

# TONEAudio

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No.32 October 2010

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**Iggy Pop**  
Bob Gendron Covers  
New York's ATP Festival

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# PUBLISHER'S LETTER



**A**s I write this, I'm only a few days away from attending the Rocky Mountain Audio Fest in Denver, Colorado. The RMAF is pretty special to TONEAudio because that's where we launched five years ago. Wow, the time has flown by. If you take a peek back at Issue No. 1, it was only 55 pages! As you can see by this issue, tipping the scale at just over 250 pages, we've grown by leaps and bounds.

My old boss Harry Pearson of The Absolute Sound used to say, "I've got the best job in the world." As someone who enjoys music and HiFi as much as I have throughout my life, I certainly can't imagine having a better one. Keeping track of all the people and all the gear certainly requires some organization, but I have to congratulate everyone on the staff for always going above and beyond the call of duty, sharing my vision to bring you this fusion of music, gear and associated goodies every issue. I couldn't do this alone.

It proves you don't have to stop having fun, even as you get older. No one epitomizes that more than the man that graces our cover, Iggy Pop. When music editor Bob Gendron and I pushed our way through the crowd to get up close and personal with Iggy at the recent ATP festival, he demonstrated the vigor (and the sense of humor) of a man in his early 20's, not his early 60's.

So, here's to starting year six. Our audience has grown exponentially in five years, and I think the only places on the globe not getting our magazine don't have an internet connection. At least that's what Google Metrics tells us.

I not only thank you for reading but for all the kind words we've received over the years. Many have asked for advice on components, set up and music. A few of you have even become personal friends, so it's been a very rewarding experience in that respect as well. Fortunately, the happy letters have outweighed the crabby letters by a considerable margin. (Actually, we've had only 17 grumpy emails in five years...)

We have another fun issue in store, so I hope you enjoy it. And I hope to see some of you at RMAF this weekend.



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## NEW CONTRIBUTORS

### Samantha Marble

Photographer Samantha Marble has spent the past five years intensely documenting one of the most thriving independent art scenes in the US, New York City. Capturing images of up-and-coming artists, musicians and actors along the way, her work did not go unnoticed; outlets like *The New York Times*, *Brooklyn Vegan*, *Stereogum*, *Time Out NY*, *The NY Daily News*, and *Inked*, among many others, all came knocking.

Samantha Marble currently lives in Brooklyn, where she can be found front-and-center sans earplugs. You can view more of her work at: [www.samanthamarble.com](http://www.samanthamarble.com)

### Jessica Amaya

Jessica Amaya is a freelance photographer living in the New York City area who's main focus is concert and portrait photography. She is a regular contributor to *Brooklyn Vegan*, *Stereogum*, *Amplified* and other online music sites.

You can view more of her work at: [www.jessicaamaya.com](http://www.jessicaamaya.com)



### Mr. Horse Action Figure

The Ren & Stimpy Show  
 © Viacom and Palisades Toys  
[www.superherotoys.com](http://www.superherotoys.com)



*“No, Commissioner Gordon, I can’t help you rip your CD’s. I’m an analog guy.”*

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Iggy Pop at ATP 2010  
Photo by Jeff Dorgay

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FESTIVAL

# All Tomorrow's Parties 2010:

*Upstate New York's Intimate Music Festival Does Everything Right*

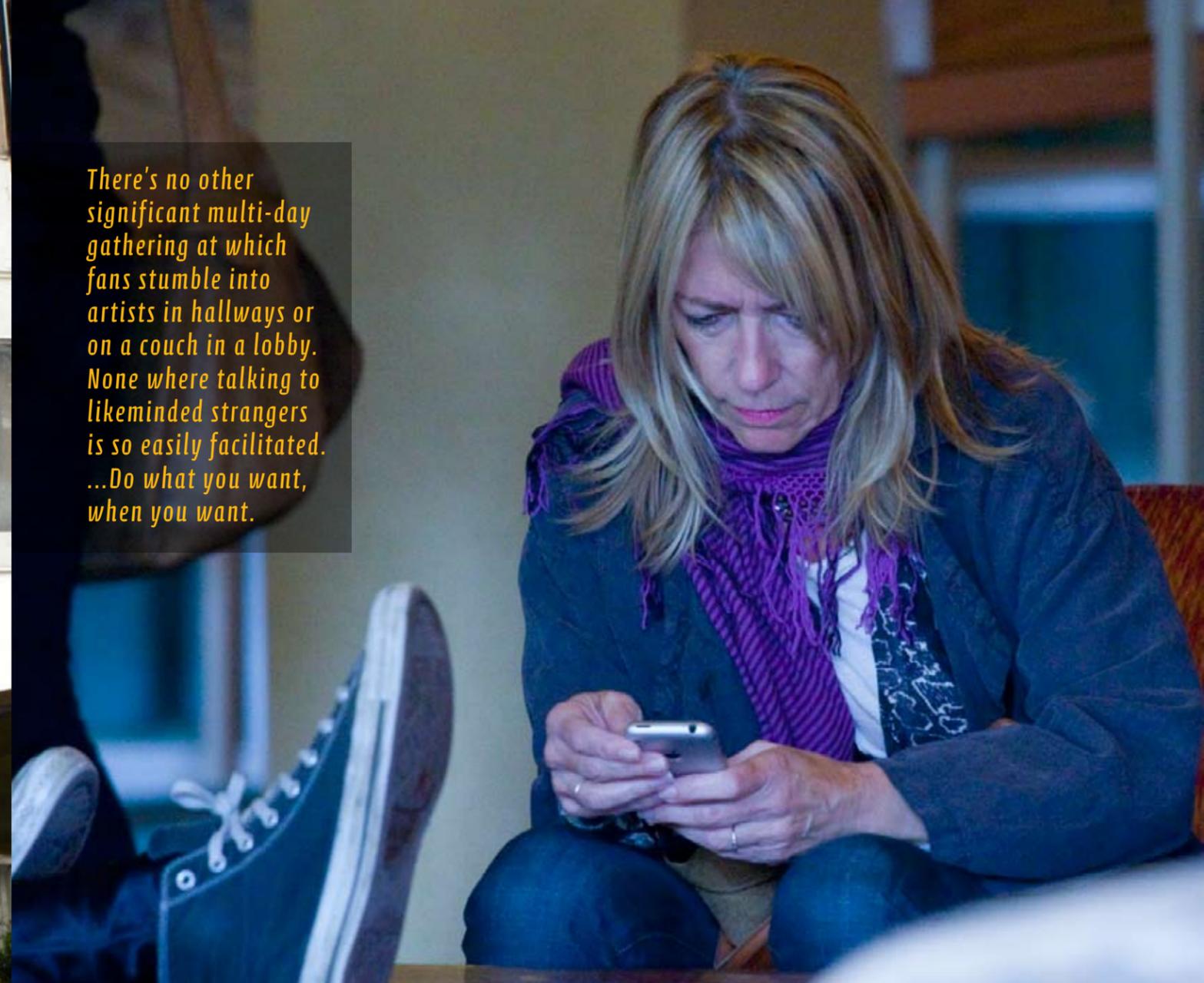
By Bob Gendron  
Photos by Jeff Dorgay

Approximately three thousand fans, dozens of artists, multiple comedians, and ongoing Criterion film screenings coalesced at the country's most intimate, laidback major music festival over Labor Day weekend in upstate New York's defunct Borsht Belt. Hosted by Kutshers Country Club and curated by Jim Jarmusch and ATP, the third annual All Tomorrow's Parties drew a sold-out mix of youthful hipsters and older attendees to watch an enviable lineup of cutting-edge bands that, with rare exception, consistently delivered inspired and inspiring performances.





*There's no other significant multi-day gathering at which fans stumble into artists in hallways or on a couch in a lobby. None where talking to likeminded strangers is so easily facilitated. ...Do what you want, when you want.*



*Kim Gordon from Sonic Youth relaxes in the lobby*

Free of corporate sponsorship and designed to put everyone—fans, press, artists—on the same level, the unique festival is as a standout example of grass-roots organization and common purpose. For anyone who has ventured to Coachella, Bonnaroo, Lollapalooza, or even the extremely fan-friendly Pitchfork Music Festival, ATP's relaxed attitude, unfettered access, and noncommercial environment comes as a pleasant shock. So does the fact that organizers put a limit on attendance.

There's no other significant multi-day gathering at which fans stumble into artists

in hallways or on a couch in a lobby. None where talking to likeminded strangers is so easily facilitated. No celebration where the security personnel is essentially comprised of stagehands. Do what you want, when you want. Given the rural setting and surrounding bodies of water, as well as the on-site dorm-like hotel, ATP ostensibly functions as an independent summer camp that's actually fun.

Depending on one's view, Kutshers' dilapidated setting is either a handicap or a help. The 1907 club certainly adds atmosphere—and surreal vibes. Save for the main building that houses the lobby,

swimming pool, ballroom, and a few floors of rooms, the resort needs a multitude of repairs, upgrades, and cleaning services. Coming across as an eerie combination of "The Shining" and "Friday the 13th," a majority of the complex's decor and condition suggest that time froze in 1962.

The appearance of an elderly saleswoman manning a gaudy jewelry and perfume counter, and a septuagenarian singing karaoke just across the way, added to the "Twilight Zone" feel. As did room doors that didn't properly lock or shut; rippled carpet worn with stains and dirt; windows held in place with duct tape; peeling

wallpaper and flaking paint; broken couches and split chairs; dilapidated fire escapes and unusable sports facilities; and an omnipresence of spiders, insects, and what is rumored to be a sizeable bedbug population.

Of course, none of this got in the way of the performances, which were galvanized by an extraordinary sound system and cozy confines. And, admittedly, strolling the grounds of Kutshers provided eye-opening entertainment as well as the brief sensation of what it must've been like to have been in the Rat Pack. *(continued)*

...better lodging accommodations are only a few miles away. Not that you'll encounter friendly folks custom-painting plastic Smurf figurines in the hall, hundreds of music lovers chilling out around a pond, or a bar that's a supreme specimen of space-age 60s design at a local Holiday Inn.

DANCE  
CONTEST

FRIDAY 1<sup>CH</sup> 3<sup>AM</sup>

→

Lobby  
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However, anyone wanting sleep, privacy, or crisp bed linens should think twice about staying there—better lodging accommodations are only a few miles away. Not that you'll encounter friendly folks custom-painting plastic Smurf figurines in the hall, hundreds of music lovers chilling out around a pond, or a bar that's a supreme specimen of space-age 60s design at a local Holiday Inn. Kudos also go to ATP for keeping alcohol and food prices reasonable. Other festivals, already buttressed with advertisers' money, should take note.

Yet what's most distinctive about ATP is the lack of filler. Friday evening, and all of Saturday and Sunday were packed with engaging groups and must-see talent—not to mention A-list films for those seeking alternative media stimulation. As a rule, the festival caters to obsessive listeners that can discuss at length the merits of doom-metal heroes Sleep's cult debut versus the group's follow-up, *Holy Mountain*. Since it's unconcerned with attracting the fickle middle-of-the-road populace and pandering to a particular taste, ATP isn't hamstrung by conventional festival booking logic. Nowhere was this advantage more evident than on the stages, where highlights were myriad. (For hour-by-hour reports of the headlining bands and more photos, visit [www.tonepublications.com/on-tour/atp-festival-day-one-coverage/](http://www.tonepublications.com/on-tour/atp-festival-day-one-coverage/) where TONE's live coverage was posted immediately after the shows. Due to a family emergency, we regretfully had to miss Sunday's events.) *(continued)*



On Friday, four bands engaged in ATP's tradition of playing a classic album in its entirety. For Mudhoney, that meant 1990's *Superfuzz Bigmuff Plus Early Singles*, a collection that hasn't aged a day. Lead guitarist Steve Turner and fellow guitarist/vocalist Mark Arm gave everyone ample opportunity to dance, their gutbucket slide playing and flanged notes contributing to the zany shimmy on uptempo fare and spraying beer-soaked grime onto slower, bluesier material. Moaning and yelping, Arm conveyed frustration, desperation, and dissatisfaction with a knowing wink. And as the Seattle group's wah-wah pedal effects and swiveling rhythms knifed in and out of the ramshackle grooves, songs such as "In and Out of Grace," "You Got It (Keep It Out of My Face)," and "If I Think" solidified their reputation as some of the most exhilarating garage rock tunes ever woodshed.

# Mudhoney



# SLEEP

Not to be outdone, Sleep's foundation-shaking riffs and bowel-moving low-end thunder literally shifted air in the room to the extent that anyone within the premises sensed the hairs on their arm moving from the vibrations. The reunited stoner metal trio shrouded itself in dry ice fog, dense lighting and unimaginably massive amounts of volume. Plying psychedelic doom that rendered vocals inaudible, Sleep personified the art of the drone, decibel, and the dirge, treading as if scaling a glacier—taking its time, refusing to go fast, and steadily climbing upward, one step at a time. Distinguished by tectonic tension and perception-changing feedback, the down-tuned quake of overdriven sonic mulch such as "The Druid" and "Inside the Sun" appeared to unfold in slow motion. In the process of annihilating eardrums, guitar god Matt Pike and company redefined the limits of sonic hypnotism and monolithic heaviness. Absolutely transfixing.



The same couldn't be said for Australia's The Scientists. Performing its first-ever American show, the post-punk quartet—a significant influence on Mudhoney, Jon Spencer, and others—failed to muster requisite energy or chemistry. Devoid of personality, the band ignored the crowd and clung to a volley of monotonous beats while airing *Blood Red River*. Yet for all the rustling reverb, tough swamp-country tones, and barbed-wire rolls of slash-and-burn guitar notes, the Scientists' rumbling cacophony suffered from one-dimensional flatness.

# The Scientists

A photograph of Iggy Pop performing at a festival. He is shirtless, wearing black shorts, and is being held up by a crowd of people. The crowd is dense, with many hands reaching up towards him. The scene is lit with bright, warm stage lights, creating a high-energy atmosphere. The background shows other festival-goers and structures, slightly out of focus.

# Iggy and the Stooges

Iggy and the Stooges ensured that any bad tastes didn't linger for long. Having entered the stage as if he had just been shot out of a cannon, the 63-year-old Pop proved more animal than human, his sinewy body riddled with grainy lines that resembled those found on a tough cut of flank steak. *(continued)*

Whether swaying his hips, punching imaginary foes, or diving at the feet of his mates, the legendary frontman thrived on confrontation and contortion. Microphone stands got tossed. Speaker monitors were shoved into the P.A. system. Challenges became directives. And the Stooges were more than up to task.

From a crouched stance, bassist Mike Watt watched the spectacle unfold with invested intensity, behaving much like an overzealous football coach barking at his team to crush the opponent. Guitarist James Williamson assumed an all-business mentality, manhandling his guitar and reeling off searing solos that further spiked Pop's adrenaline. Steve Mackay remained off to the side, his blaring saxophone pouring gasoline on the music's conflagration of free-jazz irreverence. Administering every ounce of force hinted at on *Raw Power*, the group tore into the record's songs like a band of teenage kids ripping open a case of beer. "Search and Destroy," "Your Pretty Face Is Going to Hell," and "Penetration" doubled as unadulterated kicks to the stomach and uppercuts to the skull. Walloping, aggressive, and invigorating, the Stooges' storming violence and pummeling assault simultaneously threatened and incited. Whew!



# Tortoise

Saturday calmed down a bit but ended with a ruckus. Pushing buttons, lightly skimming drums and cymbals, and creating compositions seemingly designed for playback on a hi-tech calculator, Tortoise approached jazz-rock fusion with the focused sensibility of an audio nerd. Nothing about the Chicago quintet ever changes, including its stoic and serious disposition. The band's instrumental songs alternatively faded and flowed, squealed and soothed, and split the difference between ambient and acoustic. Cerebral and dependable, Tortoise's liquid funk, outré blues, and modulated electronics emitted a pastel glow not at all dissimilar from the purple hues of the overhead lighting that bathed the group onstage. Still best experienced in small doses.



Billed as Hallogallo, guitarist/composer Michael Rother and bassist Aaron Mullan entered into intoxicating conversations with Sonic Youth drummer Steve Shelley. Nearly four decades ago, Rother flipped the conventions of art-rock music on its side with Neu, a pioneering electronic band that bridged his native Germany's Krautrock heritage with exotic European timbres. Neu's impact continues to be felt in the work of contemporaries such as U2, Radiohead, and Wilco. Watching Rother diligently operate behind a table packed with gadgets, pedals, plugs, wires, cords, and boxes while performing Neu material for the first time in 35 years testified on behalf of the importance of his band's legacy. Seldom staring out at the enraptured crowd, the trio instead maintained constant eye contact with one another, the direct glances serving as communicative cues for when a groove should be switched into another gear. Shelley served as a model of precision, pounding out tom-dominant beats that contrasted with Rother's processed guitar melodies and Mullan's slumbering bass burble. If circuitry had a human voice and soul, Neu/Hallogallo is what it would sound like.

# Hallogallo

FESTIVAL

Shellac needed only 45 minutes to almost steal the show away from the bigger-name headliners. Immaculate, dry sonics and unbridled intensity propelled songs infused with seething anger, push-and-shove momentum, tightrope tension, and offbeat humor. And that sound. Guitarist/vocalist Albini and seemingly cuddly bassist Bob Weston (each accomplished recording engineers) played through their trademark silver amps distinguished by one large knob and audiophile-grade tones. Augmented by drummer Todd Trainer, the trio's swerving music swerved, paused, and resumed at unconventional intervals, often erupting with an intentional imbalance of murderous intent and comical relief. Sensing the divide, Albini choked the microphone stand like a bookie shaking down a delinquent gambler. He spit while barking and shouting lyrics to songs such as "The End of Radio" and "Steady As She Goes," metallic-coated material that evoked the torque and sound produced when a large screw is forced into a too-small hole on a sheet of reinforced steel. Ugly, acidic, caustic—and thoroughly energizing.

Shellac

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## FESTIVAL

Following a listless set by the Breeders, Explosions In the Sky lived up to their name. Reveling in the areas found between light, shade, and darkness, the quartet's instrumental hybrid of gentle dream pop, bursting cosmic rock, and intermittent heaviness merged abrasive passages with quieter, wispy sequences. Sustain, delay, distortion, wah, and volume pedals played as large of a role as actual instruments. Sparked by trickles of reverb, glowing choruses, and deep-black backgrounds, the group's ambitious compositions conjured images of meteor showers, lightning storms, the aurora borealis, rocket launches, and solar eclipses. No wonder the band members kept their eyes closed for a majority of the concert. An impressive showing.

# Explosions in the Sky



# Sonic Youth

As was the torrential display put on by Sonic Youth. Performing with vicious energy and rampant urgency, the iconic New York art-rock quartet stuck to an all-80s set and, in doing so, revealed how far it has come as accomplished musicians. The older, wiser Sonic Youth not only possesses the confident disposition, freak-out experimentalism, and cool factor it claimed during the early days; it now also has the effortless capacity to spin thickets of imaginative noise and patchwork quilts of combusive rhythms into discernible songs without sacrificing any of the bluster.

Bassist/vocalist Kim Gordon pounced with don't-mess-with-me feminist attitude on "The Sprawl." "Cross the Border" turned wild in a hurry, with guitarist/vocalist Thurston Moore jumping with childlike glee as the tune dangerously raced around the bend. "Catholic Block" left its mark like a graffiti tagger on a subway car. Similarly, the rush of New York's bustling downtown—the cabs, horns, trains, pedestrians, vendors—filled the sensory-blurring "Stereo Sanctity." No possibility seemed off-limits. Alternate tunings brought forth unexpected shifts and twists. Hot-rod guitars coughed, wheezed, burped, and gurgled. Pieces of wood doubled as makeshift bows that got dragged across frets and necks. Sonic Youth shaped the discordant mix like aural putty, undaunted by the hazards and renewed by the potential of what's to come. What a homecoming. ●

# Todd Rundgren

**Clowes Memorial Hall**

Indianapolis, Indiana

**September 11, 2010**

Photos and Text by Jeff Dorgay

A photograph of Todd Rundgren performing on stage. He is wearing a highly decorative, multi-colored jacket with floral and abstract patterns. He is playing a custom-painted electric guitar with a rainbow and floral design. The background is dark with blue spotlights and a pattern of small blue dots.

Talk about ambition. Taking his recent concept of performing a complete album on back-to-back nights to the next level, Todd Rundgren played two of his classic albums, *Todd* and *Healing*, on 9/11's ninth anniversary at Clowes Memorial Hall in Indianapolis. Other than staging *A Wizard A True Star* on a few dates in 2009, Rundgren has primarily been sticking to a set largely comprised of music from his last record, *Arena*, as well as songs in tribute to blues great Robert Johnson.

The significance of these thematic concerts shouldn't be lost on those who aren't Rundgren fanatics. *Todd* and *Healing* have never been performed live in such a manner. Audiences that witnessed any of these shows truly experienced something unique. Not that Rundgren hasn't always been anything but distinctive.

After a cracking opening set from The Fixx, the crowd was amped for Rundgren to hit the stage. As he entered in a wizard/monk-like outfit, everyone jumped to their feet in applause. Having just performed *Todd and Healing* the previous night in Missouri, Rundgren looked a bit tired during the first number, but his vocal delivery showed no signs of fatigue. And by the end of the opening track from *Todd* (appropriately titled "How About a Little Fanfare"), the headliner flashed a grin that rarely left his face. His voice strong throughout, Rundgren also played blistering guitar leads on a totally psychedelic Gibson SG that looked like it could have been custom painted by Peter Max, all the while reminding us of his multi-instrumental prowess.

For support, Rundgren enlisted recent bandmates Jesse Gress on guitar, Kasim Sulton on bass, and Prairie Prince on drums. Keyboardist Greg Hawkes (with whom Rundgren has played in The New Cars) and saxophonist Bobby Strickland rounded out the lineup. Although each musician devoted a majority of their attention to their respective instrument, all but Prince also spent a fair amount of time on keyboards.

Numerous stagehands took advantage of an uncluttered stage and platform rollers to move keyboards on and off as songs dictated.



And since everyone wore headset mics and in-ear monitors, the crowd enjoyed clear views of the costume and equipment changes. Rundgren abandoned his wizard costume for a Nehru-esque jacket during the program's second half, the portion focused on *Healing*. When playing *sans* guitar, he paced back and forth in bare feet, genuinely coming across as a spiritual healer. To further complete the evangelist vibe, Rundgren enlisted a local choir to help fill out the set, using a different group of local singers for each of his dates. It's an inspired move.

Yet, for all the impressive visual and spiritual dimensions, the show's standout highlight amounted to the extended time Rundgren spent at the piano. When *TONEAudio* interviewed him last year, Rundgren disclosed that he doesn't play keyboards live any more because of the concentration required to play and sing. He should reconsider; he didn't miss a beat all evening.

As for living up the names of the two classic albums he performed? Rundgren exceeded expectations. Heal us he did. Slightly more than three hours after this rock legend took the stage, that part of Indianapolis was truly a better place. ●

# Costuming the Wizard

## A Few Minutes With Rachel Culp

By Jeff Dorgay Photos by Danny O'Connor

If you missed Todd Rundgren in the mid-to-late 70s, he famously produced some incredibly theatrical productions, with the stages and costumes as elaborate as his multi-layered musical compositions. And though the economics of 21st century touring find Rundgren and company wearing t-shirts more often than not, he recently pulled out all the stops for a five-date tour focused on his back-to-back performances of the entire *Todd* and *Healing* albums.

Enter Rachel Culp, fashion and costume designer. The daughter of famous *I-Spy* detective Robert Culp, longtime Rundgren fan and longtime friend of Todd's wife, Michele, she designed the costumes the band adorned for its recent block of conceptual shows. The execution was flawless and the outfits beyond cool, bringing rare glimpses of 70s psychedelia to the fore that helped make the concerts that much more special. As *Todd* and *Healing* had never been played live before, the shows wouldn't have been anywhere near as awesome if Rundgren had just played in a t-shirt.

I caught up with Rachel right after the tour to ask her a few questions about the whole affair and fill in the gaps for Rundgren fans everywhere.



Rachel (center) clowning with band members: Kasim Sulton, Greg Hawkes, Jesse Gress, Bobby Strickland and Prairie Prince (left to right)



Rachel Culp working with Michele Rundgren right up to show time.



**“I pulled a couple of all-nighters and got them done. We all know a cranky rock star is something you don’t want.”**

**STONE:** How did you get this gig? Are you a friend of Todd and Michele, or did someone recommend you?

**RC:** Michele contacted me about collaborating with her on the costumes for the first half of the show, the *Todd* part. I’ve known Todd since I was about 15. With my dad being Robert Culp, I was one of those “Hollywood kids” you sometimes hear about, going to concerts and making mischief. While my friends were getting ready for the prom, I was hanging out backstage. Musicians were a lot more fun. I’ve known Michele since she was with the Tubes. Used to go to a lot of their shows as well. My husband, Danny O’Connor, used to tour with Todd and Utopia, doing a lot of their merch and album covers. He still designs t-shirts for Todd, so it’s a small world. I started designing clothes for musicians around 1985. You can view more of my work at The Deep Blue “C” Etsy Shop: [www.etsy.com/shop/mydeepbluec](http://www.etsy.com/shop/mydeepbluec).

How much lead-time did you have to get this done?

Michele first called in June. She flew me to Los Angeles in July to start on everything and we pretty much finished the project the day of the first show, September 5, in Cleveland. They’re probably still cleaning up after our mess!

Any bizarre problems, or was it smooth sailing? Any wardrobe malfunctions?

The only hiccup [related to] the Indian Wedding costumes for the *Healing* part of the show that Michele custom ordered from India. While she was assured that everything would be done and arrive by September 1, that date came and went with no packages from India! Michele scrambled to find some backups in California, just in case, but a few of them did show up just before the first show. So we had a lot to choose from.

Were the costumes the same for each of the six shows, or did you create something different for each?

We made some alternate choices for everyone (again, as backup) but they ended up wearing the same thing every show—except the bass player and drummer. They wanted different pants. So in order to deliver “tight rock star pants,” I pulled a couple of all-nighters and got them done. We all know a cranky rock star is something you don’t want.

Were the guys pretty cooperative throughout the process?

Yes, all kidding aside, they are my buddies first and foremost, so I wanted them to be happy with the end result. Todd and his crew were very easy to work with. ●

**Vic Theatre**

Chicago, Illinois

**October 1, 2010**

By Bob Gendron

Photos by Jessica Amaya

**G**raig Finn might be the biggest, proudest geek in rock. Onstage, the bespectacled leader of The Hold Steady dances goofily, claps along to songs, hops around like a hyper rabbit, and mouths off-microphone words to lyrics he's already sung. He comes on with the shy innocence of schoolboy, cuddly persuasion of a stuffed teddy bear, and nervous belligerence of an Asperger's diagnosed teenager that forgot to swallow medicine. But Finn's unrivaled enthusiasm and unbridled giddiness are part of his enduring charm, and a large reason his Brooklyn-by-way-of-Twin Cities group emerged as one of the most rewarding live acts of the last decade.



# The Hold Steady

Yet, after enjoying several trouble-free years during which it attracted mainstream attention, the past few months presented the ensemble with numerous hurdles. In January, longtime keyboardist Franz Nicolay, who contributed distinctive color and personality, departed. And after maintaining an impossible pace—the band's first three albums are mandatory listening and should've attracted the masses, not just in-the-know crowds—The Hold Steady began to show signs of a group attempting to expand its sound on 2008's uneven *Stay Positive*, struggles that carry over in more obvious ways on this year's *Heaven Is Whenever*, which possesses the marks of a band in transition. *(continued)*

During an invigorating 100-minute concert at a sold-out Vic Theatre, The Hold Steady successfully defeated some of the flatness, poise, and polish that mar its most recent material, with newer songs such as “Hurricane J,” “Rock Problems,” and “A Slight Discomfort” benefiting from a muscularity and grit absent on record. Still, despite nailing “Both Crosses” and the country-laced “The Sweet Part of the City,” each failed to connect, the tunes lacking the swagger, punch, surprise, wit, and sincerity that adorn a majority of the band’s music. Fortunately, those individual performances turned out to be aberrations during what was otherwise a momentous 25-song set.

Even before a note had been played, Finn gazed upon the crowd, smiling like a freshly awoken 8-year-old spying a pile of presents underneath the tree on Christmas Day. The guitarist/vocalist’s belief in the transcendent power of rock and roll is genuine, and while the band’s hallmark characteristics might appear as put-ons to the naked eye, Finn’s spontaneous energy and from-the-pulpit deliveries make clear that he approaches each show as if it is his first. Not that the group hasn’t evolved.

An auxiliary keyboardist spelled Nicolay, and, as could be expected, organs and keyboards assumed a reduced role. In line with its progressive embrace of arena rock, The

Hold Steady also added a third guitarist, all the better to allow Finn more room to prance, point fingers, flap his arms as if he’s ready to take flight, and utilize his entire torso to channel messages and second emotions. When freed of guitar duties, Finn often stepped to the front of the stage, further spurring fans that didn’t need more encouragement, sharing in their excitement and whispering lyrics as if he was a clued-in bartender dishing small-town secrets to a priest in a confessional.

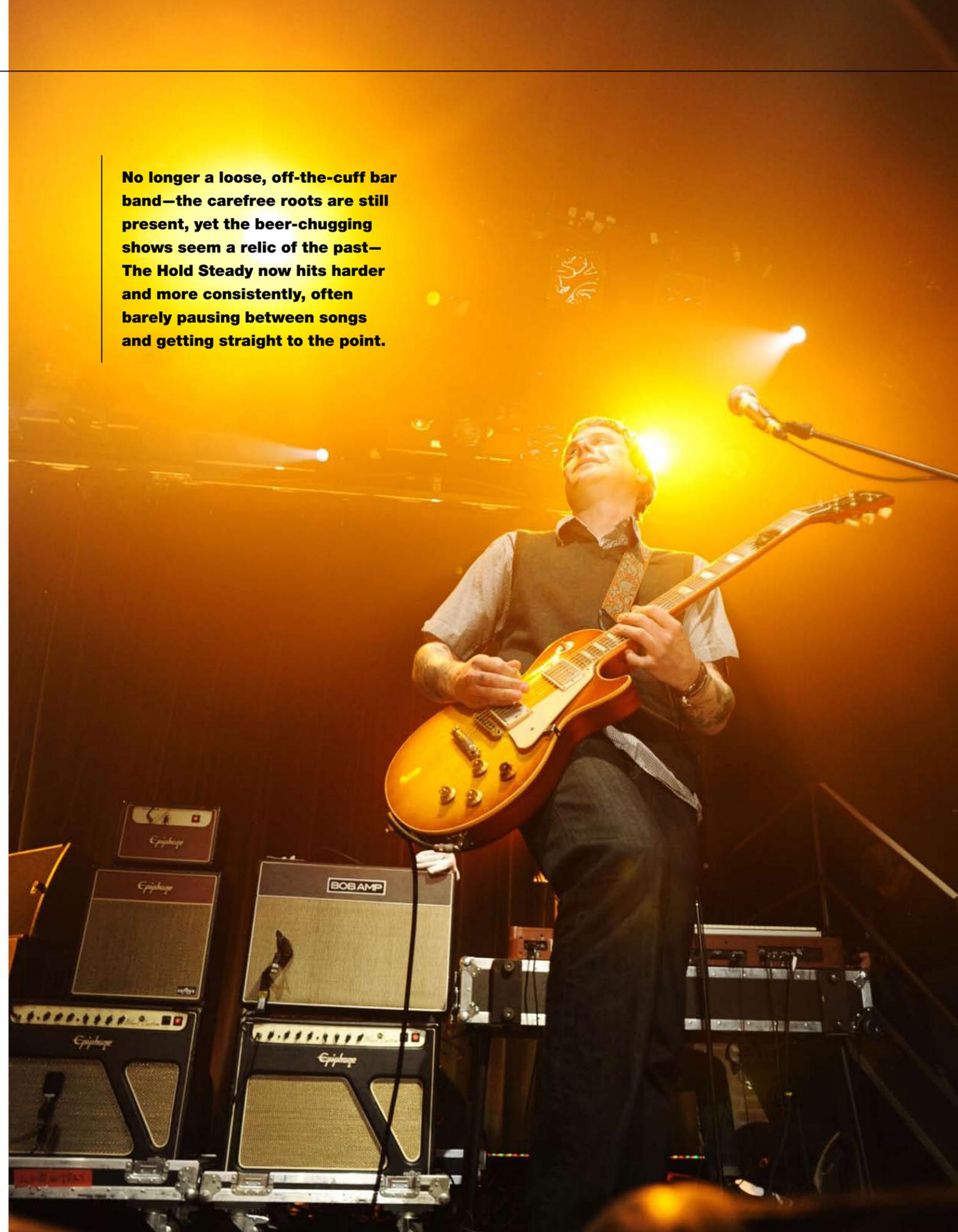
Replete with religious imagery and Catholic references, The Hold Steady’s tunes reinforced the concert’s semblance as a renewing, rejuvenating force not far removed from that of a baptism. Finn’s fidgety narrations and impromptu off-microphone asides—he continued to repeat phrases long after verbally expressing them—paralleled his view of the song as scripture. Rather than trying to convince himself or the audience, he spread the gospel truth, be it about a protagonist’s keyed-up mental state or the innate details of a meeting place. In negotiating the white noise of youth culture and suburban malaise—the politics of romance, highs and lows of chemical episodes, fleeting pleasures associated with scenes and circles, gamesmanship involved with members of the opposite sex, hard lessons of maturation—The Hold Steady remains unfailingly therapeutic, with

“Magazines,” “Banging Camp,” and “Chips Ahoy” searching for and finding meaning amidst suffocating pressures, challenging circumstances, and ego-deflating boredom.

No longer a loose, off-the-cuff bar band—the carefree roots are still present, yet the beer-chugging shows seem a relic of the past—The Hold Steady now hits harder and more consistently, often barely pausing between songs and getting straight to the point. No wordy Finn monologues on this night, no sprawling jams. Laidback and strictly business, lead guitarist Tad Kubler operated as the perfect foil to Finn’s caffeinated personality, handling the surfeit of power-pop chords, skyscraping riffs, and soaring hooks with aplomb. He and his mates mastered the art of the giant crescendo on multiple occasions (“Slapped Actors,” “Southtown Girls”) and testified on behalf of why, when solidly built, a “whoa-oh” chorus can be an unforgettable communal experience (“Stay Positive,” “Massive Night”).

As a whole, the earlier music—less linear, more stream-of-conscious and open to give-and-take exchanges—still towered above well-meaning and well-constructed power ballads such as “Lord, I’m Discouraged.” But in locating the medium between irreverent fun and focused rumination, The Hold Steady made the inevitable process of growing up sound much more palatable. ●

**No longer a loose, off-the-cuff bar band—the carefree roots are still present, yet the beer-chugging shows seem a relic of the past—The Hold Steady now hits harder and more consistently, often barely pausing between songs and getting straight to the point.**



SNAPSHOT



Rainy weather didn't dampen the spirit and sounds of Chin Injeti performing live in front of a home town crowd. He was opening for fellow Canadians Shad and K'Naan at the Malkin Bowl in Vancouver, BC.

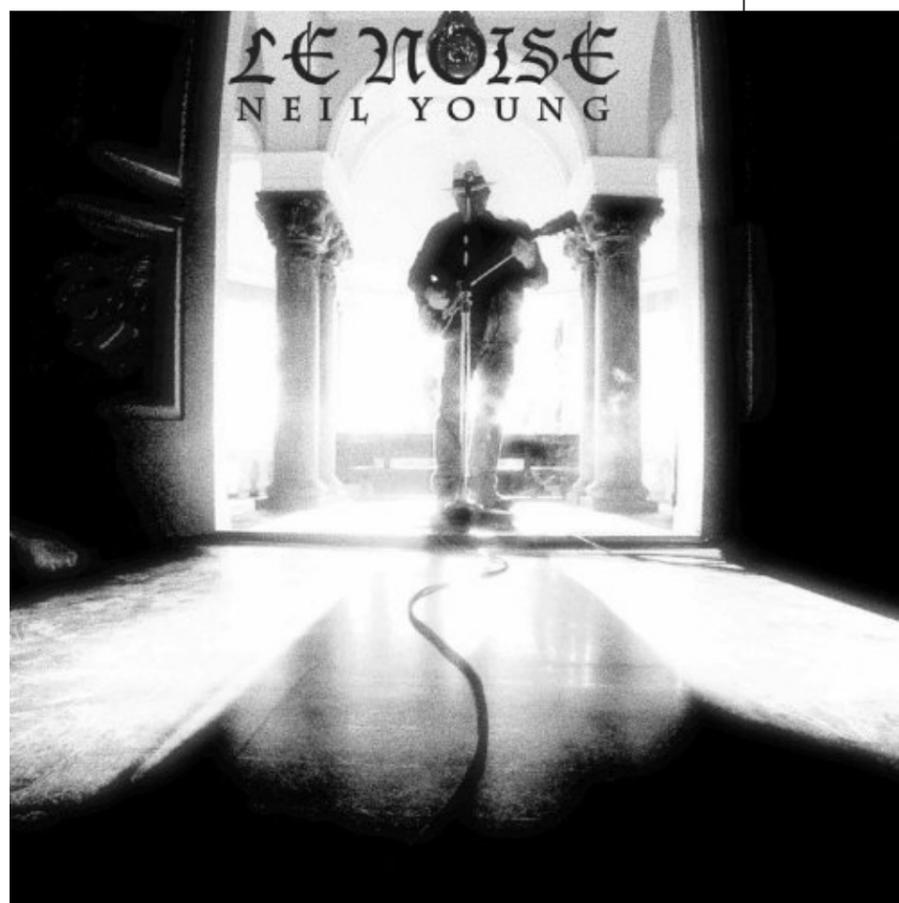
*You can catch more of David Thai's images from this show and others at: [www.mrdavidthai.com](http://www.mrdavidthai.com)*

# Chin Injeti

# Current Releases

By the TONE Staff

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**Neil Young**  
*Le Noise*  
Reprise, CD or 180g LP

## RECORDING OF SPECIAL MERIT

**N**eil Young's unparalleled legacy is defined in part by surprising decisions and eclectic albums. The iconoclastic artist is one of the very few musicians that genuinely does what he wants when he wants, consequences and public reaction be damned. Such sudden and odd choices have proven both beneficial (2006's institutionally scathing *Living With War*, 1982's ahead-of-the-times *Trans*) and disastrous (2009's hit-and-run *Fork In the Road*, all of his feature film projects). And while Young thrives on unexpectedness, the amount of people who truly believed that the singer/guitarist could deliver a pioneering (and great) album at this stage in his career could be counted one hand.



Featuring Young just playing guitar and singing, *Le Noise* is a record that changes how music can be presented and heard. Originally intended as an acoustic solo effort, it evolved into a grand, epic-sounding work made in a style that Young has dubbed "folk-metal" due to producer Daniel Lanois' stunning sonic treatments. Recorded live with no overdubs and no outside band assistance at Lanois' Silver Lake home, the album is like nothing else in Young's catalog—or that of contemporary music.

How Lanois got such terrific sounds, and what he did with the guitar, is part of the genius. He initially outfitted an acoustic model with a pickup that imitates the human voice and loops it through the song, manipulated the two low strings to give them heavier bass presence, and plugged it into a tremolo amplifier. A hollow-body electric guitar, used on six of the eight tunes, got fed through two amplifiers—one clean and one dirtied with tremolo, the dynamic contrasts paralleling *Le Noise*'s striking

juxtapositions of intimacy and enormity, calm and turbulence.

Chords are augmented, magnified, echoed, stretched, thickened, stripped; arrangements unpredictably build, decay, and disintegrate, with some of the random pieces then reassembling into different shapes that collect like iron shavings on a moving magnet. Individual notes break off from parent structures, occasionally taking the form of jagged chords, other times doubling as the clink of a piano or stop of an organ. Riffs seem as if they've been filtered through a multitude of distortion devices, choral pedals, sustain gadgets, and delay boxes. An entrenched sense of melody and rhythm allows the songs to hold their shape, and Young's singing is as clear, attentive, and passionate as it's been in years. Straightforward and direct, the songwriting is equally superb.

Dealing with tremendous loss—two of Young's longtime collaborators, L.A. Johnson and Ben Keith, (*continued*)

**Originally intended as an acoustic solo effort, it evolved into a grand, epic-sounding work made in a style that Young has dubbed "folk-metal" due to producer Daniel Lanois' stunning sonic treatments.**

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passed away within the past year, and Lanois almost died in a motorcycle crash last June—Young addresses mourning, love, politics, conflict, redemption, and the environment (all hallmark themes) in penetratingly honest lyrics that appear less interested in concrete answers than arriving at certain understanding and finding peace of mind. Several songs take on a decidedly autobiographical bent.

“The Hitchhiker” chronicles Young’s life journey, touching on his geographical bases, drug use phases, and marriages before concluding with the 64-year-old hauntingly confessing “I don’t know how I’m standing here/Living in my life.” On the affecting hymn “Love and War,” one of two acoustic tracks, Young again invokes mistakes of his past while punching the song through with forthright emotion and terrifying sincerity. It’s a concise gem, the simple words teeming with poignant meaning and heartbreaking tenderness. “I said a lot of things that I can’t take back/But I don’t really know if I want to,” Young contemplates, his intimate voice aching with a chilling mix of soulful fear and deferred relief. Pain and trepidation are also present on “Peaceful Valley Boulevard,” a socially conscious reflection that the singer delivers with lullaby softness. Asking a host of refined questions and making salient observations, the song distills many of Young’s longtime favorite subjects into a quiet anthem for the ages that ends with a stark scenario: “A child was born and wondered why.”

On its own, Young’s material would prove engaging if experienced in normal folk settings. Yet it’s the new language of Lanois’ rich soundscapes that elevate it to thrilling levels. Rhythmic blocks reverberate as if emanating from a massive hall located in some enormous European palace. Young strums, swipes, and strikes at guitar strings



that snap, crackle, moan, howl, hiss, and rumble. Provided enhanced definition and dimension, the noises waft and carry, disappear and reappear. Covering a vast tonal spectrum, the music often feels like a series of alternately choppy and even waves, ebbing and flowing, monumental in size and impression. And so the ragged glory bite of the sawtoothed guitar patterns during “It’s An Angry World” and oncoming thunder of the chunky chords on “Walk With Me” sound titanic—all the better to share space with Young’s booming, from-the-heavens vocals. What an album.

Reprise’s 180g LP possesses depth and width that defy limits. The louder the record is played, the more extraordinary Young and Lanois’ work becomes. The lifelike nature of the acoustic properties, myriad frequencies, and surreal tonalities is eclipsed only by the imaging. It often seems that Young—just as he’s pictured on the album’s cover—is that short of a distance away from the speakers.

—**Bob Gendron**



©Photo by Deidre O'Callaghan

### Grinderman

*Grinderman 2*  
Anti, CD and LP

**Hysterical, humorous, volatile, surprising, and liberating, *Grinderman 2* epitomizes what rock and roll should be but seldom is—a Wild West of ideas, sounds, sex, menace, rawness, and fun.**

Nick Cave's world isn't anything like yours or mine. It's flush with creatures real and imagined: Mickey Mouse, the Abominable Snowman, the Wolfman, the Loch Ness monster, heathens, warring brothers, and dangerous women of all imaginable stripes. Jonathan Goldsmith, Dos Equis' "Most Interesting Man in the World," has nothing on the Aussie native.

Around his rich assembly of characters and creations, the singer/guitarist/organist constructs outlandish tales of mayhem and mercy, desperate pleas for love and deliverance, possessive threats of desire and destruction. And around these, his simpatico cohorts in Grinderman—the rambunctious quartet comprised of Cave and three of his mates from the Bad Seeds, which initially assaulted senses in 2007 with its self-titled, distortion-raining debut—wrap voodoo storms of pounding rhythm, random noise, and undulating melody in seemingly free-form albeit sophisticated manners that extend the wild, severely neglected traditions established by musical personalities such as Howlin' Wolf, Captain Beefheart, and Screamin' Jay Hawkins. Hysterical, humorous, volatile, surprising, and liberating, *Grinderman 2* epitomizes what rock and roll should be but seldom is—a Wild West of ideas, sounds, sex, menace, rawness, and fun.

Picking up where the band's initial offering left off, the sophomore effort claims improved songwriting, looser structures, and greater diversity—a trifecta of accomplishments that rarely come together. Multi-instrumentalist Warren Ellis, bassist Martyn Casey, and percussionist Jim Sclavunos respond to Cave's narrative sprees with a lavish spread of mangled effects, chords, beats, and grooves. Guitars double as meat grinders, clogged drains, ray-gun lasers, and rusty radiators. Ellis' Mandocaster, flute, bouzouki, and violin create chamber havoc, his scratches, plucks, drones, and plinks contributing to a new sonic vocabulary. Casey's tractor-pulling bass contributes resistance and foundation, stringing up innocent victims while allowing plenty of room for spontaneous interaction and come-what-may peril. Sclavunos takes a jazzy approach to his trapkit, refusing to abide by any rule and playing by feeling rather than following a given beat. Songs resound with post-punk bite, bluesy bluster, unbuttoned looseness, and wailing intensity.

Better still is Cave's way with words—and unchecked libido. He seizes every opportunity to tease out phrasings, howling and moaning vowels and consonants, stretching out as if he's become a rabid animal inspired by the glow of a full moon. He brings persuasive glee and mercurial personality to his murderer's row of devilish protagonists, welcoming the madness, yearning, and lust with an assortment of voices. He shivers on the intimate, minimalist "What I Know," capturing uncertainty with scary intent. He's a demon shouter on "Evil," on which children are tossed into a heap. And he's a mercenary on "Bellringer Blues," an intoxicating psychedelic romp rooted in Eastern modalism and backward loops.

However, nothing bests the singer when his mind focuses on the opposite sex. Females in Cave's songs are often powerful, emasculating, mysterious, attractive—qualities that prove irresistible. He's in love with a lightning-cracking snake charmer on the eerie, rumbling, sex-driving "Worm Tamer," and not surprisingly, the narrative's femme fatale serpent wrangler is immune to his boasts. The girl in the creeping "Heathen Child" plays with guns, powder, and poison while



sucking on her thumb in the bathtub; Cave cautions that no form of protection works against her spell. More pistols, and guns greet "When My Baby Comes," which features Cave in full-on crooner mode, completely conscious that he's about to lose his object of affection at any moment. "Kitchenette" is the most twisted courtship song since Elvis Costello's "I Want You," replete with sleeping executioners, Oprah on the plasma television, and a prowling-by-the-back-door Cave throttling the protagonist's husband while sending the kids down the street. "It's getting hard to get my act together," he says, almost as an aside, attempting to maintain the fragile balance between suitor and solicitor. He's a man on a mission, and Grinderman's conviction makes plain that these songs aren't intended as novelty items in spite of the inherent humor.

Just to be sure, Grinderman delivers "Palaces of Montezuma," a devotional soul song flush with serious romance—and impossible promises. "A custard-colored super dream of Ali McGraw and Steve McQueen?" "The spinal cord of JFK wrapped in Marilyn Monroe's negligee?" Along with shots of blasphemous energy, mushroom clouds of nasty garage rock and noise-drenched funk, and deranged art-punk, Cave and Co. give it to you all in spades. Get it on. —**Bob Gendron**



©Photo by Todd Cole

**No Age**  
*Everything In Between*  
 Sub Pop, CD or LP



**N**o Age's third album, which sounds sprawling even at a relatively taut 38 minutes, finds the Los Angeles duo of singer/guitarist Randy Randall and drummer Dean Allen Spunt working with a more expansive palette of sounds and textures. Rarely does the group play it straight. Randall, for one, utilizes a host of effects pedals to make his guitar sparkle and pop like fresh-lit firecrackers, howl like violent November winds, and shriek like industrial drills.

"Life Prowler" sets the tone, opening with a speaker-rattling guitar echo that reverberates like an awaiting helicopter before the group layers on a dense array of snaking riffs and chiming electronics. Spunt introduces the aptly-named "Glitter" with a drum volley reminiscent of Toni Basil's "Hey Mickey" before Randall's guitar swoops in like a particle accelerator, breaking the song into an atomic cloud of tuneful white noise. Channeling the likes of My Bloody Valentine (note the screeching, feedback-laced guitar that weaves through the punkish "Fever Dreaming") and Sonic Youth at its most melodic (the instrumental one-two punch of "Dusted"/"Positive Amputation," which, taken together, sound akin to galaxies being born), No Age seems to revel in seeking out the beauty in a range of ugly sounds.

How else to explain the rusted drums that kick off "Skinned"? While Spunt pounds away on a kit that rattles like it's seconds away from complete disintegration, Randall lays down a jangly guitar line as straightforward as any on the album. "Shred and Transcend" attempts exactly what its title suggests, Randall alternating between drugged out, spacey riffs and an impudent scrawl that sounds like it just dragged itself all scuffed up and bloodied from the gutter. The duo's ragged experimentations reach their apex on the scruffy "Depletion," where everything from the drums to the guitars to Randall's detached, deadpan vocals (think a less-humorous, indie-rock Stephen Wright) sports a bushy growth that would make the Joaquin Phoenix of "I'm Still Here" look clean cut by comparison.

Lyrically, the group tends to waver between esoteric non-sequiturs ("I don't want to go to bed/Sun still shining in my head") and more simplistic proclamations. "Common Heat," which chugs along on little more than a chiming guitar riff, could be the early morning rumblings of a twenty-something slacker, Randall singing, "Get myself up and go to work/I Can't find my cleanest shirt/No way I can get out of bed now."

The real draw here remains the way the pair molds feedback in its increasingly melodic noise-rock, often displaying the same dexterous hand as a master sculptor in crafting dense, textured walls of sound like the barnacle-caked "Sorts" and album closing "Chem Trails." Here, with electronics crackling, Randall weaves an array of airy solos that briefly linger like airplane contrails before dissipating as mist in the early-morning sun.  
 —**Andy Downing**

**No Age seems to revel in seeking out the beauty in a range of ugly sounds.**



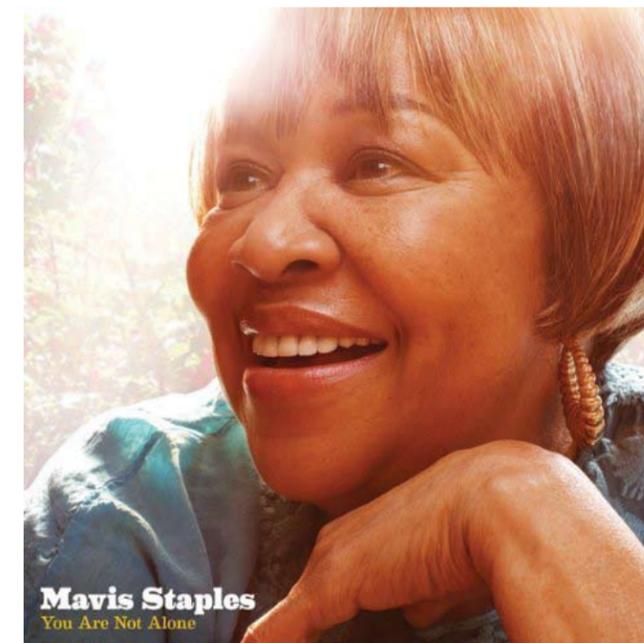
**M**avis Staples doesn't have to prove anything to anyone. Her heritage, experience, and sound make for one of the most interesting stories in music—a tale that's still waiting to be told in a well-written biography—and her conviction for her subject matter is as pure as cane sugar. Staples believes and inhabits every word she sings. Her messages of hope, faith, joy, and perseverance aren't a construct or act; they honestly represent who she is as a person. Just how the Chicago icon continues to escape most mainstream listeners despite her pedigree, voice, and interpretive skills remains a quandary that lacks a credible answer. Particularly considering the excellence of her last three releases—2004's comeback *Have A Little Faith*, 2007's riveting *We'll Never Turn Back*, and 2008's electrifying *Live: Hope at the Hideout*.

Staples' fortunes are forecast to change with the highly anticipated *You Are Not Alone*. Produced by Wilco's Jeff Tweedy, it's the record that many predict—or at least wish—will bring her wider acclaim and serve as a commercial breakout.

Having dazzled audiences in August at Lollapalooza, at which Tweedy joined her onstage, all indications suggested that the former leader singer for gospel's legendary Staples Singers had, at the age of 71, finally created a defining solo statement that would carry her for years to come.

There's only one problem. While there's nothing egregious about *You Are Not Alone*, it's not the album it could—or should—have been. Yes, all of Staples' trademark vocal and stylistic personas are present. There are gospel rave-ups that float on heaven-bound clouds of rejoining voices and flanged guitar (“Don't Knock,” “Downward Road”). Hand-clapping soul stirrers (a hopping cover of Rev. Gary Davis' “I Belong to the Band—Hallelujah”). Aching, wounded-soul balladry (a cover of Randy Newman's “Losing You”). Swampy shuffles (the Allen Toussaint-penned “Last Train”) and upwelling folk-rock (an engaging take on John Fogerty's “Wrote A Song For Everyone”). Tweedy's pair of originals split the difference, with the sleepy title track falling short and the blues-punctured melody of “Only the Lord Knows” triumphing over a few bland lyrics. Keen listeners will note the latter tune's parallels to Wilco's recent work, as well as the tameness of “In Christ There Is No East or West,” a forgiveness-preaching traditional tethered to Wilco member Pat Sansone's twilight keyboard notes. And it's the Wilco angle that might be the source of the problem.

While clean, reverberant, and organic, the record lacks edge and risk. Seeming more and more like he's permanently settled into “dad rock” mode, Tweedy plays it safe with the arrangements and stellar backing band, ostensibly repeating moves Staples executed in the past. There's plenty of salvation and spirituality but a glaring shortage of fire and brimstone. For all intents and purposes, the approach yields solid results. Still, a proverbial “great record” this is not. And that's a shame.



**Mavis Staples**  
*You Are Not Alone*  
Anti, CD and LP

What's most overt is that the well-intentioned, 13-track set fails to capture the transcendent dynamic present at a Staples concert. She is an irrepressible woman who can make an atheist believe, uplift the most depressed soul, and move an audience to tears. Staples possesses a raw power that isn't dissimilar to that referenced by the Iggy Pop and Stooges song of the same name. And it's not for lack of preparation; Tweedy knows his subject and did his homework. *You Are Not Alone* is a communion of two like-minded souls. However, he somehow forgot to pour Staples' essential live components into the music and shape a record that claims a similar energy, urgency, and feel.

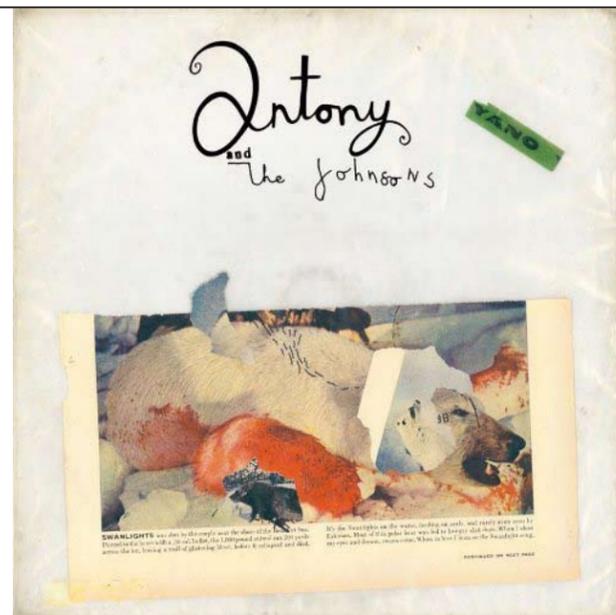
Lord knows that Staples still has the drive, intensity, and voice to create a studio album on par with her enormous talents. *You Are Not Alone* is satisfying. But you're going to want it to be absorbing. And, because of that deficiency, listeners—and, indirectly, Staples—are left wanting. —**Bob Gendron**



W

When Antony Hegarty—the creative force behind Antony & the Johnsons—burst into the popular consciousness with his Lou Reed-endorsed sophomore album, 2005's still-gorgeous *I Am a Bird Now*, he was seen as something of an oddity: a sexually ambiguous torch singer with a Viking's build and the ghost of Nina Simone lingering in his otherworldly pipes.

By comparison, Antony's 2009 follow-up *The Crying Light*, while not without striking moments (particularly the soul-stirring, Otis Redding homage "Aeon"), felt a little too polished, a little too fussy, and a little too familiar. So hopes were high when Antony led off his fourth studio album with a track titled "Everything Is New." After all, while Antony



**Antony & the Johnsons**  
*Swanlights*  
Secretly Canadian, CD or LP

has used the Johnsons to explore both inner and outer turmoil in more manicured settings, he's shown a wider range belting it out alongside the likes of Bjork (on the Icelandic singer's soaring "The Dull Flame of Desire") and anthemic disco crew Hercules & Love Affair (on the life-affirming, horn-stoked "Blind").

While Bjork returns the favor here, appearing on the theatrical, vaguely cabaret stylings of "Flétta," *Swanlights* too often finds Antony unwilling to stray from the previously established template. That said, there are moments of rare beauty.

A hymn-like "The Great White Ocean" surrounds the singer's haunted voice with guitar so delicate it sounds as though it'd shatter like a hummingbird egg if dropped. "The Spirit Was Gone" returns to familiar themes of transformation, Antony ruminating on what happens as we pass from this life into the unknown. "The spirit was gone," he repeatedly intones as gentle harp swirls heavenward like fine smoke curling over a candle. "Thank You For Your Love," by contrast, sounds far more grounded, Antony dueling with buoyant saxophone on a fractured, increasingly desperate celebration of Earthly love. —**Andy Downing**

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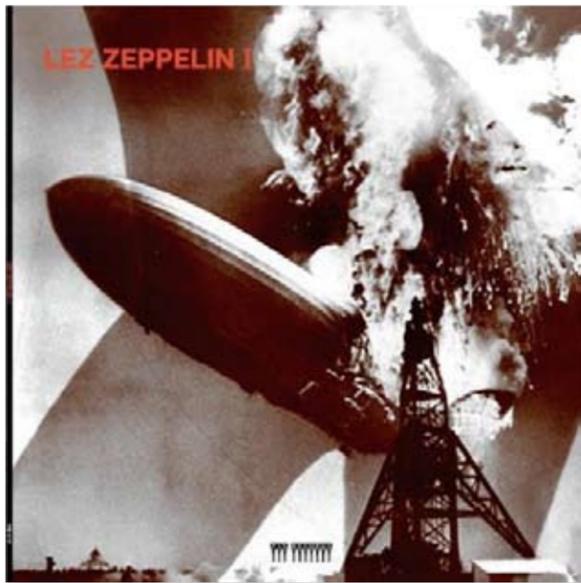
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### Lez Zeppelin

*Lez Zeppelin 1*  
+1 Records, CD and LP

With apologies to Chuck Klosterman, cover bands don't make much sense, particularly when they try to cover some of the most monster rock ever created. The only woman that's ever come close to capturing Robert Plant's vocal intensity? Heart's Ann Wilson, who has serious pipes. But this record by four women billed as Lez Zeppelin (it's exactly what you think) is a joke that borders on sacrilege, especially if you worship at the altar of Zeppelin.

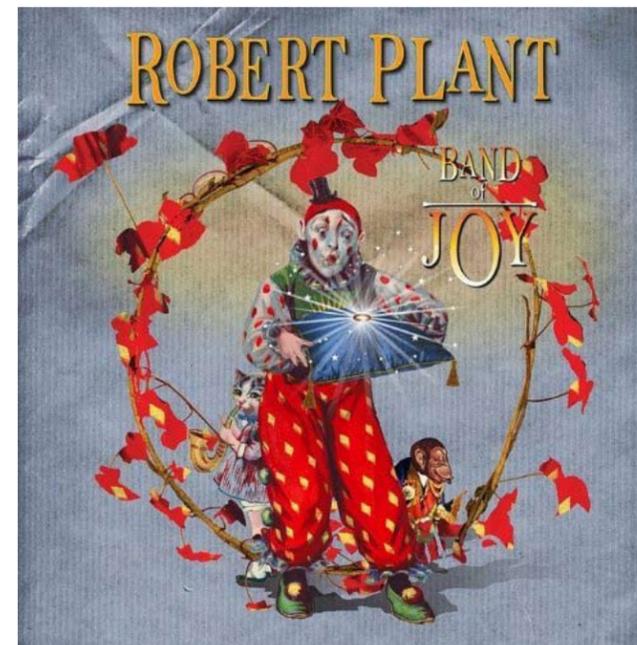
Right down to the near-exact copy of the original Zep album's artwork, there is nothing original about *Lez Zeppelin 1*. What's worse is that the playing is simply uninspired. None of the fire that made Led Zeppelin such a driving force is present. Has everyone forgotten the movie *The Song Remains The Same*? This sounds like a bunch of Barbies trying to play Zeppelin. Ugh.

What's really unfortunate is the amounts of time and work wasted in creating this abortion. The liner notes mention the attention paid to correctly duplicating the guitar and keyboard sounds of the period. And to the producers' credit, the record sounds fantastic. It's too bad that a number of current heavy rock records don't claim this level of production. So, yeah, I guess I'd still rather listen to Lez Zeppelin than Patricia Barber. But that's not saying much. Now where's that Pretenders album I was looking for? —**Jeff Dorgay**



© Photo by Gregg Delman

“Put me to sleep so easily or keep me out all night,” Robert Plant softly exhales on “The Only Sound That Matters,” the lyric serving as a fitting metaphor for the dichotomy on the legendary singer's new *Band of Joy*. Named after one of his earliest groups, the past- and present-blurring record entertains Plant's desire to revisit his past and primarily interpret other writers' material—just as he did when starting out in the mid-60s.



### Robert Plant

*Band of Joy*  
Rounder, CD or 2LP

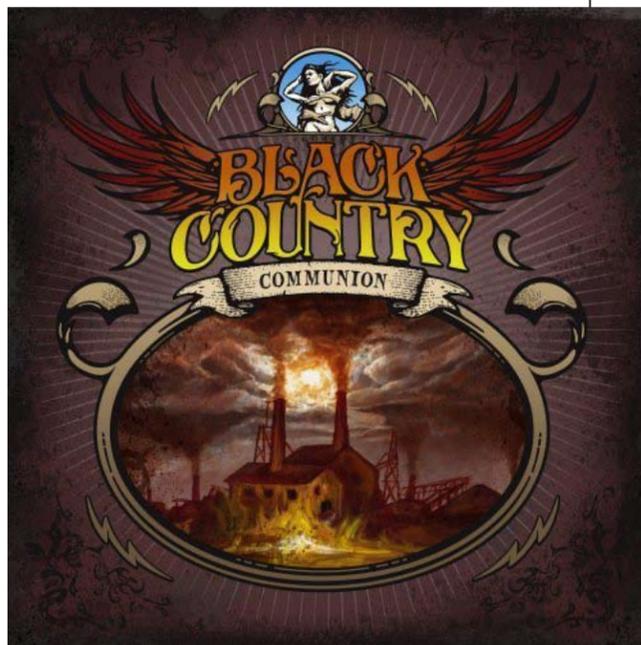
Miller and company add to this ethereal vibe, their notes soaked in shivering reverb on “Silver Rider” and pent-up with muffled violence on the surreal “Monkey.” David Lynch, your next soundtrack is ready.

Plant's reverent, patient-to-midtempo treatments of folk-rock (Richard Thompson's “House of Cards”), traditional country (“Satan Your Kingdom Must Come Down”), and throwback pop (“You Can't Buy Me Love,” which shares plenty in common with several blues-based originals on Tom Petty's recent *Mojo*) are respectable if standard affairs, distinguished only by the familiarity of that voice. Plant's singing remains a trumpet knowing of secret chords, capable of delicate finesse and unexpected bursts of brassiness. But there's little here that listeners haven't heard Plant tackle before. Absent is the imaginative manner in which he challenged himself by exploring African music, desert modalism, and Malian rock on 2005's extraordinary *Mighty Rearranger*. Yes, Plant sounds more authentic than most contemporary artists in capturing the essence of mountain bluegrass during “Cindy, I'll Marry You Someday” (shades of *Led Zeppelin III*) and shapes Los Lobos' “Angel Dance” into a nimble rumba courtesy of a prancing, Middle Eastern-inspired mandolin line. Similarly, he's utterly convincing stepping into the role of a love-struck crooner on the sweet, swooning “Falling In Love Again,” a country-soul torch delight that could come right out of 1963.

*Band of Joy* possesses expert musicianship and scintillating sonics that frame each song with stripped-down scenery and vintage, organic vibes. One only wishes Plant brought the same sense of adventurousness and intrigue to more of the songs. There's already enough music out there to lull listeners to bed. Besides, Plant's always been better when he stays out all night. —**Bob Gendron**

As for the actual band responsible for the joy, it's loaded, with former longtime Emmylou Harris lead guitarist and solo artist Buddy Miller, multi-instrumentalist Darrell Scott, bassist Byron House, and percussionist Marco Giovino cultivating colorful acoustic and electric swatches. Co-producing with Miller, Plant washes the 12-song set in rich, salty baths of texture, timbre, tone, and atmosphere. Sonics, feel, and space play as much a part of the experience as the arrangements. And while the psychedelia-treated roots material here is more thrilling than the cosmic country and gypsy soul that peppered 2007's *Raising Sand*—Plant's intriguing albeit drowsy, polished collaboration with Alison Krauss—he could still afford to step out of the box with more curiosity and courage.

That's exactly what he does on the two stand-out tracks, “Silver Rider” and “Monkey,” each originally recorded by the husband-and-wife indie band Low. Dark, moody, murky, and mysterious, the renditions are pregnant with danger and suspense. On both, guest vocalist Patty Griffin doesn't harmonize with Plant (as Krauss did) but instead functions as a looming shadow that creeps across the horizon. The mystic songs take us into a rural Midwestern landscape at dusk, where otherwise innocent images of farms, hills, and backroads give way to potential bloodshed and desolation.

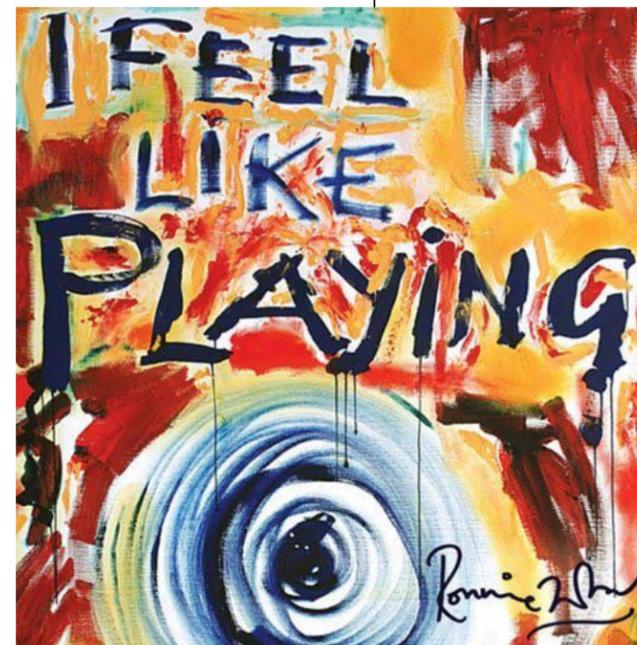


**Black Country Communion**  
*Black Country Communion*  
 J&R Adventures, CD and LP

**S**“Supergroup” is the most overused, overhyped term in the music biz. However, a rock band featuring lead singer Glenn Hughes and drummer Jason Bonham should at least be given a cursory listen. Guitarist Joe Bonamassa and keyboardist Derek Sherinian round out a lineup comprised of serious instrumental experience and heavy rock insight.

As it happens, Hughes still possesses the vocal drive to make this a successful record. From the opening “Black Country,” he makes it clear that he’s still in charge. Beginning with a driving bass line and major scream, Hughes grabs us by the throat and instantly gets our attention.

While no new ground is forged, Black Country Communion members engagingly fuse their various styles into an interesting sonic blend. The closer you listen, the more each musicians’ past influences emerge, with ample doses of Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin coming to the fore. And why not? Are there any better cook-books for a hard rock band to sample? —**Jeff Dorgay**



**Ronnie Wood**  
*I Feel Like Playing*  
 Fontana, CD

**A**bout every ten years, the world’s most famous rhythm guitarist takes time off from painting and touring with the Stones to produce a studio album. Unless you’ve got Ronnie Wood’s other two albums, you probably aren’t too familiar with his voice, as the Stones don’t hand him the mike. And that’s shame, given that his timbral character falls somewhere between that of Bob Dylan and Keith Richards. *(continued)*

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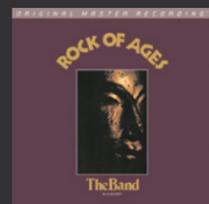
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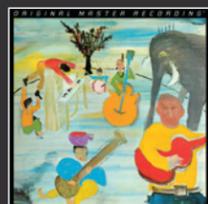
Frank Sinatra & Sextet  
*Live in Paris*



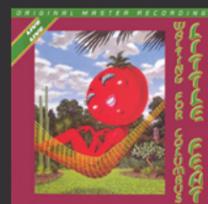
Frank Sinatra  
*Sinatra & Strings*



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*



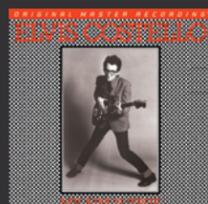
Beck  
*Sea Change*



Marshall Crenshaw  
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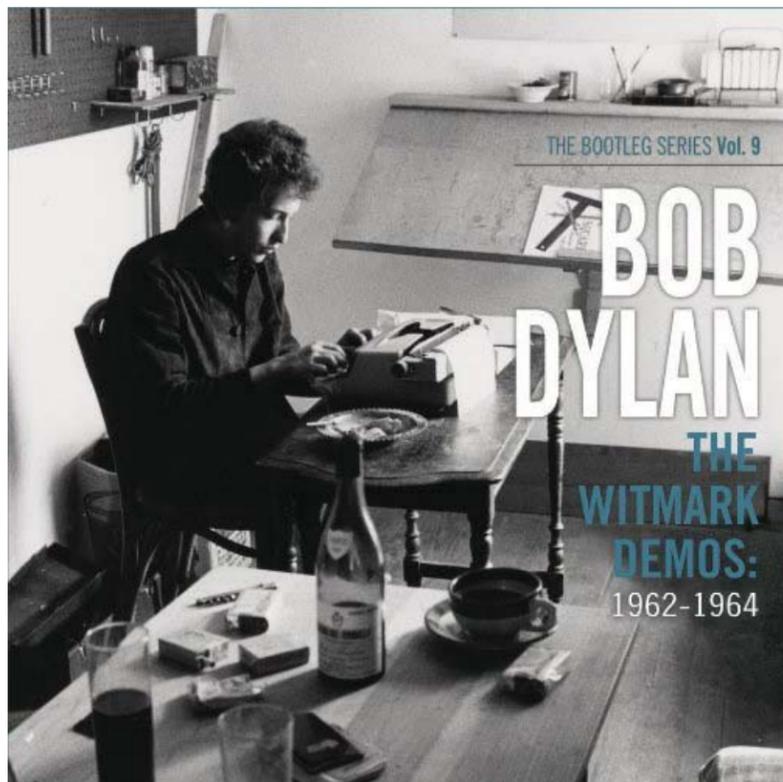


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Wood is paired here with an all-star cast that counts ZZ Top's Billy Gibbons, Waddy Watchel, Bobby Womack, and Slash among the honored guests. He's also joined on a few tracks by former Faces colleague Ian McLagan and wrote a tune with Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder. If Ringo Starr ever stops touring with the All Star Band, Wood's lineup could easily take their place.

As you might expect, Wood serves up generous helpings of bluesy rock, and for the most part, shies away from the Stones' style sheet on all but one song. He even mixes in reggae flavor on "Sweetness My Weakness." Approximately half the cuts tap a laidback, feel-good vein, but the rest of the record shows off a surprisingly personal side. He looks back at his life on "Lucky Man," ponders the opposite sex on "Catch You," and contemplates long-term relationships on "Forever." There's even a groovy rendition of "Spoonful" that's heavy on the Hammond organ and funky bass lines.

While *I Feel Like Playing* might initially come across as Ron Wood hanging out with his buddies and knocking out a solo record, it's actually a perfect example of deceptive simplicity. These guys are so fluid, they sound like they've been playing together forever. It only looks easy from the outside if you've really got the chops. Hats off to Wood for showing that you can get old and still be cool. This is the kind of record that Wood's ex-mate Rod Stewart should have been making for the last 20 years.  
—Jeff Dorgay



### Bob Dylan

*The Bootleg Series Volume 9: The Witmark Demos*  
Columbia/Legacy, 2CD or 180g 4LP

The most striking aspect about the music contained on *The Witmark Demos* isn't that these 47 Bob Dylan compositions were written and recorded before the artist turned 24 years old. It isn't that more than one thousand artists have covered versions of these songs over the past several decades. And while staggering, it isn't how confident, original, or beyond his years Dylan sounds on semi-rough cuts of landscape-shifting fare such as "Masters of War" and "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall." Rather, what's truly astonishing is how the material revolutionized not only cultural, political, and social mores but how it impacted the music industry as a whole, and, within a span of less than three years, wholly redefined industry concepts and relationships.

Comprised of fare Dylan laid down for the Witmark publishing company—all demos feature the Bard solo, self-accompanied on guitar, harmonica, or piano—the latest Bootleg Series entry magnifies how quickly the icon evolved as a songwriter, moving from traditional folk storytelling to topical protest to the surrealist genius and humorous stream of consciousness of the tunes that made him the most impactful musician of his or any generation. Early on, his manufactured Okie accent and hobo drawl color songs like "Talking Bear Mountain Picnic Massacre Blues" and "Hard Times In New York Town," tracks that don't lack for authenticity but which are mere stepping stones for what would soon come.

A total of 15 previously unreleased Dylan originals never recorded for any of his albums, not the least of which is the daunting "The Death of Emmett Till" (ranking up with his finest non-fiction commentary) and personal ramblers "Guess I'm Doing Fine," debut here. Diehard fans will be overjoyed to hear these uncovered gems, but casual listeners should be drawn to this set for the manner in which it reveals how Dylan's prolific skills forever altered the business of the music industry.

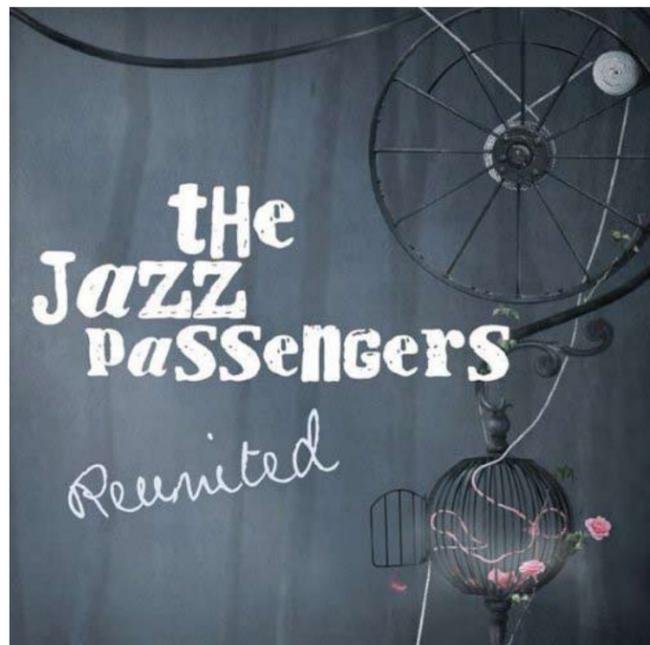
Accompanied by an illuminating essay by historian Colin Escott that sheds light on the procedures, contracts, strategies, and motivations associated with songwriting and publishing (as well as Dylan's experiences in this field), *The Witmark Demos* is at its core the soundtrack of the moment when singers/musicians became artists

and the separation between performers and writers shrank. It's a colossal shift, and it's no surprise that Dylan and his manager, Albert Grossman, were behind it all. Due to this greater context and historical import, this set claims a consistency, focus, and reach that several other Bootleg volumes lack. From a strictly musical perspective, Dylan is incredibly focused, as the presence of certain exchanges and artifacts reveal his seriousness.

"This imposes a real problem. Imposes, is that the right word?," he asks before beginning a slower-paced "Boots of Spanish Leather," his picking meticulous and delivery romantic, the version here as impressive (if not more so) than the studio edition. At other points, coughs, jokes, pauses, questions, mistakes, and spoken admissions serve as reminders of the intimacy and purpose at hand. Scant few tracks come off as sketches; given that this stripped-down material was recorded quickly and cheaply, the execution mesmerizes. A piano-only rendition of "The Times They Are-A Changin'" is bracing; ditto the triumphant inflections on "Paths Of Victory."

Sonically, the producers have done an exceptional job. There's little depth or body to these demos, yet the clarity, presence, and directness are much better than they should be. Consider *The Witmark Demos* an essential complement to *The Original Mono Recordings*. —**Bob Gendron**

**What's truly astonishing is how the material revolutionized not only cultural, political, and social mores but how it impacted the music industry as a whole, and, within a span of less than three years, wholly redefined industry concepts and relationships.**



### The Jazz Passengers

*Reunited*

Justin Time Records, CD

Though not as trippy as Fee Weybill and The Tubes singing “Love Will Keep Us Together,” *Reunited* comes close. Very close. If your idea of jazz is anywhere near the more traditional world of Blue Note, this record is not for you. And unless your dad used to smoke a lot of weed, it’s probably not your dad’s jazz record, either.

Which isn’t to suggest that *Reunited* isn’t fun and more than a bit wacky. With most of the charts resembling something from an Ornette Coleman or Frank Zappa set, the Jazz Passengers mix everything up in an avant-garde fashion. Starting with Elvis Costello singing “Wind Walked By,” this collection of jazz standards makes a stop at “Spanish Harlem” and tackles “The National Anthem,” ending with Debbie Harry performing a very esoteric version of her own hit “One Way or Another.” If you are a Blondie fan, you’re either going to love or hate it. But it’s tremendously cool and you’ll ultimately give it up for Harry, having enough sense of humor (and chutzpah) to pull it off.

Seemingly exhausting all possibilities, the Jazz Passengers even tread down a funk path on a rendition of “Button Up.” Perhaps the ensemble’s next record will be *The Funk Passengers*. I’d pay big money to hear Debbie Harry sing “Skin Tight.” —**Jeff Dorgay**



### Various Artists

*Beat at Cinecitta, Vol. 1*

Crippled Dick Hot Wax Records, LP

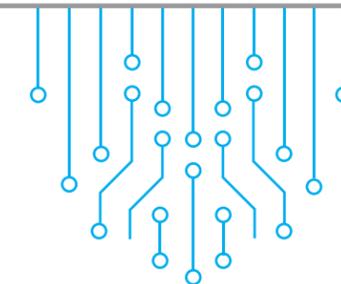
How do you resist an album whose cover sports a picture of a gorgeous Italian girl in her underwear sitting in front of an Alfa GTV? I know I can’t. What we have here is a collection of soundtrack snippets from various cheesy Italian horror/action/semi-erotic thrillers from the 1960s. This record is worth the money just for that; think of it as *Gidget Goes to Milan and Kills Zombies* on her way to a swanky dinner party.

Filled with over-the-top horns that suggest being chased down an Italian back road, or perhaps even the Autostrada, the moods quickly change, feeling much more like sitting in a dark, smoky cappuccino bar where an angry communist raves about the petty bourgeoisie. (Or, since you probably don’t speak Italian, that’s at least what you think he’s mad about.)

Best of all, the liner notes provide a brief history lesson in 60s Italian cinema (Cinecitta), filled with enough information that allows you to seek out the wonderful films in which this music appears. (Most of the movies are the equivalent of U.S. spy movies and spaghetti westerns.) So, grab this while you can. *Volumes 2* and *3* are all but out of print on vinyl, and sealed versions of the CDs are tough to find at reasonable prices. —**Jeff Dorgay**



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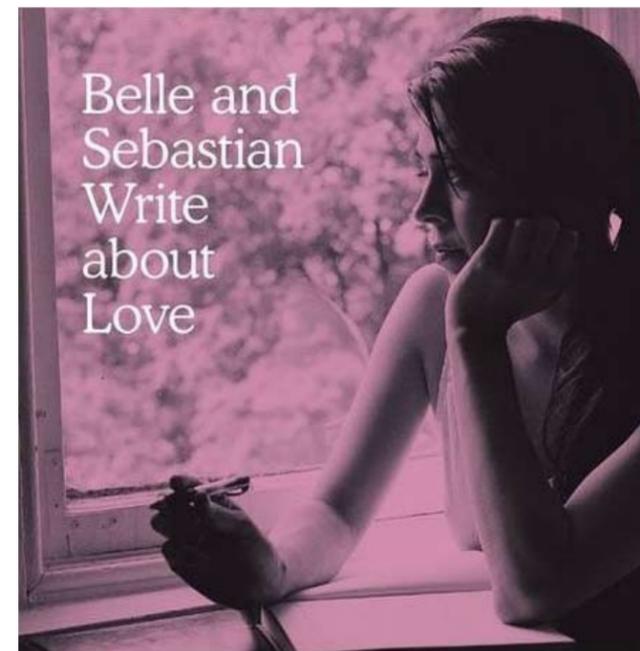
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**TONE**Audio  
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**Belle & Sebastian****Write About Love**

Rough Trade, CD and LP

It's fitting that Belle & Sebastian titled its eighth album *Write About Love*, because Stuart Murdoch and Co. have been doing just that since debuting in 1996 with the lo-fi pop gem *Tigermilk*. Of course, things were a bit more conflicted back then. The Scottish crew's songs dripped with youthful confusion, sexual ambiguity, and barely-obscured resentment. Witness "The State I Am In," the opening salvo off the band's debut, where the narrator takes on a young bride to prevent her deportation and subsequently struggles with his faith ("I gave myself to God.../I gave myself to sin...") and his own self-worth, singing, "Oh love of mine, would you condescend to help me/Cause I'm stupid and blind."

There's little on *Write About Love* that reaches that deep. Instead, Belle & Sebastian often flirts with the same lilting, middle-of-the-road orch-pop that has defined the careers of Corrine Bailey Rae and Norah Jones. Indeed, it's little surprise when the latter turns up on "Little Lou, Ugly Jack, Prophet John" for a snoozy duet every bit as engrossing as watching bedsheets line-dry in a stilted summer breeze. Religious themes crop up in "The Ghost of Rock-school," a languid tune that strolls along on undulating organ and muted horns, though Murdoch appears to have resolved his long-simmering conflicts of faith. "I've seen God in the sun," he sings. "God before bed and the promise of sleep." Yaaaaawn. The title track, which features a vocal assist from Academy Award-nominated actress Carey Mulligan, rails against the meaninglessness of the workaday 9-to-5 existence, offering nearly as much perspective and insight as a triptych of Dilbert panels ("I hate my job/I'm working way too much").

While most of Belle & Sebastian's rougher edges have been buffed away, the band resists the urge to play it completely straight. The crew clearly had a laugh titling one of the album's most heartfelt songs "Calculating Bimbo." And "I Didn't See It Coming," with the sweet-voiced Sarah Martin taking over the vocal lead, finds the group spinning budget cuts into blossoming romance—an exceedingly appropriate tale in these challenging economic times. The lush synth-pop of "I Want the World To Stop," punctuated by rich blasts of brass, even finds some of those old discomforts and doubts seeping through: fears of being trapped in the wrong relationship, workers fleeing for the suburbs, and a general sense that things are spinning hopelessly out of control. While it's a brief respite from the breezy contentment that defines the album, the tune offers some hope that middle-aged crises are to come.

—Andy Downing



# Slaying the Dragon

By Jeff Dorgay

**W**ith an 11-year production run that ended in 1993, the Nakamichi Dragon epitomized cassette-deck technology, and to many enthusiasts, it was considered the Holy Grail of what could be accomplished at 1 7/8 i.p.s. A three-head deck with discrete heads for recording, playback and erase, it used Nakamichi's NAAC auto azimuth correction to optimize playback azimuth on any tape played. While some other Nakamichi models used an adjustable record azimuth, the Dragon concentrated on the playback domain. This resulted in a Nakamichi deck that could play back tapes recorded on other manufacturers' machines as well as doing a great job with pre-recorded tapes.

Alas, the Dragon ceased to be at the end of the analog age. Soon after its introduction, the Compact Disc would arrive on the scene and shortly thereafter become the ubiquitous format of choice. Either way, with a list price of \$2,499 in 1982, this was truly a high-end machine. I always wanted a Dragon, but its spell eluded me until just recently.

These days, the toughest part of keeping any tape machine running smoothly (or any piece of vintage gear for that matter) is finding a good tech. With Nakamichi decks, there are no new parts being produced because the company disappeared into bankruptcy in 2002 after being acquired by a Chinese firm. Fortunately, plenty of parts decks remain for sale on the internet, and there are a few acknowledged masters who keep the Nakamichi flame burning brightly.

Thanks to a suggestion from a friend, I found Willy Hermann of Willy Hermann Services. You can find him on the web at: [www.willyhermannservices.com](http://www.willyhermannservices.com)

A life-long Nakamichi technician who also owned a few high-end retail stores, he now concentrates on Nakamichi and Krell repair. Mr. Hermann was very helpful on the phone and gave me perhaps the best tip of all: "Pick one up that doesn't work. They almost all need repair anyway, so don't pay a premium price for a used Dragon." Fortunately, the person from whom I purchased the deck on eBay for \$410 was willing to ship it straight to Hermann, after a little convincing that I wasn't trying to pull an eBay scam on him.

Hermann's service came to just under \$600 and required six hours of his labor and about \$40 worth of parts. As it turned out, I had bought pretty much a basket-case deck; the record and play heads needed repair as well as most of the transport assembly.

But I've heard of people spending more-than twice this much on a deck that still needed a going over. If your heart is set on a Dragon, plan on spending \$1,200 - \$1,600 by the time you are done. If you aren't as adventuresome as I am, look for a deck on Audiogon that has been recently serviced by Hermann, and make sure they have all the paperwork. It's a lot like buying a vintage Porsche 356; you're going to have to spend the money one way or another if you want it to run right.

## A Classic Transformed

Hermann sent me a note when the Dragon arrived, and since I was buried with my duties here, told him not to rush the job. Two weeks later, it arrived on my doorstep, *packed way better* than it did when it left the Nakamichi factory. *(continued)*

**"Pick one up that doesn't work. They almost all need repair anyway, so don't pay a premium price for a used Dragon."**



“Dude, if you have a Dragon, you should be the keeper of this tape.”

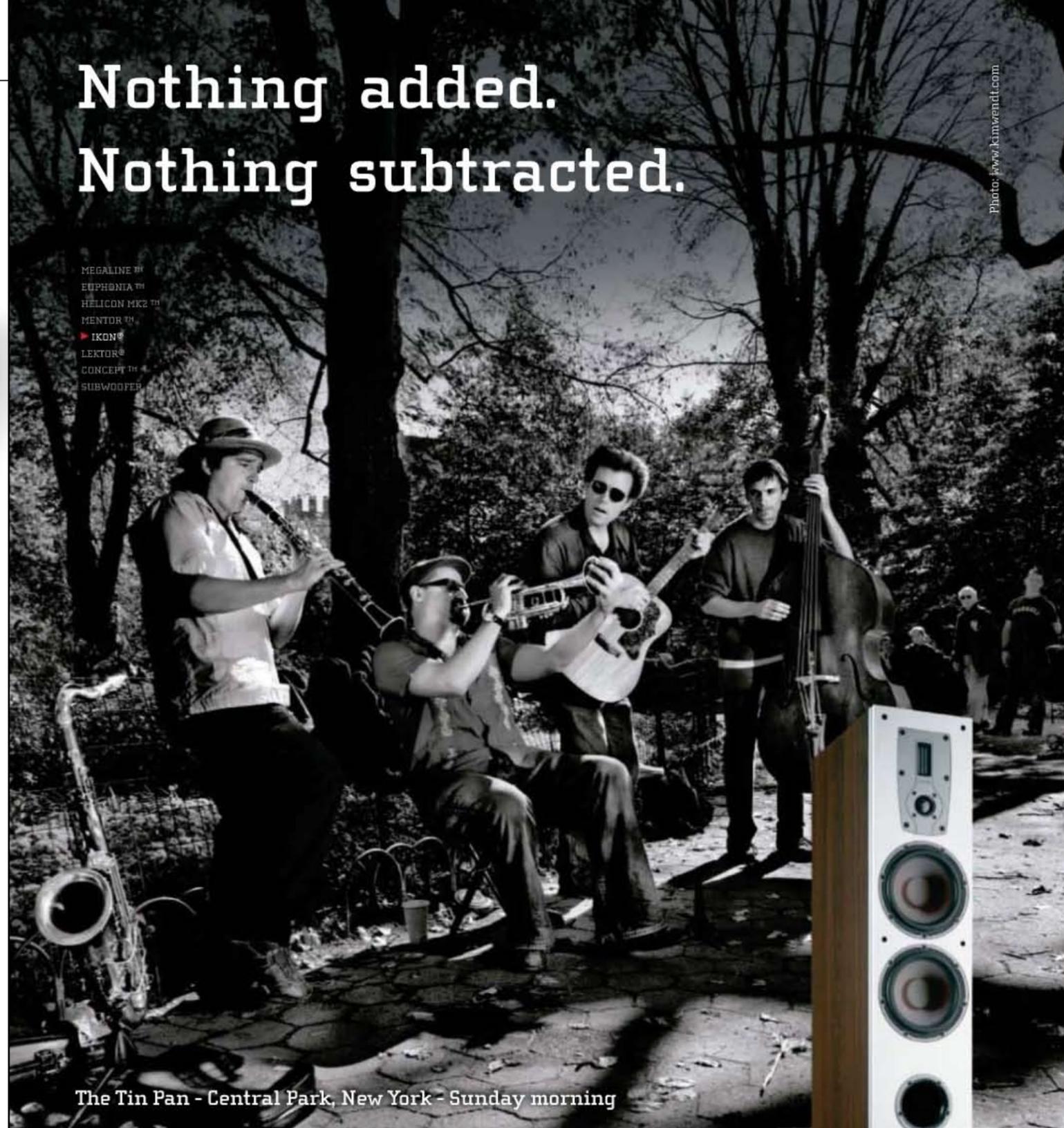
As I saw the care that was taken in packing this machine, any doubts I had about its performance began to fade away. After all, it was a little chancy to buy a relatively expensive tape deck from a stranger, ship it to another stranger, pay them both and hope all would turn out well.

But that's what happened. Once the photos were taken for this article, the deck was installed in my main system and connected directly to the single-ended outputs of the Audio Research Reference Phono 2 with the Oracle Delphi V/SME iV.VI/Koetsu Urushi Blue combination, and I recorded a few tracks. The result was breathtaking. On many levels, it rivaled open-reel performance. Granted, when comparing the same track to my J-Corder Technics 1500 recorded at 15 i.p.s., the compact cassette gave up a little ground, but not much, especially with metal tape. The open-reel deck may have more image depth, but the Dragon has more-even bass response and remarkably smooth, extended highs.

I dug out a few pre-recorded tapes from my collection and cued up some Tangerine Dream, recorded on Cr02, and I was amazed by the results. A number of non-audiophile friends couldn't believe I was listening to a lowly cassette, and a pre-recorded one at that. Our resident HMEC (human musical encyclopedia & collector) Tom Casselli sent me a MoFi recording of *Dark Side of the Moon*. “Dude, if you have a Dragon, you should be the keeper of this tape.” Yeah, it was cool and now the hunt for a few more MoFi cassettes is on. *(continued)*

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But making mix tapes is still the most fun thing you can do with a cassette deck. A good music server makes this somewhat redundant, but if you have a substantial vinyl collection, it's a great way to spend an evening with a glass of your favorite adult beverage and a pile of albums, figuring out just how many tracks you can fit on one side of a TDK SA 90. If you're really good, you can run music right to the end of both sides of the tape. Just the way we did it back in the late '70s.

#### A Visit Worth Taking

In the past, cassette decks have left me cold, trading convenience for ultimate sonic performance. But the Dragon is in a class of its own. I truly wish I had sprung for one when they were introduced instead of buying the CD player that my local HiFi dealer convinced me was the *wave of the future*.

Even though music servers have all but made the mix tape obsolete, there is still something special about planning out a few custom tapes that you create yourself. If this sounds like fun to you, watch eBay for the Nakamichi you desire (I highly suggest a Dragon) and give Willy a call. You'll be glad you did. ●

In the past, cassette decks have left me cold, trading convenience for ultimate sonic performance. But the Dragon is in a class of its own.



# The Musical Jewel In The Desert

Arizona's Musical Instrument Museum

By Bob Golfen Photos by Jeff Dorgay

Somewhere in Uzbekistan, there's an intense-looking man who sings in a deep, nasally voice while strumming a single-string instrument made from planks of wood. His vocal sound is strangely haunting, alien and mysterious, and sung in an incomprehensible language.

Yet there is something familiar in the rhythm and structure of this folk music from the other side of the earth. The way he sings with his instrument, then voices his words unaccompanied for a couple of phrases, seems to echo the original blues style of the American south. And from it we learn yet again the lesson: music is the language of all mankind.



Within the Asian gallery of the vast Musical Instrument Museum in Phoenix, Arizona, a video of his solo performance is played repeatedly beside his actual-type instrument displayed with others from that region. And that's the magic of this place. The thousands of musical instruments from all parts of the world are not left to stand alone on static display. In each showcase, a large video screen captures the sights and sounds of the instruments, how they are played and who plays them, from African tribal drummers and Chinese fiddlers to Eric Clapton on electric guitar and Thelonius Monk on piano. *(continued)*



The 190,000-square-foot Musical Instrument Museum opened at the end of April to international acclaim in a building designed by renowned architect Rich Varda. Calling itself the “world’s first global musical instrument museum,” the facility contains more than 12,000 instruments and cultural items set in an open-desert section of northeast Phoenix. The museum is the creation of former Target CEO Bob Ullrich, who began the collection three years ago with the vision of building a monument to the world’s musical cultures. This included sending curators to all parts of the globe to locate fine examples of traditional instruments as well as filming local musicians performing on them. The result is stunning.

About those musical videos: don’t expect to walk into rooms filled with cacophonies of competing music. When you pay your admission, you are given a head-set with a short-range receiver that picks up the music from each video for private listening. *(continued)*



# MUSICAL JOURNEYS

## Music Follows the Pathways of Human Movement



17 (plucked lute)  
France, 1974  
Louis Durieux, maker  
is a replica of a historical instrument.

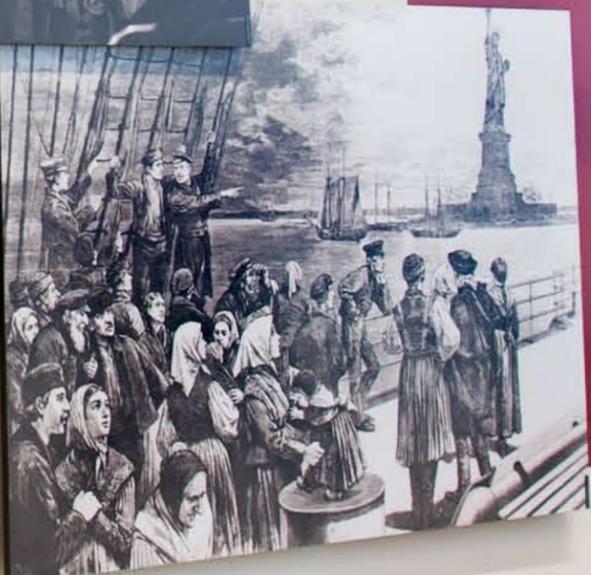
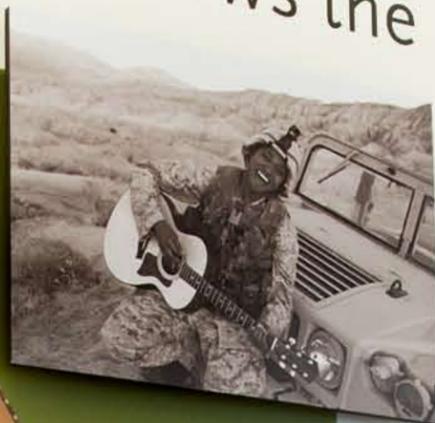
Ancient "Silk Road" trade routes crisscrossed Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, linking far-flung places and peoples. Similarities among the *pipa*, *oud*, and lute reflect these connections.



Pipa (plucked lute)  
China, 19th  
century



18 (plucked lute)  
Persian, 19th century



As you move from display to display, the headset leaves off the music you just heard and begins the next listening session. With the music in your ears, you shuffle from one regional display to another, from Asia to Africa, from Europe to South America, from the South Pacific to the United States. And from the most ancient of musical forms to the most-modern sounds of electric guitars.

The Geo Galleries represent essentially every country on earth, with beautifully arranged displays of the sometimes odd instruments along with other cultural touchstones, such as costumes, photographs and traditional items to thoroughly engage you in the experience. Separated into five global regions, these second-floor galleries take up the lion's share of exhibit space. The world tour brings you to foreign lands and familiar places, with representative samples of the instruments themselves as well as the marvelous videos that allow you to see and hear them in action.

The world's music is represented by instruments that range from those built from logs, hides, tendons, shells and gourds to the most complex and intriguing musical inventions. *(continued)*

The brass instruments alone involve hundreds of variations, and there are instruments that create music with scores of strings, collections of bells or crystal glasses that you play with moist fingertips. One video shows a carillon being played by two people who pound giant keys with their fists.

An Artist Gallery contains instruments and videos from the world's greatest popular musicians, including such items as Clapton's worn Fender Stratocaster guitar and the piano on which John Lennon composed "Imagine." Lennon is shown performing his masterpiece on that very piano. Another amazing piano also can be found in this room, the first piano built by Henry Steinway (as his name was anglicized when he came to America) that he constructed in his kitchen in Germany, which began the Steinway piano empire. A truly impressive piece of history. There are displays honoring Dick Dale, Ravi Shankar and George Benson, as well as a stand that showcases Zildjian cymbals. *(continued)*



"ES-345TD" (electric guitar)  
Nashville, Tennessee, USA, 1964  
Gibson Guitar Corp., maker  
  
Last owner of Eric Clapton



Born Eric Patrick Clapp in 1945 in Ripley, Surrey, just outside London, Eric Clapton first rose to prominence in the 1960s and became one of the era's superstar guitarists, alongside Jeff Beck, Jimmy Page, and Jimi Hendrix.

The group that brought Clapton his greatest fame in this decade was Cream. Comprised of Clapton, bassist Jack Bruce, and drummer Ginger Baker, Cream was the archetypal power trio, electrifying psychedelic-era "Swinging London" with wild, extended improvisations on blues-based themes.

Clapton experimented with a number of different guitars in the early phases of his career. One style of guitar he favored during his 1966–1968 tenure with Cream was the Gibson 335/345/355 family of semi-hollow body electrics. The guitar seen here is one of Clapton's instruments from this period.

## GUITARS

Many Forms, Many Countries

In the Orientation Gallery stands a wonderfully diverse collection of guitars that span more than a century, showing not only their differences but their connectedness. Here we find such guitar icons as a 1934 Rickenbacker, the first commercially produced electric guitar known as the Frying Pan; a 1958 Danelectro, a classic favorite; and a 1952 Gibson Les Paul, so early in its development that it has no serial number. There are also unique harp guitars, lutes and fanciful classical guitars.

*(continued)*



1958 Danelectro guitar  
 1952 Gibson Les Paul guitar  
 1934 Rickenbacker guitar  
 Electric guitars developed from collaboration between Dallas Ashby, Jim Burns, and others.



A nearby room is dominated by the Octo Bass, a 20-foot-tall bass fiddle that you play by standing on a stool and pressing brass keys while drawing the bow. Used to reach impossibly low notes in concert, this Italian model is one of only three known to exist. A Mechanical Music gallery is filled with player pianos and hurdy-gurdys of all sorts, including an immense Belgian dance organ fitted with saxophones, drums, xylophones, accordions and who knows what all; at \$100,000, the mechanical band named Apollonia is the most expensive instrument in the permanent collection. It plays several selections daily in raucous, vibrant exhalations that fill the museum.

Visitors naturally get the urge to play some instruments themselves, and the museum has a room for that, too. Called the Experience Gallery, it offers hands-on playing of all kinds of instruments, including drums, rattles, xylophones, small Martin guitars and a gigantic Chinese gong. Alongside the gong is a sign with the admonition: one strike per visitor. You can also perform eerie electronic music on a theremin, which is played by passing your hands between two radio antennas to control the pitch and volume without ever touching the instrument. *(continued)*





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## FEATURE

Obviously, the museum is absolutely enormous, and to give it a fair viewing, a visitor should plan on spending more than a single day inside; this is not something that you will want to hurry through. We went back a second time after spending several hours in the Asian and African galleries, as well as the Orientation and Artist Gallery. On our second trip, we toured the European and American/Canadian galleries. The big North American gallery is just amazing, with a sweeping range of content from ancient Indian cultures and traditional folk music to modern jazz, country and of course, rock n' roll. There are Souza marching bands and hillbilly string bands, New Orleans Dixieland and Miles Davis. And with video samplings of each.

Which brings me to my only real complaint about the museum, although I don't see where there could be a solution: some of the videos are just too short. Just as you start getting into a piece of music, it fades out and something else comes in. *(continued)*

## MAKING MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

This was particularly noticeable in the European displays, where you would be given just a taste of some classical masterpiece, and it would quickly be gone. But really, that's such a minor complaint when considering the rich panoply of musical sounds that you get to sample.

The Musical Instrument Museum is also a performance venue, with a fairly large Music Theater offering a widely diverse selection of performers for evening concerts. Some recent concerts featured the Tannahill Weavers with the music of Scotland; Parno Graszt, a group that performs authentic Gypsy music; A Jazz Celebration with a number of great musicians performing classic jazz pieces; and Bonga and Voodoo Drums of Haiti, which pretty much speaks for itself.

Admission to the museum is a bargain at \$15, with seniors admitted for \$13, young people six through 17 at \$10 and free for children younger than six. For more information about the Musical Instrument Museum, including a schedule of concerts and special shows and exhibits, see [www.themim.org](http://www.themim.org).

The museum should be a destination for every music lover that will greatly expand your understanding of our own musical roots as well as continuously surprise with instruments you never knew existed, and the unique sounds they make. It is certainly well worth making a special trip to Phoenix, even in the summer. ●



# Audiophile Pressings

By Jeff Dorgay and Bob Gendron

Click on album art to purchase from Music Direct

## The Grateful Dead

The Warner Brothers Studio Albums  
WB/Rhino 5LP box set

If you are even a casual Grateful Dead fan, you should click on the album cover shown here and immediately buy this box set. Mastered at Bernie Grundman Mastering by Chris Bellman, the fellow responsible for the outstanding Neil Young box set released earlier this year (and too many other great audiophile pressings to count), this collection of the Dead's first five studio albums is a must.



The Dead may well have been the first audiophile rock stars, always picky about every facet of the sound quality of their music, even down to using McIntosh amplifiers for their PA system. Reflecting such meticulous detail, this set is housed in a pop-art orange box containing updated liner notes that include some great era photos of the band members as well as some of the charts used to record the various tracks, both features offering further insight into the group's creative genius/madness.

If you are searching for originals, our resident collector says the group's self-titled debut was available on the Warner GOLD label in both stereo and mono versions; average prices for near-mint versions are \$75 and \$150, respectively. First pressings of *Anthem of the Sun* and *Aoxomoxoa* on the Green Warner 7 Arts label are the only ones to use the same original mix as the pressings in the box set. A quick listen to any of the CD versions reveal almost two different albums. *Workingman's Dead* is a very rare find on said label and can command \$100. *American Beauty* is also on this imprint, yet more common to find, with a mint version only fetching \$30.

These records were played and enjoyed, so \$27 each for this level of quality is truly a bargain, especially with pristine artwork. Music Editor Bob Gendron will have an in-depth review in Issue 33, but if you just need a snapshot of the sonics, the answer is a big YES. These five records finally do justice to the underrated studio recordings of the Grateful Dead.

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*Kate Bush*



*Hounds Of Love*

## **Kate Bush**

*Hounds of Love*  
Audio Fidelity, 180g. LP

**A**udio Fidelity's recent release of Kate Bush's biggest record is a definite audiophile triumph. These days, while everyone is listening to Eva Cassidy, Patricia Barber, and the like, it's easy to forget about one of contemporary pop's most innovative female vocalists. Originally released in 1985, *Hounds of Love* has sold three million copies worldwide, and its big hit, "Running Up That Hill," was in constant MTV rotation.

Audio Fidelity principal Marshall Blonstein indicated that the label will release *The Sensual World* and received the green light to produce more of Bush's catalog. "We're in on Kate Bush," Blonstein recently told me, also underscoring that this LP was produced from the original master tape provided courtesy of Abbey Road.

The pressing has plenty of the analog magic. While I only had a garden-variety U.S. pressing available for comparison, the AF release offered a tremendous step up in every aspect. Kevin Gray and Steve Hoffman did a fantastic job at keeping the air on this recording intact. Bush's breathy vocals are no longer buried in the mix as they are on domestic LP pressing and CD, and the overall sound field is quite larger. Best of all, this disc is exceptionally quiet, which ideally suits the music.

For those unfamiliar with the recording, the first side is labeled "Hounds of Love," almost entirely comprised of hit singles, and distinctly flavored with pop arrangements. The flip side is labeled "The Ninth Wave" and is much more ethereal and experimental. These tracks feature more vocal processing and electronic effects, not unlike what you might expect from Peter Gabriel or Thomas Dolby.

To celebrate the trippiness of the record, AF pressed it on light violet vinyl and gave it a tie-dye coloring. So, whether you're a long time fan or need to break out of the same-old female vocal doldrums, Audio Fidelity's pressing of *Hounds of Love* is a great place to start.

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**Foreigner**

*Foreigner*  
MoFi, 180g LP and SACD

**T**he good news is that this is by far the best that Foreigner's self-titled album will ever sound. Digital lovers interested in the SACD and analog enthusiasts after the vinyl are in for a sonic treat. The bad news is, it's Foreigner. But far be it from me, a guy who still loves KISS' *ALIVE!*, to criticize anyone's music taste. (Now there's a record MoFi should remaster, but I digress.)

Rob LoVerde has done his usual meticulous job of getting the maximum amount of detail from the master tape without compromise. If you grew up listening to this band on the radio in the 70s, you will be amazed at the amount of musicianship presented here. This pressing reveals layer upon layer of vocals, guitars, and, of course, the Roland Space Echo intro on "Star-rider" didn't even sound this good when you were really baked.

Normally, I'd say friends don't let friends listen to Foreigner. But if you must, this is the version you want.

**NEU!**

*NEU!*, *NEU! 2*, *NEU! 75*, *NEU! 86*  
Groenland Records, 180g LP

**F**resh from seeing NEU! founder Michael Rother at this year's ATP festival, revisiting the studio remasters from this pivotal German duo that first worked together in Kraftwerk (his creative partner, Klaus Dinger, passed away in 2008) was a true pleasure, particularly considering how many bands NEU! inspired.

Those just after the essence of the NEU! sound will probably be happy with the four individual albums at \$36.99 each, but the hardcore fan should invest the extra \$50 and purchase the limited-edition box set, which also includes a t-shirt, a stencil, and extra goodies. (Bob Gendron will have a full review of said import box in Issue 33.)

The sound quality of all four records is incredible, echoing founder Rother's comment about achieving "the best musical result." The discs are pin-drop quiet, (essential to the NEU! experience), with long, airy pauses and gentle synthesizer riffs over NEU!'s signature 4/4 beat. Rother explains on his website ([www.neu2010.com](http://www.neu2010.com)) that the copy of the previously unreleased *NEU! '86* was produced from the original masters and multitrack tapes. The care and precision he took producing these records is evident the second you lower the stylus.





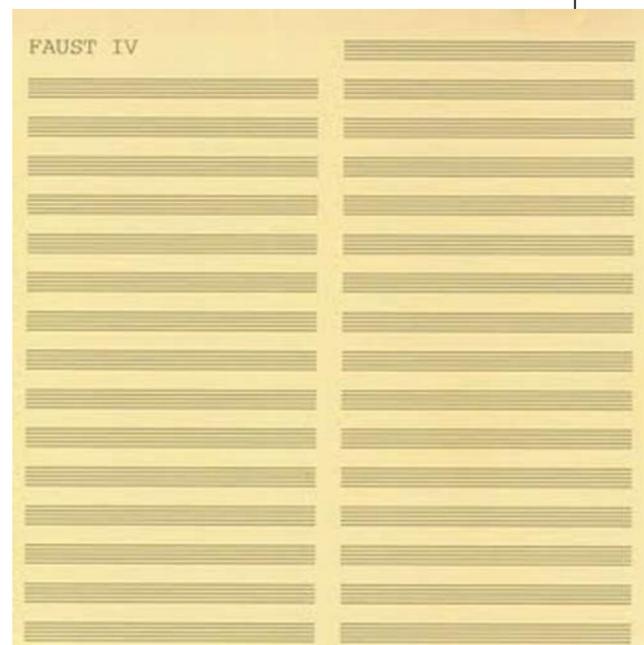
**Faust**

*Faust So Far, Faust IV*  
4 Men with Beards (*Faust*), Capitol (*Faust IV*)  
180g LP

**N**o discussion of Krautrock would be complete without Faust, the legendary band started in 1970 and produced by Uwe Netelbeck. The devotion of collectors and fans becomes clear the moment you log in to eBay and try to purchase original copies of the group's early works. Most times, the bidding starts at around \$100 per LP.

Alas, the lowdown on these reissues is mediocre. Though both are done on different labels, it's unfortunate that a few of the dollars spent on the excellent cover-art reproductions weren't diverted to recording and pressing quality. Neither of these LPs sound like they were pressed from anything close to the analog master tapes, and while the bearded guys did a little bit better job of taming the glare, the imprint's pressing is so noisy, it doesn't really matter.

For now, if you're just discovering the joys of Faust, head to your local record store or take your chances on eBay. Thumbs down on this pair.



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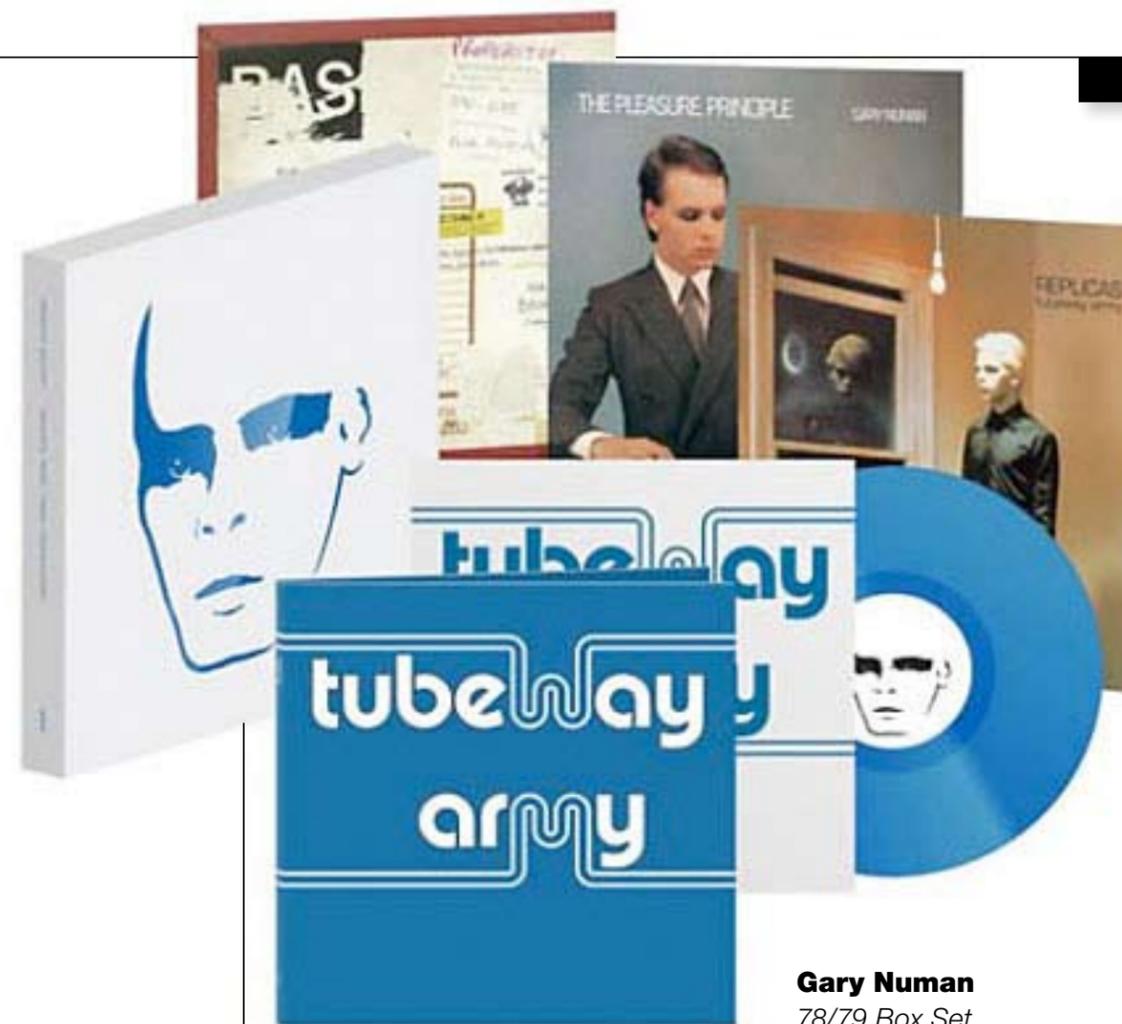
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## **Gary Numan**

78/79 Box Set

Vinyl 180, 180g LP Box Set

A relative newcomer to the reissue scene, British-based Vinyl 180 is concentrating on a small stable of artists from the 80s and 90s that are thankfully anything *but* traditional audiophile fare. We're talking albums by Gary Numan, The Cult, and Dead Can Dance, to name a few.

Limited to 500 copies, this four-LP Numan box set includes his first three albums, *Tubeway Army*, *Replicas*, and *The Pleasure Principle*, along with *The Plan*, the latter a 1984 release that features demo material from *Tubeway Army*, recorded in 1978. While the box set is tough to find in the U.S., Vinyl 180 is planning to release these albums individually in the near future.

In comparing these pressings to the U.S. originals, the new releases are clear winners. While a decibel or two louder than that on the earlier versions, the dynamic range does not seem to be compromised, though there is a slight "smile" to the EQ curve that emphasizes the deep bass and the very highest treble. Loaded with synthesizers and drum machines, the U.S. originals are fairly murky, with Numan's vocals buried behind a wall of keyboards and cool, obscure electronic sounds.

With the additional information on tap, Numan's genius is more evident. All but those with the most forward/revealing systems should welcome the additional resolution.

**H**eavy metal is seldom associated with the audiophile world. In general, metal records aren't often afforded the quality of production granted to rock, pop, and jazz releases, a custom partially due to the music's underground and independent nature. Still, it's a shame given that, even before vinyl began its huge comeback, metal listeners were still supporting the format en masse, preferring the superior low end and complete experience that analog afforded.

Ever since signing to Rick Rubin's Def American Records in 1986, Slayer has proven an exception to the unwritten rule that metal bands' albums automatically sound inferior. While Metallica, Testament, and Megadeth—not to mention lesser-known thrash groups such as Nuclear Assault and Exodus—had to wait until later in their careers to get well-produced records, Rubin gave Slayer the treatment on 1986's landmark *Reign In Blood* and never looked back. Ever since, the bearded producer has been involved on all but one Slayer album as producer or executive producer; whether planned, fortuitous, or both, the upshot of his participation has never loomed larger than it does on *The Vinyl Conflict*.



©Photo by Mark Seliger

**The amount of newly uncovered information is staggering. What's been unburied (and/or filtered) from the original, more congested mix is a testament to Rubin's understanding of the quartet's strengths and structures, and how they can be expressed in the most riveting manner.**

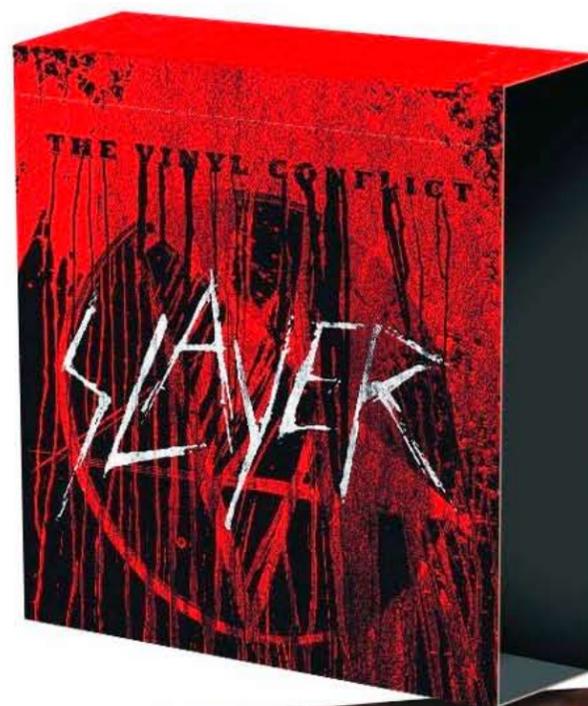
Collecting nine Slayer studio efforts (spanning *Reign In Blood* through last year's brutal *World Painted Blood*) well as 1991's double live album *Decade of Aggression*, all made for American, *The Vinyl Conflict* takes its unique place as the hands-down best-sounding metal package ever produced. Mastered from the original flat analog master tapes and pressed on 180g LP at RTI, these records are frighteningly good, possessing the kind of air, dimensions, dynamics, details, and imaging normally expected of a high-end classic Blue Note jazz pressing. Sparing no expense, lacquers were cut and re-cut several times to ensure the highest-possible sonic excellence. The meticulous quality control has paid immense dividends. Placed in the context of their metal genre and recording eras, there is no available comparison to how lively, realistic, open, and balanced these LPs sound. And since Warner Bros. had to fight through shoddy original production on the first four original Metallica albums (not a problem in Slayer's case, much thanks to Rubin), not even WB's otherwise excellent 45RPM remastered editions of *Kill 'Em All*, *Ride the Lightning*, *Master of Puppets*, or *...And Justice for All* touch the breathtaking pace, sound staging, separation, and impact achieved here. (Rhino's analog remasters of Pantera's essential studio efforts, reviewed in TONE 29, are the nearest contenders.)

There's not a metal band more deserving of the honor. With the exception of the punk detour covers album *Undisputed Attitude* and slightly experimental *Divine Intervention*, Slayer has persisted as a model of consistency while continuing to both push limits and take innovative approaches. Moreover, eight of the records in this set, housed in a slipcase, have been out of print for years; some, for decades. In one fell swoop, generations too young or then without turntables can now realize the unrelenting riffs, immersive tempos, and head-spinning rhythmic architectures that, even on the CD remasters, never delivered the massive level of disarming gut-punch and severing slam present on these LPs. The degrees of instrumental isolation and textural colors astound; these sound like completely new albeit familiar records.

In particular, Dave Lombardo's inhuman drumming has, almost impossibly, become more astonishing by virtue of the fact that his precise timing, double-bass beats, and blistering speeds are that much more apparent and visible. Kerry King and Jeff Hanneman's guitars come on like marching armies, the grinding textures and fanatic momentum split evenly between the left and right channels, with solos often hovering near the center. And Tom Araya's vocals are nearly three-dimensional, with previously unheard echoes

and howls carrying and decaying across an extra-wide field. The amount of newly uncovered information is staggering. What's been unburied (and/or filtered) from the original, more congested mix is a testament to Rubin's understanding of the quartet's strengths and structures, and how they can be expressed in the most riveting manner.

To be certain, Slayer isn't for everyone. Audiophiles that prefer to hone in on Norah Jones' tongue smacking against the roof of her mouth rather than feeling the unsettling, invigorating, and visceral music of one of the five best, most virtuosic, and socially relevant bands to emerge in the last three decades are welcome to their soulless porn. But for those that seriously want to rock and experience what's possible across the dynamic spectrum via decibel-pounding, surface-quiet, amazingly produced LPs that bring to life several of the greatest metal records ever made in a way that places Slayer on a stage feet away from where you sit—a thrill as exhilarating as any in audio—*The Vinyl Conflict* is a godsend. —**Bob Gendron**



### Slayer

*The Vinyl Conflict*  
American/Columbia  
(180g 11 LP Box Set)

**Sparing no expense, lacquers were cut and re-cut several times to ensure the highest-possible sonic excellence. The meticulous quality control has paid immense dividends.**



# The Virtue Audio Piano M1 is a Keeper!

By Jeff Dorgay

**F**inding a great CD player for five figures isn't really a problem these days. All of the aspects of optical disc-based playback have pretty much matured, and there are a handful of DAC chipsets and transports from which to choose from as well as a short list of op amps and other components that are known to work.

But producing a great CD player for 700 bucks is another story altogether. The first way to cut cost on a player at this level is to bypass the dealer network, which is exactly what Virtue Audio principal Seth Krinsky has done. Krinsky is an affable guy who feels that "life is too short for bad audio." What he lacks in experience he more than makes up for in enthusiasm, and that's something this industry needs a lot more of.





**The Piano M1 is a CD-only player, though it does upsample everything to 176.4kHz/24 bit resolution. There are two pairs of analog RCA jacks as well as a Toslink optical digital output and RCA S/PDIF output.**

While we typically do not review gear outside of the realm of established manufacturers, with broad dealer networks, etc., the next wave of HiFi companies have to come from somewhere, and Krinsky's concept of performance *and* style really appealed to me. Virtue has received a lot of praise on the web and for good reason; the gear sounds great and has a small form factor that is well-executed. Much like the Naim Uniti Qute or the Wadia 151 Power Dac (which is also made offshore), the Piano M1 and its matching integrated amplifier, the Sensation M451, has a tiny footprint. The enclosures are only about 12 x 12 x 4 inches, so you can easily stack an amp and CD player just about anywhere.

The Piano M1 is a CD-only player, though it does upsample everything to 176.4kHz/24 bit resolution. There are two pairs of analog RCA jacks as well as a Toslink optical digital output and RCA S/PDIF output. MSRP in standard finish is \$699. The player includes a basic, full-function plastic remote that can be upgraded to a billet remote for \$99. It's great of Virtue to offer this to the more style conscious user, but for my money, I'd buy a better power cord at this level of system. (Incidentally, the Piano M1 responds very nicely to the Shunyata Venom 2 power cord, which retails for \$125)

### Ready, Set, Customize!

My test pair of Virtue components came with matte-silver front panels, extremely cool yellow sides and red rosewood tops, which can be slid out and changed at a later date, should your environment change, or if you just feel like a different look. Most of the wood finishes have an additional \$5 to \$25 upcharge, but if you are feeling frisky, you can get real carbon-fiber tops for an additional \$250 each. I'm sure this is incredibly cool but starts to defeat the budget ethos of these components. But kudos to Virtue for giving you the options.

It doesn't stop there. You can also customize the sides, add columns and even change the color of the buttons. Again, the cost is reasonable, though some color combinations are on backorder. With so many options, I'd give the Piano M1 a perfect 10 for wife-acceptance factor. I can't imagine anyone not being able to find a combination that would work in his or her decor, and that's important to today's design-conscious music lover.

### Listening Context

The Piano M1 already has a huge legion of owners out in cyberspace making some lofty claims for this player, many comparing it to CD Players costing five and even 10 times more. As is often the case, people are usually most enthusiastic about something on which what they've just plunked down their hard-earned cash, and usually when the phrase "giant killer" enters the conversation, it's pretty much like salt peter. But again, Krinsky's enthusiasm compelled me to give this little player a listen. And since TONEAudio contributor Marc Marcantonio also had high praise for the Virtue, listening began in earnest. *(continued)*



I let the player run on repeat for about two weeks before even sitting down to listen, eliminating any thoughts of inadequate break in. With a cache of fairly high-end digital hardware on hand, I went straight to the top and plugged in a pair of Shunyata Aurora interconnects and a Python CX power cord to make an apples-to-apples comparison to my \$55,000 dCS Paganini stack. Nope, you are not getting a dCS for \$600, that's for sure.

Making the comparison to a handful of players in the \$1,000 to \$2,500 range was much more interesting. I also had an OPPO BDP-83 and my trusty Denon 3910 on hand as new- and old-school universal player references.

#### **Listening Pleasure and a Few Quick Comparisons**

As my GamuT S-9 reference speakers are only down 3db at 18hz, I was immediately struck by the weight and bass control possessed by this little player; this is definitely the Piano M1's strongest suit. Where the OPPO and even my Rega Apollo pretty much have one-note bass, the Piano M1 offers a lot of detail and definition. Thomas Dolby's "May the Cube Be With You" has a heavy dose of plucky, electric-bass riffs, which served as an obstacle course that was mastered by the M1. Taking the acoustic path, the player did an equally good job with the intro to "Easy Money" on Rickie Lee Jones' self-titled CD. Snoop Dogg sounded pretty darn good, too.

Man cannot live on bass alone, however, and moving up the register revealed the rest of the strengths and weaknesses of this great little player. The highs are just slightly rolled off with transients slightly muffled, which probably accounts for so many people on the web talking about the "tubelike" quality of this player. The PrimaLuna ProLogue 8 has more midrange magic and smoother highs than the Virtue, but nowhere near the bass slam, and it costs \$2,500. Advantage: PrimaLuna *(continued)*

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**The comparison got a lot more interesting when I compared CD playback to the \$500 OPPO BDP-83 that is one of the current media darlings. In short, I felt the Piano M1 exceeded it in every way...**

The comparison got a lot more interesting when I compared CD playback to the \$500 OPPO BDP-83 that is one of the current media darlings. In short, I felt the Piano M1 exceeded it in every way: more dynamics, cleaner midrange and that bass control again. If you just want to play redbook CD's, forget about the OPPO; M1 is the droid you want. Advantage: Virtue

I saved the best for last, comparing the Piano M1 to the Rega Apollo. Here's where we'll probably get all the hate mail because I'd call it almost a dead heat between the two players. It also exposed what I felt was the only weakness of this player, and to be fair, all CD players in the \$500 to \$2,000 range to varying extents. The Rega excels in image depth while the Virtue

excels in image width; if you were listening to a solo vocalist or a single vocalist with minimal accompaniment, either of these could fool you into thinking that it was much more expensive player.

But they both fall down flat when the music gets densely layered, as in a full-scale symphonic recording or one of my favorite fusion tracks, "Malaga Virgen" from Brand X. In case neither of these ring a bell, your favorite TOOL or Slayer track will demonstrate the issue just as well. This is where inexpensive digital falls down, and both players were equally guilty, with the presentation getting fairly grainy and congested as the density of the music increased. That's why we'll call this one a draw. (continued)

## FEATURE

To put this all in perspective, the comparison listening so far had been done on my main reference system, so I could hear exactly what the Piano M1 was completely capable of and easily compare it to other players at various price points. When I plugged the Piano M1 into the Virtue Sensation amplifier and a pair of Vandersteen 1C's on loan from one of my staff members, I was amazed at how much musicality could be had for under \$2,500 total. And as I'll mention in the amplifier review, the synergy between the two Virtue components was excellent.

### Award Winning Performance

If you don't need a universal player, I can't recommend highly enough Virtue Audio's Piano M1, especially if you are trying to put together a high-performance system on a tight budget. Again keep in mind, Virtue is the new kid on

the block and the products are assembled in China, so you are taking a calculated risk compared with buying from such well-known brands as Rega or Naim. That's your call. Considering the price level as well as the fit and finish, Virtue is tough to ignore.

It's also worth mentioning in the same breath that many people laughed at Kevin Deal of Upscale Audio about eight years ago when he brought PrimaLuna to market. He's certainly proved that Chinese manufacturing and a direct-to-buyer concept can work if the t's are crossed, the i's dotted and careful attention is paid to the small stuff. Here's to hoping that Seth Krinsky can have the same success. He's doing it right so far.

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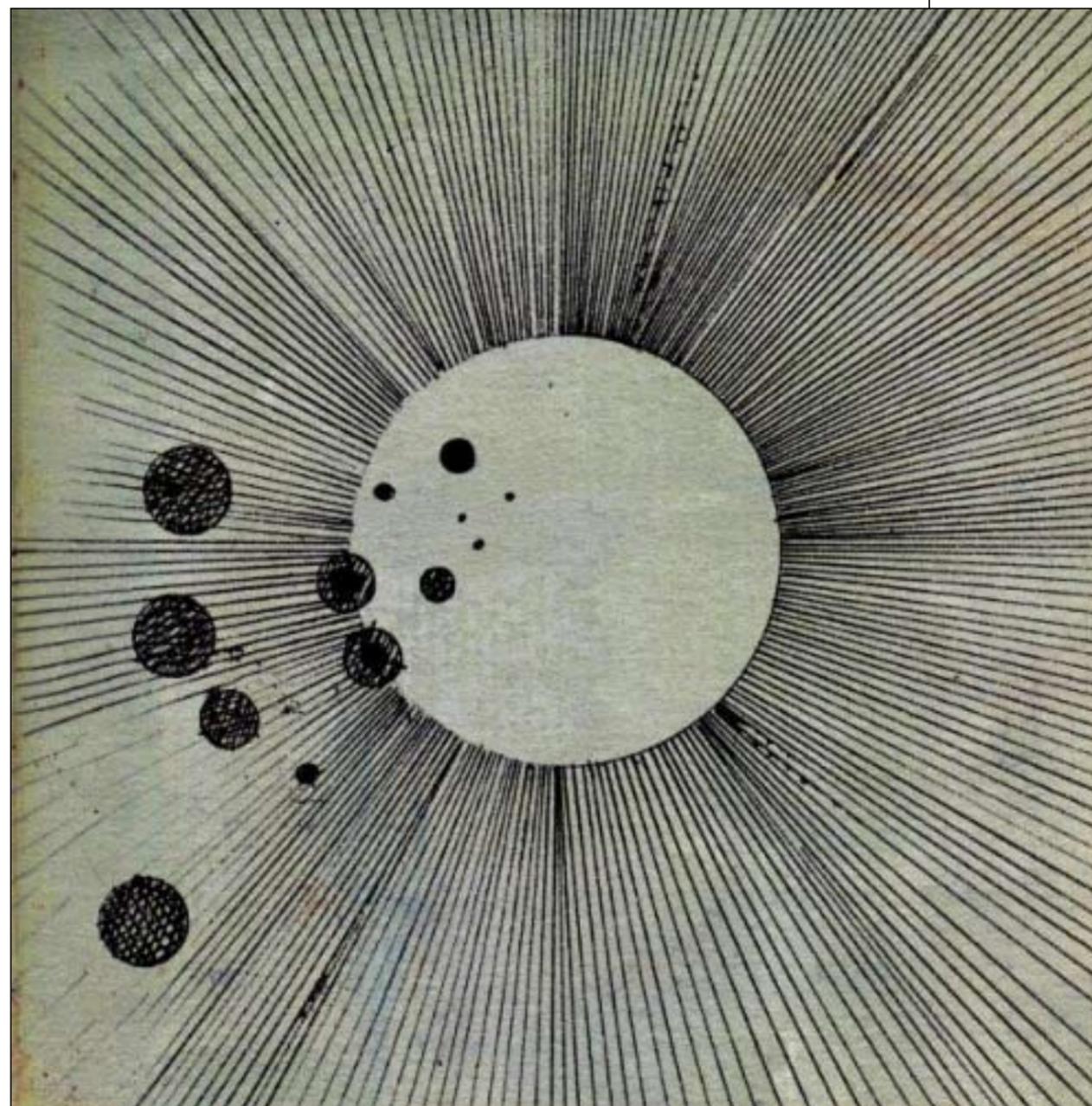
"Damn close to a perfect piece of equipment."  
*The Audio Critic*

# Club Mix

By Scott Tetzlaff

**T**here's always something exhilarating about peeling the plastic off of a new piece of media, whether CD or LP. The crunchy sound, the smell, those little warning stickers... it's a multi-sensory experience. Such excitement is doubled when you're opening a new release. And if it's a disc by an artist that's new to you, well, the experience is still even better.

In this edition of Club Mix, we present a selection of new releases from either new artists and/or artists that have never appeared in this column. And since we're taking a snapshot of new releases, we'll be talking about different musical styles and, hopefully, something for everyone. Let the exploration begin.



## Flying Lotus

*Cosmogramma*  
Warp Records, CD and LP

**F**lying Lotus is Los Angeles-based music producer Steven Ellison. *Cosmogramma* represents his third project under the Flying Lotus name, and it's even more intriguing than his previous efforts. Unlike the trip-hop influenced *Los Angeles*, this one is more thick and abstract, featuring heavy influences from the "glitch" school—music characterized by seemingly random electronic sounds and artifacts introduced into the mix.

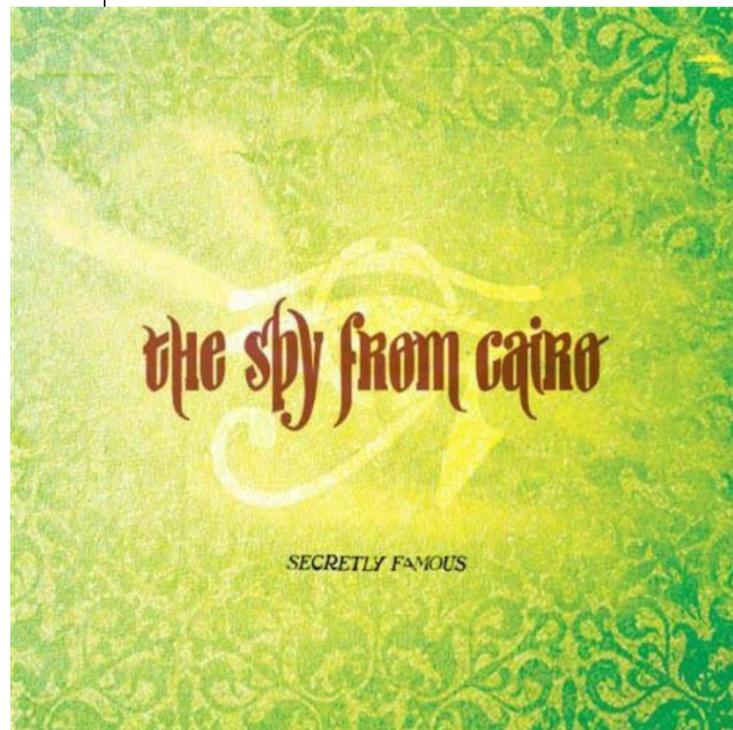
While glitch can often be too jarring, it works well here. Part of the charm owes to the fact that the effects are tempered with heavy doses of structured harp music. (Ellison's great aunt is a famous harpist, so that may be related.) Standout tracks include avant-jazz pieces like "Pickled!" and "German Haircut" that blend in thunderous bass riffs sure to rattle your china cabinet and maybe even your floors. Set your subwoofer accordingly.

Big, complex, multilayered pieces such as "A Cosmic Drama" and "Do the Astral Plane" provide hours of fun and take multiple listens to fully assimilate into your frontal lobes. And unless your parents teach jazz theory, this probably isn't the best disc to play when they come to visit. If you end up digging *Cosmogramma* and want more, listen to Ellison's *Pattern + Grid World*, an EP whose tracks are all based on video-game sounds.

**T**he Spy from Cairo is actually Moreno Visini, a talented DJ that grew up in a family of Italian gypsies. His self-described mission is to bring great Arabic music to the western club scene. So hang on to your fez. This record starts out at a fast pace, right from the opening “Nayphony” and “Kurdish Delight,” with the latter adding a healthy dose of manjira (a traditional Brazilian percussion instrument) sounds to the mix.

The string-laden arrangements also contain ethereal female vocals mixed in at just the right level, providing the illusion of belly dancers lurking right behind your speakers—perhaps to serve you fine delicacies, perhaps to kill you. It’s all part of the intrigue. Just past the midway point, the tempo slows a bit with the more electronically reliant “Sufi Disco.”

*Secretly Famous* is big fun, but perhaps fun best kept in your car or on your iPod, as the disc’s dynamic range is somewhat compressed. On a large system, the album lacks the requisite openness and bass punch. For those of you who don’t want to party until the end, check out the six-song EP, *Secretly Famous Remixes*. The remix fare is good, but the original is the real gem, genuine confirmation that Visini is succeeding on his mission.



### **The Spy from Cairo**

*Secretly Famous*  
Wonderwheel, CD

**The string-laden arrangements also contain ethereal female vocals mixed in at just the right level, providing the illusion of belly dancers lurking right behind your speakers— perhaps to serve you fine delicacies, perhaps to kill you.**

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**Chromeo**  
*Business Casual*  
Atlantic, CD and LP

Similar groups perform this sort of music almost ironically, with a sly wink to let you in on the joke. But Chromeo makes clear that it's having a blast expressing itself via this style. If any irony is present, it's a secret kept between the duo and its fans.

A cursory look at the song titles lets you know what's on their minds; the album cover even suggests these guys want to get busy. "I'm Not Contagious," "You Make it Rough," and "Don't Turn The Lights On" convey that Chromeo is all about making out—albeit with a pumping 4/4 disco beat in the background. The pair also extends its range with a few surprises, ala the French ballad "J'ai Claqué la Porte." (Chromeo is Québécois, after all.)

The real draw of course, are the dance tunes. Take a listen to the synth-driven "Hot Mess" or the Hall and Oates-esque "Don't Turn the Lights On." Is Chromeo deeply artistic and serious? No. But, these folks are definitely fun. And the music works. You'll probably catch yourself busting a move whether you want to or not.

**C**hromeo, an electro-funk duo from Montreal comprised of David Macklovich and Patrick Gemayel, revels in synth-laced, 80s-inspired dance music. Imagine the Time with a little less R&B and heavier synth bits, and the Brothers Johnson mixed in for good measure.



Three of the five members of Caravan Palace originally got together in 2005 when hired by a film production company to produce soundtrack music for silent porno films. Weird.

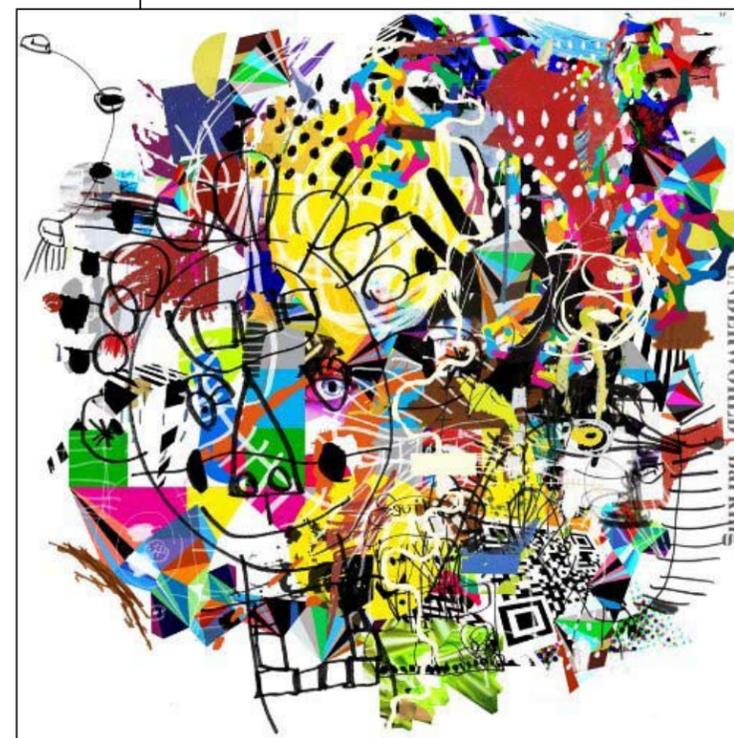
### Caravan Palace

*Caravan Palace*  
Wrasse Records, CD

Available in the band's native France since 2008, the record recently made its way to U.S. shores and sounds like a love child born of gypsy jazz guitarist Django Reinhardt and Daft Punk. The final result has a 1920s Spitfire-era jazz feel tinted with modern electronic elements.

*Caravan Palace* starts out more Reinhardt than Daft Punk, but by the second track, "Star Scat," things turn more electronic, with vocalist Sonia Fernandez Velasco taking vocal processing off on a different track, singing scats in a robot voice amidst the softness of a few lazy clarinets. Velasco contributes vocals to several other songs as well, with "Brotherswing" feeling like it draws from Lady Gaga's juju.

In the end, however, *Caravan Palace* never sways too far from the speakeasy and is sure to put you in a good mood.

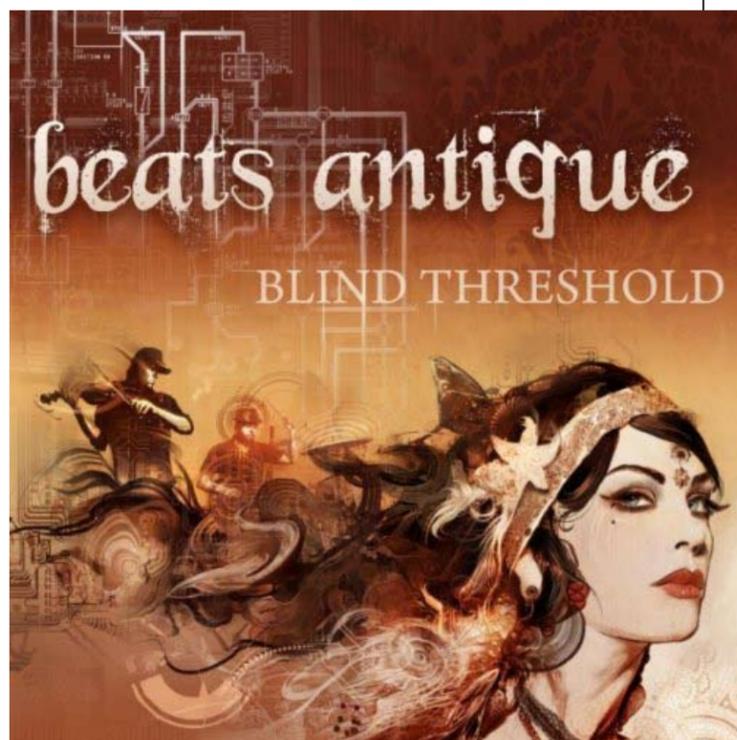


### Underworld

*Barking*  
Om, CD and LP

In a genre not known for artistic longevity, Underworld is a rarity, having continuously created great dance music since the early 90s. *Barking* marks the group's first release in three years. Think of the album as a shift from black to medium grey. Underworld definitely sports a lighter touch this time out. The collective collaborates with old friends (Paul Van Dyk, Dubfire, Mark Knight, D. Ramirez) and augments its sound with pop hooks. It's a winning combination: *Barking* is the group's best record in years.

Graced with a touch of characteristic darkness, the opening "Bird 1" nonetheless provides a transition to Underworld's updated sound. By the second track, the album lightens up and embraces the easier vibe that dominates everything here. This new, brighter approach finds Underworld casting a wider net. Let's hope it doesn't alienate core fans in the process.



**Beats Antique**  
*Blind Threshold*  
 Copland Intl., CD

**With its fusion of Middle Eastern, downtempo, Indian, and Afrobeat, the band is the perfect accompaniment to Jakes' dance style.**

Only in San Francisco: Avant-garde belly dancer Zoe Jakes asked her manager, Miles Copland (brother of the Police drummer), to produce an album of tribal/hip-hop/belly dance music. So, he brought multi-instrumentalist David Satori and drummer Tommy Cappel together and put the resulting album out on his own CIA label.

With its fusion of Middle Eastern, downtempo, Indian, and Afrobeat, the band is the perfect accompaniment to Jakes' dance style. And this, the group's fourth outing, includes a few quirky surprises. How else to explain the unlikely addition of Blues Traveler leader John Popper on "There Ya Go"?

The opening "Egyptic" starts out slow and light but soon gives way to the trance-like, bass-pounding "Runaway." "Rising Tide" features vocalist Lynx and tips the scale to the hip-hop side even while retaining a light, violin-oriented Middle Eastern flavor. Singing in a choppy robot voice, Eva Salina makes a guest appearance on "Nesvalo," adding yet another flavor to the already spicy menu.

Addendum: If you'd like to sample Beats Antique's live show, do a quick search on YouTube. The vast array of clips demonstrates Jakes' pop-and-lock belly-dance style, which gives you even more appreciation for the music.

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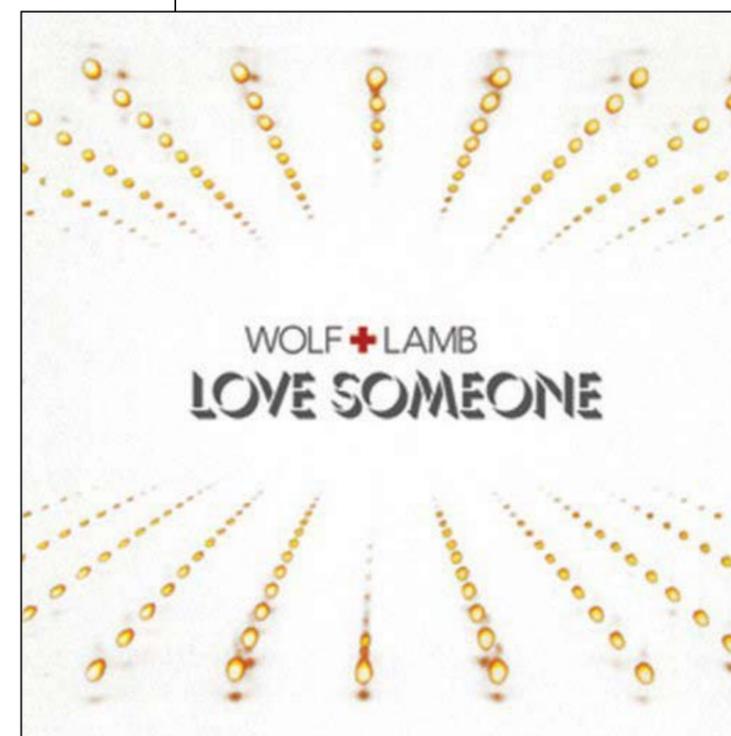
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**Wolf+Lamb**

*Love Someone*

Wolf and Lamb Records, CD

**B**rooklyn based Wolf+Lamb have their collective fingers in many pies: a music label, clothing line, the Marcy Hotel, and now, an organic dog food (Woof & Lamme). The ensemble's latest disc, *Love Someone*, epitomizes why 30-second samples are often just not enough. Avid Club Mix readers will recognize where the samples come from, but in this case, it would help if the band could have swiped just a bit more to flesh out the songs.

Regardless, the nine tracks are appointed with rich soundscape designs. Every song starts with a fairly slow build, best experienced serially, just as the authors intended. The sound is midtempo house, hovering in the lower tonal registers with solid, pumping beats. Plenty of obscure samples get thrown in for good measure. The final verdict: A definite contender for the year's best dance album.

# Club Mix Off to Monaco!

By Jeff Dorgay



**Some of the top clubs in the world will take over the scene, with superstar DJ's representing their various countries, spinning their favorite sounds.**

**N**ovember 11-13, Club Mix columnist Scott Tetzlaff and I will be headed to the lovely Principality of Monaco to attend the MICS (Monaco International Clubbing Show) and cover a wide range of activities, which we will be featuring in our December issue. Those of you that are Formula 1 fans already know the luxurious setting that awaits us with one of the most incredible beach fronts in the world.

But this looks to be more than just a music festival. By day, the event will be an exhibit hall, featuring the latest and most innovative vendors in all aspects of nightclub activity, from DJ's and architects to lighting and sound vendors, all in an environment that fosters collaboration on all levels. Then from 6PM forward, some of the top clubs in the world will take over the scene, with superstar DJ's representing their various countries, spinning their favorite sounds.

And that's only a part of the event. There will be a variety of art exhibits, with some artists commissioned to produce live work at the show, along with an art academy, looking for new artistic talents. The MICS staff said that it is open to all mediums, but you must above all, "be crazy about music." Even the world famous designer, Ora-Itto, the man who designed the aluminum Heineken beer bottle will be there.

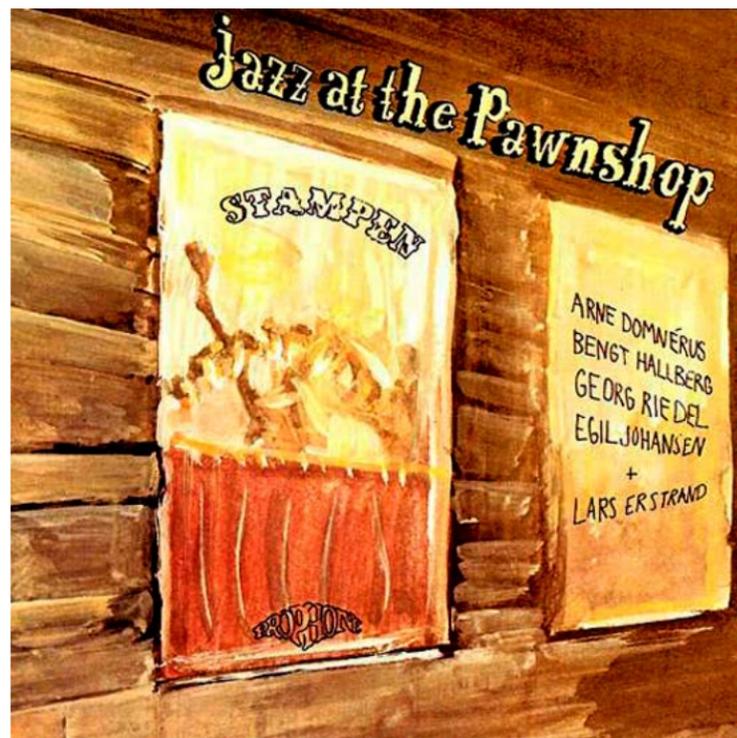
A year's worth of promotion around the globe has been leading up to the main event: The MICS show in Monaco. Mojitos, Motocross, Fashion, Music and more. We look forward to seeing you there!

For more information, visit the website:

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# Downloads

By Jeff Dorgay

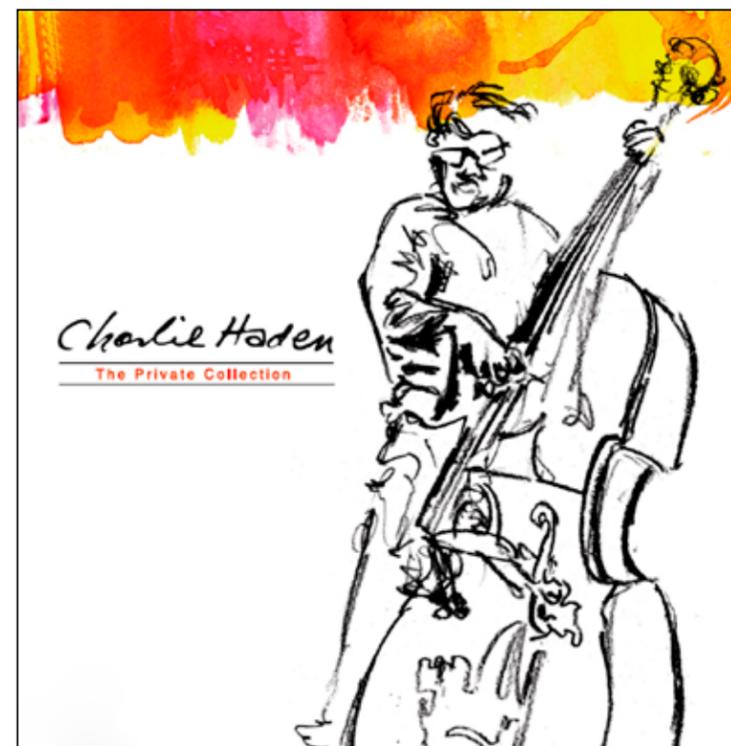


**Y**eah, yeah, I know that *Jazz at the Pawnshop* is an audiophile classic and for many of you, it's been played to death. But for those of you that *haven't* played it to death and only have a CD copy, this latest release on HD Tracks is a breath of fresh air.

**Arne Domnerus, et. al.**  
*Jazz at the Pawnshop*  
HD Tracks, 24/88 download

Where the CD is a bit harsh on top with a somewhat recessed midrange, Chesky and Co. have done a great job of capturing the essence of the famous recording. This version sounds so much better than the CD, it's as close to analog as you can get, and actually a bit quieter than the LP, with more top-end extension. Interestingly, the audience sounds much more live on this release and on a great system. You will feel like you are sitting about three tables from the stage.

If you don't have the original set on LP, or you missed out on the limited-edition three-disc SACD 30th Anniversary box set, the \$39.98 at HD Tracks is a steal, featuring all 28 tracks from the original sessions along with cover art and 28 pages of liner notes. A side note: More than 500,000 copies of *Jazz at the Pawnshop* have been sold, which has to be some kind of a record for an audiophile release.



**Charlie Haden**  
*The Private Collection*  
The Naim Label, 24/96 download

On many levels, *The Private Collection* captures two live gigs performed by legendary jazz bassist Charlie Haden. The first half, recorded in 1987 on his 50th birthday, has long been considered as the modern-day *Jazz at the Pawnshop*. The second half of the performance was recorded a year later in Missouri.

Ken Christianson, the man behind most of the recordings on the Naim label, recorded both shows in True Stereo. And yes, the 3LP set is a tribute to analog excellence. However, much like the aforementioned JATP set, the 24/96 files are exceptional. When compared to the original analog pressings, there's a tie between the two.

The vinyl has a few more drops of midrange warmth, with cymbals just that much creamier. But the noise floor is lower on the high-res file and Haden's bass possesses more weight. I could happily live with either, but if you've only heard this one on CD, you are in for a treat.



**T**he *Isaac Hayes Movement* picks up right where his previous album, *Hot Buttered Soul*, leaves off. By the time he got to Phoenix, Hayes figured out a new rap to lay on his best friend's girl, confessing his life story and how much she means to him even though she's just been engaged.

### Issac Hayes

*The Isaac Hayes Movement*  
HD Tracks, 24/96 download

Once again, women drive men to madness, as confirmed by the presence of the Jerry Butler classic "I Stand Accused." The other three songs are also covers, but Hayes makes them his own, with heavily orchestrated arrangements dripping with soul power. There's even an 11 ½-minute version of the Beatles' "Something."

Where so many original Stax LPs sound dreadful, this is a legitimate audiophile recording. Hayes' voice dominates the soundstage so convincingly, you might want to turn the volume down a bit at the beginning and wade in. In the 21st century, with artists scrambling to produce enough filler to take advantage of the 80 minutes on a CD, it's refreshing to hear 36 minutes and 18 seconds of music created with a purpose.



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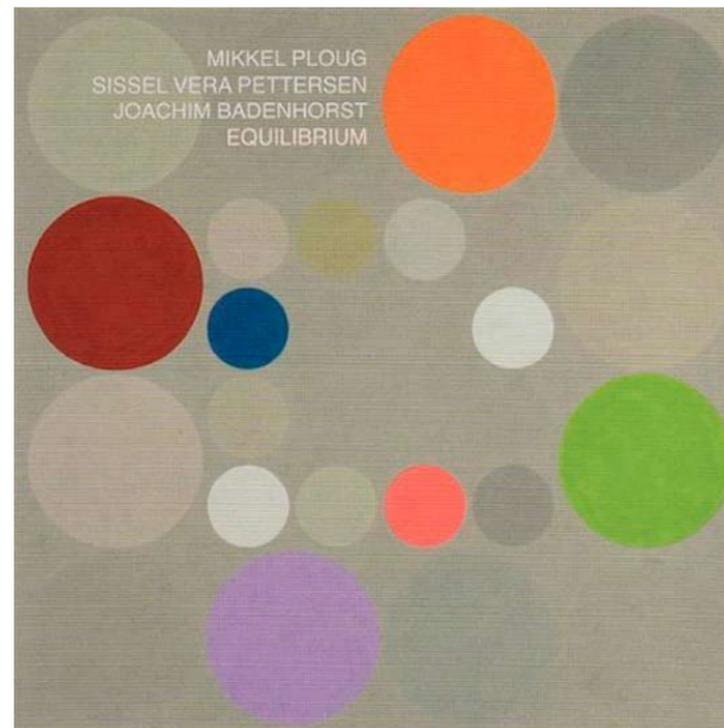
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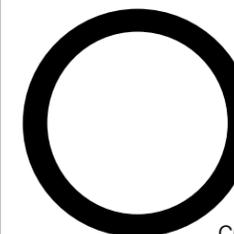


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**Joachim Badenhorst,  
Sissel Vera Pettersen,  
Mikkel Ploug**  
*Equilibrium*  
HD Tracks, 24/88 download



K, I confess: I bought this one for the cool cover art and the fact that I like just about everything that comes from Denmark. Maybe it's just the synergy between THE Danish musicians and my Danish GamuT speakers, but this is a fantastic recording and performance. Sissel Vera Pettersen's voice has a unique texture and presentation; even those who normally shy away from female vocal recordings should dig it. If you have heard (and enjoy) Anja Garbarek, you'll enjoy the performances here.

The music is sparse, somewhat dissonant, and yet very dynamic. The recording claims a huge, cavernous feel, with the musicians everywhere in the room. Even on just two speakers, *Equilibrium* sounds like a surround mix. And the recording captures so much detail; you can hear every bit of Joachim Badenhorst's breathing and clarinet clicking.

If you want an acoustic recording to probe the extent of your system's performance (and still retain a high level of musical integrity), put this one in your shopping cart the next time you visit HD Tracks. Highly recommended. ●

# An Auspicious Contender From China:

**The Consonance XBB Turntable** By Jeff Dorgay

It's a great time to be a vinyl enthusiast. Despite all the excitement over five- and six-figure turntables, many audiophiles are not spending that kind of dough on record players. There are a lot of music lovers exploring vinyl for the first time and getting their feet wet with a \$300 to \$500 table-and-cartridge combination, but if you really want a stronger dose of analog magic (and remember, digital keeps getting better all the time), you need to spend some more money.





## FEATURE

How much money you ask? I've always felt that about \$1,500 to \$2,500 is an excellent plateau for a turntable and phono-cartridge combination. If you can increase your budget to this range, you'll get a much more substantial analog experience than an entry-level table has to offer without heading off to never-never land. Of course, this number is not in stone, but this is where I've always felt you can really enjoy the subtleties that make analog fantastic. For the time being, I'm assuming that you already have a phono stage built into your preamplifier or have a suitable outboard phono stage already on hand. If not, budget about another \$1,000 here and you will be well rewarded.

If you can afford to make this kind of investment in an analog front end, there are a plethora of choices when shopping for a new turntable. There are some bargains to be found on the web occasionally, but more often than not, used-turntable transactions end up with a frown instead of a smile because precious few people take the necessary care to *pack* a turntable so that it reaches its destination in one piece. So for now, let's talk new.

### The Competition

There are some great tables in the \$1,000 to \$2,000 range from Rega, VPI, Pro-ject and a few others, not to mention the outstanding Clearaudio Concept we reviewed just recently. Add one more to your list: the Consonance XBB is the real deal, and it takes a different approach than the others in its immediate price range, making it very intriguing.

Ian and Rachel at Grant Fidelity have been importing some great gear from China over the past few years combining high performance with some very reasonable prices, and their customer service has been exemplary. *(continued)*



We just reviewed their Shugyuan Premium EL-34 tubes last issue and they are fantastic. And well-worth mentioning, their customer service is second to none. So I was very excited to receive their latest turntable, which has an MSRP of \$1,465 *with* the standard nine-inch tonearm. For an additional \$210, you can add a 12-inch arm tube that will require configuring the turntables' base differently so you can achieve the proper spindle-to-pivot distance required for the 12-inch tonearm.

### Construction

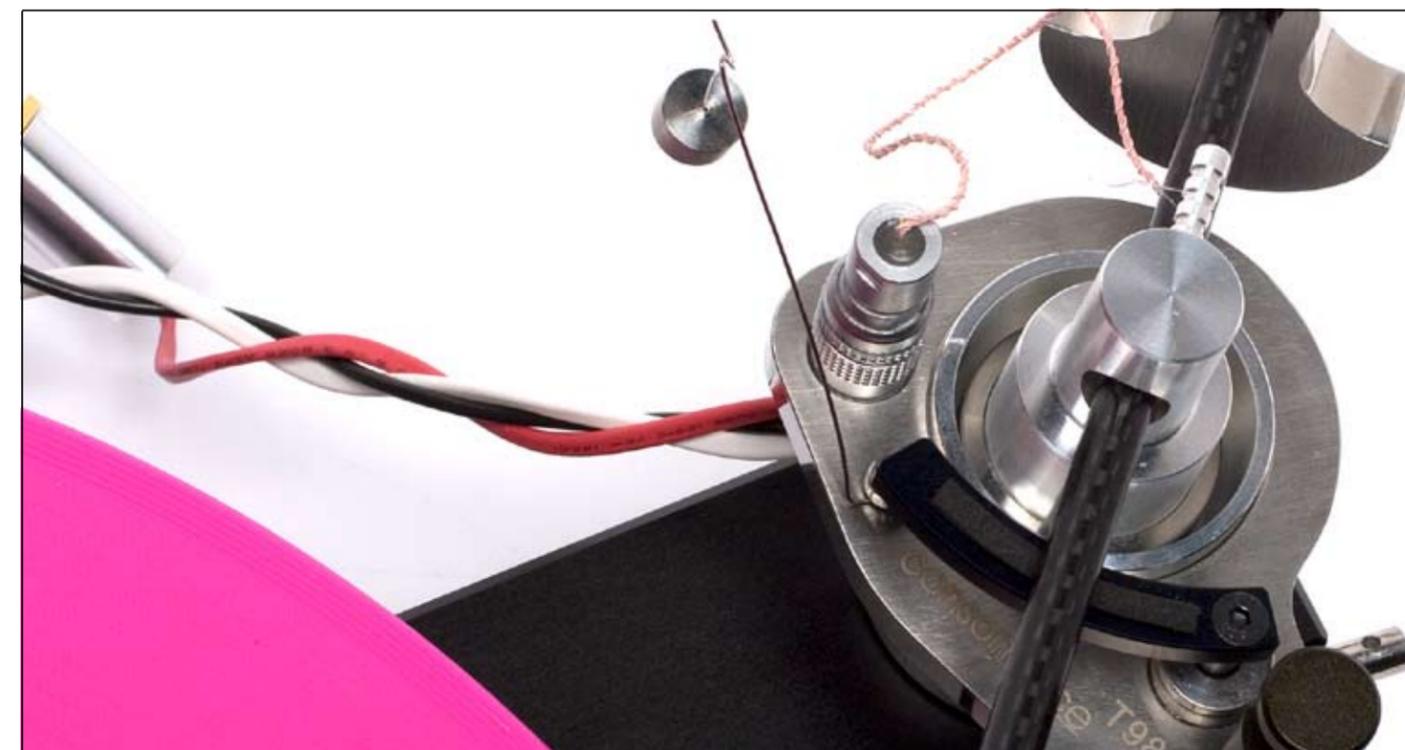
The XBB is a plinth-less design that goes together quickly. Once you remove the metal bars that make up the base and lower the one-inch-thick acrylic platter onto the bearing surface, the only remaining step is to attach the unipivot arm and dial it in with your favorite cartridge. And what a cool tonearm it is! The long, carbon-fiber shaft is somewhat reminiscent of the one featured on the Well Tempered Arm, with a quick disconnect so that additional arm tubes can be easily substituted. Once exposed, the main bearing can be filled with the supplied oil to damp its movement.

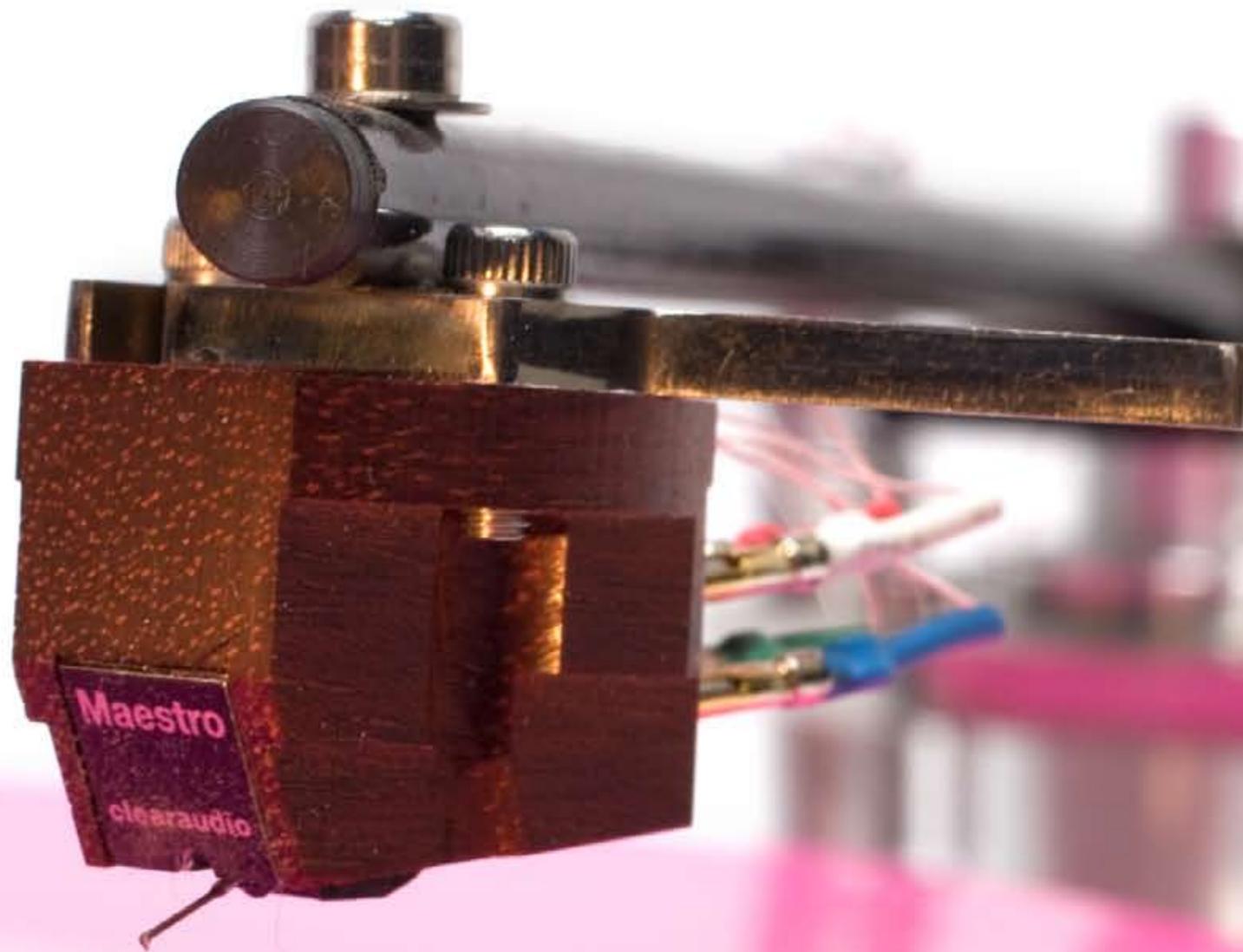
The Consonance arm uses a threaded tube that allows you to set the VTA easily for any

cartridge, which is a rarity at this price point. Once you snug down the two round washers on top and below the arm mount, there is a 4mm Allen bolt in the turntable base to snug the tube the rest of the way. Fail to take this last step and low bass will suffer.

The other side of the tonearm connector has a short pair of unshielded leads that connect to a pair of RCA jacks, allowing you the flexibility of choosing your own phono interconnect. While convenient in theory, this was my only complaint with the table. With these just hanging loosely from the tonearm mount, I see this as an area that could be problematic for someone who accesses this on a regular basis, changing cables. You could very easily bump the counterweight and send the tonearm bouncing across a record. Set-it-and-forget-it types will be fine, and in all fairness, I'd still rather see this arrangement than have such a good turntable be handicapped by a mediocre tonearm cable that is hardwired in place.

When unpacking the Consonance turntable for the first time, be careful not to misplace the belt; it is a very fine, monofilament material (much like fishing line) wrapped around a tiny paper bobbin. It does not stretch at all. So again, caution is the word when installing it. *(continued)*





## Cartridges and Setup

Once assembled, a quick speed check with the Acoustic Sounds test record and my digital multimeter revealed that all was well. The 1000 Hz track played at exactly 1,000 Hz right out of the box.

The Consonance arrives sans cartridge, but I did try a range of cartridges in the \$400-\$1,000 range, settling on the Clearaudio Maestro Wood MM. I was able to achieve excellent performance with the Lyra Dorian as well, but staying with a moving-magnet design really kept with the ethos of not getting too carried away with the checkbook on this setup. If you already have a MC preamplifier, a great MC cart in the \$1,000 to \$2,000 range will not embarrass this table.

Cartridge setup is straightforward, but if you've never used a unipivot arm before, the "floppiness" at the pivot point is somewhat unnerving until you get accustomed to it. When setting the azimuth, it's critical to have the half-moon shaped counterweight perfectly level or you will have some serious channel-balance issues. You will spend a bit of time going back and forth between optimum tracking force and perfect azimuth adjustment, but your cartridge will be much better off for it. Anti-skate is set with a small hanging weight, as is common on many of the Pro-ject arms.

The table was auditioned primarily in my second system, consisting of the McIntosh C500 preamplifier and MC 1.2kw power amplifiers driving a pair of B&W 805D speakers with JL Audio Gotham Subwoofer. Near the end of the review period, it was transferred to my main system to provide direct comparisons with my reference table/cartridge combinations.

## Sound

I was immediately struck by the openness of the presentation with the Consonance and spent an uncharacteristically long time listening to female vocalists. When listening to K.D. Lang's *All You Can Eat* LP, there was a wealth of inner detail that is not normally present to this degree on similarly priced tables. It seems like Consonance and Clearaudio have both raised the bar substantially for turntable performance in the \$1,400 range. I noticed the same effect with Fleetwood Mac's self titled remaster on Mobile Fidelity; as Christine McVie's voice faded out on "Warm Ways," there was a longer gradation between the softness in her voice than that delivered by my trusty Technics SL-1200 on input 2. *(continued)*



## Burmester 100 Phono Preamp

Auravis Systems is pleased to announce the arrival of Burmester's state of the art 100 Phono Preamp in Salt Lake City. As avid fans of analog music reproduction, ground breaking engineering, and world class craftsman, we could not be more excited about Burmester's introduction of this work of art.

The 100 Phono Preamp may be the world's most advanced phono stage amplifier. At its core, the 100 is built with the finest, hand selected and proprietary components. The design is executed with Burmester's zero compromise "Reference Line" technology. The Result? .... Possibly the quietest, most accurate and spectacularly dynamic and natural, three dimensional presentation ever yielded by a phono stage amplifier.

The 100 features up to two independent MM/MC phono inputs with on the fly cartridge load/gain setting switching. An optional A to D conversion module allows for reference level digital output of your vinyl collection to a hard drive or CD burner. Additional features include an auto-adjust function for cartridge channel output balance, variable volume direct to amplifier capability, and phase switching.

*Burmester*  
ART FOR THE EAR

For more information about this phenomenal Burmester product or to arrange a demo call:

**801.558.1625**



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This is indicative of a solid-bearing design, not letting the finest details get lost in the noise floor. And just like the Clearaudio table, the DC motor responds very well to battery power, giving this table even better low-level resolution. But that's an article for another time.

In fear of mellowing out *too much*, AC/DC's 12-inch 45 maxi single of "Let's Get It Up" was the next selection, and if you are an AC/DC fan, searching one of these out is a must. Although the album on which this track is originally featured (*For Those About to Rock*) is somewhat compressed, spreading this track out on a full side of vinyl spinning at 45 rpm is a tour de force of rock dynamics, giving you a tremendous insight into what a wall of Marshall amplifiers really sound like. Make no mistake, this table can rock.

It is also worth mentioning that even though the Consonance is a suspensionless design, it is relatively impervious to acoustic feedback, even at high SPL.

### Tweaks

While the battery power will increase the resolution of this table, the parameter that might drive you crazy is making the choice for a mat. The table comes supplied with a 2mm thick, spongy rubber mat. Ian told me that the table's designer prefers to use the table with no mat, but that was a bit too harsh for my taste. If you have

a cartridge possessing a more lush tonal balance, this may be just perfect.

The jury is still out on the "right" mat, but for now, the standard issue Rega felt seems to be my favorite choice. I encourage some experimentation here to fine-tune the Consonance to your cartridge and the rest of your system. While this table exhibits the snappiness you'd expect from an acrylic platter, it offers up more image depth and width than the VPI Scoutmaster did when in this system. Using the Scoutmaster/Maestro combination, the stereo image stopped dead right at the speaker cabinet boundaries, but switching to the Consonance, the image extended about four feet beyond the left and right speakers.

The easily removable arm wands make it easy to use multiple phono cartridges to enjoy your music collection. Additional nine-inch arm wands are available from Grant Fidelity for \$200, or you can take things a step further with the 12-inch arm wand.

As with any longer arm, it's best to keep your choice of cartridge lighter rather than heavier to reduce the mass out at the end of the tonearm.

As expected, the longer tonearm does offer a more liquid presentation, thanks to its lower inherent tracking error.

Because the base must be reconfigured, switching between the different length arm wands isn't a plug-and-play operation, so I would suggest that if you are going the multiple cartridge path that you stick with one length and go from there. Should you get lucky enough to find a couple of cartridges that you like with an identical height, you can switch from one sound to another in a minute! Nothing else at this price point offers this kind of flexibility.

### Conclusion

Add the Consonance XBB to the very short list of the best turntables in the \$1,500 to \$2,000 range. It offers everything that an analog lover would want (great sound, ease of setup and a tweable upgrade path) with no downside at a very reasonable price. This one is joining our long-term turntable fleet. ●



# Something New From Bowers and Wilkins

By Richard Colburn

Curiosity got the best of me when the assignment came to listen to B&W's new headphones. As far as I knew, Bowers and Wilkins was not a name I had previously associated with headphones. The P5 is their first headphone and is part of a new group that B&W calls Mobile Hi-Fi. And you can put a strong emphasis on fidelity because these phones sound great.



Retailing for \$299.95, these relatively compact on-ear phones are exquisitely finished in brushed aluminum, black leather and chrome steel. They're beautifully packaged as well. The overall presentation is like that of expensive jewelry, not affordable consumer-electronics gear. The P5s also come with a high-quality quilted magnetically latched carrying pouch containing two different cords. One features a microphone and volume control for use with the iPhone and the other without, as well as a mini-to-quarter-inch stereo phone-plug adaptor for use with more traditional audio gear. One slick feature is that the left earpiece is magnetically attached to the outer shell and can be easily removed. Once you've done that, you can attach the proper cord for your listening device of choice. What's more, the P5s are "Made for iPod," meaning that they have been certified by Apple to meet compatibility standards required by recent-generation iPods. *(continued)*



What you will find is a finely engineered set of transducers that faithfully produce music in a very neutral and linear fashion. Hmm, kind of like B&W speakers.

B & W claims that the same amount of intense acoustic engineering that they use in their speaker manufacturing went into the P5 so that you can listen to them for long periods of time without suffering listener fatigue. After a few of my own extended listening sessions, it's clear that they have achieved their goals. There are no screaming high frequencies, shouting midrange or bloated bass here. What you will find is a finely engineered set of transducers that faithfully produce music in a very neutral and linear fashion. Hmm, kind of like B & W speakers. Great sound can be compromised without a comfortable fit, and the P5 hits the mark again. The soft leather head band and ear pieces are light and fit tightly, and they provide good but not complete isolation without any undue pressure.

My evaluation began with the Musical Fidelity X-Can V8 headphone amp, evaluating both uncompressed music stored on my hard drive as well as CD's played via my computer's optical drive. What is immediately obvious is that the P5s present a spacious concert hall right in the middle of your head. Listening to the latest from Moe, *Smash Hits, Volume One*, the vocals were natural and lacking any kind of artificial push. Guitars were well-rendered and the overtones preserved, while the bass drum and guitar had the requisite "thwack" with no overhang, a characteristic of good

speakers but not many sets of headphones.

As I ran through dozens of pieces from all genres, I was struck by just how non-fatiguing the sound really was. For those of you accustomed only to ear bud-type phones, you will probably be in for a shock at how great your music can sound, even from an iPod. It's not small, tiny and tinny. It's really meaty, beaty big and bouncy, to borrow a phrase from the Who. Classical-music fans will be happy that the string tone on the P5s has a lot of body and never becomes shrill.

Next I moved to my iPod Classic, using a mixture of .wav and lossless files. Considering that this is still the audiophile approach, I sampled the P5 with MP3 files toward the end of my listening sessions to see if these phones made sense as an upgrade for the average listener. No matter what type of music I tried, the P5s came through with great results. The reggae bass line on "Chop 'Em Down" from Matisyahu's *Live At Stubbs* was forceful and full sounding but well-controlled, while they also conveyed a good sense of space in the club. Moving on to "Miami Gato" from Medeski, Martin & Woods' *End Of World Party*, the propulsive nature of Billy Martin's drumming was captured faithfully and keeps the feet moving. Finally, the skull ripping "Come On" from Stanley Clarke's *The Toys Of Men* was served up with full impact by the P5s. *(continued)*

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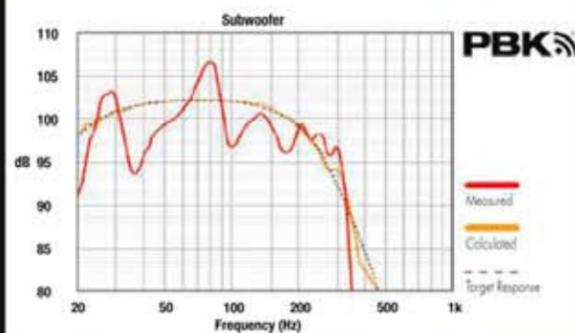


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As a final test, I tried a few low-res tracks that were downloaded from iTunes. First up was “Don’t You Forget About Me” by New Found Glory, where I expected the vocals to sound really compressed; surprisingly, they weren’t. Next, the upbeat “Lump” by The Presidents Of The United States Of America sounded pretty dynamic where usually it would sound squashed with typical ear bud-type headphones. It’s a tribute to the engineering behind the P5s that MP3s sounded entirely tolerable albeit not nearly as good as uncompressed music. Regardless of your level of audio-equipment enthusiasm, the P5s are a worthwhile upgrade even for the MP3/iPod user.

The P5s have no negatives and a lot of positives: stylish looks, comfortable fit, good isolation and most of all, superb sound quality. The B&W engineers have done a brilliant job on their entry into the highly competitive headphone world. Whether you are in the market for a reasonably compact set of headphones as a welcome relief to ear-bud fatigue or are simply looking for a great pair of headphones for home audio use, look no further than the P5s. You can’t go wrong for \$299.95 ●



# Polk Audio Atrium Sub10 and Sat 30

\$149 ea. (Sat 30) \$299 (Sub 10)  
[www.polkaudio.com](http://www.polkaudio.com)



Finally, outdoor sound done right! The folks at Polk Audio put a lot of thought and engineering into their new Atrium series. As my recent factory visit was winding to a close, our host asked if we wanted to hear some “great outdoor sound” and led us to the patio area where Polk Audio employees congregate for break time. Under the picnic table was a Sub 10, with a few Sat 30’s attached right to the wall.

As interesting as the tech briefing was, the big news is that these speakers sound great. If you’ve had the pleasure (displeasure, actually) of hearing other outdoor speakers, you know

that generally just plain suck, usually with a cheesy full-range speaker that will sound even worse after a bit of porch duty. Polk went back to the drawing board, and drawing on 35 years of engineering expertise came up with a system that not only sounds fantastic, but will withstand extreme weather. Polk claims that these speakers are weatherproof from a range of -40 to +185 degrees F, and they back it up with a five-year warranty. I have to believe these babies will hold up just fine here in the relatively mild climate of the Pacific Northwest, but I will report back in a year as I’m buying the review set for my back porch.



### The Components

You can buy the system as individual components so you can mix and match to suit your application. If you had a large enough backyard area, these could make for an incredible outdoor 7.1 system! Each one of the Sat 30's contains a 3.5-inch woofer with a bridge-mounted three-quarter-inch composite dome tweeter, very similar to the drivers lurking under the grille cloth in your favorite Polk Audio home speakers.

The Polk engineers have thought of everything. The enclosure is made from polypropylene with an aluminum grille and stainless-steel hardware to avoid any kind of rust. There is a metal security plate that should make these tough to pilfer, and they have a shock-absorbing gasket to prevent weed-whacker damage. While I have tremendous faith in Polk Audio's engineers, my lawn guys are a bit more dangerous, so I'll be mounting my Sat 30's up under the eaves just to be safe.

The Sub 10 features a dual-voice-coil subwoofer built into an enclosure that looks like a clay pot that you might see in Santa Fe. Coincidentally, we have a few of those pots left from our prior life in Phoenix, so I don't even need to change the color. The Sub 10 looks like it was custom-made for my backyard.

DIY'ers in the crowd take note: the Polk instruction manual is *excellent*, so read it. They even offer great painting instructions. Installing these speakers is as foolproof as it gets.

The Sat 30's can be connected directly to your amplifier or receiver, but I suggest adding the Sub 10 subwoofer. Polk gives you the option of connecting the satellite speakers and subwoofer together as a full-range system. Or if your HT system has a separate zone for the outdoors, you can connect the Sat 30's and the Sub 10 to their own amplifiers. Each has their own high and low pass filters so that you won't damage them. *(continued)*

**Time to Rock**

Even though Polk lists the -3db spec on the Sub 10 at 50hz, I'm guessing this is a bit on the conservative side. Used in conjunction with the 80 wpc Virtue Audio Sensation M451 integrated amplifier and matching Piano 1 CD player, I was able to more than sufficiently annoy my next-door neighbor while playing a Moby Grape superset as I barbequed on a recent weekend.

Ever the audiophile, I mounted the speakers about 10 feet apart and aimed them so that the sweet spot is right where my favorite lawn chair sits, with the subwoofer about eight feet from this position. I was highly impressed at the stereo image that was generated, and by the speakers' ability to play fairly loud without compression. Blasting classic rock is essential while grilling animal flesh, and the Polk Sat 30/Sub 10 system delivers the goods. I was able to play

*Van Halen II* loud enough to have my next-door neighbor bring over a 12-pack and the old dude across the street to call the police, so I would call these speakers an unqualified success.

Should your outdoor music needs be more relaxed, they do a great job with jazz as well. Though my wife made fun of me while installing these, I did catch the ladies drinking wine and listening to some of my favorite ECM recordings, so I know their WAF extends beyond their stealthy appearance.

**You Need Them**

So, if you need great sound in your outdoor environment and don't want to break the bank, head to your Polk Audio retailer and grab a set of Sat 30's and a Sub 10 of your very own. Now you can enjoy your favorite music everywhere. Maybe a second set for the garage? Hmm. —*Jeff Dorgay*



I was able to play *Van Halen II* loud enough to have my next-door neighbor bring over a 12-pack and the old dude across the street to call the police, so I would call these speakers an unqualified success.



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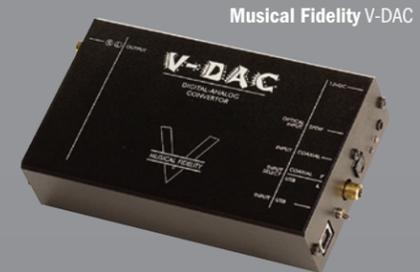
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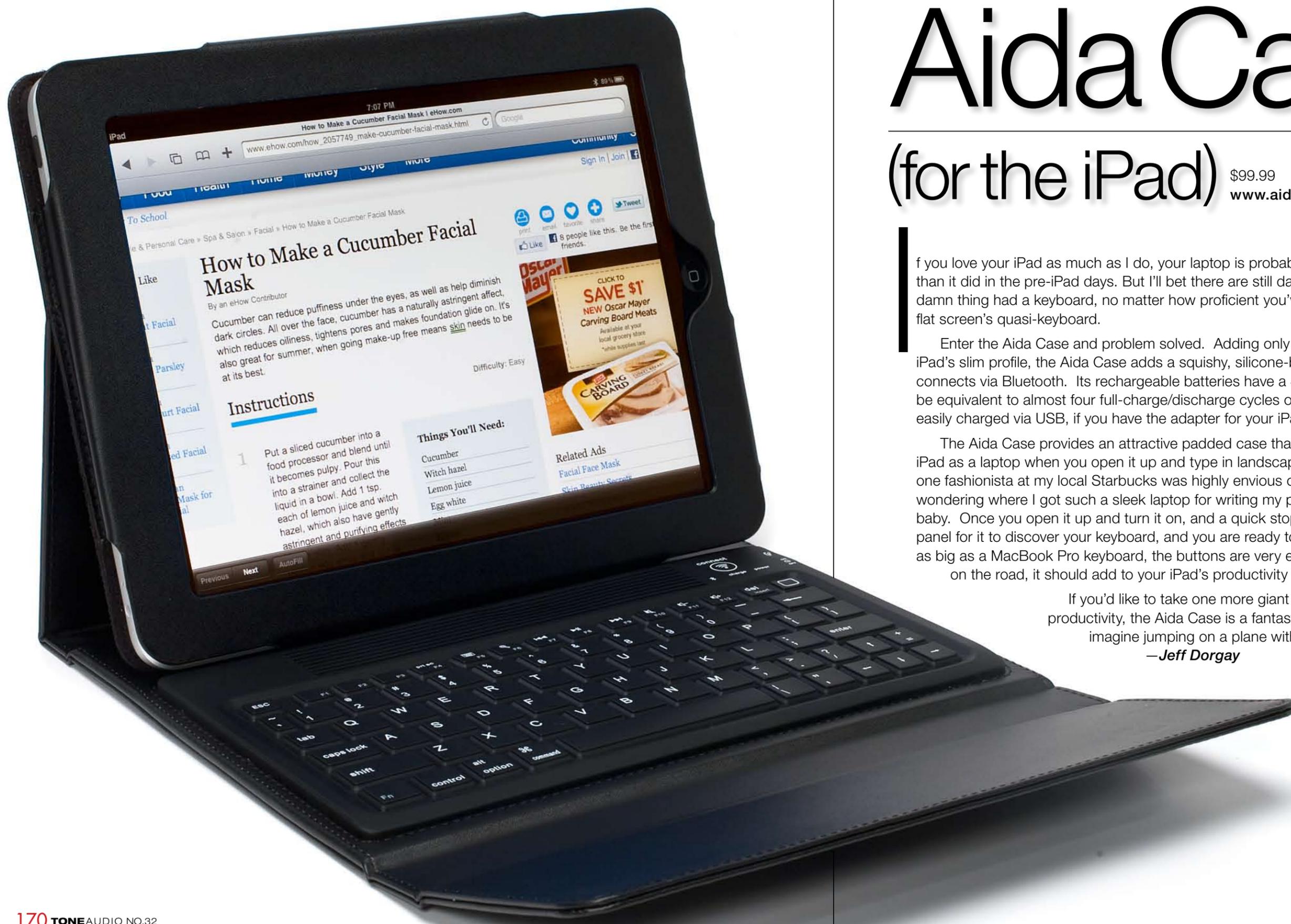
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# Aida Case

(for the iPad) \$99.99  
www.aidacase.com

If you love your iPad as much as I do, your laptop is probably getting a lot less use than it did in the pre-iPad days. But I'll bet there are still days when you wish the damn thing had a keyboard, no matter how proficient you've become at using that flat screen's quasi-keyboard.

Enter the Aida Case and problem solved. Adding only about a pound to the iPad's slim profile, the Aida Case adds a squishy, silicone-button keyboard that connects via Bluetooth. Its rechargeable batteries have a 45-hour life, which should be equivalent to almost four full-charge/discharge cycles on the iPad and can be easily charged via USB, if you have the adapter for your iPad.

The Aida Case provides an attractive padded case that allows you to use your iPad as a laptop when you open it up and type in landscape mode. More than one fashionista at my local Starbucks was highly envious of the Aida Case, initially wondering where I got such a sleek laptop for writing my prose. It's all attitude, baby. Once you open it up and turn it on, and a quick stop at the iPad's control panel for it to discover your keyboard, and you are ready to roll. Though not quite as big as a MacBook Pro keyboard, the buttons are very easy to use, and if you are on the road, it should add to your iPad's productivity considerably.

If you'd like to take one more giant step into iPad productivity, the Aida Case is a fantastic accessory. I can't imagine jumping on a plane without one.

—Jeff Dorgay

# The Leica X1

\$1,995

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

**M**y past experiences with Leica compact cameras have been mixed. The coolness factor of anything Leica has always been high, but the price penalty for having the red dot on the case didn't outweigh the fact that some of their early entries into the world of compact digital cameras were nothing more than rebadged Panasonic Lumix cameras. Handling and ease of use were always exquisite, but I never felt I was getting much extra for the money, and the high ISO performance of these cameras really suffered in comparison with comparably priced (and often lower-priced) competition from Canon and Nikon.



**TO NE STYLE**

But the X1 is a different game. Having spent plenty of time with the Leica M9, I can honestly say this is a *real* Leica, especially in terms of image quality. And for most Leicaphiles, that's what really counts. Built in Germany, the X1 uses an APS-C format 12.9 megapixel CMOS sensor, giving the 24mm f2.8 aspherical lens a view equivalent to that of a 35mm lens on a Leica M9. (Or 35mm M-series film Leica body.) As so many people love the "slightly wider than normal" perspective that this lens offers, it's an excellent choice.

The only disappointment with the X1 is that it does *not* feature interchangeable lenses, but the flip side of this combination is that you will never need to clean the sensor as you would on an M8 or M9; every photo you take will be as pristine as the very first one. While the steep price of \$1,995 might seem like a lot for a compact camera without interchangeable lenses, I assure you that this one is worth the asking price.

**All About Precision**

Comparing images shot with the X1 with those of my other two reference compacts, the Canon G11 and the Olympus E-P1, the Leica is in a league of its own. Shooting outdoors in soft light with all cameras set to ISO 400, the images captured with the Leica had less noise and cleaner color than the other two. Even when setting the other two cameras to ISO 100 (and leaving the Leica at ISO 400), the Leica was still superior. The same advantage was evident when shooting at ISO 3200; the other two cameras were completely unusable at 3200 while the Leica could still produce decent images, with a grain structure that is reminiscent of TMax 3200 film.

Also a huge step up from compacts in the \$500-\$900 range is the X1's autofocus performance. I was impressed with how quickly the camera would lock onto a subject, even in fairly flat lighting situations. *(continued)*



Shown: LTX 500 Projector



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## TONE STYLE

You have a choice of one-point or 11-point AF, with the latter being very handy when shooting people or things moving so that you can focus on a specific object easily. Both focusing modes also feature a "high-speed" function that helps capture action without blur. Considering that the major Leica cameras are all manual focus, it's to their credit that they've done such a good job with automatic.

The X1 offers three different metering modes: averaging, spot and combination. I did most of my shooting in the combination mode with excellent results, but I did enjoy the spot option when lighting situations became more high-contrast. This eliminated the need of trying to set the +/- exposure combination in a hurry, allowing me to concentrate on picture taking.

All of these great features would be useless if the X1 did not offer up the color balance and contrast for which Leica cameras are famous. And again, the X1 does not disappoint. From the minute you open up the first image captured with the X1, you will notice a film-like tonal scale and crisp, defined colors. This camera bested my two compacts by a long shot and rivaled photos taken with a DSLR.

The eight-element, six-group lens offers stunning performance when compared with the other compacts I've tried with zoom lenses. If you can work with the 35mm view offered by the X1, you will be rewarded with images that do not look like they were taken by a compact camera. In addition to its excellent tonal scale, the 24mm ASPH lens is free from distortion and vignetting, period.

Capturing digital images in RAW format gives you the ultimate in control, and I salute Leica for using Adobe's DNG (digital negative) format for their RAW images. This is so much easier than dealing with a specific manufacturer's RAW format, which usually requires not only downloading *something* from Adobe but also means that photographers using a slightly older version of Photoshop would have to buy the latest version just to take advantage of RAW image capture. DNG is much more backward compatible, and this is a great thing for someone who does not want to be a slave to their digital-imaging tools. I'm sure this was at least partially responsible for the high-quality image capture that I was able to achieve at ISO 3200. While my Canon G11 can capture a decent JPEG file at ISO 1600, the images are useless when captured RAW and imported into Photoshop – nothing but grain. *(continued)*

LEICA X1

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



## Highly Intuitive

Last but not least, this camera is easy to use and M-series owners will feel right at home. It features a 2.7-inch view screen that has the most accurate on-screen color I've yet experienced. The most-often used controls are placed down the left side of the camera, with the usual dial and four buttons on the right side for digging further into the various menus. This is a camera that even the uninitiated can just turn on and quickly start taking pictures.

The X1 offers the option of a small pop-up flash that works well in the two- to 10-foot range and a fully functioning hot shoe for either a larger flash or remote trigger. The internal flash can be set in one-third f-stop increments in a range of +3 to -3EV. Non-flash exposure also has the same level of adjustment.

Four exposure modes are available: Program automatic, Aperture Priority auto, Shutter Priority auto and fully manual. Shutter speeds range from 1/2,000th of

a second to 30 seconds, and most importantly, the lens has an aperture range out to f16, allowing extreme depth of field as well as the option to use ISO 400 or 800 in fairly bright light. Most compacts will not go beyond f8, so this feature makes the X1 much more useful in a wider range of situations.

## The Essence of Compact Photography

The Leica X1 forgoes the features that bog down most compact cameras. It does not capture video or have any functions that are not specifically dedicated to capturing high-quality images. And that's what makes this camera so spectacular.

Finally, there is a choice for the photographer wanting DSLR image quality in a compact package. And it's not a bad choice for the M-series photographer who doesn't always want to go everywhere with close to \$10,000 around his or her neck, yet who doesn't want to give up Leica image quality. —*Jeff Dorgay*

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"The Scarlatti Upsampler and DAC are proof that dCS still knows how to make products that are both world-beating and life-enhancing" – *HiFi News*

**dCS**  
ONLY THE MUSIC

www.dcsLtd.co.uk

TONE STYLE

# iPod Nano

\$149 (8gb) \$179 (16gb)  
www.apple.com

Usually the most apathetic member of a multi iPod/Pad/Phone family, I could care less about Cupertino's latest, even though Apple's recent attempt at brainwashing did look rather compelling. The first words out of my mouth were, "The iPod I already have works just fine." But in this case, my first-generation Nano really sucked. As cute as my little pink Pod was, I could never find an armband that made it function well for gym time. Critical, since I'm the only staff member around to help carry in all of those 400-pound speakers.

So I must confess that *I wanted* this one. I didn't even care that Best Buy only had 'em in silver, the idea of a portable player with clip-and-go functionality was awesome. And after initial use, I can attest that even while using the rock-climbing wall at the local REI store, the new Nano didn't budge.

Thanks to the tiny video display, navigation through my music collection is much easier, and the new Nano also has a built-in FM radio. Just the thing for listening to NPR in line at the co-op or turning your B&W Zeppelin into a table radio. Good times.

As for the sound quality, with the supplied ear buds this Nano doesn't seem any better or worse than models past. The staff nerdrtrons claim that with a set of real headphones it has better bass and more midrange bloom when using Apple Lossless files. Do I care? Not really. But this new Multi-Touch interface is fantastic and the Genius Mix function is not bad either, though every now and then it adds a clunker to the mix that is unexpected.

This is Apple's best iPod yet, and that's straight from the only member of this staff that isn't drinking the Apple Kool-Aid.  
—*Jean Dorgay*





# The iPort CM-IW2000

\$499

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

If you caught our article on the 2.1 system last issue, you saw those gorgeous Sonance in-wall speakers that we used to power our HT system. But now, one of their other divisions, iPort, has something newer and cooler – a way to integrate your iPad into your HT system. And it mounts vertically or horizontally into your wall.

Those wanting a smaller screen can use the IW1000, which utilizes an iPod touch, but I say go for the gusto and use the iPad. Thanks to the design of the iPort, you can use the iPad as a full home-automation controller, but that's only the beginning. Retaining the iPad's wi-fi access, it can also be used to download whatever other apps you might want and surf the web as well, making this much more than just an automation controller.

This keeps the iPad fully charged at all times, and you can use it as the perfect touchpad for an iTunes-based music server, provided you choose the larger 64 gb iPad. We will be reporting on full implementation of the iPort at a future date so stay tuned.

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\$5995

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

While a 100-thousand-dollar pair of speakers for a *two-channel* HiFi system is all in a day's work for me, I've never been one to spend money on television. Until my daughter was born in the mid-90s, I didn't even own a TV. But as Homer Simpson is so fond of saying, "TV gives so much and asks for so little in return," I started to warm up to the small screen a few years ago when I bought the first 42-inch Panasonic Plasma at Costco.

That's such a dirty six-letter word if you're thinking about high-end electronics or luxury, but OK if you're a bargain shopper. In the past year, however, Costco has stepped up the game and you can actually drop \$3,500 on one of their top LCD/LED television sets. So why would you want to spend almost double that on someone else's TV?



It's the big L-word baby. Luxury. The same reason a handful of people buy Bentley's instead of BMW 750i's. Sure a 750i will get you back and forth to the symphony (or the 7-Eleven for that matter), but you don't get as much handmade craftsmanship or coddling at the dealer. And this is precisely what you *do* get with the NuVision sets. And at \$5,995, it's worth every penny.

### The NuVision way

David Hester, NuVision's CEO, summed it up perfectly when I visited their offices earlier this month in Scottsdale, Arizona. "We eliminate everything that takes away from the viewing experience." That's why their sets feature a matte finish instead of gloss like all of the other LCD sets. "Seeing your reflection in the screen distracts you from watching the movie." *(continued)*

**"We eliminate everything that takes away from the viewing experience."**

# Burmester

ART FOR THE EAR

Since 1977, musician and engineer Dieter Burmester has been overwhelmed with awards. Always striving for perfection to reach sensational sound characteristics, superior technical features and unsurpassed manufacturing qualities he has led the company to become the German high-end system manufacturer, always setting the highest standards in music reproduction.

Burmester would like to extend an invitation to experience the new members of the Top Line family: 089 CD Player with Burmester's renowned belt-drive technology. The 088 Preamp with the newest generation of Burmester X-Amp2 technology.

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As I reflect on the past few months of what has been the best television experience of my life (and remember, I'm the guy that thinks spending more than about 800 bucks on a TV is *stupid*.), Hester's philosophy is starting to sink in. NuVision carries it further. The bezel is only about an inch and a half wide, made from aluminum extrusion instead of shiny plastic, and the logo is so small you barely notice it. Who wants to have a billboard for SONY or Samsung in their living room anyway?

You can even have that skinny little bezel custom painted the color of your choice so it blends even further into your decor. "We can usually get these turned around in ten working days, so the wait isn't bad," according to Hester. This option adds \$1,500 to the price, but in a super snazzy installation, well worth it. The set is barely more than an inch thick and only weighs about 50 pounds, which makes it a snap to mount to the wall. I used one of Sanus Systems' new Ultra Thin mounts that are less than an inch thick, making for an extremely tidy installation. You can see another picture of the final installation of my set in last issue's Style section.

All NuVision sets carry a two-year warranty that includes in-home service by Gurus2Go, their appointed service provider, usually within two business days of a call. No need to pack it up and try to return to the factory; they come to you. A fairly detailed internet search has not revealed any grumpy NuVision

customers, so they must be doing their job.

### Ins and Outs

Once the set is mounted on your wall, or positioned on the accessory stand should you be placing it on top of an equipment cabinet, setup is quick and easy. The NuVision manual is straightforward and will be helpful for tech newbies. For the experienced video users, the FX5 features PIP and PBP, with full 1080p as well as 1920 x 1080 resolution should you want to make a computer part of the installation. Note to music server users; iTunes in Cover Flow mode looks incredible on this set!

Any source you have should connect easily. There are four HDMI 1.3 inputs, one DB-15 VGA input, and a three-jack RCA component video input along with a digital-audio output and an old-school pair of RCA jacks for analog sound output. I don't know where they squeeze a pair of speakers in a set this thin, but the on-board sound is not bad. But you want a killer sound system to go with this picture...

### Tech Talking Points

As the FX5 has been around for a little while, there are some other rave reviews that go into great detail on the specs of this set. We don't pretend to be a professional video review magazine, but as someone who's been staring at a flat screen for the past seven years (and a CRT

for about 10 years before that) evaluating color for a living, I could instantly see a difference in the FX5 when I turned it on. Just like a fine pair of speakers, I've only come to more appreciate the subtleties as time goes by. Hardcore nerds can click here to get the in-depth story: [www.nuvision.com/technologies.aspx](http://www.nuvision.com/technologies.aspx)

Much like the difference between a BMW that is made mostly by robots and a Bentley Continental that is almost all hand-finished, the NuVision people use their own custom firmware and take quite a bit longer to calibrate the finished chassis than do the manufacturers of off-the-rack sets. I'm sure this plays a big part in how engaging the color is right out of the box.

I really enjoyed NuVisions FX5 frame X10 film mode. As movies are only filmed at 24 frames per second, translating this to an HDTV that typically displays images at 60 fps means that the set has to interpolate the frame rate (3:2 pulldown) so that motion effects will be smooth. More often than not, this is where other sets fall down, offering up jittery movement and panning. This is one of the areas in which the FX5 really stood out from other sets, offering up a more lifelike presentation, especially when watching the last round of the NBA playoffs. I don't usually watch basketball on TV, but I was drawn in on the FX5; the action looked great. And the F1season has been pretty awesome, too. (*continued*)



Nothing like watching cars zooming around the track at 200 mph to help you look for jitter.

Quite a few video magazines use a standard test image (much like I once used when evaluating monitors for color pre press applications) or a chunk of video footage that they know very well to judge a set's performance. For me, it's Fox's station ID's for Sunday night's Animation Domination or my favorite toons on Cartoon Network. Forget *Avatar*; that's the equivalent of listening to Patricia Barber on your HiFi. It features lush, saturated color and makes most sets look better than they have a right to. A full screen of saturated color is tough to get right. Check out the bright purple intro for *The Simpsons*, or the bright lime green screen for *American Dad!* The absolute best one is the bright, solid yellow screen advertising *Family Guy*. Yellow is the toughest color to reproduce

properly because it's the easiest color to pollute. Just a percent or two of any other color reduces its vibrancy.

One of the toughest frames in moviedom to reproduce is *Patton*, where George C. Scott stands in front of the giant American flag. Look closely where the bright red and blue in the flag meet. A substandard TV will create major jaggies here. Again, the NuVision aced this test. In case you don't have a copy of *Patton*, the set of *The Colbert Report* features some of the most saturated red and blue with flesh tones I've yet seen. It almost looks three dimensional in my living room, as if Colbert is coming right out of the screen. The jury is still out on whether that's a good thing or not, but it does look pretty awesome. And with all this talk about color, the FX5 has great blacks, too. Though some sets are claiming zillion to one contrast ratios, NuVision only claims 15,000:1.

But the proof is in the blacks. Not only are the blacks black, there is great shadow detail, which is much more important to getting a film-like experience from your TV. Ten minutes into an episode of *Mad Men* and you'll be convinced.

**Conclusion**

Is my FX5 twice as good as the \$3,500 Sony sitting on the rack at Cosco? I'm not sure I can quantify that, but the picture is definitely better. It's richer and more engaging than what I've seen on the other sets that I considered. While the viewing experience with the FX5 is spectacular, what I enjoy about this set almost as much as the picture quality is how much I *don't* notice that I have a 55-inch television hanging on my wall – it looks like a piece of art. I'd say NuVision has succeeded brilliantly at their objectives. ●



CM-IW2000

The iPad has become the face of the modern home, with Apps for anything and everything. So doesn't it make sense to have a central location to check emails, post notes, update social networks, or even work out what to wear and which route to take to work.

With iPort, the iPad is neatly installed into the wall, fully charged, and always ready to use.





# Batmobile

\$150,000 (sinister villains not included)  
[www.fiberglassfreaks.com](http://www.fiberglassfreaks.com)

This is not a misprint. You can now purchase a real, fully operational and officially licensed (By DC Comics) Batmobile from Fiberglass Freaks. If you've ever dreamed of being Batman, now you can make it reality. Fiberglass Freaks owner Mark Racop has been studying and refining his design for more than 30 years, and he's known the world over as one of the top experts on this custom car, surpassed only by the man who created the original, George Barris.

Built from the ground up on a '70s Lincoln Town Car chassis, there is a brand-new GM 350 crate motor and transmission under the hood, so reliability shouldn't be a problem. It's good to know that whether you are chasing criminals (or hot chicks, for that matter), your ride won't let you down. It also features an "increase output knob, molded from an original vintage knob." I'm not quite sure I even want to know what that is, but it sounds cool. All of the Batmobile styling cues you remember, such as the Emergency Bat Turn handle, the Remote Bat Computer Switch and the Detect A Scope, are all reproduced flawlessly.

Of course, the six-speaker stereo system will do an awesome job of playing the original *Batman* theme, so when your co-pilot of choice "brings the atomic batteries to speed," you can blast out of your own Batcave in retro style. It even uses an onboard propane tank so you get the big flame out of the rear, just like on the TV show.

Racop told us that it takes about six months to build each car, so at present, they only build about eight per year. However, he said that with all the recent publicity, "inquiries are off the scale."

All kidding aside, this car is definitely a man's labor of love and has a show-car level of detail paid to its construction. So you have to ask yourself, for \$150k would you rather have a plain old Porsche 911GT3 or a Batmobile? I know what I'd buy. —**Jerold O'Brien**



## dmitri

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- Robert Harley,  
The Absolute Sound,  
Issue 193



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- Jeff Dorgay,  
TONEAudio  
Magazine,  
Issue 18



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PREVIEW



# The Audio Research PH6 Phono Preamplifier

\$3,495

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

On my recent visit to the Audio Research factory, they were buzzing about with the introduction of their newest phono preamplifier, the PH6. Incorporating a lot of what ARC learned in the development of the REF Phono 2, the PH6 replaces the PH5, which was produced from 2004 to earlier this year. As ARC's Dave Gordon likes to say, "We don't introduce new phono preamplifiers around here every day."

Taking the place of my PH3SE, the PH6 builds on the last two generations of ARC's hybrid FET/Tube design, this time swapping the four 6922/EC88cc triodes for a pair of 6H30's, just like their flagship, the REF Phono 2, my current reference preamplifier. With one phono input and 58db of gain, the PH6 should work well with all but the most low output MC cartridges and like the REF, allows you to set the gain and loading from the front panel, or the comfort of your listening chair. How much of the REF's magic can you get for \$3,495? You'll have to stay tuned, the review is in process.



## Octave Phono Module

\$5,495 - \$8,495  
[www.octave.de](http://www.octave.de)

**A** few issues ago, we reviewed the Octave V-40SE integrated amplifier and it was a fantastic take on the tube integrated amplifier concept. Their new Phono Module is another home run. Featuring fixed and variable outputs, it also can be configured to take three phono inputs (MM or MC), or one high level input and two phono inputs, making it the ultimate minimalist linestage with high quality phono inputs. This has been one of the biggest surprises this year. Review to follow on our website.



## Denon DL-103 R

\$379  
[www.denon.com](http://www.denon.com)

**W**e can't always review megabucks gear, right? The Denon moving coil cartridges have always been known for great sound at a modest price and the DL-103R is one of their top moving coil designs at \$379. In honor of Denon celebrating their 100th anniversary this year, they have just introduced an anniversary MC cart, based on the 103R. Review in process. ●

# Reaching the Top of the Mountain

## The GamuT S-9

By Jeff Dorgay

Purchasing a six-figure loudspeaker system is not for the faint of conviction or checkbook. If you live in a world that allows a purchase like this, the last thing you want to experience is buyer's remorse. Just like with any other exotic luxury purchase, a number of excellent choices in the \$100k - \$200k range present themselves, all with their own distinct character. Anyone thinking that there is a "perfect" speaker, even at this level, is kidding themselves.



After living with the GamuT S-9's for some time now, I can see why the Danes are the happiest people in the world.

But after hearing quite a few examples of what some of the world's finest speaker manufacturers have to offer, they all share a level of performance that is unmatched by the speakers down in the \$30-60k range.

While the speakers in the latter category are certainly nothing to sneeze at and for most people will provide an exhilarating experience, this final jump to what I call "destination speakers" offers the last bit of musical experience that you just don't get with the lower-priced models. And once you experience the pinnacle, there's no turning back. Yes, this is gonzo insanity on a Hunter S. Thompson level.

After living with the GamuT S-9's for some time now, I can see why the Danes are the happiest people in the world. A pair of GamuT S-9's will set you back \$140,000 in the U.S. and roughly 100,000 Euros everywhere else. Believe me, it's tough not to sound like a dismissive jerk when attempting to justify products at this level. All the usual arguments about the priorities of a purchase like this are out the window because if you are shopping for speakers in this range, I'm guessing you aren't sweating the mortgage payment (or for that matter, the Bentley payment). So let's continue.

#### Background

The GamuT S-9's stand 66 inches tall (167cm), and weigh just over 400 pounds each (185kg), but they have a very slim profile. With their rounded edges and machined stainless-steel bases, (which make up almost half of their total weight), they are certainly one of the most unobtrusive and understated mega speakers on the market. If you are a fan of the Charles Eames' school of design, you will feel instantly at home with the S-9. My test pair arrived in a dark D'Oro finish, made from Sipo mahogany, nearly identical in appearance to the S-7's we reviewed last year.

GamuT's designer, Lars Goller, mentioned that they had a few hurdles to overcome in the speakers' design. Getting the curve just right on the cabinets required a large investment for two huge presses that hold the bent side panels for a number of hours so that they hold the shape properly. Then, optimizing the woofers with their wooden inserts and impregnation of the midrange driver (shared with the S-7) takes quite some time. *(continued)*



# LUXMAN

Where 80 Years of Innovation  
Combines with Passion  
and Emotion



## REVIEW

Where the S-7 uses three seven-inch drivers and Gamut's own ring-radiator tweeter, the S-9 adds three 10.5-inch woofers to a single seven-inch midrange driver and the same tweeter. Every component used in the S-9's from the drivers to the hardware is custom built for the EI Superiores series. Goller has designed all of the drivers specifically for each model; in the past, he has worked for Vifa and Scanspeak, with years of research behind his efforts.

The cabinet is formed from laminated birch plywood that does not have an outer skin, making the S series of speakers much more impervious to minor damage than a speaker with a thin outer laminate or a high-gloss automotive finish. Considering that many of us have real world issues to deal with, this is a thoughtful extra touch that makes the S-9's easier to live with day to day. Besides, these are speakers that you will *want* in your living room. As with the S-7's, these speakers have the highest wife-acceptance factor of anything we've ever reviewed. Usually when we have a large pair of floorstanding speakers in for review, most of my friends' domestic partners will say "not in my house" within about 10 seconds. Not with the S-9. Although they do freak out when told how much these speakers cost.

### Danish Design Sensibility Throughout

Goller said that the EI Superiores have been a "culmination of the thought process that started with the first L series speakers that were designed for GamuT." While all of his speakers from the entry level on up share these core technologies, only the top range have this level of refinement.

Going from initial design concept to the first approved pair of S-9's was a three-year process, with half of that time spent fine-tuning the design. *(continued)*

## REVIEW

He has taken what the design team learned here and will apply it to their M series of speakers that will be available in 2011.

Instead of a cardboard or plastic port tube, each speaker has two ports made from five-mm-thick brass tubing and threaded into a stainless steel flange. When Goller and I met in Copenhagen last year to discuss the arrival of the S-9's here, he made it a point of telling me how critical port rigidity and length are: "Even a millimeter or two will change the sound." The main conductive part of the gigantic binding posts is machined from OFC copper and gold plate, as is the insert that presses the bare wire against the main connector bracket.

The speakers have separate inputs for the woofer and the mid/tweeter sections, or they can be jumpered to use single-ended cable. The 20mm binding posts are much too large to work with using conventional spade lugs, though banana plugs will work just fine. While Goller prefers to connect the speaker wire with bare ends, I just couldn't bring myself to strip the ends of my Shunyata Stratos SP speaker cables, so instead I used the banana jacks. If I ever get the nerve to strip them bare, I will release a follow up report!

At present, there are 10 pairs of the GamuT S-9 in the world, but another set is being prepared for production as of this review. Eighty percent of the mechanical manufacture and assembly is performed by Danish artisans skilled in woodworking. As Goller says, "Things take their time. Everything is finished by hand and each individual enclosure has a slightly different shape due to the bending process, so skilled hands are needed to finish them perfectly."

Even the wheeled packing crates are models of elegance and simplicity. Once you get the crates as close to your listening position as possible, tip them upright and remove the front panel and two crossmembers. Slide the crate out from behind the speakers and you are in business.

Try that with a pair of Wilson X-2's. Fortunately, I had a set of thick, Delrin pucks that made sliding the S-9's into final position a lot easier. I started with the optimum position from the S-7's, and within an hour had the S-9's most of the way there. The good news is that this is an extremely high-performance speaker that is not finicky to set up. Over the following week, more experimentation got me a little closer to perfection, but the S-9's sounded amazing right out of the box. When Goller paid us a visit to confirm my setup skills, he fine-tuned the speakers to the nth degree, but admitted I was "very close."

Thanks to a crossover that does not present a terribly complex load, the S-9's can be driven with anything from monster monoblocks to your favorite SET.

### The Listening Environment

The majority of my listening was done with my usual reference components: The Burmester 011 preamplifier, Burmester 911 mk. 3 power amplifier, Spiral Groove Turntable with Triplanar arm and Lyra Skala cartridge. However, the increased resolution and dynamics forced an upgrade to my digital and analog front ends. The Naim CD555, which has been a staple of my system for almost three years, was upgraded to a four-box dCS Paganini stack and the Nagra VPS/VFS phono stage has been upgraded to the Audio Research REF Phono 2. All components continue to be connected with Shunyata Aurora balanced interconnects, and the speakers were connected with Shunyata Stratos SP speaker cable.

My listening room is 16 feet deep by 24 feet wide, opening into a larger space that gives the room a very airy feel, with a modest amount of room treatments from GIK and Sonex. All electronics are fed via the Running Springs Dmitri, Duke and Maxim power conditioners through a combination of Shunyata and Running Springs Power cords, with separate 20-amp circuits for the preamplifiers, the dCS stack and the Burmester power amplifier. *(continued)*

Thanks to a crossover that does not present a terribly complex load, the S-9's can be driven with anything from monster monoblocks to your favorite SET.



Many of my favorite recordings offered up new surprises when listening to them for the first time on the S-9's.

The final position of the speakers ended up with the tweeter centers 49 inches from the rear wall and exactly 10 feet apart. Distance from the sidewalls was about six feet for each speaker and my listening spot, 11 feet back from the center between the speakers. I will be expanding the space of my listening room next year to further accommodate the S-9's. While Goller fine-tuned my speakers by eye only, after he left, I checked the positioning with my Leica laser measuring device and found that both speakers were situated within .1 inch of each other. The man definitely has great setup skills.

As my review pair of speakers was fully broken in before shipment, they still spent about two weeks sitting in crates before they arrived. After about two days of constant play, they settled in fully and the evaluation began. The highest compliment I can pay the GamuT S-9's is that they transcend the realm of equipment. To echo the comments of every single person that has heard them, "They just sound like music; they don't sound like a pair of speakers." I'll break down the sound of the S-9's into what I feel are the most critical areas: extension at frequency extremes, overall dynamic range, low level detail and tonality/coherence.

#### **Extension at the Frequency Extremes**

As the -3db points for the S-9 are 18hz and 60khz, the full

range of the sound spectrum is not compromised and the need for a subwoofer is eliminated. This is what separates the top speakers from many otherwise excellent speakers at a lesser price point. Thanks to the full frequency response, if your electronics are of sufficient quality, you will be able to hear the lowest and highest notes that are in your recordings without any compromise.

My past reference speakers, the Martin Logan CLX's, were definitely restricted in the LF range, so the JL Audio Gotham took care of deep bass and did so with authority. I can say without question that the S-9's easily went as deep as the Gotham and they actually have more bass definition. This is no small feat, but when listening to a handful of recordings with extremely deep bass, the GamuT's always brought an extra level of texture to the bass that I was not getting before. Many of my favorite recordings offered up new surprises when listening to them for the first time on the S-9's.

On the opposite end of the audio spectrum, where the extension to 60khz plays a major role, is their ability to provide phenomenal transparency. One of these speakers' best attributes is that it offers a high level of high-frequency resolution without ever sounding harsh, strained or forward. This is evident any time that you play music with drums and percussion; everything has just the right amount of decay.

#### **Dynamics**

A recent favorite from the Original Recordings Group, *Ella Fitzgerald Sings the Cole Porter Songbook, Vol. 1*, really grabbed me, in particular when Ella sings, "The Lady is a Tramp." If you want knockout dynamics, look no further. This focus of this track shifts constantly between Ella's creamy voice and the screaming horns in the background. Keeping the piano from getting lost in the mix during this musical banter is a tough job, even with the best speakers, but the S-9's handled this with ease; they can start and stop on a dime, yet they retain the body that defines acoustic instruments.

An often overlooked aspect of dynamic performance is composure at high volume levels with dense musical passages, and this is another area in which the S-9 excels. No matter how many layers of music, the S-9's keep everything in perspective without compressing. Even when I was burying the power meter needles on the mighty McIntosh MC1.2kw monoblocks (1,200 watts per channel), these speakers never broke a sweat. While some speakers are capable of large dynamic swings, many fall victim to the soundstage flattening at high volume. This was never an issue with the S-9's.

While this is a tremendous benefit to the Slayer fans in the audience, it equally benefits those loving full-scale orchestral works. *(continued)*



I've never enjoyed listening to classical music as much as I have with the S-9's. Shostakovich and Mahler have stayed in much heavier-than-normal rotation since the arrival of the S-9's because I finally have speakers that can play this music effortlessly!

#### Low Level Detail

The S-9's excel at being able to extract the most-minute level of detail from whatever recording you are listening to and they are especially good at preserving those low-level details even in the middle of complex passages. The quiet moaning and groaning in the title track of Alan Parsons' *Robot* is spectacular, with those voices having their own separate space while the synthesizers just emanate out from beyond the speaker boundaries. Listen for the triangle in the middle of Robert Plant's "Sixes and Sevens" from *Shaken and Stirred*. Instead of being buried in the mix, it now stands on its own, way past the right of the speakers at chest height, just where it would be if you were standing there playing it.

On the S-9's,  
it *does* sound  
like someone is  
standing in my  
room playing  
the flute about  
six feet in front  
of me.

The longer I spent with the S-9's, all of these little things added up to a musical experience that I've never had in the past.

#### Tonality

Towards the end of the review period, I received one of the latest discs from Reference Recordings, *Pipe Dreams* featuring Jim Walker on flute and Mike Garson on piano. RR's Dr. Johnson is well known for his attention to detail, but this could be one of his best. A subtle interplay between flute and piano, this disc will give your whole system a workout; the flute is captured with such delicacy, it will instantly reveal the tonal accuracy (or not) of your speakers. On the S-9's, it *does* sound like someone is standing in my room playing the flute about six feet in front of me.  
*(continued)*

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The bottom line is, every bit of the S-9's work together seamlessly, with the technology serving the music perfectly.



Another one of my favorite speaker tests is comparing vocalists that sound somewhat similar. If you've heard the 90's classic, *Little Village*, featuring the vocals of John Hiatt, Nick Lowe and Ry Cooder, it's easy to fall into listening to this album thinking Hiatt sings all the lead vocals, but through the S-9's, the vocal stylings of these three men is easily discernible. I had the same experience listening to some of my favorites from Todd Rundgren and Utopia. While Rundgren does have a signature sound, the other three guys making up Utopia (Kasim Sultan, Willie Wilcox and Roger Powell) can fool you with their harmonies at times. But again, every vocalist was different and distinctive. Truly exciting stuff, at least for music geeks.

#### Coherence

If you've been reading TONEAudio for a while, you know I'm a panel-speaker enthusiast, ESL's in particular. There's just something about the way a full-range ESL has a seamless coherence for which I've always been willing to sacrifice some dynamic range. With the arrival of the Gamut S-9's, I have the same level of coherence in a dynamic speaker as my longtime reference, the MartinLogan CLX. Though I must admit in all fairness, the YG Acoustics Anat Professional excels in this department as well. Those of you who have a great pair of minimonitors also know what I'm talking about, so imagine a six-foot-tall pair of minimonitors that go down to 18hz and play loud, effortlessly.

Because of its range, the piano is one of the better instruments for demonstrating this phenomenon. Going from the mid 30hz range up to about 6khz, chances are good that a solo piano recording will expose deficiencies in a

multiple driver speaker, either showing off the differences between the respective drivers or problems in the crossover network. The direct-coupled midrange drivers in the S-9 (and the rest of the El Superiores series) provide excellent time-domain performance without sacrificing the phase domain, providing some of the most enticing reproductions of piano that I've ever heard coming through speakers.

This is a hot button for Goller as well as he explains, "I have spent most of my professional life designing speakers at Vifa and Scanspeak in Denmark, yet my main field of interest is psychoacoustics – understanding how we interpret sound and create our subjective listening experience. During a 10-year period of research between 1990 and 2000, I learned that the most essential part of our listening experience is linked with how a speaker handles the relationship between the multiple frequencies from voices *and* instruments, and their reflections (time domain/time distortion), rather than just frequency response."

The bottom line is, every bit of the S-9's work together seamlessly, with the technology serving the music perfectly.

#### Conclusion

My main criteria for a component with this kind of pricetag is that it should take you somewhere you have never been while performing its task effortlessly and transparently. For my money, nothing rocks my world like the GamuT S-9's, and nothing in the past 35 years has given me more musical enjoyment. Much like an Aston Martin DBS, the S-9's deliver the goods for the long haul; even after many 12-hour marathon listening sessions, I was always ready to play another record. *(continued)*

The best way I can describe the sound of the GamuT S-9's is that they have everything I want in a speaker and nothing I don't.

Most of all, you should have to make ZERO excuses for speakers (or anything!) that costs six figures. There should be no limitations. This is what the GamuT S-9's deliver without fail or compromise. They play loud, they play soft. They have an expansive soundstage that assimilates you into the musical presentation, and in essence, they sound real. While they do a fantastic job with average recordings, when they are playing flawless recordings, the GamuT S-9's can fool you into thinking that there is a live musical event going on in your room, if you have the electronics to back them up. There was never a point in the review period that I had even the most minor complaint with these speakers. This is truly the sound that dreams are made of – at least my dreams.

The 140-thousand-dollar question is, would you like the GamuT S-9's as much as I do? Unfortunately, the hours I've put into this review still don't tell the whole story. The second you put the pedal down in one of the world's finest high-performance cars, you know. The S-9's offer the same experience: 20 seconds into your favorite piece of music, you'll know that these are indeed something unique. Even other speaker manufacturers and a handful of friends who are HiFi dealers conceded that the S-9's were amazing speakers. Don't show up for an audition if you can't write a check, because if they really grab you, there will be no turning back.

In a recent conversation with Lars, I asked him what's on the horizon after such a spectacular achievement. He said, "That's a hard question to answer. Maybe something a little bigger or maybe a little smaller than the current range. But don't count on it to arrive any time soon!"

So for now, I am thrilled to give the GamuT S-9 our Product of the Year – Overall award and equally thrilled to be using the S-9 as my reference speakers. Unless Lars can take speaker design even further than his present efforts, I see the S-9's being here for a very long time. ●

There was never a point in the review period that I had even the most minor complaint with these speakers. This is truly the sound that dreams are made of – at least my dreams.



The GamuT S-9's  
MSRP: \$140,000 (US)  
E100,000 (Rest of World)

#### MANUFACTURER

www.gamutaudio.com

#### PERIPHERALS

**Analog Sources** Spiral Groove SG-2 w/Triplanar arm, Lyra Skala cartridge, Oracle Delphi V w/SME i.Vi arm, Koetsu Urushi Blue cartridge

**Digital Sources** Sooloos music server, Naim HDX-SS music server, dCS Paganini system

**Preamplifier** Burmester 011, McIntosh C500

**Power Amplifier** Burmester 911mk. 3, McIntosh MC1.2KW's, Simaudio W-7M's, Conrad Johnson LP70S

**Cables** Shunyata Aurora I/C's, Shunyata Stratos SP speaker cables, Furutech Silver Arrow tonearm cable, Shunyata Anaconda CX power cords, Running Springs HZ and Mongoose power cords

**Power Conditioning** Running Springs Dmitri, Duke and Maxim power conditioners, Shunyata SR-71 outlets at wall

**Accessories** Furutech DeMag, Shunyata Dark Field Cable elevators

# Lovin' the Loricraft

**A Great Way to Keep Your Vinyl Sorted**

By Jerold O'Brien

I love it when the boss gets overloaded. It usually means something cool that he was going to keep for himself comes my way. In this case, it was the new Loricraft PRC-3 record-cleaning system. We've both gone through the Nitty Gritty and VPI 16.5 machines (and I still have mine), but we've both secretly lusted after a Keith Monks machine since the early '80s when we used to make the pilgrimage to The Audio Emporium in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to pay 50 cents a pop to get our newest MoFi albums cleaned. It's not to say that the slot machines aren't a lot better than hand cleaning, but the lure of the Monks was always there. Records always sounded fantastic after a thorough cleaning with one.

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PROFESSIONAL RECORD CLEANER  
BY  
LORICRAFT AUDIO

MOTOR OFF



Fast forward to 2010 when the grail finally arrived. No doubt the Monks Ruby is an excellent machine, but at \$6,999, pretty much crazy talk for all but the most well-heeled record collectors. I tried to convince our publisher that if everyone on the staff chipped in, we could afford it. But in the end, common sense won out and we shipped it on to the next reviewer.

### Neli Saves the Day

Thanks to Cornelia Davis at The Audio Federation ([www.audiofederation.com](http://www.audiofederation.com)) in Boulder, Colorado, the Loricraft machine arrived as we were boxing the Ruby, and the saga could continue. While both machines have a slightly different implementation of the technology, the concept is the same. Instead of using a padded slot with a vacuum pump, the Loricraft uses an arm (not unlike a tonearm) with a soft plastic tip, which uses a fine thread to keep a gap between the record groove and the orifice, creating a vacuum.

The good news is that you can pick up one of these babies for about \$2,400, depending on finish, with the wood veneer model slightly more expensive. The way I spray record cleaning fluid around, I appreciate the spartan utility of the basic black model. Still more expensive than a VPI 16.5, but if you have a fairly large record collection, probably not too far out of your reach and it is definitely worth the extra cleaning power and versatility.

Even though the PRC-3 came well-packed, the UPS guy must have played a few rounds of World Cup Soccer with the box because at turn on, we had less-than-adequate suction. A quick call to Neli and she talked us through lifting the cover and reconnecting the vacuum hoses. Minutes later, we were back in business cleaning records! *This is reason No.1 to buy gear from a good dealer – technical support. (continued)*

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REVIEW



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## Operation

Once set up, operation is very straightforward. The Loricraft features three switches: one for the tonearm, one for the pump and one for the turntable motor. This machine does work in both directions. While we can argue about the validity of this system, I felt better doing the wash in one direction and the rinse in the other. Personally, I like having the option. They even include a little rubber mat to put over your record label so that you won't get any cleaning fluid on it. Nice touch.

I can already hear the Internet forum naysayers in the background: "But what about the dust on the platter contaminating the side of the record you just cleaned?" The old saying about cleanliness applies here. To keep the platter clean on your Loricraft, you have two options: Order the textured Monks mat (But don't tell them it's for a Loricraft machine;

they might get pissed.) or follow my simple method. Sacrifice an old record that you no longer listen to and leave it on the Loricraft platter when it's not in use. And don't forget to clean the Loricraft platter with a tight-weave microfiber cloth and a spritz of MoFi Pure between sides. This should keep re-contamination at bay.

## On the Subject of Cleaning Fluids

We can argue for months about which formula of record cleaning goo is the best. The Loricraft came packaged with a bottle of L'Art Du Son concentrate (enough to make just over a gallon of cleaning fluid), so I rustled up some distilled water and gave it a spin. Much like the MoFi Enzyme cleaner that I normally use, L'Art Du Son requires about a minute "soak time" before vacuuming up. I suggest another rinse/vac cycle with MoFi's Pure Record Wash, or whatever your favorite ultimate pure water might be to remove any residual cleaning fluid from

## REVIEW

the grooves.

Whether the Loricraft does a better job of cleaning records than the Monks machine is tough to tell, but it *does* do as good a job as the Monks for one third the price, and there are a lot of records you can buy with the change. Hell, that's a week in Europe with the change. And it does do a much more thorough job of cleaning really dirty records than the slot-based machines I've used in the past.

The Loricraft also does a fantastic job at cleaning warped records, which is of huge benefit if you happen to have a Furutech Record Flattener. There's one in the TONEAudio office, and the cleaner you can get your warped record, the higher the success rate. Any dirt that you can't get out of the grooves will be embedded into them once you heat up that slab of vinyl. So serious collectors take note: this is the machine you want.

In operation, the Loricraft was significantly quieter than the Monks machine and way quieter than the Nitty Gritty/VPI 16.5/Clearaudio Simple Matrix machines. While not totally silent, you can actually listen to music while cleaning.



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### REVIEW

records with the Loricraft.

#### Helpful Hints

There are only a few things to keep in mind for keeping the Loricraft running smoothly. To keep that thread clean, they suggest that you pull about 5mm of clean thread from the bobbin every time you clean another album side. The minute you turn the pump on, you will see the slack in the thread taken up as it goes up through the arm tube and into the fluid reservoir. Once the fluid has risen to about an inch or so, it will need to be emptied along with the string residue. This does look potentially icky, so be prepared.

Keep the machine level and make sure to set the counterweight to approximately two grams of down force. If you have a Shure tracking gauge or other measuring instrument, this will work nicely to be sure that the arm tip does not bear down too heavily on your grooves.

#### A Record Lovers Dream

If you don't have a large record col-

lection or most of what you pick up is relatively new, you may not need the versatility and heavy-duty cleaning that the Loricraft offers. But if you buy a lot of used records, and some of them fairly dirty, this machine will win you over in a hurry because it does such a fantastic job in getting even the dirtiest records spotless. It is truly built to last a lifetime.

While this one went back to our publisher, (and he purchased the review sample) I know that there's a Loricraft in my future. I've certainly put my nomination in the ring for this to be our Analog Accessory of the year. Stay tuned for the December issue to see if I get my way. ●

**The Loricraft PRC-3  
Record Cleaning Machine**  
MSRP: \$2,235 (standard black finish)  
\$2,435 (hardwood veneer)

US Distributor: The Audio Federation  
www.audiofederation.com





# Anthony Gallo Acoustics Nucleus Reference 3.5

---

## Start Making Sense

By Steve Guttenberg

Don't let all the hoopla surrounding the Green Revolution fool you; America still has a size obsession. Our houses are bigger than ever, our cars and trucks grow taller and heavier with each passing year, and TV screen sizes escalate. It's the same with state-of-the-art speakers. Gargantuan 60-inch or taller beauties are now de-rigueur.

As much as I love the sound of the best heavyweight towers, I've never understood why there are not more manufacturers developing room-friendly high-end speakers, such as the Anthony Gallo Acoustics Nucleus Reference 3.5. It stands just 35 inches tall, 5.5 wide, 12 deep, and it weighs a mere 47 pounds. It's a stunning work of industrial art.



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The Reference 3.5 is, structurally at least, a minimalist design. Anthony Gallo eliminated the expense of fabricating a massive speaker cabinet and went for a more skeletal approach that supports the tweeter, midrange and woofer drivers in a rigorously precise alignment. Gallo's design virtually eliminates cabinet resonance, reflections and colorations that plague all but the most advanced box speakers.

The Reference 3.5 may be small, but its sound is anything but. The speaker gets closer to producing bona-fide three-dimensional imaging than all but a handful of the most exotic speakers. In the late 1980s, I started working as a producer for an audiophile label, Chesky Records, and I have to tell you the Reference 3.5 resurrected not just the music from those Chesky sessions but the acoustical space of the studios and churches in which we recorded. The sense of being in the room with the band was eerily realistic. That was especially true for the sessions recorded at the legendary RCA/BMG Studio A in New York City (which closed in 1993).

Chesky engineer Bob Katz liked to record jazz groups in the middle of that glorious studio. The Reference 3.5 simply coaxed more of the studio's signature sound out of the recordings than other speakers. I think that probably has something to do with the way the speaker projects sound into my room. The image floats free of the Reference 3.5, and even when you're standing just two feet from the speaker, it's hard to localize the sound. That's amazing.

The Reference 3.5 shares a lot of technology with Gallo's smaller Reference Strada LCR speaker, including the very same four-inch carbon-fiber midrange drivers straddling the cylindrical tweeter. Anthony Gallo designed the Strada's drivers and the Reference 3.5's 10-inch ceramic-coated aluminum woofer. To enhance transparency, the midrange-to-tweeter transition is handled without a crossover.

Gallo's proprietary three-inch tall CDT 3 cylindrical tweeter features a specially formulated silver (ink) over Kynar diaphragm that projects sound in a 300-degree lateral arc; each tweeter's surface radiating area is the equivalent of 20 one-inch dome tweeters! The patented design doesn't use a voice-coil or a magnet; the silver film simply expands and contracts with the signal. *(continued)*



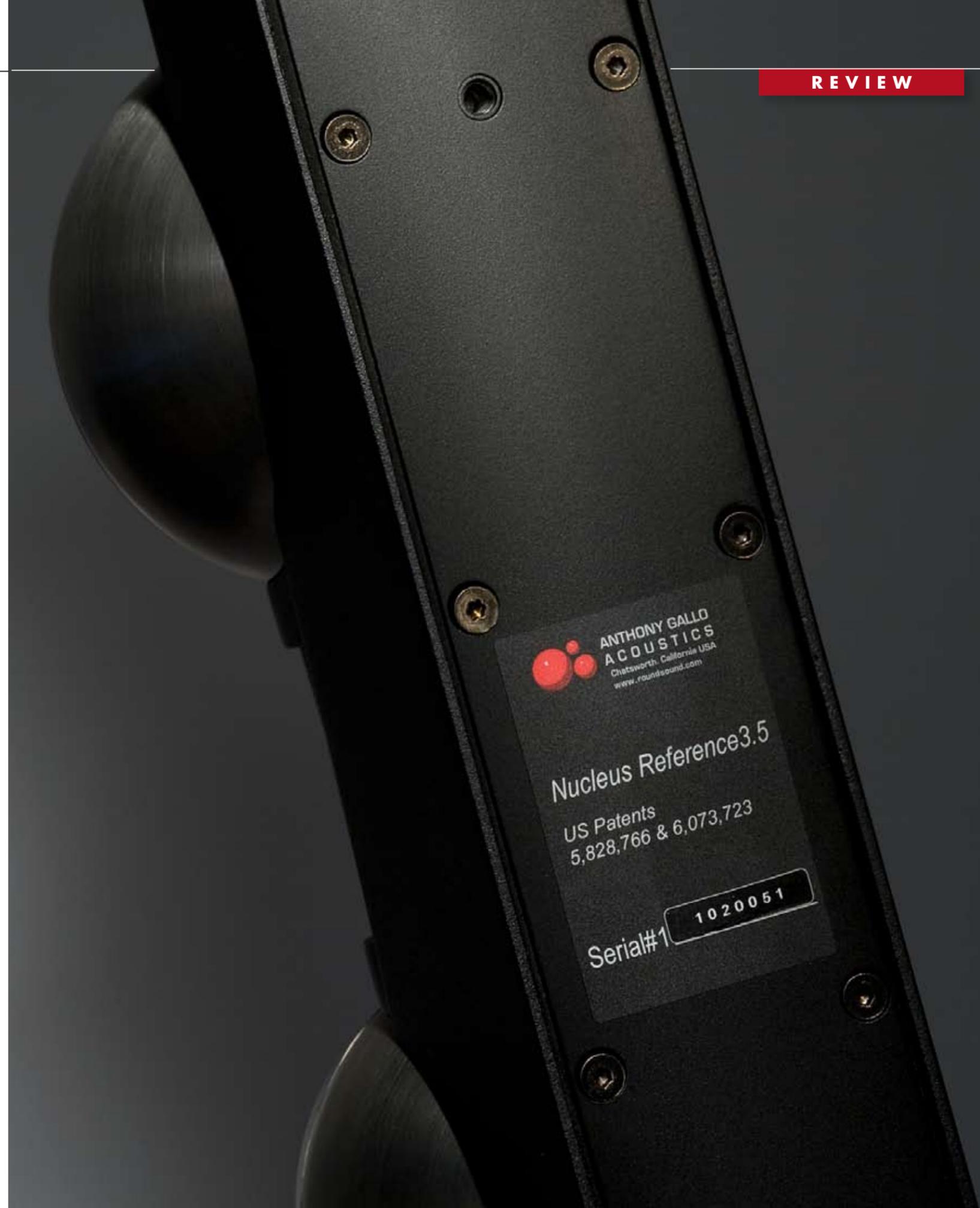


The midrange drivers sit on beautifully machined stainless-steel bezels, which in turn fit on the front of five-inch-diameter stainless-steel spheres. Those drivers and the 10-inch ceramic-coated aluminum woofer *are not* secured to the speaker via front bolts. No, they are precisely torqued into place with one bolt from the driver's rear end to ensure the optimal fit. All three driver enclosures are fitted to the speaker's cast-aluminum "backbone," which is mounted on a Garolite (resin-laminate) base. The plinth doesn't sport the usual quartet of spiked feet; the base-to-floor interface is a full-contact squishy material that serves to decouple the Reference 3.5 from the floor.

Gallo's proprietary S-2 technology (paper-like flakes that fill the interior of the speaker) dramatically improve bass extension and reduce the amount of internal cabinet sound that radiates through the midrange and woofer drivers, compared with other stuffing materials (wool, foam, etc). The midrange driver's spherical enclosures virtually eliminate the coloration-inducing internal standing waves that occur in every flat-sided cabinet.

So you see, Anthony Gallo thinks differently, which is why his speakers sound like no other. When we chatted on the phone, he reminded me that he designed the complete speaker, "The only parts of the Reference 3.5 not designed by or custom made for Anthony Gallo Acoustics are the screws." Even the silver solder used to terminate the internal wiring is custom formulated to Gallo's specifications.

The speaker's two sets of very robust connectors might lead you to believe the Reference 3.5 is a "bi-wire-able" design: one pair for the midrange and tweeter, the other for the woofer. But that's not the case. The top pair are labeled "speaker-in" and connect the 3.5's woofer, midranges and tweeter to your amp. The lower set, labeled "sub in," are wired to the woofer's *second* voice coil. *(continued)*



The sub-in connection is designed for use only with Gallo's dedicated Reference SA subwoofer amplifier. That amp features proprietary equalization and crossover electronics that usefully extend the Reference 3.5's deep bass response.

That unusual wiring scheme was used on the original Reference 3 and the 3.1, but the 3.5 has one additional connectivity option: the Optimized Pulse Technology (OPT) Level 2 input. That system involves the use of a third wire that runs between the amp and speaker. OPT Level 2 is said to improve electrical phase response and reduce the deleterious effects of dielectric absorption. I was skeptical about what OPT Level 2 would do for the sound. But when I connected the third wire, the speaker's clarity and transient speed improved and I heard a bit more low-level detail and ambiance in concert recordings.

The Reference 3.5 is finished in matte black or matte black with brushed stainless-steel driver enclosures. I think the Reference 3.5's form-follows-function design is quite handsome, but since the look won't work with all decors, Gallo offers an optional grille that completely encloses the speaker.

I can't say the 3.5's bass is going to threaten any powerhouse speaker's low-end prowess, but the quality of the Gallo's bass is outstanding. Listen to a good jazz recording with acoustic bass, and you'll instantly understand the Reference 3.5's abilities in that area. Each pluck of the strings and the sound they create from within the instrument's large wooden body sound like the real thing. I attribute that to the speaker's seamless integration of bass, midrange and treble ranges. Vocals and instruments sound more completely realized and three-dimensional than what you'd get from any box speaker priced near the Reference 3.5. It is state of the art in that regard, and the total elimination of cabinet resonance and reflections make for a remarkably open sound.

Jewels and Binoculars, a trio that plays

nothing but Bob Dylan songs as jazz instrumentals, sounded great. The trio plays clarinet, bass clarinet or alto saxophone for the melody, acoustic bass for the harmony, and a range of percussion instruments. Man, the sax's and clarinet's tone was spot-on, and the CDT 3 tweeter resolved the percussion's crash, sparkle and shimmer with rare precision. Moving onto my Tom Waits collection, the speaker easily tracked Waits' vocal evolution from young hipster poet to aging gruff shouter. Soundstage depth on Alison Krauss and choir's "Down To The River to Pray" from the *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* soundtrack was nicely delineated.

With the Rolling Stones' *Shine A Light* concert Blu-ray, the Reference 3.5 easily reproduced the band's full-throttle dynamic impact. Charlie Watts' drums in particular fared well, and Ron Wood and Keith Richards' dueling guitars thrash were in their full glory. The Reference 3.5 sounded remarkably potent, if not on par with larger and more expensive speakers, such as a Dynaudio Confidence C2 or Thiel CS3.7. What can I say? Size still matters. But if your room dimensions are under 250 square feet, the Reference 3.5 might be a better sounding fit than larger speakers, no matter what they cost. The speaker-size/room-size proportions have to be right, or you'll never get great sound.

The speaker under review is the third-generation model, and a fairly radical update from the earlier Reference 3 and 3.1. The 3.5 features new tweeter, midrange and woofer drivers, along with a range of smaller tweaks that make for a significantly better speaker. Owners of the earlier models won't be left high and dry, though; Anthony Gallo Acoustics will offer an upgrade package through their dealer network.

I've been following Anthony Gallo's progress as a designer for more than a decade, and I owned an early Gallo Reference years ago. But with the Reference 3.5, he's taken the sound to the next level. ●

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## REVIEW

### MANUFACTURER

Anthony Gallo  
Acoustics Nucleus Reference 3.5  
MSRP: \$5,999 a pair  
[www.roundsound.com](http://www.roundsound.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

**Electronics** Parasound JC 2 preamp; Whest 2.0 phono preamp; Pass Labs XA100.5 and First Watt J2 power amps

**Speakers** Dynaudio C-1, Zu Essence, Mangepan 3.6

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



REVIEW

# Massive and Precise

**The Acoustic Signature Analog One Mk. III**

By Jeff Dorgay



These days, most turntables fall into a few basic categories: suspended or not and high or low mass. Granted, there are a number of sub variations on these themes with some using different kinds of bearings, tonearm mounts, platter materials, etc., etc., but this is how I see the major lines drawn in the sand. The Acoustic Signature Analog One is a prime example of the non-suspended, high-mass school of design, but with a few interesting twists on the theme to make it a very interesting record-playing machine.



The plinth of the Analog One is machined from high-grade aluminum and the platter is made from a softer aluminum alloy to control resonance. The underside of the platter reveals another layer of damping material embedded in the platter that weighs about 34 pounds (15kg). On the top face of the table, even further attention to resonance control is provided by the 20 machined brass silencers imbedded into the platter. According to Acoustic Signature, these silencer discs are decoupled from the platter and have been evaluated over extended listening sessions. They damp the platters resonant characteristics yet leave the high-mass platter sounding lively and giving the musical presentation an energy not often heard from composite and acrylic platters.

Using an inverted bearing design, which needs no lubrication, the platter is set into the bearing sleeve and the whole assembly is *solid*, requiring barely any energy to keep it moving. The standard setup arrives with one motor, but you can increase this to two or even three motors. Though incredibly quiet in the single-motor configuration, the additional motors will further reduce the tables wow and flutter spec, for the obsessive user.

The rest of the table is very straightforward, with the motor

having its own module, disconnected from the chassis, and a tonearm module that is also machined from aluminum and attached to the bottom of the plinth with three large hex screws. For those wanting multiple tonearms, the Analog One will accommodate up to three tonearms simply by adding additional modules. The best part of the equation for true analog lovers: the modules are adjustable, so 10- and 12-inch tonearms will work without problem.

The standard one-motor, one-tonearm module Analog One Mk. III has an MSRP of \$9,995 in the U.S. and 7,000 Euros in the rest of the world. Additional tonearm modules that are drilled for the arm of your choice cost \$800 US or 650 EURO. Extra motor modules carry the same price and the Alpha power supply that comes packaged with the table can accommodate three motors.

### Playing Records Almost Instantly

The initial setup for the Analog One only takes about 15 minutes to install the platter and tonearm module. The review sample came with a standard SME armboard, so the review proceeded with the SME i.Vi tonearm that usually resides on my TW Acoustic Raven TWO. This made for an interesting comparison, as I could

lift a tonearm and cartridge with which I was very familiar and just move it to the review sample, reset VTA and proceed. In this case, I had been listening extensively to the very resolving Clearaudio DaVinci MC cartridge (MSRP: \$5,500). Throughout the course of the review, I managed to try the Lyra Dorian and Skala cartridges as well as the Grado Statement, all with excellent luck.

My full suite of tools from Acoustic Sounds and Clearaudio had the SME set correctly and back in business quickly. Enjoying the ability to use two tonearms on the Raven, I can see where those with an extensive record collection would want to use one or perhaps even two more tonearms on the Analog One. Worth noting is that if you are using an SME, or other arm with the five-pin DIN plug, you will need a tonearm cable with a 90-degree plug to go into the tonearm. You should also assemble the tonearm onto the top plate, string the cable and then attach the plate into the module. My only complaint with this turntable (as it is with most high-end tables, so no extra demerits for Acoustic Signature here) is that an instruction manual with a few pictures would help tremendously, even if it was a PDF that I could download from their website. *(continued)*



As mentioned earlier, the Alpha power supply will control up to three motors, and if speed adjustments are needed, the cover must be removed. Again, pictures! Fortunately, both the 33 and 45 rpm speeds were perfect, so no adjustment was needed throughout the duration of the review.

**Dynamic!**

From the first record played, in this case Dave Grusin's *Discovered Again* (an original Sheffield Direct to Disc recording), the dynamic punch of this turntable was revealed. Having used the DaVinci lately on quite a few different turntables, I was instantly impressed with the extra bass control of the DaVinci/SME combination. Those complaining about the SME arms having wooly, slow bass usually have put too much damping fluid in the trough, but the results here were spectacular. Hopefully, on our next Acoustic Signature turntable review, we'll investigate the Rega and Tri-Planar arms as well.

Continuing on the jazz groove, I went through a fairly large stack of recent Blue Note remasters, again marveling about the fine detail present on instrument attack and the extra gradation on the decay. Because the DaVinci is capable of so much resolution, it's easy to blur the dynamic range of which it is capable. The trick is to get the perfect balance of weight, damping and speed, much like tuning your room. Too much damping and things start to sound dead and lifeless. Too little and things sound harsh and brittle. I came away from each listening session with this table highly impressed and keying in on this aspect. *(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.

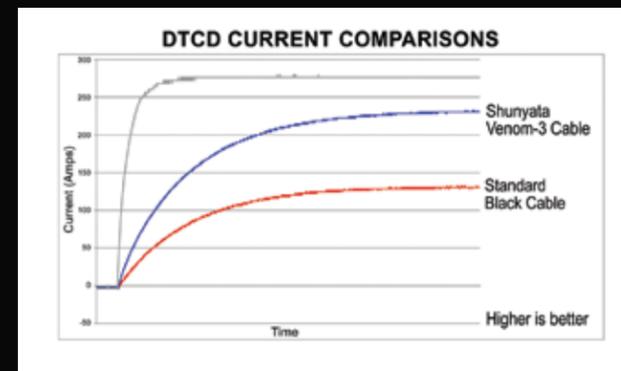
The measurements represent three critical performance criteria:

- 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.

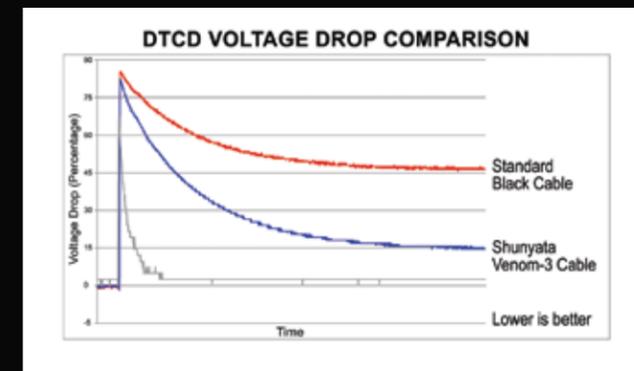
The DTCD Analyzer allows the measurement of pulsed transient current through a variety of AC power products, including power cords.



**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.



And I've rarely heard a high-mass table possess this kind of agility. While on this subject, the Analog One came packed with a very thin felt mat, which was used with mixed results. Some records definitely sounded more live without it, but of course, your preference may vary.

The dynamic contrast and weight possessed by the Analog One brought with it a high degree of timbral accuracy. Listening to The Jung Trio's current 45 rpm recording of *Dvorak's Trio in F Minor, Op. 65* was indeed a spectacle. Violin and piano are my two favorite instruments to listen to for tonal accuracy, and the two not only sounded incredibly realistic, both were able to coexist in their own space together very well. I've noticed that to get the proper amount of ease on this recording is really tough, yet another test that the Analog One passed easily.

Of course, this table was just what the doctor ordered for large-scale orchestral music or heavy rock. One of my favorite classical warhorses is Mussorgsky's *Pictures at An Exhibition*. I have an old mid '70s pressing of the Chicago Symphony on DG, and while it may not be the go version for all classical lovers, I've heard this record a million times. The Analog One captured the necessary amount of force to make it sound more than convincing. Staying in the warhorse vein, playing through the four Peter Gabriel solo albums on Classic Records was a treat for the same reason; this table just has a way of really gripping the deep

bass passages in whatever you listen to.

On many levels, the Analog One took me by surprise in a good way. Having really settled into the sound of the Raven Two, I've been very happy with a similar sound, one possessing a more than average helping of weight without sacrificing tonal contrast or low-level detail. But the Analog One had a much bigger helping of both. Playing the same records back to back with identical SME arms and Lyra Skala phono cartridges, it's as if the room's walls were pushed out a few feet in all directions.

**The Verdict**

The Acoustic Signature Analog One is an incredibly solid contender in the \$10k turntable range, and the versatility of being able to add two more tonearms makes it tough to beat for the serious analog lover with a large and varied music collection. You could have two of your favorite flavors of phono cartridge as well as a third setup for mono! If this isn't analog bliss in a compact package, I don't know what is. For all but those craving a turntable that costs as much as a new Porsche, the Analog One could easily be the "final destination" for 98 percent of the analog fanatics out there.

The build quality is top shelf, and this turntable is the perfect example of basic engineering principles executed to perfection. Watch for this one again next year in our Recommended Components issue. It's a winner. ●



**The Acoustic Signature Analog One Mk. III**

**MSRP: \$9,995**  
(with one motor and armboard)

**Contact information:**  
[www.as-distribution.de](http://www.as-distribution.de)

**PERIPHERALS**

**Preamplifier** Burmester 011

**Phono Preamplifier** Nagra VPS w/VFS isolation platform

**Power Amplifier** Burmester 911 mk. 3

**Speakers** GamuT S-9

**Cartridges** Clearaudio DaVinci, Lyra Skala, Lyra Dorian, Dynavector XV-1s

**Tonearm** SME iv.Vi and 309

**Tonearm Cables** Furutech Silver Arrows, Furutech AG-12, Audioquest LeoPard

**Interconnect** Shunyata Aurora

**Speaker Cables** Shunyata Stratos SP

**Accessories** Running Springs Dmitri and Maxim power conditioners, SRA Ohio XL Plus Isolation platforms, Furutech DeMag

# Dali Lektor 2 Bookshelf Speakers

By Mark Marcantonio

**N**ot everyone needs a gigantic pair of floor-standing speakers, and some of us with massive speakers need another setup somewhere that is a bit more space-saving. While it's often easy to get caught up in speakers that are increasingly overbearing on the room as well as the pocketbook, small speakers can be a ton of fun *and* a breath of fresh air. I have a soft spot for small speakers that pack a big wallop, and the Dali Lektor 2's do just that.

REVIEW



**The five-inch driver cone is made of a paper-fiber combination with visible wood flecks stained the signature Dali purple.**

One of the largest speaker manufacturers in the world, Dali currently offers seven different speaker lines, starting with the Lektor series and moving up to the Euphonia at the top of the range. The Lektor 2's are a great way to get acquainted with this Danish speaker manufacturer, and they only cost \$549 a pair in black or light walnut vinyl.

The Lektor 2's are handsome, understated bookshelf speakers with just a hint of flair coming from the four silver trim pieces on the upper and lower front sides that also act as receptacles for the grill tabs, a hint at how nice the speakers would look in an office system. They look quite sharp next to any piece of silver electronics in the house. The cabinets are constructed of MDF and my review pair were the low-sheen-vinyl black oak. The speakers stand just 12 inches tall (310mm) and weigh nine pounds (4.1kg). Included are eight cylinder-shaped clear feet that can be attached via adhesive.

The front baffle covers the entire face and is vertically tapered to the sides. Both the tweeter and driver are flush mounted with no visible screws. A dual set of tuning ports is placed between them. The textile-dome tweeter is placed in its own brushed-aluminum flange, setting it off against the black baffle. The five-inch driver cone is made of a paper-fiber combination with visible wood flecks stained the signature Dali purple. *(continued)*



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

Robert Harley - The Absolute Sound - 09/07



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"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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# RedEye, the **personal** remote.

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## 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

[redeyere.com](http://redeyere.com)



Around the back is a single set of binding posts, and just below the top center is a circular mount with a nail/screw mounting point. The Lektor 2's have a sensitivity rating of 85db/1 watt and a nominal impedance of 6 ohms. The crossover point between woofer and tweeter is 2,700 hz. The wood fibers in the cone are easily visible and make for some interesting conversation with guests.

### Initial Setup and Run In

Dali recommended at least 50 hours of burn-in, which I doubled out of personal habit. Once accomplished, I initially brought them into my main system of the Sim Audio i7 integrated amp and DAC300, with the McIntosh MS300 music server as my main source. The Lektor 2's sat on a pair of sand-filled Celestion si stands that are 24 inches tall. In part due to the small woofers, the ideal balance of bass weight and midrange magic was achieved with the front face of the speakers just two feet from my rear wall.

As with any small speaker, achieving the best bass response is critical because you don't have that much to work with. Those of you mating these to a subwoofer for a 2.1 or multichannel system (four of these would be an excellent place to start a high-performance multichannel system), you will have more options for speaker placement. Bringing the Lektor 2's further out in the room will add more depth to the presentation if you have that option.

### Impressive Small Speakers

After a bit of time in my reference system to fully understand the Lektor 2's limits, I moved them to a system more in keeping with their price point: a slightly modified PS Audio Trio C-100 integrated amplifier paired up with a Wadia 170 playing lossless files through an iPod Classic.

The Lektor 2's overall sonic signature is easy and relaxed, no doubt in part to the soft-dome tweeter. The 50Hz tuning ports don't try to fool the listener into thinking that a subwoofer is thumping about in the room. *(continued)*

While these speakers roll off fairly quickly after about 55 hz, the bass that is present is defined and well-controlled, a big plus at this price point. One of my favorite test tracks, Donald Fagen's "Morph the Cat," has somewhat accentuated upper bass and can wreak havoc with most budget speakers, but the Lektors came through with flying colors.

My hot spot is midrange. That is where speakers live or die in my book, and again, the Lektor's were no slouch. Diana Krall's *The Look of Love* became a daily requirement throughout the review period with her sultry and clear voice accentuating the natural character of these speakers. I had the same experience when listening to Melissa Etheridge's "Into the Darkness" from her *Breakdown* album. The Lektors did a great job at highlighting her ability to surround the microphone with her voice, yet leave the rest of the band room to shine. When switching faire to classic-jazz performances, piano notes were reproduced in a lively and well-defined manner, yet electric keyboards did not have the sugary, overemphasized midrange I've often heard on sub-\$1,000 speakers.

Dali's website mentions that wide dispersion is an important part of their design brief, and this is another important area where these speakers really perform. The sweet spot is big and almost as enjoyable way off axis as on. This allows for the whole listening room to have a great seat and also makes these speakers very useful as rear surround speakers that need to be placed in a less-than-optimal location. When doing duty

as rear-channel speakers in my HT system (normally, I only run a 3.1 setup but the room is wired for 5.1), clarity was the one word that kept coming back to me as I watched *Valkyrie* and *Date Night*. Whether it was the bullets from the American Mustang strafing the German troops or the sounds of downtown New York City, the ability to clearly distinguish the depth in the mix with these speakers continued to impress me.

#### Easy to Drive

Though the Lektors are on the lower side of the sensitivity range, this did not present an issue with any of the amplifiers at my disposal, from the Wadia Power DAC 150 to my reference Simaudio i-7. A quick trip to the TONEAudio office revealed that they work well with modestly priced tube gear as well. The 35-watt-per-channel Prima Luna Prologue One was a fantastic match, as was our publisher's vintage Conrad Johnson MV-50. That little bit of mid-bass warmth from both of these amplifiers was a bonus, occasionally fooling me into thinking these speakers had a bit more bass grunt than they actually do with solid-state electronics.

Cranking up AC/DC's anthem "Hells Bells," the Lektor 2's kept the high-decibel vocals quite clear along with the lead guitar. However, once the peaks started hitting the upper 90db range, dynamic compression started to set in. Major head bangers might need to move a bit further up the Dali range to achieve concert-hall levels, but this was solid performance for such a small speaker. Like most smaller speakers, the Lektor's are

at their best when played within their limits, and they really shine with solo vocalists and smaller ensemble music.

#### Final Score

The best budget components do not try to be all things to all people, and this is what makes the Dali Lektor 2 speakers such a success. Concentrating on getting the fundamentals correct and making the speaker so easy to drive provides true value indeed. This is the kind of speaker that stays in the family for a long time.

If you are looking for great performance in a small package, put the Dali Lektor 2 at the top of your list. ●

#### The Dali Lektor 2

MSRP: \$549/pair  
in walnut or black vinyl

#### MANUFACTURER

[www.dali-speakers.com](http://www.dali-speakers.com)

#### US Distribution

The Sound Organisation  
[www.soundorg.com](http://www.soundorg.com)

#### PERIPHERALS

**Digital Source** McIntosh MS300 music server with Simaudio Moon 300 DAC, MacBook Pro, Wadia 170i

**Analog Source** Rega P9 with Shelter 501 II

**Amplifier** Simaudio i-7, PS Audio Trio 100, PrimaLuna Prologue 1





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Designed by Yoav Geva (Gonczarowski)

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### 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..."**

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<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 jeff Dorgay

As the summer wound down here in the Pacific Northwest, so have the garage sales, but there have been a few good finds. Lots of oversized rear projection TV's at giveaway prices, but no need for that here. Still no \$25 vintage McIntosh amplifiers, or tube caddies full of NOS Mullard's, but a few good treats nonetheless.



## DBX 224 Noise Reduction Unit

Yard Sale — \$25

When flipping through the record bins at this "estate sale," I noticed a handful of records that were DBX encoded. When I asked the gentleman sitting behind the folding table if he had a decoder, he smiled and was surprised that I even knew what records were. Thirty minutes of chit chat later and I walked away with this mint DBX decoder to play the LP's in my own collection.

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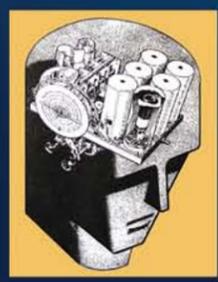
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### DJ Road Case

Yard Sale — \$20

So much for the budding DJ that didn't have enough vinyl to get his career started. All of the records he had were beat, but when I inquired for the price on this mint case, he said it wasn't for sale. I pulled a twenty out of my wallet and he let it go, a great score for my budding maxi single collection. Normally these go for about \$80 at your local DJ store.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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