed player, but it will be worth it. If you are concerned, I suggest checking with ModWright before proceeding. Please note that ordering the Sony as a complete player is only available directly from ModWright.

Modwright is not offering multi-channel upgrades for this player. Their tube modifications are intended to transform the Sony 9100ES into a Reference 2CH player or CD, SACD and DVD (not DVD-A).

Remember, multi-channel circuits and video functions are NOT disabled by the mod in any way. The unit can be user-configured however to

(continued)



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Pictured at left: Naim **NAT 05** FM Tuner, **CDS1** Compact Disc Player, **NAIT 51** Integrated Amplifier, and **Ariva** Loudspeakers.

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It's a pleasure!

REVIEW



disable video circuits, display and "digital out circuits" which I recommend for best two-channel audio. This is a function of the stock player and a nifty idea. Should you want to make this player part of a multi-channel installation and play video as well, you can leave the multichannel outputs (unmodified) available for a home theater system as well, offering a lot of versatility.

In conclusion, this is a world-class digital playback machine, able to hold its own with players costing considerably more. I urge you to check it out, NOW! Thanks for reading. ●

MANUFACTURER:

**ModWright
Instruments, Inc.**

21919 NE 399th St.
Amboy, WA 98601
360-247-6688
www.modwright.com

PERIPHERALS:

Preamplifier Concert Fidelity
CF-040

Power Amplifier Concert Fidelity
Fusion Monoblocks

Speakers Venture Excellence III

Cables Kubala-Sosna Emotion
(interconnect, speaker and power cord)

Power Conditioning Running
Springs Jaco

Vibration Control Symposium Ultra
Platforms, Rollerblocks



The ACI Sapphire XL

— JEFF DORGAY

Every now and then, something comes in under our radar. As much as we think we are the audio mavens hip to everything, we miss some cool stuff from time to time. The Sapphire XLs from ACI are a perfect example of this. While having a friendly chat with some friends in the Upscale Audio room at this year's CES, I couldn't help but notice the great sound coming out of these little speakers up against the wall. I started talking to another guy in the room about how much I was enjoying them, only to find out he was Mike Dzurko, the owner of ACI. *(continued)*

It won't matter if you are a tube or transistor lover, the XLs will work fine with your flavor of choice.



If you are as unfamiliar with ACI as I was, they have been around since 1977. Located in the bottom half of Wisconsin's second oldest stone church, there is a full service recording studio upstairs, so the crew at ACI gets to spend a lot of time listening to live music. And it really comes across when you give the Sapphire XLs a listen. As you can see from the photos, these speakers are beautifully finished! This is a level of quality that you would expect on speakers costing much more.

The XLs use a ScanSpeak 5.5-inch Revelator woofer and a ScanSpeak 1-inch 9500 series silk dome tweeter, with a crossover at 2.7 khz. The shape is a bit out of the ordinary, looking like two boxes attached together instead of just one big box, but this helps the speakers have a smaller frontal area, which is good for reducing diffraction effects. Efficiency is listed at 85.5 db with a 6 ohm (4.5 ohm nominal) impedance. However, considering how easy these speakers are to drive, the numbers don't mean everything.

As Mike and I talked more about the speakers, I noticed that ACI makes a few subwoofers, so midway through this review, the Titan subwoofer arrived to compliment the XLs, after I was familiar with the sound of them alone.

Initial Set-up

Most of my listening was done with the BAT VK-42SE, along with the excellent DeHavilland Aries amplifiers from last issue. But to be objective, I used them with quite a few different amplifiers. As I had heard these at the show with the Prima Luna gear, I had a pretty good idea that they would sound great with tubes as well, so I tried them with the Manley Mahis that were here for review, as well as my own Conrad Johnson MV-60. It won't matter if you are a tube or transistor lover, the XLs will work fine with your flavor of choice.

Solid state offered a bit different, but still enjoyable, sound, and my Pass Aleph 3 was able to drive these speakers extremely well. Just to be wacky, I moved the CJ Premier 350 into the mix, but this was complete overkill for this system. A good 30-100 watt per channel solid-state amplifier should be all you need for the Sapphire XLs.

Digital playback was offered up by ModWright's new SONY 9100ES (see Steve's review) and I was spinning a lot of LPs with my trusty P25/Sumiko Blackbird combination through the BAT VK-P5. The XLs were connected with DH Labs Q-14 cable (which ACI suggests) for most of my listening. I did not find the XLs particularly fussy about cable, but found my favorite sound with the ZU Libtec cables I used with the ZU Druids. *(continued)*

I'M A HEDGE FUND MANAGER

A FASHION DESIGNER. A LEAD SINGER.

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

While not magic with every speaker, they were a very synergistic match here, offering that last bit of detail in the mids without being grainy.

The XLs only have one set of binding posts, so you will not require bi-wired speaker cables. I used my own homemade stands that are very beefy, but we will feature a follow-up on the TONE-Audio website when the custom-made Sound Anchors stands arrive. These come already filled and can be ordered in other than the standard 24-inch height at additional cost. (The Sound Anchor stands are \$499 at 24 inches, and if purchased with the Sapphires, are \$450.)

The XLs are very good at just disappearing into the room, with their precise imaging delivering a very big and open sound field.

This is always the dilemma facing the small speaker buyer, unless you are handy with an arc welder and associated tools, a good (i.e. MASSIVE) set of stands will set you back a few hundred dollars, which starts pushing the price of that \$1,500 pair of minimonitors closer to the \$2,000 mark.

Even though this is starting to intrude on floorstander territory, a pair of good minimonitors in a small-to-medium room can offer magic a big speaker often can't. The XLs are very good at just disappearing into the room, with their precise imaging delivering a very big and open sound field.

(continued)

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The Sound

The pair of XLs I reviewed already had some hours on the clock, so they only took the weekend to settle right in. Even in the listening area for my second system, which is on the long wall of my studio, the first thing I noticed is their solid bass response. A quick spin of the Stereophile test CD confirmed that the XLs indeed go down solidly to 50 hz, with useable output to 40 hz. This makes it very easy to mate them with ACI's Titan sub, but more about that later.

These speakers are made as a mirrored pair, with the tweeters slightly offset to one side of the woofer by about an inch from the center of the cabinet. In my listening area, I got the biggest soundstage by positioning them with tweeters out, but I suggest you experiment, as they were set to the inside when I heard them at CES in a much smaller room.

My first response to these speakers was very positive. I kept saying "Wow, I can't believe how great these sound for the price!" Four months later, my enthusiasm has not waned. I still can't get over how solid and detailed the bass response is for a small speaker. Pulling out some of my favorite Weather Report albums revealed an adequate amount of bass response, but good texture as well. Listening to Jaco Pastorius' mastery of this instrument is always a great test for bass speed and attack.

I have to admit I'm probably more a midrange and tone fanatic than some. Over the last 25 years, I always end up gravitating towards the sound of a panel or good small speaker, so I am biased. The only shortcoming on the Sapphire XL is that it will not play at

brain-damage levels. Other than that, it is fantastic, offering a lot more detail than you might expect at this price point. A good dose of this value comes from ACI's direct sales philosophy, which allows them to put more money in a speaker at a given price than a manufacturer selling through distribution.

One of the biggest dilemmas of being an audio reviewer is that you can get pretty jaded in a hurry, and lose interest in the

reasonably priced equipment, but I maintain that there is just as much excitement in the reasonably priced gear as the expensive stuff.

I maintain that there is just as much excitement in the reasonably priced gear as the expensive stuff.

The XLs are the perfect example of this philosophy, revealing enough information to keep a music lover at any level happy.

At the beginning of this review, I was in a bit of a 70's Jazz/Fusion mode when I got a call from DB who said he had put the classical records aside and was listening to Joni Mitchell.

This prompted me to put **Hissing of Summer Lawns** on the turntable.

Again, the XLs painted a great picture of this record, doing a great job with all the overdubbed vocals and textures. When listening to *Shadows and Light*, I noticed there was not as much bass extension on the synth parts as I am used to, but the fundamental was very good. Another favorite test record is an old Japanese pressing of Bowie's **Aladdin Sane**. The title track has a wealth of detail on a great system, and the piano solo was sufficiently haunting through the XLs. Listen for the pace of the bass line during the piano solo; this is the kind of stuff that the XLs really nail.

Unfortunately, a lot of the familiar clichés come to mind when listening to these speakers, so I don't want to bore you with that. The Sapphire XLs are the most enjoyable speaker I have heard yet for \$1,700. For 20 years, my favorite \$1,700 speaker (though they used to be a little less and now they are a little more) was the Vandersteen 2c/ci/ce/signature. *(continued)*



EXCEPTIONAL AUDIO COMPONENTS



The Vandersteens were never the last word in musical detail, but they did a good job on the fundamentals, and they never did anything wrong. I've probably sold about a hundred pairs of these over the years to friends who wanted good sound with no fuss at a reasonable price.

The Sapphire XL has become my new suggestion, especially if you have a small room.

More Bass

Where this speaker really excels is the amount of resolution you get for the price, without being harsh at all, because the folks at ACI chose wisely to sacrifice that last bit of bass response for accuracy everywhere else. Even matching them with significantly more expensive components, they still did very well, but that last bit of bass was sometimes missed.

Enter the Titan subwoofer, a 12-inch, downward firing sub in a pretty substantial cabinet with a built-in crossover and amplifier that allows you a lot of flexibility. You can connect the Titan to your system via the high level inputs or line level inputs. You also have the choice of doing it similar to the Vandersteen arrangement, using high-pass crossovers in line with your preamp (provided you have two sets of variable outputs) so your power amplifier only works from about 60 hz on up. This actually works well if you decide to use a low powered tube amplifier, but if you have the juice, I suggest running the XLs full range and tweaking the crossover on the Titan (adjustable from 35-250 hz) for a more seamless match. This gave me the best results, and after an hour of moving it around, I was able to get the

(continued)

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subwoofer to integrate exceptionally well. The cost for the Titan XL is about \$1300, depending on finish.

The extra bass extension gives these speakers the weight they need to be a full range system. Using the enclosed setup CD that had test tones down beneath 20 hz, I was getting pretty flat response down to 25 hz, with useable output at 20 hz.

Granted, dealing with a pair of satellite speakers and a subwoofer makes for a bit more cumbersome setup than a pair of floor standing speakers, but in the right room, you can move the Sapphires out in the room to get the imaging you want and place the woofer for optimum bass response. You can't always do this with a pair of big speakers, and the combined price of the speakers, stands, subwoofer, and even a decent pair of speaker cables will still keep you well under \$3,500.

The real key here is that last bit of bass extension in the Sapphire XLs allows them to go down low enough to work with the sub without that big hole in the frequency response that you sometimes get when using smaller speakers with a sub. When you have the sub dialed in just right, it will only be noticeable on really low passages. Properly set up, you forget about the sub and think "wow, these little speakers really go low!"

Plays Well With Others

In case you might be just interested in the subwoofer, rest assured it works well with other speakers very well. Thanks to a very adjustable crossover and a 250 watt amplifier, you should be able to mate it with just about anything. My initial thoughts were that if the Titan could keep up with the small woofers in the Sapphire XLs, they might just be good with a few other speaker configurations.

Even though my wife might tell you that I am not a mind reader, I am. I know what you are thinking right now. You are thinking "but I have a pair of Magnepans (or Martin Logans) and there's no way that sub can keep up. Well, I gave the Titan a try with my Apogee Calipers and the 2nd Rethm lowther-based speakers and it did well, especially considering it has a 12-inch driver.

I think the panel enthusiasts would be very happy with this woofer. ACI offers a 30-day money back guarantee, so I would put this one at the top of the list if you have been considering a reasonably priced subwoofer to give your speakers a bit more extension. While the Titan did not do a bad job with the Rethms, it was not quite fast enough to keep up with them, but I haven't heard a sub this size that could, so no disrespect there.

It's a musical combination, but the 2nd Rethms are so fast, you can still hear the difference between the two drivers. But remember, this is a \$1,300 subwoofer, so in that context, the performance is very good indeed. I also had excellent results mating the Titan to the Penaudio Serenades, adding some extra weight to their performance as well.

Properly set up, you forget about the sub and think "wow, these little speakers really go low!"



THE VERDICT

What this speaker offers that many of the others in this category have not (and I haven't heard 'em all yet, so don't send me any snarly emails...) is a high level of musical accuracy and transparency, offering a level of refinement that warrants TONE-Audio's Exceptional Value Award. When you consider that you can return them to ACI should they not work out in your room or system, you can't go wrong with the Sapphire XLs.

If you end up giving them a listen, I hope you enjoy them as much as I did. ●

MANUFACTURER INFO:

Audio Concepts Inc.
901 S. 4th Street
LaCrosse, WI 54601
608-784-4570
www.audioc.com

PERIPHERALS:

Preamplifier BAT VK-42SE

Power Amplifier Pass Aleph 3

Digital Source ModWright Sony 9100ES

Analog Source Rega P25 with ProMach mods, Sumiko Blackbird

Interconnect DH Labs Air Matrix

Speaker Cable DH Labs Q-14, ZU Libtec

Power Cords DH Labs Power Plus

Power Conditioner Running Springs Haley

Vibration Control Symposium Svelte Shelf, Rollerblock Jr's.

FAVORITE TEST TUNES

David Bowie – Aladdin Sane (LP)

Joni Mitchell – Hissing of Summer Lawns (LP)

Weather Report – Heavy Weather (LP)

10CC – Original Soundtrack (LP)

The Tubes – Young and Rich (LP)

Devo – Are We Not Men? (LP)

The Channel Islands D-100 Amplifiers

— JEFF DORGAY

D•100 Monoblock Amplifier

D•100 Monoblock



At first glance to the unknowing, the D-100s from Channel Islands might easily be mistaken for a power conditioner. They are pretty small at 6.25" x 5.5" x 8", however they weigh about 15 pounds each, so they are substantial. Quick he-man test: can you palm a pair of D-100s? I can! A quick look inside reveals a pretty space efficient package, with a giant toroidal power transformer and a small circuit board for the amplifier along with a slightly larger one for the power supply. Everything looks very neat and tidy, with good parts quality throughout.

You can order your D-100s with a balanced XLR input or a single-ended RCA input as well as ordering a high gain (32db) or standard gain (26db). My test samples were the RCA/26db gain models, but I felt this offers great flexibility for a wide range of users.

Ok, let's get serious and get down to business. The CI D-100s are Class-D monoblock amplifiers that produce 100 watts into 8 ohms and 175 watts into 4 ohms. They are \$1599 a pair and can be purchased directly from CI or Music Direct.

Initial Set Up and Listening

These came right out of the box and got plugged right into my third system to get cooking. Because there aren't a ton of parts inside these little boxes (it's mostly power supply inside) I did not anticipate a terribly long break in period. My suspicions were confirmed and after about three days with the CD player on repeat, the D-100s were settling in rather nicely.

I did almost all of my listening in my third system, consisting of the Emotive Audio Poeta lineage, the Acoustic Zen Adagios and the ModWright Denon 3910 universal disc player. DH Labs Revelation interconnects and Q-14 speaker cables were used along with DH Labs Power Plus power cords. Power conditioning was supplied by a Running Springs Haley.

I did experiment a bit with other lineages, including the ModWright 9.0 SWL SE, which Dusty Vawter, owner of Channel Islands said "A lot of our customers have found a good match between our amps and the ModWright preamp in their system." I also had excellent results with this combination.

Vawter claims 20 amps per channel worth of current capability, so this led me to try my Apogee Calipers as well as the Daedelus Audio D-2s which are very current hungry. Lou Hinkley, owner of Daedelus told me he was pretty sure a Class D amplifier would be a "bad choice" for his speakers, but the little D-100s did a great job here as well. Bottom line, you should be able to use these amps with any speaker you have or might be considering, they will drive anything. *(continued)*

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The Sound

I can't stress enough that you ignore these amplifiers for the first 50 hours of operation, or you will get grumpy. However, once they have some hours on them, they open up considerably and settle into a very enjoyable character. When not in use, the amber LED in the right corner lights up to keep the amplifier in a standby mode. A quick poke at the power switch and they power up, indicated by the blue LED. I felt these amplifiers only needed about 10 minutes to really get going.

Most amplifiers seem to have one or two things that really define their sound. For me, the D-100s had a lot of dynamic capability and very powerful, controlled bass. The Adagios have a very taut, extended bass response and the D-100s did a fantastic job with records having a lot of information in the lower octaves. This issue I was investigating the 30th anniversary pressing (LP) of **Dark Side of the Moon**, so I was comparing all five of my pressings with this system (I know, I know...). Thanks to a lot of punch, these amplifiers did a great job revealing the differences between all five of them. *(continued)*



If your taste in sound is more on the neutral side, I think you will really enjoy these amplifiers. There was no mistaking these for a slightly warm, tube-like sound, as my Pass Aleph 3 exhibits, however, there was no mistaking the D-100s for an etched solid-state feel, as I have heard from certain amplifiers from Krell, Levinson and a few others.

Just Pretty Darn Neutral

Personally, liking things just a touch on the warmer side, I really enjoyed the sound with my Poeta, which also is just a touch warm. My Prima Luna Prologue 5 is very warm and that too, was just fine with me. The nice thing about an amplifier this neutral is that you can go either way with it without any issues.

The D-100 also did a good job with anything requiring midrange accuracy and the usual female vocal tracks were reproduced very well. I had to go the extra mile away from the normal female tracks and put on a great old copy of Peggy Lee's **Is That All There Is?** on the turntable. This led me down the Dusty Springfield and Nancy Sinatra path (no boots related puns here) with equal enjoyment.

Thanks to the monoblock design, there was great separation, but if I had to find one fault with these amplifiers, they didn't have as much of a three dimensional feel to them as I would like if I were shopping. However, to be fair to CI, I haven't heard anything else in this price range that does either. The recently tested Manley Mahis and the Prima Luna Prologue monoblocks have a bit more of this, but they will set you back another \$1000-1200 and they don't have anywhere near the weight that the D-100s possess. And they both will need a pile of tubes every couple of years. Even with cheapie tubes, that adds up. Remember the price you pay for the glowing bottles, two re-tube operations and you could have a free pair of D-100s!

Another bonus is that the D-100s barely generate any heat. You can play these at brain damage levels and they never really even get warm! For those of you with space at a premium, this is something to consider, especially if you are building a home theater system.

THE VERDICT

Living with the Channel Islands D-100s for a while was a very good experience. These amplifiers are solidly built and offer better sound than their modest price would suggest. The D-100s are also very versatile, they were able to drive any speaker I threw at them with ease. Thanks to the small footprint, low power consumption and low heat output, this is as easy as high-end sound gets.

Like me, Dusty Vawter is a car guy and we both drive BMWs. However, if I were going to compare his amps to a car, it would be a Mini Cooper S with the works kit: big performance, quality and value in a compact package. That's exactly how I feel about these amplifiers. ●

MANUFACTURER:

Channel Islands Audio

567 W. Channel Islands Blvd. PMB #300
Port Hueneme, CA 93041
805-984-8282
www.ciaudio.com

PERIPHERALS:

Preamplifier Emotive Audio Poeta

Phono Preamplifier Hagerman Trumpet

Analog Source Modded Rega P25 with Sumiko Blackbird, Sota Comet with Shelter 501 mk.II

Digital Source ModWright Denon 3910

Speakers Penaudio Serenade, Tetra 506, ACI Sapphire XL

Interconnect DH Labs Revelation



Speaker Cable DH Labs Q-14

Power Cords DH Labs Power Plus

Power Conditioner Running Springs Haley

Vibration Control Symposium Ultra Platforms, Rollerblock Jr.s

FAVORITE TEST TUNES:

Pink Floyd Dark Side of the Moon (CD/LP)

Peggy Lee Is That All There Is? (LP)

Brian Eno Music For Films, Music For Airports (LP)

Charles Mingus Passions of a Man: Complete Atlantic Recordings 1956-1961 (CD)

The Doors LA Woman (CD) DCC

Matthew Sweet Girlfriend (CD)

In Search of the Ultimate Listening Chair

— Jeff Dorgay

I'll bet you have more than a few sets of great interconnects and power cords, but I'll bet you don't have a great chair. For the guys in the audience, this might be a good bonding experience for your wife or girlfriend. They will never see it coming when you say, "Hey, let's go furniture shopping!" Seriously though, a great chair will not only make your listening environment more stylish, it will eliminate listener fatigue, which will lead to more musical enjoyment! *(continued)*

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I must admit right now, I'm a little snooty when it comes to this kind of thing. Many years ago, I dated a Herman Miller sales rep and while she never acquired a taste for KISS, I really dug all the cool furniture. Now I'm doomed and have yet another spendy thing to be obsessed with and I want to drag you down with me.

I tend to focus on the classics, from the '30s to the '90s, but we also threw one new chair in the mix. There is really only one rule when doing this, don't buy a knockoff chair. While you can get one of the fakes for half price or less, they won't hold up and are consequently worth nothing on the used market. A quick check of EBay revealed the real chairs selling for about 60-80% of their sticker price and some of the really old ones (just like McIntosh tuners...) are going for more than what a new one is worth.

**Are you sitting down?
Sorry, I couldn't resist
that one.**

If you are uninitiated to the designer furniture world, don't worry. It's just like music, find something you like and go for it. However, get ready to spend some money. We are talking \$2-4000 big ones for a great chair. The good news is that if you choose wisely, you will still have it 10 years from now (or longer), after many expensive power cords have come and gone. *(continued)*

I've picked a few of my favorites and you can get any one of these chairs at **Design Within Reach** (www.dwr.com) Fortunately, we have a showroom here in Portland, so they were kind enough to let us mull around and take pictures. If you aren't comfortable buying something like this out of a catalog, they may have a showroom near you, and if you live in a major city, chances are good that Herman Miller, Knoll and the other manufacturers have an office near you. The great thing about shopping with DWR is that they have this stuff in stock and ready to go. Should you have to go right to a Herman Miller or Knoll dealer, be prepared to wait as long as 12 weeks, which is typical in the contract furniture world. (And you thought waiting a week or two for that new amplifier sucked?)

So, as my evil ex-girlfriend used to say, let's go shopping!

EAMES LOUNGE CHAIR AND OTTOMAN \$3125

This is probably the most recognizable piece of designer furniture on Earth and quite possibly the most copied. Originally designed by Charles Eames and his wife Ray in 1956, this is one that will never go out of style. This is the chair I'm buying before there are any more expensive power cords in my studio. If you are feeling really loose with the Master Card, you can pick up the 50th Anniversary Eames Chair that features a Santos Palisander veneer.

What is that you ask? Well, back in the old days, the Eames chair used to use a bit more exotic veneer, which made each chair completely unique. But as HM is a very environmentally friendly company, they switched to walnut veneer quite a while ago, however this made the chairs slightly more uniform. The Santos Palisander veneer is somewhat exotic, but is a harvested wood, so you can sit in the height of coolness and not worry about destroying the rainforests. *(continued)*



Measurements

H 33" D 33" W 33" Seat H 15" D 20.5" Arm H 20.5"

Ottoman, H 17.5" W 26" D 21.5"



BARCELONA CHAIR \$3499
MATCHING BARCELONA STOOL \$1654

Designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe for the 1929 International Exhibition in Barcelona, (hence the name) this is another chair that looks like a million bucks in your living room or listening room. A good friend of mine that used to work with John DeLorean at GM in the '60s told me that they had so many of these in the GM design department, they used to use them as saw horses!

For my money, they should have sent DeLorean to jail just for that! But seriously, this is a mega stylish chair that photos do not do justice to. The cushion is hand made from a single Spinneyback hide and feels fantastic. A pair of these together makes a great, albeit expensive love seat that will look fantastic in front of your MAXX 2s.

Available in black or white, avoid the white one like the plague. It gets dirty immediately, and should you decide to make a seating change, no one will buy a used white Barcelona chair. Besides, black goes with everything! *(continued)*

Measurements

H 30" W 29.5" D 30" Seat H 17" Seat W 29.5"
 Stool, H 16" W 24.5" D 22"

Womb Chair and Ottoman

WOMB CHAIR \$2380
MATCHING OTTOMAN \$697

Another Knoll classic, created by Finnish architect and designer Eero Saarinen in 1948, was part of a design challenge to make a chair to curl up in. I can personally vouch for this as I used to fall asleep in my neighbor's Womb Chair all the time. This one does not offer the best positioning to listen to your system in, but it's a great headphone chair! Add a cool table from the DWR catalog or your favorite equipment rack and you can look forward to hours of headphone bliss.

The Womb Chair is available in Crimson or Pumpnickel and is fairly large, so it will require a good amount of space around itself not to feel crowded. The base is multiple layer chrome plating and is very rich. This one would look right at home next to some vintage McIntosh gear.

(continued)



Measurements
H 35.5" W 40" D 34" Seat H 16"
Ottoman, H 16" W 20.5" D 20"

Le Courbusier

**LC2 GRAND COMFORT PETITE
MODEL ARMCHAIR \$2695**



Measurements
H 26.4" W 30" D 27.6"

When they say Petite, they mean it. If you are larger than about 5'10" and weigh more than 200 pounds, you will start to feel cramped in this one, even though it is really gorgeous. These were originally designed to be used on cruise ships in their clubs, hence the compact size. Another design from the '20s, The Le Courbusier chair and sofa have probably been knocked off more than any other. The sofa is about 6k, and looks just like the chair, but with three cushions instead of one.

The height of modern design in its day, you will see this chair in a number of museums around the world as well as being part of the permanent collection in the Museum of Modern Art in NYC. One of my fanatical car collector buddies has a set of these in his listening room with his Bugatti parked behind them! *(continued)*



Bugatti T35 Courtesy of
Mr. Bruce Hannay

The Flight Recliner

FLIGHT RECLINER \$2698

Even if your taste is still more towards the traditional Barcalounger, you can probably use a bit of a style update. The Flight Recliner is a contemporary chair, designed exclusively for DWR in 2005 by Jeffrey Bennett, so this is the only one in the group that you can only purchase there.

The bonus feature here is that it is a recliner, so it can be a hi-fi chair or a TV chair! It doesn't get any better than this and it is available in four leather colors as well as fabric in 2 color choices at \$1998. Unlike your Lexus or favorite preamp, the Flight Recliner's frame and suspension feature a lifetime warranty.

There you have it. We all like to upgrade things, so I respectfully submit these five chairs, as they are my favorites. No matter which way you go, a good chair or couch will really make your listening sessions more enjoyable. Just don't spend too much cash on this stuff, or you won't be able to buy any more power cords! ●



Measurements
H 37.5" W 28" D 29.5-57"
Arm H 22" Seat H 18"

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There were two big problems with the grocery store crates though, and they were both equally bad. First, the size was never terribly consistent and often your records squeezed in too tight. This scraped up the jackets in a hurry. Second, they weren't strong enough to hold a full crate of records and if you stacked them on top of each other, you had another big potential for disaster.

But Todd has solved both of these problems with a few interesting twists.

These crates are made of solid maple, which is a very hard wood. When I got ready to assemble my three test crates, I thought that I would take some measurements and build my own after this to save a few bucks. A visit to Home Depot to price materials quickly dispelled this idea. These little crates are exquisitely built and well thought out. All of the lumber has been run through a planer, so it is very smooth and very straight. *(continued)*



This alone would probably take you an hour or two to accomplish, if you had the tools. **Bottom line, this is way more trouble than it's worth to try and do it all yourself.** Just call Todd and buy the kits, you will be much happier.

Each of the square end caps are drilled, countersunk and screwed together with high quality screws. The holes in the seven individual boards that make up the crates are also pre-drilled and countersunk for you, so you can't botch the assembly. The most impressive part of this project? TTVJ encloses a few EXTRA screws, in case you lose one. Seems like shelving you buy from Lowe's or Home Depot is always one screw shy, so this shows a lot of thought.

All you need to build a few of these is a #2 Phillips screwdriver, but I suggest a few tweaks. (We're audiophiles, right?) A little wood glue on the surfaces will give the crates even more rigidity and lower their resonant frequency somewhat. A quick coat of clear Krylon varnish will keep the Maple from getting a lot of fingerprints with use as well. You can easily cover three crates with one spray can, or you can order them already coated for \$20 each. If you are handy with an aerosol can, here is a way you can save a few bucks and leave some extra cash for a few more crates. You might even want to stain them a cool color and then put a topcoat on them, but there we go getting obsessive again...

Once done, the crates are very stylish and solid. **Built to hold about 100 audiophile LPs, 130 regular LPs (or 400 K-Tel LPs)** they do not bow in the middle, even when full. The other genius of the design is readily apparent.



The tops and bottoms interlock to provide stability and further prevent bowing when you have the crates full of records. Build quality is top shelf and the TTVJ crates should outlast you if they are put together with a bit of TLC. My only dilemma is that now I need about 50 more!! Highly Recommended ●

www.ttvj.com

CokeBlak

You need to understand that I am the only guy who lives in the Pacific Northwest that does not drink coffee. (Or have a goatee, but that's another story.) Hence, I need to find a bump another way. While Red Bull might give you wings, it gives me the runs and tastes like liquid bubble gum. Everywhere I go, I see billboards for Coca-Cola's new energy drink mixed with coffee extract, appropriately called Blak.

Being a sucker for a good ad, I caved in and tried it, against the advice of our art director.

"You won't like it, you hate coffee" she said, but I walked up to the counter anyway and plunked down two dollars for an 8 oz. bottle.

At first sip, I thought they might as well call this stuff Gak, but I was trying to be open-minded. I handed the bottle over to Jean and after taking a drink she said "well, this certainly isn't a party in my mouth!" I would speculate if you are one of those people who orders a mocha Frappuchino blah-blah at Starbucks, you might like this.

The good news though is Blak really packs a wallop. About 10 min later, I could definitely feel a bump, so whenever you need to set up a ton of gear at CES, this might be your cup of tea. I'll stick to Mountain Dew. ●



Auricaps from Audience

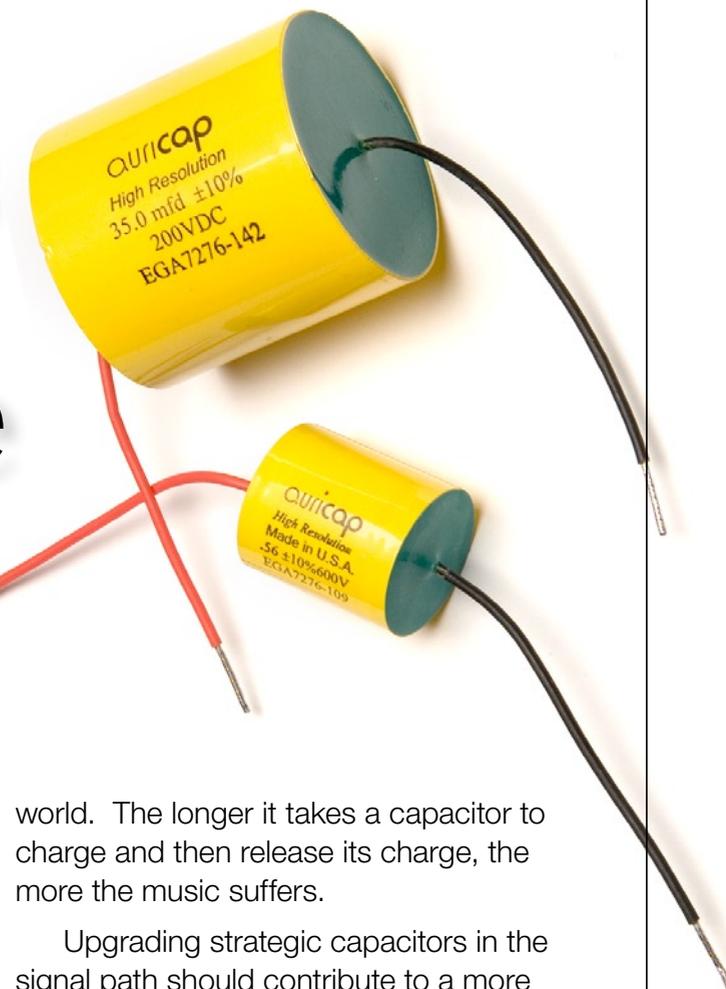
www.audience-av.com

Chances are if you have taken off the top of a piece of gear in the last few years, you've seen a few of these yellow jewels lurking inside.

Audience has been making high performance capacitors for the high-end market since the mid '80s. (You might remember their first capacitor, the Siderealkap, which had an excellent reputation.) The good news for DIYers is that you can buy these capacitors for your own projects.

Regardless of the arguments you may have heard on various audio boards, capacitors probably have more effect on the sound of your equipment than any other component inside the box. Why? Because capacitors charge up, store energy for a brief period of time and then release that energy. In a perfect world, a perfect capacitor would charge instantly and then discharge instantly with no loss, lag, or overshoot.

However, those are the exactly the factors that smear the sound of your electronics, because we do not live in a perfect



world. The longer it takes a capacitor to charge and then release its charge, the more the music suffers.

Upgrading strategic capacitors in the signal path should contribute to a more open, neutral sound. If you are a die-hard DIYer (as I am) and handy with a soldering iron, you should be able to pull this off fairly easily and have a bit better sounding box in the process. Check the Audience website to make sure that they stock the values you need. Should you need some assistance, they have engineers there that can help you with your questions.

While you are at it, pick up some of their Auric wire as well, especially if you are restoring an older piece of gear. Upgrading to higher quality wire will also improve the sonic signature of your equipment.

Very soon, we will be outlining the restoration project of our Dynaco Mark IIIs on the TONE website, with some step-by-step photos of what we did. We used quite a few Auricaps and the Auric wire, to tidy things up. Stay tuned...●

Acrolink 7N-A2070 II Interconnects

Distributed by The Lotus Group

www.lotusgroupusa.com \$995, 1m pair/ \$150 each additional meter

Everyone has their favorite flavor when it comes to cables, so I won't even try and boss you around there. However, I had the opportunity to give these interconnects a good listen and came away extremely impressed. Rather than having strange names for you to remember, Acrolink just uses numbers. These cables are the 7N-A2070 II RCA. They are also available with XLR connectors, same model number, with XLR at the end.

Sometimes, a copper interconnect can have a bit of a dulling effect on the music, while silver or silver coated cables can be a touch bright. Of course all of this depends on your gear and the synergy between components. Personally, I tend to gravitate towards an all copper

cable and this is one of my favorites.

To really give this cable the acid test, I used it between my LP-12 and phono pre-amplifier, figuring that if it did a great job with such a low level signal, it would probably be great elsewhere in my systems. This one passed the test with flying colors, taking my analog rig to a higher level of accuracy than I had previously.

I like my presentation very accurate and detailed, yet still smooth and NOT etched. As you can imagine, this is a tall order and I was very pleased with these cables. They were not the least bit grainy, thanks in part to the 7N copper used as well as the new core and dielectric materials. The RCA connectors are the same ones used in their top of the line Mexcel series. If you would like all the technical info, just click here:

<http://www.lotusgroupusa.com/Premium.htm>

Rather than acting like a tone control, these cables seemed very neutral in my systems, just making the musical experience a bit more open and less grainy. Discs that were too tilted towards the hot end of the tonal spectrum still had that quality, but with just a touch less bite, while recordings that were warm and romantic did not get pushed back into excess warmth. In all cases, harsh or warm, the essential char-

acter of the music remained, but I always heard a bit more detail than I did before.

It is always difficult when evaluating a cable because ripping one out of the system and putting another in its place requires the cable to "settle in" again.

Moving the 2070 to take the place of the interconnect between my CD player and preamplifier had the same effect; everything just got less grainy. Over the months, I did a few other A/B tests as best I could and the results were always the same. The closest comparison I can make here is if you happen to have a piece of music that has been mastered very well on both the digital and the analog sides. (Like Morph The Cat) No matter how close they sound, somehow that analog copy is just more natural sounding.

That's what I got with the 2070; so if you are looking for that kind of thing, check these out. At \$995 for a one meter pair, they aren't cheap, but they aren't ridiculous either and they deliver the goods. And they are beautifully constructed, with cool carbon fiber and a similar look to the braid on the jacket. The only miniscule bone I have to pick with this cable, is because they paid such close attention to aesthetics as well as the sound (which on one level I really appreciate), the writing is very hard to read, and you will need a magnifying glass to see which direction to hook them up.

But hey, I'll take gorgeous cables that sound great and are hard to read over ugly ones any day. Definitely worth a good listen. ●



Isofeet from ModWright

www.modwright.com \$200, Set of Three

If you happen to have a ModWright preamplifier and would like to separate yourself from the herd and get a bit better sound to boot, check these out! Machined from steel and magnesium, suspended by what looks very similar to the cords on the springy feet of an SME turntable, these new feet from ModWright come custom tuned for your preamplifier.

When we say custom tuned, it means that each foot is sprung specifically to maintain even weight distribution of the unit to the base. Definitely a nice touch. If you are considering the purchase of a ModWright preamplifier, you can order them at assembly, but if you already have one, these will give you a bit more detail in the mids and upper registers for a modest investment. ModWright is also planning to offer tuned sets for their other modifications in the near future.

Last but not least, they look much more interesting than the stock rubber feet. I'd buy a set just for the zoot factor alone. ●



The Tube Cube from the Tube Depot

www.tubedepot.com \$49

If you have extra tubes hanging around and you would like to keep them out of harm's way, this is the ticket. Approximately 11" x 10" x 7", the Tube Cube will hold 2 quads of power tubes and 8-16 preamp tubes. If you have purchased some spendy NOS tubes, this is the place to put them.

Though it has the cool Tube Cube logo silk-screened on the front, this is based on the cases from Pelican. I have used Pelican cases for years in my photo studio and have dished out a lot of abuse with no problem, so I can vouch for the indestructible nature of these cases. Also, should you change your mind to the contents, you can get a new foam insert and adjust it to your new stuff. Might be a great place to keep a spare phono cartridge or two as well. The friendly folks at the Tube Depot guarantee it from breakage for life, so how can you go wrong? While you are at it, check out their selection of tubes. They have quite a bit of the standard issue stuff and their pricing is very good. A few exotic things here, and they still have some Western Electric 300B's for only \$899 per matched pair. Everyone else charges \$1200 for these babies, so stock up now! ●

Sophia Electric 300B S.E.T. Princess Mesh Plate Tubes

www.sophiaelectric.com \$450 A Pair

If you are a lover of single ended triode amplifiers featuring the legendary 300B tubes, you will get many different opinions when discussing variations on the theme. Some people, like our own Steve Hoffman, are purists. They insist that the ONLY tube for this application is the Western Electric version of this tube.

The small problem with this, is that a current production pair of WE 300Bs will set you back \$1200, and the NOS versions can easily cost 2-3 times this. Again, you can argue till the cows come home on which one of these is better.

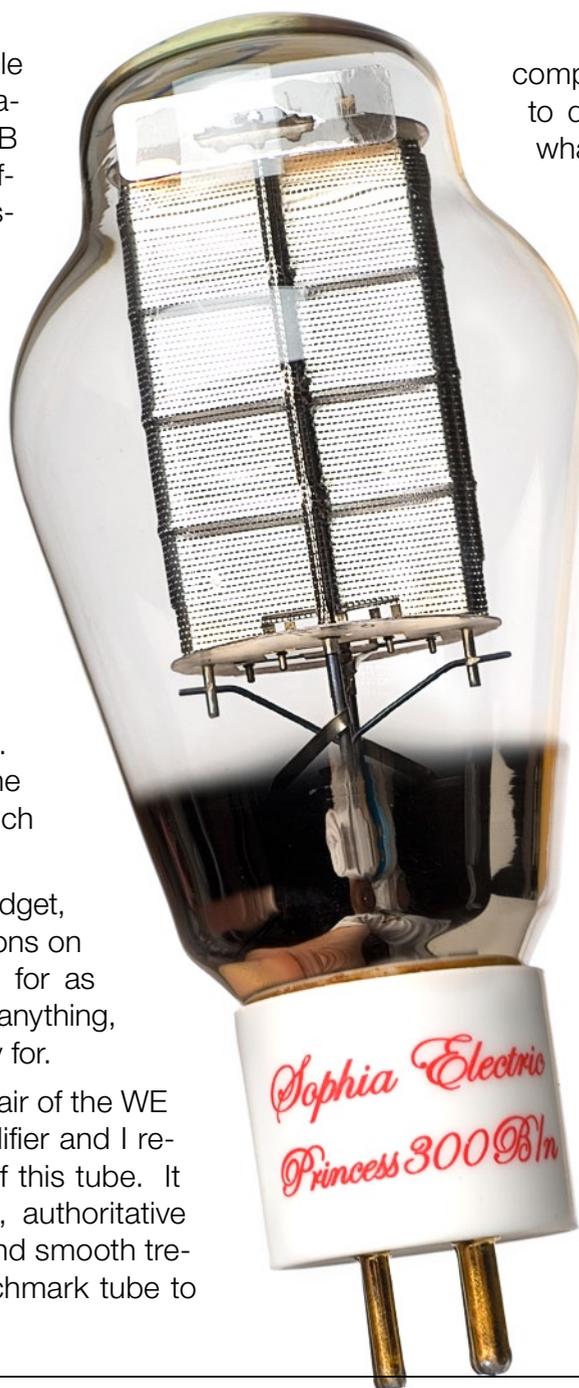
For 300B lovers on a budget, there are a number of variations on the theme that can be had for as little as \$150 a pair. But like anything, you tend to get what you pay for.

I just happen to have a pair of the WE 300Bs in my reference amplifier and I really enjoy the presentation of this tube. It has a very liquid midrange, authoritative bass and a very extended and smooth treble. Hence, this is my benchmark tube to

compare all the others. I have listened to quite a few and they all fall somewhat short of the mark.

However, the Princess tubes from Sophia Electric do an excellent job and considering they are only 1/3 the price of a set of WE tubes, these can be considered a great reference 300B that offers great value as well for the cost conscientious audiophiles. I use a Sophia Electric 274B rectifier tube in my Poeta preamplifier instead of the \$600 WE version of this tube and I have been very happy with it. I feel that Sophia Electric is establishing a good reputation for high quality and good value.

I used a test system consisting of my Pacific Creek 300SEI amplifier (from issue 1), the Emotive Audio Poeta preamplifier and the ModWright Denon 3910 along with my 2nd Rethm speakers. As the Rethms do not have a terribly extended low frequency response, I also substituted the Tetra 506 Customs (92db, very SET friendly) and my Senheiser HD650 headphones. *(continued)*



Let's get right to it: if you don't have \$1200 for a pair of Western Electric 300Bs, I think you could live happily ever after with the Sophias. I compared them to the original "no name" Chinese tubes that came with the Pacific Creek and they just trounced the stock tubes in EVERY way. Bass was tighter, treble was more extended and grain-free and the midrange was much warmer. No contest here.

Next, I moved up to a \$200 pair of Electro-Harmonix 300B EH gold grid tubes. These were better than the stock tubes, but the Princess 300Bs again really offered more of everything across the board. The Sophias were much more open and much less grainy.

I also tried a few other tubes, but I just kept coming back to the Princess 300Bs. Especially using them in my Pacific Creek amplifier for headphone duty, these are a real value.

I often use my headphone amplifier for extended listening sessions, so it's nice to have a set of these for everyday use. **Just like a guy I know that has a Ferrari 360 as his Sunday car, but uses and Acura NSX for his daily driver,** I would suggest that even WE 300B owners consider a set of these, if you don't want to put so many hours of non critical listening on your very expensive tubes.

I haven't heard every single 300B there is, but for now, I'm comfortable recommending the Sophia Electric Princess 300B as the best compromise between sound performance and good value so far. ●

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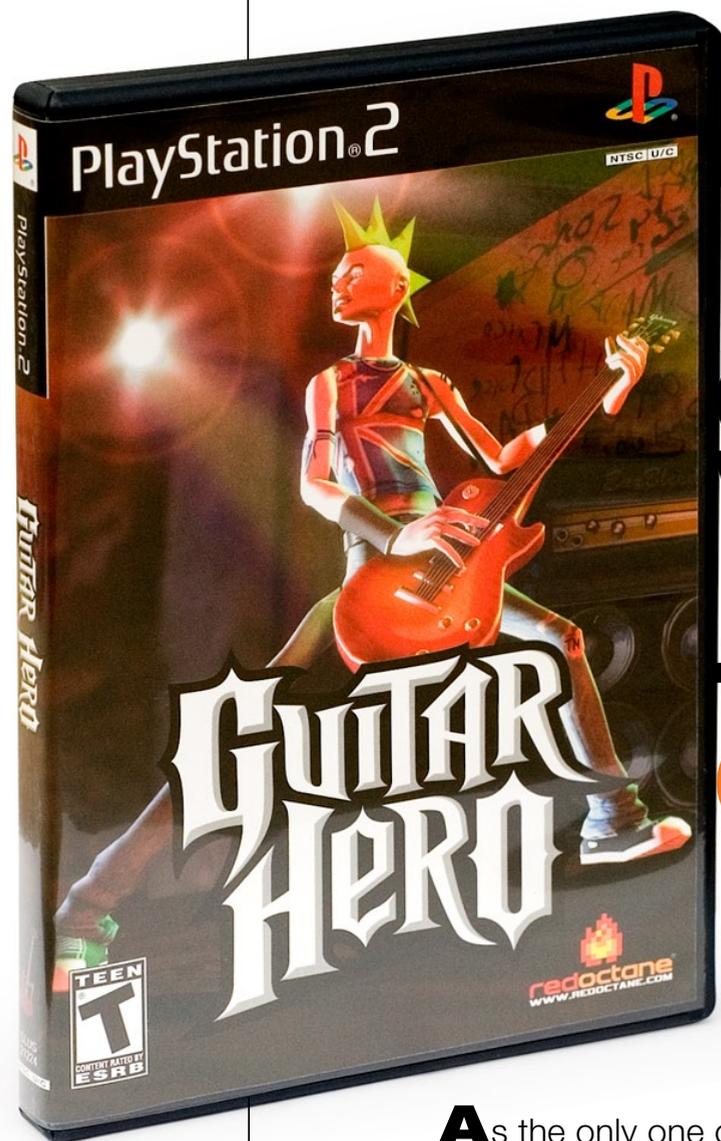


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The Most Fun You Can Have With A PlayStation Guitar Hero!!

As the only one on the staff that doesn't play an instrument, I am always in awe of those who can. I have recently acquired a Squier Stratocaster and a copy of *Rock Guitar for Dummies*, but who has spare time these days?

When at the local Fry's Electronics the other day, I saw a couple of 13 year olds in front of a 72 inch TV totally rocking out. It always warms my heart to see the next crop of kids banging their heads to Judas Priest just like we did, but when I returned to the front of the store to check out, they were still there, except now Motley Crue was coming out of the speakers.

They were playing a game for the Play Station called Guitar Hero.

For \$70, you get the game disc and a cool controller that looks like a small Gibson SG. It has five colored buttons along with a strumming button and a whammy bar that really works! I had to have one, so I grabbed one from the pile and proceeded to check out with my two Joni Mitchell DVDs. One of the kids said, **"Hey, that old dude bought that game."** Hmm, old dude.

It continued at the check-out with the perky 20 year old at the register. "Are you buying this for your kids, I heard this is a GREAT game." "No, buying it for me." She put my Joni DVDs in the bag and gave me a strange look. At the final checkout, the kid at the door looked in my bag and said **"Dude, this game rocks, you're gonna LOVE it!"**

So, this old dude got in his old BMW and headed for home. *(continued)*



This is a cool game. If they would have had stuff like this when I was a kid, I probably would have failed most of my classes in college. Setup is straightforward; you need to make sure your Play Station has a memory card, so you can save your game. Just plug the guitar controller into slot one, put the disc in and get going! To get a bit more effect, I bypassed the internal TV speakers and ran a 15-foot pair of DH Labs interconnects from the Play Station over to my Naim Nait 5i and Naim Ariva speakers. If you have your Play Station hooked up to a home theater system, you are in for a major treat!!

There are four levels of play and there is also a great tutorial. I highly suggest the tutorial first. This will get you off and rocking pretty quickly.

While this isn't terribly hard, it is more difficult than it looks and will give you a new respect for your 12 year old.

Before you start your session, the game gives you some helpful tips. **“Don't give the mic to the drummer, it can only end in tears.”** and **“Lead singers are always egotistical”** were two of my favorites.

You can also play in a few different modes, from quick game to career, where you start out in the basement and work your way up to playing arenas. You get to choose from eight standard characters and two mystery characters as you go along and amass a higher score. You also get to choose from a number of Gibson guitars. They must not have been able to secure licensing rights from Fender, as there are only Gibsons available. As you get more points, you can purchase additional guitars, including a double-neck!

If you miss the notes, you fail the song and the lead singer gets mad at you. There is a rock-o-meter in the lower right corner of the screen and it goes up when you hit all the notes and down into the red when you miss. Screw up too much and it starts blinking red; too much time in the blinking red zone and you fail.

I never realized I could eat up four hours of my life so quickly! I can't recommend Guitar Hero highly enough; this is a ton of fun!

Next time you and your friends are arguing which interconnects are better, challenge them to a game of Guitar Hero instead. ●



Headphone Planet

The National Head-Fi meet in New York this spring renewed my interest in headphones with a vengeance. Granted, I'm a newcomer to this world, but it has been a lot of fun and has given me another perspective on this aspect of audio. I recently picked up a pair of Sennheiser 650s to use as a reference (with a few more pairs in the works) and have even dusted off my old STAX phones to remember where I used to be in the game.



These days, I'm using my Pacific Creek SE 300I amplifier as a reference headphone amp, just going right from the outputs to the 650s. The impedance difference really hasn't been a big deal and with my Western Electric tubes in place, it's a very nice warm yet detailed sound. I have been using the Ah! Tjoeb 4000 player from Upscale Audio with all of the available tweaks and some NOS 6922s in the output stage. However, the Pacific Creek amplifier is a pretty big beast and is not that handy for living room or bedside listening.

The CI VHP-1 Headphone Amplifier and External Power Supply

Many of you may be familiar with Channel Islands and their popular Class-D monoblocks, but they also make a great headphone amplifier, the VHP-1 that is very small in size. This little amplifier is all solid-state and only costs \$349. For another \$159, you can add the VAC-1 external power supply to upgrade from the stock wall wart. Believe me, this is definitely money well spent, as it opens up the soundstage and extends the bass considerably.

Another great upgrade to this setup is the addition of a DH Labs Power Plus power cord for another \$180. Add a good interconnect and you have a nice system for around a thousand bucks, minus the CD player of your choice.

I started my listening with a pair of DH Labs BL-1 interconnects (\$99, 1 meter pair) but swapped out for a pair of Cardas Golden Presence (\$700, 1 meter pair) with excellent results. *(continued)*

This cleaned up the high frequency response quite a bit, and really showed off what this little box can do. Granted, it's still not quite as liquid as my 300B amplifier, but it's outstanding at this price point. I know it's a little obsessive to use a pair of interconnects that cost more than the headphone amplifier, but you won't be able to take advantage of all the performance the VHP-1 can deliver with inexpensive cables.

Both boxes are only 4.40"w x 2.65"h x 4.40"d, so they are perfect for a bedside system, or anywhere space is at a premium. Much easier to work around than that giant 300B amplifier!

The general overall sound of the VHP-1 is very musical and not that solid-state at all. There are two gain settings, high and low, so you will have to experiment with your particular phones for the optimum match. (The HD 650s worked perfectly with the high gain setting)

As with any piece of audio gear, bigger power supply usually translates to bigger sound, and the VHP-1 is no exception to this rule. While the stock VHP-1 sounds very good, you will really get a lot more air, punch and bass extension if you add the VAC-1 power supply. Revisiting the more bass heavy tunes I used for test listening revealed a completely different presentation, with the lower registers extending down a bit further as well as tightening up a bit. Same with the overall "imaging" of my HD 650s, the more time I spent with the VAC-1 in the mix, the less aware I was of the headphones. **The better your phones, the more you will appreciate the VAC-1 part of the combo.**

Everyone here enjoyed the VHP-1. It's very easy to use; a gain button and a volume control make it goof proof for even entry level users. I had to keep going over to our art director's desk to retrieve it, so that is a good sign. It even made the trip over to Steve Hoffman's house, and he liked it enough to purchase one for use with his AKG 701s to use for mastering.

Being solid-state, you can just leave it on continuously. Break-in is relatively short and after a few days of constant play, with a spin or two of your favorite break-in disc for good measure and you will be ready for serious listening.

The VHP-1/VAC-1 is a great combination wherever you choose to use it, but its small size really lends itself to more portable applications. I have a friend that takes his to work in a small Pelican case along with his phones and iPod! This would also be great for traveling, putting high end sound at your disposal on the road.

For many of you, this may be all the headphone amplifier you ever need. Whether you are new to the headphone game, or just want a more portable headphone amplifier without sacrificing quality, the VHP-1/VAC-1 will not let you down. It was exciting to see how much musical enjoyment you can experience with such a modest outlay of cash!

Two great inexpensive phones: the Sennheiser HD 202 and the Grado SR60

One thing we always get accused of in the realm of reviewing gear is that we concentrate on the expensive stuff too much. We will try our best here on Headphone Planet to give you a fair share of headphones and accessories that are reasonably priced, as many of you are just starting out with this (potential) obsession. We also want to reach out to those of you in the iPod crowd, that perhaps could care less about the rest of the gear in *TONE-Audio*, but would like a better set of headphones to use with your portable, or perhaps at your computer. I think the two we have this issue fit that bill very well and they are both under \$100. *(continued)*

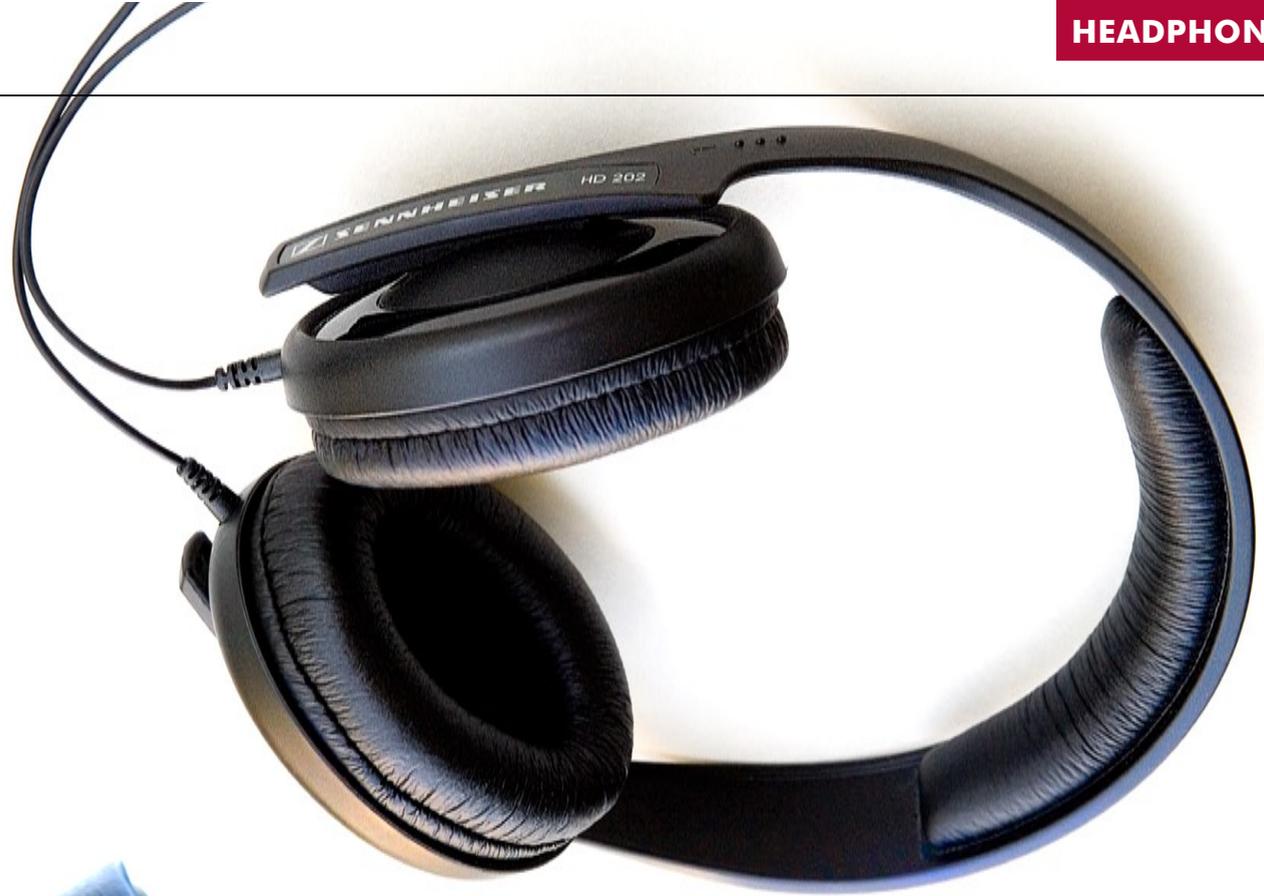


The Senheiser HD 202

I know it makes me look like a dork, but I have been using a pair of Senheiser HD 202s on a number of recent plane trips. They aren't much larger than those crappy headphones they hand out on the airlines and for 35 bucks are much better than another pair of bud headphones that came with your portable player. **The bad news is you can't take these to the gym, unless you are trying out for Napoleon Dynamite 3, in which case carry on.**

The 202s have been around for some time now, but are a favorite of mine because they offer incredible sound for about \$35, and are fairly indestructible as well. No need to upgrade the wiring, or any other tweaks, just use them and enjoy them. Granted, these do not have the resolution as the more expensive phones, but they are a great way to get your iPod toting friends to step up their game a bit.

It's easy to get overly analytical about the bass and the imaging, but then you realize that these are only \$35 headphones! The closed back offers two advantages: you won't disturb the people sitting next to you on the plane (or in the adjacent cube) and you get a bit deeper bass response.



The Grado SR60

The Grado SR60s are another step up the food chain and will amaze you for \$69. I started out just listening to these from the output of my Mac G5, as I have my whole CD library on the computer uncompressed. (watch for the story on this next issue) Initially, this was very good and certainly a big step up from the HD 202s. But tweaking things got the better of me, and pretty soon I was running the optical digital out from my Mac into the Benchmark DAC-1 and using the headphone output on its front panel.

Big difference! The great thing about the DAC-1 is that it's small enough to put in your briefcase. Use it at home as a DAC and at work as a headphone amp!

The SR60s took on a completely different character with a good headphone amplifier. Todd the Vinyl Junkie's website says **"This is the headphone that has sent many fanatics on their way to a large headphone collection."** If you don't have the bug yet, these will get you started. *(continued)*



Reference setting audio designs!

Metronome-Technologie (Reference Digital)

- State-of the-art digital playback
- **Kalista** – simply the finest transport available!
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- **Separate power supplies** for **driver** stage and **power** stage to easily drive demanding loads
- Tonally accurate, transparent, dynamic & detailed w/large, open soundstage



Manger loudspeakers (Precision Monitoring System)

- Think ESL...but faster, more transparent, detailed & dynamic
- Easy to drive flat impedance
- **ZeroBox 109** 2-way begins at \$7500
 - **Frequency:** 40-24khz (±3db)
 - **Sensitivity:** 89db
 - **Impedance:** Flat 4Ω
 - **Crossover:** Includes Mundorf MCap & MCap Supreme
- TAS #131: *The Mangers (ZeroBox 109) otherwise were outstanding, even stunning. Their coherence is total. Almost no other speaker comes close in this regard. The Mangers also have extraordinary clarity, transparency & resolution. Instruments such as the banjo, which have distinctive, emphatic initial transients, had extraordinary lifelike character.*



Even if you don't become part of our obsession, you can still enjoy your stereo, computer or iPod a lot more with a pair of SR60s. Bass response was very good for an open design, with good separation through the mids as well. Compared to the big boys, the image inside your head is a bit smaller, but still outstanding considering the price point. I was listening to one of my favorite spacy CDs, Jean Michael Jarre's **Zoolook** and noticed that all the trippy sounds weren't spinning around my head as much as with the HD 600s.

As great as these are, you can't have everything for under 100 bucks. What these phones ultimately lack is really deep bass and a super clean high end. When you put a \$3-600 pair of phones on, you can hear the grain in these, but again the performance is mega respectable for the price.

If you have a son or daughter in college, here's a great birthday or Christmas present. Get 'em hooked early, I say!

Highly Recommended ●

Distributed by: tmh audio

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

Classical Music A to Z

— Dan Babineau

Hopefully, you enjoyed your assignment from last issue. For those just tuning in we were all supposed to go out and listen to a live classical performance. It didn't matter if you caught a high school end of the year performance or the Emerson String Quartet. I just wanted to get you out there and expose you to the best way to learn about classical music.

I managed to drop in to see Andre Watts up in Santa Barbara while heading back from a bike race. Bach, Mozart, Liszt. Blew my mind!

I cannot overemphasize the sheer joy that can be obtained by attending live performances of just about any kind of classical music. Listening to a record or CD is always nice but to experience the raw energy first hand is often difficult to explain to the uninitiated.

**Think of your first kiss or
the first time you drove over
150mph.**



The power of the orchestra is at times overwhelming and the finesse and intricacies of the players can put hope back into your soul. To be able to play an instrument with such precision and unreckless abandon will surely restore your faith in humanity. The tonality of every live instrument comes through so loud and clear that when you get home to your audio rig you just sit and try to remember how good it really is! *(continued)*

But we need a reference to begin our quest to enjoy classical music and there has never been a better time to start. When I began playing music there were two mediums available for playback. The first was the LP: 45, 33 1/3 & 78 rpm respectively. Then there was an amazing device called the reel to reel tape deck. Messy to operate but great sound and lots of it. If you still have a reel to reel tape deck in good working condition, don't be afraid to buy used master tapes of classical music as some of these recordings can't be beat.

It's not so bad for the rest of us, though. Classical music is available in a cornucopia of formats: LP, cassette tape, CD, SACD, DVD-A, MP3, downloads etc. etc. I always grimace when I hear audio industry people complain about the status of classical music in the world. **There has never been a time in history when classical music has been more accessible; it doesn't matter what your format of choice is.**

It's our fault that the youth of the world has fallen behind in so many areas involving the arts. Man and woman cannot live on numbers alone. It's been proven time and time again that art in its many forms has and always will bridge the gap between cultures and our own humanity. If you don't believe me then why can a French conductor take charge of a Japanese orchestra, with a Korean soloist and play the music of Sibelius with such elegance and power to the point that the audience becomes completely mesmerized?

We need classical music more now than ever is the fact that this genre has stood the test of time and on many levels has managed to reach out to people better than any other art form! You do not have to be a Rhodes Scholar to love it and it will take you on a delightful journey if you let it.

In the last issue I outlined my priorities and it starts here with giving you at least 100 essential pieces of classical music. And now my secret: **there is no way that I could keep this list under 1000 titles** but I knew everyone would think this obsessive and probably attempt to, God forbid, EDIT ME! So here's how I'm going to cheat:

This list will mention various composers and their work. Often times I will point out that you are crazy not to get all of a certain composers work, but remember, I'm obsessed. (and I'm hoping you will share my obsession as we go..)



In future columns I will go on to dissect these incredible composers and actually focus on specific categories, for example: Russian music, or English music, or famous violin virtuosos, or the effect that war had on classical music, or classical players alive today and the music that they choose to play. How about famous concert halls throughout the world? We may take a few trips to check out these halls first hand! I think you get the idea, I have a lot to share with you.

We'll proceed in alphabetical order simply because I have no real favorites, I love them all equally at different times of the day, hour, month or year. In some cases I'll just list the composer and title of the piece and in other cases provide much more. I hope you like these gems as much as I do and don't forget to support your favorite record vendors, local or online! Wherever I can, I will even give you the catalog number to make it as easy as possible to find these titles.

This will actually take a few issues to complete, so let's get started. *(continued)*

TOMASO ALBINONI (Baroque)

You can't always live in the present so jump back to the Baroque with this killer oboe music: *Concerto a cinque Opus 7, No. 3 in B Flat major* (just buy the Complete Oboe Concerti CD on Chandos catalog #579). Albinoni is mostly known for his *Adagio for Organ and Strings in G minor* but being an oboe player, I like the oboe music best!

MALCOLM ARNOLD (20TH Century)

You have to at least get his 5th symphony to even be in the game. Arnold's music is fun and rambunctious. It's hard to believe that this man suffered from depression a great deal of his life. Big horn passages with lots of energy for strings and percussion.

CARL PHILIPP EMMANUEL BACH (Classical)

One of the Bach boys, I especially like *Concerto for Cello No. 2 in B Flat major*. His flute music is also quite good, light and airy, makes you feel like going for a brisk walk!

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (Father of the Baroque)

Eventually, you'll like it all but here are some essentials: *The Brandenburg Concertos, The Well Tempered Clavier, Books 1&2*. All of the chamber music. Obviously the *Jesu, Joy of Mans Desiring*.

A couple of Bach Cantatas and a long, hard bike ride can be better than church! Try *The Goldberg Variations*, Gould or Perahia, either is great.

The many partitas for violin and the sonatas for flute, viola & cello will keep you focused. Though I'm not a huge fan of either, I still advise you to investigate the harpsichord and organ pieces, as they can often provide you with a peaceful feeling early in the day, and that's a good thing! **Organ music also works well for checking out the lower frequencies of your hi-fi system and nicely annoys the neighbor's cat.**

J. S. Bach is a mind set and almost a religion to some. To me his music has incredible weight like a force of nature. Mathematically precise, full of energy, humble yet powerful and always overflowing with melody that sticks with you. Rumor has it he messed around with a chamber maid or two in the basement of the church, I know I did when I could! It's amazing to think that Bach rarely left his own village and supposedly never left Germany but was able to compose this diverse array of exemplary music!

SAMUEL BARBER (20TH Century)

I'll admit Barber is one of my oldest weaknesses. Remember I am a woodwind player and Samuel Barber really liked woodwinds, namely the oboe, my favorite. Everybody knows Opus 11, *Adagio for Strings*, but check out all three of Barber's *Essays for Orchestra*. His first symphony is huge and ends rather loud. While the second still sounds like a work in progress to me, I like it just the same.

Want to roust the kids out of the bed in the morning? Play the *School for Scandal Overture*, that'll wake them up. Even if you don't like oboe music (and to heck with you if you don't) check out Barber's *Canzonetta for Oboe and Strings*. While you're at it, let me know what you think of his *Capricorn Concerto for Oboe, Trumpet and Strings*, Opus 21. I cut my teeth on this stuff and never get tired of this incredible air and tonality. And don't forget some of his delightful choral music, namely *Knoxville Summer* or opus 32, *Vanessa*. *(continued)*

BELLA BARTOK (20TH Century)

Take a trip to Hungary, specifically – Transylvania. Bartok sets a dark mood but was way ahead of his time musically. Most of us know his Concerto for Orchestra, Sz 116, but don't be afraid to slip in the *Divertimento for Strings* or better yet *Music for Strings, Percussion & Celesta*. The folk music is also fun once you learn the big stuff. The string quartets take time to get used to, but I feel they represent one of the first leaps into modern music.

ARNOLD BAX (20TH Century)

For many years I called the three “Bs” Bax, Bridge & Britten, rather than the cliché Bach, Beethoven & Brahms. Bax is to English music what Ferrari is to auto racing: powerful, menacing even mystical. Buy the new Chandos box set of Bax symphonies with Vernon Handley conducting. If you have an analog rig get your hands on the Lyritas with Del Mar, Fredman or Leppard!

Beautiful tonality, raw energy and dark haunting passages with light just at the end of the tunnel like Bruckner with no apologies.

Symphonies 2, 5, 6 & 7 played loud will terrify you in the best possible way. If you are into English chamber music with a twist look no further, Bax was a master at writing for small ensembles and he was influ-

enced by his many travels especially on his trips to Russia. The premiere recordings on the Chandos catalog #9879 with Martyn Brabbins are spot on for both performance and sound!

LUDWIG VON BEETHOVEN (Classical)

It almost impossible to find a bad piece of music attributed to Beethoven. First and foremost, you must get all nine symphonies. The odd number symphonies tend to be more dramatic and dynamic where as the evens more pastoral. Beethoven's music is moody and full of energy. Listen to all four movements of the fifth; you'll be amazed at how complex this supposedly overplayed work is. And the importance of the 9th symphony can never be underestimated! First and foremost Beethoven was a true pioneer of musical form and changed the orchestra forever!

The piano concertos are powerful and very complex. I especially like the third. The violin concertos and romances for violin blend this amazing power with delicate string exchanges. And of course I love all of the music for winds, wonderful music for all woodwinds, even the trombone. Don't forget the overtures – *Egmont* & *Leonore* and last but not least warm up you system with a little *Wellington's Victory*, Opus 91 usually called the *Battle Symphony*. **Beethoven didn't write any dogs and its fun to compare each conductor's interpretation of his work.** I like Otto Klemperer across the board but some of the new recordings are also nice – think Claudio Abbado. When you really get hooked buy the string quartets and feel the raw nerve of a true genius.

HECTOR BERLIOZ (Romantic)

Opus 14 or the *Symphonie Fantastique* is indeed a great dream or fantasy. A very large piece for the time – revolutionary one might say. Berlioz started to expand the orchestra and with his ballet *La Damnation of Faust* and freaked out audiences of his time. I also like his underplayed *Harold in Italy*. *Romeo & Juliette* & the Roman carnival overture are also great fun, while on the light side. *(continued)*



LEONARD BERNSTEIN (20TH Century)

Along with Aaron Copeland, **Bernstein brought more to American classical music than can even be recognized.** He hooked me in my youth with *West Side Story* and then finished me off with *Candide*. A brilliant conductor and spokesman for the arts, Leonard Bernstein woke America up with his many lectures and concerts. I saw him once in concert and actually got to meet him during a rehearsal. He smelled of smoke but music seemed to just radiate out of his pores.

GEORGES BIZET (Romantic)

Let's face it, you have to have one or two good copies of *Carmen* or as my dad used to



say: "where have you been your whole life"? But in a sense *Carmen* was a small curse for Bizet as many of us forget some of his other fine efforts. Try out his *Symphony in C major* that is again ahead of its time in structure and refinement. Opus 22 – *Jeux d'enfants* much like Debussy's *Jeux* really makes you think of children and their many games – delightful!

ALEXANDER BORODIN (Romantic)

Holding up the Russian end of the Romantic Movement Borodin's *In the steppes of central Asia* is a diverse journey that has an eastern flair. *Prince Igor* or at least the overture is fun to play every now and then. Borodin is one of the building blocks of what will latter become an amazing force in the realm of classical music, namely 20th century Russian music.

JOHANNES BRAHMS (Classical)

Brahms' music is enchanting almost euphoric in it's ability to make sense out of life. Boisterous at times, tragic and reflective at other times, Brahms music is another example of the ever expanding orchestra where sections of the orchestra begin to develop their own voice. I love the *Academic Festival Overture* with German drinking songs to let the establishment know who really runs the show.

The concertos for both violin & piano are some of the most subtly power music around. There's nothing boring about Brahms and all four symphonies have their own unique tone and tempo. The *German Requiem* can bring me to tears and I don't cry easy. And you have to get the *Variations on a Theme by Haydn* to appreciate how far Brahms can take us. Don't forget some of the *Intermezzos* for piano that clearly show Brahms' unique structure and sense of pace. Musically speaking, reading any of Brahms' scores one begins to understand just how amazingly understated this genius really is.

FRANK BRIDGE (20TH Century)

Anyone that likes Benjamin Britten has to thank Frank Bridge. Bridge spent a great deal of time with the already amazing Britten perfecting his style and incredibly advanced skill for musical composition. Bridge was a genius at composition and like Debussy or Ravel, made it look easy. Here are my favorites: *Phatasm*, H182, *The Sea* H 100, *Summer* H116. H174 is called *There is a Willow Grows Aslant the Brook*; you might recognize it when you hear it. Another favorite is H72: *My Pent Up Tears Oppress My Brain*. Actually, I love the guy! EMI catalog # 66855 with Groves or the Chandos #10012 with Richard Hickox are great Bridge CDs. *(continued)*

BENJAMIN BRITTEN (20TH Century)

I'm going to go on record and say that **Benjamin Britten was more important to 20th Century music than the Beatles**. No other 20th Century composer has got it all together like Britten. Born on St. Cecilia's day the patron saint of music, Britten is just now being recognized for his innovation and sheer genius in structure and composition. It all fits together like a gigantic puzzle. **This is serious music not for the light at heart.**

Even his *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* gave me a run for my money. Based around one of Britten's favorite giants of folk music, Henry Purcell what better way to introduce your three year old to the wonders of the orchestra. Personal favorites are: Opus 57, the ballet *Prince of the Pagodas* the full version not the striped down version. *Peter Grimes* or at least the *Four Sea Interludes*, Opus 33a. Play the second interlude loud and hang on tight to the side of the cliff this one will shake you up! You have to get *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge*.

A composition genius in his own right, Bridge taught Britten for many years and here is the result of their hard work. Both the *Violin and Violin & Viola Concertos* are must haves and don't forget the *Simple Symphony* a light stringy affair with a couple of interesting twists. Yes, I'm biased but **Britten does everything right for me**. Take him in small doses and call me in the morning.

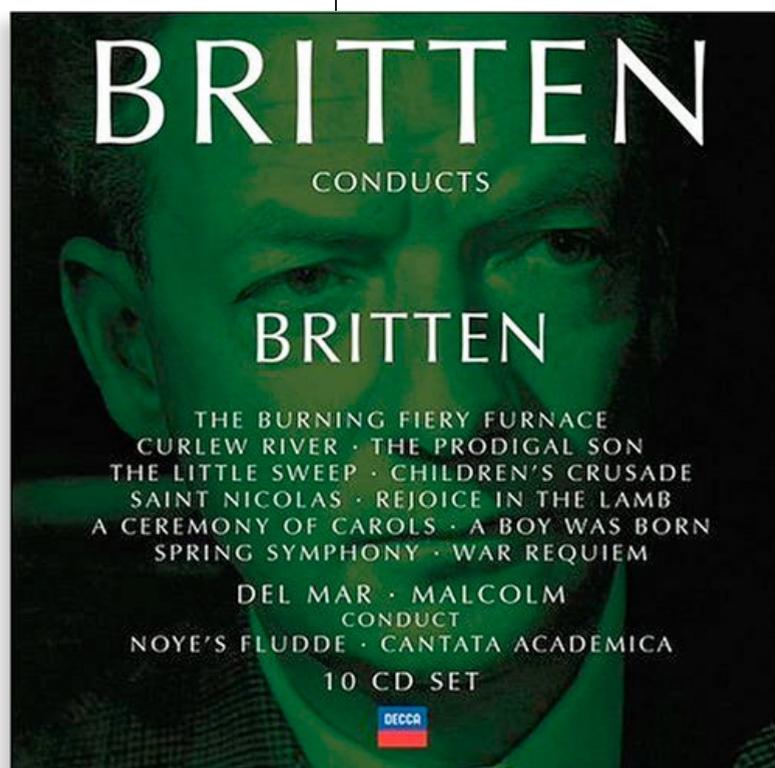
MAX BRUCH (Romantic)

Known to a large extent for his exquisite violin music Bruch helped solidify the Romantic Movement. He wrote several other types of music that unfortunately are rarely played: Opus 88, *Concerto for Clarinet & Viola* is nice if you like that kind of thing. And of course his tour de force for cello Opus 47, the *Kol Nidrei for Cello and Orchestra* needs to have a place on your record shelf. My favorite time to play this music is during the seasonal changes, it just seems to fit. Very warm like an old stone hearth, get Opus 26, *Concerto for Violin* and of course Opus 46, *Scottish Fantasy for Violin*.

ANTON BRUCKNER (Romantic)

I'll admit that when I was younger I didn't quite get Bruckner. He'd float along with these light sweeping passages and then out of the blue set a bomb off with the horn section and then go back and apologize with tiny little microscopic harp solos and the like. A very reverend and religious man, I think the muse would take too strong a hold on old Anton and he'd light up the room for a moment only to cower in regret. It does make for interesting listening. Be sure to have your remote handy because volume levels are all over the place. I recommend the following symphonies to start: the 4th (the Romantic), the 7th, the 8th & 9th. That'll keep you busy for a while.

Well, we barely got through the "Bs" and I left a few composers out. Your assignment for next time is to go out and test drive some of my recommendations. Most of the CDs that I'm recommending are classic performances at very good prices. Remember, there is a great deal more to go. So take a breath, give it some time. **Everyone is different but you'll know when we hit your soul!** *(continued)*



RECAPITULATION*(a.k.a. Dan's favorites)*

TOMASO ALBINONI: *The Complete Oboe Concerti* and might as well pick up the *Adagio for Organ and Strings* while you're at it. Chandos catalog # 579 for the oboe.

MALCOLM ARNOLD: Symphonies 3 & 5, go ahead and grab some of the *Scottish Dances*. Opus 29 is a super piece – *Sonatine for Clarinet & Piano*. If you like film music, Arnold wrote some great film music i.e.: *Bridge on the River Kwai* & *David Copperfield*. Try the Classico recording catalog #294 for the symphonies or the EMI Cat.# 66324 if you want to hear the man himself conducting!

CARL PHILIPP EMMANUEL BACH: *Concerto for Cello #2* and the flute music. I like the Teldec catalog # 77 with Hugh Wolf and the St. Paul & Mr. Rostropovich. And get the flute music on Philips Duo catalog #442592.

J. S. BACH: At least get the *Brandenburg Concertos* to start, then close your eyes and pick, you cannot go wrong!

SAMUEL BARBER: Pick up one the fine compilations like the Telarc catalog #80250 and then merge into the 2 Symphonies.

BELLA BARTOK: The Hungaroton SACD listing cat. # 32187 of *Concerto for Orchestra* with Zoltan Kocsis at the helm releases the excitement terror of this piece magnificently. Get the string quartets when you're ready – *The Emerson* on DG.

ARNOLD BAX: Either the Handley box set of symphonies or the *Lyritas* on LP. Do me a favor and also buy the Martyn Brabbins listed above.

LUDWIG VON BEETHOVEN: Get either the EMI CD box set cat. #73895 or the LP version of Klemperer conducting the 9 symphonies. The CD version has Daniel Barenboim playing piano concertos 3, 4, & 5 as well as the *Choral Fantasy*.

HECTOR BERLIOZ: The CD on RCA cat.# 68979 has *Symphonie Fantastique* plus a bonus, Opus 17 the love scene from *Romeo and Juliette*. Send me the LP version as I don't have it.

LEONARD BERNSTEIN: One stop shopping with the fine Deutsche Gramophone cat. #474426 will get you started with Bernstein conducting a variety of great material.

GEORGES BIZET: I like Beecham with the French National Orchestra & Chorus on EMI catalog #67353.

ALEXANDER BORODIN: There is a little bit of everything on this Decca release catalog #444386.

JOHANNES BRAHMS: I go to my old favorite Otto Klemperer for the 4 symphonies: EMI's Great Recordings series catalog #62760 but there are a lot of great Brahms recordings available. Bruno Walter, John Eliot Gardiner's German Requiem on DG and even Giulini with the CSO, EMI cat. #62883.

FRANK BRIDGE: Just get the Hickox recording on Chandos, cat. # 5018. You cannot go wrong!

BRITTEN: On LP I like the Previn *The Music of Benjamin Britten* on EMI but the Chandos CD Cat. #9221 with Richard Hickox is a real good start to a long journey.

MAX BRUCH: For the two violin pieces grab the wonderfully priced Vox Classic cat. # 7906 with Aaron Rosand and for the Cello piece pick up some bonus players namely Dvorak & Bloch on DG cat#429155 with Pierre Fourier. Killer disc!

ANTON BRUCKNER: For the fourth symphony it's Karl Bohm on London/Decca cat. #466374. For the eighth my pick on CD is Lorin Maazel on EMI Seraphim cat. #73708 and last but definitely not least is Nikolaus Harnoncourt the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra in the ninth on RCA Red Label cat#54332. ●

Audiophile Pressings

— Jeff Dorgay

This issue we have a mixed bag of treats; some good, one really bad and one from our past. I've really been on a vinyl kick lately, so this time there is much more vinyl than CD. I always like to get the bad news out of the way, so let's start here...



PINK FLOYD 30TH ANNIVERSARY REMASTER

EMI LP

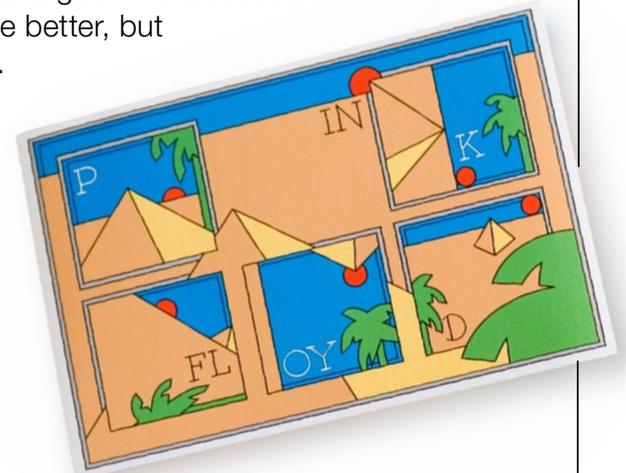
Once again I can read your mind. Why on Earth would anyone need, want or pursue yet ANOTHER copy of **DSOM**? Well, loyal readers, I asked myself that very question when this one stared at me from the record bin. A few people had told me that the 30th anniversary SACD version of this was pretty good. Since I'm not interested in multichannel I had given up on it. But there it was, only two left in the bin and I thought "what the heck?" I managed to resist temptation on this for about a year; this day I would give in.

For those of you that still have this record and like it, I am with you. When I sold mid-fi gear in the early '80s everyone that walked in the store wanted to hear this or Supertramp's **Crime of the Century**. It was kind of the Patricia Barber of my day. Needless to say, I couldn't listen to **DSOM** for about 10 years, but then it managed to get its charm back. I probably listen to it three or four times a year, because it's still a great record.

However, it seems that the original I have on Harvest is not bad, just a little compressed. The MoFi copy is pretty good, but a little thin. The MoFi CD is even thinner, and so it goes. I thought perhaps for the 30th anniversary of this classic record, they would get it right, especially considering they went to all the trouble to press it on 180gm vinyl.

Well folks, forget this one. This is one of the worst pressings I have ever heard. The highs sound so bad, if I didn't know any better I'd think I had a bad stylus or blown tubes in my phono stage. Very sibilant and cloudy, however, the low end is wonderful. No more **DSOM** I say. I don't care if the next version is perfect; I'm not falling for it again! The shining light in this is that my local record store, Music Millennium in Portland, Oregon even took it back and gave me a second one! The second one was a little better, but still sucked in a major way. Can't win them all.

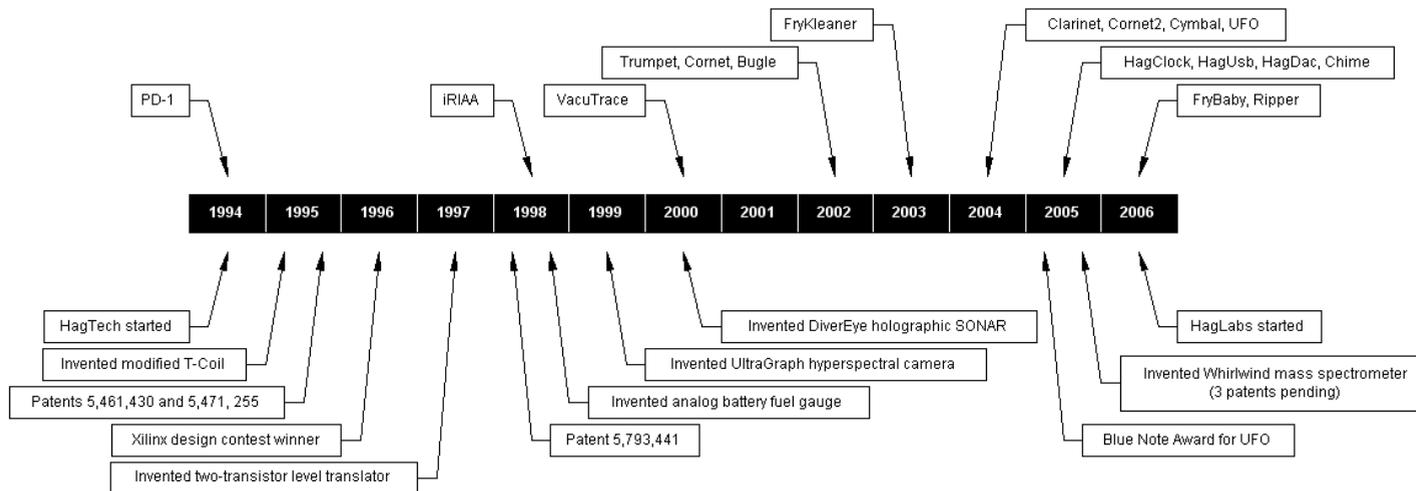
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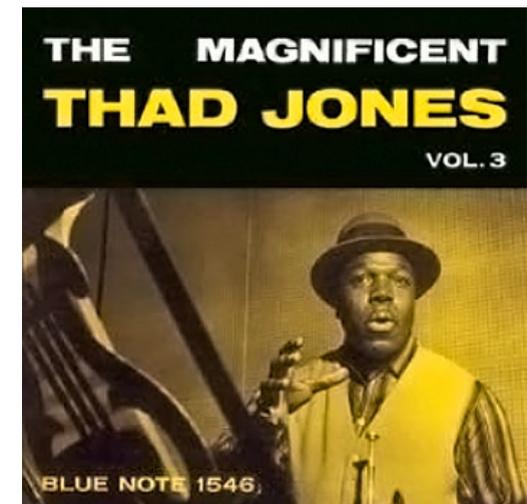


THE MAGNIFICENT THAD JONES

Classic Records LP

According to Charles Mingus, Thad Jones was “the greatest trumpet player he had ever heard in his life.” This record, recorded by the master, Rudy Van Gelder was done in two separate sessions from July 1956 and February 1957. Either way, this one is a must for the jazz die hards in the audience.

With only three songs on side one and two on side two, this one is over way too soon. This record is very quiet, pressed on Classic’s Quiex SV-P 200 gram material, however the tonal balance on this one was just a bit hot for my tastes. I’m reserving final judgement on this one though, because I’ll have a mono cartridge installed on a spare turntable by next issue and I want to revisit these and other mono recordings in my collection. For now, I’m giving Classic the benefit of the doubt on this record, just because it’s so groovy. *(continued)*



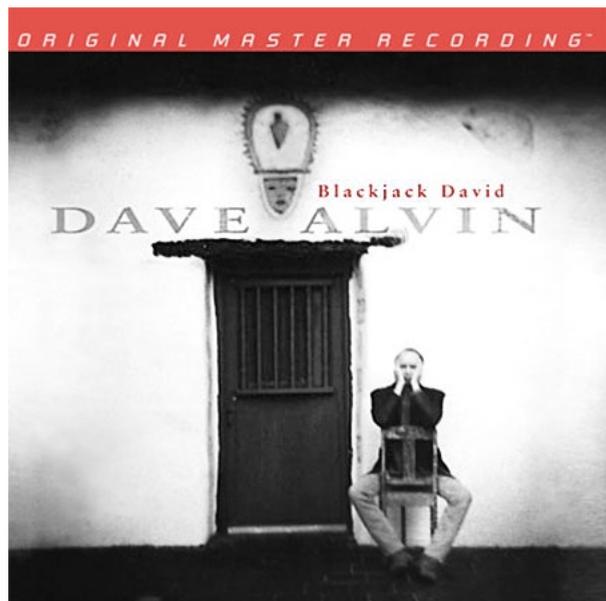
Dave Alvin —
BLACKJACK Mobile Fidelity LP

This is definitely not a **Blasters** LP! For me, this is a good thing because while I really liked the art on the cover of **The Blasters**, I HATED that song *Border Radio*. Who knows, maybe I'm mellowing out in my old age, but this is a nice record. The songs are well crafted, though listening to *California Snow* when I know its 119 degrees in the California Hills right now is a bit wacky.

The MoFi website calls Dave a “dust bowl bal-ladeer” and while I tried to come up with a more witty description of this music I can't. In the liner notes, Dave says the songs are about “leaving and those left behind”, so this is a somewhat sad record. Definitely not happy party music, but as someone who usually has an aversion to this kind of thing, I really enjoyed this record.

The recording is outstanding and I feel that **Blackjack** will definitely become one of those great records that not only shows off how well your audio system performs, but one you'll listen to over and over again. I really like the trend of only putting a couple of songs on an album side, as it seems to make for a much more open sound.

The bad news is you have to get up every 10-12 minutes to flip a record, buy hey I need the exercise anyway.



Madeline Peyroux —
CARELESS LOVE Mobile Fidelity

Now this is happy, party music. Take one part Billie Holliday, one part cute French chick (that is really from Georgia) and one part Paulo Conte and you have a bit of an idea of Madeline Peyroux is about.

The songs on this record sound like they are being sung by someone who is much older than the 30-year-old woman who sings these songs. Mr. Britton did a great job mastering this one; it's nice and smooth with a big sound. Thanks to Joni Mitchell's ex, Larry Klein, this definitely keeps a good groove going throughout the whole record. This is what analog is all about!

If you are looking for female vocals that are just a bit off the beaten path than the standard faire, this one is worth listening to. Watch for a review soon on her recent album, **Half the Perfect World**.

Gerry Mulligan meets Scott Hamilton —
SOFT LIGHTS & SWEET MUSIC Mobile Fidelity SACD

This disc is wine and cheese music at it's best and I don't mean that as a put down at all. If you are a long time jazz fan, you know very well who Gerry Mulligan is and whom he's played with. If you are new to the world of jazz and want to catch up on this master in a hurry, go to (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerry_Mulligan) for a great overview of his life and career. For those of you mega fans, that would like a molecular-level review of his career and everything he ever recorded or performed, there is a link at the bottom of the Wikipedia page that will tell you everything you want to know.

But back to the disc. Originally recorded in 1986 about 10 years before Mulligan's death, it has a very similar feel to the Verve series in the '50s aptly titled Gerry Mulligan Meets... teaming him up with other sax players. As the title suggests, this is a disc of slow songs. Even though Mulligan has done some very spunky work in the past, this disc is definitely for when you are chillaxin.

This disc is so well done; it really makes me wish that SACD had gotten a better foothold. When done right, this format is exquisite. Even if you only have a regular CD player, that layer sounds great, but if you have SACD capability, you will really enjoy this one. LP fans rejoice, this one is soon to be released by MoFi on vinyl! (*continued*)



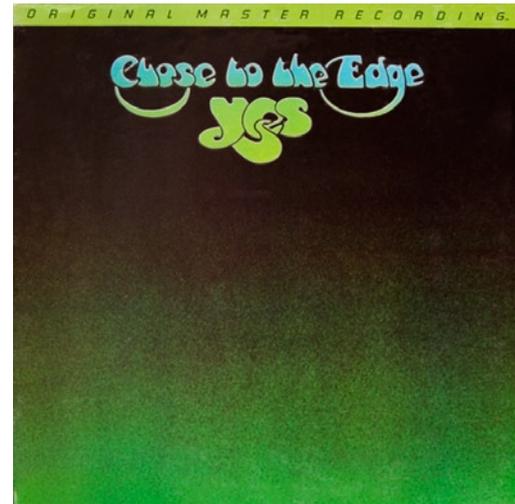


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Yes —
CLOSE TO THE EDGE
 Mobile Fidelity LP

Here's one from the vault, that's always fun to revisit. A quick check on Ebay revealed that one of these in excellent shape will set you back about \$65-100, depending on who is selling it.

Yes was really the band that defined Progressive Rock for me, and to many fans this is one of their favorite albums. **Close to the Edge** features the most powerful lineup of Yes (Wakeman, Howe, Buford, Squire and Anderson) that also produced the monster album **Fragile** earlier in the year of 1972. A bit more trippy than **Fragile**, **Close to the Edge** was more of a concept album instead of a group of songs.

If you have this in your collection, dust it off and enjoy. **It still amazes me that these guys put out both of these records in 1972 and it took Pearl Jam 15 years to come out with another record. ●**

When I was a kid, I grew up in a house with parents that did not have much of an appreciation for music, so I can't say that I've inherited any of my taste from them. Often many of us 40 and 50 somethings put down the 20 something's music or worse yet, ignore them altogether.

My experience with this bunch has always been good, and with a few of them on our staff, I'm always getting exposed to new, cool stuff and hopefully every now and then I lead them to some enjoyable tunes as well.

Here's a great story by our music writer Joe Golfen and his dad, Bob. They both play guitar and have always shared their music with each other, which was the main reason we hired Joe. For a 22 year old guy, he not only has a fantastic handle on what's new and happening, he is more familiar with the music of my generation than a lot of my forty something friends.

I hope this encourages all of you to share your music with your kids and take an interest in what they listen to as well. Granted, some of it is crap, but a lot of what we listened to back in the day was crap too! The bonus is the interesting stuff they will lead you to.

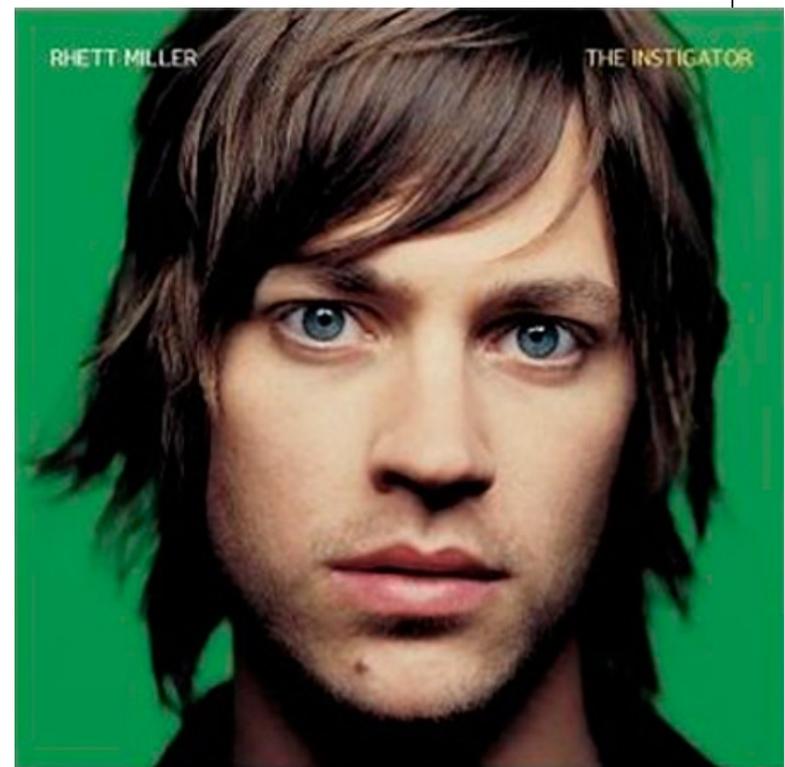
Six From My Son

— Bob Golfen

Too many guys I know are stuck in the '70s. They play the oldies station all day long and think Pink Floyd made the last decent rock and roll song. They sneer contemptuously at today's bands and whine that kids these days don't know their butts from a cassette tape. Or worse, many of these older guys just don't care about anything musically that's happened since the punkers came along and screwed things up for good. **Just throw on another cut of Sweet Home Alabama and call it a day.**

OK, so my formative rock and roll years were in the '60s and '70s (which probably makes me a bona fide codger) but that doesn't mean I had to stop there. I've managed to keep up with the past quarter century, the fantastic highs and the depressing lows, everything from the Sex Pistols to U2, from Nirvana to Sir Mix-A-Lot. And it doesn't hurt that nowadays; I have college-age sons who turn me on to great music.

It used to be that I was the musical influence in our house, playing guitar for the little dudes and teaching them songs. I take credit for their appreciation of Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, John Prine, Paul Simon and, of course Beatles. Also, Motown, modern jazz, blues, bluegrass and Beethoven. *(continued)*



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But after I bought Joe his first electric guitar and he set out on his own, I've just tagged along for the ride. He and his younger brother, Paul, are the ones who now set the tone. I could say something Yoda-like here about the father teaching the son who then teaches the father, but I'll spare you.

Enough said that Joe has turned himself into a pop music encyclopedia, much to my unending pleasure and edification. As such, he subjects me to a constant barrage of up-to-date sounds, tells me about the characters making music these days and puts it all into perspective.

Fortunately, we have a lot of overlap in our musical taste so that I don't have to endure any gangsta rap (or, how many words can you rhyme with bitch) or latter-day "punk" music by bands that sound like they just got their guitars for Christmas.

No, it's all good stuff, and since he's usually well ahead of the curve, so am I. Of the six albums I've picked out that Joe exposed me on to, all are (aside from Moby) heavy on solid songwriting and poetic lyrics. This sort of shows how he and I are both musicians and writers that our appreciation of pop music comes from both the heart and the mind.

The first music I recall Joe bringing to me that really hit the spot was by Rhett Miller and his fine country-rock band, the Old 97s. *(continued)*

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But really, it was Miller's solo album, **The Instigator**, that made me take notice of this highly talented singer/songwriter.

I found that his songs have a smart story-telling aspect to them, and his turns of phrase are effective, original and filled with wry humor. He makes learned references to art and literature, as in one of my favorites, *Our Love*, and the enigmatic *Point Shirley*. *World within a World* references a recent novel by Don DeLillo. And I love the adolescent timbre of his voice, which sounds like a combination of fireside cowpoke and exasperated urban youth.

Recorded during a hiatus from Old 97s, this album was supposed to be a mainstream breakout hit for Miller, launching him as a major star, complete with mountains of cash and dates with super models. But **The Instigator** was too esoteric, lacking the formula and the sex appeal of pop hits, and failed to take Miller very far beyond his core fans. And I count myself as one of them.

Techno artist Moby did score a mainstream hit with his album **Play**, which also was a major hit among the Golfen clan. Yeah, sure, I know this album was considered a big, bad sellout among the techno-rave junkies. But with **Play**, Moby surprised everyone with his depth, ability and amazing musical instinct. Who else has tried, much less succeeded, to combine

old-time Gospel music with heart-pounding techno rhythms?

When I first heard this album, I was just stunned, and it remains a true favorite. Among other things, it makes great road-trip music.



Joe was an early discoverer of the Glasgow, Scotland, band Franz Ferdinand, and got me hooked on them early on. Their self-titled album, which included the monster hit *Take Me Out*, has the

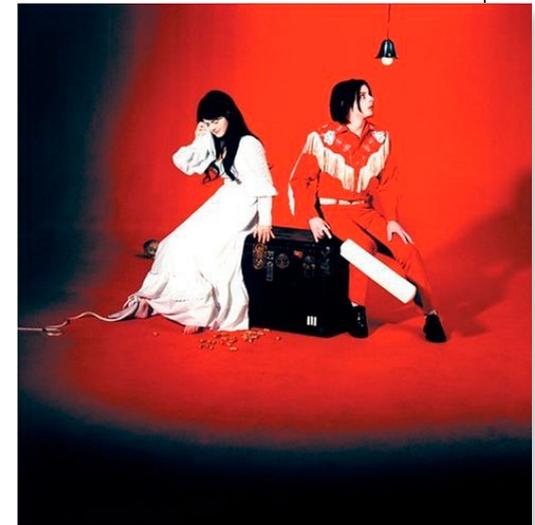
kind of nerdish appeal that reminds me why I love the Talking Heads. These guys were also a batch of art students when they began making music in rock-friendly Glasgow.

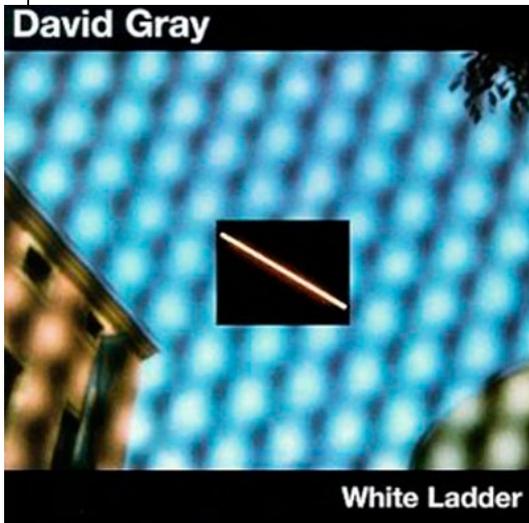
This album set the stage for another wave of great New Wave bands, such as the Killers and Bravery. I like just about everything on this album, with its amped-up guitar playing and smart lyrics.

The strangest band on the planet, the White Stripes has become a rallying cry for garage bands everywhere. And Jack White is the two-word answer for the probing question: where are the guitar gods of yesteryear? Their funky, blues-tinged and slightly surreal **Elephant** was a revelation for me, proving once again that low-tech combined with high talent form the roots of rock and roll. That, along with some sex-inflamed lyrics and wacky drumming by the ex-Mrs. White. *Seven Nation Army* has got to be one of the best album opening songs ever.

While you are at it, check out the raw guitar sound on *Ball and Biscuit*. Plus the gnarly blues lyrics: **"It's quite possible I'm your third man but it's a fact I'm a seventh son."** Pure theater.

Taking a complete about face, David Gray's haunting vocals and rich lyrics make him another favorite singer/songwriter, ever since Joe hooked me up with the highly regarded **White Ladder** album. I love the background story too, about how a discouraged, label-dumped Gray hunkered down in his London apartment and produced this hit album himself. *(continued)*



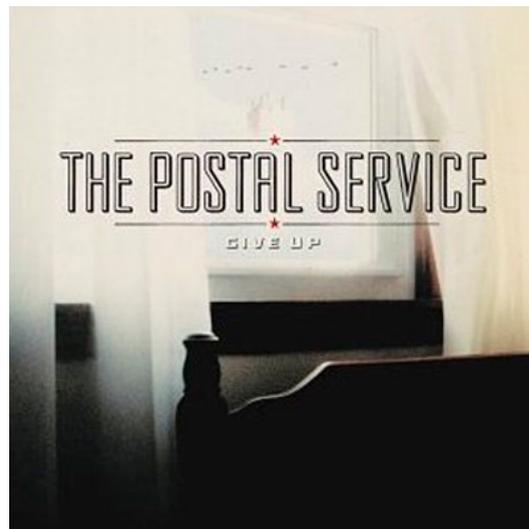


I'll bet the EMI execs were kicking themselves over this chart smasher, especially when *Babylon* roared to the top of the playlists. The songs are pretty straightforward, the kind of tunes you might teach yourself to play on guitar, with plenty of repeating hooks that work well rather than feeling contrived. The skimpy production quality has a lot of appeal, with Gray's strong melodies and sweet voice backed up by a dinky drum machine and other basic tools. It's a singular work of art that richly deserves its commercial success.

The final album from the Joe collection is **Give Up** by Postal Service, which seemed kind of soft at first but which grew on me with each listen. Here's another great back story, how techno artist Jimmy Tamborello and Ben Gibbard of Death Cab for Cutie

(another interesting band) collaborated coast-to-coast by mail to come up with the songs and music for this album. Hence, their name.

The result is an atmospheric sound, excellent lyrics and a solid mainstream audience. But there's more here than initially meets the ear, and after a few plays, I realized that Postal Service has more depth than most people give them credit for.



I also have to acknowledge that Joe has shown some real depth in his choices of music. Makes a papa proud. Keep them coming, dude.

Six From My Dad

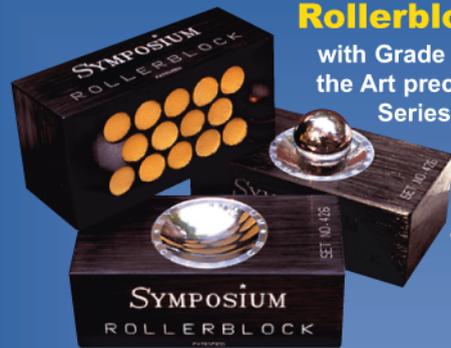
— Joe Golfen

When I was three years old, I made a decision that would change my little brother's life forever. No, I didn't beat him up or tease him incessantly, that would all come later. When I was three I got to name my little brother; I named him Paul, after my favorite musician at the time, Paul Simon. I still remember listening to Simon's groundbreaking 1986 album **Graceland** over and over again. **The tape once got stuck in the cassette player of my mom's old Volvo station wagon, and even though I must have heard it a hundred times; I never got sick of it.**

Even today this album amazes me. Simon's ability to effortlessly float between his classic singer-songwriter style to making music with an African acappella group and still make it sound natural and solid is something at which many other artists would have failed miserably. This album was the first to make me love music.

Graceland was the first album my dad ever gave me, and from that point on he would help to shape my musical tastes and opinions. He used to sit on the edge of my bed and play soft guitar versions of the songs on **Graceland** to put me to sleep, and this early introduction to good music has had a lasting effect on me.

We sat down the other day and listed the six albums that we had showed each other that have had the greatest impact on us. This one was the first album to really expand and develop my musical palette. *(continued)*



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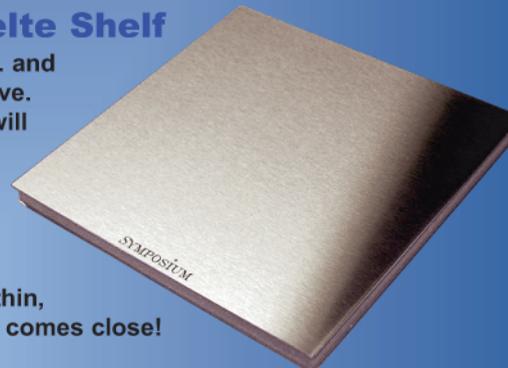


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PAUL SIMON
GRACELAND



It has had a huge effect on how I listen to songs and the songs I choose to listen to. At the time, I thought the album was really fun, especially with all of the instruments that Simon employed. To my developing mind this album had everything; horns, xylophones, accordions and harmonized vocal groups. I even thought the song *Under African Skies* was about me, since it's protagonist is named Joseph and Tucson, Arizona is mentioned, although looking back I don't know how I missed that whole Africa thing.

When I listen to this album now, I can tell that even though I may have simply enjoyed it because of its' fun sound, **Graceland** was instilling me with a love for subtle and haunting lyrics and melodies. The chorus of the title track, for example, is a piece of music that has always stuck with me.

The sad, lonely way Simon delivers the line "She comes back to tell me she's gone/ as if I didn't know that/ as if I didn't know my own bed," has stayed with me and whenever I hear a short line of lyrics with the same lonesome tone, I'm drawn to it. *(continued)*

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Paul Simon is a master of holding all the parts together.

Now this is going to sound pretty obvious, but the next big musical bomb my dad dropped on me was The Beatles. Most everyone my age has parents that loved the Beatles, but my mom and dad have an impressive record collection, and I loved playing the old Beatles LPs on our worn out record player.

The first Beatles album my dad played for me was **Rubber Soul** and it is also one of my favorites. Not only was this a great album, it contained so many different styles that it set the basic groundwork for modern rock, and

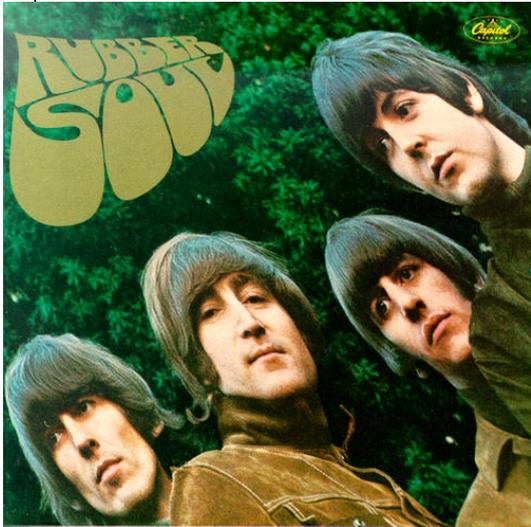
for my appreciation for it. From the twanging opener *I've Just Seen a Face* (which is only on the American LP version, not the English LP or the re-released CD) to the sitar-laden *Norwegian Wood*. Songs like *Run for Your Life* and *Girl* were an excellent segue into the worlds of punk and alternative music.

The Beatles could do it all and this album helped

transform them from a cute pop group into a full blown artistic expression. I'd like to think **Rubber Soul** changed me in the same way.

Next on the list: **The Freewheeling Bob Dylan**. This record was another step to musical maturity and refined how I listened to music yet again.

I think there are two kinds of music lovers in the world: sound lovers and lyrics lovers. I am a lyrics lover. While I of course have to like the way a song sounds to like the song, but when push comes to shove, either blow my mind or leave me shaking my head. This is why I'll always choose Leonard Cohen over Frank Zappa, or Death Cab for Cutie over Radiohead. (Hmmm, them sounds like fighting words... JD)



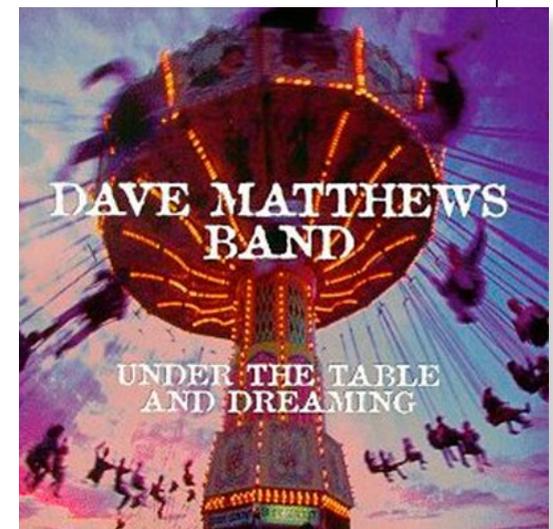
The Freewheeling Bob Dylan was the first album of my Dad's that really made me sit in my room for hours listening to it and reading along with the lyrics. I loved the depth and emotion of Dylan's words; his great imagination is mixed with real world problems.

I enjoyed the way his youth contrasted with his weathered worldview and it was this album that made me want to write songs. I remember my dad listening to Dylan songs and saying how great they were, but I never really understood why until he gave me this record. Then it became abundantly clear. As I got older, I began to grow restless with just my parents' record collection and the classics it held. Not that they weren't great, but it had all been discovered.

The Beatles were never going to make another album and neither were the young Bob Dylan or Simon and Garfunkel. So my attention turned to new music and once again my dad was there to provide me with two of my favorite bands of the 1990s, The Dave Matthews Band and Counting Crows.

I sometimes wonder what I might have turned into without these bands. These two and The Wallflowers became my saving grace in the world of Limp Bizkit, 311 and Korn. While many snobby hipster might have a million dirty looks squirreled away for the day when they encounter a Dave Matthews fan, Matthews quickly became my favorite band.

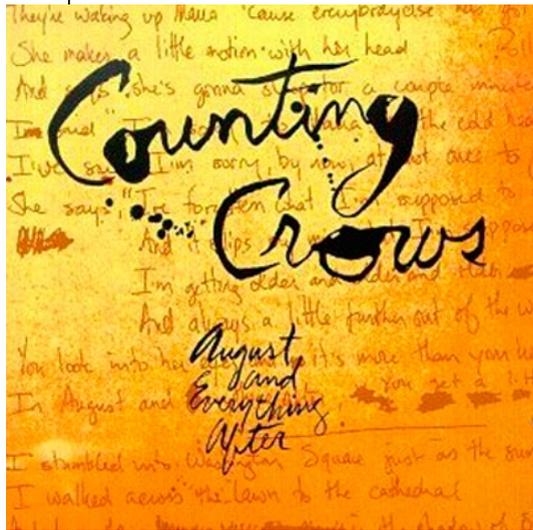
I listened to the Dave Matthews Band all through junior high and high school, two of the darkest moments in human history. I just thought that the way Matthews played guitar and the way his incredibly unique band, with its' violin and saxophones, worked around him was incredible. They were so different from anything else out there and they still are. *(continued)*



Even with all the Dave Matthews wannabe bands like O.A.R and Guster, no one has been able to craft songs like Dave Matthews.

My dad bought a cassette tape of Dave Matthews Band's debut album **Under the Table and Dreaming** after being impressed by them in concert; he passed the tape along to me. He always says that the root of the band isn't Dave Matthews, but rather drummer Carter Beauford, whom my dad claims is the "greatest drummer in rock and roll" and I'm inclined to agree.

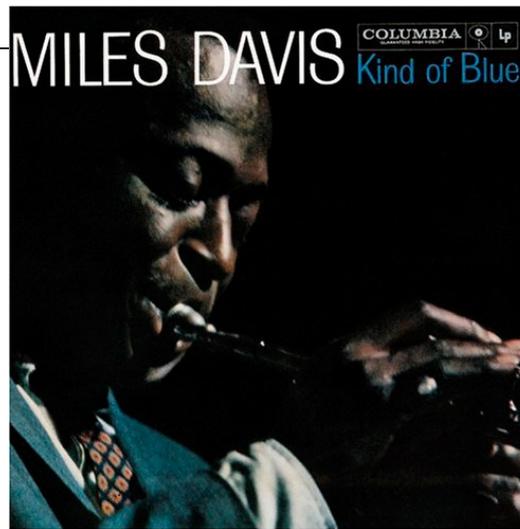
I remember listening to it on a giant Walkman I had and just getting more and more sucked in as time went on. The album was so original and Matthews' songwriting, with all of its jazz and country leanings, was unlike anything I'd ever heard at that point in time. Although they have their detractors, I think the Dave Matthews Band will be remembered as a great moment in music history.



Counting Crows is another band that was very hot when they first arrived and have since been widely mocked by the hip music community. Although they have taken a few missteps lately, like that song from "Shrek 2," their debut album **August and Everything After** remains one of the best albums of the '90s. My dad found this band while watching David Letterman, and was very

impressed by the band, especially dreadlocked front man Adam Duritz.

The album really is all about Duritz, his fears and longings, and his lyrics and songs are so strong and sad that they intrigued me for a long time, and still do. Oddly enough, this was an album I didn't care for much at first, but then it really began to grow on me. All of those lonesome sounds I mentioned about **Graceland** are magnified on **August and Everything After**.



Counting Crows helped examine my teenage angst rather than exploit it like the Marylyn Mansions of the world might have, which I'm very grateful for today.

Finally, I remember taking a family trip to San Diego and on the drive

home, my dad put on **Kind of Blue** by Miles Davis and I was amazed. I have always had a respect for jazz, but never really a love for it, until I heard this album. It was engaging in a way that other jazz from this period lacked.

Kind of Blue represents not only a brilliant moment in Jazz history, but could stand as a definition on the musical form itself. Made in 1959 when Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Cannonball Adderley, Bill Evans, Wynton Kelly, Paul Chambers, and Jimmy Cobb went into a studio with a few song sketches and recorded the whole album in one take.

Anyone familiar with how effortless and breathtaking this album is should be surprised by that, I know I was. To image that so many virtuosos could share the same space and make this album is incredible. **Kind of Blue** really made me appreciate jazz as more than relaxing cool music, but as passion and energy set to song.

My dad really set me on the right path when I was young, and helped me gain a proper understanding of what good music really is. Without his influence, who knows where I might have ended up on the musical highway. **I'd probably be in a multi-car pileup of generic rock.**

I'm glad he showed me a different way to go. Although I've taken over as the lead provider of new music into the house, without my dad's help, things would have been a lot different. My brother might have been named Charlie. ●

I was ready to wrestle JD for that 30th anniversary copy of **Dark Side of the Moon**, because that is one of my favorite records of all time, but now that I see it sucks, the joke is on him. I got the Motorhead records, hah! While I realize that many of you are not connessiours of this heavy metal band, which according to their website is **“one of the greatest live bands that ever stalked the Earth”**, I felt the remastered Motorhead records were worth a listen.

Having seen Motorhead more than once, I can attest that they do put on a great show and they are definitely one of the LOUDEST live bands that ever stalked the Earth. Unfortunately, like one of my other favorite loud bands, KISS, their albums really sound dreadful. What’s a headbanger to do? While you will never mistake the recordings here for a Steely Dan record (i.e. they are still pretty lousy), all had very quiet surfaces and were warp free.

I did uncover something that really makes these records sound a lot better. Remember the old 3bx? I bought one on Ebay to hook up to my iPod in the garage system and it does wonders with these recordings. Laugh if you will, but if you want the ultimate Motorhead experience, get yourself a 3bx. It rules.

Thanks to the folks at Earmark Records, just about all of the Motorhead catalog has been remastered and pressed on 180 gram vinyl, with excellent reproductions of the album artwork to boot! Now, you can never have too many Motorhead albums (24 in all, according to the website discography) as far as I’m concerned, but here are the five I picked. *(continued)*

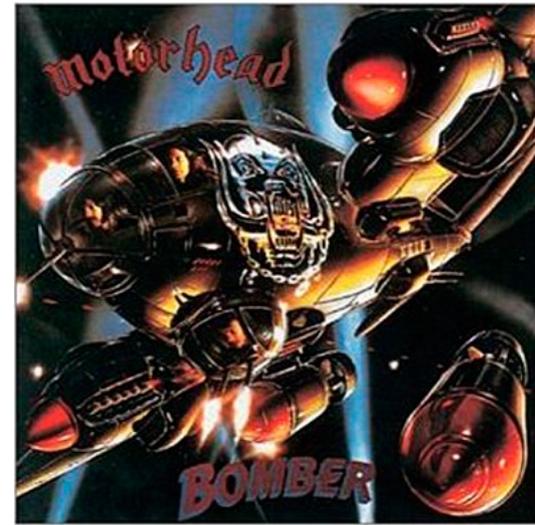
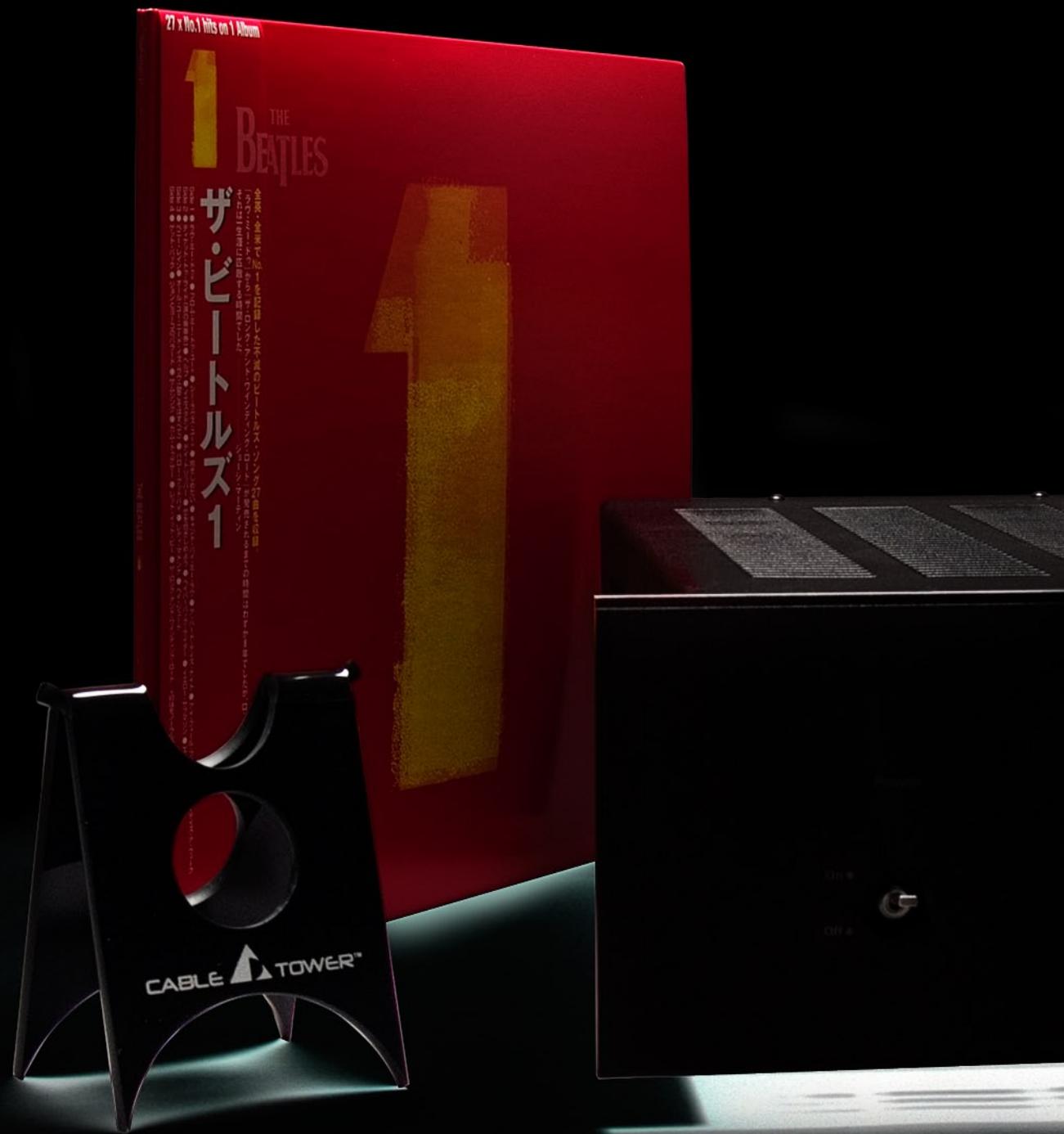
Revisiting the Motörhead Catalog

— Jerald O’Brien



Photo by Paul Nouwen

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BOMBER

Though better than the original, this one is still a bit compressed with the highs a touch rolled off. Released just before the classic **Ace of Spades**, this has a number of classic Motorhead tunes, including *Dead Men Tell No Tales*. The Motorhead site points out that some of these songs came back into the live lineup sometime in the '90s, which I can't confirm, because in the interest of keeping some of my high frequency hearing intact (I can still hear a bit beyond 16k...) I stopped attending this kind of thing live anymore.

But if you got a chance to check out Motorhead on the Bomber tour, you did experience the extremely cool lighting setup they had back then. **Between this and the wacky monster that blew fire in the Judas Priest stage show, it was a great time for metal, indeed.** *(continued)*



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NO SLEEP 'TIL HAMMERSMITH

This for many, was the quintessential Motorhead live record with the original lineup of Lemmy, Fast Eddie Clarke and Phil Taylor. If you have never attended a Motorhead show, it's hard to believe that three guys (other than Rush) could make this much sound!

It opens with one of my favorite tunes, *Ace of Spades* and completely kicks major ass all the way through. This one went straight to number one and cemented Motorheads position as the driving force in thrash metal.

Live records usually sound exceptionally awful, but this copy is significantly better than the original. A must if you are a die hard fan. If your system can play really loud effortlessly, this one's for you. **Nothing can clear the company out of the house like 120 db of Motorhead and this is the one to do the job with.**

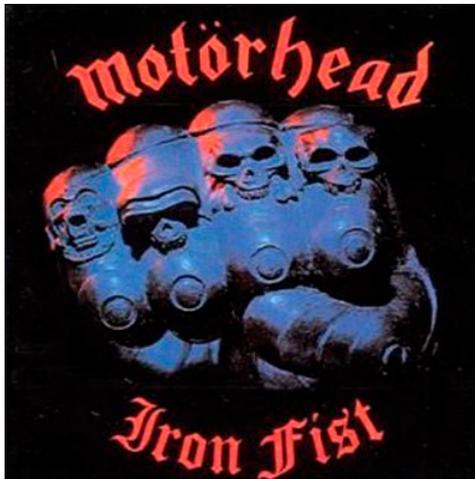
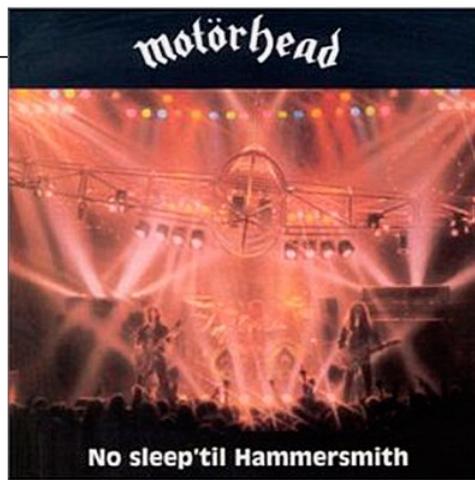
IRON FIST

The last record to feature the original lineup, **Iron Fist** did not do as well as previous records, because this was released shortly after the **Hammersmith** record. Again, drawing the parallel to a number of other great metal bands, their studio efforts just never project the energy that they have live.

This one is for the die hard fans only. Cool cover art, though.

ORGASMATRON

Moving up a few albums in the Motorhead timeline, this one features the revised lineup of Phillip Cambell and Wurzel on guitars and Peter Gill on drums. This gave Motorhead much more of a Priest-like quality with the dualing guitars and really fattened up the sound some more.



Lemmy stretches his songwriting skills a bit more on this album and is a bit more lyrically diverse, delivering the classic Motorhead tunes *Deaf Forever*, *Nothing Up My Sleeve* and *Built for Speed*. The Motorhead site claims that on this record **“classic tracks return by the shitload”** and I couldn't agree more.

ROCK 'N' ROLL

The lineup changes again, with Phil Taylor returning on drums for this record. Featuring my absolute favorite Motorhead tune, *Eat the Rich* this album really cranks. (Especially with that 3bx pushed to maximum expand) Though we have another song mentioning hearing loss, *Stone Deaf in the USA*.

You can definitely chart the musical growth in Motorhead here. The songs are a bit longer, and they have stepped up the production values a bit. The guitars dual a bit more and there are more backing vocals. Lemmy appears to be encouraging a bit more collaboration on **Rock 'N'Roll** than past Motorhead albums. There also appears to be a touch less compression on this record as well.

Diehard fans will be disappointed that the lyrics are not quite accurately reproduced on the album jackets, so if you are trying to learn these songs for your Motorhead tribute band, you will have to listen carefully.

I took a minute to reflect on all of this, as Lemmy is now 60 years old. His recent interview in MOJO magazine suggests that **this guy is still probably someone you wouldn't want to mouth off to in a bar.** Whether you are an aging headbanger like me or new to the world of metal, these are still worth owning, regardless of the sound quality. ●

Current Classical

— Dan Babineau

While I will have a lot to talk to you about classical music (pretty much forever), I will also throw a few good ones out there every issue that are fairly current that you can buy now, at Amazon.com or wherever you like to purchase music. Here are my three favorites this time around. Enjoy!



RAVEL, MARTINON, CHICAGO AND THE BARGAIN OF A LIFETIME

One of the beautiful things about the modern world is its ability to bring us the past for a really good price, a “bargain” for lack of a better expression. And a bargain can be found in this RCA Red Seal HP Catalog #63683 release of 5 of Maurice Ravel’s orchestral works.

Jean Martinon never really received the appropriate accolades that he deserved for taking the Chicago Symphony Orchestra to one of their highest levels of performance. No one can deny that Martinon

knew Ravel and his music better than anyone at the time and these recordings reflect that understanding.

I like Martinon’s *Rhapsodie* on this disc better than Reiner’s with the same CSO. Martinon’s is more sensual, more mysterious, more –well –French! The *Mother Goose Suite* is enchanting with the brilliant CSO woodwind section shining through. *Suite number 2* from *Daphnis et Chloe* comes across with great authority and clearly shows the ultimate power and grace of the CSO under Martinon. Don’t forget the *Allegro* and **by all means fall into the atmosphere beautifully created in *Alborado del garcioso* transporting us straight to Iberia.**

This is a must have CD and an amazing value. The analog version of these performances are also amazing, but the last time I checked, they were selling on Ebay for about \$200. If you have to have it, hold out for the LP, but if you just want to enjoy the performance, go for the CD.

THE ROMANCE OF BEETHOVEN AT ITS FINEST

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in D major, op.61

Romance for Violin and Orchestra No.1 in G major, op.4

Romance for Violin and Orchestra and Orchestra, No.2 in F major, op.50

Alright, I admit it. I have a crush on Anne-Sophie Mutter and I’ve had this crush for more than ten years. It all started when I was dating a viola player and met Ms. Mutter during a rehearsal of another concerto for violin: the Tchaikovsky also in D major. There is one major problem however, Anne-Sophie is married to my favorite living conductor, Andre Previn and I am also very happily married.

But her playing is intoxicating and can put even the stodgiest of men or women in an incredibly dreamy state of mind. The Concerto for Violin is a perfect example of the utter genius of Beethoven; full orchestral power coupled with an amazingly intricate grace. *(continued)*



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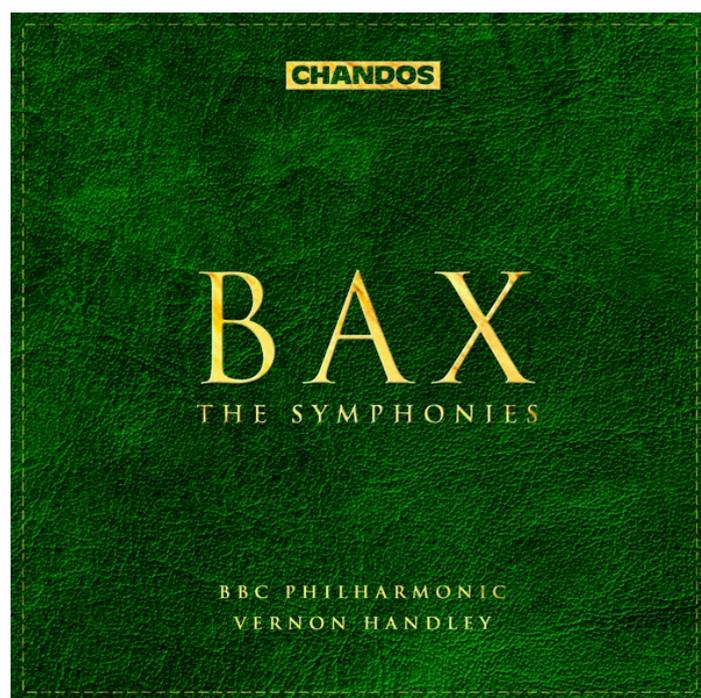
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The first movement – *Allegro ma non troppo* is composed of great walls of tension followed by delicate elegiac detail and no one can handle these contrasts better than Mrs. Previn. The second movement - *largo* is Beethoven in love, strong but elegant. **The third movement and finale with a Fritz Kreisler cadenza testifies to the fluidity and raw energy that only Beethoven could pull off and Anne-Sophie Mutter translates into a tempo to wake up the dead!**

This is a wonderful CD with two additional Beethoven romances to make you fall even more in love with Beethoven and ASM. Kurt Masur and the New York Philharmonic do their usual flawless job with major compliments to the components making up the lower frequencies. Buy this disc, buy all of her work, you will not be disappointed!

(continued)



**STEAL THIS
ARNOLD BAX BOX SET!**

I guess I had better rephrase this heading: "the Chandos box set including all seven of Arnold Bax's symphonies is truly a steal." Ah, now that's better than dealing with the authorities. But authority is what Vernon Handley had when he brought the BBC Philharmonic orchestra together to complete the full cycle of Bax symphonies and offer it in one tidy green box for the entire world to enjoy!

I go back to the golden years of hi-fi when a combination of conductors Del Mar, Fredman or Leppard and Lyrita brought us some of the most incredible renderings of classical English music ever recorded with their various recordings of Bax symphonies. Only two CDs were ever released from these analog sources (Symphonies 1 & 7 on Lyrita), Sir John Barbirolli offer up Symphony # 3 and then Bryden Thomson took a whack at Bax with his somewhat slower more lyrical readings which included Symphony 4.

However, no one but Handley and Chandos had the foresight to put these amazing works together as one giant masterpiece filled with emotion, evolution and precision.

Precision because Vernon Handley seems to get it all right: the tempo, tonality and the magnificent power that Bax' music encompasses. Dark, haunting emotion and an evolution very apparent as we start with the more lyrical but still forceful early symphonies and almost explode by the time we hit Symphony #5, one of my favorites. Continuing through Sym. 6 & 7 we begin to see the musical influence that travel had on Bax's compositions, namely Russian in atmosphere.

I also like the Naxos offerings of the symphonies under the baton of David Lloyd Jones and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. But as a whole Vernon Handley should be knighted for his exemplary effort to finally put Bax in the hands of the masses where he belongs! The BBC Philharmonic should get big exemptions on their taxes for their diligence and straight ahead approach to the music of one of the three Bs of classical music. **Go ahead, sell that golf club for fifty bucks and run out and buy this group of some of the most engaging music on earth! ●**

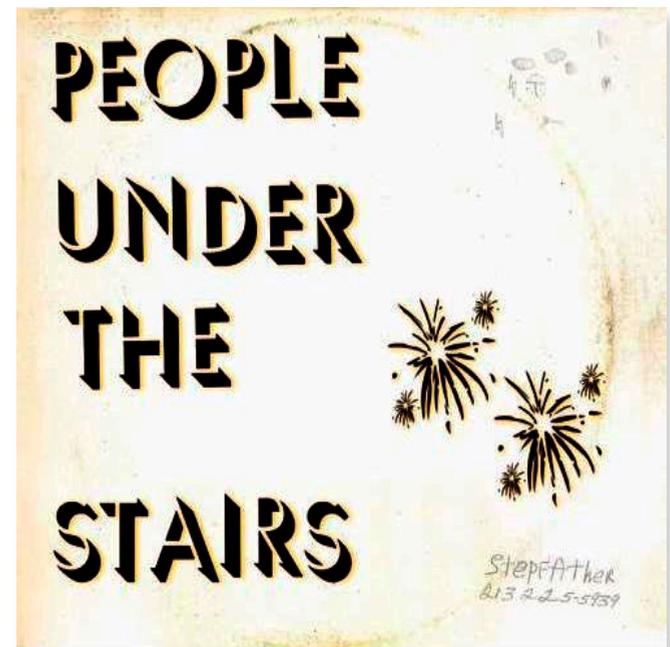
Summer Road Trip Selections

— Nicole Wilson

Every time summer rolls around I'm reminded more than ever how crucial it is to keep really great music in the car. When the sun is out in fine form and the wind is blowing through your windows you just can't afford to match it up with the same old stuff. Hot weather and blooming vegetation call for careful calibration when choosing your sound. I picked up a handful of albums I feel satisfy the jaunt to the city or the exodus into the country. It is important to have the exciting and whimsical, the acoustic and romantic, and of course the deeply contemplative.

First, it is key to have some hip-hop that has nothing to do with selling drugs and being subjected to violence all your life. You need something that makes you want to groove in your seat. The very essence of hip-hop is fun and exciting so you need to give *People Under the Stairs* a try. I picked up **Stepfather** and the sound hits that spot dead on. Thes One and Double K sound like they came out of the late 1980s, but their first album hit the streets in the late 90s. The beats they create are not layered up with bells and whistles like most rap albums are these days but the songs are to the point and pleasant to listen to.

There are 20 tracks on **Stepfather** that discuss music, culture, ladies, and food. *Eat Street* is one of my favorite songs because they rap about hitting up their favorite spots in town to eat (which is what I talk about half the time anyway). *Letter to the Old School* is a heartfelt song addressing the artists that shaped "old school" which is popular today but Double K speaks to the artists directly and asks for their feedback on how he can grow lyrically. George Clinton lays down some tracks on *The Doctor and the Kidd* which interestingly enough sounds like Tom Waits telling one of his savory tales. All songs are scratched and mixed by both Double K and Thes One. In the end, these guys do resemble a stepfather to hip hop; no they weren't the original, yet they still have the true sound and talent that makes them stand tall in the house of hip hop culture. *(continued)*



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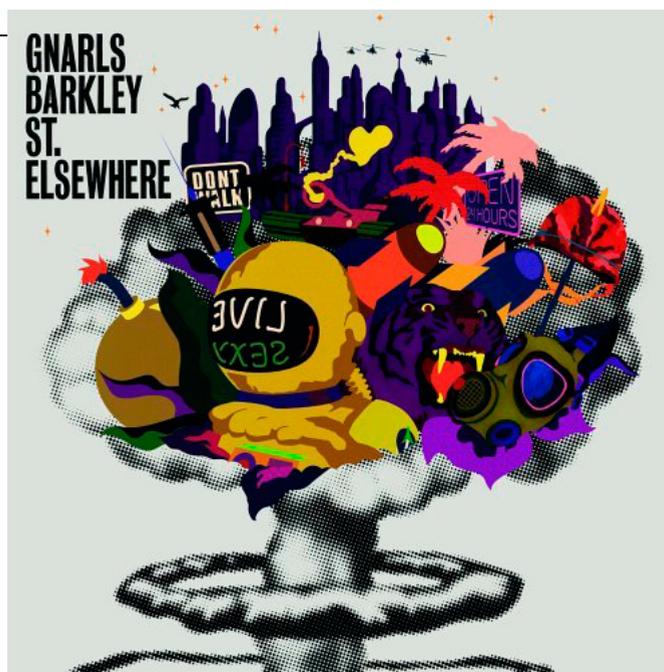
I had an armful of CDs at the record store but I wanted just one more; I went up to the counter and asked the sales guy if there was an album that I really needed to listen to. **He could tell I wasn't going to leave until he gave me something I could use so he rolled his eyes behind his Buddy Holly glasses** at me (just like in High Fidelity!) and told me that the Gnarl's Barkley album was selling quicker than he could restock it. He told me it was the "big summer hit or whatever." He gave me the last store copy and I popped it in for a quick listen and the music sounded intriguing.

Gnarl's Barkley a.k.a Cee-Lo teamed up with producer Danger Mouse and created an album detailing episodes in mental illness wrapped up nice and tight with original and truly fitting music. In one of the late Tupac Shakur's songs, he makes reference to Cee-Lo and calls him the bald head nut... Years later after listening to this album it all makes sense. "It's even dark in the daytime, It's not just good it's great depression, When I was lost I even found myself, Looking in the gun's direction, And I've tried, everything but suicide." This guy is a trip!

I am a big fan of Gorillaz **De-mon Days** so I took quite easily to **St. Elsewhere** because Danger Mouse's beats are fun and the music is genuine to the subject matter in the lyrics. There is an excellent cover of *Gone Daddy Gone* written by the Violent Femmes that fits the album's funky- crazy vibe. *(continued)*

The Boogie Monster is a song about the nasty monster that comes out at night that is revealed to be the menacing side of Gnarl's. *Feng Shui* and *Transformer* are short, catchy tunes and then later there is *Necromancer* which is too CSI to report on. **Why the heck is this album so ridiculously popular?** Danger Mouse is the man and the chemistry is just right between these two artists. Danger's genius with beats creates a lighthearted, often times outrageous sound that takes the album to the next level. This album brings about interesting conversation when carpooling too.

Now good hip-hop won't get you through the whole journey so you must consider the rest of the spectrum. You need tunes you can sing along to, right? I recommend the next chapter in Jack White's musical odyssey in which he takes up with Jack Lawrence, Patrick Keeler, and Brendan Benson to form the Raconteurs. Jack White does a fantastic job sharing creative juices with Brendan Benson to write and produce **Broken Boy Soldiers**. The album's sound is familiar; sometimes they sound like Jack's band the White Stripes and other times they sound a bit like The New Pornographers. The album gets off to a great start with *Steady As She Goes* and continues to be pleasurable from then on. You will hear heavy percussion and great rhythms in *Store Bought Bones* with the occasional sensation of sliding down a rainbow on your



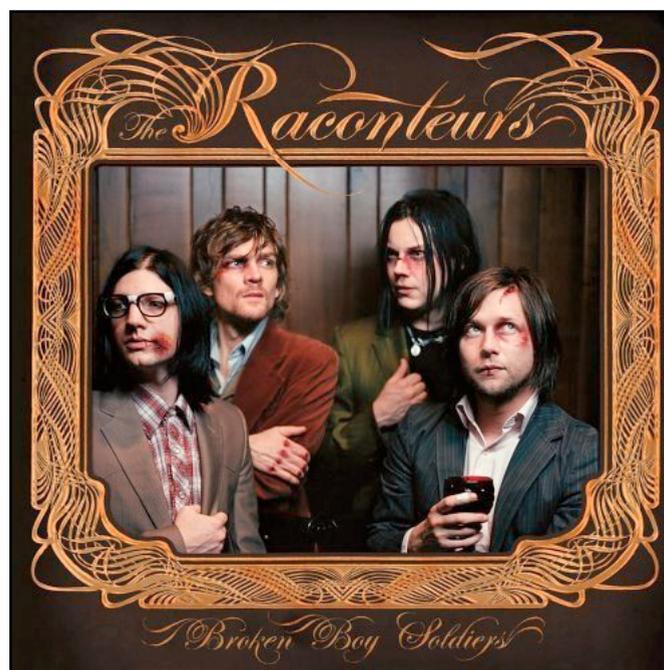
butt like in *Anchorman* (must be the synthesizers and all that harmonizing). *Yellow Sun* could be a lost track from the Beatles, a familiar characteristic of Jack White if you ask me. Song lyrics are simple and deal with make up/ break up situations but somehow it sounds unusually cute when four rock boys sing about it.

Broken Boy Soldiers is a great all around album and

should keep your energy level up on the long ride.

Not in the mood to bounce around in your car? When the mood cools down you shouldn't have a hard time listening to KT Tunstall. Her voice has a wonderful way of sounding sweet and innocent but also commanding her lyrics and occasionally showing that she has force to belt it out without going overboard. With **Eye to the Telescope** she opens the door slowly with sophisticated lyrics and a good-natured heart. She writes her own lyrics with occasional help; she plays guitar and piano, which makes her an easy comparison to Sheryl Crow or Fiona Apple.

I sing along with her like I would with Fiona but **Fiona sings like she has a deep gash in her chest that never stops bleeding where Tunstall seems to fare the usual storms as most lovers do.** *Under the Weather* is thoughtful and light without being ditsy, and then *Black Horse and the Cherry Tree* is confident with a stern tone singing of a frustrating heart. (continued)



Anyone having issues trying to listen to their heart relates to KT and this is an album I can relate to on many levels.

She's young and this is her first album, yet I find myself listening to this one more than others I've

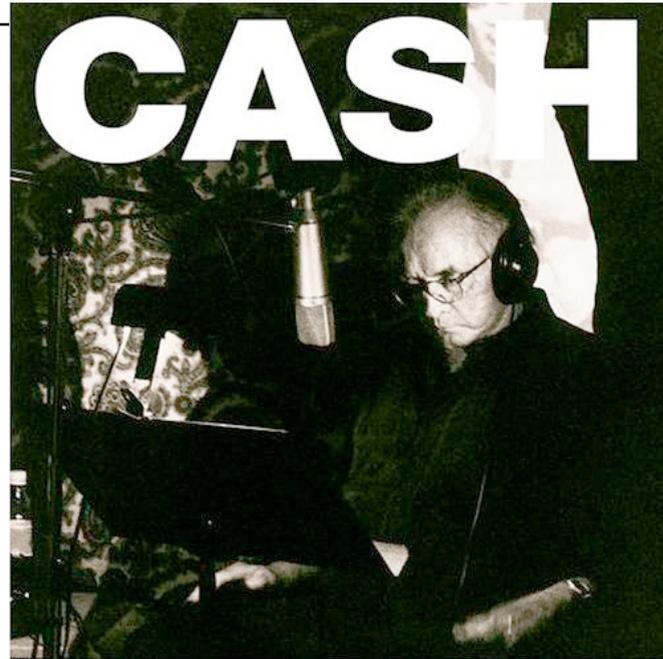


picked up recently. The sound is squeaky clean and definitely polished in a studio, but it makes the right connection with her voice and lyrics. She doesn't break new ground and the album won't blow your mind, but it's light and comfortable for day-dreaming, and there is nothing wrong with a well-composed album about coming of age, love and life.

Summer always seems the time for rite of passage issues, and

Johnny Cash's final album **American V: A Hundred Highways** fits the bill perfectly. For my generation, Johnny Cash is considered our Great Grandfather of Time. The heart that he presses into his songs on his later albums draws us close to his early albums and you can't help but consider him a high authority on life.

He has been trapped and been set free, loved and lost, taken the high road and walked the back roads of our landscape. He sings *On the Evening Train* by Hank Williams and *Further On Up the Road* by Bruce Springsteen; he even covers Gordon Lightfoot's *If You Could Read My Mind* and only Cash could make that song more unbearably intense. This album differs from the rest because the songs he wrote and the other songs he chose to sing describe a changed man asking for help and surrendering to a higher power.



He sings in *I Came to Believe*, "In child like faith, I gave in and gave him a try, and I came to believe in a power much higher than I." Cash sings of being overwhelmed and coming to an understanding that he needed help from God. He sounds at peace understanding that the world doesn't revolve around himself, but he is a piece that fits into God's big picture. The album sounds like you are listening to your grandfather on his deathbed reflecting on the lessons that changed his life.

American V is meant for those contemplating life's meaning, those on the brink of real change, and of course genuine Johnny Cash admirers. The liner notes written by Rick Rubin are very personal and definitely worth reading. Driving through the country listening to this album will definitely send you on a different journey.

Now that you understand the importance of having a good mix of tunes this summer, remember to be courteous of those in your passenger seats. KT Tunstall and the Raconteurs will turn most people on where Gnarl Barkley may creep out a few. **Also if you have to drive your parents, your partner's parents, or old people around for whatever reason, remember that they loved Johnny for his original songs and sound and probably will never appreciate good hip hop.** Happy listening! ●

An older guy's perspective on the road trip

— Jeff Dorgay

I must agree with Nicole that good music is a must whether you are just going to Krispy Crème to get donuts or driving across the country. The worst road trip I had in recent memory was a thousand mile drive down the I-5 to Steve Hoffman's house with no tunes! The rental car radio had no connection for an iPod, and then it died completely about 200 miles out of town!

If I'm just going across town, I throw the iPod on shuffle and see what I get. Usually that's ok, but can sometimes be bizarre. However, if it's a trip of more than a couple hours, I have a few staples that are must haves. These days, I have a portable CD holder that I have burned 30 of my all time favorite discs, so that I will have something to listen to, no matter what. But for now, here are the five discs I will not go on a road trip without:



The Monkees — THEN AND NOW

Even though half of the songs on this disc are clunkers, the rest are great. Whether or not you grew up with the Monkees like me, I defy anyone to not get a smile on their face listening to the *Monkees Theme Song* or *Pleasant Valley Sunday* (which was my theme song, when I lived in the burbs). Another bonus is that this disc is pretty compressed, which would normally aggravate your average audiophile, but is just fine when driving a Ford Focus cross-country.

The Beatles — ONE

By now you have probably figured out I tend to like pop music on a road trip. I have the whole Beatles catalog on my iPod, but for those of you less maniacal, this one is a great cross section of their work. Again, this one is mixed a bit bright for my home stereo, but it cuts right through the noise in the auto environment.

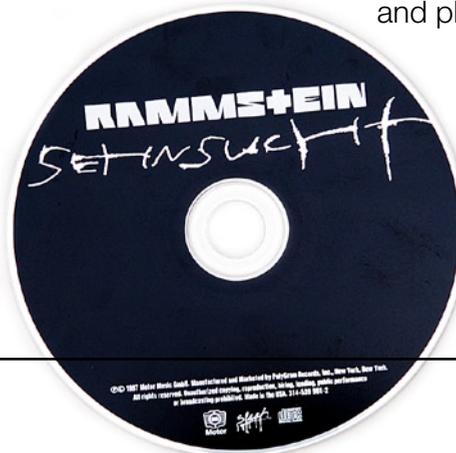


Kiss — ALIVE

When I used to commute between Phoenix and Los Angeles on a regular basis, this was the disc that I always cranked up loud for the last hour of the drive into town. Especially handy if you are starting to nod off, "There's only one thing that's going to do it the way you want it!" Guaranteed to annoy anyone over 25 in the car, especially Mom and Dad. (Unless I'm your Dad)

Ricki Lee Jones — RICKI LEE JONES

180 degrees away from Kiss *Alive*, this is a great traffic jam CD. Nice and mellow, this one will help get you through the malaise. I have listened to this one in traffic jams all over the country and it never fails to soothe the frayed nerves. Do NOT listen to this one in the middle of nowhere, late at night or you will end up in the ditch. There's a time and place for everything.



Rammstein — SEHNSUCHT

This is hard driving German metal and is one of my favorite discs for driving along on curvy roads in the Bimmer, with the tachometer as close to the redline as possible. I would call this one a bit of a solo road trip CD, but highly effective nonetheless. ●

Club Mix

— Scott Tetzlaff

Yesterday's Tomorrows: Roots of Electronica

I don't know about you, but I love cutting edge stuff – technology, sociology, fashion, music, you name it. It's a funny thing though... the half-life is pretty short. Either it gets accepted into the mainstream (then by definition it's not cutting edge any more), or it's a failed science experiment that gets pushed onto the 'odddities shelf'.

It's kind of a strange and insidious thing.. to slowly accept the new. If you sat down and thought about it, how many now common occurrences freaked you out the first time you were exposed to them:

The first rap music you heard

The first person you met with a tongue piercing

Watching a 'reality based' TV show

Mandals (you know, a man wearing sandals to work in the office..)

Frankly, all of them aren't good (see Mandals), but as you become accustomed to them, they fade into the fabric of everyday life. Eventually you forget they were ever 'new'. Pretty soon all the soccer moms have tattoos, and so it goes.

I think part of the acceptance process is to have a 'review' every now and again. Society likes to pull small time segments out of

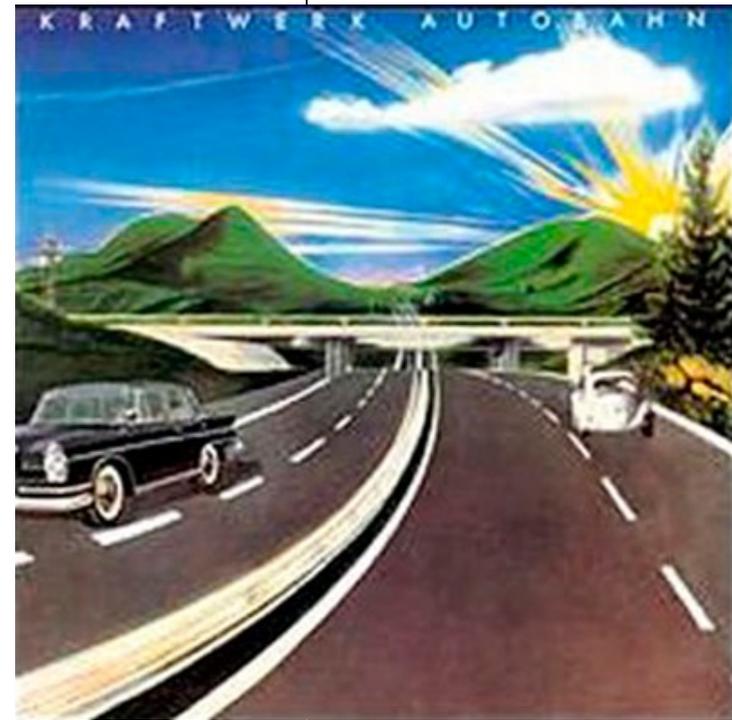
the mothballs, examine and often repurpose aspects of it.

There seems to be a lot of 1980s being looked at right now. Musically, a lot of 'Big 80s' pop music is being dusted off. Some of it is being smelted down into 'electro pop' – remixing old cuts and over-tracking with new stuff. You might even hear some of it scavenged into a rap song or two.

It's interesting to me how very few people have been sniffing around the old electronica from that time period. There's a goldmine of great electronic music from the late '70s through the '80s that is still very unknown to a lot of people. Seriously.

I'm not talking fluffy, squishy, moog coma inducing music. I'm talking about thought provoking, challenging **music that you might have to do a little bit of digging to get comfortable with. Music with some sharp little electronic teeth.**

Well, having thrown the proverbial gauntlet – let's take a look at some titles. Some that are familiar and maybe a couple of surprises.



AUTOBAHN — Kraftwerk

This is a concept album by the German group Kraftwerk. It was a surprise hit with the single *Autobahn*. *Autobahn* is a trip down the high-speed freeway – including doors opening and closing, cars passing, and engines revving. I'm still amazed whenever I hear this piece of music - such a great blend of organic and electronic elements. There's a great element of playfulness on these tracks as well. (Who would have thought a German-techno group could be playful?) One of the most astounding things is when it was made – the first issue was in 1974. I would be surprised if you didn't have a copy of this. If you do, bust it out and take a listen. Maybe while driving a new body style VW bug. Don't forget the Da, Da, Da song by Trio either, that came out about 15 years before VW started using it in their ads. *(continued)*

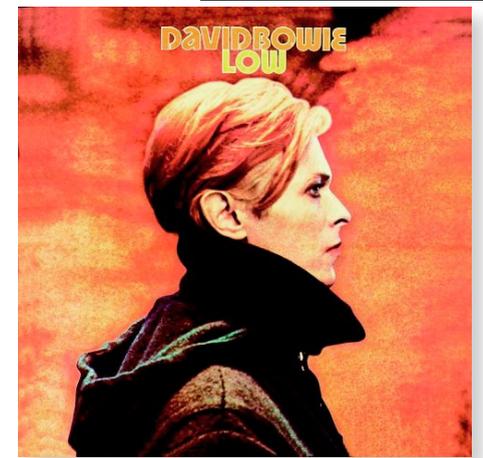
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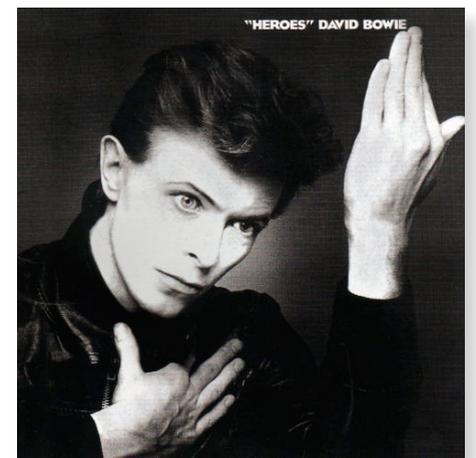
LOW / HEROES by David Bowie

I think of these as a double set. I know they're not actually, but – they could have been. They were both released in 1977, with **Low** starting the year off (Jan.1 to be exact) and **Heroes** coming out in fall (Oct.1). And they were both produced by genius/wizard Brian Eno.

What an incredible collection and variety of music. I remember being fully freaked out the first time I heard both of these. It was only after acclimating over the course of a week, that I could listen without being 'disturbed'.

Bowie himself said (paraphrasing) He has an informal deal with his listeners. They like what he is working on for a while, and then he changes his style. His fans leave, and then they come back when they can 'agree' again. I remember how strange this music was – but compelling. Now, when I hear it – it's comforting, like an old friend.

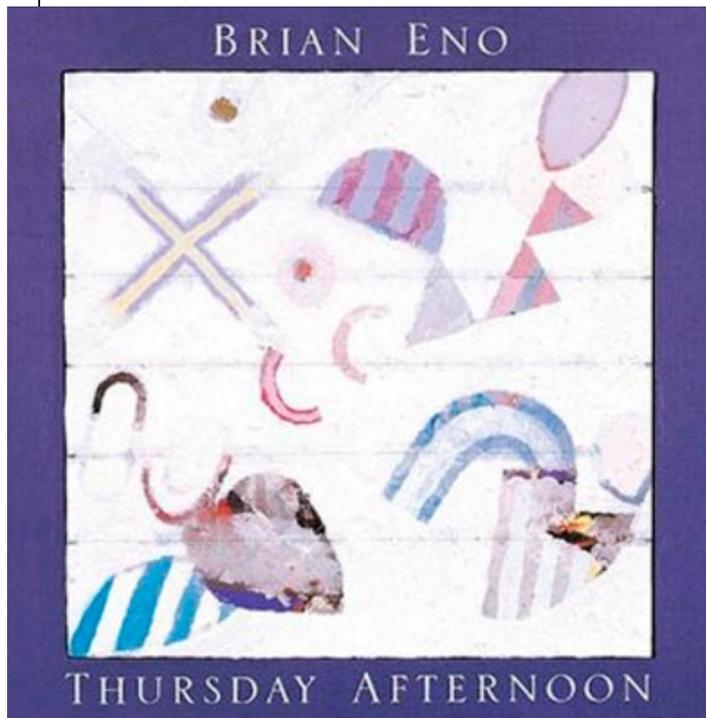
I've recently had people listen to this with fresh ears, having never heard it before. Then I've asked them 'when' this music is from. My favorite answer: the near future. *(continued)*



"HEROES" DAVID BOWIE

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

-Dave Clark
Positive Feedback



THURSDAY AFTERNOON — Brian Eno

Originally released in 1985, this is the archetype for ambient music. It's not edgy – as in jarring – but the format might challenge you. It's one continuous track, 61 minutes long. This is a minimalist masterpiece. He didn't invent the genre, but he may have perfected it.

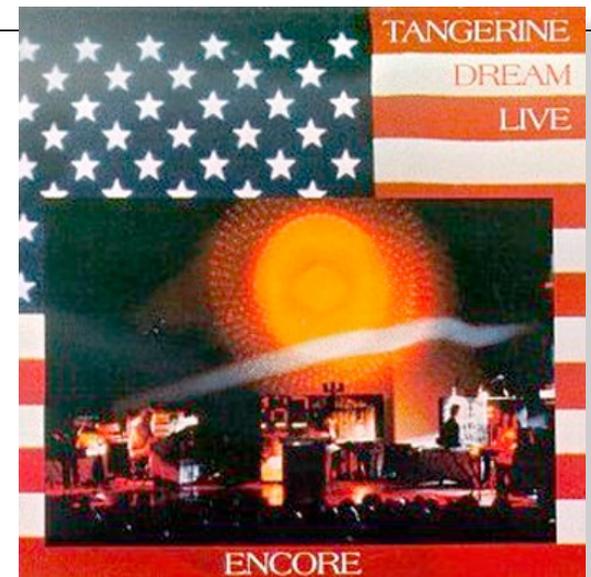
If Brian Eno wasn't a musician, I think he would have made a great scientist. Anyone that would think of learning perfumery to make himself a better musician gets my vote as a very creative problem solver. For an interesting peek into his mind, take a look at the book: *Brian Eno, His Music and the Vertical Color of Sound* by Eric Tamm. You won't believe how much music he's touched that you're probably familiar with. The laundry list includes solo work, collaborations, producing, and quite a few soundtracks.

KOYAANISQATSI — Philip Glass

Speaking of soundtracks, this was the soundtrack to a very unusual movie released in 1983. Minimalist composer Philip Glass scored this for a movie with no plot, no dialogue. Just visuals. The title of the movie is from an Indian word meaning 'Life Out of Balance'. If you haven't seen the movie, you should. It might be one of the best ever done. The deep rumbling vocals are really great. It's one of those cultural reference pieces that brings back the whole experience in just a soundbyte.

Weird side note: I watched a recent episode of *Scrubs* — **they used a bit of the soundtrack while one character was giving another 'the evil eye'.** It was perfect.

I almost fell off the couch laughing. It's a pretty serious piece of music... it was the juxtaposition that made it so funny. See why it's good to be familiar with old school music?



ENCORE — Tangerine Dream

The movie industry adopted electronic music early on. One of the Granddaddies of this genre is Tangerine Dream. An electronic group formed in 1967, they were used heavily during the 1980s for movie soundtracks such as *Risky Business*, *Thief*, *Blade Runner*, etc. They have an amazingly large catalog – nearly 100 CDs.

I can't recommend all of them, but certain key pieces are really great. The **Encore** album was released in 1977, a live album of their tour. It's interesting the vibe of the live audience with the electronic music. Although a little close for comfort to 'New Age' music (not that there's anything wrong with that), but there's enough tension and energy in this particular piece to carry it through. It's also an interesting piece of history if you think about the time frame this was made, and compare it to other popular culture music – like Pink Floyd. I get little whiffs of Pink Floyd sometimes when I hear Tangerine Dream.

All in all, this is my favorite album to listen to while petting dolphins. (Just kidding about the dolphin petting.)

(continued)



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BIG SCIENCE

LAURIE ANDERSON



BIG SCIENCE / STRANGE ANGELS — Laurie Anderson

Here's an interesting crossover story. Ms. Anderson started her career as a singer/performance artist by substitute teaching an Egyptian Art class at a college. She didn't really know the subject very well...so she started making up outlandish stories to go with the slide show. The shows started getting more and more elaborate. Next thing you know, a multimedia performance artist is born.

I couldn't decide which of her CDs were the best, so I just picked two of my favorites.

The first, **Big Science**, has a frostier, more electronic feel. Her lyrics are very interesting. I would invite you to puzzle on them for a while. However, don't puzzle on this disc before getting on an airplane...

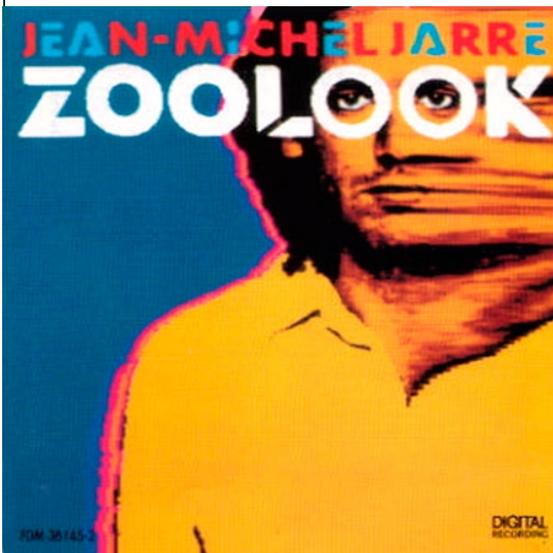
The second, **Strange Angels**, is much more melodic – and haunting. I've heard that she went in to record the second CD after writing the material. After sitting down, she thought 'I don't really know how to sing' – and went off to learn. On returning, I think you'll agree she laid down some pretty interesting stuff.

(continued)



ZOOLOOK — Jean Michael Jarre

Jean Michael has been making music for a long time now. This is still, by far, his most unique piece. He assembled quite a crew for this one: the aforementioned Laurie Anderson, experimental guitarist Adrian Blew, the list goes on. The sound is very dense and multilayered, with a lot of running water type of sounds. There's something like 80 languages tracked forward and back at various times. Make sure you use the restroom before you listen to this one, or you will have to pause the CD player.



I have to say, this one isn't for everyone. The first time I heard this I HATED IT. I put it down. A year later, I listened to it again. STILL HATED IT. **A short while later, I listened again. Hmm... I liked it.** Today, it's one of my favorite CDs of all time (so far).

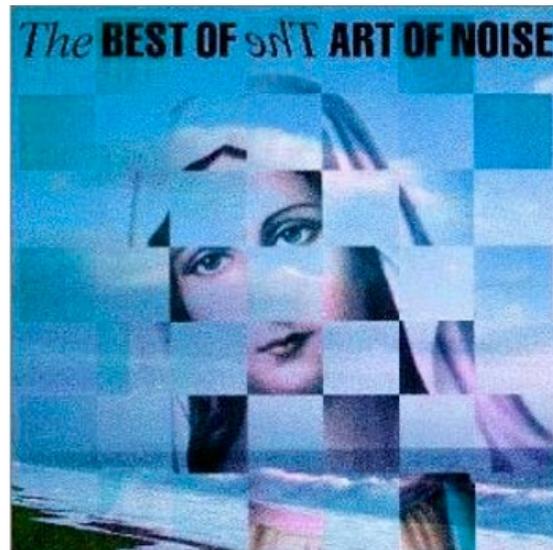
This one is definitely difficult listening hour, but well worth the effort.

BEST OF THE ART OF NOISE

— Art of Noise

What can you say about a group that will do a cover song using Tom Jones, featuring an 'air wrench' as a musical instrument? These are some very adventurous minds, and you're never quite sure what's going to be in the mix. If you saw the movie *Dragnet* (with Tom Hanks), you might remember the groovy remix of the original theme... It's on this CD.

There's also a cool version of the *Peter Gunn Theme* that will have you reaching to put on your best, darkest shades. This particular compilation is a great overview of their work up until the late 1980s. Here's a big caveat though... find the 'Best of' CD with the Blue cover. There are two CD versions with the same name and cover art, but with a different background color. A pink one, and a blue one. **It's very, very important to get the blue one.** A little hunting on the internet will yield a copy. If you can't find this one, check out the import, **Daft**. This is also a compilation, but with different tunes. Heck, get them both!



PRIVATE MUSIC — Ok...so, that's not a CD, it's a record label. (Or, more precisely, it was a record label) Back in the late '80s, Peter Baumann of Tangerine Dream started a music label for what eventually became known as 'New Age' music.

Later, the label was sold to BMG. They are not currently active...

Back in the wildcat days of 'New Age' music...when it wasn't very defined as a musical genre - all kinds of interesting stuff got filed there. The Private Music label had a lot of really kooky artists that defied categorization. Here's a partial list of folks (and discs) from that label and time period. (Pub. note: **Theme of Secrets** has just been re-released as an import and the other three on this list, all excellent can be had used on Amazon for next to nothing!! Check it out before they are gone...)

THEME OF SECRETS — Eddie Jobson

ANCIENT DREAMS — Patrick O'Hearn

ETOSHA — Sanford Ponder

SAFETY IN NUMBERS — David Van Tieghem

If you flip through the whole catalog, you might find a few things that are too squishy for your liking. For the most part, there is a definite jazz underpinning that keeps all of these from becoming an unstructured ambient snooze fest.

Bonus amusement factor: the 'oh so dramatic' artists pictures on the sleeves. **Think 'Flock of Seagulls' hair, and you're in the neighborhood.**

Collecting the whole '80s catalog would make for a good, inexpensive hipster hobby. ●

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Slummin'

— Jeff Dorgay

As always, we have some major bargains for you. Some desirable, some best left alone, but that's ok. The goal here is to find very inexpensive audio oddities for you. We usually keep our eyes on a few garage sales, Ebay and our local shop, Echo Audio because every now and then Kurt brings a winner home for next to nothing!

Here are the treasures for this issue: *(continued)*

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Dual 1224 — \$50, Echo Audio

This is a more valuable tool than you might realize. It had a perfectly good budget Grado cartridge installed and has come in handy breaking in phono stages. Just put on a budget album and keep hitting repeat all day long! It's the easy way to put hours on a phono stage; now if it only played 78s!

Speaking of punk albums, believe it or not, the sound isn't that bad, so I'll be recording all those warped punk albums I inherited from Skeptical Roy and using a few sound shaping programs to clean them up. Watch for this science project in the near future.

**Console Stereo**

— Free for the Hauling

I passed on this one for obvious reasons. Nowhere to put this and not sure if the darn thing even worked. The lady of the house gave me a very surly look when I stopped the car and took some pictures of this one, so we barely escaped with our lives! However, it's still there, last I looked, so you never know...

(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™, Podfrēq mini, or Podfrēq nano. Charge your iPod® while on the go with our USB Power Adapter. Sonnet iPod accessories let you love your iPod even longer!



iPod Batteries

Easily upgrade your iPod battery with specialized tools + video instructions



Podfrēq, Podfrēq mini, Podfrēq nano

Use your iPod, iPod mini, or iPod nano to play your tunes with any FM radio!



iPod USB Power Adapter

Charge your iPod anywhere; includes matching dock cable

ifrēq

Buckle Up. Enjoy the Tunes.



Like Sonnet's award-winning Podfrēq, ifrēq offers superior sound and ease-of-use. Simple controls and a large, backlit display are integrated into ifrēq's body, which plugs directly into a car lighter jack. This design makes it easy for you to tune both ifrēq and the vehicle's radio to the same frequency, and play your iPod music library over the vehicle's sound system.



Coming
Soon

SONNET™

www.sonnettech.com

File of Classical Tapes

— \$12, Ebay

Lucked out here. No one was bidding and this one ended on a Tuesday morning about 2a.m. That's what happens when you make your Ebay auctions end at bizarre times, no one buys your stuff! Taking DB's advice, I've been buying these up like crazy. If you have an old reel to reel tape deck, consider this as another great source for your music collection. ●



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

Aperion: www.aperionaudio.com

Audience: www.audience-av.com

AV123: www.av123.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 products: www.essentialsound.com

Hagerman Technology: www.hagtech.com

Head-Fi: www.headfi.org

Maxtor: www.maxtor.com

Microtek: www.microtek.com

Milbert Amplifiers: www.milbert.com

Modwright instruments: www.modwright.com

Naim: www.naimusa.com

Olympus: www.olympusamerica.com

Pacific Creek: www.pacificcreek.com

Penaudio: www.penaudio.fi

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.ttvj.com

Upscale audio: www.upscaleaudio.com

Vh-1: www.vh1savethemusic.com

Wadia: www.wadia.com

