

# TONEAudio

Music.Gear.Style.

No. 39 August 2011



## Montreal

### International Jazz Festival 2011

- **Live at Montreal:** Brad Mehldau, Kenny Garrett, Prince, and Others
- **Spin the Black Circle:** Reviews of New Albums by St. Vincent, Mekons, Mister Heavenly, The Nightwatchman, Cave, and More
- **Eruption:** 100 Exceptional Rock, Pop, and Soul Records from 1975-1979
- **Beer Snob Covers The Lost Abbey Brewery**
- **Gear:** All-Star Cast from Pass, Burmester, Magnepan, and Conrad-Johnson

**Stereotypes**

Daytona Beach, FL 32114  
386-253-7093

**Sound Components**

Coral Gables, FL 33146  
305-665-4299

**Audio Advisors**

West Palm Beach, FL 33409  
561-478-3100

**Independence Audio**

Independence, MO 64055  
816-252-9782

**Definitive Audio**

Bellevue, WA 98005  
425-746-3188

**Audio Design**

Fairfield, CT 06825  
203-336-4401

**Sound City**

Denville, NJ 07834  
973-627-0083

**The Sound Concept**

Bedford Hills, NY 10507  
914-244-0900

**Sound Image Audio and  
Video Design Group**

Carrollton, TX 75006  
972-503-4434

**Advanced Home  
Theater Systems**

Plano, TX 75075  
972-516-1849

**Speaker Shop**

Amherst, NY 14226  
716-837-1557

**Audio Classics**

Vestal, NY 13850  
607-766-3501

**Home Theater Concepts**

Morton, IL 61550  
309-266-6640

**Global Sight & Sound**

Sussex, WI 53089  
262-820-0600

**Freeman's Stereo**

Charlotte, NC 28216  
704-398-1822

**Hi Fi Buys**

Nashville, TN 37211  
615-832-3121

**Electronic System  
Consultants**

Aspen, CO 81611  
970-925-1700

**Shelley's Stereo  
Hi Fi Center**

Woodland Hills, CA 91367  
818-716-8500

**DSS- Dynamic  
Sound Systems**

Carlsbad, CA 92088  
760-723-2535

**L & M Home Entertainment**

Tempe, AZ 85285  
480-403-0011

**Joseph Cali Systems Design**

Santa Monica, CA 90404  
310-453-3297

**Systems Design Group**

Redondo Beach, CA 90278  
310-370-8575

**Sunny Components**

Covina, CA 91724  
626-966-6259

**Audio Vision S F**

San Francisco, CA 94109  
415-641-1118

**Audio FX**

Sacramento, CA 95825  
916-929-2100

**Media Enviroments**

San Rafael, CA 94901  
415-456-1681

**Pro Home Systems**

Oakland, CA 94609  
510-653-4300

**Overture**

Wilmington, DE 19803  
302-478-6050

**3800 Watts.  
360 lbs.  
Devastating Bass.**

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

© 2007 JL AUDIO, Inc. For more information on our complete line of subwoofers, please visit your local authorized dealer or [www.jlaudio.com](http://www.jlaudio.com). Subwoofers pictured with grilles removed. In Canada contact GemSen Distribution at [www.gemsen.com](http://www.gemsen.com). U.S. PATENTS: #5,734,734 #5,949,898 #6,118,884 #6,229,902 #6,243,479 #6,294,959 #6,501,844 #6,496,590 #6,441,685 #5,687,247 #6,219,431 #6,625,292 #6,744,902 #D472,891 #D480,709 Other U.S. & Foreign patents pending.



CONTENTS



78

©Photo by J. Michelle Martin-Coyne

- 11. PUBLISHER'S LETTER
- 13. NEW CONTRIBUTORS
- 14. TONE TOON  
By Liza Donnelly

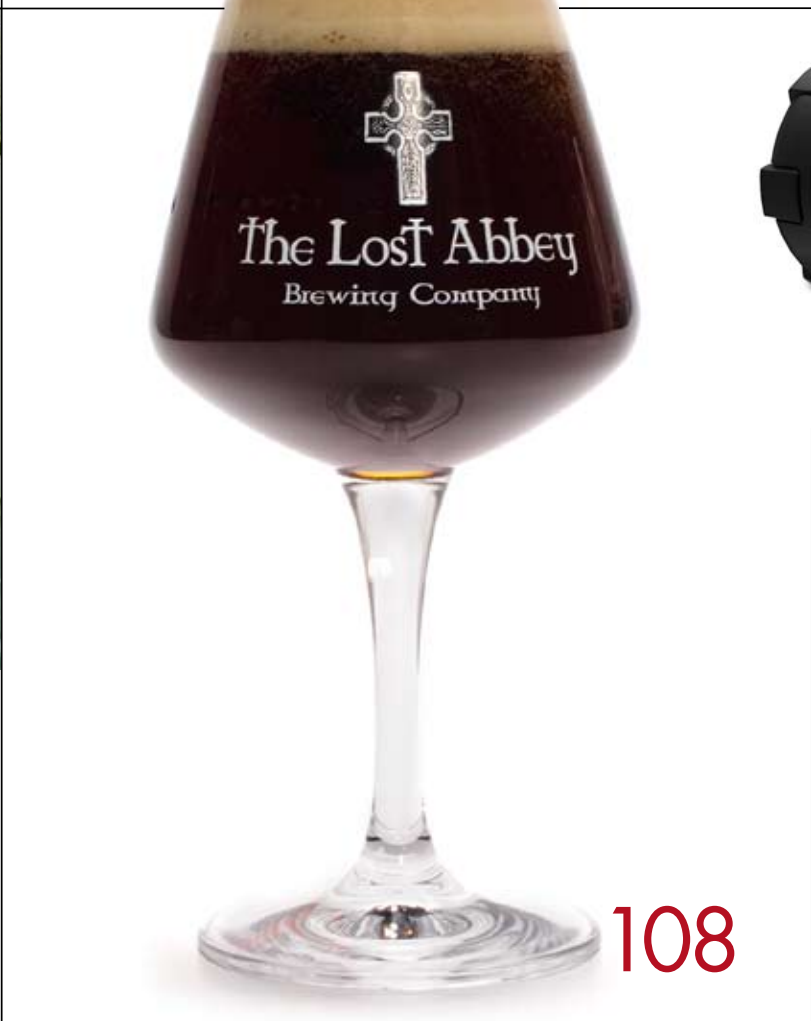


16

features

- 16 Budget Gear  
**Valves for the People:  
Icon Audio PS2 Valve Phonostage**  
By Paul Rigby
- 62 Old School  
**Pass the Nak!**  
By Jerold O'Brien
- 78 Interview  
**A Discussion with Flaming Lips  
Ringleader Wayne Coyne**  
By Andy Downing
- 99 Macro  
**Furutech Cruise Headphone Amp**  
By Jeff Dorgay
- 140 Journeyman Audiophile  
**AVID Pulsus Phonostage:  
Small in Stature Only**  
By Jeff Dorgay

CONTENTS



108



134



tone style 126

- 108 The Beer Snob  
**Brewery Focus: The Lost Abbey**  
By Bob Gendron
- 120 The Dot Mystique  
**Leica V-Lux 30 Camera**
- 124 SpongeBob earbuds  
**Take These Jellyfishing**
- 126 The Boomer Box  
**JVC's Kaboom**  
By Kevin Hunt
- 129 Custom Billet Amplifier  
Handles
- 130 M is for Metal!  
**The Loudest Alphabet Book  
On Earth**
- 132 AVID Platform  
**Give Your Gear a Boost**
- 133 Smart Pebble Stand  
**Stick to it!**
- 134 The Porsche Cayenne  
Gets Green  
By Bailey S. Barnard



# CONTENTS



## music

- 24. LIVE MUSIC:**  
Bon Spectacle:  
Montreal International  
Jazz Festival 2011  
*By Bob Gendron*
- 46. NEW RELEASES:**  
Fresh Releases in the  
Pop/Rock World  
*By the TONE Staff*
- 68. AUDIOPHILE PRESSINGS:**  
Madeleine Peyroux, Quicksilver  
Messenger Service, Bon Iver,  
Stan Getz, and More  
*By Jeff Dorgay*
- 84. THE MUSIC NEVER STOPPED:**  
100 Exceptional Rock, Pop, and  
Soul Albums from 1975-1979  
*By Bob Gendron*
- 102. JAZZ & BLUES:**  
New Releases from Steve Coleman,  
John Scofield, and Johnny Nicholas  
*By Jim Macnie*



**46.** St.Vincent *Strange Mercy*

# CONTENTS

## gear previews

- 148.** Audio Research  
REF 150 Power Amplifier
- 149.** B&W 802 Diamond  
Speakers
- 150.** Sumiko Palo Santos  
Presentation Cartridge

## gear reviews

- 152.** Simply Monstrous  
Pass XA160.5 Monoblock Amplifiers  
*By Jeff Dorgay*
- 164.** Taking Sound to a New Level  
Burmester 088 Preamplifier  
*By Jeff Dorgay*
- 174.** Start Making Sense  
Magneplanar 3.7 Loudspeaker  
*By Steve Guttenberg*
- 186.** One Step Beneath the GAT  
Conrad-Johnson ET5 Preamplifier  
*By Jacob Heilbrunn*

## web gear reviews

- 198.** Woo Audio WA5  
Headphone Amplifier
- 201.** Penaudio Cenya Mini-Monitors
- 202.** Slummin' *Audio on the Cheap*
- 205.** Manufacturers Info.



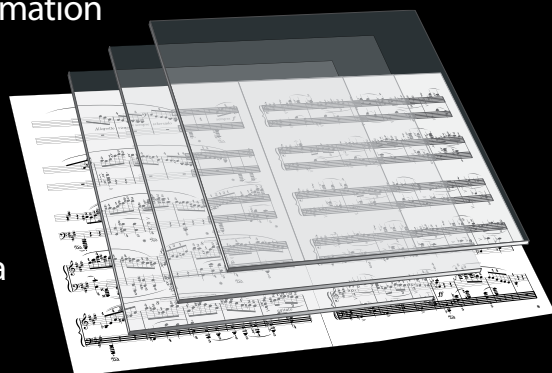


# Do No HARM!

Great sound and great pictures, music that consumes you, movies that transport you around the universe ... comes from honoring the original signal.

An unavoidable fact-of-life: Every component and cable in a system causes some amount of distortion. These aberrations add up, like layers of foggy glass between you and the image. The goal of high quality components and cables is to be like clean clear panes of glass, altering and distorting the information as little as possible.

Some of the most fundamental distortion mechanisms are honored and addressed by AudioQuest's **4-Elements**. Any improvement in these areas of design and materials results in less damage and a more effective immersive experience.



## Solid Conductors

Electrical and magnetic interaction between strands is one of the greatest sources of distortion in normal cables. Separate solid conductors prevent interaction between strands.



## Insulation

In addition to insulating, all conductor coatings are also a "dielectric." Signal flow is slowed down and distorted by a dielectric, making the choice of material, and AQ's Dielectric-Bias System, very important.



## Geometry

The relationship between conductors, whether of the same polarity (+ & +) or opposite polarity (+ & -) affects many electrical and mechanical parameters, including capacitance, inductance, RF Interference, etc.



## Metal Quality

Conductor material quality has a pronounced effect on the signal passing through. Different materials have more or less impurities, grain-boundaries, surface irregularities, etc.

# PUBLISHER'S LETTER

# H

ere's some wacky advice. Shut off your hi-fi system and go experience some live music, preferably at one of the many music festivals around the world. And even if it isn't an event featuring A-list talent, chances are good that there's a compelling live band playing somewhere near your home. Besides, following this recommendation serves a number of purposes—all good for you.

First, a little fresh air is probably just what the doctor ordered. The air in your listening room is getting stale anyway. A little time on a blanket chilling out with some friends will help you reconnect with your interpersonal skills (sorely needed, especially for audiophiles that spend way too much time arguing about minutiae on Internet forums) and dramatically lower your blood pressure.

It's also a great opportunity to hit the road, and perhaps even soak up another culture for a few days, a thought that leads us to this issue and the Montreal International Jazz Festival. Editor Bob Gendron and I recently spent four fantastic days in Montreal covering as much of the two-week festival as we could in that time frame. We both came away highly impressed at the level of organization, even in the midst of major road construction in the downtown area.

Other than Prince making us wait a bit, the shows went like clockwork, and the venues all had excellent sound, whether indoors or outdoors. Moreover, the talent lineup couldn't have been better. There was also a great selection of festival food and, as a sponsor, Heineken plentifully flowed. Of course, Gendron, ever the beer snob, led me offsite on multiple occasions to partake in Montreal's excellent selection of late-night bars and restaurants.

Between the two of us, we've covered Pitchfork, Lollapalooza, Austin City Limits, Dave Matthews Caravan, Montreux Jazz Festival, and many other festivals big, medium, and small. But we both feel that the Montreal festival experience is at the top of the heap in every way, and look forward to returning next year.

So shut off your system and meet us there. We guarantee a great time.







The Most Anticipated Consumer Electronics Event Is Coming...



# TAVES

TORONTO AUDIO VIDEO  
ENTERTAINMENT SHOW



Le Méridien King Edward Hotel, 37 King Street East, Toronto, ON

September 30 - October 2, 2011

A chance for visitors to experience thrilling demonstrations of leading electronics brands like never before.

An unprecedented opportunity for exhibitors to expand into Canada's largest consumer market.

In Association With:

**CANADA HIFI**  
Magazine

**HOME  
THEATER**

**stereophile**

**TONEAudio**

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

## NEW CONTRIBUTORS

### Kevin Hunt

Kevin Hunt, the consumer electronics columnist for Tribune Newspapers, is not afraid to mix the past (the EL34) and the present (a music server controlled by the Remote app). This is a great, transitional period in technology. He's enjoying every minute of it.

### Todd Martens

Todd Martens has written about music for the *Los Angeles Times*, *Alternative Press*, *Punk Planet* (RIP), *Los Angeles New Times* (RIP), and *Giant Magazine* (RIP), among others. The Chicago native began writing about music at an early age, when he came to the realization as a teenager that he would not be a rock star and thought rock criticism would impress girls. He was right about the rock star thing and wrong about the girl thing. You can read his random thoughts on music, beer and dating here: <http://toddmartens.tumblr.com/>



MechTech Leader  
Bumblebee

By Transformers  
[www.hasbrotoyshop.com](http://www.hasbrotoyshop.com)





*"So when did you first discover that you hated your mother's record collection?"*

PUBLISHER Jeff Dorgay

EDITOR Bob Gendron

ART DIRECTOR Jean Dorgay

MUSIC VISIONARIES Terry Currier  
Tom Caselli

RESEARCH Earl Blanton  
Ken Mercereau

STYLE EDITOR Scott Tetzlaff

SENIOR CONTRIBUTOR Ben Fong-Torres

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS Bailey S. Barnard  
Lawrence Devoe  
Andy Downing  
Anne Farnsworth  
Kevin Gallucci  
Steve Guttenberg  
Jacob Heilbrunn  
Ken Kessler  
Jim Macnie  
Mark Marcantonio  
Jerold O'Brien  
Paul Rigby  
Michele Rundgren  
Todd Sageser  
Jaan Uhelszki

UBER CARTOONIST Liza Donnelly

ADVERTISING Jeff Dorgay

WEBSITE [bloodymonster.com](http://bloodymonster.com)

#### ON THE COVER:

Kenny Garrett  
Montreal Jazz Festival  
Photograph by  
Jeff Dorgay

**tonepublications.com**

Editor Questions and  
Comments:

[tonepub@yahoo.com](mailto:tonepub@yahoo.com)  
800.432.4569

© 2011 TONE MAGAZINE, LLC  
All rights reserved.



# Valves For The People

**Icon Audio PS2 Valve Phonostage**

By Paul Rigby

If you were to step back into time to the 1950s and look at the decade's small-scale manufacturing, you'd likely find companies that valued resources, hand-built products, viewed quality over consumerism, took simplified approaches to design, and supplied customers with a most precious commodity: time. Specifically, time to provide support, repair products new and old, and stage face-to-face consultations.

David Shaw's UK-based Icon Audio follows such a manufacturing philosophy in 2011. Utilizing valves as a mainstay in its products, Shaw constructs products to last. "I'm not a keen environmentalist," he says, "but I hate to see resources wasted where transformers, chassis, and the like are buried in land-fill. If they're designed correctly in the first place, it's economic to fix them. We like hardwiring in our design, which makes repair [easy]."



## FEATURE

At heart, Shaw's designs are socialist—hi-fi for the working classes, as it were. In fact, you could dress Shaw up in miner's clothes polluted with coal dust or watch him emerge grease-caked from underneath a repaired car and find his deportment, speech, and manner genuinely believable. Primarily offering amplifiers as well as the odd CD and speaker product, Shaw designs luxury products for the rest of us. The approach has resulted in Icon Audio forging a reputation for providing outstanding sound quality at very reasonable prices.

"I realize that if someone has a family and other commitments, their disposable income is often limited. Yes, I'm here to make money, but I wanted to fill the space, providing products for them," he claims.

The PS2, a moving-magnet phono amplifier, is one such product. Created as a simplified one-box version of the company's two-box PS1 phono amp, it plugs a budget-model gap in Icon Audio's lineup.

"We used a simplified power supply and a lot of jiggery pokery to try and get the transformer in there so it won't cause too much of a problem with noise," comments Shaw. "It uses the same circuits as the more expensive PS1. I used Mullard valves (ECC 803) or the American equivalent—the 12AX7."

#### Valve Selection

Choosing valves is critical. They must be as sympathetic as possible with the typical RIAA curve found on a majority of vinyl albums in order to detract the

focus away from pops, clicks, and surface noise. According to Shaw, valves also remove the distortion effects found within a typical solid-state phono amplifier that, when compared to a valve's infinite margin, has limited signal headroom.

"These valves are also used in the PS1 phono amp," adds Shaw, "and the power supply is designed sympathetically but simplified so the performance is not degraded to any extent. The construction is completely metal. I used to

work in the plastics industry for a time and know that plastics degrade relatively quickly. So I use solid aluminium for the chassis and a solid-steel bottom."

In keeping with Shaw's design tenets, the chassis is suitably simple. Spanning 10.5" x 5.5" x 27.5" and weighing in at 5.5 pounds, the front provides a power switch and light indicator. The input/output phono sockets, ground connector, toggled earth lift (to reduce possible hum), and fixed power cable are found along the rear. *(continued)*

**CHOOSING VALVES IS CRITICAL . THEY MUST BE AS SYMPATHETIC AS POSSIBLE WITH THE TYPICAL RIAA CURVE FOUND ON A MAJORITY OF VINYL ALBUMS IN ORDER TO DETRACT THE FOCUS AWAY FROM POPS, CLICKS, AND SURFACE NOISE .**





## FEATURE

**Sounding Off**

Spinning Mobile Fidelity's edition of the Pixies' "Where Is My Mind?" from *Surfer Rosa*, the PS2 exhibited an airy midrange and sparkling treble espoused by Frank Black's often-cutting vocal delivery and Joey Santiago's acerbic, soaring guitar wails. It all transpired within a beautifully constructed 3D soundstage.

Before I went any further with listening, I ran the PS2 alongside a solid-state phono amp in order to provide technological contrast. Enter the well-regarded A.N.T Kora (£325). One aspect immediately became apparent. The PS2's gain was notably higher, by a factor of six or seven notches on my preamp. Even at low volumes, the Kora yielded a high degree of bass drive, with a slight mid-range recess that contrasted with the PS2's cleaner upper frequencies and slightly slimmer bass array. The PS2's reduction of inherent distortion on LPs encouraged me to increase the volume, a decision that, in turn, enhanced vinyl's musicality and brought forward more information. In addition, the Icon provided an enhanced instrumental separation that successfully improved clarity and boosted transparency.

Moving onto Kate Bush's "Mrs Bartolozzi", a challenging solo piano track from *Aerial*, told me even more. Despite the A.N.T.'s admirable detail retrieval efforts, the PS2 did a superior

job conveying the emotions behind the words, adding consistency and weight, as well as showcasing greater depth and nuance. The PS2's bass output lacks some depth but feels more truthful to the ear. In addition, when experienced through the PS2, bass possessed more body and structure. The piano danced around Bush with a rhythmic lucidity that dodged in and around her singing.

Contrasting the largely organic noises of the Pixies and Kate Bush came courtesy of the synth-based

noodlings of electronica group Autechre's *Circhsuite*. Putting the busy, cacophonous electronic output into an orchestral-like arrangement, the A.N.T displayed admirable clarity and enhanced bass. The PS2, however, offered more pizzazz, extra sparkle, and greater sense of life. Upper frequencies were extended, and the bass felt cleaner. Moreover, the PS2 ably separated the conglomeration of electronic noises into recognizable tones, enhancing the musical interaction.

**Conclusion**

Since the PS2 is stuffed into a single box, noise is slightly higher than that of a phono amp within a two-box configuration. But it's not intrusive, and quality is maintained in both construction and sound that, for the price, is impressive. And the £450 cost is important: Users can now go valve without having to shell out for an outrageously expensive design that doubles as an *objet d'art*. The PS2 allows you to discover what all the fuss is about and realize just what a valve-based phono amp can do.

THE PS2'S REDUCTION OF INHERENT DISTORTION ON LPS ENCOURAGED ME TO INCREASE THE VOLUME, A DECISION THAT, IN TURN, ENHANCED VINYL'S MUSICALITY AND BROUGHT FORWARD MORE INFORMATION.







“In Admiration of Music is the very foundation on which we develop and produce speakers.”  
- Lars Worre, CEO, DALI A/S

It starts with a vision.

Ours is a relection of life: that what's on the inside is more important than what you see on the outside. Music engages every sense, it makes us laugh and cry, tap our toes, and ignites a fire in our hearts.

Music is our reality.



IN ADMIRATION OF MUSIC



Helicon 600 MK2

## SIDEBAR

### Icon MCTX1

The MCTX1 moving-coil transformer step-up device makes for an ideal upgrade for moving-magnet phono amplifiers. It helps maximize hi-fi systems and permits you to concentrate upon source—the cartridge—until funds allow for a further upgrade of the phono amp. A simple, small device (4.5" x 4" x 2") with RCAs and a bypass button, the MCTX1 connects to a MM phono amp. You then plug your preamp into the MCTX1, and you're ready to go. Pressing the bypass button disengages the unit, affording greater flexibility.

In connecting the MCTX1 to the PS2, I used my reference Avid Acutus turntable, SME IV arm, and Benz Glider cartridge to compare it to the A.N.T. Kora Special Edition MC solid-state phono amplifier (£495). On the Pixies' "Where Is My Mind?," as it did in MM mode, the PS 2 offered higher gain than the Kora at the same volume. And, again like the MM comparison, the Kora provided lower bass thump with more impressive attendant rhythmic flow. Still, the PS2 claimed the edge in upper bass and treble, with more insightful examination of both acoustic and vocal output.

Similarly, with Kate Bush's "Mrs. Bartolozzi," the Kora supplied a more pronounced guttural bass punch, while the PS2 offered more character-rich bass output. When the piano kicked in, the midrange felt exhilarated via the PS2. There was also a deeper, organic flavor. Moving back to Autechre, the Kora's greater lower-frequency netted the electronica a comfortable, authoritative swing. The PS2, however, more than compensated with complex synth orchestrations pregnant with extra layers of texture.

The MCTX1 is very easy to operate. No circuit boards are used; just the two transformers. Allowing the MC cartridge to do its job without interruption, the little box is indeed a great budget upgrade. ●

Icon Audio PS2  
£450

Icon MCTX1  
£299

**MANUFACTURER**  
[www.iconaudio.co.uk](http://www.iconaudio.co.uk)

#### PERIPHERALS

**Analogue Source**  
Pro-ject Essential turntable

**Preamplifier**  
A.N.T. Kora 3T Special Edition  
MM phonostage, Aesthetix  
Calypso preamp

**Power**  
Icon MB845 monoblocks

**Speakers**  
AE Revolution One

**Cables**  
Avid SCT, Avid ASC



LIVE MUSIC

# Bon Spectacle

## Montreal International Jazz Festival 2011

By Bob Gendron   Photos by Jeff Dorgay



Encompassing nine days, 1000 performances, several city blocks, multiple stages, nearby local venues, and an offshoot guitar festival, the Montreal International Jazz Festival justifiably lays claim to its title as the world's biggest celebration of its kind. But with music and, especially, concerts, bigger isn't often better. Sprawl normally translates into concertgoers being disconnected from the artists. Substantial size doesn't guarantee high standards or discerning focus. And too often, large festivals devolve into social mixers—fetes at which people congregate more for the sake of drinking, meeting, and talking than for the music at hand.

Yet the 32nd annual Montreal affair subverted convention and functioned as a model that all other events should heed. Not only is it officially the biggest, but the Quebec-based jazz festival is the best of its sort—and, as far as large-scale music events go, might be the best festival, regardless of genre, in North America. The logistics, accessibility, spirit, diversity, and entertainment offered greatly surpassed those of their North American counterparts—and even outpaced Montreux, Montreal's closest jazz-based competitor. Having attended and reported on numerous destination festivals over the past decade, I've seldom seen so many aspects of an event handled so well.



### European-Style Atmosphere and Innovative Planning

Most festivals subscribe to one of two admission methods, free or pay. At Montreal, organizers follow a novel approach that combines the two tactics. Entrance to the festival grounds and upwards of 750 outdoor performances costs nothing. A handful of small-to-large stages hosts music that, on certain days, begins as early as noon. Two massive block parties bookended the kickoff and conclusion.

Of course, a lack of major talent has of late become synonymous with a majority of free festivals. Facing budget cuts and scaled-back resources, cities have pared both quality and duration. Chicago's proud Blues and Jazz Festivals are now each shorter by one day. Similarly, many of the city's other smaller weekend musical celebrations have been folded into single-day events. Absent the ability to charge fees, programmers are left with little choice other than to book lesser acts.

Montreal evaded these common problems. On any given evening, listeners could find at least one noteworthy band to hear without having to pay a dime. Weekday afternoon options were understandably more limited. Still, it's hard to complain about sitting and watching, before the workday technically ends, an international array of performers—artists such as L'Espirit de la Nouvelle-Orleans and the Edmonton-based Don Berner Sextet—that soared above the state-fair caliber of what's currently presented at so many US fests. Moreover, the welcoming atmosphere and smart layout encouraged relaxing, strolling, browsing, and yes, listening.

On the grounds, a miasma of makeshift bistros, shops, seating areas, bars, and tents were at one's disposal. Child-friendly diversions, ranging from sandboxes to inflatable obstacle courses, helped give the scene a truly all-inclusive vibe. The geographic location—it's built around Montreal's exceptional Place des Arts complex of performance theaters and rehearsal halls, an expanse that's also outfitted with a terraced esplanade and metro stop—could easily be reached by foot or public transportation.



Conveniently, a number of intimate clubs were adjacent to the premises. Such advantages allow for the existence of a ticket-based system for indoor shows.

Announced more than month in advance of the festival, concerts held in standalone venues such as L'Astral frequently featured the biggest names. Prices depend on the performer and venue. In theory, attendees can mix and match—watch free music during the afternoon and hit up the fee-structured shows in the evening. Visitors that don't have the luxury of staying for all nine days are likely to base their trip around their favorite headlining attractions, which this year included Dave Holland, Marc Ribot, Brad Mehldau, Dave Brubeck, Bela Fleck, Keren Ann, Milton Nascimento, and Diana Krall as well as several pop, rock, world, and hop-hop artists (Marianne Faithfull, the Roots) with strong jazz influences.

But New Orleans Jazz Fest this was not. Montreal takes the "Jazz" portion of its festival moniker seriously, and thankfully, leaves crowd-drawing albeit middling fare such as Bon Jovi to the Crescent City's increasingly non-jazz soiree. Such emphasis bestowed Montreal's event with a distinctive flavor and consistency that staved off the homogeneity present at other events sacrificing their core identity in the name of popular appeal. The latter strategy may prove commercially beneficial in the short term, yet over time, character and reputation erode, and what remains looks as if it could take place in any other city.

### Animation Musicale

Embodying the festival's diversity, guitarist Marc Ribot played three shows with three separate ensembles, each yielding entirely different flavors and programs. With the impressive Ceramic Dog, he paired with self-taught bassist Shahzad Ismaily and drummer Ches Smith—musicians who, akin to the trio's leader, are prized for their extreme versatility and collaborative ease. Between Ribot, Ismaily, and Smith, lines can be drawn to a truly astonishing array of movers and shakers: Tom Waits, Bonnie Prince Billy, Laurie Anderson, Elvis Costello, Mr. Bungle, Marianne Faithfull, Robert Plant, McCoy Tyner, and John Zorn among them. *(continued)*





Fittingly, New York underground pioneer Zorn's free-form spirit hovered over the three-some's set. Comfortably seated, with a balding patch on the back of his head indicating his seniority, Ribot began by channeling loose Spaghetti Western and country-and-western themes. Desert noir with a sense of humor, the opening sequences pounced and curved, bending into odd shapes when Ribot fired off animated notes that, akin to the doodles on a free-hand sketch, squiggled off the page. As much as any aspect, alinear-ity guided Ceramic Dog, eagerly embracing the liberty such risk-taking afforded.

Subscribing to a punk aesthetic that sonically manifested

via clattering feedback, amplifier hum, and mind-melting keyboard emissions, Ceramic Dog abandoned rules, establishing an unwritten credo that demanded that an artist should do what it wants independent of convention or opinion. Approaching its improvisational tasks with the utmost concentration and comfort, Ribot and Co. repeatedly challenged the audience, time-shifting signatures while diving in and out of sudden chaos, using only Ismaili's sturdy stand-up bass as its navigational compass. The trio beat funky grooves into malleable forms and filtered looped effects through percussive contours, occasionally conjuring the sensation of water bubbles emanating from the mouth of a fish.

Mood and style aside, if a piece's textures could be manipulated, Ceramic Dog jumped at the chance. Prickly surf-rock, strolling blues, aluminum-clad post-punk, provocative skronk, ghostly meditations, machine-gunned post-bop—even a radical interpretation of Dave Brubeck's "Take Five" and equally imaginative poke at Jimi Hendrix's "The Wind Cried Mary"—remained vulnerable to collapse, reassembly, and repurposing. Practicing an all-for-one, one-for-all strategy, each of the instrumentalists showed how sound poetry can be both noisy and quiet, and that, despite its century-old history, jazz has barely begun to explore what lies beneath its roots. *(continued)*



## POWER TRIO

The latest additions to Burmester's Top Line offer award winning fidelity and tremendous versatility. The 088 preamplifier features X-Amp 2 modules and can be configured with an on-board phono stage or DAC. The 089 CD player uses an advanced Belt Drive system to keep digital jitter to a minimum, while also featuring a preamplifier stage with volume control and a pair of analog inputs. The 100 phono preamplifier combines two phono inputs and an optional 24-bit/192kHz analog to digital converter, so that you can capture your favorite vinyl treasures at the highest quality possible.

*Burmester*

ART FOR THE EAR

Top Line  
HANDMADE IN GERMANY



# REFERENCE 150

The best reality show  
isn't on television.

**audio research**  
HIGH DEFINITION®

REFERENCE 150  
HIGH DEFINITION®

An impromptu street performance that occurred on the festival grounds, but which wasn't listed in any guide, shared Ceramic Dog's adventurous and youthful mindset. The participatory affair also extrapolated the event's communal atmosphere. Set up on a sidewalk in front of a church, and absent any signage or calls for money, a nameless D.I.Y. trio demonstrated that mechanical bicycle parts can make for an accessible albeit inventive homegrown presentation that the likes of Sonic Youth and Flaming Lips would admire.

With a bike wheel mounted to a tree branch, metal contraptions affixed to wooden percussive devices, and an assortment of bike chains, wheels, and spokes propped up on cinder blocks, the intrepid threesome mirrored the pitter-patter of a drum roll, drone of an effects pedal, and rattle of cymbals. Handed out to kids and adults in the crowd, shells, horns, and tambourines complemented the musicians' clarinet- and cello-driven fare. Ready for the big time? No, but the Suessian cacophony hinted at issues more important than commercial success and widespread fame. Namely, it captured the feeling of ingenuity, advanced the thrill of astonishment, and indirectly promoted an unhurried pace, factors too often squashed in conventional circles. *(continued)*

LIVE MUSIC





Unexpected treats also came courtesy of Group Doueh, a family-based Western Sahara band versed in Arabic prose, Muslim faith, and beautifully exotic trance that merged Western rock with traditional Saharoui rhythm, chant, and blues. Plugging a tinidit (a high-pitched three-string lute) through a Marshall amplifier, leader Doueh visually bridged the ancient and the modern while the band did the rest of the heavy lifting. Adorned in colorful garb and head wraps, the collective pushed songs forward with low-frequency waves, syncopated grooves, and call-and-response hollers.

The hybrid concoctions spanned Morocco to Mauritania, stopping at all points in between, and reflecting both Indian and American cadences. When Doueh switched over to the electric guitar, prompting the thrump of looped hand drums to increase in intensity, the band's modal phrasing turned into slow-build hypnotism of epic proportions—joyful declarations steeped in spirituality, psychedelics, and sincerity. As the most engaging world music often does, Group Doueh served as a reminder that, for all the (unfounded) hand wringing over the alleged lack of resourcefulness in modern rock and pop, the problem isn't that there's a shortage of enticing music—it's that there's not enough time to listen to all the intriguing global sounds most have yet to discover.



### Trois Continents, Trois Géants

Milton Nascimento's health and physique have seen better days. The 68-year-old Brazilian singer-songwriter moved extremely slowly, his head seemingly willing his body in the direction he wanted to travel, and his stiffness requiring an assistant to come out and strap a guitar on him or take one away. Despite having clearly regressed on the six-stringed instrument he once commanded, there was little wrong with his voice. Backed by a four-piece band and standing before a table holding glasses of wine and water, Nascimento charmed a capacity crowd with a calming range of Brazilian pop, tropicalia, and balladry despite announcing that he was battling throat problems.

Suited for the theater's formal confines and pin-drop acoustics, Nascimento exhausted a laidback arsenal in which pitch, control, volume, phrasing, polyrhythm, and timbre rendered arrangements almost meaningless. Wearing dark sunglasses, the vocalist converted breezy melodies and pensive hymns into romantic birdsongs. He scatted, emoted, whistled, and fluttered, but mostly, he crooned, teasing out syllables in his Portuguese tongue with the finesse that a sous chef would utilize to prepare a fine wine reduction sauce. Effortlessly natural and gracefully elegant, Nascimento offered grand gestures on a micro scale, with bossa nova patterns weaved within Latin-influenced folk tapestries stitched with rich acoustic textures. *(continued)*





If anything, Nascimento would've benefited from allowing the support quartet additional room to roam, and mixing in a few more uptempo salsa numbers alongside ballads such as "E a Gente Sonhando." But if the appearance constituted his farewell to the festival—he hadn't appeared since 1996—it left a definite imprint, one that has more to do with warm memories than newfound vitality.

Three years Nascimento's senior, Hugh Masekela could've passed for a man in his 50s—not one who is in his 70s. "Why are you so giddy?" he quizzed the crowd. As if he needed to ask. Swiveling his hips, crab-walking across the stage, and executing squat exercises that would make an NFL offensive line-man blush with jealousy, Masekela brimmed with contagious joy and charismatic enthusiasm. While the statement about music being a universal language is unavoidably cliché, it's nonetheless true, and for nobody more so than the South African native. While primarily delivered in African dialect, Masekela's words required no translation, as messages of overcoming sorrow, conflict, and repression exploded via a vivacious array of Afro-pop, mbaqanga, reggae, funk, and soul jazz.

Cowbells, handclaps, shakers, guiros, steel drums, and other noisemakers established dance-friendly percussive frameworks over which Masekela unfurled scurrying trumpet fills. The latter's ribbon-like construction allowed them to stream around (rather than through) the arrangements, as if bows wrapped around a package. When he didn't go toe-to-toe with one of the musicians in his band or strike bow-legged poses, *(continued)*

# mu-sic mil-len-ni-um

a place where the music & people still matter



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



One of America's Best Record Stores

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

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





Masekela approached the microphone, filling the Club Soda's cozy environment with a distinctive vocal timbre etched with throaty grit and soaked in Caribbean rum. A man of seemingly 100 voices, the septuagenarian exuded tremendous poise, intimating sensuality on "Lady" and turning slinkier on material that demanded action.

Masekela's arresting rendition of "Stimela (The Coal Train)" found him filling in crevasses with wordless trilling, chanting, and intoning. He loudly inhaled and exhaled to replicate the chugging of a locomotive engine, whistled to mimic the shrill blast of a shrieking train horn, and duplicated the ominous clickety-clack of an approaching iron horse. A fiercely struck cowbell doubled as the scrape of a metal shovel hitting hard rocks in a mine. Simultaneously inspiring and haunting, his narrative of slavery and oppression gave way to salvation conjured by coiled horn solos. Akin to the frontman, the spiritually penitent passages balanced regrettable lament with eternal hope.

Sayyd Abdul Al-Khabyr isn't a household name. But the saxophonist, who played with the likes of Dizzy Gillespie and Illinois Jacquet, is a cult hero in Canada. He's also father-in-law to Kenny Garrett and parent of drummer Nasyr Abdul Al-Khabyr and trombonist Muhammad Abdul Al-Khabyr, all three of which helped comprise Time Capsule, a sextet that paid tribute to the Montreal great with a set steeped in straight-ahead bebop and hard bop. At its peak, the collective sounded the way it feels to look through a prism, with notes entering the  $\frac{3}{4}$ -time fray as a whole before later emerging as twisted, stretched, or resized fractals.



Garrett played for slightly more than half of the show and, as expected, inspired the band to new heights whenever he stepped onstage. Adorned in a black skullcap and debonair suit, he attacked his saxophone with the pronounced motion of a bird sipping water from a feeder. His torso bobbed up and down as his aggressive flights conjoined with Muhammad Abdul Al-Khabyr's muscular releases, forming a sonic diptych. Garrett alternated between violating and adhering to established

parameters, shading sonorous melodies and chasing darker-hued complexities amidst broad canvases.

Assertive without being overbearing, the leather-lunged Coltrane disciple established continuous dialogs with his mates, knowing when to pull back just before the moment that the spooling interplay threatened to lose sight of the main theme. Garrett's impeccable sense of exit—and his boomeranging retrieval of common motifs—caused fresh grooves

and spry pacing to bloom. Abdul Al-Khabyr's sons held their own, yet Time Capsule became a lesser unit when deprived of Garrett's presence. For instance, a pensive reading on James Blunt's adult-contemporary hit "You're Beautiful" bettered the drippy original but appeared out of place and an unnecessarily schmaltzy excursion. The band should've also retired after the viewing of a tribute video to and touching appearance by the elder Sayyd Abdul Al-Khabyr, in ailing health. *(continued)*





### No Ticket Required

While the ticketed shows often touted the star factor, the public performances claimed a more colloquial accent. Hailing from France, Les Doigts de L'Homme made a convincing case for a revival of gypsy jazz. Tapping into the spirit and legacy of Django Reinhardt, the quartet unleashed a fervent geyser of swing-, shuffle-, and jig-based pieces, frequently performing at such a rapid tempo that the members' fingers became a peachy blur. The group's fluency, flair, and proficiency were as impressive as the

nimble details that emerged within the all-instrumental songs. Adroit touches abounded.

Low frequencies of a bowed bass contrasted the friskier, airier qualities of the woody guitars. Bluegrass twang and Spanish classical lines crept in amidst a surfeit of fleet-footed grooves. Natural harmonic stops allowed the music to catch its breath. And the group's chemistry imparted a narrative ability that, on sympathetic numbers, communicated a romantic sadness.

Soul Rebels Brass Band elicited no such melancholy. Simple yet effective, the New Orleans septet remained true to its name, throwing down funk, hard bop, and reggae-splashed rock centered around big, boldly flavored brass foundations. Spurring spontaneous dancing, the ensemble's irresistible sway, durable marches, and Louisiana-fired verve put a spin on Funkadelic's old mantra of free your mind and your ass will follow. The updated command? Move your limbs and your troubles will disappear. *(continued)*

**polk**audio®  
the speaker specialists®

## Serious Fun For Serious Listeners

For 40 years we've made it our mission to make high performance audio more accessible. In the early aughts, we introduced the LS/M Series, a true high performance loudspeaker that anyone could afford. Everyone flipped over their engaging sound, detail, and audacious realism. Now we're back to change the paradigm again with the next generation of these legendary performers, re-engineered from the ground up for a superior sonic experience.

The new LS/M Series is packed with our newly designed, next generation components like dynamic Cassini oval woofers and super-accurate ring radiator tweeters and

presented in boldly sculpted wood enclosures. Whether you're seriously into music on vinyl or MP3, or movies on BluRay or DVD, the LS/M is capable of astonishing realism at lifelike volume levels.

The LS/M Series is the loudspeaker for the serious listener, but it's also seriously fun to listen to. If you've always wanted to hear your favorite song in a way you've never heard it before, we encourage you to experience the surprising, new LS/M Series from Polk Audio.

Visit [www.polkaudio.com](http://www.polkaudio.com) for a dealer near you.



Polk Audio is a DEI Holdings, Inc. Company. Polk Audio, Polk and The Speaker Specialists are registered trademarks of Polk Audio, Inc.





# The most extraordinary museum you'll ever hear.

Enter MIM and discover an incomparable new experience that will delight your senses. With more than 3,000 instruments and cultural treasures on display, you'll enjoy music from every country in the world using the latest audio and visual technology. See people playing their native instruments. Attend a live performance in the state-of-the-art MIM Music Theater. Even make a little music of your own.

It's a fun, new way to discover the powerful and uniting force of the world's music.

**MIM**  
MUSICAL INSTRUMENT MUSEUM

[www.theMIM.org](http://www.theMIM.org) | 480.478.6000

4725 East Mayo Blvd., Phoenix, AZ 85050

Corner of Tatum & Mayo Blvds., just south of the 101 in Phoenix

HOURS: Mon., Tue., Wed., Sat. 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.  
Thu., Fri. 9 a.m. – 9 p.m. | Sun. 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.



The most riveting example of the Crescent City's expansive reach and cross-cultural mélange arrived via Galactic. A jam band by trade, the collective never drifted into *ennuyeux* territories or pointlessly wandered off for the selfish sake of exhibiting any individualistic skill. Rather, the heat-searing organs, traded-off verses, wah-wah guitars, and creeping Rhodes pianos coalesced into a cohesive entity, the blend of hip-hop, funk, pop, and post-bop rolling, bouncing, and chortling to wondrous effect. Galactic also carried an ace up its ruffled

sleeve: Former Living Colour vocalist Corey Glover.

Sporting a sweater vest and pork-pie hat, Glover bore little resemblance to the singer that, in the late 1980s, rocked out bright Body Glove spandex and long dreadlocks. But his voice remains as potent as ever. Whether a temporary or permanent addition, Galactic has stumbled upon a performer that ideally complements its fluctuating sonic potpourri, the singer matching the high-energy state of its horn-driven fusion. Glover erupted during a jumpy, harmonica-drenched take on Led Zeppelin's "How

Many More Times" and inhabited a cover of Allen Toussaint's "Going Down Slowly" as the band freely indulged in brassy blowouts and sassy tangents.

Already armed with formidable Mardi Gras party-starting potential, the R&B gained a leading edge it heretofore lacked, as Glover's strong pipes and effervescent falsetto carried an interpretation of the Lee Dorsey/Toussaint gem "Night People" later into a weekday evening that, refreshingly, witnessed thousands of people ogling the proceedings as if it was Saturday night. What a bonus. (*continued*)





## Hear More Music.

Meridian Sooloos' powerful media server system makes any digital music collection a joy to explore. Not only do you have instant access to your entire library with an intuitive touch-screen interface: you'll also rediscover forgotten albums as the system finds music for you based on what you want to hear. Meridian's DSP Active Loudspeakers combine 30 years of high performance digital loudspeaker excellence in a simple, elegant design. Bring them together, and you have an astonishing listening experience.

The Meridian Sooloos Control 10 connects quickly and easily to your Meridian DSP Active Loudspeakers to form a complete digital audio system in a single room – or throughout your entire home.

It's the ultimate music system for simplicity and elegance, power and performance, enjoyment and discovery.

Call 404-344-7111 to arrange for a personal demonstration of Meridian's distributed audio, home theatre and music server systems, or visit [www.meridian-audio.com](http://www.meridian-audio.com) to learn more about Meridian products.

*"A complete reinvention of how we relate to music"* —ESQUIRE

*"Arguably the most intuitive and rewarding piece of audio technology ever conceived"* —WHAT HI FI

*"The Sooloos system gave us a musical epiphany... it's sheer genius"* —STEREOPHILE

*"Sooloos' ability to instantly sort through your library and present to you exactly the music you might want to hear at any particular moment borders on the magical..."*

—THE ABSOLUTE SOUND

**MERIDIAN** sooloos

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

LIVE MUSIC



Jack Vartoogian/Front Row Photos

### Lessons in Musicology

Brad Mehldau and Joshua Redman's artistic relationship stretches back nearly two decades and includes several recordings, and while an established history never guarantees against the possibility of an off-night or uninspired collaboration, the pairing of the pianist and saxophonist/clarinetist ranked among the festival's most highly anticipated shows. By the time the friends left their mark onstage, the sold-out event also rated as one of the soiree's finest moments.

Proving the ultimate accompanist, the photo-phobic Mehldau deftly slipped into the background when Redman sought to surface, altering keystrokes and the intensity of his finger movements as to delicately cleave chords in halves, thirds, and quarters. What transpired often resembled cigarette smoke, the music wafting into the air as puffs, wisps, clouds, and trails. Mehldau's hands conducted a private symphony—his left digits bolstering rhythms as his right roamed the grand's black-and-white nexus of keys, the angularity of his seated position a metaphor for the manner

in which the sonic contours visibly vibrated through his shoulders, wrists, neck, and elbows. There would be no ignoring the fine symmetry, or he and Redman's pointillism. No small features, miniature gestures, or microdynamics were overlooked. *(continued)*

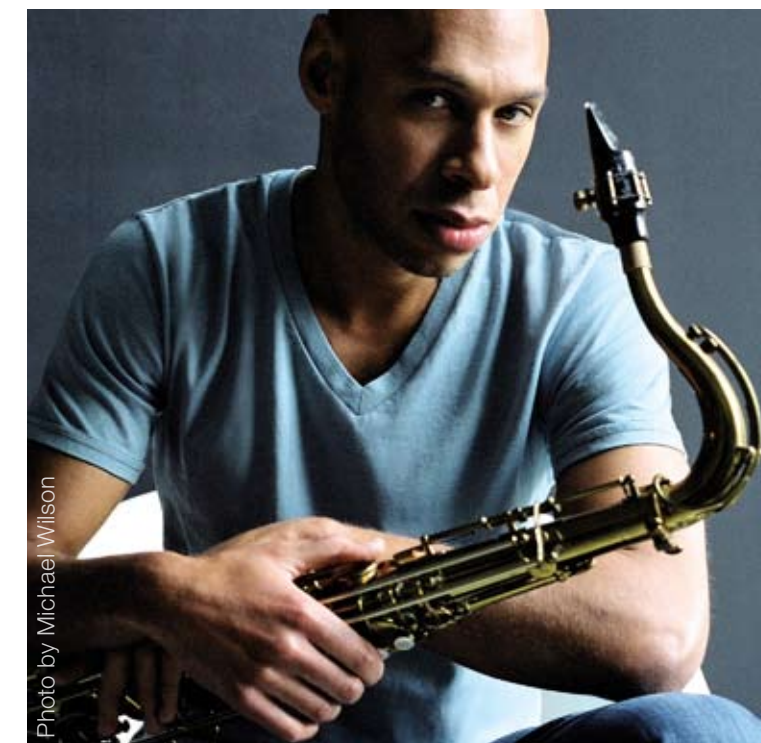


Photo by Michael Wilson



On politely mannered, classically informed pieces, the duo's balladic agility and indefatigable elegance spoke of emotional drama and unseen fractures—regret and sorrow pouring from pindrop-quiet soliloquies and ornate sequences that settled like raindrops on a stained-glass window. A patient and sympathetic foil, Redman waited for his partner to develop a languid theme, then gracefully streaked woodwind entrails over the melody, the sweetened contrapuntal communication murmuring the language of an exotic tone poem. Not that the pair avoided tension.

Tandem work during a standing ovation-worthy rendition of Charlie Parker's "Cheryl" reminded fans that they were in the presence of greatness. Mehldau met Redman's rolling, bluesy, hip-checking saxophone flights with boogie-woogie and R&B inertia, the two musicians zig-zagging across an imaginary chess board, each chasing the other, each avoiding entrapment. The cat-and-mouse games appeared to unlock a youthful verve within each of the 40-something players. As the long-time colleagues toyed with friction, theory, and contrast, one got the sense that, in their minds, Mehldau and Redman were back in a rehearsal hall somewhere out east, where nobody was listening save for oblivious passersby strolling underneath an open window.

Prince abides by a similarly casual approach when staging impromptu club shows. And when the Purple One asked, just two weeks before the festival commenced, if he could zoom in for a few nights and play two nights at the 2000-capacity

Metropolis, the 2011 version of the Jazz Festival officially scored its coup. Fresh off a 21-night stand in Los Angeles, the enigmatic performer has of late experienced a live rebirth that's eluded him in the studio. Lasting more than three hours and until 3:30 in the morning, Prince's second Montreal concert added to his legend.

For the uninitiated, watching Prince hold court at one of his intimate affairs can lead to potential frustration. He's in no hurry, meaning that encores are multiple and buttressed by long breaks. And he still hasn't let go of trotting out his latest female "find" to handle several

songs—a practice that usually serves as a time filler. Both delay tactics occurred on this night. Yet the Minneapolis native's unrivaled showmanship and tireless gusto more than atoned for any inconveniences. As did the element of surprise.

Unlike his arena dates, Prince views the club gigs as gatherings at which to delve into rare material, unreleased songs, and covers. Save for "Pop Life," "Kiss," "Controversy," and the closing "Purple Rain," the entertaining multi-instrumentalist steered clear of Top 40 fare but not the braggadocio reputation it brought him. "We're going to party for three days—that's how many hits I've got.

You think I'm playin'?" he teased, a wry grin showering his face, the statement less an exaggeration and more of his way of telling everyone he was ready to meet every expectation and deliver on his genius-level talent.

Indeed, a flashy distortion-spiked solo guitar break during which he subtly quoted Motley Crue's "Dr. Feelgood" (no joke) surpassed nearly every vocal track he attempted. Throw in an atomic bass solo, complete with classic rock-star poses, percussive slap-string techniques, and acrobatic between-the-legs moves, and Prince owned Montreal. He damn well knew it. Maceo Parker

blowing hard and steady on a take of the JB's "Pass the Peas" and a sultry, breathtaking "Shhhh"? Gravy. Non-stop funk and uninhibited dance flourishes, repetitive challenges to keep up with his energy, and a Fender Telecaster guitar made to sound as if it came from another planet? Priceless.

Deviating from prearranged formulas, Prince viewed every song as an opportunity to top what had come before. You thought "Musicology" swaggered and caused hips to gyrate? Get a load of the synthesized "Freak Out." Dig the guitar sustain on "Take Me With You." Tell Janet Jackson she needs to reclaim

"What Have You Done for Me Lately?" as her own. When, after finishing tearing up Wild Cherry's "Play That Funky Music"—as fitting a theme as any for the epic concert—Prince casually tossed his Telecaster into the crowd and nonchalantly headed for stage right, it represented one of the most perfect and unflappably cool exits any artist could ever devise. Prince Rogers Nelson, your table is ready. ●





# New Releases

By the TONE Staff



©Photo by Tina Tyrell

A glimpse into the mind of Annie Clark can be had with relative ease. Scan the titles of her latest effort, *Strange Mercy*, her third, and the word “Cheerleader” is one that stands out—not for its images of youthful enthusiasm but for the terms that surround it. The song that precedes “Cheerleader”? That one is called “Cruel.” And the one after? That one is labeled “Surgeon.” It doesn’t take much detective work to discern that Clark’s “Cheerleader” probably isn’t going to be of the rah-rah kind.

To enter a world conjured by Clark, who records under the St. Vincent moniker, is often to find an aural landscape where the familiar becomes foreign. As evidenced by the numerous Disney flourishes that dot her work, she has the talent to compose an orchestral score as soft as a stuffed Winnie the Pooh. Yet she also possesses the destructive tendencies of the fiercest of hard-rock guitarists.

Her 2008 album *Actor* is a collection of mini-symphonies, with dark fairy-tale imagery jarring with more computer-constructed classical tendencies. *Strange Mercy*, however, sees Clark in something of a tug-of-war. The orchestrations are no less ornate, but there’s less of an effort to disguise their synthetic nature. Yet rather than feel more programmed, the album seems slightly stripped down—an anxiously tentative attempt to peel back the surface.

“I don’t know what good it serves, pouring my personal dirt,” Clark sings on “Cheerleader,” a hands-in-the-air declaration before she does it anyway, knocking away any electronic hiss with riffs that hit the surface like one meteor after another. The feel isn’t completely confessional, as shady police officers occupy the murky digital beats of the title track. Still, “Neutered Fruit” feels brutally honest for Clark. “Did you ever really care for me?” she asks, the song unfolding like a time-lapsed trip through a lifetime of sounds as childlike choirs and Prince-like jazzy excursions eventually fold in on themselves.

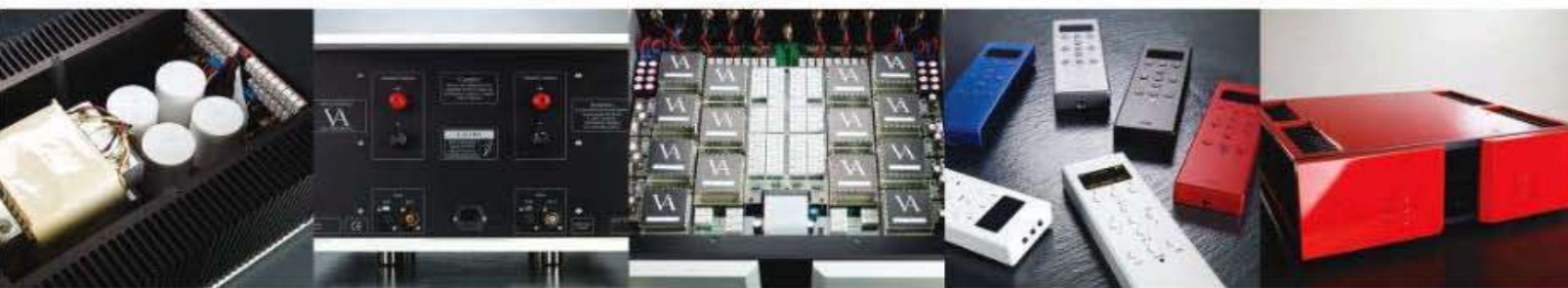
When she wants, the diminutive artist can sing with a disarming grace. But more often than not, Clark doesn’t see the need to waste her time on such trivialities as sweetness. How else to explain the vocal overlays that turn the warm into something caustic on the album-opening “Chloe in the Afternoon,” or the ghastly howls that disrupt the nursery-rhyme coyness of the verses on “Hysterical Strength”?

At times, Clark’s atmospheric experimentations can get the better of her, as *Strange Mercy* lags slightly in the middle. It’s not a quibble so much as an acknowledgement that the exuberant intensity of “Cruel” and jangly psychedelics of “Northern Lights” are early emotional highs. But this is still weirdness that’s engaging throughout. Toward album’s end, Clark laments that she’s not invited to the party she can hear through the wall, momentarily forgetting that it’s the outsiders who are often more alluring. —**Todd Martens**



**St. Vincent**  
*Strange Mercy*  
4AD, LP or CD





**P**acked with violent imagery and musical nods to the classic doo-wop era, Mister Heavenly's debut album, *Out of Love*, sounds as though it could have sprung forth fully formed from filmmaker David Lynch's imagination.

On the swooning "Your Girl," the indie rockers deliver lines like "You got a gash, let's get that sewn" atop a slow-dancing 1950s groove, while the twinkling "Hold My Hand" opens as a sincere love song ("I'll stroke your hair/Put your head on my shoulder") before taking a significantly darker turn ("Don't try to leave/Feral dogs have us surrounded").

The band, which gained a bit of notoriety late in 2010 by inviting actor Michael Cera to tag along as a touring bassist, brings together frontmen Ryan "Honus Honus" Kattner (Man Man) and Nicholas Thorburn (The Unicorns, Islands) along with Modest Mouse drummer Joe Plummer. The crew's musical output is every bit as bat shit and unpredictable as its combined DNA suggests. There are definite strains of Modest Mouse in the chunky guitar march of opener "Bronx Sniper." "Reggae Pie," by contrast, flirts with dub, the hypnotic groove pulsating as though it were emanating from a private cabana on some tropical isle—and dig that not-so-subtle nod to Soul II Soul's "Back to Life (However Do You Want Me)."

Elsewhere, the trio experiments with surf-rock on "Harm You," a dreamy bit of ocean-pop with lyrics—"Close your eyes/Don't turn around/I won't harm you"—that would have most women digging in their purses for pepper spray. Equally twisted is "Charlyne," a piano-pop nugget so undeniably jaunty that it nearly conceals the decaying heart at the tune's core.

Like a Ripley's Believe It or Not museum, oddities abound, from the woozy "Pineapple Girl," which takes its inspiration from a relatively obscure event (the late 80s pen-pal relationship between 10-year-old Michigan resident Sarah York and Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega) to "Diddy Eyes," a dreamy throwback whose nonsensical chorus ("She has diddy eyes, diddy eyes") cuts against the more straightforward musical backdrop. Indeed, there are times where it sounds as though this joyously twisted effort took its inspiration from a single line off the album-closing "Wise Men": "I tried so hard to keep my head on straight, but I'm cracking like a coconut anyway."—**Andy Downing**

**MUSIC**



©Photo by Jacqueline Di Milia



**Mister Heavenly**  
*Out of Love*  
Sub Pop, LP or CD

**manufacturer**  
Vitus Audio, Denmark  
+45 9626 8046  
[www.vitusaudio.com](http://www.vitusaudio.com)

**distributor**  
For details of your nearest  
Distributor/Dealer, please  
visit [www.vitusaudio.com](http://www.vitusaudio.com)

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





©Photo by Shawn Brackbill

One might be better off not knowing the backstory to this album. Yet pop-culture secrets aren't well kept in 2011, so let's get it out of the way: *Only in Dreams* is a record about death, much of it written while the lead singer's mother was falling prey to terminal brain cancer. Now try and forget that.



### Dum Dum Girls

*Only in Dreams*  
Sub Pop, LP or CD



### C50 Stereo Control Center:

- For the first time 4 assignable digital and one dedicated USB input are offered
- New eight band tone controls are programmable by input selection
- Two dedicated phono sections, one moving magnet and one moving coil are supported
- Multiple amplifiers, headphones or signal processors are all controlled

# PERFECT PAIR

### MC452 Stereo Power Amplifier:

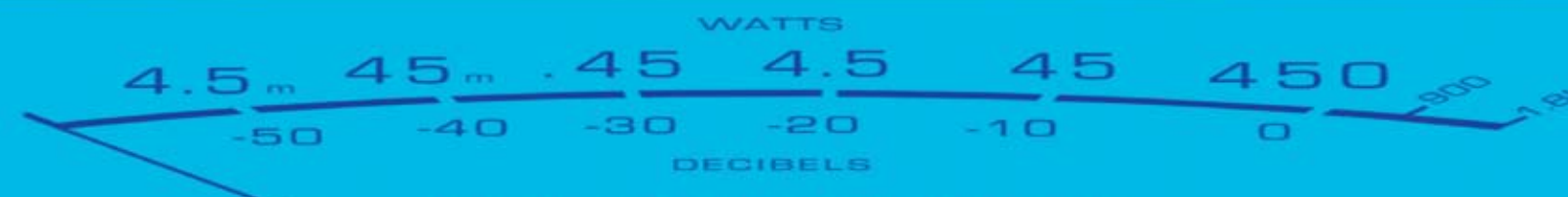
- The most powerful McIntosh stereo amplifier, MC452 is the master of the most delicate or demanding musical passages
- The latest advancements in transistor technology and circuit design result in cooler operation and longer life
- Larger, easier to read power meters monitor the power delivered while protecting one's speaker investment
- New McIntosh designed output binding posts guarantee the best connection with all speaker cable types



**McIntosh®**  
LEGENDARY PERFORMANCE™

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

Handcrafted in America since 1949, McIntosh's unwavering commitment to performance, innovation and quality brings an elevated music and film experience.





While lead Dum Dum Girl Dee Dee (real name: Kristen Gundred) isn't shy about the tragedy that inspired *Only in Dreams*, it would be unfair to forever brand this LP as one obsessed with sadness and mortality. For it's first and foremost, a rock 'n' roll record, and one on which singer and band try to maintain a too-cool-to-cry toughness throughout. Additionally, the girl-group harmonies, morale-boosting hand-claps, and reverb-laced guitars—which hit the pavement running on album opener “Always Looking” as if they're maxing out the odometer on a vintage Porsche 550—aren't built for wallowing.

Even the album's six-and-a-half-minute centerpiece of a ballad, “Coming Down,” traces a sudden moment of clarity. Should anyone attempt to stand in Dee Dee's way, “you had better make it strong,” she sings. This is a long way removed from the demo-like feel of the act's low-fi debut, last year's “I Will Be,” as every echoing quiver of a guitar string is heard loud and pristine. As for Dee Dee, she's calm as she scolds, and she's stern when she seduces, like a film noir femme fatale as filtered via Chrissie Hynde.

The formula here is one that's well-traversed, and it's no coincidence that the band works closely with industry vet Richard Gottehrer, perhaps still known best for co-writing “My Boyfriend's Back.” The Dum Dum Girls, however, do retro without it feeling worn. “Bedroom Eyes” conquers wistfulness with a steadily building momentum, peaking with a glistening, reach-for-the-stars bridge, while “Creep” is a kiss-off disguised as a dance party.

Still, the real pull is the emotional depth these largely three-minute songs reach with simplicity and directness. Take, for instance, “Caught in One,” a jangly number that does country by way of California garage rock. “This year's been a drag,” Dee Dee sings, eventually revealing that she simply wanted to have fun. Even in the darkest of times, the Dum Dum Girls show how it can be done. —**Todd Martens**



**Cave**  
*Neverendless*  
Drag City, LP or CD

**C**hicago psych-rockers Cave have a way with noise.

In the past, the crew, which originated as a five-piece before slimming down to a quartet for this most recent turn, bashed out shaggy, feedback-heavy squalls of guitar drone that are the sonic equivalent of primal cave paintings. But on *Neverendless*, that hairy sound is given the *Encino Man* treatment.

Songs like the Neu!-inspired “WUJ,” which sounds something like Wilco's “Spiders (Kidsmoke)” if it had remained strictly instrumental and never progressed past its percolating first quarter, and the epic 14-plus-minute “This Is the Best” (truth in advertising, in this case) are scrubbed up and given a clean shave.

While the group's 2010 EP *Pure Moods* hinted at a new musical direction (more lyrics, less chaos), these five songs don't stick to the expected script. Instead of the central role it played on songs like “Teenagers,” the human voice is almost non-existent here, save for a few random shouts and a brief passage of cult-like chanting (“OntheriseOntherise”). Listening back, it's as if the machines are fully in control. Witness the mechanized “Adam Roberts,” a hypnotic mash-up of buzzing guitar and synthetic noise that, at just a shade over four minutes, doubles as the album's shortest track. At nearly twice the length, “OJ” stretches things back out, piling on deep reverberations of bass that sound like coded messages being beamed into deep space—fragmented synths and guitars buzzing as if they're trying to shake loose years of accumulated cobwebs.

There are definite connections to be made between *Neverendless* and the Dirtbombs' latest, *Party Store*, an album that finds the Detroit garage-rock crew reinterpreting classic techno tunes from the Michigan city's electronic music heyday. Fittingly then, Cave draws upon its own hometown's musical past, weaving together its own version of Chicago house on “This Is the Best,” a robotic and repetitive jam that sounds like four dudes doing their damndest to come across like cyborgs. “On the Rise,” by contrast, has a more handmade feel, the bandmates layering together the steady click of drums, needly guitar, and deadened vocals.

The downside? At just five tracks, things are over way too quickly. Fortunately for all, these repetition-heavy cuts demand repeated plays.

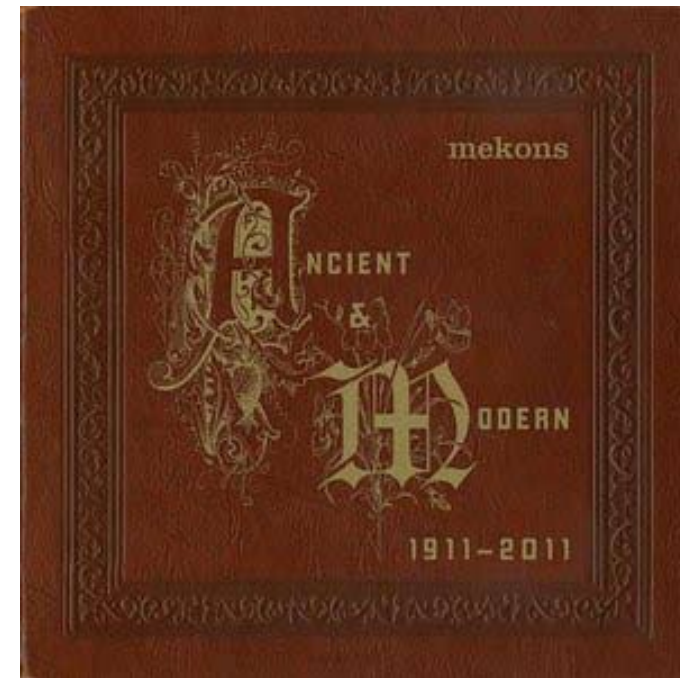
—**Andy Downing**





©Photo by Francesca Allen

**P**ity the Mekons. On the verge of year number 35, the Chicago-via-Leeds, England, band has amassed one of the more adventurous catalogs in rock n' roll. Yet despite the relatively consistent roll-out of material—the tally of albums and collections is near 30—the artsy punk-county-folk collective has soldiered on in near-obscurity. In fact, it's a safe bet that rock critics comprise a sizable contingent of the band's fan base.

**Mekons***Ancient & Modern*

Sin/Bloodshot Records, CD

None of that, sadly, is likely to change with *Ancient & Modern*, although the promise of a forthcoming Mekons documentary could finally lift the band's profile. For newcomers, this is as fine a place as any to dive into what could be a daunting mass of material. There's meaty political rock anthems, boozy stream-of-conscious ruminations on religion, a piano vamp, and chant-like songs outfitted with plucked lutes and violins. After the folksy rock of 2007's *Natural*, this is one of the looser later-day Mekons albums, and it ambles through genres with a devilish grin.

Always-exquisite vocalist Sally Timms has her fun dancing around the rootsy cabaret of "Geeshie," and Jon Langford is in his comfort zone in "Space in Your Face," on which there's a grand break-up, a drunken spill in the street, and a reference or two to the American labor movement—all while digital effects shoot

over guitars like laser beams. "The Devil at Rest" is quieter, a group sing-along with island rhythms. And "Calling All Demons" is a bluesy stomp with accordions.

Thematically, the 11 songs here promise to look at the world just on the brink of WWI and offer parallels with modern society. There's no doubt plenty of material to please the most cynical of rock n' roll socialists, but one of the Mekons' strengths has long been their ability to humanize big issues.

See, for instance, "I Fall Asleep," where Tom Greenhalgh is the tortured, woozy narrator who stumbles through the piano ballad. "My darling cannot understand what I have done," Greenhalgh sings, as images of combat rest alongside those of loneliness. So, to sum up the Mekons' history lesson: War, drink, break-ups, and a good tune.

—**Todd Martens**



**O**n his solo debut as the Nightwatchman, Rage Against the Machine guitarist Tom Morello dubbed himself a *One Man Revolution*, strapped on an acoustic guitar, and stomped his way through an array of fist-pumping protest songs as if he were overcome by Woody Guthrie's spirit.

For his third Nightwatchman album, Morello recruited a full band (the Freedom Fighter Orchestra) and expanded on his folk-troubadour sound. Heck, the guitarist even plugs his instrument back in for a handful of tracks, which, while miles removed from Dylan going electric, remains a welcome development for fans. See, as a singer, Morello has always been utilitarian at best, hammering out words like a contractor pounding away at nails. But as a guitarist? Well, just check the solo he uncorks midway through "It Begins Tonight," a ferocious six-string display that sounds something like an army of marauders storming the castle gates—a fitting accompaniment to coup-baiting lines like "Let's move tonight and take the throne."

©Photo by Sean Ricigliano



## Lohengrin II

Lohengrin was designed in 2001 as a reference from which all other product development at Verity would flow. It became the benchmark for the creation and revision of every member of our growing product family.

Lohengrin II's introduction in 2007 reset the bar, pushing all performance parameters to an unprecedented level. Its proprietary, made-in-house ribbon tweeter is the best high-frequency transducer in the business, and it necessitated significant refinements to the system's other drivers, crossover, and cabinet to take full advantage of its uncanny ability to resolve the finest detail present in the best recordings available today.

The development of Lohengrin II allowed us to see clearly the path we needed to take for our next-generation product family. Joining Parsifal Ovation and Rienzi, the all-new, higher-sensitivity Finn, Leonore, Amadis and Sarastro II are crafted with the same careful attention to detail, each and every loudspeaker benefitting from Lohengrin II's unique DNA.

We welcome you to visit an authorized Verity dealer and experience our new product line for yourself, and we warmly welcome you to the Verity Audio family.



verityaudio.com



# grive thyself

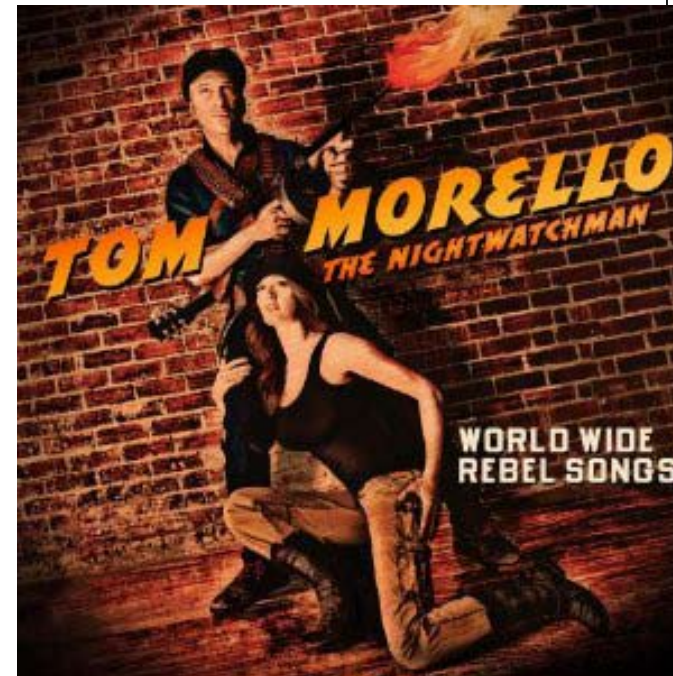


You listen, you look, you're there...

**MUSIC MATTERS**  
presents **BLUE NOTE**

LIMITED EDITION  
2500 BLUE NOTE

musicmattersjazz.com



## The Nightwatchman

*World Wide Rebel Songs*  
New West Records, LP or CD

The hit-or-miss *World Wide Rebel Songs* arrives quickly on the heels of the recent *Union Town* EP, a more traditional effort that could have served as the soundtrack to the wave of pro-union protests still dominating headlines in Madison, Wisconsin—or, based on its throwback sound, any pro-union movement throughout history. But while the targets on *Union Town* are clear (corporations, right wing news outlets, apathy), *World Wide Rebel Songs* is a far more eclectic affair. Songs deal with everything from stop-lossed American soldiers stuck fighting an unjust war (“Stray Bullets”) to Mexican slums decimated by the drug trade (“The Dogs of Tijuana”).

Lyrically, Morello still finds himself prone to broad sloganeering, dropping lefty lines like he’s been holed away brainstorming bumper sticker copy for Ralph Nader: “History is not made by presidents or popes”; “Freedom’s train has left the station”; “Are you gonna stand around? Or are you gonna be free?” While it’s difficult to argue with the sentiments in his songs, there are definitely moments where the delivery is best described as clunky. Witness the title track, constructed around a sing-along chorus that sounds as though it’s being belted out by the cast of *A Mighty Wind*. Superior are the shake-the-rafters thump of the gospel-inflected “Speak and Make Lightning” and comparatively stoic “Facing Mount Kenya,” a slinky spiritual on which Morello puts the overwhelming challenges facing our democracy in more natural terms. “I am only one man,” he whispers, “facing Mount Kenya.”

At its best, Morello’s solo output serves as a rallying cry. “I ain’t alone no more,” he howls atop the harmonica-fueled folk of “Black Spartacus Heart Attack Machine.” But too often on *Rebel Songs*, the frontman sounds unmoored, coming across less like a would-be prophet than one well-intentioned man adrift in the desert. —**Andy Downing**





 **MICS**

MONACO INTERNATIONAL CLUBBING SHOW

**9 • 10 & 11 NOVEMBER 2011**

[www.mics.mc](http://www.mics.mc)



# Pass the Nak!

By Jerold O'Brien

**STASIS**  
Inherently Stable/Uniform-Impedance Amplifier  
200W + 200W  
Power



## FEATURE



Nakamichi is synonymous with high-performance cassette decks, but not everyone is as familiar with the rest of its electronics. The company's first attempts at amplifier and preamplifier design, the 400 and 600 series, were nonetheless popular as they followed the tenets of the day with excellent measured ability albeit somewhat compromised sound.

When the compact disc became ubiquitous in the late 80s, demand for Nakamichi cassette decks declined. Still, the manufacturer developed another series of electronics that included the power amplifier you see here as well as a lower-powered model, the PA-5 (100wpc), and a few receivers, all incorporating Stasis technology licensed from Nelson Pass.

Introduced in 1988, the PA-7 retailed for \$1,595, a bargain compared to the Threshold S-350e that cost twice as much and sported a rated power output of only 150 watts per channel. Nakamichi's scale of manufacturing made it easy to grab one of Pass' best designs at a very reasonable price. Today, clean PA-7s can be found on the used market for \$600-\$700. According to Pass, the original PA-7 (not the PA-7 series II) is "the one you want." *(continued)*



## e.One C5i DAC Integrated Amplifier

Why choose different components for your music downloads, computer, CD player, turntable, cable/satellite box or game consoles? Keep it simple with Bel Canto's compact, powerful **e.One C5i DAC Integrated Amplifier** that powers it all!

The C5i features **2 SPDIF** and **2 TOSLINK** inputs at 24/192, a **USB** input at 24/96, plus **analog MM Phono** and **line level inputs on RCAs**. Outputs include speaker binding posts, line level outputs on RCAs, and a front panel headphone jack. It's a powerful, energy efficient multimedia analog and digital media center. Just add speakers and the C5i's **versatility, performance and dynamic sound** puts you in total system control.

For More Information Call (612) 317-4550 (9 AM to 5 PM CST M-F). © 2011 Bel Canto Design, Ltd.



## FEATURE

If you troll the Internet in search of a unit, insist on seeing pictures and deduct heavily for cosmetic damage. Replacements are unavailable and greatly diminish the resale price should you decide to resell at a future date. Run away screaming from an amplifier that has been “modified.”

### Circuit Overview

The PA-7 delivers 200 watts per channel, uses no overall negative feedback (a Pass trademark), and boasts the Stasis section, which consists of a low-power voltage amplifier coupled to the current mirror bootstrap output stage to do all the heavy lifting required for high-power output.

Back in 1989, when *Stereo Review* featured the PA-7, writer Julian Hirsch measured the PA-7's output at 253 watts into an 8-ohm load, 400 watts into a 4-ohm load, and 650 watts into two ohms. A quick look under the hood reveals why. A large 700 VA toroidal transformer and a bank of power supply capacitors totaling 132,000µf proves the PA-7 means business. Such a setup made the PA-7 a perfect choice for demanding loudspeakers and, like the Threshold Stasis amplifiers, it ended up in many systems based around electrostatic speakers or Magnepans. I once used one to drive a pair of Magnepan Tympanis to excellent results.

As a single-ended amplifier, the PA-7's rear panel is sparse, with a pair of RCA input jacks, an IEC socket for your power cord of choice—little did Nakamichi engineers know that in the 21st century, power cords would cost

much more than the original price of the PA-7—and relatively standard binding posts for speaker output.

### A Budget-Conscious Steal

Irresistible at \$500, and formerly on display at Portland hi-fi dealer Echo Audio, my newly acquired PA -7 is in great shape. Serving duty in a system consisting of a pair of Magnepan 1.6s along with an Audio Research SP-9 vacuum tube preamplifier (covered in issue 24), the PA-7 has no issue driving the Maggies to sufficient levels with all but the heaviest music.

Putting the amp through its paces with a number of different speakers, and often at high volume, it became warm to the touch, but not as warm as a pure class A amplifier. Much like the Adcom GFA-555, which Pass also designed, the PA-7 features a pair of front-panel LEDs to indicate clipping. When driving the Vandersteen 2CE Signatures or my JBL L-100s, I couldn't push the speakers hard enough to get the LEDs to illuminate. Switching to the Magnepans, however, verified that the LEDs still worked.

The sound is free of harshness and grain, but a bit veiled when compared to Pass Labs' current designs. And, as can be expected, the PA-7 lacks the three-dimensionality of the best amplifiers. But for \$500, it's a solid anchor for a budget-minded high-performance system and far superior to what you might purchase new for a similar price. ●





# Audiophile Pressings

By Jeff Dorgay

Click on Album Title to purchase from Music Direct



## Madeleine Peyroux

*Standing on the Rooftop*  
Decca, 2LP

As she's done throughout her career, Madeleine Peyroux continues to evolve on her fifth solo effort. Her songwriting has become more sophisticated and choice of covers more intelligent—perhaps even quirky—but it works well. Earlier this summer, a message on her Web site promised a “more roots oriented record,” and *Standing on the Rooftop* follows up on the pledge.

It starts with a slow, sparse rendition of the Beatles' “Martha My Dear” that fortunately doesn't set the vocal tone for the rest of the record. On the song, Peyroux stretches a bit too far, her voice straining to hit and hold the high notes. The next track, “The Kind You Can't Afford,” picks up on a tempo that's similar to that of the singer's from *Careless Love*. But there's a much funkier thing going on, thanks to virtuoso guitarist Mark Ribot and bassist Meshell Ndegeocello. As she lazily raps to a male friend, Peyroux jokes about him “cruising in a Mercedes” while she's “broke down in a Ford.” (Speaking of disparity: It's too bad Peyroux doesn't give her poor friends that bought the \$30 LP an included CD or download of the album.)

The remainder of the set dramatically slows down, as it's rich with environmental texture and big, muddy drum beats with slow attack. While Ribot does not play guitar throughout, his influence is everywhere, as it adds a tonal complexity that feels like a soundtrack to a film that takes place in a rainy, desolate location. In the same way that you have to pay close attention to someone speaking softly in a room, the listener is forced to sidle up closely to the music. And we learn that we're suddenly a long way from *Careless Love*. There are a few light spots, but this is a primarily dark ride.

Mastered by Greg Calbi at Sterling Sound, the two-LP, 33RPM set offers sound on par with Peyroux's last two Mobile Fidelity LPs. Surfaces are exceptionally quiet, complementing her voice perfectly and allowing Ribot's reverb-laden guitar to stretch out to infinity. Ndegeocello's bass is full of rich overtones that perfectly translate, and infrequent bursts of percussion emerge across a very wide soundstage. Props to Peyroux for again taking an enthralling detour from a path she's already traveled.



Introducing the **M6 500i** integrated amplifier



500wpc, Titan output circuit, completely dual-mono, balanced, ultra-precise switched attenuator w/LED display, separate Class-A preamplifier w/ dedicated power supply, 5 inputs, home-theater bypass, preamp outputs, 2 speaker outputs per channel, buttons machined from solid metal.

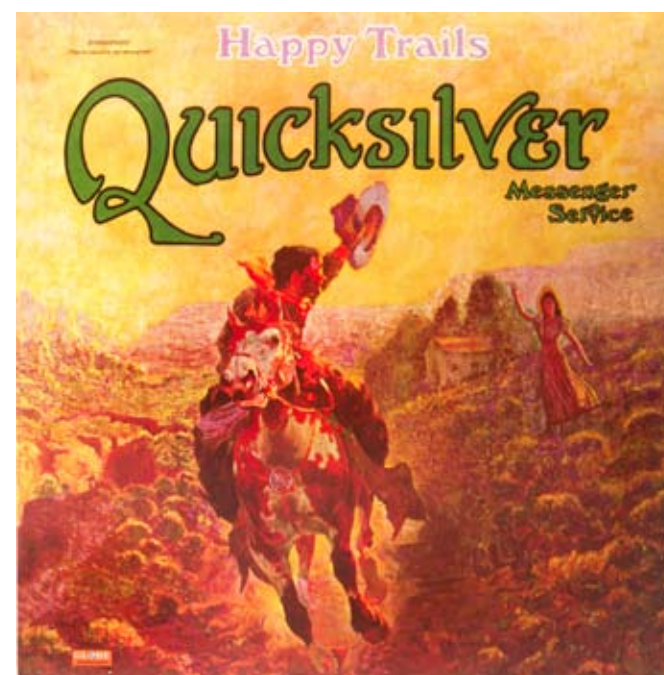
**Much more than just pure adrenaline.**

Exclusive North American Importer

Tempo Distribution LLC Waltham, MA 02454 (617) 314-9296 tel (617) 336-3496 fax info@tempohighfidelity.com

[www.musicalfidelity.com](http://www.musicalfidelity.com)  
[www.tempohighfidelity.com](http://www.tempohighfidelity.com)

## Quicksilver Messenger Service



*Quicksilver Messenger Service and Happy Trails*  
 Pure Pleasure, LP

The first two albums from QMS are considered by many devoted fans and critics to be from the “classic period” before the original lineup underwent a series of changes. The reputation is deserved.

TONE staff collector Tom Caselli, always on the alert for additional clean copies of these LPs, notes that early stamper originals are “tough to find that aren’t beat. These were the ultimate party records back in the 60s.” If you can find them, early stamper black label Capitol LP’s are the ones you want. Clean copies fetch about \$100 each. UK import pressings can go for twice that amount, and it remains open for debate about whether they sound any better than US versions.

Compared to the later-version Capitol LPs, Pure Pleasure’s reissues sound fantastic and reveal layered sound, not unlike my favorite Dead albums. The sound instantly brings back a 60s jam band vibe, and both records offer tremendous depth and guitar texture. What the albums lack in modern studio trickery, they make up for in spades with soulful performance. The self-titled set possesses a soundstage with more depth than width, with only an occasional drumstick hitting the rim of a snare on the far right or left to remind you that this is, in fact, a stereo recording. Hearing “The Fool” restored to its former glory is worth the price alone.

While barely a year separate the self-titled record and *Happy Trails*, the latter possesses a much bigger and cleaner sound. The latter spreads well beyond the speaker boundaries, and guitars occupy not only a larger space but enjoy greater prominence on the recording. *Happy Trails* also has stronger dynamic contrast than the first, with instruments convincingly fading into the distance, and much greater low-level detail, revealing more nuances in the guitar playing.

Pure Pleasure has more QMS titles on the way. For now, this pair makes for an excellent addition to any psychedelic collection.





*Lights Out*  
Back on Black, 2LP

## UFO

**A** la *Spinal Tap*, the two-word review for this record would be “shit sandwich.” To elaborate a bit further, this two-record set—pressed on green vinyl and encased in a beautifully printed cardboard sleeve to keep pace with the best remasters—disappoints the second you lower the stylus onto the wax.

The first two sides feature the original 1977 album; the live tracks from the 2008 remaster are on sides three and four. Flat and compressed with a harsh, crunchy high end, this version sounds no better than the 128kb Rhapsody file on my iPhone. A \$5 US pressing of this blows the Back on Black edition—currently (over)priced at \$38—out of the water.

This is truly a crime against metal. Avoid at all costs.

## Bon Iver

**S**taff writer Andy Downing wrote an insightful review of this, Bon Iver’s recent album, in Issue 38. But since he was then only in possession of the advance CD, he was unable to comment on the LP’s sound quality.

Greg Calbi at Sterling is at the helm here, and does an acceptable job but no more. The pressing is quiet, though, which adds to the music’s ethereal feel. Where the CD is slightly flat in terms of soundstage, the LP has more width and a modest helping of depth. But where Justin Vernon’s wispy voice resides on the same plane as the music in the digital version, he’s relegated to the rear of the stage on vinyl. Similarly, the low-level keyboard bits have more room to float, yet the more prominent keyboard riffs now sound more like mellotrons—ironic given that the liner notes specifically say, “No mellotrons were used in this recording.”

So something is gained, and something is lost on the LP version. Also note: The additional warmth gained from going to analog may prove too much for anyone having a system with a tonal balance skewed to the romantic side.



*Bon Iver*  
Jagjaguwar, LP

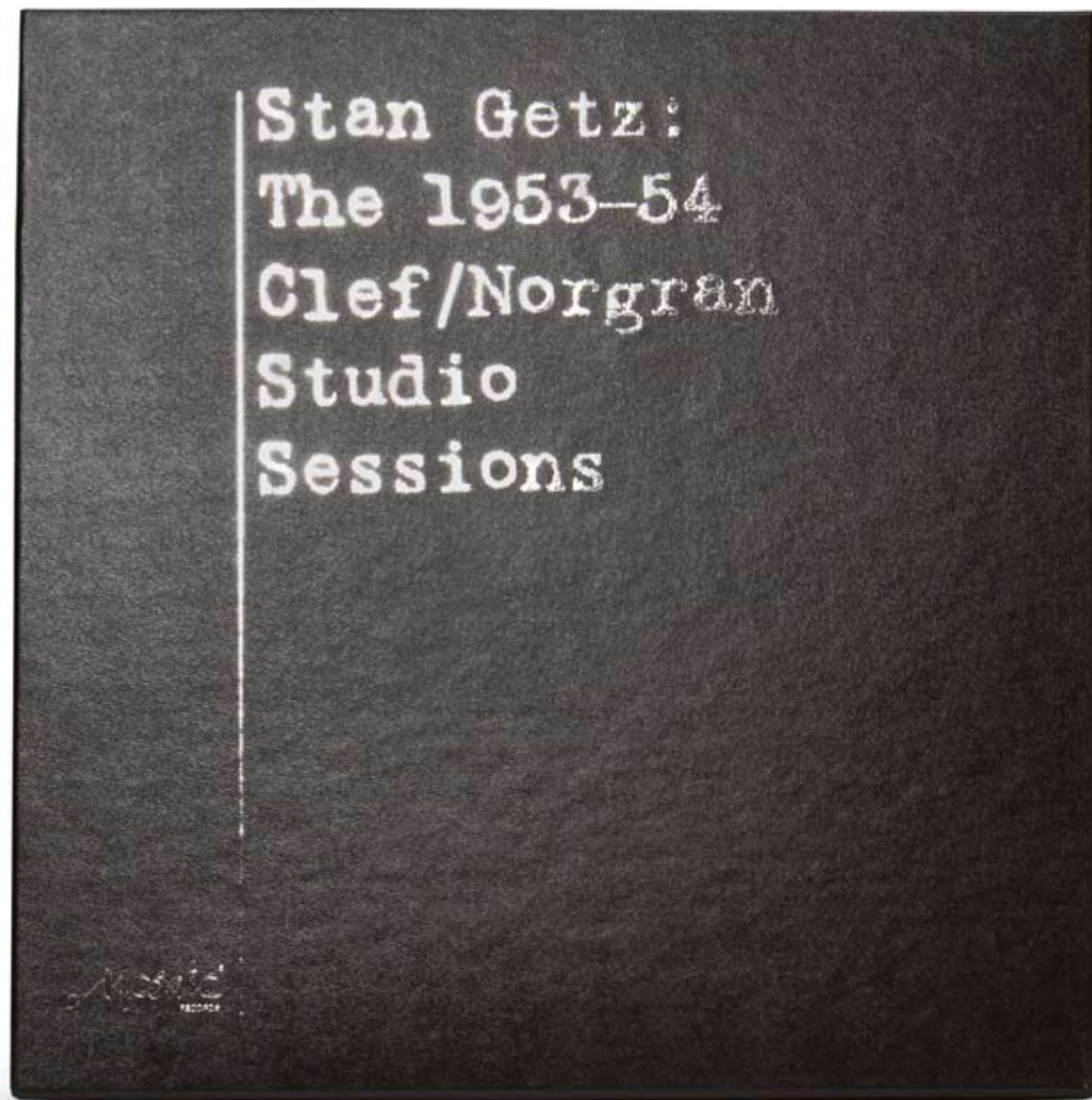
All the coughing there is. Beethoven’s 6th, 1st movement, on the new Focus 260.



### The new Focus 260. A perfect symbiosis. Now.

Cohesively balanced like a compact monitor. Exhibiting the substance and power of a floor-standing loudspeaker. The Focus 260 features the legendary Dynaudio soft dome tweeter, now with new Precision Coating. A dual mid/bass driver complement featuring the advanced new Black Kapton® voice coil formers. And our famous die-cast aluminum driver baskets, in a relatively large cabinet volume. The Focus 260 brings you homogenous balance, excellent speed and incredibly natural musicality with added low-bass dynamics and presence. Soon at your Dynaudio dealer. Read more at [www.dynaudio.com/new\\_focus](http://www.dynaudio.com/new_focus)





*The 1953-54 Clef/Norgran Studio Sessions*  
Mosaic Records, 180g 4LP box set

## Stan Getz

Mosaic's latest unburied treasure compiles mono recordings produced on the Clef, Norgran, and Verve labels during one of the lowest points in the career of legendary saxophone player Stan Getz, who, at the time, was battling heroin addiction and assorted personal problems. Such circumstances made it tough for the jazz icon to land a major recording contract. Indeed, if Getz's story were written today, it might read that he was "in-between projects." A quick Google search fills in the gaps on Getz's career, yet Ashley Kahn's liner notes here offer an even better history lesson.

Independent of how small or large the label for which it was made, the music from the seven albums that comprise this collection should be savored. Even if they can be located, the original LPs command a premium price and are often of questionable quality. Yes, the fare can also be had on CD, but be forewarned: Verve/Hip-O all but squashed the life out of them. Even the most modest analog rig will bring these tunes to life in a manner that's impossible on the existing CDs.

Mastering engineer Kevin Gray took great care with this set, sourced from the original full-track mono masters. (Well, all save for an alternate take of "Pot Luck" transferred from an original 78.) As with all of the Mosaic titles we've sampled, the sound is spectacular. Gray preserves the musical delicacy, and it does not feel like the EQ has been goosed or other alterations made.

Because these records have been cut on a modern lathe, you will not need a mono cartridge to take full advantage of the rich, warm sound presented on these grooves. It's easy to see why Getz got the nickname "The Sound." The soundscape feels as if comes through in stereo, as the best mono material always does.

A slight bit of tape hiss exists in the quietest part of some tracks, but everything else is exceptional. How so? These records do not feel "remastered" in the classic sense. Rather, they sound as if you had uncovered a pristine original set in a hermetically sealed, temperature-controlled environment.



# Listen. Don't just hear.

You've collected hundreds — even thousands — of songs on your computer and iPod. But, you haven't really experienced the music until you play it through Wadia's proven iTransports and PowerDAC integrated amplifier.

The first truly superior way to listen to your music.



Wadia series 1 171iTransport and 151PowerDAC mini [www.wadia.com](http://www.wadia.com)

## Hiromi Kanda

*Days of Yesterday*  
Music Gate, LP and CD

While I found singer Hiromi Kanda's last release, *Hiromi in Love*, quite charming, her new record offers more of the same—and that's not necessarily a plus. Think Hello Kitty meets Diana Krall, but without the sparkles. The album credits reveal that Al Schmitt (the engineer on Krall's early albums) to be present, as well as a 50-piece orchestra. Another household name, Bernie Grundman, turns in an exemplary performance as mastering engineer. And while it doesn't possess the LP's last bit of vocal warmth, the CD comes very close, indicating the amount of care given the entire project.

Some might think Kanda's vocal tone polarizing, but her level of craftsmanship remains indisputable; she is a perfectionist. Having taken four months to produce at Capitol Records, the record is squeaky clean—albeit too clean. But those simply looking for great sound will be pleased; no fault can be had with the recording. This is a sonic spectacular that “deep listening” audiophiles will enjoy when the lights are down low.

Alas, due to the pedestrian arrangements and safe approaches, no musical boundaries are pushed, no borders crossed. Kanda includes three original compositions and utilizes legendary keyboardist Joe Sample to good advantage.



Still, the songs unfurl to a monotonous sleepy tempo that seemingly repeats itself on every track.

As one who is bored beyond belief with the vocal grifters of the “Great American Songbook,” I'd love to see what Kanda could do with truly interesting material; she's definitely got the chops. But I'm of the mind that if you want a Harley, you should buy a Harley and not a Yamaha Gold Star. *Days of Yesterday* falls short in a similar way. In the end, if you'd like another sultry female vocalist to add to your stack of scrumptious recordings, Kanda nicely slips in between Diana Krall and Eva Cassidy. Me? I want the real thing and will take Ella any day.



# A Discussion With Flaming Lips Ringleader Wayne Coyne



©Photo by J. Michelle Martin-Coyne

By Andy Downing

**F**or more than 25 years, Wayne Coyne has acted as ringleader of the ongoing Flaming Lips carnival, guiding the psych-rock crew through acid-washed experimentations (*Telepathic Surgery*), heartfelt art-pop (*The Soft Bulletin*), and, most recently, into the dark, damaged explorations of the endlessly weird *Embryonic*. Through it all, the frontman has maintained a fierce work ethic, childlike sense of wonderment, and enviable creative streak. After all these years, Coyne and Co. can still find new ways to surprise.

Witness the band's latest project: The release of a miniature drive containing four new songs in the middle of a seven-pound gummy skull. In a recent phone interview, Coyne discussed the darker turn on *Embryonic*, how the Lips are like the Beatles (a comparison he made with tongue planted firmly in cheek), and why the Oklahoma collective still toys with the idea of bringing *Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots* to Broadway.

**Are these single-track releases like “Two Blobs Fucking” an offshoot of the idea that you possibly pushed the album format as far as you could with *Embryonic*?**

Part of the mentality that freed us up on *Embryonic* was this idea that we were doing a double record. Because it's a double record, it allowed us to be ridiculously self-indulgent. Songs didn't have to make any sense and they didn't have to have chord changes and they could be ten minutes long. It was total freedom. You think things like discipline and listening and caring about the audience make your music better, and perhaps they do. I don't know. But all I know is every time we got away from this way that we worked, we just had such a great time. We would get done with one of these normal pieces of music and then we would reward ourselves and say, “Let's do one of these freaky things!”



I always point to “Revolution #9” on the Beatles’ *White Album*—see how I compare myself to the Beatles? Without that being this weird, behemoth of a double record, a song like “Revolution #9” probably never would have been made or put on an album. But because it was this big, expansive record you think, “Okay, we’ll throw that on there.” When I was growing up, those sorts of songs just felt like very normal songs.

**Did you have the sense as you were recording *Embryonic* that you were taking some darker turns with the music?**

The word “dark” comes up a lot. It’s not this major-chord, optimistic, gleeful record like some of ours have been. I think people who love *Soft Bulletin* and love *Yoshimi* sometimes probably wish that we made records like that every time. To me, we wouldn’t want to do that. I think we’ve been lucky that when we look back at what we’ve done I can say, “Wow, we really turned a corner there and became something different!” But at the time I don’t think we knew that at all. I don’t think we sat there and said, “We’ll show everybody there’s more to us!” We’re just in a panic making whatever music we can.

**Did it feel like the darker musical direction was a way to cut against the glitter and animal costumes that have become staples of the live show?**

Well, part of the reason we do that in the live show is I sometimes feel like even songs from *Soft Bulletin* are too heavy. I can remember the first night we played some of the *Soft Bulletin* songs. It was to a crowd in Dallas. We had played to this crowd for a long time and they were a bunch of 25-year-olds who did acid, and every time we played it would be this fucking great party. And here we were about to play this heavy, existential, death-oriented group of songs. Even a song like “Feel Yourself Disintegrate,” I mean, it’s a bummer. It’s powerful, but it’s not a party. I didn’t want people to think that this can’t still be a party. Even then it was, “What can we do?” I was throwing handfuls of confetti back in 1999 to say, “C’mon, I want you to do acid and have a good time.” I thought about it a little after we made *Embryonic*. Maybe these songs are just too strange to play next to something like “Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots”? But they’re not. I always try to remember, it’s just like talking. If we were having a conversation, you could be talking about something that’s absurd and funny one minute and then three minutes later you could be talking about a very tragic serious thing, and it wouldn’t seem like, “Hey, I thought we were supposed to be laughing?”

I think we’ve been lucky that when we look back at what we’ve done I can say, “**Wow, we really turned a corner there and became something different!**”



*The benchmark has now been established - 6moon  
Transparent balanced & very realistic - PlayBack  
The most effortless, immediate presentation of sound - Positive Feedback*

WA22 Fully Balanced Headphone Amplifier

**WO0 AUDIO**

Finely Crafted in New York

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





## INTRODUCING THE NEW TOTEM ELEMENT SERIES

The Totem Element Series is in perfect balance between art and science. Streamlined for all musical genre, it conveys conviction and honesty, while offering enormous scale and presence. Revolutionary in its conception, the Totem Element Series is a true evolutionary step in sound design.

Discover yours at [totemacoustic.com](http://totemacoustic.com)

TOTEM  METAL  
ELEMENT SERIES

## INTERVIEW

**I read a great quote from you where you said, “We don’t need to make the world any more normal and boring than it already is.” It seems like mindset drives almost every decision you guys make.**

[Laughs] Well, yeah, and in the defense of the things that are boring, I understand there are things out there that can’t just be whimsical and do whatever the fuck they want. I’m lucky I can. The Flaming Lips audience would think much less of me if I tried to calculate and play it safe or whatever. The Flaming Lips audience has allowed me to fail spectacularly in the pursuit of this. “Entertain us, Wayne. Show us your world.” But I agree, too many people play it safe and it’s boring.

**Is that the driving force behind releasing music in a seven-pound gummy skull?**

Completely! We do live in times where there’s an almost absurdist kind of art to [releasing music], and I think sometimes the more absurd it is the more interesting the group is.

**Do you consider yourself impulsive?**

Not necessarily. It’s not like one minute I’m working on a film and the next minute I want to build racecars. This thing of one idea sprouting another idea sprouting another idea, well, yeah I believe in that. Even in the way we work musically, you see where it streams off. But I don’t know if it would be impulsive. Maybe impulsive just had a bad connotation to it. It’s more intuitive.

**Has U2’s experience with the *Spider-Man* musical deterred you pursuing *Yoshimi* for the stage?**

No, no. I have to say the mistake people make is when they think, “I don’t want to make some big, dumb Broadway thing that is laughed at and fails and is an embarrassment.” If it loses money and it’s embarrassing, I don’t care. I’d rather do it and fail than worry about it. When you look at things that way you become pretty fearless.

**I imagine if you staged it the way you wanted the potential for injury among the cast and audience would be higher than with *Spider-Man*.**

Well, yeah. But it wouldn’t be boring, would it? ●

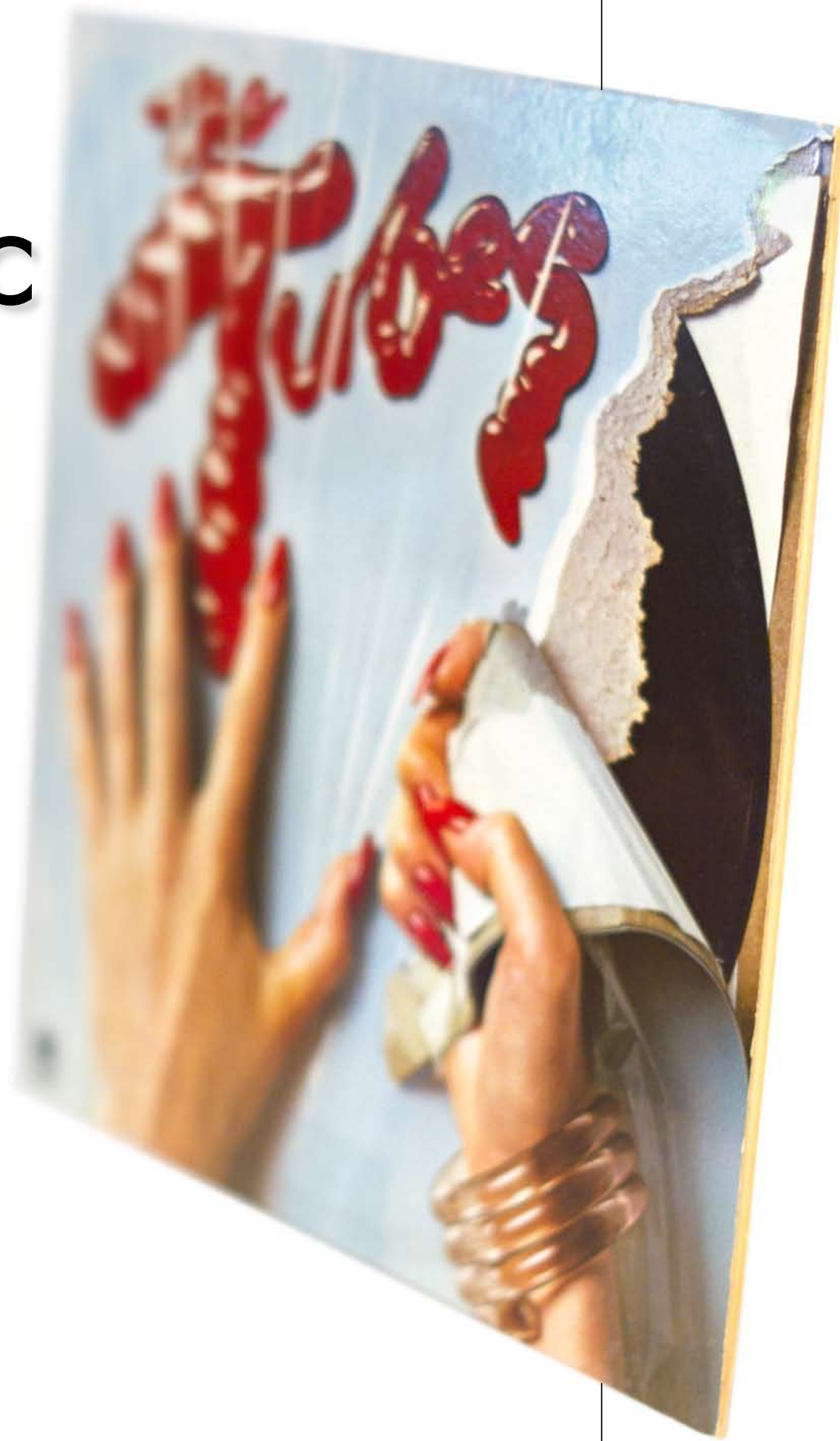
The Flaming Lips audience would think much less of me if I tried to calculate and play it safe or whatever. The Flaming Lips audience has allowed me to fail spectacularly in the pursuit of this. “Entertain us, Wayne. Show us your world.”



# The Music Never Stopped

100 Exceptional Rock, Pop, and Soul Albums from 1975-1979

By Bob Gendron



The first in our series of decade-based guides, and a corollary to Issue 38's candid editorial on great rock/pop/soul music and the narrow-minded audiophile press, *TONE* kicks off its chronological succession of exceptional albums long ignored by and/or completely unknown to the high-end—as well as many curious listeners—by focusing on standout LPs released between 1975-1979.

Since many audiophile “experts” are on record stating that most good music ceased to exist by the mid-1970s, starting with the latter period made for a logical launch point and hours upon hours of fun. And since anyone can make a list, for necessary context and direction, short descriptions and accounts accompany each entry. Future installments will cover the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s.

For now, in the spirit of eschewing the obvious—we know you already know about classics by Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, The Who, and the like, and that repeating such commonplace information serves no useful purpose—and accentuating the creative, herewith 100 records from the mid-to-late 1970s worthy of your ears and attention.

## **Abba Arrival**

Swedish pop maestros' finest hour. Amidst the catchiness, notice the highly underrated rhythm guitar work throughout. Home to the immortal “Dancing Queen.”

## **AC/DC Highway to Hell**

Go ahead. Find a better guitar-driven rock record. On Bon Scott's swan song, Australia's bad boys come into their own. Not a wasted note here.

## **Aerosmith Rocks**

Hard to believe this is the same band that later made driveline like “Janie's Got a Gun.” Quintessential hard, heroin-needle dirty, bluesy rock played in desperate fashion.

## **Amon Duul Made In Germany**

Space rock, acid rock, and Krautrock pooled together into a druggy, galaxy-exploring mind warp.

## **The B-52s The B-52s**

Masters of kitsch, beehive hairdos, and surf-rock quirk, the B-52s' debut is a party album that transcends eras.





**Big Star**  
*Third/Sister Lovers*

Messy, vulnerable, and consistently genius: power-pop connoisseurs give a middle finger to ignorant radio programmers and record-label politics on mythical farewell.

**Blondie** *Parallel Lines*

Debbie Harry and Co. go pop on a 1978 classic knee-deep in sing-a-long material and insouciant hooks. The iconic album cover is a bonus.

**Tommy Bolin** *Teaser*

The virtuosic guitarist's debut doubles as his pinnacle moment, rife with subtleties and heavy fusion.

**Boston** *Boston*

Nothing sounds like Boston, and nothing ever will. Arena rock blasts off into another stratosphere. More than a feeling, indeed.

**David Bowie** *Low*

A groundbreaking piece of avant-garde ambiance, art rock, and drug-addled electro-pop. Not surprisingly, Brian Eno is involved.

**Jacques Brel** *Brel*

The French chanteur emerges from a ten-year absence with one of the finest goodbyes in history. Rapture.

**Buzzcocks**  
*Singles Going Steady*

Yes, it's a compilation, but many of the seven-inch singles here never resided on an LP. Quintessential British punk that will attach spikes to a leather jacket.

**The Cars** *The Cars*

Start to finish, as close to a greatest-hits album as any band has produced. A blueprint for new-wave tunesmithship and sardonic emotion.

**James Chance and the Contortions** *Buy*

A lynchpin of New York City's no-wave scene—which extended into visual art, 'zines, and even housing situations—James Chance and the Contortions' *Buy* corrupts free jazz, funk, and punk into an angular wail for freedom.

**Cheap Trick** *In Color*

Pick your pleasure: Rick Nielsen's crunchy guitar, Robin Zander's paralyzing vocals, Tom Petersson's 12-string bass runs, Bun E. Carlos' on-the-beat drumming. Heaven tonight.

**The Clash** *The Clash*

Whether it sports the American or UK track listing, the Clash's first salvo fires an insurgent shot.

**Guy Clark** *Old No. 1*

An outlaw country landmark, and the table-setter for one of the great songwriters of the past 40 years.

**The Congos**  
*Heart of the Congos*

As earthy, tribal, and hypnotic as any roots reggae record ever devised, the Congos' 1977 opus constitutes Lee Perry's high-water mark.

**Elvis Costello**  
*This Year's Model*

The addition of the Attractions and increase in frustration, angst, and disgust motivate Costello to a heightened level of breathless urgency.

**The Damned** *Damned Damned Damned*

The first English punk LP released, the Damned's 1977 debut captures an irreproducible, snide, high-speed rambunctiousness that the band never again recaptured. Rat Scabies' drumming is worth the price of admission.

**Betty Davis**  
*Nasty Gal*

Miles Davis' ex-wife proves 20 years ahead of her time on a risqué, boisterous 1975 set that rocks out, gets funky, and explores outré psychedelia.

**Dead Boys**  
*Young Loud and Snotty*

Obsessed with boredom, casual sex, and killing time, sneering vocalist Stiv Bators leads the garage-reared Dead Boys through a debut that, by comparison, makes most period punk look tame and polite.

**Devo**  
*Q: Are We Not Men? A: We Are Devo*

Sarcasm, wit, and prophetic criticism inform a 1978 new-wave landmark that blazed the way for synth-pop, robotic beats, and flower-pot headgear.

**Dr. Buzzard's Original Savannah Band**  
*Dr. Buzzard's Original Savannah Band*

Among the craziest, sophisticated, most festive disco efforts imagined, the New York ensemble throws swing, R&B, Latin, and pop into a big-band stew that comes on as an automatic elixir.

**Ian Dury**  
*New Boots and Panties!!*

Armed with a Cockney accent and encyclopedic slang, Dury bridges pub-rock and disco on a 1977 cult favorite that went platinum.

**Brian Eno**  
*Another Green World*

The place to start a prolonged investigation into the mindset of ambient's godfather. A sonic version of Georges Seurat's *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte*.

**Marianne Faithfull**  
*Broken English*

An unexpected and almost unrecognizable comeback, *Broken English* begat Marianne Faithfull's second career and set a new precedent for raspy, bitter singing.

**The Fall**  
*Live at the Witch Trials*

The weird, shambling, cynical world of British curmudgeon/prolific songwriter/moaner and groaner Mark E. Smith starts here.

**Flamin' Groovies**  
*Shake Some Action*

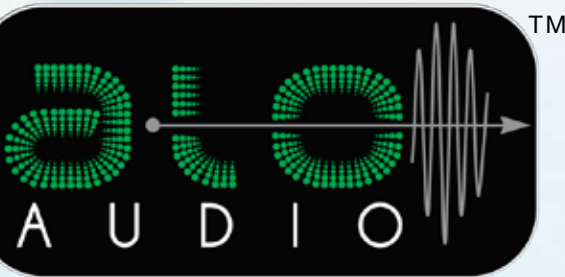
Garage-filtered British Invasion revivalism for the mid-1970s and every period since. Try not to follow the directive of the title track.

**Funkadelic** *One Nation Under a Groove*

Funk has never been better, more outrageous, irreverent, or politically savvy than on this 1978 smash. George Clinton's finest hour.



Don't let your interconnects be your weakest link.



Tel. 503-232-9184  
Web. ALOaudio.com

**Serge Gainsbourg**  
*Je T'aime Moi Non Plus*

Anchored by the erotic, controversial title track, which Gainsbourg and Jane Birkin perform as a duet between two lovers having sex, the French pop icon's 1976 LP epitomizes sensual and erotic.

**Gang of Four**  
*Entertainment!*

Incalculably influential, a post-punk watershed whose industrial coldness, staccato rhythms, and unapologetically sociopolitical content continues to agitate and inspire.

**Al Green**  
*Al Green Is Love*

The last in an odds-defying run of fantastic Memphis soul records, Al Green's 1976 ode to romance's drearier aspects wants for nothing.

**David Grisman**  
*Hot Dawg*

Mandolinist Grisman has followed the bluegrass-cum-roots-jazz template he laid down here for the past 30+ years.

**Hawkwind** *Quark*  
*Strangeness & Charm*

Known for their black-light vibes and acid-fueled explorations, the English space rockers surprise with an accessible, concise pop juggernaut. No joke.

**Richard Hell**  
*Blank Generation*

The literate male answer to Patti Smith's style of punk, former Television and Heartbreakers member Hell pairs with underground phenom Robert Quine on a New York-centric set that defies compartmentalization.

**Eddie Hinton**  
*Very Extremely Dangerous*

Lead guitarist for the Muscle Shoals Sound Rhythm Section, Hinton played on hits by everyone from Wilson Pickett to Otis Redding to Solomon Burke. The rousing singer's solo debut is vintage Southern soul.

**Joe Jackson** *Look Sharp*

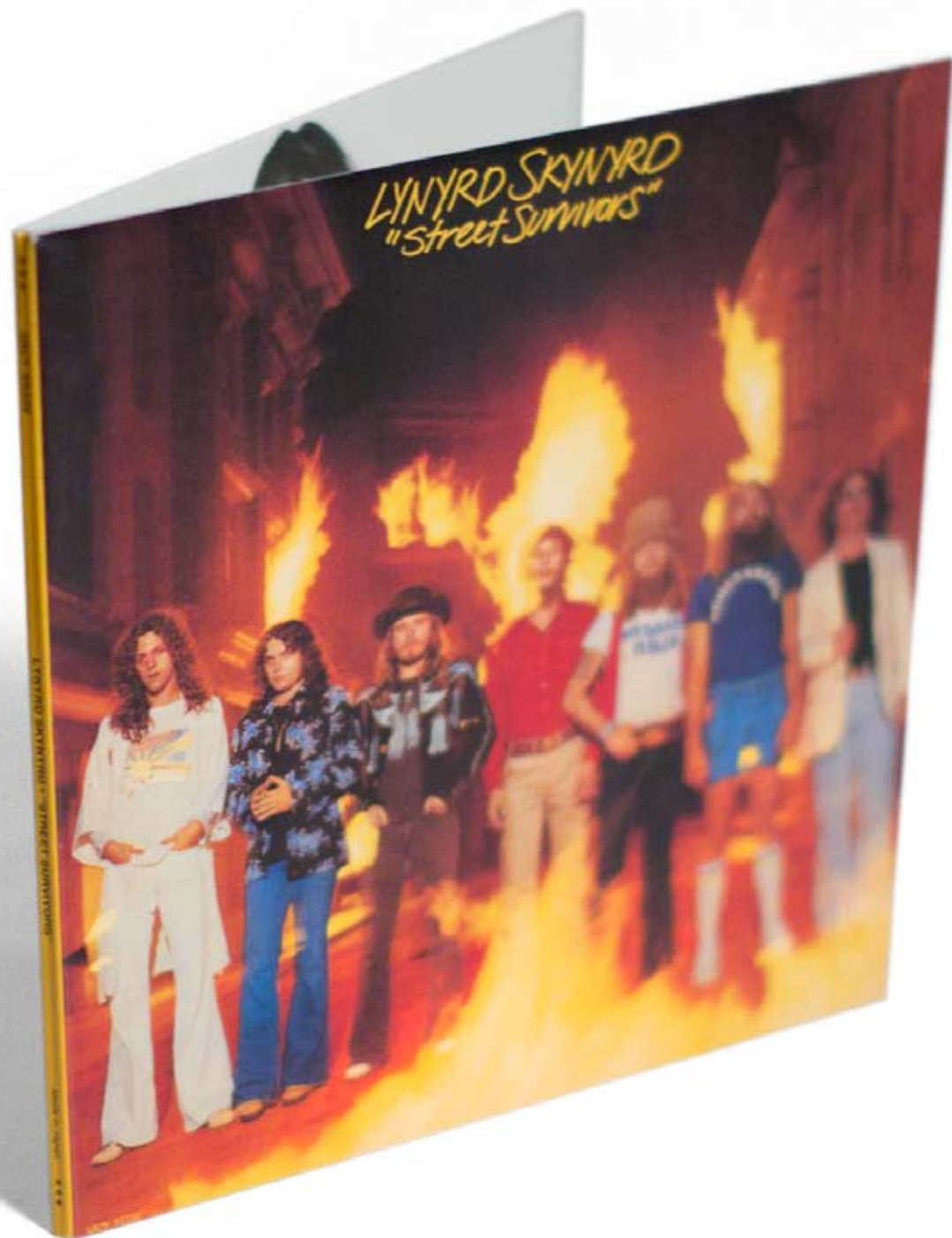
Ripe with frustrations, Jackson's brisk new-wave debut sparks with tremendous hooks and wry, truthful witticisms. "Is She Really Going Out With Him?" still captures the defeated feelings of hard-luck guys the world over.

**Michael Jackson**  
*Off the Wall*

Forget *Thriller*. The King of Pop's 1979 dance with producer Quincy Jones creatively laps the more popular, better-selling follow-up.





**The Jam** *All Mod Cons*

England's youthful rebellion in the late 1970s spawned dozens of LPs laced with bracing social commentary. Few are better or more intellectual than Paul Weller and Co.'s 1978 date.

**Waylon Jennings***Waylon Live*

Oddly, remarkable live country albums are in short supply. Jennings' 1976 offering depicts the music's Outlaw colloquialism at its peak.

**Joy Division***Unknown Pleasures*

Despairing, cathartic, intense, and atmospheric, Joy Division's emotionally wrenching debut established precedents still being followed today.

**Judas Priest***Stained Class*

*Hellbent for Leather* and *British Steel* are great. But *Stained Class* presents Priest in its purest, leanest, sharpest form. New Wave of British Heavy Metal arrives for the long haul.

**Kiss** *Alive!*

You wanted the best, you got the best. Overdubs aside, the explosive double-album pioneered the live record concept, and for good reason. Kiss never sounded as hungry again.

**Kraftwerk***Trans-Europe Express*

Germany's techno-savvy innovators construct mechanically minimalist arrangements out of pulsing beats and recurring rhythms, marrying Krautrock to austere electronic hypnosis.

**Fela Kuti** *Expensive Shit*

Named after the police's interest in his defecation, Afrobeat's inventor does no wrong—he seldom did—on a political, humorous, and optimistic set ensconced in snorting brass and loose grooves.

**Nick Lowe***Labour of Lust*

One of England's greatest living songwriters puts on a charm school in the art of melody and irreverence on a bloody brilliant pop set.

**Lynyrd Skynyrd***Street Survivors*

Southern rock titans' no-frills comeback stands as their tragically unofficial swan song; irreplaceable singer Ronnie Van Zandt and guitarist Steve Gaines died in a plane crash days after its 1977 release.

**Bob Marley** *Exodus*

Recorded while the iconoclastic reggae frontman recovered from an attempt on his life, *Exodus* symbolizes Marley's international appeal and calming, disarming influence.

**The Modern Lovers***The Modern Lovers*

"Going faster miles an hour," Jonathan Richman and his Modern Lovers are indeed "in love with the modern world and rock n' roll" on this paradigm of candid proto-punk.

**Motorhead** *Overkill*

As heavy as the oft-cited *Ace of Spades*, and even nastier and uglier, this aptly titled 1978 affair storms ahead as a conflagration of raw vigor and crude power.

**Neu Neu!** 75

The final salvo in a trio of pivotal Neu! albums, *Neu!* 75 drives metronomic beats and surreal guitar lines down the Autobahn for one more thrilling motorific ride. Kraut bliss.

**Mickey Newbury***The Sailor*

Awash in lush strings and bittersweet confessionals, *The Sailor* ranks as another of the country maven's critically beloved albeit commercially shunned achievements.

**Ted Nugent***Cat Scratch Fever*

Ignore his contemporary wack-a-doo politics. Mind, instead, the Motor City Madman's frenzied guitar riffs and party-til-you-puke energy.

**Gary Numan and Tubeway Army** *Replicas*

Preoccupied with science-fiction themes and human clones, *Replicas* is as mechanized as the subject matter. It informed a generation that would soon take the style and go darker places under the industrial banner.

**Ohio Players** *Honey*

As if the infamous cover art isn't enough, the Ohio Players' 1975 funk and R&B opus spills over with exceptional performances that include "Fopp" and the now-ubiquitous "Love Rollercoaster."

**Orchestra Baobab***Baobab a Paris Vol.1 & Vol.2*

You'll need to settle for bootlegged versions, but anything from the pan-African pop-fusion supergroup's 1970s heyday is worth hearing no matter the sonic condition or format.

**Graham Parker***Squeezing Out Sparks*

Far and away Parker's pinnacle move, his 1979 post-punk diatribe on romance, placement, and politics preceded decades of ill-advised, weaker crossover attempts.

**Parliament***Mothership Connection*

The greatest funk trip ever? An astounding lineup—keyboardist Bernie Worrell, bassist/guitarist Bootsy Collins, ex-J.B. horn members Fred Wesley and Maceo Parker, and more—tear the roof off of this sucker.

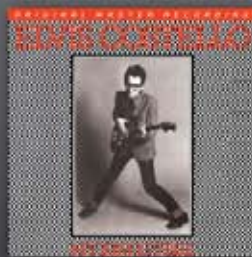
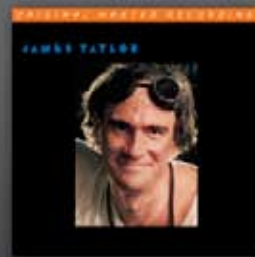
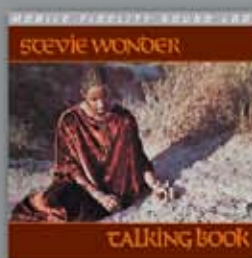


*Mofi*™

MOBILE FIDELITY  
SOUND LAB

The Original Audiophile Record Label.  
Still Producing the World's Finest  
LPs, SACDs and 24K Gold CDs.

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



### **Evan Parker** *Saxophone Solos*

Following up the theoretical havoc that Peter Brotzmann wrought on *Machine Gun*, avant-garde saxophonist Parker wages war on tonality, form, and practically every known rule on an album as punk as anything released in the rock canon.

### **Pere Ubu** *Dub Housing*

Discover why David Thomas loomed as post-punk's master ringleader on a record engrossed with abstract patterns, oddball humor, and grim dissonance. Amidst the weirdness, the music manages to hold its shape.

### **The Police** *Outlandos d'Amour*

The Police before pretension, internal conflict, and Sting's soft-pop drudgery poisoned the well. A smart collision of reggae, jazz, punk, and rock.

### **Iggy Pop** *Lust for Life*

The thumping, throbbing title track is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg on this David Bowie-produced banger glazed with glam-rock icing and drenched in exuberant survivalism.

### **Queen** *Jazz*

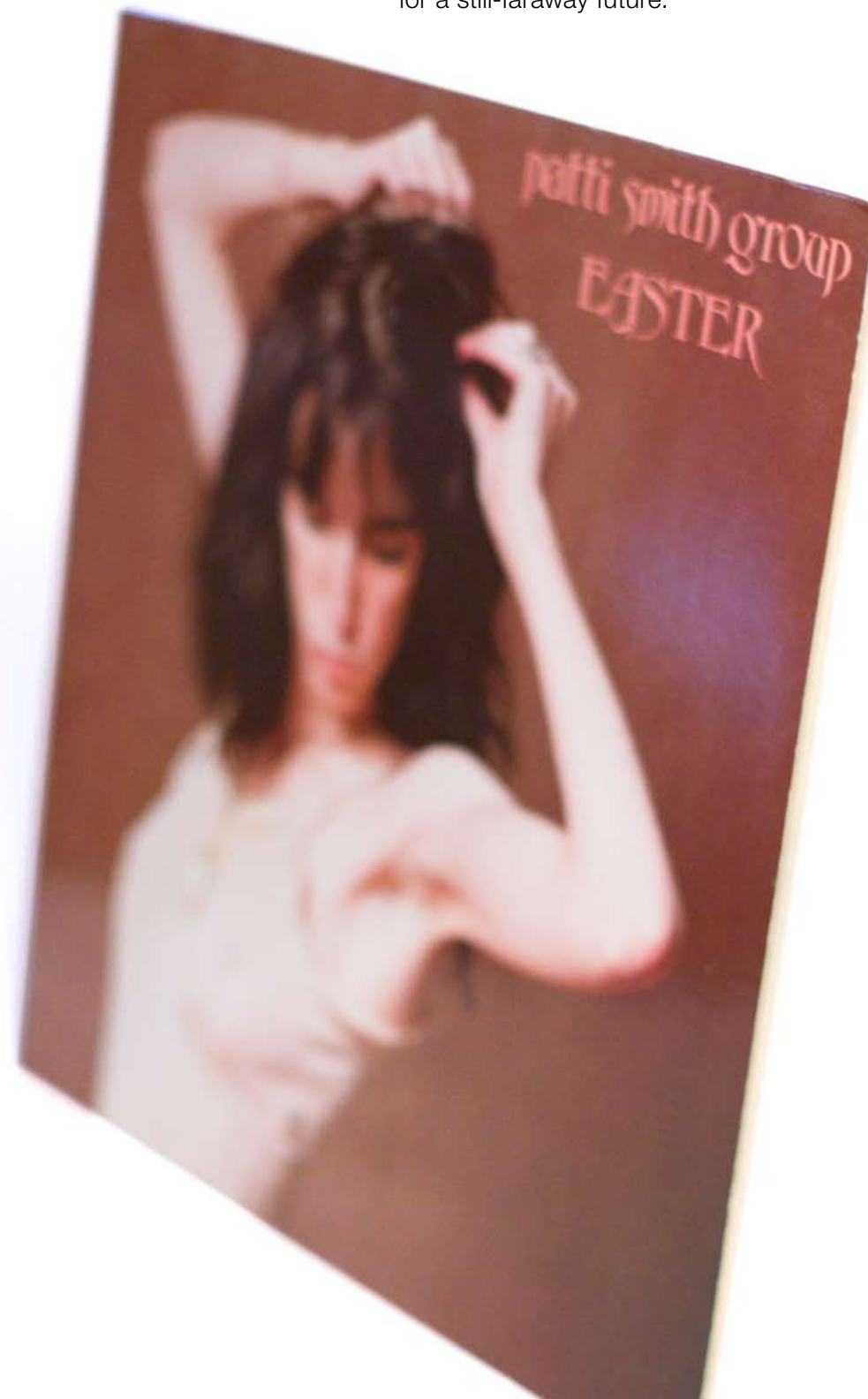
"Fat Bottomed Girls," "Bicycle Race," and "Don't Stop Me Now" lead a quirky multilayered parade of self-conscious excess, bravado camp, and classically inspired pageantry.

### **Ramones** *Rocket to Russia*

Chewing-gum sticky, Bowery tough, cartoonishly funny, and amazingly simple, the Ramones' 1977 offering will forever be cool, fun, and catchy as hell.

### **Lou Reed** *Metal Machine Music*

Unlike most controversial releases, *Metal Machine Music* didn't seek out publicity—its provocative noisescapes and disconcerting alienation simply attracted it. Musique concrete for a still-faraway future.





**Roxy Music** *Siren*

No group tailored smooth, debonair pop as if it was the materials for an Armani suit quite like the artful rockers on this near-perfect, stylized 1975 set.

**Rush** *2112*

Bridging the divide between geeky prog-rock and more accessible hard rock without surrendering its penchant for imaginative arrangements, Rush's unique career effectively starts here.

**Scorpions** *Lovedrive*

Augmented by a mighty albeit short-lived three-guitar front line—Rudolf Schenker, Michael Schenker, and Matthias Jabs—the German group rocks like a hurricane. And dig the politically incorrect, chauvinistic cover art.

**Bob Seger** *Live Bullet*

Captured at the same venue as Kiss' *Alive!*, Bob Seger's unfailingly consistent blue-collar narratives and working-class rock songs transcend their studio-album counterparts and make the Midwest favorite a national star.

**Sex Pistols**

*Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols*

Few records literally transformed culture on both sides of the Atlantic. This is one of them. And it hasn't lost a modicum of its edginess, danger, or revolutionary promise.

**Shoes** *Black Vinyl Shoes*

Cut on a four-track recorder by a quartet from Zion, Illinois, the melodically rich and unavoidably catchy *Black Vinyl Shoes* predates the power-pop revival by a decade.

**Siouxsie and the Banshees** *The Scream*

The eyeliner, black-on-black dress codes, and claustrophobic depression that would inform goth can all look to *The Scream*, which connects punk to weird atmospheric psychedelia, as their earth mother.

**Patti Smith** *Easter*

"Outside of society/That's where I want to be," passionately declares the New York-based poet-cum-singer on an autonomous, proudly penetrating proclamation of underground principles and liberating primitivism.

**The Soft Boys**

*A Can of Bees*

With Robyn Hitchcock tapping into the 1960s psychedelic scene for lyrical inspiration and the band shaking down punk and guitar-anchored rock for its arrangements, the English ensemble never sounded more aggressive.

**The Specials** *The Specials*

A whale of a debut. The British ska revivalists (and producer Elvis Costello) stare their country's social ills directly in the eye while intersecting reggae rhythms with fearless punk attitude.

**Stiff Little Fingers** *Inflammable Material*

The scene in *High Fidelity* wherein this record prompts the record store's customers to query if Green Day released a new album couldn't be truer. Suspect device!

**Suicide** *Suicide*

Nearly 35 years on, Suicide's debut remains as inimitable as it was when Martin Rev and Alan Vega unleashed their menacing, cold, minimalist synth-pop on an underground accustomed to ferocious screeds.

**Swell Maps**

*A Trip to Marineville*

The British act's chaotic experimentalism and boiling, noisy racket forms the bridge between post-punk's angularity clatter and crude, recycled garage rock.

**Talking Heads**

*Talking Heads: 77*

Pregnant with jagged rhythms, bounding hooks, oddball lyrics, slippery tension, and David Byrne's zany yelps, a New York-bred debut that whisks jittery new wave, neurotic punk, and art-rock vocabularies into a language of its own.

**Television** *Marquee Moon*

Richard Lloyd and Tom Verlaine sculpt sonic canyons with two sets of six stings and pieces of wood—guitars used as shivs. Complex, purposeful exploration that bypasses blues and soul and instead heads straight for shimmering quicksilver.

**Richard and Linda Thompson** *Pour Down Like Silver*

Intimate, haunted, and downcast, a 1975 gem that finds the Thompsons beating the retreat and pulling back the curtain on stark, bittersweet fare that presaged the booze-soaked blow-up that followed.

**Thin Lizzy** *Jailbreak*

Victims of institutionalized racism due to Phil Lynott's skin color, Thin Lizzy performed 70s rock as well as any of its contemporaries. Heed the twin-lead guitars on *Jailbreak* and attempt to argue any differently.

**Throbbing Gristle**

*20 Jazz Funk Hits*

Profound strangeness that has nothing to do with jazz nor funk nor hits, the transgender English electronic adventurers mash electronics, ambience, disco, and exotica into a rave targeted at cultural outsiders.

**Peter Tosh** *Equal Rights*

Drummer Sly Dunbar delivers one-drop snare-dominant pulses and Robbie Shakespeare drapes songs in taut albeit putty-textured bass lines as Tosh touts militancy and human rights on reggae's magnum opus.

**The Tubes** *The Tubes*

It's hard to top a track like "White Punks on Dope," and the Tubes never really did. The final track serves as the perfect end to a satiric rock debut that comes the closest to capturing the freewheeling nature of its performance art.



## Nagra MSA amplifiers

### Power is nothing without refinement!



- The finest engineering focused on truthful musicality
- Advanced Nagra PFC power supply for unwavering performance under all conditions
- Highly configurable 60 wpc stereo, 60 wpc mono bi-amp or 120 wpc parallel-bridged mono
- Compact chassis with integral heatsink milled from a solid block of aluminum

**NAGRA**

swiss made  
www.nagraaudio.com

Nagra USA, more than 30 years at your service Tel. 800 813-1663

#### **UFO** *Strangers in the Night*

Doctor, doctor! Michael Schenker helps send the hard-rocking UFO into overdrive, as evidenced by this minimally overdubbed live record, which belongs in any discussion of the greatest concert albums ever made.

#### **James Blood Ulmer**

##### *Tales of Captain Black*

Former Ornette Coleman protégé Ulmer goes into the way out on an anarchic 1978 avant-music outing that messes with harmolodics, structures, keys, and signatures in the best possible ways. Coleman guests.

#### **The Undertones**

##### *The Undertones*

If you're somehow under the impression that the Undertones' punk-pop depth started and stopped with the exuberant single "Teenage Kicks," you need to consult this record. Immediately.

#### **Van Halen** *Van Halen*

A 1978 debut that instantaneously catapulted guitar playing into the 21st century and, for better or worse, ushered in the booze-soaked, cocaine-caked era of boisterous arena rock.

#### **Townes Van Zandt**

##### *Live at the Old Quarter*

Trumpeted in the liner notes as the "Rosetta Stone" of Texas music, and captured at an intimate, hot and sweaty Houston venue, this is the essence of the late, great country-folk icon Van Zandt: all alone, all acoustic.

#### **Loudon Wainwright III**

##### *Unrequited*

"You say you got domestic problems," sings Wainwright on *Unrequited*, "Well, you should get a load of mine," throwing down the gauntlet on a potent album surrounding the dissolution of his marriage. Wry humor abounds.

#### **Tom Waits** *Small Change*

Skid-row back alleys, dive bars, two-bit floozies, heartsick ballads, auctioneer pleas, whiskey-river timbres, beat-poet verses: welcome to Waits' nocturnal world.

#### **Wire** *Pink Flag*

Regarded by many as the most visionary, original LP to spring from Britain's flourishing punk scene, the streamlined minimalism *Pink Flag* disregards parameters and makes mincemeat out of the expected.

#### **Stevie Wonder**

##### *Songs in the Key of Life*

Containing two full-length LPs and an EP's worth of material, Stevie Wonder's final "classic period" album still hangs in against any R&B collection devised before or since. Ambitiousness at its best.

#### **X-Ray Spex**

##### *Germ-Free Adolescents*

If the yelping "Oh Bondage, Up Yours!" was the only slice of music X-Ray Spex released, the London punk group would've done enough. But it did more, leaving this joyous bleat of a debut that ensures Poly Strene's legacy lives forever.

#### **XTC** *Drums and Wires*

With the title reflecting its percussive core and incorporation of a second guitarist, *Drums and Wires* converts XTC's British sensibilities into smart, internationally digestible pop that speaks all languages.

#### **Neil Young** *Zuma*

The most overlooked 70s-era Young set ranks as one of his and Crazy Horse's absorbing, magnetic moments. "He came dancing across the water..."

#### **Frank Zappa** *Sheik Yerbouti*

In advancing so-called "dumb entertainment," Zappa's more accessible side revels in bawdy humor, controversial sexism, and rich sarcasm.

#### **Warren Zevon** *Excitable Boy*

The first side alone—"Johnny Strikes Up the Band," "Roland the Headless Thompson Gunner," "Excitable Boy," "Werewolves of London"—belongs in both a music hall of fame and literary noir compendium. ●





# Macro

## Music for Your Desktop

By Jeff Dorgay

### Furutech Cruise Headphone Amplifier

Furutech's Alpha Design Labs is all about small. Earlier this year, the company introduced its GT40 that squeezes a MM/MC phono preamplifier, headphone amplifier, and USB DAC/ADC all into a petite box no bigger than a short stack of CDs. Incredibly handy, it became a permanent addition to *TONE*'s reference collection. Furutech continues this trend of small but mighty products with the Cruise.

A fully equipped desk Death Star needs a great headphone amplifier for the times when your stressed out co-workers don't share your enthusiasm for Slayer and when you don't want them to know that you really do like Justin Bieber. The Cruise gives you a great headphone amplifier and a 24bit/96kHz USB DAC as well.



### Simply Gorgeous

The Furutech Cruise seems “mega” just sitting on a desk. Sheathed in carbon fiber and polished stainless, it looks more like a telemetry device from the Ferrari pit. And if you really want to impress your friends at work after being gone for a long weekend, tell them you took a few vacation days to hang out with your F1 pals at Ferrari, and this just happened to be in the gift bag.

With a footprint barely bigger than an iPod Classic, the Cruise has its own self-contained battery that can be charged via a provided wall wart or a computer's USB port. My Furutech goodie bag included its cool, purple 3.5mm i-D35SP stereo interconnects that directly go from an iWhatever (that doesn't have a high-res USB output) to the Cruise *and* an ADL Formula 2 USB cable. Furutech is known for cable products that feature ultra-pure conductors and its proprietary cryogenic treatment process. Indeed, both of these cables are well made and reasonably priced (\$59 for the USB, \$50 for the line-level cable). Most importantly, both take the Cruise further down the high-performance road. After spending all that hard-earned money on high-res downloads, you don't want to shortchange yourself with cable from Radio Shack, do you?

### Down to Business

The Cruise requires five hours to fully charge, after which it's said to deliver 80 hours of playback. Sure enough, I played it for more than

62 hours at near-full volume on a headphone stand (we do not recommend or endorse high-volume headphone listening) and it was still going strong. Suffice it to say that the Cruise claims enough capacity to outlast any device with which you'll pair it.

For Mac users, hookup is simply a matter of selecting the output device in the System Preferences. I've been told it's just as easy to mate with a PC. But, as a Mac die-hard, I didn't go this route. A green LED indicates signal lock on the USB side while a blue one on the front confirms audio output. When fully charged, the LED goes from red to green.

### The Test Kitchen

I divided listening sessions between an iPhone 4, iPad 1, and MacMini, running Pure Music with a majority of the music on the desktop system high-resolution 24/96 files. Most of my listening was done via Audeze LCD-2 headphones, but Grado, Sennheiser, and AKG models all worked well.

The Cruise sports an overall natural sound, without a hint of solid-state glare. On Keith Jarrett's *Concert in Köln*, the piano floated between the earpieces, sounding just slightly in front of my head rather than directly between the ears, an experience I prefer. With Kenny Burrell's *Soulero*, the Audeze/Cruise combination effortlessly revealed the nuances of Burrell's delicate fretwork.

Of course, no headphone review is complete without trippy headphone effects. Enter Pink

Floyd's *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*. Mmmm, nothing like 60s rock and headphones. Four Grateful Dead albums followed, and my trip finally came to an end with Todd Rundgren's "Sounds of the Studio" from *Something/Anything?* Those little sounds bounced all around the soundstage.

The Cruise also offered great extension at both ends of the frequency spectrum. Bass was powerful and well defined. And while the Audeze 'phones go deep, shuffling through Genesis and Daft Punk tracks revealed that they were up to the task when mated with the Cruise, which has more than enough resolution on tap to satisfy those with a serious collection of high-resolution music.

### Paid In Full

While the USB DAC casts the Cruise in its best light, the latter is no slouch when utilized via the line level input. And as much as it added to iPod listening sessions, it worked wonders for watching movies on the iPad, as the latter really struggles with driving high-quality phones. If you spend a lot of time on an airplane, you will really appreciate the Cruise.

Whether you enjoy the Furutech Cruise at home, at the office, or on the go, its superb sound quality and long battery life will bring you closer to your media. You don't need a \$1,000 pair of headphones to partake in the journey. But the more time you spend with the Cruise may have you shopping for headphones sooner than later. ●

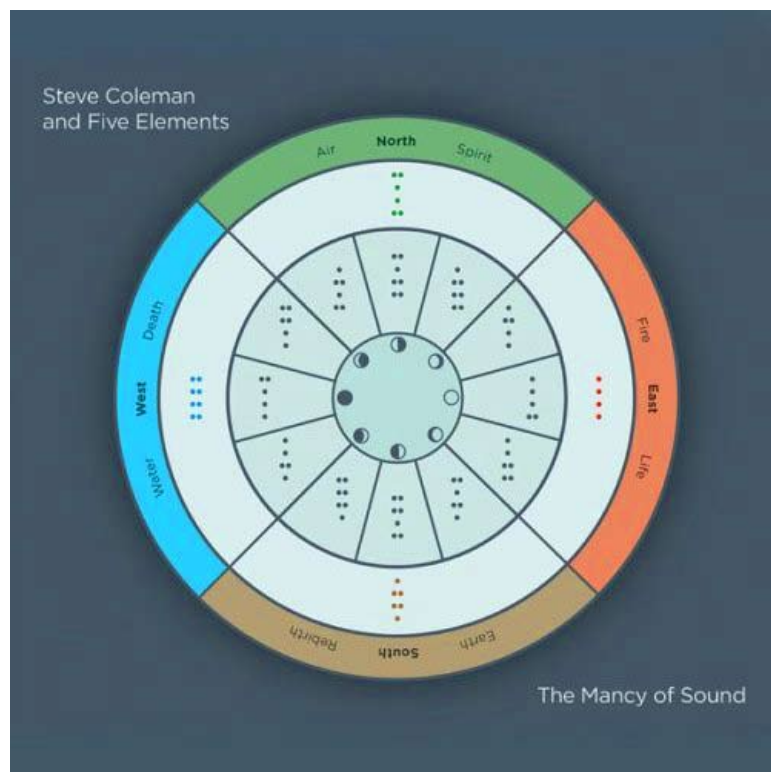
[www.furutech.com](http://www.furutech.com)





# Jazz & Blues

By Jim Macnie



## Steve Coleman

*The Mancy of Sound*  
Pi, CD

Precision is occasionally missing in the complex music of saxophonist Steve Coleman, but precision has forever got its back. Notable for its focus, polyphonic swirl marks the essence of the middle-aged saxophonist's strategies. Instruments often exclaim simultaneously, but rarely does their friction become messy. Counterpoint defines any Coleman ensemble, and on *The Mancy of Sound*, every member of the octet makes his or her own spark.

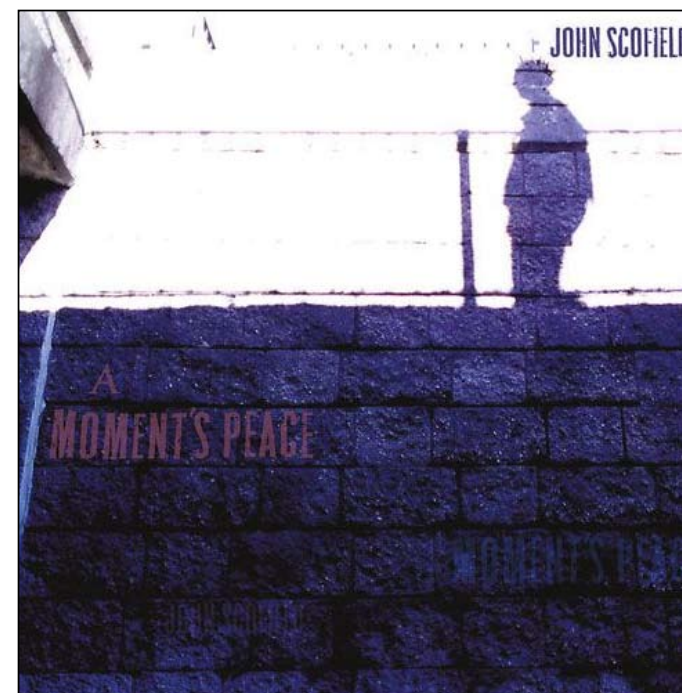


This rigorous process can sound like popcorn popping. Two of the era's most exacting and propulsive trap drummers, Tyshawn Sorey and Marcus Gilmore, interact with hand percussionist Ramon Garcia Perez to form a nexus of beats through which trumpet, trombone, bass, and voice intricately zigzag. Some of the grooves feel like they've been reflected in a funhouse mirror. Some sound like they've been concocted at a calculus seminar. Most are fascinating precisely because of this warped spin on trad precision. On "Water-Oyeku (Odu Ifa Suite)," the melody slips while the thrust slides. Coleman, who sometimes explains his work by alluding to lunar phases as well as I-Ching trigrams, has previously likened his soloing efforts to the movements of clouds in the sky.

A couple pieces—deemed "Formation 1" and "Formation 2"—operate without rhythm-section support yet lose little of the oomph that marks the album's other tracks. Ultimately, they have a fugue-like atmosphere, with lines darting in and out of the foreground. A few moments on *Mancy* (which alludes to the practice of foretelling future events) are disorienting, but in the large, it's quite engaging. And at its best—as on the "Noctiluca (Jan 11)"—this record is a whirlwind to which you'll likely want to submit again and again.

©Photo by JC Hernandez




**John Scofield**

*A Moment's Peace*  
EmArcy, CD

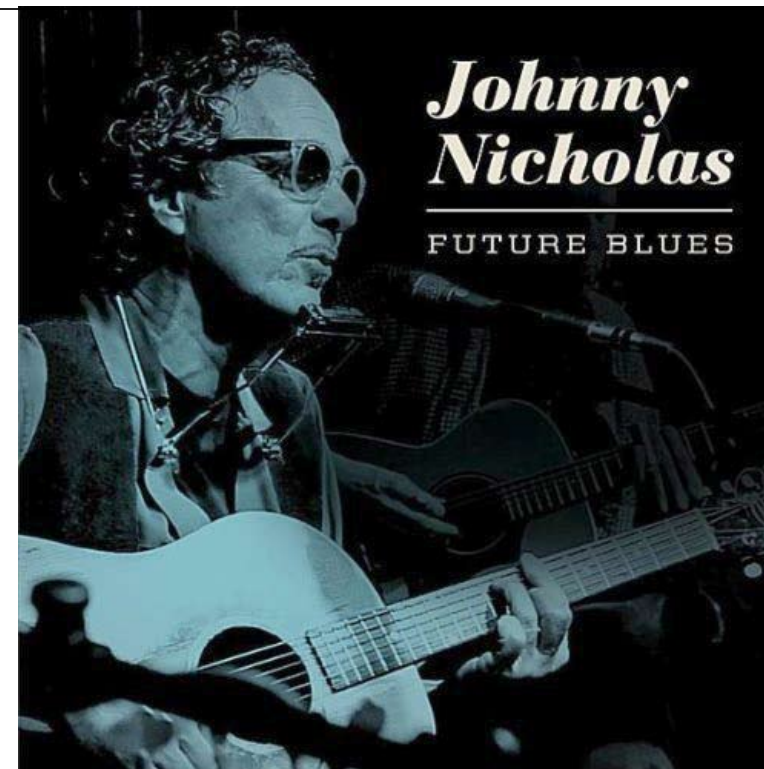
Milking melody at every juncture, Team Sco—drummer Brian Blade, keyboardist Larry Goldings, and bassist Scott Colley—proves that its dedication to refinement doesn't mar its interest in tension.

As soon as you hear that one of your favorite fiery improvisers has made a disc that spotlights the mellow side of things, the fretting begins. Will it be too soft? Are the tunes hokey? Where will the sparks come from? All those worries are rendered moot after a few spins through John Scofield's latest album, a quartet date that indulges in balladry but keeps the interplay taut. Milking melody at every juncture, Team Sco—drummer Brian Blade, keyboardist Larry Goldings, and bassist Scott Colley—proves that its dedication to refinement doesn't mar its interest in tension.

From a Carla Bley ode to suburbia to a Paul McCartney valentine, the song choices assist in selling the album's thesis. No massive reconstructions are included; *A Moment's Peace* teems with dulcet themes that the leader and his crew imbue with lithe solos. Perhaps the most tantalizing is Sco's own rumination on Abbey Lincoln's "Throw It Away." With Blade using mallets and Goldings designing sublime tinkles, the guitarist sashays along, turning his elastic notes into a pliable string of phrases that parallel the poignancy of Lincoln's philosophical lyrics.

Indeed, one of the disc's strong points is the way that Scofield renders myriad tones from his instrument. The whispered blues of "Gee Baby, Ain't I Good To You" has a sting, and it's an overtly different texture from the bright ringing on "Johan" or the phat plucking on "Plain Song." And, for sure, the gnarled electronics of "I Loves You, Porgy" are different from everything else. Closing the disc with Gershwin's jewel, the band lets us know that abstraction can be mellow, too.





### Johnny Nicholas

*Future Blues*

The People's Label, CD

*Future Blues* is Nicholas' first proper release since a nice little buzz rose around the *Texas Sheiks* session he was part of two years ago. Sharing the vocals with Geoff Muldaur and Jim Kweskin, the sixty-something vet proved how rich his whispered growl actually was, and how deeply the blues resonated within him. That disc is loose and charismatic. The new record is arranged and charismatic, a blend you don't often find in blues, where over-thinking occasionally squelches vibe. Both of those elements find a way to thrive on these 12 tunes, and because each track proffers a discrete personality (tempo, groove, and style are all well-considered), it becomes the kind of savvy and entertaining date you might get from Delbert McClinton or John Hammond.

Some auras are eerie. "Graveyard Blues" is full of shadows, and "Roads On Fire" feels like a ghost town. Some are romantic. "Mister Moon" wears its heart on its sleeve, but wants to bump and grind, too. There's even a Dylan tune, usually a fatal error for also-rans like Nicholas. But somehow "Whatever it is you wish to keep/You better grab it fast" fits the overall mood of *Future Blues* quite nicely. Turns out there are very few things that an aw-shucks shuffle beat can't bolster.

Johnny Nicholas isn't a complete unknown, but these days he is something of a shadow figure. The lanky singer and skilled journeyman hung with Rhode Island's Duke Robillard during the hippie era, worked with Big Walter Horton in the Midwest a decade later, and ultimately wound up in Texas—recording intermittently, getting his twang on with *Asleep At The Wheel*, and occasionally waltzing towards Cajun country. For the last 20 years, he's been playing regional gigs and tending to a successful café that he and his wife own in the hill country above Austin.



# Beer Snob

*Life is too short to drink mediocre beer.*

By Bob Gendron

**Brewery Focus:**

## The Lost Abbey

**C**raft breweries that offer multiple year-round staple beers aren't unusual. However, rare is the institution at which more than two or three such selections rank as A-list beverages. Normally, one or two anchor beers are complemented by good albeit lesser choices that fill a certain style or taste need. The scenario is not unlike the five-person starting pitching staff on a major league baseball team.





Lead Brewer Ryan Fields getting ready to torch some raisins.



Ryan Fields adding wort to raisins for Lost Abbey's own Lost & Found Ale.

Competitive clubs frequently lay claim one or two hurlers that rate as an ace. The third and fourth starters get the job done, but are a level or two below their star colleagues. And the last man on the totem pole is often in the mix due to a combination of salary limitations as well as basic necessity—he plugs a hole, as modern-day long tossers no longer throw on three days rest. Larger microbreweries that tout more than four to six permanent beers can be seen as having a strong bullpen, with specialty concoctions serving specific roles that parallel the niche functions of relief pitchers.

To extend the baseball metaphor, if the Lost Abbey was a current NL or AL squad, the San Marcos brewery would undoubtedly be the Philadelphia Phillies, stocked with the best starting rotation fans have seen in decades. Whereas most breweries hope to trot out one or two attention-getting signature beers that will hold drinkers' interests for years to come, the Lost Abbey is spoiled with riches. It touts six high-quality permanent beers, five widely available seasonal offerings, and a quartet of extremely limited non-denominational picks. On top of its extraordinary rotation, the company also nails the cool factor with vivid labels, a compelling history, recognizable symbols, and a myth-building ethos. Moreover, the Lost Abbey claims steady distribution—an essential albeit often-overlooked facet that hampers many smaller breweries.

Founded in May 2006, the Lost Abbey boasts that it was conceived “as part of a crusade in [the] ongoing story of Good vs. Evil beer.” What’s not to like about that? Good humor

aside, the California firm sprouted out of Pizza Port and sprung to life once Stone Brewing Co. abandoned its facility for a larger, nearby location. The latter’s move prompted Pizza Port co-founder Vince Marsaglia and head brewer Tomme Arthur, along with two other associates, to launch Port Brewing Company, owners of the Lost Abbey. (Port Brewing Company specializes in aggressive, “West Coast” style beers while the Lost Abbey focuses on Belgian-inspired creations.) Seldom has a brewer’s relocation yielded such positive results for all involved parties. *(continued)*

**The Lost Abbey is spoiled with riches. It touts six high-quality permanent beers, five widely available seasonal offerings, and a quartet of extremely limited non-denominational picks.**



Head Brewer Tomme Arthur

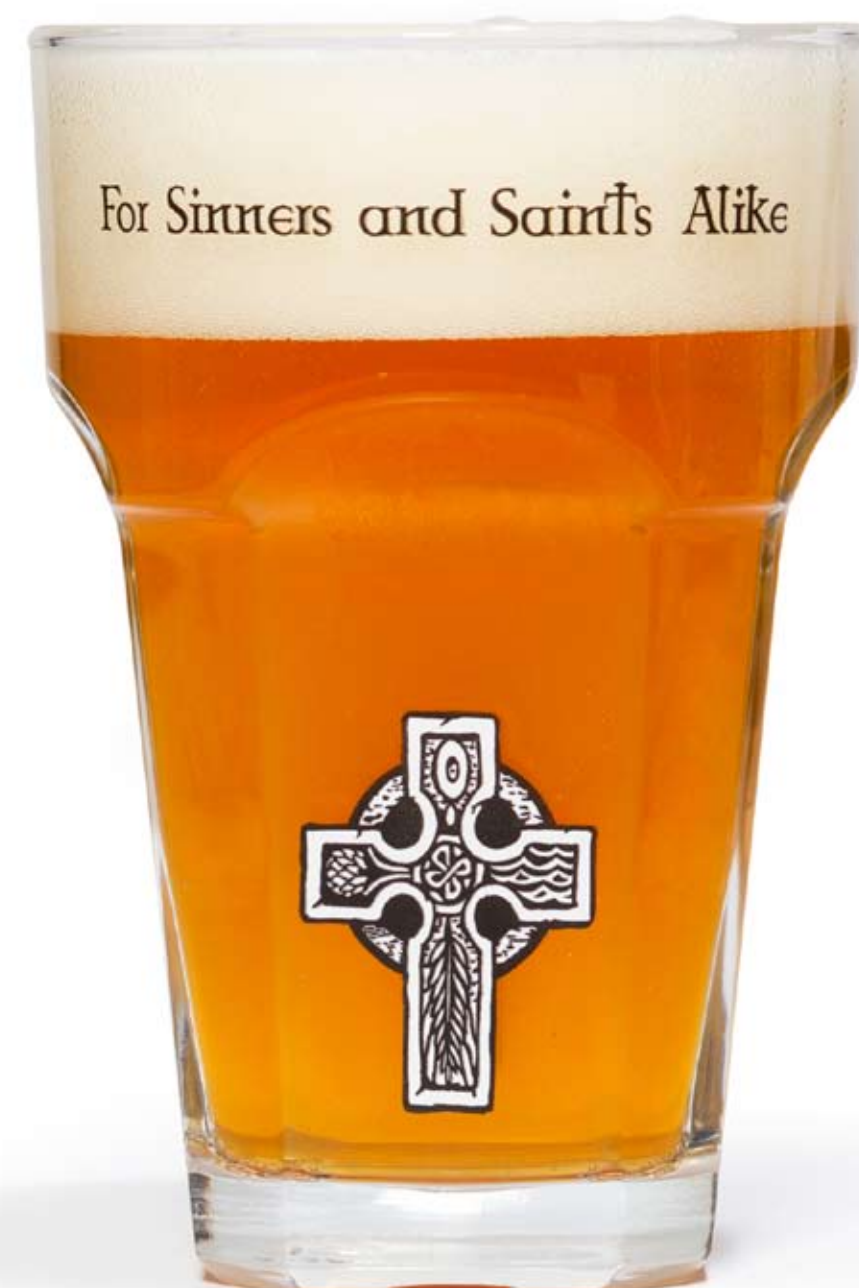




Each of Lost Abbey's beers is distinguished by its iconic Celtic Cross—the four arms designating the four main ingredients (barley, water, yeast, hops) as well as the four seasons—and original artwork that looks like it belongs on the gatefold sleeve of a 1970s album. The company also plays fast and loose with the religious angles associated with abbeys; names often reference Biblical tales or characters, and the Lost Abbey's tagline, "Inspired Beer for Sinners and Saints Alike," continues the good versus evil dichotomy. Indeed, the founders aren't afraid to poke fun at themselves. The Lost Abbey moniker not only alludes to Belgium's traditional abbey-run breweries but also the fact that this particular abbey never existed. Hence, it's forever "lost."

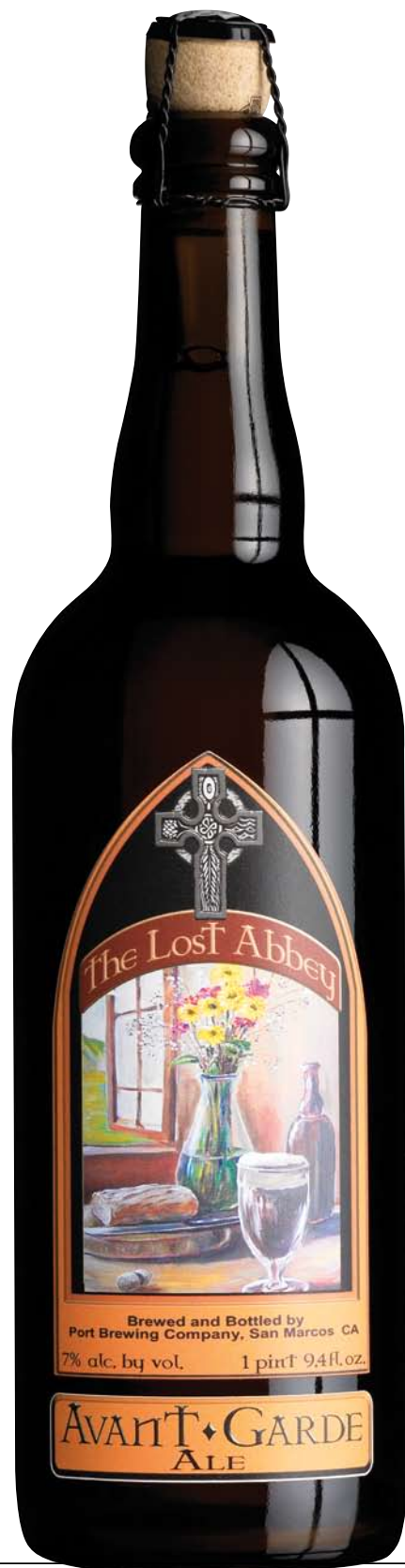
Available in either 375ml or 750ml corked bottles, Lost Abbey's "main six" are notable for their exceptional complexities, enhancing palates, and out-of-the-box makeup. Ideal for summer, Red Barn Ale pours with a golden yellow body evocative of a Kansas wheat field. True to its French saison style, it gives off aromas of citrus and spices—specifically, orange and ginger, with subtle traces of black pepper. Savor the mild yeast notes, lemon accents, and medium body. A thin and slightly dry finish helps quench thirsts on a hot, humid day.

## Red Barn Ale





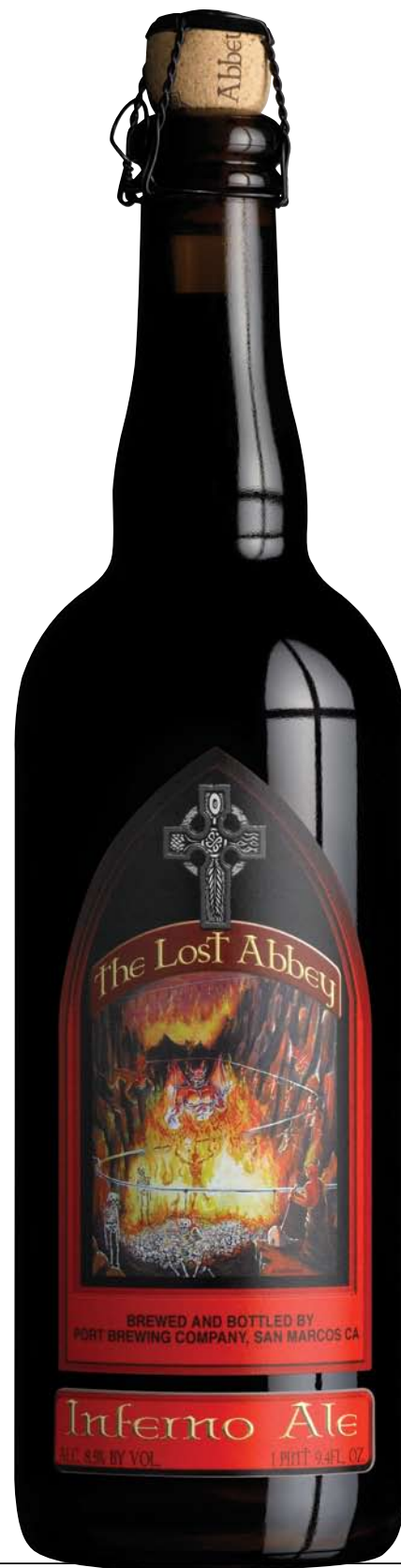
## Avant Garde Ale



Similarly inspired by Northern French tradition, Avante Garde comes out of the bottle with a pronounced gold coloring, its homey scent comprised of bread, biscuits, and coriander. Not surprisingly, the Lost Abbey makes one of the three ingredient malts in a pizza oven. Involving, but not overly so, the beer veers toward the light toasty side, with shades of biscuit malts, citrus hops, and floral overtones dominating the overall flavor. Eminently drinkable, with a refreshingly smooth finish, it makes a perfect match with cheese and bread. Fondue, anyone?

As indicated by the hellfire scene depicted on the label, as well as its name, Inferno Ale isn't as simple or forgiving. The Belgian strong pale ale pours with a fair amount of carbonation that forms a solid, white head that floats above a miniature yellow-hued lake. Pineapple, honey, banana, lemon, clove, and black pepper fragrances entice the nose, none too prevalent, and all extremely well balanced and mirroring what a great Belgian-style brew should claim. The allure continues to the mouthfeel and taste, infused with sugar and malty tints that grow better as the beer warms in goblet stemware. Pears and apples may also make a guest appearance; Inferno treads extremely lightly for a concoction that is 8.5% ABV. You won't notice the alcohol until you've tossed a few back.

## Inferno Ale



# UNLIMITED ENJOYMENT. LIMITED PRODUCTION.

The ART amplifier

with its seemingly

unbounded power

reserves places

no limits on your

enjoyment of

recorded music.

But only 250 units

(125 pairs) will be

available to

audiophiles

world-wide.

conrad-johnson

conrad-johnson It just sounds right.

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



## The origin of true sound

One material sums up our uncompromising quest for perfection in sound reproduction more than any other. Diamond. A unique combination of lightness and rigidity, it's the ultimate tweeter dome material. So when we were designing our flagship 800 Series Diamond reference speakers, we knew

that nothing else would do. Now, for the first time ever, you can experience the unparalleled clarity of diamond in every speaker in the range. True sound. Made for recording studios. And now available everywhere else.

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

## Judgment Day Ale

Use caution just how many Judgment Day Ales you enjoy at one sitting. Claiming 10.5% ABV and a decidedly heavy character, the Belgian-style quadrupel makes the most of the apocalyptic scenario suggested by the four horsemen on the metal-leaning label. Gorgeous, with reds and browns combining to form a seductive maroon-tinted pool, the beer

exhales black cherries, dried fruits, raisins, toffees, and chocolates in a manner that entices the nasal cavity to salivate. The taste is even better. Deep, rich malt flavors, brown sugars, and port wine accents pair with woody oak lines and nutmeg traces.

Leave it sit for an hour, and the experience will be enhanced.

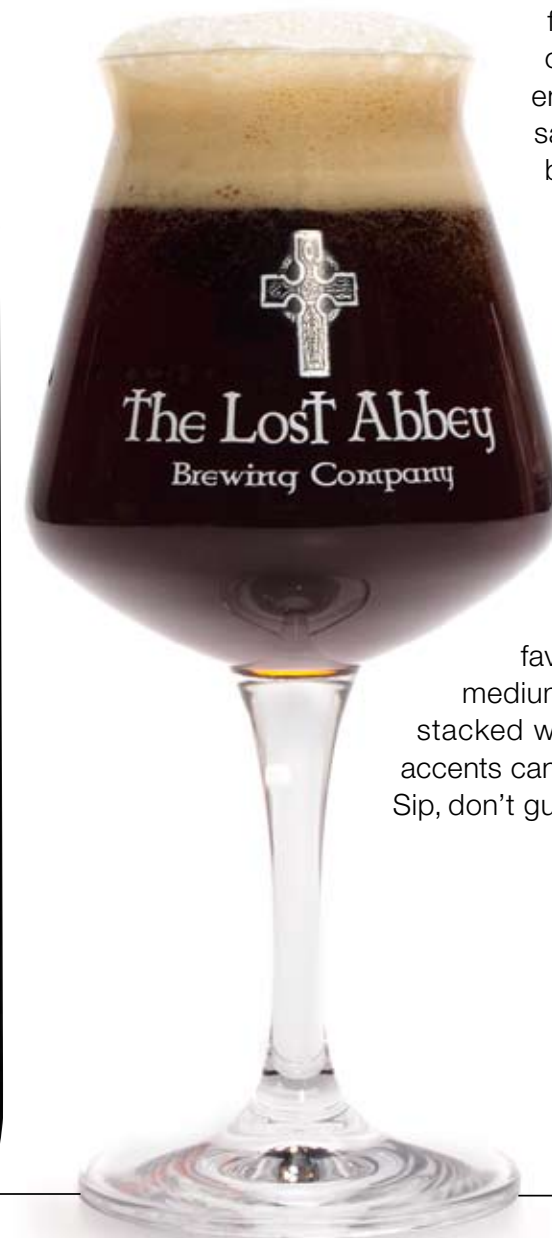
Some may feel that the sweetness and alcohol presence need to be increased,

but connoisseurs that favor a medium-bodied,

medium-carbonated quad

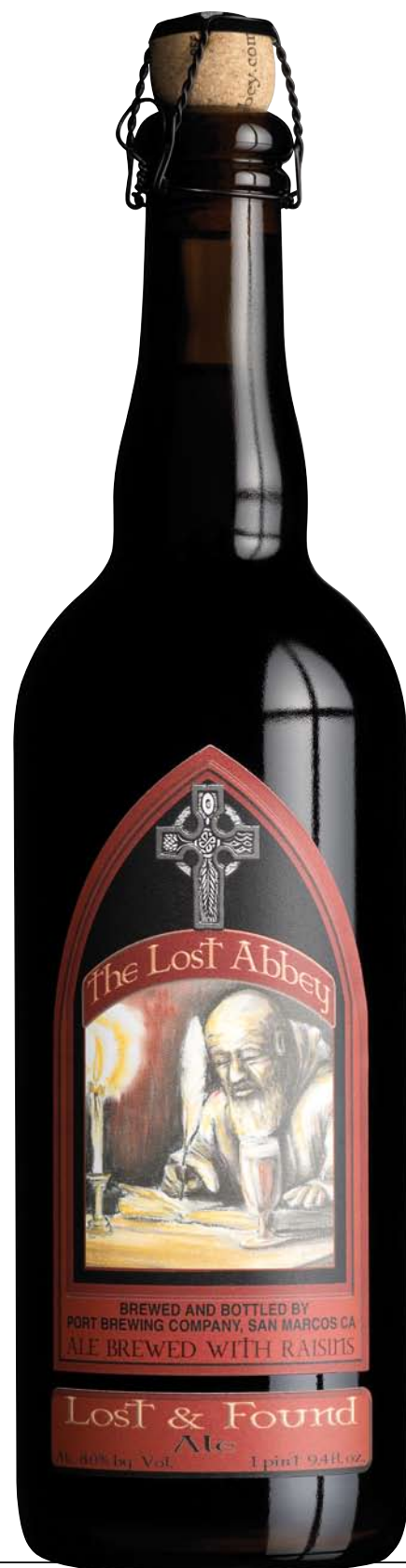
stacked with caramel accents cannot go wrong.

Sip, don't gulp.





## Lost &amp; Found Ale

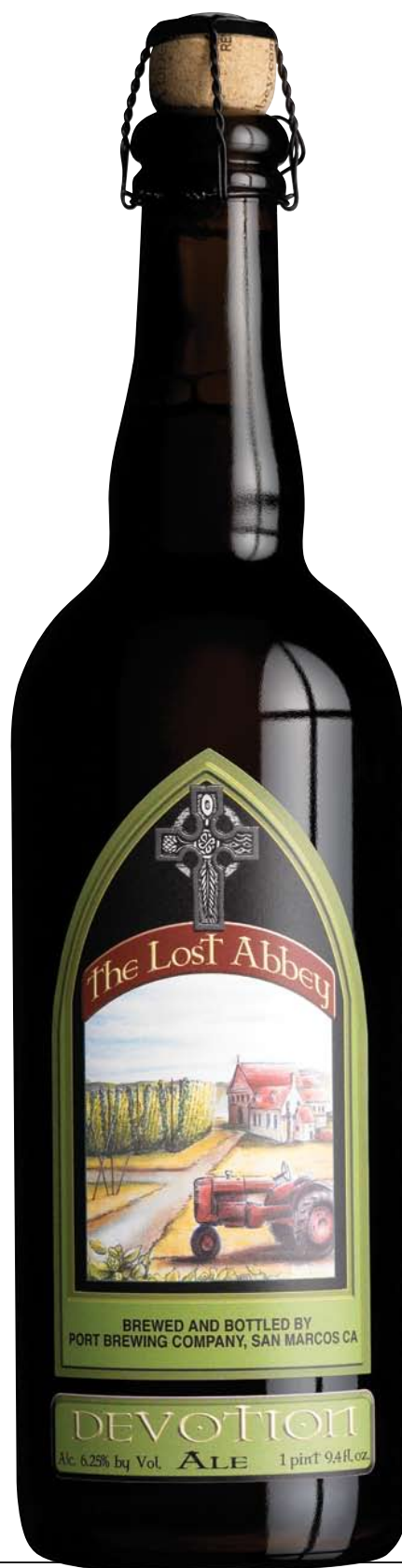


Few beers strike a better balance between sweetness, fruitiness, and spice than Lost & Found, a Dubbel-style ale. Its amber color and raisin, fig, fruit, banana, and spicy fruit scents function as a prelude to the seamless blend of flavors at work. Mild albeit distinctive, the beer's taste walks a fine line between fruity and sugary without giving in to either trait. A glance of bitterness greets the mouthfeel, but the chocolate finish and soothing malt layers render any potential dominant accents moot. In the mood for pork tenderloin? Here's your beverage.

Out of the Lost Abbey's stable, Devotion Ale—a Belgian blond—is the least moody. It pours yellow, emits a pungent yeast and clove smell, and, if pressed, forms a gargantuan white head. Mild Belgian hops rule here, with wheat and champagne-like flavors abetting a medium-light body and dry-fruit aftertaste that doesn't stick around long enough to annoy or distract from the main course. Designed to complement rather than become the center of attention at a meal—a job it performs nearly flawlessly.

All of Lost Abbey's seasonal selections—particularly Carnevale Ale, Gift of the Magi, and Cuvee de Tomme—are worth seeking out, even if it means scheduling a visit to the brewery. The explosion of excellent craft breweries during the past five years is unprecedented, but if forced to pick a handful of go-to establishments, one could do much worse than naming the Lost Abbey as their chief provider of liquid sustenance. ●

## Devotion Ale



# "The Truth, nothing more, nothing less..."

"Ridiculously good in every aspect of vinyl playback" -  
Michael Fremer, *Stereophile*



The Diva II SP edition reveals a genuine insight into the performance standards of high-end audio.

Precision control of turntable speed is achieved with our DSP engine. Variations in the mains supplies are ironed out to create a pure supply of power to the motor. This can be calibrated to achieve perfect platter speeds.

Motor noise, vibration and control are class-leading with a 'twin belt' drive controlling platter dynamics and stability under load. The result? A smooth, yet dynamic sound quality, improved bass and treble definition.

"It revealed an incredible wealth of genuine low-level detail... If times got tough and I had to sell my big rig, I could listen happily ever after to the Diva II SP. That's how well balanced and robust its overall sound was."

— Michael Fremer, *Stereophile* (January 2011)

[www.avidhifi.co.uk](http://www.avidhifi.co.uk)

**AVID HIFI LIMITED**, Bicton Industrial Park, Kimbolton, Huntingdon, Cambs, PE28 0LW  
Tel: +44(0)1480 869 900 Fax: +44(0)1480 869 909  
Website: [www.avidhifi.co.uk](http://www.avidhifi.co.uk), Email: [info@avidhifi.co.uk](mailto:info@avidhifi.co.uk)



Pulsare Phono Stage



# The Dot Mystique

Leica V-Lux 30 Camera

By Jeff Dorgay



Leica's latest compact camera is a true joy to use until you get to the checkout counter—or worse yet, see a friend's Panasonic DMC-ZS10, which is essentially the same camera (Leica lens and all) for less than half the price. It's akin to that tense moment when two women wearing the same dress spot each other from across the room at a party.

Hardcore Leicaphiles will probably not want to be caught dead with a Panasonic camera in their hands, but those in search of value will relish being able to approach a similar level of quality with the DMC-ZS10. The latter possesses the same 16x Leica zoom lens that has an equivalent focal length of 24-384mm on a 35mm camera; nonetheless, you are relegated to a maximum aperture of f5.9. Hence, consider extreme telephoto shots limited to bright sunlight or tripod use.

The \$749 V-Lux 30 is stylishly black with a three-inch TFT view screen that practically covers the back of the camera, except for a few buttons and a multi-function dial to adjust flash, change exposure compensation, regulate the self timer, and engage the macro mode. Reading the manual is recommended, yet the V-Lux 30's controls are very logically placed. If you've spent any time with other digital cameras, you'll be able to get started taking pictures almost immediately.

So why pay a price premium for the Leica? It comes with several key extras. The V-Lux 30 includes a copy of Adobe's Photoshop and Premier Elements, so you can get down to serious editing of your photos and video footage. By comparison, Panasonic provides its proprietary image software,

which is ponderous to use. Leica also offers its proprietary firmware for the image sensor. And even though the Leica and Panasonic share the same Leica zoom lens, midrange detail and flesh tones on the former's images are truer to life and have less contrast. Most importantly, the Leica features a two-year warranty as opposed to Panasonic's one-year plan. (To put this in perspective, Amazon will sell you two more years of warranty from a third party vendor for \$250.)

## Photons Required

Like most handheld cameras with compact image sensors, the V-Lux 30 comes up short when shooting in low light at high ISO settings. Forget using much past ISO 400 for anything that you'd like to view or print much bigger than a standard 3 x 5 print. Conversely, image stabilization is very good, and yields better image-quality shooting at low ISO by taking advantage of the IS rather than cranking up the ISO dial to get a higher shutter speed. Some may find this counterintuitive, but the approach provides the best results.

The V-Lux 30 offers outstanding performance in moderate to bright daylight. Its 14 MP CMOS sensor has a film-like response, with a slight warm cast that favors reds.

The V-Lux 30 excels at producing images with pleasing color and a wide tonal scale. Mid-tone detail when shooting at ISO100 could easily be mistaken for pictures taken with a DSLR at modest enlargement.

## Easy to Handle

Amidst the handful of available white balance settings, auto mode proved best and is suggested for all but the most advanced users. Since the camera lacks a RAW capture mode, you'll want to get the color balance as close as possible. The safety net offered by RAW capture removed the stress out of shooting in difficult situations and would be a great way for Leica to differentiate this camera from its Panasonic sibling. The additional creative control of shooting in DNG format would take the V-Lux 30's versatility to another level.

1080i video capture is only a click away, and easily allows you to bring out your inner news reporter with a touch of the red button located just above the power switch on the right side of the camera. The 3D function is another story. Unless you have the hands of a brain surgeon, this mode is limited to tripod use, destroying the compact camera ethos in the process. The 3D images produced were novel, but ended up being more blurry than dimensional. *(continued)*





# The new gateway for Audiophiles

After the first drum hit, you'll be hooked. But don't worry, at these prices, Junior's college fund is safe...for now.

**Never Settle.** That's the driving philosophy behind every product our distinguished in-house design and engineering team creates, and the Motion Series is no exception. Voice matched with MartinLogan's ultra-high-end electrostatic speakers, Motion speakers features exotic Folded Motion tweeters that will have your ears lusting for more alone time with your music collection.

**Meet the family**  
Starting at only \$199.95\* each.

\*Suggested US retail



**Motion**  
MARTIN LOGAN

The Great American Speaker Company

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

**● TONE STYLE**



This experience is not limited to the V-Lux 30; other manufacturers' compacts netted the same results.

Everything else is standard. The camera stores images to a standard SD card, so taking advantage of one with 8MP capacity or larger means never running out of pictures. Those on extended excursions will want to bring along an extra battery, as you will run out of juice before you run out of storage—especially when repeatedly shooting HD video or using the on-camera flash. Expect about 400 photos with no flash and half that amount with heavy flash use. Plan accordingly.

Photos and video are easily transferred to your computer via a card reader or the integrated USB port. Those who just require a quick viewing session can use the HDMI port for large-screen playback. Images displayed on my calibrated television screen looked very similar to those on the computer desktop, with slightly more contrast, but for critical color work, stick to a calibrated computer monitor.

## Dot Dilemma

The Leica V-Lux 30 performs admirably and offers excellent picture quality when used in bright light. And Leica engineers limited the feature set to options that you will actually *use* in most situations.

But the question of the price premium remains: Do you want the prestige of the Leica dot or do you want to come close with the Panasonic? Well, if you tend to hang on to a digital camera and don't require each year's latest model, the additional warranty is an excellent value. It covers the *full* camera as well as the battery and digital sensor. Plus, if you don't have a copy of Photoshop and Premier *Elements*, that's another \$129 to take into consideration. At the end of the day, the actual price disparity is only about \$100. Given that amount, and the performance, I'll take the coolness of the Leica badge any day. ●



# SpongeBob earbuds

\$9.99

<http://www.toysrus.com/product/index.jsp?productId=3986341>

**W**ho knew that Toys “R” Us had an electronics department? That’s where Google sent me when I checked my local store for availability on these SpongeBob earbuds. The sales guy gave me a funny look when I walked in to pick them up, and grimaced when I told them that they were for *me*, not one of my kids. I got an even funnier look at the gym the next day. I’m sure the grumpy old ladies on the treadmill would have been even grumpier if they would have heard my Ted Nugent superset queued up for the morning jog.

For \$10, these earbuds sound on par with the \$29 standard-issue Apple buds and are tons more fun. Don’t be surprised if you buy a pair for yourself as well as the kids. Psst: They have Iron Man buds, too!



# Benchmark



## DAC1 HDR

Stereo Pre-Amp with Remote Control  
DAC / Headphone Amp / USB

“...a great all around piece.”  
*Tone Audio*

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

800-262-4675  
BenchmarkMedia.com

Made In  
Syracuse, NY, U.S.A.





# The Boomer Box

JVC's Kaboom

By Kevin Hunt

When diehard fan Christian Lopez retrieved the ball after Derek Jeter's 3,000th hit and didn't immediately demand a tricked-out Tesla, a plaque in Yankee Stadium's Monument Park, and dinner with Oprah for its return, the Yankees should have known how to reward such retro humility. Give the big palooka a JVC RV-NB70B Kaboom, a modern update on the pre-iPod, pre-Steroids Era, circa-1980s big-city phenomenon known as the boombox. Yes, the ghetto blaster has returned, gentrified. (Starting with the name: No more "ghetto blaster," please.)

Long gone since LL Cool J declared his love for the boombox in 1985's "Krush Groove" are the rugged, rectangular Samsonite-like chassis, oversize handle, chrome accents and, naturally, the cassette player. The \$299 Kaboom is as contemporary as a bowl of organic shredded wheat in almond milk. Just look at those soft, rounded edges, the centrally located iPhone/iPod dock, the single-disc CD player, USB port, FM radio, composite-video output, and—here it comes, Ritchie Blackmore wannabes—a guitar/microphone input. (The first person to ask if the dock bypasses the iPod's DAC is outta here!)

The Kaboom preserves the boombox heritage, however, with that signature boombox sound—butt-kicking, earth-trembling bass and volume that could wake a Seattle Mariners fan.

The Kaboom, 15 pounds and 26 inches long, positions a 5-inch

"superwoofer" on each end of its depth-charge body. How serious is the bass? It has its own volume control. And 30 of the Kaboom's aggregate 40 watts of power fuel these little terrors. Across each, like a prison bar, is a handle for toting the Kaboom. (A vinyl strap is also available, but that's just a little too 2011.) Keep your hand on that superwoofer dial: The speakers, only 3 inches each, need all the help they can get. (Asterisk: I liked the Kaboom's softer side as soon as I heard Morocco-born singer Amina Alaoui's on "Arco Iris.")

Don't expect miracles, though. The Kaboom will sound too much like its name, ready to explode when pushed near 90 decibels. The CD player—feeling retro already?—sitting atop the Kaboom reveals a fully exposed laser lens as the lid rises. Just what you don't want in the dusty outdoors. The USB host, a lifeline for the Kaboom's firmware updates, accepts

only MP3 and Windows Media Audio files on four-gigabyte-or-less storage devices. The Kaboom's tiny display screen doesn't help, either. Skip songs or select a group in USB mode, but you can't search for a specific song.

That leaves the iPhone or iPod—between the Kaboom's on-board controls under a flip-down plastic door—as the star of this show. The remote allows full navigational access to an iDevice, although you must mount your treasured digital player carefully. JVC does not supply dock adaptors.

It's hard not to typecast the Kaboom. When an iPod Touch shuffle started with They Might Be Giants' kid stuff ("I Am a Paleontologist"), my face nearly reddened in embarrassment. Yes, it pays to have some Afrika Bambaataa in the music collection.





Shown: LTX 500 Projector



= Home Theater Bliss

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

**ANTHEM**  
THE KEY TO HIGH END AUDIO-VIDEO™

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

www.anthemAV.com

TONE STYLE

# Custom Billet Amplifier Handles



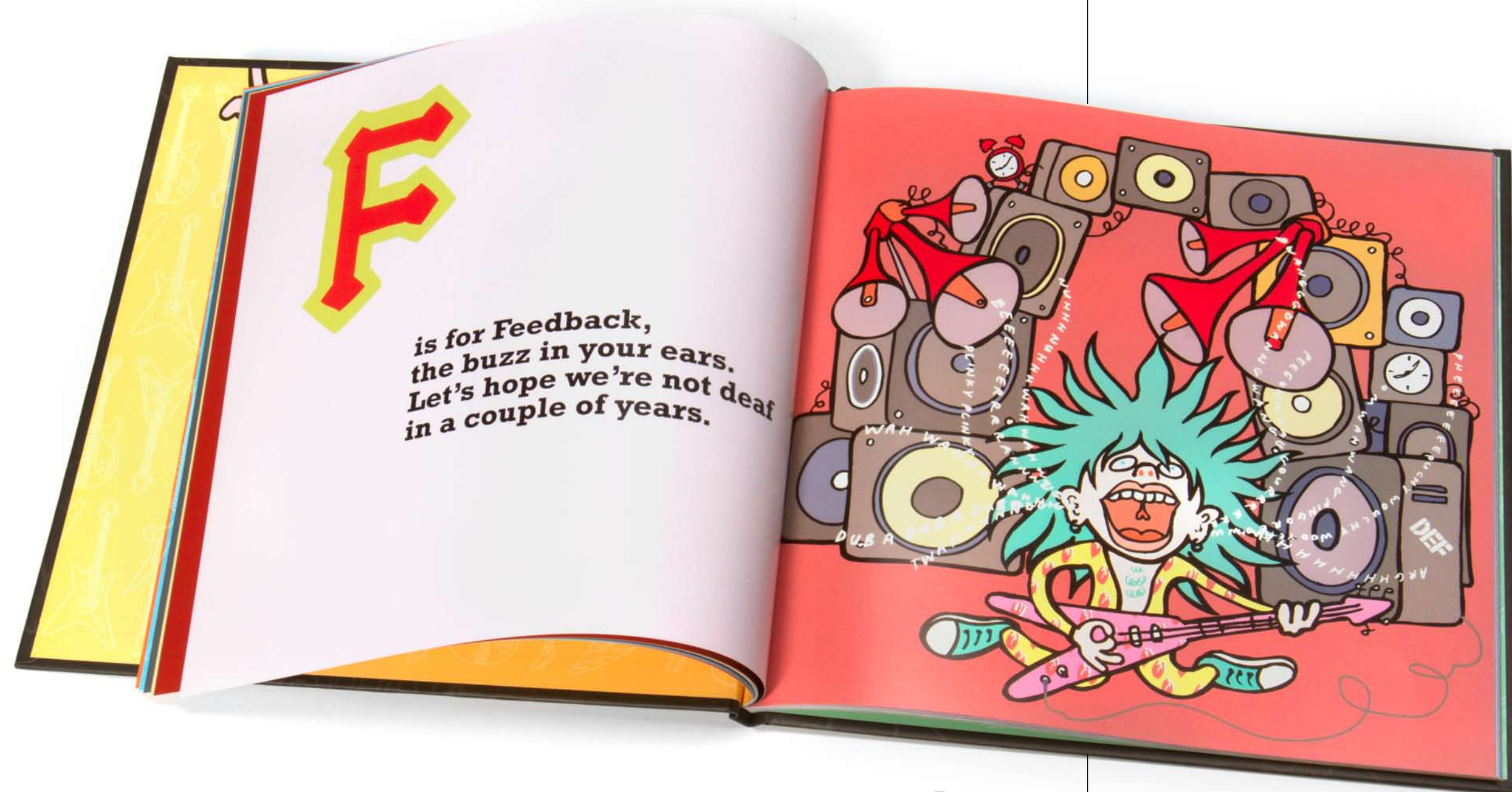
\$450/pair  
[www.audioaficionado.org](http://www.audioaficionado.org)

If you own one of the large McIntosh amplifiers with the large, machined aluminum handles and always wished that your Mc gear could match, the wait is over. McIntosh aficionado Ivan Messer has taken the time and effort to engineer handles that look and feel just like the originals, and which are available to fit *your* McIntosh components.

Quality and attention to detail are readily apparent, as shown here on a C500 preamplifier—just like the one I use in the *TONE* studio. Easily swapped on a kitchen table in less than an hour, these handles give your gear the muscular look that all the big Macs have.

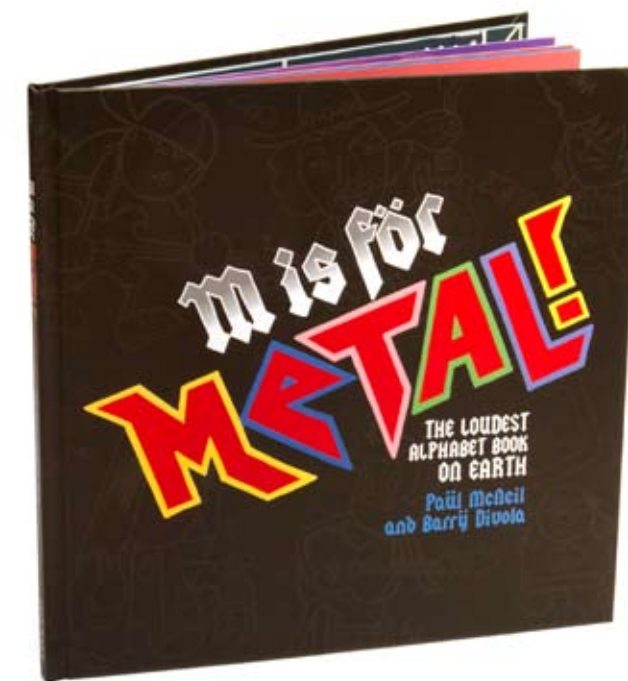
Allow about two weeks for delivery; every handle is made to order.





# M is For Metal!

*The Loudest Alphabet Book on Earth*



\$40.00

[http://www.amazon.com/Metal-Loudest-Alphabet-Rockin-Alphabets/dp/0975683403/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1310959089&sr=8-1](http://www.amazon.com/Metal-Loudest-Alphabet-Rockin-Alphabets/dp/0975683403/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1310959089&sr=8-1)

If you like to bang your head and read your recent spawn *Cat in the Hat* way too many times, here's a little something that will break up the monotony. *M is for Metal* features cute rhymes that will teach junior about Angus Young long before he (or she) is old enough to jump off of a Marshall practice amp. And if you start reading this to your child before they are old enough to speak, who knows what their first word might be?

It's not completely family friendly; "G" is for groupies. So if you're a bit on the prudish side, this may not be the perfect book for you, but then you wouldn't be buying *M is For Metal* in the first place, would you? In the end, this is a great collection of rhymes and illustrations that will be fun to share with kids of all ages.

However, the book has one flaw. It lists the Rolling Stones under "S," and we all know it should be Slayer.





## AVID Platform

Price: TBD  
[www.avid.co.uk](http://www.avid.co.uk)

**T**aking what they've learned from using Sorbothane as suspension devices in the Diva turntables, the folks at AVID applied a higher-grade version of the material—complete with a wide-band albeit linear absorption characteristic—to footers for their equipment platforms.

Available in black or ash, these allegedly work wonders under budget CD players and vacuum-tube electronics. We've had such luck that a full review is in progress.

## Smart Pebble Stand

\$15.99

[http://www.amazon.com/Pebble-Iphone-Notebook-Cellphones-Smartphones/dp/B0047VAZC6/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1312058242&sr=8-1](http://www.amazon.com/Pebble-Iphone-Notebook-Cellphones-Smartphones/dp/B0047VAZC6/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1312058242&sr=8-1)

**W**hile we purchased them to hold objects up in our studio, these Smart Pebbles have a million and one uses. Well, maybe not that many. But they are handy for various electronic gadgets. And they come in a variety of bright colors, or basic black and white.

Made from platinum silicon, they are non-slip and heat resistant, and don't leave any slimy residue behind. Perfect for holding an iPod Touch or remote control!





# The Porsche Cayenne Gets Green

By Bailey S. Barnard

**F**or its 2011 lineup, Porsche introduced its first-ever hybrid production model: the \$69,000 Cayenne S Hybrid. In the seven years since the German automaker first began offering the Cayenne, the latter has far outsold all of the marque's other models. To date, Porsche has moved nearly 300,000 Cayennes worldwide—about 88,000 of which made their way to U.S. roads. In addition to the S Hybrid, this year's Cayenne range includes the base Cayenne (\$48,200), the Cayenne S (\$65,000), and the Cayenne Turbo (\$107,100).







For this new generation of SUVs, Porsche designers conceived all-new styling with a rounder snout, more aggressive lines, and a longer wheelbase, the latter of which provides a bit more passenger and cargo room. Compared to previous models, Porsche also trimmed about 400 pounds from the Cayenne's curb weight. Interior appointments include everything Porsche owners expect—from hand-stitched leather to an optional Burmester audio system, continuing the partnership between the two famed German companies.

As far as the driving experience goes, an optional torque-distribution system called Porsche Torque Vectoring Plus—new this year—delivers electronic control of the rear-axle differential lock to improve stability in curves. Pairing it with Porsche's newly developed traction management system, eight-speed Tiptronic S gearbox, and all-wheel drive (which gives power to the front wheels only as needed via an electronically controlled multiple-plate clutch), makes this year's models the most dynamic Cayennes yet produced.

Of course, the lineup's standout is the Cayenne S Hybrid, which features a dual-engine powerhouse. It combines a supercharged 380hp V6 combustion engine with an electric motor that draws juice from a 288-volt nickel metal-hydride battery. The combustion engine gives drivers all the muscle they expect from a Porsche—a 150mph top speed with enough torque to push the car to 60mph just over 6 seconds—while the electric engine improves fuel consumption. *(continued)*



The Cayenne S Hybrid averages 20mpg in the city and 24mpg on the highway. It stands as the cleanest car in Porsche's portfolio, producing 193g/km of emissions.

The Hybrid model also features Porsche's new hybrid management system, which determines from what engine power should be drawn via a decoupling clutch for smooth transitions between powerhouses. The Hybrid Manager evaluates the driving conditions and required power to determine whether to take power from the electric engine, combustion engine, or both. As such, the Cayenne S Hybrid can travel up to 37mph on short distances solely on electric power while producing zero emissions. It also offers a coasting mode, which disengages the gas engine from the drivetrain when the driver lifts his or her foot off the gas pedal while traveling at speeds of up to 75mph. When this occurs, the engines shut off and the vehicle coasts without utilizing any power. This system helps bring Porsche and its best-selling line into the era of green technology. In addition, Porsche enthusiasts will be satisfied to find all the muscle and interior refinements they have come to expect from the luxury icon. ●

Porsche, [www.porsche.com](http://www.porsche.com)





FEATURE

# AVID Pulsus Phonostage

**Small in Stature Only**

By Jeff Dorgay



The good news is that a few hundred dollars grants you access to the analog world. But should you become truly obsessed, you'll require a better analog front end. Not to worry. Competition is fierce in the \$100-\$300 phono preamplifier segment, with fewer great choices in the \$500-\$800 range. Moving to the \$1,000-\$2,000 plateau offers not only a huge performance jump, but one of the most intense product rivalries in the high end. If you can stretch to this section of the game board, you will be given much more than a get-out-of-jail-free card. To wit, the \$1,895 AVID Pulsus. It's designed, built, and tested at the company's UK facility. Many other units in its price range come from China.

Matching a phonostage like the AVID Pulsus with a favorite turntable and cartridge for a sum total of a couple thousand dollars will yield a very formidable analog source.





## 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.



## FEATURE



Better still, it allows many wallet-conscious listeners to steer clear of megabuck turntables. Such a setup offers more than enough resolution to enjoy the best LPs. Plus, you're only one Internet forum post away from a healthy argument.

A compact two-box design, the Pulsus allows you to place the power supply about three feet away from the actual preamplifier chassis, thus eliminating noise concerns. Said power supply connects to the preamplifier via a shielded cable with an XLR connector. Unlike AVID's Pulsare phono stage, which features balanced inputs and a balanced design, the Pulsus is single-ended. Designer Conrad Mas insists that the unit isn't a "stripped-down Pulsare," yet a comparison of both models reveals a remarkably similar tonal balance.

When listening to both side by side with smaller-scale acoustic music, the two AVID preamplifiers sounded far more alike than different. However, the Pulsare's superiority is made evident on symphonic and heavy metal fare. Such traits will appeal to those wanting to "stay in the family." Why? Should you decide to move up to the Pulsare at some point, you will be rewarded with more instead of different—just as you do with the full line of AVID turntables. *(continued)*



## FEATURE

### Setup

Underneath the chassis, the Pulsus offers a wide range of adjustment, with three gain settings: 48db for MM cartridges, 60db for MC, and an additional 70db setting as well. Combined with the Pulsus' ultra-low noise floor, even the low-output Dynavec-tor 17D3 cartridge (.23mv output) had no trouble delivering. For MM users, the three available capacitance settings (100pf, 200pf, and 500pf) should easily handle most combinations.

I began my listening with a suite of reasonably priced cartridges that included the Shure V15vx-mr, Denon DL-103R, and Dynavec-tor DV-20xl. All turned in great performances and, in conjunction with the Volvere SP/SME combination, sounded better than when in my budget setup consisting of the Rega P3-24 and Dynavec-tor P75 mk. 2. Feeling that the Pulsus was capable of more, I substituted the Sumiko Pearwood Celebra-tion II MC cartridge (\$2,499) and discovered the AVID still held its own. Thanks to a removable head shell on the SME309 arm, swapping the Pearwood for the Sumiko Palo Santos cartridge (\$3,999) was as simple as opening a beer. The Pulsus still yielded enough resolution to tell the difference between the two cartridges, but distinctions were more easily discernable via the Pulsare. Such performance makes for a phono preamplifier with which you should be able to grow through several rounds of cartridge/turntable upgrades.

Please note: Both of the Sumiko cartridges were optimally loaded at 100 ohms with my ARC REF Phono, yet 2,300 ohms suited the Pulsus. As with any cartridge, experimentation always leads to the best results.

### Listening

Unlike the Pulsare, which took a week of continuous play to fully blossom, the Pulsus required just 48 hours to come out of its shell. Only slightly congested upon first turn-on, it quickly became a great performer. And since it draws about 10 watts, leave the Pulsus on to maximize your analog experience. *(continued)*





WHEN THE WORLD STOPS  
AND THERE IS...

# ONLY THE MUSIC

Scarlatti. The Ultimate Digital Playback System.



"The dCS Scarlatti is the best sounding, most satisfying digital playback system I've heard." **Stereophile**



Our design philosophy in building **Scarlatti** was to use our 21 years of experience to deliver the best digital playback system in the business. For people who are serious about their music, Scarlatti sets new standards in both measured performance and musicality. CD or Computer Audio, Scarlatti delivers a life enhancing performance every time.

Imported by dCS North America

[www.dcsLtd.co.uk](http://www.dcsLtd.co.uk) | [info@dcsLtd.co.uk](mailto:info@dcsLtd.co.uk) | +1 617 314 9296

Manufactured in the UK by Data Conversion Systems Ltd, Unit 1, Buckingham Business Park, Anderson Road, Swavesey, Cambridge, CB24 4AE

## FEATURE

Blondie's *Autoamerican* came alive with both the AVID Volvere SP/SME 309 and Rega P9 turntables, each boasting an identical Sumiko Pearwood Celebration II cartridge. While Blondie's 1980 set is fairly dense and somewhat compressed, marginal LPs can sometimes be more telling of a phono preamplifier's capability than meticulously mastered audiophile pressings. In this case, "Rapture" extended more pace and depth than I'm used to experiencing with other similarly priced phonostages.

Kiss' *Alive!* is another LP with very limited dynamic contrast, but again, the Pulsus impressed. The highly processed drum solo during "100,000 Years" actually had life and dimension, effortlessly revealing the differences between the US and Japanese pressings—a revelation that confirms the Pulsus as a serious audiophile tool.

As expected, the Pulsus shined when playing pristine recordings. Classic Records' remaster of Crosby, Stills and Nash's self-titled debut had so much depth, it prompted one of my audiophile pals to look behind the equipment rack to be sure that the Volvere wasn't plugged into the adjacent Audio Research PH6. "Are you sure it doesn't have at least one tube inside?" he repeatedly asked, inspired by the natural presentation. The PH6 is similar in the sense that it does not sound overly tubey. Akin to its more expensive Pulsare, AVID managed to create a solid-state phonostage that's both resolving and quiet, and yet not at all harsh.

The Pulsus' wide dynamic range is another welcome treat.

Music Matters' recent pressing of Sonny Rollins' *Newk's Time* pinned me back in the listening chair. As Rollins' sax blasted from between the speakers, felt like I was the dude in the famous Maxell ad. With the turntable already in 45RPM mode, there was no reason not to blitz through my growing 12-inch maxi-single collection. Spread onto the whole side of an album, the Scorpions' "Rock You Like a Hurricane" volunteered crushing guitars that convincingly approximated the live experience. In addition to verifying that there are many well-produced hip-hop tracks, Eazy-E's "We Want Eazy" proved that the Pulsus indeed goes deep and advances a highly convincing bass groove.

### Comparisons

The Pulsus holds its own amidst a sea of comparably priced products. The Lehman Black Cube SE, a previous favorite in the \$1,500-\$2,500 solid-state category, doesn't claim the AVID's bass grip or expansive soundstage. Another favorite, the EAR 324P, is almost the polar opposite of the AVID. Whereas the EAR puts a warm, romantic feel on everything—great if you have an

overly forward-sounding cartridge/system—the AVID gives you what's on the recording, with an excellent sense of pace that leaves the valve unit, by comparison, sounding slow.

On a related note, the Pulsus' best aspect is its overall natural tonal balance, which makes it painless to integrate it into any system. By merely revealing the nature of the equipment to which it's connected, it has neither a forward, etched character nor a warm, embellishing one.

### The Verdict

The AVID Pulsus builds on the Pulsare's success, offering high performance at a more accessible price, and combining neutral tonal balance with excellent resolution and a high degree of dynamic contrast without going so far as to become harsh. Moreover, its low noise floor and ease of adjustability put it at the top of its respective price class.

If you'd like to skip the pointless Internet banter and get down to the business of listening to records, head to your dealer and sample the Pulsus. I'm guessing you'll take one home. ●

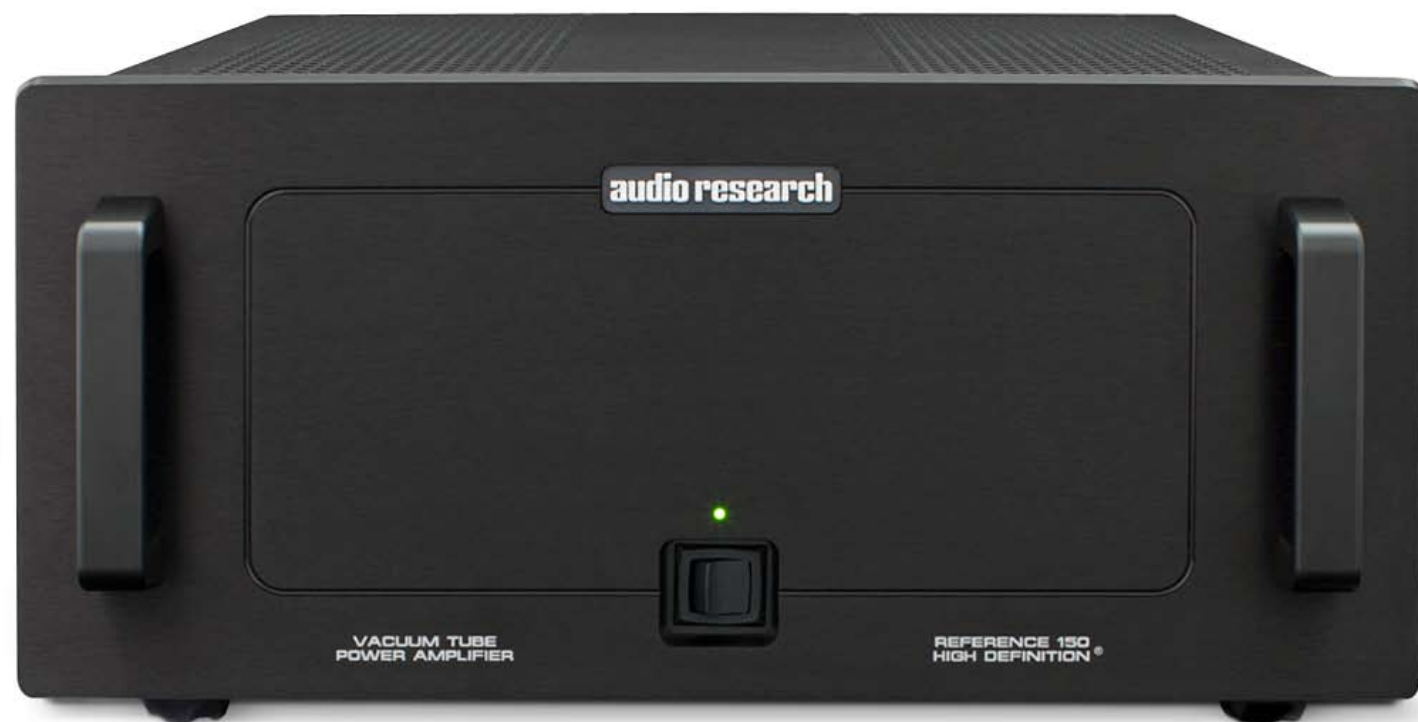




## Audio Research REF 150 Power Amplifier

\$12,995  
www.audioresearch.com

**A** not-so-subtle upgrade to Audio Research's popular REF 110 power amplifier, the REF 150 takes full advantage of the new KT120 power tubes. Accommodating the increased power requirement as well as incorporating lessons learned with the 40th Anniversary Reference preamplifier, the REF 150 could possibly be the legendary Minnesota company's best effort yet. Full review as soon as we can pry ourselves away from it.



## B&W 802 Diamond Speakers

\$15,995/pr.  
www.bowers-wilkins.com

**J**ust one step down from its 800 Diamond, B&W's 802 offers a similar sound in a slightly smaller (and lighter) package. Utilizing a pair of 8-inch woofers instead of the dual 10-inch drivers found in the 800, the 802 provides prodigious bass response, only down 6db at 27hz.

Thanks to a 90db sensitivity rating and crossover network that works well with any amplifier, these speakers are remarkably easy to drive with even a modest tube amplifier. Available in gloss black, rosenut, or cherry wood, the 802 Diamond is both visually and audibly stunning. Look for the full review and a report on a visit to the B&W factory in Issue 41.







## Sumiko Palo Santos Presentation Cartridge

\$3,999

[www.sumikoaudio.net](http://www.sumikoaudio.net)

Utilizing a rosewood body—not unlike that “other” Japanese manufacturer—the Palo Santos Presentation exhibits a rich tonal character that sacrifices neither speed nor resolution. The results: Heavenly. In an age of mega-dollar cartridges costing two to four times as much, most will need to go no further than the Palo Santos. It’s that good. Review in progress.

the absolute sound  
2010  
PRODUCT  
OF THE YEAR  
AWARD

Now in stock!

The Absolute Sound's  
2010 Product of the Year  
Award Winner  
The **ca21** Preamplifier

\$2295



"Of all the integrated amps I've reviewed in the last year...the Mystère la21 is my favorite, the least expensive, and drew the least attention to itself, allowing me to focus on the music." —Erick Lichte *Stereophile* March 2011

The Mystère la21 Integrated amplifier \$2995

For more information

USA: Mystère USA at 909.931.0219 [www.mystere-usa.com](http://www.mystere-usa.com) • Canada: Audioscape Canada Inc. at 905.833.0010

Anyone can change a product... improving it is the real challenge.

The new – and improved – **ProLogue Premium Integrated Amplifier**. \$2299  
More features and better built than any product in its class.



And the sound?

"Truly stunning... PrimaLuna's latest effort goes to the heart of what the high end represents..."

—Neil Gader, *The Absolute Sound* April 2011

**PrimaLuna®**

909.931.0219 ■ [info@primaluna-usa.com](mailto:info@primaluna-usa.com) ■ [primaluna-usa.com](http://primaluna-usa.com)



# Simply Monstrous

**Pass XA160.5 Monoblock Amplifiers**

By Jeff Dorgay





No matter your drug of choice—chemical, horsepower, audio—with prolonged use, you always reach a plateau at which you believe you just can't get any higher. But sooner or later, something else enters your reality that restarts the cycle, and you're off and running again. Such is my experience with the Pass Labs XA160.5 monoblocks.

If you are new to the world of high-end audio, you can get the condensed history of Pass Labs here: <http://www.passlabs.com/about.htm>. The shorter version is simple: Nelson Pass is a genius. He's probably got more patents for amplifier design than almost everyone else combined. And he's got a great sense of humor, too. The owner's manual describes the new amplifier as "tending to run heavy and hot, but elicit high performance and reliability from simple circuits."

Weighing in at about 130 pounds each and \$24,000 per pair, the XA160.5s are not for the light of wallet—or bicep. Or, for that matter, air-conditioning capacity. The power draw isn't huge, but each unit sucks 600 watts from the power line, whether idling or at full power. Because they only produce 160 watts per channel into 8 ohms, doubling into a 4-ohm load, they get very warm to the touch. Yes, this behavior is normal for a class A design. The extra heat was welcome in March when the amplifiers arrived, as it kept our studio toasty. Yet, as days got longer, the amps forced us to run the A/C well before we normally would.



estelon)  
from Alfred & Partners



Model XA

Pushing the boundaries of style and engineering – an amorphous shape resulting from the latest manufacturing technologies with a healthy dose of handmade craftsmanship.

estelon.com



### Super Yet Simple

Pass has always advocated keeping things as simple as possible. While squarely looking at the enormous monoblocks might cause you to question whether he still believes in this basics-minded philosophy, thanks to Pass' patented SuperSymmetry design, the amplifier has only two gain stages. At the risk of oversimplifying, the SuperSymmetry approach achieves low distortion (and tonal purity) by making each half of the balanced amplifier as close to identical as possible so that the resulting distortion from each half of the amplifier circuit cancels out in balanced mode.

To achieve maximum performance, the amplifier must be run in balanced operation. Fortunately, the ARC REF 5 offers balanced and single-ended outputs, which makes comparisons a snap. And Pass is right again: Utilizing

the XA160.5 in single-ended mode proved very good, but it featured a layer of grain not present in balanced mode. Whether you use a Pass Labs preamplifier or a model from another manufacturer, make sure to take the balanced route.

### Coming Full Circle

My first experience with Pass' class A amplifiers came in 1979. I combined a Threshold 400A with a Conrad Johnson PV-2 preamplifier driving a pair of Acoustats, making both an incredibly natural combination and excellent case for pairing a solid-state power amplifier with a tube preamplifier. While many combinations have since passed through my room, the tube pre/solid-state power amplifier is always the one to which I'm drawn, especially when it involves a class A amplifier. *(continued)*



The XA160.5s symbiotically work with all of the preamplifiers at my disposal, but the match with the Audio Research REF 5 linestage and REF Phono 2 preamplifier is heaven-sent. Pass Labs president Desmond Harrington tells me that many customers use the company's amplifiers with tube preamplifiers. "It's a popular combination, but when it comes to power, we like to see our amplifiers offering the tube sound without the tears." Truer words haven't been spoken.

As someone who's purchased more than a fair share of power tubes, I am relieved to know that the sound of the XA160.5s will never change. And, you won't have to buy new power tubes every year. Continuous operation cuts down on tube life. If only Costco sold tubes by the palette.

### Like Luke, I Ignored Yoda Just Once

Pass' instruction manual cautions against using the XA160.5s with a power conditioner. Nonetheless, I plugged them directly into the wall and then into my Running Springs Maxim power conditioner, with the latter providing an even cleaner presentation. The soundstage opened up significantly, and I didn't experience any loss of dynamics. Yes, the stock power cords that come with the XA160.5s are very good, but aftermarket power cords (Shunyata and Running Springs models yielded excellent results) offered up a slightly clearer window to the music.

In all fairness, think of superior power cords as being able to take an amplifier that goes to 11 up to 11.2.

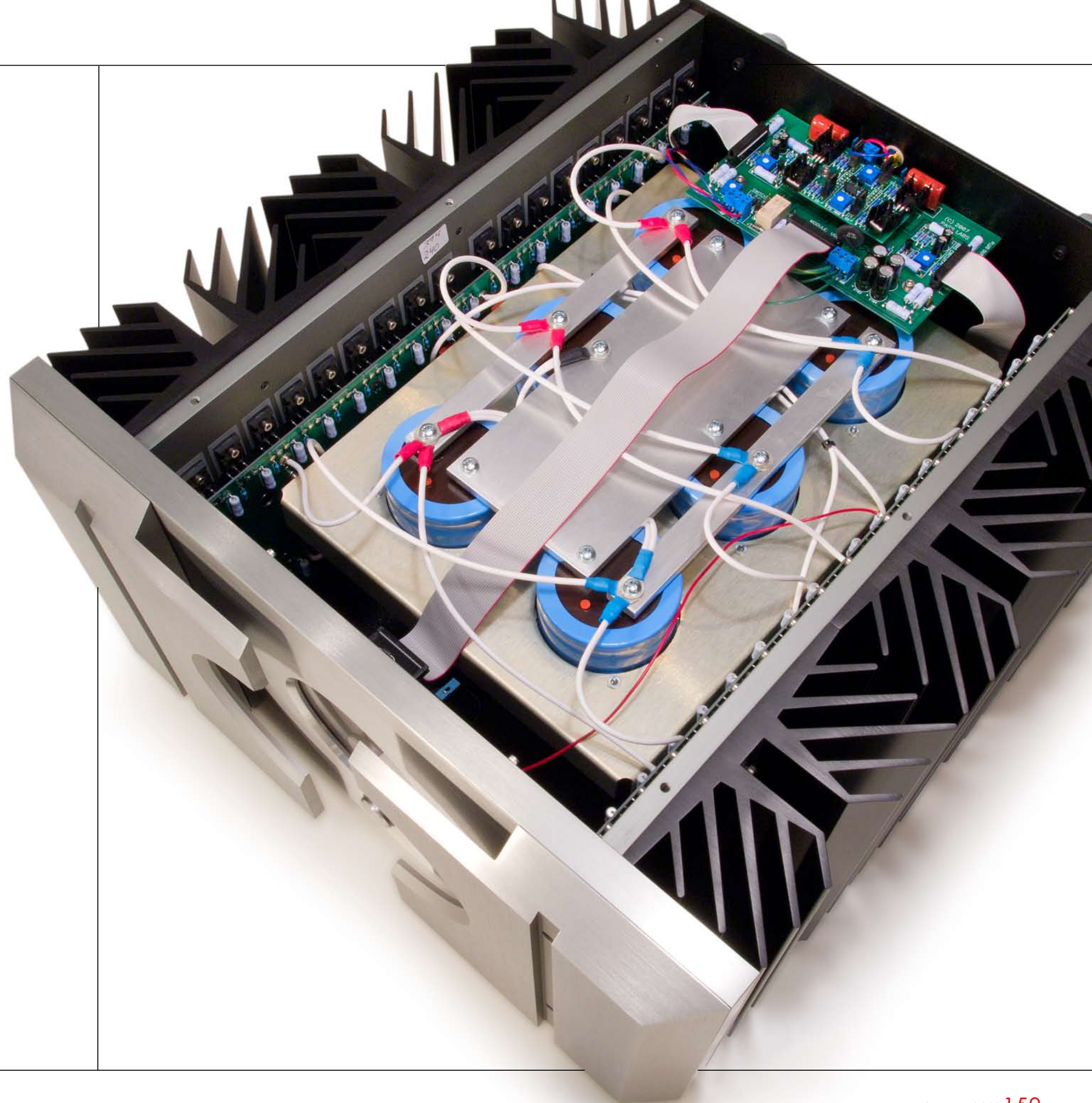
Besides, you wouldn't put regular gas in your Porsche, would you?

### Super and Scrumptious

Unlike a non-class A solid-state amplifier, the XA160.5s shouldn't be powered on for 24 hours a day. They generate too much heat. Still, just like a tube amplifier, the XA160.5s need an hour to warm up and stabilize. At first turn on, they still sound great, but once you get used to them, you'll notice a slight haziness that softly dissipates as the clock ticks. Coincidentally, the ARC REF 5 and REF Phono 2 need an hour to sound their best, too, so if you are using a tube front end, everything will warm up at the same pace.

I initially listened to familiar digital tracks from the Sooloos music server/dCS Paganini combination. I was immediately taken aback by the additional weight and depth, even more so with high-resolution digital files. All of the class A amplifiers with which I've lived share a tonal richness that other solid-state amplifiers do not possess. Some might refer to this quality as warmth, but I prefer to call it tonal richness. I associate warmth with slowness, lack of pace, and rounded-off treble; the XA160.5s exhibited none of these characteristics. The Pass monoblocks sport the equivalent of a great guitar's ability to sustain a note. On a choice Gibson Les Paul, for example, music just seems to hang in the air a little longer.

Switching back and forth between amplifiers at my disposal revealed that the XA160.5s are indeed very special. *(continued)*







DEVIALET



*For those who still believe in progress*

## D-Premier, The Audiophile Hub

NEW HYBRID AMPLIFICATION TECHNOLOGY - PATENTED ADH® CORE  
REVOLUTIONARY 24/192 DAC - PATENTED ZERO PROCESSING I/V CONVERSION  
EXCLUSIVE PFC PLANAR POWER SUPPLY  
FULLY CONFIGURABLE AND UPGRADABLE PLATFORM

“Once  
in a generation  
a company will emerge with a  
concept so original and innovative  
that it has the capacity to re-define the  
expectations of a product genre.  
That company is Devialet. ”

**Paul Miller**  
Hi-Fi News

“Forget everything  
you know about  
high-end audio (...)  
The D-Premier is more than  
the sum of its parts in concept,  
performance and value. ”

**Jeff Dorgay**  
Tone Audio

Devialet is distributed by:

USA - Audio Plus Services - [www.audioplusservices.com](http://www.audioplusservices.com) - 800 663 9352 / Canada - Plurison - [www.plurison.com](http://www.plurison.com) - 866 271 5869

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

## REVIEW



It was as if the particular characteristics from my favorite amplifiers have somehow taken up residency in one model. Thanks to their monoblock design and huge power supplies (the 160.5 is claimed to have a significantly larger power supply than the 160 it replaces), these amplifiers throw a soundstage that is prodigious in all three dimensions. Image width really stands out.

I noticed such traits on all program material, but they became more obvious when listening to classical. Conveying the size of a symphony orchestra—much wider than most listening rooms—is one of the toughest feats to ask a system to accomplish. When listening to Sir Arnold Bax's sixth symphony, it felt as if the sidewalls in my listening room had been each moved out about six feet. Not realistic, of course, but much more convincing than without the XA160.5s.

Recorded live and flush with ambience, Hugh Masekela's "Stimela (The Coal Train)"

from Analogue Productions' 45RPM 2LP version of *Hope* provides an excellent test. Having just heard Masekela perform the song at the Montreal International Jazz Festival in June, the recorded version via the Pass amps colored me impressed. While the live version claimed a slightly different arrangement, the XA160.5s pushed my GamuT S9s to a realistic sound level and conveyed such nuance and tonal contrast, I felt like I was back in Montreal's Club Soda venue. Even at the high volume level, the front panel's deep-blue backlit oval meter barely flinched from its center position, indicating that the amplifier never left class A mode.

Of course, man cannot live on jazz alone. At prime operating temperature, the XA160.5s did not miss a beat on a Japanese vinyl pressing of Michael Schenker's *Built to Destroy*. No matter how hard I pushed, I could not destroy the amps or my speakers. And yes, that's a very good thing. *(continued)*



Staying in Japanese LP mode, Bruce Springsteen's *The Wild, The Innocent, and the E-Street Shuffle* proved tough to resist, as did David Bowie's *Aladdin Sane*. These old favorites never sounded better, and when I quickly switched back to the gear I've lived with for some time, across-the-range performance boosts became manifest.

### Staggering Pace and Tonality

While classical music plays to one group of the XA160.5's strengths, revisiting the recently remastered Beatles catalog plays to another: These amplifiers offer rock-solid pace. Violins in the mono version of "Eleanor Rigby" (from *Revolver*) were strongly anchored, and Lennon and McCartney's voices unwavering. There was so much depth, it almost sounded like a stereo recording! Speaking of the latter, the stereo version of "Penny Lane" from *Magical Mystery Tour* turned out to be just as exciting. Ringo Starr's drumming and McCartney's bass held true throughout the psychedelic soundscape.

I am easily swayed by the big sound of these amplifiers, yet that characteristic only scratches the surface of their capabilities. Concerning tonal accuracy and texture? Spot on. Acoustic instruments sound correct, whether listening to wind, string, or percussion instruments. Dynamic contrasts equate to the best I've experienced. A few *TONE* writers whose tastes skew towards classical remain astonished at the lifelike piano reproduction.

Music fans that crave vocal performances will benefit from the XA160.5's picture-perfect tonality and resolution. Again, the extra tonal body almost feels as if one is listening to an SET—albeit an SET with nearly unlimited power that you can use with real-world speakers. The extra low-level resolution goes a long way, especially when spinning marginal discs. An ideal example comes courtesy of Keith Richards' *Talk is Cheap*. Richards is not known for possessing a terribly strong lead vocal. Yet, when put through the XA160.5s, it actually has some depth. Such is the XA160.5s' allure. They hover at the optimum point of boasting maximum resolution without being harsh, sounding full bodied and musically natural without introducing tonal distortion—a difficult balancing act.

Bass response keeps in line with the exceptional performance found elsewhere in the frequency range. While the XA160.5s have more than ample weight and slam, the bass reveals a level of texture and detail that I've only experienced with a small handful of amplifiers. Remember: It's easy to confuse "audiophile bass" (usually over-damped and distinguishable



from the real thing that has life, texture, and resonance); the XA160.5s are the genuine article. A cursory listen to your favorite acoustic bassist reveals the way these amplifiers allow the instrument to breathe, and bring you that much closer to the actual performance.

### Top Contenders

Two years ago, I proclaimed the Burmester 911 Mk.3s the best amplifiers I've heard. And over the course of hundreds of product reviews, I've used that dreaded "B" word just once in the absolute sense. After conveying my enthusiasm for these amplifiers to Harrington, he responded, "The 160's are amazing, but you need to hear the 200s." So just when I thought I couldn't get any higher, the quest begins again.

It's always tough to make comparisons, yet the XA160.5 combines the virtues of my three favorite amplifiers into one (actually two) boxes: the delicacy of the Wavac EC300B, the texture and dimensionality of the ARC REF 150, and the power, control, and composure of the Burmester 911s.

Independent of the "B" word, the Pass Labs XA160.5 monoblocks orbit the top stratosphere of amplifier design at any price. If you would like that *je ne sais quoi* that you thought required a vacuum-tube amplifier, these are a consummate alternative. There is nothing that the XA160.5s do not do. ●

**Pass Labs XA160.5 monoblocks**  
MSRP: \$24,000/pr.

### MANUFACTURER INFORMATION

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

### PERIPHERALS

**Analog Source** Audio Research REF Phono 2, AVID Acutus Reference SP w/SME V tonearm and Koetsu Urushi Blue cartridge, AVID Volvere SP w/SME 309 tonearm and Grado Statement1 cartridge

**Digital Source** dCS Paganini stack, Sooloos Control 15

**Preamplifier** Burmester 011, Burmester 088, ARC REF 5, McIntosh C500, Conrad Johnson ET5

**Speakers** GamuT S9

**Power** Running Springs Dmitri, Running Springs Maxim

**Accessories** Furutech DeMag, Loricraft RCM



# Taking Sound to A New Level

## Burmester 088 Preamplifier

By Jeff Dorgay

Comparing my Burmester 011 preamplifier to the company's new 088 preamplifier reminded me of two other German high-performance machines I've sampled: Audi's 430hp eight-cylinder R8 and its new 525hp 10-cylinder model. Both cars are outstanding and from the outside, look virtually indistinguishable. Much as you want to convince yourself that 430hp is enough, all it takes is a quick spin around the block and suddenly, you can't live without the extra performance. The Burmester 088 is equally exciting—the minute you hear it, your perception is similarly altered.





CLEAR Light  
cardas.com



The 088 is the latest edition to Burmester's Top Line of electronics. While the latter is one level beneath its Reference Line, everyone that doesn't hold an American Express Black Card can safely consider it reference gear. The \$28,995 088 arrives with either a DAC module or a phono preamplifier stage installed. Our review sample came fitted with the DAC, the very same upsampling module fitted to the Reference Line 077 preamplifier. Interestingly, when connected to my MacBook Pro, system settings in the control panel displayed "Burmester 077."

At first glance, the 088 looks identical to the 011, with the input selector on the left and volume control on the right. The current preamplifier allows more set-up capabilities on the front panel, as well as switching between SPDIF and USB digital

inputs. For listeners that don't need an onboard DAC or phono stage, the 088 can be configured with an additional unbalanced (RCA) high-level input. At press time, pricing was not available for this configuration.

If you've never had the Burmester experience, know that the company's products are electrically and mechanically built to an incredibly high standard. Front panels are machined to a "jewelers finish" and are of the finest quality we've ever experienced. Even when photos of Burmester's metalwork get zoomed to 400% on a 30" Apple Cinema Display, it appears completely smooth. It's like chrome-plated glass. If you are even the slightest bit obsessive compulsive, chances are you'll be using the remote to keep the chrome free of fingerprints—even though it's easy to clean.

Fortunately, the sound is as exquisite as the casework. The new 088 represents a significant step up from the 011 preamplifier it will replace. (For now, the 011 remains in the Burmester lineup but will disappear in the near future.) While the 088 incorporates a number of evolutionary changes, the biggest difference relates to the incorporation of Burmester's latest X-Amp 2 gain modules. The latter are used in all of the Reference Line components, as well as the 100 Phono Preamplifier that we recently reviewed. Note: These modules are hand-built with matched discrete components throughout; no op amps are used in the amplification chain. *(continued)*

**While the 088 incorporates a number of evolutionary changes, the biggest difference relates to the incorporation of Burmester's latest X-Amp 2 gain modules.**





**While older preamplifiers like the 011 boast a few unbalanced inputs and a pair of unbalanced variable outputs, the 088 is balanced throughout and utilizes XLR inputs and outputs.**

### System Compatibilities

While older preamplifiers like the 011 boast a few unbalanced inputs and a pair of unbalanced variable outputs, the 088 is balanced throughout and utilizes XLR inputs and outputs. This may prove inconvenient for some. Unless you have a studio tape recorder, the tape outputs will require an XLR to RCA adaptor, easily sourced from your Burmester dealer.

The XLR pin out is also different on Burmester gear. Almost every other hi-fi manufacturer follows a standard formula in which pin number one is the ground (as it is in pro audio gear), pin two positive, and pin three negative. Burmester is just the opposite, with pin two being negative. If you mate Burmester gear with other manufacturers' components, doing

so requires a special XLR adaptor, custom cables, or switching your speaker leads from positive to negative to make up for the phase difference between components. Intuitively, the 088 has a phase switch on the front panel. So, when using the ARC REF 2 phono preamplifier, a flick of the switch achieved absolute phase throughout the system.

The 088 offers five balanced inputs and, for those wishing to integrate the 088 in a multichannel system, a surround pass through. A single set of variable level XLR outputs is the only shortcoming. Anyone with a powered subwoofer will have to resort to some kind of "Y" adaptor or purchase different speakers. Hopefully, this limitation will be remedied once a mark II version of the 088 becomes available.

### Illusion Nears Closer to Reality

Having lived with the 011 preamplifier and 911 Mk.3 power amplifier for the past two years, the combination's natural sound became burned into my memory. But after the 088 was powered up for two days and fully stabilized, the difference was immediately noticeable—and all for the better. From its entry-level Rondo Line up to the Reference Line, all Burmester gear has a similar tonality. Still, a higher level of performance exists in four specific areas: increased dynamics, added bass weight, lower noise floor, and greater overall resolution.

With the 088 as quiet—if not more so—as the 011, the unit's increased dynamic impact revealed itself on "Take It So Hard," the first

track off Keith Richards and the X-Pensive Winos' *Live at the Hollywood Palladium*. Decidedly not a record with an audiophile pedigree, the drums are nevertheless miked incredibly well, something I noticed on a recent jaunt in editor Bob Gendron's car. I also forgot how much fun this record can be. Through the 088, the drums exploded out of my speakers. By comparison, they were noticeably more subdued when I returned to the 011.

Bass detail also stood out from the 011, with the 088 claiming more weight and control. Rock, jazz, and classical music all equally benefited. After queuing up Kanye West's recent *My Twisted Dark Fantasy*, the title track's beats went straight to the gut in a way they never did before. On first listen,

even with the 011, West's album felt fairly dense. Yet the 088 unraveled the layers of texture with fantastic results. This upshot remained consistent with everything auditioned. Moderately dense and compressed recordings sounded more open than I could've imagined, and great recordings became sublime.

In projecting an expansive soundstage well beyond the boundaries of the GamuT S9s, the 088 helped the six-foot-tall speakers disappear, as if they were a pair of mini monitors. With such depth, there's just no need for surround sound! And honestly, there's no need for vacuum tubes, either.

Burmester's new preamplifier throws a larger soundstage in all dimensions than any tube preamplifier I've tried. *(continued)*





## dmitri

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

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

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

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



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

– Robert Harley,  
The Absolute Sound,  
Issue 193



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

– Jeff Dorgay,  
TONEAudio  
Magazine,  
Issue 18



running springs audio

**CLEANPOWERPURESOUND**

Power Line Conditioners Hand Made in California . Tel: 714.765.8246 . [www.runningsspringsaudio.com](http://www.runningsspringsaudio.com)

## REVIEW

If you want *enormous*, reach-out-and-touch-it sound and do not want to worry about hand-matching expensive NOS tubes, the 088 will painlessly take you there. After living with the 088, it's tough to believe that it's "only" Burmester's Top Line preamplifier, as yet another level of greatness is available in its Reference Line. (However, moving up requires spending more than double the cost of the 088.)

Resolving low-level detail and texture constitute the most interesting aspects of the 088's incredible performance. A few of my favorite vocal records instantly brought such traits home. Regardless of playback volume, my system achieved a new level of overall clarity. Digital now sounded almost as grain-free as analog did with the 011. And the analog presentation? Delicious. Spinning Mobile Fidelity's reissue of Frank Sinatra's *Nice 'N' Easy* clearly illustrated the 088's marvelous capability, as it not only succinctly defined the room size, but perfectly reproduced the illusion of height—putting Sinatra front and center with his voice where it would be if he were standing eight feet from my listening position. Such an accomplishment is rarely achieved when playing music back through electronics, yet the 088/911 combination achieved it with ease.

I've never heard Sinatra live, but I have had the privilege of hearing the Fleet Foxes up close and personal. On the 088, the group's "Tiger Mountain Peasant Song" possessed sizeable body and depth. At this point, the illusion neared much closer to reality. Even after full-day listening sessions, the 088 never ceased to amaze, especially with records often used as test tracks, regardless of resolution. Even Rhapsody tracks were more palatable to the senses. *(continued)*







### A Capable DAC

The 088's internal DAC is an upsampling 24 bit/192khz design that upsamples all incoming data to 24/192. While some may shy away from this approach on principal, Burmester's implementation is one of the most transparent I've experienced.

Feeding the DAC section with both the Sooloos via SPDIF and a current iMac running Pure Music nearly finished in a dead heat, with a slight nod to the SPDIF input in terms of overall musicality with 16 bit/44.1khz tracks. When I switched to high-resolution files, the USB input fared better.

The Simaudio 750D (\$12,000) and Burmester 089 (\$28,995), along with the four-box dCS Paganini (\$55,900), offered higher performance than the onboard DAC. Nonetheless, the 088's digital capabilities should be a great addition for anyone getting started with computer audio. It provides performance that's on par with the best DACs I've heard in the \$4,000-\$5,000 range. (And remember, there's no power cord or interconnects to buy.) It could also prove excellent for vinyl listeners that only

occasionally listen to digital. Those that listen to analog and digital with equal enthusiasm will be best served with an outboard albeit higher-performance DAC; Burmester's 089 is the obvious choice.

### A Destination, Not a Journey

While the Burmester 088 preamplifier costs nearly a third more than the 011, the model it's replacing, the unit is definitely worth the price. Sure, \$30k is a healthy sum to pay for a single component, but this is a hand-built, high-performance preamplifier with performance equaled by few preamplifiers at *any* price.

Because it's massively overbuilt, the 088 should be a destination that you will never leave. To those always in the hunt for the latest thing, be forewarned: Refrain from trading it in before you've really had the chance to realize what the 088 can do. Should you be a music lover that wants to cease the tiring practice of upgrading and simply enjoy nirvana for a very long time, the 088 has the potential to become a family heirloom. ●

### Burmester 088 Preamplifier

MSRP: \$28,995

### MANUFACTURER INFORMATION

www.burmester.de  
(factory)

www.burmester-northamerica.com  
(US and Canada)

### PERIPHERALS

**Analog Source** AVID Acutus Reference SP w/ SME V and Koetsu Urushi Blue, Audio Research REF 2 Phono, Burmester 100

**Digital Source** Burmester 089, Simaudio 750D, dCS Paganini (4 box), Mac Mini, Sooloos Control 15

**Power Amplifier** Burmester 911 Mk. 3

**Speakers** GamuT S9

**Cable** Shunyata Aurora, Cardas Clear

**Power** Running Springs Dmitri and Maxim power conditioners



# Start Making Sense

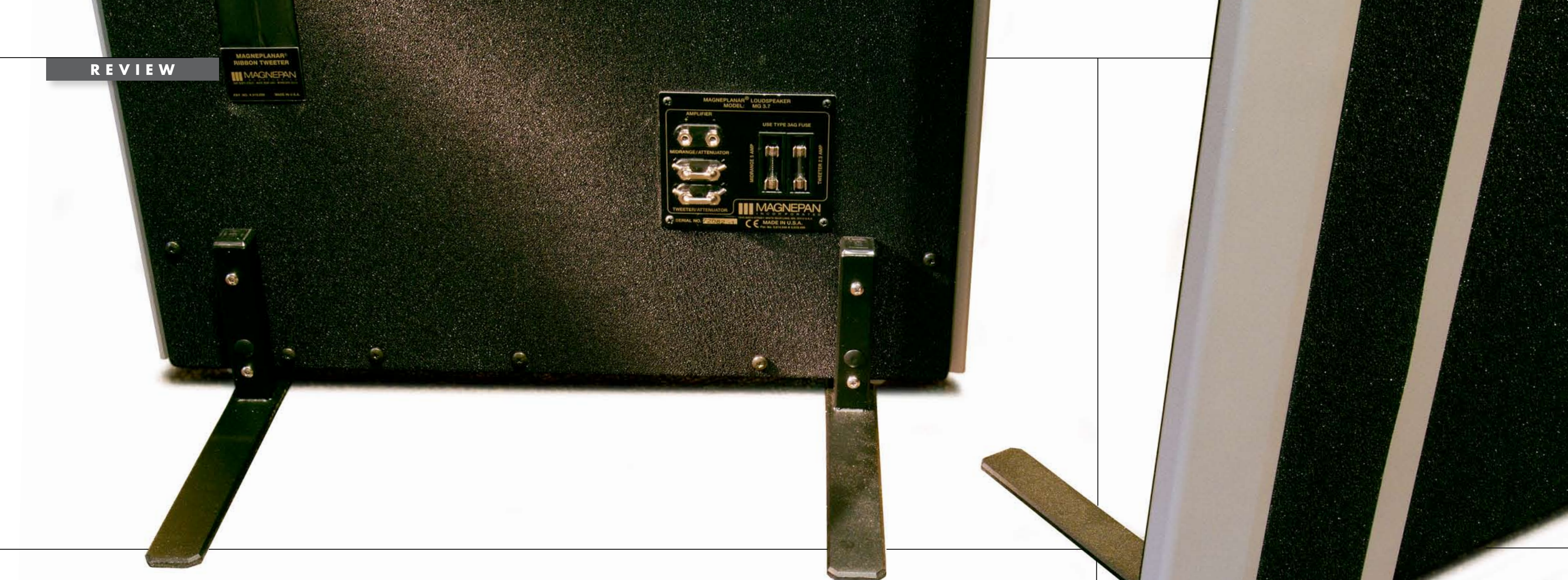
## Magneplanar 3.7 Loudspeaker

By Steve Guttenberg

don't know about you, but I'm rarely bowled over by the sound of really expensive speakers or high-end systems. While they can make lots of bass, play stupidly loud with super-low distortion, generate wham-bam dynamics, image like crazy, sound hyper-transparent, and/or have a gorgeous midrange, you never get the whole enchilada. Sure, the best ones deliver most of it. But all hi-fi, no matter how expensive or well designed, are imperfect in different ways.

Magneplanar's new 3.7 panel loudspeaker also falls short of perfection. But at \$5,495, it is easily one of the best-sounding speakers to ever grace my listening room. Best in every performance category? No, of course not. Still, the 3.7's sound is breathtakingly transparent and presents a virtual window to the soundstage. With the right recording and music, the believability of the sound is extraordinary.





### Dare to Be Different

The 3.7 replaces Magnepan's venerable 3.6, which remained in the line for more than 12 years (same as Magnepan's 1.6 to 1.7 transition). Having used the 3.6 as one of my reference speakers since 2008, I was eager to get my hands on the 3.7. Viewed from the front, the two speakers are twins; the rears are similar, but the 3.6's crossover is in a separate box that offers provisions for bi-wiring. While Magnepan didn't set out to eliminate the 3.6's bi-wire/bi-amp capabilities, the 3.7 has, alas, just a single set of speaker connectors. The bi-wire loss is an unintentional byproduct of the newly designed crossover network. Banana plugs and bare wire are the only cable hookup options. (You can attach bananas to spade-terminated cables.)

In addition to getting painted silver, natural oak, and/or black oak finishes for an extra \$400, you can opt for gloss black, gloss red, and cherry finishes. The finishes are painted on thick extruded aluminum pieces (over MDF) frame, which results in a far stiffer and stronger panel. Magnepan makes no claims on whether the stronger frame changes or improves the 3.7's sound. The speaker can be ordered with black, off-white, and dark gray cloth grilles. Physically, the 3.7 is 71" tall by 24" wide, but it's only 1.625" deep. A pair of panels comes packed together in a single 125-pound box. Unboxing is definitely a two-person job.

Kudos to Magnepan for refraining from the usual high-end practice of updating models every few years, or introducing "Reference" or "Signature" versions of its

speakers. You know the drill: A manufacturer takes a successful speaker, and builds a model with better crossover components, upgraded wiring, and/or a stiffer, more rigid cabinet or frame, and then jacks up the price by 30 to 50 percent. Such changes may or may not make significant sonic improvements. No matter. Magnepan takes its time developing new models, and never plays the upgrade game. Its speakers are manufactured in White Bear Lake, Minnesota. Nearly all of the parts that aren't fabricated in-house are sourced from US suppliers.

### Shrouded in Secrecy

The 3.7 benefits from "trickle-up" technology gained from development work performed on the 1.7 speaker, introduced last year. *(continued)*





*From spinning vinyl...  
to streaming a library  
of thousands of albums.*

The medium may change...but some songs  
will always remain the same.



*Creators of high-quality audio equipment for the enjoyment of music.  
Designed, tested, and hand-built in Salisbury, UK since 1974.*

It received boatloads of rave reviews, including one from yours truly in *TONE*. The 1.7 stands as the company's first "full-range ribbon" design. Before moving on, I should clarify Magneplanar's ribbon terminology. You see, the 1.7 is a "quasi-ribbon" design. That's Magneplanar lingo for ribbons that use aluminum conductors bonded to Mylar, which makes for a more durable albeit somewhat less-transparent sounding transducer than the company's "true" ribbons. The prime advantages of the quasi-ribbon are its lighter weight and larger conducting surface area, especially when compared to the company's planar-magnetic's heavier, skinnier wire grids. Hence, the quasi ribbon's larger surface area that pushes and pulls the diaphragm produces lower distortion than the planar-magnetic's wire grids.

Along with the 20.1, the 3.7 is the only Magneplanar that features "true" ribbon tweeters (the other models have quasi-ribbon tweeters). True ribbons are classified as such because the aluminum ribbon conductor is the only moving part of the tweeter. This approach lowers moving mass and greatly increases the tweeter's speed and resolution. Alas, the vast majority of speaker manufacturers that use ribbon tweeters opt for quasi ribbons.

The 3.7 isn't just a bigger 1.7; the latter features woofer, tweeter, and super tweeter quasi-ribbon drivers. By contrast, the 3.7 sports quasi-ribbon woofer and midrange drivers, and a "true" ribbon tweeter. In addition to the all-new quasi-ribbon midrange and woofer drivers, the 3.7's crossover network is very different than that of the 3.6. Magneplanar says there are other differences and new ideas in the 3.7, but refuses to reveal more details. I did learn one thing: The tweeter is in fact the only part of the 3.7 that isn't new; it's the exact same tweeter as that used in the 3.6. Still, the 3.7's tweeter sounds significantly more transparent and faster. Visitors to the Magneplanar factory are treated to a demonstration during which they drop a piece of the ribbon on their hand, but no one actually feels it land there. Why? The ribbon weighs almost nothing. *(continued)*





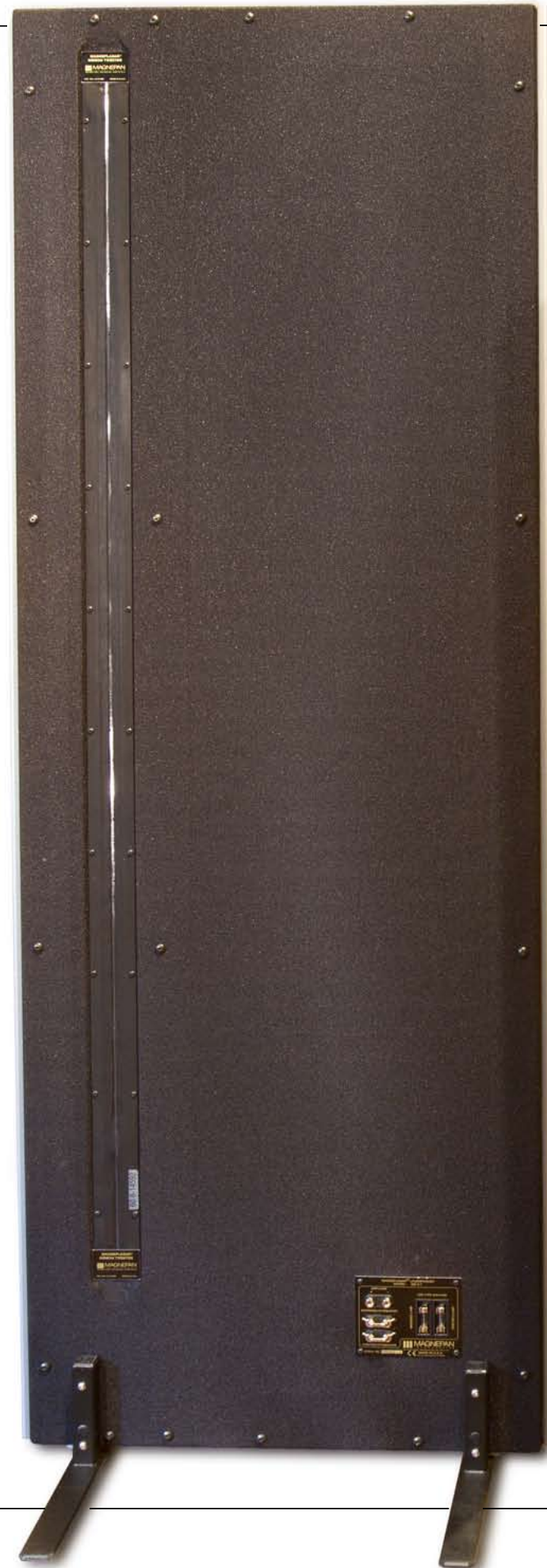
Located directly below the speaker connectors, you'll find two socketed jumpers that can be replaced with load-ing resistors that modify the speaker's midrange and/or tweeter's frequency response. Magnepan recommends us-ing a supplied 1-ohm resistor on the tweeter. The company considers the "loaded" tweeter as the "default" setting, but also recommends utilizing midrange resistor loading dur-ing the break-in process. I agree: The 3.7 was much too bright during the first few hundred hours of playing time; the resistors warmed up the sound enough to make break-in listening that much more enjoyable. I also found that the 3.7s sound best with the tweeters on the "inside" (closer to each other) while my 3.6s sound better with the tweeters on the outside. Distance from the wall—about 48 inches—was the same for the 3.6 and 3.7. The latter require more toe-in, so the panels should directly face the listener.

I tried and failed to get additional technical information about the 3.7, as Magnepan remained frustratingly vague when it came to answering my questions. Magnepan's Marketing Director, Wendell Diller, just says, "Techno-talk means nothing if the pudding tastes bad." He did note that blind testing is part of the company's development pro-cess. Consequently, the 3.7's design phase wasn't com-plete until the speaker consistently bettered the 3.6 in such tests involving audiophile and non-audiophile listeners. By the time the engineers finished, the 3.7 was preferred 100 percent of the time in blind tests.

### Licks, Bitches, and Concerts

The 3.7 possesses an uncanny ability to clarify densely mixed recordings. To me, the Rolling Stones' *Live Licks* CD always sounded like a jumbled mess. But now, with the 3.7, it really does sound live. There's still a lot of reverberation overlaying the mix, but the band's sound is defined within the reverberant cloud. In this sense, it's like hearing a su-perbly mixed concert. And unlike real concerts that are often too loud, I can tweak the volume to suit my taste—loud, but not so loud that it hurts.

Similarly, the 3.7s really let me feel the heat from Miles Davis' *Bitches Brew*—man, those churning jungle rhythms are intoxicating. It's electric jazz but organic to the very core, and it's another album that emerged with newfound power. (continued)

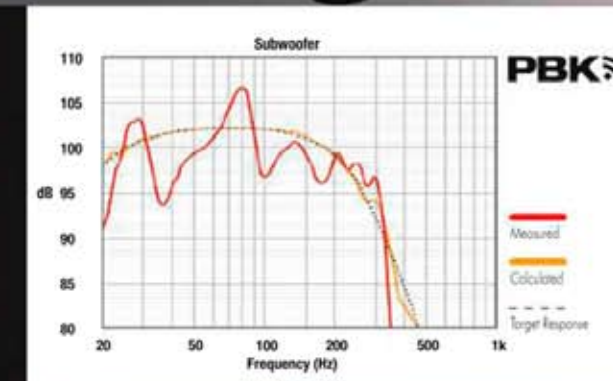


## SUB 2: THE WORLD'S MOST POWERFUL SUBWOOFER\*

From Paradigm, the #1 Speaker Brand†



PARADIGM REFERENCE  
Signature Series



**Physics trumps mechanics, with help from Paradigm**  
Signature SUB 2 is a mover not a shaker. Massive air movement, massive output, vibration free. Six identical, perfectly balanced state-of-the-art drivers radially aligned (two on each side) inside the cabinet in a **Vibration Canceling Design Architecture**. As powerful opposing forces of equal magnitude, the vibration-reaction forces effectively cancel each other out. Barely a ripple disturbs the contents of the glass placed on top of the cabinet, such is the degree to which unwanted, distortion-inducing vibrations are reduced.

### "Audibly better bass through science"

—Chris Martens, AV Guide

Room dimensions, dead spots, archways, furniture placement have a negative effect on bass performance. Until now. In a process that takes just a few minutes, Paradigm's **Perfect Bass Kit** puts the sub through a frequency sweep to highlight problem areas, determines necessary adjustments and saves configurations to your connected PC. Optimized solutions are uploaded to the sub. A scientific approach to perfect bass.

**10" drivers handle the amazing 9,000 watts Peak Power and 4,500 watts Continuous Power the amp delivers through its unique Power Factor Correction feature.**



\*Connected to a 240-volt line

www.paradigm.com



## It's Power Conditioning Month at Music Direct!

Electricity. It's AC that drives your entire music system. Take a moment and think about that. Every subtle syllable from the world's finest voices. Every guitar lick from the best pickers. Every thwack of a drum skin, or breath through a reed. Every pluck of the bass or tinkle of the keys. Without the proper AC foundation, these sounds can not be reproduced faithfully in your

listening room. And you know you want more than the minimum when it comes to the realism of your music system. You demand the best, that's why you are reading this magazine. A world-class power conditioner will be the biggest upgrade to your system you have ever heard. Guaranteed. And no one understands power conditioning products better than Music Direct.

### Shunyata's Best: Award-Winning Hydras Get Upgraded

Introducing the brand-new Shunyata Hydra Talos and Triton power conditioners, each contain a decade of Shunyata research and development. The Talos and Triton eliminate noise with a level of precision and control superior to any previous design. Gone are the massive buss bars and banks of capacitors, replaced with new patented and proprietary core technologies. You'll hear so many different improvements we can't even begin to list them all here. These new conditioners represent the absolute state-of-the-art in high-performance, high-current power delivery.



**Triton \$4,995** (Eight Outlets)



**Talos \$2,995** (Six Outlets)

### PS Audio P5 & P10 Power Plants—Create Your Own Clean Power



**P10 Power Plant \$4,495** (Ten Outlets)



**P5 Power Plant \$2,995** (Eight Outlets)

PS Audio introduced its first Power Plant fourteen years ago. For the first time, the quality of the power coming from your outlet was taken out the equation. Finally, you could create your own AC with a mini power plant in your listening room. But PS Audio engineers have busy with their new P5 and P10 PerfectWave Power Plants, which exceeded our expectations. Now fully designed and built in PS Audio's Boulder, Colorado factory, the P5 and P10 are huge improvements over older designs. Plug one in and you won't believe you're listening to the same system.

#### Trade In Your Old Power Conditioner

We have generous trade-up programs in effect this month. Call us and we'll help you get a big upgrade in performance.

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

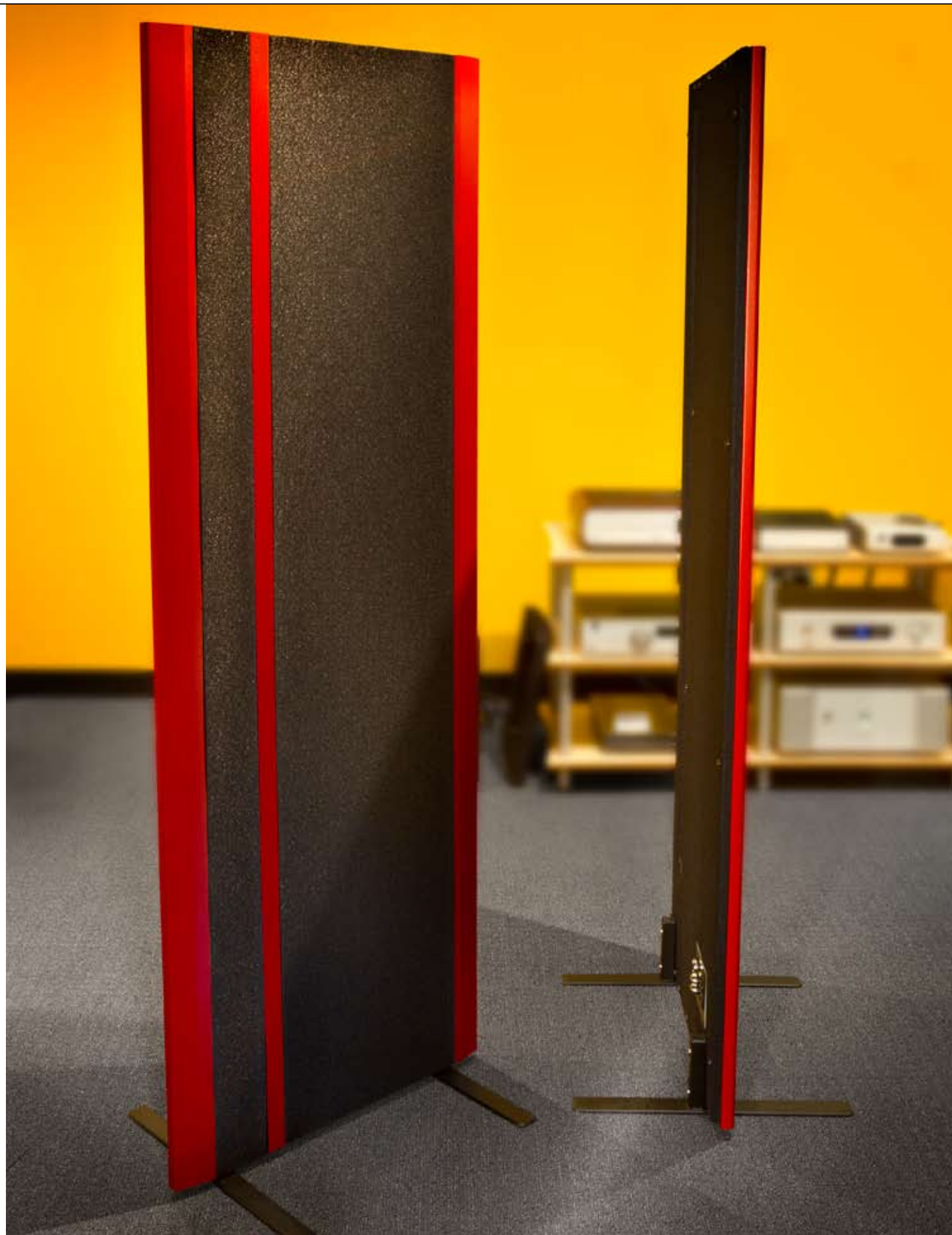
The kinetic energy of the band's rhythm section is staggering, and while the recording can sound harsh and aggressive, the drums' pulse totally kept me in the groove. The soundstage was so big, I could have taken a stroll within its parameters.

While the Magnepons won't deliver brute-force dynamics that'll knock you back in your seat like a six-foot tall, 600-pound Wilson Alexandria, the 3.7 is a champ at reproducing small-to-midsized dynamic contrasts. In listening to percussive recordings, you really hear the musicians' touch. The dynamic shadings are extraordinary; I attribute some measure of this ability to the 3.7's transient speed and coherence of the three drivers. They move as one and reproduce the leading transient attack better than any speaker I've had at home. Listen to the way the 3.7s absolutely nail the sound of a well-recorded snare drum! Yikes, it's amazing.

My VPI Classic turntable also sounded juicier than ever with the 3.7s. On the Modern Jazz Quartet's 1974 *Last Concert* LP, Milt Jackson's vibes struck me as so right. Each shimmering note, the attack and tone, all perfectly rendered. Connie Kay's cymbals floated free, sounding properly brassy and metallic. Indeed, the 3.7's ribbon tweeter is the best, most natural-sounding tweeter I've heard at any price. Very few speakers get metallic sheen just right, but it was the way the instrumental sound of each member of the Quartet—Jackson's vibes, John Lewis' piano, Percy Heath's bass, and Connie Kay's drumkit—was given its due. The simultaneously loud and soft sounds were all played in correct proportion to each other. That, and the manner in which I could hear the four men engaging in a musical conversation, just like I would if I was at the concert.

Again and again, the 3.7s let the music through with remarkably little editorializing. Vinyl's analog signature was organically developed, and digital media unleashed a different, equally valid sound. The 3.7 just let everything be. No, the 3.6 was no slouch in this regard, but the 3.7 represents a quantum leap forward. The speakers' transient speed imparts a level of realism to the sound of well-recorded music. Play processed, heavily equalized, dynamically compressed, and Auto-Tuned music and it'll still sound like crap. Once the music has been dissected and fractured, the 3.7 can't make it whole. *(continued)*





The 3.7's speed and definition extend down to the bass driver, and mark a major advance over the 3.6. The bass-to-midrange transition is seamless. Sure, the older speaker's planar-magnetic woofer went deep, but when asked to play loud, definition went south. The 3.7's bass plumbs at least as deep as most \$5,495 audiophile speakers, but it's not the high-impact, gut-punching sort of bass. For that, you need a big woofer, and if bass impact is what you crave, the 3.7 isn't the way to go.

Turning to straight-up audiophile fare, I played *Ghatam*, by the Antenna Repairmen. The all-percussion group plays nothing but ceramic instruments. As the members slap, strike, and rub pots and other instruments, the 3.7s masterfully reproduced large and small transients, as well as the subtlest gradations of the texture of human skin rubbing against coarsely finished ceramic. I swear I can hear the air resonating within the vessels; the 3.7 nails the initial thunk, followed by an evocative low moan. OK, this is a great audiophile-quality recording. What happens with something like *The Very Best of the Jefferson Airplane Live*, a CD on which the performances were recorded at various venues between 1966 and 1972?

"Somebody to Love" from Fillmore West in 1968 sounds dimensionally flat and trebly; "Feel So Good" at Winterland in 1972 is bathed in sweet-sounding reverberation; "Have You Seen the Saucers," also from Winterland, sounds like I'm in the best seat in the house; and "Good Sheperd," from a 1969 Fillmore East gig, highlights more of Jack Casady's thrilling bass runs. I wouldn't use the disc to impress my audiophile pals, but I love that the 3.7s maintained their composure through all of the tracks.

#### Giant Steps

The 3.7's sound is a giant step closer to being "there," and the design constitutes a landmark achievement. And I unequivocally state the following: I can't go from the 3.7 (or the 3.6) to reviewing a dynamic speaker; the disparity is too great. I always put the Magnepans aside for a week before starting on another dynamic speaker review. Don't get me wrong; there are lots of great dynamic models out there, but they all sound very different from panel speakers.

As for me? These blazing red and gray 3.7s aren't going back to Minnesota. I would miss them too much. ●

## REVIEW

**Magneplanar 3.7  
Loudspeaker**  
MSRP: \$5,495/pair

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

#### PERIPHERALS

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

**Digital Sources** PS Audio PerfectWave Transpost & DAC, MSB Technology Platinum Data CD IV Transport and Platinum Signature DAC IV; Oppo BDP-95 Special Edition

**Electronics** Pass XP-20 preamp; Whest 2.0 phono preamp; Pass Labs XA100.5 and First Watt J2 power amps

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

**Cable** XLO Signature 3 interconnects; Analysis Plus Silver Oval interconnects and speaker cables, Audioquest Sky interconnects



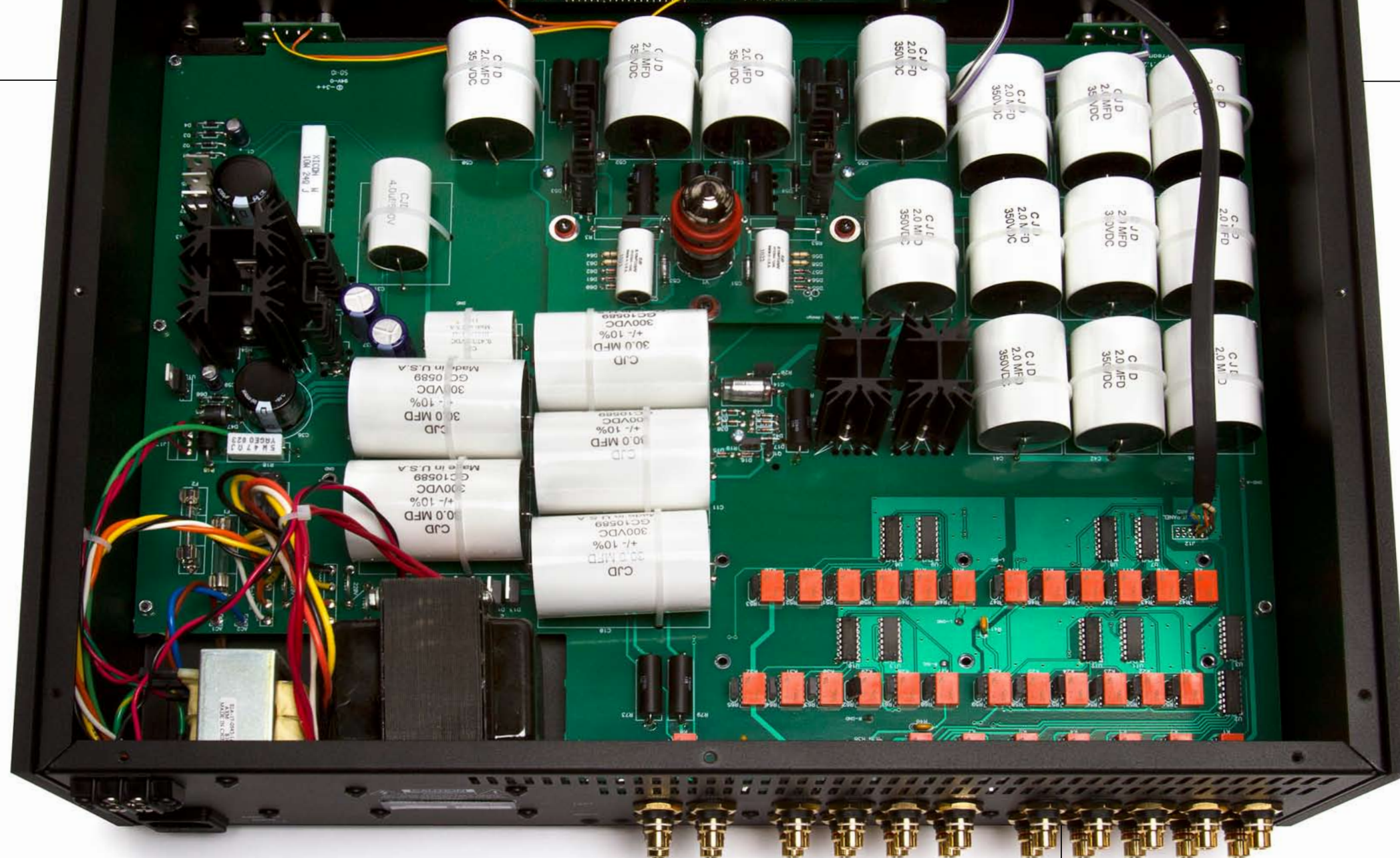


# One Step Beneath the GAT

**Conrad Johnson ET5 Preamplifier**

By Jacob Heilbrunn





Conrad-Johnson exudes stability. The look of its equipment never seems to radically change. The black top, the champagne face, the little silver buttons: All attest to a company that's not fretting about its looks. Instead, it's confident. But content and resting easy in the saddle? Not a chance. What's taking place inside the box, of course, is what counts. And here, Conrad-Johnson makes some big changes. Bill Conrad and Lew Johnson, stalwarts of the high-end audio industry, are doing anything but resting upon their laurels. Instead, they seem intent on demonstrating that C-J remains on the cutting edge.

The new ET5 preamplifier offers a case in point. It is the latest expression of C-J's quest to refine the sound of its product line. Over the past decade, C-J has taken numerous steps to improve its preamplifiers and amplifiers, the heart of the company. It has made occasional forays into producing CD players, but tubed gear is its bread and butter.

### Best of Both Worlds

C-J never abandoned the tube, and its traditional house sound has always emphasized musicality—a warm and fairly lush presentation, anything but coarse or grainy. But in recent years, the trend at C-J and elsewhere has leaned toward a more transparent sound. It used to be that musicality came at the expense of transparency, and vice versa. But that's far from the case today. Very far, in fact. The truth is that improvements in capacitor technology have allowed audio

companies to lower the noise floor to levels that might have seemed difficult, if not impossible, a mere decade ago.

After a series of highly regarded (and expensive) ART and ACT preamplifiers, C-J recently broke new ground with its GAT preamplifier, which is loaded with Teflon capacitors. It also employs a circuit design that for gain relies on the venerable 6922 tube. It seems that C-J, for reasons of sound or practicality, abandoned the Russian 6h30 tube that was introduced with much hue and cry, but which is no longer as easily obtained. C-J likes to use a single gain stage and mosfet buffer at the output with the ET5. In theory, using a mosfet is quieter and more reliable than employing a tube. (Although some tube lovers will always swear by the glowing bottle regardless of its position in the circuit.) C-J also makes a big deal about the fact that it doesn't use electrolytic capacitors anywhere in its preamps—not even in the power supply. It's a different approach. Electrolytics give you a lot of storage capacity, so they can be useful in power supplies.

That said, few companies disdain them to the extent that C-J does. But C-J feels they degrade the sound, and there's no doubting that, if possible, electrolytics are best avoided. In addition, the single gain stage in the company's preamplifiers means that it inverts phase, which, in turn requires reversing the polarity of your speaker

cables if you are not using a power amplifier that also inverts phase, as C-J amplifiers do. C-J has always preferred the simplicity of a single-ended design as opposed to the complexity of a fully balanced design. Moreover, all C-J gear is single-ended, which means no doubling of parts, as in a balanced design. C-J's attitude: Why complicate the gear more than necessary?

Hence, the ET5 is the lineal descendant of the much-extolled GAT. But does it sacrifice too much to be even mentioned in the same breath? No way. And it weighs in at the much more affordable price of \$9,500.

### Covering the Bases

The ET5's winning qualities are immediately apparent. For its price, you deserve transparency, rock-solid imaging, and beauty. The ET5 delivers them all. It does a great job of balancing a somewhat mellow sound with transparency. And that mellowness comes through beautifully on instruments such as flute. Vide, MA Recordings' stellar CD featuring Diana Baroni playing Johann Sebastian Bach's flute sonata. This might sound like another fusty, old baroque recording, but believe me, it isn't. And through the ET5, it truly sounds alive. The ET5 brings to the table a wonderfully rich shower of harmonic overtones. I could practically hear the flute vibrating, every breath that the performer took, all the details that take a performance from the mundane to the sublime. Pure artistry. *(continued)*



# GamuT S7

Main Office:  
GamuT International A/S  
gamutaudio.com

U.S. Distributor:  
KT Audio Imports  
ktaudioimports.com

Experience the “El Superiores” Speakers

Ditto for another of my favorite flute recordings, this one featuring Joshua Smith on a Delos CD. I could practically see Smith’s fingers whizzing up and down the flute as they hit the keypads. The ET5 suffused my room with music, drenched it with harmonics, buzzing sounds, and plangent cellos. The amount of air it produces around instruments? Nothing short of sensational. One easily gets the feeling that the concert stage is right there in front of you.

The ET5’s ability to nail the timbral signature of an instrument equates to another strong point. Many have been the times that I have listened to a recording of multiple trumpets called—what else?—*Baroque Trumpetissimo*. It features an all-star cast, including Raymond Mase and Edward Carroll. These guys can pretty much do anything on the horn, and the ET5 really let me hear how they strut their stuff. Particularly impressive is the facility with which the ET5 allows the initial intonation to come through; that silvery pop signals that a master trumpeter is at work.

Then there is image stability. The ET5 excels at it. With this preamp, you can focus on the performers’ position to your heart’s content. And this particular virtue is probably a product of the preamps’ exceptionally low grain. It simply doesn’t smear the images, but opens up a huge and panoramic soundstage.

## The Question of Power

Where does the ET5 come up a little short? That’s easy to answer. *(continued)*







**The ET5 represents a significant step forward for C-J. Without sacrificing the mellifluous sound that is its trademark, C-J demonstrates that its new products can deliver a transparent sound and more.**

It doesn't pack the punch of its bigger brethren. Preamps retailing for \$20K and up—which, believe it or not, has become the routine price for top-drawer models—have more sonic power and impact. My Messenger preamplifier claims more heft and grandeur. But go to the GAT, and you'll get that as well. Why? The secret, as always, is in the power supply. More capacitance usually means more acoustic thunder. If a preamp is going to navigate complicated passages with aplomb, it needs plenty of dynamic reserves. In audio, you get what you pay for, and sometimes, a little more.

The ET5 unquestionably lands on the “more” side of the equation. This unassuming preamplifier is a quietly devastating piece of equipment, one that may force you to rethink the limits of sonic reproduction, particularly at its price. One of the things that tends to get lost in the audiophile shuffle is that recordings to which many audiophiles listen can feature some pretty amazing playing. However, audiophiles often get distracted by sheer sonic effects as opposed to instrumentalists' virtuosity.

For my money, the ET5 represents a significant step forward for C-J. Without sacrificing the mellifluous sound that is its trademark, C-J demonstrates that its new products can deliver a transparent sound and more. Anyone looking for a high-end preamp that's linear, musical, and reliable would do well to consider the ET5. It does nothing wrong and pretty much everything right.



extraordinary  
+  
synergy



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

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



**WLM**  
Loudspeakers

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



# Additional Listening

By Jeff Dorgay

Having logged experience using C-J's ACT 2 series 2 preamplifier for a number of years as a reference component, and having spent considerable time with the CT5 and ART series of preamplifiers (series 1, 2, and 3), the ET5 emerges as an entirely different animal. Even when taking the ART preamplifiers into account, my favorite series has always been the ACT 2, because of the combination of tonal accuracy and dynamic contrast it provides.

If you've had a chance to experience the GAT, it is truly the pinnacle of C-J preamplifier design—and perhaps the pinnacle of preamplifier design, period. The ET5 comes shockingly close to it for less than half the price and offers a similar tonal rendition. Listeners with world-beater systems will happily belly up for the GAT, if for nothing else than bragging rights. And, it genuinely is a step above the ET5. But those happy to reside one step down from the true audio maniacs will be equally happy to keep the additional \$10,500 in their pocket.

## A Quick Comparison

Since I utilized the ET5 in an-all CJ system with a Premier 350 power amplifier and GamuT S9 speakers, it was rather easy to compare the new model to the ACT 2. Of course, there will always be a difference in sound between anything based on the 6922/6DJ8 tube versus the 6H30. The former possesses a slightly softer and warmer sound than the 6H30, which usually offers more authority in the lower end as well as more punch.

The ET5's hybrid design brings the two preamplifiers closer together in tonal rendition, and offers an even quieter background than the ACT 2—not dramatic, but enough that those enjoying classical and small-ensemble acoustic pieces will definitely take notice. Listening to David Grisman's *Hot Dawg* at a realistically live level via the ACT 2 yielded a bit of tube noise in the interludes. There was markedly less of the latter when I played the disc played through the ET5. Advantage, ET5.



Thanks to only one 6922 tube, the ET5 is easier to manipulate than any other vacuum-tube preamplifier going. When you only have to buy one tube, those \$300 Telefunks and \$200 Bugle Boys become more interesting. Considering every C-J tube preamplifier I've owned since 1978 has been easy on tubes, I'm going to assume the ET5 will continue in that tradition.

While the ET5 sounds just fine with the stock tube, another world awaits you with aftermarket tubes. The EAT ECC88 is quite possibly the best choice since it does not alter the tonality of the preamplifier; it just offers up more dynamic punch and a lower noise floor. After installing the EAT, I went back to the Grisman record and discovered zero tube noise in the background. The EAT tube also threw a bigger soundstage in all three directions and had more bass weight. When listening to the title track from Thievery Corporation's recent LP, *Culture of Fear*, the upgraded tube yielded deeper bass beats with more grip.

Swapping the EAT for a rare Telefunken CCa sacrificed some transient speed but gave the midrange an intoxicating opulence, especially with my favorite 60s rock records. Jimi Hendrix's *Are You Experienced?* proved a revelation. I now truly was experienced. Similar sensations came courtesy of Incredible Hog's "To The Sea," a track from the band's self-titled album. It was as if I had x-ray vision and could just see the plate reverb vibrating inside one of the group's Orange amplifiers.

Lew Johnson and Bill Conrad are primarily classical music guys, yet they may have inadvertently created the world's most incredible rock n' roll preamplifier with the ET5/Telefunken combination. And while we don't recommend using tube swapping as a tone control, it's nice to know you have the option. (Guitar players have been doing it for years, so why not?) With this being such an easy process, the advantage again goes to the ET5.

In terms of dynamics, the ACT 2 is still the king. Whether I was listening to the Who or Shostakovich, the ET5 didn't as effortlessly move the big air as did the ACT 2. Via the latter, drum thwacks had more punch and were better defined, both on the leading and trailing edge of the sound. *(continued)*



sound choices

"KEEPING IT FUN"

Wayne Garcia, THE ABSOLUTE SOUND

"2010 ASL Product of the Year"

Nola Boxer Loudspeakers



and yes \$1499 per pair

1603 pine street san francisco ca. 94109

ph:415-614-1118

www.audiovisionsf.com

dali  
dynaudio  
gallo  
jl audio  
kef  
**nola**  
psb  
quad  
raidho  
rel acoustics  
rockport technology  
thiel  
triangle  
ultrasone  
wilson benesch

arcam  
audio research  
audioquest  
bat  
bel canto  
benz  
cardas  
cary audio  
chord  
clearaudio  
composite products  
finite elemente  
harmonic resolution systems  
harmonic tech  
integra  
lyngdorf audio  
lyra  
marantz  
micromega  
naim audio  
nordost  
nuforce  
primaluna  
pro-ject  
ps audio  
quadraspire  
rega  
richard gray  
runco  
shunyata research  
sim 2  
simaudio moon  
sonos  
soundsmith  
vpi

REVIEW



#### Ladies and Gentlemen, We Have a Winner

The toughest part of describing expensive audio equipment is the degree of importance one should place upon the gear. To many, the difference between C-J's best may not be quite as dramatic as it is to those that are somewhat more maniacal. Whether you choose to experiment with the tubes or not, the new ET5 remains an outstanding preamplifier in every aspect. Those well-versed with the C-J of old—with a warmer, more romantic sound—may long for the euphonic coloration those units provide.

Personally, I love the current C-J sound. It offers up almost all of the tonal richness that made the company famous, yet adds the dynamic capabilities of a modern preamplifier. Thanks to the CJD Teflon capacitors and a single tube, the ET5 should last even longer than my PV-1, which is still in service after 33 years. I can only think of about six preamplifiers that outperform the ET5. They all have a price that costs two-to-five times greater, and half of them are C-J designs. If that doesn't say Exceptional Value Award for 2011, nothing does. Highly recommended. ●

Conrad-Johnson ET5 Preamplifier

MSRP: \$9,500

#### MANUFACTURER INFORMATION

www.conradjohnson.com

#### PERIPHERALS

**Analog Source** Continuum Caliburn w/2 Cobra tonearms, AirTight PC-1 Supreme (Stereo) Lyra Titan (Mono)

**Preamplifier** Messenger

**Power Amplifier** Classe CA-M600 Monos (two more for subwoofers)

**Speakers** Wilson Audio Alexandria X-2 w/Thor Subwoofers, Magnepan 20.1

**Cable** Jena Labs

**Power** Isoclean Supreme Focus

**Stage III Concepts** Analord Prime Phono Cable



# From the Web site

In case you haven't been perusing the *TONEAudio* Web site on a regular basis, we are constantly adding gear reviews between issues. The following are links to the two most recent reviews.

## Woo Audio WA5 Headphone Amplifier

\$3,195

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

If you haven't experienced the exquisite sound of a single-ended triode amplifier only because your speakers aren't sensitive enough, you can now indulge yourself via your favorite headphones. We hadn't listened to the WA5 in two years, but in the time since, the amplifier experienced so many upgrades that it warranted another full review.

The short version: The WA5 is one of our reference headphone amplifiers, offering breathtaking sound and such an expansive soundstage that it doesn't feel as if you're even wearing headphones. Moreover, a tube complement of 6SN7, 5U4 (easily upgraded to a 274B), and the venerable 300B triodes gives the amplifier a plethora of options that take the sound to an even higher plateau. And should you put your hands on a pair of high-efficiency speakers, the WA5 features multiple inputs and speaker outputs, allowing it to serve double duty as an integrated amplifier.



## Where Have all the Good Stereos Gone?



We know. Sorting through the jungle that is pre-owned hi-fi gear can be tough. Myriad Internet forums and online shopping sites just don't offer the expertise required to make sound decisions.

That's where Echo Audio comes in. We have more than 20 years of retail experience in selling hi-fi equipment the way it should be sold: In a brick-and-mortar environment that provides you with personalized attention.

While we will certainly ship any of our gently used classics directly to your door, we invite you to stop by our shop in beautiful downtown Portland, Oregon to browse our inventory in person. Thanks to an in-house service department, we not only service everything we sell, but every piece of used gear is thoroughly checked before being put on display. Consider our white-gloves treatment your guarantee against potential problems.

So, when you are looking for high-quality, lightly used hi-fi gear, look no further than Echo Audio. Be sure to check out our Web site for current products and new arrivals.

echo)))  
audio

[www.echohifi.com](http://www.echohifi.com) 888.248.echo



# "Cash for Clunkers?"

Not exactly, but here's how to turn your old CD player into an industry-acclaimed Rega CD player... and enjoy substantial savings.

"The Apollo is a **surprising step forward** in a field that I'd thought was empty of same, and a hell of a bargain."

—Art Dudley, Stereophile

"Rega has given us a digital player that offers **breakthrough performance** at a bargain price."

—Chris Martens, The Absolute Sound

"There seems to be unanimity among critics about this: the Rega Apollo is a \$1000 **category-killer**."

—Sam Tellig, Stereophile

"The Saturn **surpassed just about every digital playback system I've heard before**...on a purely musical level it would be hard to beat this machine."

—Mike Quinn, Jazz Times

It's easy. Whatever its age, make or condition, bring in your old CD Player and we'll surprise you with an eye-popping, trade-in allowance on a new Rega Apollo or Saturn CD player. What was always affordable is now simply unbeatable. Discover that what is music to your ears you were able to get for a song.



To find out the details of this plan and your closest participating Rega dealer, call or email:

**THE SOUND ORGANISATION**  
MORE THAN MUSIC



In USA: 972.234.0182 —Steve  
steve@soundorg.com

www.soundorg.com

## Penaudio Cenya

\$4,500/pair  
www.penaudio.fi

After a brief hiatus, Penaudio is back in the US market with new mini-monitors. For those not familiar with the company, its speakers sound as good as they look—better, in fact. Past Penaudio models we reviewed always had a natural, open character and a big sound that might surprise you upon first listen.

Featuring understated woodwork, these small monitors feature Penaudio's newest 5-inch woofer and 1-inch soft-dome tweeter. A ported design, the Cenya claims a minimal footprint, yet delivers solid bass response and substantial output. If you're dreaming of a fashionable speaker that sacrifices nothing in the performance department, auditioning these is a must.





# Slummin'

By Jeff Dorgay



## Harmon Kardon A30 amplifier

\$149

Echo Audio

This one was way too good to pass up. While it might look rough in the photo, the sound is pure romance. And sure, the unit's original 7408 output tubes are long out of production. But they're easily replaced with 6L6s that provide 15 of the most enjoyable watts you'll ever hear. The MM phonostage isn't bad either. As a bonus, the previous owner had the output transformers coupled to the 16 ohm taps, resulting in a killer headphone amp.

What really makes this unit a Slummin' bargain is that the usual capacitor upgrades and cleanup had already been performed by Echo's knowledgeable repair staff. Yes, this one will play for some time. Add a pair of Klipschorns or some JBL L-100s and ease right back into the 60s.

# A REVOLUTION IN AMERICAN HI-FI



## The New OMEN DEF 3.0

package pricing starting at \$3,400

U.S. price only - Call for International pricing

PROUDLY BUILT IN THE U.S.A.

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





Look, everyone knows I'm a solid state kinda guy. But lately I've been fantasizing... about tubes.

Well, maybe you're "Tube Curious." Just go with it.

**PRECISION SELECTED**  
**Upscale Audio**  
SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA  
**CRYOGENICALLY TREATED**

**MARTIN LOGAN**  
*ElectroMotion*  
EM-ESL  
\$1999

**SUTHERLAND**  
20/20 Phono Stage \$2200

**PRIMALUNA Prologue Premium**  
Integrated Amp \$2299

**PEACHTREE AUDIO**  
iDac \$995

**NOLA**  
Boxer \$1500

**MYSTÈRE CA-21 Preamp** \$2295

**Tube upgrades! Huge stocks of cryogenically treated, current production and vintage new old stock (N.O.S.) tubes. See how we do it at [upscaleaudio.com](http://upscaleaudio.com)**

**IN STOCK:** ACOUSTIC ZEN, AESTHETIX, AHI! TJOEB, ANTHEM, ARCAM, ATMA-SPHERE, AUDIO ELECTRONIC SUPPLY, B&K, BENZ MICRO, CARY, CHANG LIGHTSPEED, CLEARAUDIO, COINCIDENT, DH LABS, DYNAVECTOR, ERA, EQUI-TECH, EXACTPOWER, GALLO, GRAHAM, JL AUDIO, KIMBER KABLE, LYRA, MAGNUM DYNALAB, MANLEY, MARTIN LOGAN, MUSIC HALL, MYSTÈRE, NITTY GRITTY, NOLA, NORDOST, NOTTINGHAM, OPERA, PATHOS, PEACHTREE, PRIMALUNA, PRIMARE, PS AUDIO, QUAD, REGA, REL, SME, SOOLOOS, SONUS FABER, SUTHERLAND, TRI-PLANAR, VPI, VINCENT, VIENNA ACOUSTICS

**UPS**  
**SCALE**  
**AUDIO**  
HIGH FIDELITY • MUSICAL SYSTEMS

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

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

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

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

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

AudioVision SF: [www.audiovisionsf.com](http://www.audiovisionsf.com)

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

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

AVID: [www.avidhifi.co.uk](http://www.avidhifi.co.uk)

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

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

BelCanto: [www.belcantodesign.com](http://www.belcantodesign.com)

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

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

Cardas Audio: [www.cardas.com](http://www.cardas.com)

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

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

Dynaudio: [www.dynaudio.com](http://www.dynaudio.com)

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

Estelon: [www.estelon.com](http://www.estelon.com)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MICS: [www.mics.mc](http://www.mics.mc)

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

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

Musical Fidelity: [www.musicalfidelity.com](http://www.musicalfidelity.com)

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

Music Instrument Museum: [www.themim.org](http://www.themim.org)

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

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

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

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

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

Polk Audio: [www.polkaudio.com](http://www.polkaudio.com)

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

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

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

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

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

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

Totem: [www.totemacoustic.com](http://www.totemacoustic.com)

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

Vitus Audio: [www.vitusaudio.com](http://www.vitusaudio.com)

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

Woo Audio: [www.wooaudio.com](http://www.wooaudio.com)

Zu Audio: [www.zuaudio.com](http://www.zuaudio.com)