

# TONEAudio.

A full-page photograph of Brad Paisley playing a pink and orange paisley electric guitar. He is wearing a white cowboy hat, a dark t-shirt with a graphic, and a dog tag necklace. The background is dark with blue stage lights.

The e-journal of analog  
and digital sound.

no.21

2009

**ACM's  
Male Vocalist of the Year**

## Brad Paisley

Plays to a Full House

**GERMAN PRECISION:  
THE BURMESTER 082  
AND 016**

**IRON MAIDEN MADNESS**  
From Bob Gendron

**THE VINYL ANACHRONIST**  
Samples the 540P and 640P  
From Cambridge Audio

**McIntosh's New MCD500**

**Anne Farnsworth covers  
Keith Jarrett (and lives  
to tell us about it!)**

**TOP DRAWER ANALOG:**  
THE NAIM SUPERLINE  
WITH SUPERCAP 2

**MORE GEAR,  
MORE MUSIC!**



**PUBLISHER** Jeff Dorgay

**EDITOR** Bob Golfen

**ART DIRECTOR** Jean Dorgay

**MUSIC EDITOR** Ben Fong-Torres

**ASSISTANT  
MUSIC EDITOR** Desi Day

**MUSIC  
VISIONARY** Terry Currier

**SENIOR  
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR** Marc Phillips

**STYLE EDITOR** Scott Tetzlaff

**CONTRIBUTING  
WRITERS** Kurt Doslu  
Anne Farnsworth  
Bob Gendron  
Joe Golfen  
Rich Kent  
Ken Kessler  
Rick Moore  
Jerold O'Brien  
Michele Rundgren  
Todd Sageser  
Richard Simmons  
Randy Wells

**UBER CARTOONIST** Liza Donnelly

**ADVERTISING** Jeff Dorgay

**WEBSITE** bloodymonster.com

Cover Photo of Brad Paisley  
By Jeff Dorgay



**tonepublications.com**

Editor Questions and  
Comments:

tonepub@yahoo.com  
800.432.4569

© 2009 TONE MAGAZINE, LLC  
All rights reserved.

TONE **A2** NO.21 2009

SARASTRO II SM1262  
VERITY AUDIO  
Designed & Manufactured in Quebec (Canada) Canada

**VERITY AUDIO**

www.verityaudio.com





72



14

# CONTENTS

## features

10 Old School: **Bringing Back the Naim NAIT 3R**  
*By Marc Phillips*

14 Budget Gear: **Anthem's Integrated 225**  
*By Jerold O'Brien*

45 The Vinyl Anachronist: **Cambridge Audio's Phono Preamplifier – Respect Yourself**  
*By Marc Phillips*

55 Maiden Flight: **The Premiere of Iron Maiden's Flight 666**  
*By Bob Gendron*

72 Caelin Gabriel of **Shunyata Takes Us for a Tour of Their Facility**  
*By Jeff Dorgay*

7. NEW CONTRIBUTORS

8. PUBLISHER'S LETTER

9. TONE TOON  
*By Liza Donnelly*





64

# CONTENTS

## tone style

63 **Metallica's M4 Jacket**  
**Warm Up and Rock**  
*By Jerold O'Brien*

64 **Chrysler's GEM Peapod**  
**Finally, a Car for Your iPod**  
*By Jeff Dorgay*

65 **Cool Tees: Celebrate**  
**With Some Fresh Gear**  
*By Marc Phillips*

66 **The Olympus E-30**  
**You Can't Always Get**  
**What You Want**  
*By Jeff Dorgay*

70 **Metal Ring Tones of Death,**  
**Ray-Ban Wayfarer Sunglasses**  
**And a Caffeine Boost via the**  
**Butterfinger Buzz**  
*By the Tone Staff*

71 **Sonic Lighter: Raise Your**  
**Favorite Flame With This App**  
*By Jerold O'Brien*



63



71



# 19 Brad Paisley

(on the cover)



# CONTENTS

## music

- 19. LIVE MUSIC:** The TONE Staff Covers Recent Shows by Brad Paisley, India.Arie, John Scofield, Spinal Tap, Chick Corea, Calexico and Keith Jarrett
- 31. CURRENT RELEASES:** Fresh Releases in the Pop/Rock World  
*By the TONE Staff*
- 50. CLUB MIX:** A New Crop of Beats From Some Favorites and the New Guys on the Scene  
*By Scott Tetzlaff*
- 57. AUDIOPHILE RECORDINGS:** Pearl Jam, Marshall Crenshaw, Sonny Rollins, Otis Span, John Hammond, Black Sabbath, Louis Armstrong and John Coltrane  
*By Jeff Dorgay and Marc Philips*

# 28

Keith Jarrett  
Jack DeJohnette  
Gary Peacock



Page 43

**Keith Emerson Band**  
*Featuring Marc Bonilla*





87

96



# CONTENTS

## reviews

- 79. The Burmester 061 CD Player**  
**Art for the Ears Indeed**  
*By Jeff Dorgay*
- 87. A Perfect Balance:**  
**Burmester's 082 Integrated**  
*By Jeff Dorgay*
- 96. The PNB Audio Groove Master**  
*By Jeff Dorgay*
- 104. McMini: The McIntosh MC252**  
**Power Amplifier**  
*By Rich Kent*
- 111. Analog Mountain Top: The Naim**  
**SuperLine Phono Preamplifier**  
*By Jeff Dorgay*
- 120. An Affordable Reference From Furutech**  
*By Jeff Dorgay*
- 127. AV123 X-Head Headphone Amplifier**  
*By Marc Phillips*
- 130. Boxless Beauty: The Gradient**  
**Helsinki Series 1.5 Loudspeaker**  
*By Marc Phillips*
- 138. Multipurpose Digital:**  
**The McIntosh MCD500**  
*By Jeff Dorgay*
- 145. An Ear Opener From Rega**  
**The Exact 2**  
*By Jeff Dorgay*
- 149. SLUMMIN' Eartha Kitt and Gear Classics**
- 151. Manufacturers Index**

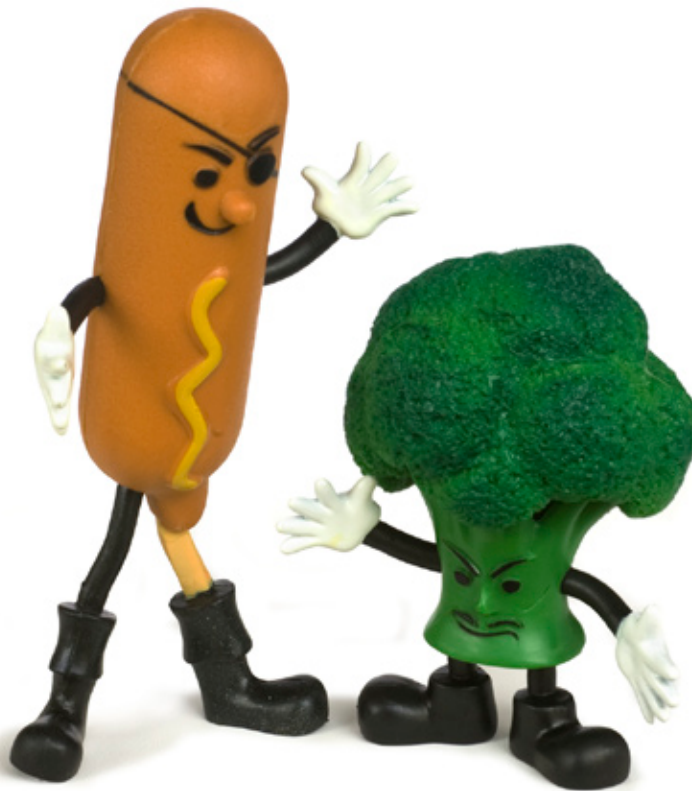


# CONTRIBUTORS

## new in tone this issue

### BOB GENDRON

**A** music critic for more than a decade, Bob Gendron is a frequent contributor to the *Chicago Tribune* and the author of the 33 1/3 series book on the Afghan Whigs' *Gentlemen* album. He formerly served as the longtime Music Editor for *The Absolute Sound* and has written for *Rollingstone.com*, *Downbeat*, *The Source*, and various other outlets. In his spare time, the native Chicagoan enjoys going to concerts, watching and playing sports, and listening to too much heavy metal.



Captain Corndog vs. Baron Von Broccoli  
**Only One Can Remain at the Top of the Food Chain!**

[www.accoutrements.com](http://www.accoutrements.com)

## new on the web

### FOLLOW US ON TWITTER!

Now that we are publishing new content on the TONE website on a daily basis, you can tune in via Twitter. If you want to know the minute we have new gear and music reviews, blog posts and concert coverage as well as our daily playlist, featuring what's playing on our Sooloos music server first thing in the morning - join us.

Just go to: <http://twitter.com/ToneAudio> and sign up to follow us. Stay informed!

### RACHELLE RAMM (on the web)

**R**achelle Ramm calls San Francisco home, but spends a lot of time on both coasts performing with her own band and hanging out with her friends in the world of heavy metal. Check out her live coverage of Zakk Wylde's Black Label Society show in NYC in the "On Tour" section of the TONEAudio website:

[www.tonepublications.com/on-tour](http://www.tonepublications.com/on-tour)

You can find out more about Rachelle at:  
[www.rachelleramm.com](http://www.rachelleramm.com)



# PUBLISHER'S LETTER

---



## **Just Say No to Your Audiophile Sensibilities**

**A**lways a little late to the party when it comes to movies, I finally saw Jim Carey's *Yes Man* the other night. As my favorite South Park character Kyle likes to say, "I've learned something here." Actually, I've learned a few things.

While I certainly understand that one can't just throw caution to the wind and say yes to everything, I think the audiophiles in the audience should throw caution to the wind more than they do. I realize that for some of you, the true joy in our wacky audiophile world is the chase; the constant upgrades and tweaks are what give you the rush you need to stay in the game and all of our advertisers certainly thank you for that.

However, I think some of us forget what a truly amazing thing a good music system really is. There are only a few things in this life that can completely disconnect you from our over-connected world as can a great musical experience in your listening room.

## **So get out there and experience more of it!**

I suggest spending your next few listening sessions with music that you know nothing about and see where it takes you. A perfect case in point was my encounter with Brad Paisley for this issue. Any of you who know me personally know that I'd rather swallow a Metallica CD whole than listen to country music. But thanks to our writer in Nashville, Rick Moore, I'm now a fan.

He called to tell me one afternoon, "I know you're not into this kind of thing, but just pick up a copy of *Play*. I really think you'll like it." I don't think I'll be trading in my BMW on a pickup truck just yet, but after seeing Brad Paisley live, I'm *definitely* a fan.

## **Here are a few other methods that can help:**

Peruse your friends' CD collections and ask to borrow five things on their shelves that you've never heard of. That's how I discovered Kruder & Dorfmeister years ago, and this has led me down a long path of related artists that I would have missed otherwise.

Go to your favorite record or CD store and buy some albums with intriguing art on the covers. After more than 35 years of buying records, I'm still batting about 85 percent with this approach, but it helped me to find Graham Parker, Brand X and Supreme Beings of Leisure. And many more.

If you don't want to go cold turkey, listen to your new discoveries while you are cooking or cleaning out the garage. You might be surprised what creeps up on you when you least expect it.

The worst thing that can happen is that the warhorses in your collection might gather some dust for a while. They will sound that much better when you come back to them.





DOWHELLY

*"I could downsize, but it would involve a divorce!"*





# Naim NAIT 3R

By Marc Phillips

**M**y love for British hi-fi can be traced directly to a Naim NAIT 2 that I purchased back in 1992. This little integrated amplifier, rated at between 15 and 21 watts per channel, taught me that power ratings were relative, and that a modest amp could sound more musical than the big 100wpc Japanese amplifier that it replaced. The only real flaw with the wonderful-sounding NAIT 2 was its inability to play large symphonic pieces and loud rock 'n' roll with any sort of authority. When pushed too far, the tiny Naim would break down, and its soundstage would collapse, sounding like an old Zenith console television.





### More Power

The NAIT 3, introduced in 1993, now had 30 watts per channel so that it could be compatible with a broader range of speakers. The unit we have here is actually the 3R, a remote-controlled version, released a couple of years later. To my surprise, this 14-year-old unit could actually be controlled with our publishers R-Com remote. When it comes to promoting brand loyalty through these kinds of details, Naim is certainly a leader in the industry.

The 3R brought back a wave of nostalgia since it uses the same case as the CD3 CD player I used for over a decade. I had a brief chuckle at the input marked “VCR” on the front panel, but I also sighed at the lack of one marked “PHONO,” which was present on my NAIT 2. (That was a killer little MM section, too.) If your NAIT 3 was blessed with a phono stage, the AUX button was replaced with one marked PHONO.

While the phono stage uses standard RCA jacks, the rest of the inputs will require DIN cables. Fortunately I still have some Naim DIN cables from the old days, so I could get right to listening; and I had the Shanling CD-T1500 CD player and my Lehmann Audio Black Cube phono preamplifier connected straight away. The speaker connections only offer one choice; banana plugs. During the Vereker years when the Nait 3 was made, there was only one choice of speaker cable too. If you didn’t hook up your speakers with Naim issued NACA5 cable, your warranty was void as this cable was one of the only ones that would properly load the output stage. Luckily, I still had a pair of these hanging around.

I couldn’t help but crack a huge smile as the Naim logo on the front panel started glowing that familiar shade of green, and I settled in for several enjoyable listening sessions. *(continued)*



**If your NAIT 3 was blessed with a phono stage, the AUX button was replaced with one marked PHONO.**



# See in a new way.



© Craig Tanner

**Lensbaby 3G™**



Lensbaby 3G—the newest member of our family—lets you lock your lens in a bent position, then fine focus. Explore the possibilities of our latest selective focus SLR lens at [lensbabies.com](http://lensbabies.com).

**bend • lock • fine focus**



another simple idea from  
**Lensbabies™**

The NAIT 3R was made during the “old Naim” days when PRaT (Pace, rhythm and Timing) ruled the day, meaning soundstaging and imaging were a lesser priority in the name of toe-tapping rhythms and tonal accuracy. While that certainly isn’t as bad as it sounds, Naim loyalists know that in the 21st century, you can have it all, but many still enjoy the vintage Naim sound too. The soundstage depth of the NAIT 3R was fairly shallow and sounded like my Harbeth 40.1s had been pushed against the back wall. Imaging suffered slightly, with everything sounding more blurred and forward than with my reference gear.

**The NAIT 3R’s strong suit was the way it presented acoustic musical instruments, with excellent tonality.**

Just like my NAIT 2, this is a fantastic amp for listening to intimate jazz and chamber music. You can easily hear the woodiness of various cellos, and the sensation of air being forced from the chest cavity of singers during loud passages. Hauling out my old faithful Spondor S20’s that I used to use with my NAIT 2, I noticed how the NAIT 3 could be played considerably louder before clipping set in. Though nowhere near as authoritative as the Monitor 40.1’s, I was still able to turn up the volume without the size and scope of the music folding in on itself.

If you’re using a pair of older BBC monitors from Rogers, Spondor or Harbeth, I think that this NAIT will make an excellent mate, especially if you are a PRaT junkie and crave it on a regular basis.  
*(continued)*



**It's no secret that most of the popular British speakers offer good synergy with past and current vintage Naim electronics.**

Originally selling for \$1,600, the unit you see here is available at Echo Audio in Portland, Oregon for \$695. A quick check of Audiogon and EBay proves this to be right on the money for a clean Nait 3R. While Naim gear has an excellent reputation for long term reliability, these are getting somewhat long in the tooth, so if you really love this sound, budget for a recap sometime in the next few years. This will probably set you back about another \$250, but well worth it and should give you another 20 years of excellent performance. ●

**Publishers Note:** Should you be more curious about vintage Naim gear, their website features a forum with some very knowledgeable Naim owners that can point you in the right direction.

<http://forums.naim-audio.com/eve>



*www.ZuAudio.com*



ANTHEM INTEGRATED 225



# Anthem's Integrated 225

By Jerold O'Brien





In today's economy, everyone is on the lookout for value, and the Integrated 225 from Anthem is a refreshing treat for the audiophile that craves a lot of power but needs to keep an eye on the bottom line. The \$1,495 gets you a full-featured integrated amplifier with tone controls, a built-in headphone amp and a phono stage packed into a beefy 47-pound box. I loved the McIntosh MC7000 that we had in for review, but we can't all play at this level. I've tried a few of the British integrated amplifiers in the \$3,000 range with good luck, but I'm power crazed and I really like to rock – I want big power.

Sure a Rega Brio or vintage Naim Nait 2 has more tonal richness, but they won't blast. If your tastes mirror mine and you want some real giddyup on a budget, the Integrated 225 might be your ticket to ride, with 225 watts per channel into 8 ohms at your disposal.

### Very Flexible

While not possessing the bevy of inputs and outputs of the Mac, the Integrated 225 is still well-equipped with four traditional single-ended RCA high-level inputs and a balanced input, along with a MM phono input. There is also a monitor input with fixed level output, plus a variable output for those with multiple power amplifiers or powered subwoofers. Also included is a 12V trigger and an RS-232 control interface. There is one set of speaker binding posts that will accommodate spade lugs and bananas, which is good for an amplifier at this price point. An IEC socket offers those seeking more performance the option to upgrade. While it would be defeating the budget gear concept to suggest a mega power cord with this amplifier, I did notice a step up in presentation by tossing the stock power cord into my giant cable box of doom and installing one of Shunyata's \$99 Venom power cords. *(continued)*





### Power to Spare

The Integrated 225 has a lot of juice, so you should not have a difficult time with any speaker that might be in your system; it even did a great job with our publishers' set of Magnepan 1.6's, which are notoriously power hungry.

The tonal balance is slightly forward, so the only speakers that did not marry well were my reference AV123 Strata Minis. In all fairness, I have a room that is a bit bright and I tend to prefer tubes, so for me, this was not the best combination. Moving along to my Vandersteen 2Ce signatures was just what the doctor ordered. The power and control of the Integrated 225 drove my 2Ce's better than anything I've heard at twice the price.

Though you will never mistake this amplifier for something with glowing bottles inside, it does have a very neutral midband that is free of the graininess usually on the menu in the \$1,500 price range. When listening to my favorite female vocalists, the presentation was clean enough that I could easily forget about the gear and get into the music. *(continued)*

---

The power and control of the Integrated 225 drove my 2Ce's better than anything I've heard at twice the price.





What really made this amplifier shine was the power on tap. Whether I was listening to Wolfmother or Wagner, the Anthem amp gave me the necessary range to really enjoy music with large dynamic swings. The soundstage was also very wide, and when listening to “Home” on David Byrne’s latest, *Everything That Happens Will Happen Today*, all of Brian Eno’s trippy sounds were floating all over my room. Same thing with the plucked guitar intro to “Time Precious Time” from Lindsey Buckingham’s *Gift of Screws* – the soundfield was enormous.

The extra power comes in handy when you really want to rock the house, but even at low levels, this contributes to the overall ease that the Anthem projected, which the 50 wpc integrations can’t touch, and that is this amplifier’s trump card.

### Join the Vinyl Revolution

If you are one of the many people who are considering getting back into vinyl, the Integrated 225 would be an asset, as the onboard MM phono stage is very good and certainly equal to whatever modestly priced turntable you might add. Using my Rega P3 and the company’s Technics SL-1200, I added the modestly priced Shure M97 cartridge and Rega’s Bias 2 (on the P3) which can be a torture test for a phono stage because of its 7mv output.

The Rega Cartridge was no problem for the Anthem’s phono stage and was my favorite combination, adding that bit of warmth that I prefer. If you are a vinyl enthusiast, this makes the Integrated 225 an even bigger value because the phono stage is easily equal to an external unit purchased in the \$175-250 range. *(continued)*

---

What really made this amplifier shine was the power on tap.



NEW

# FOCAL XS<sup>®</sup>

2.1 MULTIMEDIA SOUND SYSTEM



Just because you aren't a multi-million dollar recording studio does not mean you can't sound like one.

**\$599**

**FOCAL**  
the Spirit of Sound

## FEATURE

You can only expect so much of a phono stage at this level, but what impressed me about the Anthem was its extremely low noise floor.

### Head of the Class

Chrysler's ex-CEO Lee Iacocca used to say, "If you can find a better car, buy it." I think that applies well to Anthem's Integrated 225. If you are looking for a powerful integrated and need to keep a close eye on the bottom line, I can't think of a better choice that will give you high power and this level of functionality. ●

[www.anthemav.com](http://www.anthemav.com)





# Brad Paisley

**The Rose Garden**

Portland, Oregon

**February 27, 2009**

Text and Photos by  
Jeff Dorgay

**A** recent convert to Brad Paisley's music, I was not prepared for the live experience. As I was escorted past Paisley's collection of the 40 guitars he had lined up immediately behind stage for tonight's performance, I had the feeling I was in for something special. When the lights came up, I saw a stage filled end to end with a wall of amplifiers that would put KISS to shame.





Paisley opened the show with “Mud on the Tires,” with the stage a backdrop for the video that went along with the song. A few songs later, he had some footage of Keith Urban on the screen accompanying him in “Start a Band,” from his current album, *Play*. The set went just over two hours, with almost a half hour encore. Though this show was only six dates away from the end of this leg of the Paisley Party Tour (it started up again on April 25) Paisley and his band played at such a high level of enthusiasm, you could have sworn the tour started only days before.

A gracious host, Paisley took a few minutes to thank the crowd for attending, “especially in these tough economic times.” He quickly moved on: **“Enough of that,” he declared. “Let’s have some fun!”** The band took a break while Paisley went down the center stage runway to play a few acoustic tunes, ending with “Layla.”

This was an interesting choice, because Eric Clapton is the guitarist I’d compare Brad Paisley to; he plays with the same level of economy and delicacy that few other contemporary guitarists can match. Paisley let his playing shine through in an understated way, always trading licks with his band, The Drama Kings. If your guitar heroes include Beck, Clapton and Page, here’s another guy to add to your list.

Country fan or not, you owe it to yourself to see Brad Paisley. I’ve seen few performers who’ve offered up such a high level of musicianship along with a healthy dose of fun.





# India.Arie

**The Kiss and Fly Club**

New York, New York

**February 10, 2009**

By Brian Hughes





# Get More Ben

TV  
LANDLike a *Rolling Stone*

## Music of the TV Generation

by **Ben Fong-Torres**

(former senior editor at Rolling Stone)


[www.tvland.com](http://www.tvland.com)

India.Arie was classy, outspoken and soulful as ever, performing at the Kiss and Fly club, in the Meatpacking District of Manhattan. This small club, in-the-round setting gave the audience an intimate perspective on Ms. Arie's newest work, as she played tracks from her fourth studio album, *Testimony: Vol. 2 – Love and Politics*, from Universal Republic Records.

Warning that she was about to go into a rant, Arie broke out her anti-Bush White House rocker, "Better Way." Labeling it "anti-Bush" limits the scope of the song, which tackles issues like "children on TV ... glorifying their bodies," Hurricane Katrina, and drug abuse.

**Arie manages a motivating style that doesn't cross the line and get preachy.**

Reggae star Gramps Morgan joined Arie on "Therapy," her second single from the new album, and then thanked two of the most important women in her life—her mother, Joyce Simpson (a jazz vocalist, songwriter and actress), and Sade. She explained that Sade introduced her to the African continent, transforming her life. She then dedicated "Pearls," a song about female suffering in Africa, to Sade. Next up was a song co-written by her mother, "Long Goodbye," which showcased Arie's vocal strength, as she soared over a powerful melody.

Arie closed the show with "Brown Skin," and the audience responded with smiles all around. India.Arie is a bright, passionate singer; a comforting throwback to the heyday of R&B.



# John Scofield

**Portland Art Museum**

Portland, Oregon

**February 14, 2009**

Text and Photo by Jeff Dorgay

John Scofield has played a wide range of jazz styles over his career and showed no signs of slowing down at this show at the Portland Art Museum, which was part of the Portland Jazz Festival. The sold-out crowd of 500 people was so vocal in its enthusiastic support for Scofield, he paused a few times to laugh and say thanks.

Though his new album, *Piety Street* is a blues record, this evening's performance was a mixture of straight-ahead jazz and some experimental guitar excursions. If I didn't know better, I'd swear that Adrian Belew had merged with his consciousness as Kathleen Turner did with Steve Martin in *The Man With Two Brains*, as Scofield effortlessly took off on some very free form solos that were heavy on effects.

This evening's performance was mostly the John Scofield Trio, featuring Bill Stewart on drums and Max Penman on bass, occasionally joined by Joe Lovano on sax. Scofield took right off with Charlie Parker's "Wee," and for a minute, I thought he had lost the other two players in the first solo, with his guitar just exploding.

By the second tune, the band found its groove, doing a psychedelic version of "Satisfaction." Emphasizing the 'stone' in the Stones song, Scofield extended his orbit once again on a feedback-filled excursion that included as much work with the effects pedal as he did on the fretboard.

I've seen Scofield quite a few times now, and the best part of his shows is his unpredictable nature. You never know what to expect from this innovative player. This evening, a great performance, in a room possessing good acoustics, with an engineer maintaining a tasteful volume level, added up to a concert to remember.



# Spinal Tap

**Keller Auditorium**  
Portland, Oregon

**April 19, 2009**

Text and Photo by  
Jeff Dorgay



In typical 70's rockstar fashion, "Unwigged and Unplugged" started about 20 minutes late. The Spinal Tap fans were up on their feet immediately as this trio of comic actors (who also happen to write, sing and play very funny music) launched into their acoustic set, full of tunes from Spinal Tap and The Folksmen. Christopher Guest, Michael McKean and Harry Shearer performed a two-hour set that was full of laughs, special surprises and great music.

On only the second date in the tour, the guys were already on top of their game. Their voices were strong, the harmonies spot on and all three proved to be excellent guitar players, though there were a few instances where Guest stole the show with his solos (as you would expect Nigel Tufnel to do).

They started the concert with a hearty "Hello Cleveland," instantly bonding them with the Portland audience, and went right into "Hell Hole." Bouncing back and forth seamlessly between Spinal Tap and Folksmen songs, they added some interpretive dance to a Rat Pack styled swing version of "Big Bottom" that

earned a standing ovation. Then came a folk version of "Start Me Up." McKean informed Tapheads "This is the only song of the evening that we didn't write."

They did their fair share of storytelling throughout the show and included some great video clips, including their first performance on network television and the censor's sheet from when *This is Spinal Tap* was going to be shown on network TV, with each of the band members reading alternative material that had to be edited from the movie before it could be aired at 11:30 p.m. Just when I thought I couldn't laugh any harder, they put up a YouTube video of "Tonight I'm Gonna Rock You Tonight" played by Lego characters.

(You can see it here at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zTxzvsELdDM>)

The audience went wild for "Stonehenge, and the trio ended the set with the theme song from *The Mighty Wind*. They encored with "Give Me Some Money." They got some—and more.



A photograph of Chick Corea, a man with curly grey hair and glasses, smiling and sitting at a piano. He is wearing a black leather jacket over a black t-shirt with a white graphic. His right hand is resting on the piano keys, and his left hand is resting on the piano's frame. The background is dark and out of focus, showing some musical equipment.

# Chick Corea and John McLaughlin: Five Peace Band

**Royce Hall, UCLA**  
Los Angeles, California

**March 19, 2009**

By Anne Farnsworth

**C**hick Corea must be in a nostalgic mood. Less than a year after reuniting jazz/rock juggernaut Return To Forever for a triumphant world tour, he's touring with another former band mate, long-time friend and fusion icon, Mahavishnu John McLaughlin. Last March, they tore the roof off UCLA's Royce Hall, driving the capacity crowd into frenzied roars and standing ovations before, during and after tunes, for nearly three hours. Midway through, I seriously wondered, How many layers of awesomeness can the human central nervous system withstand?

The co-leaders have enlisted three all-stars to fill out the Five Peace Band — saxophonist Kenny Garrett, bassist Christian McBride and drummer Vinnie Colaiuto (who is alternating dates with Brian Blade). Over the years, breathless label reps and publicists have worn out the honorific 'supergroup,' but, in this case, you can't disagree. As fellow music critic Scott Yanow remarked during intermission, "When Kenny Garrett is one of the mere mortals on the stage..."

Garrett, an outstanding post-bop horn player who shares Miles alumnus status with Corea and McLaughlin, would be the focal point in any other combination. He often took a guitar part on the heads, doubling with McLaughlin the fast unison lines that are a hallmark of the guitarist's compositional style. *(continued)*



# music mil-len-ni-um

a place where the music & people still matter



#9 on the List of Best Record Stores in the Country



One of America's Best Record Stores

[www.musicmillennium.com](http://www.musicmillennium.com)

3158 E. Burnside  
Portland, Oregon 97214  
Phone: (503) 231-8926

He drove his solos into the stratosphere, ripping his themes apart as if he were channeling Ornette Coleman. Christian McBride, *Rolling Stone's* Hot New Jazz Artist at 20, more recently was a member of Superbass with Ray Brown and John Clayton. Best known for his straight-ahead acoustic playing, he absolutely burns on a fretless 5-string electric. Colaiuto, who jump-started his career playing with Frank Zappa beginning in the late '70s, is also touring this year with another rock legend, Jeff Beck.

And the two old masters? Corea never disappoints, as his ideas are as complex and his technique is as sharp as ever. He played mostly a Rhodes sample with a lot of pitch bender, creating an evocative mood for those of us old enough to remember the '70's. On the spacey "Hymn to Andromeda," he switched to the grand, tapping the strings inside the piano with a drum mallet as he comped chords with his left hand. The 67-year-old McLaughlin has not lost a bit of his astonishing technical prowess. Playing a Godin guitar with fat Humbucking pickups and wearing an "I've got a secret" smile, he tore through his extended solos with lines that were intellectually brilliant yet emotionally gut-wrenching. He looks like a man with a steady pulse, but this listener's heart was pounding.

Jazz fusion, by the sheer physicality of the form, is a young man's game. In basketball, young legs keep the ball moving across the court, before it's handed off to the superstar for that miraculous 3-pointer or patented skyhook. And so it is with this outfit, the rhythm section driving the momentum and setting it up for the seasoned virtuosos to step in and deliver the *coup de grace*.



# Calexico

## Heritage Square Park

Phoenix, Arizona

**April 4, 2009**

Text by Joe Golfen

Photo by Paul Golfen

**P**hoenix audiences consider Tucson-based Calexico family, and they received a hometown welcome as they stepped onto the stage one recent Sunday evening. Their mix of traditional mariachi sounds and contemporary indie style was a perfect fit in the open air gazebo of Heritage Square Park in downtown Phoenix, as the sun set on the historic brick buildings and palm trees.

The group's size varied throughout the night, starting with a nine-man ensemble that included two drummers, a horn section and a vibraphone player, and swelling to more than 15 people on the stage towards the end of the show. To make the homage to their roots complete, Arizona mariachi legend Salvador Duran lent his booming voice and tapping boots to a few songs, offering a *grande* contrast to lead singer Joey Burns' gentle tenor.

Standout tunes included "Across the Wire," "The News About William," and "Not Even Stevie Nicks." Burns told the audience, "That one goes out to the real Stevie Nicks (a Scottsdale resident) who lives right up the street. She'll probably send me a Twitter about it."

Calexico will be playing a few more U.S. dates before heading off on a major European tour this summer.







# Keith Jarrett/Jack DeJohnette/Gary Peacock

**Royce Hall, UCLA**  
Los Angeles, California  
**March 11, 2009**  
By Anne Farnsworth

**J**azz icons Keith Jarrett, Jack DeJohnette and Gary Peacock, a/k/a The Standards Trio, are touring again in support of their latest release, *Yesterdays*. In March, they returned to UCLA's Royce Hall for the second time in a year, to the delight of loyal fans who packed the house.

I reviewed *Yesterdays* in a previous *Tone* (issue 20). In a nutshell, here are three master musicians who have played cutting-edge jazz for the last half-century, yet choose to play standards. That's right, the same Great American Songbook repertoire pounded out by "Fingers" McKey in your neighborhood piano bar.



# Gradient

Experience the Gradient  
Helsinki Series 1.5

Combining  
Finnish Style  
with Stunning  
Audio  
Performance.

www.gradient.fi  
Exclusive Distribution  
In the US:  
Fidelis AV  
603-437-4769  
www.fidelisav.com



"There's no denying that the  
Helsinki is an unconventional  
design that defies expectations"  
– Marc Phillips, TONEAudio



Snarky derision dogged their debut 26 years ago as a handful of sniffing critics tried to wrap their minds around the concept. What they didn't understand was the delicious subversion of it all. Picasso applying his genius to a paint-by-numbers picked up at the local toy store. If an artist of Jarrett's stature decides to investigate a genre mistakenly considered mundane, the very fact of his interest adds value to the form.

The aforementioned fans are well aware of Jarrett's prickly public persona; by comparison, Glenn Gould is a mugging suck-up. His audience seems to enjoy his obvious disdain of live appearance for the performance art it possibly is. If you haven't seen him in person, here are some tips: Don't come if you have a nagging cough, although Jarrett has been known to thoughtfully dispense lozenges to disruptively catarrhal listeners.

**Don't even think of taking a photo. Jarrett will cut you.**

At the very least, he may threaten to bolt for the airport (the mayor of Perugia is *still* waiting for an apology). And, most importantly, pray that he likes the piano. Because if Jarrett's not happy, nobody is.

He walks onstage loaded for bear. At the Royce concert, after the obligatory and vaguely menacing no photos/no recording admonitions (immediately followed, of course, by an audient with a death wish snapping a cell phone pic), he introduces the first selection by describing its title as "a lie." The song? "Life Is Just A Bowl Of Cherries." *(continued)*





© Sven Thielmann/ECM Records

Jarrett is your opinionated physics prof, your nutty uncle whose swagger is sheathed in social awkwardness. With his wire-rim glasses, neatly trimmed mustache and shiny gold vest, he's Gene Kelly playing a nerd, Mr. Chips clumsily courting a beauty. Jarrett doesn't so much play the piano as lunge at it, embellishing his lines with guttural vocalizations that range from infantile whimper to primal wail. His boney posterior hovers over the bench, bouncing, swaying, feet marching in time to the music. Throughout, he tosses sideward glances at the audience that are hard to decipher. Is he sharing his ecstatic experience or monitoring our behavior?

So why subject yourself, not to mention your recession-sapped entertainment dollars, to a Keith Jarrett concert? "I've already got a mother-in-law," you might think. Simply put, after all the histrionics, Jarrett and company are artists of the highest order. What the eye sees doesn't gibe with what is heard as Jarrett spins improvisatory lines that are baroquely complex, technically breathtaking, and as smooth as silk. ●

---

**What the eye sees doesn't gibe with what is heard as Jarrett spins improvisatory lines that are baroquely complex, technically breathtaking, and as smooth as silk.**



# Current Releases

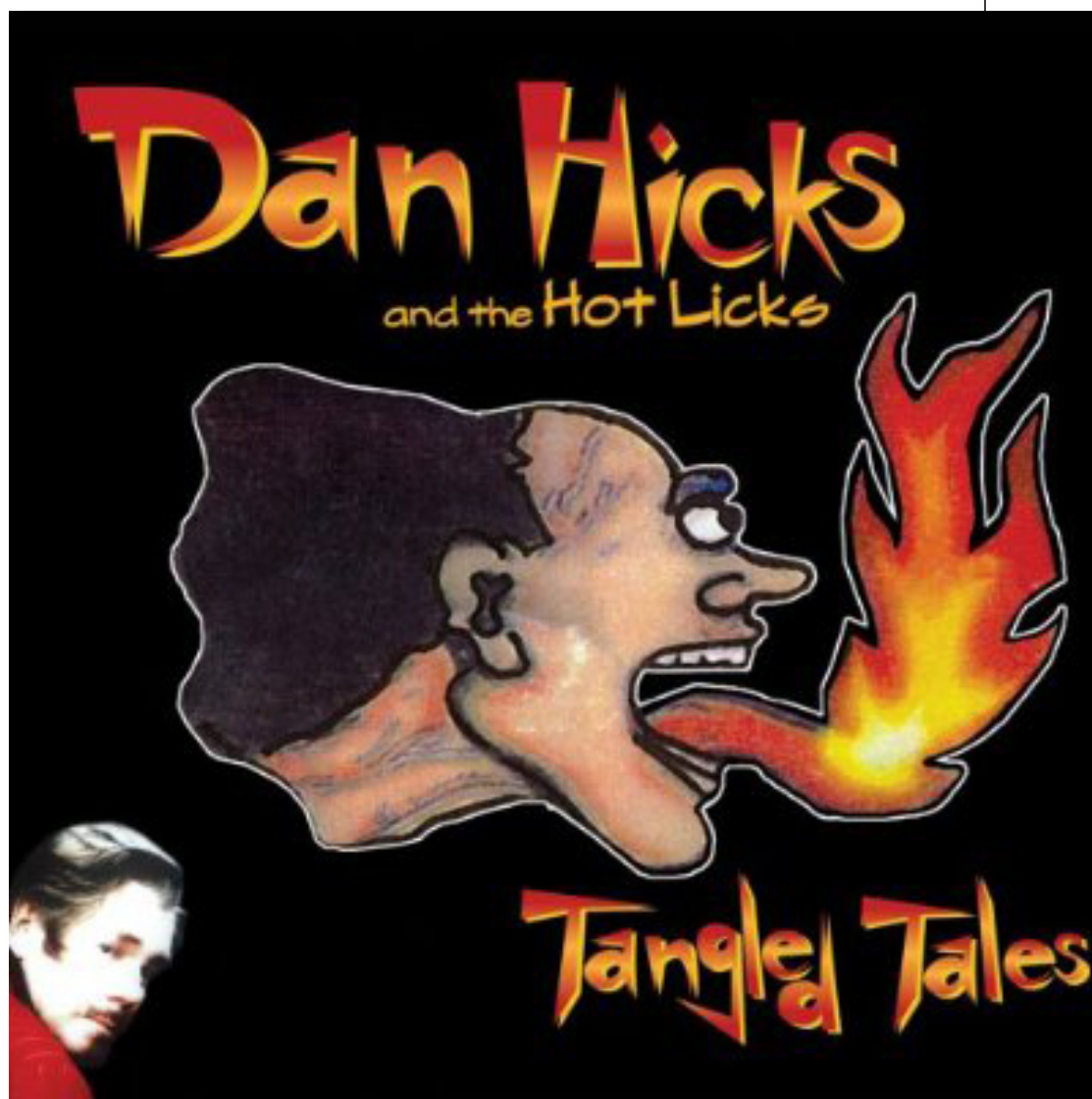
## Dan Hicks and the Hot Licks

*Tangled Tales*

Surfdog, CD and LP

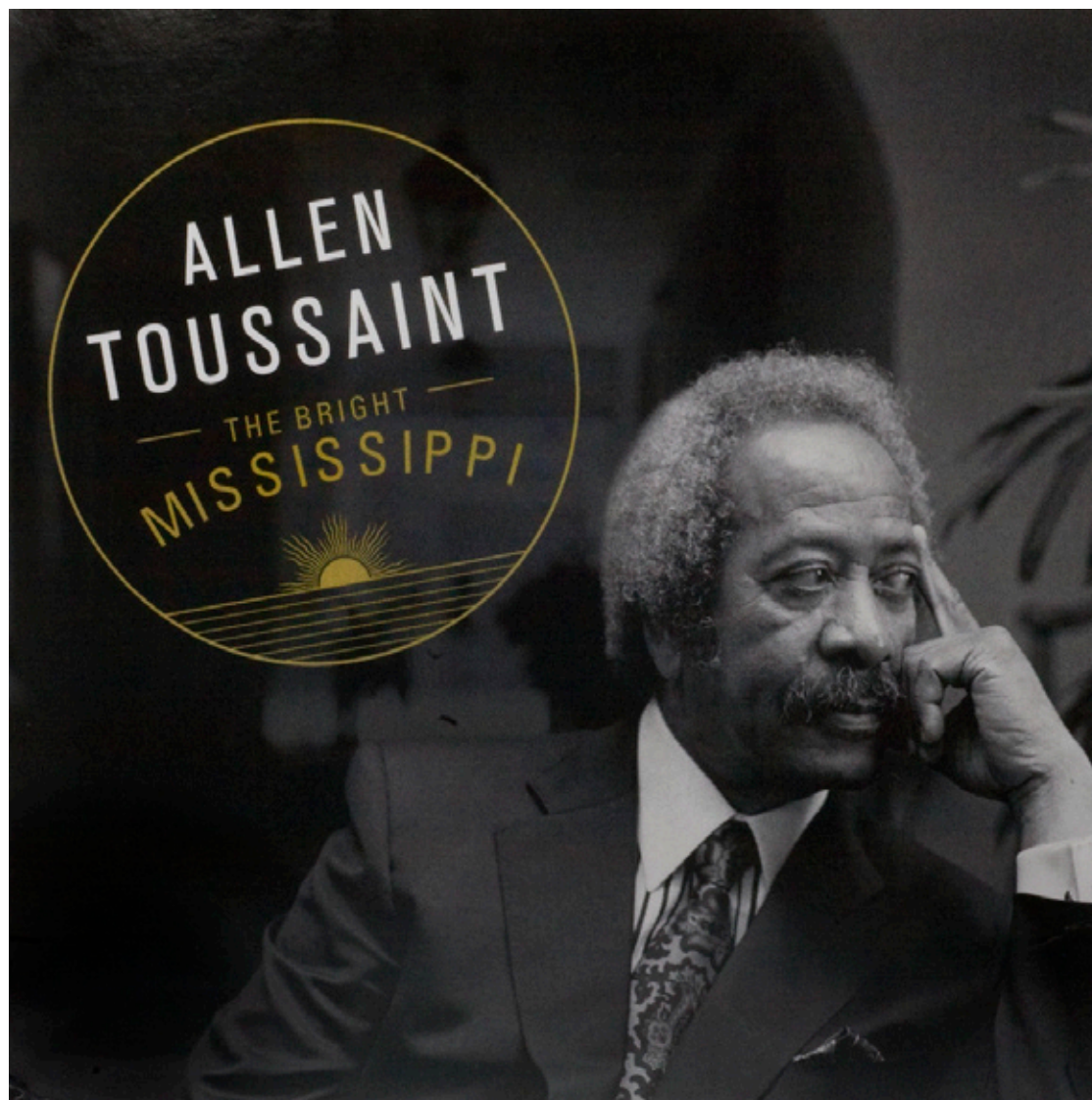
**P**retty much every band that came out of the “San Francisco scene” of the Sixties has gone the way of the waterbed, but Dan Hicks, he of the Charlatans and Dan Hicks and His Hot Licks, soldiers on. Actually, he swings on, with occasional shifts in the cast around him. The one constant, over 40 years, is the man and his hard-to-define, even tougher-to-resist music. It’s jazz and country swing, it’s Lambert, Hendricks & Ross (courtesy of chipper chirpers Roberta Donnay and Daria); it’s Grappelli and Django, plus jingles, along with witty lyrics, lovely harmonies, tight playing, and some bebop scatting that’d do Ella Fitzgerald proud. The tight players include such guests as David Grisman on mandolin, Roy Rogers on slide, Charlie Musselwhite on harmonica, and Richard Greene on violin.

Hicks, who composed such rhetorical classics as “How Can I Miss You When You Won’t Go Away?” and “Where’s the Money?”, is in top form in *Tangled Tales*, a dozen cool cuts, by turns bluesy and bouncy (including a dazzling cover of “Subterranean Homesick Blues.”) Look for the limited edition package, including both a vinyl and a compact disc, leaving only one question: Where’s the MP.3? – **Ben Fong-Torres**





## RECORDING OF SPECIAL MERIT:

**Allen Toussaint**

*The Bright Mississippi*  
Nonesuch, CD and LP

**Y**ou might not know Allen Toussaint by name. But whether you realize it or not, you're familiar with the work of this legendary New Orleans musician. "Fortune Teller" (covered by everyone from The Who and the Rolling Stones to Robert Plant and Alison Krauss), "Southern Nights" (a Number One smash by Glen Campbell), "Working in a Coal Mine" (made famous by Lee Dorsey and later rejuvenated by DEVO), and "Get Out of My Life Woman" (The Doors, Jerry Garcia Band, Paul Butterfield Blues Band) are among the classics penned by Toussaint.

The pianist also factored into the recent presidential campaign. His infectious "Yes We Can Can," a hit in 1973 for the Pointer Sisters, prominently figured in Barack Obama's run for office. Given the tune's spirited message, supporters suggested naming it the campaign's official theme song. While that didn't happen, it might have been for the best. Doing so would've been contrary to the low profile Toussaint has maintained since he began playing professionally more than five decades ago.

Content to spend most of his career behind the scenes in the studio, where, in addition to songwriting, arranging, and session work, he produced hit records for the likes of Labelle (check the credits on the gay-pride anthem "Lady Marmalade") and Dr. John (*Right Place, Wrong Time*). Toussaint also recorded a handful of solo albums. Yet it wasn't until Elvis Costello came calling in 2005—right after Hurricane Katrina blew down Toussaint's beloved hometown—that the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee began stepping out. He and Costello's superb *The River In Reverse* spawned a national tour, Toussaint's first road trip since 1957. The collaboration ultimately led the 71-year-old to record a new album. And what a treasure it is.

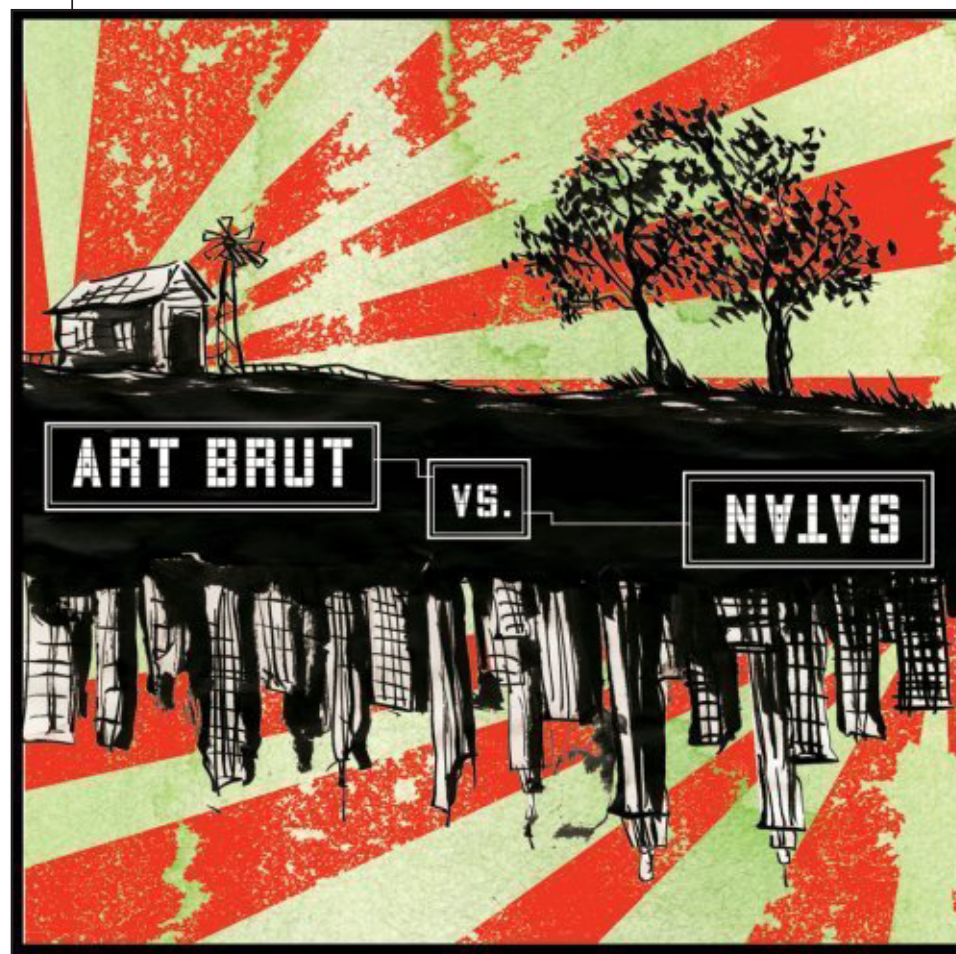
Produced by Joe Henry, *The Bright Mississippi* [Nonesuch, CD] is quintessential Toussaint. This is the hopeful sound of a proud Southern native refusing to have his city stay lost in the flood. More significantly, it's the sound of American blues and jazz coming full circle. At the urging of Henry, who first paired with Toussaint on 2005's *Our New Orleans* benefit disc, the composer/pianist turned his attention away from familiar repertoire and toward songs that shaped and cemented New Orleans' legacy. And so here, standard roles are reversed. An artist accustomed to seeing his work interpreted by countless musicians is on this primarily instrumental effort in the position of covering tunes by (*continued*)



figureheads such as Jelly Roll Morton, Louis Armstrong, Django Reinhardt, and Duke Ellington. Not that any encyclopedic jazz knowledge is needed to enjoy what's here.

A master of subtlety and articulation, Toussaint conveys his laid back charm and easy-going personality through the notes. His style is a unique blend of R&B, funk, jazz, and blues informed by Creole, Cajun and Delta influences. Instinctively drawn to melody, his fingers don't pounce on keys as much as they dance and caress, allowing songs to alternately strut and sway, swing and slide. The music retains an unmistakably New Orleans feel throughout, the humid aura and relaxed vibe directly connected to a fixed sense of time and place. And so Toussaint's soulful takes on gems such as "Long, Long Journey," "Blue Drag," and "A Dear Old Southland" are not just odes to his homeland—they function as vibrant, wordless storytelling that's at once ageless, elegant, and triumphant.

Henry's contributions go beyond the organic sonics and stripped-down arrangements. He assembled a band whose members span multiple genres. The chemistry displayed by guitarist Marc Ribot, drummer Jay Bellerose, clarinetist Don Byron, bassist David Piltch, and trumpeter Nicholas Payton is as loose and natural as one can expect to hear on record. No single individual dominates. Rather, each contributor is content to lay back, listen, and react in order to serve the music as a whole. Just like Toussaint has done all of his life.' — **Bob Gendron**



### Art Brut

*Art Brut vs. Satan*  
Downtown, CD

If there's a wittier contemporary English band in existence than Art Brut, then they've yet to break out of their parents' basements. Since emerging in 2004, the quintet has jolted audiences with fun, irony, and irreverence. Led by frontman Eddie Argos, a dandy whose wry one-liners and self-deprecating barbs rival those of iconic British tart Morrissey, Art Brut plays economical garage rock that's never short on edgy riffs, surging hooks, dance-floor bass lines, or raw energy. To these lads (and lass), nothing is sacred. Or is it?

Nobody knows—and that's part of the lure. For example, the group's debut single in 2004, "Formed a Band," found Argos wailing, "We formed a band/Look at us/We formed a band!" and "We're going to be the band/That writes the song/That makes Israel and Palestine get along." Seldom has an act so wonderfully nailed its sensibility in song. In one verse, Art Brut seemingly acknowledges that, yes, it's only rock and roll, and to hell with elitism and world-conquering aspirations. But its smarts and joyfulness also suggest that everything that comes out of Argos' mouth is genuine. It's an inspired ploy. Argos simultaneously manages to be satirical and sincere, or, at least, makes you question whether he's joking. Or not.

Thankfully, little has changed on *Art Brut Vs. Satan*, a humorous stroke of modern genius that comes across as a needed tonic for a society drowning in worry and regret. Recorded in just 12 days by Pixies honcho Frank Black—someone who knows a thing or two about get-in-and-get-out production—the album possesses a warts-and-all spirit that the songs demand. Every tune save two finishes well inside of four minutes—plenty of time for Argos to share observations and banter.

Singing with a heavy Cockney accent and in a conversational manner that's more stream-of-consciousness than deliberate, Argos is unashamed about passions, shortcomings, and choices. In a word, he is the everyman in all of us—only funnier, and more in love with sex, drugs, and rock and roll. Whether the subject is public transit, graphic novels, alcohol excess, teenage kicks, punk rock, or awkward situations, simplicity reigns supreme. (*continued*)



An innovative new partnership with Peter Gabriel's Real World to bring you an exclusive new album every month. These stunning recordings are delivered in lossless quality and can be burned to CD or played on iTunes. The albums cross genres and geographies: eclectic, sometimes electric, and always excellent.

Free trial available now

[www.bowers-wilkins.com/sos](http://www.bowers-wilkins.com/sos)

# B&W Music Club

Bowers & Wilkins

"Some things will always be great/Even though I'm 28," Argos proclaims as he checks off favorite diversions on the aptly titled "D.C. Comics and Chocolate Milk Shakes." His interest in pop music is similarly uncomplicated. "I want to hear the crack in the singer's voice," he demands on the fuzz-drenched "Slap Dash for No Cash," a catchy defense of do-it-yourself methods on which he also ponders "Why is everyone trying to sound like U2/It's not a very cool thing to do." Brilliant. Not a band to shy away from embarrassment, Art Brut also updates the age-old account of a regrettable one-night stand on the peppy "What a Rush," which finds Argos frantically searching for his clothes while contemplating the merits of the Beatles and Stones.

---

**Hilarious episodes and baiting snipes aside, it's honesty that sets the quintet apart.**

"I can't believe I just discovered the Replacements!" Argos raves on "The Replacements," yelping with the unbridled glee of a child who wakes up on Christmas morning and finds presents under the tree. Such is the wily enthusiasm Art Brut brings to every track on *Art Brut Vs. Satan*. "We're doing this for you/So you better be grateful" deadpans a tongue-in-cheek Argos on "Demons Out!" Oh, indeed, we are, sir. Indeed.

– Bob Gendron





### Jason Lytle

*Yours Truly, the Commuter*  
Anti, CD and LP

**M**oving to a new town in order to make a start fresh is a right that's American as playing hooky on a summer day and heading to the beach. While relocating involves myriad risks and uncertainties, as well as the bittersweet consequences of leaving friends and memories behind, there comes a time in most people's lives where such change isn't just an attractive option; it's a necessity.

For former Grandaddy leader Jason Lytle, the breaking point occurred during 2006 while the indie-rock icon was finishing up sessions for *Just Like the Fambly Cat*. All the telltale warning signs soon followed on tour: Concerts were halfhearted; Lytle no longer enjoyed going from city to city; the music began to suffer; substance abuse took its toll. And so Lytle reevaluated his life, first pulling the plug on Grandaddy after a decade-plus run, and then packing up and exiting the Northern California region that had always defined his neo-psychedelic material. A new beginning awaited in Bozeman, Montana.

Lytle's striking solo debut, *Yours Truly, the Commuter*, is the culmination of his transition. Personal and reflective, it's the mellow din of rejuvenation and ambivalent atmosphere of conflict. Lytle wavers between hope and loss, confusion and acceptance. A tempered optimism ultimately wins out, but this is a set that's meant to be heard from start to finish as it traces the divisive feelings the singer had to resolve on his own. The detached wryness that occasionally surfaced in Grandaddy is replaced here by a more mature focus and susceptible confidence that give the songs added weight.

Thematic contrasts loom large, with Lytle torn between the past and future. Uplifting tunes such as the declarative title track, "Brand New Sun," and "It's the Weekend" blossom with the promise of a new day. Correspondingly, Lytle's scribbled guitar solos, retro synthesizers, and soft desert-partched warble form ideal backdrops for skygazing. But the singer also realizes that resettling isn't all wine and roses. The folk-rock "Ghost of My Old Dog" and swirling "You're Too Gone" confront departure, each gorgeous, albeit lonesome song echoing a palpable sadness. It helps that Lytle played every instrument on the album, which, true to form, has an enhanced lo-fi quality that suits the hushed ambience.

"I'm here for good," he croons on the closing track, his voice emerging like a ray of sunlight peeking through a thin layer of smog. For Lytle and anyone familiar with the discordant experiences that accompany major transition, it's a relieving and welcome sound. — **Bob Gendron**



# Purity

Pure sound • Pure design • Pure Swedish

It has always been Primare's mission to develop products of elegant style, simplicity of use, exceptional value and high performance, providing a wholly pleasurable music and movie experience.

What else do you expect from a country known for pure blondes?

For more information, call 972.234.0182, or email [steve@soundorg.com](mailto:steve@soundorg.com)



Partial product list:

- Integrated Amplifiers
- Two Channel, Three Channel and Five Channel Amplifiers
- Two Channel Pre-amplifier
- DVD & CD Players
- Home Theater Processor
- Accessories & more

**THE SOUND ORGANISATION**  
MAKES MUSIC

The Sound Organization is the exclusive Primare USA distributor. [www.soundorg.com](http://www.soundorg.com)



## **Buckwheat Zydeco**

*Lay Your Burden Down*

Alligator, CD

**B**uckwheat Zydeco hits the ground running – hard – on his latest disc, with a powerful, uptempo cover of Led Zeppelin's "When the Levee Breaks" setting the tone for another fine CD, full of New Orleans' inspired party music.

Though he's recorded on numerous labels over three decades, Buckwheat Zydeco seems to be hitting his stride with his debut recording for Alligator. The Zep cover is just right, mixing the Buckwheat sound with enough of the original arrangement to make you want to listen to it repeatedly. His other wisely chosen covers include Bruce Springsteen's "Back In Your Arms" and Captain Beefheart's "Too Much Time."

Produced by Los Lobos saxman Steve Berlin, *Lay Your Burden Down* is named for the Gov't Mule track of the same name, with guest stars including the Mule's own Warren Haynes. While Berlin is an ace horn man, his production credits are the icing on the cake. Zydeco is bit less prominent on the accordion on this record compared to prior releases, but when he chimes in, it's always in the right spot. Nicely done. – **Rick Moore**



## P J Harvey &amp; John Parish



A Woman A Man Walked By

**PJ Harvey & John Parish**

*A Woman A Man Walked By*  
Island, CD and LP

**A**fter more than 20 years of performing, Polly Jean Harvey still comes across as raw and wounded. With her longtime producer and collaborator John Parish, she continues to be one of the most haunting female singer-songwriters ever to step into a recording studio. As she approaches 40, she still manages to sound unique, with her tortured voice growing older and wiser, but still highly guarded. Harvey claims to be shy at best and eccentric at her worst, but when you listen to this disc it still feels like she might self-destruct right in front of you. It's disturbing and fascinating at the same time.

There's nothing quite as bone-chilling as "Down by the Water" from her 1995 set, *To Bring You My Love*, here, but these songs do possess an unsettling loneliness, especially on quieter songs "April" and "The Soldier," on which her fragile voice is framed by little more than a ukulele, a piano or an old organ. Even when she does rock, as on the opening track, "Black Hearted Love," it's with more hesitation than in her younger days. On "The Pig Will Not," Harvey launches into a primal punk growl amid a buzzsaw guitar, but retreats into near silence for the coda. This may be a relatively quiet album, but it's not mellow.

The sound quality on this recording is striking as well, with plenty of dynamic swings and crescendos that may take you by surprise. PJ's voice is also intimate and forward, adding to the overall anxiety of the record. Even when she sounds as welcoming, friendly and downright sexy as she does on "Passionless, Pointless," you may want to take another step back. When it comes to creating tension and a sense of looming danger from just a few well-placed words, PJ Harvey is almost without equal. — **Marc Phillips**

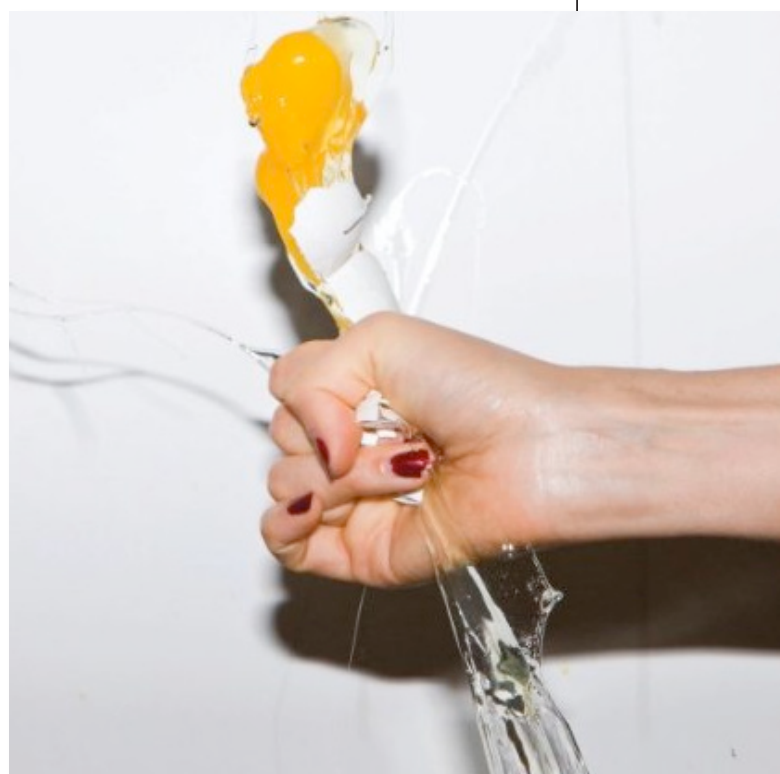
**Yeah Yeah Yeahs**

*It's Blitz!*  
Interscope, CD and LP

**F**or their third album, this New York City trio ditched its garage band demeanor in favor of a mid-80's synth-pop dance sound. Much of *It's Blitz!* sounds like an update of Berlin, with lead singer Karen O's distinctive delivery showing some growth since their last record. The Chrissie Hynde growls at the end of each verse are gone, and her vocal range has widened.

Sure, most of these songs will wind up being overplayed in trendy clubs everywhere, but the real joy in these highly danceable tunes is in mining the gold deeper in the less pulsing tunes. "Skeletons" has a Celtic feel, "Dull Life" has some Hungarian folk influences, and it's very funny when Karen O screams, "Dance till you're dead!" in "Heads Will Roll." In many ways, I'm reminded of New Order's *Low Life*.

Much like the way TV on the Radio rediscovered their inner funk with last year's *Dear Science*, Yeah Yeah Yeahs have tweaked a familiar sound to come up with something new. It may not grab you on the first listen, but I guarantee it will the second time around. Yeah Yeah Yeahs have taken the first step by showing another side to their frenetic yet engaging sound, one that just may guarantee their longevity. — **Marc Phillips**





## Prince

*Lotusflow3r*

NPG Records, 3 CD set

Prince's latest release is available as a single or a three-disc set. Buy it alone, and you get the *Lotusflow3r* disc. For a few dollars more, you also get the *Mplsound* disc and the forgettable *Elixir*. Yes, Prince has found his latest (incredibly beautiful) protégé, and she's only marginally talented.

So, let's break it down because each disc has its own flavor.

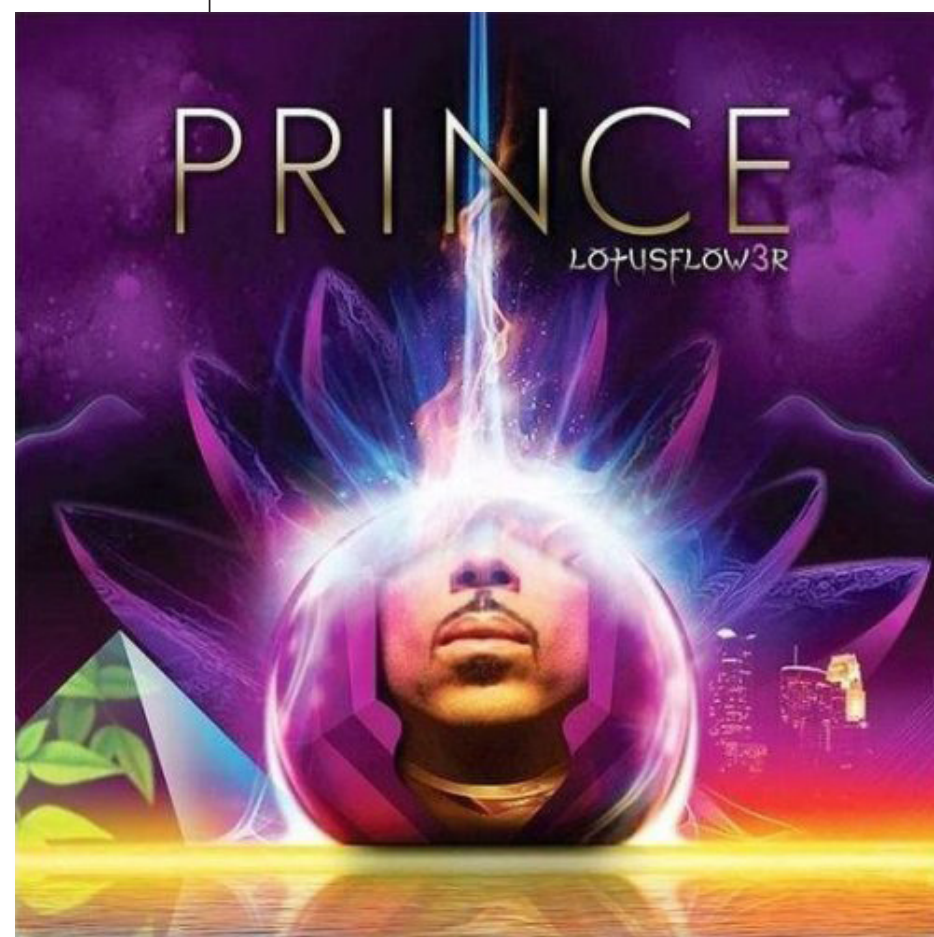
*Elixir* features the vocal talents of Bria Valente. If this record were produced by anyone other than Prince, I could cut it more slack because it's no better or worse than a lot of the generic, faux R&B you hear on any mainstream radio station. But *Elixir* is a group of vapid sex-you-up songs ("I'm gonna pop you like a cork on a bottle of Chardonnay") and Valente just doesn't have a powerful enough voice to carry the day. Even the Purple One's genius can't save *Elixir*, and this is terribly difficult for me to write because Prince is one step above the Beatles in my book.

Fortunately, *Lotusflow3r* gets down to business quickly. In case you've forgotten, Prince is a virtuoso on guitar and this record has plenty of great playing throughout. The first track, "From the Lotus ..," starts out with an easy synthesizer groove, but about 30 seconds into the second track, "Boom," Prince takes off with his funky, signature shred. And don't let Prince fool you, he's still as horny as ever. In "4ever" he sings, "Stop lookin' at me like that unless you're gonna bite that." Yeah.

Hard-core Prince fans will notice bits throughout the disc that will remind them of their other favorites. His take on "Crimson and Clover" shows he still doesn't take himself too seriously after all of these years.

Prince plays all the instruments (though he needs to flush the talk box) on the third disc, *Mplsound*, and it's a direct throwback to the *Purple Rain/Diamonds and Pearls* period, with a lot of funky bass grooves and serious sensuality going on. The first track on the disc (*There'll Never Be Another Like Me*) is on target; it highlights how weak the Bria Valente disc is. The rest of the record has a more raw feel to it, similar to some of the material he did with *The Time*.

While the *Lotusflow3r* collection doesn't break any new ground, it's another well-crafted Prince album to add to your collection, and for this reviewer, it's worth the asking price just for the monster guitar work. — **Jeff Dorgay**



**Hard-core Prince fans will notice bits throughout the disc that will remind them of their other favorites. His take on "Crimson and Clover" shows he still doesn't take himself too seriously after all of these years.**




**Eric Lindell**

*Gulf Coast Highway*  
Alligator, CD

I remain confused after listening to *Gulf Coast Highway*. This record bores me to tears with uninspiring horn arrangements, weak guitar playing and some of the worst lyrics I've heard in a long time ("If love can't find a way, it's a sad, sad day"), yet major critics are praising his songwriting ability

and musicianship, and comparing him to Van Morrison and Bruce Springsteen.

This is yuppie party music at its best, folks. I've heard a lot of fine artists on the Alligator label, and Lindell is a very pale imitation of the blues and R&B musicians that he claims have influenced him. – **Rick Moore**

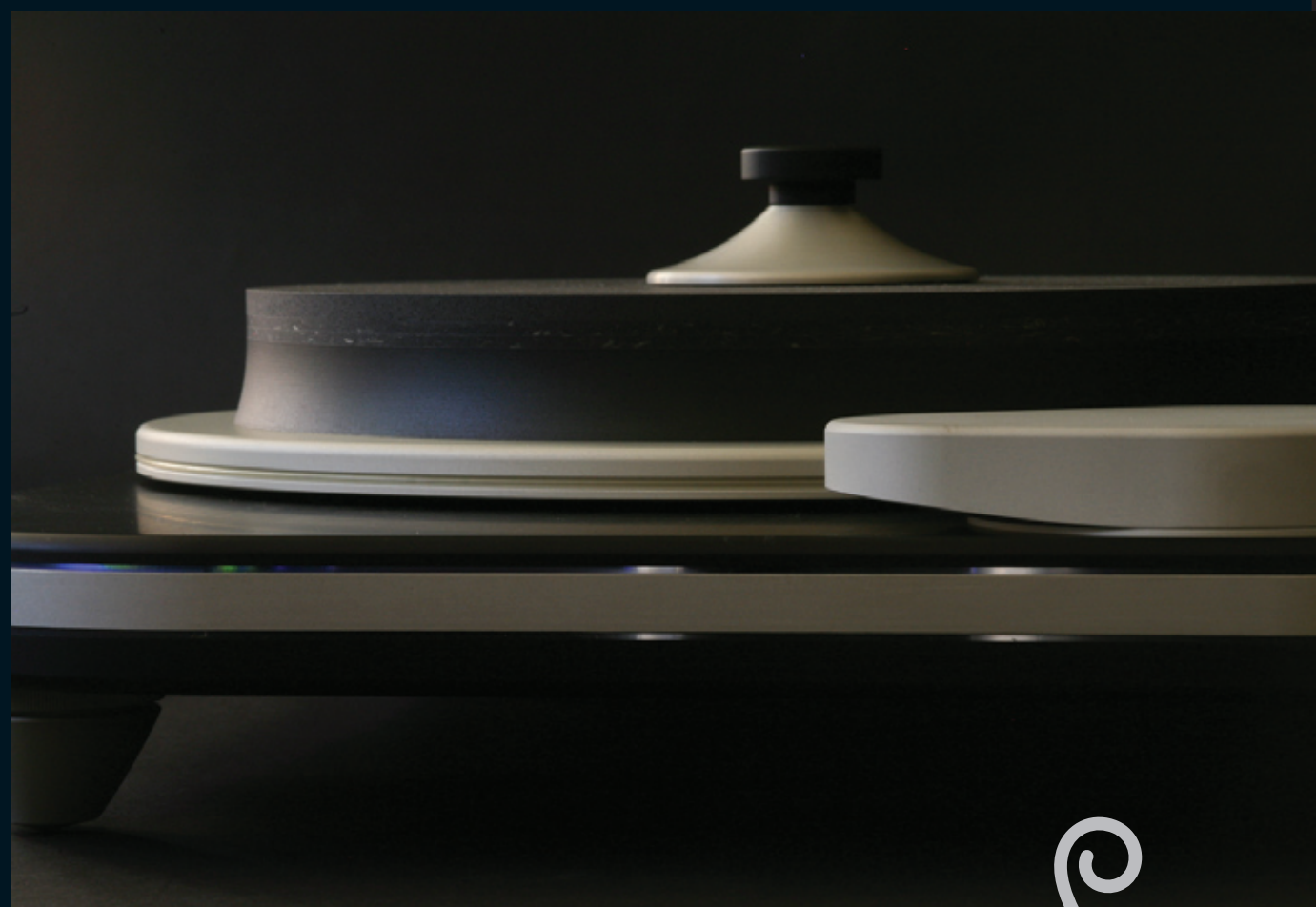
The SG-2's phenolic, vinyl and graphite platter with decoupled bearing and high inertia drive ring delivers unparalleled speed stability and tonal balance.

With its exchangeable arm-board, custom motor controller and easy user set-up, you are guaranteed convenience with performance. American Craftsmanship.

## INTRODUCING SG-2



510.559.2050



[www.immediasound.com](http://www.immediasound.com)



SPIRAL GROOVE





### Mastodon

*Crack the Skye*

Reprise, CD and LP

I'm pleased that the latest generation of heavy metal is intelligent, literate, exciting and critically acclaimed. Recently, we've seen smart and challenging entries in this musical genre from Protest the Hero, The Mars Volta, System of a Down and Zu, who combine a fierce metallic assault with themes and political stances that border on scholarly. Mastodon is currently at the top of this heap of the next wave of heavy metal bands, one of the most inventive on the scene.

Their fourth studio album, *Crack the Skye*, chronicles the murder of Rasputin and the excesses of Tsarist Russia, along with a few tangents concerning wormholes in the universe and Stephen Hawking. On a personal note, the album title comes from the suicide of drummer Brann Dailor's 14-year-old sister. This component adds a more intimate component to this musical tidal wave without being pretentious.

Fortunately, Mastodon doesn't wear out their welcome with an hour and a half of ruthless post-apocalyptic landscapes. *Crack the Skye* strikes the perfect balance of being highly ambitious without crossing over into excess. Despite all of the musical ideas bouncing around, the whole affair clocks in at just a tad over 50 minutes, including two epic songs that are just over ten minutes long. It also includes generous portions of prog, folk and country, resulting in an album that connects with your inner headbanger.

Mastodon comes across as very fluid and unified, with less emphasis placed on the individual musicians than in a band like, say, TOOL. The songs are focused and exhilarating – as great heavy metal should be. – **Marc Phillips**



### Rokia Traoré

*Tchamantché*

Nonesuch, CD and LP

Although this disc has been available in Europe for about a year, it is a newcomer to the U.S. market. Dedicated to one of her mentors, Ali Farka Toure, *Tchamantché* has a much more sparse feel than Traoré's 2005 debut album on Nonesuch, *Bowmboi*. While her last album had more instrumental density, sometimes burying her voice behind a wall of African rhythms, this record concentrates on her stunning vocal talents. I'm sure the comparisons to Billie Holiday and Nina Simone must be flattering, but Traoré's voice stands on its own. It's distinctive; fierce yet airy and delicate at the same time, with a very wide range. I've listened to this record a few times and I still can't come up with a label that adequately describes this singer.

The mix is spartan, with most tunes combining acoustic guitar, drums and some traditional African instruments. Traoré's vintage Gretsch guitar and her voice, up front and center, make you feel as though you are listening to her play in a big room with little else inside. There's even a smidge of human beat box on a few tracks, to change the mood.

If you are looking for a new female vocal record to add to your collection, I suggest putting *Tchamantché* at the top of your list. The music is intriguing and the sound quality is top notch, mastered by Bob Ludwig at Gateway. I'm buying a second copy on LP.

For more information, here is a link to an interview with Traoré on Pitchfork: <http://pitchfork.com/features/interviews/7627-rokia-traore/> – **Jeff Dorgay**





## GamuT S5

[www.gamutaudio.com](http://www.gamutaudio.com)



### Romeo Spike

*For the Cause*

Romeospike.com, CD

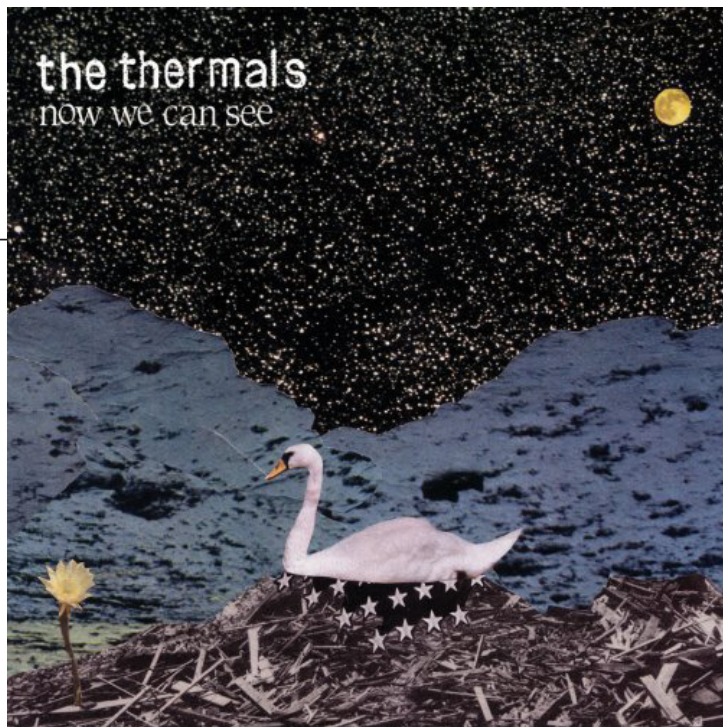
**T**his debut album from Romeo Spike is like a good episode of *The Simpsons*: It takes ten minutes to discover what it's really about. The songwriting duo of Mike Kunz and Donn Aaron are longtime friends and writing partners, and for the first few songs, they combine a classic '70s soft rock sound (reinforced with plenty of old-fashioned electric piano) with techno-ambient accents à la Air or Apples in Stereo. Suddenly Aaron's pedal steel guitar kicks in and masterminds a gentle detour into the realm of Americana, forcing you to re-evaluate the situation.

This is what makes *For the Cause* so intriguing. In lesser hands these experimentations can deteriorate into a mish-mash of musical styles that never quite gel, but the duo succeeds by not straying too far away from the basic formula. Kunz's smooth voice is the thread that binds these songs together, while the guitar work anchors the synthesizers to the rural moments of the album.

Romeo Spike could probably strip this music down to the basics (electric piano, pedal steel and vocals), but the electronic effects are the icing on the cake that make them stand out from artists following a more traditional path of Americana.

The CD will be available May 19, but you can download some of the songs now at the band's website; [www.romeospike.com](http://www.romeospike.com). — **Marc Phillips**





### The Thermals

*Now We Can See*  
Kill Rock Stars, CD and LP

**T**he Thermals' first album for the Kill Rock Stars label is considerably more polished than their last three with Sub Pop. Their new sound is more melodic and less chaotic, with more polish on their playing, overall. The result is thoughtful yet melancholy, and the Thermals retain an old-school punk aesthetic.

Singer-guitarist Hutch Harris and bassist Kathy Foster were between drummers during the recording of this album, so *Now We Can See* was recorded as a duo. Foster said that she "became a one-woman rhythm section" for the recording sessions, but Westin Glass (Model Photographer and Mistletoe) has joined the band for the tour supporting the record. Let's hope the Thermals don't become the Spinal Tap of the 21st century.

Harris fills *Now We Can See* with songs addressing big issues like death, disease and fear, but his lyrics are infused with wit and relief. In the opening track, "When I Died," he states that his body is "busted and wrecked/justly infected" and still has the audacity to ask his creator, "Where will I go and how will I know I'm there?" Those neuroses certainly pervade the rest of the album, but they somehow seem wry in the hands of someone so young. With songs like "When We Were Alive," "We Were Sick" and "When I Was Afraid," the Thermals may seem slightly moribund, but if you stash the lyric sheet in your back pocket, you may never know the difference. — **Marc Phillips**



### Gomez

*A New Tide*  
ATO, CD and LP

**T**his British band has released six albums over the last 11 years, and they've done an amazing thing in this day and age—they've retained all of their original members. The result is a well-polished quintet, albeit one playing it perhaps safer than they need to. But it does explain why the band that delivered the stunning *Bring it On* in 1998 now tours with The Dave Matthews Band.

Gomez is one of those rare British bands that if you heard them on the radio and didn't know better, you'd swear they were from Austin. Perhaps some of labelmate Ben Kweller's Texas influence has worn off on them when they've played together.

You can hear it in "Win Park Slope" and "Bone Tired," which are peppered with acoustic guitars, double basses, cellos, bass harmonicas and Silvertone Wheeze organs. Three great lead vocalists in the band (all possessing very different vocal styles) also help keep Gomez fresh to its fans, old and new.

Recorded at Engine Studios in Chicago and produced by Brain Deck, *A New Tide* sounds wonderful. There are a few sonic surprises along the way, like the percussion breaks in "Natural Reaction" and the small army of backing vocalists used throughout the record. But the mix never gets muddy or confusing, this one could almost have been in our "audiophile pressings" section.

I'd just like to see Gomez shake things up a little more on the next outing, I know these guys have it in them. — **Marc Phillips**





### Black Joe Lewis and the Honeybears

*Tell 'Em What Your Name Is!*

Lost Highway, CD and LP

**T**hese guys are smokin' hot. Think James Brown meets Fishbone meets the Busboys, but on a label based in Nashville, which perhaps explains the sometimes surprisingly loud guitar in the mix. I did feel that the bass player did not quite have the chops and precision to be so prominently featured on this recording, he repeatedly fell "out of the pocket."

On *Tell 'Em What Your Name Is!*, Black Joe Lewis and the Honeybears produce infectious, funky, driving music of color that ends up being colorless. Universal's Lost Highway imprint, which issued 2007's excellent *Night Train to Nashville* R&B collection, is behind this recording, issuing music by artists (Elvis Costello, Ryan Adams) that other major labels seem to be scared of.

This band could use some better songs, but what they lacked in the songwriting department, they made up for with infectious energy and feel. If this record doesn't make you wanna shake it and shout, you're either deaf or dead. If this band doesn't end up at the top of the charts in the next couple years, it will only give guys like me one more reason to complain about how corporate pre-fab music has taken over the world.

*Tell 'Em What Your Name Is!* currently resides at the top of my playlist.  
– Rick Moore



### Keith Emerson

*Keith Emerson Band Featuring Marc Bonilla*

Fontana, CD

**E**merson, Lake and Palmer made up one of the primary roots in the tree of progressive rock, and keyboard player Keith Emerson (with some help from Rick Wakeman of Yes) made the synthesizer a ubiquitous instrument almost overnight. ELP also became a supergroup in a world of guitar-hero worshipping fans without a lead guitarist. Much as I liked ELP, I always wondered what they would have sounded like with a killer guitarist in the mix.

I had to wait 30 years to find out, but it was worth it.

The album's title says it all – *Keith Emerson Band Featuring Marc Bonilla*. Though not quite as visible as the other two guitar heroes from the San Francisco scene (Steve Vai and Joe Satriani), Bonilla is equally proficient with a six string. The band is rounded out with Greg Bissonette on drums and Bob Birch on bass, making this an all-star lineup. The album starts with three short instrumentals: *(continued)*



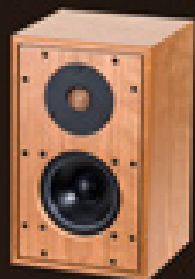
"Ignition," which will exercise your system's woofers to the fullest with some very deep synth bass riffs, followed by two epic organ pieces, "1st Presence" and "Last Horizon," which sound as if they could have been outtakes from ELP's 1972 classic, *Trilogy*. Bonilla's voice in "Miles Away" is so eerily like Greg Lake's that I rechecked the liner notes to be sure he didn't make a guest appearance after all.

But it's Bonilla's guitar playing that brings The Keith Emerson Band into the 21st Century and saves it from sounding like another '70's rehash. He and Emerson play off each other's strengths without getting carried away in endless soloing; none of the songs on the disc is longer than six minutes. There's even a bonus track at the end, with an updated version of "The Barbarian" for die-hard ELP fans.

*The Keith Emerson Band Featuring Marc Bonilla* is a lot like the new Dodge Challenger with a Hemi: it comes packaged in a shape you grew up with and has the right updates to make it a useful vehicle in today's world, but it still has a monster engine under the hood. – **Jeff Dorgay**

# Harbeth®

L O U D S P E A K E R S



HL-P3ES-2



Compact 7ES-3



Super HL5



Monitor 30



Monitor 40.1





# How to Be Frugal

## And Still Respect Yourself in the Morning

By Marc Phillips

**A** few weeks ago, I received an email from a 21-year-old named Andrew who had read some of my old columns and was ready to take the analog plunge. He is a college student and didn't have much money to spend, but he knew that he didn't want to "cheap out" and wind up with an unimpressive analog rig. As a newcomer, his friends suggested something used that would maximize his investment, so he was combing EBay and Audiogon for a bargain. What he failed to consider, however, was that he needed a proper phono section.



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

Like many novices, Andrew had no idea what an RIAA equalization curve is and figured he could plug his new turntable into the AUX jack of his integrated amplifier.

**He was discouraged  
when I informed him of  
the problem.**

"How much will that cost?" he asked. I told him that decent phono stages tended to start in the \$200 to \$300 range, but he wanted to know about the basic units that sell on EBay regularly for \$29. I reminded him that this was "cheaping out."

Seasoned audiophiles know the sonic benefits of an out-board phono stage, but we sometimes forget that not long ago, a decent moving magnet phono cartridge was included inside amplifiers and receivers. Newcomers to this hobby freak out when they see these simple, unadorned black boxes with four-figure price tags that are needed to use a turntable, and they've got a point. If we want to keep the vinyl resurgence going, we need a few great entry-level phono preamplifiers.

### **Cambridge to the Rescue!**

When I first received the Cambridge Audio Azur 540P-B and 640 P-B phono preamplifiers for review, I wasn't really thinking about those vinyl newbies. Cambridge certainly has a reputation for providing good performance at a low price, but when I unpacked these little black boxes, I assumed they were just two more entries into the \$300-400 phono preamp category.

*(continued)*



### **VH1 SAVE THE MUSIC FOUNDATION**

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

TO LEARN WHAT YOU CAN DO TO SUPPORT THE FOUNDATION,  
PLEASE VISIT US AT [VH1SAVETHEMUSIC.COM](http://VH1SAVETHEMUSIC.COM).





Slightly larger than paperback novels, these two units feature relatively robust cases, simple yet tasteful faceplates and most of the features of the more expensive units. The only indication that these units were budget-priced was the lack of loading options—just 47K ohms for MM (on the 540 and 640) and 100 ohms for MC (on the 640 only).

Both preamplifiers are almost identical in appearance, with the only external differences found on the back panel. The 540 P-B is meant for moving magnet cartridges with an output of 3 to 5 mV, and the 640 P-B provides an additional set of moving coil inputs for cartridges with outputs of 0.5 to 1 mV. Gain is listed as 39db for MM and 55db for MC. The 640 goes two steps further by adding a subsonic filter and an upgraded internal power supply. Both units also use single-ended Class A gain stages and discrete transistors. The only other difference is that the 540 uses an active RIAA equalization circuit while the 640 uses a passive one.

Before I plugged in either unit, I double-checked the manufacturer's suggested retail price and did a double take. The Cambridge Audio Azur 540P-B retails for just \$99 and the 640 sells for \$179. I felt conflicting emotions at that moment—either these units were going to suck, or my new buddy Andrew was going to receive some very good news.

## Surpassing Expectations

I placed the 540 and 640 into a pretty lofty system that included a Rega P9 turntable, Clearaudio Maestro and Zu Audio DL-103 cartridges, a Red Wine Audio Isabella preamp, a BAT VK-55SE power amp and a pair of Harbeth 40.1 speakers. Neither of the Azurs were intended for this type of the system, but I knew I would be able to hear these units at their best. Cambridge recommends that you let each unit burn in for at least 36 hours before use, so I gave them twice that to get into their groove before I sat down to listen seriously.

I must admit that during this period I was focusing on what the Azurs were going to do wrong. Putting a \$99 phono stage into a \$35,000 system, after all, would reveal some pretty profound shortcomings. But once I had the 540 warmed up and ready to go, I only noticed what it did right. I immediately noticed how quietly both of these preamplifiers performed. A few years ago, you had to lay out big money to get a phono preamp that offered this low of a noise floor. The 540 also offered precise, stable imaging and solid low-frequency performance. *(continued)*

**A few years ago, you had to lay out big money to get a phono preamp that offered this low of a noise floor.**



# MS750 DIGITAL MUSIC SERVER

## FEATURE



## ORGANIZE AND ENJOY YOUR MUSIC COLLECTION AS NEVER BEFORE

With the McIntosh MS750, your music is always at your finger tips. It can hold, catalog, and sort over 2,000 hours of music at full CD sound quality on its 750 GB hard drive. That is enough storage for more than 2,500 CD's and 120,000 individual songs!



- 750 GB Internal Hard Drive
- Built-In CD, CD-R, CD-RW, MP3, WMA, and AAC Player
- Built-In CD Burner
- High Performance D/A Converters
- Multiple RS232 Data Ports
- Multi Language Support

To experience the legendary performance of McIntosh, please call on us at 1-800-538-6576

McIntosh Laboratory, Inc.  
2 Chambers Street, Binghamton, NY 13903-2699  
www.mcintoshlabs.com

# McIntosh®

LEGENDARY™

Finally, this phono preamp offered a smooth, fatigue-free presentation that is uncommon for phono preamps under \$500, much less \$100.

Okay, so the 540 wasn't perfect. It did tend to gloss over the finer details and nuances in the music, and I detected some grain in the lower treble. I missed some of the transient cues that distinguish the finest phono stages from the budget gear. Though the soundstage was smaller than what I'm used to with my reference phono preamplifier, there was still a wealth of information available beyond the outer edge of the Monitor 40.1s. The depth of the soundstage was noticeably compromised, but for \$99, the 540 was still crazy good.

Keeping everything else the same, I swapped the 540 for the MM section of the 640 and was rewarded with a lower noise floor and a slightly more forward overall presentation. The subsonic filter really didn't make a big difference with the P9, but with the next contender it was rather handy.

### Oh No, He's Going to Bring Out the 1200 Again...

That's right, I am. I wanted to see how the 540 and 640 would perform with a turntable more in keeping with a \$99 and \$179 phono stage. So I stopped by our publisher's house to grab the SL-1200. Fortunately, it had just been fine tuned with the Zu Denon 103 installed. Playing in his new Burmester system, with a pair of MartinLogan Summit X speakers, I was surprised at just how much music actually lurks in this table. I was starting to get enthused about the 1200 again! *(continued)*



# THE VINYL ANACHRONIST:

With this combination plugged into the 640's MC section, I was pleased with the results. I've determined that after sampling about two dozen cartridges, the Zu is my favorite match for the 1200. The Cambridge did nothing to sway my opinion. Compared with the Rega P9, the 1200 obscured details, shrunk the soundstage and made the bass sound a bit wumpy, but I was still enjoying a relatively lively and open sound overall. The subsonic filter did make a difference here and provided an additional measure of control for that loose bottom octave. I did have the sense that the filter also robbed the music of some low-level energy and re-introduced some of that dark, closed-in sound that prevents me from being a true fan of the Technics, so it was a trade-off. The effectiveness of this filter will undoubtedly depend upon the resonances in your room and in your equipment.

## Good News, Andrew!

Before I finished this review, I sent off a quick email to Andrew. During our exchanges, he mentioned that he was considering a few used phono stages on Audiogon. The prices were still slightly more than his budget allowed, but he felt he had no choice. He certainly didn't want to compromise on the table itself and had already committed to finding a P3 for as close to \$500 as possible. He probably was going to brown bag it for lunch for the next six months just to get what he wanted – that's dedication to the analog cause!

So I told him to buy the Cambridge 540P-B for \$99. I told him that Cambridge was a respected UK brand that was known for value, and even though these phono stages were built in China to cut costs, Cambridge was a solid company that would provide an outstanding warranty and excellent customer service. I told him to consider the 640P-B if he could make the stretch. The additional features would allow him more cartridge options in the future with even better sound today. I'll be curious to see which one he chooses.

Going forward, this pair of phono preamplifiers from Cambridge will be my first suggestion to anyone entering the world of vinyl. For \$99 and \$179, these phono preamplifiers are just too good to ignore and I am happy to nominate them for one of our Exceptional Value Awards for 2009. ●



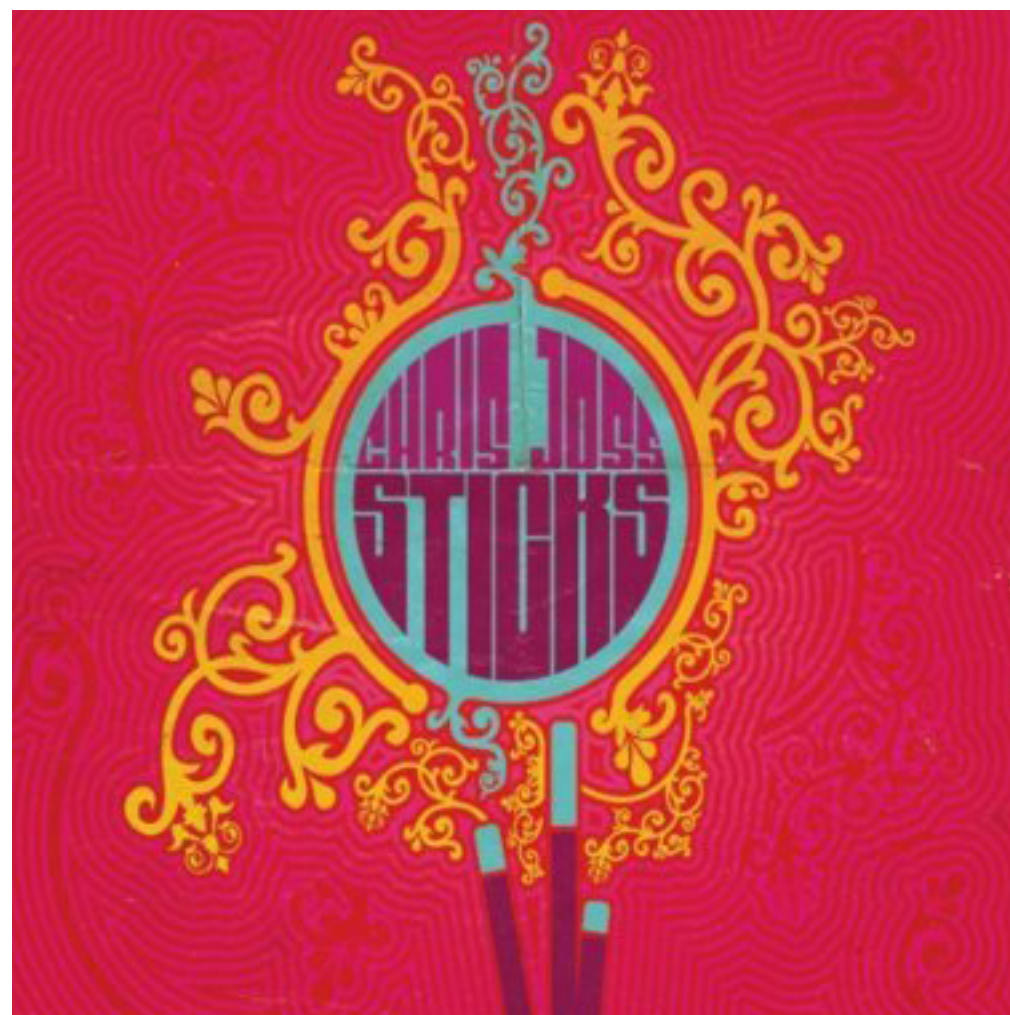
**Going forward, this pair of phono preamplifiers from Cambridge will be my first suggestion to anyone entering the world of vinyl.**



# Club Mix

By Scott Tetzlaff

Club music was going through a drought at the beginning of the year. Perhaps it was the weight of world events, the economy, New Year's Eve post-partying fatigue, or competing distractions. Who knows? Maybe everyone was too busy Tweeting to lay down some new grooves. Whatever, the spring has brought some renewal, and the beat farmers are back to work harvesting a new crop. I'm happy to say the yield includes some interesting work from some old favorites as well as the new guys on the scene. I even threw in one from a few years ago that you might have missed. It's from Medeski, Martin and Wood, and it feels like it could have been released with the rest of the discs in this group. Enjoy.



## Chris Joss

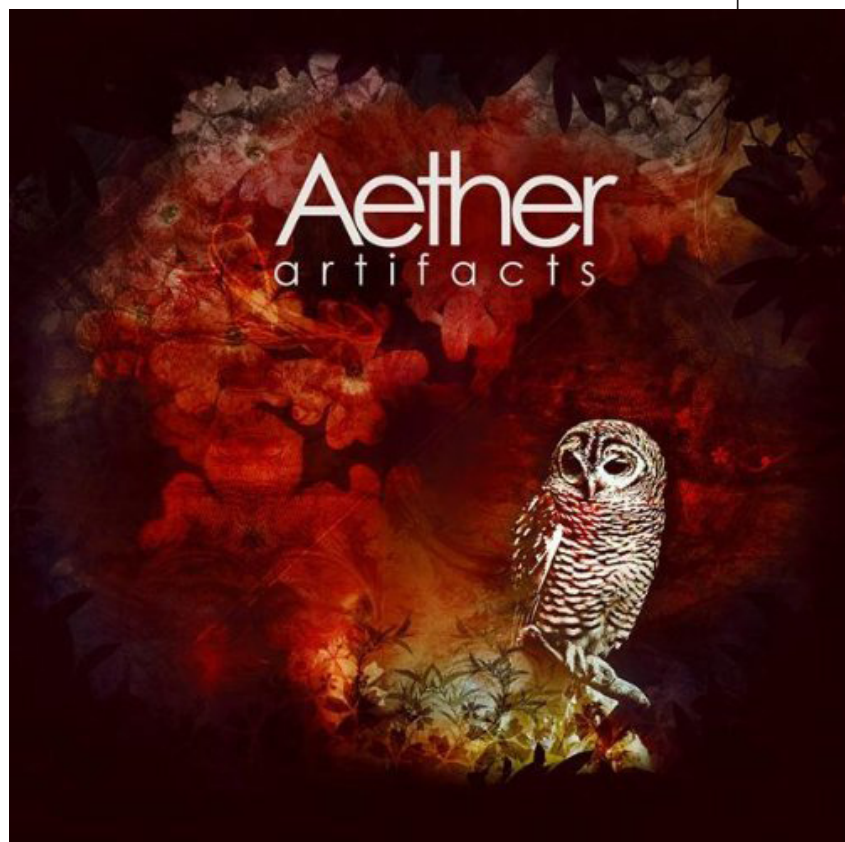
*Sticks!*

ESL Music, CD

**B**ack for his third full CD on ESL, Chris Joss has leveraged the vintage “blaxploitation funk” sound that he excels at, and he’s added an Asian dimension to the mix. The result is an amazing new twist, with a thick and lush sound full of flutes, sitars and a helping of Hammond organ.

Fans of Joss’s last two ESL discs (*You’ve Been Spiked* and *Technotronic Overdubs*) will hear the evolution of his sound and the crosspollination of some of his labelmates. Joss says that the drums are his favorite instrument. “My music always revolves around the beat.” This disc has a solid groove from start to finish, with standouts being “Little Nature” with its exotic sitar solo and “Night Scare” with its zither riffs, sounding very reminiscent of The Persuaders TV show theme. Not a speck of filler in this one.





### **Aether**

*Artifacts*

Exponential Records, Digital Download

**T**his album could be prophetic and disturbing for audiophiles; *Artifacts* is only available as a digital download; there is no physical media available. You can purchase it from iTunes or Amazon in 256kb/sec form, or you can download it right from their Web site in the FLAC format (marked “for audiophiles and nerds”) for the same price. I did find it ironic that the record is filled with scratchy vinyl record artifacts throughout.

The material is all new, but the pacing, sampling and artistic sensibilities invite comparisons to DJ Shadow and The Boards of Canada. This record should bring a big smile to the faces of most old school trip hop fans. It’s light and breezy all the way through, with “Orfeu Negro” being the most upbeat of the collection. Drum n’ bass fans will enjoy “To Her.”

My only complaint with *Artifacts* is that it’s way too short, clocking in at just over 42 minutes. It left me wanting more – and that’s a good thing.



### **Kaskadee**

*The Grand*

Ultra Records, CD

**C**askadee is one of San Francisco’s favorite DJ’s. The reasons are obvious: He’s extremely prolific and he always keeps the quality of his content high, with *The Grand* being no exception. With 18 glimmering, club-ready tracks, this one is just as much fun to listen to while relaxing on the couch as it is in a club.

The Grand has a lot of collaboration going on, with appearances by Dirty Vegas, Canadian DJ Deadmau5 and Mischa Daniels. If you are a fan of any of these artists, this one will zoom to the top of your playlist. The Grand has a big room mix, with subterranean bass throughout, so if your system isn’t up to the challenge, you won’t get the full effect. Kaskadee is at the top of his game on this disc. Note: This is another short disc, at 42 minutes.





### Ursula 1000

*Mystics*

ESL Music, CD

Since he began his career in 1990, Ursula 1000 (a/k/a Alex Gimeno) has been incorporating pop culture elements and bits of his current interests into his music. His last record, *Undressed... Remixed*, centered on his love for different animals. *Mystics* incorporates various retro sounds and beats, with a lot of this record sounding like something from the next *Starsky and Hutch* movie. There are plenty of gangster-esque rhythms in the background of "Pump," with "This Magick" taking the funk to a more sinister level, along with deep bass grooves that will shake the foundation of your home.

If you still have a case of the winter blues (A little late for this ref?), *Mystics* should help cure what ails you. Go directly to track five, "I.C.O.M.E." Roll the windows down and crank up the volume. If your car has big enough subwoofers, they just might blow the clouds into the next county.

# Music Store

Introducing Naim's HDX

The World's First Performance Upgradeable Audiophile Hard Disk Player

- Naim CD player sound quality
- Bit-perfect CD ripping and data storage
- Two 400GB internal drives for storage and back-up
- Front panel touch screen and intuitive user interface
- Naim Extended Music Database for simplified browsing and detailed search
- WAV, FLAC, AAC, WMA and MP3 files played from any USB-connected storage device
  - 24 bit/192kHz internal architecture with support for hi-resolution audio formats
  - Upgradeable with external Naim XPS or 555 PS power supply
- IP-enabled for audiophile multi-room replay of up to 6 streams over a home network



[www.naimusa.com/hdx](http://www.naimusa.com/hdx)





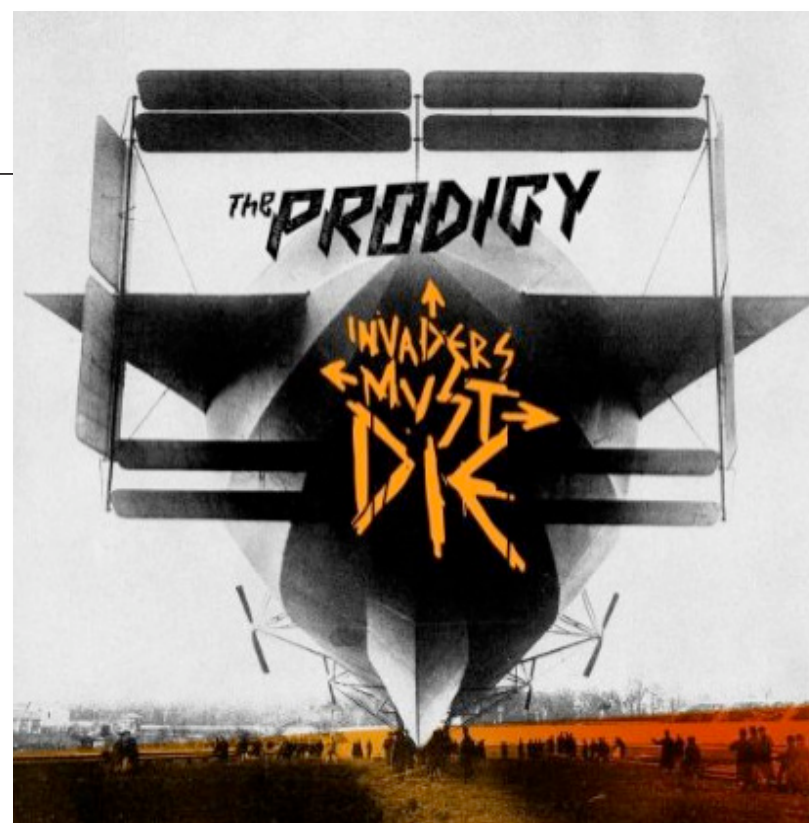
### **Blackbelt Andersen**

*Blackbelt Andersen*

Full Pupp, CD

**T**he debut disc from Daniel “Blackbelt” Anderson of Oslo has to be the best Norwegian disco CD of the year. The sophisticated, polyrhythmic beats combined with some very smooth mixing make this disc a perfect choice for chill-out hour. The first track, “Lordag del 1,” reminds me of vintage Kraftwerk; if Norway has an equivalent to the Autobahn, this would be the track I would play going down their highway at full speed.

The upbeat pace and variation in tempo between the tracks are what really set Blackbelt Andersen above the other Norwegian electronica I’ve heard. It’s not a gloomy set of tracks with slow segments that cause you to zone out. The disc comes to an end on an easy note with “Lordag del 2,” which reminds me of Herb Alpert’s *Rise*.



### **Prodigy**

*Invaders Must Die*

R.E.D. Distribution, CD and LP

**Y**ou’ll have to decide if releasing a rave CD in 2009 is bold or crazy. Put me in the bold camp. *Invaders Must Die* harkens back to a simpler time. Not everyone needs a soundtrack appropriate for punching stationary objects, but when it is necessary, *Invaders Must Die* does the job.

Arguably, this record has not evolved very far from the early Prodigy sound, but that’s part of their charm. You’ve heard the rat-a-tat-tat drum machines, ice-cold synth riffs and growling voices before, but you know you want another helping. Strap on a neck brace, put on some boxing gloves and listen to the title track, “Omen,” and then “Warrior Dance.” And if you are feeling really nostalgic, dim the lights and get some glow sticks out.





# musicdirect®

The Music Lover's Super Store — Since 1988



Call For  
Our Free  
180 Page  
Catalog

## TONE Audio Product of the Year

The Best Selling Product in Music Direct History!



stereophile  
CLASS "A" RATED

**Wadia  
iTransport in  
Silver or Black  
\$379**

The Wadia iTransport helps music lovers get more musical enjoyment from their iPods. Call us about our Money Saving offers on Wadia Packages with Digital Cables and Digital-to-Analog Converters. Silver and Black available.



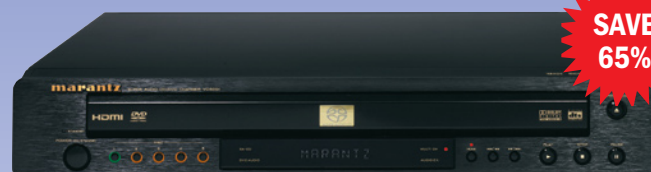
SAVE  
35%

**Shunyata Python Alpha  
Helix AC Power Cable  
Was \$1,100,  
Now Only \$699**

**More Money  
Saving  
Special Offers**

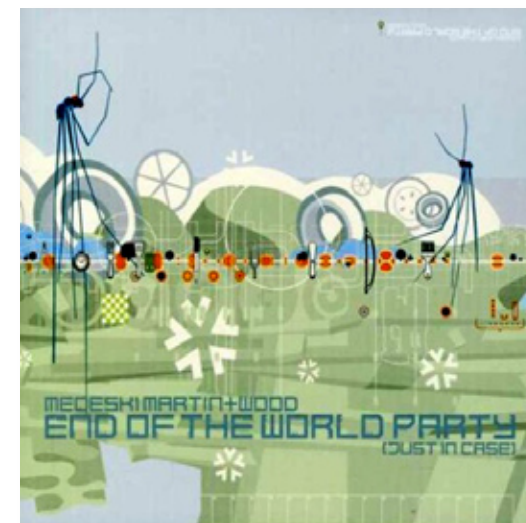
**VPI 16.5 Record  
Cleaning Machine  
Basic Package  
Was \$645,  
Only \$550**

SAVE  
\$95



SAVE  
65%

**Marantz VC-6001 Universal 5-Disc  
Changer Was \$699, Only \$250**



**Medeski, Martin and Wood**  
*End of the World Party*  
(Just in Case)

**M**M&W have been laying down avant jazz tracks since 1991 and their latest release is due mid-June. While you are waiting, I suggest this often overlooked gem from their catalog, if it's not already in your collection.

Released in 2004, *End of the World Party* has a much more funky, electronic feel than MM&W's usual faire. Heavy on organ riffs, a lot of this disc feels like it could have been used as party music during an episode of *The Munsters*. I can just see Grandpa dancing around to "Curtis."

"Reflector" and "New Planet" are much more guitar-driven, while "Mami Gato" and "Shine It" sway more towards the cool jazz side of the fence. In the end, this record is a funk sandwich with another helping of funk on the side. ●



GET ON BOARD THE  
MOST ADVENTUROUS TOUR  
IN ROCK HISTORY!

**IRON MAIDEN**

**FLIGHT 666**

THE FILM

**ACCESS ALL AREAS**

50,000 MILES\*  
5 CONTINENTS  
23 CONCERTS  
IN JUST 45 DAYS

\*VIA: MUMBAI, SYDNEY, TOKYO, LOS ANGELES, COSTA RICA, MEXICO CITY, BOGOTA,  
SAO PAULO, BUENOS AIRES, SANTIAGO, PUERTO RICO, NEW YORK & TORONTO

**ONLY IN CINEMAS  
TUESDAY 21ST APRIL**

BANGER FILMS PRESENTS IN ASSOCIATION WITH PHANTOM MUSIC MANAGEMENT AND EMI  
"IRON MAIDEN: FLIGHT 666"  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS ROD SMALLWOOD, STEFAN DEMETRIU, ANDY TAYLOR  
CO-PRODUCER VICTORIA HIRST, DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY MARTIN HUNNES  
MUSIC MIXED AND ENGINEERED BY KEVIN 'CAVEMAN' SHIRLEY  
EDITED BY LISA GROOTENBERG, WENDY HALLAM MARTIN AND MIKE MURKIN  
PRODUCED, WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY SCOT MCFADYEN AND SAM OLIN

EMI PHANTOM Canada ARTS ALLIANCE MEDIA

# Maiden Flight:

**The Premiere of Iron Maiden's *Flight 666***

By Bob Gendron

**N**ever tell a metal crowd that no alcohol is allowed at a venue. Chances are they'll react with the same lighthearted combination of laughter and booing as the sold-out audience did at Chicago's Kerasotes City North 14 Theater on Tuesday, April 21, at watching the premiere of the new Iron Maiden film *Flight 666*. If only every movie and movie crowd were this much fun.



Co-directed by Sam Dunn, the Canadian anthropologist responsible for 2005's excellent documentary, *Metal: A Headbanger's Journey*, the feature-length Maiden set follows the band, which formed in East London in 1975, around on the first leg of its 2008-09 "Somewhere Back in Time" tour. One of the most ambitious and visionary outings ever attempted by a rock band, the multi-part tour—which ended in early April—found the British sextet skirting logistical convention by flying themselves, their crew, and their equipment around in a customized 757 (dubbed "Ed Force One," after Maiden's longtime mascot, Eddie). The pilot: vocalist Bruce Dickinson. The idea afforded the band a previously unknown freedom and efficiency to jump not only time zones, but entire continents and weather seasons within the span of hours.

about morality in Maiden's lyrics and hosts 162 Maiden tattoos on his body. The childlike gushing of Rage Against the Machine guitarist Tom Morello before a gig in Los Angeles. Hotels literally blockaded by throngs of fans.

But nothing beats the footage of the countries' landscapes, and Dunn and company's capturing of each locale's unhinged enthusiasm. If there's a bigger worldwide band than Iron Maiden, they're sure keeping it a secret. Seeing and hearing the pandemonium, particularly those in Latin America, puts the phenomenon that is Maiden and all of the band's associated images, meanings, and attitudes into focus. Reactions are on par with those of Beatlemania, and of hysteria for other major musical acts. One gets the sense that for many of these people, the concert is likely the biggest event of their life.

## One gets the sense that for many of these people, **the concert is likely the biggest event of their life.**

It's this international flavor and sociological perspective that, along with the music, give the film an appeal that transcends typical band-on-tour documentaries. Sure, we get to see what the band members do on their days off (golf, dive, tennis, soccer) as well as insider perspectives on the rather uneventful escorted car rides to the hotel after gigs. Requisite interviews with crew, managers, and the group provide basic personality sketches of each band member, though nothing too revealing surfaces. Thankfully, these moments primarily serve as transitions between the film's major components: the concerts and their respective locations, and the testimonials and reactions of the crowds.

In two hours, viewers jet across 50,000 miles, five continents, and 13 countries as they witness the band performing 23 shows in just 45 days, traveling from England to India to Australia to Japan to the U.S. to Mexico to South America to Puerto Rico before returning to the U.S. and (pew) finishing off in Canada. And that was just the first leg of the stint. There's no shortage of eventful, colorful experiences: Militant security in Columbia. A priest who preaches

For them, the band's music amounts to a spiritual entity, to which they feel they can look to for hope, release, healing, and deliverance. Such connections between band and audience are rare, and the film establishes that Maiden understands the significance.

In light of the quick pace and scintillating visuals, the live tracks that provide the soundtrack to the film almost feel like they are a bonus. In a revisiting of the band's legendary 1984-'85 "World Slavery" tour, "Somewhere Back in Time" featured many of the same Egyptian-themed stage pieces and songs, including resurrected epics such as "Rime of the Ancient Mariner." Rather than treat it as an exercise in nostalgia, Maiden approach the material with freshness, respect, and energetic verve. By the end, there's no wondering why (or how) the band, with virtually no airplay or mass-media support, has managed to remain relevant nearly 35 years after its debut.

**Flight 666** will be released on extended Blu-ray and DVD, alongside a double-disc soundtrack album and limited-edition double-vinyl picture disc on June 9.



# Audiophile Pressings

Presented by Music Direct  
Click on record cover to purchase



## Pearl Jam

*Ten*

Epic/Legacy, 2 180g. LPs

The planned 20th anniversary reissues of Pearl Jam's 1991 debut album turned out so well, Epic/Legacy have released them two years early. What's even more exciting is that *Ten* is offered in a variety of different formats and versions, ranging from a basic two-CD set to a four-LP set that contains lots of additional material and retails for \$140. I chose the 2-LP set for my own collection, which contains a re-mastered version of the original release and a "Redux" version that contains subtle re-workings of each of these 11 songs.

If the first LP was the sole offering, I'd be a little disappointed. I know it was called "grunge" for a reason, but this version still sounds distant, sloppy and muddled. The Redux version, however, is much better. The overall changes to these songs are pretty subtle—these aren't extended dance mixes, after all—but the result is an album that is more lively, energetic and forceful. While you'll have to listen to the two versions of "Even Flow" to really notice the differences, songs like "Jeremy" (always my favorite cut) are much tighter and focused, with more of a live interplay evident between the band members. Eddie Vedder's voice comes through much clearer as well, and for the first time it sounds like he recorded his vocals in the same studio and not in another city.

Which version you select will depend on your devotion to the band. Back in 1991, it seemed like music lovers were forced to choose between two very different grunge sensibilities, the bleak, stripped-down power of Nirvana's *Nevermind*, or the more ambitious yet conventional sound of this album. If Pearl Jam had originally released the Redux version, my decision to ultimately go with the other guys might have been a lot tougher. — **Marc Phillips**





### Marshall Crenshaw

*Marshall Crenshaw*  
Mobile Fidelity, SACD, 180g. LP

**W**hen Marshall Crenshaw's self titled album hit the Chicago airwaves on WXRT back in 1982, it was well received and eventually, "Someday, Someway" got played to death. Always a great songwriter, perhaps Crenshaw's star might have risen a lot higher if Elvis Costello hadn't been around at the same time. Spinning the original LP was just as I remembered it, crunchy and compressed; perfect for radio play in the early 80's.

Kudos to MoFi for taking their usual amount of care for something this far off the beaten path; the remastered version sounds fantastic. Now you can really get a feel for Crenshaw's voice, and the sparse, almost rockabilly feel of these songs really shines through.

If this record brings back fond memories for you, I highly suggest buying a copy of this 80's pop masterpiece that was critically acclaimed but relatively obscure. Marshall Crenshaw never sounded better and even "Someday, Someway" made me think of Annie Hall sunglasses and jackets with big shoulder pads. – **Jeff Dorgay**

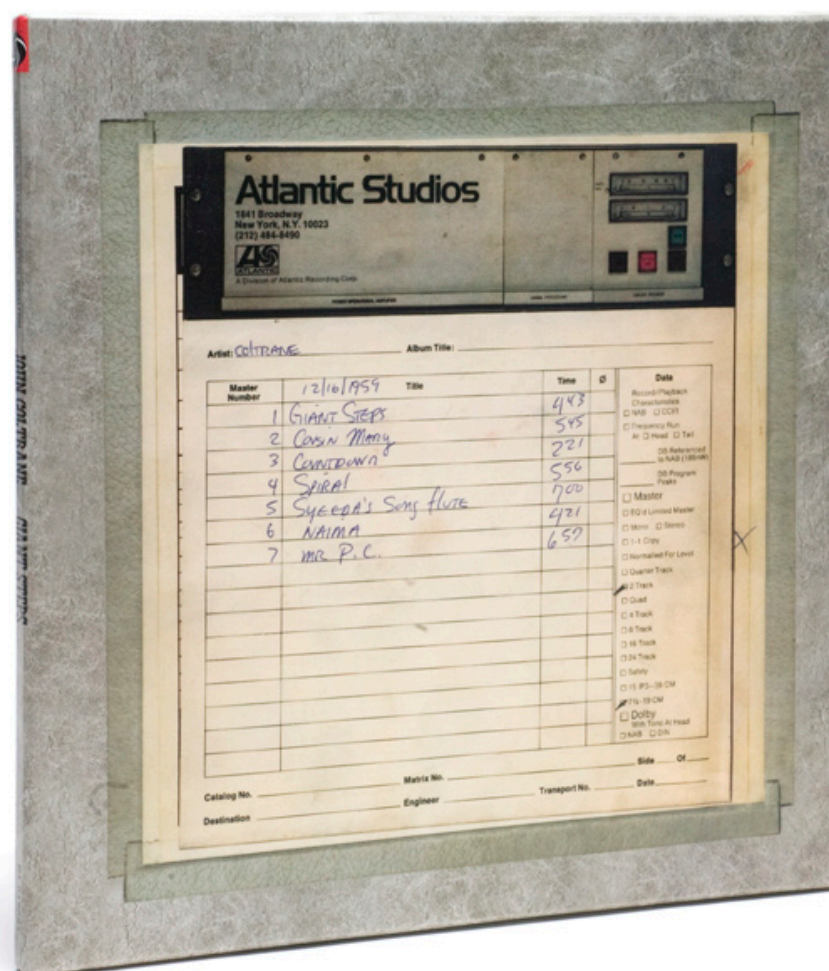
### John Coltrane

*Giant Steps*  
Atlantic/Rhino, 180g. 45 rpm 2-LP set

**M**y good friend Tom Caselli is hard to please. He has more copies of *Dark Side of the Moon* than most people's entire CD collection. So when he gets on the phone demanding that I buy a record, I take it seriously. With the edition limited to 2,500 copies, I got off the phone and called Music Direct immediately.

As Tom said, "This is the result you get when a major label gets behind a project like this – the packaging is as good as the records inside." Consummate collectors will appreciate the outer box that looks like the master tape box, opening to reveal the exceptional reproduction of the original album artwork on the two 45 rpm discs within.

Best of all, the sound of these records is fantastic. If all records sounded this good, the iPod might never have been born. Bernie Grundman is still the master of mastering when it comes to this material – he lived it the first time around and I firmly believe that this level of knowledge makes the difference between a competent remaster and a masterpiece. – **Jeff Dorgay**





### Sonny Rollins

*What's New?*

RCA/Pure Pleasure, 180g. LP

This reissue of Sonny Rollins' 1962 exploration of Bossa Nova is another winner from Pure Pleasure and the re-mastering team of Kevin Gray and Steve Hoffman. Rollins has always been my favorite jazz saxophonist, and this ultra-quiet pressing reveals his smooth and gentle lyricism with a clarity I haven't heard since I got a sealed copy of an early pressing of *Way Out West* many years ago.

The overall sound of this recording isn't quite as startling and immediate as *West*, but it captures the smooth vibe of South American music without sacrificing Sonny's more abstract sensibilities. Percussion, in general, is portrayed realistically, with the stereo imaging quite precise and persuasive. However, at times the center fill seemed lacking, and the sound appeared to only come out of the left and right speakers.

This title has become a prized addition to my Rollins collection, and if you're a fan I suggest you grab this one quickly. – **Marc Phillips**

### Otis Spann

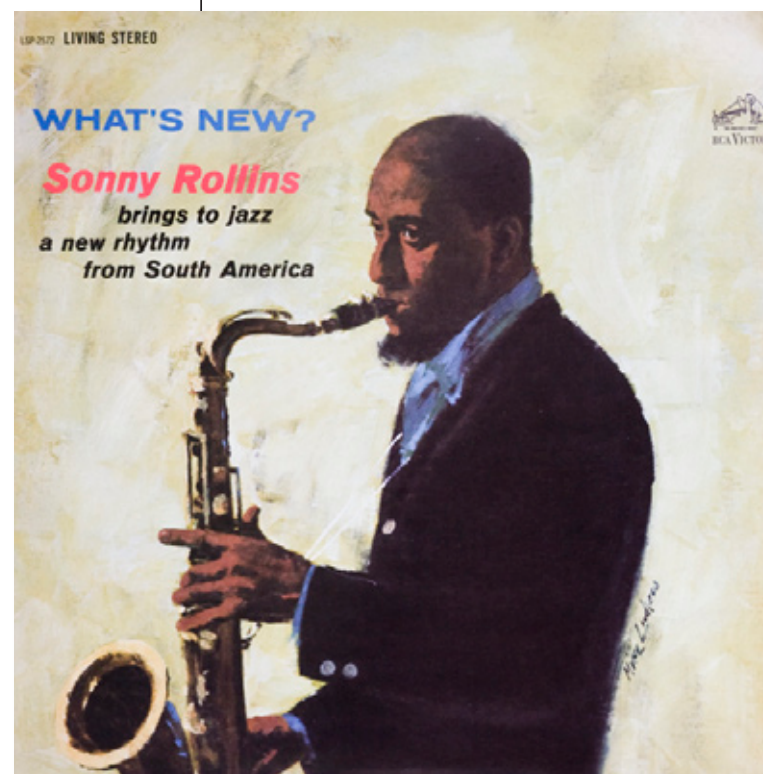
*Portraits in Blues Vol. 3*

Storyville/Pure Pleasure, 180g. LP

This Pure Pleasure release was re-mastered by Sean Magee at Abbey Road, and while it sounds more spare and distant than the Gray/Hoffman efforts, it does excel at presenting Spann's gruff yet hesitant voice in an eerily realistic manner. Originally recorded in Copenhagen during the 1963 American Folk Blues Festival, this LP projects the feeling of a live performance witnessed from the back of a club, with the sound of Spann's voice and piano bouncing around from seemingly opposite directions through the crowd. The only thing missing is the crowd.

Much like the Sonny Rollins record, this one also is plagued somewhat by center fill issues. Like others in this series, it is an artifact of the original recording session, and Magee focuses on bringing voice and instrument to the listener with as few obstacles as possible.

Again, we have extremely quiet surfaces, essential to such a stripped down recording. Listen closely and you'll hear Spann's feet on the pedals and his heels grazing the floor of the studio as he plays the piano. If you don't mind the somewhat large spatial gap between bluesman and ivory, you'll find this to be one of the most revealing audiophile recordings released so far this year. – **Marc Phillips**





## Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab—The Ultimate Listening Experience

- From the Original Master Tapes
- Proprietary Mastering Technology & Techniques
- Limited Audiophile Collectors' Editions

mofi.com

*Mofi*  
MOBILE FIDELITY  
SOUND LAB

### SPECIAL FREE T-SHIRT OFFER\*

Buy any three (3) MoFi music titles on any format and get a FREE MoFi T-Shirt. Enter Promo Code "FreeT" Online.

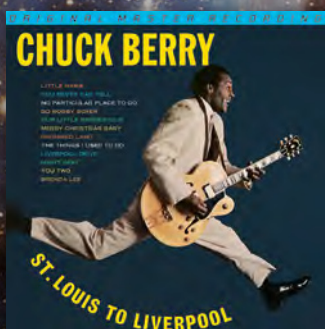
FREE



Sign up for *The Lab Report*, our email newsletter, and be entered to win a Santana (Abraxas) LP Test Pressing.\*

\*Expires February 15th.

\*Winner will be announced February 5th.



## Black Sabbath

*Paranoid, Deluxe Edition*  
Universal, 3 disc package  
(2CD's, 1 DVD-a)

Let's face it, Ozzy's metal masterpiece sounds dreadful unless you are willing to shell out about \$500 for a rare, first-first edition British pressing – if you can even find one in perfect shape.

For 30 bucks, you can buy this three-disc set from your favorite record store. Along with a stellar remaster of this classic album on CD, a DVD audio disc is included with the original 1974 Quadraphonic mix and another CD with alternate takes. Who knew gold would drop to \$30 an ounce in 2009?

Now you can hear Black Sabbath the way the band was meant to be heard. The drums have impact and air, there are *layers* of guitars instead of one big crunchy axe, and the overall sound is huge. Best of all, Ozzy doesn't sound like he's at the back of the room with a burlap bag over his head. He's right up front, screaming about fairies with boots right in your face. This is the definitive *Paranoid* as far as I'm concerned. Just save "Iron Man" for last.

– Jeff Dorgay







### Louis Armstrong and His All-Stars

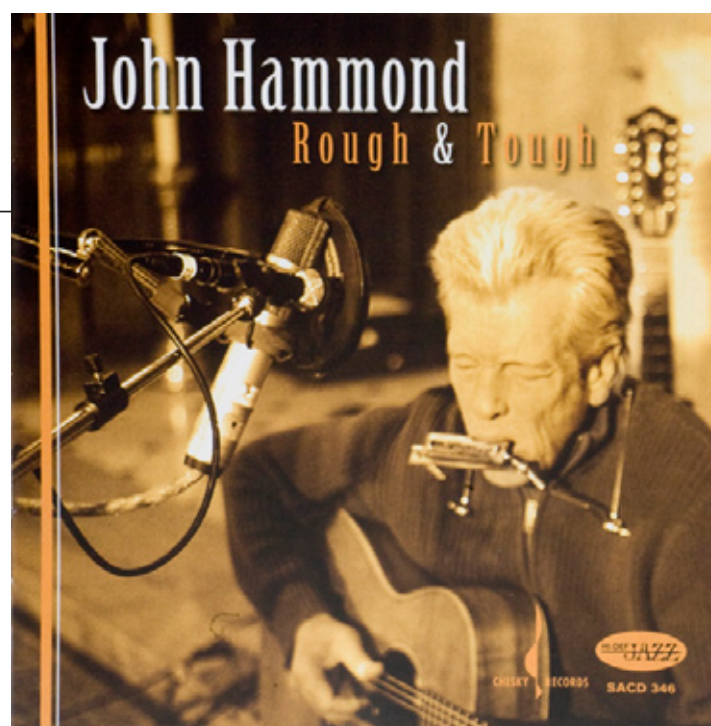
*Satch Plays Fats*

Columbia/Pure Pleasure, 180g. LP

The sound from this Pure Pleasure Records 180g reissue is so immediate and lifelike that it may take a couple of songs before you realize it's a mono recording. Armstrong's 1955 tribute to one of his major influences came 30 years after the last time he and Fats Waller played together, but the joy and enthusiasm Satchmo had for the man did not diminish over the decades. The interplay he has with fellow singer Velda Middleton is priceless, especially when, on "All That Meat and No Potatoes," she asks him what's wrong, and he replies, "Nothing wrong with me honey that a piece of roast beef can't fix now." Armstrong's trumpet also has plenty of that familiar bite, and it sounds like he's in the room with you.

This recording was re-mastered by Kevin Gray and Steve Hoffman, who bring their trademark warmth and fidelity to the original. The duo succeeds by keeping the sound of this recording firmly rooted in the era in which it was recorded instead of making it sound as modern as possible. You can hear each musician perform clearly in his own space, yet it still sounds like you're witnessing a historical event.

I've heard a few audiophile recordings lately that sounded like there may have been a forklift accident at the pressing plant, so additional points are awarded for an exceptionally clean pressing. Highly recommended. – **Marc Phillips**



### John Hammond

*Rough and Tough*

Chesky Records, SACD Hybrid

When Bono performed the blues classic "All Along the Watchtower" on *Rattle and Hum*, he sang, "All I've got is a red guitar, three chords and the truth." Though John Hammond does not play a red guitar, the rest certainly applies to this brilliant Chesky recording, captured live at St. Peter's Episcopal Church in New York City. It's just Hammond and his guitar; no overdubbing or editing.

The song selection is excellent, relying on some great blues standards from Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, and a few others. Hammond offers up a gritty rendition of "Statesboro Blues" that stays true to the Blind Willie McTell classic, rather than taking excessive liberty with it. A few of Hammond's originals are in the mix, and the only truly forgettable cut is "Chattanooga Choo Choo." By far, the killer track for me was his version of Tom Waits "Get Behind the Mule." If you've ever wondered what fussy audiophiles mean when they talk about hearing the signature of the room in which a performance was recorded, this is a great example.

Chesky recordings are always about capturing a performer in an intimate venue with minimal intrusion by technology to bring you as close to the music as possible. On that score, *Rough and Tough* does not disappoint. There is so much texture on Hammond's guitar in this recording, along with a heavy dose of hall ambience, it will fool those of you with great systems into believing that Hammond is playing in your listening room.

Blues fans will dig this, and crazed audiophiles will have another great disc with which to show off their systems. Everybody wins with this one.

– **Jeff Dorgay**



## Two More Coltrane Greats from ORG

*"Live at the Village Vanguard"*

*"John Coltrane Quartet – Ballads"*

Original Recordings Group, 45 rpm dual-record LP sets

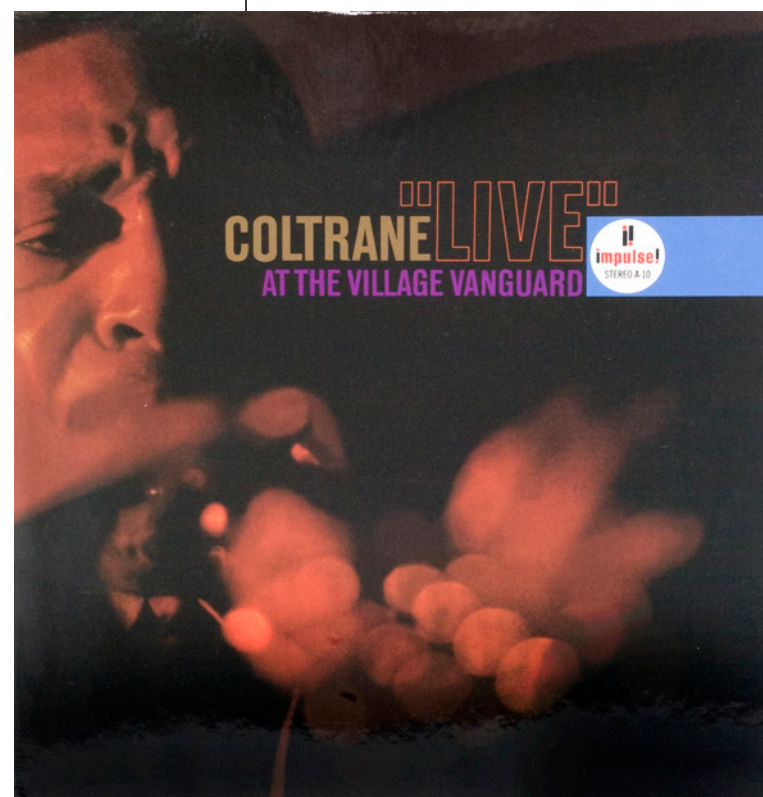
I was highly impressed with the quality that the folks at ORG achieved with their first releases from Diana Krall and Rickie Lee Jones in March. Coltrane's two classic jazz albums from the Impulse catalog have been produced to the same high standard.

Much like the original Blue Notes, most of the original Impulse recordings have skyrocketing price tags. They're like an original steering wheel for a 1955 Porsche Speedster; there just aren't that many around at any price in any condition, so remasters that come this close to the original will make even the most finicky collectors happy.

Mastered by Bernie Grundman, these discs have been pressed at Pallas in Germany instead of RTI in Southern California (as the Rhino Coltrane reissues were) but none of the magic was lost on the round trip. The covers are printed in the Czech Republic, and the reproduction quality is worthy of the vinyl within. The surfaces were perfectly silent and the records arrived with no warping whatsoever. If you love Coltrane, these records are worth the \$59.95 asking price.

Not having original first pressings to compare these with, I can't be sure that these are the definitive pressings, but they sound fantastic on my reference system. Recorded in ultra-wide, mega-stereo, Coltrane usually comes in on the left, with the drums somewhere between the middle and slightly to the right, with the piano varying between the left and right channels.

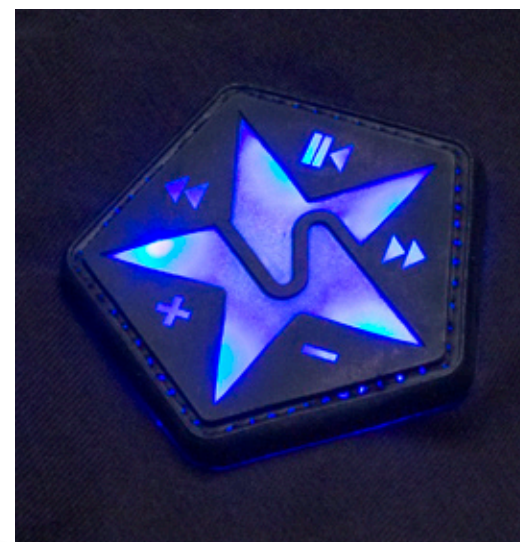
For those of you just tuning in to the vinyl resurgence, or if you missed them the first time around, here's a chance to add some classic performances to your LP collection. – **Jeff Dorgay**





As always, we can not live on high-end audio and records all the time (or can we?), so we bring you a short list of fun things to amuse you in between visits to your favorite record store:

# The Metallica M4 Jacket



\$330, Sessions (available soon)  
[www.sessions.com](http://www.sessions.com)

Whether you are screaming down the slopes or screaming for vengeance while walking down the street, the new Metallica M4 Jacket from Sessions gets the job done, with a built in pair of speakers, amplifier and a control pad on the outer sleeve. It all plugs into your iPod or iPhone and is tucked safely away in a sewn-in waterproof compartment. The jacket is all black on the outside (what other color would a Metallica jacket be, really?) but all business on the inside with a killer rendition of the *Death Magnetic* album graphics.

For best results, set your iPod's EQ to the "Rock" setting, but then you probably knew that. The in-jacket speakers can blast pretty loud, and they do sound better and have more bass with the hood up. The control pad lights up in an electric blue and is very easy to read in modest to low light, a nice touch.

You can not play Patricia Barber while wearing the M4 Jacket or you will self destruct, leaving the jacket unharmed. – **Jerold O'Brien**





# Chrysler's GEM Peapod



## An iPod dock to drive to the grocery store

Price TBA

**N**eed a new dock for your iPod? This could be just what the doctor ordered. Chrysler's new Peapod is an iDock with iPod controls built into the steering wheel.

If Chrysler doesn't go belly up in the next few months, there's a great chance that you will actually be able to buy this, if they don't price it wrong. For now they are only predicting a short range of about 30 miles and a low top speed of 35mph, but if you just need to go to the grocery store, what the heck?

I would like to see a Hello Kitty version, though. – **Jeff Dorgay**



# Strung Out on Strings



\$15 each

[www.applemusicrow.com](http://www.applemusicrow.com)

In celebration of my first successful re-stringing of my Fender Telecaster (perfectly done on the very first try), I went out and found these T-shirts from a couple of popular guitar -string companies. Elixir Strings is one of the newer kids on the block, yet their strings are known for their durability and tone. Ernie Ball has been around for much longer, and their Slinky guitar strings are favored by many Telly players. Both companies have brought a real rock-n-roll swagger to their advertising campaigns, a welcome change for a market segment that's usually a bit on the conservative side when it comes to image.

I found these cool tees at Apple Music Row here in Portland for a mere \$15 each. Apple Music, one of the largest music stores in the Pacific Northwest, always has a great selection of unusual t-shirts. They vary their selection at any given time, so on one visit you might find more DJ-oriented shirts, while at other times, the apparel favors musical-instrument brands such as Rickenbacker, Gibson or Pearl. You can check out the latest offerings at their website and they ship worldwide. — **Marc Phillips**



# The Olympus E-30

## Good But Not Amazing

By Jeff Dorgay

The Olympus E-30 looks good on paper, but it's still behind the curve in some real-world photographic situations. Having used every one of the E-Series cameras over the years, my opinion hasn't changed much since the original E-10.





Olympus has always been a spectacular optical company in search of the right camera. Unfortunately, they still haven't found it. The E-30 has a ton of very exciting features, that will ultimately please a certain segment of photo hobbyists who like to diddle with their cameras more than take pictures. You know the type. In the old days you had to watch their slide shows. Fortunately, today you can just delete their Flickr posts when they show up in your inbox.

The E-30 isn't a terrible camera; it's just overpriced and underpowered. As I said, they are a great optical company. Their E-Series lenses broke ground about five years ago as the first lenses designed specifically for a digital sensor from the ground up. I'd go as far as to say that on a digital camera, the Olympus lenses meet or exceed the optical performance of Leica glass.

In your hand, the E-30 definitely feels like a pro camera, with substantial build quality and a logical arrangement of the most needed buttons. You can swivel the viewfinder up and out of the camera body so that shooting at extremely high or low angles is convenient.

### A Slew of Useless Features

The big buzz on the new E-30 though, is its set of "art filters" and its multiple exposure capabilities. The Flickr crowd probably sees this as a ton of fun, but I see it as a crutch for the ADD crowd who won't take the time to master Photoshop. Sure, I want a "pale light" filter to purposely make my images look washed out and overexposed. Or a "soft focus" filter to take away the one true advantage that the E-System has over their competitors: tack-sharp focus from corner to corner.

What the attractive Olympus "technical representatives" don't tell you in the cool video of their photo shoot (on the Olympus website), is that all these special effects will only be used a few times and then look really boring. Good photography is about vision, not cheap special effects. *(continued)*

---

Olympus has always been a spectacular optical company in search of the right camera.





LOIMINCHAY

speakers

Perfect balance of science and art



degas

chagall



kandinsky



LOIMINCHAY

*The Art of Audio Essence*US dealers**Audio 202**

526 Hwy 202  
Farhills, NJ 07931  
(908) 766-0456

**Audio Vision SF**

1603 Pine at Van Ness,  
San Francisco  
(415) 614-1118

**Glenn Poor Chicago**

55 East Grand Ave.  
Chicago, IL 60611  
(312) 836-1930

**Magnum Opus Audio**

1511 East Las Olas Blvd.  
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301  
(954) 623-7243

212.941.7488 [www.loiminchayaudio.com](http://www.loiminchayaudio.com) [info@loiminchayaudio.com](mailto:info@loiminchayaudio.com)

Same goes for the in-camera multiple exposure feature. The only thing worse than cheesy multiple exposures (think the bride and groom in the wine glass) is the page curl filter in Kai's Power Tools. Again, you can only use this effect once in your whole life or you look like a Photography 101 wanna be. Well, maybe scrapbookers would have fun with this.

**Lackluster at the Extremes**

While the E-30 focuses very quickly in bright light, it hunts in moderate to low light. This means you will almost always miss the critical shot at the birthday party, wedding or rock concert. The "live view" function that allows you to use the LCD panel to compose is great in theory, but focus accuracy suffers and the camera gobbles up its battery in about 100 shots. In the studio, trying to get a super accurate macro shot, it's spectacular, but it still sucks too much battery power to be really useful in the field.

Olympus has made strides in high ISO performance compared to their previous models, but they are trounced by their competitors from Nikon and Canon that cost 50 percent less. If you really need to shoot events or other things that will require a lot of low-light shooting, I'd suggest looking elsewhere. I wouldn't push the E-30 much further than ISO 1600. *(continued)*





### Too Much For Too Little

Unfortunately, Olympus has spent way too much time on trendy marketing slogans such as “capture it all” instead of concentrating on their core competencies. The E-30 would be a fantastic camera if it had a 15 megapixel sensor and cost about 700 bucks. It does a lot of things right, but with a 12 megapixel sensor, a 2.7-inch LCD screen and a \$1,200 price tag, forget about it.

If you are using this camera in a more controlled environment, and you won't be pushing it to any kind of extremes and can take advantage of Olympus' superior optical capabilities, the E-30 could still be for you. And if you really want cool, repeatable special effects, buy a copy of Color Efex Pro from Nik Software.

I wanted to love this one, it looked great on paper. ●



# Tones of Death

\$2.99 each

[www.tonesofdeath.com](http://www.tonesofdeath.com)

I have dedicated myself to having the coolest collection of ringtones on my block by constantly downloading songs from The Clash, Primus, Public Enemy, Echo and the Bunnymen and more. But when it comes to quality metal, you know, the real underground stuff, my cell-phone carrier has always been woefully conservative. What does a closet headbanger like me do when it comes to finding ringtones from such satanic luminaries as Lamb of God, Cannibal Corpse and Lair of the Minotaur?

That's where Tones of Death comes in. It's a website that offers some of the darkest, crunchiest and most twisted ringtones on the planet. This service is also incredibly easy to use; just pick a tone, enter your cell phone number and pay \$2.99 per selection, which is only about 50 cents more than my cell-phone company charges for their wimpy ringtones. It's as quick and painless as the website proclaims, although Tones of Death states, "If you want pain, we can arrange that too."

Even if you're not into such stellar death rock as Lordi, Apocalyptica, Hate Eternal and Cattle Decapitation, you can find plenty of classic metal and hard rock from Ozzy, Alice Cooper, Alice in Chains and Ted Nugent. You can even download some Metallica if you're in a quiet and reflective mood. Just check out the website, load up your phone and wait for that important business call you've been expecting. Your iPhone toting co-workers will be insanely jealous because Tones of Death are not yet ready for the iPhone. – **Marc Phillips**

**Tones of Death states, "If you want pain, we can arrange that too."**



## Ray-Ban's Classic Redone The Wayfarer Square

Various models and colors

\$139, Ray-Ban USA

[www.rayban.com](http://www.rayban.com)

Many of music's coolest people have worn the classic Ray-Ban Wayfarer, which for years only came in basic black. In the 21st Century, this classic gets a makeover with different color combinations such as the dark green and tortoiseshell you see here. Still made to precise standards and one of the only sunglasses that features crystal lenses, the dark green lenses give everything you see a slightly dark and green cast. A definite plus in places like Los Angeles and Phoenix, where the bright sun tends to wash things out. – **Jean Dorgay**



## The Butterfinger Buzz

\$1.59 at Walgreens Stores Everywhere

I don't know who decided to combine all the caffeine of a can of Red Bull with all the sugar of a Butterfinger, but it's brilliant. This is just what the high end audio world needs – after eating three of these and throwing back a Red Bull just for good measure, I can pick up a Wilson X-2 by myself.

I can see the TV spot now with an amped up Bart Simpson, saying "everybody better get the hell away from my Butterfinger Buzz." Butterfinger is claiming a limited run of these, so stock up now. – **Jeff Dorgay**





# Sonic Lighter for the iPhone

99 cents, The Apple App Store  
[www.apple.com/iphone/appstore](http://www.apple.com/iphone/appstore)

**N**ow whenever your favorite ballad comes on, you'll never be at a loss for a lighter to raise in the air. And, you can get it past the security guards at the airport. You can pinch the flame to change its size, blow out the flame with your breath and pick what kind of lighter with which to carry the torch. A ton of fun for 99 cents. – **Jerold O'Brien**

## Vantage

POWER PURITY PERFORMANCE

For over twenty years the world's most demanding enthusiasts have flocked to MartinLogan in pursuit of the magic that only MartinLogan's electrostatic technology can provide.

Even so, our fiercest critics have argued that MartinLogan speakers were too big... Were too hard to drive... And their low-end performance didn't measure up. Not any more.

Featuring a compact cabinet, 92dB sensitivity, and explosive articulate bass, the new Vantage™ speaker system seamlessly blends a 200-watt PoweredForce™ woofer with XStat™ electrostatic technology to fully reveal the powerful emotion of sound.

For a deeper look into Vantage's advanced technologies and to locate your local authorized MartinLogan ESL Series store please visit [www.martinlogan.com](http://www.martinlogan.com).



[www.martinlogan.com](http://www.martinlogan.com)



# TONEAudio Pays a Visit to Shunyata Research

By Jeff Dorgay

These days, Shunyata Research is a name well known to most audiophiles. They make a full range of power conditioners, power cords, accessories and wire products (power cords, interconnects and speaker cables) used in homes and recording studios all over the world. Some of their products have even made it into hospital operating rooms and other critical applications.

Now celebrating their 11th year in business, the company just recently moved to larger headquarters in Poulsbo, Washington, which is about an hour from Seattle to the north, and about three hours from Portland to the south. They have greatly expanded their production facility as well as the sound room that founder Caelin Gabriel uses to evaluate every Shunyata product.





## A tour of the Shunyata facility revealed a fair amount of space devoted to warehousing a lot of finished product, ready to be shipped to Shunyata's many dealers worldwide.

There were also a dozen separate work areas where Shunyata's master technicians assemble their power-line conditioners and painstakingly build their premium power cords, interconnects and speaker cables.

The work areas are very tidy, with an extremely high level of organization, not unlike what you might see in a race garage at the 24 Hours of LeMans. Everything is in its place and everyone knows their job. The cables at the very top of the Shunyata product line require a tremendous amount of hand assembly – each one is thoroughly tested and the technician who built the cable signs his or her name right on the cable. Impressive.

Next stop was the cryo chamber. This is a massive unit that looked big enough to fit a few people inside. Knowing Gabriel does a bit of auto racing on the weekend, I asked him if he's cryo'd some brake components in there between runs of power cords. He laughed, "I've pretty much cryo'd my whole race engine in there..."

Last, we moved to the sound room. Again, Gabriel leaves nothing to chance. An isolation transformer the size of a Sub Zero side-by-side refrigerator is outside the listening room to take care of any outside interference from the neighboring industrial complex. Even the conduit segments that go to the dedicated outlets in the room are all exactly the same length. The reference system I heard consisted of an Audio Research Ref 3 preamplifier, ARC REF 210T monoblock power amplifiers and an ARC CD8 CD player, all powered by Shunyata's V-Ray line conditioners. *(continued)*



## What does *ne plus ultra* mean?

*ne plus ultra* \nay-plus-UL-truh; noun:

1. The highest point, as of excellence or achievement; the acme; the pinnacle; the ultimate.
2. The most profound degree of a quality or condition.

As more and more audio retailers around the country embrace convenience, control, and gadgetry over audio and video performance, they effectively abandon the music and film lovers who desire a real experience from their systems at home.

At *ne plus ultra*, our passion is designing and installing systems that provide a compelling, engaging, and realistic experience of music and film in our clients' own homes. We invite you to our showrooms located in a Victorian mansion in downtown Austin, Texas. We have created an ideal environment in which you can relax and revel in just how amazing and exciting truly realistic music reproduction can be.

audio physic

Ayre Acoustics

Balanced Audio Technology

Cardas Audio

conrad-johnson design

dCS

EAR / Yoshino

Faroudja

*finite elemente*

Grand Prix Audio

Halcro

Helius

Hovland

Lyra

Meridian

Nagra

Rives Audio

Shunyata Research

T + A

Transparent Audio

Wilson Audio

Wilson-Benesch

Gabriel uses a few different types of speakers for auditioning his products, but today he had a pair of original Quad 57's that had been flawlessly restored to "slightly better than new" condition. His room measures about 16 by 30 feet and was actually built as a floating "room within a room." The large sliding door closes on a gasket to block a significant amount of extraneous noise and provide an optimal listening environment.

**As Gabriel and his assistant locked down the room, he said, "I hope you don't have to get up in a hurry; it takes five minutes to open the door now."**

A quick vision of a recent "24" episode ran through my head (after all Gabriel did work for a top military organization at one point), but the minute he pressed play on the CD player, my anxiety disappeared.

Any of our readers who have heard the Quad 57 know that this is not a speaker typically known for its dynamics or range. You also know that these are tough to get set up just right. I must say that this was by far the most musically revealing I've ever heard the Quad 57's sound. I must also say that so far, Gabriel's room at Shunyata is definitely one of the most natural I've heard.

After plenty of music, we had a long chat about Shunyata, its history and future directions. As Gabriel is a big racing enthusiast, the course of the discussion got derailed here and there, but we always came back to the central theme: his passion for Shunyata and his constant research into improving his products. Considering his meticulous attention for detail, I'd hate to be staring him down on the racetrack! *(continued)*



*ne plus ultra*

music and cinema systems ~ *without peer*

402 West 7th Street, Austin, Texas 78701

vox 512.241.0000 / fax 512.236.1764

www.neplusultrainc.com

*by appointment only*

Our Reference Listening Studio Three at *ne plus ultra* features the Wilson Audio Alexandria X-2 Loudspeaker.





**TA:** First of all, where did the name Shunyata come from?

**CG:** It is a Sanskrit word meaning emptiness or stillness. It seems appropriate to the products that we make.

*Your current bio on the Shunyata website lists your backgrounds in physics and computer science. When you were young, what did you gravitate toward first?*

When I was young, I had a telescope and stared off into the stars a lot, but I was the kid who always took everything apart, much to my mother's dismay! I used to burn ants on the sidewalk with a giant 7-inch magnifying glass, too. My parents bought me a giant set of science encyclopedias, too, that was very cool.

*You came from a family of electricians?*

Yes. My grandfather was an electrician, most of my uncles were electricians and my sister is currently an electrician. She's the one responsible for the meticulous wiring in the building and my sound room. I also worked as an electrician in my early college years.

*That attention to detail runs in the family then?*

Definitely.

*Many of our readers know that you used to work for the military. How did you land that job in the first place? I can't imagine you went to a college job fair and walked over to the NSA Booth.*

I was going to college in Southern California, but expenses were mounting. I went to the Army recruiter and took some technical tests. I had the highest score they had seen, so they called me back and told me about a Naval program where I would have two years of just applied electrical engineering. This was during the Vietnam War and it was a better option than getting drafted. So after school, I was off to Berlin, to a communications facility just behind the Berlin wall.

Our job was to pick up signals that at the time were theoretically impossible to pick up because they were beyond the "line of sight." I worked with a team developing digital circuits. Some of this stuff was the size of a room!

---

**In the '70s in the military, you were either into stereos, cameras or drugs. I was a stereo guy.**

*Where did you go after the military?*

I went to the private sector and started working on high-speed data networks, early ethernet systems, back at the beginning of the internet. Later, I went to work with the people at FibreChannel. A lot of time building bridges and routers.

*What brought you to the world of HiFi?*

I was always an audiophile, even when I was stationed in Germany, I worked at some of the HiFi shows for Pioneer. It was always my hobby. In the '70s in the military, you were either into stereos, cameras or drugs. I was a stereo guy. From the beginning, I was trying to get a better sounding system.

When I got out and started working with a lot of test equipment at my day job, I started to investigate why my expensive HiFi system still didn't sound enough like music. And I had close to \$100k invested in my system back in the '80s. *(continued)*





*What did your first system consist of? Do you remember where you bought it?*

Again, in the military. A Pioneer receiver, Technics receiver and a Technics turntable, just before the direct drive tables came out.

*How about a reel-to-reel deck? Did you have an Akai? All of my friend's brothers came home from Vietnam with Akai reel-to-reel decks with GX heads.*

I was a little higher class than that. I had a TEAC and then I moved on to a Revox B-77. Some buddies of mine in the military ran a mobile disco with a Phase Linear 700 and six pairs of BOSE 901's. We used to go to dances and spin records. Great time. Had a few Nakamichi decks, the early DBX system. I was into it all.

My first "high-end" system when I got a job in the private sector had a set of Magnepans, a Carveramp and a VPI turntable. We can just keep going ...

Funny how you can't remember what you ate for dinner a week ago, but you can remember every piece of HiFi you've owned!

**Funny how you can't remember what you ate for dinner a week ago, but you can remember every piece of HiFi you've owned!**

*Has your obsession with audio driven your family and friends crazy, or have you turned some of them into obsessed audiophiles along the way?*

It pissed my wife off until it became a business. Once I could justify it that way, it was OK. My friends all complained that I ruined them, but it's a disease that gets passed along.

*How did you feel about "perfect sound forever," when the first CD players hit the scene?*

I was not happy with digital at all in the beginning and held on to my turntable for a long time. But these days, I feel digital has come a long way.

*Where did the initial spark for Shunyata come from?*

Even though I had an incredible system for the time, it still had too much of an "electronic" sound for me, not enough like music. I didn't start out to build a power cord or a power system, I was just trying to get better sound, period.

Pretty soon I figured out that changes to the power system could dramatically change how my system sounded without changing the components. Everything in the chain makes a difference.

*What do you think of the people that say you don't need a good power cord or an expensive power line conditioner?*

It's like when people say, "If that amplifier had a good power supply, it wouldn't need a good power cord, etc, etc." But we know that's not true. I look at the power cord, etc., as the first few feet of connecting to the power source, rather than the last few feet that come from the power company."

*What does your music collection consist of? Any personal favorites or guilty pleasures?*

Very eclectic, I'm all over the map. I like a lot of classical and straight-ahead jazz. No guilty pleasures.

*How much time do you spend listening to live music? Do you feel that is essential to your work as an ultimate reference?*

Definitely. I listen to live music all the time. We even record live in the sound room to have a great playback reference.

*Are you primarily a digital guy or an analog guy?*

I keep threatening to get my turntable out of storage, but I have really taken an interest in The Tape Project. I have an Ampex being built that I'm pretty excited about. That will become my main reference for the room. I've always been an analog guy – tape. As an analog source, I feel it is far superior to the LP. *(continued)*





*What are your favorite musical choices to evaluate new components with?*

I used to be really familiar with a particular recording of Swan Lake on Deutsche Grammophon. I knew every note. But these days, my palette has widened.

*When you had the first working Hydra, who was your first customer?*

Actually the first product we built was the Hydra but first product we sold was a power cord. The dealer I bought my gear from locally, at Weekend Environments, was intrigued with power cords and Synergistic Research was coming on strong. The company started on my kitchen countertop. It's come a long way. I'm always accumulating information.

*Typically, how long does a Shunyata product go from initial concept to finished product?*

About three years per product generation and I'm usually a generation or two ahead of what the consumer has in my personal system. I'm not "stingy" with new product, but I'm always experimenting with new products. Much of what we learn is what *not* to do. I have a large library of data on what hasn't worked over the years.

*In that vein, when you are working on something new, when do you finally put your stamp on it and call it a day, rather than just researching and improving forever?*

I'm never happy with it. I'm always trying to improve our product. But because we have so many dealers and distributors, I can't be quite as loose with implementing change on the fly

as I did in the early days. To be fair to the customer, a product has to have stability. The guy who buys a Python (power cord) today needs to know that if he adds another one in a year, they will sound the same.

*When did the lightbulb really go on for Shunyata? Was it a leap of faith to make the jump from day job to audiophile company?*

I started making my products for some close friends and myself. When I no longer had enough time to make my products in my spare time, it became my day job.

*Where would you say you get your best ideas?*

All during the day actually. I'm constantly testing things and I like to think I test things that others take for granted. Throughout the course of my testing, one thing tends to lead to another. I spend a lot of time listening, which leads to a reference library of knowledge. After a while, you are able to eliminate certain combinations right away. It's almost like being a good chef – you have to know your ingredients.

And you have to have quality ingredients. If you can't get them, you have to create them.

*You like to race cars. Do you ever get a great idea sliding out of Turn 2 because you are completely immersed in something other than design at the time? (continued)*

---

**I spend a lot of time listening, which leads to a reference library of knowledge. After a while, you are able to eliminate certain combinations right away.**



**F80**  
BOOTHROYD STUART  
**MERIDIAN**

## The Meridian F80. Hi-fidelity distilled.

Developed in collaboration with Ferrari, the Meridian F80 is the world's most advanced and compact complete entertainment system. The press agrees: the F80's performance is just as astonishing as its design.

*"Holy crap, that sounded good... The sound wasn't just big—it was enveloping. Immense. Intense. Immediate."*  
—Wes Phillips, *Stereophile*, April 2008  
Stereophile Class A Recommended Component

*"As a second room system, or even something to take on holiday... the F80 is a work of genius."*  
—What Hi-Fi? *Sound & Vision*, June 2007

*"....what makes it a no-brainer is the sheer scale, drama and musical satisfaction that the Meridian can generate."*  
—Roy Gregory, *Hi-Fi +*, July 2007

**Ferrari**  
OFFICIAL LICENSED PRODUCT

**Meridian America Inc**  
8055 Troon Circle, Suite C  
Austell, GA 30168-7849, USA  
+1 (404) 344 7111  
[www.meridian-audio.com](http://www.meridian-audio.com)

All trademark rights reserved. Produced under licence of Ferrari SpA. FERRARI, the PRANCING HORSE device, all associated logos and distinctive designs are trademarks of Ferrari SpA.

No, when I'm behind the wheel, nothing else exists.

*What would you say has been your biggest triumph with the company?*

Our \$99 Venom power cord. It's our least-expensive power cord. It's our biggest achievement because it offers a lot of our technology at a very reasonable price point and makes a huge difference from the standard black cord that comes with a component.

**My mantra is "get all the black cords out of the system."**

Fortunately, some audiophiles want a more expensive cord, but we tell our customers: just get rid of all the stock cords and start with our venom cords so that you have decent power cords on every one of your components instead of just having one good cord in the system. That's a great place to start.

I'm not asking you to buy a \$2,000 power cord. I'm not even asking you to buy Venom cords. I want you to hear how good your components can sound. Go to one of our dealers and *borrow* five Venom cables to evaluate your system. Then, once you hear the difference our power cords make, just put one black cord back in the system and listen to the difference. I think you'll see my point.

That's the Shunyata story, at least a good portion of it. Caelin Gabriel is a man with an appreciation for science, music and, most of all, the drive to constantly improve his products. I was very impressed with the commitment to excellence I saw in every phase of the Shunyata factory. Watch for the review of their flagship Aurora cables in our next issue. ●



# The Burmester 061 CD Player

By Jeff Dorgay

---

For many audiophiles and music lovers, Burmester represents the top of the mountain in terms of sonic excellence.

Company principal Dieter Burmester is a designer of highest quality as well as a musician, which I'm convinced makes a substantial contribution to some of the most natural and lifelike HiFi gear I've ever had the pleasure to audition.

*Burmester*  
061







The helicopters came in and I sat up on the couch fully engaged. Looking down at my arm, I noticed that I had major goosebumps.

My journey started at this year's Consumer Electronics Show on the final day as the show was winding down. U.S. Sales Manager Jenny Smith told me about Burmester's four different product lines and offered a demo in the next room with their flagship components. Her associate, Ralf Manhardt, cued up Pink Floyd's *The Wall* as I thought to myself, "I've heard this about 50 times already this weekend..."

The helicopters came in and I sat up on the couch fully engaged. Looking down at my arm, I noticed that I had major goosebumps. I left the Burmester room about an hour later completely impressed with the Burmester sound and approach, and returned a few more times with friends in tow, who all experienced the same goosebumps.

Those of you visiting Burmester's website for the first time will notice the mirrored finish on the 061's front panel. This is a chrome-plated front panel, not just polished aluminum, which will retain its luster indefinitely. This chrome finish is applied over a layer of brass, for ultimate longevity. The car-restoration experts in the audience know that this is the way chrome plating used to be applied in the old days, but now only done by the most meticulous experts. This attention to detail permeates Burmester, as they strive to make their products something that you can own for a lifetime. *(continued)*



Photographed against a white background, the chrome finish might appear very bright, but as Ralf reminded me, “The chrome finish reflects the environment that the Burmester gear is placed, allowing it to blend in to its surroundings.” In a rack next to my other gear, it draws little attention to itself, and in low light, the 061’s front panel appears black; very chameleon like!

### A Brief Overview

Burmester offers four different product ranges, and the 061 is the CD player that is part of their Classic line, retailing for \$13,995. Above this player resides their 001 and 069 players (which are both belt drive). Like all Burmester components, the 061 is fully balanced and uses an upsampling DAC design that can be switched between 96 and 192kHz modes, easily changed from the front panel or via the remote control.

Though Burmester is known for its belt-drive CD players, the 061 features direct drive and is a top-loading model, with the drawer sliding back manually. I prefer this arrangement because the last thing you want from your five-figure CD player is to have it crippled because it won’t open or close, and I applaud Burmester for taking this straightforward approach.

Sliding the massive door open, you see the Burmester slogan, “Art for the Ears – Handmade in Germany”. Once your CD is placed inside, you drop the finely machined clamp on top and you’re ready for musical bliss. Should you open the door during playback, the sound mutes immediately without any annoying thump.

### Flexible for today, ready for the future

All Burmester CD players are built in a modular fashion, with future upgrades in mind, so that should something radically different come along, the 061 will be ready to handle it. The MMI slot located on the rear panel shows the commitment to expansion, and this is what makes a player at this price point an investment rather than a mere purchase. *(continued)*

---

Sliding the massive door open, you see the Burmester slogan, “Art for the Ears – Handmade in Germany”.





Battleship build quality means little without the sonics to back it up, and the 061 does not take a back seat to anything in its price category.

A look at the rear panel of the 061 reveals an optical digital input and two RCA digital inputs. There is an optical and RCA digital output to use the 061 with a digital amplification source along with single ended RCA analog outputs and balanced XLR's.

For those requiring computer control, there is a pair of BURLINK interface ports (RS-232 and USB) so that the 061 can be integrated into any kind of remote-control system. Using these ports will require your dealer to fit a small expansion module at the cost of \$345. This module was not ready in time for the review, so there will be a follow-up review in the near future because I want to control the Burmester system from my computer!

### Sublime Sound

Battleship build quality means little without the sonics to back it up, and the 061 does not take a back seat to anything in its price category. Listening side by side with my reference Meridian and Wadia players that are comparably priced, I came away very impressed with the 061. When you are purchasing a CD player at this level, it is very similar to buying an equally expensive analog front end; each player has its own sound characteristic and strengths.

While others like to throw the word "best" around, what I'm listening for is how much music the digital player reveals and most importantly, how much does that component get out of the way and just provide a conduit to the music. Can you sit in your listening chair and not worry about the source? Some digital players grab you with detail initially, but it can give way to listener fatigue after a long session.

*(continued)*



# Actually, you CAN have it both ways.

*The lucidity and harmonic "rightness" of a tube amplifier and the muscle and control of a solid-state amplifier.*

Introducing the conrad-johnson ET250S enhanced triode amplifier. The sole source of voltage gain, a single-ended triode establishes the harmonic character, while a high-current, high damping factor transistor output stage produces the muscle (250 watts/ch) and control. Hear one for yourself at your nearest conrad-johnson dealer. Write or visit our web site for more information.

The 061 does a fantastic job on all counts. It may lack the ultimate weight and resolution of Burmester's top players and my Naim CD555 (which costs more than twice as much), but it plays at the top of its class when compared to other players at similar prices. Where the Wadia 781SE has more bass slam and the Meridian 808.2 a slightly smoother top end, the Burmester has a more organic and cohesive feel overall, with midrange magic that the other two do not possess.

Much like my Naim CD555, when I'm listening to the Burmester player, it is easy to sit back and experience the music.

---

**The common phrase "that's great for *digital*" does not enter into my thought process when listening to the 061.**

After multiple listening sessions, the natural tonality of the Burmester just kept coming back to the front of my consciousness. Even though the 061 does not offer up as much resolution as the company's two more expensive players, the overall sound quality that I found so natural and enjoyable was consistent. It's much like comparing Burmester's SME 10 turntable to its flagship SME 30: very similar sound quality, but more resolution is available as you go up the line.

The 061 really shines when listening to acoustic instruments. No matter what kind of music you enjoy, you will notice an extremely lifelike quality from the presentation. I know digital is not analog, but I like to be fooled whenever I can and the 061 does an excellent job. Where the 061 continued to hold my attention was with its balance. *(continued)*

**conrad-johnson** It just sounds right.

2733 Merrilee Dr • Fairfax, VA 22031 • phone: 703-698-8581, fax: 703-560-5360 • [www.conradjohnson.com](http://www.conradjohnson.com)





I always found the sound to be very neutral and inviting. This incredibly neutral tonality eliminated listener fatigue, while the resolution kept me anxious to hear the next disc, even after hours in the listening chair.

Test discs are always tough to pick when evaluating any component because the chance of my favorite music being the same as what you enjoy (and your favorite pressing of the CD) is a shot in the dark. And I know our younger readers get tired of hearing about the same warhorses over and over again.

While I don't typically listen to a ton of sultry female vocalists (I'd rather hear Patti Smith or Shirley Manson from Garbage), I do listen to a lot of acoustic instruments when evaluating tonality, piano and violins in particular as these seem to be the toughest to get right. *(continued)*

---

This incredibly neutral tonality eliminated listener fatigue, while the resolution kept me anxious to hear the next disc, even after hours in the listening chair.





Though more sophisticated classical listeners in the audience will have their favorite pieces by which to judge a component's virtue, my classical test is very simple: a great digital component will reveal a natural tone when playing back anything on violin, while mediocre ones make the violins sound screechy and uncomfortable. Laugh if you want, but it works.

### Dual Upsampling

The 061 is an upsampling DAC/player, but you can switch between a 96khz rate or 192khz. I spent a fair amount of time with this and noticed a subtle but marked difference between the two. On almost every disc I auditioned, the higher upsample rate smoothed out the treble response during playback. The closest thing I can compare it to is swapping preamplifier tubes in my Nagra PL-L; the stock tubes are slightly more extended and neutral, while substituting the NOS Telefunken offers up a "creamier" sound.

Fortunately, you can do this right from the comfort of your couch with the 061, and when you have engaged the higher sampling rate, a green LED lights up on the front panel. I preferred the 96khz rate for most discs, but when playing the *Monkees' Greatest Hits*, which is notoriously crunchy, I found the higher sampling rate made the disc more listenable. Ultimately, your preference will boil down to personal taste.

### DAC Magic

The 061 is an extra versatile player, thanks to its optical and RCA digital inputs, allowing you to use it with your computer (via optical digital output), music server or Wadia 170i transport.

I use my Sooloos music server quite heavily, so I spent an equal amount time listening to the 061 as a DAC and came away impressed. On many discs, the difference between the FLAC files on my Sooloos sounded very close to what I was hearing from the 061's disc drawer. *(continued)*



series 1

## 170iTransport



The 170iTransport is the first component specifically designed to transform your iPod into a high-resolution audio/video media server.

The 170iTransport combines the convenience of personal audio with the performance and connectivity of your home audio/video system, delivering bit-perfect digital audio signal via a coaxial S/PDIF output, DVD quality video via component outputs, and built on a sleek stackable cast aluminum chassis.

When the iPod docks with 170iTransport, the iPod transforms into an audiophile-grade media server that rivals some of the top performing digital source components available.



I also had excellent results using the 061 with our McIntosh MS300 and Wadia 170i. The optical input worked well from my Mac Book Pro, but this input showed a decrease in overall performance due to the limitations of the optical connection from my laptop. I would love to see a USB input on future Burmester digital players to address the dedicated computer audiophile; that is my only complaint with the 061.

### It Keeps Coming Back to Balance

While \$13,995 certainly isn't an entry level CD player purchase, in a world where we have players with \$30,000, \$50,000 and even \$100,000 price tags, the Burmester 061 is a solid value on a number of levels. Adding its ability as a high-performance DAC and digital control center makes it easier to justify the cost.

Most importantly, the sound quality is at the top of the range where it currently resides. Beyond that, it is meticulously built and, by the nature of its modular construction, is ready for any future format changes. Burmester makes it clear that when you send a piece of their gear back to the factory for an *authorized* upgrade, your unit will have a three-year warranty upon return.

And that, my friends is why you write the five-figure check. The Burmester 061 offers fantastic sound, dashing good looks and it is built to last a lifetime. ●

---

*Manufacturers information and associated components in Burmester 082 review.*

**TONE**Audio  
Magazine  
**2008**

Product of the Year  
Award

D I G I T A L I N T U I T I O N

[www.wadia.com](http://www.wadia.com)

Wadia

TONE **A86** NO.21 2009





*Burmester*  
082

# The Burmester 082 Integrated

A Perfect Balance

By Jeff Dorgay





Perusing the covers of most HiFi magazines, we see the word “best” used quite often, perhaps too often. The word not used often enough is “balance,” and if I had to sum up the Burmester 082 in one word, that would be it. If I had the luxury of a two-word description, it would be expanded to “perfect balance.”

The 082 is Burmester’s most recent integrated amplifier, a direct descendant of their 032 integrated and world-renowned 911 power amplifier. If I ever get the opportunity to meet Dieter Burmester, the company principal and head designer, I will buy him the most expensive drink in the bar for NOT naming his electronics after his wife, daughter, dog or favorite spice. I like numbers. My favorite cars (BMW) have numbers that are easy to remember, and that’s the way I like it.



The 082 integrated has an MSRP of \$15,995. Once you get over the initial shock of spending that kind of money on an integrated amplifier, you'll find that it's actually quite a bargain. Still with me? If we break the cost down, \$15,995 buys a power amplifier, full function preamplifier (*with* tone controls) and a headphone amplifier all in one gorgeous box. If you were buying a midlevel power amplifier and preamplifier from any other well-respected brand like CJ, BAT or ARC, I'm sure you would spend at least \$16,000, and then you would need a \$1,500 interconnect between the two and, of course, you would need a second power cord for the other box. Let's postulate that you would spend about \$750 there and at least another \$1,000 for a nice headphone amplifier, so the 082 does turn out to be a bargain, plus you gain space on your rack.

Though I'm the world's greatest rationalizer, 15 minutes after you turn on the 082, you won't be thinking about numbers anymore. You will be under its spell. It all comes back to balance, you see.

The 082 shares the exquisite build quality of every Burmester product. The small front panel is chrome plated, while the heatsinks that cover the periphery of the chassis are powder coated in silver. The top panel has the cleanest laser cutting I've ever seen, showing off the Burmester logo; removing it reveals top quality parts and meticulous attention to parts layout and cable routing. All amplification stages are DC coupled, with no capacitors in the signal path, and the power supply is overbuilt with a huge toroidal power transformer and 82,000 uf of filter capacitance.

### The Ins and Outs of the 082

The 082 has fully balanced circuitry throughout, though it does feature two unbalanced RCA inputs along with the three balanced XLR inputs and a balanced XLR input for use in a surround-sound system. (*continued*)

**15 minutes after you turn on the 082, you won't be thinking about numbers anymore. You will be under its spell.**







There are a set of balanced and unbalanced variable outputs should you want to include a powered subwoofer or use the 082 as part of a biamplified system. Handily, there is a set of fixed outputs for those with recording devices that require an analog feed. Just like the 016 CD player, there are USB and RS-232 outputs, so this amplifier could be part of a computer-controlled system, via your desktop, Crestron or other popular controller.

While I was impressed with the speaker connectors and their ease of use, my sole complaint with the 082 is the close proximity of left and right RCA jacks to each other. I could not use all of my favorite cables with this amplifier; anything with a large RCA plug would be crowded. I had no problems with Cardas Golden

Reference and Furutech Reference, but my Shunyata Anteres cables would not fit. A small point of contention, but if you have a substantial investment in RCA cables, take them with you to the Burmester dealer when you audition the 082, just to be safe. If you do not plan on switching to balanced interconnects for everything, your Burmester dealer can provide you with balanced to RCA adapters for your present components.

### Much Better Than iDrive

Much like the current BMWs, the 082 has one major control knob, but it's a lot easier to use than the notorious iDrive and the feel is sublime. *(continued)*





**If I expand my definition to include a third word, it would be “thorough.”**

You can select inputs and functions from the front panel or the remote, as well as program most of the functions from the remote. The 082's volume control has the perfect weight, feel and damping. It's so well executed, you don't even want to use the remote; it beckons you to walk across the room and use it.

You can also use the setup menu to adjust the levels of your sources to make them all identical, adjust channel balance and the overall gain of the amplifier. I found this to be a handy feature because if you have very high-efficiency speakers, setting the gain to the LO position offers a full range of motion on the volume control.

The volume control can be set to start at a preset level, or by using “last” mode, it will start up at the setting last used. If I expand my definition to include a third word, it would be “thorough.” The Burmester 082 leaves no possible scenario unaccounted for, something I've grown accustomed to after living with this amplifier for a few months. No matter what you might want to add to a system built around the 082, it will be ready.

### **The Boundaries**

The best news is that the Burmester 082 has audio performance to match its design sensibilities. As I replaced my reference Conrad Johnson ACT2/Series 2 and Premier 350 for the 082, I was surprised that I wasn't giving up that much and in some ways, I enjoyed the Burmester more. The only area that the 082 could not match my CJ combination was in ultimate volume and dynamics, but the Premier 350 produces three times as much power.

While I have never been able to drive the Premier 350 to clipping when driving my MartinLogan CLX's (or any other speaker I've had in the studio) I could run the 082 out of gas if I pushed it to insane volume levels. It did a better job than I expected driving the current-hungry Magnepan 1.6's, and while I could have used a bit more juice there as well, the quality of the sound was amazing. I've never heard the 1.6's sound more realistic and open. The 082 is rated at 100 watts per channel into an 8-ohm load and 150 watts per channel into 4 ohms. *(continued)*



**Coffin&Trout**  
Fine Jewellers



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

WWW.COFFINANDTROUT.COM

IMAGINATIVE - ARTISTIC - JEWELRY | 480.763.1300 800.684.8984 CHANDLER, ARIZONA

Moving along to some more real-world speakers, like the Verity Sarastros and the new JM/Focal Diablos, I could play these as loud as my hearing would allow and I was bottoming the woofers on the Diablos way before the 082 did. The owner's manual mentions that if you overheat the 082, a light will come on with an error code on the front panel. Even running the 082 hard while pushing the Magne-pans, the 082 never got more than slightly warm to the touch. I can't imagine what you would have to do to get this amplifier to shut down.

At the Burmester factory, the amplifiers are run at full volume into a very low impedance load for five straight days. The amplifiers are measured again and any deviation from original measurements is cause for rejection. I am told that it gets very warm in that room.

### **The Big Natural**

One of the biggest questions that every audiophile faces is whether to choose amplification with tubes or transistors. Those who love tubes prefer that extra bit of romance, musicality or whatever you'd like to call it, while solid-state aficionados prefer the extra grip and dynamic slam that solid-state amplifiers usually offer. At the edge of their respective technology curve, the sounds start to converge, but most people usually respond more favorably to one than the other. I've always hedged my bet with a big solid-state power amplifier and a tube preamplifier with a minimal complement of tubes. (The ACT 2 has only four)

The 082 satisfies my quest for having the extra bit of three dimensionality that tubes offer, while it retains the dynamics of the best solid-stage gear. *(continued)*





## dmitri

The new RSA Dmitri is the ultimate evolution of our work in power line conditioning technology. Utilizing our new RSA platinum series capacitors and proprietary inductors, the Dmitri takes power line conditioning to the next level and beyond.

- All components are designed and manufactured in our ISO 9001:2000 approved facility in Anaheim, California – USA.
- Tolerances on capacitors and inductors meet or exceed 1%.
- 100% passive, non-current limiting topography.
- New carbon fiber resonance vibration control.
- Significantly lower noise floor and improved dynamics.

With meticulous attention to detail, coupled with raw science, the Dmitri allows your components the opportunity to deliver all of the performance that your system has to offer.

The Dmitri can be ordered as a stand alone unit, (without 20A power cord), with our world famous Mongoose power cord or with our new flagship PC, "High Zoot" (HZ) for ultimate performance. Stop by your Running Springs Audio dealer and audition the future of power line conditioning.

*"The Dmitri represents the state of the art in power line conditioning."*

– Jeff Dorgay, *TONEAudio Magazine*, Issue 18



# clean power pure sound

Power Line Conditioners Hand Made in California [www.runningspringsaudio.com](http://www.runningspringsaudio.com)



running springs audio

Between what I heard in the Burmester room at CES and living with the 082 for some time, it does the best job I've yet experienced at defying conventional definition. It doesn't sound specifically like either, yet I prefer it to the best examples of either that I've heard. While it doesn't have the ultimate warmth of the best Class-A designs, neither does it have the softness of some of those amplifiers.

If anything, the presentation is only slightly different from my CJ gear in the respect that where the CJ does an amazing job at defining the exact space of where a performer is standing in the recording space (sometimes a bit too much) and the 082 does not have quite the razor-sharp edges of my reference amplification, though slightly more natural overall. Spending four years with a pair of reference components affords an intimate relationship and allows differences to stand out immediately.

As I logged more hours with the 082, I noticed that I lost a bit of pinpoint imaging, but I gained more texture, nuance and inner detail – a happy tradeoff indeed. A number of my good friends who have listened to my system grow over the years all said the same thing: "It doesn't sound like tubes or transistors. It just sounds like music!"

**When I revisited favorite discs that I've heard many times over, I was able to repeatedly hear further into the recordings than I have been able to in the past.**

Everything took on a slightly more "real" feel than I've been used to, and I was very impressed that this was happening with an integrated! (continued)



Spending a whole week at the Portland Jazz Festival listening to primarily acoustic instruments helped reset my references for how some of my favorites sound in various acoustic spaces. A stand-up bass in a moderate-sized room does not have highly damped bass response. It's slightly loose. But a Fender electric bass run through a set of Gallien-Kruger cabinets (with aluminum cone drivers) has a much tighter, damped sound. A group of performers up on a stage doesn't offer pinpoint imaging, even when you are listening from the center of the fifth row. It was quite revealing to listen to some of my favorite performers live and then come back the next day to revisit them with the Burmester gear, the subtle differences completely intact when listening to recorded examples of the same music.

### I'm Hooked

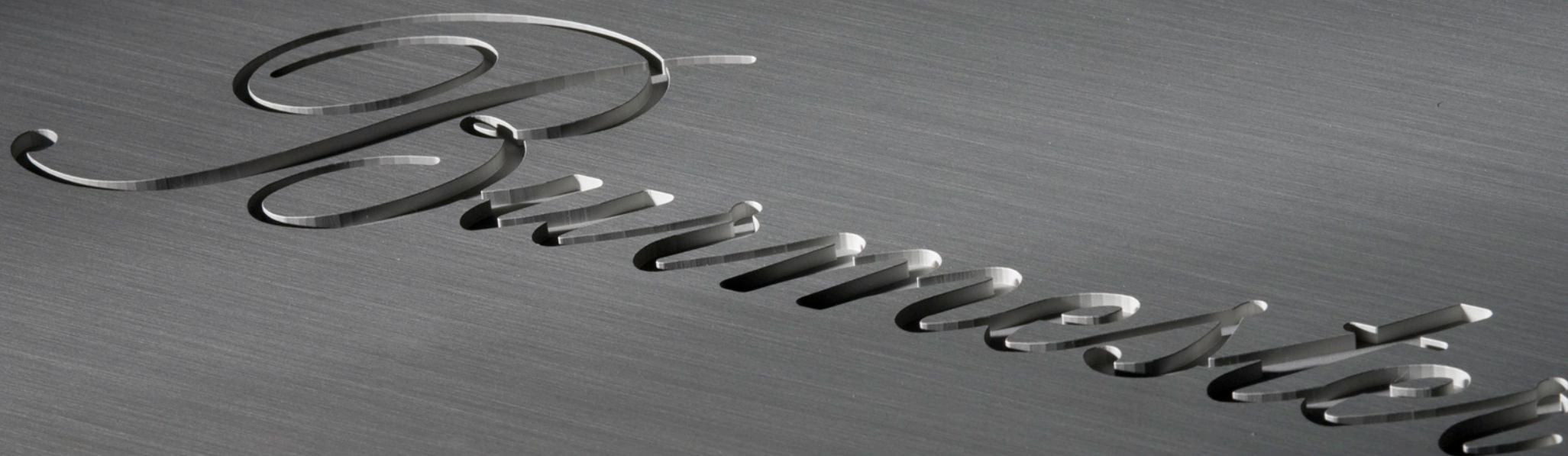
I think Dieter Burmester sums it up perfectly when he says, "The optimum sound is achieved when you

cease contemplating." I couldn't agree with him more. I love music and enjoy evaluating components, but after a full week of critical listening, it can be tough to remove the reviewer hat and just experience music. Recording engineers and musicians I know have told me they have the same problem. They keep listening to the mix or the drum tracks and can't always enjoy recorded music as much as they would like because they are immersed in it all day long.

The highest compliment I can pay the Burmester 082 was that I could always get to that non-contemplative state that Dieter Burmester talks about within a few minutes, regardless of program source. If you are looking for an extremely high performance, yet minimalist system the Burmester 082 is the integrated amplifier I'd tell you to buy. ●

---

**I think Dieter Burmester sums it up perfectly when he says, "The optimum sound is achieved when you cease contemplating."**





The Burmester 082  
Integrated Amplifier  
MSRP: \$15,995

#### MANUFACTURER

Burmester Audiosysteme  
GmbH  
+49 (30) 787 96 80  
www.burmester.de

#### US DISTRIBUTION

ASL Group  
317-841-4100  
www.audiophilesystems.com

#### PERIPHERALS

(082 and 016 reviews)

**Digital Sources** Burmester 016  
CD player, Naim CD555 player,  
Sooloos Music Server

**Analog Source** TW-Acoustic  
Raven TWO w/SME 309 and SME  
iV.Vi tonearms, Clearaudio Maestro  
Wood and Dynavector XV-1s  
cartridges, Nagra VPS phono  
preamp

**Speakers** Harbeth Monitor 40.1,  
Magnepan 1.6, MartinLogan  
CLX w/Descent i subwoofers,  
MartinLogan Spire, Verity Audio  
Sarastro II

**Cable** Shunyata Anteres  
interconnect, Shunyata Orion  
Speaker Cable

**Power** Running Springs Dmitri  
and Jaco Power Conditioners,  
Shunyata Hydra 2 Power  
Conditioner, Running Springs HZ  
Power Cords, Shunyata Anaconda  
VX Power Cords

**Accessories** Burmester V3 rack,  
Finite Elemente Pagode Signature  
rack and amplifier platform, Finite  
Cerapucs and Ceraballs, Shunyata  
Dark Field Cable Elevators,  
Clearaudio Simple Matrix record  
cleaning system

ALO audio

*Don't let your interconnects be your weakest link*

www.aloaudio.com  
ALO - Hand Built in the USA





# Master Indeed! The PBN Audio Turntable

By Jeff Dorgay



**A**fter listening to different turntables from a lot of manufacturers, you start to get a feel for everyone's "sound." Even the most inexperienced listener would never mistake a Rega turntable for a Linn, or a VPI for an SME; they each have their own character and way of presenting recorded music.

I've heard my share of Peter Noerbaek's Montana speakers over the years at various shows and was always impressed. So when I saw he was making a turntable, I got on his case to send me one. It was well worth the wait. This is a beefy turntable, with a plinth made from three layers of kiln-dried hardwoods. The dual motor-drive system has a 17-pound flywheel to help ensure speed accuracy and a low noise floor with four belts driving it. The Groove Master does take up a large footprint, so make sure that your rack can accommodate it.

The Montana Groove Master is \$8,995 with an SME 312 arm installed. The new Magnesium tube S version is also available at a slightly higher cost. While a 12-inch arm offers lower tracking error than a 9-inch arm, it also requires more attention when setting up; just as a long telephoto lens is more susceptible to camera shake unless it is steady, that long arm will accentuate tracking errors if you have it set up incorrectly.







# Unprecedented.

In 2008, The Absolute Sound honored three of our subwoofers with an Editors' Choice Award.

(The other two haven't been reviewed yet.)



Fathom® f212

Fathom® f110

Fathom® f112

Fathom® f113

Gotham® g213



GOATHAM® g213  
FATHOM® f113  
FATHOM® f112

But don't let that scare you off. Using my standard set of tools from Acoustic Sounds and my trusty multimeter, I was able to get this arm to sing in less than an hour, with another half hour to make minute adjustments by ear.

## Throwing My Bias Out the Window

I've never really warmed up to the VPI sound, so I was somewhat reserved when I saw the VPI speed controller, motor assembly and clamp as I was unboxing the Groove Master, which comes meticulously packaged in a sturdy wooden crate with the tonearm already installed. Peter said that he also purchases the platter and bearing from VPI, but told me "the wood is the difference. You'll see!"

A quick check of the factory settings revealed them to be spot on, so I proceeded with setup. The Groove Master uses the VPI SDS controller, making it easy to switch between 33 and 45 rpm operation and perform fine speed adjustments. If you are in an environment that requires fine-tuning, you can set the speed up or down right from the front panel of the SDS. You probably can get it pretty close optically, with a fluorescent light and your favorite strobe disc, or by using a test record with a 1000 hz band and a digital multimeter that reads frequency. Just use the buttons on the front of the SDS and vary the speed until your multimeter reads 1000hz and you can set your speed to *exactly* 33.33 r.p.m. Fortunately, my test sample was perfect right out of the box. *(continued)*





### The Benefit of a Longer Tonearm

I was anxious to investigate the longer tonearm, but I was warned that it did have its own issues. The downside to the longer arm is cartridge selection. Heavier models are out, because the combination will result in too much mass to get any kind of decent trackability. SME specifies cartridges in the 5-9 gram range for the 312, eliminating my reference Dynavector XV-1s (12 grams) from this review.

That still left me with the Lyra Skala (nine grams), Sumiko Blackbird (nine grams) and a pair of six-gram Grados (the new Master and the old Statement) to investigate. First up was the Blackbird, which has always been a harsh match for the VPI Scoutmaster. The Blackbird is a great budget cartridge, but it's not totally compatible with that many turntables that I've tried. With the right table, it is magic, offering a lot of detail retrieval and great tonality. But on the wrong table, it can be a big disappointment, sounding screechy, harsh and thin.

It's an understatement to say I was not prepared for the magic I experienced with the Groove Master. I've been using a Blackbird for about five years, so I feel familiar with the cartridge. But I've never heard it sound this musical – ever. I noticed creaminess to the playback that reminded me of good analog tape. It's not soft or rounded off, just free of the distortions that come with a stylus being dragged around a groove and the associated tracking error. If you've ever had the chance to hear a demonstration from the guys at The Tape Project, or heard some of the one-half track pre-recorded tapes of classical music from the '60's, you know what I'm talking about.

Switching to two other cartridges with which I am familiar, the Grado and the Lyra, produced the same results.

*(continued)*



One of my favorite records from past year was the Fleet Foxes' self-titled debut, but I've always preferred the CD because the LP sounds somewhat grainy and flat. This was the first record I spun with the GM and there was definitely more depth to the recording than what I had experienced before, even compared with the XV-1s on my Raven Two/SME iV.Vi combination. At this point, I was wishing that my XV-1s weighed less so I could give it a whirl on the Groove Master.

### Is it the arm or the table?

The more time I spent listening to the Groove Master, the more I wondered how much of its magic was the 12-inch tonearm and how much was Noerbaek's unique plinth and arm board. The Groove Master I had for review only had provision for one arm, though you can get a second arm board for an extra \$295.

To get a better feel for the arm, I mounted it on my Raven TWO, next to an SME 309 with each arm having identical Lyra Skala cartridges and Furutech tonearm cables, so that the only variable was the arm itself. The different tonal character of the Raven was immediately apparent, having more punch than the Groove Master and allowing slightly more resolution, but not as dreamy. Not better or worse, just different, like switching from the comfort mode to the sport mode on a Bentley Continental.

Playing many of the same records I had used for the initial evaluation of the Groove Master, it was easy to compare arms on the Raven. The 12-inch arm definitely had the edge in providing a more substantial helping of analog bliss.

*(continued)*

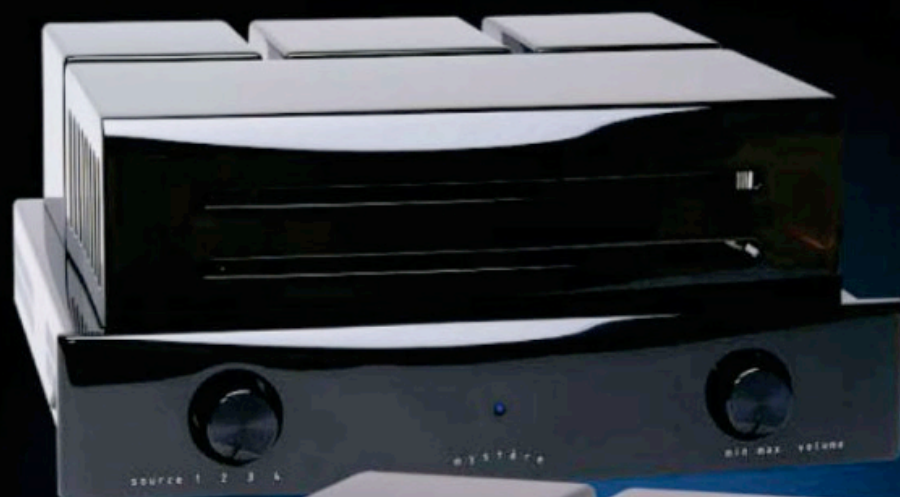




## m y s t è r e

"...a true giant in the world of integrated amplifiers."

— Marc Phillips, **TONE**Audio 2008



the **ia21** \$2999  
50 watts per channel



the **ia11** \$1999  
40 watts per channel



For more information:  
**Upscale Audio at 909/931-9686**  
[www.mystere-usa.com](http://www.mystere-usa.com)

A limited number of dealer and manufacturer's  
representative positions are open

Everything you've read about longer arms having lower distortion (if setup correctly) is true. Even on the Raven, I preferred the sound of the 12-inch arm, providing a more relaxed overall presentation.

However, putting that arm back on the Groove Master brought a further level of warmth and three-dimensionality, so that I found myself listening to it for hours on end. If you've thought that all turntables sound the same, you just need to mount the same arm and cartridge to two different turntables and it's easy to hear the distinction.

I can easily say that the Groove Master is at the top of my list for great analog experiences. While it lacks the ultimate resolution of the top dogs, it has such a great balance of tonality, weight and analog richness that it is definitely *not* one of those analog setups that only allows you to play your most well-recorded treasures.

---

**While the Groove Master adds some warmth to the presentation, it never bothered me.**

Unless you are like a friend of mine who says, "It's never warm and romantic enough for me," I'd suggest making cartridge choices that tend toward the neutral to slightly forward side of the scale. The Blackbird and Skala were both fantastic choices, but the Grado Statement (which is a perfect match for my Raven Two) was too much of a good thing.

Overall, this table has such a rich tone that it's hard to break away from its spell. Noerbaek chalks this up to the exotic woods used in the tonearm mounting board. He calls it a "secret detail," and I have to agree. Switching from the Blackbird to the Lyra Skala allowed me to hear way into the music while offering up that incredible smoothness. (*continued*)





I spent more time with this combination listening to marginal records, only to find that much of what I perceived as graininess was eliminated by the combination of longer tonearm and warmth from the Groove Master. Many records I had deemed only barely listenable now provided an enjoyable experience.

### **A Great Hybrid That's More Than the Sum of its Parts**

Though you might pooh-pooh Peter for using some off-the-shelf components in the construction of the Groove Master, the good news is that should anything ever happen to it, there would be no problems getting it repaired. Unless we end up in a Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome world, I'm pretty confident there will be someone with a VPI motor and controller to sell you as a replacement. And after 50 years, SME isn't going anywhere, either, so you are assured that the Groove Master can always be serviced.

Unless you have unlimited check-cashing privileges (and an awesome room), high-end audio is always going to be a series of compromises, and I always suggest gear that will allow you to make the most of your music collection. The Groove Master does that. It has all the things that matter most to me: excellent tonality, speed accuracy, and a substantial dose of weight and body that brings recorded music to life in my listening room.

Granted, \$9,000 is certainly not a budget turntable, but it's not out of reach for the serious music lover and it does not require a mega cartridge for great performance. Compared to the other tables I've had the pleasure of using in this price range, the Groove Master is one of my favorites. I wouldn't call it warm or colored as much as I would just call it tonally rich, in the way I would call a Martin guitar richer in tone than a Takamine. Put this one at the top of your turntable wish list. ●





extraordinary  
+  
synergy



Red Wine Audio is proud to be the exclusive  
North American Distributor for **WLM Loudspeakers**

**Red Wine Audio**  
battery-powered purist hi-fi



**WLM**  
Loudspeakers

[www.redwineaudio.com](http://www.redwineaudio.com)

The Montana Audio Groove  
Master Turntable

MSRP: \$8,995 with  
SME 312 arm

# MANUFACTURER

## PBN Audio

380 Vernon Way, Suites I&J  
El Cajon, CA 92020  
619-40-8237  
[www.pbnaudio.com](http://www.pbnaudio.com)

# PERIPHERALS

**Cartridges** Sumiko Blackbird,  
Grado Statement, Grado Master,  
Lyra Skala

**Phono Stages** Audio Research  
PH3SE, Nagra BPS, Nagra VPS,  
Naim Superline w/HighCap2

**Preamplifier** Conrad Johnson  
ACT2/Series 2

**Power Amplifier** Conrad  
Johnson Premier 350,  
Burmester 082(integrated)

**Speakers** JM/Focal Diablo,  
MartinLogan CLX w/(2) Descent  
i subwoofers, Verity Audio  
Sarastro II

**Interconnects**  
Shunyata Antares

**Speaker Cables**  
Shunyata Orion

**Power Cords** Running Springs  
Mongoose and HZ, Shunyata  
Anaconda

**Line Conditioning** Running  
Springs Dmitri, Jaco, Shunyata  
Hydra 2

**Accessories** Burmester V3  
equipment rack, Finite Elemente  
Pagode Signature equipment  
rack, Finite Amplifier Platform,  
Finite Cerapucs and Ceraballs,  
Furutech DeMag, Furutech  
record flattner, Shunyata Dark  
Field cable elevators





# McMini

## The McIntosh MC252 Power Amplifier

By Rich Kent





The MC252 is McIntosh's "entry-level" solid-state power amplifier, rated at 250 watts per channel and weighing in at a hefty 94 pounds. It is the smallest solid-state amp in McIntosh's line, measuring roughly at 10x18x15 inch, with an MSRP of \$5,000. This model includes their famous Autoformer transformer circuitry and sentry monitor protection circuits as well as the option to use the amplifiers as bridged monoblocks, offering 500 watts per channel.

The rear connections include balanced and unbalanced inputs, speaker outputs for two, four and eight ohms, and a trigger to power it on automatically with your preamp. As long as your preamplifier has a three- to 30-volt trigger (high on, low off, center positive) the MC252 will work with your other components.

The rear connection markings are easily read and spaced appropriately for easy access with whatever cables you possess. The front panel features two knobs; one for power and one to control those big, blue power meters. You can select real-time power display, a peak-hold function or, if you prefer, turn off the front panel lighting completely. But who would want to do that with a McIntosh? *(continued)*



# Burmester

ART FOR THE EAR



061 CD Player



035 Pre Amplifier



931 RDS FM Tuner



036 Power Amplifier

## Classic Line



Burmester Audiosysteme

The meters make the presentation for me and now they are backlit with LEDs for much longer life. McIntosh tech guru Chuck Hinton estimates a 70,000 hour lifespan, perhaps longer, so when your kids inherit your MC252 it will still be looking sharp.

### Full Disclosure Before I Begin


While I used to be a solid-state guy with a penchant for Class A power amplifiers, the tube McIntosh sound has won me over for the past couple of years. My reference system features their C2200 preamplifier and the MC275 IV power amplifier, running balanced throughout with MIT cable for signal and speakers.

### As most audio enthusiasts know, this game is always a series of tradeoffs.

But the tubes were a nice compromise from where I had spent the past few years, and my MartinLogan CLS speakers are not the easiest to drive. A little restless, I was starting to get intrigued by solid-state power again.

It is worth noting that McIntosh gear typically has a short break-in time and I received the MC252 with a few hundred hours on the clock, so I was ready to start the audition immediately. My first choice was Bill Evans' *Waltz With Debbie*. I had a few new magazines to read while getting a casual first impression, but it didn't take very long for this change in my system to capture my full attention. Stone cold, it sounded very musical, and it became somewhat more open after about 30 minutes. (*continued*)





METER  
WATTS

HOLD

LIGHTS OFF

### A Brief Comparison

As I kept inching up the volume control, I was not noticing the edge that I've experienced from other solid-state amplifiers that I've owned. Fully warmed up, I was enjoying a huge soundstage, with a wider and deeper presentation than I was accustomed to with my MC275. I also was impressed with the additional bass articulation the solid-state amplifier brought to my system. Due to a slightly lower sensitivity (3.2v input for full output in balanced mode, vs. 2.5v input for full output with the MC275) I had to run the volume control higher for the same sound levels, but the C2200 was up to the task.

Switching the program to large-scale orchestral music, I noticed that the meters were occasionally jumping up to the 250-watt level, making me wonder if I needed more power after all. I did notice more detail and separation of the instruments with this type of music, especially at slightly elevated listening levels.

Whether you choose the tube amplifier or solid state is personal choice. I found the piano recordings that I auditioned

slightly more true in tone with the MC252, and slightly more full and romantic with the MC 275. The MC252 reminds me more of the sound of a Steinway, while the MC275 sounds more like a Yamaha or Baldwin piano.

### An Excellent Dilemma

I made the switch to tubes a while back for that extra romance when listening to vocals. I admit to being a big fan of female vocalists. Listening one of my favorite test tracks, "Here, There and Everywhere" from Erin Bode's *Don't Take Your Time*, the solid state amplifier does not convey the last bit of control and phrasing in Bode's voice the way my MC275 does.

However, when I switch to Led Zeppelin's "I Can't Leave You Babe" and those big blue meters start bouncing, it's another ballgame entirely. The solid-state amplifier has the extra punch and weight to do this recording justice. If most of your music leans towards heavy rock, you will appreciate the extra headroom an amplifier of this size offers. *(continued)*



Listening to Martin Pearlman's recording of the Bach Brandenburg Concertos tips the scale back toward the tube camp again. It's no contest with intimate classical pieces like this. I prefer the additional warmth of the tube Mac with solo instrument recordings and quartets.

### A Quick Switch to Some Dynamic Speakers

The CLS has a reputation for being a very analytical speaker and one that is tough to drive. To round the test out, I wanted to try some dynamic speakers as well. I have some modest alternatives, the Paradigm Atoms and Monitor Audio B100's, that I was able to raid from other listening areas in the house. The comparison was very revealing.

Both sets of speakers had more dynamics and pace with the MC252. This amplifier turned my modest monitors into major overachievers with so much power and control on tap. They also played much louder and cleaner with the MC275. This exercise reinforced my belief that one should spend hard-earned money on stellar electronics to build a good foundation and upgrade speakers as your budget allows.

The McIntosh MC252 is one of these stellar amps to consider. Its rock-solid build quality barely works up a sweat, even at full output, and it will silently protect itself and your speakers if it senses any problems. In the current economy, a purchase of \$6,500 is no small investment, but it is comforting to know that McIntosh components have an uncanny ability to retain or even appreciate in value over the years. If you are in the market for an amplifier in this price range the MC252 deserves an audition, one that any McIntosh dealer would be happy to arrange. *(continued)*

When you want to hear the truth...



echo  
audio

Fine Home Audio  
Bought - Sold

425 SW 10th Avenue  
Portland, Oregon 97205

888.248.echo  
503.223.2292

echohifi.com  
echoaudio@hotmail.com

m-f 11-6  
sat 12-5



## Second Opinion: Jeff Dorgay

I also own the MC275, but having current MartinLogan speakers, which dip even further on the impedance curve than the CLS, I've never been happy with the presentation. The solid state Mac was really the way to go in my system. It offered the necessary air and dynamics to make the CLX come alive, where the smaller tube amplifier always sounds rolled off to me.

Reviewing power amplifiers tends to be straightforward because they usually don't have more than a power switch, so we don't have a list of super cool features to take half the review telling you about. Once you fire up the MC252, it just goes about its business, though you do have those hypnotizing meters to enjoy.

One thing worth noting is McIntosh's Power Guard circuit, which is a soft clipping circuit that prevents harsh distortion from reaching your speakers if you get carried

away with the volume control. If you really like to rock, this feature will probably save you the cost of the amplifier in speaker service calls.

### Extremely Versatile

I compared the MC252 to a number of different solid-state power amplifiers from C-J, SimAudio, Marantz and Burmester. Granted, they all have their own signature sound, but I found the 252 to be very dynamic and ever so slightly on the warm side tonally. While it was here, I also investigated a number of speaker combinations to see what synergies might exist.

With my reference MartinLogan CLX's, I was able to drive them quite loud before the red Power Guard lights came on, but the Magnepan 1.6's seemed to just gobble up the output of this amplifier, so perhaps even more power is required? *(continued)*





## NEW PRODUCT

# SKY SERIES

signal cables

## Sky Series Signal Cables: An Evolution in Signal Cable Science!

### A PATENTED BREAKTHROUGH IN SIGNAL GEOMETRY!

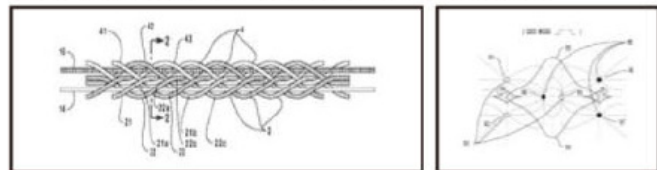
The new *Sky Series Signal Cables* utilize *Shunyata Research's* extremely complex, hand wound *Helix Geometry* braid; granted a patent for its ability to minimize the effects of electromagnetic interference, reactance and self-induced distortion. The dual helix, longitudinally offset, counter-rotating geometry eliminates the self-induced distortions that plague other cable designs.

All signal cables have a characteristic resistance and reactance (capacitive and inductive), which is essentially a simple type of filter. Resistance is a linear function and simply reduces signal level while reactance is much more destructive to signal integrity in that it is frequency dependent. It skews amplitude and phase as frequency increases.

Conventional cable geometries dictate that a cable must be either capacitive or inductive, if one is reduced the other increases and vice-versa. By all accounts, the ideal cable would have virtually zero resistance, zero inductance and zero capacitance — which of course is impossible to achieve, but it should be the design goal. No cable should be designed to be either capacitive or inductive.

*Shunyata Research's* patented *Helix Geometry* solves the cable reactance problem. Wide conductor spacing and 90-degree crossing angles, minimize capacitance. Counter-rotating helices that are longitudinally offset create disparate EFF (electromagnetic flux fields) that minimize inductive reactance! Only the *Helix Geometry* achieves both low capacitive reactance AND low inductive reactance.

By virtually eliminating the self-induced distortion inherent in all other cable designs, *Shunyata Research's* hand-braided *Helix Geometry Cables* have brought about universally documented endorsements from the world's foremost recording engineers, studios and sound professionals, as well as the industry's toughest critics and most renowned electronics manufacturers.



### A DEFINABLE ADVANCE IN CONDUCTOR SCIENCE

After 3 years of development and testing, *Shunyata Research* introduces *Cohergenic Conductors*. *Cohergenic Conductors* are the result of a process that creates a permanent inter-molecular alignment of the copper molecules within a conductor. During the extrusion process or the casting process of copper wire, the wire is in a molten to semi-molten state. In this state, the molecules are free to move in relation to one another. As the copper cools and hardens the molecules are locked into place in a relatively random orientation.

The *Cohergenic Process* creates an electrical alignment of the molecules through the use of a *Shunyata Research* designed electromagnet. The electromagnet's powerful electromagnetic field induces an electrical current within the conductor while the conductor cools, locking the molecules into electrical alignment — PERMANENTLY.

### UNIQUE ALPHA CRYOGENIC PROCESS

All connectors are treated with *Shunyata Research's* exclusive performance enhancing *Alpha Cryogenic Process*. This treatment uses a modified atmospheric condition during the cryogenic treatment process that improves upon the effects of conventional nitrogen based cryo treatments.

### PATENTED SCIENCE — A REVELATION IN PERFORMANCE

The *Sky Series's* advances in *Helix Geometry*, proprietary *Cohergenic Conductors* and the exclusive *Alpha Cryogenic Process* deliver performance in recording and entertainment systems that simply must be experienced to be appreciated.

Contact *Shunyata Research* or your nearest authorized *Shunyata Research* dealer for a complete system demonstration!

www.shunyata.com  
MADE IN USA — POULSBORO, WA



cohergenic

CRYO

Switching to the Verity Audio Sarastro II's (92.5db sensitivity), the meters rarely jumped up to even the 100-watt level even when playing music at ear-splitting levels.

Though many people like to assemble an all-McIntosh system, don't count out this amplifier if you are looking for a higher-powered solid-state amplifier, no matter what you are using as a front end. In today's economy, I'd call a 250 watt per channel power amplifier with this pedigree for \$5,000 a bargain. There are a couple of big solid-state amplifiers out there that will reveal more music than the MC252, but you're looking at a five-figure pricetag. ●

The McIntosh MC252  
MSRP: \$5,000

### MANUFACTURER

#### McIntosh Laboratories

2 Chambers Street  
Binghamton, NY 13903  
607-723-3512  
www.mcintoshlabs.com

### PERIPHERALS

**Analog Sources** Linn LP-12 w/ Sumiko Blue Point Special, Rega P9 w/RB1000 arm and Lyra Skala, Nakamichi Dragon

**Digital Sources** Krell KPS20i, Naim CD555

**Preamplifiers** Conrad Johnson ACT2/Series 2, McIntosh C2200, Nagra PL-L

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

**Cable** MIT, Shunyata and Cardas





# The Top of the Analog Mountain

**The Naim SuperLine Phono Preamplifier**

By Jeff Dorgay



There have been a few nominations for this lofty post over the years and every reviewer has a favorite, so I'm nominating mine: the Naim SuperLine with SuperCap2 power supply. And I agree with Naim that a hefty power supply goes a long way to achieve big, natural dynamic sound. With my other favorite phono preamplifier, the Aesthetix IO, two extra power supplies can be configured, and in my book, it's always been the pinnacle of analog reproduction, but it's full of tubes.

These days, I just can't get behind 32 vacuum tubes to play a record. The 12AX7's of only moderate quality can fetch \$50 each and the exceptional ones can cost three times that. As SpongeBob likes to say, "That's crazy talk." Enter the SuperLine solid-state phono preamplifier: all of the analog goodness, none of the tube hassle.

Don't put me in the valve-hater category. I still enjoy them in small doses, but I spend a lot of time with my system fired up, and there's nothing more frustrating than getting a tube preamplifier sorted to perfection only to lose the magic when it's time to retube. This happened to me recently, so I am on a quest to eliminate, or at least minimize, the glowing bottles in my system.

I asked Chris West from Naim North America why they decided to produce a premier phono stage when they don't even make a turntable. "We go way back with analog and we just wanted to produce the best phono preamplifier we were capable of making," West replied. "It's our way of giving a little something to the analog enthusiasts."

### **Like a Butterfinger, the Surprise is Inside**

In understated British fashion, the SuperLine looks like a little black box, slightly narrower than a standard Naim component and lacking even a power switch on the front panel, just a backlit green Naim logo. When you pick it up and realize it weighs more than a Nait 5i integrated amplifier, it sinks in that this is a serious phono stage.

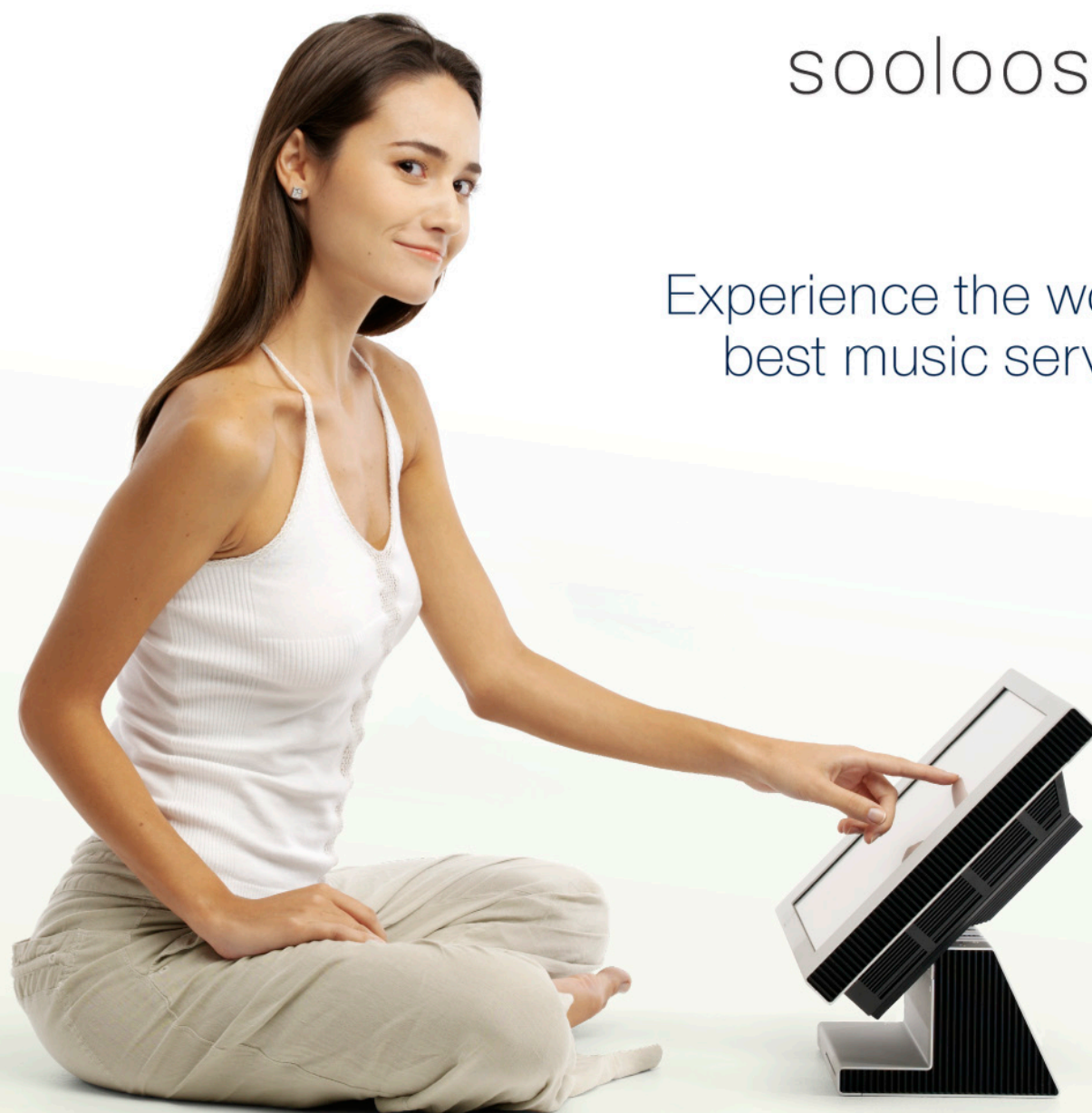
The circuit board is suspended, floating inside the case, much like Naim's approach to the CD555 CD player. The actual preamplifier is a single-ended, Class-A design, with no op amps in sight. The wiring is executed with surgical precision and features 25 internal regulators while borrowing thermal isolation concepts from Naim's flagship NAP power amplifier. *(continued)*



"We go way back with analog and we just wanted to produce the best phono preamplifier we were capable of making,"



sooloos

Experience the world's  
best music server.**Powerful Options**

Some criticize Naim for taking the separate-power-supply approach, but I applaud it. I hate getting rid of gear to which I get attached, so I prefer components with an upgrade path. The Superline itself retails for \$2,950 without a power supply, but it offers a number of power options. This allows you to purchase a top-shelf phono stage that you can upgrade as your system improves by merely changing the power supply.

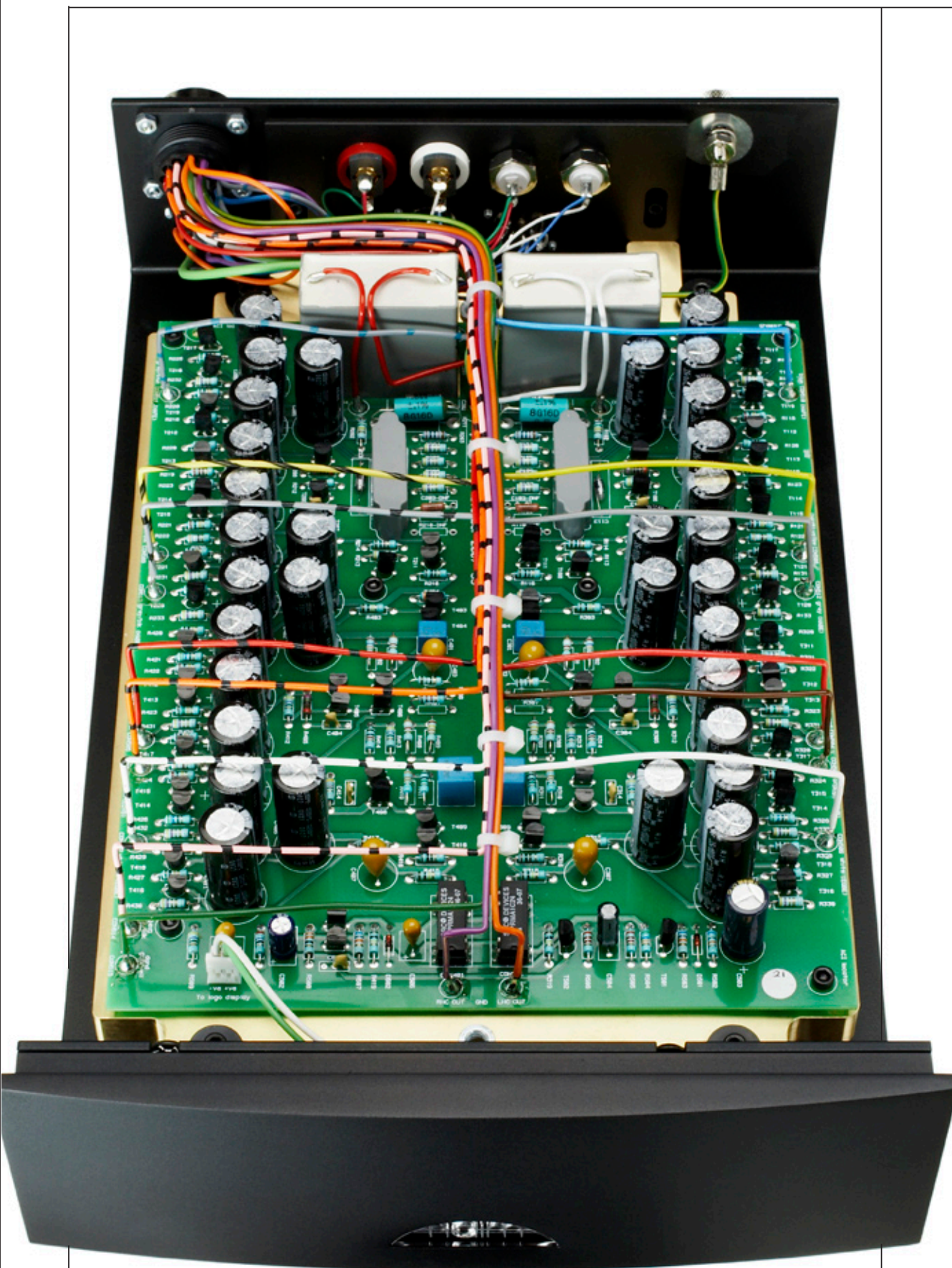
**If you own one of the SuperNait integrated amplifiers, or a Naim preamplifier, you can power the SuperLine with that.**

I started my journey plugging the SuperLine into the SuperNait and was quite impressed. If you will use the SuperLine in a non-Naim system (or just want more power) you can mate it with their entry-level FlatCap 2x (\$1,100), a HiCap 2 (\$1,900) or the SuperCap2. (\$5,950) If you are on a tight budget, you can usually find an original FlatCap used for about \$500 from a Naim owner moving along the upgrade path. Still with me?

You also have the option of purchasing the SuperLine in a standard (58db) or high-gain (64db) model. I had the high-gain version here, which worked fine with my Dynavec-tor 17D3 with its .23mv output and it had no problem handling the 2.5mv output of the Sumiko Blackbird without overload.

*(continued)*





So it should work well with whatever cartridge you have. Keep in mind, though, that this phono pre-amplifier is not intended for MM cartridges.

### Lightning Fast Setup

When first setting up, be sure to remove the two transit screws that keep the floating circuit board secure (the manual warns you not to use the SuperLine with the screws still in place) and I suggest putting them in a Ziploc bag and taping them to the inside of the shipping carton, just in case you ever need them. Keep the SuperLine level and over a table while you are removing the screws and then carry it *gently* to where it will be used, as it is now floating free.

Once the SuperLine is connected to your power supply, the next step is to set loading and input capacitance. Naim supplies four resistive plugs and three capacitive ones, giving you loading options of 100 ohms, 500 ohms, 1,000 ohms and 10,000 ohms. Chris Koster from Naim USA suggested that I use a 400-ohm plug with the Lyra Olympos cartridge, and he sent along a custom loading plug. Should you have a cartridge that requires different loading, your Naim dealer can have custom sets made for you at \$60 each. The plugs are tightly matched for value and channel balance, so I'd advise against doing this yourself. I used minimal capacitance loading with all of the cartridges tested. (*continued*)





I still had my ASR Basis Exclusive when the SuperLine first arrived, and the first thing that struck me about the Naim was that it is every bit as quiet as the battery-powered phono stage that was off the grid entirely! So chalk up an immediate victory for the engineers at Naim. The ASR depends on very high-quality op amps, however, and is not nearly as grain-free as the SuperLine, even while plugged into the SuperNait.

I used four top-shelf cartridges for the primary evaluation of the Naim combo – the Dynavector XV-1s, the Lyra Skala, the MoFi 3.5C and the Lyra Olympos. Thanks to the ease of changing the loading on this preamplifier, it was easy to optimize for each cartridge. Chris Koster was kind enough to send an extra 470-ohm loading plug, which he felt would be optimum for the Olympos. The Skala found happiness at 220 ohms while the other two preferred 100 ohms.

### Snaic or Burndy?

I did not get a chance to audition the SuperLine with the FlatCap power supply; the rest of the review period was spent with the HiCap2 and the SuperCap. If you are not a current Naim user, you will need to familiarize yourself with their various cable and connection options.

Plugging into a SuperNait, requires a Snaic, as does the FlatCap or HighCap2. This is a five-pin cable that brings current to the SuperLine and high level audio output back to the power supply. You plug your tonearm cable right into the SuperLine and you take another cable (Din if you have an all Naim system or a Din-to-RCA cable in a non-Naim system) out to your linestage; this works the same with all three power supplies. The SuperCap2 will require the higher-capacity Burndy cable, which goes where that big plug is on the back of the SuperLine.

### Analog Bliss, a Stage at a Time

Those who have heard the SuperLine with one of the smaller supplies may wonder what all the fuss is about. As an addition to your Naim preamplifier or SuperNait, the SuperLine makes a good showing and is well worth the asking price. When the HighCap2 is added to the equation, you start thinking something pretty special is lurking inside that little black box. And by adding the SuperCap2, you are taken somewhere very special indeed. *(continued)*

Plugging into a SuperNait, requires a Snaic, as does the FlatCap or HighCap2.





It is always a challenge to describe a component this good because all the great audiophile clichés have already been taken. Cutting to the chase, I've never heard a phono preamplifier reveal more information from the black grooves than the SuperLine/SuperCap2. What puts the SuperLine/SuperCap2 solidly on the top of the mountain is the presentation; those seeking tonal neutrality and boundless dynamic range will be in heaven. This combination knocks down the walls of your listening room, expanding the presentation in all three dimensions.

I like that big, big sound, and the SuperLine/SuperCap2 gets it right. It doesn't make everything sound big, but it has a very precise ability to capture dynamic contrasts and spatial cues, doing a good job at convincing your brain that what you are hearing is happening right in front of you.

The SuperLine had plenty of hours on its clock from using it for the SuperNait review, and I thought I was very familiar with the sound. But after the addition of the SuperCap2, I was on another planet. I haven't been this impressed with a phono preamplifier since the famous Vendetta Research of the '80's, which was the last time I had a major paradigm shift in analog listening. In my system, the SuperLine/SuperCap2 opened the window to the music wider than it has ever been.

The SuperLine/SuperCap2 hits you first with its weight and power, but it keeps you riveted to your chair with subtlety and nuance. Naim enthusiasts always like to talk about the immediacy of their gear, and the SuperLine/SuperCap2 has that quality in spades. Everything else I've heard in comparison sounds moderately hazy. As expected, the perfect tonality of this preamplifier is intact, even with the basic configuration, but as you increase the power supply you get more dynamics, less noise and a more-sorted view of the music.

The Naim SuperLine with SuperCap2 power supply is the closest I've heard to analog perfection. It neither adds nor subtracts from what's in the groove and faithfully offers what I'm looking for in any component. It offers a staggering level of resolution without being

harsh or forward, while offering tremendous musicality without being overly romantic or rounding off the edges of musical transients in an effort to sound polite.

### Not an Audiophile Component

Phenomenal recordings will send you into bliss, yet even average recordings will yield sonic rewards that will surprise you. While the SuperLine/SuperCap2 does not romanticize, should you want that sound, you can always mate it with a romantic-sounding cartridge. I could have easily lived with either the lush presentation of the Lyra Olympos or the slightly more neutral, yet dynamic, presentation of the Dynavector XV-1s. Every one of the cartridges in my stable sounded fantastic! *(continued)*

I've never heard a phono preamplifier reveal more information from the black grooves.





# Introducing the x-head from AV123.

The newest addition to the AV123 product line can drive your favorite headphones with ease and has a second headphone output jack, so you can share it with a friend. Take advantage of our 30 day in-home trial period and see for yourself.



*"Plug in your favorite set of cans, and you'll be amazed at how much headphone amp \$199 can buy."*

Marc Phillips  
TONEAudio Magazine

One of the biggest complaints I hear from people with mega systems is that they only sound good while playing a handful of "audiophile-approved" records. This couldn't be further from the truth with the Super-Line/SuperCap2 combination. Sure, the best pressings gave their all, but I have a substantial collection of just-average records. So I went on a power pop binge and listened to a lot of my favorite but fairly lousy-sounding records one night, and I was astonished at how much was actually lurking in those grooves.

On Cheap Trick's first album, *Cheap Trick*, when Tom Petersson's bass line kicks in on "Mandocello," I felt like that Maxell guy in my chair. Substituting a popular \$1,000 phono preamplifier and playing that cut again (with the \$10,000 Lyra Olympos), it became flat and uninvolved, completely lacking any depth. I moved on to a few of my favorite Elvis Costello records, Squeeze, XTC and The Sinceros before calling it a night with "Christmas with the Chipmunks." Damn, even that sounded good.

**Should you install a SuperLine/SuperCap2 into your system, I guarantee the phono stage will no longer be the weak link in your system.**

It will not bring back the parts of your marginal recordings that suffer from compression, but it *will* extract every bit of music your turntable, tonearm and cartridge are capable of delivering.  
(continued)



Purchase from us directly at:  
[www.av123.com](http://www.av123.com)  
877-543-7500



# SUPERCAP

DESIGNED AND MADE IN ENGLAND BY NAIM AUDIO LTD.  
SOUTHAMPTON ROAD, SALISBURY

## WARNING:

DISCONNECT SUPPLY CORD BEFORE  
OPENING

## ATTENTION:

DEBRANCHER AVANT D'OUVRIR

## WARNING:

THIS APPARATUS MUST BE EARTHED

PLEASE READ THE MANUAL BEFORE USE

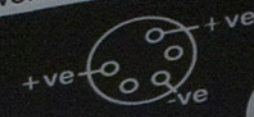
S/No. 257631

N1501

CONFORMS  
TO EN 60065



## Power & inputs



2

1

When listening to Ella Fitzgerald on the “Ella Sings the Cole Porter Catalog” box set, she was in the room, six feet in front of my listening chair.

With the average records sounding fantastic, the fantastic records sound dreamy. When listening to Ella Fitzgerald on the “Ella Sings the Cole Porter Catalog” box set, she was in the room, six feet in front of my listening chair. In a completely different vein, the LP version of The Beastie Boys’ *The Mix Up* was a true psychedelic event. Though a little crunchy on the extreme high end, this record is a giant, surreal soundscape, with bongos, synthesizers and crunchy guitars floating all over the place, with big, thumping bass lines running in and out of the music. Again, on a lesser analog setup, it just sounded flat and CD-like, but through the SuperLine/SuperCap2, I was amazed at how much information lurked on this disc.

### Super Squared

I’ve owned a Naim CD555 for nearly two years and it still puts a smile on my face whenever I listen to it. It’s looking as if another pair of Naim boxes are in my immediate future, and I’m anticipating the same result with the SuperLine and SuperCap2.

My biggest expectation for a five-figure component is that it should take me somewhere that I’ve never been. The world of the SuperLine/SuperCap2 is one of those places, and I always have a hard time leaving it and coming back to reality. When I was proofing this article, Microsoft Word wanted to keep changing SuperLine to Superfine. Maybe the ghost in the machine had a point. ●



# DeVORE FIDELITY



# The Nines

[www.devorefidelity.com](http://www.devorefidelity.com)

The Naim SuperLine  
Phono Preamplifier  
MSRP: \$2,950

## MANUFACTURER

**Naim Audio, Ltd.**  
Southampton Road  
Salisbury SP1 2LN  
England  
[www.naim-audio.com](http://www.naim-audio.com)

## US Distribution

ASL Group  
[www.audiophilesystems.com](http://www.audiophilesystems.com)

## PERIPHERALS

**Turntables** Continuum Criterion w/Copperhead Tonearm, TK Acoustic Raven Two w/SME 309 and SME i.Vi tonearms, Spiral Groove SG-2 w/TriPlanar vii

**Cartridges** Dynavector 17D3 and XV-1s, Lyra Skala and Olympos, MoFi 3.5C, Sumiko Blackbird

**Tonearm Cables** Furutech

**Preamplifiers** Conrad-Johnson ACT2/Series 2, Nagra PL-L, BAT VK-32SE

**Power Amplifiers** BAT VK-55SE, Conrad-Johnson Premier 350, Nagra PSA, Naim SuperNait (integrated)

**Speakers** Harbeth Monitor 40.1, MartinLogan CLX w/Descent i subwoofers, Verity Audio Sarastro II

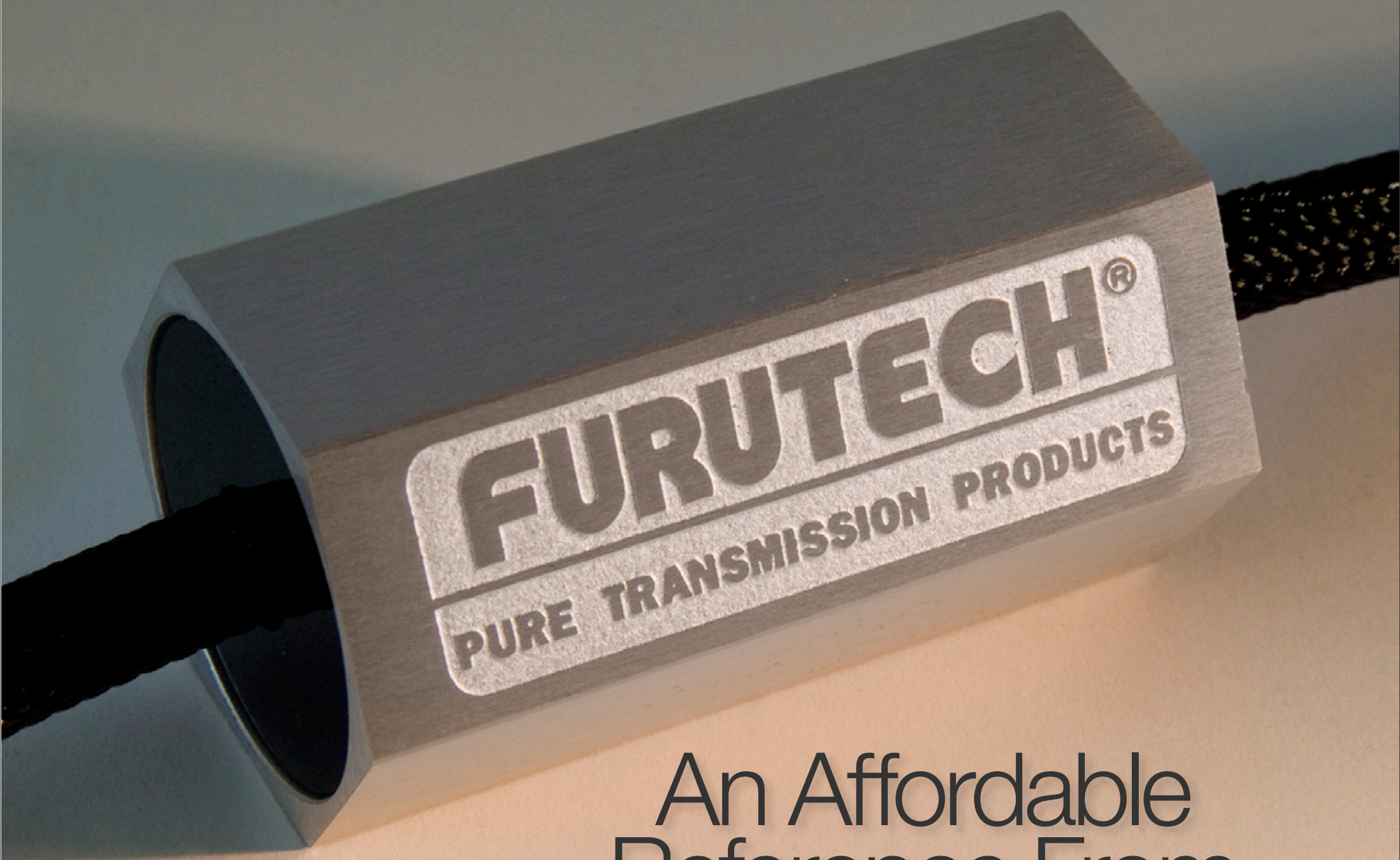
**Power** Running Springs Dmitri and Jaco Power Line Conditioners, RSA Mongoose Power cords, Shunyata Anaconda Vx power cords

**Interconnects** Shunyata Antares, Cardas Golden Reference

**Speaker Cables** Shunyata Orion

**Accessories** Furutech DeMag, Shunyata Dark Field Elevators





# An Affordable Reference From Furutech

---

By Jeff Dorgay





Last year, we gave Furutech an Exceptional Value Award for their AG-12 phono cable.

It remains one of my personal favorites and the reference cable on my three tables that allow an aftermarket tonearm cable. It is very neutral, easy to use and, best of all, reasonably priced.

I've been impressed with the fanatical attention Furutech pays to every step of the cable manufacturing process; they measure and test everything! I think the proof of Furutech's quality is exhibited in how many audio manufacturers use Furutech's power cords, wire and power connectors as OEM components in their products.

Spending a substantial amount of money on cable is a touchy subject. We at TONE take the stance that good cable is the icing on the cake that lets your system's performance shine through. The cables reviewed here are expensive, at about a thousand dollars each, so while they are not unobtainium, nor are they a casual purchase. I feel strongly that the Furutech cables in this review offer enough of an increase in performance over cables in the \$100-\$300 range that they are worth the investment if your system has enough resolution to reveal it.

The 1.2-meter Reference III interconnects have an MSRP of \$1,175 with RCA connectors and \$1,325 with XLR connectors. They are available in lengths of 1.7, 2.2 and 2.7 meters at a slightly higher cost. A 2-meter pair of Reference III speaker cables with spade lugs has an MSRP of \$1,325, and the 3-meter pair is \$1,575. These also are available in a bi-wire version for \$1,575 and \$1,725 respectively.

*(continued)*



# LUXMAN

Where 80 Years of Innovation  
Combines with Passion  
and Emotion

## Furutech's Winning Formula

The core technology of Furutech's Reference III cables reviewed here centers around their Alpha OCC conductors and their associated 2-Stage Alpha Super Cryogenic and Demagnetizing process. The more technically minded in the audience are invited to click here to read the eight-page PDF that explains their methodology in depth:

[http://www.furutech.com/news/cables\\_explained.pdf](http://www.furutech.com/news/cables_explained.pdf)

Here's the short version – it all works together very well. Cable junkies will appreciate the great care and flawless execution of Furutech's products, and the music lovers will dig the enhancement it provides for their systems.

As soon as you open the box, you will see that these cables are a work of industrial art. The plugs and speaker-cable spade lugs are finished in rhodium-plated cast brass and polished to a smooth finish. Each set of the Reference III series cables has an extruded module on the end containing Furutech's GC-303 compound, which they claim absorbs EMI, providing quieter backgrounds. These cables are certainly finished to a higher level than their price point would suggest.

## Establishing a Baseline

The next step was to evaluate their reference series cable with the rest of my system. The larger and more complex system you have, the tougher it is to evaluate the change made by just one cable, especially in a system that has quite a few components.  
*(continued)*





To keep it simple, I assembled a high-performance system made up of components with which I am intimately familiar: the Luxman L-590a II integrated amplifier, Luxman Du-8 Combination player and the MartinLogan Spires, later substituted for the Harbeth Monitor 40.1's. This pared it down to one set of interconnects and one pair of speaker cables with relatively short runs, making it easy to evaluate any difference made by the cable.

I spent a month listening to this combination, switching back and forth between Cardas Golden Reference (speaker and interconnect) cable and DH Labs Silver Sonic to burn two different perspectives into my consciousness before introducing the Furutech.

Many audiophiles like to mix and match cables, and sometimes the sonic character of a cable can be used as a tone control to fine tune a particular component, but I have really seen the light when it comes to using one manufacturer's cable throughout to feel the effect they have on your system.

### **Murky at First, Then Magic**

For the first 50 hours, the Reference III cables had a distinct haze, with a somewhat murky sound that lifted completely by 150 hours, so if you buy a set of these cables, I'd suggest setting your CD player on repeat for a few days before you engage in critical listening.

Once the fog lifted, I was very impressed with the cable, and would like to point out to newcomers that every cable requires current to be run through it for a while before it reaches its optimum sound. Though I am *not* in favor of using any of the popular "cable cookers" currently on the market, as I've heard them do more damage than good. Just like a great pot of gumbo, cables need to cook slow and long in the opinion of this writer.

To keep track of the burn-in process, I start my Radio Shack stopwatch and listen to something I've heard thousands of times at 10-15 hour intervals, and I suggest that you do the same. That way, you can get a good handle on what's happening as you burn in the cable. For the naysayers in the audience who think cable break-in is imaginary, apply a little science. Put 200 hours on the cable of your choice and leave an identical pair in a box with no burn-in hours, then compare the two. It helps to have a friend behind your equipment rack to make a quick switch so that you can keep your aural memory intact. *(continued)*







# "The best CD playback under \$5k... for \$1799!"

Robert Harley - The Absolute Sound - 09/07



azur

"For starters, the 840C doesn't sound like anything in its price range. It had a resolution, refinement, ease, grace, and musicality that were instantly recognizable as being different from every other product in the category. (...) Not only is the 840C easily the greatest value in digital sources in my experience, it must be considered one of the greatest bargains in all of high-end audio."

**"In fact, I could easily live with the 840C at the front end of my \$100K reference system – it's that good."**

Robert Harley - The Absolute Sound - 09/07



**Cambridge Audio 840C - \$1799**  
CD Player with 24bit / 384kHz upsampling  
ATF (Adaptive Time Filtering)  
Dual-Differential DACs & Balanced Output

 **Cambridge Audio**

Your music + our passion

[www.cambridgeaudio.com](http://www.cambridgeaudio.com)

## Ease and Neutrality

With the necessary amount of break-in time completed, I settled down for serious listening, finally deciding that the tonality of the Reference III cables is very neutral. The Golden Reference that I have listened to for almost four years sounds slightly on the warm, romantic side, which is not a bad thing, and the DH cable used for an equivalent amount of time is always somewhat forward, my choice when I want to give a component some extra zip.

**I usually have a wide range of music for evaluating components, but with cable, I'm looking for nuance, so I tend to pick music with extremes.**

That way, it's easier to hear the change that a cable has made in my system. I prefer recordings with known flaws to investigate whether a cable is really adding or subtracting from the presentation. One of my favorite "dreadful" recordings is Audioslave's debut album of the same title on CD. There are some dynamics buried within this album, but you need a system with a lot of dynamic contrast to reveal it. The record sounds forward overall, so any cable with too much zing will give you listener fatigue immediately and the lack of dynamics will crush the recording.

Satisfied that the extremes of the spectrum were not being harmed, moving on to a series of vocal and acoustic-instrument recordings was a true pleasure. The Reference III did a great job with acoustic instruments, leaving tonality and decay well intact.  
*(continued)*





Thanks to Furutech's successful noise-reduction technology, I was able to hear very deeply into my favorites that are well-recorded. Even when substituting components that I felt had a known sonic signature, I never thought that the Furutech Reference III cables altered my perception of those components, so this set of cables would not be appropriate if you are searching for tonal control.

Tonality aside, what I could discern easily with the Furutech cables in my system was how much more fine detail and resolution they offered compared with some popular cables in the \$300 range. This is where listening to your favorite pristine recordings is a useful tool. The ability to hear further

into your recordings than you could before is a primary reason for purchasing a higher quality cable, and definitely something in which Furutech excels.

#### **A Choice for Music Purists**

If you are an audiophile and music lover who subscribes to the philosophy that the components in your system should be as accurate and neutral as possible, and that the cables' main job is to be an undistorted conduit, then the Furutech Reference III cables should be at the top of your list. I certainly will be using them as one of my references from now on. ●



## Review the Reviews...

"... excellent compared to anything that I have encountered at any price... the beginning of a new era in audio."

Robert E. Greene - *The Absolute Sound*, Issue 183

"I haven't found a product so instantly and confidence-inspiring in years."

Ken Kessler - *Hifi News*, July 2008

"Thanks to all those inputs, the DAC1 Pre is a digital source lover's dream come true."

Jeff Dorgay - *ToneAudio Review*, 2008

Read all reviews at [www.DAC1PRE.com](http://www.DAC1PRE.com)

## ...Experience the Experience

Experience the DAC1 PRE with a 30 Day In Home Trial\*. Order yours at: [www.DAC1PRE.com](http://www.DAC1PRE.com)



\*30 Day In Home Trial available in US only. Visit website for details.

### DAC1 PRE

Stereo Pre-Amplifier / DAC / Headphone Amp

[www.benchmarkmedia.com](http://www.benchmarkmedia.com) 800-262-4675

*Benchmark*  
...the measure of excellence!™



### MANUFACTURER

**Furutech CO., LTD**

+81 (0)3 5437 0281  
[www.furutech.com](http://www.furutech.com)

### PERIPHERALS

**Amplifier** Luxman L-590a II

**Digital Source** Luxman DU-7

**Analog Source** Rega P9 w/  
RB1000 arm and Lyra Skala  
cartridge

**Speakers** Harbeth Monitor 40.1

**Accessories** Finite Elemente  
Pagode Signature rack, Fu-  
rutech DeMag, Shunyata Dark  
Field Cable Elevators





# AV123 X-Head Headphone Amplifier

By Marc Phillips

**O**ver the past couple of months, I have been privy to some screaming audio bargains, so I'm in the right mindset for this brand-new X-Head headphone amplifier from AV123. This compact yet unusually attractive amp features two headphone jacks, a mute button, "up and down" control buttons and pretty blue LED power indicator cleanly laid out on the front panel.





**The X-Head sounded powerful and dynamic as well, and it was able to deliver sudden shifts in mood and tempo with relative ease.**

A beautifully finished curved piece of wood sits on top, looking as if it were carved from the same infused Japanese cherry that graced the expensive, and stunningly gorgeous, Yamamoto Sound Craft amplifiers that I once owned. The front faceplate is covered with a piece of Plexiglas that gives the entire amp a textured, detailed look that usually accompanies expensive gear. But the AV123 costs just \$199. Shipping is an additional \$20.

If you've dealt with AV123 before, you'll know that this is one value-oriented company. Not only do you get a three-year warranty (a good thing to have when gear is sourced from China), you have a 30-day, no-questions-asked return policy. AV123 is well-known for having exceptional customer service, so if you experience any problems with your X-Head, these guys will fix it.

I used my Grado GS1000 and AKG 701 headphones, both with Equinox cabling from Stefan

Audio Arts, to test out the X-Head. My first impression of the AV123 was of a detailed, expansive sound that was fairly uncharacteristic of an inexpensive headphone amplifier. The X-Head sounded powerful and dynamic as well, and it was able to deliver sudden shifts in mood and tempo with relative ease. This is where a rotary volume knob might have been a better choice since I found myself lunging for the push buttons on a fairly consistent basis as I moved from recording to recording. That mute button was also quickly put into service more than once.

Compared to more expensive units, the X-Head could sound a little thin, especially in the upper bass. My Grados have always sounded warm and full and open with a variety of headphone amps, but with the AV123, they sounded just a little lean. The AKGs were a slightly better match, offering a sweeter and more coherent overall balance (although I did miss those dynamic swings). I've heard that the Beyerdynamic DT880s are an exceptional match for the X-Head, so you may want to hear this amp with your own headphones before making a final decision. Again, this is why AV123's return policy is such an asset.

I know the extremists are a passionate, highly opinionated bunch, so here's mine: the best synergy I found with the X-Head was with a pair of Sennheiser 650's, also with Stefan Audio Art cabling. The slight thinness I experienced with the other two was absent on our publisher's modded 650's and would be my first choice if I were starting with the X-Head and didn't already have a set of cans. It also made a very nice budget setup with the new Grado SR-60i.

For \$199, the X-Head is a solid value. I've used plenty of headphone amps that cost considerably more than the AV123, lack many of its features and sound only marginally better. When you first take the X-Head out of its box, you'll be amazed at the fit and finish. Plug in your favorite set of cans, and you may be amazed at how much headphone amp \$199 can buy. ●





# MANUFACTURER

## AV123 Audio

Longmont, CO

877-543-7500 USA

303-543-7500 International

[www.av123.com](http://www.av123.com)

# PERIPHERALS

## Digital Source

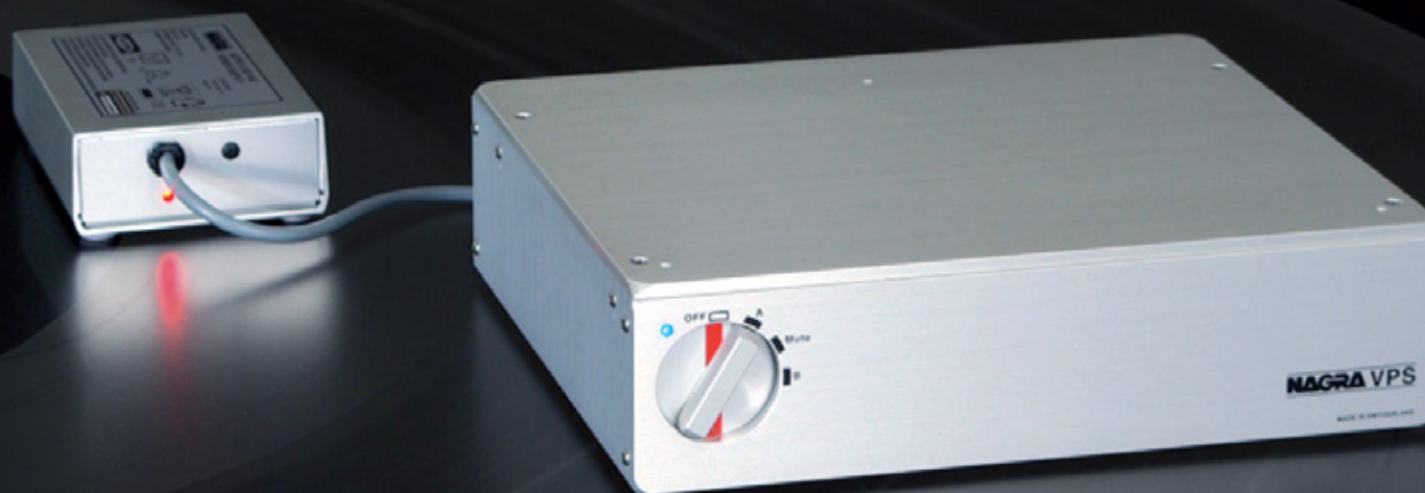
McIntosh MS300

## Headphones

AKG 701 with ALO Audio cable, Grado GS1000 with Stefan Audio Art Equinox cable, Sennheiser HD 650 with Stefan Audio Art Equinox cable

# Nagra VPS valve phono preamplifier

## Discover the full potential of your LP's



- Modular, highly configurable input boards for optimal load-matching to any MC or MM cartridge
- Two selectable RIAA curves
- Selectable output level to facilitate system matching
- New, custom input transformers made by Nagra
- External power supply to ensure dead-quiet operation

Nagra USA, 31 years at your service Tel. 800 813-1663

**NAGRA**

swiss made  
[www.nagraaudio.com](http://www.nagraaudio.com)



# Boxless Beauty:

## The Gradient Helsinki Series 1.5 Loudspeaker

By Marc Phillips

There's something vaguely feminine about the new Helsinki Series 1.5 loudspeaker from the Finnish audio company Gradient. I'm not talking about the wife-acceptance factor, or that these distinctive-looking audio sculptures will fit into a wide variety of decors. In fact, they probably won't. I'm talking about the swooping curves that distinguish this uniquely shaped speaker, the three separate sections which suggest a head, a decidedly female torso, and ... well, a derrière.





# Frugalicious.

We admit it. We're a frugal company. There's no shame in that. The question is, how does it benefit you?

Our "no frills" attitude is directly reflected in what we make – the finest, affordable line of components in the stereophonic world. Clean design without showy frills.

Our frugal nature makes sure we never lose sight of 'affordability.' For many other companies, that seems to have gotten lost in the pursuit of the perfect component.

At Rega, we have a different pursuit – for the perfect sound. A distinctive, balanced sound. We call it (somewhat immodestly)...the Rega sound.

We're able to create our own sound because we make every component that affects this sound – cartridges, record players, CD players, amplifiers, pre-amplifiers, speakers and more. (Very few companies can say that.)

So if you're looking to upgrade your system in one area (or to replace it entirely), come listen to our affordable, priceless sound. We think you'll agree, it's frugalicious.

For more information, call 972.234.0182, or email [steve@soundorg.com](mailto:steve@soundorg.com)



# rega

**THE SOUND ORGANISATION**  
MAKES MUSIC

The Sound Organization is the exclusive Rega USA distributor. [www.soundorg.com](http://www.soundorg.com)

They're not hourglass-shaped, a design decision that would leave no doubt about what inspired it. Instead, the Helsinkis are more impressionistic if not downright modernistic, like a Picasso nude that's set askew while it retains its female essence. In other words, the Gradient is just plain sexy in a slightly abstract way.

**I first heard the Gradient two years ago at the Rocky Mountain Audio Fest, and I was immediately struck by its stunning looks.**

Three minutes later, I was equally smitten with its open and convincing sound. Despite its deceptively compact size, the Helsinkis produced an incredibly huge soundstage and very deep bass. I wanted them almost immediately. Two years, later my wish has come true, and the new 1.5 version of the Gradients are now in my living room. After taking a couple of cold showers, I hooked them up.

**It's a woman!  
No, it's a kangaroo!**

You may know Gradient from their excellent subwoofers that were designed to mate with Quad ESL-63 and ESL-57 loudspeakers. A few years ago, I had a chance to listen to the impressive Revolution full-range loudspeakers that combined an open dipole bass cabinet with a coaxial midrange/tweeter unit mounted in a separate unit. One of Gradient's ongoing themes over the years has been that dipole approach, with designer/founder Jorma Salmi favoring speakers that interact with room boundaries as little as possible. *(continued)*





He calls this approach control directivity, and the Helsinki has taken the concept of a speaker that is free from room reflections to a whole new level.

The Helsinki starts with a open baffle that's 2 5/16-inches thick with a shape that reminds me of a kangaroo without a tail. This large hunk of wood is finished in the finest Scandinavian tradition and is available in birch, oiled walnut, oiled oak, black or white. My pair was finished in oiled oak and gorgeous, even up close, with that same layered veneer that is common to the best Scandinavian high-end speakers. A large hole is cut on the lower, wider section of the baffle, the kangaroo's haunches so to speak, to make room for the 12-inch woofer. Because of the open-baffle design, the large magnet for this driver simply sticks out of the back.

The cardioid midrange and wave-guided tweeters are placed into their own thick disc-shaped enclosures (available in either black or white) and set on the front edge of the baffle, perpendicular to the woofer. A glass wing is added to the back edge of the baffle to aid with dispersion as well as stability, and the whole assembly is placed on a heavy glass base. While clear rubber half-spheres are placed on the bottom of the base opposed to spikes, I found that the Helsinki was amazingly stable and free from wobble on my carpet. At just a shade over 50 pounds, the Helsinkis are easy to maneuver and place into position, but they're a bit awkward to carry.

---

**The Helsinki has taken the concept of a speaker that is free from room reflections to a whole new level.**

Speaking of position, Gradient has two basic placement recommendations. The first position involves sliding the speakers against the rear walls with the woofers facing the side walls and the tweeter and midrange facing straight out. This method is recommended in order to achieve a spacious and dynamic sound in smaller rooms. The other more conventional placement involves bringing the speakers a few feet into the room and toeing them in at a 45 degree angle. With the woofers facing outward, you should be able to barely see the back edge of the magnets from the listening position. The further you bring the Helsinkis from the wall, the more you should toe them in. If you desire an increase in low bass response, you can toe them in even more. I wound up pulling them out about 30 inches from the rear walls, 40 inches from the side walls and toed-in at 45-degree angles, which offered the best balance between an airy, monstrous soundstage and deep bass response. *(continued)*



# audience



"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**



## Speakon! Speakoff!

The review pair was equipped with professional-grade four-pole Speakon connectors, chosen for its durability and ease-of-use as well as sound quality. Gradient does offer a pair of dedicated cables to go with the Helsinki, but you can experiment with other cables as long as they are terminated properly. The owner's manual gives explicit instructions on how to strip and prepare the cable for termination if you're inclined to experiment. Standard 5-way binding posts were abandoned in favor of the Speakon for a more positive connection and ease of moving the speakers when positioning them.

The Helsinkis have a rated sensitivity of 85db, with a benign 6-ohm impedance curve that never dips below 4-ohms. Gradient recommends between 25 and 250 watts per channel of amplification. At first I tried the Helsinkis with the new Conrad-Johnson LP66S linear pentode amplifier, which is rated at 50 watts per channel. With the CJ, however, I felt like bass impact was somewhat lacking, and I never felt completely involved with the music. I checked the owner's manual once more and noted that Gradient specifically recommends solid-state amplification with these speakers. I immediately replaced the CJ with the SimAudio Moon I-7 integrated, which offers 150 watts per channel. The Gradients instantly produced the same sweeping, substantial sound that I had experienced at RMAF two years prior. *(continued)*



**A little more lihapullat with your hernikeitto?**

It took a couple of days for the speakers to finally break in and shed some of the brightness and hyper-detail that initially bothered me. During that somewhat frustrating period, I joked about why these speakers were named Helsinkis, drawing comparisons to the icy tundra that spreads out just beyond the Finnish capital's city limits. Soon the fireplaces of Helsingfors began to glow, and the icicles began to melt from the eaves. In other words, you will have to be more patient than usual during the break-in period, so grab a hot chocolate and a korvapuustit before you throw Sallinen's "Harlekiini" or *Dead Letters* from The Rasmus on your turntable.

Once I had everything dialed in, the Helsinkis delivered the full, deep and expansive sound I expected. Low bass was very impressive. Gradient says that the Helsinkis low frequency response is down about 6 dB at 35 Hz, but this is highly dependent upon room placement, and how those big, exposed woofers are positioned in relationship to your listening position. True to Gradient's claims, the Helsinkis were fairly impervious to

placement and delivered agreeable sound in a wide variety of locales. The amount of bass was certainly affected, but the overall presentation remained surprisingly constant. As a bonus, the Helsinkis turned out to be great "two-person" speakers, displaying a rather large sweet spot. At one point I had three other people in my listening room, and each one commented on the huge, airy sound from their various sitting positions.

My only reservation about the Helsinkis was that even after break-in, they still lacked a bit of warmth throughout the bass and lower mid-range. I've been using "Home Life" from Shearwater's *Rook* to test bass quality over the past few months. It's not so much that the recording reaches the lower depths as much as it simply provides a palpable reference for low-frequency definition. (*continued*)

Once I had everything dialed in, the Helsinkis delivered the full, deep and expansive sound I expected.





# upscaleaudio.com Fully Stocked? "Yes, Sir!"



**PrimaLuna**  
DiaLogue Two Integrated Amp

**CARY CAD 120S Amplifier**  
Switchable 120 watts/ultralinear; 60 watts/triode



**Vincent™ SP-331**  
Stereo Power Amplifier  
Other Vincent models  
acquired on special purchase.  
Call for info!



**SOOLOOS**  
Music Server  
2400 hi-rez CD's!  
The fun of album covers is  
back with perfect sorting of your  
music. Go ahead. Touch it. You *know* you want to.



**MANLEY**  
Steelhead Phono Preamplifier

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

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

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

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

**UPSCALE  
AUDIO**  
HIGHEST FIDELITY • MUSIC SYSTEMS

[www.upscaleaudio.com](http://www.upscaleaudio.com)

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

With stellar equipment, I get the distinct impression that the studio has a suspended wooden floor, and that the floorboards are bending and creaking with the movement of the musicians. The Gradients preserved that impression, but it also seemed like the janitor came in during the night and laid down a few coats of wax. The bass sounded smoother, but cooler and less visceral.

In the end, the Helsinkis were a lot of fun. My teenage sons, for example, are starting to approach me for tutorials on hard rock. I've already turned them on to the joys of Tool, System of a Down, Primus, Nirvana and Black Sabbath's *Paranoid*. With the Gradients in place, I started them in on a few of my old school favorites, "Everybody Wants Some" from an old vinyl copy of Van Halen's *Women and Children First*, the first three Cheap Trick albums and the Classic Records reissue of *Physical Graffiti*.


**I've never expected to hear rock sound so adamant, recalcitrant and downright surly from a diminutive pair of three-foot tall speakers from Finland.**

The Helsinkis were dynamic and powerful and came alarmingly close to reproducing club-level sonics in my 16-by-20-foot listening room. My sons were duly impressed.

## At the Finnish Line

As much as I enjoyed the Helsinkis, I'm still a tube guy through and through, so these speakers would not be a good fit for me.  
(continued)





But if I changed my spots and found a high-powered solid-state amp that I couldn't live without, I'd choose the Helsinkis in a heartbeat. Great sound aside, the aesthetics of the Gradients will either grab you or not. They will look much better in a listening room with a couple of Eames Lounge chairs than it will in a room full of Chippendale cabinets. (That's what the Tannoy Classic series is for.) I'm a modern kind of guy with a house full of modern furniture, and the Helsinkis were a stunning focal point in my room.

There's no denying that the Helsinki is an unconventional design that defies expectations in terms of soundstage depth, bass performance and dynamics. I hate using the term "out-of-the-box," especially since it is used in almost all of the promotional material for this speaker, but I can't think of a better example of the term. If you consider yourself to be a non-traditionalist when it comes to audio, I couldn't recommend a better loudspeaker.

## Further Investigation: Jeff Dorgay

With a few more amplifiers at my disposal, I spent some additional time looking for system synergy with the Gradients. With a larger room, I settled on about the same placement from the rear walls, but had the speakers 9 feet apart and about 7 feet from the side walls. Much like my reference MartinLogan speakers, if you have the luxury of more space, the Gradients will offer a larger presentation.

I concur with Marc's assessment of using these speakers with tube amplification. I tried the McIntosh MC275, The BAT VK-55SE, and the Prima Luna Prologue 7 monoblocks all yielded the same result: mushy, undefined bass response. Change the game to solid state and the Gradients are a winner. Again, I made it a point to sample them with about a dozen different amplifiers, from low power to high, and while these amplifiers are easy to drive, even with the modestly powered Naim Nait 5i, if you have a larger room, you will be rewarded with more expansive sound, especially if your amplifier has a lot of current drive.

While my reference Conrad Johnson Premier 350 would drive the Gradients to insane volume levels, my favorite slice of the Gradient sound was paring them with my Luxman L-590II, an integrated amplifier that is fully Class A. The slight bit of warmth that the Luxman (and our Clayton A-40 amplifier) brought to the mix was perfection for me, offering a high level of resolution without being the least bit harsh or fatiguing. *(continued)*



"Clearly one of the top  
phono preamplifiers..."

Helmut Rohrwild  
HiFi & Records

"Spot-on tonality..."

Jeff Dorgay  
TONEAudio

audio  
revelation  
MUSICAL TRUTH )))

bringing music to life



Featuring our recent  
shootout winner,  
The Vacuum State  
JLTi Phono Stage

## Analog Specialists

25+ Years of Experience  
40+ Leading Edge Brands

760.944.0444

[www.audiorevelation.com](http://www.audiorevelation.com)

Much like my favorite panels, these speakers are extremely transparent and throw a huge soundstage. I suggest placing them as far apart as you can while maintaining a proper stereo image.

Definitely a fashion-forward speaker, the Gradient has major style points, while delivering the goods in the sound department as well. Just don't plan on using your favorite tube amplifier with them! ●

## The Gradient Helsinki 1.5

MSRP: \$8,000

## IMPORTER

### Fidelis AV

14 East Broadway (RT 102)

Derry, NH 03038

603-437-4769

[www.fidelisav.com](http://www.fidelisav.com)

## PERIPHERALS

**Analog Sources** Rega P9 w/ RB1000 and Clearaudio Maestro Wood, Spiral Groove SG-2 w/ Triplanar and Lyra Skala

**Digital Sources** Naim CD 555, Luxman Du-7, Shanling CDT-1500, Sooloos music server

**Preamplifiers** BAT VK-32SE, Conrad Johnson ACT2/Series 2

**Power Amplifiers** See text

Cable Shunyata, Cardas, Audience

**Power** Running Springs Dmitri and Jaco, RSA Mongoose power cords, Shunyata Anaconda VX power Cords, Shunyata Hydra 2



# Multipurpose Digital

## The McIntosh MCD500

By Jeff Dorgay

McIntosh  
MCD500 SACD/CD PLAYER



(continued)





can hear that loudmouth guy who advertises OxyClean on TV screaming at the top of his lungs: "It's a CD player! It's a DAC! It even plays SACDs!" But what *really* makes the latest digital hardware from McIntosh so exciting is its subtlety and its versatility. This is a serious CD/SACD player. For \$6,500, you get a CD player, SACD player and a DAC with two inputs. "Don't wait! If you buy now, we'll throw in a volume control!" I can still hear that guy screaming in the background.

Making use of the latest DAC chips from SABRE technologies, this device takes a big leap forward, raising the performance benchmark in its class and offering full 192kHz sampling. Ron Cornelius at McIntosh told me that they use the 24-bit version of the Sabre Reference, model No. ES9008. "Our specs are better than they list; we use 4 DAC's per channel in a parallel balanced configuration to increase signal-to-noise ratio by an additional 6 db." McIntosh engineer Ted Saito gave this player a master clock to sync the D/A process independently of the incoming data stream to minimize jitter and increase the quality of out-board digital sources.

McIntosh didn't stop there. Careful attention was paid to the analog section in terms of parts selection, component layout and power-supply design. They didn't scrimp on the mechanical construction either; this is a beefy player, weighing almost 30 pounds. I was particularly impressed with the steel CD drawer in the mechanism, something absent on my \$17,000 Wadia 781i SE or the recently reviewed \$16,000 Meridian 808.2. Cornelius went on to say, "The MCD500 is one of if not the best selling player we make and feel that it should be partnered with the C500 preamp and the MC1.2k, MC 501 or MC2301 amplifiers, so the whole system can be run fully balanced."





**The big change that MCD301 owners will notice is the compliment of digital inputs.**

The good news is that the OxyClean guy was a bad dream, but the MCD500 is a sweet dream that really exists. When you wake up, you can go right down to your local McIntosh dealer and buy one. The styling is old-school McIntosh: a nice glossy-glass front panel with backlit green lettering and blue LED displays. I'm sure the loyal McIntosh customers in the crowd are saying, "So what's the matter with that?" Nothing, in my book. I've been a fan of McIntosh look since the early '70's, and I think it's very cool that while it's been slightly upgraded over the past 10 years, it still looks great. And should you have any older vintage Mc gear, they look right at home together.

### Setup

Most McIntosh components require precious little burn-in time, and the MCD500 was no exception. It sounded fine out of the box and opened up in the upper registers slightly during the first 50 hours of playing time. Part of that may have been a result of it being so cold outside when it was delivered. It felt like a brick of black ice when we unboxed it!

The MCD500 is very well-equipped for an SACD player. The rear panel reveals variable and fixed RCA and XLR outputs, which are selectable from the front panel. The big change that MCD301 owners will notice is the compliment of digital *inputs*. The MCD500 features an optical digital input as well as a SPDIF (RCA), also selectable from the front panel. My only regret with this player is that it does not feature a USB input, which is becoming the preference for computer audio users. Not a deal breaker, but I think this will be an essential option for the next revision of this player, considering how many people use their computers as digital sources.

### System Combinations

Fully equipped with a low-voltage trigger circuit, the MCD500 can integrate into your remote-controlled system, and it makes for a simple yet high-performance system when teamed up with the McIntosh power amplifier of your choice. The supplied remote will then control your entire system. (Unless you pair the MCD500 with an MC275, which can not be triggered remotely) *(continued)*



DH LABS

SILVER SONIC®



D.H. Labs, Inc.  
9638 NW 153rd Terrace  
Alachua, FL 32615  
(386) 418-0560 FAX (386) 462-3162

www.SilverSonic.com

If you are part of the new breed of audiophiles who does not have an LP collection or hasn't gotten around to it yet, the MCD500 works great as a stand-alone control center for digital sources. Its variable level outputs deliver six volts in unbalanced mode and 12 volts balanced, which should be more than enough to drive any power amplifier. I had no problem driving a 20-foot run of balanced or unbalanced cable to the MC252 while it was here.

**Using the MCD500 with the McIntosh MS300 music server and the MC252 amplifier proved to be the ultimate in simplicity and flexibility.**

I could take advantage of my SACD library, play extended playlists with the MS300 and use my laptop via optical to play downloads. You could also use the optical connection for a digital cable box if you were integrating your television into this system. Best of all, you can control it with one remote. I would highly suggest this combination for anyone with space at a premium who does not want to sacrifice performance.

While I am still a fan of a high-quality linestage as the front end of your system, I tried the MCD500 with a number of non-McIntosh power amplifiers with excellent results. Interestingly enough, I really liked the MCD500 with the MC275 tube power amplifier. Mated with my Harbeth Monitor 40.1's, I definitely had a substantial slice of audio heaven in the room.

### The Sound

All of the specs and engineering wizardry goes straight out the window the minute you push the play button and the MCD500 delivers the goods. *(continued)*





I spent a fair amount of time comparing discs that I had ripped on the MS300 to playing from the drawer of the MCD500, and I can happily report that the difference was negligible, even non-existent. A few of my informal listeners even preferred the hard-disc playback to the CD player, but it was always a close race.

Standard redbook playback is still one of my favorite SACD player tests. With so few new SACD's being pressed, chances are most of you will be using your SACD player as a CD player at least half of the time. I'm happy to report that the MCD500 passed this test with flying colors. On well-recorded SACD's, such as my latest jazz favorite from Eastwind Imports, *Blue Minor: The Great Jazz Trio* by Hank Jones, George Mraz and Billy Kilson. Even though the high-resolution layer of the disk had more air and slam, the CD portion sounded excellent. A number of other jazz favorites that were redbook only spent a lot of time in the MCD500's tray and I never felt limited. But when the occasional SACD came along, it was nice to ratchet up the presentation a notch.

My major complaint about the player is that it does not sense SACD automatically, forcing you to set it manually. This lead to confusion on a few occasions, and I'd love to see that changed on the next version. I'm sure the fussy audiophiles in the crowd wouldn't mind the ability to switch from CD to SACD on the fly as well. At present, when you switch formats, it mutes and stops the player. On the grand scale, pretty minor gripes about a fantastic player.

Having a few other SACD players around to compare and contrast, I felt the MCD500 had its own sound. Compared with the Luxman Du7 and Marantz XA-11, the Mac player sounded more open, dynamic and less grainy, even a touch forward at times. It had a *HUGE* soundstage as well, throwing an image way beyond the outer boundaries of my MartinLogan CLX speakers. This was a very engaging player that I could listen to for hours without fatigue, and though it is obviously voiced to use with an all McIntosh system, it was a perfect compliment to whatever system we chose to use it in. *(continued)*

---

**This was a very engaging player that I could listen to for hours without fatigue.**



# FURUTECH

Pure Transmission Technology

## Disc Flattener



### DF-2 LP Flattener

"... Those of you with voracious appetites for vinyl will find this little gadget indispensable."

—Jeff Dorgay, Tone Audio.com



DeMag



Furutech's deMag Frees LPs, Optical Disc Media, Cables and Connectors of Magnetically-Induced Distortion — CES 2007 Best of Innovations Award winner

## Reference Series



"... Furutech's cables offer great transparency and purity, plus an uncanny ability to block out noise and grunge"

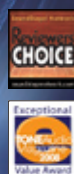
—Chris Martens  
The Absolute Sound 2007  
Editors Choice Awards



## Ag-12 Phono Cable Series

"I don't know if the Furutech Ag-12 is the best phono cable on the market, but it's the best I've heard, a fact made all the more meaningful by its mid-level price. It's one of the phono cables to beat, and it's affordable to boot."

—Marc Mickelson, Soundstage.com Reviews Choice Award



Ag-12 (DIN/RCA)



Ag-12-L (L-DIN/RCA)



Ag-12-R4 (RCA/RCA)

## CF Series NEW



CF-102 (R)



CF-201 (R)



CF-202 (R)

"Elegant, lustrous, non-resonant carbon fiber and nonmagnetic stainless steel bodies plus leading-edge technology and materials for enthusiasts seeking musical perfection."

Furutech Pure Transmission Technology, improving every element of signal transmission, from the AC to the speaker

*Make a More Powerful Connection with Furutech!*

## Elite Audio Video Distribution

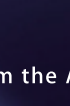
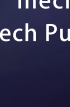
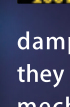
Hollywood USA (800) 457-2577x22  
info@eliteavdist.com www.eliteavdist.com



## FI-50(R) Piezo Ceramic Series IEC Connectors



Carefully chosen and tested "active" materials mechanically and electrically damp Piezo connectors as they "interconvert" thermal, mechanical, and electrical energy for the finest Furutech Pure Transmission signal imaginable.



**This player does not embellish the presentation of whatever you put in the tray.**

My Japanese imports sounded exquisite, David Bowie's *Scary Monsters* sounded harsh, and *Every Breath You Take* from the Police sounded crunchy and compressed. However, great SACD's (like the new Marvin Gaye discs from MoFi) will keep you so engaged that you'll spend less time with your turntable.

Bouncing between old favorites (Pink Floyd and Genesis) and new (Fleet Foxes and the new Prince disc), I was consistently impressed with the low-end grunt and slam that this player had to offer. The lower registers were well represented with excellent texture, not merely one-note bass. Dynamics and attack were powerful and controlled. Going back to Michael Hedges *Aerial Boundaries* on Windham Hill made for a great torture test trying to capture Hedges plucky guitar style, another test that the MCD500 aced.

Frequency extremes are where all but the best digital hardware reveal their true natures, and this is where the MCD500 falls a little short when compared with reference players such as the Naim 555 or the Wadia 781i SE. But these players cost two-to-three times as much. Compared with its equally priced (or slightly more expensive) peers, the MCD is without fault.

Where the MCD500 played closest to the big-bucks boxes was in low-level detail retrieval. Switching back and forth between the \$18,000 Wadia player and the MCD500, I was impressed with how much of Sinatra's vocal inflections came through on both players. (continued)



### I Keep Coming Back to the DAC

As great as the MCD500 is as a disc player, it's a stellar DAC. Every digital source that I paired it with was a great combination, from the Wadia 170i up to the Sooloos music server. So you can look at the MCD500 as a great disc player with a free DAC thrown in or vice versa. I would go as far as to say that I would pay \$6,500 just for the MCD500's DAC, even if I rarely need the disc player.

I hope the McIntosh people won't mind me prodding them for new products, but this DAC with a USB input without the transport at say \$3,995 would be a world-beater!

### The Last CD Player Many of You Will Need, Equipped for the Future

While the Compact Disc is close to the end of its lifespan, (like all other physical media) the majors are still pressing 500 million discs a year, so you still need something to play them on and the used market will probably remain strong for the next 20-50 years. I can highly recommend the McIntosh MCD500 because regardless of your shiny disc preferences, the DAC inputs should carry you forward quite nicely. And there has never been a better time than the present to make some great deals on the remaining SACD's that are floating around on the used market. ●



The McIntosh MCD 500  
MSRP: \$6,500

### MANUFACTURER

**McIntosh Laboratories**

[www.mcintoshlabs.com](http://www.mcintoshlabs.com)

### PERIPHERALS

**Digital Sources** Luxman Du7, McIntosh MS 300, Naim CD555, Wadia 170i, Sooloos Music Server

**Analog Source** Rega P9w/ RB1000 arm, Lyra Skala cartridge and Nagra BPS phono stage

**Preamplifier** Burmester 011, Conrad Johnson ACT2/Series 2

**Power Amplifier** Burmester 911mk. 3, Conrad Johnson Premier 350, McIntosh MC252, McIntosh MC275

**Speakers** Harbeth Monitor 40.1, Martin Logan CLX w/ Descent i Subwoofers, Verity Audio Sarastro II

**Cable** Shunyata Aurora Interconnects, Shunyata Orion Speaker cable

**Power Management** Running Springs Dmitri and Jaco Line Conditioners, Running Springs Mongoose and HZ power cords, Shunyata Hydra 2 Line Conditioner, Shunyata Anaconda VX power cords

**Accessories** Burmester V4 and V1 Equipment racks, Furutech DeMag, Finite Elemente Cerapucs and Ceraballs, Shunyata Dark Field Cable Elevators





# A Real Ear Opener From Rega

## The Exact 2 Phono Cartridge

By Jeff Dorgay

If you've read our magazine for any length of time, you know that I'm a big fan of Rega. But I've never been terribly crazy about their moving-magnet cartridges; always a bit dark for my taste. The concept is brilliant though. They add a third mounting hole in the cartridge body so that anyone can set one up quickly without special tools. Not that they were ever bad-sounding cartridges, just more like a Dynaco Stereo 70 retro kind of thing, which always struck me a little odd, because their electronics are very neutral, dynamic and extended.

The Exact 2 you see before you is the top of their moving-magnet cartridge range, with a "vital" fine-line stylus. Rega's website claims that it "fits the groove more precisely than the usual elliptical stylus." It is a high-output moving-magnet cartridge at approximately 7mV, so check the overload of your phono stage because it may not be compatible with some phono preamplifiers. I had a problem with it overloading the MM section of the Nagra BPS we had in for review last issue, though Nagra's flagship VPS (my reference phono stage) worked flawlessly with the Exact 2. MSRP for this cartridge is \$595 if purchased alone or \$495 if purchased with a Rega Turntable.





# Half the country owns an iPod.

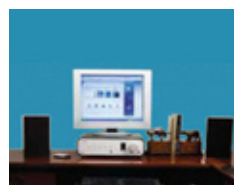
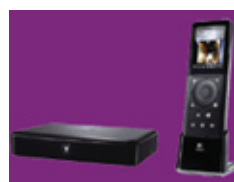
## Now you can hear how good digital music can sound.

The Peachtree Audio Decco is a compact powerhouse that works equally well with analog or digital sources. Its robust 50 watt per channel amplifier gives you a wide range of speakers to choose from, or you can use the built-in headphone jack for private listening sessions.

With optical, coaxial and USB inputs it can interface with any digital source. Products like the Apple TV, Sonos ZP-80, Slim Devices, Squeezebox and the Wadia iTransport are natural combinations, as well as your desktop or laptop computer. A traditional analog input makes it easy to connect your iPod with the standard Apple dock.

The internal digital to analog converter in the Decco offers a significant upgrade to the typical computer soundcard, making it the anchor for the perfect desktop audio system.

But the Decco isn't limited to your office. Its attractive styling will make it right at home anywhere you would like a compact, yet high performance music system.



decco  
peachtree audio

www.signalpathint.com

704 391 9337

## Analog in Five Minutes or less!

You will never have an easier turntable setup experience than mounting a Rega cartridge to one of their turntables. Thanks to that third mounting hole, it only took a couple of minutes to make the swap between my P3-24 and P9. Since all Rega turntables are optimized for their cartridges, no other adjustments are required. Set the tracking force to 1.75 and the anti-skate (bias) to about two-thirds that value, and you are ready to spin records.

Being the ever-finicky audiophile, I used my digital stylus gauge to check the accuracy of the tonearm dial and it was very close: 1.75 grams measured 1.63 grams on the P9 and 1.88 on the P3-24. Well within tolerance, but after a little experimentation, I did experience the best presentation right at the factory spec. So if you have or can borrow a digital force gauge, it is worth your while. Those three holes still allow the cartridge to move slightly, so I suggest using the protractor that came with your P3 (or a GEO-Disk if you have one) to make sure the body is square on the end of the tonearm.

## A Brand New Rega MM Experience

I must ask you to forget everything you have heard about Rega cartridges and approach this with an open mind because that is all it will take to convince you that there has been a substantial upgrade to this cartridge.

I started with the P3-24, figuring this would probably represent close to the ultimate configuration and price range for most P3 owners, though I have known a few people who have put \$2,000 cartridges on their P3s. *(continued)*



The minute I set the tonearm down on the first record, (*Chicago Transit Authority*, on MoFi) I was pleasantly surprised. This was not the Rega MM sound I was used to.

They've changed the recipe, folks, and it's for the better. Way better. There are still a few drops of analog warmth in the mix, making this a very pleasing cartridge tonally, but a substantial helping of resolution has been added to the presentation. The end result makes this cartridge much more palatable overall and definitely one of my favorites at this price point.

Spinning CTA put me in the mood for more jazz, so next on the list was the latest Impulse releases from ORG, *Live at the Village Vanguard* and *Ballads*. The Exact 2 did an excellent job tracking John Coltrane's solos, leaving me impressed that Rega has overhauled this aspect of the cartridge as well.

But what about the next generation getting into vinyl? They probably aren't listening to *Chicago Transit Authority* on Mobile Fidelity. Fear not. The slightly warm overall balance of this cartridge forgives a lot of the recording sins of my favorite indie vinyl. This cartridge adds just enough bloom to make many of the current releases I've been hearing more palatable than they are on my \$30,000 analog front end.

"f. boyfriend" from Ida's *Tales of Brave Sin* sounded pretty dull and flat on my Raven/Dynavec combination, but the Rega cartridge injected much-needed life into this record, with lead singer Karla Schickele's voice taking a more center-stage presentation. All of my Chad VanGalen records have now become enjoyable on my reference system, thanks to the Exact 2.

### A Different Perspective

Of course, you would expect a Rega cartridge to sound great on a Rega table, but what about elsewhere? I went upstream and downstream to investigate, mounting it first on the SME309 arm on my Raven TWO and then on the Technics SL-1200. *(continued)*

---

**The slightly warm overall balance of this cartridge forgives a lot of the recording sins of my favorite indie vinyl.**





The Rega/Technics combination might be too bass heavy for some, so this would not be my first choice. The ever so slightly warm presentation of the Exact 2, combined with the somewhat dull presentation of the SL-1200 was not my cup of tea, but moving upscale to the Raven/SME package was a completely different story. The zippier sound of the Raven was a perfect match for this cartridge along with the SME arm. The overall effect was similar to what I achieved with the Clearaudio Maestro Wood cartridge and was very musical indeed.

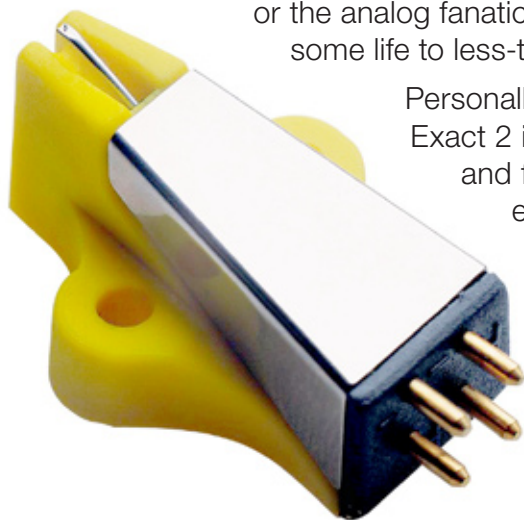
The last stop for the Exact 2 was on the P9. Just as it may be a little out there to mate a \$2,000 cartridge with an \$800 turntable, it's just as wacky to put a cartridge in this price category on a \$5,000 table, but it works. I'm sure a big part of this is Rega synergy, but the Exact 2 makes a great partner for the P9. If you just aren't ready for a big-bucks cartridge and phono preamplifier right now, but have your sights set on a P9, this cartridge won't embarrass you. A few of my friends spent time listening to the P9/Exact Mk2 combination recently and hadn't noticed that I had swapped the more expensive cartridge that normally resides there for the Exact. They were surprised when they found out what they were listening to!

### In the End, A Great Performance

The Rega Exact 2 does a fantastic job at capturing the musical essentials of LP playback. With an excellent balance of tonality and resolution at a reasonable price, this cartridge can play equally well for the audiophile ready to make the next step up from their first turntable or the analog fanatic that would like a great "second cartridge" to bring some life to less-than perfectly recorded discs.

Personally, I think the combination of the P3-24 and the Exact 2 is as good as it gets in the under \$2,000 "set it and forget it" analog category. It also provides a big enough dose of analog magic that may entice a few of your friends to investigate what this vinyl resurgence is all about.

I think the combination of the P3-24 and the Exact 2 is as good as it gets in the under \$2,000 "set it and forget it" analog category.



### The Rega Exact 2 MM Phono Cartridge

**MSRP: \$595 (\$495 when purchased with a Rega Turntable)**

### MANUFACTURER

**Rega Research Ltd.**

Essex, England

[www.rega.co.uk](http://www.rega.co.uk)

### US CONTACT

**The Sound Organisation**

972-234-0182

[www.soundorg.com](http://www.soundorg.com)

### PERIPHERALS

**Turntables** Rega P3-24 w/RB301 arm, Rega P9w/RB1000 arm, Technics SL-1200, TW Acustic Raven TWO w/SME 309 arm

**Phono Preamplifiers** Nagra VPS, Cambridge Audio 640

**Speakers** Harbeth Monitor 40.1, MartinLogan CLX, Verity Audio Sarastro II

**Preamplifier** Conrad Johnson ACT2/Series 2, Burmester 011

**Power Amplifier** Conrad Johnson Premier 350, Burmester 911mk. 3

**Cable** Shunyata Aurora, Anteres and Orion

**Power** Running Springs Dmitri and Jaco, RSA Mongoose power cords and Shunyata Anaconda VX power cords, Shunyata Hydra 2



# Slummin'

By Jeff Dorgay

No matter where you go, there are cool HiFi things to find. This issue we've got some goodies from the 50's and the 70's. I'm always on the lookout!



## Eartha Kitt

*That Bad Eartha!*

Mermaid Music — \$20

Even when I'm waiting for the pizza to be ready for takeout, I've got records on my mind. So when the local pizzeria told me that dinner was going to be 10 minutes late, I made a dash for the record store across the street and came up with this classic. A few passes on my Clearaudio Simple Matrix record cleaner and it plays like the day it was new.



## DBX 128

Echo Audio — \$50

When the DBX 128 hit the scene around 1978, it held a lot of promise and intrigue as an alternative to Dolby B, which was already ubiquitous. The 128 could be used as a complete noise reduction system, compressing on record and then expanding (an equal amount) on playback. The more sophisticated 1, 2, 3 and 4BX along with the 224 "noise reduction system" would come and go, along with almost 1100 albums recorded with DBX encoding. Once the compact disc was introduced in the early 80's, 90 db dynamic range was a way of life...

The DBX 128 can still be had for \$50 - \$125 depending on the condition and they make a great addition to a vintage garage system, especially when listening to an iPod full of MP3's.





### SAE 2100 Power Amplifier

E Bay — \$125

This was the amplifier I would have bought after my Phase Linear, had I not gotten sidetracked to another store that sold Conrad Johnson! But I always loved going to Pacific Stereo and watching that row of LED's bounce as I was listening to Pink Floyd.

This one was in very clean condition and will be shipped off to Ken Ealey Audio (<http://www.kenealeyaudio.com>) for a full rebuild and we'll report on it in the vintage gear column at a future date. Ken is well known for rebuilding SAE, Threshold and Acoustat amplifiers. ●

## Simplify your system... and get more from your music!



"...a complete success..."  
 — Audio Ideas Guide, 2007

"...dangerously seductive..."  
 — magazine-audio, 2007

"...among the very standalone CD players  
 and preamps..."  
 — SoundStage!, 2006

"... without question  
 the best CD playback I've heard."  
 — Ultra Audio, 2005



Stereo Times Most Wanted Components, 2007 :: SoundStage! Reviewers' Choice Award, 2006  
 SoundStage! Edge of the Art Award, 2006 :: Ultra Audio Select Component Award, 2005

## Because Less is More! ONE COMPONENT — ONE REMOTE — MINIMAL CABLE REQUIREMENTS MORE TECHNOLOGY — SUPERIOR SOUND

The pinnacle of the "less is more" concept is the **Integris CDP**. As an integrated CD player and preamp you'll hear digital at its absolute finest — the is your one-piece solution for performance, convenience and simplicity. You will also appreciate your other sources with excellent fidelity, extensive flexibility, a great feature set and reference caliber engineering, as every preamp should offer (but few do).  
 state-of-the art DSP-enhanced CD playback with premium top-loading transport :: multiple PCM digital inputs supported  
 neutral transparent linestage preamp with 5 inputs :: high performance MC/MM phono stage — **new option!**  
 dedicated headphone amplifier circuit — **new option!**



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

---

ALO Audio: [www.aloaudio.com](http://www.aloaudio.com)

Audience: [www.audience-av.com](http://www.audience-av.com)

Aurum Acoustics: [www.aurumacoustics.com](http://www.aurumacoustics.com)

AV123: [www.av123.com](http://www.av123.com)

B&W Music Club: [www.bowersandwilkins.com](http://www.bowersandwilkins.com)

Benchmark: [www.benchmarkmedia.com](http://www.benchmarkmedia.com)

Burmester: [www.burmester.de](http://www.burmester.de)

Cambridge Audio: [www.audioplusservices.com](http://www.audioplusservices.com)

Coffin and Trout: [www.coffinandtrout.com](http://www.coffinandtrout.com)

Conrad Johnson: [www.conradjohnson.com](http://www.conradjohnson.com)

DH labs: [www.silversonic.com](http://www.silversonic.com)

Decco labs: [www.signalpathint.com](http://www.signalpathint.com)

DeVore Fidelity: [www.devorefidelity.com](http://www.devorefidelity.com)

Echo Audio: [www.echohifi.com](http://www.echohifi.com)

Furutech: [www.furutech.com](http://www.furutech.com)

GamuT: [www.gamutaudio.com](http://www.gamutaudio.com)

Gradient: [www.fidelisav.com](http://www.fidelisav.com)

Harbeth: [www.fidelisav.com](http://www.fidelisav.com)

Immedia Sound: [www.immediasound.com](http://www.immediasound.com)

Luxman: [www.onahighernote.com](http://www.onahighernote.com)

JM Labs/Focal: [www.audioplusservices.com](http://www.audioplusservices.com)

JL Audio: [www.jlaudio.com](http://www.jlaudio.com)

Lensbabies: [www.lensbabies.com](http://www.lensbabies.com)

Loiminchay Audio: [www.loiminchayaudio.com](http://www.loiminchayaudio.com)

Martin-Logan: [www.martinlogan.com](http://www.martinlogan.com)

McIntosh: [www.mcintoshlabs.com](http://www.mcintoshlabs.com)

Meridian: [www.meridian-audio.com](http://www.meridian-audio.com)

Music Direct: [www.musicdirect.com](http://www.musicdirect.com)

Music Millennium: [www.musicmillennium.com](http://www.musicmillennium.com)

Nagra: [www.nagraaudio.com](http://www.nagraaudio.com)

Naim: [www.naimusa.com](http://www.naimusa.com)

NePlusUltra: [www.neplusultrainc.com](http://www.neplusultrainc.com)

Nik Software: [www.niksoftware.com](http://www.niksoftware.com)

Primare: [www.soundorg.com](http://www.soundorg.com)

Red Wine Audio: [www.redwineaudio.com](http://www.redwineaudio.com)

Rega: [www.soundorg.com](http://www.soundorg.com)

Running Springs Audio: [www.runningspringsaudio.com](http://www.runningspringsaudio.com)

Save the Music: [www.vh1.com](http://www.vh1.com)

Shunyata: [www.shunyata.com](http://www.shunyata.com)

Sooloos: [www.sooloos.com](http://www.sooloos.com)

Upscale Audio: [www.upscaleaudio.com](http://www.upscaleaudio.com)

Verity Audio: [www.verityaudio.com](http://www.verityaudio.com)

Wadia: [www.wadia.com](http://www.wadia.com)

Zu Audio: [www.zuaudio.com](http://www.zuaudio.com)