

BEN FONG-TORRES

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AFTERNOON WITH
DUSTY SPRINGFIELD

RADIOHEAD SHAKES
UP THE ESTABLISHMENT

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The Return Of Crowded House



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By Liza Donnelly



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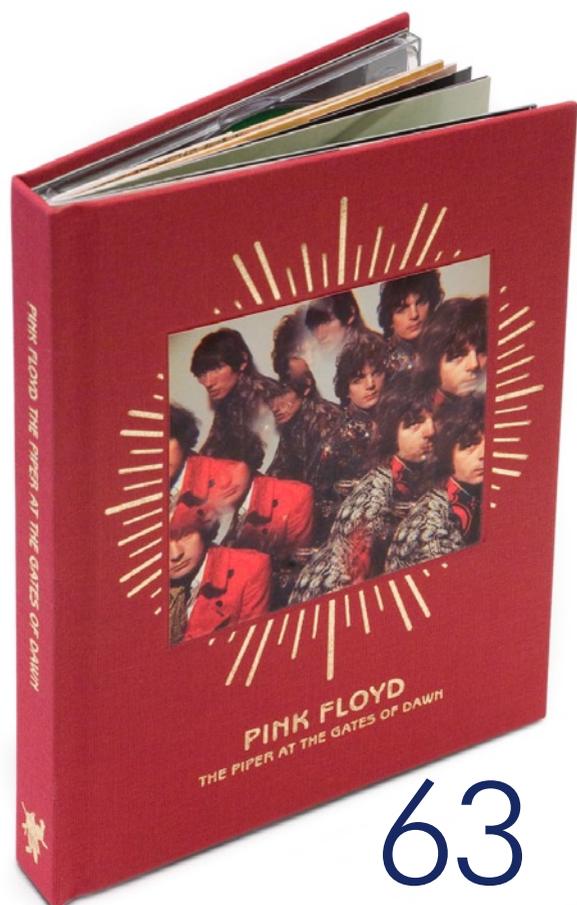


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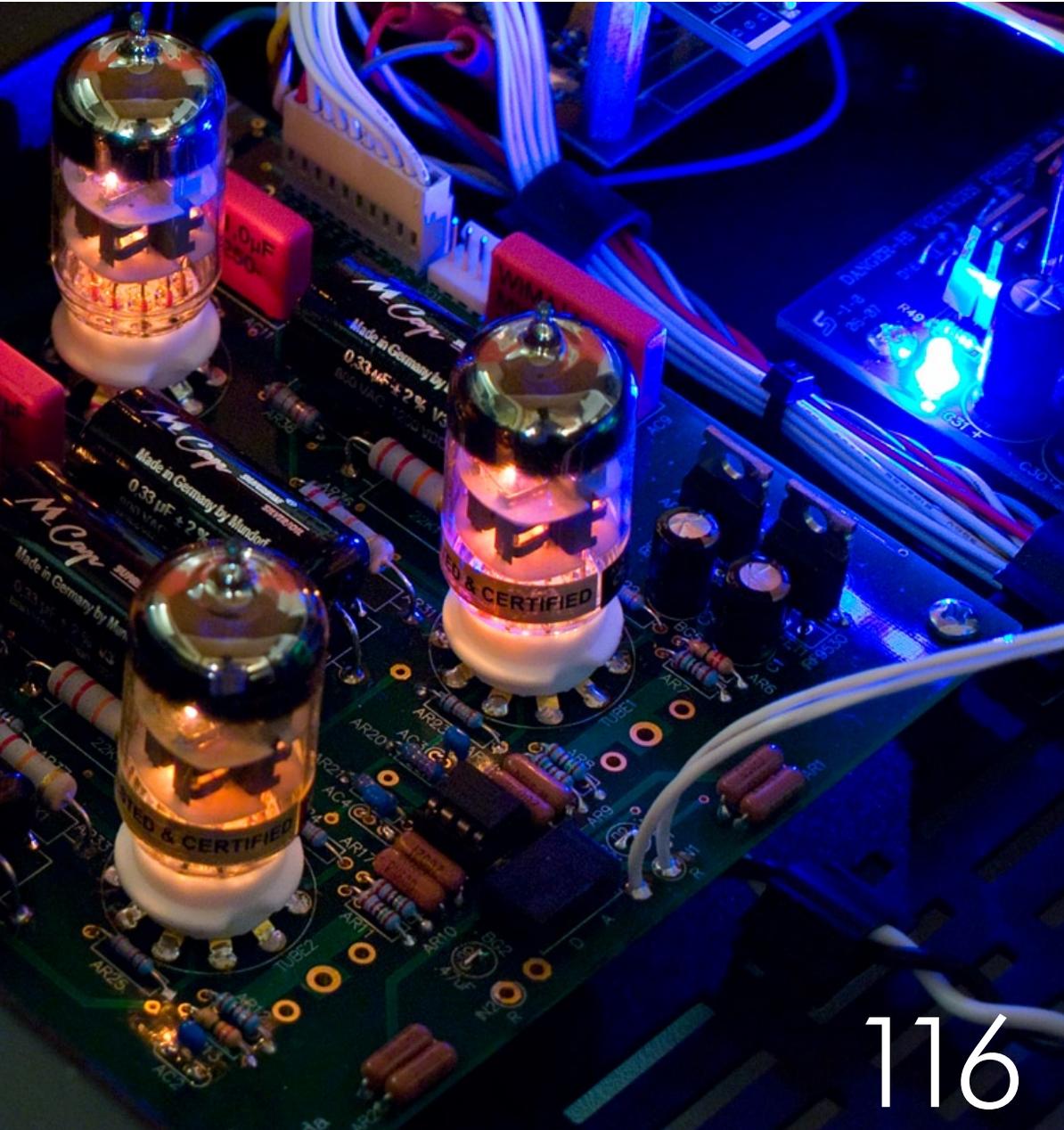
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new in tone this issue



Mr. Peanut
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BEN FONG-TORRES

How do you properly introduce a legend? Many of you know our new music editor, Ben Fong-Torres from the many articles he wrote as the former senior editor of *Rolling Stone* magazine, others know him from his character in *Almost Famous*. As an insider who's seen and done just about all of it, he continues to stay busy in all aspects of the media. Check out Ben's blog on the TV Land website:

http://blogs.tvland.com/blog/ben_fong-torres

DESI DAY

A native New Yorker and lifelong jazz fan, Desi has just retired from USO, working as their entertainment liaison. She assures us she has some great stories about goings on in the Pentagon, but for now she is willing to share her knowledge of jazz with us.

RICHARD SIMMONS

Growing up in a very musical household, this Long Island Native has been involved in the hip-hop/house/club lifestyle since the age of 15. Now the father of three, he still keeps a pair of turntables ready, though he is a graphic designer for a blue chip realty company. In his spare time, along with myriad other projects, he is creating a Gospel Hip-Hop workshop with his son at their local church.

RANDY WELLS

Our newest addition to the review staff, Randy Wells lives just outside of Seattle with his wife and two vintage Porsche 911's. A life long music lover, Randy travels the world as a photographer for Getty Images. He has also been a frequent contributor to a number of photography magazines and Porsche Excellence magazine.

PUBLISHER'S LETTER

As another Rocky Mountain Audio Fest ends in a very quiet Denver Marriott lobby, it's great to look back on two very exciting years of TONE Audio and where we've come in a short time. Entering year three, it's a very different picture indeed.

We promised to offer a more fun and somewhat different perspective on this wacky world of high-end audio, but also to be fully committed to the exploration and enjoyment of music. While we always like to investigate the latest pair of speakers, phono cartridge or DAC, we all came together because we are music lovers and the gear serves the purpose to enjoy it.

With the addition of former *Rolling Stone* senior editor, Ben Fong-Torres to the masthead, we will be expanding our music coverage even further as we go forward. I am truly honored to be working with the man who has been pivotal in chronicling the history of rock music over the last 40 years.

Speaking of music, we are continuing the trend we started last issue in a big way; live music and more of it. This issue we covered four shows, with some great pictures to boot. Next issue we will have a major feature on the Crossroads Blues Festival, sponsored by Chad Kassem at Acoustic Sounds, so stay tuned.

I'd really like to thank our ever-growing staff for all their contributions and insights. If two heads are better than one, certainly the present group is at least more intriguing than one! A great source of advice since day one, staff classical music writer Dan Babineau is now our technical editor. With a masters in Electrical Engineering and a Ph.D in Physics, it is great to have a bona fide scientist on the staff. I can't tell you how many times one of us may have jumped to a false conclusion about how gear works; without Dan's help, we'd sound as silly as...

Marc Phillips, known to most of you as TONE columnist and *The Vinyl Anachronist* also gets an office with a window. He's moving up to copy editor and will be making sure our I's are dotted and T's crossed with better regularity in future issues. Last but not least, our new jazz columnist Desi Day will also be our assistant music editor. Thanks to all of her experience at the USO, she is not only a great resource linking us to more people in the music world; she's a great organizer as well. Not to mention her upbeat personality always comes in handy at deadline.

If you are a gearhead though, don't panic. We will be expanding the coverage on all fronts. As you can see from the Naim CD555 review, we are pushing out a little bit from our initial area of coverage and we are doing our best to review as much gear in the \$500-2500 range too. Look for a big web overhaul towards the first of the year, where we have a lot more in store for our readers.

If you are new to the party, welcome aboard. If you've been reading since day one, thanks for sticking with us. I hope you enjoy what's coming up in season three, it's going to be exciting and most of all, fun.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Marc Phillips', with a stylized, looping flourish at the end.



"Well I guess we know whose kid THAT is."



The iTube Fatman

By Jeff Dorgay

As we try to build a bridge to the younger generation of music enthusiasts that could potentially be interested in high end audio equipment, I can think of no better product to introduce them to than the iTube Fatman for a number of reasons:

You can use it with your iPod easily, it has a built in cradle.

It has additional inputs, so it has room to grow.

It sounds fantastic and looks really cool!



Did I mention that this little jewel for \$800 packs 25 watts per channel of tube power and also has a bitchin' EM87 tube for a power output level indicator? When I asked designer James Roth at this year's CEDIA show why he made this design choice, he said, "Because it looked cool!" Yes, this is my kind of fun...

Fear not, the Fatman sounds fantastic as well, so it's not just another pretty face with an iPod dock. To give it the torture test right out of the box I used my B&W 805S speakers, which tend to need a lot of current and usually punish most small tube amplifiers. Smooth sailing here! The Fatman is a great match for the 805's and filled my living room with tubey goodness.

A Versatile Player

The dock at the left of the box will accommodate any iPod that you have; however I would suggest handling with care when using the slimmer iPods so that you don't damage the plug. Over on the right side is the required tube cage for safety reasons, but if you don't have any prying little fingers, take that thing off and throw it in the Fatman box for safe keeping. You want to see the tubes, right? *(continued)*



Moving around to the back, you can see the two pairs of input jacks and the speaker binding posts. My only complaint for the more hard-core audiophiles is that the jacks are a bit close together for really good cables and the binding posts could be a little beefier.

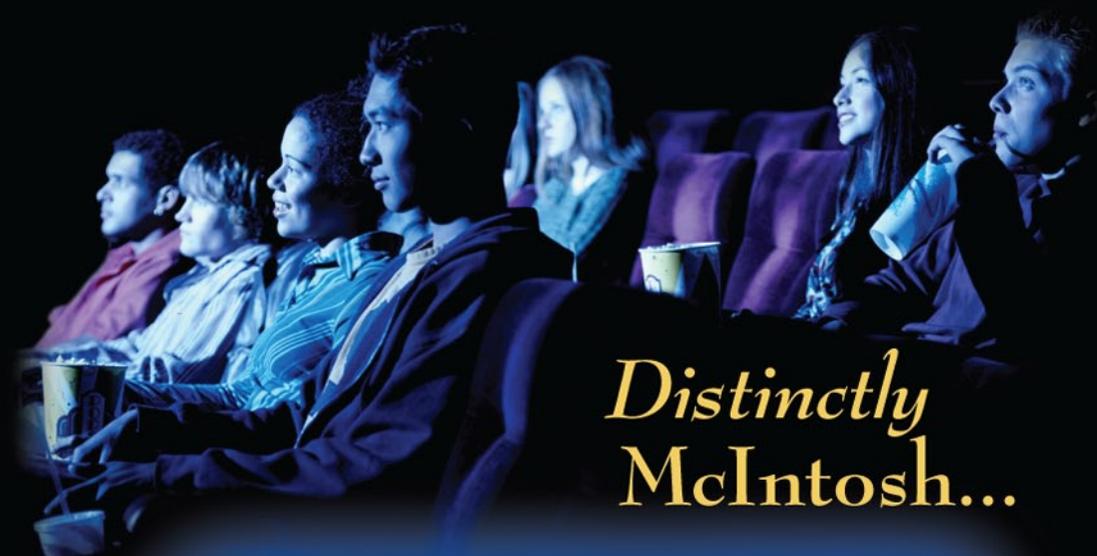
I'm sure with most iPod people this will be a moot issue, but the sound quality of the Fatman is so enjoyable I suspect more than a few of them are going to get hooked up to some pretty good components in addition to the family iPod! One last cool feature, there is a pair of video outputs (S-Video and RCA) so that you can hook your video iPod up to the Fatman and then jack it into your television set! Again, very user friendly.

While we are on the subject, the Fatman even comes with a svelte remote control! Those of you with eagle vision can probably read your iPod from across the room, (I am not in that category anymore...) while the rest of you will be able to use it to bump up or down a song, or control your iPod should you use the S-video cable to your TV set. Very cool indeed.

Good Looks, Good Sound – Who Could Ask for More?

I made it a point to hook the Fatman up to the Rega Apollo CD player that we have in for review as well as Magnum Dynalab's XM tuner. I even had a blast playing cassettes with my vintage Nakamichi deck! A number of different speakers were used, all with good results. The AV123 xl-S speakers at \$219 a pair are a phenomenal match and offer up some of the most pleasing sound I've ever heard for a thousand dollars. *(continued)*





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All enjoyed a very wide range of music, and this amplifier always got plenty of compliments, no matter who had stopped by. As long as you aren't trying to blow the windows out the Fatman does a great job. Bass response is strong and a touch on the warm/loose side as it is with any small tube amp. Midrange is glorious and way better than you would expect from something in this price range and the highs are smooth with a touch of romance as well.

It's the perfect combination for an iPod or budget CD player and will cover up almost all the sins of said sources. If you just happen to have one of Red Wine Audio's iMod players, you will really be blown away by the sound!

Regardless of what you use, something in the 88-92 db range should give most people enough juice to listen at fairly loud levels without clipping.

So there you have it. A very stylish little package with very pleasing sound. This one gets my vote as one of the most enjoyable Christmas presents you could buy for the music lover in your house.

**The iTube Fatman
by TLAudio**

MSRP: \$799

www.fat-man.co.uk



Radiohead

In Rainbows

By Marc Phillips

“I like the people at our record company. But the time is at hand when you have to ask why anyone needs one.”

— Thom Yorke

If February 3, 1959 was the day that the music died, then October 10, 2007 might be the day it received a big fat jolt from a cosmic defibrillator. And before you write that statement off as frantic hyperbole surrounding the release of the new Radiohead album, know that everyone in the music industry is watching the sales of *In Rainbows* very, very carefully.

That's because Radiohead decided to release their seventh studio album as an MP3 download off their official Web sites (radiohead.com and inrainbows.com), instead of more conventional methods. And just to shake things up a little more, they will be releasing *In Rainbows* in a limited edition “discbox,” containing the original release on both CD and 180-gram LP, an additional disc with 8 new tracks, digital photos and artwork, and a lyric book. This package, which retails for \$80, will be sent out in early December, and is only available by pre-ordering on the two Web sites. A conventional CD may or may not be available early next year, depending on how well this new strategy works.

And It Is Working

In its first 24 hours, *In Rainbows* sold an estimated 1.2 million copies. What makes this even more interesting is that Radiohead is asking their fans to pay whatever they want for the release. In other words, you can spend a buck or two and get all of the downloads (although I'm sure the boys would like you to pony up a little more than that). *(continued)*

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While that may sound like Radiohead is doing this for the good of the industry, as opposed to making any sort of profit, know that even the biggest acts in the music industry only make a buck or two on each unit sold. **That's why *In Rainbows* is so important, since it completely takes the music labels out of the business model.**

This would all be for naught if *In Rainbows* was anything less than a vital, cogent musical statement. Anyone thinking that the album's strength is in the marketing, rather than its content (a la *Amnesiac*), will be in for a pleasant surprise. *In Rainbows* isn't as jolting or transitional as *Kid A*, and tends to borrow liberally from all their albums since that 2000 benchmark. At the same time, every song seems busy and bursting with new ideas. Paradoxically, the song structures are tighter than ever, continuing the trend set by their last album, *Hail to the Thief*. Yet *Rainbows* is much sunnier and more upbeat than *Thief*, which, in comparison, sounds like one giant minor chord.

I could break down each song for you, the way most critics might, but that would be beside the point. Most criticism is designed as a buffer, so that you can determine if you want to lay down your hard-earned money. In this case, it will only cost you whatever you choose to pay to evaluate *In Rainbows* for yourself. Besides, it always takes me several months to fully absorb a Radiohead release (What can I say? I'm a fan). The only downside is that the sound quality of the MP3 downloads are not up to snuff. That's OK. That will only prompt me to buy *In Rainbows* in a less ethereal format in the near future. ●

The New Cars

**August 6, 2007
Clark County Fairgrounds**

**Story and Photos
By Jeff Dorgay**



Here we are on deadline and I drag our art director out to a show. Sometimes you have to just say WTF and have a little fun. But seriously, after hearing all the controversy surrounding the New Cars, I was more than curious to see if they were any good. Sometimes, a different lead singer just doesn't work, no matter how talented said singer is, like Paul Rodgers taking over as the front man for Queen. *Blehh.*



In 1977 you made friends at concerts by sharing a joint. In 2007 you make friends at concerts by having extra ear protection to hand out. And so it goes.



Somehow, I'm falling into a pattern of not seeing exactly who's on the band's Web site when I go to see them. Last month, when I went to check out the Tubes, expecting my favorite drummer, Prairie Prince, he was on tour with The New Cars, so some guy I had never heard of filled in. But I did get to see Prairie Prince at this show, and as always he offered up some of the best live rock drumming I've ever seen.

However, this time Kasim Sulton, who was on the roster for bass guitar and backup vocals, was absent. (I think he's still on the Meat Loaf tour) *Arrgh*. Fortunately, the guy who was filling in was a very powerful bassist and took control of the rhythm section as well as singing some pretty good backup vocals.

I have to be honest with you, I saw the Cars 20 years ago and I like them better with Todd as the front man.

He's still a great singer who did a fantastic job with the Cars' material and is way more fun to watch than Ric Ocasek ever was. *(continued)*

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It was a little creepy when he sang "Drive," though. They opened with "Let's Go," and about 30 seconds into the tune I knew that this was going to be OK after all. Fortunately the Ticketmaster computers made a mistake and we were only two rows behind the VIP seats that cost \$250. I love it when things work out that way.

The band came out promptly at 7:30 p.m. and played a 17-song set, lasting a little over an hour. They were a very tightly knit unit and did a great job of trading licks without anyone hogging the spotlight. (i.e. no 15-minute bass solo, etc.) **They ended the set with my favorite Cars tune, "Moving in Stereo." I was a happy camper.** They came back out for a three-song encore of "Just What I Needed", "Open My Eyes" (I found this interesting because it is a pretty obscure Todd tune) and ended with "Let the Good Times Roll." 15 minutes later, the lights were on and half of the stage was torn down.

All things considered, an excellent show for \$50.





Prince

**August 27, 2007
The O2, London, UK**

By Scott Tetzlaff

Prince. He's kind of zany. But you know that.

His latest venture (or travel habit) is to stay camped for a time in a single location to give a series of concerts. First encampment was the Rio hotel in Las Vegas. Next he set up shop at the Hollywood Roosevelt hotel in Los Angeles for some summer poolside concerts. More recently, he did an unprecedented series of 21 concerts in London at the O2 Arena.

The O2 is a giant dome built for the millennial celebration. It looks a bit like an enormous birthday cake. Technically, it's in Greenwich (where Greenwich Mean Time comes from), about 30 minutes outside central London. The venue is a big part of the story.

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This 20,000 seat facility also has a mall of sorts, under the same roof. There are a couple of dozen shops, restaurants, and nightclubs to hang out in before and after the show. (And only one public restroom. But I digress.)

Here's the setup as advertised: Prince will be performing his greatest hits for the last time in this series.

That's it. After this, no more "1999," "Little Red Corvette," or "Cream."

Another logistic to this series – All tickets will cost 31.21 GBP. That's about 65 dollars American. Rather generous, actually. Additional packages were available, including access to an after party at one of the nightclubs in the outer rings of planet O2. The good news/bad news is that the Tube (subway) and water taxis cut out around midnight. So if you chose that option, you would be trapped partying until dawn. Kind of like a party sleepover with Prince.

The tickets listed the starting time as 6 pm. I thought that was a bit strange, but put it down to a cultural difference. There also seemed to be some confusion as to the existence of an opening act. So, off to the arena at 6 pm. They started letting people into the arena area around 6:30 p.m. It seemed very promising.

Somewhere around 8 p.m., I gave up hope of an opening act.

Now, in the US, I would contend many audience members would be exploring how flammable or launch worthy the seats were.
(continued)

Most in the audience seemed good humored about the long wait, with a cocktail party feel to the whole thing, so off we went to the mezzanine for fish and chips. Several beers later, still no Prince – nor any announcements.

I did spend some time watching the security people assist a woman who was overcome by the 'sheer, cliff-like seating' and needed medical attention. There would be no chair dancing in *that* section tonight.

Finally, at 9 p.m., the house lights dimmed. The giant Prince logo/ stage lit up. The purple one had arrived!

We Will Rock You

Let's Go Crazy

1999 (a snippet)

Baby I'm A Star

Proud Mary

All Along The Watchtower
(Super Bowl version)

Take Me With U

Guitar

Shhh

Musicology

**Prince and the Band
extended jam**

Play That Funky Music

Sexy Dancer / Le Freak

What A Wonderful World /
Your Song

Prince solo keyboard set

Somewhere Here On Earth

Diamonds And Pearls
(edited)

Adore

Strange Relationship

Sometimes It Snows
In April

Band returns

7

Come Together

If I Was Your Girlfriend

Black Sweat

Kiss

Purple Rain

The sound system was epically bad. Seriously. I am generally pretty tolerant, but this was really bad. I started wondering if it were some military crowd control experiment using low tone sonic waves. The bass was distorting and overpowering the vocals. Perhaps the sound people had never worked in a venue this size or shape.

Another point to ponder – Prince opened with a Queen song, "We Will Rock You." A tip of the hat to being in the UK? Fine. As the night wore on, all kinds of covers were thrown into the mix. Just so you know I haven't lost my mind, check the set list.

OK. Either I had misread the adverts and this was some sort of karaoke show, or that time spent in Las Vegas had mutated this into a lounge act of some sort. I was waiting for the inevitable "New York, New York" encore.

I'm joking, but really, if you advertise this as your goodbye to the old material, you really should play a bit of them. And not as a medley. Prince has a catalogue of more than 400 songs, so it seemed really odd he would do a Beatles cover. On the other hand, he's the musical genius with a closet full of awards, and I am just a fan.

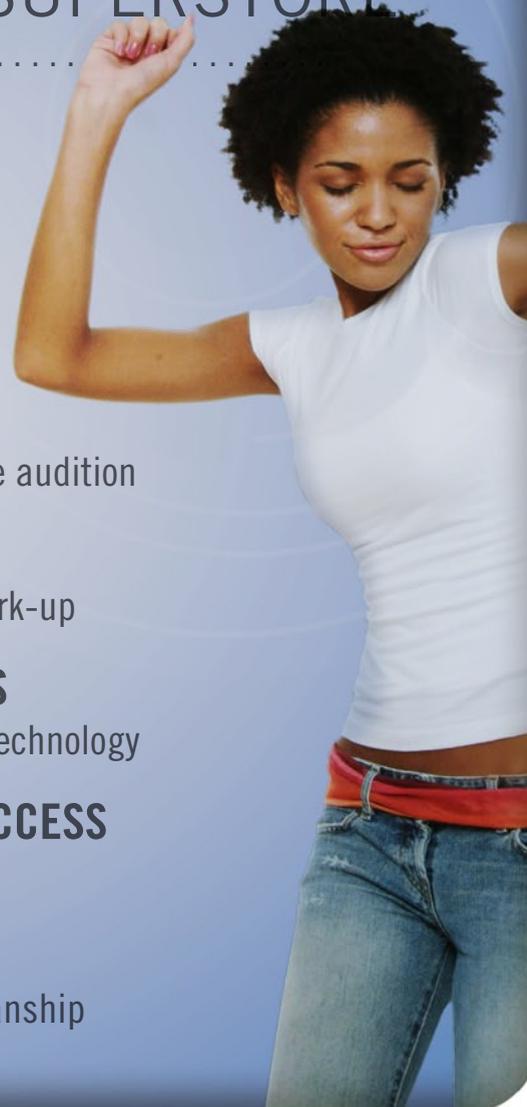
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Being the junior scientist that I am, I ran a couple of experiments.

I moved to other places to see if the acoustics were better. The improvement was marginal. On the floor the sound was slightly better. Most interesting was the restrooms attached to the supporting walls. The doors of stalls were rattling at a very high rate from the bass. I feared for the safety of the concession people I had gotten to know so well in those first hours.

The most frustrating thing was that *if* the sound was better, this would have been a pretty amazing concert, even without the classic hits.

At the end, they turned up the house lights. This is usually the international signal there will be no encore. Many people left. **Surprise! An encore. Maybe it's some sort of test. Prove that you love me. Again, it struck me as strange.**

Post mortem: If you do the math, there's an excellent possibility that one in five of your friends that live in or near London attended one of these concerts. After talking to various people it's become clear that there was a huge variation in what was going on out there. The set lists, opening acts, surprise guests were all variables. Sadly, the sound system complaints seemed to be fairly consistent across my informal survey.

I'm hoping the management at the O2 gets some help on the acoustics. A few years ago, engineers did a makeover of the Hollywood Bowl that radically improved the sound quality. The O2 should do the same. The venue is pretty cool, and it would be a shame for it to be turned exclusively into a very fancy UFC fighting ring.

September 2, 2007
Arlene Schnitzer Hall

Story and Photos By Jeff Dorgay



Crowded House

Based on the strength of the new Crowded House album, *Life On Earth*, I was ready to take the plunge to see them live, especially at Schnitzer Hall, here in Portland, Oregon. A wonderful venue, built in 1928 and re-opened to the public in 1984 after a complete renovation, this great theatre is also the home to the Portland Symphony. As the anticipation was mounting, I managed to download some clips of the current tour from MSN.com and saw what a great job these guys were doing live.

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Music of the TV Generation

by **Ben Fong-Torres**
(former senior editor at Rolling Stone)



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By the time you read this, the U.S. leg of the Crowded House tour will be over, but they will continue on in Europe and Australia, headed back to the UK for December, with their last three shows in the UK already sold out. **So, if you were one of the lucky U.S. fans to see them, I hope you had as much fun as I did. To our European readers, get tickets if you still can!**

The current lineup of Crowded House features front man Neil Finn, bassist Nick Seymour, and new recruits Matt Sherron (formerly with Beck) on drums and Mark Hart on keyboards and guitar. Mark actually played on *Woodface* and *Together Alone*, so he's somewhat of a semi-native to Crowded House.

The band opened with "There Goes God" and worked their way through a few of the songs from the current album, moving back and forth between the material in their other three albums. Not to disappoint the crowd, they performed their two biggest U.S. hits, "Something So Strong" and "Don't Dream It's Over" reworked to sound a bit more contemporary.

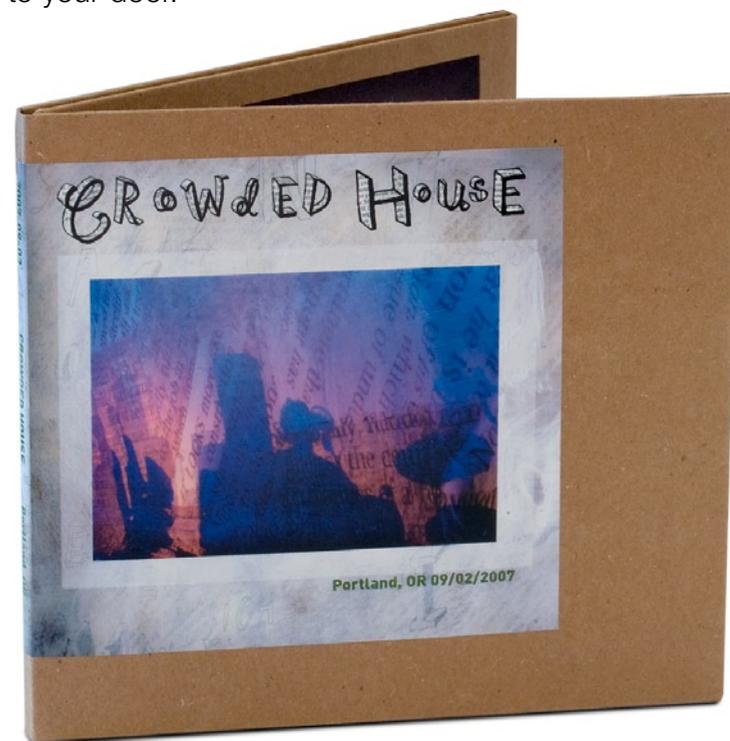
Finn and Seymour joked and played off of each other so well; you would have sworn that it had only been a year since you saw them on stage. *(continued)*

The energy level was very high, and considering they had just played in Seattle (with Eddie Vedder making a guest appearance on three tracks) the night before, it was quite impressive for a couple of guys pushing 50. Two encores later, after the band closed with “Better Be Home Soon,” the house lights came up and a very happy crowd filed out.

But Wait; There's More!

Back in the day it used to be a real score if you could smuggle your Pro Walkman into a concert and come out with a bootleg tape of the evening's show. But thanks to the folks at Kufala recordings (www.kufala.com), you can visit their site and buy a CD that was made straight from the mixing board of your favorite Crowded House show.

I had initially purchased the disc of the Chicago House of Blues show, but the Portland and Seattle discs became available as we were finishing the issue, so I picked them up as well. **The sound quality is way better than what my friends used to come home with — and it's legal!** Not to mention that it makes a very nice remembrance of the evening's performance. Kufala is doing this with other artists on tour and I'd love to see more of this kind of thing. Twenty bucks brings those memories right to your door.



Todd Rundgren

September 19, 2007
The Aladdin Theater

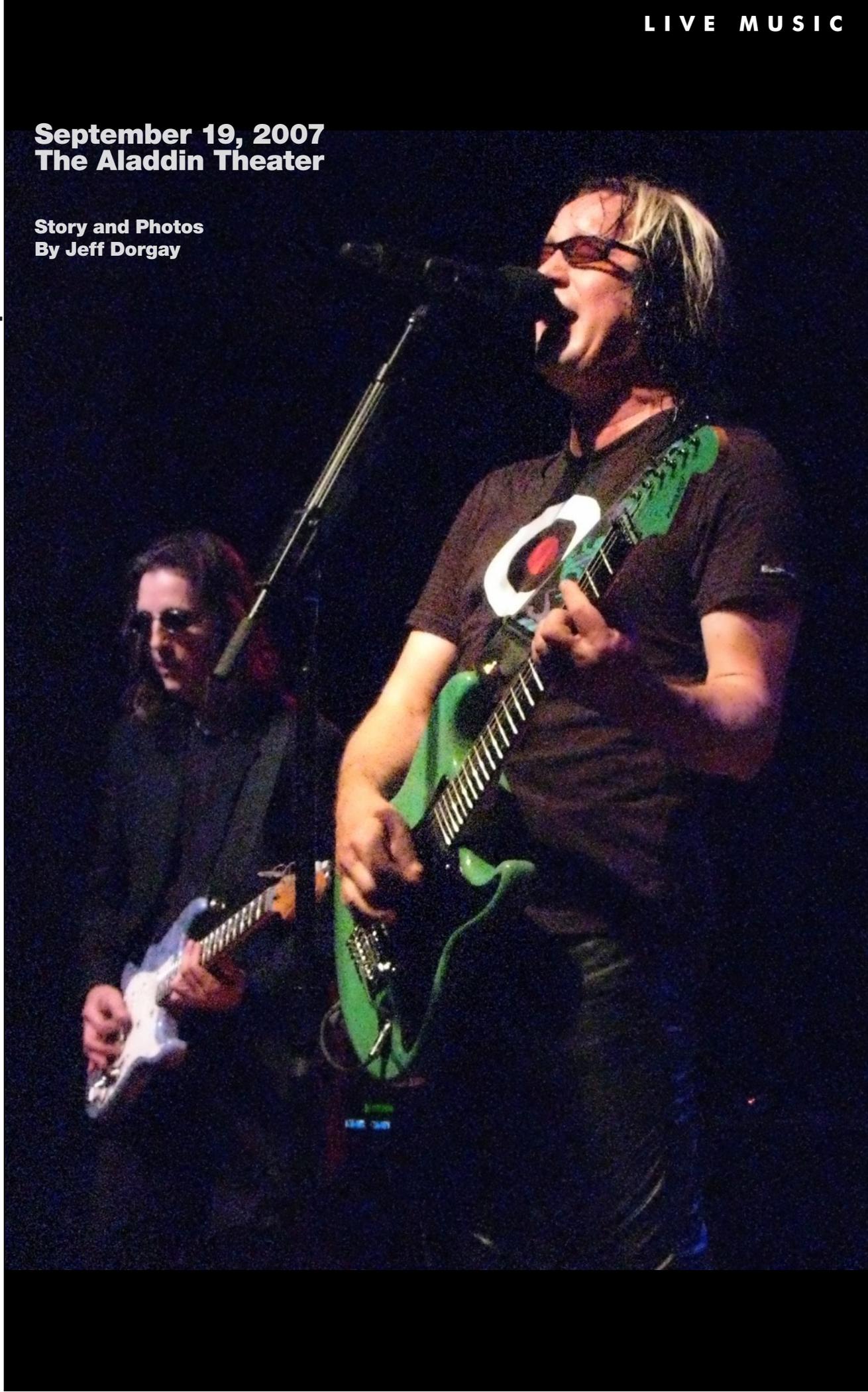
Story and Photos
By Jeff Dorgay



Todd Rundgren and Utopia
at the Riverside Theatre, Milwaukee, WI 1981

I've seen Todd quite a few times over the years, but it's never the same thing twice in a row. Those of you who are not true Todd fans think of "I Saw The Light" and "Hello It's Me." The rest of us know better. Regardless, I've never seen Todd Rundgren put on a bad show, and this evening would turn out to be no different.

I got to see Prairie Prince and Kasim Sulton together with Todd for this show, and that was a big treat. Prairie Prince played drums on most of the later TR albums in the 80's and 90's and was a big part of the collaboration between Todd and The Tubes. Kasim joined Todd during the *Utopia* phase of his career and has been the other half of his rhythm section for most of his tours. **We even got to meet Todd's mother-in-law, who just happened to be sitting in the row behind us wearing a "Todd For President" T-shirt.**





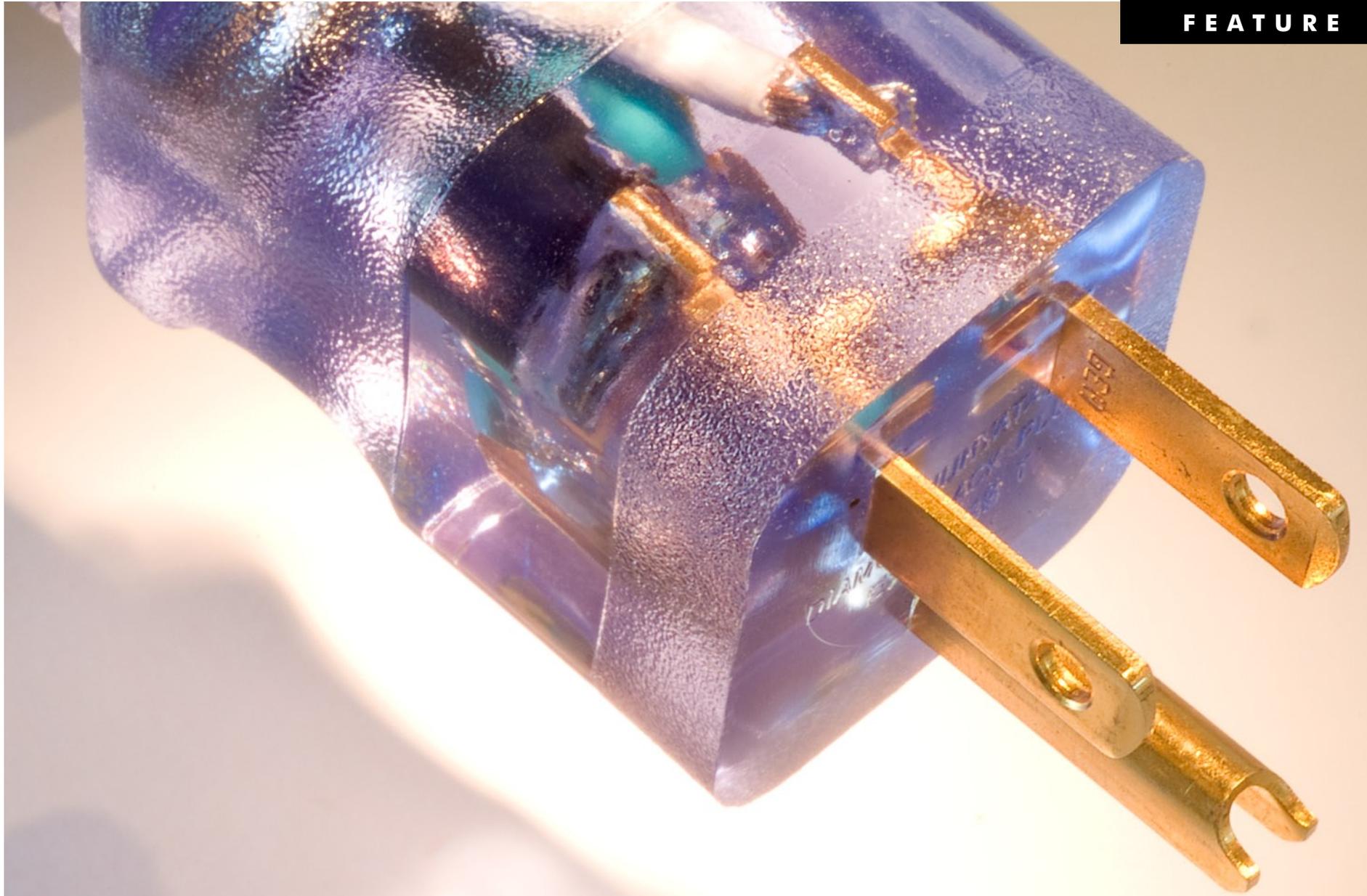
An additional treat was Jesse Gress on guitar, former music editor of *Guitar Player* magazine, who also tours with the Tony Levin Band. He had some great solos and added a lot of texture to Todd, who himself was no slouch this night. My only disappointment was that Jesse was somewhat buried in the mix. Todd's guitar playing definitely overpowered the rest of the band a bit.

Looking at this from the outside, you might think that a 59 year old guy fronting a couple of boomers and one hot young guy on lead guitar would add up to a pretty mediocre evening, but you wouldn't be more wrong. Todd and company played for two hours straight and offered up a great mix of new, old and obscure tunes. Todd even held his nose to sing the processed backing vocals on "Fascist Christ." Then the band came back out for a 15-minute encore. Yep, he's still got it.

What impressed me the most was how great his voice still sounds.

No offense to the Toddmeister, but I've seen him sing himself hoarse a couple of times over the years. Maybe it's all the clean living in Hawaii. He was hitting all the high notes and had plenty of sustain. If I didn't know better, I would have sworn I was watching a 29 year-old guy rocking out up there, with a sheepdog haircut and all.

A big surprise was that he did not sing "Bang The Drum" (which was a good thing, because I *hate* that song and had to endure it with The New Cars show). But the biggest surprise was that this was the first time in 30 years that I did *not* see him perform "Hello It's Me." I told you; it's always something different with Todd. ●



Shunyata Mondatta:

By Marc Phillips

For nearly a decade now, I've been preaching some basic tenets concerning the enjoyment of vinyl. If you've been following along for that long, you'll know the first two by heart. First, you must take good care of your records, which usually means the purchase of a record cleaning machine. And second, you probably need to spend a pretty fair amount of change on a decent turntable before you will achieve a higher level of musicality that eclipses most budget CD players. While that number has fluctuated over the last few years, in the year 2007, I still stick by my original statement.



If you own very efficient speakers paired with low-powered amplifiers, you owe it to yourself to try power conditioning and upgraded power cords.

Then, a few years ago, I introduced the idea of valve amplification as being an important part of the enjoyment of vinyl. My reasoning was that all of the things that brought you to the analog fold could be enhanced through the use of tubes, such as warmth and that organic and natural feel that eludes so much transistorized amplification and digitized sources.

And the overall response to these edicts has been overwhelmingly positive over the years. But my work here is far from over. Once you've re-entered the vinyl fold, and have fallen in love with the sound of tubes, there's still some work to do. Sure, you can address some of the problems in your listening room, which is perhaps the single most important variable in achieving good sound. (As we speak, I am experimenting endlessly with room treatment.) But for now, we're going straight to the wall, so to speak.

Yes, I'm talking about power cords and conditioners.

Watch out for the last step...it's a doozy!

For the last six months, I've been using a wide complement of Shunyata Research power cords, all plugged into their Guardian 6 conditioner. And I do hear differences. I'm not talking about a subtle shift in dynamics, or a slightly lower

noise floor. I'm talking about things like a major reduction of hum in my phono stages, or the fact that I no longer pick up my neighbor's cell phone calls on my highly-sensitive Zu Audio Druids.

For instance, I go through a lot of light bulbs. Part of me says that this is because I always cheap out on said bulbs. But the other part of me suspects that it's because of the wiring in my house is old, and probably hasn't been updated since the place was built in 1954. If you also share this dilemma, that's good reason number one to buy a line conditioner and upgraded power cords. I also spent the majority of this past year using low-powered SET amplifiers with very small power supplies, which are very susceptible to power spikes and surges. My 101dB Zu Druids are ruthlessly revealing, especially when you crank up the volume. If you own very efficient speakers (anything over 92 or 93 dB sensitive) paired with low-powered amplifiers, you owe it to yourself to try power conditioning and upgraded power cords.

As I delved into the world of power conditioners and upgraded power cords to attack these more practical matters, I started to notice the subtle yet noticeable sonic improvements these products made in the overall sound. *(continued)*

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While the Shunyata gear was able to tame most of these anomalies, it also helped to turn my system into a much more quiet and revealing one, which has to be a priority when listening to LPs.

I know that a lot of people in the audio world shun upgraded power cords and line conditioning. And while I'm certainly used to being called an audio tweaker, I'm actually anything but. I'm usually pretty conservative when it comes to audio accessories, but for me this is a solution to a number of problems. Remember years ago, people thought speaker cables and interconnects were snake oil until everyone started listening too.

I can hear for miles and miles...

The argument I hear most frequently is that the current has managed to travel for miles and miles from the power station to your house, so what difference could the last few feet make? This makes perfect sense when discussing whether throwing a single upgraded power cord into your system will make a difference (it may or may not, depending upon your system). But that argument takes the line conditioner out of the equation. And while many power conditioners do not actually regulate power, most do contain some kind of filtering system to help level out voltage peaks. As cool as those giant power cords look behind your rack, you really don't get the one-two punch without a good line conditioner; it's a systemic approach.

Once you have line conditioning, however, these upgraded power cords certainly do a better job of preserving the quality of current that runs through your system.

(continued)

RMI and EFI is certainly reduced; I no longer get to hear my neighbors gossip about me through my system late at night. The effect that you hear when auditioning these products will depend on your power grid, system and ears.

Even a big bucks power cord may not make a difference if it's the only thing you do. Shunyata claims that, you're better off buying five \$100 power cords than one \$500 cord. However, I always suggest experimentation. If you are only going to buy one power cord to start down this path, try your power amp first because that will usually make the largest current demand, but you never know, plugging it into the CD player or your phono preamplifier might make the biggest difference! I heard noticeable improvements in my system with each component.

Trussst in me...

I was able to play with a variety of Shunyata power cords over the course of the last few months, ranging from the Taipan Helix, part of their PowerSnakes line (yes, it does look serpentine), to the much more modest Venom (which is that aforementioned \$100 power cord that you can put everywhere). I was also treated to a variety of Copperhead and Diamondback cords, which fall somewhere in the middle of Shunyata's product line.

When I went back to my simple hospital-grade outlet strip; all that noise and distortion came flooding back like a bad memory.

I mated the substantial Taipan Helix cords with the power amplifier (with the 20-amp Helix linking the Guardian 6 power conditioner to the wall). I then worked down the chain, using the Copperheads and Diamondbacks with preamps, phono preamps and headphone amps. Thanks to the beefy power supply in my Naim CDX2 CD player, the Venom was all I required there.

A brief chat with the folks at Shunyata confirmed that my intuition was right, that placing the best cords closer to the wall was the correct strategy. In other words, if you have a variety of power cords like I did, you should put the most effective cord between the power conditioner and the wall, and then move onto the power amp and preamp. I then compared the 20-amp Taipan Helix to the less expensive 20-amp Copperhead from the wall to the Guardian 6. Any doubts I had to the effectiveness of adding the Guardian and associated power cords evaporated when I went back to my simple hospital-grade outlet strip; all that noise and distortion came flooding back like a bad memory. *(continued)*



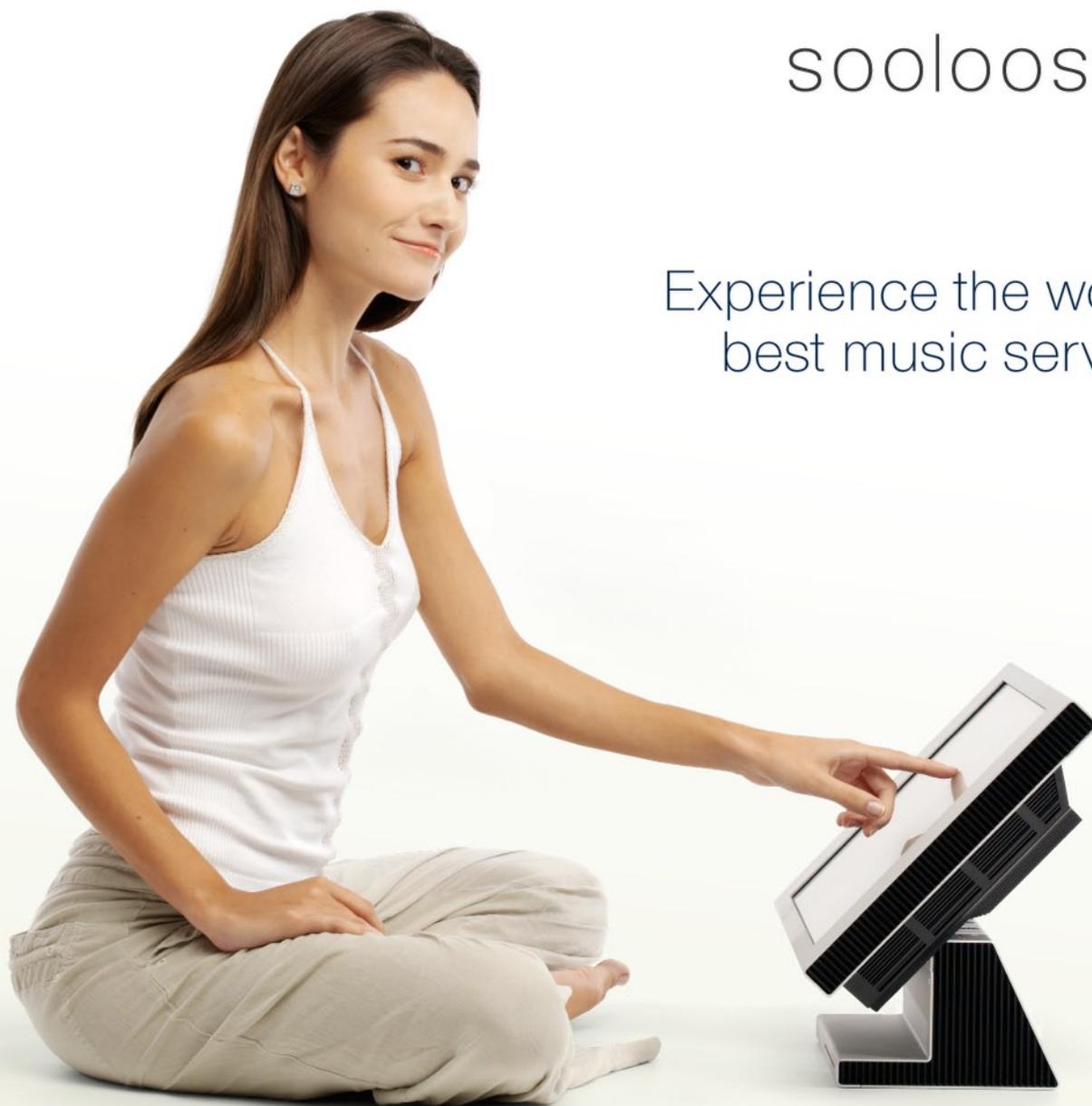
My suggestion to those of you with high powered amplifiers is to move up to one of Shunyata's flagship products. SET and modest integrated users, this one's all you need!

I did use the Guardian 6 line conditioner on its own, using all of the stock power cords that came with my equipment. This managed to eliminate some hum and keep the system quieter but was not as effective as using it with the upgraded power cords. During more spirited listening sessions the Guardian by itself offered up a presentation that was not as grain free as it was with them. Again I was reminded that you need both power conditioning and upgraded power cords to get the maximum effect. The only shortcoming I found with the Guardian 6 was with larger power amplifiers. This is definitely an entry level power conditioner that doesn't have as much capability as the top of the line Hydra products. When using the Guardian with Conrad Johnson's new ET250 (250 watts per channel) and my Gibbon 8's I could definitely hear some loss of dynamics, compared to my Running Springs Jaco.

My suggestion to those of you with high powered amplifiers is to move up to one of Shunyata's flagship products. SET and modest integrated users, this one's all you need! *(continued)*

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At a reasonable \$750, the Guardian 6 is a very affordable way to really discover the benefits of line conditioning. The Guardian 2 and Guardian 4 offer the same technology at a lower price, albeit with fewer outlets.

Quiet, Please!

The Shunyata gear delivered what it promised, yielding tangible sonic advantages. If you are one of those people who balk at the very idea of expensive power cords and line conditioning, I can only lead you to the water, I can't make you drink. You have to listen for yourself.

A year ago, I was a little skeptical about these devices too, but after living with them for quite some time now, I'm reluctant to send them back.

And while I firmly believe that battery-powered components will be the wave of the future, for now we need line conditioning and power cords like the Shunyata gear to clean up our power, and to make our enjoyment of vinyl as quiet as possible.

Yes I was late to the party when it came to power conditioners and upgraded power cords. But the world, electrically speaking, is becoming a noisier place, and I now view good power management as critical as component choice. And I'm very enthusiastic about Shunyata's approach and look forward to investigating their approach to interconnects as well. Stay tuned. ●

The Little Receiver That Could

The Advent 300

By Kurt Doslu

Enjoying the comfort of my test bench (with its associated blinking scopes and signal generators) I found myself mesmerized by Neil Young's "Helpless" which was playing on a turntable that I was setting up for a customer. On any given day it's a bunch of various components strewn about like dancers at a Grateful Dead concert with gangling wires connecting them all through a hive of switchboxes and cryptically labeled input jacks. I think the actual recipe is 5 parts equipment, 2 parts disorganization and 1 part artistic freedom.

Lost in the music, my newest employee sneaks up on me (they always do) and asks, "Why do you use that old thing?" He's referring to my beloved Advent 300 receiver, which holds court among in my patchwork quilt of test equipment. It is connected up to an [unusual](#) pair of Elac monitors that were heavily modified by Steve McCormack.

"Because it sounds good," I say. "Listen."

"Sure does. Why?" he asks.

"Why?"..."Why?" (I was stalling)





I'll give you a bit more of a technical explanation later on. For now our goal is to cast some light on a great classic from the mid 70s. The Advent 300 is definitely one of these pieces.

Introduced in 1976 by the Advent Corporation (founded by Henry Kloss), this 15-watt, FM only receiver sold new for a suggested retail price of \$269.95. Immediately it was seen as a different animal. You can click on this link and read how Advent did everything right to explain WHY it was a "very different receiver" (http://www.davidreaton.com/PDFs/A_very_different_Stereo_receiver_from_Advent.pdf) in all of their sales literature.

The pedigree was irrefutable. Advent's chief electrical engineer, Tomlinson Holman (of Apt/ Holman and later THX) designed the revolutionary phono stage within the Advent 300 which effectively eliminated impedance interactions between preamp and cartridge. Advent even announced that in double-blind listening tests that they had discovered "no reliable correlation between test measurements, price and the audible quality of various phono stages under actual conditions of use."

(Who's brave enough to say that these days?!)

Tom Holman pretty much lifted up the skirt of the audio world and noticed that we were testing phono preamps with test equipment instead of cartridges. As a result, he was able to consider asymmetrical waveforms and the acoustic feedback of various cartridges below 20hz to develop a phono stage with the lowest possible background noise for its time. Excited about these new discoveries, Holman published an article (http://www.davidreaton.com/PDFs/Holman_AES_paper.pdf) with the Audio Engineering Society and even sent out a letter (http://www.davidreaton.com/images/Holman_letter.jpg) to Advent 300 owners describing cartridge loading/ resistance values and included a few low noise transistors for free!

The Audio Critic went so far as to declare the Mark Levinson JC-2 just marginally superior to the Advent 300. They heralded the Advent as one of the best tuner/phono/preamp circuits to have been available at the time REGARDLESS of the price. Even the legendary Harry Pearson of TAS had one of these in his systems for a while! *(continued)*

If this bootlicking adulation of the Advent's phono stage isn't enough to get you typing a bid into Ebay, just wait until you hear about the rest of this little giant's attributes.

The FM tuner is remarkably good and challenges the Scott 330C tube tuner with regard to sensitivity and selectivity. With a simple four FET circuit and classic layout, the Advent 300 FM tuner boasts remarkable channel separation and uses notch filters and self-mutes to retain a very high signal to noise ratio. A Phase Locked Loop circuit, usually reserved for more expensive equipment, was employed here to attain better stereo separation, lower distortion at high frequencies and less background distortion ("birdies"). Moreover, the round tuning dial is extremely enjoyable to use and employs two Light-Emitting Diodes that instruct you how to glide into a perfectly tuned signal.

Give that propeller on your beanie just one more spin....

The amplifier section of the Advent 300 is a standard class AB, quasi-complementary circuit with flatpack TO220 output transistors producing 15 watts of power.

What? 15 watts?

Yes, but here's the trick. Most amplifiers limit the voltage or current going to the output transistors. Advent didn't. So while other manufacturers would insert an output transistor capable of just 15 watts into a test load and then utilize circuit protection, Advent used output transistors capable of twice that power and let them run full-out into the complex load that a real speaker could present.

See a pattern?

Tom Holman and Advent broke out of the mold of bench test-itis to build a receiver that actually sounded good with real cartridges and real speakers.

So why do I use this old thing on my test bench? Because it still sounds great, that's why.

These days you can still put your hands on one of these for about 150 – 200 in excellent condition. Like a vintage sports car, I suggest buying the best example that you can afford, with the best cosmetics. There are a few people that are offering updates/modifications to the Advent 300 and we will report on that in a future issue. I know our publisher was impressed enough with the one you see here to buy it after the photos were taken! ●



DUSTY

SPRINGFIELD

**Recalling Food Fights with
Martha & The Vandellas**

By Ben Fong-Torres

It was just one of those things. I interviewed Dusty Springfield for two hours in Beverly Hills one afternoon in May 1973, for *Rolling Stone*. She was feeling down in the dumps, unhappy with her latest album and uncertain about her musical direction, but we had a good time, talking in her apartment, in a car, and at a Mexican restaurant.

I never wrote the story. I'm not sure why. It may have been the press of other articles, or it may have been her album, *Cameo*. It was doing a quick fade by the time we got together, and, although critics were kind to her, Dusty declared herself "embarrassed" by the album.

Dusty, born in London in 1939, died on March 2, 1999, after a long battle against breast cancer. She died six weeks shy of turning 60 and less than two weeks before she was to be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

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As the Hall of Fame web site notes, she was “blessed with a powerful, smoky voice that ran the emotional gamut from cool sophistication to simmering passion... She’s been called ‘one of the five mighty pop divas of the Sixties’ — the others being Aretha Franklin, Dionne Warwick, Diana Ross and Martha Reeves.”

Dusty, the Hall of Fame noted, had hits in four successive decades.

I decided to find my tapes and notes on Dusty, and to write about her. As I searched, her music came readily to mind. And what a range she covered, from the rip-roaring “I Only Want to Be with You” in 1964 (Dusty was the first British female to hit the charts during the British Invasion) to dramatic ballads (“You Don’t Have to Say You Love Me”) and pop tunes by turns silly and sultry (“Wishin’ and Hopin’”, “The Look of Love”). She infused soul into all her work, and her 1968 album, *Dusty in Memphis*, which contained the hit, “Son of a Preacher Man”, is still considered her masterpiece. (Rhino Records issued a remastered version of the Atlantic album in 1999 with 14 bonus tracks that had never been released in the U.S., and in 2002, the audiophile label, Four Men With Beards, offered a remastered version of the original album on 180g HQ vinyl.)

Dusty was successful, influential, and beloved. The Pet Shop Boys called on her to co-star in their 1987 recording of (*continued*)



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“What Have I Done to Deserve This?”, she received the Order of the British Empire award in January, and Elton John did the honors at her posthumous Hall of Fame induction. But, despite the praise, she was deeply insecure and self-critical.

On the day we met, she was charming, joking about her “mishmash” of an outfit, from a floppy London hat to clattering Moroccan necklaces to what she called “apologetic platforms.” Born Mary Catherine Isabel Bernadette O’Brien, she said she was known as “fudge” as a kid. She spoke with intensity about her battles to make music on her own terms. But she also broke up, laughing, when she got to recalling food fights in the good old days. Here are some excerpts from our day together.



Dusty on Dusty in Memphis

I hated it for a long time, and then I liked it. I don't like all of it.

Why did you hate it?

I just didn't like the mix. The songs, I liked. I had lots to do with choosing them. I don't know what went wrong. They just couldn't find more material for me; they didn't know what to do with me.

I didn't like “Son of a Preacher Man.” I knew it was a hit song, but I didn't like the record; I liked the other side [“Just a Little Lovin'”].

What was the overall experience of recording in Memphis?

That really threw me. I wasn't used to working with just a rhythm section – with sweetening afterwards, and I was very unhappy. I'm the kind of singer that wants to bounce off the whole ... setup.

You mean you want the string section, the whole orchestra, there?

Yeah, I want to hear them coming through those [headphones]. I just want one date, you go in there, and you hear all these gorgeous sounds in your ears. One day someone's going to invent a system where a singer can just stand in the middle of the studio and have that noise. That noise is the joy, and the joy gets rid of the inhibition, and makes me sing the best way I can sing.

*After Memphis, you did **A Brand New Me** in Philadelphia with two great producers, Gamble and Huff – Kenny and Leon. What did you think of the album?*

I was disappointed. While I was making it, I was entranced, because I loved the musicians and the way they played. But the end result wasn't really exciting. I was trying things that really weren't in me.

I loved them very much, but the kind of music they like takes a lot of improvisation, and I'm not that kind of singer. Basically I'm a melodic singer; it's hard for me to ad lib.

On Songwriters

Do you have any favorite composers?

I like to listen to Randy Newman. Valerie Simpson writes great. Holland-Dozier-Holland. I think “Ain't No Mountain High Enough” is a great song. There must be other people that I like. Name me some people.

Carole King ...

I love Carole King! I used to collect Carole King demos, from the beginning. I think she's just fantastic. “Might as Well Rain (Until September).” Loved that song. There was a song, “Goin' Back,” that she wanted me to do, that she didn't want anyone else to do. I did “Goin' Back” in England, and it's got fantastic orchestration, and I was proud of it.

On Her First Music

As a child, I heard classical and some New Orleans, Jelly Roll Morton. I picked up what my brother played. Tom's a songwriter. He wrote “Georgy Girl.” *(continued)*

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

When did you start to sing?

When I was very small. I was very interested in film musicals – especially 20th Century Fox. My brother and I would set up a broadcast system, neighbors would come in and sit in one room, we'd sing and play piano in the other room.

You sang with another group, even did a little television work, before Tom formed the Springfields in 1961.

The Springfields happened at the right time. We were an extraordinary mixture of pseudo-country, folk ... indescribable, I would put it. There were two guitars and me in the middle trying to find room to move my arms. I felt like I was directing traffic.

The Springfields hit with "Silver Threads and Golden Needles," and then you went solo and got a reputation for sounding black.

When I first started, I copied every black singer. One week I was Baby Washington, next week I was the lead singer of the Shirelles. You know, I had no style at all. I never pretended to be black, and I didn't really sound black. People put that label on me. It was only an influence. There were just certain things in it; an empathy, whatever you like.

I listened to Motown – early Motown. The Contours, Mary Wells. In London, I was a host of a show called The Motown Revue, an hour special. I was the only white artist on it, with the Miracles, the Temptations, the Supremes, Stevie Wonder, the Vandellas. Also, I played the Brooklyn Fox for a Murray the K show with literally a Motown revue.

Your first Top Ten hit in the United States was "Wishin' and Hopin'" which, in retrospect, was pretty sexist. (continued)



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Yeah, but I don't see that at all. Nothing. I have a blank spot. That people can see that [sexism] is absolutely amazing. Because I don't think in those terms.

That was the follow-up to "I Only Want to Be with You."

I just knew it was a hit, and did it. I didn't think about the lyrics at all. But my god, I did think about the lyrics of "You Don't Have to Say You Love Me." I heard that song a year beforehand, in Italian, in San Remo, and cried. When that happens to me, I know it's going to work.

"The Look of Love" certainly worked, both in the movie Casino Royale and on the radio.

Musicians tell me they liked "The Look of Love," but I hit so many flat notes on it! I did it at ten o'clock in the morning.

On Being Demanding

During the Springfields era, I found that to speak my mind was the best thing. When I did my first sessions for Philips Records, I had a kind of recording manager who allowed me to take over. All the hit records I had in England were found, produced, almost promoted by me. I never took any credit. It wasn't fashionable for women to have credit. Now it's very fashionable. But I did the whole bloody lot myself!

What's your favorite part about performing?

Well, I'm not good at stage patter. I'm very aloof. I want to make them smile. Nothing makes me happier than seeing somebody that, maybe it's a big night out for them, and just to see a smile of enjoyment. And yet, it's funny, I communicate mostly with audiences with sad songs.

There is a sadness there in my voice, I don't know why, it didn't grow on me. I was born with it. Sort of melancholy. Comes with being Irish-Scottish. Automatically melancholy and mad at the same time.

On Her Reputation

Speaking of "mad," how do you feel about the tabloids in England and all the talk about your personal life?

I've given up on this business about "gay reputation." I had a reputation before I did anything. I was once accused of raping a 13-year-old black boy in the corridors of Ready Steady Go, so I really don't know where I'm at!

On this whole gay thing, I've been misquoted so on it, that I really – my god ... I really think, settling back on an old cliché, that it's no one's business, and it really has no bearing on anything.

It does have a bearing if decisions are made based on reasons people might have for liking or disliking you. And one of those reasons could be a prejudice towards gay people.

That is, IF I am ... or if they think I am ... yes. One of the reasons I'm very insecure is that I have many reputations, and many things that are totally unfounded. Being unreliable. Not turning up for a show. Doing the craziest things.

In the early days I was pretty wild. I came in on the wave of Beatlemania, and they somehow associated me with the Beatles. [At the Brooklyn Fox] I only had to stick my head out in the street – and [she screams, high-pitched] AGGGGH!!!

It was amazing, when I first started singing on my own. They didn't mind that you were a boy or a girl. They would come up onstage. The minute I appeared onstage, girls would scream. *(continued)*

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Purely because they were so hyped up on the whole atmosphere of a rock 'n' roll show.

The whole troupe thought I was crazy. My brother and I had a habit of throwing things, particularly dishes. It saved washing them. I got a reputation in England because I'd start throwing food at people. My brother was the instigator. I threw two parties that completely disintegrated. People you'd least expect. Martha and the Vandellas – all their hatred, all those suppressed feelings came out with long French loaves that they were belting each other over the heads. Kim Weston was cowering behind a lounge chair in her mink coat. Gene Pitney was sliding around. Everyone was coated in flour. Nobody hit anybody; people just laughed and laughed. I remember aiming a sardine across the room at one of the Shangri-Las, straight down the front of her dress!

It started with a slice of salami. There was an agent's wife with a low-back dress, so we snuck the salami down her back, and gradually the whole thing took off.

And to think that, as a teenager, you were a clerk in a department store ...

You've been reading old Philips bios.

Let's see: "My favorite actor is Daffy Duck," bubbles Dusty Springfield. . ."

Well, I still like Daffy Duck. Can't think of anyone I like better. Actually, that's who I'm having an affair with. Difficult, but rewarding! ●

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Little Feat and Big Sounds

By Jeff Dorgay

This issue we have a few fun things for you from the world of classic rock with some fusion thrown into the mix. We have three new releases from Mobile Fidelity that are now in the format of the Japanese mini-LP formats. The famous MoFi hinged jewel case is gone in favor of heavy card stock packaging with a cloth sleeve inside for the CD. We also have a new project, an incredibly good recording from legendary mastering engineer Bernie Grundman featuring Neil Larsen.

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Little Feat

— *Little Feat*
(Mobile Fidelity, CD)

I have to admit that while I've always been fond of Little Feat, I came to the party late. *The Last Record Album* was my first purchase, followed by most of their other records, but for some reason, I never bought the first one.

Back in 1971, when this record was released, these guys were somewhat under the radar, not making the big splash that some other L.A. bands did, but *Little Feat* did get major critical acclaim and was definitely a musicians' band. **After listening to this one quite a few times, I would have to say that it's now my favorite Little Feat album.**

This record has a grittier sound with a much more bluesy/roots feeling than the later LF records. *The Last Record Album* and *Time Loves a Hero* are definitely more polished works, but this one really captures the essence of the band right at the beginning of their career, when things were perhaps more unstructured. If this is one you don't have in your collection, or your old LP is just plain worn (or parted) out, I highly suggest the MoFi remaster.



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Linda Ronstadt

— *Don't Cry Now* (Mobile Fidelity, CD)

Move the clock up to 1973 and we see Sneaky Pete sneaking onto this album as well. *Don't Cry Now* was Linda Ronstadt's first solo album for Asylum Records, but the fourth solo record in her extensive discography. Though I'm not a fan of "Silver Threads and Golden Needles," it was my first memory of Linda Ronstadt's presence on the airwaves. The Zenith table radio on my parents' kitchen counter played that song way too much for me.

(This song would keep me completely uninterested in her career until *Mad Love*, when she covered a couple of Elvis Costello tunes and I deemed her worthy.)

Revisiting this album was a very pleasant experience. Maybe I'm mellowing out with age, or maybe it's all of these alt-country CD's I've been hearing over the last ten years, but this is a disc I know I'll go back to. Interestingly enough, I've read in more than one place that Linda's first solo album, *Hand Sown...Home Grown* was considered by many to be the precursor of all alt-country albums.

Much like the Little Feat album, this record has a very open recording quality to it that feels almost as if it were recorded live in the studio. No major studio tricks here; back in 1973 they didn't pitch correct and quantize anything. Nothing but Ronstadt's powerful voice and a great backing band make *Don't Cry Now* a keeper. It's much better-sounding than the original vinyl that I could find in my local used record store.

The Allman Brothers

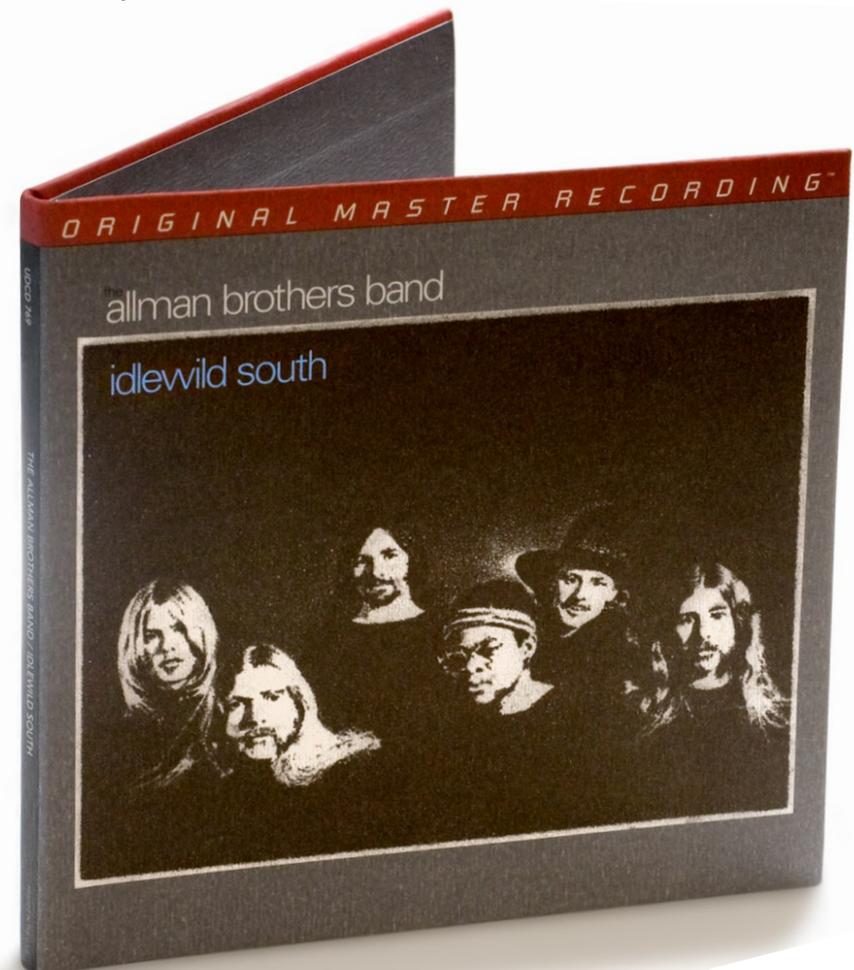
— *Idlewild South* (Mobile Fidelity, CD)

Ever since I had the pleasure of interviewing the legendary music photographer Jim Marshall, I have had a much bigger appreciation for the Allman Brothers. Definitely not a victim of the dreaded sophomore slump, this record produced two of the most well-known hits by the Allmans, "Revival" and "Midnight Rider," though this is probably not the radio version that you remember from the 70s.

Round out the package with the instrumental jam "In Memory of Elizabeth Reed" and the cover of "Hoochie Coochie Man," and you have one of the first killer country rock records. Remember, without the Allman Brothers, there would be no Lynyrd Skynyrd and certainly no .38 Special.

In terms of its audiophile qualities, *Idlewild South* is somewhat thin and compressed. It doesn't measure up to the quality level of the Little Feat or the Linda Ronstadt discs.

I wasn't buying Allman Brothers records back in 1971, so I don't have an original pressing with which to compare. If you are a die-hard AB fan, by all means, get this. But you may be better served by a low numbered LP.



Neil Larsen — *Orbit*
(Straight Ahead Records, CD)

Back in the late 70s, when some of us were in the fusion craze, Neil Larsen's *Jungle Fever* and *High Gear* albums got a lot of play. Along with Larsen on keyboards, the band featured a group of very successful studio cats including Buzz Feiten, Michael Brecker and Steve Gadd, with some backing vocals by Rickie Lee Jones.

Orbit was recorded recently at Bernie Grundman's studio and was done live to two-track analog and digital formats. Digital was captured at 16/44.1 and 24/96 resolutions simultaneously, so you know these guys are fanatics.

Many of the tunes on *Orbit* are from the *Jungle Fever* and *High Gear* albums, re-arranged with a few new ones thrown in. If you were a big Neil Larsen fan and were wondering, **"What ever happened to that guy?"** you will be in for a treat. Guitar great Robben Ford takes charge on this album and really adds some nice subtleties to the old songs. The performance is very good and it reminded me of a lot of the great direct-to-disc jazz records recorded in the 70s, when they just went into the studio and captured a live session. *Orbit* really has that kind of energy to it.

Music lovers will enjoy the tunes and audiophiles will love the sound quality; this one sounds awesome and is by far the best sounding one of the group. I can't wait to hear the LP copy, which will be released by the time you read this.

Of course, Bernie is a true master of his craft, and he hasn't lost his touch here. Job well done. You can find this one at www.straightaheadrecords.com ●



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Get On Board With Music Giants!

By Jeff Dorgay

Scott Bahneman, the CEO of MusicGiants is the only guy I've ever met that's even more amped than I am and I suspect he leaves a trail of dead pink bunnies wherever he goes. That's what I like about him. If the major record labels had this guy at the helm, I'm convinced that they would not be in decline because his boundless enthusiasm would conquer anything. Trust me, the music and the high-end audio industries need a lot more of this kind of thinking.

Before MusicGiants came along, I had probably downloaded about a dozen songs from the iTunes store. But sound quality just isn't there and I can't get over paying for a CD twice. With MusicGiants, you can download CD or even SACD quality digital files and it's just as easy as the other guys. As a music lover and audiophile, why would you want to bother with anything less?

A Growing Catalog

MusicGiants was still getting a wider range of artists put together when they first became a blip on my radar screen about six months ago. Now, with a larger selection to choose from they are becoming more and more of a contender to the iTunes store.

What I am the most excited about, is their quickly expanding collection of HD downloads, that are essentially the back catalog of SACD and DVD-a releases. You can download these with 24bit/96khz resolution. Some are available in Stereo only and many in 5.1 formats. These files play back at up to 11,000 kb/sec, so make sure you have storage that is up to the task!



Look for a short feature in **The Lab**, where we will walk you through the process and show you how to get this setup in the current version of Windows Media Player so that you can take full advantage of what MusicGiants has to offer!

Most important, the staff at MusicGiants are music people through and through. Bah-neman is on a personal mission to keep high quality source material at the forefront of our consciousness. One of his favorite lines is,

“No one will be interested in listening to their music anymore if the sound quality isn’t there!” I think that we can all agree on that.

They have also teamed up with recording industry legend Elliot Mazer to remaster all of their HD content, so what you get from MusicGiants is indeed special. My initial downloads sounded fantastic, but look for some more reviews in the future as well as links to

purchase MusicGiants content right from the *ToneAudio* Web site.

For those of you that are way too busy to digitize a huge pile of CDs, you can purchase a Concierge Collection from MusicGiants, that is a prepacked group of music in a particular genre or can be custom created by you. Then, a hard drive appears at your door ready to install into your computer or music server, ready to go! *TONE* will be working with MusicGiants to develop a couple of Concierge Collections that we are really looking forward to.

Visiting the Mother Ship

When I was zooming through Lake Tahoe about a month ago, Scott and his advertising/marketing manager Katherine Ryan were kind enough to take a few hours out of their busy schedules to chat with me. They gave me a quick tour of the corporate headquarters and told me the whole story about MusicGiants. They also gave me a good idea about what we can expect from them in the months to come.

When did you actually get the brainstorm for MusicGiants?

I was playing golf at the Riviera Country Club in L.A. with the head of one of the major labels and we were discussing digital music. Coming from the credit card industry, I thought that all music should be downloadable just like credit card data. That is when the idea first struck me. It wasn't until later when I was at a private Doobie Brothers concert in Las Vegas that MusicGiants actually

became a business. This is when I met John Williams.

I've enjoyed what I've heard in the airstream as well as at your corporate office. Have you always been a music nut?

You might say that. I used my freshman student loan to buy a high end stereo. I have always loved music and I think that it is so universal. Usually, someone asks “What kind of music do you like?” rather than, “Do you like music?”

Did you spend a lot of time, money and effort buying music from the Apple Music store before the light bulb went off?

No. The concept for MusicGiants came before Apple's iTunes was even announced.

I noticed you have a couple partners. Did this require a monstrous capital investment or mostly a lot of sweat equity?

Both!

Once you got rolling, how long did it take to get your business associates to accept your vision?

It took months to get the labels to realize that there was a market for high quality sounding music.

How about convincing your customers? Once they get used to Music Giants are they pretty bowled over, or do they tend to ease into buying high res music this way?

A lot of customers do get bowled over. Generally, after someone purchases our HD music and listens to it, the difference is impossible to miss. What we see is a more intense and emotional reaction to the music when it's listened to in full resolution.

What percentage of your customers are purchasing the SACD/DVD-a quality downloads? Personally, I'm really excited to see a source for hi res digital!

Currently a small percentage mainly because our offering is limited. *(continued)*

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We expect it to grow as our catalog expands and as people start to understand it better.

How did you guys get Elliot to come on board? Did you find him or did he find you?

My partner, John Williams was introduced to him at a tradeshow. Elliot got involved in MusicGiants because he shares our passion for sound quality.

Currently, what is the limiting factor to getting new titles for the MusicGiants store?

It's a quality over quantity equation. We have an intense focus on sound quality and we are not rushing just to fill up our music catalog for the sake of quantity.

All the buzz I've been hearing about you guys is really positive. Do you have a lot of feedback on where your customer base is coming from?

Yes. The largest amount of feedback comes from the sales of high-end audio equipment. That is our biggest customer base.

I'm guessing people are pretty excited about being able to buy music this way...

How are the concierge collections doing? We are getting excited to work on a couple of them for your customers!

They have been really well received. One of our best compliments was a from a customer who said it was the coolest thing he had ever bought!

Is there anything else that you would like to tell us about MusicGiants that our readers need to know? (continued)

We really believe that by delivering high quality music files we can help reverse the impact and damage that file sharing has caused the music industry. We believe that if you give consumers a high quality product worth paying for, they'll pay for it.

Do you still have any physical media in your home (records, tapes, CDs) or have you gone to all server based music?

About 5% of my music is on CDs and 95% is on my media server.

Think you will ever miss holding LP's in your hand, or are you completely happy with the music server concept?

I haven't had LPs since I was in college. Our Super HD content is like having 3D vinyl and the sound quality is so much better that I don't miss vinyl.

How long do you think it will be before we can't even buy physical music content anymore?

I still think it will be a really long time. I think we'll continue to see physical content sales continue to drop dramatically and eventually it will tail off. But I think that tail will continue for a long while.

MusicGiants **A Record Store for the 21st Century**

By Joe Nino-Hernes

If you can believe it, there is no longer a major record store in downtown Chicago! Tower has closed along with the Virgin Megastore on Michigan Avenue, so there is no place left to just duck in, grab some CDs and go back to your life. I used to order records and CDs online and wait a week, or put up with the substandard quality of iTunes downloads.

But about a year ago I discovered MusicGiants, an online service that allows you to browse thousands of titles and then download them at CD (and now SACD) quality. Founded in September of 2006, it took them a few months to grow the catalog and get a few glitches out of the download process, but it's been smooth sailing for some time now. Upon creating your account, MusicGiants integrates directly into Windows Media Player. Sorry Macintosh users, unless you boot your Intel based new Mac up as a PC or use Parallels, this Bud is not for you.

All of the files are in the Windows Media Lossless file format, and most use Digital Rights Management. (though some are DRM free) For most titles, you are allowed to burn up to 5 copies from the original file.

Just Like Picking CDs Off the Tree

The sound quality of downloaded albums is the same as if you had bought them from your favorite CD store and pricing is also consistent with physical product;

The average full length album is \$12 to \$15. Single tracks are around \$1.30. Windows Media Player automatically downloads album art, and allows you to organize your music library.

MusicGiants also offers a number of Super HD downloads, which are 24 bit/96khz high resolution files. Some are available in high resolution stereo and others offer the 5.1 mix as well.

Combined with a music server or similar device, MusicGiants is truly the record store of the 21st century, allowing the on demand purchase and acquisition of full quality audio right from your home. You will need a pretty speedy internet connection to use MusicGiants due to the large file size. With my high speed DSL service, it takes about 15 minutes to download an entire album. It sure beats waiting a week for a CD to show up in the mail!

Make sure you have the latest version of Microsoft Internet Explorer installed on your machine. Older versions are not compatible with MusicGiants. IE is the only browser that is compatible with MusicGiants. Both Windows Media Player and Internet Explorer run on both PC and Macintosh platforms, however things seem to work a bit smoother on the PC side. Go to the MusicGiants website and start downloading. Its quite addicting. You expect to buy one or two albums, and you end up downloading 10! Legal, high quality on demand music is a great thing. ●



Current Releases

By Jeff Dorgay and Terry Currier

Kasey Anderson

The Reckoning
CD, Terra Soul

Produced by Eric Ambel of Ryan Adams fame, this record, from a guy in the Pacific Northwest, reminds me a lot of early Bruce Springsteen. Kasey Anderson's first album, *Dead Roses*, had a lot more pop-country twang and his voice was much thinner than it is on *The Reckoning*.

This sophomore effort is fantastic. **I'm guessing that this boy picked up a lot more life experience between albums, because these songs are a lot richer in sound and in spirit.** On his Web site, he says that "these songs are about the price we pay," and I have to say that it has a dark sadness to it – somewhat like the characters that Tom Waits paints. The first record is a basic pop country record, but this one is much deeper and more emotionally charged. Much darker.

Musically, *The Reckoning* is a masterpiece. It has an airy, sparse feel with just the right amount of notes; not too many or too few. The recording itself is also outstanding; on a good stereo system, you'll swear the boy is sitting on the couch next to you telling these sorrowful tales.

If we gave out an award for record of the year, *The Reckoning* would be my choice.



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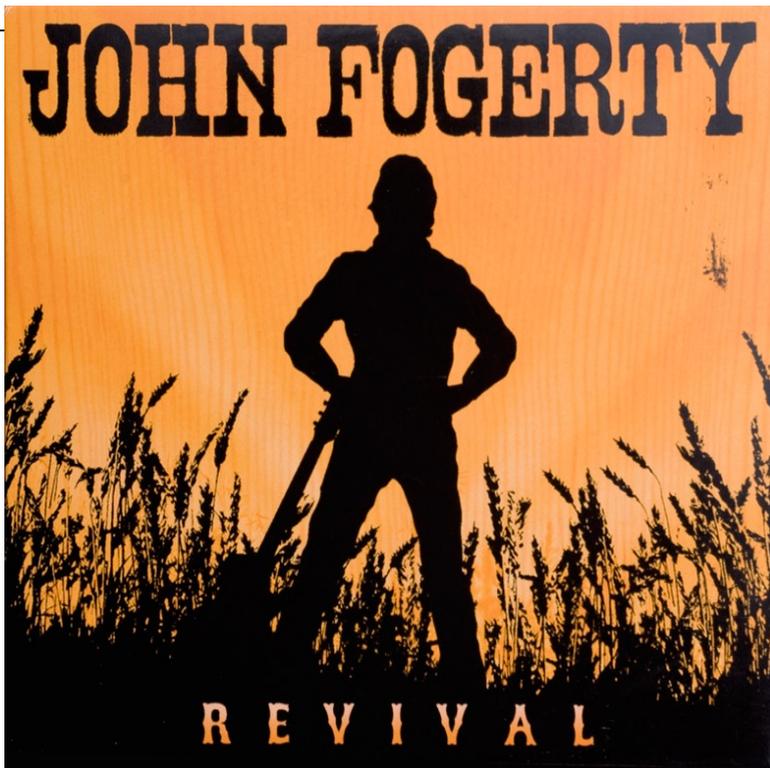
CD, Natcheztracer Records

A roots rock guy who's been around forever, Tim Krekel's newest effort is somewhat of a wapatooli musically, pulling styles from a number of different directions to come up with a recording that is fun and upbeat. A major contrast from *The Reckoning*.

As good as this record is, I get the funny feeling that the TK orchestra is an even better band to see live. *Soul Season* does such a good job of blending roots, blues and straight-ahead rock that you never can quite put your finger on exactly what kind of record this is. (Which I always enjoy...)

Although he's from Louisville, Krekel spends a lot of time in Nashville and, according to his biography, has played with a tremendous number of people in his 30-plus year career, which explains the diverse range of styles on this album.

Most of the songs are pretty short, sweet and tight; your basic "Baby, baby, git over here and dance with me" kind of thing. The TK Orchestra has a great horn section, and just when you feel like the sound is chasing down one direction, they throw you some cool keyboard riffs that sound like they came from an Oingo Boingo tune. This is definitely feel-good bar music at its best.



John Fogerty

Revival

CD, Fantasy Records

I think that John Fogerty is going to become the next Dick Clark — he just doesn't seem to age at all. I'm really not a fan of Creedence Clearwater Revival, and "Centerfield" is on my top ten most hated list, but this is a killer record.

If you don't dig the playing and tonality on *Revival*, there is no hope for you because Fogerty plays his ass off. The credits reveal an all-star cast, with Kenny Aronoff on drums, Benmont Tench on Hammond B-3, and the Waters Sisters singing backup vocals.

On one level, Fogerty has gone commercial by offering ringtones for all the songs; he redeems himself by having a great sense of humor on "Creedence Song." It's a song about a guy with a cover band who gets some advice from the audience: **"Say, you can't go wrong if you play a little of that Creedence song..."**

Sure, he's a little corny. But on this level of musicianship, I can forgive just about anything. The audiophiles in the audience will love this one, too. Mastered by Bob Ludwig, it has a soundstage that is a mile wide and has a nice, smooth top end; you would swear that they recorded this one on 30 i.p.s. analog tape.



Joni Mitchell

Shine

CD, hearmusic

Joni's back. A couple of years ago she left the record business, angered by the corruption and dilution of the industry, only to return on Starbucks' hearmusic label, which I find somewhat ironic. I'm amazed at how many people of my generation (not to mention generations X and Y) aren't familiar with one of the greatest female vocal talents of our time, so my hope is that the Joni/Starbucks partnership serves her well.

Shine is a very introspective album, dealing with cynical relationships and the coming environmental collapse. Though she seems to feel a little peaceful from spending some time in her B.C. residence, she still cuts to the quick better than anyone else. In "This Place," when she says, "You see those lovely hills, they won't be there for long. They're gonna tear 'em down and sell them to California," I think she speaks for everyone in the Pacific Northwest.

With Larry Klein on bass and Brian Blades on drums, this record is beautifully crafted stylistically and technically. Bernie Grundman handles the mastering duties as he has on all past Joni Mitchell albums. You know instantly that it's a Joni Mitchell record, yet it moves a little further down the jazz path that started back in 1975 with *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*. At just a tick over 60 now, Joni Mitchell still has a phenomenal voice; this record should please old fans and new converts alike.

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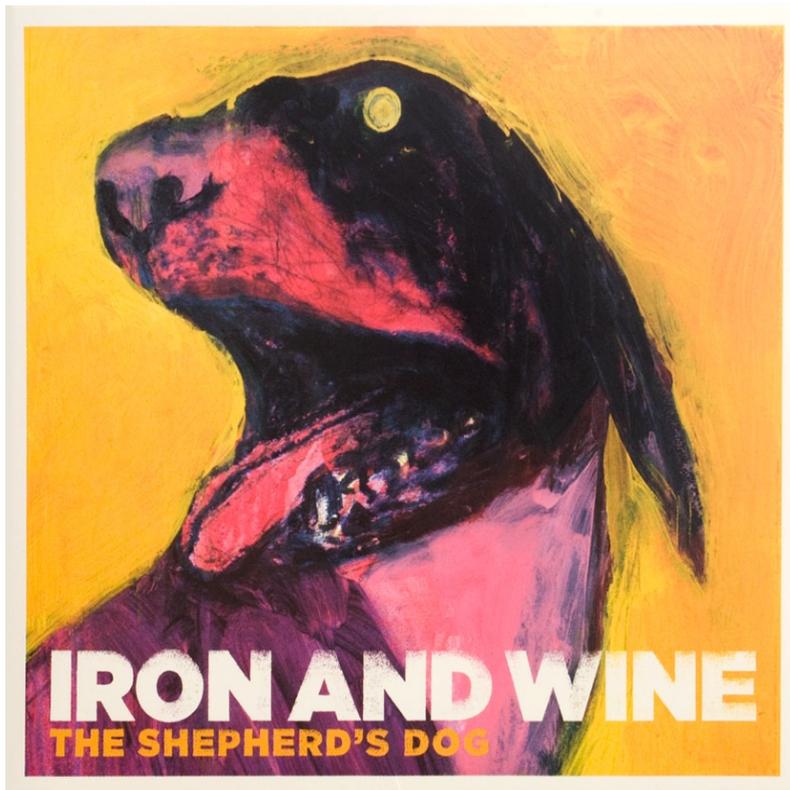
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Martin Simpson
Prodigal Son
CD, Compass Records

Prodigal Son contains a group of traditional English, Irish and American folk songs along with a few originals from Simpson, who hails from Lincolnshire. Simpson is quite a good guitarist and banjo player with a sublime touch. This is very sparse music, for the most part a man and his guitar with an occasional backup vocal or accordion. Jackson Browne makes a guest appearance to round out the package.

This one may or may not be your cup of tea, but it's a very personal record that demands your attention. The songs draw you in and the whole thing has somewhat of a melancholy feel to it, so you may need to play something brainless afterwards to lighten the mood back up. Even the photos inside the CD jacket are a variety of somber yet retrospective poses by Simpson.



Iron and Wine

The Shepherd's Dog
CD and LP, Sub Pop Records

I confess: I grabbed this one because I loved the art on the cover, and then I realized who it was. The first Iron and Wine album, *The Creek Drank the Cradle*, has a much softer, more reserved sound and performance. It's like Simon and Garfunkel on Quaaludes compared to *The Shepherd's Dog*. Not that it's a bad thing. I'm sure part of that overly reserved quality that permeates the first record has to do with singer/songwriter Sam Beam having mixed and recorded it in his modest home studio.

The progression of *The Shepherd's Dog* is good. Beam has shown a lot of growth, but will probably not scare his existing fan base away. I am intrigued by the fact that quite a few of the songs have lyrics that border on the spiritual; yet Beam claims to be an agnostic. Hmm.

The record has a psychedelic folk feel to it. Beam's guitar playing is very enjoyable, and by adding more instruments to the mix, he's created a much bigger sound than on the previous two albums, while honoring a lineage to them.

This is indeed a very groovy record and is also available on LP, along with the other two Iron and Wine records.



Mountain

Masters of War
CD, Big Rack Records

Enough twangy acoustic guitars; now you can rock. While a new release by Leslie West might not make the front page of music magazines these days, the head-bangers on our staff were intrigued to see what he had come up with this time, especially considering all the tunes on this album are Bob Dylan covers.

A quick peek at West's Web site reveals that he is still a (self-proclaimed) major force in rock today, and this album isn't a bad example of the heavy rock genre. It sounds like a big dose of Mountain from the 60's with updated guitar voicing and perhaps some Brian Johnson and Bob Seger thrown in on the side.

West is joined by Ozzy for a duet on the title cut, but he goes it alone for the rest of the tracks except for "Blowin' in the Wind," which is sung by drummer Corky Laing. The sound quality is quite good, with very little compression used in the recording. **Guitar heads will dig this disc because the guitars are mixed right up front and loud.** I never thought I would hear Leslie West sing "The Times They Are a-Changin'", but it works. ●

Myths, Legends & Truth: The Four Faces Of Hip-Hop

By Rich Simmons

Hip-hop has become synonymous with many connotations, some positive, some negative. It all depends on which side of the line you are living and walking on.

Just as rock 'n' roll was seen as a debilitating and degrading force on the youth of the 50's and 60's, hip-hop has been given a similar turn throughout our current society.

But What Is Hip-Hop?

If you stopped 50 people on the street and asked them what they thought hip-hop was, 90 percent would probably say, "Rap music."

And This Answer Is Wrong. Mostly.

Hip-hop is a culture consisting of four different, but cohesive, elements. Hip-hop is a lifestyle employed by many, truly lived by few, and enjoyed by the masses. Of the four elements, the first is the disc jockey (DJ). The second are the MC's (rappers). Third are the dancers (B-boys). Fourth are the graffiti artists (taggers).

Like many histories, the true origins of hip-hop are questionable. While some points are in agreement, there will forever be disputes among the old school pioneers and their peers. The first is: "Where did hip-hop start?" **Most people agree that hip-hop began in the South Bronx, although I do know some people who claim it started in uptown Manhattan. But these are the kind of arguments that legends are made of. The one undisputed fact is that hip-hop started with the DJ's.** Particularly, one Jamaican DJ named Kool Herc from the Bronx in the mid 1970's.

What's My DJ's Name?

Kool Herc is denoted for being not only the first DJ to start 'catching beats' with his turntables, but also for being the first MC. Radio personalities were already calling themselves DJ's instead of Disc Jockeys, so anyone who would spin records became known as a DJ as well. It was a natural progression. But what Herc did was legendary. He talked over the beats of the records. Not necessarily rhyming, but catchy phrases to get the crowd into the party. "Throw your hands up in the air and wave 'em like you just don't care!" A default that even today holds true for many people who chant on the microphone. Herc was also known for extending the 'breaks' on records by using two identical albums on each turntable. When a break, usually a solo drumbeat, would come, Herc would use an audio mixer to extend that break without pause. *(continued)*

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This is called “cutting,” which is the basic mix you can do with a record; to cut back and forth. If you can do it without anyone knowing you’re cutting back and forth, so much the better. As long as you can keep it smooth.

But then something happened. Something that has probably happened to all of us at one time or another. DJ Grand Wizard Theodor’s mother told him to turn down his music. But what he did was stop the record on the platter while the cross fader was still open, causing a new, strange sound to emerge by running the record back and forth under his fingertips. Hmmmm. Scratching was born. Scratching is one of the first things new DJ’s want to aspire to grasp. I know I did. I wore out a lot of records learning how to scratch. This is evident by the static you hear from an over-scratched break in a record. These days you can actually go to school or even browse the Internet for scratching skills. But back in the day, we experimented with everything we could get our hands on. Skillful scratching involves not only being able to move the record back and forth, but creating a sub-beat with the movements, highlighting parts of the playing disc, and using it to mix from one record to another or constantly back and forth. If your scratch or cut was off, you made people misstep their dance. This was a serious taboo that could turn the crowd against you and clear the dance floor.

So now DJ’s are scratching and cutting, but something else was needed.

The Mix

Mixing is not as easy as people might have you to believe. It is more than just knowing how many beats per minute a record is running (although that is the first step). I’m going to tell you the most important thing you ever need to know to be a successful mixer.

You have to know your music.

Every beat, every measure, every verse, every break, every nuance of the song. You must know it. You must know that this record has a 64-four beat (16 bar) verse, followed by an eight bar break. During that eight bar break, can you fit something else into it? Do you want to scratch a new beat? Maybe you can put the verse of another song into that break. Or perhaps you can time the music so while one song is singing, the other is in a break and then they switch back and forth while both records are playing simultaneously.

I still get goosebumps when I think about the mix. I love the mix. I adore it. I caress it. It’s a part of me – much to the chagrin of my wife, who has more than once told me that I’m married to my music. I can get up in the middle of the night and throw on the headphones because I have to try out “that mix” that I couldn’t get out of my head. As a matter of fact,

I’m going to stop typing for an hour and go mix because just thinking about my turntables has got my juices flowing.

OK. I’m back.

Mixing will keep people on the dance floor because the music is continuous and there’s no noticeable beat change. The worst thing a DJ can do is go from 100 beats a minute to something like 116 beats a minute by cutting. The dancers lose their step. But if you can control your mix and make it fly, you can control the crowd. The power is in your hands. But that’s a whole other article.

Once DJ’s started cutting, scratching and mixing, it didn’t leave them much time to get on the microphone any more. So MC’s were born.

1, 2, 1, 2, in the place to be...

The Master of Ceremonies. The MC. Truth be told, all MC’s are not rappers, but all rappers are MC’s.

Huh?

In the beginning, all a DJ needed was for someone to keep the crowd into the party mix. Some people call it “amping the crowd,” or “hyping it up.” The most famous hype man of all is Flava Flav, but he really wasn’t the first in his class. Even today, when you go to a wedding with a DJ or even a band, there is someone who makes you dance in a conga line, gives out party hats, and makes the crowd do things that maybe they wouldn’t normally do. Same concept, different venue. It’s still hyping.

What evolved from a simple party chant is what we have now been inundated with throughout our society. Rap. I’m not talking about rap music. That’s something else. But the rap that we know today started as a boasting tool of one’s self-esteem. I’m the best rapper there is and this is why. Like hot butter on popcorn.

As with anything, rapping evolved and rappers brought things to a new level. The commercial world wasn’t looking at a bunch of street kids on a block party as the next money making venture. So, we made our own music. Rappers wrote rhymes and put them to beats that DJ’s spun for them; a combination of popular R&B music or classic soul. Even breaks from rock music were used, some of the more popular ones being Billy Squier’s “I Got the Big Beat,” Thin Lizzy’s “Johnny the Fox Meets Jimmy the Weed,” and later on groups like Queen’s “Another One Bites the Dust” and Talking Heads’ “Once in a Lifetime” would infiltrate hip-hop. The fusion of rock, pop, and soul was there from the beginning. But how did they spread this music around? *(continued)*

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MUSIC

**Answer:
The Underground Mix Tape.**

One of the most offensive statements made about hip-hop is that it is a 'sub-culture.' It's not. It's a culture all its own like any other. And like any culture, it has its own music. Many people got started with underground mix tapes. These were sets that were recorded live at parks, block parties, or even someone's basement. And they spread through the masses by duplication. Over and over again. Some of the most famous underground artists were groups like The Cold Crush Brothers, The Furious Five, and Nas. Even 50 Cent was an underground legend before he dropped his first CD. These days, it's quite common to come across underground CD's with the advent of CD burners, computers and accessible and cheap hardware. Practically anyone can create their own mix CD's. I record my own DJ sets with Sony Vegas and break down the session into multiple tracks.

And then it happened. The corporations and commercial interests took notice and brought rap music off the streets and into the studios. Notably in 1979 with "King Tim III" by the Fatback Band. But a week later, Sugar Hill Records would release "Rapper's Delight." The rest, as they say, is history. Companies couldn't sign rappers fast enough. In the first year alone we were introduced to Spooky Gee (the company changed it to Spoonie), originally of the Treacherous Three with Kool Moe Dee and L.A. Sunshine before Special K came along. There was Kurtis Blow, the first rapper signed to a major label, Mercury, with "Christmas Rappin'," Funky Four plus one more, Grandmaster Flash and The Furious Five, Eddie Cheba, and a slew of others.
(continued)

At first, rap was all about partying. It would turn its head towards social commentary with songs like “The Message” and with socially conscious rappers like KRS-1 of Boogie Down Productions and Chuck D of Public Enemy. Rap would later become twisted from its roots into a sometimes-misogynistic epitaph of life on the streets. While some lyrics choose to exemplify the harsh realities of the streets and its wrongs, others have set to glorify it. A false sense of success has been created by doing wrong. When the cameras turn off, most rappers get back into their Hondas and go home. The glittering life of video is a misrepresentation of the genre and what it originally stood for.

Where my B-boys at?

Popping. Locking. Electric Boogie. Breaking. Krumping. C-Walk. Chicken Noodle Soup.

Chicken Noodle Soup?

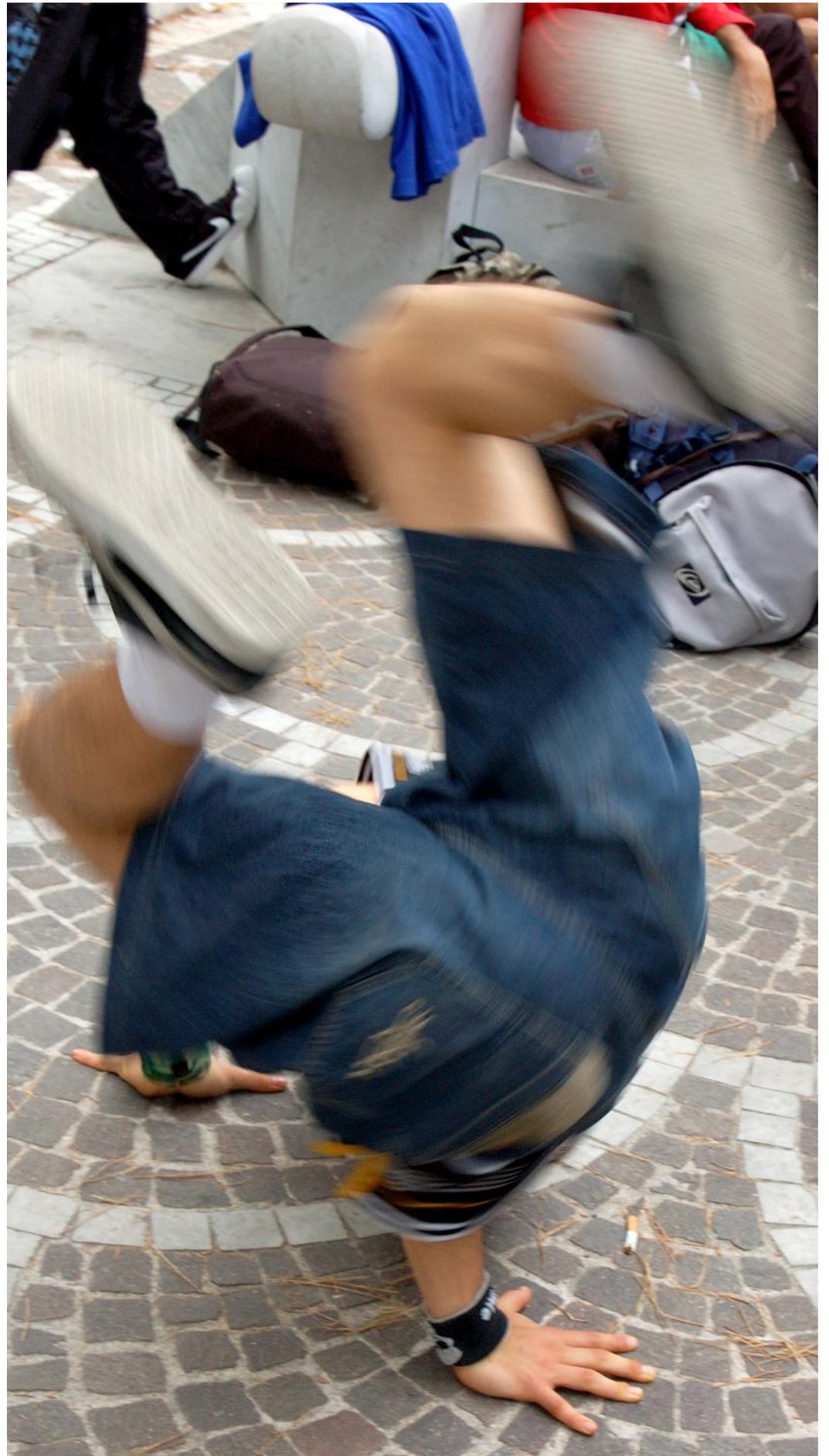
Yes, these are all hip-hop dances. There are two types of hip-hop dancers. On the one side, you have your average partygoer who knows the latest dances. Back in the day it might have been the Smurf, the Wop, or the Patty Duke. More recently you might have been doing the Harlem Shake, the Butterfly, or yes, the Chicken Noodle Soup, but there is another faction of dancers that stands out and above from the rest.

The B-boys and B-girls.

These are the kids, some now who are adults, who spin on their heads, stop motion on one arm while their body is raised in the air or the ones you see with the lightning fast footsteps. B-boys have been around since day one. Dance has always been incorporated into the music. I’m going to break a myth for some people. Michael Jackson did not invent the Moonwalk. Nor did he invent popping or locking. He just incorporated all this stuff, including beat boxing, into his own style.

One influence on B-boying was the kung-fu movies that came on television on Saturday afternoon. The spins, wind-ups, kicks, locks, and other flashy moves that captivate the crowd can be seen in the imported flicks we once enjoyed, and still do. Combined with natural talent, ingenuity, and creative force, it was very plausible to become well known in the surrounding neighborhoods. It was always fun to watch guys and girls battle each other on the dance floor, too. This is something that still goes on today. To see how far B-boying has come, you can take classes at reputable dance studios that will teach “hip-hop dance” as a class. Even the television show *So You Think You Can Dance?* has a hip-hop segment each week. If you rent or own the movie *The Fighting Temptations*, watch the credits at the end and you can see Cuba Gooding Jr. B-boying on the pulpit. He’s really good, too.

The most famous of all the B-boys in history, in my opinion, is the Rock Steady Crew, who is celebrating their 30th anniversary. (continued)



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What always surprised me about RSC was not how good they were, but that there were so many of them. Sometimes upwards of 20 at a time. But there were other groups, among them The Zulu Kings, The Bronx Boys, Rockwell Association, and the Crazy Commanders.

B-boys showed off their skills during the break in the record. The DJ would hold the break piece in the record by cutting back and forth and the B-boys would do their thing. Soon they became known as “break dancers” by the media. But break dancing is made up of a lot of different styles of dance. B-boying, Popping and Locking are as different as the waltz, the rumba, and tango. Each of these also has different forms and styles, but I would need a book to describe them all. Check the Web, where you can find out about the dances with any search engine.

And if you ever call a real B-boy a “break dancer” to his face, be prepared to fight. That's an insult.

Tag, you're it. Graffiti.

It's been around since man first drew on the walls of his cave to let people know something happened here. History. Our story. This is how a saber tooth ate my buddy. Whatever it was, one thing was clear. See the message. The initial intent hasn't changed in this unique form of communication.

There is a distinct difference between graffiti artists (graffitists) and taggers. The former is an art form. The latter is a signature.
(continued)

The first initial problem that every graffiti artist has is this: I need a canvas.

Unfortunately this is why some people consider graffiti the work of a vandal and not of an artist, because the canvas is more than likely going to be someone else's property. Let's face it, there's an abundance of blank concrete walls. They're just sitting there all drab and gray just waiting to be painted. Right? At least, that's what an artist would have you believe, but let's look at the difference between the two.

You may often hear of a tag being referred to as a "chop" or a "hanko," but a tag is the signature that the graffiti artist puts on his work, just as an oil and canvas artist would sign his own work. There are three levels of tags. Tags, throw ups, and wild style. Tags are the signatures composed of thin letters. Throw ups are bubble lettered. Wild Style encompasses anything from a 3-D look to the downright outrageous and colorful. But they all have one thing in common: the person's name. The problem started when people would start tagging other people's graffiti work and taking credit for something they didn't accomplish. It further evolved into gangs using tags to stake their claim to certain parts of their neighborhood. It also became a sort of conquest for someone to put his or her tag, in what would seem like the most difficult places possible. Like overpasses, billboards and trains. The higher up you can get, the more clout you can achieve. The more you can tag, the more you will be seen. And the field was full of competition.

So where's the art in all of this?

The art of graffiti is tantamount to the skill of the artist, as with any genre. The tools mainly consist of spray paint with various sized nozzle caps for controlling the spread of the paint. What some set out to accomplish is to enhance the look of the neighborhood. This is real art. **Some of the pieces that have been displayed are nothing short of spectacular. Some are made in memory of someone's passing. Some are a call to justice.** I've witnessed some that truly belong in a museum. *(continued)*



What's the difference between a mural and graffiti? The neighborhood.

Today, graffiti has become more mainstream, and, yes, has been exploited by capitalism. You can see graffiti everywhere. It's on the back of jean pockets, jackets, advertisements, and logos. In the accepted venues, graffiti is a cash machine.

Hip-Hop You Don't Stop

Hip-hop is here to stay. It's just a matter of how. The last 30 years has changed the genre considerably. What began as a way to party has grown into a multi-billion dollar industry controlled

by suits. This is unfortunate because it has caused hip-hop to lose focus of where it came from, accepting values that are unedifying and goals that are not relevant to the uplifting of the community. What we have been left with are dreams of grandeur, misguided principles and a mentality with no future. Tomorrow will become now before you know it. A threefold cord is not easily broken, but hip-hop is unfolding before our eyes and losing the essence that makes it – well, hip-hop. Some people believe you can't stop this snowball of destruction. And to those people I say...

Don't believe the hype. ●

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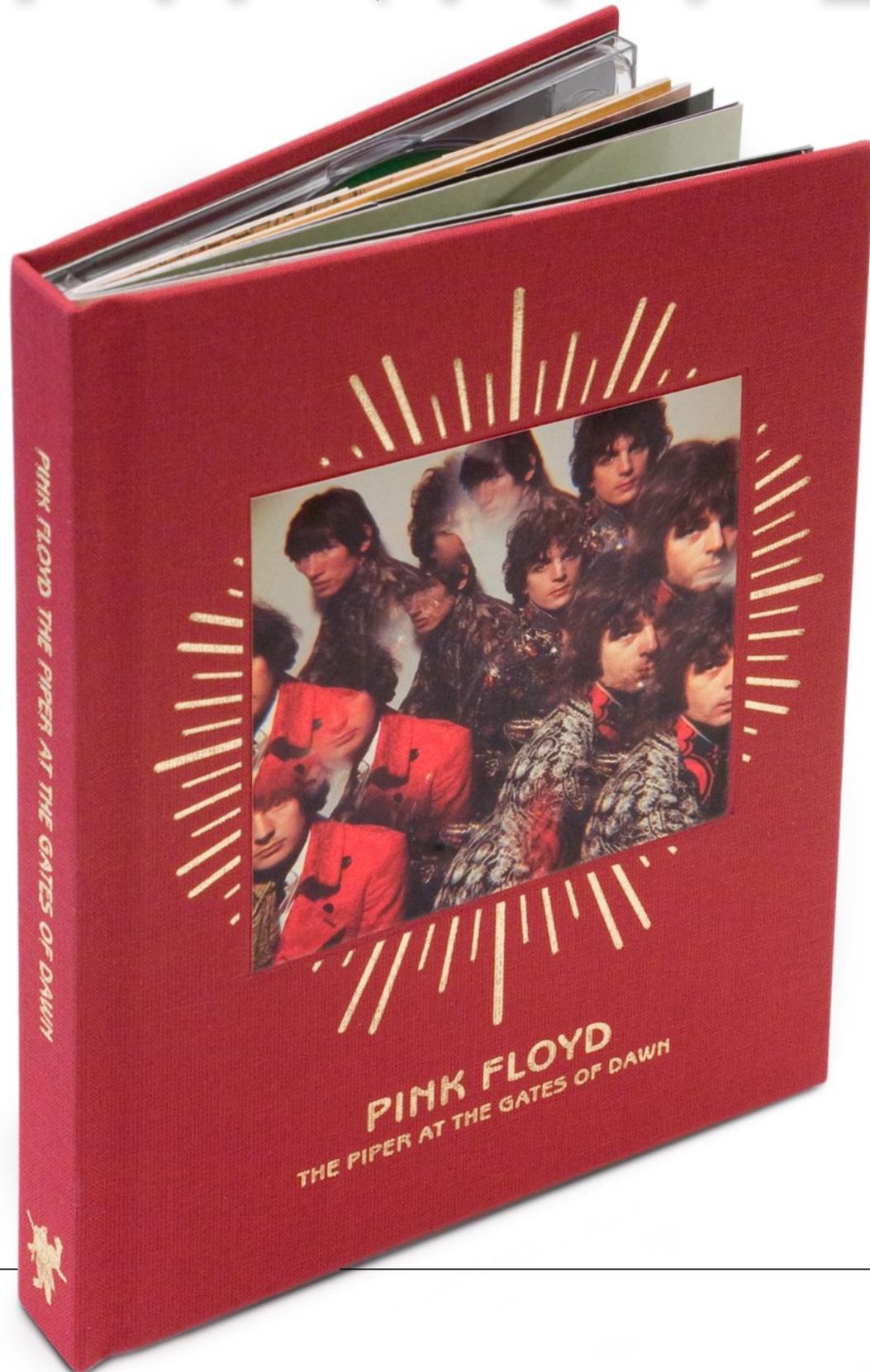
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PINK FLOYD



The Piper at the Gates of Dawn

40th Anniversary
Limited Edition 3-CD Set

By Eddie Kaddi

Rock and Roll history is rife with legends and myths. Everyone from the Beatles to Led Zeppelin is rumored to have sold their souls to the devil at least once in their careers.

You couldn't write a story more interesting than that of Roger "Syd" Barrett's early days as guitarist and songwriter for Pink Floyd. The talented young artist was a wellspring of creativity with his artwork, unique and creative compositions, and unexplainable live performances. His erratic stage manner was often attributed to his penchant for LSD and other psychedelic drugs.

The jury is still out as to whether it was an undiagnosed mental illness or his incessant drug use that led Barrett to spend the better part of his life in a self-imposed exile.



He abruptly parted ways with Pink Floyd and remained steadfastly alienated from the band, its music, and society in general in the years after the release in 1967 of their first album, *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*. Barrett released two solo records following his departure, but by 1975 he had all but vanished from the rock world. He chose the safety and solitude of his mother's basement in her home in Cambridge, England, and he stayed there until his death on July 7, 2006 from pancreatic cancer.

This 40th anniversary release of Pink Floyd's debut record is a brilliant 3-CD set capturing the essence of Barrett's contributions to Pink Floyd.

The set includes a rare mono mix of the record on disc one, a remastered stereo recording on discs 2 and 3 (the crème de la crème), containing all of their originally released 45 rpm singles along with the rare B-sides and a couple of unreleased demos, plus outtakes, to boot. If the music weren't enough, there's the incredible hardbound book in which the limited edition is packaged. It features a beautiful arrangement of liner notes with lyrics and a great reproduction of an early Syd Barrett scrapbook project, which he had given a girlfriend many years ago, titled *Fart Enjoy*.

The sound quality of the mono release on disc 1 is amazing; the sound comes alive in all its original glory. I had given up trying to track down the long out-of-print Japanese mono version, so this was indeed a bonus!

I was not even born when this album was released, but everything I have learned to equate with the 60's psychedelic sound comes through in these songs. Don't forget that the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* was being recorded at the same time Pink Floyd was putting together *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*. They say that lightning doesn't strike the same spot twice, but I have to wonder whether there was something cosmic at play to enable two so completely eclectic recordings to develop simultaneously, and in the same location.

(continued)

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This anniversary clearly celebrates the 40th anniversary of the UK release, as the track "See Emily Play" is conspicuously absent from both album versions, but is included in the bonus third CD, along with their early singles collection. This song and "Bike" are great examples of Barrett's sheer skills with wordplay and songwriting. When I first discovered this record I couldn't put it down for weeks. This collection is a must have for anyone interested in the music of the 60's.

The stereo version of the album was my first experience with Syd Barrett's work and is probably the one most people are familiar with. Bouncing back and forth between the stereo and mono versions makes the nuances of each a real treat. As a huge fan, I am very happy that Capitol went the extra mile and released both versions together.

"Interstellar Overdrive" is a nearly ten-minute instrumental journey that Pink Floyd takes the listener on midway through the album. Originally, it opened side 2 of the record in the UK, and it's nothing short of genius. **This time, the stereo version won me over with an ethereal feel and some cool phasing effects at the end.** But being somewhat of a collector, I was most excited about disc 3. I was counting the days leading up to this release and the opportunity to hear the two alternate takes of "Interstellar Overdrive" that it features. The first is from a long lost French single that was recently unearthed and remastered for inclusion here.

(continued)

The second came straight out of the vaults, and is one of only three previously unissued rarities on the release.

Both takes clock in at just over half the length of the original, but you will hardly notice, since they still carry with them the same epic aural characteristics of the final take published on the original record. The other two previously unreleased tracks are studio outtakes of their single “Apples and Oranges” and an album track, “Matilda Mother.” These tracks may only be for the true fans, but I always find it fascinating to hear the alternate interpretations of the songs I’ve fallen in love with over the years.

The 45 rpm singles featured on the third disc were all issued as an EP set in 1997 called *1967 Singles Sampler*. This one is long out of print, so for many fans, having them on disc 3 will alone be worth the price of the box set. **A slightly more economical standard CD set was released, featuring only the stereo and mono versions of the album, but for the extra few quid you’re better off snatching the limited edition box set while you still can.**

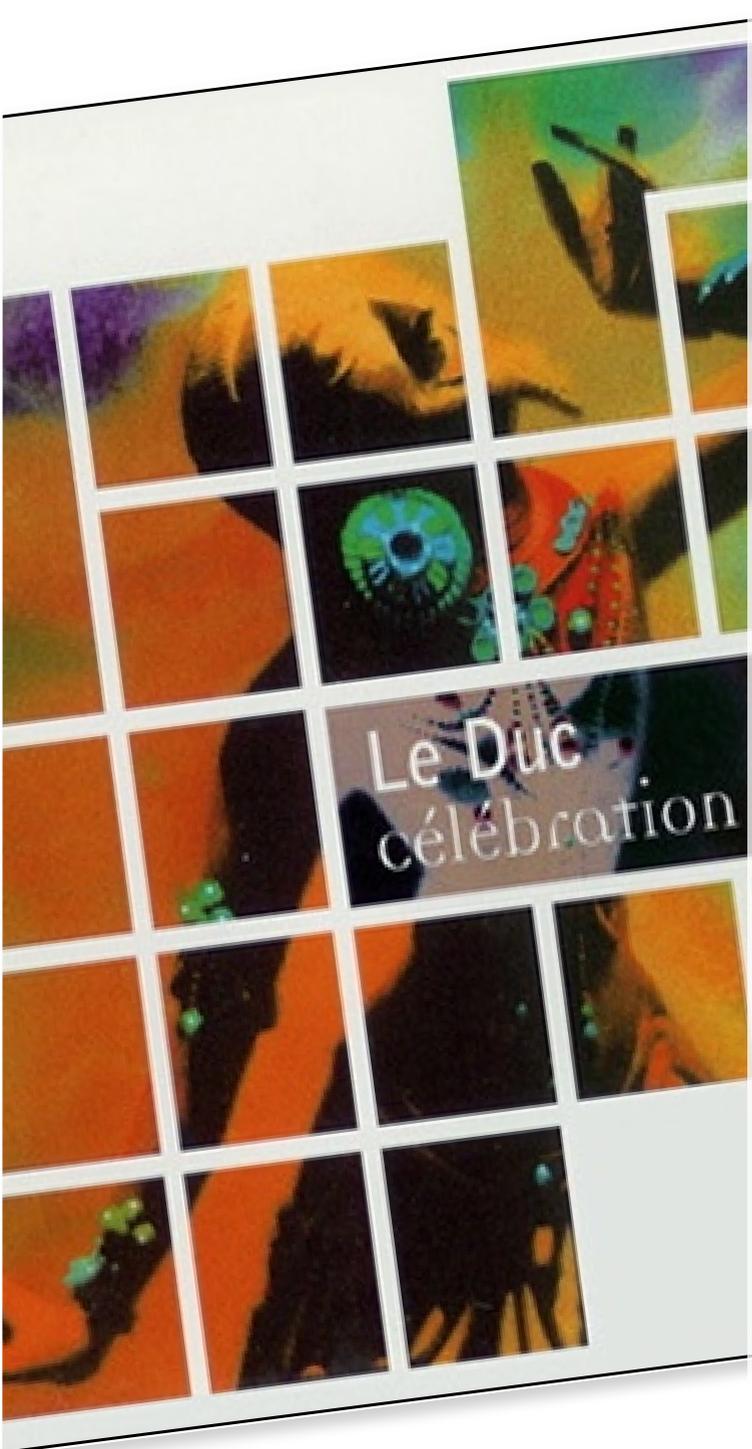
There’s no denying that music has changed much over the four decades since this album was first released. Few records grip me to the core like this one. Though many fans of Pink Floyd might not cite this record as the masterpiece of the band’s discography, for me, it remains the Syd Barrett record. ●



PINK FLOYD

Club Mix

By Scott Tetzlaff



I've recently finished the book, *The Nature of Happiness*, by Desmond Morris. It's a catalogue of all the different ways to be happy. It's a brilliant book that should be issued to people as soon as they're old enough to reason. It asserts that older, more primitive ways of being happy have morphed into more symbolic versions. For example, the hunt of the cave-man is changed into less violent pastimes like stamp collecting, artistic endeavors, sports, and so on.

There is also a primal satisfaction that comes with hunting up a hitherto undiscovered CD. And you don't get covered in swamp goo and such, as with regular hunting – although Ted Nugent would probably prefer the latter to the former. I'm not sure how ancient cultures went about finding cool CD's, but in today's complex and fragmented music scene, you'll need a good strategy. Here are a couple that might help you:

1. Read *Tone*. Sure, it's obvious – but the editor loves it when you put stuff like this in your article.

2. Get snooty with your pals. There's nothing better than a referral from someone you know. Strike up a conversation about music, and ask what their favorites are. Along with that, ask to snoop through their music collection. You never know what you'll find. Example: I was looking through a new acquaintance's record collection. This otherwise normal human's collection was made up entirely of Revolutionary War era drum and fife music. Run to the exit – do not walk.

3. Befriend a DJ: This is slightly trickier. Many DJ's love to chat about music, and are happy to share their opinions. But certain protocols should be observed, along with good common sense. You will not win any friends by drunkenly shouting that he/she should "PLAY SOME

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE!!!" As with most things, it goes better if you are buying a round of drinks.

4. Use online store marketing tools: This is an excellent source for finding things like the electronica-oriented titles you've been reading about in my column. If you poke around the online stores (Amazon, for example), you'll find referral lists by other listeners. Don't take these as gospel, but they're great pointers to things you may not have heard before. Dig one or two levels deeper by looking up the descriptions of individual CD's, and user comments.

5. Check the label: A lot of times, smaller record labels have a stable of similar artists. You might do well to go to the home page of the recording company, to see who else is signed with them. As an added bonus, many of the record companies have additional samples, so you can get a better flavor of a CD before you buy it.

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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.

6. Follow the threads: There are a ton of collections out there in the electronic and club music genre. If you have a track you are fond of, take a few minutes to do some research. You might like the rest of that artist's work, too. Exercise some caution, though. There's nothing worse than buying a full-priced import CD based on a single song to find out it was the only good song on the disc. Whenever possible, listen to as many samples as you can before you press the "buy it now" button.

7. Check your music's genomes: There are tools on the Internet, such as Pandora (www.pandora.com), that will help you find music similar to what you like. Using an algorithm that uses beats per minute, tone, artists, producers, and maybe some witchcraft, music is chosen to match your specifications. As music is played on your custom "radio station," you can vote on individual songs to let Pandora know how closely they match your taste.

8. Find a radio station you like: This is more difficult than it sounds. The good news is that many stations are now broadcasting over the Internet, so you're not stuck with what's being broadcast in your area. My personal favorite is KCRW. In particular, the shows "Metropolis" and "Morning Becomes Eclectic." As an extra bonus, they've posted their playlists on their site. (www.kcrw.com/music)

I bagged this issue's selections using these very techniques:

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Splendid Isolation and Shallow & Profound
by Yonderboi

These were found using the “follow the thread” method. Cuts from these CD’s appear on multiple collections. The full CD’s are amazing. Yonderboi is actually a Hungarian composer whose real name is László Fogarasi Jr., and mixes elements of opera, classical, pop, rock, and east European influences. Listening to a Yonderboi CD is a constant surprise. Rock might be followed by French horns, trip hop, a kazoo, or obscure dialogue samples – all artfully woven. This is an archetype for CD’s that defy classification in iTunes.

Shallow & Profound was out of print for a while, but is available again, and features the beautiful and subtle remix of the Doors’ “Riders on the Storm,” a downtempo classic. Taken as a whole, it’s one of the most original records in years, and every track is a pearl. How could you top it? *Splendid Isolation* is as good or better than *Shallow & Profound*. The opening song begins with crow calls and violins, which then break into a haunting children’s choir singing “All We Go to Hell”.

Again, there’s not a bad track on this incredible CD, which defies description as the songs change from electronica to rock and back again. The song “Love Hides,” based on a Jim Morrison poem, is a great example of the rock elements fused into this work. I highly recommend both of these CD’s.

Infinessence by Various Artists

This was located both by the DJ and the “check the label” method. A DJ friend named this as his absolute favorite chillout CD. I did a little digging, and, now, the obscure Canadian label, InterChill, has become a favorite of mine. Each year, a couple of ambient jewels are put out by this small label. This is sleepy time music at its best.

Infinessence is excellent for relaxing and doing creative work in the late night hours – but it has enough structure and variation to be interesting. The CD is an older work that is a little difficult to find new, but if you can obtain a used copy, you will not be disappointed. Early cuts are more upbeat and include water pipe sound samples, break beats, and ping pong balls – but it quickly settles down to the sleepy ambient space-out music the musicians are beloved for, with lots of soothing sitars, tinkling pianos, and synthesizers mixed in.

The opening track, “Fluxation,” by Lumo, begins with a stark piano solo and builds to a beautiful, fast-paced harmonic piece; it’s stunning. The fourth track, “Faeri Dub,” begins with a sound sample, a discussion of “the little people” with a young girl. It’s a turning point on the CD; from here on it gets dreamlike and ambient. The overall effect is warm and pleasant – like settling into a welcoming bathtub.

Explore the Interchill website at www.interchill.com when you are not operating heavy equipment. There are plenty of sound samples to be had from the current catalogue.



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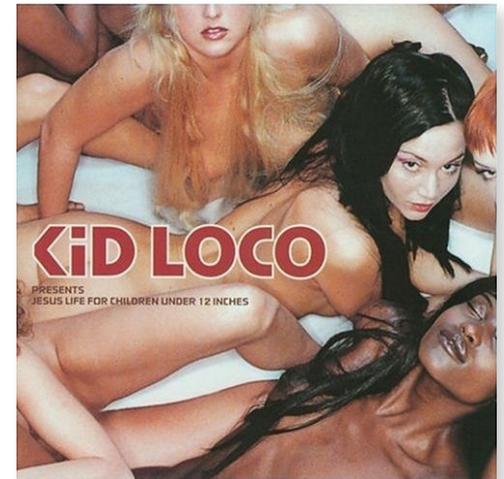
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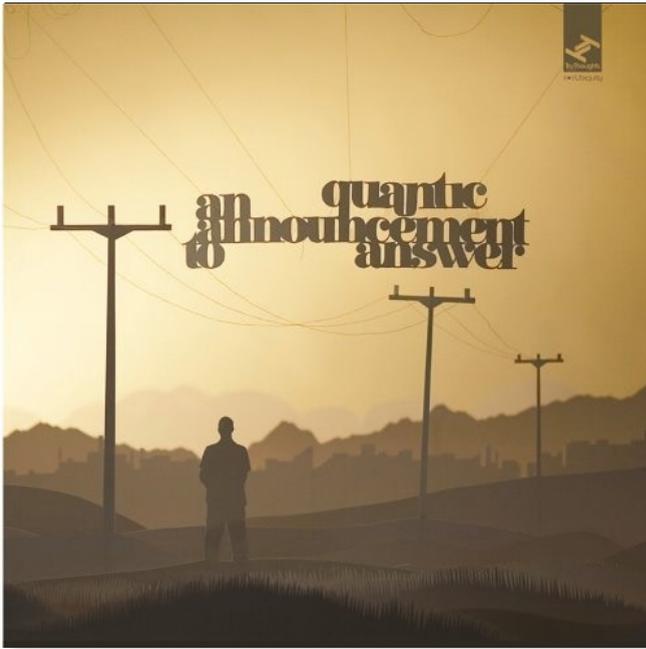
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Jesus Life for Children Under 12 Inches by Kid Loco

This was a referral list find. Kid Loco is another favorite, and this is an older CD. After seeing it pop up on lists repeatedly, I got my hands on a copy. Wow. Subtle reworks of pieces from Mugwai, Talvin Singh, and Pulp (to name a few). This jazzy, relaxing CD is not what you'd expect if you were flipping through the CD's at the store and saw the cover full of naked girls. Hide the cover and you can play this one for most people without worry.

Standout tracks include the opening anthem, "The Viaduct," by the Pastels, and the action theme tune "Les Reprouves" by Tommy Hools. One warning: the eleventh cut, "Youpi" by Cornu is a little bizarre, so you might want to pass on this one if you have more conservative dinner company over. **The vocals include the muffled screaming of the word "Youpi."** No idea. If anyone has a clue, please contact me via *Tone*. Don't let it spoil your enjoyment of an otherwise perfect CD. (By the way, I've actually come to love the Youpi song.)



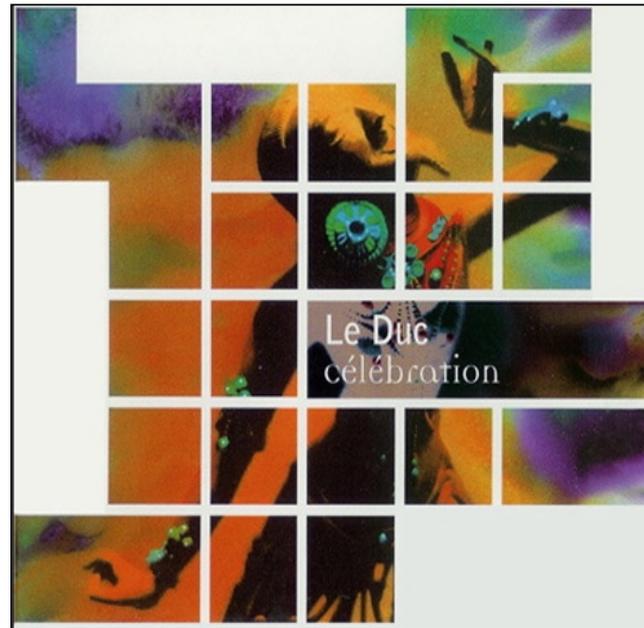
An Announcement to Answer by Quantic

I found this one using a variation on the follow-the-thread method. Quantic has done remixes for lots of compilations, so I had to get their solo CD. There's a ton of hip-hop, rap, soul and Puerto Rican influences here, but a bit of Asian *koto* music thrown into the blender was what got me hooked. If that wasn't enough, great percussion work makes this one spicy mix that will stay in your rotation for a long time. My only complaint: it's a little too short – only about 40 minutes total.

The opening track, "Absence Heard, Presence Felt" mixes Chinese classical music with 1920's vintage jazz elements, brilliantly done with a nostalgic feel. "Politick Society" does a quick switch to a Latin beat, yet somehow, this strange mix holds together really well. After listening to a solo effort, it's really fun to go back and listen to remixes from other collections. You can begin to recognize the fingerprints of a DJ from his (or her) work.

Celebration by Le Duc

This was found in a friend's record collection. It looked pretty strange, so I had to ask about it. It's a collection of chants from all over the place (Native American, Southeast Asian, Tibetan) reworked with electronic music. Very ethereal; not at all sleep-inducing, yet it's too dance-like to call New Age. I would definitely put this at the more energetic end of the scale. The original CD is difficult to find, but you can download a copy via iTunes. My favorite track is "Kali," a lingering, sitar-driven piece. "Cheyennes" is a great track as well – there's something very cool about taking an anthropologic track of American Indian chanting and weaving it into a modern dance tune. "Touareg" uses some variation of gamelan (the Indonesian cousin of the xylophone). **Not only will you enjoy listening to this; it could help you get a great grade on your next sociology paper.**



Tales of the Forgotten Melodies by Wax Tailor

This was found by the "get snoop with your friends" method, in which you talk with them about music. During late night ramblings with music pals, we were talking about sampling and scratching – and who was the most masterful. This album was brought up as the winner... even possibly beating out DJ Shadow (But I'm saving that for a later arm wrestling match).

This is truly a work of art. Dark, brooding, and incorporating musical and sound elements from many genres – it could be one of the best electronic CDs of the decade. It falls squarely into the trip hop / turntablist camps, but there's enough jazz, funk, and soul mixed in to please most everyone. Take a listen to "Que Sera" with samples of Doris Day. In anyone else's hands, I'm not sure this would work. Over tracked with a lingering beat and other soundbytes, it takes on another dimension. "Hypnosis Theme" is a sinuous piece featuring a single violin. Simple beauty mixed with amusing soundbytes. Finally, there's one technique not listed: Dumb luck. You just never know.

On a recent trip to Paris, a cab driver provided some really useful information.

Probably the best advice is to stay vigilant and chat freely about your favorite topic. You never know who'll jump in and join the hunt.



The Mind of Meridian

By Jeff Dorgay

Meridian Audio is known world wide for their innovative hi-fi products. Celebrating their 30th year in business they are still at the forefront of high performance design with the 800 series disc players, a full line of active loudspeakers and now the F80 radio that was a joint venture between Meridian and Ferarri.

Bob Stuart, one of the two founders of Meridian is one of the most enthusiastic guys in the high end today and after thirty years of hard work, shows no sign of slowing down at all! Here's what he had to say to us about the past, present and future:



What did you do before you founded Meridian? Have you always been involved in audio design, or did you come to this world from some other discipline?

I have always been interested in music, audio and electronics. At a young age I designed and built radios, amplifiers and tape recorders. I always wanted to do this. My first degree was in electronics, acoustics and psychoacoustics. After university I worked for a year with the Marconi Co., then I was recruited into an award-winning start-up called Lecson Audio. Three years later Allen and I started Meridian.

Did you ever have another career path in mind?

My only other flirtation was medical applications of electronics. I was driven by a very strong interest in music and a desire to apply my talents to that.

Just so our readers have it straight, your partner Mr. Boothroyd does the industrial/aesthetic design and you do the circuitry? Do the two of you have any overlap?

That is how we have always worked: Allen is essentially a sculptor but in fact he also does industrial engineering and graphics and I also do acoustics -- we say 'Allen does the outside, I do the inside'. But it goes beyond that, because there is a strong ethos of co-operation.

The most fascinating time in every project for us is the initial bartering; the tension and debates between size, shape, user interface, etc. and how it impacts the sculpture and the workings.

What is very important is the overlap; we both share a passion for great design as well as for excellence. I might add that our partnership is as strong now as it was in the beginning. That is unusual for two guys that have worked together as long as we have! *(continued)*



With Meridian being 30 years old now, you still have more enthusiasm for the industry than I see in people that have been in business half the time you have. What keeps your interest piqued?

I love what I do and I love pushing the boundaries; we have a mission to bring a better understanding of the sound of real music to a wider audience and to show how much more worth-while and life-enriching it can be. We have a real passion for what we do – if we didn't, we would stop.

Meridian is universally acknowledged as designing the first 'audiophile quality' CD player. I remember the MCD, but it seems like the 208 was really the player that put you on the map with all the audiophile magazines. (I always wanted one of those, back then.) Would you agree with this, or was that just the US perception of Meridian?

I think that may be a perception based on timing. Both were highly significant players, but probably MCD Pro was the most surprising because at the time it was smashing the barriers of conventional thinking – namely that all CD players sounded the same and that the era of 'audiophilia' was over. The MCD and 207 were highly significant in Japan

Is there a 'museum' where you keep all of your legacy hardware? Do you still listen to it to see just how far you have come?

Yes, we have examples of each thing we've made and keep them in full running order. We do sit down from time and review. We also try to show our new recruits where we came from so that they can appreciate which parts of design are 'eternal truths' and where technology can improve.



Very interesting listening opportunities sometimes come from these 'across the years' sessions. I vividly remember how very good a 25 year-old pair of M10 loudspeakers (a floor-standing active design which went out of production in 1980 and which in its day could only look to vinyl for the best source) sounded when we drove it from an 808. It has capabilities un-plumbed by the sources of its time.

Speaking of how far you have come, the 808 is fantastic! How much further do you think that you can take the CD in terms of realistic playback? Do you think there is still more information in those discs that can be extracted, or must we wait for another high-resolution format?

There is more to be had, in fact, more coming soon :-)

While we are talking about high resolution, do you think/hope there is any chance for resurgence in DVD-a? I know I'll get some flack from our readers that love SACD, but I have always found the sound of DVD-a to be quite superior.

It has become clear that the audio industry correctly prefers PCM coding and history will show DSD to be one of many side-alleys in audio history. The high-resolution audio formats failed for two reasons: format war and lack of music industry support. *(continued)*

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Meridian put in a lot of effort, starting in 1992, with ARA, the Japan Audio Council, the DVD-a format and, as much again, into making sure that the highest-possible sound quality, combined with convenience, be possible on the two blue-laser formats.

The carriers are there, but it needs a music industry with vision, determination and courage to make a format succeed.

Several errors were made by the industry collectives. Formats designed by multinational committees become too complex, permitting mistakes or miscomprehensions that can have far-reaching implications; this was true for audio and it is true for blue-laser.

Second, a format war antagonizes consumers and almost always leads to disaster. We only have to cite microgroove, 2000/Beta/VHS, 8-track, quadraphony (SQ/QS/Ambisonics), Elcaset, DCC, MiniDisc, DVD Recordable, DVDA/SACD, HD-DVD/BluRay, etc. to see that this is not normally a winning formula.

Unfortunately, three generations of participants didn't learn from history. There were only two good examples: CD and, the best one, DVD. DVD because it nearly came to grief with a potential war between SD and MMCD. In that case a strong leader in Hollywood insisted on a single format. That process worked, but it sowed the seeds of future discontent. But the same thing did not happen with audio: the music industry was so concerned about competition, antitrust and declining sales, that it did not back one or the other high-resolution format. The way was left open for the mediocrity and convenience of compressed downloads to take hold. *(continued)*



Another problem still faced is the content owners' insistence on highly-restrictive technical measures for copy protection which lead to burdens in hardware, great distortions in system architecture and unreliability or lack of interoperability. This sad chapter, of treating the customer as a potential thief rather than establishing good business models is not over. I regret the time may have passed for both SACD and DVD-A because there is not enough new software to justify future generations of hardware builders to support the complexity of universal players — especially with blue-laser coming. However, should blue-laser succeed, the new carrier is there waiting for a music provider to make a release.



I am curious, because the Meridian players, do such a great job with reproducing instruments from a tonally correct perspective, how many of the Meridian staff are musicians? (amateur or professional is fine) Do the people on the design team attend a fair number of live performances as reference material?

A fair number of our staff are musicians, but as important, a good number are trained and avid listeners of live music. (Remember, the ensemble or orchestral player has very little idea how it sounds for the conductor or audience and listens from a very different perspective). **We spend a huge amount of time listening to live music and, in particular, when I am working on a loudspeaker, I make direct comparisons between specific live instruments and the reproduced sound.** Only if we can place single instruments exactly, tonally and spatially, can we handle more complexity.

For me, the touchstones are piano, voice and strings and I am lucky to live in Cambridge where we have a feast of opportunities to hear world-class performers across many genres.

Another future question: I thought your unveiling of the new dock that works with the video iPod was brilliant, and can't wait to purchase one to use with my iPod. Can we expect to see any more products like this from Meridian, that take advantage of your engineering and manufacturing expertise at somewhat of a mass market price structure? I know you said at CES this year that some people were giving you a bit of static, but I do hope that you will continue down this path, as we need to get more young people involved in this world hi fi.

We are keen to showcase our technologies, but even more, to bring awareness of what we do and of the 'possible' to a wider audience.

Speaking of this, the F80 is not really what I would consider a 'mass market' item but a very high performance niche item. Might we see some more of these products if the F80 meets your goals?

Definitely.

Will the F80 be available at Ferrari dealers, seeing that it is a cobranded product? (continued)

The answer to this varies from country to country. In the UK it is available from the car showrooms, we hope that may also be arranged in the USA.

Knowing firsthand how hard it is to get any kind of a licensing agreement, if you don't mind telling us, how long did it take you to get the F80 concept finalized with Ferrari?

Did I mention that Ferrari is 'Italian?' :-). The straight answer is about 3 years ...

I understand that, I used to work with Ducati in another life! Whose idea was it to cobrand with Ferrari?

Ferrari approached us with a concept, we proposed F80, they were so excited they made the very unusual proposal for a co-branded product.

As far as music goes, does the staff at Meridian listen to a pretty wide range of music? If we dropped in unexpectedly, would we be surprised at what is being played on all those Meridian systems in the corporate office?

Yes, our engineers and staff have very wide musical tastes. That's lucky, because it means I can stay in my comfort zone, content that other genres are taken care of!

What kind of music do you enjoy most?

Classical 95%, and Jazz. I especially enjoy chamber, song and choral music.

Because Meridian has been at the forefront of digital design for so long, have you ever been an analog enthusiast? Do you still have a turntable?

One of my core skills is analogue engineering — after all when we started there was no digital audio.
(continued)



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Analogue engineering remains at the core of everything we do, because conversion (A/D and D/A) is an analogue process and digital hardware must be designed from an analogue perspective.

Very early on we embraced and became expert in digital audio and signal processing. Precisely because we were so good at analogue we understand its limits. And the reverse is true -- there are things we prefer to do in the analogue domain. That core appreciation and ability to trade off is central to the high performance and regard in which our products are held.

No, I don't have a turntable. I realize that may seem heretical, and may not agree with fashion, but to me, although it has many euphonic enticements, the limitations of vinyl are fatal. For example, I have never heard a playback of a piano recording that was convincing, or that made me feel that the instrument was actually in tune, standing on the ground, sounding like the real thing. If it can't do a piano what hope is there for Verdi's great Requiem? If you ever got to listen to the difference between a master tape and a master cut, you will know this. Game over ...

At the end of your day, when you finally go home and relax, do you have a full-blown Meridian system at home, or do you prefer quiet?

Of course I have several systems. I listen to a full DSP8000 theatre, I enjoy DSP5200/808 and last but not least, F80s in a few rooms. I listen to music all the time, more so at home.

Last but not least, what is your favorite interest outside of music and hi-fi?

Aside from answering questionnaires like this? I have a lot of interests including industrial archaeology but most of my time is spent with my young, absorbing, family. ●

Desi On Jazz

By Desi Day

From the very first song, “Can’t We Be Friends,” Ella’s vocals are as sweet and calling as ever. After quite a while of not listening to either Ella or Louis I wondered, “What was I thinking?” I missed them, and here they are together on one of the best jazz vocal albums ever recorded. Two musical legends of the 20th century put together an LP of some of the best classic songs ever written, and as soon as I started to listen to this CD, a huge smile came across my face, as I remembered just how perfect these two musical giants sound. Ella has been quoted as saying, “I sing like I feel,” and here it is for all of us to experience.

Louis Armstrong, in his own style, is just as smooth and relaxed as Ella. Singing softly, Louis’ usually gravelly, raspy, and gritty tenor vocal styling actually becomes soothing because he knows just what he is doing. His trumpet phrasing on “Tenderly” is the essence of clarity, note by note. The album swings, and each song is produced with perfection. And it doesn’t hurt to have one of the best jazz trios ever, with Peterson, Brown, and Ellis, along with the drummer extraordinaire, Buddy Rich. What is truly amazing is this ensemble never takes away the spotlight from Ella and Louis. Instead, they add their handsome musicianship to the vocals, to create the just-right dynamic. It is difficult to choose any one song as a favorite because each tune is as beautiful as the next.

On “Cheek to Cheek”, Armstrong and Fitzgerald sing, “It’s Heaven”, and it is true. Very true.



Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong
— *Ella and Louis* (Japanese SACD import)

Ella Fitzgerald, vocals
Louis Armstrong, trumpet & vocals
Oscar Peterson, piano
Ray Brown, bass
Herb Ellis, guitar
Buddy Rich, drums

Originally recorded in 1956 on Verve Records



Stan Getz and Joao Gilberto

— *Getz/Gilberto* (Japanese SACD import)

Stan Getz, alto sax
 Joao Gilberto, guitar/vocals
 Antonio Carlos Jobim, piano
 Tommy Williams, bass
 Milton Banana, drums
 Astrud Gilberto, vocals

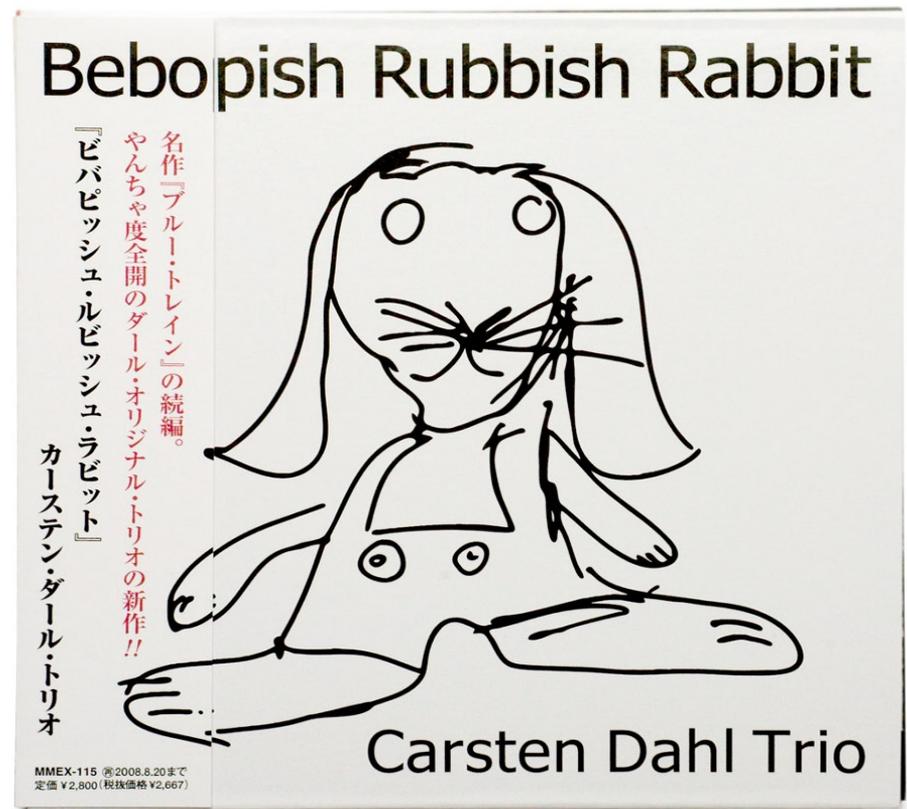
Originally recorded and released in 1964 on Verve

Cool-bop saxophonist Stan Getz collaborated with guitarist Charlie Byrd in the early 1960's after Byrd returned to the United States (from a holiday in Rio) with a new love of the Brazilian music styling of the samba. In 1962, Getz and Byrd initiated a fusion of jazz that would sweep this country in the musical style we have come to know as the bossa nova.

The first generation of the bossa nova was created in Brazil during a period of economic growth and political change by the middle class of that country. This style evolved from the samba, with its rhythmic and percussive style giving the emphasis to the first beat. Stan Getz and Charlie Byrd took this style of music to creative heights and won a Grammy in 1962 for their hit, "Desafinado." Their LP, *Jazz Samba*, was a ground breaking venture, bringing the new sound of bossa nova to millions.

"Desafinado," written by Antonio Carlos Jobim and Newton Mendonca, became one of Getz's signature songs. Then, in 1964, Getz and Joao Gilberto teamed up with Jobim, who wrote the smash hit, "The Girl From Ipanema." This disc, *Getz/Gilberto*, is still as wonderful a listening experience as it was when it debuted. The sounds remain clear and fresh, the lilting rhythm is still dreamy and wistful, and you still find yourself wanting to head to the nearest beach in a tropical paradise as soon as possible. Six of the songs on this CD are written by Jobim, who also plays piano. Gilberto, on vocals and guitar, shares the stage—or studio—with his then wife, Astrud, singing, or reading, the words in English to the title track. In 1964 this album won four top Grammys, and it is easy to hear why.

If you are not one who likes yoga, meditation, drumming circles, or any of the other New Age type of relaxation methods, all you have to do is listen to this soothing CD, and you'll find yourself in a transcendental state before you know it. A pure enjoyment for one and all.



Carsten Dahl Trio

— *Bebopish Rubbish Rabbit* (CD)

Carsten Dahl, piano
 Lennart Ginman, bass
 Frands Rifbjerg, drums

Released August 21, 2007 on Marshmallow Records



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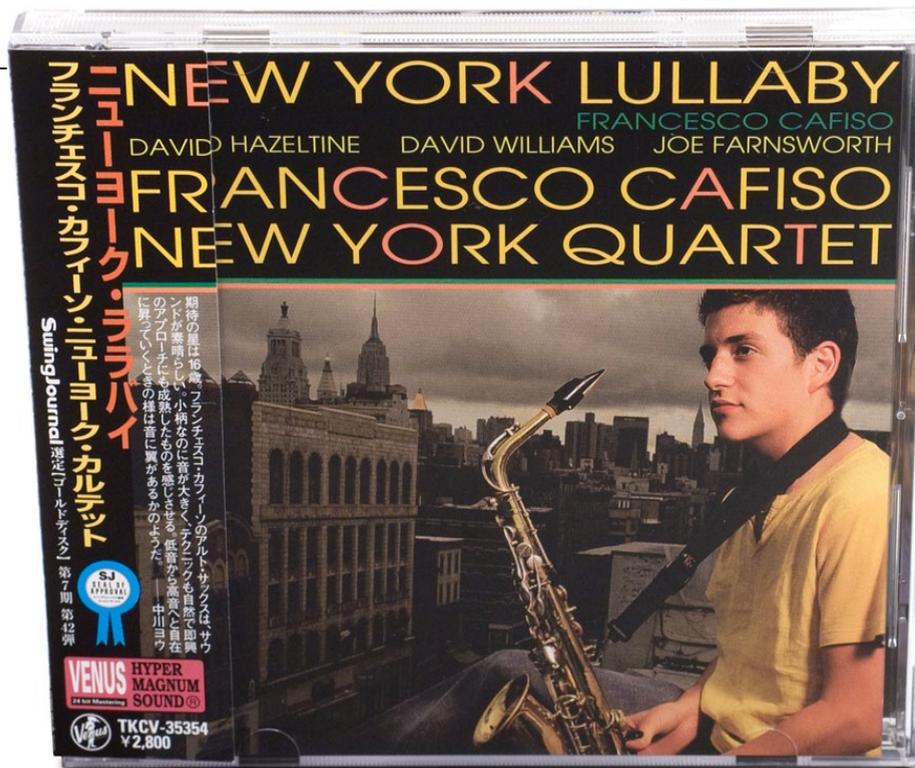
Carsten Dahl, soon to be 40, hails from Denmark. Carsten and his wife, Christina (tenor saxophone), are known as the first couple of jazz in their country. Carsten, a sophisticated and versatile jazz pianist, has a bevy of at least sixteen recordings to his name. This 2007 release from Marshmallow, brought to you by the folks at Eastwind Import, is a tight and melodic recording. From the straight ahead first track, “When You Wish Upon a Star”, to his last song, “Coming Home,” Dahl, bassist Ginman, and drummer Ribbjerg bring you a savory sample of classics, along with three originals by Dahl.

George and Ira Gershwin’s 1929 master, “Someone to Watch Over Me,” is emotionally soft and at the same time makes your heart ache, just a bit, like I believe the Gershwins intended. The title song, “Bebopish Rubbish Rabbit,” has great minor chords, along with the vocal groans of Dahl, ala Errol Garner and McCoy Tyner. The melody allows you to envision the hop-along rabbits quite well.

Dahl’s trio with Lennart Ginman and Frands Ribbjerg previously recorded on Dahl’s second release, *Blue Train*. Theirs is a blend of talent and subtleness.

Dahl is fluid in his touch and phrasing. He studied with Ed Thigpen, a master drummer who is well known for his work, in the studios and on the road, with Oscar Peterson and Ella Fitzgerald. Thigpen moved in 1972 to Copenhagen, where he eventually taught Dahl drums and percussion. After Dahl moved on to piano he recorded with Thigpen on “That’s Entertainment,” released in 1998.

This masterful recording is definitely one you’ll want to have for your own library.



Francesco Cafiso New York Quartet

— *New York Lullaby* (CD)

Francesco Cafiso, alto sax
David Hazeltine, piano
David Williams, bass
Joe Farnsworth, drums

Released September 21, 2005 on Venus Records

This is a true story. Francesco Cafiso was born on May 24, 1989. In other words, he's only 18. And when he recorded *New York Lullaby*, he was a mere 16. He was a saxophone phenomenon then and continues to be one now. The last time I witnessed something similar was when I went to a small club in Syracuse, N.Y., to hear a young jazz soon-to-be giant, Wynton Marsalis. Marsalis was fronting a band made up of his talented family members when he was about 19 years old. The first set was so good I stayed for the second.

This young man, Francesco Cafiso, who comes to us from Italy, first took to the stage when he was nine years old with the Mediterranean Jazz Orchestra. At age twelve he won the National Massimo Urbani Award and won first prize in the International Eurojazz Competition. Francesco opened the 30th Pescara Jazz Festival with Wynton Marsalis and the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra. Marsalis was so impressed with Cafiso, he asked him to join him on a 40-day European tour in 2003. Cafiso also ventured to Louisiana to work on his English as well as to improve his chops by playing with Ellis Marsalis, Jason Marsalis, Thadeus Richard, Maurice Brown and other important musicians

while taking special lessons from Alvin Batiste. Alvin Batiste, who recently passed away, was known for his unsurpassed knowledge of his art. Batiste taught at his own Jazz Institute, part of Southern University in Baton Rouge.

On *New York Lullaby*, Cafiso joined with a team of excellent musicians who work in Manhattan. With bassist David Williams and drummer Joe Farnsworth, the rhythm section held the session together in fine form, along with pianist David Hazeltine. The group allows Cafiso to shine without confining him or letting him become a showboat. Francesco's playing definitely shows he has listened to all the greats, and his strength comes from incorporating the sounds, trills, and riffs from all of them to give the tune his own signature. You can tell Cafiso will only grow. Considering the level he's already at, as evidenced on this recording, this can only be astounding. His tone is warm and full of expression, and at such a young age filled with endless energy. America doesn't know what it is missing.



Francesco Cafiso Quartet

— *Seven Steps to Heaven* (CD)

Francesco Cafiso, alto sax
Andrea Pozza, piano
Also Zunino, bass
Nicola Angelucci, drums

Released February 21, 2007 on Venus Records

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On Seven Steps To Heaven, issued almost a year and a half after *New York Lullaby*, Francesco Cafiso, now all of 18, shows us his growth as a virtuoso. From the opening title track, written by Miles Davis, Cafiso is so right on that he is downright scary. I believe it has been years and years since the jazz world has experienced the likes of Cafiso. His bebop style is so clear and precise, while his notes soar to wonderful heights of churning phrases; yet Cafiso is able to pull it all back in from the organized chaos with a soft palette.

The entire album is full of lush ballads and songs written by such great composers as Thelonious Monk, Jerome Kern, Richard Rogers and Lorenz Hart, Hoagy Carmichael, Charlie Parker, and Ferde Grofe. The choice of these songs goes hand in hand with Cafiso's style of playing.

This album is nothing short of amazing, with the lineup of musicians Cafiso has pulled together. It is so exciting, animated, and arresting to listen to that you will want to turn everyone you know onto this young artist and album. Order a copy now, and you'll be able to say, "I told you so." Francesco Cafiso is that good, great, *magnifico*.

Publisher's Note: The titles featured this month are courtesy of Eastwind Import (www.eastwind-import.com). Eastwind specializes in imported jazz recordings previously only available in Japan. So far, every one of their CDs that we have purchased have had exceptional sound quality. Highly recommended to audiophile and music lovers alike.

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Here in the Mile High City, we had five days of gorgeous weather in which to experience the CEDIA show. I know this might seem a little bit out of place in our magazine, but for those of you who have taken your two channel system as far as you can or want to go, I hope that you are as intrigued as I am with the world of home theater. Maybe it's just the light-headed feeling from the altitude, but I had an absolute blast at the CEDIA show!

I must be honest, a number of years ago when all of this stuff was incredibly expensive (and a 42" plasma TV had a five figure price tag), many people had to choose between a great two channel system to enjoy music and a surround sound system to enjoy music. In many cases, making the family friendly choice, home theater won. Not me, I held steadfast to the two channel world and turned my nose up at 'home theater', which to me usually meant 'six cheap speakers instead of two good ones...' But no more.

Now that you can get a 42" flat panel TV for the price of a good power cord, the whole game has changed. Not to mention that the cost of a movie tickets and snack treats for a family of four is now pushing about 75 bucks, a good home theater system is looking better every day. And let's not even start to talk about concert tickets!

Not to fear, loyal two channel readers, we aren't going to shift gears midstream and become another home theater magazine, but we ARE going to investigate this world as we go forward. We have some big music lovers on the staff, but most of us are movie lovers as well. *(continued)*



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And even if you aren't a big movie lover, with so many music videos out there now, this is another great way to enjoy the big screen.

One of the big benefits of the home theater world maturing is that all the major players of the two channel world have joined in and are producing some pretty fantastic stuff. Even if you just decide to watch movies with a big screen and your two channel system, it's still way more exciting than listening to those dinky speakers that came with your TV.

While busy, this show was not so busy that you couldn't walk in the booths and talk to people at length and get most of your questions answered. Make no mistake, this is not a show like CES or the RMAF, where the vendors are dedicated to playback. With open air booths, this is NOT the show to audition potential components, though some vendors like McIntosh, Paradigm and Definitive Technology (to name a few) had separate sound rooms setup inside their booths.

The two biggest trends I saw at CEDIA was the proliferation of music servers and TVs that were larger than life. \$70k will buy you a 108-inch plasma from more than one vendor and there are quite a few variations on the music server theme. Most of the music servers I investigated were still variations on Windows Media Player and iTunes, so my favorite is still the Sooloos by far. *(continued)*

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But the name of the game was integration and I really enjoyed what I saw in terms of making all this gear not only work together, but work well in your home. More and more designers have their eye on making this stuff blend harmoniously into your home and that's going to sell a lot more sets of speakers going forward. I saw a lot of innovative ways to put home theater in your home that can all apply to those of us that just want two channel, so stay tuned for a few future articles on this.

All in all, an excellent experience and I know I'll be attending CEDIA again next year. **Remember that this one is an industry-only show, so if you aren't in the business (or have a close family member) you can't just buy a pass at the door.**





Rocky Mountain Audio Fest '07

October 12-14
Marriott Denver Tech Center

think this picture says it all; this year's Rocky Mountain Audio Fest was bigger and better than ever! Show presenters Al and Marjorie were their usual perky selves and a great time was had by all that attended.

I can't say that I've ever been to a smoother running audio event. Best of all, there was something for everyone here. There were a few great live music events, plenty of records to buy and some great seminars to attend. Not to mention 122 rooms of great hifi gear, up from about 100 last year.

As always it was great to mingle a bit with our readers, say hello to old friends in the industry and make a few new ones. Have to keep that steady flow of gear coming in for you to read about, you know...

Towards the middle of peak traffic on Saturday, things got a little bit crowded, but there was nowhere near the bottlenecks experienced at the Venetian this January. CES is another animal entirely.

A number of people felt that there was a bit of a shift in the gear offered this year. There were probably more things available at the middle to upper end of the spectrum than last year and a bit less of the DIY and small manufacturers. **One subtle change was that there were a few less turntables and a few more music servers than last year. The writing is on the wall folks; we still love our analog, but the newer formats are running up the flagpole very quickly.** I'll be curious to see how this changes next year.

The RMAF is maturing. Though a bit more corporate and professional,

it hasn't lost the friendly vibe that has made this one of the best places to experience hifi in the US and that's a good thing. Al Steifel commented, **"This is no longer a regional show. We had people from all over the country, all over the world here this weekend."** And he's absolutely right. His wife, Marjorie Baumgart who handles most of the show's logistics said on Sunday morning "This all went very smoothly this year, the people were great!"

I always enjoy it when so many people can get together and share the music and gear that they love, see some new goodies and perhaps even make a few new friends while they are at it. My only complaint was that of any audio show. Still way too much female vocal music – boring. If it were my show, I wouldn't let anyone play Patricia Barber, Eva Cassidy, Norah Jones, etc, etc. On my Saturday walkaround, the only one I heard playing any rock music was Garth Leerer from Musical Surroundings – *bravo!*



Marjorie Baumgart greeting attendants at check-in.



I also felt that the proportion of rooms that had better than average sound had gone up by a considerable margin. I saw and heard a lot of good ones! I'm glad that we don't pick a "Best of Show" award, because I couldn't possibly nail it down. Maybe the best 30 or 40. Everyone worked very hard to get their rooms dialed in and it really paid off.

I have to believe that this show was an over the top success for Al and Marjorie because last year on Saturday they said "well, we don't know if we have the date yet for next year..." and this year the date for next year's show was already printed in the program!

See you there next year. ●

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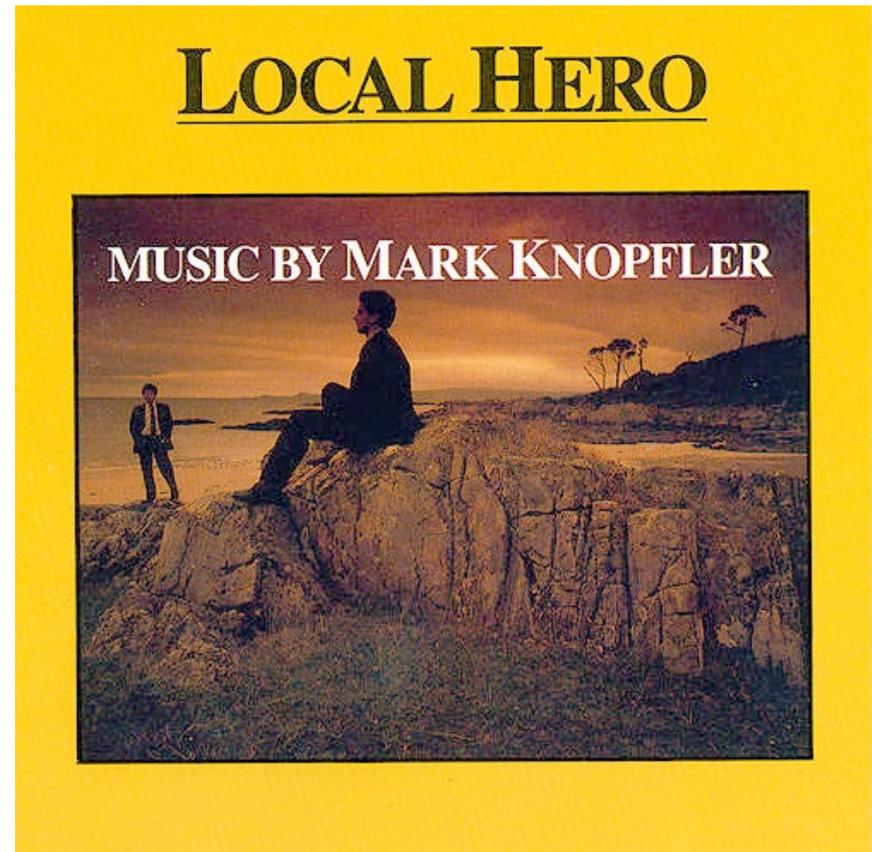
All Verity Audio designs are crafted with a balance of science and art. It is only through this tradition that the spirit of knowledge and craftsmanship come alive.



Marc's Movie Madness

By Marc Phillips

For this month's column, I chose three new film soundtracks, pretty much at random, to write about. And then I noticed that they were from 1983, 1984 and 1985. Coincidentally, those years were a very exciting time in my life, when college was winding down and I needed to figure out what I was going to do with my life. (Sad to say, I'm still trying to solve that conundrum.) At the same time, my love for music and film expanded almost exponentially as I was exposed to art that pushed the boundaries of what I thought was possible. These were the days of *Stranger Than Paradise* and Arvo Part, *Eraserhead* and Kevin Volans, and *Cutter's Way* and Art Zoyd. The following film soundtracks, I believe, capture some of that wide-eyed wonder.



Local Hero (original soundtrack)
(Warner Brothers 23827-1, LP)

Working chronologically, we'll start with the soundtrack to Bill Forsyth's *Local Hero*. For those of you familiar with this movie, it is the epitome of subtle, textured filmmaking that rewards you with thoughtful and funny details if you pay close attention. While most people recognize this as a whimsical tale of a large oil company's attempt to buy out a small seaside village in Scotland, and the village's eager counter-plotting to profit from the deal, it is actually a sublime exercise in delivering the unexpected. Nothing in the plot follows convention, and if you keep trying to guess how things will turn out, you'll only be gently reminded that you've been watching too many far inferior movies.

(continued)



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For every person who knows and loves this film, there's another who is more familiar with Mark Knopfler's amazing soundtrack. When I first saw *Local Hero*, I was still feeling a bit pixilated from Dire Straits' crowning achievement, *Making Movies*, which came three years before. In other words, the second I heard Knopfler's distinctive guitar work dancing around the edges of the movie, I felt comfortable and relaxed. And it helps that the main musical theme that runs through the film, called "Going Home," may be the single most memorable melody Knopfler has ever composed, perfectly evoking that shimmering coastline in Scotland. Twenty years passed from time I saw *Local Hero* for the first time until I found a copy of the LP in a local thrift store, and that theme felt as familiar to me as if I had listened to it every day in the interim.

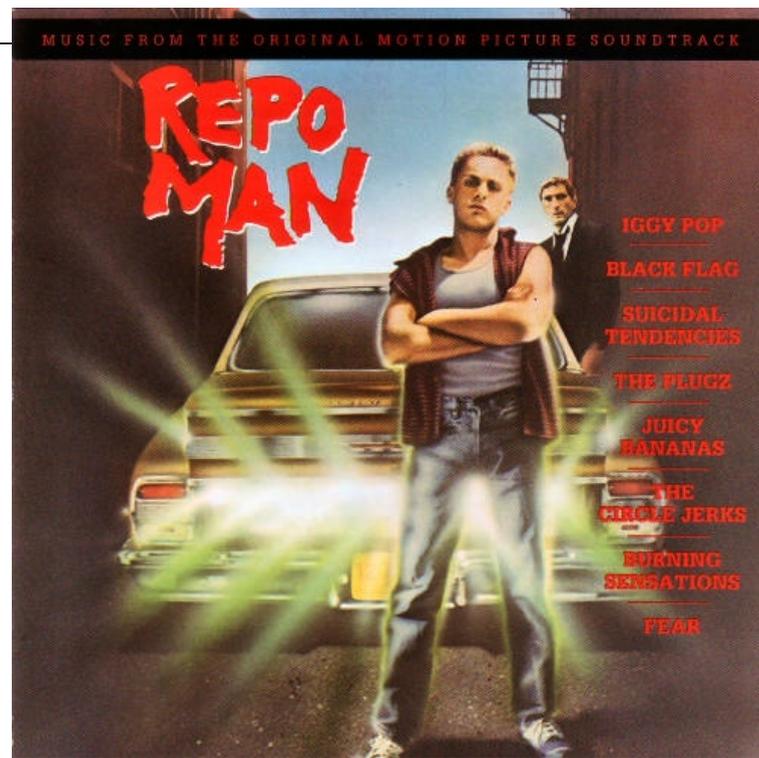
The LP is recorded quite well, with a big, open and wet sound made possible by Bob Ludwig's mastering, and the fact that the record was engineered using a Nagra 4.2L deck. And since I'm currently using a Nagra amp and preamp, the sound is extra primo special! (For any stuffy objectivists out there, I'm just kidding.)

Repo Man (original soundtrack)
(San Andreas SAR 39019, LP)

It's strange for me to meet so many people these days, from all parts of the world, who love Alex Cox's 1984 film *Repo Man*. For me, it's the quintessential Los Angeles punk rock movie, with its in jokes concerning Ralph's supermarket's "plain-wrap" store brand (Emilio Estevez is seen in one scene eating from a can merely labeled *MEAT*), and the obligatory yet knowing car chase that takes place in the storm channels underneath the Fourth Street bridge (which has happened in about 135 other films). Even the bands that contribute to the soundtrack, from Burning Sensations to The Plugz to Suicidal Tendencies, have a definite LA-centric edge. But everyone else seems to get it these days.

Maybe it's because Michael Nesmith of the Monkees was the executive producer, or that songs by Iggy Pop, Fear, the Circle Jerks and Black Flag are also represented. But I grew up in L.A., and the film reminds me of an exciting time, when Cox, who also directed *Sid and Nancy*, was the most interesting and promising filmmaker in the world. **Truth be told, the *Repo Man* soundtrack may be one of the finest punk anthologies ever recorded, second only to the original soundtrack for *Decline and Fall of Western Civilization*.** It introduced the world to truly immortal lyrics such as "All I wanted was a Pepsi, and she wouldn't give it to me" and "Pablo Picasso was never called an asshole." For many Angelenos, both the film and the soundtrack are important touchstones.

The sound quality is all over the place, mostly because the punk recording scene in Los Angeles during the early '80s (think SST) stressed minimalism, which used to be a code word for "We have two days and \$700 to get this record finished." Still, the fury and the irreverence come through, especially during Iggy Pop's angry title song, and a superb and energetic version of "Hombre Secreto" (aka "Secret Agent Man") performed by one of L.A.'s great-but-forgotten Hispanic punk bands, The Plugz. If you are cool enough to have purchased this one on vinyl back when it came out, you are welcome for dinner at my house any time.



Mishima (original soundtrack)
(Nonesuch Digital 79113-2, CD)

I have a confession to make. I didn't get all the way through Paul Schrader's 1985 biopic of Yukio Mishima, which boasted none other than Francis Ford Coppola and George Lucas as executive producers. *(continued)*



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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.

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I tried to watch it once or twice, but it was too fragmented and frantic for my tastes. And I tend to take an instant disliking to any film that switches to black-and-white film stock to indicate that we are watching a flashback. You might as well flash a giant title card saying WE ARE GOING BACK IN TIME NOW, FOLKS.

I've listened to the soundtrack of *Mishima*, however, hundreds of times. I'm not sure if it was my actual introduction to the music of Philip Glass (that honor may go to the solo piano piece, "Opening," which was featured in the Richard Gere remake of *Breathless*), but it's definitely the recording that turned me into a genuine Glass fan for a steady decade. **This is the Philip Glass album for those people who think they don't like Glass.**

For many years, it was one of my reference discs to test the dynamics of a system. The opening cut, simply titled "Mishima," starts off with the delicate sounds of chimes and bells, slowly building and swelling to an astonishing crescendo that will make you literally jump out of your seat. And if you think you've tired of listening to the repetitive themes and recurring arpeggios that characterize much of Glass' work, listen to "Kyoko's House," in which an electric guitar takes over and walks the fine edge between a sound that is very Japanese, and one that's very '50s. Twenty-two years later, this is still, in my humble opinion, the coolest music Glass has ever composed. I'd love to own this on vinyl. ●

My First Ferrari! The F80

By Jeff Dorgay

And it's yellow! No, the ad rates aren't going out of sight at TONE Audio to pay for my latest sports car; the F80 is a table radio that is a co-branded product between Meridian and Ferrari, not just a licensed product. Ferrari lent their expertise in building composite structures for their Formula 1 cars to this project along with their color palette - you can get the F80 in five official Ferrari colors; Red, Yellow, White, Silver and Black.



The F80



To call the F80 a table radio would be like calling a Ferrari a car.

I applaud the choices, but I'll be curious to see how the various colors sell. Close to 92 percent of all Ferrari automobiles made are in the classic Ferrari red, (which has been known to change in hue over the years a bit...) a few percent in yellow and the remainder in a combination of white, black, silver and a few other metallic colors these days. On the used Ferrari market anything other than red or yellow usually means a severe resale penalty, but the F80 looks great in every color offered and I highly doubt you will ever want to part with it.

When a good friend of mine took delivery on a new silver Ferrari 360 a few years ago he said "If I was still your age, I guess I'd go for yellow, but I'd like to be a little low key at my age." Low key in a Ferrari? Forget it! If you want to be low key, buy a BOSE or a Camry.

Did I say the dreaded B word?

I promise that's the last time I'll say it. The BOSE table radio products don't even come close to the F80 on

any level; design, build and most importantly *sound* quality. This is not some mass-market piece of junk stamped out in China. The F80 is built with care in the UK, hand assembled by the same people that build Meridian's top of the line 800 series disc players and their state of the art active speaker systems.

The F80 uses all of the same cutting edge technology as well. While I wouldn't dream of popping the case apart on this machine, you can see the F80's insides as well as get a detailed technical brief here: (<http://www.thef80.com/Technical.aspx>).

Why on Earth would I buy a table radio for \$3000?

To call the F80 a table radio would be like calling a Ferrari a car. The F80 is really a full-blown Meridian hifi system in a small attractive package. It has an 80-watt amplifier with a 2.1 active DSP loudspeaker system for starters, that automatically adjusts bass level as you get closer or further away from the wall. *(continued)*

Thinking outside the box...



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The built in tuner has AM, FM and is equipped for DAB digital radio. The AM and FM performance is fantastic, but I could not spend any time with the DAB broadcasts. Honestly, I'm not much of a radio listener but those of you that are will not be disappointed in the least.

At the bottom of the F80 is a CD/DVD slot.

That's right - DVD. It can play stereo audio from DVD discs as well. Try that with your BOSE lump. I had just received some of the new classical discs from High Def Tape Transfers, so I put Sibelius' *Symphony No. 5* in the slot and was instantly impressed!

I spent quite a bit of time with the F80 at the CEDIA show last month, having been shown the basics by Bob Stuart himself. He told me that one of his main goals with the F80 was to build a Meridian product that his Mother could use easily. While I suspect she (and a seasoned audiophile or two) might have been a little intimidated by the remote that comes along with the flagship Meridian products, the F80 is extremely easy to use. Turn it on, adjust the large black volume control on the lower right side and enjoy music! Those requiring a remote will enjoy the tasteful remote that also has the Ferrari prancing horse in the middle.

The True Purpose Of The F80

As absolutely smashing as the F80 is, it's much more than a snazzy clock radio that plays CD's. It's really a complete Meridian entertainment center at a bargain price. *(continued)*

The F80

If you really want to take advantage of the power locked up inside the F80, hook it up to a TV monitor and make it the entertainment hub of your living room. The rear panel reveals a full compliment of inputs and outputs. It has a very attractive (optional) iPod dock, as well as a headphone jack. There is a line level input and a digital input so you could even plug a music server and your cable box into it. Not to mention the S-video output.

If you want the ultimate setup, add a pair of Meridian's active speakers to the digital output! I can't imagine a more fashion forward AV system in a room; the F80, a pair of DSP7200's and a plasma screen. This is the answer for those of you that do not want a lot of gear in your living space. The video output can be set to 4:3 or 16:9 ratio to accommodate whatever type of monitor you have.

While my 7200's have not arrived yet, I *did* (reluctantly) move the F80 out into the living room and used it as the heart of our AV system, driving a power amplifier and speakers. One friend of ours that became very smitten with the F80 said "It does all that and it only costs \$3000?"

Sixty Seconds To Blast Off

Finally a product with a well thought out manual and a lot of pictures! Because Bob designed the F80 so his Mom could easily use it, you can just unpack it, slide a disc in and be listening to music in under sixty seconds. The default settings offer about 85% of what the F80 is capable of, but once you make a few adjustments you can wring the rest of the performance out of it.



The manual for the F80 sets a new benchmark for what informative owners manuals should be: well written, concise with a *lot* of pictures. I can't tell you how many pieces of gear I have unpacked and set up by feel because the manual was awful. Anyone who is not an audio geek will be able to read this manual in five minutes and access the rest of the functionality that the F80 has to offer.

The menu structure is hierarchal and straight-forward. Just to the right of the power button is the 'home' button. Pushing this gives you the selection of Radio, Disc, Aux and Adjust. The first three buttons when pushed bring up the appropriate buttons for that function; Radio gives you the tuning functions, Disc brings up the forward, reverse, play, stop and pause, while Aux lets you choose which one of the three Aux inputs you would like to select. Adjust lets you control the display brightness, set the clock, bass, treble and 'width' of the speakers. You can also set and lockout these settings so prying hands can't undo your handiwork.

Those of you with a full sized Meridian MHR component can also use your big Meridian remote. I loved this feature, because I can just take the remote from my 808 in the living room into the bedroom and use it with the F80, leaving that little remote with the Ferrari badge tucked away for safe keeping. You will probably want to proudly display the Ferrari remote, but I'm infamous for losing remotes; I'll stick with the big boy!

(continued)



I can't imagine a more fashion forward AV system in a room; the F80, a pair of DSP7200's and a plasma screen.



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An added bonus is that the backlit 800 series remote works much better in the dark.

The Sound

So far, I've spent a lot of time talking about how to use the F80, but it's very important that you know what a sophisticated device it really is. And how much it is capable of.

Fear not, this isn't a stylish package without the horsepower to back it up.

I feel the Ferrari badge is well served; this is the best sounding portable stereo system I've ever heard. Just using it on a table or shelf, the F80 possesses a high quality of music reproduction that should make any audiophile/music lover thoroughly happy.

As I mentioned earlier, I started with some classical music to see how well the F80 would do with piano and strings. Great results there, acoustic instruments were reproduced with a very good amount of body and timbre. Next I moved on to *Unorthodox Behaviour*, by Brand X to listen to "Euthanasia Waltz". Again, excellent with the F80 handling all of the complex percussion and offering up a very transparent sound with excellent dynamic range. With the "width" control set to six the illusion of a pair of small speakers a few feet apart was very convincing. When listening to "Riders on the Storm", from the Doors' *LA Woman*, I was getting more than a taste of what my 808 offers up.

I was pleasantly surprised with my favorite rock and electronic records how much bass the F80 was able to produce as well. *(continued)*

The F80



There were definitely times where those tone controls came in handy. Just a smidge of extra bass or a little less treble tastefully applied helped make the CD experience much better.

Going through all the standard favorites and turning up the volume to the levels you would associate with this kind of music was where the F80 really stood apart. Cranking up my new Japanese mini-LP of Grand Funk's *We're an American Band* was very impressive indeed. The F80 is truly compact in size only.

Don't Forget Your Headphones

The F80's headphone amplifier was not an after-thought. It has a mini jack, so you will need to use an adapter for those of you with standard audiophile headphones. I gave it the full test with my standard set of headphones: the Grado GS 1000, the AKG 701's and the Sennheiser 650's. Again the F80 passed with flying colors, this is a serious headphone amplifier.

However, this led me to my only complaint with the F80. Because it is such a great headphone amplifier, it would have been nice to access the bass and treble controls. These are unfortunately not accessible when using headphones for playback. Regardless, the F80 should be able to keep even the fussiest headphone enthusiast happy.

I would seriously place the headphone playback quality on par with many of the other stand alone headphone amplifiers I have heard in the \$5-800 range.

Bass was very solid, even with the AKG's which can be notoriously hard to drive. Treble was full of detail; extended without being grainy and the soundstage was very big.

So let's review. Here's what you get for three thousand dollars:

AM/FM stereo (DAB in UK) tuner

CD/DVD player with 24bit/96k upsampling DAC

DVD video player

Preamplifier with three Aux inputs

80 watt 2.1 DSP controlled loudspeaker system

Audiophile quality headphone amplifier

A really cool remote and optional iPod dock

Compatibility with other Meridian hifi products

And the Ferrari badge on the hood

A Winner, A True Champion

If you want high performance audio and video performance in a drop dead gorgeous package, there is nothing else that comes close to the Meridian F80.

Considering that the US dollar is in the toilet right now on the world stage, I can't imagine that Meridian US is making any profit on these. I'm buying this one right now before they wake up and raise the price. I suggest you should do the same. ●

If you want high performance audio and video performance in a drop dead gorgeous package, there is nothing else that comes close to the Meridian F80.

Sometimes you win, sometimes the bear wins, but in the end music will always take you to heaven!

I awoke September 6th to my clock radio playing Luciano Pavarotti singing *Nesum Dorma!*, an aria from Puccini's "Turandot" on my favorite classical radio station KUSC. Clear, bell-like tonality, exuberant and full of life; as it should be. As the aria ended, I thought to myself that the angels might be jealous when this ambassador opera finally makes his way up to heaven, when the announcer said that Pavarotti has lost his fight with pancreatic cancer. (As did my brother a few years ago) I fell out of bed, ran to my computer to confirm the story on the Internet. For seventy-one years we were treated to one of the most incredible personalities in the opera world and now he was gone!

I met Mr. Pavarotti several times when I lived in New York. Along with Ralph Vaughan Williams, we share the same birth date, and Luciano always remembered this fact when I saw him. "We have the same soul for music, we know that music is the best part of life," he told me once. As I was being prepped for cancer surgery this August, I could hear Pavarotti singing "Nesum Dorma!" as I drifted off and it doesn't get any better than that.

Classical Music A to Z

By Dan Babineau

Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953)

The surgery was successful so I've dodged the cancer bear for now; and my column is still on the roster for the years to come. As I came back to consciousness, I heard the second movement of Prokofiev's third symphony, one of my all time favorites. But it didn't end there, Wayne Shorter blasted a few soprano saxophone riffs from his "High Life" CD, the Beatles sang "Here Comes the Sun" and somewhere in the mix I heard one of my daughter's hip-hop songs. (I even liked it!) I explained this strange musical phenomenon to my wife and after a minute she exclaimed, "You mean it's going to get worse?" Yes, honey its going to get much, much worse!

The world will be a much lesser place without Luciano Pavarotti.

He gave the world an unparalleled gift of music that transcends life on our planet and always takes you to heaven! Fortunately, there are excellent recordings of Pavarotti's many performances and as I discuss Giacomo Puccini in this issue I'll point out a few masterpieces that you can add to your collection.

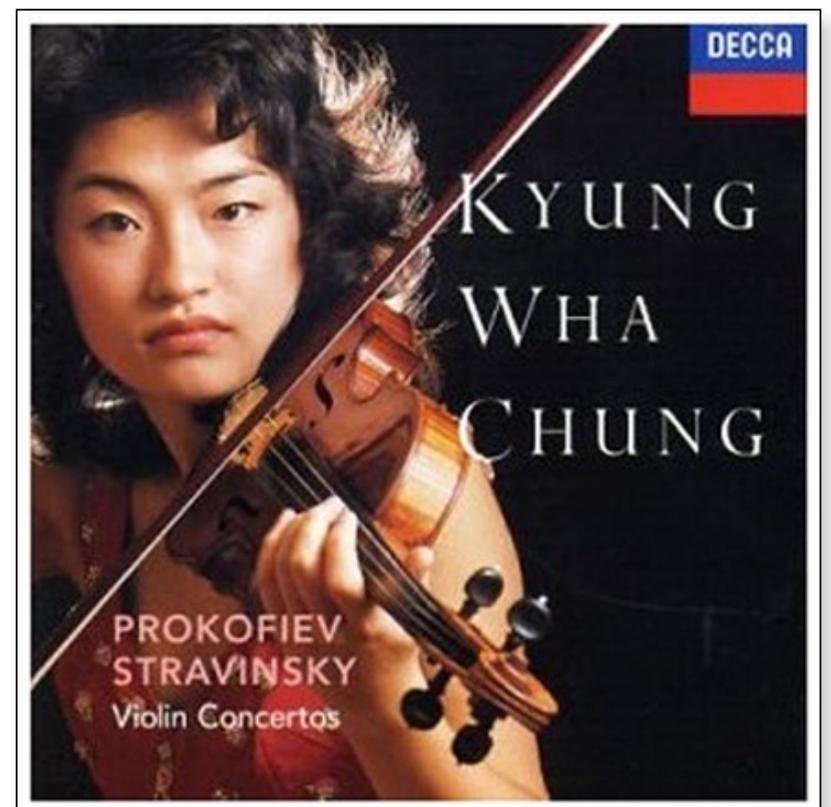
I have a hard time containing myself when discussing Prokofiev. For me, Sergei Prokofiev was one of the most prolific and diverse musical innovators to have ever inked a score. From his first symphony to "Eleonora", his Piece for Harp, his musical innovation and experimentation made Hendrix look like a choirboy.

Another child prodigy, Prokofiev managed to escape the many perils of war torn Russia and began developing a new form of classical music that still sounds contemporary. All of his creations had to pass under the scrutiny of what would eventually become Communist Russia, a dictatorship that had little time for pure art. Early in this political process Prokofiev decided to leave Russia, first to London and then to the United States. Because his work was so far ahead of his time, I think he probably shocked the audiences as much (or more) than he entertained them.

His work was way ahead of its time (much like that other great Russian composer, Stravinsky) and it took the world a long time to catch up. One of the most prolific composers, he wrote in every realm, even producing some rambunctious music for marching band!

Musical complexity seemed to ooze out of his pores; just when you think the house is about to explode, he brings you back to Earth with an organic sound, a melody or a riff that cannot be mistaken for another composer. A complex score with melody sandwiched between irregular syncopation with wild tonality and powerful crescendos thrown in. Some say that he awakened the dead with a few of his concoctions; I say Prokofiev had a musical style without parallel.

Of course I love all of his music so it is difficult to pick just a few out of his hundreds of compositions, but let's start with the seven symphonies and work our way through a list of exemplary musical compositions, shall we? *(continued)*



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Symphony #1 is like Prokofiev's version of Joseph Haydn on amphetamines. A neo-classic, "The Classical Symphony" will wake up any room with its intense energy and style. While there are many great recordings of "the Classical Symphony", Neeme Jarvi and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra on Chandos, cat. # 8400 gets my vote for raw power and verve. While some of the Chandos Prokofiev recordings sound a little bright, this CD with the 1st and 4th gets it right on all levels. Other solid performances can be found on EMI Classics with Andre Previn and the London Symphony, Cat. # 76945. While you are at it, check out Previn's ideas on opus 87, Cinderella on this disc.

Though Prokofiev's 1st and 5th symphonies are his most popular, don't forget the other five.

For symphony #2, I like Neeme Jarvi on Chandos, cat. # 8368 or the old standby on now on Testament, cat. # 1395 with Erich Leinsdorf and the Boston Symphony. Investigate the new collection on Philips with Valery Gergiev and the London Symphony Orchestra, catalog #000632902, which nicely handles symphonies 2,4 &6. For the 5th, purchase the LP with Jean Martinon and the Paris Conservatoire Orchestra on RCA if you can find it. This is an award winning performance and recording that will put hair on your chest and life into your soul! On CD, The St Petersburg Philharmonic under the direction of Yuri Temirkanov on RCA, cat. #62319 is a must have.

(continued)

Required listening for any first year music student, Naxos "Complete Symphonies & Concertos", catalog #859001 is the box set deal of the 21st Century for only \$35.

Martha Argerich and the Montreal Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Charles Dutoit is a showstopper!

On EMI, catalog #56654, this disc puts everything in the right place for piano concertos 1 & 3. These are crazy pieces of music to listen to and even crazier to play; Prokofiev pushes music theory well beyond its limits in the 1st concerto, with the energy and atmosphere of the 3rd brilliantly displayed by Ms. Argerich in this recording. The Bartok on this disc is a bonus that adds to the MSO's understanding of this revolutionary music. These are definitely my favorites of the piano concertos. Kyung-Wha Chung and the London Symphony Orchestra with Andre Previn, cat #425003, and the second features another extraordinary violinist, Lin Cho-Liang with Esa Pekka Salonen and the LA Phil, cat. #53969 on Sony are my favorite violin concertos.

Some of the essential music of Prokofiev can be found in the highlights (or "suites") from his ballets "Romeo & Juliet" & "Cinderella", his film music, "Love for Three Oranges" or the extremely popular "Lieutenant Kije". Latch on to the incredible rhythm and melody in these pieces. The Naxos collection of these fine works, catalog #8550381 is a home run. Last but not least, have a little fun and pick up the two CD sets of "Classics for Children" on London/Decca, catalog #458595. This 2 disc set includes Prokofiev's "Peter & the Wolf" with Sir Ralph Richardson doing the spoken parts and Sir Malcolm Sargent leading the London Symphony Orchestra. It's hard to beat this diverse musical collection no matter how old you are!

Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)

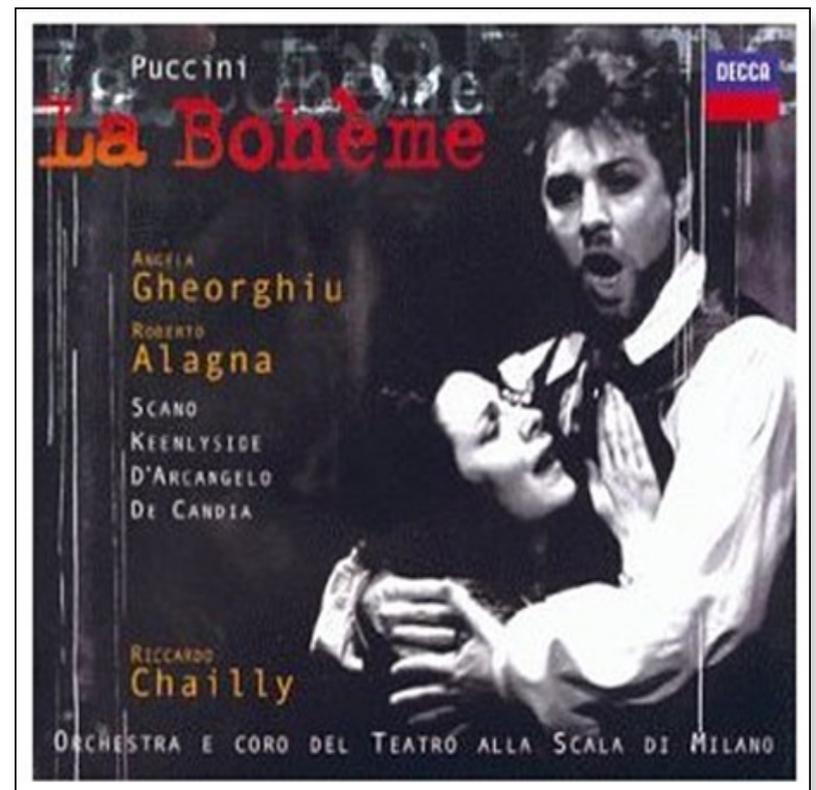
If you've ever been truly in love then you may understand Puccini's music better than those that have not. I think this man from humble beginnings has laid down the music of love better than any other songwriter, coupling enchanting melodies with raw emotional power. Although Puccini wrote other forms of music, he is widely known for his many wonderful operas; from his first "Le Villi" to his last unfinished work "Turandot". Though critics from his day to today try to dismiss his music as sappy, nothing could be further from the truth! Puccini's genius is that he makes it all sound too easy.

Arias seem to just flow out of the singers like songbirds and emotion is inserted in just the right places to draw us into the story and create an unmistakable musical atmosphere. Operas always tell us a story, usually with a lesson or moral. Puccini's innate ability to create this musical atmosphere allows us to leave our world behind and jump into the painting and I find the operas are the most accessible.

As much as I like the other giants of the opera, I always go to Puccini when I want to get someone new interested in opera because of this magic that reaches your soul and stays with you forever! Puccini's many operas were about the drama of everyday life as we follow the story of a couple of "Bohemians" burning their furniture to stay warm. In "Madame Butterfly" we see a different example of what might be called the spoils of war as "Butterfly" is trapped in a Peyton Place that rivals any bad soap opera.

Soon you find yourself trapped in the drama, feeling sorry for Rodolfo and Mimi in "La Bohème". It's the classic story where the poor girl dies leaving her lover alone to face the cruel, cruel world. But listening to this music that surrounds this cliché drama will lift you above and beyond your own Peyton Place!

As I've stated before in this column, the world is much more convenient than it once was, and this is especially true when it comes to opera recordings. *(continued)*



When I was a young man opera recordings fell into two categories: historic and the relatively new format called stereo! All of my father's opera records were mono recordings that documented great performances but lacked fidelity. When stereo came to fruition, recording techniques got better and opera took a giant leap into what we now call "high fidelity". The recordings got quieter, microphone placement got a little more scientific and you got a better sense of what it would be like to actually attend the opera in person.

Though I like both versions, some of the mono recordings are still my favorites even though they are a bit noisy and singers mysteriously change position on stage mid way through their aria. Music bounces from the left speaker to the right and then back left again kind of like some bad psychedelic record from the 60's, but the performances are nothing short of breathtaking! I counted over 1000 CD sets featuring Pavarotti, so the record companies have made it easy for us to access so much material! Let's start with Pavarotti singing Puccini on Decca, catalog #443260. I can't listen to Pavarotti sing Gershwin, but the remaining arias on this disc are fantastic.

Let's stick with Decca for "La Boheme"; I suggest catalog #446070 with Riccardo Chailly and the Milan Teatro alla Scala Orchestra, Chorus and Chorus of White Voices. This outstanding recording features a superlative cast with soprano Angela Gheorghiu as Mimi, tenor Roberto Alagra as Rodolfo and Simon Keenlyside singing the baritone part of Marcello better than anyone I've heard in a long, long time.

My favorite "Madame Butterfly" is on EMI, catalog #67888, with Sir John Barbirolli conducting the Rome Opera House Orchestra and Choruses and features soprano Renata Scotto and tenor Carlo Bergonzi. I think Barbirolli's overly seductive interpretation of this opera has never been rivaled. It's opera, it's Puccini, it's full of drama and loaded with emotion: that's how opera is supposed to be! If you want precision and supercharged power wait until I talk about Wagner!!

For "Tosca" I have to stay in mono, with the EMI CD reissue, catalog #62893 featuring opera absolute Maria Callas with conductor Victor De Sabata. It features the amazing Milan Teatro alla Scala Orchestra and Chorus with an award-winning cast. This 2-disc set is a musical masterpiece!



For the technically unfinished "Turnadot" I'm back with Luciano Pavarotti on Decca, catalog #414274. Recorded in Kingsway Hall, this performance is the benchmark for all other Turnadot's to aim for. Dame Joan Sutherland clearly gives one of her best ever performances on record and combined with an all star cast including soprano Montserrat Caballe and the "King of the high C's", Luciano Pavarotti you'd be foolish to not own two copies of this masterpiece!

As for the other less popular operas, give them a try too; they all exude warmth and romance. For a good compilation containing some highlights of Puccini's other operas as well as the favorites check out the two-disc offering on Decca, catalog #000300702. This excellent group of recordings features everybody under the sun singing and playing their heart out. Then get a fire going in the fireplace, grab a snifter of cognac for you and your honey, turn up the volume and prepare to fall in love all over again! ●

State of the Art CD Playback

The Naim CD555

By Jeff Dorgay





I used to think Michael Fremer was off his rocker.

I read that article about the Continuum turntable and thought he was a wildman to buy something that expensive, even considering that audio reviewers and industry professionals get the opportunity to get a discount on gear purchased for our own use. The usual thoughts applied: “How can it be *that* good?” “How can it be *that* much better than a ten thousand dollar turntable?” You know the logic.

But then I had a similar experience with the Naim CD555. Get a couple of planks, some spikes and get ready to nail me to that same cross, because I feel the same way about this CD player. And that convertible I was all ready to buy this summer got put on hold for a *long* time, because I ponied up to buy this little jewel.

After thirty years, I’m happier than I’ve ever been with hifi.

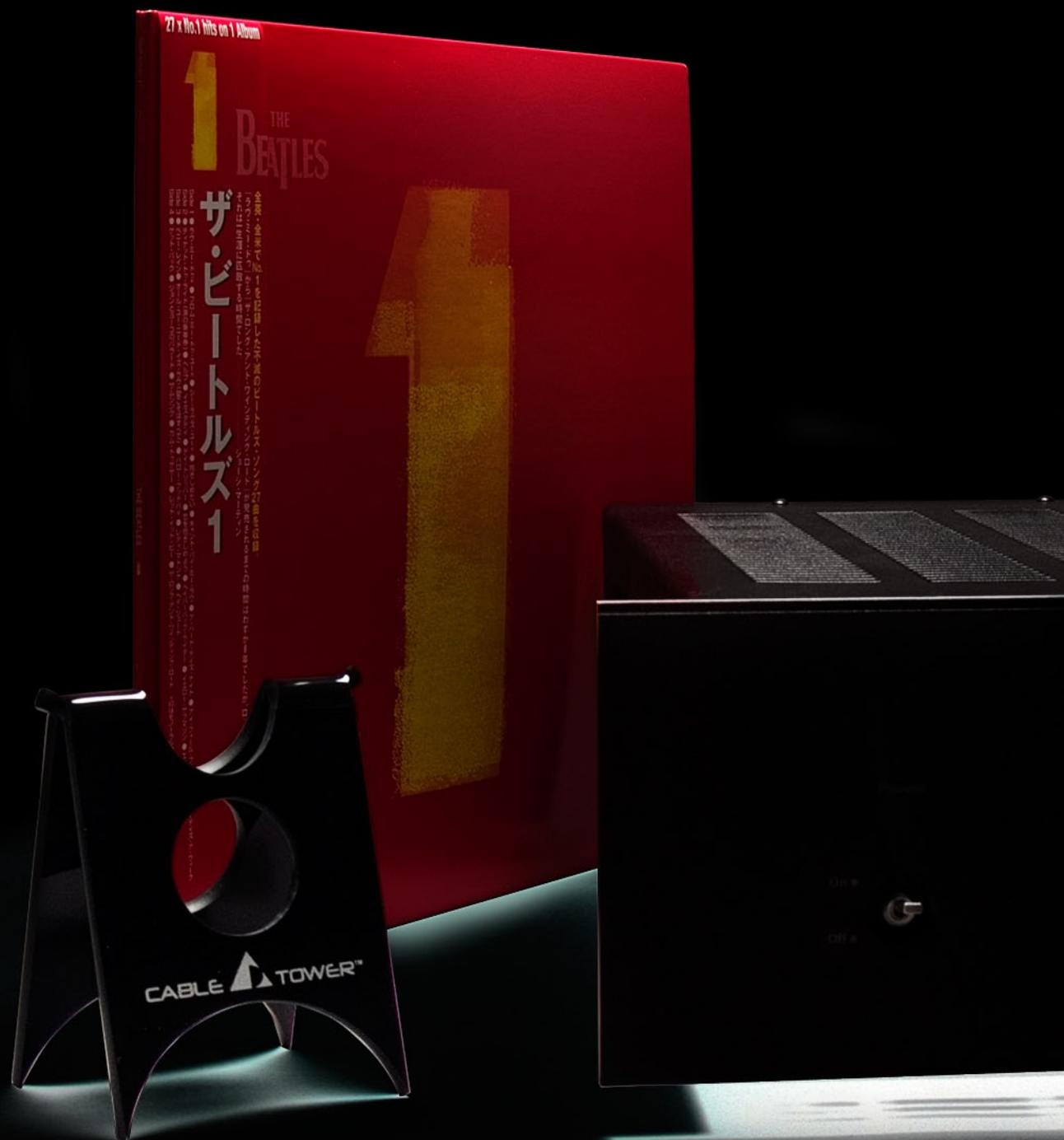
I’m not going to tell you that digital is better than analog. I still have three turntables and a lot of records that I have no intention of selling. I still have my music servers full of digital files that are really cool. But when I have that rare moment to relax, more often than not, it’s listening to a CD on my Naim CD555.

It’s not comfy up on that cross with people leering at you. I’ve listened to quite a few people calling me an idiot, in person and on various internet forums. They all think I’m off my nut too. Of course their whiz bang CD players, modded with a few high zoot capacitors are just as good as the CD555, in their opinion.

Before you spend the amount of time required to read this article and then get grumpy at the end when you find out how much the CD555 costs, I’ll save you the time. It costs 31 thousand dollars. That’s right, I said thousand. That’s serious nice car money or down payment on a nice house (anywhere but Southern California) money.

(continued)

Hardware. Software. Accessories.



You will need to have a pretty good chunk of available credit on your platinum card to walk in the Naim dealer and buy one of these.

Interestingly enough, while Continuum will probably sell ten of their 50 thousand dollar turntables this year, Naim has sold 300 CD 555's and 500 of the PS 555's.

The PS555 is an upgrade for the CD3 and CDX2 as well, so more power supplies have been sold. The CD555 only works with the PS 555, just to keep it straight! Chris West from Naim USA told me that Naim was tooling up for a production run of 500 units for the entire lifetime of CD555 production, which they thought would be about 8-10 years. "We'll be tooling up for another run of CD 555's much sooner than we thought..."

I think that this speaks volumes about how much interest the CD format still holds. But then why not? Quite a few of us still have a lot of records that it took us years to purchase; the same goes for CD's. Even if they stop producing CD's tomorrow, there will be a ton of used CD's around for the foreseeable future.

A Few Proclamations

First off, I'm not going to tell you that the CD555 will transform your system unless you have a spectacular system that is capable of top shelf dynamics, resolution and musicality. If your system is merely adequate or pretty good, this player may not sound that much better than the five or ten thousand dollar CD player you already own.

(continued)



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You could still buy a CD555 for bragging rights, or because of its phenomenal construction, but I doubt you will hear much more music. Those of you that do have a top shelf system though, will be in for a very special treat!

I'm not trying to sound haughty, though the last paragraph could easily be misconstrued. If you can't pair the CD555 up with a killer system, it would be just like running the Continuum turntable through a four thousand dollar line stage, or driving a Porsche GT3 on cheap all weather tires from Costco. I guarantee that if you have a system that is worthy, the benefits of the CD555 will be apparent.

If you want the musical experience that the CD555 offers, you will have to spend the money, that's the way it goes.

I'm not going to put a value judgment on the price of the CD555, i.e. that it is worth x percent more than the other excellent players that I have reviewed (or own myself) at other price points. If you want to own a Picasso, you have to pay the price that it will command. If you want a great piece of art from someone else less known or less talented, it will be priced accordingly. If you want the musical experience that the CD555 offers, you will

have to spend the money, that's the way it goes. Ferrari only sells about 700 cars per year in the US, and there was a two-year wait when I stopped by the dealer the other day. People are willing to wait (and pay) for goods at this level. I pass no value judgment on anyone that can't afford to play at this level.

If I didn't have a lot of seat time with great digital playback, this would be the spot in the review that I went on and on with a lot of demonstrative verbiage. I could tell you that this is "the best CD player on Earth" and how "the CD555 annihilates every other player I've ever heard." But that would be amateurish. *(continued)*



**I can tell you quite easily what the CD555 does.
It sounds like music, pure and simple.**

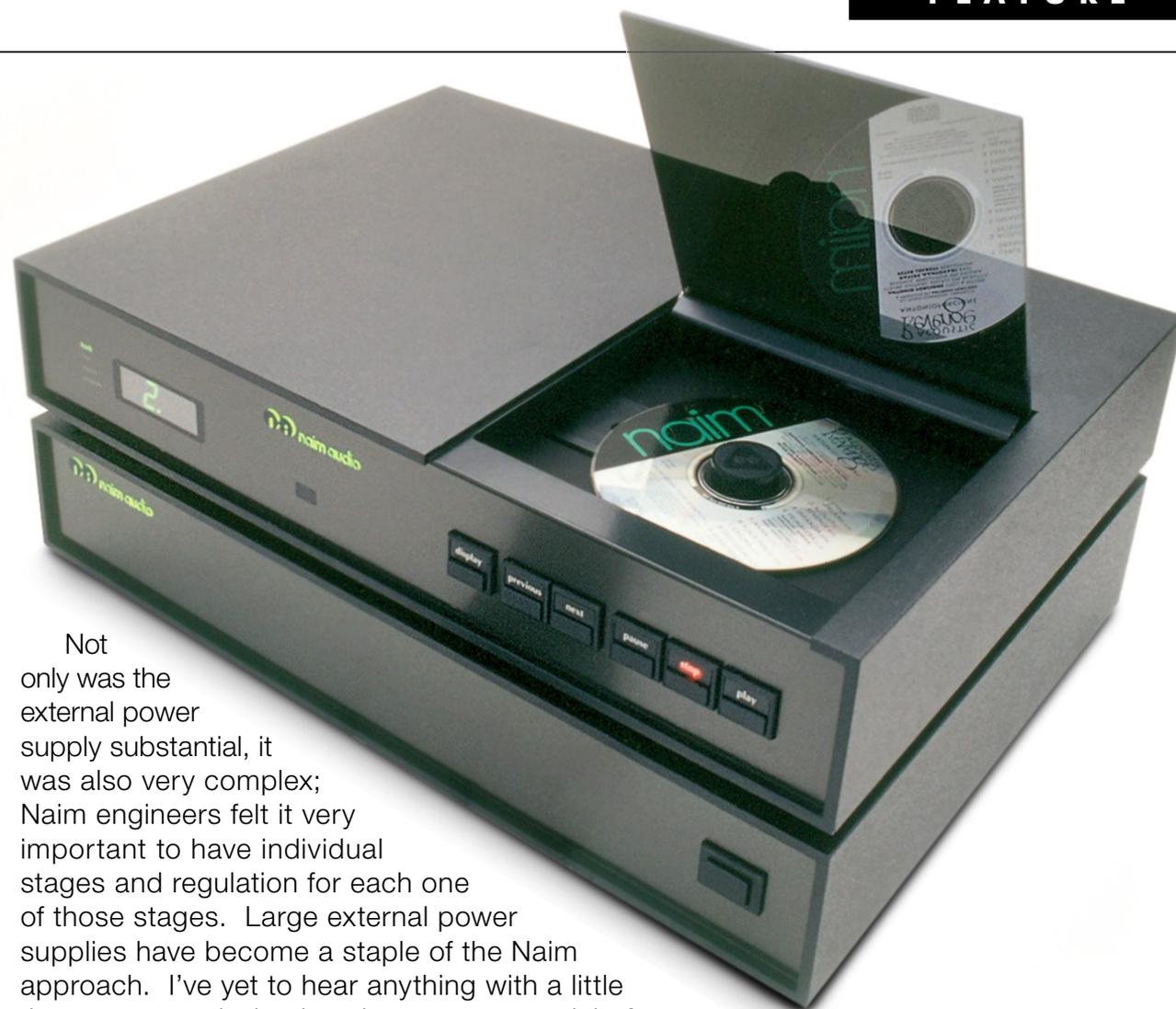
When CDs first made it on the scene about 25 years ago, they sounded pretty awful. Harsh, sterile, lifeless, you name the adjective. If you were there you know what I mean. But like any other aspect of the high end, it didn't take long for people to get to work on making those shiny discs sound better.

Music lovers over the last five years have had it a lot easier, because the players have been so much better. Today, even a thousand dollar player sounds fairly good. Naim's entry-level player, the CD5i offers up fantastic sound for \$1750 and listening to it next to the CD555, you can definitely hear the lineage.

Naim got to the high performance CD player game a little bit late, introducing their two box player, the CDS in 1991 for \$6750. It featured the same architecture that they use now – instead of using a transport and DAC, as everyone else does, they preferred to do it with a separate chassis for the player and separate outboard power supply.

I remember hearing that player when it was introduced thinking three things: This thing sounds better than any CD player I've ever heard. It sounds remarkably like analog playback. I can't possibly afford one!

Their engineers were on to a number of concepts that continue to this day with Naim players; The Naim "puck" that is a small magnetic clamp to hold the disc in place. (So much for those of you using a CD demagnetizer...) Guard that little puck with your life because a replacement costs \$500! Suspending the transport as well as critical electronics also made its debut on the original CDS. While this may look like a Legoesque toy, it is a precision machined part, similar to what you might expect from a very expensive cartridge body...



Not only was the external power supply substantial, it was also very complex; Naim engineers felt it very important to have individual stages and regulation for each one of those stages. Large external power supplies have become a staple of the Naim approach. I've yet to hear anything with a little tiny power supply that has the necessary weight for a convincing musical experience, so I think they are on to something! This trend continues with the CD555, which needs the matching PS555 for operation.

Another trend that has continued with Naim CD players has been the elimination of a motorized drawer, which is another potential source of electrical and mechanical noise. Not to mention, the last thing you want to cripple your 30 thousand dollar CD player is a 20 dollar drawer motor going south. When you open the lid in the top loading mechanism, you will notice that the inside of the transport is all black, coated with a paint that has exhibits a very high absorption of the extraneous laser light that might bounce off of that shiny disc. It's kind of like the coating on a stealth bomber...

Which brings us to another good reason why the CD555 is worth the asking price. Naim is committed to the future. They design their products and base their support for the long haul. The CDS series was discontinued in 1997, yet Naim continued to offer reconditioned transports for quite a few years. *(continued)*

I remember hearing that player when it was introduced thinking three things: This thing sounds better than any CD player I've ever heard. It sounds remarkably like analog playback. I can't possibly afford one!





Every time I put a well-recorded CD in the CD555 and push play, I forget about everything but the music.

Had the original Phillips CDM4 transport not become completely unavailable, I have no doubt you could still have that part serviced! I'm very confident that ten years from now I will still be able to get my CD555 repaired should something need attending to.

The current CD 555 has been an evolutionary product, not just a whiz-bang new approach to CD playback. The original concepts from the CDS have been refined, taking what the Naim engineers have learned over the last 15 years and combining that with the latest in materials and advances in machining techniques to create their current masterpiece.

And it is a masterpiece.

Built in the style of current Naim gear, with the square edges and backlit lime green buttons, the CD555 looks fairly normal, until you pick it up. The transport section weighs about 65 pounds and the power supply another 50. These are substantial pieces of gear indeed! There are seven transit screws that need to be removed in a certain order to free up the transport. This needs to be done with the player held level, so you will need to recruit a friend for help. Once the transport is free, you need to carry it to your rack with extreme care to keep the insides from bouncing about. Put those transit screws in a safe place, because they don't even list a price for these! *(continued)*



This is the most exquisite remote I've ever used. It's so gorgeous, I'm tempted to put it back in the shrink wrap and just use the plastic remote.

This is where a substantial amount of the CD555's cost comes from; there is a lot of hand assembly and calibration inside both boxes. Every part of this player has been optimized for the best possible result, which takes a lot of time to get just right. You can read the full list of fine details here, should you be so inclined.

<http://www.naim-audio.com/products/cd555.html>

If you are someone who appreciates mechanical and engineering excellence as much as you enjoy listening to music, you will be very impressed with this deck. No detail has been left unattended to. In the interest of getting me this unit for review, the folks at Naim sent the CD555 to me before the new remote control was finalized. I made it a point to tease them mercilessly about the "happy meal" remote that I received for the beginning of the review period.

However, you can see from the photo what a gorgeous remote this is and I must say it was worth waiting for. Initial CD555 owners got the Naim FLASH remote control, which is very comprehensive, but quite large and bulky. The interim customers that got the lesser remote with their CD555 will be receiving the remote you see here at no extra charge. New customers will receive the new remote as standard equipment. Balanced with just the right amount of weight, it is machined from billet aluminum and has a full compliment of black buttons backlit with lime green just like the ones on top of the player. The minute you pick it up, it lights up for your use! This is the most exquisite remote I've ever used. It's so gorgeous, I'm tempted to put it back in the shrink wrap and just use the plastic remote.

Once you turn it on and listen, none of the techie stuff will matter.

After about a hundred hours, I sat down and really paid close attention to the CD555 and compared it closely to the four other top shelf players I had on hand. (Two of which I own and two were in for review...) My observation with great digital is that the better it gets, the more you just think about music, not the medium that you are playing said music on. This is what the CD555 does a better job at than every other digital player I've heard.

Every time I put a well-recorded CD in the CD555 and push play, I forget about everything but the music. The weight it brings to a performance is out of this world good. Whether I was listening to classical music or the heaviest metal, the level of dynamics and punch was very impressive indeed. *(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**

What never ceased to amaze me about this player was how much sound is actually lurking in a lot of my favorite CDs!

No, it will not make terribly recorded CDs magically sound good. Discs that were poorly mastered still exhibited all the traits they did before, however I was getting more resolution than before.

All of the attention the Naim engineers paid to isolating vibration and keeping mechanical and electrical noise really paid off in the CD555, because when listening to music that had a lot of air and space, the music just hung there as it would with top shelf analog.

Same thing with the upper registers. Some players that I have auditioned that at first had a more of an analog feel to them, upon closer listening were rounding edges off unnecessarily. While pleasant, that's not the ultimate musical experience, especially on a high-resolution system. This player gave me all the detail and attack up on top without any softening of details or transients. Pianos and violins have never sounded this realistic to me! Drums and percussion have natural, realistic decay as they do in real life.

This player offers the most realistic tonal response I've yet to hear. Granted, I do not have a six figure analog front end, but my turntable, arm, cartridge and phono preamplifier are close enough to the CD555 that it's a fair fight. Bottom line: If the music in question has been recorded and mastered with more care on CD, it sounds better on that half of my system. If the LP has been produced with more care, it takes the cake. I can't ask more of that from a source component.

(continued)



The CD555 possesses all the qualities that I used to enjoy from the best analog playback with all the strengths digital has to offer; perfect pitch accuracy, lower noise floor and greater dynamic range.

What continued (and still does) to blow me away about the CD555 is how big and lifelike the presentation is, in terms of spatial information. My main system is in a 16 x 24 foot room, with a pair of Martin Logan Summits about four feet out in the room on the long wall. The speakers are about seven feet from the side walls and with a terrific recording, the soundstage goes all the way out to the side walls with ease. Friends and family that had not heard my system before kept asking me where I had hidden the surround speakers!

What about high resolution digital?

On occasion, I have heard a very well recorded SACD or DVD-a that because of the extra resolution will outperform what the CD555 is capable of delivering. That's why my other two players are staying put in my reference system. The problem is that I only have about 100 SACD's and about 75 DVD-a's. About half of those sound great, with the rest sounding worse than their CD counterparts. However, I own over 5000 CD's (and I'm always buying more) so that's where I'm hanging my hat.

While I don't know if they were mastered identically, the only piece of music that I have on CD, LP and DVD-a is the Beatles *Love*. Cuing up all three

at the same time so that I could listen to the CD version on the CD555, the DVD-a on the Meridian 808 and the LP on my SME turntable, I switched back and forth repeatedly. The LP was a touch noisy, the DVD-a did have a bit more in the dynamics department, but I did prefer the tonality of the CD playback in the end.

I performed this exercise with a few of my music loving (but not audiophile buddies) and they all picked the CD555 each time. I put a bit of a twist on the test for my audiophile buddies: I lied to them and mixed up the sources. The CD555 is plugged into my ACT2 preamplifier in the input marked phono, the ASR Basis phono stage into Aux and the Meridian 808 into the CD input, so when they were switching between inputs they did not know the true sources.

As suspected, they all picked the phono input and one remarked, "See, I told you analog still sounds the best..." Much to his surprise when I told him to walk behind the ACT2 and see what was plugged in where. And this is as close to a blind test as will ever happen in my studio, folks. *(continued)*

The CD555 possesses all the qualities that I used to enjoy from the best analog playback with all the strengths digital has to offer



A Winner, A True Star

If you are shopping for a redbook-only player and this happens to be your budget range, I think that you will be thrilled with the CD555. I spent five months of solid listening before I sat down to the keyboard and I still don't think I've been able to adequately tell you just how smashing this player is.

I do not have a single complaint about the Naim CD555, not even the price. Sure, I'd love to be able to buy this player for \$2500, but that's not what the market dictates. All of the truly fantastic analog rigs I've heard are equally spendy. Considering that there are a lot of people paying two and three hundred dollars apiece for rare LPs, (and a recent rare copy of Steely Dan's Aja fetched close to a thousand dollars on the internet a few weeks ago...) \$32k is not as crazy as it initially sounds.

In the end it's about the sound. As I said at the beginning of the review; in thirty years I've never enjoyed music this much. If you are one of the 500 people that already own this player, you know just what I'm talking about. ●

The Naim CD555

MSRP (USD): Player, \$22,150
555PS Power Supply, \$8,700

www.naimusa.com (US contact)

www.naim-audio.com (UK and rest of world)

ASSOCIATED COMPONENTS:

Conrad Johnson ACT2/Series 2 preamplifier, Conrad Johnson Premier 350 power amplifier, SME 10 Turntable/SME V arm/MoFi 3.5C cartridge, ASR Basis Exclusive phono preamplifier, Meridian 808 CD player, Martin-Logan Summit loudspeakers, Running Springs Audio Danielle and Haley power conditioners, Cardas Golden reference interconnects and speaker cables, Running Springs Mongoose and Essential Sound Products The Essence "Reference" power cords, Finite Elemente Pagode Signature racks, Cerapucs and Ceraballs



Curing The Insatiable Need For More Music

The Magnum Dynalab MD-609T XM Tuner

By Jeff Dorgay

I'll say it again – I'm obsessed. I can't ever get enough music. There are always more records, tapes, CDs and downloads to buy. When satellite radio first came out, I was very intrigued with the service even though, God forbid, one is now paying to listen to the radio. All things considered, what's another \$13 a month between friends, right?



Next obstacle, limited options to get the XM radio signal into your living room. Most cars now have an XM option at the end of a check box, but the home is another story. Everything I've listened to that brings XM into your home has sounded like crap, and has been priced accordingly. What's a lover of fine audio to do?

**I've got the answer,
but it's going to cost you.**

It's going to cost you \$3995, but it's damn good. And when you pull it out of the box, it sounds like you made a \$3995 mistake. But a week later you will have a BIG smile on your face because once this tuner has some hours on it, the sound is glorious. There are about 170 channels on XM these days and some of them suck, but there are an awful lot of good ones. The wider your taste in music, the more you will love it. In addition to the talk radio, sports, news and comedy channels there are 69 channels worth of music.

**Music of every kind that you can imagine,
without commercials.**

Personally, my favorite is Channel 40 – Deep Tracks. It's exactly what album rock was in the 70s when I was a kid, obscure album cuts from bands you know or want to find more about. But there are plenty of great stations to listen to and if you would like to find out what's playing *right now*, just click on this link:

<http://www.xmradio.com/onxm/full-channel-listing.xmc>

How great is that?

There is a punk station, a ska station, some hip-hop, classical and classic rock, any kind of music you can think of, 24 hours a day without commercials. Occasionally there is a DJ popping in and there are some premium shows with guest DJ's like Bob Dylan, Snoop Dogg, Tom Petty (another awesome show) and many others. If you don't want to keep an internet browser open, you can just peek at the blue alphanumeric display and see what artist and track is currently playing. *(continued)*

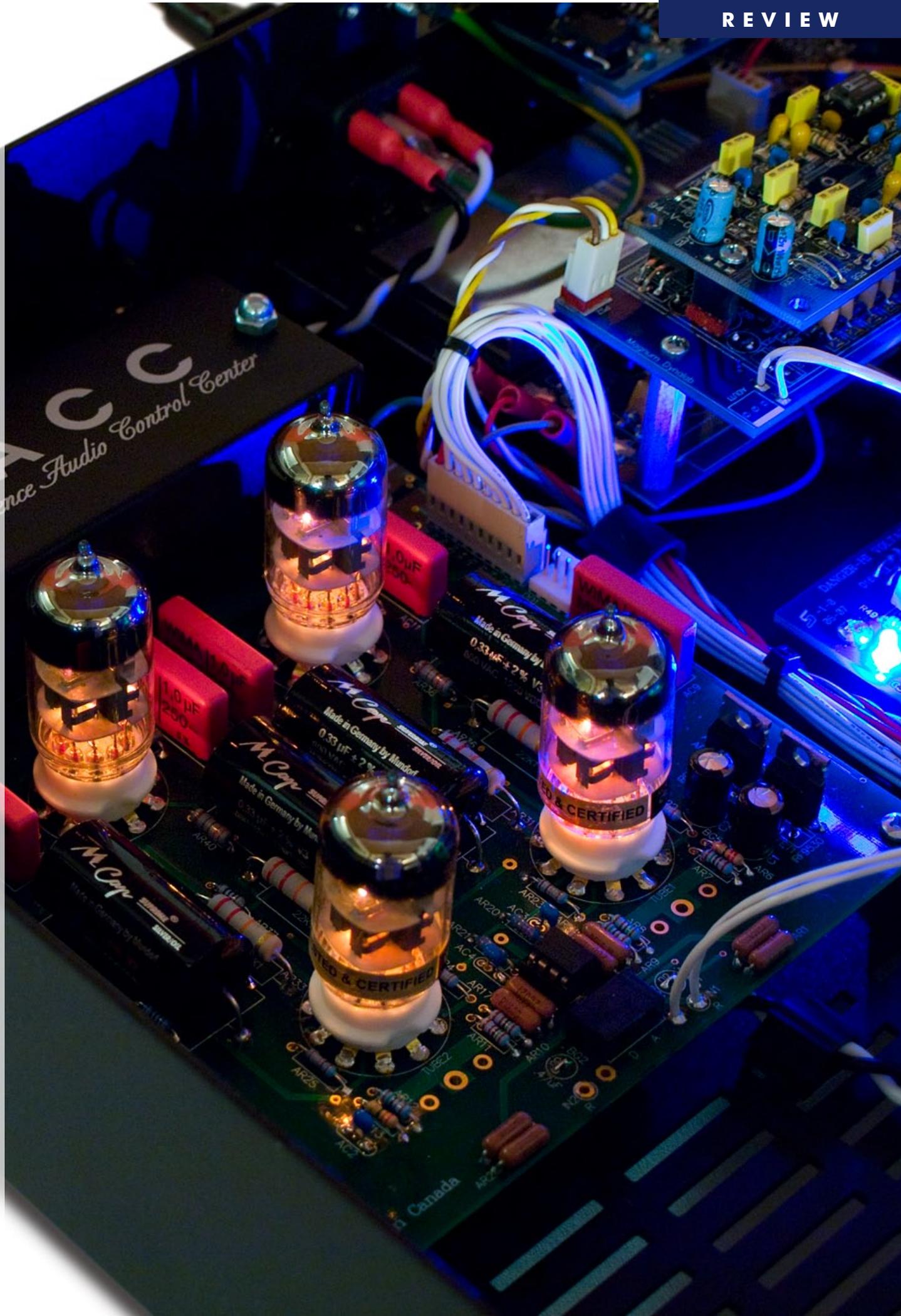
Let's talk more about this tuner, shall we?

I'll agree that four grand for a tuner is a bit much, especially considering the nature of the XM broadcast. According to most of the technical information I read about XM, it is digital but compressed to about a 400kb/second data stream. So, it's not CD quality, but awfully good. Kind of reminds me of the old days listening to a good FM station on a legendary Magnum Dynalab analog tuner...

Taking a peek inside reveals the best goodies the high end has to offer; the latest CS8416 Digital Audio Receiver from CIRRUS and the ubiquitous Burr-Brown PCM1794 oversampling DAC chips. The analog board applies everything MD has learned over the years in analog tuner construction, with four of their cryo'd 6922's offering a fully balanced output as well as single ended RCA's. The lesser-priced MD-606 (\$2500) does not have as elaborate of a digital or analog circuit, but should still be excellent.

I also noticed a pair of digital outputs, (RCA and TOSLINK) but with this level of construction, you won't get better quality by going to an out-board DAC. To verify this, I did try the 609 with my Wadia 521 and actually preferred the sound straight from the 609. I would guess that that wonderful tubed output stage works a bit of magic on the compression artifacts!

(continued)





The Sound

The only limitation of this format is truly the source. I am confident that the 609 is wringing every last molecule out of the XM data stream that is there to be had. I compared it to a few budget models and it was dreadful. Once you have this baby in your system, you will never be able to go back!

On a good station, XM is very pleasant and offers you a way to get a lot more music into your diet. I think all but the fussiest audiophiles should be able to live with this tuner and be quite happy with the format. You can get a little picky and complain about the slight degradation from compression, but I've never heard FM sound this good and I have a lot of awful rock records from the 70s that don't sound this good either.

On the best sounding stations, I often forgot I was listening to a tuner. Bass was tuneful and tight, the midrange was wonderful and there was enough of a three-dimensional image happening that I could just relax and enjoy. It certainly is nice to have a stream of uninterrupted music at your disposal!

You will notice a bit of loss in depth from your original CDs and a touch of splashiness in the highs, but again that is no fault of the 609, it's the limitations of the XM format. Magnum Dynalab is very committed to an upgrade path on this tuner, so as XM improves, should you need an upgrade to your tuner, it will be available.

It's a keeper!

If you are looking for a great gift for the audiophile man that has everything and one remaining rack space on which to put it, I can think of nothing more worthy than the MD-609. As the price may scare you away, they have offered to send us the 606 in the near future to investigate. While not offering the take no prisoners approach of the 609, I'll bet that it's still way better than anything else on the market to receive XM broadcasts with and the \$2500 price tag might be a little bit more palatable.

Either way, if you want the best possible sound from XM, Magnum Dynalab is the way to go. Highly recommended! ●

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
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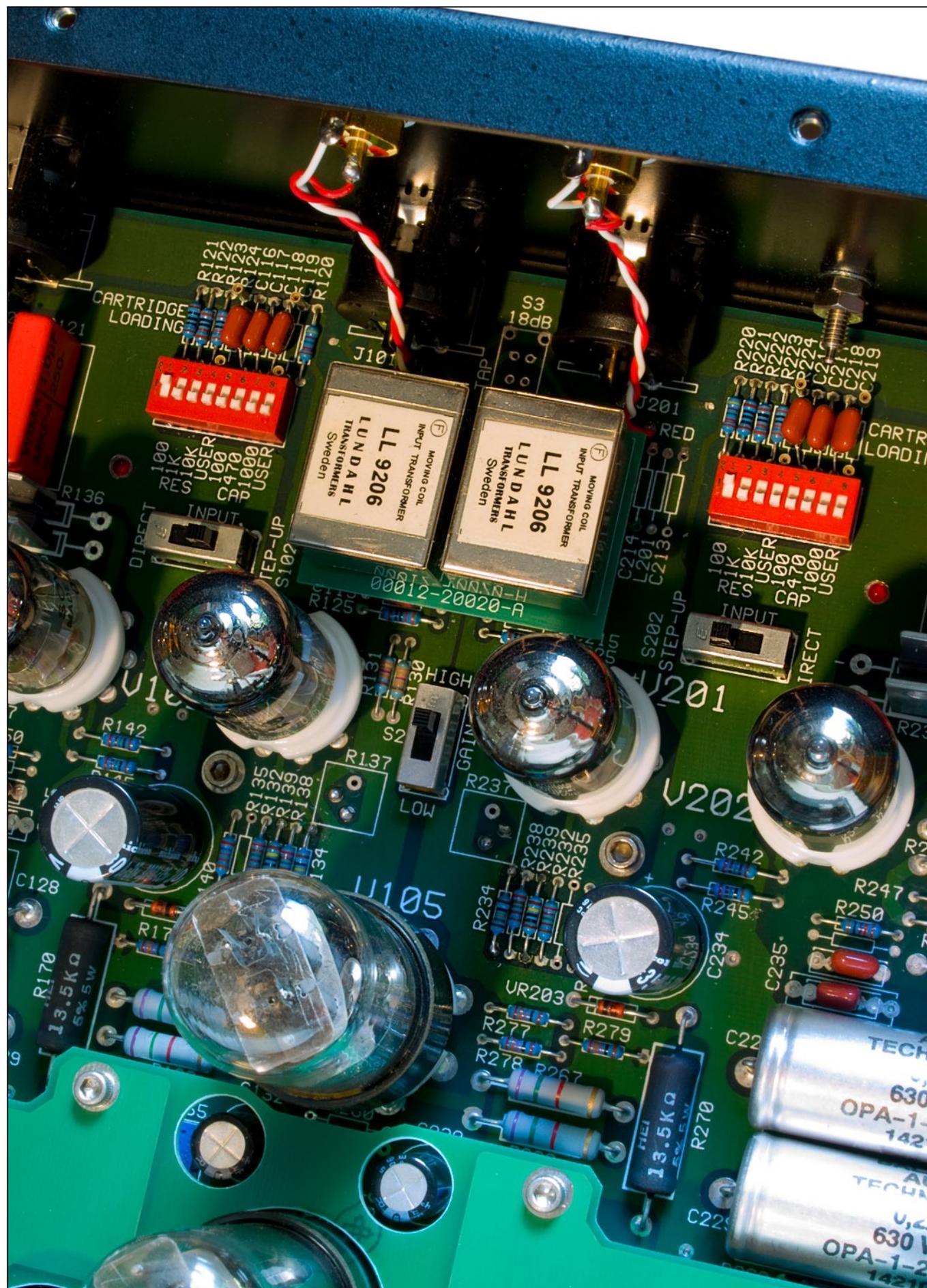
By Jeff Dorgay

The BAT VK-P10SE sits right in the middle of the P10 lineup. There is an 'entry level' P10 that sells for \$5000, the SE model reviewed here for \$6500 and the 'super-pak' edition that is running around \$8500. I'm sure the first questions a potential buyer might ask would be: What are the differences between the three models and how MUCH better is the P10 than the P5? Let's investigate.

As I currently own the P5 and am very happy with it (yet always on a quest for more...) I was anxious to see how much more music would be let through from my turntable to the rest of my system with a better phono stage. I'm already a fan of BAT's build quality, sleek industrial design and the powerful, dynamic sound their products offer, so the P10 seemed like a logical choice indeed. But which one?

If you've ever taken the top off a piece of BAT gear, you know these guys are all about the power supply.

The P10SE weighs in at 36 pounds and has dual mono power transformers, weighing more than most of the integrated amplifiers we've had in for review! The entry level P10 uses a pair of 6SN7 tubes and eight 6922s. The SE model upgrades the output stage of the phono preamplifier to a set of four 6C45 tubes that offer even more current drive. All of the circuit critical resistors have been upgraded to Vishay units (which cost about 15 bucks a piece these days...) and the power supply now features their SIX-PAK, oil-impregnated capacitors. Like I said, it's about power with these guys... *(continued)*





The Super Pak model takes this to the ultimate limit replacing the electrolytic capacitors with enormous film capacitors. While I am sure that this takes the P10SE to an even greater, more dynamic level, prudence dictated the middle of the line-up for this review. Fortunately, you can have either of the entry level P10 phono stages upgraded to the Super Pak state and who knows, after I've lived with the P10SE for a while, I may just need more!

It's About Versatility

I really enjoy the amount of versatility that the VK-P10SE offers an analog lover. You can connect your favorite tonearm via balanced XLR or unbalanced RCA connections. If you have an arm that will permit balanced operation, I highly suggest pursuing it, as this is the one place that you will notice an even lower noise floor. With such miniscule signals floating around, everywhere you can get a bit of help is a good thing. Rest assured that connecting through the RCAs is still great, but for the analog purist, you will an even better presentation with the balanced inputs!

I really enjoy the amount of versatility that the VK-P10SE offers an analog lover.

There is one set of balanced outputs, and if your preamplifier does not offer balanced inputs, you can purchase a set of adapters from your BAT dealer for about \$150. The preamplifier in the test system (the Aurum Acoustics Integris CDP) was balanced all the way through, so this was a piece of cake.

When you lift the lid of the P10SE, you have a number of dip switches to control input loading and gain, as well as a low/high overall gain switch and a switch marked 'step-up'. This gives you a range of gain settings from 44 to 79 db of gain that you can add in stages. The low position will more than likely only be required for high output MM cartridges, but as the MM carts seem to be making a bit of a comeback, this is a welcome option. For the MM lovers, there is a four position (along with a user selectable option) set of dip switches to give you capacitance loading from 100pf to 1000pf. In addition to the standard 47k loading, there are settings for 100, 1000, 10k and a user definable

Switching to the high mode gives you another 15db of gain and is probably suited for most MC cartridges between about .25mv

and .6mv. Should you have an extremely low output MC, you can switch in the step up transformers and get almost 20db of gain.

See what I mean, this baby is versatile! If you can't match up your cartridge to the P10SE, it's not going to happen.

Initial Setup

The P10SE arrives from BAT set to 47k loading on the high setting with the transformers out of the loop. I did most of my listening with the AVID Volvere table with an SME V arm and the Rega P9/RB1000 combination and tried four different cartridges: the Dynavector 17D3, Rega Apheta, Benz Ref 3 and the MoFi (Myabi) 3.5C. These cartridges all ranged in output from .25mv to .5mv, so I was right on target. I also used a Grado Reference Master with 4mv to give the 47k settings a try.

The AVID/SME combination was setup for a balanced connection, while the Rega used standard RCAs. A 1.5 meter length of Cardas Golden Reference XLR cable brought the signal to my preamplifier and a Running Springs Mongoose power cord was used for power delivery. *(continued)*

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With ten tubes glowing inside, I found the sound just a touch tighter overall with a set of Finite Elemente Ceraballs beneath the P10SE. This is a very minor tweak, but worth it if you are obsessed will give you those last few molecules of detail!

Ok, How Does the Damn Thing Sound?

In a word, fantastic. This is tube sound at its best folks. However, if you were after a romantic tube phono stage with a lot of bloom, this may not be the phono stage for you. I would describe the character of the P10SE as very dynamic and tonally accurate with just a touch of tubeyness. You won't mistake it for a solid-state phono stage, but it will not romanticize the sound of your system either. It does however, offer up that last little bit of air that you tend to get from a great piece of tube gear.

When I talked to Geoff Poor at BAT a year ago while writing the P5 review, he felt that the P5 would offer about 80% of the sound of the P10, but I think it goes a little further than that. I have spent a lot of time listening to some great phono stages in the 2 - 4000 dollar range for the last year and everyone always wants to know what kind of performance gains one can expect going from a good three thousand dollar stage to something like the P10SE, costing just more than double...

It boils down to the subtleties. I always hear people telling me that 'the really expensive gear isn't worth the money' and their (insert popular \$3000 phono stage here) outperforms all that expensive stuff, but it doesn't.

To hear the difference that any top tier piece of hardware provides, you need to be infinitely familiar with your system and recordings. *(continued)*

You don't even need to have the best records, but you DO need to listen to records that you have heard fifty or a hundred times, that you know backwards and forwards to hear what's really happening. Because what you (should) get as you move up the food chain with good analog is more resolution, dynamics, contrast AND musicality. You should get it ALL as you start paying this kind of dough.

Again, this is what I got an awful lot of with the P10SE. I'd love to tell you that I played some fantastic thousand dollar a piece classical recordings that few mere mortals owned, but I just went back to some of my old favorites that I've heard a million times. The first thing I put on the turntable was Pat Metheny's **First Circle** album.

The opening track *Forward March* is kind of a funny tune reminiscent of a lousy school band playing at halftime. When you hear that bass drum being pounded, you first hear the drum head being struck, the resonance after, and the notes drifting off into the air. On the P10SE, you hear this very distinctly and it sounds like someone just walked in the room playing a bass drum, as it should be.

Next up, *My Friend Goo* from Sonic Youth. Listen to that growling, distorted bass line; it's got a lot more meat on the bone. Perhaps a few extra layered vocals in the background that was falling into the noise floor before? Then, I decided to drop the MoFi recording of Albert Collins, Robert Cray and Johnny Copeland's **Showdown!** on the table and listen to their rendition of *Black Cat Bone*.

It always came back to the same thing, the difference was in the subtleties, the finesse.

When you hear these great blues players take turns soloing, you can really hear the distinctly different sounds of their guitar rigs burning right through your speakers.

Of course, I played a ton of records while listening to the P10SE, but it always came back to the same thing, the difference was in the subtleties, the finesse. There is a definite lack of haze, grunge and obscurity that I kept hearing that I really enjoyed with this phono preamp. This is what you get with a big power supply at your disposal!

I believe this also helped add to the sense of pace that the P10SE consistently brought out in the music, again giving recorded music a much more lifelike feel. No matter how complex the music got, things didn't get blurry, you could always follow where the individual players were.

So, Is It A Keeper?

I think that if the rest of your system is up to the task, and you like the kind of presentation that the VK-P10SE offers, it is definitely

worth the asking price. My only negative comment about this unit is that for \$6500, I would rather see BAT tack another thousand bucks or so on the pricetag and offer this preamp with three inputs that offer adjustable gain and loading on the fly. Combine that with the outstanding interface used on the BAT preamplifiers and that would be a home run out of the park... No matter how much we have, we always want more!

But judged on the basis of the sound offered up, the VK-P10SE is definitely a keeper for someone who just needs one high performance phono input. ●

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Dynavector 17D3, Grado Signature

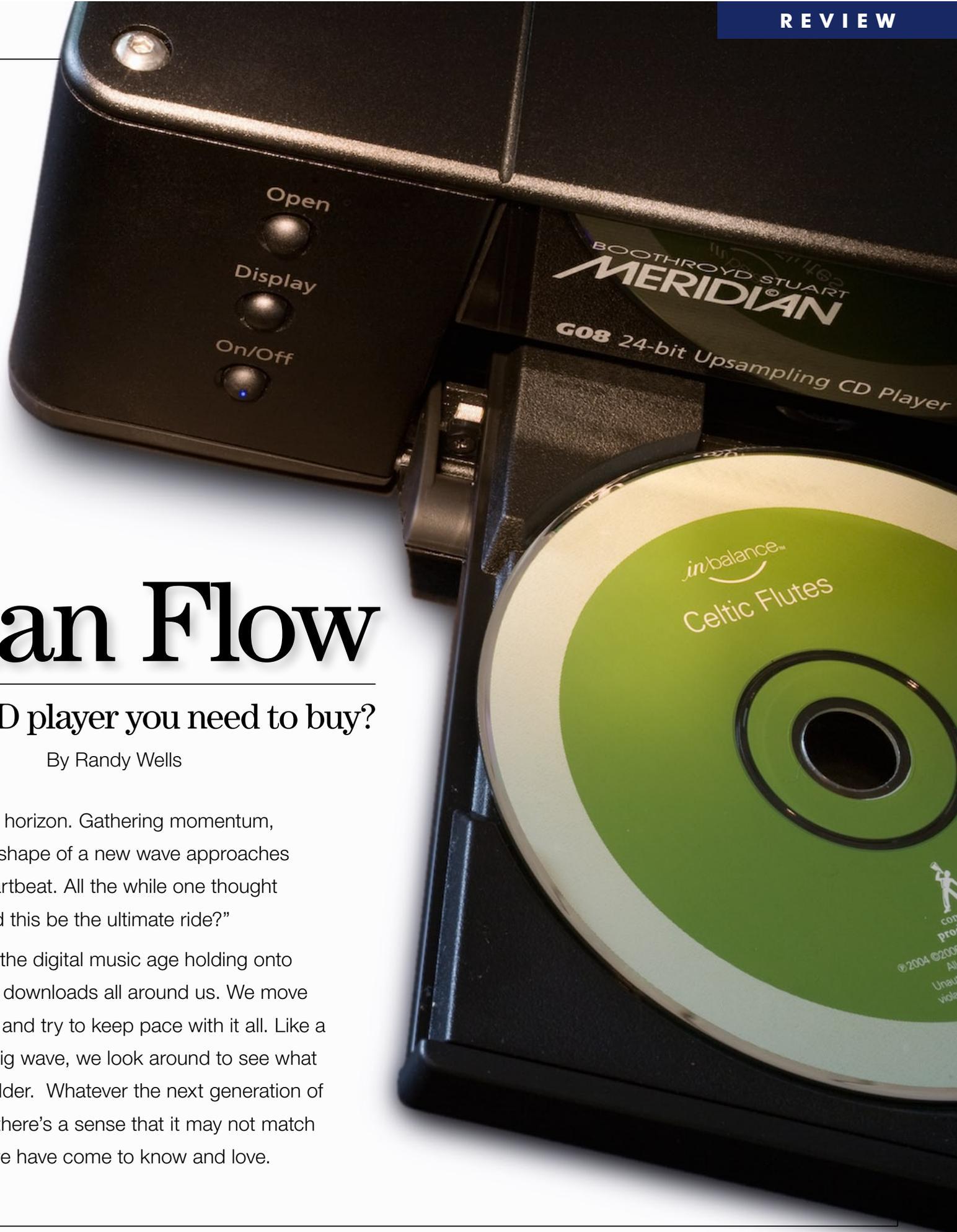
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Meridian Flow

Is the G08 the last CD player you need to buy?

By Randy Wells

It starts as a single blip on the horizon. Gathering momentum, it forms a profile, and soon the shape of a new wave approaches seemingly in the space of a heartbeat. All the while one thought swirls around your head, “Could this be the ultimate ride?”

Here we float on a zenith of the digital music age holding onto our precious CD platforms with downloads all around us. We move forward through the turbulence and try to keep pace with it all. Like a surfer trying to catch the next big wave, we look around to see what might be coming over our shoulder. Whatever the next generation of music delivery turns out to be, there’s a sense that it may not match the physical format of the CD we have come to know and love.



The traditional black Meridian G08 is one such contender for the title of 'last CD player you need to buy — within reason'.

Even for music lovers who did not embrace CDs in the 80s, these shiny silver and gold discs are ubiquitous containers of musical information. Some assert that now may be the best time to buy that *last* CD player, especially when the future of new audio packaging and delivery is uncertain and the past decade has brought forth some of the best interpreters of the CD format with which we can sink deep into the night.

The traditional black Meridian G08 is one such contender for the title of 'last CD player you need to buy – within reason'. It weighs in at 18 pounds and a relatively moderate retail price of \$4K. It is, for all intents and purposes, a formidable CD-only platform that is neither the least nor the most expensive player out there. Meridian is certainly well known and respected in the audio community, having produced dozens of different models since the world's first audiophile CD player, the MCD, in 1984. This history is reassuring, as is the two-year warranty and reports that the G08's sonic signature is evolved from the award-winning 508 and 800 players.

The G08 is of the 24-bit upsampling variety and sits comfortably within the mid-level G series of Meridian products. This means that it is situated just below the 800/808 reference series. The 808 is their \$15K top of the line CD/DVD-Audio player, which offers the highest quality sound, and was reviewed in TONE Audio no.8.

In brief, I can tell you that the G08 uses triple buffers for increased audio quality and a CD-ROM drive that reportedly has ten times error-correction. The 24-bit DAC operates at 176.4kHz, and there are balanced & unbalanced analog outs, as well as optical and digital out for maximum flexibility. I used only the analog outs on the G08, since that is what my VTL TL-5.5 line stage preamp allowed. The MSR Plus System remote supplied with G08 is a real looker with its stylish profile and automatic backlighting. This remote also has the capability of learning to control other equipment and the keycaps are interchangeable to accommodate this. For more detailed information on the technical side of the G08, you can visit: http://www.meridian-audio.com/p_g08.htm

Character:

My initial impression of the G08 right out of the box was one of a very well built CD player with a detailed and musically dynamic sound. The illusion created of listening to live music was so uncanny, that it was with anticipation that I approached my assignment. After a couple of weeks of burn in I was thoroughly impressed with all the detail I was hearing with the G08, but I felt it might be just a bit forward in its presentation. So, I swapped the analog silver interconnects I was using for Audience's copper Au24, and the player settled into an even more balanced presentation. *(continued)*

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I feel that the Au24 interconnect contributed a refinement to the G08's tone without blurring its signature, which improved my long-term listening satisfaction with this player.

The G08 exhibits superb detail and low-level resolution that is delicate yet engaging at the same time.

It seems to unearth every nuance from underlying instrumental passages and lays them out in layers upon a broad soundstage. The depth of the soundstage produced is not quite as stellar but impressive nonetheless. This player is very balanced in its tonal character. There is excellent bloom with a sense of air around each instrument, though this portrayal errs ever so slightly toward the analytical rather than the lush and romantic side. Dynamics are well delivered, but not in the 'hyper' hi-fi way lower priced players can sometimes sound.

There is great weight and fullness to the bass, which has a slightly loose quality. Image solidity is excellent, as is pace and drive. The midrange is very liquid with just the very tiniest hint of grain, and the treble is transparent, extended, and smooth. There is a nice timbre to all acoustic instruments with piano tone in particular being very impressive (if not completely resolved). All told, the G08 is a very engaging, lively, and energetic player which does not lose its focus when the music becomes more complex. If you want a laid back middle of the hall presentation, this may not be the best player for you.

(continued)

However if you want to be in the 7th row, this player will put you there and keep you in your seat for hours.

Not only did the G08 sound divine playing well mastered discs like Steve Hoffman's DCC **Love Is the Thing** by Nat King Cole, it also sailed right through poorly mastered CDs with ease (listen to John Hiatt's **Walk On** for an example of this). It never put a foot wrong and was always able to make CDs sound musical and listenable. If this is the last CD player you'll be buying that's important, since (let's face it) not all silver discs sound wonderful. Yes, the G08 misses that last bit of pace and realism that my reference Unidisk 1.1 player has with CDs, but that unit's retail price is nearly three times that of the G08. The plus side is that, in comparison to the Unidisk, the G08 has a fuller presence in the midrange with more immediacy.

This quality is utterly captivating on well-recorded vocals like Ella Fitzgerald's reading of 'Angel Eyes' on Classic Record's CD of **Let No Man Write My Epitaph**. This same character lends an airy presence to modern multi-tracked albums like Kate Bush's **Aerial**. In particular, the background voices on 'How to be Invisible' are otherworldly when played through the G08. As mentioned previously, the overall musical tonality presented by the Meridian is excellent and inner details are rendered very distinctly. It is extremely easy to follow each line of music, and there is just the right balance between Kate's voice and her backing tracks. Upper mid-bass is especially tactile in its portrayal and the rhythmic track, 'Joanni', is rendered in a very appealing

way with all its complexity intact. When I finally got around to playing Eric Clapton's **Unplugged**, the atmosphere of this stage-thumping performance was captured admirably. One thing's for sure, it's a rockin' good time on CD with the Meridian G08!

Conclusion:

When you take a long studied look at the G08 and all it has to offer, it's ultimately a balancing act of pros and cons (as it is with any component). Sure, the G08 doesn't play SACDs or DVD-As, but what it does with CDs is emotionally compelling and musically balanced – it's very engaging and never fails to excite the senses. OK, it's a bit of a diva – taking more command of your attention than some players might – but it does this in a way that is sympathetic to the music being played, and that's what matters most to me. I could live with this player happily for a very long time.

So, is this the ultimate ride in the \$4K price range? In my experience it would take a significantly more expensive player to better its overall performance. As we look ahead to the next new wave of packaged media and high-resolution downloads, it's reassuring to know that this well-designed player can ride the incoming tide entertaining you with all those CDs you already own and cherish in a musically flowing way. Hey, it floats my boat! ●

One thing's for sure, it's a rockin' good time on CD with the Meridian G08!

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(continued)



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Power Amplifiers: Vacuum
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MB-250 monoblocks

Speakers: Magnepan MG 3.6

Analog Source: Rega P9 with
RB1000 arm and Koetsu Rose-
wood Cartridge, Cary PH302
phono stage

Other Digital Source: Linn
Unidisk 1.1

Interconnects: Audience Au24,
Harmonic Technology Magic
Link One, Grover S

Speaker Cables: Transparent
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Power Cords: Black Sand
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The Ayre CX-7e CD Player

By Jeff Dorgay





While I've been accused of being an elitist on the digital side of the fence, I've been very excited about what's going on in the world of 2-4000 dollar CD players and have been listening to quite a few of them over the last year. Matter of fact, we have a few of them in this issue! The Ayre player reviewed here is smack dab in the middle of the price range, coming in at \$2950.

The top of the line Ayre C-5xe universal player has received countless accolades and is also a great player, that I have always been pleased with wherever I've heard it. But this CX-7e to me is even a greater achievement on one level because it offers so much performance at a price point that is attainable for quite a few music lovers.

As soon as you lift it out of the box, you know you are going to be in for a treat, this is a SUBSTANTIAL player, weighing 25 pounds.

We all know that a beefy power supply is a big part of the recipe for good sound and the CX-7e does not disappoint.

If you pop the top, you can see the two big power transformers; one for the transport and logic sections, the other for the audio section.

The CX-7e is a fully balanced, differential design from start to finish. The power supply and DAC are fully differential, including the analog output stage. This explains the extra magic I heard using the balanced outputs so if you have a preamplifier with balanced inputs, I would definitely use this one in balanced mode.

The casework is simple yet elegant with a brushed silver finish and eight buttons on the front so that you do not have to use the remote control to operate the deck. Coming from someone who always seems to have about twenty remote controls around the studio, I appreciate *not* needing the remote to play a CD. The standard plastic remote is quite good, but if you desire a machined aluminum remote, you can order one from your Ayre dealer. (It will set you back an additional \$295) If you are new to the Ayre brand, they do very meticulous metal work, so you may just want to invest in one of these!

(continued)



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Not only can you use the CX-7e without the remote, it is very intuitive to use. The buttons are very logically laid out and the display is a very nice soft blue that is large enough for those of us over 25 years old to read.

Easy to Set Up and Operate

I gave the CX-7e about two weeks of break-in time before I got down to critical listening, but after about three days it was already hinting at greatness. It spent almost all of its time in my second system, because the Aesthetix Callisto Signature had balanced inputs and I did want to be able to compare the sound back and forth using an identical 1 meter length of Cardas Golden Reference cable, with XLRs and RCAs to keep the test fair.

I tried a few other cables, but I ended up going back to the XLR version of the Golden Reference. That was the magic combination for the Ayre in this system! I also used the CX-7 with the stock power cord for a while, but did the remaining listening with a Running Springs Audio Mongoose power cord, as that's what I was using with the other two CD players in this category that I was listening to.

The rear panel also has a digital output that you can switch off when not in use. There is a curious little switch that also says, 'listen' and 'measure'. I tried it in both positions, but preferred it in the 'listen' position with all amplifiers except my McIntosh MC275, which is a bit on the romantic side. *(continued)*



With the MC275 I kept the switch in the measure position; in all the other configurations I tried it, the measure position sounded a touch forward and somewhat harsh in comparison.

The listen position gives you Ayre's proprietary digital filtering which is phase coherent in the analog domain and possesses a more natural and airier sound quality. The measure position has the traditional brick wall filtering that conforms to the Sony/Phillips SPDIF protocol.

Damn Good Digital Sound

Even when I pulled this player out of the box cold, I was impressed with its weighty sound. Somewhere between 150 and 200 hours, the CX-7e really opened up and expressed itself. The people at Ayre always do a very good job with the sound in their rooms at the RMAF and CES, but what you never get a chance to experience at a show are the subtle nuances of a particular piece of gear. Many times that component that really grabbed you at the show or at the dealer isn't so exciting after you have heard it for a while. Sometimes the luster wears off.

Not with this player! The longer I listened to it, the more I enjoyed it. I spent a TON of

time going back and forth between other top shelf players from Rega, Naim, Meridian and the new tubed CD player from Prima Luna, so the Ayre was in a pretty serious competition for my attention!

You know I like to rock, so if I told you the first thing I played on the CX-7e was some wimpy female vocal CD you would probably punch me at CES in January. Straight away I put on System of a Down's *Mesmerize* and cranked it up! I moved on to a little Rollins Band, some Audioslave, a touch of Metallica and calmed it down a bit with Rush's *2112*. Yes, this player kicks ass and has the necessary dynamics to keep any music lover happy. It doesn't deteriorate into a big mushball of sound when there are ten layers of screaming guitars on tap. For you classical lovers, the Ayre player did a great job with my favorite Shostakovich and Bax discs as well.

The soundfield that you experience with this player is very wide and very deep. It has that BIG BIG sound that I really enjoy; very open and very transparent.

That's the first part of the equation, but I was equally pleased with the imaging and dimensionality of this player as well. After that brain damage session, I gave my ears a rest until the next day and resumed listening with a few more mellow selections. The live mix CD from the recent Crowded House show I just saw in Portland a couple weeks ago arrived in the mailbox and the Ayre did a fantastic job with the harmonies I had heard live. While in

this groove, I listened to the new Crowded House CD **Here on Earth** and their older CD, **Woodface** with a little Del Amitri thrown in for good measure.

I'm sure this is where all that attention to the power supply in the CX-7e really pays off. The soundfield that you experience with this player is very wide and very deep. It has that *big, big* sound that I really enjoy; very open and very transparent. *(continued)*



The weight of the CX-7e was what grabbed me initially, but what kept me at the party until last call was the amount of detail this player possessed without having an exaggerated high end. Often times with a player at this level, I can listen for a little while and then I end up going back to vinyl, but I found the CX-7e very satisfying.

While some CD players sound a bit up front and others a little bit laid back, I found the CX-7e right in the middle. My three systems all have a different character and the Ayre player did not add to or subtract from the presentation with either system. I even took it over to a few friends' houses whose systems I am very familiar with and had equally good experiences, so I can't imagine anyone not being happy with it.

Always a good sign, the pile of CDs next to the rack where the CX-7e was playing just kept getting bigger. Last but not least, the tonality of this player was exemplary. Attack and decay was excellent. Cymbals sounded right and acoustic guitars had just the right amount of bite and twang with just the right amount of contrast to the mix. We have all heard some digital players that overdo the contrast and sound great for five minutes, but after you've had the darn thing in your house for a week or so, something sounds amiss. Again the Ayre player passed with flying colors.

We've Got a Winner Here

I am happy to announce that we are awarding the Ayre CX-7e one of our Exceptional Value Awards for 2007 (and we only hand out a few of these...). I mentioned earlier that I've been listening to a lot of great digital players at this price level, but this one's my favorite.

If I were buying a CD player in this price range, the CX-7e is the one I'd spend my hard earned cash on. It has everything I want in a CD player: Dynamics, tonality, musicality, excellent build quality and above all balance. The CX-7e doesn't sacrifice one part of the equation for another, it does everything very well and that's a tough combination to beat. Now that I've seen what they can do for \$2950, I can't wait to hear the top of the line Ayre player!

Very highly recommended. ●



If I were buying a CD player in this price range, the CX-7e is the one I'd spend my hard earned cash on.

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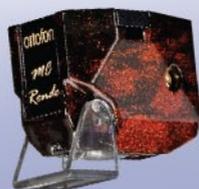
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MANUFACTURER

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PERIPHERALS

Preamplifiers Aesthetix
Callisto Signature, Conrad-
Johnson ACT2/Series 2,
Nagra PL-L

Power Amplifiers Nagra
PSA, Conrad-Johnson Premier
350, McIntosh MC275

Other Digital Sources
Naim CD555, Meridian 808,
Wadia 581i

Speakers Penuaudio
Serenade, Martin Logan
Summit, B&W 805S

Interconnects Cardas
Golden Reference
(RCA and XLR)

Speaker Cables Cardas
Golden Reference

Power Management

Running Springs Jaco and
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Running Springs Mongoose
power cords

Vibration Control Finite
Elemente Pagode Signature
Racks, Ceraballs and
Cerapucs

A Classic Table Gets Updated

The Rega P3-24

By Jeff Dorgay

The Rega P3 has been with us for about 30 years now and many of you even remember it as the Planar 3. A basic belt drive table, with a lightweight plinth and its unique glass platter has made the P3 the turntable of choice for generations of audiophiles.

Back in the late 70s when the Planar 3 was introduced, I believe they were \$299. I bought my first one when they went to the RB 300 tonearm (right around 1981) and I paid \$329. Today's P3-24 costs \$845 and the upgraded power supply is another \$345. My test model was shipped with an Elys 2 cartridge (\$245) already mounted to make this a very nice analog deck that is ready to go for about \$1500.

Carefully unbox everything, attach the counterweight, set the tracking force and anti-skate and you will be playing records in about five minutes! It's painless.

Even if you need to mount the Elys 2, Rega cartridges use three mounting holes, so you won't have to worry about cartridge alignment in the headshell (why can't everyone do this?) or worry about VTA.

(continued)



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 Primare
 Exact Power
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 Sumiko/Project
 Acoustic Solid

What's New?

The last update to the P3 was in the year 2000, involving the plinth and motor design, taking some of what Rega had learned from the P25 and applying it at a lower price point. Rega claims that the P3-24 is not just an update but 'revisits the virtues of the original Planar 3'. The new plinth, though it looks almost identical to the old, utilizes some new laminates and features a slight bevel on the edges.

The motor is now the same low vibration motor used in the P9 turntable.

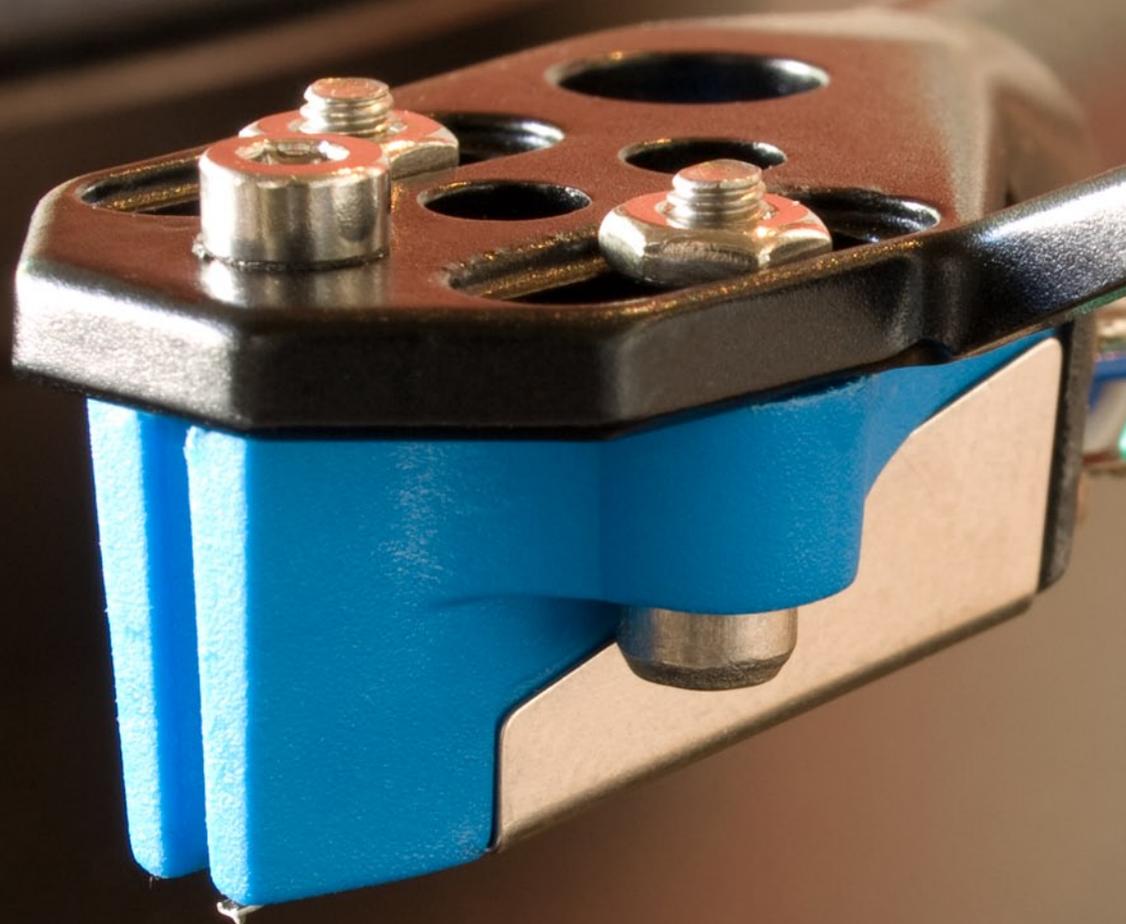
The TTPSU external power supply was first developed for the P7 and is a must have upgrade to the P3-24. It offers better speed accuracy and the ability to change from 33 to 45 r.p.m. with the push of a button! Legacy P3 owners know what I'm talking about.

The RB300 tonearm has also been upgraded and is now called the RB301. The vertical bearing housing has improved rigidity, the RCA cables are identical to the P7 and the anti-skate mechanism is now similar in look and operation to the RB1000 arm fitted to the P9. The anti-skate assembly on the RB301 is a composite material instead of the machined aluminum on the RB1000. The RB301 arm uses a three-point mount (like the RB700/900 and 1000) instead of the single, screw mount from the RB300. Shims are still available to raise the back of the arm for cartridges that do not have the same 14mm height as the standard MM Rega cartridges. These 2mm shims are available from your Rega dealer for \$39 each. *(continued)*

(gateway sound)

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 Suite 160
 Tucker, Georgia
 770 493 1550

www.gatewaysound.net



Setup Is A Pinch

Rega tables are known for their ease of setup and this was no different. I spent a bit of time listening to the Elys 2 cartridge, but it was a bit too friendly for my taste. I would think if someone had a solid state amplifier that was a little bit forward, this might be a great match, but my second system is a little bit on the friendly side, so I did not achieve the synergy I was after here.

Somewhat obsessed, I kept staring at the Apheta cartridge that I had used for the P9 review thinking that it would be really crazy to put a \$1700 cartridge on a \$1200 dollar turntable. I'm happy to report that it isn't! The Apheta is a great match for the new P3. But the Apheta has an 18mm height, so it took a pair of spacers to get VTA correct again. The elapsed time for this setup was still only about 15 min.

During the course of the test, I tried a number of different cartridges with the P3 and had good luck with all of them.

Thanks to those spacers, adjusting the VTA was very easy. All of the other cartridges I tried happened to have an 18mm height, so no further adjustment was necessary for the remainder of my listening sessions.

Old vs. New

I just recently gave my original Planar 3 to a good friend when I purchased a P9 earlier this year, so I was fortunate enough to be able to borrow it back for a little while to compare it to the current version. My old Planar 3 is now mated to a Dynavector 17D3, so that was what I used on the P3-24. Apples to apples, you know. Switching between the tables through the ASR Basis Exclusive in my reference system made it very easy to clearly discern the difference between the old and new version of the P3. A little overkill for tables at this level, but very scientific because we are only changing one component. Just to be completely OC, a new belt was installed on the old Planar 3, so everything was as similar as possible.

The old Planar 3 still holds its own as a great entry-level table for those wanting to get serious about analog playback. The good news is that the new P3-24 is better in every way. The first thing you will notice is that the overall sound of the new P3 is more like the top of the line P9. Thanks to the power supply and motor upgrade, the backgrounds are a bit quieter with speed stability. *(continued)*

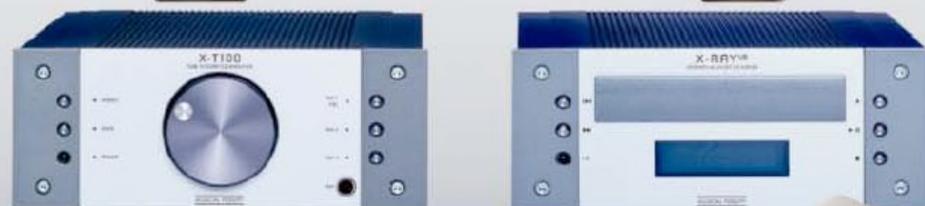
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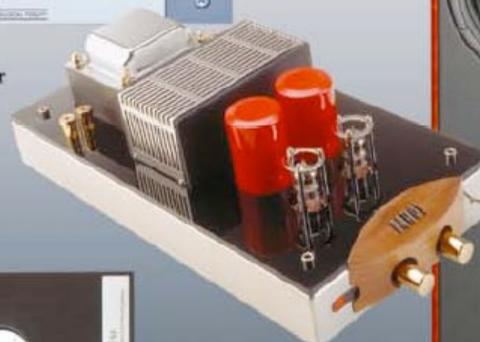
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Listening to Joe Sample's piano on *Rainbow Seeker* and *The Three*, you can hear the individual notes of the piano having more body and solidity. When notes sustain on a turntable with poor speed control, you tend to hear more warbling instead of the instruments tonal quality. This was the biggest difference between the two tables, with the new one greatly improved.

Energy and control in the lower registers is also substantially improved.

The P3 has often been characterized as being a very lively sounding, perhaps a little bit lean, but no longer. Some of my Thomas Dolby albums from the 80's have some great synth bass grooves, my favorites being 'I Scare Myself' from *The Flat Earth* and 'Pulp Culture' from *Aliens Ate My Buick*. Through the new table, the presentation really energizes the room, where it was merely polite and tuneful before.

Finally, the noise floor is a bit lower on the new table as well. I noticed this the most when listening to classical music. Everything has a bit blacker background, giving the presentation a bit more dynamic range. Same with acoustic music; the new WB pressing of *Sweet Baby James* is a great example. JT's acoustic guitar really lingers in the middle of the speakers. Anything that you have in your collection that has a lot of natural decay in the recording shows off how well the music just falls off slowly into nothingness. I'm guessing most of you will not have an original Planar 3 to compare to Rega's newest model, so I bet the question on the tip of your tongue is: "How well does this thing stack up for \$850, and do I really need that additional power supply?"

(continued)



With so many people either getting back in to LP playback or going down the path for the first time, this is a great place to hang out while you amass a substantial record collection!

Great and Yes

I've probably convinced a few hundred people over the years that this is a great turntable and I stand firm on that. I can't think of anything even close to the P3-24 that I would tell a good friend to invest in at this price level. However, the power supply improves the resolution so much, I wouldn't go without it unless your budget just prevents you from spending another \$345. The good news is you can always add it later if you have to and there is no price penalty. The bad news is that the wall wart takes the P3-24 back a notch or two in performance.

Tonally speaking, the P3-24 is still a somewhat lively table. No one will ever mistake this one for a Scout with their eyes closed. This new design has really put some meat on the bone, making this turntable even more of a contender for getting a peek at serious high end sound on a modest budget. I think even past owners of the P2 and P3 will be very surprised at how much more musical the new table is.

In a more modest system, match the P3-24 up with a great \$500-1000 cartridge and any one of a number of good phono preamplifiers (I'd suggest the Aqvox 2ci or the ASR Basis Mini) and you may never need to take analog playback any further. With so many people either getting back in to LP playback or going down the path for the first time, this is a great place to hang out while you amass a substantial record collection! I've seen too many people break their piggy bank on the table, arm and cartridge only to run out of money for records!

An Updated Classic

The Rega P3-24 comes from a long path of subtle refinement and is in no danger of relinquishing its classic status. It was and remains one of the best performers and best bargains in vinyl playback. ●

The Rega P3-24

MSRP: \$845, additional TTPSU power supply, \$345

MANUFACTURER

US Importer
The Sound Organisation
11140 Petal Street Suite 350
Dallas, TX 75238
972-234-0182
www.soundorg.com
www.rega.co.uk

PERIPHERALS

Preamplifier: Conrad Johnson
ACT 2/Series 2

Phono Preamplifier: ASR
Basis Exclusive, ModWright 9.0
SWLP

Cartridges: Shure M97Xe,
Rega Elys 2, Rega Apheta,
Dynavector 17D3, Benz REF 2

Alternate Analog Source:
Rega P9/RB1000/Shelter 90x,
Oracle Delphi V/SME V/MoFi
3.5C

Digital Sources: Meridian 808,
Naim CD555

Power Amplifier: Conrad
Johnson Premier 350

Speakers: Martin Logan
Summit with REL B2 subwoofer

Interconnects: Cardas Golden
Reference

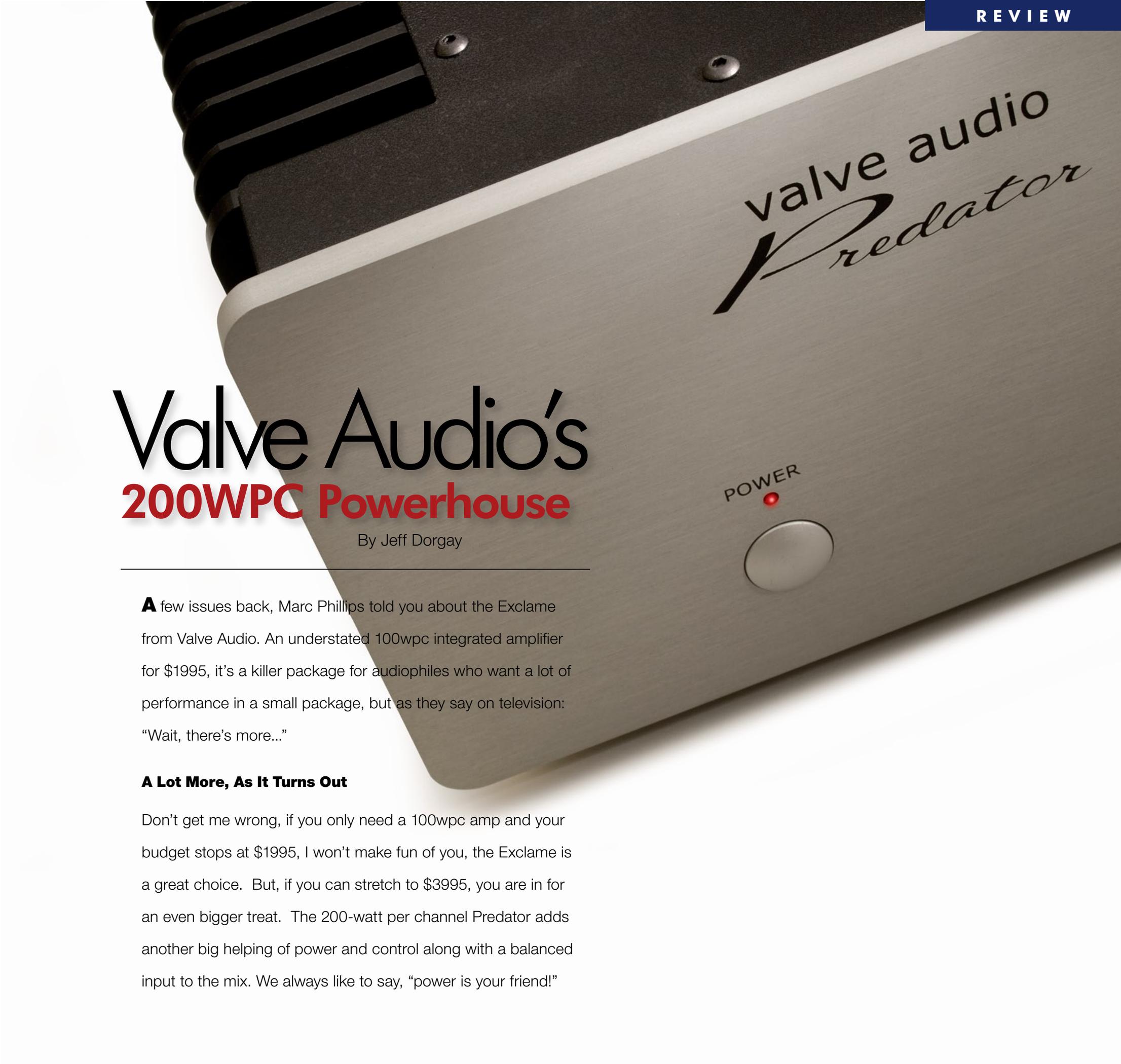
Speaker Cables: Tetra Artet

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

Power Conditioning: Running
Springs Jaco, Running Springs
Danielle

Vibration Control: Finite
Elemente Pagode Signature racks
and amp stand, Finite Elemente
Cerapucs and Ceraballs

Room Treatment: GIK 242
panels, GIK Tri-Traps and Sonex
Classic



valve audio
Predator

Valve Audio's **200WPC Powerhouse**

By Jeff Dorgay

A few issues back, Marc Phillips told you about the Exclame from Valve Audio. An understated 100wpc integrated amplifier for \$1995, it's a killer package for audiophiles who want a lot of performance in a small package, but as they say on television: "Wait, there's more..."

A Lot More, As It Turns Out

Don't get me wrong, if you only need a 100wpc amp and your budget stops at \$1995, I won't make fun of you, the Exclame is a great choice. But, if you can stretch to \$3995, you are in for an even bigger treat. The 200-watt per channel Predator adds another big helping of power and control along with a balanced input to the mix. We always like to say, "power is your friend!"



I have been spending a lot of time listening to speakers in the \$2500-4000 range, targeted at the person wanting that amazing combination for under \$10k for a complete system. The Predator is my number one choice so far in that category if you are only concerned with audio performance. This price point is very competitive, and has a lot of excellent players in the game. Valve Audio is a newcomer to the US, distributed by Music Direct and made in South Africa, however they have been making amplifiers down there for quite sometime.

Not A Lot Of Bling, But A Killer Remote

And I mean that literally. Sharing the same massive remote with the Exclaim, the remote control for this amplifier is very stout. Should you ever be the victim of a burglar, you could easily do major damage to another person with this remote! Or you can just chill and switch from CD player to your turntable; it's up to you. This is the only remote control that I've ever put a coaster on my Noguchi table for!

All kidding aside, the Predator puts all of the money inside the box. The face plate is a nice thick aluminum panel, but it is so understated that you might mistake it for a lesser piece of gear until you pick it up. This little bugger is really massive!

The Predator puts all of the money inside the box...This little bugger is really massive!

Opening the top reveals a huge power transformer and some very beefy heatsinks. Build quality is very good and there are a lot of decent parts lurking inside, for those inquiring minds that need to know.

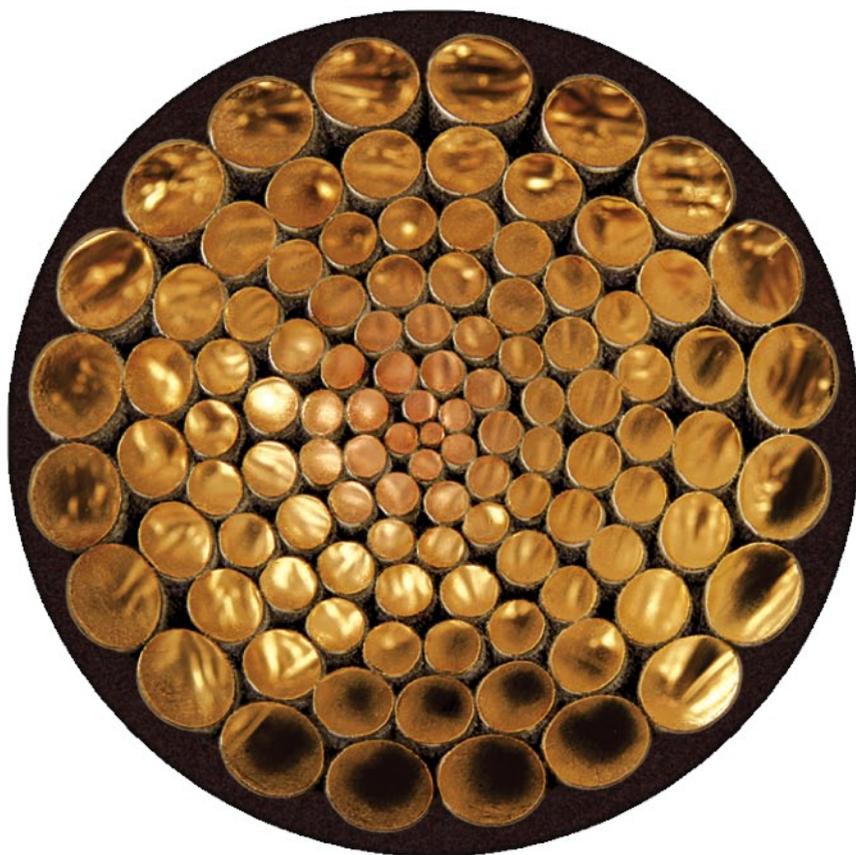
Moving around to the back, we see high quality RCA jacks and speaker binding posts as well as a pair of balanced XLR inputs, and yes this is a fully balanced input. There are four additional single ended inputs, so you should be able to build a pretty big system around the Predator. Being a tape deck guy, I really appreciated the tape output jacks.

There was also a Shunyata power cord in the box, which I felt was a very nice touch.

Break In And Configuration

The Predator will not need a horribly long break in and sounds quite good out of the box. You will notice a bit of an opening up over the first 100 hours. The initial configuration for the review was with the DeVore Fidelity Gibbon Super 8 speakers, but I also moved in my Penaudio Serenades as well as the mini Stratas from AV123 and the newest version of the 805 from B&W. I used the Rega Saturn player on the RCA inputs and the Ayre CX-7e on the XLR inputs with excellent results. *(continued)*

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For those of you considering a phono preamp to go along with the Predator, I tried the BAT VK-P5 as well as the new Moon I-5 Phono Stage, both with balanced outputs, to keep noise at a minimum in the phono chain.

Pure Joy To Have Around

Because of space limitations, I need an integrated amplifier in my living room. There just isn't enough space for the big racks of gear I have out in the studio. The problem is one gets spoiled listening to the really good stuff, so a mass-market lump just won't do at the end of the day. After a few months of solid listening, I am as happy with the Predator as the day it got here.

The Predator has enough current drive to use with any speakers.

I have more than one set of speakers here that really need a solid-state amplifier to sing and the Predator did a fantastic job, no matter what I paired it up with.

A confessed lover of the tube preamplifier with a solid state power amplifier concept, the Predator has a sound that really appealed to me; solid, powerful bass with a nice airy midrange and high end. While there are a few disadvantages to everything being on one chassis, when well implemented like the Predator, you get the benefit of needing one less power cord and interconnect, as well as not worrying about amp/preamp synergy! The shortest path between amplifier and preamplifier is none at all! *(continued)*

Music just has more life to me with a lot of clean power on tap and that is one of my favorite things about the Predator.

While this integrated may not have the last hair of detail that a very expensive set of separates might, I dare you to find a separate amplifier and preamplifier (don't forget to add at least the cost of a pair of interconnects to the package) at this price that sounds anywhere near this good. The Predator is a great value and should make quite a few converts to the audiophile world.

Enough Power For Everything

The great thing about 200 watts per channel is that you should be able to listen to whatever you want without giving up dynamic range. This aspect is often overlooked, as volume is an important dimension of musical reproduction. There's just something about going from

a 50 watt per channel amplifier to 200 watts per channel, if everything is implemented equally well. Music just has more life to me with a lot of clean power on tap and that is one of my favorite things about the Predator.

Listening to some solo piano from Keith Jarrett's *The Sun Bear Concerts* took on a lot more realism than I had with my former integrated that only had 50wpc. Again, you can cheat this a bit, going for more efficient speakers, but with the new B&W 805's, they really need that extra drive to sound realistic. Spinning some of my favorite rock CDs also revealed that extra push over the cliff that makes this music more fun if you have the juice. The recent Megadeth Gold CD from MoFi was quite good indeed... *(continued)*

After spending a lot of time with the Conrad Johnson CA200, (also fantastic, but a lot more expensive) I found myself saying, "what if this had just a slight touch of tubey sound?" If your taste in amplification is just slightly to the warm side of solid state, the Predator might just be the answer to your quest. What I enjoyed so much about the Predator was that it was very easy to listen to for very long sessions and struck the perfect balance of having a very three dimensional, organic sound without coming across as dark or rolled off.

If your taste in amplification is just slightly to the warm side of solid state, the Predator might just be the answer to your quest.

I spent a fair amount of time doing the usual experimenting with cables and the like and found the Predator to be very user friendly as well. The sound is very musical and from the first

song you know there are some tubes in there somewhere; you won't mistake this one for strictly solid state!

The bonus is that the tubed input stage adds that bit of air and space that gives this piece its magic. Listen to a piece of solo vocals or acoustic guitar and you can really feel the texture. This is a major achievement at this price point!

A Realistic Approach To High-End Sound

The longer I listened to the Predator, the more I liked it. It got the thumbs up from all of my usual pals that like to come over and listen to the latest goodies. Our dyed in the wool vintage tube guy, Jerold O'Brien is ready to put half of his vintage Dynaco collection on Ebay to finance one of these, and I NEVER thought I would hear *that* guy wax poetic about solid state anything.



The bottom line is that if you are trying to put a great system together between five and ten thousand dollars and you would like an anchor that you can live with for a very long time, I can't suggest the Predator highly enough. If you want more buttons and flash, you might be better served elsewhere, but if you are dedicated strictly to the music, this one is a winner. Watch for this one in a future edition of Turnkey, on the TONE Audio Web site. We've been having a ton of fun building a few systems around the Predator and I think you will too. ●



MANUFACTURER

The Valve Audio Predator
MSRP: \$3995

**US Importer
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318 N. Laflin Street
Chicago, IL 60607
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www.musicdirect.com

PERIPHERALS

Digital Sources: Ayre CX-7e,
Rega Jupiter

Analog Source: Rega P9/RB1000/
Apheta cartridge

Phono Preamplifiers: BAT
VK-P5, Moon I-5

Speakers: B&W 805S, Penaudio
Serenade, Martin Logan Vantage

Interconnects: Cardas Golden
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Speaker Cable: Cardas Golden
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A New Contender for the Top of the Heap

The Spiral Groove SG-1

I had an interesting surprise when I visited Allen Perkins at Immedia Sound recently; I got a chance to listen to his new Spiral groove SG-1 turntable. We often get these opportunities but rarely comment on them because it's not enough of a demonstration to really draw a valid conclusion, but this was special.



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The SWL-9.0SE
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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

The sound room at Immedia just happens to be almost the same size as the one here at TONE and the speakers were the Sonics Allegras, that we had reviewed a short while back. Throw in the Lyra Skala and there was enough gear that I was comfortable to do some serious listening.

Featuring Perkins new tonearm that should also be ready soon, the minute the stylus hit the groove I heard amazing musicality. The first cut was 'Yulunga', from *Into the Labryinth*, by Dead Can Dance. A great test tune that I've heard a number of times at different shows came to life here. The chanting came right up from the middle of the room with a soundstage that extended clear out to the left and right wall, with the percussion just hanging in the air.

We moved on to some various jazz cuts and again, the presentation was very realistic. These days digital is getting a LOT more convincing, so if I'm going to go through the analog ritual, it better be fantastic. I assure you that what I heard was some of the best analog sound I've heard anywhere.

I'm Fussy and Demanding

I want it all, especially when you start talking about four figure cartridges and five figure turntables. I want weight, dynamics and tonality. You can tell that the SG-1 was designed by a man that knows music, because this turntable has it all.

You can see from the photo (taken by Mr. Perkins, also a very capable photographer) that the SG-1 is a visual as well as an aural work of art. We are more excited than before to do a full review of this true analog masterpiece. I urge you to seek this one out and listen for yourself. The SG-1 is now available to ship and the SG-2 prototype has been completed. It will be premiering at the 2007 Tokyo High End Audio Show. ●

You can reach Immedia at:

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510-559-2050



Control Flexibility With The Manley Skipjack

By Jerald O'Brien

Vintage amplifiers are a lot like old houses. Old houses don't have enough outlets and old amplifiers don't have enough inputs. In the 50s and 60s, the average audiophile had a turntable and maybe a tuner or tape recorder. They didn't have two turntables, a CD player, iPod, etc., etc. So what do you do when you spend a year restoring your favorite vintage amplifier with TLC and it dawns on you that you can't plug half of your stuff into it?



Call Manley And Buy A Skipjack...

Problem solved dude. (or dudette) Don't freak out at the price. I know the Skipjack costs 900 bucks but it is a super high-quality switching box. You could buy a crappy one at Radio Shack for 80 bucks, but it would suck. Come on, you audiophile wussies, step up to the plate and spend some money! And who better to give your hard earned cash to than EveAnna Manley, right?

This thing is built like a tank. It weighs more than any of the 900 watt surround receivers at Best Buy and most of the budget CD players I've owned. The Skipjack is stylishly finished in that nice dark blue color that covers all other Manley gear. Should you happen to be the proud owner of other Manley gear, it will fit right in. Even if you don't own other Manley products, the Skipjack is small enough to fit behind a rack should you want to conceal it.

The Skipjack is a high quality switcher that allows you to go from four inputs to one, or three inputs down to two. For me, four into one is the

way to go. If you are a reviewer, or have a wall of tape decks to listen to, the Skipjack will really come in handy. It effortlessly goes about its business. You have four backlit buttons on the back to switch between inputs. The lazy ones can use the cabled remote that looks like the trigger they used to use in that scary portrait studio where we all got our high school year-book pictures taken.

This is a particularly cool device because you can shut up your wanker audiophile friends with it. That's right, attach a different pair of interconnects to each input and make them guess which one is which while you switch randomly from the comfort of your Lazy Boy. Or make your girlfriend remove a piece of clothing everytime she can't identify which recording of her favorite Rick Springfield record is which. You get the picture.

Regardless of how you use the Manley Skipjack, once you have one, you will wonder how the heck you ever got along without it. ●

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The TTVJ Portable Millett Hybrid Amp

By Marc Phillips

If you're like me, someone the objectivists call a tube and vinyl bigot, you're still not completely sold on the basic iPod sound. Whenever I listen to mine, I'm instantly transported back 25 years when I owned a Sony CDP-101, the first and possibly worst-sounding CD player ever made. And while it has been many years since I've heard first-generation digital playback, I'm instantly reminded of such terms as haze, glare and grain whenever I plug in to its more modern and infinitely smaller counterpart.



So what are your choices?

I've tried using the best cans available (am I the only person in the world who has used a pair of Grado GS1000s on the matchbook-sized iPod Shuffle?), and I'm still not quite impressed. And I'm not sure if I'm committed enough to my aging iPod Mini to send it to Red Wine Audio for the excellent iMod. There's only other option... a portable amplifier.

That's where the TTVJ Portable Millett Hybrid Amp comes in. TTVJ, for those who haven't figured it out yet, stands for Todd the Vinyl Junkie, the stalwart online analog purveyor. The Millett is Todd's first amp, and he's mighty proud of it. Just slightly larger than your average iPod (it's almost exactly the size and shape of a whiskey flask), the Millett uses those miniature tubes formerly used by the military for their portable radios. And since these tubes only draw about 15 milliamps of power, one battery charge is good for an astounding 40 hours of use.

I started off by connecting the Millett to

my iPod Mini via an ALOAudio Cryo Dock cable, and alternating between my Grado GS1000 headphones, and the ALOAudio-modified Grado SR225 headphones I reviewed last issue. Aside from the gain that the TTVJ amp supplied, I heard virtually no sonic differences between the cans being jacked into the Millett and being jacked directly into my iPod. While the increase in

gain would certainly be useful for anyone wanting to drive a wide variety of headphones, \$459 is certainly a high price to pay for that option.

Fortunately there just happened to be an iPod at the TONE mother ship that has just had the stellar Red Wine Audio iMod upgrade. This is by far one of the best portable sources we've yet to hear. This completely changed the experience.

With the Grado GS1000s plugged directly into the iMod player, I experienced a warm and inviting sound that was easily the best I have heard yet from this particular format. Both compressed and lossless files were far superior to

anything I'd heard on either the iPod Mini or Shuffle. Once I plugged the iMod into the Millett, however, the differences became fairly obvious. The TTVJ sounded much more laid back and relaxed than the iMod alone, with a less aggressive and forward presentation. On Radiohead's Kid A, for example, I was able to hear more deeply into the mix without being jarred by sudden dynamic contrasts. As a result, I felt more relaxed, and was able to space out more easily, which for me is the main purpose of 'phone listening.

This warmth and ease of presentation was consistent song after song, from "Deacon Blues" to "Living for the City" to "The Ballad of El Goodo." I even caught myself rockin' out to Van Halen's "Everybody Wants Some," something I haven't done since...uh, when did that album get released, anyway? This overall smoothness reminded me of good vacuum tube amplification, and how it is often the antidote for less-than-stellar digital playback. Along with the Fatman iTube amplifier, this might be the easiest way for tube and vinyl lovers to enjoy their iPods. *(continued)*

This is by far one of the best portable sources we've yet to hear. This completely changed the experience.



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)

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* with USB input and volume control

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I did experience one small glitch with the Millett.

Whenever I set the unit down on a hard surface, I could hear a high-pitched resonance through the headphones, sort of a ring, which would be the same if you set your tube preamp down on the counter while it was playing. The ringing would occasionally last for more than a minute, depending upon the impact. The TTVJ does come with a quartet of those small sticky-back clear rubber feet, which did ameliorate most of the ringing. But this may be a problem if you want to place both your iPod and the Millett in a carrying case where both units may come into contact with each other. In other words, you may have to place some padding around the amp and I would suggest a little TLC wherever you place it down because of the tubes inside.

Other than this small caveat, I enjoyed my time with the TTVJ Millett amp. I don't think it will transform lesser portable players, as I found out with my iPod Mini. But if you already have a capable iPod set-up, the Millett will take full advantage of the upgraded source. And let's not forget the Millett's ability to drive every type of headphone out there. I had just as good a time with the AKG 701's, Sennheiser 600/650's and even our publishers vintage Koss Pro 4aa's!

The TTVJ Portable Millett Hybrid amp provided a compelling reason for me to upgrade my own iPod, and to re-direct my focus on the format. Now I just need to find a way to avoid looking like a hopeless audio dork when I wear my big Grados during air travel...

Slummin'

By Jeff Dorgay

More goodies for you this issue! Ever vigilant, I am always on the lookout for cool hifi bargains on the cheap. Some days it's great to unpack a mega CD player, but on others it's great to steal a bargain on EBay or at a garage sale. My favorite phrase always works:

"Nobody listens to this junk anymore, *come on!*"

Those eight words will almost always intimidate someone into dropping their price way down. And if it doesn't work, move on. There is definitely someone at the next garage sale that will buckle under pressure.

ADS 2002 Speakers — Garage Sale \$20

This was an amazing find and I didn't have to haggle at all. Sometimes when you find a killer deal on something special, just pay the price; sometimes when you try to haggle for that last five bucks, the garage sale chaperone will chase you out of there! I just paid the money and headed for the hills.

Now this is what I call a mini monitor. Back in the late 70s a pair of these cost 300 dollars and they were built like tanks. The little four-inch woofers have rubber surrounds, so you don't have to worry about refoaming. Don't crank these little speakers too far because I have no idea where you can get replacement drivers...

If you have a small space that needs some sound, this is the ticket! They are particularly good with that little Advent receiver in the front of the magazine.





Technics SA-9010 Parametric Equalizer — EBay \$72

Now here's a word that is strictly verboten in audiophile circles, equalizer. (Wait until you see what I've got cooked up for next issue!) I had one of these in college and it did a great job at polishing my Cerwin – Vega speakers from the turds that they were into halfway decent sounding speakers. My neighbor, the radio engineer even commented that **“I was indeed on to something.”**

You won't see this lump jacked into the external processor loop of my ACT 2 any time soon, but in my garage system, *woo hoo!* I dare you to get one. ●

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

Acoustic Sounds: www.acousticsounds.com

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

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

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Maxtor: www.maxtor.com

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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

Rega: www.soundorg.com

Running Springs Audio: www.runningspringsaudio.com

Salagar Speakers: www.salagar.com

Shunyata: www.shunyata.com

Sooloos: www.sooloos.com

Todd The Vinyl Junkie: www.ttvj.com

Upscale Audio: www.upscaleaudio.com

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Wadia: www.wadia.com