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No.45 April 2012

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**The Wino Returns**  
Of Earth and Fruit,  
Balance and Restraint

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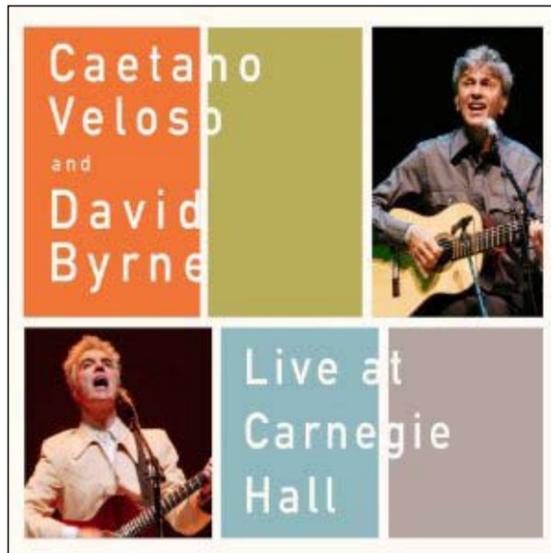
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# PUBLISHER'S LETTER

It's analog time again, readers. With so much excitement surrounding vinyl, we're releasing back-to-back analog issues, beginning with this April offering. Please note: There's no repurposed content or recycled round-ups here. What you see are all-new reviews, along with links to a few others on the Analogaholic section of our Web site.

While they may never be what they were during vinyl's heyday, LP sales continue to soar. Fanatical collectors even express surprise at the amount of reissues are both in production and on the horizon—as well as at how many new titles enjoy release (at least in small quantity). I hope 2012 brings more interesting analog titles from major imprints, and that we see the tide turn away from remastering the same warhorses we've already witnessed done too many times. That means more Mudhoney, less Miles.



And while I'm ranting, let's concentrate on quality—especially at today's prices. We seek to expose freshly remastered titles in our "Audiophile Pressings" section, but the sonics on at least a third of the remasters (and new indie releases) coming across my desk just suck. Never assume something will automatically sound amazing just because it's on vinyl.

Sure, many listeners believe the increased sentimentality for the long-playing record amounts to a trendy fad, soon to be dismissed by contemporary youth. I don't think so. I recently sat down with Ben Meadors and Owen McCafferty, authors of *The New Face of Vinyl: Youth's Digital Devolution*, and picked their brains. The duo's upcoming book chronicles under-25 record collectors and vinyl enthusiasts from across the US. While sound quality was not the sole reason, McCafferty appeared delighted at just how many people from his age bracket are excited about analog for the same reasons older generations love it.

Perusing various internet forums, however, reveals a large division between those enjoying music and those savoring hi-fi gear. Few manage to take it all in with equal enthusiasm, and both camps have major issues with the other. Sadly, a reverse snobbery exists and suggests that if you've spent more than a week's salary on a system, you can't possibly love music. As Mister Senor Love Daddy says in *Do the Right Thing*, "It's time to chill this shit out." So, regardless of where you stand, I hope you enjoy what we've put together for you in this issue, and what's to come in the next.





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# Diamanda Galas

**Museum of Contemporary Art**

Chicago, Illinois

**February 25, 2012**

By Bob Gendron

“**D**ue to the intensity of the performance, the artist requests no intermittent noises (cell phones, candy wrappers, et al.)” It would be easy to deem this statement, printed and posted to each entry door of the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago at Diamanda Galas’ sold-out two-night stand at the facility, an example of the type of persnickety demands often accompanying musicians’ riders.



©Photo by Kristopher Buckle

Doing so, however, would be misguided. For few performers approach the frightening degrees of severity, concentration, and fervor Galas seemingly embraces as parts of her natural disposition.

Watching her sit at the piano, eyes staring ahead, hues of bruised red and purple lighting illuminating the sparse stage, can be a near-religious experience—a cathartic cleansing and intimate brush with emotional extremities that forces even the most devoted listener to question what the human voice can do, to what depths it can penetrate the soul, and just how much scourged history, limb-severing pain, and tragic redemption it can convey without collapsing in a heap.

And so it went in late February during the second of two Galas concerts in the modern museum’s hall, rare appearances coinciding with the exhibition “This Will Have Been: Art, Love & Politics in the 1980s,” to which the pioneering California native lent several works. The daughter of Greek and Anatolian parents, Galas has always been more popular and

respected overseas, traits reflective of the international community’s headier interest in avant-garde and bold creativity. Unconcerned with the mainstream, she’s devoted her career to difficult subject matter and inventive interpretation. Topics such as AIDS, dementia, genocide, injustice, torture, depression, and isolation inform her compositions. Akin to her intrepid songs, Galas’ three-and-a-half octave vocal range remains a distinctive weapon capable of dividing audiences and eliciting disbelief.

Indeed, the opera-trained singer’s voice defied limitations throughout the brilliant 75-minute set by alternately weeping, wailing, cackling, shrieking, screaming, howling, moaning, trilling, sighing, and hissing. It often appeared as if Galas spoke in tongues, digging for and finding crevasses between words, syllables, and pauses. She channeled phrases in Italian, English, Greek, and German, contributing an exotic vibe and sense of entrenched empathy for the narrative subjects. Her program, “Were You There When

They Crucified My Lord?,” drew from *Masque of the Red Death Trilogy* as well as several jolting newer works.

Dramatic silences punctuated “The Cats Will Know,” a suicide poem by Cesare Pavese that Galas set to music, her bel canto deliveries and diving vibrato reinforcing tragic sympathy. She inhabited multiple personalities for a reading of Ferdinand Freiligrath’s devotional “Der Stunde Kommt (The Hour Will Come),” Marlene Dietrich’s favorite text and, in Galas’ hands, a sentimentally melancholy tune that inspired her to terrifying heights. Her throaty nasal timbre and uncoiling of complex frequencies recalled the quick-strike actions of a serpent before the piece ended in a muted, funereal close.

Confrontational moments abounded. Roy Acuff’s standard “Were You There When They Crucified My Lord” began in heavy barrelhouse form and evoked rowdy New Orleans tradition before Galas let loose with challenging snarls, rolling her fingers over piano keys until they literally vibrated. *(continued)*

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LIVE MUSIC



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She then punctuated the dramatic presentation with a repeated series of siren-blast vocal highs that threatened to shatter eardrums. For "Let's Not Chat About Despair," Galas embraced sarcasm and a curdled-milk tone, slamming her right hand down on the 88s, the display echoing with savvy edginess and pouncing blues.

She proved just as convincing and compelling when taking a mellower approach. "In Despair," regarding the abandonment of a gay lover, touched on balladic structures, an aural soliloquy that amidst certain passages bordered on a lullaby one might croon to a child. During a pleading version of the gospel spiritual "Be Sure That My Grave Is Kept Clean," Galas' handclaps mimicked the sound of a coffin lid. For all her seriousness, the 56-year-old experimentalist revealed

a humorous side by bantering with the crowd and admitting her music was ugly, and that it wasn't going to change. Not that it, or she, should. Equal to her chilling take on Ralph Stanley's "Oh Death"—on which her singing seemed to emanate from underground as she whipped mournful verses into tornadic fury—a determined "Let My People Go" combined striking imagery and vocal exorcism. An angry cry for salvation that pit god against the devil, and mortality against life, its outcome and appearance were as dark, unnerving, sinister, and provocative as Galas herself. ●

Mike Hill of Tombs illuminates the stage at Union Pool in Brooklyn, New York on March 3rd, 2012.

*Photo by Samantha Marble*



# New Releases



## Justin Townes Earle

*Nothing's Gonna Change the Way You Feel About Me Now*  
Bloodshot, CD or 180g LP



© Photo by Joshua Black Wilkins

“**H**ear my father’s voice on the radio/Singing, ‘Take me home again,’” warbles Justin Townes Earle one second into his new *Nothing’s Gonna Change the Way You Feel About Me Now*. He invokes Steve Earle once again on the closing “Movin’ On,” but only by way of conversation with his mother. Fittingly, the reference is quickly swept under the rug.

As it should be, for on his fourth and finest album, the younger Earle completely puts his patriarch in the rear-view mirror, accomplishing the difficult feat with such convincing authority that any comparisons from here on out are nothing but lazy and trivial. It doesn’t hurt that the stripped-down, Memphis soul-ridden set eclipses anything dad’s made in more than a decade.

Weighing in at barely over a half hour in length, the 10-song set exists as an archetype of concision and economy. There’s not a wasted note, not one tossed-off idea or space filler. Earle doesn’t over-think or -analyze any moves. The casual

attitude extends to his decision to cut the album entirely live, sans overdubs, in just four days at a North Carolina studio that was converted from church. Earle’s succinct songwriting, pleasant band, and fluent sonics beget a creative trifecta: *Nothing’s Gonna Change the Way You Feel About Me Now* exudes direct purity and conviction. The songs sound as if they could come from any era—whether via a 1950s jukebox tucked away in neighborhood bar in El Paso or through a modern working band’s amplifiers. Their messages are honest, simple, and sincere, their melodies as warm and assured as the embrace of a loved one’s hands wrapped around a partner’s waist, and their feeling comfortable, natural, weightless, charming, easy.

Demonstrative of the album’s title, a majority of material revolves around relationships, and largely, the adaptations one usually must make to hold on to them. Earle’s protagonists yearn to find more preferable circumstances and reflect upon self-improvement. Earle sings “I thought I’d be a better man” on the contemplative “Am I That Lonely Tonight?”; indicates he’s “learning to be a better man” on the jazz-stoked shuffle “Look the Other Way”; wonders “maybe if I were I better man” on the heel-kicking R&B dust-up “Baby’s Got a Bad Idea”; confesses he’s “looking for a change” on the bright midtempo waltz “Memphis In the Rain.”

Similarly, the namesake character in the achingly gorgeous

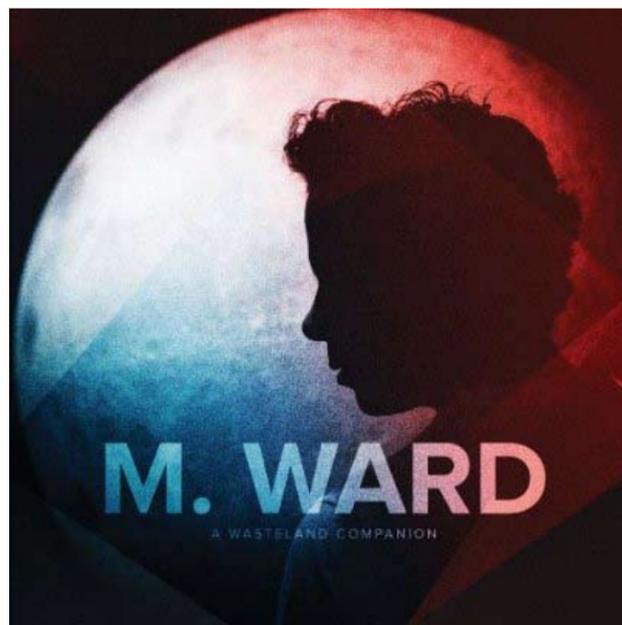
“Unfortunately, Anna” wants for geographical and emotional transition. Earle paints her as a small-town local at the end of her rope, his sympathetic voice allowing tension to mount yet refrain from anger, the desperate wishes taking the form of pleas and leading up to a point where the singer delivers a knockout one-liner that turns the situation upside-down and seizes upon reality as a confrontational wake-up call. “It’s you that’s got to change,” he matter-of-factly declares, the record’s theme again coming full circle. But change is never easy—a concept the record openly and regularly acknowledges. “I just can’t stand myself alone,” Earle divulges after he’s offered an opportunity for a getaway retreat on the bluesy juke “Movin’ On,” during which the bandleader realizes trying is key to any success.

Addressing desires, regrets, failures, compromises, and minor triumphs in disarmingly plainspoken fashion—and with equally relaxed and bare-bones musical support via rubber-necking stand-up bass lines, cooing organ passages, brushed percussive beats, purring string devices, delicate piano notes, and measured brass fills—*Nothing’s Gonna Change the Way You Feel About Me Now* is as resolutely human as an album can be. Staying patient, refusing to hurry, and taking the shapes of teardrops and ribbons, the music unfurls as a soulful and soul-affirming courtship dance none of us can afford to ignore. —**Bob Gendron**

“**I**’d like to think I’m a primitive guy,” sings Matt Ward early on in his latest solo turn. In many ways, the admission is a fitting description, as the singer’s lush, distinctive songs often sound as though they’re emanating from within the dusty grooves of 78RPM vinyl.

Indeed, even Ward’s mannerisms seem borrowed from a more innocent time, and songs like “Sweetheart,” which gets an assist from his She & Him companion Zoey Deschanel, harken back to the 1950s, the frontman singing of taking drives down Lover’s Lane and walking hand-in-hand beneath the stars. When his thoughts turn to the bedroom just one tune later on the rollicking “I Get Ideas,” he refrains from using any words that might send even the most sensitive network censor into a tizzy, letting the listener’s imagination fill in the gaps as he croons, “When we’re dancing and you’re dangerously close to me/I get ideas/Oh, I get ideas.”

Elsewhere, Ward turns out cinematic tunes that come across like alternate soundtracks to a daydream (“Wild Goose,”) and more ominous turns best described as



**M. Ward**  
*A Wasteland Companion*  
Merge, CD or LP

nightmarish (the galloping, primal “Watch the Show”). “Primitive Girl,” which surges along on piano lines and slapdash drums that echo the song’s title, lands somewhere in between, combining dreamy female backing singers with Ward’s distorted, creepy vocals, which sound as though they echo from within an antique radio.

Ward has referred to *A Wasteland Companion*, recorded at various studios around the U.S. and Europe—including at John Parish’s workspace beneath a centuries-old church in Bristol, England—as a musical travelogue of sorts, marking the years he spent on the road with She & Him and Monsters of Folk. Fittingly, the singer packs narratives with references to running away, conquering the ocean one wave at a time, and unfamiliar people who “look at you as if you were a stranger.” (continued)

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MUSIC



This unsettled feel occasionally pours over into the music. "Me & My Shadow," for one, glides along innocently on a gentle strum of acoustic guitar before a fuzzed-out surf-rock riff rips through like a massive tidal wave, laying waste to everything in sight.

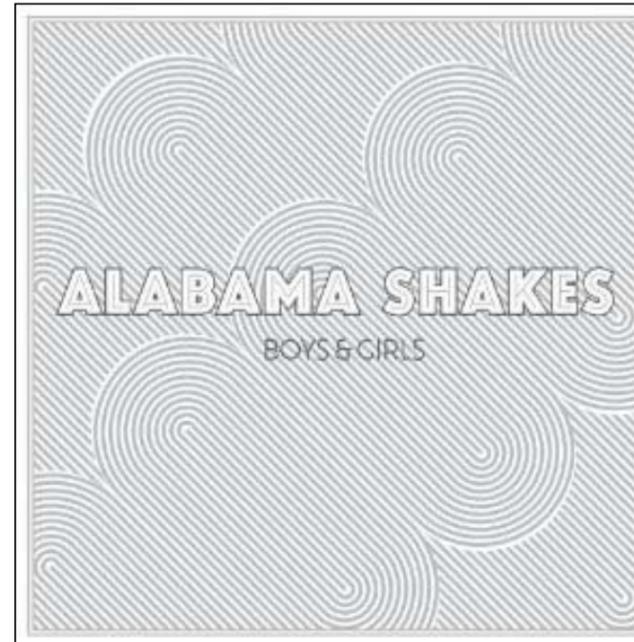
While Ward's strange surroundings certainly inform his approach, the album also seems to double as the singer's attempt to come to terms with the increased spotlight placed on him by both She & Him and Monsters of Folk. Lyrics that hint at deep-seeded self-doubt are scattered haphazardly throughout. "Some mistake me for a writer," he sings on one tune. Then, on another, "Mockingbird, you ain't no innovator." The album-closing "Pure Joy," an effortless acoustic number that drifts through like a pleasing spring breeze, further delves into this ongoing creative struggle. "Thought I was falling into a deep depression," he sings, "thinking all the mystery was gone." *A Wasteland Companion*, then, is the sound of Ward gradually rediscovering his muse. —**Andy Downing**



© Photo by David A. Smith

**First and foremost, the Alabama Shakes are a rock 'n' roll band, one with a lead singer who is equally comfortable to holler and stomp or simply let her voice crack as she tries to connect with a loved one.**

**A**mong the many assets of the Alabama Shakes is to leave the listener wanting more. At 11 songs and 36 minutes, the Northern Alabama group's debut album *Boys & Girls* isn't exactly a svelte little rhythm & blues morsel. But its songs, only two of which breach the four-minute barrier, are designed for the sneak attack.



### **Alabama Shakes**

*Boys & Girls*

ATO Records, CD or LP

Keyboards grow sweltering hot, rhythms deliver a groove as if they're conveying an order, and singer Brittany Howard—oh my, Brittany Howard—throws one vocal knockout punch after another. She's steeped in all sorts of blues and soul tradition, yet the real templates here are the likes of Mick Jagger and Jack White.

Indeed, Alabama Shakes' penchant for rootsy instrumentation and songs that build to audience-participatory hallelujah moments has some pegging the group as a form of retro or vintage soul act. Such a description isn't inaccurate. Listening to "I Found You" is like blowing the dust off of some long undiscovered Motown gem, and "You Ain't Alone" is a prom-theme

slow-dance that channels an era when rock 'n' roll power chords were discovering the blues.

The tunes on *Boys & Girls*, however, aren't trying to freshen up tradition. Instead, they're trying to fight out of it. These songs feel as if they belong in a marathon four- or five-hour set loaded with blues and rock staples such as "Roadrunner" and "Everybody Needs Somebody to Love." These are bar-band tough and road-tested versatile, marked by the effortless swing from the tearjerker of a title track to the gospel preaching of "Be Mine." They're offered as deft little challenges: You think you know all there is to know about rhythm and blues? Think again.

First and foremost, the Alabama Shakes are a rock 'n' roll band, one with a lead singer who is equally comfortable to holler and stomp or simply let her voice crack as she tries to connect with a loved one. As for where they will go from here, *Boys & Girls* throws the doors open wide as it all comes to a close. "Be Mine" swells to a grand finale of hoarse vocals and galloping guitars and keys, "I Ain't the Same" showcases the strength of the riff, and "On Your Way" sees Howard ending the album with a tease.

"It was just me, just little ol' me," she sings, and then gets out of the way to let her band kick up a racket. She's a force, yes, but the Shakes have plenty of other tricks in their arsenal. —**Todd Martens**

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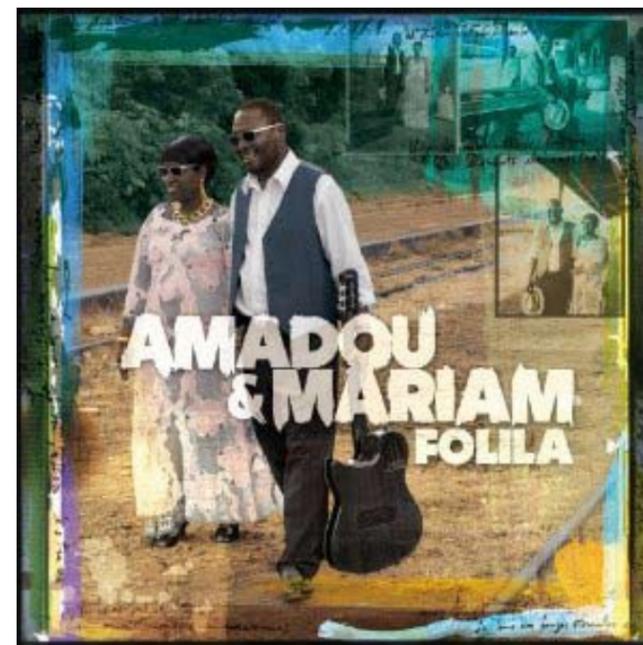
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### Amadou & Mariam

*Folila*

Nonesuch, CD or 2LP

**F**rom the time they began playing, Amadou and Mariam, the adorable blind couple from Mali, waited more than two decades to experience a breakthrough in the United States. This despite having garnered a following in Europe and their native Africa much sooner. But later is better than never. Both 2005's *Dimanche a Bamako* and 2009's *Welcome to Mali*, co-produced by Blur's Damon Albarn, remain delightfully cosmopolitan affairs that fully embrace the "world music" moniker.

Albarn isn't involved with *Folila*. His absence may relate to the set's overall problem wherein promising material is victimized by an overabundance of guests and one of the oddest mixing decisions in memory. Originally, the duo set out to make two LPs. The first was conceived as a crossover effort shaped in New York City. The other, a traditionally minded affair captured in Bamako with African colleagues and vintage percussion. Everything went to plan, with the husband-and-wife team laying down the same songs in both locations, albeit with different personnel and arrangements. However, upon further contemplation, the pair elected to fuse the distinct outcomes via the aid of various mixing engineers.

While it's hard to fault ambition, *Folila* isn't the intended-for best-of-both worlds as much as an obvious amalgamation in which organic

and electronic, retro and modern devices often sound artificial—or worse, blatantly commercialized. Rather than seamlessly intersect and mesh, tracks fit akin to misshapen puzzle pieces that line up only after they are forced together. The slightly cluttered, overly polished process is a step back from the true synthesis of the futuristic samples, hip-hop rhythms, and Westernized rock grooves dotting the collective's two previous efforts.

And it's not like Amadou and Mariam lack for compelling details or addictive fare found amidst the post-edit constructions. A desert-blues guitar line traces the melodic edges of the opening "Dougou Badia," one of the few times the musical guest (Santigold) doesn't overstay their welcome. An upbeat, sunny tropicalia vibe forces "C'est Pas Facile Pour Les Aigles" to dance, yet *Ebony Bones'* layered-on English-language vocals come across as unnecessary and distracting. *(continued)*



© Photo by Yuri Lenquette

“Metemya” begins well enough, its dusty roots planted in ancient soil. But when Scissor Sisters member Jake Shears enters, he turns it into a glossy pop tune that wouldn’t be out of place in *Lion King*. Apart from being marketable names, TV on the Radio cohorts Tunde Adebimpe and Kyp Malone contribute nothing more of lasting value to the slender funk “Wily Kataso” then they do on Tinariwen’s recent *Tassili*.

Yeah Yeah Yeahs guitarist Nick Zinner and French singer/guitarist/harmonica player Bertrand Cantat are the two prominently billed helpers that add rather than subtract or simply just exist. Zinner drops flavor-filled riffs throughout, and the latter’s *français* yields a genuine match with the horn-driven “Africa Mon Afrique” and rustic trance “Mogo.”

Ironically, however, the headliners require little help; their blended voices and textured songwriting go down fine on their own. Someone needs to locate and individually issue the separate sessions, particularly the traditional African recordings. Exchanging purity, grit, and vibrancy for fabricated composites and pop-skewed catchiness on *Folila* does not make for a wise trade. —**Bob Gendron**

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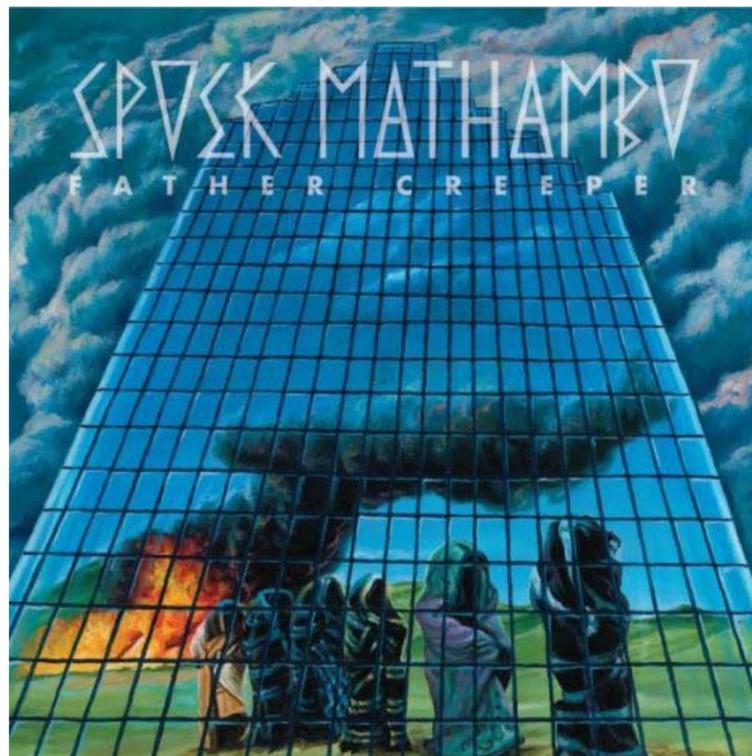
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**Spoek Mathambo**  
*Father Creeper*  
 Sub Pop, CD or LP

**For many, peace comes only in death. For the rest of us, Mathambo constructs the dark, intensely weird soundtrack to our increasingly unsteady times. Best buckle up.**

“**B**ad news is good for business,” spits South African rapper/singer/DJ Spoek Mathambo, who was born Nthato Mokgata, on “Let Them Talk.” Judging by the 11 diverse cuts populating Mathambo’s sophomore album, *Father Creeper*, business must be booming.

“Put Some Red On It,” for one, plays like a counterpoint to Beyonce’s “Single Ladies (Put a Ring On It),” seeing as it documents the violence and bloody human toll of the gold and diamond trades. Atop a sparse, gilded beat that could pass for a Neptunes production, Mathambo spins fevered hallucinations of kicking it with warlords in Sierra Leone, snorting gun powder, and the gaping wounds inflicted on those who step out of line.

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## MUSIC



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Elsewhere, Mathambo sings of bullets falling like raindrops from the sky (the minimalist, creepy "Dog to Bone"), bemoans the calloused lives of blue-collar workers forced to work until they drop (the buzzing, synth-driven "We Can Work), and turns out cryptic tunes that read like shattered prayers ("I hope I don't die 'fore I get old," he chants on the frenetic "Venison Fingers"). On "Stuck Together," a guitar-driven jam that makes it clear grunge has finally made its way to Johannesburg, Mathambo repeats what might be the least sexy come-on ever recorded, singing, "We'll have our tombstones rub up against one another."

Musically, much of *Father Creeper* sounds somehow both handmade and futuristic—like a rocket ship constructed from spare parts in the garage of a backyard scientist. Throughout, Mathambo crafts a veritable mosaic of found sounds, piling on 8-bit videogame bleeps and beeps, jagged shards of synth noise, throbbing dub-step basslines, oceanic power chords, and terse Soweto guitar lines. "Let Them Talk" opens as a spiky R&B jam and closes in a torrent of spacey guitars that imagines what it might have sounded like had Explosions in the Sky been reared in South Africa rather than Texas. Other cuts are far uneasier. Mathambo

assembles the title track from so many skittish moving parts that you almost sense it would dart away if someone reached out to touch it.

Indeed, the ever-restless Mathambo only finds a measure of peace on the album-closing one-two punch of "Grave (Intro)" and "Grave," his voice drifting in as if he's delivering his words from somewhere in the afterlife. Arriving on the heels of the chaos preceding it, the suggestion is clear: For many, peace comes only in death. For the rest of us, Mathambo constructs the dark, intensely weird soundtrack to our increasingly unsteady times. Best buckle up.  
—Andy Downing

**H**igh On Fire picks up where Mastodon left off. Where the latter eschews fantasy worlds on its recent *The Hunter*, the formidable West Coast power trio embraces such concepts on *De Vermis Mysteriis*, which translates to “The Mysteries of the Worm” and honors the fiction of late novelist Robert Bloch. Song narratives involve a time-traveling twin brother of Jesus, an ancient Chinese scroll devised by an alchemist that invents a serum named Liao out of a black lotus, and the twin appearing in other individuals’ bodies. Got it?

Of course, storytelling has always taken a backseat to Matt Pike and Co.’s mountain-moving fare. With *High on Fire*, the riff takes priority, plundering bottom-end rhythms come in a close second, and everything else follows. While unquestionably the deepest-reaching psychedelic effort in the group’s six-album catalog, *De Vermis Mysteriis* doesn’t significantly alter the threesome’s approach. And there are not many reasons it should.

Long recognized by heavy-music aficionados as a mammoth guitarist, whether with his current outfit or during his tenure in pre-reunion Sleep, Pike lives and breathes metal—relishing its physicality, power, pace, and attack. Conscientious of the irony surrounding the mainstream press’ hyperbolic praise that’s greeted his band during the past few years, he’s likely getting a laugh from reading comments that lazily (and wrongly) label High on Fire “stoner metal,” drop vacuous drug references, and/or strike faux outlaw poses in attempts to feign shared interest in the bandleader’s outsider persona.



**High On Fire**  
*De Vermis Mysteriis*  
E One Music, CD or LP

**With High on Fire, the riff takes priority, plundering bottom-end rhythms come in a close second, and everything else follows.**

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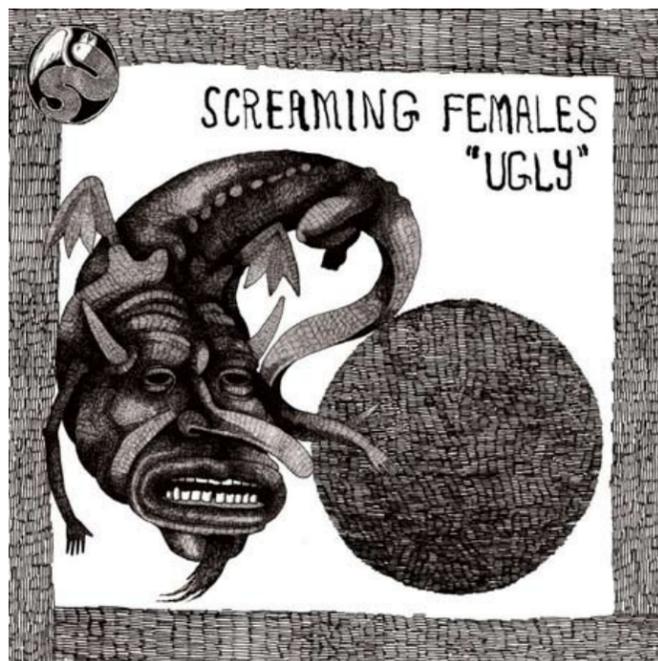


**Deviations aside, *De Vermis Mysteriis* is blood sport. It's a witching hour that haunts, shakes, and crushes in the manner that anything connected to Pike should.**

True to the demon-skull rings hugging his fingers and devilish tattoos decorating his hands and chest, Pike wields his pillaging six-string instrument akin to a battle axe on roto-tilling tunes such as “Madness of an Architect” and the title track without a trace of self-consciousness or inauthenticity. Thrashing (“Fertile Green”), grinding (“Spiritual Rights”), and pounding (“Serums of Liao”), High on Fire is the sound of the underground—not in the cultural sense—but literally, meaning, the band projects what the earth’s outer core, boiling with iron-nickel alloy, sounds like as viscous fluids and rocks perform a constant dance of collision and tension. Framed by Des Kensel’s aggressive double-kick drumming and Jeff Matz’s flexible bass lines, Pike’s hoarse, throat-straining growls and barks couldn’t demand a more fittingly dense, swinging, and scraping background.

Despite the familiar no-quit nature of a majority of the material, several changeups substantiate High on Fire’s ongoing evolution, however slight. Pike taps into an effects-laden solo on “Serums of Liao” that wouldn’t be out of place on an early Van Halen record had Eddie an extreme interest in punk and distortion. The instrumental “Samsara” seemingly doubles as a tribute to fallen Metallica bassist Cliff Burton and his memorable contributions to *Ride the Lightning*. “King of Days” slows down the tempo and recalls Pike’s early works.

Deviations aside, *De Vermis Mysteriis* is blood sport. While not entirely on par with the band’s last three superior records, it’s a witching hour that haunts, shakes, and crushes in the manner that anything connected to Pike should. —**Bob Gendron**



**Screaming Females**

*Ugly*

Don Giovanni Records, CD or LP

**Nominally a punk band, Screaming Females pull from the genre's lean velocity but heighten the tension by threatening each song's tautness with fanciful guitar work.**

**E**

arlier this year, a rock-obsessed friend of mine was lamenting a lack of modern-day guitar heroes. This is a man who, this past March, went to see the latest incarnation of Guns N' Roses multiple times in Los Angeles. To his credit, he found it depressing. Yet the bloated spectacle that is the modern-day Axl Rose simply made said friend more disheartened he had no current, crank-it-to-11 rock gods. He asked me for advice. Marissa Paternoster was the first name I told him to investigate.

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## MUSIC



© Photo by Patrick Ernst

So the name doesn't roll off the tongue, but Paternoster, the leader and heart of New Jersey trio the Screaming Females, has the ability to stop a listener dead in his or her tracks. Her band's new album, *Ugly*, is a lesson in six-string dexterity—so much so that absorbing all of its 14 tracks in one setting can be exhausting.

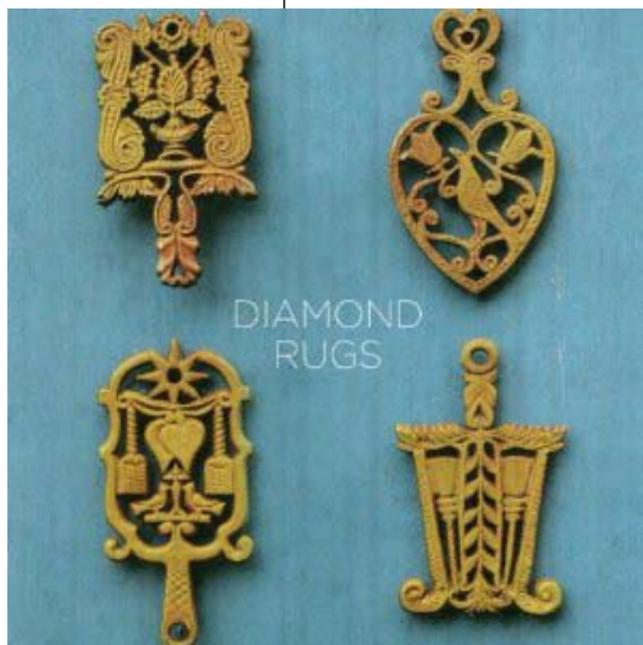
Nominally a punk band, Screaming Females pull from the genre's lean velocity but heighten the tension by threatening each song's tautness with fanciful guitar work. In "It All Means Nothing,"

Paternoster nearly brings the tune to a halt, using the instrument to slam the breaks one second and hit the accelerator the next. On "Red Hand," she doesn't riff so much as jump from Point A to Point C, her instrument wire-thin and spastic, recalling the work of Sleater-Kinney's Carrie Brownstein. Throughout the record, she wields her voice as if it's an animal fighting to be let loose of its leash, pulling her register down low, up high, or left and right with great recklessness.

While the band, on album No. 5, is only becoming more confident,

*Ugly* is a coming-of-age record on which the act doesn't always like the look of maturity. "You want to make me older, but I can't grow again" Paternoster snarls during "Help Me," and then proceeds to unleash some of the most gleefully playful guitar work on the set. The closing "It's Nice" is the sole moment of calmness, complete with violins, in which the only wish against growing responsibilities and increasingly bad news is to "feel just like a little child." A guitar, after all, can only solve so much.

—Todd Martens



**Diamond Rugs**  
*Diamond Rugs*  
Partisan, CD or LP

**W**hen he's not bellied-up to a bar, Deer Tick frontman John McCauley seems to enjoy plenty of spare time. The singer also dabbles in Middle Brother with folks from Delta Spirit and Dawes. And now, he's taken his liquor-clogged pipes to Diamond Rugs, an indie "supergroup" of sorts that counts members of the Black Lips, Los Lobos, Dead Confederate, and Six Finger Satellite among its ranks—as well as a few honored guests.

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Deliberately shabby and sonically low-rent, the collective's self-titled debut comes across as the musical equivalent of checking into a budget motel for a night with a few buddies, several cheap six-packs, a bag of tacos, and nothing on the agenda but boozing and watching 1970s television reruns. *Diamond Rugs* is the type of scruffy, laissez-faire, low-key, do-it-yourself record Sub Pop would've proudly released and Jack Endino produced in the late 1980s.

In addition to clearly having fun in the Nashville studio, the cohorts extrapolate their enthusiasm to a batch of originals that toy with the idea of playfully sending up classic styles while simultaneously holding tight to a punk-rooted earnestness. *Diamond Rugs* cut both ways—songs are equally ironic and genuine, or, at least candid in the manner that a wobbly drunk is forthcoming to a gaggle of friends when it's well-past midnight and he can't stop himself from rambling on about relationships that got away, chance meetings, simple boasts, and wanting another can of Budweiser.

Fittingly, women, sexual yearning, rejection, country living, hangovers—and wishes for delights such as “the kind of dog/that listens when I call/and pisses on my neighbor's fence” on the humorous Westernized romp “Gimme A Beer”—are as deep as *Diamond Rugs* get on

tunes that double as informal rap sessions. McCauley's ramshackle, frayed, occasionally out-of-tune, sung-spoken vocals resonate as those of a man who knows he's passed his limit but orders yet another whiskey and grabs one more smoke even if he realizes the consequences of such actions won't be kind. On the surf-tinged “Out on My Own,” his throaty pleas and lying admissions evoke the *Blues Brothers* image of John Belushi, face dirtied, on his knees in front of Carrie Fisher, who buys his pathetic act.

Savvy musical references to and updates of the past also abound. “Country Mile” alternates between daydream-believer pop and heavy 1970s rock, wet-sock bottom-end textures included. “Call Girl Blues” sasses and struts, the horn section seemingly on loan from Neil Young's defunct *Bluenotes* era and taking up residence at a local Holiday Inn lounge. The self-lacerating “Totally Lonely” winks at classic Roy Orbison ballads, the sparse arrangement inviting blowing tumbleweeds and added vocal reverb. Keyboard accents join bluesy harmonica and strolling beats on “Motherland,” invoking the fringe of mainstream 80s synthpop.

Yet, for all their humor, intentional and otherwise, *Diamond Rugs* have in the solitary lament “Christmas In A Chinese Restaurant” crafted a new holiday classic in which loneliness is no joke. Tom Waits, for one, would be proud.

—**Bob Gendron**

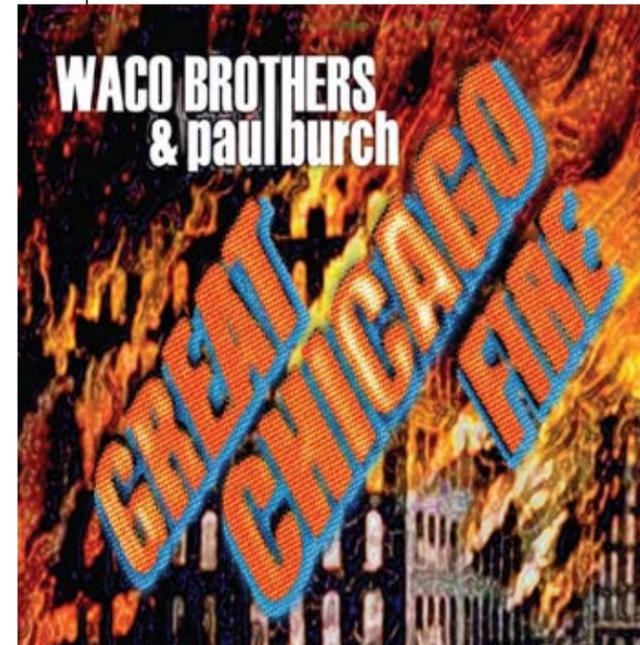


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**Waco Brothers and Paul Burch**  
*The Great Chicago Fire*  
Bloodshot, CD

**T**he opening line on the Waco Brothers first album since 2005's *Freedom and Weep* echoes Johnny Rotten's onstage epitaph for the Sex Pistols: "Did you ever get the feeling that you've been cheated?"

But while the Pistols were in the midst of a sloppy breakup, the Chicago-based Wacos, who've been kicking up a storm since releasing their 1995 debut, *To the Last Dead Cowboy*, still exhibit the easy camaraderie of lifelong friends. Anchored as always by songwriters Jon Langford, Tracey Dear, and Deano Schlabowski—and buoyed here by the addition of Nashville-based honky-tonker Paul Burch—the Brothers comfortably settle into middle-age life on the beautifully weathered *The Great Chicago Fire*.

That's not to say the roots-rockers can't throw down from time to time. Witness the title track, which imagines what T-Rex might have sounded like had Marc Bolan grown up favoring dive bars and cheap beer rather than feather boas and top hats. Then there's a rowdy cover of Bob Dylan's protest anthem "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" that sounds as if it was thrown together at last call, steadily devolving into a tangle of jangly guitars and righteously angry, slurred voices.

Elsewhere, the politics remain largely personal, the bandmates turning out lived-in tunes about men existing on the fringes—be it in a relationship or within society as a whole. The casual, country-spiked "Monterey" comes across like a breakup anthem penned by Paul Giamatti's character in "Sideways," the mates singing, "You've got one bottle of wine to make up your mind." (continued)

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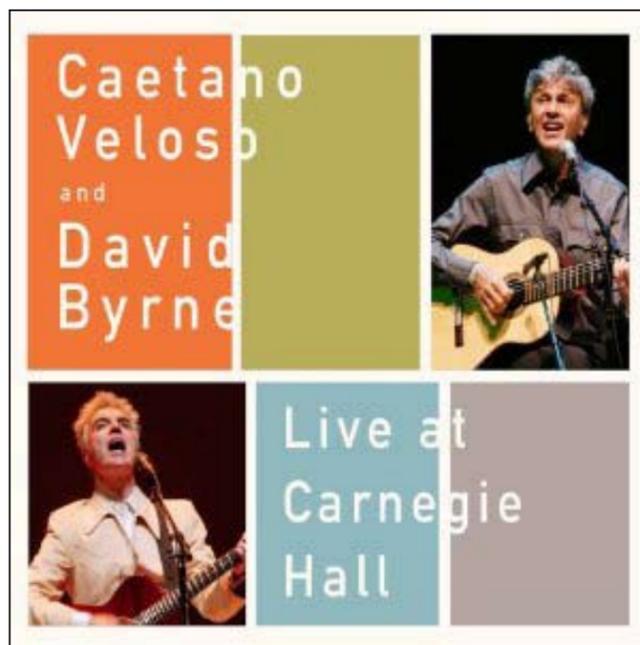
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Conversely, the central figure in “Someone That You Know,” which lopes along as steadily as Johnny Cash’s “Folsom Prison Blues,” sounds as if he could’ve sprung forth from the shadowy mind of author Cormac McCarthy, with his “teeth a little yellow” and “heart a little black.”

There’s little optimism throughout. Langford sings of how “everything that flies will someday fall” on the shuffling “Cannonball” and Burch opines that “no one ever dies with a smile on their face” on the casual pub rocker “Wrong Side of Love.” Schlabowski’s tejano-influenced “On the Sly” nearly serves as a counterpoint to the latter. “If I could make it through to see tomorrow,” the guitarist sings atop a bramble of fingerpicked guitar notes, “If I could make it to the other side.”

Still, while the band might sing of escape now and again—from the leaving-on-a-jet-plane ruminations of “Flight to Spain” to “Up on the Mountain,” a fiddle-flecked hootenanny about taking in the view from a distance—the spirited music indicates that there’s never any doubting the Wacos are in it for the long haul. —**Andy Downing**



### Caetano Veloso and David Byrne

*Live at Carnegie Hall*  
Nonesuch, CD



© Photo by Chris Lee

**W**hat a lovely time this concert was. Exquisite, even.

The moment Caetano Veloso's "Desde Que o Samba é Samba" opens this live album, it's easy to picture the attentive Carnegie Hall audience relaxing with a smile, marveling at how Veloso's hands seem to tap-dance over his strings. The melody isn't played so much as brushed, materializing as if one is watching a time-lapse of a watercolor painting. Even more sprightly moments, such as the Talking Heads' "And She Was" and David Byrne's "Everyone's in Love with You," are preserved as if they're museum pieces—so pristinely captured that one gets the sense that the slightest mistake will send the whole thing crashing down.

Chances are, if you're reading this, you did not witness this 2004 concert, recorded as part of a Veloso-curated week of events at Carnegie Hall. Eight years later, Nonesuch is giving the event the live album treatment, and on record, the pairing of musical legends and longtime friends likely comes across more serious than it did in the flesh.

Byrne, a longtime admirer of the Brazilian singer/songwriter, arrives after a handful of Veloso originals, which find the latter accompanied by little more than cellist Jacques Morelenbaum.

The mood definitely changes. Joined by percussionist Mauro Refosco, Byrne's "She Only Sleeps" becomes a lovely bossa nova trifle, and the Talking Heads' "Life During Wartime" is reworked so that the acoustic guitars drive the rhythm. Later, Byrne's "God's Child" gives way in its final moments to a fiery, Latin beat—a feel sweetened on "Dreamworld: Marco de Canaveses."

*Live at Carnegie Hall* ultimately becomes a snapshot of two celebrated artists that appear to be in awe of

each other's songwriting and musicianship. The most inspired moments are those that feel most spontaneous, namely the vocal and language-swapping during Veloso's "Um Canto de Afoxé para o Bloco do Ilê" and the Talking Heads' "(Nothing but) Flowers." Byrne sings in Portuguese on the former, and Veloso sings in English on the latter. And even when both are clearly out of their comfort zone, they sound nothing less than calmly sophisticated.

—**Todd Martens**



# Out of Tune With You

*When everything one knows about love and sex is learned from a pop song, is normalcy an impossibility?*

By Todd Martens

his column is being written four days after I found out my cat didn't have long to live. Those who aren't pet owners or aren't interested in reading an ode to a feline need not worry. I'll keep much of my mourning in my head and off of this page as few, I believe, are interested in how I haven't left the house, stopped going into work, and set up a sleeping bag on my bedroom floor so I can be closer to Pfeiffer when she sleeps under the bed.

There, it's out of my system. I almost feel guilty for sharing that. Not that I'm opposed to talking about myself, as this column attests. But I realize I shirk against any expression that seems to beg for human compassion and/or companionship. Likewise, I tend to not get terribly excited about the solitary combo of musician and acoustic guitar. I look to art to excite, to seduce, to make me laugh, and even to make me cry, but not, simply, to be human. Give me emotion that's exaggerated.

Rock n' roll isn't to blame for such an outlook. That would be a copout. But rock n' roll cleared a path for such avoidance, such selfishness. For as much as music is spoken about as a communal experience, obsessive fandom—if gone unwatched—breeds exclusion. It starts as an extension of self-expression. You can listen to Oasis, thought the teenaged version of myself, but the superior among us listen to Pulp, even if it means doing so alone, in our bedrooms, and with no one to talk to about it.

Ultimately, the approach leads to this: “You don’t want to date me,” a girl I dated for a couple weeks said to me last month. “You want to date your anxieties.”

Maybe. I write because it became obvious early on that being a rock star wasn’t a viable option. Yet the validation I seek isn’t all that different—adoration, largely anonymous, and at a distance. The girl gave me the aforementioned psychological analysis shortly after I refused to A.) walk barefoot on the beach (sand is gross, I said); and B.) declined to more closely inspect the weekly tradition that is the Venice Beach drum circle (drum circles are gross, I said). It made for a lousy date, but I was pleased to have a story to tell at the office the next morning. I knew a brief rant against the beach would generate a few chuckles, and I was formulating the story in my head over dinner with the girl.

Let’s bring this back to cats. I once dated a girl—let’s call her Misti—for five years. A month before she was scheduled to move in with me, I put a halt to it. She had a cat. I had a cat. I was nervous that my cat, Pfeiffer, wouldn’t like a peer of her own species. Considering Pfeiffer was then 7 years old and her cat 12 years old, I said, helpfully I thought, “It may be too shocking for an elder cat to be placed in a new environment.” She saw through it. “So you want to wait for my cat to die before we can live together.”

I realize this example makes me look particularly bad, but it’s also true that it can be applied to most aspects of my life. As a relatively anonymous teenager (I wasn’t popular but I was never bullied or picked on, either) my identity was formed by things I liked—the music, movies, and video games that were “mine.” I went out of my way to save up for Japanese-only Nintendo games, and I would gladly discuss how Green Day was okay for those unaware of the Smoking Popes.

I was also relieved, for instance, on my first date with Misti when she said that her favorite band was the Pixies. The Pixies were a gap in my knowledge, and I now wouldn’t have to worry about the potential relationship, should it go bad, ruining things I liked. If it went bad, I wouldn’t be losing nearly as much as I would have had our interests more overtly overlapped. My favorite songs, for example, would not be scarred by images of someone else. This all makes for a funny, *High Fidelity*-like aside, but it’s ridiculous.

If you can’t risk sharing a song with a loved one, you eventually go through everything, even grief, the same way you experience Wilco bootlegs: Alone, in your room, trying to connect with someone who largely exists only in your speakers. ●



**“It may be too shocking for an elder cat to be placed in a new environment.” She saw through it. “So you want to wait for my cat to die before we can live together.”**

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# A Different Approach to Clean Power

## PS Audio Power Plant P300

By Jerold O'Brien

**D**uring high-end audio's early days, power from AC lines was never suspected of gremlins. But like every other aspect of music reproduction, it, too, came under scrutiny. In the mid 70s, rumblings suggested the best sound could be had late at night—after most everyone had gone to bed.

Now, fast-forward a decade to the mid 80s, when Tice Audio power conditioners were considered state-of-the-art. However, for the most part, they were nothing more than high-capacity isolation transformers that solved some issues plaguing the AC line. Indeed, it was PS Audio that actually approached the problem from a different angle, but not until another decade later.

Instead of merely filtering the AC line in a passive mode, the company's P300 takes the AC power and regenerates fresh AC by way of a DSP oscillator coupled to a high-current amplifier that essentially operates at one frequency.



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Utilizing high negative feedback—generally, a no-no for a wide-bandwidth power amplifiers but fine in this application because of the narrow bandwidth—results in freshly generated AC that, in comparison to what emanates from the outlet, remains relatively free of distortion. It's a novel approach, especially considering that the P300 delivers balanced AC power known to minimize hum.

When introduced in the late 90s, the P300 had a maximum-output capability of slightly more than 200 watts. It was unable to work with a large power amplifier, or really any amplifier, for that matter. But if you plug your preamp and CD player (DACs or phonostages work too, as long as they have low-current demands) into the P300, the results are impressive. The change is akin to cleaning the picture window in your living room the morning after your uncle smokes his way through family game night.

Of course, the P300 sucks power. It's like constantly leaving on a 300-watt light bulb.

Still, there's an unmistakable upshot in sound quality for source components. Just don't over-tax the P300, or it automatically shuts down. Connected to my vintage Audio Research SP-10 mk.2 preamplifier, the P300 delivers the goods. The noise floor is lower, with less grain through the audio range. The cumulative effect is similar to going from new, inexpensive Chinese tubes to a handpicked, matched set of NOS Telefunks. Not bad for \$500.

PS Audio continues to improve and upgrade the Power Plant series of power conditioners, and publisher Jeff Dorgay has its top P10 in one of his two reference systems.

The newest design claims enough current capacity to run a large power amplifier. Plenty of additional features make it a dream to use, and our review is in progress.

But the P300 is where it all began. My pristine example cost \$500 from San Diego's Blackbird Audio Gallery ([www.blackbirdaudiogallery.com](http://www.blackbirdaudiogallery.com)) and is typical of the price a very clean P300 fetches on the used market, a testament to PS Audio's build quality and product philosophy. ●



# Audiophile Pressings

By Jeff Dorgay

Click on Album Title to purchase from Music Direct

## Miles Davis

Originally recorded at the legendary Blackhawk club in San Francisco on April 21 and 22, 1961, this two-record set captures Miles Davis at an interesting crossroads. Transitioning from the band that produced *Sketches of Spain*, Davis pairs here with players that would be featured on his following studio album, *Someday My Prince Will Come*, released in the fall of 1961.



### Miles Davis

*Friday and Saturday Nights:  
In Person At the Blackhawk,  
San Francisco*  
Impex Records, 180g 2LP

Davis once said he could assemble the ultimate rock n' roll band, and this effort definitely rocks. The performances are spectacular—and the recording quality equally worthy. The Blackhawk was known for great sound, and the Impex pressing does not disappoint. Via a wide stereo image, Davis' quintet spreads across the room in lifelike fashion. Kevin Gray takes charge of mastering duties, and if you've been subscribing to Music Matters' jazz series, you know Gray's track record. LP surfaces are unblemished and perfectly quiet. There's no hint of groove distortion, even in the loudest passages. The natural timbre may fool you into thinking you are sitting at the Blackhawk, glass of whiskey in hand.

Impex does everything right, from the glossy jacket to the period record label and killer sound. Let's hope the imprint produces more Columbia titles in this fashion. If you only have the CDs of this masterwork, you owe it to yourself to hear the music as it should be experienced.

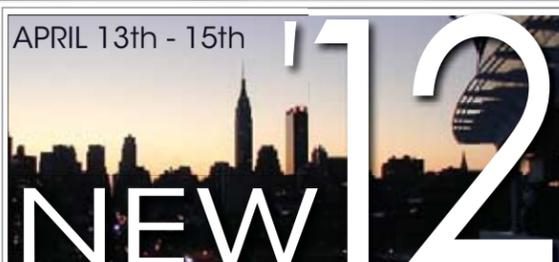
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## Van Der Graaf Generator

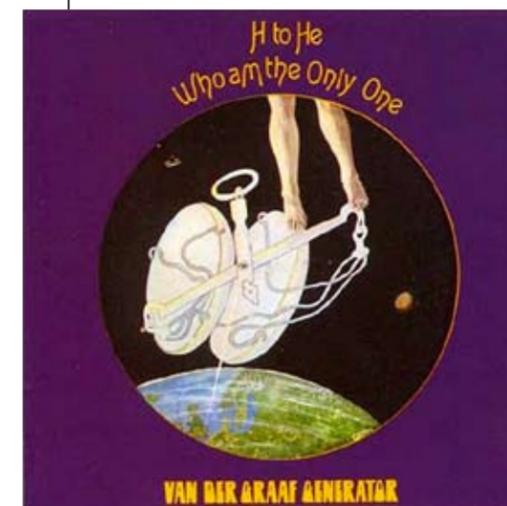
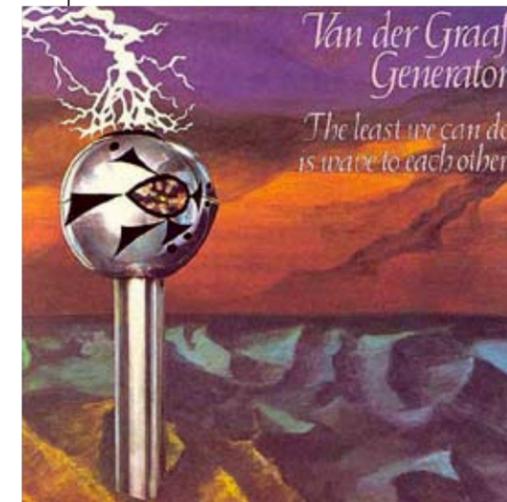
Prog lovers rejoice! Four Men With Beards label does a super-freaky job with these genre cornerstones. *TONE's* resident prog maniac says the original British pressings represent the pinnacle, yet even if you can find them, they run from \$200-\$350. And the remastered CDs are but mere sonic carcasses of these complex recordings.

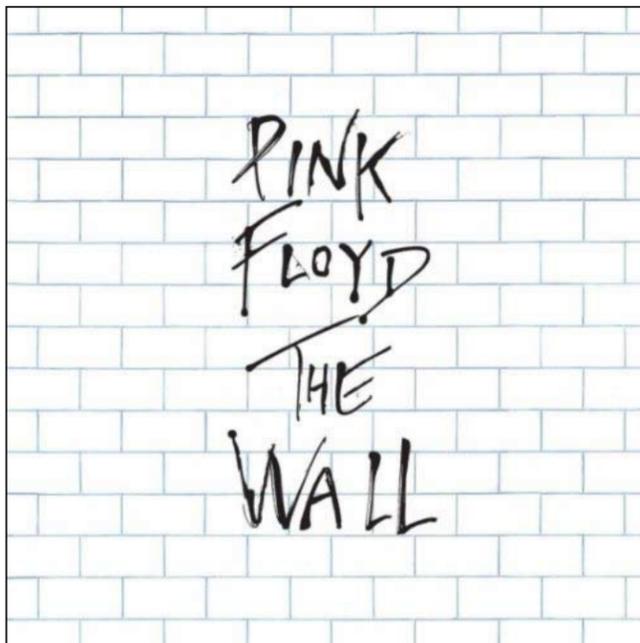
Keeping the 4 Men With Beards' underground vibe, there's no mastering information listed. For that matter, 4MWB doesn't even have a Web site, meaning it's impossible to know what tapes were utilized. However, these three albums have an equally high quality level—with very quiet surfaces, and overall sound quality that makes it tough to discern if they were made with high-quality digital masters or original analog masters. Considering they hail from 1970-1971, anything is possible.

All three LPs feature a vast soundstage that practically wraps around your head, with plenty of ping-pong stereo effects throughout. Compression is kept to a minimum, and the recordings feel uncluttered and spacious, with a smooth high end. Better-than-average printing remains true to the original artwork, and the \$18 price is a bargain.

### Van Der Graaf Generator

*The Least We Can Do Is Wave To Each Other*  
*H to He: Who Am The Only One*  
*Pawn Hearts*  
 Four Men With Beards, 180g LP





**Pink Floyd**

*The Wall*  
EMI, 180g 2LP

The final chapter in the major Pink Floyd remasters trilogy is the best. While the analog remasters of *Dark Side of the Moon* and *Wish You Were Here* are okay, they don't come close to the early-stamper British, German, and Japanese pressings.

Unquestionably, the rare pressings remain tops, yet they're insanely collectible and accordingly priced. Collector wonks will turn up their noses, but this is *The Wall* for the rest of us. If you'd like a significantly better edition than what's available for \$10-\$20, get on board. Anyone new to vinyl will be shocked at how much better it sounds than any CD version, even on a modest turntable.



**Billy Joel**

*Piano Man*  
Mobile Fidelity, 180g LP

If you're looking for an ideal example of the wealth of information available in a record's grooves versus a high-resolution digital file, this is it. I favorably reviewed the SACD of this set several issues ago, yet the LP uncovers far more sonic treasures.

The additional layers of texture, echo, and spaciousness in the oft-played title track are revelatory. It feels as if MoFi even captures the smokiness conveyed in the tune; such is the degree of piano texture available on this analog version.

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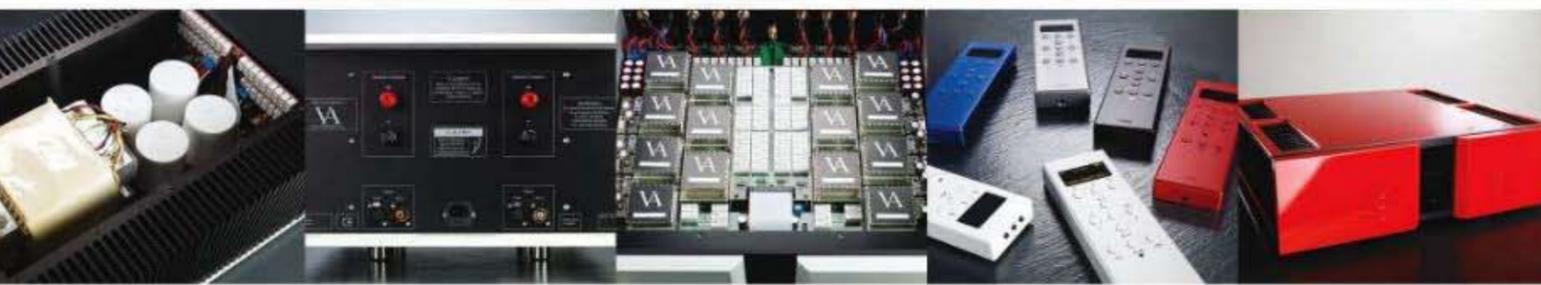


Photo by Getty Images

# Davy Jones

## He was a Monkee's Monkee

By Ben Fong-Torres

**D**o celebrity deaths really happen in threes? I think not. But, then, there was Whitney Houston. Then Davy Jones. Then Ronnie Montrose.

Talk about three different musicians. Soul, pop, rock.

I got calls about all three, but it was the San Francisco Chronicle that asked me for more than a sound bite. The paper wanted an appreciation of Davy Jones, the former Monkee.

“Appreciation”? I wasn’t sure, at first. But then, as I thought about that group, and the TV shows and music they left behind, I became more agreeable to dashing off a quick piece. Here’s part of it:

Of the four (Monkees), Davy Jones was perhaps the most accepting of his lot in life, as part of the group that was derided as a sitcom copy of the Beatles; put together by producers who auditioned some 400 would-be Monkees; forever known as the “Pre-Fab Four.” *(continued)*

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After the Monkees' show went off ABC-TV and after the band disbanded in 1969, Jones and Dolenz attempted reunions, despite the fact that Tork had split in '68, and Nesmith, an accomplished singer and songwriter ("Different Drum"), had gone solo.

Jones soldiered on, and, in 1987, was working on an autobiography, "They Made a Monkee Out of Me." "It won't be bitter," he said about the book. "When little kids ask me, 'You weren't in the Monkees, were you?' you can't say, 'Piss off, I don't want to talk about the Monkees.'"

The group had nothing to be ashamed of. After all, it wasn't as if they were a garage band that decided to copy the Beatles and attained a similar level of fandom. As Nesmith told me, when I spoke with him for a magazine profile in 1984: "The Monkees' was a TV series that was hoped would mirror the times. The four of us were hired as actors. And the show fell right onto the horns of a dilemma. It was perceived not as a TV show but as a rock and roll group that had landed a series. We weren't a rock and roll band, but as the thing began to twist around it became, 'Here are

these guys who're nothing but a TV show coming on like they're a group. The fact that the press expected us to make serious music was strange. It was like condemning a Chevrolet station wagon for not performing well at the Indy 500."

**"I watched from the side of the stage," he said. "I saw the girls going crazy, and I said to myself, 'This is it. I want a piece of that.'"**

For a manufactured group, they performed well enough; Nesmith and Tork were folk musicians; Dolenz and Jones, stage actors. But the latter two could also sing, and handled lead vocals on most of the Monkees' hits. Jones sang lead on one of the group's more enduring recordings, "Daydream Believer," as well as "A Little Bit Me, A Little Bit You" (written by Neil Diamond).

The Monkees, with reunions engineered by Jones and Dolenz, kept coming full circle. So did Jones himself, whether as a solo act or as an actor.

Just before becoming a Monkee, he'd played the Artful Dodger in "Oliver!" in London and on Broadway. In February, 1964, he was part of the cast of "Oliver!" on the Ed Sullivan Show, which featured the American debut of the Beatles. "I watched from the side of the stage," he said. "I saw the girls going crazy, and I said to myself, 'This is it. I want a piece of that.'"

He got it, and he never let go. Talking with a TV reporter, I called Jones "a Monkee's Monkee," and she burst into laughter. But I meant it as a compliment. Jones had pride in his work. As his friend, Rich Enea, noted, "He always said that being a Monkee ruined his acting career – and then he'd laugh." On the road, he was indefatigable, rising early to do TV interviews, then staying after concerts to sign autographs and pose for photos. Last summer, Enea said, a reunion tour was cut short when Tork and Dolenz dropped out. "Davy wanted to keep going. He was born for the stage." ●

## Where Have all the Good Stereos Gone?



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# Cartridge or Turntable?

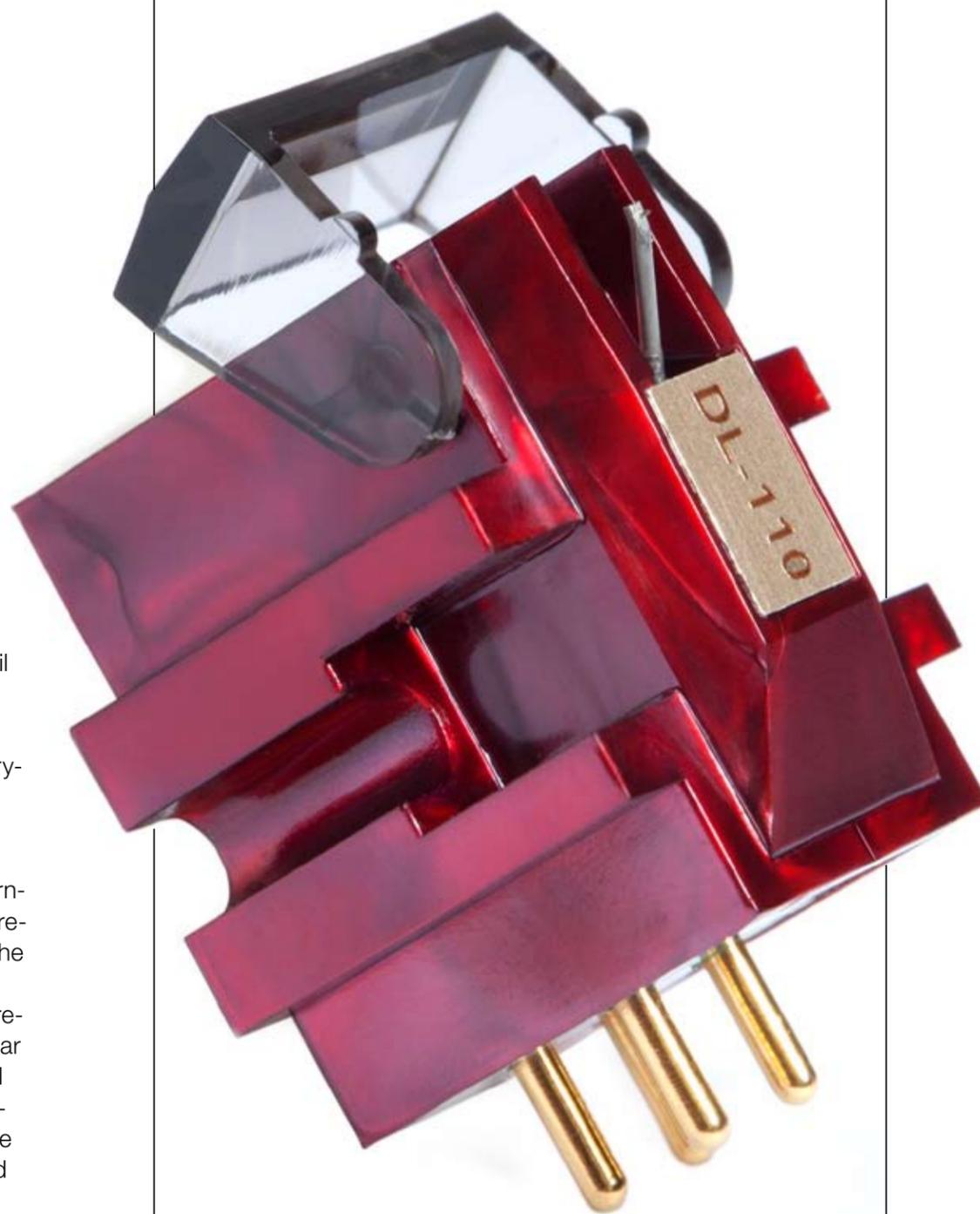
By Jeff Dorgay

The budding turntable enthusiast is greeted with a handful of obvious choices when it comes to \$100-\$150 safe-bet phono cartridges: the Shure M97xe, Grado 2M Red, and Ortofon Red (standard on the Project Carbon turntable). However, the \$139 Denon DL-110 and \$100 Nagaoka MP-110 MM represent two alternate courses of action. Neither breaks the bank, and both provide very good sound, albeit with a different flavor.

Each cartridge got auditioned on an AVID Volvere SP turntable with SME 3009 tonearm so that the headshells could be easily moved to a Technics SL-1300, recently acquired on eBay for under \$100. A last swap to the Rega RP6 was made as an interim step between the other 'tables. Initial listening in my reference system showed just how much performance the models offer in a situation wherein the 'table and phono preamplifier were not limiting factors. An Audio Research REF Phono 2 was used for comparisons between the SL-1300 and the AVID; final listening was performed with a \$175 Rega Fono Mini preamp.

The change from the AVID to the Technics (and back) repeatedly convinced me the turntable is the most influential contributor to the sound of your system until you advance up the food chain. Advice to the value-conscious analog enthusiast: Pick a great inexpensive phono cartridge and don't even think about spending more money until you have a better turntable and phonostage.

Also, even if you have an entry-level turntable, master its set-up procedure. Knowledge is power. You can build upon these skills, should you ever upgrade your turntable. Even a \$100 eBay special responds well when you optimize the cartridge. All you need is a MoFi Geo Disc (\$49), patience, and a record or two you can afford to wear out. I suggest something like Earl Klugh's *Finger Paintings* or Spandau Ballet's *True* on MoFi. They're pressed on JVC "super vinyl" and you can play the hell out of them without much wear. I use Gino Vanelli's *Powerful People*, which is \$4 in mint shape.



## Denon DL-110

A high-output MC design, the DL-110 will integrate into your current system with out a moving-coil step-up device. Output is claimed to be 1.6mv, but I suspect it is higher, as there was minimal signal drop from the 5mv- and 6mv-output MM cartridges in use before the Denon. The DL-110 also works well with the standard 47k impedance loading of nearly all MM inputs, regardless of phonostage.

The DL-110 acquits itself as a good tracker. Vide, the high-amplitude screams in "Never" from the *Grape Jam* album are always tough to capture. The record's open, bluesy feel is punctuated by fairly loud vocal excursions that often flummox a poor setup. The music's wide, super-stereo sound also plays to the Denon's other strength: excellent separation.

Not as sumptuous as the Denon DL-103r, the DL-110 nonetheless offers a very palatable midrange and a smooth top end that is a smidge rolled off, but in a good way, like a Dynaco Stereo 70. Depending on your system, the slightly soft/romantic high-frequency response may get dull if you have a Technics or Dual 'table with stock wiring, as they're notoriously dark.

The DL-110's bass response is adequate but not terribly weighty, and yet, the unit shines due to its overall balance. This cartridge has such wonderful balance between the top and bottom of the frequency range (along with excellent tonality), you don't really sense the lack of weight. No, you won't really care, and if you pair it with a vintage system that's a little warm and perhaps tubey, you'll also never notice. *(continued)*

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## FEATURE

of changing the loading to 68k or even 100k, you will be rewarded with a smoother, more open high-frequency response.

The MP-110 comes across grain-free and sounds much more refined than most of the other inexpensive MM designs I've experienced. Tracking is nearly equivalent to that of the Denon, with less low-frequency energy. A few of my favorite rock records from Pink Floyd, the Who, and Led Zeppelin lack some punch and immediacy.

What the MP-110 loses in weightiness, it gains in midrange smoothness. Zipping through Pure Pleasure Records' pressing of Cassandra Wilson's *Blue Light Until Dawn* proves sultry and inviting, with a round, warm midrange. But the Gibson SG guitar on the *Grape Jam* is not as dynamically convincing. The MP-110 is a great all-rounder, but does not offer the dynamic swing of several cartridges I've heard in this price range.

### Rubber Biscuit?

Elwood Blues once said, "What do you want for nothing—rubber biscuit?" And while it might be easy to think that you need a foot-high pile of twenties to get great sound, these cartridges are great performers—and very reasonably priced.

Where the Denon DL-110 might suit a slightly more resolving system that can take advantage of its extra dynamics, the MP-110 would feel more at home with a system built around a solid-state integrated to tame some of the brightness inherent to its design. ●



### Nagaoka MP-110

The moving-magnet Nagaoka MP-110 also features an elliptical stylus design. Its higher (than the Denon) output of 5mv shouldn't overload even the oldest receivers, as most of the cartridges produced back in the 60s and 70s featured output in the 5-7mv range. Suggested loading is 47k. However, the cartridge feels a little flat there, and if you have a way

# Jazz & Blues

By Jim Macnie



## Steve Lehman

*Dialect Fluorescent*

Pi, CD



You can barely get through a review of Steve Lehman's work without bumping up against the word "angular." Hairpin turns made by the saxophonist's horn, along with the pressurized kinetics of his mainstay trio Fieldwork (Lehman, drummer Tyshawn Sorey, pianist Vijay Iyer), have created an artistic persona that's a smidge foreboding.

But lyricism is often audible through his rattling alto lines. And on this new, hard-driving trio disc, contours are more pronounced and several of the hallmark angles beveled. At the start of the program, on the feisty "Allocentric," one fleet barrage of notes seemingly conjures the famed "Figaro, Figaro" exclamation from *The Barber of Seville*. It brings to Lehman's occasionally steely sound the human cry that Ornette Coleman brokered.

*Dialect Fluorescent* could well be Lehman's most approachable album. Between original pieces, it features romps through gems by Duke Pearson, Jackie McLean, and John Coltrane—as well as an update of "Pure Imagination" from *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*. As the improv bustles along, a sense of traditional song bubbles up. Lehman and his colleagues—bassist Matt Brewer and drummer Damion Reid—attack the standard tunes with the same ardor they bring to the leader's songs. I use the term "bustle" because *Dialect Fluorescent* is a punchy affair, teeming with three-way interaction that barely takes a breath. Reid and Brewer have absorbed the sideways funk lingo established by Steve Coleman's M-BASE strategies, and their coordination on unpredictable rhythms is expert. They bring a deep swing to Pearson's "Jeannine."

Lehman studied with McLean and Anthony Braxton, among others, and his piercing tone is a fetching blend of both these masters. In cahoots with a profound support team, Lehman's sound is as eloquent as it is formidable. Here's a date that just might become one of jazz's classic sax trio discs.



©Photo by Mike Schreiber

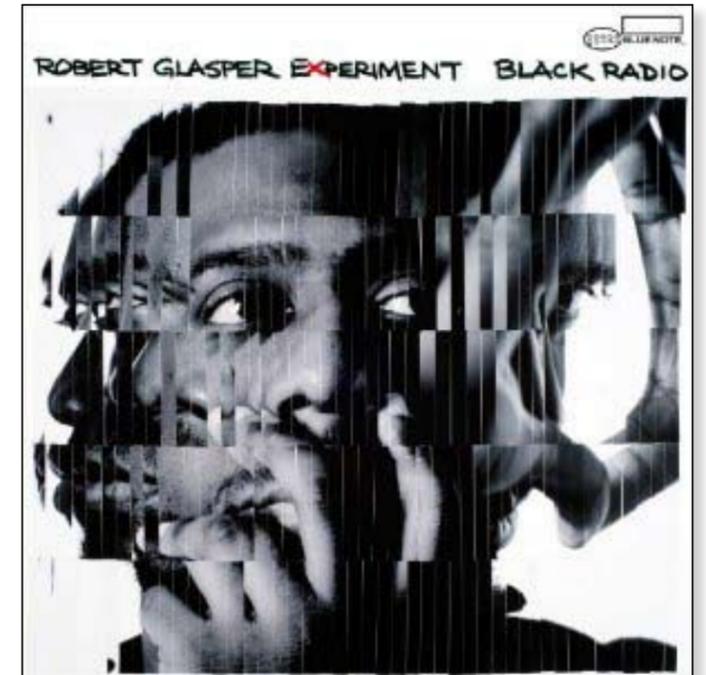
In a recent *DownBeat* cover story, pianist Robert Glasper says he's basically looking for trouble by blending hip-hop, improv, and swing, and that he's got no problem with what people think of the resultant chemistry on his new album because jazz needs "a big-ass slap."

*Black Radio* indeed entwines the three aforementioned elements, but it would be hard to deem its music as a radical shift or a defiant statement that rebuffs decades of orthodoxy.

Grooves abound, echoes of 70s R&B bubble up, rhymes get dropped by notable MCs, and soulful vocal tracks are nudged to the forefront. As a collage of modern urban moves, it really works. There's an enticing flow that starts at Erykah Badu's glide through John Coltrane's "Afro Blue," curves through Lupe Fiasco's thoughts about "the transformation of niggas," veers towards philosophical pillow talk from Meshell Ndegeocello, and winds up with a kaleidoscopic refraction of Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit." It's all plush, pretty, and mildly engaging, but as everything plays out, you never feel the sting of the slap Glasper referenced.

Maybe it's for the best. Jazz is a music of nuance just as much as it is a music of exclamation. And with the declamation of MCs getting most of the attention, hip-hop's subtleties are often under-appreciated, as well. The canny architectural design that gives *Black Radio* its shape employs plenty of dreamy funk that drifts from place to place and offers a sizable scope. At separate junctures, it allows Lalah Hathaway and Ledisi a chance to bring their own blend of church and boudoir into a romantic realm that conjures Massive Attack's shimmering ballads.

Ultimately, flash is missing from the formula. Hip-hop's most kinetic rhymes are energizers, and actual parts of the rhythm section. Between all the vocal cooing and rounded tones of the Fender Rhodes, there's something a tad too mellow about the program; it's a bit too smitten with the quiet-storm vibe. That said, it is the most natural stylistic confluence the leader has created thus far, and its pleasures are many. I'd just like to hear a bit more animation. I bet Glasper's got a hell of a party record in him yet.

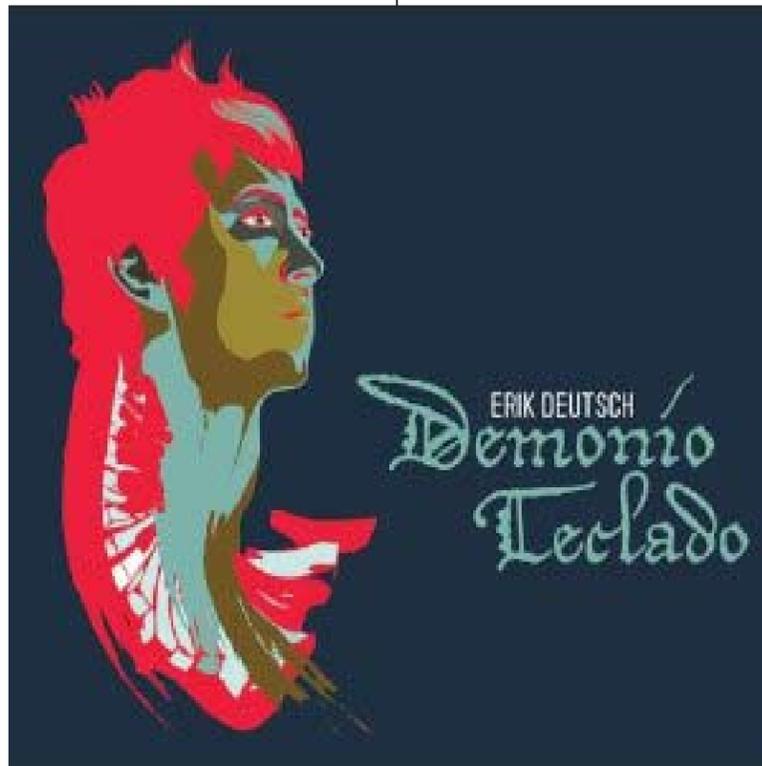


### Robert Glasper Experiment

*Black Radio*

Blue Note, CD or 180g 2LP

## MUSIC



**Erik Deutsch**  
*Demonio Teclado*  
 Hammer & String, CD

**G**arish flash is one reason fusion got a bad rap. Yes, rock rhythm can assist jazz improv, bringing in a more mainstream audience. But too many fireworks from a keyboardist or guitarist (hello, Return To Forever) beget a cheese factor, especially if melody gets left in the dust.

Keyboardist Erik Deutsch's instrumentals might be deemed some kind of fusion progeny. Basically, they're wordless pieces used as soloing vehicles. Yet instead of radical time signatures and hammer-on extrapolation, they feature catchy melodies and subtle dynamics.

*(continued)*

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Deutsch worked with Charlie Hunter for a few years. He knows the advantages of a chops display now and then. But on *Demonio Teclado*, he heads in the opposite direction, making compact statements that establish little worlds of sound.

Baby Boomers might recognize this approach as that taken by the Section, the 70s foursome of session dudes that backed Jackson Browne and others. Artsy twenty-somethings know the tact via its recent revival by Marco Benevento and likeminded associates. Deutsch is a clever synthesist; some pieces here sound like Booker T & the MGs working the CTI songbook. Others feel like Steely Dan throwing punches at Black Sabbath.

The music lives and dies on its ability to make an engaging arc in just a few minutes, and to a one, the tracks on Deutsch's third disc rise and fall with a natural grace. A trumpet blasts over a backbeat, a steel guitar gets fuzzy while floating in the ether—there's no lack of hues swirling around Deutsch's palette. By the time Neil Young's "Don't Let It Bring You Down" saunters by, you definitely understand what Hunter means when he talks about his pal's "soundscapy stuff." Deutsch has more than a little cinema in him. ●



# The Wino

By Wayne Garcia

## Of Earth and Fruit, Balance and Restraint

One of the reasons I don't sell California wines in my shop is that too many offerings from my home state are insanely high in alcohol, laced with an excess of new oak, and so rich with jammy fruit that, if not for the booze, they might be better spread on toast and served at breakfast than as something to enhance the dinner table.

Before roughly 1990, most California wines were made in a more balanced and restrained style. For example, a friend recently shared a bottle of 1977 Ridge Lytton Springs Zinfandel that was 12.8% alcohol. At 35+ years of age, the wine was vibrant, focused, and beautifully balanced between its fruit and earth elements.



These days, 15% alcohol Zinfandels are relatively restrained, but with their ripe fruit, residual sugar, and excessive alcohol, they taste to me like bubblegum with a vodka chaser. And I won't even get into the subject of toasty new oak barrels, or worse, wood-chip additives that leave you feeling like you've been gnawing on a wine-drenched two-by-four.

Of course, California is not alone in practicing this so-called "international style" of winemaking. Thankfully, a new, younger breed of California vintner is dialing back the "too much of everything" approach in favor of wines that are not, as a certain well-known critic calls them, "hedonistic fruit bombs."

The three reds discussed today are quite the opposite. Each is from an impeccable property, and each serves the role Zinfandel once did in California: Providing a light, simple, yet delightfully delicious and affordable wine to enjoy with a meal.

ONE STYLE



## 2009 Domaine Trenel Fleurie

**Beaujolais, France \$22**

If your idea of Beaujolais is that of the candy-colored, fizzy nouveau you see stacked in supermarkets every November, you might be surprised that actual Beaujolais is one of France's finest wines and values. The best of the bunch hail from one of ten cru villages. These are, from north to south: Saint-Amour, Juliéna, Chéna, Moulin-à-Vent, Fleurie, Chiroubles, Morgon, Régnié, Brouilly, and Côte de Brouilly. As it is with Burgundy and Pinot Noir, the Gamay grape expresses itself differently from village to village based on elevation, soil content, exposure to sunlight, and of course, the style of individual producers.

Domaine Trenel crafts wines in a traditional method that brings out the best of the Gamay grape. The 2009 Fleurie is a warm and elegant wine with aromas suggestive of damp earth, white pepper, blackberries, and tomato leaf. Medium-bodied with soft and integrated tannins, it is quite versatile at the table.

# REFERENCE 150

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isn't on television.

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## 2010 Maxime François Laurent Côtes-du-Rhône Rouge *Il Fait Soif*

**Southern Rhône, France \$26**

**M**axime François Laurent is a rising star of French viticulture. He produces wines at his family estate, Domaine Gramenon, in the northernmost part of the Southern Rhône valley, and puts his name on two special cuvées. *Il Fait Soif* ("he is thirsty") is made entirely of organically grown, hand-harvested Grenache. No machinery is used in the cellar, and the wine is neither fined nor filtered. In a nod to modernity, *Il Fait Soif* is aged in stainless steel in order to retain the freshness of the fruit. As the name suggests, this is very quaffable stuff. Aromas of wild berries, a touch of herbs, and a delightful drinkability make this a terrific match with any light meat, vegetable dish, or even slightly chilled with salmon.



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## 2009 Thürnhof Lagrein "Merlau"

**Alto-Adige, Italy \$19**

Italy's Alto-Adige region is nestled in the country's north-center, just underneath Austria. Indeed, the Germanic name for the region, Südtirol, or South Tyrol, reflects the cultural heritage and ties the people here have to their brethren to the north, who were under Austrian rule until just after World War I.

As you might guess, this Alpine region is quite high in altitude (up to 10,000 feet), and grapes grown here experience a mix of warm days with very chilly evenings. The white wines are crisp, pure, and stony; reds are light, focused, and fresh.

Lagrein is a native grape variety, and like Il Fait Soif, Thürnhof's Lagrein "Merlau" (the vineyard, not Merlot) is raised without oak in order to maintain freshness and purity of fruit. The wine is a deep purple-red in color, with aromas suggesting small plums, blackberry, wet stones, and black tea. With a medium body, this wine is perfect with cured and grilled meats, as well as with slow-braises and stews. ●

TO NE STYLE



*Wayne Garcia is the owner of San Francisco's DIG wine shop, a boutique operation with a focus on small-production wines from France and Italy. Visit him at digwinesf.com.*



## Cole Haan Lunargrand Wingtips

\$248  
[www.colehaan.com](http://www.colehaan.com)

**I**n the same spirit of Bentley borrowing from Audi's toolbox to create luxury cars with a performance feel, Cole Haan does the same with the Lunargrand. Melding Nike's lunar tech sole to a classic wingtip is brilliant.

Since the shoe is available in five colors, guys no longer have any excuse not to be stylish—whether on a tradeshow floor or big-city streets. Such fusion of fun and function means the classic blue suede shoe will never be the same.



### Battery Thermonkruzhus Mug

\$29  
[www.artlebedev.com](http://www.artlebedev.com)

**N**ow you'll know for certain when you need a warm-up on coffee or tea. The Battery Thermonkruzhus Mug's indicator logo lights up (however, slightly disappointingly, not incrementally) when your beverage is above 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit. Drinkware can't possibly be more nerdy.



## Marshall Fridge

\$299

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

**R**ock—and drink—on! The company that brings musicians the ultimate in guitar amplification now delivers the ultimate beer cooler to match. Perfect for a dorm room, man cave, or anywhere a cache of cold beverages needs be close at hand, this refrigerator is styled to look exactly like a Marshall head and cabinet, complete with Jim Marshall's signature and knobs that go to 11.



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TO NE STYLE

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# Kiss Rock and Roll Over Vans

\$25 (used)  
www.buffaloexchange.com

Initially available as a package deal containing high-top sneakers and a pair of slip-ons, these unbundled, barely worn Sk8-Hi's were too good to pass up. No longer in production, this bit of Kisstory is rare, as most pairs doubtlessly reside with rabid fans. Don't despair. Vans currently features a very suave pair of \$50 Ramones "Gabba Gabba Hey" sneakers.



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# DJ Cat Scratch Turntable

Suck UK via Perpetual Kid, \$39.99  
www.perpetualkid.com

**C**at scratch fever just got an entirely different meaning. Felines can now experience the analog revival with their very own turntable. Of course, kitty participation is limited to spinning and scratching the rotating platter and, depending on the pet's talent level, moving the poseable tonearm.

Disappointed this clever scratching post doesn't play tunes? Don't be. On the bright side, no cables, power cords, cartridges, or alignment tools are needed. In fact, assembly takes no more than five minutes. The contraption arrives folded flat in an extra-large envelope also containing simple, eight-step instructions. A few folds of cardboard, some tucks of tabs into slots, placement of a wooden peg into the center of the 'table, and, finally, an insertion of the disc onto the base, and voila, the all-cardboard device is ready for paws and claws.

Admittedly, \$40 is a hefty price to pay for a product that has not even a single plastic part. Still, there's no faulting the originality or detail. Faux stickers that read "RUN DOG" and depict cat-themed obsessions add to the humor and appearance. The deck would make for a great conversation piece even in households without four-legged creatures.

Besides, the turntable puts an authoritative end to the moving magnet or moving coil debate. What more could any analog fanatic want?

—**Bob Gendron**



# Benchmark



## DAC1 HDR

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“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)



**TO NE STYLE**

## Netgear WN3000RP Range Extender

\$69.95  
[www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

Instead of giving a geek trendy colored socks, consider the Netgear WN3000RP, which automatically doubles the range of a Wi-Fi network. No drivers or additional software required. Even those lacking networking skills can have this up and running in under 45 seconds. Just plug it in at the edge of your current network's coverage, log in to your computer or iPad, and assign a password to the extender. Job done.



STONE STYLE



## Pop Phone Handset

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Working equally well with an iPhone, iPad, Android phone, and laptop (great for Skype), the Pop Phone Handset provides old-school convenience for high-tech devices. The sound quality is much better than the tinny little speaker-like thing in the iPhone, and it keeps the transmitter away from your noggin. So stylish and practical, your mom will be proud. Comes in five bright colors and basic black.

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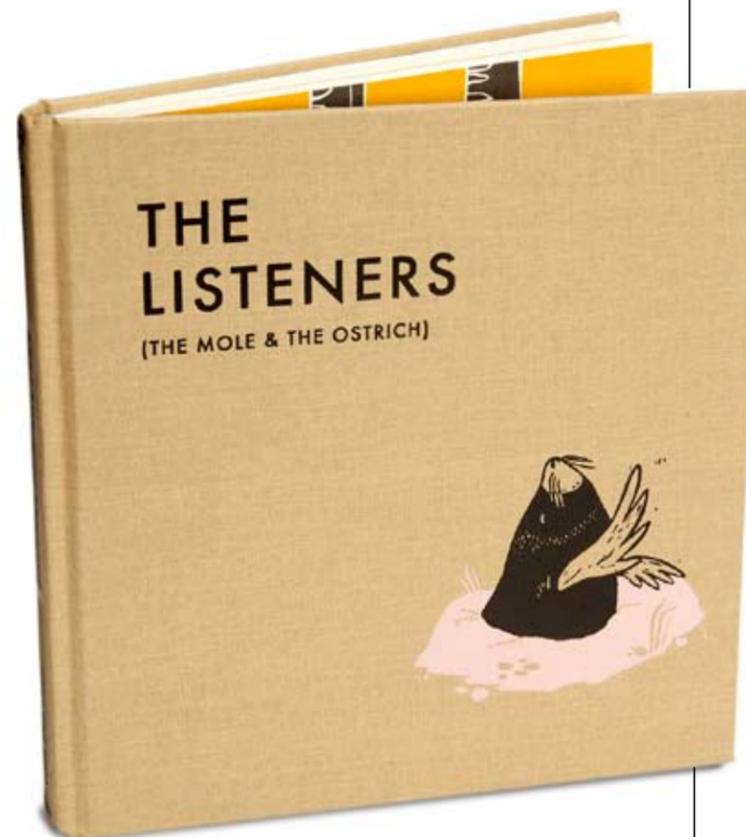
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Truth in Sound.

### TO NE STYLE



#### Breathe Owl Breathe

"The Listeners/These Train Tracks"  
[www.breatheowlbreathe.bandcamp.com/track/the-listeners](http://www.breatheowlbreathe.bandcamp.com/track/the-listeners)  
(taking orders for next printing)

One of the biggest complaints from those that embrace digital downloads is the absence of tactile input; we miss splashy album covers and lengthy liner notes. Michigan's Breathe Owl Breathe knocks such details of the park with this hardcover book that brings to life two songs as illustrated short stories.

Assembled in a beautiful, woodcut style, the stories are placed opposite each other, meant to be read from outside to inside. A 7-inch single sits in the middle of the book. Everything is entirely produced in Michigan by local artisans. Band member Micah Middaugh handles the illustrations, carving, and printing.



## Canon G1x Camera

\$799  
www.canonusa.com

**C**anon's G1x represents a paradigm shift for what's possible with compact cameras. Costing as much, if not more, than some entry-level DSLRs, this is the only compact featuring a sensor that approaches the size of the APS-C sensor common in many DSLRs. Canon claims the sensor in the G1x is six times the size of that used in the prior G12 model.

Of course, there are many reasons why a high-quality compact is ideal for countless situations—and plenty of times that you can't get a big, clunky DSLR in the door. Its 28-113mm (equivalent) zoom lens (with macro function) handles just about anything you need to shoot, and a 4x digital zoom, combined with the high-performance sensor, produces excellent images.

The proof is in the photos. Pictures taken at 100 ISO in medium to bright light are virtually indistinguishable from those taken with a DSLR, and the G1x has amazing low light performance as well. You can even capture very useable images at ISO 3200 and 6400. Watch for a forthcoming review in *TONEphoto*.



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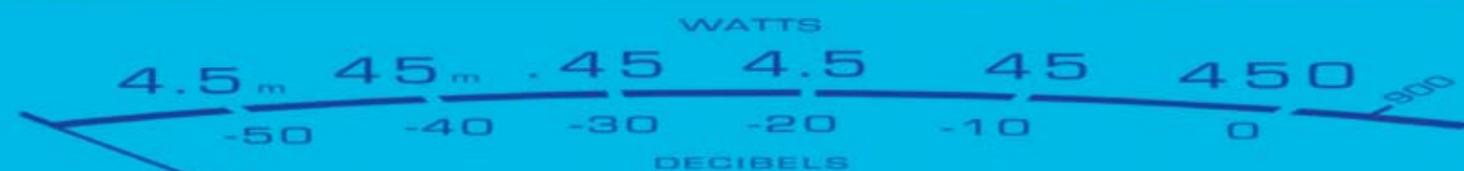


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**TONE STYLE**

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If you really love analog, you're into tape. What better way to show your support than with this cassette-tape floormat? This 23 x 26-inch throw is sure to be a topic of conversation the next time audiophile or hipster buddies visit. ●



**PrimaLuna ProLogue  
Premium Integrated Amplifier**

# A Musical Moon Dance

By Lawrence Devoe



Space-conscious listeners love integrated amplifiers because they can route and amplify sound signals from a single box. And while audio purists often devoutly believe that separate preamps and power amps constitute the one true path to great sound, the distance between separates and integrations has audibly narrowed.

Founded by Herman van den Dungen, a CEO with an extensive audio pedigree, PrimaLuna (“First Moon” for non-Italian speakers) entered the tube-gear scene in 2003. It currently merges sophisticated Netherlands design with cost-conscious Chinese production. Now, before you “Chinese audio products suck,” know that van den Dungen and company marketing executive Dominique Chenet demand quality.

## FEATURE

### Prima la Luna, Poi la Musica

The \$2,299 ProLogue Premium integrated amplifier falls between ProLogue and Dialogue integrations. The “heft means quality” principle is operative, as witnessed by the 45-pound snatch-and-grab needed to lift the unit out of the triple-box carton. Fit and finish are superb. From the silver facade (black is also available) to the attractive cage keeping the hot tubes safely away from curious fingers to the automotive-grade paint job on the transformer covers, this baby exudes class.

The front panel sports a volume control, source selector, and operation lights. A power switch resides on the left side panel. On the right sits a tube selector switch for EL-34s, allowing 35 watts per channel (per the review sample) or 40 watts per channel with KT-88 tubes. The rear panel hosts speaker terminals for 4- or 8-ohm operation, four line inputs, one home-theater pass-thru, and a power receptacle/fuse holder. A slender but solid remote handles volume, source selection, muting, and playback for a PrimaLuna CD player.

Considerable coolness resides beneath the warm tube sockets housing four EL-34s and four 12AU7s. The Adaptive AutoBias, or AAB, circuit keeps tubes from misbehaving and protects the output stages. Additionally, there's the BTI, or “bad tube indicator,” that detects tube malfunction, flags the offender, and powers the unit down until said tube gets replaced. A PTP, or “power transformer protection,” stops the party if the output power transformer overheats. This device is coupled with an OTP, an output transformer protection circuit. Given the wing-and-a-prayer security offered by some audiophile equipment, the ProLogue Premium is a component you could surely take into a hurt locker. Plus, for vinyl heads, PL offers an optional easy-to-install moving-magnet phono stage for \$199. *(continued)*





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FEATURE



### Low-Frequency Slam, Dynamics, and More

Plug-and-play equipment is great in concept. Unfortunately, many such high-end adventures resemble trips down the Amazon after the local guide falls overboard and drowns. In this regard, the ProLogue Premium marks a refreshing return to civilization.

After removing the foam surrounds from the tubes, I hooked up my peripherals and speakers, and plugged everything in. Wait. Is that the sound of silence? Not to worry. PrimaLuna subscribes to an aptly named SoftStart feature that powers everything up very safely, but very slowly. Red panel lights give way to green panel lights and, in less than two minutes, it's ready to go.

For the purposes of this review, the ProLogue Premium drove Totem Mani-2 Signatures, fortified with Nordost Frey bi-wire speaker cable. Sound sources included a PS Audio PerfectWave Transport and Mk II

DAC, a Logitech Squeezebox Touch with USB drive, and an Oppo BDP-95 universal player. In my 15' x 10' x 8' room, I settled back in an easy chair about eight feet away from the Totems, which rested on lead-filled Target stands.

After a week of break-in, I popped Mark Levinson's demo *Live Recording from Red Rose SACD* into the Oppo. Enter "In a Sentimental Mood" flowing from Chico Freeman's mellow sax and George Cable's funky piano. Having sat in the same Red Rose show room where these performances were recorded, I assure you that the ProLogue Premium faithfully renders the music's immediacy, right down to the reed movement on Freeman's mouthpiece.

A high-res 96 kHz/24-bit download of Cat Stevens *Tea for the Tillerman* places the visceral guitar from *(continued)*

## FEATURE



"Wild World" right in my face and exposes the slightly veiled character of Stevens' distinctive voice. Speaking of vocals, Diana Krall's well-recorded *Live in Paris* contains a very, very good rendition of "A Case of You." Krall's sensual huskiness comes across convincingly, thanks again to the ProLogue Premium.

Larger-scale music arrived courtesy of a 176.4k/24-bit Reference Recording of Rachmaninoff's *Symphonic Dances*, performed by Eiji Oue and the Minnesota Orchestra. The ProLogue Premium conveys the first movement's low-frequency slam without running out of gas. Moreover, Bach's *Gigue Fugue*, from the ultra-demanding *Pipes Rhode Island*, more than amply fills my modest-sized room with the dynamic sounds of the English Renaissance organ in St. Paul's Church in Wickford, RI.

### Is it Moon Glow or Memorex?

When comparing the ProLogue Premium with my reference unit, the Class A Pass INT-30A, the worlds of tubes and transistors seemingly converge. The Pass sounds non-solid-state and the Prologue Premium non-tube-like. The evaluation also shows how power ratings can be misleading, especially given the nominal five-watt output difference between the two amps. In recordings with heavier bass passages, like the Rachmaninoff disc, the Pass brings out more low-end oomph and overall space. In voice reproduction, a critical issue for testing audio gear, the ProLogue Premium behaves well, yielding little, if any, ground in warmth to the Pass.

The ProLogue Premium performs well beyond its real-world price tag. *(continued)*

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## FEATURE



A hale and hearty pentode pumper, it's well up to the task of keeping content my Mani-2 Signature speakers. Of course, before opting for such an amplifier rated on the lower side of the power curve, careful consideration must be given to room size, speaker sensitivity, and listening habits. Remember, 35 watts per channel can't do everything.

Still, compared with other similarly priced products, the ProLogue Premium is considerably overbuilt. The on-board protection circuitry gives considerable ease to my concerns about tube equipment. Better yet, none of the proprietary protection circuits entered the picture during my evaluation, which should reassure any prospective owner that the integrated claims the reliability of most solid-state gear. Further reassurance against field failures comes via PrimaLuna's tube selection. On average, the company rejects 40% of manufactured tubes—not due to defects but because they don't meet the company's high standards. The ProLogue Premium definitely meets mine.

\*Paradigm's PBK and PT-2 Wireless Transmitter available as extremely affordable options.





## Additional Comments

Jeff Dorgay

**A**ttention vacuum-tube amplification newbies and all other concerned parties: My first PrimaLuna product, the ProLogue One integrated amplifier, is still going strong after almost nine years of constant play. It's had an interesting trip, going from *TONEAudio*'s headquarters to our first music editor's office (where it was rarely turned off) to my niece's living room, where it still plays eight-to-ten hours a day. Other than a new set of EL-34 output tubes installed in 2010, it has run faithfully without as much as a hiccup.

Where the original ProLogue has a warmer overall sound, the Premium features more extension at both ends of the frequency range and more immediacy—thanks to the updated circuit and larger transformers. Having exchanged the EL-34s for KT88s and 6L6s, I prefer the tonality of the EL-34. In a modest-sized room with a great pair of mini monitors (I used the outstanding Penaudio Cenyas for my listening), this amp is all you need to rock the house. Should your tastes veer more towards Van Halen than Vivaldi, the ProLogue Premium will please you.

Based on my 2004 review for the magazine, the original ProLogue received a Product of the Year Award from *The Absolute Sound*. The new Premium version costs more, but still offers an audio experience unmatched for the price. I'm happy to grant this integrated an Exceptional Value Award for 2012. Like the legendary tube amplifiers from McIntosh and Marantz, it's an amplifier you can hand down to your family members through the years. ●

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# Kronos Turntable

\$28,995

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

**K**ronos designer Louis Desjardins takes an unconventional albeit highly practical approach to turntable design, rotating in the opposite direction another platter beneath the main platter. Of the schematic reminiscent of Mitsubishi's crankshaft balancing technology (later licensed to Porsche for the 944), Desjardins says, "I've given this a lot of thought and wondered why it had never been done before."

The now-patented method brings a level of clarity that challenges current turntable designs and is sure to put Kronos on par with the world's greatest turntables. This sonic masterpiece will be featured in Issue 46.



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 751 Amboy Avenue, Woodbridge NJ, 07095

# VPI Classic 1 Turntable

\$2,750  
[www.vpiindustries.com](http://www.vpiindustries.com)

VPI's Classic line has been expanded to a model 2 and model 3. But the cost of both models defeats the performance/value ethos initiated by the Classic 1. Competitively priced with VPI's famous Scoutmaster, the two couldn't sound more different, with the Classic 1 claiming a richer, more old-school feel.

Bundled with a version of VPI's latest JMW-10.5i tonearm, complete with interchangeable tonearm wands, the Classic 1 possesses the versatility and expandability to grow with your vinyl obsession. Review in progress.



# Pro-Ject Carbon Turntable

\$400 (with Ortofon Red cartridge)  
www.sumikoaudio.net

**S**umiko raises the bar set by its Debut III turntable with the Carbon, offering myriad improvements and an Ortofon Red MM cartridge in place of the OM-5 that came standard with the Debut III.

Ready to play records right out of the box, it looks like a perfect jump-off point for vinyl newcomers—and LP aficionados on a budget. Watch for the review in the Analogaholic section of our Web site.



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# Successor to The Throne

## ARC PH8 Phonostage

By Jeff Dorgay

**F**orget the long dance. You can quickly cut to the chase when evaluating the ARC PH8 phonostage by playing a familiar piano recording.

Take Liz Story's minimally miked *Wedding Rain*, a great demo album recorded on a Studer deck at 30ips. All you hear is Ms. Story and her Steinway. The PH8 captures every performance nuance. Story's slow, lingering style often fades into the background with a melancholy feel and is punctuated by brief runs up the keyboard. The passages illustrate the lightning-fast transient response characterizing this premium phonostage. And rest assured: Revisiting the rest of your record collection will be just as much fun.



Lyra's Kleos cartridge, currently in for review, makes for a symbiotic match with the PH8 in an all-ARC REF system. The combination provides excellent tonality, separation, dynamics, and, equally important, a very low noise floor. Utilizing the same FET/tube hybrid design as the top-of-the-range REF Phono 2 (now an SE model), the PH8 affords vinyl aficionados the best of both worlds: virtually nonexistent background noise and the tonal richness of vacuum tubes.

Vide, Bill Lordan's epic drumming on Robin Trower's "A Tale Untold" from *For Earth Below*. His kit is exquisitely rendered in both horizontal and vertical planes, and with plenty of meat, as Trower explodes into a distorted Stratocaster run on the following "Gonna Be More Suspicious." Equally explosive is Bob Brookmeyer's trombone on the recent Pure Pleasure release of *Kansas City Revisited*—another recording featuring wide dynamic swings. It shows how quickly the PH8 responds, from the softest brushwork on the drums to ear-flattening horn bursts.

#### Birth Order

The PH8 resides in the middle of ARC's phonostage line, with an MSRP of \$6,995. The PH6 (reviewed in Issue 30) is \$3,495 and the REF Phono 2 SE (review in process) comes in at \$12,995. Living with all three—the PH6, PH8, and the REF Phono 2 (now the SE model)—and playing them side by side through identical turntable/tonerarm/cartridge/cable combinations makes it easy to discern the differences. *(continued)*

## REVIEW

As with the REF Series power amplifiers, ARC phonostages share a similar physical and aesthetic design, as well as a nearly identical sonic signature. They all exhibit neutral tonality with a hint of tube warmth (albeit not at the expense of pace and timing) and an extremely low noise floor, thanks to their hybrid FET/tube design. Apparent, as well, is a similar level of user friendliness, with all controls duplicated on the front panel and remote control—a feature some may deem frivolous, but highly appreciated once in the throes of car-tridge setup.

Moving up the food chain brings an increase in low-level detail and sheer dynamic drive. If you have a no-holds-barred stereo, nothing less than the REF Phono 2 SE will do. But having one means getting an analog front end and system to match.

Shuffling Andrew Bird's *Break It Yourself* between the three phonostages reveals more depth and

inner detail in Bird's violin playing. Yet, because it is not a record with wide dynamic swings or terribly deep bass lines, one could easily be convinced that stepping beyond the PH6 isn't necessary—or perhaps, not worth the extra cash. However, upping the game to a full-scale symphonic piece or heavy rock record uncloaks the PH8's capabilities. A similar effect is realized when going to the REF Phono 2SE.

Whether listening to the bombardment of drums in Pink Floyd's "Another Brick in the Wall Part 1" or unraveling the layers of guitar in Mastodon's "Blasteroid," the PH8 possesses the horsepower to get the job done. Moving up the analog ladder means accepting fewer and fewer compromises. The more complex the music, the easier it is to discern the distinctions between the two phonostages.

Perhaps the toughest part to quantify is the realistic timbre the PH8 offers when playing acoustic

instruments, another benefit the phonostage offers, along with a larger soundfield. It's like moving your favorite band from a club to an arena. The sense of congestion that comes with lesser analog front-ends disappears. Cream's live *Royal Albert Hall* (with half-speed mastering courtesy of Stan Ricker) goes from sounding like it was recorded at Ronnie Scott's (an intimate jazz club in London), with the performers bunched together, to a proper auditorium.

So while acoustic instruments take on a more realistic, three-dimensional feel via the PH8, even electronic recordings like the Cream set benefit. Guitar enthusiasts can now hear the unmistakable tone of Clapton's Fender cabinets rather than just generic guitar sound.

### Ins, Outs, and Adjustments

The PH8 is a single-ended design featuring a pair of 6H30 triode tubes like the PH6. *(continued)*



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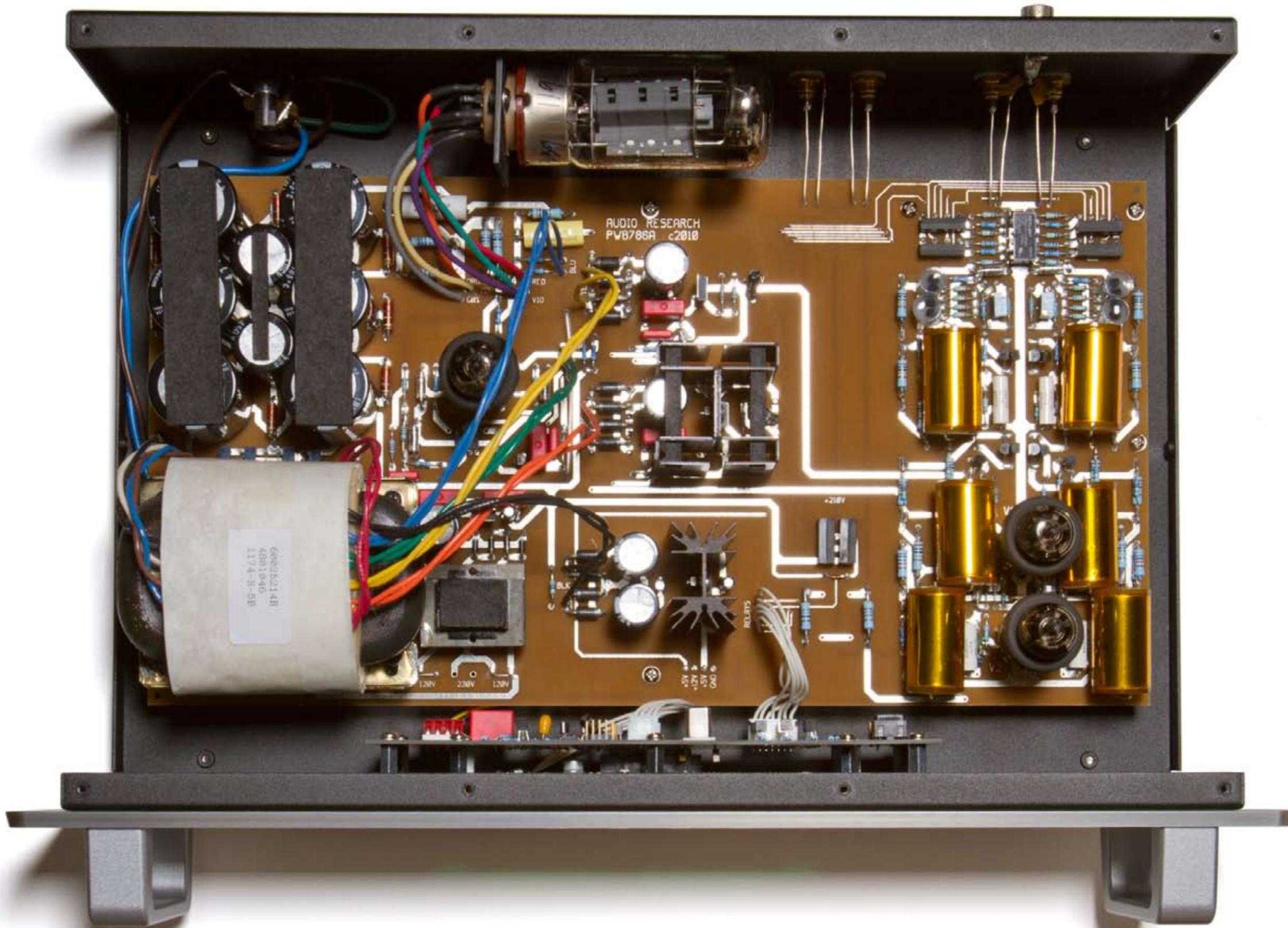
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But where the PH6 uses all solid-state devices in the power supply, the PH8 takes advantage of the same 6550 and 6H30 tubes as the REF Phono 2SE. And while it will require tube replacement at 2,000-5,000-hour intervals, the additional tonal saturation is well worth the small sacrifice in convenience.

Only one set of RCA inputs and outputs is available, so the PH8 cannot be placed as far from your linestage/preamplifier as the REF Phono 2 in a fully balanced system. The front panel mirrors the design of current REF components as well as the LS 17 and 27 preamplifiers. Gain is fixed at 58db, and while this level is slightly high for a MM cartridge, it's doubtful one will employ a phono stage of this magnitude with an MM. The 47k loading option comes in handy should you prefer a moving-iron design, most of which still have 47k loading albeit a lower output of 1mv or less. Also, the Grado Statement 1 is as compatible with the PH8 as it is with the REF Phono 2SE.

The 58db gain spec is misleading—if only in the sense that the PH8 is so quiet, it works fine with MC cartridges having at least .5mv. Whereas a few all-tube phono stages expose the noise floor when the volume is turned up to modest levels, the PH8 hasn't any problem. You will just need to get used to seeing the volume control turned up a bit higher. Running the PH8 into the ARC REF 5SE preamplifier with the .5mv output Lyra Kleos is effortless. Meanwhile, the .4mv Koetsu Urushi Blue cartridge pushes the limits of what can be expected, and the .3mv Dynavector 17D3 lacks the necessary oomph required to form a symbiotic match.

Finally, loading options are 100, 200, 500, 1000, and 47k ohms. The PH8 doesn't possess the REF Phono 2SE's 50 ohm and custom settings, but, again, handles the majority of MM cartridges without issue. *(continued)*

## REVIEW

### Further Listening

In the owner's manual, Audio Research mentions the PH8 requires about 600 hours to sound its best. Sure, the unit sounds reasonably good right out of the box, yet you do need to reserve judgment until you've racked up serious hours on the clock. You will be surprised.

The more time I spend with the PH8, the more I am convinced of its value. True, it won't be an impulse purchase for many listeners. But for all but the few that want to step all the way up to REF Series components, the PH8 is a great destination.

While I achieved excellent results with the AVID Volvere SP/SME V/Kleos combination, the PH8 also proves worthy via the AVID Acutus REF SP/TriPlanar combination along with Lyra's new Atlas cartridge. The model features enough resolution to easily discern the differences between these state-of-the-art cartridges. ●

**Audio Research PH8**  
MSRP: \$6,995

**MANUFACTURER**  
Audio Research

**CONTACT**  
www.audioresearch.com

### PERIPHERALS

**Analog Sources** AVID Volvere SP w/ SME 309, AVID Acutus Reference SP w/ TriPlanar and SME V

**Cartridges** Lyra Atlas/Titan - i/Kleos, Sumiko Palo Santos, Koetsu Urushi Blue

**Preamplifier** ARC REF 5/REF 5SE

**Power Amplifier** ARC REF 150

**Speakers** GamuT S9

**Cable** Shunyata Aurora

## The More Things Change, the More Things Stay the Same ...



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# You Can Have It All

## Sumiko Palo Santos Presentation Cartridge

By Jeff Dorgay

Since many of today's LPs are mastered from digital sources, many vociferous audiophiles willingly sacrifice dynamics and resolution on the altar of tonality. Yes, the vinyl revolution has an ugly side. Combining this trend with the strong resurgence in vintage gear becomes akin to dealing with comfort food for your ears. Half of your brain wants foie gras. The other half craves a chilidog. Sophistication? Or comfort and convenience? What if you could have both or, at least, a great mixture of the two? Enter the Sumiko Palo Santos Presentation (PSP).

In theory, something slightly mellow makes sense, and it is nearly impossible to have one cartridge that suits everything in your record collection. If you must draw a line in the sand, siding with tonality isn't a bad way to roll. The only problem with said approach? Truly great recordings don't sound much better than the mediocre albums.

Still, hyper-detail gear only goes so far. How many times have you heard a mega-bucks system playing a current audiophile treasure with aplomb, but falling horribly short of expectations when spinning your favorite record? At the end of the day, you want Led Zeppelin, Belle & Sebastian, Diana Ross, and Fleet Foxes to all sound equally great on your system. Plus, the surgeon general says listening exclusively to audio pap like Jacintha is bad for your health. The PSP yields tonal complexity, resolution, and dynamic power with little sacrifice.



### The Good, the Bad, the Ugly, and the Average

A two-edged sword, resolution can be a blessing and a curse. The key to the PSP's success relates to its capability as a high-quality daily driver. While some cartridges send you on a limited quest to uncover details previously obscured from view on your best pressings, the PSP illuminates information on less-than-amazing records. Of course, the sonic spectaculars sound great with the Sumiko, but now, I find myself listening to LPs I haven't heard in ages—titles lacking audiophile credentials.

The Fabulous Poodles' *Mirror Stars* never sounded better on my stereo. Even if you aren't predisposed to 80s Britpop, you probably have your own short list of records that sound less than, well, great. And sure, current pressings, such as Amy Winehouse's posthumous *Lioness: Hidden Treasures*, sound as dreadful as anything produced in the Reagan Era. But the PSP transforms Winehouse's posthumous record from nearly unlistenable to a platter you can enjoy on a top-notch system.

The PSP does a fantastic job of analog triage with terrible records, and comes into its own with records possessing average to above-average sound quality. Spinning Classic Records' Led Zeppelin 200g remasters elicits thrills. *(continued)*

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Harbeth speakers have the clarity, imaging, dynamics and fatigue-free character that I demand of speakers in my work. I highly recommend them! – Kevin Gray

Coherent Audio owner, Kevin has mastered music for every major label. He has more than a hundred top ten and Grammy award winning records, and dozens of RIAA certified gold and platinum albums and singles.



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The cartridge rocks with the best of them, boasting a tonal richness that isn't thin or sterile. John Paul Jones' bass playing on *Led Zeppelin II* possesses the requisite fatness, with no loss of dynamic slam. The PSP keeps the musical pace locked down.

A quick comparison to the Koetsu Urushi Blue, mounted on an identical AVID Acutus Reference SP (both 'tables playing through the Vitus Audio MPP-201 phonostage), brings to the fore the Koetsu's sonic signature. Both cartridges are equally mellifluous through the midband. But when compared directly to the PSP, the Koetsu sounds slow and rolled-off on the high end—and lacking low-level detail. With the PSP, the drum solo during Led Zeppelin's "Moby Dick" reveals more sparkle in the cymbals, more leading-edge transient attack, and yes, more percussive textures.

Tom Petty's recent *Kiss My Amps: Live* illustrates the cartridge's serious dynamic punch and attack. "Takin' My Time" often transitions from loud to soft. Sumiko's cartridge always keeps separate Petty and Mike Campbell's guitars, and convincingly captures the audience's swelling cheers. With the Pass XA200.5 monoblocks pushed to their limits, the PSP's meaty presentation comes damn close to recreating the live Heartbreakers feel I've heard many times before.

### Space, the Final Frontier

Listeners that prefer solo vocalists and/or acoustic recordings will be right at home with the PSP. Its rich tonality and wide dynamic contrast only tell half the story. The cartridge navigates snaky grooves with ease. Spinning Music Matters' 45RPM edition of Art Blakey's *Indestructible* tells one everything they need to know about the PSP's tracking. Blakey's explosive drumming is in your face, as it should be. On ORG's pressing of John Coltrane's *Live at the Village Vanguard*, the PSP effortlessly handles the saxophonist's rapid-fire deliveries and ensures that the brassy "blats" are lively and full of sparkle. Both of the aforementioned high-velocity discs often cause lesser cartridges to mis-track.

The PSP also delivers every bit of vocal breathiness. MoFi's current remaster of Priscilla Ahn's *A Good Day* shows how the PSP renders the subtleties of the singer's delicate voice without presenting her on an overblown soundstage. Rather, she's revealed to enjoy an exquisite, finely gradated tonal palette in a realistic space. I experienced similar revelations with Anja Garbarek's *Smiling & Waving*, on which her voice sounds real in tone and in regard to spatial dimension. *(continued)*



### Nuts and Bolts

The PSP sets up quickly. Its medium compliance value (8 x 10<sup>-6</sup> cm/dyne) is ideally suited to tonearms like the SME (Sumiko is the US importer). Any model in SME's turntable range makes for a great match. Having turned in fantastic performances with the Funk Firm FX II•R, TriPlanar, Rega RB 1000, and SME 309, 312, and V, it's safe to say the PSP works well with a wide range of tonearms.

The PSP spent the majority of its review time mounted to the SME V tonearm, which mated with the AVID Acutus Reference SP turntable. When the splendid Kronos turntable arrived, I installed the PSP with equally brilliant results on the SME 312 tonearm. Sumiko specifies a load range of 100-1000 ohms, with 200 ohms proving optimum on the Vitus MPP-201 and ARC REF Phono 2SE phonestages and providing the best balance between high-frequency smoothness and extension. Experiment, however, as your phonestage may yield better results with a different combination. Tracking force is specified at 1.8–2.2 grams, with 2.05 grams the best on both SME arms at my disposal. In addition, the PSP has a .5mv output, so gain shouldn't be an issue with an MC phonestage or step-up transformer.

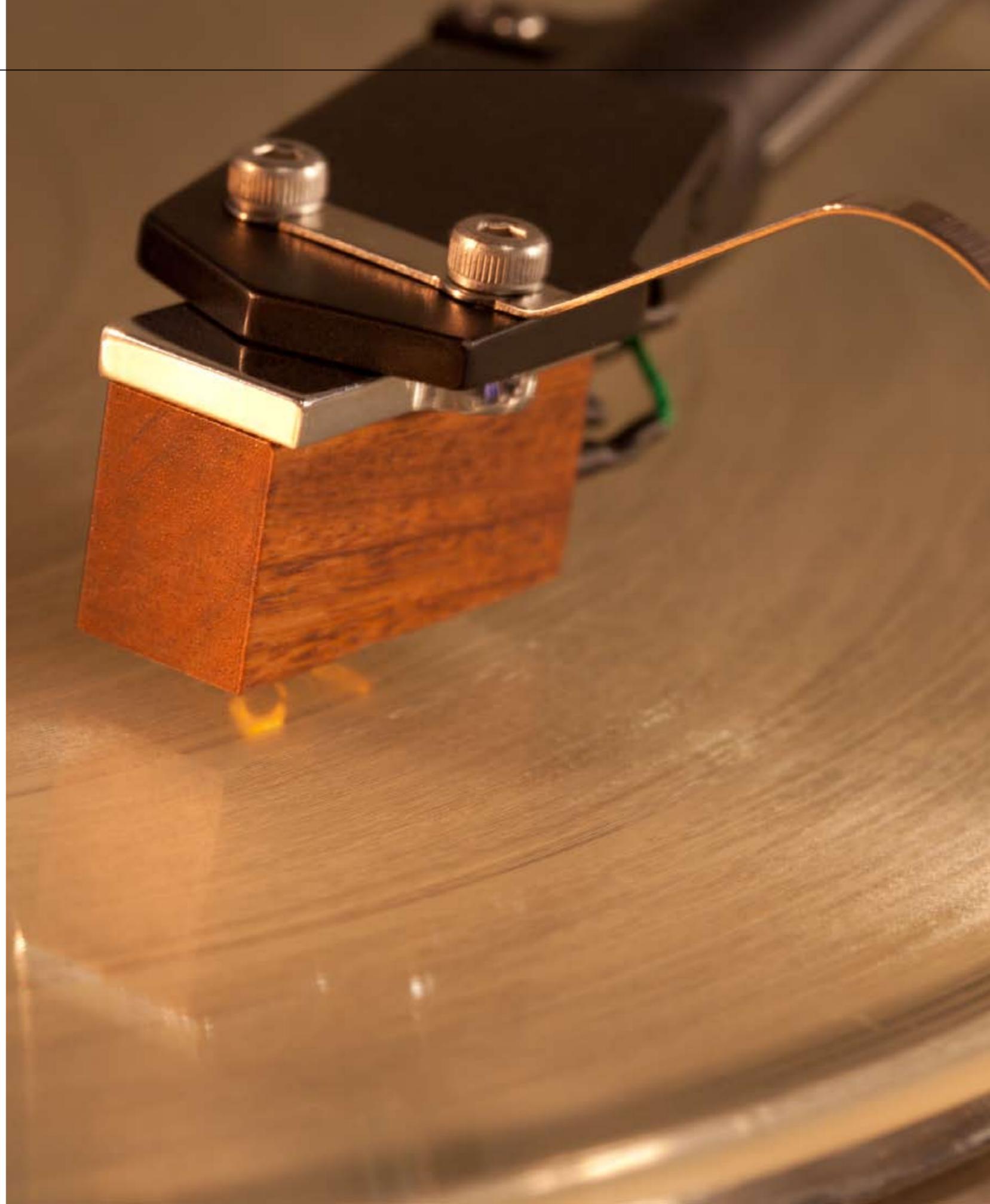
Much like Koetsu cartridges we've sampled, the PSP benefits from optimization and

attention to VTA, even if these aspects aren't as critical here as with other cartridges. Think of the PSP as a set of speakers with a big "sweet spot." It's worth taking the time to dial in, but you can expect excellent results along the way—especially if you have an arm like the SME or TriPlanar, which make it easy to set VTA. This cartridge also requires precious few hours for mechanical break-in, as it sounds natural out of the box and slightly improves after 25-30 hours.

### Loving It

Audiophiles that want or need to settle on owning one high-performance cartridge will have a difficult time topping the PSP, especially if you are a tone aficionado. For those on stricter budgets, I highly suggest Sumiko's \$2,499 Pearwood Celebration II. It possesses similar tonality, with slightly less dynamic swing. Of course, the better your table/arm/phonestage, the more you will appreciate what the PSP brings to the dance.

Can you get a little more detail here or a little more slam there? Yes, but it's going to cost a lot more money. Or, you will have to reconsider your listening priorities—and now you're back to that place where you primarily listen to just twenty of the records in your collection. That scenario isn't for me. The PSP is staying in my reference system as my daily driver. ●



### Sumiko Palo Santos Presentation Cartridge

MSRP: \$3,999

### MANUFACTURER

Sumiko

### CONTACT

www.sumiko-audio.net

### PERIPHERALS

**Turntables** AVID Acutus Reference SP w/SME V and Triplanar tonearms, Kronos w/SME 312 tonearm, Rega P9

**Phono Preamplifier** ARC REF Phono 2SE, Vitus Audio MPP-201

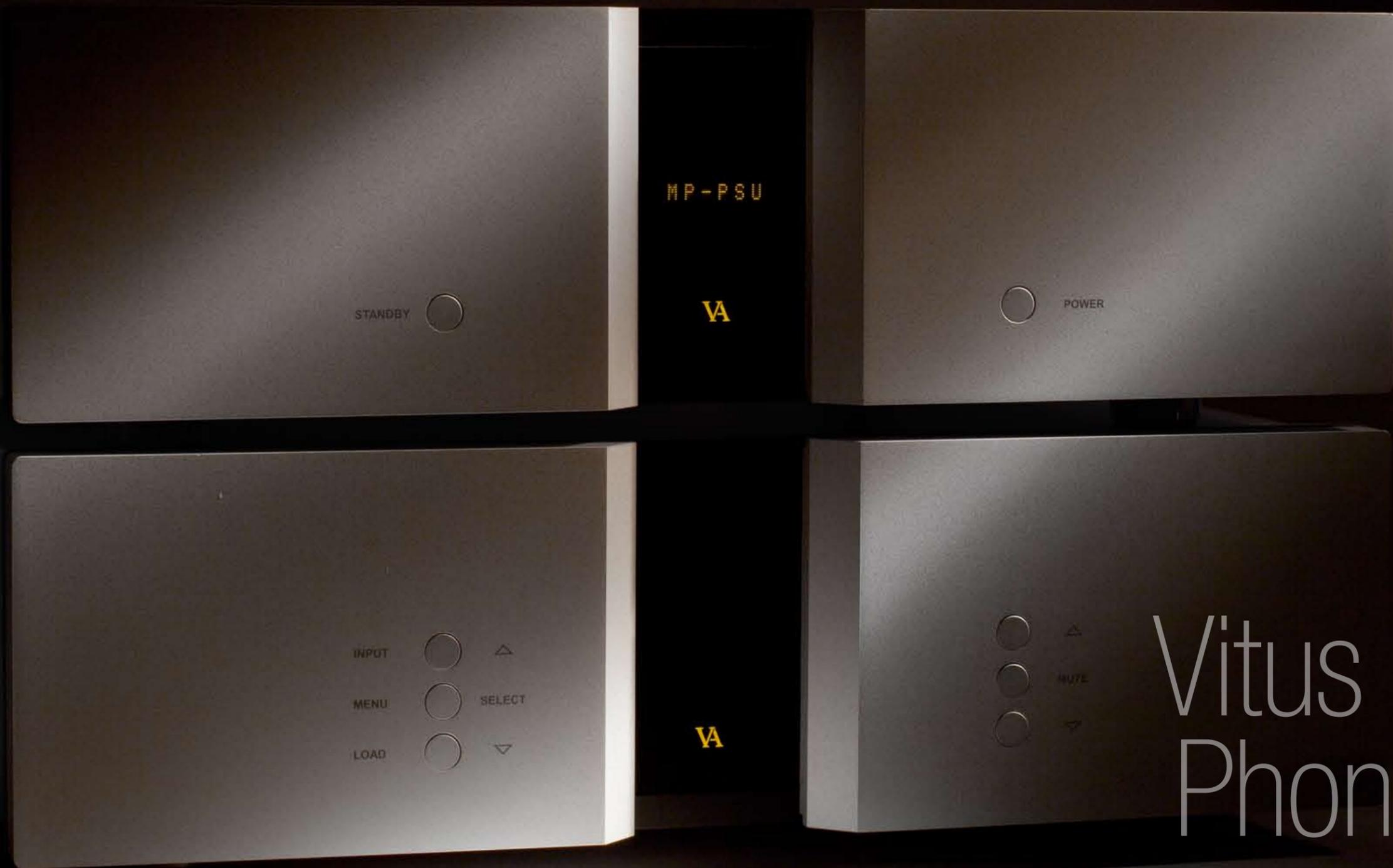
**Preamplifier** ARC REF 5SE

**Power Amplifier** ARC REF 150, Pass XA.200.5 monoblocks

**Speakers** GamuT S9

**Cable** Shunyata Aurora

**Power** Running Springs Dmitri and Maxim



# Vitus MP-P201 Phonostage

**Infinity Plus One**

By Jeff Dorgay

When I was a kid, my friends would be quick to shout out “infinity” when they spotted the coolest bike, baseball glove, or sneakers. Yet as soon as that word was uttered, another voice rose up and declared “infinity plus one!” Decades later, more than a handful of us have faster bikes and fancier shoes. But we often make similar claims when referring to our audio systems. And the stakes are much higher—at least in the sense that “infinity plus one” now costs a lot more.

It is always tough assigning value to things we don't need. Of course, the biggest question with something like the \$60k Vitus MP-P201 phonostage is “how much better is it?” Passing the \$10k mark for a phonostage means serious high-performance territory. If you don't have a mega-system with an equally mega-turntable, don't even think of blowing this kind of coin on a phonostage. It's a waste. Competition at this level is fierce, and there are a number of excellent choices in the \$10-\$15k category. We've reviewed such models from Aesthetix, Audio Research, ASR, Burmester, Boulder, Conrad-Johnson, Naim, and Pass Labs. Plus, there are probably another ten excellent models in this range we haven't covered.



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For listeners wanting to venture beyond the barrier at the boundary of the analog universe, what are the options? Surprisingly, quite a few. The Ypsilon YPS100 tips the scale at close to \$30k; the Boulder 2008 is even more expensive. Where does the madness end? A \$60,000 phonostage is no more realistic to most audio enthusiasts than a \$1.2 million Bugatti Veyron is to someone driving a Toyota Camry. Yet these exotic products have customer waiting lists.

On the bright side, you'll never need to change oil or replace a clutch in the MP-P201. And you won't need to hunt down rare NOS vacuum tubes. The MP-P201 is a fully solid-state design that, once experienced, will change your thinking about transistors' capabil-

ities—provided you have the preconceived notion that glass bottles are the only devices that yield untouchable musical performances.

### A Little Perspective

Think of the sound of an ace \$1,000 phonostage. Musical notes are reproduced, everything is quiet, and a dollop of tonality and dynamics makes you feel warm and squishy about having upgraded. If you made the leap from a basic \$200-\$400 turntable to a \$1,000 unit with a competent phono cartridge, and everything is properly set up, analog enchantment happens. You evangelize about how vinyl is better than digital. The crusade begins.

The next major jump costs two-to-five times the aforementioned

amount and includes added flexibility as well as a substantial performance gain (assuming your system is resolving enough to reveal the difference) and added flexibility. Gain and loading are more easily adjustable, and multiple inputs might even be present. You're moving closer to a more realistic picture of the music on your best recordings. The speakers feel more liquid and natural.

Once you cross the \$10k line, in general, your speakers begin to boil like a big pot of water into which you drop delectable pasta. Yummy. Music sounds like it should—timbre, texture, low-level detail, dynamics, and bass weight envelop you, and yep, it's time to upgrade other parts of your system to keep pace with the enhanced analog front end. *(continued)*

### How Good Is It?

Imagine your speakers becoming clouds from which music emerges. Welcome to the MP-P201. Marathon listening sessions with every turntable, tonearm, and cartridge at my disposal reveals *la meme chose*: beyond-sublime music reproduction. The Denon DLA100 (based on the DL-103r) even takes on a new dimension, with a weighty presentation I've never heard from 103 Series cartridges. Mounted on the Funk Firm FX•Rll tonearm, and mated with the AVID Acutus Reference SP, the \$499 cartridge sounds like one that costs much, much more.

Have you ever ogled the paint job on the winning car at the Pebble Beach Concours de Elegance? Gotten lost in depth that feels so real it could just swallow you? Again, meet the MP-P201. Whether via the humble Denon cartridge or mighty Lyra Atlas, the Vitus phonostage expands room boundaries to the point where you'll look for surround speakers.

This is two-channel sound at its finest.

I've heard too many highly tweaked systems that are so resolving, the owner is reduced to playing 20 perfect recordings and, after spending a small fortune, makes record-buying decisions based on "what will sound great on the system." The MP-P201 does not force you to make such feeble choices.

This phonostage does not embellish in any way, yet it retrieves information from records at a supernatural level. The joy is twofold: Your best recordings transport you beyond what you ever thought possible, and mediocre LPs lay bare a wealth of information that previously appeared compressed. Run-of-the-mill pressings—whether an 80s classic like The Fixx's *Reach For The Beach* or modern offerings such as the Decemberists' *The King Is Dead*, neither of which sound particularly open—now come alive and possess tonal shading where none before existed. *(continued)*



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As great as the MP-P201 is with average pressings, extraordinarily recorded LPs sound truly amazing. The more time I spend with the MP-P201, the more I suspect it comes equipped with one of the Guild Navigators from *Dune*—folding time and space every time I play records. Swapping the Denon for the Lyra Atlas and Koetsu Urushi Blue, it's impossible to decide which is more enjoyable. The latter's sumptuous midrange and depth lend well to recordings with a slight edge, while the Lyra's ability to uncover the minutest details hypnotizes the senses.

Pink Floyd albums prove enthralling, especially when enjoying first-stamper German, Japanese, and UK pressings of *Dark Side of the Moon*. There's so much more information throughout the spec-

trum, it's actually initially arduous to process. The opening heartbeat now feels buried in the floorboards, threatening to burst out, Edgar Allen Poe style, while the alarm clocks feel as if they are duct-taped to my head. Once acclimated to the additional bandwidth in my realm, the navigators take over again; hours melt away.

Classical lovers will marvel at the phonostage's fathomless quiet—a wonder for rock and jazz, but a necessity for symphonic music. The resultant blackness may even force you to reconsider your test-LP protocol. My preferred classical demo discs include Mercury Russian recordings pressed a few years ago.

Byron Janis' delicate touch on the piano during Liszt's *Piano Concerto No. 1 in E Flat Major*

“Triangle” comes off like a once-played master tape. This LP's air and space will challenge any analog front end, but otherworldly is the combination of the Atlas cartridge and MP-P201, melding the best digital recordings' inaudible background with the dreamy, fine-grained smoothness that only analog can deliver.

### A Fourth Dimension

Regardless of the music, the MP-P201 gives more. There's more extension at both ends of the spectrum. And even though this phonostage casts more detail on the high-frequency section, cues never become harsh or forward—a tough feat. Whether listening to Audioslave or Miles Davis, the density of information constantly exceeds expectation. (continued)



The increased texture now present in all recordings, combined with the dynamics and resolution, makes for a fourth sonic dimension. Music is no longer played as much as it is displayed, in almost hallucinatory form. Spinning the recent remaster of Miles Davis' *Bitches' Brew* casts wildly convincing impressions. Davis seems to lurk in my room, the illusion so realistic, it seems as if I can get up and walk behind him. Trippy and fun.

### The Fine Print

The MP-P201 is a two-box design, with power supply and the phono stage on separate chassis, connected by a pair of umbilical cords. Once plugged in, the MP-P201 is ready to play after about two minutes. Akin to any premium component with a massive power sup-

ply, it requires a few days to fully stabilize. Since my review sample arrived with hours on the clock, I can't comment on how long a new unit needs to sound its best.

Chassis and front-panel design mirror other Vitus products. The aluminum front panel is beveled in the middle in order to reveal the control functions behind the black, smoked glass. Removing the vault-like top panels showcases the precise build quality one might expect to see if a Swiss watch was enlarged to the size of a preamplifier. Hans-Ole Vitus redefines meticulous build quality. He heavily relies on custom-made surface-mount modules to guide every aspect of the preamplifier.

Loading can be controlled from the front panel or optional remote.

When I brought this up with Mr. Vitus, he just assumed that anyone buying the MP-P201 would have the remote and not need one. Again, Danish practicality, but he puts my fear at ease. "Of course if you purchase the MP-P201 as a standalone component, we will include a remote at no charge." Right on.

Input sensitivity can be set from .15mv to .5mv. With this kind of gain, all MC cartridges can be utilized—even ultra-exotic models with three turns of Martian wire on the core. Sixteen different load settings, with four separate modules, are also available. While you might think 47k is a useless setting at this price, don't forget about the moving-iron cartridges out there. They could be a great match.

The MP-P201 features two inputs, one balanced and one RCA. Both work so well, I can't really tell the difference—even with identical tables, cartridges, and tonearm cables. I experience no loss of fidelity when using the balanced input with XLR-to-RCA adaptors. Balanced XLR and RCA outputs are available.

### Perfection?

A \$60,000 component should take your breath away, and the MPP-201 does so the second the first record is placed on the turntable. So choose carefully. You will always remember the paradigm shift. After months of listening, I still pinch myself nearly every time I experience this marvel, and remain amazed at how much detail is locked up in those grooves.

### Vitus Audio MP-P201

MSRP: \$60,000

### MANUFACTURER

Vitus Audio

### CONTACT

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

### PERIPHERALS

**Analog Sources** AVID Acutus Reference SP Turntables (2), Kronos Turntable, SME V, SME 309 and SME 312 tonearms, TriPlanar tonearm, Funk Firm FX•R II tonearm

**Phono Cartridges** Lyra Atlas, Titan-i and Kleos cartridges, Koetsu Urushi Blue, Sumiko Palo Santos, Ortofon SPU, Denon DLA100, ZU Denon 103

**Preamplifier** Audio Research REF 5SE

**Power Amplifier** Audio Research REF 150

**Speakers** Peak Consult Kepheus

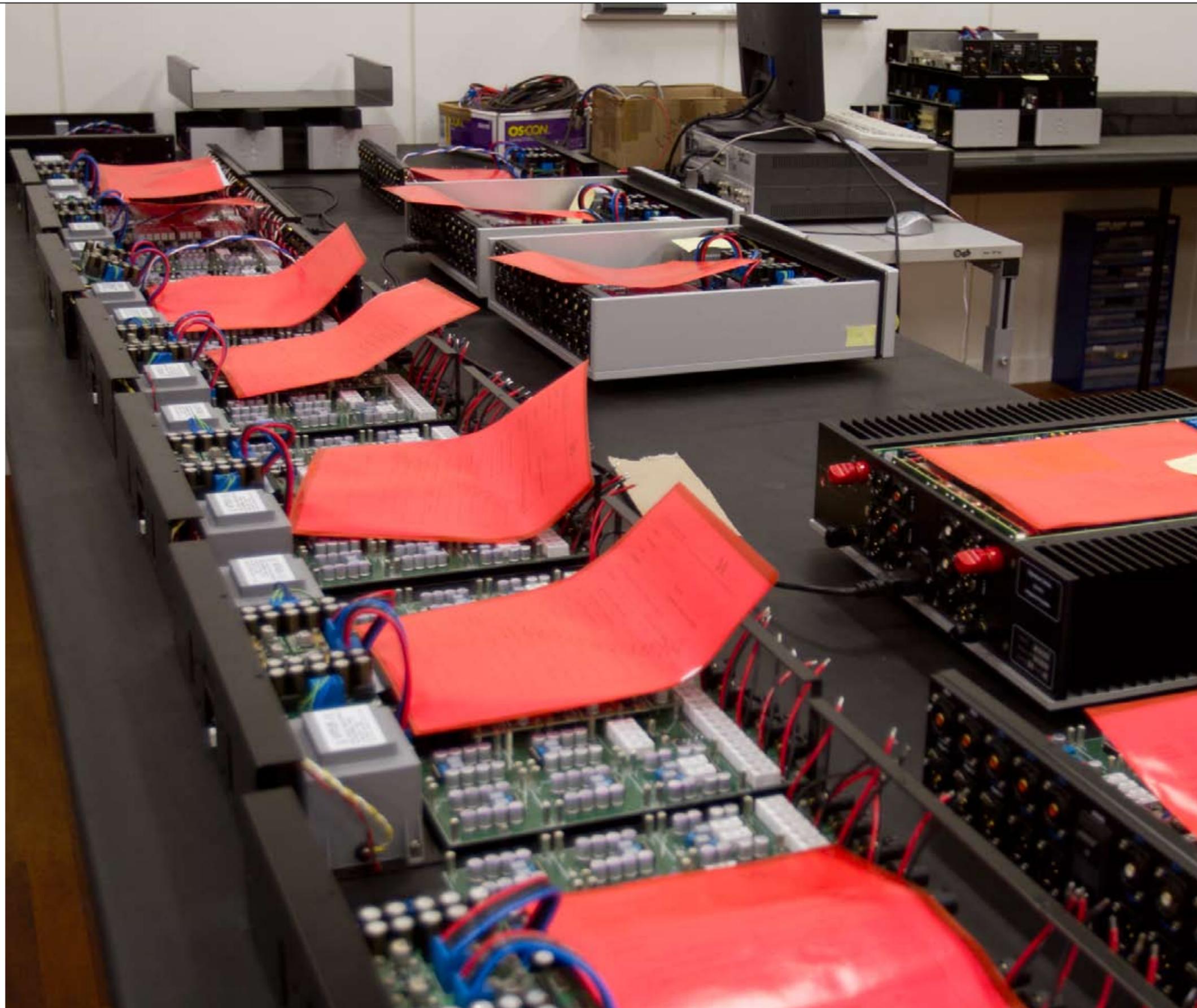
**Cable** Shunyata Aurora

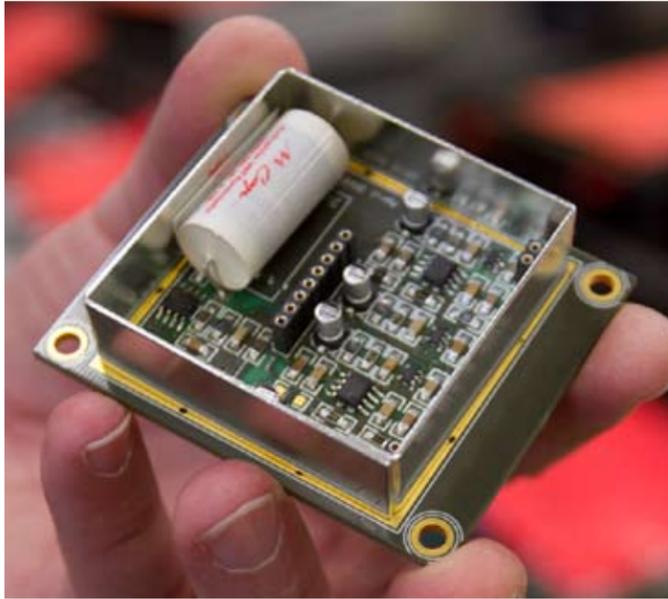
# Visiting Vitus Audio

The headquarters for Vitus Audio is tucked away in a small industrial park in Herring, Denmark. The company's soul becomes apparent immediately upon entrance, as a pair of original MartinLogan CLS speakers greet you. Hans-Ole Vitus grins, "I love those speakers."

Danish to the core, the facility sports a spartan albeit purposeful and highly efficient design. Administrative offices are small. Everything is concentrated on factory and warehouse space, sans the practice area for Vitus' son's band, where a drum kit and amplifier stacks sit. As his eyes light up about his latest guitar purchase, Vitus tells me that he, too, stops out here to jam now and then. After January's Consumer Electronics Show in January, he and his son (also a budding electronics designer) stayed in Vegas to see Tool perform.

A quick tour reveals the Formula 1-level of attention paid to Vitus products during every step of the assembly process. The outlay doubles as a model of efficiency, with ceiling-high shelves containing various electronics and mechanical parts. Modern test gear and strict assembly (and testing) protocols ensure each product is perfect before it goes out the door.

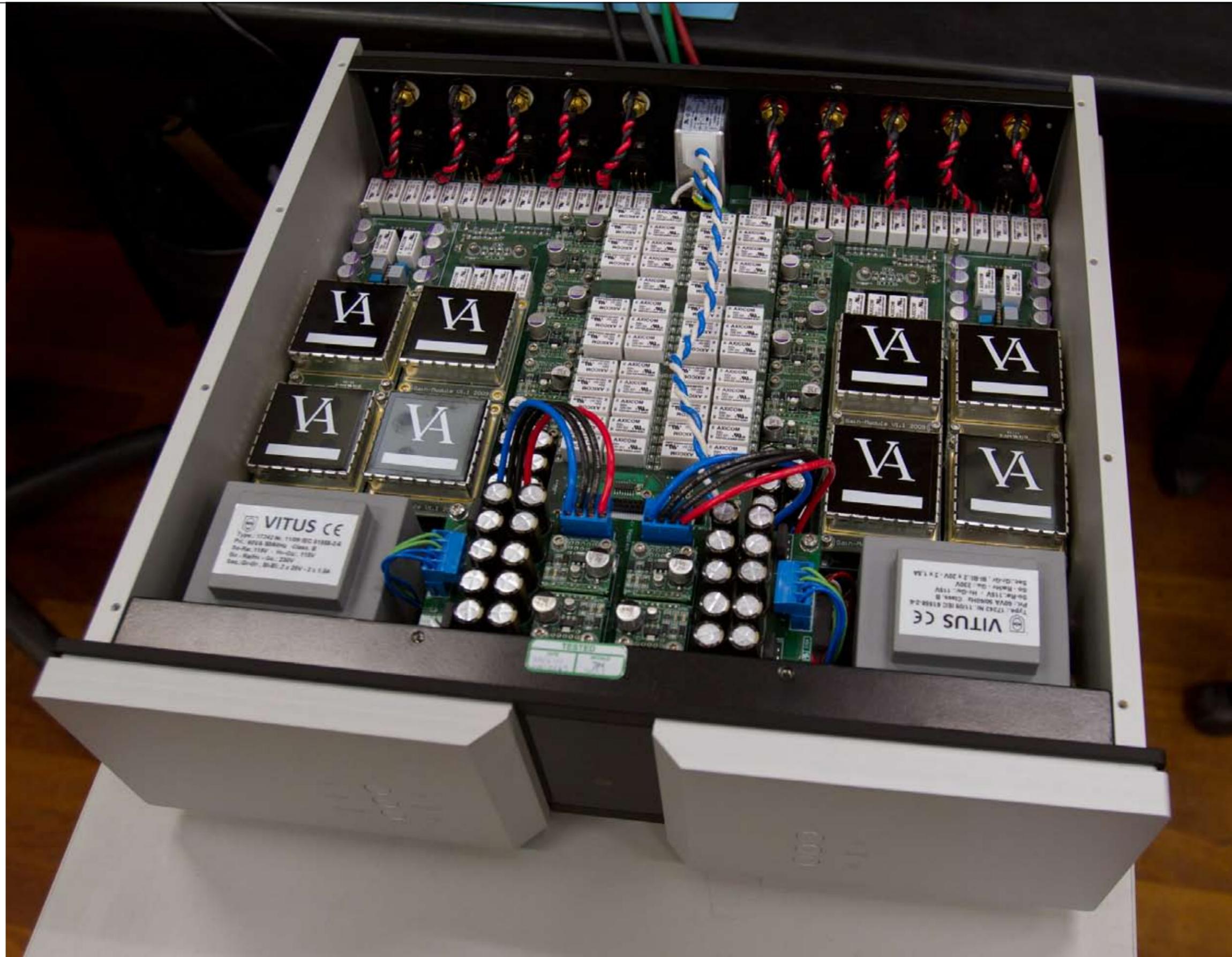




Removing the top of any Vitus product tells a big part of the story. Custom-designed surface-mount modules control every aspect of the company's amplifier and preamplifiers performance. Vitus even has its own in-house surface-mount machines, a considerable expense often subcontracted out by even some of audio's top manufacturers. The only aspect farmed out? Metalwork. But even that's subject to meticulous quality-control measures.

Finished components are then burned in and rechecked before final delivery to a substantial sound room that features a few different pairs of state-of-the-art loudspeakers. R&D doesn't stop there. Vitus' home listening room contains all of his top-line products along with one of the few pairs of Focal Grande Utopia EM speakers on display. Flanked by a Kuzma turntable and barrage of Vitus Class A power amplifiers, this evaluating test bed is absolutely spectacular.

Minutes into our listening session, it becomes obvious that the driving force behind Vitus Audio is never more than a few steps away from music, whether at work or at home. Such musical immersion, combined with a perfectionist approach, makes Vitus Audio products objects of desire for many of the world's most discriminating audiophiles. ●



# The Sweet Sounds of Vinyl

## Pass Labs XP-15 Phono Preamp

By Lawrence Devoe

Nelson Pass is a living legend of high-end audio for good reason. Whether with his first company, Threshold, or current enterprise, Pass Labs, he and his co-designers consistently produce stellar equipment—excellent not just for the money, but for outstanding performance. Audiophiles that know Pass' company understand it's thoroughly dedicated to vinyl reproduction, as witnessed by the excellent line of phono preamplifiers issued over the past 15 years.

My analog journey includes time spent with every one of these pieces, beginning with the Aleph ONO and continuing on to the subject of this review, the one-box XP-15. As Pass phonostages evolve, each successive generation improves upon the recovery of the delicate signals contained in those beloved LP grooves.



### Putting the Pass into the Picture

Like all current-generation Pass equipment, the XP-15 sports an attractive brushed-aluminum chassis with an engraved logo and small blue power light located above the model number. The rear panel is relatively sparse, with a ground post, balanced and unbalanced outputs, and separate inputs for MM or MC cartridges. Cartridge gain is fixed at 46dB for MM and adjustable from 50dB to 71dB for MC (an additional 6dB is available for balanced output). Paired dipswitches are available for adjusting MM capacitance from 100 pF to 750 pF. MC resistive loading has (count 'em) 18 settings, including a 47k ohm option used for most of my own listening.

To keep phono newbies from going bonkers, Pass provides an excellent owner's manual with tables and pictures depicting routes to the desired settings. Looking at this guide will be a one-time exercise unless you own more than one cartridge. Out of the box, break-in time will be at least 100 hours, and with further use, the sound continues to slightly improve.

### Pass Me the Platters, Please

My current reference turntable—a VPI HRX with rim-drive and Nordost-wired JMW 12.7 tonearms, along with Clearaudio Goldfinger v.2 stereo and Lyra Titan Mono cartridges—provided the test bed for the XP-15 listening sessions. Previous experience with Pass phono stages reveals the maximum-output setting yielding the best balance of tonality and lowest noise floor. The XP-15 is no different, and while it provides great sound in balanced and single-ended mode, I leaned toward the former preference. *(continued)*



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- ART ROSSI, Customer Review



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- T. DIGGS, Customer Review

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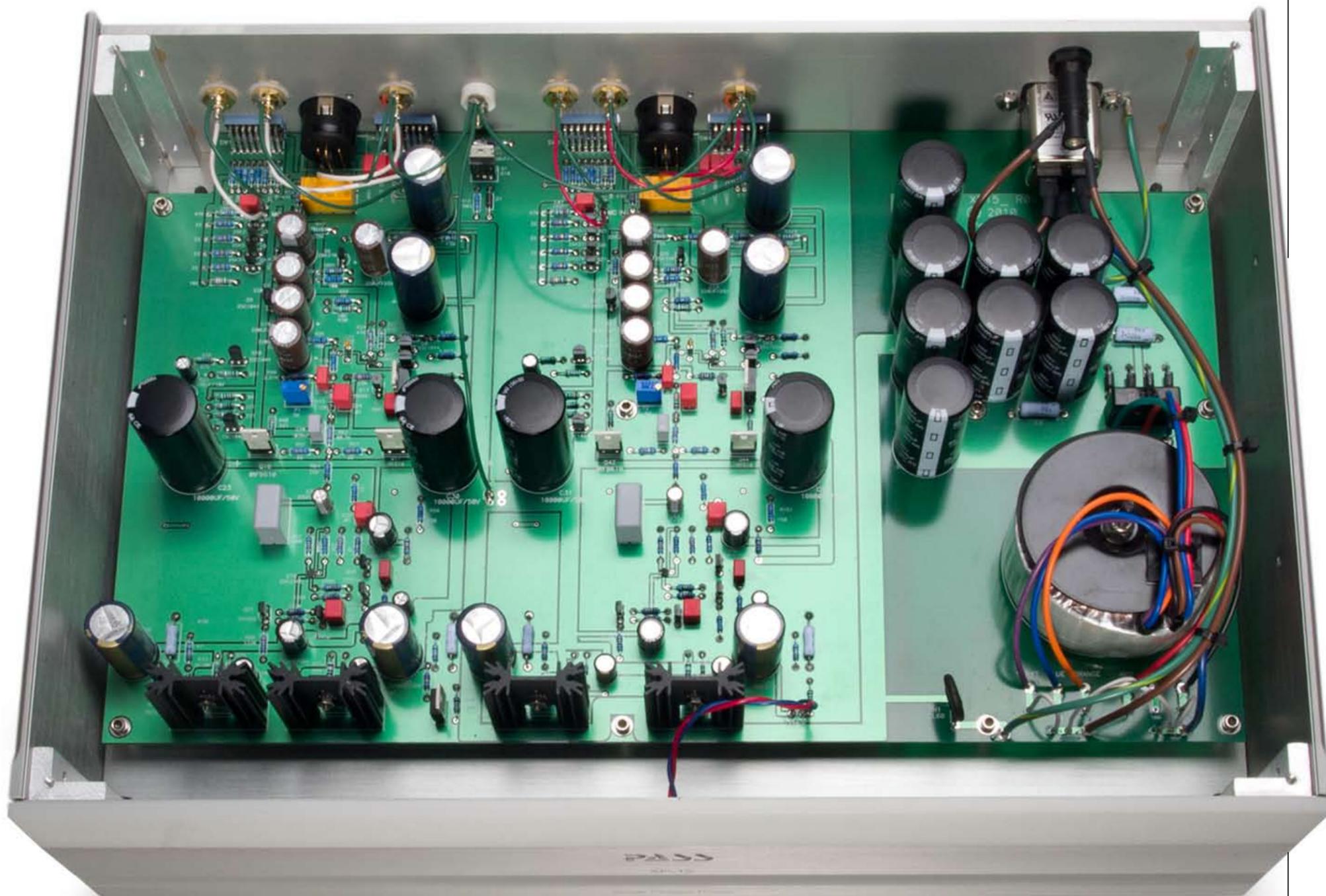


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As vinyl purists know, spinning LPs becomes addictive when playback equipment is up to the task. Enter the XP-15. On Dire Straits' "Your Latest Trick," from a four-sided reissue of *Brothers in Arms*, Mark Knopfler's husky voice sounds just right and never swamps the background percussion details. Via her Grammy-winning *Chamber Music Society*, Esperanza Spaulding plies a Brazilian number, "Inutil Paisagem," with Gretchen Parlato. The XP-15 righteously clarifies the overlapping female voices, keeping distinct the lyrics and articulate the underlying bass (listen closely for the fingers on the fretboard).

Large-scale orchestral music, replete with vocals, is always my favorite acid test. And for it, I use my old reliable—the closing scene from Wagner's *Das Rheingold*, a classic 1958 Decca recording recently reissued in a superb collection titled *The Decca Sound*. The cut starts with a high-powered musical thunderstorm, followed by a rainbow-bridge crescendo that must be heard to be believed. Sir Georg Solti, his singers, and the orchestral forces come right out of my speakers, giving the passage the visceral feel it deserves.

Getting the monaural soundstaging just right is vital for listeners whose collections include older jazz and pop vocal albums. On Analogue Productions' 45RPM reissue of Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong's classic *Ella and Louis*, the warmth of Fitzgerald's voice

and sound of Armstrong's unique raspiness literally pops out of the background. The Beach Boys' *Smile* reveals their individual voices crisp and clear on "Wonderful," with solid recreation of the band's trademark studio reverb. While I thought I knew these songs well, I now realize I'm really hearing them for the first time. And it's definitely worth the 40-year wait.

Finally, a Mercury original pressing of Holst's *Suites for Band*, with the Eastman Wind Ensemble and Frederick Fennell, shows why the single-point mike technique is right not just for its era but for all times, with the XP-15 illustrating the proper stage size.

### Passing Judgment

Even after hours of listening to dozens of LP sides, I find it nearly impossible to drag myself out of my chair and power down the XP-15. This phono stage easily bests Pass designer Wayne Colburn's previous efforts, which aren't sonic slouches. The XP-15 does practically everything right: soundstaging, tonal colors, background information. And its flexible setup should satisfy about every cartridge on the planet.

If doing so wouldn't drive up the price, I'd love to see adjustment switches on the front panel (as on the flagship XP-25) or have them accessible via remote control. Quibbles aside, your record collection is worth many times the cost of the XP-15, making this phono stage an excellent all-around buy.



## Further Listening

By Jerold O'Brien

While Mr. Devoe has a lifetime of experience with Pass phono stages, I come from the opposite side of the tracks: I'm a lifelong Audio Research guy. Skeptical of all things transistorized, I had the pleasure of listening to the XP-15 after it spent a few hundred hours in our publisher's listening room.

For those entrenched in the vacuum-tube camp, the XP-15 gives up very little midrange palpability in comparison. Paired with a vacuum-tube preamp and power amplifier, the sacrifice is miniscule, and the gains made via my workhorse ARC PH-3SE with super-high zoot tubes are tough to deny. The ability to get at the adjustments is awesome, and encourages more cartridge fiddling—a good or bad habit, depending on your level of OCD.

My listening tests featured the Oracle Delphi V turntable and SME 309 tonearm, chosen for its removable headshell. Fiddling, you see. The Shure V15 vmxr, Grado Master Reference 1, and Lyra Skala cartridges all constitute excellent matches for the XP-15. And yet, I remain highly impressed at the performance the XP-15 extracts from a relatively inexpensive cartridge like the V15. *(continued)*



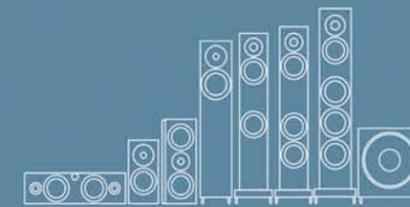
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Since Mr. Devoe covered jazz classics, female vocals, and classical selections, I'll concentrate on rock and ambient music. Again, it is worth noting that the XP-15, especially in the context of an all-tube system, does not leave you yearning for the glowing bottles. I'm constantly surprised at how well it produces a large, dynamic soundstage with some of my favorite Led Zeppelin, Who, and Nirvana records, usually played louder than prudent.

In search of a bit more air, Lou Reed's "Goodnight Ladies" from *Transformer* floats the singer out in front of the rest of the band—and with enhanced separation. Moreover, the bass-drum blasts at the beginning of Keel's "The Right to Rock" from the album of the same name are reproduced with serious weight and texture.

While many listeners enjoy the extra flavor tubes can bring to the picture, the XP-15's dynamics clarity and ultra-low noise floor are tough to beat, and may convince the most hardcore tube lover to make a switch—especially if one's MC cartridge has an output of less than .5mv. The unit certainly has me thinking about never again having to pay a premium for an ultra-low-noise matched set of tubes for my PH-3SE. ●

**Pass Labs**  
**Phono Preamp XP-15**  
**MSRP: \$3,800**

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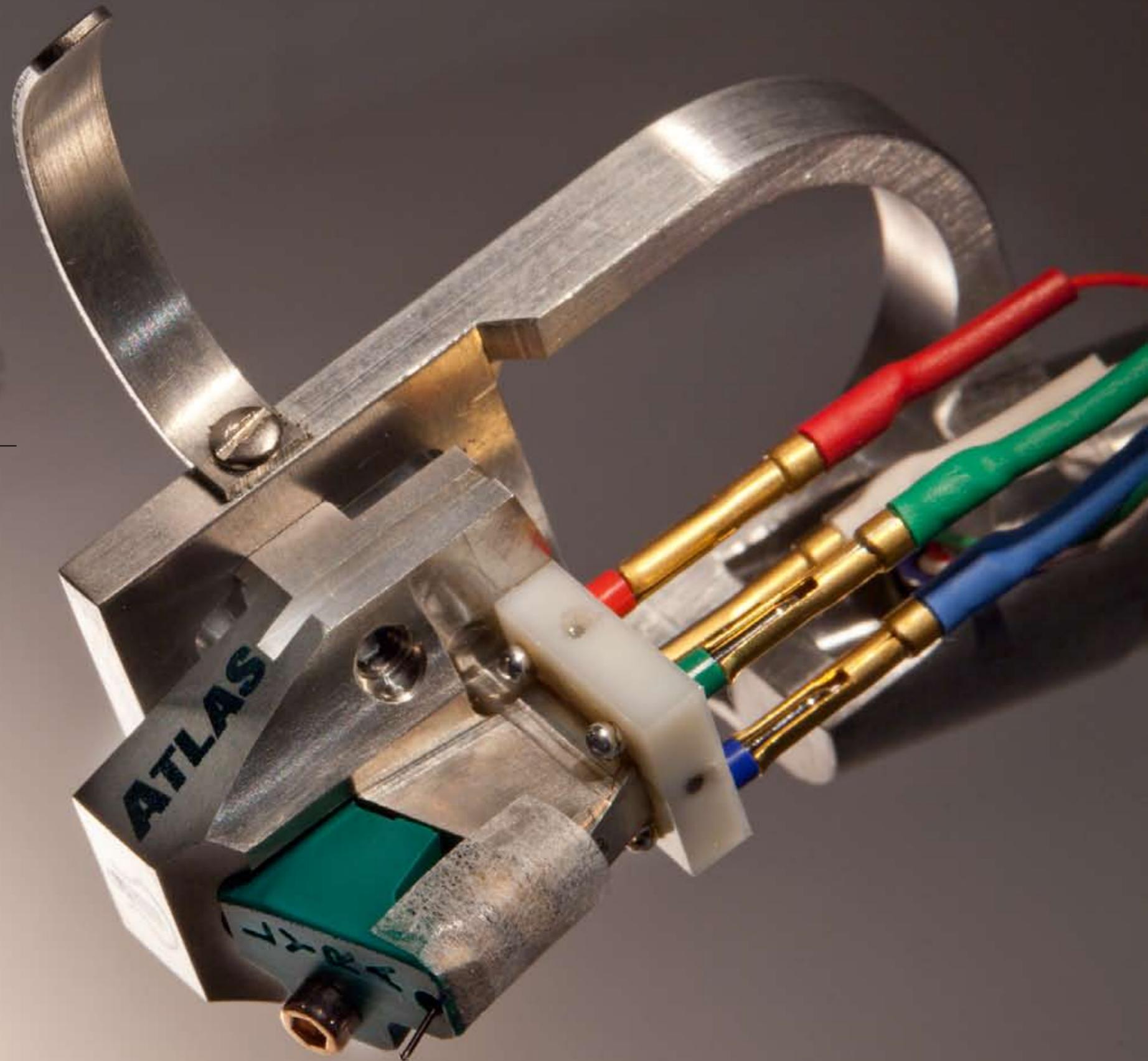
**Power Cords**  
Nordost Valhalla, Odin

# Lyra Atlas Cartridge

## The Top of a New Generation

By Jeff Dorgay

Anyone thinking the \$9,500 Lyra Atlas merely amounts to high-priced audio jewelry that exceeds a fixed point of diminishing returns couldn't be more wrong. However, to be put in proper perspective, the cartridge must be evaluated in a high-performance audio system alongside Lyra's other models—the Titan i and the Kleos. Rather than rely on digital captures or, worse, aural memory, we chose to compare the cartridges side-by-side in identical AVID Acutus Reference SP turntables played through the world-class Vitus MP-P201 phonostage.



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REVIEW

Jonathan Carr, responsible for all Lyra cartridge designs, points out that the Atlas' "new angle" technology actually was introduced on an entry-level cartridge (Delos) and carried forward to the Kleos. Unlike all other MC designs that center the signal coils between the magnets when a cartridge is at rest (and with no load from being placed on a record), new-generation Lyra cartridges achieve optimum alignment between magnet and coil when the cartridge is set down on a record under the load of tracking force. Lyra claims the approach equalizes compliance in both vertical and horizontal planes. In practical terms, the Atlas tracks better than any MC I've yet experienced.

Following the lead of the Titan i and

legendary Olympos cartridges, the Atlas' body is machined from pure titanium. Asymmetrical shapes on both the inside and outside further set the Atlas apart from the rest of the Lyra line. Just like a room lacking parallel walls, the dimensions diminish resonances inside the cartridge. Carr mentions that the internal shape of the cartridge requires very complex machining as well, which is accomplished via electric discharge machining, a non-contact process.

The Atlas also delivers 12% more output than previous designs, and does so with 22% less wire in the coils—practically cheating physics. These numbers translate to faster transient response and more accurate reproduction of difficult musical passages. *(continued)*



These new coils now conform to X-core design that yields better channel separation, less crosstalk between channels, and lower distortion. Again, Lyra beats the odds without suffering the lower efficiency that plagues most cartridges using traditional square core coils.

Speaking fondly of cartridge builder Yoshinori Mishima, who has worked for Lyra for more than two decades, Carr notes: “When I come up with a new design, I like to challenge Mishima to produce something perhaps a bit beyond what he is capable of. As I show him the final design drawings and design prototypes, we discuss what can be done, and if any slight changes must be made. The Atlas is by far the most difficult thing I have asked him to build.”

The Atlas took two years from conception to build. While one of Carr’s intermediate designs did not make it to fruition, it provided knowledge to flesh out the Atlas. “Producing [the concept] cartridge, even though we did not build it, gave me what I needed to take the Titan i to its destination with the Atlas. Without it, I would not have been able to travel the full distance.”

### Easy Albeit Different Setup

Experience with the Lyra Skala, Argo-I, and Dorian cartridges (confirmed by AudioQuest’s Joe Harley, Lyra’s US importer) suggests orienting the tail of the cartridge body slightly down from the front instead of placing it in the more traditional parallel configuration.



The latter arrangement comes across somewhat thin and lacking in body, which has fueled comments stating that Lyra cartridges are highly accurate albeit thin-sounding. No. It’s all in the setup.

Initial listening on the AVID Acutus Reference SP turntable was done with the current Triplanar arm. I performed later comparison tests with identical SME V tonearms and matching Furutech Silver Reference tonearm cables. Optimal tracking force proved to be 1.72 grams in both tonearms—exactly what’s recommended. Lyra suggests a loading range of 104-887 ohms; 1000 ohms is the magic number with the ARC Ref Phono 2SE, and 500 ohms delivers perfection with the Vitus MP-P201 and Pass XP-25 phonostages. Perhaps it’s a tube versus solid-state thing.

Lyra hints that maximum performance requires 30-50 hours, after which the sound smooths out and noise gets reduced. AudioQuest analog gurus Harley and Shane Buettner corroborate the 30-hour limit. But the cartridge sounds damn good out of the box.

### Sound Without Limitations

Technical talk aside, the Atlas succeeds at retrieving more music from the groove than anything I’ve heard. While I am a huge fan of the limited-availability Olympos (reviewed in Issue 17), its richer, nearly romantic sound is not Lyra’s specialty. Carr says, “The Olympos was created for a purpose, with a certain sound in mind. I feel it’s within my rights as a designer to occasionally present a different design exercise. That’s the Olympos; it’s very sexy-sounding.”

As I mention in this issue’s review of the Vitus MP-P201 phonostage (page 121), in order to justify its expense, a component at this price level has to take you on an amazing journey while blazing uncharted territory. The Atlas does so and more. Combining it with the Vitus phonostage makes for almost unworldly sensations. It offers everything: rock-solid imaging, unparalleled dynamics, unmatched tonal accuracy, and exquisite low-level detail retrieval, all created inside a galactic soundfield. *(continued)*

## Nagra MSA amplifiers

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Sure, these characteristics are enough to propel Atlas to the top of the super-cartridge list. But its greatest strength lies in its ability to extract more information from all of your records. Literally, every one you spin. Yes, the most fantastic recordings reveal buried sonic treasures. Still, the Atlas does an equally great job with normal pressings. Spoon's 2007 album *Ga, Ga, Ga, Ga, Ga* is a perfect example of a relatively flat indie-rock record that leaves you wondering if analog is worth the bother. The Atlas brings it to life in a way you'd never think possible.

Bruce Springsteen's new *The Wrecking Ball* yields similar riches. The CD is highly compressed, and the LP not much better. Enter the Atlas, which pulls every molecule of detail from the grooves while making an otherwise harsh-sounding record enjoyable. Carr underscores that these sorts of hallelujah moments represent his goal with the Atlas, stating, "A high-performance system should increase the number of records you can enjoy on it."

Much of the newfound resolution can be attributed to the Atlas' increased tracking; the cartridge passes every tracking torture test with ease. Delighting in my own nerdiness, I chose my Shure TTR-101 test record, the famous "Audio Obstacle Course." The Atlas effortlessly tracks the toughest passages, a feat I've never accomplished with an MC design. And the Kleos proves no slouch in this area, either.

Think of the aforementioned effects as akin to a Formula 1 car coming in for a pit stop. The best drivers hit their marks exactly, while the lesser guys miss the stop by as much as a foot. Not life or death. But as Michael Schumacher's pit guys once told me, even a small difference cuts down efficiency. While an F1 championship is certainly not on the line while spinning records, the more precisely a stylus can follow the groove, the more accurately the music is rendered, and, the lower the wear is on records. *(continued)*

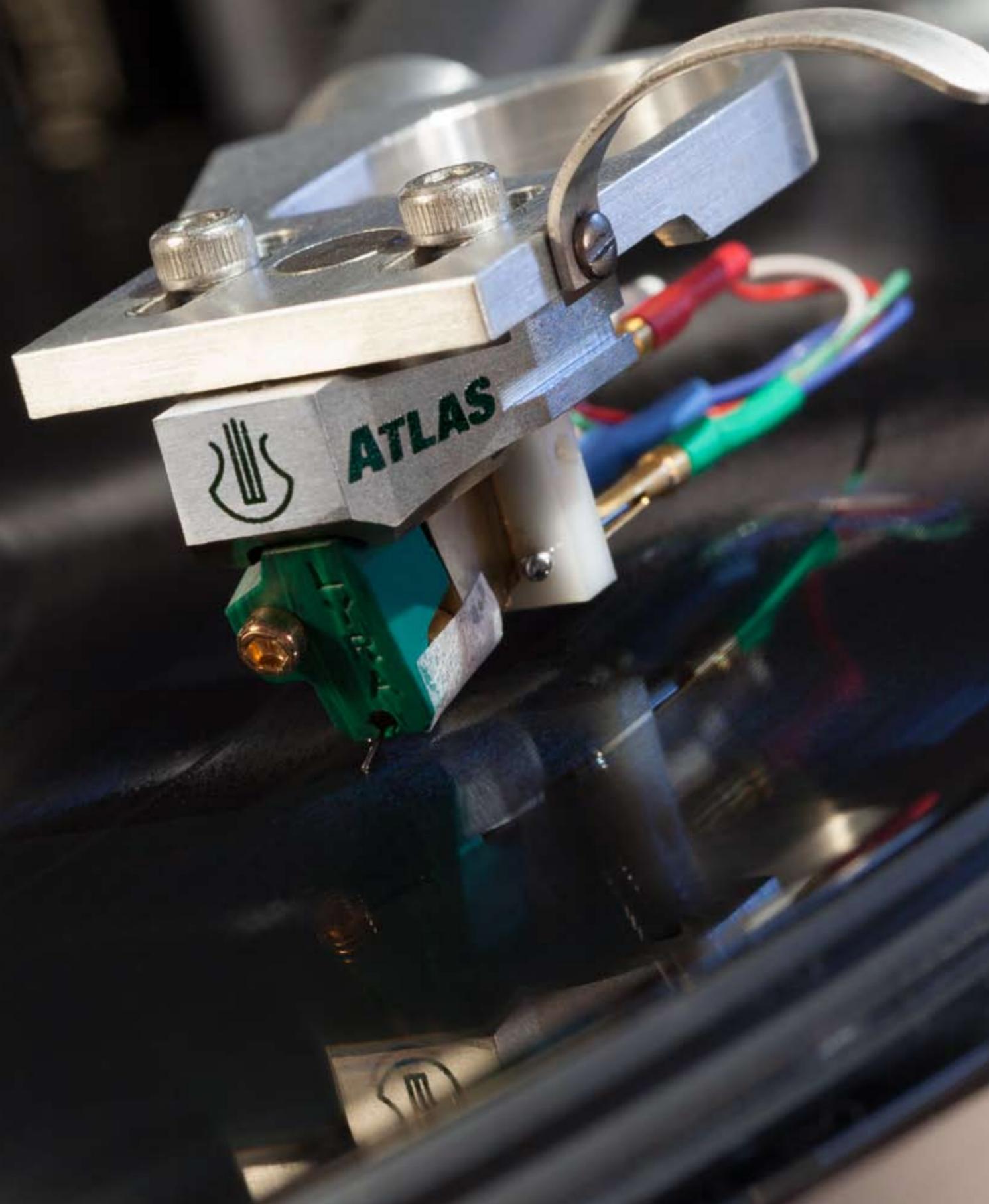
Unlike a Ferrari that you will only want to take out of the garage on a sunny day, you will want to use the Atlas as a daily driver. Doing so invokes the dreaded subject of cartridge life. Since the company believes that keeping records meticulously clean and paying close attention to the stylus extends life, Lyra includes necessary tools, a stylus brush, and LPT stylus treatment with the Atlas. In addition, lowering the cartridge on to the record as gently as possible dramatically extends cartridge life and puts minimal wear on the delicate suspension.

In a perfect world, the Atlas might last 2,500 hours, give or take a few. So, if you listen to three albums a day, every day of the week, the Atlas will last about four years. How many audiophiles keep anything for four years?

### A Proper Comparison

Of course, you can't truly appreciate the Atlas until you compare it to the other two high-end cartridges in Lyra's lineup. Differences illustrated by my reference system with the Vitus MP-P201 phono stage are not just instantly apparent, they're major. However, when swapping out the reference components for a much more modest system consisting of the Audio Research PH6 phono stage, AVID Volvere SP turntable, Unison Research S6 amplifier, and Dynaudio Confidence C1 speakers, disparities between the three models are minimal.

Note: If you don't have a system capable of producing incredible resolution and dynamics, consider sticking with the Delos or Kleos. They offer high performance at a much lower cost, with all the same tonal qualities that make the Atlas and the Titan i stellar. Too often, I've seen enthusiastic audiophiles grossly overspend on a mega-bucks cartridge, only to sacrifice resolution elsewhere in the



system, and therefore, fail to take full advantage of what a cartridge like the Atlas provides.

### Atlas vs. Titan i

Listening to Richard Thompson's *The Old Kit Bag* instantly reveals the contrast between the Atlas and Titan i. The latter showcases a more forward tonal balance that might be mistaken for edgy and, when using the Atlas as a direct comparison, slightly thin. The acoustic bass line in "Gethsemane" is well rendered with the Titan i, yet a quick switch to the Atlas gives the song extra weight and a lot more texture. It's much like going from a zoom lens to a prime lens on a camera; there's more clarity and tonal purity. With the Atlas, Thompson's guitar playing locks into place with a precision the Titan i can't match.

Mobile Fidelity's reissue of James Taylor's *JT* exposes another variation between the two fantastic cartridges. The Titan i possesses more edge sharpness than the Atlas, which at first blush gives the appearance of more resolution. Extended listening shows how much further the Atlas goes into the recording. Anyone who works or plays with Photoshop's unsharp mask command know this feeling. Used sparingly, the increased edge contrast gives an illusion of sharpness, but pushing it too far gives everything in the photo a surreal, embossed quality.

Instrument decay tells yet another part of the story. The acoustic guitar and cymbals on Taylor's "There We Are" fade out further, and with more levels of gradation, before going all the way to black with the Atlas. The additional contrast provided by the Titan i, making Taylor's guitar sound pluckier, may appeal to some. Yet Carly Simon's backing vocals are almost lost on "Looking for Love on Broadway" when the Titan i is at bat; the Atlas projects them. *(continued)*



If the Atlas makes sense for your budget and system, the additional weight and image size—combined with the aforementioned tonal qualities—will take you to a very special place, indeed.

**Titan i vs. Kleos**

Carr points out that there are some areas in which the Kleos will excel when compared to the Titan. Vide, lower surface noise. Both the Kleos and the Atlas are much more like my favorite Koetsus in the sense that the latter maximizes the musical presentation while minimizing surface noise. Most of my records are in excellent shape, but somehow, with the Titan i, one or two pops always surface. (All of my records are cleaned on the Loricraft

before major listening sessions, while the Furutech DeMag and the DeStat further reduce surface anomalies.)

On more modern recordings, the edge in dynamics goes to the Kleos. A direct comparison of Mobile Fidelity's version of Madeline Peyroux's *Bare Bones* illuminates the Kleos' ability to accelerate faster and stop at the end of notes with greater precision. The Kleos does a better job at capturing a drumhead's "twack" sound as well as the initial strike of piano keys. There's energy without any acoustic hangover.

Evaluating identical pressings of Brian Eno's *Ambient 4: On Land* favored the Kleos and its weightier presentation. The extra bass grunt adds to the album's ethereal,

spooky feel and the Kleos' ability to minimize background noise is another plus. Densely packed recordings like Mobile Fidelity's reissue of Santana's *Abraxas* favor the Titan i. Its additional edge contrast digs deeper into the cloudy mix.

**Shopping Suggestions**

The newer technology present in Lyra's Delos, Kleos, and Atlas represents a major step forward in analog reproduction by giving more resolution, separation, and dynamics than previous designs—and sacrificing nothing. They are incredibly user-friendly and easy to set up and optimize. An hour spent with analog tools and some careful listening is all that's required. *(continued)*

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## REVIEW

The more resolution your system (and analog front end, in particular) can deliver, the more you will be able to hear and appreciate the differences between these cartridges. The Kleos is an excellent model, covering all the bases with a fantastic combination of tonal accuracy and tonal saturation, along with a large presentation and wonderful dynamics. Titan i manages more resolution, adding additional contrast even as it might beget a love/hate situation in certain systems. It also took the most time to set up to perfection. In the end, however, the Atlas is the grail. Once you've experienced it, there's no turning back. ●

The Lyra Atlas MSRP: \$9,500  
The Lyra Titan i MSRP: \$5,995  
The Lyra Kleos MSRP: \$2,995

### MANUFACTURER

LYRA

### CONTACT

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

### PERIPHERALS

**Turntables** AVID Acutus Reference SP (2) w/ SME V, TriPlanar and Funk Firm FX•R tonearms, AVID Volvere SP (2) w/SME V tonearms

**Phonostages** Vitus Audio MP-P201, Audio Research REF Phono 2, Pass Labs XP-25, Audio Research PH6

**Preamplifier** Audio Research REF5SE, Burmester 011

**Power Amplifier** Audio Research REF 150, Burmester 911mk. 3, Pass XA200.5s

**Speakers** GamuT S9

**Cable** Shunyata Aurora

**Tonearm Cable** Furutech AG-12, Furutech Silver Arrow, AudioQuest LeoPard

**Power** Running Springs Dmitri and Maxim



# From the Web site

When we're in between issues, we add gear reviews to the *TONEAudio* Web site. The following are links to the two most recent reviews.



## Schiit Bifrost DAC

Starting at \$349

**T**hey say you can't polish a turd, but you can chrome it. The new Schiit Bifrost DAC keeps the cost down by utilizing a simple, brushed aluminum case. And the sound is anything but stinky.

Read the full review from our new contributor from Down Under, John Darko, here. ●

"It's truly **thrilling** to hear this level of sound quality from an amplifier with an \$895 price tag...this one could make a **crazed audiophile** out of you where you least expect it." - Jeff Dorgay, *TONEAudio* May 2011

"It's Rega's entry-level model, and few manufacturers **make one as good**. It could be exit-level too... No integrated amplifier I have heard for under \$1000 has a **finer** built-in phono stage." - Sam Tellig, *Stereophile* Dec 2011

"It's the **music** itself that always grabs your attention, rather than any particular hi-fi virtue. And that, of course, is **exactly the way it should be**." - *What Hi-Fi?* 2011

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- simaudio moon
- sonos
- soundsmith
- spiral groove
- vpi

**Rega PH6 Turntable with Exact Cartridge**  
\$1,900

At first glance, the RP6 looks familiar. But a second flyby reveals a new brace between tonearm pivot and main bearing (introduced in the RP3). The improved RP303 tonearm, a new two-piece platter, and a reworked TT-PSU power supply also contribute to a serious sonic upgrade.

While available without cartridge for \$1,495, the package bundled with the Exact saves you \$100 and personifies plug-and-play analog excellence by combining tremendous value and performance in a stylish package. All that's required? Fitting the counterweight. Minutes later, you'll be spinning records.

In short, the RP6 is substantial improvement over the P5—and similarly priced. That's the Rega way. In depth-analysis on our Web site. Click here. ●



BARGAINS

# Slummin'

By Jeff Dorgay



### Teac A-450 Cassette Deck

\$100, Estate sale

Produced from 1973-1976, this was Teac's top-of-the-line cassette deck and its answer to Nakamichi's models. A two-head design, it shared the same big, bold VU meters with reel-to-reel decks, along with a "peak reading" LED to keep recordings distortion-free.

This clean example will be off to the test bench for a full check, lube, and alignment. Will it live up to sentimental memory? We'll see.



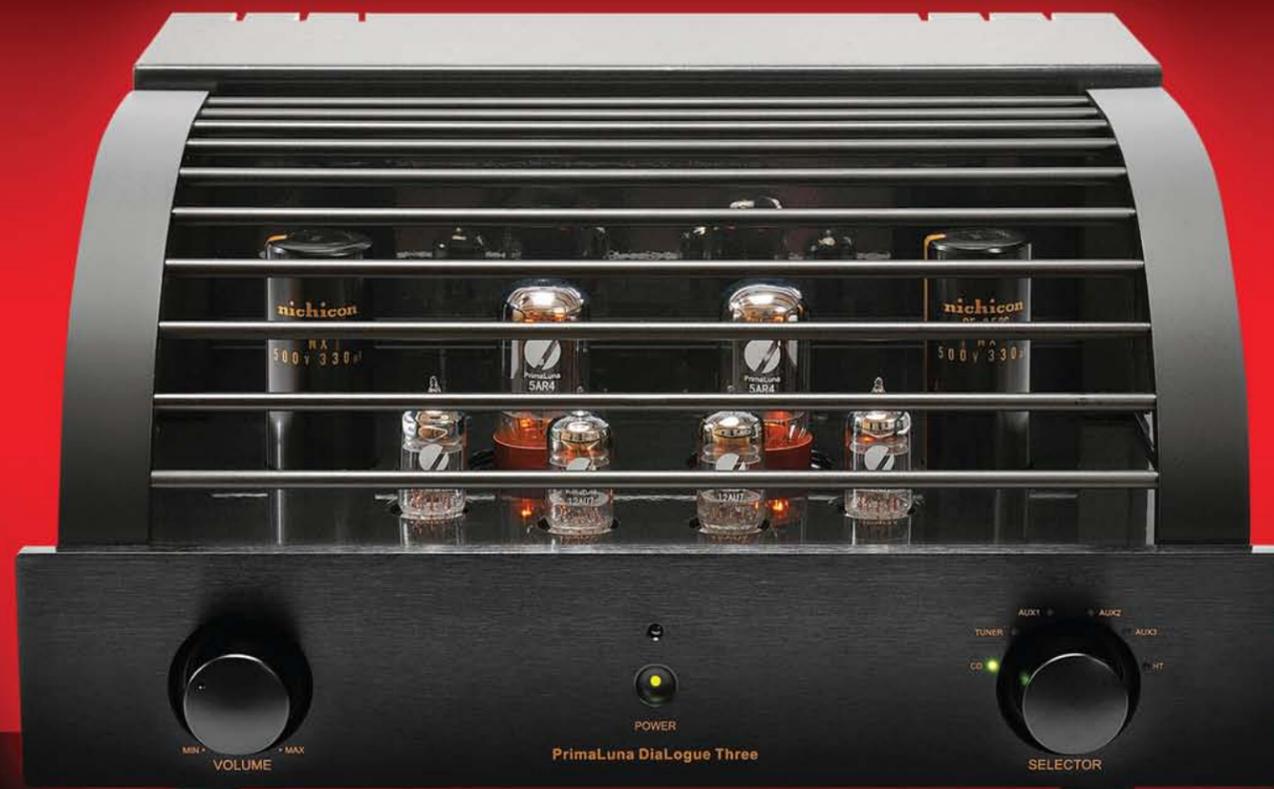
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# Proof That Power Cords Matter

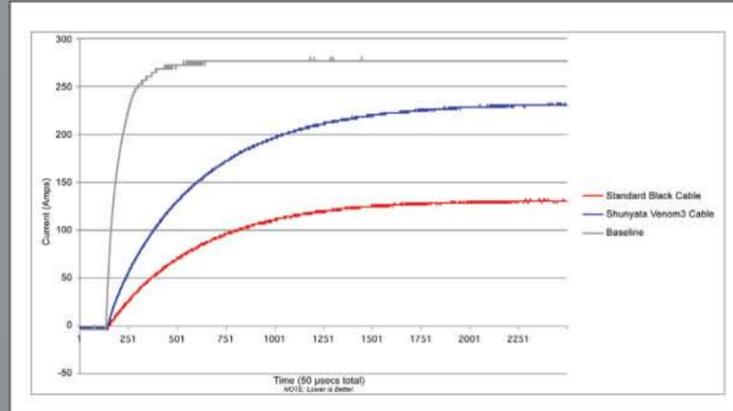


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## DTCD CURRENT COMPARISONS

The graph below demonstrates the difference in instantaneous current delivery between a stock AC cord and the \$99 Shunyata Venom 3. There is an enormous difference between the two cords; the Venom 3 delivers 84% of the available current while the stock cord only delivers 47%. The Venom 3 delivers almost twice as much current.



## Shunyata Power Cords: The First Six Feet Your Components See

Shunyata power cords are the most highly advanced power cables made. Their new Venom 3 is the best-value power cable ever designed. Shunyata's other cables are nothing short of revelatory.



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## Shunyata's New Venom 3

Like Neil Gader said last month in his power cord shootout, "If there was a ringer in this field, the Venom was it...for less than a hundred bucks, I had to ask myself, is Shunyata on a mission to embarrass everyone?" We couldn't have said it better ourselves. Try the Shunyata Venom 3 and we'll give you 100% trade-up value towards any better Shunyata power cable... forever.



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