

# TONEAudio

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No.31 August 2010

Scorpions  
Wolf Parade  
Lady GaGa

Sonus Faber  
Sneak Peek

The  
Beer Snob  
Returns

**A Private  
Session  
with A&E's**

# Lynn Hoffman

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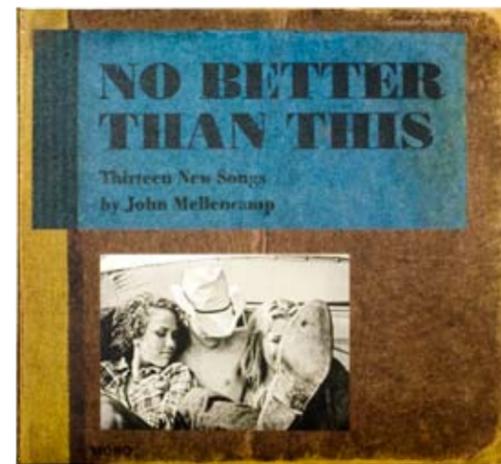
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## PUBLISHER'S LETTER



“That was shock and awe! I’ve never heard *the music I like* sound like this.”

Recently I had a visit from a man in his 20s, new to the world of high-end audio. Of course, he oohed and aahed over all the gear I had staged for this issue’s photo shoot, but when I asked him what he’d like to hear, he said, “I hate to admit it, I’m pretty much a rock guy. I’m really not into the audiophile-approved stuff.” He laughed when I told him I didn’t even own a Patricia Barber record.

Fortunately, he’d come to just the right place. Seconds later, I cued up Audioslave’s first album on the Sooloos music server and cranked up “Gasoline.” He had a big smile as we went through a few more heavy tracks when I asked if he wanted to hear some vinyl. About 30 seconds into the recent MoFi release of Beck’s *Sea Change* LP, his eyes were closed and his feet were tapping, just like a seasoned audiophile.

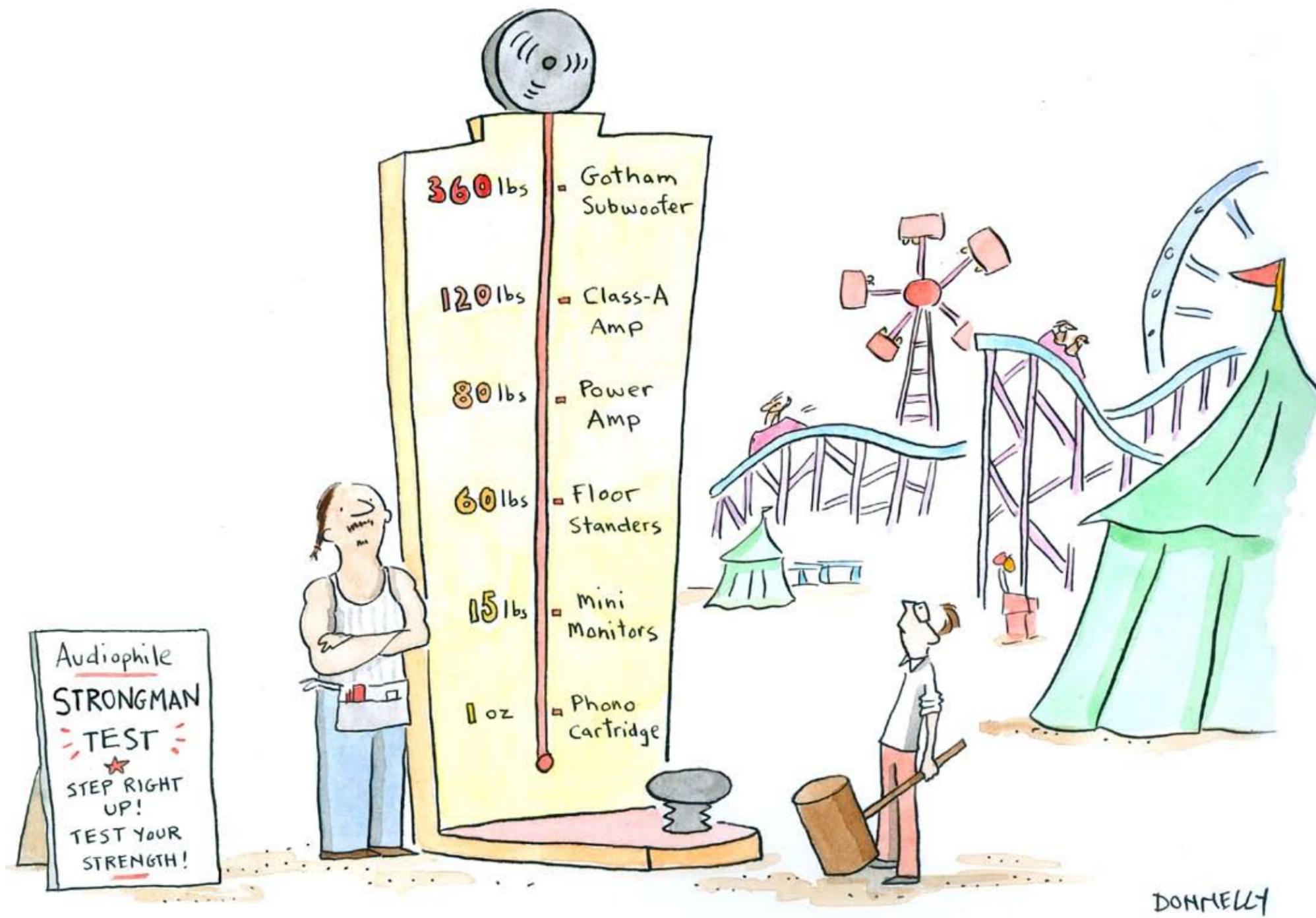
After a little Snoop Dogg (hi res digital this time), we went back to vinyl and spun some Clapton to wind up the session. His response? “That was shock and awe! I’ve never heard *the music I like* sound like this.” Interestingly, we found that we had a lot of music in common even though about 25 years separated us.

But the hook was set and you could see it all over his face; my guest was having a great time with nary an audiophile-approved track to be heard.

While I despise columnists who blather on with their lists of “rules,” I merely suggest one thing; if you’d like to further the cause for music and HiFi, play your guests’ music and let them discover. That’s always worked for me.



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LIVE MUSIC

# The Scorpions



**Sleep Country Amphitheater**  
Vancouver, Washington  
**August 7, 2010**

Text and Photos by Jeff Dorgay



**N**o one was snoozing when the Scorpions blasted onto the stage with the German power and precision of a Porsche Turbo motor screaming at redline, opening their 90-minute set with the title track off their recent album *Sting in the Tail*. After 35 years of touring, the Scorpions still deliver the goods, arguably as well as they did in the late 70s through the late 80s, the peak of their popularity. The only regret was that the setlist wasn't long enough for 17 more songs.

The group's current lineup features founder Rudolph Schenker on rhythm guitar along with core members Matthias Jabs on lead guitar and singer Klaus Meine. Drummer James Kottak, who has been with the band since 1996, and relative newcomer, bassist Pawel Maciwoda, held up their ends of the bargain with a rock-solid foundation and a more than ample helping of attitude.

Near the start, the band romped through "Bad Boys Running Wild" and "The Zoo" before slowing the pace with a few ballads. As soon as the sold-out crowd got comfortable swaying back and forth with lighters in the air, the Scorpions put the pedal to the floor again with "Tease Me, Please Me" and "Black Out," dividing the classics with a thunderous drum solo. No, it wouldn't be a real rock show without solos, and Kosak gave a textbook performance during his turn in the spotlight.  
*(continued)*



Similarly, Jabs and Schenker were on fire all evening, trading a flurry of riffs and poses. Before the set's close, the pair treated the crowd to a massive dual-guitar solo and took the dial *past 11*. The fist-pumping fans in the front rows looked like they were ready to trample the barrier and become one with the guitar gods onstage. The show ended with two of the Scorpions' biggest hits from their triple-platinum album *Love at First Sting*: "Big City Nights" and "Rock You Like a Hurricane."

Although the U.S. leg of the tour is over, the Scorpions are headed to South America and Europe, appropriately finishing in their native Germany on November 27.

If you haven't heard, the band claims that this is its final tour, so if you haven't seen the Scorpions in a while (or ever), don't miss the chance to see heavy rock served up as it should be: loud, proud, and powerful.

# Wolf Parade

**Crystal Ballroom**  
Portland, Oregon  
**July 27, 2010**

Text and Photo by Jeff Dorgay

**T**hanks to the venue's highly flexible floor, Wolf Parade took the stage at the Crystal Ballroom to a very enthusiastic and bouncy crowd. Yes, it was going to be one of those kinds of shows.

Supporting its current album, *Expo 86*, the band opened with the same tune as it did when playing Portland two years ago—"You Are a Runner And I Am My Fathers Son" from its debut album *Apologies to the Queen Mary*. Whether an attempt at continuity or just coincidence, several fans felt the parallel reeked of coolness.

Guitarist Dan Boeckner and keyboardist Spencer Krug went back and forth all evening, trading vocal duties with ease. Alternating leads on each successive song, the difference in timbral perspectives resonated as the most interesting aspects of Wolf Parade's sound. And, to the group's credit, the setlist drew from all three records, lending to elements of surprise as well as a cross-section of pop-rock approaches that culminated with "Language City."

However, while the energy never wavered, the band seemed trapped in a punk mindset. Devoid of many tempo variations, the textural nuances and instrumental prowess that characterize Wolf Parade's albums were severely lacking. Nearly every song featured the same Ramones-like level of surf-rock thrash. All good fun, certainly, but perhaps not exactly what was expected. Maybe that's a good thing?



SNAPSHOT

# Lady Gaga



David Thai braved the pyrotechnics to capture the Lady at her piano in full blaze on August 23rd when she played Rogers Arena in Vancouver, BC. You can catch more of David's images from this show and others at: [www.mrdavidthai.com](http://www.mrdavidthai.com)

# Current Releases

By the TONE Staff

Click on album covers to purchase from Music Direct

## RECORDING OF SPECIAL MERIT

### John Mellencamp

*No Better Than This*  
Rounder, CD or LP

**T**he concepts behind John Mellencamp's *No Better Than This* seem culled from the closed-door meetings of a marketing focus group. Songs were recorded in mono on vintage equipment and on one microphone at strategic historical locations: The First African Baptist Church in Savannah; Sun Studios in Memphis; Room 414 of the Gunter Hotel in San Antonio. The locales, respectively, reflect America's gospel and slave-trade heritage, rock and roll's core foundation in the form of Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, and the like, and the haunted sounds of the Delta blues' largest myth-making figure, Robert Johnson.

If the on-the-nose ideas behind the sessions weren't enough, Mellencamp and Co. even took measures to "arrange themselves on the [Sun] studio floor in accordance with the markings that had been laid down by Sam Phillips many years before for optimal presence" and "sang facing the corner of the room that Johnson had almost 74 years earlier." Oh, and the album was produced by America's leading retro-music producer, T Bone Burnett. Could Hollywood devise a more perfect script?

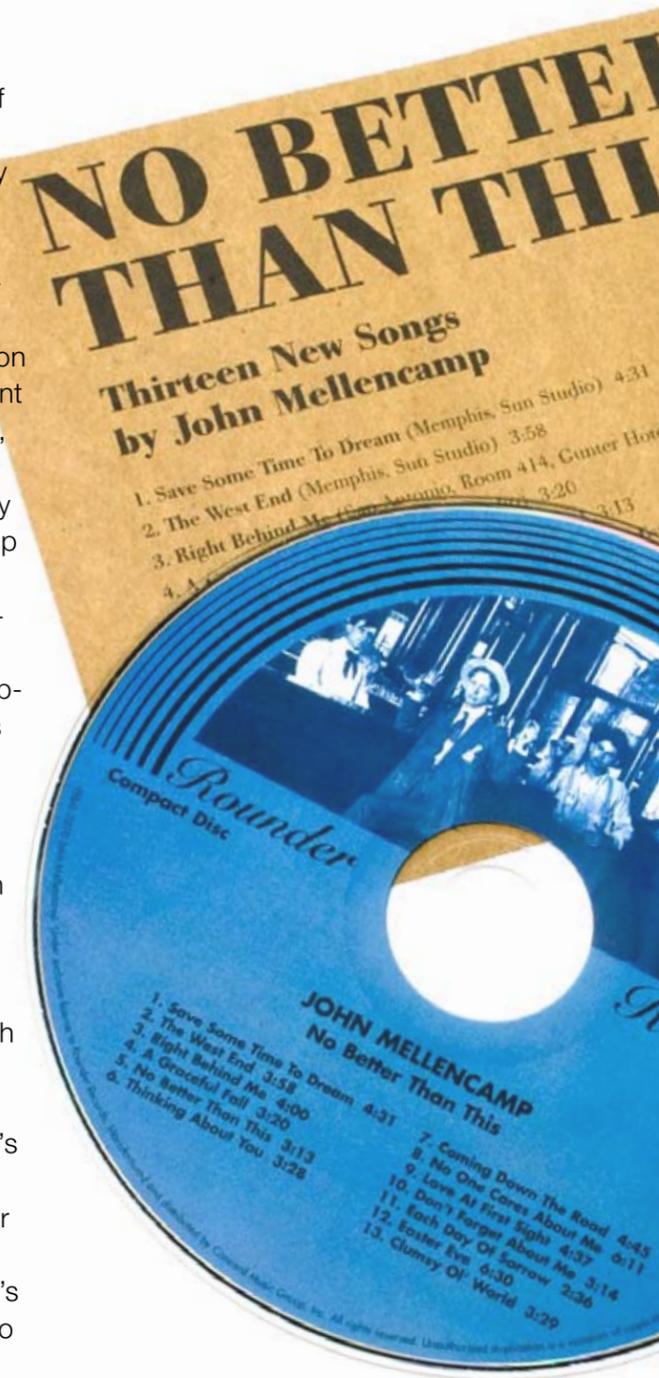
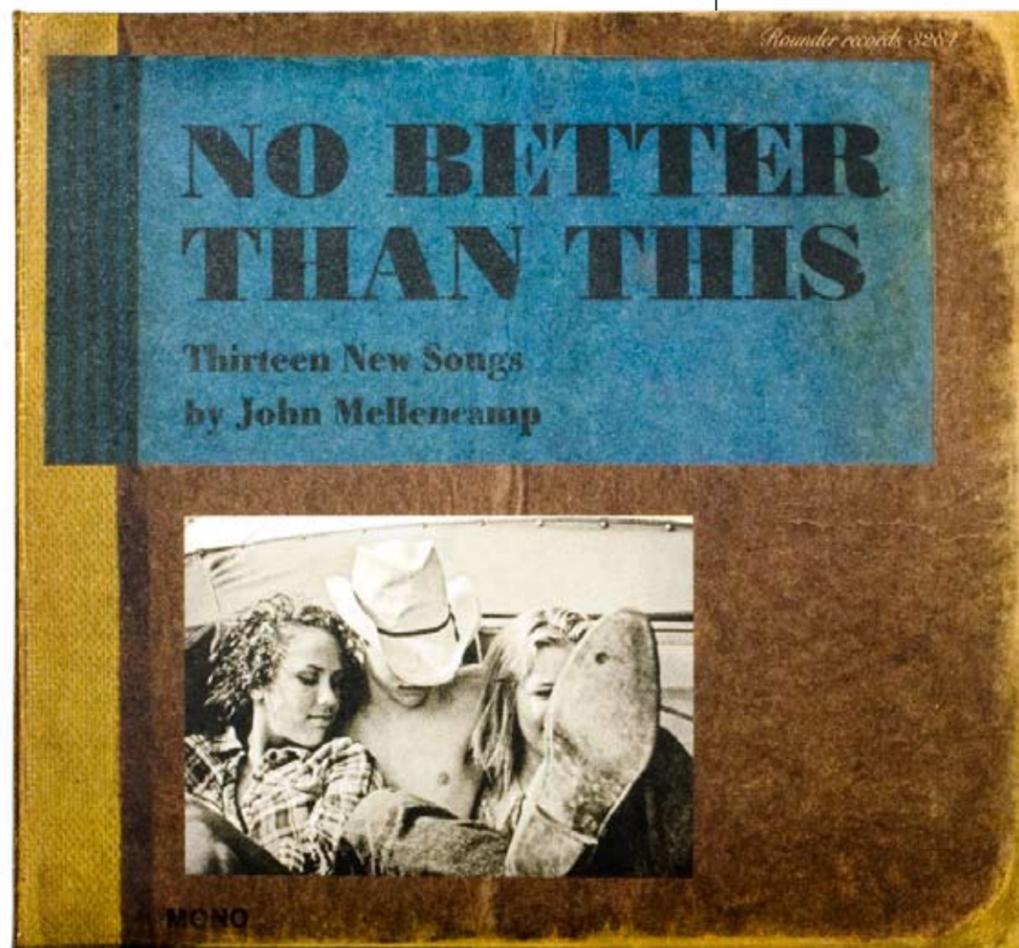
Surprisingly, *No Better Than This* is nowhere as sterile, predictable, or overthought as its premise might suggest. In fact, it's the type of back-to-basics album that helped resurrect Bob Dylan's career in 1997, albeit less obsessed with mortality and dustier in execution. Akin to 2008's *Life Death Live and Freedom*, Mellencamp's latest offering provides ample reason to tune back into an artist that, after two decades of making declarative Heartland rock and pop, is determined to leave his stamp on roots music—record sales be damned. It's a stance that demands respect, a decision grounded in integrity and, as it happens, engaging authenticity.

Written over the span of 13 days, the songs crackle with bluesy grit, rustic simplicity, and sincere reflection. "Could it be this is all there is?," Mellencamp wonders on the opening "Save Some Time to Dream," a rustling ghost-chain-jangling ditty that offers up a litany of memorable advice as seen through the eyes of a man who's experienced his share of times good and bad. Throughout, the Indiana native strikes a balance between hard luck and righteous perseverance, almost laughing in the face of defeat.

"No One Cares About Me" belies the narrator's dour predicaments and weary loneliness with a scampering arrange-

ment that encourages a campfire sing-a-long; slipping along to a sawing violin, "Right Behind Me" honors the time-worn tradition of feeling the devil in one's soul but offers up a fresh twist; the keenly humorous "Clumsy Ol' World" details a mischievous woman's habits even as the no-frills country-blues functions not as an indictment but a low-key celebration of being alive. The latter sentiment is central to *No Better Than This*, thankfully free of the miserable ponderings proffered by so many aging musicians. No, Mellencamp doesn't ignore reality but recognizes that love at first sight, crystalline memories, and a night of good music trump even the deepest sorrows. In the process, he's turned in his most inspired and finely executed album in an age.

Credit also goes to a crack band that includes Marc Ribot on guitar, Jay Bellerose on drums, and Miriam Strum on violin. And that sound. Ramshackle, loose, and sharing more in common with a scratchy Paramount Records 78 than a compressed modern recording, it frames Mellencamp's gather-around-the-microphone performances wherein the power of individual is sacrificed in the name of tradition and honesty. It's doubtful the musicians needed to be in the same place that Johnson first record to capture these vibes, but then again, when the devil is in the details, one never knows. — **Bob Gendron**



**John Mellencamp**

*On the Rural Route 7609*  
Universal, 4CDs

**W**ho is America? And what has America become? These are two questions John Mellencamp repeatedly asks in song throughout *On the Rural Route 7609*, by definition a box set but in execution and design, something else entirely. Arranged so that the four discs signify four distinct albums, Mellencamp's career-spanning collection eschews convention in that it bypasses most of the hits—"I Need a Lover," "Small Town," "Hurts So Good," "R.O.C.K. in the U.S.A.," and "Check It Out" aren't here but 17 unreleased cuts are—and instead zeroes in on more insightful deep cuts, rarities, and the sort of roots-oriented fare that the singer has plumbed for the better part of the past decade.

Housed in a book appointed with excellent photography, song-by-song commentary, and a lengthy essay by Anthony DeCurtis, the box plays like Mellencamp's answer to all of the criticism he's fielded since starting out as middling pop artist "Johnny Cougar" in 1976.



Chronicling change, delving into darkness, and pondering political consequence, it's a snapshot of an artist that embodies the Heartland's grounded aesthetic and a country that is no longer best served or depicted by the sentimental nostalgia of "Jack and Diane" (represented here by a demo version, album version, and a rough-hewn pre-demo edition). Mellencamp clearly loves his country and its people, the very reasons why he appears resolved to probe modern perceptions, principles, and priorities. He spares no one, including himself, refraining from soapbox preaching yet sounding an alarm to rattle the public consciousness.

Mellencamp frames his character-rich studies and social observations in a rich assortment of Americana, blues, and folk steeped in country violins, acoustic guitars, accordions, and, as the set's title implies, rural textures. Many songs echo Woody Guthrie's ghosts in sound and theme. At a time when the middle class seems to be getting lost in a flood of debt, insecurity, and lies, Mellencamp comes on like a voice of truth—not as savior but as an authentic, sincere narrator of struggles, concerns, defeats, and hopes. Yes, this voice is present on earlier rock-based fare such as "Pink Houses" and "Love and Happiness" (included here, as well as the surefire "What If I Came Knocking," from 1993's still-underrated *Human Wheels*). Heard in the context of this well-sequenced and well-packaged set, it's more relevant, confident, and consistent than before.

It's not clear that Mellencamp ever arrives at definitive answers to his two general questions. Still, in at least searching and embracing a stripped-down sound that mirrors his down-home disposition, he's left an imprint that's much greater than those still associating him with "Pop Singer" could ever imagine. A bracing, riveting aural companion for modern times with a hardscrabble sound that suggests anything but. — **Bob Gendron**

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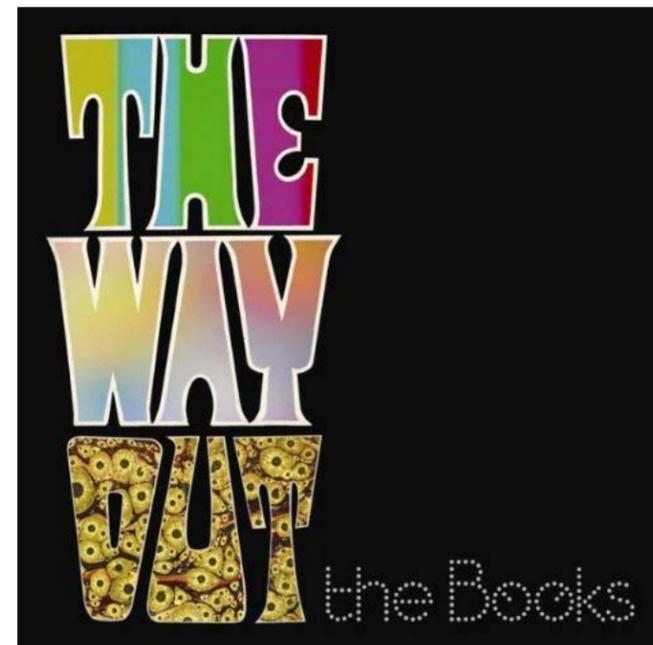
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## MUSIC



### The Books

*The Way Out*

Temporary Residence, CD and LP

**O**n “Chain of Missing Links,” the beating heart of the Books’ fourth studio album, a mantra-like voice urges listeners “to be in this world...to be a fleshy temple.” On previous records, Nick Zammuto and Paul de Jong balanced their playful side with brief moments of sentimentality. Here, the scales dramatically tip in the opposite direction. And though the pair still samples a kaleidoscope of found, flea-market recordings, this time out there’s something deeper connecting the disembodied masses: an element of vulnerability.

“Thirty Incoming” opens with an emotionally naked answering machine message from Bob to Mary. “It felt really good to lay down next to you,” he confesses amidst a chorus of exultant voices and buoyant strings. “I didn’t realize how much I missed that feeling.” The children populating “A Cold Freezin’ Night” are equally exposed in their collective, almost psychopathic anger, an outpouring that makes *The Bad Seed*’s Rhoda sound damned-near genial by comparison. Atop cartoonish effects, pounding, incessant drums, and shotgun blasts of harmonica, a plethora of “innocents”—their chipmunk voices captured by Fisher-Price Talkback recorders—threaten all manner of horrors: “I am going to blow your brains out”; “I could kill you with a shotgun, a rifle—any way I want”; “I’m gonna rip your hair off, and then your balls.”

Not everything is quite so heavy. “I Didn’t Know That” finds the pair successfully experimenting with funk, crafting an aural collage of ecstatic voices (“I didn’t know that!”), robotic breakbeats, and bubbling bass. The Books reemerge as sonic jesters on “The Story of Hip-Hop,” which sounds like it might be about one thing (the breakbeat drums and schizophrenic record scratches call to mind hip-hop pioneer DJ Kool Herc), when it’s actually about something else altogether: namely, a rabbit. A rabbit named Hip Hop. “The flowers like Hip Hop,” intones a doddering narrator, “And Hip Hop liked the flowers.”

Occasional misfires (“We Bought the Flood” captures the experience of sharing conversation with a bug-eyed acid casualty, while “All You Need Is a Wall” functions as little more than pretty window dressing) do little to dampen the pair’s enthusiasm for its latest, human-centric shift, which is perhaps best summed up by the final words spoken on the album: “You’re becoming the world and everyone in it.” – **Andy Downing**

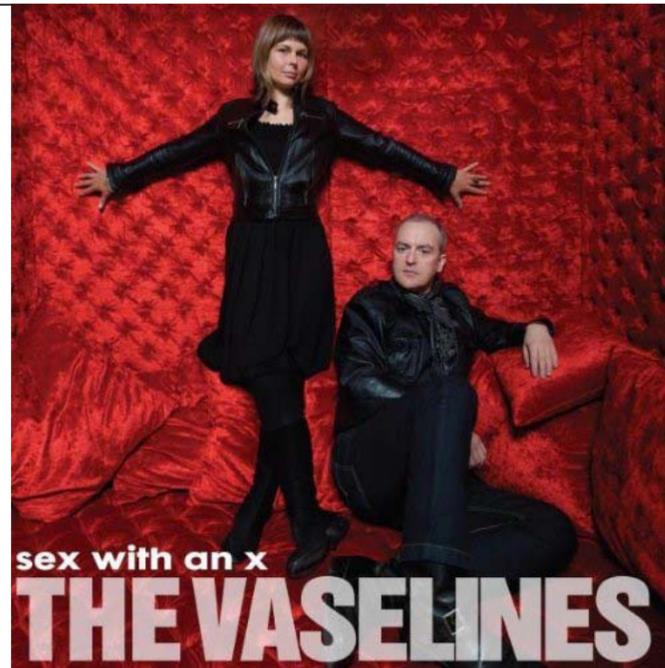
### The Vaselines

*Sex With An X*  
Sub Pop, CD and LP

**T**he Vaselines shouldn't even be a footnote in the thick annals of rock history. After issuing a pair of singles, the Glasgow duo released a debut album on a small indie label in 1989—and split up the same week. However, their music caught the attention of a certain Seattle guitarist with a penchant for the kind of bubblegum melodies, sticky choruses, and extremely witty sexual and religious irony found on Vaselines classics such as “Rory Rides Me Raw,” “Sex Sux (Amen),” “Molly’s Lips,” and “Monsterpussy” (it’s about a cat—really). As fate would have it, one Kurt Cobain found international fame and included three Vaselines covers on various Nirvana projects. As result, the defunct Scottish group became cult sensations.

Motivated by an unannounced appearance at a charity fundraiser in 2008, Eugene Kelly and Frances McKee elected to reconvene for a reunion tour in 2009, an outing that, for all intents and purposes, functioned as the band’s first genuine U.S. excursion. Sub Pop commemorated the events with *Enter the Vaselines*, a definitive compilation that includes all of the band’s official recordings plus demos and live material. However, while every artist is always allowed—if not always welcome—one victory lap tour, new material remains the raw currency when measuring the creative value of reunions.

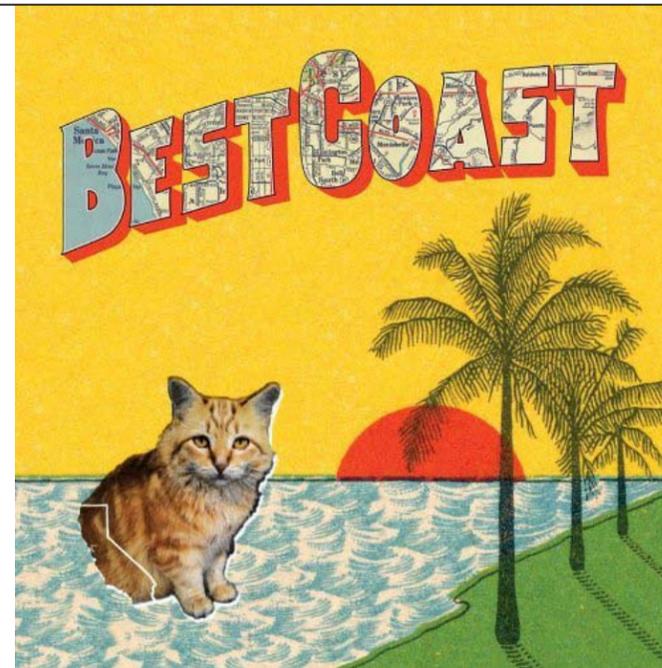
Unlike the Pixies, Pavement, and scads of other resurrected college-rock bands, the Vaselines answer the bell with a dozen new tunes on the highly enjoyable *Sex With An X*. Is the album the equal of its 1989 debut? Not quite, but few aspects have changed, and for the Vaselines, that’s a good thing. So is the excellent title track, a persuasive slice of pop



genius that addresses pleasure’s nasty truths via clever lyrics, handclap-like beats, spacious reverb, and chattering guitars. A majority of the other songs are nearly as memorable and contagious.

With McKee supplying her trademark breathy vocal support, “The Devil’s Inside Me” straddles the line between hilarious and serious without a clear verdict, the fat country-and-western twang rolling off as if echoing throughout a campy bar. It’s hard not to chuckle at “Overweight But Over You,” yet the garage-rock riff salivates and Kelly’s Scottish accent turns the pronunciation of “mama” into a delicacy. “Such a Fool” is tailor-made for AM pop stations of yesteryear and clings to the group’s congested jangle while “Turning It On” strolls to a rockabilly groove amidst moody temptation and seedy backgrounds. The Vaselines excel and making you feel dirty, akin to a junior-high kid who peeks at adult magazines stuffed under the mattress and tee-heeing about the secret. This sense of coy slyness informs the record and never grows tiresome. Neither does the band’s spunk.

“You want the truth/Well this is it/I hate the 80’s/Because the 80’s were shit” the Vaselines declare on “I Hate the 80’s,” a slap-down on what’s arguably the worst decade in pop music. Amen to that. — **Bob Gendron**



### Best Coast

*Crazy For You*  
Mexican Summer, CD or LP

It’s easy to view Bethany Cosentino as another in a continuing line of temporary indie-rock heroes and heroines whose fame is as fleeting as hipster tastes. The Best Coast leader is obsessed with smoking weed, declaring the world insane, and the most popular pet in music—her cat Snacks, whose likeness adorns the cover of the duo’s debut album. She also pens what, to the naked ear, could easily be dismissed as amateurish pop-rock songs given that they’re largely comprised of three or four chords, don’t demand solos, and offer little in the form of variety. The lyrics suggest an unpolished, possibly rushed demeanor. Simple and uncomplicated, the narratives could come off like the scrawled diary entries of a girl obsessed with a high-school crush. But a closer listen reveals there’s a lot more happening underneath the surface.

For starters, there’s an undeniably effective catchiness gleaned from girl-group pop legends. Best Coast’s plain directness—and the songs’ heartfelt sentiments—both trump and complement a breezy aura that sees most tunes hover around the two-and-a-half-minute mark, if that. Along with guitarist/bassist/drummer Bob Bruno, Cosentino delights in reverb-drenched melodies and quaint hooks that double as the sound of the thin haze that appears over ocean beaches during early mornings. Yet what ultimately distinguishes Best Coast from hundreds of retro-pop peers is Cosentino’s delivery and words: Serious heartache, maddening restlessness, and emotional paralysis bubble under the multitude of cooing harmonies and wishful sentiments. The summery fare may appear silly and benign, yet akin to a damaged soul who covers up his or her true feelings, this is adult-level material and not the childish musings of a teenager.

There’s no escaping the sadness and loneliness punctuating “Boyfriend,” desperation and frustration fueling the adorable ode “Crazy for You,” or the sorrow and agony pumping up the distortion-boosted “Goodbye,” a paean to the enthusiasm-killing impact that love can lay on the person who’s not in the power position of the relationship. *(continued)*

Similarly, the musically harmless “Each and Everyday” concerns the nerve-wracking torture wrought by can’t-get-you-off-of-my-mind lovesickness, Cosentino questioning her feelings yet surrendering to the heart, describing the inescapable conundrums of what occurs when work, food, drink, and pleasure are rendered useless unless enjoyed with the subject of affection.

Inevitably, in a two-person relationship, one partner emerges as the victor. On *Crazy for You*, Cosentino doesn’t often (if ever) get the upper hand. She frequently bares open her wounds, professes longing, and repeats the phrase “miss you” with the hope that they might be enough to bring back her lover. Even the break-up song, the garage-rock ditty “Bratty B,” is more apology than blame. She peaks on the afflicted “I Want You,” on which the singer appears to crawl along on the floor on her hands and knees, her voice spilling with pain, vulnerability, and tears in a manner that makes it clear her amore goes way beyond bedroom fascination or passing addiction.

Intentionally or not, Best Coast dredges up issues no psychiatrist or drug can cure. Cosentino finds relief on “When I’m With You” (which, tellingly, is a bonus track), and naturally, it involves spending time with the suitor she craves. Lovesickness has seldom sounded so mellifluous, emotional, or disarmingly honest. — **Bob Gendron**



### Wavves

*King of the Beach*  
Fat Possum, CD or LP

**W**avves mastermind Nathan Williams might have dubbed himself “King of the Beach” on his latest, but he doesn’t make the crown sound like much of a prize. This is a prickly album crawling with doubt, self-loathing, and, on “Super Soaker,” visions of horrifying death. “Waves crush my flesh and skull,” the singer-guitarist snarls over the jangly, lo-fi garage backdrop.

There were times in 2009 when it appeared as though Williams might never pull it together long enough to record a follow-up to his overly hyped sophomore effort, *Wavvves*, which masked a lack of actual tunes by burying the songs beneath thick barnacles of sonic scuzz. In a matter of months, Williams feuded publicly with fellow garage rockers the Black Lips, experienced a near-epic, drug-fueled meltdown onstage at Barcelona’s Primavera Sound Festival, and delivered a tuneless, amateurish performance to a bored-looking audience at Chicago’s annual Pitchfork Music Festival.

So it’s little surprise that, when he’s not doubled-over with soul-gnawing doubt, much of *King of the Beach* assumes a defensive posture, Williams singing: “You’re never gonna stop me”; “To take on the world would be something”; “My own friends hate my guts, but so what? Who gives a fuck?”

As interesting as it might be to listen in as Williams wobbles between defiance and depression, the real draw here is (surprise!) *the actual tunes*. Perhaps it’s his public courtship of Best Coast singer Bethany Cosentino (the pair’s Twitter flirtations are the indie-rock equivalent of watching high school sweethearts swap notes in biology class), but there’s a definite romantic element that creeps into slow-burning Jesus & Mary Chain homage “When Will You Come.” Likewise, it’s sort of, well, sweet, when a sweaty palmed Williams nervously coos, “I don’t want to walk around outside without you” on the leisurely “Baseball Cards.”

Absent much of the sonic mud that caked his last album, the songs here are generally tighter and meaner, given added punch by new additions Stephen Pope (bass) and Billy Hayes (drums)—perhaps best known for their work as the late Jay Reatard’s rambunctious rhythm section. Just check the rumbling “Idiot,” a garage anthem that doubles as a non-apology, Williams singing, “I would say I’m sorry, but it wouldn’t mean shit.” No reason to beg forgiveness when the tunes connect like this.

— **Andy Downing**



**The Extra Lens**  
*Undercard*  
Merge, CD or LP

**J**ohn Darnielle has built a career out of creating richly sketched characters whose awkward circumstances and quirky traits come into high-definition detail amidst troubled situations. The Mountain Goats leader remains at the forefront of indie-rock’s literary songsmiths, distinguished with a flattened nasal cry that adds to the credibility of the clammy-hands schmucks and often-doomed romantic dalliances he regularly sings about. After a five-year run of first-rate albums, Darnielle began to slow on 2008’s solid albeit spotty *Heretic Pride* and smashed into a stultifying wall of conceptual purgatory on 2009’s *Life of the World to Come*, on which every song is titled after a Bible verse. The claustrophobic record is as fun as an overlong sermon.

It’s a welcome sign, then, to hear him letting loose again on *Undercard*, a collaboration with singer/journalist Franklin Bruno under the name Extra Lens. Darnielle wastes no time, indulging in a raw, mean streak of surf/garage rock on the opening “Adultery.” The playful tune allows enough room for slice-and-dice guitar riffs and deals in the vocalist’s trademark black-cloud humor. Similarly, the Extra Lens injects amplified edginess into “Dogs of Clinic 17”—told from the perspective of a canine trapped in a lab—and frame the balladic “In Germany Before the War” with aptly thematic accordion and barroom piano accents. *(continued)*

Most tunes feature what are now Darnielle trademarks: well-paced guitar strumming, intimate folk-rock frameworks, plaintive melodies, meditative singing that hints at the protagonists' hesitant states of mind, and supremely precise descriptions of people, places, and items that give the music a bookish bent. Occasionally, Extra Lens gets caught up within an intricate sameness ("Tug on the Line," "Programmed Cell Death") that recycles Darnielle's past efforts—a low-key comfort zone that yearns for variations. Such alterations carry "How I Left the Ministry," a frisky shuffle that recounts a how-did-I-get-here story of a man being freed from his wrecked car by the Jaws of Life, as well as "Some Other Way," which bustles with nervousness and illuminating organ notes.

With the slightest crafty sonic touches in place, Darnielle's rapier cleverness is enough to carry what come across as abbreviated chapters of Joan Didion and T.C. Boyle accounts. Possibly rejuvenated by Bruno's presence, a majority of the delightful *Undercard* finds the North Carolina resident again relying on his humorous imagination and innate perception of everyday individuals rather than attempting to stuff big themes into a small box. — **Bob Gendron**

a musical tribute to the songs of  
**Shel Silverstein**



*Twistable, Turnable Man: A Musical Tribute to the Songs of Shel Silverstein*

Various Artists — Sugarhill, CD

Perhaps you don't know who Shel Silverstein is at first glance. And perhaps you haven't read any of his better-known books like *The Giving Tree* or *Where The Sidewalk Ends*. But on many levels, Silverstein was as big as Dr. Seuss. And even if you are a fan of Silverstein, the author of adorable kids books, you may not know that he likely penned quite a few of your favorite popular songs—or at least some of the ones that got a lot of airplay in the 70s and early 80s, including: " Sylvia's Mother," "The Queen of the Silver Dollar," "The Cover of the Rolling Stone," and of course, "A Boy Named Sue." Yeah, that guy.

*Twistable, Turnable Man: A Musical Tribute to the Songs of Shel Silverstein* starts and ends with My Morning Jacket and features a star-studded cast throughout. John Prine turns in a great performance of "This Guitar is For Sale" and Nanci Griffith makes "The Giving Tree" a tearjerker. Dr. Dog begins "The Unicorn" with a capella groove before finishing with an intriguing emo groove. Todd Snider turns in a straight-ahead country rendition of "Boy Named Sue" that, appropriately, was captured at John Carter Cash's Cash Cabin Studio. Even Kris Kristofferson makes an appearance, singing, somewhat ironically, "The Winner."

Orchestrated and produced by Silverstein's close friend, Bobby Bare Jr., the care taken with this record is apparent, with Silverstein's acoustic guitar used "on almost every track." Though recorded in a wide variety of locations, the production remains consistent. Final mastering was done in Nashville and, thankfully, does not have the typical overly compressed Nashville sound of late. It's a shame this wasn't released on vinyl. *Twistable, Turnable Man* could be one of the most fun records you hear this year. — **Jeff Dorgay**

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### Iron Maiden

*The Final Frontier*

Universal CD, Deluxe CD, or Colored 2LP

Iron Maiden has never shied away from the epic. Even its first two punk-rooted albums hint at the ambitiousness that would follow, with “Phantom of the Opera” and “Prodigal Son,” respectively, obliterating the standard lengths of most hard rock of era. Not that the British legends don’t make a strong case for big, exploratory arrangements. A beloved piece of metal lore, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” was hailed when the sextet resurrected the 12-minute-plus narrative on its excellent Somewhere Back in Time tour. Similarly, fans continue to call for live performances of 1986’s “Alexander the Great (356-323 B.C.)” Hey, there are worse ways to get ancient history lessons.

Having executed one of the past two decades’ most improbable musical comebacks—after vocalist Bruce Dickinson departed in 1993, Iron Maiden became a parody of itself until the swashbuckling frontman returned in 1999—the band has greeted the new century with three consecutive triumphant sets, the most recent of which, *A Matter of Life and Death*, ranked among 2006’s best metal efforts. Not for lack of temptation, bassist Steve Harris and company have managed to primarily avoid the sort of gross excess that doomed fellow resurrected English titans Judas Priest on *Nostradamus*.

Granted, any band that’s been around for more than 30 years and remains willing to risk defeat at the expense of juggling the formula is to be commended. And throughout *The Final Frontier*, Maiden take chances. The band pushes the limits on introductions, segues, fills, extremes, lengths. Epic in every sense of the term, and sure to please the faithful, the group’s 15th album is located somewhere between 1988’s masterful *Seventh Son of a Seventh Son* and 2003’s classically appointed *Dance of Death*, yet is sprinkled with more textures, atmospherics, and shifts. Never has Maiden entertained prog-rock figures so prominently.

It doesn’t take long to conclude that *The Final Frontier* is designed as an album (not a song-by-song) experience. Opening with the curious detour “Satellite 15,” a jazz-rock meets tribal-beat fusion introduction that sounds nothing else in the band’s catalog, nearly five minutes expire before

Maiden arrives at the first actual song: a title track that features the veteran ensemble’s signature drop-step rhythms, dramatic spaces, and Dickinson’s lung-clearing vibrato wail. “El Dorado” is also prototypical post-*Live After Death* Maiden, a tangled mess of raving guitars giving way to Harris’ trigger-finger bass line, Nicko McBrain’s topsy-turvy drumming, and a stormy menace topped with Dickinson’s wicked cackle. And that roving hook, opening the floodgates to a soaring chorus that dares fly too close to the sun. For better or worse, what follows occasionally strays from Maiden’s conventional path.

While there’s no faulting the performances—Maiden remains comprised of self-assured musicians, particularly Harris, who can hold water with the most celebrated four-string strummers—several songs journey into wonderland. Not so “Mothers of Mercy,” replete with a soldier-stomping march and enough dramatic poise to please Shakespeare. Or the bittersweet ballad “Coming Home,” filled with stacked riffs, keyboard fills, and a towering payoff that should have lighters—and flags—waving. The familiar Maiden gallop is in evidence on “The Alchemist,” Harris using the bass strings to place a stranglehold on passersby, McBrain clacking the cymbals and throttling the percussion, and the guitars engaging in a chess game of dual-harmony leads. Classic stuff, albeit with a modern feel. So, too, “Starchild,” which slashes and burns with urgency.

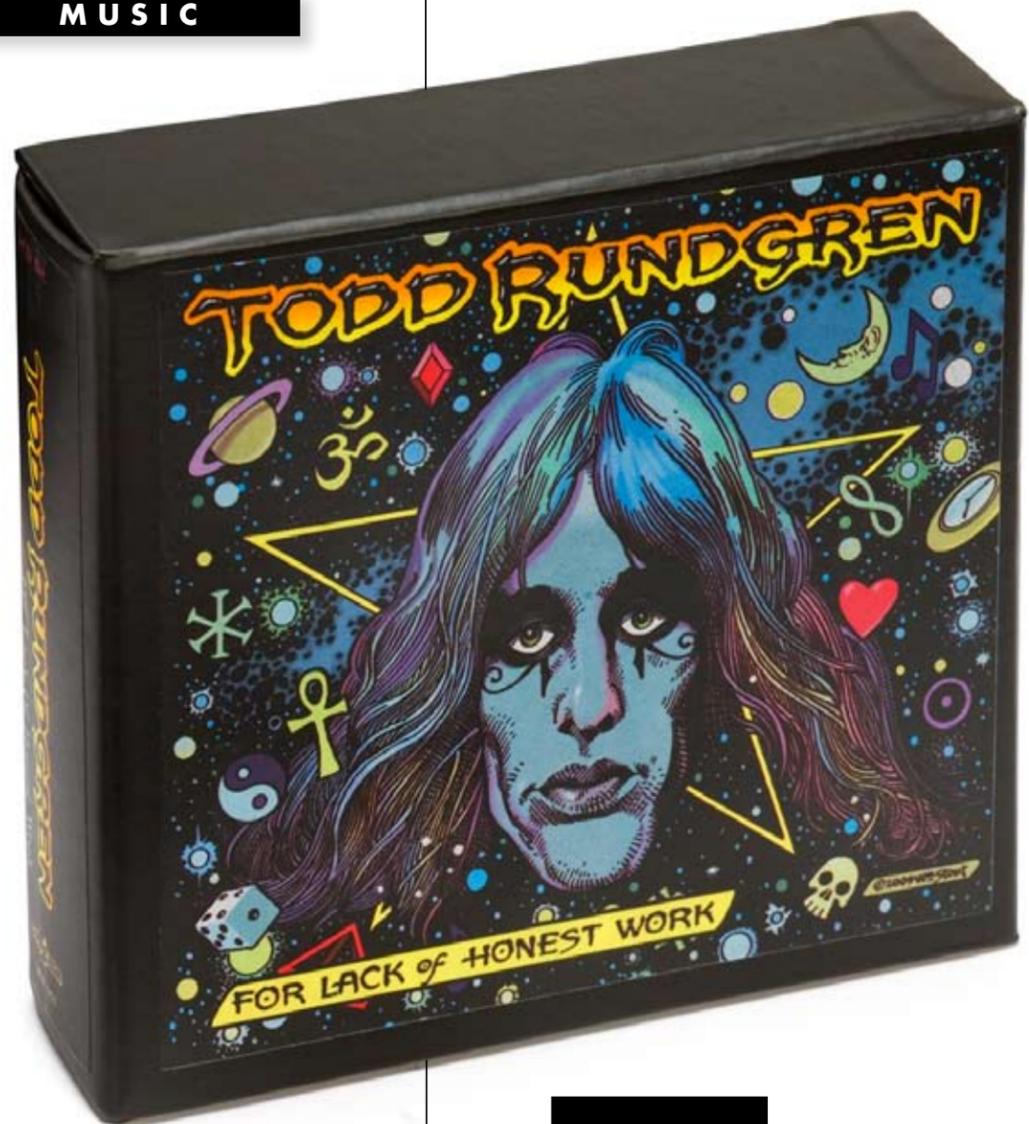
Alas, “Isle of Avalon” demands patience, its gently picked passages

providing a soft bed for Dickinson’s musings in a manner that evokes unhurried Rush. For those that stick with it, there are plenty of twists, yet the song would’ve benefited from extra punch and less contemplation. “The Talisman” also stretches over the nine-minute mark and favors similarly voiced Dickinson reflections. Think an alternate “Fear of the Dark” that requires several more shoves to get out from the moor and into the turbulent oceans. At least there’s nothing wrong with Dickinson’s ceiling-scraping highs here, or on “When the Wild Wind Blows,” a marathon sprint inspired by Raymond Brigg’s 1982 graphic novel about a post-nuclear attack. Lasting for eleven minutes (though it seems longer) and framed around a motif that sounds culled from an Irish jig, the extremely complex, multi-sectional, and borderline operatic turn is overkill—even by Maiden standards.

What keeps even the most drifting tunes afloat is a characteristic that’s always been Maiden’s undeniable hallmark: Uncanny melodies. *The Final Frontier* overflows with them, to the extent that they almost (but not quite) make the most indulgent fare palatable. In addition, the record’s conceptual themes—dressed up as science-fiction fantasy—seem to function as a larger metaphor for earth’s precarious survival. Destruction, burden, greed, prophesying, searching, uncertainty, and farewells course through the narratives. Then there’s the album title. A smokescreen for the end of the world as we know it? Maybe so. Meanwhile, up the fucking irons.

– Bob Gendron

What keeps even the most drifting tunes afloat is a characteristic that’s always been Maiden’s undeniable hallmark: Uncanny melodies.



**Todd Rundgren**  
*For Lack of Honest Work*  
 MicroWerks, 3 CD Box

**T**odd Rundgren has always stretched. Creative wizard that he is, the musician always seems to work best when there's a great band behind him. Perhaps the best way to look at this box set, then, is to view it as an expanded version of his double live album, *Back to the Bars*, only this time spanning a greater cross section of his career, sans his last album, *Arena*.

The track selection is excellent in that it offers up the ultimate Rundgren concert in a box. While he covers a wide scope of his catalog, playing a balance of obscurities and standards, there's precious little of the 1980-85 Utopia period.

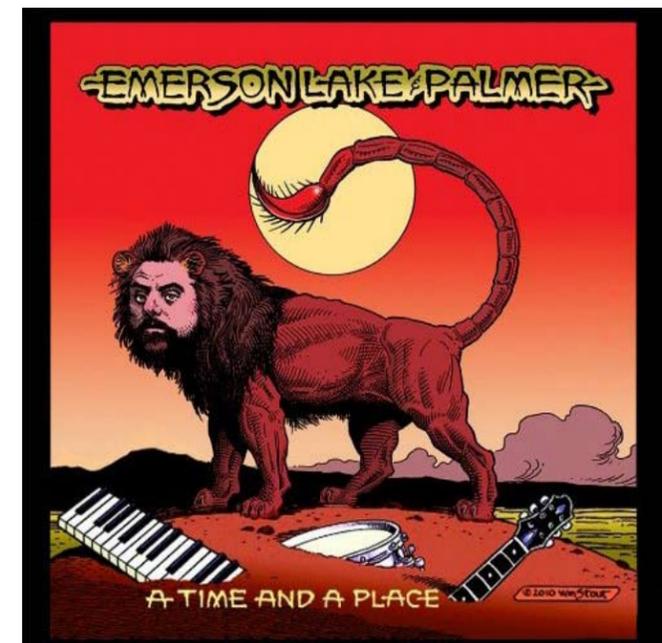
However, Rundgren includes three tracks ("Johneee Jingo", "Hodja," and "Honest Work") from his *A Capella* tour where he brought a dozen musicians on tour to perform harmonies that he captured in the studio by himself on the album. If you were in the audience at any of those gigs, you know how powerful these performances were. And still remain.

Alas, the set falls short in terms of context, relaying little background information save for listing the venues in which the songs were captured. Strange, especially given the obsessive nature of most Rundgren fans. Why didn't we get a standard booklet that outlines the performances in greater detail? Rundgren often mixes it up onstage with any number of special guests. This is stuff that music nerds want to know.

But it's hard to argue with the music. Along with the deep cuts, Rundgren gives us more than a fair share of the hits, all plucked from standout performances. Although there isn't a stinker here, the sound quality is only average. Having seen Rundgren countless times (and at a few of the shows listed here), better sonics should've been in order given that he usually delivers an excellent live mix.

Still, what Rundgren lacks here in audiophile sensibilities, he more than makes up for with emotion. If you are a fan, *For Lack of Honest Work* is a very worthwhile addition to your collection.

— Jeff Dorgay



**Emerson, Lake and Palmer**  
*A Time and a Place*  
 Shout Factory, 4 CD box

**A** *Time and a Place* opens with "The Barbarian," from ELP's second-ever live performance, at the Isle of Wight festival in the UK on August 29, 1970. The song serves its purpose as, immediately, the power of the trio becomes impossible to ignore. Divided into four discs ("The Early 70s," "The Late 70s," "The 90s," and "This Boot's For You-A Fan's View") this box set is completely comprised of live recordings—specifically, rarities, bootlegs, and even ELP-approved fan recordings. *(continued)*

For the dedicated fan, the collection will provide deeper insight into the band's repertoire or, if nothing else, bring back great memories of tours past. And with the tracks culled from excellent performances, the multi-disc offering proves that, while ELP was often charged with demonstrating excess, when on the money, the band did an outstanding job at pulling it off in a live environment long before there were racks of gear on the soundboard to mask performers' sins. No mean feat, that. Nonetheless, several hiccups dictate that casual listeners should tread with caution.

The first disc shows the band from the beginning of its career, playing classics, such as "Take a Pebble", "Hoedown," and "Still You Turn Me On," and closes at the peak of ELP's prowess. By contrast, disc two concentrates on 1977-1978, when the band struggled to stay relevant amidst an invasion of new-wave fashions and disco. The music presented here, however, is top-notch, and fortunately comes to an end before ELP's ill-fated *Love Beach* album, which contributed to the group's undoing in late 1979.

While ELP reformed to take another crack at touring in 1985,

disc three ignores that period and instead focuses on mid-1992 through August 1998. We get a rendition of "Time and a Place" recorded on August 1st, 1998, just weeks before the ensemble splintered again. ELP made the right decision. Plodding along, Greg Lake sounds weak on vocals, and Keith Emerson's keyboard riffs are clearly not up to task, lacking the intricate fills of his earlier years.

On many levels, the fourth disc, though comprised of bootleg recordings, is the best of the four. It offers the widest range of material, going all the way from "Toccata (with drum solo)" to "I Believe in

Father Christmas." Unfortunately, the recording quality is not up to the level of the performances, and I'm surprised that the band, upon hearing the level of intensity on these tracks, didn't go back to their vaults and give us more. A missed opportunity.

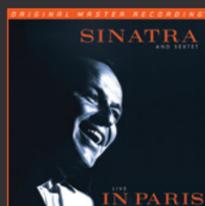
In the end, *Time and a Place* is a mixed bag. It does a great job at chronicling the rise and fall of one of prog-rock's biggest bands. Yet, unless you are a diehard fan or a completist, you might be better served by spinning the group's first three albums and remembering ELP at its best.

— Jeff Dorgay

For the dedicated fan, the collection will provide deeper insight into the band's repertoire or, if nothing else, bring back great memories of tours past.

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Frank Sinatra & Sextet  
*Live in Paris*



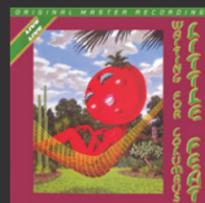
Frank Sinatra  
*Sinatra & Strings*



The Band *Rock Of Ages*



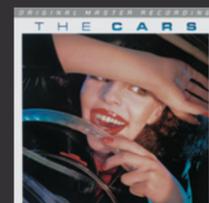
The Band  
*Music From Big Pink*



Little Feat  
*Waiting For Columbus*



Marvin Gaye  
*What's Going On*



The Cars *The Cars*



Santana *Abraxas*



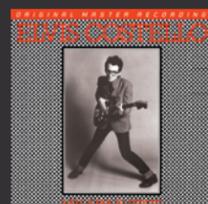
Beck *Sea Change*



Marshall Crenshaw  
*Marshall Crenshaw*



Pixies *Surfer Rosa*



Elvis Costello  
*My Aim Is True*

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# Fix My Dual!

By Jerold O'Brien

**M**any of us have fond memories of Dual turntables. In the mid to late 70's, these automatic, idler drive tables were top contenders, with stiff competition coming from the likes of Thorens and Garrard. Built like tanks, the underside was full of springs, gears and of course the big rubber idler wheel. About this time, Linn's LP-12 hit the scene, offering a new level of musicality along with the direct drive tables from the Japanese that both stole some of the thunder from the idler drives. Dual would go on to produce belt (and direct) drive models before fading off into oblivion in the mid 80's, but their legacy was definitely the idler drive tables.

**Who needs iTunes and Cover Flow, when you can load up five albums to play non-stop.**

With the vinyl revolution showing no sign of losing steam, many music lovers have turned to the classic turntables as an alternative to some of the budget offerings from Rega, Pro-Ject and Music Hall. On the upper end of the price range, the classic Garrard and Thorens tables have really been making a comeback in audiophile circles, with fully restored versions easily fetching prices in the \$3,000 - \$5,000 range, with diehard idler enthusiasts claiming better bass response and more lifelike tonality.

If you'd like a taste of the idler sound at a more reasonable price, consider a Dual. Whether you are new to spinning vinyl, or trying to find something to play those old Foghat albums that you've had tucked in the closet since high school, this is a fun record player and it's fully automatic. Which can really come in handy if you revisit the state of mind that you were in the last time you listened to Foghat... If you want your audiophile buddies to think that you've really lost your mind, grab some dollar selections from your local record store or thrift shop and stack 'em! Who needs iTunes and Cover Flow, when you can load up five albums to play non-stop.

The two most popular models, the 1219 and the 1229 are trading on eBay between \$75 and \$225, but this is not the way you want to roll.

Like any fairly complex mechanism, turntables don't respond positively to being bounced around in an adverse manner. Your chances of getting a clean example, and it *not* getting trashed in shipping by a non-audiophile are slim to none.

## A Turnkey Solution

Just call Bill Neumann at [fixmydual.com](http://fixmydual.com). He's taken his hobby of restoring these tables and turned it into a full time job, thanks to the demand and word getting around on the Internet. He charges anywhere from about \$100 - \$300 to rebuild a table, depending on condition, or you can buy a fully restored model *with cartridge installed* for about \$425, which is just what our publisher did. While a fair price for a budget turntable, this is a testament to the staying power of these turntables, as they were \$185 when new in 1970-1972.

"I've always got at least a few on the shelf, ready to go," Neumann said when we talked to him. His cartridge of choice; a vintage Shure, or the Grado Black. As the big cheese just happened to have a spare Grado Red hanging around, that was the direction this table, a 1219 ended up taking. Neumann added, "The major difference between the 1219 and the 1229 is the later model has a window with a strobe for the speed control. *(continued)*

FEATURE



**This is the perfect solution for the vinyl newbie... All you need to do is affix the counterweight and set the tracking force.**

They had to do that to keep up with Technics, but it's really not necessary, these tables hold their speed very well."

This is the perfect solution for the vinyl newbie, because the table arrives meticulously packed. All you need to do is affix the counterweight and set the tracking force. You'll be playing music in five minutes.

### Definitely a Vintage Sound

After the photos were taken we decided to explore the limits of the 1219's performance envelope, before I took it home to a more "vintage" environment. I'm sure most Dual owners won't be hooking this baby up to a \$12,000 Audio Research REF Phono 2, but it was easy to see just what the table was capable of when doing so. It is definitely as I remember them sounding, somewhat warm and wooly, yet friendly. There is definitely something to be said for "the idler arm sound", with a nice weight to the lower end. *(continued)*

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Back in my batcave, hooked up to a recently restored Harmon Kardon Citation 18 preamp and Dynaco Stereo 70 driving a pair of JBL L-166's, the sound was full and enjoyable with killer bass. When comparing this to a Rega P2 with Elys cartridge, the Rega table definitely has a livelier sound with more midrange detail; now I remember how and why these tables were so exciting back in the 70's when they arrived on the scene. However, I suspect that the 1219 may be severely limited by the cheapo stock tonearm cable. My tweakazoid sensibilities might get the better of me, so don't be surprised if you see a follow up

article after I've played with this table a little more, experimenting with some cable options as well as a few more budget cartridges. I'm convinced there is more performance to be had from the 1218.

I just couldn't bring myself to use fully automatic mode, but the auto return feature was handy when I was getting busy later that evening. Foghat never sounded so good. ●

For more product information:

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

[www.dual-reference.com](http://www.dual-reference.com)



# A Private Session With Lynn Hoffman

By Jeff Dorgay

If you were watching VH-1 at the turn of the 21st Century, chances are you caught VJ Lynn Hoffman on their popular new cable network, *VH-1 Classic*, which featured many of the best videos from the 80s by the likes of popular artists like Michael Jackson and Van Halen as well as some from more obscure and one-hit-wonder bands.

Hoffman was a great host, often interviewing many artists about their work, past and present, as well as hosting the popular "All Request Hour." She even started a Thanksgiving trend, hosting a show with Twisted Sister's Dee Snider. (Hoffman told me in the following interview that she unfortunately missed the year that he cut the turkey with a chain saw.)

Today, she's the host of A&E Networks and Daytime Emmy Nominated *Private Sessions*, (airing at 9 a.m. EST, on Sundays) taking the concept further.

Photos of Lynn Hoffman  
©2008 AETN / Photo Credit: Eric McNatt

Photos of Lynn with guests  
©2009 AETN / Photo Credit: Billy Tompkins



Her latest show concentrates on a single artist, with the interviews punctuated by live performances from the artist in the A&E studio. And Hoffman has expanded her reach, not only covering great artists from the 70s and 80s (Squeeze, Cyndi Lauper, Smokey Robinson) but current acts such as Seal, Maroon 5, and Alanis Morissette. She's also interviewed actors (Michael Douglas, Dustin Hoffman) whose careers span the decades.

Having taken on some of the biggest personalities in the music business (Ringo Starr, Gene Simmons), Hoffman is as warm off camera as she is on the show. As she mentions in the interview, the best discussions are those that end up being a conversation and go off the scripted path. With *Private Sessions* now in its third season and attracting 93 million viewers, she's certainly come a long way since doing radio commercials for her dad's furniture business when she was 19.

**TONE: Are you still doing radio these days?**

Lynn: I don't have my own show right now, but I am the imaging voice of a lot of stations all over the country and I did just come out of the studio from recording a demo show with Dee Snider. It's hush hush right now; we'll let you know soon.

**How much time are you spending with Twitter and Facebook now that we are so interconnected?**

A lot, but I am looking forward to going on vacation and having a little quiet time.

**Between all the projects on your plate and *Private Sessions*, you seem to be staying very busy.**

Fortunately, I'm as busy as I'd like to be and that's great. I've met one of my major goals to get more control over my schedule. I've got a studio at home too, which really helps. It's a nice balance between working at home doing voice work, narrations and commercials, then coming into the studio to shoot.

**You started in radio and moved to VH-1. Was that your first TV gig?**

Yes, after ten years of morning radio, I wanted to make the transition to TV and VH-1 hired me to be the first host of *VH-1 Classic*, which was part of MTV Network's new chain of digital cable networks launched in 2002.

**Classic was always a great slice of our past and was really popular around here. Was it a lot of fun to work on the show?**

(Laughs) It was great fun, a real breath of fresh air. Not many commercials then either, just great videos. I had 5 ½ years at VH-1 having the time of my life and I didn't want it to ever end. I was an 80s chick heavily influenced by 70s music, which to me was still my favorite time period for music. To be able to start in this business with so many seasoned pros was a thrill. But my boss warned me that when the show became really popular he feared we would lose it, because it was a small group working on it.

**So, how did *Private Sessions* come about? Did they find you or did you find them?**

Well, one day my producer (from *Classic*) called and said, "Don't show up tomorrow because none of us are going to be there. We're all getting our pink slips." (continued)

"Don't show up tomorrow because none of us are going to be there."

We're all getting our pink slips."



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FEATURE

### **Ouch.**

Yeah, no one ever even called me, just my producer to give me a heads up. But within two hours, my agent called and told me he had good news about an audition I had done for A&E.

***That's great that one door opened just as the other shut...***

Exactly.

***Is it more interesting being more in control of this show, and not having a co-host? How much input do you have on the program?***

I love it, I absolutely love it, and my producer, Liisa Lunden has made me a collaborative partner on the show. I get to be a big part of the show, sharing ideas and my questions for the guests. I've even received producer credit on a few shows, which has been very exciting.

***Who handles the actual booking of the guests? Do you get to put the thumbs down if it's someone you really don't want to interview?***

(Laughs) Liisa does the bulk of the booking. But if there's someone I'm dying to get on the show, she'll make the pitch.

***Has anyone turned you down?***

Not so far, though we've got a few people with scheduling conflicts from time to time. At least that's what they tell us. Often, it depends on recording and touring schedules as well as getting all the members of the band in NYC at the same time.

***I would think in the climate of today's music industry, with everyone clamoring for buzz, most artists would be thrilled to get in front of the camera.*** *(continued)*



Lynn with Smokey Robinson



Lynn with John Oates and Daryl Hall

(Producer Lunden adds) You would think so, maybe 70% of the artists agree. But the other 30% still don't get it. The music industry is not like it used to be.

**You always come across so calm and relaxed on camera. Is there anyone that you've interviewed when you had to fight the urge to be a fangirl?**

Not really, because I feel the only way to do this job properly is to not fall into that trap. But I did have a moment recently....

**Was that when Sting kissed you?**

Believe it or not, it wasn't Sting. It was when I met Debbie Harry. I was struck by her beauty. Her stylist came into my dressing room and said Debbie wanted to know what I was wearing so she would know what to wear. I knocked on her door and there was this woman, one of the most photographed women in the world, and when I saw her there I got sweaty and didn't know what to say. I kind of backed out of the door, but she couldn't have been sweeter. By the time we got on camera, it was cool. And [Blondie guitarist] Chris Stein is one of the nicest guys ever, so it all went easy.

**How about your recent show with Gene Simmons?**

Gene was so awesome. We had the best time with him. He stayed over an hour after the interview! He gave us guitar lessons and taught us how to balance flowers on our noses, that kind of thing.

(Lunden adds) I have to say as an outsider, who has to research what guests have done on other shows: Lynn did an outstanding job with Gene. Sometimes he can be very challenging to the person who is interviewing him, and the interviewer has to stay on their game in order to keep up with him. Lynn handled it all and that's why they hit it off so well. Whereas a lesser interviewer might have been offended by a couple of things he said, Lynn got him and enjoyed chatting with him and to this day, it's one of her best interviews yet!

**You made it look so easy...**

I think it was because I get the character. Howard Stern is the same way. If you get the character and let them be themselves, it's okay. It's part of the brand. Gene Simmons is not a jerk at all. I felt like we really connected. *(continued)*

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**Who has been your most challenging interview?**

Joe Jackson. It was my first on camera interview. He gave me all one-word answers.

**What do you do then?**

I cried after that one! I wanted to give up. Meat Loaf was challenging but in a good way, because he has such a long story to tell, so how do you fit it in? Ringo was tough, only because everyone here freaked out about having a Beatle in the building. You could cut the tension in the hallway with a knife. But once I sat down with him, he was great.

**Is it tougher interviewing someone like that, who's been interviewed a lot over the years, to come up with a few interesting, perhaps off-the-beaten-path questions?**

That's a big part of what we try to do on the show, especially with someone like Ringo who has been interviewed for almost 50 years now. Even with some of the questions that have been asked before, we try to ask them in a way that sounds fresh.



Lynn in an interview with Lindsey Buckingham

And if at all possible to ask some questions that haven't been asked. When it turns into an actual conversation, that's when you get the interesting stuff that hasn't happened on camera.

**Have any of the people you've worked with in the music industry become good friends?**

Dee Snider and I became good friends and we share an agent. I've been to dinner with Roger Daltrey after a show. He was a perfect gentleman, and even walked me home. I invited him in and he hung out with my boyfriend and I for a while. It was very surreal! Simon Kirk from Bad Company, Jack Blades, and Kelly Keagy from Night Ranger are dear friends as well.

**I loved the clip of you helping Glenn Tilbrook from Squeeze with his makeup. Any wardrobe malfunctions at Private Sessions?**

No, but it is interesting. At any given time you might see me getting sewing lessons from Vanessa Williams or Kevin Bacon doing my hair. Our guests feel comfortable goofing around on our show, and I love that.

That really helps the guest get comfortable before the interview, and I never know who might be sitting next to my chair when I'm getting my makeup and hair done.

**Sounds like it's always a pretty interesting day.**

Exactly. It's like home here and from the minute our guests get here, we try to make it very comfortable.

**So, how much of a music person are you? At the end of the show, have you had enough and need peace and quiet, or are you still in the groove?**

No, I'm a music nut. I've been listening to Pandora a lot lately on my iPhone. To just punch in one of my favorite artists and get a custom radio show with no commercials. It's fantastic.

**You mentioned being a 70s and 80s girl. What new things are you listening to these days?**

I'm definitely more of a rock fan. I grew up with Motley Crue, Whitesnake, that kind of thing. I just finished a segment with Rob Halford from Judas Priest. And, I have to mention my brother Greg, from Boston, who is in a band called Cropduster. Though new, they are highly influenced by the 70s sound. I also am a big singer-songwriter fan and love James Taylor, but I haven't seen him on the current tour yet with Carole King.

**The premium seats here in Portland went for \$4,500 each!**

(to Liisa) Can we book him on the show, so we don't have to pay that? But one of the other artists I'm listening to is Michael Nappi. I can't get enough of him and though he's getting limited airplay, I think he's got a good chance at breaking to a larger audience. Tom Glynn, from Boston, is on my list as well. I'm also listening to Katy Perry, Lady Gaga, and Scissor Sisters. If you catch me alone in the car I'll even blast Miley Cyrus once in a while. *(continued)*



Lynn and Rob Halford share devil horns



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***Any other guilty pleasures?***

I still like Winger. "Headed for a Heartbreak" was one of my favorite songs growing up.

***Do you play Rock Band and if so, are you a casual or maniacal player?***

I do, definitely more on the maniacal side. I've been playing video games since I got my first Atari system in 1979. Today, it's Xbox for me and I love to play *Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero* whenever I have the time. It's great for entertaining friends and family. But truthfully, *Halo* is my game and I can beat any guy at it. Bring it on!

***People are playing it a lot safer these days. They aren't driving motorcycles through hotels anymore!***

***Who would you most like to play Rock Band against?***

Aerosmith, my all-time favorite rock band. It would be fun to play against the guys from ELO, or perhaps Earth, Wind and Fire too.

***Who would you most like to sing a duet with?***

That's a tough one. John Mayer, Steve Perry, Alicia Keys, or Sheryl Crow.

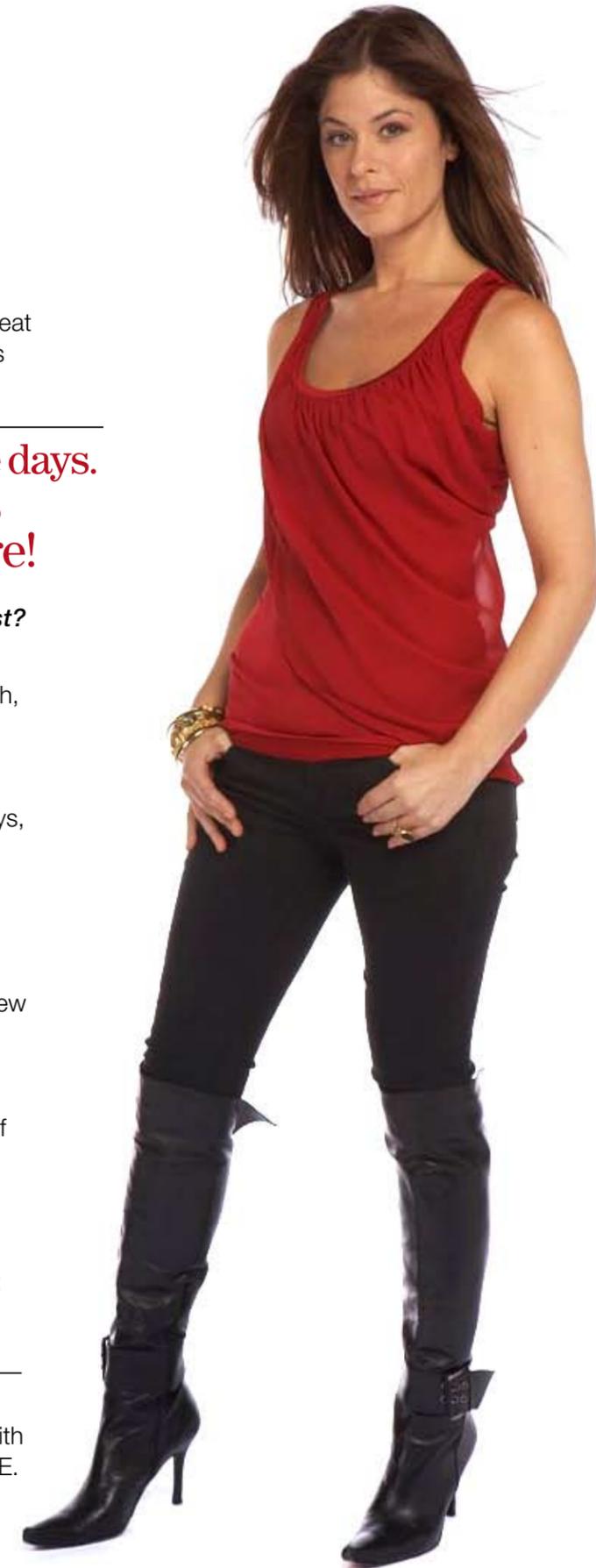
***Are you surprised that vinyl has made such a big comeback and that LPs are selling as well as they are in 2010?***

I still have a turntable, and still listen to the records I grew up with. I love the sound of vinyl. The artists really like it too. So many have told me that they wish the music business would go even further back that way. I think today's kids are really starting to appreciate that part of music's heritage.

***What's the biggest change you've noticed in the business?***

People are playing it a lot safer these days. They aren't driving motorcycles through hotels anymore!

The music of the 70s and 80s has been good to Lynn Hoffman, and she's always on the move. Stay tuned with Lynn and *Private Sessions* on Sunday mornings on A&E. She's got an interesting guest list going forward. ●



# Audiophile Pressings

By Jeff Dorgay

In light of many heated arguments over which pressing happens to be the proverbial holy grail, we feel it is important to re-state our position on today's remastered LPs. Whenever possible, for the sake of absolute reference, we will attempt to compare said remasters to "unobtainable" pressings in our collection.

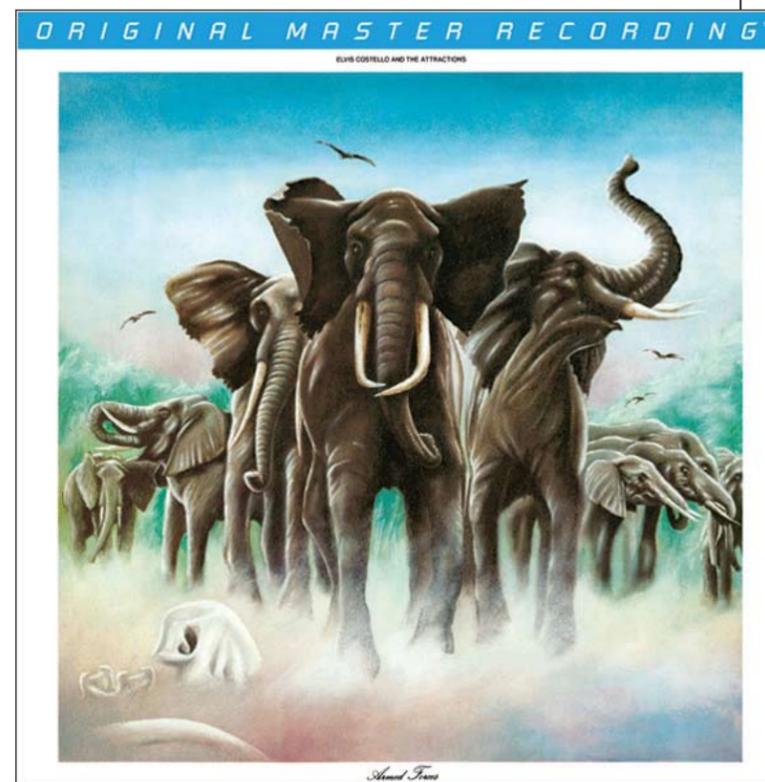
However, when considering the purchase of a remastered album, our primary criteria for evaluation is not whether said remaster is equal to or better than an unobtainable pressing. We judge the record on its own merit.

Specifically, here's what we *do* look for:

- 1.** Is the quality of the vinyl exceptional? Low surface noise, flat pressing, etc.
- 2.** How does the sound compare to not only an unobtainable pressing (which may be prohibitively expensive) *and* how does it compare to the average pressing that you might find at your local record store or online auction in the \$5-\$25 range?
- 3.** How does the packaging compare to the original? If there were any special features with the original (gatefold, stickers, additional poster, etc.), how much care was taken in duplicating such goodies as well as the overall print quality?
- 4.** If there is a significant variation from the original, what has the current mastering engineer done with the interpretation?

Also, with so many holy grail pressings out of the financial reach of most of us, does the remaster come close to the magic without costing more than it would cost you to live in Belize for a year? If so, then it's an overwhelming success. (Personally, I think anyone paying \$900 for a "hot stamper" of anything is crazy, but our hobby is all about obsession, so I won't pass judgment.)

If you are looking to this column for the last word on pressing quality, it might be of more limited use to you. But if you want to know if the latest Elvis Costello remaster rocks, we can help. And so this issue's column begins with...Elvis!



## Elvis Costello

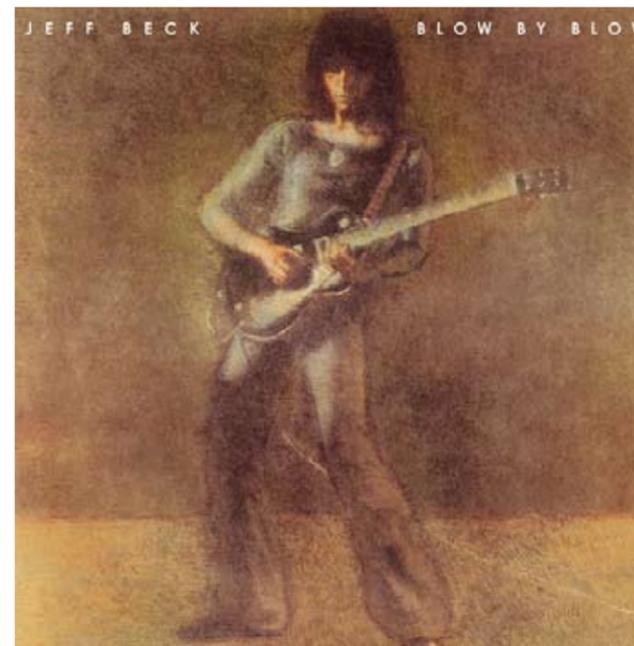
*Armed Forces*  
MoFi, 180g LP

While the first two LP's in Elvis Costello's catalog have already been given the royal treatment by MoFi, this, a restoration of his third record, is the best yet. If you are one of the Costello fans that consider his first four albums his finest work, you are in for a treat. We can only hope that MoFi will get its hands on *Imperial Bedroom* as well. For now, the guys in Sebastopol aren't talking.

In the meantime, the quality control on this pressing is fantastic. MoFi did a great job on the printing and again used the U.K. format for the cover (rather than the U.S./Columbia format). So if you bought a U.S. copy, the covers appear reversed. U.S. copies with early stamper numbers currently sell in the \$18-\$30 range, and original UK pressings fetch about 30% more. Garden-variety editions can be had for about \$6. If you are looking for something off the beaten path, Linn's Selekt Records produced a remaster that's not half bad, but is rare and often trades as high as \$100.

Bottom line, however, is that the MoFi disc is exemplary, and for \$29.95, is likely the best version of this record available. U.S. editions not only have the treble tipped up but also feature more compression and don't have the MoFi's weight.

As is typical with all of the label's recent pressings, the LP surfaces are CD quiet, with a big, wide soundstage. Cymbals actually sound like cymbals, and you can hear a lot more of the echo applied to Costello's voice. The soundstage is slightly wider, but a lot deeper. Moreover, a huge level of grain has been removed. Highly recommended.



## Jeff Beck

*Blow by Blow*  
Friday Music, 180g LP

Although Friday Music claims that this pressing is half-speed mastered from the original master tape, the results don't sound any better than my early Epic pressing.

The last few records that we've sampled from Friday Music have been somewhat harsh and compressed, with a tonal balance that skews towards the thin, bright side of the spectrum. Alas, this Jeff Beck classic doesn't veer far from that typical (i.e., disappointing) experience.

Although Friday Music claims that this pressing is half-speed mastered from the original master tape, the results don't sound any better than my early Epic pressing—an edition that you should be able to find at a used record store for about \$4. This copy and my original Epic are somewhat crunchy sounding on the top end, and have an equally wide soundstage. Keep in mind, however, that these results come via the somewhat lush Koetsu Urushi Blue cartridge. When played on my other 'table with the Clearaudio DaVinci (very resolving and upfront tonal balance), the record is almost unlistenable. Seriously, don't even think about buying this pressing unless your system is somewhat on the romantic side.

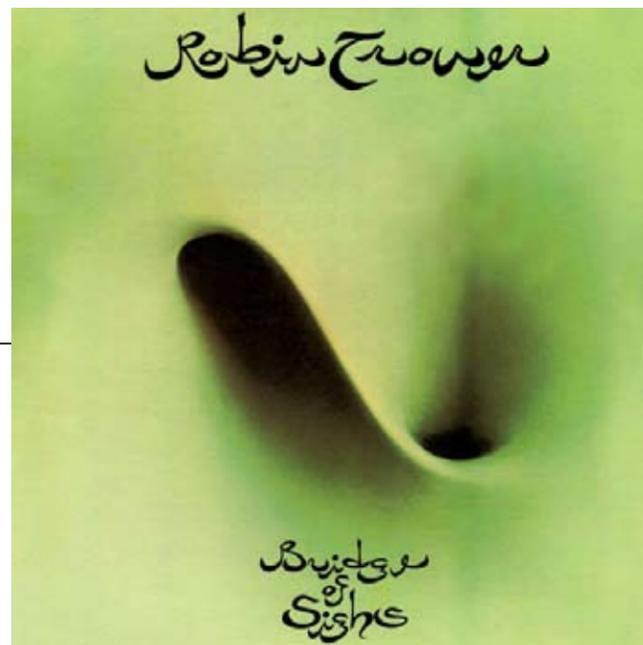
The recording to beat—if you can find one at a reasonable price—is the original SACD. With a more relaxed top end, bigger soundstage, and better dynamics, it's my first choice.

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## Robin Trower

*Bridge of Sighs*  
Friday Music, 180g LP

Every track on this record sounds fantastic, with a lot more air than my early U.S. pressings.

Maybe I'm an eternal optimist, or maybe it was the writing in the deadwax on this record that says "One of Joe's favorites," but I had to give Friday Music one more chance because *Bridge of Sighs* is one of my favorites, too. It brings back great memories of seeing Robin Trower live during the period when he was a guitar god, regularly compared to Hendrix, and did an awfully spectacular job delivering the goods.

Helming one of the great 70s power trios, Trower follows the Cream tradition throughout this set by way of husky bass lines, innovative drumming, a gritty lead singer (James Dewar), and, of course, bluesy guitar work. Every track on this record sounds fantastic, with a lot more air than my early U.S. pressings. The soundstage is expanded and possesses more low-level detail. Backing vocal tracks and band interaction are much easier to discern, and the cymbals sound correct. Trower's spacey wah-wah guitar claims a richer tone and figures more prominently in the mix, slightly to the right of center.

This pressing is definitely a treat for Trower fans, especially for those whose older copies are mediocre or worn from heavy rotation. The question remains: Will Friday Music get its shit together and continue to produce records at this level of quality? I certainly hope so.

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# Canned Heat and John Lee Hooker



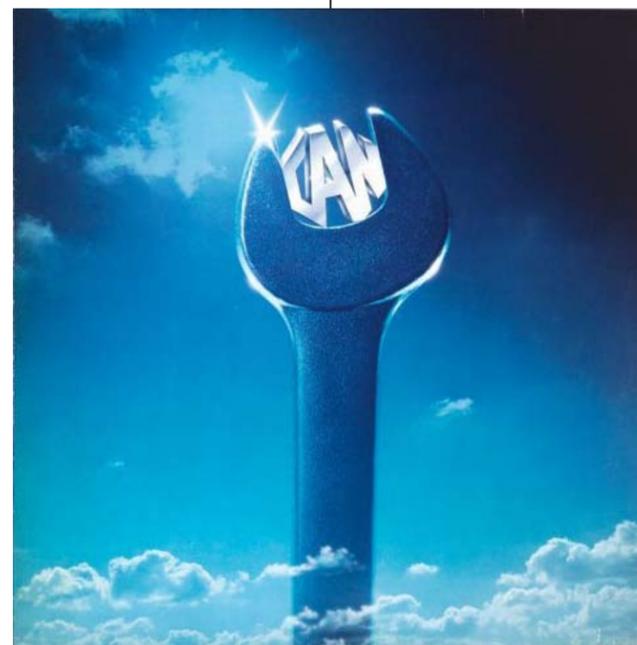
*Hooker N' Heat*  
Pure Pleasure Records, 180g 2-LP set

**If you are a blues fan and don't have this one in your collection, I can't recommend it highly enough—it's the real deal.**

**C**hances are your copy of *Hooker N' Heat* didn't survive the 70s in very good shape. If that's the case, here's your chance to get a pristine edition. The folks at Pure Pleasure have done their usual excellent job at resurrecting vintage blues and taking it home.

True to the title, this double album features Canned Heat and mega bluesman John Lee Hooker performing the latter's songs in August 1970. The liner notes mention that Hooker used a vintage Silvertone amplifier propped up on a wooden platform where he sat and played guitar. Pure Pleasure's pressing does a fantastic job of recreating Hooker's guitar as well as said recording space. His vocals are mostly just to the right of the right speaker, with his guitar more to the left. But the sound is *huge*, full of body and decay. During some of the quieter parts, you can even hear the tube rush in his amp, which must be cranked up to about 13.

If you are a blues fan and don't have this one in your collection, I can't recommend it highly enough—it's the real deal. The LP puts you right in the room with Hooker seated about ten feet in front of you.



## Can

*Inner Space*  
Sundazed, LP

**I**f you are a Krautrock fan, you know about this band and you know that mint, early U.K. pressings of Can's albums can fetch as high as \$300 each. While this Sundazed version suspiciously sounds as if it's been cut from a digital master, with the highs slightly crunchy and harsh, the overall effect is much better than that of the reissued CDs.

The overall mix is big and wide, and very Kraftwerk-like in delivery, as a bevy of analog synth and atmospheric sounds bounce throughout the room, everything punctuated by random drumbeats. And while *Inner Space* isn't the best example of Can's hallmark sound, this LP is priced right at \$19. Moreover, your chances of finding one with surfaces this quiet will easily set you back more than \$100—and that's if you're lucky.

And for those that don't know about Can? Start your adventures in Krautrock here.

**While this Sundazed version suspiciously sounds as if it's been cut from a digital master, the overall effect is much better than that of the reissued CDs.**

THE POLICE SYNCHRONICITY



# The Police

*Synchronicity*  
Universal Japan, SHM-SACD



# The Allman Brothers

*At Fillmore East*  
Universal Japan, SHM-SACD

For those unfamiliar with the new SHM-SACD format, it is a very high-purity disc material that claims a more accurate transfer of the digital information that yields better sound. That's the theory anyway. Currently, these discs are being distributed by Eastwind Imports, a company that has built a stellar reputation for bringing hard-to-find Japanese imports to the world. While I have purchased some fantastic discs from Eastwind over the years, this time, I must advise caution with these two particular examples of the SHM technology.

Yes, these discs are the epitome of the word *detail*, but unfortunately, there isn't much warmth or body. These characteristics will appeal to some listeners, but they're not my cup of tea. And, as these discs possess only an SACD layer, they are not backward compatible with conventional CD players. Which means you must have an SACD player at the ready.

Both the Police and the Allman Brothers discs are very forward sounding, albeit with excellent dynamics. Should your system already be slightly forward and analytical, these discs might be too much to bear. However, when feeding my dCS Paganini to a vintage tube amplifier, the combination proved intriguing. Hence, if your system features a more lush overall balance, these discs will bring extra life to your set-up.

My only real complaint is that for \$49 each, Universal needs to open up the vault to more interesting titles than records (like these) that have already been remastered at least five to ten times. This kind of strategy only bodes well for obsessive collectors, not true music lovers.

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# Four More Blue Note XRCDs

By Richard Colburn

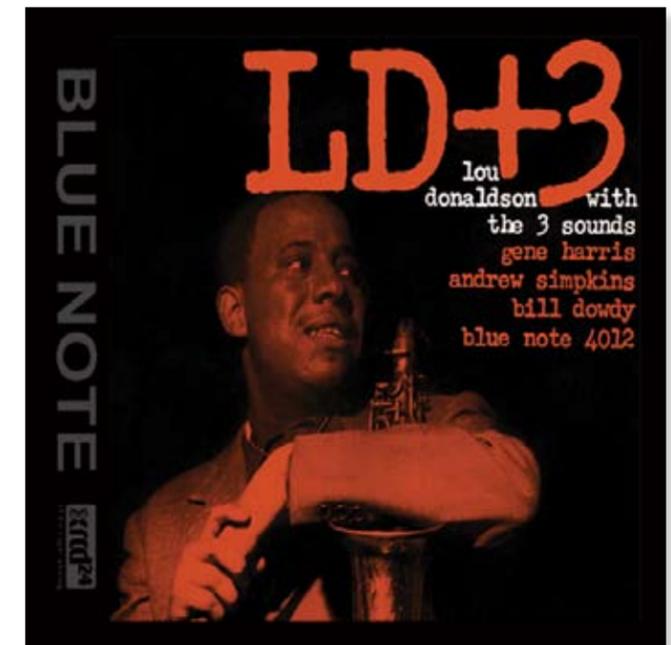


If you feel left out of the highly deserved hoopla surrounding Music Matters' classic Blue Note 45RPM vinyl reissues because you don't own a turntable, not to worry. You can still get in on the action with the Audio Wave Music JVC XRCD editions of the same recordings. And you won't be missing out on much at all. Producer Joe Harley is the common denominator between the two projects. There's also one big advantage to listening to digital: You don't have to get up after one or two compositions because the lead-out groove is insistently grinding your cartridge. Yes, you can sit back, relax, and enjoy the whole recording session in relaxed, uninterrupted 24-bit fashion.

Johnny Coles was rather diminutive in stature, hence his moniker "Little." But the nickname has nothing to do with his sound. Pianist Duke Pearson, tenor saxophonist Joe Henderson, alto saxophonist Leo Wright, bassist Bob Cranshaw, and an alternating pair of drummers, Pete La Roca and Walter Perkins, join Coles on 1963's impressive *Little Johnny C*, the only album the trumpeter released as a bandleader. From the opening bars of the upbeat title cut to the beautiful soulful tones of "So Sweet My Little Girl," Coles' soft touch on the horn is majestically showcased. However, most of the tunes swing with stand-out tandem playing of the major lines. But it's Henderson's "Hobo Joe" that'll really have you tapping your feet and snapping fingers. Coles' career involved associations with Gil Evans, Charles Mingus, and Herbie Hancock, but you'll be asking "what if" after hearing this treasure.



Dexter Gordon needs no introduction. On *Doin' Alright*, the tenor saxophonist's first Blue Note session, he steps out with a young Freddie Hubbard on trumpet, Al Harewood on drums, George Tucker on bass, and Horace Parlan on piano. And what a session this is. It leads off with the George Gershwin's lovely "I Was Doing All Right," on which both Gordon and Hubbard display their considerable melodic talents. Gordon's ballad "You've Changed" is delivered with thoughtful tenderness and restraint. By contrast, the mood turns bluesy and somewhat fiery on "Society Red." And Gordon's big, signature tone peppers the swinging "It's You Or No One." As usual, the sound is clean and clear, with excellent placement of the instruments within the soundstage. Highly satisfying.



On *LD+3*, the Three Sounds—pianist Gene Harris, drummer Bill Dowdy, and bassist Andrew Simpkins—are joined by prolific alto saxophonist Lou Donaldson. By the time this 1959 effort was recorded, the Three Sounds already made a name for themselves as a tight Blue Note trio. But as a quartet, the group simply swings hard. Nowhere is this more evident than on Donaldson's "Jump Up" and Charlie Parker's "Confirmation." The tempo slows up a bit on Rogers and Hart's "Blue Moon." Yet the band never approaches ballad territory because the percolating rhythm section just won't let it happen. Besides Donaldson's excellent blowing, Harris' chops and tidy solos dominate. And yes, there's more of that trademark Blue Note house sound here, rendered so well by JVC's mastering process.

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The 1964 set captures Morgan in fine form and accompanied by some of Blue Note's most legendary names...

Lee Morgan's *The Sidewinder* is one of the most famous jazz albums in history. It was also a huge commercial success, and is considered jazz's first crossover hit. Lost in its shadow, another period Morgan recording, *Tom Cat*, sat in the vaults before seeing the light of day in 1980. What a shame. The 1964 set captures Morgan in fine form and accompanied by some of Blue Note's most legendary names: Art Blakey on drums, Bob Cranshaw on bass, McCoy Tyner on piano, Jackie Mclean on alto sax, and Curtis Fuller on trombone. A formidable lineup, and the recording does not disappoint. Witness the uptempo blues of the title cut, with a creeping bass/piano line over which the horn players alternately slow burn or freely swing. After an opening statement on "Twice Around," Fuller, McLean, Morgan, and Tyner follow with intense solos as Blakey either crashes or taps percussive rhythms before taking his own solo turn. The final piece, "Riggarmortes," is anything but cold and stiff. We're lucky the vaults yielded this sonic secret. By the time *Tom Cat* was released, Morgan had been gone for eight years, murdered by his common-law wife between sets at Slug's, an East Village jazz club. He was just 33.

JVC's packaging on all of these discs is top notch, featuring an extra-sturdy case with classic Blue Note album artwork adorning most of the reissues. The insides open up to original liner notes, recording session photos, and extensive information on the XRCD recording process. Good-quality original master tapes, Harley's meticulous production, and Alan Yoshida's mastering skills are responsible for the amazing sound. ●

# Cute, Powerful, Portable

## The Logitech Squeezebox Touch

By Rich Kent

**M**usic lovers are always compiling lists of their favorite songs, and long before we had playlists in iTunes, there was the venerable mix tape. Those who remember when our only options for music software were records and tapes will also recall the work needed to make a great mix tape: you had to listen and record in real time as well as keeping a calculator handy to determine just how many tracks you could fit onto the side of a cassette or reel tape. It was an art form and a gift to others who treasured and cherished these collections wholeheartedly. And the true masters could run music right to the end of the tape. As the saying goes, you had to be there...

Times have changed with digital media reigning supreme and analogue sources a curiosity and an eccentric media at best. The LP has been making a solid comeback, but it is still a minor part of total sales compared with the digital music format.

While ripping used to be something that the guy at Home Depot wouldn't do to your sheet of plywood, most of us now equate it with copying the digital files on a CD directly to a memory storage device, whether it be an iPod, computer or separate external hard drive. Within a few minutes all of the tracks on a CD can be copied, stored and compressed to MP3's that will have either a loss in sound quality or, in a lossless format such as Free Lossless Audio Codec (FLAC), with no audible sound deterioration. A play list can be created by selecting files and creating queues to your digital storage device in seconds; gone is the time-consuming real-time editing process. We've turned the art form into a convenience.





**The Touch can work directly with an external USB hard drive, memory key or SD card.**

### Today's Mix Tape is Somewhat Different

With hard-drive storage being somewhat ubiquitous these days, there are quite a few different choices for the music lover who wants a series of virtual playlists at his or her disposal. The Squeezebox was introduced to the public a few years ago, and it offered an inexpensive yet portable way to stream audio from the files on your computer via a network (hard wired or wireless, but that's a discussion for another day). It was a great device, but it lacked much of a visual interface, making it ultimately limited.

The current Squeezebox Touch consists of a 4.3-inch glossy touch-screen interface tilted back at a 30-degree angle and has a form factor remarkably close to the original. The unit comes complete with a wall wart power supply, RCA audio cables, polish cloth and remote. The Touch can connect to your network wirelessly or via a direct Ethernet connection. Coax and optical digital outputs complement the analogue RCA jack connections, plus a mini headphone jack output. USB and SD ports are also available for memory cards and external hard drives. The USB port will not support a direct computer connection.

If connecting the Touch directly to a computer or a NAS device on your network, the Logitech server software must be installed. This should not cause any problems as the server software has been written for PC, MAC or Linux systems. My NAS (network attached storage) device is a Readynas NV+ and required just a quick download from Logitech and a firmware update to install, making the integration seamless.

The software reads the media file, whether it be MP3, FLAC or WAV, and it creates a file sort system which allows you to search your media via album, song title, artists or genre. Full specifications for the Touch can be found here: <http://tinyurl.com/23p65r6>. Selecting a track consists of few key punches through the file data, and you are streaming media to your audio system. Custom playlists can be created by selecting tracks from the menu screens and saving the list. Best-of and favorite mood selections can be created in minutes simply by following the menus.

The Touch can work directly with an external USB hard drive, memory key or SD card. The built-in software takes a few minutes to read the files on either of those sources and organize them into the user interface. This was my favorite feature, and it makes the Touch that much more user friendly. Now you can just take some files over to a friend's house and share music instantly.

### Audio Quality and Portability

This level of portability also makes the Touch a great source

for a second system with powered speakers wherever you might want to place it: the porch, the garage, wherever you would like access to your music library. Thanks to the easy-to-read display and interface, the Touch becomes a music system that everyone can enjoy. I could easily see this working well in a party environment, where people could play a compilation of songs from a memory device as well as from a main music library. Maybe the future isn't so bad after all. This is where the Touch really eclipses an iPod on a dock. Thanks to that built-in headphone jack, the Touch makes a great bedside listening station. Crazy headphone enthusiasts can always plug in the Touch via the analog outputs if you want more fidelity.

Playing the Touch directly from its analogue outputs in my reference system gave an adequate performance, but there was a definite veiling effect and compression of the soundstage when compared with my CD player.

Routing the signal via the SPDIF output to the PS Audio Perfect Wave DAC improved the sound quality tremendously, going from a "C" grade through the analog outputs to a "B+" through the digital output. However, considering this is only a \$300 device combined with tremendous convenience, overall it rates a solid "A" in my book.

### Extras...Apps and More

The new buzz word these days seems to be apps, brought to popularity by Apple and their famous App Store. For those still living in

the dark ages, an app is short for an application that can be run on a specific device, much like software on your computer. The application gallery on the Touch menu is sparse, although Logitech promises more in the future. I installed a weather app as well as an app to access my Facebook accounts. While it took a bit of wrestling with the applications to install both the weather app and Facebook app, they worked well enough to be additional reasons to want a Touch.

The Touch will also read image files and display them as a slideshow while your music is playing. This is a cool feature in theory, but the small screen makes it of dubious value.

### A Caveat

The Touch is supplied with a remote and when in use, the Screen Fonts increase in size for easier viewing from a distant position. A great feature if you are still fairly close to the Touch screen, but in most cases you will be too far from the small screen to read them or in another room altogether when changing your music selections. If only Logitech could make a remote with its own LCD screen or an application that would allow your iPod Touch to control the Logitech Touch from a distance.

The Sonos music server offers this functionality now, albeit at a much higher price. In the end, the Squeezebox Touch is a feature-rich product that is well worth the asking price. It is powerful, portable and can access your digital music files with ease, making 21st Century playlists a snap.

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## Additional Listening Jeff Dorgay

While I found the first Squeezebox interesting a few years back, no one in my family wanted to engage it and I started down the path with the Sooloos, which remains my music server of choice. The current Squeezebox Touch is more intriguing now that the visuals have been improved tremendously. I can access the MP3 files in my Sooloos TwinStores as well as the high-resolution files that a Drobo feeds my Naim HDX music server, making the Touch a fantastic remote client that I can pick up and take anywhere. Thanks to the wireless connection, I can even take it next door when everyone is hanging out there and make it part of the party.

To use the Touch, you will have to install the Squeezebox Server software on your Mac or PC. I had no problems on either platform, and this is the bridge that tells your Squeezebox where your music is located.

One area in which the Touch has been improved is its ability to stay locked on the music stream from your network. The first-generation Squeezebox was glitchy, cutting out if there was a lot of other activity on the local network. The current product is much better, but if we were taxing the network, moving large files or streaming something on Netflix, it would still take its toll on the Squeezebox stream if used wireless. Hence, I still suggest hardwiring the Touch for maximum performance if you have other users on your network.

### High and Low Res

As Rich mentioned, the fidelity is quite good with the Squeezebox; it steps up a sizeable notch if you have high-resolution files on hand. Sampling a number of downloads from the Naim Store, HD Tracks and my own LP rips, 24/96 files definitely make a big difference in sound quality.

On the other end of the spectrum, the Touch lets you program in your favorite Internet radio stations in addition to your ripped music files. For those of you who don't even want to start digitizing your music collection, the Touch is a fantastic Internet radio tuner that you can use anywhere you have a connection. Even if you only use it for this purpose, it is well worth the price.

Now that the Squeezebox has a decent user interface, it's tough to beat for 300 bucks. If you haven't yet dipped your toe in the music-server pond and you'd like to give it a try with minimum risk, the Squeezebox Touch is the way to roll. Even if you graduate to something more exotic in the future, the versatility that the Touch offers will allow you to use it somewhere in your environment, no matter what your eventual system configuration. It's not quite as touchy-feely as a cassette tape, but in many ways much more versatile. ●

**The Logitech Squeezebox Touch, \$299**  
<http://tinyurl.com/29n2rya>

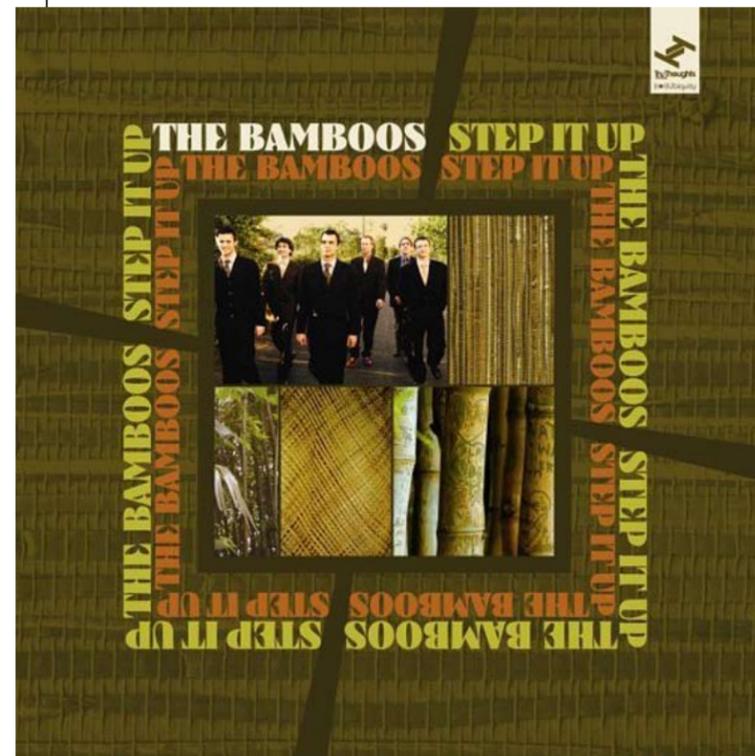
# Club Mix

By Scott Tetzlaff

Certain things signal that it's officially summertime—the smell of coconut-based skin products, beer laced with citrus, fluffy beach towels, *and* funk. Picture yourself heading towards the beach with the car windows open, funk music cranked on the stereo, and a large cooler of beverages in the trunk. If you add a new pair of sunglasses to the mix, you're approaching perfection. (And you get bonus points for driving a large, vintage 70s American convertible.)

Of course, your track choices are everything. You could go for the obvious old-school choices (Ohio Players, Parliament, Rufus, et. al.) but there are so many new and exotic choices, there's enough to keep it fresh for a long time. Or at least until it is time to put the top back up in the fall.

Digging through the nooks and crannies, searching for unknown funk, I've come up aces. Here's a collection of old tunes that have been lost, some new friends, and a few choice exports from lands you might not associate with sticky, smelly funk music.



## The Bamboos

*Step it Up*

Ubiquity Records, CD and LP

**T**he Bamboos are an Australian funk group that's been around for about 10 years. Who knew? Released after a series of excellent singles, their full-length debut, *Step it Up*, heavily relies on flute and organ to produce a 70s sound that's perfectly complimented by vocals from Alice Russell. Both the title track and "Transcend Me" could easily pass for the kind of undiscovered classics located on the sides of a locally released 45RPM single stashed away in your parents' attic.

If this description piques your curiosity, check out the band's latest release, *4*, also on Ubiquity. It extends the sound into new territories with a few new vocalists and great sitar riffs. But *Step It Up* is where it all began.

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### Dimitri from Paris

*Get Down With The Philly Sound*  
BBE Records  
CD, LP and WAV or MP3 download

**Y**ou won't find this one on iTunes. Dimitri (aka Dimitris Yerasimos) has been cranking out excellent soul, funk, and disco compilations for years. His latest is a tribute to the Philly sound, a style characterized by sweeping orchestral flourishes, smooth vocals, and lush instrumentals. This double CD features a wide selection of remixes straight from original 1970s master tapes.

So we get great tracks from the likes of Teddy Pendergrass, Harold Melvin & The Blue Notes, and The Tramps, plus a pair of remixes of The Jacksons' "Living Together." If your list of summer fun includes a dance party, this set needs to be on your shopping list. And if you're still scared to mess with the classics, there's a 35-minute preview here: [www.soundcloud.com/dfp](http://www.soundcloud.com/dfp). Warning: Once you dip your toe in the water, you'll be hooked. These songs have been redone so tastefully that if you hadn't heard the originals, you'd think this was the way they were done back in the day. Perhaps that's Dimitri's greatest compliment to the music.

Collectors and DJ's take note: BBE Records announced that only 1000 copies will be pressed to vinyl. Currently, the CD is an import, but kudos to BBE for making it available as a download in the form of an uncompressed WAV file as well as standard MP3. The uncompressed files are worth the extra few bucks since the sound quality is superb. A 26-page PDF file that outlines the project and gives background history on the musicians that made the Philly sound famous comes with the download. A must-have.



### The London Funk Allstars

*London Funk Allstars Vol. 1*  
Ninja Tune, CD

Those preferring a decidedly modern approach to funk will appreciate this disc. *London Funk Allstars Vol. 1* shades more toward acid-jazz and hip-hop realms. Still, if you tune your ear a bit, there are definite classical funk underpinnings. Sadly, the London Funk Allstars (Jason Tunbridge, Stefan Turner, and Francis Carter) have only put out a couple of albums—preferring quality to quantity.

Favorite cuts include the trip-hop-beat driven "Funky Sweater," the jazzy "What's in the Basket," and "6 Million Dollar Man," which features samples of Oscar Goldman from the TV series of the same name as the song; it will crack you up every time you hear it. Impress friends with your musical knowledge by identifying the jazz samples elsewhere on the album. Yes, the treasure is deeply buried here, adding to the intrigue.

If you like this one, explore further by listening to the London Funk Allstars' other disc, *Flesh Eating Disco Zombies versus Bionic Hookers from Mars*. Dig that!

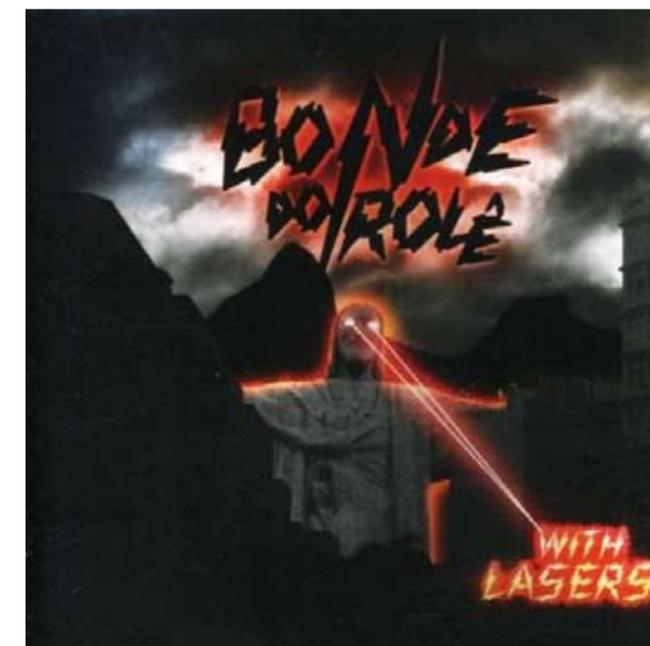
### Bonde Do Role

*With Lasers*  
Domino, CD and LP

Mixing a taste for funk, modern and exotic, we arrive at Bonde Do Role, a Brazilian Funk (baile funk) band discovered by producer Diplo a few years ago. The high-energy group sings in Portuguese, but you don't have to understand the language to enjoy the music. Songs range from playful to downright punk-ish. Originally released in Brazil in 2007, *With Lasers* is just making it to our shores now.

A metal groove is fused into the opening "Danca Do Zumbi" and weaves throughout the song, which is layered on top of rapid drumbeats. A deep, monster voice growls in the background. This is definitely not garden-variety funk.

The disc immediately changes direction with "Solta O Frango," sporting a more traditional hip-hop groove before shifting again on "James Bonde," a tribute to you know who. If only I understood Portuguese. "Office Boy" wanders the furthest away from the funk vein, channeling 80s rock yet still keeping a familiar vocal styling that ties it to the rest of the album.





### Orgone

*Cali Fever*  
Ubiquity Records, CD and LP

**B**ecause Orgone always puts a different spin on its signature “big funk sound,” the group continually keeps fans anxious for more. The Los Angeles nonet (with a strong lineup of friends and followers) has come a long way since its 2002 self-titled debut.

Orgone builds on where it left off on previous releases. While the first record has more distorted guitars and a side of Stanley Clarke fusion on the side, and the second a bit more straight-ahead funk, *Cali Fever* moves ahead yet again, with more aggressive vocal tracks. Not surprisingly, vocal stylings are reminiscent of Macy Gray, Alicia Keys, and Estelle—singers that various band members have worked with in the past.

The record opens heavy on bass and brass with “The Last Fool” and cruises right to “Crazy Fool,” offering a slightly slower tempo in a retro mode overlaid with interesting sonic textures. Orgone continues to ply the throwback groove on the title track, which will leave you searching thrift stores in want of big shiny lapels and an 8-track player. The band quickly shifts gears again with “Sandstorm,” replete with a guitar and horn-based rhythm track that begs to be part of an upcoming adventure movie. Such is Orgone’s magic, offering plenty of variation without losing track of the core sound.

*Cali Fever* is a super-sized can of funk without an ounce of filler, overflowing with big horns, big beats, and grizzly guitars that know no bounds. Refreshing.



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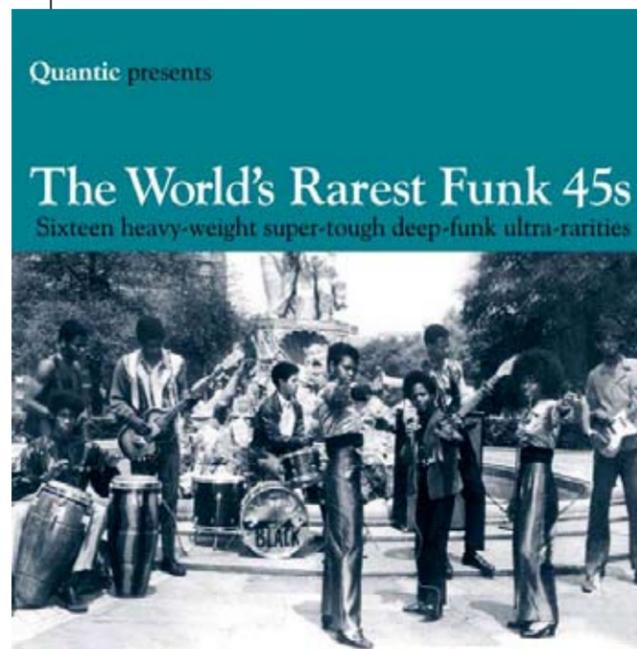
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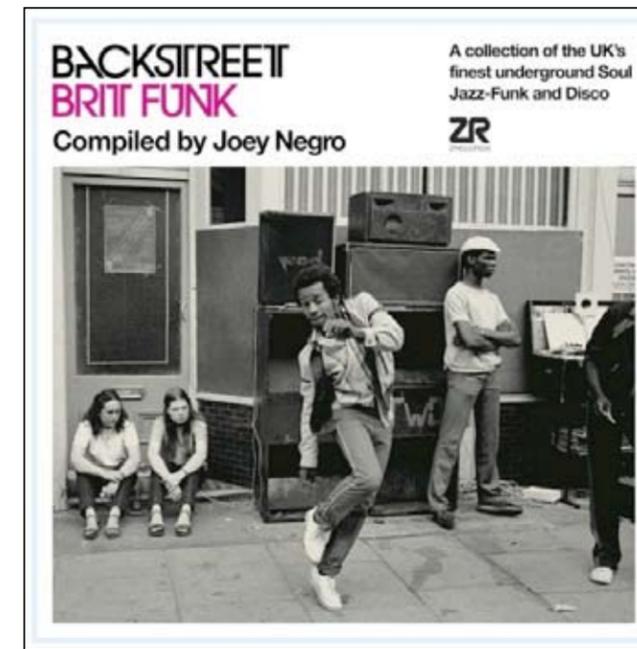


**Compiled by Quantic**  
*World's Rarest Funk 45s, Vol. 1*  
Jazzman, CD

Another sonic archaeological find, this time from the States. Producer Quantic, usually recognized for his own brand of Asian fusion trip-hop, has put together an amazing collection of raspy vocal funk with a heavy dose of big brass.

This is not the kind of stuff you see on late-night TV funk collections. Rather, these are some deep cuts, the genuine article. Standout tracks include the Soul Lifters' organ-laced "Hot, Funky, and Sweaty" and "Ain't No Other Way" by Herman Hilson, who offers up excitable vocals in a classic James Brown style. Featuring a crazy amount of cowbell, Sandi and the Matues' "The World (Pt. 1)" is pure energy.

Quantic evidently spent some late-night hours mining these tracks; his respect for the genre is transparent. The good news? *Vol. 2* is just as good, if not better. Alas, the funk quality is high, but the sound quality is low. Buy this one because you love it, but don't expect much in terms of sonics.



**Compiled by Joey Negro**  
*Backstreet Brit Funk*  
Z Records, CD

Here's an excellent piece of musical archeology: a new release of deep cuts and rarities from various 80s U.K. funk groups. Better still, *Backstreet Brit Funk* is compiled by Joey Negro (aka, Dave Lee), a prolific house music producer and remix artist extraordinaire that publishes under a variety of aliases and projects (the Sunburst Band, Jakatta, and Misturra to name a few).

With this time period and location, the sound leans more towards the disco end of the funk spectrum, but manages to stay heavy nonetheless. And while this disc can be tough to find, you can listen to samples on iTunes to see if this one fits the right groove for you. However, there is a tradeoff. The iTunes version has three more songs but is a "clean" version that's slightly altered from the original. The CD offers better sound quality albeit fewer tracks.

Highlights include Mirage's "Summer Grooves," which plays homage to Earth, Wind, and Fire; the Hudson People's decidedly lower-key "Trip to Your Mind"; and Incognito's "Parisienne Girl," the latter much more of a breezy jazz track, with probably the lowest proportion of funk in the collection. ●

FEATURE



# The Wadia PowerDAC 151

By Jeff Dorgay

Two years ago, Wadia began a digital revolution with their 170i transport, being the first to unlock the digital bitstream and give the iPod serious clout as an audiophile component. Their latest creation, the 151 PowerDAC mini, utilizes the same form factor as the 170i and allows the 170i to be stacked on top for a high-performance yet space-efficient audio system. MSRP for the Power DAC mini is \$1,195.

Wadia's engineers have managed to squeeze a full-function amplifier and DAC into an 8x8-inch box, taking advantage of Class-D amplification technology. The power supply is also built into the chassis, eliminating the need for an external power supply as the 170i has. This is definitely a 21st Century audio component, with a form factor that eschews the "big box" look, making up the core of a high-performance-yet-compact system that should fit anywhere with ease. The 151 looks as if you put one of Wadia's full-size disc players in a shrink machine, with identical styling cues, right down to the spiked feet, which are made of hard rubber instead of the aluminum ones found on the big players.

The 151 uses a rectangular aqua-blue display with off-white lettering, similar in look and feel to the full-size Wadia components. The top level of information shows the input choice, while the lower level gives the volume level based on a series of vertical bars. A nice remote control is also included to control the 151. To the right of the display are five small rubber buttons labeled: Input, Phase, Mute, Volume + and -. Though full, the back panel offers respectable space with the speaker binding posts on the left half, the right housing the digital COAX 1 and 2 inputs on top, and the Toslink and USB on the bottom. The power switch and standard IEC power-cord receptacle occupy the chassis' far right.



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## FEATURE

### Tech Background

One of the standout features of the 151 is its volume control that operates in the digital domain, just like their five-figure disc players. Though tougher to implement than an analog volume control, adjusting the gain before converting to analog eliminates distortion in the output stage. Wadia president John Schaffer commented, "It took a lot of finesse to get this level of performance at this price point. We were able to offer a lot of the feel of the 381/S7i/781i components in the 151."

One of the major design goals was to keep the signal in the digital domain until just before it goes to the speaker terminals. The process begins by converting the Pulse Code Modulation from the DAC into Pulse Width Modulation, thus allowing the signal to be amplified digitally. Wadia also uses a light version of their DigiMaster reconstruction filter (upsampling) in the 151, accomplishing the digital-to-analog conversion in the software domain, not relying on an off-the-shelf chipset, with DSP occurring with 24bit/384k resolution. A filtering algorithm is used to eliminate distortion and the signal is amplified by a Texas Instruments TA5162 chip. The signal is then passed through a passive low pass filter to output 50 watts per channel into 4 ohms. A very unconventional approach indeed.

### Setup

The 151 has only digital inputs, so it *has* to be part of a digital-based system. I did most of my listening via Wadia's i170 iPod dock and my old Denon 3930 Universal Player. For anyone wishing to add a disc player at a budget to a system like this, the 151 is a fantastic performer. As there just happens to be a Wadia 381 CD player in system two, I made it a point to check the performance and was pleasantly surprised at how well the 151 did.

*(continued)*





**You should be able to have the 151 up and playing music with one hand tied behind your back in about five minutes. Plug in your digital source, the AC mains cord and speakers of your choice, and you're rocking.**

You should be able to have the 151 up and playing music with one hand tied behind your back in about five minutes. Plug in your digital source, the AC mains cord and speakers of your choice, and you're rocking. As chip amplifiers always tend to be just a touch speaker sensitive, I tried the 151 with a very wide range of speakers to see where the rocks in the road might be. While contributor Mark Marcantonio could not find peace and harmony with his Verity Audio Finns, I had excellent luck here with all of the speakers at my disposal.

Though I used the Harbeth Monitor 40.1's, B&W 805D and even the \$140,000 GamuT S-9's with no problem, I did a lot of

my listening with the \$2,000/pair Penaudio Rebel 3's and the Mordaunt Short Aviano 6 Floor-standers (\$995/pair) to keep more in line with what the typical 151 owner might choose with which to pair these speakers. I also kept cabling very basic, using the supplied AC mains cord and some DH Labs speaker cable. It's worth mentioning that this little amplifier was not embarrassed when used with megabucks speakers, evidence that the Wadia engineers really did their homework on this product.

One thing to keep in mind, though, is that the 151 will take about 150-200 hours to sound its best. There is a bit of high-frequency glare when you first

take it out of the box, but about 80 percent of that is gone after a couple of days of continuous play, and the rest will go away shortly thereafter.

### **A lot of sound hiding in that little box**

The overall tonal balance of the 151 is very similar to that of Wadia's top CD/SACD players, and I say that from experience, having used one of their players (the 581, 781 and now the new 381) as reference components for the past four years. The 151 is resolving and dynamic without being harsh or grainy. Very impressive for a chip amplifier. Even more so, considering you are getting an amplifier *and* a DAC for just under \$1,200 bucks.

When listening with the B&W 805D's, a quick swap from the reference combination of McIntosh C500 preamplifier and MC1.2kw monoblocks was indeed intriguing. While the 151 did not have the level of warmth possessed by the McIntosh tube preamplifier, it did not sound harsh through the 805D's, which are highly resolving and will offer a poor showing with a bright amplifier.

On one level, the sound of the 151 is a bit reminiscent of the best Naim gear, with a healthy dose of pace and timing. The 805D's probably presented the toughest challenge to the 151, with only an 88db sensitivity rating and an 8-ohm impedance.

The Wadia's power level drops to 25 watts per channel with an 8-ohm load, but it never had a problem driving the 805D's in my somewhat small (11 x 17 foot) living room. In a larger room, they might need a little more juice, but if you aren't playing at concert hall levels, the 151 should be fine in almost any situation.

Vocals came through clean and clear, with stringed instruments sounding natural, but unlike a tube amplifier, the 151 does not embellish or add body to the sound. However, if it's on the recording, it will come through as intended. If you consider that this is essentially a \$600 DAC and a \$600 amplifier in one compact chassis, *(continued)*

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## FEATURE



**The Wadia 151 PowerDAC is the perfect anchor for a high-performance, all-digital system in a small space.**

I think you will be hard-pressed to find this kind of performance elsewhere at this price point. The only other \$600 amplifier I really enjoy is the Rega Brio3, but it is the antithesis of the Wadia. Where the Wadia has lots of resolution, the Brio is a bit on the warm, somewhat dark side. I like them both, but each will appeal to a different customer.

Going through some of my favorite classic-rock tracks from Genesis, Pink Floyd and Yes, I was impressed at the amount of bass extension and control that the 151 was able to muster. A brief stint with my GamuT S-9's (which are only 3db down at 17hz) confirmed that the 151 would go down deep.

Listening to an equal mixture of Apple lossless and uncompressed files on my iPod Touch through the i170

dock and a few different pairs of mini monitor speakers in the \$500/pair range, I was consistently impressed at how musically rewarding this combination offers up for about \$2,000.

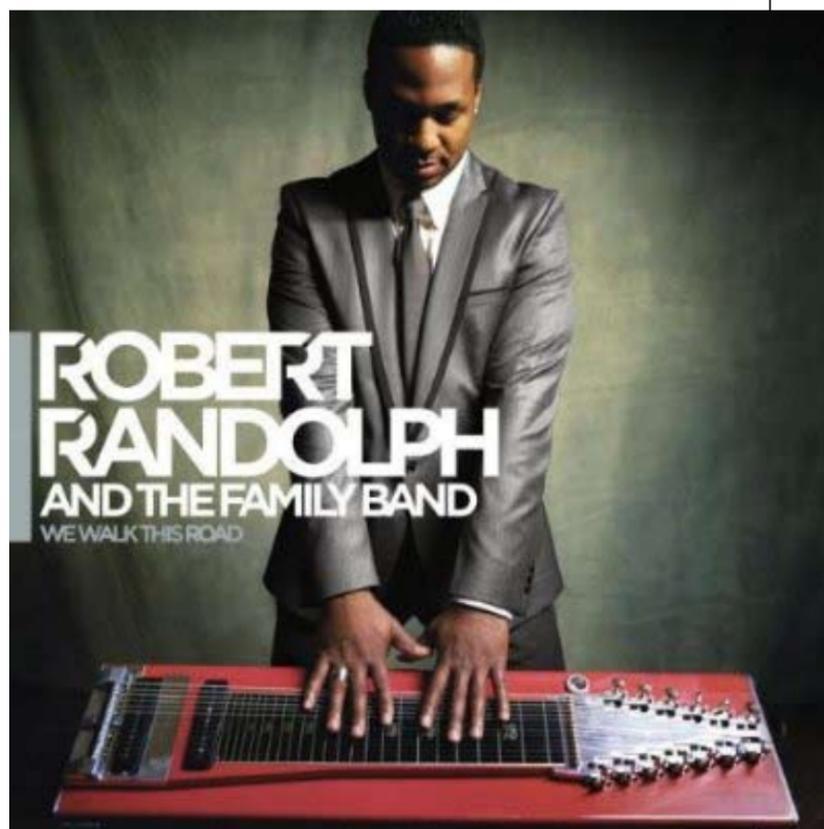
### Conclusion

The Wadia 151 PowerDAC is the perfect anchor for a high-performance, all-digital system in a small space. Whether you choose to use it with a disc transport, computer or Wadia's own iPod dock, the 151 offers great sound quality with ease of use and setup. We are happy to award it one of our Exceptional Value Awards for 2010. Wadia has created another breakthrough product that may just define a new category, as their i170 did two years ago. ●

— Staff writer Marc Marcantonio contributed to this review.

# Jazz & Blues

By Richard Colburn



## Robert Randolph & The Family Band

*We Walk This Road*  
Warner Brothers, CD

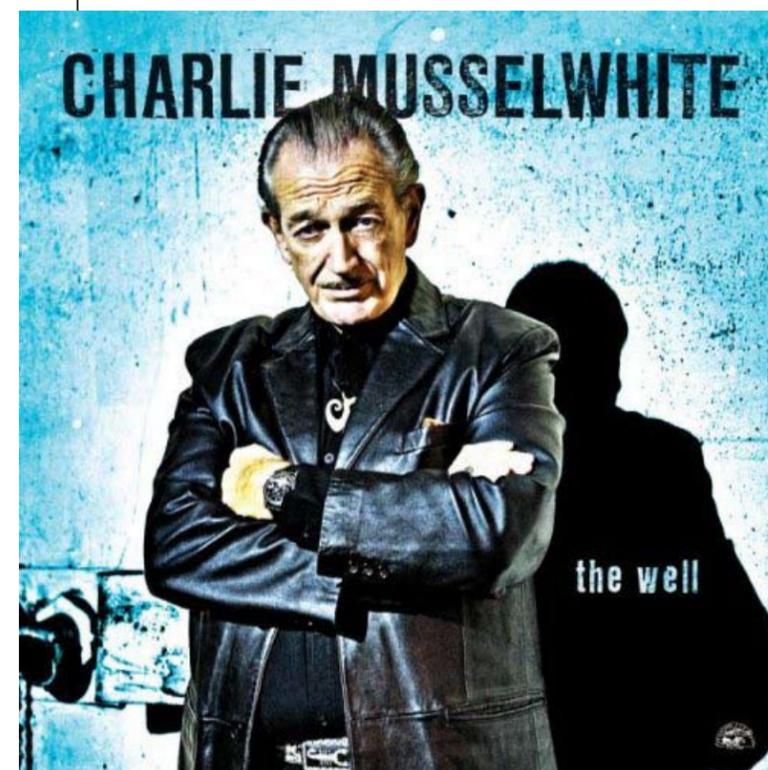
When Robert Randolph's *Unclassified* burst on the scene in 2003, it came on like a shot of adrenaline. The songs were performed with an exuberant no-holds-barred gospel-infused funk, rock, and soul flourish. The pedal-steel guitar Randolph played in the House Of God Church and at Sacred Steel conventions remained front and center, full of promise for future enjoyment.

Unfortunately, the band went off track on follow-up efforts, becoming too slick and straying too far from its gospel roots. Which is all the more reason that it's good to see the collective return to form.

Coupled with a desire to reach back to country-blues-influenced traditional gospel, and a new producer in the person of T-Bone Burnett, the group's new *We Walk This Road* is a very spiritually satisfying listen. Appearances by guest artists like Ben Harper and Leon Russell don't hurt either. But the core strength lies in the original compositions by Randolph and co-writers Burnett, Tonio K, and Peter Case, which are interspersed by traditional segues by Mitchell's Christian Singers and Blind Willie Johnson. These older songs, originally sung in fields and churches, are about as far from modern gospel as one can get. Yet, the ways in which Robert's contemporary material pays homage to such customs while introducing themes like war ("I Don't Wanna Be A Soldier Mama") and media overload ("I'm Not Listening") make for thought-provoking moments infused with genuine feeling.

Randolph's pedal steel is much more restrained on this disc than on previous outings, but any loss in excitement is replaced by meaningful contemplation of problems surrounding society. That's not to say that your feet won't be tapping the whole time. The infectious "Traveling Shoes" sees to that.

It took two years for the band to complete *We Walk This Road*, and it shows. Great songwriting, great playing, and great production: All in one soul-satisfying package.



## Charlie Musselwhite

*The Well*  
Alligator Records, CD

The title song on *The Well* is inspired by true story that involves a young girl who fell down a well and managed to survive until she was rescued several days later. To Charlie Musselwhite, the girl's life-and-death struggle made his own addiction to alcohol seem trivial. He decided to show a bit of his own bravery and quit drinking until the girl was out of the well. And once she emerged, he never did resume drinking, having come out of the well himself.

Fittingly, many of the songs on this album are about incidents in Charlie's life that somehow went unmentioned until now. When most artists reach a certain age and look more towards the end of their life than their youth, they often have something poignant to say about such circumstances. We're lucky Musselwhite decided to tell us some of these stories in song.

"Where Hwy 61 Runs" speaks to the bluesman's regular road trips to the Mississippi Delta where his mother was born; "Cook County Blues" is about being framed and arrested in Chicago and sent to Cook County Jail. Closer to home, "Dig The Pain" concerns heavy drinking and embraces the hurt that pursuit entails.

Of course, what blues album would be without a song about a woman who's just too much? We meet her in "Cadillac Women." The standout is "Sad And Beautiful World," on which Musselwhite tells us about how he felt after his mother was murdered in Memphis in 2005. It took him this long to come to grips with the tragedy. But he's got quite the support cast in gospel legend Mavis Staples, who accompanies him on the sad and beautiful song.

The production and sound are first rate. Musselwhite's harp is front and center, while bass drums and guitar remain steady. Oh, and it just so happens that John Bazz of Blasters fame plays electric and upright bass throughout.

Blues albums are a dime a dozen. But records like this, with meaningful stories to tell, are worth much more rare. Highly recommended.



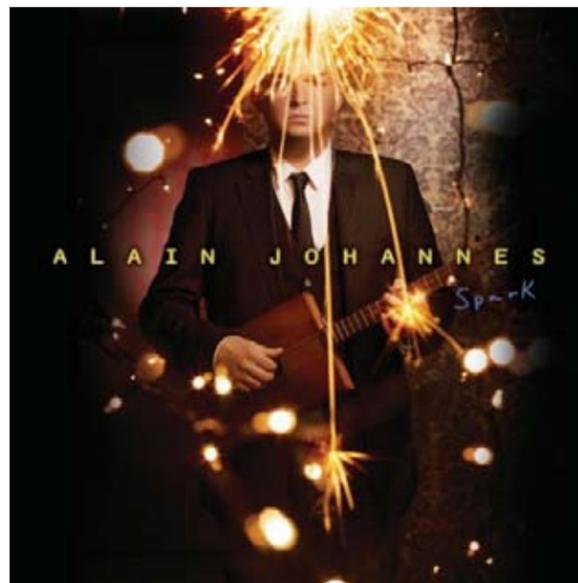
### JJ Grey & Mofro

*Georgia Warhorse*  
Alligator Records, CD

**O**n *Georgia Warhorse*, JJ Grey & Mofro continue to trade in the kind of swamp rock and blues found on their 2002 debut *Blackwater* (which caught my attention on hi-res DVD-A), with the band's sound an authentic tribute to the Northern Florida area from which it hails.

Amusingly, the album's title cut refers to a type of locust found in Mofro's backyard. These critters are apparently tough as nails and really hard to kill. Hence, the song is more a metaphor than a tribute to an insect. "The Sweetest Thing" is a heartfelt soulful ballad, while "Slow, Hot & Sweaty" is true to its name. The most insightful number, "King Hummingbird," features a protagonist narrating about how he killed a beautiful hummingbird for no reason and becomes haunted by the destructive act for years to come. A song to remember.

*Georgia Warhorse* was recorded at Florida-based Retrophonics, one of the least-modern studios in use due to its exclusive utilization of vintage analog recording gear. The sound on the disc reflects the studio's practices—as well as the geographical location. A bit dense, damp, and swampy, but full of songs to savor and enjoy.



### Alain Johannes

*Spark*  
Dangerbird Records, CD

**A**lain Johannes has been associated with Them Crooked Vultures and Queens Of The Stone Age but *Spark* heads in a completely different direction. Don't expect a heavy attack here. This all-acoustic effort features instruments like harmonium, fretless E-bow guitar, 12-string guitar, and cigfiddle. What's more, Johannes wrote, sang, produced, played, and recorded the entire eight-song set. If all that weren't enough, the tunes are refreshing, given their simple approach and excellent lyrics.

Thematically, the subject matter gets heavy on songs such as "The Bleeding Whole" but the instrumentation and melodies buoy listeners along and keep the music from becoming dirge-like. Similarly, the reflective "Spider" seems simple on the surface but goes rather deep into lament. Even better, "Return To You" recounts love lost and found and "Speechless" comes complete with captivating lyrics and haunting breaks.

Alas, sonics are uneven. Some cuts are passable and others are excellent. However, the efforts and results are well worth the listening time. ●

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# In Defense Of 2.1

By Jeff Dorgay

**W**hile multichannel home-theater sound is by no means a novel thing anymore, the options keep getting better all the time. Combine that with ever-decreasing prices on high-quality flat-screen TV's and projectors, and it's become a straightforward proposition to put together a high-performance system with a minimum of effort. Should you not be in favor of a lot of hardware in your room, or if your room is small, I submit the concept of a good 2.1 system as an excellent solution to these issues.

**Though I've always bristled at in-wall speakers, I returned from last year's CEDIA show with some exciting prospects, but I was sold on the latest from Sonance as they have some great solutions that integrate into your wall in a sleek manner.**

As someone who has a small (11 x 17 foot) living room, I did just that recently. I zeroed in on the 55-inch Lucidium FX5 super-slim LED/LCD from NuVision, for a number of reasons: they have a reputation for picture quality and customer service, and their sets have an ultra-compact form factor; they currently offer the most compact models in their respective sizes. I wanted to maximize the picture size in my room, and thanks to their 55UXN set being only 1.5 inches thick, combined with the latest ML11 Super Slim Low Profile mount from Sanus Systems, the installation was incredibly tidy.

The slim bezel of the NuVision set was also a big bonus: when turned off, it doesn't look any bigger than most 46-inch sets. Weighing only 55 pounds, I was able to mount the set to the wall easily, requiring the help of only one person. The Sanus mount streamlined the process, and it allows the set to tilt out about three inches by the use of two pull strings behind the set, making the rear panel inputs easy to access should your system become more complex in the future. When folded back in place, the Sanus mount is only .55 inches thick, making for an incredibly tidy installation.

The 55UXN has all of the traditional video inputs as well as four HDMI inputs, so there's more than enough room for whatever sources you need to make your HT system flourish. We will have a full review of the NuVision with a factory tour next issue. Suffice to say that for now, the set has greatly exceeded my expectations. If you want the ultimate in user friendliness, you can also order the NuVision sets with their "mirror" option, which turns the set into a reflective mirror when not on.



### Hiding Those Speakers

Though I've always bristled at in-wall speakers, I returned from last year's CEDIA show with some exciting prospects, but I was sold on the latest from Sonance as they have some great solutions that integrate into your wall in a sleek manner. After about an hour chat with their Product Education Manager, Ken Manson, we decided that a pair of their LCR1 in-wall speakers (\$599 each) would be a perfect match for my room. Because Sonance was the first company to develop in-wall speakers and they've been doing it for more than 25 years, they (and their dealers) have a depth of experience to help you choose the right products for your installation; they also have a wider range of speaker configurations than anyone else in the market. No matter how large, small or odd-sized your space; you should be able to find something in the Sonance line that can be custom tailored to your application.

The LCR 1's feature a pair of five and 1/4-inch woofers with a four-inch midrange and a one-inch silk dome tweeter in a compact enclosure that is just less than nine inches wide, so it will easily fit between the studs in your wall. To make installation even easier, these speakers are fully self-contained in their own sealed enclosure. This offers two advantages: it cuts down on ambient sound outside of the home-theater installation, and it minimizes the chance of vibration in the wall once installed.

While it probably won't matter to those of you having your Sonance system professionally installed, should you take the DIY route, Sonance provides some of the best instruction manuals I've seen. We built our new living room wall specifically to accommodate the Sonance speakers and the NuVision, but for those of you retrofitting an existing wall, it couldn't be easier.

Thanks to the Sonance RotoLock® system, all you need is the supplied allen wrench and the ability to cut a clean, straight opening in your wall. With the use of a stud finder, you should be able to easily center the 7.5-inch by 20.5-inch opening. With the RotoLock® clamps retracted, you attach the speaker wire to the LCR1's binding posts and ease the speakers into the wall. Then, just rotate the allen screws in the front of the speaker to tighten the clamps and snap the grilles in place. It's that simple. The white grilles only extend from the wall about an 1/8th of an inch and can easily be painted to match, resulting in a very stealthy look for the person who does not want to see any of their HT components.

As the LCR1's have a low-frequency limit of about 70hz, we also added the Cinema Sub System (\$1,300), which consists of a pair of eight-inch subwoofers in two cabinets and Sonance's Cinema 260 subwoofer amplifier. With the speakers being only a three-ohm load, the amplifier is able to offer up 120 watts per channel in a compact package not much bigger than a cable tuner box. *(continued)*

Worth noting is that the Cinema 260 amplifier is a discrete amplifier with a robust power supply, not a class-D unit. Controls for adjusting the phase relative to the satellites and crossover frequency are on the front panel for easy access. Though many of today's advanced HT receivers offer built-in room correction, I was able to achieve excellent results by ear in no time.

Unlike the LCR1's, the Cinema Subs are open baffle, so you can either build an enclosure behind them, or in my case as the space behind the new wall for the HT system was now serving double duty as a walk-in closet, a room full of winter clothing and bath towels make for a perfect open baffle subwoofer!



### Rounding Out the System

Again, keeping this system simple in terms of installation, ease of use and on a budget, I went with components from Cambridge Audio, utilizing their Azur 740A amplifier that produces 100 watts per channel, an excellent match for the Cinema 260. The 740A is compact yet versatile, offering six inputs and the ability to control an iPod from the remote. More about this later when we add Sonance's new iPad port to the system. We'll have a full review of the 740 soon, but at \$1,199 this is a great way to add high-performance sound to the mix and stay on a reasonable budget.

Complimenting the 740A, the new 650BD from Cambridge is only \$779 and does a spectacular job at playing Blu-Ray discs as well as every format of audio that is available. Because we still have a large collection of DVD-a and SACD discs, this was a big plus.

And just in case the system does get expanded to multichannel at some point, the 650BD will be able to roll with the upgrade.

The system is currently using some basic Home Depot HDMI cables, so this system will become a test bed for future HDMI cable upgrade. The speakers have been temporarily wired with a spool of Monster Cable, so this is very representative of what the average consumer might throw together in a weekend. But planning for the future, the system is on a separate AC circuit and utilizes a Shunyata V-Ray power conditioner with a full compliment of Shunyata Venom power cords to keep the gear running at its peak.

### All Told, a Stunning Result

Since we were building the wall from scratch, the shelves were custom built in the wall to accommodate the current gear and

perhaps some future upgrades. The combination works together tastefully while maintaining a minimal footprint in the room. Whether you have a roommate who doesn't want a lot of gear and wires in the house or you are just trying to make the most of a small space, I can't suggest going in-wall highly enough.

The final result has been fantastic, and while this system does not provide as immersive of an experience as a full multichannel system, it does offer a huge improvement from the tiny speakers hidden in today's flat screen TV's. The Sonance/Cambridge combination played loud enough for all but the most gigantic explosions and provided an excellent three-dimensional soundstage.

Listening to a wide range of TV, movies and concert video, the Sonance/Cambridge combination was a tremendous improvement and unless you need to play the *(continued)*

**TONE STYLE**

Master and Commander sea-battle scenes (ugh) at 120db, this modest system may be all you need to really enjoy your video sessions. Even though the twin subwoofers have a LF spec of 35hz, thanks to the large closet baffle, I never felt like I was lacking any bass authority. Most episodes of *House* have some fairly low bass notes that came through loud and clear, and a recent James Bond marathon left my guests very impressed with the audio performance.

Even playing concert videos at high level, the LCR1's and the subwoofers delivered the goods without rattles or buzzing of any kind, testimony to the integrity of their in-wall mounting system.



**Great Balance of Performance and Price**

If you would like to augment the sound of your flat screen but aren't quite ready to make the jump to multichannel, I highly recommend the Sonance products. If the leap to 2.1 isn't enough, they offer a wide range of center- and rear-channel speakers with larger subwoofers if you need

even more bass output or have a large room. So you can get your feet wet and easily upgrade later. If you are doing a custom build on a new home, I'd run some extra wire where you "might" put a center channel and rear speakers. Then if the upgrade bug hits, it will be a breeze.

Not only is the quality high, but Sonance's years of experience make

their products incredibly easy to install and conceal whether you install them yourself or have a custom installer handle the job. In the end, I was able to pull off a very sound upgrade for about \$3,500.

Stay tuned for full reviews on the Cambridge amplifier and Blu-Ray player along with a full review of the Nu-Vision set in our next issue. ●



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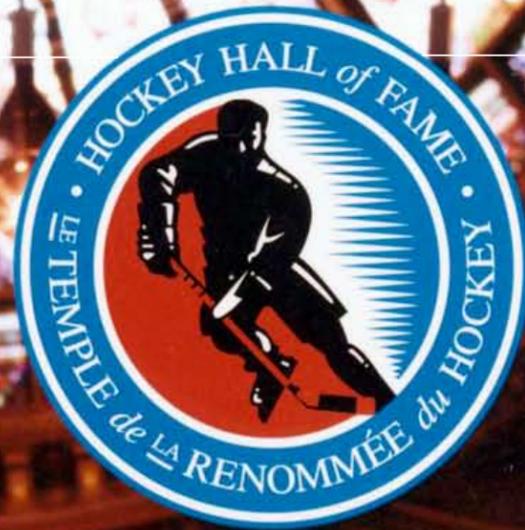


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# A Cool Excuse to Go North

## Toronto's Hockey Hall of Fame

By Bob Gendron

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## TONE STYLE



**G**ive the Hockey Hall of Fame two hours of your time, and you will likely emerge a fan of the game. Or, at the very least, be instilled with a burning fascination that will prompt you to want to learn the difference between the blue and red lines. Whether the discipline is sports or Egyptian hieroglyphics, all museums should be as well designed, enjoyable, and vivid as this Toronto gem. Then again, not every institution possesses the Stanley Cup, more than a dozen other hulking trophies, bank vaults, hundreds of patch-adorned sweaters (jerseys), or protective gear of every imaginable texture and color.



**TORONTO'S MOST-VISITED TOURIST ATTRACTION NOT ONLY PROVIDES AN ADDICTIVE IMMERSION INTO CANADA'S GAME, IT WARMLY WELCOMES THOSE WHO THINK THEY HAVE NO AFFINITY FOR HOCKEY.**

Of course, the secret behind any museum worth its salt is whether it can entice people that have little interest in a particular subject. But only the great facilities both attract and hold the attention of visitors that otherwise might spend their time elsewhere. Institutions ranging from 100-year-old natural history halls to once-stodgy art complexes are realizing these facts, as the days when going to a museum meant staring at immobile objects and reading dull placards

are long gone. Increased entertainment options have forced such cultural destinations to rethink presentation, organization, and involvement. Fun, excitement, and interaction are in; boring, stuffy, and hands-off are passé. And few places do a better job of presenting the social allure of its topic and stimulating interest in a theme than the Hockey Hall of Fame. (HHOF)

Toronto's most-visited tourist attraction not only provides an addictive immersion into

Canada's game, it warmly welcomes those who think they have no affinity for hockey. Even if you've never set a skate on the ice or watched a period of hockey in your life, the Hall veritably guarantees that you will come away satisfied—and most likely, intrigued by the sport's cherished traditions.

For starters, the building itself claims a rich architectural significance. Housed in the Brookfield Place complex, the shrine makes use of a former bank building that survived

1904's devastating downtown fire. Constructed in 1885-1886, and once the head office of the Bank of Montreal, it features a 45-foot-high stained glass dome (the largest of its kind in the city) that counts 24 fanned panels depicting allegorical dragons. Interior carvings, detailed arches, and riveting sculptures round out the classically styled rococo architectural marvel. While several features are visible from the outside, one has to go in to soak up the breathtaking charms.

But no museum gets by on good looks alone. It's what's inside that matters. And the HHOF doesn't shirk on attractions. Before paying the admission fee (\$15 for adults), visitors can stroll around the foyer, in which a grand display of goalie helmets acts as colorful bait. The collection serves as a quick history of the evolution of the artful masks—dating back to 1930, but really hitting stride in 1959, the year that Montreal *(continued)*



**WHEN COMPARED TO THE MODERN CAGE VERSIONS, THE OLDER MASKS' CRUDE DESIGNS AND ODD SHAPES ENHANCE ONE'S APPRECIATION FOR THE COURAGEOUS MEN THAT BRAVED 100MPH SHOTS WITH BARE-MINIMUM PROTECTION.**

Canadiens goaltender Jacque Plante became the first NHL player to regularly don a mask for regulation games. (After his nose was broken during the first period of a contest with the New York Rangers, Plante refused to return unless he was allowed to wear his fiberglass concoction. Realizing the team would forfeit without Plante—the Canadiens didn't have a backup goalie—the coach hadn't any choice, and what today is a mandatory piece of gear started its ascent.)

Masks donned by the likes of Ed Belfour, Terry Sawchuk, Glenn Hall, Ken Dryden and many others reveal constructive creativity (they range from bone-style to molded glass to homemade fabrications of wire and mesh) and exude the personal and team-related expressiveness that's now become commonplace. When compared to the modern cage versions, the older masks' crude designs and odd shapes enhance one's appreciation for the courageous men that braved 100MPH shots with bare-minimum protection. And where would the *Friday the 13th* film series be without them?

Just beyond the goalie gear resides a plethora of memorabilia that commemorates various milestones. Sticks, pucks, and sweaters from the longest overtime game in history in 1936; names, numbers, and facts relating to numerous records; ephemera from all-time leaders such as Gordie Howe, Mike Bossy, and Dave Andreychuk; souvenirs from "NHL Firsts," be it a puck from the first official outdoor game

(1993) or a sweater worn by the first Soviet-born player (Sergei Priakin). Passersby interested in memorizing who tallied 50-goal seasons can do so, and stare at the equipment used in achieving the feats. Others can marvel at a case that houses a net and 802 pucks that spell out "802"—the seemingly unbreakable amount of regular-season goals tallied by Wayne Gretzky, whose insurmountable quantity of records convincingly argues on his behalf as the most dominant athlete to ever play a professional sport.

Other individual hockey immortals are afforded their own display case, and while diehards will gravitate to statistical specifics, arrays of photos and objects best serve to illuminate the game's multi-faceted appeal and international draw. Pittsburgh Penguins icon Mario Lemieux is represented by several sweaters, including those from his Junior League, Team Canada, and Atom years phases. Gordie Howe's Red Wings and WHA sweaters accompany a blazer he wore for the Canada-USSR series. Mr. Hockey's game-worn skates, beat-to-hell gloves, and completely flat (no curve) wooden stick function as history lessons, tracing both the advancement of hockey equipment and an arc of how the game has incrementally progressed. Sawchuk's goalie belly pad—discontinued for decades—does the same. Scads of game-used jerseys bear marks, scrapes, and tears. All are testaments to tremendous physicality and determined endurance.

In an unexpected way, these

artifacts also slow the game down from its fast pace, and force viewers to see it from a fresh perspective. Generally, goalie equipment has gained in size (and effectiveness) and the players' protective gear has shrunken yet become more versatile, contoured, and efficient. To compare, view the apparatus and belongings used by the Hall of Fame's Class of '09—including Mike Leech, Luc Robitaille, and Brett Hull. Their legacies serve as comparative benchmarks against the era's earlier stars, whose memorabilia includes tobacco advertisements, primitive safety gear, and tighter-fitting sweaters with thicker, woollier textures.

As much as any article, sweaters provide hockey clubs with an identity, and like all sports, include their share of iconic designs (Chicago Blackhawks) and mistakes that look devised by fashion-school drop-outs (Anaheim Mighty Ducks alternative jersey, 1996). This mix of gaudy and goofy, gauche and great is highlighted in the World of Hockey Zone, a 3500-square-foot area chock full of international sweaters and memorabilia from IIHF (International Ice Hockey Federation) members ranging from seemingly obvious national teams (Germany, Austria) to countries that never even see freezing temperatures (Thailand, Israel). An old Team Italy sweater boasts a heinous logo that looks like a copy of the Porsche symbol; a discontinued Australia sweater aptly features a kangaroo. Plenty of medals, pads, helmets, gloves, and numerous

trinkets from the World Championships and Olympics are also presented.

The globally focused Zone includes space for special temporary exhibits. Currently, to coincide with the 2010 Winter Olympics held in Canada, an extremely impressive show of Olympic medals on loan from Switzerland makes for an amazing presentation. Totalling 137 medals from each and every of the 46 Winter and Summer games, and accompanied by copies of the official poster for each respective Winter game (and host country), the exhibition of etched gold, silver, and bronze (and in one instance, copper) magnifies the reasons why skilled athletes are willing to devote and donate so much of their lives in pursuit of the Olympic dream. Amazingly, like hockey itself, little about the medals—other than individual design and imprinting—has changed throughout the years. Perhaps that's why each pastime remains so wonderful. *(continued)*





Nothing epitomizes tradition, passion, dignity, and sacrifice more than the Hall's Trophy Room, a.k.a., the Great Hall, a hockey cathedral replete with the Tiffany Dome ceiling. The former bank building exudes a classiness and character that no modern structure can match. One expects to find royalty here, and, as you survey and are nearly overwhelmed by the shine of multiple hefty trophies—ranging from the Conn Smythe to the Lady Bing, all of which are accompanied by explanations and etched with the names of winning recipients—one indeed finds themselves in the presence of greatness. And yes, the HHOF has the Stanley Cup—and, inside a refurbished bank vault, the original Stanley Cup bowl donated by Lord Stanley of Preston in 1892 (he purchased it for \$50). Various retired collards that adorned the Cup, as well as jewelry (gold locket, watches, rings) awarded to early champions, also grace the elegant space. And no, you do not have to pay to get your photo taken with the Cup. Yet another thing that the HHOF does right.

Need to take a break? Two small movie theaters offer visitors a cozy respite while old footage plays on one big screen while the other film attempts to capture the speechless emotion and play-through-injuries stamina associated with battling for the Stanley Cup. Want to know what it feels like to be in an NHL dressing room? Witness the to-scale replica of the Montreal Canadiens Dressing Room, which recreates the Montreal Forum space that hosted 23 Stanley Cup championship teams until it shuttered in 1996. The player stalls feature nameplates, sweaters, equipment, socks, skates, and more. On the walls, plaques with the rosters of Canadiens teams hang high, and a countdown-to-game-time clock hovers over the exit. It's as close as most of us will ever come to being in a big-league dressing room—and thankfully, we don't need to endure the sweat-soaked smell. Go ahead, try on the goalie pads, and discover how difficult it is to maneuver.

With the NHL firmly tethered to tradition—its roots stretch back to the early 1900s—it's no surprise that the HHOF emphasizes the league's history as seen through the comings, goings, and (mostly) staying of teams. A visually based timeline charts the early organizations and how the league ultimately arrived at the Original Six (Chicago, Montreal, New York Rangers, Detroit, Boston, and Toronto). Aficionados can track the fate of defunct clubs such as the San Francisco Seals while gaining a better understanding of the expansion teams' arrivals.

Yet, the biggest team-oriented attractions are reserved for Franchise Alley, an enormous room in which all 30 teams are represented in separate, eight-foot-plus tall display cases that contain uniforms, sticks, pictures, facts, and in-depth information about each franchise's minor-league affiliates. The same area also holds myriad trophies and awards from a countless number of Canadian leagues as well as college, women's, and grassroots clubs. Here is where hockey's extensive cross-continental span is made transparent. Best of all, curiosity seekers can simply look at their leisure while fanatics can try and soak up all of the head-spinning statistics and geography. *(continued)*

**NOTHING EPITOMIZES TRADITION, PASSION, DIGNITY, AND SACRIFICE MORE THAN THE HALL'S TROPHY ROOM, A.K.A., THE GREAT HALL, A HOCKEY CATHEDRAL REplete WITH THE TIFFANY DOME CEILING.**

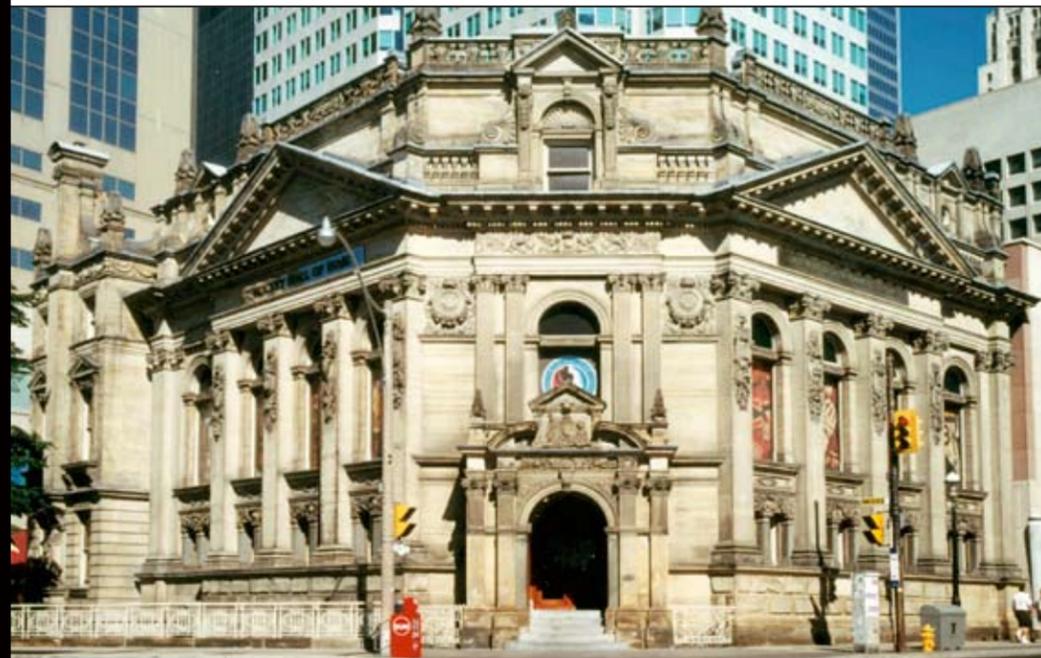
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Given that the HHOF's focus is on sport, what would it be without demonstrative games that permit visitors to get a sense of the game's involved skills? Several interactive, virtual games provide anyone (adults or kids) the opportunity to shoot on goal utilizing actual sticks and pucks as well as the chance to make saves as a goalie, complete with pads and blocker. Surprisingly, the lines for each contest, which reside on a 2400-square-foot simulated rink, move rapidly. Nearby, multiple Wii systems are hooked up to televisions and allow users free plays at NHL 2K10. No offense to video gaming diehards, but the interactive games blow away even the best-rendered computer graphics.

Retro also rules in the Collector's Corner, which will take many people back to the era when baseball cards reigned supreme in every boy's mind. A lavish potpourri of thousands of hockey-related plastic cups, cereal boxes, trading cards, pins, magazines, books, pinball devices, board games,

coffee cans, foam gloves, hats, ticket stubs, programs, pennants, helmets, hot sauces, beer bottles, plastic figurines, statues, toys—you name it—span multiple decades and serve as reminders of merchandising power. You'll wish your grandmother's attic contained so many treasures.

Is there more? Yes, including a wing devoted to the game's broadcasters. But the subtle brilliance of the HHOF resides in the set-up. Everything is accessible and almost entirely on one floor. There are no cheesy cafeterias beckoning visitors with overpriced keepsake mugs full of Coke, and little wasted space. Nobody needs to devote more than a few hours unless they want to. Sure, you exit through the souvenir shop, but if every museum's emporium offered this level of cool, there wouldn't be funding shortfalls. Besides, where else can you get a Czech Republic Olympic jersey to go? No sport boasts more passionate fans, and wearing a team sweater (lettered, preferably) is the best way to show support. ●

## TO NE STYLE

**SEVERAL INTERACTIVE, VIRTUAL GAMES PROVIDE ANYONE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHOOT ON GOAL UTILIZING ACTUAL STICKS AND PUCKS AS WELL AS THE CHANCE TO MAKE SAVES AS A GOALIE, COMPLETE WITH PADS AND BLOCKER.**

### When In Toronto...

*Hockey and beer go together like baseball and sunflower seeds, and several Toronto pubs boast some of the best beer you will ever enjoy. Make **Mill St. Brewery** (55 Mill Street) your first stop. Unavailable in the States, ask for a flight of Mill St.'s basic beers and imbibe on a pint of whatever seasonal beverage is on tap. For more liquor nirvana, visit **C'est What?** (67 Front Street East), which exclusively serves Canadian microbrews on draught and cooks up an assortment of gamey burgers. The lamburger is delightful. Still thirsty or hungry? Like C'est What?, **Bier Market** (58 the Esplanade) is steps from the HHOF and provides an impressive selection of Belgian and Czech brews, plus tasty food combos ranging from lobster fondue to cheese plates. All three establishments are worth the trip. Bottoms up!*

# Beer Snob

By Bob Gendron

Life is too short to drink mediocre beer. Here are three more brews that will enhance your mood—if not your life.

## New Glarus Brewing Co.

### Spotted Cow Cream Ale

Don't be alarmed by the light gold, slightly cloudy appearance. The foundation beer of the New Glarus Brewing Co. is not at all like its mainstream American counterparts. If only Budweiser or Miller produced anything this refreshing. Out of the bottle, there's a decent foamy white head and noticeable carbonation. Akin to the rural area from which it springs, Spotted Cow gives off a pleasing aroma one might associate with a wholesome family farm, steeped in corn and wheat. Yet it's the taste—clean, simple, amazingly subtle, and perfectly balanced with pale maltiness, gentle creaminess, and honeyed crispness—that makes this an ideal summer or spring beer. The finish is a bit dry, but smooth notes persist. Credit the quality to New Glarus' policy of refusing to sell outside of its native Wisconsin territory. If you're in the state, or nearby, it's undoubtedly worth seeking out.



## St. Bernardus

### Abt 12 Belgian Abbey Ale

It's almost always a good sign to spot a picture of a smiling, balding monk on a beer label. Over the past several years, craft brewers have devised clever marketing tactics to sell what often turns out to be a better art concept than beverage. Nothing beats a classic image, though, and this Belgian abbey brown ale, which follows the traditional brewing style of the country's Trappist monks and stems from Watou, the center of the hop-growing region, comes damn close to living up to its "Bringing Heavenly Nectar Within Reach" tagline. In addition to the dark-brown color and lacey head that illuminate the goblet, the beer gives off scents of figs, dates, cherries, and currants. The taste? Fruity but not overwhelmingly so, as accents of bananas, wood, toffee, vanilla, and caramel blend together to temper any sweetness overkill. A full mouthfeel and easy finish round off what's one of the finest Quadrupels available. Splendid.



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● TONE STYLE

## Flying Dog Brewery

### Raging Bitch Belgian-Style IPA

**N**ever mind the name. Ralph Steadman's zany artwork is the first hint that this IPA isn't going to be tame. That said, this is an IPA for those who don't normally like the style. Out of the bottle, it reveals an orange-amber glow with a white head that, if poured correctly, lasts a while. True to the inflammatory prose on the label, Raging Bitch is supremely spicy, owing to an abundance of hops and yeast that team up on the malt and bubblegum tones. Mid-level carbonation parallels the intense flavors, but overall, the flavor isn't too prickly or overbearing. The beer's finish will leave a slightly tingly feel on the tongue, and, unlike many IPAs, beckons you back for another. Arguably the best offering in Flying Dog's stable. ●





# iPhone 4

\$199-\$399  
[www.apple.com](http://www.apple.com)

The new iPhone has been out for a while, and while fur is still flying on the internet between Apple lovers and haters, the truth is somewhere in the middle. "Casegate" is pretty much finished and Apple has handed out enough free bumper cases to keep Santa's elves busy for some time, but a few issues remain with this phone.

Even with the bumper case, the iPhone 4 still does not work as well indoors as did the older 3G and 3GS models: it's much easier to fall into a dead spot. A highly casual poll reveals that the sound quality on the other end is not quite as good either, but the verdict here is still out.

So, why *should* you rush down to the Apple store and trade up to Cupertino's latest/greatest creation, other than just because? Face Time is pretty cool, but unless your other friends have an iPhone 4, this will remain a novelty. Hopefully, the next release of Apples' iPhone operating system will allow using Face Time with iChat AV and Skype so that everyone can see your live podcasts from Monaco and parts unknown.

Frills aside, the big buzz with the iPhone 4 has been the much-awaited multitasking capability, but it comes with the penalty of draining your battery in a hurry if left unchecked. Most applications didn't present a problem, but if you are using the TomTom software or any other application utilizing the internal GPS, you can run the iPhone 4 down to zero in about an hour if you don't make it a point to manually shut off the unused applications. Web browsing with Safari is much quicker with the new phone, but again, if left on in the background with video playing, it will wear the battery down straight away.

## Top features

The big plus with this phone is the screen. It's absolutely stunning with 326 dpi of resolution, so you can blow up your on-screen images a lot before they start to pixel out. This should make reading e-books and magazines much easier, as well as surfing the web. Just the ticket when you need to find the latest sushi spot and forgot your glasses.

The new screen is quite a bit brighter than the 3G or 3GS and according to Apple, it's made from the same stuff used in helicopter and high-speed train windshields. It certainly bounces off the floor much better than the 3GS, and this is speaking from direct experience.

## Turbocharged

Email and web browsing are much faster with the iPhone 4 as well. Though the Droid phones still rule in the speed department, Apple has closed the gap considerably and combined with the high-res screen, it's more workable in the end for the power user.

All kidding aside about multitasking, battery life is actually about 40 percent better than the 3GS, which was actually a bit of a stinker in the battery-life department. Apple claims "up to" seven hours of talk time on a 3G network, and while that is slightly optimistic, just over six hours is easily achieved. Be extra careful not to leave your TomTom on and you might actually get seven hours.



The iPhone 4 has a proximity detector to dim the screen when it gets close to your face, which is supposed to factor into the increased battery life. Pretty nifty.

Another much-needed improvement with this phone is the camera. It now features a 5-megapixel camera and captures 720p HD video. While not broadcast quality, it should be good enough to capture one of your friends doing something stupid in high enough quality to get 15 seconds of fame on *Tosh.O*. But that 8 megapixel from the Droid would really be cool. Video playback is another story. HD video never looked this good on a smartphone. For those of you under 35 with eagle-eye vision, you can watch your favorite movies with stunning clarity.

## Conclusion

So in the end, what's the buzz with the iPhone 4? Overall, the verdict is thumbs up. It's faster, sleeker, cooler and has better battery life. If you're an Apple lover, you probably already have one. If you're a hater, you're never going to get one no matter what. If you're on the fence, you just might be lured over to the Apple side. It's pretty compelling, especially when you consider the wealth of apps at the App Store and the ease of incorporating it into the rest of your home-computing experience.

Sure, there are still a few glitches, but hey, the iPhone 5 will be out next summer!



## FiveFingers Performance Footwear

\$85-\$150

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

**G**ive into Twitter trendiness and get instant Hobbit feet in the process. Once your three smaller toes get used to being inside these shoes, they feel a lot like those funny socks your Grandmother bought you for Christmas with individual toes, coated with Vibram's TC1 performance rubber.

Of course, the Vibram website claims the FiveFingers experience stops just short of curing cancer, but they are a lot of fun. And there are quite a few cool color combinations to choose from. At about six ounces each, these are as close as you can get to walking around barefoot, if you like that sort of thing. They are great for driving, offering up a great foot-to-pedal interface.

## DC31 Mini Vac

\$219

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

**N**ot only does the Dyson DC31 really suck, it offers two levels of suction. Powered by a smaller version of the digital motor in full-size Dyson vacuum cleaners, this little gizmo is awesome. Because of its high power, it is perfect for cleaning underneath and behind your stereo rack, and the brush attachment works great for keeping keep your stacks of records nice and tidy.

While there is almost nothing the DC31 *won't* clean, (ShamWow!) it only cleans for a little while before needing a recharge. Ten minutes at low suction and about seven on high power should be

enough to get most chores done, and that's about how long you get to use the vacuum at the car wash for five bucks. After 45 trips to the car wash, the Dyson has paid for itself, and even if you don't get the ROI on the DC31 as fast as you probably should, the look on your wife's face when she sees you excited about using a vacuum cleaner will be priceless.





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# Smart Electric Drive

Price TBD  
[www.smartusa.com/electricdrive](http://www.smartusa.com/electricdrive)

A fleet of 1,500 Electric Drive Smart cars is loose in Europe and the U.S. for initial testing, and Smart's parent company Daimler-Benz is claiming that standard production cars will be available for purchase in the 2012 model year.

With a top speed of 60 mph and a claimed maximum range of about 100 miles, you could say the Electric Drive has about the same capacity as the iPhone 4 with the TomTom on. But seriously, for those of us trying to cut our carbon footprint, the Electric Drive promises to be a lot spunkier than the gas version, which gathered momentum rather than actually accelerating. Claimed 0-60 time is a respectable 6.5 sec, about the same as a base-level 3-series BMW.

While perfect for people who only need to make short hops, the Electric Drive could really use a top speed of about 75 mph and double the current range. But remember, the first iPhones didn't have much range either.

TONE STYLE



# Sonus Faber Fenice

By Ken Kessler

It was as if 2008 had never happened and we had been whisked back to the days of lavish launches. The intervening years of austerity could not have prepared the hundred-plus guests for the grandeur that enveloped the launch of Sonus Faber's most ambitious speaker to date: Fenice.



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Although naming a speaker “the Phoenix” (albeit in Italian) suggests an ascent from the ashes, Sonus Faber’s rebirth isn’t quite so dramatic: the name signifies a new era, marked by the arrival in 2009 of Mauro Grange, a CEO with a world view not bound by the usual constraints of high-end audio. For those who prefer double meanings or monikers related to music, La Fenice is also a spectacular opera house in Venice. Appropriately then, Sonus Faber chose Venice as the launch site for their new flagship model, the first speaker to arrive under Grange’s aegis.

More than 100 guests from around the globe attended the launch at the Palazzo Grassi. The elegant art gallery was ideal for the showing of an audio/video presentation prior to the unveiling of the model, which heralds a new shape for Italy’s trailblazing speaker maker. Like the Guarneri before it, which popularized the idea of a tapered enclosure, and the Stradivari with its wide but shallow cross section, Fenice introduces a new form with technical complexity to complement the new profile.

An overhead view presents a profile inspired by that of a lyre, just as the Guarneri and Amati were modeled after the lute. The form incorporates dual curvatures in a cabinet made of cross-grained, double-thickness, marine-grade plywood. The enclosure is decoupled from the floor through a complex suspension system, while overall resonance is controlled by the “Anima Legata” system, a pair of massive, CNC-machined, anodized-aluminum clamps that form the speaker’s top and bottom. The two are connected by a steel rod that Sonus Faber calls the “Soul Pole” that “concentrates the vibrations to the Multiple Tuned Mass Damper” – yet another device employed to dampen structural resonances through anti-phase oscillations. *(continued)*





Fenice is a 3.5-way system with a 25 mm hybrid Neodymium/Samarium-Cobalt Larsen/Goeller ring radiator tweeter, visco-elastically decoupled from the main baffle board. This is attached to a natural-wood acoustic labyrinth rear chamber, with a mechanical anti-resonator. Middle frequencies are covered by 6.5-inch cone driver with 1.5-inch voice coil, the cone fashioned from traditional cellulose pulp with papyrus and other natural fibers. It is driven by a Neodymium magnet system, all mounted in a fully CNC-machined basket made from solid billets of two different metals. The combination of the metals allows the chassis to cancel out any mutual resonance. As with the tweeter, the mid is decoupled from the main baffle.

Two 10-inch woofers cover the bottom octaves. They use sandwich-cone construction made up of a high-tech syntactic foam core covered on its two surfaces by coated cellulose pulp skins, which provides the same sonic characteristics of the midrange cone. It features a three-inch voice-coil on a Kapton former. Supplementing the woofers is a side-firing 15-inch bass driver, also using a sandwich structure, but with skins made of nano-carbon-fiber on the syntactic foam core.



Its four-inch voice-coil has been optimized to have progressive damping through the use of both Kapton and Avional. The output of the “infra-woofer” is separately adjustable.

Probably the most radical element of the Fenice, beyond its construction, is the Sound Field Shaper, which looks like someone fitted a small two-way Sonus Faber speaker in an aperture at the back. It controls the direct/reverberant radiation of Fenice, and the module can be adjusted for both azimuth and SPL. Its tweeter is a ring radiator dome derivative with the “peculiarity of optimized off-axis radiation.” A crossover similar to that of the Cremona M and Liuto range matches it to a 4.5-inch mid-woofer, a fourth-generation derivative of the midrange of the original Minima. Its cone uses the same paper pulp/papyrus/natural fibers as the primary midrange driver.

One question remains: why would Sonus Faber hold such a huge event for a speaker that will only be offered to just 30 clients? Yes, that’s right. They’re only producing 30 pairs. A brief demonstration showed it to be world-class, even with unfamiliar material that apparently was chosen by someone who spent too much of his youth reading hi-fi magazines. But despite the screeches of Hugh Masakela, it was clear that Fenice is a magnificent product, fully worth the €140,000 (about \$214,000 U.S.) per pair. The need for all of the pizzazz? Fenice will be followed by a family of models using the same technologies at a downward range of prices. Me? I’d like the next to be a baby Fenice with the same exact footprint, one less woofer, a height reduction of about 20 inches and half the price tag. Forget a phoenix rising from the ashes: that one would start the fires. ●

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Last issue, we reviewed the Keith Monks Ruby 40th anniversary model, which uses the latter method and worked well, but was fairly spendy at \$6,995.

However, the cleaning method was a definite step up from the slot machines, and when the chance came to get our paws on a Loricraft machine thanks to the very helpful folks at the Audio Federation, it was irresistible.

We'll have a full review next issue, but the short story is forget about the Monks; call Neli at Audio Federation and get your hands on the Loricraft. You'll be glad you did.



# A Major Upgrade from CJ

## Conrad-Johnson TEA-2SE

By Jacob Heilbrunn

Conrad-Johnson holds a special place in my heart. It's the first real high-end equipment that I ever owned. I used a Conrad-Johnson PF-2 preamplifier and an MF-2500 amplifier to power a pair of Snell E/IV loudspeakers. The sound was warm, musical, and inviting, the qualities I've always associated with CJ, which is located just down the road from me in Fairfax, Virginia.



My other CJ connection comes via its former technical director, Bill Thalmann, who now has his own business, Music Technology, and has upgraded my VTL Wotan amplifiers to the latest factory specifications. So CJ always evokes good vibrations when I think about it. But has its sound changed in the intervening decade since I first had it? Better, worse, just different? The opportunity to review CJ's new TEA-2SE phono preamplifier provided a good chance to find out. At \$3,995, it is a jump in price from the standard TEA-2, but still a long way from the flagship TEA-1, which has a \$10k price tag.

### Straightforward Design

One thing certainly hasn't changed: CJ has stuck with its champagne-colored faceplate. I like it. You may not. But to me, it indicates consistency and a no-fuss, no-muss attitude when a company has a look and sticks with it.

There are not many controls with the unit, either. You flip it on or off and decide whether you want to go with high-gain (55dB) or low-gain (40 dB). For me it was a no-brainer; low gain just didn't pack enough punch for my low-output moving-coil Air-Tight Supreme cartridge, which I use on the Continuum Caliburn. High-gain did. The unit relies on the good, old 12AX7 tube for its high-gain section. Some audiophiles like to grouse that the 12AX7 is a "dark" sounding tube. *(continued)*

**Perhaps the most notable aspect of the TEA-2SE's design is that it does not – hold on to your hats! – use a step up transformer.**

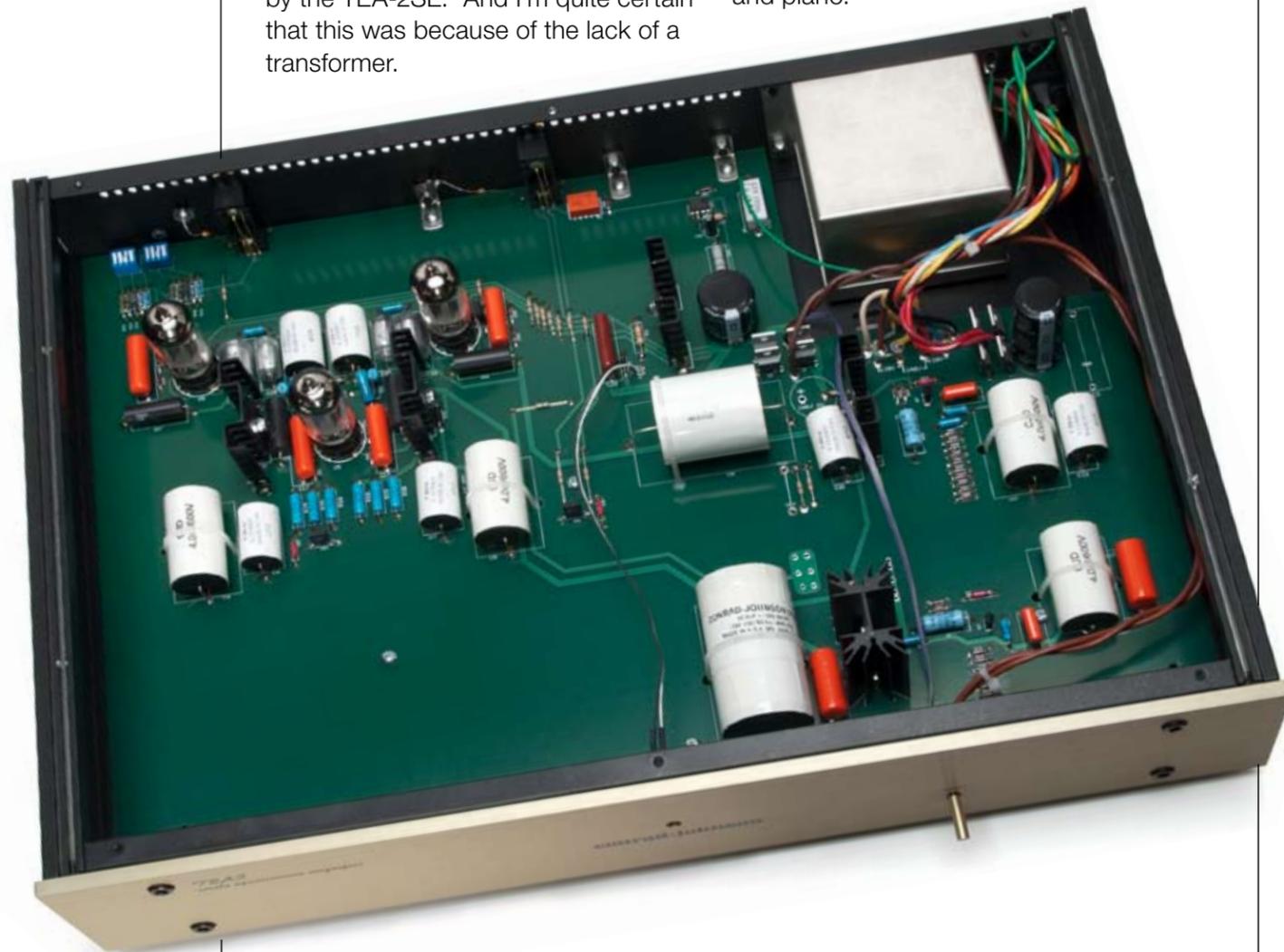
Not as far as I can tell. The TEA-2SE employs no negative feedback, something that it shuns in all of its preamplifiers. That means there isn't much wiggle room for the tubes to differ, so they had better be well-matched. CJ also likes to use mosfets rather than tubes for the buffer stage in the current iteration of their phono preamps.

Perhaps the most notable aspect of the TEA-2SE's design is that it does not – hold on to your hats! – use a step up transformer. This is a big deal. A transformer can hold down the noise floor. But it also introduces a lot of wire into the signal path. Frankly, I was floored by the transparency, the unforced nature of the sound produced by the TEA-2SE. And I'm quite certain that this was because of the lack of a transformer.

Indeed, I had the chance to compare the TEA-2SE with its pricier big brother, the TEA-1. The TEA-1 does use a transformer and is loaded with more and bigger Teflon capacitors in its power supply. Nevertheless, I couldn't avoid the nagging sense that the TEA-2SE might have sounded a bit more natural. It didn't have the bass of the TEA-1 or sound as powerful overall. But it sure did render vinyl beautifully.

#### **An impressive Performer**

I was particularly impressed by the TEA-2SE's rendition of vocals. Let's face it: the acid tests for musical reproduction are voice and piano.



On my Classic Records 45 rpm pressing of Dusty Springfield singing "The Look of Love," I was enraptured by the lissome, mellow tones produced by the TEA-2SE. Every instrument was carefully rendered in the background, saxophones breathy and the trumpets brassy, as the cut spun to a finish. The absence of a transformer simply made for a more immediate, palpable sound. Ditto for my wonderful pressing of Louis Armstrong playing "St. James Infirmary," one of the most shocking and moving Armstrong performances ever. The TEA-2SE did nothing to smooth off Armstrong's gravelly vocals and the shimmer of the cymbals at the end of the tune was hauntingly evanescent.

What about orchestra and rock? Here the TEA-2SE probably won't satisfy the diehard, head-bangers out there (you know who you are) who seek the ultimate in dynamics. That's simply not the TEA-2SE's bag. At its relatively low price tag, as these things go, the TEA-2SE does not sport the kind of hefty power supply of CJ's lineup of reference-grade products. Nevertheless, the TEA-2SE never sounded less than winning on large-scale works. It just wasn't completely able to convey the massive power of an orchestra playing full tilt.

These were sins of omission rather than commission. It wasn't that the phono stage got overwhelmed. It just doesn't boast the sonic prowess of the more overbuilt phono stages available from companies such as Aesthetix, which offers dual external-power supplies.

I couldn't say that the noise floor was absent or "vanishingly low," as reviewers often like to put it. Not the case. No transformer and tubes means that some nasties are bound to get through. But the amount of noise really was negligible, nothing that you could hear from the listening chair, at least not in my system. I had to stick my ear up to the tweeter to hear a little buzz and tube hiss. In fact, I was impressed by how quiet the TEA-2SE was overall.

#### **The New School of CJ**

The blunt fact is that CJ has come a long way in improving its products. The Teflon capacitors that it now uses are a sonic marvel: transparent, fast and clean. CJ has managed to marry its legendary golden sound with dynamics and great treble extension. Yes, the sound may be just a touch warmer than the neutrality that so many manufacturers seek. But go to a concert hall and I'll wager that you will find that cello and piano sound pretty warm indeed.

And the TEA-2SE has superb reproduction of the treble, which is why I enjoyed it so much when listening to jazz recordings. It reproduced a wonderful, holographic sense of air around cymbals and snare drums.

Anyone purchasing this wonderful piece of equipment should have years of enjoyment ahead. The TEA-2SE is a superbly engineered phono stage that offers a powerful reminder of the advances that audio has made during the past decade. The level of performance it provides would have been inconceivable a decade ago. The competition at this price level is keen. The resurgence of vinyl means that a plethora of phono stages are now available at prices that don't demand you refinance your house, if you can manage to pull it off these days.

So anyone looking for a phono stage or merely an upgrade would do well to consider the TEA-2SE. Listening to it for only a few minutes could leave you smitten. As I admitted at the beginning of this review, I'm biased. I like the CJ house sound. But who wouldn't? It sounds like music, not hi-fi. And the TEA-2SE fits right in. It is a phono stage that does not hide its sonic qualities but displays them proudly.

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## Additional Listening

Jeff Dorgay

Like Jacob, I too am a huge CJ fan going all the way back to their original PV-1 preamplifier and MV45 power amplifier. The biggest change in the CJ house sound was with the introduction of the company's ACT 2 preamplifier and Premier 350 power amplifier. Both of these products abandoned the somewhat romantic sound that their gear always possessed in the past. Not that I ever found that to be a bad thing.

The TEA-2SE definitely has a foot in both camps of CJ design. The lower-priced (\$2,495) TEA-2 does not have the bevy of CJD Teflon caps and subsequently has a more mellow sound. I enjoyed the additional dynamics and larger soundstage of the SE model, so I think it's a reasonable upcharge. When most hack modders would charge you \$1,200 - \$1,500 bucks to make these kinds of upgrades, they never show the level of care that the factory does, so why not keep it stock and get it done right?

Of course, both the TEA2 and SE models had perfect synergy with my ACT 2/series 2 preamplifier, but it worked well with the other preamplifiers I had on hand from Burmester, McIntosh and ARC, so I'm confident it will work well with yours. Just make sure you have a pair of RCA inputs, as the TEA-2SE is single-ended.

I had the same luck with a variety of cartridges as well, everything from the \$900 Sumiko Blackbird up to the \$5,500 Clearaudio DaVinci posed no

problems for the C-J, though I never used a cartridge with a lower output than .5mv and the ACT 2 has 21.5db of gain. Overall tonal balance was more neutral than the standard TEA2, and the SE model made a big jump in dynamics, starting and stopping more accurately on both ends of musical transients. But it is still a drop or two on the warm side of the tonal scale.

Tube rolling provided a slight change in tonality, but did not have as dramatic of an effect as I've heard with some other phono preamplifiers, I'm sure in part due to the Mosfet buffer stage. I found getting a tightly matched set of NOS tubes did more for lowering the background noise than radically improving the overall sound. The slight bit of tube hiss that remained all but disappeared when I plugged the TEA-2SE into my Running Springs Dmitri power conditioner, so that was not an issue.

Even for a headbanger like myself, this was never objectionable and I think lovers of either classic or contemporary rock music will appreciate the richness this phono stage offers, I know I did. If you are sitting on the fence and have the extra cash on hand, I suggest going all the way to the SE model, having lived with both extensively.

The CJ TEA-2SE phono preamplifier is priced right, offering a level of performance that puts a substantial helping of "cost no object" sound within reach of a wider range of audiophiles. Highly recommended. ●

### MANUFACTURER

The Conrad-Johnson TEA2SE  
MSRP: \$3,995

### PERIPHERALS

Turntable  
Continuum Caliburn

Preamplifier  
Messenger

Linestage and phono stage  
Nagra phono stage

Amplification  
Classe Omega  
Monoblocks and  
VTL Wotans

Loudspeakers  
Magnepan 20.1

Cable Jena Labs

Power Cables  
Shunyata and  
Isoclean

# The 805D: B&W's Latest Jewel

By Jeff Dorgay



A close-up photograph of a B&W speaker driver, showing the diamond tweeter in the center. The driver is black and has a circular shape. The background is blurred, showing another similar speaker driver.

n America, where better is too often assumed to be bigger, we occasionally overlook products that offer high performance in a compact package. B&W's top range of speakers, the 800 series, has always been synonymous with a great mixture of performance and style. Over the past few years, the speakers in the 800 series have all taken advantage of their diamond tweeter except for the smaller models, the 803S, 804S and 805S. The previous version of this speaker, the 805S, was favorably reviewed in *TONEAudio* in Issue 11.

The 805S was a perfect fit for someone desiring 800-series performance in a compact enclosure, even though the speakers did not have the diamond tweeter. I must have touched a nerve chatting with the folks at B&W at last year's CEDIA show; when I mentioned to one of the engineers that they really needed to add the diamond tweeter to the 805, he just smiled and said, "I can't discuss that." In audio speak, that usually means it's right around the corner. And now we have the 805D.

**A big jump in performance and price**

The new 805D now places the same diamond tweeter from the 800 range directly on top of the curvy cabinet that you know and love, but it comes at a cost. Where the 805S speakers were \$2,700, the current 805D is now \$5,000 per pair. *(continued)*



## dmitri

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

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

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

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



*"...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

**CLEANPOWER PURESOUND**

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

If you are trading up, you can use the same stands; otherwise the B&W stands are an additional \$600. I highly recommend the factory stands because they are perfectly matched aesthetically to the speakers and, while fairly massive to begin with, they can be easily filled with sand for more rigidity. Good speaker-to-stand interface is essential to getting the most out of a high-performance compact speaker.

The 805D utilizes a Kevlar 6.5-inch mid/woofer that crosses over to the diamond tweeter at 4,000 hz. The stated frequency response is 49-28,000 hz +/- 3dB. While one might think that's a ton of money for a speaker that only goes down to around 45hz, this is a good time to remind you that the \$30k per pair Magico Mini's only go down about this far, as do my \$25k pair of MartinLogan CLX's, so I wouldn't call this a deal breaker.

### Setup and initial impressions

For this review, the B&W factory stands were used, giving the speakers the proper listening height, placing the tweeters 41-inches from the floor and providing an excellent visual compliment to the 805 form factor. As with the 805S's, I preferred the enclosed soft rubber buttons between the speakers rather than spikes. While you can achieve some bass reinforcement in a smaller room by placing the speakers closer to the rear walls, this will be at the expense of imaging and soundstage width.

In the main listening room, the optimum spot for the 805D's had the front of the tweeters exactly five feet from the rear wall and just over eight feet apart (measured at the tweeters, center to center). The listening position was 10 feet, ear to tweeter, for a nice, triangular arrangement. While this sacrificed a smidge of bass reinforcement, the tradeoff in spectacular midrange and imaging performance was well worth it.

After experimenting with the 805D's in a few different rooms, the most critical setup component to wring maximum performance from the speakers was distance to the sidewalls. The further you can get these speakers away from the sidewalls, the more you will be impressed with them. Those having limited speaker placement options can take advantage of the foam port plugs included in the accessory kit to cut the bass response slightly for extreme corner-placement situations. *(continued)*



**Good speaker-to-stand interface is essential to getting the most out of a high-performance compact speaker.**



**Thanks to a 88db sensitivity rating and a crossover that works well with solid-state or valve amplification, the 805D will integrate easily into your system.**

Also included in the accessory box is the best user manual I've yet encountered; it's incredibly reassuring after one has spent a substantial sum on a HiFi component to get a comprehensive manual on how to use it. B&W has definitely set the diamond standard here, and I hope others in the industry take note and follow their lead.

Thanks to a 88db sensitivity rating and a crossover that works well with solid-state or valve amplification, the 805D will integrate easily into your system. Anything more than about 30 watts per channel should suffice, and we made it a point to mate them with a very wide range of amplification from the PrimaLuna ProLogue 1 and Naim UnitiQUTE (both 30wpc) all the way up to the Burmester 911 MK.3. Once a fair amount of amplifiers were tested, the 805D's settled into system two, powered by the McIntosh MC 1.2KW/C500 combination with excellent results.

Though the average 805D owner may not pair these speakers up with a \$30k power amplifier, these speakers have enough resolution and finesse to be used in a world-class system. Much like the Verity Finn that we reviewed last issue, the 805D is the spot-on solution for the audiophile who wants an extremely high-performance speaker system in a smaller form factor.

#### **Time to play with sand**

A quick trip to your favorite home-and-garden store will provide the best \$3 upgrade you can make to a system based on a pair of 805D's. Each stand will hold

about 15 pounds of sand, and the improvement to the quality and quantity of bass is not subtle. A quick listen through "Model Man" from King Crimson's *Three of a Perfect Pair* revealed a substantial increase in bass weight and texture. With the stands empty, Tony Levins' bass line is somewhat buried in the mix, but with the stands full, it took on a presence of its own in the track. The extra weight offered a slight increase in these speakers uncanny ability to offer up precise imaging within a very wide sound stage. Filling them with lead shot might prove even better, though lead is tough to get these days and somewhat toxic to work with. Should you go down this path, be sure to use adequate ventilation, a face mask and rubber gloves.

#### **The Big D**

While a two-way speaker can usually go only so deep, there's always a lot to be said for the simplicity of a great two-way design. *(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.

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

Product of the Year  
Award

## REVIEW

Only one crossover point means that much less that a speaker designer has to optimize. If you are a proponent of the simplistic approach to better sound, the 805D's will be your ticket to ride.

I've seen a number of posts on various internet forums waxing enthusiastic about the pairing of McIntosh electronics and B&W speakers, and after living with this combination for a couple of months now, I can see why. The 805D's are ever so slightly forward in their presentation, so an amplifier that is more on the thin/forward side of the tonal scale will produce listener fatigue in a short period of time. The slight warmth of the Mac gear was the perfect match in my listening room. I must admit I preferred having a few tubes in either the amplifier or preamplifier to get a completely organic sound from the 805D's.

Not to minimize any of B&W's efforts in the Matrix enclosure or the myriad other engineering improvements in the 805D, but the diamond tweeter really steals the show. Having spent a lot of time with the prior model 805S, I made it a point to refresh my memory with a friend's pair before starting on this review, and there is no question that while the new model costs almost twice as much as the one it replaces, it's a stellar performer in every way. The amount of clarity that the new tweeter and crossover brings to the presentation is phenomenal. The new speaker is definitely worth the price asked. The transparency of the diamond tweeter rivals that of the best panel speakers, and I say that from experience, having a pair of MartinLogan and Magnepan's here for reference. *(continued)*



## REVIEW

Friends who have owned older speakers in the diamond series have often commented about a fairly long break-in period for the diamond driver, but this was not the case with the 805D. A few days of non-stop play at moderate listening levels found the tweeters settling in nicely. They continued to improve over the next few hundred hours, but at 100 hours, the magic began in earnest.

The only thing the 805D can't do is produce the level of low-frequency energy that a pair of full-range floorstanding speakers can. I didn't have B&W's latest subwoofer, the DB-1 on hand for this review, but I did add my JL Audio Gotham with excellent results. The B&W unit should be a perfect match for these speakers, especially because of its compact size. Look for a follow-up review as soon as we can get our hands on one. Suffice to say, the 805D's with a suitable subwoofer is a very formidable combination, making for a compact yet full-range system. If you just don't have the space for the larger speakers in the 800 series, this is an excellent option.

### Neutral and musical

Running the full gamut of my music collection, there wasn't anything that the 805D couldn't handle, except for the aforementioned deep bass passages. To their credit, B&W has taken the high road here, *not* designing an upper bass bump into the LF range to give an impression of bass where there is none.

This is a very neutral loudspeaker that presents what is there, but it does not embellish

and this should be kept in mind when putting a system together. Keep in mind that the high level of resolution that these speakers offer will expose any weaknesses of the source components and amplification driving them. This is not a speaker that I would match up with budget electronics. At worst, you will suffer disappointment, and at best, you won't be taking advantage of what the speakers can deliver. The only area that the earlier 805S perhaps excels over the 805D is that its soft-dome tweeter was more forgiving of source components.

If like me you prefer a dash of warmth to the presentation, it can easily be accomplished by adding a tube amplifier or preamplifier to the mix. Personally, I'd *rather* start with a neutral speaker and voice the system to my taste. And I'd always rather have more than less resolution, so if this sounds good to you as well, put the 8085D at the top of your list.

I was pleasantly surprised at how loud these little speakers would play when hooked up to the MC1.2K's. With 1,200 watts on tap, there were no worries that the amplifiers would run out of power and clip while driving the 805D's. Listening to a handful of my favorite Sheffield lab direct-to-disc LP's, the 805D's would cruise along at a 1-10 watt level and take 400 watt peaks without flinching. A single 6.5-inch cone can move only so much air (all the more reason to add that B&W subwoofer to the mix...), but unless you are trying to achieve rock-concert levels, I submit that the 805D's should play loud enough for the majority of listeners. Not only do these speakers do an exceptional job at

playing loud, they still have a high degree of resolution when playing at low levels, which is equally impressive.

### Conclusion

The B&W 805D speakers are a *tour de force* of style and technology in a compact package. Whether you are buying a pair as your main speakers in a high-performance two-channel system or a multichannel setup, you'll find that they offer up performance well beyond their small size. While I missed purchasing the last version, I didn't let the 805D's get away. They will be taking up permanent residence here in system two. Highly recommended. ●

**The B&W 805D**  
MSRP: \$5,000/pair,  
Stands, \$600 addl.

**MANUFACTURER**  
[www.bowersandwilkins.com](http://www.bowersandwilkins.com)

**PERIPHERALS**  
**Analog Source**  
Clearaudio Concept turntable  
w/ Clearaudio Maestro Wood

**Digital Source**  
Wadia 381, Naim HDX

**Preamplifier**  
McIntosh C500

**Power Amplifier** McIntosh  
MC 1.2kw Monoblocks

**Cable** Cardas Clear

**Power** Running Springs Jaco  
w/ Mongoose power cord





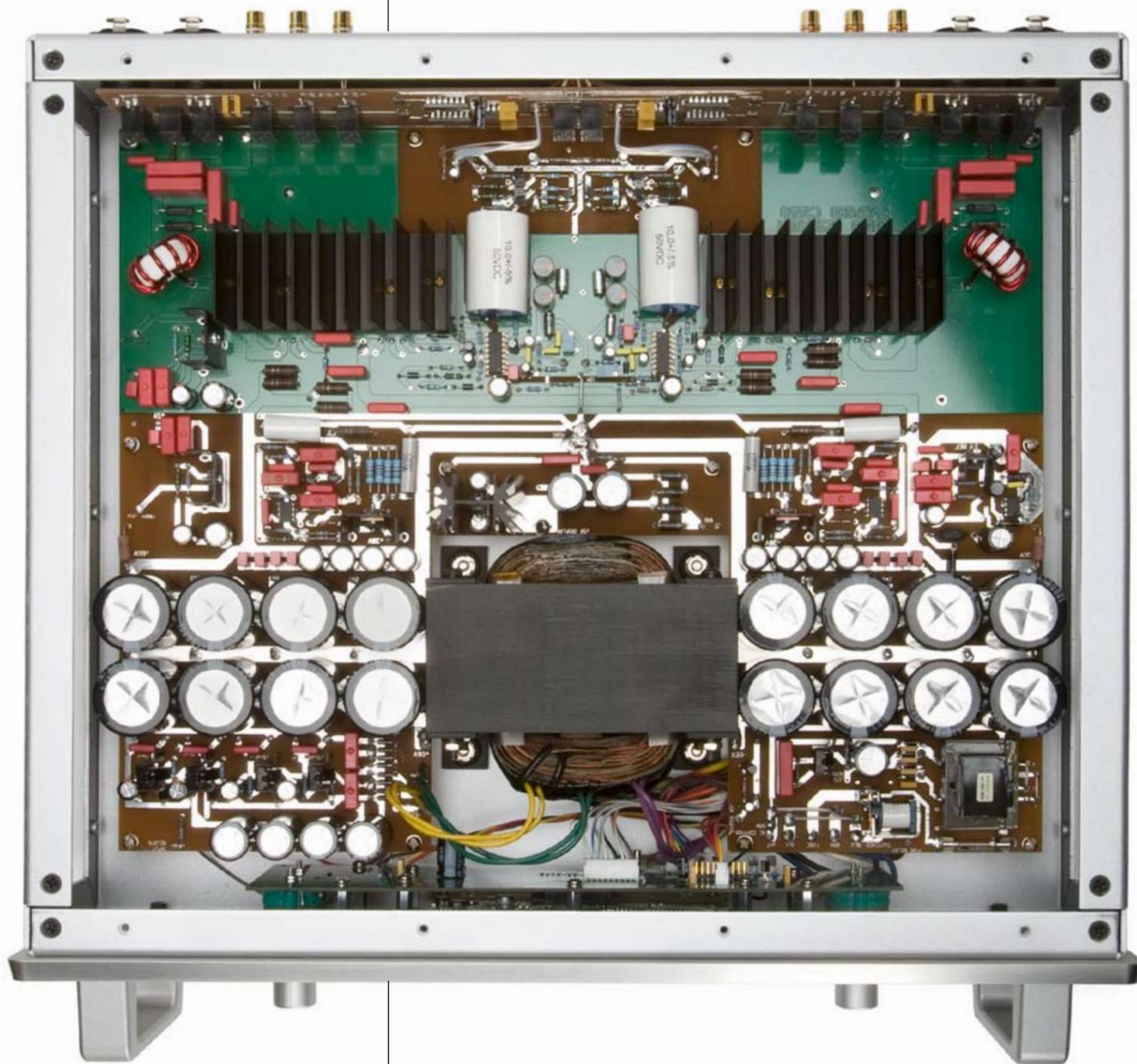
# Somewhere between tubes and transistors...

## Audio Research DSi200

By Steve Guttenberg

The combined forces of the Audio Research DSi200 Integrated Amplifier and the White Stripes' CD, *Under Great White Northern Lights*, hit me like a ton of bricks. I definitely felt something primal when Meg White bludgeoned her drum kit and Jack White screamed his guts out while shredding his guitar. I jumped up and down, totally caught up in the frenzy. The DSi200 must have been doing something right.

And get this: it's a Class D amp! Yeah, I know, but Audio Research's Class D is something else again. The DSi200 doesn't sound like tubes or solid state or any digital amp I've heard to date. Most but not all digital amps sound bland, lifeless and mechanical. No such problem here; the DSi200 uncorked R.L. Burnside's rip-roaring blues, which are best enjoyed turned up to "11."



The preamp section is passive, but according to ARC, the amp features a fully discrete *analog* power supply with a high-speed switching MOSFET output stage. And the DSI200 does not rely on any OEM modules such as those found in designs from other high-end manufacturers of Class D amps. Beyond that I'm not qualified to comment on the technology other than to note Class D operation is super-efficient, so the DSI200 draws a mere 38 watts at idle, 750 at full power.

### Redefining High Definition

ARC has billed itself as the "High Definition" company for as long as I can remember and decades before HD was ever used to describe 1080P video. Ah, but the DSI200 is part of ARC's new "Definition" Series, which runs parallel to the existing standard and Reference lines. The Definition line also has a Class D DS450 power amp, and there's some talk about a preamp, so we'll see. There might even be a few solid-state components showing up in the Definition Series, but one thing's for sure, no tubes.

I think the DSI200 is the prettiest ARC component ever. Sure, there's a strong kinship with the classic ARC aesthetic, but the proportions are better. The silver rack handles, silver top and sides make for a fresher, more contemporary look. Mine had a gorgeous silver faceplate, but you can get a black one with black knobs, handles and cover although the sides will still be silver. The left knob is the volume control, the right handles input selection. The row of

buttons just below the knobs and display cover Power, Mono, Phase Invert and Mute.

The plastic remote is standard ARC fare – a Plain Jane, black-and-silver plastic thing – but it offers all of the controls found on the DSI200 itself, plus a few more. With it you can turn down the display brightness, and there's a balance control.

### Built to Last

The DSI200, like all ARC products, is hand-built in the company's 48,000-square-foot factory in Plymouth, Minnesota. It's interesting that ARC doesn't wave solder or surface mount components; they believe that hand soldering makes for better sound, so each resistor, capacitor, IC, etc., is soldered by hand. Some of those things are so tiny that the soldering is done under a microscope!

Each completed DSI200 is burned in for 48 hours, fully QC-ed and listened to, and I mean really listened to by none other than Warren Gehl, the company's resident golden-ear in a reference-grade system. Gehl has been known to reject entire batches of units in a run if they're not up to snuff. Not only that, Gehl evaluates every unit sent in for service before it leaves the premises; that's an amazing commitment to ARC's customers.

The DSI200 is fairly compact, just 19 inches wide, 5.25 inches high and 14.25 inches deep. It weighs a very manageable 37.2 pounds. Power output is 200 watts per channel into 8 ohms, and 300 watts into 4 ohms. *(continued)*



# LUXMAN

Where 80 Years of Innovation  
Combines with Passion  
and Emotion



There are two balanced and three singled-ended inputs.

Audio Research recommends sticking with the DSi200's stock power cord before trying anything else and plugging it directly into the wall before experimenting with power-line filters. That was fine with me. I don't use conditioners and I'm not one to experiment with power cords.

I did note one minor design quirk with the DSi200: When I turned the volume way down so that the numerical volume display was reading "2" or "3," the sound moved over just a little bit to the left speaker. Correction was easy; I just used the balance control to re-center the sound.

ARC claims the DSi200 needs a solid 600 hours of run-in time to fully settle down. My review sample had already logged 200 hours at ARC before Editor Jeff Dorgay received it for photography, and of course he listened to it a bit.

Shipping across the country to Brooklyn didn't reset the burn-in clock back to zero, but the sound an hour after powering up was soggy. Twelve hours later, most of the haze lifted, and the next day it was starting to sound nice. Really nice.

### To Panel or Not to Panel

My favorite "break-in" disc of late is Elvis Costello's *Live at Hollywood High*. This 1978 show finds Elvis in high-energy mode, and cranked up nice and loud, the music gets my juices flowing. It's not the sort of stuff I'd normally use to evaluate an amp or speaker's finer points, but when it comes to evaluating the more visceral aspects of sound, *Hollywood* ain't bad.

I started listening to the DSi200 hooked up to my Zu Essence speakers. On paper, it's not an ideal match. The Essence is pretty efficient and can sound

amazing with low-power amps, the DSi200/Essence marriage was a happy one. One thing I noticed right away was the bass; it was fatter than I'm used to, though still well-behaved.

Ellis and Branford Marsalis' *Loved Ones* CD is pretty special, first because the father-and-son connection is so strong. Senior Marsalis plays piano and Branford plays sax. This disc's 1995 sessions were recorded at MasterSound Astoria, in Queens, NY, and I know the sound of that place from the many Chesky sessions I worked on there.

The DSi200 worked as some kind of time machine, bringing back not only the sound of Ellis' piano and Branford's sax, but I also could "hear" the room. Truth teller that it is, the DSi200 decoded more of the sax-in-room sound than the piano, but that seemed to be the result of closer mic-ing on the piano. *(continued)*



**The DSi200 is a breakthrough product from ARC. It heralds a new approach from a company that in April celebrated its 40th anniversary. Here's to 40 more.**

On the tunes that featured Ellis solos, the mics were apparently moved back a few feet and the DSi200 picked up more of the sound of the piano within the studio.

My Magnepan 3.6's are fairly demanding speakers because they are relatively inefficient. Many otherwise excellent amplifiers have been humbled by the 3.6's, but the DSi200 allowed them to coast along.

A.C. Newman's *Slow Wonder* CD sounded mighty fine with the DSi200 in my system. All of the melodies, jangly guitars, incessant piano riffs and punchy drums seemed hookier than before. The DSi200 somehow clarified the dense mixes, and I kept playing some tunes, such as "One of Us Prizefighters," over and over again. I can't get enough of this record.

A bass-clarinet solo on Eric Dolphy's

*Illinois Concert* CD was magical. The tone variations and colors, from soul-stirring, guttural bass to Dolphy's squeaks and squalls, emerged fully formed. The 1963 analog tape recording's hiss really sounded like analog tape hiss, and that's not always the case. Sometimes it just sounds like undifferentiated noise accompanying the music.

#### **Reflecting on the Conventional**

So how does the DSi200 stack up against more conventional designs? My reference Parasound JC 1/JC 2 power and preamp sounded more organic, more fleshed out than the DSi200. So by that standard, the Parasounds were more "analog" sounding even when playing CDs. Dolphy's clarinet was darker toned and further back in the soundstage with the Parasounds, or you might say that the DSi200 foreshortened depth.

I also used the DSi200 in my two-channel home theater, kicking things off with the Talking Heads concert film, *Stop Making Sense*. Tina Weymouth's bass was a thing of wonder: tight, deep and oh-so funky. The MG 3.6's bass panels seemed better controlled with the DSi200 than they do with the Parasounds. Soundstage depth and dimensionality were rendered with more precision than I'm used to hearing, and dynamic jolts courtesy of Chris Frantz' blazing drums were abundant. And the Dolby Digital sound seemed surprisingly fresh as if I was hearing a newly remastered version of the soundtrack. The stereo LPCM track on the Rolling Stones' *Shine a Light* Blu-ray was a brighter, edgier and altogether more modern-sounding recording. Yet when I pushed the DSi200 hard, it always kept its cool.

The DSi200 is a breakthrough product from ARC. It heralds a new approach from a company that in April celebrated its 40th anniversary. Here's to 40 more.

# 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](http://redeyereMOTE.com)



## Additional Listening Jeff Dorgay

I couldn't resist the urge to give the DSi200 a test drive because it represents a fairly radical departure for ARC. These guys don't reinvent the wheel every two years, so their jumping on the Class D bandwagon piqued my attention.

Much like every chip-based amplifier that I've had the opportunity to use, the DSi200 is speaker sensitive in a way that's more like a vacuum-tube amplifier than a high-current solid-state amp. I had the same experience with my Magnepan 1.6's as Steve did with his, but driving the MartinLogan CLX (which dips to .8 ohms at 20kHz) was not my favorite setup. The CLX's seemed to lack body and sparkle when switching from my reference Burmester 911mk. 3. But again, the CLX is probably one of the toughest speakers to drive.

As we just happened to have quite a few large speakers in here for review, I had the chance to try

the DSi200 with a pair of Stella Utopias, the YG Anat II's, the Gamut S7's and S9's, and a few other examples from Dynaudio, Verity and B&W, all with no problems. Dave Gordon from Audio Research pointed out, "Switching amplifiers are optimized for an impedance range. Our amplifier will have good luck down to about two ohms and we don't have a problem with impedance swings. That's why we came up with our own design for the DSi200."

Even driven to brain-damage levels, the DSi200 stays cool. So this is the perfect integrated amplifier for someone who wants a high-performance yet relatively compact system. And thanks to everything being on one chassis, you save the cost of an extra interconnect and boutique power cord, if that's your usual recipe.

The DSi200 is definitely Class D done right. ●

### MANUFACTURER

**Audio Research DSi200 Integrated Amplifier**  
MSRP: \$5,995  
[www.audioresearch.com](http://www.audioresearch.com)

### PERIPHERALS

**Analog Source** VPI Classic turntable with a van den Hul Frog cartridge

**Digital Sources** Ayre C-5xe MP Universal Player, Oppo BDP-83 Special Edition Blu-ray player

**Electronics** Parasound JC 1 preamp, JC 2 power amp, Pass Labs XA100.5 amp, Whest 2.0 phono preamp

**Speakers** Zu Essence, Dynaudio C-1, Mangepan MG 3.6/R

**Cable** Zu interconnects, speaker cable, and XLO Signature-3 power cords

# The Goldring Legacy Moving Coil Cartridge

## Light, Lithe and Lively

By Lawrence Devoe

**A**udiophiles who survived the digital tsunami and had the foresight to keep their record collections intact are now rewarded with a renaissance of vinyl playback gear, including a new generation of phono cartridges. While cartridges *can* be objectively assessed on the test bench, measured output, channel separation and frequency bandwidth don't tell you how a cartridge will sound when mated with your tonearm and turntable. This makes reviewing cartridges mighty challenging. Yet when the stars align and great music emerges from your chosen grooves, the payoffs are substantial. Enter the Goldring Legacy phono cartridge.

Goldring is a UK-based company that has been around since the dawn of time or 104 earth-years, according to their website. They make high-quality yet affordable equipment, primarily phono cartridges. In an industry where audio enterprises rise and fall every few years, Goldring must be doing something right to have survived two world wars, countless parliaments and the vagaries of the British economy.

The Legacy is the top of their moving-coil (MC) line which includes the Eroica and Elite cartridges. The Legacy is distinguished by a slim, lightweight non-resonant magnesium body and proprietary "vital line" stylus. A tracking force of 1.75 g and load impedance of 100 ohms are recommended, although the latter settings will definitely vary according to the cabling and preamp used.

## Getting Started

Set-up instructions are quite straightforward and do not presume extensive prior experience in cartridge mounting. However, I would strongly recommend using an alignment grid since the stylus and cantilever are obscured by the cartridge body when viewed from above. Installation was straightforward and completed in less than 10 minutes. Before further considering this cartridge, you should know that it has a low output of only 0.28 mv. (many MC cartridges have outputs of around .5mv)  
*(continued)*



Therefore, a phono stage with adjustable gain and impedance will be needed. Weighing in at 8 g, this cartridge would be a good match for most standard tonearms. All cartridges require some break in, and for the Legacy, about 50 hours seemed right, although the sound did improve slightly with additional time.

### Listening to the Legacy

My critical listening was done with a VPI Aries/Flywheel turntable using a VPI 10.5i tonearm, Nordost Valhalla interconnects and a Pass XP-15 phono preamp. The Clearaudio Stradivari was used as my reference. Sessions ran the gamut from pop and jazz vocal, solo piano, organ, small instrumental ensembles to full-force orchestral recordings

I use vocal recordings as my standard for initial assessment of any component under serious consideration. I began with Sheila Jordan's "Sheila" (SteepleChase Records), which features solo voice and acoustic bass. The Legacy captured the warmth in Sheila's voice while Arild Andersen's bass was solid and articulate. Rickie Lee Jones' self-titled first album followed; while this album can sound strident with lesser cartridges, the Legacy offered up good tonal balance and presented a credible soundscape throughout the spectrum.

Hyperion Knight's piano rendition of scenes from Stravinsky's Petrouchka (Wilson Audio) has a strongly percussive quality that challenges a cartridge's tracking ability and musicality. The Legacy had no trouble with these cuts and gave a nice account of this difficult music. So far, so good. *(continued)*

# Power Cord Measurements!

## REVOLUTIONARY DTCD ANALYSIS

For years, the debate has raged on-line and off regarding the perceived value of after-market power cords within professional and consumer audio-video systems.

Though there are many sound and visual professionals who report experiencing dramatic differences when replacing stock power cords, there are still skeptics who point to a lack of measurements as proof that no real difference can exist.

Shunyata Research scientist, Caelin Gabriel, has put an end to the debate by revealing not only one — but three dramatic measured differences between stock power cords and an inexpensive audio-grade power cord.

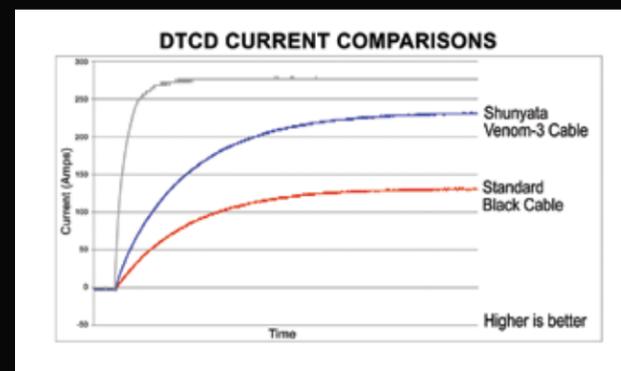
The measurements represent three critical performance criteria:

- 1 The quantity of instantaneous current available through a specified power device or circuit. Measured in amperes.
- 2 The amount of voltage drop across the device during the conduction period.
- 3 The stored residual noise component rate of dissipation after the current conduction period (displayed on web-site).

### DTCD (DYNAMIC TRANSIENT CURRENT DELIVERY) ANALYZER

DTCD is a method of current analysis that measures instantaneous current delivery in the context of a pulsed current draw. In layman's terms, it is a way of measuring current performance into typical electronic component power supplies.

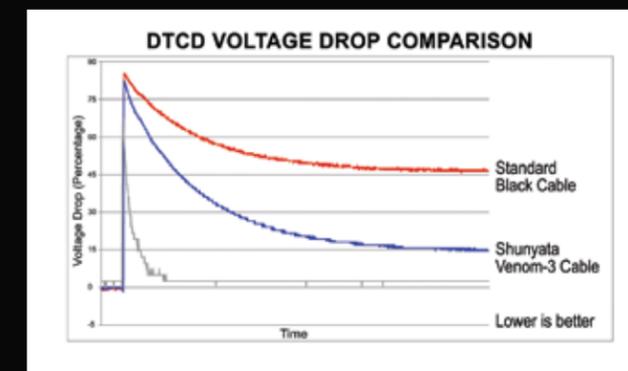
The DTCD Analyzer allows the measurement of pulsed transient current through a variety of AC power products, including power cords.



### DTCD CURRENT MEASUREMENT:

This measurement depicts the difference in available impulse current between Shunyata's Venom-3 power cord (\$99 retail) and a standard black component power cord. Note the enormous difference in the quantity of current available compared to the stock power cord. The stock power cord delivers only 47% of available current compared to 84% with a Venom-3 power cord. By any standard of measure, this is statistically significant.

See more measurements and complete info at [shunyata.com/Content/dtcd.html](http://shunyata.com/Content/dtcd.html)



### VOLTAGE DROP COMPARISON:

The voltage drop depicted for the stock power cord was so profound that several models were tested to validate the standardized measurement. A 53% drop in voltage during the conduction period compared to only a 17% drop with a Shunyata Venom-3 power cord represents a night to day objective difference. This magnitude of difference is certainly significant in a high performance entertainment system.

NOTE: Many standard cords were tested. This cord is representative of the average measurement.



Pressing on with more challenging fare, my next test was Frederick Fennell's digital remake of the Holst Suites for Band (Telarc Records) because of its huge dynamic swings. The original packaging even came with an insert for certain tracks "warning" about their potential threats to speakers if played at high volume. Again, I was impressed with the Legacy's ability to handle these demanding grooves without problem. Winds, brass and bass drums were appropriately balanced with a good sense of hall acoustics. The lively pace on a number of the selections was also well conveyed.

Among the very best organ records of all time were those produced by Dave Wilson, featuring organ virtuoso James Welch. The instruments chosen are superb, the recording and mastering beyond reproach. Lesser cartridges simply cannot convey the huge space and body of these vinyl discs. The Legacy's feet were definitely held to the fire by the Bach Toccata and Fugue BWV 565 (Magnum Opus, Wilson Audio) and its feet didn't fail. The cathedral environment was solidly reproduced with realistic echo and sonic decay. The low end was plentiful but not bloated. Organ aficionados, if any of you are still out there, can rejoice in the Legacy.

Rachmaninoff's *Symphonic Dances* stress the playback chain across the audible bandwidth like few other pieces. The classic Turnabout LP featuring Donald Johanos and the Dallas Symphony is a venerable demonstration disc and has been nicely remastered by Athena Records with much quieter surfaces. The Legacy rendition of these oft-played tracks was convincing in its reproduction of orchestral size, instrumental timbre and depth of image.

The Legacy listening sessions concluded with the soundtrack from *The Emerald Forest*, (Varese Sarabande), a forgettable movie but a great atmospheric set of tracks. This cartridge recreated the otherworldliness of this music very convincingly.

#### Performance Summary

Over my hours of listening, the Goldring Legacy put it all together quite nicely. This cartridge was devoid of listener-fatigue issues. I listened to most of my reference albums from start to finish, which is a good sign. Despite its low output, the Legacy was dead quiet and hum-free in my system. Surface noise disappeared effectively, and imaging was spot on.

My Clearaudio Stradivari's performance comes within about 80 percent of the top-of-the-line Goldfinger v.2 so the bar was already set pretty high for this contest, perhaps an unfair comparison.

On the selections used for this audition, the Stradivari conveyed more detail and openness, which is the hallmark of the Clearaudio MC cartridge line. But from the standpoint of sheer musicality, the Legacy was never embarrassed. Remember, we are comparing a \$1,300 cartridge with one that retails for nearly three times that price.

In the competitive market of phono cartridges, the Legacy should find a happy home with vinyl-lovers who have other financial priorities, such as college tuition, car notes, mortgage payments and the like. It conveys the sonic magic of the moving-coil design without the penalties of noise, hum or susceptibility to interference. Most importantly, the Legacy handles a wide range of music without problems. Yes, it is lively in a good sense, as it brings out the life in a recording without sounding analytical, a recurring issue with some high-end MC cartridges.

The Legacy is a testament to this company's success and longevity. Put simply, the "secret" is that they can make a reasonably priced cartridge that will work well with the equipment that many prospective buyers already have, and it will give lots of listening pleasure. The Goldring Legacy becomes one of my choices for top-value product of the year. ●

#### The Goldring Legacy MSRP: \$1,295

##### MANUFACTURER

www.goldring.co.uk  
www.musicallaudio.com  
(US Distribution)

##### PERIPHERALS

**Digital Sources** Esoteric P-03/D-03/G-Orb/UX-Pi/Logitech Squeezebox Duet

**Analog Sources** VPI HRX/12.7 Arm/Rim Drive/VPI Aries/10.5i Arm w/Flywheel/SDS Controllers

**Phono Cartridges** Clearaudio Goldfinger v.2/Clearaudio Stradivari

**Phono Preampifiers** Pass XP-15/XP-20

**Preampifier** Pass XP-20/Lexicon 12HD-B

**Power Amplifier** Pass XA-100.5/Pass X-3

**Speakers** Martin Logan CLX/Stage/Script-i/Descent-I (2)/Descent (2)

**Interconnects** Nordost Odin/Valhalla

**Speaker Cable** Nordost Odin

**Power Cords/Conditioning** Running Springs Audio Dmitri,Maxim/Nordost Odin/Valhalla

**Vibration Control** Black Diamond Racing

**Room Treatment** Echo Buster/ Corner busters/Bass Busters/ Double Busters



# Black Beauties

## The Shuguang Treasure “Black Bottle” 6CA7 Tubes

By Jerold O'Brien

**E**ven though we all went bonkers here over the EAT KT-88 tubes featured in our last issue, they are *damn* expensive. While a few manufacturers have begun manufacturing higher quality 6550/KT-88 tubes, the classic EL-34/6CA7 has not had the attention it deserves, and the price of NOS (new old stock) versions of this classic power tube have skyrocketed. It's not uncommon to pay upwards of \$500 for a pair of premium examples. With a number of new tube amplifiers on the market in the 35-50 watt per channel range taking advantage of these tubes and quite a few vintage models being restored, this is an exciting development.

Shuguang has been in business in China for more than 50 years and according to their website, they produce 40 percent of the world's total output of vacuum tubes. They've come a long way since their first production run of 20 6Z4 tubes back in 1963!



One of the most interesting features of these tubes is their black coating. Shuguang calls it their (HPCC) High Polymer Compound Carbon coating, and it is designed to “minimize secondary emission flow” inside the tube, claiming that the loose electrons bouncing around the inside of a tube contributes to the noise produced.

These mysterious black tubes have a number of other important features that should endear them to tube lovers: gold pins, enhanced plate coating, and the Treasure series of tubes are hand assembled by Shuguang’s senior technicians. Their premium Grade A tubes cost \$460 per quad and arrive securely packaged in a foam-lined box. All Shuguang tubes come with a 30-day warranty and an extended, one-year warranty is available for an additional \$25.

Grant Fidelity goes the extra mile with Shuguang, insisting on very tight quality control for their imports. Company principal Rachel Zhang told me that they have had a failure rate of less than .5% with the Treasure series, which is why they can offer the extended warranty with confidence.

#### Plug and play

The Shuguang tubes have the same electrical characteristics of EL-34’s past, so you can plug them right in to your amplifier with nothing more than a quick touch up of the bias. For this review, they were used in the new ProLogue Premier amplifier, made by PrimaLuna, my modded Dynaco Stereo 70 and our publisher’s Conrad-Johnson MV-50. These amplifiers were chosen because the PrimaLuna is a current product and the MV-50 is an excellent example of a fine vintage amplifier that is probably still in service in a number of homes, while the Stereo 70 remains a perennial favorite of DIY’ers everywhere. The PrimaLuna features automatic adaptive bias, while the Dynaco and CJ must be biased manually. I was curious to see how these amplifiers would respond to the tube upgrade.



Shuguang suggests 300 hours of use for the tubes to be fully burned in, and I have to thank staff member Mark Marcantonio for taking care of this for another review on which he is working, so the tubes arrived here with hours on the clock. These tubes definitely have a quality feel, they are well-packaged and the level of outward fit and finish is excellent. The black coating takes a bit of getting used to for classic tube lovers, but you’ll get over it.

#### A Big Improvement

The difference that the Shuguang tubes made with the PrimaLuna amplifier was not subtle. As good as the PrimaLuna amplifiers are, the stock tubes have always come across as being somewhat veiled and grainy, compared with what a great set of NOS tubes will do for them. Remember, great EL-34’s can cost \$300 *each*, and for all but the most fanatic tube enthusiasts, this is just out of reach for someone with an amplifier in the \$500 - \$2,000 range.

The first thing noticed when switching to the black bottles was a much lower level of grain throughout the audio range. This was evident from turn on. The Shuguang tubes sounded better after five minutes than the stock PrimaLuna tubes did after two hours, and they improved for about an hour, by which time they felt completely warmed up.

Vocal lovers in the crowd will key in on this immediately.

When listening to Fee Weybill’s lead vocal on the title track of the Tubes’ *Young and Rich*, his voice is not only clearer but has a much greater sense of having its own distinct space in the recording. Male and Female vocals had more body/warmth and a greater depth.

As good as the gains were in “midrange magic,” the effects that these tubes had on both the high and low ends of the frequency spectrum were the most dramatic. I experienced the same effect with all three amplifiers; the highs were at the same time more extended, yet also smoother.

**As good as the gains were in “midrange magic,” the effects that these tubes had on both the high and low ends of the frequency spectrum were the most dramatic.**

Carlos Santana’s *Caravanserai* is a relatively bright, forward recording, and when switching from the stock tubes in the MV-50 to the Shuguang’s, the cymbals on the opening track “Eternal Caravan of Reincarnation” sounded more natural than ever before.

Thanks to these tubes, the characteristic bass (i.e. somewhat loose) response of my favorite amplifiers lost a bit of their upper mid-bass bloom but gained some lower bass weight. Digging out the usual suspects and going through a slew of Pink Floyd, Genesis

and Dead Can Dance records revealed a healthy dose of the bass punch I’m used to with the 6550/KT88 style tubes, while not giving up the body of this tube. Very nice.

As all three of my test amplifiers were extremely quiet, the only thing that can’t be easily verified is whether these tubes are actually that much quieter. They certainly didn’t cause an increase in noise and that’s a good thing.

#### Conclusion

If you have an amplifier that uses EL-34 tubes and you don’t have a cache of NOS power tubes, the Shuguang Treasure Black Bottles is your next choice. These are fantastic-sounding tubes that command a premium price but are worth the money, offering sound improvement across the spectrum. The only thing I can’t verify at this time is tube life, but we will be running a set through their paces in the months to come, and should they fail prematurely, we’ll let you know. Otherwise, you won’t find out the results of our final testing for a while. At present, these represent the pinnacle of EL-34 sound, in terms of current production tubes. ●

#### Shuguang Treasure Black Bottle 6CA7 Tubes

**MSRP:**  
\$460 per quad “A” version  
\$340 per quad “B” version

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

# Both Sides of the Moon

The Simaudio MOON 300D DAC and MOON 750D DAC/Transport

By Jeff Dorgay



Simaudio has recently released a pair of outstanding DAC's at opposite ends of the price scale. Their 300D entry-level model is reasonably priced (\$1,595) while the 750D costs considerably more (\$11,995) and includes a CD transport as part of the deal. I've been living with both of these DAC's for some time now and have been equally impressed.

## Let's Start Small

The 300D is available in black or silver and comes packaged in a case not much bigger than Simaudio's LP5.3 phono stage, or about half the width of a standard component. A nice touch if you are going to place it on a rack with a LP5.3 or perhaps a turntable power supply. It takes a somewhat unconventional approach, using the BurrBrown PCM1793 DAC chips, featuring 24bit/192kHz resolution, yet internally upsamples everything to 24 bit/352.8 kHz processing. A row of LED's on the left front panel indicate the sampling rate of the incoming signal.

Though the current trend has been more towards USB DAC's, a USB input is included on the 300D's rear panel, however it is only for convenience. The Simaudio engineers do not feel that USB offers the best solution for high-quality digital playback, concentrating instead on investing the quality in the S/PDIF (RCA) inputs. An optical input is also included to make this a very versatile DAC. There is a pair of RCA and XLR outputs to accommodate either type of system.

## Setup

To give the 300D a thorough test drive, I used a variety of 16/44 and 24/96 source material, primarily from my Sooloos music server, as well as pairing the DAC with a few older disc players. For the audiophile on a budget, the Pioneer 563 and Denon 3910 can both be purchased used for less than \$250. With a suitable digital cable, either of these can mate with the 300D to provide a high-quality digital front end while offering the added flexibility of multiple digital inputs.

For comparison purposes, the digital output of the MOON 750D was used just to find the limitations of the budget transports.

The 300D was used via XLR and RCA outputs to my reference Burmester 011 preamplifier, and I preferred the sound of the XLR outputs here, using identical AudioQuest Colorado interconnects. Staff writer Mark Marcantonio, who now uses the 300D as his reference, also had the same experience with the 300D mated to his Simaudio i-7 integrated amplifier, finding the balanced outputs offering up slightly more ease and smoothness.

## Mighty Mite

In the midst of this review, we had the opportunity to do a bit of "group listening" where I had a few staff members over for a day of music while comparing a wide range of DAC's from about \$1,000 all the way up to the \$55,000 dCS Paganini stack with upsampler and word clock. While we don't do formal product shootouts in the magazine, it is always worthwhile to compare gear that's in for review to other similar-priced offerings to see how they shake out in terms of ultimate value.

With four other DAC's ranging from similar to almost double the price of the 300D, I kept switching between one DAC and another while the staff members listened, not knowing what they were listening to. The vote was unanimous on "DAC C" having the most open and least "digital" sound. A couple of the staff writers were disappointed that they consistently picked the MOON 300D over their own DAC's, but that's how the chips fell. *(continued)*

**I've been living with both of these DAC's for some time now and have been equally impressed.**

Just as there are multiple paths to great analog sound, the same applies to digital. Most companies defend their position as “the best” when in reality, there is always more than one way to skin a cat. In the case of Simaudio’s up-sampling approach, it works well.

If I had to describe the 300D in one word, it would be “natural.” This was very evident when listening to solo vocal tracks, small ensembles of acoustic instruments and especially violins; the 300D consistently turned in an excellent performance. Keeping in line with the Canadian vibe, listening to “Love Won’t Find Us Here” from Mae Moore’s *Dragonfly* CD showed off Moore’s breathy vocals, giving the presentation a big, open sound. Moving on to the XRCD of Dave Grusin’s *Discovered Again*, the sound of the triangle in the opening of “Sun Song” was smooth with a natural decay.

This is a small but subtle test that many lower-priced DAC’s can’t handle.

While the 300D had great dynamic range and solid, decisive bass performance, what really sets this one apart from its peers in its price range is that level of delicacy that usually does not exist *at all* here. No, it’s not a giant killer and you won’t mistake it for Simaudio’s top player, but it gives a very solid performance that is as non-digital as I’ve yet heard here. To try and put it in better perspective, if you only have a modest analog setup, I’m guessing you’ll either be shopping for a better turntable or more time listening to digital, especially if you have any kind of collection of high-resolution digital music files. Call me crazy, but I’d rather have great digital than mediocre analog, and at this level, the 300D delivers the goods. *(continued)*

**If I had to describe the 300D in one word, it would be “natural.”**



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**The 750D has a pricetag to match its level of quality.**

### Going to the Head of the Class – The 750D

Removing the 750D from the box, this player feels substantial at 35 pounds. Like all of Simaudio's Moon Evolution series, the aluminum chassis is built in-house on their own five-axis milling machine, and the result is a player that looks like a piece of sculpture with performance to match. The 750D includes a front loading CD (only) transport as part of the bargain, and even though many audiophiles are strictly playing music from their hard drives, there are still quite a few who do not want to embrace the computer as a means for playback. With the 750D, you can have the best of both worlds. And should you decide at a later date to include a music server, you're prepared.

The rest of the visual scheme is in keeping with Simaudio's top line Evolution series of electronics, with an all-silver front panel or the black-and-silver front panel. I've always been a fan of Simaudio's industrial design; the layout is intuitive and incredibly easy to

read, and like the other Simaudio products, it has a large, LED readout that those of us who are older than 30 can read easily.

Around the rear panel, the 750D features four digital inputs; Toslink, USB, AES/EBU and an RCA S/PDIF input should handle whatever source you require. Personally, this is my only complaint with the 750D. At this price point, I would love to see a second RCA input for the fanatics in the crowd who have more than one source requiring it, even if it was at the expense of the Toslink input. It would have been nice to connect my Wadia 170i and my Sooloos to the 750D. When you've got a DAC this good, you want to use *all* of your sources with it.

As with the 300D, the USB input is not considered the high-performance option on this DAC and is limited to 16/48 capability. It's worth mentioning here that even though Simaudio does not offer 24/96 USB capability on the 750D, I was more than impressed while streaming 16/44 lossless files from my MacBook Pro and never felt like I was missing out on anything.

The 750D has a pricetag to match its level of quality; MSRP is \$11,995. However, considering you get a world-class DAC and transport, you'll agree that this one is quite the bargain after all.

### Top technology

Even though the CD is slowly falling from favor (as is all physical media) as a means for distributing music, I'm guessing that if you are going to spend 12 large on a red-book player, you probably have a substantial

collection of CD's that you're not planning on getting rid of anytime soon. In 2010, it's the late 80's all over again, and just like everyone was getting rid of their LP's for peanuts, the used CD market has never been better. So it's exciting to know that Simaudio has made a commitment to their customers by designing and building their own transport, thus assuring you that this player will be serviceable in the future. Simaudio's Lionel Goodfield told me at this year's CES show, *(continued)*





**“We felt we had to build our own transport after getting burned by a major supplier a decade ago. This way, we *knew* we would always have transports for our own decks. And we feel our transport sounds better, too.”**

“We felt we had to build our own transport after getting burned by a major supplier a decade ago. This way, we *knew* we would always have transports for our own decks. And we feel our transport sounds better, too.”

Thanks to the ESS Technology Sabre32 Reference ES9018S DAC/Digital Filter working in Hyperstream™ – which uses a total of 16 DACs (8 per/channel in a differential configuration), the 750D operates in 32-bit asynchronous mode and combined with their M-AJiC32 jitter reduction circuitry, reduces jitter to below 1 picosecond. The 750D operates in fully balanced, differential mode throughout and sounded it’s best running in balanced mode. The sound through the RCA’s is excellent, if that is your only option, but it will give the last few percent of sound quality in an all balanced system.

### Top Shelf Sound

Just like all the other Simaudio components I’ve used, the 750D requires about 300 hours to sound its best. Fortunately, with a CD player this is easy to get out of the way. Two weeks of constant operation ran the clock up significantly. Starting each day with the same CD, Tina Brooks *True Blue* (the current XRCD) allowed me to listen to how the player was opening up day by day with some sparsely recorded acoustic music. I’d venture that about 75 percent of the change took place in the first 100 hours, with the final unfolding of the sound happening in the next 200. Don’t fret, the 750D sounds very good right out of the box, but it becomes magical after about 300 hours with the high frequencies smoothing out more and the low-level dynamic contrast increasing as well.

While I could write paragraphs about transparency, etc., etc., the short story is that the 750D is one of a very few select CD players that gets out of the way of the decoding process well enough that you can forget that you are listening to digital. Though some players achieve this by rounding off the leading and trailing edges of the music to make it easier on your ears, the 750D gets the job done with a huge helping of resolution and lack of grain. Much of this lack of grain comes from the attention to jitter reduction as well as the massive power supplies in the 750D.

Along with an eerie, almost analog-like smoothness, the 750D excels at what digital does best: dynamic range. Whether listening to large-scale orchestral pieces or the heaviest metal in my collection, this player has the sheer weight that makes for a compelling performance. *(continued)*

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### Tracks captured in 24/96 with my Nagra LB from records became stunningly close to the originals through the 750D.

This is another one of the biggest differences that you get with a world-class player. Fortunately, it has the low-level resolution and ultra-low-level noise floor that will add a new dimension to recordings you've heard many times.

Always a common audiophile argument regarding the superiority of a hard drive versus CD for tip-top performance, I still maintain that at least with the hardware at my disposal (MacBook Pro, Wadia 170i, Sooloos and Naim music servers), standard 16/44 discs still sound more natural when playing through the transport. It's close, but when listening to the best discs in my collection, the transport still had the edge in smoothness and low-level detail. Acoustic instruments had more body and texture, and again, the upper-most register had a lack of harshness that I didn't hear until I switched back to hard-drive playback.

Upping the ante to high-resolution files changed the game. Playing a combination of downloaded files from HDTracks.com and the Naim Music Store

established how much more interesting digital is in high resolution. Comparing some of my favorite analog tracks captured in 24/96 with my Nagra LB from records became stunningly close to the originals through the 750D and certainly good enough that I found myself listening less often to vinyl. Especially with those Blue Note 45's, and that's as good as it gets for digital.

### Against the Odds

Again, the unlikely comparison test occurred, as I just happened to have a handful of great CD players here in the studio, including my Naim CD555, the Wadia 781SE and my new reference, the four-box Paganini stack from dCS. From an informal comparison, I'd put the 750D squarely in the middle of the "big bucks" category. While it did not have quite the level of refinement in the upper registers as my \$32,000 Naim player (and we are really splitting hairs here on a six-figure reference system), it did have a little more weight and control in the lower registers, very impressive for a \$12k player. *(continued)*

Switching to system two, consisting of the daRTzeel CTH-8550 integrated and my Harbeth Monitor 40.1 speakers, the difference between players evaporated, so for 99 percent of the market, the 750D will be the top of the mountain and you'll be happy living there.

But that's not the whole story, in 2011 when Simaudio releases the *outboard power supply* for the 750D, I anticipate that it will increase the performance substantially, just as any of my favorite Naim components have when making a similar upgrade, so don't count the 750D out of the very top of the playing field just yet. We are anxiously awaiting this upgrade and will report as soon as it is available. For now, the Simaudio 750D is a fantastic digital player that is as obsolete proof as today's technology will allow. This is a fantastic player in every way and it is certainly a bargain in the "cost no object" CD player category.

I am very happy to award the Simaudio 750D DAC/Transport one of our Exceptional Value Awards for 2010, and we have purchased the review sample for our reference fleet of components. ●

*Staff members Marc Marcantonio and Ken Mercereau both contributed to this review.*



The Simaudio Moon  
300D DAC  
MSRP: \$1,595  
750D DAC/Transport  
MSRP: \$11,995

**MANUFACTURER**  
www.simaudio.com

#### PERIPHERALS

**Analog Source** Spiral Groove SG-2 w/Triplanar arm and Grado Statement 1 cartridge

**Digital Sources** Naim HDX music server, Sooloos music server, Squeezebox Touch music server

**Preamplifier** Burmester 011

**Power Amplifier** Burmester 911 mk. 3, Simaudio i-7 (integrated), daRTzeel CTH-8550 (integrated)

**Speakers** GamuT S-9, Harbeth Monitor 40.1, B&W 805D

**Interconnects** Shunyata Aurora, Cardas Clear

**Speaker Cable** Shunyata Stratos SP, Cardas Clear

**Power Conditioning** Running Springs Dmitri and Maxim

**Power Cords** Running Springs HZ and Mongoose, Shunyata Python CX

**Accessories** SRA "Ohio Class" isoBase amplifier platforms, Shunyata Dark Field Cable Elevators



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## Introducing **CARMEL**

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Designed by Yoav Geva (Gonczarowski)

**YG Acoustics LLC**  
4941 Allison St. #10, Arvada, CO 80002, U.S.A. Tel. 801-726-3887  
E-mail: [info@yg-acoustics.com](mailto:info@yg-acoustics.com) Web: [www.yg-acoustics.com](http://www.yg-acoustics.com)

### Technology

Carmel incorporates the same technologies that make YG Acoustics' Anat Reference II Professional the best loudspeaker on Earth: YG's DualCoherent™ crossovers produce the best frequency response and relative phase available today; Carmel's enclosure is milled using 4-axis technology as opposed to the competition's 3-axis milling, which avoids the parallel internal surfaces common in other so-called "complex enclosure" designs.

### Detail

Carmel utilizes Scan-Speak drivers, modified to YG Acoustics specifications, with the tweeter assembled in-house. The unique enclosure design keeps mechanical losses lower than any competing speaker<sup>1</sup>, by combining the minimized turbulence of a sealed design with the low friction otherwise associated with enclosure-free concepts. All this is made possible through extremely tight manufacturing tolerances, and vibration-free pressurized assembly of the precision-ground and hardened CNC-machined enclosure panels<sup>2</sup>.

### Sound

The end-result is a speaker of remarkable refinement. Carmel is ultra-transparent, and presents a huge yet precise soundstage, with the neutrality and warmth of a live performance that YG Acoustics is famous for. This is all presented in a speaker with elegant lines and a shape that invites inclusion in the finest home environments.

### Reviews

Neil Gader from The Absolute Sound  
reporting on CES 2010

**"Best Sound:  
the new and smaller two-way YG Carmel."**

Robert Harley from The Absolute Sound,  
January 2010 (issue 199)

**"...the Kipod was capable of an enormously appealing and captivating sound. It disappeared in the sense that it was a transparent window on the music, with extremely low coloration. ...the Kipod Studio achieved its lifelike vitality by imposing so little of itself on the music."**

**"This quality was, I concluded, not just the result of the Kipod's lack of tonal colorations in the midband, but of its transient quickness and coherence. Leading edges of notes seemed to jump out of the presentation with startling speed... Transient information had a coherence that was world-class..."**

**"This quality is the Kipod Studio's greatest strength – the ability to sound highly resolving and alive without a trace of fatigue-inducing etch. ...its resolution was musically authentic..."**

Wes Phillips from Stereophile, March 2009

**"But most of all, the YGs were so adept at presenting dynamic details that, instead of simply making the music come alive, they presented living, breathing musicians making music in my living room."**

**"Wow – a speaker that makes me reevaluate an entire instrument's capabilities."**

Adam Goldfine from Positive-Feedback, Issue 45

**"...goose bump inducing realism..."**



<sup>1</sup> See YG Acoustics' ad titled Reason #3 for measurements of mechanical losses.

<sup>2</sup> YG Acoustics is unique in the industry in having in-house CNC precision-grinding equipment in addition to CNC milling machines.



# Slummin'

By the Tone Staff

Summer's in full force and with it comes garage sale madness. Still no mint Stereo 70's on the horizon, but a few fun, vinyl related items.

**Todd Rundgren Drink Coasters**  
eBay — \$5

Who can resist four of my favorite Todd Rundgren albums, laminated and made into drink coasters? It must have been tough to cut these records up, but they now are protecting the Noguchi table from nasty rings.



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

Robert Harley - The Absolute Sound - 09/07



azur



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

"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

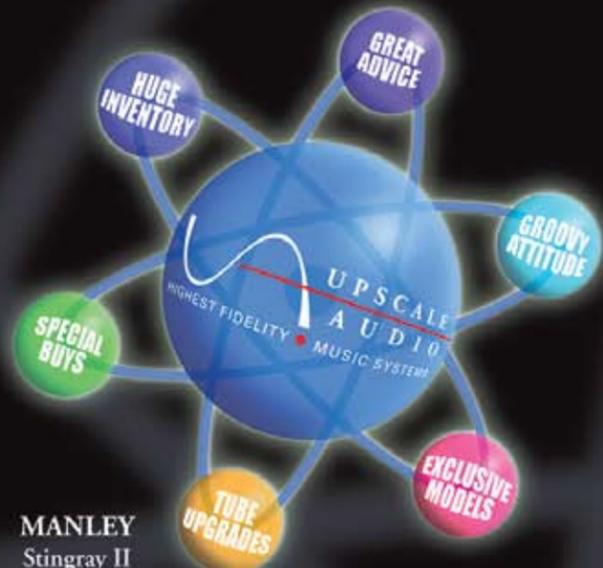
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BARGAINS



### Pile of Records — \$20

Though the covers were in awful shape, this stack of records revealed a few treasures, including a mono version of the first Doors' album, some classic Kinks and even a couple of mono Paul Revere and the Raiders albums. About half way through the stack and so far, there is nothing that the Loricraft record cleaner hasn't been able to handle.

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

ALO Audio: [www.aloaudio.co](http://www.aloaudio.co)

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

Auravis Systems: [www.auravissystems.com](http://www.auravissystems.com)

AudioQuest: [www.audioquest.com](http://www.audioquest.com)

B&W Music Club: [www.bowersandwilkins.com](http://www.bowersandwilkins.com)

B&W Loudspeakers: [www.bowersandwilkins.com](http://www.bowersandwilkins.com)

Benchmark: [www.benchmarkmedia.com](http://www.benchmarkmedia.com)

Burmester: [www.burmester.de](http://www.burmester.de)

Cambridge Audio: [www.audioplusservices.com](http://www.audioplusservices.com)

Conrad Johnson: [www.conradjohnson.com](http://www.conradjohnson.com)

DCS: [www.dcsLtd.co.uk](http://www.dcsLtd.co.uk)

Echo Audio: [www.echohifi.com](http://www.echohifi.com)

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

HDTracks.com: [www.hdtracks.com](http://www.hdtracks.com)

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

Luxman: [www.onahighernote.com](http://www.onahighernote.com)

JM Labs/Focal: [www.audioplusservices.com](http://www.audioplusservices.com)

JL Audio: [www.jlaudio.com](http://www.jlaudio.com)

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

McIntosh: [www.mcintoshlabs.com](http://www.mcintoshlabs.com)

Meridian: [www.meridian-audio.com](http://www.meridian-audio.com)

Mobile Fidelity: [www.mofi.com](http://www.mofi.com)

Mystere: [www.mystere-usa.com](http://www.mystere-usa.com)

Music Direct: [www.musicdirect.com](http://www.musicdirect.com)

Music Matters: [www.musicmattersjazz.com](http://www.musicmattersjazz.com)

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

Nagra: [www.nagraaudio.com](http://www.nagraaudio.com)

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

NuVision: [www.nuvision.com](http://www.nuvision.com)

Paradigm: [www.paradigm.com](http://www.paradigm.com)

Primare: [www.soundorg.com](http://www.soundorg.com)

Red Eye: [www.thinkflood.com](http://www.thinkflood.com)

Red Wine Audio: [www.redwineaudio.com](http://www.redwineaudio.com)

Rega: [www.soundorg.com](http://www.soundorg.com)

Running Springs Audio: [www.runningspringsaudio.com](http://www.runningspringsaudio.com)

Save the Music: [www.vh1.com](http://www.vh1.com)

Simaudio: [www.simaudio.com](http://www.simaudio.com)

Shunyata: [www.shunyata.com](http://www.shunyata.com)

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

Verity Audio: [www.verityaudio.com](http://www.verityaudio.com)

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

YG Acoustics: [www.ygacoustics.com](http://www.ygacoustics.com)

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