

2007



PUBLISHER Jeff Dorgay

EDITOR Toni McQuilken

ART DIRECTOR Jean Dorgay

MUSIC EDITOR Norwood Brown

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS Dan Babineau
Tom Caselli
Kurt Doslu
Joe Golfen
Irv Gross
Ken Kessler
Christina Kratzman
Joe Nino-Hernes
Jerold O'Brien
Marc Phillips
Nicole Rice
Todd Sageser
Scott Tetzlaff

UBER CARTOONIST Liza Donnelly

ADVERTISING Jeff Dorgay

SERVER SUPREMO Nate Silva

MR DREAMWEAVER Eddie Kaddi



tonepublications.com

Editor Questions and
Comments:

tonepub@yahoo.com

800.432.4569

© 2007 TONE MAGAZINE, LLC
All rights reserved.

TONE **A2** NO.11 2007

Summit

NOTHING BUT PERFORMANCE

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

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

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

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


MARTIN LOGAN
ESL

www.martinlogan.com





25

- 6. NEW CONTRIBUTORS
- 7. PUBLISHER'S LETTER
- 8. TONE TOON
— Liza Donnelly

CONTENTS

features

9 Budget Gear: **Audio Technica's Vinyl Crescent Wrench, The PL120**

13 The Monogamous Audiophile: **Scott O'Kelly's 30 years with JBL L100 Bookshelf Speakers**

21 Old School: **In Search of Tubeyness with Kurt Doslu**

25 The Tubes: **Past, Present and a Chat with Lead Singer, Fee Waybill**

45 Shana Morrison **talks with Kimberlie Gold about her music, marketing and making own way.**

53 **All of your music, all of the time.**
The Sooloos Music Server

62 The Collector: **Tom Caselli sheds some light on Great Britain's blues history and chasing down the vinyl.**



53

(on the cover)



CONTENTS

music/media

- 32. Club Mix:** All That (acid) Jazz
— *Scott Tetzlaff*
- 39. PRINCE** Musical Genius, Marketing Genius, Both or Neither?
— *Eddie Kaddi*
- 42. Soundtracks:** Movies that Show Up in Your Favorite Music Collection
— *Marc Phillips*
- 68. On The New Music Front**
Fresh Releases in Pop/Rock World
— *Christine Kratzman & Jeff Dorgay*
- 74. Blues You Can Use:** New Music from Koko Taylor, John Mayall and Tommy Castro — *Irv Gross*
- 78. Somewhat Beatlesque**
Saving Darfur and Memory Almost Full
— *Joe Golfen*
- 86. Classical Music A to Z**
Nationalism Corrupted by Musical Freedom — *Dan Babineau*
- 94. Box Set Goodies**
— *Jerold O'Brien*
- 98. Audiophile Pressings:** Announcing the Newly Remastered Aja, Beatles Love on Vinyl and the Return of Reference Recordings — *Jeff Dorgay*



120



113

126



101

CONTENTS

reviews

- 101. The B&W 805s**
Small Package, Huge Style!
- 108. Good Moon Rising**
Moon's LP 5.3 Phono Preamplifier
- 113. The Wadia 581i** A Fantastic
Multipurpose Digital Player
- 120. The Classé CA-2100**
Power Amplifier
- 126. ASR's Basis Exclusive Phonostage**
Big Battery, Big Fun
- 134. The JLTi Phono Preamplifier**
Serious Gear with a Small Footprint
- 140. Great Budget Cable**
Audio Art SC-5 Speaker Cables
- 143. HEADPHONE PLANET:** ALO Audio
Modded Grado SR225s and Aurum
Acoustics' Headphone Module
- 146. SLUMMIN'** Audio on the Cheap!
- 148.** Where to Find What You've
Seen In **TONE**

CONTRIBUTORS

new in tone this issue

KIMBERLYE GOLD

Currently living in the Bay area, Kimberlye is a singer/songwriter that moonlights as a journalist between gigs. She's worked in Nashville and has written her share of well recieved songs too.

Kimberlye caught up with Van Morrison's daughter Shana for an interview about her career to date for this issue and has a few more interviews for us in the works.

You can pick up her new CD, Sycamore Street at CD Baby. <http://cdbaby.com/cd/kimberlye>

EDDIE KADDI

Not exactly new to TONE, Eddie does all of the Dreamweaver work, and keeps our website running smoothly day to day, but like everyone else on the staff, is a huge music lover. And a pretty good guitarist as well! When you walk into his office in Phoenix, there is a big road case full of guitars front and center!

He's been promising to write a music article since we started the magazine, but being a lifelong Prince fan, this was finally the time to jump in with a review of the new album. Watch for more of Eddie's insights in the months to come!



Rat Fink Wacky Wobbler
©2005 Ed "Big Daddy" Roth, Inc.
www.funco.com

PUBLISHER'S LETTER



Just so you all know that I haven't lost my way, I'm spinning the new Crowded House LP that I had to buy in the UK, because the vinyl probably won't make it over here. Please don't misunderstand me, I still love my record collection, but digital keeps getting better and MUCH EASIER TO USE.

The iPod has been with us for a long time and thanks to uncompressed files and a few tweeks (especially the phenomenal iMod from Red Wine Audio), there is some reasonable sound to be had from our favorite little portable jukebox. Thanks to the Squeezebox, The Transporter and a number of other great products, it's never been more convenient to have a lot of music at your fingertips.

And this brings up a lot of interesting ways to mix it up. Classical editor Dan Babineau and I always had reel to reel decks with 10 ½" reels full of music mixes back in the day, but let's face it, that medium only has linear delivery. Not convenient to just instantly play your favorite KISS song at a party, but it did keep prying hands away from the turntable...

I've spent the better part of this year really ramping up on music server technology and if you are a music lover, IT'S THE WAY TO GO! I'm not talking about the ultimate in fidelity, though the best ones do a darn good job and they all have digital outputs so that you can use them with the DAC of your choice. So, you CAN have audiophile quality sound and 10 thousand CDs at your disposal.

I've also made the commitment to the music server world with my purchase of the Sooloos music server. It's on the cover, because I feel that it is that significant; this is truly the way to access a large music library. There are few bigger thrills for a lover of music and hifi to have people come over and actually interact with the system! What good is all this great music if you can't share it with your friends?

Music server technology is the first thing that really allows you this freedom. You don't actually want strangers thumbing through your albums or dropping your 24kt gold CDs on the floor, do you? With a music server, everyone can play. If you have a multi-zone music server, you can have your music

all over the house and your kids can enjoy your music library too! (And if they add their music to the collective, you'll get turned on to some music that you might not have tried either...)

As we go forward, expect a lot more music server and related technology articles. I've never enjoyed my music collection as much as I do now, having it all at my fingertips with instant access.

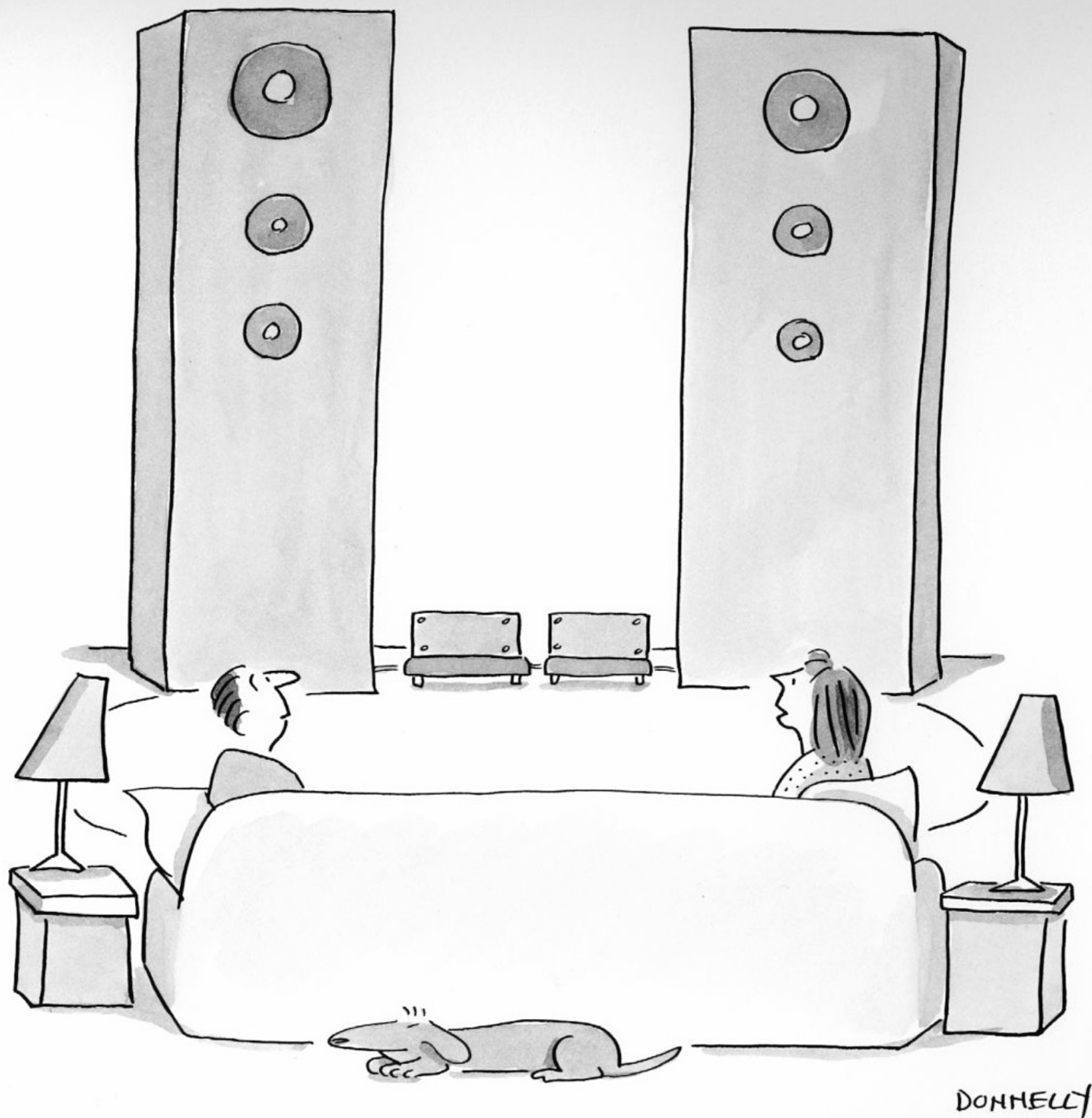
For those of you in the audience that really savor the ritual of going to the stacks, pondering over what record to listen to (and then perhaps the additional ritual of cleaning said record before listening) fear not, we have three great phono preamplifier reviews this issue, all at different price points.

Speaking of music, we have some great stuff for you this month. Our newest writer, Kimberlye Gold, is a singer/songwriter from the Bay area that has recorded in Los Angeles and Nashville as well as being a regular contributor to the San Francisco Chronicle and a number of other newspapers and magazines. We are honored to have her on board and look forward to her contributions. This issue, she has a very interesting interview with Shana Morrison, daughter of that other famous Morrison...

Along with our usual cast of characters, our blues man Irv is back from summer vacation with some more records for you to peruse and Joe Golfen, who usually has his finger on the pulse of what's the newest in the music scene gives us his take on the Beatles. Christina is taking the lead on new releases this issue and the Vinyl Anachronist has a new column on his favorite movie soundtracks.

And if that's not enough for you, Tubes frontman Fee Weybill took a few minutes from his tour schedule to chat with yours truly. Take a peek on page 25 to see what he's got to say.

Thanks again for reading, we hope you enjoy the issue!



"Honey, I'm starting to worry about our carbon footprint."



Audio-Technica's PL120

The Vinyl Crescent Wrench

— Jeff Dorgay

Recently, there has been a lot of chatter out on the web in the various forums about the comeback of the direct drive turntable. Yes, the age old Technics direct drive table (the SL-1200 in particular) that many of us had back in the day has been a big part of an analog resurgence at the low end of the price spectrum.

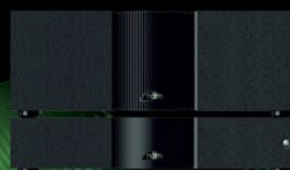
I bought my SL1200 when still in high school and had to flip a lot of burgers to get it, along with a Stanton 681 cartridge. A few years later as I started to really examine the high end world that was in its infancy, I heard a Rega Planar 3 belt drive table that got me to abandon my old Technics and I never looked back.

500 SERIES

Serious sound from serious retailers...



CD555 - CD Player



NAP500 - Power Amplifier



NAC552 - Preamplifier

...experience the
500 series for yourself

THE RETAILERS

PACIFIC NORTHWEST
Hawthorne Stereo
206-522-9609

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

ROCKY MOUNTAINS
Audio Alternative
970-221-1496

MIDWEST
ProMusica
773-883-9500

FLORIDA
Wellington Audio
561-798-1059

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

NORTHEAST
Accent on Music
914-242-0747
Ears Nova
212-288-2855
Fidelis AV
603-437-4769
Fidelis Boston
617-851-9417
Innovative Audio
212-634-4444



world class sound...

www.naimusa.com/500

But thirty years later, these direct drive tables REFUSE TO DIE and they are back with a vengeance. So, rather than just dismiss all the people that own them with a big whack of the high end audio punishment ruler, we decided to investigate. Marc Phillips took on the task of the SL1200, but all this research led me to something I like a lot better for the money: The Audio-Technica PL 120.

Now you might ask, what would an admitted turntable snob like myself be doing with a \$300 table? Having fun, that's what! As our classical editor, the ever-vigilant scientist likes to say, 'Please explain!'

I picked my PL120 up locally, but you can source them from the Needle Doctor (www.needledoctor.com) along with a fantastic selection of budget cartridges. The folks at the Needle Doctor were kind enough to provide us with a few for this test: An Ortofon OM-10 (which is cool, because it can be upgraded to an OM-40 by changing the stylus), an Ortofon 2M Blue and a Grado Platinum. These range from \$69 to \$300, so should be within the budget of an entry-level audiophile. Watch for in-depth reviews of these cartridges on our website in the near future.

Setup And Alignment

When you get this table out of the box, you will notice considerably more heft than your favorite budget belt drive table. At 24 pounds, it's substantial. There are only two things you really need to do to get the PL120 up and running; disable the internal phono preamp and mount your favorite cartridge. *(continued)*

Save the very budget AT cartridge that it came with in case you want to do some scratching later, or use it to play parts of your favorite rock records backwards (yes, the PL120 has a reverse switch!) to find out the hidden meanings once and for all...

As with any turntable, paying a little bit of extra attention to leveling and cartridge adjustment goes a long way. A few minutes with a Shure Stylus Gauge and my Geo Disc and we were ready to spin records!

Moment Of Truth

As much as some of the folks on the internet would like you to think that this table and the Technics SL-1200 are giant killers of epic proportions, that is not the case. However, this table is a very solid performer for 300 dollars. I'll give the farm away and answer the 300 dollar question you all want answered: How does the damn thing sound compared to a Rega P1?

It's easy yet difficult at the same time. When I started this test, I still had my Aesthetix Rhea, so it was very easy to hook both tables up and just switch back and forth with everything else constant. I upgraded the Rega to an OM-10 so we were definitely comparing apples to apples and the reference system I used was considerably better than what the average owner of this table would possibly use. That way, there would be no passing the difference between the tables to system anomalies.

Here's the bottom line: On a great system, the direct drive table has the edge in low frequency slam and solidity but the belt drive table has the edge in midrange magic, especially if you upgrade the P1 to a glass platter. The Rega has a bit more depth, but the AT has a bit more left to right imaging happening. On a modest system though, the gap closes dramatically.

To give this modest turntable a listen, the first album I put on the platter was the new Modest Mouse album, it just seemed right. Definitely the analog warmth going compared to the CD even at this level. Again, no one is going to mistake this for a big bucks table but its heart is in the right place.

Because of the limited resolution of this setup, I kept my listening restricted to basic rock music and especially a lot of inexpensive vinyl I had purchased in the cheapo racks. I have to say after playing with all three cartridges, this time I had to give the nod to the Grado in this situation because it was great for offering up a very mellow presentation, making some otherwise lousy albums palatable. Sometimes resolution is not your friend with popular music! The Ortofon cartridges were a bit better trackers and a touch more neutral, but this isn't a cartridge review. Seriously, you can't go wrong with either one of the three, I just had an ulterior motive for the Grado...

I told you earlier to keep that budget AT cartridge in case you ever want to play anything backwards, but you can take that a step further and try your hand at the DJ thing... That's right – scratching. After fussing over records for more than thirty years it is liberating to put your hands on the playing surface and scratch back and forth!!! Watch for our lesson on scratching next issue. Spin your favorite audio hat around backwards and get a little bit of flavor!

Versatility Is The Answer

I really like the Audio Technica because it plays 45s and 78s too. If you are a budget vinyl lover, this is hard to beat. The removable headshell feature is awfully nice too! I keep my Grado stereo cartridge on most of the time for budget albums and 45s and switch to the Grado mono when I want to play 78s. *(continued)*





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

MC207 Power Amplifier

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

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

Thanks to both cartridges weighing the same and requiring the same tracking force, this is very handy indeed! Somewhat of a specialized application, but great nonetheless.

The PL120 has adjustable VTA which is pretty sweet for a 300 dollar table and allows you a few options that you wouldn't have elsewhere. In the end, all of this adjustability is what makes the PL120 a winner in my book. One thing to beware; the stylus gauge on the counterweight always read a bit optimistic, so at least get your hands on the Shure gauge to set it up with anything more than the cheapest cartridges.

The PL120 sits right on my rack next to my Rega P9, so don't think I've lost my head. But I wanted a table that was a crescent wrench and the PL120 is it, especially with the Grado cartridges. Thanks to the variable speed control, listening to some of those old 78s (that weren't always exactly 78 rpm) is a breeze to compensate for.

A Very Reasonable Taste Of Analog Indeed

Whether you have a friend that wants to start down the analog path, you need a separate table for 78s or you want a secret life as a DJ, the Audio Technica PL120 is a winner. The sound quality is well on par for this price point, and it's built like a tank. I'll be watching for you at the next DJ battle! ●

The Audio-Technica PL120
 MSRP: \$399
 (\$299 at The Needle Doctor)

Audio-Technica US Inc.
 1221 Commerce Drive
 Stow, Ohio 44224
 330-686-2600
www.audio-technica.com

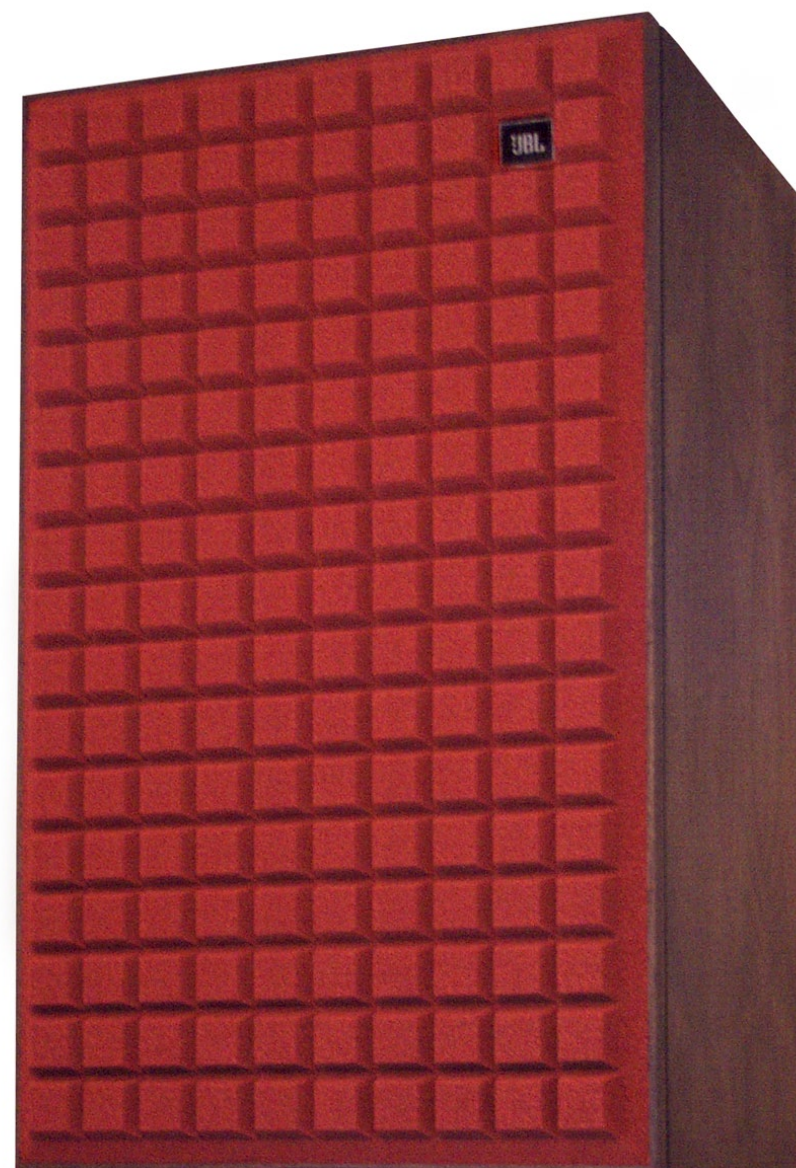
How's this for monogamy? Scott O'Kelley has had his JBL L100s for thirty years now! That's a love affair for sure and I always enjoy hearing that people have held on to gear for such a long time and still love it.

JBL L100 Century Bookshelf Speakers

— Scott O'Kelley

Assembling my first grown-up system was an important rite of passage. I grew up with my dad's stereo that went unchanged for nearly three decades (he stuck by hi-fi brands the way other men clung to baseball teams), so I weighed my decisions carefully. And the weightiest decision concerned the speakers.

Other components were chosen out of economic necessity (an affordable 25-watt-per channel Sony receiver) or hand-me-down convenience (my dad's spare Weathers turntable and an old Shure cartridge), but the speakers were a different matter. They were, to my turn-it-up teenage sensibilities, the heart and soul of the system, the focal point. After all, what towered behind my guitar gods on stage? What did you sit staring at for hours (when not watching the label spin, that is) as the records played? And what blew that guy's martini off the table in those Maxell ads?



THE MONOGAMOUS AUDIOPHILE:

Yep, Speakers

It being the '70s--and me being a teenager--the choice was easy: JBL L100 Century bookshelf speakers. Those oiled-walnut cabinets and cubed-foam grilles (chocolate brown for me, thanks) were the '70s. Sure they had their sonic limitations, awful binding posts, and weren't exactly cheap, but they were (for their day) efficient three-way front-ported magic that made your Led Zeppelin records stand up and scream. And for those of us who wanted nothing more out of life than to *be* that Maxell guy--slung low in the chair,

They were (for their day) efficient three-way front-ported magic that made your Led Zeppelin records stand up and scream.

ties and perms buffeted by our speakers' power--that was plenty. But there was also the familiarity of those speakers--the fact that they were the home version of real studio monitors. All the pros (we were led to believe) used JBL 4310 monitors, the studio precursors to the L100, and I imagined my speakers booming from the walls of every control room that gave birth to my record collection. If they were good enough for the studio, they were good enough for my bedroom.

So, while most of my friends used their after-school earnings for bigger eight-track decks for their cars (or for bigger cars), I saved my grocery-sacker salary for the right pair of speakers. That meant countless hours in the audio store--a now forgotten and long-defunct shop in a mall in Fayetteville, Arkansas--perusing brands, comparing setups, listening to records I wouldn't be caught dead with at home. The JBL lineup had a lot to offer in those days, but the L26 two-ways sounded thinner, the Jubals (L65s) looked like end tables, and the L166 Horizons were just beyond my price range, so I sprung for the L100s.

Though reviled by some, the L100 Centurys have maintained something of a fanatical following for their classic tone and studio pedigree. The commercial version was the house monitor at Sunset Sound Recorders and epitomized the reigning West-Coast sound of the 1970s, offering a perfect match for the LPs of that era. Those Alnico magnets in the 12-inch woofers and the midrange drivers packed quite a punch, although the direct-radiator tweeters could get overworked quickly. While front panel presence and brilliance attenuator controls allow for some fine tuning, trickier upper trebles can cause some sonic traffic jams with the taxed crossover. The two-knob controls can also be prone to shorts and static.

While they may be a reference nightmare by today's standards, neutrality was as foreign a concept as digital to my teenage ears. Neutral? Heck no, I wanted my records drenched in the aural palette of studio coloration that I heard in my favorite records. In fact, the L100's sound with its full-range bass driver was so big and chunky that they even made albums I didn't like sound good. I still remember one of the salesman's audition records when I bought my JBLs: Jeff Beck's **Blow By Blow**. I never really liked that record--too slick and studio-bound for my tastes--but I went out and bought it anyway just so I could replicate the dim-light and brown-shag ambience of that audio store.

I forget exactly what I paid for them, but I remember my brand-new boxed pair was a bit off the \$333 list, which made me feel quite the urbane sophisticate. These days a good pair on eBay can top that. At this writing, a mint pair is up to \$436 with three days to go. Vintage matched-serial number bass drivers go for roughly the L100's original list price. A pair of matched NOS midranges or dome tweeters will cost you just under 200 bucks. New aftermarket replacement drivers, binding posts (the tiny spring-loaded stock terminals were an oxidation factory), and various repair kits are also readily available, including a crossover upgrade kit for \$200. *(continued)*



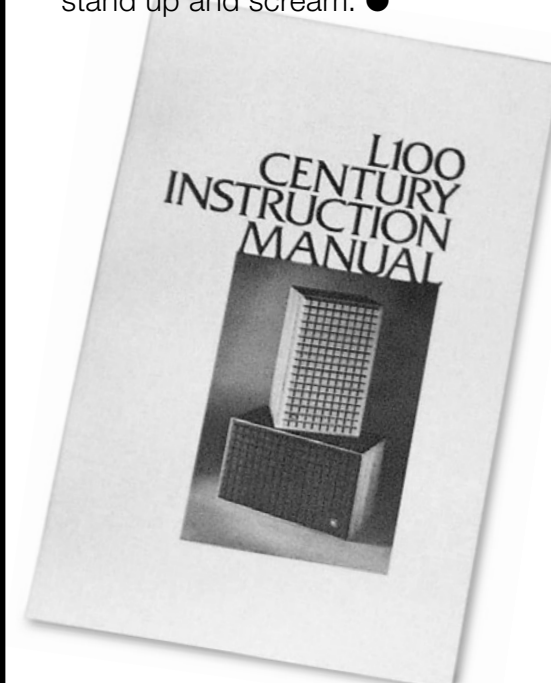
THE VACUUM STATE OF THE ART CONFERENCE RETURNS!

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

Even new replacements for the checkerboard foam grille inserts--the L100's least-durable feature--are available at about \$150 a pair.

Despite the endless availability of parts and repair options, mine remain stock. Sure the tone controls have the slightest crackle, one tweeter cuts out from time to time, and the foam grilles have long since deteriorated (I always preferred baring those ivory-colored woofers anyway), and they haven't been my everyday speakers for years, but they still sit front and center, waiting patiently to be juiced up for the right LPs.

Having recently entered the world of tubes, I've found them a great match for the 12 EL-34s in my Audio Electronics SixPacs. Though the L100's thin highs and boomy lows can become aural mush on some records, the tubes' midrange detail can be an ideal complement on others. And 30 years later, they still look, sound, and even smell pretty much the same way they did in 1976. And most important, they can still make my Led Zeppelin records stand up and scream. ●





Direct Drive Boot Camp:

A MONTH WITH THE SL-1200

— Marc Phillips

Hear that sound? It's me, tiptoeing. I'm trying to talk about the best-selling turntable of all time without waking up the dreaded 1200 Army.

Quite a while ago I expressed a somewhat narrow minded opinion of the Technics SL-1200, being more of a belt drive fan myself, the Rega brand in particular. I wrote a column for another magazine about 18 months ago, aptly called 'Truth, Justice and the Technics SL-1200.' Let's just say it wasn't terribly positive and leave it at that. While a significant majority agreed with me, a very vocal minority protested vehemently, saying that I

was heavily biased against the SL-1200 and questioned my authority. One card-carrying member of the 1200 Army solemnly announced that the Vinyl Anachronist had officially jumped the shark.

I don't want to spend too much time talking about this, since it's all thoroughly documented in cyberspace. And to tell you the truth, I've been trying to put the ugly chapter of my life behind me ever since I came on board at TONEAudio. But I've learned something. I will never harshly criticize someone's pride and joy again. No one wants their buying decisions criticized, especially in front of thousands of people.

© 2006 Olympus Imaging America Inc.

Not responsible for damaged rocks.



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



OLYMPUS
getolympus.com

Yet there it is, sitting in the spot where my J.A. Michell Orbe SE usually holds court over my listening room...an honest-to-goodness Technics SL-1200 mk 2. I almost can't believe it's there. It's like a weird nightmare, where I look over and see that someone has cruelly switched out my beloved Orbe, with its SME V tonearm and Koetsu Rosewood cartridge, with the Technics. (Cue the dramatic music...da-da-DUMMMM!) **The strangest part is that it's mine. I bought it.**

I had threatened to do this several times, in fact. You see, I had followed up that nefarious article with a challenge on a few different audio forums. I wanted someone to bring their 1200 over to my house so we could compare it to the Rega P2 I had available at the time. There was plenty of grumbling, but no serious takers. Again, the subject of my anti-1200 bias came up, and no one wanted to walk into an ambush. But the crazy part to me was that I wanted to like the 1200. I wanted to see if I was wrong. I told everyone that it would be far more interesting for me to write that the 1200 was much better than I expected than to write, 'I heard it. I was right. Blecchhh.'

So I finally bought one. Mostly because Todd the Vinyl Junkie gave me an outstanding deal on a new black Mk. 2, and our publisher promised to keep me neck-high in inexpensive cartridges to review. (I'm starting off with an Ortofon OM-10.) But another part of me gave in when I realized it was a chance to fire a final, definitive salvo over the heads of the 1200 Army, armed with plenty of knowledge. *(continued)*



Diary Of A Mad Anachronist

At first I had envisioned this project as sort of a journal of my experience with the 1200. I wanted to hide the Orbe and the SME V and the Koetsu away in my closet so I wouldn't even think about them and be tempted to hook them up. I wanted to spend one solid month with the 1200. I wanted to commit completely.

I even envisioned what my journal would look like:

Day 1: Not so bad, I'm able to listen to it without running from the room, screaming out loud, my hands cupped over my bleeding ears.

Day 4: Large sores have started to appear all over my body. I've started listening to music from Randy Newman and Foghat. My refrigerator is talking to me in Portuguese.

By Day 30, I imagined that my prose would begin to look like that one chapter of Jack Kerouac's **Desolation Angels** where he's been living in isolation for months working as a fire lookout, and his writing has degenerated into a series of meaningless scribbles and archaic geometric symbols.

Okay, okay...so much for my lofty goal of being unbiased

about the 1200. The fact is, the whole experience had been so hyped that I was expecting the worse, which is a big no-no for a so-called professional audio reviewer. **So I threw some cold water on my face, popped open my seventh Diet Coke of the day, and I plugged the darn thing into my system.**

Good News People

Sorry, but I couldn't resist. I came not to bury the 1200, but to damn it with faint praise. In other words, this is the part where I tell you what I liked about the 1200.

The fact is, there's plenty to like about the 1200. In fact, I'd like to start off for apologizing for calling Technics turntables 'cheap and plasticky.' Perhaps I was remembering the Technics 'tables I knew from the '70s, which definitely were. But the modern Technics SL-1200 is a heavy, well-made and substantial beast. Somehow it feels even heavier than the claimed weight of 26.5 pounds (or the approximate weight of three Rega P3s). No wonder the 1200 Army has little respect for the Regas, and refers to them as little toys. *(continued)*

Great... Greater... Greatest...



The affordable G06: "...assured, detailed and refined... this is a really music-loving piece of hi-fi equipment. Meridian has achieved a high and consistent standard with this player... a highly recommendable item."

—Richard Black, *Hi-Fi Choice (UK)*, July 2006



The impressive G08: "I've not heard a more elegant sound emanate from a transistor-based system in quite some time."

—Sue Kraft, *The Absolute Sound*, February/March 2005



The incomparable 808: "Finally a digital player an analog lover can enjoy!... We liked the 808 so much, we both bought it for our reference systems!"

—Jeff Dorgay & Dan Babineau, *TONE Audio Magazine*

There's a Meridian CD for you.

BOOTHROYD STUART
MERIDIAN

Meridian America Inc, 8055 Troon Circle, Suite C, Austell, GA 30168-7849

T: +1 404 344 7111 • F: +1 404 346 7111 • www.meridian-audio.com

In Canada, contact Aralex Acoustics: +1 800 663 6732 • www.aralex.com

I was also impressed by the precise operation of the 1200. When you turn it on, the platter achieves full speed almost instantaneously, which is amazing after spending years with belt drives. And when you switch from 33 to 45rpm, you get that same robust, mechanical obedience. And I like the little details, like the tiny light that pops up and illuminates the stylus for you when you're cuing records. I also like the deliberate and smooth action on the cuing lever.

But I haven't mentioned anything about the sound, have I.

Well, I liked the imaging. The 1200 did a pretty good job of placing instruments in a well-defined space. For instance, on my Classic Records reissue of Duke Ellington & Louis Armstrong, the 1200 provided a glimpse of what I hear on my reference table. I once heard this LP played on a well-known inexpensive belt-drive 'table, and it almost sounded like an entirely different recording of the same sound because the imaging was so off-kilter. But the 1200 was able to sort out this spatial information fairly accurately.

I also enjoyed low bass information on the 1200. **This is one of the 1200 Army's main tenets, that direct-drive 'tables offer more solid bass performance, which is supposedly a function of the superb speed accuracy. I heartily concur.**

Members of the 1200 Army... please skip this section

After that, the going got tougher. Let's face it...the Technics SL-1200 is a dark-sounding turntable. There's absolutely no doubt about it. It's as dark as midnight in a coal mine. (And I concur – ed.) And if you're thinking that 'dark' is one of those goofy audiophile terms, let me elaborate.

(continued)



By dark, I mean closed in. I thought about using the word compressed, but what I really mean is oppressed. It's kind of an oppressive sound. It's struggling to get out into the light, to be energetic, to sound like real music. But it can't quite get out from under the thumb of all that darkness.

I think this is due to the very small soundstage presented by the 1200. I know, I said the imaging was excellent. Well, it was excellent within a greatly reduced space. With the 1200, you really don't experience true soundstage depth. And I used them with the Devore Fidelity Gibbon Super 8s, which for me are the soundstaging depth champs of the world, especially when you bring them well out into the room. For instance, with my original RCA/EMI pressing of *Barbirolli Conducts English String Music*, it sounded like just a handful of guys were playing, instead of a full string orchestra. The 1200 made everything sound small and distant.

Wait...I'm Sorry! Come Back!

Okay, I didn't learn anything new from my month with the 1200. It sounded exactly like I remembered fifteen or twenty years ago. But before you think this is the end, let me tell you that this is just the beginning!

You see, I've been told by various members of the 1200 Army that I cannot judge the potential of the 1200 based upon a stock version. I have to do at least three things before I can officially pass judgment.

First, I must hear a 1200 with an excellent cartridge. Well, I've done that. I was invited by a fellow audio reviewer to audition his Technics SL-1210MK5G with a decent cartridge in the \$12-1500 range.

This was a lot better, but still not a lot of depth to the presentation. Second, I'm told I need to hear the KAB modifications, that they COMPLETELY transform this 'table. Just as we did with the Rega P25 last year, we will go through a series of upgrades to this table and let you know what we find out.

Finally, I need to hear a 1200 with another arm, such as a Rega RB-300 or one of the older SMEs, such as a 3009 or 3012. One engineer told me that the biggest flaw isn't the direct drive system, as I originally maintained, but the substandard tonearm. However, another engineer I spoke to said the arm is just fine, and I was right about direct drive all along.

So this project is long from over. This current version of the 1200 is just a baseline, so we can report on each improvement along the way. And maybe one day, years from now, after the magazine has invested thousands of dollars into my SL-1200, we'll come up with an SL-1200 with killer performance. What we want to find out is after we've invested another \$1500 into this 'table, how will it stack up to its peers at the \$2000 level. Stay tuned! ●



In Search Of Tubeyness...

The HH Scott 299C Integrated Amplifier and 333 AM/FM Stereo Tuner

— Kurt Doslu

On any given weekend as I help customers in my shop, I often hear the same question: Does it have a 'tubey' sound? Whenever I hear this question, I go into a brief sermon about the benefits of tubes sounding more harmonic and rich -- that luscious treatment of notes that lingers like a summer vacation. But let's be honest: The new tube equipment doesn't sound as 'tubey' as it used to. I'm definitely referring to the vintage tube gear here.

Audio Research, Conrad Johnson, BAT and the other big hitters have advanced so far in their design, research, and power supplies that they run circles around the vintage tube amps. The line between tube sound and transistor sound becomes more blurred all the time, and now again one can even be fooled by one or the other! Just give a Sugden A21SE a listen and you will see what I mean.



But if you're seeking that romantic, glowing sound of tubes, there's nothing like the sound of amplifiers from the Golden Age of hi-fi, the 1960s. So, let's go back in time and re-visit what it was like to stereo shop back then.

The date is 1963 and you are walking into Hi-Fi Unlimited in Portland, Oregon. The store owner is Bob Rorer, who actually coined the term 'Heresy' to describe Klipsch's non-folded horn center speaker, previously named the Model H. Your budget is \$800 – which was a lot of money. (A new Chevy Impala was only about \$2500 back then...) But Hi-Fi equipment was all the rage and everyone was excited to experience the effect of 'stereo' separation.

The shop is a veritable smorgasbord of equipment: Eico, Fisher, McIntosh, HH Scott, Marantz, Sargent Rayment and more. You peruse the brochures and try to figure out why each company is proclaiming to be the best. Bob decides to show you around, playing everything from a Sherwood stack through Klipschorns to the JBL Paragon driven by McIntosh. Who knows, if you are a really astute hifi shopper, you might have even brought along a couple of albums or perhaps your favorite reel tape?

That big Ampex tape machine looks awfully inviting...

To stay within your budget and get the best sound possible, he shows you an HH Scott 299C Integrated Amplifier paired with the matching 333 AM/FM Stereo Tuner. *(continued)*

They were well-marketed, sounded terrific and offered great value. 'Get a Scott 99 for just \$99!'

series 5

581 CD Player
581i CD Player



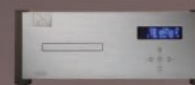
Innovation is our nature –
it is what we do.

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

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

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

Here the results for yourself!



At \$470 for the pair, you decide
to take his advice and mate them
up with a pair of EMI speakers
(\$169ea) for a total of \$808. Done.
Your thoughts linger for a moment
on a pair of AR-3s, but they would
put you way out of the budget and
require a larger amplifier as well
– back to reality.

A scenario like this hap-
pened quite frequently in the early
60s. Both the HH Scott tuner
and 299 amplifier became some
of the most popular tube electron-
ics ever purchased. Why is this?
Because they were well-market-
ed, (get a Scott 99 for just \$99!)
sounded terrific and offered great
value.

Hermon Hosmer Scott Was No Slouch

Scott was an MIT graduate
who was best known for invent-
ing the dynaural noise suppres-
sor, which allowed broadcasters
to improve the sound of sub-stan-
dard early recordings. His tuners
were legendary. Prior to the in-
vention FM stereo multiplex, many
stations would ‘simulcast’ their
signals. The left channel would
come through on an FM station
and the right on an affiliate AM
station. You looked like a sub-
mariner dialing in a periscope with
both hands spinning knobs in
varying directions. And if you’ve
never twirled the gyroscopic tuner
dials on a Scott tuner, you need
to run down to the closest used
hi-fi shop right away and have this
experience before they are gone!

The HH Scott ‘Stereomaster’
299 integrated amplifier embod-
ies that ‘tubey’ sound that many
audiophiles are looking for.

(continued)

L I V I N G T H E D R E A M

www.wadia.com

Wadia

In fact it sounds so good that for many cures the audio affliction of ‘how do I make it better?’ Audio lends itself to an obsessive tug toward perfectionism. It’s easy to become transfixed by the possibilities of improving upon something so good that you find yourself spiraling into an Ahab-like madness.

While there are countless forums and chat rooms where audio junkies will gladly share their favorite Scott 299 upgrades, beware! Yes, those new capacitors, resistors, power supply upgrades and new wiring will definitely improve harmonic distortion and feedback, but you may find that you’ve lost a lot of that ‘tubey-ness.’

So the question becomes, when do you stop? I say enjoy it as it is for as long as you can and when it finally goes, realize that with a rebuild, you will lose a bit of the magic. Hence, for many the answer will be a resounding ‘never.’ Regardless of which side of the fence you are on the HH Scott Integrated amplifiers represent some of the best sound for the money in vintage hi-fi.

Here’s the deal: The 299A used EL-84 output tubes (the babies with bite) and put out about 17 watts per channel. Great sound and easy to fiddle with. While you can still get current model EL-84s for around \$20 a pair, the best NOS varieties can fetch \$100 each! If you truly want the vintage sound and have the cash, this is the way to go. For those of you considering building a vintage system around a 299, they had a full compliment of inputs, featuring two types of phono equalization (RIAA and Euro 78) as well as a tape head input!

The 299B had bigger transformers and changed the phase splitters – still used EL84 output tubes but produced around 22 watts per channel. The 299C and D were considerably beefed up and used 7591 output tubes to deliver a whopping 35 watts per channel of creamy tube power. If you like these, also consider the LK-72 (kit) integrated amplifier.



Any one of these amplifiers will more than surprise even the haughtiest of audiophiles. They will sell for between \$250-\$450 on the used market. And if there’s a better sounding tube integrated for the money, I haven’t heard it.

Ed. Note: While editing this article and the subsequent photos, I hooked the 299 you see up to my vintage pair of AR 2ax speakers with a TEAC 2300SX (not quite the same vintage...) and spun some reel tapes via the tape head input. Very romantic indeed and very musical. Very much like driving a great example of a vintage automobile, it is really a lot of fun to go back and experience this world. I encourage any of you that have the space to check this out! ●

In fact it sounds so good that for many cures the audio affliction of ‘how do I make it better?’

The Tubes

Aladdin Theater

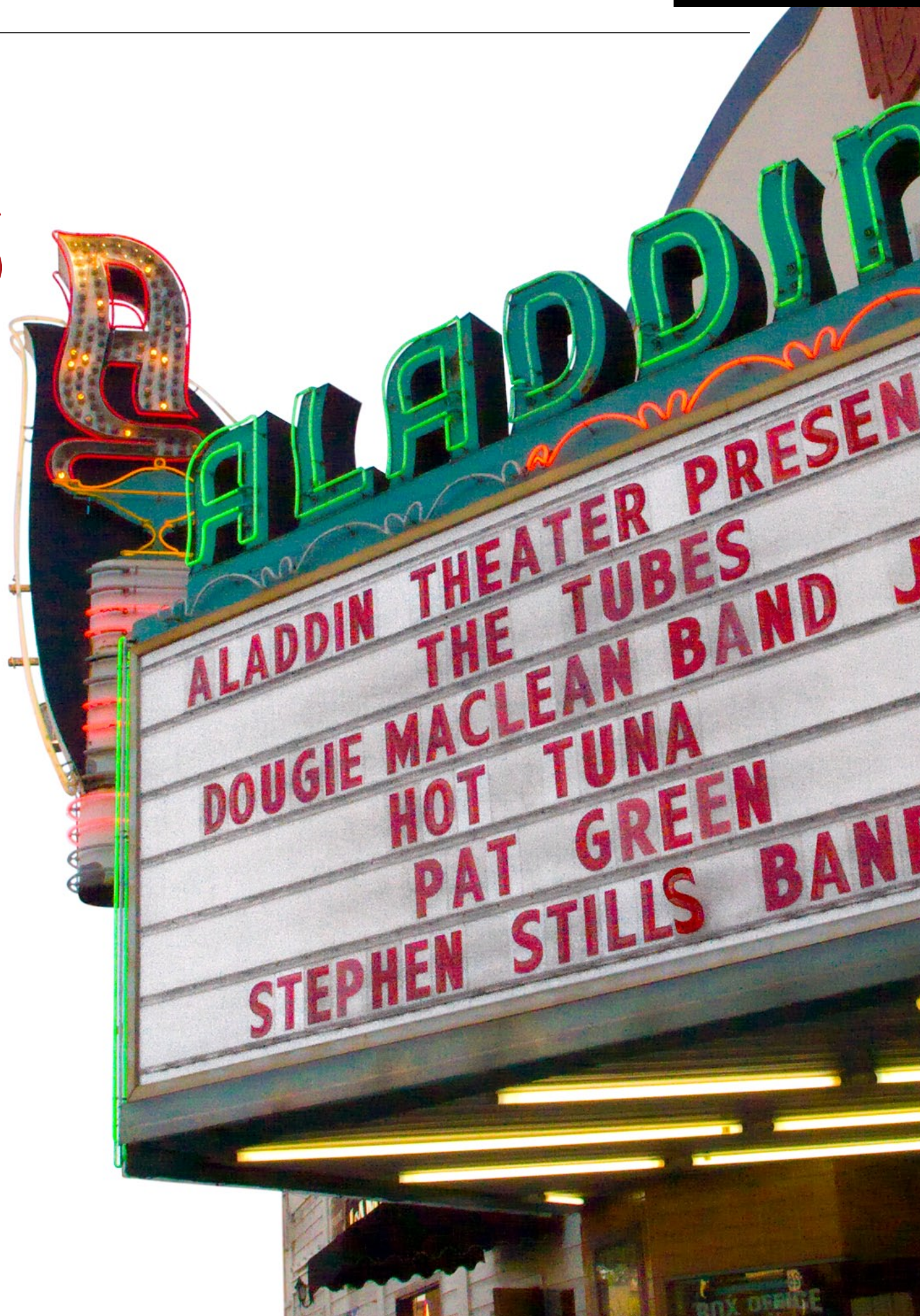
June 30

The Internet truly is a wonderful thing. I had just finished ripping all of my Tubes CDs to our Sooloos music server and I wondered if The Tubes just might still be on tour somewhere. A quick peek at their website (www.thetubes.com) revealed that they were going to be here in Portland in a week! Another quick click through to Ticketmaster and I had a pair of Tubes tickets printing on my laser printer...

You have to indulge me this luxury for a few reasons:

1. The Tubes were the absolute coolest band in the late 70s/early 80s
2. I'm a huge Tubes fan
3. It's my magazine. Ownership has its privilege.

Though some of the boomer generation go to shows like this to relive their youth only to be horribly disappointed that the band in question only has one or two of the original members (and usually minor ones at that, i.e. Thin Lizzy, Lynyrd Skynyrd), once I noticed that the band still consisted of four of the original members (Fee Waybill, Roger Steen, Prairie Prince and Rick Anderson) it was looking like their was enough DNA from the original band to make this a worthwhile quest.



And while I'm proud to be an American, I'm also proud to say that I never really stopped listening to The Tubes after all these years. Spinning *White Punks on Dope* always brings a smile to my face, as well as just about any other Tubes song. The audiophile in me always appreciated that their records were always well recorded.

The Tubes to me were always the consummate thinking man's art band. Alice Cooper was always fun, but a little gross at times and KISS was just too simple musically. But The Tubes were very exciting; they always went on tour with a major troupe, featuring a pair of keyboard players, sometimes a percussionist (usually Mingo Lewis), and a pair of lead guitarists. And they could ALL sing! There were also assorted female backup vocalists and elaborate set designs (not to mention the lovely Re Styles...)



ever seen in the 70s and 80s that could actually play their complex compositions in a live environment. These guys were really talented! If you saw The Tubes, you know that they always pulled off the great harmonies, tasty guitar fills and intricate keyboard bits in the live show. The only other band I had ever seen that could play live at this level of excellence was Frank Zappa.

The last time I saw The Tubes, was with our classical editor, Dan Babineau, towards the end of the Love Bomb tour in Chicago, with Todd Rundgren opening. It was a fantastic show, but shortly after that, The Tubes went off the radar for a while.

A recent clip of The Tubes performing in London last year really piqued my interest. As we all know, some of our favorite bands from the 70s and 80s really suck these days. (and they've gained a lot of weight too...) *(continued)*



If you saw The Tubes, you know that they always pulled off the great harmonies, tasty guitar fills and intricate keyboard bits in the live show.

The Tubes set designs usually went along with the current album that they were touring to support. **The Completion Backwards Principle** tour had them all come out in suits, the **Remote Control** stage looked like the insides of an old TV set, with big circuit boards everywhere. For the **Outside Inside** tour, they played at a series of theme parks. The **Love Bomb** tour set looked like a giant art studio doused in bright lime green. Yep, I'm a die-hard fan and saw them on every tour!

But showmanship is nothing without musical talent for me and what I always appreciated about The Tubes was that they were one of the few bands I had





ENCORE PERFORMANCE

CT5 COMPOSITE TRIODE PREAMPLIFIER

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

conrad-johnson It just sounds right.

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



But not The Tubes! They still had it from what I could see on YouTube, so I was getting pretty excited about seeing these guys again.

The Aladdin is a great theater in Portland that holds about a thousand people and it was sold out by show time.

The Tubes took the stage at just a touch past 9pm and Fee opened with *I Want It All Now*, from the **Remote Control** album. (which he also opened with when I saw The Tubes on the Remote Control tour...)

They burst on the stage and right away, I knew this was going to be a great show.

The crowd was fairly well behaved, but all four aisles were full of people dancing and carrying on. I didn't see *that* when I went to see Sting...

True to Tubes tradition, they covered tunes from the first Tubes album, **Remote Control**, **The Completion Backwards Principle** and **Outside Inside**. Fee also did a medley of James Brown songs dressed in homage to the man himself, and I do believe there was a bit of channeling of the great one this evening. (*continued*)

Of course they played *She's A Beauty*, *Sushi Girl*, and *White Punks on Dope*. They also played *What Do You Want From Life*, which got everyone whipped into a frenzy, and did *Mondo Bondage* as part of their encore. Total show time: about two and a half hours. The Tubes are still a great value indeed!

One of the biggest worries when seeing a band that has been around as long as The Tubes is, 'Can they still sing?!'

Don't laugh, I know a friend who paid \$350 to see Fleetwood Mac last year and told me Stevie Nicks could barely carry a tune! So far the score is Sting – 0, Stevie Nicks – 0 and the Tubes – 1. Fee wins again.

Yes, he can still belt The Tubes' songs out just like he did back in the day and Roger Steen and current keyboard player David Medd did a fantastic job with backing harmonies. Bass player Rick Anderson even stepped up to the mike for the chorus of *Give Me That Wine*, which was a rare treat. I think I only heard The Tubes do that song once before in the 70s.

The whole set was very tight and the drummer that filled in for Prairie Prince this night was quite good as well, offering up a mega drum solo that had the crowd screaming their approval. Just like any good concert, it went by much too quickly and in the middle of Fee singing *Love's A Mystery*, I was magically back with my buddies in the early 80s digging the scene.

That's what it's all about, folks.

Call me nostalgic, but watching those guys in action reminded me another thing about the music of my generation. A lot of the bands from those days really knew how to entertain you and work the audience. You walked out to the parking lot feeling great - that you saw a SHOW. It was nice to have that feeling again.



Fee took a few minutes the following week after the show to talk to me and here's what he had to say...

TONE: You guys kicked ass in Portland last week; you put on a great show!

FEE: Well, we are pretty good! We're better than we ever were, probably because we're less hampered by drugs these days...

TONE: Aren't we all! Moving right along, when I went to the show, I noticed that Prairie Prince wasn't drumming for you guys. Is that just a schedule thing with the New Cars?

FEE: He's pulling down a large paycheck for the summer, what are you going to do? Todd (Rundgren) has always loved Prairie, and tries to pull him in on whatever he's got going on.

TONE: Is Todd still a sore subject with The Tubes?

FEE: Nah, we're ok with Todd, he just deals with Prairie these days, but I do think the New Cars thing is kind of pathetic.

TONE: Yeah, even though I'm a big Todd fan, I thought he was a weird choice. Kind of like choosing Paul Rodgers for Queen...

FEE: At least Freddie is dead, Ric Ocasek is still alive and kicking, man! Another one going for the large paycheck!

TONE: No kidding, The New Cars gig here is \$250 a seat! No offense to any musicians, but I'm not paying that kind of money to see anyone!

FEE: (laughs) Yeah, that's Madonna money! Were hoping after the tour ends on Labor Day that we'll get PP back. The guy you saw in Portland left us after that show. He'll never work with The Tubes again!!

TONE: So who's drumming for you now?

FEE: Jonathan Mover. Awesome drummer, worked on all the Joe Satriani tours, Aretha Franklin and a number of others. He's filling in till Prairie gets back.

TONE: Does going through a few drummers in a short period of time ever feel like a Spinal Tap moment for you? *(continued)*

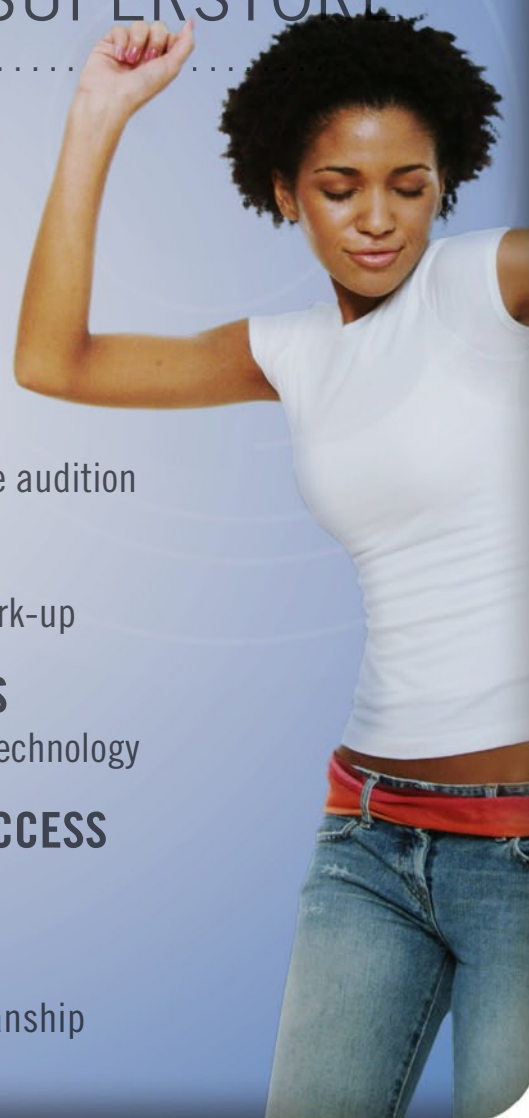
FIVE REASONS TO *choose us* OVER THAT ELECTRONICS SUPERSTORE

(AS IF YOU NEEDED
MORE THAN ONE)

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

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

—Thomas J. Norton, Ultimate AV



 **aperionaudio.com®**

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

➤ Or give us a ring:
1 888 880-8992

FEE: Prairie's just too good and everyone wants him. He's raised the bar for us so high, we can't just get any schmuck in to keep time, we need a great drummer! Everyone expects that out of us. Honestly, though we haven't been through THAT many drummers...

TONE: Back on the Completion Backwards Principle tour, I had front row center seats at the Oriental Landmark Theater. You dragged my girlfriend and I up on stage to sing a chorus of *White Punks On Dope* with you and you planted a big kiss on her before you tossed us back in our seats. When we sat back down, she commented, “He stuck his tongue ALL the way down my throat!!” That was my great Tubes moment.

FEE: (cracking up) Yes, the Oriental Landmark Theater. Lots of fond memories of that place.

TONE: These days are you keeping pretty busy; how many shows are you doing?

FEE: The phone's ringing off the hook, we will probably do 50 shows this year. We usually do between thirty or forty. I guess everyone's sick of booking Cheap Trick!

TONE: Here in the TONE office, you guys are still in regular rotation. A good friend was over a few days ago when I was listening to **Young And Rich** and he commented on what a great sounding record it was.

FEE: Yes, that was a great record. Ken Scott, what a great engineer, great producer. He probably didn't say six words to us while we made the whole record! It was at studio A at A&M, that was an amazing room; everyone wanted to work there back in the day! *(continued)*

TONE: Mick Jagger said he couldn't imagine singing *Satisfaction* at fifty. Did you think you would still be singing *White Punks* at fifty? WPOD is a better song..

FEE: (cracks up) Oh God, I didn't... Yeah WPOD is a better song! We are lucky to have so many songs in our repertoire that are still in demand. The crowd starts screaming *White Punks* by the second song! It's like, come on, you know we are gonna do it, just relax! It wouldn't be a Tubes show, without that song.

TONE: You did do a great mix of songs from every album on this show. When you go to see a band like The Tubes that did so many great songs, you always wonder what you will get to hear... It was nice that you did *Gimme that Wine* I haven't heard that since the 70s!

FEE: That one's ancient, before the first album! Back in those days we did a fair share of cover tunes because we just didn't have enough material of our own for a full set. Prairie's always the one that digs out these obscure songs from the vault. The James Brown Medley was his idea...

TONE: That was very cool!

FEE: About two or three times a year we get together in Parries studio in his basement to rehearse and we revamp the set and mix it up. We go to a number of cities every year, so we don't want to shortchange the fans by playing the exact same songs we did the last time they saw us.

TONE: That's good, because you know how those music geeks are, they will all be on the Internet complaining that you played the same songs!

FEE: (cracking up again) I know, I know!!!

TONE: You guys have been playing together for so long, it looks like you are still having a great time.

FEE: We are, we still really enjoy playing together. The traveling part sucks these days. Lugging gear is always a problem. But getting up on stage for a couple hours is a great release after traveling.



TONE: You were always a sports nut. You've gotta be working out big time to keep prancing around on those giant Quay Lude shoes and jump around like you do...

FEE: I work out three times a week and do yoga to stay flexible. And I ride horses a lot, I play polo about four times a week.

TONE: Wow! There's the one obscure thing about the Tubes we never knew. Fee plays polo. So, you against the Prince of Wales, would you kick his ass?

FEE: I think he quit playing actually, so we'll never know. Stewart Copeland used to play too.

TONE: Well that has to be good for the butt muscles...

FEE: You bet. I'm so into polo, it's a joke. From April to October I'm playing polo or music every weekend. One week I spend it on the polo field, next week I try to earn it back on tour! It's a completely different world from the music scene.

TONE: Anything that gets you away from your job is great, even if you love what you do...

FEE: You have to have it, something outside of your job.

TONE: What about the new DVD?

FEE: Looks good, I'm chatting with Mike Cotton and our lawyer right after you. Mike has put most of it together himself. He and his assistant have gone around and interviewed almost everyone who's ever had anything to do with The Tubes.

There are six full concerts and some great stuff from Wolfgang's Vault too. They have nine more Tubes performances they are talking about releasing as well.

TONE: So what ever happened to Re Styles?

FEE: She got tired of touring and quit the band after the Remote Control Tour.

TONE: So if you had to do it all over again, would you? I mean it's still better than being a cube zombie...

FEE: No shit. I would in a heartbeat. I've never had a real job and I'm lucky. God, what a nightmare, I can't imagine doing 9 to 5!

TONE: Say, what about your relationship with Richard Marx? Do you guys still work together?

FEE: I just talked to him this morning. He lives in Chicago with his three boys (my Godchildren) and wife. We are still working together on a few things. *(continued)*

The Connection Between Art and Science



duke

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

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

POWERUP



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

running springs audio

TONE: What kind of music do you listen to when you're just hanging out?

FEE: I listen to Buzzsaw on Sirius. Classic rock.

TONE: There's still a lot to be said for the classics! When we left your show, I talked to a number of people from the audience and they were saying that this was how the rock shows used to be, where the band came out and took over! Not like watching some of these new bands where they just kind of stand there...

FEE: I know! These guys just stand there in their street clothes and if you passed them by on the street, you wouldn't recognize them. You download one or two songs on iTunes and there isn't much else.

Thank God we aren't trying to make it today! We only had a couple of top 30 songs. No one would let you make five records without a number one hit anymore.

TONE: So the future is good for you and The Tubes?

FEE: You bet. But right now I'm waiting for the fucking Roto Rooter guy to get here! ●



Ed. Note: The current Tubes photos were shot here at the Aladdin and I took the early photos at the Oriental Landmark Theater in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on the Completion Backwards Principle tour and the Remote Control tour.

Club Mix

— Scott Tetzlaff



All THAT Jazz

There are an awful lot of different kinds of Jazz. Standing in front of the jazz section inside a large CD store, I tend to get a little woozy. Frankly, I'm not sure anyone has ever come up with a really good jazz classification system.

I have a favorite quote: **'Talking about love is like dancing about architecture'**. Similarly, maybe a filing system approach is not the best way to express one's thoughts about jazz.

That being said, as a public service, I'll jump in and take a wack at it anyway. While I've given this a lot of thought, the kind of jazz I prefer doesn't fall neatly into any of those little plastic markers in the store.

My first attempt was along the lines of what they do in some countries, taking the names of the people getting married and gluing them together to form a new name. While it initially seemed like it might work, I ended up with categories like:

'Modern-Electro-Nu-Groove-Acid-Funk-Jazz'

Frankly, it doesn't slide off the tongue that well.

My next thought was to throw away the traditional, poorly thought out labels, and reclassify everything in a clean, functional way. Thus, I present the first approximation of the proposed 'Standardized International Functional Jazz Chart' (or SIFJC):

Jazz that only John Tesh's mother would like

Jazz that sounds good while drinking 'Hurricanes' in New Orleans

Jazz that is used as incidental music during Hallmark TV movies

Jazz with a lot of brass instruments – useful for scaring cats

Old Jazz only available on vinyl that makes you smile

Jazz you can play your bongo drums along with

Interesting jazz with big flecks of electronica incorporated used for relaxing (Some people do refer to this body of work as Acid Jazz...)

You get the idea. It's not conclusive. This is only a first draft, and I feel the word 'metric' should be incorporated into the title somehow.

I, of course, am most interested in the last category listed. Music that is firmly rooted in jazz, but uses all of today's best technology, too. And we have a lot of work to do, because there's a lot of great music in this category – so, let's get down to business. Rather than go too deep on the format this time, I'm just going to give you a few favorites of mine to give you a 101 level intro course.

Keep It Unreal by Mr. Scruff

Mr. Scruff is the king of jazzy, goofy fun. If you're not familiar with his name, you might have heard a track or two without knowing it. You may recognize the track *Get A Move On* as something like *The Lincoln Navigator Song* from a few months back. That crass commercialism shouldn't detract from how good this CD is. The signature pieces for Mr. Scruff always seem to have a hint of Dixieland jazz mixed in – but with a lot of updated touches.

There's a wide variety of styles mixed on this showcase CD, with numerous standout tracks- here are a couple: Hot guitar licks on *Spandex Man*, the very sexy track called *Honeydew* with some very smokey vocals and finally the jazzy rant *JusJus*. For extra fun, subscribe to the newsletter on their site at www.mrscruff.com



Rebop The Savoy Remixes by various

Here's a project similar to the beloved Verve Remixes - but this time it's the guys from Savoy opening their vaults to DJs to mix up a storm. So imagine taking some of your classic 4 and 5 piece jazz groups, and throwing in some great scratching (but not too much), and picking up the beat to make it even hotter – you're in the neighborhood.

This is a fairly high energy endeavor, and Savoy brings some big names to the party – Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, and Duke Jordan to name a few. Favorite tracks on this include *A Night in Tunisia* remixed by DJ Jazzy Jeff, Herbie Mann's *Yardbird Suite* remixed by Saint Etienne, and Sarah Vaughan singing *Lover Man* made over by King Britt.

CAUTION: If you aren't familiar with the originals, Savoy has the same CD with the unmixed tracks available. A Word of caution: The CDs look almost exactly the same!! Read the labels carefully or you may get an unpleasant surprise.

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

Les Hommes by Les Heommes

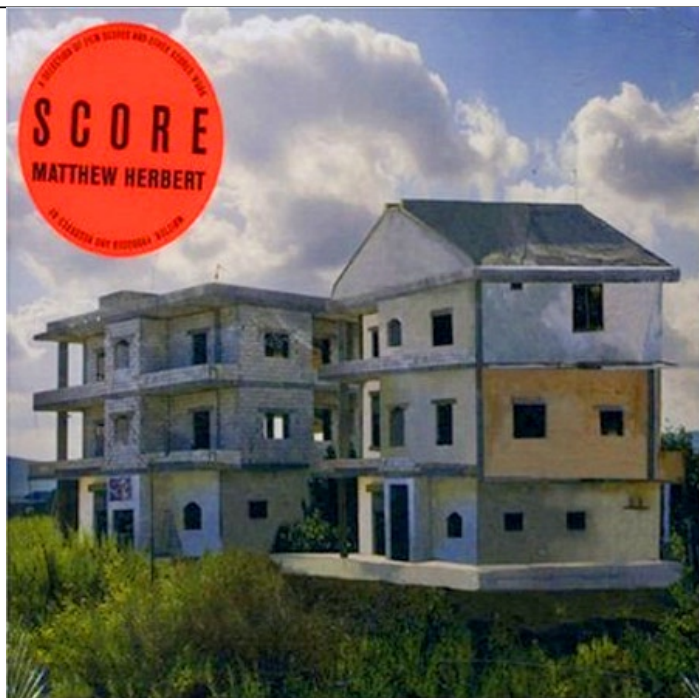
If there were a poster CD for light and airy jazz, this could be it. Lots of brushed cymbals and xylophones, this has a really great retro feel. It will most likely remind you of soundtracks from great 60s films. The first time I listened to this CD, I seriously searched the jacket looking for the release date – I thought it was a reissue (the real release date is 2002). Stand-out tracks include the jazzy funky *In Spring* and *Intraspettro*, but make sure to take a listen to the bossa nova cut *Hommage*. Trivia fact: **Even though the name of the group is French, the band is actually Italian.**



VH1 SAVE THE MUSIC FOUNDATION

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

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



Score and **Bodily Functions**

by Matthew Herbert

Matthew Herbert is a genius. Classically trained on the piano, his generally quiet and beautiful works are infused with something you can't quite put your finger on. Outer space stuff? Something organic? Maybe this goes back into that pile of experiences you can't use words to describe as well as you would like. One thing is for sure, his use of Dani Siciliano to do the breathy vocals is a perfect pairing.

The music is sparse, and artfully arranged, with the piano taking center stage. If you've never heard anything of his, start with **Bodily Functions** – if that works for you, continue on to the newest work **Score**. **This is not your father's jazz.** There are lots of strange breaks, found sound samples, and a sense of otherworldly-ness. Who would have thought piano based jazz could be so controversial? I guarantee you will not be on the fence about these CDs.



Tre by The Dining Rooms

This one is Chic and sexy, a truly amazing CD, taking front and center in my CD rack at home for a very long time. **Tre** possesses a jazzy, somewhat cinematic flow, yet always manages to be energizing at the same time. **Don't let your girlfriend take this one to her yoga class!**

This is an Italian group published on an Austrian label – which explains why their music has such a cross cultural appeal, possessing a great mix of instrumental and vocals, with a lot of structure. You can usually play this for someone that likes popular music, and they won't be freaked out, in spite of it's heavy jazz sensibilities. Some favorite tracks are the nostalgic opening song *Tunnel*, the orchestral *Fluxus*, and the elegantly simple *Prigionieri nel deserto*.

As much as I like their other work, if you put a gun to my head and forced me to choose, this one would be it. Remember, this is just the intro course...



Jet Sounds Revisited by Nicola Conte

What if you took an Italian jazz guy with a black belt in Bossa Nova, and paired him up with some of the best lounge music people in the world to make a record? **Jet Sounds Revisited** is the outcome. There are tracks made with folks like: Thievery Corporation, NuSpirit Helsinki, Koop, and Kyoto Jazz Massive to name a few. It's ALL about the Latin beat on this one – Mambo, Samba and Bossa Nova, but with a definite lounge twist. This is an extremely groovy CD. **People that never use the word groovy say it's groovy when they hear it.**

My favorites are the fast paced tracks with Gianluca Petrella, enjoy!

DH LABS

SILVER SONIC™

HIGH PERFORMANCE AUDIO CABLES

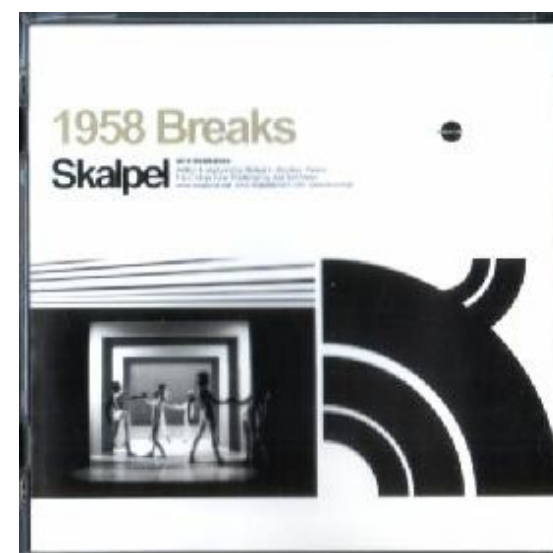
D.H. LABS, INC.
612 N. ORANGE AVE. SUITE A-2
JUPITER, FL 33458

SILVERSONIC.COM
561-745-6406



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

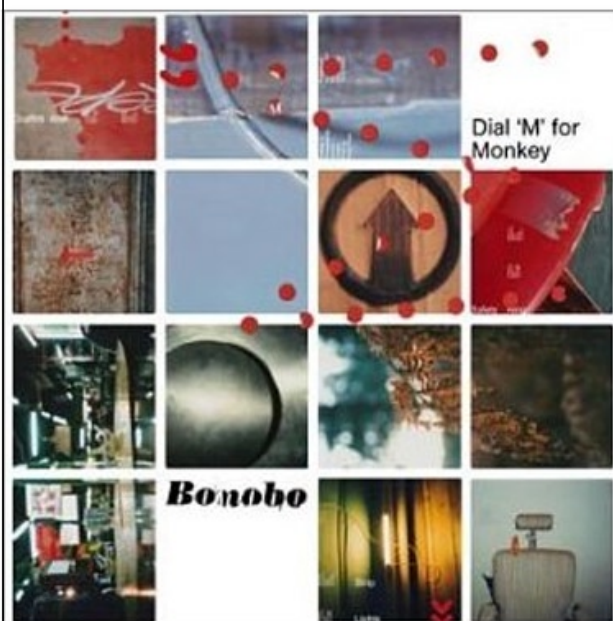
-Dave Clark
Positive Feedback



1958 Breaks by Skalpel

Skalpel is made up of two DJs - Marcin Cichy and Igor Pudlo - working together in Warsaw, Poland. Fast paced and nicely produced, this will have your toes tapping in no time. Jazz mixed with some quick beats, this CD comes out of the chute a little slow and dark, but heats up by the third track. **Amazingly, their work has a definite west coast US jazz club feel, circa late 1960s.**

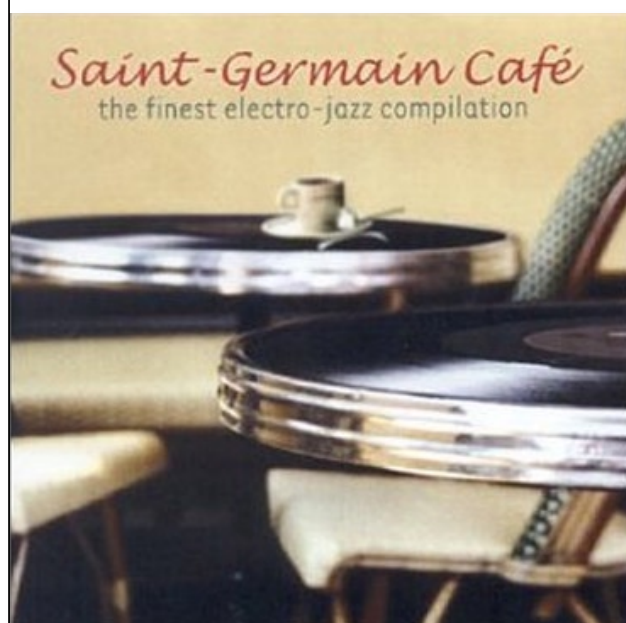
If you have any doubts as to the jazz-worthiness of this group, listen to track seven *Low* - a jazz trio piece, with some slight mixing. Then listen to track eight - a remix of the same, but made epic and orchestral. Brilliant. Currently, they are recording on the very cool 'Ninja Tune' label. So, if you're having any trouble finding samples of their work, take a look at www.ninjatune.net.



Dial 'M' for Monkey by Bonobo

Another member of the Ninja Tune family, Bonobo does jazzy, downtempo, beat driven music – mostly instrumentals. By the way, a 'Bonobo' is a type of dwarf chimp –but you probably knew that. Difficult to slot into a category, I would very much recommend listening to a few samples from some of the download sites first.

An excellent example is the first track *Nocturnary*; it gets my vote for best use of a harp in downtempo, jazz based music. (Is there a Grammy category for that?) There's a good mix of upbeat and slower songs, but if you were so inclined, you could make a playlist out of the slower ones, and have a great CD for staring at the ocean.



Saint Germain des Pres Café III by Various

It's really hard to decide sometimes – so what about a jazz fun pak? Here's a great series where you can get a little of this and a little of that. Billing itself as the 'Best in Electro –Jazz' from the cafes of Paris, this series is really and truly consistently good. Again, if I had to pick only one in the series, it would be this one. (Maybe it's the coffee cup on the cover that appeals to me).

It's very peppy – and great music for a wide variety of situations (work, cocktail parties, doing art, and so on) when you interview someone on the street, and ask them to think about jazz – this is what is lurking in their subconscious. Fast piano, snare drum, maybe a female vocalist. Great café music. The extra added bonus on these collections is taking tracks and doing a little research on the individual contributors. They will surely lead you to more interesting music to purchase.



Kind of Cool by Gare Du Nord

Gare Du Nord is the name of one of the main train stations in Paris. It's a place where influences from some pretty diverse places mix together. It's also a rather appropriate name for this group. If you strain your ear a little while listening to this CD, you can hear jazz influences from Paris, Memphis, Spain, some German cabarets, and maybe a hint of somewhere in the direction of Asia. The muted horns and train sounds on the first track *Kind of Cool 1* are a really great effect. The track *Sold My Soul* is a perfect nod to classic R&B. Excellent late night listening.

Take Your HiFi On The Road.



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

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

"The Milbert Bam-235ab is most certainly the Holy Grail of autosound."

— Jeff Dorgay
The Robb Report Collection



MILBERT AMPLIFIERS
Vacuum Tube Car Audio Equipment
Since 1986

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



New Comer by Llorca

Ludovic Llorca has excellent taste in music. A native of northern France, he's been producing music for a long while considering his young age. This is his first CD. You could spend a lot of time arguing that this is a jazz CD with a lot of funk, or a funk CD with a lot of jazz. I prefer to just crank up the volume and enjoy this one.

Standout tracks include *The Novel Sound* with artfully included spoken word pieces woven into it, and *Indigo Blues* with soulful vocals provided by Nicole Graham. There's also some major funk going on with *True to Me* featuring Lady Bird.

The pacing on this CD is really nice – a mixture of vocal and instrumental tracks at medium to slightly faster. This might be a perfect compliment to a summertime barbeque.

Don't get me wrong; I still enjoy Miles Davis and John Coltrane. But these are some selections that take the best of what the classics have to offer and blend it in with other modern influences to come up with a new kind of cocktail that is a ton of fun. Is it your recipe for fun? Investigate and see! More next issue... ●

Prince

Musical Genius, Marketing Genius, Both or Neither?

— Eddie Kaddi



Planet Earth (released July 27, 2007) marks Prince's 38th album. It's hard to imagine how anyone could remain vital with a back catalog as deep as this, but Prince hit the ground running. Just weeks prior to the album release, a whirlwind media frenzy was instigated by his announcement that this album would be given away free in the UK with each copy of a British newspaper called MAIL ON SUNDAY. The music industry and press were in conflict over what seemed like a marketing disaster. In an age of illegal download battles and reportedly slumping album sales, Prince would serve up his latest disc alongside your Sunday comics to the tune of £500,000 (\$1,000,000) in licensing and 3 million copies which may count as albums sold in UK's equivalent of Soundscan. Label execs are up in arms fearing this will spark a trend that will cut them out of the equation in the future. For his part, Prince claims the move is a 'direct mail' tactic designed to promote his latest tour. Either way, he wins. Artists always generate far more money on the road with merchandising and ticket sales than they will ever receive in record company royalty deals. The question is whether or not the album itself will arouse more interest than your average newspaper advertising insert or coupons.

Planet Earth, to me, is reminiscent of a few of Prince's mid to late 90s albums with pop-ish hooks and power anthem choruses designed to appeal to more than your average fan of **Purple Rain** or the more eclectic **Black Album**. After being largely delighted with **Musicology** and **3121** (Prince's last two releases), I was inclined to believe that he'd finally made his way back into the good graces of many longtime fans like myself. I've been disappointed and confused by much of his work over the past decade. The title track, **Planet Earth**, falls right into the socio-political track of today with its environmental and anti-war vibe. Politics aside, it reminds me of *Gold* (another Prince title track) and as such - it just doesn't really grip me beyond the smoking guitar solo that kicks in at the end. The song almost started to grow on me, but sections of the song are far too saccharine to stomach. Lawrence Welk even came to mind when I first heard the bridge, and I started to worry. I REALLY want to love this album. I'm anxious for this guy to win me over again. This solo on **Planet Earth** kept me curious for more, after all ... this is only the first track, and I'm reminded of *Purple Rain*'s timeless guitar riffs. This is the kind of guitar solo that makes the hair on your arms stand in ovation.

Speaking of guitar, the opening riff to *Guitar* came screaming out like a fire alarm with driving drums and bass to match. Think Peach or Pussy Control, I'm thinking wise move on choosing this one as the lead single. Many folks probably heard it first in the Verizon TV ads that have pounded airwaves leading up to the album's release. **This is one tune that will remind you why you love Prince even when you hate him.** He's singing about how he loves nothing like he loves his guitar, and after hearing this song you have to believe him. This was followed up by what has to be the best album closing song he's ever

recorded - only problem is that this is track 3. I can't slam *Somewhere Here On Earth* because it's a gorgeous ballad, but one that my grandparents might have danced to at their prom. I can dig it, but I'm hungry for the funk at this point. *The One U Wanna C* has all the right ingredients to sell a car or rock a sitcom theme. I just couldn't find enough interest in this one to really say much more. **I'm always impressed at how even the songs I can't wrap my ears around tend to rival the best that most contemporary artists have to offer.**

No sooner did I start to waver did the grooves start pounding out from *Future Baby Mama* and *Mr. Goodnight*. The familiar funk I grew up listening to for so long was waking me up now. At this point, the album is well worth the price of admission and we're only half way through. One reason I lost interest in Prince's music in recent years was the fact that his devout religious beliefs began to take over his music to a degree that his material was less and less recognizable as the stuff I had enjoyed for so many years. It was more than an artist growing.

It became an artist with an agenda and I had no room for evangelizing in my record collection. *All the Midnights In the World* is a love song with an overt 'Sunday school' vibe that I was willing to look past in

order to appreciate as a great composition. Again, though, I feel the sound is dated, and Prince seems to be showing his age with tracks like this one. *Chelsea Rogers* features a kick-ass female vocalist supporting Prince whom I had to look up because I was sure that Mavis Staples was blowing through my speakers. It's actually Shelby Johnson - someone to watch out for in the future. This is a slamming groove with all the telltale signs of a true Prince jam. I can hear the club remixes already! Finally, the album wraps up with a pair of songs: *Lion of Judah* drenched in biblical references and the anti-war bubblegum pop song *Resolution*. These are tracks that do not really resonate for me. It's hard to deny the wholesome and refreshing message in the lyrics, but tough to swallow when coming from the guy that told us how his Darling Nikki 'masturbated with a magazine' back in 1984 ... and we loved it. *(continued)*





PENAUDIO[®]

auditional wellbeing[™]

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

SERENADE

The Essence of Finnish Design

Simple. Elegant. Natural.

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

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

I've been following Prince's career and buying his albums for over 20 years. I own enough released (and unreleased) material to fill several storage racks. This doesn't make me an authority, but I like to think of my opinion on the subject as well-informed. Few artists have the talent and longevity of a musician like Prince.

With around 35 albums and 19 Top Ten hit singles to his credit, Prince has also composed songs for over 180 of his contemporaries under an array of pseudonyms.

Some of his contributions are sure to surprise the average listener (Stevie Nicks' signature *Stand Back* synth lines for example). He holds a vast catalog of hundreds of unreleased recordings stowed away in a secure vault within his Chanhassen, MN recording facility and creative playground, Paisley Park. While Prince may be accused of being many things to many people, one tag that will most certainly stick every time is 'genius.' **Planet Earth** will not take a spot among the greatest albums Prince has ever made, not even close ... but there are songs on here that certainly make me anxious to hear where he's going to do next, and that's got to be music to his ears as he turns 50 next year.

Check out the latest in Prince's world at his very slick and multimedia rich official web site **www.3121.com.** ●

Sound Traxxx! Or The Soundtrack To Our Lives! Or Movie Magic!

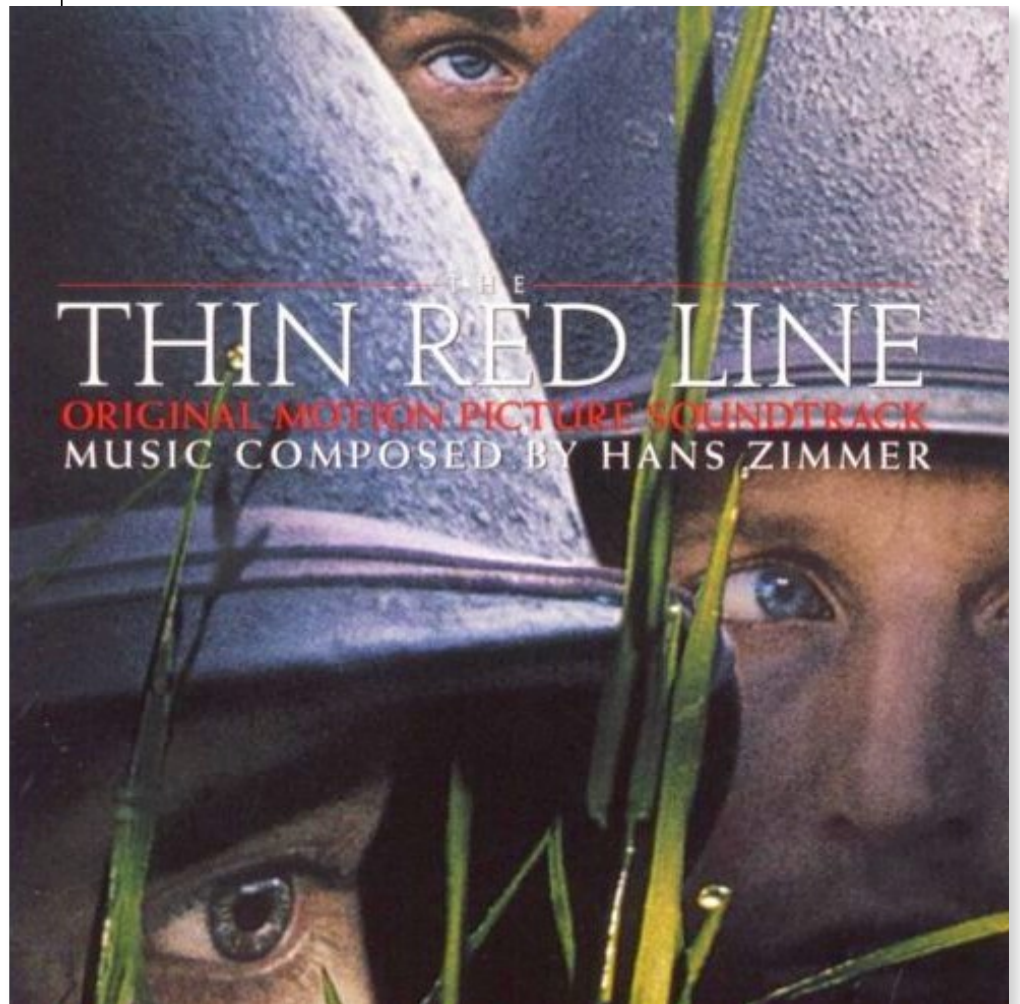
— Marc Phillips

Jeff: Hey dude, did you ever see that episode of SpongeBob where he...

Marc: No dude...but have you ever seen that movie where Steve Buscemi...

I got the gig to write a column about great OST recordings, mostly because I'm the shameless movie nut on the staff, and also because, much to my surprise, I have quite a few of them in my music collection. Some are appropriately thin, can't stand on their own, and have no business being pressed onto a poor blob of vinyl that never did any harm to anyone. (The soundtrack recording to *Let's Do It Again*, which was sent to me accidentally by Columbia House Record Club when I was twelve, comes to mind.) Others are true works of art that do stand on their own, and come close to being the classical music of our time, especially when they're composed by contemporary giants such as John Corigliani (*Altered States*), Philip Glass (*Koyaanisqatsi*), Michael Nyman (*The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover*), and even the great Aaron Copland (*The Reivers*).

Deep down, I've always wanted to be a film critic. (I've also wanted to be a film director, a screenwriter, a fireman, and the President of the United States during different times of my life.) Well, here's my chance to be a film soundtrack critic, which is close enough.



The Thin Red Line Original Motion Picture Soundtrack

(Music composed by Hans Zimmer, RCA Victor 09026-63382-2) CD, HDCD

Though I was given free reign to be as obscure as I wanted, I'm starting off with one of the most well-known soundtrack recordings of the last decade, Hans Zimmer's often transcendent score to director Terrence Malick's enigmatic and challenging 1998 film, *The Thin Red Line*. The film itself is a sprawling, difficult World War II epic based on James Jones' classic novel, and moviegoers either loved it or hated it (with me being snobishly and indignantly in the former camp). Regardless of how you felt about the film when you first saw it, there was a certain point where, like me, you had to stop and say to the person sitting next to you, **"Have you noticed how great the score is?"** *(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

Being a huge Terrence Malick fan (this was his first film in 20 years), I ran out and saw the film the day it came out. And I purchased the soundtrack CD later that same evening.

I was surprised that the score was composed by Hans Zimmer, whom I only knew as the guy who did The Lion King theme. Performed by a full orchestra, and accompanied with flourishes of instrumentation reflecting the South Pacific locale, such as taiko drums, Tibetan bowls, kotos and a Shakahachi flute, this is an unusually mature and majestic work.

I gravitated immediately toward two pieces on the album. The first, entitled *Journey to the Line*, builds slowly and powerfully, its percussion section steadily driving the flow of the music through constant brushed strikes toward a crescendo that suggests the sounds of battle, which then leads into a dreamy, ethereal coda played by just the string section. For me, this piece is especially evocative of Gorecki's now-famous Symphony No. 3.

The second one, simply titled *Light*, is perhaps one of the most melodically beautiful pieces of music I know. This slow, sad waltz tends to be a show-stopper whenever I have other audiophiles over to listen to music. **This is the selection that makes them immediately stop chatting amongst themselves, listen for a few minutes, and then turn to ask me what it is and where they can get it.** (continued)

The sound quality of this CD is uniformly excellent, thanks in part to the HDCD encoding. I believe it spent time on Harry Pearson's Hit List for a while, along with Zimmer's follow-up, the soundtrack to *Gladiator* (Which I like considerably less). Even so, I still feel like I'm continually turning people on to this recording, that few people know of its existence. So here's my opportunity to tell everyone at once...get this now!

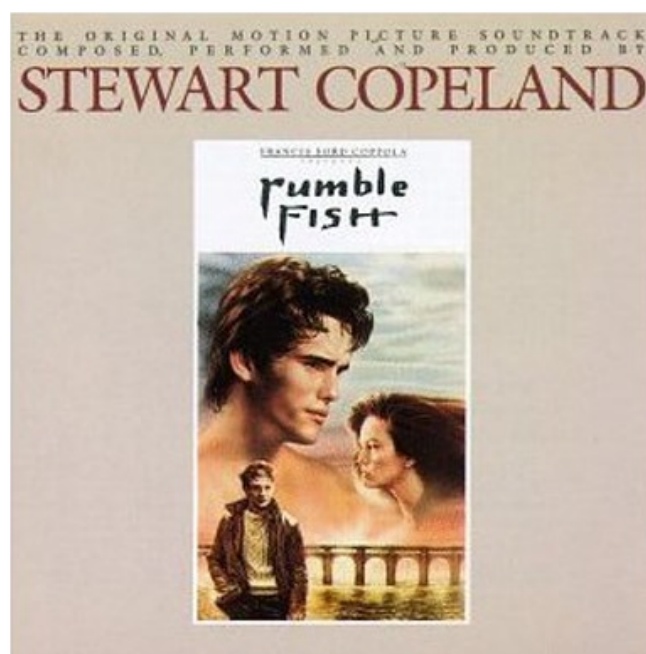
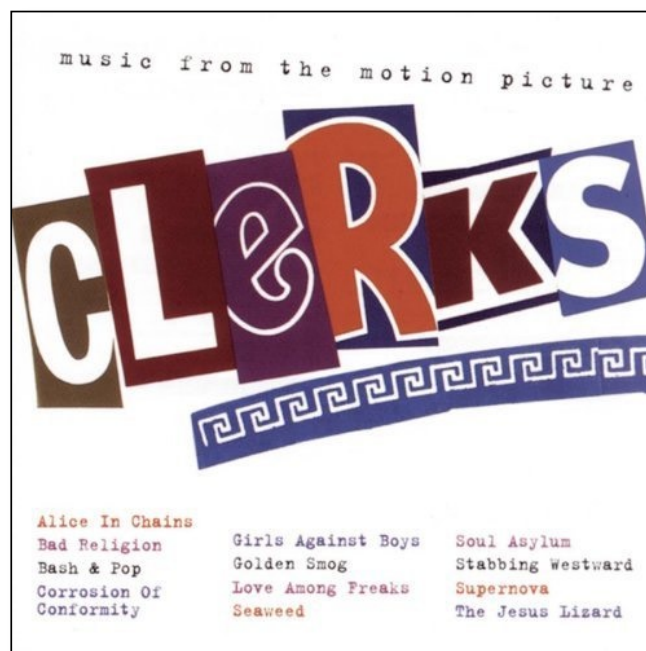
Music From The Motion Picture Clerks

(Chaos/Columbia OK 66660) CD

Here's an interesting bit of trivia: Clerks is the only film in history where the music rights cost more than it took to make the film. And while the soundtrack does include songs by Alice In Chains, Stabbing Westward and Soul Asylum, how much could it have possibly cost to secure the rights to Supernova's *Chewbacca* ("What a wookiee!"), or Love Among Freak's *Berserker*, which includes the immortal line "My love for you is ticking clock, ber-SER-ker"?

I offer the soundtrack of Clerks as sort of a sherbet between courses, a comical cleanse of the palate. This CD is a must for the many fans of the film, since the gaps between the songs are punctuated with audio snippets from the film ("No time for love, Dr. Jones!") and will constantly remind you of the fact that Dante wasn't even supposed to be there that day. But above all, there's a few songs here that I actually like, such as Love Among Freak's loose-limbed, hard-rocking title track, and Alice In Chains' *Got Me Wrong*, which has always been a sort of guilty pleasure for me.

Plus, you get Dante and Randall's thoughtful and sensitive ruminations on sex, Star Wars and other important cosmic dilemmas, as well as the occasional contribution from Jay and Silent Bob (well, not so much from Silent Bob). Again, if you're part of Kevin Smith's 'View Askewniverse,' then I don't need to tell you how important it is to own this CD.



Rumble Fish Original Motion Picture Soundtrack

(Music composed, performed and produced by Stewart Copeland, A&M SP-6-4983) LP

Here's another stellar score from a love-it-or-hate-it film, Francis Ford's 1983 adaptation of S.E. Hinton's *Rumble Fish*. This was Copola at his most artsy-fartsy, a highly-stylized black-and-white melodrama that treated the concerns of a group of Tulsa teens as if the fate of the universe hung in the balance.

I remember liking it from a visual standpoint, though. And I was excited by the fact that the score was both composed and performed by one of my three favorite rock drummers, Stewart Copeland of The Police.

Rumble Fish was the first of Copeland's many film soundtracks, coming between *Ghost In The Machine* and *Synchronicity*, when most of the world was beginning to appreciate him as one of the truly great rock drummers (although the cooler among us knew this for many years). And while the soundtrack may be best known for the song *Don't Box Me In*, sung by Wall of Voodoo's Stan Ridgway and written by Ridgway and Copeland, it's Stewart's skills as a "rhythmatist" (as stated in the caption below his picture on the back of the LP) that make this soundtrack instantly memorable.

I hadn't pulled out my LP pressing of this in years, and was surprised how I still remembered every note, every trademark hi-hat fill. The music that fills *Rumble Fish* straddles the line between the blues and jazz, forming a sort of bleak yet dynamic Tulsa variation of those two musical forms. Copeland's quick, driving percussion adds an aggressive yet desperate feel to the proceedings, like one of Hinton's young protagonists running from the law after throwing a brick through a storefront window.

What's particularly amazing is that Copeland, as the credits imply, plays most of the instruments, including the piano, guitar, bass and all other forms of percussion (including a typewriter). In fact, it's strange to see the pic of Stewart playing guitar on the inside sleeve. Only the plaintive horn section and strings are left for others. **The result is a score that is almost otherworldly, a strange mutation of a film noir sensibility and Copeland, who is an instantly identifiable musical force by himself.** This may not satisfy fans of The Police, but it will certainly thrill the fans of Stewart Copeland.

More fun movie soundtracks next issue, stay tuned! ●

Shana Morrison

— Kimberlye Gold



I recently had the pleasure of meeting the lovely and talented Shana Morrison, daughter of Van the Man. But the diminutive 29 year-old brunette beauty is no mere spawn of a celebrity, living off her daddy's legacy. With a versatile, huge voice that defies her petite stature and breezy, down-to-earth demeanor, Shana has amassed an impressive catalogue of four CDs of eclectic, strong material that should be heard all over the radio. From the Sophie B. Hawkins sounding *I Spy* to the rockin' *Drive*, to the sexy *Cherry on Top*, Ms. Morrison's soulful, bluesy style refuses to be stuck in a single genre box. It's probably what has kept her simmering under the radar for 12 years, which is the way she seems to like it. Taking a break from her busy schedule, the Mill Valley native was kind enough to meet me at the Depot to fill us in on her past, present and future...

DeVORE FIDELITY



2006 Awards for the SUPER 8
 Positive Feedback Writer's Choice
 Best of 2006, 6moons
 Best of 2006, Enjoy the Music
 Best Speaker 2006 Home Theater Israel

**gibbon
SUPER 8**

five out of five reviewers bought em

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

TONE: I love the new CD. It's a really eclectic wonderful mix of different genres of music: blues, rock, soul and pop.

SM: Thank you! I try to be versatile.

TONE: Where are from originally? Were you born in the Bay Area?

SM: I grew up half and half between here and Los Angeles. I was born in upstate New York and moved to Marin when I was two years old. I went to Jr. High School, High School and college in LA. I lived in London for a year after school. After that, I came back to Marin for what I thought was going to be a little while and now it's been 12 years!

TONE: What do you think of the music scene in the SF Bay Area, as opposed to LA?

SM: I like it a lot. It's a lot smaller definitely. There's no real music business here, and you do have to travel a lot. The live music community is really nice. Everyone is very supportive and helps each other out; it's not as competitive as down south. I like the camaraderie, and all the musicians kind of know each other. It's a good pool of people. There's also a lot of paying gigs here.

TONE: Really, I'm a musician too. Explain what you mean.

SM: At first, we started playing Irish pubs for lots of people and it was really fun, but we made no money. Then we started playing places once a month for a small cover for less people. It was hard at first, but you start building a little following and you can start raising ticket prices gradually and work your way up to making some money, whereas in LA there is never any money. *(continued)*



TONE: Where do you play in Marin?

SM: The Sweetwater obviously, Rancho Nicasio, Café Amsterdam, 19 Broadway, 142 Throckmorton Theatre, New George's when that was still there. Pretty much everywhere. We've made our rounds over the years.

TONE: Has your band remained consistent?

SM: Some of the guys have been in my band 8, 9, 10 years. Others at least 2. I think in over 12 years, I've had about 16 or 17 people. It's been a pretty small group, considering. The more we play, the better we are, and we really like to play together.

TONE: Wow, it's hard to keep a band together that long! Do you play guitar to write?

SM: I can pick out basic chords on piano, then I hand it to the other musicians to actually play (laughs).

TONE: Do you co-write?

SM: Some, I write a lot on my own. When I get tired of 1, 4, 5 chords, then I go to one of the other guys and say, 'Hey, you want to write something and add some different chords?' (laughs again)

When the band members co-write, we all have a common goal. They're not necessarily just living my dream. They're involved in the creative process too.

TONE: You basically write all the material yourself and use them as arrangers?

SM: If I co-write, I co-write...they'll write the music, and I'll write the words usually. Otherwise, I'll just write on my own. Occasionally, I write with people outside the band.

TONE: Okay, we all know who your dad is. Tell me about the rest of your family.

SM: My mom is in LA now but is a Marin native, she went to Redwood High. She's a songwriter and backup singer, and now has a handmade jewelry business. My brother lives in Marin, plays guitar, but never chose to pursue music as a career.

TONE: I presume you don't like to be asked about your dad and would like to keep it separate. Is that standard?

SM: Definitely, I'm here to talk about me, and he doesn't need any more publicity. (laughs)

TONE: I just wanted to get that out of the way because I'm sure everybody wants to ask you about him? (and of course I will later) Do you ever do any work together? Is that how you got started?

SM: Yeah, we have. I have sung backup on some of his records. He played a harmonica solo on my last record. But I didn't actually choose to play music professionally until after college. My dad was in a review with a lot of other guest artists. It was about a 2 ½ hour show, my dad was on and off. My friend Brian, this great singer, was one of the guests. I got to sing two duets with him and two duets with my dad, and I did this for about a year. I had always sung in choirs in school, but I didn't want to do it as a living. I didn't find it to be an attractive lifestyle, but I really got the performance bug after that year with my dad. Well, I thought, I do write songs and if I'm ever going to get people to hear them, I'd better do it now, rather than waiting till later and wishing I had.

TONE: What were you studying in college?

SM: I was studying business and expecting to go to law school afterwards. Most of my friends got their MBA or law degree, so I did the paralegal thing, but it just wasn't for me. I did the thing with my dad for a year, but after a while it was just very little work, very easy life, very nice hotels, four songs a night. *(continued)*

Thinking outside the box...



Coffin & Trout
Fine Jewellers

WWW.COFFINANDTROUT.COM

IMAGINATIVE - ARTISTIC - JEWELRY | 480.763.1300 800.684.8984 CHANDLER, ARIZONA

Designs © 2007, Coffin & Trout

It was like a paid vacation, really. I realized I had to do something else.

TONE: Some people would have done that forever (meaning me).

SM: Yeah, I know. Not me. But it was a great learning experience. Every night was different...very impromptu. It was a great education to see how that could all work out.

TONE: My friend Annie Stocking sung background for your dad for many years.

SM: Yeah, she's an amazing talent.

TONE: Yes, she is. If you ever need a background singer, I'm available! I love to sing background!

SM: I will definitely keep that in mind! (laughs)

TONE: Who are your influences?

SM: I have a lot of influences, but I wouldn't necessarily say I sound like them. If I say I like Earth Wind and Fire and Joni Mitchell, they'll write, 'she sounds like a cross between Earth Wind and Fire and Joni Mitchell.' (laughs) Growing up, it was more Pat Benetar, Ricki Lee Jones, Dolly Parton, the great female vocalists. But then I also liked the harmonies of the Beach Boys and EWF.

TONE: Do you sing all your own backgrounds on your records?

SM: Yeah, that's a big part of the record making process, I love it. The band does them live.

TONE: Tell me about the record deals you've had. You were on Vanguard? What happened?

SM: The thing with the record deals is I end up spending a lot of time talking to people like you on the phone, doing photo shoots and interviews, and all that is unpaid work. *(continued)*

And I'm giving up being able to play and make an income. So, it's really tough for me at the level that I'm at. I've gone back to doing my own label, and I don't have any other obligations that are keeping me away from playing.

TONE: Do you have a publicity support system?

SM: Wherever we are at that time, I set it up in advance, but it's not an ongoing thing.

TONE: Didn't the label support you in doing that?

SM: A lot of times the managers made me into more of a Shana Morrison personality and promoting myself instead of just playing. I need to be playing all the time in order to keep the band and support them. If I'm off doing radio interviews, they're not working and they'll go play with other bands. (laughs) It's better if I just keep it really consistent and working.

TONE: How often do you play?

SM: As much as we can. When we're home, I try to play every weekend.

TONE: Do you book this all yourself, or do you have an agent?

SM: I now have an agent, but it took me several years in the beginning to find one. Before that it was just me, my friends and any way I could find a gig. After about 2 ½ years, I found who I am working with now, and they have about 12 acts. They are based out of Vancouver, Washington. We all play the same types of venues, so it works out well.

TONE: So YOU have to finance all the hotels and airfare when you tour?

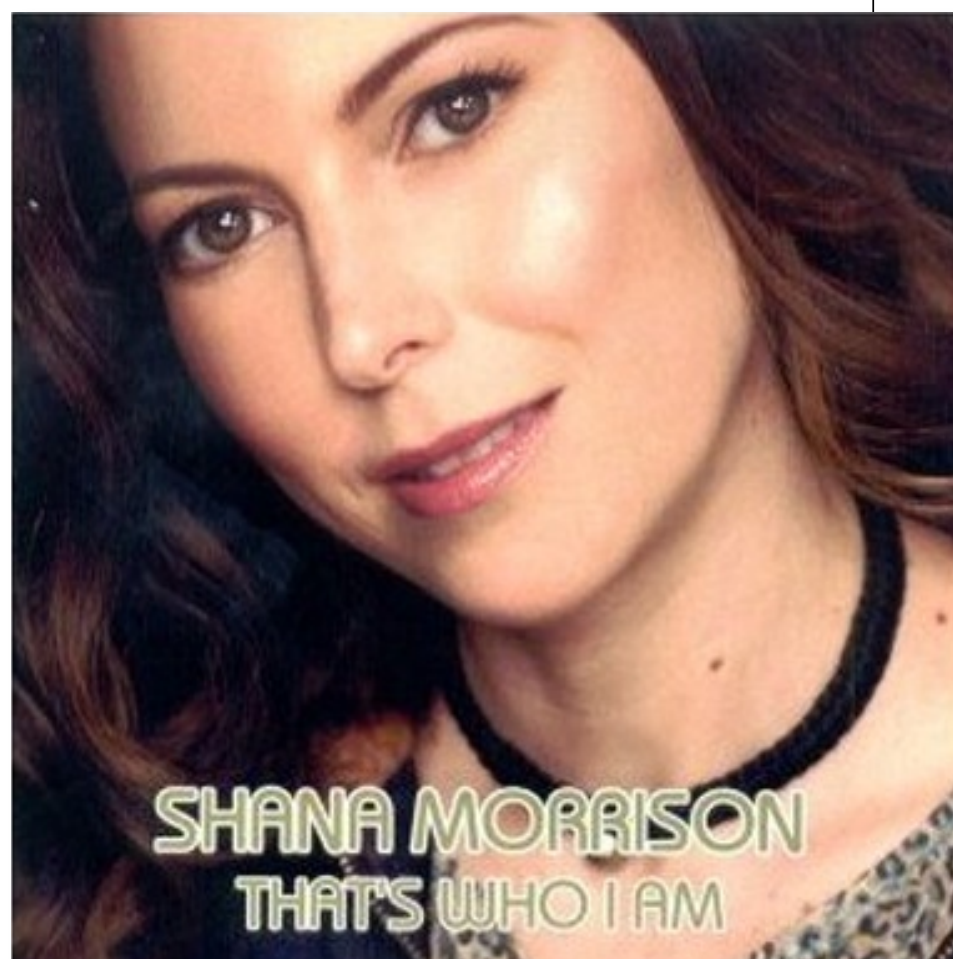
SM: That's all me. Once I get the contract, I contact the travel agent and set it all up. If we are doing a tour, I bring a road manager and they handle day-to-day stuff. But before we go, I do all the set-up as the manager of the band.

TONE: Oh my God that's a lot of work!

SM: Yeah, it's very time consuming. When I'm home, I'm in my office. When I'm away, I'm living out of my suitcase. I've got 5 days in Mill Valley to chill, and it's nice to be hanging out here with you.

TONE: Thanks! Do you have a van?

SM: Yeah, we have a tour manager/driver. (laughs) I'm able to make a living and keep going.



TONE: Do you have distribution?

SM: Vanguard still distributes their record, and the rest are distributed by City Hall, a local distributor, and I'm on I-tunes, Amazon.com...

TONE: How much time do you spend writing?

SM: When I'm traveling, not at all.

TONE: Do you plan to write for each record?

SM: No, I just write when it comes to me and I have the time and space. I don't specifically write for a record. I could use songs from 8 years ago or from yesterday.

TONE: Have you ever gone to Nashville to write there?

SM: Yeah, it's really fun there. One of the people I co-write with in Nashville has co-written on all my CDs, Kim McClean, or Kim Patton.

TONE: I know Kim Patton. Kim Patton-Johnson was what she used to go by. I lived there for 5 years! *(continued)*

Great Sound.Great Price.



Onix from AV 123

Onix Electronics offers a full line of amplifiers and

CD players for 2-channel enthusiasts.

All of our gear is designed and manufactured by us

to bring you equipment that looks and sounds like

higher priced gear! The experts agree.

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

Srajan Ebaen
6moons.com

"The result, great sound!"

Jeff Dorgay
ToneAudio



Purchase from us directly at

www.av123.com

877-543-7500

SM: Yeah, she's gone back to her maiden name. She is one of my favorite writing partners. It's a real fun experience going there 9 to 5. After 5:00, you've got the song done, a little tape demo, very regimented. It's cool.

TONE: What new artists do you currently like now? You're so eclectic. Your sound at times is timeless, others very cutting edge and contemporary.

SM: I love Shelby Lynne...love her new record. Love Joss Stone.

TONE: Yeah, she's amazing. I have no idea where she gets that voice from across the pond at such a young age.

SM: Actually, I try not to listen to the radio. I don't want to accidentally steal something. So, I just try to stay away from everything. (laughs) If I cover a song, I try not to hear the song. I try to avoid it. I really try to make it my own.

TONE: I'm dying to ask you what it was like to be on Howard Stern. Did he give you a hard time?

SM: Howard was pretty good. I have a sense of humor. I understand comedy. I was good natured. He said, 'First I'm going to play your record, then I'm going to convince you not be in the music business; you'll never live up to the legend of your father, whatever.'

TONE: Do you think that's why you got on the show? How did you get on the show in the first place?

SM: Yeah, probably. For the release of this record, we sent it out to all radio stations for the press tour, and this time he said yes. *(continued)*

He rewarded me by listening to the record and saying 'Hey, I really like your music. Where are you playing?' So, I listed upcoming shows and got ten thousand hits on my website that day.

TONE: That's cool! I love that song / *Spy*. It's my favorite. That's the one he played on the show, right?

SM: Yeah, he started to analyze it, 'Let's listen to the first line. What does that mean? Now, let's listen to the second line...' (laughs)

TONE: That's funny!

SM: Yeah, he was very nice to me...no regrets.

TONE: Did he ask you to take your top off or anything?

SM: He asked me to sit on his lap, but I said no. He said, 'I didn't think so.'

TONE: Can you tell me a little bit about your personal life? Do you have one?

SM: I'm in a long distance relationship right now. I've never done this, so it's new for me. I'm not really sure, but it's going pretty well. He lives on the east coast. When we met, he was living here, but he was already moving back. It's only been since the beginning of the year, so we'll see.

TONE: Have you found it hard to do what you do and have long-term relationships?

SM: In the past, yeah, but once I hit that 10 year mark that I'd been working, concentrating everything on my career, not really making time for anything else, I realized it was important to take time off...do laundry, watch TV, see friends. For a long time, I didn't do that at all. Now, all my friends' kids are growing up, I've missed everybody's weddings and birthday parties. I didn't have a life. Now I say, 'Tell me when your wedding is going to be, so I don't work that day.' (laughs) Even long distance, it's easier to have a relationship now because I'll plan to take a week or two off and just hang out and have a good time.

TONE: You've never been married...no kids?

SM: No, none of the above.

TONE: You sound like you've got your business cap on really strong. I really admire that.

SM: Thank you. Sometimes you get real burned out and a little tired, but right now I'm in a very productive mode.

TONE: I wanted to meet you before I heard your music.



I've been meaning to get out and see you play, since I list in you in my *After Dark* column all the time. Now that I love your music, I'm dying to hear you live! And you could come hear me too! (shameless plug)

SM: Yeah, that would be great!

TONE: Do you find that you have a good network of friends here?

SM: Yeah, most of them are in music and they've all made the rounds too, so we share experiences...where do you play, where do you not want to play? I find that it's a really great community to be a part of.

TONE: Who are some of the people?

SM: I've worked with Roy Rogers, Pete Sears, a lot of the old guard, the musicians who have been playing here since the 70s. And then there are the people who are playing the clubs for the past 10 years...Jerry Hannan, Storm and the Balls. Some of the bands have moved away or are no longer together.

TONE: I imagine because of your dad, you've met a lot of amazing people over the years. (continued)



PHONO PREAMPS



BAT VK-P10
\$4500



Graham Slee Gram Amp
\$399



Aesthetix Rhea
\$3995



Bellari Tube Phono Stage
\$249



PS Audio GCPH
\$999

CARTRIDGES



Shelter 501 MKII
\$850



Lyra Titan
\$4500



Miyabi 47
\$3995



Benz LP
\$4700



Clearaudio Concerto
\$1999



Dynavector XV-1S
\$4250



Lyra Skala
\$2499



Dynavector 10x5
\$380



Sumiko Blackbird
\$799

Music Direct Recommended ANALOG COMPONENT list!

Just like *Stereophile*, the staff at Music Direct has compiled a list of some of our favorite analog components. Some are amazing price-to-performance killers as well as some cost-no-object reference products which will leave you breathless. Please call us to discuss your analog rig and how we can get you closer to the music you love.

TURNTABLES



Marantz TT-15
\$1595



VPI Super Scout Master
\$5500



AVID Acutus
\$13,000



Music Hall MMF-7
\$1199



Pro-Ject 1.2
\$329

Analog:
There is No
Substitute!

800-449-8333 » musicdirect.com

SM: When I was growing up, I met many of the musicians my dad worked with. I can't really say I've worked with any of them, but I definitely know all those guys.

TONE: Your bio says you've opened for people like Bonnie Raitt, played on shows with them and stuff.

SM: Yeah, that's the stuff they always want you to say, 'What other big names can we drop in there?' (laughs) We got to open for Joe Cocker once. That was incredible! We got to tour with Keb Mo. That was really fun! I wish I could do more of that.

TONE: Are you doing this next tour with someone else or on your own?

SM: Just us.

TONE: That's awesome. Do you have a following in the UK?

SM: Yeah, we played there a couple of times. We played in Ireland once. We are playing the Galway Arts Festival in Ireland. That's our anchor date and the main reason why we are going over there. The rest will just be clubs and pubs around that. Last time we played the Korg Jazz Festival. Those are the two main events, so it's great to have that one big exposure date.

I'd like to thank Shana Morrison for taking the time to talk me, she's a very cool gal. You can keep track of Shana's tour schedule and upcoming information via her website:

www.shanamorrison.com



ALL OF YOUR MUSIC, ALL OF THE TIME

The Sooloos Music Server

Just so you know that I haven't fallen off my rocker, I still love analog. I own about 4000 LPs and a pretty darn good analog front end to boot. But the more time I spend listening to music, the more digital intrigues me because it's become so much more listenable in the last few years AND because it's terribly convenient.

Like it or not, that's the word, convenience...

sooloos

Hold that thought and let's take it a few steps further. The iPod came along and iTunes let you have a lot of music in a central place, which was a lot of fun for casual listening. Being one of the crazed ones that started importing in lossless from the beginning, I built up a pretty good collection of music on my computer at high resolution. The problem still came linking the computer to the hifi in a meaningful way. This led me to the Squeezebox, which allowed me to have the collection on my network and this great little box in my living room that I could scroll through when I wanted music. It was cute and fairly easy to operate, but had some limitations.

I also tried a few of the other music servers, with acceptable results, but I still found myself wanting something more and still screwing around with the process way too much. Again, convenience!

Just so you know that I'm not a technophobe, I've been using computers, digital cameras and Photoshop since day one and have been an early adopter of darn near everything. (But not an iPhone!) I tell you this so you don't think that I'm not able to understand compression rates, i.d. tags, filing album art and all the other hoo hah that goes along with managing a digital music collection. I've been there and done most of it.

The big problem is that after all of these years, I'm sick of it! I want the promises that Steve Jobs made years ago to be kept. I want these things to be as easy to use as a toaster, so I can just enjoy music. I DON'T want to dink around with any of that stuff, especially because I do this for a living. And I certainly don't want to do it for my friends or family either. I hate being the tech support guy in my spare time, it really makes me testy.

Finally, the promise has been fulfilled with the Sooloos.

No more screwing around. Turn it on, rip some CDs and enjoy your music. No more filing, tagging, or categorizing and then doing it over because you did it wrong the first (or second, or third) time. Once you have all of your music loaded into the Sooloos music server, you can just enjoy it, and for this writer, that's what it's all about. If you are really lazy, the folks at Sooloos will even pre rip your whole collection on your server so you don't have to lift a finger, just push play!

I'm going to take a guess that if you really enjoy music and are like me, you probably have at least a few thousand CDs, maybe even ten thousand CDs. (maybe even more) **But even though you have all that music, you listen to the same two or three hundred CDs most of the time. Why? Convenience.** Even if you have all of your CDs in alphabetical order or some other kind of mental relational database in your head, some days you just don't want to stretch or try and remember what's on that Blondie album you haven't heard in a few years. *(continued)*

No more screwing around. Turn it on, rip some CDs and enjoy your music.





KEEPING it REAL with Tetra Speakers

Ron Carter

***“Adrian, come hear the band.
They’re playing at my house!”***

Herbie Hancock

***“Shut up Adrian and play
the Speakers!”***

Benny Golson

“They’re fantastic, Adrian!”

Dave Holland

***“Tetra speakers have revitalized
my entire record collection...
Thanks Adrian!”***

Paul Bolin

***“A Lot of Fun!”
(Stereophile, August 2005)***

Read more at: www.tetraspeakers.com

Let's face it, we are all visual people. When you see those CDs all lined up on the shelves, or the big list of song titles on the iTunes screen, it doesn't really register, because you need the visual. The latest versions of iTunes with the flipping album covers is a step in the right direction and helpful, but not enough. Should you have a really big music collection, you also know that iTunes becomes pretty cumbersome to use once you get about 1000 CDs loaded and almost unusable if your collection is in the thousands.

Music guys are behind this thing, that's why it rules.

'We wanted a music server that would hold our personal collections!' That's the answer you get out of the guys at Sooloos. Make no mistake they are hard core music lovers (with backgrounds as recording engineers, and programming people) that have pooled their talents to make what I feel is the most significant consumer electronic device since the Macintosh computer made the scene.

The last time I saw Laurie Anderson, she said that we tend to buy new technology but end up just throwing it in a drawer with all those other gadgets that we don't use because we are too overwhelmed or just too lazy to figure out. Rob Darling, one of the three principles of Sooloos put it this way: 'Whenever I'm at a party and someone has a Squeezebox or an iPod, no one interacts with it. But if I go to someone's house with a Sooloos, everyone is hanging out, waiting to pick the next song!' (continued)



At first you might think that of course, one of the guys that designed this thing would say that, but now that I've had a Sooloos for a while, I couldn't agree with him more.

Listening to music is one of my favorite pastimes in the whole world and whenever I can, I always enjoy sharing it with others. But those of you that have a decent system know that it often discourages casual listening. When your friends come over and you start digging through the stacks of music (no matter how well you have them categorized) they start to glaze over and talk about buying Jet Skis.

Having a Sooloos in my living room has changed all of that. The minute we installed this baby, everyone went crazy! Best of all, my television has been pretty dark and the DVR has only been about 40% full instead of the 98% full that it used to be. Anything that keeps TV time to a minimum is a good thing in my house, especially with a teenager!

Ok, Let's Address The Techie Stuff, Shall We?

The Sooloos requires three components: The Store, The Control and The Source.

The Store is where the hard drives are stored to hold your music. You can get them configured in any size that you need, depending on how expansive your music collection is. They come in pairs because the system is always backing up your library. The Store uses convection cooling, so it is very quiet and should not offend the fussiest audiophiles in the crowd. If you really need silence, just run an Ethernet cable and put your stores somewhere else!

The Source has the DAC and analog output circuitry and depending on which one you purchase (we have a Source:five) will determine how many separate analog zones you can control from The Control. The Source is completely silent. *(continued)*

Having a Sooloos in my living room has changed everything. The minute we installed this baby, everyone went crazy!




 audioArtcable

CONNECTING YOU WITH THE MUSIC



WITH THE MUSIC



"Editor's Choice Award, 2006"
STEREOTIMES.COM

"Writer's Choice Award, 2006"
POSITIVE FEEDBACK ONLINE

"Exceptional Value Award, 2006"
TONE AUDIO

SAN DIEGO, CA
AUDIOARTCABLE.COM
619-255-6451



At the rear the Source:five has four Ethernet jacks to connect the other Sooloos components and five sets of analog RCA outputs for the other 'zones.' There is also a digital output for zone one, so you have the option of running one zone through an external DAC if you have one. I use mine with Wadia's fantastic 521 and am very happy with the results. The Control is the 17" touchscreen panel that looks very similar to an Apple flat screen computer monitor, finished in silver with a slot in the base for you to import your discs. Thanks to this big panel, you don't have to worry about losing a remote control!

Initial Setup is Extremely Easy

Once you unpack and decide where you will place the Source and Store units, Connect the Source to a router and the internet, then connect the Stores to the Source. Then you run some Ethernet cable to where you would like the Control to be. I suggest a nice central location, because no matter where you put the Control, it will get a ton of attention! That's all there is to the setup.

While there are other music servers that offer a bit more flexibility by being wireless, they are not without their pitfalls. The Squeezebox and Transporter glitch constantly, especially if my network has a lot of traffic. While only mildly annoying, it still takes away from the convenience that this kind of device is supposed to provide in the first place. Darling concurs: 'We just couldn't get the reliability we wanted with a wireless system, especially since we are using FLAC files. And we felt that with a lot of people putting the Sooloos into a multizone system in a big home would probably have all of their electronics in a central location anyway.' (continued)

Ultimate Flexibility

When you insert a CD in the slot of the Control you will notice that it takes a few minutes longer to rip than on your standard PC, about six minutes compared to about three or four on my laptop. It takes a while because it has to do some specialized things.

The Sooloos stores everything in FLAC format, so when it comes back out to analog, it is a lossless format, ensuring absolute fidelity. For those of you not familiar with FLAC, you can read more here: <http://flac.sourceforge.net/>. And as they are ripping, they do many things - hidden sector synchronization (jitter correction), detection of read errors, and heavy error correction at multiple speeds - to compensate for the weaknesses of redbook cd players.

Now, they aren't the only ones to use FLAC or take advantage of what a computer can do better than a CD player, but they are the only ones who rip the album as one large file, so you get truly gapless playback. Gone are the little ticks between tracks in Dark Side of the Moon or at the super quiet pianissimo between movements. They also analyze the average volume of the track so that during a party you can turn on 'Radio Mode' and all the songs will play at the same volume. They also look for the actual start of audio so songs don't start with silence during a party. You can tell these guys know music, because they've thought of everything! They've even made it possible for you to easily go in and change the album art on your collection (via the Control PC function) so those of you with import or collector versions can have the right album art.

Here's another of the areas that the Sooloos stands head and shoulders above the rest of the music server world - that extra time it takes to rip a CD is because it is also creating a backup FLAC stream AND a separate MP3 stream that you can download to your iPod! (ever try keeping a whole collection of both full-quality files and mp3s? Insane!) Once you are done ripping a CD, it's already backed up and ready to go on your iPod as well. You will have to log in



to the Sooloos with your computer and transfer the tunes you want through iTunes, but that is very easy. Best of all, you can rip your CDs while you are listening, not interrupting the music flow! Again - convenience!!

A Touch of Greatness

What really defines the Sooloos is its ease of use via that giant touchscreen. I currently have about 3000 CDs loaded on mine and it's a blast! It takes about a minute and a half to fully boot and the screen comes up at a random spot in your library, but if you are like me and just leave it on at all times (so you can always play music!!), this is completely a non issue.

Navigation is across the top in alphabetical order, with tabs similar to what you might see at your favorite record store. Each page on the screen displays 18 album cover thumbnails that are a very legible 2" squares, with each album's title and artist description right beneath it. *(continued)*

What really defines the Sooloos is its ease of use via that giant touchscreen.

The bottom of the screen features a pair of arrows to take you forward and backwards in the collection. When you flip from page to page, the response time is instant, and if you hold the navigation button down, it will whip through the pages. If you can read as fast as Mr. Data, you can probably scroll through my 3000 CDs in about 15 seconds!

Also along the bottom there is a window that lets you know what album and track are playing, as well as how much time is remaining on the current song and how much time is left in the song queue. The middle has the standard play/pause, forward and reverse buttons. The next window lets you know which zone you are accessing and there are a couple of tool icons in the lower right corner.

The one that looks like a magnifying glass, brings up a touch screen that lets you search the entire database by album, song or artist. If you just have a fragment, it will work just like doing an advanced search on your computer. There is also another great button here that looks like the aperture of a camera lens and it is appropriately called the Focus button.

The Ultimate Music Lover's Treat

This is where the Sooloos really gets powerful. While you can make playlists on the fly, Focus allows you to categorize your music by Genre, Credits, Labels AND Credits. Want to find all the music in your collection produced by Mutt Lange? No problem. Want to find all the music in your collection that Prairie Prince played drums on? Easy. You can add them to a focused collection and go for it. Try that with your Squeezebox!

Lets take it a step further: we can even sort by mood! To try this, I just chose 'trippy' from the menu and it reshuffles the music available on the screen and sorted down from 3000 CDs to 210. It did a pretty good job of choosing too: Flaming Lips – good, Greatful Dead – definitely trippy! Pink Floyd – pretty trippy indeed. To go back to the whole collection, just touch the Focus button again and hit refocus. That will put your whole collection back at your disposal.

If it just ended here, the Sooloos would be the ultimate server, but there's more. This thing is KILLER fast. Want to go from listening to Blondie to YES? Instant. Our Club Mix correspondent Scott Tetzlaff oversees data management and server building for one of the top advertising agencies on Earth and when he saw how lightning fast the Sooloos was he said, 'Dude, that thing is fast! Those guys know what they are doing!!' And it works this fast with all five zones going at once!

When you queue up some tunes to play, you can pick individual songs, or whole albums. Once you start listening, you can add more songs to the queue from the back end with the Add to Queue button, put a song in rotation next with the Play Next button or if you are like my good friend Skeptical Roy (who we sometimes tease and call ADD boy) hit the Play Now button. When the selection has played it goes right back to your playlist, which is quite excellent when you need to hear something RIGHT NOW. *(continued)*

This thing is KILLER fast. Want to go from listening to Blondie to YES? Instant.



But wait, there's more! Instead of using the Gracenote music database that iTunes does, the Sooloos uses the AMG (All Music Guide) database for its information. Instead of just giving you album art and song titles, you get the release date, full album credits and even a review at your fingertips! Like I said, if you are a true music lover, this is the grail indeed.

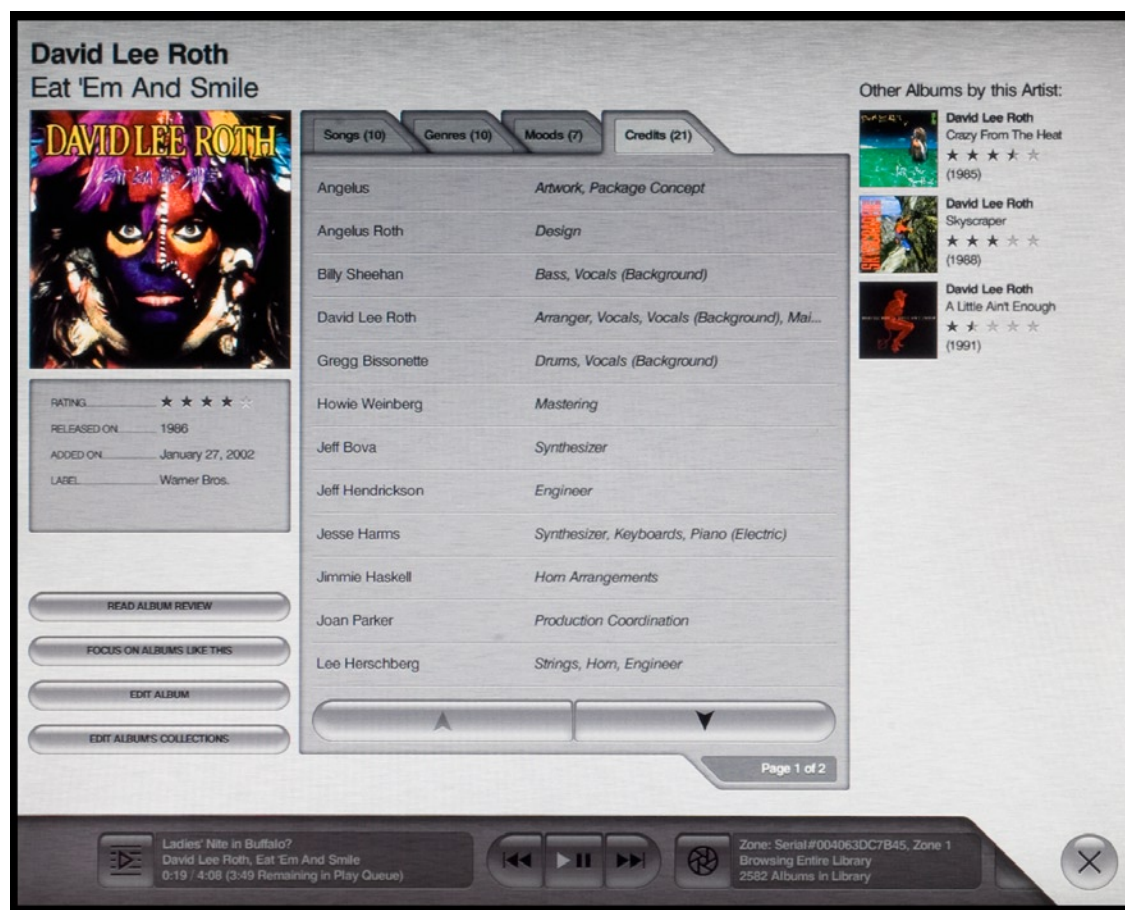
Want to really blow your mind? Put the Sooloos in 'Swim' mode and it will just do the random shuffle thing, still allowing you to pick your favorite songs at random and then go back to swimming! I can't wait until I have 10 thousand CDs loaded, I may never take it out of swim mode!

We Keep Coming Back To Convenience

The Sooloos just makes it so easy to enjoy a large music collection, I can't imagine not having one of these anymore, and I am totally addicted! The wife acceptance factor on this piece of gear is fantastic and I'm told by a few of the Sooloos dealers I've talked to that it's often the wife that wants one even more than the man of the family. Ok, I'll tell you the bad news, a basic Sooloos system will set you back about \$12k, but considering who this product is aimed at, and the convenience offered, I feel it is reasonably priced.

I'm sure the computer geeks out there could kluge something together for a few thousand bucks, but I guarantee that it would not have the look and feel of the Sooloos and it certainly wouldn't have the elegant operating system that this offers. Know anyone who's successfully outdone the Macintosh OS yet?

You are paying for elegance, convenience and speed here folks. Yes I know that the new 26 thousand dollar Hyundai sedan has one inch more legroom than the 90 thousand dollar BMW 760i, but I know what I'd rather pull up to the Grammys in. You get sneezy designer appeal and incredible server performance with the Sooloos.



The Sooloos music server can easily be used in a large home with multiple music zones as it comes from the factory, or it can be used as an audiophile component in the best systems with an external DAC. Straight out of the box, the sound quality is on par with what you'd expect from a CD player in the \$2000 range, but with a good DAC is as good as you would expect with a very high end digital player. I've been using mine with the new Wadia 521 DAC and the sound is comparable to what I get from my Wadia 581i player. You will need a good external DAC if you want the best performance from the Sooloos.

To Buy or Not to Buy a Sooloos

For some of our readers, a five-figure music server is not the right choice and is probably out of reach. There are tons of other products out there, but I haven't seen anything that comes close to being this intuitive, elegant and easy to use.

The Sooloos just makes it so easy to enjoy a large music collection, I can't imagine not having one of these anymore, and I am totally addicted!

However, considering there are people paying more than this for a one-meter pair of interconnects, it's not ridiculous by any stretch of the imagination.

I've had quite a few of my family members and friends over to interact with the Sooloos now and it's unanimous, they all LOVE it. As a music lover, it is so much fun to have your friends over and let them just go at it to pick out their favorite songs. On one level I wish this darn thing was a touch more affordable, because in my 30 years of being a high-end audio enthusiast, I've never seen anything that gets people to connect with music like the Sooloos music server.

And if that's your objective, the Sooloos is the ONLY choice. ●

MANUFACTURER**Sooloos LLC**

110 Greene Street, Suite 608

New York, NY 10012

866-606-0333

www.sooloos.com

info@sooloos.com

Ruby the sooloos mascot



Fish and Chips With a Side Of Grits?

— Tom Caselli



When Steve Martin uttered the line ‘I was born a poor black child’ in *The Jerk* it was probably a thought that echoed through the mind of many a budding guitarist in the UK during the early sixties. Great Britain experienced its introduction to blues via records brought to the country by many of the GI’s stationed there during the fifties. While American Jazz, specifically Dixieland held a die-hard following in England with the previous generation, it was natural for the youth to look for something different. The new generation latched on to Muddy’s electric Chicago blues and the foot stomping boogie of John Lee Hooker recycling it to make it their own.

Like many of the late baby boomers, my familiarity with British Blues was through Cream. After being exposed to Clapton, I went in search of other recordings on which he played. Of course there were the Yardbirds, but they were known only for their hits in the U.S. and were far too pop oriented in the late sixties to be considered cool. So it was up to John Mayall’s second album **John Mayall and the Bluesbreakers** featuring Eric Clapton to provide the impetus for sparking America’s interest in the British blues movement.

Although Clapton, Beck and Page became household names, a slew of other equally gifted players never achieved the mass adulation garnered by the big three. Perhaps the brightest of all was Peter Green who initially took over the guitar chair vacated by Clapton in Mayall’s Bluesbreakers and then went on to steal Mayall’s entire band to form Fleetwood Mac. An equally talented player who has slipped through the net completely was Tony (TS) McPhee of the Groundhogs. Fortunately, guitarists Peter Green and Free’s Paul Kossoff from the first onslaught eventually got their due from the next generation of axe slingers. Here are a couple of my favorites from this period: *(continued)*



John Mayall's Bluesbreakers – *A Hard Road*

While Mayall's second album gets all the attention because of Eric Clapton, it's his follow-up that is my personal favorite. During Clapton's tenure with Mayall he left for several months and Peter Green was brought in as his temporary replacement. Peter had previously been making a name in the London clubs gigging with Peter Bardens. Upon Clapton's final departure Mayall was left to find a suitable replacement for the third time in as many albums, and it was to Peter Green he turned. Like Clapton at the time Peter's trademark tone was channeled through a 1959 Gibson Les Paul aided with his ample use of vibrato.

For this comparison I had three copies of the album on hand an original Stereo 1W UK Decca stamper, a first issue US London Red label Mono and a 1970s Japanese London label King pressing. Like most 1960 rock albums, no one will ever mistake this for an audiophile recording, so if you are looking for demo quality, you came to the wrong place. What you DO get is some of the greatest British Blues

playing ever committed to vinyl. This is a dual mono recording, in that it features the hard left and right with mostly only the vocals occupying the center on stereo pressings. No matter which copy was played it was obvious that either the engineer was having an intimate relationship with an echo unit or the studio was Carlsbad Caverns.

As always, the Japanese issue is immaculately pressed and packaged, featuring dead quiet surfaces comparable to the best pressings coming out of RTI today. Like most Japanese vinyl it features a tipped up top end. Because the low end is also somewhat lacking, this pressing is a somewhat aggressive listening experience.

Right from the opening track *A Hard Road* you can hear synergy with this band as well as a master tape that is several generations removed. There is noticeable distortion on the cymbals with drums sounding like Aynsley Dunbar was banging on cardboard boxes. Mayall's vocals and Harp are treated with liberal amounts of echo. On the track *It's Over* the harp is so recessed that it's almost inaudible and the vocals lack all sense of a body.

Finding clean quiet UK copies of mid-sixties albums are nearly impossible and my copy is no exception, but that is what makes the chase interesting!

Up next is *You Don't Love Me* and it's obvious from the start that their version formed the blueprint for the Allman Brothers adaptation of the song. Thankfully this sounds significantly better than the preceding tracks. Peter Green takes the lead vocal on this song and although still thin sounding, the overall song features a much more cohesive sound with better center fill. Peter Green excelled on instrumentals and *The Stumble* is no exception; this is the album's tour-de-force. Since it's mostly a showplace for Greens playing the echo is reined in, which allows his wonderful tone to break through.

Finding clean quiet UK copies of mid-sixties albums are nearly impossible and my copy is no exception, but that is what makes the chase interesting! While the Japanese copy offers the best in low noise, it's the British pressing that excels in tonality and dynamics. The UK provides the low end weight with a nice punchy bass that gives a much more balanced presentation to the music. Although still sporting the dual mono approach, the soundstage is not spread as nearly wide as the Japanese copy. *(continued)*

Both vocal and guitar benefit from this pressing. Finally singers are no longer severed heads but have gained a body. On the UK pressing the guitar tone becomes much smoother and takes on the complexities that Les Pauls are known for. *On Another Kind of Love*, while the vocals are cavernous in size, the snare drum picks up the details missing from the Japanese copy. Throughout the song Green's lays low on his signature vibrato and more closely emulates Clapton's playing from the previous Mayall album.

Though I've owned numerous U.S. Stereo copies, I've never been fond of any of them. They were all lackluster in sound and dynamics and I would probably choose the original West German CD over the U.S. LP. (This is another discussion for a future column, perhaps). Lacking a UK Mono pressing, my only remaining alternative was the original Bell Sound pressing issued by London in the U.S. After listening to the mono mix of this album you can tell that it was given priority to the stereo, featuring a uniform mixture of all instruments presented. *(continued)*

Compact Disc Concept CDC

So authentically Nagra



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

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

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

NAGRA

Swiss made
www.nagraaudio.com

Mayall's piano previously buried on *A Hard Road* is given an up front presentation; although far from eliminated; echo is slightly downplayed in this mix. Peter Green's double tracked vocals on *You Don't Love Me* are easily discernable, although the guitar tone suffers a bit. I'll venture that some of the guitar characteristics are lost as a result of a safety copy tape used to cut it. Though I have been less than overwhelmed by any Bell Sound mastering, I'll bet that if you can uncover a clean UK mono original this might be the showstopper. Seek out a Mono U.S. or UK copy.

Fleetwood Mac – *Fleetwood Mac*

My sixteen year old son Justin came in while I was listening to this album and asked what I was listening to, when I replied Fleetwood Mac he had a surprised look on his face. Though he is musically wise beyond his years, I quickly added, 'This is not your Mother's Fleetwood Mac'.

Like most people the name Fleetwood Mac conjures up the witchy Stevie Nicks and a string of AOR hits from the seventies. Long before they sold their souls to the California coast, Fleetwood Mac was one of the originators on the UK blues scene. Initially a four-piece band comprised of Bluesbreaker alumni Peter Green, Mick Fleetwood and John McVie. A second guitarist, Jeremy Spencer a twenty year old Elmore James devotee, was brought in to compliment Peter Green's playing. They were quickly signed to Mike Vernon's blues specialty label Blue Horizon in the UK. The quartet initially recorded two albums for the UK market before expanding, with the addition of Danny Kirwin, to form a triple guitar front line.

I have numerous copies of their initial effort on hand but chose the following three for this shoot-out. The original UK mono, a promo only US mono copy and the 2000 Simply Vinyl reissue. My original UK mono copy has seen better days but thanks to the thick vinyl still offers up good but somewhat noisy sound. The album contains fourteen tracks mostly penned by either Peter Green or Jeremy Spencer with a sprinkling of cuts by the masters Robert Johnson, Elmore James and Howlin Wolf thrown in for good measure.

Long before they sold their souls to the California coast, Fleetwood Mac was one of the originators on the UK blues scene.



Forget any semblance of low end on this album it's just not there in any shape or form. Drums are boxes and cymbals are all but non-existent. Rather than break up the review into separate sections for the UK and U.S. versions, they are so similar sounding that I will address them together. US copies carry the wording 'Prepared for release in the U.S.A. by Manny Kellum'. Now I'm not sure what Manny did other than thread the tape, because both pressings feature the identical tracks and order with nearly identical sound.

The mono version has the guitars at the front of the mix as they should be. Peter Green's playing has nice bite and the interplay especially on the classic *Shake Your Moneymaker* is prestigious. I'm sure more than Peter Green's playing it was Jeremy Spencer's slide that caught the ear of British audiences. In 1968 bottleneck slide was a novelty in rock music and Spencer was most certainly one of the earliest purveyors. *(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.

The cut *Long Grey Mare* offers up some of good harp playing from Peter to compliment his guitar.

Simply Vinyl has certainly got its share of bashing in the audiophile community, most justly deserved. While their LPs sport absolutely top-notch pressing and vinyl quality, some of the best in the business, they often use random sources. Many of the tapes used are nothing more than the digital versions prepared for the CD issue.

Fortunately that is not the case for this release. This is a solid home run hit of which Babe Ruth would have been proud.

Sporting the dual mono stereo of almost every other release of this period with drums and bass panned right, the stereo version allows the interplay between Green and Spencer's guitars to shine through. While the bass is still limited in extension the Simply Vinyl reissue provides a smooth top end. *Long Greg Mare* now has bass that is both clear and well focused. When you cue up *Merry Go Round*, there is plenty of air around the instruments and vocals. I highly recommend that before you spend the time and effort hunting down an original you quickly grab the reissue while it's available. While you are breaking open the wallet, make sure you get the Pure Pleasure reissue of Fleetwood Mac's **Blues Jam at Chess**, a two LP set with Fleetwood Mac playing along side their Chicago heroes.

(continued)

MAXTOR ONETOUCH™ III MINI EDITION

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



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

Maxtor®
GOOD THINKING.™



The Groundhogs – *Blues Obituary*

Several years ago on a menu in a local German restaurant, for the special of the day they had Schweinhaxen. Printed next to it was 'for those who know'. Schweinhaxen is a slow roasted pork shank where all the fat is cooked out, once you have it you'll long remember it. Well aside from the obvious reference to pork, The Groundhogs are for those who know. They are one of the lost UK bands that never achieved a U.S. following.

Led by guitarist Tony McPhee they started life as a backing band for visiting U.S. bluesmen. Most closely associated with John Lee Hooker, with whom they recorded an album, it was 1968 before they broke out and issued their first album **Scratching the Surface**. The Groundhogs started as a quintet, with Steve Rye on harmonica, he was quickly dropped before the start of their second album, **Blues Obituary**. After album number two their sound evolved to a harder more progressive style.

It was with their fourth album **Thank Christ for the Bomb** which they had their greatest success in Europe. The band, with some minor changes, continued until 1976 at which time they broke up. Tony McPhee reformed the band ten years later and they lasted another twenty years before McPhee left to pursue an acoustic career.

Unlike the two albums preceding this review, for **Blues Obituary** I only have the original U.S. Imperial label copy. The opening track *B.D.D.* has a swampy blues sound reminiscent of Creedence Clearwater Revival. During this phase McPhee was using a Fender Stratocaster instead of the Gibson SG that he chose during their next phase and the classic Fender sound is instantly identifiable on the recording. The overall quality is flat sounding with very little detail coming through.

With the following cut *Daze of the Weak*, a classic 12 bar blues number, the sound opens up a bit with more intricacies showing through. One of the albums highlights is *Natchez Burning* a tune in which McPhee shows his understanding of delta blues. The closing number *Light of the Day* is an instrumental similar in style to Fleetwood Mac's *Albatross* with some fine bottleneck slide work.

The Groundhogs are for those who know. They are one of the lost UK bands that never achieved a U.S. following.

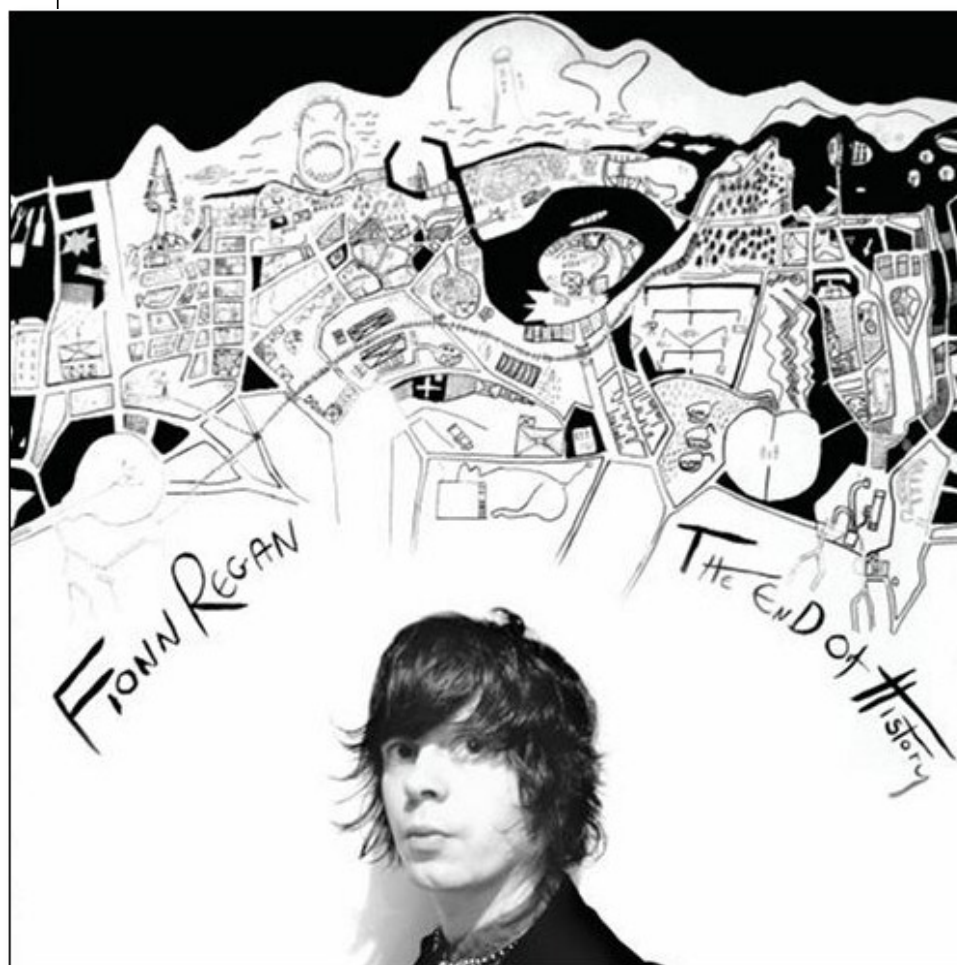
At least on my U.S. copy bass is somewhat limited so don't expect the bombastic sound that can be found on other rock albums from the era. If you are a fan of guitar based progressive rock ala early Rush, I would recommend that you explore some of the later Groundhog albums especially **Who Will Save the World? The Mighty Groundhogs**.

So there you go blues lovers, three classic records to add to your collection if you haven't already. As always, happy hunting! ●

New Music by (mostly) New Guys

— Christina Kratzman

I love my stereo, being able to put some music on and turn it up filling the room with sound. But let's face it, every now and then a stereo isn't that practical: on an airplane traveling, in a library. And that is where the computer comes in handy. Like most people, I rely on iTunes to sort, classify, and do whatever else it does to my music. While most of the time iTunes is fine, it serves its purpose, plays some music, it does have one place where it really falters (and drives me crazy): its ability in genre classification. Maybe music isn't what it used to be, or maybe I just have odd music, but more times than not I put a CD into iTunes and its genre isn't exactly what I expected it to be, or what the CD necessarily sounds like. As I was listening to some CDs that have come out in the past few weeks, I noticed this reoccurring trend – nothing really fits too well in one place. But even misplaced music can be good and here is what I've just recently experienced...

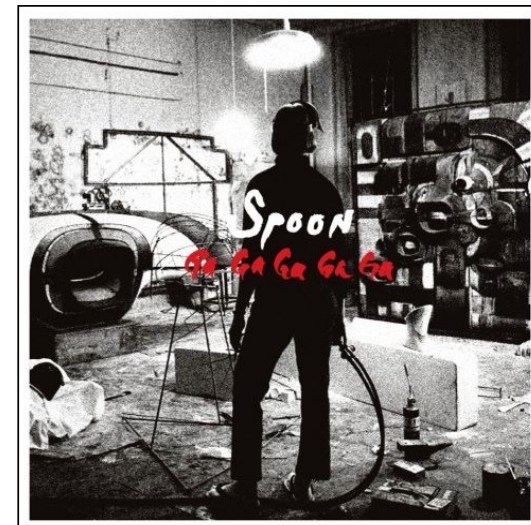


The End of History – Fionn Regan

I put Regan's album into my computer to my surprise (but not really) iTunes grouped it under the 'folk' genre. Yet this album too doesn't really fall under its given genre. So hold onto your judgments for a sec – this isn't your typical 'folk' album; I promise it really is pretty cool.

Regan takes a little bit of folk, especially in its story-like lyrics, a little rock, and a little of his own style and kind of smooshes it together with a side of strings and banjo to create some rich, full sounding tracks that are quite refreshing and really satisfying to listen to. This isn't some hokey folk music, but there is a little hint of it that is carried through between each track along with the acoustic guitar to create a cohesive album with a unique sound.

However, while there are all these little quirks to Regan's music, they all made the album enjoyable to listen to: the songs sounded complete and there was a mutual complement between the natural sounding timbre of Regan's voice and the music he was singing to – it all fits!



Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga – Spoon

I found some toe-tapping goodness in Spoon's album **Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga**. While most music that is considered alternative rock is usually just electric guitar and bass as well as percussion, Spoon deviate from the rest of their genre creating an album that's really pretty damn good. One of my favorite parts of the album was having a brass section or piano in nearly every song. With the fusion of flamenco, a twist of the early 70s and smidge of electronic, it combines with bass (which you can actually hear!) and drums making this album an awesome listen.

The combination of multiple styles and instruments give the album and band a relatively individual sound along with producing some catchy tunes (which I found myself happily singing long after listening to the album.) But I was also impressed at how complete each track sounded. There was a lot going on in each song, but the balance between the instruments and vocals helped each part complement the next without one overpowering the rest. *The Underdog*, one of my favorite tracks, combines trumpet, bass, drums, piano, sax, and trombone to build a fabulous jazzy rock that made me want to get up and dance.



HIDDEN MESSAGES

WHEN YOU CAN'T PLAY



CDs BACKWARDS?

1. TODDTHEVINYLJUNKIE.COM

Toll-free 866-444-3910

Turntables, Cartridges and
Complete Systems



The Else – *They Might Be Giants*

There is something very wholesome sounding about the They Might Be Giant's album **The Else**. Though it's very major chord sounding and just kind of happy sounding, their quirky lyrics (including my personal favorite *The Mesopotamians* – a song about the Mesopotamians that are both a band and an ancient civilization) really play a big part in the personality and style of their music: it makes it just that much more fun. I listened to it and smiled – it's the way off-the-beat-path rock should be!

While the usual suspects of instrumentation make an appearance (guitars, drums, percussion, bass etc.) the guest appearance of sax, trumpet, and trombone add a little something extra, along with the occasional flair of jazz, to their music - which most definitely isn't the usual. But while it started off strong and ends equally as wonderful, there is a little boring slump in the middle with some songs that don't have the same energy as the rest of the album – so just skip over those tracks and you'll have an awesome album to sing out loud with.

Plus, the CD came with a nifty bonus CD. With some lyrics and song topics that are a little more 'innovative' than the first CD, like *Why Did You Grow a Beard?*, they're as equally quirky, okay maybe a little bit more peculiar, than those on the first CD, but definitely worth the listen (and a recommended sense of humor.)



We Are The Night – *The Chemical Brothers*

After the first listen through of The Chemical Brother's album **We Are the Night** I wasn't that impressed – there seemed to be no variation in the songs, but rather the same mood and tone carried through each one. However, after a few more listens, the subtle differences in each song started to stand out more as well as the individual personality to each song. While definitely an electronic album, each song has its own style with a little 80s pop, dance rock, some attempt at something futuristic all mixed in here and there to create some surprisingly peaceful, and some unusual songs that work together along side of the ones that make you want to dance.

Even with a sparse amount of lyrics on the album, the songs still sound well constructed and strong with the many layers of different sounds building and playing off each other. While each song carries the common thread of the electronic style, the order of tracks also helps each one play off the other separating songs with similar styles. Each one and its little traits stand out preventing the album from sinking into monotony.

The track *The Salmon Dance* alone is worthy of being mentioned. This rather curious, offbeat song combines some neat electronic sounds and percussion, along with some slightly odd ones, and a little salmon trivia to teach you the brand new *Salmon Dance*. While I'm not exactly tempted to get up and 'put [my] hands to the side...and shake [my] body like a salmon floating up stream,' it's a pretty funny song.

GERMAN PHYSIKS

HIGH END TECHNOLOGY

There is Only ONE

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

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

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

GERMAN PHYSIKS

Signals
SUPER-FI
DISTRIBUTORS OF FINE AUDIO INSTRUMENTS

828 RALPH MCGILL BLVD
STUDIO W3
ATLANTA, GA 30306
678.528.8077

WWW.SIGNALS-SUPERFI.COM



MUSIC



Our Love to Admire – Interpol

Although it wasn't a bad album, I wasn't overly enthused by Interpol's **Our Love to Admire**. I normally like alternative music, which the album is considered, but while some of the songs were okay, the album came across with a generic flavor to it: it wasn't anything that I haven't heard before and nothing I can't find a sound or band similar to.

It might just not be my cup of tea, but I was relatively disappointed by the time I finished the album: it just left me thinking 'bleh.' Most of the songs just drifted into the next without much differentiation between the song before it or after it. There definitely is that ability within the members of the band to write and play well, but it seems that they just got stuck doing the same thing song after song after song.

Perhaps the next Interpol album will hold more promise...

(Considering this CD is only about ten days old and is already about 50 used ones up on Amazon for eight bucks, I have to agree with her. **-ed.**)

New Music by (mostly) Old Guys

— Jeff Dorgay

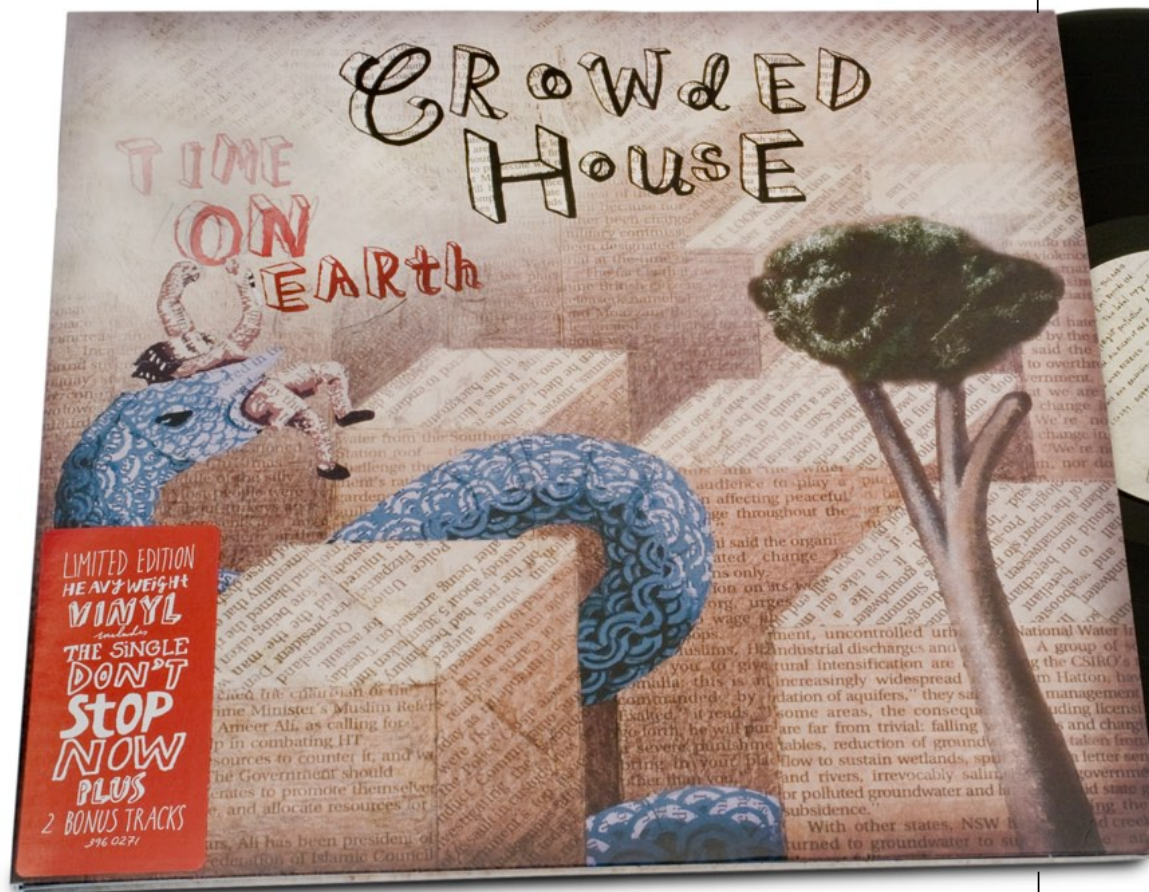
Time on Earth – Crowded House

Not sleeping much has its advantages. While you were all sleeping about three weeks ago, the new Crowded House record was released. That's right, I said record. Yes the CD was released on July 10, but it was released in the UK on vinyl as a two record set! So, I zipped over to Amazon UK and scooped up a copy on vinyl. Five days later it was on my doorstep! That's faster than I get deliveries from some domestic record shops!! If you are a CH fan, get one before they are gone and watch for our interview next issue...

This version of Crowded House features original members Neil Finn and Nick Seymour, so it still has plenty of that signature sound that we all love. The sonics of the LP are superb and to be honest the CD is quite good too, so either way this one is a keeper.

On many levels this record is like catching up with an old friend that you haven't seen for ten years and picking up where you left off without a glitch, other than that you are both older.

Don't Stop Now, is the single that's getting airplay and has a very cool video to support the song that is very reminiscent of the *Don't Dream It's Over* video from their first album. The rest of the record has a distinctly Crowded House feel, yet somewhat updated, so this one is a fun spin and a must have if you are a big fan. Great stuff indeed.





Zeitgeist – Special Edition – *Smashing Pumpkins*

I have to admit I hate this band and I have always thought that lead singer Billy Corgan was a dick. That being said, the new Smashing Pumpkins disc is fantastic. So I don't want to hear any of you telling me I'm closed minded ever again.

Granted, this work is a little bit self indulgent, dark and moping around like the end of the world but from the second you put it on, it grabs you – instantly. The buzzing, distorted guitars and

energy that seems to come from the world's biggest can of Red Bull really rocks! If you weren't familiar with these guys, you might mistake it for Nine Inch Nails, or something similar.

If you are as big of a softie for packaging and collectibles as I am, spend the extra 10-12 bucks and get the booklet. It's quite the work of art; I'd buy it just for that, even if I hated the disc! However, if you need a fresh dose of heavy rock for the summer, this is it! ●

RIENZI

THE ESSENCE OF EXCELLENCE

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

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

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



Blues You Can Use

— Irv Gross



Blues Royalty

When most people think of the blues, they think of the highly energized electric style that characterizes the Chicago style. When it comes to Chicago blues, there is one queen, Koko Taylor. At 79 years young, Koko has just released her first new album in seven years called **Old School**, and it kicks butt. This is not a sit and listen to the disc with your head in a vise grip audiophile album. The twelve tracks make for a disc so full of energy that it moves the body as well as the soul. It is a disc that almost begs to be cranked up as if you were listening to the queen perform on stage. In addition to singing and leading the band, the indomitable Ms. Taylor wrote almost half of the songs on the album.

EXCEPTIONAL AUDIO COMPONENTS



EMOTIVE AUDIO

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

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

— Steve Hoffman, TONEAudio

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

www.emotiveaudio.com



Musically, the album is filled with steady driving rhythms. Every song seems to have a break after about a minute or two when the band takes over and jams usually with a solo or two before Koko joins back in for the finale. Unfortunately, nearly every song seems to follow the same formula. The more up-tempo pieces seem to work better than the slower ballad-type numbers. On Koko's own *Gonna Buy Me A Mule* and the Willie Dixon penned *Don't Go No Further*, Mark Kazanoff joins the bass, piano, and drums to help the band get down even more. Bob Margolin's solos on *Black Rat* and *Hard Pill to Swallow* are the instrumental highlights of the album.

Thematically, the songs cover the traditional blues themes of hard economic times, loves won and lost, and retribution. Sonically, the music comes from between the speakers with Koko's voice always front and center. The instrumental solos are clearly captured although the sound does become a little bit compressed at times, but the joy of this style of blues is its ability to portray raw emotion and energy. Blues conveys the ragged side of life, and this album showcases one of its leading practitioners. **The energy of the band, and the power of the voice raise the spirit. As they say in England, "God save the Queen."**

From Los Angeles, by way of England, comes another septuagenarian legend, still playing as if in his prime, the godfather and primogenitor of British blues, John Mayall. *(continued)*

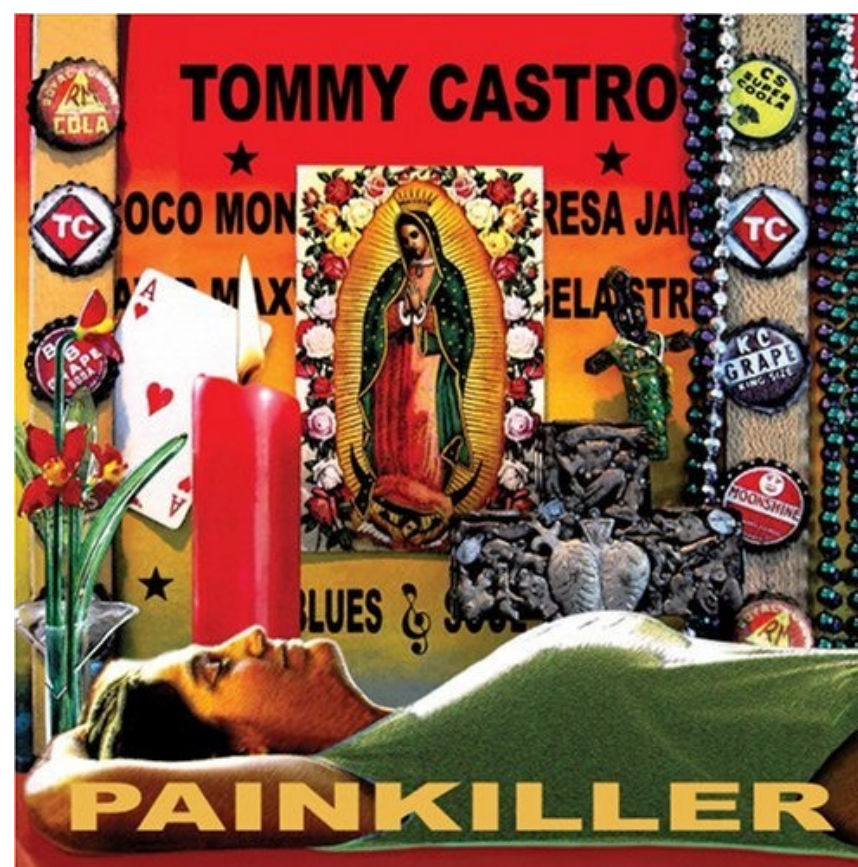


Mayall's Bluesbreakers are a Who's Who of British musicians including Eric Clapton, Jack Bruce, Peter Green, Mick Fleetwood, John McVie, and Mick Taylor. While the current crop of Bluesbreakers may not be household names, under the leadership of the master, their new album **In the Palace of the King** continues to enhance the legend.

Mayall does not play guitar on this album, but he is in fine form on the piano and harmonica, and his voice belies his age. Conceived and dedicated as a tribute to the late Texas bluesman Freddie King, *Palace* showcases fine musicianship, superb songwriting, and a deep-seated love for the idiom. Listening to the second cut, *Going Down*, I noted that it sounded a little like old Fleetwood Mac, having forgotten that the roots of that band go back to the Bluesbreakers. Mayall's harp on *Some Other Day, Some Other Time* has a timeless Mayall feel. *Time to Go*, written in memory of Mayall's mother Beryl, features the lead and rhythm guitar work of Buddy Whittington carrying on the tradition of those who have occupied that chair before him. On this particular track, the horns fortify the foundation of the track. One gets the sense of not only the skills of the individual musicians, but also their ability to play together as a disciplined band.

If listening to the Koko Taylor disc is like being at her concert, then Mayall's disc is like enjoying an artist at work. Taylor is performing; Mayall is playing. Taylor's band fills every moment with energy. The Bluesbreaker's playing is spare and articulate. The soul of the blues fills the spaces between the notes. There is a difference in perspective. **If I was walking by a club and heard Koko playing, I would want to come in and party. If I heard Mayall playing, I would want to sit down and listen.** The more I play the album, the more I enjoy *listening* to it. Sonically, the disc sounds very natural, with a wide and deep soundstage. The musicians are where they should be. What I like about Mayall is his sense of perspective. Here is a man who has few peers, yet one who openly acknowledges that he is standing on the shoulders of giants like Freddie King who came before him. In acknowledging the blues tradition, he builds upon and enhances it.

Painkiller is Tommy Castro's 10th album release and 7th on San Francisco's Blind Pig records. The disc showcases Castro's considerable talents as a guitar player and bandleader. A veteran Bay Area musician who has played with Carlos Santana, **Painkiller** has the feel of a musician willing to incorporate a number of styles in service of his art.



JERRY RASKIN'S NEEDLEDOCTOR

Established 1979

Toll Free 800.229.0644 | Phone 612.378.0543
Fax 612.378.9024 | Email info@NeedleDoctor.com
419 14th Ave SE, Minneapolis, MN 55414



BELLARI VP 129
\$250



PRO-JECT TUBE BOX SE
\$549



PRO-JECT TUBE BOX II
\$349



SHELTER 501
\$850



FEATURED ITEM ▼
PRO-JECT RM5
\$649



FEATURED ITEM ▼
PRO-JECT RM9.1
\$1499



DYNAVECTOR 10X5
\$380



DYNAVECTOR 17D3
\$895



LYRA DORIAN
\$750



NEW BENZ MC20E2 L
\$199



SUMIKO BLUE POINT 2
\$299



SUMIKO EVO III
\$399



SUMIKO BLACKBIRD
\$799



NEW SUMIKO
CELEBRATION II \$2000



GRADO GOLD
\$180



GRADO SONATA
\$500



ORTOFON RONDO
BRONZE \$899



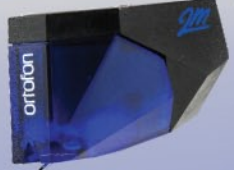
FEATURED ITEM ▲
PRO-JECT RM10
\$2499



ORTOFON
KONTRAPUNKT C \$1650



NEW ORTOFON SAMBA
\$249



NEW ORTOFON 2M BLUE
\$199

www.needledoctor.com

Including a strong horn section reminiscent of Boz Scaggs at his best, the roadhouse blues of a Delbert McClinton, honky-tonk New Orleans piano, and a '50s-style Jersey energy, it strikes me as a little bit of Dion and a lot of Springsteen. The result is a disc that delivers great musical pleasure.

The mood and the tempo are upbeat. **While you can't have a blues album that doesn't cover the loneliness of a broken-hearted lover, the joy of discovering new music as a youngster is clearly evident** on *Big Sister's Radio*. Castro knows when to take center stage with his guitar and also knowing when to share it with his strong rhythm section on the title cut and *Goin' Down South* or guest vocalist Angel Strehli on Freddie King's *If You Believe (In What You Do)*. The Tommy Castro Band has been together since 1991, and the playing is tight. For me, the highlight of the disc is *A Good Fool is Hard to Find* featuring guitarist Coco Montoya. Castro and Montoya trade riffs with Tommy on the right and Coco on left.

Castro is an accomplished songwriter, penning 9 of the album's 12 cuts. With his many talents, it will be interesting to chart his continued growth as a musician, songwriter, and bandleader. For now, this is great summer fun. ●

Somewhat Beatlesque

— Joe Golfen



Instant Karma: The Amnesty International Campaign To Save Darfur

Tribute albums are tricky things. More often than not, if an artist or band is good enough to have other famous artists collaborate to perform their songs, the songs don't need to be redone. This is surely the case with the Beatles. Albums like the **I Am Sam** soundtrack or **The Chipmunks Sing the Beatles Hits** can attest to the fact that even reworked in the hands of great artists (or poor ones), the originals of these songs are still the best.

It's not that covers of Beatles songs aren't fun, or occasionally interesting, it's just that they usually end up making me want to listen to the real songs instead. And so it goes for John Lennon as well, a point proven a number of times by **Instant Karma**, a collection of big name artists performing songs from Lennon's solo career with mixed, but never remarkable, results. This is to say nothing of the charity that this album benefits, and such a cause is a very fitting use of Lennon's name and work. But the album itself is bogged down by several weak performances, the exclusion of some of Lennon's best solo work (no *Look at Me* or *Oh Yoko?*) and the inclusion of several fairly irrelevant artists on the roster.

U2 kicks off the two-disc set with a very fitting version of the title track, doing a good job of keeping the original spirit of the song while still making the performance distinctly their own, with springy guitars and Bono's signature wail. REM follows suit with a fine rework of *No.9 Dream*, but both of these tracks are basically just the song the way Lennon did them, with a very recognizable singer taking over the vocal duties.

Cristina Aguilera takes a go at *Mother* and although her mediocre voice can't manage the soulful warbles she's trying for, she does keep the song listenable. Aerosmith has no such luck with their wretched reggae-infused version of *Give Peace a Chance*. Perhaps spending their careers aping the Beatles' greatest competitors left them unprepared to take on Lennon's anthem, and Steven Tyler's screechy vocals ruin this great song.

DAB / FM
tuner / clock
module now
available!



n-Vi

DVD and CD player

n-Vious ?

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



world class sound... with vision

The entire album turns out to be very hit or miss, but even the hits are a soft blow. Lenny Kravitz' version of *Cold Turkey* sounds like the background music for some sort of futuristic robot porn, though Los Lonely Boys manage a funky version of *Whatever Gets You Through The Night* that captures both their own sound while sticking close enough to the original to keep it fun. There are a few more bright spots on the disc, with Jakob Dylan giving a heartfelt version of *Gimme Some Truth*, Jackson Browne working his mellow magic on *Oh, My Love* and Corinne Bailey Rae taking on *I'm Losing You*. Rae gets highest marks for soulfulness on the album, maybe because she really can sing, unlike some of the others making an attempt here.

One of the major downfalls of *Instant Karma* lies in the fact that too many of the artists rounded up to cover Lennon's songs just aren't talented enough to do them justice. Avril Lavigne does a pale, wispy job on *Imagine*, and Big and Rich make a obnoxious Nashville mockery of *Nobody Told Me*. The Black Eyed Peas, who thus far have shown their main talent to be reworking old songs in interesting ways, let their rendition of *Power to the People* lay flat, banking mostly on Fergie's nasal vocals.

Sadly, even The Postal Service misses the mark with *Grow Old With Me*. The chimy Nintendo-esque chirps and beeps the band usually commands with such authority sound tinny and boring on this track. (continued)

There are, however, a few stand out performances towards the end. Green Day does a great job turning *Working Class Hero* from a folksy protest song into a full-blown punk-rock anthem. Jack Johnson takes a swing at *Imagine* and turns the tune from a powerful piano ballad into a whispered fingerpicked plea for peace. Irish rockers Snow Patrol turn up the tension on *Isolation*, making the tune more haunting and indeed, isolating.

Of coarse between these songs, there is Ben Harper's version of *Beautiful Boy*, which

features him singing in his wimpy falsetto, which makes this song's normally sweet lyrics sound pretty creepy. And the fact that gimmicky rapper (somehow...) Matisyahu is allowed to cover *Watching the Wheels*, one of Lennon's finest songs is terrible. The album closes with Regina Spektor, whose delightfully off-kilter vocals play nicely on *Real Love*.

But the highlight of the album is The Flaming Lips brilliant version of (*Just Like*) *Starting Over*. Ironically, this song was

Lennon's return to straight ahead rock songs, after making a few misguided experimental tunes. The Flaming Lips turn this song on its head, filling it with their trademark futuristic instrumentals and warbling guitar, with Wayne Coyne's cracking vocals taking the melodic reins.

What makes this song a real standout is the fact that it's everything a cover should be. It

reinterprets the song, doesn't just copy it or completely change it, and thereby adds to it.

(continued)

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

Thirty years of research towards the advancement of musical sound quality has enabled Rega to produce two CD players that incorporate a radical new technology. The **Apollo** and **Saturn CD players** use a proprietary system which analyses each disc and optimizes the player's setup accordingly. Rega's new technology squeezes the musical essence out of the CD just as it was interpreted and recorded, right to the last note. Take a test squeeze for yourself, contact The Sound Organisation today for a qualified Rega retailer.



Rega Apollo CD Player



Rega Saturn CD Player



THE SOUND ORGANISATION
MAKES MUSIC

Exclusive **Rega** USA Distributor
steve@soundorg.com | 972.234.0182

rega



Much like Joe Cocker's soulful take on *A Little Help From My Friends*, The Flaming Lips add a different dimension to the song they cover, which is why tastefully done remakes are worth it in the first place.

John Lennon left behind a brilliant musical legacy, one that is sure to be remembered for generations to come. And while it is fitting that such a wide variety of artists want to pay tribute to Lennon's music, especially while helping a worthy cause, his brilliance is a tough act to follow. Few can even come close to touching Lennon's abilities, and though it is admirable that they try, ultimately, John Lennon wins out in the end.



Paul McCartney — *Memory Almost Full*

It's never easy growing old. In his 65 years of life, Paul McCartney has seen and done more than most dare to dream. He has hit towering heights, met great success and still found loss and loneliness along the way. On **Memory Almost Full**, McCartney crafts a sort of musical memoir of his experiences, and in the process creates a powerful album that never loses the lighthearted charm of its creator.

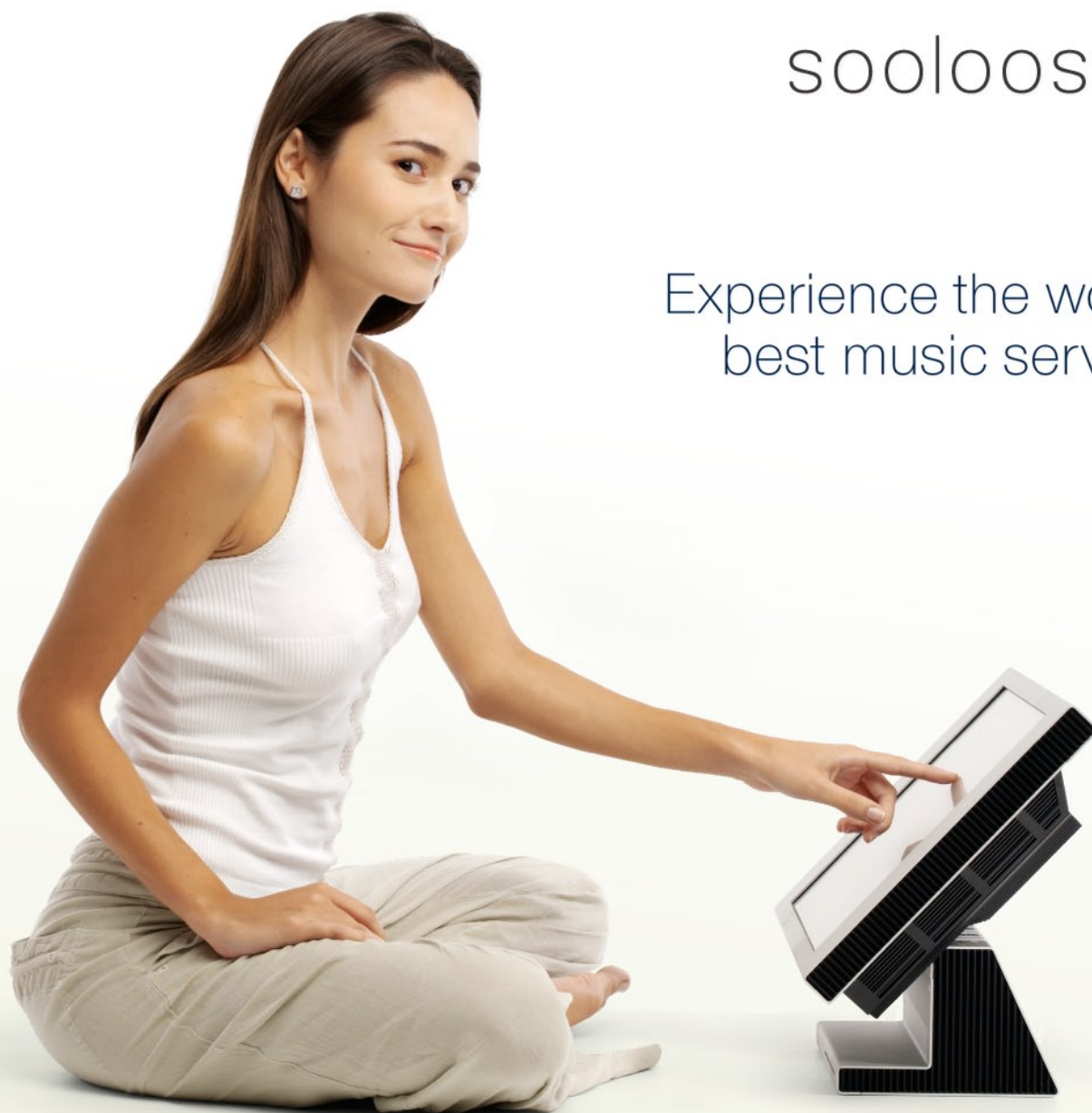
While McCartney's solo career has been uneven, his past three albums have shrugged off much of the light rock corniness Sir Paul dabbled in during his Wings period. 2001's **Driving Rain** found McCartney still reeling from the loss of his beloved wife Linda, something he seemed to be trying to escape on his 50s inspired rock-and-roll album **Run Devil Run**, released shortly after Linda's death. The dark, crunchy *Lonely Road* is some of his best solo work and many of the other songs were so deeply personal that the album soared beyond Paul's usual fare.

In 2005, McCartney teamed up with Radiohead producer Nigel Godrich and created **Chaos and Creation in My Backyard**, a dark, experimental album, which critics lauded but many fans ignored. While the album isn't all solid, there are a number of stark and powerful tracks such as *Riding to Vanity Fair* and *How Kind of You* that revealed McCartney's still potent and versatile songwriting skills.

Memory Almost Full finds McCartney in a pensive state, reflecting on his life as a boy, a Beatle and as a man growing old. But even though the lyrics carry a heavy melancholy vibe, the warm simple melodies never let them touch the ground. The frolicking opener *Dance Tonight* is pure McCartney, lighthearted and accessible but charming and cool at the same time. *My Ever Present Past* weaves an irresistible melody over a crunchy guitar riff, while McCartney confesses 'I've got too much on my plate/ Don't have no time to be a decent lover.' (*continued*)

sooloos

Experience the world's
best music server.



While the album does have a few generic light rock tracks, such as *See Your Sunshine* and *Gratitude* they are very listenable and are balanced out by the raucous stomp of *Only Mama Knows* and *Nod Your Head*, or the Beatlesque (who'd have thought) harmonies on *Vintage Clothes*. **While most of these songs are pleasing, only a few rise to the very top, but they make the whole album worthwhile.**

The fifth track, *You Tell Me*, is an elegiac tune, sweetly sung over a quietly plinking guitar. Clearly the darkest and most mournful track on the album, *You Tell Me* is McCartney looking back over his youth with unclear hindsight. McCartney listfully sings 'Were we there/ was it real/ is it truly how I feel?' like a man confused by his own past, perhaps because it now seems so far off.

Mr. Bellamy is a driving, engrossing song, with a fantastic piano riff and darkly humorous lyrics about the police trying to talk a jumper down. What's best about this tune are the psychedelic vocals and stark instrumentation that brings to mind much of the Beatles' later work, particularly reminding me of Sgt. Pepper. It's interesting to see McCartney make a song like this, because most of his solo career (as with John Lennon's) seems to be built around a simple Let It Be-type sound. But *Mr. Bellamy* captures some of the off-beat, progressive and distinctly English wit that made the Beatles so endearing.

McCartney does have some good things to say about his past, and he does them on the jangly *That Was Me*. (continued)

Here, Paul takes a trip all the way back to building sand castles on the beach, to playing music on TV, and on up to the present. McCartney seems almost amazed that the kid he remembers was really him and that he is still around today to tell the tale.

The finale of **Memory Almost Full**, *The End of the End*, is a lovely piano ballad that tackles an issue not many artists would try to take on in earnest; their own death.

McCartney croons and whistles his way through this quiet song, discussing with beautiful frankness the legacy he hopes to leave behind: 'On the day that I die/ I'd like bells to be rung/ And songs that were sung/ To be hung out like blankets/ That lovers have played on/ And laid on while listening/ To songs that were sung.'

McCartney seems to feel that his time is coming to a close, hence the album's title, and he is laying out the way he would like to be remembered. 'Try and get it all said, but at the same time with a feeling of optimism and enthusiasm,' McCartney writes about this album on his website. 'I thought if I could accomplish that then that would be a good thing to do.' **Memory Almost Full** may not be Paul McCartney's greatest contribution to music, but it will leave a lasting impression of McCartney himself, as a lighthearted, brilliant man and certainly someone worth remembering.



My Favorite Beatles Albums

I know, I know, the Beatles were doing their thing before I was born, so most of you guys probably think it's blasphemous of me to even TALK about the Beatles in the first place, and then to pick MY favorites that by the way DON'T include Sgt. Pepper. But more than almost any other group in history, these guys still resonate with my generation. So here goes!

Rubber Soul

To me this was the first 'serious' Beatles album. Released in 1965, **Rubber Soul** ushered in a new era for the Beatles, one based more in artistic expression and the exploration of new sounds and themes. Many critics point to Fab Four's exposure to the American Folk scene, especially through Bob Dylan, as the vehicle for their new found seriousness and creativity. (*continued*)

The album sounds more like a folk record, with a greater emphasis on acoustic instruments and strong lyrics. From Paul McCartney's country-based opener *I've Just Seen A Face* (available only on the American LP release, replacing the vastly inferior *Drive My Car* found on the UK and CD version) to John Lennon's folksy *Norwegian Wood*, an off-color tune about a freaky groupie, The Beatles had now fully blossomed into major geniuses.

This album introduced rock music to a variety of new sounds. The Indian Sitar, played by George Harrison, would inspire groups like The Rolling Stones and The Beach Boys to experiment with new instruments and sounds. **Rubber Soul** also features some early studio tricks, like the sped-up piano that sounds like a harpsichord on *In My Life*, and a heavily compressed piano riff on *The Word* that would be a major influence on psychedelic rock.

But I think **Rubber Soul** has some of the best songs The Beatles ever wrote. Tunes like *Girl*, *Run For Your Life* and *You Won't See Me* explore loneliness and heartbreak, while *In My Life* and *Michelle* are some of the sweetest love songs of all time. *Nowhere Man* isn't even about girls (one of their first to move away from the subject) and its still great.

Because **Rubber Soul** is such a fresh approach from their previous work, these songs are not only brilliant, they come off sounding very fun and alive.



SINGLE STAGE CLASS A
VOLTAGE SOURCES
CURRENT SOURCES
POWER JFETS



LIMITED EDITION AMPLIFIERS
BY NELSON PASS

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT RENO HiFi AT 775.829.7332
WWW.RENOHIFI.COM WWW.FIRSTWATT.COM



Abbey Road

If **Rubber Soul** was the starting point for The Beatles' brilliance, **Abbey Road** was the zenith. The final album the group ever made together, **Abbey Road** captures the very heart of the group. Free from the adolescent musings of their early work, and stripping back the grand experimental veneer that covered much of their later albums, the album shines as the highlight in their lofty career. **The songs and production on this album were so ahead of its time that the tracks don't sound a bit dated or weak, even after nearly forty years.**

Although their friendship had all but corroded away, McCartney and Lennon still make great songs together, as B-side of the record can attest to. *You Never Give Me Your Money* is a few of their left over songs rolled into one, and *Mean Mr. Mustard*, *Polythene Pam* and *She Came in Through the Bathroom Window* blend together flawlessly. The idea of a song within a song still lingers today, obvious as new groups make rock opera after rock opera.

Heavy album opener *Come Together* has always been a favorite of mine, because it's so well done and it still amazes me how cool it is. I can't even imagine what it must have sounded like in 1969, but I wish I could have been there.

George Harrison offers his best work here, with the beautiful *Something* and *Here Comes The Sun*. Even Ringo shines on this album, with his wonderfully playful *Octopus' Garden*.

Abbey Road is what **Sgt. Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band** was trying to be. It is an album that must be listened to all the way through to be understood. Each track bleeds into the next and each needs the other to be spectacular.

Unfortunately, as soon as The Beatles had reached this state of perfection, they were gone, leaving behind them a high watermark for everything that would come after them. A mark that many have dreamed of reaching, but few have even glimpsed. ●



Classical Music A to Z

— Dan Babineau

Fred George/ LA Philharmonic

Nationalism Corrupted By Musical Freedom

What do a Russian composer, a French composer and a Danish composer all have in common? I think my title gives away the answer: if the composers happen to be Modest Mussorgsky, Carl Nielsen and Francis Poulenc the commonality would be nationalism corrupted by musical freedom! All three of these very different composers were intent on representing their own unique culture in this time capsule we call music. Just as their cultures differed so did their music and as their souls were dedicated to preserving the spirit of their existence they were also pushing the musical envelope in a way that had no time barriers and no geographic boundaries.

When we listen to Mussorgsky's *Night on Bald Mountain* we immediately escape into a different world that is bold, dark and menacing. Nielsen's amazingly theatrical compositions seem to suggest somewhere a little south of Denmark like the Middle East or Africa but yet savors the righteousness of his small Scandinavian country. And no one feels more elegant and French to me than Francis Poulenc: delicate and light but also stirringly innovative and even somewhat comical.



Modest Mussorgsky was greatly influenced by his Russian surroundings but he was even more taken by Russian history and folklore...

I consider myself fortunate to have played the majority of these three dynamic composer's music with some pretty amazing orchestras. Another common element for each of these three composers was their innate ability to quickly capture you in their music and then transport you into a timeless musical abyss! I experienced this time snatching phenomenon the first time I performed Poulenc's *Organ concerto* and then in the same performance played the rambunctious *Inextinguishable*, Nielsen's 4th symphony. These compositions do more than merely interweave folk melodies into a central theme, they re-invent an entire culture through music. Music is all about freedom; giving us the key to unlock our own souls and the three composers that I'm going to talk about in this installment of Classical Music A to Z were as free as they get!

MODEST MUSSORGSKY (1839-1881)

Normally, I would not include Mussorgsky on my short list of classical composers. Although he was one of the famous 'Russian Five' his breadth of musical composition was somewhat limited and the importance of his musical innovation is somewhat debatable when compared to other members of the 'Five' i.e. Rimsky Korsakov or even Alexander Borodin. But if you're going to get into this classical game you're bound to hear Mussorgsky's music somewhere in your musical travels.

Modest Mussorgsky was greatly influenced by his Russian surroundings but he was even more taken by Russian history and folklore; where he drew much of the material to compose his musical stories or fables. Both the tone poem *Night on Bald Mountain* and his piano cycle *Pictures at an Exhibition* convincingly illustrate a mysticism that looms throughout Russian folklore. In *Pictures* each of the various movements paints a picture; first we visit a gallery and then jump feet first into the paintings. Mussorgsky composed these piano suites to commemorate his good friend Viktor Hartman, an artist and architect who died suddenly at the young age of thirty-nine.

Each musical picture draws us into an atmosphere of Gnomes and catacombs. Immediately we are catapulted into the middle of a scene where children play loudly in a garden, then a cart is drawn by oxen. We are entertained by a strange *Ballet for Unhatched Chicks* and we stop to take in drawings of two Jewish men one rich one not so rich. Next two French women quarrel in a busy marketplace and we drop back into the catacombs to check out the dead and round things off, while the witch Baba Yaga soars overhead on – you guessed it – a broom. *(continued)*

Ayre

C-5xe universal stereo player

The Ayre C-5xe universal stereo (U2) player creates a new dimension in digital playback technology. This no video, no compromise design plays all optical disc formats with unprecedented life and realism. Exclusive Ayre DSP algorithms decode each format in its native domain, for an experience that rivals the original performance.

Zero-feedback analog circuitry reveals the full palette of musical colors. Separate linear power supplies for both analog and digital circuitry delivers unparalleled tonal purity. When music is paramount, the C-5xe sets a new standard for every digital format under the sun.

Boulder, Colorado • www.ayre.com • 303.442.7300



Finally we visit the 'Gates of Kiev' and the musical journey is over! I failed to mention earlier that the *Pictures of an Exhibition* that most people associate with Mussorgsky was not exactly composed by Mussorgsky – at least not in its orchestral form. Maurice Ravel took it upon himself to transcribe this mystical piece for orchestra and as far as I can tell Mussorgsky never heard his own composition performed by an orchestra.

For years and years many high-end audio dealers used both *Pictures and Night on Bald Mountain* to demonstrate the sheer dynamics of an audio component or system.

And for the longest time, I could not even think to listen to these great works mainly because I had heard them too much in the wrong setting. But there is magic in almost all of Mussorgsky's music and don't be afraid to check out his other works, namely his opera *Boris Godunov*. This opera clearly shows Mussorgsky's modernistic technique that ends up trickling down to other Russian composers like Prokofiev and Shostakovich. Shostakovich even went as far as to orchestrate Mussorgsky's *Songs and Dances of Death*. I'm not sure I would start out a party playing this piece but the musical innovation and raw emotion of this work is breathtaking.

Selecting Mussorgsky's music is fairly easy; he only produced a small amount of material, but what we have is very, very good. To start, you might as well pick up a copy of *Pictures at an Exhibition* and *Night on Bald Mountain*. Because these works are so popular with the (God forbid) audiophile-set, every orchestra known to man has at least one performance on disc/record. (*continued*)

My all time favorite is with Fritz Reiner and the Chicago Symphony on RCA. The new version is a SACD, Catalog #61394 and also contains top rate performances of works by some other well know Russian composers. Another disc to consider is on Sony CD #60693 with Bernstein and the New York Phil. This CD includes *Pictures*, *Night on Bald Mountain* and *Songs*.

Here are some more great performances of these spectacular works: for the opera *Boris Godunov*, I like Valery Gergiev and the Kirov Theatre Orchestra and Chorus, catalog #462230 on Philips. And there is also an award winning two disc set of Mussorgsky's music on DG, Catalog #469169 which pretty much goes through all of the music with an all star list of conductors and performers. This DG disc set is a great introduction to a Russian composer who was clearly underrated in his lifetime and beyond!

CARL NIELSEN (1865-1931)

Just like Finland has Jean Sibelius as their musical hero; the small country of Denmark has Carl Nielsen. And Nielsen should be recognized as a hero with a musical style that soars well beyond normal musical boundaries.

As you run through his symphonies, Nielsen pushes the musical envelope further and further until he pierces the canopy and merges into what I like to call 20th century, modern music. Nielsen loved brass and percussion and raw syncopation. And when he pairs the orchestra down to nine instruments in the second movement of his last symphony it hits me like a Paul Klee painting, simple, bold and refined. Nielsen wrote 6 symphonies, assorted music for brass and woodwinds, incidental music, tone poems, concertos, choral music, piano music, operas, organ music and some very fun overtures.

His symphonies are a sure way to witness musical evolution first hand as he quickly abandons the accepted sonata form of his day and begins corrupting this traditional style. From the first symphony to the last it is very apparent that Nielsen is an inventor of his own unique musical form. More and more percussion is brought in to generate more and more radical syncopation. While still very melodic, Nielsen's compositions have their own



Danish Arts Agency

strange voice. Carl Nielsen's greatness is just starting to be recognized in the last decade with insight of composer/conductors like Esa-Pekka Salonen leading the charge. Nielsen was far ahead of his time and his fourth symphony – *the Inextinguishable* is a perfect example with dueling timpani's set on each end of the stage. Nielsen did not compose 'program music' per se but did use a central theme to build his musical scores.

The incidental music of *Aladdin* nicely illustrates this point. And let's see if you can remain still in your seat while taking in a performance of his *Masquerade*. The concertos for clarinet, flute and violin respectively are complete musical jewels; slightly atonal, syncopated into the heavens with melodies from another stratosphere. (*continued*)

From the first symphony to the last it is very apparent that Nielsen is an inventor of his own unique musical form.

UNMASK YOUR AUDIO

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

Mike Kontor, NotePerfect Loudspeakers

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

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

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

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



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

Benchmark
...the measure of excellence!™



I've been playing the clarinet for a long time and Nielsen's concerto for clarinet is still one of my all time favorites to play! He was very nationalistic creating the voice of Denmark for all of the world to behold, and what an amazingly futuristic voice it is!

Carl Nielsen is single-handedly responsible for launching the long careers of two top rate orchestras: the Danish National Radio Orchestra and the Royal Danish Orchestra.

These two orchestras have made it their goal to preserve and perform Nielsen's music to the highest level. With a variety of noteworthy conductors (some also Danish) these two musical ensembles will never disappoint no matter what is on their program.

Start out with an historic compilation of Danish conductors performing the six symphonies on the obscure label Danacord, catalog number 351/53.

For a more contemporary look at the symphonies I like Michael Schonwandt and the Danish National Radio Symphony on another Danish label, Dacapo, cat. #8224169. Schonwandt's straight ahead interpretation of these six diverse pieces hits the nail square on the head for tonality, controlled dynamics and natural rhythm. *(continued)*

For the clarinet concerto you must seek out the Bis recording catalog #1463 with Swedish clarinet player extraordinaire Martin Frost.

You should also check out EP (Salonen) and the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra & Chorus performing the clarinet concerto, the flute concerto and a piece from the opera *Saul & David* and some tone poems. On Sony, catalog #53276, EP always gets the atmosphere of Scandinavia right, the tone and the energy.

I'll admit to finding the Nielsen violin concerto a bit trippy. Maybe others would agree that because it is not performed all that often largely because it is a very difficult work to perform. It starts out with a bang and by the last movement it's as if all of the air was let out of the piece as it becomes very pastoral and relaxed. But Nielsen's music is very addictive and the more you listen to this fashion forward concerto the more you'll come to understand just how much of a musical genius he truly was!

The two discs that I like for the violin concerto are the Sony with EP and the Swedish Radio Orchestra, catalog #92613 and also a live recording on the rare Bridge label, catalog #9100. The Bridge recording features a variety of great players performing two Nielsen works and one very intense quartet by late Romantic composer Rued Langgaard. This rare CD will wake up your day and represents the quintessential *Danish Wave* of classical music that took place late in the 20th century.

I also enjoy string quartets and Nielsen's four delightful efforts can be found on Bis, catalog #503. Don't forget to check out Nielsen's chamber music that once again is very addicting and full of finely crafted musical experimentation. The Paris Chamber Ensemble does a fine job with some of this material on another small label, Gall, catalog #904. I already know what you're going to say: 'here goes that woodwind player talking up the wind music again' but in this case, Nielsen's woodwind music is so unique, so fresh that you owe yourself the opportunity to be lifted to an extraordinary musical level.

One last mention would be the songs. If you like art songs then look no further because Nielsen's gorgeous offering is among the best. On Dacapo, catalog #8224218, these songs set to Danish

poetry are delightful. For all of you analog aficionados, Decca has a nice offering of the Nielsen symphonies either in a box set or separate. Zubin Mehta and the LA Phil absolutely bring down the house with Nielsen's fourth in the vinyl format.

FRANCIS POULENC (1899-1963)

As a prominent member of the 'French six' Francis Poulenc had a profound effect on the development of modern French music. While Poulenc composed basically in all forms of classical music, he is well known for his compositions for small chamber ensembles and as well as for his sacred chorale works. These works are innovative, complex, delicate and free.

Poulenc was influenced by his predecessors, like Brahms or even Mozart for his woodwind music but stylistically he started an evolution in French music that effected all future French musical composition from Claude Debussy to Pierre Boulez.

(continued)

Stylistically Poulenc started an evolution in French music that effected all future French musical composition from Claude Debussy to Pierre Boulez.



I N T R O D U C I N G

The DiaLogue Series from **PrimaLuna®**

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

DiaLogue One and Two

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

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

PrimaLuna Has Once Again Raised the Bar

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

\$2199 and \$2499

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

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

**UPSCALE
AUDIO**
HIGHEST FIDELITY • MUSIC SYSTEMS

www.upscaleaudio.com

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

**Tonality, rhythm, structure
and even tempo were all
dismantled by Poulenc and
then rebuilt in a most
unique format.**

Poulenc's wind music can still sound somewhat on the edge or experimental. Groups of woodwind instruments are brought together to form bizarre twists in tone, pace and syncopation letting the listener know that this is not just some typical flowery woodwind music but instead a bold and somewhat comical look into the future. *Sonata For Horn, Trumpet And Trombone* will get your attention with an energy and dynamic range that teeters on the insane. Poulenc's many, many wind pieces are extremely challenging to play. Very complex forms, key changes from hell and intense little musical innuendos that drive even the best players crazy. But in the end, if you give it a chance you'll realize that this somewhat controversial Frenchman wrote some of the most exciting chamber music ever composed.

This is where Poulenc takes a weird turn. Being very close to his many friends in Paris, Poulenc took friendships very seriously and when some of these close associates died in the course of things, Francis Poulenc retreated to the Catholic Church for solace. His music took a turn toward the sacred and solemn as his many beautiful but somber chorale works attest. To bridge this gap he composed a very unusual concerto for organ, strings and timpani. This work pushes the musical canopy to the limit and clearly illustrates the genius behind Poulenc's musical composition. *(continued)*

Atonal in part, with wild rhythms coupled to the power of the organ darting in and out of the piece, *Concerto for Organ, Strings And Timpani* is another one of those modern sleepers that just recently has been given adequate praise from a number of well-respected classical musical communities at large.

There are not enough good recordings of Poulenc's music available on either format – digital or analog. But the fine people at Naxos give you a nice intro into Poulenc's music with a few nicely priced offerings. Start out with the above mentioned organ concerto, catalog #554241. This disc also contains two rather bizarre pieces for harpsichord and orchestra that kind of grow on you if given the chance. For the chamber music, Naxos again makes it easy with their two disc set of the complete Poulenc chamber music, catalog #553611 & 553612. My personal favorite is with the Paris Woodwind Quintet featuring the likes of Yehudi Menuhin, Pierre Fourier and an all star cast of woodwind players. On EMI, catalog #69267, this recording lays down some of the finest performances of modern French music to date.

For the piano music check out the EMI release catalog #66831. This disc is a cornucopia of Poulenc music with solid performances all around. Among the many fine recordings of Poulenc chorale music one recording stands out for me and is on the Telarc label, catalog #80643 with maestro Robert Shaw conducting the Atlanta Symphony & Chorus. Robert Shaw's contribution to performing and recording first rate choral music of all kinds cannot be overemphasized or over praised! And this Telarc disc is another example of Robert Shaw's mastery of two works by Poulenc and then the Stravinsky *Symphony of the Psalms*.

Poulenc's version of music for children came in the form of an opera – *L'Histoire de Babar* which is a nice story about the escapades of a certain pacoderm. This opera spoof is fun to listen to what ever your age. For about \$8 bucks, the Naxos disc catalog

#554170 that features conductor John Lanchbery and the Melbourne Symphony gives you more than adequate readings of *Babar*, Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* and my favorite music for children – Britten's *Young Person's Guide*...For the more serious opera music like *Dialogues des Carmelites*, Poulenc's only full length opera, try the DVD video of Dame Joan Sutherland with Richard Bonyngne and the Elizabethian Sydney Orcheestra on Klutur Video, catalog #2088. Poulenc's raw emotion and surreal lyricism shines through in this spectacular performance.

Sweet Summertime

Summertime is a great time for Classical music in Southern California. There are an amazing amount of free outdoor concerts that feature classical music as well as some top rate outdoor venues such as the Hollywood Bowl or the Sunset Concerts at the Skirball Cultural Center. It's great fun to take in a performance, drink some wine and watch an orchestra rip up the open air! I used to get tired of hearing people claim that there was no real culture left in southern California. But many of those people did us all a favor and left for other more cultural areas. I remember when culture returned to sunny LA; it was about 15 years ago when a certain young Finnish guest conductor picked up the baton and surprised the hell out of all of us. And now after over 15 years, Mr. Esa-Pekka Salonen will be putting down his baton and spending his days writing music rather than making sure it gets played right. I'm sure I speak for all fans of classical music in southern California and around the world when I thank EP for doing what many thought might be impossible – put Los Angeles back on top of the classical map where we belong!

FYI, catch Maestro Salonen and the LA Phil at the Hollywood in early September for *Mahler's 5th* and his own *Foreign Bodies*. Two days later catch the spectacular Boris at the Bowl with EP, the LA Phil and featured soloists from the Mariinsky Theatre performing

the original 1869 version of Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*! Pack a picnic basket, a bottle of your favorite beverage and get ready to expand your mind – legally! ●



Matthew Imaging / LA Philharmonic

Maestro Salonen

Blame It On Columbia House!

— Jerold O'Brien



Back when I was a starving high school kid, the easiest way to get records cheap was to scam Columbia House. Like Ice-T said, **“Ain’t no criminal, though I used to be...”** Being a young cracker from the Midwest, I didn’t sell drugs or anything serious, but when I figured out that I could get 12 albums for a dollar and then three bonus records for signing up my friends (who weren’t into music at all, but would let me pick up my Columbia House box at their houses) I struck gold! A year later, I had the biggest record collection in the neighborhood!

But as fate would have it, I didn’t always pick up the mail on time... Sometimes I got the selection of the month that I wasn’t supposed to get and this is how I stumbled upon Sly and The Family Stone. Matter of fact the first Sly record I got, wasn’t a record at all but an eight track. I had to cut one of my buddies in on the deal, so his first shipment was all eight tracks. If I didn’t send the card back in time, we got an unnecessary eight-track tape. I still had a player, so it was cool.

Always inquisitive for music, I popped that orange tape in my Pioneer 8 track deck and my parents FREAKED OUT! They had never heard anything like it and were much more nervous about their teenager listening to Sly singing *Babies Makin Babies* than Alice Cooper singing *Billion Dollar Babies*. What’s a kid to do? You HAVE to rebel against your parents, so instead of buying more Alice Cooper records, I bought every record that Sly and the Family Stone made!

However, I really liked Sly, and it opened up a musical door that probably would not have ever been opened, considering I lived in total whitebread land. I would never have gone on to Prince, Parliament, James Brown and rap music if not for that one package...

Same thing with the Bee Gees. The first Bee Gees album came because I filled out the card wrong and again, I was never one to get rid of a record, so I gave it a try. I must admit from the first play, I really did like the Bee Gees, but it has always been a guilty pleasure. And when they went down the dark path of disco in the ‘70s, you could not be a cool guy and admit you liked this band, so I just turned my Bee Gees albums around for about ten years. Guests at my house would say, ‘what are these turned around records doing here?’ ‘Nothing,’ was always the response and luckily only a few girls noticed. My reputation remained intact.

But I’m a sucker for good packaging (and anything mastered by Kevin Gray), so when the new Sly box set was released, you know I had to buy it right away! Ditto for the Bee Gees box set. Ok, vinyl first:

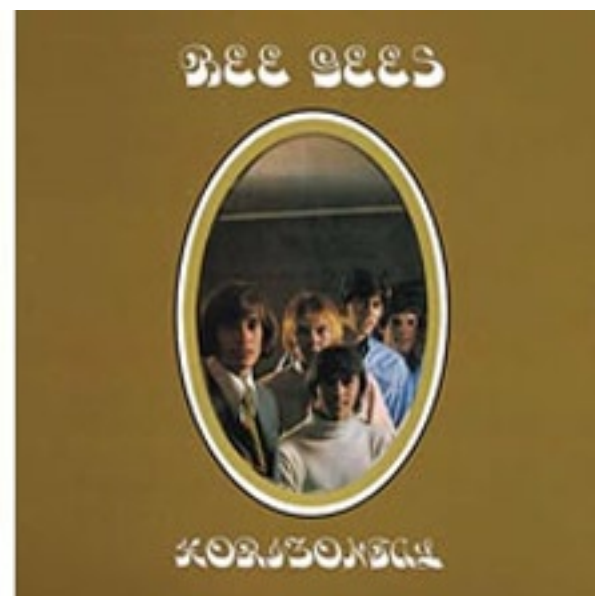


The Bee Gees

— *The Studio Albums 1967-1968*

It is a bit bizarre, seeing these records on the old Reprise label, when back in the day they were on ATCO. But once you get over that you can really enjoy the rest of the package. There is a great booklet of photos and info from the Bee Gees past that is very cool and includes some interviews and trivia for the die-hard fan.

The LP version of this box set was done by Kevin Gray at RTI on 180-gram vinyl and I must say he did his usual awesome job! It was a great experience to hear this music again on super quiet vinyl. For those of you that are fans, yet have marginal copies of these records, this is a great deal. Collectors will be split between those that like the bonus tracks or are annoyed by them being present here. I always love the extra material, so I really enjoyed the additional album worth of unreleased and alternate takes for each record. *(continued)*





A/C POWER CORDS & ACCESSORIES

One listen, and nothing else will do.™

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

Greg Petan, *Ultimate Audio Magazine*

New!
Reference
version

The Essence
A/C Power Cord & POWER DISTRIBUTOR



visit our website at:
www.essentialsound.com

**I hate to say it, but the real
treat is the CD box set.**

In addition to the alternate takes, you get the mono versions as well and for my money, these are the best ones! Not as big of a soundstage, obviously, but a tonal correctness and weight that you don't get in stereo. With my vintage Dynaco gear and NOS Quad 57s I was really digging the mono mixes the best! (they didn't sound too shabby on the Naim 555 over at the bosses house either!)

As I hadn't dusted mine off in a while, I forgot how much like The Beatles these guys used to sound! For those of you that only remember the Bee Gees for the Saturday Night Fever period, just give *Every Christian Lion Hearted Man Will Show You* or *In My Own Time* a spin. Pure Beatles with a slight twist! If you listen closely you can notice Maurice Gibb's very Beatlesque bass riffs too.

There are some great tracks that have been previously unreleased, including the Christmas songs (mega fans only...) and their two spots that they did for Coke. This is definitely the answer if you are a devoted fan. **Both the CD and the LP feature great sound quality, so even if you have pristine originals you can enjoy these and keep the good booty in the vault!**

Sly and The Family Stone — *The Collection*

The great James Brown used to say, 'Now that's funky!' I'm sure he said it a lot, but it certainly applies to Sly and The Family Stone. No disrespect to the great Mr. Brown, but there have been an awful lot of Sly Stone's grooves sampled by the Hip Hop folks over the years in addition to his. Not to mention *Sex Machine*, wonder where Joe Walsh got the idea for the intro to *Rocky Mountain Way*? Hmmmm.

This box set features all seven of the studio albums, all remastered. Just to make sure I wasn't losing my mind, I dug out my vinyl originals and a couple of the remastered LPs that I own to get a good feel on sound quality. It's a close call between the original LPs and the CDs in this box set. **The LPs are a touch more open in the mids, but the CDs are a LOT quieter with a bit stronger bass. And bass is what funk is all about, Holmes!**

In addition to the full catalog, there are some great bonus tracks, including a number of previously unheard instrumentals, as well as album and single versions of all the hits. I particularly enjoyed *My Gorilla Is My Butler*, *My Brain (Zig-Zag)* and *Never Do Your Woman Wrong*. How about *Don't Call Me Nigger, Whitey!* That used to send our parents running for cover!

As a sucker for great packaging, this box set is definitely first rate. My only slight gripe is that instead of having the original album/CD art on the disk itself, they did The Collection motif in gold on every disc. Makes it harder to put the right disc in the right jacket when you are getting funky...

However, the printing on the CD covers is awesome and no other details were left unattended to. If you love Sly and The Family Stone, you need this box set! Boom, lakka-lakka boom! There is some fantastic music on these seven CDs. It doesn't really make me wax nostalgic, because I've never stopped playing this music! ●



Audiophile Pressings

— Jeff Dorgay

This issue we have a few things you know and something new: The 30th anniversary reissue of Steely Dan's *Aja*, the vinyl pressings of the Beatles' *Love* and a new release from Reference Recordings. It's good to see them back on the scene as well!

Steely Dan – *Aja*
Cisco Music

This is one of those records that on one hand, what more can be said? Most people are pretty polarized when it comes to the topic of Steely Dan, they either really enjoy their music and feel that they have often injected some great jazz sensibilities with clever lyrics, or SD is way too pedestrian for their sophisticated palette.

Throw me in with the commoners, because I've always enjoyed Steely Dan. Yes, I know that they are no King Crimson when it comes to being the last word in esoteric rock music, but it's a lot like going to P.F. Chang's. The atmosphere is pleasant, the waitresses are attractive and you know that you will always get a decent order of orange peel beef.

Since we're in the day of the 40 and 50 dollar albums that suck, I happily shelled out 30 for a fresh copy of *Aja*.

(continued)



This is not the Collector column, so we won't be discussing the merits of multiple copies of this record. I bought it because I'm a big fan of Kevin's work and I knew it would be great. I wasn't disappointed in the least.

If you really enjoyed Aja and would like a fresh copy, or are unhappy with the current version you have, whatever it may be, **I think even the fussiest audiophile will be very happy with this rendition. The highs are nice and clean, not grainy or splattered anywhere.**

The drum solo in the title track is fantastic! The surfaces are super quiet, so that those of you with great analog front ends will be very impressed indeed.

For some of us, this record got played way too much back in the day, but if this was one of your favorites, you owe it to yourself to buy a copy now while they are still available.

I also would like to give a word of praise to the folks at Acoustic Sounds for their excellent customer service. I called and ordered mine a few days before the release date and did not play the reviewer card. I just politely asked if I could pay extra for overnight shipping so I could have it before the weekend. Sure enough, my copy showed up a day after the release date as promised! It was well packed and went right from the FedEx man's hands to my turntable! Fantastic job!



The Beatles – Love EMI

Love has been around for a while now and this is another piece of music that while very popular, has divided Beatles fans. Many of the hard-core collectors I know see this endeavor as complete heresy, while other fans are always clamoring for anything that is new from the Fab Four. If you caught Paul and Ringo on Larry King about a month ago, celebrating the one year anniversary of **Love by Cirque Du Soleil** show in Vegas, you got a chance to chuckle when Larry accidentally called Ringo by the wrong name, and he had to correct him, saying 'I'm Ringo, Larry.'

Ok, let's assume for a minute, you are in the 'like' column for the **Love** album. If you

are a vinyl fanatic or a major collector, go ahead and buy the LP. Thanks to reading our collector column, now I'm getting mental about this, and listening to the DVD-a version, the CD version and the LP versions all side by side, I can honestly say that they did a fantastic job on all three, and I feel that most of the differences I was hearing was more of a function of my three methods of playback (The SME 10 vs. the Meridian 808 and the Naim CD555) than what was actually captured on either.

It appears from very close listening that they took as much care to press the vinyl as they did the other formats, so this is another home run for vinyl fans!



The Hot Club of San Francisco

– Terra Buena Bounce

Master audiophile engineer Keith Johnson (along with mastering from Paul Stubblebine) did a phenomenal job of capturing the Hot Club of San Francisco in the large soundstage at Fantasy Studios. Rather than go on and on about audiophile recording techniques and the HDCD process (which Dr. Johnson invented...) just take a peek at their website, www.referencerecordings.com

Bottom line, I firmly believe the HDCD thing works wonders and my Naim 555 has that decoder built in, so I was able to take full advantage of it.

After a couple of listens, I have to say that this is one of the most exquisitely recorded CDs I've heard in a long time. Though it is not possible to put a complete symphony orchestra or fifteen Marshall stacks in your listening room, this is the kind of music with a small group of players that an amazing system can really give you that elusive 'you are there' feel. This IS truly a reference recording and shows off just how well the CD format can reproduce music when this kind of care is put into the finished product.

I have to come clean, I'm not a fan of Django Reinhardt, so when I read a review elsewhere about this disc, I was a bit worried if it would make the cut and end up in my music server. But in my typical manner, I just plopped it in the CD player and started listening thinking, 'hmm, this sounds a lot like a David Grisman record...'

I happen to like David Grisman a lot and as it turns out he actually plays on two of the tracks on this record! So much for not reading the liner notes first. I also noticed that one of the three bonus tracks had this group doing a Paolo Conte tune, who I really like, so I went right to track 16. Sorry, this one flames out, sounding more like a Tom Waits impersonator on Quaaludes. But hey, how many times have we bought a CD with only one good song on it and the rest were clunkers? So I can't get down on these guys for this one tune that wasn't to my liking. ●

The B&W 805S

Small Package, Huge Style!

— Jeff Dorgay



like to think that I'm an equal part lover of art and science, so I always appreciate when a company serves up a healthy dose of research and development in an aesthetically pleasing package. The current version of the B&W 805S is right on the money in both worlds. From the aerodynamic tweeter enclosure, to the curved main cabinet all the way to the new port that is dimpled like a golf ball, this is a small speaker that should look great in whatever environment it is placed. Though the 805S came with the standard black speaker grilles, I suggest leaving them off so you can gaze at the Kevlar woofer cones! *(continued)*

TONEPhoto.

M A G A Z I N E



The e-journal of analog and
digital photography.

www.tonepublications.com

subscribe now. (it's free)

The B&W product guide on their website lists the 805S as a 'surround' speaker for the rest of the 800 range, but for those of us in a small room, it makes a superb pair of speakers for a compact, yet high performance two channel system.

Anyone who has been around the audio world for any amount of time knows the legendary reputation of B&W, with the larger models in the 800 range showing up at Abbey Road and many other places where our favorite music has been made. I am always curious to see how much of that heritage trickles down to the smaller models.

Again, B&W Does Not Disappoint With The 805S

Utilizing the same tweeter as the 803S and the 804S but only a single 6.5-inch woofer, this speaker does a great job in a smaller room. The 805's retail for \$1250 each and the matching stands are \$300 each, making a total system price of \$3100. I had good luck with my Sound Anchors stands, but they don't really match these gorgeous cabinets from an aesthetic point of view. Even if you already have stands, I highly suggest purchasing the ones from B&W; they are at the exact height that their engineer's feel is correct and they look smashing too. Unlike some other aesthetically pleasing stands that I've had the option to use, the B&W stands are very beefy even if you do not add sand or lead to them. However, if you can add the sand, it will tighten up the bass a touch and is worthwhile.

(continued)

If you would like a more in-depth explanation of the technology inside the 805S, I suggest going to the B&W website (www.bowers-wilkins.com). There is also plenty of info about the rest of the speakers in the B&W range along with a good smattering of B&W's history.

A Long Audition

For the majority of this review, the 805s stayed in my living room that measures 11 x 16 feet with the speakers on the short wall. My sources were the Sooloos music server and a Meridian G08 CD player with the Conrad Johnson PV-15 preamplifier and a number of different power amplifiers, (solid state and tube) as well as the Valve Audio Predator integrated, which is a hybrid design featuring a solid state output stage.

As with many British speakers, this speaker has a lot of loyal fans. The remainder of the audio world is equally divided in their view of the 805S.

Jay Leno once said that rather than viewing the glass half full or half empty, he thought you just needed the right glass.

And so it is with the 805S, in terms of amplifier choice. This is a marvelous set of speakers, but they need the right amplifier to deliver all they are capable of. Just plugging them into a budget amp will deprive you of the proper experience.

Bottom line, the 805S needs an amplifier with a pretty healthy dose of current drive to sing. Most of you know that I tend to lean a little bit on the valve side of the equation, but it's all about finding the right tool for the job. *(continued)*





Elegance. Simplicity. Truth.



ModWright
Instruments

modwright.com

360.247.6688

21919 NE 399th Street
Amboy, WA 98601

While I gave my favorite valve amplifiers plenty of listening time I had the best results with solid-state amplification. The tube amplifiers I tried were just a bit too dark for my taste.

The Sound

As well as these speakers did with the mega electronics, I settled on the Valve Audio Predator and the Meridian CD player, with the Sooloos server. I also found that my favorite all around speaker cable, the Cardas Neutral Reference was just a touch too warm for this application, but the DH Labs Q-14 was just right, offering up a little bit more ultimate detail in this application. I would definitely suggest a bit more revealing cable for these speakers.

The 805s come with the ability to be bi-wired or if you do not have cables to accommodate this, you can use the enclosed jumpers.

I used them in the bi wired mode for all configurations, which leads me to my only complaint about these speakers; the binding posts. I HATE these goofy binding posts that have a slot in the side that will only let you use a small spade lug. I won't single out B&W, as I have noticed a number of other manufacturers using them too, but they are very difficult to use if you have serious speaker cables.

One of the nicest things about having 3000 CDs at your fingertips is that you can really go through a lot of test tunes in short order to get a good read on the initial character of a component. The Sooloos music server is indispensable for this; with 3000 CDs on tap, it's easy to bounce around and listen to your favorites right away.
(continued)



Having just spent some time with an older pair of 801s, it was very easy to trace the heritage of this speaker. On music that didn't have a lot of super deep bass, there were times I was fooled into thinking much bigger speakers were in the room!

The B&W 805S excels at pinpoint imaging and also offers up very powerful dynamics for a small speaker. Again, the key is not having them in too large of a room. I just happened to be in a power pop mood after the break in period and spent a lot of time listening to Big Star, Cheap Trick, Rusty Anderson and Matthew Sweet. The first track on Cheap Trick's *In Color* CD, *Hello There*, just begs to be turned up as loud as you can stand it and I was very impressed at how well these speakers would play very loud without strain or distortion. If the 805s weren't broken in before this listening session, they certainly were after!

With that out of my system, it was time to play the standard female vocal faire. No worries there, this speaker does a very convincing job with that kind of music. Though these are British speakers, you would never mistake them for Spendor, Harbeths, or even ProAcs. Still musical with a very tonally correct midrange, they are more neutral than other speakers I have heard in this price class. Whether that sound is for you requires an audition.

Spinning the new Beastie Boys CD, *The Mix Up* and my favorite Chemical Brothers CD, *Push the Button*, I was very impressed at just how deep these little speakers would go. This led me down the old school rap path and I put LL Cool J's *Mama Said Knock You Out* on to hear the bass line on the title track. Again, I was very impressed; the 805s played everything I threw at them very convincingly.

To get the maximum amount of bass extension and detail, I highly suggest filling the stands (I used sand) and replacing the little rubber dimples that go between the stand and speaker with some small spikes. This will give you every last bit of slam the 805 is capable of. The stock stands and rubber pads are very good, but I'm obsessed!

In the midst of all this rocking out, I also noticed the ability of the 805S to do a very nice job with dynamic contrasts. It is a very fast speaker, and this adds to the spaciousness of the presentation. I played a few CDRs made from some of my old direct to disc LPs and was very happy with what I heard. (Having 200 watts per channel on tap didn't hurt either!)

But seriously folks, no matter what kind of music you enjoy, I think you just might be very impressed indeed with the 805S. However, I must emphasize that these are very high quality speakers and will be very revealing of the components associated with them. If you have a budget receiver or integrated amp, you stand a high probability of being unimpressed, but I assure you, that's NOT the speaker's fault.

Acquire the proper kit and you will be rewarded accordingly. I even moved up a few clicks on the food chain and matched the 805s up with my Aurum Acoustics CDP preamplifier/CD player and the Classe CA-2100 power amplifier that was also reviewed in this issue. Even with gear at this level, the 805s were up to the task and could be made the cornerstone of a very high quality music system where space is at a premium. *(continued)*

The B&W 805S excels at pinpoint imaging and also offers up very powerful dynamics for a small speaker.

Renaissance

Triode Monoblock Amplifiers



STOP.LOOK.LISTEN.

Rocky Mountain Audio Fest
October 20-22, Denver, CO
Rooms: 2002, 2024 and Primrose



Denver: 303-393-7918
Toll Free: 866-393-7918
redrockaudio@yahoo.com
www.redrockaudio.com

In Conclusion

The B&W 805S is a top-notch small speaker. It is very well made from a mechanical standpoint and personally; I think it is drop dead gorgeous. This one is pretty much straight down the middle tonally, neither warm and romantic nor dry and clinical, especially if you can mate it with a good solid-state amplifier with ample current drive. So in the end, you have a beautiful package that offers up great sound as well. That's tough to beat. ●

The B&W 805S

MSRP: \$2500, Plus \$600 for Stands

MANUFACTURER

B&W Group Ltd
Dale Road
Worthing, West Sussex
www.bowers-wilkins.com

PERIPHERALS

Preamplifier: Aurum Acoustics Integris CDP

Power Amplifiers: Nagra PSA, Classe CA-2100, McIntosh MC275 (Valve Audio Predator used as integrated)

Digital Sources: Aurum Acoustics Integris CDP, Meridian G08, Sooloos Music Server

Interconnects: Audience AU24

Speaker Cables: DH Labs Q-14

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

Power Conditioning: Running Springs Jaco

Good Moon Rising

THE MOON LP 5.3 PHONO PREAMPLIFIER

— Marc Phillips

I've been curious about SimAudio, and their Moon Classic series of components, for quite a while. SimAudio has definitely enjoyed some recent success in the High-End press due to the value and quality of their gear and recent accolades have made them a very popular brand indeed.

I was very excited about receiving the Moon LP 5.3 to review, because it fills a very valuable niche in the market. While we have a ton of budget phono preamps and there is certainly no lack of product in the 3-10 thousand dollar range, there is a definite void in the 1500 dollar range. This is a very important segment, because it is where a lot of the middle of the audiophile bell curve actually lives.



Where's my Allen wrench set, honey?

When I pulled the 5.3 out of its box, I was thrilled with its small size, and its solid build quality. The Moon radiates quality, with its thick machined faceplate and its precisely placed innards. I initially liked the fact that the faceplate had no switches or buttons, just that gold Moon logo and a bright blue LED indicator. (I know, the LEDs drive me nuts!!) The 5.3 was smooth, streamlined and confident-looking.

However, no visible adjustments on the front panel meant only one thing, the cover would need to be removed to change loading and gain, as the rear panel is crowded with balanced and RCA jacks as well as a connector for an optional outboard power supply. Though sometimes we obsessed audio types freak out about having a million adjustments at our fingertips, the average music lover sets

the loading and gain once every few years when they get a new cartridge. In retrospect, that's not a bad way to go!

Once you pop the top, it's all gravy. The instructions are very thorough, and after I removed the eight screws in the case, I found myself starting into a very well-laid out PC board, with dozens of tiny plastic jumpers in lieu of dip switches that can be easily extracted as long as you haven't just clipped your fingernails. Here you can adjust resistance loading from 10 to 47K ohms, capacitance loading (0pF, 100pF, 470pF), and choose between the RIAA or IEC equalization curve. 99% of all the records produced after the late 60s probably use the RIAA curve, but those of you with older records will enjoy having this option. If in doubt, just check the record

jacket on those older records to see how they were done.

You also have multiple settings for gain, with 40db for MM carts and 54 to 66db for MC cartridges that should be adequate for just about anything available these days. Should you choose to use the balanced XLR outputs, each setting has an additional 6db of

gain. I experimented a bit with the settings to match my Koetsu Rosewood cartridge just to note the differences, but I wound up sticking with the Moon recommendations (66dB gain, 100 ohm resistance, plastic instead of paper).

The Moon LP 5.3 required very little break-in time, which I'm finding is more and more the norm these days with solid-state equipment that doesn't have exotic capacitors. *(continued)*

When I pulled the 5.3 out of its box, I was thrilled with its small size, and its solid build quality.



Hardware. Software. Accessories.



BALANCED AUDIO TECHNOLOGIES • CARDAS • RUNNING SPRINGS AUDIO
SHELTER • USHER • VPI AND MUCH MORE

7652 EAST GREENWAY ROAD / SUITE 108 BY APPOINTMENT
SCOTTSDALE / PHOENIX ARIZONA 85260

WWW.DEDICATEDAUDIO.COM 480.991.8181

You will get a good feeling of what the 5.3 sounds like within 48 hours, with very subtle and gradual changes occurring afterward. I did give the Moon a solid week of playback before critical evaluation began.

Ch-ch-ch-changes

To investigate system synergy I tried the Moon in three very different systems, with my reference Michell Orbe SE with SME V arm and Koetsu Rosewood cartridge as the constant. Lately, I have had a much stronger feeling that a careful matching of solid state and tubed components can yield exceptional results.

Often times, the lower noise floor of a solid state phono stage can really be a plus in your system and the Moon was right on the money here.

I made it a point to use this phono stage with my SET system as well as the Exposure solid state integrated that I had around for a few months to review as well as my main system which has been making good use of the Mod-Wright 36.5 tubed linestage, with the McIntosh MC275 power amplifier and alternate performances by the Nagra PSA, which is solid state. There's that mix again!

While your tastes may vary, I especially enjoyed the Moon inserted in the all tube systems because it was so quiet. Thanks to this, I was able to hear more detail than before, yet the Moon sounded smooth, silky, not at all etched or tizzy. It was almost as laid-back and relaxed as the tubed phono stage of my Yamamoto CA-03L, but with the added benefit of precise imaging and extraordinary soundstage depth.
(continued)

I put the Moon to the ultimate test by playing all 9 discs from the 45 rpm Classic Records reissue of the Ansermet Royal Ballet Gala Performances, and I heard a stunning amount of detail that some of the more expensive tubed phono preamps I had on hand may have slightly obscured. But none of this resolution came at the cost of harshness or an overly-analytical sound.

Next, I used the Moon in an all solid-state system, trading out the Yamamoto and Zu gear with the Exposure 3010S I reviewed in Issue 10, and the utterly beguiling Devore Fidelity Gibbon Super 8 loudspeakers. This was an entirely different creature, with an incredible expansive soundstage, pinpoint imaging, and some of the deepest bass I've ever experienced with this combination. The Moon, however, did an amazing thing. It supplied 'bloom' to this system. I know, many think that you can only get bloom with tubes, but the Moon introduced a warmth that I didn't get with another tube phono preamp I had on hand at the time. The Moon wound up being a true chameleon in this regard.

When I was comfortable with the sound of the Moon and my Michell, I inserted the Technics SL-1200 that I was reviewing along with a few budget cartridges. Again, excellent results!

Not the Swiss Army knife analogy again!

If you follow my column, you know that I have a few favorite pieces of gear that I like to refer to as Swiss Army knife components, because they work so well in any instance. I wholeheartedly add the Moon LP 5.3 to that list of great components. I can't help but think a lot of vinyl lovers will hang on to the Moon for a long time, because it may never be the weak link in their system. It adapts and it excels; and with an external power supply looming on the horizon, it even offers an upgrade path for those more obsessed. It doesn't get any better than this!

I get a lot of email from people asking me for suggestions in this price range and I know what I'm going to tell them going forward. I look forward to listening to more Moon gear in the future and we'll be sure to give you an update when we can get the new power supply!



Second Take On The Moon

— Jeff Dorgay

We have had a lot of fun listening to so many different phono stages this year! While some predict gloom and doom for our good friend, the LP, I can't help but believe all is well with the plethora of great playback gear at our disposal, which leads us to the Moon LP 5.3. When Marc was finished with his evaluation, I made it a point to spend about a month listening very carefully to this phono stage and was equally impressed.

Currently I've been running a Grado Statement on my Oracle Delphi V and the Apheta cartridge on my Rega P9 and while they are at the opposite ends of the spectrum, with the Grado being very lush and romantic and the Apheta being the king of detail retrieval, it made a good contrast by which to put this phono stage through it's paces. To round things out a bit, I also used the SOTA Comet with the Dynavector 17D3 as something a bit more in keeping with the spirit of how this phono preamplifier might be used in a real world application.

The more time I spend listening to solid state phono stages, the more I like them and the Moon is no exception. The more work I do on my room, the easier it is to

hear noise and other artifacts that I DON'T like, so the absolute quiet of a solid state phono stage is more welcome every day. As with any solid state preamplifier, you will probably notice the sound opening up a touch after it has been on for a day or two; that's when you get that last bit of bloom.

I love the set it and forget it aspect of this preamplifier, and the small size makes it very easy to get close to your linestage. I was able to get away with a half meter pair of Audience AU24 balanced interconnects and using AU24 cable for both modes, preferred the balanced operation a touch more than the RCAs, because it offered even a bit quieter background. Those having to go RCA won't be disappointed, but if you are crazed and have a balanced option can get those last few molecules of quiet!

I've mentioned before that the best tube and solid state electronics seem to be converging and the Moon LP 5.3 is a perfect example of this. It possesses all the things I like about solid state (low noise floor, plenty of dynamic punch, no tubes to replace) with a good helping of tonality that doesn't scream tube or transistor, just musical and accurate. *(continued)*

SHUNYATA RESEARCH INC.

NEW FROM SHUNYATA RESEARCH THE GUARDIAN A/V POWER CONDITIONER



Massive Current Capabilities

Trident Defense System:
3 Stage Power Protection

Venom Noise Filter:
Proprietary Capacitive Array

All Metal Chassis

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

<< HYDRA PERFORMANCE
& TECHNOLOGY AT
HALF THE PRICE!

Gold Plated Contacts

100% Coverage Shielding
RFI/EMI Immunity

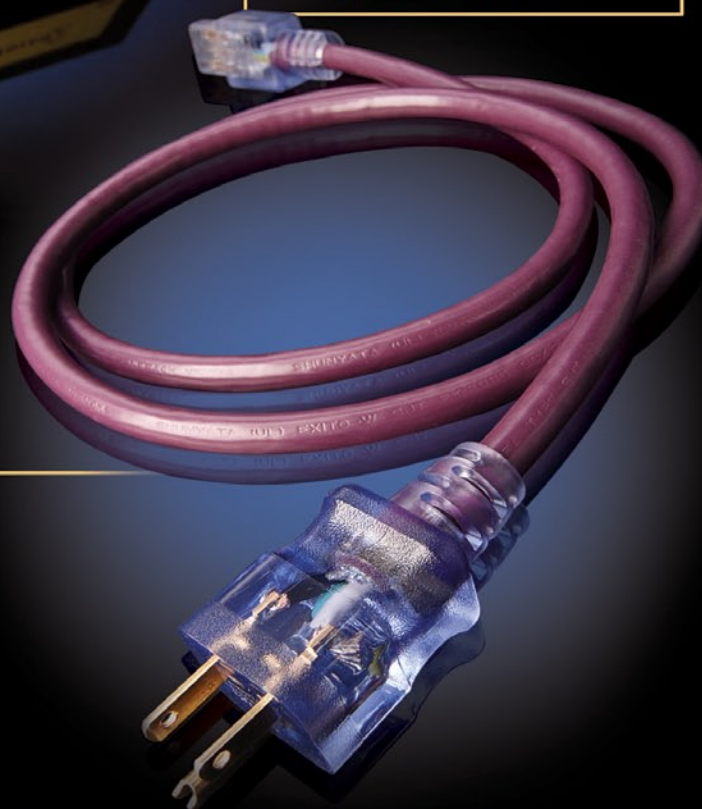
Massive 12AWG

Oxygen-Free Pure Copper

Proprietary
Molded Connectors

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

EXTRAORDINARY
PERFORMANCE –
UNPRECEDENTED VALUE! >>



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

www.shunyata.com

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

No matter what I listened to, I was very impressed with the performance. I dragged out a few of my favorite war-horses, Genesis' **Trick of The Tail** (on MoFi) and Queen's **Night At The Opera** (also on MoFi). The 5.3 gave me tons of bass on the Squonk test, and I passed right by the opportunity to have a Wayne's World moment with *Bohemian Rhapsody* to spin *I'm In Love With My Car*. Those layered Queen vocals were in full form and I could pick out all of the overdubs quite well.

This is a perfect example of a great product at a very affordable price. I think that a lot of people out there in the 500 – 3000 dollar turntable range could live very happily ever after with this phono stage. I can't wait to hear the power supply upgrade! Highly recommended. ●

**The Moon LP5.3 Phono
Preamplifier** MSRP: \$1400

MANUFACTURE

Simaudio Ltd.
2002 Ridge Road
Champlain, NY 12919
450-449-2212
www.simaudio.com

PERIPHERALS (Marc)

Preamplifiers: Conrad Johnson PV-15, Modwright 36.5, Yamamoto CA-03L

Power Amplifiers: Exposure 3010 (as integrated), McIntosh MC275, Nagra PSA

Speakers: DeVore Gibbon Super 8, Zu Druid

Turntables: Michell Orbe SE/SME V/ Koetsu Rosewood, Technics SL-1200/ Ortofon OM 10

Interconnects: Chord Cobra 2, DH Labs Relelation, Cardas Golden Reference

Speaker Cable: Zu Libtec, Wireworld Equinox III +

Power Cords: Shunyata Taipan Helix, Diamondback, Copperhead, Venom

Power Conditioning: Shunyata Guardian 8, Running Springs Jaco



The Wadia 581i

A Fantastic Multipurpose Digital Player

— Jeff Dorgay

I've always been a fan of Wadia's products. They have consistently been an industry innovator and make CD players that offer up great digital playback as well as being built like a bank vault. The classic Wadia styling has been with us for some time now, but it never looks dated to me.

I was fortunate to get one of the very first pre-production Wadia 581s last fall, so I have had a lot of time to evaluate this player thoroughly. Most pre-production units have their share of glitches, but the 581 did a fantastic job from day one. My only issue with this unit was that it did not have SACD capability. This was not a deal breaker for me, as I only have about 100 SACDs, but as time goes on, one tends to miss them...



Moving right along, the production versions made their way to the consumers and the initial response has been great. I was more than happy enough with the 581 to make it a permanent fixture here at TONE and the folks at Wadia were nice enough to replace my 581 with the 581i, which features full digital inputs and outputs in addition to variable outputs. Yep, you can use this as a preamplifier if you were a strictly digital person. Retail price on the 581i is \$9450 and the standard 581 is \$7950.

Thanks to all those digital inputs, you can now use your 581i with a music server, or other digital device. I've been using mine with the new Sooloos music server and a test DAC for all of the other things I've been experimenting with in this vein, like the Transporter, Squeezebox and a few others. It really ramps up the sound of the Squeezebox to play it back through the 581i, but that's another article!!

One other really nice touch that was implemented in the current version, is that the minute you hit the play button, the display dims to about 50% brightness. While we are on the subject, I really enjoy the size of the display, being very easy to read from across the room. *(continued)*



IMMEDIA

Sound Refinement

www.immediasound.com 510.559.2050

A Slightly Different Approach

Where Wadia differs from most of the other players is their approach to D/A conversion and filtering.

Instead of using off the shelf chipsets, it is all done with their proprietary Digimaster software (currently at version 2.5).

This costs a lot more than a chip-set, but offers higher performance as well as field upgradeability. It also gives them the ability to offer 32x oversampling and we can argue till the cows come home if that is THE WAY TO GO or not, but it works damn good here. Over the years, Wadia has also done an excellent job of providing software and firmware upgrades to their players, so again, you can feel very secure in making this investment.

Initial Setup

For those of you on the edge of your seat, I'll come clean. The final production model sounded even better than the one I had lived with for about six months! I was over the moon with the prototype, but this has reached another level of refinement indeed. It's a good thing in retrospect, that I did not jump the gun and report sooner.

During the last six months, the 581 spent rack time in my main system, with the ACT2/Se-ries 2 and Premier 350. It took about two weeks of continuous play to fully break in. Right out of the box it had a little bit of upper end glare, but a few weeks later was doing just fine. It had also managed to gain a little more ultimate bass slam and control after break in too! *(continued)*



Two weeks of continuous play in my garage system and it was ready to bring in the studio and get down to serious listening.

I used the 581i on the bottom shelf of one of my Finite Elemente Pagode Signature rack with a set of Cerepucs underneath it. I highly suggest a set of these and they have tightened up the sound of every CD player I've managed to use them with enough to justify their existence.

Because this is a fully balanced player, I did use it in balanced mode in my second system exclusively, but through the RCAs in my main system. In both cases, I used Cardas Neutral Reference interconnects and an Essential Sound Products The "Essence" Reference power cord. Running Springs power conditioning was used in both cases.

The Sound

The more time I spend with high performance digital gear, the more I'm impressed with how much better it has become. In my opinion, on a good system, the jump from the 2-4000 dollar players to the 7-10,000 (and up) players is not subtle. As I said in my review of the Meridian 808 in TONEAudio No.7, if you want superlative digital playback, it's going to cost some serious coin, just as it would if you wanted superlative analog playback. As Michael Fremer is fond of saying, 'Don't

shoot the messenger!' I have to tell you that every time I get another warped 40 dollar record from the UPS man, my 581i looks better and better!

Fortunately, the cost of excellence here is still a bit lower than my other reference player. My only complaint with the 581i, is the same one I have with my Meridian player: I wish they played all three formats and I'd be happy to pay a little more to get all three!

Until now, I have been somewhat uninterested in the SACD format, but in true collector fashion, I kept buying the discs here and there thinking 'well someday I'll have the right player!' The Wadia 581i is THAT player and it has made me want to keep pursuing this medium! Sure enough, I've been out on Ebay, picking up more discs, taking advantage of those that have lost interest in the medium. Just as my Meridian 808 has rekindled my excitement for DVD-a, the Wadia has done the same for me with SACD. Where will this madness end? This is supposed to be fun right?

As with any medium, it all depends on the recording and the mastering, but I assure you if you have any kind of SACD collection at all, you will be very pleased with the SACD playback portion of the 581i. The overall sound character of this player is the same, no matter what kind of disc you have in the tray, a well recorded SACD just has some more dynamic range. *(continued)*

The more time I spend with high performance digital gear, the more I'm impressed with how much better it has become.

This is where I hand the kudos to Wadia; granted, I have not heard every top echelon SACD player out there, but this is the first one that the SACD presentation has really grabbed me.

If I had to characterize the sound of the 581i, it would be powerful.

It is very quiet and dynamic, possessing a lot of weight to the overall picture. The high end performance is very neutral and extended without being harsh. I was freaking out listening to the SACD of Aerosmith's **Toys in the Attic**, with that old warhorse of FM airplay *Sweet Emotion*. Wow, Joe Perry's talkbox on the intro was just huge, extending way beyond the speakers and engulfing the room!!

Moving along to the excellent *Guitarra de Pasion* SACD from Juan Carlos Quintero, I was really enjoying the air around the guitar work, with the percussion floating all over the place. This is one of those discs that sounds very good on the CD layer, but the SACD playback just gave it so much more of a three dimensional feel. But I had to go back and rock out some more, so it was back to Aerosmith again and some Rolling Stones. Should you enjoy popular music from the 60s and 70s as much as I do, all of the Bob Dylan SACDs and the Rolling Stones CDs are a sonic treat!

The other thing I noticed about all of the SACDs I listened to, they seemed to have a bit more of an illusion of height than all but the best CDs. This was a very nice surprise! *(continued)*

When you want to hear the truth...



echo
audio

Fine Home Audio
Bought - Sold

425 SW 10th Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97205

888.248.echo
503.223.2292

echohifi.com
echoaudio@hotmail.com

m-f 11-6
sat 12-5

I hinted earlier about the weight this player has on tap. The more selections I played with a lot of bass, the more I was impressed with the authority and control in the lower registers that was just not available with the lesser players. Whether I was listening to music with a solo upright bass, or pounding synth bass, the amount and the texture was very impressive indeed. Symphony orchestra or Public Enemy, it was all very good. Again, this is what you pay the big money for!

Speaking of symphonic music, listening to the Mozart box set we wrote up last issue on Brilliant Classics was fantastic. Have no fear, the tonality of the 581i is excellent and does a great job with natural instruments as well. Again, Wadia does not throw the baby out with the bath on redbook performance. After the better part of the year listening, it does not compromise either and if you are not a collector of SACDs, rest assured this is an outstanding CD player too!

A Versatile Performer, Indeed

If you any inclination of getting some kind of music server in the next five years, spend the extra cash and procure the 581i. Trust me, you are going to kick yourself if you don't! And besides, it will really blow your friends away when they see a Squeezebox sitting on top of your rack playing through your 581i!

And it will sound great! I used the 581i for my final testing of the Squeezebox and Transporter. It took both of these devices to a much higher level of playback and with all the music server reviews we have in the pipeline, the 581i will become my standard DAC for all of these systems.

Should you be someone who is not an analog listener, the 581i becomes a downright BARGAIN, when you consider it uses Wadia's digital volume control, which to the best of my knowledge and experience, has been the only one I've heard that works in the digital domain, not degrading the output signal. I tried this with a number of different amplifiers and it worked well with most and spectacularly with the Manley 250 Monoblocks which are all tubes as well as the new Conrad Johnson ME250 which is a tube hybrid.

If you have the extra money, I still prefer a separate line stage, but only if you can use something really fantastic. Otherwise, you might have better luck just jacking this right in to the power amp of your choice.

Make This The Center Of Your Digital Universe

Thanks to the tremendous versatility of the 581i, you can use it as a high quality DAC, CD player and SACD player for not much more than the cost of just one of these three components alone. Considering Wadia's phenomenal build quality along with the ability to easily upgrade the software, makes this a player you should put at the top of your list. Enthusiastically recommended for the digital lover! ●

Considering Wadia's phenomenal build quality along with the ability to easily upgrade the software, makes this a player you should put at the top of your list.



UPSCALE AUDIO

Discover what's at the end of our rainbow.

CARY SLP-05 Preamplifier

Three years in the making from the legendary Dennis Had, Cary's premiere pre-amp is perhaps the finest we sell. Loaded with features like balanced and RCA ins and outs, cinema bypass, balance control, and a tubed headphone power amp.

Best of all, you get that glorious Cary tube sound.

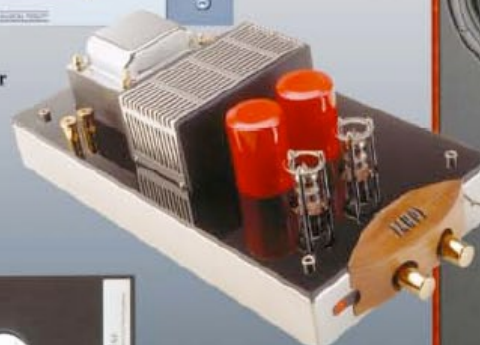


MUSICAL FIDELITY

X-T100 Integrated Amp and X-RAY V8 CD Player



MANLEY STEELHEAD



PATHOS CLASSIC ONE MK III

OPERA Quinta



BALANCED AUDIO TECHNOLOGY VK-51SE



Upscale Audio retubes more high end gear than anybody. Strong attention to detail, including a \$21,000 FFT analyzer and custom built test gear. See pictures on our website! And remember... we **DO NOT** use your amp as a tube tester.

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

**UPSCALE
AUDIO**
HIGHEST FIDELITY • MUSIC SYSTEMS

www.upscaleaudio.com

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



The Wadia 581/581i

MSRP: (581) \$7950, (581i) \$9450

MANUFACTURER

Wadia
1556 Woodland Drive
Saline, MI 48176
734-786-9611
www.wadia.com

PERIPHERALS

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

Power Amplifier: Conrad Johnson Premier 350, Conrad Johnson ME250, Manley 250 monoblocks, McIntosh MC275

Other Digital Sources: Sooloos Music Server, McIntosh MS300, Squeezebox, Transporter

Speakers: Tetra 506 Custom, Penaudio Serenade, Martin Logan Summit

Interconnects: Cardas Golden Reference, Audience AU24

Speaker Cable: Tetra Artet, Cardas Golden Reference

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

Power Conditioning: Running Springs Jaco, Running Springs Duke

Vibration Control: Finite Elemente Pagode Signature Racks (3) and Amplifier Stand, with Cerapucs and Ceraballs

Room Treatment: Sonex Classic, GIK panels and GIK Bass traps



The Classe CA-2100 Power Amplifier

— Jeff Dorgay



While not a newcomer to the scene, the CA-2100 was new to me. I've always admired the industrial design of the recent Classe products and have enjoyed what I heard at shows and friends houses.

The CA-2100 is the beginning of their Delta range of power amplifiers, going all the way up from 100 watts per channel in this case to 400 watts per channel (stereo or the M-400 monoblocks). Priced at \$3500, this is a great Journeyman audiophile product; definitely a step up from an integrated, but not so expensive to be available only to a select range of enthusiasts. *(continued)*

audience

...experience the fascination



"The Audience Au24 and powerChord cables share a family resemblance—they balance tonality extremely well, have superb detail (again, in balance; neither too much nor too little of it), and they're smooth. Not colored-smooth, but just-right-smooth."

OnHiFi.com - Wes Phillips - April '04



auricap
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**



Over the years, I have agonized over the question of tubes – to have or not to have.

While I always enjoy that last bit of dimensionality and musicality that tubes seem to offer, I must admit the gap is getting closer all the time. In the meantime the supply of good tubes keeps getting more elusive and more expensive! Combine that with the fact that a number of people just don't want to put up with tubes in their environment because of pets and children and we have to face solid state sooner or later!

I'm Pretty Judgmental After All...

Just so I could get a quick read on the sound, I put the CA-2100 into my reference system, leaving everything else intact, but swapping the CA-2100 for my Conrad Johnson Premier 350.

This little amplifier (actually, pretty heavy at about 47 pounds) did a good job powering the Martin Logan Vantages that I had been listening to for about three months. The sound definitely got smaller, but so it should in this type of comparison. Using my best sources from the analog and digital worlds, I spent a few days evaluating. So that you do not think I am being unfair to the Classe, it did spend a month in my living room system playing almost non-stop, so there were plenty of hours on the clock by the time it migrated out to the studio. Once I had a fair amount of time logged, I noticed that the CA-2100 went from ice cold to full bloom in about 30 minutes. *(continued)*



So far, so good. The CA-2100 was definitely holding its own. The most difficult part of evaluating a component like this is to keep it in the context of which it will most likely be used. In my living room it spent a lot of time paired with my Conrad Johnson PV-12 and the B&W 805S speakers, swapping them out for the DeVore Gibbon Super 8s and the Penaudio Charismas. (all great, but different speakers in the 2800 – 4000 dollar range) While each of these speakers have their own distinct personality, none threw a curve to the CA-2100 and I could play any of them loud enough to get me in trouble with my family and the neighbors.

While we are discussing the act of playing music rather loud, it's worth noting that even at ear splitting levels, the CA-2100 never got more than slightly warm to the touch.

Choices, Choices

At this price point, one is always forced to make compromises; you can't have it all for \$3500. You can have a reasonable helping, but not the whole meal. While not related that much to the sound, I really like the stunning good looks of this amplifier and its high build quality. If we were judging on aesthetics alone, the CA-2100 is in a class of its own at this price point. (And I've seen my share of things for this kind of dough that look outright shabby.)

Ok, great looks, solid build. What about the sound? I would rate the overall tonal quality of the CA-2100 pretty smack in the middle of the neutral to the just a smidge dry category; you will never mistake this one for a tube amplifier.

However, comparing it very extensively to my prized McIntosh MC275 (which is over on the other side of the personality meter, firmly in the romantic side of the dial) it does some things that the Mac does not.

First off, this amplifier is super quiet and does a fantastic job with low-level detail. Listening to the beginning of *The Healing Colors of Sound* on the fourth album from

Spocks Beard, I was very impressed with the nuances revealed. This amplifier does a very nice job at bringing out the tiny details in the recording that will

keep your interest piqued. I also spent a fair amount of time listening to the whole Brian Eno ambient collection with a big smile on my face. *(continued)*

This amplifier does a very nice job at bringing out the tiny details in the recording that will keep your interest piqued.

The New Sound of the South



We invite you to visit our new facility that offers four unique listening rooms in a relaxed atmosphere, featuring high performance products from the following manufacturers:

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

And on some of my DCC 24kt discs of my favorite classic tunes from the '70s I could hear the tape hiss from the master tape, where it was masked by the noise floor of my other tube amplifiers.

The CA-2100 has a lot of weight in the lower registers with a good dose of texture and detail.

Everything from Little Feat to Mahler was reproduced with plenty of authority.

If you were listening from another room, this amp could easily be mistaken for something much more powerful than 100 watts per channel. Blasting the test pressing of the upcoming WB/Rhino remaster of Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours* showed that this amplifier has what it takes down low; the bass riffs in *The Chain* were very impressive.

The midrange of the CA-2100 was neither pushed forward nor recessed, but this is where you just don't get the full enchilada at this price point. My more expensive Nagra PSA had a slight edge in lack of grain, but it has a much bigger price tag. The McIntosh is without question more romantic sounding with more air in the mids, but nowhere near the low level resolution or the slam. Listening to the Netherlands Wind Ensembles *Beethoven Wind Music* was very correct sounding, neither embellished nor thin. While I am being picky here, it is important to let you know what to expect.

What the CA-2100 offers above and beyond the competition is the effortlessness at which it plays, due to the large power supply under the hood.

(continued)

(gateway sound)

125 Royal Woods Court
Suite 160
Tucker, Georgia
770 493 1550

www.gatewaysound.net



I was also very impressed that it offered two sets of binding posts for speaker connection, which was a nice touch.

The CA-2100 offers you the option to use it with a balanced preamplifier or single ended with RCA's. I made it a point to try it both ways and must admit I preferred it in balanced mode, trying it with Cardas Golden Reference cable as well as DH Labs Revelation interconnects. You can change the input configuration with the mode switch on the front panel. Click it into standby and change it from balanced to unbalanced in just a second, easy!!

Maybe It's Just The Canadian Connection

Adrian Butts from Tetra Loudspeakers says that hifi gear from Canada sounds better because it's more quiet in Canada, so hifi designers there experience a different soundscape. I can't vouch for that personally, but there was definitely a great synergy going between my Tetra 506 Customs and Aurum Acoustics Integrus CDP. With only one balanced interconnect in the chain, it would have been very easy to mistake the CA-2100 for a more expensive amplifier indeed, driving the 92db Tetras effortlessly.

So, It's Back To Those Hard To Make Choices

The CA-2100 has plenty of bass and bass control along with a very wide soundstage and very good low-level detail resolution. I suspect all but the most died in the wool tube lovers will come away from an audition very impressed with the dynamics and tonal quality of this amplifier.

I spent a lot of time trying the CA-2100 with a number of different speakers, cables and a few different preamplifiers to see how well it would work when I changed the other variables. All of my experiences were very good and it is so neutral I think this is an amplifier that everyone with all but a very bright or dry linestage could be quite happy.

A Very Nice Package, Indeed

The Classe CA-2100 packs a lot of musicality into its compact package and throws in a very healthy dose of versatility along with a ton of style. I'm certainly hoping that we will see more of their gear coming through our doors in the months to come.

If you are looking for a great solid-state power amp at a very reasonable price, look no further. ●

The Classe CA-2100 Power Amplifier MSRP: \$3500

MANUFACTURER

Classe Audio, Inc.

5070 Francois Cusson
Lachine, Quebec
H8T 1B3 Canada
514-636-6384

www.classeaudio.com

PERIPHERALS

Preamplifier: Aurum Acoustics Integrus CDP, Conrad Johnson PV-12, Conrad Johnson ACT2/ Series 2, Aesthetix Callisto Signature

Analog Source: Rega P9/RB1000/Grado Statement

Digital Source: Aurum CDP Speakers, B&W 805S, DeVore Fidelity Gibbon Super 8, Martin Logan Vantage, Penaudio Serenade, Penaudio Charisma

Interconnects: Cardas Golden Reference, DH Labs Revelation

Speaker Cable: DH Labs Silver Sonic Q-14 Power Management Running Springs Haley, Running Springs Mongoose Powercords





The ASR Basis Phonostage Is No Mistake

— Dan Babineau



enjoy the occasional mistake. I made a mistake when I bet one of my good friends that the Boston Red Sox would never win the World Series in our life time. I made a similar bet on the Chicago White Sox and in both cases I gladly paid the bet because it was incredible to watch two underdog teams take the pennant.

When I first heard about the ASR Basis phonostage I was very reluctant to even stop in for a listen. Generally, I don't like the sound of a phonostage with electrolytic capacitors in the power supply and I'm also not always that fond of OP amps in the phono circuit.

And then there is the solid-state caveat. I have an old photograph of me sitting on the floor of my father's den holding a Mullard EL34. My mother tells me that I was about two years old when the photo was taken and I have been absolutely devoted to vacuum tubes ever since.

So imagine my hesitation to evaluate a battery powered, solid-state phonostage with op amps under the hood. It's a tough job but someone had to step up to the plate and do a David Ortiz, namely knock one out of the park! And that is exactly what Mr. Fredrich Schafer has accomplished with his ASR Basis, a grand slam homerun!



Sometimes Good Things Come In Large Packages!

The unit comes in two boxes, one for the control unit, (the light one) and one for the battery power supply, weighing about 60lbs. There is an eight foot umbilical cord hard wired from the control module that attaches to the battery power supply via a massive double clamp connector that won't come off in a tornado. I sat down with the two units unboxed and a cup of tea, proceeding to learn the basics of the ASR Basis.

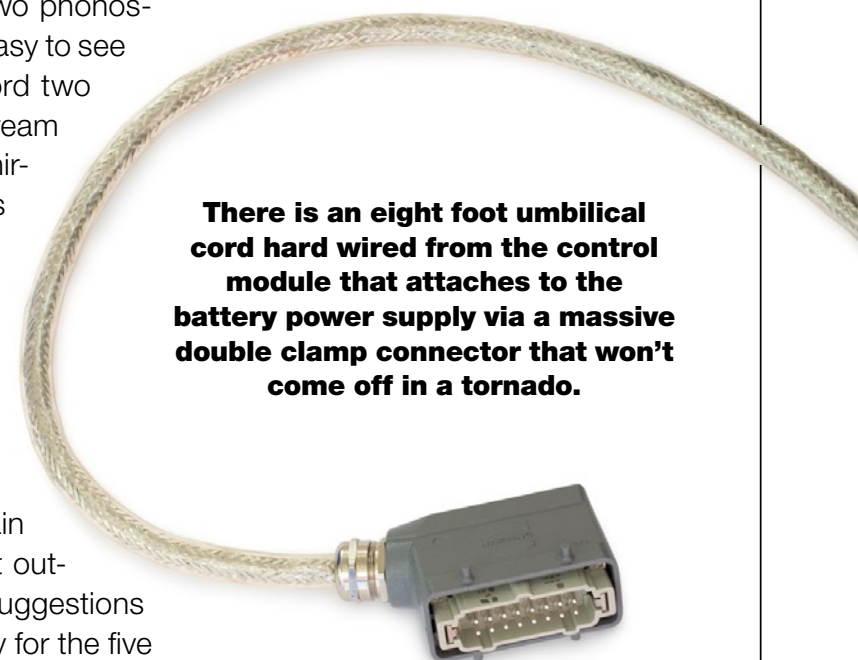
The owner's manual is one of the best in the business, starting with basic setup and then going into detail on how to obtain the best performance possible from your cartridge. It also gives a good lesson on the care of the battery supply. I was very impressed that the unit came fully charged (nice touch right off the bat), so that I didn't have to wait a day or so to give it a test drive!

The control module of the Basis is constructed entirely from black acrylic and looks very racy sitting on my racks. All adjustments are facilitated with the top off; gain, loading and

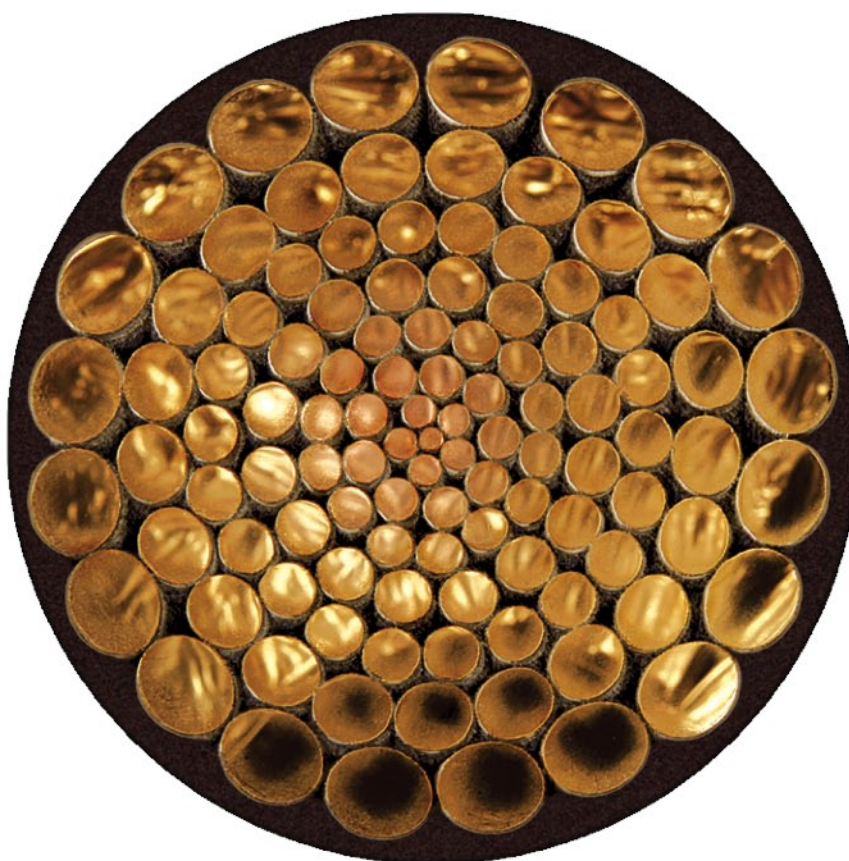
even a high pass filter. The top stayed off until I was satisfied that all was just right.

Inside, the ASR is neat as a pin with blue circuit boards and a series of LEDs that indicate the status of playback. One of the first delights for me was learn that the ASR is actually two phono-stages in one. With the top off it was easy to see two identical circuits that would afford two turntables/cartridges. A reviewer's dream but better yet an analog fanatic's nirvana. I've always had two turntables in my system and NO, I DON'T DJ. My Linn LP-12 is used to evaluate the many used records that I purchase, while the SME 20 has been my mainstay for over 5 years. Gain and loading are set via separate dip switches that even I could see with my extreme far-sightedness. The gain structure will handle even the lowest output cartridges and Mr. Schafer's suggestions for loading and gain worked perfectly for the five cartridges that I used to evaluate the unit. *(continued)*

There is an eight foot umbilical cord hard wired from the control module that attaches to the battery power supply via a massive double clamp connector that won't come off in a tornado.



The Cardas Conductor



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

cardas.com

I preferred the high pass filter off and I strongly agree with the manual that the unit sounds best when run balanced from the tone-arm if you have this option available. While I run my LP-12 single ended with good results, the SME 20 is run balanced.

Setup Options

The Basis can be played using either AC power or DC with the internal battery. One silver knob on the face plate of the control module allows you to select AC or DC for input A or B; it doesn't get any easier than this. The single output can be run to your linestage or integrated amplifier via balanced or single ended. My Conrad Johnson ART 3 preamplifier uses RCAs, so that choice was already made for me.

A Lyra Skala cartridge (.5mv output) is currently mounted to the LP-12, and a Koetsu Rosewood Signature Platinum (.2mv output) is mounted to the SME 20 with an SME 4.5i arm. Cardas Golden Reference interconnects are used between the tables and the ASR, with Cardas Golden Cross interconnects everywhere else. Both tables sit on separate Grand Prix Audio Monaco racks.

The rest of the system consists of the Conrad Johnson 350SA power amplifier and a pair of Avalon Opus speakers. Power conditioning is handled by my own Running Springs Audio Haley and Danielle with RSA Mongoose power cords throughout.

I experimented with the gain and loading settings a bit, but ended up liking the factory suggestions the best. Remember to set the number 10 dip switch on the gain block to the on position if you run single-ended or you'll experience a rather loud pop during playback! *(continued)*

Using the ASR Basis is very straightforward. There is an amber light on the power supply that indicates that the unit is running in AC, when you select the battery position on either inputs, this light turns to blue indicating the battery mode.

DC Magic Indeed

I first listened to the Linn/Skala using AC power: Quiet, with a lot of energy. I then selected the battery mode, dropped the tone arm on the Linn and then things went DEAD QUIET with a musical naturalness that at first was hard to describe. The same results happened with the SME/Koetsu combination, maybe even quieter and more lifelike. And this thing had no hours on it! I sat on the floor of my listening room and started to laugh to myself, thinking what a great piece of hardware, boy I am glad I was wrong!

Then I started to put the Basis through the paces, playing every type of record I could pull off of my record shelf. I'm not going to tell you that the ASR sounded unbelievable right out of the box, but I will tell you that it was easy to listen to music while it broke in without getting that funny 'what happens if this thing doesn't get any better' feeling in my stomach. And by the time I had played about fifty LPs I began to hear the true magic of this battery driven phono preamplifier.

Music is magic! It can take you places that no other artform can: it can set the stage, create an instant atmosphere and bring you to tears all at the same time. Music playback is a little trickier. If you hear too much of the electronics involved in playback your senses get overloaded, your brain starts to overprocess and tries to make sense of what your ears are hearing. This subliminal organization of information creates what we've come to call 'listener fatigue'.

Here lies the magic of the ASR: while running on DC, the ASR creates a naturalness, an organic presence that allows you to hear into the music and does not fatigue your brain. This presentation is one of the most unique and thoroughly musical examples of analog playback that I've heard to date in over thirty years of analog obsession. Yes, the ASR is dead quiet; you can actually hear a pin drop between tracks. Yes, surface noise seems to evaporate even on questionable LPs. And yes the ease of use is a welcome relief in this modern world of noisy vacuum tubes.

The precision built into the unit structurally and the accuracy in tone, pace and ultimate dynamics is what make this phono-stage capture your soul. Now throw in the lack of distortion obliterated by the use of DC power and you get one or should I say two first class phono stages.

And Many Records Were Spinned...

I played everything including the kitchen sink through the ASR and came away smiling every time. I started with piano music and

Debussy: Charles Rosen on Epic performing some of my favorite Claude Debussy piano music. Tonally correct, spot on for rhythm and pace and extremely realistic decay. Next some string quartets and Shostakov-

ich with the Borodin String Quartet playing all lucky 13 of these Russian masterpieces. Again, quiet, tonally correct and extremely musical.

Believe me if it is going to sound harsh and wrong it will be with these intense quartets all composed in minor keys. Other big stand-outs in the classical mode were Michelangeli's stunning performance of Ravel's *Concerto for Piano in G Major* for intense inner detail and amazing air. The fact that the ASR is so dead quiet allowed me to finally hear into the brilliant second movement of this piece and discover even more micro detail of pianist Michelangeli's unbeatable performance. For tonality and tempo I especially like David Oistrakh on EMI playing the Prokofiev *Violin Concerto in G Minor*. Spot on for tone and enough energy to launch the space shuttle. *(continued)*

The precision built into the unit structurally and the accuracy in tone, pace and ultimate dynamics is what make this phono-stage capture your soul.



TIDAL Audio

Piano



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

Shostakovich *Symphony #10*, with Andre Previn and the LSO on EMI, a digital recording, gave me fine examples of the ASR's core strengths: extremely low noise floor, accurate, incredibly dynamic and definitely musical.

I love the atmosphere that Shostakovich creates in the first movement. As we progress through this monumental work the energy and power of the orchestra takes over the room and we are catapulted head first into the turmoil and chaos of this extremely volatile time in Russian.

This work gets loud and the ASR delivered the 10th unerring and without distortion!

The same can be said of the Bax symphonies on Lyrita where things get violent at times but the ASR allows you to pick out the details and hear the various instruments that collectively create a musical atmosphere.

To change moods I dragged out a copy of the Dixie Dregs **Industry Standard** and the room exploded with energy. I could play the Dregs much louder than I could before the ASR and that felt great! I got the same buzz playing more fusion, this time it was Brand X. I played both sides of **Masques** and again sat in my listening chair grinning ear to ear. I played a bunch of jazz, tons of Miles, Coltrane, Parker, and Dizzy. I had to play the rather sinister *Back Seat Betty* off of Miles' **Man With A Horn**. Marcus Miller's bass just locked in the middle of the soundstage as Miles proceeds to blow his brains out on trumpet.

(continued)

This record is not a great recording, but with the lack of surface noise coupled with the low distortion delivered consistently by the ASR, I could play it over and over without fatigue.

It got to the point where I wasn't afraid to play almost any record in my collection. Even my favorite rock recordings sounded great: Metallica, Audioslave, Nirvana, Sabbath, Pat Travers. . .

Boom, Boom out came my neighbor to tell me to turn it down a bit.

Of course you know the trick when you get in the volume predicament with your neighbors – just invite the annoyed neighbor in and play something that they enjoy. I shifted gears for my grumpy neighbor and played The Stones' **Beggar's Banquet**. After a few songs Mr. Grumpy replied: 'I've never heard The Stones sound this good, what's the secret?' 'Battery power, my grumpy friend,' and he went off singing the chorus from *Sympathy for the Devil*.

Eventually, I moved on to some blues and even a few reggae discs, where my daughter danced around the room and said 'This is fun, daddy.' And fun is exactly what the ASR Basis Exclusive is: fun to use and fun to play!

I tried other cartridges just to be sure; a Benz Ebony LP, a Lyra Argo and my old standby, the Van den hul Frog. In all three cases the ASR just made the music come alive. I've owned a multitude of phono stages through the years but the ASR playback is truly unique in the best possible way – it draws amazing amounts of information from your phono cartridge, deciphers the data and turns raw data into a magic we call music.



Delivery From Tube Agony!

— Jeff Dorgay

If this were **Car and Driver**, I'd be delivering a counterpoint but that's not the case this time. I completely agree with Dan on the Basis Exclusive. After listening to his at length, I bought one of my own a few months ago and can't be more thrilled.

And I'll tell you why, no tubes! Don't think I've lost the faith with tubes, but they are the most difficult to deal with in a phono preamplifier because of all the noise issues. With good NOS tubes getting more difficult to procure all the time, it's another rabbit I just didn't want to chase any longer. I can't tell you how many times over the last year or so that I thought I had it JUST RIGHT, only to lose a tube! Then the replacement wasn't QUITE RIGHT and the chase started all over again.

Granted if you aren't as obsessed as we are, you can throw a set of Sovteks in and pray. It will work (for a while) and certainly play music, but if you want that last bit of musical magic, locating high quality tubes will make your job harder.

Oh yes, the magic is there and if you don't listen every day or perhaps only a couple of hours a week, the valve approach is still sound.

I've said it before and I'll say it again; my reference system is a tool by which I evaluate and compare all the other equipment I evaluate, so I just didn't have time for this anymore, but the dilemma was to find a solid state phono preamplifier that was musical enough to make me put the tubes away for now. The ASR Basis passed with flying colors. I still have a couple of great tubed phono stages that I use from time to time, but only sparingly. The Basis is what I spin records on every day!

The nicest thing about the ASR Basis is that the sound is so neutral that I feel that anyone with tubes or transistors in their system could find real happiness with it. I know I did. Rather than tell you about all the records I played, I would like to point out another thing that might make the ASR more interesting to you; it doesn't need a fancy power cord! Thanks to the battery operation, once it's charged, the AC supply is out of the circuit.

(continued)

Once Is Not Enough

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

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

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

We carry virtually all cable, cartridge
and accessory lines.

GALEN CAROL

A • U • D • I • O

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

San Antonio, Texas
210.805.9927



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

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

The Standard SWL-9.0SE
With Solid State Power Supply is \$2495

The SWL-9.0SE
With a Tube Rectified Power Supply is \$2995

The SWLP-9.0SE
With an Internal Phono Stage and Outboard
Tube Rectified Power Supply is \$3995



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

The LS-36.5
With a Tube Rectified Power Supply is \$4995

For the naysayers in the crowd that don't think the batteries make a difference, switch the Basis back to AC power and watch the soundstage collapse. It's ok and will do in a pinch (or if you forgot to turn it back to recharge mode for a day or so) but no where near in the same league as with DC power.

In the end, if you are considering a phono stage in the \$5-10 thousand dollar category, this one gets my vote. My hat is off to Mr. S. ●

The ASR Basis Exclusive
MSRP: \$7500

**ASR Audio Systeme/
Fredrich Schafer**
www.asraudio.de

US DISTRIBUTOR

Daniel R. Barnum
Half Note Audio
www.halfnoteaudio.com
847-656-5015

PERIPHERALS (Dan)

Preamplifier: Conrad-Johnson
ART 3

Power Amplifier: Conrad
Johnson Premier 350

Analog Sources: SME 20 w/
SME 4.5i and Koetsu Rosewood
Signature Platinum, Linn LP-12
w/Lyra Skala

Phono Preamplifier: Aesthetix
IO with dual power supplies

Interconnects: Cardas Golden
Reference, Golden Cross

Speaker Cable: Cardas Golden
Cross

Power Cords: Running Springs
Audio Mongoose

Power Conditioning: Running
Springs Audio Danielle, Duke

Huge Performance, Small Footprint!

The JLTi Phono Preamp

— Jeff Dorgay

With so much excitement for analog playback these last few years, it seems like there is always another phono preamplifier on the horizon. Allen Wright, the man behind Vacuum State has been coming up with some very interesting designs for quite some time now, and if you peruse his website www.vacuumstate.com you will realize that he is a very passionate man when it comes to hifi!





The Badge Tells You What's Inside.

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

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

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

Great Northern Sound

620 Birchwood Avenue
White Bear Lake, MN 55110
651-762-8333
www.greatnorthernsound.com

Watch for our new location and showroom.

This preamp has been getting quite a bit of buzz out in the field, so we were very excited to get one in for review in the stock configuration, with a small wall mounted power supply (\$1650) as well as the upgraded external power supply which raises the price tag to \$2600. I am always very enthusiastic about this kind of arrangement, because you can work around a sound you enjoy and then when your budget allows, buy the bigger power supply to increase resolution and refinement.

If you are a lover of giant boxes, stop right here. But if you are more entrenched in the form following function mentality, the JLTi will be right up your alley.

I have to come clean with you. I enjoyed the JLTi so much more with the external supply, I am basing most of the review on this configuration. Granted, it is a great value and excellent performer with the stock supply, I liked it so much more with the additional power on tap, I didn't want to go back!

With the power supply off to the side, I was able to get the preamp directly beneath my P9 and directly above my Aurum CDP Linestage/CD player, only depending on a half-meter section of Cardas Golden Reference interconnects. It's always a great idea to make the path from the tonearm to the preamp as short as possible.

Setup And Operation

The JLTi came with a manual that had concise instructions, was thoughtfully put together AND had some useful pictures. Considering some of the dreadful manuals that I have read, this is a great step in the right direction. I wish we could see a little more of this in the industry.

(continued)

Once you decide if you need the high or low gain settings and how you need to load your cartridge, it's pretty easy to get going. Just pay close attention on the rear panel, because there are three sets of RCA jacks, marked: In, Out and Load. If you do not plug anything in to the load jacks, you will have a standard 47k load. The owners manual says that you will be surprised at how many moving coil cartridges, even though they are rated for a 100 ohm loading will sound better at 47K. Keeping an open mind, I gave this a try, but none of my test cartridges provided me with this surprise!

Regardless, considering how easy it is to set loading, you should experiment away to find the perfect setting for your system!

What really impressed me was the sense of weight this tiny little preamp was able to throw around the room. Don't let the small size fool you, this is a serious phono preamp.

I was supplied with 100 ohm and 1000 ohm loading plugs that you attach at the back of the preamp. Take care with loading, inputs and outputs because the only downside of that nice compact box is that there is not a ton of real estate on the back panel. All use RCA plugs, so make sure before you start to play records, just to be safe! The low and high gain settings are also set on the rear panel, with jumpers similar to those on the hard drive of your computer. Again, functional not showy; nice touch.

The JLTi spent its time here in my second system and gave me the ability to use my Rega P9/RB1000 combination as well as the Oracle Delphi V/SME iv.Vi with seven different cartridges, ranging from about 100 dollars up to about 3500 dollars. Rest assured, you can expect good luck with whatever you mate it with.



Very Neutral Indeed

The JLTi is for now, the most neutral phono stage I have heard at this price point. I have been listening to quite a few things on the solid state and tubed side of the fence because I think that the \$2-3000 range is the sweet spot in terms of budget for a lot of music enthusiasts. (My other favorite is the ModWright 9.0 SWP) While it does not have that last tiny bit of air, bloom or whatever you would like to call it, the JLTi is not the least bit sterile or thin.

This preamp possesses a very nice airy sound and will not embellish the sound, yet it takes nothing away. Comparing the sound

of the new Crowded House album **Time On Earth** through the JLTi to my reference (the ASR Basis Exclusive), it held its own very well and did an incredible job with getting the spatial cues right. I noticed this a lot on anything that had a lot of really breathy vocals and harmonies, you could hear the space between the vocal tracks quite well, with a very natural sounding decay. Nothing forced, it was just right.

What really impressed me right from the beginning was the sense of weight this tiny little preamp was able to throw around the room. Don't let the small size fool you, this is a serious phono preamp. *(continued)*

Is this what is meant by “intelligent design”?

- World's best vacuum tube phonostage under \$1000 (Cornet MC, \$999)
- World's best vacuum tube DAC under \$2000* (Chime, \$1799)
- World's best vacuum tube tester (VacuTrace, \$1249)
- World's best moving coil headamp under \$1000 (Piccolo, \$299)
- World's best phonostage under \$200 (Bugle, \$129)
- World's best digitizing phonostage under \$500 (The Ripper, \$399)
- World's best cable burn-in device under \$500 (FryBaby, \$249)
- World's best CD reference clock under \$200 (HagClock, \$99)
- World's best variable equalization phonostage under \$2000 (Archiver, \$1249)
- World's best turntable strobeclamp (UFO, \$399)

Compare our products to anything else available. Hagerman Technology provides an unbeatable combination of performance, features, and price. Feel free to question any of these audacious claims via email. jim@hagtech.com

* with USB input and volume control

www.hagtech.com

Often, the hardest thing for a preamplifier to get right in this price category is a real sense of resolution.

Sometimes we are given a sonic picture that has too much tonal contrast at the edges, which leads to serious listener fatigue after a while. That 'wow' factor you heard at a dealer, show or friends house starts to fade after a few hours and can get downright annoying after about 50 records.

One You Can Live With

I can happily report that the JLTi passed the 50 record test (and the 200 record test for that matter) with flying colors. I spent a lot of time bouncing back and forth between the new Pro-ject RM-10 with a Sumiko Blackbird, the Rega P9 with the Grado Master and the Oracle with the Dynavector 17D3. It was very much a yin and yang type of thing, with the Blackbird being very fast and detailed, the Grado being very lush and romantic, while the Dynavector was split down the middle. Depending on my mood, I could have been very happy with either of these choices. The RM-10 (watch for a full review next issue) with a decent thousand dollar cartridge of your choice and the JLTi made for a very musical analog front end that you don't need a home equity loan for.

These three cartridges were a great fit for this test, because the Sumiko is a high output MC (2.5mv), the Dynavector a low output MC (.23mv) and the Grado is a low output MM (.5mv and actually a moving iron cart...) The JLTi is extremely quiet and had enough gain for each of these cartridges. The MoFi 3.5 C on my SME 10 is also very low output (.27mv) and worked very well with this preamp.

(continued)

Noise was never an issue, no matter what cartridge I matched it with. This is one of my favorite things about solid-state phono stages!

Thanks to the spot on tonality of the JLTi, each of these cartridges did a great job and stayed in character, revealing their strengths. If a phono stage goes too far on one side of the scale, it can make the detailed cartridge sound a bit dull or the romantic cartridge muddy. No problems here. If you are looking for your phono stage to be a system adjustment or tone control, this one's NOT for you.

One of the highest compliments I can pay the JLTi was that no matter which way I had it configured, I was just concentrating on the music, not nitpicking the sound. I was very pleased no matter what kind of music I was enjoying.

It's All About Power

To digress for a minute, we need to address the power options for the JLTi. With the standard wall mount power supply this is still an excellent phono preamplifier. However, after spending so much time listening to it with the additional outboard supply, I did hear the soundstage collapse somewhat when going back to the standard power supply.

The better your system, the more you need the upgraded power supply. Where does one draw the line? This one is always hard, because I'm obsessed. Don't look to me to be the voice of reason, because I'll fail you every time and tell you to just spend the money and live it up.

In all fairness though, I would suggest this as a ballpark; if you are more in the 800-2000 dollar table and cartridge level, you could probably live happily ever after



The better your system, the more you need the upgraded power supply. Where does one draw the line?

with the entry-level configuration. More than this and you are probably in a grey area. If you have more than a few thousand dollars tied up in your analog rig, I think you will be shortchanging yourself if you DON'T get the upgraded power supply if the extra dough isn't a problem, because you will probably have enough resolution to hear the difference. This is very handy, because you can grow with the JLTi as your system improves.

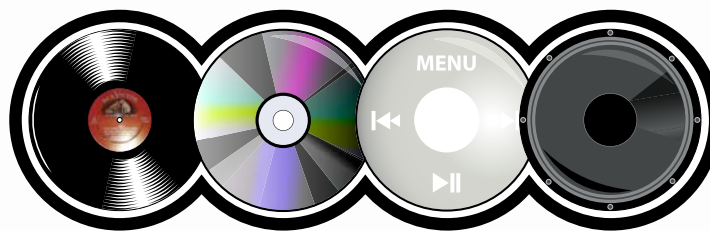
Every aspect of the JLTi is improved. More weight, bigger soundstage, better imaging and a more refined presentation awaits you with the bigger power supply. But most of all, it's the bass performance; this preamp never ceased to impress me with its bass performance, especially with the external supply! The very first record I put on when I put the JLTi in my system was **Morph The Cat**, just because it has

so much LF energy and I was quite surprised indeed! But because this record has a bit of a loose, whumpy bass line it isn't the best to judge bass control and texture, so I dug out a few other jazz records with acoustic bass in a natural space so that I could get a better handle on things.

Again, no problem. Listening to all of my favorite jazz standards on DCC vinyl the JLTi did an exceptional job with texture and attack on this instrument.

The all important midrange was well presented too. This is what you get as you move up the analog food chain when they do it right; detail and musicality! As I said earlier, it's important to me for gear not to embellish too much in any direction (unless I'm putting a vintage system together...) so, I tried some of my more dreadful albums to see how that went. Much as I like it, Mark Ronson's new album still sounds thin and compressed, though I was getting some good detail that I did not get on my budget setup. *(continued)*

Rocky Mountain Audio Fest



Fourth Annual - Oct. 12 - 14, 2007
Marriott Denver Tech Center Hotel
4900 South Syracuse, Denver, CO

GEAR FOR THE EAR.

Gear up for extreme listening!

Create your own audio adventure at the nation's largest, independent home audio/video equipment showcase:

- 100+ Listening Rooms
- Specialty Seminars from Industry Experts

"The RMAF was easily one of the best Hi-End audio shows I have ever attended. I urge every Audiophile on the planet to make the pilgrimage to Denver, it is an experience not to be missed."
Ron Nagle, Enjoy the Music

Online registration May 1 through October 10, 2007.

- \$10/day, \$25/3-day pass (students 1/2 price)

Updates and Registration at:
www.AudioFest.net
RMAudioFest@yahoo.com
303.393.7918



The \$2600 Question, Answered

The JLTi phono stage is well built, easy to use and offers up a very neutral, yet powerful presentation of LP playback. It gave a fantastic performance with every combination of turntable and cartridge that I matched it up with. If you are shopping in this price range, snap this baby up now before the Dollar gets weaker! ●

The JLTi Phono Stage

MSRP: \$1650 with wall mount power supply, \$2600 with external, power supply

MANUFACTURER

Vacuum State GmbH
www.vacuumstate.com

US Distributor

Audio Revelation
Jay Kaufman
2630 Pirineos Way #24
Carlsbad, CA 92009
760-944-0444

PERIPHERALS

Preamplifier: Aurum Acoustics
Integris CDP

Power Amplifier: ConradJohnson
ET250

Speakers: Penaudio Serenades
w/REL B2 subwoofer

Digital Source: Aurum CDP

Turntables: Rega P9 w/RB1000 arm, Oracle Delphi V w/ SME iv.Vi arm, SME 10 w/SME V arm

Cartridges: Grado Master, Grado Statement, Sumiko Blackbird, Sumiko Celebration, Dynavector 17D3, Shelter 90x, MoFi 3.5C

Interconnects: Cardas Golden Reference, Audience AU24 Speaker Cable Audience AU24

Power Cords: Essential Sound Products The Essence "Reference"

Power Conditioning: Running Springs Danielle

Great Budget Cable!

The Audio Art SC-5 Speaker Cables

If you recall last year, we gave the Audio Art interconnects one of our exceptional value awards for 2007. For around a hundred bucks, they make a great pair of interconnects and for \$115, (\$130 with banana plugs and double for bi wired) they make an equally good pair of speaker cables.

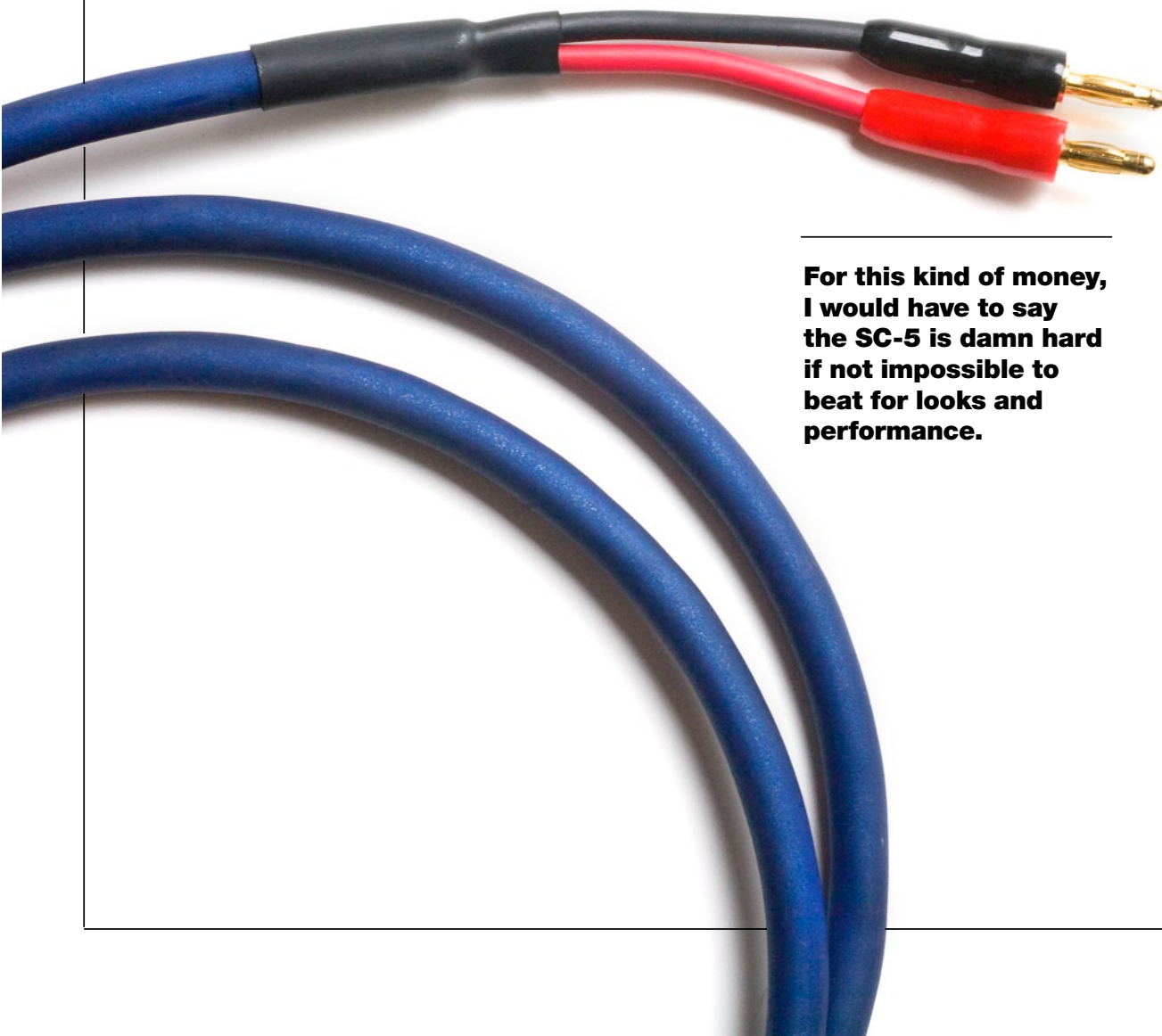
While it is often very fashionable in this industry to talk about the mega expensive cables, it's easy to lose sight that what we have grown used to paying for an eight foot pair of speaker cables would feed a family of ten for a year in Bali. Without getting into a major discussion about the struggle between the haves and the have nots, the bottom line is that there are a lot of people out there that just need a great pair of speaker cables for around 100 bucks.



The Audio Art SC-5s Deliver This In Buckets!

I know there are a lot of people that like to go the DIY route and while I have nothing against that (because I'm known to pick up a soldering iron on occasion and a torque wrench for that matter...) sometimes you just don't have the time or ambition to screw around with it! At this price, why bother? Spend that time record shopping instead, I say!

The SC-5 uses a pair of 14 gauge silver coated OFC copper. Unlike a few cables that I have heard with some silver added to the mix that have had a touch of brightness, I found these to be very neutral. They come in very basic packaging (no wooden boxes here) and have a nice basic dark blue insulation with bananas or spade lugs.



For this kind of money, I would have to say the SC-5 is damn hard if not impossible to beat for looks and performance.

A quick visual inspection reveals that these look very nicely made for this price. It's one thing to make your own pair of speaker cables for this kind of money, it's another to make em look this good!

Great All Around Performance

I tried the SC-5s in a number of different systems, with quite a few amplifiers in the \$1000-4000 range and was very impressed. They are currently in my living room system with the Valve Audio Predator and the B&W 805S speakers doing just fine, thank you very much! I made it a point to use the SC-5s with a couple of speakers that tend to be a little bit forward and bright to see if they would tone them down at all. (They didn't) I also used them with a couple of speakers that I knew were a bit recessed and closed in to see if the SC-5s would give them a bump. (Again, no dice.)

I also made it a point to listen to plenty of music to see how they did across the spectrum. Bass response with the 805s was very good. These speakers need a fair amount of current drive, so the wrong cable will rob them of that last bit of punch. Same thing with the high end; a lousy cable will really muck up the imaging and the SC-5s passed both tests with flying colors.

So, my conclusion is that these are a very neutral cable for \$115 a pair. Yes, if I put them in with the really spendy stuff, there is a bit of grain compared to the cables in the four figure category as well as a slight loss of fine detail in comparison. But for this kind of money, I would have to say the SC-5 is damn hard if not impossible to beat for looks and performance.

Put that soldering iron away and give Rob a call at Audio Art. You will be glad you did! ●

Reference setting audio designs!

Metronome-Technologic (Reference Digital)

- State-of the-art digital playback
- **Kalista** – simply the finest transport available!
- Modified metal CDM12 Pro2 transports for highest accuracy
- Upsampling 24-bit/192khz
- Pure, transparent analog sound
- Advanced Power Supply—most in a separate chassis
- Players from \$10,800



Metronome-Technologic (Class-A amplifiers)

- Class-A 70w/ch
- Full, constant Class-A up to 45w/ch
- DC-150khz (-3db)
- S/N: >100db
- Extraordinarily fast rise time ~ 2μs
- Minimalist circuit design and short internal wiring
- **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.*



Distributed by: tmh audio

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

The Audio Art SC-5 Speaker Cables

MSRP: \$115 for a 6 foot pair with spade lugs, bananas \$15 extra. Consult website for different sizes and bi-wire pricing.

MANUFACTURER

Audio Art Cable

4665 Altadena Avenue
San Diego, CA 92115
619-255-6451
www.audioartcable.com

PERIPHERALS

Amplification: Valve Audio Predator

Digital Sources: Sooloos Music Server, Ayre CX- 7e CD player

Speakers: B & W 805S, DeVore Gibbon Super 8

Interconnect: Cardas Neutral Reference, Art Audio IC-3

Power Conditioning: Running Springs Haley w/RSA Mongoose Power Cords

This issue we have another winner from Ken Ball and ALO Audio. His rewired Grado SR-225s have found a permanent home at The Vinyl Anachronist's house right alongside his prized Grado GS 1000s. We also take a peek at the headphone amplifier module for the Aurum CDP, it's fantastic!

As always enjoy, and remember not to crank those headphones up too far, we want you to enjoy your music for years to come!



The ALO Audio Modded Grado SR225s

– Marc Phillips

Last issue, we talked about ALO Audio, and Ken Ball's amazing modifications to the Grado SR-60 and AKG 701 headphones, which use cotton-insulated silver wiring and wooden earcups (in the case of the Grados). I was able to visit Ken in Portland a few months ago, where we sampled most of his products, which was followed by a lot of sushi. It was quite a treat, sitting at a large table at ALO Audio Central with dozens of portable headphone amps, portable players and headphones spread out in front of me. I was also able to hold and fondle a variety of his custom-made headphone enclosures, all made out of a variety of exotic woods. (Insert joke about 'wood' here, using your best Butthead impersonation.)

As I was leaving, he handed me a pair of his modified Grado SR-225s, which came with a pair of utterly beguiling rosewood cups. **"I don't think you'll like these as much as your Grado GS-1000s,"** he told me. I was charmed by his modesty, but at the same time I felt conflicted. I've been working hard to avoid the 'shootout' mentality that plagues most of us audiophiles. Yet Ken had thrown down the gauntlet, albeit passively. As soon as I got home, I hooked up my Woo Audio 3+ headphone amplifier to the McIntosh MCD 201 SACD/CD player I had on hand at the time, and I started performing painful A/B comparisons almost immediately (well, I did try to give the 225s some time to break in.)

Unfortunately, Ken was right...at first I did prefer the sound of my Grado GS-1000s to his SR-225s. The GS-1000s sounded warmer and more open. In fact, I didn't even notice a 'family resemblance' between the two pairs of cans. Ken's headphones almost sounded like they were made by someone else other than Grado. They were much more forward-sounding than the GS-1000s, more in my head than out in front of me. After a few days, I felt that Ken's phones were more competitive with such headphones as Sennheiser HD-650s or even AKG 701s than the GS1000s. I was curious as to how he would price them.

Then, an interesting thing happened. I started using Ken's 225s with my iPod Mini and my sons' iPod Shuffles. There, the gap between the 225s and the GS-1000s closed considerably.

I'd been using the big Grados with my iPod Mini for a few months, and I'd been considerably underwhelmed. With the GS-1000s, the iPod sounded grainy, with a distinct digital haze galumphing around deep in the background. My take, however, was that I was still experiencing the best iPod sound yet, but I had merely realized the limits of the format. The ALO Audio cans, however, alleviated the glare to the point where the musical presentation was much more relaxed and soothing. It didn't take long before I actually preferred the sound of the 225s for all of my iPod listening.

One could suspect that the 225s weren't resolving as much detail, and that's why they offered a less fatiguing sound. But after a while, I came to a different conclusion. I remember sitting at Ken's place, and trying all of those headphones with all of those portable players, and I remember how consistently excellent everything sounded, by far the best sound I'd ever heard from portable digital players. And I said to myself, Ken is actually voicing these 'phones for portable players. That's when I truly started to respect the 225s.

Eventually I went back to the Woo Audio amp, but I used my reference Naim CDX2 CD player instead of the Mac. The 225s sounded much more open with the Naim, more revealing. As a result,



the 225s now sit side by side next to the GS1000s in my bedroom system, hanging from a pair of banana stands. It's almost a toss-up now as to which pair of cans I grab for some late-night listening.

Incidentally, I've been recently using the 225s to transcribe some audio recordings into written material for a friend of mine. I just plug the ALO Grados directly into the jack of my laptop, and I'm able to hear every syllable, every consonant, every nuance from my friend's lovely voice. I can almost tell what she had for lunch! Now, I know I could probably say the same thing about any number of quality headphones. I just think it's an unexpected yet classy application for Ken's headphones. I'm keeping them! For those of you that want your own pair, stop by ALO's website at www.aloaudio.com. My pair with a 6 foot cable, cost \$565.

Ken is actually voicing these 'phones for portable players. That's when I truly started to respect the 225s.

The Aurum Acoustics Headphone Module

I've been using the Aurum Acoustics CDP as the cornerstone of my second system all year and it is a fantastic sounding piece of gear, but one of the things that makes it so incredible for me is that it offers a full function preamplifier (with balanced inputs and outputs), CD player and a DAC all on one chassis. Designer Derrick Moss believes in the simple approach and I have to say that it works wonderfully, when you consider the cost savings in additional interconnects and power cords. It is also a fantastic reviewer's tool for that reason, because there is only one set of cables in the test system.

He now adds a headphone amplifier to the chassis that is field upgradeable. Those of you that would like a headphone amplifier to go along with your CDP can also order it straight from the factory that way. \$800 is what it will cost to add even more functionality to what has to be one of the best control centers I've had the pleasure of using.

Current CDP owners will notice a slight change on the rear panel, with a headphone jack and a switch. This allows you to turn the main outputs on or off as required. With the headphone jack on the rear panel, you may need a headphone extension cord. I use one from ALO Audio, but your favorite cable vendor should be able to take care of you if your phones only have a six foot cable.

It features a fully differential circuit that is buffered from the preamplifier in the CDP. It also features four independent, locally regulated power supplies, which explains the exceptional bass response!

As the system with my CDP is very near my desk, this is where I do most of my headphone listening and the listening is very good indeed! I just left the CDP on repeat for a few days before I even bothered to listen and was very impressed straight away. I made it a point to listen a lot with all four of



my reference phones (Grado SR60s modded by ALO, Grado GS1000s, AKG 701s w/ALO cable and Sennheiser 650s w/Stephan AudioArt cable).

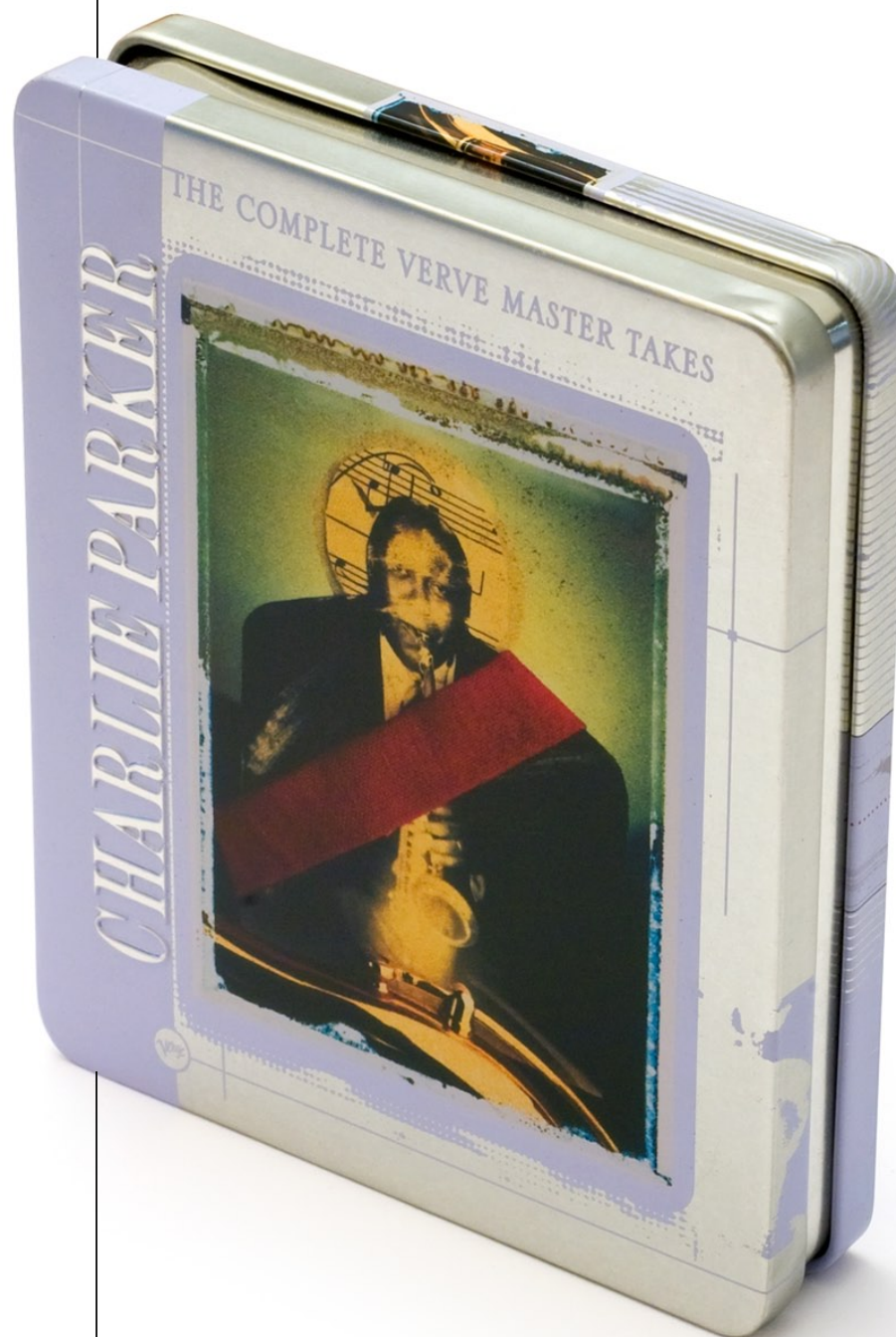
The CDP headphone amplifier had no problem driving any of the phones in my stable and I was thrilled with the presentation. This is a neutral, yet powerful headphone amp with very clean, un-grainy sound. Listening to a few of my headphone favorites, as well as the standard female vocal tracks revealed a complete lack of listener fatigue.

I could go on and on describing this track and that one, but really the bottom line for me is that this compares to anything I've heard for considerably more money and it's right inside my preamp! More rack space saved again. Personally, I think this one is so good, I'm hoping Mr. Moss will sell this baby in a separate enclosure so that even you non CDP owners can enjoy it! You can see the CDP at www.aurumacoustics.com ●

Slummin'

— Jeff Dorgay

Found a few fun things this month shopping at rummage sales! I'm telling you guys, your wife won't know what hit her when you say 'honey, let's go to a bunch of rummage sales today!' While it might be worth it for the shock factor alone, there are often audio bargains to be found. This weekend was a major score!



Charlie Parker:

The Complete Verve Master Series — \$5

I already have one of these, but for another five bucks, it will make for something great to trade to a fellow audio pal or a gift perhaps. The recordings inside are vintage CP, and nothing special sonically, but the case is very cool indeed. New, I believe these went for about \$60.



Dynaco SCA-80 — \$32

Most people think of tubes when they think of Dynaco, but their solid-state gear was a lot better than many give it credit for. The PAT-4 and PAT-5 preamps were great back in the day (Built one of each myself!) and the ST-400 power amplifier had legendary status, offering the most watts for the dollar you could get.

But a great little workhorse is the SCA-80. Combining the circuitry of the PAT-4 and the Stereo 80 on one chassis, this is a great amplifier for a dorm, garage or other system. You can see from the photo that this example is in mint condition!

Possessing a really wimpy little power cord, the SCA-80 came right to life and sounds pretty darn good, considering its years. I'll be using it for sound reinforcement during the TONEAudio Summer Outdoor Movie Series, so if you see flickers of light behind my house, drop by and bring popcorn! ●

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

Aperion: www.aperionaudio.com

Audience: www.audience-av.com

Audio Art Cables: www.audioartcable.com

Audio Physik: www.signals-superfi.com

AV123: www.av123.com

Ayre: www.ayre.com

Benchmark: www.benchmarkmedia.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

DeVore Fidelity: www.devorefidelity.com

Echo Audio: www.echohifi.com

Emotive Audio: www.emotiveaudio.com

Epiphany Speakers: www.epiphanyaudio.com

Essential Sound Products: www.essentialsound.com

First Watt: www.firstwatt.com

Galen Carol Audio: www.gcaudio.com

Gateway Sound: www.gatewaysound.net

Great Northern Sound: www.greatnorthernsound.com

Hagerman Technology: www.hagtech.com

Half Note Audio: www.halfnoteaudio.com

Immedia Sound: www.immediasound.com

Martin-Logan: www.martinlogan.com

Maxtor: www.maxtor.com

McIntosh: www.mcintoshlabs.com

Meridian: www.meridian-audio.com

Milbert Amplifiers: www.milbert.com

ModWright Instruments: www.modwright.com

Music Direct: www.musicdirect.com

Nagra: www.nagraaudio.com

Needle Doctor: www.needledoctor.com

Naim: www.naimusa.com

Olympus: www.olympusamerica.com

Penaudio: www.penaudio.fi

Red Rock Audio: www.redrockaudio.com

Running Springs Audio: www.runningspringsaudio.com

Shunyata: www.shunyata.com

Sonnett Technologies: www.sonnettech.com

Sooloos: www.sooloos.com

Tetra Speakers: www.tetraspeakers.com

TMH AUDIO: www.tmhaudio.com

Todd The Vinyl Junkie: www.ttvj.com

Upscale Audio: www.upscaleaudio.com

Verity Audio: www.verityaudio.com

Wadia: www.wadia.com



Rat Fink Wacky Wobbler
©2005 Ed "Big Daddy" Roth, Inc.
www.funco.com