

toneAudio.



The e-journal of analog
and digital sound.

no.26

2009

The POWER Issue

MONSTER MONOBLOCKS!

McIntosh MC 1.2KW
Simaudio Moon W-7M

Power and Finesse:

Burmester 911 MK.3
darTZeel's CTH-8550

Massive Bass:

JL Audio's Mighty Gotham

World's First Review!

The Rega Osiris Amplifier

Factory Visits:

Bang & Olufsen and Nagra

Jaan Uhelszki talks to
Mark Mothersbaugh
about the Swiffer and
other stories.

Stanley Clarke
charms
Portland with Chick Corea
and Lenny White

PUBLISHER Jeff Dorgay

EDITOR Bob Golfen

ART DIRECTOR Jean Dorgay

MUSIC EDITOR Ben Fong-Torres

ASSISTANT
MUSIC EDITOR Bob Gendron

MUSIC VISIONARY Terry Currier

STYLE EDITOR Scott Tetzlaff

CONTRIBUTING
WRITERS Bailey S. Barnard
Tom Caselli
Kurt Doslu
Anne Farnsworth
Joe Golfen
Jesse Hamlin
Rich Kent
Ken Kessler
Rick Moore
Jerold O'Brien
Michele Rundgren
Todd Sageser
Richard Simmons
Jaan Uhelszki
Randy Wells

UBER CARTOONIST Liza Donnelly

ADVERTISING Jeff Dorgay

WEBSITE bloodymonster.com

Cover Photo: Stanley Clark
by Jeff Dorgay



tonepublications.com

Editor Questions and
Comments:

tonepub@yahoo.com
800.432.4569

© 2009 TONE MAGAZINE, LLC
All rights reserved.

SARASTRO II SM1262
VERITY AUDIO
Designed & Manufactured in Quebec, Canada

verity

verityaudio.com



CONTENTS

7. PUBLISHER'S LETTER

8. TONE TOON
By Liza Donnelly

features

9 Old School:
The Mark Levinson no.23
By Jerold O'Brien

18 Almost everything you want to
know about Mark Mothersbaugh
By Jaan Uhelszki

36 Rolling with the Stones
By Ben Fong-Torres

45 Dealers That Mean Business:
**A Visit to TomTom Audio in
St. Albers, England** *By Jeff Dorgay*

68 High Style and Functionality:
**The Bang & Olufsen BeoSound 5
and a Visit to the B&O Factory**
By Jeff Dorgay

81 Budget Gear:
The devilsoundDAC
By Jerold O'Brien

91 Journeyman Audiophile:
Paradigm Studio 60v5
By Mark Marcantonio

103 Swiss Performance:
**The Nagra LB Mastering Recorder
and a Tour of the Nagra Factory**
By Jeff Dorgay

CONTENTS

tone style

63



58 The Canon G11:
Fast Focus with Low Light Capture

61 Friend or Foe
Audiophile T-Shirts

62 Greener Screen Cleaner
Biodegradable and Antibacterial

63 The Aston Martin Cygnet
Small Size, Big Style

64 The Olympus LS-10 Recorder
Endless Functions, Quality Playback

66 The Xbox Boxer Shorts and
the Real Time Analyzer App



67 Smiley Face Wine
**A Crisp Chardonnay from
Happiness Project**



64



CONTENTS

music

- 13. LIVE MUSIC:** The TONE Staff Covers
Bruce Springsteen & the E Street Band,
Chick Corea, Stanley Clarke &
Lenny White

- 25. CURRENT RELEASES:**
Fresh Releases in the Pop/Rock World
By the TONE Staff

- 41. CLUB MIX:**
This issue, France!
By Scott Tetzlaff

- 52. AUDIOPHILE RECORDINGS:**
Four Blue Note Reissues, Dianna Krall,
Rickie Lee Jones, Neil Young, Devo and
Jeff Beck *By Jeff Dorgay*



Pg.42 *Hotel Costes 12*

CONTENTS

previews

- 97.** The McCormack DNA-750 Monoblocks
- 98.** Hegel's H100 Integrated Amp and CDP 2A CD Player
- 99.** The Naim HDX Music Server
- 100.** The Win Analog SET Amplifier

reviews

- 84.** Headphone Planet:
Hearing Is Believing
By Bailey S. Barnard
- 114.** Major Muscle: McIntosh MC1.2KW
By Jeff Dorgay
- 122.** Monsters of Rock: The Simaudio
Moon W-7M Monoblocks
By Jeff Dorgay
- 129.** The Ultimate Subwoofer:
JL Audio's Gotham
By Jeff Dorgay and Jacob Heilbrunn
- 138.** Perfection: The Burmester 911 MK3
By Jeff Dorgay
- 146.** Slightly Un-Swiss: The darTZeel
CTH-8550 Integrated Amp
By Jeff Dorgay
- 154.** The Rega Osiris Integrated Amp
By Jeff Dorgay
- 161.** SLUMMIN' Classics on the cheap
- 164.** Manufacturers Index

138

84

PUBLISHER'S LETTER



About 10 years ago, when I still earned my living with a camera, I had what was probably the best assignment of my life. Over the course of six days, I photographed (and drove) 14 different Porsches – Boxsters and 911's of every color and configuration. Needless to say, it was great fun, and that concentrated blast of performance allowed me to assess a number of similar vehicles that ranged from great to insanely great.

The first time behind the wheel produced a fairly high level of excitement. But after driving them all under different conditions, each model's strengths and weaknesses started to become clear. As I gained objectivity about quantifying each car's driving experience, I could definitely see why a particular owner might prefer a twin-turbo S to a Boxster, or a C2 to a C4.

This issue brings a similar sentiment. I spent the past few months with a great cache of amplifiers from some of the world's best manufacturers, which raised the thought that high performance is expected in the \$20,000 - \$30,000 range – all of them passed with flying colors – yet each one has its own distinctive character.

I could have lived with any of them long term. Although the Burmester 911 MK3 is my personal favorite, you might find yourself more addicted to the gigantic soundstage of the Simaudio W-7M monoblocks, the bang for the buck of the McCormack 750's, the simplicity of

the Rega Osiris, or the warmth of the McIntosh MC1.2KW's. Any one of these great amplifiers could be the anchor of a world-class system.

If you are in the market for *big* amplification, I hope we've pointed out a few choices to add to your short list. If you are panicked by the sticker shock of these behemoths, fear not: the February Issue of TONEAudio will focus on great small speakers, all in the \$1,000 - \$3,000 range. As you well know, we like to mix it up.

While we are on the subject of mixing it up, TONEAudio will be going to an eight-issue schedule next year, up from seven this year and six issues in prior years. We appreciate your support. The biggest request we get from our readers is for more content.

So, we wish you all a happy holiday season and thank you again for your support. See you in 2010.

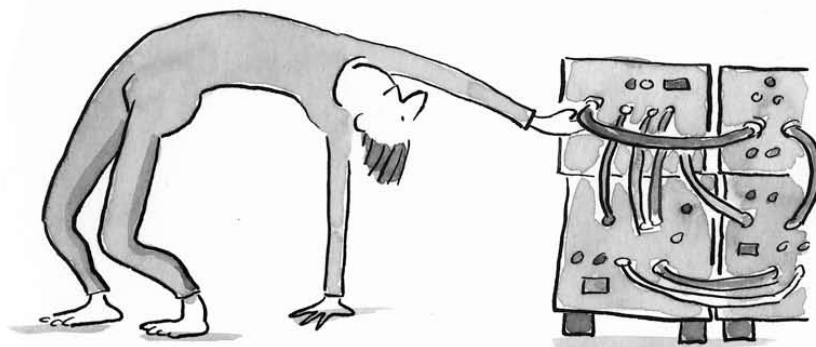
Audiophile Yoga



Twin Amp Tree Pose



Volume Control Pose



Backbend Interconnect Pose



Remote Control Pose

DONNELLY



The Mark Levinson no.23

By Jerold O'Brien

Getting my hands on a Mark Levinson 23 was definitely a pleasant stroll down memory lane. The last Levinson amp to grace my listening room was the 50-watt-per-channel ML-11, and it sucked. The amp I *really* wanted was this baby here, the mighty no.23 with 200 watts per channel. But alas, back then I was a poseur and the no.23 had a retail price of \$4,995 while the wimpy little ML-11 was only \$1,995. But it said Mark Levinson on the front panel!

OLD SCHOOL:



The no.23 was made from 1987 to 1990 and then became the 23.5, which ran all the way to 1995. For a limited time, 23 owners could upgrade to the new model for about \$2,000. As much as hard-core Levinson fans will grump about which version is better, the truth is: they both really rock. Though designed by the Madrigal staff (not Mark Levinson, the man), these amplifiers had a very musical sound that was considerably warmer overall compared to later products that were more clinical sounding.

Compact in size compared to the monstrous blue Krell amplifiers of the same period, the no.23 was packed with power supply and output transistors bolted to massive heat sinks. Don't let the small size fool you; it still weighs almost 100 pounds. Not man enough to lift it? Then you're not man enough to own it, I'd say. *(continued)*

MAESTRO

UTOPIA™

Vivid colors, subtle nuance,
perfect pace and rhythm;
Perfection only a
Maestro can create.



Culminating 30-years of passion, sweat and hard work expressed in original Focal breakthroughs:

- 25-micron thick Pure Beryllium inverted dome tweeter
- Infinite Acoustic Loading™ (IAL2) tweeter chamber
- Laser cut "W"™ Glass Cones
- Magnetic Damping™ System
- Gamma™ cabinet structure
- Focus Time™ driver alignment



FEATURE

How much is that doggie in the window?

This particular specimen came from a recent visit to Echo Audio (www.echohifi.com) in Portland, Oregon with an \$1,800 price tag on the shelf. As you can see from the photos, it's as clean as a whistle and upon bringing it home to for some extended listening sessions, I am tempted to make this part of my permanent collection.

Back when I owned my ML-11, I didn't have a balanced preamplifier and those special CAMAC connectors were a major pain to deal with. Fast forward to today with an Audio Research LS-26 preamplifier and a three-meter pair of balanced Audioquest Sky cables, and I'm ready to roll. Having just recently acquired the same speakers that I owned back in the late 80's, a pair of mint Acoustat 2+2's with the Medallion upgrades and fresh capacitors, I was astounded at just how good this amplifier sounds, even by today's standards.

The bass is thunderous and gripped the Acoustats, providing better sound than I ever had back in the 80's. The high end is very non-grainy with a smooth if slightly forward midrange. Even when taking it over to the TONEAudio studio to compare it with a few of the big-bucks power amplifiers in for review this issue, the no.23 not only sounds great but it's an incredible bargain for less than \$2,000. *(continued)*



Should your no.23 need service, there are a number of independent facilities around the country that can help you, and a quick call to the factory revealed that they send all their legacy product to Pyramid Audio in Austin, Texas. Chris Lewis has years of ML repair under his belt and told me that the no. 23 is still very serviceable. You can reach them at 512 458-8292.

A Great Anchor for Your System

If you'd like a great treasure from high-end audio's past and an amplifier that will drive practically anything, I would suggest a nice, clean Mark Levinson no.23. An all-solid-state Levinson system from this time period is too much for me, but pair this amplifier with your favorite tube preamplifier (preferably one with balanced outputs) and you will be amazed at the level of musicality you can achieve in your system. And if you come across a mint pair of 25 watt, ML-2 monoblocks, call me. I'm done collecting tube amplifiers for a while. ●

If you'd like a great treasure from high-end audio's past and an amplifier that will drive practically anything, I would suggest a nice, clean Mark Levinson no.23.

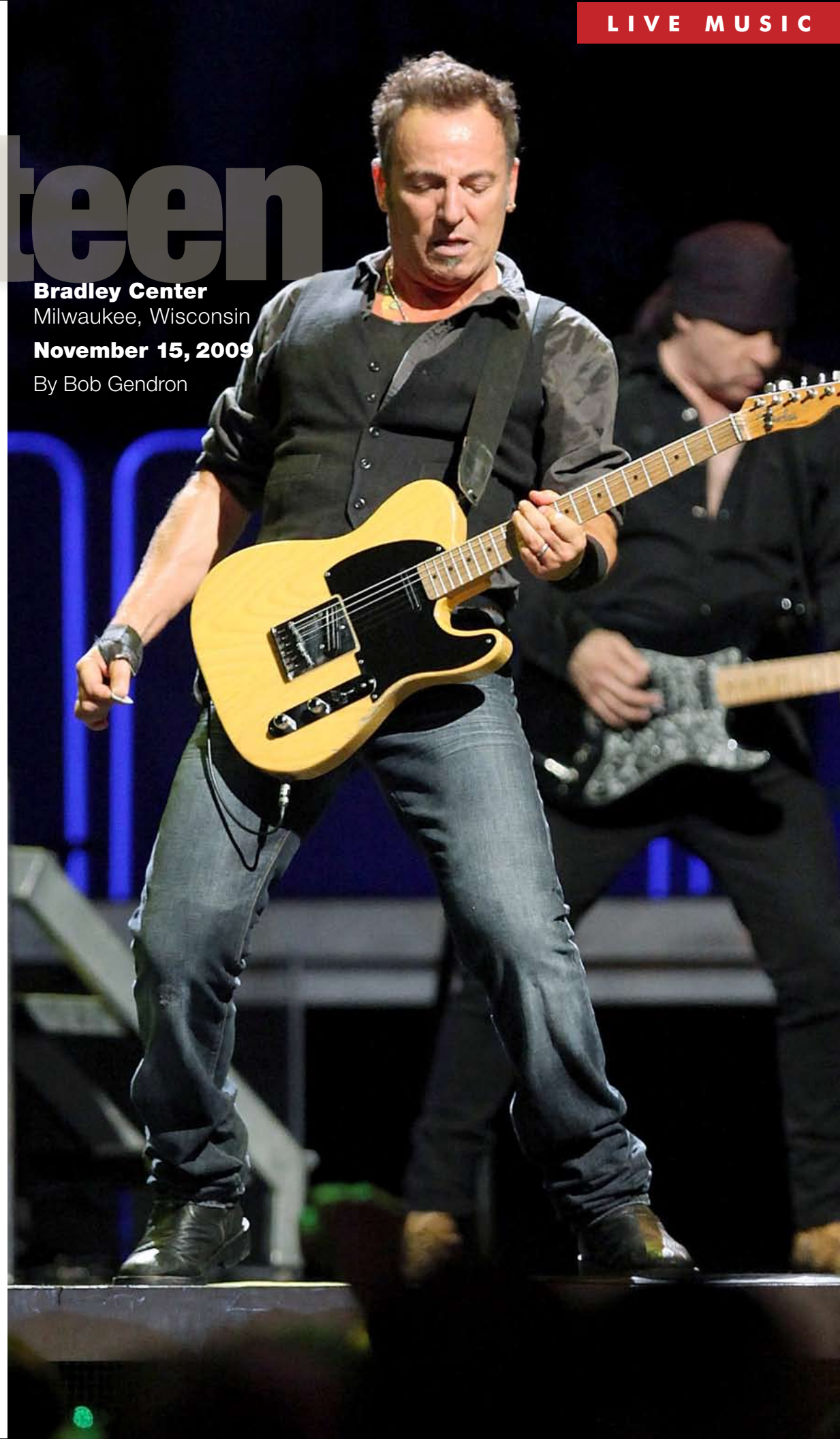
Bruce Springsteen

Make no mistake about it: Bruce Springsteen knew exactly where he was from the moment he stepped onto the stage at the Bradley Center in Milwaukee. “Driving alone through the Wisconsin night,” he proclaimed on the set-opening “Cadillac Ranch,” emphasizing “Wisconsin” to the delight of the sold-out crowd. Just two days before, the Boss entered Spinal Tap territory when he greeted a Detroit audience with “Hello, Ohio!” Embarrassing for certain, but it’s the only slip Springsteen has been guilty of on the final lap of a lengthy tour that wrapped up in Buffalo shortly before Thanksgiving.

Springsteen diehards are a notably enthusiastic bunch, so when reports came that the 60-year-old and his accompanying E Street Band were performing some of the best shows of their career, I thought they needed to be put in proper perspective. Yet, as the veteran ensemble demonstrated in Milwaukee—as well as at a multi-night stand in East Rutherford, New Jersey and practically every other place it’s hit since early October—fans fortunate enough to catch the final batch of shows have indeed witnessed something special. Perhaps ignited by the decision to play legendary studio albums (*Born to Run*, *Born in the USA*, *Greetings From Asbury Park*, *The Wild, the Innocent, the E Street Shuffle*, and *The River*) in their entirety, or by the fact that Springsteen has said he’s taking an indefinite hiatus after the current stretch, or by the fact that, as some insiders believe, at least one member of the E Streeters (most likely saxophonist Clarence Clemons) will retire before the next outing, the band has simply been on fire. By comparison, gigs from a year earlier seemed like those of a frayed group on the verge of burning out.

Fervent momentum carried throughout the group’s rollicking three-hour set, anchored by a spirited reading of *Born to Run* and punctuated by Springsteen’s wowing enthusiasm and leave-it-on-the-floor passion. The singer—dressed in trademark blue jeans, a vest, and long-sleeve shirt—waded into the crowd just three songs in, falling backward into a sea of hands that passed him back up to the stage for the end of “Hungry Heart.” As someone who’s always believed the concert venue represents the church of rock n’ roll, Springsteen played the role of music’s patron saint on this night, testifying on behalf of joy, faith, hope, love, and promise. As the Midwestern-themed “Badlands” waved a middle finger in the face of despair, “Working on a Dream” swished and swayed with the purpose of a gospel choir, with the Boss injecting humor (“Good evening, Ohio! I’m just fuckin’ with ya! I’m back on my meds tonight”). (continued)

Bradley Center
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
November 15, 2009
By Bob Gendron



THE CATS ARE READY RUDY'S READY ARE YOU READY?



STEREO
THE FINEST IN JAZZ SINCE 1939

BLUE NOTE

music matters

You listen / You look / You're there...

music matters presents the definitive 45 RPM reissue series

*"If you love jazz, this is **the** series to own. There's never been a better reissue series than the Music Matters Blue Notes." John Crossett - Soundstage*

Not that anyone in the band needed any help having a good time. While drummer Max Weinberg had previously been sitting in for partial shows before being spelled by son Jay, the primary timekeeper displayed no signs of fatigue and lasted the duration, supplying beats that gave a jet-engine thrust to "Born to Run" and a waves-crashing-on-the-Boardwalk sensation to "Backstreets." Paired with Clemons' soaring horn and a rejoinder of rhythm guitars, the E Street Band achieved an orchestral sweep, the crescendos doubling as puppets on a string. Everything looked and sounded effortless—the "Honky Tonk Women" tease before "Darlington County," the Bo Diddley stomp during "She's the One," fiddler Soozie Tyrell's country tones during the beer-barrel polka jig "American Land," and the hep-cat nightclub vibes of a lengthy "Kitty's Back." Yet Springsteen saved the best for those who hoisted handmade signs decorated with requests.

After collecting a dozen placards and dumping them near the drum riser, the Boss randomly began pulling them out and placing one next to his microphone stand before the start of each tune. He re-taught the band how to play "Living Proof," obliged an early call for "Santa Claus is Coming to Town," nailed the beautiful and rare "Jole Blond," and led by example for "Growin' Up." Abstaining from any political commentary and smiling for the duration, Springsteen clearly enjoyed his band's return to urgency and, at times, physicality. Who cares if Clemons has less of a role than in the past? And if backing vocalist Patti Scialfa stayed home to mind the kids? The changes were for the better, and how. No matter what the future brings, it was one hell of a way to go out.



www.musicmattersjazz.com



AcousTech
MASTERING

The Aladdin Theater
Portland, Oregon
December 12, 2009

By Richard Colburn
Photos by Jeff Dorgay

Chick Corea, Stanley Clarke and Lenny White





Precious few things are worth waiting over an hour in 20 degree weather for, but the crowd assembled outside the Aladdin Theater waiting to see and hear the power trio of Chick Corea, Stanley Clarke and Lenny White was not disappointed. You could hear them rumbling, wondering what the show would consist of; would it be electric, acoustic or a mixture? It turned out to be acoustic, with the evening's sound engineer giving the sold out crowd a great mix of direct sound from the stage and gently amplified sound. Even Corea took the stage still wearing a hoodie, which he did not remove until the third song of the set.

The highly enthusiastic audience was treated to mostly early *Return To Forever* tunes, back when they weren't a fusion band. Those intimately familiar with their first two albums got a rare treat of music that hasn't been played in this acoustic format (without Al DiMeola on guitar) for quite a few years, according to Corea in a recent interview. The band played these pieces with love and care, from "Some Time Ago" to the encore, "Spain," with plenty of smiles and improvisation all around.

They added some standards, "All Blues" and "Waltz for Debby," which sounded familiar, yet freshly composed. Part way through the set, as Clarke was shuffling through the song list, he threw it to the floor and took off onto one of the many captivating solos he would perform this evening. *(continued)*



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® f113

Fathom® f110

Fathom® f112

Gotham® g213



GOTHAM® g213

FATHOM® f113

FATHOM® f112

The set changed gears again when someone in the crowd shouted “School Days.” Just as Clarke and White took off into the beginning of that fusion classic, Clark gestured towards his head, making reference to a large Afro that used to be there, while pointing at White with an “I don’t know that guy anymore” look that brought the crowd to its feet.

The first half of the set lasted an hour. The band took a ten-minute intermission, starting back up with a long improvisation that was heavy on the percussion. Corea took a break from playing the piano to start playing drumsticks on top of Clarke’s bass amp, while White provided dynamic accompaniment on drums. At this point, Clarke and White both looked as surprised as the first few rows of the audience did, again underlining the diverse talent of these musicians.

But the high point of the evening was when the trio slid into “No Mystery.” Having fully shaken off the Portland cold by now, all three members hammered through this classic piece. After the encore, the band came back out and thanked the audience, signing autographs and album covers before sending them out into the cold again. If you are a fan of the early *Return to Forever* music, this is an excellent tour to catch.. ●

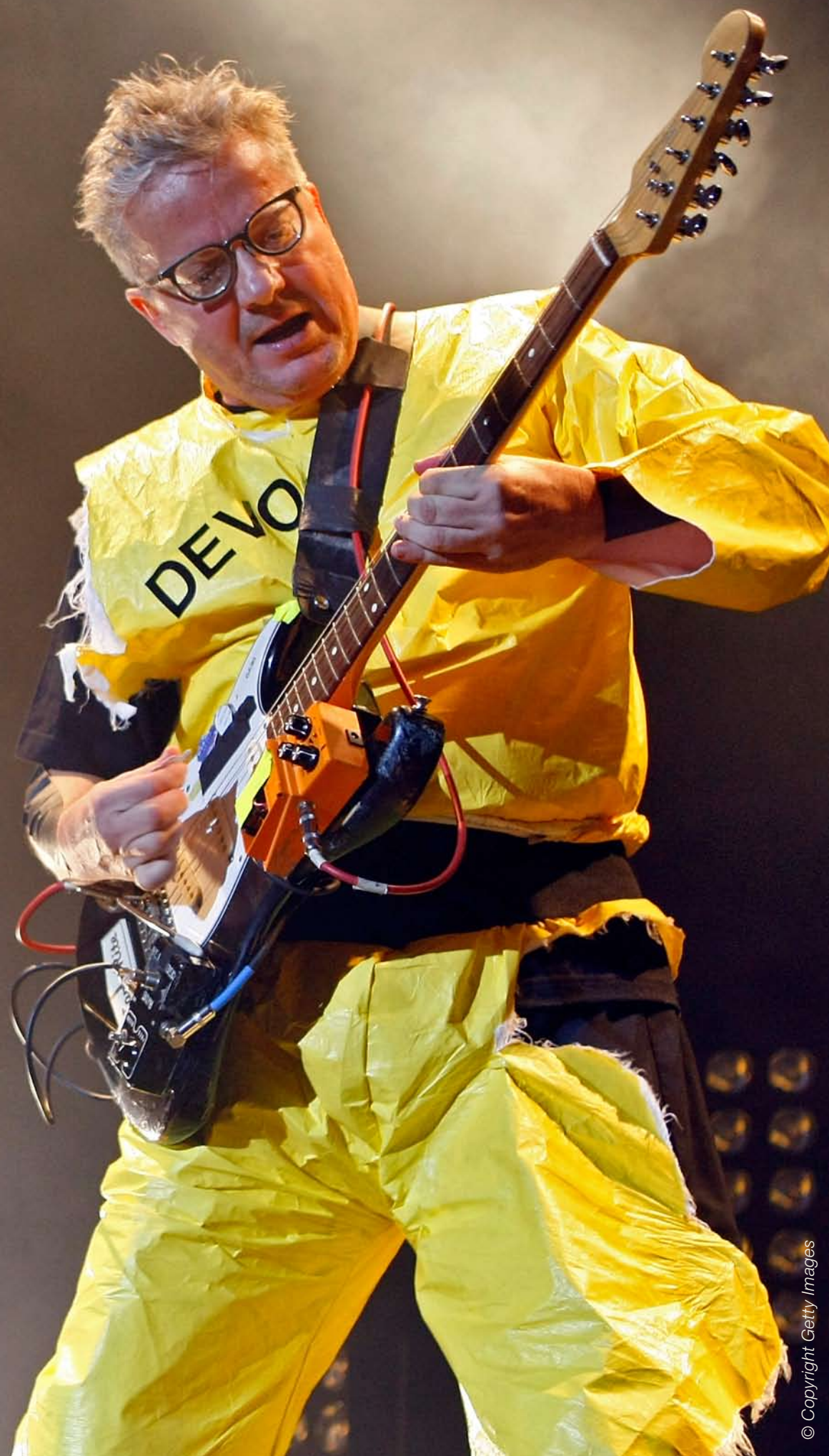
Almost everything you want to know about Mark Mothersbaugh

By Jaan Uhelszki

Mark Mothersbaugh would be loathe to be called a Renaissance man, but that's what he is. Rather a savant for most of his years, he got the name and idea for his revolutionary science-cum-art rock band from a Jehovah's Witnesses pamphlet, and nabbed the phrase, "Are we not men? We are Devo," from a 1932 Charles Laughton movie called *Island of Lost Souls*. An odd title for a man who has a preponderance of soul, even if he is from Akron, Ohio.

In addition to being the bespectacled, robotic lead singer of Devo, the 59 year-old Mothersbaugh is a well respected film composer, with over 100 credits. He wrote the music for *Pee-wee's Playhouse* in 1986 --and even got to sit on Chairy. He's an accomplished artist in the "low brow school of art," mainly because he incorporates fluorescent pigments in the base of his paints so they glow when you least expect it -- much like the occasional subliminal messages he inserts into the commercials he creates, signifying only one thing: With Mark Mothersbaugh, what you see is not what you get. But what you get is a lot.

With Devo back on tour and a new album in the works, our favorite spud boy is as busy as ever.



What's the greatest misconception about you?

Oh, good grief. The greatest misconception is that "Whip It" was the best thing I ever did.

That's the song with the gift that keeps on giving, you know?

Yeah, all the way to being the theme song for the Swiffer Wet Jet commercial!

You did that commercial? Now, that's de-evolution. I have to tell you it's probably the worst product ever made for man.

It is. I got this little tiny old, inexpensive house out in Palm Springs, fixed it up really nice so it had a nice epoxy floor. And oh, there's a little spot over there. I got the Swiffer out. I'll try it. It ate the epoxy right off the floor. Whatever it is, I don't know, but I think it came from outer space. I don't know if we're even allowed to dispose of it in your trash.

You should retaliate and put subliminal messages in those commercials.

I love to put subliminal messages into commercials. It's easy to do. We used to be into it more than we are now because nobody cared. I kept putting these messages in and nobody ever stopped or called me or got freaked out and said, "Take that out immediately!" People just acted like they didn't hear it.

How did you feel when Target used "Beautiful World" to sell soap?

Well, we really liked the idea. The only thing is the ironic humor was lost on them. People that really know the song, and know "It's a beautiful world for you / But not for me," would appreciate it even if those words weren't used in the actual commercial.

Tell me about the importance of being from Ohio.

Ohio had everything to do with my band and myself, the people in my band and myself, our vision of the world and the particular viewpoint that we have, and have had since we were angry young men. And now we're grumpy old whatevers.

My mom always tells me that men get meaner as they age.

I don't think men get meaner. I think what happens, as they get older and then as lust fades away, they become more like women.

Are you the oldest kid or the youngest?

I'm the oldest kid.

When David Bowie asks you to eat raw fish, you say "Yes."

Did you fit in in school?

I was kind of a loner and I fought with the teachers and I fought with the other kids. I got my ass kicked by everybody when I was in school, so when I left, when I went to Kent State. I liked it because I was anonymous. At 3:30 the bell would ring and all the kids in my class, they'd all perk up ... And then they'd head off for their fraternities and their sororities and their beer houses and all the things they did, and I just stayed right there and I used all the facilities in the art department and just kept doing art all night. Did it till one or two in the morning and then get up and go to my classes and just wait for everybody to leave again.

I remember in an interview in the '80s you said that you're a picky eater, so was it a big deal when David Bowie asked you out for sushi? Did you eat the raw fish?

I did. When David Bowie asks you to eat raw fish, you say "Yes."

So David Bowie cured you of being a picky eater.

Yeah I pretty much got over my picky eating because of David Bowie.

That, and seeing the world. But my eating habits were partly economic. I used to think food was like something to take your money away so you couldn't afford to buy a roll of recording tape that week and record a song.

(continued)



During Devo's heyday, when everyone from Mick Jagger to Jack Nicholson to Eno were asking to be on your guest list and saying that you were such a revolutionary band, did you think you deserved all that high profile attention? And were you nervous when people would come backstage?

I don't know, I was kind of nerdy. I was the guy that was happiest sitting at, before there were computers, sitting at whatever instruments I had and making music or making visual art – that's what made me happy. In a way, I wish I would have been more interested in meeting people and hanging out with the people that wanted to collaborate with us and stuff. And I did some collaborations. We worked with Eno and Bowie, of course. And I played on a Rolling Stones song, and I wrote some music for Hugh Cornwell and the Stranglers, and did some sessions but not all the stuff that we could have done or that we were offered to do, so it's like in retrospect I kind of wish we would have been a little less insular as a band.

Yeah, but maybe that would have changed like your vision, too.

That's what we thought: We don't want to be a rock and roll band. We didn't think of ourselves that way.

Yeah, Devo was more like an art statement.

That's how we felt about it.

I always think that we're all the same. It doesn't really matter if Mick Jagger wants to collaborate with you unless you have had a meeting of the minds, you know? But I could see where there was some kind of intersection between Devo and Eno.

Yeah. That was during the Roxy Music days.

Eno always seemed like a space alien to me. Did he ever come off his pedestal? I mean, did you guys communicate well?

It was funny, Eno was one of the few people I had kind of like some sort of a reverential feeling for and I kind of lost it. I still think he's a great guy, but ... it's really hard to pinpoint incidents, but you know, after we finished, I never thought of him in the same way. But having said that, I always thank him because he paid for the first Devo record for us, because we didn't even have a record deal.



© Copyright Getty Images

I read that Iggy was also instrumental in getting you signed?

Iggy, David, and Brian Eno all took an interest and actually were all proactive in helping us.

Now you spend most of your time scoring films and creating music for commercials. Did you feel like getting into the film music business was serendipity? Is it something you went after or did it just kind of fall into your lap?

Well, I always liked film music, but I didn't go to school to be a composer. I went to school and didn't know what the hell I was doing there, and then became obsessed with printmaking and then met Jerry [Casale], who I started the band with. Then everything just started falling forward.

I know you named your band for de-evolution, but don't you feel like everything's been like an evolutionary progression, like it's built on each other? Or has it just been like a lot of random accidents?

(continued)



I think there's an intelligent design at work here. What's all this bullshit about evolution and intelligent design? It's de-evolution! Nobody knows, they're just like ignoring the facts. Pay attention to what's going on!

Was there a watershed moment when you really thought you got to a nadir of de-evolution, that you were prescient in your ethos?

To me it was MTV. MTV was exactly what we were predicting. Sound and vision. We were reading *Popular Science*. We knew about laser discs, and said, Oh, my God, it's exactly the same size as an album but it has pictures to go with the whole thing. This is going to totally change who's making pop art. It's not going to be some guy sitting over there with a band in a bar, and it's not going to be somebody that's sitting on a hill painting a landscape, it's going to be somebody that works in the pop media of our time. They're going to be doing stuff that goes on television and it's going to be music and pictures together. And that's what we wanted to be. We wanted to be the new art form. And instead MTV came along, and it looked like, during first half a year or year, it had potential. And then all of a sudden, I remember having this realization that MTV was just Home Shopping Network for record companies.

It became less a thing of making albums; you were just making one song. And one song that was going to get on MTV because if it didn't, you were fucked. And your whole project died, and all the money that you would have used to like seed yourself to keep going till you had your third album and maybe had a chance to have enough maturity to make a statement that was interesting from an art point of view, people never got there.

Make it one step more depressing. Oh, I know. Let's change the format to CD's, where now all of a sudden people feel like instead of writing 44 minutes of well-crafted music, they have to come up with 70 or 80 minutes of filler to go around the one song that's on MTV. So you got one song for MTV and then you got 70 minutes of stuff just to fill up a CD.

Was that really anxiety-producing for you when you were in the band?

Well, by the time, our airliner was already heading to the ground where CD's were concerned and we were weaving a cocoon to hibernate in at that point. So we saw it more than we felt it. It was already a virulent strain of anti-art that was like a gas permeating the industry, and for some reason it made record companies hopeful. It gave them a new lease on life because they reissued all their old shit. And then they went into horror when they realized, "Oh, but wait. Once we give it to them in digital form, then that's it. They will share it with each other and they don't need us anymore."

When you were in the throes of Devo, did you know how cool it was? Did you have that sense that you were doing something really tremendous?

We felt like we were doing something big in the early days. There was that energy that started it. And then by the mid-to-late '70s, we had that power and that energy of things moving forward. And then we went into retrograde, then with the *Freedom of Choice* album it started heading downhill, there was this horrible feeling where we felt misunderstood. We felt like—"wait a minute, we have something to say, and there's a lot of people that don't have anything to say, and you should ignore them!" It was a frustrating thing. I never anticipated it, you know. I didn't know then that things were cyclical and they came back. Like careers.

Your career came back when you did the music for Pee-wee's Playhouse. Were you asked to do it because Paul Reubens was a big Devo fan?

Yeah, I'd known him for years, and he'd asked me to work on his live theater show. He asked me to score his film. And I was too wrapped up in Devo and I was traveling all over the world. I was interested, but you know how it goes. When the TV show thing came up, my drummer had just left the band to start another band. Greta, Greta. You don't remember that? Nobody does. *(continued)*



Tommy Pickles from the Rugrats poses with Mark Mothersbaugh

When you worked on Pee-wee's Playhouse did you hang out on the set a lot?

When you're a composer, especially for TV but for film also, you spend a lot of time by yourself. It is much more solitary than you would imagine. I visited the set once when they were shooting in New York for the first season, and I sat on Chairy. The rest of them were all easier because they shot them in L.A. I'd go visit, but most of the time, I got a tape on a Monday and sent it back to them on Thursday, and watched it on the weekend.

Is the process different than writing a rock song? Do you have to use a visual kind of sense?

I don't know how to compare that kind of writing to a rock song because when we did songs, we were thinking about sound and vision. And we oftentimes had ideas for films before we wrote the song. Write a song to go to a film idea that we were talking about, because we made our own little films, back when they were still called promo videos.

How did you get the gig doing the Rugrats music? Were the Clasky Csupo people pretty wacky or were they fairly normal?

Gabor Csupo, of Klasky Csupo called me and wanted to license a song from *Muzik for Insomniaks*, a solo album I recorded in the early '80s. I offered to write him something new, and a great collaboration was born. All people in animation seem to be pretty wacky, yet somewhat normal.

And the Sims video games?

That was actually Mutato Muzika, my West Hollywood muzikal think tank (www.mutatomuzika.com) that scored many of those Sims games, but Devo would be a perfect fit... Wait, didn't they license an unheard Devo tune called, "i've fallen in love, (with recombinant dna)" for a WB trailer, or something?

Mutato Muzika has scored many big games, and Devo has contributed to a number of games, also.

What was the greatest thrill being in Devo?

To actually be able to pull it off. I think it'd be great if everybody could at one time go to the Forum or go to Madison Square Garden and know what it's like to have 35,000 people all looking at you, and you move your hand and feel everybody's eyes watch what you're doing. Or have them sing along with words that you made up in your basement about half a year ago when you were really depressed. *(continued)*

mu-sic 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

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

Then all of a sudden there's all these people singing it together, and you're like, "Whoa, it's cool." You understand what evangelist preachers feel and to know what it's like to have the power be so concentrated, and have the ability to use that power to go over and touch somebody and they jump back like they've been hit by lightning. That's what being on stage with Devo in the early years was like.

I think that music has the power to change your life, and I do think it's just like electronic force fields. It's a great responsibility and a great buzz. Was it hard for you to go back to the film music and kind of be in the background rather than the foreground?

I know what you're saying. But you know what? I saw those people that had been onstage, where I was five years before, waiting backstage, you saw the way they looked at you, and I go, "You know what? It's not going to be forever and I'm going to enjoy it while it's here." And to be honest with you, Devo was a collaborative band. Although you'll see people get credit for songs on albums, everybody contributed, because it was two sets of brothers originally. And to me, the idea of collaborating with a director and a producer, it feels more like Devo than if I would be just by myself doing solo records.

So you work well with others?

Yeah, I enjoy it.

Do you have a rule or a motto, something you say to yourself when you just don't feel like getting up to do it in the morning?

God, I have no great quotes. I mean I try to live my life like a virgin.

(continued)

What do you think your greatest strength is?

I enjoy solving problems. I'm a good problem solver everywhere in life. The big difference between Devo and KISS is, if the plumbing wasn't working in the hotel room when we checked in, it probably worked when we left. And if the TV had snow on it we could, it was probably adjusted properly by the time we left the room. I can fix things, yeah. You know what? Save your brain for other stuff.

When you first came out with that line, "Are we not men? We are Devo," was that a seminal moment in your life?

Yeah. It was a great moment. I was sitting in this shitty apartment in Akron, Ohio, \$65 a month apartment, and I had quack religious pamphlets that I'd been collecting. I always invited Jehovah's Witnesses in because they had great gravitas, and they were always attacking evolution. So they were the ones who got me thinking about all this great stuff – you know, things that I could use for pro-de-evolution. I could just use all their information so I would invite those people in and they'd stay around, and they'd walk around and look at all the masks I had on the walls, and I could hear them saying, "He has one room. He doesn't have a bed. What is this? Is this a real apartment, or what is this? Hell?"

Would you overhear people saying, "Are we not men?" when you'd be out in the shopping mall or at the bank?

Yeah, but they always got it wrong. They said, "We are not men." Dammit. Of course, a rhetorical question.

What's something money can't buy?

What can't money buy? Peace of mind. No, it does buy it. What does it gain a man to have all the pussy in the world but to lose his soul? No, that's not my motto.

What's one thing that would surprise fans about you?

I think what surprises *Rugrats* fans is when they find out I was in Devo.

Let's fast forward to today. In regards to the current tour, what prompted you to play the first two albums back to back as opposed to anything else?

The two-album-back-to-back concerts were inspired by Devo playing a string of parties back in London in May '09. We were surprised that the first album, side 1 cut 1 through to side 2 last cut format worked so well, and wanted to let the Americanos get a chance to hear it.

Will the rest of the set list have some surprises for loyal fans?

Yes... and, uh, OK... yes! That said, I think the interesting part of this concept for a concert is, no surprises? Except extraordinarily good merch, for once.

Are you having a good time doing this music again? A while back you said you wouldn't do DEVO again.

"He has one room. He doesn't have a bed. What is this? Is this a real apartment, or what is this? Hell?"

First off, it's not about having a good time. We just do what we must do. I think I said "I wouldn't 'doo' Devo, referring to wearing those uncomfortable plastic hair 'doo's' we wore on the *New Traditionalists* album cover. Of course, none of us in the band have a lot of control over "doing" Devo; it's in our genetic encoding.

How did the first two Devo albums end up getting remastered on 180g. vinyl? Was it a Devo decision or a Warner Bros. decision?

The vinyl remastering was spearheaded by Tom Biery at WB, I think. He loves vinyl as much as we do. I miss vinyl and not just for the sonic reasons.

Will we see the rest of the catalog remastered?

If WB hits black gold in some Burbank oil field soon, they may want to press a whole bunch of Devo albums.

What info can you leak to us about the new album? What else is up your yellow sleeves?

The new album is what our first albums would have been like if we would have had nurses to administer the drugs, and rascals to ride around on. Stay tuned. ●



Current Releases

By the TONE Staff

Click on album covers to purchase from Music Direct

RECORDING OF SPECIAL MERIT:

Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers

The Live Anthology

Reprise/Warner Bros. 5CD/1 Blu-ray/1LP/2DVD
Box Set or 7LP Box Set or 4CD.

Tom Petty famously sang “the waiting is the hardest part” almost 30 years ago. Applied to the legendary artist’s seemingly eternal delay in recording a live album—Petty has practically disowned the underwhelming *Pack Up the Plantation: Live!* ever since its 1986 release—the statement rings true, particularly given that he and his Heartbreakers rank amongst the finest live bands in history. As it happens, Petty’s resistance to simply chuck out what he deems is a set of “greatest hits played faster” and willingness to do things right have paid off handsomely in the form of *Live Anthology*, one of the best concert anthologies ever to hit the street.



A career-spanning collection available in three different configurations, it confirms what most everyone already knows (or should)—the Heartbreakers were (and are), on any given night, contenders for the best rock n' roll group in America—and exceeds expectations via its inclusion of unreleased originals, deep-cut rarities, and invigorating covers. More than a year in the making, it's the offshoot of what was originally supposed to be a basic live album released to accompany 2006's *Runnin' Down a Dream* documentary. Despite the fact that its Gainesville performance from the same year would've easily fit the bill, the band scoffed at repeating what it had just released on video. As a result, the tape vaults were opened, revealing multi-track recordings of 169 shows, with older gigs on 245 reels of two-inch analog tape (requiring baking in an oven) and newer ones on twelve 500-gigabyte hard drives. The raw numbers are staggering: a sum total of 3,509 songs, 245 of them unique. It soon became clear that the project would transcend a double-disc set.

Producer Ryan Ulyate, Petty, and Heartbreakers guitarist Mike Campbell began sifting through it all, abiding by the rule that a performance needed to capture their attention within the span of one minute, else it was discarded. After seven months of work, 80 tracks were picked. It took another six months to mix them to everyone's satisfaction. From there, Petty spent another three weeks sequencing the material. His intent was to present each disc as its own show, each with a logical flow that mirrored the group's thought process, rather than take the easy route and present songs in chronological order at the expense of sacrificing mood and feeling. At last, 61 tracks were selected for the final product, and 14 days were spent mastering. No overdubs, no fixes, no compromises. What listeners hear is what went down onstage.

Petty also had the foresight to ensure the package lived up to the highest-possible sonic standards. For analog aficionados, there's a limited-edition 7LP box set pressed on 180-gram vinyl that contains 51 tracks.



The same program is repeated on a bargain-priced 4CD set. Yet the real treasure is a bells-and-whistles box that includes: the 51 tracks plus a bonus disc of another 10 cuts; a Blu-ray that presents all 61 tracks in incredible 96K/24-bit PCM stereo resolution and 5.1 DTS HD sound; a vinyl EP (*Official Live 'Leg'*) of one of the band's earliest performances in 1976; a DVD of a previously unreleased 1995 documentary (*400 Days*) about the recording of and touring behind the infallible *Wildflowers*; a DVD of a live 1978 show; concert souvenirs; and an oversized booklet containing essays and track-by-track notes from Petty. Given the content's excellence and scope, fans won't regret spending more and opting for the lavish set—the extended rendition of “Don't Come Around Here No More” and raucous cover of “County Farm,” on the bonus disc, are alone worth the price. (*continued*)

Prepare to be dazzled by the music. Nearly every song is a highlight unto itself. The Heartbreakers handle almost every conceivable rock-related style—blues (“Born In Chicago”), pop (“Dreamville”), folk (“I Won’t Back Down”), psychedelia (“Mystic Eyes”), soundtrack themes (“Goldfinger”), hard rock (“Drivin’ Down to Georgia”), boogie (“Diddy Wah Diddy”), R&B (“Green Onions”)—with startling ease, conviction, and authority. Levels of consistency, craftsmanship, chemistry, and interplay remain superb no matter the era. Unless one looks at the date of the recording, it’s nigh impossible to tell whether “Breakdown” comes from 1981 or 2001, “Mary Jane’s Last Dance” from 1997 or 2007. The host of covers—the Grateful Dead’s “Friend of the Devil,” the Zombies’ “I Want You Back Again,” Fleetwood Mac’s “Oh Well,” the Dave Clark Five’s “Anyway You Want It” among them—provide insight into the band’s influences, direction, and individual talents.

One of the most underrated players in history, Mike Campbell constantly impresses with subtlety, colors, textures, and emotion. Laid back and in the shadows, he never overplays, wastes a note, oversteps his bounds, or tosses in a lick that doesn’t serve the song. A master of the stringed instrument, Campbell’s mandolin on “Angel Dream (No.2),” slide guitar on “Southern Accents,” and Marxophone on “Wildflowers” epitomize graceful beauty. Keyboardist Benmont Tench is equally marvelous. While on studio albums his presence can be slightly muted, the live recordings demonstrate how much he adds to the arrangements—tossing in a complementary riff here, adding a warm glissando line there—while underscoring, shading, supporting, or transitioning. Spirited, engaged, and in great voice throughout, Petty is the deserved headliner. But as he rightly remarks in the introduction, *The Live Anthology* is the cumulative effort of an amazing band, the likes of which are too rare and which we may not ever see again. — **Bob Gendron**



Lloyd Cole

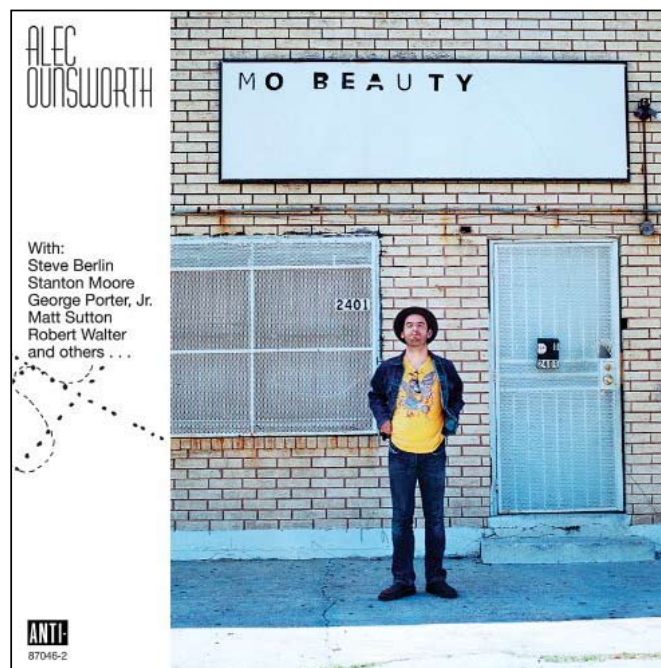
Cleaning Out the Ashtrays
101 Distribution, 4 CD box

In the introduction to this collection of Lloyd Cole’s rarities and B-sides, he admits to “not having a perfect memory,” and says that this collection will “still have holes.” He explains that all of the tracks in this collection were initially intended for commercial release, and most have been previously available only as bootlegs or downloads. Admirably, he defends his reason for producing this box set on CD in physical media, stating that he doesn’t consider tracks only available for download as “in print.”

Unlike many artists cashing in on the box-set craze, charging a healthy price for mostly recycled tracks with perhaps a new song or two, *Cleaning Out the Ashtrays* contains a lot of unreleased material, with the rest being alternate takes of familiar tunes. Disc 4, labeled “Difficult Pieces,” is almost all unreleased tracks, a true bonus for Cole fans.

The package is elegantly packaged, and the included booklet is written by Cole. Though he describes a somewhat torrid recording career, he manages to keep his sense of humor while telling us how the songs in the box set came to be, as well as why the unreleased tracks never fit on the albums they were supposed to be part of.

All the music is pulled from Cole’s original masters, and the recording quality is high throughout, although a few of the alternate tracks lack the polish of the finished tunes that didn’t make it onto various albums. With such a wide range of material, *Cleaning out the Ashtrays* does a great job of tying up the loose ends in Lloyd Cole’s career. — **Jeff Dorgay**



Alec Ounsworth

Mo Beauty

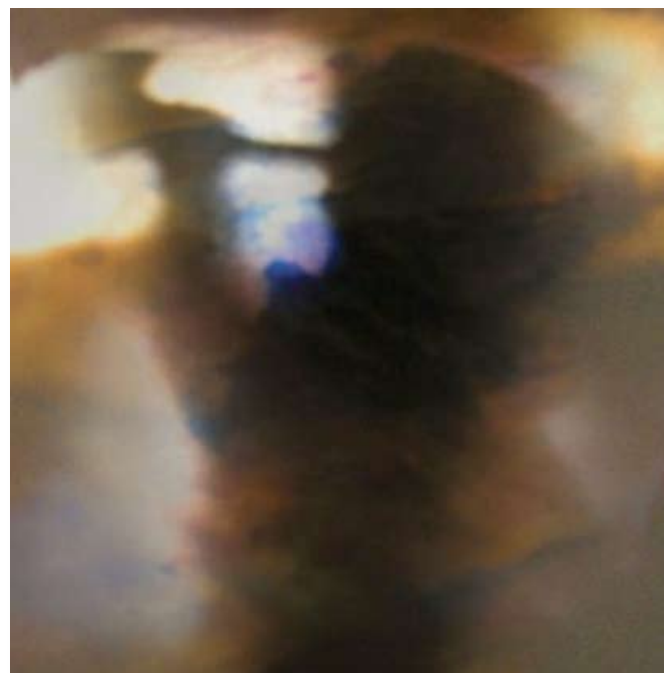
Anti Records, LP and CD

Alec Ounsworth, the former front man of Clap Your Hands Say Yeah, is back with his first solo effort, *Mo Beauty*. Ounsworth sounds less like the Talking Heads or Sonic Youth on this album than he did with Clap Your Hands, but you can still hear the David Byrne-like twitchiness sneaking out.

Musically and sonically, Ounsworth stretches out, with a much more organic sound than he's ever attempted before. The record opens with the catchy "Modern Girl (...with Scissors), featuring some intriguing atonal rhythms, with sparse keyboard and saxophone riffs delicately layered between the drums, bass and guitar.

The mood changes instantly with the next song, "Bones in the Grave," which has a much more driving beat, borrowing heavily from the Flaming Lips book of beats. "Idiots in the Rain" is a delicate track that wouldn't be out of place in a David Lynch movie. And there are still five more to go, with a few more mood swings along the way.

Mo Beauty successfully achieves a critical balance between catchy and clever, wrapped up in a well recorded package. Fortunately, Ounsworth has left the days of the home studio behind, and the result is exceptional. — Jeff Dorgay



Animal Collective

Fall Be Kind

Domino, LP and CD

Still riding high on the spaced-out buzz of their widely acclaimed eighth album, *Merriweather Post Pavilion*, New York City's Animal Collective are back with even more epically blitzed-out tunes. But where most groups would try to milk their recent success with an EP full of tunes that could have made the last album, *Fall Be Kind* sees the band already stretching in new directions.

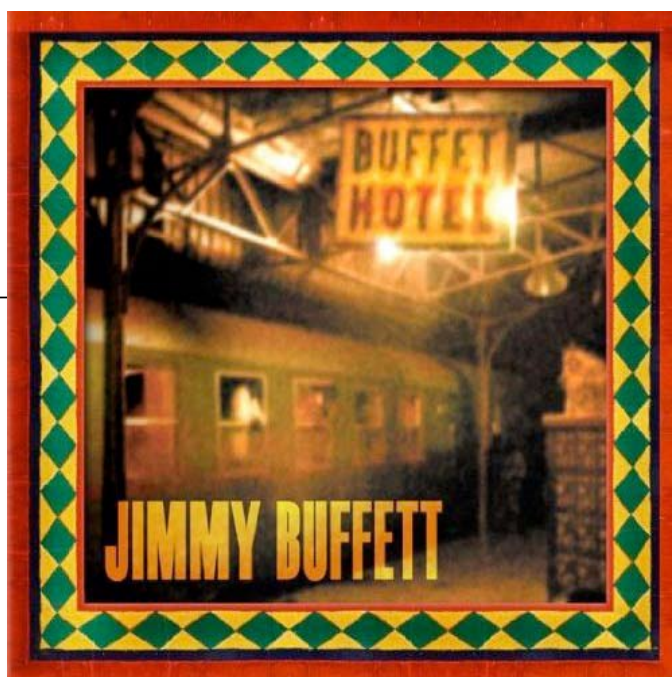
Things start off as you might expect, with Avey Tare (David Portner) and Panda Bear (Noah Lennox) wrapping their wind tunnel voices around each other in "Graze." But midway through the song, a whimsical pan flute breakdown comes out of nowhere, courtesy of a Gheorghe Zamfir sample, from the Romanian flutist known as "Zamfir, Master of the Pan Flute."

It should really come as no surprise that a group that made its name by being as weird as possible should want to throw in some surprises, and the weirdness works well on *Fall Be Kind*. The world doesn't really need a five-song rehashing of *Merriweather Post Pavilion*, and the Animal Collective don't offer it here.

The EP's second song "What Would I Want? Sky" features the first ever licensed Grateful Dead sample, mixing "Unbroken Chain" into a soundscape of churning electronica. "Bleed" is the slow burner of the group, offering a single chorus that doesn't do much, but is compelling nonetheless.

"I Think I Can" is the most interesting of the bunch, though also the least accessible. At just over seven minutes, it offers a cloud of chattering beats, pounding drums and looped vocal chants before lightening up at the five-minute mark, when it takes on a frolicking Calypso vibe, the way Vampire Weekend might sound if they were really into psychotropic drugs.

While these songs aren't as instantly memorable as the tracks off *Merriweather Post Pavilion*, it's still fun to listen to an experimental band still experimenting after hitting pay dirt, leaving listeners to wonder where they'll go next. — Joe Golfen



Jimmy Buffett

Buffet Hotel

Maliboat Records, CD

For a guy who claims that he wants nothing other than to lie on the beach, Jimmy Buffett has made a staggering empire out of his low-key party tunes. He's spread his flip-flopped, suntanned vibe to merchandise, restaurant chains and beer lines, all of which are gobbled up by the thousands of Parrotheads that religiously flock to Buffett's never-ending live shows.

So why would he take any risks or offer up anything new on his 28th studio album?

Named after the Buffet Hotel de la Gare, a historic train station in Bamako, Mali, *Buffet Hotel* does exactly what Jimmy's legion of fans would like it to do; it offers breezy, sing-along tunes that recall hanging out on the beach. Or getting drunk. Or getting drunk while hanging out on the beach.

These 12 songs will have fans singing along by the end of the third chorus, and since that's clearly Buffett's goal in all this, he succeeds widely. Tracks like "Summerzcool" and "Big Top" are island escapism at its finest, with choruses you'll hum for the rest of the day, whether you want to or not. Nothing as memorable as "Volcano" or "Margaritaville," but they should be crowd pleasers.

The title track is the most interesting, featuring a slide guitar and a West African harp-lute called a kora, but all the other songs are cut-and-dry Buffett tunes. Overall, the album's pretty corny and wildly predictable, but it's sure to be a big hit, because at this point Buffett's fans are so enamored of his make-believe lifestyle that they've given him the Midas touch.

Those who don't want to hear about the surfing exploits of a 62-year-old beach bum can go and buy a Jack Johnson album instead. - **Joe Golfen**



Los Campesinos!

Romance Is Boring

Arts & Crafts CD and LP

Few bands are better equipped to energize a huge festival crowd than Los Campesinos! The Welsh collective, whose members all claim Campesinos! as their last name, ala the Ramones, not only earns the exclamation point at the end of their group moniker but delivers frenetic, feel-good pop music designed to stave off boredom and be screamed at the top of one's lungs. Of course, it's one thing to be zany and excitable, and another to pen memorable songs. On *Romance Is Boring*, the septet accomplishes both feats as it expands its already-large sound to include strings, brass, acoustic guitars, ambient effects, and drum machines. Yet the ensemble's trademarks—witty lyrics, mile-a-minute vocals, surging refrains, bang-on-a-can percussion, big arrangements, nervous tension, and surprise changes—remain in place.

"I think we need more post-coital and less post-rock," declares frontman Gareth Campesinos! on the impossible-to-ignore "Straight in at 101," one of several songs that confront sexual desires with blunt honesty and whip-smart humor. His frustration is matched by spring-coil guitars that frame the pep rally tune's function as a piece of music designed to be shouted back at its creators. While the band's first two albums are written from a more personal perspective, Gareth crafted the words to *Romance Is Boring* from his experiences traveling and encountering down-and-out people along the way. Not that the material is dour—it's anything but. Still, looking past the confessionals and wordplay would be a mistake. Los Campesinos! manage to couch philosophical sentiments and dark matter in the service of ultra-catchy melodies and sarcastic humor; the uplifting juxtaposition is part of the appeal. *(continued)*

A Casio keyboard, handclaps, and staggered beats set up “We’ve Got Your Back (Documented Minor Emotional Breakdown #2),” which turns into a conversation about the trauma of relationships between Gareth and keyboardist Aleks Campesinos! Oh, those boys and girls. The band almost laps Gareth on the title track, featuring female-male vocal exchanges and electronic burble that push the song towards the edge of a cliff. Even when they get noisy, Los Campesinos! don’t forget the importance

of the hook. “Plan A” is filtered through white noise, the riffs stabbing like a knife, and yet the chorus comes on like a burst of sunlight on a gray winter day. The exuberant “There Are Listed Buildings” makes the septet candidates for the most fun marching band on the planet, with call-and-response horn lines punctuating the tale of “two atheists in lust.” Trouser-dropping trysts in church, donations of organs to science, mental anguish, premature death—no topic is off limits.

Sonically, producer John Goodmanson (Sleater-Kinney, Wu-Tang Clan) brings out the newly developed textures and complexities. Simultaneously, the group’s songs are sharper and more direct, affording an enhanced range reinforced by ample instrumental separation and a crisp punchiness. Los Campesinos! may not be as messy as they were in the past, but emotional purging and catastrophic futures have never felt better. — **Bob Gendron**

Harbeth®

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



HL-P3ES-2



Compact 7ES-3



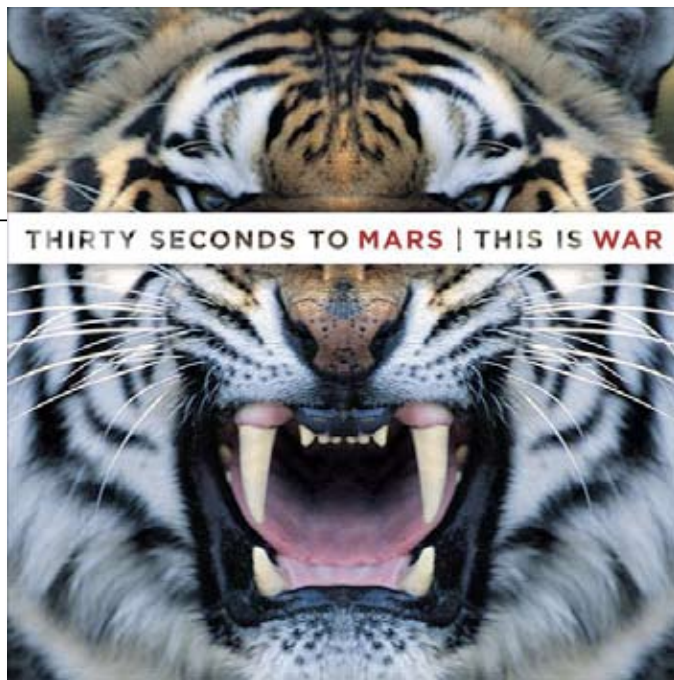
Super HL5



Monitor 30



Monitor 40.1



30 Seconds to Mars

This is War

Virgin, LP and CD

Johnny Depp, Russell Crowe, Scarlett Johansson and Kevin Bacon are all A-list actors that never made it as rock stars. So how did *My So-Called Life* alum Jared Leto manage it?

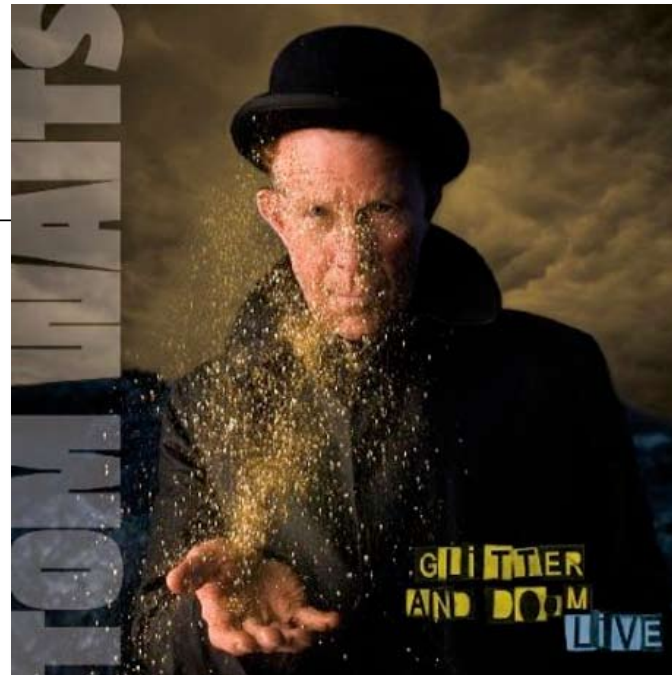
Some might argue that he wasn't much of an actor in the first place, but there's no denying that Leto struck solid gold when his band 30 Seconds to Mars dropped their sophomore album, *A Beautiful Lie*, in 2005. On the power of mid-tempo, dramatic singles like "From Yesterday" and "The Kill," *A Beautiful Lie* went platinum in the U.S. and the U.K.

For their third outing, the band apparently decided not to mess with success.

This Is War begins with low chanting, swirling guitar distortion and a sea of pounding drums, before it all drops off as an anguished Leto delivers the first of many seething lyrics. A massive chorus follows, loudly chanting, "This is war," resulting in a promising, ambitious start to an album that's anything but.

Since the band has fared so well with epic power ballads, *This is War* is filled with them. Literally. Each song is a near carbon copy of the other, all mixing hurricane drums, big guitars, shout-along lyrics and Leto's anguished voice into a mesh of forgettable rock tunes.

Nothing is as catchy as "The Kill," nor as epic, but it's not for a lack of trying. Tracks like "Night of the Hunter" and "Search and Destroy" build in grandness while standing on nothing but chanted one-liners. Leto's lyrics are bummed out and pissed off, but the music lacks any urgency or intensity to back them up, leaving *This is War* to brood without ever getting to the point. — Joe Golfen



Tom Waits

Glitter and Doom Live

Anti Records LP and CD

This two-CD set features the highlights of Tom Waits' 2008 tour and the tracks presented here are primarily from the European leg of the tour. If you've never had the pleasure of seeing Waits in concert, *Glitter and Doom Live* will take you as close as a recording can. On a fantastic stereo system, you'll swear he's lurking in the closet somewhere, waiting to stab you, or at least yell at you in his characteristic growl.

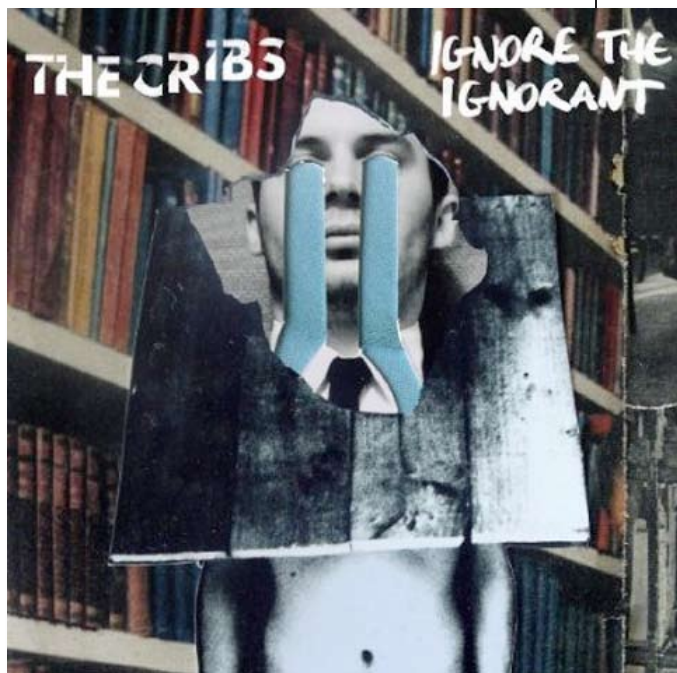
The opening track, "Lucinda Ain't Goin Down" has an arrangement that is very similar to "House of the Rising Sun." You may ponder how Waits manages to keep that sinister voice of his intact, but that's his magic.

Although Waits performs a wide range of songs you're familiar with, the arrangements and style are completely different than what you might be used to from the studio recordings. (Typical Tom Waits!) In this case, the songs on *Glitter and Doom Live* have an extra helping of murkiness. There's much more doom than glitter here.

An added bonus is the second CD, titled "Tom Tales," which begins with Waits discussing the eating habits of vultures, then delving into a brief tale about swastika soup and the eating habits of rats. Accompanied by the piano, Waits playfully torments the crowd, repeatedly asking them if they want another song, but continues to tell more stories. He gives in and closes the set with a tender rendition of "Picture in a Frame" from *Mule Variations*.

The recording quality is excellent throughout on the CD, and Anti's treatment of Waits's last few albums on vinyl has been fantastic, so analog aficionados should find the LPs worth pursuing.

— Jeff Dorgay



The Cribs

Ignore the Ignorant

Warner Bros./Witchita. CD

Comprised of three brothers from Yorkshire, the Cribs started out as one might expect a band of football-watching, pint-swigging punters would: All brashness and sloppiness, with little in the way of memorable tunes or noticeable exertion. A peek at the cover of 2005's *The New Fellas* communicates everything anyone needs to know about their early work. Yet the English trio turned a corner on 2007's *Men's Needs, Women's Needs, Whatever*, flashing trademark British wit and demonstrating tighter focus, improved songwriting, and willful determination.

The upward trajectory continues on *Ignore the Ignorant*, a record that finds the band dialing down its punkish pub-rock tendencies and further upping its melodic quotient. There's very good reason for the development. Due to good fortune, the Cribs are now rounded out by none other than Johnny Marr, the legendary Smiths guitarist whose most recent stint was with Modest Mouse. As Marr did with the Portland group, he pays immediate dividends for his fellow countrymen. Songs are sharper, airier, and more richly textured. Akin to the action of a broom sweeping a puck on an icy surface, arrangements swish and sway, and grease the grooves. Better still, there's a sense of genuine chemistry. Rather than a core trio playing with a distinguished guest—an uneven divide that often torpedoed collaborations and exposes many such pairings as forced—the band plays as a unit.

And as made evident on the opening rush of “We Were Aborted,” the Cribs aren't shy about chasing grand ambition. Rhythms are massive, tempos race, and pop elements come quick and often. Less angular and staccato than in the past, the quartet splits time between harmony-laden Britpop and soulful garage rock, a hybrid that's cut through with a modern edge and dance twist. Marr's trademark ringing treble and jangle crop up on every cut.

His contributions—and the group's want for them to be noticed and receive adequate room—are likely the reason why locomotive-sized hooks abound, whether on the insistent “We Share the Same Skies” or the lunging “Nothing,” on which Marr's continual dabbling and splotching of instrumental colors keeps his mates grounded. Similarly, his introspective touches on “Victim of Mass Production” and atmospheric tones on “City of Bugs” send the Cribs places they wouldn't have dared explore before.

Lyricaly, the band remains entrenched in the politics, ironies, and dynamics of relationships. Anxiety, frustration, jealousy, and sexual tension dominate, and Gary and Ryan Jarman deliver lines with careful attention to phrasing without trying to be overly clever. Occasions of throaty graininess on bridges and choruses to songs such as “Cheat on Me” add balanced degrees of drama and passion. Off-the-cuff requests to “gently emasculate me” achieve the same thing that Marr's playing does: they reel the listener in, little by little, and refuse to let go.

The Cribs aren't yet an elite band. A few songs overlap, and there's still the aftertaste of a close debt to early Strokes material that can't be dismissed. But producer Nick Launay (Nick Cave, Talking Heads) has given their new album a polished, punchy albeit homogenously smooth sonic wash that confirms the group's aspirations and escalating status at home. Much more than a transitional record, *Ignore the Ignorant* is the sound of a band ready to expand its reach.

—Bob Gendron

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



rega

THE SOUND ORGANISATION
MAKES MUSIC

The Sound Organization is the exclusive Rega USA distributor. www.soundorg.com



Living Colour

The Chair in the Doorway
Megaforce, CD

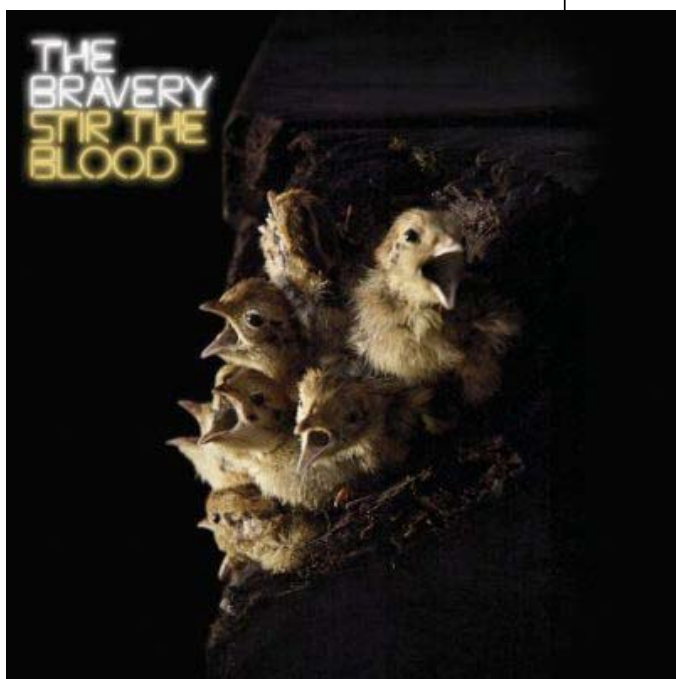
Currently on tour with its original band members, the funk-metal ensemble Living Colour's latest record (their first studio release since *Collideøscope* in 2003) is dark in mood as well as sound.

Lacking the fire of their earlier releases, *The Chair in the Doorway* opens with "Burned Bridges," with the chorus, "I've burned every bridge I've crossed and now I know I'm lost." The level of introspection is interesting, but lead vocalist Corey Glover just sounds tired, and this records dreadful recording, which buries him far in the mix, doesn't help.

Unfortunately, it doesn't get any better as the record progresses. Unless you are a hard core fan and a completist, pass on this one. – **Jeff Dorgay**

The Bravery

Stir the Blood
Island Records, CD



When front man Sam Endicott said the new Bravery album would be dark, he wasn't kidding. "I would say there is a dark tone to this album," Endicott told music Web site Spinner UK. "There's an angry undertone to it. I was pretty pissed off when I wrote a lot of the songs."

With titles like "Hatef--k" and "Slow Poison," this New York City band's third album takes a turn for the bleaker, but not always the better. When The Bravery debuted in 2005, they sailed into the sceneriest mainstream on the strengths of danceable hits like "An Honest Mistake" and "Unconditional." After tooling with a more guitar-based formula for their sophomore effort, the band loaded *Stir the Blood* with dark synth leads, pounding drums and pissed off vocals.

While the band is clearly aiming to make a late-night soundtrack for party hopping urbanites, what they ultimately come back with is an album that's difficult to like, and even more difficult to take seriously.

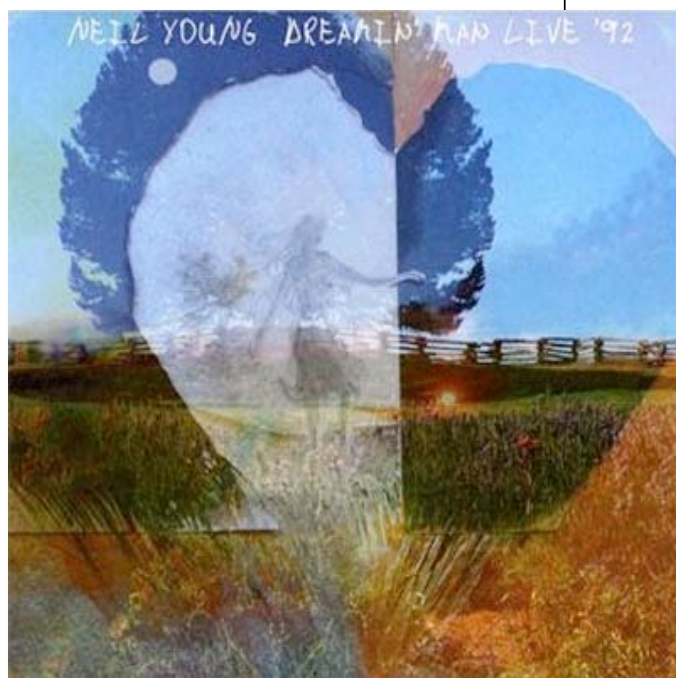
Endicott's lyrics were never exactly poetry, but when you add his endearingly fake English croon to his band's manic, uptempo grooves, The Bravery have always been a lot of fun.

But *Stir the Blood* is not fun. In fact, when it's not being mopey and melodramatic, it's being downright creepy. When Endicott croons lyrics like, "If I put my hands around your wrists, would you fight them?" or "I want to be your skin/I want to feel everything you feel/I want to be your covering," in what amounts to a terrible Robert Smith impression, its cringe-worthy. The opener, "Adored," sounds like the weakest track off the band's first two records, and the pointless slow tempo closer, "Sugar Pill," is based around a lyric too insipid to repeat.

The album's darker-than-dark synths, angry lyrics and cracking drums work well on tracks like "Song for Jacob," "Hatef--k" or "Red Hands and White Knuckles," while the band takes a nice break on the slow jam "She's So Bendable." For all its Nine Inch Nails aping, *Stir the Blood* comes off as pretty soulless, and more than a little disappointing. — **Joe Golfen**

Neil Young

Dreamin' Man Live '92
Reprise CD and LP



In the wake of his gargantuan *Archives Vol. 1* box set, Neil Young has again opened the spout on his vault Archives Performance Series with a single volume of material recorded at various venues in 1992. Akin to the Canadian's preceding *Live at Massey Hall 1971* and *Sugar Mountain: Live at Canterbury House 1968* collections, *Dreamin' Man Live '92* presents the singer in a solo acoustic context—specifically, playing the entirety of his comeback *Harvest Moon* album onstage before he recorded it in the studio.

(continued)

New 2010
 Music Direct
 Catalog.
 Call for a
 Free Copy.



Extremely Limited-Edition Marantz KI Signature Products: The SA-KI Pearl CD/SACD Player and PM-KI Pearl Integrated Amp



marantz®



Get this Special Edition
 Marantz SACD with Purchase
 of KI Signature Product.

Mobile Fidelity + VPI Keep All Your LPs Sounding Their Very Best!

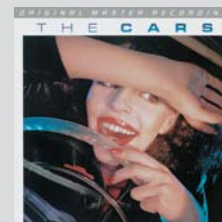
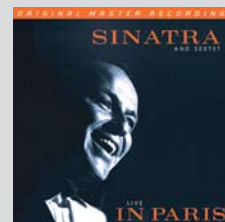
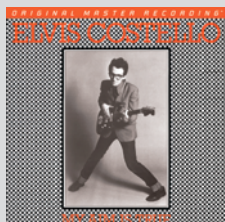
Includes everything you need to immediately start hearing how much music is actually buried in those grooves. Included: one bottle of Mobile Fidelity Super Record Wash, Mobile Fidelity Super Deep Cleaner, one Mobile Fidelity LP Record Brush (for scrubbing), and 100 Mobile Fidelity Original Master Sleeves for your clean LPs.

**SAVE
 \$95**



**The Rega Isis is a
 Real Work Of Art.
 The Last CD Player
 You'll Ever Own!
 Call Us To Learn More.**

Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab—The Premier Audiophile Label for More Than 30 Years



Those hoping for insight into the songwriting process or changes in lyrics, arrangements, or presentation might be surprised that none is to be found. Despite fine performances of mellow fare such as "One of These Days," "You and Me," and "Hank to Hendrix," the versions differ from the studio takes only in that they are slightly more stripped down and without accompaniment. Of course, fans of Young's romantic and introspective side—as well as his rootsy folk guitar picking and easy rocking-chair rhythms—will be entranced. Young sequenced the songs in a different order, which helps change the experience. Intimate readings of "Such a Woman" and "War on Man" shiver with emotion and feeling. Yet they do on *Harvest Moon* as well. All of which makes this particular collection a puzzling APS choice, given the dozens of sought-after shows from the '70s, '80s, and '90s still sitting in Young's stash. Ironically, the legendary artist's renowned unpredictability applies more to his selection of this set rather than the straightforward and relatively unexciting renditions of music most fans already own.

Per usual, the sound is fantastic, filled with natural tones and resonant timbres. Audiophiles will doubtlessly want to hold out for the forthcoming LP. Simple charms aside, *Dreamin' Man Live '92* possesses the distinction of being the first APS release unessential for everyone but Young diehards.

— Bob Gendron

Rolling with the Stones

By Ben Fong-Torres

What's left to be said about the Rolling Stones and, in particular, about Mick Jagger?

But when he raged out of the wings and onto the stage at Madison Square Garden last month at one of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame's 25th anniversary concerts, and hooked up with Fergie on a sizzling "Gimme Shelter," I began thinking of a few things to say. Like: Wow. And like: This guy could still go out on a tour. And, no doubt, will.

And I'm thinking this in 2009. It's been 20 years since the media laughed at the Stones for daring to hit the road again for their Steel Wheels tour. That was 1989 into 1990. They were ranging in age – emphasis on "age" – from 46 (Mick and Keef) to Charlie Watts' totally ancient 53. This, they said, should be the Steel Wheelchair tour. A case of going from rockin' to rocking chairs.

I wasn't making those jokes. I'd met the Stones back in 1973 in Honolulu as part of a tour, and then, in late 1981, visited with Jagger for the magazine piece that follows. I offer it as evidence that no one should have been surprised, much less mocking, when the Stones went on, and on, and on.



© Copyright Getty Images

We used to ride, baby, ride around in limousines

We looked so fine, baby, you in white and me in green ...

*Well, look at your face now, babe
Look at you and look at me ...*

— “Black Limousine”

Look at him. Years ago, smug in his richness and his youth, Mick Jagger swore he wouldn't be “leaping about, singing ‘Satisfaction’ at age 42.”

Now, here he is, on the road again, leaping about and singing “Satisfaction” to bigger crowds than ever, for more money than ever. What a difference a payday can make. And so the Rolling Stones, their lead singer now 38, just keep rolling on.

They started 18 years ago, in 1963, playing rhythm and blues clubs around London. They broke through the next year, and right away they were the dark, flip side of the Beatles. The Fab Four were cute, precocious and seemingly innocent. The Stones were ugly, malicious and clearly dangerous.

And they have survived. They've weathered the Sixties, which ended for them with the free and ultimately deadly concert in Altamont.

They got through the Seventies, which started with their unofficial crowning as “the greatest rock and roll band in the world” and the death of original lead guitarist Brian Jones, and ended with lots of questions. Their music seemed to wallow in mid-decade and yet, every three years, they'd go on tour and rev up a storm of interest. Mick got married (in 1971) and seemed to revel in the jet set he used to despise, but, on stage, he somehow maintained that nasty-little-boy image.

The Stones survived a serious drug conviction against guitarist Keith Richards and the loss of Brian Jones's replacement, Mick Taylor, and they persevered in the face of New Wave music, and attacks by punk rockers that they, the original punks, had become rock and roll dinosaurs. Still, just over a year ago, bass player Bill Wyman began talking about retirement.

So the question was: How long could they go on?

At this moment, the logical answer is: forever. Their recent tour sold out faster than any rock tour before it, even though half the dates were in large football and baseball stadiums with capacities of between 65,000 and 90,000. Additional shows had to be added in several cities. With admissions averaging about \$15, the Stones figured to pull in a gross of some \$30 million, \$10 million more than the business they did three years ago.

And, while the Stones have retained many of their original fans, they have also drawn teenagers, kids who weren't even born when the band started up, young fans who were turned on to the Stones by their own parents.

So the question was: How long could they go on?

At this moment, the logical answer is: forever.

But the fans – their numbers and their age range – tell only part of the story. Newspapers, magazines, radio and television took to the Stones as never before. Wherever they went, the papers responded with front page stories and ran whole series on them — their history, their future, the gossip about where they were staying, eating and partying.

“The feeling among the media,” said Paul Wasserman, the Stones' press agent, “was ‘We gotta do something; we can't just ignore it.’ There's a gut instinctive feeling that they're the big news.”

Why? “Because they're the last survivors of the Golden Era,” he said. “They're the last of the big three: Dylan, the Beatles and the Stones, the three ‘mythical characters of the Sixties.’”

But the Stones were more than myth. The reality is that they helped shape and define and explain many of the social changes of the Sixties. *(continued)*

Reach for the MOON



M O O N

www.simaudio.com

877.980.2400

They also reflected the decadence, the self-love, the political frustrations and ennui, and the chi-chi rituals that prevailed in the Seventies. And in the Eighties, they've become legitimate news to the people who now decide what goes into the newspapers and onto the airwaves, people in their thirties, men and women who were raised on rock – and the Stones.

This, of course, is personal theorizing. For The Word, one must go to the head Stone.

Jagger is not only the lead singer of the Rolling Stones; he's their manager as well. It's Mick who set up the tour, decided where to play and how much to charge. The bad boy of old has become, of all things, respectable. In Philadelphia, he accepted a Liberty Bell on behalf of the band. In Boston, the mayor invited them to play a free concert downtown (the Stones declined). And in San Francisco, a properly suited Jagger rode a cable car with Mayor Dianne Feinstein and plugged her fund drive to save the city's moving landmarks.

Wherever he went, Jagger was a diplomat. For each performance, he wore an outfit to identify with the area he was visiting. In Philadelphia, he wore a Flyers jersey; in San Francisco, he paid tribute to the just-vanquished A's by wearing an Oakland uniform, with "Jagger" stitched on the back. It was Jagger the rock star/pro jock; the aging Brit as all-American kid, fantasies in full display.

When the Stones were in San Francisco for the Candlestick Park shows and a week of R&R, Jagger did not talk to the press.
(continued)

In fact, he had an altercation with a radio reporter who walked up to him in a restaurant with tape recorder rolling. But in Philadelphia, after the first concert of the tour, he sat for an interview in his suite at the Barclay Hotel. Scattered about his room were a few items: a running outfit, a racquetball racquet, and a memo from an aide reminding Jagger of things to do, including "Exercise outdoors if possible." Jagger was obviously following orders. He looked ridiculously healthy and as skinny as ever, as he sat for a chat.

What are you, part Chinese? How do you keep looking so young?

Well, I think it's what you're born with. I was raised to be healthy. I bucked against it a lot in my teens and in my early twenties – but then you come back to it.

The last time around, in 1978, the press seemed interested in three subjects: Keith Richards' bust and your reaction to punk rock ...

You can see how different this tour is; they're not interested in any of that.

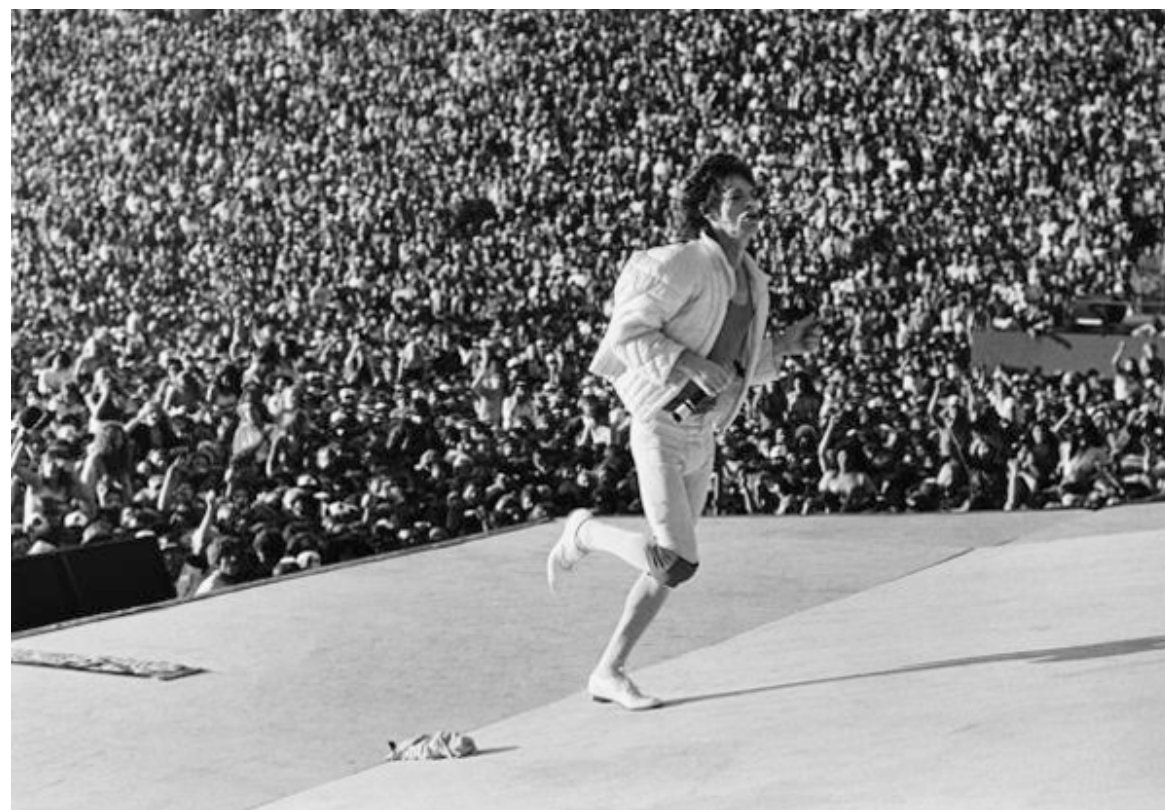
This time, the hook seems to be "Are the Stones too old to rock? Is this the last time around?"

That's an old perennial. I think it's less around on this tour because they were so heavy on it last time, and then we do another one, so obviously they can't make such fools of themselves, just to keep hopping on it. It's a dead dog.

The tour is going to gross about \$30 million. Has this passed ...

... Yeah, everyone's wildest dreams! We didn't expect to do this kind of business.

Part of that is because you're doing so many outdoor shows this time, which helps meet the demand for tickets and makes you more money, but you've said before that you didn't like doing the stadium shows ...



© Copyright Getty Images

I have no misconceptions that I can play to a stadium in the same way we can play to an arena. I think we're running on 15 percent efficiency in the stadium. I don't think we're pleasing the people enough.

Of course, for a lot of people, it's not so much the concert as the experience of being there, in the same place as the Stones ...

... With their friends, in their town or the surrounding areas, but yes, to be in the same place, and I think the music's incidental a lot. It could be us or several others ...

Maybe ...

It helps to be us. But c'mon, we're only an excuse; you might as well use us as anybody for them to have a good time. 'Cause they can't see from the back. I do the same thing. Those afternoons are quite like going to see a football game.

From today's show it is clear you are having as much fun on stage as ever.

Yeah. You can fool around and no one minds. And on an outdoor show in the afternoon with the sun shining, no one wants to hear about your problems. In other words, they don't want to hear you do a serious song too much.

In today's show, you played quite a few oldies ...

Outdoor shows are different. You've got a pretty large cross-section of people that like the Rolling Stones because they've been around for a long time, and you don't want to pander to them; you want to be able to play new stuff at least half of the show. But yes, it's basically hits, uptempos and a few ballads, whereas indoors you can stretch yourself a bit more and play nearly all new stuff.

A lot of younger Stones fans say they first heard you through their parents, which is quite a distance from the Sixties, when a lot of the appeal of the Stones was from how you outraged parents. (continued)

I can't see how they can be outraged about the Rolling Stones. No parent in the mid-thirties age group is outraged. Maybe we *should* outrage them.

But, as you yourself have said, there's nothing new any more in rock and roll. It's all "recycled past."

The thing about rock and roll – the influence of rock and roll is all pervasive in all other forms of music, as the other forms of music are on rock and roll. You've got these intertwinings, but the real rock and roll and excitement ... if you have a new artist with a "new sound," it tends to be what the old sound was. What people like is purity. Rock and roll is a traditional form now.

Even as we were talking, though, there were knots of people ten floors below, waiting for Mick or another Stone – but preferably Mick – to show his face.

When he left the hotel for a late dinner, he was rushed by fans, some of whom got past security guards and grabbed at his hair, at his scarf, at any possible souvenir. When he returned, at 3 in the morning, they were still there. Mick said the fans don't bother him. "I don't think they want a piece of me," he said.

Oh, but they do. And the fans served to remind him that, in his nineteenth year with this enterprise called the Rolling Stones, business is still very good.

"I still live in hope that rock and roll will turn a corner and doesn't just keep reverting. I think it will eventually. Hope I'll be around when it does."

But if the music's just going around in circles, where does your own continuing interest in it come from? Is it just what you do, or is there still something that the music does?

Well, I think that I still live in hope that rock and roll will turn a corner and doesn't just keep reverting. I think it will eventually. Hope I'll be around when it does.

You sound like a serious musician, which kind of contradicts the image that you have in the gossip columns ...

I certainly don't invite it. I don't do talk shows. I don't do *People* magazine. I don't try and get on the gossip circuit.

It started in England when I was very young, when I was twenty. It took me one year to get to that elevated level without actually wanting it. And it took me 20 years to do it in America! But I guess after a tour, it tends to disappear.

Another note from 2009: Since that visit in 1981, the Stones have hit the "pause" button many times, but never "stop" or "off." Their tours included Steel Wheels, Voodoo Lounge (1994-'95), Bridges to Babylon (1997-'98), Licks (2002-'03) and a Bigger Bang (2005).

In 2007, Jagger declared, "As far as I'm concerned, I'm sure we'll continue."

Sure enough, there's talk about the band planning a tour next year. They may never tire of riding, baby, riding around in limousines. ●

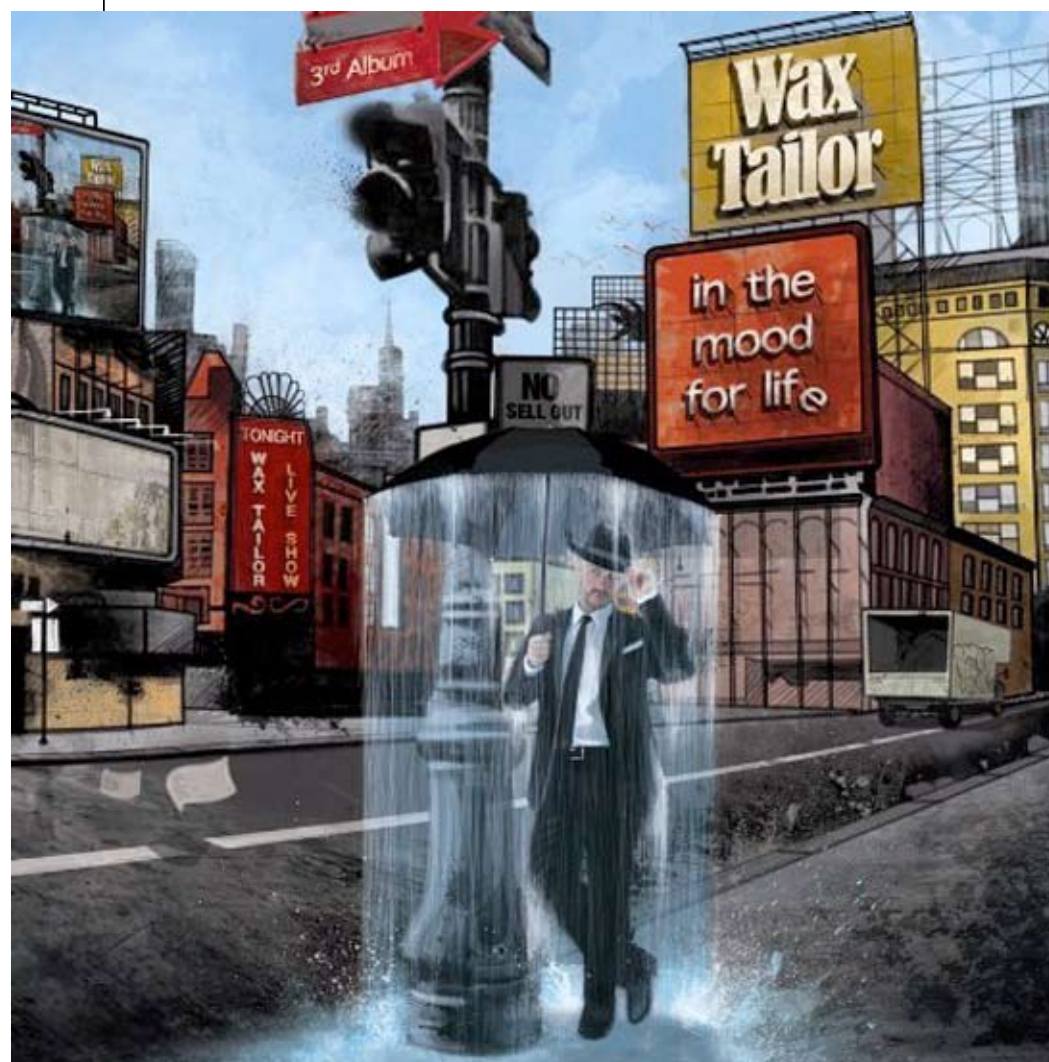
Club Mix

By Scott Tetzlaff

In France, a new release of Beaujolais Nouveau wine occurs on the third week of November. It's a long standing tradition. It's a light wine that goes with many different foods, and even though it's a familiar taste each year, each year's batch has its own distinct character.

Music is another of France's great passions. And, as you may know, president Nicolas Sarkozy's wife Carla Bruni has released a couple of CD's. (*And Quelqu on M'a Dit'* and *Comme Si de Rien N'Etait* aren't bad at all.)

Modern French lounge music might surprise you, having more in common with jazz, hip-hop and world music than techno; yet it is still influenced from the outer regions of the dance floor. Nothing too heavy, always fun, just like the Beaujolais. It's been a great year for wine and music in France this year. Here are a few of my favorites..



Wax Tailor

In the Mood for Life
Le Plan, CD and LP

This is the third U.S. release for Wax Tailor (aka Jean-Christophe Le Saout). This disc has an amazing range of different styles, with a cinematic quality throughout; it's like a journey. It reminded me of a French Pink Floyd cover band performing in English with a heavy dose of DJ Shadow mixed in. Standout tracks include the hip-hop tune, "Until Heaven Stops the Rain," with vocals provided by Mattic; the R&B track "Leave It," with sassy vocals from Dionne Charles, and the interesting juxtaposition of Charlotte Savary's delicate voice and Mattic's on "Fireflies." If you're only listening to samples of this record on Amazon or the iTunes store, be aware that no one track represents the whole disc. An additional shopping tip: the deluxe CD version includes an instrumental version as a bonus.



Stephane Pompougnac

Hotel Costes 12
Pschent, CD

The Hotel Costes series has been a cornerstone of Parisian lounge music for some time now and a great way for the uninitiated to sample the club music scene. The 12th entry has been stirring up some controversy among followers, as Stephane Pompougnac has continued the trend, begun a few albums ago, to lean more towards electro folk, with a dash of pop music.

My small sampling of *Hotel Costes* fans are split 50/50. The ones not familiar with the first five or six discs have been very enthusiastic towards the latest offering, while the fans that go all the way back to the beginning of the series have been somewhat lukewarm. Personally, I found it growing on me after a few listens. If you haven't heard the earliest discs, enjoy this one and let the connoisseurs argue about the details, just as they do with wine.

The disc starts out slowly and almost feels Brazilian with "Alright," sliding into "Raid the Radio," with its whistling intro that will have you singing along in no time, with a bass line that sounds surprisingly like old school Parliament. The middle of the record transitions towards the ambient, dance floor sound, with harder driving beats. The end of the record will chill you out nicely, with the last two tracks, "Ether" (how appropriate) and the breezy vocals of Despina Ricci on "Plage Ensoleillee."

Mezzanine De l'Alcazar

Mezzanine De l'Alcazar 7
Defected, CD

The compilation series follows the format of previous Mezzanine discs featuring a "Dinner" disc and a "Dance" disc – each done by a guest DJ.

In volume 7, the "Dinner" offering has such an energetic soul/funk flavor, at first spin, you might think you've slipped the wrong disc into your CD player. Gwen McCrae's opening track, "90% of Me is You" sounds straight out of a '70s blaxploitation movie. The further you get into the disc, the more you'll hear electronica mixed into the groove, with "Hurry on Down" by the Elektrons having some brutal beats that will rumble the floor if your subwoofer is up to the challenge.

The "Dance" disc sounds straight off the runways of Fashion Week, starting off easy with "Stay as You Are" from The Ananda Project, but then it's right back to the big beats by the second track, "Sun Will Shine." This disc stays in the same dance groove for the duration, without the wide range of stylistic changes that the "Dinner" disc possesses.

"Feel The Musik" by The MD Express is probably the standout track on this disc, along with a very tasty Frankie Knuckles remix of Hercules and Love Affair's "Blind." A great song made even better.

A word of caution to audiophiles: the sound quality on this disc is lacking. You'll probably enjoy it more in your car or on your iPod than on a big system.





Wild

Wild Series analog and digital cables by AudioQuest
Red Wolf Pack by Carole LaRoche

audioquest



The DJ Cam Quartet

Diggin'

Shadow Records, CD and LP

DJ Cam (aka Laurent Daumail) is best known for his classic *Mad Blunted Jazz* disc, but his latest efforts have been under the DJ Cam Quartet banner. This second release, following *Rebirth of Cool*, is another fine example of DJ Cam's fusion of jazz with a liberal sprinkling of hip-hop embellishments.

This is the perfect disc for a Sunday afternoon chill out, whether sitting by the pool or taking a leisurely cruise down the Pacific Coast Highway. The overall feel is brass and keyboards, with occasional scratching added tastefully to the mix, but it always stays a side dish. There are some great covers; Freddie Hubbard's "Little Sunflower" gets a vocal accompaniment, while Donald Byrd's "Think Twice" is the only track on the disc that gets a heavy dose of scratching. But it works well.

This is only available as an import, with the CD fetching \$30 and the LP going for about \$150, if you can find one. DJ Cam's last three LPs are extremely rare, so grab a copy of *Diggin'* on LP if you can.



Air

Love 2

The French electronic duo Air (Nicolas Godin and Jean-Benoit Dunckel) were featured on the soundtrack for the 1999 movie *The Virgin Suicides*. Their wildly successful, downtempo disc, *Moon Safari*, was released at the same time. But the guys have been quiet until now.

Love 2 keeps the music moving in the same direction as before. Everyone is a little older and wiser, but that same electronic coolness and detachment is still there. There are big splashes of '60s and '70s retro fun mixed with modern instrumentation and some monster guitar riffs. Take note of the additional percussive dimension of this record; thanks to drummer Joey Waronker.

Air mixes it up with the action/adventure instrumental "Be a Bee," and the relaxed calm of "Tropical Disease." The duo closes the record with the very traditional sounding "African Velvet." *Love 2* has a wide range of fun tracks and deep cuts that harken back to the days when late-night FM radio played albums all the way through, allowing music fans to discover hidden treasures.



Claude and Jean-Marc Challe

Select 2009, Music For Our Friends
MSI Wagram, CD

Brothers Claude and Jean-Marc Challe, the geniuses behind the very successful *Buddah Bar* series, started a trend last year, releasing a two disc set titled *Select 2008, Music For Our Friends*. The first disc is "Music For Our Party Friends" and the other is "Music For Our Chill Friends."

They are back with a new series and have gathered an impeccable lineup of sophisticated sounds gathered from Europe, Africa, the Middle East and beyond. The Challe brothers are definitely not suffering from a sophomore slump, as the second effort builds on the success of the first, with an even more diverse collection of music. There's a little bit of everything here, from classical to electronica, plus some truly undefinable styles as well.

As with the 2008 collection, the "Party Friends" disc leans more towards dance oriented tracks and the "Chill Friends" more towards the electronica and exotic, with just enough crossover to blend the two. Don't miss the first two tracks on the "Party" disc, a remix of Louis Armstrong's "Smiling" that transitions ever so smoothly into a crazy cover of the 1940's classic, "Rum and Coca-Cola." There's a cheeky bit of editorial commentary on the fashion industry "Les Monsters Sacres" (The Sacred Monsters) on the "Chill Friends" disc, along with the dreamlike, violin-based "A Quiet Conversation" and a very Asian remix of Sting's "An Englishman in New York." The Challe brothers have really outdone themselves with this collection. ●

A Visit to TomTom Audio



Dealers That Mean Business

By Jeff Dorgay

Strolling down the quiet street in St. Albans, England, you'd never guess there was world-class HiFi shop lurking behind one of those doors. Not that TomTom Audio doesn't fit perfectly well in this stylish neighborhood. Just like some dealers who sell gear from their home, James Almey started out that way. But with his current level of business, he's actually made the home into his shop and moved down the street.

"I just ran out of living space as the business grew," Almey laughs, as we head down the stairway into the basement to see some of his most-prized possessions, including one of the prototype Naim 500 series power amplifiers. "This is one of the only three made. It was literally the last thing Julian signed off on before he passed away. I purchased it from a colleague of his who knew how badly I wanted it."

A former ad agency man, Almey's website reflects his background. The TomTom site is updated often and has a visual sophistication rarely if ever seen from a retailer. And it's contributed significantly to his success. "Definitely, we've had customers from all over Europe and many of them have been pulled in from the website."

The approach at TomTom is different from the conventional shopkeeper. Since he works in a home environment, he is open to show gear virtually any time by appointment, and he has a very busy online presence. Also very different from the average shop, he puts a large emphasis on used Naim gear and is the largest retailer of used Naim products in the world.



Though you have the shop now, do you still maintain a large collection of your own gear?

Yes. As you could tell by my "mini-museum" down in the basement, I still love the gear, and keeping the hobbyist perspective in mind is very important to me. I like to share that with my customers. I've got some special, low serial-number things that I really enjoy. One of my favorite products is the early Nait 2, especially the chrome bumper ones.

Where did you get your love of HiFi?

My Dad, he is the ultimate enthusiast. We built my first amplifier and speakers when I was a teenager. Between that and a few hand-me-downs, I put together the best system I could, upgrading it bit by bit. By the time I was 17, I had a pretty reasonable system, so it's a lifelong fascination. I had always wanted to be in the audio business somehow.

How did you start TomTom?

I was running the ad agency for the fellow up the street and while it was a great job for 10 years, it wasn't *my* business. So it was finally time to start something of my own, and audio was the first choice.

Thinking back on my youth, the guys at the HiFi stores were real enthusiasts and going to a shop for the better part of a day was a real experience. I learned a lot from those guys in my early days. Later, as home theater became more prominent and the dealers widened their focus, some of that enthusiasm went away. That's what I wanted to offer with TomTom. *(continued)*



Why the heavy involvement with primarily one brand, Naim?

I was curious to see if I could work very vertically with Naim, if I could offer a broad experience for the current Naim owner as well as the potential owner by stocking the brand past and present in great depth, having all the new product on display and demoing the used gear properly. If I have a customer who has some older Naim kit that wants to hear how his system will sound by say, just upgrading the CD player or the preamp, I can give him that experience here.

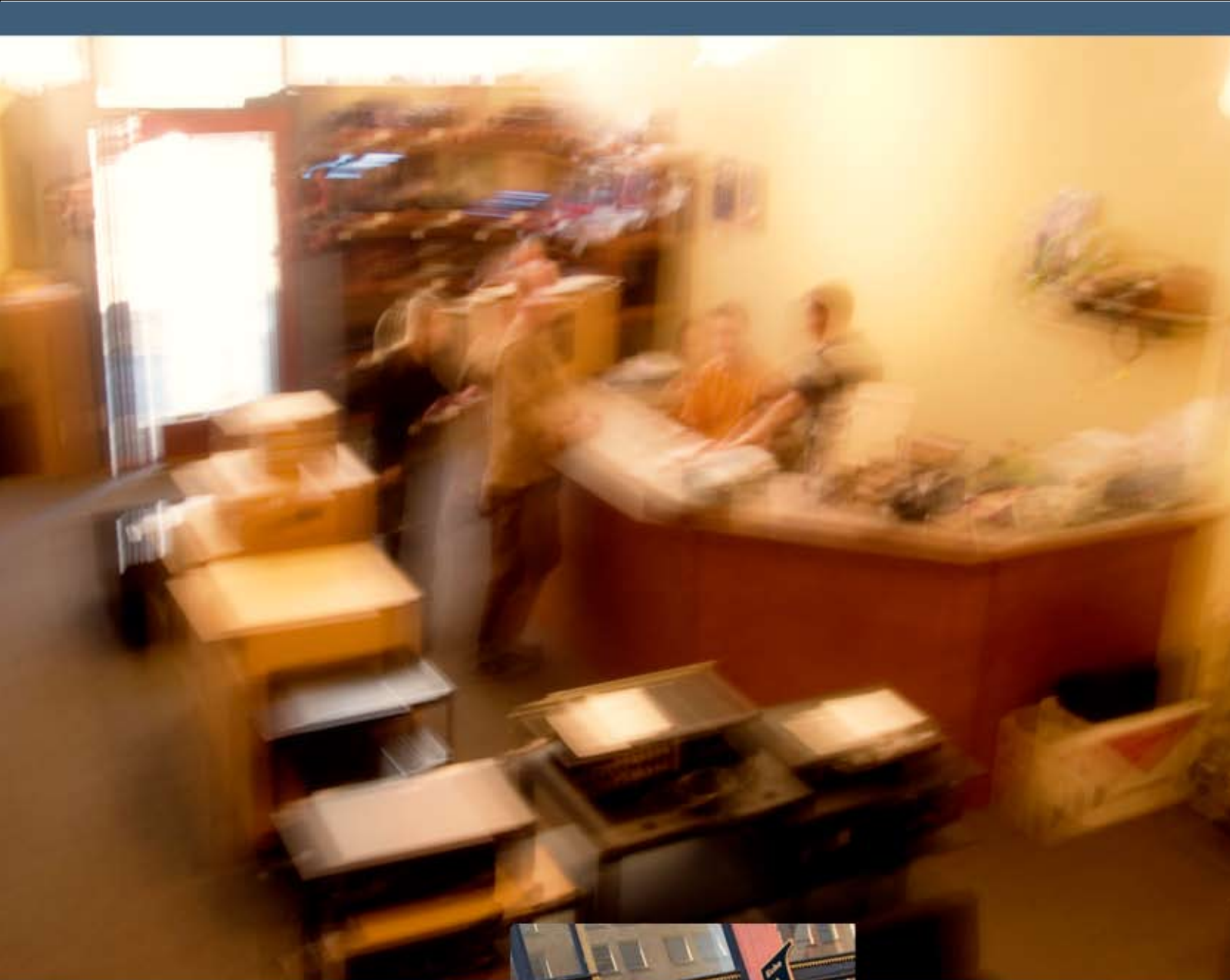
So, much like the vintage-car guy who specializes in one marque, you're the guy who has all the rare Naim bits? And people all over the world find you because of that?

Exactly. I wanted the store to do the proper dem, but I think the idea of buying from the local store for that reason only is going away. I get people from all over the UK and all over the world for that matter because they've heard good things about us. If people are looking for that rare phono board for a Naim preamp or something like that, chances are I have it or I know where to find it.

Because of this extensive experience, I imagine you are an excellent resource as an "answer man" as well?

All the time. Quite a few of our customers started out as someone looking for information on how to upgrade or fix the older Naim gear that they had.

(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

How integral to your business model is the heavy concentration on used gear?

Very much, I started out as a dealer of used Naim gear as there wasn't a dealer opportunity where I lived.

How does it affect what you might sell the customer?

Where another dealer might have a customer just cash his system in to move on, my business model doesn't require that they get rid of the system they've cherished for years. We always have a few options for them to upgrade. It might be a new system or a new component. It might even mean getting their current Naim gear re-capped.

That builds the customers trust and when they are ready to trade up, I've always got a customer looking for his trade in. It's really a great way of thinking green because we aren't always throwing things away. This is another reason I like Naim so much, because their modular approach to things always means there is something to trade up to and someone who can make use of the last power supply or whatever. Again, it reinforces the service aspect.

What is the benefit of buying used from TomTom?

I offer a 12-month warranty on all the used gear I sell so it's like buying a certified pre-owned Lexus. The extra confidence this gives my customer far outweighs the minimal repairs I've had to take care of. Another benefit of selling Naim.

I don't see buying second-hand as buying second-best. *(continued)*



Because of my used inventory, even at an entry level, we can keep them in the family. I know they will be satisfied and eventually they will be back.

What percentage of your sales is used gear as opposed to new?

It's almost an even split between new and used gear.

In tighter economic times like the present, have you noticed more people buying used than before?

An interesting question. I've noticed that the used values of Naim gear are very steady; as long as the demand is there, the values stay in place. With the economy a bit weaker, the customer tends to take a little more time thinking about the purchase, but it's still been a great year with the normal percentages intact. We've had a very decent loyal clientele; they tend to look after me as much as I do them. I feel very lucky to have such good clients.

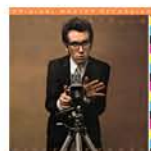
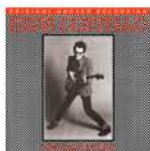
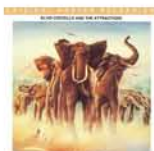
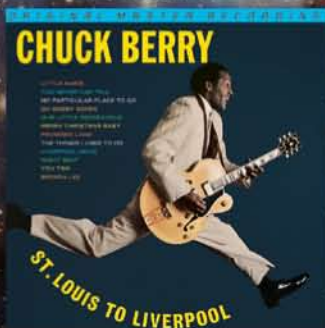
How heavily committed are your clients to analog?

My clients are predominantly hard core enthusiasts and as such analog reproduction is still a very important part of most of their lives.

With your own personal music collection, are you primarily analog, digital or an even mix? Has the Naim HDX taken over your life, or do you still prefer to drop a CD in the 555, or your turntable?

I believe the new hard disk and streaming technologies are really exciting and you can't beat the smile on client's face when they have such easy access to their music collection, digging up gem after gem. I think the whole download and streaming arena is great for the industry and something we will be very active in as it's really getting people interested in music again.

But personally for now after a busy day I still enjoy the calm ceremony of taking a record out it's sleeve and queuing it up.
(continued)



• Coming Soon: Elvis Costello!

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

Have many of your clients become good friends over the years?

Absolutely. Often times I will spend an evening over dinner or good music with many of these people. When someone walks through the door, chances are we have at least two things in common: music and the kit we love to listen to it on. Then it moves on to other things, cars, watches, architecture, etc.

Is that what led to your other events that often are outside the HiFi world?

Yes, we do an annual event with some Bentley dealers every year, bringing a nice crowd of people with overlapping experiences together.

What was the ultimate decision to work out of your home as opposed to a retail shop?

I thought about it for quite a while and questioned whether I really needed a storefront. I felt that it would necessitate broadening my scope past beyond what I wanted to do. My online shop has all sorts of Naim bits. That's often your first experience with TomTom, perhaps buying a five-pound puck for your CD player. Or when you are ready to sell your preamp after a few years, you've lost those little plugs in the back.

That's me!

That's everyone. But when it happens, they know TomTom is the place to get those bits. You can't get those things from Naim directly and most dealers don't stock them. We've built up quite a following just stocking the hard to get items. *(continued)*



How did you come up with the name? Do you find people ever confuse you with the GPS company or the band? (The TomTom Club)

Actually, I was thinking about the drum. As Naim is famous for pace, rhythm and timing and I happen to use the original Naim logo of two adjacent circles, TomTom just seemed to fit rather well. I came up with the name a few years before I launched in 2003 which was just before the GPS company started, but I do get the occasional call from someone who is hopelessly lost trying to program their GPS.

What about software?

I'm expanding the online shop to carry the whole catalog of Naim label music as well, and First Impression, too. That's the way it used to be, that your shop had a good selection of records as well. It's very important to me. I'd love to have a record shop, too. I think we'd all love to have a record shop.

Back to the retail shop vs. home approach. How available are you for your customers if they can't just stop by between 9 and 5?

Seven days a week. It's no problem to stop in for a few hours if a customer needs to stop by on Sunday or whatever. It also gives me more time to go out to my clients and listen to their systems and make suggestions. It's much easier after you've seen and heard their system and suggest how it can be improved. Sometimes a customer just needs a piece repaired and that may be all they want at the time. Nothing replaces that personal experience.

I don't like just leaving a client with a box. It's best to know that all is set up and that they are being looked after.

What's the next step for TomTom Audio?

I'm bringing one guy into the business full time so that I can spend more time on business development and tracking down more rare Naim bits.

If you find yourself in the UK and have the time, make an appointment with James and be prepared for a fantastic time. Even if you don't need anything now, take him out to lunch, because you might need those plugs someday and it will be good to have a friend when you do. ●

Audiophile Pressings

By Jeff Dorgay

Presented by Music Direct

Click on Record Cover to Purchase

Sonny Clark *Cool Struttin'*

Tina Brooks *True Blue*

Horace Parlan *Speakin' My Piece*

Hank Mobley *Soul Station*

AudioWave, XRCD24

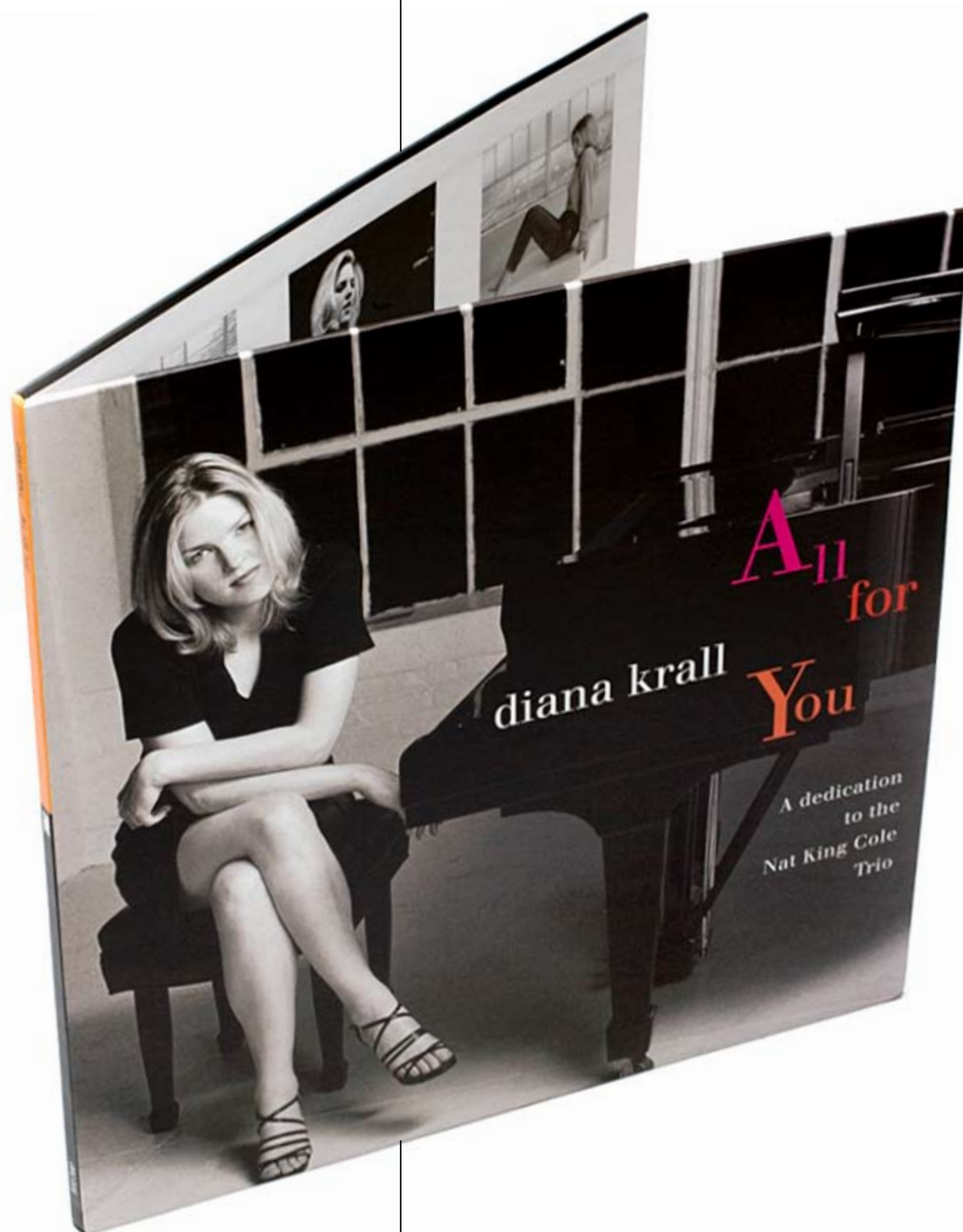
If you missed the first part of the Music Matters 45 r.p.m. Blue Note reissues that began at the end of 2008 and would like to catch up on the titles, think of the current series released by AudioWave as an encore performance. Granted, these are *digital*, but the first series of Blue Note albums on XRCD (which is fully compatible with all CD players) hit the shelves in mid-December, with the titles listed above. Each month, two to four titles will be released.

Producer Joe Harley, the man behind the Music Matters team, is coordinating the XRCD group consisting of Michael Cuscuna, Alan Yoshida (a co-creator of the XRCD format) and Robert Bantz, the president of Elusive Disc and AudioWave Music.

In addition to out of this world sound, the AudioWave Blue Notes come custom packaged in a mini-hardcover book format. There are expanded liner notes, great photos, and an explanation of the XRCD process along with album credits.

Compared to the 45 r.p.m. vinyl, the LPs still have a slight edge in smoothness and liquidity, but thanks to the XRCD process and the care that was taken transferring these albums directly from the original analog masters, these CD's have to be approaching the limit of what the compact disc is capable of resolving. Instrument timbre is stunningly real, and the amount of air and decay present on these recordings will make the uninitiated swear that there is a record playing on a turntable somewhere. I've never heard this music sound this good in *any* digital format.





Diana Krall

All For You

Original Recordings Group, 2-180g LP set

If I had to have one smoky female vocal recording in my record collection, the ORG version of *All For You* would be it. My personal taste in female vocalists leans more towards Patti Smith and Chrissie Hynde, but I've always had a fondness for Nat King Cole.

While I've heard way too much Diana Krall over the years at audio shows, this record is quite good. Krall's third record in her career, before she started winning Grammys, has a much more intriguing feel than her latest efforts. The liner notes mention that she toured with the players in this band for six months before going into the studio to record, and it shows.

Mastered by Bernie Grundman to four sides of vinyl at 33 1/3 r.p.m., *All For You* has a very dreamy overall feel. This is an intriguing record, with no drummer present, leaving Krall on piano, backed up by Russell Malone on guitar and Paul Keller on bass. It's easy to see why this record has become such an audiophile staple for showing off the tonality of a great system, without having to include the taxing dynamics of the drums.

On a system of the highest caliber, this will be as close to having Ms. Krall in your living room as you could ever hope to achieve.



Rickie Lee Jones

Pirates

MoFi, 180g LP

We reviewed MoFi's *Pirates* on SACD in our last issue. Our staff agrees that because it was one of the earliest digital recordings, this was one of the more harsh-sounding LPs released in 1981, as the music industry was gearing up for the compact disc.

MoFi's treatment of the SACD was much better than the original LP or CD, but unfortunately, although the LP was

cut from the analog master tape (which was still mixed down from the 24-track digital recording), they have not managed to wring out much more warmth, air or detail here. Only so much can be done with a bright recording. If you don't have the SACD, the LP is definitely worth adding to your collection if you are a Rickie Lee Jones fan. If you already have the SACD, I'd suggest passing on this one.

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

Neil Young

The Official Release Series, Discs 1-4
Warner Bros., 180g LP

The latest re-releases from Neil Young, mastered by Chris Bellman of Bernie Grundman Mastering and pressed at Pallas in Germany, are outstanding. The 4-LP set consists of Young's first four albums: *Neil Young*, *Everybody Knows This is Nowhere*, *After the Gold Rush*, and *Harvest*.

Many die-hard collectors who already have the original first-stamper pressings of these albums in their collection may argue that said discs are a molecule better. But, after numerous listening sessions, I would say that the current releases are up to the task.

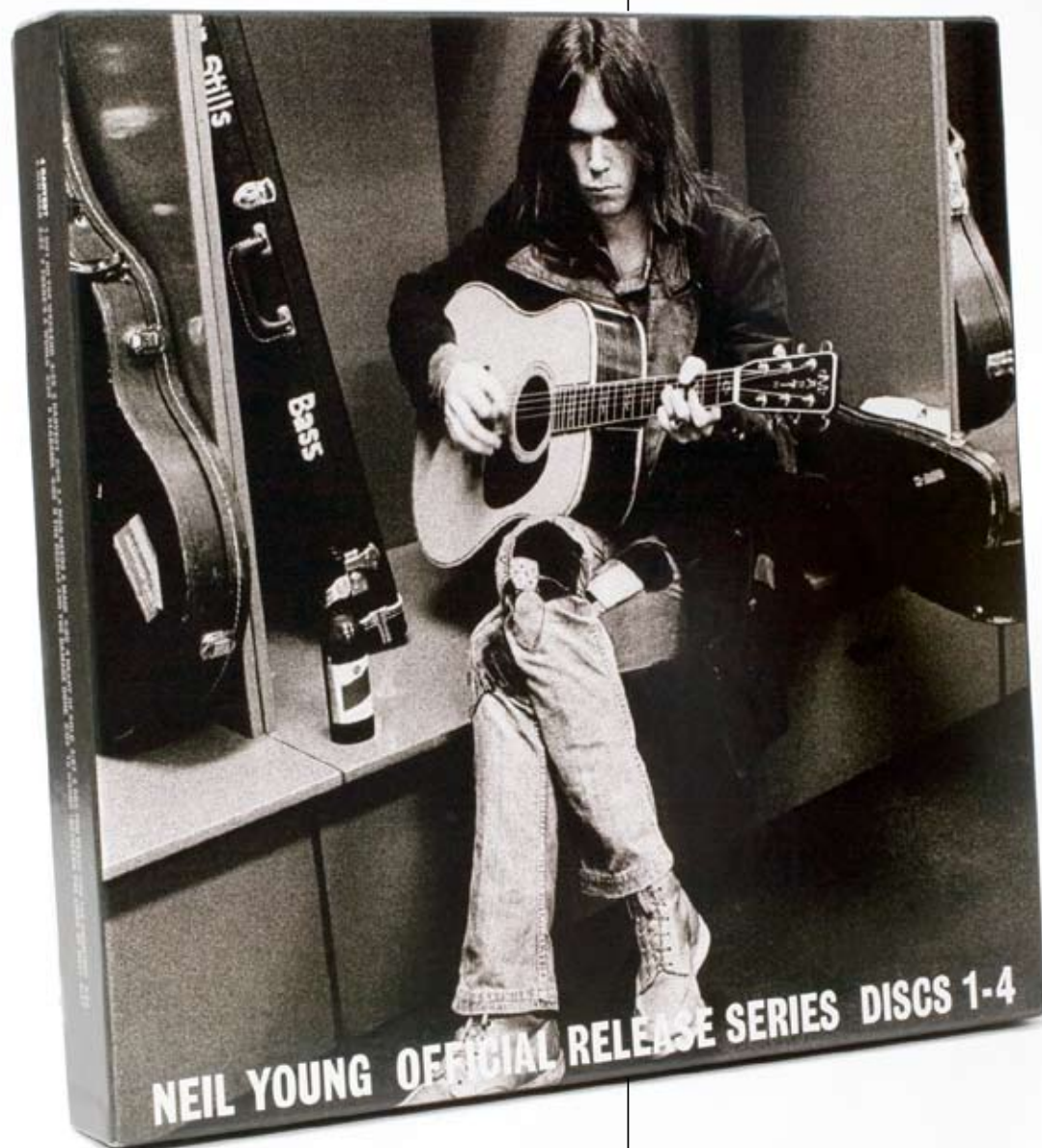
The printing on the box and album covers was overseen by Neil Young's art director, the famed album art director, Gary Burden, and the edition is limited to 3,000 copies worldwide. Every detail has been painstakingly recreated, right down to the liner notes on the albums; with the current versions exceeding the quality of the originals.

Chances are good that even our younger readers have heard "Old Man," "Heart of Gold" and "Cinnamon Girl" numerous times, but if you've only heard them on CD or a garden variety LP, the new WB discs will be a revelation. There is so much more detail and ambience in these recordings, I felt like I was hearing them for the first time. (And I've been listening to them since the '70s.)

The increased level of resolution available on these pressings shows just how recording technology improved between 1968 and 1972; it's much like comparing mid-career Beatles records to *Abbey Road*. Two main characteristics of these records stand out: the intricacies of Young's voice and the density of the recordings, now that all the compression has been removed, the dynamics are staggering.

The Pallas pressing plant in Germany is known for the high quality of its work and has an excellent reputation for extremely quiet pressings, but the people there have outdone themselves on this box set. These records are CD quiet, and all four of the records in my box set (#22 in the series) were perfectly flat, exhibiting no manufacturing defects whatsoever.

There are a number of online music forums that have already dissected these recordings song by song, but the bottom line is that unless you have pristine copies of the unobtainium booty, you can't do better than these. Highly recommended.





Devo

Q: Are We Not Men? A: We are Devo!

Freedom of Choice

Warner Bros., 180g LP

These two albums coincide with the current Devo tour, on which they have been performing these two albums in their entirety. *Are We Not Men?* is significant because it was Devo's official debut (remember them on *SNL*?). *Freedom of Choice* contains their biggest hit, "Whip It." Both have been pressed on colored vinyl to add to the festivities; *Are We Not Men* is on yellow vinyl and *Freedom of Choice*, red. Rick Gershon from Warner Bros. told me recently, "We're having a ton of fun pressing things on colored vinyl, now that we can get the colored stuff in good quality."

Having first stamper pressings of both to compare, I'd say that both of these records sound great, but the bigger improvement is with *Freedom of Choice*. *Are We Not Men?* always was a very well recorded record, but the new remaster has a lower noise floor and more fine detail; now you can hear all those cool synth effects to the fullest. The original pressing of *Freedom of Choice* has a muffled midrange, with harsh compression the bandit here, but this release brings the sonics back to the level of Devo's first album. Here's hoping they remaster *Duty Now For The Future* with this level of care.

It's great to see a label step outside the normal boundaries to remaster something that's further off the beaten path.

Jeff Beck*Truth* (Mono)*Beck-Ola* (Stereo)

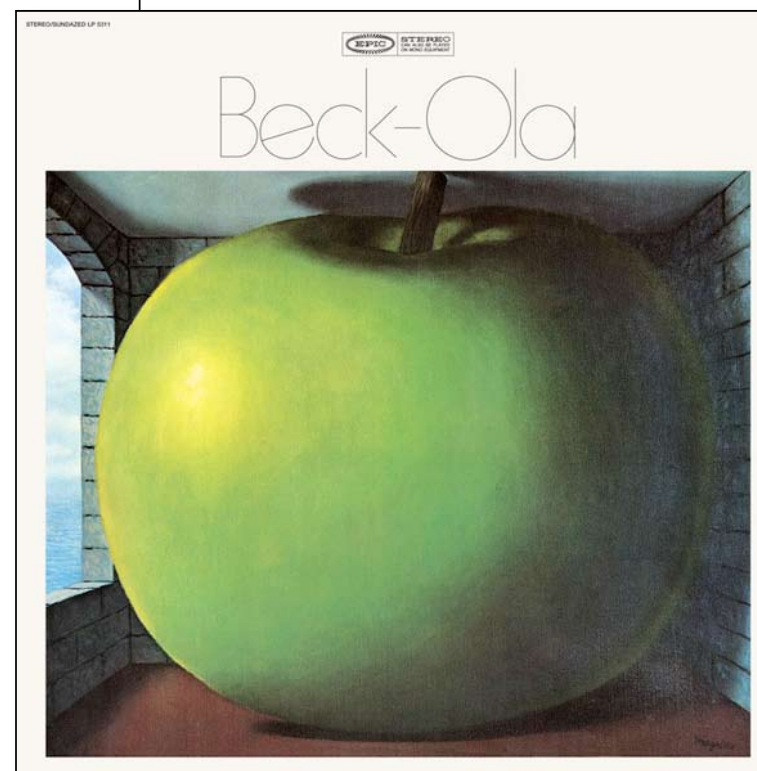
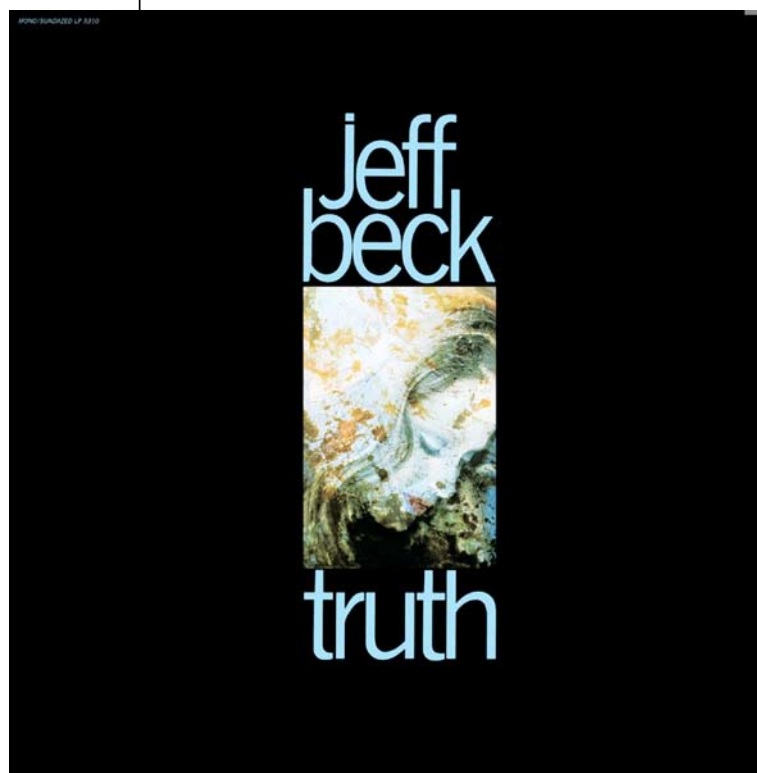
Sundazed, 140g LP

These reissues from Sundazed get a C for sonics, an A- for quality, and an A+ for effort. With many of your favorite discs fetching \$40 - \$60, you have to appreciate a company that's making an effort to keep it real, producing records like this for \$17 each.

Sundazed claims to have sourced these from the original U.K. analog masters, but there is no mastering credit given. *Truth* has an overall darkness to the mix, but I did not have an original mono to compare it to. However, my early American version in stereo has more extension at both ends of the frequency range, but the vocals are buried in the mix so far that they sound like Rod Stewart is singing about ten feet behind the speakers. Overall, the Sundazed issue is still the winner. Playing this record on a turntable with a dedicated mono cartridge will yield a warmer midrange than from just using a standard stereo cartridge and pushing the "mono" switch on your preamplifier.

Beck-Ola (in stereo) is a considerable step up in quality from a garden variety copy of this record that you'll find for \$5-\$10 at your local used record store (if you could find a decent copy for that kind of money). This is a record that everyone *loved* to play, so most of the ones that remain are sadly worn. Also claimed to be sourced from the U.K. master, this record still has some compression with a rolled off top end.

While these are not the most spectacular remasters I've ever heard, the quality presented represents good value for the price. The pressings are very quiet and the covers are printed reasonably well, so, unless you are the fussiest of collectors, they are worthy of a spot on your shelf. ●





Canon G11

MSRP: \$499

www.canonusa.com

No exotic sports cars this issue, but we do have some sneak photos of the latest “baby” Aston Martin and some fun gadgets nonetheless. As we’ve covered the last two generations of the Canon G series, we start off with Canon’s latest, the G11.

Canon has dropped the megapixel count from 13 MP to 10 on the G11, but it has been able to drop the noise level significantly in their latest offering in the Power Shot line. A long time G9 and G10 user, my only complaint with this series of cameras is their inability to produce acceptable images in low-light situations. The G11 has broken this barrier by a considerable margin. The cover photo of this issue was taken with the G11 at ISO 1600. Pretty impressive for a point and shoot.

The key to getting this kind of low-light performance is somewhat counter intuitive. I’ve always been an advocate of shooting in RAW mode so that the images captured can be manipulated in Photoshop for maximum dynamic range, but Canon’s new DIGIC 4 processing engine has made this part of my workflow obsolete. The images captured at the highest jpeg setting were *much* clearer and noise free than the ones captured in RAW and imported through Photoshop’s raw capture module. *(continued)*



The flip-out viewfinder makes an excellent grip; holding the camera by the far edge of the viewfinder and the camera body made for sharper pictures at low shutter speeds.

With lower ISO settings (100-400), Photoshop works just fine, but if you want every bit of performance the G11 is capable of delivering in low light, stick to jpeg and watch your exposures carefully, which shouldn't be too hard with the 2.8 inch screen that folds out. This is handy because you can angle the viewfinder for extreme wide-angle shots or when shooting high overhead. Another bonus provided by the flip-out viewfinder is that it makes an excellent grip; holding the camera by the far edge of the viewfinder and the camera body made for sharper pictures at low shutter speeds.

My trusty G9 has a zoom lens that is the equivalent of a 35mm – 210mm lens on a 35mm camera. The zoom range on the G11 is identical to that of the G10, 28mm – 140mm. Pictures taken at the wide-angle setting were remarkably distortion free. The latest improvement in autofocus processing is also readily apparent: the G11 focuses faster than both the G9 and G10, especially in low light.

Again, the picture quality regardless of lighting conditions is spectacular. In good to moderate light situations, I'm amazed at how close the picture quality of the G11 is to the images taken with my three-year old Canon EOS 20D DSLR. And with built-in image stabilization and face recognition, I can take *better* pictures in some instances with the G11.

The main downside to the G11 is short battery life. I was not able to get any more than 100 shots with the camera with no flash use. With moderate fill flash, that dropped to about 75 pictures. (*continued*)

Burmester
ART FOR THE EAR

Power, precision, perfection
Burmester since 1977.



Top Line from Burmester transforms power into
ultimate music fidelity, when only the best will do

NEW for 2010

088 - 089 - B30's

088 Pre-Amp

Derived from Ref. Line 077 Pre amp, double-mono structure, X-Amp2 output stages, 5 bal inputs + surround thruput, bal output and Tape out (2nd bal output), incl. DAC Module or Phono MC/MM module, 180° phase change for each input, BurLink

089 CD Player

Top loader with belt-drive, Upsampling 96kHz/24bit or 192kHz/24bit, X-Amp2 output stages, 2 digital, 1 analog input, fixed/variable output, DOT Matrix display, BurLink, MMI slot

911 MK3 Amp

One of the fastest in the world, DC-coupled Power Amp without capacitors in the signal path, Stereo output per channel (4 Ohm): 350W, Damping factor > 1,800, stable operation on all loads, drives any loudspeaker without effort, Burmester X-Amp amp technology

B30 Speakers

Timeless appealing design, easy setup and perfect integration into every living environment, profound bass, very clean midrange and subtle treble, warm, full-bodied, detailed sound, passive 3way bass reflex, suited for Bi-Wiring/ Bi-Amping, load 250 W, impedance 4 Ohm, response 89dB, frequency range 32-45,000Hz, +/-3dB. (Please note: speakers shown above are B50's in Carrera White)

911 MK3 Amplifier: Product of the Year

“ This is the BEST amplifier I have ever heard! ”
Jeff Dorgay — Tone Audio

If you plan on taking a lot of pictures with your G11, or you have a vacation on the horizon, get at least one spare battery to take with you. I'd hate to see your batteries expire just as you're sitting down to tea with the Queen.

Another observation that will be troubling to some, and perhaps not so important to others, is that the outer shell has a decidedly more plastic-like feel than the G9, which feels like a mini EOS DSLR. I'm sure Canon had to cut costs somewhere to keep the pricing consistent with prior models, and this could be where they did it. If you are a look and feel junkie, make sure you go to the camera store and hold a G11 in your hands before you press the buy-it-now button online.

Will G9 and G10 owners feel the need to upgrade, when their current cameras are only six months to two years old? If you long for better low-light capability, definitely. If you take most of your pictures in adequate lighting situations, probably not yet unless you are the ultimate camera fanatic who has to be on the leading edge.



Burmester North America 604.542.0904 info@burmester-northamerica.com

A DIVISION OF RUTHERFORD AUDIO INC.



Friend or Foe Audiophile T-shirts

MSRP: \$48

www.musicdirect.com

Before you freak out at the pricetag, these T-shirts are made from high-quality cotton and the printing is first rate. Friend or Foe specializes in music T-shirts and they've been spotted lately on numerous celebrities. These guys are true T-shirt artists, their color palette is impeccable and the artist choices are fantastic as well: Coltrane, Miles, Sinatra and more. Best of all, just like your favorite audiophile pressing, they are limited to an edition of 2,500 shirts.

You'll pay more than this for a Coldplay T-shirt at their merchandise counter and besides, who would you rather put on your chest? Coldplay or Coltrane? I thought so.



Shown: LTX 500 Projector



AVM 50v audio/video processor

+



Anthem Room Correction (ARC™)

+



LTX 500 LCOS Projector

= Home Theater Bliss

... that's what you get when Anthem, the #1 Electronics Brand Overall, offers a complete audio/video solution. You get high-end home theater that doesn't get any better ... or any more affordable! Visit your nearest Anthem Dealer today for an amazing demonstration of a complete Anthem Home Theater.

ANTHEM
THE KEY TO HIGH END AUDIO-VIDEO™

#1 Brand Overall, Inside Track Annual Dealer Survey 2007, 2008, 2009.
An annual independent nationwide survey of consumer electronics
specialist retailers and custom installers.

www.anthemAV.com



Greener Screen Cleaner

MSRP: TBD
www.silverpac.com

I'm sure most of you know how tough it is to keep your flat-screen devices clean. So far, every screen cleaner I've tried leaves some kind of slimy, streaky residue. Until now.

Silver Pac's Greener Screen Cleaner uses a solution that is completely biodegradable as well as antibacterial. Even the packaging uses a recycled plastic bottle. I made it a point to try this stuff on everything in our environment – the plasma TV in the living room, the 30-inch Cinema Displays in the studio, the Kindle, even my iPhone. Every device I cleaned with the enclosed microfiber cloth came out squeaky clean!

As I just received this in the mail a few days, I'm giving Greener Screen Cleaner a posthumous Product of the Year award. Great stuff!!

The Aston Martin Cygnet

MSRP: \$32,000 (est.)
www.astonmartin.com

The newest addition to the Aston Martin stable does not have hidden weapons or a V-12 under the bonnet, but it sure is adorable. Initial reports say the car will be based on the Toyota iQ city car now available in Europe.

Rest assured that when they are available here in the US, we will get one in for review. I'm hoping that it has the quiet interior and the B&O sound system; it would be like a pair of headphones on wheels. But I'm still not sure just how the Aston Martin engineers are going to shoehorn a V-12 into this little bugger. Stay tuned.



Olympus LS-10

MSRP: \$299

www.olympusamerica.com

Whether you need a high-quality transcription recorder for conducting interviews or bootlegging your favorite concert (though we do *not* endorse such practice), the Olympus LS-10 is up to the task. It records in Linear PCM mode up to 24 bit/96khz and in addition to the 2gb of built in memory, you can use SD/SDHC memory cards up to 16gb capacity. A 16gb card will give you anywhere from 7.5 hours (24bit/96khz – PCM format) to almost 300 hours (128 kb/sec MP3). Just be sure to take plenty of batteries; a pair of AA alkalines will offer 8-12 hours worth of capacity, with Ni-MH batteries offering 10-16 hours. While I did not get a chance to verify this, Olympus has always been very conservative when rating battery life. In almost 10 years of owning and reviewing Olympus cameras, they have always exceeded the published battery life, so I expect the LS-10 will do the same.

The LS-10 also does an admirable job at archiving vinyl, especially in 24/96 mode via the line-in jack. I made a few recordings and compared them to my Nagra LB, and came away very impressed. The Nagra still has the edge in ultimate fidelity, but for the vinyl enthusiast who only does occasional needle drops, put the LS-10 on your short list of recorders to audition. Just like the Nagra that records to a CF memory card, you can use the LS-10 to capture to an SD card, then edit from your computer. There is also a USB output if you'd like to plug the LS-10 into your computer. *(continued)*



LOIMINCHAY **Kandinsky** Master Engineering & Artistic Execution

**Let's
Enjoy
the
Music!**

In addition to linear PCM, you can also record in .wav, mp3 and .wma formats. The LS-10 is easy to use, with all the menus logically arranged. Only the most technologically challenged will need to resort to the manual, but don't throw it out. It has some handy info for the advanced user. But if you need to interview Mick Jagger in five minutes, snap in a pair of AA batteries and roll.

The built-in microphone can be adjusted to have a wide or narrow pattern, which can be handy when recording voices. In the wide mode, you get a better stereo image and in the zoom mode, it's much easier to key in on a single person's voice. Also handy is the low cut switch that does a great job at reducing background noise. Very helpful when interviewing someone in a crowded club, bathroom or airplane. External microphones can also be used.

Around the backside of the LS-10, there are a tiny pair of monitor speakers that will at least let you know that everything is working, but headphone monitoring is the way to go. The LS-10 had no problem driving a standard pair of Sennheiser 650's, so on-location monitoring is only limited to the quality of your phones. Vinyl junkies take note: with a 16gb SD card, you can capture your favorite vinyl tracks and have a very sophisticated digital music player. CD lovers can rip their music with the enclosed Olympus software or iTunes.

No matter what your digital recording need, the Olympus LS-10 should have you covered.



Xbox Boxer Shorts

MSRP: \$18
www.amazon.com

If they are going to get you socks and underwear instead of the toys you wanted, make sure that it's at least something fun, such as these Xbox boxers. Packaged in a tin container that looks like an Xbox controller, you'll probably have as much fun with the box as the contents. And isn't that what makes a great gift in the end?

AudioTools

MSRP: \$19.99 - \$40.00
www.studiosixdigital.com

Need a Real Time Analyzer right now or perhaps a dual trace oscilloscope? With a suite of about 10 tools, including a very handy tone generator, this is a set of iPhone apps that the audio hobbyist should not be without. All of these will prove helpful setting up your system.



Bass

How **deep** is your love?



Signature **SUB 25** &
Paradigm's Perfect Bass Kit™
The **only** solution for perfect bass

Pushing 3,000 watts of continuous power (7,500 watts Dynamic Peak) SUB 25 unleashes room-pounding bass accurate to a gruelling 9 Hz! In an average listening room, it can reproduce an incredible 125 dB without audible distortion. And there's the rub ... the 'average' listening room. Even when the world's finest subwoofer is perfectly positioned, room dimensions, dead spots, archways, even furniture can turn the room into an additional instrument playing alongside musicians or movie scores with unwanted coloration and resonance. Bass sounds boomy with poor definition. You have the perfect sub, in a less than perfect room.

You can pad the walls, trap the corners, remove the furniture, or you can let Paradigm's optional Perfect Bass Kit (PBK-1) tackle the problem. Based on research conducted by the National Research Council, PBK-1 analyzes the sub's response in your room, then sets about perfecting that response through scientific calculation!



Optional Paradigm Perfect Bass Kit
for **real** digital room correction



PARADIGM REFERENCE

Signature Series

For more info on the award winning research behind Paradigm's Perfect Bass Kit (PBK-1) visit www.paradigm.com

2008 Project Happiness Chardonnay

MSRP: \$10 per bottle
www.oreanawinery.com

How can you not buy a bottle of wine with a smiley face on it? I know I couldn't resist, and the checkout person at Safeway quietly snickered as she was packing my groceries. But if there's anything I'm a sucker for besides Girl Scout cookies, it's something with a smiley face on the label. The verdict? For \$10, this is a decent Chardonnay with a slightly fresh fruity taste. It certainly put a smile on my face.





High Style and Functionality:

The Bang & Olufsen BeoSound 5

By Jeff Dorgay

The BeoSound 5 is a very intriguing music-server product on many levels. B&O is synonymous with Danish style, so that's a given; this is by far the most beautiful music server I've ever worked with. The system has an MSRP of \$10,130 with the powered speakers. Also available is the BeoLab 2 powered subwoofer for \$2,995. The music server is available separately for \$6,250, with the remote control ala carte at \$195 (Beo4) or \$560 (Beo5). The prices include table stand and cables.

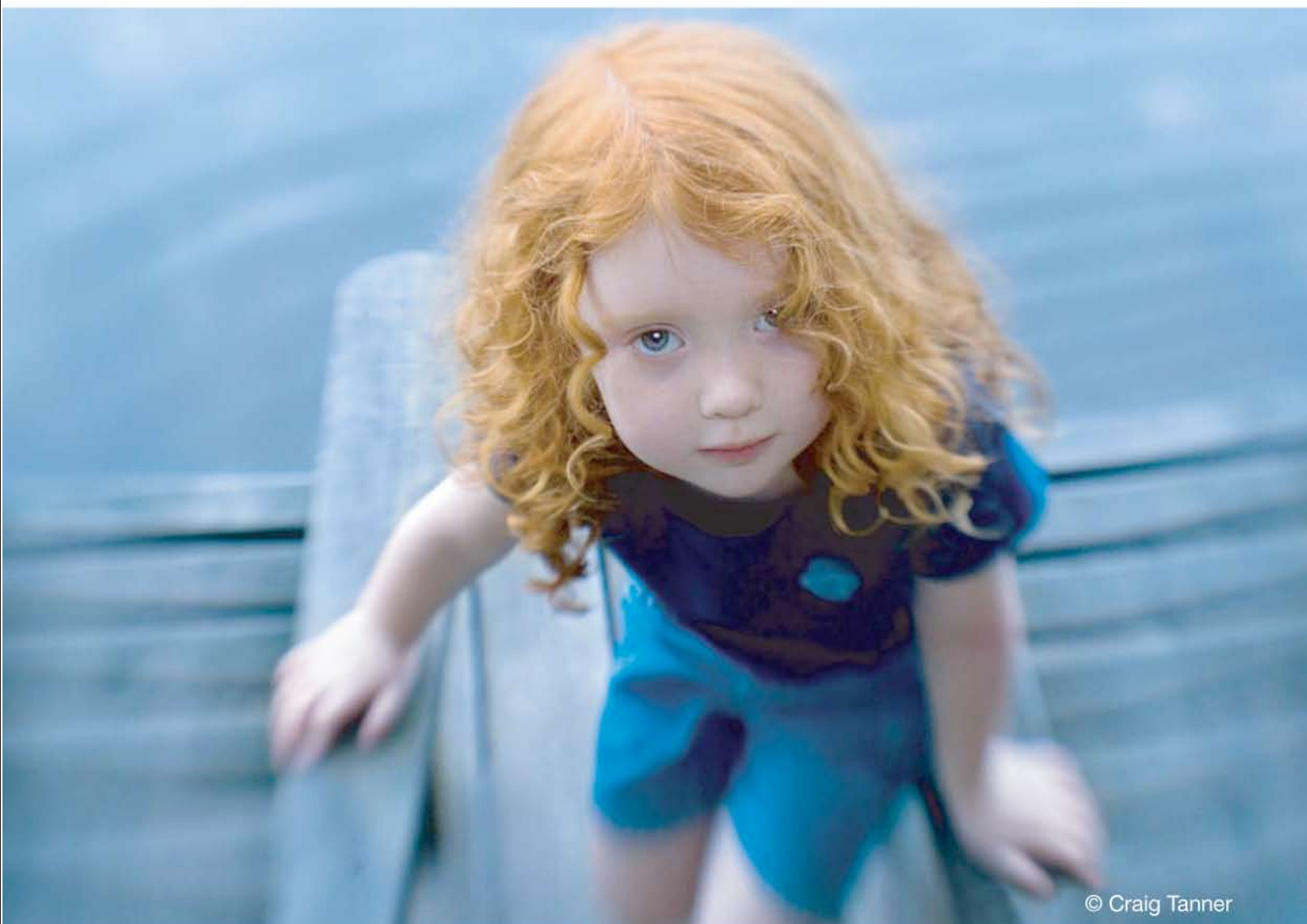
The advantage of using the B&O speakers is not just their compact size but the 250-watt ICE-power amplifiers neatly tucked into each one of these little modules. At first, you might think \$3,800 is a lot of money for those tiny speakers, but when you consider that you are getting the pair of speakers, four power amplifiers, electronic crossovers and (only digital on the BeoLab 5 speakers) room correction, this is a very high-performance package in a compact space. Don't let the small size fool you. These speakers are very capable indeed.

A Different Type of Music Server

The heart of the BeoSound 5 is a gorgeous machined-aluminum control pod with a 10-inch flat-screen monitor that features 1024 x 768 pixel resolution to display the server's commands. This is connected to the main server box with three cables that exit from the bottom of the control base. *(continued)*



See in a new way.



© Craig Tanner

Once turned on, the screen lights up and takes about two minutes to begin operation, just like a standard PC. Actually, once set up and powered on for the first time, the system is meant to remain "on." It goes into standby mode when not in use at very low power consumption and when you spin the wheel, it wakes up right away in a matter of seconds. Once the server screen comes to life, there are three rotating control rings that take you through your music collection. The main slider that is in the middle of the upper selection ring and the lower volume-control ring has a tab on it that allows you to scroll through main functions, organizing your music by album, artist, covers, etc.

Inside the ring are three rubberized buttons marked left, right and "go." These help you navigate up and back through the hierarchical menus, and the "go" button is the equivalent of a mouse. It takes a bit of getting used to, but once you familiarize yourself with the system, it becomes second nature.

On the other hand, the BeoSound 5 might just be the world's greatest internet radio tuner, albeit the world's most expensive. Thanks to its menu system, you can easily organize your favorite internet radio stations by country. Honestly, this was my favorite use of the BeoSound 5 system. It was even more fun to seek out internet stations from all over the world and see what other people like to tune into. I find this incredibly cumbersome to do on a computer, but it's a breeze with B&O. I'd love to see a stand-alone tuner version of this product at some point. *(continued)*

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.

bend • lock • fine focus



another simple idea from

Lensbabies™

Limited Storage

If you are a huge music collector and want to rip thousands of CD's to a central location, the BeoSound 5 is not for you. It has a 500GB internal hard drive that is limited to about 1,000 CD's saved in Windows Lossless Format, four times that if saved as MP3 files. However, the Windows Lossless Format is not terribly popular among digital music collectors, so the chances are high that you will have to re-rip your collection for the BeoSound 5. It would be a tremendous plus if B&O included FLAC compatibility in the next software release.

I did find it extremely positive that unlike my reference Sooloos music server (which only allows you to rip full CD's), the BeoSound 5 will let you just rip the tunes you want from any particular disc. This somewhat changes the outlook on storage, and it makes the BeoSound 5 like more of a "greatest hits" music server for those with gigantic collections. For the rest of you with more modest collections, this could be all the storage you need. Personally, I'd love to see the BeoSound 5 with a 1.5TB drive inside. As inexpensive as these drives are today, it would make this device much more palatable.

Setup and Operation

Every music server has its strengths and weaknesses, and the BeoSound 5 is no different. For the music lover with a moderate-size music collection who wants a stunning piece of hardware in the living room and does not want all of those CD cases or associated storage lying around, the BeoSound 5 would be perfect. If you tend to listen to music serially or just want to let B&O's MOTS (more of the same) software entertain you with random choices from your collection, the BeoSound 5 is *definitely* for you.

Non techie users take note, the instructions for the BeoSound 5 are slightly tough to decipher and could really use some pictures to show you just what to connect and where to connect it. Fortunately, all the various connectors are different so you can't plug anything in wrong, but it might be intimidating for a novice user. I'd suggest having the dealer assist you the first time around. *(continued)*





Surprisingly, those small BeoLab 3 speakers really rock. I was surprised by the sound quality and sheer sound pressure level they could produce. While the review pair came with rubber doughnuts on the base so the speakers could be placed on a desk, this really masks how good they are. While the BeoCenter 5/BeoLab 3 combination makes the world's most stunning desk HiFi system, you will get so much desk-surface-to-speaker interference (especially when you turn the volume up) that the speakers sound cloudy throughout the midrange. B&O actually recommends the table stands for this application for this very reason. Donuts are for shelf placement where the speakers can be close to the edge.

The speaker enclosures are solid aluminum with all rounded surfaces to minimize cabinet effects, and it works very well. The BeoLab 3's have a very clean, open midrange and utilizes their passive drivers to really enhance the bass performance and deliver world-class bass.

Place them on proper stands (preferably the cool B&O Stands) with the tweeters about 20-24 inches from the ground and they provide a very expansive soundstage. Thanks to B&O's built-in room correction, with three different settings depending on where the speakers are placed in the room, and Adaptive Bass Control, I guarantee you will be amazed at the performance. Those needing more grunt might consider the matching BeoLab 2 subwoofer or a pair of their floor-standing models.

It's also worth mentioning that the BeoLab 3's use the same acoustic-lens technology found in the Aston Martin system we reviewed last issue. While this works wonders in a car, it also is fantastic in a "real world" home system, where speakers may not be placed in the optimum spot for two-channel listening. Thanks to the wide dispersion of the tweeters and the small cabinet size, I was able to achieve an expansive soundstage with great imaging without a lot of fuss placing the speakers. *(continued)*



GamuT S5

Other Options

Should you purchase the music server alone, you can use it with other digital speakers via the S/PDIF output, or you can run this output to a DAC of your choice and a conventional HiFi system. I tried both with excellent results, first using the BeoSound 5 to run a set of Meridian DSP5200 powered speakers with internal DAC, then integrating it into my reference system with a Wadia 781i.

While you can use a wireless adaptor to move data to and from the BeoSound 5 you can load all of your music in one location and then run the BeoSound 5 as a stand-alone device. It does not need a constant connection to the Internet to display album art and song titles. I commend B&O on this choice because it can be inconvenient to get a connection for this purpose. The 500GB of music files should only take a couple hours to transfer, so loading your BeoSound 5 shouldn't be an all-day affair.

Backing up the data is also a quick process. The BeoSound 5 has the easiest backup scheme I've seen on a music server so far, and I wish they would all do it this way. You open the BeoSound 5 software client on your Mac or PC and just drag the contents over to the folder where you want it to reside. It doesn't get any easier than that. *(continued)*



A Music System That is Truly a Work of Art

No one offers better industrial design than Bang & Olufsen, and this is one of the most beautiful pieces of HiFi equipment I've ever been seen. The size of your music collection and your listening habits will determine whether this is the music server for you. And whether the coolness factor justifies the price tag.

A Visit to the B&O Factory

The look and feel of Bang & Olufsen products tells only part of the story. A trip to the B&O factory in Struer, Denmark, tells the rest. The hardwood floors that I encountered at the Copenhagen airport underscored the ethos of style and design that permeates the Danish culture. B&O's corporate headquarters looks more like a museum of contemporary art, or at least a very cool furniture store, than a factory where HiFi gear is produced. But it wasn't always that way ...





Peter Bang and Svend Olufsen started B&O in 1925. College friends, Olufsen was the marketing half of the company and Bang was the engineer. The manufacturing facility began in an unused part of the Olufsen home and farm. Their first product was called “The Eliminator” because back then, radios ran from lead-acid batteries that emitted harmful fumes in the home, and no one thought it would be possible to power a radio from the AC mains. The Eliminator showed they were wrong by ditching the batteries for AC current.

A National Treasure

Today, Bang & Olufsen is a major employer in Denmark and there is a museum in the center of Struer that documents every step of their achievements. If you love HiFi and find yourself in Denmark, a visit to the museum is a must. They have an original Eliminator there as well as every other product that B&O has produced over the years, right up to the current day. *(continued)*



It's fascinating to see how their product mix evolved. For years, they made microphones, movie projectors, even electric shavers! But from the 70's on, they stuck to their core technologies, concentrating on HiFi systems and televisions, and lately automotive HiFi systems. In Issue 22, we reviewed the B&O sound system in the current Aston Martin DBS; B&O produces the premium sound system in the full line of Audi cars. I saw a few parts on the factory tour that suggested that they may be producing sound systems for a few other automobiles in the future, but we shall see.

You might be surprised at how traditional some of their products looked at first, but it didn't take B&O long to develop their distinctive style. I believe this began in earnest in 1939 with the BeoLit 39 radio, which featured a case made entirely of Bakelite. A somewhat brittle plastic, it was a relatively new material at the time and was deemed tough to mold into complex shapes. But B&O's designers pushed for Bakelite, and the engineering staff devised a process. This design-driven way of doing things at B&O continues to this day.

As we were told by our host at B&O, Jette Nygarrrd, "The designers are given free reign here. It is our job to turn their vision into current products." It is worth noting that the designers at B&O are not company employees but contract workers. The company feels this allows them the autonomy to challenge their vision, which might not be as free if they were worried about pensions and stock options. *(continued)*



As we were told by our host at B&O, Jette Nygarrrd, "The designers are given free reign here. It is our job to turn their vision into current products."

Style, Performance and Precision

B&O puts an equally high priority on the performance of their products and rigorous quality control. While many audiophiles are curious about sonic testing and specs, B&O takes it way beyond that. They had numerous labs to measure every electrical parameter possible and two listening rooms where the speakers are hidden behind a transparent screen.

They employ about a dozen people who are their “Golden Ears,” trained strictly to listen to nuances in prototypes and final products in a real environment. These test listeners are asked to make notes and comment on every aspect of the sound on a wide variety of program material. Although in our demonstrations, we had to listen to The Eagles’ “Hotel California” a little more than I cared to! *(continued)*



On a parallel track to what's going on in the engineering department, there is another department that is trying to destroy their creations. This is what gives B&O such a high reliability rate. A worker at one workstation is simulating high vibration, while another repeatedly drops a television set from 10 feet in the air. Yet another machine pushes buttons in and out, while others bathe their products in heat, cold and humid conditions. They even have a machine that blows cigarette smoke into the air, which is equivalent to one of their components being exposed to a one-pack-per-day smoker for 10 years. Remote controls are bathed in the equivalent of human sweat to see how long it takes to wear the markings off them.

One of the engineers told us an interesting story about a man who was complaining about how his remote control had become discolored and the markings had faded prematurely. The B&O engineers finally figured out that cancer medication he was taking had changed the pH balance of his sweat, and that was something they *hadn't* planned on. I came away convinced that there is no torture to which B&O products have not been subjected!

We also got to see a full, working example of a B&O store. This is where a lot of corporate training is done, and it helped us to get a feel for how B&O works with their customers, as well as seeing all of the latest products. Unlike other HiFi companies that work through a dealer channel, B&O takes the Apple store route and has all company-branded stores. *(continued)*





Ending With the Big Screen

We ended our trip with a demonstration of B&O's spellbinding 103-inch plasma TV that should be in stores right after the New Year. The demo room was very sparse with four BeoLab 5 speakers at the far corners. Although a \$140,000 plasma isn't for everyone, it again underscored the fact that B&O has the technological capabilities to deliver cutting-edge products.

While Bang & Olufsen is occasionally criticized in the audio press for putting style ahead of substance, nothing could be further from reality. After spending a few days at their factory, it is obvious that while aesthetic appeal is very important, their commitment to technology, engineering and *vigorous* testing is unmatched in the industry. Granted, the Danes like to do things their way, but that's what gives their products soul. For my money, we could all use a little more style in our everyday lives. ●

www.bangandolufsen.com

The devilsound DAC

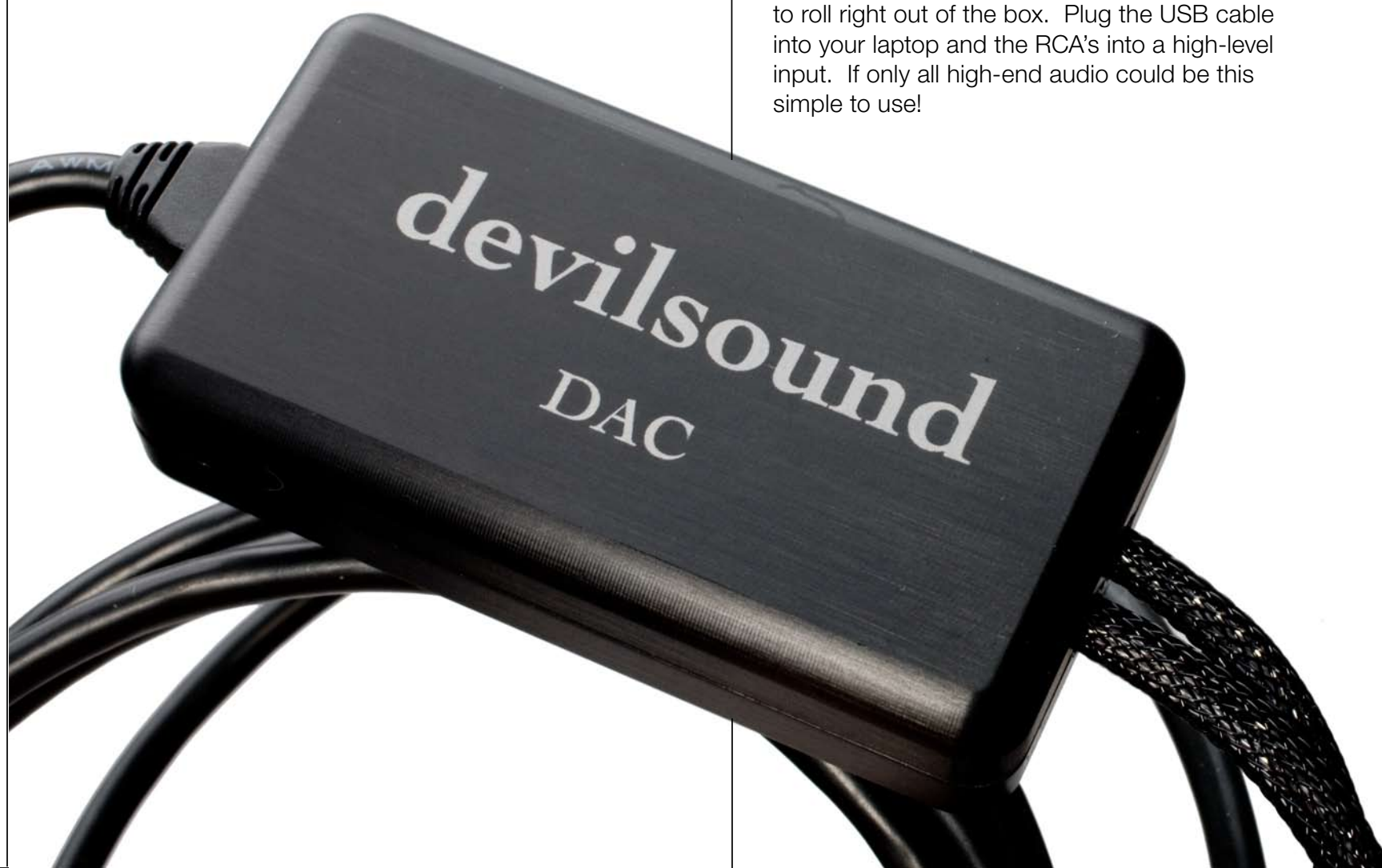
By Jerold O'Brien

I love it when I get presents from trade shows. Upon his return from the Rocky Mountain Audio Fest, our publisher handed me this little box at lunch and said, "Here, now you have no excuse not to start using your laptop as a music source." Inside the box was a cable with a miniaturized circuit built in. As I was thinking, "Hmmm, this looks like one of those MIT cables in tadpole form," he said, "It's a DAC, dummy. Just plug one end into your Dell and the other into your preamp. It's all you need."

As much as I hate being chastised as the only non-Apple user on the staff, I admit I was intrigued with this little device. Here was something I could plug my Mini 10 into and enjoy. Not only am I the only one here who uses a PC, I'm the only one not interested in playing music from a hard drive. Too much bother. But the devilsound DAC from devilsound is just so cute, you can't resist wanting to get on board with the computer-audiophile revolution.

No Drivers, Etc. Etc.

What makes the devilsound DAC so enticing is that you don't need *anything* else to make it work. No drivers, no downloads, no wall-wart power supplies to lose, and no cables. It's ready to roll right out of the box. Plug the USB cable into your laptop and the RCA's into a high-level input. If only all high-end audio could be this simple to use!



Because USB bus power is usually fairly dirty and inconsistent, devilsound uses custom power supply circuit to regenerate clean, stable positive and negative power rails, independent of the USB bus. The output stage uses a single-stage op amp output with no coupling capacitors to keep things as clean as possible. The USB plug is gold plated and the RCA plugs are Eichmann Silver Bullet Plugs. I've seen interconnects using these plugs that cost \$400. It's like getting a good pair of interconnects and a free DAC. If that weren't enough, the whole thing is cryogenically treated as well. The lowdown on what chips were used, and why, can be found right here:

www.devilsound.com/DAC/design/

Darn Good Sound

The devilsound DAC does not use any oversampling or upsampling, yet achieves very musical results. The only shortcoming of sticking with a 16-bit/44 khz system is that you cannot listen to high-resolution files. If you haven't started to build a library of high-res files, or it's not a priority, no problem. Those using it with their laptop to listen to standard 16/44 files and MP3's will be impressed with the performance.

Running through the standard jazz and rock test tracks, I felt that this DAC had much in common with the Red Wine Audio Isabella, which also uses a non-oversampling DAC. There is warmth to the midrange, and you might swear that the folks at devilsound have miniaturized a couple of triodes to go in that enclosure, too. Listening to "Chili Dawg" on David Grisman's *Dawg '90*, I was impressed with how well the roundness of the mandolin was captured.

Bass performance was excellent, too. Going through the CD layer rips I had made of the Genesis 1970-1975 box set, I found that the synth bass riffs in "Wot Gorilla?" from *Wind and The Wuthering* got my subwoofer moving right along. I was also excited with the amount of bass texture that was present with such an inexpensive DAC. Digital has really come a long way. *(continued)*



XS SERIES

The XS Series represents so much more than evolution.

Behind their brushed aluminum fascias, **XS Series** products embody radical and innovative audio engineering that builds on Naim's previous slimline X Series to take performance to yet greater heights.

The XS Series comprises a CD Player, FM Tuner, Integrated Amplifier, Preamplifier, Power Amplifier, and Power Supply, each one refined and polished to offer flawless system matching and matchless performance.

Distributed in the U.S. by:

ASL Group

8709 Castle Park Drive
Indianapolis, IN 46256
(317) 841-4100
www.aslgroup.com

naim
world class sound...

The most interesting comparison was between the devilsound DAC and my budget vinyl system in the family room that features a pair of vintage JBL L-100's and my trusty Marantz 2275 with a bone stock Technics SL-1200 and Grado Red cartridge. Forget about the "analog magic;" the devilsound DAC and my Netbook sound much more musical for less money. Granted, I don't have any great pressings down there, but I feel that this is fairly representative of what either a budget vinyl lover might have for a system or else someone digging those albums out of the closet after years of disuse.

In short, if you're thinking about buying a turntable and shopping the yard sales for some \$2 albums, you'll get more musically satisfying sound with the devilsound DAC. And your chances of getting useable CD's for \$2 or \$3 each are a whole lot better than the level of vinyl you'll find for that price.

I'm Converted

It looks as if I need to get one of these. It really made listening on my vintage system a pleasure, and I'm even thinking about taking this on the road with my headphone amplifier when I have to travel; it's certainly small enough. And not having to worry about batteries or AC adaptors is a big plus when traveling overseas.

For just under \$400, the devilsound DAC is a great piece of digital hardware. If you're still holding out for a reason to use a laptop as a source, here's the ticket. Highly recommended. ●

Hearing is Believing

By Bailey S. Barnard

Too rarely do we find the opportunity to stop and listen to the music. With so many things going on in our lives, music too often seems to take a back seat to everything else. Sure, it's easy enough to scan satellite radio during your commute or play a favorite album through your home stereo while doing chores around the house. But when was the last time you found "listen to music" at the top of your to-do list?

Fortunately, high-end ear cans (otherwise known as ear-cup headphones) exist to remind us how incredible music can be. They can reveal to our ears what recording artists and producers intended us to hear, but what we too often miss the opportunity to enjoy. The headphone models that follow are arguably the best that money can buy for hearing music as it's supposed to be heard.

These dynamic circumaural (coil-driven over-ear) headphones sit at the top of their respective product lines and offer the highest quality sound reproduction of anything on the market. I've chosen not to discuss electrostatic headphones because they are comparatively uncommon and require a dedicated amplifier, which makes them less convenient. I also avoid supra-aural phones; they sit directly against the ear and, in my opinion, do not provide as adequate of a sound stage as over-ear phones and are less comfortable to wear for long listening sessions. I do present both open and closed dynamic circumaural models because they offer different results for different listeners.

I chose three models – Denon's AH-D7000, Sennheiser's HD800, and Grado's PS1000 – for testing and ran them through a gamut of components and audio sources to assess their capabilities in numerous listening scenarios. They all passed with flying colors.



Denon AH-D7000

Denon calls the AH-D7000s its “ultra-reference” headphones for a reason. They are perhaps the finest closed-style ear cans on the market. As with all of the products in Denon’s extensive lineup, these phones are constructed with the highest-quality materials and craftsmanship. Denon – a subsidiary of Japanese electronics superpower D&M Holdings – has been around in one form or another for about a century and inserts its supreme expertise into these \$1,000 cans.

Most noticeably, the lightweight piano-finished mahogany housings not only offer a certain sex appeal, they also contribute to a phenomenal tonal balance and serve to dampen resonance. A magnesium frame and duralumin sliders give these phones an extremely sturdy yet feather-light feel, while urethane-filled soft-leather ear pads and headband make for exceptional comfort that doesn’t diminish over long listening sessions.
(continued)

Nothing added. Nothing subtracted.

MEGALINE™
EUPHONIA™
HELICON MK2™
MENTOR™
IKON®
LEKTOR®
CONCEPT™
SUBWOOFER

Photo: www.kimwendt.com



The Tin Pan - Central Park, New York - Sunday morning

Captivating an audience calls for honesty and genuineness and just like Tin Pan we enjoy what we do. Creating pure and authentic sound is all about passion and respect for music and those who interpret it.

Nothing added. Nothing subtracted.

Find out more about Tin Pan and the DALI speaker range on our website or contact our US Office, The Sound Organisation
Tel: 972-234-0182 www.soundorg.com



IN ADMIRATION OF MUSIC

www.dali-speakers.com



The DALI IKON series sets new standards. Each model offers materials, technology and performance worth of comparison well beyond their price range.

More so than the two open models that I tested, the closed design of the AH-D7000s manages to contain the sound derived from the micro-fiber and neodymium-magnet driver, which provides a frequency response from 5 to 45,000 Hz. This range and the closed design lends itself best to hard-hitting rock and pop music, as open models have slightly more discernible headroom at frequencies approaching 50 kHz and are best suited for jazz and classical music.

The AH-D7000's high-strength driver contains such an efficient magnetic circuit that no degradation will occur between the input and output signals. The 9.5-foot lightweight-yet-durable cable, which is sheathed in a tangle-free elastomer material that also helps avoid sound distortion, feeds the signal to the driver and is made from reference-grade copper wiring that is virtually oxygen free. Denon ensures that the signal begins pure from the audio source by utilizing a gold-plated aluminum-cased connector for these beauties.

The most notable technology implemented in the AH-D7000s is something that Denon calls its "Acoustic Optimizer." This equalizes the sound pressure being produced by the driver for a neutral balance of tone to achieve the precise reproduction that music producers would be hard pressed to discern from their original recordings, and they may even like better.

The only drawback to the AH-D7000s is that they only shine when paired with equally high-end components. With the right gear behind them, though, these phones will definitely indulge your ears and quite possibly blow your mind.



Sennheiser HD800

The open-style HD800s, from German mic and headphone specialist Sennheiser, sound amazing no matter what you plug them into. There's also a futuristic aesthetic and a feel that goes beyond the most serene comfort level. The ear pads of these \$1,400 masterpieces are handcrafted from very fine micro-fiber fabric that is a pleasure to place against your skin, and the cups have such a large diameter and depth as to encompass the ear free of contact. This makes them completely unobtrusive and provides a huge sound stage.

The encasing is crafted from an extremely lightweight stainless-steel material that constitutes the majority of the HD800's roughly 9.2-ounce weight, without the cable, while the headband and headphone mounting are constructed from unusually stable aerospace-grade plastic that has phenomenal dampening and rigidity properties. *(continued)*



The connectors are insulated with Teflon, and the nearly 10-foot cable is strengthened with Kevlar. These technical advancements and more make the HD800s seem well ahead of their time. Yet they're here now and ready to excite your aural senses.

The engineers also implement into these auditory monsters a number of sophisticated technical innovations, the most noteworthy of which is a Sennheiser patent. The large ring-shaped transducer is the largest ever produced in a headphone, employed in each of the ear cups with a minimal surface area so that they generate only the necessary amount of vibrations. That compares with those with solid circular plate-like surfaces that produce unwanted vibrations, causing distortion in the higher registers.

The clarity of the resulting sound is so incredible that listeners will hear nuances they never knew existed. Suddenly, the cleanest classical recordings seem fraught with scratchy bows, squeaky chairs and musicians gasping for air, an effect that provides a transcendent amount of realism. Sennheiser's engineers also devised an unusual angled ear cup to create an eerily natural spatial dimension, giving the illusion of sitting alone in the Royal Albert Hall as the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra presents you with your own personal performance. Magnificent!



Grado PS1000

The company that produces this third pair of cans is one to which no audiophile needs an introduction. Joseph Grado founded his namesake hi-fi product company in the mid-1950s. Now in its second generation, the manufacturer is helmed by his nephew, John. While Grado Laboratories is perhaps best-known historically for creating the world's finest phono cartridges, today the Brooklyn, NY, company produces what many consider to be the absolute best dynamic headphones on the market.

Unveiled in March, the flagship PS1000s (for professional series), embody the very essence of fine headphone craftsmanship. The hybrid design employs mahogany inner-cup sleeves, while the outer casing is machined from a resonant-free alloy. Grado reworked the voice coil and implemented a vented diaphragm for these \$1,695 models to provide fuller, more natural tones and improved precision compared with previous models.

These are also the most comfortable models Grado has ever produced, so the flawless sound they produce can be enjoyed for hours on end. The company also makes a wooden holding case for an extra \$75. And its Reference RA1 Headphone Amp will ensure an absolutely outstanding listening experience, though listeners will be amazed how good these sound plugged into an iPod.

The PS1000s stand head-to-head with Sennheiser's HD800s. While Grado's phones deliver a bolder bass response on such recordings as Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, the quickness and precision of the HD800 on Miles Davis' *Bitches Brew* cannot be rivaled. For more-rockin' albums from groups such as the Stones or the Kinks, many prefer the raw sound provided by closed headphones such as Denon's AH-D7000s.

The best way to determine which model best suits your listening preferences is to listen for yourself; hearing the extraordinary sound reproduction capabilities of these three models will inspire anyone beyond belief. ●



Enjoy!
Purchasing your audio system
should be as rewarding
as listening to it...

We'll take the stress out of the purchase experience
and make the process a pleasure!

- ✓ In-home demo programs
- ✓ Money-back satisfaction guarantees
- ✓ Our "can't lose" longer-term upgrade policy
- ✓ "No-strings" system and equipment consultations
- ✓ System and room design services

*"Let's chat
about your
system goals."*

Exclusive U.S. Premier!

Now premiering at Auravis Systems,
Rega Research's spectacular...

ISIS
cd player →



PRODUCTS

Denon AH-D7000
MSRP: \$1,000

Sennheiser HD 800
MSRP: \$1,400

Grado Labs PS1000
MSRP: \$1,695

MANUFACTURERS

Denon Electronics (USA)

100 Corporate Drive
Mahwah, N.J. 07430-2041
www.denon.com

Sennheiser

Am Labor 1
Wennebostel
30900 Wedemark
Wennebostel
Germany
www.sennheiser.com

Grado Labs

4614 Seventh Ave.
Brooklyn, NY 11220
www.gradolabs.com

PERIPHERALS

Audio Sources: Apple iPod;
McIntosh Labs MCD500 SACD/
CD Player; Marantz SA8003
SACD/CD Player; Denon DCD-
CX3 SACD/CD Player; Peachtree
Audio Nova Integrated Amplifier;
Grado RA1 headphone amp

SACDs: Rolling Stones: *Big Hits: High Tide and Green Grass*;
Pink Floyd: *DSOM*; The Kinks:
Low Budget; John Coltrane:
Blue Train; Miles David: *Bitches Brew*;
Stravinsky: *Le Sacre du Printemps*,
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra



AURAVIS
SYSTEMS
801-558-1625
WWW.AURAVISSYSTEMS.COM

Paradigm Studio 60v5

By Mark Marcantonio

I have enjoyed Paradigm speakers for more than 20 years, ever since I helped my parents put together a system including their 3SE's. Those speakers are still going strong at their house, which underlines the value inherent in Paradigm products. Paradigm has grown considerably in that time, building on their core values of performance and service.

A good part of the value that Paradigm continues to offer stems from their building all of their own drivers in house, as well as conducting all R&D at their factory in Ontario, Canada. You can view a tour of their factory here: http://www.paradigm.com/en/paradigm/factory_tour/

The Studio 60 is a very svelte floorstanding speaker that is only about eight inches wide and 40 inches tall, and just under 12 inches deep. My review pair arrived in cherry but they are also available in rosenut, black ash or piano black, so these speakers should fit in any decor. They have a tasteful black grille in case you don't want to look at the drivers and a curved back, which adds to the aesthetic appeal and improves airflow inside the cabinet.

Under the grille is a four driver, 2-½ way speaker that uses a pair of 5½-inch woofers with Paradigm's mineral-filled polypropylene cones. The midrange driver uses another 5½-inch driver featuring a satin anodized aluminum cone with a gold anodized aluminum phase plug, which is also used in their Signature Series speakers. The Signature S1 was reviewed very favorably in TONEAudio last year, and even after a quick listen, you can hear the engineering legacy present in the Studio 60.

With a sensitivity of 92db, and a minimum power requirement of 15 watts per channel, the Studio 60's are as easy to blend into your system as they are into your decor. Having spent some time with the lower-priced Monitor 7's earlier this year, I was curious to see the differences in the further upscale Studio 60's. You start to get the picture as soon as you lift the Studio 60's out of the box; they weigh almost twice as much, and a quick knuckle rap test responds with a more solid sound. Quite a boost in performance for the \$1,998 price tag. *(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

B&W Music Club

Bowers & Wilkins

Setup

Though the Studio 60's revealed more music straight from the box than the 7's with which I was already familiar, the drivers definitely needed a little break-in time to settle down. Through the break-in period, I kept listening to Donald Fagen's *Kamikirand*, which is slightly tipped up to begin with. Two-hundred hours was the magic number, which calmed the slight edge on the tweeter and resulted in even better driver integration. At this point, the speakers went back into my main system with the SimAudio Moon i-7 integrated amplifier and i.5 CD player. Now we were getting somewhere!

The forward and rearward firing bass ports intrigued me, and it does require a little extra care to get the correct speaker-to-wall distance. Get them a little too far from the wall and there is a slight upper-bass suckout. Place the Monitor 60's too close to the wall and not only is there too much upper bass/lower mid bloom added to the mix, I could hear some port noise as well.

You'll know it when you hit the sweet spot.

In my room, the perfect position ended up with the rear of the cabinet 38 inches from the rear wall with no toe in. All listening rooms are different, but due to the resolution these speakers possess, I would suggest at least starting your initial listening sessions with no toe in. These speakers aren't terribly fussy about creating good sound, but the extra 15 minutes you spend getting them perfectly set up will be well worth your time and effort. *(continued)*

Listen to the Music

In my reference system, I was instantly struck by how well the Studio 60's did at placing vocals very specifically within the soundstage. Shuffling through a few of my standard reference discs from Adele, Bonnie Raitt and David Crosby, I was consistently impressed at the vocal purity of these speakers and how well they integrated the rest of the spectrum.

I was also impressed at how much the tweeter in this speaker has been upgraded, providing more overall smoothness without sacrificing resolution. If anything, the new tweeter in the Studio 60 is even more resolving. I owned an older version of the Studio 40's and when listening to Alison Krauss' "Sawing on The Strings" from her *Hundred Miles or More* CD, which is on the bright side to begin with, the presentation was always too forward for my liking. Playing this disc again on the Monitor 60's revealed a more relaxed response, with the bass tight and well-defined.

You'll be amazed at how well a pair of 5½-inch woofers can produce solid bass output. The Studio 60's go fairly deep. A quick run through of my test tone disc revealed solid output down to 40hz, tapering off quickly by the 31.5hz track. Depending on your room placement options, you can pick up some room gain with a more corner-oriented placement, with a slight sacrifice of mid-range clarity.

Once set up to your liking, the Studio 60's reveal tight, defined bass performance. The opening bass lines of Dire Straits "Ride Across The River" from *Brothers in Arms* has a lot of texture that is left behind on lesser speakers. Another track I often listen to for bass detail is the opening track of Norah Jones *Come Away With Me*, "Don't Know Why." I enjoyed the way the Monitor 60's kept a solid focus on the bass line while integrating it into the soundstage nicely. The bass present is solid and controlled, but you can only expect so much from a pair of 5½-inch drivers. If you have the room and need more oomph, one of the Paradigm-powered subwoofers would be a perfect match for this system. *(continued)*





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

The Studio 60's are very revealing on top, and I would suggest pairing them with an amplifier that is capable of doing them justice. They reveal enough detail to expose the shortcomings in a lesser amplifier yet remain easy to drive. I had no problems with tube or solid-state amplification. When listening to Adele's debut CD, *19*, through a mid-level Rotel receiver, I noticed a bit of upper-end harshness that was not present with my i-7. Personally, I enjoyed the Monitor 60's the most with the Vista Audio i34 amplifier that I've had in for review. It will depend on the quality of your sources and your software. A little bit of tube warmth went a long way in taming some budget CD players that I am in the process of reviewing.

In addition to the exceptional resolution and imaging that these speakers can deliver, they can also play incredibly loud thanks to their moderately high sensitivity. With the smaller SimAudio i.5 featuring 60 watts per channel, I was able to play my favorite Who records almost as loud as they could handle. But through the 150-watt per channel i-7, my ears gave out way before the speakers did. It's worth making a point of the overall quality of the Studio 60's: you will be able to upgrade your current system quite far before you feel that you've outgrown the speakers.

Wrapping Up

If you need compact, high-performance speakers in the \$2,000 range, the Paradigm Studio 60's should be at the top of your list. Even after a quick listen, it's easy to see why they are the choice of so many conscientious audiophiles. The new cabinets look stunning and the overall tonal balance is excellent.



Additional Listening: Jeff Dorgay

I spent a lot of time last year with the Paradigm Signature S-1's, and that was my first long-term experience with Paradigm since I bought a pair of original Atom's for my darkroom years ago.

Taking Mark's lead, I spent a little more time exploring the tube side of the equation and agree that it changes the tonal character considerably. My living room is the typical audiophile nightmare with a glass coffee table, leather furniture and almost bare hardwood floors. A budget solid-state amplifier was just too forward in that room, but my trusty Prima Luna ProLogue 1 was a perfect fit.

Out in the studio, with a fully treated room and much wider range of amplifiers at my disposal, I had the chance to experiment more. I had better results and achieved greater system synergy with the Rega Brio 3 integrated amplifier (60 watts per channel, solid state, \$695) and the Naim Unit (50 watts per channel).

I even gave the Studio 60's a brief spin with the Moscode 402au power amplifier with 200 watts per channel on tap, and I severely punished the speakers with more than a few cuts of Megadeth and Nine Inch Nails at high volume. The speakers performed exceptionally well and no harm came to them, even at high sound pressure levels, underscoring the robustness of the design. If you have a large amplifier and really want to rock out, these speakers will deliver the goods. The Paradigm Studio 60's offer a lot in a small footprint and have the heritage of a strong company behind them. Definitely a pleasant reunion! ●

The Paradigm Studio 60v.5

MSRP: \$1,998 per pair

MANUFACTURER

www.paradigm.com

Two McCormack DNA-750 Monoblocks are shown from a low angle, highlighting their sleek, metallic design. Each unit features a red LED indicator light, the model name 'DNA-750', the McCormack logo, and a power switch. The background is a soft, out-of-focus gradient.

The McCormack DNA-750 Monoblocks

\$9,500 per pair
www.conradjohnson.com

For those of you that didn't know, C-J purchased McCormack a few years ago and have been producing the entire line of McCormack gear at their factory in Virginia with the same attention to detail as the rest of their line. The first new McCormack amplifier in about five years, the DNA-750's look very modest, but pack a wallop that is unbeatable for under ten thousand dollars a pair. That 750 stands for 750 watts per channel and initial listening reveals that these are some amazing amplifiers for the price, offering bottomless power and more refinement than you might expect for the money.

The Hegel H100 Integrated Amplifier and CDP 2A CD Player

**\$3,000; Amplifier,
\$2,650; CD player
www.hegel.com**

Well known in Europe, the Norwegian company Hegel is now being distributed in the United States. From what we've heard from the H100 integrated and the CDP 2A CD player, this looks like the beginning of a great relationship between the two countries. The build quality is excellent, and the look elegantly understated.

The Naim HDX Music Server



\$8,750

www.naim-audio.com

Naim's HDX music server holds great promise in that it is the first music server we've seen that is built to audiophile grade quality. It has the ability to be used to play CD's as well as rip them to the internal hard drive, along with an SPDIF digital output to be used with an even higher quality DAC than the one inside. In typical Naim fashion, of course the power supply can be upgraded with the same PS555 that goes with their flagship CD555 CD player. As we just happen to have one of these on hand for reference, it will be an interesting comparison indeed.

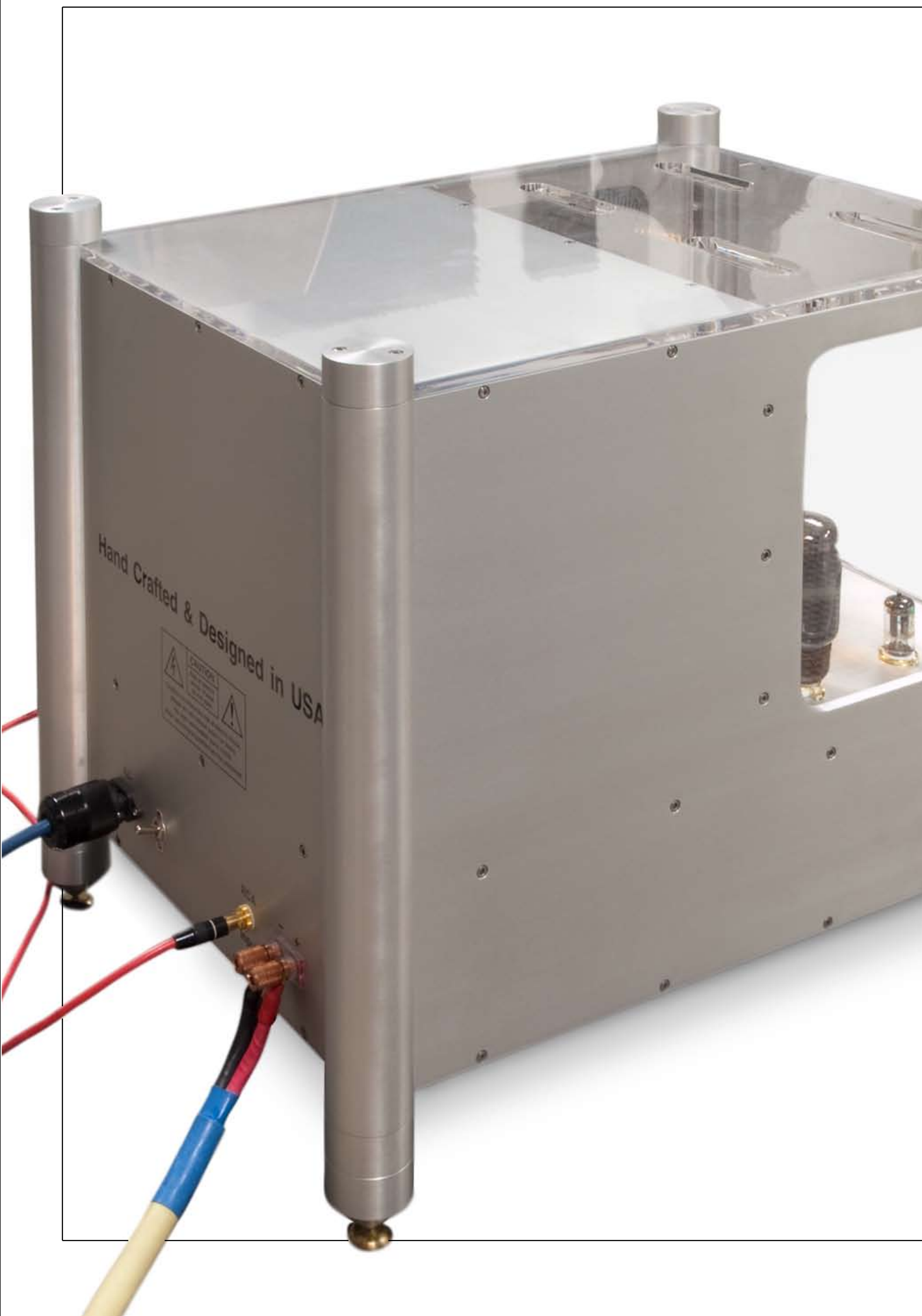
FIRST LOOK:

The Win Analog SET

By Jeff Dorgay

If you've been a HiFi enthusiast for any length of time, you've probably heard about SET (single ended triode) amplifiers, or better yet been taken in by their magic. With both halves of the output signal flowing through a single device, the midrange purity of these amplifiers is highly seductive.





The only drawback to the SET concept is that most of them are very low power, in the 1 – 10 watt per channel range. Unfortunately, the audio world has a limited number of super sensitive speakers to mate with these low powered amplifiers, so the SET lover is usually left with odd, single driver speakers that lack frequency extension at both ends of the spectrum.

Again, wonderful if you're just listening to chamber music or solo vocals, which is what you usually hear in a room where SET amplifiers are usually shown off. Whenever I have the pleasure of listening to a great SET amplifier, I always think, "now if I could only have about 100 watts per channel of *this* sound..." Because all the power goes through a single output device, it has to be a big tube and power supply voltages go up accordingly. There have been a few decent SET amplifiers in the 30-50 watt range, but if you truly want big power, one of the only choices has been the gigantic, two-chassis WAVAC models that will set you back \$350,000.

Fortunately, there are a new group of dedicated enthusiasts in San Jose, California at Win Analog that are stepping up to meet the challenge with a pair of 130 watt mono blocks that will only tip the scales at \$75,000 per pair. Granted, this is still a healthy sum to spend on an amplifier, but nowhere near as stratospheric as the WAVAC.

I had the chance to listen to these massively overbuilt monoblocks, weighing just over 200 pounds each, first at the Rocky Mountain Audio Fest and then again on a recent trip to the Win Analog facility.

Old School Meets New School

Win's designer Andy Ton is a disciple of the famous audio designer Sao Win, more well known for his analog work with the original strain gauge cartridge, used by Panasonic for CD-4 LP (quadrasonic sound) playback. *(continued)*



The amplifier is an all tube design, using NOS rectification, voltage regulation and of course the monstrous 833 power tube. Ton told me that the tube is actually capable of putting out almost 400 watts worth of power, but the plate voltage would have to be near 3000 volts! "By keeping the output to 130 watts per channel, voltages are easier to control and tube life is much longer." Massively overbuilt, with hand wound, silver output transformers; the WinAnalog monoblocks have a commanding presence in the listening room, with those gigantic power tubes glowing.

The Sound

As this was just a preview, I spent the day listening to the WinAnalog monoblocks with their matching, all tube preamplifier, a modded Sony CD player and a pair of one off speakers, built by the amplifier's designer. They had a well-treated sound room so I spent the better part of the day listening to a variety of music that I was very familiar with.

Of course the SET design is fabulous with solo vocals. I zipped through a couple of tracks on MoFi's latest release of Rickie Lee Jones' *Pirates*, Mae Moore's *Dragonfly* and of course Johnny Cash's "Delia's Gone." Even with unknown speakers, the textural abilities of the WinAnalog amplifier came right through. The only thing better an SET to achieve holographic vocals is a *really big SET*.

What really separates the WinAnalog amp from the rest though, is power. They will all do an admirable job playing female vocals at a modest level, but this amplifier will *rock*. The next selection was "The Light" from The Supreme Beings of Leisure's *11i*. While this disc is slightly crunchy, it is a heavily layered recording than on anything than the best system, can all just collapse into a big wall of sound. We were able to blast this track without peril and I came away very impressed again.

Playing to the strength of the SET, the next two discs were the excellent MoFi remasters of Frank Sinatra's *Nice and Easy*, and Beck's *Mellow Gold*, both of which were our choices for product of the year in the remaster category in 2008 and 2009. Though very different in content, both of these records have a huge front to back dimension to the recording and the WinAnalog amplifier did an outstanding job here. The tonal body and texture of this SET is tough to beat.

Closing the listening session up, with "Linus and Lucy" from Vince Guaraldi's *A Charlie Brown Christmas* on SACD confirmed the delicacy this amplifier possessed with acoustic instruments.

Full Review to Follow

Only so much can be determined by a brief listening session in an unfamiliar environment, but the WinAnalog amplifier looks extremely positive. These guys are definitely on the right track. If you are attending the CES show in January, stop by their room and have a listen. We look forward to a full review next year, where we can really put this amplifier through its paces. And if you were going to spend \$350k on a WAVAC, I highly suggest keeping your AmEx black card in your wallet until you hear these. You can contact them directly at www.winanalog.com ●



The Nagra LB

**A Mastering Recorder
That Fits in the Palm of Your Hand**

By Jeff Dorgay

One of the most exciting things I saw at the Nagra factory in Switzerland this summer (more about the factory visit later) was their newest digital recorder, the LB. While many of you know Nagra for their legendary portable analog tape recorders, their digital recorders are equally great. Their six-channel Nagra VI is sitting at every console at the Montreux Jazz festival, and US distributor John Quick always has great Nagra digital recordings in his room at the annual Consumer Electronics Show, played back on his Nagra VI. While a Nagra VI costs \$8,000, you can put your hands on a Nagra LB for \$3,000, which makes it the perfect two-channel companion to your system, whether you want to start an audiophile record label or just archive some vinyl.

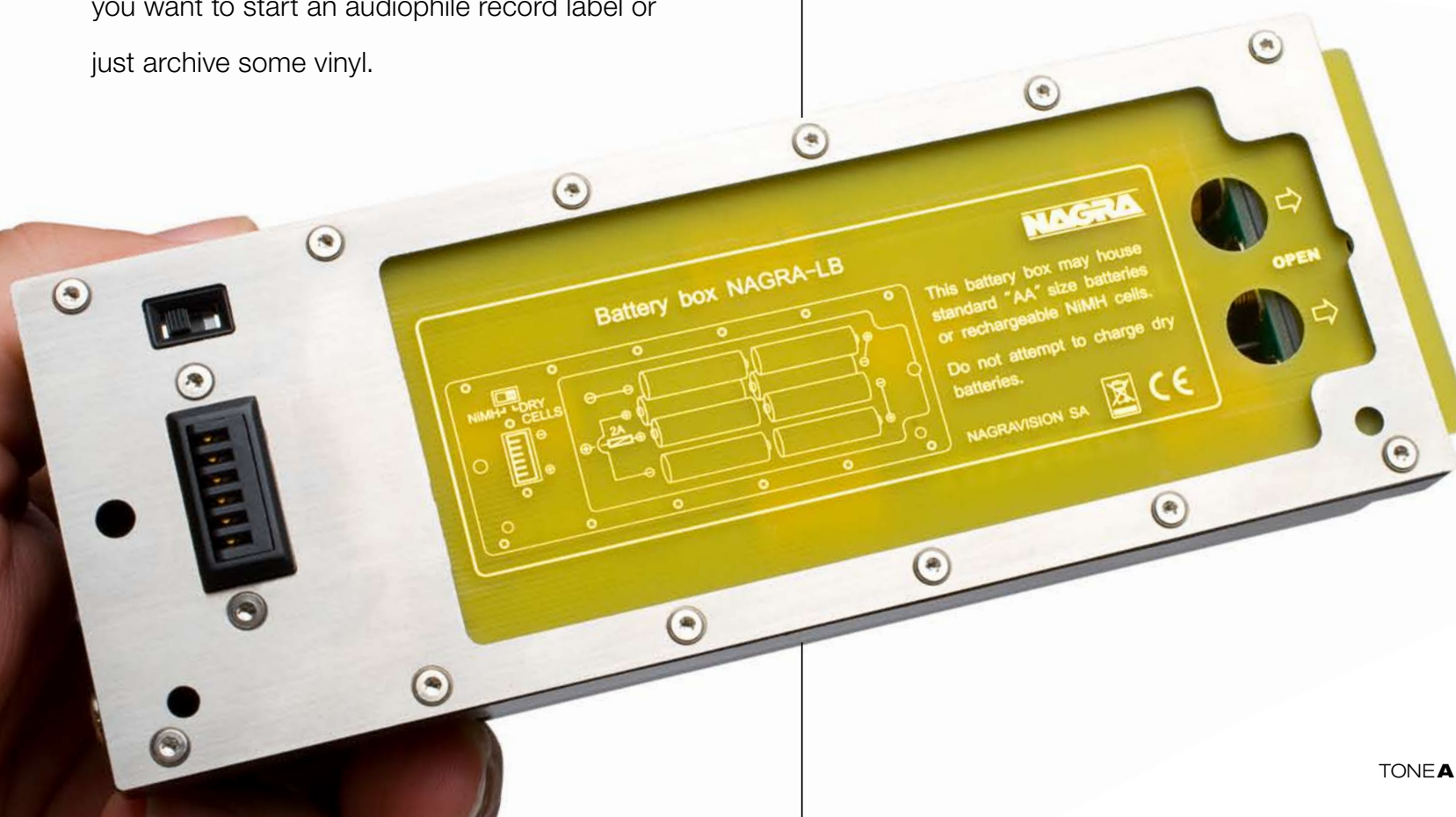
If you don't require a six-channel digital recorder but would still like studio-quality capture, the LB is the perfect solution. Weighing only 3.2 pounds, it can run from AC power or its on-board battery pack that consists of eight AA rechargeable batteries. Of course, you'll get the best sound from the batteries. Nagra claims a fully charged set of NiMH batteries (2500mAh rating) will last eight hours, but my experience has been more in the 6.5-to-7 hour range. No matter, because I've been using mine to archive vinyl so its capacity is still way more than I need.

Setup

As the LB is self-contained, the only thing required is a set of balanced XLR cables to go from the record output of your preamplifier to the input of the recorder. If your preamplifier only has RCA outputs, a pair of XLR to RCA adapters can be easily obtained. For those who don't want to bother shopping around, you can purchase the Cardas adapters here:

<http://www.musicdirect.com/product/73267>

My system is completely balanced, though I did try both configurations. Thanks to the LB being battery-powered and off the grid, I had no noise or hum problems even when using the RCA adapters. Setup is straightforward, although this is one piece of audio gear for which I would suggest keeping the manual nearby until you become comfortable with all the available menus and options. *(continued)*



m y s t è r e

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

— Marc Phillips, **TONEAudio** 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

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

The LB has 2 GB of internal storage, which is enough to record both sides of an album at the LB's highest resolution, 24bit/192khz. You easily download the data to your computer for editing via the onboard USB or Ethernet connections, but I preferred using one of the same 4GB Lexar high-speed CF (compact flash) cards that I use in the photo studio. This is an elegant solution because you can record to the CF card, pop it out and take it to your editing workstation. Don't forget to perform a quick backup before you start! For those of you actually using the LB to record live events that need extra recording capability, there is a "hot swap" function that allows a 30-second overlap between the CF card and internal memory. This will avert a disaster if the session goes too long, giving you that extra 2 GB as your ace in the hole.

Let's record some tracks!

It takes a minute or two to pick your mode of recording from 16 bit/44khz up to 24 bit/192khz. You can find plenty of arguments about whether to record at the 24/96 or the 24/192 setting, but I tend to agree with Ken Christiansen of Pro Musica in Chicago (the gentleman behind most of the recent recordings on the Naim Label), who prefers 24/96 as the ultimate combination of dynamics and tonality.

With all cables in place, I suggest formatting your memory card before a recording session to eliminate any memory fragmentation, which is critical when recording at high resolutions. It's a good practice I've carried over from digitally capturing high-resolution photographs, and it has saved me from ever dealing with corrupted data.
(continued)

The LB acts like a reel-to-reel or cassette deck at this point. Place it in pause mode, set maximum levels and go. The onboard headphone amplifier is excellent for monitoring your recordings should you not want to listen through your HiFi system during the process.

Thanks to an on-board editor, you can use the large LCD display to break up your tracks, etc. etc., but I found it easier to download the file to my computer and edit in Audacity. You can download it at no charge, and it is more than powerful enough to break up and trim tracks for this application.

Stunning Sound Quality

Convenience aside, the best part of the LB is the sound quality. Back in the reel-to-reel days, there was always a fairly noticeable difference in sound quality (or at least noise level when not recording at 15 i.p.s.) when recording to tape. Recordings made with the Nagra LB at the 24/96 setting are within a whisper of the analog originals that I copied.

While playback through the digital output of the LB through my Wadia 781SE was superb, battery-powered playback from the LB's analog outputs was very satisfying. The big difference between the two in my system was that of ultimate weight and dynamics. While the Wadia had more to offer on the playback side, it did reveal how much information the LB is capable of capturing. *(continued)*



RedEye, the **personal** remote.

The RedEye system allows the iPhone and iPod touch to control nearly any TV, stereo, cable box, DVD player, and many other devices that receive standard infrared signals.

Personal.

- Each iPhone or iPod touch acts as a controller
- More than one controller can simultaneously interact with existing home entertainment gear

Simple.

- One touch launches any activity—watch TV, listen to music, play a video
- Custom screen layouts for each activity means no hunting for the right button

Smart.

- Multi-touch gestures for common functions
- Free software upgrades delivered via iTunes
- Control different rooms from anywhere in the house



Wi-Fi to Infrared

Communication from iPhone or iPod touch to RedEye device via Wi-Fi, and RedEye device to entertainment gear via infrared



A hardware device and a free App available on iTunes turn the iPhone and iPod touch into a remote control

redeyeremote.com

My archiving setup utilized the Nagra VPS phono preamplifier on a Nagra VFS anti-vibration platform, along with the Spiral Groove SG-2 turntable and Triplanar VII with Lyra Skala phono cartridge. There was enough of a difference, again in dynamics and high end smoothness, between battery and AC operation that I wouldn't use the LB when powered from the wall unless absolutely necessary.

The LB's high resolution also made it easy to hear the difference between different turntable/cartridge configurations. As a reference tool, the LB is fantastic and will allow me the freedom of archiving samples from every turntable and cartridge combination we review from now on. Even at the highest level of nuance, it was easy to tell the difference between a set of \$5,000 cartridges all mounted on the same turntable. It's also a great way to archive the "perfect" setup of a table/arm/cartridge configuration so that when returning to it after a while, a side-by-side comparison can be made. I can't imagine writing another analog review without the Nagra LB as a reference tool.

A Solid Case for the LB

One might question the initial purchase of a \$3,000 digital recorder used solely for the purpose of archiving analog recordings. But when you start tallying the cost of audiophile pressings in the \$30 - \$100 range, with rare original recordings costing considerably more, and consider your cartridge as an expensive consumable item, I believe those with a substantial investment in recordings and phono cartridges will quickly see the cost benefit of the LB. The less wear and tear you put on your Goldfinger, the less often you need to buy a replacement.
(continued)

Another clear advantage of the LB is that of convenience. If you have a large collection of the recent crop of 45 rpm remasters, flipping the album from side to side can get tiring, especially if you aren't sitting down to do critical listening.

Those with music servers will wonder how you ever did without an LB. The files are easy enough to break into tracks; it's now easy to import some of my favorite vinyl into my Sooloos and Naim music servers. It's a nice feature to vary the recording resolution according to the program source. Standard 16 bit/44khz sampling works fine for *KISS Alive!*, and your choice of 24 bit/96khz will capture every bit of your favorite audiophile recordings. This also helps to maximize space on the server, which comes in handy with a large collection.

A Fantastic Addition to Your System

Since the late '70s, I've always had at least one tape deck in my system and enjoyed making compilations as well as archiving my favorite vinyl to keep wear to a minimum. In the 21st century, the Nagra LB does a great job at taking its place. It is easy to use and the Nagra logo on the front is good enough for me. Best of all, there are no moving parts to wear out or tape heads to keep aligned. High-resolution recording couldn't be easier.

Who knows, between the Nagra LB and my Manley Massive Passive studio EQ, I might just buy a couple of good mikes and ...

The Nagra LB recorder
MSRP: \$3,000

MANUFACTURER
www.nagra.com

NAGRA USA
Gallatin, TN
615- 451-4168

John Quick
US Sales and Marketing Manager
Tempo Sales & Marketing
617-314-9296



A Visit to Nagra

Nagra's main office is about 45 minutes from the train station in Geneva, with their factory another five minutes away. The first thing you notice when deplaning in the Geneva airport is the giant ads for watchmakers, each one more beautiful than the next. The minute you step through the door at Nagra's factory you recognize the same high level of technical excellence and precision around every corner.





We started our tour in the engineering department where we saw various phases of product development, with digital and analog products from the pro-audio and HiFi divisions being made together. Nagra's diverse background in pro sound and military electronics give a level of sophistication that few strictly HiFi-based companies can offer. Not only does this give Nagra a wider range of capabilities, it also insulates them somewhat from the effects of the current volatile market in consumer audio.

With the same engineering talent applied to products such as the Nagra 6 pro recorder (which took two years to go from initial concept to finished product) and the VPS phono stage all under one roof, the level of passion in the engineering department is easy to see.

The designer of the Nagra 6 boards showed us some of his process for building the circuit board and the levels of complexity involved in component placement. "It is very much like laying out a small city, deciding the optimum placement for everything. With some circuit traces as small as 100 microns, we have to take great care to minimize noise and maximize bandwidth." The same care went into the production of the LB digital recorder, which has become one of my prized possessions. *(continued)*





At the next workstation, we saw Nagra's latest creation, a 60-watt-per-channel solid-state amplifier that had debuted at CES this January. It was plugged into a massive test bench with every possible parameter being measured. Upside down in the same room was a working prototype of a new vacuum-tube power amplifier featuring 300B tubes.

The most important part of a Nagra

The Nagra factory could just as easily be mistaken for a watch-making facility or a Formula 1 garage. It is a marvel of Swiss precision, with every workstation featuring state of the art instrumentation (some of it built by Nagra), but high-tech instruments are not the whole story. What makes Nagra products so special is the care and expertise of their workforce, many who have been with the company 20 years or more. There is a high level of pride and dedication at Nagra. The stable workforce contributes to the quality of the end result. Highly experienced workers assemble the products with great care and every assembly is checked and rechecked to ensure that it meets the standards set by the engineer.



Nagra products have always been compact because of their background in high-performance location recording. When you are carrying a recorder to a remote location, every gram that can be saved in construction will pay dividends in the recording engineer's back muscles. Keeping everything compact also shortens signal paths and lowers noise, which is a benefit to pro and consumer audio alike.

Back in the days of the legendary open-reel recorders, Nagra made every bit of their products in house, right down to the nuts, bolts and screws. The screws are no longer made in house and a few minor bits of casework are jobbed out, but everything else is still made in the Nagra factory. Our tour guide Matthieu Latour (sales and marketing manager for Nagra HiFi Products) explained while showing us a faceplate for the PL-L preamplifier, "Our front panels use a process for the lettering and coating the aluminum that we invented over 20 years ago. When that is completed, we must remove the coating from the rear face of the panel to retain its conductivity, and this requires a level of care that we can not send to a subcontractor."

Upon leaving the machine shop, we met a new apprentice at Nagra who was recently hired. Latour emphasized to us that in Switzerland, these trades are viewed with great respect and the craftsmen at Nagra are as important to the final product as the engineering staff.

All of the input and output transformers are wound in-house and we saw a demonstration of the exacting process that goes into making the output transformers for the VPA vacuum-tube power amplifiers. Just as I was thinking about the ladies at McIntosh who still wind all of the transformers, Latour said, "We are much like McIntosh in this respect, winding our own transformers. It is the only way to ensure consistent quality."

We Meet the Wizard

After the factory tour, we were introduced to Jean-Claude Schlup, who oversees all product design at Nagra. Mr. Schlup gave us a tour of his research and design facility, which includes a full suite of instruments for UL and CE certification. He even had a gigantic RF antenna so they can bathe their products in radio waves to make sure things are adequately shielded.



"We are much like McIntosh in this respect, winding our own transformers. It is the only way to ensure consistent quality."



We were shown some of Nagra's pivotal products ranging from their first recorder to some defense projects and, finally, current Nagra gear. Interestingly, Schlup's lab is behind a foot-thick steel door with a big rubber gasket (actually in the basement of the building, a bomb shelter!).

After getting Schlup's perspective on Nagra, we were taken into his fairly large listening room where a full complement of Nagra audio gear was warmed up and ready to play. We listened to the PL-L and PL-P preamplifiers through the VPA tube monoblocks and a pair of speakers that Schlup designed himself. It was interesting to hear the reference system where Nagra products begin, and Schlup had a wide range of music on hand by which to evaluate things. We started out slow with some jazz and a little Elvis. But showing his wry sense of humor, he ended the listening session with "Smoke On the Water" from Deep Purple.

By the end of our visit with Mr. Schlup, he had asked us as many questions as we had asked him. While explaining his thought process for the PMA and PSA solid-state amplifiers (the pyramids), he told us that the pyramid shape was not just for cooling. It was also so that no one could stack anything else on top of them!

Off to Listen to More Music

Our next stop after Mr. Schlup was an outstanding lunch in the Nagra factory cafeteria. Well-fed workers are happy workers, and perhaps even that contributes to the care in assembly of Nagra products.

Before returning to Montreux, we were able to spend about two hours in Nagra's big listening room, this time with a pair of PMA amplifiers driving the Verity Audio Lohengrin II speakers. The very efficient (95db/1watt) Verity speakers had some major authority, and even though the room was still awaiting some room treatments, they sounded excellent. The Nagra folk left us to our own devices and were gracious hosts, even when we played "Thriller" at Studio 54 levels. On the way back to our hotel, Latour commented, "We wondered who was playing Michael Jackson so loud."

As someone who has always been a big fan of Nagra components, and has owned a few over the years, my journey to the factory completed the picture and underscored the level of care and attention to detail that goes into every one of them. ●





Major Muscle:

The McIntosh MC1.2KW

By Jeff Dorgay



McIntosh made a big splash a few years ago with its six-box, 2,000-watt MC2KW power amplifiers. They are very cool, play incredibly loud (if you have enough juice in your power line to let them wind out all the way) and command an impressive presence. Many lovers of the McIntosh brand see them as the Holy Grail. For those who don't have the space or the budget but still dig those gigantic level meters, there's a more reasonable alternative: the MC1.2KW.

If your hairs don't stand up, it's all for nothing. Transmission of encoded energy is key and deliverance rides on pure timing and h... The Essence nails both. While more 'modern' leaner designs focus on greater apparent detail retrieval, Zu sh... on rhyth... coherence and mass.” — Srajan Ebaen 6moons

The Zu Essence is not a hair-shirt product, in which... at least half the high-efficiency loudspeakers in the o... is it's among the more affordable choices—expor... surpassed many of the rest. The Essence is something... good bass extension, superb musicality, lack o... and impressive spatial performance, the Zu Essence... 've heard that combines genuinely high efficien... performance for which no excuse needs to be m... he Essence—and, yes, I could happily live wi... — Art Dudley Stereophile October 2009

True tone, real bass, and explosive dynamics for “HD” music reproduction on reasonable budgets

Our new critically acclaimed Essence loudspeaker, formerly starting at \$5,000 per pair in retail stores now starts at \$3,495 per pair—its new price direct from Zu!

Essence is as useful for uncompromised home theater systems as for audiophile stereo. It delivers inimitable intimacy for solo voice or violin, with the convincing emotion only possible with our full-range driver's extraordinary tone density, while jumping to life for jazz, rock, blues, country, folk... and the challenging power of a full symphony orchestra. And Essence will do all of this with everything from vintage 70s receivers to flea-power triode exotica, to the latest solid state amplification. Its amp-friendly impedance, crossoverless design, and high power efficiency makes any amplifier sound good.

Essence is complete in form and quality of sound. Order your pair of Essence today, with full no-questions-asked 60 days return privileges. Pull the music you really listen to from the depths of your CD, LP, or download music collection, and let the Essence work its magic. If you love music in your own home, alive with all the passion the artist originally recorded, get Essence today...

800-516-8925

www.ZuAudio.com



More manageable thanks to their monoblock design, the MC1.2KW's tip the scale at *only* 147 pounds each. They're still not budget components, but the \$22k price tag will leave you with enough money left over from not buying the \$70,000 MC2KW's to assemble a formidable system. Consider the 1.2KW's the “thinking man's gigantic monoblocks.”

The MC1.2KW's have a face-plate that is about the same size as the meter module on the MC2KW's, but these amps are still attention getters. They will be the center of attention in your music system, no doubt. A direct descendent of the MC1201's, the MC1.2KW's have some significant electrical as well as cosmetic upgrades. According to Ron Cornelius, McIntosh product manager, the MC1.2KW “Actually puts out closer to 1,600 watts per channel on a test bench, so you have to be careful with this much power on tap!”

And those meters. While there are many audiophiles that love “deep-listening” sessions, I really like the gigantic meters on the front of the MC1.2KW's and feel that they are a big part of their charm. In low light, their blue glow floods the listening room like a couple of gigantic lava lamps. If you must, you can turn them off. But why?

Setup

Unless you are a super hero, I suggest getting at least one person to help you unpack the MC1.2KW's, and be certain that your equipment rack can support at least 150 pounds per shelf. Thanks to the large lip on the back, they are surprisingly easy to move around. I wish more manufacturers would provide rear panel handles on amplifiers this heavy. *(continued)*

These big beasts need a lot of juice to do their thing... if you really want the full 1,200-watt-per-channel experience, you'll need a pair of 15-amp dedicated lines.



While not the latest word in aesthetics, I found that a pair of Home Depot piano dollies come in handy when I was comparing the MC1.2KW's to my reference amplifiers, as well as the other gigantic amplifiers we had in for review this issue. They've since taken up permanent residence on a pair of Finite Elemente amplifier platforms and look very stylish... Personally, I think these amplifiers deserve to be displayed proudly instead of tucked away in a rack somewhere.

Your next concern will be power. These big beasts need a lot of juice to do their thing. You can run a pair on a 15-amp line, but they won't reach full power. A dedicated 20-amp line is better, but if you really want the full 1,200-watt-per-channel experience, you'll need a pair of 15-amp dedicated lines, as McIntosh tech-support head Chuck Hinton recommends: "Each amp needs its own 15-amp line for maximum performance." While McIntosh lists the maximum current draw at 13 amps, no point in scrimping if you're getting dedicated power lines run. I say go for 20 amp lines and make sure to have it done by a qualified electrician.

During more discussion with Ron Cornelius, he again stressed having a pro take care of the wiring and also to make sure that the wiring is in tip-top shape. "While you've got that electrician out there, have him double-check your grounding and tighten up all the connections at the breaker box and your outlets. It's the nature of solid-core copper wire to wiggle loose with time. If you don't have solid power going to your system, your line level components will suffer as well."

To confirm this, I tried the MC1.2KW's together on a 15-amp line, then a 20 and finally, giving each their own dedicated 20A line. When hooked up to the single 15-amp line, I blew the circuit breaker repeatedly when rocking out. With one 20 amp line, I was not wearing a path in the floor to the breaker box, but the two dedicated lines was really the way to roll. No question, power is your friend. *(continued)*

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.

TONEAudio
Magazine
2008


Product of the Year
Award

The rest is easy. MC1.2KW's have balanced XLR inputs on the back panel along with RCA inputs and a 12-volt trigger, so it should fit into any system handily. Due to the use of the legendary McIntosh Autotransformers in the output stage, there are 2-ohm, 4-ohm and 8-ohm taps to connect your speakers. So while I would suggest starting with the nominal impedance on your speaker's spec sheet, a little experimenting will yield the best results.

However, I must add that these multiple taps are not my only minor complaint with the MC1.2KW. I do not like the binding posts used in any of the solid-state McIntosh amplifiers. The opening is too small to use any major audiophile speaker cables with spade lugs easily, and I have to believe anyone dropping \$22k on a pair of power amplifiers is going to buy good cable to go with. The three sets of terminals are way too close together for anyone but ET to make use of them handily. And while you're retrofitting the chassis, I'd love to see the IEC socket moved to the rear panel to make it easier to use a big, beefy power cord. Other than that, the amp is perfect!

The Sound

The MC1.2KW's grabbed me immediately. After giving the amplifiers a few hours to warm up with nondescript background music, I dropped Joe Harley's recording of Sam McClain's, *Give it up to Love* on the turntable and played "Too Proud." This record was recorded live to two-track analog tape and has a massive soundstage. When you crank this one up and dim the lights, it sounds like mighty Sam is right there in your listening room (singing in front of a pair of gigantic McIntosh amplifiers in this case...). *(continued)*



With this kind of dynamic range at your disposal, big power is essential to get that live feel and the Mac's never disappointed me whether I was listening to a fully symphony orchestra or Rammstein. You don't realize just how wimpy your 100-watt per channel amplifier is until you have 1,200 per channel at your disposal. Trust me, you won't want to go back.

Friends listening to my system with the MC1.2KW's almost always made the same comment: "Wow, I can't believe how often those meters jump up around 300-600 watts and we're not listening that loud." All the arguments about "tube watts" vs. "transistor watts" vs. "whatever other watts you got" go away, and quickly. It's big power vs. little power, baby, and if there was ever an argument for size mattering, the MC 1.2's settle the score handily.

People often forget that the need for power goes up exponentially as sound-pressure level doubles; so that 100-watt-per-channel amp sounds great when you are listening in the one-to-10 watt range because you still have 100 watts or so in reserve. But when you get fast and furious with the volume control, compression sets in quickly and, if you're not careful, clipping. Still, you do have to proceed with care when really rocking out because even though it's tougher to burn out a tweeter with all that clean power, you can run the risk of toasting a crossover when you are pushing the MC1.2KW's near their limits. And that's when bad things happen to good people.

Power and Control

Next up, some Prince from the *Diamonds and Pearls* album. The beginning of the track, "Insatiable," features deep synth bass that has some grunt but usually comes across loose and sloppy. The extra power and control of the MC1.2KW's grabs that note, holds the sustain and then stops cleanly. I usually need the help of the JL Audio Gotham in my system to achieve that experience. *(continued)*

The other aspect of a high-powered amplifier that becomes instantly apparent is the ability to play complex music at relatively high volume levels without the soundstage collapsing. Try this with your favorite piece of densely packed music, whether it is a full symphony or driving rock. This is where you really hear the difference between 100 watts per channel and 1,200. Though both play fairly loud, when you start to crank the 100-watt amp, everything gets muddy and you lose focus. If you become the happy owner of a pair of MC1.2KW's, this will be a thing of the past and you might even discover that some of those discs that you thought were compressed just had their peaks rounded off.

During the course of the review, I had the opportunity to use the MC1.2KW's with about a dozen different loudspeakers, from the Martin-Logan CLX electrostatics to the YG Acoustics Anat II Studios, both of which have low impedance dips and can be problematic to drive. But nothing in my speaker arsenal requires more power than my Magnepan 1.6's, now updated with new crossovers from the Skiing Ninja.

Should you be a Magnepan owner looking for the Holy Grail, nothing lights up a pair of Maggies like the MC1.2KW's. Where the 1.6's had always felt somewhat bass shy in my 16 x 24 foot room, with the Mac amps they sounded like I had added a subwoofer to the system. The dynamics were amazing and again, all who listened were surprised how easy it was to use up 1,000 watts per channel. It's worth mentioning that no matter how hard I pushed these amplifiers, even when driving the Magnepan *very loud*, the MC1.2KW's never got more than slightly warm to the touch.

Having just spent time with the MC252 amplifier that we reviewed very favorably, I must comment that the MC1.2KW's are in a completely different league. The MC252 is an excellent amplifier and a great value, but it does not have the delicacy and clarity that the MC1.2KW has.



No matter what the listening level, these are some pretty special amplifiers with just the slightest bit of warmth and body to the overall presentation. I doubt that anyone will ever refer to these amplifiers as "sterile solid-state."

Big Power, Big Meters, Big Fun

At \$22,000 a pair, this is not an idle purchase, even for the well-heeled. But if you want a pair of amplifiers that will never run out of juice or require you to buy a futures contract on output tubes, the MC1.2KW could be your version of the Holy Grail. So dim the lights, put your favorite disc on and let em' rip. ●

No matter what the listening level, these are some pretty special amplifiers with just the slightest bit of warmth and body to the overall presentation.



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, the HZ Crown Jewel, for ultimate performance. Stop by your Running Springs Audio dealer and audition the future of power line conditioning.



CLEANPOWERPURESOUND

Power Line Conditioners Hand Made in California . Tel: 714.765.8246 . www.runningsspringsaudio.com



"...my new reference in AC conditioners."

– Robert Harley,
The Absolute Sound,
Issue 193



Product of the Year
Award

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

– Jeff Dorgay,
TONEAudio
Magazine,
Issue 18



running springs audio

The McIntosh MC1.2KW
monoblock amplifiers
MSRP: \$22,000/pr.

MANUFACTURER

McIntosh Laboratories

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

PERIPHERALS

Digital Sources Naim
CD555, Wadia 781i, Sooloos
Music Server, McIntosh
MCD 500

Analog Sources Spiral
Groove SG-2 w/ Triplanar
VIII and Lyra Skala cartridge,
TW-Acoustic Raven Two with
SME IV.Vi (Clearaudio DaVinci)
and SME 309 (Soundsmith
"the voice"), Rega P9 w/
RB1000 and Dynavector
XV-1s cartridge

Phono Preamplifier Nagra
VPS with VFS base and Red
Wine Audio Black Lightning
Power supply, Naim Superline
with HiCap 2 power supply.

Preamplifier Burmester 011

Speakers MartinLogan CLX
w/JL Audio F110 subwoofers,
Gamut S-7's, YG Acoustics
Anat II Studio, Harbeth
Monitor 40.1, Magnepan 1.6.

Cable Shunyata Aurora
interconnects, Shunyata
Stratos SP speaker cable

Power Running Springs
Dmitri, Jaco (2) and Maxim
power conditioners with RSA
Mongoose and HZ power
cords

Monsters of Rock:

The Simaudio Moon W-7M Monoblocks

By Jeff Dorgay

W-7M POWER AMPLIFIER



M O O N



We have always had excellent results with Simaudio's Moon components, and we've been using their I-7 integrated as a reference component for quite some time. I'm always on the lookout for fantastic solid-state sound, and the W-7M's fall into that very rare category of amplifier that possess the delicacy and tonal purity of the finest tube gear, with none of the drawbacks.

The W-7M's weigh 87 pounds each and you can see why the minute you pop the top. There is a pair of .5KW power transformers in each amplifier with 240,000 microfarads worth of capacitance for the power supply and 24 output transistors per channel. Overbuilt is an understatement with these amplifiers. The Simaudio website says that the "W-7M will drive virtually any loudspeaker to its maximum capabilities with incredible ease." As I was screwing the top plate back on, I felt pretty confident about this.

The W-7M's retail for \$24,000 per pair and are available in standard silver, as were our review samples, or a combination black and silver front panel. Custom options are available. Rated power for these amplifiers is 500 watts per channel at 8 ohms, doubling to 1000 watts at 4 ohms. No measurement is listed for 2 ohms.



All of Simaudio's components are built in Quebec, Canada. "We're a vertically integrated company," said Marketing VP, Lionel Goodfield. "Though we purchase some raw materials worldwide, we build everything here in Canada." Goodfield was quick to point out that Simaudio is one of the few manufacturers in North America that owns a five-axis CNC milling machine to produce their own chassis and faceplates. If you've seen a piece of their gear up front, you know what I'm talking about. We are looking forward to a factory visit in early 2010 for a full report.

Setup

The only parameter to keep in mind with the W-7M's is that your rack's shelves will support an 80-pound amplifier. With this kind of power at your command, I would even suggest a dedicated 20 amp line if it's at your disposal, as I would with any high-powered amplifier.

The W-7M's have two pairs of speaker-output terminals, which use premium WBT's that are easy to twist. They were no problem at all with my Shunyata Stratos SP speaker cables, which feature some relatively large spade lugs. You can connect to the W-7M via the RCA input or the XLR input. As this amplifier is fully balanced, I'd suggest going the balanced route if your preamplifier is so equipped.

Thanks to a bi-directional RS-232 port and a 12-volt trigger port, you can make the W-7M's a part of a fully automated home audio/theater system. I had no problems patching it into my stack of McIntosh and Burmester components, so it will work just fine if you do not have an all-Simaudio system.

Both the instruction manual and marketing manager Goodfield will tell you that the W-7M's need to be left on for a couple of days before they reach their full potential. (*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.

My review samples already had some burn-in time. If you have just purchased a fresh pair, expect a 300-500 hour break-in before their true tonality is expressed. Fortunately, these amplifiers draw only 40 watts each when idling, so the power drain is not very high.

The W-7M's sounded excellent right out of the shipping cartons, but true to form, they opened up significantly by the second day. The main power switch is tough to get to on the back panel, buried underneath the speaker terminals next to the 15 amp IEC socket, but this switch is intended to be left on at all times. You can easily switch the amplifier between standby and operate from the front panel.

The Sound

These amplifiers definitely live up to the marketing verbiage. Even with the power-hungry Magnepans, these amplifiers never came close to running out of juice. Thanks to the dual-chassis, dual-power-supply design, the W-7M's redefine soundstage width. As I happened to have a number of other high-powered amplifiers at my disposal for comparison, the W-7M's were definitely the champion in this department. Listening to "Just Chillin'" from the Crash Test Dummies' *Give Yourself a Hand*, the W-7M's soundstage felt like it extended about six feet beyond the walls.

This was a surreal experience and honestly quite addictive. At this point, I was using the Martin-Logan CLX's and I was hearing things *behind* me, which only happens with the most resolving electronics. *(continued)*

conrad-johnson It just sounds right.

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

I had the same experience with “What’s He Building?” from Tom Waits’ *Mule Variation*, with the percussive sound effects floating all over the room. And when I spun “The Bunny” from Michell Froom’s *Dopamine*, it was definitely a psychedelic experience. Which led me to an Electric Prunes superset, but I digress.

Unlike some class-A solid-state amplifiers that can fool you at times into thinking there might be some glass bottles under the hood, the W-7M’s do not embellish the presentation. As with my favorite solid-state amplifiers (C-J Premier 350, Burmester 911 MK3 and the darT-Zeel CTH-8550) the W-7M’s achieve the task of sounding like neither tubes nor transistors, and this is the highest compliment I can pay them.

You can get carried away with the natural tonality of these amplifiers, and the level of fine detail that these amplifiers resolve will keep you in the listening chair for hours on end without fatigue. That level of detail and the long natural decay of acoustic instruments is what can fool you from around the corner into believing you aren’t listening to recorded music at all.

During the course of the review, I listened to all of the new Blue Note remasters from Music Matters and Acoustic Sounds a few times over on vinyl, CD and SACD. While I couldn’t compare these records to the actual performers for obvious reasons, I did spend a fair amount of time with live acoustic music during the review period. I always came away impressed with what I heard through the W-7M’s in terms of tonal correctness.

Power, Power, Power, Yeah!

There’s just nothing like a pair of gigantic power amplifiers, and once you hear a pair of full-range speakers driven effortlessly, I guarantee that you’ll be hooked. Like any other HiFi component, every amplifier has its own sound and its own strengths. When comparing the W-7M’s with the big McIntosh MC1.2KW’s, I found that even though the McIntosh amps had more power, the Moon amps had more contrast and snappier transient response. Think of the McIntosh amps as a Z06 Corvette and the W-7M’s as an Audi R8. They both have more performance than you can handle, but the Audi is a little snappier off the line and around the corners. *(continued)*



That extra transient snap will be apparent, no matter what kind of music you enjoy, but I suspect that this will be appreciated most by classical-music lovers that prefer large-scale orchestral pieces. Mahler, Shostakovich and Bax never sounded bigger, and this too was a ton of fun. Many audiophiles predisposed towards small amplifiers lose sight of the importance of dynamics as a major component of accurate sound reproduction. You just can't get it without a power amplifier like the W-7M that has huge reserves.

These three were primarily what I listened to during the audition period because it really played to the strength of the amplifiers. One of my biggest complaints with well-recorded classical music is that when you turn it up far enough to experience the quiet bits along with the crescendos, the amplifier runs out of power. This power always makes itself known most clearly when listening to complex music with huge dynamic swings. Whether you are listening to the alarm clocks in *Dark Side of the Moon* or the cannon shots at the end of

the *1812 Overture* (or the cannon shots in AC/CD's *For Those About to Rock...*), the W-7M's never lost the ability to hang onto the most faint details in the music while being pushed to its limit dynamically. That's what gives you the extra feeling of realism.

I was unable to find the limits of the W-7M's in terms of getting them to clip or compress. I even knocked a few small chunks off my ceiling down as I tried! The comment about "driving any speaker" is true.

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



SPIRAL GROOVE



The GamuT S-7's and Verity Audio Sarastro II's are both fairly efficient and easy to drive as well as my Harbeth Monitor 40.1's, but the Martin Logan CLX, Magnepan 1.6 and the YG Acoustics Anat II's are no picnic to drive. They all have fairly low impedance and have proven moderately to very torturous to other amplifiers lacking adequate current drive. The W-7M's glided through with ease, no matter what music or volume level I chose, and it did so without getting terribly warm.

Consistent In Its Resolve

One of the things that impressed me most about the W-7M's was that while possessing a neutral character, the amplifiers' character came shining through no matter what speakers I paired them with. The amplifiers possessed a stunning level of resolution, yet I always heard the essence of whatever speaker I was hearing. This is definitely a pair of amplifiers around which you can build a very high-end system. And should your taste in speakers change in a few years, you won't be shopping for amplifiers as well.

If you must have a smidge of tube warmth, these are not the amplifiers for you, although perhaps you could add a tube preamplifier to the mix. But once you spend a little time with solid-state at this level, you just might lose some of that romantic feeling towards tubes. I know I have. Remember, once you get a few hundred hours of listening under your belt, you never have to turn the W-7M's off and you never have to hunt for power tubes again. Walk the five blocks to get your latte every day to balance out your carbon footprint if you feel that guilty about using 40 watts of power all day long. It's a small sacrifice to make!

Award Winning Performance

In Issue 25, we awarded the Simaudio W-7M's our Product of the Year award in the amplifier category. While \$24,000 is a lot of money to spend on a pair of power amplifiers, you could easily spend a lot more and not get the combination of sound and build quality that Simaudio offers. Most importantly, this is a product built by a company with a 30-year history of manufacturing with a solid worldwide dealer network, which is not something to be taken lightly in our current economy. ●

The Simaudio W-7M
monoblock power amplifiers
MSRP: \$24,000/pr.

MANUFACTURER

www.simaudio.com

PERIPHERALS

Analog Sources Spiral Groove SG-2 w/Triplanar VIII and Lyra Skala, TW-Acoustic Raven Two with SME iV.Vi and Dynavector XV-1s

Digital Sources Naim CD555/PS555, Naim HDX, PS Audio Perfect Wave, Simaudio 750, Wadia 781SE, Sooloos Music server

Preamplifiers Burmester 011, Conrad-Johnson ACT2/Series 2, Audio Research SP-17

Phono Preamplifiers Nagra VPS/VFS with Red Wine Audio Black Lightning power supply, Manley Steelhead RC, Naim Superline w/HiCap2

Speakers GamuT S7, Harbeth Monitor 40.1, MartinLogan CLX, Magnepan 1.6, Verity Audio Sarastro II, YG Acoustics Anat II Studio

Cable Shunyata Aurora interconnects, Shunyata Stratos SP speaker cable

Power Running Springs Dmitri and Maxim power conditioners, RSA HZ power cords and Shunyata Python CX power cords

Accessories Burmester V1 and V3 racks, Furutech DeMag, Finite Element Cerapucks and Ceraballs, Shunyata Dark Field Cable Elevators

The Ultimate Subwoofer

The JL Audio Gotham

By Jeff Dorgay





First of all, there will be no corny Batman puns in this review. Now that we have *that* settled, let's get on to exploring a fantastic subwoofer, shall we? The JL Audio Gotham hit the scene a few years ago featuring a pair of custom-designed 13-inch drivers and an amplifier that could deliver 3,800 watts of power. Needless to say, it redefined the standard for a premium subwoofer, and the competition is still scrambling to catch up.

With a pricetag of \$12,000 and a weight of 360 pounds, this is no casual purchase. After living with the Gotham for some time, my advice is not to take it for a test drive unless you are ready to write the check; when it's gone, there will be a big hole in your system where the bass used to be. And honestly, you need a pair of them, so budget accordingly.

Once uncrated, the Gotham is a thing of beauty. A high-gloss black finish with a satin-finished aluminum control panel and a large medium-blue power indicator inside the gain control makes it look like a futuristic bass-bot. Though it is gently curved, it still makes a statement in your room (especially if you have two of them) and has a substantial footprint. It is 34 inches tall 21.5 inches wide and 24 inches deep. You will definitely need a few friends and a piano dolly to move the Gotham to its ultimate resting place in your listening room.

Where to put the darn thing?

Once you've determined that your floor can handle the weight of the Gotham, the next step is to make sure you have adequate power. I'd suggest a dedicated 20-amp circuit for the Gotham considering its maximum output, just to make sure you're getting every bit of the power you paid for.

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



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

My only complaint with the Gotham is that I wish they would come up with a set of casters that is similar to what Wilson supplies with their Maxx and X-2 speakers so that initial placement would be easier. But hey, no pain, no gain in the world of high-performance audio. I had exhausted numerous placement options and all of the Energizer bunnies that were enlisted to move the Gotham, but by the end of the first day, I still didn't have the bass *quite right*.

As I mentioned in my review earlier this year of the JL Audio F110 Fathom subwoofers, JL Audio has the most comprehensive instruction manual I've experienced, which thoroughly outlines all the facets of subwoofer setup. They also mention that two subwoofers is really the ideal way to go, and while I normally love to suggest ways to spend your hard earned money, \$24,000 and more than 700 additional pounds of gear in your listening room may require some negotiation with those who share your living space.

There will be no sneaking a pair of Gothams into the house unnoticed.

We'll have some input at the end of the review from TONEAudio columnist Jacob Heilbrunn who actually has a pair of Gothams in his listening room. I will be paying Jacob a visit in 2010 to experience this first hand, but for now we will be discussing the merit of the single Gotham in my system.

After trying quite a few different placement options (much to the dismay of the bunnies), the optimum spot was discovered just behind my listening-room couch, facing rearward. (*continued*)



The ARO (Automatic Room Optimization) feature ... uses a microphone calibrated to the response characteristics of the subwoofer, which is placed at your approximate listening position.

I had tried the middle of the listening room, in between the speakers, everywhere from directly in the middle to various asymmetrical placements. But I still heard bass coming from a big box in the middle of the room. Behind the couch turned out to be the magic location that allowed the Gotham to blend perfectly with my GamuT S-7s. The last time I ran a test-tone sweep in my room to investigate the low bass performance of the GamuT's, I found they played solidly down to 30hz, with some output at 25hz, then dropping off steeply after that point. With the Gotham in place, the output was solid at 25hz, 20hz and even 18hz, although when playing the 18hz tone, it was more *feel* than *hear*.

To replicate a pair of Gothams, I returned the two F110's to the system, just to the inside of the main speakers. This ended up evening out the low frequencies even better, but I'm sure a pair of Gotham's would be the best. If you can't be with the one you love, love the one you're with.

The Secret to Easy Setup

Adding a subwoofer can often create as many problems as it solves and getting perfect integration with the main speakers can be tough. While the home-theater crowd may be looking for the maximum level of bass output to reproduce those explosions and car crashes, a high-performance audio system has different goals. Pumping out a lot of bass at a high SPL is one thing, but achieving low bass response with authority and definition is much more difficult. With the Gotham(s) installed, you might even find a few things in your room that rattle at subterranean frequencies that will require attention.

Depending on the room, I've always spent a lot of time with subwoofer setup, but the ARO (Automatic Room Optimization) feature built into the JL Audio subwoofers is a *big* help. You can read about ARO further on the JL website, but to simplify, it uses a microphone calibrated to the response characteristics of the subwoofer, which is placed at your approximate listening position. A few minutes worth of frequency sweeps are made from the subterranean to about 200hz as the ARO circuit measures and analyzes the bass modes in your room. Then, an EQ curve is generated for your room so the Gotham sounds great from your listening position. This takes about three minutes and really comes in handy when you have more than one subwoofer to work with.

Once the initial calibration is done, you can tweak the setup further by using three controls on the top panel. The phase control lets you set the Gotham between zero and 280 degrees out of phase with your main speakers. This should be adjusted to get the tightest bass and the best integration with the mains. The frequency control sets the effective crossover frequency of the Gotham, and as one who sees a subwoofer as a device to truly extend the low frequencies, I'd say it should be set as low as possible. Again, the goal is always seamless integration with the mains. Last, the ELF trim control is a fine level adjustment. (*continued*)



Working with all three of these controls after you've run ARO is like sorting out VTA on your turntable. As you adjust one, you may have to play with the other two to get things just right. But once you do, it is awesome.

Even if you use the stock calibration, you will be surprised at how close you can optimize the performance. Where the ARO circuitry really shines is in a situation with less than optimum placement. Whenever I just tucked the Gotham in the room somewhere with no attention paid to placement, the ARO was able to compensate for most of the self-induced error. Make no mistake, there will be one or two perfect spots in your room, and that's what to shoot for if it works with your environment.

A Perfect Addition to Any Setup

While I'm a fan of using a set of full-range speakers as mains and a great subwoofer to anchor the low end, that's not for everyone. What amazed me about the Gotham was how *high* it would go up without mid-bass bloat. When it was still in the center of the room, I tried it with a number of speakers, all with excellent results.

The Gotham is more than fast enough to keep up with Magnepans or MartinLogan speakers, and it is incredibly good with a pair of mini monitors. I even used the Gotham with a pair of Spica TC-50's that we have in for review. The Focal Diablos and the Gotham made a particularly great combination, and had seamless integration. A few friends that have heard the \$170k Grande Utopia EM's commented on how a Gotham and a pair of Diablos could easily become the "poor man's Grande Utopias."

Unlimited Power

Properly set up, the Gotham will add bass extension, weight and definition to your system, but the most unexpected benefit is the amount of spatial information it adds to the presentation. I guarantee that for the first week or two, you will be playing all of your favorites that have a lot of LF information.
(continued)

MS750

DIGITAL MUSIC SERVER



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™

And you may be surprised at some of the records you thought were bass heavy actually have faux-bass instead. But that extra oomph in the presentation is truly exciting.

Having a Gotham (or two) is a lot like the experience I had with the 540-horsepower Aston Martin DBS earlier this year. You get behind the wheel and floor it a few times with grins all around, but once you adjust to the power and redefine your senses, it's quite intoxicating knowing you can go 200 mph on a whim. Yet in everyday driving, that extra power and responsiveness takes away what would have been limitations.

With the Gotham in place, you no longer have limitations on the low-frequency content that your system can reproduce, whether you like full-scale orchestral music or Run DMC, and adding the "feel" dimension to the music is something I never tire of.

But the Gotham's added impact of reaching so low will add to the three dimensionality of your system. As Jacob Heilbrunn mentions below, even with musical selections that do not have a lot of obvious LF information, the room seems much bigger, and the minute you turn the Gotham off, that extra spatial information is gone.

Top of the Mountain

The Gotham is a fantastic product that can transform whatever system in which it is placed, no matter how good. If you have the room and the extra power to support it, it is one of the rare pieces of high-end audio gear that will take you somewhere you have never been. Highly recommended.

Additional Listening: Jacob Heilbrunn

Audiophiles are often prone to wrinkle their noses at subwoofers. “Silly, silly, silly,” you can almost hear them saying. And indeed, the complaints are as familiar as they are ubiquitous: too slow, too lumpy, too loud and too boomy. Too everything, it seems.

Except when it comes to the JL Audio Gotham. No subwoofer has elicited more raves in my listening room from subwoofer skeptics than the mighty Gotham. But allow me to amend that sentence. I should have said, the mighty Gothams. For I have not one but two of these mastodons lurking in my basement. Big, powerful and smooth, these subwoofers call attention to themselves except when they don’t, which is most of the time.

Confused? Let me explain. Put the Gotham in and you immediately hear an expansion of the soundstage, new details and an ambience that simply wasn’t there before. Put two Gothams in and you get even more of the above qualities. Install four or even six Gothams, and I’m quite sure that the sound would improve even further. The more subwoofers you have in your listening area, the smoother the response can become. One subwoofer may load your room properly. May. But with two, the task becomes far, far easier. Most audiophiles, unless they’re listening exclusively to mono records, bless their little hearts, would never dream of employing a single loudspeaker. But when it comes to subwoofers, they’re more prone to skimp. Bass, so the argument goes, is hard to localize. It doesn’t really matter if you have only one sub.

I’m here to say it ain’t necessarily so. Maybe it is harder to discern where the bass is emanating from. But there does seem to be something quite satisfying about splitting the signal into left and right channels, which is what the Gotham allows you to do. It has special inputs marked for left and right channels, a feature that I haven’t seen on a whole lot of other subwoofers.

The way I run the Gothams is to place each one next to a loudspeaker rather than behind it. I had them in the corners of my listening room briefly, but I found that they sounded most transparent, most potent and most articulate when placed immediately adjacent to each loudspeaker. *(continued)*



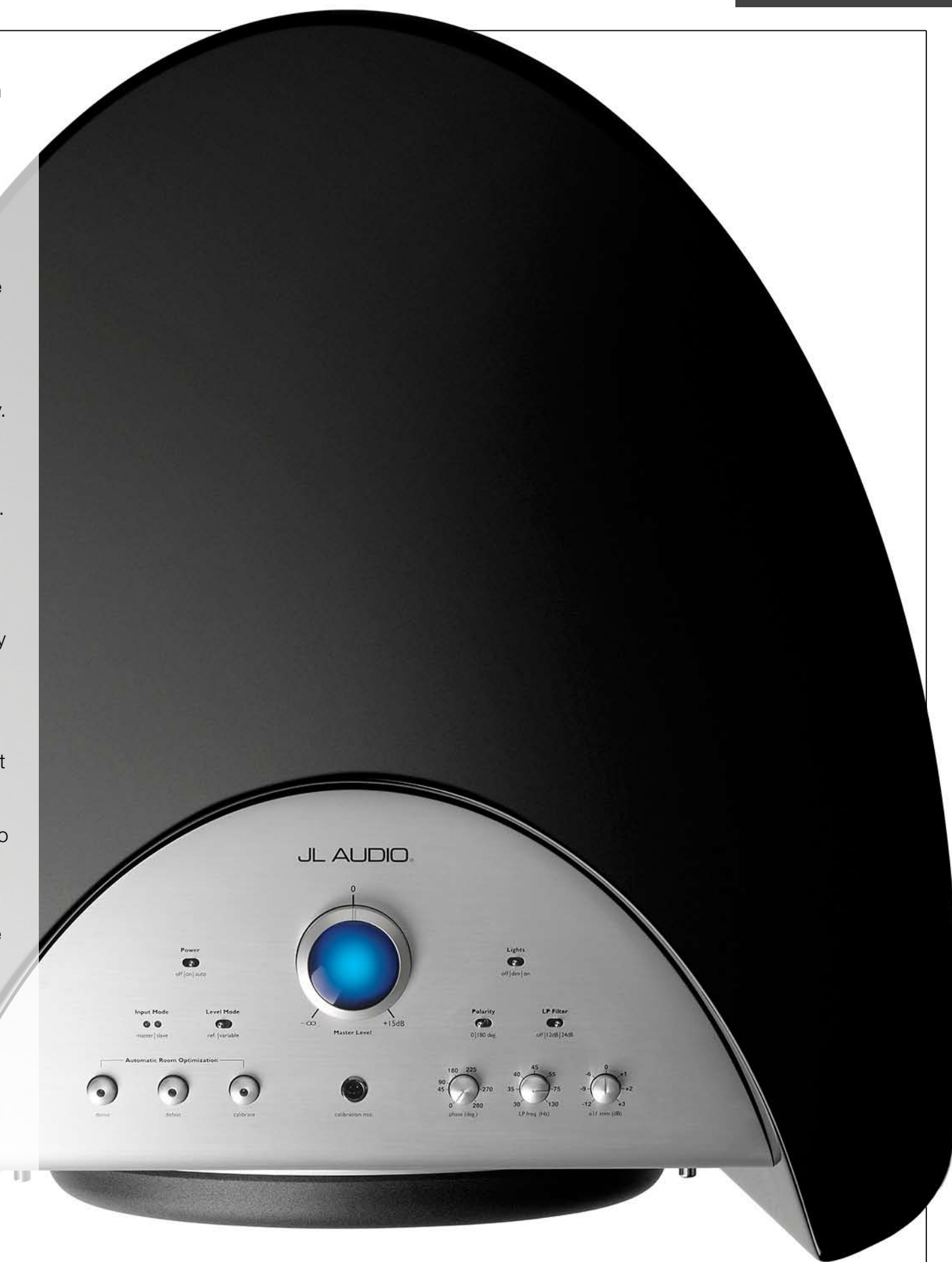
Two subwoofers does not mean that I'm shaking the rafters with the Gothams. Quite the contrary. It allows me to run them at lower levels and to produce a more refulgent, satisfying sound. But that sound can be hard to pin down because, as I tried to suggest above, the Gothams are often out of the picture when no real deep bass frequencies are present. But they are producing ambience all the time. Turn the two subs off and it sounds as though the mains shrank in size and volume – even on a Bach solo guitar piece. Weird? Definitely. But impossible to refute. There is apparently information in the subsonic region that fills out the sound of a concert hall. Once you've heard it, you can't go back.

It would be interesting to hear the effect that another pair of subwoofers located in the rear of the room would have on the soundstage. You could go nuts and place a third pair at the halfway point of the room firing across it and at each other. This would almost surely allow me to lower the levels of the subs further and produce an even richer and weightier sound. But at some point, cost considerations do intrude as, incidentally, do the sheer size of the Gothams. But if you're considering buying JL Audio subs, I would suggest getting two of them, if affordable, as opposed to buying just one more-expensive version. Instead of wrinkling his or her respective nose, your most jaded audiophile chum will probably be left slack-jawed by their combined performance. ●

The JL Audio Gotham Subwoofer
MSRP: \$12,000

MANUFACTURER

JL Audio
www.jlaudio.com





"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

PERIPHERALS

Analog Source Spiral Groove SG-2 turntable w/Triplanar arm and Lyra Skala cartridge TW Acoustic Raven TWO with SME iV.VI arm and Dynavector XV-1s cartridge, Furutech AG-12 tonearm cables

Digital Source Naim CD555/PS555, Wadia 781I, SimAudio 750

Phono Preamplifier Nagra VPS w/VFS isolation base and Red Wine Audio Black Lightning power supply.

Preamplifier Burmester 011, Conrad Johnson ACT 2/Series two, Nagra PL-L

Power Amplifier Burmester 911 MK3, Conrad Johnson Premier 350, McIntosh MC1.2KW's, Simaudio Moon W-7M's

Speakers Gamut S-7, Harbeth Monitor 40.1, Martin Logan CLX, Verity Audio Sarastro II, YG Acoustics Anat II studio

Cable Shunyata Aurora Interconnects, Audioquest Sub 3 subwoofer interconnects, Shunyata Stratos SP Speaker cable

Power Running Springs Dmitri and Maxim Line Conditioners, RSA HZ power cords, Shunyata Python CX power cords

Accessories Furutech DeMag, Furutech record clamp, Shunyata Dark Field Cable elevators

JACOB'S SYSTEM:

Turntable Continuum Caliburn

Preamplifier Messenger linestage and phono stage, Nagra phono stage

Amplification Classe Omega mono blocks and VTL Wotan

Loudspeakers Magnepan 20.1

Subwoofers JL Audio Gotham

Cabling Jena Labs

Power Cables Shunyata and Isoclean Supreme Focus



PERFECTION:

The Burmester 911 MK3

By Jeff Dorgay



I I've probably listened to a thousand amplifiers in the past 25 years and have easily owned at least 75-100 in search for the perfect balance of tonality, dynamics and reliability. Proponents of every different amplifier topology have their reasons why their pet choice is "the best," forsaking all others in the process. But the main argument usually comes down to the tube camp vs. the solid-state camp.



Musical Surroundings

510.547.5006 www.musicalsurrroundings.com

AESTHETIX
BENZ MICRO
CLEARAUDIO



While I've always loved vacuum tubes, I have different requirements than the average listener who may only turn on his or her system for a few hours a week. With a reference system that is usually playing at least 12 hours a day, the tube game can get tiring in a hurry, especially when you've chased down some *unobtainium* tubes for your pride and joy.

If you've fallen under the spell of a great vacuum-tube power amplifier, it's hard to wipe the experience out of your memory bank; that tonal delicacy and three-dimensional, airy presentation is indeed seductive. It's the same for the best examples of the solid-state camp with bottomless dynamics, weight and bass grip that you can't get on the other side of the fence.

I'm happy to report that you can have it all in one box: the Burmester 911 MK 3. It's not inexpensive. Current MSRP on a 911 MK 3 is \$29,995. If you're anything like me, you've already thrown half of that price tag away over the past 10 years, swapping amplifiers in and out of your system. A couple of thousand here, another thousand there, and pretty soon you've flushed a year's worth of your kids' college tuition down the drain. And you're still not quite happy. I know that feeling all too well, and I'm right there with you.

Sixty Seconds to Music

The 911 MK 3 couldn't be easier to set up. This 68-pound amplifier is covered with heatsinks on all four sides, so don't play catch with it. The powder-coated silver aluminum case has a pair of handles on the rear panel that makes it easy to move into place on your rack of choice. *(continued)*



Binding posts with gigantic plastic wing nuts make it a snap to attach the beefiest speaker cables you can imagine.

There is a pair of balanced XLR inputs, a 15-amp IEC socket, a Burmester Power Cord 2.5 and binding posts with gigantic plastic wing nuts that make it a snap to attach the beefiest speaker cables you can imagine. A pair of 12-volt trigger outlets is provided to allow the 911 MK 3 to be turned on from your preamp, if it is so equipped. I've never shut off the 911 MK 3 since it's been here, so while handy, it's not been necessary. The front panel has a single power switch with power-on and standby LED's. Plug it in, turn it on and enjoy.

Built to Take It

Much like the black Porsche 911 turbo in *Bad Boys*, the Burmester 911 MK 3 crashed into my life. While awaiting the delivery of the 911 and the companion Burmester 011 preamplifier, I received a phone call. "Is this TONEAudio Magazine?" "Yes..." "Great, I have a damaged palette that I found in the middle of the street with your companies' name on what's left of the label. Give me your address and I'll be right over."

At this moment I was horrified that the 911 MK 3 and the 011 were destroyed and my relationship with Burmester was not getting off to a great start. Twenty minutes later, a very nice man from Northwest Gas arrived with a palette in the back of his pickup truck that looked as if it had been dropped out of an airplane.

(continued)



Upon inspection, the 011 was without a scratch and the 911 MK 3 only had a slight dent in the left corner of the top faceplate. Nothing sounded loose internally, and upon plugging them both in, they worked perfectly! When I told Burmester's Robb Neiman about my experience, he said "Oh yeah, we had a pair of our B 100 speakers get dropped out of a Boeing 747 cargo plane a few years ago. They fell 30 feet on the tarmac and only had a little scratch. They played fine and are still in use for international shows." If this doesn't speak volumes about the rock-solid build quality of Burmester, take a peek inside the chassis where everything is massively built and tidily tucked in place.

The Essence of Musicality

During the past six months, I've had the opportunity to use the 911 MK 3 with about 20 different pairs of speakers, all with excellent results. But the bulk of the review listening was done with the Verity Audio Sarastro II, the MartinLogan CLX, the GamuT S-7 and recently the YG Acoustics Anat II Studio. All world-class speakers in their own right and all of them have given their best performance with the 911 MK 3. *(continued)*

Take a peek inside the chassis where everything is massively built and tidily tucked in place.

Exact science

Creative imagination



A single note struck on a piano, followed by another. The subtlest brush stroke from the drummer a few feet away. Low bass notes filling the air. The piano strikes a full chord. For just a few moments, the world stops... and there is only the music.

I've also had about 20 amplifiers come through my listening room, either for review by me or on their way to someone else on the TONE-Audio staff. All great amplifiers to be sure, but every time I put the 911 MK 3 back in the system, I always felt like I was back home.

The best way to describe the 911 MK 3 (and for that matter all the Burmester electronics I've heard) is complete neutrality and complete lack of grain. As I've mentioned in the 082 integrated review, everyone who has heard the 911 MK 3 always makes the comment that it does not sound like solid-state amplification, nor does it sound like tubes.

I've never heard an amplifier that does a better job of getting out of the way of the music than the 911 MK 3.

The bass is powerful and articulate, the mids seamless and smooth, and the highs are extended, not harsh, grainy nor forced in any way. When working on a review of the vintage Mark Levinson no.23, it reminded me of how that amplifier had a midrange that was pushed slightly forward. A few other solid-state amplifiers exhibited an artificial quality to the midrange or high frequencies that always left me thinking "pretty good for solid-state." This thought never went through my head while listening to the Burmester amplifier.

Three of my favorite large solid-state power amplifiers – the CJ Premier 350 (my previous reference for almost five years), the McIntosh MC1.2KW monoblocks and the SimAudio Moon W-7 monoblocks – each have more power than the 911 MK 3. But at the end of the day, none had the complete neutrality, lack of grain and smoothness that the Burmester has. *(continued)*

When playing my MartinLogan CLX's at insane levels, I found my self wishing for a touch more power, but that was really pushing it. Should you find yourself at that point, you can use the 911 MK 3 as a mono amplifier and just add a second one. I experienced a very similar CLX-based system that used a pair of 911's, and that was the ticket for those who need the ultimate push over the cliff.

Richly Detailed

Dynamics are big fun, and so is bass grip and slam; that's what large solid-state power amplifiers are famous for. What continues to hold my interest so strongly after six months with the 911 MK 3 is the way this amplifier continues to unravel records I've been listening to my whole life on a countless variety of systems.

Even with records that aren't known for killer sonics. One day while stuck in an early 70's groove, I was listening to Three Dog Night's *Seven Separate Fools* CD and noticed a few layers of violins and mellotron that I've never heard on "Pieces of April." Sure, that's a crazy music choice, but the point is that while the 911 MK 3 is an extremely high-resolution component, it is not one that sacrifices musicality for ultra detail, it blends both. My favorite aspect of the Burmester gear is that it does not transform your system into something that you can only listen to a limited number of "audiophile approved" pressings. It brings more enjoyment to your entire music collection.

Same thing with DEVO's *Q: Are We Not Men?, A: We Are DEVO?* While evaluating the original to the current remaster, this record took on a whole new dimension, with the soundstage expanding in all three dimensions. Fast forward to current releases, "Adrien" on Peter Kruder's (of Kruder and Dorfmeister fame) new disc, *Private Collection*, starts with chimes that just float slightly to the left of the soundstage, but the echoes travel all the way right and sound as if they trail off behind the listening chair. Indeed, very trippy.

Another favorite disc that features very densely packed music is *The Word is Out*, by Jaco Pastorius and his Big Band. This is a killer fusion album that has a great mix of acoustic and electronic instruments with a lot going on simultaneously. Even at high volume, Pastorius maintains his space just slightly left of center without his bass line becoming flabby, with the drums miked somewhat behind the plane of the speakers, while the horns float in front of the mix, going all the way from left to right.

While at times almost impossible to describe, the 911 MK 3 is very linear in its performance, regardless of where you have the volume control set, until you push it so far that the soundstage flattens out, ever so slightly. Even at this point, I wasn't hearing any harshness or clipping. Though the 911 MK 3 is claimed to be heavily biased into class-A operation, it didn't get overly warm during normal listening, and no matter how hard I pushed it, would not shut down. *(continued)*



HYDRA MODEL-8 & HYDRA V-RAY

VERSION II

The most critically and professionally heralded products in the history of high-performance Power-Distribution just got a WHOLE LOT BETTER!!

Hydra power distribution centers earned unprecedented critical and professional accolades from those at the forefront of the media, film and recording industry through pure engineering, and technical innovation.

- 10 years in research and development
- Custom manufactured buss systems
- Custom manufactured SR-Z1 outlets
- CDA 101 custom manufactured Copper
- ZrCa-2000 noise reduction compounds
- Custom manufactured SR-V2 Filter Array
- Dual chassis design
- Massive three-stage system protection
- 20Amp high current delivery
- On-Site Alpha Cryogenic treatment
- Cohergenic conductor treatment



After eight years as the recognized world references in high-current power distribution, the *Hydra Model-8* and *Hydra V-Ray* models have been improved!

HYDRA MODEL-8 VERSION II / HYDRA V-RAY VERSION II

Shunyata Research's latest developments in patented materials and parts engineering will deliver dramatic improvements in sound and visuals that will startle the most seasoned recording and film engineers, and the toughest audio and home theater critics alike!

SHUNYATA RESEARCH

THE HYDRA 8 VERSION II AND HYDRA V-RAY VERSION II ARE AVAILABLE NOW!

shunyata.com

I continue to draw the same conclusion with the 911 MK 3. It has a huge, three-dimensional sound-stage that I would normally associate with tubes, with the pace and drive I would normally associate with solid state, yet the weaknesses of neither.

As Good as It Gets

After six months of listening day in and day out, I can find no fault with the Burmester 911 MK 3 and am happy to say that this will become my new reference amplifier. It was dropped off of a truck on its way to me and I've often played it continuously for 24 hours day after day when breaking in new speakers, and it's never let me down in any way.

The 911 MK 3 offers perfect balance in my book; it is highly detailed and articulate, yet not harsh, and it is tremendously musical without being dark or rolled off in any way. This is truly the best power amplifier I have ever experienced. I can't recommend it highly enough. ●

The Burmester 911 MK 3 Power Amplifier MSRP: \$29,995

MANUFACTURER

www.burmester.de

PERIPHERALS

Analog Source Spiral Groove SG-2 turntable w/Triplanar arm and Lyra Skala cartridge

Digital Source Naim CD555/PS555, Wadia 781I, SimAudio 750

Phono Preamplifier Nagra VPS w/VFS isolation base and Red Wine Audio Black Lightning power supply.

Preamplifier Burmester 011, Conrad Johnson ACT 2/series two, Nagra PL-L

Speakers Gamut S-7, Harbeth Monitor 40.1, Martin Logan CLX, Verity Audio Sarastro II, YG Acoustics Anat II studio

Slightly Un-Swiss:

The darTZeel CTH8550 Integrated Amplifier

By Jeff Dorgay





One thing I didn't experience a whole lot during my recent trip to Switzerland was an overall sense of humor. The trains ran on time, all the outlets in my hotel room worked perfectly and there was always plenty of hot water. But I never got a feeling of lightness, even at the Montreux Jazz Festival. The Swiss take most of what they do seriously, and what they take seriously, they do fantastically.

But after living for some time with the darTZeel CTH-8550 integrated amplifier, I get the feeling that principal designer Herve Deletraz has a good sense of humor. Not for putting a \$20,300 price tag on the CTH-855; he's dead serious about that. Upon unpacking the CTH-8550, with its bright-gold (not subdued Conrad Johnson champagne, but *bright* gold) and bright-red case, I took a bit of pause. After six months with the amp, I decided that if I were buying one, I'd go for the red and gold instead of the more subdued all-black model. It fits.

The fun continues as you take a closer look at the front panel and notice that the volume control is labeled "Pleasure Control," with an arrow going clockwise indicating "more" and counterclockwise indicating "less." Perhaps there are some Swiss guys who like to rock the house after all.

Before the Fun Can Begin, Configuration is Necessary

The CTH-8550 has over 50 different menu options hiding behind that amber LED panel, so I suggest reading the manual very carefully. Before you can configure this amplifier for your use, you will need to locate and install the USB key. (*continued*)

LUXMAN

Where 80 Years of Innovation
Combines with Passion
and Emotion



It's a very tasteful brushed aluminum USB drive with the darTZeel logo etched on the outside and attached to a small chain. You will need an activation code from your dealer that once downloaded to the USB key stores all of your amplifiers parameters, allowing your amplifier to escape "demo" mode. Without the USB key, the amplifier shuts itself off. A rather nice anti-theft touch since you can only reactivate the amplifier if you are the original owner.

You can configure almost every parameter of the CTH-8550, from the maximum volume level addressable to when you'd like it to turn on and off throughout the day. Like BAT and McIntosh you can re-label the inputs from "input 1" to "CD player," "Turntable," "Tuner", etc. This makes things a little easier when family members use the system.

Don't Try This at Home

My listening began with the MartinLogan CLX's by giving that Pleasure Control a big spin after queuing up a dozen of my favorite Van Halen tracks on the Sooloos music server. No FTC standard preconditioning here, folks. Unfortunately, the CTH-8550 was not up to this punishment, and just as I was getting into a serious air-guitar session during the lead break of "Atomic Punk," the fun came to a dark halt. *(continued)*

**800
series**



CONTROL AMPLIFIERS
C-800f



STEREO POWER AMPLIFIER
M-800A

**1000
series**



CONTROL AMPLIFIER
C-1000f



MONAURAL POWER AMPLIFIER
B-1000f

**600
series**



CONTROL AMPLIFIER
C-600f



STEREO POWER AMPLIFIER
M-600A



My listening began with the MartinLogan CLX's by giving that Pleasure Control a big spin after queuing up a dozen of my favorite Van Halen tracks on the Sooloos music server.

Ever destroy the transmission in Dad's car doing neutral drops when you were supposed to be running errands for your Mom and *coming straight home from the store*? That's the same feeling you get when you fear that you've just melted down someone else's \$20,000 amplifier.

Fortunately, after about a 20-minute cool down and a quick speaker swap, the CTH-8550 was good as new. In typical Bart Simpson fashion, I had to try it again. Swapping the CLX's for the Verity Audio Sarastro II's seemed to sure the problems. So as much as I love the CTH-8550, it's not a match for MartinLogan speakers, especially if you like to rock out in a major fashion. Though the CTH-8550 ran very warm, it did not shut down again, regardless of volume level with the rest of the speakers I had at my disposal.

I'm guessing it's another example of Herve's sense of humor because the manual claims that this amplifier "runs very cool, saving on your electric bill." No way. This amplifier runs warm, bordering on hot, which makes me wonder if it doesn't spend a lot of time running in Class-A mode or very close to it. But the world's going to end in 2012 anyway so I'm more than happy to increase my carbon footprint a few more millimeters for sound this good.

(continued)



The detail that the CTH-8550 provides without ever being harsh is intoxicating.

Breaking It Down

Vacuum tubes are tons of fun until they don't work right or you have to pay the NOS tube bandits a ridiculous sum of money to retube your precious. That's when the fun ends. So in Swiss fashion, let's get serious for a minute and do a little cost analysis, shall we?

While I'm sure some of you completely freaked out when I mentioned the \$20,300 price tag of the CTH-8550 at the beginning of the review, where does your money go? When you break it down, the CTH-8550 isn't that scary after all. My neighbor just dropped \$30,000 on a John Deere tractor to cut his grass, and how much fun is that? Not nearly as much fun as listening to this Swiss masterpiece from darTZeel.

If we take the \$20,300 price of the CTH-8550 and subtract the cost of a pair of suitable power cords, say \$750 each, and two pairs of somewhat upscale interconnects at \$1,000 each from the purchase price, it drops down to \$17,500. Ok, so that's still not bargain-basement pricing, but remember, the CTH-8550 has a full-function preamplifier, 220-watt-per-channel power amplifier and a damn good phono preamplifier all on one chassis. So at that rate, if we look at the CTH-8550 as a

\$4,000 phono preamplifier, \$6,000 preamplifier and a \$7,500 power amplifier, it's not crazy money anymore.

Now, let's say you keep the CTH-8550 for five or six years. That means at least one retube of your preamplifier and maybe twice for your power amplifier. If you've got a pair of big tube monoblocks that use eight output tubes per side, that's 16 (count em') tubes to replace. Even with so-so tubes, we're talking about \$1,600. And if you want some expensive NOS versions or the boutique EAT KT-88's, you're staring at \$5,000 worth of tubes. That darTZeel is now looking like a real bargain, eh?

Who needs tubes when solid-state sounds this glorious?

Add the darTZeel to the list of the rare few solid-state amplifiers that are so grain free, you just dig the music and don't even stop to think whether you are listening to tubes or transistors. And it offers everything: staggering dynamics, spot-on tonality and a gigantic three-dimensional soundstage.

The detail that the CTH-8550 provides without ever being harsh is intoxicating. (*continued*)

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"

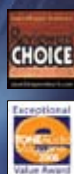
—Chris Martens
The Absolute Sound 2007
Editors Choice Awards



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."

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.



Carefully chosen and tested "active" materials mechanically and electrically damp Piezo connectors as they "interconvert" thermal, mechanical, and electrical

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



This amplifier never failed to catch me off guard, even when listening to less-than-outstanding recordings. I've heard Tommy James' "Do Something to Me" a zillion times over the past 40 years, but with the combination of the darT-Zeel and the GamuT S-7's, there were about three more layers of overdubs that I've never heard before. It's even better with great recordings. Spinning *Swim* from The Whisptown 2000 had an overwhelmingly huge soundstage. Listening to my favorite female vocalist of the year, Anya Garbarek's *Smiling and Waving* was spooky in a David Lynch movie kind of a way. All of the Frank Zappa records I played had the same effect; there were so many little musical details floating around the room, at times it was hallucinogenic and that's a ton of fun in my book.

Great Phono

Quite a few of the very expensive preamplifiers that I've auditioned in the past couple of years that include an on-board phono preamplifier, the darTZeel is only one to which I've listened that actually has a phono stage worthy of the amplifier it's built into, not just an afterthought.

For the duration of the review, I used the Dynavector XV-1s mounted on a Raven Two with SME iV.Vi arm and was very pleased with the results, though I usually load the Dynavector at about 500 ohms in my reference system. This leads me to the only major complaint I have with this amplifier: I was hoping that somewhere in that long list of menu items, there would be a way to change phono loading, but no such luck. (continued)

This means that making the CTH-8550 part of a system that includes analog playback will require a cartridge that will work well with 1,000 ohm loading.

Again, I would like to stress that this is not an “add-on” phono stage and I would compare this one to other units I’ve heard in the \$3,000 - \$4,000 range in terms of dynamics, tonal accuracy and most of all, quiet. The darTZeel has one of the quietest phono stages I’ve had the pleasure of hearing. In many ways, it reminds me a lot of the battery-powered Nagra FFF that we reviewed earlier in the year. Another Swiss masterpiece. Hmmm.

At the very end of this review, the four-LP Neil Young box set arrived, and this was the final bookend on the darTZeel’s phono stage. These records have super-quiet surfaces that only played to the strength of the Dynavector/darTZeel combination. These records are some of the best analog I’ve heard this year, so they make a great demo discs. This was probably the first time I’ve listened to *Harvest* all the way through in 30 years and it was outstanding. Young’s voice just floated in front of the soundstage, with the rest of the backing instruments all having a specific space instead of falling into the grunge, as it would in a mediocre recording.

No matter what your taste in music is, I guarantee the darTZeel can not only handle it, it will take you to a place you haven’t been and that’s what it’s all about when someone is asking you to write a \$20,000 check. If you are an audiophile that changes electronics like underwear, spending time with the darTZeel will probably be a costly stop on the path because you always lose money going from new to used. But if you’d like something to live with long term, you can finally stop horse trading with one of these.

Conclusion

If you’re ready to get off the merry-go-round and just enjoy music, and you’d like to be set free of component and cable matching, the darTZeel CTH-8550 will take you to Nirvana. It offers a level of musicality that few amplifiers I’ve heard possess. Add your favorite source or two, a great pair of speakers and call it a day. ●



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

The dartZeel CTH-8550
Integrated Amplifier
MSRP: (with phono stage)
\$20,300

MANUFACTURER

www.dartzeel.com
www.bluelightaudio.com
(US distributor)

PERIPHERALS

Digital Sources Naim
CD555/PS555, Wadia 781SE,
Sooloos Music Server

Analog Source TW-Acoustic
Raven TWO w/SME iV.Vi
arm and Dynavector XV-1s
cartridge, Furutech AG-12
Tonearm cable

Speakers MartinLogan
CLX w/JL Audio Gotham
Subwoofer, Harbeth Monitor
40.1, Verity Audio Sarastro
II, GamuT S-7, YG Acoustics
Anat II Studio

Cable Shunyata Aurora
Interconnects, Shunyata
Stratos SP Speaker Cable

Power Running Springs
Audio Dmitri Line Conditioner

The Rega Osiris

By Jeff Dorgay

Upon meeting Roy Gandy at Rega, you instantly realize two things: he's always thinking of how to make his products better and, more importantly, he likes to do things a little differently than everyone else. Last month, Rega's Isis CD player created quite a stir when introduced to the world with a \$9,000 price tag, but its performance more than justifies the price tag. The companion Osiris power amplifier is identically priced and while it shares an equally high level of components, it is a bit more specialized in operation.

Osiris



If you want to put together a minimalist yet high-performance system, the Osiris could be your path to perfection.

If you want bells, whistles and a myriad of features, the Osiris may not be for you. But if you want to put together a minimalist yet high-performance system, the Osiris could be your path to perfection. A perfect comparison to the Osiris would be Porsche's new Boxster Spyder. With a higher price tag than a Boxster S, this model has no radio, no air conditioning, no proper convertible top and no door handles! (It uses nylon pull straps to save weight.) Its only goal is to provide maximum performance.

The average person might think that paying \$6,000 *extra* for a car with no door handles is sheer lunacy, but when I called my local dealer to schedule a test drive, he said, "Forget it. Every one we could get our hands on is sold."

The Osiris is a similar piece of high-performance gear. It uses a passive attenuator instead of an active gain stage because Rega felt that a minimalist signal path would offer the highest fidelity. Though it offers seven inputs, (six RCA, one XLR) there is no preamplifier output to run a pair of powered subwoofers, though there is a fixed-level (.215 mv) output for those of you with a tape deck or digital recorder. *(continued)*

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

...Experience the Experience

Experience the DAC1 PRE with a **30 Day In Home Trial***. Order yours at: 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 800-262-4675

Benchmark
...the measure of excellence!™



Built With Care

The chassis is a massive chunk of aluminum that helps with cooling and minimizing vibration, along with a billet remote. Interestingly, the Osiris remote will control the basic playback functions of the Isis, but not vice versa. A companion to the Isis CD player aesthetically, you'll either love or hate the design, but there can be no argument about the amount of care and quality that went into building this amplifier.

Having seen the first batch of Osiris amplifiers being built on my trip to Rega this summer, I can vouch personally for what's under the bonnet. There is a pair of 400VA power transformers, so this is a full dual mono design that is also fully balanced symmetrically. My only real complaint with the amplifier is that it needs at least one more balanced input, preferably two, as I have mostly balanced source components these days. Not a deal breaker, though. (*continued*)



The Beauty of Using a High-Performance Integrated

The Osiris is ready to go right out of the box, with an audiophile-quality power cord that is identical to the one packaged with the Isis CD player. To make this as much of an all-Rega system as I could, I began this review with the Isis CD player, the IOS phono stage and my trusty P9 turntable, along with the Harbeth Monitor 40.1's. Ok, not quite all Rega, but all British! I'm guessing that all but the most fussy audiophile could call it a day right here because this delivered some great sound with a minimal footprint. All of the components fit perfectly on a four-shelf rack, so those of you who don't want a room full of gear will definitely appreciate this system.

I'm guessing that this compilation would probably be your Rega dealers' idea of the perfect system (with Rega speakers of course), offering high-quality sound with a minimum of fuss. The synergy between the Isis and the Osiris is unmistakable, and the P9/IOS/Osiris combination would be excellent for anyone who likes a minimalist analog system.

Exiting Rega-land

But the burning question was how well the Osiris would work with other source components and speakers. I had some initial reservations about an integrated with a passive volume control because passive linestages can limit dynamics when impedances between source component and amplifier do not match up. I made it a point to plug about 10 different CD players from various manufacturers into the XLR and RCA jacks, and there were no issues at all. With the Ayre C5xeMP disc player and my Nagra VPS phono stage player that features XLR and RCA outputs, I preferred the XLR input on the Osiris. I felt that it offered a smidge more dynamic range and slightly darker background, especially with the phono stage. Again, that quest for ultimate performance.

My first impression of the Osiris' sound was that of big dynamics and a lot of bass grip, much like my first impression of the Isis CD player. The Osiris is rated at 162 watts per channel into eight ohms and 250 per channel into four ohms. (I told you they liked to do things differently at Rega.)

(continued)



The Osiris had no problems driving anything connected to it. However, when connecting your favorite speakers, make sure your speaker cables have banana plugs on one end because you will never get spade lugs around the binding posts. I must compliment Rega on using very substantial binding posts instead of those plastic-covered ones I've been seeing on much more expensive amplifiers.

The MartinLogan Summit X speakers were a breeze to drive with the Osiris, despite their dipping down to .7 ohms at their frequency peak and even the power-hungry Magnepans were able to let go and rock out. Magnepan owners take note: if you have a pair of 1.6's or 3.6's, the Osiris' open and dynamic top end combined with tremendous bass grip is a wonderful combination.

Compact and Powerful

The heritage of the Osiris goes back to the original clamshell design Elicit about 15 years ago, with some of the Exon amplifier's DNA mixed in.

The level of refinement that the Osiris offers is quite a bit beyond Rega's past flagship integrated, the current Elicit. Still an excellent value for \$3,000, the Elicit is a bit warmer sounding overall and is only 82 watts per channel.

Because the gap in performance (and price tag) is so substantial, I doubt many current Rega customers will make this leap because the Osiris requires a different mindset. The Elicit offers great performance and functionality at its price point, but the Osiris shares the design philosophy of the Isis in being the best amplifier that Rega can make with no cost constraints. No compromises have been made in its design or manufacture. I suspect that many of the Osiris buyers will come from customers who were looking at Luxman, Burmester, darTZeel and other premium integrations. Initial reports from Rega indicate that they are the same customers who gravitate towards these two components.

The Osiris has a very neutral, clean and fast midrange, with a tremendous amount of bass weight and control. *(continued)*



Listening to “The Fire in Me/Falling” from Julee Cruise’s *The Art of Being a Girl* (Twin Peaks fans will remember this) had great delicacy with her over-processed vocals, but the GamuT S-7’s rumbled the room with the synth bass lines. Dusty Springfield’s voice sounded a little smokier than what I’m used to in “Take Another Little Piece of my Heart” from *Am I The Same Girl?* Which was very cool.

One of my favorite tests for tonality, though, is The Netherlands Wind Ensemble’s *Beethoven Wind Music*. The whole record is fantastic, but my favorite track is the “March In B Flat” on side one. I certainly agree with how difficult it is to reproduce the piano and violin correctly, but the oboe is right up there on my list. Where the piano and violin really test transient attack, the oboe is the go-to instrument for microdynamic texture.

The only way I can describe this is that once you’ve heard an oboe play, you know when it’s right when reproduced, and the Osiris definitely gets it right. The perfect amount of breathiness and smoothness.

Again, the Osiris always played louder than I expected for an amplifier in this range, and no matter what speakers I used, it never got more than moderately warm, even at brain-damage levels. The only speakers with which I could get it to clip were the Magnepans. This is no shame for the Rega because the only amplifiers I couldn’t drive to clipping with these power-hungry speakers was the \$20,000 SimAudio W-7 (500 watts per channel) monoblocks and the \$22,000 McIntosh MC 1.2KW’s (1,200 watts per channel), so the Rega is in great company. *(continued)*

WELCOME TO THE
NEW MILLENNIUM



Nova is the most versatile hybrid integrated amplifier available today specifically designed for the way you listen to music. Whether you download, rip, play and stream music - or enjoy CD's, LP's or digital radio - Nova delivers an audiophile experience you never thought possible.

Nova interfaces directly with your computer, Sonos®, Squeezebox®, Apple TV® and other digital sources. Bypassing regular soundcards, Nova's superior state-of-the-art 24-bit/96kHz up-sampling DAC (Digital-to-Analog Converter) will transform just about any digital source to CD quality. No matter the source, Nova lets you rediscover all of your music.

- 80 Watts RMS per channel stereo hybrid Class A/B MOS-FET amplifier section
- Variable and Fixed output Class A 6922 vacuum tube preamplifier section
- Remote switching ESS 9006 Sabre DAC with 24-bit/96kHz up-sampling, patented jitter reduction circuit, 122dB s/n ratio plus user selectable filter slope
- Digital Inputs: 1 x USB (galvanically-isolated), 2 x coax, 2 x optical; Analog Inputs: 3 x RCA
 - Home Theater bypass and Class A vacuum tube headphone amplifier
 - Available in genuine Rosewood, Cherry or Piano Black wood veneer

peachtree audio

So, is this the \$9,000 amplifier for you?

The Osiris is at the top of the list for high-performance integrated amplifiers. If your quest is for nothing but that performance, I think Roy Gandy and his staff have got your number. If you need air-conditioning and door handles, not so much. Paired with an Isis and your favorite speakers, the Osiris is your ticket to leaving behind the world of audio nervosa. And that's always been one of the advantages to owning Rega gear: great sound, no fuss. ●

The Rega
Osiris Integrated Amplifier
MSRP: \$8,995

MANUFACTURER

www.rega.co.uk
www.soundorg.com
U.S. Distribution

PERIPHERALS

Digital Sources Ayre C5xeMP, Naim CD555/PS555, Rega Isis, SimAudio Moon 750, Sooloos music server

Analog Source Rega P9 w/ Dynavector XV-1s, Rega IOS phono stage and Nagra VPS/VFS phono stage

Speakers GamuT S-7, Harbeth Monitor 40.1, Magnepan 1.6, MartinLogan Summit X, Verity Audio Sarastro II, YG Acoustics Anat II

Cable Shunyata Aurora Interconnects, Stratos SP Speaker Cable

Power Running Springs Dmitri power conditioner

Slummin'

By Jerold O'Brien

From a Marantz 8B, to the KISS lunch box, we've got it all this issue. After years of looking for a Marantz 8B in a basement or garage sale, our publisher finally found one. And I found the rest of the booty...



KISS Lunchbox **\$5, Mermaid Records**

While perusing the cassettes on sale for 99 cents each I almost missed this one, but my niece let out a squeal when she saw the KISS lunchbox, not realizing this is a most excellent one from the period celebrating the four "individual" KISS records.

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-res 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

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



Nakamichi 250
\$20, Craigslist

Before there were Walkmen, there were compact Nakamichi tape recorders. Usually sold with a pair of powered ADS biamplified speakers, this made for the ultimate compact HiFi. One of our other writers used to have this system in his car. Some new belts and a tune up and this one will be good as new.



Marantz 8B
Basement, price n/a

Our publisher found this at a friends' house tucked away in the garage. He won't tell me what he paid for it, but it hasn't even been turned on for over 15 years. A long term restoration project for sure, this is definitely the audio equivalent of finding a Porsche 356 in a barn somewhere. Very cool.

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

ALO Audio: www.aloaudio.co

Anthem: www.anthemav.com

Auravis Systems: www.auravissystems.com

AV123: www.av123.com

B&W Music Club: www.bowersandwilkins.com

Benchmark: www.benchmarkmedia.com

Burmester: www.burmester.de

Cambridge Audio: www.audioplusservices.com

Conrad Johnson: www.conradjohnson.com

DCS: www.dcsLtd.co.uk

Decco labs: www.signalpathint.com

DeVore Fidelity: www.devorefidelity.com

Echo Audio: www.echohifi.com

Furutech: www.furutech.com

GamuT: www.gamutaudio.com

Gradient: www.fidelisav.com

Harbeth: www.fidelisav.com

Immedia Sound: www.immediasound.com

Luxman: www.onahighernote.com

JM Labs/Focal: www.audioplusservices.com

JL Audio: www.jlaudio.com

Lensbabies: www.lensbabies.com

Loiminchay Audio: www.loiminchayaudio.com

Martin-Logan: www.martinlogan.com

McIntosh: www.mcintoshlabs.com

Music Direct: www.musicdirect.com

Music Matters: www.musicmattersjazz.com

Music Millennium: www.musicmillennium.com

Musical Surroundings: www.musicalsurrroundings.com

Nagra: www.nagraaudio.com

Naim: www.naimusa.com

Paradigm: www.paradigm.com

Primare: www.soundorg.com

Red Wine Audio: www.redwineaudio.com

Rega: www.soundorg.com

Running Springs Audio: www.runningspringsaudio.com

Save the Music: www.vh1.com

Shunyata: www.shunyata.com

Upscale Audio: www.upscaleaudio.com

Verity Audio: www.verityaudio.com

Wadia: www.wadia.com

Zu Audio: www.zuaudio.com